

Coming Stories by
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BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
THE FEATURE SECTION

The Congressman's Family

By EDWARD LAWSON

WHAT HAS HAPPENED:

Sent out to interview Representative Paul Lucas, Congressman from Mississippi, I discover two persons working frantically over his dead body, removing it from an easy chair and placing it on his bed. One is a man named Hutchinson, Lucas's butler, and the other a middle-aged, white-haired, fairly beautiful woman who describes herself as Lucas's housekeeper. I call the police to handle the case and give the story to my paper. Hutchinson tries to escape by leaping through the window while the police are on the way, but I hold him until they arrive.

The two servants ascribe Lucas's death to an attack of heart disease, but the police doctor, after examination, declares that Lucas was poisoned.

A thorough search of the apartment reveals only one clue, a typewritten note bearing no signature, written by someone obviously unfamiliar with a typewriter. The note reads: "Better stick to your high society ladies or you'll regret it." The author of this note cannot be found, but a detective establishes the fact that it was written on Lucas's own typewriter.

The housekeeper tells a strange story, disclosing that she is the common-law wife of the representative, who is really a Negro. She also discloses the fact that he had been having an affair with a Washington woman, white and a widow, since his arrival in the capital city. Once when she confronted him, she says, Lucas threatened to kill her, but her son rushed in and saved her life.

Tests show that the coffee, spilled on the rug by Hutchinson, contains definite traces of arsenic poisoning. The inspector has the butler and the housekeeper each make a copy of the note found on Lucas's death to see who originally wrote it, but to his surprise finds that both are expert typists and therefore not likely to do a bungling job such as the original note revealed.

Further questioning brings out more evidence, almost all of which points to Hutchinson as the guilty person. The inspector is about to place him under arrest when a new development turns up. Lucas's son, the son of Ethel May Harmon—erstwhile Mrs. Lucas—is discovered hiding in his mother's closet by two patrolmen who have been making a thorough search of the premises.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY:

CHAPTER IV

"Well," the inspector addressed Paul Lucas's son, "Just what are you doing here?"

The boy appeared nervous, almost about to break down.

"I was—hid—sir."

"Oh, I see. Hiding. You knew, then, that your father had been murdered?"

"I knew that he was dead."

"Then why weren't you in there with him when he died? Why did you run away and hide like that?"

"I heard the police coming. I knew there was something wrong. I didn't want to get mixed up in it."

Inspector Paine grunted. "That sounds pretty fishy to me, son," he said.

"It's the truth, sir," the young man protested.

"Why were you so afraid of the police? What had you done to cause you to worry about them?"

"Nothing. But down in Mississippi, where I come from..."

"This isn't Mississippi. We won't lynch you."

"You'd send me to the chair."

"Nonsense, kid. For what?"

"You'd say I killed my father."

"Did you?"

"No sir, I didn't."

"Then why worry? You can prove that you didn't?"

"That's just it, sir. I can't prove that I didn't."

"Where were you when the thing occurred?"

"Here, in this apartment."

"Did you know that your father had been killed?"

"I was in the room when they found that he was dead."

"But you had no real reason to suspect that he had been poisoned?"

"No. I had no real reason to suspect that he had been—poisoned."

"All right. Now come on in here. Into the office. I want you to try something. A little test."

The inspector led the way back through the representative's apartment to the office room. He produced the note found on Lucas's desk,



All of a sudden I remembered that I was a reporter.

"Have you ever seen this note before?" he shot at the boy.

Young Lucas looked at it in astonishment. "No-o, sir," he finally mumbled, shaking his head.

"All right. You see it now. You can read what it says, can't you?"

"Yes sir. It says, 'Better stick to your high-society ladies or you'll regret it.' It doesn't make sense. I don't understand it."

"All right," Inspector Paine soothed him. "It doesn't need to make sense. But here's what I want you to do. I want you to sit down at this typewriter and make me a copy of it, just as you see it here. Would you mind doing that for me?"

"But I can't typewrite, sir. I never had any occasion to learn."

"Just punch it out, any way you can. You can see how badly typed the original was. You couldn't do much worse than that."

"All right, sir." Young Lucas seated himself at the desk and laboriously began to work with the typewriter. It was several minutes before he had finished.

The inspector took the completed copy and scrutinized it closely. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that at last he had been successful. The errors in the original note and those in Young Lucas's copy were almost identical!

Inspector Paine looked up with a faint smile. "Do you still want to contend that you didn't write the original note on his typewriter?" he asked the dead man's son.

"I never saw the note until just now, sir. I don't know what it means yet."

The inspector eyed him closely. "Lucas," he said, "you may not know it, but you've given yourself away completely. The typing which you just did for me is so identical with that of the original note that it leaves no question in my mind as to who wrote the original. The same

mis-spacings, the same letters off alignment..."

"But the typewriter's old, sir," the boy protested. "I'd do the same with anybody who's never had any typing experience. An expert, maybe, could handle it without any trouble. But a person who didn't know how..."

"We'll see about that." The inspector beckoned to a police sergeant standing beside him.

"Butler, did you ever learn to type? I mean, are you in any way an experienced typist?"

"No sir, inspector. I never had any need for learning it myself. Some sergeants have to make out typewritten reports, but I do mine in pen and ink."

"All right, Butler. Now you've seen what I've done with these three persons here—the butler, the housekeeper, and Mr. Lucas's son. I want you to do just exactly the same thing that they did—sit down here at the desk and make a typed copy of the mysterious note. Do you mind?"

"Not at all, sir. It's all part of my job."

The sergeant sat down at the desk. Inspector Paine inserted a sheet of paper into the typewriter for him. Then, laboriously, the sergeant began to pick out the letters of the original note. When he had finished, he drew out the sheet and handed it to his superior for inspection.

The inspector looked it over, and an expression of complete bafflement creased his face. He picked up the copy which had originally been found on the Congressman's desk and the one which Young Lucas had made. The three of them corresponded exactly!

"I guess we've gone to all our trouble for nothing," he said finally. "The typewriter's old; any person unexperienced in typing would make the same errors. We couldn't hold

young Lucas on this evidence any them a tall, slender white woman. I noticed immediately that she was a beautiful creature, slightly along in age but exquisitely featured and tastefully dressed. Only the great mass of gleaming white hair which she wore brushed back and knotted over each ear revealed that she was past middle age.

She said, "Well, well, what's all this about?" as she entered the room.

"Mr. Lucas has been murdered," the inspector informed her gravely. "Yes, your men informed me. I came right over. Is there anything I can do? I'm only a friend of Mr. Lucas, you know, but a rather close friend."

"So I've heard," Inspector Paine said with slight sarcasm.

"Have you found—the murderer?"

"Not yet. We thought you might have an idea—a clue—to contribute."

"But of course I never knew anything about the Congressman's private affairs."

"What were your relations with him?"

"I was his friend. A sort of very special friend."

"I see. Did you know that he had—a family?"

"A family?"

"Yes. A wife. A grown-up child."

"He told me he was not married. I took his word for it."

"Then you've never seen or heard of—these people?" The inspector pointed to Lucas's wife and her son.

"I don't remember. Who are they?"

"Are you sure you don't know?"

"Oh, of course. They're his servants. The woman was his housekeeper. I don't know the young man."

"Would it surprise you very much, Miss, if I informed you that the woman was Lucas's—wife?"

The woman's jaw dropped in amazement.

"And that this young man is his son?"

"But they couldn't be!" she protested. "They're—they're Negroes."

"You never knew that Paul Lucas was a colored man?"

"Of course he wasn't. How did he get into the House of Representatives—and from Mississippi?"

"He was light enough to get by. But that isn't the point now. The point is that you've gotten yourself mixed up in his affairs. We'll have to question you to see if you know anything about this murder. Unless, of course, you want to tell what you know voluntarily."

"I don't mind telling," the woman said. "I don't know very much, nothing that would shed any light on his death."

"All right. Let's hear what you do know."

The woman sank into an easy chair and played with a small lace handkerchief a moment before she told her story.

"I met Representative Lucas only a few weeks ago," she said. "He hadn't been in Congress long, but he was getting to be pretty well known around Washington. He was a great talker, you know, and when he talked he said something. He made people sit up and take notice."

"I liked his personality. He was about my own age—almost fifty—and he was interesting to talk to. We struck up quite a friendship before long, and whenever he went any place, he'd take me along. I was a widow—my husband died nearly ten years ago—so I welcomed his company. He was always very kind to me, and though he never spoke of getting married, I imagined that he was rather fond of me. I know that I was beginning to love him. But of course that was before I knew about this terrible thing. And before I knew, too, that he was a Negro."

"You never had any argument with him about anything?"

"Never, sir. There was nothing for us to argue about."

The inspector turned, went to the Congressman's office, and returned bearing the mysterious note whose authorship he had so long been endeavoring to determine.

"Have you ever seen this before?" he asked her.

"Of course," she said as she looked at it. "I wrote it!"

"Well, well, well! Then maybe you can explain what it means?"

She shook her head and smiled. "It doesn't mean a thing. I was sitting there in Mr. Lucas's office one evening, waiting for him to change his clothes. We were going out to dinner together. I had nothing to do, so I started playing with the typewriter. You see what I wrote. It's crazy. It didn't mean anything. The words just happened to fit through my mind. I never did much typing—that's why there're so many errors."

Inspector Paine bit his lip. He felt instinctively that this woman was telling the truth. Realizing that the hopes which he had placed upon the cryptic note as a clue were unfounded, he decided to take another tack.

"He said, 'That's all for you, lady, just now. If I need you again I'll call you.'"

"Then I may go?"

"No, stay right here. I'm going to get at the bottom of this thing in a few minutes. I may have a few questions to ask you."

"Anything you say," she assented cheerfully.

The inspector turned his attention once again to young Lucas. "There're still a few holes in your story," he said.

"But I've told you everything I know about the case, sir."

"Are you sure you've told everything?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you tell me anything about any of the others involved—anything we haven't discovered for ourselves?"

"No sir. I don't believe so."

"What about Hutchinson? His story sounds suspicious to me. Didn't he have some reason for wanting your father out of the way?"

"I'm not sure, sir."

"What do you mean, you're not sure?"

"Well, inspector, I do know this—Hutchinson was rather madly in love—with my mother!"

Young Lucas's statement, like a sudden electric shock, stunned us all for a moment. And before we knew what was happening there was a flash of movement across the room. The door was torn open and Hutchinson, whose motive for kill-

Continued on Page Two

NEXT WEEK COMING

True Detective Story

Who Killed Ernie Gough, Leavenworth, Kansas Detective?

Nobody saw the killers, and Ernie died without telling.

The mayor of the city and Congressman DePriest spoke at the funeral July 28, 1932.

This month the three killers go on trial for murder.

How were they caught?

See Next Week's Magazine