

An Annotated Reverse-Lookup Glossary of Hard-Boiled Slang

originally compiled by Ian Tregillis¹ for his novel SOMETHING MORE THAN NIGHT (Tor Books, 2013)

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Introduction

This document is intended to function not only as an aid to readers of hard-boiled and noirish fiction, but also (and primarily) as an aid to writers. As such, it is organized into several broad categories to facilitate reverse lookups. While these categories are somewhat arbitrary, and tend to overlap a little bit, they represent a plausible high-level organization of hundreds of terms gleaned from dozens of sources without getting overly granular. This structure speaks to the general shape, style, and tropes of hard-boiled and noir works of the era from which much of this material was gleaned.

Some terms in this glossary aren't specifically noirish, yet have been included to exemplify more general slang of the era (which can be a useful touchstone when trying to evoke a period feel). Other terms featured here are recognizable by, or even identical to, their modern equivalents. These are included to provide reassurance that certain modern-sounding phrases would not be out of place in a period piece. Some entries are listed under multiple categories.

Literature of the era being what it is, the intent here has been to deliberately omit racist and other offensive terms. Unfortunately, it is possible that a gross misinterpretation or misreading of a passage (see below) may have led to the inadvertent inclusion of unacceptable terminology. Such items should be identified and removed from future revisions.

The source material used to compile this glossary represents a minuscule fraction of the vast hard-boiled corpus published in the 1920s - early 1950s (or set during that era, or about that era), with particular emphasis on the works of Raymond Chandler. Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain are also featured. The result is neither complete nor comprehensive.

All definitions should be considered "best guess" definitions based on contextual interpretations of the example passages. Some are undoubtedly incorrect; all are subject to correction. Also, some terms are so rare or unique that they appear in only a handful of works, or even just a single work. At that point, definitions become little more than wild guesses.

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PEOPLE

gunsel: hired gun, with possible connotation of a cheap thug. *[Note the original meaning was akin to "pederast" or "sodomist." The accepted meaning of this word changed largely because of Hammett's deliberate misuse in TMF, as famously documented by Earle Stanley Gardner (GAM).]*

"Another thing," Spade repeated, glaring at the boy: "Keep that gunsel away from me while you're making up your mind." (TMF, p110.)

bull: cop

"With every bull in town working overtime to pile up grief for me a little more won't hurt." (TMF, p 141.)

twist: woman, with possible connotation of girlfriend, or somebody seen on the side (play on "screw"?)

"I don't know howcome he left that shelter, but they got him once in New York for knockin over a rose of stuss-games – his twist turned him up – and he was in a year before Fallon got him sprung." (TMF, p 142.)

"He walked up to him and stuck him with the same skewer that Whisper had used on the twist." (RH, p175)

lollipop: person without backbone, or lacking experience; weak; naive

"Jesus God! Is this the first thing you guys ever stole? You're a fine lot of lollipops! What are you going to do next -- get down and pray?" (TMF, p188.)

sap: fool; fall-guy; love-struck sucker

"I'm not Thursby. I'm not Jacobi. I won't play the sap for you." (TMF, p?)

dope: a fool; foolish person; silly fool

"Don't be a dope." (TTM, p13.)

cuckoo: crazy; nuts; touched in the head; eccentric

"She's cute, but she's cuckoo." (TTM, p16)

"You were cuckoo over the girl." (RH, p59)

nut: (nut) crazy person; wild person

"Aren't we talking like a couple of nuts?" (TLS, p196)

"You're wonderful," she said softly. "But you're nuts." (FML, p97)

bird: person, either male or female, but frequently female

"This bird a friend of yours?" (TTM, p33)

Number three was a short plump bird with a round self-righteous face and a pair of pop-eyes that kept sliding off the blonde. He was the one with the key... (TA, p127)

dope-addict: a drug addict;

"Can you tell dope-addicts by looking at them?" (TTM, p48.)

dame: woman; lady

"We ain't been able to find out for sure yet, but we have found out she wasn't the kind of dame you'd expect him to be trusting to handle all that dough..." (TTM, p58.)

"I heard the dame call him Terry." (TLG, p5)

gum-shoe: detective (**gum-shoeing:** being a detective)

"You didn't tell him you'd quit gum-shoeing." (TTM, p81.)

mugg: guy, man, person; possible connotation of not being entirely on the up-and-up

"To a mugg like him, once a sleuth, always a sleuth." (TTM, p81.)

wise-head: smart person

"She's a wise-head: plenty smart." (TTM, p120.)

cluck: chick; girl; dame; broad

"Maybe I'm wrong," he said as he sat down, "but I think somebody could do something with that cluck if they took hold of her right." Morelli said: "By the throat." (TTM, p124.)

That meant even a dumb cluck of a woman reporter could see there was something funny out there. (DI, p103)

sourpuss: (sourpuss)

After a while a middle-aged sourpuss in a maid's costume opened the front door about eight inches and gave me the beady eye. (THW, p4)

A man named Nulty got the case, a lean-jawed sourpuss with long yellow hands which he kept folded over his kneecaps most of the time he talked to me. (FML, p16)

busted flush: somebody who got nabbed; down on his luck; a sad sack?

Gertie says Morny took is over from a busted flush named Arthur Blake Popham who got caught in a mail fraud rap. (THW, p38)

screwball: nut, etc.

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Another screwball. That made three in one day, not counting Mrs. Murdock, who might turn out to be a screwball, too. (THW, p55)

cookie: coke-head; cocaine addict

...cookies and coke peddlers... (THW, p 71)

crooner: singer

The girl said: "Nice voice. If you like female crooners." (THW, p139)

twerp: (twerp)

"...or that twerp of a son you have..." (THW, p169)

chippy / chippie: dame/broad/connotation is possibly "piece of ass"; woman; girlfriend; lay

"My God! Why did I ever think to put in with a chippy like you? (THW, p217)

"I got drunk and stayed with a chippy. Just before the first snow last December. She was gone a week and came back all prettied up." (TLL, p61)

"On account of some lacquered chippie said we used loaded dice. Seems like the bim was one of his sleepy-time girls." (TLG, p346)

chiseler: low-life; hanger-on; somebody chiseling (money from) others; somebody who nickel-and-dimes

"And it would take an awful lot of chisellers an awful lot of time to rob you of enough so that you'd notice it." (TBS, p 14)

"But you can't wear the chiselers down," I said. "They'll never lay off." (TMB, p153)

Ybarra said: "If the woman is brought out into the open, you'll be a liar on a police report and a chiseler on your own partner." (TMB, p209)

motorman: driver; motorist?

I woke up with a motorman's glove in my mouth, drank two cups of coffee, and went through the morning papers. (TBS, p43)

rubbernecks: (rubberneckers)

The uniformed man pointed up at the rubbernecks at the end of the pier. (TBS, p46)

pug: heavy/tough/thug/gunsel(?)

The pug slipped a hand into my breast pocket and pulled out my wallet. (TBS, p74)

sucker: stool/stooge/fool/fall guy/dupe/etc.

"The sucker list I mentioned is in code." (TBS, p80.)

"That she is a sucker for the men and might take up with a stranger who might turn out to be a crook." (TLL, p15)

crook: (crook)

ibid.

shamus: detective/private dick/PI/etc.

"We're glad to stooge for a shamus of his standing." (TBS, p112)

"You'll get paid, shamus-- if you do your job. Not otherwise. Is that clear?" (PB, p12)

gum-shoe: detective/private dick/PI/etc.

"Who told you I was a gum-shoe?" (TLS, p75)

sharper: detectives; private operators

"We got to have you," he repeated. "We got to have sharpeners with private licenses hiding information and dodging around corners and stirring up dust for us to breathe in." (TLS, p212)

keyhole peeper: detective/private dick/PI/etc.

"You wouldn't mind me calling you a goddamn cheap double-crossing keyhole-peeper, would you?" (TLS, p212)

grifter: low-life; con man; etc.

"I hoped that the next grifter who dropped the hook on her would play her a little more smoothly, a little more for the long haul rather than the quick touch." (TBS, p128.)

loogan: a guy with a gun

"What's a loogan?" "A guy with a gun." (TBS, p147)

lush: (lush; drunk)

"Can I go on being a son of a bitch, or do I have to become a gentleman, like that lush passed out in his car the other night?" (TBS, p228)

moll: gangster's girlfriend / woman / partner

"What a lot of different girls you are. Now you're making like a moll. When I first saw you, you were a quiet well-bred little lady." (PB, p55)

tomcat: giglo; player

"I know these tomcats and I know this one too well." (TLL, p13)

private dick (PI; detective, etc.)

"It would take more than a private dick to bother me," he said. (TLL, p21)

roundheels: easy woman; slut

"But little roundheels over there ain't even that." (TLL, p41-2)

jasper: man; handsome fellow?

"I think this fellow spoke to her in the lobby, and had dinner with her. A tall good-lookin' jasper, built like a fast light-heavy." (TLL, p97)

chaser: skirt chaser

"He's dead. I knew him a little. He's a chaser." (TLL, p149)

boob: fool;

"The big boob would tear your head off right now, if you said anything against her." (TLL, p190)

happy ladies: prostitutes; easy women

There would be a few happy ladies in any apartment house. (TLL, p202.)

drip: runt; inconsequential person; sad sack?

"That frozen-faced little drip-- what is she to me?" (TLL, p206)

(house) peeper: (hotel/in-house) detective

"And don't bother to call your house peeper and send him up to the scatter. I'm allergic to house peepers." (TLL, p231)

house man: hotel/in-house detective; house peeper

"Would it be convenient for me to see your house man? If you have one." (PB, p105)

bim: (bimbo)

Degarmo said: "Usually the bim tries to give her boyfriend a bit more alibi than that. But it takes all kinds, don't it?" (TLL, p235)

darb: a person with money, who can be relied upon to pay a check

"A friend of Harry's we met there was the darbs, and after that we drifted to a couple of the clubs, and both the boys got beautifully shellacked." "Shellacked! I don't understand."
"Jammed, both of them." (WWW1)

crook: (crook; criminal)

"I don't like crooks. If I did like crooks, I wouldn't like crooks that are stool pigeons. And if I did like crooks who were stool pigeons, I still wouldn't like you!" (TTM-F)

stool-pigeon: rat; fink; an informant; criminal who talks to the cops

Ibid.

"I don't like crooks, and even if I did, I wouldn't like crooks that are stool-pigeons." (TTM, p90.)

"You want to stool-pigeon for me?" (RH, p95)

fink: rat; stool pigeon; traitor

"Now he's looking for the fink that turned him up eight years ago." (FML, p34)

rat: (rat) fink; no-good

"She was a killer," I said. "But so was Malloy. And he was a long way from being all rat." (FML, p291)

"That fellow's a rat if there ever was one." (RH, p98)

flatfoot: detective; shamus; etc.

"I've been doing a little detecting on my own. That flatfoot I married thinks he's smart." (TTM-F)

a lulu: a looker, a knockout, a doozy, etc.

"Have you got a nice evening gown?" "Yes, I've got a lulu." (TTM-F)

steady: boyfriend/girlfriend

"That Gladys," I said, "does she have a steady?" (TMB, p5)

bum: bub; guy; jack; also: (bum)

"What's the racket, bum?" (TMB, p15)

"No, you want to go away just because you're a bum, that's all." (PRT, p90)

dick: detective (not necessarily private; e.g., "private dick", "railroad dick", "hotel dick")

"You're some kind of dick, aren't you?" (TMB, p15)

hard number: tough guy;

"I love to see these hard numbers bend at the knees." (TMB, p18)

gunny: hired gun; thug

"You think those two gunnies were stashed out for Mr. Gerald?" (TMB, p28)

hard guy: hard number; tough guy

"I was stuck up by a couple of hard guys with guns who told me to lay off the Jeeter case." (TMB, p30)

deadpan: bodyguard; tough guy; gunny with a sheen of respectability(?)

...and the door opened and I was looking at a deadpan in a derby hat and dinner coat. (TMB, p36)

mugg: guy; jack; bub; or, man, with connotation of being a thug or tough guy

"Listen, mugg--" (TMB, p37)

"Couple other muggs was askin' for it a while back." (TMB, p99)

iron man: bodyguard; tough guy; hired gun;

"...and he has just collected ten from your iron man for slipping me the nasty." (TMB, p38)

tail: somebody following (as in shadowing, stalking, watching)

"But there was a tail on you when you went there and you didn't give it to the law." (TMB, p40)

hard boy: tough guy; bodyguard; hired thug

"But Marty Estel and his hard boy can." (TMB, p43)

"That's why Quest left. Respectable type. Like me. I think a couple of hard boys threw a scare into him." (TLS, p29)

"The hard boys will take care of you, buster." (TLG, 338)

buster: (buster)

Ibid.

"Well, what do you know," she drawled. "A dick with scruples. Tell it to the seagulls, buster. On me it's just confetti." (PB, p30)

"Don't get funny with me, buster. I get annoyed rather easy." (PB, p35)

"*Mister* Umney to you, buster." (PB, p67)

looker: attractive woman

"She's a tall redhead, a swell looker." (TMB, p65)

flame-top: redhead

"The flame-top gal must be pickin' them," he said. (TMB, p67)

broad: woman, with connotation of coarse, unmannered

"I'm not wised up on roulette, Lou. . . I saw plenty wrong with your broad's manners." "She's not a broad," Lou said. (TMB, p70)

jane: woman; dame; etc.

"A guy and a jane come up alongside me in the Buick and the guy offers me a hundred bucks to let him wear my cap and drive my hack into town. (TMB, p75)

"Twenty-two grand, and the jane passed it over to you to keep," Dorr said. "Ain't that just like a jane?" (TMB, p90)

gunny: thug; hired gun; hard boy; etc.

"Tell us about the two gunnies." (TMB, p104)

heel: jerk; low life; scumbag; etc.

"Which one of you heels scratched the guy at West Cimmaron last night?" (TMB, p105)

"Poor Lin. He was rather a heel. Most of one's friends are. But to die like that is awful." (FML, p127)

"Sometimes I think you're a world-beater," she said, "and sometimes I think you're the worst heel I ever met." (FML, p189)

world-beater: somebody better than the rest; capable of taking on the world; a person in high esteem

Ibid.

wren: girl; bird; cluck; etc.

"Who was the wren?" I asked. "Hub? What wren?" He still didn't look at me. "The one that phoned me." (TMB, p128)

lug: guy; generic address for a man; connotation of thick-headedness or limited ability/usefulness; not necessarily connoting goon, thug, hard boy, etc.

The girl snapped at me: "Is this lug your partner?" (TMB, p141)

frill: girl; connotation of cheap and/or easy -- low-price and low-class

Her voice lacked the edgy twang of a beer-parlor frill. It had a soft light sound, like spring rain.
(TMB, p170)

sheik: lothario;

He looked like a dance-hall sheik making up his mind whether to take the blonde or the redhead.
(TMB, p186)

fluff: arm candy; hired girl

He hadn't mentioned the girl again. Also, he hadn't mentioned that he had no job and no prospects and that almost his last dollar had gone into paying the check at The Dancers for a bit of high class fluff that couldn't stick around long enough to make sure he didn't get tossed in the sneezer by some prowl car boys or rolled by a tough hackie and dumped out in a vacant lot.
(TLG, p7)

hackie: taxi (hack) driver

Ibid.

From time to time the hackie talked into his radiophone. (PB, p13)

dish: attractive woman; hottie

"Lots of men, huh? But you went back and married her again. I realize that she's quite a dish, but all the same--" (TLG, p31)

This was really a dish. Seen up close she was almost paralyzing. (TLG, p95)

"Cut the doodads and get back to Mitchell," he said briskly. "And to the dish you was trying to fumble up on the hill." (PB, p96)

swifty: quick person; somebody with fast reflexes

"He's a swifty. He moves fast. Good reflexes." (TLG, p45)

cream puff: weakling; softie; pushover

"Whatcha waiting for, cream puff? And ice cream cone, maybe?" (TLG, p49)

wise guy: smartass; know it all; cocky tough guy

"You're the kind of wise guy I like to work over. This rap will be hanging over you for a long time, cutie." (TLG, p64)

fall guy: patsy; sacrificial lamb

A dead man is the best fall guy in the world. He never talks back. (TLG, p71)

piker: amateur; small time operator

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"You're a piker, Marlowe. You're a peanut grifter. You're so little it takes a magnifying glass to see you." (TLG, p75)

card sharp: grifter; sleight of hand expert; expert card player

"I could have got him out of the country faster than a card sharp can stack a deck." (TLG, p78)

joy girl: hooker; prostitute; hired companion

I knew a good deal about Idle Valley, and I knew it had changed a great deal since the days when they had the gatehouse at the entrance and the private police force, and the gambling casino on the lake, and the fifty-dollar joy girls. (TLG, p98)

grifter: huckster; (grifter)

"Get out of here, you cheap grifter." (TLG, p130)

nickel grabber: cheapie; penny pincher; low-rent hire; inexpensive/low skill

"It's run by a former colonel of military police. No nickel grabber, Doctor. He rates way up." (TLG, p134)

horse players: people who gamble on horse races

"But a lot of them are drifters and horse players." (TLG, p156)

pick-up: an escort, as one who would pick up men in a bar; hooker; prostitute;

But she didn't look like a pickup and there was no trace of come-on in her voice. (TLG, p161)

Mentally I put Miss Vermilyea beside her. She didn't look soft or prissy or prudish, but she made the Vermilyea look like a pick-up. (PB, p6)

bad job: someone written off; a lost cause

"You don't care who murdered your daughter, Mr. Potter. You wrote her off as a bad job a long time ago" (TLG, p235)

wrong gee: bad job; somebody not to be trusted

"To some people you're a wrong gee. I never knew you to do anything too crooked." (TLG, p277)

"They are wrong gees in a way -- I should say in almost every way -- but they still have room for personal pride and so on." (TLG, p369)

gee: man; fellow

"Just off the highway there's a small garage and paintshop run by a gee named Art Huck." (TBS, p181)

tramp: loose woman; easy woman

"So did Linda Loring, who is a bit of a tramp herself, but not completely so." (TLG, p306)

"Yeah, I remember her. Song and dance. Nice legs and generous with 'em. She went off somewheres. How would I know what them tramps do?" (FML, p30)

tramp: drifter; hobo; bum; low-class or income

"Isn't that what we want? Just to be a pair of tramps, like we really are?" (PRT, p15)

frail: woman; girl; twist; dame; etc.

"The Lennox frail had taken both her men from her." (TLG, p323)

"If you had connected up Wade and the Lennox frail for me the time Wade got dead I'd have made out." (TLG, p337)

fall guy: patsy (fall guy)

"And if she needed a fall guy, you were it. You might say she was collecting fall guys." (TLG, p323)

patsy: fall guy (patsy)

I went out of the door and got out of the building fast. Once a patsy, always a patsy. (TLG, p327)

bim: bimbo

"On account of some lacquered chippie said we used loaded dice. Seems like the bim was one of his sleepy-time girls." (TLG, p346)

sleepy-time girl: hooker; prostitute; possible connotation of girlfriend, however

"On account of some lacquered chippie said we used loaded dice. Seems like the bim was one of his sleepy-time girls." (TLG, p346)

peeper: private detective; dick; shamus; etc.

"A two-bit peeper," Menendez said slowly, "thinks he can make a monkey out of Mendy Menendez." (TLG, p347)

"Shove it, Mac. When I want to get told how to talk English I won't go to no beat-up California peeper." (PB, p95)

shyster: lawyer

"What a talkative lad he is," Ohls said, "when he doesn't have three shysters with him to button his lip." (TLG, p348)

palooka: ? (connotation of chump or loser; somebody not respected?)

"I said, 'I ain't got all night to be sittin' here gassing, so go polish your buttons and let me be on my way, you fat palooka,' I said." (ATM-F)

"If you were smacked down in the sixth or any other round by a palooka like Kid Cooper, it'd make me peevish." (RH, p 74)

loose woman: slut; easy woman

"If you think a bottle of champagne will make a loose woman out of me, I can assure you that you are very much mistaken." (TLG, p358)

son of a gun: piece of work, etc.

"You're a son of a gun, Sammy," he said. (TMF, p116.)

smart little egg: a fool; dupe; idiot

"The first guess is always right. I had myself talked out of it. Boy, did I open up to you... Boy, am I a smart little egg!" (TLL p45)

dumb onion: a fool; dupe; idiot; etc.

"If I'd been going to kill him I'd have done it in here where nobody could have seen it, or waited until he got out of sight of the house. What kind of dumb onion do you take me for?" (RH, p34)

boob: a fool; idiot; etc.

"If a girl's got something that's worth something to somebody, she's a boob if she doesn't collect." (RH, p35)

trick: (akin to "dish"?) a girl; or the girl and her personality together, i.e. her act

"Anybody ever tell you you're a cute little trick?" The eyes behind the rimless cheaters flashed. "I should hope not." (TLS, p7)

item: girl (akin to "dish"?)

I'm sitting in that office, playing with a dead fly and in pops this dowdy little item from Manhattan, Kansas and chisels me down to a shopworn twenty to find her brother. (TLS, p80)

floozy: woman, with connotation of being cheap or easy; a low-class woman

"He got himself all jammed up with a floozy and a bottle of hooch and what he's done looks to him as if he's stolen the bishop's pants." (TLS, p14)

rooster: man who picks a fight, or somebody who carries himself like a rooster; confrontational

His hand fumbled at the back of his collar and light winked on metal as his arm swept toward me. He was a game little rooster. (TLS, p19)

fast girl: easy or loose women; painted women; party girls

"I suppose you really prefer fast girls," she said, looking up at me sideways. "At least you won't have to wipe off any lip rouge." (TLS, p41)

gunman: thug; killer; one who carries a gun

"At least," the Gonzales said smoothly as she pulled the door open again, "I haven't been sleeping with any gumen lately." (TLS, p73)

redhot: gangster; one wanted by the cops

"The day a character named Steelegrave was in jail because the cops got a tip he was a Cleveland redhot named Weepy Moyer." (TLS, p119)

joker: wise guy; smartass

"Jokers like this character here keep us tuned up." (TLS, p169)

big money: a high roller; somebody with money to burn

"We've got the big money, the sharp shooters, the percentage workers, the fast-dollar boys, the hoodlums out of New York, Chicago, and Detroit-- and Cleveland." (TLS, p183)

sharp shooter: a high roller; somebody with money to burn

Ibid.

percentage worker: somebody angling for a take; somebody with a piece of the action

Ibid.

fast-dollar boy: somebody out to make a quick buck; connotation of illicitly

Ibid.

ham: actor

"No, I got to see a picture. There's a ham by the name of Jack Christolf I've got to talk to tomorrow night, and I've got to see his picture." (DI, p92)

...like a ham blacking himself all over to play Othello. (SAM, p6)

croaker: physician (HB)

fish: prisoner (HB)

foreign talent: crooks from other cities (HB)

noble: boss strike-breaker (HB)

yegg: tough character (HB); also, a professional burglar or, especially, safecracker (NOAD)

"These racketeers are a new type. We think about them the way we think about old time yeggs or needled-up punks." (FML, p253)

redcap: porter at a railway station

I went out through the arches to where a redcap was waiting by the taxi starter. (PB, p8)

pigeon: prey; person being tailed; person of interest

"Cab No. 423," I said. "That check?" "That's your pigeon. What now?" (PB, p14)

hooper: dancer? recent escapee from prison? Somebody on the run?

"The walls here are as thin as a hooper's wallet." (PB, p27)

goof: (goof)

"Get on with it, you goof. I've heard all about you." (PB, p5)

hunk of beef: handsome man (sometimes derogatory); male specimen

"And who is this hunk of beef, baby?" (PB, p31)

mudhead: ??

"Breeze off. You bore me. Mudheads always bore me." (PB, p35)

smart cookie: (smart cookie)

"I just knew I'd picked a smart cookie," he said unpleasantly. (PB, p40)

butter and egg man: sugar daddy; implication is one fairly free with his money

"Then you tore your blouse at me, ha, ha, ha, cynical as a Park Avenue pet after her butter and egg man goes home." (PB, p55)

"A newspaper report only a year later said *sugar daddy* had been replaced on Broadway by *big butter and egg man*, a prosperous farmer or rich small-town citizen who came to New York and tried embarrassingly hard to be a playboy. It was created in 1924..." (see WWW2)

pet: mistress

Ibid.

gumshoe: detective; dick; shamus; peeper; etc.

"Don't call me 'sister,' you cheap gumshoe!" (PB, p67)

moocher: (moocher); one who mooches

"He throws big parties, but the guests come from out of town unless they're moochers, no-goods, the usual trash you always find hopping about where there's money." (PB, p97)

no-good: somebody who is no good; low class; etc.

Ibid.

hood: hoodlum; crook; etc.

"You don't know these hoods that have made theirs and gone respectable." (PB, p97)

skipout: freeloader; one who leaves without paying the check

"We have our organization to take care of skipouts," he said. "They happen-- in any hotel." (PB, p107)

smooth operator: (smooth operator)

He nodded briefly and strolled away through the arch, back straight, shoulders back, chin in, a hard lean well set-up piece of man. A smooth operator. (PB, p108)

smooth article: sharp; said of somebody as a form of praise or approval

I decided Mr. Henry Clarendon IV was a pretty smooth article. (PB, p116)

rough customer: tough; violent; (tough customer)

"He drank a couple bottles of hooch a day and I heard he was a pretty rough customer. He had one daughter, Miss Patricia Hellwig. She was the real cream and still is." (PB, p128)

real cream: a good person; of a good nature

Ibid.

lifetaker: murderer

"I walked into it. No complaints. This guy's a lifetaker. I'm lucky. I'm still breathing." (PB, p138)

punks: people, generically, or low-lives

"Well so long, punks. I gotta catch a street car." (FML, p14)

"We're just two punks, Frank." (PRT, p86)

torch / torch singer: singer who specializes in singing torch songs (songs of unrequited love)

"What did the girl do before she married Eddie Mars?" "Torcher." (TBS, p125)

AN ANNOTATED REVERSE-LOOKUP GLOSSARY OF HARD-BOILED SLANG

The big new handsome radio in the corner whispered of dancing and love with a deep soft throbbing note like the catch in a torch singer's voice. (FML, p30)

dimwit: (dimwit)

"Shut up, you dimwit," I said, and stopped talking to myself. (FML, p63)

half-wit: (half-wit)

His ears stood out like red wings, and his round red face usually wore the meaningless smirk of a half-wit. (RH, p116)

he-man: (he-man) a macho guy; toughness/machismo

"I get it. You ask the answers. He-man stuff. I was looking at a man." (FML, p69)

steeplejack: person who works on smokestacks, towers, or steeples (climbing them for painting, repairs, construction, etc.)

"I think it was Walter Bagehot. He was talking about a steeplejack." (TLG, p93)

sandhog: digger; miner

"This bird is named Stoyanoffsky and he lives in Hemet and he just got through working as a sandhog on the San Jack tunnel." (FML, p86)

pansy: (pansy) weakling; pushover

"I hardly knew him. I thought he was a bit of a pansy. I didn't like him very well." (FML, p95)

run: person? runt? thug?

"What must have happened is that some gowed-up run they took along for a gun-holder lost his head." (FML, p96)

fakeloo artist: con man; faker; liar; pretender; deceiver

A fakeloo artist, a hoopla spreader, and a lad who had his card rolled up inside sticks of tea, found on a dead man. (FML, p104)

hoopla spreader: con man; faker; liar; pretender; deceiver

Ibid.

hot boy: somebody on the run; somebody wanted by the law; somebody in hiding

"A man named Sonderborg has been running a hideout there. He has been running reefers and stickups and hiding hot boys." (FML, p266)

toughie: tough guy

"I forgot the first time. Then I knew that toughie in the mess jacket would never let me on." (FML, p267)

torpedo: tough guy; "nice-tough" guy

The door at the back opened and one of the nice-tough guys came in... The torpedo sat down and smiled at me calmly. (FML, p269)

bad hat: criminal; bad actor; con man

"As for Amthor, he's a bad hat. They picked him up in a New York hotel and they say he's an international con man." (FML, p287)

newshawk: reporter

So every cop and newshawk in the country looked in all the places where money might be hiding her. (FML, p289)

lady of the night: prostitute

There were men from mines and smelters still in their working clothes, gaudy boys from pool rooms and dance halls, sleek men with slick pale faces, men with the dull look of respectable husbands, a few just as respectable and dull women, and a few ladies of the night. (RH, p6)

wobbly: laborer; worker (connotation of hard labor/blue collar) (??)

The strike lasted eight months. Both sides bled plenty. The wobblies had to do their own bleeding. Old Elihu hired gunmen, strike-breakers, national guardsmen and even parts of the regular army, to do his. (RH, p9)

chump: (chump)

"Don't be a chump," I interrupted his bawling. "Why should she kill him?" "Because she's a French hussy!" (RH, p14)

hussy: (hussy)

Ibid.

rowdy (n.): troublemaker; a belligerent person [noun derived from adjective?]

"A fine old rowdy," I growled. "A remarkably vital personality," he murmured. (RH, p17)

gold digger: (gold digger)

"A soiled dove, as the fellow says, a de luxe hustler, a big-league gold-digger." (RH, p22)

down-and-outer: sad sack; hard luck case; somebody on their way out (as with illness) (?)

"He's a down-and-outer -- t.b. He lives with her. She keeps him." (RH, p28)

lunger: somebody with t.b. or respiratory problems

This, I thought, is the lunger Dan Rolff. (RH, p31)

husky: (husky)

The secretary came in with the chauffeur, a tall sunburned young husky. (RH, p48)

wrecking crew: gang or group of heavies, specifically with the purpose of beating somebody up

The chief jerked a thumb at MacSwain and said: "Take this baby down cellar and let the wrecking crew work on him before you lock him up." (RH, p 99)

hanky-panky: a woman easily used and tossed aside; cheap thrill; somebody easy

"Now he was giving her the air for this Myrtle. I wasn't going to stand for that. Helen wasn't no hanky-panky." (RH, p113)

bozo: (bozo)

"He's the bozo that put the knife in Ike Bush the night of the fight." (RH, p119)

plug: thug; pug; toughie; palooka; etc.

"Who were the uninvited guests?" "Some plugs that don't know enough to leave me alone." (RH, p136)

croaker: doctor or nurse

"Your Dan Rolff pulled a sneak from the hospital sometime after midnight last night. The croakers are kind of steamed up about it." (RH, p172)

flunky: (flunky)

"Send the flunky away so we can talk. You won't need him. I'm not going to hurt you." (RH, p201)

hop-head: dooper; drug addict; one who takes drugs (one who gets hopped up)

"I got an idea maybe it wasn't straight dreaming so much as hop-head nightmares stirred up by the things that were happening around me." (RH, p213)

trollop: (trollop)

"And when I began to talk, up there on the screen, they knew me for what I was, and so did I. A cheap Des Moines trollop, that has as much chance in the pictures as a monkey has." (PRT, p14)

hell cat: wild woman

AN ANNOTATED REVERSE-LOOKUP GLOSSARY OF HARD-BOILED SLANG

"God, do I look like a little white bird?" "To me, you look more like a hell cat." ... "Oh, all right, I'm a hell cat, then. But I don't think I would be so bad. With somebody that wasn't greasy." (PRT, p15)

finger man: one who fingers, as for the mob, such as an informant; alternatively, one who identifies others, such as unreliable people who must be murdered

...in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob. (SAM, p17)

wheel: an important or powerful person, somebody who can throw weight around (perhaps a shortened form of "big wheel," as per definition 2 in NOAD)

"A few days later Edwin Delastone was found shot to death--nobody seems to know exactly why--and his father, a local wheel, managed to get it hushed up as suicide..." (TA, p142)

(heavy) sugar daddy: sugar daddy

"A daddy is a good thing, and when the daddy is a very good thing indeed, he becomes a sugar-coated daddy, as vide recent stories in which unfortunate vamps of Broadway appeared as the victims of murder. When a vamp gets a sugar-coated daddy she puts him on the merry-go-round until his money has spilled. Some say he goes through the separator. But Broadway slang is of the day only." (WWW2)

DRINKING / DRUGS / DRUG USE

Mickey Finn (mickey): a surreptitiously adulterated drink (or the drug added to the drink to make it so) given to somebody for the purpose of rendering them insensible or unconscious (NOAD).

siphon: a water bottle, for making scotch and soda

The fat man began to fill two glasses from bottle and siphon. (TMF, p105.)

tight: tipsy; drunk; feeling no pain; not completely blitzed, but pleasantly sozzled [also used in British English, ca. 1940s, per BF]

"And stop talking to me as if I was twelve." "It's not that," I explained. "I'm getting tight." (TTM, p13.)

"I'm afraid I was tight last night," he said. "And very objectionable, I'm afraid. I apologise unreservedly." (BF, p176.)

snoutful: drink; booze; connotation being enough booze to get "tight"

"There'll be some coffee in a little while. Where'd you get the snoutful?" (TTM, p18.)

drunk as a lord: very, very drunk

Quinn was drunk as a lord... (TTM, p110.)

cokie: coke-head; cocaine addict

...cokies and coke peddlers... (THW, p 71)

reefer: pot; joint

The wall bed with the usual distorting mirror faced me as I opened the door and made me look like a two-time loser sneaking home from a reefer party. (THW, p 73)

"Maybe you don't like the reefer smoke." (TLS, p29)

"It looked funny, him -- Marriott -- having that extra case. With the reefers in it." (FML, p196)

weed: pot

"A claim check for a suitcase full of weed." (TLS, p175)

"You were in a Packard right over there" -- I pointed -- "and I went over and opened the door and sniffed the weed." (PB, p102)

pony glass: drinking glass of some sort?

I unlocked my deep drawer and got out my office bottle and two pony glasses. (TBS, p60)

hootch: booze; liquor

"Geiger was dead and Carmen would have to find some other shady character to drink exotic blends of hootch with." (TBS, p128.)

loaded: spiked; stiffened; adulterated

"We sipped our loaded coffee." (TBS, p147)

dip the bill: have a drink

"Fine. Let's dip the bill. Got a glass?" (TBS, p174)

lush: (lush; drunk)

"Can I go on being a son of a bitch, or do I have to become a gentleman, like that lush passed out in his car the other night?" (TBS, p228)

jammed: intoxicated; tight; bolognied; pie-eyed; piffled; shot; shellacked; canned; out like a light; stewed to the hat; potted; jiggered; tanked

"A friend of Harry's we met there was the darbs, and after that we drifted to a couple of the clubs, and both the boys got beautifully shellacked." "Shellacked! I don't understand."

"Jammed, both of them." (WWW1)

"He got himself all jammed up with a floozy and a bottle of hooch and what he's done looks to him as if he's stolen the bishop's pants." (TLS, p14)

gin mill: bar; speakeasy?; drinking establishment; night club

"He dragged me into every gin mill on the block." (TTM-F)

swish: soda water(?); a drink

There was a silk Oriental rug in front of a nice rose davenport, in front of the nice fire, and in beside that there was Scotch and swish on a tabouret, ice in a bucket, everything to make a man feel at home. (TMB, p15)

hooch: liquor; booze; etc.

"Maybe I'd better have another finger of the hooch," she said. (TMB, p80)

"He got himself all jammed up with a floozy and a bottle of hooch and what he's done looks to him as if he's stolen the bishop's pants." (TLS, p14)

junked up/junked to the eyes/etc: high

"Will you go out now, before he gets junked up for the evening?" (TMB, p120)

"The night man was junked to the eyes. Harmless as a kitten." (PB, p62)

coke-hound: cocaine addict

"They saw you somewhere, and Peeler recognized you. He got to thinking how he could make himself some jack. But he was a coke-hound and talked in his sleep." (TMB, p152)

gargle: drink

"We'll go to my place and gargle. I don't like it here." (TMB, p142)

gill: drink

The brunette unwound her legs and made two drinks with soda and ice. She took herself another gill without trimmings, wound herself back on the davenport. (TMB, p199)

plastered: drunk

You could tell by his eyes that he was plastered to the hairline, but otherwise he looked like any other nice young guy in a dinner jacket who had been spending too much money in a joint that exists for that purpose and not other. (TLG, p3)

stinko: drunk; tight; blotto

"Can you make it? Are you stinko?" (TLG, p9)

I did that night what I had done the other two nights, while I was waiting on the inquest, I got stinko, or tried to. I knocked off a quart of cognac, but it didn't have any effect. (DI, p68)

"Sure, I was drunk. I was stinko." (PRT, p55)

iced: drunk

"Sylvia dead drunk, paralyzed, splifficated, iced to the eyebrows," I said harshly. (TLG, p30)

juice: booze

It was the same old cocktail party, everybody talking too loud, nobody listening, everybody hanging on for dear life to a mug of juice, eyes very bright, cheeks flushed or pale and sweaty according to the amount of alcohol consumed and the capacity of the individual to handle it. (TLG, p171)

stiff: drunk; plastered; very similar to "tight"

Either I would get really stiff or stay sober. (TLG, p335)

slug: a shot of liquor; a large swallow of booze

I got the office bottle out of the deep drawer and poured a slug and then got the phone book off the hook at the desk and looked up the number of the *Journal*. (TLG, p329)

muggle-smoker/muggle: pothead; druggie

"Desk clerk's a muggle-smoker." (TLS, p242)

"Just one more question. How in hell do you get away with it? The muggles, I mean." He looked around. "I only smoke when I feel extra special low." (PB, p103)

bindle-stiff: victim of a drug overdose

"They were just as dead as any of the score or more 'bindle-stiffs' I had found in the jungles," White wrote. He used the term "bindle-stiff," slang for the victim of a drug overdose, to give the impression that he'd seen scores of corpses, and he had... (BGP, p64)

bindle: small quantity of narcotics (HB)

skinful: a lot to drink; too much too drink; drink to excess

"Take it easy, Larry. You've got a skinful." (PB, p47)

snort: sip; swig

"There's a pint in the glove compartment. Want a snort?" (PB, p87)

nibble / nibble one: drink / have a drink

"I'm feelin' good," he said. "I wouldn't want anybody to fuss with me. Let's you and me go on up and maybe nibble a couple." (FML, p6)

"Yeah," he said. "Let's you and me nibble one." (FML, p10)

dead soldier: empty bottle

I held up the dead soldier and shook it. Then I threw it to one side and reached back on my hip for the pint of bond bourbon the Negro hotel clerk and I had barely tapped. (FML, p28)

juju: joint

"I knew a guy once who smoked jujus," she said. "Three highballs and three ticks of tea and it took a pipe wrench to get him off the chandelier." (FML, p73)

(stick of) tea: joint

Ibid.

So they were evidence. Evidence of what? That a man occasionally smoked a stick of tea, a man who looked as if any touch of the exotic would appeal to him. (FML, p99)

gowed-up: high? drunk?

"What must have happened is that some gowed-up run they took along for a gun-holder lost his head." (FML, p96)

(two-day) liquor cure: private clinic for curing alcoholism or addiction; connotation of being very quiet/private, and/or shady; a place used for discretion; also shady, because of the promise of a weekend cure

"You sit there and tell me that after the man had you beaten up by a couple of crooked policemen and thrown in a two-day liquor cure to teach you to mind your own business?" (FML, p186)

dope hospital: clinic for treating addiction; SEE ALSO "liquor cure"

"I've been thrown unconscious into this dope hospital and kept there locked up and part of the time probably strapped down." (FML, p195)

doper: one who takes dope; drug user; addict

"What did he look like?" "Like a doper, and a dope peddler." (FML, p202)

dope peddler: drug dealer

Ibid.

pie-eyed: stupefied; also, very drunk

Randall was pie-eyed. His mouth moved, but nothing came out of it. (FML, p217)

needled-up: high; addicted to drugs

"We think about them the way we think about old time yeggs or needled-up punks." (FML, p253)

hooker: portion; glass; a measurement of drink? or a vessel?

I poured out a couple hookers of gin. She went into the kitchen for another siphon and some ice. (RH, p88)

hopped up: (hopped up) high; tripping; drugged; etc.

"I was all hopped up that night, and had a lot of dreams..." (RH, p213)

hop-head: doper; drug addict; one who takes drugs (one who gets hopped up)

"I got an idea maybe it wasn't straight dreaming so much as hop-head nightmares stirred up by the things that were happening around me." (RH, p213)

coked / coked to the edges: high; drugged; tripping; on drugs

"You gallop out, coked to the edges, charging at the whole world with both eyes shut." (RH, p215)

WEAPONS / VIOLENCE

iron: bullets

"Keep on riding me and you're going to be picking iron out of your navel." (TMF, p120.)

slug: bullet

"That Webley was his, and the slug in Miles came out of it." (TMF, p 141.)

heater [also: heat]: gun

"You bastard, get on your feet and go for your heater!" (TMF, p180.)

fog: shoot; riddle with bullets

"Make him lay off me then. I'm going to fog him if he keeps it up and there won't be anything that'll stop me from doing it." (TMF, p181.)

heeled: packing; carrying a gun

"You better watch your step," I said. "The guy's heeled. Or pretends to be." (THW, p50)

gat: gun

"You're the second guy I've met within hours who seems to think that a gat in the hand means a world by the tail." (TBS, p79)

"Gimme my gat," Frisky yelped. (TMB, p22)

"Just before he gets back in his car he takes a big gat out and spins the chamber." (FML, p43)

pop: shoot

"Put some light on so I can pop this guy, if it turns out this way." (TBS, p80)

rubbing: killing

"I'd hate to have to help send him to the deathhouse for rubbing that skunk." (TBS, p104)

bump off: kill

"He'd bump a guy off between drinks. " (TBS, p166)

sock: (sock) hit

"You didn't ever get socked in the kisser, did you?" the gaunt man asked me briefly. (TBS, p185)

AN ANNOTATED REVERSE-LOOKUP GLOSSARY OF HARD-BOILED SLANG

"So you get out and walk down into the hollow, see and hear nothing, wait a few minutes, come back to the car and then somebody in the car socks you on the back of the head." (FML, p80-81).

"Come here, before I sock you." (PRT, p28)

Chicago overcoat: coffin [*definition from Erika Chappell, via email 16 May 2019*]

"Go ahead and blast and see what it gets you." "A Chicago overcoat is what it would get you." (TBS, p174)

bust up (the) furniture: have a fight

If that didn't produce for me -- and I didn't think it would -- nature could take its course and we could bust up the furniture. (TLL, p105)

slug: hit

"You say you were slugged. You mean knocked unconscious?" (TLL, p235)

So I kissed her. It was either that or slug her. (TLS, p40)

slug: bullet; round

"Quit cold, with a slug in his head." (TMB, p33)

smack: punch

"How would you care for a smack in the kisser?" (TMB, p33)

"I thought you were going to say something else," he said. "And if you said it, I was going to smack you on the button." (FML, p192)

rodded: carrying a gun (rod)

"See if he's rodded, beef." (TMB, p38)

pinked: shot; killed; knocked off; (from Pinkertoned?)

"Too bad he got pinked. I'd like to wrestle him a bit." (TMB, p58)

rod: gun (heater, etc.)

"Uh-huh. I think I'm going to be lucky -- and I'd like to have a guy with a rod." (TMB, p63)

"I can prove I'm a dick. You're an ex-con and it's a felony just having that rod." (TMB, p154)

"I was there and saw, didn't I? Don't you pack no rod?" (FML, p17)

scratch: kill; knock over

"Which one of you heels scratched the guy at West Cimmaron last night?" (TMB, p105)

iron: gun

"But you're all washed up now, you and your big smile. Hoist the mitts while I get your iron. Up, mister." (TMB, p155)

slugs: bullets

"Get the slugs out of Waldo?" (TMB, p185)

rolled: mugged

He hadn't mentioned the girl again. Also, he hadn't mentioned that he had no job and no prospects and that almost his last dollar had gone into paying the check at The Dancers for a bit of high class fluff that couldn't stick around long enough to make sure he didn't get tossed in the sneezer by some prowl car boys or rolled by a tough hackie and dumped out in a vacant lot. (TLG, p7)

mauler: brass knuckles

He looked surprisingly down at his hand. He slipped the mauler off and threw it casually in the corner. (TLG, p144)

skiv: shiv; knife; blade; instrument for shanking

"Never mind about the heater," he said. "The town's full of old iron. But you could leave the skiv with Clausen. I've done quite a bit of work on it to get it in shape." (TLS, p20)

typewriter: machine-gun (HB)

(swift) poke: punch, etc.

"Did anybody ever give you a swift poke in the nose?" (PB, p124)

twist (one's) neck: choke; strangle; murder

"All the time this Malloy was twisting the neck of this smoke." (FML, p17)

conk: (conk, as on the head) hit; knock somebody out; hit over the head

"I'm getting a hundred dollars for doing nothing. If anybody gets conked, it ought to be me." (FML, p56)

sap (n.) / to sap (v.) : (sap)

Whoever it was had a nice easy shot at the back of my head. Afterwards I thought I might have heard the swish of a sap. Maybe you always think that -- afterwards. (FML, p62)

drill: shoot; fill with bulletholes

"Move and I'll drill you!" she snapped. (FML, p70)

dry-gulch: ambush; surprise; sneak attack or attack from behind (as with a sap)

"So I went down there on foot and while I was down there they must have stuck him up. Then one of them got into the car and dry-gulched me." (FML, p75)

brass knuckles: (brass knuckles)

It was a nice face, a face you get to like. Pretty, but not so pretty that you would have to wear brass knuckles every time you took it out. (FML, p87)

push in the face: shoot? stick a gun in one's face?

"Chauffeurs are not getting themselves pushed in the face with lead bullets by holdup men -- for ninety a month." (FML, p197)

bat: hit; bash; smash; conk; smack; etc.

"Everybody bats you over the head and chokes you and smacks your jaw and fills you with morphine, but you just keep right on hitting between tackle and end until they're all worn out." (FML, p288)

smack: hit; bash; bat; smash; conk; etc.

Ibid.

smacked down: knocked out; KO'd

"If you were smacked down in the sixth or any other round by a palooka like Kid Cooper, it'd make me peevish." (RH, p 74)

gun-play: (gunplay) shootout; gunfire; violence with firearms

"We could crash the place, but that'd mean gun-play, and it's just as well to take it easy." (RH, p48)

stretch: (somebody's neck) hang somebody, or hang the pinch on them; execute somebody

"If what the Willsson dame give us ain't enough to stretch him I'm a pickpocket." (RH, p48)

drop: kill; possibly also knock down, put out for the count, etc.

"You dropped Big Nick," he said. (RH, p54)

mill: a (big) fight; a boxing match

"He flops at the Maxwell on Union Street. I guess maybe he's there now, resting up for the mill." (RH, p72)

croak: kill; murder

"He was in on the Keystone Trust knock-over in Philly two years ago, when Scissors Haggerty's mob croaked two messengers." (RH, p72)

wrecking crew: gang or group of heavies, specifically with the purpose of beating somebody up

The chief jerked a thumb at MacSwain and said: "Take this baby down cellar and let the wrecking crew work on him before you lock him up." (RH, p 99)

And, as much as Noonan hated the gambler, here was a prisoner he didn't give the works, didn't turn over to the wrecking crew. (RH, p109)

throw lead: shoot

A load of coppers buzzed past, throwing lead at the first car. (RH, p111)

plug: shoot

"Stop, or I'll plug you, MacSwain." (RH, p111)

put a knife in: stab, or throw a knife at (into) somebody

"He's the bozo that put the knife in Ike Bush the night of the fight." (RH, p119)

pot: shoot

"We just had the three of them, except Buck Wallace, the fellow you potted." (RH, p119)

mill: machine gun

"Tell him to set up his mill and start grinding." (RH, p122)

ice / put on ice: kill

"Reno seems to have had the right dope, because I notice that right now he's holding down a chair that would have been Lew Yard's if Lew hadn't been put on ice." (RH, p 149)

pills: bullets

"You never saw anybody that was deader. Must have had thirty pills pumped in him." (RH, p153)

poke: punch

"I poked his jaw, leaning my hundred and ninety pounds on the poke." (RH, p175)

crack (v.): break

"You after getting your kneecap cracked?" (RH, p200)

tangle: fight; dust-up; etc.

"Reno and Pete the Finn tangled tonight. Hear anything about it?" (RH, p205)

blackjack: (blackjack)

She was to wait till she heard him in the tub, go in for a towel, and clip him from behind with a blackjack I had made for her out of a sugar bag with ball bearings wadded down in the end. (PRT, p18)

clip: hit; conk; smash; wallop; etc.

Ibid.

slungshot: blackjack (possibly w/ connotation of being improvised); cosh

"What did you do with that slungshot?" "I still got it here, in the pocket of my dress." "God Almighty, if they had arrested you back there, and searched you, we'd have been sunk." (PRT, p23)

rap: hit (to); injury; knock (to)

That rap on the conk cost him \$322, believe it or not. (PRT, p35)

crown: hit on the head; smash somebody over the head; crack somebody's skull, etc

"And while you were stopped, you crowned the Greek with one of the wine bottles." (PRT, p61)

hang (one) (on somebody's jaw, etc.): hit somebody; punch somebody (e.g. on the jaw)

"Next time I try to act smart, will you hang one on my jaw?" (PRT, p103)

artillery: guns; weaponry

"All right, boys. I'll show you out. We'll keep the artillery here." (PRT, p104)

Nevada gas: cyanide

(title of a Raymond Chandler short story reprinted in SAM, p329)

GREETINGS / GOODBYES / GET LOSTS / GENERIC ADDRESSES

bite an egg: take breakfast; eat with me

"Morning, Sam. Set down and bite an egg." (TMF, p135.)

how's tricks?: a greeting, akin to "How's it going?:

He clapped Spade on the shoulder with a freckled hand, asked, "How's tricks?" (TMF, p 144.)

sister: girl, in the sense of "my friend"; very casual and informal address to a woman

"You're a damned good man, sister." (TMF, p160.)

"Boydie-boy to you, sister." (PB, p67)

(go) jump in a (the) lake: get lost; take a hike; etc.

"...the D.A. will tell you to go jump in the lake..." (TTM, p133)

blow: leave

I touched her arm. "Let's blow." (TTM, p148)

"Have to blow," he said. "Sorry. I'm kind of behind schedule." (PB, p39)

drift/take the air/scram/beat it/push off: get lost

"Beat it," he said. "Drift." He started to close the door. He opened it again to say: "Take the air. Scram. Push off." (THW, p76)

what's the damage: what's going on? what's happening?

A man grabbed me by the arm and asked:"What's the damage, Jack?" (THW, p95)

Jack: buddy; pal; hey-you

Ibid.

"Cop?" "Private." He grinned. "My meat, Jack." (TBS, p53)

Mac: buddy/pal/hey you/generic monniker

"I say suicide, Mac. None of my business, but you ask me, I say suicide." (TBS, p47)

"Shove it, Mac. When I want to get told how to talk English I won't go to no beat-up California peeper." (PB, p95)

dust: take a hike/get lost/drift/etc.

"The girl can dust. I'd like to talk to you a little, soldier." (TBS, p69)

soldier: buddy/pal/hey you/Mac/etc.

Ibid.

brother: buddy/Mac/hey you/etc.

"We've done all we could, brother." (TBS, p125)

go climb up your thumb: beat it; shove it; move along

"Go climb up your thumb, wise guy. You'd have to prove I paid the freight, or it wouldn't mean anything." (TLL, p23)

beat it: get lost; scam; dust; etc.

"You're a pretty level guy, Marlowe." "Go on, beat it," I said. "Go away. Go far away." (TLL, p198)

breeze (off): take off; leave quickly; scam; etc...

"She had to breeze and that meant she had something to breeze from, such as murder." (TLL, p225)

"Breeze off. You bore me. Mudheads always bore me." (PB, p35)

take off: (take off)

"Take off, buster," he said coldly. "You annoy me." (PB, p149)

What's the score?: what's going on; what's up; etc.

"Say, what is the score anyway?" (TTM-F)

beat it: get lost; leave; dust; scam

"Beat it while you can still walk," he sneered at me.

dangle: beat it; get lost; leave; dust; scam

"Dangle, before I knock your teeth down your throat." (TMB, p18)

He put his glass down empty. "Let's dangle." (TMB, p136)

pal: buddy; friend (pal)

"Miss Huntress gave me a bottle. We're pals." (TMB, p43)

"Next time, pal, I'll think of something original-- but you did all right. You really did." (PB, p140)

pally: same as "pal", but with connotation of sarcasm

AN ANNOTATED REVERSE-LOOKUP GLOSSARY OF HARD-BOILED SLANG

"You can quite stalling now." I opened my eyes and sat up. "Out in the other room, pally." ... "Sit here, pally." ... "You got fun, pally?" (FML, p158)

beat it: leave; get lost; dust; etc.

"Yeah, O.K., you can beat it for now." (TMB, p58)

nuts to you: go to hell (mild)

"Thanks for the ride, and apart from that, nuts to you." (TMB, p59)

toots: guy; lady; generic address for either gender

"Damn you," I mumbled. "I believe you would." "Right as rain, toots." (TMB, p132)

bo: generic address; guy; jack; pal; etc.

"But don't make no error, bo. It's goin' to take pressure." (TMB, p139)

hot shot: jack; pal; etc.

"Okey, hot shot," she said dryly. "Ceiling zero. See if you can reach it." (TMB, p140)

chum: pal; buddy; etc.

"Price tag? There's always a price, chum. You think I'm not happy, maybe?" (TLG, p19)

He smiled faintly. "Just because I can't print it don't mean I didn't know it, chum. So long. See you around." (TLG, p69)

"Very limited. Get the idea, chum?" (TLS, p88)

"Listen, chum. You were hired to do a job. Better do it and do it right." (PB, p12)

doll: girl; dame; dish; etc.

"Who's the doll?" he sneered. (TLG, p168)

turn blue: get lost; beat it; dust; etc.

"Beat it! Turn blue. You want a knife in the belly?" (TLG, p297)

bub: guy; jack; pal; etc.

"You ain't getting no place with that breezy manner, bub." (TLS, p28)

make with the feet: get lost; scam; beat it; dust; breeze; etc.

"On your way, dreamboat. Make with the feet." (TLS, p73)

park the body: sit down

"What's on the thinker, pal? Park the body. Cigarette?" (TLS, p109)

go spit in your hat: get lost; go jump in a lake; breeze; dust; etc.

Mitchell laughed angrily. "Why don't you go spit in your hat, mister?" (PB, p47)

go fry a stale egg: get lost; go jump in a lake; etc.

I lit a cigarette and blew smoke in his face. "Go fry a stale egg." (PB, p94)

shove it: (shove it)

"Shove it, Mac. When I want to get told how to talk English I won't go to no beat-up California peeper." (PB, p95)

go kiss a duck: get lost; go to hell; go jump in a lake; etc.

"I have a suggestion for you, Mr. Umney. Why don't you go kiss a duck?" There were sounds of strangled fury as I hung up on him. (PB, p166)

baby: bub/Jack/doll/pal/sister etc. (male or female)

"Why as me, baby?" (FML, p236)

go climb a tree: get lost; beat it; go jump in a lake; etc.

"He can go climb trees for all I care, the lousy little runt." (RH, p81)

chief: pal; buddy; jack; etc.

"Give me a chance, chief." ... "Thanks, chief. Thanks, thanks." (RH, p176)

so long: (so long)

"So long, Miss." "So long." (PRT, p25)

kid: (kid) pal; jack; buddy; etc.

"You're on, kid." (PRT, p66)

POLICEWORK / JAIL / CRIME

bull: cop

"With every bull in town working overtime to pile up grief for me a little more won't hurt."
(TMF, p 141.)

harness bull / harness cop: uniformed police officer [*per the Wikipedia entry for "Sam Browne belt," retrieved July 23, 2023, this term arose in the post-WWI era as such belts became nearly ubiquitous for American police uniforms*]

"The phone on the desk rang before I could say anything. The harness cop jumped up to answer it but Fontaine waved him away..." (TA, p 40.)

Note also the Leslie White novel titled *Harness Bull*, cited in this glossary as HB

up the river: in jail; behind bars; caught by the police

"I haven't seen him since the time he went up the river in '23 or '24." (TTM, p31)

pinch: arrest; finger; nab; collar; also, catch red-handed

"It would serve me right if you had pinched me." (TTM, p90.)

"It's a swell pinch and I'm giving it to you," I said. (TMB, p184)

If he gets pinched with a girl in a hotel room, stop sexual intercourse. (TLG, p351)

hang a pinch: lay a charge on; accuse; indict; assign prosecutable blame to

"After that I guess you can go home. That is, if he doesn't hang a pinch on you." (TLS, p219)

"Maybe he knows something that could hang a pinch on her without opening up the other box of candy." (PB, p71)

copped: surprised (with)?; nabbed?; possibly revealed or caught

"The chances are they've copped Jorgensen and she wants to know if it can be fixed." (TTM, p93.)

"Our friend Nunheim was filled full of .32s just about an hour after he copped a sneak on us." (TTM, p105.)

"The rest of them got copped, but he made the sneak." (RH, p72)

buzzer: badge; identification

I flipped my wallet open on her desk and let her look at the buzzer pinned to the flap. (TBS, p28)

"I showed him a buzzer. He looked at the buzzer. He wasn't impressed." (TMB, p12.)

"If you're a cop, let's see the buzzer." (PB, p102)

buttons: cops

"I give up," I said. "Better call your friends downtown." "I don't get it," he snapped. "I don't get your game here." "Go ahead, call the buttons. You'll get a big reaction from it." (TBS, p72)

It was about three blocks from my office building that I saw a cop car double-parked and the two buttons in it staring at something over by a shop window on the sidewalk. (TLG, p9)

clubhouse: police station

"So come on, talk it up. Unless you want to ride down to the clubhouse and sweat it out under the bright lights." (TLL, p31)

floaters: corpses in the water; people dead by drowning

"They worked out the system back in New York where they're all the time pulling in floaters." (TLL, p102)

put the arm on: collar; nab

"I want to get out of here," he said at last. "Not very far, maybe, but no hick cop is going to put the arm on me." (TLL, p262)

"Get out before I put the arm on you for interfering with an officer in the performance of his duties." (PB, p150)

stir: jail

"How is Studsy? I didn't know he was out of stir." (TTM-F)

prowl car: police car

"Okey. Drop over to the main drag and snap it up," he said. "But that don't mean trying to sideswipe a prowler car, if you lamp one..." (TMB, p86)

"The prowler-car boys came in about eight minutes." (TMB, p166)

The older of the prowler car boys opened the door to two men in plain clothes, one of whom I already knew. (TLL, p145)

When the prowler car boys stamped up the stairs, the bouncer and the barman had disappeared and I had the place to myself. (FML, p16)

stir-wise: wary of jail or returning to incarceration

"I'll stay under cover. He's too stir-wise for me. I smell of the bucket." (TMB, p139)

bucket: jail

ibid.

sneezer: jail

He hadn't mentioned the girl again. Also, he hadn't mentioned that he had no job and no prospects and that almost his last dollar had gone into paying the check at The Dancers for a bit of high class fluff that couldn't stick around long enough to make sure he didn't get tossed in the sneezer by some prowl car boys or rolled by a tough hackie and dumped out in a vacant lot. (TLG, p7)

"No cure for lads like you, is there?" he said. "Except to throw you in the sneezer." (FML, p192)

drop the hook: nab; apprehend; snatch

It was pretty obvious that the buttons in the prowl car were about ready to drop the hook on him, so I went over there fast and took hold of his arm. (TLG, p9)

drop the arm: arrest; nab; apprehend; snatch

"They can drop the arm on you for shacking up in a hotel in this town. I'll admit it has to be pretty flagrant." (PB, p38)

big house: prison (federal), as opposed to jail (local)

All this stuff you read about men yelling a screaming, beating against the bars, running spoons along them, guards rushing in with clubs -- all that is for the big house. (TLG, p52)

five spot: five years (prison sentence)

"A felony. It rates up to a five-spot in Quentin." (TLG, p62)

rap: conviction; legal entanglement

"You're the kind of wise guy I like to work over. This rap will be hanging over you for a long time, cutie." (TLG, p64)

cold storage: in jail; on ice

"No use to ask me. I've been in cold storage." (TLG, p68)

cooler: jail/in custody

"You sure you want to mix it with a guy who has been in the cooler?" (TLG, p82)

"I guess you knew I'd been in the cooler, Mrs. Wade." (TLG, p102)

"About a year or so back we had him in the cooler on a Mann Act rap." (TBS, p49)

jugged: jailed; incarcerated; nabbed

"Thanks for the plug, but that's not why I got jugged." (TLG, p108)

birdcage: jail

"Would it be all right now if I assumed you were representing Mr. Harlan Potter when you came to see me in the birdcage." (TLG, p366)

splitting (bills/cash): counterfeiting technique

"He was doing twenty-seventh months for splitting twenty dollar bills." (TMB, p119)

jug: jail

"Don't you read the papers?" "I was in the jug." (ATM-F)

squibbed (off): killed

"You made a crack when you were up there that night -- the night Joe got squibbed off." (TBS, p163)

hot: stolen; illicit

"Hey, wait a minute, dope. It's nothing hot like you think. No ice. No emerald pendants." (TLS, p42)

in hock: in jail

Day when the ex-Cleveland gangster was supposed to be in hock at the County Jail, also day when ex-Cleveland gangster's onetime sidekick was shot dead on Franklin Avenue in Los Angeles. (TLS, p146)

fish: prisoner (HB)

foreign talent: crooks from other cities (HB)

show-up: parade of prisoners for observation (HB)

(in the) coop: (in) jail

"...No convictions, but prints on file." "Been in the coop," I said, looking up at Miss Vermilyea. (PB, p6)

stick-up, stickup (v. / n.) : to commit robbery / a robbery

If he had been a smaller man and more quietly dressed, I might have thought he was going to pull a stick-up. But not in those clothes, not in that hat, and that frame. (FML, p4)

"But there couldn't be many stickups with Marriott alone with women or things would get talked about." (FML, p197)

"The First National's been stuck up." (RH, p123)

hang (a) frame on somebody: frame somebody; implicate

"Velma did some warbling. A redhead she was. Cute as lace pants. We was to of been married when they hung the frame on me." (FML, p11)

caboose: jail

"Where you figure I been them eight years I said about?" "Catching butterflies." He prodded his chest with a forefinger like a banana. "In the caboose. Malloy is the name. They call me Moose Malloy on account of I'm large. The Great Bend bank job. Forty grand. Solo job. Ain't that something?" (FML, p12)

copper: cop

"You ain't no copper," she said softly. "No copper ever bought a drink of that stuff." (FML, p28)

K-car (men): police car / police [*Credit to Sforza Hawke for this definition: aetherograph@yahoo.com*]

"And the prowl boys are not supposed to touch him until the K-car men come and they're not supposed to touch him until the coroner's examiner sees him and the photographers have photographed him and the fingerprint man has taken his prints." (FML, p72)

hammer: question; interrogate

"They would suspect some guilty reason and hammer at me until I was a wreck," (FML, p89)

glom: steal; pinch

"We got him in the back of the car." I looked in the back of the car. It was empty. "Hell, he ain't there," the big one said. "Somebody must of glommed him off. You can't leave nothing in a unlocked car any more." (FML, p162)

holdup / holdup men: robbery; stick-up; robbers; men who commit stick-ups

"Chauffeurs are not getting themselves pushed in the face with lead bullets by holdup men -- for ninety a month." (FML, p197)

racket: caper; approach; angle; job, scheme

"What's the racket, bum?" (TMB, p15)

"What's your racket?" I asked him. (TLS, p29)

"I've got nothing to do with Noonan except to queer his racket." (RH, p52)

numbers racket: illegal gambling game/lottery

...and the nice man down the hall is the boss of the numbers racket. (SAM, p17)

grift: con job; illegal job; scheme

"But hell, that's a small time racket. A peanut grift."

grease (v.): bribe

I thought of cops, tough cops that could be greased and yet were not by any means all bad, like Hemingway. (FML, p238)

johns: cops

"The johns tied me to it?" "I don't know." (FML, p275-276)

"The guy pushed hisself off," he said. "Up in 304. Some joker finds him cold and tips off the johns." (TA, p92)

knock-over (n./v.): robbery; to rob (a place)

"He was in on the Keystone Trust knock-over in Philly two years ago, when Scissors Haggerty's mob croaked two messengers." (RH, p72)

hoosegow: jail

"Oh, it's you," he said, as if it made any difference who took him back to the hoosegow. (RH, p111)

screwed up: incarcerated; in jail; in custody

"Noonan had ought to know he'd never keep that guy screwed up -- not in this burg." (RH, p111)

crush-out: breakout; escape

"He's likely all broken up over Whisper's crush-out." (RH, p112)

crack (the jailhouse, etc.): break out of (jail, etc.)

"If his friends try to crack the hoosegow again, thinking he's in it..." (RH, p194)

reader: bulletin; APB?

"Stick around. This is as good a spot as any while there's a reader on you." (RH, p194)

He went back to Headquarters and got out the Wanted file and started through the pile of readers. (FML, p289)

MONEY / VALUABLES / ESTIMATIONS OF VALUE

dough: money

"We ain't been able to find out for sure yet, but we have found out she wasn't the kind of dame you'd expect him to be trusting to handle all that dough..." (TTM, p58.)

"You got the dough," Dorr said. (TMB, p90)

"You know you didn't lift her dough and pretties." (RH, p205)

C-note: hundred-dollar bill

I dumped the lot out on the desk and then picked up the five C-notes. (TLG, p376)

hay: useless scrip/fake bills/etc.

"First of Regan carried fifteen grand, packed it in his clothes all the time. Real money, they tell me. Not just a top card and a bunch of hay." (TBS, p123)

swag: money; goods; valuables

I said: "The killers knew about the taxi -- maybe -- and the girlfriend reached town with the swag." (TMB, p106)

ice: jewelry (as green ice for emeralds, blue ice for sapphires, red ice for rubies ice for diamonds, etc.)

"I haven't seen your friend lately. The one with the green ice." (TLG, p335)

splitting (bills/cash): counterfeiting technique

"He was doing twenty-seventh months for splitting twenty dollar bills." (TMB, p119)

jack: money; scrip; swag; green; etc.

"They saw you somewhere, and Peeler recognized you. He got to thinking how he could make himself some jack. But he was a coke-hound and talked in his sleep." (TMB, p152)

"I'm a girl that likes to pick up a little jack when she can." (RH, p37)

"They hit it about two-thirty. Five of them got away clean with the jack." (RH, p125)

sawbuck / double sawbuck: 10 dollars / 20 dollars

I got five double sawbucks out of my wallet and dropped them in front of him. (TLG, p14)

folding: money; cash; scrip

"He must have made plenty of the folding." (TLG, p105)

cabbage: money(?)

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"He's whatever looks good to him, whatever has the cabbage pinned to it." (TBS, p194)

yard: one hundred dollars

"How much you shake him for? I bet it's not more than a couple of yards." "What's that? Couple of yards." "Two hundred bucks." (TLG, p217)

peanuts/peanut: small change/insignificant

"You're a piker, Marlowe. You're a peanut grifter. You're so little it takes a magnifying glass to see you." (TLG, p75)

dibs: money; possible connotation of one's share or what one needs to make do

"What's your racket?" I asked him. "Racket?" He looked hurt. "Sure. What do you shake them for? How do you make your dibs?" (TLS, p29)

(in the) chips: well-off; having plenty of money.

"Next, the guy is definitely not in the chips. He has fourteen smackeroos folding in here and about two bucks loose change." (TLS, p59)

folding: cash

Ibid.

smackeroos: dollars

Ibid.

smackers: dollars

"Mountain, hell, we got the mountain and ten thousand smackers to pile on top of that yet." (PRT, p86)

fin: \$5 bill

I passed him a fin and a 4 x 2 ½ photostat of my license. (PB, p13)

fish: bucks; dollars

"There's a guy here made five million fish in the rackets back in Kansas City." (PB, p97)

silver: change; coins

I went through his clothes. He had loose silver and bills in one trouser pocket... (FML, p72)

bills: (bills)

Ibid.

(the) roll: the money; cash; as in a person's roll of bills

"Dinah told me you were a pretty good guy, except kind of Scotch with the roll." (RH, p54)

scratch: money; payment; compensation

"What do you think of the stack-up?" "Not bad. Maybe I can use it." "The let's talk scratch." I grinned at the greed in her eyes... (RH, p91)

iron men: hundred (?) dollars

"Did you clean up?" "I win myself six hundred iron men." (RH, p95)

berry: dollars

"What do you think of that? I pick up six hundred berries like shooting fish, and have to bum four bits for breakfast." (RH, p95)

bit: (half of \$0.25?) As in, "shave and a haircut, two bits"

Ibid.

(piece of) change: cash; a bit of money

"I come into a piece of change when the wife got killed in an automobile accident -- insurance -- and I quit." (RH, p95)

century: hundred dollars

"That lousy ring wasn't worth no grand. I did swell to get two centuries for it." (RH, p96)

pretties: valuables, esp. jewelry

"You know you didn't life her dough and pretties." (RH, p205)

(a) cut: (a cut) a portion of the proceeds; one's share of a venture or of certain gains

"You mean you get a cut." "I mean he's a friend of mine. Well, if he didn't give me no cut, he wouldn't be no friend, would he?" (PRT, p66)

(heavy) sugar: (a lot of) money, cash

(see WWW2; this phrase also appears in TA)

BODY PARTS / BODIES / HEALTH

paw: hand/mitt/etc.

"But don't lay your smooth white paw on me again -- if you want my story." (THW, p222)

He clamped it in his paw and scowled down at it. (TLL, p7)

"I'm no bitch in heat," she said through tight teeth. "Take your paws off me." (PB, p31)

pan: face? as in poker-face

"Got an alibi for last night, poker pan?" (TBS, p92)

puss: face; mouth

"Maybe they got a line on Regan, and Mars has been sitting back with a smile on his puss, waiting for the chance." (TBS, p166)

kisser: mouth

"You didn't ever get socked in the kisser, did you?" the gaunt man asked me briefly. (TBS, p185)

"How would you care for a smack in the kisser?" (TMB, p33)

He stuck a pill in his kisser and lit it with a Ronson. (PB, p38)

floaters: corpses in the water; people dead by drowning

"They worked out the system back in New York where they're all the time pulling in floaters." (TLL, p102)

can: head(?)

"I'm in the smooth-angles of the detecting business and I make money without getting my can knocked off." (TMB, p3-4)

mitts: hands

"But you're all washed up now, you and your big smile. Hoist the mitts while I get your iron. Up, mister." (TMB, p155)

"Don't nobody try to fancy pants," he said cozily. "Freeze the mitts on the bar." (FML, p14)

"You come first," Reno ordered, "with your mitts on the top of your head." (RH, p197)

lug: ear

"Pull in that lug. It's getting in our drinks." (TTM, p120)

wen: wart? something on the skin

"He has a little scar on his left hand where he had a wen removed." (TLS, p13)

thinker: brain (mind)

"What's on the thinker, pal? Park the body. Cigarette?" (TLS, p109)

muff: toupee

"What I talked to Hicks down at Bay City he wasn't wearing his muff." (TLS, p174-5)

floaters: corpses in the water; people dead by drowning

"They worked out the system back in New York where they're all the time pulling in floaters." (TLL, p102)

corns: (corns)

He leaned forward a little and thought. I could see him thinking. It hurt his corns. (FML, p160)

button: nose (?) mouth(?)

"I thought you were going to say something else," he said. "And if you said it, I was going to smack you on the button." (FML, p192)

pipestems: legs

[need reference!]

noodle: head

A bullet kissed a hole in the door-frame close to my noodle. (RH, p65)

clam: mouth

"I'll give you fifty bucks now and a split of whatever I get from McGraw if you'll keep your clam shut till I can put it over and grab a rattler." (RH, p176)

dead pan: a lack of response; no feedback; a poker face (a poker pan)

I gave Keyes' crack a dead pan. I didn't even know what he was talking about. (DI, p9)

I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. (PRT, p3)

conk: head; skull; back of the head

That rap on the conk cost him \$322, believe it or not. (PRT, p35)

SEX / SEXUALITY

lay: screw; make love to; fuck

"It's because he's a no-good son of a bitch who thinks it is smart to lay his friends' wives and brag about it." (TLL, p13)

roll in the hay: sex; a quickie; an assignation

It might have been a hotel room rented for a meeting or a farewell, for a few drinks and a talk, for a roll in the hay. It didn't look like a place where anyone lived. (TLG, p7)

hot pants: randiness; horniness

"It's obvious what's eating him. An old-fashioned case of hot pants." (TLG, p273)

"If she ever got hot pants, it wasn't for her husband." (TLG, p324)

make [it with (him / her)]: screw; lay; have sex with

"Damn near made her yourself, didn't you?" (TLG, p323)

shack up (with): have a tryst (as a secret dalliance, etc.)

"They can drop the arm on you for shacking up in a hotel in this town." (PB, p38)

roundheels: easy woman; slut

"But little roundheels over there ain't even that." (TLL, p41-2)

happy ladies: prostitutes; easy women

There would be a few happy ladies in any apartment house. (TLL, p202.)

joy girl: hooker; prostitute; hired companion

I knew a good deal about Idle Valley, and I knew it had changed a great deal since the days when they had the gatehouse at the entrance and the private police force, and the gambling casino on the lake, and the fifty-dollar joy girls. (TLG, p98)

pick-up: an escort, as one who would pick up men in a bar; hooker; prostitute;

But she didn't look like a pickup and there was no trace of come-on in her voice. (TLG, p161)

sleepy-time girl: hooker; prostitute; possible connotation of girlfriend, however

"On account of some lacquered chippie said we used loaded dice. Seems like the bim was one of his sleepy-time girls." (TLG, p346)

joy house: bordello; cat house; etc.

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"Try looking for the girl," I said. "Velma. Malloy will be looking for her. That's what started it all. Try Velma." "You try her," Nulty said. "I ain't been in a joy house in twenty years." (FML, 19)

streetwalkers: prostitutes

A couple of frayed lamps with once gaudy shades that were now as gay as superannuated streetwalkers. (FML, p27)

lady of the night: prostitute

There were men from mines and smelters still in their working clothes, gaudy boys from pool rooms and dance halls, sleek men with slick pale faces, men with the dull look of respectable husbands, a few just as respectable and dull women, and a few ladies of the night. (RH, p6)

(get or have) a piece (of somebody): to date / make out with / sleep with

"Cute," he said. "Cute enough. I could of used a piece of that once. Haw, haw." (FML, p39)

browse: make out; kiss; chew; etc.

She fell softly across my lap and I bent down over her face and began to browse on it. (FML, p135)

chew (someone else's) face: kiss; neck; connotation of heavy kissing, possibly unwanted advance

He pulled harder and pushed his flushed face down on hers. She struggled but he was too strong for her. He chewed her face some more. (PB, p46)

The three couples began to chew each other's faces as soon as we left the shore. (FML, p242)

neck: (neck) make out

"Whatcha go up on the hill for?" "I thought maybe we could neck. She wasn't in the mood." (PB, p93)

fumble: neck with; grope; feel up (connotation of heavy petting)

"Cut the doodads and get back to Mitchell," he said briskly. "And to the dish you was trying to fumble up on the hill." (PB, p96)

mash / mash (lips) in: kiss; make out; grope; neck

Except for the shape, she really wasn't any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her. (PRT, p4)

I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers. . . . "Bite me! Bite me!" (PRT, p11)

party: (party) private get-together, with connotation of sex

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"Then two years of guys pinching your leg and leaving nickel tips and asking how about a little party tonight. I went on some of them parties, Frank." (PRT, p15)

chin: flirt(?); talk to, or perhaps chuck one's chin, with connotation of flirting?

The cop was halfway down the hall, chinning a nurse. (PRT, p55)

GENERIC ACTIONS / ACTIVITIES

ride: give a hard time; rib; needle

squawk: harp at somebody; talk at length; make a nuisance of oneself by pestering

"Christ! It'll be easier on my head than sitting here listening to you squawk." (TMF, p153.)

cut up: make trouble; talk big; prod or needle somebody

"Now listen, kid. If you come over here and start cutting up I'm going to kick you in the face." (TMF, p 194.)

"If she cuts up on you, throw her in the can." (RH, p185)

pump: get information from

"What's Mamma trying to do to you?" "Nothing. Pump me. She'd like to know what you did and said last night." (TTM, p27.)

peddling your fish in the wrong market: telling your story (alibi, excuse, justification) to the wrong person

"That's all swell," I said, "only you're peddling your fish in the wrong market." (TTM, p31)

(doing) figure eights: nervous; highly concerned; agitated; climbing the walls

"...she thinks both answers are yes, and it's got her doing figure eights." (TTM, p46.)

put (your) mouth in: chime in to a conversation or argument

"All right," he told her... "Put your mouth in and I'll pop a tooth out of it." (TTM, p88.)

soak: trade; hock

"...and the banks were closed, so he soaked his watch." (TTM, p168.)

drift with the tide: pass unobserved or unremarked-upon

I nodded and let that one drift with the tide. (THW, p11)

skip out: leave; depart; connotation is furtive, tinged with guilt

"How and when did he skip out?" (TBS, p19)

"Doc Sonderborg?" He spread his hands. "The whole shebang skipped." (FML, p216)

drop the veil: drop the pretense; stop pretending; abandon the cover story or lie

"Drop the veil," I said. "I'm in the business, too."

(have a) blanket on (something): is covering something or keeping it quiet

"Well, Joe and me watch the papers, and we don't see anything, so we know that old Sternwood has a blanket on it." (TBS, p166)

tramp: ride; give a hard time; browbeat

"That's all right," I said. "That's just something I said when you were tramping me." (TLL, p17)

slip (one's) clutch: losing it

"You're slipping your clutch," I told him. "I didn't come up here to enquire into your love life." (TLL, p39)

lam: run away; escape; go on the run; disappear; go away; get lost

"That straight goods little roundheels lammed off?" (TLL, p47)

"Why the hell don't you lam out of here, bud?" (TLL, p107)

take a flutter (at something): to make a passing attempt

She looked me over thoughtfully. A lot of guys had probably tried to show her things, including etchings. At another time I wouldn't have been above taking a flutter at it myself. (TLL, p128-9)

ribbing: teasing; giving a hard time

"He was ribbing Mrs. Almore about her husband's practice." (TLL, p131)

lead (someone) a pretty dance: to lead on; to make a fool of; to string along

"I can tell you she led him a pretty little dance." (TLL, p190)

jack: grab; take; reach for; wield

"You look to me like a fellow who would jack his gun out kind of fast." (TLL, p247)

make a monkey of (somebody): (make a fool of)

"But I can't let you make a monkey of me in my own territory, either." (TLL, p263)

let this one ride: let it go; I'm okay; I'm good; I don't need any more (drinks, etc.)

"Here you go, stock up." "Let this one ride." (TTM-F)

pipe down: be quiet; shut up; etc.

"Aww, pipe down." (TTM-F)

apple-polish: bribe; sweeten up

"Why try to apple-polish the [person] downstairs?" (TMB, p14)

polish an apple: talk up; chat up; suck up to; ingratiate oneself; schmooze

A dark-haired headwaiter who looked like a road company Herbert Marshall circulated among the tables offering his intimate smile and stopping here and there to polish an apple. (PB, p45)

sick up: vomit; throw up

"Big blonde bruiser, plays a fair game of golf, thinks he's hell with women, drinks heavy but hasn't sicked up on the rugs so far." (TMB, p28)

horse around: fool around; goof off

"Let's all quit horsing around and talk sense." (TMB, p33)

bug: talk; squeal(?)

"Used to be a dummy chucker, then found out he could bug his way outta raps." (TMB, p33)

touch: hit up; ask somebody for money

"Until Hawkins comes up to touch me for another ten." (TMB, p40)

"They know who he is, they touch him big when they got a fund-raising drive..." (PB, p97)

"Also, he was broke. Had to make a touch for dinner money." (PB, p106)

park the body: don't move; stand still; sit down, take a seat, take a load off(?)

"Park the body, friend. No false moves." (TMB, p44)

lamp: see; spot; observe

"Okay. Drop over to the main drag and snap it up," he said. "But that don't mean trying to sideswipe a prowl car, if you lamp one..." (TMB, p86)

put the bee on (something): ?? finger? put the word out? put the heat on?

"Hell! You're the guy who put the bee on that hot rod." (TMB, p94)

"After you, I visit that kid. I tailed him home from Headquarters, but I figure you're the guy to put the bee on first." (TMB, p179)

shoot (one's) cookies: throw up; vomit; toss your cookies; etc.

Ohls said: "You better go lay down somewhere, buddy. If I'm any judge of color, you're goin' to shoot your cookies." (TMB, p102)

scrape (one's face): shave

Then I phoned down for another pint, scraped my chin, changed clothes, and looked up Frank Dorr's number in the book. (TMB, p107)

brace: question; shake down; prod

"He's the only roomer I've got now, and I'd kind of go in by his door and listen to him talking to himself. That way I got enough to brace him. He told me the rest." (TMB, p119)

"Why'd you brace me?" "You had the word, didn't you?" (TMB, p137)

shake: (shake down); also, to chisel or finagle money from somebody

"What's your racket?" I asked him. "Racket?" He looked hurt. "Sure. What do you shake them for? How do you make your dibs?" (TLS, p29)

"Make the sneak and keep under cover till noon, and his frame-up will be a wash-out." (RH, p55)

lay an egg: ?

"You haven't murdered anybody, the way you tell it, but you laid an egg down at police Headquarters." (TMB, p199)

eat: to buy; to accept at face value; connotation of reluctance

"I'm eating this dish, but as a cop you can't expect me to like it." (TMB, p209)

drop (a / one's) nickel: commit; put one's time in; join in (from paying a nickel into a pay phone)

The drunk promptly slid off the seat and landed on the blacktop on the seat of his pants. So I went over and dropped my nickel. I guess it's always a mistake to interfere with a drunk. (TLG, p4)

nickel drops: something registers; the other shoe drops (again, as a nickel in a pay phone)

He was halfway to the door before the nickel dropped. He swung around fast then. (TLG, p155)

squiff out: pass out

"You squiffed out at The Dancers in a Rolls. Your girlfriend ditched you." (TLG, p7)

ham it up: play along; go along with the fiction or farce

"Why ham it up any more, Spencer? Paul Marston and Terry Lennox were the same man." (TLG, p304)

hold the line: wait a moment (on the telephone)

I heaved up on the feet and lumbered into the living room and pulled the phone off the cradle and said into it: "Hold the line." (TLG, p317)

to have someone's number: to have evaluated somebody accurately; to sum somebody up; (to have someone's number)

"Only with the eggheads," Lonnie Morgan said, "and they already had his number." (TLG, p341)

miscount the trumps: to overlook something, or misunderstand a situation, or misinterpret

And for some reason I had that empty feeling of having miscounted the trumps. (TLS, p20)

take all the tricks: clean up; to get everything one wants, or to have a situation play out to one's inclinations

He smiled thinly. "I let them take all the tricks and then salve my dignity by working out on you, eh?" (TLS, p226)

shack up: take up with; move in with; possibly, have a tryst (as in a hotel)

"I'm not talking about her love life," I said. "She doesn't have to shack up with a redhot." (TLS, p118)

"They can drop the arm on you for shacking up in a hotel in this town. I'll admit it has to be pretty flagrant." (PB, p38)

set a man nuts: drive somebody crazy

Under those blue pajamas was a shape to set a man nuts, and how good I was going to sound when I started explaining the high ethics of the insurance business I didn't exactly know. (DI, p6)

beef: complain, or harangue somebody

"What are you beefing to me for? I remember that case..." "Walter, I'm not beefing to you. I know you said he ought to be investigated." (DI, p8)

peel off: to undress, or to remove an article of clothing, such as a coat

She was standing there in a raincoat... When I got her peeled off, she was in sweater and slacks, just a dumb Hollywood outfit, but it looked different on her. (DI, p14)

rip out: unleash

He ripped out a flock of cusswords, and at last I heard the crutches rattling against the side of the car. (DI, p43)

go (out): date

"He's going with Phyllis." (DI, p79)

squawk: make noise; complain

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"Lots of reasons. It's not fair to you, for one." "Did you hear me squawk?" (DI, p82)

make a gag (with): to make a joke; to joke around with somebody

The waiter knew me. I made a gag with him, to fix it on his mind it was Friday. (DI, p91)

paw: grab; grope; fondle (unwanted advance)

"There's one thing I like about you. You don't paw. And you have nice manners--in a way. "
(PB, p6)

draw a lot of water: to have a lot of influence; to exert great influence [possible ref. to Owens Valley water wars?]

"Listen, chum, you were hired to do a job. Better do it and do it right. Clyde Umney draws a lot of water in this town." (PB, p12)

win the wrist watch: persevere; come out on top; win a contest/fight/etc.

Mine was the better punch, but it didn't win the wrist watch, because at that moment an army mule kicked me square on the back of the brain. (PB, p32)

work the same side of the street: to have similar goals; to work together or to be in competition; to have common (but possibly competing) interests

"Don't worry about anybody losing anybody. There's two other guys working the same side of the street. One's a local boy named Mitchell..." (PB, p40)

chew (someone else's) face: kiss; neck; connotation of heavy kissing, possibly unwanted advance

He pulled harder and pushed his flushed face down on hers. She struggled but he was too strong for her. He chewed her face some more. (PB, p46)

The three couples began to chew each other's faces as soon as we left the shore. (FML, p242)

hang a red light on (somebody): make trouble for; mark somebody for trouble; run out of town

"Just watch your step. Very carefully. I have enough influence around this town to hang a red light on you." (PB, p69)

button the lip: be quiet; shut up; pipe down; put a sock in it; etc.

"Button the lip, kid," Jack said tersely. (PB, p81)

hang out (one's) ear: eavesdrop; listen in

The bell captain was hanging out his ear six feet away. (PB, p84)

neck: (neck) make out

"Whatcha go up on the hill for?" "I thought maybe we could neck. She wasn't in the mood." (PB, p93)

fumble: neck with; grope; feel up (connotation of heavy petting)

"Cut the doodads and get back to Mitchell," he said briskly. "And to the dish you was trying to fumble up on the hill." (PB, p96)

milk: question; get information from; squeeze

He had milked me dry-- of everything that was printed on my business card. (PB, p109)

brush (off): (brush off)

"He got the brush, but good, from Captain Alessandro. He can't hurt you." (PB, p151)

licked: beat; defeated (licked)

"So you have me licked. I don't have any defense, except to have you killed." (PB, p160)

hire a gun: hire a killer; have somebody murdered

"You hired a gun. That puts you out of the class of people I shake hands with." (PB, p161)

warble: sing

"Velma did some warbling. A redhead she as. Cute as lace pants." (FML, p11)

fancy pants: to get fancy; to get a smart or clever idea; to try to be clever

"Don't nobody try to fancy pants," he said cozily. "Freeze the mitts on the bar." (FML, p14)

ride: tease; josh; give a hard time

"Okey, go ahead and ride me. Everybody else does. What's another one matter? Poor old Nulty. Let's go on up and throw a couple of nifties at him. Always good for a laugh, Nulty is." (FML, p17)

take a gander: (take a gander); have a look around; assess; look (for)

"I mean you got time to sort of take a gander around for this dame. That's a good idea you had there. You might pick something up. You can work under glass." (FML, p20)

work under glass: ?? without scrutiny? without raising suspicions? under (police) auspices?

Ibid.

barber: cooperate; share; negotiate (?) be nice to (?)

"I shouldn't ought to barber with you. But when I like a guy, the ceiling's the limit." (FML, p30)

(get or have) a piece (of somebody): to date / make out with / sleep with

"Cute," he said. "Cute enough. I could of used a piece of that once. Haw, haw." (FML, p39)

bear down: dig in; get stubborn; wait someone or something out; get serious or violent

"But don't forget he's looking for her and he's a man who would bear down." (FML, p39)

stooge: secretly work for; foolishly do somebody else's work for them

"We're glad to stooge for a shamus of his standing." (TBS, p112)

"I just don't have time to stooge for you or any other cop." (FML, p45)

keep one's nose clean: (keep one's nose clean) stay out of trouble; avoid making trouble

"That's all," he said. "And keep your nose clean." (FML, p85)

hammer: question; interrogate

"They would suspect some guilty reason and hammer at me until I was a wreck," (FML, p89)

paper flower: something with false or shallow beauty; a pale imitation of true beauty (?) OR something fragile

The muscles in it were strong. She was a well-built woman, and no paper flower. (FML, p134)

browse: make out; kiss; chew; etc.

She fell softly across my lap and I bent down over her face and began to browse on it. (FML, p135)

give time to: put stock in; care about; devote effort to (caring about)

The big man said: "Now that we are all between pals and no ladies present we really don't give so much time to why you went back up there, but this Hemingway stuff is what really has me down." (FML, p164)

skim it: give a quick summary

"Try again. And skim it. All I want is the cream. Who put me in your private funny house?" (FML, p 181)

take to the cleaners: (take to the cleaners)

"I like smooth shiny girls, hardboiled and loaded with sin." "They take you to the cleaners," Randall said indifferently. (FML, p196)

crab: ruin; mess up; sabotage; bung up

"If you crab this case, you'll be in a jam." (FML, p215)

crab: complain; nitpick; pester; henpeck

But he was dumb, and kept crabbing. (PRT, p8)

grease: bribe

I thought of cops, tough cops that could be greased and yet were not by any means all bad, like Hemingway. (FML, p238)

play (v.): manipulate; trick; ("played for a fool")

"I bet it's fun to be played by handsome blondes," Anne Riordan said. (FML, p286)

play (n.): business (as a turn of business)

"Well, it's our summer resort, thirty miles up the canyon road. It's a dump, but it's cool in the summer, so it gets a good play." (RH, p87)

rope: question; feel out; brace (for information); possibly also in the sense of deceive/trick

"So you're a gum-shoe." "That's the bunk," I complained. "I come all the way down here to rope you, and you're smarted up." (RH, p29)

smart up: to get wise to something

Ibid.

rib: frame; put away; double-cross, as "shiv in the ribs" (?)

"And if Max Thaler means anything to you, you ought to pass him the word that Noonan's trying to rib him." (RH, p40)

(take a) plant: hide

"I went up the street and took a plant in the vestibule." (RH, p54)

string: frame; set up; in the sense of "throw under the bus"

"So I had to make an out for myself, in case something slipped. I strung the woman." (RH, p55)

(make the) sneak: slip out; escape; sneak out

"Make the sneak and keep under cover till noon and his frame-up will be a wash-out." (RH, p55)

give the air: dump; toss aside; to break up (from somebody)

"You're an ex-boy-friend of Dinah's who was given the air." (RH, p59)

flop: rest; sleep; reside (as in a hotel or flophouse)

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"He flops at the Maxwell on Union Street. I guess maybe he's there now, resting up for the mill." (RH, p72)

(to take in) paint: stare at the walls; spend time somewhere; pass the time

"Had enough of this paint?" I said I had. We went down the street. (RH, p10)

(put) skids (under): put an end to; force out

"What did Noonan put the skids under you for?" "What skids? I quit." (RH, p95)

third-degree: to question; interrogate

Even the bad luck he had trying to third-degree Whisper couldn't spoil his happiness. (RH, p109)

throw lead: shoot

A load of coppers buzzed past, throwing lead at the first car. (RH, p111)

fan: rifle; search; rummage through

"Where were you raised? Fanning my baggage!" (RH, p128)

to get a rear out of something: to get a thrill; to get a rise out of something

"But this getting a rear out of planning deaths is not natural to me. It's what this place has done to me." (RH, p157)

hash things up: make a hash of things; make a mess of things; complicate or ruin things

I was making one of my favorite complaints -- that newspapers were good for nothing except to hash things up so nobody could unhash them -- when I heard a boy chanting my name. (RH, p186)

back-window: to skip out; to elude somebody; to escape

"When the circus cut loose I back-windowed them." (RH, p205)

shoot: speak closely

She was so close I could smell her. I shot it right close to her ear, almost in a whisper. (PRT, p7)

knock for a loop: (knock for a loop)

"Swell. That'll knock them for a loop." (PRT, p10)

boss (a job): oversee; issue orders; take charge

They were lifting him out when I got to the hospital, and the state cop was bossing the job. (PRT, p22)

tumble: deduce; figure out; realize; understand; have an insight

"It all depends on the stepladder, whether he tumbles what it's there for." (PRT, p23)

snap: toss; flick; fling

"You stay back there, now, and keep an eye on that cop. I'm going to snap these bearings into the bushes one at a time, and you've got to watch if he notices anything." (PRT, p24)

chin: flirt(?); talk to, or perhaps chuck one's chin, with connotation of flirting?

The cop was halfway down the hall, chinning a nurse. (PRT, p55)

flim-flam: dupe; deceive; trick; take in

"We've been flim-flammed, Cora." (PRT, p70)

turn yellow: chicken out; back out of something; lose one's nerve

"I turned yellow, that's all." (PRT, p77)

go off one's nut: to go nuts; go crazy; act illogically; lose one's marbles; etc.

I was afraid if she got sore at me for something, she'd go off her nut and spill it like she had that other time, after the arraignment. (PRT, p88)

spill (something) / spill one's guts: (spill one's guts)

Ibid.

dance on air: hang, as from a noose; be executed; get the death sentence

"It don't cost me a thing to make you dance on air." (PRT, p105)

burn the road: speed; drive fast, possibly too fast; burn rubber; leave marks; etc.

I put her in the car, started up, and began burning the road. (PRT, p112)

(to) broad-A (somebody): possibly to put somebody below oneself; to put on airs to establish a hierarchy with oneself above others, either literally or figuratively by assuming a high-class diction (NB WWW3 & DN01Jun28) [*Credit to Liam Kincaid for uncovering this: liamkincaid@worldheartepic.com*]

"Still, Hazel doesn't broad-A *me*, knowing that I can put on a bathing suit and ruin her." (CosNov1923, p70; "King Leary," by H.C. Witwer)

"'What is the matter?' he asked the victor. 'I'll teach that baby to Broad A me,' she replied." (Life12Apr23, p. 28)

MISCELLANY

queer: strange; not on the level; also, homosexual (queer)

"This guy is queer." (TMF, p42.)

chypre: fragrance of sandalwood; perfume made from sandalwood

The fragrance of *chypre* came with him. (TMF, p42.)

Baumes rush: reference to one-time atty. general (or senator?) Caleb H. Baumes of NY, who sponsored legislation that had many cheap hoods kicked out of the city. [See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baumes_law which suggests "Baumes law" was not the origin of "bum's rush," which predates passage of the law.]

"New York, aren't you?" ... Spade nodded as if the boy had said yes and asked: "Baumes rush?" (TMF, p94.)

goose-berry lay: stealing clothes from clotheslines; to make ends meet by doing so. [See Earle Stanley Gardner's famous essay, "Getting Away With Murder" (GAM).]

"How long have you been on the goose-berry lay, son?" (TMF, p120.)

dingus: object; thing

"Then you think the dingus is worth two million?" (TMF, p129.)

stuss-game: fast-paced card game, a variation of faro (?)

excelsior: fine curled wood shavings, for packing fragile objects

When he had put the paper out of the way he had an egg-shaped mass of pale excelsior, wadded tight. (TMF, p158.)

juice: electricity

"The juice is not on." (TMF, p 168.)

flat: the (flat) truth; the way it is, with no trickery or lies

"There hasn't been a first time yet. There isn't going to be. That's flat." (TMF, p176.)

rara avis: a rarity; from Latin, "rare bird"

"And to you, Miss O'Shaughnssy, adieu. I leave you the *rara avis* on the table as a little memento." (TMF, p204.)

sitting on dynamite: in the cross hairs; in the middle of a (figuratively) explosive situation

"We're sitting on dynamite, and we've only got minutes to get set for the police." (TMF, p 206.)

batty (as hell): weird, loco, crazy, etc.

"He's batty as hell." (TTM, p10.)

(old) fluff: humorless, rigid, old coot

"Don't be such an old fluff. You can sleep all day." (TTM, p18.)

booby-hatch: mental hospital; loony bin; insane asylum

"Thinking of putting him in the booby-hatch?" (TTM, p24.)

chewing-gum: a made-up story; a fabrication, lie, etc.

"Careful," I said. "If it's another piece of chewing-gum, I'll phone Mimi to come get you." (TTM, p40.)

just as lief: gladly; happily (per NOAD)

"I'd just as lief ask you." (TTM, p56.)

lousy with: full of, brimming with, etc.

"The place is lousy with people that think they heard things now..." (TTM, p56.)

swell: good; acceptable; fun

"That's a swell town." (TTM, p79.)

"I smiled back. Everybody was swell." (TMB, p20)

off (one's) hip: ???

"Some of the boys and girls was celebrating upstairs and I know for a fact he wasn't off his hip, let alone out of here, all afternoon." (TTM, p80.)

on the make: ???

"There was a rat named Nunheim used to come in here that was on the make for her..." (TTM, p80.)

sore: angry or upset with

"They'd get sore at the Quinns and--" (TTM, p 106.)

dido: prank; mischievous act; something showy or frivolous

"How about letting that dido rest while we get some dinner?" (TTM, p107.)

on the bum: in the poorhouse; made poor; impoverished

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"It's fellows like you that put the country on the bum." "And it's fellows like me who don't go on the bum with it." (TTM, p110.)

can: bathroom

"I've got to go to the can." (TTM, p122.)

mean-medicine: tough; hard

"I don't know as I'd want to be mixed up with that dame... She's mean medicine." (TTM, p122.)

bing: crazy; derived from jailhouse slang for solitary confinement (hence, to go crazy)

"She goes for him in a big way -- bing, according to him -- right off the bat..." (TTM, p167.)

pander: ?

And there are ratty hotels where nobody except people named Smith and Jones sign the register and the night clerk is half watchdog and half pander. (THW, p71)

bilious attack: nightmare? hallucination?

This room was painted egg-yolk yellow. All it needed was some fat, black spiders painted on it to be anybody's bilious attack. (THW, p77)

sore: angry; upset (with)

"Don't get me sore with you." (THW, p79)

downy bird: ?

"This Morningstar is a downy bird. That's the kind of language he understands." (THW, p101-2)

shop-soiled: shopworn

"Phil Marlowe," he said. "The shop-soiled Galahad." (THW, p209)

dipsy-doodle: ?

I opened the front door, leaving the key in the lock. I wasn't going to work any dipsy-doodle in this place. Whatever was, was. (THW, p211)

ing-bing: hysterical fit; hysteria, etc.

"And just what is an ing-bing, Mr. Marlowe?" ... "A case of the vapours, they used to call it." (THW, p233)

doodad: (doodad)

There were full-length mirrors and crystal doodads all over the place. (TBS, p17)

raffish: unconventional or slightly disreputable, yet alluring or attractive (per NOAD)

Her legs didn't quite have the raffish grace of Mrs. Regan's legs, but they were very nice. (TBS, p36)

ruttishness: lascivious? prurience?

I looked her over without either embarrassment or ruttishness. (TBS, p36)

buttoned: quiet, as in "button your lip" (?) / also possibly calm, not upset (?)

"Okay, keep buttoned, kid. No hard feelings." (TBS, p45)

hotcha: hot; wild; hot to trot; hard to control?

"It seems he run Sternwoods hotcha daughter, the young one, off to Yuma. (TBS, p49)

meat: bread and butter; (means of making) a living

"Cop?" "Private." He grinned. "My meat, Jack." (TBS, p53)

grift: complaint?

"So what? Got a grift, brother -- or just amusing yourself?" (TBS, p77)

sweet (on) : has a crush on; to be affectionate toward; etc.

"He was sweet on a singer named Mona Grant." (TBS, p165)

wingding: seizure; fit; hysteria; drunken fit

"She threw a wingding. Looked like a mild epileptic fit to me." (TBS, p223)

"Hardly. And drunks are cunning. He'd e certain to pick a time when I wasn't around to throw his wingding. I'm not in the market for a job as a male nurse." (TLG, p94)

I took hold of her arms, above the elbows, and shook her a little. "All right, she's dead. You've got no time to throw a wingding. Tell me about it and tell me quick." (TA, p174)

ducky: cute? feminine? delicate?

...perfumes in little pastel phials tied with ducky satin bows, like the little girls at a dancing class. (TLL, p4)

jam: trouble; a tight spot

"Also she would start yelling for help when she found herself in a jam." (TLL, p14)

"I'm no baby and I'm in a jam." (TMB, p81)

"If you crab this case, you'll be in a jam." (FML, p215)

"Or maybe it was just that she didn't think she'd get enough to pay for the risk of being caught in a jam." (RH, p28)

gag: a trick; joke; dupe; deceit

"That she went away with some other man and the wire is a gag." (TLL, p15)

"No copper ever bought a drink of that stuff. What's the gag, mister?" (FML, p28)

"Listen, this isn't just a bunch of gag lines, Mr. Marlowe." (FML, p94)

I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. (PRT, p3)

piece of beef: (piece of meat; specimen; eye candy)

He was a nice piece of beef, but to me that was all he was. (TLL, p21)

wisecrack: (joke; jape; smart-assery)

"No time to talk about business, but always time for a wisecrack. If you think we might try to get a hook into you because you crossed a state line with her, forget it." (TLL, p23)

hook (into somebody): leverage

Ibid.

nuts to you: to hell with you

"Nuts to you, pal. And nuts to Kingsley." (TLL, p38)

the weeps: tendency toward crying

"Muriel didn't cry down anybody's neck. They left the weeps out of Muriel." (TLL, p47)

prettied up: (made up; dolled up; etc.)

Ibid.

no soap: no luck; no joy; no success; etc.

I tried a knife blade between the two halves of the small window. No soap. The catch refused to budge. (TLL, p75)

light-heavy: ?

Ibid.

roué: rake; lothario

An enormous fish with bulging eyes and a bloated body an scales shining with putrescence swam around leering like an elderly roué. (TLL, p99)

play: column space; reporting; "air time" (so to speak)

"The L.A. papers give it any play?" (TLL, p146)

gummed up: overly complicated; messed up; carried away; ruined

Dobbs pushed between us and said: "We got enough, Charlie. Better not get it all gummed up." (TLL, p173)

wet: wrong; foolish; mistaken

"If you think Degarmo went up there looking for her because he wanted to hurt her, you're as wet as a bar towel." (TLL, p191)

level: straight; on the level

"You're a pretty level guy, Marlowe." "Go on, beat it," I said. "Go away. Go far away." (TLL, p198)

harvest: payoff; return on investment; what's earned in exchanged for trouble

The question was whether a battered private detective could make it, and what the harvest would be. (TLL p215)

scatter: (impromptu?) gathering?

Ibid.

smooth-angles: the easy part; cushy job; outside of danger

"I'm in the smooth-angles of the detecting business and I make money without getting my can knocked off." (TMB, p3-4)

angle: and approach, motivation, explanation; also, one's business

"Kid sister in a boarding school in Connecticut. That might make an angle." (TMB, p5)

"I've been pretty patient with you. Now you tell me something. What's your angle?" (PB, p108)

"You look like dick to me, but that's your angle. I hope you swim good." (FML, p241)

racket: caper; approach; angle; job, scheme (crime)

"What's the racket, bum?" (TMB, p15)

"What's your racket?" I asked him. (TLS, p29)

pat: quickly and easily, no complications

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"But it happened pretty pat -- just after I had been put on the job and before I had a chance to talk to him." (TMB, p17)

stash out: to wait; stakeout

Ibid.

dummy-chucker: confidence trickster who practices "dummy chucking" (early 20th century); one who fakes seizures (or other illness) to gain sympathy or charity

"Used to be a dummy chucker, then found out he could bug his way outta raps." (TMB, p33)

spruce: neat; trim; smart in appearance

Sebold looked as spruce and nasty as ever, but Finlayson looked older, more worn; mousier. (TMB, p57)

swell: good; great; (swell)

Ibid.

beef: complaint; trouble

"Yeah... Wh-what's the beef?" (TMB, p74)

beef: mistake; biff (up)

"Made a beef, shamus. Didn't frisk your skinny pal." (TMB, p155)

hack: taxi; cab

Ibid.

"Not if your boss likes guys with a few guts to run his hacks." (TMB, p105)

caught in the rain: in trouble; facing trouble; in a tough spot

She said slowly: "Lou said if I ever got caught in the rain, you were the boy to see. It's raining hard where I am." (TMB, p78)

heap: car

"Keep your hands down, and quiet. Walk on out to your heap. This is business." (TMB, p85)

"I went up the street and took a plant in the vestibule. I saw Mrs. Willsson's heap standing in the street, but I didn't know then that it was hers or that she was in it." (RH, p54)

crooked: sinister; corrupted; (crooked)

"Was the play at Las Olindas crooked?" I asked (TMB, p90)

mud (on your neck): bad reputation; discredit; cast into question; (variation on "your name is mud")

"Then you'll have to try to beat it, brother. And after you get through beating it, there'll be enough mud on your neck so no jury'll convict Manny on your say-so alone." (TMB, p91)

flossy: stylish; glamorous (esp. upon first impression)

"I wasn't very bright, but I didn't figure on anything so flossy. Who the hell would? Canales had no motive to gun Lou, unless it got back the money he had been gypped out of." (TMB, p110)

You can even get a full glass of beer at a cocktail lounge. I was getting one at a flossy new place across the street from the apartment house where I lived. (TMB, p162)

haywire: crazy

I said: "I've got an idea. It may be all haywire." (TMB, p125)

noodle: brain; mind; head

"Carol picked him up one night, the little guy. A crazy little number, full of snow [cocaine], but way back in his noodle and idea." (TMB, p129)

She was an outdoorsy type with shiny make-up and a horse tail of medium blond hair sticking out at the back of her noodle. (PB, p16)

foxy: shrewd; clever

"Only he wouldn't say who the old guy was, or where he was. Foxy about that. Holding out. I wouldn't know why." (TMB, p129)

snap: style; stylishness; panache

She wore a blue suit cut with a lot of snap. (TMB, p131)

clammed (up): quiet; silent; uncooperative (clammed up)

"He'll stay clammed," I said. (TMB, p136)

He stood and faced me. "Okay, you're clammed." (PB, p108)

play: the plan; the procedure; the scenario

"I could have shot him easily enough, but it wasn't the play." (TMB, p140)

holding a chisel: a chiseler; ready to become a chiseler; ready to chisel

Some day she'll need me and I'll be the only guy standing around not holding a chisel. (TLG, p24)

on the chisel: acting as a chiseler; scamming money; embezzling; skimming cash

"A five interest you? Or is that against the rules too?" "My old man owns the company. He'd be pretty sore if I was on the chisel. Not that I don't like money." (PB, p39)

pat: slick; easy; over-prepared; overconfident

I told it -- three times. Once for him to get the outline, once for him to get the details, and once for him to see if I had it too pat. (TMB, p167)

make: con; trick; ploy;

on the make: playing somebody; working an angle

"It's not a make," I said. "You're in trouble." (TMB, p170)

"Make your choice. Once again -- I'm not on the make." (TMB, p171)

sore: angry; upset

"Won't he be a bit sore you didn't bring him along on this?" (TMB, p185)

"My old man owns the company. He'd be pretty sore if I was on the chisel." (PB, p39)

guinea: Mexican

"That guinea?" he sneered. "To hell with him!" (TMB p185)

nolle proesse: shortened from the Latin, *nolle prosequi*: "We shall no longer prosecute." Declaration made by judge to prosecutor in a case.

"He turned the gang in later and got a nolle proesse." (TMB, p203)

Dutch: fake (?)

"Don't kid me," I said. "They're Dutch." ... He didn't look up. "And they're not Dutch. They're Bohemian." (TMB, p211)

Bohemian: ?

Ibid.

nuts to that: to hell with that

"Nuts to that," I said. "But it's your business." (TLG, p18)

quotidian/tertian/quartan ague: periodic shaking or seizures associated with malarial fever (quotidian: repeated every 24 hours; tertian: 48 hours; quartan: 72 hours)

"It must be something like tertian ague," he said. "When it hits you it's bad. When you don't have it, it's as though you never did have it." (TLG, p20-1)

on ice: on hold; on the shelf; ready

They had it on ice for when they needed it. (TLG, p61)

jake [also **jakeloo**]: fine; okay; acceptable; no big deal

"I'm offering you a chance to clear yourself. If you don't want it, that's jake with me too." (TLG, p61)

"Nothing to do then, is there?" I said. "All jake to the angels-- or whatever they say in Manhattan, Kansas." (TLS, p136)

"That's jake with me," I said. "I didn't have any other plans." (TLS, p186)

"'Stickup,' he said. 'Be very quiet and everything will be jake.'" (FML, p132)

pill: cigarette

I leaned back and lit another pill. (TLG, p63)

He smiled faintly, lit another pill himself, and blew smoke. (TLG, p371)

He stuck a pill in his kisser and lit it with a Ronson. (PB, p38)

white night: sleepless night

A white night for me is as rare as a fat postman. (TLG, p86)

bushed: exhausted; tired out; worn out

I had the room to myself. I was too bushed at the moment to care where anybody was. (TLG, p191)

carriage trade: wealthy patrons or customers; business from/with well-heeled part of society

"This one came out of the special bottle. Old private stock. Strictly for the carriage trade." (TLG, p276)

The place was jammed with the carriage trade, foggy with tobacco smoke, jumping with the high-pitched voices and shrill laughter of women in their cups. (TA, p115)

spaghetti: whole cloth; a fiction; made-up; a deceitful yarn; a canard

"Do I have to draw you a picture? Either that foxhole yarn of yours was all spaghetti or it happened somewhere else." (TLG, p285)

brass: the bosses; the higher ups

"I'll call you. I have to check with the brass." (TLG, p329)

jam on one's face: egg on one's face

It asked questions -- the kind a newspaper asks of public officials when they are caught with jam on their faces. (TLG, p336)

lacquered: made up; painted; with a cosmetic sheen

"On account of some lacquered chippie said we used loaded dice. Seems like the bim was one of his sleepy-time girls." (TLG, p346)

snap: photograph (also a verb: "to take a snap" for "to take a photograph")

"One of those cameras with a very fine lens. You can take snaps in almost any kind of light. A Leica." (TLS p13)

snarling match: argument; confrontation that hasn't escalated to violence (yet)

"Strictly speaking we don't have to get into no snarling match," he said. (TLS, p28)

gripe: complaint

"What's the gripe?" he growled at me. (TLS, p46)

smoker: party? gathering? ball

That one was a riot at the police smoker in 1921. What a wit. Like a hummingbird's beak. (TLS, p96)

tuned up: ready; on one's toes

"Jokers like this character here keep us tuned up." (TLS, p169)

green-label: high end; top drawer; expensive; high class

I reached down and put the bottle of Old Forester up on the desk. It was about a third full. Old Forester. Now who gave you that, pal? That's green-label stuff. Out of your class entirely. (TLS, p228)

cellarette: ?

She jumped up and went to the little cellarette. She came back with a couple of huge glasses of Scotch and water. (TLS, p244)

out of the same can: of the same or similar style; possessing similarities

This was right out of the same can, with a coat-of-arms tapestry over the fireplace and a castle tapestry over the sofa. (DI, p5)

dope sheets: (?) (Insurance-related. Actuarial tables?)

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...you can pretty near rate an agent by how quick he gets to the family sofa, with his hat on one side of him and his dope sheets on the other. (DI, p4)

in dutch: in debt; in trouble; in contempt; to be in low(ered) esteem; in hot water

If young Norton was the man we had to do business with, then he was the man we had to do business with, and there was no sense letting Keyes get us in dutch with him. (DI, p9)

I'm in dutch all right, but I guess lying about it won't do any good. (PRT, p55)

dead pan: a lack of response; no feedback; a poker face (a poker pan)

I gave Keyes' crack a dead pan. I didn't even know what he was talking about. (DI, p9)

I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. (PRT, p3)

on the up-and-up: (on the up-and-up)

Neither one of them are on the up-and-up, and if there'd been an insurance angle those people would wind up on the gallows. (DI, p20)

life stretch: life sentence

He'd have had a guilty plea out of her, and already on her way to do a life stretch at Fulsom. (DI, p67)

back of (something): behind the scenes

"My father's death. I can't help thinking there was something back of it." (DI, p72)

whip hand: the upper hand; the right side of things; the initiative or imperative

"We had it out this afternoon. Down at the company. I had the whip hand. There was no two ways about it. I called it long ago, even when Norton was still talking suicide." (DI, p108)

whips and jingles: a case of the nerves (HB)

taxi starter: taxi stand(??), as at a train station

I went out through the arches to where a redcap was waiting by the taxi starter. (PB, p8)

photostat: reproduction ("projection photocopying", predating Xerox/copy machine technology)

I passed him a fin and a 4 x 2 ½ photostat of my license. (PB, p13)

two-way radiophone: period-appropriate analogy for CB, walkie-talkies, radio, etc.

From time to time the hackie talked into his radiophone. (PB, p13)

PBX: "private branch exchange"; a private telephone switchboard for an office or building

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I looked from him to the girl at the small PBX against the side wall. (PB, p16)

fast curtain: shortcut (to), in the sense of a transition

"Guns never settle anything," I said. "They are just a fast curtain to a bad second act." (PB, p28)

confetti: wasted effort; meaningless flash or affectation; something of no concern

"Well what do you know," she drawled. "A dick with scruples. Tell it to the seagulls, buster. On me it's just confetti." (PB, p30)

bite: coercion; blackmail; pressure

And that in turn meant that whatever kind of bite he planned to put on Betty Mayfield, financial or amatory or both, would have to be put on fast. (PB, p42)

"I've observed him in action. Last night he put a bite on somebody and got enough to blow town." (PB, p106)

low-down: (low-down)

"With a little practice I might get to like you. You're kind of cute in a low-down sort of way." (PB, p73)

lowdown: the skinny; the details; a complete rundown or an overview

One person in the world that wasn't asking me to sit down to the table a minute, and then telling me to give them the lowdown on that case where they said the Greek was murdered. (PRT, p92)

sparkler: jewelry; necklace?

The girl had a diamond and emerald sparkler and a wedding ring which she kept touching with her fingertips. She looked a little dazed. (PB, p83)

By slow freight: not in any hurry; slowly

Goble said yes and wanted to know where his drink was. The waiter said it was on the way-- by slow freight, his tone suggested. (PB, p96)

dilly: doozy

"You're the most impossible man I ever met. And I've met some dillies." (PB, p124)

rich: (rich) amusing; a scream; funny; entertaining (often used sarcastically)

I heard someone laugh. I heard a voice say, "This guy is really rich. I wonder what he does on his day off." (PB, p146)

johnny-jump-ups: flowers (?)

He spoke almost dreamily, as if was all by himself, out in the woods, picking johnny-jump-ups.
(FML, p8)

nifty: prank or prankster? joke? gag?

"Okey, go ahead and ride me. Everybody else does. What's another one matter? Poor old Nulty. Let's go on up and throw a couple of nifties at him. Always good for a laugh, Nulty is." (FML, p17)

confidential lay: a secret job; working in confidence for somebody else

"Cop?" "Private -- on a confidential lay. And I know a man who can keep things confidential when I see one." (FML, p22)

dead soldier: empty bottle

I held up the dead soldier and shook it. Then I threw it to one side and reached back on my hip for the pint of bond bourbon the Negro hotel clerk and I had barely tapped. (FML, p28)

(white night) trap: bar; night club; place to spend the evening (connotation of disreputability, or a place to go as a last resort in the face of sleeplessness) (SEE ALSO "white night")

"This place called Florian's was under the same name when it was a white night trap." (FML, p37)

nerve: (nerve) moxy; courage

I liked the cool quiet of her voice. I liked her nerve. (FML, p74)

fast: (fast) quick; clever; witty; amusing

"Not funny," she said. "Not even fast." (FML, p92)

one in a thousand: (one in a thousand)

"You're one in a thousand, Mrs. Morrison," I said. (FML, p11)

soap: a light touch; easy handling; taking a gentle approach

"Soap now," she said. "Soft stuff. Copper-smart. You guys still think it gets you something." (FML, p114)

phooey: (phooey)

"Ten o'clock at the Belvedere Club," I said. Somebody said: "Phooey." It sounded like my voice. (FML, p140)

high pillow: The boss, the man in charge. [*Credit to Nick Leggatt for this definition. See also the [Wiktionary entry](#) for this phrase.*]

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"There were a couple solved for the record, but they were just rappers. Some punk took it for the high pillow." (FML, p194)

grouch: complaint; beef; reason to grouch; a grudge

"On the other hand any acting-captain with a grouch can break you." (FML, p215)

on the quiet: quietly

"The whole shebang skipped. Men from the D.A.'s office went down there on the quiet." (FML, p216)

pie-eyed: stupefied; also, very drunk

Randall was pie-eyed. His mouth moved, but nothing came out of it. (FML, p217)

scooter: coaster

The gorilla mixed a couple at the little bar. He didn't try to hide the glasses while he did it. He placed one on the side of the desk, on black glass scooters. (FML, p264)

fast wagon: ambulance

He was still on his knees and still trying to get up when the fast wagon got there. It took four more men to get him on the stretcher. (FML, p283)

taped: prepared; set up

"These boys work fast when they feel like it. I think Randall has had this thing taped for days and was afraid I'd step on the tapes." (FML, p287)

rumpus: disturbance; excitement; dust-up(?)

"What's the rumpus?" I asked him. (RH, p6)

off the lode: off base; off target; wrong; mistaken

"I can tell you that that French hussy killed him, and I can tell you that any other damned numbskull notions you've got are way off the lode." (RH p16)

numbskull: (numbskull)

Ibid.

(the) bunk: sarcastically: perfection; "the icing on the cake"; etc.

"So you're a gumshoe." "That's the bunk," I complained. "I come all the way down there to rope you, and you're smarted up." (RH, p29)

kick in the pants: (kick in the pants)

"Think she killed Willsson?" "Sure. It's a kick in the pants." (RH, p30)

hep: wise; clued-in

"Whisper's hep," the burly man told the chief. "He phoned Donohoe that he's going to stay in his joint. If you think you can pull him out, try it, he says." (RH, p49)

one-legged: unconvincing; thing; trumped-up or flimsy

"He ought to know what a swell chance he's got of hanging a one-legged rap like that on me." (RH, p53)

Scotch: cheap

"Dinah told me you were a pretty good guy, except kind of Scotch with the roll." (RH, p54)

percentage: advantage; angle

There was no percentage in trying to peep out under those conditions. (RH, p66)

cooked: rigged; arranged; planned; set up; fixed; etc.

"I don't know how far you've got it cooked. Rigged right, you could make it stick in court, maybe, but you'll not get a chance to make your play there." (RH, p54)

rigged: cooked; arranged; planned; set up; fixed; etc.

Ibid.

sewed-up: firmly established; solid; made definite (complementary to cooked, rigged, etc.)

"What kind of an ass are you? Whoever heard of anybody not betting when they had a thing like that sewed up?" (RH, p80)

stack-up (n.): the way in which things stack up

"What do you think of the stack-up?" "Not bad. Maybe I can use it." (RH, p91)

sneak (n.): escape

It had broken a rib for him, but he made the back-door sneak while the rest of us were busy. (RH, p110)

sitting pretty: (sitting pretty)

"Then she makes the play and I know I'm sitting pretty." (RH, p114)

chinch: target; person one is following; assignment; suspect (?)

"My chinch and Dick's are together at your client's joint." (RH, p130)

dope: the facts, as in "the straight dope"

To have sent him the dope he wanted at that time would have been the same as sending in my resignation. (RH, p143)

sour end: short end of the stick

"When the time comes that you sit in with me and Whisper and Pete, I don't expect the sour end of it." (RH, p167)

crazy as a bedbug: (crazy as a bedbug)

"Be careful -- she's crazy as a bedbug." (RH, p185)

burned up: angry; steamed; hot under the collar

About three o'clock a guy came along that was all burned up because somebody had pasted a sticker on his wind wing. (PRT, p6)

(a) peach: something good, swell, of high quality, enjoyable

"That one I had for lunch, it was a peach." (PRT, p6)

to have somebody's number: (to have somebody's number)

She knew what I meant, and she knew I had her number. (PRT, p7)

hash house: cheap restaurant

"I was working in a hash house. You spend two years working in a Los Angeles hash house and you'll take the first guy that's got a gold watch." (PRT, p14)

flop: failure; disappointment

It was the worst flop of a home-coming you ever saw in your life. (PRT, p37)

cock-eyed: crazy; false; loony; preposterous

That was just a cock-eyed story I was going to take back later on, when we got in a place where it really meant something, which this inquest didn't. (PRT, p52)

on the up-and-up: (on the up-and-up)

"A cop sent him to me. I thought he was on the up-and-up." (PRT, p70)

down in the mouth: (down in the mouth) feeling low; feeling sick; under the weather; depressed

While he was backing away, I leaned up against the wall, like I was pretty down in the mouth. (PRT, p100)

grub: food

I think they give you dope in the grub, so you don't think about it. (PRT, p116)

hooley: (hooley) baloney, etc.

I don't believe it. It's just a lot of hooley, that this guy thought up so he could fool the judge. (PRT, p116)

spillikins: jackstraws; a parlor game (also, a splinter or fragment)

The rest is spillikins in the parlor. (SAM, p17)

lid: hat (?)

plaster: a follower, in the sense of a tail or close observer (perhaps from "sticking plaster")

The Pontiac hung on, dropping well back when the traffic thinned out, closing the gap when it thickened again. Any lingering doubt was gone. I had a plaster. (TA, p78)

"You don't think Brill would let me walk out of Headquarters without sticking a plaster on me, do you?" (TA, 204)

strapwatch: wristwatch

A longish pause during which I could hear my strapwatch ticking away. (TA, p95)

cheaters: eyeglasses (per NOAD)

There was the usual flag and the elevated bench, and behind the bench a small severe-looking bird with grey hair and a pair of steel-rimmed cheaters. (TA, p132)

UNKNOWNS

rolling a match in his ear: ?

"McFee walked up Carter to Third, stood there a minute, rolling a match in his ear." (SP, p87)

(to feel like) an oil can: possibly to feel low, or shabby, as beneath somebody else; to feel like something to be held at arm's length

"They certainly looked me over," she broke out after they had walked a little way in silence. "High-toning me!" And then this extraordinary bit of slang, hot from her tongue. "Made me feel like an oil can!" (SEP21Jan22, p36) [*Credit to Will Lever for uncovering this: will@willleaver.com*]

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