

AUTHOR OF "The Leavenworth Case,"

AGATHA WEBB.

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

The Purple Orbed.

The dance was over. From the great house on the hill the musicians had all departed and only the musicians remained.

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

"No, no!" muttered another, starting aside as the slight figure of a young man coming from the house behind them rushed hastily by.

"What name are you shouting out there?" he broke in.

"Agatha Webb!"

"Is Agatha Webb hurt?"

"Yes, sir, killed," repeated a half dozen voices at once.

"We've just come from the town in a hurry. Some say her husband did it."

"No, no!" was Mr. Sutherland's decisive, though half inaudible response.

"Philemon Webb might and his own life, but not Agatha. It was the money."

"No, no!" he cried, addressing the crowd of villagers more directly.

"Wait!" said he, "and I will go back with you. Where is Frederick?"

"He is over in the woods there. He is holding a stick as though he were dead."

"No one knew."

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

"No, no!" he cried, "I will manage very well without him."

"Yes, sir, we will all see him go. Shall we sing out to him?"

"Do you mind if I go with you? I will not make any trouble."

"It was the same young lady we have seen before."

"The old gentleman frowned—he who never frowned—and remarked shortly:

"A scene of murder is no place for women."

"The face upturned to his remained unaltered."

"I think I will go," she quickly replied.

"I can easily mingle with the crowd."

"He said another word against it. Miss Page was under pay in his house, but for the last few weeks no one had undertaken to see her."

"What difference does that make when it isn't her features you notice, but hers?"

"I don't like her."

"A laugh followed this."

"That won't bother her, Sweetwater, Sutherland does, if you don't, and that's much more to be said for her."

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My turn on his best friends some day. Sutherland's best place for folks as they left 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 there were two 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 man in the country was going to say so woman—was more beloved, nor was any one held in higher esteem. Yet he would not control his only son, as every one within ten miles of the hill well knew.

At this moment his face showed two pains and shock.

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As soon as Mr. Sutherland entered upon this path a man appeared from the bushes and came directly toward him.

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

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

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

Miss Page started, looking so bewitching in the fresh morning light that the rough old constable scratched his chin in grudging admiration. But he did not redden 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 the spectators.

Mean while Mr. Sutherland had stepped into the house.

He found himself in a small hall with a staircase in front and open door at the left. On the threshold of this open door a man stood, who at the sight of him doffed his hat. Passing by this man, Mr. Sutherland entered the room beyond. A table spread with eatables met his view, beside which in an attitude which struck him at the moment, as peculiar, sat Philemon Webb, the well known master of the house.

At a glance he saw that the old friend in this room and in such a position, he was about to address him, when Mr. Fenton stopped him.

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gesture, entered a small room opening into the one in which they stood. His attention was attracted by the body of the woman, who had been seen from below, lying half in and half out of the window. That she was dead was evident, but as Mr. Fenton had said, no wound was to be seen upon her, nor were there any marks of blood on the floor about the place where she lay.

"This is a dreadful business," groaned Mr. Sutherland, "the worst I have ever had anything to do with. Help me to lift the woman in; she has been lying long enough about the place where she lay."

There was a bed in the room (indeed, it was Mrs. Webb's bedroom), and upon this poor body was laid. As the face came uppermost, both gentlemen started and looked at each other with amazement. The expression of terror and alarm which it showed was in striking contrast to the look of exaltation to be seen on the face of her dead mistress.

As they re-entered the larger room they were astonished to come upon Miss Page standing in the doorway. She was raising at the moment, as if by a man rushing out, and for a moment seemed unconscious of their presence.

"How did you get in? Which of my men was weak enough to let you pass against my express prohibition?"

"Excuse me, sir, I was not strong enough to bear a sudden shock."

"No, no, poor Philemon! That he should sit sleeping here while she—that 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."

"Asleep?"

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

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as the victim of her husband's imbecility or of some vile robber's caprice. Can you find the key to the other drawer?"

"Suppose you begin then, by looking on her person. It should be in her pocket, if no marauder has been here."

"It is not in her pocket."

"Hanging to her back, then, by a string?"

"No; there is a locket here, but no key. A very handsome locket, Mr. Sutherland, with—"

"Never mind, we will see that later, it is the key we want just now."

"What is it?"

"It is in her hand; the one that lies underneath."

"Ah! a point, Fenton."

"Stand by her Fenton. Don't let any one rob her of that key till the coroner comes, and we are at liberty to take it."

"I will not leave her for an instant."

"He had scarcely done so when a fresh arrival occurred. It was one of the village clerghmen."

CHAPTER IV.

This gentleman had some information to give. As he was returning home from the bedside of a sick parsonage, some little time before, he had been run against on this very corner by a man rushing out of the gateway in a state of great agitation.

This man held something in his hand that glittered, and though the encounter nearly upset them both, he had not stopped to inquire the name of the man, but had hurried away in a dazed and feeble way, showing that he was neither young nor active. The minister had not been able to see his face, but noticed the ends of a long beard flowing over his shoulder as he hurried away.

Philemon was a clean-shaven man. Asked if he could give the time of this encounter, he replied that it was after 11 and before 12, for he was in his own house by 12 o'clock, and he had seen the man at those windows before leaving."

"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 desired, should cause the death of a creature so good and simple! Unhappy life, unhappy death! Fenton, I shall always have 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 the any considerable amount of it?"

"I am sorry to say, no. She had a few dollars, but she had never seen her look so contented."

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