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**MANHUNT** VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3, MAY, 1954. 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 St. John Publishing Company), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. Telephone MU 7-6624. Application for second class entry is pending at the Post Office, New York, New York. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1954 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under International 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, New York. 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.

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

IT WAS the shabbiest strip dive on the shabbiest street in the tenderloin. Up here, on the stripper's platform above the horseshoe-shaped bar, the air was hot and sour, so heavy with the stench of cigars and sweat and cheap hair oil that she could scarcely breathe.

*It had been a long search but, there on the stage, she looked down into the audience and knew she had found*

## The Right One

But she kept on breathing, somehow, and she kept on smiling. You always smiled, and you always kept your body in motion, no matter how much it hurt your lungs to breathe and your face to smile. If you didn't, there'd be no job tomorrow night.

Not that the job mattered. Not that *anything* really mattered any more. But this was the kind of place you'd meet him. The bumps and grinds



and the smiling were just things you had to keep doing while you waited. They wouldn't let you wait for free. They'd give you a few dollars a night if you showed your body, but otherwise it was outside. They were sharp. They knew you were on the thin edge of nothing, and they didn't give a good god-damn. Nobody did. Not even you.

So you kept smiling and you kept the bumps and grinds going — and you kept waiting for the right one. You'd know him. You'd recognize him the instant you saw him. When your business is men, and always has been, you'll damn well know him. He'll have the look. There'll be nothing intuitive about it, nothing mysterious. It's just that you've looked into so many thousand hungry male eyes you've learned to see straight through them, all the way through.

She saw him just as she reached one edge of the platform and turned to walk the other way. He hadn't been sitting down there at the bar a moment ago, but he was there now, and suddenly she felt the thin film of perspiration on her body grow chill. She missed a step, and someone in the crowd giggled, and she caught her balance and moved with the stripper's long stride to the other side of the platform to look down at the man.

Maybe, she thought, maybe at last this is the one.

"Wind it up and let it go, Lori!" someone shouted.

She picked up the beat from the drums and piano and got the grind going steadily, the upper part of her body almost motionless, the shimmering fringe around her waist swirling with the fast circular motion.

I've got to see his eyes again, she told herself. I've got to see the look.

But he kept his eyes on the bar, sitting quite motionless, staring at the drink the bartender pushed toward him. All Lori could see was his forehead and his nose, and that was not enough; she had to see his eyes. She had to see *into* his eyes, and beyond them. She had to know for sure.

The chill had left her now. She wondered why she had been affected that way, after waiting so long for so many nights, hoping for this moment. She put her hands up beneath her thick platinum hair and clasped them and began the grind. The drummer was backing her up beautifully, for once, giving her a nice even roll on the snare and a sharp rim-shot with every movement. *Goddamn it, why didn't the guy look up at her?*

She kept the grind going for a full minute, and still the man — the one who might be the answer to everything — sat staring down at the bar, not even bothering to sip at his drink.

She reached behind her back and undid the clasp that held her brassiere and let the brassiere flutter to the floor. The crowd yelled at the

sight of her bare body. All but the one man who counted. He hadn't moved, hadn't even lifted his eyes.

Lori moistened her lips. She knew how to get those eyes up fast enough, but she'd have only one chance. A few seconds, and then they'd stop her. Stop her and probably throw her out on the street. But to hell with it . . . it was the only way. She hooked her fingers in the elastic of her G-string and then, quite slowly, pushed the G-string down as far as she could and still hold on to it.

She stood poised on her high heels, the lower part of her body moving almost imperceptibly now, while the yells of the crowd hammered at her ears and the drummer built a thundering crescendo on his crash cymbals.

And now the man was looking at her. A man in his early thirties, a handsome man, with a tanned, heavy-featured face and pale eyes that stared at her unblinkingly.

And it was there. The look was there — and this was the man.

She smiled at him, but he did not smile back. His face was almost expressionless. He raised his glass and drank and put the glass back down again, and not once did the pale eyes blink or move from her body.

She let the G-string fall to the floor, and then she got the grind going again. But this was a grind like none she had ever seen or done before. She exaggerated it, making such rapid, vicious thrusts that the

entire lower part of her body began to hurt. And when she knew she had done all she could ever do, she scooped up the brassiere and G-string, slipped quickly into the nylon robe she had left on the steps leading up to the platform, and ran back through the crowd to the dressing room.

She tried not to think, not to let her mind dwell for a single moment on the possibility that she might fail. She took down the new green jersey dress and slipped it over her naked body, ran a comb hurriedly through the bright platinum of her hair, and left the room.

What if I lose him? she thought. What if he leaves before . . .

But he was still at the bar, and he glanced at her strangely as she moved past and took a table directly behind him. This was the hardest part of all, this moment of uncertainty while she sat and waited to see whether he would take the initiative. And he *had* to take the initiative. That was part of it. Everything either one of them did from now on was all part of a pattern, and it had to move in a certain way.

A man came by her table and asked to buy her a drink. She turned her shoulder to him and the man went away. Another man came and she did the same thing.

The man at the bar stood up, put a bill on the bar, and walked slowly toward her. He sat down in the chair next to her, not looking at her, and studied the backs of his broad hands.

When she was sure she could trust her voice, she said, "Did you like my dance?" She arched her back, feeling the clinging material of her dress grow taut across the upthrust breasts.

He nodded, still not looking at her. "Yeah, I liked it. What're you drinking?" His voice was pleasantly husky.

She smiled. "I don't drink."

His eyes jerked up to hers. "Quit kidding."

She looked into his eyes, deep into them, and a strange warmth filled her. It was going to be all right, she knew. She just had to play it carefully, that's all.

He was frowning at her a little now. "If you don't want a drink, maybe you'd like something to eat?"

She hesitated a moment, as if considering. "Well . . ."

"But not here," he said. "Not in this hole. I've got a car outside, though."

She smiled at him. "Well, all right. But I can't leave with you. It's against the rules."

"To hell with the rules," he said. "Let's go."

She shook her head. "I can't. But you go ahead and get the car and park it down at the corner, at Tenth and Webster. I'll be along in about fifteen minutes."

He laughed shortly. "Like hell you'll be along."

She let her smile grow warmer. "I won't stand you up, Mr. — what did you say your name was?"

"Burt," he said. "Call me Burt."

"I'll be there, Burt. It's just that I have to make it look right. The boss is awful strict."

He shrugged. "Okay, I'll take a chance. What've I got to lose?"

"Nothing," she said. "I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

He shrugged again and shouldered his way through the crowd toward the door, a tall, powerfully built man, much too well dressed for a place like this.

Lori watched him go, watched the door close behind him, and then she shut her eyes and tried to quell the nerve-tingling tension that had filled her.

He's got to be there, she thought; he's *got* to.

Fifteen minutes later, she got into Burt's dark sedan and pulled the door closed behind her. The wait had had the result she wanted, she saw. Burt's face was no longer expressionless; it held an eagerness now, a hunger. Her skirt had ridden up above her knees as she got into the car, and she left it that way. She moved a little closer to him, without being too obvious about it.

He started the motor and glanced at her face and then down at the white sheen of her bare thighs.

"Where'd you like to go?" he asked.

"Loring Park," she said. "Let's forget the food. It's nice in Loring Park, with the moonlight and the lagoon and all."

He grunted and eased the big car out into the traffic. He drove rapidly, and the trip to the lagoon seemed to Lori to take no time at all.

When they had parked she let him kiss her, but when he tried to go further she pushed him away.

"What the hell?" he said.

"What'd you expect?" she asked. "What do you take me for?"

"Don't give me that," he said bitterly, and this time when he reached for her she felt the hard ropes of muscles beneath his coat sleeves and the steel strength of his thick fingers.

She fought against him, knowing it would be no good, while his hands had their way with her. Then, suddenly, she let her body go limp and when his lips mashed down against hers she returned the kiss as savagely as she knew how.

"That's better," he muttered. "Now you're getting the idea."

She caught his lower lip between her teeth and bit until she felt the salty taste of blood.

He flung her from him. She twisted around quickly and jerked down the handle of the door and jumped outside. But she did not run. She stood there, waiting for him, laughing at him, taunting him.

He came out of the car, making a soft animal sound in his throat, his eyes pale and bulging in the moonlight. There was blood on his mouth and when he cursed her his teeth glinted redly.

She laughed at him and he reached

up and ripped her dress down to the waist. Then he lunged toward her, and she turned and ran. She tripped and fell and he dove for her, but she squirmed away and got her feet beneath her and ran again.

Then, when she came to a small clearing in the trees, she stopped. When he came for her again she stood very still, her head tilted a little to one side, staring at him.

His body slammed into her and she felt herself thrown back and down. And now she fought again. She had no chance and she wanted none, but fighting him was part of the pattern. It was necessary to make him do what he must do.

She lay on her back, helpless now, crushed beneath him. She felt his fingers around her throat, felt them sinking deeper and deeper into the soft flesh, and she knew it was going to be all right. He was going to follow the pattern.

She thought, ironically, of how they would pity her. How they would never realize that she had waited for him, searched in thousands of faces and eyes until she found him.

There was nothing but a warm, damp blackness now; the sound of the man's ragged breathing seemed to be coming from far away.

*At last, she thought . . . at last I've found the right one. The man who will do what I haven't had the courage to do for myself . . . the man who will end the life I hate . . .*

It was her last thought as she died.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### CRASH

JAMES T. FARRELL, author of *Studs Lonigan*, makes his debut in *Manhunt* with *The Old Flame*, the realistic story of a man who was afraid for no reason, and a woman who didn't seem to be afraid of anything at all. FRANK KANE's Johnny Liddell returns in a story about a reporter, who was killed for what seemed to be no motive whatever, and a big-time dance-hall owner, in *Lead Ache*, and . . . *Or Leave It Alone* is EVAN HUNTER's portrayal of a dope addict who said he didn't really need the stuff, until he suddenly had to do without it.

### COPS

RICHARD DEMING portrays a cop tempted to accept a very lovely bribe for what looked like absolutely nothing, in *The Blonde In The Bar*, and JACK WEBB's *Broken Doll* is the story of a new branch of the police force — the Airport Detail — and a simple murder.

### COOL

*The Right One*, by JONATHAN CRAIG, shows a woman with only one thing to live for, and the man who gave it to her. CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. poses a question with a single brutal answer, in *You Know What I Did?*

### CASH

FLETCHER FLORA turns in another one of his realistic and shocking stories, *Murder Of A Mouse*, which deals with the perfect murder — which, unfortunately, included an imperfect victim. R. VAN TAYLOR's *The Woman on the Bus* is the story of a woman who was obviously in hiding, and a man who had nothing to hide.

### CROP

A bumper crop of stories, plus our regular features: VINCENT H. GADDIS' *Crime Cavalcade*, *Portrait Of A Killer* by DAN SONTUP, *The Murder Market* by H. H. HOLMES, and our special fact feature, *Footprints* by FRED L. ANDERSON — all combine to make a mammoth mountain of grade-A material for May!