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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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"I have accounted for the blood on my hand," she said, not looking at him, but at Mr. Courtney. "If there is any on my slippers, it can be accounted for in the same way." And she rapidly renewed her narrative. "I had no sooner made my little finger clean—I never thought of any one suspecting the old gentleman—when I heard steps on the stairs and knew that the murderer was coming down and in another instant would pass the open door before which I stood.

"Though I had been courageous enough up to that minute, I was seized by a sudden panic at the prospect of meeting face to face one whose hands were perhaps dripping with the blood of his victim. To confront him there and then might mean death to me, and I did not want to die, but to live, for I am young, sirs, and not without a prospect of happiness before me. So I sprang back, and, seeing no other place of concealment in the whole bare room, crouched down in the shadow of the man you call Philemon. For one, two minutes, I knelt there in a state of mortal terror, while the feet descended, paused, started to enter the room where I was, hesitated, turned and finally left the house."

"Miss Page, wait, wait," put in the coroner. "You saw him. You can tell who this man was?"

The eagerness of this appeal seemed to excite her. A slight color appeared in her cheeks and she took a step forward, but before she could leave her lips, she gave a start and drew back with an ejaculation which left a more or less sinister echo in the ears of all who heard it.

Frederick had just shown himself at the top of the staircase.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said he, advancing into their midst with an air

"Ah, yes. Go on, go on. You have not yet explained how you came to be in possession of Agatha's money."

"Just so," she answered, with another quick look at Frederick, the last she gave him for some time. "As soon, then, as I dared I ran out of the house into the yard. The moon, which had been under a cloud, was now shining brightly, and by its light I saw that the space before me was empty and that I might venture to enter the street. But before doing so I looked about for the dagger I had thrown from me before going in. But I could not find it. It had been picked up by the fugitive and carried away. Anxious to lose such a valuable piece of evidence through a purely womanish emotion, I was about to leave the yard when my eyes fell on the little bundle of sandwiches which I had brought down from the hill and which I had let fall under the pear tree at the first scream I had heard from the house. It had burst open, and two or three of the sandwiches lay broken intact on the ground. But those that were ever picked up, and, being more than ever anxious to cover up by some ostensible errand my absence from the party, I rushed away toward the lonely road where these brothers lived, meaning to leave such fragments as remained on the old doorstep, beyond which I had been told such suffering existed.

"It was now late, very late, for a girl like myself to be out, but under the excitement of what I had just seen and heard I became oblivious to fear and rushed into those dismal shadows as into transparent daylight. Perhaps the shouts and stray sounds of laughter that came up from the wharves where a ship was getting under way gave

me a certain sense of companionship. Perhaps—but it is folly for me to dilate upon my feelings; it is my errand you are interested in and what happened when I came up to the Zabels' dreary dwelling."

The look with which she paused, ostensibly to take breath, but in reality to weigh and criticize the looks of those about her, was one of those wholly indescribable ones with which she was accustomed to control the judgment of men who allowed themselves to watch too closely the ever changing expression of her weird yet charming face. But it fell upon men steeled against her fascinations, and, realizing her inability to move them, she proceeded with her story before even the most anxious of her hearers could request her to do so.

"I had come," said she, "very quietly along the road, for my feet were lightly shod, and the moonlight was too bright for me to make a mistake. But as I cleared the trees and came into the open place where the house stands I stumbled with surprise at seeing a figure crouching on the doorstep I had anticipated finding as empty as the road. It was an old man's figure, and as I paused in my embarrassment he slowly and with great feebleness rose to his feet and began to grope about for the door. As he did so I heard a sharp, tinkling sound, as of something metallic falling on the doorstep. I looked over his shoulder and saw in the moonlight at his feet a dagger so like the one I had lately handled in Mrs. Webb's yard that I was overwhelmed with astonishment and surveyed the aged and feeble form of the man who had dropped it with a sensation difficult to describe. The next moment he was stooping for the weapon with a startled air that has impressed itself distinctly upon my memory, and when, after many feeble attempts, he succeeded in grasping it he vanished into the house so suddenly that I could not be sure whether he had seen me standing there or not.

"All this was more than surprising to me, for I had never thought of associating an old man with this crime. Indeed I was so astonished to find him in possession of this weapon that I forgot all about my errand and only wondered how I could see and know more. Fearing to be observed where I was, I slid in among the bushes and soon found myself under one of the windows. The shade was down, and I was about to push it aside when I heard some one moving about inside and stopped. But I could not restrain my curiosity, so,



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"I rushed away toward the lonely road," pulling a hairpin from my hair, I worked a little hole in the shade and through this I looked into a room brightly illuminated by the moon which shone in through an adjoining window. And what did I see there? Her eye turned on Frederick. His right hand had stolen toward his left, but it paused under her look and remained motionless. "Only an old man sitting at a table and"—Why did she pause, and why did she cover up that pause with a wholly inconsequential sentence? Perhaps Frederick could have told, Frederick, whose hand had now fallen at his side. But Frederick volunteered nothing, and so one, not even Sweetwater, guessed all that lay beyond that and which was left hovering in the air to be finished—when? Alas, had she not set the day and the hour!

To be Continued.

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