



# The Case Of The Careless Cupid

*Erle Stanley Gardner*

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## **The Case Of The Careless Cupid** Erle Stanley Gardner

Selma Arlington is engaged to a wealthy widower. His heirs don't want him to tie the knot. Perry Mason is asked by Selma to prove she is neither a gold digger nor a murderer of her first husband, but incriminating evidence comes to light.

## **The Case Of The Careless Cupid Details**

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Author : Erle Stanley Gardner

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## Ed says

#79 in the Perry Mason series. Widow Selma is afraid to wed rich widower, Delane Arlington , because of the enmity of his nieces and nephews. Selma is accused of insurance fraud in the case of her husband's death and the fiancé of one of Delane's nieces scares her into fleeing the state. Perry catches on and, beating Lt. Tragg to El Paso, manages to turn her trip from a flight to a publicized trip for philanthropic purposes. She still winds up being prosecuted for premeditated murder. But in pointing out the hopelessness of her case, Perry is asked "Who else had a reason to poison her husband?" When the question is answered "No one", a light goes on and the case is on its way to a successful conclusion.

Perry Mason series - A woman whose husband dies as a result of tainted crab salad is accused of poisoning her him with arsenic. She was a bird watcher who had progressed to trapping, killing and mounting species - a hobby she developed to fill her time because her husband was gone so often. The product she used was called Featherfirm and was loaded with arsenic. To complicate matters, she falls in love with the man at whose home her husband is poisoned. The man is wealthy, single, and lives with nieces and nephews, some of whom fear that he will marry the woman and leave his wealth to his new wife rather than to them. Did the woman murder her husband for his insurance or did someone else? The case against her looks rock solid but Perry Mason believes that she is innocent and is determined to help her.

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## Bailey Marissa says

An intriguing story that is not only complicated but also involves Perry pulling some stunts with human psychology and a polygraph test.

Recommended 13+ for murder, language, poisoning, and mild romance from secondary characters.

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## Anna says

"It was a sorry day for law enforcement when Perry Mason was admitted to the bar." Indeed it was. When a wealthy widow Selma Anson spots the same man everywhere she goes, she decides to confront him. She doesn't end up going to Mason's office because of accidental killing of the "detective," but to make sure she is in the clear if she should punch him in the face anytime in the future.

I really enjoyed reading it, even though I've just discovered I'd already read it few years ago. Perry is on top of his game. There're some intrigues, plot twists, poisoning, fast thinking, fortune hunters and pretty nice trial scenes even though they're relatively short.

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## Bob says

I've been reading Gardner's Perry Mason books off and on for decades. Many years ago, I was an intense fan

of the series. Now, after a lot of water over the dam, I'm looking at them again.

Those who are used to really fine mystery writers (in the literary sense), such as Ross Macdonald, may find the writing style here to be stiff and mechanical. Nonetheless, I still love the general setting: the characters of Perry, Della, Paul, Lt. Tragg, and Hamilton Berger. That, and the ingenious plots, are why I read Perry Mason.

This is number 79 in the long series, from 1968. It is among the last written. There are a few interesting parts, and a lot of it is dryly written, but less dry than the other late novels.

The opening is a bit unusual, and that's good. Selma Anson is eating at a restaurant when she recognizes a nearby diner as someone who has been following her for at least a week. She confronts the man, who plays innocent. She threatens to slap him if she sees him again, and he replies angrily that he will sue her if she does. She goes to Perry Mason, and thus begins the case.

What is really going on is that a year earlier, her husband Bill died after ingesting a lot of crab salad that was left out of the refrigerator too long. The death certificate said acute gastro-enteric disturbance due to food poisoning. As a result she received a large life insurance payment, which she has since invested wisely.

This happened at a barbecue given by wealthy acquaintance Delane Arlington. Living with him in his large mansion are several nephews and nieces and some of their spouses. Since then Delane and Selma have fallen in love. This has aroused fears on the part of some of the relatives that if Selma and Delane marry, they will be cut out of the inheritance.

The crux of the matter is that there is now, more than a year later, evidence that Bill Anson was in fact murdered by arsenic poisoning. An insurance agent, Herman Bolton, pushes to exhume the body and wants to question Selma, the obvious suspect. This results in a lively and fun exchange between him and Perry Mason, which I enjoyed.

A decisive piece of evidence is that Selma had been a bird watcher of the type who likes to collect and preserve specimens of rare birds. (This kind of bird watcher is extremely rare today, and was becoming rare in 1968 when this book was written, but thirty years earlier was rather common. Perhaps Gardner knew someone with this hobby.) A good way to preserve such specimens is with — you guessed it — arsenic. So Selma had quite a lot of it then, but no longer.

Selma realizes there is evidence against her, and, prompted by one of the other characters, flees to El Paso. Mason follows with Della. This is the highpoint of the story, as there is a colorful pilot Pinky Brier. Mason engineers a great ruse in El Paso to disguise the fact that Selma Anson fled from LA. But Selma is soon arrested, and the rest is fairly standard Perry Mason. The actual culprit is not a surprise.

Characters:

Selma Anson, widow with a hobby of taxidermy.

Bill Anson, deceased husband of Selma, died of food poisoning — unless he was murdered.

Delane Arlington, wealthy man who is attracted to Selma Anson.

Ralph Baird, who has been tailing Selma Anson.

Daphne, niece of Delane Arlington.

Mildred, another niece.

George Findlay, who hired Baird, and is the boy friend of Mildred.

Fowler, a nephew.  
Lolita, Fowler's wife who makes crab salad.  
Herman Bolton, aggressive insurance agent.  
Duncan Harris Monroe, lie detector operator.

Oh yes, the title. Who is the careless cupid? This is partially a spoiler, so I won't go into it, but it's not a good name for the book.

I loved the exchange with Bolton: old fashioned tough-guy Mason. There is a similar exchange with Findlay. Average use of Drake and Della.

Unusual: we never meet the person who was murdered. I didn't like it that several times a character is discussed and named but then never mentioned again.

Modern times: Sophisticated use of lie detector. Perry and Della fly on a jet! For a late novel, it's pretty good. Recommended.

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## Yue says

It was nice that in this one the murderers were kind of obvious right from the beginning. There is actually no mystery about *who* were the killers, or *why* they did it but *how* it happened. Selma Anson was accused of murdering her husband. Delane Arlington's nephews and nieces were expecting to inherit his money, but he fell in love with Selma. So of course one of them wanted to incriminate her. I read this one faster than the previous one.

Read in Spanish.

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## Tony says

THE CASE OF THE CARELESS CUPID. (1968). Erle Stanley Gardner. \*\*\*1/2.

"I walked up to him and told him that I was sick and tired of having him follow me around, that if I saw any more of him I was going to slap his face and keep on slapping it every time I saw him." This is how this story starts out when a woman gets into Perry Mason's office and begins to tell him what her needs are for his services. Her husband had recently died, and, at the same time, she began to notice that she was being shadowed everywhere she went by one man or another. Turns out that the followers were employees of the insurance company that had the policy on her husband. It was for the face value of \$50,000, but was awarded as \$100,000 since her husband died as a result of accidental poisoning. This leads into a long story of how she was suspected of poisoning her husband with arsenic laced into the crab salad that he so loved. She wants Mason to somehow prove her innocence in this affair – not a simple matter. After the usual number of red herrings and look-alike suspects, Mason's case heats up and the whole matter becomes a real problem. When the story gets to the courtroom scene, more possibilities open up and the action becomes even more hectic. Gardner has mostly avoided the excessive introduction of characters in this tale, and most of his moves seem to make sense. Two items that made me puzzle my head included the statement – made twice in the book – that flight from the scene of the crime is viewed as evidence of guilt in California. Is it? (or, was

it?). The other puzzler was the introduction of a female pilot, “Pinky” Brier, who, supposedly, did all of Mason’s charter flying north of the Mexican border. I either missed her introduction in other novels, or Gardner assumed that he had done so earlier. We’ll have to see if she turns up again in other Mason thrillers. On the whole, this was a good read from Gardner – one that most readers would enjoy. The only negative I had was that Gardner pulled a switch at the very end of the book that turned the whole case on its ear.

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### **Christopher Taylor says**

A later, but pretty solid addition to the vast Perry Mason collection. Something I really appreciate about these books is that the trial scenes are so careful and specific, they lack most of the usual dramatic tricks and violations of actual courtroom rules and behavior that most courtroom fiction suffers from. In some ways its almost clinical how they courtroom is portrayed, except for Perry's more dramatic tricks.

In this book, a woman is being followed by someone, and turns to Perry for legal help about how to respond. Soon the woman's troubles become more significant and Perry Mason has a new case. The story flows sort of slowly and without bumps until a sequence I'm pretty sure Gardner stuck in after the first edit because it needed something to jazz things up and add beef to the word count. But it works out because its such an interesting twist and so typically Perry Mason.

Overall a decent book that has few flaws and is a nice, entertaining read.

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### **Rusty says**

Erle Stanley Gardner is one of my favorite mystery writers. He is so clever when it comes to writing a unique mystery tale. In this one, a woman whose husband dies as a result of tainted crab salad is accused of poisoning her him with arsenic. She was a bird watcher who had progressed to trapping, killing and mounting species - a hobby she developed to fill her time because her husband was gone so often. The product she use was called Featherfirm and was loaded with arsenic. To complicate matters, she falls in love with the man at whose home her husband is poisoned. The man is wealthy, single, and lives with nieces and nephews, some of whom fear that he will marry the woman and leave his wealth to his new wife rather than to them. Did the woman murder her husband for his insurance or did someone else? The case against her looks rock solid but Perry Mason believes that she is innocent and is determined to help her.

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### **James Vest says**

A solid entry into the Perry Mason cannon, but ultimately, a pretty straightforward dash to the truth.

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### **Les Anderson says**

This felt like one of the shortest of the Perry Mason mysteries. If you have been reading the others, you will see some familiar elements here, which is something that ESG does regularly.

SPOILER ALERT HERE THOUGH

When Mason first finds the planted evidence, it is so obvious that it can be proven to be planted due to the testimony of the manufacturer that their product had changed recently. When Mason suggests that a man can't testify against his wife, I was scratching my head wondering what happened. Trust ESG to, once again, make things look not quite as they really are. I suspect that, even after the trial, the two members of the couple would refuse to get married due to some imagined idea that they would be besmirching the other. He forced them to get married, cementing their happiness, and pointed out the obvious planted evidence, and exposed the murderers. Probably the easiest case he's ever had.

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### **Snowynight says**

Interesting comfortable read

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### **Robert A Keene says**

This 1968 late Erle Stanley Gardner was far better than I anticipated. I do like the earlier Perry Mason books better, but this held my interest to the end, mostly trying to figure out how he would get this woman off when so much evidence was against her.

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### **Sharon Barrow Wilfong says**

Another great Perry Mason. I gobble these up so rapidly it's a wonder I don't get heartburn. Luckily, books don't give you heartburn and Mason novels aren't Jane Austen to be savored and contemplated. They are that bowl of Hershey chocolates that you really shouldn't be scarfing down but can't stop, which is why I was able to run through this story in one sitting.

The plot: A distressed woman comes to Mason (aren't they always distressed woman?) because of a complicated situation. She is in love with and engaged to be married to man who is wealthy and also has a gaggle of nieces and nephews who are jealously guarding their Uncle against any gold diggers.

Mrs. Anson is a widow, wealthy in her own right, and is not a gold digger but that has not stopped at least one niece and her fiancé from attempting to sabotage Mrs. Anson's plans to marry the Uncle whose name is Mr. Anderson.

How do they go about this? Mrs. Anson's husband died the previous year from food poisoning at a party given by Mr. Anderson due to a crab salad that had been left out all afternoon in warm weather. All the party got food poisoning, which included Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Anson and the nieces and nephews, but only Mrs.

Anson's husband died from it.

Or did he? The niece and her fiance say they believe that Mrs. Anson killed her husband and demand that the body be exhumed and examined for poisoning. Because the insurance company would get back the sizeable settlement received by Mrs. Anson, they are more than willing to pursue an investigation. The body is exhumed and sure enough, traces of arsenic are found.

Did Mrs. Anson kill her husband? Perry Mason is going to find out. What follows is an interesting thread on how detectives work through shadowing and what the actual purpose of lie detectors are for as well as how a crime trial is operated through prosecution and defense.

While Mason's mysteries might be a little formulaic, they are certainly satisfying and the best part is how Gardner describes the legal system and function of each player in that system.

Finally I can gobble as much Mason as I want and never get fat.

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### **Ashley says**

Perfect cozy read for me. I love figuring things out with Mason. This is one where I did have it figured out before the end but I still enjoyed it!

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### **Evgeny says**

A widow Selma Anson noticed she was being followed. She came face-to-face with her tail

and told the guy next time she sees him she would slap him. The guy suggested her to lawyer up as he would sue her if she ever does. Departing on such friendly terms Selma realized having a lawyer might not be such a bad idea after all, so a short time later Mason got himself a client asking him how could she slap a guy without any legal repercussions.

Obviously the story was much deeper than this. Selma fell in love with a rich guy and his relatives (nephews and nieces) quickly realized that in case the marriage comes to be they had to say their goodbyes to their much-craved inheritance. Mason suspected that the tail had something to do with this, but the story turned out to be even deeper than that.

At this point let me change subject and remind you of the biggest legal scum of the modern capitalist society... sorry that would be the whole politics, but this is not what I had in mind.

So let me remind you of the second biggest scum... oops, sorry again the second biggest scum would be stock exchange where people on the inside make money out of the thin air.

Thus let me remind you of the third biggest scum: insurance business. If you think it is an honest one look no further than the whole health insurance system of US. I rest my case.



Coming back to the story Selma received cool \$100,000 for her husband life insurance. She turned out to have a good business sense greatly increasing the pile of money. Now insurance company realized that paying off such a big chunk of money really hurt, so they started their investigation into Selma's husband death trying to prove an insurance fraud hoping to get not only their money back, but Selma's investments as well. Luckily for her she had Perry Mason on her side.

The whole book is saved by one scene where Mason's legal trick kept Selma out of jail. This part was nothing short of brilliant showing that even at the end of his life there was nothing wrong with Erle Stanley Gardner's mind agility (he was 79 at the time of publication). This is also the sole reason the book has 3 stars rating and not lower.

The big problem was the villain who won my own award for the most obvious villain of Perry Mason's books ever. Book #55, The Case of the Foot-Loose Doll came close, but in that case one had to do *some* brain activity to figure out the mystery; none was required here. The person in question was practically carrying a sign saying "I am the murderer!" the whole time.

Please do not get me wrong; as a standalone mystery it is good. It is not however up to the usual standards of the series.

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