

# The MYSTERY OF THE SILVER DAGGER

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. WEIL

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## SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—In a New York jewelry store Philip Severn, United States consular agent, notices a small box which attracts him. He purchases it. Later he discovers in a secret compartment a writing giving a clue to a revolutionary movement in this country seeking to overthrow the Chilean government. The writing mentions a rendezvous, and Severn decides to investigate.

CHAPTER II.—Finding the place mentioned in the writing apparently deserted, Severn visits a saloon in the vicinity. A woman in the place is met by a man, seemingly by appointment, and Severn, his suspicions aroused, follows them. They go to the designated meeting place, an abandoned iron foundry.

## CHAPTER III.

### Within the Factory Walls.

I stood as though paralyzed, with one foot uplifted, a hand pressed against the wall, unable to move. There was nothing I could do to avert discovery, no place in which I could crouch in hiding. The newcomer moved swiftly, knowing his way through the darkness, and I had scarcely opportunity to even glance backward when he rounded the corner and bumped into me.

"What the h—ll!" he exclaimed, startled at the encounter. "Why, d—n it, Charlett, what are you slouching here for? You're Charlett, ain't you?"

"Yes," I muttered, the assent actually frightened out of me; then added lamely, "I couldn't remember the signal."

The fellow laughed softly, releasing his grip on my coat.

"If you attended more meetings you'd be better perfect," he said, his English without an accent. "Where have you been the last month—out of town?"

"In Washington," I ventured, praying the swift answer might suffice.

"Oh, I see," more heartily. "So you were the one Alva sent? Did the woman come back with you?"

The woman! Who could he mean but the same girl who had been waiting in the saloon? I had ventured already too far to draw back; I must take yet another chance, an answer.

"Not with me; that would be too risky. She is here, though."

"Good enough. That means money. Let's go in."

He pushed past, and I followed, totally unable to determine in my own mind what to do. The fellow in the darkness evidently mistook me for some one of the gang. His confidence in my identity as Charlett might win me entrance—but what then? That I was not Charlett would certainly be revealed by the first gleam of light, and I would be helpless. I was alone, unarmed, and these fellows, beyond question, were engaged in a desperate game. I am sure I should never have ventured it had not my companion suddenly turned and grasped my sleeve.

"You saw Mendez, of course?"

"Sure."

"And he vouched for her; he says she is all right?"

"He chose her; that ought to be enough."

"H—ll, I suppose so, but even Mendez has made mistakes. Here's the door."

He rapped lightly, his fingers still gripping my sleeve in a grasp of friendship. I could have broken away, and ran for it, but something mysterious held me, some odd fascination of danger. I saw nothing, heard nothing, yet had an instinctive feeling that a narrow wicket had opened in the door, through which our dim outlines were being scrutinized. I held my breath expectantly.

"Who is there?" the voice was a mere whisper, so close as to startle me.

"Gaspar Wine," was the answer, in the same low tone, "163."

"What word?"

"Cervantes."

"But there are two of you."

"Oh, this is one of us. It's all right, Juan; I'll vouch for him."

The fellow inside grumbled something in indistinguishable Spanish, but opened the door silently, just far enough for us to slip through one at a time. I felt Wine press past me, and was aware that the guard closed and barred the door, but could see nothing; not even my own hand before my eyes.

A latch clicked softly, and a dim ray of light broke in upon us from a revealed passage beyond. It was so faint as to scarcely render features visible, and, as my coat collar was still upturned, I pressed forward close behind Wine without discovery. I could perceive something of the fellow now,



I Could Perceive Something of the Fellow Now.

a rather squat figure, concealed by a long, shapeless raincoat, wearing a closely trimmed beard, and horn spectacles. His features were clearly foreign, yet failed to bespeak the fighting type. I placed him as a theorist, a professor, perhaps, in some small college.

But my thoughts were not so occupied with my guide as with the problem of how I was to escape from him. I dare not go on into the presence of others, where discovery that I was not Charlett would be immediate. At any cost I must avoid such exposure—but how? The place in which we were gave me little inspiration. I was a low passage-way, inclosed by rough board walls, instantly driving home upon me the impression that it had been constructed for the very purpose for which it was now being utilized—a secret entrance to prevent any gleam of light from being seen without. This precaution, coupled with the tightly boarded passage, left the whole building apparently deserted and desolate, to any chance watcher without. This was evidently no common, vulgar band of schemers, but men with a definite purpose in view, which they were engaged in carrying out with true secret efficiency. They were plotting revolution. Only a strange chance had given me the clue, and only a reckless persistency had opened a way before me. Now my life was no longer my own; it belonged to my country. I must live to expose these men. But how?

My heart failed me as I stared about at the bare walls, and forward to where a heavy curtain draped the end of the passage. This widened as we advanced, so as to form what evidently had been designed as a cloakroom. Wine stopped and removed his coat, appropriating an unoccupied nail, and I followed his example, rejoicing to observe that he still remained so confident of my identity as to not once glance around in my direction. The fellow seemed obsessed with some special desire, for he swept his eyes over the swinging garments, and exclaimed:

"Not half of them here yet. I want a word with Alva before the show opens. Charlett, so you better go right on in. See you later."

He pressed something in the side-wall, sliding back a panel, and disappeared, the rough boards returning instantly into place. I was left alone, staring at the spot where he had disappeared. Beyond doubt the entrance awaiting me lay straight ahead, concealed by the hanging curtain. I stepped cautiously forward, listening for some guiding sound from beyond that barrier, afraid to draw it aside and take a blind plunge into the unknown. I could detect the murmur of voices, several of them speaking Spanish, yet in such low tones I could distinguish only an occasional emphasized word. There was no door between us; only that thick, hanging curtain, and I ventured far enough to draw this aside sufficient to peer through with one eye. Beyond was a reasonably large room, but so dimly lighted as to be scarcely visible from end to end. I could discern men present, a number of them, lounging about on chairs, their outlines being fairly revealed, but the light was not sufficient to give me any impression of their faces. It seemed quite possible that I might slip in unobserved, and pass among them unrecognized except through accident. But the risk of discovery was too great. I must find some other point of entrance.

The private doorway through which Wine had disappeared gave me the thought that there might also be others. I dare not follow after him, but

if there was another opening to be found I was perfectly willing to explore into its mysteries. The search was brief, yet the very nature of the rough board wall made concealment impossible. Behind the dangling coats I uncovered what I sought, and not a moment too soon. Even as my hand touched the exposed latch, a murmur of voices in the outer entry reached my ears—there were new arrivals being questioned, and admitted.

The panel slid back silently in its grooves, and I peered through the revealed opening into absolute darkness. All I could be sure of, as exhibited by the dim light of the passage, was a single step downward, and then apparently a strip of earth floor. I dare not wait and meet those entering; there was but one choice of action. I pressed through the orifice, forced the panel back into place, and stood erect in the intense darkness, and silence, listening for the slightest sound.

I was still motionless, my heart beating fiercely, when several men entered the passage I had just left. Pressing my ear against the thin crack I distinguished words so as to piece together scraps of conversation. It seemed to me there were three voices—one speaking Spanish entirely, the others using English. One of the latter spoke first.

"Tis a dirty night out, but good for our purpose. You came by motor, Alonzo?"

"No. Wine said that was too risky. I walked from the car line. What's up? Do you know, Captain?"

The fellow addressed exploded in Spanish.

"Why you call me that? I tell you my name!"

"It's safe enough in here, but I'll be careful outside. What was this meeting called for?"

"It was a message from Washington, orders maybe, that we act soon. I hope it."

"From Washington? Is Mendez here?"

"Saprista, no! Can he move without a dozen spies at his heels? He find a messenger no one ever suspect. She bring the word."

"She? A woman?"

"Sure! that was better. No one know her; no one ever see her with our people. It was a good trick, and it fool the pigs."

"But who is the woman?"

The other uttered a gruff exclamation of disgust.

"If I know, you suppose I tell? Not much, but I do not know. They trust her—is it not enough? 'Tis my guess she come special for to do this."

"She is a Chilean then?"

"Maybe; maybe American, Spanish. What difference if she be in our service? They know what she is; tonight she is Marie Gessler—it has the sound of Switzerland. Beyond this I care nothing."

"But you have seen her, perhaps?"

"Not a sight; none of the boys here. She was to meet Alva at Times square this noon. I went with him, but no girl—just a messenger boy there with a note in code. Something had frightened the lady, and she made a night appointment over here."

"Here! How did she know the way out?"

"She didn't, for the matter of that; But she had been piped off on Jans' place, and agreed to be there as soon as it was dark. I'm wondering if she showed up; let's go in and see."

The three moved off down the passage, still conversing in subdued tones, the sharp accent of the Spaniard most prominent, and I became acutely aware of the black silence in which I stood. There was no occasion for me to risk my life farther in an effort to learn more. I had located the secret rendezvous of this gang of revolutionary plotters. I was aware of their connection with the Chilean Junta at Washington, and it would be a comparatively easy matter now to capture them red-handed. I saw therefore no reason why I should venture further, or endeavor to learn in detail the nature of this message intrusted to the girl for delivery. My duty now was to report what I had discovered, when the prompt arrest of Alva, and a few others, would end the whole scheme. It seemed simple enough, if I could only find my way out safely.

But escape unobserved was far from being assured. Any retreat by way of the lighted passage was impossible; there were guards there at both ends; the only hope lay in a blind effort forward.

I accepted the only course possible, and began to feel my way to the left, skirting the wall of rough boarding, until it widened out into what was apparently the larger room beyond. No sound reached me from any direction, the silence and darkness oppressing me, as though they had weight.

Yet one fact became more and more clear—the deliberate purpose with which this deserted iron factory had been prepared for a secret rendezvous. Apparently, from without, it stood grim, desolate and deserted, yet the interior arrangements were such that conspirators could meet securely inside, protected from observation, in rooms through whose walls no gleam of light might be visible from either street or alley. Only an accident, or constant vigilance without, could reveal the true use to which the building was now being devoted. This knowledge rendered the peril of my own position the more intense. I could be killed, murdered, and no man would ever be the wiser. I would simply disappear, vanish, and that would be the end.

At that moment I had no thought but to discover some means of escape. The knowledge of the danger I was in robbed me of all courage. I was like a child afraid in the dark. I moved forward, inch by inch, feeling my way along the rough planking with one

hand, my limbs actually trembling under me. If I could only find some opening; see some gleam of light; break away from this terrible silent darkness.

I supposed I was moving with the utmost caution, every nerve on edge, feeling a way forward with hands and feet. Once I stepped upon a shelf of some kind which crunched beneath the weight, and again my groping hand dislodged a small block of wood, which fell with a slight clatter. I halted both times, my heart in my mouth, yet nothing happened, and I moved forward again confident of not being overheard.

I could not have told what it was that halted me. I remember I stopped as though shot, my very breath suspended, one foot still uplifted in a step forward, my eyes staring helplessly into the black void. The silence was that of a tomb. I could feel the perspiration flow down my face in a stream; it was an instant of torture. Then an unseen hand gripped me and an electric flash-light glared into my eyes.

## CHAPTER IV.

### I Became a Well-Known Thief

The sudden, unanticipated attack, the burst of dazzling light in my eyes, rendered me for the moment utterly



So Tightly Grasped at the Throat as to Be Nearly Strangled.

helpless. I was blinded, and so tightly grasped at the throat as to be nearly strangled. I only dimly realized that my assailant was a man, his grip that of a giant. Then, to my surprise, the fellow laughed oddly, snapping out his light, and releasing his grip.

"Well, if this don't beat h—ll," he said, in the tone of cheerful disgust. "Come in here and let me look you over."

His hand closed on the sleeve of my coat, and before I scarcely found time to catch my breath again I had been dragged through a narrow opening and became aware that a door shut silently behind me.

The fellow gave me little opportunity to either act, or think. A match flared, and was held aloft to a gas jet which instantly broke into a dull flame, sufficient to render visible the full extent of the small room in which we stood. In some semi-conscious way I was aware of bare walls, of a small table opposite with some writing materials on it, and a short bench covered by a blanket. I suppose I saw these things, yet all that I seemed to perceive was the man fronting me, who stared in my face, a quizzical smile on his lips, as though still half uncertain of the reality of my presence. He was tall, a trifle angular, but exceedingly well-dressed, with closely trimmed iron-gray beard and peculiar eyes deeply set in a rather chalky face. He broke the silence, evidently inclined to look upon this meeting as a joke.

"Don't recognize me, I reckon? Well, that ain't to be wondered at, for likely enough you never saw me before. Beats the devil though why you should drift in here; now I suppose it will have to be fifty-fifty."

His words and manner gave me a new lease on life. Whoever the fellow might be he was seemingly friendly. I must meet the fellow in that same spirit and endeavor to extract from him some knowledge of whom he supposed me to be.

"I do not quite get the drift of all this," I ventured. "You imply that you know me."

"H—ll, yes. Over in Bow Street, on the other side. The Hartlebury robbery case. I'd been hearing about you for years, and when that came on, I took a chance and drifted into court one day just to see what you looked like. You've shaved your mustache, and look ten years younger, but I knew you, all right. I never forget a face. Say, who put you onto this game—Waldron?"

I nodded, taking a chance. "I'd have bet my life he was the guy. I might have known he would double-cross me some way. Of course a tip's a tip in this game, and I don't blame you for horning in. Naturally you never knew this was my game—how could you? Waldron never said a word about me, did he?"

"Not once."

"That is how I had it sized up, so I don't hold any grudge against you. Now listen," and he bent forward confidentially, lowering his voice, so I could barely distinguish the words. "We'll talk it all over later, when we're alone. 'Tain't exactly safe here, for

(Continued on page 6.)

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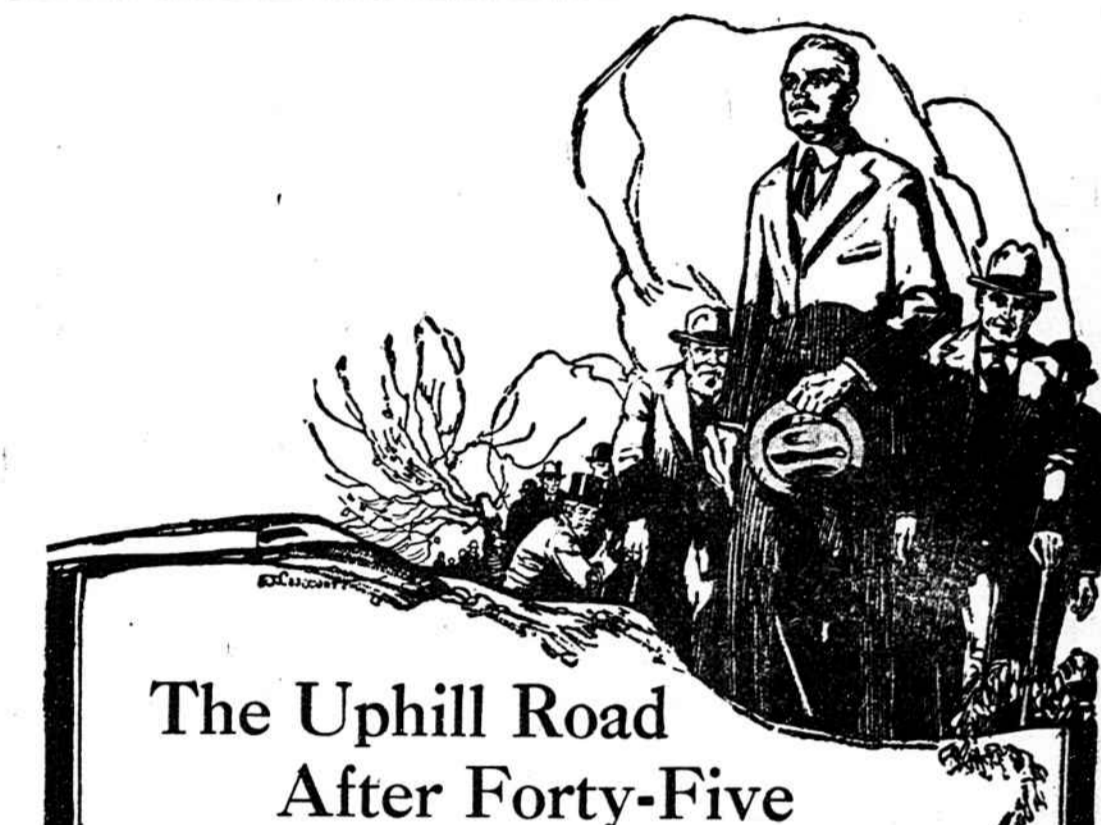


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