

THE HUMAN SPHINX

By **Ellis Parker Butler**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. E. WATSON

NEW LIONS HEAD



Benjamin A. Ruffin

Benjamin A. Ruffin was elected President of the International Association of Lions Clubs at the last session of the twelfth annual convention of the Association, held in Des Moines, Iowa, July 10-13, 1928. Mr. Ruffin was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, which has always been his home.

The new President of Lions International is engaged in the general insurance business and is a partner of one of the leading firms of architects of the city, and also a director of many other companies. He is the author of various insurance papers and insurance forms which have been adopted by the American Bankers' Association and has spoken before many bankers' conventions in various states.

Mr. Ruffin has been associated with Lions International for a number of years, and due to his pleasing personality and eloquent oratorical power he has been constantly in demand as a speaker at district conventions, charter nights and everywhere Lions have gathered.

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The day was splendid, as brilliant as a day on Long Island can be, and that is brilliant indeed. The great square house with its mansard roof and many wings and additions and the great pillars of the veranda that gave it a certain nobility was glistening white for it had just been painted. The painters, as a matter of fact, were still at work on the rear of the house. They were working, hurrying to finish the job. John Drane had complained of the paint odor, saying it gave him a head ache.

The Drane place, although it had been given no name in particular, was as good as any in Westchester estimated to be worth a hundred thousand dollars and pointed to it as an example of how prices had improved in Westchester; Drane had paid fifteen thousand for it in 1892 and had spent some twenty thousand in improving the place, having the pillared veranda built on and so that the cost to him had been only thirty-five thousand. This was mentioned as a sample of the good fortune John Drane had in all his investments. No one knew just what he was worth but he was reputed to be worth at least a million dollars, possibly a great many millions.

On this Saturday afternoon he sat on his veranda just as he had seated himself on his return from his office in the city. He sat in one of the wicker chairs, a wicker stand beside him, and on this he had placed his hat and cane, and he leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed in the attitude of a very tired man. One of the hands that grasped the arm of his chair twitched slightly; it was the slender aristocratic hand of a man of seventy. Presently Norbert, the colored houseman, came through the door carrying a tray on which were a glass of milk, a plate of crackers, a napkin and several dainty sandwiches. He moved the wicker stand a little closer to John Drane's chair, removed the hat and cane, and placed the tray on the stand. John Drane opened his eyes.

"All right, Norbert," he said. "I'll just put this hat and cane in the hall, Mist' Drane," the negro said. "I thought how maybe you might like them sandwiches—"

"Perhaps! Perhaps!" Drane said. "An' Miss Amy say I should ask you is you goin' use the car any more this afternoon. She say if you ain't maybe she go ridin' awhile."

Drane dipped a cracker in milk and ate a little without apparent appetite.

"I don't feel well, Norbert," he said. "I certainly don't feel well. Take this stuff away will you? I can't eat it. I'm not going to use the car; you may tell Amy she can have it. There's nobody come?"

"Only Mist' Carter," the negro said. "Him and Miss Amy is playin' tennis out back in the tennis court."

"Alone?" "Couple o' young folks." "Yes. When you go out there, Norbert, tell young Carter I want to see him. No hurry—tonight or tomorrow will do; whenever he has time. And tell Mrs. Vincent to see that the yellow guest room is ready for a guest. I'm expecting a man to stay a few days."

fairly. No, sir." John Drane's fingers tapped the arm of his chair nervously. He frowned as his eyes rested on the long tree-studded lawn that ran down to the road. This nervousness was unusual with him, ordinarily he was so calm and cold and unmoved by even the most exciting events that in the district surrounding Wall Street he was called the Human Sphinx—silent, stern, unfathomable.

To the town of Westcote John Drane was not a sphinx. In Westcote he had made his home some twenty-five years earlier, a bachelor of forty-five who preferred a home in the country. His purchase of the old house and his considerable expenditures for repairs had been a seven day topic and then he had been accepted as a silent man, possibly suffering from a chronic indigestion that made him a little cranky. He took no part in the town affairs that called for mass meetings and service on committees but he gave with fair liberality when he approved a cause; he received those who came to him on such affairs and listened to them, silently but with keen attention. Sometimes, without a word, he wrote a check; sometimes he merely said, "I am not interested."

He took no part in social affairs

been profuse in his thanks; not until the check was turned in to the treasurer was it discovered that it was for the amazing hundred thousand. The check went through the bank and was paid without question. "Well, the bony old son-of-a-gun!" the treasurer of the hospital exclaimed. "He must have a heart in his dried-up carcass after all, even if he don't look it!"

At seventy John Drane was still as bony as ever, but "dried-up" did not describe him, nor had it ever. He was thin almost to emacipation, but it was a soft thinness; his skin was not dried nor leathery, and his face had not so much wrinkled as fallen into jowls and folds. His cheeks were drawn down below his cold gray eyes and when he removed his eye glasses the hollows below the eyes were almost ghastly, but even at seventy he was minutely careful of his body and dress, almost dandified. He shaved twice a day, once in the morning and once at noon, for he had a complete shaving outfit at his office. In a small dressing-room there he could not hear soiled linen.

He was a tall man, or his thinness made him seem tall, and now he arose from his chair as one of the nondescript black taxicabs of the town entered his driveway. "Ah!" he exclaimed, and then



As time passed he did become interested in some of the financial concerns—he became a director of one of the banks, was a regular attendant at its board meetings—but he was known mainly, until automobiles made horses a nuisance, for his fine horses. His coachman always drove him to the train and met him on his return until the time came when he bought an automobile after that his chauffeur always drove him to his office just around the corner from Wall Street on Broadway. He was not so much a peculiar man as a self-sufficing one. In the deals he made in Wall Street he played a lone hand. He never took part in syndicates, never allied himself with groups. And some of his deals were sensationally profitable. It was the amazing effrontery of some of these deals that had attracted attention to him sufficiently to warrant his being given a sobriquet of his own—The Human Sphinx. He would not talk of his deals or of the or of any thing. The moment he reached the city he was, for all practical purposes, mute.

It was not long before Westcote knew he was an extremely wealthy man. Solicitors for a new hospital, going to John Drane in the hope of getting him to give some hundreds of dollars or perhaps a thousand, came away from the house with a check for an even hundred thousand. There had been no wasted words. "Yes, I approve of it; I will give you something," he had said and, turning to the desk, he had written the check. The solicitor, glancing at it, had thought it was for a thousand dollars and had

frowned, because a second taxicab had followed the first.

The two cabs, following the wide sweep of the drive, one cab following close on the wheels of the other, drew up before the veranda and their doors opened simultaneously. From the second the passenger was quick to alight, a small man all in black, and he glanced toward John Drane. The millionaire, still frowning, raised a finger and touched his lips—a gesture so brief that it was hardly observable, but the man in black caught it and nodded that he understood. From the first cab the passenger had considerable trouble alighting. He was a huge man, broad of shoulder and hip and he was trying to bring with him a huge yellow oilboard suitcase, in size proportioned to himself. He had the awkwardness of a man not accustomed to the frequent use of cabs and when he finally stood on the gravel his face was red and perspiring and he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand before he dug into his pocket for the cab fare.

"Black my cats!" he cried. "Come mighty near never gettin' out of your shebang, son. Half a dollar, hey? 'Tain't bad; here's a dime for you."

He picked up his suitcase and turned to the steps.

"Well, black my cats!" he cried. "You durned old Johnnie Drane! If you ain't just as bony and skinny as you was when we was kids! Well, now who'd have thought I'd ever be shakin' hand with Skinny Drane away down east here, on the front porch of a regular blamed old palace like this! How are you, anyhow, you oldascal? Good old