

英語
簡易讀物

Wilkie Collins

The Moonstone

(adapted)

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英語簡易讀物

THE MOONSTONE

by Wilkie Collins

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(簡寫本)

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PROLOGUE

THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM

(1799)

EXTRACTED FROM A FAMILY PAPER

I

I address these lines—written in India—to my relatives in England.¹

I wish to explain what made me refuse the hand of friendship² to my cousin John Herncastle. The silence which I have kept in this matter has been misinterpreted by members of my family whose good opinion is dear to me. I beg them not to make any hasty decision until they have read my story. And I declare that what I am going to say is the truth.

The quarrel between my cousin and me began during a great public event—the storming of Seringapatam³, under⁴ General Baird, on the 4th of May, 1799.

In order to make things clear I must go back for a moment to the period before that event. I must also mention the stories that were told in our camp of the jewels and gold in the Palace of Seringapatam.

II

One of these stories described a Yellow Diamond, a famous Indian jewel.

Centuries ago the stone was placed in the forehead of the four-handed Indian god, the Moon-god. Partly from¹ its colour, partly from a belief that it changed with the Moon, it received the name by which it is known in India to this day—the name of *The Moonstone*.²

The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the new era.³ At that time the Mohammedan⁴ conqueror Mahmoud of Ghizni⁵ captured the holy city of Somnauth⁶ and seized all the treasures of the famous temple which had stood for centuries—a place of Hindoo⁷ pilgrimage and the wonder of the eastern world.⁸ Of all the gods in the temple the Moon-god alone was saved. With the Yellow Diamond in his forehead he was removed by night by three Brahmins⁹ and transported to the second of the holy cities of India—the city of Benares.¹⁰

Here in a new shrine, in a hall decorated with precious stones under a roof supported by columns of gold the Moon-god was placed. Here, on the night the shrine was finished a deity appeared to the Brahmins in a dream.

The deity ordered that the Moonstone should be watched from that time on by three priests in turn,¹¹ night and day, to the end of the generations of men. The deity prophesied misfortune to the man who took the precious stone. And the prophecy was written over the shrine in letters of gold.

One century followed another—and still generation after generation the successors of the three Brahmins watched the precious Moonstone night and day. One century followed another until the first years of the eighteenth century when Aurungzebe,¹² Emperor of the Moguls¹³ ordered that the holy temples of Brahmah¹⁴ should be destroyed once more. The shrine of the four-handed god was broken and the Moonstone was seized by an officer of rank¹⁵ in the army of Aurungzebe.

Unable to get back their lost jewel by open force, the three priests followed and watched it in disguise. The generations succeeded each other. The Moonstone passed carrying its curse with it from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another.¹⁶ And still the successors of the three priests kept their watch, waiting for the day when the precious stone should return to them.

In the last years of the eighteenth century the Diamond became the property of Tippoo, Sultan¹⁷ of Seringapatam, who used it as an ornament in the handle of a dagger. Even then—in the palace of the Sultan himself—the three priests still kept their watch in secret. There were three officers in Tippoo's palace, strangers to the rest,¹⁸ who had won their master's confidence. It was said, that those three men were the three priests in disguise.

III

Such was the story of the Moonstone that was told in our camp. It made no serious impression on any of

us¹ except my cousin, who believed it. On the night before the storming of Seringapatam he got angry with me and with others, who did not believe the whole thing.² He declared boastfully that we should see the Diamond on his finger if the English army took Seringapatam. Our answer was a roar of laughter, and there, as we all thought that night, the thing ended.

Now let me describe to you the storming of Seringapatam. My cousin and I were separated at the very beginning. I never saw him when we crossed the river and, fighting every inch of our way,³ entered the town. It was only in the evening, when the place was ours, and after General Baird himself had found the body of Tippoo under a heap of the dead, that Herncastle and I met.⁴

We each belonged to a party sent out by the General's orders to prevent the plunder and disorder which followed our conquest. The soldiers found their way into the treasury of the Palace and filled their pockets with gold and jewels. It was in the court outside the treasury that my cousin and I met to establish order among our own soldiers. But Herncastle, after the terrible fight through which we had passed, looked wild, as I could easily see, and was not fit, in my opinion, to do his duty.

In the treasury there was enough disorder but no violence so far.⁵ The soldiers were rather good-humoured,

All sorts of rough jokes were heard. The story of the Diamond turned up again unexpectedly.⁶ "Who has got the Moonstone?" were the words that could be heard here and there. As soon as plunder was stopped in one place, it began in another. While I was trying without success to establish order I heard a terrible cry on the other side of the court and at once ran towards the cry.

I got to an open door and saw the bodies of two Indian officers of the palace lying across the entrance, dead.

A cry inside made me hurry into the room, which appeared to be an armoury⁷. A third Indian, deadly wounded, was falling to the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle with a dagger covered with blood in his hand. A stone in the end of the dagger's handle flashed, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian pointed to the dagger in Herncastle's hand and said in his native language: "The Moonstone will carry its curse to you and yours."⁸ He pronounced these words and fell dead on the floor.

Before I could do anything, the men who had followed me across the court-yard rushed in. My cousin ran to meet them like a madman. "Clear the room!"⁹ he shouted to me, "and set a guard at the door!" The men stepped back as he threw himself on them with his dagger. I set two guards to keep the door.¹⁰ Through

the rest of the night I saw no more of my cousin.¹¹

Early in the morning the plunder was still going on. That is why General Baird announced publicly that any thief caught red-handed, whoever he was, should be hanged.¹² It was then that Herncastle and I met again.

He held out his hand as usual and said: "Good morning." I did not give him my hand in return. "Tell me first," I said, "how the Indian in the armoury met his death, and what those last words meant, when he pointed to the dagger in your hand."

"The Indian died, I suppose, of a deadly wound,"¹³ said Herncastle. "What his last words meant I don't know."

I looked at him attentively. He seemed calm. I decided to give him another chance. "Is that all you have to tell me?" I asked. He answered, "That is all."

I turned my back on him; and we have not spoken since.

IV

I want to make it clear that what I write here about my cousin is for the information of the family only.¹ I have no reason to make the matter public² because I have no evidence, except moral evidence.³

I cannot say that my own eyes saw him kill the two Indians at the door; or the third Indian inside. It is true that I heard the dying man's words. But how can I prove that those words were not said in delirium?

Therefore I want our relatives to decide for themselves whether I am right in feeling a dislike towards this man or not.

Before I finish I must say that, though I don't believe the fantastic Indian legend about the precious stone. I have a certain superstition in this matter. It is my belief that crime always brings something fatal with it. I am not only sure that Herncastle is guilty. I also believe that he will live to regret it,⁵ if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

THE STORY

FIRST PERIOD

THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND

(1848)

THE EVENTS RELATED BY GABRIEL
BETTEREDGE, HOUSE-STEWARD IN THE
SERVICE OF JULIA, LADY VERINDER

CHAPTER I

In the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*,¹ at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find the following lines: "Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning something before we judge rightly of our own strength to do it."²

Only yesterday I opened my *Robinson Crusoe* at that place. Only this morning (May twenty-first, 1850), came my lady's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and said:

"Betteredge, I have been to the lawyer's³ about some family matters; and, among other things, we have been talking of the loss of the Indian Diamond in my aunt's house in Yorkshire two years ago. Mr. Bruff thinks, as I think, that the whole story must be written down—and the sooner the better.⁴ And I think, Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I have found the right way of doing it."

Very clever of them,⁵ no doubt. But I could not see what I myself had to do with it.⁶

"We have certain facts to describe,"⁷ Mr. Franklin continued, "and certain people who can do it. The idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn — as far as our own personal experience goes.⁸ We must begin by showing how the Diamond first became the property of my uncle Herncastle, when he was serving in India fifty years ago. This introduction I have already got in the form of an old family paper. The next thing to do is to tell how the Diamond found its way into my aunt's house⁹ in Yorkshire two years ago, and how it was lost in little more than twelve hours afterwards. Nobody knows as much as you do, Betteredge, about it. So you must take the pen in hand, and start the story."

Two hours have passed since Mr. Franklin left me. As soon as his back was turned, I went to my writing-desk to start the story. There I have sat helpless ever since, seeing what *Robinson Crusoe* saw, namely, "the Folly of beginning something before we judge rightly of our strength to do it." Remember, I opened the book by accident only the day before I rashly undertook this work. If *that* isn't prophecy, what is it?¹⁰

I am not superstitious. I have read a lot of books in my time.¹¹ Though I am seventy, I possess an active memory and legs to correspond.¹² You must not take it

as the opinion of an ignorant man, when I say that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* was never written and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years — and I have found it my friend in need.¹³ When my spirits are bad — *Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice — *Robinson Crusoe*. In past times when my wife bothered me — *Robinson Crusoe*. I have worn out six stout *Robinson Crusoes*.¹⁴ On my lady's last birthday she gave me the seventh.

Still this doesn't look much like starting the story¹⁵ of the Diamond, does it? I will take a new sheet of paper and begin over again.

I spoke of my lady a line or two back. Now the Diamond could never have been in our house, where it was last, if it had not been made a present of to my lady's daughter.¹⁶

CHAPTER II

And my lady's daughter would never have got this present, if my lady had not produced her into the world. That is why I am going to begin with my lady.

If you know anything of the fashionable world¹ you have heard of the three beautiful Miss Herncastles. Miss Julia was the youngest and the best of the sisters, in my opinion. I went into the service of² the old lord, their father, as pageboy of the three young ladies at the age of fifteen. There I lived till Miss Julia married the late

Sir John Verinder. An excellent man, who only wanted somebody to manage him³ and, between ourselves,⁴ he found somebody to do it; and what is more, it did him good⁵ and he lived happily and died easily.

I have forgotten to say that I went with the bride to her husband's house and lands down here. "Sir John," she said, "I can't do without Gabriel Betteredge."⁶ "My lady," said Sir John, "I can't do without him either." That was how I went into his service. It was all the same to me where I went, so long as⁷ my mistress and I were together.

I was put under the bailiff. Some years later I got his place.⁸ Well, there I lived, placed in a position of honour,⁹ with a little cottage of my own to live in, and my pipe and my *Robinson Crusoe* in the evening — what more could I possibly want to make me happy? Remember what Adam wanted when he was alone in the Garden of Eden;¹⁰ and if you don't blame it in Adam, don't blame it in me.¹¹

The woman I fixed my eye¹² on, was the woman who kept house¹³ for me at my cottage. Her name was Selina Goby. She was strong and healthy, which was one reason for marrying her. I also had another reason for doing it. Selina, being a single woman, made me pay for her board and services. Selina being my wife, couldn't charge for her board, and would give her services for nothing. Economy — with a dash of love.¹⁴

That was the point of view¹⁵ I looked at it from.

With my lady's permission I spoke about it to Selina. And what did Selina say? Lord! how little you must know of women,¹⁶ if you ask that. Of course she said, Yes.

When the day of the ceremony was quite near I began to feel doubtful. I tried to find out what other men felt while they were in my interesting situation: it appeared that, about a week before it happened, they all secretly wished themselves out of it.¹⁷ I went a little further than that myself. I actually tried to get out of it. Not for nothing!¹⁸ I offered Selina a feather-bed and fifty shillings to become free. You will hardly believe it, and it is nevertheless true — she was foolish enough to refuse.

After that it was all over with me¹⁹ of course. We were not a happy couple, and not a miserable couple. How it was I don't understand, but we always got, with the best of motives, into one another's way,²⁰ When I wanted to go upstairs there was my wife coming down; or when my wife wanted to go down, there was I coming up. That is married life, according to my experience of it.

After five years of misunderstandings on the stairs my wife died and I was left with my little girl Penelope. Shortly afterwards Sir John died, and my lady was left with her little girl, Miss Rachel. My little Penelope was