

stir up a storm when the whole thing may blow over with nobody hurt." He added hasty apology. "Nobody else, I mean."

I'm supposed to take that beating in line of duty and just forget about it, no hard feelings? Hell you say, brother! "I'll be out of the store some. Sib Forde will be, too. Long as Press isn't around, I may ask Alice Stein to take over on the interviews."

On his way down from Stolz's office he was paged over the public-address system to break up a disturbance at the Adjustment Bureau, where an infuriated woman had resorted to flailing a clerk with an allegedly defective toasting fork from a barbecue set. He managed to soothe the enraged customer and to retrieve the lethal fork before any real damage had been done . . . but it made him more conscious than ever of Jim Preston's absence. That was the sort of hassle Press would have handled in ten minutes; it was a good half-hour before Don got back to Protection.

Sibyl was waiting for him. "We had a break."

"About time. What?"

"Baisha Gates knows the fur buyer at Sari Soeurs; she's certain she can get the list of their recent mink customers; she's gone right up there."

"May help." He riffled through the morning batch of flyers from the Stores Mutual Protective Association. Descriptions of confirmed kleptomaniacs, amateur shoplifters and confessed boosters, of bag snatchers and pickpockets who considered crowded store aisles their happy hunting grounds, of hit-and-run workers who calmly helped themselves to garments off the racks and straightaway strolled out. But no flyers about jumpers or hijackers of sable coats. . . .

Sibyl said: "And Baisha said you have an appointment with Morris Berkowsky at eleven-thirty, his office."

"Good." The red button on the intercom winked on and off and on; the emergency signal. "Yes, Becky?"

"Miss Stein is in Interview," his secretary said. "I think she needs help!"

It was a dozen steps from his desk, through the outer office; he could hear the screaming before he flung open the door.

experience with him has been that he's inclined to look on the darkest side of a situation. So if he says this is all going to come out in the wash . . . ?"

"He might be right, Bob. I hope he's right. But I have to play it on the basis of what happened up there on West End." *Is he giving you the tip-off? Norman K. Rettjer? The celebrated specialist consulted by ailing corporations? The doctor for sickly dividends? Fellow supposed to be able to sit in on a different directors' meeting every day in the month. That would figure. One of his companies might be picking up the tab for Painting the Town. He might have met the lady.*

Stolz said: "How are you going to play it?"

"We have some top cards. I've met two of the hijack crew face to face, I have a good description of the third man. It shouldn't take too long to identify one or the other of them. Maybe one of them worked at Berkowsky's. Lily Inez may know one of them. We're trying to trace the brunette through her mink or her gown. I'm going through the files in the Bureau of Identification; way those guys worked makes me think they may have been run in, at one time or another, for jumping."

"Jumping? Trailing a truck, making off with it when the driver stops at a gas station or a lunch wagon? Don't see the connection. . . ."

"Same technique, Bob. A jumper never goes after a loaded truck unless he knows, beforehand, what's in it and how much it's worth and where it's going. The actual snatch only takes a minute—hot-wiring the motor so it can be started without a key. All the work is in getting the dope on the load, the driver, the destination. That's how it was done with the crown sables, too. They had been trailing Grolheim. They were waiting for him at the destination."

The voice of the secretary was a mere murmur from the intercom: "Mister Rettjer is not at his office, Mister Stolz. His secretary will have him call you back as soon as he comes in."

"All right, Ann." Stolz might have been sitting behind a pile of blue chips with a deuce in the hole, waiting for Don to bet. "Play it cagey, boy. Keep away from those newspapers. Don't