

The Adventure of the Intarsia Box- Inta
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, March, 1964
The Casebook of Solar Pons, 1965

Date

Copper/Late June, 1930

Patrick/NA

Quotes

- Jamison: *Come, come Pons. You have a softness for a pretty face.*
- *Capital! Capital! You have only to keep this up, my dear fellow, and I can begin to think of retiring.*
Parker: *You are making sport of me!*

The Case

Flora Morland visits Praed Street, concerned for her uncle, Colonel Burton Morland. He had received a beautifully detailed Intarsia box containing a mummified human hand and a warning: "I will come for you." He does not realize that his niece saw the contents and she is concerned when he doesn't tell her. Pons asks Flora Morland many questions and comes to the conclusion that her uncle's life is in danger. They travel to his home only to find that he has been murdered.

Comments

- Pons has an amusing exchange with Jamison that is a spoof of Sherlock Holmes' famous observation in *The Silver Blaze* of the dog that did nothing in the nighttime. Jamison asserts that "since the dog did nothing in the nighttime the murderer was known to him."

This amuses Pons, who replies, "You ought to stay away from Sir Arthur's stories, my dear chap. They have a tendency to vitiate your style."

Pons deems it probable that the dog did not hear the murderer, who was barefooted and likely gained access by a window, sneaking about the house undetected. It is amusing to see Pons poking fun at Jamison for espousing Sherlock Holmes' deductions, since the Scotland Yarder rarely does it.

- Bendarloh Ali had been found guilty of stealing and his right hand was cut off. This occurred in the Federated States of Malaya. The custom of cutting off the right hand for such crimes extends back to the ancient Middle East. In those cultures the community ate as a group, with the right hand being used for dipping into the communal food bowl. The left hand was for taking care of bodily functions and could not be used for eating. Thus, to cut off someone's right hand was far more than a physical punishment; it represented exorcism from the community.

- From 1895 to 1939 what we now call Malaysia was split into two parts: the Federated States of Malaya and the Unfederated States of Malaya. They were combined as Malaya during World War II and became the current Malaysia in 1965. Malaysia is in the Pacific Ocean northwest of Australia, southwest of Thailand, near Indonesia.
- Pons has a key piece of evidence in this case; the Intarsia box. Jamison tells Pons that he must give him the box. The detective tells him to “send round to 7B” for it, but that he needs at least the day with it. Jamison agrees to send for it the following day.

We see several instances in the Canon where the police almost seem to treat Pons as a superior officer. Certainly they accept his assistance and grant him some liberties, but a Scotland Yard inspector tells Pons that he must have an important piece of evidence. Pons essentially says that he can have it tomorrow. The inspector accepts this. The private investigator certainly seems to have the upper hand on the inspector in this exchange.

- The killer certainly was quiet. Not only did he not wake the dog, but the servants and Flora Morland did not hear the brutal slaying of Colonel Morland and the ensuing ransacking of his room.
- Ahmad seems to over react to Pons’ trap, sealing his fate. Pons does not have what he refers to elsewhere as “convicting proof.” So he puts Colonel Morland’s severed hand into a recently purchased Intarsia box and returns it to the young man at his shop. Upon the site of it he goes insane and grabs a sword. He is captured almost immediately. Had he been able to act as if he didn’t know why there was a hand in the box Pons would have had to find another way to prove him guilty.

Parker’s response is questionable. Ahmad, clearly a dangerous individual, grabs a sword from the wall and threatens Pon. His mother faints and Parker leaps forward to catch her. Inspector Jamison pulls his gun and stops Ahmad, affecting his capture.

A man who committed a brutal murder is about to hack at an unarmed Pons with a wicked-looking blade and instead of coming to his friend’s aid, Parker catches a fainting woman. This cannot be justified!