

The Congressman's Family

Who Killed Congressman Lucas? Was It the Butler? The Lady in Black? Who? A New Edward Lawson Story of Crime, Intrigue, Love, Mystery and the Color Line Begins Below. Three Other Installments are to Follow.

By EDWARD LAWSON

Jimmie Stewart, my city editor, flagged me the minute I hit the office one morning. He seemed all excited about something.

"What's up?" I wanted to know.

"Nothing much," he told me. "The House just passed that Lucas bill yesterday—you know, the one that provided for a bond issue of five billion or so to relieve the unemployed. Well, I want you to go up and see old Lucas and get some comment out of him. Ask him how soon the bonds'll be floated, and just exactly how the money's to be used."

"Is that all?" I was rather disappointed. I had hoped to draw something just a little more exciting for my day's work. Still, being a new man, I couldn't have expected the choice assignments. I had to take what Jimmie handed out.

"That's all for right now. Call in as soon as you get that story and give it to a rewrite man. I'll have something else for you by then."

"O. K." I grabbed up a wad of copy paper and stuffed it into my pocket, stopped a minute to put a point on my pencil, then hurried out.

Driving up Sixteenth Street, I tried to recall the features of Representative Paul Lucas. I had only seen him on one occasion, but at that time he had made a tremendous impression upon me. I remembered him as an uncommonly tall man, middle-aged, very dark and wind-tanned; a jovial, well-liked old gentleman with a strong southern accent and exaggerated manners. He had been a member of the House of Representatives but a short time, yet some of the most

constructive features of the government's reconstruction program were already being credited to him. This five million dollar bond issue, for instance, was hailed by leading papers of the country as one of the most important steps yet taken toward relief of the country's economic situation. And its passage through the House was largely due to the persuasive oratory of this stalwart representative of the people of Mississippi.

I turned into Connecticut Avenue and drove north a few blocks until I reached Cranbrook Castle, exclusive old hostelry in which Representative Lucas maintained his home and headquarters. He lived on the tenth floor, so I took an elevator. I knocked on the door which bore his card.

There was no answer. This seemed strange to me because I happened to know that the Representative kept a colored butler named Hutchinson. Thinking that I had not been heard, I rapped again. Still no answer. I tried the door, gently at first. The knob turned; the door slid open.

The outer room was empty; I strode through it quickly. I heard someone moving stealthily in a back room, so I went to investigate, treading the thickly-carpeted floors as quietly as I could. I reached the door of the Representative's bedroom and found it open. I stared inside, then drew back quickly.

What I had seen caused me to wonder. There was a woman in the Representative's room as well as Hutchinson, the butler. The woman's skin was of a light olive color, but her features were definitely Negroid. The two of them were carrying the old man in a sling formed by their interlocked arms and placing him in his bed. The representative himself appeared to be asleep, although fully dressed; his head of silver hair drooped over his left shoulder and his arms hung limp.

I watched the man and the woman as they placed the representative on the bed and stretched him out, then covered him over with a blanket.

"We'd better call the police," the woman said in a hoarse whisper.

"In a minute," the butler agreed. He bustled around the room, straightening things up. He was evidently perturbed and very nervous. He moved quickly over to a small portable table which stood by the bed and began to take the dishes from it, carrying them into the kitchen. On his second trip I heard a muffled crash and saw a small china coffee cup drop to the floor, smashing into a thousand pieces. At this the woman, who seemed even more nervous than Hutchinson, dropped to her knees and began laboriously to pick up the broken bits from the floor. Before she had finished, Hutchinson reached for the telephone.

At this moment I decided to step into the room. Still mystified at the proceedings, I was anxious to discover what was transpiring under my gaze.

"What's happened?" I burst out

suddenly. "Has something happened to Representative Lucas?"

The butler whirled on me, dropping the telephone receiver in his agitation. It clattered to the floor. The woman also turned, amazed.



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and I saw that her eyes were blazing wildly. Neither could speak for a moment, so astonished were they to realize that I had been a silent witness to their actions. Finally the woman found her voice, or a faint ghost of it. "Mr. Lucas is dead!" she whispered.

"Dead!" I cried.

The butler nodded weakly in corroboration. "We just discovered him here. He had gotten up and eaten his breakfast. When he failed to leave for his office we discovered what had happened.

"And haven't you called the police yet?" I was astonished.

"I'm calling them now." The butler picked up the telephone from the carpeted floor. He fiddled the receiver nervously. I snatched it from him. "Give me police headquarters," I told the operator.

Connected with headquarters, I quickly told of my gruesome discovery. Instantly, I knew, a gigantic and highly organized machine would be set into action. Every precinct, every radio patrol car, every policeman on his beat would know of the representative's death within two minutes after my report went in. There was nothing to do now but wait. I called my paper and spoke directly to Jimmie Stewart, giving him every detail of the drama I had seen enacted in the congressman's bedroom. The story, I knew, was good for an extra edition of any man's paper. It was an extraordinary scoop for myself; a scoop for the paper which I represented.

Already I could hear the screaming of sirens of the radio patrol cars tearing up Connecticut Avenue. I glanced swiftly about the room as a flash of movement caught my eye. Hutchinson, the butler, had been telephoning, moving so slowly open window all the time I had been telephoning, moving so slowly and so carefully that I had not noticed that anything was wrong. Now as he caught the attention of my eye I saw that he was making a wild leap for the window, a terrific expression of his face. I shot myself across the room after him and tackled him around the legs as the forward part of his body cleared the window. With all my strength, I tugged at him, bracing myself against the window sill. Finally I landed him back on the floor of the room, panting and so obviously upset that he could do nothing but lie there quietly in an effort to regain his breath. The woman was sobbing now into a tiny handkerchief, the hand which held it trembling as if palsied. She had dropped back into the Representative's easy chair and was waiting there, her head bowed, for whatever might occur.

She was a middle-aged woman who looked as though she might have been beautiful at some time in the past. Perhaps fifty years old, her hair was pure white and her skin clear olive. I wondered a little that she should be working as the congressman's housekeeper because she impressed me as being of a higher calibre than the ordinary domestic. She was dressed in black, a rather sombre black I noticed now, with

only a few touches of color anywhere apparent. Yet, it was the way one would expect a person of her age and position to dress.

My thoughts turned from her, however, as through the open window I saw three speedy scout patrol cars draw up to a stop before the door of the hotel, with a big, black limousine from headquarters following close behind. Uniformed police and plainclothes detectives swarmed out of the cars and rushed into the hotel entrance. A few seconds later they burst into the apartment.

"Where's Representative Lucas?" one of them asked me. "I'm Inspector Paine of the homicide squad; I'm in charge here now," he added by way of explanation.

I pointed to the figure on the bed. "Has the body been moved?" the inspector asked.

"Yes," I informed him. "Before I came in."

"Who moved it?"

"This man and this woman," I pointed out Hutchinson, the butler, and the woman with whom I had found him when I first entered the apartment.

The Inspector turned to them.

"Didn't you know better than to do that?" he roared. "Why didn't you call us at once?"

The butler cowered and mumbled incoherently. The woman's sobbing increased. She calmed herself finally and said, "We didn't know—didn't know the congressman was—was dead. We thought he'd had a heart attack while eating his breakfast. We stretched him on the bed so that we could loosen his clothes and let him breathe a little easier. He had heart trouble, and these things happened rather frequently. But this morning, after we'd put him on the bed, we discovered that he'd stopped breathing." She sobbed again. "His heart was still," she

went on with an effort. "We listened for it."

The inspector turned to Hutchinson. "What were you doing here?" he shot at the servant. "Do you work for Representative Lucas?"

"I do," replied Hutchinson nervously, trying hard to regain his composure. "I'm his butler."

"Do you know whether the Representative has suffered much from heart attacks in the past?"

"Yes, sir, I do. He has, sir, rather often. But they were never very serious, sir. He was getting old. He knew that one day they'd be the end of him. I guess the overwork and strain of getting that bill through the House was a little

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