

MANHUNT

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OBJECT OF DESIRE

by
**PAUL
G.
SWOPE**

A chippy, a tramp; but she had what he wanted.



HE LEANED against the bar, toying with his drink and letting his eyes move over the room, so it wouldn't be obvious he was studying her.

She sat in the booth close to the door, sipping a sloe gin fizz and peering through the window at the fog that rolled gloomily through the street. One slim leg swung back and forth, keeping time with the music of the juke box.

His gaze flickered casually over her, taking in each detail with interest. Brown loafers with turned-down, dirty white socks. Good legs. Tight black skirt that hugged the curve of her thighs. A faded pink sweater molded her breast into a thrusting invitation. Short, brown hair peeked out from a white, silk scarf that was worn peasant style and framed a face that had seen too much. A tired face.

A tramp, he decided. Just another hooker. But she had what he wanted. The need rose in him

suddenly, nearly overpowering in intensity. He fought it down and took a long, gulping drink. His hands trembled. The room suddenly seemed too hot—too bright and noisy.

He let his eyes wander to the window, then back to the girl. With a start, he realized that she was looking directly at him. He licked his lips and finished the drink. The beat of the juke box kept time with the throbbing in his head.

"Refill," he ordered tersely. He turned from the bartender back to the girl. She was still watching him—with an amused smile, now. One eyebrow quirked quizzically. He felt a momentary revulsion. Chippy, he thought. A cheap little chippy.

He paid for the new drink, picked it up and walked over to her.

"May I join you?" His voice sounded loud in his ears and a little unnatural.

"Sure, handsome." The smile widened. "Sit down."

He sat down. "Warm in here," he said. "Or is it just me?"

Her eyes encouraged him. "Well," she drawled, "it *could* be the weather."

He didn't have much time. The need was rising in him again, building up pressure.

"Another drink?" he asked.

"Skip it," she said, her voice hardening. "I come higher than that."

He felt a sense of relief. It was going to be easy. "How much higher?" he asked. His voice sounded shaky.

"Twenty bucks," she said flatly. "One time." And waited for his refusal.

"A bargain," he said.

She picked up her purse, snapped it shut. "Then let's go," she said. All business now.

They rose and went to the door. She tightened the scarf around her head, and they stepped out into the night.

They walked a block and turned. The street was quiet and the fog folded around their footsteps as they moved.

He stopped suddenly and turned, facing her.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "It's not far." Her face was indistinct in the mist.

The need knotted up in him and he took a step forward. "We're not going any farther," he said hoarsely.

Her eyes widened in sudden fright. She turned to run, but his fingers caught the scarf and pulled her back. His hands tightened on her throat.

"Don't!" she gasped, fighting him. "You don't have to do this! Please!"

He forced her back, closing his hands slowly, feeling their strength.

"Oh, yes!" he breathed. "I do. It's no good unless I do."

He squeezed harder.

The fog swirled around him as he half-walked, half-stumbled down the street.

He held the scarf in his hands, crooning softly to it. It was beautiful, so soft and white. He stroked it. He would put it with the others, to be enjoyed again and again.

He turned the corner and walked on in the fog . . .

