

The Moonstone – Episode 3 – (Wilkie Collins)

The story is being told by Gabriel Betteredge, head servant to Lady Verinder and her daughter Rachel. Gabriel has a daughter, Penelope, who's a maid in the house in Yorkshire. It's 1848, Rachel has been left the Moonstone as a birthday present in the Will of her wicked uncle, Colonel Herncastle, her mother's brother. The diamond is said to be cursed, and to be followed wherever it goes by three Hindu priests, who want to get the sacred jewel back, and there are three Indians, said to be travelling magicians, in the neighbourhood. Two cousins, Franklin and Godfrey, are in love with Rachel, and Penelope believes she has refused Godfrey and favours Franklin. Another maid, the hunchbacked Rosanna, is in love with Franklin, who never notices her. It's the evening of Rachel's birthday.

Episode 3

(Chapter 7 - The Indians Return)

Twenty-four guests sat down to dinner. I will mention only a few.

Miss Rachel, the queen of the evening, wore her wonderful birthday present. Cleverly, Mr Franklin had fixed it to her dress with silver wire. On her left sat Dr Candy, from Fritzinghall, a pleasant man, wise in his medicine and fond of a joke. On her right sat the explorer Mr Murthwaite, a tall quiet man with a watchful eye. He had spent years wandering about India. After a long look at the diamond, he said, 'Miss Rachel, if you ever go to India, don't take that with you - your life wouldn't be worth sixpence.'

As the meal went on I became sadly aware that the party lacked life. Nobody had their usual appetite, there were often gaps in the talk, and even old jokers like Dr Candy had nothing funny to say. Normally brilliant conversationalists seemed almost dull - Mr Godfrey, for instance. He spent the whole meal in serious discussion with Miss Clack, a distant cousin of Miss Rachel's. She was one of his ladies' charity friends, a most religiously-minded woman. However, I noticed she had a rather low-cut dress and a fondness for champagne.

Not even Mr Franklin was able to brighten up the evening. On the contrary! Having annoyed our local priest with his ideas on marriage, he made Dr Candy angry with his views on medicine. The argument ended on the subject of his sleepless nights. Dr Candy told him that his nerves were out of order and that medicine could cure his sleep problems. Mr Franklin replied that medicine was like a blind man in the dark. My lady wisely interrupted them, and invited the ladies to leave the gentlemen over their wine.

Shortly afterwards, as I was filling Mr Franklin's glass, I nearly jumped out of my skin. It was the sound of a drum. The Indians had returned! I ran outside, only to see my lady welcoming the three men and the boy. And beside her stood Miss Rachel, with the diamond shining on her dress! Immediately, Mr Franklin went and stood next to her, ready for anything. Mr Murthwaite spoke to them in their language, his words instantly wiping the smiles off their faces. They bowed to him in the most polite and snaky way, and their chief, his dark skin now slightly grey, turned to us and said, 'There will be no magic tonight.' Everyone except Mr Murthwaite, Mr Franklin and myself went inside. I led the Indians to the gates and they left. When I returned, Mr Murthwaite and Mr Franklin were talking. 'Gabriel,' said Mr Franklin, 'Mr Murthwaite suspects that they are priests. I've told him the story behind Rachel's present.'

'They're certainly not magicians,' said Mr Murthwaite. 'How you escaped them so far, I can't imagine. You're lucky to be alive Mr Blake. Yes, there can only be one reason for

their presence here: to return the diamond to the forehead of their god.'

'Priests!' I said. 'Murdering thieves, you mean!'

'They're only acting according to their religion,' he said. 'They've seen the diamond now,' said Mr Franklin.

'Take it to Amsterdam tomorrow,' said Murthwaite. 'Have it cut into several smaller ones. It will no longer be the Moonstone, therefore no longer holy to its - to those who once owned it.'

'What about tonight?' I asked. 'They may come back.'

'No, they won't risk that,' Murthwaite replied. 'But let your hunting dogs loose in the garden just in case.' He and Mr Franklin went inside and I sat down, sweating, wondering what to do. Penelope came out later with a report from the drawing-room. Mr Murthwaite had fallen asleep. Mr Franklin had deliberately annoyed Mr Godfrey by making fun of women's charities. Dr Candy had mysteriously disappeared, mysteriously returned and had a whispered conversation with Mr Godfrey. In about an hour they would all be leaving.

I could hear distant thunder. I went out with two of the dogs and made a final search of the garden. It was beginning to rain hard as I returned. Dr Candy was the last guest to leave. I was concerned because his carriage had no roof. He boasted that all doctors had skins like ducks and drove away in the rain laughing at his joke.

(Chapter 8 - The Theft)

When my lady had said goodnight to Mr Franklin and Mr Godfrey, she looked hard at her brother's gift shining on her daughter's dress. 'Rachel,' she asked, 'where will you put your diamond tonight?' Rachel thought. 'In my Indian cabinet, of course - the one with all the drawers.' Her mother frowned. 'My dear, it has no lock on it.' Miss Rachel, happy, light-headed, replied, 'But mamma, there are no thieves in the house.'

'Why not let me keep it tonight?' said my lady. Miss Rachel refused. 'Then come to me first thing tomorrow, Rachel,' said my lady, going upstairs. Miss Rachel said goodnight next, simply shaking hands with Mr Godfrey, but giving Mr Franklin an extraordinarily tender smile. I began, at that moment, to believe that Penelope might be right after all.

'I'm going to let the dogs loose tonight,' I told Mr Franklin as soon as she was gone.

'We'll decide on what is to be done tomorrow morning,' he said. He looked pale and tired. I advised him to take some whisky and water to help him sleep. Mr Godfrey came over to say he agreed and tried, in the friendliest way, to persuade him to drink something. Mr Franklin refused politely and the two rivals went upstairs together. A minute later Mr Franklin called down: 'Perhaps I will have that whisky.' Samuel went up with the drink, I let the dogs loose, and when we had shut up the house, I took my old bones up to bed and lay awake all night listening to the rain and the wind outside.

At 8 a.m., Penelope rushed into the kitchen. 'Father the diamond's gone!' she screamed, and dragged me upstairs. Miss Rachel was standing as white as a sheet beside her Indian cabinet, one of its drawers open, empty. 'I saw Miss Rachel put the diamond in there last night!' Penelope cried.

'Is this true, miss?' I asked. With a look that was completely unlike her, with a voice that didn't seem to be her own, she simply answered, 'The diamond is gone!' and went into her bedroom and locked the door.

My lady came in, stone-faced, knocked at Miss Rachel's door and was let in. The two gentlemen rushed in. Mr Godfrey held up his hands in helpless disbelief. Mr Franklin, however, showed himself to be more clear-headed - perhaps because that night he had slept well for the first time since he had given up smoking.

He ordered us to search the room and knocked on Miss Rachel's bedroom door. My

lady came out. The door was shut behind her and locked from the inside. 'The loss of the diamond has thrown Rachel into a state of shock,' she said. 'She won't speak about it, not even to me.'

'We must call the police,' said Mr Franklin. 'They must arrest the Indians immediately - if it's not already too late.' Seeing my lady's and Mr Godfrey's surprise, he added, 'All I can say now is they certainly have the diamond. I'll ride to Fritzinghall immediately.'

I hurried out after him and asked how the Indians could have got into the house. 'One may have got in while the guests were leaving,' he shouted, riding off. But how did the thief escape? I inspected the house. All the doors and windows were locked. And how could he have possibly escaped the dogs? After breakfast - theft or no theft, one must have one's breakfast - I told my lady the truth about the Indian's plot. She was extremely shocked but, surprisingly, seemed more concerned about her daughter. 'I've never seen her behave so strangely,' she said. 'The loss of the jewel has had an effect on her brain.'

Mr Godfrey was behaving strangely too, wandering about in an uneasy, aimless way. He was of weaker metal than I had thought. But we were all uneasy. The servants were suspecting one another. The Moonstone had turned us all upside down.

Mr Franklin returned before eleven. 'Superintendent Seegrave is coming,' he said. 'But it's useless. The case is hopeless.'

'Why? Have the Indians escaped, sir?' I asked.

'Those Indians have been imprisoned unfairly,' he replied. 'Police enquiries proved that they returned to Fritzinghall and stayed in their hotel all night. Nevertheless, in case of any further discoveries, they're being kept in prison for a week.'

But if they were innocent, I asked myself who had taken the Moonstone?

Ten minutes later, Superintendent Seegrave and his men arrived. I knew him well: a large, loud man. Mr Franklin immediately told him the investigation was hopeless. Seegrave found no signs of a forced entry.

'Someone inside must have stolen the stone,' he declared confidently. The servants, feeling suspected, followed him up to Miss Rachel's sittingroom like a cloud of angry bees. 'Look!' he said, pointing to a smear in the paint on the door. 'Someone's dress has brushed against the wet paint.' Everyone except Rosanna crowded round to see. 'Back to work, all of you!' he ordered. I noticed Rosanna leave immediately. Seegrave then searched the room, found nothing, and asked to see Penelope.

'Now, young woman,' he said sharply, 'I want the truth.'

'Are you accusing me?' my daughter replied fiercely. After I had smoothed things over, she told him how she had seen Miss Rachel put the diamond in the drawer before going to bed. Next morning, at eight o'clock, when she brought Miss Rachel her breakfast, she had found the drawer open, empty.

Seegrave knocked on Miss Rachel's bedroom door. 'Go away! I have nothing to say to anyone!' she shouted from inside. Seeing his anger and surprise, I told him Miss Rachel was ill and asked him to wait and see her later.

'Seegrave is a fool,' Mr Franklin whispered to me, before going out on to the terrace with Mr Godfrey. Suddenly Miss Rachel came out of her room, as pale as death, ignoring the Superintendent, who tried to speak to her. She went down on to the terrace, straight to Mr Franklin, ignoring Mr Godfrey, who stepped back and left them alone. For the life of me, I couldn't help looking out of the window. I watched Miss Rachel's vehement words bring a look of complete astonishment to Mr Franklin's face. My lady appeared on the terrace, Miss Rachel said some quick last words to her cousin and rushed inside. Mr Godfrey joined my lady and Mr Franklin and they walked off, Mr Franklin explaining

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something to them. They stopped short, like people struck with amazement. Inside, Miss Rachel brushed past Seegrave, who once more attempted to question her. 'I don't want to talk to you!' she cried, a wild, angry look in her eyes. 'My diamond is lost. Neither you nor anybody else will ever find it!' With those words she went into her room, and locked the door in our faces.

End of episode 3

1881 words, not including intro