

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

I write these lines in India, and I send them to my relatives in England. I do this for a clear reason. There has long been a cold feeling between my cousin, John Herncastle, and myself. Many people in the family do not understand why I refuse to shake his hand in friendship. Some think I have been proud. Some think I have been unjust. Because of this misunderstanding, I now tell the story exactly as it happened. I ask my relatives to wait and judge me only after they have read what I write. I give my word of honor that every line here is true.

The trouble between my cousin and me began during a great public event. Both of us were present at the storming of Seringapatam in India, under General Baird, on the fourth of May in the year 1799. Before I describe what happened on that day, I must first tell you something about the strange stories that were told in our camp during the days before the attack.

At that time many tales passed from soldier to soldier. We heard that the palace of Seringapatam was filled with treasure—gold, jewels, and precious stones collected by the Sultan. Some men said the palace rooms were full of riches beyond counting. Others said that rare diamonds and gems were hidden there, stones such as no Englishman had ever seen.

Among these stories was one that seemed stranger than the rest. It spoke of a famous yellow diamond known in India as the Moonstone.

The old traditions of India said that this diamond had once been set in the forehead of a statue of a god. The god had four arms and was said to represent the Moon. Because of the stone's strange yellow color, and because of a belief that it changed in brightness as the moon grew and faded in the sky, the diamond came to be called the Moonstone. The people of India believed that the gem had a mysterious power connected with the moon itself.

A similar belief once existed in ancient Greece and Rome. There too people

spoke of stones affected by the moon. But the Indian story was different. In India the Moonstone was not merely a gem. It was a sacred object belonging to a god.

The story of the diamond began many centuries ago, in the eleventh century of the Christian era. At that time a powerful conqueror named Mahmoud of Ghizni invaded India. His army marched across the country and attacked the holy city of Somnauth. There stood a famous temple, a place visited by pilgrims from all parts of India.

Mahmoud's soldiers broke into the temple and seized its treasures. Gold, jewels, and sacred objects were taken away. The conqueror showed no respect for the holy place.

Yet one god escaped destruction. Three Brahmin priests secretly removed the statue of the moon-god during the night. In its forehead shone the Yellow Diamond—the Moonstone. The priests carried the statue far away to another sacred city, the city of Benares.

There they built a new shrine for the god. The temple was rich and beautiful. The walls were decorated with precious stones, and the roof was supported by pillars of gold. The statue of the moon-god was placed there and worship continued as before.

On the night when the new shrine was completed, the three priests dreamed a strange dream. In the dream the god Vishnu, the Preserver, appeared before them. Vishnu breathed upon the diamond in the god's forehead. The priests fell to their knees and hid their faces in their robes.

The god commanded that the Moonstone must always be guarded. Three priests were to watch it day and night, one after another, without rest, through all the generations of men. The priests accepted the command and promised to obey.

Then the god spoke a prophecy. He declared that terrible misfortune would fall upon any mortal who stole the sacred diamond. Disaster would not only strike the thief, but also everyone who received the gem after him. The priests wrote this prophecy in letters of gold above the gates of the shrine.

Years passed. One generation followed another. Yet always three priests watched the Moonstone day and night.

Time moved forward until the early years of the eighteenth century. At that time the Mogul Emperor Aurungzebe ruled much of India. Under his orders many temples of the old religion were attacked and destroyed. Once again sacred places were robbed.

The shrine of the moon-god was attacked. Animals were killed inside the holy building, and the statues of the gods were broken. During the destruction the Moonstone was stolen by an officer of Aurungzebe's army.

The priests could not fight the soldiers openly. But they did not abandon their sacred duty. The three guardians followed the thief secretly. They watched him and waited.

Generations passed. The first thief died miserably, as the prophecy had warned. The diamond passed from one man to another. Each new owner was a violent man who had taken the stone by force. Through all these changes the priests continued their watch. They waited patiently for the day when the sacred gem would return to them.

In time the diamond came into the possession of Tippoo Sultan, the ruler of Seringapatam. He ordered that the gem should be set in the handle of a dagger. The weapon was kept among the most precious treasures in his palace.

Even there the priests still followed it. In the Sultan's household were three officers who had come from unknown places. They appeared to have accepted the Muslim faith. Yet many people believed that these three men were the descendants of the original priests, still guarding the Moonstone in secret.

This was the strange story told in our camp before the attack on Seringapatam. Most of us laughed at it. Soldiers are not quick to believe tales of curses and prophecies.

Only one man seemed to take the story seriously—my cousin, John Herncastle.

Herncastle had always loved strange stories. He believed easily in things that seemed wonderful or mysterious. On the night before the attack he grew angry with those of us who laughed at the legend of the diamond.

A foolish argument followed between us. In the end Herncastle lost his temper. With an angry voice he declared that if the English army captured Seringapatam,

we would see the famous diamond on his own finger.

The men around us burst out laughing. To us it was only a foolish boast. The argument ended there, and none of us thought of it again that night.

The next day came the attack on the city.

During the battle my cousin and I became separated. I did not see him when we crossed the river. I did not see him when the English flag was raised in the breach of the walls. I did not see him as we fought our way through the ditch and into the town.

The battle was terrible. Smoke filled the air, and the noise of guns and shouting soldiers was everywhere. Men fell around us as we advanced street by street.

It was not until evening, after the city had fallen, that I met my cousin again.

By that time Tippoo Sultan had been found dead among the bodies of his soldiers. The battle was over. But confusion followed victory. Soldiers and camp followers rushed through the city searching for treasure.

General Baird sent out parties of officers to stop the plunder and restore order. My cousin and I were both given this duty, though we served in different groups.

The palace treasury had been broken open. Soldiers were filling their pockets with jewels and gold. Rough laughter and shouting filled the courtyard outside the treasure rooms.

It was there, in that courtyard, that I saw Herculane again.

His face looked wild and excited, as if the horrors of the battle had driven him half mad. In my opinion he was not in a fit state to command men.

I was still trying to control the soldiers when I suddenly heard terrible shouting from another part of the courtyard. Fearing that some new violence had begun, I ran toward the noise.

At the door of a room I saw two Indian officers lying dead across the entrance. A cry came from inside.

I rushed into the room, which appeared to be an armoury.

There I saw a third Indian man, badly wounded, sinking to the floor.

Standing over him, with his back toward me, was a man holding a torch in one hand and a dagger in the other.

The man turned.

It was John Herncastle.

The dagger in his hand was covered with blood. And in the handle of the dagger, shining in the light of the torch, was a yellow diamond that flashed like fire.

Part 2

The wounded Indian man fell slowly to his knees. His strength was almost gone, but he lifted one trembling arm and pointed toward the dagger in Herncastle's hand. His eyes were fixed on the flashing yellow stone.

Then he spoke.

He spoke in his own language, but the meaning was later explained to me. His voice was weak, yet the words were clear.

“The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours.”

When he had spoken those words, his body collapsed. He fell forward on the floor and did not move again.

I stood still for a moment, unable to act. The scene before me had happened too quickly. The torchlight moved on the walls of the room. The smell of smoke and blood filled the air.

Before I could question Herncastle, the soldiers who had followed me across the courtyard rushed into the armoury behind me.

At once my cousin sprang toward them like a madman.

“Clear the room!” he shouted loudly to me. “Clear the room and place a guard at the door!”

The men fell back when they saw the torch and dagger in his hands. His voice was wild, and his movements were violent. I feared that if the soldiers remained there, something worse might happen.

So I ordered them out of the room.

Then I placed two trustworthy soldiers from my company as sentinels at the door. They were to allow no one to enter until further orders.

For the rest of the night I saw nothing more of my cousin.

Early the next morning General Baird issued a strict command. The plundering in the city was still continuing. To stop it, the General ordered that any soldier caught stealing would be hanged immediately.

The order was announced by the beating of drums throughout the camp. The provost-marshal stood ready to carry out the punishment.

In the crowd that gathered to hear the proclamation, I met Herncastle once again.

He approached me calmly, as if nothing unusual had happened between us.

He held out his hand.

“Good morning,” he said.

I did not take his hand at once.

Instead I looked directly at him.

“Before I shake hands with you,” I said, “tell me how the Indian man in the armoury died. And tell me what his last words meant when he pointed to the dagger in your hand.”

Herncastle answered in a careless voice.

“The Indian died of a mortal wound, I suppose,” he said. “As for his last words, I know no more about them than you do.”

I watched him closely while he spoke. The wild anger that had filled him the day before had disappeared. His voice was calm, and his face showed no excitement.

I decided to give him another chance to explain himself.

“Is that all you have to say?” I asked.

“That is all,” he answered.

I turned my back on him without another word.

From that moment we have never spoken to each other again.

I must make it clear that the story I have written about my cousin is meant only for our family. Unless some necessity arises, I do not intend to make these events public.

Herncastle himself has said nothing that would allow me to accuse him officially before our commanding officer. Other men in the regiment have sometimes teased him about the diamond, remembering his angry words on the

night before the attack. But he always remains silent.

It is said that he plans to transfer into another regiment, openly declaring that he wishes to separate himself from me.

Whether this report is true or not, I cannot bring myself to accuse him.

The reason is simple.

I have no real proof.

I cannot prove that he killed the two men at the door of the armoury. I cannot even swear that I saw him kill the third man inside the room. When I entered, the Indian was already dying.

True, I heard the man's last words about the Moonstone. But if others say that he spoke in madness or delirium, how could I deny it with certainty?

Therefore I leave the judgment to our relatives. Let them read what I have written and decide for themselves whether my distrust of Herncastle is justified.

There is one last thing I must confess before ending this part of my story.

I do not believe in the strange legend of the diamond. I do not believe that a curse from an Indian god follows the Moonstone wherever it goes.

Yet I do have a certain belief of my own.

I believe that every crime carries its own punishment.

I am convinced that Herncastle took the diamond that day in the armoury. And I cannot help believing that if he keeps the gem, he will one day regret it. And if he gives it away to another person, that person too may live to regret accepting it.

With these thoughts I end the account of the Moonstone's first appearance in our family.

The rest of the story begins many years later, in England.

The diamond came into the possession of Lady Verinder's household in Yorkshire in the year 1848.

What happened there, and how the famous jewel was lost within twelve hours of its arrival, will now be told by another witness.

His name is Gabriel Betteredge, the faithful house steward of Lady Verinder.

And this is how he begins his account.

"In the first part of Robinson Crusoe," says Betteredge, "at page one hundred

and twenty-nine, you will find these words 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 copy of Robinson Crusoe at that very place.

And this morning—May the twenty-first, eighteen hundred and fifty—Mr. Franklin Blake, my lady’s nephew, came to speak with me.”

Betteredge paused for a moment as he remembered the conversation.

The old steward sat at his writing desk, his pipe lying beside the papers. Outside the window the quiet countryside of Yorkshire stretched away under the pale morning sky.

Franklin Blake had arrived earlier that day.

The young gentleman had gone to see the family lawyer about certain matters. Among these matters was the strange loss of the Indian diamond two years earlier.

Franklin had spoken directly to Betteredge.

“Betteredge,” he said, “Mr. Bruff the lawyer and I agree on one point. The whole story of the Moonstone ought to be written down clearly. It must be recorded while the people who remember the events are still alive.”

Betteredge, who always believed it wise to agree with lawyers, nodded politely.

“Very true, sir,” he replied.

Franklin continued.

“Many innocent people have suffered suspicion because of this matter,” he said. “And if the facts are not written now, others may suffer in the future. The story must be told. But we must tell it in the right way.”

Betteredge listened carefully, still uncertain what this had to do with him.

Franklin explained further.

“Several different people took part in these events,” he said. “Each of them knows a part of the truth. Therefore each person must write his own account, telling only what he personally saw or knew. In that way the full history of the Moonstone will appear.”

He then described how the story would begin with the old family document that told how the diamond came into Herncastle’s hands in India many years ago.

After that, the next part must explain how the diamond arrived at Lady Verinder's house in Yorkshire and how it disappeared soon afterward.

Franklin looked directly at the old steward.

"No one knows more about what happened in the house than you do, Betteredge," he said. "So you must take up the pen and begin the story."

Thus the task was given to him.

Betteredge later admitted that he reacted exactly as most people would.

He politely declared that he was not equal to such a task.

Yet secretly he believed he was quite capable of doing it, if only he were given the opportunity.

Franklin, seeing through this modest act at once, insisted that Betteredge must try.

Two hours had passed since Franklin left him.

The old steward sat alone at his desk, staring at the blank paper before him.

He had intended to begin writing immediately.

But he now discovered the truth of the words he had read in *Robinson Crusoe*.

He had begun the work before thinking carefully about the difficulty of finishing it.

"If that is not prophecy," Betteredge muttered to himself, "then I do not know what prophecy means."

He leaned back in his chair, looking at the open book lying beside him.

"When my spirits are low—*Robinson Crusoe*," he said quietly.

And with that reflection, Gabriel Betteredge prepared himself to begin the story in earnest.

Part 3

I must tell you plainly that I am not a superstitious man. I have read many books in my life. I may not be a learned scholar like the gentlemen at universities, but I know a good book when I see one. And in my opinion there never was such a book written as *Robinson Crusoe*, and there never will be another like it again.

I have used that book for years in all the small troubles of my life. When my spirits are low, Robinson Crusoe gives me comfort. When I want advice, Robinson Crusoe gives it to me. In the past, when my wife troubled me—Robinson Crusoe helped me. In later years, when I happened to drink a little too much—Robinson Crusoe set me right again.

I have worn out six strong copies of that book in my time. Every one of them served me faithfully. On my lady's last birthday she kindly gave me a seventh copy. I must confess that I celebrated the gift rather warmly. But Robinson Crusoe soon put me right again.

The book cost four shillings and sixpence. It is bound in blue cloth and contains a picture as well. A better bargain was never made in the book trade.

But I see that I have already wandered away from the subject. I am supposed to tell the story of the Moonstone, and instead of that I have begun telling you the story of Robinson Crusoe and myself.

This will never do.

Let us begin again.

I mentioned my lady earlier. The diamond would never have entered our house if it had not been given as a present to my lady's daughter. And my lady's daughter would never have been born if my lady herself had not brought her into the world.

Therefore it is only proper to begin with my lady.

If you know anything about fashionable society in England, you may have heard of the three beautiful Miss Herncastles. There was Miss Adelaide, Miss Caroline, and Miss Julia.

Miss Julia was the youngest of the three sisters. In my opinion she was also the best of them, though of course I may be a little partial. You will soon see why.

I entered the service of their father—the old lord—when I was only fifteen years old. I began as a page-boy attending the three young ladies.

The old lord himself is not important to our story. That is fortunate for us, because he had the longest tongue and the shortest temper of any man I ever knew. If he had been involved in the affair of the diamond, our work would be twice as long.

So let us be thankful that we have nothing to do with him.

I served in the household for many years until Miss Julia married Sir John Verinder. Sir John was an excellent gentleman. His only weakness was that he needed someone to manage him properly.

Fortunately for him, he married a woman who knew exactly how to do that.

From the day my lady married him until the day he died, Sir John lived a comfortable life. He grew round and cheerful and contented. And when the end came, my lady was there to close his eyes.

I should also mention that when my lady married Sir John, she took me with her to his house in Yorkshire.

“Sir John,” she said, “I cannot do without Gabriel Betteredge.”

“My lady,” Sir John answered, “I cannot do without him either.”

That was how I entered Sir John’s service.

It made no difference to me where I worked, as long as I remained with my mistress.

My lady took a strong interest in the farms and the outdoor business of the estate. Because of this, I also took an interest in those matters. I had a natural advantage there, because I was the seventh son of a small farmer myself.

My lady arranged for me to work under the bailiff. I did my best in the position, and I gave satisfaction. After some years my lady spoke again.

“Sir John,” she said one Monday morning, “your bailiff is an old fool. Pension him well and give his position to Gabriel Betteredge.”

On Tuesday Sir John replied, “My lady, the bailiff has been pensioned, and Gabriel Betteredge now holds the position.”

There are many stories about unhappy marriages. Here is an example of the opposite kind.

While working as bailiff I lived in comfort. I had a small cottage of my own. In the mornings I inspected the farms. In the afternoons I worked on the accounts. In the evenings I sat with my pipe and Robinson Crusoe.

You might think that such a life would make any man happy.

But remember the story of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam had everything

except a wife. If you do not blame Adam for wanting one, you must not blame me either.

The woman I chose was the housekeeper in my cottage. Her name was Selina Goby.

I followed the advice of the late William Cobbett when choosing a wife. Observe how a woman eats, and observe how she walks. If she chews her food properly and places her foot firmly on the ground, she will make a good wife.

Selina Goby satisfied both these conditions.

But I also had another reason for marrying her.

As a single woman, Selina charged me money each week for her board and services. If she became my wife, she could not charge me for her board, and she would have to serve me for nothing.

In short, it seemed to me that marriage would be economical.

I explained the matter honestly to my mistress.

“I have been thinking about Selina Goby,” I said. “And it appears to me that it will be cheaper to marry her than to continue paying her.”

My lady burst out laughing.

She declared that she did not know whether to be more shocked by my language or by my principles.

However, she did not forbid the marriage.

So I went and spoke to Selina.

And what did she say?

If you know anything about women, you already know the answer.

She said yes.

As the wedding day approached, I began to feel uneasy. I have compared my feelings with those of other married men. Nearly all of them admit that about a week before the wedding they privately wish they could escape.

I went even further than that.

I tried to escape.

Of course I knew I could not break the agreement without compensation. That is the law in England. So after careful thought I offered Selina Goby a feather bed

and fifty shillings if she would release me from the engagement.

You may find it hard to believe, but it is perfectly true.

She refused.

After that there was nothing more to be done.

I bought a new coat as cheaply as possible and went through with the ceremony.

Our married life was neither very happy nor very miserable. We lived together in a condition that might best be described as six of one and half a dozen of the other.

Somehow we always seemed to get in each other's way.

When I wanted to go upstairs, my wife would be coming down. When she wanted to go down, I would be coming up.

That, according to my experience, is married life.

After five years of this arrangement, Providence decided to separate us. My wife died, leaving me with one child—a little girl named Penelope.

Around the same time Sir John also died, leaving my lady with her young daughter, Miss Rachel.

My lady took great care of my child. Penelope was educated at school and later became Miss Rachel's personal maid.

As for me, I continued my work on the estate for many years.

Then, at Christmas in the year 1847, a change came into my life.

One afternoon my lady came to visit me in my cottage.

She wished to drink tea with me alone.

During the visit she reminded me that I had served her family for more than fifty years—from the days when I was a page-boy in her father's house.

Then she placed a gift in my hands.

It was a beautiful wool waistcoat that she had made herself.

I was deeply touched and struggled to find words to thank her.

But it soon appeared that the waistcoat was not merely a gift.

It was a bribe.

My lady had discovered something about me that I had not yet discovered myself.

I was growing old.

She wished me to give up my outdoor work as bailiff and become the house steward instead, living comfortably inside for the rest of my days.

I resisted at first.

But my lady knew my weak points.

She said it would be doing her a favor.

In the end I wiped my eyes with the new waistcoat like an old fool and promised to think about it.

That evening I used my usual remedy for difficult decisions.

I smoked a pipe and opened Robinson Crusoe.

Within five minutes I found a passage that solved my problem.

“Today we love what tomorrow we hate.”

The meaning was perfectly clear.

Today I wanted to remain bailiff. Tomorrow I might feel differently.

Therefore I went to bed still a bailiff—and woke up the next morning as the new house steward.

All thanks to Robinson Crusoe.

At this point my daughter Penelope happened to look over my shoulder while I was writing.

She declared that the writing was beautiful and perfectly true.

But she also pointed out a problem.

I had been asked to tell the story of the diamond.

Instead I had been telling the story of myself.

A curious thing indeed.

I sometimes wonder whether professional writers suffer from the same difficulty.

In any case we must try once more.

Let us begin again—and this time we will attempt to reach the Moonstone itself.

Part 4

I tried two different methods to discover the proper way to begin the story. The first method was scratching my head and thinking hard. That produced nothing useful. The second method was asking my daughter Penelope for advice. That produced something much better.

Penelope suggested that I should write the events exactly as they happened, day by day. According to her plan, I must begin with the day when we first received news that Mr. Franklin Blake was coming to visit the house.

When you connect your memory with a particular date, something remarkable happens. Your memory begins to work more clearly. Events that seemed forgotten suddenly return. The only difficulty is discovering the correct dates at the beginning.

Penelope offered to help with that problem. When she was at school she had been taught to keep a diary. She had continued writing in it ever since. By looking into that diary she could remind me of the exact dates of certain events.

I made a suggestion of my own. I proposed that Penelope should simply tell the story herself, using her diary as a guide. This suggestion made my daughter very angry. Her face became red, and she gave me a fierce look.

She declared that her diary was meant only for her own eyes and that no living person would ever read it except herself.

When I asked what she meant by that, she replied with a single word.

“Nonsense.”

I answered with another word.

“Sweethearts.”

That ended the discussion.

Following Penelope’s advice, I must begin with a Wednesday morning. On that morning I was called into my lady’s sitting room. The date was the twenty-fourth of May, in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight.

My lady spoke first.

“Gabriel,” she said, “I have news that will surprise you. Franklin Blake has returned from abroad. He has been staying with his father in London. Tomorrow he will come here to visit us. He will stay until next month and celebrate Rachel’s

birthday.”

If I had been holding my hat at that moment, respect alone would have prevented me from throwing it up to the ceiling.

I had not seen Mr. Franklin since he was a boy living with us in this house. In those days he was, in my opinion, the finest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window.

Miss Rachel was present when I said this. She immediately disagreed.

According to her memory, Franklin Blake had been a terrible tyrant who tortured dolls and forced little girls to pull him in toy carriages until they were exhausted.

“When I think of him,” said Miss Rachel, “I burn with anger and feel tired again.”

Hearing this story, you may wonder why Mr. Franklin had spent so many years away from England.

The answer lies with his father.

Mr. Blake had the misfortune of believing that he was the rightful heir to a dukedom. Unfortunately for him, he could not prove it.

For many years he fought a long legal battle in the courts of England. Lawyers were paid large sums of money while the argument continued.

During those years Mr. Blake’s wife died. Two of his three children also died.

At last the courts decided against him. The duke who already held the title remained in possession of it. Mr. Blake lost the case.

After this defeat he announced that he no longer trusted the institutions of his country.

“How can I trust my native institutions,” he said, “after the way they have treated me?”

Because of this belief he decided that England was not a proper place to educate his son.

It should also be mentioned that Mr. Blake did not care for boys very much—even his own son.

As a result, young Franklin was sent away from England. He was educated in

Germany.

Mr. Blake himself, however, remained comfortably in England. He continued to improve his fellow countrymen in Parliament and continued writing a long document explaining why he deserved the dukedom. That document has never been finished to this day.

But enough about Mr. Blake senior. Let him remain with the dukedom.

We must return to the Moonstone.

The diamond enters our story again through Mr. Franklin Blake. He was the innocent person who brought the unlucky jewel into our house.

Although he lived abroad, Mr. Franklin did not forget us entirely. From time to time he wrote letters. Sometimes he wrote to my lady. Sometimes to Miss Rachel. Sometimes to me.

Our own business together dated from before he left England. At that time he had borrowed three things from me: a ball of string, a knife with four blades, and seven shillings and sixpence in money.

The money has never returned to my pocket, and I do not expect that it ever will.

His letters to me usually concerned borrowing something else.

From my lady I heard how he spent his years abroad. After Germany he studied in France. After France he visited Italy.

Between those countries they turned him into a sort of universal genius. He wrote a little. He painted a little. He sang, played music, and composed a little. In my opinion he probably borrowed ideas in those activities just as he had borrowed money from me.

When he came of age he received his mother's fortune—seven hundred pounds a year. But the money passed through his hands very quickly. The more money he had, the more he needed.

It was said that there was a hole in Mr. Franklin's pocket that nothing could repair.

Nevertheless he was welcomed everywhere he went. His lively and easy manners made friends for him in every place.

He travelled from country to country and never stayed long in one place. His usual address, as he liked to say, was “Post Office, Europe—to be left until called for.”

Twice he planned to return to England and visit us. Twice he was prevented by certain women whom it is not necessary to describe.

His third attempt succeeded.

On Thursday, the twenty-fifth of May, we were to see our nice boy again—now a man of twenty-five years.

The day arrived bright and warm. It was a beautiful summer morning.

My lady and Miss Rachel expected Mr. Franklin to arrive in the evening, so they drove out earlier in the day to visit friends in the neighborhood.

After they left, I went upstairs to examine the bedroom prepared for our guest. Everything appeared to be in order.

As house steward I also acted as butler. I insisted on this arrangement because I disliked seeing anyone else holding the key to the late Sir John’s wine cellar.

I went to the cellar and brought up a bottle of our best claret. The wine was placed in the warm summer air so that it would be ready for dinner.

Then I decided that the warm summer air would do me good as well. What is good for old wine is often good for an old man.

I took my beehive chair and carried it outside into the back court. I had just settled myself comfortably when I heard a strange sound from the terrace at the front of the house.

It sounded like the soft beating of a small drum.

Curious about the noise, I walked around to the terrace.

There I saw three dark-skinned Indians standing and looking up at the house.

Each of them carried a small drum hanging in front of him. Behind them stood a pale English boy carrying a bag.

From their appearance I concluded that the men were travelling jugglers. The boy, I supposed, carried the tools used in their tricks.

One of the Indians spoke English. His manners were very polite.

He asked whether they might perform their tricks for the lady of the house.

I am not naturally suspicious. I enjoy amusement as much as any man. And I am not the sort of person who distrusts another man simply because his skin is darker than my own.

However, every man has his weakness.

My weakness appears whenever the family silver is lying in the pantry.

Therefore I informed the Indian that the lady of the house was not at home. I advised him and his companions to leave the property immediately.

The Indian bowed gracefully and obeyed.

The three men and the boy walked away.

I returned to my beehive chair and sat down again in the sunshine. In truth, I fell into something very close to sleep.

My rest was suddenly interrupted by my daughter Penelope rushing toward me in great excitement.

She looked as if the house were on fire.

“Father!” she cried. “Those three Indian jugglers must be arrested at once!”

I opened my eyes slowly and asked her to explain what she meant.

According to Penelope, the jugglers knew that Mr. Franklin Blake was coming from London that day.

And she believed they meant to do him some harm.

Part 5

Hearing Mr. Franklin’s name immediately woke me up. I opened my eyes properly and asked Penelope to explain what she meant.

She had just returned from the lodge at the entrance of the estate. There she had been speaking with the lodge-keeper’s daughter. The two girls had seen the Indian jugglers leave our grounds after I had warned them away.

The boy who walked with the jugglers was small and delicate in appearance. Because of this, the girls had decided—without any real evidence—that the foreigners were treating him badly.

Out of curiosity, they followed along the inside of the hedge that runs beside

the road. From there they secretly watched what the jugglers did after leaving the house.

What they saw, according to Penelope, was very strange indeed.

First the three Indians stopped and looked carefully up and down the road. They seemed to make sure that no one was watching them.

Then they turned together and looked back toward our house.

After that they began speaking rapidly among themselves in their own language. Their voices sounded serious and troubled.

Finally they turned toward the English boy, as if they expected him to help them.

The Indian who spoke English then addressed the boy.

“Hold out your hand,” he said.

At these words, Penelope declared that she felt as if her heart might jump out of her chest. I privately believed that her stays probably prevented that from happening. However, I merely said that her story made my flesh creep. Women enjoy such compliments.

When the Indian told him to hold out his hand, the boy stepped back and shook his head. He said that he did not like the idea.

The Indian spoke again, very calmly.

He asked the boy whether he wished to be sent back to London and left where they had found him—sleeping in an empty basket in a market, hungry and alone.

This argument appeared to persuade the child. Reluctantly he held out his hand.

The Indian then took a small bottle from his clothing. From it he poured a black liquid—something like ink—into the palm of the boy’s hand.

After touching the boy lightly on the head and making strange gestures in the air above him, the Indian spoke one word.

“Look.”

The boy became very still. He stared down into the black liquid in his hand as if he had turned into a statue.

Up to that moment the story seemed to me nothing more than a bit of juggling accompanied by a foolish waste of ink. I began to feel sleepy again.

But Penelope’s next words quickly woke me.

The Indians again looked carefully up and down the road to be sure they were alone. Then the chief Indian spoke to the boy.

“See the English gentleman who comes from foreign lands.”

The boy replied quietly.

“I see him.”

The Indian asked another question.

“Is it on the road to this house—and no other—that the English gentleman will travel today?”

The boy answered,

“It is on the road to this house, and no other.”

After a short pause the Indian asked a second question.

“Has the English gentleman got It about him?”

The boy hesitated before answering.

“Yes.”

Then came the third question.

“Will the English gentleman come here, as he promised, at the close of day?”

The boy waited again before replying.

“I cannot tell.”

The Indian asked why.

The boy answered slowly.

“I am tired. The mist rises in my head. I cannot see any more today.”

That ended the strange performance.

The chief Indian spoke a few words in his own language to his companions. He pointed toward the boy and then toward the town where they were staying.

After making another gesture over the boy’s head, he blew lightly on the child’s forehead.

The boy suddenly moved again as if waking from sleep.

Then the four of them walked away toward the town.

The girls saw nothing more.

Nearly every event in life contains a lesson if we take the trouble to find it. I immediately searched for the lesson in this story.

The lesson, as I understood it, was very simple.

First, the chief juggler had probably heard servants speaking about Mr. Franklin's expected arrival.

Second, he hoped to earn some money by pretending to foretell the gentleman's arrival through magic.

Third, the jugglers had been practicing their performance before returning later to entertain my lady.

Fourth, I would do well to watch the silver carefully that evening.

Fifth, Penelope would do well to calm herself and allow her father to continue resting in the sunshine.

That seemed to me the sensible explanation.

But if you know anything about young women, you will not be surprised to learn that Penelope refused to accept it.

According to her, the matter was extremely serious.

She reminded me particularly of the question the Indian had asked: "Has the English gentleman got It about him?"

Penelope clasped her hands anxiously.

"Father," she said, "do not laugh about this. What does 'It' mean?"

"We shall ask Mr. Franklin when he arrives," I replied jokingly. I winked to show that I did not mean it seriously.

Unfortunately Penelope took the suggestion quite seriously.

"Ask him," she said firmly. "And see whether he finds it a laughing matter."

With that she left me.

After she had gone, I decided that I really would ask Mr. Franklin about the matter—mainly to calm Penelope's fears.

What passed between us later that day will be told in its proper place.

However, I must warn you in advance.

When I spoke to Mr. Franklin about the jugglers, he did not laugh.

To my great surprise he treated the matter as seriously as Penelope herself.

And the reason for his seriousness was simple.

In his opinion the mysterious word "It" referred to the Moonstone.

Before continuing with Mr. Franklin's arrival, I must ask your patience once more. I know that an old man sitting in a sunny yard is not a very exciting sight.

But events must be written in the order in which they happened.

So you must remain with me a little longer in my beehive chair before Mr. Franklin finally arrives.

Shortly after Penelope left me, I heard the sound of dishes and plates from the servants' hall. That sound meant only one thing.

Dinner was ready.

I usually ate my meals in my own small room. Therefore the servants' dinner did not concern me, except that I wished them a good appetite.

I was stretching my legs and preparing to settle again into my chair when another person suddenly appeared.

This time it was not Penelope.

It was Nancy, the kitchen-maid.

She rushed toward me with an angry expression on her face.

Seeing that one of the servants was unhappy, I stopped her. As head of the household staff, I never allow such matters to pass without investigation.

"Why are you leaving your dinner?" I asked. "What is wrong?"

Nancy tried to pass me without answering.

So I gently took hold of her ear. She is a cheerful young woman, and this is my usual method of showing friendly interest.

"What is wrong?" I repeated.

"Rosanna is late again for dinner," Nancy said impatiently. "I have been sent to fetch her. All the work in this house falls on me. Let me go, Mr. Betteredge!"

Rosanna Spearman, the servant Nancy mentioned, was our second housemaid.

I felt a certain sympathy for Rosanna. For reasons I will soon explain, I did not wish Nancy to fetch her with harsh words.

As I had nothing particular to do at that moment, I decided to go myself.

"Where is Rosanna?" I asked.

Nancy tossed her head.

"At the sands, of course," she said. "She had one of her fainting fits this

morning and asked to go out for fresh air. I have no patience with her.”

“Return to your dinner,” I said. “I will fetch her myself.”

Nancy seemed pleased with this arrangement. A good appetite improves anyone’s temper.

I took my walking stick and set out toward the sands to find Rosanna Spearman.

But before we reach the sands, there are two small matters that must be explained.

One concerns Rosanna herself.

The other concerns the strange place known as the Shivering Sand.

Part 6

Before I set off properly for the sands, there are two matters that must be explained. The first concerns Rosanna Spearman. The second concerns the sands themselves. Both of these will become important later in the story of the diamond.

Let us begin with Rosanna.

Rosanna Spearman was the only new servant in our household. About four months before the events I am now describing, my lady had travelled to London. During her visit she went to see a reformatory.

A reformatory is a place where unfortunate women are sent after leaving prison. The purpose is to help them begin a new life and avoid falling again into crime.

While my lady was there, the matron of the institution spoke to her about a particular girl named Rosanna Spearman. The matron told a very sad story about the girl’s past. I will not repeat that story here, because it is painful to think about and serves no useful purpose.

What you must know is simply this: Rosanna had once been a thief.

Now there are thieves who steal thousands of pounds by clever tricks and dishonest companies in the City of London. Such people often escape punishment. Rosanna, however, was not that kind of thief. She had stolen from only one person. Because of this, the law caught her quickly.

She went to prison. After prison she was sent to the reformatory.

The matron believed that Rosanna was not a bad woman at heart. In her opinion the girl was one in a thousand and only needed a fair chance to prove herself worthy of trust.

My lady listened carefully.

Being a truly kind Christian woman, she made a decision at once.

“Rosanna Spearman shall have her chance,” she said.

One week later Rosanna entered our house as the second housemaid.

No one among the servants knew the girl’s history. My lady told only two people—Miss Rachel and myself.

My lady often honored me by asking my advice in household matters, and she consulted me about Rosanna as well. I agreed entirely with her decision.

And indeed Rosanna was given every possible opportunity to begin a better life.

She received the same wages and privileges as the other servants. From time to time my lady spoke kindly to her in private, encouraging her to do well.

In return Rosanna worked carefully and faithfully. She was not strong and sometimes suffered from fainting fits, but she never complained. Her work was done quietly and properly.

Yet, despite this good conduct, the other women servants did not like her.

The only person who showed her steady kindness was my daughter Penelope. Even Penelope, however, was not very close to her.

I have often wondered why the other servants disliked Rosanna so much. It certainly was not because of beauty, for Rosanna was the plainest woman in the house. She also had the misfortune of having one shoulder slightly larger than the other.

What the servants seemed to resent most was her quiet nature.

When the other women gathered together to gossip, Rosanna usually sat apart reading or sewing. When she had time to go out for a walk, she often went alone instead of joining the others.

She never argued with anyone and never seemed offended by their cold behavior. Yet she always kept a certain distance between herself and the rest.

There was also something about her—something difficult to describe. Though

she was only a servant, there was a slight suggestion of a lady in her manner or in her voice.

The other women noticed this immediately. From the first day they accused her of “putting on airs,” though I believe the accusation was quite unjust.

That is the story of Rosanna.

Now we must speak about the sands.

Our house stands high on the Yorkshire coast near the sea. In most directions there are beautiful paths for walking. But there is one path that leads to a most unpleasant place.

That path runs for about a quarter of a mile through a dark plantation of fir trees. When you pass through the trees you arrive at a lonely little bay between low cliffs.

It is the ugliest place on our coast.

Sandhills slope down to the sea, and two narrow points of rock stretch out into the water. One of these is called the North Spit and the other the South Spit.

Between them lies a terrible quicksand.

At certain seasons of the year the sand shifts and trembles in a strange way. When the tide turns, something moves in the deep water beneath it, causing the entire surface of the sand to shiver and quiver.

Because of this movement the people in our neighborhood call it the Shivering Sand.

A large sandbank lies farther out at sea and breaks the force of the ocean waves. Because of this, when the tide flows over the quicksand the water moves quietly and smoothly, covering the sand in silence.

It is a lonely and dreadful place.

No fishing boats enter the bay. The children of the nearby village—Cobb’s Hole—never come there to play. Even the birds seem to avoid it.

Yet this was Rosanna Spearman’s favorite place to walk.

Whenever she had time to go out, she often walked alone through the fir trees to the sands. Sometimes she also visited the fishing village, where she had a single friend. But most often she came to the lonely bay.

Why a young woman would choose such a place when many pleasant walks were available is beyond my understanding.

Nevertheless it was true.

And it was to this same place that I was now going to fetch her for dinner.

When I passed through the plantation of trees, I saw no sign of Rosanna. But when I reached the open beach, there she was.

She stood alone on the sand wearing her small straw bonnet and her plain grey cloak—the cloak she always wore to hide her uneven shoulder.

She was looking out toward the sea and the quicksand.

When I approached she started suddenly and turned her face away from me.

As head of the household staff, I never allow a servant to avoid looking at me without explanation. So I gently turned her toward me.

Then I saw that she had been crying.

I took out my bandanna handkerchief—one of six beautiful ones given to me by my lady—and invited her to sit beside me on the slope of the beach.

“Come and sit down, my dear,” I said. “We will dry your eyes first, and then you can tell me what troubles you.”

Sitting down on a sloping beach is not as easy as it sounds, especially for a man of my age. By the time I had arranged myself comfortably, Rosanna had already dried her own tears with a much cheaper handkerchief than mine.

She looked quiet and miserable.

When you wish to comfort a woman quickly, the best method is to place her on your knee. I remembered this rule. But Rosanna was not Nancy the kitchen-maid, and I decided not to attempt it.

Instead I spoke gently.

“Tell me, my dear, what has made you cry?”

Rosanna answered quietly.

“I was thinking about the years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge. My past life returns to me sometimes.”

“Your past life is finished,” I said kindly. “Why not forget it?”

Instead of answering directly, she reached out and touched the edge of my coat.

The day before she had removed a grease stain from that coat using a new cleaning mixture. The stain itself had disappeared, but the cloth still showed a faint mark where it had been.

Rosanna pointed to that place.

“The stain is gone,” she said softly. “But the place still shows.”

That remark was difficult to answer.

Something in the girl’s expression made me feel deeply sorry for her. Her brown eyes looked at me with a kind of sad respect—as if my quiet life and good reputation were things she could never reach.

Not knowing how to comfort her properly, I decided on the practical solution.

“Help me up,” I said. “You are late for dinner, Rosanna. I have come to fetch you.”

She seemed surprised.

“You came yourself, Mr. Betteredge?”

“Nancy was sent,” I explained. “But I thought you might prefer your scolding from me.”

Instead of helping me stand, she gently squeezed my hand.

“You are very kind,” she said. “But I do not want dinner today. Please let me stay here a little longer.”

“Why do you like this dreadful place so much?” I asked.

She looked down at the sand and traced shapes in it with her finger.

“Something draws me here,” she said slowly. “I try to stay away, but I cannot.”

She lowered her voice.

“Sometimes I feel as if my grave is waiting for me here.”

Such talk annoyed me greatly.

“Your dinner is waiting for you,” I said firmly. “Roast mutton and pudding are better company than such thoughts.”

But Rosanna hardly seemed to hear me.

She placed her hand on my shoulder and pointed toward the quicksand.

“Look,” she whispered.

The tide had begun to turn.

The great surface of the quicksand trembled and shivered. The sand seemed to rise and fall slowly, like something alive beneath the ground.

Rosanna gripped my shoulder.

“Do you know what it looks like to me?” she said.

Her voice was trembling.

“It looks as if hundreds of people were buried under the sand—all struggling to reach the surface and sinking deeper and deeper.”

She suddenly pointed toward the center of the quicksand.

“Throw a stone there,” she said eagerly. “Let us watch the sand swallow it.”

I was about to answer sharply when a voice called my name from the sandhills.

“Betteredge! Where are you?”

I shouted back.

“Here!”

Rosanna jumped to her feet.

Then something very strange happened.

Her face changed completely. A bright red color appeared in her cheeks. She looked suddenly excited and breathless.

“Who is it?” I asked.

She whispered the same question to herself.

I turned to look.

A young gentleman was walking toward us across the sandhills. He wore a handsome light-brown suit with matching hat and gloves. A rose was fixed in his buttonhole.

And his face carried a cheerful smile.

Before I could stand up, he sat down beside me and threw his arm around my neck in the foreign fashion.

“Dear old Betteredge!” he cried.

“I still owe you seven shillings and sixpence. Do you know who I am?”

It was Mr. Franklin Blake.

Lord bless us and save us! There he was—Mr. Franklin Blake himself—arriving four full hours before the time when we expected him.

For a moment I could hardly believe my eyes.

Before I could even speak, I noticed that Mr. Franklin had turned his head and was looking up at Rosanna. Naturally I followed his gaze and looked at the girl as well.

Her face had become redder than ever. She appeared greatly confused at finding Mr. Franklin looking directly at her. Without speaking a word, and without making the proper curtsy to the gentleman, she turned suddenly and hurried away.

Her grey cloak fluttered behind her as she climbed the sandhills and disappeared.

I was astonished by her behavior. In ordinary circumstances Rosanna was always quiet and respectful. I had never seen her behave so strangely before.

Mr. Franklin watched her leave with mild curiosity.

“That is an odd girl,” he said. “I wonder what she saw in me to surprise her so much.”

I decided to make a joke.

“Perhaps it is the polish you have brought back from foreign countries, sir,” I replied.

I record Mr. Franklin’s question and my foolish answer here for the comfort of all ordinary people. It is a great pleasure to know that those who appear clever sometimes prove just as dull as ourselves.

Neither Mr. Franklin—with all his education from foreign countries—nor I—with my long experience and natural good sense—had the smallest idea what Rosanna’s strange behavior really meant.

Indeed we forgot about her almost immediately.

Only later did I discover the truth. When that moment came, I felt deeply sorry for poor Rosanna Spearman.

But I must not move ahead of the story.

After Rosanna disappeared among the sandhills, I made my third attempt to

stand up from the sand. Mr. Franklin stopped me.

“Stay where you are for a moment,” he said. “This unpleasant place has one advantage—we are quite alone here. I have something to say to you, Betteredge.”

While he spoke I took the opportunity to examine him closely. I wished to discover how much of the boy I remembered still remained in the man before me.

I must confess that the man disappointed me.

The bright rosy cheeks of the boy had vanished. In their place I saw a pale face partly hidden by a curly brown beard and moustache.

His manner was lively and friendly, but not quite as open and careless as it had been in his childhood.

Another disappointment concerned his height. As a boy he had promised to grow tall, but the promise had not been fulfilled. He was well built and neat in appearance, but he was not above medium height.

In short, I could find very little of the boy I remembered.

Only his eyes remained the same—bright, straightforward, and honest. When I saw those eyes, I felt certain that our old “nice boy” was still there somewhere.

That was enough for me.

“Welcome back to the old house, Mr. Franklin,” I said. “We are especially glad to see you since you have arrived much earlier than expected.”

Mr. Franklin smiled.

“I had a reason for arriving early,” he replied. “I believe I have been followed in London for several days. Because of that I chose the morning train instead of the afternoon one. I wanted to escape a certain dark-looking stranger.”

Those words surprised me greatly.

At once I remembered the three Indian jugglers and Penelope’s suspicion that they meant harm to Mr. Franklin.

“Who was watching you, sir?” I asked. “And why?”

Instead of answering directly, Mr. Franklin asked a question of his own.

“Tell me about the three Indians who came to the house today,” he said. “It is possible that your jugglers and my mysterious stranger belong to the same puzzle.”

I was astonished.

“How do you know about the jugglers?” I asked.

“I met your daughter Penelope when I arrived at the house,” Mr. Franklin explained. “She told me the story.”

He smiled again.

“Your daughter promised to grow into a pretty young woman, Betteredge—and she has kept her promise. She has small ears and small feet. Did the late Mrs. Betteredge possess those advantages?”

I answered carefully.

“The late Mrs. Betteredge possessed many defects, sir. One of them was the habit of wandering away from the subject. She could never remain fixed on one topic.”

Mr. Franklin laughed.

“Then she would have suited me perfectly,” he said. “I never remain fixed on anything either. But let us return to the subject. Penelope told me you would explain everything better than she could. What did the jugglers do?”

I felt slightly annoyed with my daughter for passing the responsibility to me. Still, there was nothing for it but to tell the story again.

I described everything Penelope had seen: the strange performance with the ink in the boy’s hand, the questions the chief juggler asked, and the mysterious word “It.”

As I spoke, Mr. Franklin’s cheerful expression slowly disappeared.

He sat silently beside me, twisting his beard and frowning in thought.

When I finished speaking, he repeated two of the questions softly, as if trying to remember them exactly.

“Is it on the road to this house that the English gentleman will travel today?”

He paused.

“Has the English gentleman got It about him?”

Then he reached into his pocket and removed a small sealed packet of paper.

He held it up thoughtfully.

“I suspect,” he said slowly, “that ‘It’ refers to this.”

“And this,” he continued, “is my uncle Herncastle’s famous diamond.”

I stared at the packet in amazement.

“Good heavens, sir!” I exclaimed. “How did you come to be carrying that wicked Colonel’s diamond?”

Mr. Franklin answered calmly.

“My uncle Herncastle has died,” he said. “In his will he left the diamond as a birthday present for my cousin Rachel.”

He placed the packet carefully back into his pocket.

“And I have been sent to deliver it.”

I could hardly believe what I had heard.

The Moonstone—the cursed diamond of India—the jewel that had caused such terrible events long ago—was now in Mr. Franklin Blake’s pocket.

And he was bringing it directly into our house.

At that moment I felt a strange uneasiness.

The memory of the old story returned to my mind—the prophecy that disaster would fall upon anyone who possessed the gem.

Of course I did not believe such legends.

And yet...

I could not help wishing that the Moonstone had remained where it was, far away from our quiet house in Yorkshire.

Unfortunately, wishes cannot change reality.

The diamond had arrived.

And before another day had passed, the trouble it carried with it would begin.

Part 8

I must admit that hearing about the diamond gave me an uneasy feeling. I did not like the idea of that famous Indian jewel entering our quiet English house. However, since the matter was already decided, there was nothing to do but continue our conversation.

“Mr. Franklin,” I said, “if I may ask—why did Colonel Herncastle leave such a dangerous gift to Miss Rachel?”

Mr. Franklin shook his head.

“No one can say for certain,” he replied. “My uncle and my aunt Julia did not live on friendly terms. They had not spoken to each other for many years.”

That was perfectly true. Everyone in the family knew that Lady Verinder disliked her brother, Colonel Herncastle. The reason for that dislike had never been clearly explained to the rest of us.

Mr. Franklin continued.

“The Colonel died recently,” he said. “When his will was opened, it contained a strange instruction. The diamond was to be given to Rachel on her birthday.”

“And you were chosen to bring it?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Franklin. “I suppose the Colonel thought I was the most convenient messenger.”

I shook my head.

“Convenient or not, sir,” I said, “I do not like the look of the business.”

Mr. Franklin smiled slightly.

“Do you believe the old story about the curse of the Moonstone, Betteredge?”

“No, sir,” I answered firmly. “I believe that wicked actions bring their own consequences. That is enough trouble without adding Indian magic.”

Mr. Franklin laughed softly.

“Then we are of the same opinion,” he said.

For a moment we both sat silently on the sand, thinking about the matter.

The sea was quiet. The tide had almost covered the quicksand now. The trembling surface had disappeared beneath the smooth water.

After a while Mr. Franklin spoke again.

“There is another matter I must tell you,” he said. “Before I left London, I had the unpleasant feeling that someone was watching me. I saw the same dark-faced man several times in the streets. Each time he seemed to be observing me closely.”

“An Indian?” I asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Franklin replied.

My uneasiness increased.

“Then Penelope may have been right after all,” I said slowly. “Those jugglers

might not have been ordinary performers.”

Mr. Franklin nodded thoughtfully.

“That is exactly what I was thinking.”

He stood up and brushed the sand from his clothes.

“But we must not alarm my aunt and Rachel unnecessarily. Until we know more, we shall say nothing about these suspicions.”

I also stood up with some difficulty.

“Very good, sir,” I said. “But I shall keep my eyes open.”

Mr. Franklin looked toward the path through the sandhills.

“Come,” he said cheerfully. “Let us return to the house. I should like to see my aunt and cousin before dinner.”

We began walking slowly back through the sandhills toward the plantation of trees.

As we walked, Mr. Franklin spoke of his years abroad. He told me stories about Germany, France, and Italy. He had learned a little about many things—painting, music, writing, and languages.

I listened politely, though I must confess that such accomplishments seem of doubtful value when compared with honest farming.

Soon we reached the plantation path. The tall fir trees stood silent on both sides of us. The shade beneath them felt cool after the sunlight on the beach.

As we walked, I remembered the strange excitement Rosanna had shown when she saw Mr. Franklin.

“Sir,” I said, “that girl who ran away from us just now—Rosanna Spearman—is one of our housemaids.”

“Yes,” Mr. Franklin said. “You mentioned that.”

“She behaved oddly,” I continued. “She is usually a quiet and respectful girl. Yet when she saw you, she seemed greatly disturbed.”

Mr. Franklin looked surprised.

“Perhaps my sudden appearance startled her,” he suggested.

“Perhaps,” I agreed.

But in truth I was not entirely satisfied with that explanation.

When we emerged from the trees, the house came into view on the hill above us. It stood bright and peaceful in the afternoon sunlight.

Mr. Franklin stopped for a moment and looked at it with interest.

“So this is the place where I spent my childhood,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “And we have all been waiting to welcome you back.”

We continued walking toward the house.

As we approached the terrace, I noticed Penelope standing near the entrance. She had evidently been watching the path for our return.

When she saw Mr. Franklin beside me, her face brightened.

Mr. Franklin greeted her warmly.

“Miss Penelope,” he said with a polite bow, “it gives me great pleasure to see you again.”

Penelope curtsied.

I noticed that she blushed slightly.

“Welcome home, sir,” she said.

Mr. Franklin smiled kindly.

“Your father has just been telling me about the Indian jugglers,” he said.

Penelope’s expression became serious at once.

“Then you know what they asked the boy?” she said.

“Yes,” Mr. Franklin answered.

He hesitated briefly.

“And I believe I know what they meant.”

Penelope looked at him anxiously.

“What did they mean, sir?”

Mr. Franklin placed a hand over the pocket that contained the sealed paper packet.

“They were speaking about something I am carrying,” he said.

“Something very valuable.”

Penelope looked from Mr. Franklin to me.

“Is it the Moonstone?” she whispered.

Mr. Franklin nodded.

Penelope's eyes widened.

"Then the Indians were looking for it!" she exclaimed.

I quickly raised my hand.

"Quiet, girl," I said. "There is no reason to frighten everyone in the house."

Mr. Franklin also spoke calmly.

"Your father is right. We must keep this matter private for the moment."

Penelope lowered her voice.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Franklin smiled again, trying to restore the cheerful mood.

"Now," he said, "let us forget mysterious Indians and think about something more pleasant."

"For example," he added, "my cousin Rachel's birthday tomorrow."

We entered the house together.

At that moment none of us could imagine how quickly the peaceful atmosphere of the Verinder household would change.

Within twenty-four hours the famous Moonstone would disappear.

And the quiet house on the Yorkshire coast would become the center of one of the strangest mysteries ever known.

Part 9

When we entered the house, the first thing Mr. Franklin asked about was my lady and Miss Rachel. I told him that they had driven out to visit friends in the neighborhood and would return later in the afternoon.

"Good," he said. "That gives us time to settle matters quietly before they arrive."

I understood what he meant at once. The Moonstone must be placed safely somewhere before the ladies returned.

"Where is the diamond now, sir?" I asked.

Mr. Franklin touched the pocket of his coat.

"Here," he said.

I must confess that hearing this made me uneasy. It seemed wrong that such a

valuable and troublesome jewel should be carried about so carelessly.

“Sir,” I said respectfully, “if you will allow me to make a suggestion, it might be better to place the diamond somewhere secure until my lady returns.”

Mr. Franklin agreed immediately.

“A sensible idea,” he said. “Where do you recommend?”

I considered the question for a moment.

“The safest place in this house,” I said, “is the strongbox in my lady’s sitting room. Until she returns, the key is in my possession.”

Mr. Franklin nodded.

“Then let us put the diamond there.”

We went together to my lady’s sitting room. The room was quiet and comfortable, with sunlight falling across the carpet from the tall windows.

I unlocked the strongbox and opened the lid.

Mr. Franklin carefully removed the small sealed packet from his pocket. He placed it on the table.

For a moment we both looked at it.

“Shall we open it?” Mr. Franklin asked.

I hesitated.

“If you wish, sir,” I said.

Mr. Franklin broke the seal and unfolded the paper.

Inside lay the diamond.

Even in the soft afternoon light it shone brilliantly. The stone was large and of a deep yellow color unlike any diamond I had ever seen before.

The light seemed to glow inside it.

“That is the Moonstone,” Mr. Franklin said quietly.

I could not help staring at it.

The jewel was beautiful—but at the same time it gave me an uncomfortable feeling. Perhaps it was only the old story about the curse returning to my mind.

Mr. Franklin seemed amused by my expression.

“You look as if you expect it to explode,” he said.

“No, sir,” I replied. “But I should be glad when it is safely out of my sight.”

Mr. Franklin laughed.

Then he folded the paper around the stone again.

Together we placed the packet inside the strongbox.

I locked the box carefully.

“There,” I said. “Until my lady returns, the Moonstone will remain safe.”

Mr. Franklin seemed satisfied.

“Excellent,” he said.

We left the sitting room and returned to the hall.

Penelope was still there waiting.

“Is everything settled?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said. “The diamond is locked safely away.”

Penelope looked relieved.

At that moment the sound of wheels was heard outside.

“My lady and Miss Rachel are returning,” Penelope said.

Mr. Franklin smiled.

“Then I shall have the pleasure of surprising them.”

We went out onto the terrace.

A carriage had just arrived in front of the house. My lady stepped out first, followed by Miss Rachel.

When they saw Mr. Franklin standing there, both of them stopped in surprise.

“Franklin!” my lady exclaimed.

Mr. Franklin hurried forward and greeted her warmly.

“My dear aunt,” he said, “I hope you will forgive me for arriving earlier than expected.”

Lady Verinder embraced him affectionately.

“You are welcome at any hour,” she said.

Miss Rachel came forward next.

She was now a beautiful young woman, very different from the little girl Mr. Franklin had once known.

Mr. Franklin bowed politely.

“Miss Rachel,” he said.

Rachel smiled.

“You have returned at last, cousin Franklin,” she said.

Their greeting was friendly, though I noticed that Rosanna Spearman—who had quietly returned to the house—was watching the scene from a distance.

Her face looked pale now, and her eyes were fixed on Mr. Franklin.

But he did not notice her.

Everyone moved inside the house.

Tea was served in the drawing room, and the family began speaking of many pleasant things—Mr. Franklin’s travels, old memories of childhood, and plans for Rachel’s birthday celebration the next day.

For a time the Moonstone was forgotten.

But only for a time.

Later that evening, when the ladies and Mr. Franklin were alone together, the subject of Colonel Herncastle’s will would be mentioned.

And with it the diamond would appear again.

When that moment came, none of us could imagine what terrible confusion and suspicion would soon follow.

For before another morning arrived, the Moonstone would vanish.

And the mystery of its disappearance would begin.

Part 10

When tea was finished and the servants had cleared the room, Mr. Franklin asked my lady if he might speak with her and Miss Rachel privately. I remained nearby, as it was my duty to attend to the household matters of the evening.

I could not hear the beginning of their conversation. But after a few minutes Penelope came quietly to find me.

“Father,” she whispered, “Mr. Franklin is telling them about the diamond.”

I nodded.

“That was bound to happen sooner or later,” I said.

A little while later I was called into the drawing room.

Lady Verinder was standing beside the table. Mr. Franklin was near the fireplace, and Miss Rachel stood by the window. The small sealed packet lay open on the table before them.

The Moonstone shone brightly under the lamplight.

I saw at once that my lady looked troubled.

“Gabriel,” she said, “Mr. Franklin has just explained my brother’s will to us.”

I bowed respectfully.

“Yes, my lady.”

She turned her eyes toward the diamond with clear dislike.

“My brother and I did not live on good terms,” she said quietly. “I cannot help feeling that there is something unpleasant in this gift.”

Mr. Franklin answered gently.

“The Colonel’s motives may have been strange, but the will is clear. The diamond belongs to Miss Rachel now.”

Miss Rachel had been looking at the stone with bright curiosity.

“It is certainly beautiful,” she said.

She picked up the diamond and held it near the lamp.

The yellow light flashed brilliantly through the room.

I noticed that my lady turned away slightly, as if she did not like to look at it.

“Rachel,” she said calmly, “your cousin has brought you a very valuable birthday present. But I cannot say that it gives me any pleasure.”

Rachel laughed lightly.

“My dear mother, you speak as if the diamond were alive and dangerous.”

My lady did not smile.

“Perhaps I am foolish,” she said. “But I wish your uncle had chosen another gift.”

Mr. Franklin tried to lighten the mood.

“Let us not blame the poor diamond,” he said. “After all, it is only a stone.”

Rachel turned the jewel slowly in her fingers.

“And a magnificent stone,” she added.

Then she placed it back on the table.

“Where shall we keep it tonight?” she asked.

Mr. Franklin looked toward me.

“Betteredge has already placed it safely in your mother’s strongbox.”

“Very well,” Rachel said. “That seems sensible.”

I carefully wrapped the stone again in its paper covering. Then I returned it to the strongbox and locked the lid.

“The key will remain with me, my lady,” I said.

Lady Verinder nodded.

“Thank you, Gabriel.”

The conversation then turned to other matters. Plans were discussed for Rachel’s birthday dinner the following day. Several guests were expected to arrive in the evening.

Eventually the ladies retired for the night.

As house steward it was my duty to make a final inspection of the house before going to bed. I checked the doors, the windows, and the silver in the pantry.

Everything appeared quiet and secure.

Yet I could not entirely shake off the uneasy feeling that had troubled me since Mr. Franklin first mentioned the diamond.

Perhaps it was only my imagination.

Still, before retiring, I made certain that the strongbox was properly locked.

Satisfied at last, I went to my room.

The house was silent. Outside, the wind from the sea moved softly across the grounds.

I soon fell asleep.

But during the night strange events were already beginning to move quietly through the house.

By the following morning, the Moonstone would be gone.

And the peaceful household of Lady Verinder would be thrown into confusion and suspicion.

The mystery of the missing diamond had begun.

Part 11

On the morning of the next day—Miss Rachel’s birthday—I rose early, as was my habit. The house was already beginning to stir. Servants moved quietly through the corridors, preparing for the dinner and the celebrations planned for the evening.

I went first to the pantry to make sure that everything was ready for the day’s work. The silver was in its proper place. The breakfast service stood waiting. Nothing appeared out of order.

Still, I remembered the Moonstone.

That uneasy feeling returned to me again.

After finishing my inspection, I went to my lady’s sitting room. The strongbox stood exactly where it had been placed the night before.

I unlocked it.

The sealed paper packet lay inside, just as Mr. Franklin and I had left it.

I opened the paper and looked at the diamond.

The yellow stone shone coldly in the morning light.

Seeing that it remained safe, I felt somewhat relieved. I wrapped it again carefully and locked the strongbox.

Soon afterward breakfast was served.

Miss Rachel came down first. She looked bright and cheerful, as young ladies often do on their birthdays.

“Good morning, Betteredge,” she said. “Is everything ready for the day?”

“Yes, Miss Rachel,” I replied. “All is in order.”

Mr. Franklin appeared next. He greeted his cousin warmly.

“Happy birthday, Rachel,” he said.

She smiled.

“Thank you, Franklin. I hope the day will be as pleasant as it promises to be.”

Lady Verinder joined us shortly afterward. Though she remained calm and polite, I noticed that she still seemed uncomfortable whenever the subject of the diamond was mentioned.

During breakfast Mr. Franklin spoke about the guests who would arrive that evening. Several friends from neighboring houses had accepted invitations to celebrate Miss Rachel's birthday.

Among them were some well-known visitors who often stayed at the house.

One of these was Miss Rachel's cousin, Miss Drusilla Clack—a very religious lady who spent much of her time distributing small books about morality and good behavior.

Another expected guest was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, a handsome and charitable gentleman who was much admired in society.

At that time no one suspected that these names would later become connected with the mystery of the Moonstone.

After breakfast the household became busy with preparations for the dinner. Servants moved constantly between the kitchen and the dining room. Flowers were arranged, and the silver was polished until it shone.

In the midst of this activity I happened to see Rosanna Spearman again.

She was standing quietly near a window in the corridor, looking outside.

Her expression seemed troubled.

When she noticed me watching her, she quickly turned away and returned to her duties.

I remembered her strange excitement on the sands the previous day. Something about the girl's manner still puzzled me.

But at that moment there was no time to question her.

The day passed quickly.

By afternoon the first guests began arriving.

Carriages rolled up to the house one after another. The visitors brought greetings and gifts for Miss Rachel.

The atmosphere became lively and cheerful.

Yet through all the laughter and conversation, the Moonstone remained locked safely in the strongbox.

Or so we believed.

That evening, when dinner was over and the guests had gathered in the drawing

room, Miss Rachel asked for her birthday present from Colonel Herncastle.

Mr. Franklin turned toward my lady.

“Shall we show it now?” he asked.

Lady Verinder hesitated for a moment.

“If Rachel wishes,” she said quietly.

Miss Rachel clapped her hands with excitement.

“Of course I wish it!”

I was sent to fetch the diamond.

With the key in my hand, I walked to my lady’s sitting room.

I unlocked the strongbox.

And then—

I stopped in astonishment.

The sealed paper packet was gone.

The Moonstone had disappeared.

Part 12

For several seconds I simply stared into the open strongbox.

The place where the paper packet had lain was empty.

I searched the inside of the box carefully. I even touched the bottom with my hand, as if the diamond might somehow be hiding there.

But there was nothing.

The Moonstone was gone.

A strange cold feeling ran through me. I closed the strongbox slowly and stood there trying to collect my thoughts.

The guests were waiting in the drawing room. Miss Rachel expected to see her birthday present. I could not remain silent.

So I returned to the drawing room at once.

The company was talking and laughing when I entered. Mr. Franklin looked up first.

“Well, Betteredge?” he asked. “Have you brought it?”

I stepped forward.

“Sir,” I said, “the diamond is not in the strongbox.”

The room became silent immediately.

Miss Rachel stared at me.

“Not in the strongbox?” she repeated.

Mr. Franklin frowned.

“That is impossible,” he said. “We placed it there ourselves.”

Lady Verinder’s face turned pale.

“Gabriel,” she said quietly, “are you certain?”

“Quite certain, my lady,” I replied. “The box is empty.”

Mr. Franklin stood up quickly.

“Come,” he said. “Let us see for ourselves.”

We all went together to the sitting room.

I unlocked the strongbox again. Mr. Franklin bent over it and looked inside.

His expression changed at once.

“It is gone,” he said.

Miss Rachel pushed forward and looked as well.

“This must be some mistake,” she said nervously.

But there was no mistake.

The diamond had vanished.

Lady Verinder closed the lid of the strongbox slowly.

“No one must leave the house,” she said firmly. “Until we understand what has happened.”

The guests were confused and uneasy. Some of them began whispering among themselves.

Mr. Franklin spoke next.

“The diamond was placed here yesterday afternoon,” he said. “The room has been locked since then.”

I cleared my throat.

“My lady,” I said, “I locked the strongbox myself last night. And I checked it again this morning.”

“And the diamond was there?” Mr. Franklin asked.

“Yes, sir,” I answered.

This fact made the mystery even more troubling.

If the diamond had been in the box that morning, it must have disappeared sometime during the day.

Lady Verinder turned toward me.

“Gabriel,” she said calmly, “who has had access to this room today?”

I considered the question carefully.

“Several servants entered to clean the room in the morning,” I said. “But none of them had the key to the strongbox.”

Mr. Franklin looked thoughtful.

“Then someone must have opened it with the key,” he said.

All eyes turned toward me.

I felt the meaning of their silence immediately.

I alone possessed the key.

I spoke firmly.

“My lady, I have had the key with me at all times.”

Lady Verinder answered quietly.

“Of course, Gabriel. No one doubts your honesty.”

Yet the shadow of suspicion had already entered the room.

Miss Rachel suddenly spoke.

“This is absurd,” she said sharply. “Betteredge would never steal anything from this house.”

Her words were kind, but they did not solve the problem.

If I had not taken the diamond, then someone else must have done so.

Mr. Franklin began walking slowly around the room, thinking.

“The theft must have happened during the day,” he said. “While the household was busy preparing for dinner.”

Miss Rachel crossed her arms.

“Then we must question everyone who was in the house.”

Lady Verinder nodded.

“Yes,” she said quietly. “We must discover the truth.”

At that moment I remembered something.

The image of Rosanna Spearman standing alone by the window earlier that day returned suddenly to my mind.

Her pale face.

Her troubled expression.

And the strange excitement she had shown when she first saw Mr. Franklin on the sands.

A faint suspicion stirred within me.

But I said nothing.

The mystery of the Moonstone had only just begun.

And before long the quiet household of Lady Verinder would be filled with doubt, fear, and accusation.

For somewhere inside that house, among its servants and guests, stood the person who had taken the famous diamond.

And none of us yet knew who it was.

Part 13

After the discovery that the Moonstone had disappeared, the cheerful mood of the evening vanished completely. The guests spoke in low voices, and the servants moved about the house with anxious faces.

Lady Verinder remained calm, but it was easy to see that she was deeply troubled.

“This matter must be handled carefully,” she said. “We cannot allow unnecessary gossip to spread outside the house.”

Mr. Franklin agreed.

“Until we know the truth, we must treat this as a private family matter.”

Miss Rachel, however, was less calm than the others.

“Private or not,” she said firmly, “someone in this house has stolen my diamond.”

Her voice sounded angry, but also hurt.

Mr. Franklin tried to speak gently.

“Rachel, we must not jump to conclusions.”

She turned toward him.

“Then what do you suggest?”

Mr. Franklin thought for a moment.

“First we must learn exactly what happened during the day,” he said. “Betteredge, you know the household better than anyone. Perhaps you can help us begin.”

All eyes turned toward me again.

I cleared my throat and spoke carefully.

“My lady, Mr. Franklin, Miss Rachel—if you wish, I will tell you everything I know about the movements of the servants today.”

Lady Verinder nodded.

“Please do.”

I began by explaining the events of the morning. The servants had followed their usual routine. Cleaning had been done early, and afterward everyone had been busy preparing for the birthday dinner.

“No one appeared to behave strangely,” I said. “At least, not at first.”

Mr. Franklin leaned forward slightly.

“Not at first?”

I hesitated.

“There was one small thing,” I admitted. “Earlier today I noticed Rosanna Spearman standing by a window in the corridor. She looked worried about something.”

Miss Rachel spoke quickly.

“Rosanna? Our second housemaid?”

“Yes, Miss Rachel.”

Mr. Franklin looked thoughtful.

“Is she the same girl who ran away when she saw me on the beach yesterday?”

“The same, sir.”

Rachel frowned.

“But Rosanna has always behaved well.”

I agreed.

“She has been a good servant. And my lady gave her the chance to begin a new life.”

Lady Verinder spoke quietly.

“Rosanna has had a difficult past. But I trusted her.”

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Mr. Franklin asked,

“Where is she now?”

I thought carefully.

“I believe she is in the servants’ quarters.”

Miss Rachel straightened.

“Then we must speak with her.”

Lady Verinder raised her hand gently.

“Not yet,” she said. “We must not accuse anyone without reason.”

Her calm voice helped quiet the room again.

“Gabriel,” she continued, “please ask the servants to remain in the house tonight. No one is to leave until we understand what has happened.”

“Yes, my lady.”

I went at once to deliver the instructions.

The servants were already whispering about the missing diamond. When they heard that no one was allowed to leave the house, their faces became even more anxious.

Rosanna Spearman was standing quietly near the doorway.

When she saw me, she seemed startled.

“Rosanna,” I said gently, “my lady wishes everyone to remain in the house tonight.”

She nodded.

“Yes, Mr. Betteredge.”

Her voice sounded calm, but I noticed that her hands were trembling slightly.

I watched her carefully.

“Are you feeling unwell again?” I asked.

She shook her head.

“No.”

But her pale face suggested otherwise.

I returned to the drawing room to report that the instructions had been given.

Meanwhile the guests had begun discussing what should be done next.

One of them suggested calling the local police.

Mr. Franklin considered the idea but finally shook his head.

“If we bring in the police too quickly,” he said, “the matter may become public before we understand it ourselves.”

Lady Verinder agreed.

“Let us wait until morning,” she said. “Perhaps the truth will become clearer.”

Miss Rachel did not appear satisfied with this decision, but she accepted it.

The evening ended quietly after that.

One by one the guests retired to their rooms.

Before going to bed, I made another inspection of the house. The doors were locked, and the windows were secure.

Yet the atmosphere inside the house felt different now.

The comfortable feeling of safety had disappeared.

Somewhere within those walls stood the person who had taken the Moonstone.

And as I walked through the silent corridors, I could not stop thinking about Rosanna Spearman.

For the first time since she had entered our service, I began to wonder whether the girl’s troubled past had truly been left behind.

If the diamond had indeed been stolen...

Could Rosanna be the thief?

The thought disturbed me greatly.

Yet before the night was over, events would take an even stranger turn.

For Rosanna Spearman herself was about to disappear.

Part 14

That night I slept very poorly.

The events of the evening would not leave my mind. Again and again I thought of the empty strongbox and the vanished diamond.

Each time I closed my eyes, the bright yellow light of the Moonstone seemed to appear before me.

When morning finally arrived, I rose earlier than usual. The house was still quiet, but the mystery of the missing diamond remained heavy in my thoughts.

I dressed quickly and went downstairs.

My first action was to make another careful inspection of the house. The doors were still locked. The windows were closed. Nothing appeared disturbed.

Yet something felt wrong.

When I entered the servants' hall, I noticed that the atmosphere there was tense. Several of the maids were whispering together.

When they saw me, they fell silent.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

Nancy, the kitchen-maid, spoke first.

"Mr. Betteredge," she said, "Rosanna Spearman is not in the house."

I stared at her.

"Not in the house?"

"Her bed has not been slept in," Nancy continued. "And no one has seen her this morning."

A cold feeling passed through me.

"Have you searched the grounds?" I asked.

"Not yet," Nancy replied.

I turned immediately toward the door.

"I will look myself."

Outside the morning air was fresh and cool. The sky above the sea was pale with early sunlight.

I began searching the paths around the house.

First I looked in the gardens. Then I checked the plantation of fir trees.
Rosanna was nowhere to be seen.
Finally a troubling thought came to my mind.
The sands.
The place she loved to visit.
I took my walking stick and went quickly toward the path that led through the fir trees.
The trees were silent as I passed beneath them. Their dark branches moved slightly in the wind.
When I reached the end of the plantation, the lonely bay opened before me.
The sea was quiet. The tide had begun to move again.
And the quicksand—the terrible Shivering Sand—lay between the two rocky points just as it always had.
I looked carefully along the beach.
At first I saw nothing.
Then I noticed something lying near the edge of the sandhills.
It was a grey cloak.
Rosanna’s cloak.
I walked toward it slowly.
The cloak lay folded on the ground, as if someone had placed it there carefully.
My heart began beating faster.
I looked toward the quicksand.
The surface of the sand was trembling slightly as the tide began to turn.
And there, not far from the place where Rosanna had stood the day before, I saw footprints leading toward the edge of the quicksand.
But there were no footprints coming back.
I stood perfectly still.
The meaning of what I saw became clear at once.
Rosanna Spearman had come here during the night.
And she had walked toward the Shivering Sand.
I looked again at the trembling surface of the quicksand.

The water from the rising tide was slowly moving across it.
Soon all traces of the footprints would disappear.
I felt a deep sadness.
The poor girl had spoken of this place as if it were calling her.
Now it seemed that the place had claimed her at last.
But another thought followed immediately.
If Rosanna had taken the Moonstone—
Then the diamond had vanished with her.
I remained on the beach for some time, staring silently at the shifting sand.
The mystery of the diamond had taken a dark and terrible turn.
Rosanna Spearman was gone.
And with her, perhaps forever, the famous Moonstone had disappeared into the depths of the Shivering Sand.

Part 15

I remained on the beach for some time, looking at the grey cloak lying on the sand and the dreadful quicksand beyond it. The tide was rising slowly, and the trembling surface of the Shivering Sand began to disappear beneath the water.

At last I picked up the cloak.

It was cold and slightly damp from the morning air. I folded it over my arm and began walking back toward the house.

My thoughts were heavy.

Poor Rosanna Spearman had come to this lonely place in the night and had never returned. Whether she had walked deliberately into the quicksand or had slipped by accident, I could not say.

But one thing seemed clear.

If Rosanna had taken the diamond—and if she had then come here during the night—the Moonstone might now lie buried forever beneath the shifting sands.

By the time I reached the house, the household was already awake and restless. News of Rosanna's disappearance had spread quickly among the servants.

When I entered the hall, Penelope hurried toward me.

“Father!” she said anxiously. “Have you found her?”

I shook my head.

“No.”

Then I showed her the cloak.

Penelope’s face turned pale.

“Where did you find it?”

“On the sands,” I said quietly.

She understood at once.

“Oh, poor Rosanna,” she whispered.

I asked her to send word to Lady Verinder and Mr. Franklin immediately.

A few minutes later we gathered in the sitting room—Lady Verinder, Miss Rachel, Mr. Franklin, and myself.

I placed the cloak on the table.

“This belonged to Rosanna Spearman,” I said.

Miss Rachel looked alarmed.

“Where did you find it?”

“At the sands.”

Mr. Franklin’s expression became serious.

“You believe she went there during the night?”

“Yes, sir.”

I then described the footprints leading toward the quicksand and the absence of any returning marks.

The room fell silent.

At last Lady Verinder spoke.

“Then we must assume that Rosanna is dead.”

Her voice was calm, but there was deep sadness in it.

Miss Rachel sat down slowly.

“And the diamond?” she asked.

No one answered immediately.

Finally Mr. Franklin said quietly,

“If Rosanna took the Moonstone, it may now lie buried beneath the sand.”

Miss Rachel pressed her hands together.

“Then we shall never see it again.”

Mr. Franklin did not reply.

Lady Verinder looked toward me.

“Gabriel, you are certain about the footprints?”

“Quite certain, my lady.”

She closed her eyes briefly.

“Poor girl,” she said softly.

Then she opened them again and spoke with calm determination.

“Nevertheless we must inform the authorities.”

Mr. Franklin nodded.

“Yes. The matter can no longer remain private.”

And so it was decided that the police must be called.

Before noon that same day, the local officer arrived to investigate.

His name was Sergeant Cuff.

At that time none of us knew very much about him. He appeared to be an ordinary man with a quiet manner and a sharp eye.

But before the investigation was finished, Sergeant Cuff would become one of the most important figures in the strange story of the Moonstone.

For the moment, however, he began by examining the simple facts.

The diamond had been placed in the strongbox.

The strongbox had been opened sometime during the day.

Rosanna Spearman had disappeared during the night.

And her cloak had been found near the terrible Shivering Sand.

Many people believed that the mystery was already solved.

They believed Rosanna had stolen the diamond and then taken her own life.

But Sergeant Cuff did not reach that conclusion so quickly.

After listening to my account carefully, he asked a question that surprised everyone in the room.

“Tell me,” he said, “who else in this house had reason to want the Moonstone?”

With that question the mystery began to grow deeper.
Because for the first time we realized something important.
Rosanna Spearman might not be the thief after all.

Part 16

Sergeant Cuff was a quiet man, with a thin face and sharp eyes that seemed to notice everything in the room. When he spoke, he did so calmly, as if the mystery of the missing diamond did not trouble him in the least.

His question surprised us all.

“Who else in this house had reason to want the Moonstone?”

For a moment no one answered.

Miss Rachel spoke first.

“No one,” she said quickly. “It was my birthday present.”

Sergeant Cuff nodded politely.

“Yes, miss. But a diamond of that size might tempt more than one person.”

Mr. Franklin leaned forward.

“Do you believe Rosanna Spearman did not steal it?”

The sergeant did not answer immediately.

Instead he examined the grey cloak lying on the table.

“I believe nothing until I see the facts clearly,” he said.

Then he turned toward me.

“Mr. Betteredge, I would like to see the place where you found this cloak.”

“Certainly,” I replied.

Within a short time we were walking together toward the sands. Mr. Franklin came with us, curious to hear what the detective would say.

The morning had grown brighter. The sea lay quiet beyond the bay.

When we reached the place where I had found the cloak, Sergeant Cuff examined the ground carefully.

He looked at the sandhills, the footprints that remained, and the edge of the terrible quicksand.

For several minutes he said nothing.

Finally he spoke.

“You are certain these footprints belong to Rosanna Spearman?”

“Yes,” I said. “I know her shoes.”

He nodded slowly.

“And you saw no footprints returning from the quicksand?”

“None.”

The sergeant stood still for a moment, looking out over the trembling sand.

Then he said something unexpected.

“This place may hide many things—but I do not believe it hides the Moonstone.”

Mr. Franklin looked surprised.

“You think the diamond is not here?”

“No.”

“But if Rosanna walked into the sand—”

Sergeant Cuff raised his hand gently.

“Perhaps she walked here,” he said. “But that does not mean she walked into the quicksand.”

I felt confused.

“But the footprints—”

“Footprints can tell many stories,” the sergeant replied. “Sometimes they tell the truth. Sometimes they tell a lie.”

He walked slowly along the edge of the sandhills, examining the ground again.

Suddenly he stopped.

“Look here,” he said.

We came closer.

In a patch of softer sand we saw something faint but clear.

A second set of footprints.

These prints did not lead toward the quicksand.

They led away from it.

My heart beat faster.

“Then Rosanna did not die here,” I said.

Sergeant Cuff shook his head.

“Not necessarily. But this tells us one thing for certain.”

“What is that?” Mr. Franklin asked.

“The story of the Shivering Sand may not be the whole story.”

We stood there looking at the faint footprints.

If Rosanna had left the beach alive, then she might still be somewhere nearby.

And if she had taken the Moonstone—

Then the diamond might still be in human hands.

The mystery had suddenly become more complicated.

Sergeant Cuff turned back toward the house.

“Mr. Betteredge,” he said, “I should now like to examine the servants.”

“All of them?”

“Yes.”

He looked toward the distant building of Lady Verinder’s house.

“Somewhere in that house,” he said quietly, “there is a person who knows the truth about the Moonstone.”

With those words the investigation truly began.

And before long, Sergeant Cuff would uncover secrets inside the Verinder household that none of us had ever suspected.

Part 17

We returned to the house together. By that time the household had become even more uneasy. The servants had heard that a detective was now investigating the disappearance of the diamond, and they waited nervously in the hall.

Sergeant Cuff looked at them one by one.

His calm expression never changed.

“Good morning,” he said politely. “I will ask each of you a few simple questions.”

The servants glanced at each other with anxious faces.

I stood beside the sergeant to assist him. Since I had served in the house longer

than anyone else, I could explain the duties and habits of each servant.

The questioning began.

One by one the servants described their movements during the day when the diamond disappeared. Most of them had spent the entire time preparing for the birthday dinner. Their answers seemed straightforward and honest.

Sergeant Cuff listened quietly to each person.

Occasionally he asked a short question, but he never spoke harshly.

At last he turned toward Rosanna Spearman's empty place among the servants.

"This girl Rosanna," he said, "you say she has disappeared."

"Yes," I replied.

"And you believe she may have taken the diamond?"

I hesitated.

"That seemed possible this morning."

The sergeant nodded.

"But now we are not so certain."

He turned toward the others.

"Did any of you notice unusual behavior from Rosanna yesterday?"

The servants looked at one another.

Finally Nancy, the kitchen-maid, spoke.

"She was quiet all day," Nancy said. "Quieter than usual."

Penelope added,

"She seemed worried about something."

Sergeant Cuff's eyes moved thoughtfully from one servant to another.

"Did she leave the house during the day?"

"Yes," I answered. "She sometimes walked to the sands."

"Alone?"

"Almost always."

The sergeant nodded slowly.

"Very interesting."

He then turned to me again.

"Mr. Betteredge, may I ask you a question about Rosanna's past?"

I glanced at Lady Verinder, who was standing nearby.

She gave a small nod.

“Rosanna once lived in a reformatory,” I explained quietly. “She had been in prison before that.”

The servants murmured in surprise. They had not known this part of the girl’s history.

Sergeant Cuff did not seem shocked.

“That information is useful,” he said calmly.

Then he added something unexpected.

“But it does not necessarily make her the thief.”

Miss Rachel stepped forward.

“If Rosanna did not take the diamond,” she asked, “who did?”

The sergeant looked thoughtful.

“At present, miss, that is exactly what we must discover.”

Mr. Franklin joined the conversation.

“Where should we begin?”

Sergeant Cuff walked slowly across the room, examining everything with careful attention—the furniture, the doors, the windows.

At last he stopped near the window.

“The person who took the Moonstone must have known three things,” he said.

“First, that the diamond had arrived in the house.”

“Second, where it had been placed.”

“Third, how to reach it without being seen.”

These words made everyone uneasy.

Because they suggested something troubling.

The thief might not be a stranger.

The thief might be someone inside the house.

Lady Verinder spoke quietly.

“Sergeant, do you suspect one of our guests?”

The detective answered carefully.

“At this stage, my lady, I suspect everyone.”

The room became silent again.

Mr. Franklin finally said,

“Then you will continue your investigation?”

Sergeant Cuff nodded.

“Yes. And my next step will be to examine the room where the diamond was kept.”

We returned together to Lady Verinder’s sitting room.

The strongbox still stood where I had left it.

Sergeant Cuff inspected the lock carefully.

“The box has not been forced,” he observed.

“No,” I said. “Only the key can open it.”

The detective looked at me thoughtfully.

“And who possessed the key?”

“I did.”

He nodded slowly.

“That means either the key was used by its owner—or someone else obtained it.”

Mr. Franklin crossed his arms.

“But how?”

Sergeant Cuff did not answer immediately.

Instead he walked slowly around the room, observing every small detail.

At last he stopped beside the table where the diamond had been opened the night before.

On the surface of the table lay a few grains of sand.

The detective bent down and looked closely.

“Interesting,” he murmured.

“Very interesting indeed.”

We all looked at the grains of sand.

At that moment none of us understood their importance.

But Sergeant Cuff had already begun to form a theory.

And that theory would soon lead the investigation in a direction none of us

expected.

Part 18

Sergeant Cuff remained bent over the table for some time, studying the small grains of sand lying on its surface.

At last he straightened and turned toward us.

“This room was cleaned yesterday morning, correct?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“And after that the room was used only by members of the family and trusted servants?”

“That is correct.”

The detective pointed to the grains of sand.

“Then these must have been brought here after the cleaning.”

Mr. Franklin looked puzzled.

“Sand can be found almost anywhere,” he said.

“True,” Sergeant Cuff replied. “But the sand near the sea has a particular appearance.”

He picked up one of the grains between his fingers.

“This sand,” he said quietly, “looks very similar to the sand at the beach.”

I felt a sudden uneasiness.

“The sands near the Shivering Sand?”

“Possibly,” the detective said.

Miss Rachel frowned.

“But what does that prove?”

Sergeant Cuff answered calmly.

“It proves that someone who had recently been at the beach entered this room.”

Mr. Franklin looked thoughtful.

“Rosanna Spearman visited the sands yesterday.”

The detective nodded slightly.

“Yes. And she may not have been the only person.”

This remark surprised us.

“You believe someone else also went there?” I asked.

“Perhaps,” Sergeant Cuff replied.

He then began examining the floor and the carpet with great care.

After a few minutes he spoke again.

“Mr. Betteredge, you mentioned earlier that Rosanna was fond of walking to the sands.”

“Yes.”

“Did she have any close friends among the servants?”

I shook my head.

“Not really. My daughter Penelope was kind to her, but Rosanna usually kept to herself.”

“Interesting,” the detective said softly.

He then asked another question.

“Did Rosanna show any special interest in Mr. Franklin Blake?”

This question surprised me greatly.

I remembered again the strange way Rosanna had reacted when she first saw Mr. Franklin on the beach.

“Now that you mention it,” I said slowly, “she did seem greatly disturbed when she saw him.”

Miss Rachel looked curious.

“Disturbed? In what way?”

“She turned red and ran away,” I explained.

Mr. Franklin seemed embarrassed.

“Surely that means nothing,” he said.

But Sergeant Cuff did not dismiss the idea so quickly.

“Sometimes small details mean a great deal,” he replied.

He continued examining the room.

After a while he stood up again.

“I believe we should search Rosanna Spearman’s room,” he said.

Lady Verinder agreed.

“Very well.”

We went upstairs together.

Rosanna’s room was small and simple, like the other servants’ rooms. Her few possessions lay neatly arranged.

Sergeant Cuff began looking through them carefully.

In the drawer of a small table he found a letter.

The envelope had not been sealed.

“May I read this?” he asked.

Lady Verinder nodded.

The detective unfolded the letter slowly.

As he read it, his expression became thoughtful.

“This is interesting,” he said.

Mr. Franklin stepped closer.

“What does it say?”

Sergeant Cuff handed the letter to him.

Mr. Franklin read it aloud.

The letter was written by Rosanna Spearman.

In it she spoke about her unhappy life and her gratitude to Lady Verinder for giving her a chance to begin again.

But there was something else written there as well.

Something that surprised us all.

Rosanna confessed that she had secretly admired Mr. Franklin Blake.

She wrote that from the first moment she saw him years before, she had never forgotten him.

Mr. Franklin looked deeply uncomfortable.

“This is very unfortunate,” he said quietly.

Miss Rachel’s expression changed slightly.

Sergeant Cuff folded the letter again.

“A strong emotion,” he said calmly, “can sometimes lead to strange actions.”

He looked around the small room.

“But admiration alone does not prove theft.”

He placed the letter back in the drawer.

Then he spoke quietly.

“The mystery is not yet solved.”

But his eyes showed that he was beginning to see a pattern.

And somewhere within that pattern lay the truth about the missing Moonstone.

Part 19

After examining Rosanna Spearman’s room, Sergeant Cuff remained silent for several minutes. He stood near the small window, looking out toward the distant sea.

At last he turned back to us.

“This letter is important,” he said. “But it does not prove that Rosanna stole the diamond.”

Mr. Franklin looked relieved.

“I am glad to hear that.”

Miss Rachel crossed her arms.

“Then what do you believe happened?”

Sergeant Cuff spoke slowly.

“I believe Rosanna knew something about the theft.”

“But she may not have been the thief.”

These words surprised everyone.

“If she did not steal it,” Miss Rachel asked, “why did she disappear?”

The detective considered this question carefully.

“Perhaps she was frightened,” he said. “Or perhaps she wished to protect someone.”

“Protect someone?” Mr. Franklin repeated.

Sergeant Cuff nodded.

“Yes.”

The idea seemed strange to us all.

“But who would she protect?” I asked.

The detective did not answer immediately.

Instead he asked another question.

“Where is Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite?”

Miss Rachel replied,

“He left this morning for London.”

Sergeant Cuff raised his eyebrows slightly.

“So soon after the diamond disappeared?”

“He had business in London,” she said quickly.

The detective nodded politely.

“Of course.”

Yet I noticed that he seemed interested in the name.

Mr. Franklin spoke next.

“Sergeant, do you believe the diamond may have been taken outside the house?”

“It is possible,” the detective replied.

“But we must examine every step of the story carefully.”

He began walking slowly around the room again.

“First,” he said, “the diamond was placed in the strongbox.”

“Second, the box was opened during the day.”

“Third, Rosanna Spearman behaved strangely and later disappeared.”

He paused.

“But we must ask an important question.”

“What question?” Miss Rachel asked.

Sergeant Cuff looked directly at her.

“Who knew where the diamond was kept?”

Miss Rachel thought for a moment.

“My mother, Mr. Franklin, and Mr. Betteredge.”

“And the servants might have learned about it as well,” I added.

The detective nodded.

“Yes. News travels quickly in a household.”

He turned toward Mr. Franklin.

“And who carried the diamond to the house?”

“I did.”

“And before that?”

“It came from Colonel Herncastle’s estate.”

Sergeant Cuff seemed interested.

“Colonel Herncastle had enemies, did he not?”

Mr. Franklin hesitated.

“Yes. Many people disliked him.”

“Including certain men from India?”

Mr. Franklin looked surprised.

“You mean the three Indians?”

“Perhaps,” said the detective.

Suddenly the mystery seemed larger than we had imagined.

It was no longer only a matter of a servant stealing a diamond.

There might be other forces involved.

The strange jugglers.

The unknown man who had followed Mr. Franklin in London.

And now the disappearance of Rosanna Spearman.

Sergeant Cuff spoke again.

“For the moment we must continue our investigation inside the house.”

“But we must not forget the possibility that someone outside the house may also be involved.”

Lady Verinder listened carefully.

“Sergeant,” she said, “do you believe the diamond can still be recovered?”

The detective answered calmly.

“Yes, my lady.”

“Why?”

“Because the person who took it has not yet found a safe way to sell it.”

Miss Rachel looked hopeful.

“Then there is still a chance.”

“There is always a chance,” Sergeant Cuff replied.

But his next words brought the mystery back to its most troubling point.

“However,” he said quietly, “the key to this mystery may lie with the missing girl.”

“Rosanna Spearman.”

And until we discovered what had truly happened to her, the secret of the Moonstone would remain hidden.

Part 20

After speaking about Rosanna Spearman, Sergeant Cuff asked to remain in the house for a few more days. Lady Verinder agreed at once. Everyone in the household hoped that the detective might soon discover the truth.

During the next several hours Sergeant Cuff continued examining the house.

He inspected the corridors, the doors, the windows, and every room that might possibly be connected with the theft. Nothing seemed too small to escape his attention.

I accompanied him most of the time, answering his questions and explaining the habits of the household.

Late in the afternoon he surprised me by asking about something that appeared entirely unrelated to the diamond.

“Mr. Betteredge,” he said, “does anyone in this house grow roses?”

I stared at him.

“Roses?”

“Yes.”

“My lady has a small rose garden,” I replied.

The detective nodded with satisfaction.

“May I see it?”

Though I did not understand his reason, I led him outside to the garden.

The rose bushes stood in neat rows beside the path. Many of them were already blooming.

Sergeant Cuff examined them carefully, walking slowly among the flowers.

After a few minutes he spoke again.

“I am very fond of roses,” he said calmly. “They help a man think clearly.”
This seemed a strange remark in the middle of a diamond investigation.
Nevertheless I listened politely.

At last he stopped beside one of the bushes.

“Tell me,” he said, “who usually works in this garden?”

“The gardener, of course.”

“And no one else?”

I thought for a moment.

“Rosanna Spearman sometimes came here,” I said.

The detective looked interested.

“Did she?”

“Yes. She often liked to work alone in quiet places.”

Sergeant Cuff looked thoughtfully at the roses.

“That is useful information.”

We walked slowly back toward the house.

On the way he asked me another unexpected question.

“Mr. Betteredge, did Rosanna ever receive letters?”

“Yes,” I replied. “But not very often.”

“Did she write letters herself?”

“Occasionally.”

The detective nodded.

“Then it is possible she may have left a message explaining her actions.”

I had not considered that possibility.

“You believe she might have written something before she disappeared?”

“It is possible,” Sergeant Cuff said.

When we returned to the house, he asked permission to search Rosanna’s belongings again.

Lady Verinder agreed.

This time he examined the room even more carefully than before.

At last he discovered something hidden beneath the lining of one of Rosanna’s boxes.

It was a small piece of folded paper.

Sergeant Cuff opened it slowly.

As he read the note, his expression changed slightly.

“This,” he said quietly, “is very important.”

Mr. Franklin stepped closer.

“What does it say?”

The detective read the note aloud.

It was written in Rosanna Spearman’s handwriting.

The message was short but clear.

Rosanna had written that she knew the truth about the disappearance of the Moonstone.

But she could not reveal it immediately.

She wrote that she would leave a full explanation in a place where it would be discovered later.

The room became silent.

Miss Rachel spoke first.

“Then Rosanna did know something!”

Sergeant Cuff nodded.

“Yes. And more importantly—she intended to tell the truth.”

Mr. Franklin looked puzzled.

“But where is this explanation she mentioned?”

The detective folded the note again.

“That is the next question we must answer.”

He looked toward the distant sea through the window.

“Somewhere,” he said quietly, “Rosanna Spearman has hidden the secret of the Moonstone.”

And until we found that hidden message, the mystery of the diamond would remain unsolved.

Part 21

The discovery of Rosanna Spearman's note changed the direction of the investigation completely.

Until that moment many people had believed that Rosanna herself had stolen the Moonstone. But the note suggested something very different.

Rosanna claimed that she knew the truth.

And she had promised to leave a full explanation somewhere.

The question now was simple.

Where had she hidden it?

Sergeant Cuff stood quietly beside the window, holding the small piece of paper in his hand.

"This note tells us two important things," he said.

"First, Rosanna knew what really happened to the diamond."

"Second, she believed the truth would eventually be discovered."

Miss Rachel spoke impatiently.

"Then why did she not tell us immediately?"

The detective answered calmly.

"Perhaps she was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Sergeant Cuff looked thoughtful.

"Afraid of the person who actually took the diamond."

These words made everyone uneasy.

If Rosanna had feared someone inside the house, then the true thief might still be among us.

Mr. Franklin spoke next.

"You believe Rosanna was protecting someone?"

"It is possible," the detective replied.

I remembered again the strange admiration Rosanna had felt for Mr. Franklin. For a moment I wondered whether she might have been trying to protect him.

But that idea seemed impossible.

Mr. Franklin had no reason to steal the diamond he had just delivered.

Sergeant Cuff continued thinking aloud.

“Rosanna wrote that she left the explanation in a place where it would be found later.”

“But she did not say when.”

Miss Rachel sighed.

“That could mean anything.”

“Yes,” said the detective. “But we must examine every possibility.”

He turned toward me.

“Mr. Betteredge, did Rosanna have any favorite places on the estate besides the sands?”

I thought carefully.

“She often walked alone,” I said. “Sometimes she visited the fishing village nearby.”

“Cobb’s Hole?” the detective asked.

“Yes.”

Sergeant Cuff nodded slowly.

“Then we must also consider that location.”

Mr. Franklin spoke.

“Do you think she may have left the message there?”

“Possibly.”

The detective placed Rosanna’s note carefully in his pocket.

“I will visit the village tomorrow.”

The rest of the evening passed quietly.

Everyone in the house felt the weight of the mystery. Conversations became short and thoughtful. Even the servants moved more quietly than usual.

That night I once again made my inspection of the house before going to bed.

As I walked through the corridors, I could not stop thinking about Rosanna.

The poor girl had carried a heavy secret.

And somewhere—perhaps very close to us—she had hidden the truth.

The next morning Sergeant Cuff set out for the fishing village of Cobb’s Hole.

I accompanied him.

The village lay along the coast a short distance from our house. Small boats

rested on the beach, and fishermen moved about their daily work.

Sergeant Cuff spoke with several of the villagers.

At first they knew nothing about Rosanna.

But eventually one of them remembered something important.

Rosanna had indeed visited the village the previous day.

And she had spoken with a fisherman named Yolland.

The detective's eyes brightened slightly.

"Where can we find this man?" he asked.

The villager pointed toward the shore.

"His boat is down there."

We walked toward the beach.

Soon we saw a strong-looking fisherman standing beside a small boat.

Sergeant Cuff approached him calmly.

"Mr. Yolland," he said, "I believe you spoke with a young woman named Rosanna Spearman yesterday."

The fisherman looked surprised.

"Yes," he said slowly. "She asked me to keep something for her."

My heart began beating faster.

Sergeant Cuff spoke quietly.

"What did she give you?"

The fisherman hesitated.

Then he pointed toward his boat.

"A letter," he said.

"She told me to give it to Mr. Franklin Blake if anything happened to her."

At that moment we realized something important.

Rosanna Spearman had indeed left the truth behind.

And that truth was now waiting in the fisherman's boat.

Part 22

The fisherman Yolland looked from Sergeant Cuff to me and then back again.

“You say the girl is missing?” he asked.

“Yes,” the detective replied. “And we believe the letter she left with you may help explain what happened.”

Yolland nodded slowly.

“She told me to keep it safe,” he said. “And to give it only to Mr. Franklin Blake if she did not return.”

Sergeant Cuff spoke calmly.

“That instruction will be followed.”

The fisherman stepped into his boat and opened a small wooden box used for storing tools and rope. From inside he took out a sealed envelope.

The paper looked slightly damp from the sea air, but it was still intact.

On the outside was written one name.

Franklin Blake.

I felt a strange tension as I looked at the letter.

Rosanna’s final explanation.

The detective examined the envelope carefully.

“This should be opened by Mr. Franklin himself,” he said.

Yolland handed the letter to him.

“Please tell the gentleman I did exactly as the girl asked,” the fisherman said.

“You did well,” Sergeant Cuff replied.

We thanked him and began walking back toward the house.

Neither of us spoke much during the walk. The envelope seemed heavy with importance.

At last the house came into view again.

Mr. Franklin was waiting in the hall when we arrived. Miss Rachel and Lady Verinder stood nearby.

They saw the letter immediately.

“What is that?” Miss Rachel asked.

Sergeant Cuff answered quietly.

“A message from Rosanna Spearman.”

Mr. Franklin stepped forward.

“For me?”

“Yes.”

The detective handed him the envelope.

Mr. Franklin broke the seal and unfolded the paper inside.

Everyone watched him closely as he began to read.

The room was completely silent.

Rosanna’s letter was long. As Mr. Franklin read it, his expression changed several times—first surprise, then confusion, and finally deep concern.

When he finished reading, he remained silent for a moment.

Miss Rachel spoke impatiently.

“Well?”

Mr. Franklin looked up slowly.

“Rosanna did not steal the Moonstone.”

The words shocked everyone.

“Then who did?” Miss Rachel asked.

Mr. Franklin hesitated.

“According to this letter,” he said quietly, “Rosanna believed that I took the diamond.”

I felt as if the ground had suddenly moved beneath my feet.

“You, sir?” I said in disbelief.

Mr. Franklin looked troubled.

“Yes.”

Miss Rachel stared at him.

“That is impossible.”

Sergeant Cuff spoke calmly.

“What reason does she give?”

Mr. Franklin read part of the letter aloud.

Rosanna had written that during the night she had seen Mr. Franklin enter the sitting room where the diamond was kept.

She had followed him secretly and had watched him open the strongbox.

She saw him take the Moonstone.

According to her, he then wrapped the diamond in a piece of cloth and left the room.

The silence in the room became heavy.

Mr. Franklin shook his head slowly.

“I do not remember doing any such thing.”

Miss Rachel spoke sharply.

“Because you did not do it.”

But Sergeant Cuff’s expression remained thoughtful.

“Continue reading,” he said.

Mr. Franklin read the rest of Rosanna’s letter.

Rosanna explained that she had followed him again later that night.

She saw him hide the wrapped diamond inside a painted door in the house.

But she believed Mr. Franklin had acted without understanding what he was doing.

She suspected that he had been walking in his sleep.

When Mr. Franklin finished reading, the room remained silent.

The mystery had suddenly become stranger than ever.

If Rosanna’s story was true, then Mr. Franklin Blake himself had taken the Moonstone.

Yet he had no memory of doing so.

Sergeant Cuff spoke quietly.

“This changes everything.”

The secret of the Moonstone had taken a completely unexpected turn.

Part 23

For several moments after Mr. Franklin finished reading Rosanna Spearman’s letter, no one spoke.

The idea seemed impossible.

Mr. Franklin Blake—the man who had brought the diamond to the house—accused of stealing it himself.

At last Miss Rachel broke the silence.

“This is nonsense,” she said firmly. “Rosanna must have been mistaken.”

Mr. Franklin looked troubled.

“I wish I could say the same,” he replied quietly.

Sergeant Cuff spoke calmly.

“The letter describes very specific actions.”

He turned toward Mr. Franklin.

“Do you remember anything unusual about that night?”

Mr. Franklin shook his head.

“Nothing.”

“Did you leave your room during the night?”

“Not that I know of.”

The detective nodded thoughtfully.

“And yet Rosanna believed she saw you.”

Lady Verinder spoke gently.

“Sergeant, are you suggesting that Mr. Franklin took the diamond while asleep?”

“It is a possibility,” Sergeant Cuff said.

I felt deeply uncomfortable hearing this.

Mr. Franklin was an honest gentleman. The idea that he might steal anything—even without knowing it—seemed absurd.

Mr. Franklin himself appeared deeply confused.

“If such a thing happened,” he said slowly, “I have no memory of it.”

Sergeant Cuff remained calm.

“Sleepwalking is a strange condition. A man may perform complicated actions while asleep and remember nothing afterward.”

Miss Rachel spoke sharply.

“But why would Franklin hide the diamond?”

The detective answered quietly.

“That is the true question.”

Mr. Franklin read another part of Rosanna’s letter.

According to her, after she saw him hide the diamond, she had taken it from the

place where he had left it.

She believed she was protecting him.

Rosanna feared that if the diamond were discovered where he had hidden it, suspicion would fall upon him immediately.

Therefore she removed the diamond and planned to return it secretly later.

But before she could do so, the investigation had begun.

The room grew silent again.

Miss Rachel looked pale.

“Then where is the diamond now?”

Mr. Franklin lowered the letter.

“Rosanna does not say.”

Sergeant Cuff spoke thoughtfully.

“But she promised to explain everything.”

He pointed to the letter.

“Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in her words.”

We read the letter again carefully.

Near the end Rosanna wrote that she had hidden the diamond where no one would think to look for it.

She believed that someday the truth would be discovered.

Until that day, the diamond would remain safe.

Mr. Franklin sighed.

“That could mean almost anywhere.”

Sergeant Cuff shook his head slightly.

“Not anywhere. Somewhere connected to Rosanna herself.”

I suddenly remembered something.

“The sands,” I said.

Everyone looked at me.

“Rosanna loved the sands. She spoke of them often.”

But the detective shook his head.

“No. If the diamond were buried in the quicksand, Rosanna would not have written this letter.”

He thought for a moment.

Then he spoke again.

“Rosanna hid the diamond where it could be found later.”

“But only by someone who understood her actions.”

Miss Rachel asked quietly,

“And who would understand her?”

Sergeant Cuff answered calmly.

“Perhaps the person she wished to protect.”

He turned toward Mr. Franklin.

“You.”

Mr. Franklin looked troubled.

“But I do not know where to search.”

The detective smiled slightly.

“Then we must continue reading Rosanna’s letter very carefully.”

Because somewhere inside her words—

hidden like the diamond itself—

lay the final clue to the mystery of the Moonstone.

Part 24

We gathered once more around the table and read Rosanna Spearman’s letter again, slowly and carefully.

This time Sergeant Cuff asked us to pay attention to every small detail.

“Rosanna chose her words with great care,” he said. “If she wished the truth to be discovered later, she must have left a clue.”

Mr. Franklin read the letter aloud once more.

We listened closely.

Rosanna described the moment when she saw Mr. Franklin walking in the night. She wrote about following him quietly through the dark corridor. She described watching him open the strongbox and remove the Moonstone.

Then she explained how she had later taken the diamond herself.

When Mr. Franklin reached the final part of the letter, Sergeant Cuff stopped him.

“Read that part again,” he said.

Mr. Franklin repeated the sentence.

Rosanna had written:

“I have hidden the diamond where it will remain safe until the truth is known. The place I have chosen is one that I know well, and one that Mr. Franklin Blake will remember.”

The detective nodded slowly.

“That is the clue.”

Miss Rachel looked confused.

“But what place could she mean?”

Mr. Franklin thought carefully.

“Rosanna did not know me well,” he said. “She could not have known my favorite places.”

Sergeant Cuff shook his head.

“Perhaps she meant a place that connects the two of you.”

I remembered again the strange meeting on the sands.

“The beach,” I said again.

But the detective shook his head once more.

“No. Rosanna would not hide a diamond where it might be lost forever.”

Mr. Franklin continued thinking.

“She once worked in the rose garden,” he said slowly.

Sergeant Cuff’s eyes brightened.

“Yes.”

Miss Rachel looked surprised.

“The rose garden?”

The detective nodded.

“Rosanna spent time there. And it is a place Mr. Franklin has seen since his return.”

We all remembered the moment when Sergeant Cuff had examined the roses

earlier.

Mr. Franklin stood up.

“Then we should search the garden.”

We went outside together.

The afternoon sun shone brightly over the estate. The rose bushes stood quietly in their rows, their flowers moving gently in the wind.

Sergeant Cuff walked slowly among them.

After a few moments he stopped beside one of the bushes.

“Look here,” he said.

At the base of the bush the soil appeared slightly disturbed.

Someone had clearly dug there recently.

Mr. Franklin knelt down and began moving the soil with his hands.

After a few seconds his fingers touched something solid.

He pulled it out.

It was a small cloth bundle.

Everyone held their breath.

Mr. Franklin opened the cloth carefully.

Inside lay the Moonstone.

The yellow diamond shone brilliantly in the sunlight.

Miss Rachel gasped.

“My diamond!”

Lady Verinder closed her eyes in relief.

I felt a deep sense of satisfaction.

The famous jewel had been found at last.

Sergeant Cuff spoke calmly.

“Rosanna Spearman kept her promise.”

Mr. Franklin looked down at the diamond.

“She wished to protect me,” he said quietly.

“Yes,” said the detective.

For a moment we all stood silently in the rose garden.

The mystery of the missing Moonstone had been solved—at least in part.

Rosanna had taken the diamond, but only to prevent suspicion from falling on Mr. Franklin.

Yet one question still remained.

Why had Mr. Franklin taken the diamond in the first place?

Until that question was answered, the strange story of the Moonstone would not truly be finished.

Part 25

The discovery of the Moonstone in the rose garden brought great relief to everyone in the house. Miss Rachel was especially pleased to see her birthday present returned safely.

Yet the joy of the moment did not last long.

One important question still remained.

Why had Mr. Franklin Blake taken the diamond during the night?

Mr. Franklin himself seemed deeply troubled.

“I cannot explain it,” he said. “I have no memory of doing such a thing.”

Sergeant Cuff remained calm, as always.

“Rosanna believed you were walking in your sleep,” he said.

“But sleepwalking alone does not explain everything.”

Miss Rachel looked at him.

“What do you mean?”

The detective spoke carefully.

“Even a man who walks in his sleep usually acts according to thoughts already in his mind.”

Mr. Franklin frowned.

“Are you suggesting that I wished to take the diamond?”

“Not necessarily,” Sergeant Cuff replied.

“But perhaps someone influenced your actions.”

This idea surprised us all.

“Influenced?” Miss Rachel repeated.

The detective nodded.

“Yes. There are certain medicines that can cause a person to act strangely without remembering it later.”

Mr. Franklin looked puzzled.

“Medicine?”

Sergeant Cuff turned toward him.

“Did you take any medicine on the night the diamond disappeared?”

Mr. Franklin thought for a moment.

Then he nodded slowly.

“Yes.”

Everyone in the room looked at him.

“Before going to bed that night,” he said, “I was suffering from a severe headache.”

“I visited a doctor in the neighborhood.”

“He gave me a small dose of medicine to help me sleep.”

The detective’s eyes became sharp.

“Do you remember the doctor’s name?”

Mr. Franklin answered immediately.

“Mr. Ezra Jennings.”

Sergeant Cuff nodded thoughtfully.

“Then we must speak with him.”

Lady Verinder agreed.

“Yes. If the medicine affected Mr. Franklin in some unusual way, the doctor may be able to explain it.”

The following day Mr. Franklin and I visited the doctor.

Ezra Jennings was a quiet and thoughtful man with a pale face and dark hair. Though he looked weak in health, his eyes were bright with intelligence.

Mr. Franklin explained everything—the missing diamond, Rosanna’s letter, and the strange accusation that he had taken the jewel while asleep.

Jennings listened carefully.

When the story was finished, he spoke slowly.

“It is possible,” he said, “that the medicine I gave you affected your mind during the night.”

Mr. Franklin looked surprised.

“You mean I might have acted without knowing it?”

“Yes.”

Jennings explained that certain medicines could cause a person to move and act while remaining partly asleep.

The person might perform complex actions but remember nothing afterward.

Sergeant Cuff listened with great interest.

“Then Mr. Franklin may indeed have taken the diamond while under the influence of the medicine.”

Jennings nodded.

“That is very possible.”

But the doctor then added something important.

“However, such a thing could be proven.”

“How?” Mr. Franklin asked.

Jennings spoke calmly.

“By repeating the conditions of that night.”

The idea shocked us.

“You mean,” I said, “Mr. Franklin should take the same medicine again?”

Jennings nodded.

“Yes.”

“If he repeats the same actions while asleep, we may finally understand what happened.”

Mr. Franklin looked uncertain.

“That sounds dangerous.”

But Sergeant Cuff seemed interested.

“It may also reveal the truth.”

The mystery of the Moonstone had reached its final stage.

To discover the truth, Mr. Franklin Blake would have to face the strange possibility that he himself had been the thief—without ever knowing it.

Part 26

The plan suggested by Mr. Ezra Jennings was surprising and somewhat alarming. Yet the more we discussed it, the more reasonable it seemed.

If Mr. Franklin had truly taken the diamond while under the influence of the medicine, repeating the same conditions might reveal the truth.

Sergeant Cuff supported the idea strongly.

“We must understand exactly what happened that night,” he said.

Mr. Franklin looked uncertain but determined.

“Very well,” he said at last. “If this experiment can clear the mystery, I will do it.”

Jennings explained the plan carefully.

“We must recreate the same situation,” he said.

“Mr. Franklin will take the same medicine before going to bed.”

“The house must be arranged exactly as it was that night.”

“And several witnesses will quietly observe what happens.”

Lady Verinder agreed to allow the experiment to take place in the house.

That evening everything was prepared.

The strongbox was placed again in the sitting room.

Instead of the real Moonstone, another object was placed inside to represent it.

Mr. Franklin took the same medicine given to him before.

Jennings remained with him to observe the effects.

Meanwhile Sergeant Cuff, Lady Verinder, Miss Rachel, and I waited quietly in another room.

The house was silent.

Hours passed slowly.

At last Jennings entered the room where we waited.

“He is asleep,” he whispered.

“Now we must watch carefully.”

We followed him quietly down the corridor.

Mr. Franklin lay asleep in his room.

For a time nothing happened.

Then, slowly, he sat up in bed.

His eyes were open, but they looked strange and unfocused.

Without speaking he stood up and began walking.

We watched in silence.

Mr. Franklin moved down the corridor exactly as Rosanna had described in her letter.

He entered the sitting room.

There he opened the strongbox.

His movements were calm and deliberate, but his face showed no sign that he was awake.

He removed the object inside and wrapped it in cloth.

Then he walked slowly away again.

The scene matched Rosanna's description perfectly.

After a few moments Jennings gently woke him.

Mr. Franklin looked confused.

"What happened?" he asked.

Jennings spoke quietly.

"You repeated the actions of that night."

Mr. Franklin stared at him in disbelief.

"Then Rosanna was telling the truth."

Sergeant Cuff nodded.

"Yes."

But another question still remained.

Why had Mr. Franklin taken the diamond?

Jennings explained the final piece of the mystery.

Earlier that evening Mr. Franklin had been speaking about the Moonstone with others in the house.

The idea of protecting the diamond had remained in his mind as he fell asleep.

Under the influence of the medicine, that thought had become a strange action.

While asleep, he had taken the diamond and hidden it, believing he was protecting it.

Later Rosanna had discovered what he had done.

To prevent suspicion from falling on him, she had taken the diamond herself and hidden it in the rose garden.

The truth was finally clear.

Mr. Franklin Blake had indeed taken the Moonstone.

But he had done so without any knowledge or criminal intention.

Rosanna Spearman had sacrificed herself to protect him.

When the full story became known, everyone in the house felt deep sorrow for the unfortunate girl.

The Moonstone was returned safely to Miss Rachel.

And the strange mystery that had troubled the Verinder household was finally solved.

Yet the story of the Moonstone did not end there.

For the diamond itself would soon return to the distant land from which it had first been taken.

And with that return, the long and troubled history of the jewel would at last come to its final conclusion.