

The Moonstone (Wilkie Collins) - Episode 12

Franklin Blake is telling the story. He came back from France on the death of his father, and tried to see Rachel but she refused. He then went up to Yorkshire determined to solve the mystery of the Moonstone. Gabriel Betteredge told him Lucy Yolland – Limping Lucy – had a letter for him left by Rosanna Spearman, the maid suspected of involvement in the loss of the Moonstone, who killed herself in the Shivering Sand. The letter told him to go to a certain place, pull on a chain and rescue a metal case from the quicksand. He did so, and found a nightshirt with a paintstain from the door to Rachel's room (the person who stole the diamond smeared the wet paint on the door) – and the nightshirt was his own.

Rosanna's letter

The shock of it stopped all thinking and feeling. The next thing I remember is walking back with Betteredge, and then his little sitting-room. In the state I was in, the old man was an enormous comfort to me. 'I have absolutely no knowledge of taking the diamond,' I told him. 'The very idea of my taking it is ridiculous! But here are the facts: my nightgown, the paint on it!'

'I smell something suspicious, sir,' said Betteredge, pouring me another whisky. 'Was there anything else in the case?' I was instantly reminded of the letter. I opened it. There were many pages, signed at the end by Rosanna Spearman.

'Wait,' I said. 'How do we know she didn't steal the diamond. She may have smeared the nightgown deliberately.' Betteredge put his hand on my arm. 'In justice to the girl's memory, sir, see what the letter says.' This is what it said:

Sir, I shall be dead when you read this, but I have a confession to make. I love you.

Why did I hide your nightgown with the paint on it? Why did I say nothing to you about it? Because I loved you. Do you remember when you met us on the beach that morning? You came to me, like a lover in a dream. From that moment on I loved you more and more each minute, completely forgetting who I was — only a servant, not a lady. I believe I found out you were in love with Miss Rachel before you knew it yourself. Would you have loved her if she was a servant?

The morning the diamond disappeared, after Seegrave pointed out the smear on the door and said someone's dress had done it, he sent us all back to our work. After I had left Miss Rachel's room, Penelope saw me looking to see if I had any paint on my dress and told me not to bother. The paint had been dry for hours, she said. She had heard Mr Franklin tell Miss Rachel that it would take twelve hours to dry. They had finished the door at 3 p.m. Therefore it had dried around three that morning.

It was my job, sir, to clean your room. It was the happiest hour of the day for me. I used to kiss your pillow — I beg your pardon, I'm forgetting myself. Well, that morning, I saw the smear of paint on your nightgown. It was proof you had been in Miss Rachel's sitting-room between midnight and three that morning! I was so shocked I ran to my room with it. At the time I never even thought you might have taken the diamond. I

decided to keep the nightgown and wait and watch, to see what use I might make of it. But how could I keep it without being found out? The only way was to make another one exactly the same.

I had just finished your room when I was called to be questioned by Seegrave. Next, all the servants' wardrobes were searched. Later after Penelope was questioned a second time, she came back to the kitchen boiling with anger. According to her, Seegrave suspected her because she was the last person in Miss Rachel's sitting-room that night. I knew you had been there later. My head began to spin when I realized: YOU were the thief! Deliberately, you had been the most active the next day organizing the search, fetching the police just to deceive us.

I believed you were guilty because I wanted you to be guilty. It gave me power over you, power to destroy you in Rachel's eyes. I had the nightgown that was the only proof against you. But you would miss it. I needed cloth to make the new one so, after lunch, I pretended to feel ill. Sergeant Cuff I know, discovered later that I was not in my room all that afternoon. But others already suspected me. That night, as I was working in secret, I heard two servants whispering outside my door.

There was a knock on the door. 'Come in!' Betteredge shouted. One of the strangest looking men I have ever seen entered. Judging by his figure and movements, he was still young, but his face told another story: he might have been older than Betteredge. His skin was coffee-coloured, his nose like those of the ancient peoples of the East. Dark, dreamy eyes, hollow fleshless cheeks added to his odd appearance. But it was his hair which was the most remarkable. Originally dark and curly, it had gone white in the most extraordinary manner: in stripes here and there, like spilt paint. Seeing me staring stupidly at him, he said, 'I beg your pardon,' and handed a piece of paper to Betteredge. His eyes rested on me again, and he left the room as quietly as he had entered.

'Who was that?' I asked.

'Ezra Jennings. Dr Candy's assistant,' replied Betteredge. 'Poor Dr Candy never recovered from his illness, I'm afraid, the fever he caught on that night, going home from Rachel's birthday dinner. He lost his memory. Jennings takes care of the few patients he has left —poor people mostly.'

'You don't seem to like him,' I remarked.

'Nobody does, sir - because of his appearance, I suppose. He's a quiet man, keeps himself to himself. He came with the list of the sick. Miss Rachel has carried on her mother's tradition of taking wine to the poor people who are sick.'

I began reading again:

I knew Sergeant Cuff would want to examine our clothes. There was nowhere in my room where I could hide the nightgown, so I undressed and put it on under my dress. I was asked to take the washing book to Sergeant Cuff. He and I had already met more than once, but he treated me as if I was a stranger. I knew this was a bad sign. Afterwards, as it was time for your return from taking Mr Ablewhite to the station, I went to your favourite walk near the rose garden. It was the last chance, perhaps, that I might have to speak to you. You never appeared, and

worse — Sergeant Cuff saw me hiding there.

Why didn't I go and see you later? Why didn't I go and say 'I have something to say to you, Mr Franklin. You must listen!' I could have done — I had such power over you! I had heard Mr Betteredge talk about your debts. You were obviously going to pawn the diamond. I could have told you of a man in London who would have taken the jewel. Why didn't I speak to you? When I was a thief I had taken much greater risks. What was I afraid of? You, Mr Franklin. In my dreams I loved you with all my heart. Before your face ... I was afraid of you.

Everyone was questioned by Sergeant Cuff. My bitterest enemies, cook and Lady Verinder's maid, went in before me. He was very careful to hide it but I knew that after speaking to them he suspected me of making a new nightgown secretly — and therefore of being involved in the disappearance of the diamond. The great Cuff was miles from the truth! You were safe as long as the nightgown was safe.

If I had been less fond of you I would have destroyed it. But I couldn't — it was the only thing that could prove to you that I had saved you. It was your debt to me.

After the interview I said I was feeling ill and needed some fresh air. I went straight to the Yollands' house. Here I am now, writing. When I have finished I shall go to the Shivering Sand, hide the nightgown and then — what then? I will leave this cruel world that has refused me the happiness it gives so easily to others. Don't blame yourself for this, sir, but try — please try — to remember me kindly. If you do, I believe my ghost will tremble with joy.

I love you, sir, Rosanna Spearman.

Return to London

I decided to go back to London that day, present the facts to Mr Bruff, and obtain an interview (no matter how) with Rachel.

'Betteredge,' I asked as we were walking to the station, 'have you ever known me to walk in my sleep?' He looked at me for a moment, nodded his head and walked on. 'I see your meaning, sir,' he replied. 'And the answer is no. But if we are to believe the nightgown, then you went to the room that night - without knowing it - and you took the diamond - without knowing it. How that is possible I don't know, but if it is, how can the diamond have found its way to London - without you knowing it?' I said nothing. I was so upset I couldn't think straight.

We reached the station with only a minute or two to spare. I noticed Ezra Jennings by the book stall. He took off his hat to me.

In London I went straight to Mr Bruff's house in Hampstead. He examined the nightgown and read Rosanna Spearman's letter. 'Mr Franklin,' he said, 'this is a very serious matter — for Miss Rachel as much as for you. Her extraordinary behaviour is no mystery now. She believes you took the diamond. She must be persuaded or forced to tell us why she thinks this. As a lawyer, I can tell you that the evidence against you falls down, firstly, on one important point. There must be proof that *you* wore that nightgown when it was smeared. There is also Miss Spearman's letter. It shows that she was

clever. If Rachel suspected you simply on the proof of the nightgown then I'm sure it was Rosanna who showed it to her. It was her opportunity to destroy the love between you and Miss Rachel. Search your memory. While you were staying at the house, did anything happen to make Rachel doubt your honesty?'

I immediately remembered the Frenchman's visit. I had foolishly accepted a loan in Paris. When the time came, I found it impossible to pay, and had left a promissary note. The man came to find me, and high words passed between us. My aunt had paid him, but she had been shocked by my irresponsibility. Rachel heard about it and said some severe things to me.

'I must speak to Rachel myself,' I said. 'I know that somewhere in her heart she still has some affection for me. The question is how - how to see her?' The lawyer gave this some thought. 'I'll invite her here the day after tomorrow,' he said. 'Expect a call from me that morning.'

1951 words, without intro