



Title, Author: The Moonstone, Wilkie Collins

Published: 1868, reprinted by Penguin Classics (1998)

The story is set between England and India and follows the events related to a prized diamond known as the Moonstone. After a series of adventurous vicissitudes endured over the centuries, in which bad luck befalls any individual who comes into contact with the stone, this highly precious and ancient yellow diamond originally from India, arrives in England. It is given to member of a noble family, the young and resolute Rachel Verinder as a gift for her 18th birthday, and almost immediately tribulations emerge. A few hours after receiving the diamond, it disappears without a trace, and the investigations that follow and concerted attempts to recover it are all in vain. Over the course of the novel and told through the words of the various characters linked directly to the diamond, (but not necessarily to each other), the reader discovers secrets linked to the Moonstone, and the truth about its mysterious vanishing.

Following the disappearance of the priceless jewel, Sergeant Cuff, a famous detective, is tasked with finding it. His inquiries go nowhere except for causing dismay and confusion both among the members of the Verinder family and their servants. Throughout the book the reader is left equally clueless as to the identity of the thief but is drawn gradually deeper into the story. New characters, each with their own quirks and eccentricities, are introduced to speak of their connection the story, and all of whom plead their innocence yet cannot be ruled out as suspects.

Wilkie Collins' approach to telling the story through the voices of various characters creates an intriguing novel that keeps the reader's attention until the mystery is solved. At the time of writing, it was unusual to give protagonists lower in the social hierarchy any depth or distinguishing characteristics, but Collins chooses to tell the story through many intriguing characters, each describing the events related to the disappearance of the moonstone, of which they were direct witnesses. In particular there is Gabriel Betteredge, the loyal and steadfast butler of the Verinder household, a wise man with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humour and an immoderate passion for the novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. Likewise, Miss Clack, a poor, elderly relative of Rachel, with some unusually distinct opinions on how life should be conducted, and who causes mayhem as she stumbles through her part. The young gentleman Franklin Blake is honorable but naïve, and is confounded by Rachel with whom he is much in love, and her reactions to the disappearance of the Moonstone. Sergeant Cuff, and latterly the tragic hero Ezra Jennings both play significant roles throughout the story, each of them adding various pieces to the mystery until the final twist is revealed.

The Moonstone is a masterfully constructed thriller, with an intriguing plot, full of surprising twists and dark undertones set against the backdrop of a romantic love story, a combination which keeps the reader's attention from the first to the last page. Upon its release in 1868 it was recognised as one of Wilkie Collins' greatest masterpieces, bolstering the success of the author and even arousing the envy of Charles Dickens, a great friend and teacher to Collins. Despite its size, the novel can be read effortlessly, thanks to a flowing style and a rich variety of character and humour, creating one of the first and the finest detective stories ever written.

David Cornell
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