

DR. WESCOTT SOLVES

The Case of High Murder

by Wilborne Harrell

A CHOWAN HERALD FICTION STORY



"Fasten your seat-belts," the loudspeaker blared. "Fasten your seat-belts, please. We're coming in for a landing."
 Dr. Wescott shook me awake. "Huh?" My eyes were drugged with sleep.
 "Fasten your seat-belt, Jimmy," said Dr. Wescott. "We're landing."
 I rubbed my eyes and glanced about me, slowly becoming aware of my surroundings. We were aboard a huge airliner at the termination of one of Dr. Wescott's innumerable trips in the course of his business—

which was private investigator extraordinary.
 With the exception of the buzzing of the liner by a light-plane, which had caused the pilot to dive sharply to avoid a collision, the trip had proved uneventful.

I was here because in my capacity as a crime reporter I had come to know Wescott well. We'd become very good friends, and since I wrote up all of his cases, what could be more logical and natural than for me to accompany him on his many investigations. So, in the course of a long association I had earned a certain measure of publicity as Dr. Wescott's Boswell, man-Friday and Dr. Watson, and the official chronicler of his cases. Frankly, I enjoyed basking in the reflected light of Dr. Wescott's fame.

Dr. Wescott busied himself stuffing his briefcase with the papers on which he had been working during the flight. He

glanced across the aisle at a fellow-passenger, who, still asleep, apparently hadn't heard the loudspeaker.

Zipping his briefcase shut, Wescott said, "Wake up Mr. Abernathy, Jimmy. And help him with his seat-belt. This is his first flight, and he is not familiar with flight routine."

I leaned over and patted Mr. Abernathy on the shoulder. "Wake up, Mr. Abernathy, we're touching down in a few minutes—here, let me help you with your seat-belt. You see, it's all over now—there was nothing to be afraid of." Mr. Abernathy was morbidly afraid of planes—so he'd told Wescott—it was almost a phobia with him. But Mr. Abernathy slept on.

I placed my hand on his shoulder and began to shake him, but the pressure of my hand started him falling away from me. Like an inert ragdoll he fell slowly over on the seat, and then rolled to the floor.

Too startled to do or say anything, I merely gaped foolishly at him as he lay quietly at my feet. It had all happened so quickly none of the other passenger's had noticed Mr. Abernathy's fall, but Wescott, always alert, caught the movement. He quietly stepped over, pushed me to one side, and knelt down by the fallen man. He felt for a heartbeat, and then grasping Mr. Abernathy's wrist, felt for the pulse. After a moment, Dr. Wescott straightened his tall frame; somberly he look-

ed down at the prone Mr. Abernathy.

He turned to me and placing his hand on my shoulder, said, "Get a grip on yourself, Jimmy. This man is dead."

Later, at police headquarters, Wescott and Lieutenant Crosby were in earnest conversation. At the moment, Wescott was pacing the floor with his hands in his pockets, thinking out loud. That was the way he liked to talk when he had a case on his mind. Crosby was seated at his desk, playing with a pencil, and wearing a worried crease between his eyes. "But, Mordcaï," he said, "the medical examiner thoroughly examined Abernathy before they removed him from the plane, and definitely and positively stated the cause of death was a heart attack. No bullet wounds, no knife wounds, no poison, no nothing—and you come in here and calmly state the man was murdered! Can you prove that?"

Wescott stopped in mid-stride, removed his hands from his pockets, pulled up a chair and sat down at the desk, facing Crosby. "No," he said slowly and thoughtfully, "but I have an interesting story to tell that will start you thinking, start that police nose of yours to itching. If you do a little investigation I think you will come to the same conclusion I stacks up: Blessingham, aware have—that Abernathy was mur-

dered. And if you get that far, you'll find your proof."

"Go on," said Crosby, "I'm listening."

After lighting a cigarette with exasperating deliberation, Dr. Wescott continued. "There are more ways of committing murder than by conventional and orthodox methods. Abernathy was the victim of a very unorthodox but also a very clever murderer." He snuffed the ash from his cigarette, said, "Abernathy and I became friendly on the plane trip. The man evidently led a lonely life and he opened up to me, patently pleased to have an understanding ear into which he could pour his troubles. It seems that Abernathy was in business with a partner named Blessingham, and it was not a very happy partnership. Blessingham was continually taking advantage of Abernathy's easy-going nature to the extent that he, Blessingham, was gaining practically the complete control of the business. Abernathy finally woke up to the unpleasant fact that Blessingham was trying to freeze him out entirely.

"Now," said Wescott, straightening in his chair and dragging on his cigarette, "the plot thickens. Of course, Abernathy did not tell me this part in detail, for he was unaware of the murdering plot. But I read between the lines, and this is how it came to the same conclusion I stacks up: Blessingham, aware of Abernathy's heart condition

and his morbid fear of airplanes, cooked up a business trip for Abernathy, and somehow persuaded him to go by air. Blessingham impressed upon him the trip was urgent and absolutely necessary. So—Abernathy boarded a plane for the first time in his life."

Dr. Wescott paused, and turning to me, said, "Jimmy, remember when our plane was buzzed by a lightplane, so close the pilot went into a steep dive to avoid a collision? It was the sudden shock of the plane's dive that killed Abernathy. He thought we were going to crash, and the shock was too much for his heart."

Then Wescott, turning back to Crosby, added his final clincher to the story. "I have learned, Crosby, that Blessingham was an ace pilot in World War II and in Korea, and he owned a Cessna 140, the same type plane that did the buzzing. Remember, it took expert flying to pull a stunt like that. And I am convinced that Blessingham was

the pilot of that plane—the plane that did the buzzing."

Dr. Wescott stood up, unwinding his tall frame. "If you will do a little investigating, Crosby, you'll find your proof. And you will discover that Abernathy was deliberately, cold-bloodedly and premeditatedly murdered. And Blessingham is your killer."

Clayton Ward Dies After Long Illness

Clayton M. Ward, 62, died Friday afternoon at 2:15 o'clock at his home at Tyner after an illness of two years. He was a native of Chowan-County, a veteran of World War I and a member of the Center Hill Baptist Church.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Lessie B. Ward; four sons, Raymond M. Ward of Suffolk, C. M. Ward, Jr., of Georgetown, S. C., Robert G. Ward of Belvidere and Charles B. Ward of Newport News; three daughters, Mrs. W. F. Farmer of Edenton, and

Misses Barbara Ann and Linda Faye Ward, at home, and a brother, J. D. Ward of Tyner. Funeral services were held at Center Hill Baptist Church Sunday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock with the pastor, the Rev. Henry Naper, officiating. Burial was in the Ward family cemetery at Tyner.

Pallbearers were J. F. Ward, Paul Ward, Clarence Ward, Currey Perry, Adolph Spivey and Emmett Jones.

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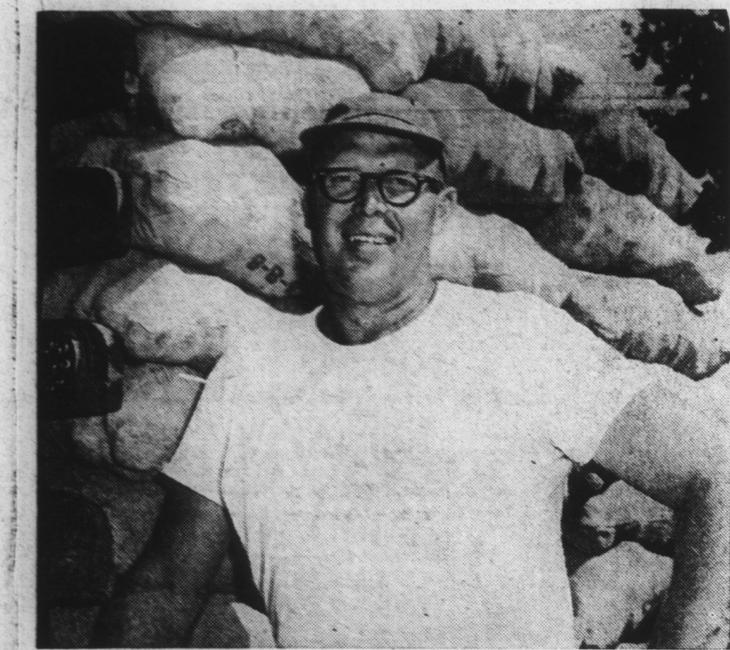
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