

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 a bed. One is a man named Hutchinson, the Congressman's butler, and the other a middle-aged, white haired, fairly beautiful woman who described herself as Lucas's housekeeper. I call the police to handle the case and give the amazing 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 the man's death to an attack of heart disease, but the police doctor, after examination, declares that Lucas has been murdered by poisoning.

A thorough search of the apartment reveals only one clue, a typewritten note bearing no signature, written by some one obviously unfamiliar with a typewriter. The note says: "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 the dead man's own typewriter.

The housekeeper then tells her story, disclosing that the Representative is a Negro and that she is his common-law wife. She also discloses the fact that he had been having an affair with a Washington woman, a white widow, since his arrival in the capital city.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY:

CHAPTER III

"So he threatened to kill you, did he?" Inspector Paine stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Well, that certainly makes the thing more interesting. First of all we'll have to get hold of this mysterious white woman, and then we'll have to corral Lucas's son. Is he in town, lady?"

"Yes, he's stopping at the White-law."

"All right. Jones and Wilson, you

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get busy and bring this woman in. Hardy and Johnson, you dig up this woman's son. Make it snappy, all of you. I want to talk to both of them."

The four detectives left the room. Inspector Paine turned to Hutchinson, the butler.

"What do you know about this—this murder?" he snapped.

Hutchinson shook his head slowly, sadly.

"All I know," he said, "is that we found Mr. Lucas here in his room this morning, seated in his easy chair, looking as though he were asleep. When he failed to wake up in time to get to his downtown office, I tried to awaken him, gently. But then I noticed that something was wrong. He didn't wake up. I became alarmed and called Miss Harmon here, the housekeeper. She said that it was a heart attack, and that he had them quite often. She said the best thing to do was to put him on his bed and loosen up his clothes. We did that, and then this man happened in." He pointed at me.

"You had helped fix his breakfast this morning?"

"Yes, sir. I made the coffee in the percolator. Miss Harmon did the rest."

"I see. And what became of the coffee? Mr. Lucas drank it?"

"No sir, he didn't. At least, not very much of it."

"Then what became of it?"

"It was spilled, sir." He pointed silently to a spot on the floor.

"Oh, I see." The Inspector looked at the butler quizzically. "Do you remember just who spilled it?" he asked suddenly.

"I did, sir."

"Ummm. You just knocked it off the table, accidentally, to the floor?"

"Yes sir, while we were transferring Mr. Lucas's body to the bed."

The Inspector turned to me, "Did you see him do that?"

"Spill the coffee on the floor, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Yes, sir, I saw him."

"Did it look like an accident to you?"

"He just brushed against the table and the coffee cup slid off. That was all. He didn't knock it off."

"It wasn't necessary to brush against the table in such a way as to knock the cup off, was it?"

"No, but he just seemed to turn that way without thinking and the cup tumbled to the floor. But what's all this got to do with the case?"

"I have an idea," the Inspector said, "there was something more



"Just copy the words of the note down on this sheet of paper," said the Inspector.

in that cup than mere coffee."

"You mean—poison?" I gasped.

"Exactly."

"But how can you find out? The coffee's all soaked into the rug now."

"The department has chemical experts who can smell poison a mile away. They'll get it out of the rug if there's any there." The Inspector beckoned to two patrolmen who had been standing behind him, listening to the proceedings. "Get this rug up off the floor and hustle it out to the Bureau of Standards in a scout car just as fast as you can get it there. Have them examine it—especially that dark spot over there—for traces of poison. Call me here just as soon as they finish their analysis."

The two men saluted and went to work, rolling up the heavy rug.

"Now," said the Inspector, facing the housekeeper and the butler, who were sitting moodily together in a corner, "it looks to me as though this case of poisoning—this murder—lies between the two of you. Miss Harmon, you say that you are in reality Paul Lucas's wife, working as his housekeeper. You say

that he refused to support you, and that he threatened at one time to kill you. Is all that true?"

The woman twisted her hands together in silence for a moment.

"Yes," she said quietly, "that's all true. But I never held that against him. I've always been fair-minded. I could see his point of view as well as my own. I never held anything against him. And I certainly wouldn't have killed him: You see, I still—still love him."

The Inspector fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a crumpled, typewritten note. "Were you the one who wrote this?" he asked.

The woman took the sheet of paper and read it quickly. "Better stick to your high society ladies or you'll regret it," the note said.

She shook her head. "No, of course I didn't write this. I haven't the slightest idea what it means. I've never seen the thing before."

She handed it back to the Inspector. He turned to Hutchinson, the butler, and handed the note to him. "Have you ever seen this before?"

Hutchinson took in the contents of the scrap of paper at a glance. I noticed, and I suppose the Inspector noticed too, that his hand trembled ever so slightly as he held it.

"No sir," he cried, "I never wrote any such letter as that."

"Are you—sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

The Inspector smiled wanly. "There is a way to tell," he said slowly, "just who it was that wrote this note. You two come up into the front office. I want to give you a little test."

He led the way into the Representative's office room, followed by the woman and man and a coterie of detectives and reporters.

"Now," he said, "here's what I want you to do. One of you. I believe, sent this note to Representative Lucas. It is very important to me to know which one of you it was. To discover that, therefore, I want you to do this for me—I want you to sit down here at this typewriter and copy the note on a clean sheet of paper. Miss Harmon, you may go first. Just copy the words of the note down on this sheet of paper."

The woman seated herself at the desk, and with quivering hand inserted the sheet of paper into the typewriter. She glanced at the note, then began to type. In less than five seconds she had copied off the brief sentence, working expertly and without the slightest difficulty. "You see," she said, "when I was very young I was a stenographer. That was how I came to meet Paul."

The Inspector took the newly typewritten sheet and compared it

with the note which he had found on Lucas's desk. The difference in typing was immediately apparent.

The first note was poorly written, the letters were not spaced properly, the words were not aligned correctly. The copy which the woman had made was correctly done in every detail, the work of an expert rather than that of an amateur.

Immediately I saw through the Inspector's method. Having proved that the housekeeper could not have written the note which was the only clue so far unearthed to the murderer, he would now turn to Hutchinson, the butler. The chances were 100 to 1 that Hutchinson would do a bungling job on the typewriter, perhaps making the same obvious errors which were contained in the original note. Would this not connect him directly to the note as its author, and thus indirectly to the murder of the Congressman?

"And now, Mr. Hutchinson," the Inspector said, "I want you to do the same thing Miss Harmon—

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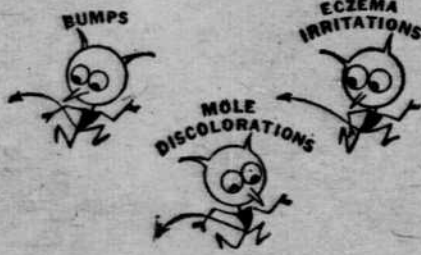


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