

K. **MANHUNT**
DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

NEW Thrillers by

RICHARD DEMING

FLETCHER FLORA

HAL ELLSON

GIL BREWER

FRANK KANE

FEBRUARY
35 CENTS



"I had to have someone . . .
and he said I was no good."
(See "FOG")

**Plus — SAM MERWIN, JR., JACK SWORD, ROY CARROLL
and others**

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MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2, February, 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of the St. John Publishing Co.), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1955 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.



Fog

He couldn't stop looking at the woman. And he knew she didn't want him to stop . . .

AT DUSK he turned into the new housing development on the far edge of town and drove slowly, craning his neck out the window, looking at street signs. He reached Wimbolton Drive, stopped looking, and drove down the palm-shaded street. The cement block houses along here were very similar to one another, assuming a sameness of color with the approach of night. Daytime the same houses were vivid blues, pinks, reds, yellows. He craned his neck again, stopped the coupé by a small, new place. 46

He got out, started across the

BY GIL BREWER

newly planted lawn, glanced back once. Across the street was a small ditch, an endless roadside row of Australian pines, and beyond the ditch and the pines was a humpy, shadowy field that stretched far into the country.

His heels scraped on the raw cement porch. He was tall, dark, wearing a light-colored sport shirt. The house was already well-lighted inside, though it was not yet completely night.

He grinned, pressed the buzzer. Somebody inside the house began running across the floor, fast. Feet skidded by the door. The door was flung open.

"Oh!" a young woman said, breathing sharply. She smiled, then went sober. "Oh?"

"Uh — is Art around?"

The young woman shook her head. She was a blonde. Her hair was very thick, bursting in thick waves around her throat and shoulders. "He's not here."

"I see. Well . . ."

She smiled again, watching him with wide clear blue eyes. "It is Mr. Thompson you wanted?"

"Yes. Then you must be —"

"I'm Mrs. Thompson, yes."

"Well — you see, I'm an old friend of Art's. Haven't seen him since you and he were married. I was in town, thought I'd drop around. He wrote me where he was living —"

"You're not Bill Calders!"

He grinned. "That's right. I suppose you —"

"Why! Art's mentioned you at least a million times!"

He kept grinning at her.

"Well, come on *in!*"

"Well, only for a —"

"Don't be silly. Come on in here, Bill."

She moved aside and he stepped in and she closed the door.

"Goodness," she said. "Imagine!"

"So you're Sarah?"

She nodded, watching him. She

was wearing a blue cotton house-dress. She was in her bare feet. She stood with her hands on her hips, her hips thrown forward, and her lips were very broad and red.

"Come on into the living room," she said, turning. "Sit down."

"Well, only for a minute."

He followed her into the other room from the narrow hall. She moved quickly, firmly, large-hipped under the scant blue dress. His gaze followed her. Her flesh moved and trembled under the dress. Bright glaring light from an unshaded floor lamp beside a small, bulging brown couch shone clearly through the material of the dress between her legs.

Bill turned his eyes away quickly as she faced him again.

"Peeking?" she said.

Bill's face went red.

"It's so hot," she said. "You know? I really don't like to wear anything. Nothing at all. Just naked, all the time."

He forced a sorry chuckle. She beamed at him, flopped on the couch, watching him steadily. She motioned toward a chair across from the couch.

"Sit down, Bill!"

He sat quietly, carefully. He glanced once back toward the doorway, then at her, then at the windows above the back of the couch. The unshaded lamplight was brilliant white, glaring on the new maroon rug, the newly painted walls, the bright new everything

with scratches here and there in the new paint. She looked pale, her lips vivid in the light.

"When'll Art be along?"

"Soon, soon. What d'you know about that?"

She bounced up and down on the couch, pressed her palms together, forced the spaded hands between her thighs, pushing the dress between her thighs, squeezing her legs tightly together on her hands, watching him.

"Uh, where *is* he?"

"Oh, he had to run out for a while. Won't *he* be surprised?"

She bounced up, jumped onto the couch on her knees and leaned over the back, reaching toward the window. She lay straight up across the couch, her toes pushing at the maroon rug and her dress drew tight up past the hollows of her knees. She yanked at the shade on the windows, drew it down to the sill with a loud *Whirrrrrrr!*

"Neighbors," she said. "Nosy neighbors, you know? The houses are so close together."

She turned and flopped back on the couch, bouncing, fanning her face with her palm and with the other hand plucking at the hem of her dress.

"Hot?" he said.

"Whew!" she said. "You know it!"

He nodded, swallowed. His face was coated with a fine sheen of perspiration. He kept looking around the room, but his eyes always came back to her with a kind of jerk.

"Art's not too well," she said. "Did you know?"

"No. What's the matter?"

"Nerves. Terribly nervous. He can't sit still. Can't sleep nights. Then he comes home from work and sleeps all day." She laughed shortly, showing even glistening teeth. "Really nervous."

"Well, I'm sure sorry to hear that."

"Yes," she said. She brought her hands back and began lifting her hair up and down, away from her throat and the back of her neck, plopping it up and down.

"Guess I better run along," Bill said, glancing at his wrist watch. "Tell you what. I'm staying overnight in town. I'll drop by tomorrow. How's that?"

"Don't go," she said, watching him closely, narrowly.

He started to laugh. Something caught in his throat and he had to cough. He went into a short fit of coughing. She leaped up, came across to him, slapped his back.

"There!" she said. "Gosh, you got all red!"

"Sorry."

"Where are you staying, Bill?"

"Hotel. The Town House."

"Oh." She returned to the couch, flopped down. She took the hem of her dress in both hands and slowly began lifting it back past her knees, dragging it up her thighs, watching him. "You don't mind if I pull my dress up a little, do you, Bill?"

He stared at her. She kept on

dragging it up and up, watching him. Her eyes were narrow as she watched him. She ceased, patted it down snugly, rubbed her thighs with her palms. Then she leaned back and began plopping her hair up and down again with both hands, away from the back of her neck.

"He should be right along. So don't go. He'd feel awful if he missed seeing you."

Her legs were very white in the glare of lamplight. They were smoothly curved, plump and unblemished. She began to hum, watching him, plopping her hair up and down. It was very thick hair, damp looking at the temples. There were small beads of perspiration on her upper lip.

It was very silent in the room.

Bill was not more than two and a half feet from Sarah and the lamplight was like a hot sun.

"It's raining," she said. "Hear it?"

They sat, listening. Rain drummed softly on the roof. It dripped on the screens outside the windows.

"I knew it would rain," she said. She writhed from side to side on the couch, straightening a little, watching him. "Say!" She leaped up. "How's for a cold beer? I simply forgot. There's some in the kitchen. Everything's so new, we're so unsettled here. We've been here five months — I can't get over it."

"Really, Sarah — I'll have to go. Some things I've got to attend to."

She moved up to his chair, standing close, with the lamplight behind

her. She put one hand on his shoulder. "I wish you'd wait a little while, Bill."

He stood up fast.

"Won't you have just one beer?" she asked softly.

"Sorry. Thanks," he said. "Take a rain check on that, though."

She watched him, smiling, her teeth tight together. "All right," she said quickly. She turned and moved into the hall. He followed her, watching her. She whirled on him.

"Peeking again?"

He walked into the hall without speaking.

She reached the door, opened it.

"You don't want to go out in all that rain."

"Got to. You tell Art I was by, huh? See you two tomorrow."

"Well — all right."

"Sure glad to meet you, Sarah."

"Yes." She held out her hand and he took it. He looked at her and she smiled. She held to his hand. He drew his hand slightly away, but she still held to his hand. Then she let go and stepped back and he turned and went outside into the rain. She called after him, softly:

"Good-by, Bill."

He turned and flapped his hand at her, running across the wet, muddy lawn. In the car he glanced toward the doorway of the house. She was standing there, looking out at the night.

A telephone rang.

Bill reached out from his bed and

turned on the light on the nightstand. He found the phone.

"Hello? . . . Sarah? Yes, but it's — it's nearly two," he said into the phone, checking his wrist watch on the night stand. "What? Art's what? Well, now just relax, take it easy. I'm sure everything's all right. . . . Yes . . . I'll be right out. . . . Yes, sure, Sarah." He hung up and lay there a moment, staring at the silent window of his room, rubbing his jaw.

He finally swung his feet down to the floor, scratched his shoulder, stood up and took off his pajamas. He lumbered into the bathroom, washed quickly, returned to the bedroom and dressed in dark slacks and the same white sport shirt he'd worn earlier. He stepped into a pair of brown loafers, strapped on his wrist-watch, pocketed wallet, change and cigarettes and matches from the top of his bureau.

It was very foggy outside. He had to drive slowly and after he was in the new development again, he had to stop the car and get out and check every street sign until finally he saw Wimbolton Drive.

He parked the car, started up toward the house. The living room light was on, glaring against the shade yellowly.

Fog rolled and billowed and the air was damp, dripping, tepid. His feet scraped on the cement porch. The door opened.

"Oh, Bill!"

"Now, take it easy," he said.

"Come on in."

She was still wearing the blue cotton dress. She had on a pair of beach sandals and she was very excited, her movements quick.

"Bill, something's happened to Art! I know it!"

"What?" He looked at her closely, standing in the hall.

She took hold of his hands with both of hers.

"I hated to call you. There was nobody else to call. We don't know a soul — not a soul!"

He didn't say anything. Neither did she. Finally he said, "What about the neighbors?"

"They're nosy neighbors," she said. "We have no use for them. It's better that way."

"Well, you'd better tell me about it."

"Come into the other room." She dropped his hands, turned and hurried into the living room. He followed her, watching her move. The unshaded light was exactly as it had been before.

They stood in the center of the room.

"Art came home, just after you left. I told him you were here, where you were staying. He said he was going to phone you. Then, he said there was something he had to attend to first." She stared at him. She put her hands together and held her shoulders hunched up and licked her lips.

"Go on."

"He was laughing, full of fun,"

she said. "He said he was going out a minute, then he'd come back and phone you. I watched him from the doorway. He went out there, across the road. Into the fog. He went into that field, over there. It was hours ago. He never came back."

Bill laughed. He reached out and patted her shoulder. She moved her shoulder toward his hand and stepped an inch closer to him. Her breathing was loud in the room.

"You're imagining things," he said. "Art can take care of himself."

She shook her head fiercely. Her hair ruffled on her shoulders. "No. He went out there into that fog and he didn't come back. I know something's happened." Her voice rose. "I know it, I tell you!"

Bill looked quickly around the room, then took her shoulder in the cup of his hand. She hunched her shoulder into his hand, looking up at him with her lips parted, making small moaning sounds. There were three buttons on the throat of her dress and the top button was undone. She reached up and unbuttoned another button and the bright light glared on the unbroken smooth white of her flesh.

"I'm afraid to go out there alone," she said. "Will you go out there with me? I've got to go out there and look for him!"

He looked at her. She moved closer.

"Yes, sure, all right. We'll go have a look."

"Oh, yes!"

They moved quickly through the house and out the front door.

"We should have a flashlight," he said. "You got a flash?"

"No," she said. "There's no time for that."

He looked at her. She kept looking at him, then over across the street at the billowing fog and the field beyond the Australian pines.

"All right. Come on," he said.

They moved down across the lawn. They passed his car, and crossed the wet street and stepped under the pines.

"There's a ditch here," Sarah said. "You'll have to help me across the ditch."

"Sure."

They moved gingerly down the side of the ditch until they stood near a three foot stream of water. She came close to him, touching him with her body.

"Can you jump?" he said.

She shook her head. "No."

There was an iridescence to the foggy night. Lights from far in the city bloomed in the fog and Sarah's face was quite plain. Everything was quite plain for a short distance. After that everything was obliterated by the fog.

"Here," he said, taking her hand. She squeezed up next to him and he took her waist in his hand. Abruptly, he bent down, placed one hand under her legs, the other along her shoulders and lifted her and stepped across the water and stood her up on the other bank.

"You're very strong," she said.

He didn't reply. They went up the bank and into the field. He turned and looked back. There was only the blooming fog and the dripping from the sky.

"It seems foolish," he said.

"Does it?"

He shouted Art's name loudly.

Sarah moved into the field. He walked behind her. The blue dress and the blonde hair and the white arms and legs were very plain against the fog. Her dress clung to her damply and perspiration coated Bill's face. He called again.

"Whatever would he come in here for?" she said softly.

He came up to her side. They walked together, silently. They moved down small hummocks into damp ground and up and over low hills. They passed trees and Bill called repeatedly.

Sarah stopped and turned and looked up at him.

"Where could he have gone?"

Bill shook his head. He stared at her. She was breathing hard, and the third button on her dress was undone, her dress flaring open. She stared at him and then she half-smiled.

"It's terrible, asking you to do all this."

"It's all right."

"It's so hot!" she said. She squeezed her hair back away from her head with both hands, watching him. She smiled at him, her teeth tight together, glistening. The moon

was up there someplace. "I'd like to just take my dress right off," she said. She kept watching him, smiling. She released her hair, leaned down and pulled up the skirt of her dress. She brought it up to her hips and tied one side of it into a big knot on her left hip. "You don't mind, do you?"

He didn't say anything.

She rubbed her legs with her hands, watching him closely.

It was very quiet. Water dripped softly, steadily from nowhere and the fog drifted.

"What would I have done if you hadn't come by?" she said.

"I don't know." He spoke quickly.

He looked away into the fog, scowling. Then he looked at her. She smiled at him, squeezing the knot of blue cloth at her hip above the full white columns of her legs.

They stood there watching each other.

"I don't think he's in here," Bill said.

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Maybe you're right," she said.

They breathed together, staring. Neither moved. They stood perfectly still, staring. Then she began to slowly rub her legs with her palms again, watching him steadily.

He made a vicious sound in his throat and grabbed her brutally. She cried out, her hands clawing at his shoulders. He fastened his fingers into her dress and ripped it savagely, tearing it away from her.

She clung to him frantically as they dropped to the ground, and lay back, her face very white, pale hair fanned out around her head on the wet grass. The night was loud with violence.

Finally, hunched beside her, his fingers still snarled in the torn folds of her dress, breathing with profound heaviness, he stared down at her fixed grin. Her upper lip rolled redly away from her teeth, eyes wide and steady.

"Art never came out here, did he?"

She shook her head, watching him.

"Why didn't we stay in the house, Sarah?"

She said nothing. He took her wrists, pulled her half up.

"It's all right now," she said,

staring. "I don't care any more." Her voice was curiously flat. "We fought all the time, he wouldn't give me any money. Kept me locked in the house when he was away. Said I was no good — told the neighbors that." Her voice took on a slight edge. "I couldn't stand it, Bill! I *had* to have someone. When I saw you . . . well, after all I'm human!"

"Where is Art?"

"Back at the house. I killed him — in bed. Just before I called you. I used a knife." Her eyes were defiant now. "I planned it for a long time. It's all right now."

He let go of her and stood up. She sprawled back on the tattered blue cotton dress, looking up at him. It began to rain softly through the fog.

