

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.

Note: Although the general locale of this story is identifiable, all the characters, incidents and situations are entirely the product of the author's imagination, and have no reference to any actual persons, places or events.

Chapter One

Dr. Wescott was in when I telephoned that eventful Thursday afternoon. The maid answered my ring. Would the Doctor be so kind as to grant me an interview? . . . He would . . . I was to come immediately. And hurry!

I hung up. The Doctor was a queer duck, a little eccentric in his ways but a right guy at that. My connection with Dr. Wescott brought me some of my greatest stories and most sensational scoops. I may also add it endeared me to my editor, who made no bones about admitting that he considered my advantageous relations with the Doc one of his most valued assets. That also assured me a plushy job, since I have acquired the expensive habit of eating, it was Okay by me. But don't get me wrong. I did not use my position to take advantage of Dr. Wescott. I liked the guy. And although our association sometimes assumed the status of apparent antagonism, we each respected the other. I was really fond of the Doc, but that was a fact I would not allow myself to admit except in my more mellow moods. In all the years that I had known him, Dr. Wescott had not hurried himself or requested haste of another but exactly twice—the two times in my life I had scooped the biggest stories of my life. His request for haste surely meant something was up; so you can bet your bottom dollar I didn't lose much time getting there.

I flagged a taxi, and telling the driver to give her the works, I was soon pressing the bell on Dr. Wescott's rather unimposing front door. The maid let me in, the same one who had answered the phone. Her name is Marie, and she rightly belongs in the movies, right along beside Marilyn Monroe, and not in the staid atmosphere of Dr. Wescott's home. Marie was a displaced war refugee. That was another thing that made me like the guy; he was always doing things, quietly, for the unfortunate. But enough of Marie. I knew my way about and proceeded straight to Wescott's study, or den. This den of Dr. Wescott's needs a little explaining. As I have said, Wescott was an eccentric individual much given to little peculiarities that to one who didn't know him would appear as strange, to say the least. And in a way he was strange. One glance around his study would convince anyone of that. But despite this he was the type of man one liked to meet, and know.

Wescott had been a great traveler, and in the course of his wanderings he had collected many odd relics of by-gone ages and civilizations. These objects, as they lined the shelves of the numerous cabinets and rested on the table tops, were the things that struck this bizarre note. Even now I shudder every time I cross its threshold. I can't for the life of me accustom myself to his curios, and especially have I a dislike for those small shrunken heads, about the size of an apple—the head of humans with the skull removed by some secret process and shrunk to a gruesome Lilliputian size, by the head hunters of South America. But Wescott claims they are the choice bits of his whole collection, as they are

very rare, and were obtained with much difficulty and under conditions extremely dangerous. In fact, they had cost the lives of two men, one native and one white member of the expedition that had secured them. Also, there were objects unfamiliar to the average person but peculiar to his trade, that added to the mystic subtlety that pervaded the room.

Dr. Wescott was a criminologist; or, as he liked to style himself when in good humor, an "intuitive" detective, and in that respect he was no less uniquely individual than the room of horrors he chose to call his den. He was, in his habits of dress and manner, as old-fashioned as a plush bound album resting on a marble topped table. But in his work Dr. Wescott was as up-to-date as nuclear fission, and about as deadly, too—for criminals. His was a figure that through sheer weight of personality and brains had created an enviable niche for himself in his chosen profession. And it fell to me, an ordinary reporter, to get within the good graces and to hold the friendship of such a man. It was indeed fortunate for me, and much to my advantage professionally (as I have said before), to be associated with him.

I found the door of the den closed, but opening it softly, I entered. It was Dr. Wescott's wish, or demand rather, that I do this. My quietly walking in, he explained, was less likely to intrude upon his trend of thought, if he happened to be engaged upon a problem at the moment, than the startling staccato raps of knocking. Wescott barely looked up when I entered. "Sit down, Jimmy. Just a minute." A few scratches of his pen, and then throwing that writ'g instrument down as if it had suddenly exhausted its usefulness, he whirled around in his chair. Without preamble, he said, "Josiah Fentress is dead! Murdered, Jimmy."

This he shot at me so suddenly, and as I had been gazing at those shrunken heads hanging by their scalp-locks on the opposite wall, I was startled; and I pride myself on possessing strong nerves, if few other virtues. I fancy for the moment I imagined those heads had taken on life and jumped at me. Damn those heads! "Murdered, Jimmy. Shot down in cold blood by person or persons unknown, as those coroner chaps have a way of putting it." Wescott was still talking.

I was pleased to note that he had taken no notice of my start, and was proceeding as though nothing had happened. "Do the police know who did it?" I asked. And could have bitten off my tongue for asking such a foolish question. Of course the police know, or were working on clues that would soon apprehend the criminal. They always were. I glanced around the room and those heads were leering at me.

"In this instance the police do not know although they think they do. According to them the case is cleared up. They got on the scene soon after it happened. They examined the gun—yes, they got that, too—for fingerprints and found it smeared with the prints of that pretty young wife of Fentress's and of Fentress himself. It can't be suicide, because the weapon was found hidden—exactly where a woman would hide it—and no suicide hides the weapon after killing himself. They've got the motive, too, Jimmy. She's sole heir of the Fentress millions and that's enough

for the police." This was a long speech for Wescott. He paused and glared at me.

By this time I had found my tongue.

"Noted Sportsman Slain By Pretty Wife'. Lord! What a story; and Fentress of all men! Say, do you think his wife really did it? They fastened it on her pretty quick."

Dr. Wescott bit one of those evil-smelling stogies he smokes before replying.

"She denies killing him but admits the prints are hers; although she refuses to tell how they came to be on the murder weapon. That shows up bad for her." He puffed furiously for a moment and then rose from his chair. "But I tell you this, Jimmy. Octavia Fentress never killed her husband. I know her well enough to know that she is incapable of such an act. And that's where we come in. No matter how airtight a case the police have, we'll punch holes in it. Suppose her prints were on the gun. There's some plausible explanation, and we'll find it."

"I am working with the police on this; they invited me to sit in because they are sure they have an airtight case, and I won't be able to upset it for them." He glanced at his watch. "Come on; we haven't but a few minutes to catch the bus for Land's End. Sergeant Crosby is to meet us there. Ever been to Dune House? Pretty place. Blue ocean, sanddunes, wonderful air—you'll enjoy it. And you'll get a story for your precious paper." (Continued Next Week)

Like gluttony or drunkenness, hatred seems an agreeable vice when you practice it yourself, but disgusting when observed in others. —Will Irwin.

TAYLOR THEATRE

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Tuesday and Wednesday, July 7-8—
Double Feature—
Joan Leslie in "THE WOMAN THEY ALMOST LYNCHED"
—also—
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Wed., Thurs., Fri., and Sat., July 1-2-3-4—
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Sunday, July 5—
Rhonda Fleming in "LITTLE EGYPT"

Monday and Tuesday, July 6-7—
Joel McCrea in "CATTLE TOWN"

Wednesday and Thursday, July 8-9—
Richard Widmark in "MY PAL GUS"

(Note: If your name appears in this ad bring it to the Taylor Theatre box office and receive a free pass to see one of the pictures advertised in the ad.)

Betty Ruth Byrum Weds Joseph H. Ward

Wedding Solemnized In Baptist Church Saturday Afternoon

The marriage of Miss Betty Ruth Byrum, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Gaskins Byrum of Edenton, to Thomas Edward Ward, son of Mrs. Joseph Henry Ward, and the late Mr. Ward, took place in the Edenton Baptist Church on Saturday afternoon, June 27, at 5:30 o'clock.

The ceremony was performed by the Rev. R. N. Carroll, and Miss Agnes Chappell rendered the wedding music. Miss Pat Flowers of Atlanta, Georgia, sang "I Love Thee" and "Because."

The bride, given in marriage by her father, was attired in a gown of Chantilly lace and nylon tulle over satin. The long-sleeved lace bodice was designed with off-shoulder scalloped neckline of Chantilly lace, accordion-pleated ruffles of nylon tulle formed the chapel length train. Her fingertip veil of illusion fell from a Mary Scott Cap of nylon tulle and seeded pearl leaves. She carried a cascade bouquet of stephanotis and butterfly orchids.

Miss Lucille Overton of Newport News, Va., was maid of honor. She wore a bouffant strapless gown of pink nylon tulle with matching stole and headdress. She carried a Colonial nosegay of blue delphinium, and pink Ester Reed daisies centered with pink rose buds.

The bridesmaids were Miss Kathleen Ward, sister of the bridegroom, Miss Kitty Campen, cousin of the bride, Miss Lillian Leary, Miss Margaret Williams, Miss Peggy Goodwin and Mrs. John Raines. They were attired in gowns of apple green nylon tulle, with headdresses; and nosegays fashioned like those of the maid of honor. Hurley Ward, brother of the bridegroom, was best man. The ushers were Albert Gaskins Byrum, Jr. brother of the bride, William E. Bond.

CARD OF THANKS

We are taking this method to express our sincere thanks to our friends and neighbors who were so kind in helping us in so many ways during the funeral of my dear son and our dear brother, John Ortese Capehart.

We also thank you for the cars loaned, beautiful flowers, cards received and all who rendered service in any way.
Bettie Capehart and Family.

Jr., cousin of the bride, Eric Haste, Sherwood Chesson, Mack Privott and Gene Spruill, all of Edenton.

The bride's mother wore a gown of ice blue lace and taffeta with matching hat, and wore a corsage of blush orchids. The bridegroom's mother wore a gown of Navy blue lace and a white orchid.

Mrs. W. P. Jones was mistress of ceremonies.

Immediately following the wedding a reception was held at the home of the bride's parents. For traveling the bride wore a Navy blue dressmaker suit of embossed Honan silk, with blue and white accessories. She wore a corsage of white orchids.

Mrs. Ward was graduated from St. Mary's School, Raleigh, North Carolina in 1953. She made her debut at the Terpsichorean Club hall in the fall of 1952 in Raleigh. Mr. Ward served three years in the Army Air Force in World War II.

CHRISTIAN CHURCH SERVICES

Services at the First Christian Church have been announced as follows by the pastor, the Rev. E. C. Alexander:
Bible School, Sunday morning at 10 o'clock; morning service at 11 o'clock; evening service at 7:30 o'clock. Wednesday Evening Bible Class meets at 7:30 o'clock. Everyone is welcome to young people's meeting at 6:30 P. M.; all services.

With faint praises one another damn. —Wycherly.

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