

“A superior collection ... Megan Abbott has assembled a talented list of contributors who deliver inspired performances.”

– **George Pelecanos**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Night Gardener*

“As a statement on contemporary noir and as a barometer of the culture, *A Hell of a Woman* tells the whole story and then some.”

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“Beautiful, bold and bloody – the dames in this collection rock, and when they do, heads roll. This anthology of compelling stories about members of the ‘fairer sex’ with a proclivity for deadly schemes is a must-read for all lovers of noir. Each story is a gem.”

– **Carolyn Haines**, author of *Penumbra* and *Fever Moon*

“The next time some jackass smirks and tells me that women can’t write noir, I’m going to knock him upside the head with a copy of *A Hell of a Woman*. Megan Abbott, our leading Queenpin of crime, has assembled a powerhouse collection of noir by the best dames in the business. (And the stories by the dudes ain’t half bad, either.) I’ve fallen hard for this antho, even though it’s destined to clean out my savings account, sleep with my best friend and break my heart.”

– **Duane Swierczynski**, author of *The Blonde* and *Severance Package*

# A Hell of a Woman

**An Anthology of Female Noir**

*Edited by*  
**Megan Abbott**

*Foreword by*  
**Val McDermid**

**Busted Flush Press**  
**Houston, TX**

# **A Hell of a Woman: An Anthology of Female Noir**

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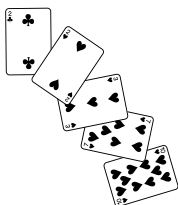
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An array of authors, booksellers, critics and film aficionados pay homage to favorite noir writers, characters and performers.

# Editor's Introduction

by Megan Abbott

“We’re sisters under the mink.”

—Debby Marsh (Gloria Grahame), *The Big Heat* (1953)

From the very beginning, noir fiction has given us memorable women. The gutsy and intrepid Anne Riordan, matching Philip Marlowe pace for pace in Raymond Chandler’s *Farewell, My Lovely*. The stalwart and principled Effie Perine, to whom Dashiell Hammett hands over the final judgment on Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. Sylvia Nicolai and Laurel Gray, one a devoted wife, the other a vampish actress, joining forces to outwit the murderous Dix Steele in Dorothy B. Hughes’ *In a Lonely Place*. James M. Cain’s combustible sister duo, June and Dorothy Lyons, careering their way through *Love’s Lovely Counterfeit*. Heartbroken and heartbreaking Helen Meredith in Charles Willeford’s *Pick-Up*.

It is, of course, much easier to generate such a list if one begins with the femme fatales, the spider women, the remorseless vixens—from Phyllis Nirdlinger (*Double Indemnity*) to Elsa Bannister (*The Lady from Shanghai*), from Carmen Sternwood (*The Big Sleep*) to Charlotte Manning (*I, the Jury*), and on and on. And few could deny their visceral pleasure, the sight of Edward G. Robinson painting the toenails of the sullen Joan Bennett (*Scarlet Street*) or Barbara Stanwyck tossing her cigarette to the floor to finish off Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity*.

But the dark (and often darkly funny) stories in this anthology evoke a broader range of female characters, some expanding our ideas of women in noir, some reinventing the terms, some playing with the traditional icons, others smashing them outright. And what they all do is glory in their female characters’ complexities, revel in their contradictions and

celebrate their bravado. What they all do is give us arresting, complicated and pulsingly alive women.

The stories in *A Hell of a Woman* invite us into the world, and minds, of both the kinds of female characters who do frequent noir—the girl-Friday secretary, the moll—but are seldom given center stage, and the kinds of women who more commonly occupy only the fringes of noir or do not appear at all. She's the woman who pours your coffee at the rust-curling diner down the road. The one who delivers your mail with an enigmatic smile. She's the business-suited woman on the subway every morning with the forlorn smile and bitten nails. The pretty face you saw at the thrift store, gazing at that pair of vintage shoes from beneath a fringe of black bangs. And she's also the one who takes your ticket at the Cineplex without ever speaking, without even looking you in the eyes.

The women in these pages are climbers, dreamers, hustlers, holders of secret truths tucked close to their shuddering chests. They're both hardscrabble and manor-born, regal yet gutter-sprung. They're guileless and stout-hearted. They're steely and smooth as silk. They're love-riddled and heartbreakers. They're shopworn angels and stone-cold dazzlers, avenging angels and knights in shining armor. We have a boxing cutman with a fierce heart, a trailer park Madonna whom neither man nor nature can vanquish. We have a police detective with a wicked bluff and a housewife with hidden steel. We have one, two, three waitresses, dreamers all, and a milky-eyed recluse with a past darker than she can bear. We have a country girl, lashed with fear, finding her chance to make things right. And they all bear secrets heavy as this blue, sick world can hold.

After these women are through with you, though, there's more waiting. Flip a few pages and you will find an appendix in which writers, booksellers, critics and aficionados champion their favorite women of noir, for your perusing pleasure. There, you will find homages to women authors unjustly forgotten,

rhapsodies to glorious and tough noir actresses, proclamations of devotion to beloved characters and enough recommendations to haunt your dreams for years to come.

# The Chirashi Covenant

by Naomi Hirahara

There were Alice Watanabe's deviled eggs, lined up in diagonal lines on her white ceramic serving plate, Betty Shoda's potato salad mixed in with a smidge of her secret ingredient, *wasabi*, and Dorothy Takeyama's ambrosia, peeled orange slices with coconut flakes.

Next to the hostess's ham was a wedge of iceberg lettuce with Green Goddess dressing dripping from the sides. Not a surprise—Sets Kamimura hated to cook and always took the lazy way out. The rest of the women knew this but would never say anything to Sets, even in jest.

And finally, in a huge round lacquerware container was Helen Miura's *chirashi*. The women were amazed by Helen's handiwork. Each piece of vegetable—carrot, *shiitake* mushroom, burdock root—was uniformly cut and mixed in with the rice like scattered tiny leaves and twigs blown by the Santa Ana winds. Others may have used a grater or a Japanese *daikon suri*, but Helen was a master with the knife. Her father had been a fisherman in Terminal Island before the war and Helen, being the oldest, was in charge of cleaning the catch he brought home for dinner. Her mother worked in the tuna cannery, so Helen was destined to get things done.

In the ice box was a vanilla cake, which had been purchased at a Japanese-American bakery on Jefferson Boulevard in the Crenshaw area of Los Angeles. Written in thick pastel icing were the words, "Japanese-American Court Reunion" and below "10-Year Anniversary."

In 1941, these seven women had ridden on a float in a parade down the streets of Little Tokyo. Yoshiko Kumai, who was hosting the reunion, had been the queen, but everyone knew that Helen was the most beautiful one of them all. Even today, with her thin frame despite having a baby girl two years ago and her long legs, she captured second looks from men of every color and income bracket.

But what Helen lacked was charm. She didn't smile easily; even in the all the photos with the rest of the court she never showed her teeth. Helen and Yoshiko, both twenty year olds at the time, stood together at the Yamato Hall in Little Tokyo, waiting for the winner's name to be called. Yoshiko groped for Helen's hand, her own hand moist and warm. Helen's hand remained limp and cool, and when Yoshiko squeezed, Helen did not reciprocate.

Even though Helen hadn't won the 1941 beauty contest, she had won life's competition so far. She had married Frank, probably the most eligible Nisei man in the Manzanar War Relocation Center. By all counts, the insurance company he had started for the resettled Japanese Americans was headed for success.

"I just don't know how you do it, Helen," said Alice. "I'm always embarrassed to make *chirashi*, because I know how beautiful yours comes out."

"It's nothing, really. Just a lot of chopping and cutting. You need to start off with a good knife."

The conversation then quickly turned to children and the Japanese American women's club that three of them belonged to. While the women giggled and laughed, Helen grew more distant.

"I'll be right back," she excused herself, taking her clutch purse with her.

When Helen was nearly out the back door, Sets pressed two fingers to her mouth and then mimed blowing smoke from her lips. "Ta-ba-co," she commented to the others, with a wink.

\* \* \*

Helen took a package of cigarettes from her purse. She had started smoking just recently. Frank didn't approve, of course, and his mother had been aghast to find her smoking in the backyard of their rented Boyle Heights wood-framed house. No matter how much Frank and his mother commented on her smoking, Helen refused to give it up. She needed something of her own.

"Hello." On the other side of the low fence stood a *hakujin*

man in a suit. He was clean-cut and handsome with a large open forehead. A William Holden type.

Helen lit a cigarette with a lighter she had purchased in a department store in Little Tokyo.

A young white couple emerged from the back door of the next door neighbor's house. The woman was visibly pregnant. "We love it, Bob. It's perfect," she said. They then noticed Helen on the other side of the fence. Helen could feel their enthusiasm wane immediately.

"You'll love the neighbors," the man who had greeted Helen said enthusiastically. Almost like he meant it. "Ken was in the U.S. Army, fought over in both Italy and France, I think. Works for the city as a draftsman. He and Yoshiko have two children. They're good people. Go to a congregational church not far from here."

"That's nice," the pregnant woman said weakly. She was disappointed, Helen could tell. Her picture-perfect world was shattered. Helen knew what that felt like.

"Don't worry," Helen spoke up. "There's not too many of us living on this block. Give us ten years, it might be a different story. But you will have moved out by then."

The couple exchanged glances and looked down at the lawn. "Well," the pregnant woman said a little too brightly, "let's take another look at the laundry room." The couple surveyed the backyard wistfully, as if saying goodbye for good before returning to the inside of the house. The man in the suit remained outside.

"I think that I might have cost you a sale," Helen said without any regret.

"Well, good riddance, then. Ken and Yoshiko are good people. Anyone would be lucky to have them or any of their friends as neighbors."

Helen was surprised. She had expected to be met with anger.

"Bob Burkard." The man walked to the low fence and stuck out his hand. Helen hesitated. She moved her lit cigarette from her right hand to her left to better shake hands. She murmured back her name.

"Are you in the market for a new home?"

"What do you mean?"

“You look hungry for a new house.” The agent then laughed. “I can tell these things. In my job, you need to be observant.” Frank had said the same thing in his line of work. He was constantly selling, but in a comfortable, non-threatening way. Usually by the end of his sales pitch, his customers thought it was they who had approached him for insurance.

“Not here,” Helen said. Not Montebello, a few cities east from where they lived now. Montebello was a growing suburb, but it was inland. Helen hated to be landlocked.

“Where, then?”

“The ocean.”

“Ocean? Do you mean Sawtelle?”

Helen almost burst out laughing. Alice Watanabe had represented the Sawtelle area in their beauty pageant. Unincorporated, it drew a cluster of Japanese-American nurseries and small shops just a stone’s throw away from the Veteran’s Administration Hospital.

“Not Sawtelle. Pacific Palisades. Malibu. Right by the ocean.”

The agent didn’t even blink. Helen was impressed.

“I grew up near the water,” she offered up more.

“Where?”

“Terminal Island.”

“The military base?”

“It wasn’t always the military’s.”

Helen snuffed out her cigarette on the Kumais’ cement patio floor and turned to go back inside.

“Wait,” Bob called out.

Helen took a few steps into the soft grass again, restraining the pointy heels of her pumps.

Bob handed Helen his business card. “Call me at my office. We’ll see what we can do.”

\* \* \*

Helen had told Frank her dream to live in Pacific Palisades months ago.

“Dear,” he said, refolding the Japanese-American newspaper that was delivered to their rented house every afternoon. “That’s

impossible.”

“They can’t keep us away. Not anymore, right?” Helen readjusted the embroidered doily on the middle of their dining room table.

“It doesn’t matter what the Supreme Court says. Remember what happened to the Uchidas in South Pasadena—they had to be interviewed by all the neighbors. Do you want to go through that? Get their seal of approval? I don’t want to be where I’m not wanted.”

“Who cares what they want? How about what we want?”

“It’s too far. I need to be around Japanese people. They are my customer base, our livelihood. Someplace like Gardena is a better bet for us. And what would Mama do in Pacific Palisades? She needs to be close to Japanese people, too.”

Helen said nothing. She went outside and smoked two cigarettes right below her mother-in-law’s bedroom window.

\* \* \*

Helen had absolutely not wanted to get married in camp. She hated the idea of being imprisoned with other Japanese Americans on her wedding day. Frank’s bachelor friends had agreed to move out of their barracks so that the newlyweds could have a proper honeymoon night, but Helen refused to go along with it. If Frank insisted that they get married in Manzanar’s mess hall with tissue paper flowers, Helen would force him to spend their first night together in a bumpy mattress next to his widowed mother’s, only separated by some hanging wool blankets.

“We need to get out of here,” she told Frank. “Let’s apply for special clearance.” She brought back bulletins about work in Detroit and Chicago.

But the answer was always the same. “What about Mama? At least in camp she has her friends nearby.”

Helen thought everything would have changed when Japanese Americans were allowed to move back to the West Coast in early 1945. But Mama would live with them and they had to be close to Little Tokyo.

Then came the birth of Diana. When Helen looked down at

her perfectly formed daughter, this mini-human being that both she and Frank had created, Helen knew that she had a renewed purpose in life.

"I won't let anything happen to you," she had whispered in her daughter's ear. "You will have everything life has to offer."

\* \* \*

Despite their earlier conversations, Helen told Frank that she was going to be looking for a new house. Frank was busy with work after all. "You should use Jun. I have his office phone number somewhere." He rifled through the layers of paper on his desk in the corner of the living room.

"There's an agent I met through Yoshiko," Helen said. "I think I'd rather use him."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. "Just don't sign anything."

The next day Helen kissed Diana's forehead and left for Bob Burkard's office in Montebello. Bob's hair seemed freshly combed and the scent of his cologne was so strong that it tickled Helen's nose.

They drove in his new Studebaker towards the beach.

"Who's watching your daughter?" he asked.

"My mother-in-law."

He showed Helen two homes and then drove her back to his office. This routine continued for four days straight.

On the fifth day, Bob parked his car in a dirt lot overlooking the ocean. "I brought us lunch," he said, taking out a blanket and picnic basket from his trunk.

Helen thought it was strange for a bachelor to own a picnic basket. "You've never married?" she couldn't help but to ask him after eating one of his egg salad sandwiches.

"Came close," he said. "It's just taken me some time to meet the right woman."

"So you're picky."

"And what's wrong with that? It's the rest of your life, right? You want to get that right."

Tears came to Helen's eyes. She knew that she was being silly.

"What did I say?" Bob became flustered and fished a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his suit. "I'm so sorry. I

didn't mean anything by it." Before Helen could stop him, he was wiping her tears with his handkerchief. He then rested his hand on her cheek. "You are a remarkably beautiful woman. Do you know that, Helen?" With that, he kissed her. Helen had never been kissed by a white man before.

On their silent drive home, all Helen could think about was, *what have I done?*

\* \* \*

The picnics continued the next day and then the next. Bob's kisses quickly moved from her mouth to her neck, down to her breasts and beyond. Helen knew what she was doing was wrong. That she would be punished someday.

"*Hausu sagashi?* Mama asked when she returned from one of her expeditions with Bob.

"Yes, house hunting," said Helen, feeling grains of sand in her panties.

"Really," she said in Japanese, not looking convinced of it at all.

\* \* \*

Helen wasn't sure if Mama had spoken to Frank about her long hours away from the house and their daughter. Frank, for all his earnestness, wasn't the type to deal with a problem directly. Instead he usually found a solution through a side door.

"I found it," Frank reported one evening upon returning home. "A beautiful house. It's in Gardena, but southern Gardena. Not that far from the ocean, and when you breathe hard, you can smell salt air, really."

Frank even had a photo of the property. A single-story wood framed house, which didn't look that different from the property they were renting.

"What are those?"

"Oil derricks. But you can pretend that they are towers. The Eiffel Tower."

In the past, Helen would have been amused by her husband's fancifulness.

"So, what do you think?"

Gardena was at least thirty miles away from Bob's office, even further from their spot in Malibu. Helen said nothing.

"You'll love it, dear. Really. It'll grow on you."

\* \* \*

"I'm moving to Gardena. Frank's bought a house," Helen told Bob over the phone while Mama was bathing Diana.

"Gardena?"

Helen nodded. "I won't be able to see you anymore."

"Why?"

"I can't be driving all the way to Montebello. Diana will be ready to go to school soon. I need to spent more time with her."

"Well, then, I'll find us a meeting place down there."

"In Gardena?" Both Helen and Bob knew very few secrets could be hidden there.

"Listen, I've found the perfect house for you in Malibu. It's just come out on the market."

"It's too late, Bob."

"It's never too late. I'll show it to him. He can always sell the Gardena house. He'll fall in love with it, really."

"But why? It's not like I'll be able to see you in Malibu much."

"I want you to be happy."

Bob was being ridiculous, and Helen was angry that he couldn't accept the inevitable. Their affair couldn't last. Diana was getting fussy from her long hours away from her mother. Helen had to bury her feelings. She had practice, but obviously *gaman*, perseverance, was a new concept for Bob.

That Thursday evening, Frank didn't come home for dinner. He hadn't called and Helen was becoming worried. She called Frank's secretary at home and was told that he was meeting a real estate agent on the westside of town.

At nine o'clock, the phone rang. "Is this Mrs. Frank Miura?" A male voice that Helen didn't recognize.

"Yes."

"This is the sherriff's department. There's been an accident."

\* \* \*

Helen was surprised that Frank's mother wanted to come with her to the coroner's office. Helen told her to stay with Diana. "Mama, it will be better if you stay behind."

"This is your fault," Mama said in Japanese.

Helen's legs had been shaky to begin with, but now she felt like her knees would buckle underneath her.

"You told him that you wanted to move near the water. He only wanted to make you happy."

\* \* \*

The coroner had warned Helen that she might not recognize her husband. His body had been severely battered from the rocks. It had been fifty-foot drop, after all.

His neck was twisted; his beautiful face now raw and torn. Helen thought that his nose was missing, but she saw that it was instead flattened into a pulpy mass.

His ears were still intact, and Helen checked behind his left earlobe, and sure enough, his mole was there. She studied his hands. His fingers were stiff but his nails were still well manicured, a little squarish at the top.

It was definitely Frank.

Later a police officer sat down with her and asked Helen what her husband was doing on a cliff in Malibu.

"I'm not sure. His secretary told me that he was there to look at a house. A new house that we were thinking of buying." Helen's voice shook. Should she mention Bob? She wasn't sure it had been Bob. But it had to be him.

"Yes, we found the address in his pocket. The real estate agent, in fact, was the one who discovered your husband's body. Do you know a man named Bob Burkard?"

\* \* \*

The police car parked in front of their rented house and Helen got out, her hands still trembling.

She thanked the officer, and the car slowly disappeared down the street. Before she got to the stairs, someone pulled at her arm.

“How dare you come here?” Helen said to Bob.

He pulled her into some pine trees framing the side of the house.

“You killed him,” she declared.

Bob shook his head. “I didn’t even make it on time for our appointment. He had fallen by the time I had arrived. I was the one who called the police.”

“I’m going to tell the police about us.” Helen was ashamed that she had not been more revealing during the police interview. All she mentioned was that Bob had been their agent. Purely business.

“That we were having an affair? What do you think that will do to your daughter? People will talk. You’ll be implicated, you know.”

Bob was right. Tongues would wag. Helen Miura was having an adulterous affair with a white man. Diana would be shunned by the parents of her peers. Her family shamed. And if something happened to Helen, who would take care of Diana? Mama couldn’t do it on her own. Helen’s parents were too old, and Helen’s siblings had their own children to raise. Helen knew what it was liked to be one of many. She didn’t want that to happen to her Diana.

“I’ll wait for you. Even a year. In respect of your husband’s death.”

Respect? Helen felt like screaming, tearing Bob’s hair out. *I know what you have done.* She wanted to spit in his face, but she used all her rage to manage a slight smile on her lips.

\* \* \*

That night Helen lay in their double bed by herself. The doctor at the Japanese hospital had dropped by some sleeping medicine for Helen. Something to stir into hot water. But Helen didn’t want to sleep. She didn’t deserve to sleep.

Helen reached out for the crumpled sheets Frank had slept in the night before. She planned to never wash them. Instead she would save them in a box so that she could periodically go and smell her late husband.

She wrapped the sheets around her legs and stared at Frank’s

pillow. There were a few loose hairs coated with oil.

She felt now that Frank, in his death, could see everything. He could see her deception, the romantic trysts in Bob's car and on the beach.

"I'm so sorry, Frank," she whispered. And then she knew what she had to do.

\* \* \*

Helen's parents had an old family friend, Kaji-san. Kaji-san, a Japanese immigrant like Helen's father, had been a fisherman as well. He was *rambo*, rough. A lot of Terminal Islanders had been that way, cured in the sun and salt water. But Kaji-san not only had callused hands but a callused face, dried up crevices like earthquake faults.

After the war, Helen's relatives had taken the old bachelor for a while before he got back on his feet and opened a Japanese restaurant in Little Tokyo. To everyone's surprise, Kaji-san succeeded and before long, he had even purchased a boat that was docked at Pierpoint Landing in Long Beach.

Kaji-san felt indebted to Helen's family, so much so that they even stopped going to his restaurant because he never took their money. But Helen needed a favor now, and Kaji-san was, of course, more than willing to comply. Deep down inside, he had questions and concerns. Helen had lost some weight—she was thin to begin with, but now her high cheekbones were even more prominent and defined. Frank's death had definitely taken a toll on her, but Kaji-san knew that Helen would never do anything rash. She wasn't that type of woman.

Helen arrived at the empty restaurant three hours before her appointment and let herself in the back with Kaji-san's key. She needed the extra time to get ready.

Bob came early, too, fifteen minutes early. Helen could tell from the flush in his cheeks that he was excited. She even let him give her a peck on her cheek. That much she could tolerate.

Helen had him sit at the wooden counter and served him a piping hot cup of green tea.

"I've never had green tea before." He sipped carefully and then grimaced. "Bitter."

“You’ll get used to it. This tea is expensive; you’ll insult me if you don’t finish it.”

By the time the teacup was empty, Bob’s head rested on the wooden counter. Helen went to the kitchen and put on her rubber gloves. And then rolled out the wheelbarrow.

One time she had been out on the fishing boat when her father had caught a bluefin tuna. It had been a magnificent fish, almost six feet tall, almost three hundred pounds. It took three men to handle the fish. The fish first needed to be stunned. Helen’s father used one of her brother’s baseball bats. This time Helen used Frank’s.

The fishermen found the soft spot in the fish’s head and then pushed a spike in its brain. Helen was amazed how easy it was to kill a huge fish like that. It shuddered as if it was hoping for another chance for life and then became limp.

There was a method to cutting a bluefin tuna. You first needed some time to bleed the fish so that its sheen would still be maintained. And then go right to the internal organs in the gilling and gutting of the fish. Later you would cut the fish’s meat into chunks and sell them by the pound.

Helen could skip many of the steps she had learned as a child. The most important tools here were the knife and the mallet. She was thankful some family friends had watched over her father’s tools while they had been in Manzanar.

After Helen was done, she carefully packed different parts of Bob in three different suitcases and cleaned the cement floor of Kaji-san’s kitchen. She had brought extra bottles of bleach for the task. She then drove to Pierpoint Landing and took Kaji-san’s motorized fishing boat as far as she could, and dropped each suitcase into different parts of the ocean. The water was black as the ink of an octopus, and for a moment, Helen imagined a huge sea monster emerging from the darkness and tearing her, too, into shreds. But her mind was only playing tricks on her. After closing her eyes hard and reopening them, she found that her fear had disappeared.

\* \* \*

Shortly thereafter, Helen, Diana and Mama moved into

the wood-framed house in southern Gardena. Next door was a flower farm and packing shed.

“That Miura widow is a cold one,” the flower grower’s wife said to her husband as they were bunching up flowers at night to get ready for the two o’clock morning drive to the Flower Market in Los Angeles.

The flower grower, Tad, just nodded, so that his wife would be under the impression that he was listening.

“Never says hello. She was on one of those beauty queen courts back in 1941. But she wasn’t the queen. Too stuck-up for the judges, I think.”

Tad grunted. He wasn’t one to spread stories. But he knew who she was. One day when he was driving back from the flower market in the morning after the children went to school, he saw her in the middle of his snapdragon blooms, next to one of the oil derricks. She was screaming and crying; at first he thought that she had been injured. When he slowed his panel truck, she straightened her hair and rubbed the smeared makeup from below her eyes.

“You okay?” he asked from his open car window.

She stared back at him, her eyes shiny like wet black stones. She then spoke, her voice barely audible above the rhythmic squeak of the derricks. “Are any of us?”

Tad’s panel truck remained idling as the widow slowly walked back into her house and closed the door.

# Contributors



**Lynne Barrett**, recipient of the Edgar<sup>®</sup> Award for Best Mystery Short Story, is the author of *The Secret Names of Women* and *The Land of Go*. Her stories have been published in the anthologies *Miami Noir*, *A Dixie Christmas*, *Mondo Barbie* and *Simply the Best Mysteries*. She is co-editor of *Birth: A Literary Companion* and *The James M. Cain Cookbook, Guide to Home Singing, Physical Fitness and Animals (Especially Cats)*, and wrote the libretto for the children's opera *Cricketina*. She lives in Miami where she teaches at Florida International University.

*Photo credit: Michele Baker*

**Charlotte Carter** is author of two highly praised mystery series. The Nanette Hayes series—*Rhode Island Red*, *Coq au Vin*, *Drumsticks* (Warner/Mysterious Press)—features a leggy young jazz-loving sax player whose sense of adventure inevitably lands her in the middle of murder. And the Cook County series—*Jackson Park* and *Tripwire* (Ballantine/One World)—narrated by precocious black hippie Cassandra Lisle, is set on Chicago's South Side during the volatile Vietnam era.

*Walking Bones* (Serpent's Tail, 2002) is her dark novel about the intersecting lives of six New Yorkers brought together by the twists inherent in love and sex, alcohol and violence, and, inescapably, race. Winner of the Chester Himes Mystery Writers Award, she has also been published in many anthologies in England and America.

A long-time New Yorker, she has worked as a part-time teacher and an editorial grunt, and has also traveled and lived in North Africa, England and France. She currently lives with her husband on the Lower East Side.



**Christa Faust** is the author of nine novels including *Hoodtown*, the award-winning novelization of *Snakes on a Plane* and *Money Shot* (Hard Case Crime, 2008). Faust will be the first female author published by Hard Case. She lives and writes in Los Angeles.

*Photo credit: Jim Ferreira*



An entertainment writer by day, **Alison Gaylin** is also the author of the Edgar\*-nominated *Hide Your Eyes* and its sequel, *You Kill Me*, both of which came out in 2005. Her standalone, Hollywood-set thriller *Trashed*, debuted in September 2007. And she is currently at work on her next novel which will come out in 2008. She lives in upstate New York with her husband, daughter and dog.

*Photo credit: Jennifer May*



**Sara Gran** is the author of the novels *Dope*, *Come Closer* and *Saturn's Return to New York*. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, she now lives in California.

*Photo credit: Robert Urb*



**Libby Fischer Hellmann** is the author of the award-winning suspense series featuring video producer and single mother Ellie Foreman. Libby grew up in Washington D.C., but has lived in Chicago for 30 years. She is also the editor of *Chicago Blues*, a dark crime fiction anthology, which was released by Bleak House Books in October 2007. Her next novel, *Easy Innocence*, a stand-alone PI novel, will be released in 2008.

She blogs at "The Outfit" ([www.theoutfitcollective.com](http://www.theoutfitcollective.com)) with six other Chicago crime fiction authors, including Sara Paretsky, Barbara D'Amato and Marcus Sakey.

*Photo credit: Sean Chercover*



**Vicki Hendricks** is the author of noir novels *Miami Purity*, *Iguana Love*, *Voluntary Madness*, *Sky Blues* and *Cruel Poetry*. She lives in Hollywood, Florida, and teaches writing at Broward Community College. Skydiving, SCUBA and travel adventures often provide atmosphere and plot for her writing.

*Photo credit: Jennifer Feebeck*



**Naomi Hirahara**, born and raised in Southern California, is the Edgar® Award-winning author of the Mas Arai mystery series, which features a Japanese American gardener and atomic-bomb survivor. A previous editor of *The Rafu Shimpo* newspaper, she also has produced seven nonfiction books on local horticulture and Asian American history. Her short stories have been published in various anthologies, including *Los Angeles Noir*. Her middle-grade book, *1001 Cranes*, will be released next summer by Delacorte. Her website is [www.naomihirahara.com](http://www.naomihirahara.com).



**Annette Meyers** was born in Manhattan, grew up on a chicken farm in New Jersey, and came running back to New York as fast as she could. With her long history on both Broadway (assistant to Harold Prince) and Wall Street (headhunter and NASD arbitrator), she is the quintessential New Yorker.

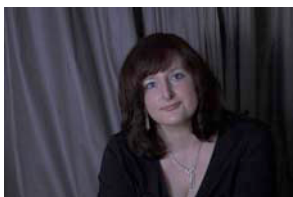
All of her books—the eight Smith and Wetzons (contemporary), the two Olivia Browns (1920), the standalone *Repentances* (1936)—are set in New York.

Using the pseudonym Maan Meyers, Annette and her husband Martin have written six books and multiple short stories in *The Dutchman* series of historical mysteries set in New York in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

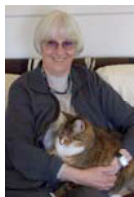
Her own short story “You Don’t Know Me” was included in *Best American Mystery Stories* (2002).

She was the 10th president of Sisters in Crime and is current president of the International Association of Crime Writers, North America.

*Photo credit: Donna F. Aceto*



**Donna Moore** was a crime fiction fan from a young age. She decided that she wanted to be one of Enid Blyton’s Famous Five and fight crime with the aid of only a basket of cucumber sandwiches and a bottle of ginger beer. So, that summer she spent her spare time following mysterious strangers around the village—especially those with cockney accents and a couple of days’ growth of stubble—until a complaint from the new local vicar put a stop to her sleuthing career. She decided instead to become a Superhero. So far, she has the tights and the cape.



**Vin Packer**, a pseudonym for Marijane Meaker, was one of the 1950s Gold Medal Books paperback crime writers. She also writes Young Adult novels as M. E. Kerr. She has won Lifetime Achievement Awards from The Publishers' Triangle, Lambda Literary and the American Library Association's Margaret Edwards Award. She lives in East Hampton, New York.

*Photo credit: Zoe Kamitses*



**Rebecca Pawel** was born and raised in New York City. She has published four books set in Spain, including the Edgar-winning *Death of a Nationalist* (2003) and *The Summer Snow*, which was listed as one of *Publishers Weekly's* best mysteries of 2006. She teaches in a public high school in New York, which at times feels like being a member of the International Brigades, and at times—given the climate at

the Department of Education—feels like belonging to the Falange. She is currently working on a novel about Renaissance Flanders. Much of her social life revolves around tango, but she has always been too timid to participate in a birthday dance.

*Photo credit: Marie-Jeanne Tavernier*



**Cornelia Read's** first novel, *A Field of Darkness*, has been nominated for Edgar, Anthony, Barry, Macavity, Gumshoe, Audie and RT Bookclub Critics Choice awards. She lives in Berkeley, California, with her Intrepid Spouse and twin daughters.

*Photo credit: Robert M. Greber*



**Lisa Respers France** is a writer and editor living in New York City. A native of Baltimore, she is a former reporter at *The Baltimore Sun* and *The Los Angeles Times*, an ardent reader and a proud graduate of Western High School. Her work has also appeared in the anthology *Baltimore Noir*.

*Photo credit: Mary Reagan*



**SJ Rozan**, the author of ten crime novels, is a life-long New Yorker. Her novels and short stories have won the Edgar®, Shamus, Anthony, Nero and Macavity. SJ is a former Mystery Writers of America National Board member, a current Sisters in Crime National Board member and ex-President of the Private Eye Writers of America. She is at work on a new Lydia Chin/Bill Smith novel, *The Shanghai Moon*



**Sandra Scoppettone** has published 19 novels, five of them for young adults. Two books have been made into movies for TV. She has been nominated for two Edgars® and won a Shamus under the name Jack Early, which she used for 3 books. She lives with her partner of 35 years in Southold, New York.

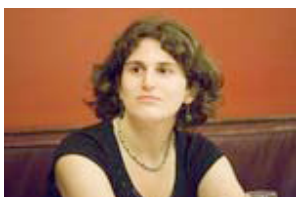
*Photo credit: Linda Crawford*



**Zoë Sharp** spent most of her formative years living on a catamaran on the northwest coast of England. She opted out of mainstream education at the age of twelve and wrote her first novel at fifteen. Sharp turned to writing crime after being on the receiving end of death-threat letters in the course of her work as a freelance photojournalist, and this led to the creation of her no-nonsense ex-army-turned-bodyguard heroine, Charlie Fox. The latest in this

award-nominated series, *Second Shot*, was published by St. Martin's Press in September 2007.

*Photo credit: Andy Butler @ ZACE Photographic*



**Sarah Weinman** is the *Baltimore Sun's* crime fiction columnist, writes "Dark Passages," a monthly online mystery & suspense column for the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* and is the proprietor of *Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind* (at [www.sarahweinman.com](http://www.sarahweinman.com)), hailed by *USA Today* as "a respected resource for commentary on crime

and mystery fiction." Her short fiction has appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and several anthologies, including *Dublin Noir*, *Baltimore Noir*, *Expletive Deleted* and *Damn Near Dead*. She lives in Manhattan, and would like to spend more time sitting nice and quiet and smelling the flowers.

*Photo credit: Mary Reagan*



**Ken Bruen** is the award-winning author of over twenty novels. He has a Ph.D. in Metaphysics. He lives in Galway, Ireland and is the proud father of Grace.

*Photo credit: Reg Gordon*



**Stona Fitch's** novels have been praised by Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee, Russell Banks and others in the U.S., U.K. and France. *Senseless*, his latest novel, is now a feature film from Scottish director Simon Hynd. He lives and writes in Concord, Massachusetts, where he also leads Gaining Ground, a non-profit organic farm.

*Photo credit: Clark Quin*



**Allan Guthrie** was born in Orkney, but has lived in Edinburgh for most of his adult life. He is married to Donna. His first novel, *Two-Way Split*, was short-listed for the CWA Debut Dagger and went on to win the 2007 Theakston's Old Peculier Crime Novel Of The Year. His second novel, *Kiss Her Goodbye*, was nominated for Edgar, Anthony and Gumshoe awards. His third, *Hard Man*, was published in 2007 along with *Kill Clock*, a novella for adult reluctant readers.

Allan is a commissioning editor for PointBlank Press and a literary agent with Jenny Brown Associates.

*Photo credit: Mary Reagan*



**Charlie Huston** is the author of the Henry Thompson trilogy (Edgar-nominated *Caught Stealing*, Edgar- & Anthony-nominated *Six Bad Things* and Anthony-nominated *A Dangerous Man*), the Joe Pitt Casebooks, including *Half the Blood of Brooklyn* (December 2007) and the suburban noir, *The Shotgun Rule*. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, the actress Virginia Louise Smith.

*Photo credit: Ray Coco Smith*



**Eddie Muller** writes novels, movie histories, plays, short stories, films and biographies, including the recent national bestseller *Tab Hunter Confidential*. His fiction debut, *The Distance*, was honored by the Private Eye Writers of America as Best First Novel of 2002. He is a two-time Edgar® Award nominee and twice an

Anthony Award nominee. He is also founder and president of the Film Noir Foundation, dedicated to “rescuing and restoring America’s noir heritage.” He has produced and directed a film version of his contribution to this collection, “The Grand Inquisitor,” starring Marsha Hunt.

*Photo credit: Ron Rinaldi*



**Daniel Woodrell** has published eight novels and lives in an isolated neighborhood in an isolated town in the isolated Missouri Ozarks because there’s something about the place he likes.

*Photo credit: Bruce Carr*

\* \* \*



**Megan Abbott** is the Edgar®-nominated author of *Queenpin* (2007), *The Song is You* (2007) and *Die a Little* (2005), as well as the nonfiction study, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (2002). She lives in Queens, New York.

*Photo credit: Joshua A. Gaylord*



**Val McDermid** is the internationally best-selling author of 21 novels, two story anthologies and one Edgar®-nominated work of non-fiction, *A Suitable Job for a Woman*. Her latest release is the fifth Tony Hill /Carol Jordan thriller, *Beneath the Bleeding*. Val divides her time between South Manchester and Northumberland. She has a son and three cats.

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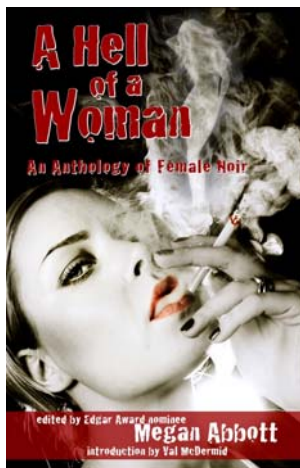
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