

An Edward Mead Legal Thriller

Book Two

LETHAL OBJECTION

MICHAEL SWIGER

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Best-selling Author

MICHAEL SWIGER



Edward Mead Legal Thrillers

LETHAL AMBITION
Book One

LETHAL OBJECTION
Book Two

LETHAL OBSESSION
Book Three
Coming Soon...

Also

Coming Soon...

TO KILL A SAINT

1

Monday, January 25
Cuyahoga County Justice Center
Cleveland, Ohio
8:05 A.M.

Judge Samuel Chesterfield examined the four lawyers standing at attention in front of his antique, Victorian desk. His eyes lingered on Jessica Parris, a narrow-faced woman with an erect torso that she accentuated by throwing back her shoulders. She looked heavier in the hams than he remembered. Her mouth pursed up as if she was about to speak.

“Out with it.”

“With all due respect, Your Honor,” she said, “shouldn’t we let the jury decide?”

“Let them decide?” Chesterfield sank back into his chair and shook his head. “Those idiots weren’t smart enough to get out of jury duty.”

“But—”

“Silence.” He raised his hand as a scrawny stenographer fumbled into the room, tripping over her tripod. “Hold it right there, Edith.”

She froze.

“We won’t be needing your services.”

“But Your Honor,” Parris said, “I specifically requested that all meetings be on the record.”

“I know full well what your sniveling little motion said.” He waved his left hand. “Edith, be gone.”

The stenographer backed out and shut the door.

Chesterfield spun around in his high-back, burgundy-leather chair

and threw his feet up on the brass and marble credenza. He looked out the window; snow pelted the glass. He addressed the lawyers with his back to them as he had done throughout the trial.

“Well, boys and girls, I hope you’re satisfied. Right now I should be in Bermuda chasing half-naked blondes through the surf in a drunken stupor. But noooo...I’m stuck in Cleveland in the middle of a blizzard, because you idiots couldn’t settle this case like real attorneys.” He crossed his feet and locked his hands behind his head. “So, since you’ve wasted my time and jammed up my docket for the rest of the winter, I’ve decided to return the favor. As soon as I finish giving the jury instructions, the four of you will report to my conference room, where you will remain until the verdict comes in.”

“You’re sequestering us?” Walter King asked.

Chesterfield spun around and sneered at the fat man with the faint mustache of perspiration over his upper lip. King looked like he had stolen his suit out of a Goodwill box and had his hair cut in the dark by a psychopath with a knife and fork.

“I’ve instructed my bailiff to station two armed deputies outside the door with orders to arrest anyone attempting to leave without my permission.”

“But I’ve got other commitments, Your Honor,” Dr. Chandler Rutledge said, his eyes blinking incessantly behind steel-rimmed glasses.

“I don’t give a d—.”

Rutledge’s face turned scarlet; his eyes looked glassy and inflamed.

“I hope the jury deliberates for a week.”

“Don’t you think locking us in a conference room may be a slight abuse of discretion?” King asked.

“Keep it up, fat boy, and I’ll lock you in the janitor’s closet.”

“What about lunch, sir?” Jonathan Burton said.

“Ah, the elder statesman speaks.” Chesterfield’s eyes traveled up and down the thin, wiry man with hollow cheeks and dark circles under his eyes. “Frankly, John, the four of you can suck the lint off the carpet for all I care; just don’t leave the conference room. Understood?”

“Yes, Your Honor,” the four said in harmony.

“Good. Now let’s get this circus over with.”

The lawyers hustled out of the room.

Chesterfield stood and buttoned his black robe. He felt a headache coming on, pressure like an iron ring digging into his forehead. He reached in his top drawer, grabbed a bottle of Valium, then tossed three pills in his mouth. He swallowed them dry as he headed down the narrow, L-shaped corridor connecting his office to the outer conference room. He stopped in the private bathroom midway down the hall and checked himself in the mirror. He ran his hand through his close-cropped, black hair, then leaned closer and examined his bloodshot eyes. He straightened his tie then continued into the conference room where his redheaded bailiff waited at the door.

“Ready, Your Honor?”

Chesterfield nodded.

The bailiff pushed open the door. “All rise! This Court is now in session. The Honorable Judge Samuel Emerson Chesterfield presiding.”

Chesterfield entered with his habitual rigid dignity, strutted up the three steps to the bench, then scanned the courtroom. The gallery was empty except for a few reporters milling around in the back. A sketch artist worked furiously at his pad from the front row of the gallery.

“Please be seated.” He rapped the gavel, plopped down, then reached for his customary trial beverage—vodka and water. He sloshed a gulp of the burning liquid around his mouth and swallowed. He scanned the jury through watering eyes.

Look at these morons. Maybe if I talk like they are two-year-olds, they won't screw this up.

He cleared his throat. “Ladies and gentlemen, you’ve heard the testimony, you’ve examined the evidence, and now it’s time for me to place this case into your capable hands. However, before I do, it’s my duty to issue the necessary instructions.” He belted back the rest of the vodka.

“As you know, Dr. Thomas Baird is accused of medical malpractice resulting in the wrongful death of Ms. Robin Roget. During your deliberation you must determine whether or not Dr. Baird acted with negligence, and if you find he did, you must then decide if his dereliction was the proximate cause of her death.”

Chesterfield poured himself another drink and glared over at Dr.

Baird, a middle-aged man with a mouth like a fish. Baird's dull staring eyes were fixed on the floor and glazed over, so that he looked as if he'd just been choked.

Chesterfield transferred his gaze back to the oak paneled jury box. "Now a word of caution. In a wrongful death case predicated on physician malpractice, the burden of proof falls squarely on the plaintiff. The defense—"

A whimpering sob resonated through the cavernous courtroom. The victim's mother buried her face in her hands. Jessica Parris patted her on the back; Walter King offered a handkerchief.

"The defense has raised the affirmative defense of contributory negligence. Which means if you find that Robin Roget conducted herself below a reasonable measure of care—the standard an ordinarily prudent person would have exercised—and if you find she could have avoided the consequences of the defendant's actions, then you must reduce any damages accordingly.

"Furthermore, if you find Ms. Roget voluntarily exposed herself to the injuries she sustained in a knowing and willful manner, then you must conclude she assumed the risk and disqualify her estate from receiving any compensatory damages. Do you understand these instructions?"

Twelve blank faces nodded their befuddled heads in unison.

"Very well then. The bailiff will escort the jury into the deliberation room, and trial counsel will report to my chambers immediately."

He banged the gavel, bolted down the steps, and disappeared through the oversized oak door. Moments later he stormed into his office, threw his robe on the floor, then made a beeline for his desk. He picked up the flask of vodka and started drinking himself into oblivion.



5:35 P.M.

Bailiff Robert Stanley rippled his fingertips on the table outside the jury deliberation room and leafed through the morning edition of *The Plain*

Dealer.

The door behind him swung open, and a scrawny man with a monstrous Adam's apple stepped out. "We've reached a verdict."

"Excellent," Stanley said. "The judge will be pleased."

He guzzled the rest of his lukewarm coffee, walked the short distance to Chesterfield's chambers, then slung open the door. Burton sat next to Jessica Parris at the conference table, wheezing behind his hand. King sat off in the corner with his chin tucked into a generous roll of flesh working on a laptop computer. Rutledge paced along the far wall of bookshelves, nibbling his lips like a nervous horse.

"The verdict's in."

A collective sigh went up.

Stanley walked past the conference table, then down the crooked hallway to Chesterfield's office. The door was cracked open; he knocked then walked in. He saw Chesterfield's legs propped up on the credenza, the rest of the body concealed by the back of the chair.

"The verdict's in."

Silence.

"Your Honor," he said a little louder. "The verdict is in."

No answer.

He's probably ripped out of his mind. It wouldn't be the first time.

Stanley tentatively tread across the floor. He stopped short of the desk and braced himself for the verbal onslaught that would surely come after rousing the judge from his inebriated slumber. He took a deep breath through his nose; a sweet, pungent scent gorged his nostrils. He crept around the side of the desk, then recoiled in horror.

Chesterfield's cadaverous head hung at an impossible angle. Red-rimmed eyes bulged out of their sockets. A dagger bit into his throat. A coagulated sheet of crimson draped his chest. His talon-like hands clutched the armrests. Blood trickled on the floor; Stanley heard the drip, drip onto the plush carpet.

Cuyahoga County Justice Center
3rd Floor
8:45 P.M.

Special Agent Sarah Riehl sat in one of the two metal folding chairs facing the interrogation room door, tapping a black Paper-Mate pen on the stainless-steel tabletop. The stench of stale coffee and wet cigarette butts permeated the room. She checked her watch, then spun around to face the wall of mirrors behind her.

“Where is he?” she demanded angrily.

“You’ve got me,” a female voice on the intercom said.

Sarah turned toward the door again. She knew better than to take out her frustration on the agents behind the glass. Just a few months earlier she’d found herself exiled to the booth, spending monotonous hours staring at the recording equipment and close-circuit monitors. But after two hours and four cups of French Vanilla coffee and three trips to the ladies’ room, Sarah Riehl felt frazzled. She startled when the door swung open.

An elderly man shuffled in; he stood motionless with parted lips, eyes strangely bright. His overcoat looked three sizes too big. His hair, white and stringy, had the impression of the tan fedora he carried under his right arm.

“Excuse me, sir,” Sarah said. “You can’t come in here.”

“Why not?”

“This is official government business.”

“I should hope so,” he said. “I’m the special prosecutor for the Chesterfield murder.”

“You?”

“I hope you haven’t been waiting long. I just got off the phone with Tony not thirty minutes ago.”

“Tony who?”

“Tony Barbour.”

“Attorney General Anthony Barbour?”

“Anthony. Tony. I call all my students by their first names. Less formal you know.”

“You’re a teacher?”

“Law Professor, Case Western.”

“I’m Sarah Riehl.” She stood and looked down on the diminutive man.

“Edward Mead.”

They shook hands; she felt the bones and tendons in his sinewy hand.

“I’m sorry about the misunderstanding, Mr. Mead. I was just...I expected...”

“Someone a little taller,” he said with a grin.

“It’s just that I...younger...I—”

“No need to explain. I make no apology for my seventy-seven years.” He unbuttoned his coat and hung it over the back of his chair. He sat down next to Sarah and crossed his legs; his knees cracked.

She examined him out of the corner of her eye. His face looked round and pale. Tired folds of skin sagged over intelligent blue eyes. A network of wrinkles covered his face. Deep smile lines etched into the corners of his eyes. A broad and weathered Russian nose sat atop flesh-toned lips and a stately chin. He glanced over and caught her studying him. She looked away.

“What do we know so far?” he asked.

“Not much.” She rummaged through a yellow legal pad for her notes. “We’ve got four suspects, all of them lawyers.”

“That’s interesting.”

“Apparently, Chesterfield ordered our suspects to remain in his conference room until the verdict came in and posted armed deputies at the only entrance.”

“Kept the lawyers sequestered, you say.”

“That’s what his bailiff said.”

“Rather odd.”

“I thought so too.” Something about the old man made her feel uncomfortable. “Anyway, sometime during the day one of the lawyers must’ve slipped into Chesterfield’s office and jammed a letter opener through his throat.”

“Grizzly.”

“Spiked his neck right to the back of the chair.”

“And no one noticed a dead man bleeding all over the place?”

“Chesterfield’s office is completely out of sight from the conference room. In fact, it’s separated by a narrow hallway with a private bathroom midway between the two rooms.”

“What about the weapon?” he asked.

“What about it?”

“I’m guessing there’s no fingerprints.”

“None. But I’m having D.N.A. samples collected from the suspects.”

He shook his head.

“You don’t agree?”

“The office is probably covered with hair fibers and skin cells from every member of the Cleveland Bar Association, including all four of our suspects.”

“What do you suggest?” she asked.

“You held the suspects?”

“Of course.”

“Let’s have a little chat with them. Maybe one of them will confess.”

“Don’t you want to see the crime scene first?”

“I’ll see it soon enough.” He steepled his fingers under his chin. “Through four different sets of eyes.”...

For more of the story, read on...

An Edward Mead Legal Thriller

Book Two

LETHAL OBJECTION

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MICHAEL SWIGER...

LETHAL AMBITION

Book One

An Edward Mead Legal Thriller

Politics. Power. Murder.

If you want something bad enough, would you kill for it?

Marcus Blanchard has worked for years to get to this night—to the eve of the Eleventh District Congressional race in Cleveland. He's determined to oust long-reigning, crooked politicians Julius McGee and William McLaughlin, and has asked his favorite law-school professor, Edward Mead, to witness the victory.

But just as the results are about to be announced, Marcus disappears...and a woman is murdered. Worse, Alontay Johnson is his old girlfriend, and he's caught crouching over her body. Did he strangle her, or was he framed? And who will believe him?

It's up to the quirky, arthritic Edward Mead, who hasn't been in a courtroom in years, to defend his friend and client...while the State of Ohio seeks the death penalty.

For more information:

www.MichaelSwiger.com

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COMING SOON...

TO KILL A SAINT

MICHAEL SWIGER

**A corpse on an altar.
A witness who isn't talking.
An ancient vow of secrecy.**

It's 2 A.M. when County Prosecutor Peter Saul arrives at the scene of a grisly murder at St. Andrew's Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Reverend Howard Jamison is covered with the victim's blood, and there's a Satanic Bible on his desk.

Attorney Hunter St. James has spent his career fighting the shameful specter of his father's legacy. Now he's assigned a pro-bono case he's sure he can't win. The charge is first-degree murder, and the arraignment is in two days. Worse, the client's a holy-roller. And Hunter doesn't trust anybody who makes his living off the superstitions of others.

Psychologist Faith McGuire has just lost a husband, but gained a new client...who knows far more than he's telling.

Saul's stepson, Jason, with his spiky hair, body piercings, and jackboots, is tapdancing on the prosecutor's last nerve. Is it just a rebellious phase...or could there be something more to his attitude?

All hold keys to the deadly mystery...if they live to see it solved.

For more information:
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MICHAEL SWIGER, a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Ohio University and an honors student at Reformed Theological Seminary, is the author of *Lethal Ambition*, An Edward Mead Legal Thriller (Book One). He has also published two novels under the pen name Michael Andrew. His first, *A Trial of Innocents*, was considered for the 2001 Pulitzer Prize. His short stories and essays have appeared in numerous national publications. Michael serves on the pastoral staff at The Gospel House Church in Walton Hills, Ohio, where he works in prison ministry. He is currently finishing *To Kill a Saint*, another novel, and working on *Lethal Obsession*, the third in the Edward Mead Legal Thriller series.

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