

ed, I'm going to tell you."
 "What?" queried Jones suspiciously.
 "I'm going to clean up your bad, bad little racket so it won't tick so 'cud."
 "Yeah?" Jones sneered.
 "Yeah," Pete replied, nonchalantly lighting a cigarette.
 Carlson said nothing but sat looking off over the floor. Suddenly he turned, "Listen, Wilson, you can't buck this racket, it's too much for you. Furthermore, somebody has given you the wrong impression of us."
 "Well, ain't that too bad," Pete said sympathetically.
 "Now, I'm a business man," Carlson went on, "and I believe you and I can do business. I got certain interests that I want to keep under cover and I can easily make it worth your while. Say about five thousand dollars?"
 "Is there that much money in Fairview?"
 "Sure," Carlson smiled cunningly thinking that he had Pete going his way. "I could make that seven thousand, if you see my point—"
 "Yeah," Pete cut in, "I see your point all right, Carlson. You want me to hang around for a while, then go back and turn in an okeh report. Huh?"
 "That's it!" Carlson exclaimed. "I want to—"
 "Well, nothing doing," Pete interrupted him, "I want to—have my fun, you know," he added grinning.
 "You'll git yo' fun, feller," Jones said darkly, "but you won't want th' kind yo're goin' t' git."
 "Sure enough?" Pete queried.
 "You don't mean to say," Carlson asked, apparently surprised, "that you refuse?"
 "Sure," Pete replied, "why not?"

"Then you're a damn fool!" Carlson exploded hotly.
 "A helluva lot mor'n that," Jones said savagely.
 "Well, well, well," Pete grinned at the two men before him. "I ask you, is that nice?"
 Just then Sally returned to the table and the talk drifted into other channels. Pete could see, though, that Carlson was worried. Jones glared darkly at him, as if he had a mind to put him out the way, right then and there.
 "Oh!" Sally exclaimed suddenly, looking at her watch. "I have to be going now. I—"
 "I'm not ready to leave yet, Sally," Carlson interrupted.
 "That's all right," Pete grinned. "I'll take her home."
 "That'll be fine," Carlson smiled. "You can use my car."
 Carlson's change of manner somewhat mystified Pete. "Thanks," he replied as he arose to go, "but we won't need it."
 "Well, think it over, Wilson," Carlson said in a hearty tone. "You can't go wrong if you accept."
 "You think it over," Pete replied as he and Sally left the table.
 "What's th' idea, Carlson?" Jones asked guffily as they watched Sally and Pete leave the room. "Tryin' t' play that bo up t' Sally?"
 "Why not?" Carlson asked, leaning back in his chair and lighting a black cigar. "He falls for her, and if we can't get him to lay off, she can. See?"
 "I git ya," Jones grinned wickedly.
 Outside, Sally and Pete got in a taxi.
 "Say," he asked her suddenly as the car rolled down the driveway, "what's Carlson to you?"
 She smiled mischievously at him. "Why do you ask me that?"
 "I want to know, please," Pete begged, taking her hand in his.
 "Well," she replied after an unsuccessful attempt to release her hand, "he used to be very friendly with my mother before she died, and since I didn't have any relatives, he has been awful kind to me. It was through him that I got the job I have now."
 "Phew!" Pete exclaimed, much relieved. "Just a sort of self-appointed guardian, huh?"
 "Uh-huh," she answered, slightly frustrated, for Pete had both of her hands now.
 "I never was that lucky," Pete said suddenly. "My mother died when I was small and my father left me in a children's home in Sanford, Virginia. You see I've been on my o' hook for a long time. Funny, ain't it?" He went on: "I mean the way we both have something in common and the way we sort of take to each other?"
 "Uh-huh," she nodded.
 Pete sighed expressively.
 "You know, I have known you only a few hours, yet I feel like I

have known you all my life."
 "I—I feel that way, too, Pete," Sally said in a wee sweet voice that thrilled him through and through.
 Pete sighed again. "I kind of wish something would happen. You know," he went on, "fire, a fight, or something that would give me a chance to save you. I mean a chance to do something big for you."
 "Silly," she said laughing lightly. "Look, we're home now."
 Neither one had noticed that the taxi had been standing still for the last five minutes.
 The driver looked back and grinned. "Take yo' time, feller; th' meter ain't got t' a dollar yet."
 They all laughed at that.
 "Well, Sally," Pete said finally, after dismissing the taxi, "how about tomorrow afternoon, or this afternoon rather?" he added grinning, for it was then about two o'clock in the morning.
 "All right, come around about four. I go to church services every Sunday morning."
 "No," Pete protested. "You mean about one o'clock."
 He wanted to spend as much time as possible with her. "We can have dinner together, then," he added.
 After quite a little arguing, it was finally settled that he could call for her at two o'clock.
 Back at his hotel, Pete reluctantly switched his mind from Sally to Carlson.
 Carlson evidently was in something up to his neck, Pete reflected, to offer seven thousand to be let alone. Well, he had never accepted "hush money" from anyone and he wasn't going to start now. "No, Carlson," he said half aloud. "I was sent to clean out your racket and that's exactly what I am going to try like hell to do."
 With that settled, he took a stiff drink of scotch and went to sleep, dreaming of Sally.
 Sunday afternoon passed all too quickly for Pete. He and Sally had dinner together and took a long drive in his roadster. He got a big kick out of seeing her drive his car. She did, too. Pete was all for asking her how she would like to drive a little apartment. In fact, he did hint at it, but Sally tactfully avoided the hints each time. Nevertheless, Pete was happy just to be near her.
 "You know," he said suddenly as they were returning to town, "I never thought a guy like me would ever fall for this soft stuff."
 "You aren't sorry, are you?" Sally asked.
 "Am I sorry?" Pete bellowed. "Hell—excuse me. I mean you know I ain't!"
 Sally interrupted him with a little significant cough.
 Consequently, Pete spent the remainder of the drive and a considerable part of the evening trying

to convince her that he had never thought of being sorry, much to Sally's secret amusement.
 After leaving her at her home that evening, she claiming an engagement with some friends, Pete took a taxi out to the Black and Tan Club.
 Practically the same sight that he had witnessed the night before, greeted his eyes. Carlson and Jones were nowhere in sight. He seated himself at a table and the same waitress approached him who had served them last night.
 "Milk?" she queried smiling.
 "Milk," Pete replied, grinning back at her, for she was a cute little brownskin girl.
 One or two heavily painted, loose-hipped women passed slowly by his table giving him the "C'mon" eye. Pete politely ignored them, however.
 Just then Carlson came from a little door at one end of the room. He saw Pete and turned toward his table, with a wide smile on his face.
 "Well, back again, eh?" he greeted Pete, seating himself and pulling out the inevitable cigar.
 "Yeah," Pete replied easily. "I'm kind of interested in your joint, Carlson."
 "Well," Carlson began, ignoring Pete's intended hint and pulling an envelope out of his pocket, "here you are, Wilson. There's eight thousand in cold cash. I managed to put another extra grand in the bargain just to show you that we mean well—"
 "Carlson," Pete cut in, "you might as well put that dough back, because it's no go. See? I'm going to clean you out if you're in wrong. Of course, if I don't find anything out the way, you won't be bothered. But get the idea out of your head that you can bribe me."
 "You're hurr-an," Carlson replied.
 "Damn right I am!" Pete exploded hotly. "But I wouldn't take any of your money to save you from going up!"
 "All right," Carlson replied, "keep your shirt on. But I'm warning you to lay off."
 "Save it!" Pete snapped.
 The next day, Pete went around to see Sally and found her in a pensive mood.
 "What's the trouble, Sally?" he asked. "Did your kitten die?"
 "Listen, Pete," Sally began somewhat confused. "I—I hear that you are trying to get Mr. Carlson into trouble. Don't Pete. Please, for my sake, don't. He's been so good to me that I almost look upon him as being a relative. And I—I couldn't bear to think that you had gotten him into any trouble."
 "So!" Pete exclaimed. "That's his game, eh? Using you to get me to lay off."
 "I—I don't understand, Pete?"
 "Well, listen, I was sent down here to clean Carlson out if I find anything on him, and that's exactly what I intend to do."
 "But listen, Pete, Carlson wouldn't do anything unlawful."
 "No? That oily guy would do anything," Pete replied hotly. The fact that she was trying to protect Carlson was making him mad. "Naturally, you don't want to see him get into trouble. Hell, I don't myself. If you think I get a big kick out of putting a guy behind the bars, you're all wrong. It's just my job, that's all. And as long as it's my job, you or nobody else can save Carlson, if I get something on him."
 It went on like that for about an hour. Finally she told him that if he persisted in making trouble for Carlson, he need not try to see her again.
 Back at his hotel, Pete strode up and down his room with long, quick strides, stopping now and then to drink from the bottle of Scotch.
 So it had come to that. Carlson had used his influence to get Sally to make him lay off. And she, thinking Carlson was right, was playing exactly the way Carlson wanted her to. He hated to think of giving up Sally just because it was his job to clean Carlson's racket out. She was more precious to him than any detective job or cleaning out Carlson either. If only Sally wasn't so positive that Carlson was innocent. Well, she had made herself clear anyway. If he persisted in going after Carlson, she wouldn't see him again. Pete thought over that and smiled grimly to himself. "It's either my duty or Sally!" he said half aloud, "and the only way I can see clearly is to do my duty. Maybe after I catch that guy red-handed, she might look at things from a different angle. Furthermore, if she likes me—aw, what the hell!" He

gave the whole problem up in disgust.
 That evening he took a taxi out to the Black and Tan Club. Instead of going in the front, however, he slipped around the side of the building. Crouching behind a tree, he looked to see whether anyone had noticed him. Apparently no one had. From where he stood he could see both the front and back of the place. He noticed a small gravel pathway that led up to a door at one corner of the house, under the rear porch.
 "Now I wonder what's behind that door?" Pete mused. After looking carefully around, he darted over to the door. It was locked. He pulled a couple of keys and another instrument of similar shape out of his pocket. In a few seconds, he had the door unlocked.
 With a small, powerful flashlight in one hand and his gun in the other, he carefully opened the door and slipped noiselessly into the pitch-dark room.
 He closed the door and listened

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