

*The Adventure of the China Cottage - Chin*  
*Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, March, 1965*  
*The Casebook of Solar Pons*

Date

Copper/Autumn, 1928

Patrick/NA

Quotes

- Parker: *Surely it's impossible.*  
Pons: *No, only improbable.*  
Parker: *I recall your saying often that when all of the impossible solutions have been eliminated, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*
- *The love of money...is indeed the root of all evil.*

The Case

Sir Randolph Curwen is an expert on foreign affairs and also a top-flight cryptologist. He was often employed by the Foreign Office. He is found dead in his home, presumably poisoned. Solar Pons' brother Bancroft calls in the detective to solve the case. Pons believes that motive is the key and shifts his attention from Sir Randolph's current assignment to a recent visit from the man's niece. A trip to Scotland allows him to bring the case to a satisfactory conclusion.

Comments

- Derleth pays obvious tribute to Sherlock Holmes in this story by paraphrasing Holmes' most famous theorem as indicated in the Quote section above.

Pons also introduces himself to the villain as "Holmes." After solving the case, he adds that his first name is 'Sherlock.' Pons says that it is a name he assumes on those special occasions when he is feeling inordinately immodest. If Pons wore his deerstalker and Inverness cape when traveling, then he was most likely dressed as Sherlock Holmes when this encounter occurred in Edinburgh.

- Pons seems to be collecting pastilles in this case. Merriam-Webster defines a pastille as "a small mass of aromatic paste for fumigating or scenting the air of a room."

A contemporary retelling of this tale would likely utilize a scented candle or an incense burner that plugs into a wall outlet. An incense stick could also replace the pastille, though the china cottage seems an unlikely artifact these days.

- This is another "red-herring" case. At the time of Sir Randolph's murder, he was working on a sensitive matter involving Germany and Russia. The setup suggests that Curwen's death is related to his assignment. Pons' brother Bancroft is predisposed towards this path, but Solar Pons has suspicions almost from the beginning.

- We again meet Bancroft Pons.
- Pons immediately notices the strangeness of a box of lilac pastilles leaving an almond smell. Though Sir Randolph's manservant mentions that his master used other scents, including almond, there is no mention of them being near the china cottage. The observant reader is left wondering where the almond smell came from. Of course, cyanide has the bitter taste of almonds; does it also have that smell?
- Crimes can usually be attributed to one of three causes: love, money or power. Sir The motive for Sir Randolph's murder was clearly a desire for money.