

## The Moonstone (Wilkie Collins) – Episode 7

The story takes place between 1848 and 1850.

The Moonstone is a sacred Hindu diamond, stolen years before in India by Colonel Herncastle, the wicked brother of Lady Verinder. Three Indians turn up wherever it goes, and legend has it they are Hindu priests trying to get it back. Herncastle left it to his niece Rachel in his will. Given to her on her birthday, it was stolen in the night. Two cousins are in love with Rachel: Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ableman.

Sergeant Cuff knew the maid Rosanna Spearman had replaced some paint-stained garment with one she had made – he suspected it was a night shirt – and hidden the old one. He followed her to the Shivering Sands – quicksands – but was too late – she had disappeared there and left a suicide note. He told Lady Verinder that her daughter, Rachel, had involved Rosanna in the apparent theft of the diamond, probably to find a way of disposing of it to a money-lender in London. He suggested that Rachel may have debts. He wanted to shock her into telling the truth by telling her suddenly of Rosanna's death. Lady Verinder insisted that she would face Rachel with the news, without Sergeant Cuff.

The story is being told by Gabriel Betteredge, steward of Lady Verinder's household in Yorkshire.

### Episode 7

My lady's carriage returned empty, earlier than expected. She had decided to stay at her sister's in Fritzinghall with Rachel for the time being. The driver brought two letters, one for Mr Franklin, one for me, A cheque dropped out of mine when I opened it. The Sergeant appeared on the steps. 'Ah!' he said in his sad way. 'News from her ladyship?' I read him the letter:

*Gabriel, Miss Verinder declared that she has never spoken a private word to Rosanna or communicated with her by other means. They never met, not even accidentally, on the night the diamond was lost. I warned her that her behaviour was inviting suspicion. She assured me that she has no debts to anybody, and that the diamond has never been in her possession since she put it in the drawer on Wednesday night. She remained stubbornly silent when I asked her if she could explain the stone's disappearance. With tears in her eyes, she said, 'The day will come when you will know why I'm silent.'*

*Give Sergeant Cuff this cheque and tell him that I am absolutely certain that his suspicions are mistaken.*

Cuff's eyebrows went up when he looked at the cheque. 'I will always remember her ladyship's generosity,' he said, but he placed it on the table. 'A fine woman. Yes, Lady Verinder has smoothed things over very cleverly - for the moment. But we shall hear more of the Moonstone before too long.'

'If you don't think Miss Rachel is telling the truth then prove it,' I said angrily. I was

sick of his accusations. He was so obviously wrong. Miss Rachel was incapable of doing what he suspected.

He wasn't offended. Quite the opposite - he took my hand and shook it! 'You're a fine man, sir!' he said warmly. 'I won't say a word more about Lady Verinder and her daughter. I'll simply say that these three things will happen. First, you will hear from the Yollands - after Rosanna's letter is delivered on Monday. Second, you will hear of the three Indians again - here, if Miss Rachel remains here, in London if she goes to London. And third, sooner or later you will hear from Mr Septimus Luker, a money-lender. Time will tell if I am right or wrong, Mr Betteredge, and if we don't meet again before I retire from this dirty job, I hope you'll come and visit me at my cottage near London. And bring the gardener — I'll teach that man a thing or two about roses!'

I couldn't help liking the man, even though I hated him.

## To London

Mr Franklin had made up his mind to leave. 'Wait a day or two longer, sir, and give Miss Rachel another chance,' I said. He handed me my lady's letter.

*Franklin, I am forced to believe now that the Moonstone's mysterious disappearance is no mystery to Rachel. I have tried everything but something forbids her from breaking her silence. She is in a pitiful state of nervous excitement. I shall take her to London for a change of air and some medical advice. Please come and see us there, will you? But not straight away. It is impossible to reason with her at the moment, and for the moment you two are better apart. Give her time.*

'The Moonstone has given Colonel Herncastle his revenge,' said Mr Franklin. 'But in a way he never dreamt of.' We said goodbye and, sad and weary, I went inside. He was right. The diamond had brought us nothing but unhappiness.

The next day (Sunday) Samuel brought a message. My lady and Miss Rachel were leaving directly from Fritzinghall for London that day. My daughter, Penelope, was to accompany them as Miss Rachel's maid, but I was to remain in the country.

I had said goodbye to Penelope at the gates and was walking back through the rose garden when I heard my name called. I turned and saw the fisherman Yolland's daughter, Limping Lucy. 'Where's Franklin Blake?' she said fiercely. 'Mr Franklin Blake, you mean,' I replied. 'Murderer Franklin Blake, I mean,' she shouted. 'He caused Rosanna's death!'

'What makes you say such a thing?' I replied angrily.

'You don't care!' she said softly. 'Everybody treated her badly. Except me. I loved her.' Tears came to her eyes. 'I'd saved up a little money. We were going to go and live together in London and earn our living by sewing. Until *he* came. She lost her mind when that man arrived. "I can't live without him," and "Oh, Lucy, he never even looks at me." It was pitiful. And then her letter came this morning.' Wiping her eyes, she cried, 'Where is he?'

'He's in London,' I replied. 'Why do you want to see him?'

'I have a letter from Rosanna to give him. If he wants it he must come back and get it from me. I and nobody else must give it to him.' She turned and limped away towards the Shivering Sand.

On Tuesday morning a letter came from Mr Franklin's father's head servant, an old friend of mine. He mentioned that Mr Franklin had left England for Europe on Sunday morning. And so, for some time to come, there would be no hope of knowing whether Rosanna's letter contained a confession or not.

Thursday brought news from Penelope. A London doctor had earned a lot of money by suggesting that the best cure for Miss Rachel was amusement: flower shows, operas, dances, that sort of thing. Mr Godfrey had visited and was most politely received.

Saturday's post brought an envelope from Cuff containing an article from a London newspaper, a report from the law courts:

*Mr Septimus Luker, a dealer in Oriental jewellers complained to the court that he had been annoyed by three poor Indians. Again and again they had tried to enter his house, asking for charity. Mr Luker believed they intended to rob him and demanded that they should be arrested. The judge dismissed the complaint, saying there was no evidence. He advised Mr Luker to get the police's advice on how to protect his property.*

The devilish Indian diamond had left us and found its way to London. And so it is here that I must leave the story for someone else to take up.

## **THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH (1848—1849) FIRST NARRATIVE**

*by Miss Clack, niece of the late Sir John Verinder*

### **A Strange Mistake**

My dear parents (both now in heaven) taught me to fold my clothes carefully, to always say my prayers before going to bed, and to keep a diary. The last of these excellent habits will, I hope, enable me to be useful to a wealthy relation. Recently, Mr Franklin Blake wrote to me here in France (where I have been forced to live for economic reasons). He asked me - with the typical lack of feeling of the rich - to reopen wounds that Time has hardly closed. He offered me a small sum to write a narrative of what I witnessed while visiting Aunt Verinder in London. After much searching of my soul I decided that it was my Christian duty to swallow my pride, accept his cheque, and help him.



My diary tells me I was accidentally passing Aunt Verinder's house in Montagu Square on July 3rd 1848, and felt that it would be polite to knock. The daughter of that godless old devil Betteredge answered the door. She informed me that Aunt Verinder and her daughter (I really cannot call her my cousin!) had arrived a week before. I sent her upstairs to say that I didn't want to disturb them but as I was passing I wondered whether I could be of any use to them. When the Betteredge girl came downstairs I decided to have a Christian word with her about the unnecessary amount of ribbons on

her cap. She opened the front door before telling me (with a minimum of politeness) that I was invited to lunch tomorrow. I left.

That evening we had a meeting of the Young Mothers' Small Clothes Society. I was a member of the charity's Committee, as was my precious and most admirable friend, Mr Godfrey Ablewhite. To my disappointment he did not appear that night, and I was shocked to hear from my Christian sisters of the Committee that the previous Friday he and a gentleman called Mr Septimus Luker had been victims of a strange conspiracy.

According to the newspapers, early on June 30th our gifted Mr Ablewhite, after cashing a cheque at a bank in Lombard Street, encountered Mr Luker - a perfect stranger - who happened to be leaving the bank at the same time. The stranger insisted that Mr Godfrey preceded him through the door; they bowed and parted. Mr Godfrey went back to his house in Lambeth, where a poorly dressed young boy was waiting for him. The boy handed him a letter, saying he had been asked to deliver it by an old lady he didn't know. It asked him to go, an hour later, to a house in Northumberland Street. The woman, who intended to give a large sum of money to charity, wanted information on the Young Mothers' Small Clothes Society. Our Christian Hero never hesitates when good can be done. He went instantly.

A very respectable-looking Englishman answered the door and led him to an apartment at the back of the house. Entering, Mr Godfrey noticed an ancient Oriental book on the table. As he was admiring it, a brown-skinned arm took him by the neck. He struggled but there was more than one person. His eyes were bandaged, he was tied to a chair, and was searched. Words were spoken in a foreign tongue, then the men left.

He was discovered later by the owners of the house. They had rented the apartment to the Englishman the day before. Seeing that the door had been left open for a long time they went in to see if anything was wrong. Mr Godfrey's belongings were lying everywhere but nothing was missing. The Oriental book was gone. Had Mr Godfrey been the victim of a strange mistake?

On the same day, Mr Luker, having left the bank, visited various parts of London on business. Returning home, he found a letter waiting for him. A customer from Manchester, a collector of Oriental antiques, announced that he was on a short visit to London and desired to see Mr Luker urgently about an important sale. He drove immediately to an address in Tottenham Court Road where exactly the same assault took place - with one slight difference. Mr Luker's watch and purse were safe, but one document had been taken: a receipt for a valuable of great price which he had put in the bank. The receipt was useless to anyone else since it clearly stated that only Mr Luker himself could remove the object from the bank.

Mr Luker hurried to the bank. Nobody had been there with the receipt. He went to the police who told him about Mr Godfrey's similar experience. They believed that a robbery had been planned and that Mr Godfrey had paid the price of being seen with Mr Luker.

1890 words, without intro