



The Case of the Beautiful Beggar

Erle Stanley Gardner

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A beautiful young woman seeks the help of the world-famous lawyer to free her frail, wealthy uncle from the clutches of a conniving half brother. But the police believe she may be a murderer. Could they be right? Or will Perry Mason and his clever assistants, Paul Drake and Della Street be able to prove her innocence?

The Case of the Beautiful Beggar Details

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Author : Erle Stanley Gardner

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Ed says

#76 in the Perry Mason series. Daphne had spent her life caring for her elderly uncle. When his half-brother showed up, with his wife and a friend, they convinced the uncle that Daphne was overworked and needed a vacation. This gave them the chance to drug the uncle and have him committed. The half-brother told the court that Daphne wasn't really the old man's niece but the illegitimate daughter of his deceased housekeeper. This novel has the usual twists of a Perry Mason entry and the requisite courtroom finale, including a rare bit of cooperation with Lt. Tragg of Homicide.

Perry Mason series - Daphne Shelby was young, beautiful, and thoroughly upset.

The letter she handed Perry Mason had been written in haste and great agitation. It was from her uncle and had reached her just after her ship had sailed from Honolulu on the return from a three months' cruise of the Orient.

"Don't come home, " the message read. "Get in touch with Perry Mason immediately...and be prepared for a shock."

April says

This was the first Perry Mason book I've read, and I have to say, I enjoyed it quite a bit! It was humorous, and although it took me a bit to figure out the character-type of Perry Mason (kind of in D&D style - i.e., lawful/neutral/chaotic good/neutral/evil), I did get into the swing of the story eventually.

It is a bit dated, but it's not like I wasn't expecting that, since I knew that Gardner wrote Perry Mason novels from the early 1930s to the mid 1970s. This particular novel was published in 1965 and reflects views/stereotypes that I expect coming from that time. I did read a few reviews of The Case of the Beautiful Beggar prior to writing my own review, and there was a reviewer who said that there was (my words, not his/hers) some swearing and indecent exposure. I have absolutely no idea what that was referring to. I can't recall any swearing in particular, which doesn't mean a whole lot since swearing only catches my attention if the F-bomb is dropped every other sentence or so, but intellectually I know that really the only swear word seen in popular books in the 1960s was "damn" (and related "mild" swear words). And IMO there wasn't anything inappropriate or indecent... so anyway. Just wanted to throw that out there because I found it curious.

I'm on vacation right now and will have a lot of time to read tomorrow when I'm flying home/in layovers at the airport, so maybe I can finish the other Perry Mason book I packed! :)

Syrdarya says

Daphne Shelby has taken care of her elderly uncle Horace for years. When Horace's half-brother, wife, and a friend show up and convince Daphne to take a much-needed three-month vacation, she acquiesces and enjoys her trip. She returns, however, to find her life turned upside down. The visitors have taken over

Horace's house, had him committed to a sanitarium, and they've wrested control of his financial accounts from both Daphne and Horace. Daphne is kicked out of her home, unable to contact her uncle, and goes to Perry Mason for help.

This book was extremely fun and full of action. Paul Drake takes a larger role here, as he and his detectives have to trail several people. Daphne doesn't entirely trust Perry Mason, much to his frustration, and despite him repeatedly going to great lengths to assist her. Daphne isn't as naive as she pretends to be, and Mason reveals this fact in one hilarious episode in a hotel room.

I would say *Beautiful Beggar* is one of my favorites among the Perry Mason novels.

Bob says

I've been reading Gardner's Perry Mason books off and on for many years. Those who are used to really fine mystery writers (in the literary sense), such as Ross Macdonald, may find the writing style here a bit dry. Nonetheless, I still love the general setting: the fast pace, the characters of Perry, Della, Paul, Lt. Tragg, and Hamilton Berger. That, and the ingenious plots, are why I read Perry Mason.

On the whole, the ones written by about 1953 are the best. This is one of the last ones, written in 1965. The plot is interesting and creative. But like most late books, written after the TV series became a huge hit, there isn't much in the way of embellishment or descriptive detail.

A young woman, Daphne Shelby, comes to see Mason with an unusual story. She's been living with her Uncle Horace since she was a baby, taking care of him for the last few years. He is now 75. Her father, Robert, was one of Horace's brothers. Her parents died a long time ago in a car accident. About three months earlier Horace's half brother Borden Finchley and his wife Elinor arrived for a visit. They brought along a "friend" named Ralph Exeter. They suggested that Daphne was exhausted and she needed a long vacation, so she took a cruise to the Orient. She has just returned after three months to find a letter from Uncle Horace with a check to her for \$125000 dollars, exhorting her to look up Perry Mason before she goes home!

It seems that Borden and Elinor were able to get Horace declared incompetent and themselves appointed guardians. Horace is confined to an institution, run by one Dr. Tillman Baxter, who isn't really a physician. Perry tries to cash Daphne's check for \$125000 but finds that Borden Finchley has closed the account and taken all the money!

Soon Perry gets a court hearing to reexamine the declaration of incompetency. He gets a shock though when it turns out that Daphne's mother was really Horace's long time housekeeper, now deceased! Borden, as a half brother, knew that Robert and his wife never had children. Who was Daphne's biological father? Borden thinks it was someone back in the East that she never knew.

That changes everything. Now Daphne is not a blood relative of Horace and has no legal standing before the court!

Perry pulls some ingenious legal maneuvers to get \$50000 of the \$125000 to Daphne. Daphne in turn turns out to be quite resourceful, on several occasions. Before long there is a murder, and Daphne is arrested.

The book references the recent (at that time) Miranda decision. There is mention of cars with telephones,

something quite rare and expensive in 1965.

This is one of the better late books. However, there aren't many suspects. There is some emotional kick at the end.

Recurring themes: older man who is thought to be incompetent; hotel or motel where several people go in and out of several rooms.

Good use of Lt. Tragg. Not much Hamilton Berger. Not much Della. Some use of Drake and his operatives. Drake seems to find lots of informatin quite quickly.

Characters:

Daphne Shelby, worried about her uncle

Horace Shelby.

Judge Ballinger, wants to be fair.

Borden Finchley, half brother of Horace.

Elinor, nurse wife of Borden.

Ralph Exeter, "friend of the family".

Dr. Tillman Baxter, so-called doctor, runs a rest home.

Dr. Grantland Alma, court appointed real doctor.

Danny Reid says

Lots of crazy things happening, but the solution lands with a thud.

Nancy says

This is the first of Gardner's that I've read and I liked that the plot would twist just when I thought it was getting wrapped up.

Richa says

The mystery was too obvious here. A lot of repetetion. It seemed more like a book wanting to champion the cause of the rich elderly, than actually a murder mystery. With all due respect for these silver people, I

expected little less of the sob story and little more ingenious detection.

Evgeny says

A young woman Daphne Shelby begged Mason to see her and the lawyer finally gave up. It seemed she just arrived from abroad and received a letter from her uncle. The letter instructed her to go straight to Mason - without even bothering to visit home, cash the enclosed check in a bank and give the money to the lawyer for the safekeeping. There were some other instructions, but for the review these will suffice. It took Mason just one look at the check to become interested: the amount was not exactly a pocket change - \$150,000.

It turns out Daphne's uncle account was wiped out clean by half-brother and his wife. According to her the situation was the following: the said relatives came to visit and remained in the house. They sent the poor girl on vacation, pumped her uncle full of drugs until he became confused, declared him incompetent, shipped him to a psychiatric asylum, and took control of his deliciously big pile of money.

Daphne was too busy taking care of her uncle to get any professional education and now thanks to her another brother she became practically a beggar - thus the title. By the way, this story was presented to Mason by her and fairly soon Mason started having doubts if this was the true picture of the events. Would it be a spoiler if I say that a murder finally happened if it took place at exactly two thirds of the book? What was going on before served to complicate it more and more.

I have to say the following: dear Mr. Erle Stanley Gardner, boo!!! Shame on you for recycling your own plot from the previous book (#15 The Case of the Rolling Bones, to be exact).

The moment I started reading I was sure I have read this Mason story before. I had to refresh my memory of the previous 75 (yes, it is seventy five) books to realize that I was right. The whole idea of a rich guy who has a nerve not only to live too long, but also make a will leaving some poor relatives out of it and those relatives taking matters in their own hands and sending the inconsiderate bastard into a mental institution

and getting in control of his money - this is a copy/paste of the book I mentioned. Also copy/paste are the events that follow - I will skip this to avoid spoiling **two** books at the same time.

To add an insult to the injury, I managed to guess the identity of the murderer before Mason announced it. Thus in conclusion taken by itself the book is quite good, however the whole recycling idea did not work for me so I had to lower the rating by one star.

Sharon Barrow Wilfong says

A typical Erle Stanley Gardner Perry Mason mystery. And by typical I mean a fun, rollicking mystery.

A young woman comes to Mason desperate to find her uncle who she's been living with. She had been taking care of his affairs until she went on vacation overseas for a timely rest. When she returns she finds her uncle taken away to a hospital for the mentally incompetent and another uncle taking over the house. She has a day to move out herself.

Mason helps the young lady find out if her Uncle is really incompetent and why his brother is trying to prove it and would the will leaving everything to the niece have anything to do with it?

Is the brother a slime ball? Or is the girl not quite what she seems to be? Is there a murder? Who's the unlucky character?

You'll have to read and find out yourself.

Tony says

THE CASE OF THE BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR. (1965). Erle Stanley Gardner. ****.

A young woman has been looking after her uncle for several years now; he is in his mid-seventies and his health is not the best. When some distant relatives come by for a visit they note that the young woman is on the ragged edge of exhaustion. They persuade her uncle to spring for a three-month vacation for her, which she takes in the Orient. When she gets back, she finds that her room has been locked up and she is given notice to be out of the house by tomorrow. She has been accused of feeding her uncle drugs in an effort to speed up his death and get to her inheritance quicker. She meets up with Perry Mason, who recognizes what is going on, but there are big parts in her story that don't all add up. It's all about the money, which seems to have aplenty. Lots of twists and turns in this story and some good courtroom strategies. Recommended.

Thom Swennes says

When Daphne Shelby, a beautiful young woman, enters Perry Mason's office with a mysterious letter and check from her Uncle Horace, the reader is once again enthralled into a world of judicial magic. Daphne was on the return leg of a three month Oriental tour when she received an urgent letter from her uncle, instructing her to go to him immediately upon her return to Los Angeles. When they tried to cash the check they were informed that the account had been recently cleaned out, leaving the heroine completely broke. Perry comes to her rescue and stands by her in the chivalrous fashion Gardner readers have come to expect. This is number 74 in the very successful Perry Mason series and although the characters and general construction are similar to other novels in the series, the different is in the details. A steady diet of Gardner will certainly inspire the reader to a career in criminal litigation. It is sure to entertain the most demanding reader and I warmly recommend it to all.

Anna says

The case of a beautiful beggar and

"If all beggars were as beautiful as you are, it'd be a wonderful world." Of course, the beautiful one is Mason's client, he would have it any other way.

Another fine book by Gardner, but it'd seem that he lost his passion for trial work though. Usually he devotes around 50% but here, the murder is committed in the middle of the book so that leaves less than 20% for the murder trial itself. There's not much fun with cross examination so typical of Gardner.

A young and penniless beauty visits the famous lawyer on a matter of greatest importance, naturally, without any appointment. She received a letter instructing her to call on Mason and cash the enclosed check as soon as she's back from her long vacation. Not only doesn't she have any funds, but also she's about to become homeless with a day notice. The lawyer deals with greedy relatives, dementia, kidnapping, lies, intrigues and a murder. Drake does a great detective work, trusting his boss for once. Mason keeps his mind sharp pulling a few fast ones. They're some plot twists and overall, I'd recommend it.

Nicole V Drakes says

This was one of the best Perry Mason novels that I have ever read. It was fast-paced with a tightly woven plot, well-developed characters and best of all, Perry practically meets his match in a client who comes close to outwitting him. A most enjoyable read! I do have one regret- it's a pity that this book is not available as an ebook, I would love to add it to my collection of Perry Mason novels!

Charles says

A woman walks unannounced into Perry Mason's office seeking assistance. Her plight moves Della Street's heart and Mason agrees to hear her story. For years, she has taken care of her wealthy uncle and then some other relatives arrive. They encourage her to take an extended trip and while on that trip, they maneuver to strip her uncle of all authority and push her out of the inheritance structure. While on the trip, she receives a letter from her uncle that lists some of the problems. However, when she gets back, all accounts have been cleaned out and she has nothing.

Of course, Mason takes the case and it once again takes him to the edge of the law. He enlists the aid of many sympathetic people, including a bank president, but things suddenly change. The uncle has been drugged and committed to an institution, and the girl cleverly manages to free him and hide him from everyone. However, one of the evil people is found dead where the uncle was hiding and all evidence points to either the girl or the uncle as the murderer.

The case takes many twists and turns and this is one of the best Perry Mason stories. While it is clear that neither of the prime suspects committed the murder, what makes this interesting is that they could have. A slight miscalculation could have caused the death, so until the end, there is the lingering possibility that they are guilty of something.

I really enjoyed this story, it kept me up very late at night until I finished it. The best Perry Mason stories are those where you always believe that his client(s) are innocent, but doubt remains until the last few pages.

This review also appears on Amazon

James Vest says

An elaborate family drama, including a man forced into a sanitarium, a niece determined to rescue him, and a half-brother bent on stealing his fortune. A satisfying web that neatly untangles in court with the help of an army of private detectives and some evidence tampering.
