

## The Moonstone (Wilkie Collins) – Episode 9

Miss Clack is telling the story. She's poor, puritanically religious, and convinced that the Verinders are damned by their frivolous ways, (even their maid, Penelope, has ribbons in her cap!)

Rachel Verinder's cousin, Godfrey Ablewhite, and a money-lender called Mr Luker, have been attacked and searched, probably by the Indians who are concerned with the Moonstone. A receipt for an article deposited in the bank by Luker is the only thing that was taken. Rachel has stated that she knows who took the Moonstone, and that Godfrey Ablewhite is innocent. Lady Verinder has told her niece, Miss Clack, that she is ill with heart trouble and may die at any time. Her will leaves everything to Rachel. Miss Clack is determined to save Lady Verinder's soul – she has left religious books all over the house for her to find.

### Episode 9

Next morning, as I was about to leave for Montagu Square, my landlady knocked. Samuel, the young servant, was standing beside her with a parcel, looking as fresh and blue-eyed as ever. I felt a Christian, motherly interest in the boy, so I invited him in. He put the parcel down, looking as though he wanted to run away, and said there was a letter inside. I delayed him with a few questions. Could I see my aunt if I called at Montagu Square? No, she had gone out for a drive with Miss Rachel and Mr Ablewhite. I also discovered that they were going to a ball that evening and a concert the following day. I offered Samuel tea. He rushed out.

We had a meeting of the Young Mothers' Small Clothes Society that night. The next afternoon there was a meeting of the British Ladies' Servants'-Sunday- Sweetheart-Supervision Society. Obviously Mr Ablewhite would not be present at either. I was beginning to see our hero in a slightly different light.

Feverishly, I began opening the parcel. Was it the 'remembrance' my aunt had promised me? No, it was my twelve precious books. I admit I was a little disappointed but, as you know, the true Christian never gives up; so at two o'clock, there I was with my books again, knocking on Lady Verinder's door.

Miss Cap Ribbons said she had had a bad night and was resting on the sofa. I said I would wait in the library. I thought that Rachel and her pleasure-loving friends (Mr Godfrey included, alas!) were all at the concert. So, having placed books here and there, I decided to go upstairs and put some in the living-room. As I entered I heard a knock on the door downstairs, then heard Samuel say,

'Upstairs, if you please, sir.' I heard footsteps. Not wanting to be discovered upstairs on my own, I hurried into a small area on one side of the living-room and pulled the curtain. The man entered the living-room and began walking up and down, talking to himself. 'Do it today! I'll do it today,' he said. It was Godfrey Ablewhite.

### **A Silent Listener**

I was about to rush out and implore him, in the name of the Ladies' Committees, to explain himself; when I heard Rachel enter and say, 'Why didn't you go into the library?' He laughed softly. 'Because I was told Miss Clack is in there.' She laughed. 'Clack, in the library!' she replied. 'You're right, Godfrey, we're much better here. Bring that chair nearer to me.' Carefully, I moved the curtain so I could see. 'Well?' she went on, 'What did you say to them?'

'That your mother was unwell, dear Rachel. They were sad not to see you at the concert.' He brought his chair even closer and took her hand. Can words describe how

sickened I was by this sight?

'Have you forgotten, Godfrey?' she said. 'We agreed to be cousins and nothing more.'

'My heart breaks that agreement, Rachel, every time I see you.'

'Then don't see me.'

'No! Am I mad, Rachel, to dream that one day your heart may soften to me?' He put his handkerchief to his eyes. Even *she* seemed to be moved.

'Are you really sure, Godfrey, that you are so fond of me?'

'You're my only interest in life. Would you believe that now my charitable duties seem like a nuisance to me? When I see a Ladies' Committee now I wish I was at the other end of the earth!'

'You've made your confession,' she said. 'Now I think the best thing you can do is leave. I'm not good enough for you, Godfrey. I hate myself; don't you understand?' She burst into tears. 'And I don't want your pity! Now go away, will you!' He did something completely unexpected. He knelt at her feet . . . and put both arms round her! 'Noble person,' he said. She was so surprised, or fascinated — I don't know which — that she made absolutely no effort to put his arms back where they should have been. 'Yes,' he repeated. 'You're such a noble person. Please let me be the one to take care of your poor wounded heart.'

'Godfrey,' she replied, drying her eyes. 'You must be mad!'

'I never spoke more seriously, my dearest. I don't ask for your love straight away. I'll be content simply with your affection and respect. Only Time can heal wounds as deep as yours.'

She looked at him, confusion clouding her face. 'Don't tempt me, Godfrey,' she said sadly. 'I'm wretched and reckless enough as it is. Don't tempt me to be more reckless still!'

'One question, Rachel. Have you any personal objection to me?'

'I — I always liked you. I respect and admire you.'

'How many wives can say that of their husbands, Rachel? Marry me, dearest! I prize your respect and admiration more than the love of any other woman! I won't get up until you've said yes!'

She looked at him curiously. 'Do you feel as confidently as you speak? You won't hurry me? You won't ask me for more than I can give?'

'My Angel. All that I ask of you is your hand!'

'Take it then.'

With those words she accepted him! He pulled her nearer, until her face touched his, and then — No! I cannot carry this shocking disclosure any farther. I tried to close my eyes before it happened but I was just a moment too late. She submitted. 'Shall I speak to your mother,' he asked, 'or shall you?'

'I don't want my mother to hear from either of us until she's better. Godfrey, go now, come back this evening.' She got up and looked in my direction. 'Who closed those curtains?' She came towards me, was about to open the curtains when — my heart almost stopped — Samuel's voice shouted from downstairs. 'Miss Rachel! Where are you?' She ran to the door. 'Miss Rachel, my lady has fainted.'

Moments later I was alone. I went downstairs unseen and saw Mr Godfrey hurrying out to fetch the doctor. I found Rachel on her knees by the sofa. One look at my aunt was enough. She was dead. I was so shocked that I didn't remember until, a few days later that she hadn't given me my little 'remembrance'.

## **Brighton**

Ten days after Lady Verinder's tragic death, the whole family knew about the secret marriage engagement. I didn't see Rachel until a month later. My aunt's will had named her brother-in-law, Godfrey Ablewhite's father, as Rachel's legal adviser.

Rachel wanted to move. The house in London reminded her of her poor mother, the house in Yorkshire reminded her of the terrible affair of the Moonstone. Old Mr Ablewhite

suggested renting a house in Brighton. Mrs Ablewhite could come and stay there with her. He asked Mrs Ablewhite to make arrangements.

Aunt Ablewhite has never done a thing for herself in her life. She found the rented house in Brighton by staying at a hotel in London and asking her son to find it. She found the servants by inviting me, her niece, to tea. 'Drusilla, dear, I want some servants. You're so clever. Please get them for me.' I went into the next room to make a list, and was surprised to see Rachel. She got up and took my hand. 'Drusilla,' she said, 'I've always been so rude to you. I do hope you'll forgive me.' Of course, like a good Christian, I accepted her apology. She invited me to come and stay with her in Brighton. There had been such a remarkable change in the poor child that I felt that I might at last be able to help her towards the only true happiness, the love of God. And the stay in Brighton would be a chance to begin the good work.

She suggested that I should go to Brighton first to prepare the house. I accepted. By Saturday afternoon I had found suitable servants and all was ready. The joy of being able to convert her to the Christian faith filled my mind with a heavenly peace. Having placed a few carefully chosen books in Rachel's rooms, I went downstairs to wait for them to arrive.

They arrived at six, not with Mr Godfrey, as I expected, but with the scheming old lawyer, Bruff. I had prepared a little heaven for my Rachel and here was a snake already! Rachel went over to the window and stared at the sea. 'Tired, my love?' I enquired.

'No,' she replied. 'Just a little sad — remembering happy days that can never come again. I've often seen the sea in Yorkshire with that light on it.'

Bruff stayed the evening. I was sure he had a reason for accompanying them to Brighton. When he finally left for his hotel he invited himself to lunch the next day.

The next morning I took Rachel to church. At lunch, she refused to eat, saying she had a headache. The lawyer jumped at his chance. 'A walk is a good cure for a headache,' he said. 'I'll accompany you.' She accepted his offer enthusiastically.

'It's past two,' I remarked gently. 'Afternoon church is at three.' But a minute later they had left the house.

They had got back when I returned from church. One look told me the lawyer had said what he wanted to say. I had never seen Rachel so silent and thoughtful. Bruff got up to leave. He had (or pretended he had) to be in London the next day. 'Are you sure of your decision?' he said. 'Quite sure,' she said. When he had left she went to her room and did not come down to dinner.

When I took up her cup of tea the next morning, I asked her whether she had had time to look at any of my books. Yes, she said, and they had not interested her. 'I was wondering, my love,' I said, 'whether Mr Bruff might have told you some bad news?' Her dark eyes flashed at me. 'No, not at all,' she said. 'It was most interesting news.' She looked out at the sea. 'I suppose,' I said with gentle interest, 'that it was news about Mr Godfrey?' She thought a moment then said these remarkable words: '*I shall never marry Godfrey Ablewhite.*'

'What can you possibly mean?' I exclaimed. 'The marriage is considered by everyone to be a settled thing!' She looked at me very seriously. 'Wait until Godfrey Ablewhite comes here today,' she said, 'and you will see. Now, please, Drusilla, I'm going to have a bath.' It was the best way of making me leave the room.

After breakfast she wandered aimlessly from room to room, then suddenly sat down at the piano and began hammering out shameful tunes from the most un-Christian shows. I was forced to leave the house.

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