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The Mystery of Agatha Webb.

By Anna Katharine Green.

Author of "The Leavenworth Case," "Lost Man's Lane," "Hand and Ring," etc., etc.

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CHAPTER I.

THE dance was over. From the great house on the hill the guests had all departed, and only the musicians remained. As they filed out through the ample doorway, with their instruments under their arms, the first faint streak of early dawn became visible in the east. One of them, a lank, plain featured young man of ungainly aspect, but penetrating eye, called the attention of the others to it.

"Look!" said he. "There is the daylight! This has been a gay night for Sutherlandtown."

"Too gay," muttered another, starting aside as the slight figure of a young man coming from the house behind them rushed hastily by. "Why, who's that?"

As they one and all had recognized the person thus alluded to, no one answered till he had dashed out of the gate and disappeared in the woods on the other side of the road. Then they all spoke at once.

"It's Mr. Frederick!"

"He seems in a desperate hurry."

"He trod on my toes."

"Did you hear the words he was muttering as he went by?"

As only the last question was calculated to rouse an interest, it alone received attention.

"No; what were they? I heard him say something, but I did not catch the words."

"He wasn't talking to you or me, either, but I have ears that can hear an eye wink. He said, 'Thank God, this terrible night is over!'"

After such a dance and such a spread, he calls this terrible and thanks God that it is over. I thought he was one to enjoy this kind of thing more than most folks."

"So did I."

"And so did I."

The five musicians exchanged looks, then huddled in a group at the gate.

"He has quarreled with his sweetheart," suggested one.

"I'm not surprised at that," declared another. "I never thought it would be a match."

Five musicians recoiled from the gate, and one of them went so far as to start back toward the house. As he did so he noticed a curious thing. The young woman whom they had all perceived standing in the door a moment before had vanished, yet she was known to profess the keenest curiosity of any one in town.

"Murder, murder!" A terrible and unprecedented cry in this old, God-fearing town. Then came in hoarse explanation from the jostling group as they stopped at the gate: "Mrs. Webb has been killed! Stabbed with a knife! Tell Mr. Sutherland!"

As the musicians heard this name, so honored and so universally beloved, they to a man uttered a cry, Mrs. Webb! Why, it was impossible. Shouting in their turn for Mr. Sutherland, they all crowded forward.

"Not Mrs. Webb!" they protested. "Who could have the daring or the heart to kill her?" "God knows," answered a voice from the highway. "But she's dead—we've just seen her!"

"Then it's the old man's work," quavered a piping voice well known as that of the village shoemaker. "I've always said he would turn on his best friend some day. 'Sylum' the best place for folks as has lost their wits."

But here a hand was put over his mouth, and the rest of the words became an inarticulate gurgle. Mr. Sutherland had just appeared on the porch, and these were not men to let their voices be heard in his presence.

He was a superb-looking man, with an expression of mingled kindness and dignity that invariably awakened both awe and admiration in the spectator. No men in the country—I was going to say no woman—was more beloved, nor was any held in higher esteem. Yet he could not control his only son, as every one within ten miles of the hill well knew.

At this moment his face showed both pain and shock.

"What name are you shouting out there?" he brokenly demanded. "Agatha Webb?"

"Is Agatha Webb hurt?"

"Yes, sir; killed," repeated a half dozen voices at once. "We've just come from the house. All the town is up. Some say her husband did it."

"No, no!" was Mr. Sutherland's decisive, though half inaudible response. "Philemon Webb might end his own life, but not Agatha's. It was the money!"

Here he caught himself up, and, raising his voice, addressed the crowd of villagers more directly.

"Wait," said he, "and I will go back with you. Where is Frederick?" he demanded of some members of his own household as stood about him.

No one knew.

"I wish some one would find my son. I want him to go into town with me."

"He's over in the woods there," volunteered a voice from without.

"In the woods?" repeated the father in a surprised tone.

"Yes, sir; we all saw him go. Shall we sing out to him?"

"No, no; I will manage very well without him." And taking up his hat Mr. Sutherland stepped out again upon the porch.

Suddenly he stopped. A hand had been laid on his arm.

But for the last few weeks no one had undertaken to contradict him. In the interval since her first appearance on the porch she had exchanged the light dress in which she had danced at the ball for a darker and much more serviceable one, and perhaps this token of

her determination play have also its influence in silencing him. He joined the crowd, and together they moved down hill. This was too much for the servants of the house. One by one they, too, left the house till it stood absolutely empty. Jerry snuffed out the candles and shut the front door, but the side entrance stood wide open, and into this entrance, as the last footstep died out on the hillside, passed a slight and resolute figure. It was that of the musician who had questioned Miss Page's attractions.

CHAPTER II.

A BLOODY SLEEVE.

Sutherlandtown was a seaport. The village, which was a small one, consisted of one long street running parallel with the coast and numerous cross streets running down from the hillside and ending on the wharves.

On one of the corners thus made stood the Webb house, with its front door on the main street and its side door on one of the hillside lanes. As the group of men and boys who had been in search of Mr. Sutherland entered this last mentioned lane they could pick out this house from all the others, as it was the only one in which a light was still burning.

Mr. Sutherland lost no time in entering upon the scene of the tragedy. As his imposing figure emerged from the darkness and passed on the outskirts of the crowd blocking every entrance to the house, a murmur of welcome went up, after which a way was made for him to the front door.

But before he could enter some one plucked him by the sleeve.

"Look up!" whispered a voice into his ear.

He did so and saw a woman's body hanging half out of an upper window. It hung limp, and the sight made him sick notwithstanding his threescore years of experience.

"Who's that?" he cried. "That's not Agatha Webb's head and shoulders."

"No, it's Betsy, the cook. She's dead too. We left her where we found her for the coroner to see."

"At this horrible!" murmured Mr. Sutherland. "Has there been a butcher here?"

As he uttered these words he felt another quick pressure on his arm. Looking down, he saw leaning against him the form of a young woman, but before he could address her she had started upright again and was moving on with the throng.

It was the sight of this woman hanging from the window which first drew attention to the house, volunteered a man who was standing as a sort of guardian at the main gateway.

"Some of the sailors' wives who had been to the wharves to see their husbands off on the ship that sailed at daybreak saw it as they came up the lane. Without that we might not yet have known what had happened."

"But Mrs. Webb?"

"Come in and see."

There was a board fence about the simple yard within which stood the humble house forever after to be pointed out as the scene of Sutherlandtown's most heart-rending tragedy. In this fence was a gate, and through this gate now passed Mr. Sutherland and his would be companion, Miss Page.

A path bordered by lilac bushes led the way to the house, the door of which stood wide open. As soon as Mr. Sutherland entered upon this path a man appeared from the house and came directly toward him. It was Amos Fenton, the constable.

"Ah, Mr. Sutherland," said he, "sad business, a very sad business! But what little girl have you there?"

"This is Miss Page, my housekeeper's niece. She would come. Inquisitiveness, the cause. I do not approve of it."

"Miss Page must remain on the doorstep. We allow no one inside except yourself," he fact that nothing of importance was ever undertaken in Sutherlandtown without the presence of Mr. Sutherland.

Miss Page courted, looking so bewitching in the fresh morning light that the tough old constable scratched his chin in grudging admiration. But he did not reconsider his determination. Seeing this, she accepted her defeat gracefully and moved aside to where the bushes offered her more or less protection from the curiosity of those about her. Meanwhile Mr. Sutherland had stepped into the house.

hour ago, and we have let him be for reasons you can easily appreciate. Examine him closely, Mr. Sutherland; he won't notice it."

"But what ails him? Why does he sit crouched against the table? Is he hurt, too?"

"No; look at his eyes."

Mr. Sutherland stopped and pushed aside the long gray locks that half concealed the countenance of his aged friend.

"Why," he cried startled, "they are closed! He isn't dead?"

"No; he is asleep."

"Asleep?"

"Yes. He was asleep when we came in and he is asleep yet. Some of the neighbors wanted to awake him, but I would not let them. His wits are not strong enough to bear a sudden shock."

"No, no, poor Philomen! But that he should sit sleeping here while she—but what do these bottles mean and this parade of supper in the room they were not accustomed to eat in?"

"We don't know. It has not been eaten, you see. He has swallowed a glass of port, but that is all. The other glasses have had no wine in them, nor have the victuals been touched."

"Seats for three and only one occupied," murmured Mr. Sutherland. "Strange! Could he have expected guests?"

"It looks like it. I don't know that his wife allowed him such privileges. But she was always too good to him and I fear has paid for it with her life."

"Nonsense! He never killed her. Had his love been anything short of the worship it was, he stood in too much awe of her to lift his hand against her, even in his most demented moments."

"I don't trust men of uncertain wits," returned the other. "You have not noticed everything that is to be seen in this room."

Mr. Sutherland, recalled to his duty by these words, looked quickly about him. With the exception of the table and what was on and by it there was nothing else in the room. Naturally his glance returned to Philemon Webb.

"I don't see anything but this poor sleeping man," he began.

"Look at his sleeve."

Mr. Sutherland, with a start, again bent down. The arm of his old friend lay crooked upon the table, and on its blue cotton sleeve there was a smudge which might have been wine but which was blood.

Be He Continued.

Joubert's Knowledge of Guna.

An American woman tells of a visit she and some friends paid to the Krupp gun works at Essen, Germany, years ago and of encountering Peter Joubert before he thought of going to South Africa. The woman was the guest of the American ambassador and his wife, and at the works they were met by Krupp himself. In making their tour of the arsenal they were joined by a man who followed through each department and in a few moments responded to some casual question about guns from one of the party.

Once having spoken, he launched forth into a detailed description of their manufacture that Krupp, who had hitherto been talking, kept still and simply followed as one of the auditors. The man accompanied the party, explaining as he went, until the tour had been made. Then he bowed and retired.

"Who is that man who knows so much about guns?" demanded one of the party.

"Oh, that's a Dutchman named Pete Joubert," replied one of the officials.

Unnecessary.

"Do you think he played a perfectly fair game?" asked Willie Boye after he had lost all his money to one of the leading citizens of Crimmon Gulch.

"What do you mean?" asked Threepfinger Sam.

"Why, didn't he stack the cards or ring in a cold deck or something like that?"

"Well, if that ain't egotism! You don't suppose he'd go to all that trouble for you, do you?"—Washington Star.

Moon Rule For Planting.

The "moon rule" for planting garden luck is that all things that grow out of the ground—such as peas, corn and the like—must be planted in the increase of the moon, from new to full. All things that mature in the ground—like potatoes—must be planted in the decrease or waste of the moon, from full to new.

Grapes and Indigestion.

The skins of grapes have tartaric acid in them, and it is from this source that most of the world's tartaric acid comes. Many people are distressed after eating heartily of grapes. They would not be if they rejected the seeds and skins.—Boston Transcript.

The French Maid.

Mrs. Goldie Nugget—"I cannot see any callers today, Nanette."

Nanette (five minutes later to caller)—"Monseigneur, I had so pleasure to inform you that madame is blind today.—Exchange.

Richard—"They say he gave you a black eye!"

Robert—"That's the way folks exaggerate. I had the eye already. He merely laid on the color."

A face that cannot smile is never good.—Marcel.

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