

V I N T A G E

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eBooks



# The Dain Curse

DASHIELL HAMMETT

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The Big Knockover

The Continental OP

The Dain Curse

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The Maltese Falcon

Nightmare Town

Red Harvest

The Thin Man

Woman in the Dark

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DASHIELL HAMMETT

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THE  
D A I N  
CURSE

■ ■ ■

VINTAGE CRIME

VINTAGE BOOKS  
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.  
NEW YORK

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TO

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ALBERT S. SAMUELS

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PART

1



**THE**  
DAINS



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# 1

## EIGHT DIAMONDS

■

It was a diamond all right, shining in the grass half a dozen feet from the blue brick wall. It was small, not more than a quarter of a carat in weight, and unmounted. I put it in my pocket and began searching the lawn as closely as I could without going at it on all fours.

I had covered a couple of square yards of sod when the Leggetts' front door opened.

A woman came out on the broad stone top step and looked down at me with good-humored curiosity.

She was a woman of about my age, forty, with darkish blond hair, a pleasant plump face, and dimpled pink cheeks. She had on a lavender-flowered white housedress.

I stopped poking in the grass and went up to her, asking: "Is Mr. Leggett in?"

"Yes." Her voice was placid as her face. "You wish to see him?"

I said I did.

She smiled at me and at the lawn.

"You're another detective, aren't you?"

I admitted that.

She took me up to a green, orange, and chocolate room on the second floor, put me in a brocaded chair, and went to call her husband from his laboratory. While I waited, I looked around the room, deciding that the dull orange rug under my feet was probably both genuinely oriental and genuinely ancient, that the walnut furniture hadn't been ground out by machinery, and that the Japanese pictures on the wall hadn't been selected by a prude.

Edgar Leggett came in saying: "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I couldn't break out till now. Have you learned something?"

His voice was unexpectedly harsh, rasping, though his manner was friendly enough. He was a dark-skinned erect man in his middle forties, muscularly slender and of medium height. He would have been handsome if his brown face hadn't been so deeply marked with sharp, harsh lines across the forehead and from nostrils down across mouth-corners. Dark hair, worn rather long, curled above and around the broad, grooved forehead. Red-brown eyes were abnormally bright behind horn-rimmed spectacles. His nose was long, thin, and high-bridged. His lips were thin, sharp, nimble, over a small, bony chin. His black and white clothes were



well made and cared for.

“Not yet,” I said to his question. “I’m not a police detective—Continental Agency—for the insurance company—and I’m just starting.”

“Insurance company?” He seemed surprised, raising dark eyebrows above the dark tops of his spectacles.

“Yeah. Didn’t—?”

“Surely,” he said, smiling, stopping my words with a small flourish of one hand. It was a long, narrow hand with overdeveloped finger-tips, ugly as most trained hands are. “Surely they would have been insured. I hadn’t thought of that. They weren’t my diamonds, you know; they were Halstead’s.”

“Halstead and Beauchamp? I didn’t get any details from the insurance company. You had the diamonds on approval?”

“No. I was using them experimentally. Halstead knew of my work with glass—coloring it, staining or dyeing it, after its manufacture—and he became interested in the possibility of the process being adapted to diamonds, particularly in improving off-color stones, removing yellowish and brownish tinges, emphasizing blues. He asked me to try it and five weeks ago gave me those diamonds to work on. There were eight of them, none especially valuable. The largest weighed only a trifle more than half a carat, some of the others only a quarter, and except for two they were all of poor color. They’re the stones the burglar got.”

“Then you hadn’t succeeded?” I asked.

“Frankly,” he said, “I hadn’t made the slightest progress. This was a more delicate matter and on more obdurate material.”

“Where’d you keep them?”

“Usually they were left lying around in the open—always in the laboratory, of course—but for several days now they had been locked in the cabinet—since my last unsuccessful experiment.”

“Who knew about the experiments?”

“Anyone, everyone—there was no occasion for secrecy.”

“They were stolen from the cabinet?”

“Yes. This morning we found our front door open, the cabinet drawer forced, and the diamonds gone. The police found marks on the kitchen door. They say the burglar came that way and left by the front door. We heard nothing last night. And nothing else was taken.”

“The front door was ajar when I came downstairs this morning,” Mrs. Leggett said from the doorway. “I went upstairs and awakened Edgar, and we searched the house and found the diamonds gone. The police think the man I saw must have been the burglar.”

I asked about the man she had seen.

“It was last night, around midnight, when I opened the bedroom windows before going to bed. I saw a man standing upon the corner. I can’t say, even now, that there was anything very suspicious-looking about him. He was standing there as if waiting for somebody. He was looking down this way, but not in a way to make me think he was watching this house. He was a man past forty, I should say, rather short and broad—somewhat of your build—but he had a bristly brown mustache and was pale. He wore a soft hat and overcoat—dark—I think they were brown. The police think that’s the same man Gabrielle saw.”

“Who?”

“My daughter Gabrielle,” she said. “Coming home late one night—Saturday night, I think was—she saw a man and thought he had come from our steps; but she wasn’t sure and didn’t think anything more of it until after the burglary.”

“I’d like to talk to her. Is she home?”

Mrs. Leggett went out to get her.

I asked Leggett: “Were the diamonds loose?”

“They were unset, of course, and in small manila envelopes—Halstead and Beauchamp’s—each in a separate envelope, with a number and the weight of the stone written in pencil. The envelopes are missing too.”

Mrs. Leggett returned with her daughter, a girl of twenty or less in a sleeveless white silk dress. Of medium height, she looked more slender than she actually was. She had hair as curly as her father’s, and no longer, but of a much lighter brown. She had a pointed chin and extremely white, smooth skin, and of her features only the green-brown eyes were large. Her forehead, mouth, and teeth were remarkably small. I stood up to be introduced to her, and asked about the man she had seen.

“I’m not positive that he came from the house,” she said, “or even from the lawn.” She was sullen, as if she didn’t like being questioned. “I thought he might have, but I only saw him walking up the street.”

“What sort of looking man was he?”

“I don’t know. It was dark. I was in the car, he was walking up the street. I didn’t examine him closely. He was about your size. It might have been you, for all I know.”

“It wasn’t. That was Saturday night?”

“Yes—that is, Sunday morning.”

“What time?”

“Oh, three o’clock or after,” she said impatiently.

“Were you alone?”

“Hardly.”

I asked her who was with her and finally got a name: Eric Collinson had driven her home. I asked where I could find Eric Collinson. She frowned, hesitated, and said he was employed by Spear, Camp and Duffy, stockbrokers. She also said she had a putrid headache and she hoped I would excuse her now, as she knew I couldn’t have any more questions to ask her. Then, without waiting for any reply I might have made to that, she turned and went out of the room. Her ears, I noticed when she turned, had no lobes, and were queerly pointed at the top.

“How about your servants?” I asked Mrs. Leggett.

“We’ve only one—Minnie Hershey, a Negress. She doesn’t sleep here, and I’m sure she has nothing to do with it. She’s been with us for nearly two years and I can vouch for her honesty.”

I said I’d like to talk to Minnie, and Mrs. Leggett called her in. The servant was a small, wiry mulatto girl with the straight black hair and brown features of an Indian. She was very polite and very insistent that she had nothing to do with the theft of the diamonds and had known nothing about the burglary until she arrived at the house that morning. She gave me her home address, in San Francisco’s darktown.

Leggett and his wife took me up to the laboratory, a large room that covered all but a small fifth of the third story. Charts hung between the windows on the white-washed wall. The wooden floor was uncovered. An X-ray machine—or something similar—four or five smaller machines, a forge, a wide sink, a large zinc table, some smaller porcelain ones, stands, racks of glassware, siphon-shaped metal tanks—that sort of stuff filled most of the room.

The cabinet the diamonds had been taken from was a green-painted steel affair with six drawers all locking together. The second drawer from the top—the one the diamonds had been in—was open. Its edge was dented where a jimmy or chisel had been forced between it and the frame. The other drawers were still locked. Leggett said the forcing of the diamond drawer had jammed the locking mechanism so that he would have to get a mechanic to open the others.

We went downstairs, through a room where the mulatto was walking around behind a vacuum cleaner, and into the kitchen. The back door and its frame were marked much as the cabinet was, apparently by the same tool.

When I had finished looking at the door, I took the diamond out of my pocket and showed it to the Leggetts, asking: “Is this one of them?”

Leggett picked it out of my palm with forefinger and thumb, held it up to the light, turned it from side to side, and said: “Yes. It has that cloudy spot down at the culet. Where did you get it?”

“Out front, in the grass.”

“Ah, our burglar dropped some of his spoils in his haste.”

I said I doubted it.

Leggett pulled his brows together behind his glasses, looked at me with smaller eyes, and asked sharply: “What do you think?”

“I think it was planted there. Your burglar knew too much. He knew which drawer to go to. He didn’t waste time on anything else. Detectives always say: ‘Inside job,’ because it saves work if they can find a victim right on the scene; but I can’t see anything else here.”

Minnie came to the door, still holding the vacuum cleaner, and began to cry that she was an honest girl, and nobody had any right to accuse her of anything, and they could search her and her home if they wanted to, and just because she was a colored girl was no reason, and so on and so on; and not all of it could be made out, because the vacuum cleaner was still humming in her hand and she sobbed while she talked. Tears ran down her cheeks.

Mrs. Leggett went to her, patted her shoulder, and said: “There, there. Don’t cry, Minnie. You know you hadn’t anything to do with it, and so does everybody else. There, there.” Presently she got the girl’s tears turned off and sent her upstairs.

Leggett sat on a corner of the kitchen table and asked: “You suspect someone in the house?”

“Somebody who’s been in it, yeah.”

“Whom?”

“Nobody yet.”

“That”—he smiled, showing white teeth almost as small as his daughter’s—“means everybody—all of us?”

“Let’s take a look at the lawn,” I suggested. “If we find any more diamonds I’ll say maybe

I'm mistaken about the inside angle."

Half-way through the house, as we went towards the front door, we met Minnie Hershey in a tan coat and violet hat, coming to say good-bye to her mistress. She wouldn't, she said tearfully, work anywhere where anybody thought she had stolen anything. She was just as honest as anybody else, and more than some, and just as much entitled to respect, and if she couldn't get it one place she could another, because she knew places where people wouldn't accuse her of stealing things after she had worked for them for two long years without even taking so much as a slice of bread.

Mrs. Leggett pleaded with her, reasoned with her, scolded her, and commanded her, but none of it was any good. The brown girl's mind was made up, and away she went.

Mrs. Leggett looked at me, making her pleasant face as severe as she could, and said reprovingly: "Now see what you've done."

I said I was sorry, and her husband and I went out to examine the lawn. We didn't find any more diamonds.

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## 2

### LONG-NOSE

■

I put in a couple of hours canvassing the neighborhood, trying to place the man Mrs. and Miss Leggett had seen. I didn't have any luck with that one, but I picked up news of another. Mrs. Priestly—a pale semi-invalid who lived three doors below the Leggetts—gave me the first line on him.

Mrs. Priestly often sat at a front window at night when she couldn't sleep. On two of the nights she had seen the man. She said he was a tall man, and young, she thought, and he walked with his head thrust forward. The street was too poorly lighted for her to describe his coloring and clothes.

She had first seen him a week before. He had passed up and down on the other side of the street five or six times, at intervals of fifteen or twenty minutes, with his face turned as if watching something—or looking for something—on Mrs. Priestly's—and the Leggetts'—side of the street. She thought it was between eleven and twelve o'clock that she had seen him the first time that night, and around one o'clock the last. Several nights later—Saturday—she had seen him again, not walking this time, but standing on the corner below, looking up the street, at about midnight. He went away after half an hour, and she had not seen him again.

Mrs. Priestly knew the Leggetts by sight, but knew very little about them, except that the daughter was said to be a bit wild. They seemed to be nice people, but kept to themselves. He had moved into the house in 1921, alone except for the housekeeper—a Mrs. Begg, whom Mrs. Priestly understood, was now with a family named Freemander in Berkeley. Mrs. Leggett and Gabrielle had not come to live with Leggett until 1923.

Mrs. Priestly said she had not been at her window the previous night and therefore had not seen the man Mrs. Leggett had seen on the corner.

A man named Warren Daley, who lived on the opposite side of the street, down near the corner where Mrs. Priestly had seen her man, had, when locking up the house Sunday night, surprised a man—apparently the same man—in the vestibule. Daley was not at home when I called, but, after telling me this much, Mrs. Daley got him on the phone for me.

Daley said the man had been standing in the vestibule, either hiding from or watching someone up the street. As soon as Daley opened the door, the man ran away, down the

street, paying no attention to Daley's "What are you doing there?" Daley said he was a man of thirty-two or three, fairly well dressed in dark clothes, and had a long, thin, and sharp nose.

That was all I could shake the neighborhood down for. I went to the Montgomery Street offices of Spear, Camp and Duffy and asked for Eric Collinson.

He was young, blond, tall, broad, sunburned, and dressy, with the good-looking, unintelligent face of one who would know everything about polo, or shooting, or flying, or something of that sort—maybe even two things of that sort—but not much about anything else. We sat on a fatted leather seat in the customers' room, now, after market hours, empty except for a weedy boy juggling numbers on the board. I told Collinson about the burglary and asked him about the man he and Miss Leggett had seen Saturday night.

"He was an ordinary-looking chap, as far as I could see. It was dark. Short and chunky. You think he took them?"

"Did he come from the Leggett house?" I asked.

"From the lawn, at least. He seemed jumpy—that's why I thought perhaps he'd been nosing around where he shouldn't. I suggested I go after him and ask him what he was up to, but Gaby wouldn't have it. Might have been a friend of her father's. Did you ask him? He goes for odd eggs."

"Wasn't that late for a visitor to be leaving?"

He looked away from me, so I asked: "What time was it?"

"Midnight, I dare say."

"Midnight?"

"That's the word. The time when the graves give up their dead, and ghosts walk."

"Miss Leggett said it was after three o'clock."

"You see how it is!" he exclaimed, blandly triumphant, as if he had demonstrated something we had been arguing about. "She's half blind and won't wear glasses for fear of losing beauty. She's always making mistakes like that. Plays abominable bridge—takes deuce for aces. It was probably a quarter after twelve, and she looked at the clock and got the hands mixed."

I said: "That's too bad," and "Thanks," and went up to Halstead and Beauchamp's store on Geary Street.

Watt Halstead was a suave, pale, bald, fat man, with tired eyes and a too tight collar. I told him what I was doing and asked him how well he knew Leggett.

"I know him as a desirable customer and by reputation as a scientist. Why do you ask?"

"His burglary's sour—in spots anyway."

"Oh, you're mistaken. That is, you're mistaken if you think a man of his caliber would be mixed up in anything like that. A servant, of course; yes, that's possible: it often happens, doesn't it? But not Leggett. He is a scientist of some standing—he has done some remarkable work with color—and, unless our credit department has been misinformed, a man of more than moderate means. I don't mean that he is wealthy in the modern sense of the word, but too wealthy for a thing of that sort. And, confidentially, I happen to know that his present balance in the Seaman's National Bank is in excess of ten thousand dollars. Well—the eight diamonds were worth no more than a thousand or twelve or thirteen hundred dollars."

"At retail? Then they cost you five or six hundred?"

“Well,” smiling, “seven fifty would be nearer.”

“How’d you come to give him the diamonds?”

“He’s a customer of ours, as I’ve told you, and when I learned what he had done with glass diamonds. Fitzstephan—it was largely through him that I learned of Leggett’s work with glass diamonds—was skeptical, but I thought it worth trying—still think so—and persuaded Leggett to try.”

Fitzstephan was a familiar name. I asked: “Which Fitzstephan was that?”

“Owen, the writer. You know him?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t know he was on the coast. We used to drink out of the same bottle. Do you know his address?”

Halstead found it in the telephone book for me, a Nob Hill apartment.

From the jeweler’s I went to the vicinity of Minnie Hershey’s home. It was a Negro neighborhood, which made the getting of reasonably accurate information twice as unlikely as it always is.

What I managed to get added up to this: The girl had come to San Francisco from Winchester, Virginia, four or five years ago, and for the last half-year had been living with a Negro called Rhino Tingley. One told me Rhino’s first name was Ed, another Bill, but they agreed that he was young, big, and black and could easily be recognized by the scar on his chin. I was also told that he depended for his living on Minnie and pool; that he was not bad except when he got mad—then he was supposed to be a holy terror; and that I could get a look at him the early part of almost any evening in either Bunny Mack’s barber-shop or Bill foot Gerber’s cigar-store.

I learned where these joints were and then went downtown again, to the police detective bureau in the Hall of Justice. Nobody was in the pawnshop detail office. I crossed the corridor and asked Lieutenant Duff whether anybody had been put on the Leggett job.

He said: “See O’Gar.”

I went into the assembly room, looking for O’Gar and wondering what he—a homicide detail detective-sergeant—had to do with my job. Neither O’Gar nor Pat Reddy, his partner, was in. I smoked a cigarette, tried to guess who had been killed, and decided to phone Leggett.

“Any police detective been in since I left?” I asked when his harsh voice was in my ear.

“No, but the police called up a little while ago and asked my wife and daughter to come to a place in Golden Gate Avenue to see if they could identify a man there. They left a few minutes ago. I didn’t accompany them, not having seen the supposed burglar.”

“Whereabouts in Golden Gate Avenue?”

He didn’t remember the number, but he knew the block—above Van Ness Avenue. I thanked him and went out there.

In the designated block I found a uniformed copper standing in the doorway of a small apartment house. I asked him if O’Gar was there.

“Up in three ten,” he said.

I rode up in a rickety elevator. When I got out on the third floor, I came face to face with Mrs. Leggett and her daughter, leaving.

“Now I hope you’re satisfied that Minnie had nothing to do with it,” Mrs. Leggett said chidingly.

“The police found your man?”

“Yes.”

I said to Gabrielle Leggett: “Eric Collinson says it was only midnight, or a few minutes later, that you got home Saturday night.”

“Eric,” she said irritably, passing me to enter the elevator, “is an ass.”

Her mother, following her into the elevator, reprimanded her amiably: “Now, dear.”

I walked down the hall to a doorway where Pat Reddy stood talking to a couple of reporters, said hello, squeezed past them into a short passage-way, and went through that to a shabbily furnished room where a dead man lay on a wall bed.

Phels, of the police identification bureau, looked up from his magnifying glass to nod at me and then went on with his examination of a mission table’s edge.

O’Gar pulled his head and shoulders in the open window and growled: “So we got to put up with you again?”

O’Gar was a burly, stolid man of fifty, who wore wide-brimmed black hats of the movie-sheriff sort. There was a lot of sense in his hard bullet-head, and he was comfortable to work with.

I looked at the corpse—a man of forty or so, with a heavy, pale face, short hair touched with gray, a scrubby, dark mustache, and stocky arms and legs. There was a bullet hole just over his navel, and another high on the left side of his chest.

“It’s a man,” O’Gar said as I put the blankets over him again. “He’s dead.”

“What else did somebody tell you?” I asked.

“Looks like him and another guy glaumed the ice, and then the other guy decided to take a one-way split. The envelopes are here”—O’Gar took them out of his pocket and ruffled them with a thumb—“but the diamonds ain’t. They went down the fire-escape with the other guy a little while back. People spotted him making the sneak, but lost him when he cut through the alley. Tall man with a long nose. This one”—he pointed the envelopes at the bed—“has been here a week. Name of Louis Upton, with New York labels. We don’t know him. Nobody at the dump’ll say they ever saw him with anybody else. Nobody’ll say they know Long-nose.”

Pat Reddy came in. He was a big, jovial youngster, with almost brains enough to make up for his lack of experience. I told him and O’Gar what I had turned up on the job so far.

“Long-nose and this bird taking turns watching Leggett’s?” Reddy suggested.

“Maybe,” I said, “but there’s an inside angle. How many envelopes have you got there, O’Gar?”

“Seven.”

“Then the one for the planted diamond is missing.”

“How about the yellow girl?” Reddy asked.

“I’m going out for a look at her man tonight,” I said. “You people trying New York on the Upton?”

“Uh-huh,” O’Gar said.



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# 3

## SOMETHING BLACK

■

At the Nob Hill address Halstead had given me, I told my name to the boy at the switchboard and asked him to pass it on to Fitzstephan. I remembered Fitzstephan as a long, lean, sorrel-haired man of thirty-two, with sleepy gray eyes, a wide, humorous mouth, and carelessly worn clothes; a man who pretended to be lazier than he was, would rather talk than do anything else, and had a lot of what seemed to be accurate information and original ideas on any subject that happened to come up, as long as it was a little out of the ordinary.

I had met him five years before, in New York, where I was digging dirt on a chain of fake mediums who had taken a coal-and-ice dealer's widow for a hundred thousand dollars. Fitzstephan was plowing the same field for literary material. We became acquainted and pooled forces. I got more out of the combination than he did, since he knew the spook rack inside and out; and, with his help, I cleaned up my job in a couple of weeks. We were fair-weather chummy for a month or two after that, until I left New York.

"Mr. Fitzstephan says to come right up," the switchboard boy said.

His apartment was on the sixth floor. He was standing at its door when I got out of the elevator.

"By God," he said, holding out a lean hand, "it is you!"

"None other."

He hadn't changed any. We went into a room where half a dozen bookcases and four tables left little room for anything else. Magazines and books in various languages, paper clippings, proof sheets, were scattered everywhere—all just as it used to be in his New York rooms.

We sat down, found places for our feet between table legs, and accounted roughly for our lives since we had last seen one another. He had been in San Francisco for a little more than a year—except, he said, for week-ends, and two months hermiting in the country, finishing a novel. I had been there nearly five years. He liked San Francisco, he said, but wouldn't oppose any movement to give the West back to the Indians.

"How's the literary grift go?" I asked.

He looked at me sharply, demanding: "You haven't been reading me?"

“No. Where’d you get that funny idea?”

“There was something in your tone, something proprietary, as in the voice of one who has bought an author for a couple of dollars. I haven’t met it often enough to be used to it. Good God! Remember once I offered you a set of my books as a present?” He had always liked to talk that way.

“Yeah. But I never blamed you. You were drunk.”

“On sherry—Elsa Donne’s sherry. Remember Elsa? She showed us a picture she had just finished, and you said it was pretty. Sweet God, wasn’t she furious! You said it so vapidly and so sincerely and as if you were so sure that she would like your saying it. Remember? She put it out, but we’d both already got plastered on her sherry. But you weren’t tight enough to take the books.”

“I was afraid I’d read them and understand them,” I explained, “and then you’d have felt insulted.”

A Chinese boy brought us cold white wine.

Fitzstephan said: “I suppose you’re still hounding the unfortunate evil-doer?”

“Yeah. That’s how I happened to locate you. Halstead tells me you know Edgar Leggett.”

A gleam pushed through the sleepiness in his gray eyes, and he sat up a little in his chair asking: “Leggett’s been up to something?”

“Why do you say that?”

“I didn’t say it. I asked it.” He made himself limp in the chair again, but the gleam didn’t go out of his eyes. “Come on, out with it. Don’t try to be subtle with me, my son; that’s not your style at all. Try it and you’re sunk. Out with it: what’s Leggett been up to?”

“We don’t do it that way,” I said. “You’re a storywriter. I can’t trust you not to build up on what I tell you. I’ll save mine till after you’ve spoken your piece, so yours won’t be twisted to fit mine. How long have you known him?”

“Since shortly after I came here. He’s always interested me. There’s something obscure about him, something dark and inviting. He is, for instance, physically ascetic—neither smoking or drinking, eating meagerly, sleeping, I’m told, only three or four hours a night—but mentally or spiritually, sensual—does that mean anything to you?—to the point of decadence. You used to think I had an abnormal appetite for the fantastic. You should know him. His friends—no, he hasn’t any—his choice companions are those who have the most outlandish ideas to offer: Marquard and his insane figures that aren’t figures, but the boundaries of areas in space that are the figures; Denbar Curt and his algebraism; the Haldorns and their Holy Grail secret; crazy Laura Joines; Farnham—”

“And you,” I put in, “with explanations and descriptions that explain and describe nothing. I hope you don’t think any of what you’ve said means anything to me.”

“I remember you now: you were always like that.” He grinned at me, running thin fingers through his sorrel hair. “Tell me what’s up while I try to find one-syllable words for you.”

I asked him if he knew Eric Collinson. He said he did; there was nothing to know about him except that he was engaged to Gabrielle Leggett, that his father was the lumber merchant Collinson, and that Eric was Princeton, stocks and bonds, and hand-ball, a nice boy.

“Maybe,” I said, “but he lied to me.”

“Isn’t that like a sleuth?” Fitzstephan shook his head, grinning. “You must have had the wrong fellow—somebody impersonating him. The Chevalier Bayard doesn’t lie, and, besides,

lying requires imagination. You've—or wait! Was a woman involved in your question?"

I nodded.

"You're correct, then," Fitzstephan assured me. "I apologize. The Chevalier Bayard always lies when a woman is involved, even if it's unnecessary and puts her to a lot of trouble. It's one of the conventions of Bayardism, something to do with guarding her honor or the like. Who was the woman?"

"Gabrielle Leggett," I said, and told him all I knew about the Leggetts, the diamonds, and the dead man in Golden Gate Avenue. Disappointment deepened in his face while I talked.

"That's trivial, dull," he complained when I had finished. "I've been thinking of Leggett in terms of Dumas, and you bring me a piece of gimcrackery out of O. Henry. You've let me down, you and your shabby diamonds. But"—his eyes brightened again—"this may lead to something. Leggett may or may not be criminal, but there's more to him than a two-penny insurance swindle."

"You mean," I asked, "that he's one of these master minds? So you read newspapers? What do you think he is? King of the bootleggers? Chief of an international crime syndicate? Whore? Whiteslave magnate? Head of a dope ring? Or queen of the counterfeiters in disguise?"

"Don't be an idiot," he said. "But he's got brains, and there's something black in him. There's something he doesn't want to think about, but must not forget. I've told you that he's thirsty for all that's dizziest in thought, yet he's cold as a fish, but with a bitter-dry coldness. He's a neurotic who keeps his body fit and sensitive and ready—for what?—while he drugs his mind with lunacies. Yet he's cold and sane. If a man has a past that he wants to forget, he can easiest drug his mind against memory through his body, with sensuality if not with narcotics. But suppose the past is not dead, and this man must keep himself fit to cope with it should it come into the present. Well, then he would be wisest to anaesthetize his mind directly, letting his body stay strong and ready."

"And this past?"

Fitzstephan shook his head, saying: "If I don't know—and I don't—it isn't my fault. Before you're through, you'll know how difficult it is to get information out of that family."

"Did you try?"

"Certainly I'm a novelist. My business is with souls and what goes on in them. He's got one that attracts me, and I've always considered myself unjustly treated by his not turning himself inside out for me. You know, I doubt if Leggett's his name. He's French. He told me once he came from Atlanta, but he's French in outlook, in quality of mind, in everything except admission."

"What of the rest of the family?" I asked. "Gabrielle's cuckoo, isn't she?"

"I wonder." Fitzstephan looked curiously at me. "Are you saying that carelessly, or do you really think she's off?"

"I don't know. She's odd, an uncomfortable sort of person. And, then, she's got animal ears, hardly any forehead; and her eyes shift from green to brown and back without ever settling on one color. How much of her affairs have you turned up in your snooping around?"

"Are you—who make your living snooping—sneering at my curiosity about people and my attempts to satisfy it?"

"We're different," I said. "I do mine with the object of putting people in jail, and I get paid for it, though not as much as I should."

“That’s not different,” he said. “I do mine with the object of putting people in books, and get paid for it, though not as much as I should.”

“Yeah, but what good does that do?”

“God knows. What good does putting them in jail do?”

“Relieves congestion,” I said. “Put enough people in jail, and cities wouldn’t have traffic problems. What do you know about this Gabrielle?”

“She hates her father. He worships her.”

“How come the hate?”

“I don’t know; perhaps because he worships her.”

“There’s no sense to that,” I complained. “You’re just being literary. What about Mr. Leggett?”

“You’ve never eaten one of her meals, I suppose? You’d have no doubts if you had. Not but a serene, sane soul ever achieved such cooking. I’ve often wondered what she thinks of the weird creatures who are her husband and daughter, though I imagine she simply accepts them as they are without even being conscious of their weirdness.”

“All this is well enough in its way,” I said, “but you still haven’t told me anything definite.”

“No, I haven’t,” he replied, “and that, my boy, is it. I’ve told you what I know and what I imagine, and none of it is definite. That’s the point—in a year of trying I’ve learned nothing definite about Leggett. Isn’t that—remembering my curiosity and my usual skill in satisfying it—enough to convince you that the man is hiding something and knows how to hide it?”

“Is it? I don’t know. But I know I’ve wasted enough time learning nothing that anybody can be jailed for. Dinner tomorrow night? Or the next?”

“The next. About seven o’clock?”

I said I would stop for him, and went out. It was then after five o’clock. Not having had any luncheon, I went up to Blanco’s for food, and then to darktown for a look at Rhinoceros Tingley.

I found him in Big-foot Gerber’s cigar-store, rolling a fat cigar around in his mouth, telling something to the other Negroes—four of them—in the place.

“... says to him: ‘Nigger, you talking yourself out of skin,’ and I reaches out my hand for him, and, ’fore God, there weren’t none of him there excepting his footprints in the cement pavement, eight feet apart and heading home.”

Buying a package of cigarettes, I weighed him in while he talked. He was a chocolate man of less than thirty years, close to six feet tall and weighing two hundred pounds plus, with big yellow-balled pop eyes, a broad nose, a big blue-lipped and blue-gummed mouth, and a ragged black scar running from his lower lip down behind his blue and white striped collar. His clothes were new enough to look new, and he wore them sportily. His voice was a heavy bass that shook the glass of the showcases when he laughed with his audience.

I went out of the store while they were laughing, heard the laughter stop short behind me, resisted the temptation to look back, and moved down the street toward the building where he and Minnie lived. He came abreast of me when I was half a block from the flat.

I said nothing while we took seven steps side by side.

Then he said: “You the man that been inquiring around about me?”

The sour odor of Italian wine was thick enough to be seen.

I considered, and said: “Yeah.”

“What you got to do with me?” he asked, not disagreeably, but as if he wanted to know.

Across the street Gabrielle Leggett, in brown coat and brown and yellow hat, came out of Minnie’s building and walked south, not turning her face towards us. She walked swiftly and her lower lip was between her teeth.

I looked at the Negro. He was looking at me. There was nothing in his face to show that he had seen Gabrielle Leggett, or that the sight of her meant anything to him.

I said: “You’ve got nothing to hide, have you? What do you care who asks about you?”

“All the same, I’m the party to come to if you wants to know about me. You the man that got Minnie fired?”

“She wasn’t fired. She quit.”

“Minnie don’t have to take nobody’s lip. She—”

“Let’s go over and talk to her,” I suggested, leading the way across the street. At the front door he went ahead, up a flight of stairs, down a dark hall to a door which he opened with one of the twenty or more keys on his ring.

Minnie Hershey, in a pink kimono trimmed with yellow ostrich feathers that looked like little dead ferns, came out of the bedroom to meet us in the living-room. Her eyes got big when she saw me.

Rhino said: “You know this gentleman, Minnie.”

Minnie said: “Y-yes.”

I said: “You shouldn’t have left the Leggetts’ that way. Nobody thinks you had anything to do with the diamonds. What did Miss Leggett want here?”

“There been no Miss Leggetts here,” she told me. “I don’t know what you talking about.”

“She came out as we were coming in.”

“Oh! *Miss* Leggett. I thought you said *Mrs.* Leggett. I beg your pardon. Yes, sir. Minnie Gabrielle was sure enough here. She wanted to know if I wouldn’t come back there. She thinks a powerful lot of me, Miss Gabrielle does.”

“That,” I said, “is what you ought to do. It was foolish, leaving like that.”

Rhino took the cigar out of his mouth and pointed the red end at the girl.

“You away from them,” he boomed, “and you stay away from them. You don’t have to take nothing from nobody.” He put a hand in his pants pocket, lugged out a thick bundle of paper money, thumped it down on the table, and rumbled: “What for you have to work for folks?”

He was talking to the girl, but looking at me, grinning, gold teeth shining against purple mouth. The girl looked at him scornfully, said: “Lead him around, *vino*,” and turned to me again, her brown face tense, anxious to be believed, saying earnestly: “Rhino got that money in a crap game, mister. Hope to die if he didn’t.”

Rhino said: “Ain’t nobody’s business where I got my money. I got it. I got—” He put his cigar on the edge of the table, picked up the money, wet a thumb as big as a heel on a tongue like a bath-mat, and counted his roll bill by bill down on the table. “Twenty-thirty—eighty—hundred—hundred and ten—two hundred and ten—three hundred and ten—three hundred and thirty—three hundred and thirty-five—four hundred and thirty-five—five hundred and thirty-five—five hundred and eighty-five—six hundred and five-six hundred and ten—seven hundred and twenty—seven hundred and twenty—seven hundred and seventy—eight hundred and twenty-eight hundred and thirty—eight hundred and forty—nine hundred and

forty—nine hundred and sixty—nine hundred and seventy-nine hundred and seventy-five—  
nine hundred and ninety-five—ten hundred and fifteen—ten hundred and twenty—eleven  
hundred and twenty—eleven hundred and seventy. Anybody want to know what I got, that  
what I got—eleven hundred and seventy dollars. Anybody want to know where I get it  
maybe I tell them, maybe I don't. Just depend on how I feel about it.”

Minnie said: “He won it in a crap game, mister, up the Happy Day Social Club. Hope to do  
if he didn't.”

“Maybe I did,” Rhino said, still grinning widely at me. “But supposing I didn't?”

“I'm no good at riddles,” I said, and, after again advising Minnie to return to the Leggett  
left the flat. Minnie closed the door behind me. As I went down the hall I could hear her  
voice scolding and Rhino's chesty bass laughter.

In a downtown Owl drug-store I turned to the Berkeley section of the telephone directory  
found only one Freemander listed, and called the number. Mrs. Begg was there and consented  
to see me if I came over on the next ferry.

The Freemander house was set off a road that wound uphill towards the University of  
California.

Mrs. Begg was a scrawny, big-boned woman, with not much gray hair packed close around  
a bony skull, hard gray eyes, and hard, capable hands. She was sour and severe, but plain  
spoken enough to let us talk turkey without a lot of preliminary hemming and hawing.

I told her about the burglary and my belief that the thief had been helped, at least with  
information, by somebody who knew the Leggett household, winding up: “Mrs. Priestly told  
me you had been Leggett's housekeeper, and she thought you could help me.”

Mrs. Begg said she doubted whether she could tell me anything that would pay me for my  
trip from the city, but she was willing to do what she could, being an honest woman and  
having nothing to conceal from anybody. Once started, she told me a great deal, damned near  
talking me earless. Throwing out the stuff that didn't interest me, I came away with the  
information:

Mrs. Begg had been hired by Leggett, through an employment agency, as housekeeper in  
the spring of 1921. At first she had a girl to help her, but there wasn't enough work for two  
so, at Mrs. Begg's suggestion, they let the girl go. Leggett was a man of simple tastes and  
spent nearly all his time on the top floor, where he had his laboratory and a cubbyhole  
bedroom. He seldom used the rest of the house except when he had friends in for an evening.  
Mrs. Begg didn't like his friends, though she could say nothing against them except that the  
way they talked was a shame and a disgrace. Edgar Leggett was as nice a man as a person  
could want to know, she said, only so secretive that it made a person nervous. She was never  
allowed to go up on the third floor, and the door of the laboratory was always kept locked.  
Once a month a Jap would come in to clean it up under Leggett's supervision. Well, she  
supposed he had a lot of scientific secrets, and maybe dangerous chemicals, that he didn't  
want people poking into, but just the same it made a person uneasy. She didn't know  
anything about her employer's personal or family affairs and knew her place too well to ask  
him any questions.

In August 1923—it was a rainy morning, she remembered—a woman and a girl of fifteen  
with a lot of suitcases, had come to the house. She let them in and the woman asked for Mr.  
Leggett. Mrs. Begg went up to the laboratory door and told him, and he came down. Never

all her born days had she seen such a surprised man as he was when he saw them. He turned absolutely white, and she thought he was going to fall down, he shook that bad. She didn't know what Leggett and the woman and the girl said to one another that morning, because they jabbered away in some foreign language, though the lot of them could talk English as good as anybody else, and better than most, especially that Gabrielle when she got to cursing. Mrs. Begg had left them and gone on about her business. Pretty soon Leggett came out to the kitchen and told her his visitors were a Mrs. Dain, his sister-in-law, and her daughter, neither of whom he had seen for ten years; and that they were going to stay there with him. Mrs. Dain later told Mrs. Begg that they were English, but had been living in New York for several years. Mrs. Begg said she liked Mrs. Dain, who was a sensible woman and a first-rate housewife, but that Gabrielle was a tartar. Mrs. Begg always spoke of the girl as "the Gabrielle."

With the Dains there, and with Mrs. Dain's ability as a housekeeper, there was no longer any place for Mrs. Begg. They had been very liberal, she said, helping her find a new place and giving her a generous bonus when she left. She hadn't seen any of them since, but, thanks to the careful watch she habitually kept on the marriage, death, and birth notices in the morning papers, she had learned, a week after she left, that a marriage license had been issued to Edgar Leggett and Alice Dain.

## THE VAGUE HARPERS



When I arrived at the agency at nine the next morning, Eric Collinson was sitting in the reception room. His sun-burned face was dingy without pinkness, and he had forgotten to put stickum on his hair.

“Do you know anything about Miss Leggett?” he asked, jumping up and meeting me at the door. “She wasn’t home last night, and she’s not home yet. Her father wouldn’t say he didn’t know where she was, but I’m sure he didn’t. He told me not to worry, but how can I help worrying? Do you know anything about it?”

I said I didn’t and told him about seeing her leave Minnie Hershey’s the previous evening. I gave him the mulatto’s address and suggested that he ask her. He jammed his hat on his head and hurried off.

Getting O’Gar on the phone, I asked him if he had heard from New York yet.

“Uh-huh,” he said. “Upton—that’s his right name—was once one of your private dicks—had an agency of his own—till ’23, when him and a guy named Harry Ruppert were sent over for trying to fix a jury. How’d you make out with the shine?”

“I don’t know. This Rhino Tingley’s carrying an eleven-hundred-case roll. Minnie says he got it with the rats and mice. Maybe he did: it’s twice what he could have peddled Leggett’s stuff for. Can you try to have it checked? He’s supposed to have got it at the Happy Day Social Club.”

O’Gar promised to do what he could and hung up.

I sent a wire to our New York branch, asking for more dope on Upton and Ruppert, and then went up to the county clerk’s office in the municipal building, where I dug into the August and September 1923 marriage-license file. The application I wanted was dated August 26 and bore Edgar Leggett’s statement that he was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 18, 1883, and that this was his second marriage; and Alice Dain’s statement that she was born in London, England, on October 22, 1888, and that she had not been married before.

When I returned to the agency, Eric Collinson, his yellow hair still further disarranged with again lying in wait for me.

“I saw Minnie,” he said excitedly, “and she couldn’t tell me anything. She said Gaby was



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