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NO. 92.

THE MYSTERY OF AGATHA WEBB.

By ANNA KATHARINE GREENE,

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

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In order that new readers of THE ENQUIRER may begin with the following installment of this story, and understand it just the same as though they had read it all from the beginning, we here give a synopsis of that portion of which has already been published: The story opens with the close of a ball after daylight in the morning. While the guests are leaving the house Frederick Sutherland dashes out frantically and disappears in the woods on the other side of the road. Agatha Webb is found up stairs murdered. The body of Batsy, the cook, is found hanging from a window. Philemon Webb, Agatha's husband, is discovered sitting before a dining table asleep, with a smear of blood on his coat sleeve.

CHAPTER III.

A MENTAL WRECK.

As they re-entered the larger room they were astonished to come upon Miss Page standing in the doorway. She was gazing at the recumbent figure of the dead woman, and for a moment seemed unconscious of her presence.

"How did you get in? Which of my men were weak enough to let you pass against my express instructions?" asked the constable, who was of an irritable and suspicious nature.

She let the hood drop from her head and, turning, surveyed him with a slow smile. There was witchery in that smile sufficient to affect a much more cultivated and callous nature than his, and though he had been proof against it once he could not quite resist the effect of its repetition.

"I insisted upon entering," said she. "Do not blame the men. They did not want to use force against a woman."

She had not a good voice and she knew it, but she covered up this defect by a choice of intonations that carried her lightest speech to the heart. Hard visaged Amos Fenton gave a grunt, which was as near an expression of approval as he ever gave to any one.

"Well, well," he growled, but not ill naturedly. "It's a morbid curiosity that brings you here. Better drop it, girl. It won't do you any good in the eyes of sensible people."

"Thank you," was her demure reply, her lips dimpling at the corners in a way to shock the sensitive Mr. Sutherland.

Glancing from her to the still outline of the noble figure on the couch, he remarked with an air of mild reproof: "I do not understand you, Miss Page. If this solemn sight has no power to stop your coquetries nothing can. As for your curiosity, it is both ill timed and unwomanly. Let me see you leave this house at once, Miss Page, and if in the few hours which must elapse before breakfast you can find time to pack your trunks, you will still further oblige me."

"Oh, don't send me away, I entreat you."

It was a cry from her inner heart, which she probably regretted, for she instantly sought to cover up the anxiety it showed by a submissive bend of the head and a step backward. Neither Mr. Fenton nor Mr. Sutherland seemed to hear the one or see the other, their attention having returned to the more serious matter in hand.

"The dress which our poor friend wears shows her to have been struck before retiring," commented Mr. Sutherland, after another short survey of Mrs. Webb's figure. "If Philemon—"

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted a voice, "but the young woman is listening to what you say. She is still in the hall."

"She is in the hall," exclaimed Fenton sharply, his admiration for the fascinating stranger having oozed out at his companion's rebuff. "I will soon show her"—But the words melted into thin air as he reached the door. The young girl had disappeared, and only a faint perfume remained in the place where she had stood.

"A most extraordinary person," grumbled the constable, turning back, but stopping again as a faint murmur came up from below.

"The gentleman is waking," called up a voice whose lack of music was quite perceptible at a distance.

With a bound Mr. Fenton descended the stairs, followed by Mr. Sutherland. Miss Page stood before the door of the room in which sat Philemon Webb. As they reached her side she made a little bow that was half mocking, half deprecatory, and slipped from the house. An almost unbearable sensation of incongruity vanished with her, and Mr. Sutherland, for one, breathed like a man relieved.

"I wish the doctor would come," Fenton said, as they watched the slow lifting of Philemon Webb's head. "Our fastest rider has gone for him, but he's not yet before he can get here."

"Philemon!" Mr. Sutherland had advanced and was standing by his old friend's side. "Philemon, what has become of your guests? You've waited for them here till morning."

The old man with a dazed look surveyed the two plates set on either side of him and shook his head. "James and John are getting proud," said he, "or they forget, they forget." James and John. He must mean the

Zables, yet there were many others answering to these names in town. Mr. Sutherland made another effort.

"Philemon, where is your wife? I do not see any place set here for her?"

"Agatha's sick, Agatha's cross; she don't care for poor old man like me."

"Agatha's dead and you know it," thundered back the constable with ill judged severity. "Who killed her? Tell me that. Who killed her?"

A sudden quenching of the last spark of intelligence in the old man's eye was the dreadful effect of these words. Laughing with that strange gurgle which proclaims an utterly irresponsible mind, he cried:

"The pussy cat! It was the pussy cat. Who's killed? I'm not killed. Let's go to Jericho."

Mr. Sutherland took him by the arm and led him upstairs. Perhaps the sight of his dead wife would restore him. But he looked at her with the same indifference he showed to everything else.

"I don't like her calico dresses," said he. "She might have worn silk, but she wouldn't. Agatha, will you wear silk to my funeral?"

The experiment was too painful, and they drew him away. But the constable's curiosity had been roused, and after they had found some one to take care of him he drew Mr. Sutherland aside and said:

"What did the old man mean by saying she might have worn silk? Are they better off than they seem?"

Mr. Sutherland closed the door before replying.

"They are rich," he declared to the utter amazement of the other. "That is, they were, but they may have been robbed; if so, Philemon was not the wretch who killed her. I have been told that she kept her money in an old fashioned cupboard. Do you suppose they alluded to that one?"

He pointed to a door set in the wall over the fireplace, and Mr. Fenton, perceiving a key sticking in the lock, stepped quickly across the floor and opened it. A row of books met his eyes, but on taking them down a couple of drawers were seen at their back.

"Are they locked?" asked Mr. Sutherland.

"One is and one is not."

"Open the one that is unlocked," Mr. Fenton said.

"It is empty," said he.

Mr. Sutherland cast a look toward the dead woman, and again the perfect serenity of her countenance struck him.

"I do not know whether to regard her as the victim of her husband's imbecility or of some vile robber's cupidity. Can you find the key to the other drawer?"

"I will try."

"Suppose you begin, then, by looking on her person. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

possession. It should be in her

neither young nor active. The minister had not been able to see his face, but noticed the ends of a long beard blowing over his shoulder as he hurried away.

Philemon was a clean shaved man. Asked if he could give the time of his encounter, he replied that it was after 11 and before 12, for he was in his own house by 12.

"Did you look up at these windows before leaving?" asked Mr. Fenton, for this interview had taken place in the presence of the dead.

"I must have, for I now remember they were both lighted."

"Were the shades up?"

"I think not, or I should have noticed the ceiling of the room. I remember seeing nothing."

"How were the shades when you broke into the house this morning?" inquired Mr. Sutherland of the constable.

"Just as they are now; we have moved nothing. The shades were both down—one of them over an open window."

"Well, we may find this encounter of Mr. Crane's of decided importance."

"I wish I had seen the man's face," remarked the latter.

"What did the object look like you saw glittering in his hand?"

"I should not like to venture an opinion. I saw it but an instant."

"Could it have been a knife or an old fashioned dagger?"

"It might have been."

"Alas, poor Agatha! That money, something she so despised, should cause the death of a creature so grand and simple! Unhappy life, unhappy death! Fenton, I shall always mourn for Agatha Webb."

"Yet she seems to have found peace at last," said the minister. "I have never seen her look so contented."

Then leading Mr. Sutherland aside he whispered; "What is it you say about money? Had she any considerable amount of it? I ask because in spite of their humble means of living she always put a generous donation on the plate, and I have received more than once during my pastorate an unexpectedly large and anonymous contribution for certain charities. As it was always for sick or suffering children?"

"Yes, yes. I have no doubt it came from her. She was by no means poor, though I myself never knew the extent of her means till lately. Philemon was a good business man once, but he evidently preferred to live simply, having no children living—"

"They have lost six, I have been told."

"So the Porchester folks say. They probably had no heart for display or for even the simplest luxuries. At all events they did not indulge in them."

"Philemon has long been past indulging in anything."

"Oh, he likes his comfort, and he has had it too. Agatha never stinted him."

"But why do you think her death was due to her having money?"

"She had a large sum in the house, and there are some who knew this."

"And it is gone?"

"That we shall know later."

As the coroner arrived at this moment the minister's curiosity had to wait. Fortunately for his equanimity no one had the presumption to ask him to leave the room.

The coroner was a man of but few words and but little given to emotion. Yet they were surprised at his first question.

"Who is the young woman who is standing outside there, the only one in the yard?"

Mr. Sutherland, moving rapidly to the window, drew aside the shade.

"It is Miss Page, my housekeeper's niece," he explained. "I do not understand her interest in this affair. She followed me here from the house and could hardly be got to leave this room, into which she intruded herself against my express command."

"But look at her attitude." It was Mr. Fenton who spoke. "She's crazier than Philemon. It seems to me."

There was some reason for this remark. Guarded by the high fence from the gaze of the pushing crowd without, she stood upright and immovable in the middle of the yard, like one on watch. The hood which she had dropped from her head when she thought her eyes and smile might be of use to her in the furtherance of her plans had been drawn over it again, so that she looked more like a statue in gray than a living, breathing woman. Yet there was menace in her attitude and a purpose in the solitary stand she took in that circle of board girded grass which caused a thrill in the breast of those who looked at her from that chamber of death.

"A mysterious young woman," muttered the minister.

"And one that I neither countenance nor understand," interpolated Mr. Sutherland. "I have just shown her the displeasure I feel at her actions by dismissing her from my house."

The coroner gave him a quick look, seemed about to speak, but changed his mind and turned toward the dead woman.

CHAPTER V.

BLOOD ON THE GRASS.

The inquiries which followed elicited one or two new facts. First, that all the doors of the house were found unlocked, and, secondly, that the constable had been among the first to come in, so that he could vouch that no disarrangement had been made in the rooms with the exception of Batsy's removal to the bed.

Then, his attention being drawn to the dead woman, he discovered the key in her tightly closed hand.

"Where does this key belong?" he asked.

They showed him the drawers in the cupboard.

"One is empty," said Mr. Sutherland. "If the other is found to be in the same condition, then her money has been taken. That key she holds should open both these drawers."

"Then let it be made use of at once."

It is important that we should know whether theft has been committed here as well as murder." And drawing the key out he handed it to Mr. Fenton.

The constable immediately unlocked the drawer and brought it and its contents to the table.

"No money here," said he.

"But papers as good as money," announced the doctor. "See, here are deeds and more than one valuable bond. I judge that she was a richer woman than any of us knew."

Mr. Sutherland meantime was looking with an air of disappointment into the now empty drawer.

"Just as I feared," said he. "She has been robbed of her ready money. It was doubtless in the other drawer."

"How came she by the key, then?"

"That is one of the mysteries of the affair. This murder is by no means a simple one. I begin to think we shall find it full of mysteries."

"Batsy's death, for instance?"

"Oh, yes, Batsy! I had forgotten that she was found dead too."

"Without a wound, doctor."

"She had heart disease. I doctored her for it. The fright has killed her."

"The look of her face confirmed that."

"Let me see. So it does. But we must have an autopsy to prove it."

"I would like to explain before any further measures are taken how I came to know that Agatha Webb had money in her house," said Mr. Sutherland as they stepped back into the other room. "Two days ago I was sitting with my family at dinner. Old gossip Judy came in. Had Mrs. Sutherland

been living she would not have presumed to intrude upon us at mealtime, but as we have no one now to uphold our dignity this woman rushed into our presence panting with news and told us all in one breath how she had just come from Mrs. Webb, who had a pile of money in her house; that she had just seen it with her own eyes; that going up stairs, as usual, without knocking, she had seen Mrs. Webb through the crack of the sitting room door walking toward the fireplace cupboard with a huge roll of bills in her hand."

"But listening she heard her say: 'Just fifteen hundred! Too much money by far to have in the house.' After which she heard first one lock turned and then another, and satisfied that the money had been put into some receptacle in the cupboard, she crept out as quietly as she had come in and ran away to tell the neighbors. Happily I was the first one she told, but I have no doubt that in spite of all my injunctions she has related the news to every one who would listen."

"Was the young woman I see down yonder at the table with you when Judy told this story?" asked the coroner, pointing toward the yard.

Mr. Sutherland pondered. "No; I do not think she was. Frederick was seated at the table with me, and my housekeeper was pouring the tea, but Miss Page had not yet come down, I think. She has been putting on great airs of late."

"Can it be possible that he does not know that his son Frederick wants to marry this girl?" muttered the clergyman into the constable's ear.

The constable shook his head. Mr. Sutherland was one of those debonair men whose very mildness makes them impenetrable.

The coroner on leaving the house was followed by Mr. Sutherland. As the figures of the two men appeared down the doorstep a faint cheer was heard from the two or three favored persons who were allowed to look through the gate. But to this token of welcome neither gentleman responded by so much as a look, all their attention being engrossed by the sight of the solitary figure of Miss Page, who still held her stand upon the lawn. Motionless as a statue, but with her eyes fixed upon their faces, she awaited their approach. When they were near her, she thrust one hand from under her cloak and, pointing to the grass at her feet, said quietly:

"See this?"

They hastened toward her and bent down to examine the spot she indicated.

"What do you find there?" cried Mr. Sutherland, whose eyesight was not good.

"Blood," responded the coroner, plucking up a blade of grass and surveying it closely.

"Blood," echoed Miss Page, with so suggestive a glance that Mr. Sutherland stared at her in amazement, not understanding his own emotion.

"How are you able to discern a stain so nearly imperceptible?" asked the coroner.

"Imperceptible? It is the only thing I see in the whole yard," she retorted, and with a slight bow which was not without its element of mockery she turned toward the gate.

"A most unaccountable girl," commented the doctor. "But she is right about these stains. Abel," he called to the man at the gate, "bring a box or barrel here and cover up this spot. I don't want it disturbed by trampling feet till the jury I shall soon call shall have had an opportunity to look at it."

Abel started to obey just as the

young girl laid her hand on the gate to open it.

"Won't you help me?" she asked. "The crowd is so great they won't let me through."

"Won't they?" The words came from without. "Just slip out as I slip in, and you'll find a place made for you."

Not recognizing the voice, she hesitated for a moment, but seeing the gate awfully, she pushed against it just as a young man stepped through the gap. Necessarily they came face to face.

"Ah, it is you," he muttered, giving her a sharp glance.

"I do not know you," she haughtily declared, and slipping by him with such dexterity she was out of the gate before he could respond.

But he only snapped his finger and thumb mockingly at her and smiled knowingly at Abel, who had lingered to watch the end of this encounter.

"Supple as a willow twig, eh," he laughed. "Well, I have made whistles out of willows before now and—halloo! where did you get that?"

He was pointing to a rare flower that hung limp and faded from Abel's buttonhole.

"This? Oh, I found it in the house yonder. It was lying on the floor of the inner room, almost under Batsy's skirts. Curious sort of flower. I wonder where she got it?"

The intruder betrayed at once an unaccountable emotion. There was a strange glitter in his light green eyes that made Abel shift rather uneasily on his feet. "Was that before the pretty mix you have just let out came in here with Mr. Sutherland?"

"Oh, yes; before any one had started for the hill at all. Why, what has this young lady got to do with a flower dropped by Batsy?"

"She? Nothing. Only—and I have never given you bad advice, Abel—don't let that thing hang any longer from your buttonhole. Put it into an envelope and keep it, and if you don't hear from me again in regard to it write me out a fool and forget we were ever chums when little shavers."

The man called Abel smiled, took the flower and went to cover up the grass as Dr. Talbot had requested. The stranger took his place at the gate toward which the coroner and Mr. Sutherland were now advancing with an air which showed his great anxiety to speak with them. He was that one of the five musicians whom we saw secretly entering the last mentioned gentleman's house after the departure of the last servant.

As the coroner paused before him he spoke. "Dr. Talbot," said he, dropping his eyes, which were apt to betray his thoughts too plainly, "you have often promised that you would give me a job if any matter came up where nice detective work was wanted. Don't you think the time has come to remember me?"

"You, Sweetwater? I'm afraid the affair is too deep for an inexperienced man's first effort. I shall have to send to Boston for an expert. Another time, Sweetwater, when the complications are less serious."

The auditor's office in the various footings of the different townships, with the abstract made for a settlement with the treasurer, and found them correct. I am glad to state that the auditor has taken on a suggestion of 1899 and has quite an increase on his books for taxation.

The books in this office show that a great deal of extra work has been done and put on them. We have never gone through a more complete set of books, especially as to neatness and correctness.

In the clerk's office, I checked the cash books from the date when the present incumbent took charge of same and found them correct. These books show that the clerk had in his possession, for which he is responsible to the county, the sum of \$5,872.40. On enquiring at the different banks of the county, I found that the clerk had \$5,872.40 on deposit; thus showing that he had, at his command, every dollar he is responsible for. This office is well kept and references easily made.

In the treasurer's office, I made a very careful examination of all matters pertaining to this office and found same in good condition. I checked all vouchers also books with settlement sheets made up for annual settlement with the comptroller general, and found them correct. In checking up the cash books, I found that the treasurer had in his possession belonging to the state and county, \$11,738.71. The treasurer exhibited his bank pass book, which showed, with the cash on hand, that he had on deposit, more than \$11,738.71, which was verified by statement from said banks.

The treasurer's books show that 93.5 per cent of the ordinary county, and 80 per cent of the poll tax was collected for the year 1899.

The probate judge's books are neatly and correctly kept, and I found his bank account greater than his liability. As an officer, the judge is to be complimented on the neatness of his office.

The sheriff's books are well kept and are correct, showing an improvement over former years. His assets as an officer are greater than his liabilities.

In the office of the county superintendent of education, I found the books well kept. I checked his books with the county treasurer's and found same correct.

The coroner failed to produce his books when asked for them. Therefore, I did not make any examination of same.

I carefully looked after all of the county officer's bonds, and found them (as we believe) perfectly good.

The officers were all very courteous and kind to me while working in their respective offices, and offered my assistance desired, for which I wish to thank them.

I wish also to thank the committee and grand jury for the confidence reposed in my capacity to do this work, and assure them that I have tried faithfully to do the same.

J. H. McFADDEN.

P. A. MILLS.

E. B. BIGGERS.

We take pleasure in commending for its completeness and thoroughness the above report, and we recommend that J. H. McFadden be paid for his services as an expert, the usual amount paid for such work, viz.: \$20.

Miscellaneous Reading.

REPORT OF THE GRAND JURY.

Some Recommendations Have Been Acted Upon and Others Have Not—Compliments For Some of the County Officers—Coroner's Office to Be Locked Except When in Actual Use of Coroner—Things Generally in Good Shape.

The grand jury got through with its work last Wednesday, and before being discharged, submitted the following as its final report:

To the Hon. J. C. Klugh, Presiding Judge:

We, the grand jury of York county, beg leave to submit this, our final presentation:

1st. We have passed upon all bills of indictment handed to us by the solicitor, and returned the same to court with our findings thereon.

2nd. The county supervisor's report relative to the county home, chain gang and magistrate's records, was received as information. It is a very commendable report, and without further comment we submit the same as a part of our final presentation.

3d. After scrutinizing said report, we did not deem it necessary to visit the county home and chain gang at this time.

4th. A committee of our number visited the county jail and report same generally in good condition; but we call attention to the fact that certain recommendations made by this body at a previous term of court, relative to ventilation in the jail, has not been carried out; therefore, we still insist upon them being carried out.

5th. Recommendations made at July term of court relative to certain changes and improvement in the court room, we are glad to state, have been and are being made.

6th. We respectfully call attention of the county supervisor and road overseers to the proper and lawful width of public roads. Complaints from various parts of the county have been made that the public roads are too narrow for the convenience of the public, and ask that they look after the matter.

7th. A committee of our body, consisting of J. H. McFadden, E. A. Biggers and T. A. Mills, was appointed at July term of court, to make an expert and thorough examination of our county officers' books. The committee performed this duty during the summer, and at this term made the following written report, which was adopted by our body, to wit:

To the Grand Jury of York County:

We, the undersigned committee, appointed by your foreman to examine the books of the various county officers, beg leave to make the following report:

We appointed J. H. McFadden, of our committee, as an expert accountant, to make these examinations, which he has just finished, with the following result, viz.:

I have examined the following officers' books: W. W. Boyce, auditor; W. Brown Wylie, clerk; H. A. D. Neely, treasurer; J. H. McFadden, probate judge; John R. Logan, sheriff; John E. Carroll, superintendent of education; T. G. Culp, county supervisor.

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