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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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Abel started. An old recollection had
come up; some months ago he had
been present when James had tried to
sell this set. They were all in War-
ner's store, and James Zabel—he could
see his easy attitude yet and hear the
offhand tones with which he tried to
carry the thing off—had said, quite as
if he had never thought of it before,
"By the by, I have a set of china that
came over in the Mayflower. John
likes it, but it's grown to be an eyesore
to me, and if any of you hear of any
one wanting such a thing send him up
to the cottage." Nobody answered, and
James had soon disappeared. It was
the last time, Abel remembered, that
he had been seen about town.

"I can't stand it," cried the lad. "I
can't stand it. If they died of hunger
I must know it. I am going to take a
look at their larder." And before any
one could stop him he dashed to the
rear of the house.

The constable would have liked to
have followed him, but he looked about
the walls of the room instead. John
and James had been fond of pictures
and had once indulged their fancy to
the verge of extravagance, but there
were no pictures on the walls now,
stick on the empty and dust covered
mantel. Only on a bracket in one cor-
ner there was a worthless trinket made
out of cloves and beads which had
doubtless been given them by some
country dame in their young bachelor
days. But nothing of any value any-
where, and Mr. Fenton felt that he
now knew why they had made so
many visits to Boston at one time and
why they always returned with a
thinner valise than they took away.

He was still dwelling on the thought
of the depth of misery to which highly
respectable folk can sink without the
knowledge of the nearest neighbors,
when Abel came back looking greatly
troubled.

"It's the saddest thing I ever heard
of," said he. "These men must have
been driven wild by misery. This
room is sumptuous in comparison to
the ones at the back; and as for the
pantry, there is not even a scrap there
a mouse could eat. I struck a match
and glanced into the room barrel. It
looked as if it had been licked. I de-
clare it makes a fellow sick."

The constable with a shudder with-
drew toward the door.

"The atmosphere here is stifling,"
said he. "I must have a breath of
outdoor air."

But he was not destined to any such
immediate relief. As he moved down
the hall the form of a man darkened
the doorway and he heard an anxious
voice exclaim:

"Ah, Mr. Fenton, is that you? I have
been looking for you everywhere."

It was Sweetwater, the young man
who had previously shown so much
anxiety to be of service to the corner.
Mr. Fenton looked displeased.

"And how come you to find me
here?" he asked.

"Oh, some men saw you take this
road, and I guessed the rest."

"Oh, ah, very good. And what do
you want, Sweetwater?"

The young man, who was glowing
with pride and all alive with an en-
thusiasm which he had kept sup-
pressed for hours, slipped up to the con-

stable and whispered in his ear: "I
have made a discovery, sir. I know
you will excuse the presumption, but
I couldn't bring myself to keep quiet
and follow to that other fellow's wake.
I had to make investigations on my
own account, and—stammering
in his eagerness—they have been suc-
cessful, sir. I have found out who
was the murderer of Agatha Webb."

The constable, compassionating the
disappointment in store for him, shook
his head with a solemn look toward
the room from which he had just
emerged. "You are late, Sweetwater,"
said he. "We have found him out our-
selves, and he lies inside there, dead."

It was dark in this narrow passage-
way and Sweetwater's back was to
the moonlight, so that the blank look
that must have crossed his face at this
announcement was lost upon the con-
stable. But his consternation was evi-
dent from the way he thrust out either
hand to steady himself against the
walls, and Mr. Fenton was not at all
surprised to hear him stammer out:

"Dead! He! Who do you mean by
he, Mr. Fenton?"

"The man in whose house we now
are," returned the other. "Is there any
one else who can be suspected of this
crime?"

Sweetwater gave a gulp that seemed
to restore him to himself.

"There are two men living here, both
very good men, I thought. Which of
them do you mean, and why do you
think that either John or James Zabel
could have killed Agatha Webb?"

For reply, Mr. Fenton drew him to-
ward the room in which such a great
heart tragedy had taken place.

"Look," said he, "and see what can
happen in a Christian land, in the
midst of Christian people living not 50
yards away. These men are dead,
Sweetwater, dead from hunger. The
loaf of bread you see there came too
late. It was bought with a \$20 bill,
taken from Agatha Webb's cupboard
drawer."

Sweetwater, to whom the whole
scene seemed like some horrible night-
mare, stared at the figure of James
lying on the floor, and then at the
figure of John seated at the table, as if
his mind had failed to take in the con-
stable's words.

"Dead!" he murmured. "Dead! John
and James Zabel. What will happen
next? Is the room under a curse?"

And he fell on his knees before the
prostrate form of James, only to start
up again as he saw the eyes of Knapp
resting on him.

"Ah," he muttered, "the detective!"
And after giving the man from Boston
a close look he turned toward Mr. Fen-
ton.

"You said something about this good
old man having killed Agatha Webb.
What was it? I was too dazed to take
it in."

Mr. Fenton, not understanding the
young man's eagerness, but willing
enough to enlighten him as to the situa-
tion, told him what reasons there were
for ascribing the crime in the Webb
cottage to the mad deed of these starv-
ing men. Sweetwater listened with
open eyes and confused hearing, only
controlling himself when his eyes by
chance fell upon the quiet figure of the
detective, now moving softly to and
fro through the room.

"But why murder when he could
have had his loaf for the asking?" re-
monstrated Sweetwater. "Agatha Webb
would have gone without a meal any
time to feed a wandering tramp. How
of two of her oldest and dearest
friends."

"Yes," remarked Fenton, "but you
forget or perhaps never knew that the
master passion of these men was pride.
James Zabel ask for bread! I can
much sooner imagine him stealing it."



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yes, or striking a blow for it, so that
the blow forever shut the eyes that
saw him do it."

"You don't believe your own words,
Mr. Fenton. How can you? Sweet-
water's hand was on the breast of the
accused man as he spoke and his man-
ner was almost solemn. "You must
not take it for granted," he went on,
his green eyes twinkling with a curious
light, "that all wisdom comes from
Boston. We in Sutherlandtown have
some sparks of it if they have not yet
been recognized. You are satisfied"—
here he addressed himself to Knapp—"that
the blow which killed Agatha
Webb was struck by this respectable
old man?"

Knapp smiled, as if a child had asked
him this question; but he answered
him good humoredly enough.

"You see the dagger lying here with
which the deed was done, and you see
the bread that was bought from Loton
with a \$20 bill of Agatha Webb's
money. In these you can read my
answer."

"Good evidence," acknowledged
Sweetwater; "very good evidence when
we remember Mr. Crane's story of the
old man he met rushing from the gate-
way with something glittering in his
hand. I never was so hot in my life,
and yet—and yet—if I could have a
few minutes of quiet thought all by
myself I am certain I could show you
that there is more in this matter than
you think. Indeed, I know that there
is, but I do not like to give my reasons
till I have conquered the difficulties
presented by these men having had
that \$20 bill."

"What fellow is this?" suddenly
broke in Knapp.

"A fiddler, a nobody," quietly whis-
pered Mr. Fenton in his ear.

Sweetwater heard him and changed
in a twinkling from the uncertain,
half baffled, wholly humble person
they had just seen to a man with a
purpose strong enough to make him
hold his head with the best.

"I am a musician," he admitted, "and
I play on the violin for money when-
ever the occasion offers, something
which you will yet congratulate your-
self upon if you wish to reach the root
of this mysterious and dastardly crime.
But that I am nobody, I deny, and
mean that this fellow shall agree with
me before this very night is over.
Only give me an opportunity for con-
sidering this subject and the per-
mission to walk for a few minutes
about this house."

"That is my prerogative," protested
the detective firmly, but without any
display of feeling. "I am the man
employed to pick up whatever clews
the place may present."

"Have you picked up all that are to
be found in this room?" asked Sweet-
water calmly.

Knapp shrugged his shoulders. He
was very well satisfied with himself.

"Then give me a chance," prayed
Sweetwater. "Mr. Fenton," he urged
earnestly, "I am not the fool you take
me for. I feel, I know, I have genius
for this kind of thing, and though I
do play the fiddle, I swear there are
depths to this affair which none of you
have as yet sounded. Sirs, who are
the \$350 in bills which go to make up
the clean thousand that was taken
from the small drawer at the back of
Agatha Webb's cupboard?"

"They are in some secret hiding
place, no doubt, which we will present-
ly come upon as we go through the
house," answered Knapp.

"Umph! Then I advise you to put
your hand on them as soon as possi-
ble," reported Sweetwater. "I will
confine myself to going over the
ground you have already investigated."

And with a sudden ignoring of the
others' presence, which could only
have sprung from an intense egotism
or from an overwhelming belief in his
own theory he began an investigation
of the room that threw the others
more commonplace efforts entirely in
the shade.

Knapp, with a slight compression of
his lips, which was the sole expression
of anger he ever allowed himself, took
up his hat and made his bow to Mr.
Fenton.

"I see," said he, "that the sympathy
of those present is with the local
talent. Let local talent work, then,
sir, and when you want me send to
the tavern on the docks, where I will
be found till I am notified that my
services are no longer required."

"No, no!" protested Mr. Fenton.
"This boy's enthusiasm will soon evap-
orate. Let him fuss away if he will.
His petty business need not interrupt
us."

"But he understands himself," whis-
pered Knapp. "I should think he had
been on our own force for years."

"All the more reason to see what he's
up to. Wait, if only to satisfy your
own curiosity. I shan't let many min-
utes go by before I pull him up."

Knapp, who was really of a cold and
unimpressible temperament, re-
frained from further argument, and
confined himself to watching the young
man, whose movements seemed to fas-
cinate him.

To be Continued.

Nothing is so dangerous as an ig-
norant friend.—La Fontaine.

Let every eye negotiate for itself,
and trust no agent.—Shakespeare.

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that terrible disease. I am more afraid of it than death. I believe you have
the right medicine for the disease. I feel so thankful to you for the good you
have done me; I was a perfect wreck when I came to you, and was on the
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