

The Moonstone



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The Moonstone

Wilkie Collins



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The Moonstone

In Memoriam Matris

Preface

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.

Gloucester Place, Portman Square, June 30th 1868

Preface to a New Edition

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 reader's continued approval has now been done.

– W.C.
May 1871

PROLOGUE

THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM* (1799)

Extracted from a Family Paper

I

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 Herncastle. 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.

II

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 semi-transparent 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, Mahmud of Ghazna, crossed India, seized on the holy city of Somnath,* and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries – the shrine of Hindu 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 Brahmans, 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 Brahmans in a dream.

The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmans 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 Brahmans 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 Brahmans 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 Brahmans watched their priceless Moonstone, night and day. One age followed another until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzeb, Emperor of the Moguls.* At his command havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahma. 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 Aurungzeb.

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 Tippu, 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 Tippu'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.

III

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 Tippu 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.

IV

IBEG 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 forwards. 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 STORY
FIRST PERIOD
THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND (1848)

The events related by GABRIEL BETTEREDGE, *house steward in the service of Julia, Lady Verinder*

1

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 21st 1850), 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 further. We must begin by showing how the diamond first fell into the hands of my uncle Herncastle, when he was serving in India fifty years since. This prefatory narrative I have already got by me in the form of an old family paper, which relates the necessary particulars on the authority of an eyewitness. The next thing to do is to tell how the diamond found its way into my aunt's house in Yorkshire two years ago, and how it came to be lost in little more than twelve hours afterwards. Nobody knows as much as you do, Betteredge, about what went on in the house at that time. So you must take the pen in hand, and start the story."

In those terms I was informed of what my personal concern was with the matter of the diamond. If you are curious to know what course I took under the circumstances, I beg to inform you that I did what you would probably have done in my place. I modestly declared myself to be quite unequal to the task imposed upon me – and I privately felt, all the time, that I was quite clever enough to perform it, if I only gave my own abilities a fair chance. Mr Franklin, I imagine, must have seen my private sentiments in my face. He declined to believe in my modesty, and he insisted on giving my abilities a fair chance.

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 (in spite of my abilities) ever since, seeing what Robinson Crusoe saw, as quoted above – namely, 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. Please to remember, I opened the book by accident at that bit, only the day before I rashly undertook the business now in hand, and allow me to ask – if *that* isn't prophecy, what is?

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years – generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco – and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad – *Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice – *Robinson Crusoe*. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much – *Robinson Crusoe*. I have worn out six stout *Robinson Crusoes* with hard

work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it, and *Robinson Crusoe* put me right again. Price: four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

Still, this don't look much like starting the story of the diamond, does it? I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you.

2

I SPOKE OF MY LADY a line or two back. Now the diamond could never have been in our house, where it was lost, if it had not been made a present of to my lady's daughter; and my lady's daughter would never have been in existence to have the present, if it had not been for my lady, who (with pain and travail) produced her into the world. Consequently, if we begin with my lady, we are pretty sure of beginning far enough back. And that, let me tell you, when you have got such a job as mine in hand, is a real comfort at starting.

If you know anything of the fashionable world, you have heard tell of the three beautiful Miss Herncastles. Miss Adelaide, Miss Caroline and Miss Julia – this last being the youngest and the best of the three sisters, in my opinion, and I had opportunities of judging, as you shall presently see. I went into the service of the old lord, their father (thank God, we have got nothing to do with *him* in this business of the diamond; he had the longest tongue and the shortest temper of any man, high or low, I ever met with) – I say, I went into the service of the old lord, as pageboy in waiting on the three honourable young ladies, at the age of fifteen years. There I lived till Miss Julia married the late Sir John Verinder. An excellent man, who only wanted somebody to manage him – and, between ourselves, he found somebody to do it – and what is more, he throve on it and grew fat on it, and lived happy and died easy on it, dating from the day when my lady took him to church to be married, to the day when she relieved him of his last breath, and closed his eyes for ever.

I have omitted to state that I went with the bride to the bride's husband's house and lands down here. "Sir John," she says, "I can't do without Gabriel Betteredged." "My lady," says Sir John, "I can't do

without him either.” That was his way with her – and that was how I went into his service. It was all one to me where I went, so long as my mistress and I were together.

Seeing that my lady took an interest in the out-of-door work, and the farms, and suchlike, I took an interest in them too – with all the more reason that I was a small farmer’s seventh son myself. My lady got me put under the bailiff, and I did my best, and gave satisfaction, and got promotion accordingly. Some years later, on the Monday as it might be, my lady says, “Sir John, your bailiff is a stupid old man. Pension him liberally, and let Gabriel Betteredge have his place.” On the Tuesday as it might be, Sir John says, “My lady, the bailiff is pensioned liberally, and Gabriel Betteredge has got his place.” You hear more than enough of married people living together miserably. Here is an example to the contrary. Let it be a warning to some of you, and an encouragement to others. In the meantime, I will go on with my story.

Well, there I was in clover, you will say. Placed in a position of trust and honour, with a little cottage of my own to live in, with my rounds on the estate to occupy me in the morning, and my accounts in the afternoon, 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, and if you don’t blame it in Adam, don’t blame it in me.

The woman I fixed my eye on was the woman who kept house for me at my cottage. Her name was Selina Goby. I agree with the late William Cobbett about picking a wife.* See that she chews her food well and sets her foot down firmly on the ground when she walks, and you’re all right. Selina Goby was all right in both these respects, which was one reason for marrying her. I had another reason, likewise, entirely of my own discovering. Selina, being a single woman, made me pay so much a week for her board and services. Selina, being my wife, couldn’t charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy – with a dash of love. I put it to my mistress, as in duty bound, just as I had put it to myself.

“I have been turning Selina Goby over in my mind,” I said, “and I think, my lady, it will be cheaper to marry her than to keep her.”

My lady burst out laughing, and said she didn’t know which to be most shocked at – my language or my principles. Some joke tickled her, I suppose, of the sort that you can’t take unless you are a person of quality.

Understanding nothing myself but that I was free to put it next to Selina, I went and put it accordingly. And what did Selina say? Lord! How little you must know of women, if you ask that. Of course she said yes.

As my time drew nearer, and there got to be talk of my having a new coat for the ceremony, my mind began to misgive me. I have compared notes with other men as to what they felt while they were in my interesting situation, and they have all acknowledged that, about a week before it happened, they privately wished themselves out of it. I went a trifle further than that myself; I actually rose up, as it were, and tried to get out of it. Not for nothing! I was too just a man to expect she would let me off for nothing. Compensation to the woman when the man gets out of it is one of the laws of England. In obedience to the laws, and after turning it over carefully in my mind, I offered Selina Goby a feather bed and fifty shillings to be off the bargain. You will hardly believe it, but it is nevertheless true — she was fool enough to refuse.

After that it was all over with me, of course. I got the new coat as cheap as I could, and I went through all the rest of it as cheap as I could. We were not a happy couple, and not a miserable couple. We were six of one and half a dozen of the other. How it was I don't understand, but we always seemed to be getting, with the best of motives, in one another's way. 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, it pleased an All-Wise Providence to relieve us of each other by taking my wife. I was left with my little girl Penelope, and with no other child. Shortly afterwards Sir John died, and my lady was left with her little girl, Miss Rachel, and no other child. I have written to very poor purpose of my lady, if you require to be told that my little Penelope was taken care of under my good mistress's own eye, and was sent to school and taught, and made a sharp girl, and promoted, when old enough, to be Miss Rachel's own maid.

As for me, I went on with my business as bailiff year after year up to Christmas 1847, when there came a change in my life. On that day, my lady invited herself to a cup of tea alone with me in my cottage. She remarked that, reckoning from the year when I started as pageboy in the time of the old lord, I had been more than fifty years in her service, and she put into my hands a beautiful waistcoat of wool that she had worked herself, to keep me warm in the bitter winter weather.

I received this magnificent present quite at a loss to find words to thank my mistress with for the honour she had done me. To my great astonishment, it turned out, however, that the waistcoat was not an honour, but a bribe. My lady had discovered that I was getting old before I had discovered it myself, and she had come to my cottage to wheedle me (if I may use such an expression) into giving up my hard out-of-door work as bailiff, and taking my ease for the rest of my days as steward in the house. I made as good a fight of it against the indignity of taking my ease as I could. But my mistress knew the weak side of me; she put it as a favour to herself. The dispute between us ended, after that, in my wiping my eyes, like an old fool, with my new woollen waistcoat, and saying I would think about it.

The perturbation in my mind, in regard to thinking about it, being truly dreadful after my lady had gone away, I applied the remedy which I have never yet found to fail me in cases of doubt and emergency. I smoked a pipe and took a turn at *Robinson Crusoe*. Before I had occupied myself with that extraordinary book five minutes, I came on a comforting bit (page one hundred and fifty-eight), as follows: "Today we love what tomorrow we hate." I saw my way clear directly. Today I was all for continuing to be farm bailiff; tomorrow, on the authority of *Robinson Crusoe*, I should be all the other way. Take myself tomorrow while in tomorrow's humour, and the thing was done. My mind being relieved in this manner, I went to sleep that night in the character of Lady Verinder's farm bailiff, and I woke up the next morning in the character of Lady Verinder's house steward. All quite comfortable, and all through *Robinson Crusoe*!

My daughter Penelope has just looked over my shoulder to see what I have done so far. She remarks that it is beautifully written, and every word of it true. But she points out one objection. She says what I have done so far isn't in the least what I was wanted to do. I am asked to tell the story of the diamond and, instead of that, I have been telling the story of my own self. Curious, and quite beyond me to account for. I wonder whether the gentlemen who make a business and a living out of writing books ever find their own selves getting in the way of their subjects, like me? If they do, I can feel for them. In the meantime, here is another false start, and more waste of good writing paper. What's to be done now? Nothing that I know of, except for you to keep your temper, and for me to begin it all over again for the third time.

3

THE QUESTION OF HOW I am to start the story properly I have tried to settle in two ways. First, by scratching my head, which led to nothing. Second, by consulting my daughter Penelope, which has resulted in an entirely new idea.

Penelope's notion is that I should set down what happened, regularly day by day, beginning with the day when we got the news that Mr Franklin Blake was expected on a visit to the house. When you come to fix your memory with a date in this way, it is wonderful what your memory will pick up for you upon that compulsion. The only difficulty is to fetch out the dates in the first place. This Penelope offers to do for me by looking into her own diary, which she was taught to keep when she was at school, and which she has gone on keeping ever since. In answer to an improvement on this notion, devised by myself, namely that she should tell the story instead of me, out of her own diary, Penelope observes, with a fierce look and a red face, that her journal is for her own private eye, and that no living creature shall ever know what is in it but herself. When I enquire what this means, Penelope says, "Fiddlesticks!" I say, "Sweethearts."

Beginning, then, on Penelope's plan, I beg to mention that I was specially called one Wednesday morning into my lady's own sitting room, the date being the 24th of May 1848.

"Gabriel," says my lady, "here is news that will surprise you. Franklin Blake has come back from abroad. He has been staying with his father in London, and he is coming to us tomorrow to stop till next month, and keep Rachel's birthday."

If I had had a hat in my hand, nothing but respect would have prevented me from throwing that hat up to the ceiling. I had not seen Mr Franklin since he was a boy, living along with us in this house. He was, out of all sight (as I remembered him), the nicest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window. Miss Rachel, who was present, and to whom I made that remark, observed in return that *she* remembered him as the most atrocious tyrant that ever tortured a doll, and the hardest driver of an exhausted little girl in string harness that England could produce. "I burn with indignation, and I ache with fatigue," was the way Miss Rachel summed it up, "when I think of Franklin Blake."

Hearing what I now tell you, you will naturally ask how it was that Mr Franklin should have passed all the years, from the time when he

was a boy to the time when he was a man, out of his own country. I answer, because his father had the misfortune to be next heir to a dukedom, and not to be able to prove it.

In two words, this was how the thing happened:

My lady's eldest sister married the celebrated Mr Blake – equally famous for his great riches, and his great suit at law. How many years he went on worrying the tribunals of his country to turn out the Duke in possession, and to put himself in the Duke's place – how many lawyer's purses he filled to bursting, and how many otherwise harmless people he set by the ears together disputing whether he was right or wrong – is more by a great deal than I can reckon up. His wife died, and two of his three children died, before the tribunals could make up their minds to show him the door and take no more of his money. When it was all over, and the Duke in possession was left in possession, Mr Blake discovered that the only way of being even with his country for the manner in which it had treated him, was not to let his country have the honour of educating his son. "How can I trust my native institutions," was the form in which he put it, "after the way in which my native institutions have behaved to *me*?" Add to this that Mr Blake disliked all boys, his own included, and you will admit that it could only end in one way. Master Franklin was taken from us in England, and was sent to institutions which his father *could* trust, in that superior country, Germany; Mr Blake himself, you will observe, remaining snug in England, to improve his fellow countrymen in the Parliament House, and to publish a statement on the subject of the Duke in possession, which has remained an unfinished statement from that day to this.

There! Thank God, that's told! Neither you nor I need trouble our heads any more about Mr Blake senior. Leave him to the dukedom, and let you and I stick to the diamond.

The diamond takes us back to Mr Franklin, who was the innocent means of bringing that unlucky jewel into the house.

Our nice boy didn't forget us after he went abroad. He wrote every now and then; sometimes to my lady, sometimes to Miss Rachel and sometimes to me. We had had a transaction together, before he left, which consisted in his borrowing of me a ball of string, a four-bladed knife, and seven and sixpence in money – the colour of which last I have not seen, and never expect to see again. His letters to me chiefly related to borrowing more. I heard, however, from my lady, how he got on abroad,