

## The Moonstone – ep 4 – (Wilkie Collins)

Butler Gabriel Betteredge is telling the story. The Moonstone is an Indian diamond, said to have a curse on it, and followed everywhere by three Indians, possibly Hindu priests trying to recover the sacred jewel.

It's 1848, at Lady Verinder's country house in Yorkshire. The Moonstone has been stolen from her daughter Rachel's room. Three Indians, who say they are travelling magicians, have been imprisoned. Superintendent Seegrave is attempting to investigate, but not getting much co-operation. Rachel refuses to speak to him, but she has had an angry conversation with her cousin Franklin. Penelope is Gabriel's daughter; Rosanna is another maid in the house, who has a history of theft and imprisonment.

### Episode 4

I accompanied Seegrave upstairs. Miss Rachel's bedroom door was locked. We heard her crying inside. The police officer was losing his patience. He asked to see the servants. They were questioned one by one, including Penelope for a second time.

My daughter's anger had made a bad impression on him. Afterwards, she rushed out teary-eyed saying that he had as good as told her that she had taken the jewel!

Seegrave then searched the servants' rooms, and found nothing. While he was deciding on his next line of action, Mr Franklin asked to see me in the library. Rosanna rushed out as I entered. The library had been cleaned in the morning, so she had no business in there. Red-faced, with a strange, self-important look in her eyes, she said, 'Mr Franklin dropped a ring upstairs. I gave it to him,' and walked away.

I found Mr Franklin writing. 'I'm going to telegraph to London, Betteredge,' he said. 'My father knows the Commissioner of Police. I hope he can send us a cleverer head than Seegrave.' He lowered his voice to a whisper. 'I think Rosanna Spearman may know more about the Moonstone than she ought to — or she's gone a bit weak in the head. She certainly behaved very strangely just now. She came in and she said: "They'll never find the diamond, will they, sir? Or the person who took it. I'll make sure of that." She actually nodded and smiled at me! I was about to ask her what she meant when you knocked.'

Passing the kitchen with the telegram I saw all the servants were at dinner except Rosanna. I was told she had suddenly felt ill and had gone upstairs. 'Curious,' I said. 'She looked well enough just now.' Penelope followed me out. 'Don't talk like that, father!' she whispered. 'They'll only treat her even worse. The poor girl is breaking her heart over Mr Franklin.'

Seegrave now had a different theory: someone in the house must have helped the Indians. Mr Franklin offered to take him into town to question them again. Mr Godfrey, interested, asked to go with them. Before they left, Mr Franklin had a word with me. 'I won't send the telegram until we've seen the Indians,' he said. 'And keep an eye on Rosanna Spearman while I'm away. And Miss Rachel. I'm very worried about her.' He left me suddenly.

Rosanna came down to tea looking ill, was given some medicine and went back upstairs. Miss Rachel remained in her room, saying she was unwell. The gentlemen returned before dinner. Mr Murthwaite, the Indian traveller, had kindly acted as interpreter, but the interview had failed to throw any new light on the affair. Mr Franklin had sent his telegram, and Superintendent Seegrave was going to return the following morning.

### **(Chapter 9 - Sergeant Cuff Arrives)**

Two pieces of news came on Friday morning. First, the baker had met Rosanna walking towards Fritzinghall on Thursday afternoon; second, Dr Candy had caught a cold driving home in the rain after the birthday dinner and had a dangerously high fever. Shortly after Seegrave arrived, a telegram came for Mr Franklin. 'Sergeant Cuff is arriving this morning!' he said. 'When it comes to unravelling a mystery, there isn't the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff!' Seegrave sat down immediately to write a report for the famous London detective.

I went down to the gate to look out for him. When a hackney cab from the station drove up, out got a grizzled, elderly man, dressed all in decent black, his face as sharp as a hatchet, the skin as yellow and withered as an autumn leaf. He might have been a parson, or an undertaker, rather than what he was. Could this be the famous Sergeant Cuff?

As he introduced himself in a quiet, sad voice, his steely grey eyes met mine. They were as sharp as knives, those eyes, and seemed to know more about you than you did yourself. I told him Superintendent Seegrave was waiting to see him and he followed me silently towards the house. The first sign of any interest that he showed was when he saw our rose garden. He began talking to the gardener - who soon found out he was an expert on roses. He touched a white rose with his thin yellow fingers. 'Pretty dear,' he said softly, as though speaking to a child.

Seegrave and Cuff spoke in private in my office. Afterwards, the Superintendent seemed excited and the Sergeant was yawning. 'The Sergeant wishes to see Miss Verinder's sitting-room,' Seegrave announced authoritatively. I took them upstairs.

Softly, Cuff examined the cabinet and the entire room. Only the door seemed to awaken his curiosity. 'How did this happen?' he asked me, placing a stick-like finger on the dried smear. Seegrave answered: 'The servants crowded into the room yesterday morning. A dress did it. I ordered them out.'

'Did either of you notice which dress?' asked Cuff, still speaking to me.

'I can't remember,' Seegrave replied. 'It's unimportant.' Cuff gave Seegrave a sad look. 'In all my experience of this dirty little world I have never known anything unimportant. We must find the dress that did this; and we must know when that paint was wet.' He turned to me. 'Sir, yesterday, you all came in here around eleven, I believe. Does anybody know whether the paint was dry at that time?' I told him Mr Franklin knew Cuff sent for him and he joined us in the room. 'The paint dries in twelve hours,' he declared. 'The smeared part was finished at 3 p.m. on Wednesday.'

'Therefore, Mr Blake, the paint dried around 3 a.m. on Thursday. It must have been dry for approximately eight hours when you all came in here at eleven.' Miss Rachel suddenly rushed out of her room. Cuff bowed and introduced himself. 'Take my advice, Sergeant,' she said angrily. 'Don't allow Mr Franklin Blake to help you.' She turned to Mr Franklin with a wild look but, curiously, was unable to look him in the eyes. Cuff's eyes never left her. 'Thank you, miss,' he said. 'Do you know anything about the smear? Might you have done it by accident?'

'I know nothing,' she declared and went and shut herself up in her room again. Hearing her burst out crying inside, Cuff said, 'Miss Verinder is extremely upset about the loss of her diamond.' A faint smile appeared on his lips. 'Naturally! — it's an extremely valuable jewel.' His face hardened. 'Now, we must discover when the paint was last seen without that smear. Who saw it last on Wednesday night?'

'Possibly Mr Betteredge's daughter, Penelope,' Mr Franklin replied. Cuff took me aside. 'We don't want to annoy the servants, do we?' he said, 'so please tell them I don't suspect anybody. I have no evidence — yet — that the diamond has been stolen. I only know it's been lost. Say I simply want them to help me find it. Now go and fetch your daughter.' Cuff seemed to approve of Penelope, She told him she saw them finish the last part of painting the door, and had seen it as late as midnight, without a smear. She had been

careful not to touch it. He examined her dress. There was no trace of paint. He then asked me whether a dog might have entered the room. I said this was impossible. He studied the smear closely and was satisfied it had been made by clothing - between midnight and three o'clock on Thursday morning. 'Yes, Superintendent,' he said, 'Please feel free to return to Fritzinghall. But leave one of your men here, will you? - in case I need him. Good morning.' He went to the window and stood there whistling 'The Last Rose of Summer.' Seegrave, deeply offended, marched noisily out. Nodding thoughtfully, his eyes on Miss Rachel's bedroom door, Cuff asked to speak to my lady. Leaving the room I heard Mr Franklin say to him, 'Can you guess yet who has stolen the diamond?' 'Nobody has stolen the diamond,' Cuff replied.

## **(Chapter 10 - The Search Begins)**

'Must I see him?' my lady said. 'I don't know why but I have a feeling that horrible little man is bringing trouble and misery into this house. But if I must see him, I must. Stay with me while we talk, will you, Gabriel?'

Mr Franklin returned to Mr Godfrey who was soon to be leaving. I took Cuff to my lady's room. 'At present, only one thing is certain,' he said to her. 'The diamond is missing.' He explained the smear on the door. 'The stained dress may lead us to the stone,' he said in conclusion. 'So I must search the servants' wardrobes, I'm afraid.' She refused, saying she would not let them be insulted a second time. 'I don't think they'll object, your ladyship,' he replied, 'if I tell them - with your permission - that I'm going to search everybody's wardrobes.'

She seemed to appreciate the Sergeant's clever solution.

'Very well, I agree to let you search my room. I am sure Miss Verinder, Mr Blake, and Mr Ablewhite won't refuse either.'

Mr Godfrey came in to say goodbye with Mr Franklin. My lady explained the Sergeant's plan. Mr Franklin agreed to let his wardrobe be searched. Mr Godfrey offered the Sergeant the keys to his luggage, saying it could be searched and sent on to London later. Mr Godfrey left a message for Miss Rachel - which made it clear to me that he had not taken her No for an answer.

'My lady,' said Cuff as soon as the young gentlemen had left, 'I must be able to account for the clothes in the house, especially the clothes that have been washed. They will be recorded in the washing book, I believe?' Rosanna brought in the washing book, looking very tired and pale, and left. He examined the book, shut it again, and said, 'The last time I saw the woman who brought this book she was in prison for theft.'

I told him the truth about Rosanna, of how my lady had taken her in from the Reformatory. My lady made it very clear how satisfied she was with her. 'You don't suspect her, I hope?' she added, getting up to go and ask Miss Rachel for the keys to her wardrobe. The Sergeant bowed. 'I have said, your ladyship, that I don't suspect anyone of stealing - at least not at the moment.'

Cuff whistled 'The Last Rose of Summer', until Samuel came in with a note. Miss Rachel flatly refused to let her wardrobe be searched. 'Ah!' said the Sergeant, as though somehow expecting this. 'It's all wardrobes or none - a pity.' His sad eyes fell on me. 'You don't seem too disappointed,' I said. 'Mr Betteredge,' he replied, 'let's go and have a look at those roses, shall we?'