

The Adventure of the Ascot Scandal - Asco
The Casebook of Solar Pons, 1965

Date

Copper/June, 1932

Patrick/Undated

Quotes

- Lady Gresham: *If we can't have the best (Sherlock Holmes), we'll have to do with second-best (Solar Pons).*
- *I am not the agent of justice.*
- Pons: *Ah, Parker, the single state favors my constitution.*
Parker: *Say, rather, few women could bear to share it.*
Pons: *Your powers of deduction are truly remarkable, my dear fellow.*

The Case

Lady and Lord Gresham visit Praed Street. Lady Gresham's extremely valuable diamond brooch had been stolen by a visitor to her husband's box at the horse races in Ascot. The brooch was a wedding gift from her father and she wants Pons to recover it, no question asked.

Comments

- Lady Gresham, an American who is anything but shy and retiring, takes over the conversation when she and her husband visit Praed Street. She is completely unconcerned that anything she says could be construed the wrong way:
"It's either the police or some private enquiry agent. I wanted to go see Sherlock Holmes – we've read so much about him over there – but Archie told me he'd retired to some place in the country to keep bees – so we came to you. If we can't have the best, we'll have to do with second-best."

Her husband's face reddened at this, while Parker suppressed a smile. But Pons is not offended at all, his eyes "dancing at Her Ladyship's gaffe."

Pons' comment after she leaves gives the impression that he considered the young woman to be something of a force of nature: "I wonder", said Pons reflectively, "if all young American ladies are like that."

- Nine of the eleven stories included in *The Casebook* had been published in either *The Saint Mystery Magazine* or *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* between late 1962 and early 1965. *The Ascot Scandal* and *The Missing Huntsman* made their first appearances in the collection. *Ascot* is one of the weakest entries in the Canon. Pons does minimal detecting and neither the thief nor the man who hired him is punished. In fact, the woman whose brooch is stolen has to pay to get it back. It is a rather subdued ending for a

crime that was front-page news. This is one of the few Pons stories that feels like “filler.”

- Pons’ comment, “I am not an agent of justice,” is an interesting one. He says something similar in *The Benin Bronze*: I am merely a private enquiry agent. I do not look upon myself as an agent of justice, which in this case seems to have been served.” However in *The Benin Bronze*, the villain suffers the fate he intended to inflict on the victim, so perhaps we can agree with Pons that justice was served.

In *The Ascot Scandal*, the thief is confronted and surrenders the stolen brooch. He then closes the door to his apartment and goes on with his life. Except, of course, he didn’t take the real brooch. The original had already been stolen, replaced with a fake. So he’s really guilty of stealing a worthless brooch.

Then what of the man who hired him? Did the mastermind suffer any penalty? Not related to the theft. Lord Gresham, in need of money, secretly took the brooch and pawned it. He could not raise the cash to redeem it. Fearing that his wife would notice the fake, he hired an actor to steal it. The brooch was heavily insured. Lord Gresham is painted as a rather sympathetic character, but it is not certain that he would avoid the temptation to engage in insurance fraud.

Pons does not reveal Lord Gresham’s actions to the man’s wife. In fact, he arranges for Lady Gresham to pay for the return of the brooch, getting her husband off the hook. Justice is certainly not served in this case. Unless Pons feels that Gresham’s life returning to normal with his wife is punishment enough.

- Pons lets his feelings towards marriage slip out in this case. He tells Lord Gresham that domestic difficulties such as this one are bound to happen. Then he says, “You see, I am content to remain a bachelor.”

Collapsing into chair with laughter, Pons says, “Ah, Parker, the joys of wedded bliss!” After his summation, he adds, “Ah, Parker, the single state favors my constitution.”

Does this attitude towards marriage factor into his decision to have Lady Gresham pay to recover her brooch, none the wiser to her husband’s responsibility? Life with her certainly could not be easy.