



The Moonstone (with original illustrations)

Wilkie Collins

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Rachel Verinder, a young Englishwoman, inherits a large Indian diamond on her eighteenth birthday. It is a legacy from her uncle, a corrupt English army officer who served in India. The diamond is of great religious significance as well as being extremely valuable, and three Hindu priests have dedicated their lives to recovering it. The story incorporates elements of the legendary origins of the Hope Diamond (or perhaps the Orloff Diamond).

The Moonstone was published in 1868 and is considered by most people to be the first detective novel. Given the novels place in the history of the genre, that alone should put this book on most people's reading lists. To sweeten the pot, the plot is compelling, the last hundred pages I couldn't have put the book down for anything. I was caught up in the case and wanted to find out the why and the who in the mysterious circumstances surrounding the MOONSTONE.

The novel is narrated by several different people. My favorite was Gabriel Betteredge, the head servant at the Verinder house, who becomes a reluctant Watson for Detective Cuff during the investigation. He is a man convinced in the spiritual guidance of Robinson Crusoe and believes that any disruption in his life can be explained by reading and interpreting passages from his dogeared copy of Defoe's classic.

"In this anxious frame of mind, other men might have ended by working themselves up into a fever; I ended in a different way. I lit my pipe, and took a turn at Robinson Crusoe."

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