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CLASSICS

Erle Stanley Gardner  
Complete Novels



Series Fifteen

*The Complete Novels of*  
**ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

(1889-1970)



**Contents**

*Perry Mason Novels*

- The Case of the Velvet Claws (1933)
- The Case of the Sulky Girl (1933)
- The Case of the Lucky Legs (1934)
- The Case of the Howling Dog (1934)
- The Case of the Curious Bride (1934)
- The Case of the Counterfeit Eye (1935)
- The Case of the Caretaker's Cat (1935)
- The Case of the Sleepwalker's Niece (1936)
- The Case of the Stuttering Bishop (1936)
- The Case of the Dangerous Dowager (1937)
- The Case of the Lame Canary (1937)
- The Case of the Substitute Face (1938)
- The Case of the Shoplifter's Shoe (1938)
- The Case of the Perjured Parrot (1939)
- The Case of the Rolling Bones (1939)
- The Case of the Baited Hook (1940)
- The Case of the Silent Partner (1940)
- The Case of the Haunted Husband (1941)
- The Case of the Empty Tin (1941)
- The Case of the Drowning Duck (1942)
- The Case of the Careless Kitten (1942)
- The Case of the Buried Clock (1943)
- The Case of the Drowsy Mosquito (1943)
- The Case of the Crooked Candle (1944)
- The Case of the Black-Eyed Blonde (1944)
- The Case of the Golddigger's Purse (1945)
- The Case of the Half-Wakened Wife (1945)
- The Case of the Borrowed Brunette (1946)
- The Case of the Fan Dancer's Horse (1947)
- The Case of the Lazy Lover (1947)
- The Case of the Lonely Heiress (1948)

The Case of the Vagabond Virgin (1948)  
The Case of the Dubious Bridegroom (1949)  
The Case of the Cautious Coquette (1949)  
The Case of the Negligent Nymph (1950)  
The Case of the One-Eyed Witness (1950)  
The Case of the Fiery Fingers (1951)  
The Case of the Angry Mourner (1951)  
The Case of the Moth-Eaten Mink (1952)  
The Case of the Grinning Gorilla (1952)  
The Case of the Hesitant Hostess (1953)  
The Case of the Green-Eyed Sister (1953)  
The Case of the Fugitive Nurse (1954)  
The Case of the Runaway Corpse (1954)  
The Case of the Restless Redhead (1954)  
The Case of the Glamorous Ghost (1955)  
The Case of the Sun Bather's Diary (1955)  
The Case of the Nervous Accomplice (1955)  
The Case of the Terrified Typist (1956)  
The Case of the Demure Defendant (1956)  
The Case of the Gilded Lily (1956)  
The Case of the Lucky Loser (1957)  
The Case of the Screaming Woman (1957)  
The Case of the Daring Decoy (1957)  
The Case of the Long-Legged Models (1958)  
The Case of the Foot-Loose Doll (1958)  
The Case of the Calendar Girl (1958)  
The Case of the Deadly Toy (1959)  
The Case of the Mythical Monkeys (1959)  
The Case of the Singing Skirt (1959)  
The Case of the Waylaid Wolf (1960)  
The Case of the Duplicate Daughter (1960)  
The Case of the Shapely Shadow (1960)  
The Case of the Spurious Spinster (1961)  
The Case of the Bigamous Spouse (1961)  
The Case of the Reluctant Model (1962)  
The Case of the Blonde Bonanza (1962)  
The Case of the Ice-Cold Hands (1962)  
The Case of the Mischievous Doll (1963)  
The Case of the Stepdaughter's Secret (1963)  
The Case of the Amorous Aunt (1963)  
The Case of the Daring Divorcee (1964)  
The Case of the Phantom Fortune (1964)  
The Case of the Horrified Heirs (1964)  
The Case of the Troubled Trustee (1965)  
The Case of the Beautiful Beggar (1965)  
The Case of the Worried Waitress (1966)  
The Case of the Queenly Contestant (1967)  
The Case of the Careless Cupid (1968)  
The Case of the Fabulous Fake (1969)  
The Case of the Fenced-In Woman (1972)

The Case of the Postponed Murder (1973)

*Perry Mason Short Stories*

The Case of the Crying Swallow (1947)

The Case of the Crimson Kiss (1948)

The Case of the Suspect Sweethearts (1950)

The Case of the Irate Witness (1953)

*Ed Jenkins Stories*

A Selection of Ed Jenkins Stories

*Doug Selby Books*

The D. A. Calls it Murder (1937)

The D. A. Holds a Candle (1938)

The D. A. Draws a Circle (1939)

The D. A. Goes to Trial (1940)

The D. A. Cooks a Goose (1942)

The D. A. Calls a Turn (1944)

The D. A. Breaks a Seal (1946)

The D. A. Takes a Chance (1948)

The D. A. Breaks an Egg (1949)

*Terry Clane Novels*

Murder up My Sleeve (1937)

The Case of the Backward Mule (1946)

*Cool and Lam Series*

The Bigger They Come (1939)

Turn on the Heat (1940)

Gold Comes in Bricks (1940)

Spill the Jackpot! (1941)

Double or Quits (1941)

Owls Don't Blink (1942)

Bats Fly at Dusk (1942)

Cats Prowl at Night (1943)

Give 'em the Ax (1944)

Crows Can't Count (1946)

Fools Die on Friday (1947)

Bedrooms Have Windows (1949)

Top of the Heap (1952)

Some Women Won't Wait (1953)

Beware the Curves (1956)

You Can Die Laughing (1957)

Some Slips Don't Show (1957)

The Count of Nine (1958)

Pass the Gravy (1959)

Kept Women Can't Quit (1960)

Bachelors Get Lonely (1961)

Shills Can't Cash Chips (1961)

Try Anything Once (1962)

Fish or Cut Bait (1963)  
Up for Grabs (1964)  
Cut Thin to Win (1965)  
Widows Wear Weeds (1966)  
Traps Need Fresh Bait (1967)  
All Grass isn't Green (1970)

*Gramps Wiggins Novels*

The Case of the Turning Tide (1941)  
The Case of the Smoking Chimney (1943)

*Other Novels*

The Clue of the Forgotten Murder (1935)  
This is Murder (1935)  
The Case of the Musical Cow (1950)

*The Short Stories*

Miscellaneous Stories

*The Non-Fiction*

The Court of Last Resort (1952)

*The Biography*

The Case of Erle Stanley Gardner (1947) by Alva Johnston

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pauline Wiggins', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Version 1

*The Complete Novels of*  
**ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**



*By Delphi Classics, 2024*

# COPYRIGHT

*Complete Novels of Erle Stanley Gardner*



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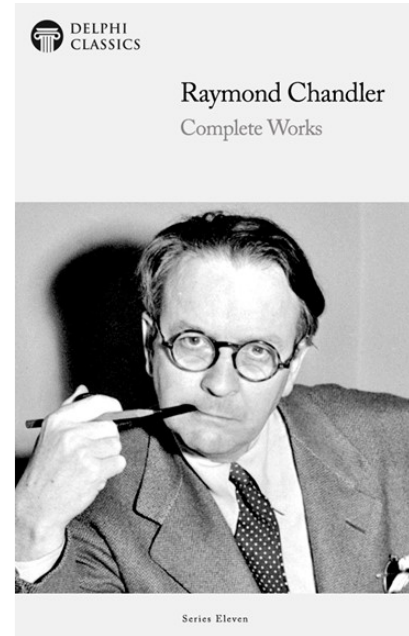
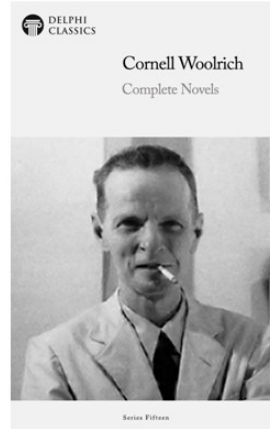
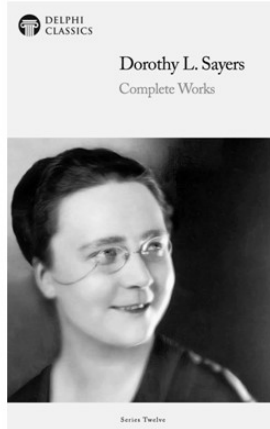
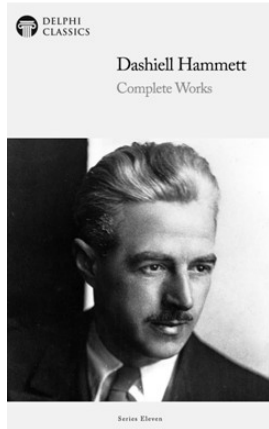
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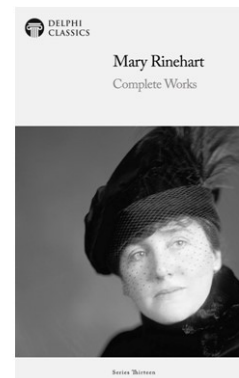
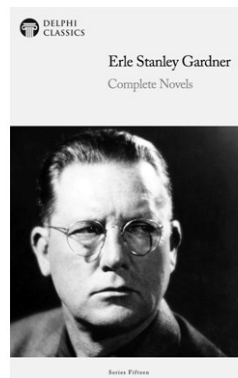
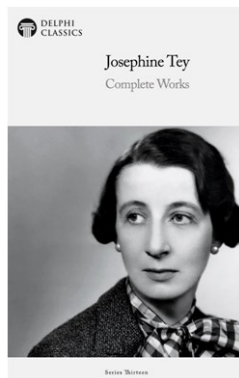
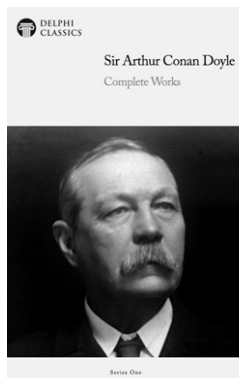
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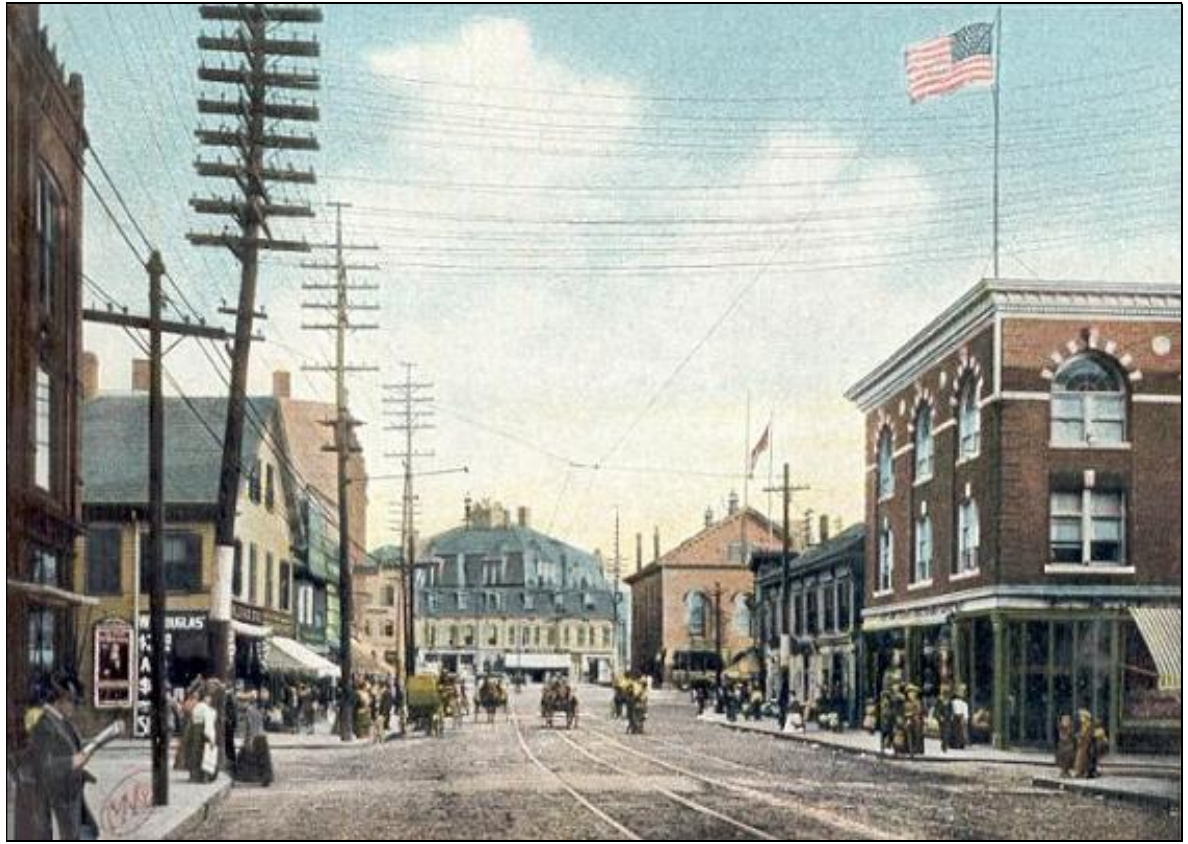


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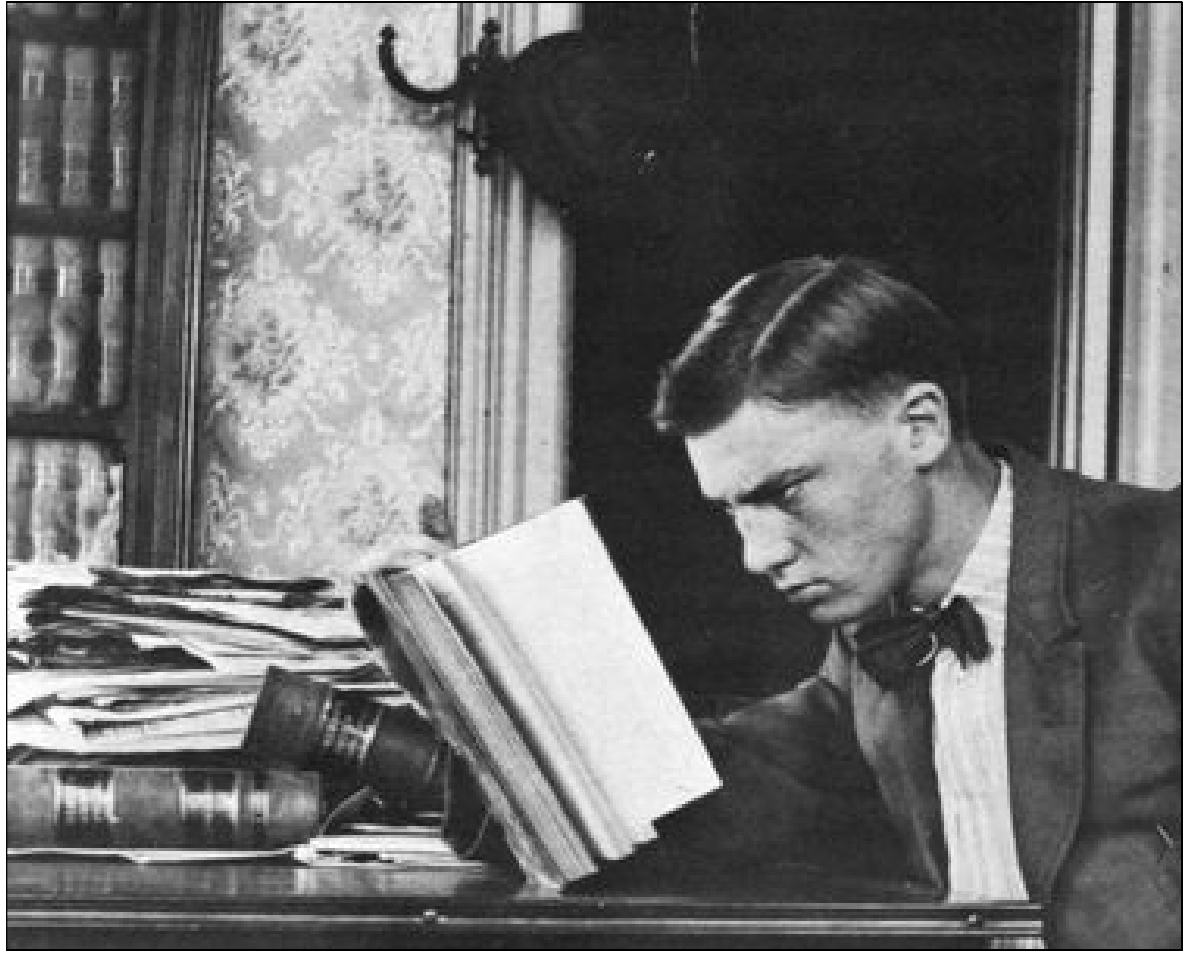
## Perry Mason Novels



*Malden, Massachusetts, 1906 — Erle Stanley Gardner's birthplace*



*The city in more recent times*



*Gardner as a young man, while working as a lawyer*

## The Case of the Velvet Claws (1933)



Gardner's enduring creation, Perry Mason was inspired by the famed and flamboyant Los Angeles criminal defense attorney Earl Rogers, who handled 77 murder trials and lost only three, even though many of his clients were widely deemed guilty. In all of the novels, Mason helps a client that is being charged with murder, usually involving a preliminary hearing or jury trial. In the first of the series, Mason describes himself in the following way:

“You'll find that I'm a lawyer who has specialized in trial work, and in a lot of criminal work...I'm a specialist on getting people out of trouble. They come to me when they're in all sorts of trouble, and I work them out... If you look me up through some family lawyer or some corporation lawyer, he'll probably tell you that I'm a shyster. If you look me up through some chap in the District Attorney's office, he'll tell you that I'm a dangerous antagonist but he doesn't know very much about me.”

As a lawyer Mason fights hard for his clients and relishes unusual or nearly hopeless cases. He frequently accepts clients on a whim based on his curiosity about their problem, for a minimal retainer, and he finances the investigation of their cases himself if necessary. Little else is known about Perry Mason. His family, personal life, background, and education are not depicted. For romantic interest, he is often assisted by his secretary, Della Street — about 15 years younger — who comes from a wealthy family that was wiped out by the stock market crash of 1929. She is forced to take a job as a Mason's secretary. The sexual tension between the two is often palpable, and throughout the series there are several proposals of marriage, all of which Della turns down because, at the time, wives of professional men did not work.

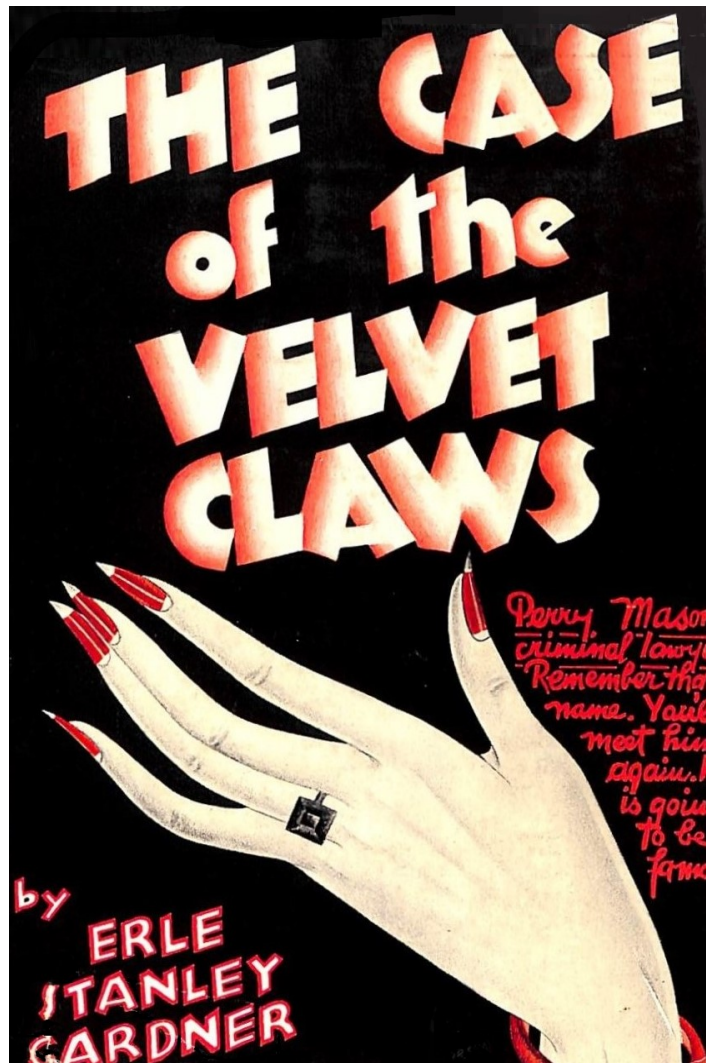
First published in February 1933, Perry Mason's first case tells of how the already married Eva Griffin has been caught at a fancy hotel in the company of a prominent congressman. To protect the politician, Eva is ready to pay hush money to a sleazy tabloid editor, but Perry Mason has other ideas. He tracks down the fat cat running the blackmailing tabloid — only to discover a shocking scoop. By the time Mason's client finally comes clean, her husband has taken a bullet in the heart. Now Perry Mason has two choices: represent the cunning widow in her wrangle for the dead man's money — or take the rap for murder.

Critics of the time praised this story, calling it “fresh, vigorous, swift-moving, plausible and smooth, unquestionably ranking very near the top for this year.” One reviewer noted that, “the story moved at something better than a mile a minute clip and this very tough lawyer is, if not a thing of beauty, at least a joy forever.” Another suggested that, “the handling and solution of the mystery are well developed and logical and evidence a trained legal mind... Also, the action is swift, dramatic and convincing and the story as a whole one to thoroughly please the vast number of murder mystery fans.” Yet another stated that, “The story is one which the publishers immediately accepted, although they had previously decided not to publish any more detective stories for a time; so that is pretty good evidence of its merit.”

Over the next forty years Gardner would go on to write four short stories and a further 81 novels featuring Perry Mason — two of which were published posthumously: highlights include the 1937 volume *The Case of the Lame Canary*, which was originally intended to be the last case for Mason, as Gardner was tired of not being published in the slick magazines (that would subsequently change);

interestingly the 1943 book *The Case of the Drowsy Mosquito* included much of Gardner's own personal philosophy espousing the joys of outdoor living, whilst *The Case of the Buried Clock* includes Gardner's only reference to World War II.

Of course, the books were adapted for the long running CBS TV series that starred Raymond Burr and ran from 1957 to 1966 (this particular book being used as the basis for season 6, episode 22). Additionally, this novel was adapted for a 1936 Warner Bros film of the same name, starring Warren William as Mason — one of six Mason films released in the 1930's. The literary adventures of Perry Mason were also adapted for radio as a 15-minute daily crime series that aired on CBS Radio from 1943 to 1955.



*The first edition*

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

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THE CASE OF  
THE  
VELVET  
CLAWS

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GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK

*The first edition's title page*

## **CONTENTS**

CHAPTER 1  
CHAPTER 2  
CHAPTER 3  
CHAPTER 4  
CHAPTER 5  
CHAPTER 6  
CHAPTER 7  
CHAPTER 8  
CHAPTER 9  
CHAPTER 10  
CHAPTER 11  
CHAPTER 12  
CHAPTER 13  
CHAPTER 14  
CHAPTER 15  
CHAPTER 16  
CHAPTER 17  
CHAPTER 18  
CHAPTER 19  
CHAPTER 20





*Earl Rogers (1869-1922) was an American trial lawyer and professor, as well as the inspiration for the character Perry Mason.*



*The Pierpont Inn, a Craftsman bungalow-style hotel in Ventura, California — near Gardner's old law office, the inn is a principal setting of this novel.*

## CHAPTER 1



AUTUMN SUN BEAT against the window.

Perry Mason sat at the big desk. There was about him the attitude of one who is waiting. His face in repose was like the face of a chess player who is studying the board. That face seldom changed expression. Only the eyes changed expression. He gave the impression of being a thinker and a fighter, a man who could work with infinite patience to jockey an adversary into just the right position, and then finish him with one terrific punch.

Book cases, filled with leather-backed books, lined the walls of the room. A big safe was in one corner. There were two chairs, in addition to the swivel chair which Perry Mason occupied. The office held an atmosphere of plain, rugged efficiency, as though it had absorbed something of the personality of the man who occupied it.

The door to the outer office opened, and Della Street, his secretary, eased her way into the room and closed the door behind her.

“A woman,” she said, “who claims to be a Mrs. Eva Griffin.”

Perry Mason looked at the girl with level eyes.

“And you don’t think she is?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“She looks phony to me,” she said. “I’ve looked up the Griffins in the telephone book. And there isn’t any Griffin who has an address like the one she gave. I looked in the City Directory, and got the same result. There are a lot of Griffins, but I don’t find any Eva Griffin. And I don’t find any at her address.”

“What was the address?” asked Mason.

“2271 Grove Street,” she said.

Perry Mason made a notation on a slip of paper.

“I’ll see her,” he said.

“Okay,” said Della Street. “I just wanted you to know that she looks phony to me.”

Della Street was slim of figure, steady of eye; a young woman of approximately twenty-seven, who gave the impression of watching life with keenly appreciative eyes and seeing far below the surface.

She remained standing in the doorway eyeing Perry Mason with quiet insistence. “I wish,” she said, “that you’d find out who she really is before we do anything for her.”

“A hunch?” asked Perry Mason.

“You might call it that,” she said, smiling.

Perry Mason nodded. His face had not changed expression. Only his eyes had become warily watchful.

“All right, send her in, and I’ll take a look at her myself.”

Della Street closed the door as she went out, keeping a hand on the knob, however. Within a few seconds, the knob turned, the door opened, and a woman walked into the room with an air of easy assurance.

She was in her early thirties, or perhaps, her late twenties — well groomed, and giving an appearance of being exceedingly well cared for. She flashed a swiftly appraising glance about the office before she looked at the man seated behind the desk.

“Come in and sit down,” said Perry Mason.

She looked at him then, and there was a faint expression of annoyance upon her face. It was as though she expected men to get up when she came into the room, and to treat her with a deferential recognition of her sex and her position.

For just a moment she seemed inclined to ignore his invitation. Then she walked to the chair across from the desk, sat down in it, and looked at Perry Mason.

“Well?” he asked.

“You’re Mr. Mason, the attorney?”

“Yes.”

The blue eyes which had been looking at him in cautious appraisal, suddenly widened as though by an effort. They gave to her face an expression of utter innocence.

“I am in trouble,” she said.

Perry Mason nodded as though the news meant nothing to him, other than a matter of daily routine.

When she didn’t go on, he said: “Most people who come in here are.”

The woman said, abruptly: “You don’t make it easy for me to tell you about it. Most of the attorneys I have consulted ...”

She was suddenly silent.

Perry Mason smiled at her. Slowly he got to his feet, put his hands on the edge of the desk and leaned his weight on them so that his body was leaning toward her across the desk. “Yes,” he said, “I know. Most of the attorneys that you’ve consulted have had expensive suites of offices and a lot of clerks running in and out. You’ve paid them big money and haven’t had anything much to show for it. They’ve bowed and scraped when you came in the room, and charged you big retainers. But when you get in a real jam you don’t dare to go to them.”

Her wide eyes narrowed somewhat. For two or three seconds they stared at each other, and then the woman lowered her eyes.

Perry Mason continued to speak, slowly and forcefully, yet without raising his voice.

“All right,” he said, “I’m different. I get my business because I fight for it, and because I fight for my clients. Nobody ever called on me to organize a corporation, and I’ve never yet probated an estate. I haven’t drawn up over a dozen contracts in my life, and I wouldn’t know how to go about foreclosing a mortgage. People that come to me don’t come to me because they like the looks of my eyes, or the way my office is furnished, or because they’ve known me at a club. They come to me because they need me. They come to me because they want to hire me for what I can do.”

She looked up at him then. “Just what is it that you do, Mr. Mason?” she asked.

He snapped out two words at her. “I fight!”

She nodded vigorously. “That’s exactly what I want you to do for me.”

He sat down again in his swivel chair, and lit a cigarette. The atmosphere seemed to have been cleared as though the two personalities had created an electrical storm which had subsided. “All right,” he said. “Now we’ve wasted enough time with preliminaries. Get down to earth, and tell me what it is you want. Tell me first who you are and how you happened to come to me. Maybe it’ll make it easier for you if you start in that way.”

She began to speak rapidly, as though she had rehearsed what she was saying.

“I am married. My name is Eva Griffin, and I reside at 2271 Grove Street. I have trouble that I can’t very well discuss with the attorneys who have heretofore represented me. A friend who asked her name withheld, told me about you. She said that you were more than a lawyer. That you went out and did things.”

She was silent for a moment, and then asked: "Is it true?"

Perry Mason nodded his head.

"I suppose so," he said. "Most attorneys hire clerks and detectives to work up their cases, and find out about the evidence. I don't, for the simple reason that I can't trust anyone to do that sort of stuff in the kind of cases I handle. I don't handle very many, but when I do I'm well paid, and I usually give good results. When I hire a detective, he's hired to get just one fact."

She nodded quickly and eagerly. Now that the ice was broken, she seemed eager to go on with her story.

"You read in the paper about the hold-up at the Beech-wood Inn last night? There were some guests, you know, in the main dining room, and some in the private dining rooms. A man tried to hold up the guests, and somebody shot him."

Perry Mason nodded. "I read about it," he said.

"I was there."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Know anything about who did the shooting?"

She lowered her eyes for a moment, and then raised them to his. "No," she said.

He looked at her, narrowed his eyes and scowled.

She met the stare for a second or two, then lowered her eyes.

Perry Mason continued to wait as though she had not answered his question.

After a moment she raised her eyes once more, and fidgeted uneasily in the chair. "Well," she said, "if you're going to be my attorney, I should tell you the truth. Yes."

Mason's nod seemed more of satisfaction than affirmation.

"Go on," he told her.

"We tried to get out, and couldn't. The entrances were all watched. It seems somebody had put through a call to the police department before the shooting, just when the hold-up started. Before we could get out, the police had the place sewed up."

"Who is 'we'?" he asked.

She studied the tip of her shoe, then said in a mumbled voice: "Harrison Burke."

Perry Mason said, slowly: "You mean Harrison Burke, the one who's candidate for ..."

"Yes," she snapped, as though she would interrupt him before he could say anything concerning Harrison Burke.

"What were you doing there with him?"

"Dining and dancing."

"Well?" he inquired.

"Well," she said, "we went back into the private dining room, and kept out of sight until the officers started taking the names of the witnesses. The sergeant in charge was a friend of Harrison's, and he knew that it would be fatal for the newspapers to get hold of the fact that we were there. So he let us stay on in the dining room until after everything was finished, and then he smuggled us out of the back door."

"Anybody see you?" asked Mason.

She shook her head. "Nobody that I know."

"All right," he said, "go on from there."

She looked up at him and said, abruptly: "Do you know Frank Locke?"

He nodded his head. "You mean the one that edits *Spicy Bits*?"

She clamped her lips together in a firm line, and nodded her head in silent assent.

"What about him?" asked Perry Mason.

"He knows about it," she said.

"Going to publish it?" he asked.

She nodded.

Perry Mason fingered a paper weight on his desk. His hand was well formed, long and tapering, yet the fingers seemed filled with competent strength. It seemed the hand could have a grip of crushing force should the occasion require.

"You can buy him off," he said.

"No," she said, "I can't. You've got to."

"Why can't Harrison Burke?" he asked.

"Don't you understand?" she said. "Harrison Burke might explain his having been at the Beechwood Inn with a married woman. But he could never explain paying hush money to silence a scandal sheet from publishing the fact. He's got to keep out of this. They may trap him."

Perry Mason drummed with his fingers on the top of the desk.

"And you want me to square the thing?" he asked.

"I want you to square it."

"How high would you pay?"

She rushed on in swift conversation now, leaning toward him and talking rapidly.

"Listen," she said, "I'm going to tell you something. Remember what it is, but don't ask me how I happened to know. I don't think you can buy Frank Locke off. You've got to go higher. Frank Locke pretends to own *Spicy Bits*. You know the kind of a publication it is. It's just a blackmailing sheet, and that's all it's for. They are in the market for all they can get. But Frank Locke is only a figurehead. There's somebody behind him. Somebody who is higher. Somebody who really owns the paper. They've got a good attorney who tries to keep them clear of blackmailing charges and libel suits. But in case anything ever went wrong, Frank Locke is there to take all the blame."

She quit talking.

There was a moment or two of silence.

"I'm listening," said Perry Mason.

She bit her lip for a moment, then raised her eyes once more, and continued speaking in the same rapid tone. "They've found out about Harrison being there. They don't know who the woman was that was with him. But they're going to publish the fact that he was there, and demand that the police bring him in as a witness. There's some mystery about the shooting. It looks as though some one had trapped this man into a hold-up so that he could be shot, without too many questions being asked. The police and the District Attorney are going to grill everyone who was there."

"And they're not going to grill you?" asked Perry Mason.

She shook her head. "No, they're going to leave us out of it. Nobody knows I was there. The officer knows Harrison was there. That's all. I gave him an assumed name."

"Well?" asked Mason.

"Don't you see?" she said. "If they put pressure to bear on the officers, they'll have to question Harrison. And then he'll have to tell them who the woman was that was with him. Or else it will appear worse than it really was. As a matter of fact, there wasn't anything wrong with it. We had a right to be there."

He drummed with his fingers on his desk for a few moments, and then looked at her steadily.

"All right," he said, "let's not have any misunderstanding about this. You're trying to save Harrison Burke's political career?"

She looked at him meaningfully.

“No,” she said. “I don’t want any misunderstanding about it. I’m trying to save myself.”

He continued to drum with his fingertips for a few minutes, and then said: “It’s going to take money.”

She opened her handbag. “I came prepared for that.”

Perry Mason watched her while she counted out the currency, and arranged it in piles along the edge of the desk.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“That’s on account of your fee,” she said. “When you find out how much it’s going to take to keep the thing secret, you can get in touch with me.”

“How do I get in touch with you?”

“You put a personal in the *Examiner*: ‘E. G. Negotiations ready to conclude,’ and you sign that with your initials. Then I’ll come to your office.”

“I don’t like it,” he said. “I never like to pay blackmail. I’d rather work some other way around it.”

“What other way would there be?” she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. Sometimes there are other ways.”

She said, hopefully: “I can tell you one thing about Frank Locke. There’s something in his past life that he’s afraid of. I don’t know exactly what it is. I think perhaps he was sent to prison once, or something of that sort.”

He looked at her.

“You seem to know him pretty well.”

She shook her head. “I never saw him in my life.”

“How do you know so much about him?”

“I told you you weren’t to ask me that.”

He drummed again with his powerful fingers on the edge of the desk.

“Can I say that I am representing Harrison Burke?” he asked.

She shook her head emphatically.

“You can’t say that you’re representing anybody. That is, you can’t use any names. You know how to handle that. I don’t.”

“When do you want me to start in?”

“Right away.”

Perry Mason pressed a button on the side of his desk. After a moment or two, the door to the outer office opened and Della Street came in carrying a notebook.

The woman in the chair sat back with a detached, impersonal air; the manner of one whose business is not to be discussed in any way before servants.

“You wanted something?” asked Della Street.

Perry Mason reached in the upper right-hand drawer of his desk, and took out a letter.

“This letter,” he said, “is all right, with the exception of one thing that I want in it. I’ll write that in in pen and ink. And then you can re-type the letter. I’m going to be out on important business for the rest of the day. And I don’t know just when I’ll be back to the office.”

Della Street asked: “Can I get in touch with you anywhere?”

He shook his head. “I’ll get in touch with you,” he said.

He drew the letter toward him and scribbled on the margin. She hesitated for a moment, then walked around the desk so that she could look over his shoulder.

Perry Mason wrote on the letter: “Go back to the outer office. Ring Drake’s Detective Bureau, and ask for Paul Drake. Get him to shadow this woman when she

leaves the office. But don't let her know she's being tailed. Tell him I want to find out who she is, that it's important."

He took a blotter, blotted the note, and handed it to Della Street.

"Have that attended to right away," he said, "so that I can sign it before I go out."

She took the letter casually. "Very well," she said, and left the office.

Perry Mason turned to the woman. "I've got to know something about how high I can go on this thing," he told her.

"What would you consider reasonable?" she asked.

"Nothing at all," he said crisply. "I don't like to pay money for blackmail."

"I know," she remarked, "but you must have had *some* experience."

"*Spicy Bits*," he told her, "will charge everything they think the traffic will bear. What I'm trying to get at is, how much will it bear? If they want too much I'll try stalling them along. If they are willing to be reasonable, I can handle it quickly."

"You've *got* to handle it quickly."

"Well," he said, "we're getting away from the question. How much?"

"I could raise five thousand dollars," she ventured.

"Harrison Burke is in politics," he told her. "From all I can hear, he isn't in politics for his health. He runs with the reform crowd, and that makes his patronage all the more valuable to the other crowd."

"What are you getting at?" she asked him.

"I'm getting at the fact that *Spicy Bits* probably won't consider five thousand a drop in the bucket."

"I *could* raise nine or perhaps ten," she said, "in a pinch."

"It'll be a pinch," he told her.

She bit her lower lip between her teeth.

"Suppose something turns up and I need to communicate with you without waiting for the ad to be published in the paper?" he asked. "Where can I get in touch with you?"

She shook her head swiftly and positively.

"You can't. That's one thing that we've got to have understood. Don't try to reach me at my address. Don't try to telephone me. Don't try to find out who my husband is."

"You're living with your husband?"

She snapped him a swift look.

"Of course I am, otherwise where would I get the money?"

There was a knock at the outer door of the office, and Della Street thrust her head and shoulders into the room.

"I have that matter attended to so you can sign the letter any time you want, Mr. Mason," she said.

Perry Mason got to his feet, looked meaningfully at the woman.

"All right, Mrs. Griffin. I'll do the best I can."

She arose from her chair, took a step toward the door, paused, and looked at the money on the table.

"Do I get a receipt for the money?" she asked.

"You do if you want it."

"I think I would like to have it."

"Of course," he said, meaningly, "if you would like to have in your purse, a receipt made out to Eva Griffin for a retainer, and signed by Perry Mason, it's quite all right with me."



She frowned, and then said: "Don't make it that way. Make a receipt to the effect that the holder of this receipt has paid you the amount mentioned, as a retainer."

He scowled, scooped up the money with his swiftly competent hands, and beckoned to Della Street.

"Here, Della," he said, "take this money. Give Mrs. Griffin a ledger page, and make a receipt to the effect that the account listed in our ledger, under that page number, is credited with five hundred dollars. Mark on the receipt that that amount is by way of retainer."

"Can you tell me what your total fees will be?" asked the woman.

"It'll depend on the amount of the work," he said. "They'll be high, but fair. And they'll depend on results."

She nodded, hesitated a moment, and then said: "I guess that's all I have to do in here."

"My secretary will give you the receipt," he told her.

She smiled at him. "Good day."

"Good day," he said.

She paused at the door of the outer office, to turn and look back at him.

He was standing with his back to her, his hands thrust in his pockets, looking out of the window.

"This way, please," said Della Street, and closed the door.

Perry Mason continued to stare out at the street for some five minutes. Then the door from the outer office opened once more, and Della Street came into the office.

"She's gone," she said.

Mason whirled to face her.

"Why did you think she was phony?" he asked.

Della Street stared him steadily in the eye.

"That woman," she said, "spells trouble to me."

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"To me, she's five hundred dollars cash for a retainer. And another fifteen hundred by way of a fee when I get the thing squared up."

The girl said, with some feeling: "She's phony, and she's crooked. She's one of those well-kept little minxes that would double-cross anybody in order to take care of herself."

Perry Mason surveyed her appraisingly.

"You don't find loyalty in wives," he said, "who pay five hundred dollar retainers. She's a client."

Della Street shook her head, and said: "That isn't what I meant. I meant that there's something false about her. She's concealing something from you right now; something that you should know. She's sending you up against something as a blind proposition when she could make it easy for you if she'd only be frank."

Perry Mason made a gesture with his shoulders.

"Why should I care if she makes it easy for me?" he asked. "She's the one that's paying for my time. Time is all I'm investing."

Della Street said, slowly: "Are you sure that time is all you're investing?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she said, "the woman's dangerous. She is just the kind of a little minx who would get you into some sort of a jam and leave you to take it, right on the button."

His face didn't change expression, but his eyes glinted. "That's one of the chances I have to take," he told her. "I can't expect my clients to be loyal to me. They pay me money. That's all."

She stared at him with a speculative look that held something of a wistful tenderness. "But you insist on being loyal to your clients, no matter how rotten they are."

"Of course," he told her. "That's my duty."

"To your profession?"

"No," he said slowly, "to myself. I'm a paid gladiator. I fight for my clients. Most clients aren't square shooters. That's why they're clients. They've got themselves into trouble. It's up to me to get them out. I have to shoot square with them. I can't always expect them to shoot square with me."

"It isn't fair!" she blazed.

"Of course not," he smiled. "It's business."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I told the detective that you wanted her shadowed as soon as she left the office," she said, abruptly getting back to her duties. "He said he'd be there to pick her up."

"You talked with Paul Drake himself?"

"Of course, otherwise I wouldn't have told you everything was all right."

"Okay," he said, "you can bank three hundred out of that retainer, and give me two hundred to put in my pocket. We'll find out who she really is, and then we'll have an ace in the hole."

Della Street went back to the outer office, returned with two hundred dollars in currency, which she handed to Perry Mason.

He smiled at her.

"You're a good girl, Della," he said. "Even if you do get funny ideas about women."

She whirled on him. "*I hate her!*" she said, "I hate the very ground she walks on! But it isn't that. It's something more than the hate. It's sort of a hunch I've got."

He planted his feet wide apart, thrust his hands in his pockets, and stared at her.

"Why do you hate her?" he asked, with tolerant amusement.

"I hate everything she stands for!" said Della Street. "I've had to work for everything I got. I never got a thing in life that I didn't work for. And lots of times I've worked for things and have had nothing in return. That woman is the type that has never worked for anything in her life! She doesn't give a damned thing in return for what she gets. Not even herself."

Perry Mason pursed his lips thoughtfully. "And all of this outburst is occasioned just because you gave her the once-over and didn't like the way she was dressed?" he asked.

"I liked the way she was dressed. She's dressed like a million dollars. Those clothes she had on cost somebody a lot of money. And you can bet that she wasn't the one that paid for them. She's *too* well-kept, *too* well-groomed, *too* baby faced. Did you notice that trick she has of making her eyes wide when she wants to impress you? She's practiced that baby stare in front of a mirror."

He watched her with eyes that were suddenly deep and enigmatical. "If all clients had your loyalty, Della, there wouldn't be any law business. Don't forget that. You've got to take clients as they come. You're different. Your family was rich. Then they lost their money. You went to work. Lots of women wouldn't have done that."

Her eyes were wistful once more.

"What would they have done?" she asked. "What could they have done?"

“They could,” he remarked slowly, “have married a man, and then gone out to the Beechwood Inn with some other man, got caught, and had to get a lawyer to get them out of the jam.”

She turned toward the outer office, keeping her eyes averted from him. Those eyes were glowing. “I started to talk about clients,” she observed, “and you begin to talk about me.” And she pushed her way through the door and into the outer office.

Perry Mason walked to the doorway and stood there while Della Street went over to her desk, sat down at it, and slid a sheet of paper into her typewriter. Mason was still standing there when the door of the outer office opened and a tall man, with drooping shoulders and a head that was thrust forward on a long neck, came into the outer office. He regarded Della Street with protruding glassy eyes that held a perpetual expression of droll humor, smiled at her, turned to Mason and said: “Hello, Perry.”

Mason said: “Come on in, Paul. Did you get anything?”

Drake said: “I got back.”

Mason held the door open, and closed it after the detective had gone into the private office.

“What happened?” he asked.

Paul Drake sat down in the chair which the woman had occupied a few minutes earlier, raised his foot to the other chair and lit a cigarette.

“She’s a wise baby,” he said.

“What makes you think so?” asked Perry Mason. “Did she know you were tailing her?”

“I don’t think so,” said Drake. “I stood by the elevator shaft, where I could see her when she came out of the office. When she came out, I got in the elevator first. She kept watching your office to see if anybody came out of it. I think she thought perhaps you’d send your girl to try and spot her. She seemed relieved when the elevator got down.

“She walked to the corner, and I tagged along behind, keeping a few people between her and me. She ducked into the department store across the street, walked right along as though she knew exactly what she wanted to do, and went into the Women’s Rest Room.

“She looked sort of funny when she went in there, and I had an idea maybe it was a dodge, so I hunted up an attendant, and asked him if there was any other way out of the Women’s Rest Room. It seems there are three ways out. There’s a way that goes into the beauty parlor. There’s a way into the manicuring room, and a way into the café.”

“Which way did she take?” asked Mason.

“She took the beauty parlor just about fifteen seconds before I covered it. I figured she’d simply used the dressing room stuff as a blind. She knew that a man couldn’t follow her in there, and she’d evidently figured it all out in advance. I found out this much, she had a car parked in front of the beauty parlor street exit, with a chauffeur sitting at the wheel. The car was a big Lincoln, if that’ll help you any.”

“It won’t,” said Mason.

“I didn’t think it would,” grinned Drake.

## CHAPTER 2



FRANK LOCKE HAD coarse, mahogany skin, and wore a tweed suit. His skin didn't have the tanned appearance which comes from outdoor sports, but looked rather as though it had absorbed so much nicotine that it had become stained. His eyes were a mild brown, the color of milk chocolate, and absolutely without sheen. They seemed dead and lifeless. His nose was big, and his mouth weak. To a casual observer, he seemed utterly mild and innocuous.

"Well," he said, "you can talk here."

Perry Mason shook his head. "No, you've got this place rigged up with all sorts of dictographs. I'll talk where I know that you're the only one that'll hear what I'm going to say."

"Where?" asked Frank Locke.

"You can come to my office," said Mason, without hope or enthusiasm in his tone.

Frank Locke laughed, and his laugh was gratingly mirthless.

"Now I'll tell one," he said.

"Okay," said Mason. "Put on your hat, and start out with me. We'll agree on some place."

"How do you mean?" asked Locke, his eyes suddenly suspicious.

"We'll pick a hotel," said Mason.

"One that you've picked out already?" asked Locke.

"No," said Mason, "we'll get a cab and tell him to drive us around. If you're that suspicious, you can pick the hotel yourself."

Frank Locke hesitated a minute, then said: "Excuse me a moment. I'll have to see if it's all right for me to leave the office. I've got some things that I've been working on."

"Okay," said Mason, and sat down.

Frank Locke jumped up from behind the desk and left the room. He left the door open as he went out. From the outer offices came the clack of busy typewriters, the hum of voices. Perry Mason sat and smoked placidly. His face held that expression of absorbed concentration which was so typical of him.

He waited almost ten minutes. Then Frank Locke came in, wearing his hat.

"All right," he said, "I can leave now."

The two men left the building together, hailed a cruising cab.

"Drive around the business section," said Perry Mason.

Locke regarded the attorney with those chocolate brown eyes of his, which seemed to contain no expression whatever.

"Maybe we could talk here," he said.

Mason shook his head. "I want to talk where I don't have to yell."

Locke grinned and said: "I'm used to being yelled at."

Mason said, grimly: "When I yell, I mean business."

Locke lit a cigarette, with a bored air.

"Yeah?" he said casually.

The cab turned to the left. "There's a hotel," said Mason.

Locke grinned. "I see it," he said. "I don't like it because you picked it out, and because it's too near. I'm going to pick the hotel."

Perry Mason said: "Okay. Go ahead and pick one. Just don't tell the driver where to go. Let him drive around and you can pick any hotel that he drives by."

Locke laughed. "Getting cautious, ain't we?"

Perry Mason nodded.

Locke tapped on the glass. "We'll get out here," he said, "at the hotel."

The cab driver looked at him with mild surprise but braked the car to a stop. Mason flipped him a fifty cent piece, and the two men walked into the lobby of the cheap hotel.

"How about the parlor?" asked Locke.

"Suits me," said Mason.

They walked across the lobby, took the elevator to the mezzanine floor, walked past the manicurist's room, and sat down in chairs that faced each other, with a smoking stand in between.

"All right," said Locke, "you're Perry Mason, an attorney. You're representing somebody, and you want something. Shoot!"

Mason said: "I want something kept out of your paper."

"Lots of people do," said Locke. "What do you want out?"

Mason said: "Well, let's discuss procedure first. Are you willing to talk a straight money proposition?"

Locke shook his head emphatically.

"We're not a blackmailing sheet," he said. "We sometimes extend favors to our advertisers."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Mason.

"That's it," said Locke.

"What would I advertise?" asked Mason.

Locke shrugged his shoulders. "We don't care," he said, "you don't need to advertise anything, if you don't want to. We sell you the space. That's all."

"I see," said Mason.

"Okay. What is it you want?"

"There was a murder at the Beechwood Inn last night. That is, there was a shooting. I don't know whether it was a murder or not. I understand that the man who was shot was trying to hold up the joint."

Frank Locke turned his dispassionate milk-chocolate eyes upon the attorney.

"Well?" he asked.

Mason continued: "I understand there's some mystery about the thing. That is, the District Attorney is going to make quite an investigation."

Locke said: "You still haven't told me anything."

"I'm telling you," said Mason.

"Okay. Go ahead."

"Somebody told me," continued Mason, "that the list of witnesses that was handed to the District Attorney might not be complete."

Locke stared at him.

"Who do you represent?" he asked.

"A possible advertiser in your paper," said Mason.

"All right. Go on. Let's hear the rest of it," Locke invited.

"You know the rest of it," said Mason.

"Even if I did, I wouldn't admit it," Locke replied. "I don't do anything except sell advertising space. *You've* got to come out in the open. You're the one that comes all the way. I don't budge an inch."

“Okay,” Mason said. “As an advertiser in your paper, I wouldn’t like to see it mix into that murder too closely. That is, I wouldn’t like to have it mention the name of any witness who might have been there, but whose name wasn’t included on the list which was given to the District Attorney. I would particularly dislike to see your paper come out with the name of some prominent witness whose name had been omitted from that list, and ask why he was not summoned as a witness and questioned. And, still speaking as an advertiser, I would dislike very much to see any comment made in any way about this witness having a companion with him, or any surmises as to the identity of that companion. Now then, how much is advertising space going to cost me?”

“Well,” said Locke, “if you’re going to dictate the policies of the paper, you’ll have to take quite a bit of advertising. It would have to be handled under a contract. I would draw up an advertising contract with you, and agree to sell you the space over a period of time. The agreement would contain a clause for liquidated damages in the event you broke the contract. Then, if you didn’t want to take all the advertising, you could pay over the sum of liquidated damages.”

Perry Mason said: “I could pay over that sum just as soon as I broke the contract?”

“Sure,” said Locke.

“And I could break the contract just as soon as it was drawn up, eh?”

“No,” said Locke. “We wouldn’t like that. You’d have to wait a day or two.”

“There’d be no action taken while I was waiting, of course,” said Mason.

“Of course.”

Mason took out a cigarette case, fished out a cigarette with his long, capable fingers, lit it, and surveyed Locke with eyes that were cold and uncordial.

“All right,” he said. “I’ve said everything I came to say. Now I’m listening.”

Locke got up from his chair and took several paces up and down the floor. His head was thrust forward, and his chocolate colored eyes blinked rapidly.

“I’ve got to think this thing over,” he said.

Mason took out his watch and looked at it. “All right, you’ve got ten minutes to do your thinking in.”

“No, no,” said Locke. “It’s going to take a little while to think it over.”

“No, it isn’t,” said Mason.

“I say it is.”

“You’ve got ten minutes,” insisted Mason.

“You’re the one that came to me,” said Locke. “I didn’t come to you.”

Mason said: “Don’t be foolish. Remember that I’m representing a client. You’ve got to make a proposition to me, and I’ve got to see that it’s transmitted to my client. And it isn’t going to be easy to get in touch with that client.”

Locke raised his eyebrows. “Like that, eh?” he said.

“Like that,” said Mason.

Locke said: “Well, maybe I could think it over in ten minutes. But I’ve got to call the office.”

“Okay,” said Mason. “Go ahead and call your office. I’ll wait right here.”

Locke went at once to the elevator and went down to the main floor. Mason strolled to the railing of the mezzanine and watched him cross the lobby. Locke did not go to the telephone booths, but left the hotel.

Mason went to the elevators, pressed the button, went down to the lobby, straight through the door, and crossed the street. He stood in a doorway, smoking and watching the buildings across the street.

After three or four minutes, Locke came out of a drug store and walked into the hotel.

Mason crossed the street, entered the hotel a few steps behind Locke, and followed him until he came abreast of the telephone booths. Then Mason stepped into one of the telephone booths, left the door open, thrust out his head and called: "Oh, Locke."

Locke whirled, his chocolate brown eyes suddenly wide with alarm, and stared at Mason.

"Got to thinking," explained Mason, "that I'd better telephone and see if I could get in touch with my client. So that I could give you an immediate answer. But I can't get a call through. Nobody answers. I'm waiting to get my money back."

Locke nodded. His eyes were still suspicious.

"Let the money go," he said. "Our time's worth more than that."

Mason said: "Maybe yours is," and stepped back to the telephone. He jiggled the receiver two or three times, then shrugged his shoulders with an exclamation of disgust, and left the telephone booth. The two men rode together in the elevator to the mezzanine floor, and returned to the chairs they had occupied.

"Well?" said Mason.

"I've been thinking the thing over," said Frank Locke, and hesitated.

Mason commented, dryly: "Well, I presumed that you had."

"You know," said Locke, "the situation that you've brought up, without mentioning any names, might have a very important political angle."

"Again," said Mason, "still without mentioning any names, it might not. But there's no use you and me sitting here trying to kid each other like a couple of horse traders. What's your price?"

"The advertising contract," said Locke, "would have to have a proviso that in the event it was breached, a payment of twenty thousand dollars would be made as liquidated damages."

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Mason.

Frank Locke shrugged his shoulders. "You're the one that wanted to buy the advertising," he said. "I don't know as I'm anxious to sell it to you."

Mason got to his feet. "You don't act as though you wanted to sell anything," he remarked. He walked to the elevator and Locke followed him.

"Maybe you'll want to buy some advertising again sometime," Locke said. "Our rates are somewhat elastic you know."

"Meaning that they're going down?" queried Mason.

"Meaning that they may go up, in *this* case."

"Oh," said Mason, shortly.

He paused abruptly, and whirled, staring at Locke with cold, hostile eyes.

"Listen," he said. "I know what I'm up against. And I'm telling you right now that you can't get away with it."

"Can't get away with what?" said Locke.

"You know damned well what you can't get away with," said Mason. "By God! You fellows have run a blackmailing sheet here and made people eat out of your hands long enough. I'm telling you right now where you head in!"

Locke regained something of his composure, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I've had fellows try to tell me that before," he said.

"I didn't say I was *trying* to tell you," said Mason. "I said I was *telling* you."

"And I heard you," said Locke. "There's no need of raising your voice."

"Okay," said Mason. "Just so you know what I mean. By God! I'm starting after you fellows right now."

Locke smiled. "Very well. In the meantime, would you mind pressing the elevator button, or else get out of the way, so that I can press it."

Mason turned and pressed the button. They rode down in silence, walked across the lobby.

When they reached the street, Locke smiled.

"Well," he said, his brown eyes staring at Perry Mason, "there's no hard feelings."

Perry Mason turned his back.

"The hell there ain't," he said.



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*End of Sample*