



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XLIX – The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone

When Dr. Watson came calling on Mr. Sherlock Holmes, he found the great detective calmly contemplating his own impending murder. Holmes told the horrified Doctor that he knew the identity of the person who had stolen a diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds. But in order to prove his case he had to catch the thief, a dangerous man, with the stone in his possession. To this end, he had arranged for a potentially deadly confrontation with the malefactor, right there in 221B Baker Street.

It's quite easy to tell that MAZA was written initially in play form ("The Crown Diamond"). In the first place, the use of a third-party narrator is a giveaway. The dialogue is very contrived in places, and the characters are more shallow than those we are accustomed to seeing in the Canon. I'm sure many of you noticed the "somethings borrowed" from earlier adventures: the air-gun and wax dummy from FINA; the "fish" analogy from HOUN; the "card game" dialogue from ILLU; the caricatured, crabby nobleman from MISS. The action is paced for entrances and exits, and events and dialogue do not flow as smoothly as in other stories. Cue lines and stage directions are obvious ("Come over to the window if you want to see the beauty properly.") There's even a *deus ex machina* in the form of a gramophone; the playing of which could hardly pass for a live performance except to the most tone-deaf of audiences. Top all of this off with an atypical, pawky, and very untimely sense of humour on Holmes' part, and you have the makings of a travesty. Small wonder that the play had a mercifully brief run on the stage, and that the only published edition of it was a limited run of fifty-nine copies.



The character of Billy, the young but wise page, seems to have evolved from the "boy in buttons"

mentioned in IDEN. My impression is that Billy is a synthesis of the street-wise Wiggins of SIGN and the faithful Cartwright of HOUN. I would welcome other opinions as to Billy's origins, however.

When Count Negretto Sylvius sends in his calling-card, Holmes looks at it and remarks to Watson, "The man himself. I had hardly expected this." Oh, really? Why, then, did he go to the trouble of having a wax effigy of himself made and of adding a second door from the room adjoining the sitting-room so that he could enter and exit behind the curtains in front of the window without attracting attention? "Hardly expected this?" I don't think so.

Was there really enough evidence to convict Sylvius of the theft of the Mazarin Stone? Consider: A cab took Sylvius to Whitehall, where the Stone was on display. What of it? People took cabs to Whitehall every day. A commissioner saw the Count near the case containing the Stone. Pooh. The Stone was on display (not in the Tower, mind you) so that people could see it. A cab took Sylvius away from Whitehall. Big deal. "Ikey has peached, and the game is up." This may well have been a bluff on Holmes' part, but even if it wasn't, it would be Ikey Sanders' word against that of a nobleman, a Count. IMHO, the best case that could be made against Count Negretto Sylvius would be receiving stolen goods, a lesser charge than the actual theft. Even that could only be proved by his actual possession of the Stone, which Holmes could have recovered elsewhere and planted on the Count (just as he did with Lord Cantlemere), with the objective of "ridding the world of a pest." The confrontational scenario described in the written account could have been fictitious; after all, only Holmes, Sylvius, and Merton were actually present in the rooms during that interval.

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