

Death Among The Dunes

Introducing Dr. Mordacai Wescott, investigator, who solves the problem at Dune House, down among the sand-dunes on the coast of North Carolina.

By WILBORNE HARRELL

★ A Chowan Herald Fiction Story.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED

Josiah Fentress, millionaire sportsman, has been murdered at his home, Dune House, on the coast of North Carolina. Dr. Mordacai Wescott, eccentric detective, is assisting Sergeant Crosby of the police to solve the crime. The police strongly suspect Octavia Fentress, the wife of Josiah Fentress, but Dr. Wescott believes her innocent. Dr. Wescott and Jimmy Maguire, newspaperman and narrator of the story, is met at Land's End by Sergeant Crosby who is to escort them across the Sound to Dune House. On the trip, Captain Wayne, who is in charge of the boat, tells Wescott and Crosby that Josiah Fentress, contrary to local belief, was a cruel, sadistic man. Sergeant Crosby quickly seizes upon this information as a motive for the crime and further proof of the guilt of Octavia Fentress.

Chapter Four

The inquest was held that afternoon, and Mrs. Fentress was now being questioned. Crosby having just stepped down from giving a recital of the finding of the gun and the fingerprints thereon that were identified as those of Mrs. Fentress. "Reddy," rather nervously, had just told of finding the body, and from the looks of her ghastly face I thought she was going to repeat her fainting act. Across the room with his eyes fixed on Mrs. Fentress's face, now beautiful with a marble whiteness that told of much suffering, sat Crane, his eyes never wavering from the woman he loved and who was facing her inquisitors with the resigned calmness that comes from exhaustion.

Captain Wayne stood in the doorway grimly surveying the tense tableau before him. Wescott was the only one in the room at ease. He seemed to be enjoying the situation and an unlighted stogy at the same time.

"She's beautiful, isn't she, Jimmy?" he whispered to me. "The face that launched a thousand ships couldn't hold a candle to her."

The coroner was speaking. "Mrs. Fentress, will you please tell the jury how your fingerprints came to be on this gun, if they were not left there in the process of firing the bullet that brought about the death of your hus-

band?" In one deft sentence he had reached the crux of the matter, and had asked the one question that would probably clear her if she would answer it.

Wescott leaned forward, tense now. The room was as quiet as a church. Crosby for once was holding his cigar still. Someone cleared his throat with startling loudness, so quiet had things become.

"Come now, Mrs. Fentress, surely there must be some reason for those prints."

Octavia Fentress's dainty hands were slowly tearing to shreds a wisp of lace that did duty as a handkerchief.

"Please—please don't ask me that. I—I—". Her hands covered her face. Then, "I did it. I did it," she moaned. "I killed him." And she slumped to the floor. With one bound Crane reached her before the stupefied coroner had recovered his wits.

"That's a lie!" Crane shouted. "I killed Fentress! She didn't do it; she said that to protect me. I killed him, I tell you, I killed him!" The room was in an uproar.

"Quiet—quiet!" shouted the coroner, his gavel beating a furious tattoo as he attempted to restore some semblance of order. His momentary surprise had passed.

A few minutes later when quiet had been restored, the coroner announced the inquest temporarily adjourned, but no one was to leave Dune House. He was evidently too flustered to continue; events were coming too thick and fast for him. They were coming too fast for me, too, for that matter.

It was obvious that Crane had made his spectacular confession on the spur of the moment and with some confused idea of protecting Octavia Fentress. I daresay that Crane had not the faintest idea what he was saying; the sight of the woman he loved being subjected to such ruthless, although necessary, handling by the coroner had simply brought the confession to his lips as a subconscious protective gesture.

Now . . . Did Octavia Fentress tell the truth? Did she really kill her husband. Whenever I looked at her I said, "No," but away from her dazzling radiance my Quixotic impulses would not stand the cold light of reason. Or, did she suspect Crane of the murder? No, hardly that—Crane's alibi was unimpeachable, and Mrs.

Fentress knew it. Then who? . . . What? . . . How explain her fingerprints on the gun and her equally inexplicable reticence concerning them? Who did it, if she didn't?

Outside, I joined Wescott. He was gazing out to sea and puffing like a locomotive on his stogy. His hat was off and the wind was whipping his hair into a tangled mess. His face bore that expression of sadness that I had come to know so well as meaning he had about reached the end of the trail. My heart gave a bound. Wescott knew!

As I came up to him he turned to me. "Jimmy, this is no case for ordinary detective tricks; Crosby with all his 'evidence' and 'clues' are unavailing. But evidently he is going to place Octavia Fentress under arrest for the murder of her husband; and that must not happen, Jimmy." His gaze again sought the far reaches of the horizon, and as though talking to himself, he said, "Time is short. We must act, and at once. Jimmy, I have a theory based almost wholly on a hunch, and I am going to act on that hunch. I know I will be treading on dangerous ground; I may be wrong."

Wescott turned away from his seagazing and his eyes again sought me. "Did you notice Captain Wayne very closely, Jimmy? Did you notice anything particularly striking about him—about his face, for instance? Was there a blemish or something that reminded you of someone else? Think, Jimmy, think hard. Where is that boasted close observation of yours?"

Vaguely my brain stirred. There WAS something, but just what . . . "When he smiled, Jimmy, when Captain Wayne smiled, what did you see? Think!"

My memory clicked. "The dimple!" I almost shouted, and Wescott smiled and said, "Now who does that remind you of?"

"Why Octavia Fentress, of course." On the stand that afternoon she had flashed one wan, tired little smile at Wescott, and there on her cheek had blossomed one of the most ravishing dimples I had ever seen in a woman's face. And Captain Wayne had one such dimple, in exactly the same place, that sprang into prominence when he smiled. But what was Wescott driving at?

"Exactly. Mrs. Fentress, and no

other. That is my hunch, Jimmy—a woman's dimple. Unless I am not far wrong the estimable Captain Wayne and Octavia Fentress are blood related; those two identical dimples place too great a strain on my credence for me to believe they are coincidental. Besides, such points of facial similarities have been a special study for me. I don't think I am far wrong; yet I may be mistaken. We must interview Captain Wayne about that dimple."

(Concluded Next Week)

Weekly Devotional Column

By JAMES MACKENZIE

Every now and then someone will ask me what I think of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (the "New Bible"). For whatever value they may have, I would like to present here a few thoughts on this issue.

First off, there is a crying need for a new translation of the Bible into English. No one will deny this. Since 1611, when the King James translation was made, we have discovered Greek and Hebrew manuscripts far more ancient than those we had at our disposal then. Further, archeology and research have given us a greater knowledge of these two languages, knowledge which enables us better to understand the exact meaning intended by the sacred writers. Then, too, many English words have changed their meaning in the past three-hundred-plus years. A mong these are "let" (which in the King James Version can mean either "allow" or "prevent"), "prevent" (that means "precede"), "perfect" (which means "mature"), "conversation"

("manner of life"), "ghost" ("spirit"), and "charity" ("love").

Does the R. S. V. meet the need for a new translation? In some respects, I think it does. Passages which had become obscure in the King James translation take on new meaning in the R. S. V. (see, for example, Romans 6: 17). I realize that the language is not nearly so beautiful as that of the older translation, but surely we who seek the will of God are willing to sacrifice poetical language for accuracy of meaning.

In opposition to the Revised Standard Version, it should be noted that: 1. The men who are responsible for this translation, with but one exception, are men who do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible (that is, they believe the thoughts may be inspired, but not the words). Such a view does not at all insure an accurate translation. Many of these men deny the basic teachings of the Bible; they do not believe in the virgin birth of Christ, in the resurrection of Christ, in eternal torment. Naturally, it is impossible for such men to give us an honest translation. Their bias is evident in many places (see especially Isaiah 7: 14). 2. In the King James translation, words which were not in the original, but which have been added to insure continuity of thought, are in italics. This has not been done in the R. S. V. (a good example of this is Romans 5: 2. The King James translation of this is the more accurate). 3. The translators of the R. S. V. profess to use the pronouns "thee" and "thou" for God, and "you" and "yours" for men. By doing this they divorce many Old Testament prophecies of Christ from their New Testament fulfillment (see, for example, Psalm 2: 7 as compared with Hebrews 1: 5 and Psalm 45: 6 as compared with Hebrews 1: 8).

4. By introducing quotation marks, the translators of the R. S. V. have arbitrarily decided many problems of interpretation about which there have

always been honest differences of opinion. For example, evangelical scholars have always thought that the words of Jesus to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John continued through the 21st verse. In the R. S. V., they end with verse fifteen.

In conclusion, I feel that the Revised Standard Version is a good translation, but that it should be read with a good deal of care. Especially as you read it keep in mind the bias of the translators. It is my earnest prayer that within the next few years evangelical Christian scholars will present us with a translation that is scholarly, accurate, and honoring to Christ, who is the Hero of the Bible.

Rubbing It In

Pletsch—"You look sore, old egg. What's wrong?"

Plumb—"I am sore. You know I was in the mile run. Well, when I got to the finish line some bum leaned out of the stand and yelled: 'Step on it buddy—they went that way!'"

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