

The Moonstone
by Wilkie Collins



AM CLASSIC • A BANTAM CLASSIC • A BANTAM CLASSIC • A BANTAM CLASSIC • A BANTAM CLASSIC • A BANT

The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins



BANTAM BOOKS

TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON • SYDNEY

THE MOONSTONE

A Bantam Classic / October 1982

PRINTING HISTORY

THE MOONSTONE first appeared in serial form in *All the Year Round* from January 4 to August 8, 1868. It was published in three volumes by Tinsley Brothers, London, in the same year.

This is the text of the revised (1871) edition.

Cover painting, High Tor of Matlock by Moonlight (detail) c. 1780 by Joseph Wright. Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, General Membership Fund.

The copyrighted portions of this book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission. For information address: Bantam Books, Inc.

ISBN 0-553-21084-X

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

0 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Wilkie Collins

William Wilkie Collins was born in London in 1824, the eldest son of a successful painter, William Collins. He studied law and was admitted to the bar but never practiced his nominal profession, devoting his time to writing instead. His first published book was a biography of his father, his second a florid historical romance. The first hint of his later talents came with *Basil* (1852), a vivid tale of seduction, treachery, and revenge.

In 1851 Collins had met Charles Dickens, who would become his close friend and mentor. Collins was soon writing unsigned articles and stories for Dickens's magazine, *Household Words*, and his novels were serialized in its pages. Collins brought out the boyish, adventurous side of Dickens's character; the two novelists traveled to Italy, Switzerland, and France together, and their travels produced such lighthearted collaborations as "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices." They also shared a passion for the theater, and Collins's melodramas, notably "The Frozen Deep," were presented by Dickens's private company, with Dickens and Collins in leading roles.

Collins's first mystery novel was *Hide and Seek* (1853). His first popular success was *The Woman in White* (1860), followed by *No Name* (1862), *Armada* (1866), and *The Moonstone* (1868), whose Sergeant Cuff became a prototype of the detective hero in English fiction. Collins's concentration on the seamier side of life did not endear him to the critics of his day, but he was among the most popular of Victorian novelists. His meticulously plotted, often violent novels are now recognized as the direct ancestors of the modern mystery novel and thriller.

Collins's private life was an open secret among his friends. He had two mistresses, one of whom bore him three children. His later years were marred by a long and painful eye disease. His novels, increasingly didactic, declined greatly in quality, but he continued to write by dictating to a secretary until 1886. He died in 1889.

PREFACE to the First Edition (1868)

In some of my former novels, the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have reversed the process. The attempt made, here, is to trace the influence of character on circumstances. The conduct pursued, under a sudden emergency, by a young girl supplies the foundation on which I have built this book.

The same object has been kept in view, in the handling of the other characters which appear in these pages. Their course of thought and action under the circumstances which surround them, is shown to be (what it would most probably have been in real life) sometimes right, and sometimes wrong. Right, or wrong, their conduct, in either event, equally directs the course of those portions of the story in which they are concerned.

In the case of the physiological experiment which occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes of *The Moonstone*, the same principle has guided me once more. Having first ascertained, not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been, I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened—which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what actually does happen, in these pages.

With reference to the story of the Diamond, as here set forth, I have to acknowledge that it is founded, in some important particulars, on the stories of two of the royal diamonds of Europe. The magnificent stone which adorns the top of the Russian Imperial Sceptre, was once the eye of an Indian idol. The famous Koh-i-Noor is also supposed to have been one of the sacred gems of India; and, more than this, to have been the subject of a prediction, which prophesied certain misfortune to the persons who should divert it from its ancient uses. *June 30th, 1868.*

PREFACE to the Revised Edition (1871)

The circumstances under which *The Moonstone* was originally written, have invested the book—in the author's mind—with an interest peculiarly its own.

While this work was still in course of periodical publication in England and in the United States, and when not more than one third of it was completed, the bitterest affliction of my life and the severest illness from which I have ever suffered, fell on me together. At the time when my mother lay dying in her little cottage in the country, I was struck prostrate, in London; crippled in every limb by the torture of rheumatic gout. Under the weight of this double calamity, I had my duty to the public still to bear in mind. My good readers in England and in America, whom I had never yet disappointed, were expecting their regular weekly instalments of the new story. I held to the story—for my own sake, as well as for theirs. In the intervals of grief, in the occasional remissions of pain, I dictated from my bed that portion of *The Moonstone* which has since proved most successful in amusing the public—the "Narrative of Miss Clack." Of the physical sacrifice which the effort cost me I shall say nothing. I only look back now at the blessed relief which my occupation (forced as it was) brought to my mind. The Art which had been always the pride and the pleasure of my life, became now more than ever "its own exceeding great reward." I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind—to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains.

The novel completed, I awaited its reception by the public with an eagerness of anxiety, which I have never felt before or since for the fate of any other writings of mine. If *The Moonstone* had failed, my mortification would have been bitter indeed. As it was, the welcome accorded to the story in England, in America, and on the Continent of Europe was instantly and universally favourable. Never have I had better reason than this

work has given me to feel gratefully to novel readers of all nations. Everywhere my characters made friends, and my story roused interest. Everywhere the public favour looked over my faults—and repaid me a hundredfold for the hard toil which these pages cost me in the dark time of sickness and grief.

I have only to add that the present edition has had the benefit of my careful revision. All that I can do towards making the book worthy of the readers' continued approval has now been done.

W.C. *May* 1871.

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM (1799)

Extracted from a Family Paper

1

FIRST PERIOD

THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND (1848)

The events related by Gabriel Betteredge, House steward in the service of Julia, Lady Verinder

8

SECOND PERIOD

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH (1848-49)

FIRST NARRATIVE; *contributed by Miss Clack, Niece of the late Sir John Verinder* 182

SECOND NARRATIVE; *contributed by Mathew Bruff, Solicitor, of Gray's Inn Square* 251

THIRD NARRATIVE; *contributed by Franklin Blake* 275

FOURTH NARRATIVE; *extracted from the Journal of Ezra Jennings* 375

FIFTH NARRATIVE; *the Story resumed by Franklin Blake* 409

SIXTH NARRATIVE; *contributed by Sergeant Cuff* 426

SEVENTH NARRATIVE; *in a letter from Mr Candy* 437

EIGHTH NARRATIVE; *contributed by Gabriel Betteredge* 439

EPILOGUE

THE FINDING OF THE DIAMOND

1. The Statement of Sergeant Cuff's Man (1849) 441

2. The Statement of the Captain (1849) 442

3. The Statement of Mr Murthwaite (1850) in a Letter to Mr Bruff 443

PROLOGUE

The Storming of Seringapatam, 1799

Extracted from a Family Paper

1

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

My object is to explain the motive which has induced me to refuse the right hand of friendship to my cousin, John Herculastle. The reserve which I have hitherto maintained in this matter has been misinterpreted by members of my family whose good opinion I cannot consent to forfeit. I request them to suspend their decision until they have read my narrative. And I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth.

The private difference between my cousin and me took its rise in a great public event in which we were both concerned—the storming of Seringapatam, under General Baird, on the 4th of May, 1799.

In order that the circumstances may be clearly understood, I must revert for a moment to the period before the assault, and to the stories current in our camp of the treasure in jewels and gold stored up in the Palace of Seringapatam.

2

One of the wildest of these stories related to a Yellow Diamond—a famous gem in the native annals of India.

The earliest known traditions describe the stone as having been set in the forehead of the four-handed Indian god who typifies the moon. Partly from its peculiar colour, partly from a superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity whom it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon, it first gained the name by which it continues to be known in India to this day—the name of THE MOONSTONE. A similar superstition was once prevalent, as I

have heard, in ancient Greece and Rome; not applying, however (as in India), to a diamond devoted to the service of a god, but to a semitransparent stone of the inferior order of gems, supposed to be affected by the lunar influences—the moon, in this latter case also, giving the name by which the stone is still known to collectors in our own time.

The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the Christian era.

At that date, the Mohammedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni, crossed India; seized on the holy city of Somnauth; and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries—the shrine of Hindoo pilgrimage, and the wonder of the eastern world.

Of all the deities worshipped in the temple, the moon-god alone escaped the rapacity of the conquering Mohammedans. Preserved by three Brahmins, the inviolate deity, bearing the Yellow Diamond in its forehead, was removed by night, and was transported to the second of the sacred cities of India—the city of Benares.

Here, in a new shrine—in a hall inlaid with precious stones, under a roof supported by pillars of gold—the moon-god was set up and worshipped. Here, on the night when the shrine was completed, Vishnu the Preserver appeared to the three Brahmins in a dream.

The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmins knelt and hid their faces in their robes. The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard, and bowed before his will. The deity predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him. And the Brahmins caused the prophecy to be written over the gates of the shrine in letters of gold.

One age followed another—and still, generation after generation, the successors of the three Brahmins watched their priceless Moonstone, night and day. One age followed another, until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzebe, Emperor of the Moguls. At his command, havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized by an officer of rank in the army of Aurungzebe.

Powerless to recover their lost treasure by open force, the three guardian priests followed and watched it in disguise. The generations succeeded each other; the warrior who had committed the sacrilege perished miserably; the Moonstone passed (carrying its curse with it) from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another; and still, through all chances and changes, the successors of the three guardian priests kept their watch, waiting the day when the will of Vishnu the Preserver should restore to them their sacred gem. Time rolled on from the first to the last years of the eighteenth Christian century. The Diamond fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury. Even then—in the palace of the Sultan himself—the three guardian priests still kept their watch in secret. There were three officers of Tippoo's household, strangers to the rest, who had won their master's confidence by conforming, or appearing to conform, to the Mussulman faith; and to those three men report pointed as the three priests in disguise.

3

So, as told in our camp, ran the fanciful story of the Moonstone. It made no serious impression on any of us except my cousin—whose love of the marvellous induced him to believe it. On the night before the assault on Seringapatam, he was absurdly angry with me, and with others, for treating the whole thing as a fable. A foolish wrangle followed; and Herncastle's unlucky temper got the better of him. He declared, in his boastful way, that we should see the Diamond on his finger, if the English army took Seringapatam. The sally was saluted by a roar of laughter, and there, as we all thought that night, the thing ended.

Let me now take you on to the day of the assault.

My cousin and I were separated at the outset. I never saw him when we forded the river; when we planted the English flag in the first breach; when we crossed the ditch beyond; and, fighting every inch of our way, entered the town. It was only at dusk, when the place was ours, and after General Baird himself had found the dead body of Tippoo under a heap of the slain, that Herncastle and I met.

We were each attached to a party sent out by the general's orders to prevent the plunder and confusion which followed our conquest. The camp followers committed deplorable excesses; and, worse still, the soldiers found their way, by an unguarded door, into the

treasury of the Palace, and loaded themselves with gold and jewels. It was in the court outside the treasury that my cousin and I met, to enforce the laws of discipline on our own soldiers. Herncastle's fiery temper had been, as I could plainly see, exasperated to a kind of frenzy by the terrible slaughter through which we had passed. He was very unfit, in my opinion, to perform the duty that had been entrusted to him.

There was riot and confusion enough in the treasury, but no violence that I saw. The men (if I may use such an expression) disgraced themselves good-humouredly. All sorts of rough jests and catchwords were bandied about among them; and the story of the Diamond turned up again unexpectedly, in the form of a mischievous joke. "Who's got the Moonstone?" was the rallying cry which perpetually caused the plundering, as soon as it was stopped in one place, to break out in another. While I was still vainly trying to establish order, I heard a frightful yelling on the other side of the courtyard, and at once ran towards the cries, in dread of finding some new outbreak of the pillage in that direction.

I got to an open door, and saw the bodies of two Indians (by their dress, as I guessed, officers of the Palace) lying across the entrance, dead.

A cry inside hurried me into a room, which appeared to serve as an armoury. A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at 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 torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger's handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian sank to his knees, pointed to the dagger in Herncastle's hand, and said, in his native language: "The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours!" He spoke those words, and fell dead on the floor.

Before I could stir in the matter, the men who had followed me across the courtyard crowded in. My cousin rushed to meet them, like a madman. "Clear the room!" he shouted to me, "and set a guard on the door!" The men fell back as he threw himself on them with his torch and his dagger. I put two sentinels of my own company, on whom I could rely, to keep the door. Through the remainder of the night, I saw no more of my cousin.

Early in the morning, the plunder still going on, General Baird announced publicly by beat of drum, that any thief detected in the fact, be he whom he might, should be hung. The provost-marshal was in attendance, to prove that the General was in

earnest; and in the throng that followed the proclamation, Herncastle and I met again.

He held out his hand, as usual, and said, "Good morning."

I waited before I gave 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 met his death, as I suppose, by a mortal wound," said Herncastle. "What his last words meant I know no more than you do."

I looked at him narrowly. His frenzy of the previous day had all calmed down. I determined 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.

4

I beg it to be understood that what I write here about my cousin (unless some necessity should arise for making it public) is for the information of the family only. Herncastle has said nothing that can justify me in speaking to our commanding officer. He has been taunted more than once about the Diamond, by those who recollect his angry outbreak before the assault; but, as may easily be imagined, his own remembrance of the circumstances under which I surprised him in the armoury has been enough to keep him silent. It is reported that he means to exchange into another regiment, avowedly for the purpose of separating himself from *me*.

Whether this be true or not, I cannot prevail upon myself to become his accuser—and I think with good reason. If I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward. I have not only no proof that he killed the two men at the door; I cannot even declare that he killed the third man inside—for I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed. It is true that I heard the dying Indian's words; but if those words were pronounced to be the ravings of delirium, how could I contradict the assertion from my own knowledge? Let our relatives, on either side, form their own opinion on what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the aversion I now feel towards this man is well or ill founded.

Although I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter.

It is my conviction, or my delusion, no matter which, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

"The fact is, my dear friend, as I suppose, by a moral wound, and I am sure, that the last words were, 'I am no more than you are.'"

"I looked at him narrowly. His head, of the previous day had all turned down, and he was now looking at me with a steady gaze. 'Is that all you have to tell me?' I asked."

"The answer, 'I have all.'"

"I turned my head on him, and we have not spoken since."

I beg it to be understood that what I write here about my cousin (unless some necessity should arise for treating a public) is for the information of the family only. I have said nothing that can hurt me in speaking to our corresponding officer. He has been taunted more than once about the Diamond, by those who recollect his angry outburst before the assault, and as they easily be imagined, his own representation of the circumstances under which I surprised him in the nursery has been enough to keep him silent. It is reported that he means to exchange with another regiment, accordingly for the purpose of acquiring himself a new one.

What is that he has or not, I cannot possibly say myself, because he is secret—and I think with good reason. If I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward. I have not only no proof that he killed the two men in the door, I cannot even declare that he killed the third man in the door. I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed. It is true that I heard the dying Indian's words, but if those words were pronounced by the ravages of delirium, how could I withhold the assertion from my own knowledge? Let our relations on either side form their own opinion as to what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the assertion I now feel to state this man is well or ill founded.

Although I much incline to give credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the stone, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter.

FIRST PERIOD

The Loss of the Diamond 1848

CHAPTER ONE

In the last part of Robinson's "Diamond" we have met Herbert and
twelve years ago, and it was then
"I got a new diamond ring, and before we parted I gave it to you."
before we parted, and before we parted, and before we parted, and before we parted,
own strength to go through with it."
Only yesterday, I opened my drawer, and there it was, in that place.
Only this morning I saw it lying on the table, and I was so glad to see it,
they came my father's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and said a
short conversation with me, as follows:
"Before," says Mr. Franklin, "I have been to the law-
yer's 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 since. Mr. Blake, I think, as I
think that the whole story ought to be in the interests of truth, to be
placed on record in writing—and the account that I have
just receiving has this, and nothing more, and nothing less, and
for the sake of peace and quietness to be on the lawyer's side, I
must, I think, say too, Mr. Franklin was not."
"In this matter of the Diamond," he said, "the character of
innocent people have suffered and it is a pity already—as you
know, the innocent and honest people may suffer, and
for want of a record of the facts to which they are entitled, that
it can appear. There can be no doubt that this strange family
story of mine ought to be told. And I think, therefore, if
Frank Blake, my nephew, had not on the right way of telling it."
Very reluctantly to both of them, as I said, but I failed to see
what I myself had to do with it, so far.
"We have certain events to relate," Mr. Franklin proceeded,
and we have certain persons connected in those events who are
capable of relating them. Starting from this point, the idea
is that we should tell all with the help of the Moderns in form—as
for our own personal experience, and no further. We

*The events related by Gabriel
Betteredge, House steward in the
service of Julia, Lady Verinder*

CHAPTER ONE

In the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it thus written:

"Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it."

Only yesterday, I opened my *Robinson Crusoe* at that place. Only this morning (May twenty-first, Eighteen hundred and fifty), came my lady's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and held a short conversation with me, as follows:

"Betteredge," says Mr. Franklin, "I have been to the lawyer's 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 since. Mr. Bruff thinks, as I think, that the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing—and the sooner the better."

Not perceiving his drift yet, and thinking it always desirable for the sake of peace and quietness to be on the lawyer's side, I said I thought so too. Mr. Franklin went on.

"In this matter of the Diamond," he said, "the characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already—as you know. The memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal. There can be no doubt that this strange family story of ours ought to be told. And I think, Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right way of telling it."

Very satisfactory to both of them, no doubt. But I failed to see what I myself had to do with it, so far.

"We have certain events to relate," Mr. Franklin proceeded; "and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn—as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther. We