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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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"Astonishing!" Mr. Fenton near him mutter to himself. "He's more like an eel than a man." And indeed the way Sweetwater wound himself out and in through that room, seeing everything and examining everything that came under his eye, was a sight well worth any professional's attention. Passing before the dead man on the floor, he held the lantern close to the white, worn face. "Ha!" said he, pecking up something from the long beard. "Here's a crumb of that same bread. Did you see that, Mr. Knapp?"

The question was so sudden and so sharp that the detective came near replying to it; but he bethought himself and said nothing.

"That settles which of the two gnawed the loaf," continued Sweetwater. The next minute he was hovering over the still more pathetic figure of John, sitting in the chair.

"Sadi Sad!" he murmured. Suddenly he laid his finger on a small rent in the old man's faded vest. "You saw this, of course," said he, with a quick glance over his shoulder at the silent detective.

No answer as before. "It's a new slit," declared the officious youth, looking closer, "and—"

"Ha! Here's a crumb of that same bread. Did you see that, Mr. Knapp?" yes—there's blood on the edges. Here, take the lantern, Mr. Fenton, I must see how the skin looks underneath. Oh, gentlemen, no shirt! The poorest dead-hand has a shirt! Brocade vest and no shirt; but he don't want my pity, not now. Ah, only a bruise over the heart. Sirs, what did you make out of this?"

As none of them had even seen it Knapp was not the only one to remain silent.

"Shall I tell you what I make out of it?" said the lad, rising hurriedly from the floor, which he had as hurriedly examined. "This old man has tried to take his life with the dagger already wet with the blood of Agatha Webb. But his arm was too feeble. The point only pierced the vest, wiping off a little blood in its passage. Then the weapon fell from his hand and struck the floor, as you will see by the fresh dent in the old board I am standing on. Have you anything to say against that?"

"That's all right," said the detective, "but there's something else here."

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE MONEY FOUND.

The lantern gone the room resumed its former appearance. Abel, who had been much struck by Sweetwater's mysterious maneuvers, drew near Dr. Talbot and whispered in his ear: "We might have done without that fellow from Boston."

To which the coroner replied: "Perhaps, and perhaps not. Sweetwater has not yet proved his case; let us wait till he explains himself." Then turning to the constable he showed him an old fashioned miniature which he had found lying on James' breast when he made his first examination. It was set with pearls and backed with gold and was worth many meals, for the lack of which its devoted owner had perished.

"Agatha Webb's portrait," exclaimed Talbot, "or rather Agatha Gilchrist's! For I presume this was painted when she and James were lovers."

"She was certainly a beauty," commented Fenton, as he bent over the miniature in the moonlight. "I do not wonder she queened it over the whole county."

"He must have worn it where I found it for the last 40 years," mused the doctor. "And yet men say that love is a fleeting passion. Well, after coming upon this proof of devotion, I find it impossible to believe James Zabel accountable for her death. Sweetwater's instinct was truer than Knapp's."

"Or ours," muttered Fenton. "Gentlemen," interposed Abel, pointing to a bright spot that just then made its appearance in the dark outline of the shade before alluded to, "do you see that hole? It was the sight of that trick in the shade which sent Sweetwater outside looking for footprints. See! Now his eye is to it!" (as the "bright spot" became suddenly eclipsed.) "We are under examination, sir, and the next thing we will hear is that he's not the only person who's been peering into this room through that hole."

He was so far right that the first words of Sweetwater on his re-entrance were: "It's all O. K., sir. I have found my missing clew. James Zabel was not the only person who came up here from the Webb cottage last night." And turning to Knapp, who was losing some of his supercilious manner, he asked, with significant emphasis: "If, of the full amount stolen from Agatha Webb, you found \$20 in the possession of one man and \$80 in the possession of another, upon which of the two would you fix as the probable murderer of this good woman?"

"Upon him who held the lion's share, of course."

"Very good. Then it is not in this cottage you will find the person most wanted. You must look— But there, first let me give you a glimpse of the money. Is there any one here ready to accompany me in search of it? I shall have to take him a quarter of a mile farther up hill."

"You have seen the money? You know where it is?" asked Dr. Talbot and Mr. Fenton in one breath.

"Gentlemen, I can put my hand on it in ten minutes."

At this unexpected and somewhat startling statement Knapp looked at Dr. Talbot and Dr. Talbot looked at the constable, but only the latter spoke. "That is saying a good deal. But no matter. I am willing to credit the assertion. Lead on, Sweetwater. I'll go with you."

Sweetwater seemed to grow an inch at least. "And Dr. Talbot?" he suggested.

But the coroner's duty held him to this house of death, and he decided not to accompany them. Knapp and Abel, however, yielded to the curiosity which had been aroused by these extraordinary promises, and soon these four started on their small expedition up the hill.

Sweetwater headed the procession. He had admonished silence, and his wish in this regard was so well carried out that they looked more like a group of specters moving up the moon lighted road than a party of eager and impatient men. Not till they turned into the main thoroughfare did any one speak. Then Abel could no longer restrain himself, and he cried out:

"We are going to Mr. Sutherland's." But Sweetwater quickly undeceived him.

"No," said he, "only into the woods opposite his house."

But at this Mr. Fenton drew him back. "Are you sure of yourself?" he said. "Have you really seen this money, and is it concealed in this forest?"

"I have seen the money," Sweetwater solemnly declared, "and it is hidden in these woods."

Mr. Fenton dropped his arm, and they moved on till their way was blocked by the huge trunk of a fallen tree.

"It is here we are to look," cried Sweetwater pausing and motioning Knapp to turn his lantern on the spot where the shadows lay thickest. "Now, what do you see?" he asked.

"The upturned roots of a great tree," said Mr. Fenton.

To be Continued.

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