



Your Fashion Detective

PART FOUR

So They Say...

New York City, Wednesday, 1:45 pm

“O.K., you guys sit down and tell me what’s on your mind,” I broke after we had all been staring at each other.

“Hey, look, you two maybe didn’t hit it right off, but he and I, we’ve got an idea maybe you could help us out with...” Phil Hudson began after they plopped down on chairs, I mean boxes.

“Maybe, but I’m still not sure what you guys are doing, or why the police would be interested in me. Know what I’m saying?”

“Fair enough. John and I are investigators. We work on lots of different kinds of stuff, but, now, more and more, they are handing us lots of, um, you know, fashion-y kinds of cases to deal with. Counterfeit goods like fake bags, perfumes, watches, all kinds of crap. Then, we also get retail store problems, you know boosters, shoplift gangs, carrying out entire stores in broad daylight. Oh, and outright illegal stores, fronts for money laundering. Those are the things we’re seeing, having to deal with, but that’s not the real problem,” said Hudson.

“I told Phil you really knew your stuff, Toni, I tracked you down. Thought we might be able to help each other out,” Hughes added.

Like I said, lots of different issues; fashion, retail, that stuff. So, he and I need, shall we say, an outside consultant to help us with certain aspects of cases we're working on."

"I can't imagine how, guys. I mean, don't you have experts in all those areas already? I'm just trying to keep my head above water, working on putting cut and sew, or wholesale deals together. Like that one," I said, pointing to the box Hughes' butt was parked on, full of silk-ish scarves. "I'm trying to get a few million of those jobs you're sitting on into stores...decent quality... for the price."

The two looked at each and nodded. "Well, that's kinda what we mean, Toni," Hudson started up with. "You're a real fashion insider, we..."

"Here's the deal, Toni," interrupted Hughes. "Yes, you are right, we, the department has all kinds of experts. Like, in counterfeiting, for example. If we're working with the Feds, God love 'em, they have experts on this, that, and the other, but do you know what's involved with using just the departmental resources, not to mention the government?"

"Paperwork!" Hudson groaned.

"Right! And lots of lost time while we fill out forms, then schedule a ton of meetings. Then, we have to explain over and over again to everyone, up, down, and sideways to us, why we need help, find out whether they are even allowed to work with us, or beg someone we can consult with be assigned to a case we're working on. Nothing moves fast. Phil and I were talking the other day about how we're getting tired of working with just some hacks who read a few books, took some course in recognizing counterfeit goods, or what not, and think they're experts. It's just a friggin' nightmare dealing with all them while trying to keep an investigation going much less close one. So, we tracked you down for a reason."

"This I'm dying to hear," I said

"You know how lots of people can sing, but there's really only one Streisand?" he asked.

"Oh, come on, John, that's just..."

“It’s the truth. You know fashion, you know stores. Not in some bimbo kind of way, but like they, especially fashion, is second nature to you. I remember you talking about clothes at the store. I listened in. You could explain how they were made, like you’d made them yourself. You could tell what would and wouldn’t sell right when you saw it. I mean, I know this sounds crazy, but a lot of people only think they know about clothes, like many only think they can sing, but really can’t. You really do know your stuff, you know about clothes in ways only few really do.

“I appreciate the flattery, but, I’m supposed to believe you can help me after you got me arrested?”

“Hey, it was my job. But it all worked out, right? The guy bought that dress for his wife, after all, He said it was present from him to her and that you just forgot it was to go to their place in the Hamptons, not their apartment. Look, that’s what he said to me, to the police, and that’s why the charges got dropped. I couldn’t get you rehired, though. Sorry about that, but all that’s over with. I don’t blame you for not being too excited about this. I know it seems kind of random; here we are out of the blue, but Phil and I need your help. We’re thinking maybe we can work out an on-call kind of consultant arrangement with you.

“And, not to be too greedy about this, but if I am the fashion expert you say I am, I’m going to need to get paid for sharing all my know-how ...” I said.

“True that,” Hudson said. “We have our ways! No, there’s always grant or funding money we can apply for. We can make it happen. Maybe not too quick, but we can find a way. So...there it is...John, you got anything to add?”

“Toni, I know this is a crazy idea, but, Hey, look at us. We’re not fashion guys to begin with and, honestly, we have enough going on, trying to keep what cases we do have moving through the process. We can’t possible learn what you know and keep up with all we got going on. If we could have someone we could call on, someone who knew what was what, and without giving us a lot of crap, that would be worth it to us. Think about it this way, if you like: we use informants all the time. You’d function like that, only to give us background, help fill in the gaps of what we don’t know.”

“So...what, in fact...would I have to do as this fashion informant, as you call it? Just take some calls, answer some emails, texts. That kind of stuff?” I asked.

“Yeah, maybe come look at evidence we’ve collected, or crap we’ve confiscated, but, yeah, just be available to us. You’d have to keep this confidential, too. I mean, it’s not like we could do much, but just not let on about the arrangement and what we ask you about.”

You get business in the strangest ways. For all the cards I’ve handed out over the years to prospective clients and for the bare bones Web site I pay for every month, I have yet to get any paying work out of both of them. I just can’t get recognized above the gazillion others doing those same things. But, network, person-to-person at cocktail parties, hang out at one of the thousands of fashion symposia, conferences, discussion groups always happening in this city, or, apparently, get arrested for felony theft. That, and yodeling seems to be what works to get work.

I took a minute to think. Both guys, yes, Hughes, too, seemed nice enough. They listened to me and I got answers back like I was a real person which is a nice change. That old-timey word “earnest”. That’s what came to mind about them. Of course, getting paid was the last thing they mentioned. So much for any financial resources, much less unlimited ones. Well...What the Hell! It’s not like I have so much work I can just throw away what little I do get.

“Alright, let’s do it,” I hear myself saying.