

The Adventure of the Camberwell Beauty - Camb
The Return of Solar Pons, 1958

Date

Copper/May, 1933

Patrick/May, 1933

Quotes

- *I congratulate you, Parker! Plainly, married life has sharpened your wits and increased your faculty for observation.*
- *Parker: I must say, your violin playing has not improved, Pons.*

The Case

Pons receives a request for assistance from the mysterious Doctor, who is Fu Manchu. Karah, Manchu's young ward, has been kidnapped; apparently by Manchu's underworld rival, Baron Alfred Corvus. Fu Manchu's extensive criminal organization cannot find her, he employs Pons to do so.

Comments

- Pons and Parker had crossed paths with Doctor Fu Manchu twice before this case. The first meeting was in September, 1923, in *The Seven Sisters*. Fu Manchu was a prominent figure in the case. The Doctor had also assisted Pons in the affair of *The Praed Street Irregulars* in April, 1926.

In *The Camberwell Beauty*, Parker does not seem to know Fu Manchu. He asks Pons if the man is a criminal and what manner of man he is. On the surface, this seems impossible. Surely the experiences of *The Seven Sisters*, and the inevitable conversations that must have followed it, left Parker with at least a superficial knowledge of Fu Manchu.

It is also a stretch when Pons says that the Doctor saved his life in *The Seven Sisters*. That is true, but it was one of Fu Manchu's own men that was garroting him at the time, so not too much credit can be given.

The explanation lies in the dates of the stories. *The Camberwell Beauty* was written in 1952 and referenced *The Seven Sisters*. However, the latter tale did not appear until 1965. So Derleth referenced an as-yet unwritten adventure. He then wrote up that adventure some thirteen years later. The details of *The Seven Sisters* are not completely consistent with the earlier story. Or at least we can say that the latter raises some questions. The composition dates of the story answer those questions.

The Praed Street Irregulars is not even mentioned in *The Seven Sisters*. This story was not written until 1961 and is likely that the title had not yet occurred to Derleth, thus there is no reference contained in the 1952 story.

- It is interesting to note that at the conclusion of this case, Pons knows that Fu Manchu resides somewhere in Limehouse; that there is an entrance to his underground lair from the Thames; and he has the Doctor's telephone number. While Fu Manchu could certainly change his circumstances if needed, Pons would seem to have some very useful knowledge if he were to find himself pitted against the Doctor in a future encounter.
- Parker comments on Pons' lack of skill in playing the violin. There are a few other references in the Pontine Canon that indicate the detective has no real skill with the instrument. It seems quite possible that Pons toys with the instrument solely because his 'illustrious predecessor' was quite accomplished on it.
- This is the only mention of Corvus. It seems odd that a man who was powerful enough to rival the Doctor did not directly cross paths with Pons. Perhaps there is an untold tale somewhere in Doctor Parker's notebooks involving the Baron.
- This case offers us another example of the Pontine Principle. Fu Manchu and his organization assume that Baron Corvus is responsible. Parker blindly follows this assumption. Pons assumes the opposite: that Lord Corvus did not kidnap Kerah. It is this approach that leads to his solving the case. We see many examples of this approach throughout the Pontine Canon. Pons makes a basic assumption that differs from the other principal parties in the case, whether the police or the client. He turns out to be correct; the others wrong.