

happened to him. They want to know about it; I don't want to tell 'em until My gets back." He scanned the list from Sari Soeurs. Many of the names he recognized as being on Amblett's *No-Limit-to-Credit* list. A few were familiar from the financial pages of the daily press. There was a scattering of anonymities, the *noms de-joie* for mistresses of men in the uppermost tax brackets. And . . . two thirds down the typed column, the name of Missus Norman Rettjer.

The stout man shouted an imprecation, slammed the receiver at the hook, backed out of the booth still muttering to himself.

Don said: "Don't tell Becky you're with me, Baisha. Just have her buzz you back."

She huddled over the phone dial.

Don wondered what might be the significance of Missus Rettjer's ownership of a Sari Soeurs mink. Had she lent it to a friend? Given it to a less affluent relative? Sold it . . . within a year of purchasing it? None of them seemed possibilities. Anyhow, since the Homicide hounds had made such a swiftly efficient identification of Max, it was more than likely they already knew about the brunette in the turquoise gown, knew who she was and what had been her connection with the dead "Burner."

Baisha said: "That's it, that's fine," started to edge out of the booth.

Don put his hand between her shoulder blades. "Stay there. Stick with it. Others waiting to use the booth. Have to keep 'em waiting."

She nodded. "I'll pretend to be talking . . . but I'll hold the hook down so nobody'll notice."

"That's the idea." The pneumatic hammers began to pound at his ears again. The store was hot, the air was close. Smells of frying hamburger and chocolate malteds mingled with the odors of sweaty clothing and too strong perfumes. An impatient line of the thwarted telephone-minded pressed against him irritably.

It seemed much longer than the four minutes his wristwatch indicated before the phone bell rang sharply and Baisha Gates let the hook fly up.