

The Case of the Drowning Duck

Erle Stanley Gardner

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A dead man in the kitchen, gas fumes permeates the house, a duck seem to be drowning in the fishbowl, but it didn't die. Maybe that fact has something to do with murder?

The Case of the Drowning Duck Details


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Author : Erle Stanley Gardner

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From Reader Review The Case of the Drowning Duck for online ebook

4cats says

I got confused with this one, the plotline was a good one but the ending and the reveal was poor.

Stephen Osborne says

Not one of the best Perry Masons. The interesting thing here is that Mason isn't the defense attorney in the case, at least at first. Of course, when he joins the team, he takes over completely. It's also interesting that Mason meddles with evidence, and this nearly lands him in trouble. Only some fast talk and some fast thinking allows him to avoid probable arrest. The main trouble here, though, is the convoluted solution to the crime. Goodness, it made my head spin.

Tony says

THE CASE OF THE DROWNING DUCK. (1942). Erle Stanley Gardner. ***1/2.

Gardner somehow learned about the discovery and action of detergents and used that knowledge to form the basis of the plot for this mystery. Detergents became a commercial item at about this time in the late 1930s, and were an instant success. Gardner used their capability of lowering surface tension as the key point in his list of clues when a duckling was placed in a container of water containing a small amount of surfactant. They duckling could no longer swim because the water would no longer support him. This fact became the key clue to the identity of the killer. This was a clever use of some new technology as a key part of Gardner's plot device. Other than that, the rest of the novel was typically formulaic.

Robert Rawls says

Quintessential Perry Mason!

Gardener proves why he is the world's most read writer! An astute observer of humankind and a love for justice as can be meted out in a framework of the American judicial system sums up the story in broad strokes. All the players in this almost real life drama are brought to life flawlessly. I was figuring the touch of the drowning duck would be gimmicky but Gardener uses it for some lessons in Chemistry as well as an interesting pivotal point! Masterful and compelling!

William says

This one is fun, more complicated than many of the Perry Mason predecessors but also with a touch of humor. For instance, Perry finds observing a court case in which he is not the attorney is "a trying

experience." And the drowning duck motif is amusing, and taught me that detergents were invented in the early 1940's. Who knew?

There are the usual problems -- all the women are sexy and attractive, for instance, even when they are not in their twenties, and Della and Perry may or may not have a romantic relationship. They ride horses together, spend the night in a romantic inn and so forth.

Unfortunately, the ending did not work for me. The plot is a bit byzantine, and its solution comes more or less out of thin air and is a bit taxing on one's credibility.

Still, fun, as I said above.

Kenneth says

This exactly scratched the Pulp Hero craving I had. It never slows down. Perry Mason is bigger than life, and always working angles that no one else sees. I thought his would be unreadable, but it flies by and never crossed the line of reality that would kick me out of the story. Does the mystery hang together? I have no idea. I'm reading it for the style and a glimpse into a long gone age of fiction and history. I got exactly what I wanted, hence the five stars. The overall attitude towards women feels old fashioned but never becomes outrageous. The mention of Mexican servants as bits of background certainly implies a racist society, but isn't overtly racist. Both things in older fiction that can ruin a story.

Jim says

I picked this up as a Kindle ebook and Amazon has a number of Erle Stanley Gardner books available. I loved the old TV series with Raymond Burr and the slightly newer ones featuring a much older Raymon Burr. I like that the ebook format is allowing us to revisit a lot of older authors. I am sometimes disappointed as I was with Leslie Charteris "Enter the Saint". Often these older novels just don't stand the test of time but that isn't the case here. Yes, the world has changed since the time this novel was written but it offers us a look into the way people loved before cell phones and the internet. And yes, these are even better than the TV series. It is hard for me to get the picture of Raymond Burr out of my mind but Perry isn't Raymond so do yourself a favor and meet the "real" Perry Mason.

Whistlers Mom says

It walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, but is it the SAME duck?

Erle Stanley Gardner was a rugged outdoorsman who objected to the stereotype of the attorney as a four-eyed wimp hiding behind his law books. In this book we see Perry Mason riding a horse and changing a tire. We also learn that he puts on clean underwear after he bathes. I think that using the words "granite hard" and "underwear" in the same paragraph is pushing the envelope, but Perry IS a man of action and he and Della

ARE on vacation. And it's none of your business, anyway.

Their much-needed R&R in Palm Springs is interrupted when an arrogant rich man demands Perry's services. His only child wants to marry a youngster of questionable family and Papa wants Perry to stop it. Young Marvin just finished a degree in chemistry and his favorite parlor trick is to render a duck unable to swim by dropping a mysterious, recently-discovered substance into the water. (You'll laugh when you find out what it is, but remember that all of our mind-boggling scientific discoveries will look pitiful in a few decades.) He drags the duck out in the nick of time, but his prospective father-in-law regards this as animal cruelty and proof of BAD BLOOD.

Even in pre-PETA days, animal experimentation was an issue and Gardner came out against it in several books. He seems inclined to cut Marvin some slack, probably because the old man is so irritating you WANT to prove him wrong even though he's paying the bill. Also, it's 1942 and Marvin is the type of energetic, brash young man who'll win the war and return home to build a strong, modern economy. And it did work out like that, although the hard-drivers and their families paid a high price.

The recurring theme is Perry Mason's deep conviction that a lawyer can only properly defend his client if he starts with the assumption that the client is innocent and deserving of full exoneration. Plea bargaining or having the case dismissed on a legal technicality is for pikers. Mason is the best lawyer in the world if you're innocent and wrongly accused and all of his clients ARE innocent. Real lawyers aren't so lucky.

Like all of this series, it's a look into the past and it's alternately charming and disturbing. Perry orders a pot of coffee in a dining car and gives the "grinning" waiter a whole dollar and tells him to keep the change. The servants are all "Mexicans" even when they speak perfect English. Perry feels very sorry for the rich white guy caught up in a web of circumstantial evidence. I reserved my sympathy for the servants who were forced to testify ("reluctantly") against their employer. Perry's client is cleared, of course, but what happened to those servants and their jobs and their families? Gardner indicates no interest. To him, they're unimportant. If he was writing today, would he show more empathy for the underdog?

Gardner wasn't a great writer, but he knew his stuff and he stuck to what he could do. During his best period, he cranked out a remarkable number of good books with well-plotted mysteries and intriguing characters. He was a hard-working craftsman and deserves our respect.

Eric_W says

I picked up a bunch of old Perry Mason mysteries and thought I'd try one. I fondly remember reading several when I was a kid and they hold up well. There are the usual archaic references to contemporary technology, and one very jarring reference to a Red River Valley in California where there were large cotton farms. That was a bit ungeographical. Not to mention the constant cigarette smoking . It was just a given that everyone smoked. And women were to be good-looking and useful.

Nevertheless, interesting plot lines. A wealthy blue-blood, John Witherspoon approaches Mason and asks him to look into the background of his daughter's fiance, Marvin Adams. Supposedly, Marvin had been kidnapped as a child and brought up by the kidnappers. Witherspoon had hired detectives who contrarily learned the boy's father had been convicted of murder and Witherspoon, overly genetically inclined, is sure those evil traits might have been passed down from father to son. He wants Mason to read the trial transcript,

see if the conviction was representative of the truth, and if so he will devise a test involving murder that will show Marvin's true colors. And the key to it all is a drowning duck.

True to the formula (this is not a negative,) Mason arrogantly bends the law, manipulates the evidence, pulls rabbits out of his hat, even switches ducks. It's hardly a spoiler to reveal that he again gets his client (always innocent) off and reveals the identity of the killer in court.

Not as sophisticated as many of the currently published legal thrillers, there is still an undercurrent of criticism of the legal system that surprised me.

Elderberrywine says

Ah, I needed this one. From the Palm Springs start (in 1942 - the same year my mom graduated from Palm Springs High!) to the shenanigans in El Templo (hi, El Centro!), this was a wonderfully nostalgic read for me. The characters were great, the mystery was a mystery right up to the grand unveiling, and Della Street continues to be a Boss.

And on another note, town names in the Perry Mason books continue to befuddle me. Palm Springs is Palm Springs, but El Centro is El Templo? Like Santa Monica is Bay City? Why do some get name changes but not others?

Ettore1207 says

Sicuramente non il migliore della serie. La trama troppo complicata toglie il piacere della lettura di un libro che si propone come svago e invece si trasforma in un puzzle.

Rod Innis says

I used to watch Perry Mason on TV, both the old and new series. I enjoyed those programs so when I saw one of the books by Erle Stanley Gardner that were the source of the TV shows at a used bookstore, I decided to read it. I see that Gardner wrote over 80 Perry Mason books between 1933 and 1973. I have no plans to read them all but I did enjoy this story and so plan to read at least a couple more. I may see if I can find the first and the last in the series. The one I have just finished was quite well written and kept the reader guessing until the very end about who really committed the crime.

Evgeny says

Perry Mason escaped from the city to take a break from work only to meet a rich guy who wanted to consult him professionally. The guy's daughter decided to marry a young fellow who literally knows nothing about his origins. By hiring detectives his prospective father-in-law found out the father of his relative in the

making was executed eighteen years ago for murder. Now Mason's client wanted the lawyer to look through the trial transcript to check if the verdict was fair. After studying the papers Mason was not sure if the defendant was guilty. His suspicion became certainty when he literally stumbled upon a dead body which was connected to the events of past.

I feel the need to speak about the title. How do you make a duck to drown?

I do not mean this one as everybody knows Daffy Duck really is unsinkable.

It seems people making living by making work related to agriculture in pre-WWII US would laugh at the idea as ducks do not drown, even the dead ones. However it can be easily done with something we - modern people - use every day. I will spoil this one for you: detergents. Put some into a water container, add a duck and a poor guy becomes as good at swimming as a heavy stone. Kids, don't try this at home. Believe it or not this fact became one of the cornerstones of a court session where Mason got to shine - as he usually does.

I keep saying that when it comes to mysteries dealing with happenings in the past which continue influencing the present and people's skeletons in the closet Ross Macdonald is an unbeatable master. If you are interested in such mysteries my recommendation would be: read his Lew Archer series.

This book strongly resembled Archer's mysteries in themes and tones. It also broke a record in the amount of dead bodies for the series, if you count both past and present.

As for the mystery itself it was both simple and complicated. I cannot explain it without spoilers, but let me just mention that I was very much caught off guard when one person was killed as at that time I was sure that was the culprit. As you might have guessed the mystery was good enough for 4 star rating.

Mark Stratton says

Just another atypical typical Perry Mason story. Courtroom hysterics, more suspects than you can shake a duck at, and a duck that sinks.

It is interesting to read a book, set in the present at the time of its writing that is instructive of new developments that we take for granted today. Detergents were something relatively new at the time, and not referred to in the same fashion as we would consider them today.

And there was a drowning duck....sort of.

Stephen C Meisel says

Everything you like about Mason

Good book based on a crazy premise. A duck that can't swim. I've read other Mason mysteries but like this one more. Has some of the usual law skirting antics. Lots of work for the Drake detective agency and of course Della keeps it all together. You won't be disappointed.
