

# HARD-BOILED



**AN  
ANTHOLOGY  
OF  
AMERICAN  
CRIME  
STORIES**

*EDITED BY*  
**BILL  
PRONZINI  
— & —  
JACK  
ADRIAN**

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Bill Pronzini and Jack Adrian

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**HARD-BOILED**

AN ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN CRIME STORIES

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*The only significant fiction in America is popular fiction. . . It is from Chandler and Hammett and Hemingway that the best modern fiction derives.*

KENNETH REXROTH

How does one define hard-boiled crime fiction?

Not easily. The very label “hard-boiled” makes it difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a precise and concise formulation. The term has been used and misused by readers, writers, and critics so often that, as with most literary labels, it has become virtually meaningless.

A more worthwhile approach is to list some of the elements contained in commendable crime stories of this type. These elements are not the only ones, to be sure; but for us they are the most vital. The more of them that an author incorporates into a particular work, the greater the work’s merit.

The hard-boiled crime story deals with disorder, disaffection, and dissatisfaction. Throughout the genre’s seventy-year history, this has remained a constant and central tenet. The typical hard-boiled character (if not the typical hard-boiled writer) has a jaundiced view of government, power, and the law. He (or, sometimes, she) is often a loner, a social misfit. If he is on the side of the angels, he is likely to be a cynical idealist: he believes that society is corrupt, but he also believes in justice and will make it his business to do whatever is necessary to see that justice is done. If he walks the other side of the mean streets, he walks them at night; he is likely a predator, and as morally bankrupt as any human being can be. In the noir world, extremes are the norm; clashes between good and evil are never petty, and good does not always triumph, nor is justice always done.

A hard-boiled story must emphasize character and the problems inherent in human behavior. Character conflict is essential; the crime or threat of crime with which the story is concerned is of secondary importance.

It must be reflective of the times in which it was written, providing an

accurate, honest, and realistic depiction of its locale (whether urban, suburban, or rural) and of the individuals who inhabit that locale. Even more important, it must offer some insight into the social, political, and/or moral climate of its era. It must, as critic David Madden has written, “reflect [its] world in a way that is at once an objective description and an implicit judgment of it.” Entertainment alone is not a sufficient *raison d’être*.

Even though it involves some type of violent crime, a hard-boiled crime story must not use unmotivated violence or violence for the sake of sensationalism. The mere threat of brute force is often sufficient.

It must have, in Benjamin Appel’s phrase, “living people talking a living language,” however harsh, cruel, or obscene these people and that language may be.

It should generate, as much as possible, what Raymond Chandler called “a smell of fear.”

The presence of these various elements was one of three criteria we used in selecting stories for *Hard-Boiled: An Anthology of American Crime Stories*. The second criterion was a given story’s familiarity and accessibility to today’s readers. Many hard-boiled tales have been anthologized in recent years; some, such as Chandler’s “Red Wind,” have been overanthologized. Wherever possible, therefore, we chose stories that either have never before appeared in an anthology or at least have not been reprinted too recently. In a few instances, where the work of such icons as Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Ross Macdonald is limited in quantity, and either still in print or at any rate easily obtainable in other sources, we chose representative stories that, in our opinion, have had the least amount of exposure.

The third criterion was the authors themselves. While we considered it necessary—indeed, crucial—to include a wide range of the form’s major practitioners, at the same time we grew aware, as we researched various magazine and book sources, of how much excellent neglected fiction they contain by writers not known to us (such as William Cole and James Hannah). As a result, in preparing the final table of contents, we decided that although preference should be given to those individuals whose body of work has defined, shaped, and influenced American hard-boiled crime writing over the past seven decades, it was imperative to include stories by lesser-known authors.

We run the risk—as all anthologists do—of excluding favorite stories or favorite authors. Our choices will certainly not please all readers; we

would be amazed if they did. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that some writers were omitted because of space limitations, while other notables in the hard-boiled tradition were left out simply because they produced no short pieces worthy of the distinction, or they wrote short stories that in our estimation do not have the quality of their longer works.

Although the hard-boiled story as we know it today was born in the 1920s, hard-boiled writing did not spring fully fledged from that anti-social maelstrom of the years between the two world wars. It was a mélange of different styles and different genres, and its heroic figures can be traced back a hundred years earlier, to both the myth and the reality of the western frontier. The history of the United States abounds with larger-than-life loners whose accomplishments, whose very survival, depended on an uncompromising toughness and a willingness to enter into struggles against seemingly insurmountable odds: Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, Davy Crockett, Jim Bridger, Mike Fink, Jim Bowie. Such rugged individualists inspired the creation of mythical heroes—Paul Bunyan, for instance—and of fictional men of action. Both James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Herman Melville's Captain Ahab are hunters driven by forces outside themselves, and in that sense are perfect paradigms of the modern private eye. Even Mark Twain's Huck Finn, and certainly Jack London's Wolf Larsen, have elements of the hard-boiled knight in their makeup.

Similarly, American history is filled with scoundrels and outlaws; persons motivated by greed, lust, and power; persons who hold human values and human life in little regard: William Bonney, John Wesley Hardin, Belle Starr, Herman W. Mudgett, and all the little-known and long-forgotten grifters, gamblers, confidence swindlers, whores, thieves, and paid assassins who inhabited the towns and cities, followed the railroads westward, and flocked to the gold-mining camps. These figures likewise inspired nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century authors, among them Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Frank R. Stockton, Upton Sinclair, and O. Henry. They, too, are the antecedents of the individuals who live in the pages of the modern noir story.

Literary writers were not the only ones energized by both heroic and villainous men and women and their deeds. Writers of popular fiction were equally motivated, in particular during the last four decades of the nineteenth century, when the "dime novel" pioneered by New Yorker

Erastus Beadle revolutionized mass-market publishing. The first of Beadle's slender, cheaply printed story booklets appeared in June 1860. Compulsory education in most states had created a growing number of readers, many of whom were more interested in escapist entertainment than in literary fiction and could not afford the 25 cents for which paper-covered novels were then sold. Beadle's Dime Novel Library was an instant success and spawned scores of competitively priced series from other publishers.

Early dime novels were melodramatic tales with historical, sea, and frontier settings; but in the 1870s, stories of street life in New York City and Philadelphia came into vogue, and soon afterward, into this milieu, the mass-audience detective story was born. "Old Sleuth, the Detective" appeared in *Fireside Companion* in June 1872 and was soon followed by dozens of other investigators of every conceivable occupation and based in every major city from Boston to San Francisco. Not all were men, either; successful series featured such women sleuths as Round Kate and the Western Lady Detective.

By today's standards, the dime-novel detective story was pallid juvenile fare. There was little character development; for the most part, the protagonists were ciphers, with neither moral code nor personality. The streets and alleys they prowled were those of hack writers' imaginations. Even the most popular and best-known of the dime-novel manhunters, Nick Carter (whose twenty-year career began in 1886 in *New York Weekly*), offered little in the way of realism, humanity, or social conscience. These characters were detectives in name only, in only the bardest sense progenitors of the tough-guy hero of the twentieth century. Yet it was their devotion to justice and their feats of derring-do that paved the way for their hard-boiled offspring. Cheap-fiction publishers of the early twentieth century would not have been so quick to promote the crime story if it had not been for the enormous followings built up by the dime-novel sleuths.

Another development in the birth of the noir crime story, this one of major proportions, also began in the nineteenth century. Frank A. Munsey, a tightfisted magazine publisher of adventure stories for young adults, decided in 1895 to revamp one of his publications, *Argosy*, in two distinct ways: first, by turning it into an all-fiction magazine aimed at adult readers; and second, by printing the new *Argosy* on rough wood-pulp paper, which was much less expensive than the smooth paper stock that was standard for periodicals of the time. The conversion to wood

pulp allowed Munsey to print and circulate a greater number of copies of *Argosy* and his other magazines. The move was rewarded by a substantial increase in sales. By the turn of the century, *Argosy's* circulation topped 80,000 copies a month, and by 1910 it had soared to 250,000 copies.

Munsey's rivals—chiefly, Street & Smith, which had supplanted Erastus Beadle and his partner, Robert Adams, as the predominant supplier of dime novels—soon brought out seven- by ten-inch pulp-paper magazines of their own. Many more so-called pulps were introduced during the 1910s: at first mostly general fiction publications, and then an increasing number specializing in categories such as Western stories and, beginning in 1915, detective stories. The first detective pulp was in fact a conversion of Street & Smith's thriller, *Nick Carter*, which in its new incarnation featured the adventures of other sleuths in addition to Nick Carter. With the exception of love-story magazines, the pulps were aimed primarily at a male readership; for this reason, especially from the 1920s onward, they were given vividly colored enameled covers whose artwork usually depicted scenes of high melodrama. Mass-market readers overwhelmingly preferred this new form of cheap fiction; dime novels and their cousins, flimsy story-paper weeklies, were virtually extinct by the end of the 1920s.

In 1920, another important development occurred, ironically enough as the long-range result of a decision by a pair of literary entrepreneurs, H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, who would later sneer openly at hard-boiled fiction. Mencken and Nathan were co-owners of the *Smart Set*, a glossy "magazine of cleverness" that was in constant financial trouble. They sought to subsidize it by publishing a pulp monthly that they called *The Black Mask*—"a lousy magazine, all detective stories, [that has] burdened Nathan and me with disagreeable work," as Mencken complained in a letter. Under their brief auspices, *Black Mask* was largely stocked with mannered, drawing-room-type mystery stories. It attracted women readers as well as men (one of its early enthusiasts was reputedly Woodrow Wilson), and its sales were substantial enough to allow Mencken and Nathan to sell it after six months for \$12,500, a tidy profit on an initial investment of \$500. The new owners, Pro-Distributors Corporation, appointed George W. Sutton and then P. C. Cody as editors. Cody, in particular, transformed the magazine into one that featured crime stories in American settings (along with adventure and Western stories). *Black Mask's* "new look" attracted two young writ-

ers whose work would have a strong impact on the hard-boiled form, one briefly and the other lastingly.

"Three Gun Terry," a tough-minded story by Carroll John Daly, was printed in the May 15, 1923, issue. Just two weeks later, Daly's byline topped the first fully realized private-eye tale, "Knights of the Open Palm," an anti-Ku Klux Klan diatribe that starred a violent, poorly educated, somewhat sadistic loner named Race Williams. Readers embraced Williams with such fervor that Daly was encouraged to bring him back fifty-two times over the next dozen years. In a 1930 readers' poll, Daly was judged *Black Mask's* favorite writer.

Despite his popularity, Daly was a crude and badly flawed writer. He was cursed with a tin ear where speech patterns of the day were concerned and possessed no talent at all for characterization. His action sequences (on which all his tales relied heavily) were invariably implausible, his plotting was weak and obvious, all his characters seem hewn from the same block of wood, and the East Coast environs in which Race Williams operated were no more authentically portrayed than were those in the dime-novel detective stories.

A far more literate and polished writer, whose detective was modeled on a real-life Pinkerton agent and whose stories were set in a sharply and believably drawn northern California milieu, was Dashiell Hammett. His first Continental Op story, "Arson Plus," was published in the October 1, 1923, issue under the pen name Peter Collinson, four months after Race Williams's debut. It was Hammett's third appearance in *Black Mask*, the previous two having also carried the Collinson byline. His second Op novelette, "Crooked Souls," published two weeks after "Arson Plus," was Hammett's first appearance in the magazine under his own name. Altogether, the Op was featured in two dozen *Black Mask* stories, plus the serialized versions of *The Dain Curse* and *Red Harvest*, from 1923 to 1929. *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett's hugely influential novel, in which San Francisco private eye Sam Spade pursues the fabulous jewel-encrusted black bird, "the stuff that dreams are made of," was also serialized in *Black Mask* before its publication in book form in 1930.

Hammett's position as patriarch of the hard-boiled crime story owes as much to the efforts of Joseph T. "Cap" Shaw, who took over the editorship of *Black Mask* in 1926, as to his own considerable talent. Shaw, a retired army captain and friend of new publisher Ray Holland, was unfamiliar with the magazine; in fact, he had never read any pulp mag-

azine prior to assuming his editorial duties. He did not care for what he found in previous issues: he felt that the contents lacked direction. The one *Black Mask* writer whose work he did like was Hammett, and it was Hammett he chose as the model for what he thought the magazine should be—one devoted to a new type and new style of detective writing.

The subject matter with which Hammett dealt and on which Shaw would focus *Black Mask* was not the bloodless crimes of Victorian-era mysteries or the hack-generated imaginary felonies of the dime novels; it was genuine sin and vice, of the sort their readers saw all around them and read about in their daily newspapers. The 1920s were a lawless decade, for this was the era of the Volstead Act, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which expressly forbade the brewing and distilling of all intoxicating alcohol. Prohibition, however lofty the motives and intentions behind it, was a staggering legislative and human blunder whose ramifications are still being felt three-quarters of a century later. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in liquor was a winked-at commonplace, and illegality became an accepted norm. This nationwide amorality—crime almost as a way of life—allowed the underworld to organize and grow strong enough for its corruption to reach into the highest levels of government and society. Feud as they might, kill one another as they did, Alphonse Capone and his gangster cohorts flourished in a climate of violence, brutality, and unconstrained social and commercial vice. It was inevitable that the hard-boiled-fiction movement, given the leadership of individuals such as Hammett and Shaw, would also grow and flourish against this background of disorder and disaffection.

Shaw would later define the *Black Mask* prose style as “hard, brittle . . . a full employment of the function of dialogue, and authenticity in characterization and action.” A fast tempo and “economy of expression” were two other ingredients. (Neither Hammett nor Shaw invented the style, of course. Its emphasis on dialogue, its use of vernacular, and its basic colloquial rhythm were offshoots of the styles employed by Sherwood Anderson and Ring Lardner and polished and simplified by Ernest Hemingway. What Hammett brought to it was “romantic realism,” in Ellery Queen’s phrase: he placed his stories against a stark background; peopled them with men and women who seemed truly to sweat, bleed, and ache; and made the pursuit of justice a noble as well as a necessary goal.)

Over Shaw’s ten-year editorial reign, he developed a nucleus of writers

who adhered to—and in some cases refined—what would come to be known as the *Black Mask* school: Raymond Chandler, Frederick Nebel, Raoul Whitfield, Paul Cain (George Sims), Horace McCoy, Dwight V. Babcock, George Harmon Coxe, Norbert Davis. These writers created heroes who were worthy of Cooper's Bumpo and Melville's Ahab—true rugged individualists—who believed that murder will out, who were determined to see law and order prevail no matter what the cost. Chandler's Carmady, an early version of Philip Marlowe, was one such creation. Others were Nebel's police captain MacBride and Kennedy of the *Free Press*; Coxe's crime photographer, Flashgun Casey; and Whitfield's private detective, Ben Jardinn.

It should not be thought, however, that Hammett and his followers wrote for any high-minded or didactic purpose, or to any grand design. Although there was in their work the dominant element of "taking murder out of the library and putting it back on the streets where it belonged," in Chandler's celebrated phrase, these writers were essentially storytellers, aiming their wares at a large and sympathetic but by no means uncritical audience. It was incumbent on them to produce stories that gripped, entertained, surprised; otherwise, the stories would not be bought and published. Thus even though the writers were working with realistic material and in a fresh idiom, to some extent they still relied on past detective-story traditions, motivations, and (often enough) clichés.

The best of the craftsmen under Shaw's tutelage were so adept at their lessons that they soon graduated to other, higher-paying media: glossy-paper magazines, novels, radio scripts, Hollywood screenplays. Some of their creations also went on to success outside the pages of *Black Mask*. Ben Jardinn was featured in one of the better early Hollywood private-eye novels, Raoul Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* (1931). Flashgun Casey enjoyed a wide following in a series of novels by George Harmon Coxe, as well as in his own radio show, *Casey, Crime Photographer*, in the 1940s. Curiously enough, the toughest of all the hard-boiled characters to come out of *Black Mask*, Paul Cain's Gerry Kells, was neither a hero nor a detective; Kells, in fact, was in many ways the first true antihero in noir fiction—a murderous, amoral gambler and racketeer whose base of operations was the Los Angeles underworld. Five interconnected stories featuring Kells were joined in the 1933 novel *Fast One*, a rock-hard tale that is arguably the harshest and most relentless of all the hard-boiled crime novels.

With Shaw at the helm, *Black Mask's* circulation increased dramati-

cally at the end of his first year and peaked in 1930 at 103,000 copies a month. Predictably, its early success brought on imitators, including Fiction House's short-lived *Black Aces* and Popular Publications' long-lived *Dime Detective*. By the mid-1930s, however, Shaw had lost or was about to lose most of his major writers—Hammett, Nebel, Whitfield, Coxe, McCoy—to the more lucrative and challenging media; only Chandler remained. Circulation had fallen off, and financial cutbacks were imminent. One cutback was to be in Shaw's salary; he objected vehemently, and in the fall of 1936 he was relieved of his editorial duties. (In sympathy, Chandler quit *Black Mask* as well. His last few pulp crime stories appeared in *Dime Detective* and in Street & Smith's *Detective Story*.)

Despite the efforts of new editor Fanny Ellsworth, sales of *Black Mask* continued to decline, and in 1940 the magazine was sold to Popular Publications. It ended its life rather ignominiously in 1951, as a second-string title in Popular's chain of detective pulps, behind *Dime Detective*, *Detective Tales*, and *New Detective*. But the *Black Mask* school remained the hard-boiled standard for all pulp crime fiction during the last twenty years of the pulp-magazine era, and for much of the hard-boiled fiction—short stories and novels alike—that has been published since.

The tough crime story was not limited to publication in pulp magazines or the tough crime novel to publication within the mystery and detective genre, once the Roaring Twenties gave way to the Depression thirties. Grinding poverty, unemployment, homelessness, bank and small-business failures in alarming numbers, ongoing police and political corruption and rampant gangsterism, violent clashes between union organizers and management scabs in both industry and agriculture—these were the social ills of the Great Depression. Combined with a vast westward migration from the Midwest and the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma and Arkansas to California's "promised land," these real-life trends gave rise to a different type of hard-boiled fiction that was more solidly rooted in the literary mainstream. Some of the period's angriest and most savagely realistic short stories were published in such "quality" magazines as *American Mercury*, *Story*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *Liberty*. Many mainstream novels of the 1930s had grim themes, in particular those that championed the cause of the proletariat; many dealt wholly or in part with violent crime, often in a bitterly existential fashion. A few, although treated less than respectfully by critics of the time, have endured and achieved the status of classics: James M. Cain's *The Postman Always*

*Rings Twice* (1934), Benjamin Appel's *Brain Guy* (1934), Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935), Edward Anderson's *Thieves Like Us* (1937), Richard Hallas's *You Play the Black and the Red Comes Up* (1938), and James Ross's *They Don't Dance Much* (1940).

With a few exceptions, the 1940s were a static decade for the hard-boiled crime story. Good work appeared in genre and other magazines, but most of it was formulaic and none of it broke any new ground. A number of talented writers made their debuts in the crime pulps, among them John D. MacDonald, Day Keene, and David Goodis; their primary contributions would come later, however, in the novel form. Easily the grittiest of the decade's novels was Jonathan Latimer's *Solomon's Vineyard* (1941), a work so tough-minded and sexually explicit that no American publisher would take a chance on it in its original form; it was first published in England (where its dust-jacket blurb trumpeted: "It's got everything but an abortion and a tornado," neglecting to mention that one of the things it does have is necrophilia). Its first publication in the United States was not until nine years later, in a heavily expurgated paperback edition retitled *The Fifth Grave*. The original text did not see print in the United States until 1982, and then only in a limited edition of 326 copies from a small press.

A scattering of very good private-eye novels—and one seminal private-eye novel—were published in the 1940s. The very good ones include Norbert Davis's fast and funny *Mouse in the Mountain* and *Sally's in the Alley*, both published in 1943 and both featuring Doan and his Great Dane, Carstairs; Leigh Brackett's Chandleresque *No Good from a Corpse* (1944); the first three Paul Pine adventures by John Evans (Howard Browne), *Halo in Blood* (1946), *Halo for Satan* (1948), and *Halo in Brass* (1949); the first of Wade Miller's Max Thursday novels, *Guilty Bystander* (1947); and the first Lew Archer investigation by Ross Macdonald (Kenneth Millar), *The Moving Target* (1949).

The decade's most influential hard-boiled detective novel is Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer debut, *I, the Jury*. When this book was published in 1947, it had an immediate and profound impact on noir fiction. Action, sex, and vigilante justice were nothing new to the private-eye tale: Carroll John Daly (an admitted influence on Spillane's work) had introduced this provocative mix more than twenty years earlier in his Race Williams melodramas, and other writers, including Hammett and Chandler, had utilized it with varying degrees of emphasis and success. But no one presented sex, violence, and the personal vendetta in such a

heady stew as Spillane in *I, the Jury*: savagely, implacably, and with the most cold-blooded (or hot-blooded, depending on one's perspective) dénouement in the history of the genre—an ending guaranteed, as more than one critic has pointed out, to enrage any feminist.

*I, the Jury*, and such subsequent Mike Hammer novels as *My Gun Is Quick* (1950), *Vengeance Is Mine* (1950), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1952), sold millions of copies and opened up the hard-boiled market to hundreds of mimics in the 1950s and 1960s. Spillane's work, far more than that of any other writer, dictated which sort of crime fiction was to be published as paperback originals over the next twenty years. And his influence on hard-boiled mysteries as a whole, whether one likes the idea or not (many readers and critics find the Mike Hammer stories repellent), cannot be ignored or underestimated.

Fawcett Gold Medal was the first of the softcover publishers to specialize in original, male-oriented category fiction. When the first Gold Medal novels appeared in late 1949, editors Richard Carroll and Bill Lengel had already assembled (and would continue to assemble) a stable of some of the best popular writers of the period by paying royalty advances on the number of copies printed, rather than on the number of copies sold; thus writers received handsome initial payments, up to four times as much as hardcover publishers were paying. Into the Gold Medal camp came such established names as W. R. Burnett, Cornell Woolrich, Sax Rohmer, and Wade Miller; such first-rank pulp writers as John D. MacDonald, Bruno Fischer, Day Keene, David Goodis, and Harry Whittington; and such talented newcomers as Charles Williams, Stephen Marlowe, and Gil Brewer.

What the Fawcett brain trust and the Fawcett writers succeeded in doing was adapting the tried-and-true pulp formula of the 1930s and 1940s to postwar American society, with all its changes in lifestyle and morality and its newfound sophistication. (This, too, was what Spillane had done and would continue to do in his Mike Hammer novels.) Instead of a bulky magazine full of short stories, Fawcett published brand-new, easy-to-read novels in a convenient pocket-size format. Instead of gaudy, pulp-style cover art, Fawcett utilized the "peekaboo sex" approach to catching the reader's eye: women depicted as either being nude (as seen from the side or rear) or showing a great deal of cleavage or leg or both, in a variety of provocative poses. Instead of printing hundreds of thousands of copies of a small number of titles, Fawcett printed hundreds of thousands of copies of many titles in order to reach every pos-

sible outlet and buyer. As a result, many Gold Medal novels, particularly in the early 1950s, sold more than a million copies each.

Fawcett and the best of its competitors—Avon, Dell, Popular Library, Lion—may have been selling pulp fiction, but it was an upscale variety. The novels they brought out were short (generally about 50,000 words), fast-paced, and action-oriented. They were well written, well plotted, peopled by sharply delineated and believable characters, spiced with sex, often imbued with psychological insight, and set in vividly drawn, often exotic locales. The best of these paperback originals were in fact the apotheosis of pulp fiction—rough-hewn, minor works of art, perfectly suited to and representative of their era. Notable individual titles include Jim Thompson's harrowing excursion into the mind of a serial murderer, *The Killer Inside Me* (1952); John D. MacDonald's *The Damned* (1952); David Goodis's *Street of the Lost* (1952); Gil Brewer's *A Killer Is Loose* (1954); Harry Whittington's *Brute in Brass* (1956); and Jack Dillon's Hemingway pastiche, *A Great Day for Dying* (1968). A number of long-running noir series were also launched and developed as paperback originals during the 1950s and 1960s; among these were the Eighty-seventh Precinct novels by Ed McBain (Evan Hunter), begun with *Cop Hater* (1956); Chester Himes's Harlem police procedurals, featuring Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones and begun with *For the Love of Immabelle* (1957); and the antihero Parker created by Richard Stark (Donald Westlake) and begun with *The Hunter* (1962).

While the bulk of the softcover originals published in the 1950s and 1960s were concerned with violent crime of an interpersonal nature, a percentage of them—and a larger percentage of hardcover novels and short stories—embraced larger themes: Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist witch hunt, widespread fear of nuclear annihilation, rampant urban juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, and the threat of organized crime (the hearings held by Senator Estes Kefauver's Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, which were nationally broadcast on radio and television in 1950 and 1951, opened the American people's eyes not only to the threat but also to the underworld's deep and longstanding ties to local political officials). In response, heroic struggles against the Red Menace were the stuff of such novels as Mickey Spillane's *One Lonely Night* (1951); grim accounts of juvenile gangs filled Hal Ellson's *Tomboy* (1950), Benjamin Appel's *Life and Death of a Tough Guy* (1955), and Harlan Ellison's *Rumble* (1958); drug addiction was examined in Ellson's *The Golden Spike* (1952) and

Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (1960); the effects of organized crime were chronicled in Louis Malley's *Horns for the Devil* (1951), Harry Grey's *The Hoods* (1952), and Appel's *The Raw Edge* (1958). Many hard-boiled novels—and such documentary-style films as *The Captive City* (1951) and *Big Jim McLain* (1952)—treated their subject matter in highly sensationalized and inflammatory fashion, in keeping with the somewhat frenzied atmosphere of the period. The same was even more true of the hard-boiled short story.

In the same way that pulp magazines had brought about the decline and fall of dime novels, paperback originals and the new medium of television sounded a death knell for the pulps. All major pulp titles were extinct by 1954. The new domain of the hard-boiled short story, in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, was the digest-size detective magazine. *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (EQMM) had been well established since 1941, but only occasionally did its editor-in-chief, Frederic Dannay, include a genuinely gritty tale; Dannay was not a proponent of the form (except for Hammett's work, which he admired extravagantly). The time was ripe for a new outlet devoted solely to the form, and in 1953 one came along: *Manhunt*, a showcase for tough, downbeat, violent stories of "the seamier side" of contemporary life. *Manhunt's* premier issue, dated January 1953, featured the first installment of a new serial by Mickey Spillane, "Everybody's Watching Me," plus short fiction by such established names as William Irish (Cornell Woolrich) and Kenneth Millar (Ross Macdonald) and such future stars as Evan Hunter. Sales far exceeded the expectations of its publisher, Michael St. John, and its editor, John McCloud—nearly 500,000 copies of that first issue—and instantly established *Manhunt* as the new standard bearer.

So successful was the magazine in the early to mid-1950s that St. John and McCloud were able to elicit hard-edged original stories from Erle Stanley Gardner, Rex Stout, Fredric Brown, and other respected mystery writers, as well as from a surprising array of literary figures: James M. Cain, Nelson Algren, Erskine Caldwell, James T. Farrell, Charles Jackson, and Ira Levin. A plethora of *Manhunt* clones with tough, staccato titles that almost verged on self-parody soon crowded the newsstands: *Accused*, *Hunted*, *Pursuit*, *Guilty*, *Trapped*, *Two-Fisted*, *Sure-Fire*, *Justice*, *Suspect*, and four from *Manhunt's* own publishing company: *Verdict*, *Menace*, *Murder!*, and *Mantrap*. Few of these lasted more than a handful of issues. A small number survived the decade (mainly those, such as *Guilty* and *Trapped*, that specialized in brutal stories about juvenile de-

linquents), but even that group had all but disappeared by the end of 1962.

*Manhunt* reigned for a scant few years; by 1959, its quality and its circulation had fallen off radically, as a result of editorial and financial mishandling, apathy, and changing reader tastes. The last important author and story to appear in its pages was Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe tale "Wrong Pigeon" in the February 1960 issue; the story had been unpublished in the United States, although it had appeared in England as "The Pencil." Few writers of note contributed material to *Manhunt* from 1960 onward. It lingered until 1967, most of the time as a bimonthly under different ownership. When it finally died it was a ghost of its former self, publishing reprints from its heyday and generally poor original stories by unknowns.

*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* (MSMM) and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* (AHMM), both founded in 1956 and both moderately successful as purveyors of genre crime stories, were the main inheritors of the post-1960 hard-boiled short story. Neither specialized in the form, however, though the preponderance of selections in most issues of MSMM could be termed hard-boiled. Now and then, a new periodical devoted to noir fiction would appear—notably, *Ed McBain's Mystery Book* in 1960 and *Mystery Monthly* in 1975—but these had short runs.

The last issue of MSMM was published in 1985. Since then, the hard-boiled short has had no regular forum. One quarterly magazine, *Hard-boiled*, is currently in existence, but it is semiprofessionally produced and has a limited circulation. EQMM and AHMM, the last of the mystery digests, publish hard-boiled stories now and then, as do such magazines as *Playboy*. Theme anthologies of original stories have provided another inconsistent market. Among anthologies of this type are four published under the auspices of the Private Eye Writers of America: *The Eyes Have It* (1984), *Mean Streets* (1986), *An Eye for Justice* (1988), and *Justice for Hire* (1990).

It is in the novel form that the hard-boiled story has had the most growth over the past quarter-century, in large part as a response to the Pandora's box of disorders afflicting modern society: the insidious and epidemic presence of drugs and drug trafficking, random violence, AIDS, homelessness, the abortion issue, child abuse, spousal abuse, and rape. Until the constraints placed on writers by society's moral guardians began to relax in the early 1970s, such issues had to be treated either in oblique, often superficial fashion or not at all. Today's writers of hard-

boiled fiction have far more latitude than their predecessors did to examine their subject matter honestly and incisively, as frankly and at whatever depth they deem necessary. Their work not only is more searching and therefore more powerful than that of their predecessors, but is erasing the line of demarcation between genre crime fiction and literature. In effect, the hard-boiled crime story has grown into adulthood, and in the process has attained some of the wisdom and insight of adulthood. To say that it is capable of attaining a great deal more is to bestow on it both high praise and the challenge of responsibility.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, several notable detective characters entered the field, among them Lawrence Block's alcoholic former New York cop Matt Scudder, in *Sins of the Fathers* (1976); James Crumley's Shugrue, in *The Last Good Kiss* (1978); Jonathan Valin's Cincinnati private eye Harry Stoner, in *The Lime Pit* (1980); and Loren D. Estleman's Detroit-based Amos Walker, in *Motor City Blue* (1980). The emergence over the past fifteen years of the female private eye (and such offshoots as realistically portrayed women cops, probation officers, and lawyers) has broadened the hard-boiled form's scope and horizon; with relatively few exceptions, it had been a male-dominated subgenre, in terms of both its writers and its readers. The best and most popular of these tough new women sleuths are Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone, who made her debut in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1977) as the first fully realized female private eye created by a woman; Sue Grafton's Kinsey Milhone, who first appeared in *A Is for Alibi* (1981); and Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski, whose initial investigation was *Indemnity Only* (1982).

Most significant among recent nonseries noir novels are those that address major social issues. Jonathan Kellerman and Andrew Vachss have each written harsh condemnations of child abuse, in such novels as *When the Bough Breaks* (1985) and *Hard Candy* (1989), respectively. In *Bitter Medicine* (1987), Sara Paretsky pulls no punches in addressing women's health issues. *The Silence of the Lambs*, Thomas Harris's 1988 bestseller, unrelentingly probes the psychology of the serial killer. The mounting controversy surrounding illegal immigration is the subject of Marcia Muller's *Wolf in the Shadows* (1993). Sexual harassment is the central theme of Linda Grant's *A Woman's Place* (1994), and sexual exploitation of women through pornography is the topic explored by Lia Matera in *Face Value* (1994).

This introduction would not be complete without a brief mention of film noir. Film has proved fertile ground for the hard-boiled movement

from the 1930s to the present day. During the 1940s and 1950s, directors seized on the grim and at times unremittingly bleak visions of Cornell Woolrich, James M. Cain, and David Goodis, among others, and transformed them into minor masterpieces of moody, shadow-filled filmmaking. There are dozens of film noir classics; a few of the outstanding examples based on hard-boiled fiction include Jacques Tourneur's *The Leopard Man* (1943), taken from Woolrich's *Black Alibi*; Edward Dmytryk's *Murder My Sweet* (1944), adapted from Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*; Delmer Daves's *Dark Passage* (1947), whose source was a book of the same title by David Goodis; Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953), based on a William P. McGivern novel of that name; and Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956), adapted from Lionel White's *Clean Break*.

Over the past decade and a half, both directors and writers in the United States have become increasingly aware of the hard-boiled genre, reinterpreting old noir favorites such as James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (first filmed in 1946 and remade in 1981 from a taut David Mamet script); updating novels by hard-boiled writers of the 1950s into dazzling screenplays, as Donald Westlake did with Jim Thompson's *The Grifters* (published in 1963, filmed in 1990); or creating entirely new works so immoderately vicious that they exceed by a considerable degree the old conventions of cinema noir. The current high priest of designer violence is director and writer Quentin Tarantino, who plunders the plots of old films and 1940s pulp fiction and reshapes them into a purely 1990s product that resonates with aberrant and often stomach-churning brutality. The idea behind the work of auteurs such as Tarantino is that cinematic violence is both fun and cathartic, a concept that has a certain validity. In the process, however, characters lose their humanity and become mere symbols, and as Dashiell Hammett once implied in a letter to Cap Shaw, it is difficult to relate to a symbol no matter how cleverly or wittily the symbol behaves.

A final word about the stories we have selected for inclusion.

The reader will note that we have taken several from the 1930s and several from the 1950s, while other decades are more sparsely represented. The imbalance is deliberate. The 1930s were the single most important decade in the form's development, thanks to Hammett, Chandler, Shaw, and numerous others. The 1950s was its renaissance decade, the first in which mystery-genre specialists were able to shed some of the restrictions of style and content created by hard-boiled crime writing's

pulp origins and stretch its limits in inventive new ways. In terms of volume, more first-rate works were published during that ten-year span than during any other.

The 1990s may prove to be the form's third most important decade. Certainly the novels and stories that have been published thus far foreshadow another renaissance period in which contemporary authors will expand its boundaries even further. It may well be that editors of future anthologies of hard-boiled stories will want to give much greater emphasis than we have to this final decade before the millennium. If so, then its promise will have been fulfilled.

## DASHIELL HAMMETT (1894-1961)

As Raymond Chandler states in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder," Samuel Dashiell Hammett "wrote at first (and almost to the end) for people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street."

To put it another way, Hammett was the trailblazer, the founding father of the hard-boiled form. Every other writer of hard-boiled fiction, past and present, including those who have made major refinements or opened important new veins, is a prospector mining the goldfields that he established.

There are those who would argue that Sam Spade, hero of the single most influential private-eye novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), is Hammett's greatest character, while others opt for the mildly inebriate husband-and-wife team, Nick and Nora Charles, of *The Thin Man* (1934). But most aficionados—the editors of this volume included among them—accord that distinction to the Continental Op. Fat, fortyish, and the Continental Detective Agency's toughest and shrewdest investigator, the nameless Op was based on James Wright, assistant superintendent of the Pinkerton Detective Agency in Baltimore, for whom Hammett worked during his fourteen-year stint (1908-1922) with the agency. The Op's methods, if not his cases, are based on real private-investigative procedures of the period. For these reasons, the Op stories are more starkly realistic than any of Hammett's other fiction.

The first Op story, "Arson Plus," appeared in the October 1, 1923, issue of *Black Mask* under the pseudonym Peter Collinson. Two dozen Op stories followed over the next eight years; the series ended with "Death and Company" in the November 1930 issue. Four of the stories constituted *The Dain Curse*, though they were published separately rather than as a conventional serial, and another four separate stories made up *Red Harvest*. Both novels were published in book form in 1929. The remaining Op yarns were reprinted by Ellery Queen in a series of digest-size paperbacks in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and several were later collected in *The Big Knockover* (1966) and *The Continental Op* (1974), the only two volumes of Hammett's stories to

be authorized by his close friend and literary executor, Lillian Hellman.

*"The Scorched Face" was first published in the May 1925 issue of Black Mask. (Curiously, in a blurb for the story, editor Philip C. Cody referred to the Op as "the Continental Sleuth.") This is arguably one of the three or four best Op tales, for not only does it have, in the words of Ellery Queen, "savagery, style, sophistication, sleuthing, and sex," but it offers three additional S's: a sharp surprise stinger in its final sentence.*

B. P.

1925

## THE SCORCHED FACE

"We expected them home yesterday," Alfred Banbrock ended his story. "When they had not come by this morning, my wife telephoned Mrs. Walden. Mrs. Walden said they had not been down there—had not been expected, in fact."

"On the face of it, then," I suggested, "it seems that your daughters went away of their own accord, and are staying away on their own accord?"

Banbrock nodded gravely. Tired muscles sagged in his fleshy face.

"It would seem so," he agreed. "That is why I came to your agency for help instead of going to the police."

"Have they ever disappeared before?"

"No. If you read the papers and magazines, you've no doubt seen hints that the younger generation is given to irregularity. My daughters came and went pretty much as they pleased. But, though I can't say I ever knew what they were up to, we always knew where they were in a general way."

"Can you think of any reason for their going away like this?"

He shook his weary head.

"Any recent quarrels?" I probed.

"N—" He changed it to: "Yes—although I didn't attach any importance to it, and wouldn't have recalled it if you hadn't joggled my memory. It was Thursday evening—the evening before they went away."

"And it was about—?"

"Money, of course. We never disagreed over anything else. I gave

each of my daughters an adequate allowance—perhaps a very liberal one. Nor did I keep them strictly within it. There were few months in which they didn't exceed it. Thursday evening they asked for an amount of money even more than usual in excess of what two girls should need. I wouldn't give it to them, though I finally did give them a somewhat smaller amount. We didn't exactly quarrel—not in the strict sense of the word—but there was a certain lack of friendliness between us."

"And it was after this disagreement that they said they were going down to Mrs. Walden's, in Monterey, for the weekend?"

"Possibly. I'm not sure of that point. I don't think I heard of it until the next morning, but they may have told my wife before that."

"And you know of no other possible reason for their running away?"

"None. I can't think that our dispute over money—by no means an unusual one—had anything to do with it."

"What does their mother think?"

"Their mother is dead," Banbrock corrected me. "My wife is their stepmother. She is only two years older than Myra, my older daughter. She is as much at sea as I."

"Did your daughters and their stepmother get along all right together?"

"Yes! Yes! Excellently! If there was a division in the family, I usually found them standing together against me."

"Your daughters left Friday afternoon?"

"At noon, or a few minutes after. They were going to drive down."

"The car, of course, is still missing?"

"Naturally."

"What was it?"

"A Locomobile, with a special cabriolet body. Black."

"You can give me the license and engine numbers?"

"I think so."

He turned in his chair to the big roll-top desk that hid a quarter of one office wall, fumbled with papers in a compartment, and read the numbers over his shoulder to me. I put them on the back of an envelope.

"I'm going to have this car put on the police department list of stolen machines," I told him. "It can be done without mentioning your daughters. The police bulletin might find the car for us. That would help us find your daughters."

"Very well," he agreed, "if it can be done without disagreeable publicity. As I told you at first, I don't want any more advertising than is

absolutely necessary—unless it becomes likely that harm has come to the girls.”

I nodded understanding, and got up.

“I want to go out and talk to your wife,” I said. “Is she home now?”

“Yes, I think so. I’ll phone her and tell her you are coming.”

In a big limestone fortress on top of a hill in Sea Cliff, looking down on ocean and bay, I had my talk with Mrs. Banbrock. She was a tall dark girl of not more than twenty-two years, inclined to plumpness.

She couldn’t tell me anything her husband hadn’t at least mentioned, but she could give me finer details.

I got descriptions of the two girls:

Myra—20 years old; 5 feet 8 inches; 150 pounds; athletic; brisk, almost masculine manner and carriage; bobbed brown hair; brown eyes; medium complexion; square face, with large chin and short nose; scar over left ear, concealed by hair; fond of horses and all outdoor sports. When she left the house she wore a blue and green wool dress, small blue hat, short black seal coat, and black slippers.

Ruth—18 years; 5 feet 4 inches; 105 pounds; brown eyes; brown bobbed hair; medium complexion; small oval face; quiet, timid, inclined to lean on her more forceful sister. When last seen she had worn a tobacco-brown coat trimmed with brown fur over a gray silk dress, and a wide brown hat.

I got two photographs of each girl, and an additional snapshot of Myra standing in front of the cabriolet. I got a list of the things they had taken with them—such things as would naturally be taken on a weekend visit. What I valued most of what I got was a list of their friends, relatives, and other acquaintances, so far as Mrs. Banbrock knew them.

“Did they mention Mrs. Walden’s invitation before their quarrel with Mr. Banbrock?” I asked, when I had my lists stowed away.

“I don’t think so,” Mrs. Banbrock said thoughtfully. “I didn’t connect the two things at all. They didn’t really quarrel with their father, you know. It wasn’t harsh enough to be called a quarrel.”

“Did you see them when they left?”

“Assuredly! They left about half-past twelve Friday afternoon. They kissed me as usual when they went, and there was certainly nothing in their manner to suggest anything out of the ordinary.”

“You’ve no idea at all where they might have gone?”

“None.”

“Can’t even make a guess?”

"I can't. Among the names and addresses I have given you are some of friends and relatives of the girls in other cities. They may have gone to one of those. Do you think we should—?"

"I'll take care of that," I promised. "Could you pick out one or two of them as the most likely places for the girls to have gone?"

She wouldn't try it. "No," she said positively, "I could not."

From this interview I went back to the Agency, and put the Agency machinery in motion: arranging to have operatives from some of the Continental's other branches call on the out-of-town names on my list, having the missing Locomobile put on the police department list, turning one photograph of each girl over to the photographer to be copied.

That done, I set out to talk to the persons on the list Mrs. Banbrock had given me. My first call was on a Constance Delee, in an apartment building on Post Street. I saw a maid. The maid said Miss Delee was out of town. She wouldn't tell me where her mistress was, or when she would be back.

From there I went up on Van Ness Avenue and found a Wayne Ferris in an automobile salesroom: a sleek-haired young man whose very nice manners and clothes completely hid anything else—brains for instance—he might have had. He was very willing to help me, and he knew nothing. It took him a long time to tell me so. A nice boy.

Another blank: "Mrs. Scott is in Honolulu."

In a real estate office on Montgomery Street I found my next one—another sleek, stylish, smooth-haired young man with nice manners and nice clothes. His name was Raymond Elwood. I would have thought him a no more distant relative of Ferris than cousin if I hadn't known that the world—especially the dancing, teeing world—was full of their sort. I learned nothing from him.

Then I drew some more blanks: "Out of town," "Shopping," "I don't know where you can find him."

I found one more of the Banbrock girls' friends before I called it a day. Her name was Mrs. Stewart Correll. She lived in Presidio Terrace, not far from the Banbrocks. She was a small woman, or girl, of about Mrs. Banbrock's age. A little fluffy blonde person with wide eyes of that particular blue which always looks honest and candid no matter what is going on behind it.

"I haven't seen either Ruth or Myra for two weeks or more," she said in answer to my question.

"At that time—the last time you saw them—did either say anything about going away?"

"No."

Her eyes were wide and frank. A little muscle twitched in her upper lip.

"And you've no idea where they might have gone?"

"No."

Her fingers were rolling her lace handkerchief into a little ball.

"Have you heard from them since you last saw them?"

"No."

She moistened her mouth before she said it.

"Will you give me the names and addresses of all the people you know who were also known by the Banbrock girls?"

"Why—? Is there—?"

"There's a chance that some of them may have seen them more recently than you," I explained. "Or may even have seen them since Friday."

Without enthusiasm, she gave me a dozen names. All were already on my list. Twice she hesitated as if about to speak a name she did not want to speak. Her eyes stayed on mine, wide and honest. Her fingers, no longer balling the handkerchief, picked at the cloth of her skirt.

I didn't pretend to believe her. But my feet weren't solidly enough on the ground for me to put her on the grill. I gave her a promise before I left, one that she could get a threat out of if she liked.

"Thanks, very much," I said. "I know it's hard to remember things exactly. If I run across anything that will help your memory, I'll be back to let you know about it."

"Wha—? Yes, do!" she said.

Walking away from the house, I turned my head to look back just before I passed out of sight. A curtain swung into place at a second-floor window. The street lights weren't bright enough for me to be sure the curtain had swung in front of a blonde head.

My watch told me it was nine-thirty: too late to line up any more of the girls' friends. I went home, wrote my report for the day, and turned in, thinking more about Mrs. Correll than about the girls.

She seemed worth an investigation.

Some telegraphic reports were in when I got to the office the next morning. None was of any value. Investigation of the names and addresses in other cities had revealed nothing. An investigation in Mon-

terey had established reasonably—which is about as well as anything is ever established in the detecting business—that the girls had not been there recently, that the Locomobile had not been there.

The early editions of the afternoon papers were on the street when I went out to get some breakfast before taking up the grind where I had dropped it the previous night.

I bought a paper to prop behind my grapefruit.

It spoiled my breakfast for me:

## BANKER'S WIFE SUICIDE

Mrs. Stewart Correll, wife of the vice-president of the Golden Gate Trust Company, was found dead early this morning by her maid in her bedroom, in her home in Presidio Terrace. A bottle believed to have contained poison was on the floor beside the bed.

The dead woman's husband could give no reason for his wife's suicide. He said she had not seemed depressed or . . .

At the Correll residence I had to do a lot of talking before I could get to Correll. He was a tall, slim man of less than thirty-five, with a sallow, nervous face and blue eyes that fidgeted.

"I'm sorry to disturb you at a time like this," I apologized when I had finally insisted my way into his presence. "I won't take up more of your time than necessary. I am an operative of the Continental Detective Agency. I have been trying to find Ruth and Myra Banbrock, who disappeared several days ago. You know them, I think."

"Yes," he said without interest. "I know them."

"You knew they had disappeared?"

"No." His eyes switched from a chair to a rug. "Why should I?"

"Have you seen either of them recently?" I asked, ignoring his question.

"Last week—Wednesday, I think. They were just leaving—standing at the door talking to my wife—when I came home from the bank."

"Didn't your wife say anything to you about their vanishing?"

"No. Really, I can't tell you anything about the Misses Banbrock. If you'll excuse me—"

"Just a moment longer," I said. "I wouldn't have bothered you if it hadn't been necessary. I was here last night to question Mrs. Correll. She seemed nervous. My impression was that some of her answers to my questions were—uh—evasive. I want—"

He was up out of his chair. His face was red in front of mine.

"You!" he cried. "I can thank you for—"

"Now, Mr. Correll," I tried to quiet him, "there's no use—"

But he had himself all worked up.

"You drove my wife to her death," he accused me. "You killed her with your damned prying—with your bulldozing threats. With your—"

That was silly. I felt sorry for this young man whose wife had killed herself. Apart from that, I had work to do. I tightened the screws.

"We won't argue, Correll," I told him. "The point is that I came here to see if your wife could tell me anything about the Banbrocks. She told me less than the truth. Later, she committed suicide. I want to know why. Come through for me, and I'll do what I can to keep the papers and the public from linking her death with the girls' disappearance."

"Linking her death with their disappearance?" he exclaimed. "That's absurd!"

"Maybe—but the connection is there!" I hammered away at him. I felt sorry for him, but I had work to do. "It's there. If you'll give it to me, maybe it won't have to be advertised. I'm going to get it, though. You give it to me—or I'll go after it out in the open."

For a moment I thought he was going to take a poke at me. I wouldn't have blamed him. His body stiffened—then sagged, and he dropped back into his chair. His eyes fidgeted away from mine. "There's nothing I can tell," he mumbled. "When her maid went to her room to call her this morning, she was dead. There was no message, no reason, nothing."

"Did you see her last night?"

"No. I was not home for dinner. I came in late and went straight to my own room, not wanting to disturb her. I hadn't seen her since I left the house that morning."

"Did she seem disturbed or worried then?"

"No."

"Why do you think she did it?"

"My God, man, I don't know! I've thought and thought, but I don't know!"

"Health?"

"She seemed well. She was never ill, never complained."

"Any recent quarrels?"

"We never quarreled—never in the year and a half we have been married!"

"Financial trouble?"

He shook his head without speaking or looking up from the floor.

"Any other worry?"

He shook his head again.

"Did the maid notice anything peculiar in her behavior last night?"

"Nothing."

"Have you looked through her things—for papers, letters?"

"Yes—and found nothing." He raised his head to look at me. "The only thing"—he spoke very slowly—"there was a little pile of ashes in the grate in her room, as if she had burned papers, or letters."

Correll held nothing more for me—nothing I could get out of him, anyway.

The girl at the front gate in Alfred Banbrock's Shoreman's Building suite told me he was *in conference*. I sent my name in. He came out of conference to take me into his private office. His tired face was full of questions.

I didn't keep him waiting for the answers. He was a grown man. I didn't edge around the bad news.

"Things have taken a bad break," I said as soon as we were locked in together. "I think we'll have to go to the police and newspapers for help. A Mrs. Correll, a friend of your daughters, lied to me when I questioned her yesterday. Last night she committed suicide."

"Irma Correll? Suicide?"

"You knew her?"

"Yes! Intimately! She is—that is, she was a close friend of my wife and daughters. She killed herself?"

"Yes. Poison. Last night. Where does she fit in with your daughters' disappearance?"

"Where?" he repeated. "I don't know. Must she fit in?"

"I think she must. She told me she hadn't seen your daughters for a couple of weeks. Her husband told me just now that they were talking to her when he came home from the bank last Wednesday afternoon. She seemed nervous when I questioned her. She killed herself shortly afterward. There's hardly a doubt that she fits in somewhere."

"And that means—?"

"That means," I finished for him, "that your daughters may be perfectly safe, but that we can't afford to gamble on that possibility."

"You think harm has come to them?"

"I don't think anything," I evaded, "except that with a death tied up closely with their going, we can't afford to play around."

Banbrock got his attorney on the phone—a pink-faced, white-haired old boy named Norwall, who had the reputation of knowing more about corporations than all the Morgans, but who hadn't the least idea as to what police procedure was all about—and told him to meet us at the Hall of Justice.

We spent an hour and a half there, getting the police turned loose on the affair, and giving the newspapers what we wanted them to have. That was plenty of dope on the girls, plenty of photographs and so forth, but nothing about the connection between them and Mrs. Correll. Of course we let the police in on that angle.

After Banbrock and his attorney had gone away together, I went back to the detectives' assembly room to chew over the job with Pat Reddy, the police sleuth assigned to it.

Pat was the youngest member of the detective bureau—a big blond Irishman who went in for the spectacular in his lazy way.

A couple of years ago he was a new copper, pounding his feet in harness on a hillside beat. One night he tagged an automobile that was parked in front of a fireplug. The owner came out just then and gave him an argument. She was Althea Wallach, only and spoiled daughter of the owner of the Wallach Coffee Company—a slim, reckless youngster with hot eyes. She must have told Pat plenty. He took her over to the station and dumped her in a cell.

Old Wallach, so the story goes, showed up the next morning with a full head of steam and half the lawyers in San Francisco. But Pat made his charge stick, and the girl was fined. Old Wallach did everything but take a punch at Pat in the corridor afterward. Pat grinned his sleepy grin at the coffee importer, and drawled, "You better lay off me—or I'll stop drinking your coffee."

That crack got into most of the newspapers in the country, and even into a Broadway show.

But Pat didn't stop with the snappy comeback. Three days later he and Althea Wallach went over to Alameda and got themselves married. I was in on that part. I happened to be on the ferry they took, and they dragged me along to see the deed done.

Old Wallach immediately disowned his daughter, but that didn't seem to worry anybody else. Pat went on pounding his beat, but, now that he was conspicuous, it wasn't long before his qualities were noticed. He was boosted into the detective bureau.

Old Wallach relented before he died, and left Althea his millions.

Pat took the afternoon off to go to the funeral, and went back to work that night, catching a wagonload of gunmen. He kept on working. I don't know what his wife did with her money, but Pat didn't even improve the quality of his cigars—though he should have. He lived now in the Wallach mansion, true enough, and now and then on rainy mornings he would be driven down to the Hall in a Hispano-Suiza brougham; but there was no difference in him beyond that.

That was the big blond Irishman who sat across a desk from me in the assembly room and fumigated me with something shaped like a cigar.

He took the cigar-like thing out of his mouth presently, and spoke through the fumes. "This Correll woman you think's tied up with the Banbrocks—she was stuck-up a couple of months back and nicked for eight hundred dollars. Know that?"

I hadn't known it. "Lose anything besides cash?" I asked.

"No."

"You believe it?"

He grinned. "That's the point," he said. "We didn't catch the bird who did it. With women who lose things that way—especially money—it's always a question whether it's a hold-up or a hold-out."

He teased some more poison-gas out of the cigar-thing, and added, "The hold-up might have been on the level, though. What are you figuring on doing now?"

"Let's go up to the Agency and see if anything new has turned up. Then I'd like to talk to Mrs. Banbrock again. Maybe she can tell us something about the Correll woman."

At the office I found that reports had come in on the rest of the out-of-town names and addresses. Apparently none of these people knew anything about the girls' whereabouts. Reddy and I went on up to Sea Cliff to the Banbrock home.

Banbrock had telephoned the news of Mrs. Correll's death to his wife, and she had read the papers. She told us she could think of no reason for the suicide. She could imagine no possible connection between the suicide and her stepdaughters' vanishing.

"Mrs. Correll seemed as nearly contented and happy as usual the last time I saw her, two or three weeks ago," Mrs. Banbrock said. "Of course she was by nature inclined to be dissatisfied with things, but not to the extent of doing a thing like this."

"Do you know of any trouble between her and her husband?"

"No. So far as I know, they were happy, though—"

She broke off. Hesitancy, embarrassment showed in her dark eyes.

"Though?" I repeated.

"If I don't tell you now, you'll think I am hiding something," she said, flushing, and laughing a little laugh that held more nervousness than amusement. "It hasn't any bearing, but I was always just a little jealous of Irma. She and my husband were—well, everyone thought they would marry. That was a little before he and I married. I never let it show, and I dare say it was a foolish idea, but I always had a suspicion that Irma married Stewart more in pique than for any other reason, and that she was still fond of Alfred—Mr. Banbrock."

"Was there anything definite to make you think that?"

"No, nothing—really! I never thoroughly believed it. It was just a sort of vague feeling. Cattiness, no doubt, more than anything else."

It was getting along toward evening when Pat and I left the Banbrock house. Before we knocked off for the day, I called up the Old Man—the Continental's San Francisco branch manager, and therefore my boss—and asked him to sic an operative on Irma Correll's past.

I took a look at the morning papers—thanks to their custom of appearing almost as soon as the sun is out of sight—before I went to bed. They had given our job a good spread. All the facts except those having to do with the Correll angle were there, plus photographs, and the usual assortment of guesses and similar garbage.

The following morning I went after the friends of the missing girls to whom I had not yet talked. I found some of them and got nothing of value from them. Late in the morning I telephoned the office to see if anything new had turned up. It had.

"We've just had a call from the sheriff's office at Martinez," the Old Man told me. "An Italian grapegrower near Knob Valley picked up a charred photograph a couple of days ago, and recognized it as Ruth Banbrock when he saw her picture in this morning's paper. Will you get up there? A deputy sheriff and the Italian are waiting for you in the Knob Valley marshal's office."

"I'm on my way," I said.

At the ferry building I used the four minutes before my boat left trying to get Pat Reddy on the phone, with no success.

Knob Valley is a town of less than a thousand people, a dreary, dirty town in Contra Costa County. A San Francisco-Sacramento local set me down there while the afternoon was still young.

I knew the marshal slightly—Tom Orth. I found two men in the

office with him. Orth introduced us. Abner Paget, a gawky man of forty-something, with a slack chin, scrawny face, and pale intelligent eyes, was the deputy sheriff. Gio Cereghino, the Italian grape-grower, was a small, nut-brown man with strong yellow teeth that showed in an everlasting smile under his black mustache, and soft brown eyes.

Paget showed me the photograph. A scorched piece of paper the size of a half-dollar, apparently all that had not been burned of the original picture. It was Ruth Banbrock's face. There was little room for doubting that. She had a peculiarly excited—almost drunken—look, and her eyes were larger than in the other pictures of her I had seen. But it was her face.

"He says he found it day 'fore yesterday," Paget explained dryly, nodding at the Italian. "The wind blew it against his foot when he was walkin' up a piece of road near his place. He picked it up an' stuck it in his pocket, he says, for no special reason, I guess." He paused to regard the Italian meditatively. The Italian nodded his head in vigorous affirmation.

"Anyways," the deputy sheriff went on, "he was in town this mornin', an' seen the pictures in the papers from Frisco. So he come in here an' told Tom about it. Tom an' me decided the best thing was to phone your agency—since the papers said you was workin' on it."

I looked at the Italian. Paget, reading my mind, explained, "Cereghino lives over in the hills. Got a grape ranch there. Been around here five or six years, an' ain't killed nobody that I know of."

"Remember the place where you found the picture?" I asked the Italian.

His grin broadened under his mustache, and his head went up and down. "For sure, I remember that place."

"Let's go there," I suggested to Paget.

"Right. Comin' along, Tom?"

The marshal said he couldn't. He had something to do in town. Cereghino, Paget and I went out and got into a dusty Ford that the deputy sheriff drove.

We rode for nearly an hour, along a county road that bent up the slope of Mount Diablo. After a while, at a word from the Italian, we left the county road for a dustier and ruttier one. A mile of this one.

"This place," Cereghino said.

Paget stopped the Ford. We got out in a clearing. The trees and bushes

that had crowded the road retreated here for twenty feet or so on either side, leaving a little dusty circle in the woods.

"About this place," the Italian was saying. "I think by this stump. But between that bend ahead and that one behind, I know for sure."

Paget was a countryman. I am not. I waited for him to move.

He looked around the clearing, slowly, standing still between the Italian and me. His pale eyes lighted presently. He went around the Ford to the far side of the clearing. Cereghino and I followed.

Near the fringe of brush at the edge of the clearing, the scrawny deputy stopped to grunt at the ground. The wheel-marks of an automobile were there. A car had turned around here.

Paget went on into the woods. The Italian kept close to his heels. I brought up the rear. Paget was following some sort of track. I couldn't see it, either because he and the Italian blotted it out ahead of me, or because I'm a shine Indian. We went back quite a way.

Paget stopped. The Italian stopped.

Paget said, "Uh-huh," as if he had found an expected thing.

The Italian said something with the name of God in it. I trampled a bush, coming beside them to see what they saw. I saw it.

At the base of a tree, on her side, her knees drawn up close to her body, a girl was dead. She wasn't nice to see. Birds had been at her.

A tobacco-brown coat was half on, half off her shoulders. I knew she was Ruth Banbrock before I turned her over to look at the side of her face the ground had saved from the birds.

Cereghino stood watching me while I examined the girl. His face was mournful in a calm way. The deputy sheriff paid little attention to the body. He was off in the brush, moving around, looking at the ground. He came back as I finished my examination.

"Shot," I told him, "once in the right temple. Before that, I think, there was a fight. There are marks on the arm that was under her body. There's nothing on her—no jewelry, money—nothing."

"That goes," Paget said. "Two women got out of the car back in the clearin', an' came here. Could've been three women—if the others carried this one. Can't make out how many went back. One of 'em was larger than this one. There was a scuffle here. Find the gun?"

"No," I said.

"Neither did I. It went away in the car, then. There's what's left of a fire over there." He ducked his head to the left. "Paper an' rags burnt. Not enough left to do us any good. I reckon the photo Cereghino found

blew away from the fire. Late Friday, I'd put it, or maybe Saturday mornin' . . . No nearer than that."

I took the deputy sheriff's word for it. He seemed to know his stuff.

"Come here. I'll show you somethin'," he said, and led me over to a little black pile of ashes.

He hadn't anything to show me. He wanted to talk to me away from the Italian's ears.

"I think the Italian's all right," he said, "but I reckon I'd best hold him a while to make sure. This is some way from his place, an' he stut-tered a little bit too much tellin' me how he happened to be passin' here. Course, that don't mean nothin' much. All these Italians peddle *vino*, an' I guess that's what brought him out this way. I'll hold him a day or two, anyways."

"Good," I agreed. "This is your country, and you know the people. Can you visit around and see what you can pick up? Whether anybody saw anything? Saw a Locomobile cabriolet? Or anything else? You can get more than I could."

"I'll do that," he promised.

"All right. Then I'll go back to San Francisco now. I suppose you'll want to camp here with the body?"

"Yeah. You drive the Ford back to Knob Valley, an' tell Tom what's what. He'll come or send out. I'll keep the Italian here with me."

Waiting for the next west-bound train out of Knob Valley, I got the office on the telephone. The Old Man was out. I told my story to one of the office men and asked him to get the news to the Old Man as soon as he could.

Everybody was in the office when I got back to San Francisco. Alfred Banbrock, his face a pink-gray that was deader than solid gray could have been. His pink and white old lawyer. Pat Reddy, sprawled on his spine with his feet on another chair. The Old Man, with his gentle eyes behind gold spectacles and his mild smile, hiding the fact that fifty years of sleuthing had left him without any feelings at all on any subject.

Nobody said anything when I came in. I said my say as briefly as possible.

"Then the other woman—the woman who killed Ruth was—?"

Banbrock didn't finish his question. Nobody answered it.

"We don't know what happened," I said after a while. "Your daughter and someone we don't know may have gone there. Your daughter may have been dead before she was taken there. She may have—"

"But Myra!" Banbrock was pulling at his collar with a finger inside. "Where is Myra?"

I couldn't answer that, nor could any of the others.

"You are going up to Knob Valley now?" I asked him.

"Yes, at once. You will come with me?"

I wasn't sorry I could not. "No. There are things to be done here. I'll give you a note to the marshal. I want you to look carefully at the piece of your daughter's photograph the Italian found—to see if you remember it."

Banbrock and the lawyer left.

Reddy lit one of his awful cigars.

"We found the car," the Old Man said.

"Where was it?"

"In Sacramento. It was left in a garage there either late Friday night or early Saturday. Foley has gone up to investigate it. And Reddy has uncovered a new angle."

Pat nodded through his smoke.

"A hockshop dealer came in this morning," Pat said, "and told us that Myra Banbrock and another girl came to his joint last week and hocked a lot of stuff. They gave him phoney names, but he swears one of them was Myra. He recognized her picture as soon as he saw it in the paper. Her companion wasn't Ruth. It was a little blonde."

"Mrs. Correll?"

"Uh-huh. The shark can't swear to that, but I think that's the answer. Some of the jewelry was Myra's, some Ruth's, and some we don't know. I mean we can't prove it belonged to Mrs. Correll—though we will."

"When did all this happen?"

"They soaked the stuff Monday before they went away."

"Have you seen Correll?"

"Uh-huh. I did a lot of talking to him, but the answers weren't worth much. He says he don't know whether any of her jewelry is gone or not, and doesn't care. It was hers, he says, and she could do anything she wanted with it. He was kind of disagreeable. I got along a little better with one of the maids. She says some of Mrs. Correll's pretties disappeared last week. Mrs. Correll said she had lent them to a friend. I'm going to show the stuff the hockshop has to the maid tomorrow to see if she can identify it. She didn't know anything else—except that Mrs. Correll was out of the picture for a while on Friday—the day the Banbrock girls went away."

"What do you mean, out of the picture?" I asked.

"She went out late in the morning and didn't show up until somewhere around three the next morning. She and Correll had a row over it, but she wouldn't tell him where she had been."

I liked that. It could mean something.

"And," Pat went on, "Correll has just remembered that his wife had an uncle who went crazy in Pittsburgh in 1902, and that she had a morbid fear of going crazy herself, and that she had often said she would kill herself if she thought she was going crazy. Wasn't it nice of him to remember those things at last? To account for her death?"

"It was," I agreed, "but it doesn't get us anywhere. It doesn't even prove that he knows anything. Now my guess is—"

"To hell with your guess," Pat said, getting up and pushing his hat in place. "Your guesses all sound like a lot of static to me. I'm going home, eat my dinner, read my Bible, and go to bed."

I suppose he did. Anyway, he left us.

We all might as well have spent the next three days in bed for all the profit that came out of our running around. No place we visited, nobody we questioned, added to our knowledge. We were in a blind alley.

We learned that the Locomobile was left in Sacramento by Myra Banbrock, and not by anyone else, but we didn't learn where she went afterward. We learned that some of the jewelry in the pawnshop was Mrs. Correll's. The Locomobile was brought back from Sacramento. Mrs. Correll was buried. Ruth Banbrock was buried. The newspapers found other mysteries. Reddy and I dug and dug, and all we brought up was dirt.

The following Monday brought me close to the end of my rope. There seemed nothing more to do but sit back and hope that the circulars with which we had plastered North America would bring results. Reddy had already been called off and put to running out fresher trails. I hung on because Banbrock wanted me to keep at it so long as there was the shadow of anything to keep at. But by Monday I had worked myself out.

Before going to Banbrock's office to tell him I was licked, I dropped in at the Hall of Justice to hold a wake over the job with Pat Reddy. He was crouched over his desk, writing a report on some other job.

"Hello!" he greeted me, pushing his report away and smearing it with ashes from his cigar. "How go the Banbrock doings?"

"They don't," I admitted. "It doesn't seem possible, with the stack-up what it is, that we should have come to a dead stop! It's there for us,

if we can find it. The need of money before both the Banbrock and the Correll calamities, Mrs. Correll's suicide after I had questioned her about the girls, her burning things before she died and the burning of things immediately before or after Ruth Banbrock's death."

"Maybe the trouble is," Pat suggested, "that you're not such a good sleuth."

"Maybe."

We smoked in silence for a minute or two after that insult.

"You understand," Pat said presently, "there doesn't have to be any connection between the Banbrock death and disappearance and the Correll death."

"Maybe not. But there has to be a connection between the Banbrock death and the Banbrock disappearance. There was a connection—in a pawnshop—between the Banbrock and Correll actions before these things. If there is that connection, then—" I broke off, all full of ideas.

"What's the matter?" Pat asked. "Swallow your gum?"

"Listen!" I let myself get almost enthusiastic. "We've got what happened to three women hooked up together. If we could tie up some more in the same string—I want the names and addresses of all the women and girls in San Francisco who have committed suicide, been murdered, or have disappeared within the past year."

"You think this is a wholesale deal?"

"I think the more we can tie up together, the more lines we'll have to run out. And they can't all lead nowhere. Let's get our list, Pat!"

We spent all the afternoon and most of the night getting it. Its size would have embarrassed the Chamber of Commerce. It looked like a hunk of the telephone book. Things happened in a city in a year. The section devoted to strayed wives and daughters was the largest; suicides next; and even the smallest division—murders—wasn't any too short.

We could check off most of the names against what the police department had already learned of them and their motives, weeding out those positively accounted for in a manner nowise connected with our present interest. The remainder we split into two classes; those of unlikely connection, and those of more possible connection. Even then, the second list was longer than I had expected, or hoped.

There were six suicides in it, three murders, and twenty-one disappearances.

Reddy had other work to do. I put the list in my pocket and went calling.

For four days I ground at the list. I hunted, found, questioned, and investigated friends and relatives of the women and girls on my list. My questions all hit in the same direction. Had she been acquainted with Myra Banbrock? Ruth? Mrs. Correll? Had she been in need of money before her death or disappearance? Had she destroyed anything before her death or disappearance? Had she known any of the other women on my list?

Three times I drew yesses.

Sylvia Varney, a girl of twenty, who had killed herself on November 5th, had drawn six hundred dollars from the bank the week before her death. No one in her family could say what she had done with the money. A friend of Sylvia Varney's—Ada Youngman, a married woman of twenty-five or -six—had disappeared on December 2nd, and was still gone. The Varney girl had been at Mrs. Youngman's home an hour before she—the Varney girl—killed herself.

Mrs. Dorothy Sawdon, a young widow, had shot herself on the night of January 13th. No trace was found of either the money her husband had left her or the funds of a club whose treasurer she was. A bulky letter her maid remembered having given her that afternoon was never found.

These three women's connection with the Banbrock-Correll affair was sketchy enough. None of them had done anything that isn't done by nine out of ten women who kill themselves or run away. But the troubles of all three had come to a head within the past few months—and all three were women of about the same financial and social position as Mrs. Correll and the Banbrocks.

Finishing my list with no fresh leads, I came back to these three.

I had the names and addresses of sixty-two friends of the Banbrock girls. I set about getting the same sort of catalogue on the three women I was trying to bring into the game. I didn't have to do all the digging myself. Fortunately, there were two or three operatives in the office with nothing else to do just then.

We got something.

Mrs. Sawdon had known Raymond Elwood. Sylvia Varney had known Raymond Elwood. There was nothing to show Mrs. Youngman had known him, but it was likely she had. She and the Varney girl had been thick.

I had already interviewed this Raymond Elwood in connection with the Banbrock girls, but had paid no especial attention to him. I had con-

sidered him just one of the sleek-headed, high-polished young men of whom there were quite a few listed.

I went back at him, all interest now. The results were promising.

He had, as I have said, a real estate office on Montgomery Street. We were unable to find a single client he had ever served, or any signs of one's existence. He had an apartment out in the Sunset District, where he lived alone. His local record seemed to go back no farther than ten months, though we couldn't find its definite starting point. Apparently he had no relatives in San Francisco. He belonged to a couple of fashionable clubs. He was vaguely supposed to be "well connected in the East." He spent money.

I couldn't shadow Elwood, having too recently interviewed him. Dick Foley did. Elwood was seldom in his office during the first three days Dick tailed him. He was seldom in the financial district. He visited his clubs, he danced and teaed and so forth, and each of those three days he visited a house on Telegraph Hill.

The first afternoon Dick had him, Elwood went to the Telegraph Hill house with a tall fair girl from Burlingame. The second day—in the evening—with a plump young woman who came out of a house out on Broadway. The third evening with a very young girl who seemed to live in the same building as he.

Usually Elwood and his companion spent from three to four hours in the house on Telegraph Hill. Other people—all apparently well-to-do—went in and out of the house while it was under Dick's eye.

I climbed Telegraph Hill to give the house the up-and-down. It was a large house—a big frame house painted egg-yellow. It hung dizzily on a shoulder of the hill, a shoulder that was sharp where rock had been quarried away. The house seemed about to go skiing down on the roofs far below.

It had no immediate neighbors. The approach was screened by bushes and trees.

I gave that section of the hill a good strong play, calling at all the houses within shooting distance of the yellow one. Nobody knew anything about it, or about its occupants. The folks on the Hill aren't a curious lot—perhaps because most of them have something to hide on their own account.

My climbing uphill and downhill got me nothing until I succeeded in learning who owned the yellow house. The owner was an estate whose affairs were in the hands of the West Coast Trust Company.

I took my investigations to the trust company, with some satisfaction. The house had been leased eight months ago by Raymond Elwood, acting for a client named T. F. Maxwell.

We couldn't find Maxwell. We couldn't find anybody who knew Maxwell. We couldn't find any evidence that Maxwell was anything but a name.

One of the operatives went up to the yellow house on the hill, and rang the bell for half an hour with no result. We didn't try that again, not wanting to stir things up at this stage.

I made another trip up the hill, house-hunting. I couldn't find a place as near the yellow house as I would have liked, but I succeeded in renting a three-room flat from which the approach to it could be watched.

Dick and I camped in the flat—with Pat Reddy, when he wasn't off on other duties—and watched machines turn into the screened path that led to the egg-tinted house. *Afternoon and night there were machines.* Most of them carried women. We saw no one we could place as a resident of the house. Elwood came daily, once alone, the other time with women whose faces we couldn't see from our window.

We shadowed some of the visitors away. They were without exception reasonably well off financially, and some were socially prominent. We didn't go up against any of them with talk. Even a carefully planned pretext is as likely as not to tip your mitt when you're up against a blind game.

Three days of this—and our break came.

It was early evening, just dark. Pat Reddy had phoned that he had been up on a job for two days and a night, and was going to sleep the clock around. Dick and I were sitting at the window of our flat, watching automobiles turn toward the yellow house, writing down their license numbers as they passed through the blue-white patch of light an arc-lamp put in the road just beyond our window.

A woman came climbing the hill, afoot. She was a tall woman, strongly built. A dark veil not thick enough to advertise the fact that she wore it to hide her features, nevertheless did hide them. Her way was up the hill, past our flat, on the other side of the roadway.

A night wind from the Pacific was creaking a grocer's sign down below, swaying the arc-light above. The wind caught the woman as she passed out of our building's sheltered area. Coat and skirts tangled. She put her back to the wind, a hand to her hat. Her veil whipped out straight from her face.

Her face was a face from a photograph—Myra Banbrock's face.

Dick made her with me. "Our baby!" he cried, bouncing to his feet.

"Wait," I said. "She's going into the joint on the edge of the hill. Let her go. We'll go after her when she's inside. That's our excuse for frisking the joint."

I went into the next room, where our telephone was, and called Pat Reddy's number.

"She didn't go in," Dick called from the window. "She went past the path."

"After her!" I ordered. "There's no sense to that! What's the matter with her?" I felt sort of indignant about it. "She's got to go in! Tail her. I'll find you after I get Pat."

Dick went.

Pat's wife answered the telephone. I told her who I was.

"Will you shake Pat out of the covers and send him up here? He knows where I am. Tell him I want him in a hurry."

"I will," she promised. "I'll have him there in ten minutes—wherever it is."

Outdoors, I went up the road, hunting for Dick and Myra Banbrock. Neither was in sight. Passing the bushes that masked the yellow house, I went on, circling down a stony path to the left. No sign of either.

I turned back in time to see Dick going into our flat. I followed.

"She's in," he said when I joined him. "She went up the road, cut across through some bushes, came back to the edge of the cliff, and slid feet-first through a cellar window."

That was nice. The crazier the people you are sleuthing act, as a rule, the nearer you are to an ending of your troubles.

Reddy arrived within a minute or two of the time his wife had promised. He came in buttoning his clothes.

"What the hell did you tell Althea?" he growled at me. "She gave me an overcoat to put over my pajamas, dumped the rest of my clothes in the car, and I had to get in them on the way over."

"I'll cry with you after a while," I dismissed his troubles. "Myra Banbrock just went into the joint through a cellar window. Elwood has been there an hour. Let's knock it off."

Pat is deliberate.

"We ought to have papers, even at that," he stalled.

"Sure," I agreed, "but you can get them fixed up afterward. That's what you're here for. Contra Costa County wants her—maybe to try her

for murder. That's all the excuse we need to get into the joint. We go there for her. If we happen to run into anything else—well and good."

Pat finished buttoning his vest.

"Oh, all right!" he said sourly. "Have it your way. But if you get me smashed for searching a house without authority, you'll have to give me a job with your law-breaking agency."

"I will." I turned to Foley. "You'll have to stay outside, Dick. Keep your eye on the getaway. Don't bother anybody else, but if the Banbrock girl gets out, stay behind her."

"I expected it," Dick howled. "Any time there's any fun I can count on being stuck off somewhere on a street corner!"

Pat Reddy and I went straight up the bush-hidden path to the yellow house's front door, and rang the bell.

A big black man in a red fez, red silk jacket over red-striped silk shirt, red zouave pants and red slippers, opened the door. He filled the opening, framed in the black of the hall behind him.

"Is Mr. Maxwell home?" I asked.

The black man shook his head and said words in a language I don't know.

"Mr. Elwood, then?"

Another shaking of the head. More strange language.

"Let's see whoever is home then," I insisted.

Out of the jumble of words that meant nothing to me, I picked three in garbled English, which I thought were "master," "not," and "home."

The door began to close. I put a foot against it.

Pat flashed his buzzer.

Though the black man had poor English, he had knowledge of police badges.

One of his feet stamped on the floor behind him. A gong boomed deafeningly in the rear of the house.

The black man bent his weight to the door.

My weight on the foot that blocked the door, I leaned sidewise, swaying to the Negro.

Slamming from the hip, I put my fist in the middle of him.

Reddy hit the door and we went into the hall.

"Fore God, Fat Shorty," the black man gasped in good Virginian, "you done hurt me!"

Reddy and I went by him, down the hall whose bounds were lost in darkness.

The bottom of a flight of steps stopped my feet.

A gun went off upstairs. It seemed to point at us. We didn't get the bullets.

A babble of voices—women screaming, men shouting—came and went upstairs; came and went as if a door was being opened and shut.

"Up, my boy!" Reddy yelped in my ear.

We went up the stairs. We didn't find the man who had shot at us.

At the head of the stairs, a door was locked. Reddy's bulk forced it.

We came into a bluish light. A large room, all purple and gold. Confusion of overturned furniture and rumpled rugs. A gray slipper lay near a far door. A green silk gown was in the center of the floor. No person was there.

I raced Pat to the curtained door beyond the slipper. The door was not locked. Reddy yanked it wide.

A room with three girls and a man crouching in a corner, fear in their faces. Neither of them was Myra Banbrock, or Raymond Elwood, or anyone we knew.

Our glances went away from them after the first quick look.

The open door across the room grabbed our attention.

The door gave to a small room.

The room was chaos.

A small room, packed and tangled with bodies. Live bodies, seething, writhing. The room was a funnel into which men and women had been poured. They boiled noisily toward the one small window that was the funnel's outlet. Men and women, youths and girls, screaming, struggling, squirming, fighting. Some had no clothes.

"We'll get through and block the window!" Pat yelled in my ear.

"Like hell—" I began, but he was gone ahead into the confusion.

I went after him.

I didn't mean to block the window. I meant to save Pat from his foolishness. No five men could have fought through that boiling turmoil of maniacs. No ten men could have turned them from the window.

Pat—big as he is—was down when I got to him. A half-dressed girl—a child—was driving at his face with sharp high-heels. Hands, feet, were tearing him apart.

I cleared him with a play of gun-barrel on chins and wrists—dragged him back.

"Myra's not there!" I yelled into his ear as I helped him up. "Elwood's not there!"

I wasn't sure, but I hadn't seen them, and I doubted that they would be in this mess. These savages, boiling again to the window, with no attention for us, whoever they were, weren't insiders. They were the mob, and the principals shouldn't be among them.

"We'll try the other rooms," I yelled again. "We don't want these."

Pat rubbed the back of his hand across his torn face and laughed.

"It's a cinch I don't want 'em any more," he said.

We went back to the head of the stairs the way we had come. We saw no one. The man and girls who had been in the next room were gone.

At the head of the stairs we paused. There was no noise behind us except the now fainter babble of the lunatics fighting for their exit.

A door shut sharply downstairs.

A body came out of nowhere, hit my back, flattened me to the landing.

The feel of silk was on my cheek. A brawny hand was fumbling at my throat.

I bent my wrist until my gun, upside down, lay against my cheek. Praying for my ear, I squeezed.

My cheek took fire. My head was a roaring thing, about to burst.

The silk slid away.

Pat hauled me upright.

We started down the stairs.

Swish!

A thing came past my face, stirring my bared hair.

A thousand pieces of glass, china, plaster, exploded upward at my feet.

I tilted head and gun together.

A Negro's red-silk arms were still spread over the balustrade above.

I sent him two bullets. Pat sent him two.

The Negro teetered over the rail.

He came down on us, arms outflung—a deadman's swan-dive.

We scurried down the stairs from under him.

He shook the house when he landed, but we weren't watching him then.

The smooth sleek head of Raymond Elwood took our attention.

In the light from above, it showed for a furtive split second around the newel-post at the foot of the stairs. Showed and vanished.

Pat Reddy, closer to the rail than I, went over it in a one-hand vault down into the blackness below.

I made the foot of the stairs in two jumps, jerked myself around with

a hand on the newel, and plunged into the suddenly noisy dark of the hall.

A wall I couldn't see hit me. Caroming off the opposite wall, I spun into a room whose curtained grayness was the light of day after the hall.

Pat Reddy stood with one hand on a chair-back, holding his belly with the other. His face was mouse-colored under its blood. His eyes were glass agonies. He had the look of a man who had been kicked.

The grin he tried failed. He nodded toward the rear of the house. I went back.

In a little passageway I found Raymond Elwood.

He was sobbing and pulling frantically at a locked door. His face was the hard white of utter terror.

I measured the distance between us.

He turned as I jumped.

I put everything I had in the downswing of my gun-barrel—

A ton of meat and bone crashed into my back.

I went over against the wall, breathless, giddy, sick.

Red-silk arms that ended in brown hands locked around me.

I wondered if there was a whole regiment of these gaudy Negroes— or if I was colliding with the same one over and over.

This one didn't let me do much thinking.

He was big. He was strong. He didn't mean any good.

My gun-arm was flat at my side, straight down. I tried a shot at one of the Negro's feet. Missed. Tried again. He moved his feet. I wriggled around, half facing him.

Elwood piled on my other side.

The Negro bent me backward, folding my spine on itself like an accordion.

I fought to hold my knees stiff. Too much weight was hanging on me. My knees sagged. My body curved back.

Pat Reddy, swaying in the doorway, shone over the Negro's shoulder like the Angel Gabriel.

Gray pain was in Pat's face, but his eyes were clear. His right hand held a gun. His left was getting a blackjack out of his hip pocket.

He swung the sap down on the Negro's shaven skull.

The black man wheeled away from me, shaking his head.

Pat hit him once more before the Negro closed with him—hit him full in the face, but couldn't beat him off.

Twisting my freed gun hand up, I drilled Elwood neatly through the chest, and let him slide down me to the floor.

The Negro had Pat against the wall, bothering him a lot. His broad red back was a target.

But I had used five of the six bullets in my gun. I had more in my pocket, but reloading takes time.

I stepped out of Elwood's feeble hands, and went to work with the flat of my gun on the Negro. There was a roll of fat where his skull and neck fit together. The third time I hit it, he flopped, taking Pat with him.

I rolled him off. The blond police detective—not very blond now—got up.

At the other end of the passageway an open door showed an empty kitchen.

Pat and I went to the door that Elwood had been playing with. It was a solid piece of carpentering, and neatly fastened.

Yoking ourselves together, we began to beat the door with our combined three hundred and seventy or eighty pounds.

It shook, but held. We hit again. Wood we couldn't see tore.

Again.

The door popped away from us. We went through—down a flight of steps—rolling, snowballing down—until a cement floor stopped us.

Pat came back to life first.

"You're a hell of an acrobat," he said. "Get off my neck!"

I stood up. He stood up. We seemed to be dividing the evening between falling on the floor and getting up from the floor.

A light switch was at my shoulder. I turned it on.

If I looked anything like Pat, we were a fine pair of nightmares. He was all raw meat and dirt, with not enough clothes left to hide much of either.

I didn't like his looks, so I looked around the basement in which we stood. To the rear was a furnace, coalbins and a woodpile. To the front was a hallway and rooms, after the manner of the upstairs.

The first door we tried was locked, but not strongly. We smashed through it into a photographer's dark-room.

The second door was unlocked, and put us in a chemical laboratory; retorts, tubes, burners and a small still. There was a little round iron stove in the middle of the room. No one was there.

We went out into the hallway and to the third door, not so cheerfully.