

The Moonstone (Wilkie Collins) – episode 11

Mr Bruff the lawyer's narrative. He told Rachel Verinder that Godfrey Ablewhite was after her money, so their engagement was broken off. An Indian man with a card of recommendation from Septimus Luker, the money-lender, visited Mr Bruff ostensibly to borrow money, but really, it seemed, to find out the usual term in Victorian London for the repayment of a loan. Both Luker and Mr Bruff had been asked the question, and both had given the information that the time of repayment was one year.

Episode 11

By an extraordinary coincidence I met Mr Murthwaite at a dinner that evening. Knowing he was a friend of the late Lady Verinder, I brought up the subject of the Moonstone. 'Have you heard from the Indians lately?' he asked immediately. I described what had happened to Luker and myself mentioning the Indian's question about the standard length of time for repayment of a loan.

'Can't you see his motive, Mr Bruff?' he said. I said I couldn't. 'Which was the event that gave the Indians their first chance of taking the diamond?' he asked me. 'When Colonel Herncastle died,' I replied. 'Until then the stone was safe in the bank.'

'Yes,' he said. 'And you, as a lawyer, know that anyone can obtain a copy of a will from the Law Office. The copy of the Colonel's will informed them that he left the stone to Miss Verinder, and that Mr Blake or someone of his choice had to give it to her on her birthday. Their one difficulty was to decide whether to attempt to get hold of the diamond when it was removed from the bank, or later, in Yorkshire. They chose the second, safest way — but were undoubtedly unaware, when they first visited Lady Verinder's house, that Franklin Blake had already put the stone in the bank in Fritzinghall. So they decided to wait until Miss Verinder's birthday; and were rewarded for their patience by the sight of the jewel on Miss Verinder's dress! However, the extraordinary disappearance of the Moonstone that night completely defeated their careful plan; and the next day they sat in jail, powerless to do anything. Their next chance came while they were still locked up. I'll explain. A day or two before they were set free the governor of the prison came to see me with a letter, addressed to the Indians at their hotel in Fritzinghall. It was written in Hindustani. I translated it:

"Brothers, in the name of the Prince of the Night, turn your faces south and come to me in the street of many noises which leads to the muddy river. My own eyes have seen it."

The day they were set free they took the first train to London. What was the next we heard of them?'

'They were annoying Luker, begging at his house,' I said.

'Somebody took the Moonstone to London and tried to pawn it, otherwise it would never have been in his possession. Have the police not found out who?' I shook my head. 'I see,' he said. 'At any rate, thanks to Luker's cleverness, the Indians lost their next chance of getting hold of the diamond. The Moonstone was once more out of their reach, in the bank, until...'

'Until next June,' I said. 'It was taken away at the end of last June.'

'Exactly. They've been defeated twice. I don't believe they will let it happen a third time.'

Those were his last words on the subject. That night I made a note in my diary about June next year. I close my narrative with what it said: *June 1849 — expect news of Indians towards end of month.*

Third narrative

contributed by Franklin Blake.

In the spring of 1849, while I was travelling in Central Asia, I sent a servant to fetch my

letters and money from the nearest British embassy. He returned with a letter from Mr Bruff. He advised me to return home immediately. My father had died.

Although I had put half the world between me and Rachel I had failed to forget her. The nearer I got to England, and to the possibility of seeing her, the more I felt her hold on my heart tightening again. She was the first person I asked after when Mr Bruff met me at the station. He told me she was living with a sister of the late Sir John Verinder, in Portland Place, London. Half an hour later I was on my way there.

The servant who answered the door wasn't sure whether Miss Verinder was at home or not. I sent him upstairs with my card. He came down again and informed me that she was out. I said I would call again at 6 p.m. That evening I was told again that she was not at home. It was clear. She did not wish to see me.

My servant took a letter to her the next day, with instructions to wait for an answer. There was none.

That afternoon, after Mr Bruff had told me of the events since my departure, I felt even more determined to find out the cause of her silence towards her mother, and of her cruel behaviour towards me. I decided to take the next train to Yorkshire. If it was humanly possible, I would find the thief who took the Moonstone!

There I was, standing on the familiar terrace, just before sunset that evening. I walked round to the back of the peaceful house and saw dear old Betteredge in his chair with his pipe.

'Franklin!' he exclaimed and struggled to his feet. He shook his head regretfully. 'You still owe me that half penny.' He invited me inside. I had to refuse — the house was Rachel's now. He was understandably disappointed. 'I had hoped things might have smoothed themselves over between you two,' he said. I took him by the arm. 'It's a lovely evening,' I said. 'I'll walk to Fritzinghall and stay at the hotel.'

'What brings you here, sir?' he asked. 'The Moonstone,' I replied. He looked at me curiously, appearing to wonder whether this was a joke. 'I intend to find out who took it,' I said.

He became very serious. 'Now you listen to me,' he said. 'You leave that evil diamond alone! Don't waste your time on it. How can you hope to succeed where the great Sergeant Cuff failed?'

I told him my mind was made up. I knew last year that the diamond was at the bottom of Rachel's dramatic change in attitude towards me, I knew it still was.

'But don't you feel afraid, sir,' he enquired, 'about what you might possibly find out about Miss Rachel - concerning her secret?'

'I'm as certain of her as you are,' I said. 'Knowing her secret won't change my love for her.'

Reassured, he said, 'Then I can tell you, sir, that you may not have far to look.' I stared at him in the gathering darkness. 'Our poor Rosanna left a letter behind addressed to *you*. Limping Lucy has it, sir. She wouldn't give it to anyone except you. It was too late — you'd already left England. We'll go to the fishing village, sir, first thing tomorrow!'

Instructions

I left the hotel before breakfast the next morning. Betteredge was waiting for me at the house, excitement showing through his characteristic calm.

When we arrived at the cottage, Mrs Yolland was in the kitchen with a thin, wild-looking girl with beautiful hair. She looked at me as if I was an object of both horror and fascination and limped upstairs. Mrs Yolland apologized for her daughter's odd behaviour. I heard 'thump, thump,' across the room above us, 'thump, thump,' downstairs again. And there she was with the letter in her hand. She made a sign for me to come with her. I followed her down to the beach, behind some fishing boats. 'I want to look at you,' she said. She

fixed her eyes mercilessly on me. 'No, I can't see what she saw in him. Oh my poor lost darling! What could she see in this man?' She pushed the envelope into my hand. 'Take it!' she said bitterly and limped away.

The envelope contained a letter and a note. I read the letter first:

Sir, if you want to know the meaning of my behaviour towards you, follow the instructions in the note. You must do this alone.

The instructions gave me precise directions how to find a particular rock at the Shivering Sand, how to find a particular part of that rock (uncovered only at low tide), to feel around in the sea plants below it until I felt a chain, and to pull on that chain.

I heard Betteredge behind me. 'I can't stand it any longer, sir. For God's sake, what does it say?' I handed him the note. 'Cuff said it!' he cried, reading it. He looked at the sea. 'The tide is going down. It will turn in an hour.'

Following the instructions, we found the place twenty minutes before the turn of the tide. Betteredge turned to leave.

'Why are you leaving?' I asked. He reminded me of Rosanna's wish that I make the discovery alone. 'I'll wait up the beach,' he said.

I waited, watching, as the morning sun poured beauty on everything around me. The sweetness of the air made the simple act of living and breathing a luxury. The wet quicksand shone like gold. At last, the turn of the tide came. I saw the quicksand begin to move, an awful tremble creeping across its surface. I climbed down the slippery rock until my face was almost touching the quicksand. For an instant a terrible fear gripped me. I thought she might rise up out of it and pull me in. I reached down among the plants underwater — and touched the chain. I pulled, and up out of the quicksand it came: a metal case.

I opened it and pulled out a white nightgown. There was also a letter. I spread out the nightgown, saw the smear of paint on it. Sergeant Cuff's words returned to me: 'Find the dress with the stain, find out who it belongs to, and you haven't far to look for the hand that took the diamond.' I looked at the label on the nightgown and read the name.
FRANKLIN BLAKE.

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