

"HONEST MONEY" By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

* BLACK MASK *

DETECTIVE, WESTERN
STORIES OF ACTION

Nov., 1932 · 20¢

"SINFUL
CIBOLA"

By

JACK BERTIN

"DEAD MEN
TELL TALES"

By

RAOUL WHITFIELD

A New JERRY TRACY Story

A detailed illustration of a cowboy, likely Jerry Tracy, in profile facing left. He wears a wide-brimmed blue hat, a green long-sleeved shirt with a purple neckerchief, a brown studded vest, and brown chaps with a yellow belt. He holds a black revolver in his right hand, which is partially covered by a white cloth. A second revolver is tucked into his waistband on the left. The background is plain white.

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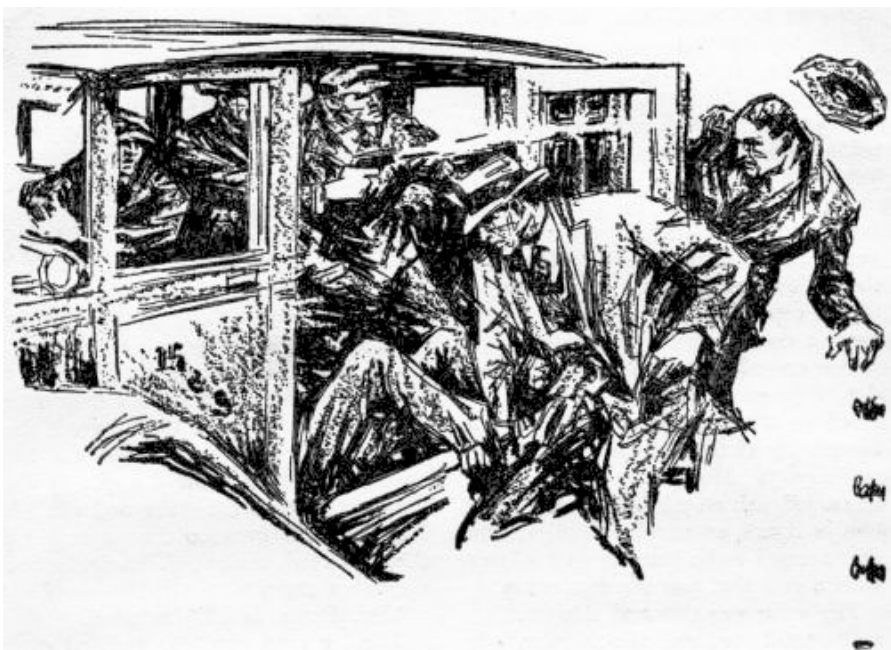
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Honest Money

By
ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

First published *Black Mask*, November 1932.

Ken Corning, fighting young lawyer, tries to earn an honest living in a city of graft



he clock on the city hall was booming the hour of nine in the morning when Ken Corning pushed his way through the office door. On the frosted glass of that door appeared the words: “*Kenneth D. Corning, Attorney at Law—Enter.*”

Ken Corning let his eye drift over the sign. It was gold leaf and untarnished. It was precisely thirty days since the sign painter had collected for the job, and the sign painter had collected as soon as his brush had finished the last letter of the last word of that sign.

The credit of young attorneys in York City wasn’t of the best. This was particularly true of young lawyers who didn’t seem to have an “in” with the administration.

Helen Vail was dusting her desk. She grinned at Ken.

He reached a hand to his inside pocket.

“Pay day,” he said.

Her eyes glinted with a softness that held a touch of the maternal.

“Listen, Ken, let it go until you get started. I can hang on a while longer. . . .”

He took out a wallet, started spreading out ten-dollar bills. When he had counted out five of them, he pushed the pile over to her. There were two bills left in the wallet.

“Honest, Ken. . . .”

He pushed his way to the inside office. “Forget it,” he said. “I told you we’d make it go. We haven’t started to fight yet.”

She followed him in, the money in her hand. Standing in the doorway, very erect, chin up, she waited for him to turn to meet her gaze.

The outer door of the entrance office made a noise.

She turned. Looking over her shoulder, Ken could see the big man who stood on the threshold. He looked as though his clothes had been filled with apple jelly. He quivered and jiggled like a jellyfish on a board. Fat encased him in layers, an unsubstantial, soft fat that seemed to be hanging to his bones with a grip that was but temporary.

His voice was thin and falsetto.

“I want to see the lawyer,” he shrilled.

Helen turned on her heel, called over her shoulder: “All right, Mr. Corning. I’ll enter up this retainer.” To the man she said: “You’ll have to wait. Mr. Corning’s preparing an important brief. He’ll see you in a minute or two.”

The pneumatic door check swung the door to.

Ken Corning turned in his swivel-chair and sent swift hands to his tie. From the outer office sounded the furious clack of a typewriter. Three minutes passed. The roller of the machine made sounds as the paper was ripped from it. The door of the private office banged

open. Helen Vail pushed her way in, in an ecstasy of haste, crinkling a legal paper in her hands.

“All ready for your signature,” she said.

The pneumatic door check was swinging the door closed as Ken reached for the paper. On it had been written with the monotony of mechanical repetition, over and over: “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.”

The door completed its closing. The latch clicked.

“Get his name?” asked Ken.

“Sam Parks. He’s nervous. It’s a criminal case. I’d have kept him waiting longer, but he won’t stand for it. He’s looking at his watch—twice in the last sixty seconds.”

Ken patted her hand.

“Okey. Good girl. Shoot him in.”

Helen walked to the door, opened it, smiled sweetly. “You may come in now, Mr. Parks.”

She held the door open. Ken could see the big man heaving his bulk free of the chair. He saw him blot out the light in the doorway as the girl stepped aside. He was signing a paper as the big man entered the office and paused. Ken kept his eyes on the paper until the door catch clicked. Then he looked up with a smile.

“Mr. Parks, is it?” he asked.

The big man grunted, waddled over to the chair which was placed so close to the new desk as to invite easy intimacy. He sat down, then, apparently feeling that the chair was too far away, started hitching it closer and closer to the desk. His voice was almost a shrill whisper.

“My wife,” he said, “has been arrested.”

Ken laid down the pen, looked professional.

“What,” he asked, “is the charge?”

The big man’s shrill voice rattled off a string of swift words: “Well, you see it was this way. We had a place, a little restaurant, and the officers came busting in without a warrant . . . tell me, can they come into a place without a warrant, that way?”

Ken said crisply: “They did, didn’t they?”

“Yes.”

“Okey, then they can. They’re not supposed to, but they did, they do and they can. What happened?”

“Well, that was about all. They claimed we were selling booze.”

Ken’s voice was sharp.

“Find any?”

“A little.”

“How much?”

“Ten or fifteen gallons.”

“Then they arrested you both?”

The fat man blinked glassy eyes.

“Just her. They didn’t take me.”

“Why?”

He fidgeted, and the layers of fat jiggled about.

“Well, we sort of outslicked ’em. There had been a guy eating at one of the tables. He got wise as soon as the first man walked in on the raiding party. He ducked out the back. I sat down at his table and finished up his food. The wife pretended she didn’t know me, and asked the officers if she could collect my bill before they took her. They said she could. I paid her

fifty cents for the food and gave her a ten-cent tip. Then they closed up the place, took the booze away with 'em, and put me out. The wife said she ran the place alone.”

Ken Corning twisted a pencil in his fingers.

“I’ll want a retainer of a hundred and fifty dollars,” he said “and then I’ll see what I can do and report.”

The glassy eyes squinted.

“You ain’t in with the gang here?”

“I’m a newcomer.”

The man opened his coat, disclosed a wrinkled vest and shirt, soggy with perspiration. He pulled a leather wallet from an inside pocket and pulled out a hundred dollar bill and a fifty. The wallet was crammed with money. He tossed the money carelessly on the desk.

“The first thing to do,” he said, “is to see the wife. Tell her you’re going to represent her, see? Let her know I’m on the job, and tell her to keep a stiff upper lip, and to keep quiet, see? Tell her to keep quiet, see?”

Ken Corning folded the money, got to his feet, stood there, signifying that the interview was over.

“Come back when I send for you. Leave your name and address and your wife’s name with the girl in the outer office so I can get my records straight. Leave a telephone number where you can be reached.”

The man turned on the threshold.

“You ain’t in with the ring?” he asked, and there was a note of anxiety in his voice.

Ken Corning reached for a law book, shook his head.

The pneumatic door clicked shut.

Ken set down the law book and fingered the money. He turned it over and over in his fingers. He cocked his head on one side, listening. After a moment he heard the click of the outer door catch. Then Helen Vail was standing on the threshold of the inner office. Her eyes were starry.

Ken Corning waved the money.

“Start an account for that bird, and credit it with a hundred and fifty.”

She was smiling at him when the door opened. Broad shoulders pushed their way across the outer office. From his desk, Ken could see the man as he crossed the outer office. Helen Vail barred the inner office door.

“Whom do you wish?” she asked.

The man laughed, pushed past her, walked directly to Ken Corning’s desk. He flipped back a corner of his coat with a casual hand.

“Who,” he asked, “was the guy that just left here, and what’d he want?”

Ken Corning pushed back the swivel-chair as he got to his feet.

“This,” he said, “is my private office.”

The broad shouldered man laughed. His face was coarse skinned, but the gray eyes had little lights in them that might have meant humor, or might have meant a love of conflict.

“Keep your shirt on, keep your shirt on,” he said. “I’m Perkins from the booze detail. There was a speak knocked over last night. The woman who was running it tried to slip a bribe, and she’s booked on a felony. That big guy was sitting in there, eating chow. He claimed he was a customer. I happened to see him come in here. He looked phoney, so I tagged along. I want to know what he wanted.”

Ken Corning’s voice was hard.

“This,” he said, “is a law office, not an information bureau.”

The gray eyes became brittle hard. The jaw jutted forward. Perkins crowded to the desk.

“Listen, guy,” he said, “you’re new here. Whether you’re going to get along or not depends on whether you play ball or not. I asked you who that guy was. I asked because I wanted to know. . . .”

Corning moved free of the swivel-chair.

“You getting out?” he asked.

The lips of the broad shouldered man twisted in a sneer.

“So that’s your line of chatter?”

“That’s my line of chatter.”

The man turned on his heel, strode towards the door. He turned with his hand on the knob.

“Try and get some favors out of the liquor detail!” he said.

Ken’s tone was rasping. He stood with his feet planted wide apart, eyes glinting.

“I don’t want favors,” he said, “from anybody!”

The broad shouldered man walked from the office, heels pounding the floor. Slowly the automatic door check swung the door shut.



Ken was ready to leave his office, seeking an interview with his client at the jail, when the door of his private office framed the white features of Helen Vail.

“It’s Mr. Dwight,” she said.

“What is?”

“The man who just came in. Carl Dwight. He’s outside. He wants to see you.”

Ken whistled. “Show him in,” he said.

She motioned towards the desk.

“Shall I get you some papers?”

“Not with him. He’s a wise bird. He knows. Shoot him in.”

Helen stood to one side of the door and beckoned. Carl Dwight came in. He walked with a slight limp. His lips were smiling. He had pale eyes that seemed covered with a thin white film, like boiled milk. Those eyes didn’t smile. His skin was swarthy and oily. There was a cut on his forehead, a slight bruise on his left cheek bone.

He wasn’t large, and yet he radiated a suggestion of ominous power. He said, crisply: “I’m busy. You’re busy. You know of me. I know of you. I’ve had my eye on you for the last week or two. You’re a likely looking young man. I want to give you a retainer. Here’s five hundred dollars. That’ll be for this month. There’ll be five hundred dollars more coming next month, and the month after that.”

His gloved hand laid an envelope on the desk.

Ken picked up the envelope. It was unsealed. There were five one hundred-dollar bills in it.

“What,” asked Ken cautiously, “am I supposed to do?”

The gloved hand waved in an airy gesture.

“Just use your head,” said Dwight. “I’ve got rather extensive interests here. You’ve probably heard of me, know who I am.”

Ken Corning chose his words carefully.

“You,” he said, “are reputed to be the head of the political machine in this county. You are reputed to be the man who tells the mayor what to do.”

The filmed eyes blinked. The swarthy skinned man made clucking noises in his throat.

“That, of course, is an exaggeration, Mr. Corning. But I have interests in the county, interests which are rather extensive. Now you can sort of look out for those interests. And, by the way, there’s a criminal case, the matter of a woman who was running rather a disreputable joint, gambling, hooch and all that. Parks was the name, I believe.

“Do you know, I think it might be rather a good thing to have that case disposed of rather rapidly. A plea of guilty, let us say. I’m certain you’ll agree that it’s a dead open and shut case. She tried to bribe an officer. There were witnesses. She gave him fifty dollars. Having such things aired in front of a jury don’t do any good.”

He got to his feet. The swarthy skin crinkled in a smile, a sallow, bilious smile. The filmed eyes regarded Ken Corning with the wisdom of a serpent.

“So now,” he smirked, “we understand each other perfectly. I think you’ll like it in York City, Corning.”

Ken slowly got to his feet.

“Yes,” he said, “I understand you perfectly. But you don’t understand me, not by a long ways. Take back this damned money before I slap your face with it!”

Dwight teetered back and forth on his feet, made little clucking noises with his mouth.

“Like that, eh?” he said.

“Like that,” agreed Corning

Dwight sneered.

“You won’t last long. You can’t . . .”

He didn’t finish. Ken Corning reached out with the envelope which he held by a corner, and slapped it across Dwight’s mouth. The filmed eyes blazed into light. The mouth twisted in a snarl. Dwight snatched at the envelope, crammed it in his pocket, whirled and started to the door. He paused on the threshold.

“Wait,” he said, significantly.

And Ken Corning, standing by his desk, feet braced wide apart, jaw thrust forward, said: “You’re damned tooting I’ll wait. I’ll be waiting long after you think you’re finished with me!”



he attorneys’ room in the county jail was a dull, cheerless place. There was a long desk which ran down the center of the room. Above this desk was a heavy wire screen. The prisoner could sit on one side of the desk, the attorney on the other.

Esther Parks came into the room through the doorway which led to the cell corridor. Ken Corning watched her with interest. Her face was heavy, her walk plodding. She was a big woman, broad-hipped and big-shouldered. Her eyes were like oysters on a white plate.

She plowed her way forward.

The attendant who had charge of the room stood at the doorway, beyond earshot, but where he could see everything that went on in the room.

The woman sat down on the stool opposite Ken Corning. Her face was within three feet of his. Her big hands were folded upon the scarred wood of the long desk. The heavy screen separated them.

“Hello,” she said.

Ken Corning kept his voice low pitched.

“Hello. I’m the attorney that your husband engaged to represent you. He thought you were just charged with unlawful possession of liquor. You’re not. They’ve got you on the charge of offering a bribe to an officer. That’s a felony.”

He paused expectantly.

The woman said: “Uh-huh.”

Ken stared into the oyster eyes.

“Well,” he said, “I’m to do the best I can for you. Can we go to trial and beat the charge?”

The eyes didn’t change expression. The heavy face rippled into dull speech.

“I was running a speak, me and Sam. We went in mostly for cheap food with drinks to sell to the right parties. I don’t see why they had to pick on us. Everybody’s doing it, that is, everybody anywhere round our neighborhood.”

Ken frowned and shook his head.

“I’m telling you it isn’t the liquor charge they’ve got you on. I could square that with a fine. It’s the bribery charge. Can we beat that?”

The woman’s voice was blurred in its accent, indifferent and stolid in tone.

“I don’t know. I gave him the money. They all take the money. Twice before I’ve had men call on me and say they was the law. I’ve given ’em money. I gave this man money. Then he collared me. They didn’t spot Sam. He sat down at a table and ate some grub.”

Ken Corning made little drumming noises with the tips of his fingers. He regarded the woman through the wire mesh of the screen.

“Have they asked you for a statement?” he wanted to know.

A flicker of intelligence appeared in the pale, watery eyes.

“I ain’t so dumb. I told ’em to wait until my lawyer showed up, then they could talk with him.”

“Who was it?” asked Corning, “the one who wanted the statement?”

She moved her head in a gesture of slow negation.

“I dunno. Somebody from the Sheriff’s office, or the District Attorney’s office. He was a young fellow and he had a man with him that took down what I said in shorthand.”

“What did you say?”

“Nothin’.”

Corning squinted his eyes thoughtfully.

“How did it happen that they didn’t spot Sam as your husband? Usually when they make these raids they’ve had a stoolie go in and make a purchase or two. They have all the dope on where the stuff is kept and who runs the place.”

The woman’s head turned again, slowly, from side to side.

“I dunno. They just didn’t spot Sam, that was all. I was behind the counter at the cash register. They came walkin’ in. I think I heard somebody say ‘There she is,’ or ‘That’s her, now,’ or somethin’ like that. I didn’t pay so much attention. They made the pinch, and I tried to hand ’em the dough.

“It was their fault I slipped ’em the money, too. One of the men held up the jug that had the hooch in it, and said: ‘Well, sister, what are you goin’ to do about this?’ I seen he had me, dead to rights, so I opened the cash register, an’ asked him if he’d listen to reason. He said he would. I slipped him the cash, an’ then they said something to each other and told me to come along with them.

“Sam had got wise to what was goin’ on, an’ he’d gone over to the table an’ was boltin’ down food. I asked the law if I could close up the joint, take the cash an’ collect from the gent at the table. They said I could, an’ I did, an’ that’s all I know about it. They took me here.”

Ken Corning clamped his mouth into a thin line.

“Then we’ve got to plead guilty,” he said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“That’s your job. I dunno. I’m tellin’ you what happened. I figured Sam would get a mouthpiece an’ spring me.”

Corning continued to drum with his fingers.

“Look here,” he said, “there’s something funny about this case. I’m going to keep a close mouth for a while, and see if I can find out what’s back of it. You seem to be on the outs with the ring that’s running the town. Do you know why?”

The big head shook slowly.

“Well,” said Corning, “sit tight for a while. Don’t talk to anyone. If anyone asks you any questions, no matter who it is, tell them to see your lawyer, Mr. Corning. Can you remember to do that?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I’ll have you arraigned and get bail set. Can you raise bail?”

“How much?”

“Maybe three thousand dollars?”

“No.”

“Two thousand?”

“Maybe.”

“Any property you could put up as security with a bail bond company for the purpose of getting them to issue a bail bond?”

“No. Just cash. We had a lease on the joint. It paid fair money. Lately it ain’t been payin’.”

Ken Corning got to his feet.

“All right,” he said. “Sit tight. Remember what I told you. Don’t talk. I’m going to see what I can do.”

The attendant moved forward.

“This way,” he said to the woman, in a voice that was a mechanical monotone.



on Graves, the Deputy District Attorney in charge of the case of the People vs. Esther Parks was almost totally bald, despite the fact that he was in his early thirties. His face ran to nose. The eyes on either side were round and lidless. He had a peculiar peering appearance like that of a startled anteater.

He turned the nose directly towards Ken Corning, so that the twin eyes bored unblinkingly into those of the attorney, and said: “We won’t reduce the charge. She bribed an officer. That’s a serious offense.”

Ken kept his temper.

“That’s a hard charge to prove, and you know as well as I do that the officer kept angling to get her to give him money. You get a jury of twelve people together, and some of ’em are going to think it’s a hell of a note to send a woman to the pen because she had some hooch and an officer kept sticking his palm out at her. It’s only natural to slip a man something when he makes a stall like that. That isn’t being criminal. That’s just human nature.”

The deputy licked his lips with the tip of a pale tongue that seemed, somehow, to be utterly cold.

“The penal code don’t say so, brother.”

Ken Corning frowned.

“The penal code says lots of things—so does the Constitution.”

Don Graves said: “Yeah,” and made as though he’d turn away.

Corning raised his voice.

“Well, listen, about bail. If you’ll suggest to the magistrate that bail be reduced to a thousand dollars cash, I think she can raise it.”

Graves turned back to Corning, stared lidlessly at him.

“You heard what the magistrate said: ten thousand bucks cash, or twenty thousand bond.”

Corning’s rage flared up.

“A hell of a bail that is. You’d think the woman was guilty of a murder or something. If you don’t know that these cheap dicks are sticking their palms out right and left and shaking down the people that run the little speaks, you’re just plain crazy! You keep riding me around, and I’ll take this jane before a jury and see what twelve men in a box have to say about the way you’re getting so damned virtuous in York City all of a sudden.”

The lidless eyes remained hard and peering.

“Go ahead,” said Graves.

“I will!” snapped Corning.

Graves spoke as Ken Corning was halfway to the door.

“Tell you what I *will* do, Corning.”

Corning paused, turned.

“Take her into court right away, plead her guilty as charged, and I’ll ask to have a minimum sentence imposed.”

Corning asked: “Fine or imprisonment?”

“Imprisonment,” said Graves. “To hell with a fine.”

Corning’s retort was emphatic. “To hell with *you!*” he said, and slammed the door.

Helen Vail had the afternoon papers for him when he walked into his office.

“News?” she asked.

He grinned at her, took the papers, touched her fingertips as he took them, and suddenly patted her hand.

“Good girl,” he said.

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know. You just are.”

“How about the case?”

“I don’t know. There’s something funny. You’d think the woman had done a murder or something. And Graves, that billiard ball guy with the snake eyes, told me he’d let me cop a minimum sentence if I’d rush her through the mill and make a plea.”

Helen Vail’s eyes were sympathetic.

“You mean send the woman to the pen because she slipped one of these dicks a little dough?”

“Exactly.”

“What’d you tell him?”

Corning grinned.

“That, precious, is something your little shell-like ears shouldn’t hear.”

And he walked into the inner office, taking the papers with him. He sat in his swivel-chair, put his feet on the desk, turned to the sporting page, browsed through the headlines, turned back to the front page.

The telephone rang.

He called out to Miss Vail: “I’ve got it, Helen,” and scooped the receiver to his ear, holding the newspaper in one hand, the telephone in the other.

The shrill, piping voice of Sam Parks came over the wire.

“Listen, is this Corning, the lawyer?”

“Yes.”

“Okey. This is Parks. I was in to see you this morning about my wife. Listen, I know why they’re trying to give her the works. I can’t tell you over the telephone. I’m coming over. You be there?”

“Come right away,” said Corning.

“Yeah!” shrilled Parks excitedly, and banged the receiver into place. Ken Corning hung up, turned to the paper. There was a frown creasing his forehead. He looked at his watch. It was five minutes to four. Street noises came up through the open window. The afternoon was warm, the air laden with the scents of late summer.

Ken’s eyes drifted unseeingly to the front page of the newspaper. Why should so much stir be made over the matter of a commonplace woman in a third-grade speakeasy giving some money to an officer who held out his hand for it? Why should a raid be made on a place where the officers hadn’t collected enough information to know who was running the place, and had let the husband slip through their fingers?

He stared at the newspaper, let his forehead crinkle in thought, and tried to fit the ends of the puzzle together.

Minutes passed.

The clock on the city hall boomed the hour of four, and the big gilt hands crept around until the minute hand marked the quarter hour.

There was the sound of a truck backfiring in the street.

Something came trebling up through the window, the scream of a child, or of a very frightened woman. Then there was the sound of rubber tires, skidding into a turn on pavement, the shout of a man.

There was a second of silence, and then the noise made by many voices, the sound of feet running on cement. A siren wailed in the distance.

Ken Corning, lost in contemplation, did not interpret the significance of those sounds until the siren had become a scream, until the clanging bell of the ambulance sounded almost directly beneath his office window, and until the door of his private office opened and Helen Vail stared at him.

“There seems to have been a man hurt,” she said.

Ken Corning put down the paper and went to the window. Helen put her hand on his shoulder as they leaned out. Corning was conscious of the touch of her hair against his cheek, the pressure of her hand on his shoulder. He slid his right arm out, around her waist.

They looked down upon the street.

There was no traffic. Such vehicles as were on the street were stalled. Men swarmed about like busy ants, moving in seething disorder. An ambulance was backing towards the curb. A

uniformed officer was clearing a path for it. Stalled cars, their motors running, belched forth thin smoke films which made the air a light blue color.

A black circle of men were not moving. They were grouped about something which lay on the sidewalk. From that form there was a dark stain which had welled along the cement until it trickled in a thin, sluggish stream into the gutter.

The man was big and fat. He was lying on his back.

“Good heavens!” said the voice of Helen Vail, “it’s the man who was in the office.”

Ken Corning swung from the window. He reached the doorway of the private office in three strides, and gained the stairs. He went down them two at a time. He reached the sidewalk as the men were loading the stretcher. He pushed his way through the crowd. Men muttered comments, turned and stared at him, growled warnings to watch what he was doing. Corning paid no attention to them.

He reached the inner circle, saw the stretcher bearers heaving against the weight of the bulk that they strove to place in the ambulance.

Parks had been shot twice. To all appearances he was dead. The bullet holes welled a red trail which dripped from the stretcher. The eyes were half open and waxy. The skin was like discolored dough. The hands trailed limply at the ends of dangling arms.

One of the stretcher bearers spoke sharply.

“Give us a hand here, some of you guys!”

Ken Corning pushed through the circle as two of the spectators swirled forward. A uniformed officer also bent to give a lift. Corning asked a question: “Who saw it? How did it happen?”

Men stared at him with blank curiosity. He was hatless, wandering about asking how it had happened, and men regarded him as a part of the incident which had broken into the routine of their daily life. They watched him with that expression of impersonal curiosity with which fish in an aquarium stare at spectators who press against the glass tank.

On the fifth repetition of the question, a man gave an answer.

“I saw it. He drove up in an automobile and parked the car. He started walking along the street. The guy that shot him was in a roadster. He pulled right in to the curb, and he didn’t drive away until he was sure the guy was dead. The first shot smacked him over. He shot again when the guy was on the cement. I seen him twitch when the second bullet struck!”

Corning led the man to one side.

“Drove up in a car, eh? Which car?”

He indicated the line of parked machines.

The witness shrugged his shoulders. “I ain’t sure. I think it was the flivver over there. I remember that it was a car that had a smashed fender. You know, there wasn’t no reason why I should notice him until. . . .”

“Yes,” said Corning, “I know. Now you want some advice?”

The man looked at him with curious eyes.

“Huh?” he asked.

“Get away from here and don’t tell your story to a soul. Go to headquarters, get the homicide squad’s office and ask for Sergeant Home. He’s on the square. Tell your story to him, and ask that your name be withheld. Otherwise, if you got a good look at the man that did the shooting, you might find yourself parked on a marble slab. Killers don’t like witnesses.”

The man’s face paled. “Gee,” he said; then, after an interval: “Gee whiz!”

He spun on his heel, started walking rapidly away. From time to time he glanced over his shoulder.

His tip gave Ken Corning the chance to be the first man to examine the light car with the bent fender.

He looked at the registration certificate which was strapped about the steering post of the car. That showed the machine was registered in the name of Esther Parks, and the address which was given was the same address as that of the place which had been raided when the woman was arrested.

Ken felt of the seat. It was still warm.



He noticed an afternoon newspaper lying on the floorboards. He picked it up. There was nothing else on the inside of the car to give any inkling as to who had driven or owned it. Ken felt in the flap pocket of the right-hand door. His groping fingers encountered a lady's handkerchief, a pair of pliers, the cap from an inner tube, and a bit of pasteboard. He pulled out the pasteboard.

It was red, bearing the insignia of the police department. It was, he found when he deciphered the scrawled lines which were placed in the printed blanks, a ticket for parking within fifteen feet of a fire hydrant on Seventh Street, between Madison and Harkley. The time was checked at three-forty-five, of that day.

Ken pocketed the ticket and walked around to the front of the car, inspecting the dent in the fender. There was but little paint left upon the nondescript car which Parks had been driving. That little paint had been cracked and chipped where the fender had crumpled. And, on the tip of that crumpled fender, was a spot of bright red enamel, evidently taken from the car with which the flivver had collided.

Ken examined the front of the springs, the radiator, found further evidences of a collision, further bits of red paint. The accident had evidently been very recent.

Aside from those things, there was nothing to indicate anything whatever about the occupant of the car, or the errand upon which it had been driven.

Ken walked to the curb, looked at the crowd which was commencing to move along under orders of the uniformed police. The traffic was moving now, crawling past at a snail's pace, horns blaring. An officer, accompanied by a woman, moved along the parked lane of cars, inspecting them.

Corning felt that this woman had seen the fat man emerge from a machine, but couldn't identify the machine. Ken let himself drift away with the scattering spectators. He walked around the block, and back to his office. He climbed the stairs, smiled at Helen Vail's white face.

"Was it . . .?"

He nodded, passed into the inner office. She came and stood in the doorway. Ken smoothed out the newspaper he had taken from the car Parks had driven. He spread it out.

A knife had cut away a section of the front page.

"Was it because he came here?" asked Helen, mustering her courage.

Ken Corning reached for the other afternoon newspaper he had been reading when the sound of the shots had interrupted him. He nodded absently as he spread the two front pages out on the desk, one over the other.

The paper from the death car showed the page of the other paper through the opening where the knife had cut. That which had been cut out was a picture with a small paragraph or two below it.

Ken looked at the picture.

It showed a man with a square-cut chin, shell glasses, a firm, thin mouth, high cheek bones and a high forehead. Below it appeared the words *Mayor Appoints Harry B. Dike as New Head of Water Department.*

Corning read the few paragraphs appearing below the headlines of the accompanying news article. Those paragraphs recited the enviable record Harry B. Dike had enjoyed in connection with his own business enterprises and such civic activities as had claimed his time. It also mentioned that Dike was firmly opposed to the granting of contracts and concessions to those who enjoyed political pull, and that, in the future, the water department would be

conducted upon a basis of efficiency with all work thrown open to the lowest responsible bidders, although the department would reserve the right to let private contracts.

The article sounded very promising. It gave the location of Dike's office in the Monadnock Building. The Monadnock Building was on Seventh Street, between Madison and Harkley.

Helen Vail watched Corning as he clamped his hat down on his forehead.

"Ken," she said, "you're going out . . . on this thing, into danger?"

Her face was a dead white. The eyes were starry and tender.

He laughed at her, saw the pale lips stiffen, quiver and tremble into the first sign of a sob, then lift into a half smile. He patted her shoulder, grinned at her.

"Listen, kid, I'm a newcomer here. I'm here to stay. Some of these chaps don't recognize that fact yet, that's all. It's time they did. I'm just going out and let a few of them know that when I hung out my shingle in this town I did it with my eyes open. I planted my feet here, and I'm staying here."

And he strode across the office, went through the outer door, made time to the street, caught a taxi. "Monadnock Building," he said, as he settled back against the cushions, "and make it snappy."

The cab lurched into motion.

"Man shot here a while back," said the communicative driver. "Raised hell with traffic."

Corning said: "Yeah," without interest and the conversation languished. The cab swung in to the curb at Seventh Street, Corning paid the meter, consulted the directory of the Monadnock Building, found that Dike's office was on the seventh floor, and took the elevator up.

There was no one in the reception office except a typist who was tapping frantically at the keys of a noiseless typewriter, and a rather stern-faced but pretty secretary who sat stiffly behind a desk in the corner of the room, three telephones in front of her.

Corning walked to her, smiled.

"I'm anxious to get in touch with a man who was to have met me here earlier this afternoon, but I had a puncture and was delayed. He's a great big man, fat, about forty-eight, wearing a gray suit that's in need of pressing . . ."

Her voice was crisply efficient.

"You mean Mr. Parks. He's been here and gone."

Corning made a gesture of disappointment, but his mouth clamped shut to keep from showing his elation.

"Mr. Dike's in?"

"Yes. He's busy. You haven't an appointment?"

"No. Can you answer the question? What kind of a car does he drive?"

"A Cadillac. It's a sedan. Then he has a roadster, a Buick."

"Thanks. I think I'm interested in the Cadillac. It's a bright red, isn't it?"

"It's red, yes."

"I'm afraid I've got to disturb Mr. Dike. Tell him it's Mr. Corning, and that I'm in a hurry."

She shook her head.

"He's not to be disturbed. You haven't an appointment, and . . ."

Corning gained the door to the inner office in a swift stride, without waiting for her to finish the sentence.

“And I’m in a hurry,” he said, and opened the door.

Harry B. Dike was even more dignified in his frosty appearance than the newspaper photograph would have indicated to a casual observer. The light glinted from the bald reaches of his high forehead. His eyes were steel gray and bored steadily out from behind his shell spectacles. He looked up from a desk which contained a sheaf of papers, stared at Corning and said: “Get out! I’m busy.”

His eyes went down to the papers.

Corning walked across the room.

Dike didn’t look up again. He was moving the point of a pencil along the typewritten lines of a document. “Get out,” he said, “or I’ll call a cop and have you thrown in for disturbing the peace. I’ve canceled my appointments. I don’t want any life insurance, any books or a new automobile.”

Corning sat down.

Dike scowled at him, banged the pencil down on his desk and reached for the telephone.

“I’m Kenneth D. Corning, attorney for Sam Parks, the man who called on you a little while earlier this afternoon,” he said.

Dike dropped the telephone. His eyes widened, darkened, then became fixedly steady in gaze and expression. He said coldly: “What’s that to me?”

“It has to do with your acceptance of the position of Superintendent of the Water Department,” said Corning. “I think it would be far better for you to refuse the appointment—particularly in view of the fact that Parks was murdered about twenty minutes ago.”

The face did not change by so much as a line.

“You mean that you think I had something to do with the murder?” asked Dike coldly.

Corning’s tone was equally cold.

“Yes,” he said.

The two men stared at each other.

“Corning,” said Dike, as though trying to place the name. “A newcomer here, eh? I presume you’re crazy. But if you’ve got anything to say, I’ll listen.”

Corning spoke, his tone dispassionate.

“He made the mistake of coming to you first. I presume he wanted a shakedown. When things didn’t go to suit him here he called me. It was Dwight’s men who put him on the spot. You probably weren’t directly connected with it. You notified Dwight, that’s all. You weren’t entirely surprised to hear of the murder, but you hadn’t exactly expected it.”

Dike got to his feet.

“All right. You’ve had your say. Now get out.”

Corning held his ground.

“You accept that position of Superintendent of the Water Department,” he said, slowly and forcefully, “and I’ll have you before the grand jury for murder.”

Dike laughed scornfully.

“A man calls at my office. Later on he’s found murdered. I have been sitting here all the time. Simply because he came here you think that I should give up my career, eh?”

Corning played his bluff.

“Forget it,” he said. “I know what I’m doing. Parks talked before he died. It was on the road to the hospital. I rode with him in the ambulance.”

That statement shook Dike’s self-control. The eyes wavered. The mouth twitched. Then he gripped himself and was as granite once more.

“I presume he said I ran alongside his flivver and stabbed him!” he snorted.

Corning grinned.

“So you know it was a flivver, eh? Well, I’ll tell you what he said. He said that he and his wife were out driving and that they had an automobile accident. The car that they ran into was your car. You were in it, and there was another man in it, Carl Dwight, the head of the machine that’s milking the city of millions in graft money. The people had been demanding a change in the water department because of that very graft. The mayor made them a gesture by putting you in charge. You were supposed to put an end to the graft on water contracts. Yet you were out riding with Dwight, the man you were supposed to fight.

“You didn’t get the man’s name. But you found out about the woman. She was driving the car. You learned she was running a speakeasy. You thought it’d be a good plan to get her where her testimony wouldn’t count. So Dwight raided her place and framed a felony rap on her. She didn’t know the full significance of what she’d seen. You thought it’d be a good plan to forestall developments. The testimony of a convicted felon wouldn’t go very far in a court of law.”

Corning ceased talking. His fists were clenched, his eyes cold and steady.

Dike’s gaze was equally steady.

“Corning,” he said, “you are a very vigorous and impulsive young man. You are also either drunk or crazy. Get out and stay out.”

Corning turned towards the door.

“I thought,” he said, “that I would have the satisfaction of telling you what I know, and showing you that you can’t gain anything by railroading this woman. Also you’ll either resign your post, or you’ll be mixed up in murder.”

Dike scooped up the telephone.

“When you go out,” he said, “tell my secretary to put the spring catch on the door. I don’t want any more crazy guys busting in here.”

Corning grinned at him.

“I’ll put the catch on the door myself,” he said, and pushed the thumb snap down, walked out and closed the door behind him. The typist paused in her pounding of the keys to watch him. The secretary stared with wide eyes. Corning walked to the corridor and took the elevator.

He stepped into a drug store on the corner and called police headquarters. He asked for the homicide squad, and got Sergeant Home on the line.

“This,” he said, “is a tip.”

“What is?” gruffed the sergeant.

“What you’re hearing. A man named Parks was killed this afternoon. He’d been driving a flivver that had collided with a red car. Harry B. Dike owns a red car that’s been in a collision. Parks had been to call on Dike just before he got killed. Carl Dwight has been in some sort of a smash. There’s a cut on his forehead, and he walks with a limp. Sam Parks has a wife, Esther. You’ve got her in jail right now on a felony charge.”

Sergeant Home’s voice betrayed his excitement.

“Tell me, who is this speaking? Where do you get that dope?”

Ken snapped his answer into the transmitter.

“Have a man you can trust at the *Columbino* at eight tonight. Have him wear a white carnation and sit near the front door. Look up the information I’ve given you in the meantime.”

And Corning slammed the receiver back on the hook, waited a moment for a free line, and then called Harry Dike's office on the telephone. The line was busy. He called three times with the same result. The fourth time he got Dike on the line, after some argument with the secretary.

"Corning," he snapped crisply. "I'm giving you one last chance to get out of the tangle Dwight's got you in. I'll be at the *Columbino* tonight at eight. If you want to make a written statement and get out of the mess I won't put the screws down."

Dike's voice was smoothly suave.

"Kind of you, I'm sure, but I don't think I care to see you there. However . . . where are you now?"

Corning laughed into the transmitter.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" he said, and hung up.

He waited in front of the drug-store, keeping in the background, yet being where he could watch the entrance to Dike's office building.

Carl Dwight didn't show up. But a speeding automobile, slamming into the curb at the fire hydrant, disgorged Perkins, the detective. Half a dozen minutes later a taxicab paused to let out Fred Granger, who was Dwight's right-hand man.

Perkins came out, almost on the run, within fifteen minutes. Granger didn't come out for half an hour. Dike followed him. Ten minutes after that, a police car bearing a detective stopped in front of the office building.

Ken Corning terminated his vigil, stepped into a barber shop, had a shave, hot towels, massage, haircut and shampoo. He was careful not to go near any of his regular haunts, or leave a trail which could be picked up.



he *Columbino* ran fairly wide open. Anyone could get in there who had the price. It went in somewhat for music, atmosphere and an aura of respectability. The liquor was very good.

It was early when Ken Corning walked into the place, exactly eight o'clock, and there were but few patrons, most of them eating. The dance floor would fill up later on, and by midnight the place would be going full blast.

A man in evening clothes, with a conspicuous white carnation in his button-hole, had a table in the front of the place. Ken heaved a sigh as he saw that Home had investigated his tip, found out enough to go ahead on the lead.

Ken Corning ordered a full dinner with a cocktail at the start, a bottle of wine with the meal, a cordial afterwards. Momentarily he expected action, and the action did not come.

It was nine-fifteen when he reluctantly called for the waiter and paid the check. The man with the white carnation continued to sit by the door.

Evidently the powers that ruled the city had decided to ignore Ken Corning, and Ken was disquieted at the thought. Things were not turning out as he had anticipated.

The waiter was gone some little time. Ken waited for the change. The man in the dinner coat with white carnation looked at his watch, pursed his lips. Ken got the idea that this man had a definite time limit fixed. At nine-thirty, probably, he would leave.

The waiter returned.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but the manager wants to see you in his office. There's a bit of trouble, sir."

Ken got to his feet, followed the waiter. He was walking lightly, his hands slightly away from his sides, his head carried alertly, eyes watchful.

The manager stared coldly from behind the desk.

The waiter turned to go. Ken thought that something brushed against his coat. He couldn't be sure. He glanced at the waiter's retreating back.

The manager said: "I'm sure it's a mistake, but it's something I'll have to investigate."

"What is?" asked Corning.

"This," said the manager, and placed on the desk in front of him the bill which Ken Corning had given the waiter. "It's counterfeit."

Ken laughed.

"Well," he said, "it happens that I can give a complete history of that bill. It was paid me this morning by way of retainer in a legal matter, in the presence of my secretary. What's more, I don't think it's counterfeit."

A door opened. A man stepped purposefully into the room.

The manager waved his hand.

"I'll let you discuss that with McGovern, of the Secret Service. You probably don't know it, but we've been flooded with clever counterfeits here the last week. McGovern has been waiting on call."

Ken turned to meet the man's eyes.

McGovern smiled, and the smile was frank.

"If you can tell me where you got it, that's all I need to know," he said. "One look at you's enough to convince me *you're* no counterfeiter."

Ken smiled in return, then let the smile fade.

"Look here," he said, "this bill came from a client. I have an idea certain interests would like to frame something else on that client and his wife. The man is dead. The wife isn't—yet. I don't want to play into any frame-up. . . ."

The other smiled, waved his hand.

"Just a formality, but you'll have to tell me. You're dealing with the Federal Secret Service now. You won't find any political frame-ups with us. As a matter of form, would you mind letting me see the rest of your money?"

Ken laughed, reached in his coat, took out his wallet.

That wallet felt strangely bulky. He stared at it. It wasn't his wallet. It was crammed with currency. He made a move as though to put it back in his pocket. The Federal man whipped down a swift arm.

"Here," he said, "none of that. Acting funny ain't going to help you."

He grabbed the wallet, opened it, whistled.

There was a moment of silence.

"That," said Ken, "is not my wallet. I demand that the waiter who brought me in here be called. I want to have him searched. He slipped this wallet into my pocket and took mine out. He's a professional dip, and this is a plant."

The lip of the Federal man curled.

"Yeah," he said. "How often I've heard that one! You've got to come along. Want to go quietly, or would you rather make a fuss?"

Ken stared at the wallet.

"I'll go quietly if you'll pick up that waiter and take him along, too," said Ken.

The Federal turned to the manager.

“Who was it?” he asked.

“Frank,” said the manager.

“Get him,” said the Federal. “In the meantime I’ll take this guy along in a cab. Come on. You can tell your story where it’ll be appreciated. They don’t pay me to listen, only to do things.”

Ken went out through the cabaret.

The man in the dinner coat, who wore the white carnation, was looking at his watch with an air of finality. Ken walked rapidly so that he was a step or two ahead of McGovern. There were couples standing on the floor. Many of the tables were vacant. The music stopped when Ken was some twenty feet from the table occupied by the man in the dinner coat who wore the white carnation. There was a perfunctory spatter of applause and then couples stood, waiting, staring at the orchestra expectantly.

Ken Corning raised his voice and called over his shoulder to McGovern: “This is just a frame-up, because I’ve got some evidence in that Parks murder case.”

McGovern spoke in an even, ominous tone. “Shut up!” he said.

Ken flashed a glance to the man who wore the white carnation. He was signaling a waiter for his check. There was nothing on his face to indicate that he had heard what Ken had said; or hearing, was in anywise concerned with it. The orchestra struck up an encore. As the couples started to twine and twist to the strains of the dance, Ken flashed a glance at McGovern, then at the man who wore the white carnation. The man was handing the waiter a bill. The waiter was pushing an oblong of pink pasteboard at him from which had been figured the items of the check. The man pushed away the pasteboard, made a sweeping gesture with his hand as though to indicate that the waiter should keep the change. Staring at his face, it was impossible for Ken to tell whether the man had hurried his exit because Ken was leaving, or whether he had simply grown tired of waiting, and decided to knock off for the day.



Behind him, McGovern said: “Get your hat and coat and don’t try any funny business.”

Ken moved up to the checking stand. A girl with a beautiful face flashed him a smile that was meant to be dazzling, but was only mechanical, took the square of pasteboard which he handed her and pushed Ken’s hat out over the counter.

The man who wore the white carnation in his dinner coat had evidently found some people he knew. He was chatting with them, a young man of about thirty, and a red-haired woman who could not have been over twenty-three. As he chatted, he reached up and plucked the white carnation from the dinner jacket, dropped it to the floor and stepped on it.

Ken said to McGovern: “Can I talk with you? Will you listen to reason?”

McGovern said: “Sure, I’ll listen to any guy who wants to talk; only remember that anything you say will be used against you.”

Ken lured him over to the far corner of the checking counter and said: “All right now, listen. I told you that this thing was a frame-up because I was a witness in the Parks case. You don’t seem to be interested.”

McGovern said: “Why should I be interested? That’s a state case, I’m a Federal. You tell me where you got this counterfeit money from and where the plates are and I’ll sit here and

listen to you until daylight. But if you've got anything to say on the Parks case you can tell it to the state authorities—I'm not interested."

Ken fixed his eyes on McGovern and said: "Listen, suppose that I could show you that this man Parks had something on the administration and was going to keep Dike from accepting the position of Superintendent of the Water Department? Suppose I could show you that Carl Dwight is mixed up with Dike; that, in place of being enemies, those two fellows are working hand in glove regardless of all this newspaper talk about Dike wanting to clean up the graft. . . ."

McGovern took his arm above the elbow and gave him a push.

"Listen, guy, I told you I wasn't interested in all that stuff. Are you going to tell me where you got the plates or where you've got the rest of this queer cached?"

Ken Corning's eyes narrowed.

"Okey," he said, "I tried to give you the breaks and you wouldn't listen. Now I'll take a look at your credentials before I leave this place."

McGovern grinned easily and dropped his right hand to the side pocket.

"Gee," he said, "you sure are full of alibis and stalls. Come on and let's get going. This is all in the day's work with me and I want to get home and get my beauty sleep. You can stall all night, but you can't keep me from taking you to jail and booking you on a charge of possession of counterfeit money. If you want my authority, here it is."

Ken felt something hard prodding against his ribs. He glanced down to where the right hand of McGovern was holding the gun concealed by the right-hand side pocket of his coat. He said: "Oh, it's like that, is it?"

McGovern said: "Yes, guy, it's like that. You're going to take it and like it. Get started out of here. You've got counterfeit money in your possession and there are witnesses that you tried to pass it. You can either go quietly or you can get your insides blown out right here. Which is it going to be?"

Ken grinned and said: "Under the circumstances, I guess I'll go quietly."

McGovern said: "Now you're talking sense. You can't gain anything by talking any other way. I'm on the square and I'm going to take you in, but I ain't going to stand here all night and listen to a lot of hooey and I ain't going to have you pull any smart aleck stuff on me. Get started!"

Corning moved towards the door. He noticed that the man who had worn the white carnation was moving towards the door also and that the man who had been with the red-haired girl was walking with him. The red-haired girl moved off towards the left and went into the women's dressing room. The man who had worn the white carnation lit a cigarette. He seemed in no hurry. Ken Corning went out of the door painfully conscious of the pressure of the gun which was held against his ribs. The doorman looked at them and said: "Taxicab?"

McGovern shook his head and said: "No, I've got a car."

The big limousine which had been parked near the curb with motor running slid smoothly up to the front of the cabaret and stopped. The doorman started to open the door and McGovern spoke sharply: "That's all right," he said, "I'm a Federal dick and this man is a prisoner. He's desperate and may try to start something. Keep back, I'll handle this!"

He reached out and opened the door. His gun prodded Ken in the ribs. "Get in," he said.

Ken put his right foot on the running-board of the limousine. He could see two men seated in the back seat. They were grinning. Ken swung his body in a pivot, grabbing with his left

hand at the gun which McGovern was holding against his ribs and pushing down with all his strength.

McGovern fired twice before Ken's fist connected with his jaw. Neither shot hit. Somebody shot from the interior of the limousine but the bullet hit the plate-glass window, shattered it into a thousand fragments and deflected. McGovern went down like a sack of cement. Ken swung himself on him and reached for the gun. Over his shoulder he could see the swirl of motion from the interior of the limousine. A man jumped to the running-board while Ken was still struggling for the possession of the gun. Ken heard him say: "All right, guy, take a load of this!"

Two shots roared out as though they had been one explosion. The man who had stood on the running-board of the limousine pitched forward and struck on his face. Ken jerked the gun from the pocket of McGovern and saw that the man in the dinner jacket was standing on the steps of the cabaret, an automatic in his hand. The man who had been with the red-haired girl was standing on the sidewalk a little bit to one side with a double-action revolver spouting fire. The doorman was running heavily, his gold-braided coat flapping grotesquely behind him. The limousine had lurched into motion. Somebody was rolling down the back window, which had not been shattered. Guns blazed over Ken's head. A bullet whistled past his cheek. The two men standing in the front of the cabaret answered the fire.

Ken got McGovern's gun in his hand and took a couple of shots at the limousine. He heard the bullets give forth a clinking sound as they struck against the metal of the body. The limousine swung far over to one side as it rounded the corner to the accompaniment of screaming tires.

The man in the dinner coat ran towards Ken as McGovern, recovering from the daze of Ken's blow, started to struggle to his feet.

Ken said: "Those men were trying to take me for a ride. This guy posed as a Federal agent . . ."

McGovern spoke up and said: "I am a Federal agent. This crook's been shoving the queer. He's got a wallet of phoney stuff on him right now."

The man in the dinner coat laughed and said: "Federal, hell! I know you, you're Jim Harper, and you've done time!"

A uniformed policeman, on beat, ran up. The man in the dinner coat spoke to him sharply: "All right, Bell. Get the crowd back. I'll handle what's left of this."

A curious crowd was commencing to form a ring around the men, and the uniformed policeman started to herd them back.

The man in the dinner coat said: "That's all right, buddy, I know this guy, he's a crook. You're a witness in the Parks case, huh?"

Ken Corning stared at him with round eyes and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I'm not a witness, I'm attorney for Mrs. Parks and I came here to meet a witness but he didn't show up."

The man in the dinner jacket stared at Ken Corning for a long five seconds. Then his right eyelid slowly closed in a solemn wink: "So," he said, "*that's* your story, eh?"

Ken Corning kept his face perfectly straight and his eyes perfectly steady. "That," he said, "is my story and I'm sticking to it. I'm not a witness, I'm a lawyer. I was to meet a witness here. These guys tried to keep me from meeting him, that's all."

The man in the dinner coat said: "Who were they? Would you recognize any of them if you saw them again?"

Ken Corning shook his head.

“No,” he said, “the light wasn’t good enough. I couldn’t see them.”

The man in the dinner coat turned to the fake Federal agent. Ken Corning slipped away. No one tried to stop him. There was the sound of a police siren, approaching fast, as he turned the corner.



Ken Corning walked into his office.

The morning sun streamed in at the east window. Helen Vail stared at him with eyes that were dark with emotion, warm with pride.

“Got your name in the papers, didn’t you?”

He grinned at her.

“How about our client?” she asked.

He spread his hands, palm up, made a sweeping gesture.

“Gone. Case is closed, dismissed.”

“And all we get then is the hundred and fifty dollar retainer?”

Ken nodded.

“That’s all. The woman was driving the car. Her husband wasn’t with her. I figured that he must have been, but he wasn’t. Dike and Dwight had been having a secret meeting. They’d been out in the country at a road-house where they were safe. Coming back they were riding in the same car. Dike was driving and he was a little bit ‘lickered.’ The woman was driving the flivver and they had a smash. She was a little bit belligerent and insisted on taking down the license number of the automobile. They paid her for her damage but she acted a little suspicious so Dwight got the license number of her automobile and found out who she was. They knew that she was running a speak, and figured that she was too dumb to know what it was all about, but they wanted her out of the way, just the same. With the deal Dike was planning to pull, it would have been fatal if somebody had uncovered this woman as a witness, so Dwight decided that he’d get her convicted of a felony. That would have discredited her testimony if she’d ever been called as a witness.

“She probably was suspicious, because she told her husband about it. Nobody knows just how much she told him or how much he knew, but it’s a cinch that he knew enough to put two and two together when he saw Dike’s picture in the paper with the blurb about his taking over the Water Department and eliminating graft.”

Helen Vail watched him with wide eyes.

“Can we prove any of that?” she asked.

Ken Corning shook his head. “We can’t prove anything,” he said. “Wouldn’t do us any good if we could. They’ve dismissed the case against the woman, released her from custody and she’s gone. They probably made a deal with her, gave her some money and started her traveling.”

“Why would they do that?” asked Helen Vail. “Her testimony is just as damaging now as it ever was.”

Ken Corning smiled and motioned towards the morning paper.

“Read the news,” he said, “and you’ll notice that Dike has declined the appointment. He said that his private business was taking up too much of his time for him to make the sacrifice of accepting a public position.”

Helen Vail blinked her eyes thoughtfully and said: “How about the people in the automobile—don’t you know any of them?”

Ken Corning said: “You mean the ones who were trying to take me for a ride?”

She nodded her head.

Ken laughed and said: “Sure I do. Perkins was one of them. He was the detective who barged into the office here. He’s a cheap heel who does dirty work for the Dwight machine.”

“But,” she said, “you told the officers that you couldn’t recognize any of them.”

Ken Corning laughed mirthlessly and said: “Of course I did. I’d never get anywhere trying to pin anything on Perkins. He’d produce an alibi and get acquitted. Then they’d turn around and prosecute me for perjury. I’m bucking a machine in this town, and the machine is well entrenched with a lot of money back of it. I’m not a fool!”

“How about the man who pretended to be a Federal officer?” she asked.

“He’s got to take the rap. They’ve got the goods on him. They might have managed to make some sort of stall there, only I knew it was coming. I had worked the wallet that the waiter had planted on me out of my pocket. When they opened the door of the limousine I tossed the wallet in with my left hand before I grabbed at this guy’s gun and socked him with my right.”

She shuddered and said: “Oh, Ken, I don’t like it.”

He stood with his feet planted far apart, his jaw thrust forward, hands thrust into the pocket of his coat.

“I like it,” he said, “and I’m going to make them like it. I’m going to bust this town wide open. They’re going to stop me if they can. They’ll try to frame me, try to take me for a ride, try to freeze me out. I’m going to stay! I’m going to be here after they’re gone.”

“But, Ken,” she objected, “you’ve done all this work and risked your life and we only get a hundred and fifty dollars out of it.”

Ken Corning nodded and laughed.

“A hundred and fifty dollars,” he said, “and it’s honest money.”

Then he walked into his private office and the door clicked shut.

Helen Vail could hear him moving around in the inner office. He was whistling cheerfully as though he didn’t have a care in the world.

She opened the drawer of her desk, took out a ledger which was innocent of entry, took a pen and wrote in a hand which trembled slightly: “People versus Parks—cash retainer \$150.00.”

[The end of *Honest Money* by Erle Stanley Gardner]