

## The Moonstone (Wilkie Collins) – Episode 8

Miss Clack, a poor relation and a puritanical religious spinster, has taken up the story of what she knew happened in London, when Lady Verinder and Rachel left Yorkshire for their London house.

A strange incident has been reported in the paper. Rachel's cousin Godfrey and a man called Mr Luker have both been attacked after they encountered each other entirely by chance in the doorway of a bank. The only thing to be stolen in either attack was a receipt for something Mr Luker had deposited at the bank, and though neither man saw his attackers, they were thought to be Indian. (In Gabriel Betteredge's account of what happened in Yorkshire, Sergeant Cuff had predicted that a money-lender called Luker would soon come to the family's attention. Miss Clack knows nothing of this, but dislikes Gabriel and his daughter Penelope, and refers here to Penelope as 'Miss Cap Ribbons').

### Episode 8

On Tuesday, dear Aunt Verinder received me with her usual kindness. However, I soon noticed that something was wrong. Anxious looks kept escaping her in the direction of her daughter, Rachel, who, as usual, disappointed me - how could such a plain looking person be the child of such fine parents? After lunch, she got up in her shamefully colourful dress and said, 'I'll go and read now, mamma, but tell me if Godfrey calls. I can't wait to hear all about his adventure in Northumberland Street.'

She gave me a careless look. 'Goodbye, Clack,' she said and left in a cloud of perfume. I refused to let her make me angry. I did what any good Christian would do: I simply decided to pray for her that night.

When we were alone my aunt told me the whole story of the Indian diamond and of Rachel's worrying behaviour. None of it surprised *me* — I have known Rachel since she was a child. The one thing that did shock me was Aunt Verinder's decision to have a doctor examine her. The poor girl was more in need of God's help! 'This strange adventure of Godfrey's has happened at the wrong time,' said my aunt. 'Rachel has been restless and excited ever since she heard about it.'

'Dear aunt,' I said. 'She's obviously keeping a sinful secret from you and everybody. Something in these recent events threatens her with discovery.' There was a knock on the door. Miss Cap Ribbons entered and announced a visitor, Mr Godfrey Ablewhite.

### **Rumours and Reputations**

A model of manners, Mr Godfrey walked in shortly after the announcement of his name. We both asked him whether he felt himself again after his terrible adventure. 'My dear aunt, my dear Miss Clack!' he exclaimed, 'What have I done to deserve all this sympathy? I would have preferred to have kept the whole thing to myself!' I was overcome by the heavenly gentleness of his smile, by the richness of his deep voice. 'And how is dear Rachel?' he enquired. 'And you, Miss Clack, I really do hope to be able to be at the Young Mothers' Small Clothes meeting next week.' I was about to reply when we were disturbed by Rachel.

'I am charmed to see you, Godfrey,' she said. 'I wish you had brought Mr Luker with you. Never mind, tell me the whole story immediately.' I was sad to see him take her hand. 'Dearest Rachel,' he said, 'The newspapers have told it better than I can.'

'Rachel, darling,' I remarked, 'true greatness and courage are always modest.'

'Godfrey,' she said, not taking any notice of me, 'I am sure you are not great and I am certain that if you ever had any modesty your lady-admirers took it from you years ago.'

You have a reason for not talking about your adventure and I will find it out.'

'My reason is simple,' he answered, 'I am tired of the subject.'

'That won't do. Now, sit down.' She dragged him to a chair. 'Have the police done anything, Godfrey?' she asked him.

'No, nothing,'

'People say, don't they, Godfrey dear, that the three men who trapped you both are the Indians who came to Fritzinghall?'

'Some people say so, I believe, yes.'

'Do you?'

'My dear Rachel, I never saw their faces.' He tried to get up. She pushed him down. 'You never met Mr Luker before you met him at the bank?' He shook his head. 'You were questioned together by the police. Did the banker's receipt describe the object left at the bank?' He said the receipt wasn't mentioned in his presence. Rachel sighed. 'The newspapers are connecting what happened at Fritzinghall and what happened here. They say the object in the bank is - ' She stopped, her face suddenly white. Dear Mr Godfrey tried again to leave his chair. 'Stay where you are,' she ordered. 'They say it's the Moonstone, Godfrey. Don't they?'

To my surprise, a change came over my admirable friend. He lost his smoothness of manner. 'They *do* say so, yes! But Mr Luker has repeatedly declared that he has never seen or heard of the Moonstone.' Rachel laughed. She looked at my friend pityingly. 'Did you know, Godfrey, that certain people are spreading rumours that you pawned the Moonstone to Luker?'

Suffering this terrible insult, his noble eyes filled with tears. He put out his hand to take hers. She jumped to her feet with a scream. 'Don't touch me!' she cried. She looked at her mother. 'This is all my fault! I sacrificed myself - I had a right to do that - but not to keep a secret that ruins an innocent man for life!'

'You exaggerate,' Mr Godfrey said. 'My reputation can't be ruined by rumours like that. All will be forgotten in a week.'

'I must stop it!' she cried out. 'I know who took the Moonstone, I know, I know.' She stamped on the ground in a peculiar temper. '*I know that Godfrey is innocent!*' She fell to her knees at her mother's feet. 'Oh, mamma, mamma, I must be mad, mustn't I?' Mr Godfrey attempted to calm her. Pulling herself together, she said, 'Godfrey, I've been so unfair to you. You're a better man than I believed. I'll try and repair the wrong I've done you.' She gave him her hand and — he actually kissed it!

'I will come, dearest,' he said, 'as long as you never mention this hateful subject again.' I was deeply shocked by our Christian Hero's behaviour. A thunderous knock at the door startled us all.

Rachel got up. 'They've come to take me to the flower show,' she said, teary-eyed. She kissed her mother. 'Mamma, before I go, this hasn't caused you too much anxiety, has it?'

'No, no, my dear, go with your friends now and enjoy yourself'

She left the room. My heart bled for the poor misguided girl. Mr Godfrey gave us one of his beautiful smiles, held out a hand to his aunt, a hand to me. I closed my eyes, put his hand — in a moment of self-forgetfulness — to my lips and sat down. When I opened my eyes again he had gone.

But, alone with Lady Verinder, I was to hear worse. 'Drusilla,' she said. 'I have something to tell you, and a favour to ask you. My lawyer, Mr Bruff, is coming at five. I want you to witness the signing of my will. I have been seriously ill, Drusilla, for more than two years now, with heart disease, and the truth is I may live another year or die this afternoon.' She looked hard at me. 'Rachel, of course, must not be told.'

Little did my poor aunt imagine what devout thankfulness thrilled through me. My dear aunt was utterly unprepared, on the eve of the great change, and was led, providentially, to me. 'Oh! Oh, the good I mean to do you, aunt!' I said, forgetting myself She gave me

a puzzled, almost frightened look. 'Aunt,' I said, 'I have some books which you must read, books that can help you in this hour of need.' I had just time to hurry home, get the books and return for the signing of the will.

When I returned, the doctor was with Aunt Verinder. I joined Mr Bruff in the library. He was surprised to see me - we had met on similar occasions more than once. 'Have you come to stay here?' he said, eyeing my large bag full of books. 'My aunt has asked me to witness her will,' I said.

'I see,' he said. 'Very well - after all, you've no financial interest in it. So, tell me, Miss Clack, what's the latest news from the world of ladies' charity? How is your friend Godfrey Ablewhite? I've been hearing some salty stories about him.'

Understanding his meaning perfectly, I replied, 'I won't argue with a clever lawyer, Mr Bruff. I will simply say that in the eyes of a famous London police officer, there is not the slightest shadow of suspicion on anyone except Miss Verinder.'

'Do you mean,' he replied, 'that you agree with Cuff?'

'I mean nothing. I am a Christian, Mr Bruff, I judge no one.'

'I judge the Sergeant to have been completely wrong,' he replied. 'If he knew Rachel's character as I know it, he would never have suspected her. I admit she has her faults — she's wild, stubborn, secretive — but she's as honest and true as steel.'

I could not resist telling him the truth. 'In that case, permit me to inform you that when Mr Godfrey was here two hours ago Rachel declared that he was innocent.' I went on to describe the whole scene, everything that was said.'

'You would have made a good lawyer, Miss Clack,' he said when I had finished. He began walking thoughtfully up and down. The new light I had thrown on the subject had obviously disturbed him. 'What a case!' I heard him say to himself 'A complete mystery.'

'Excuse me,' I said. 'But may I remind you that Mr Franklin Blake was also in the house when the diamond disappeared? His debts are well known.' The old devil looked at me steadily with a hard and vicious smile. 'I manage Mr Franklin's legal affairs,' he said. 'And I can tell you that most of his lenders, knowing that his father is a very rich and very old man, are quite prepared to be patient. Besides, Lady Verinder has told me that her daughter is ready to marry Franklin Blake. She told her that she loved him. So, Miss Clack, why would he steal the jewel?'

'The human heart is unsearchable,' I said gently.

'No, no, Miss Clack,' he said, 'Miss Rachel's innocence is without doubt. So is Mr Ablewhite's. So is Mr Franklin's. All we know is that the Moonstone came to London, and that Mr Luker or his banker has it at the moment. It puzzles you, me, everybody.' A servant came in to say Aunt Verinder was ready to receive us.

## Placing the Books

My aunt's will was short. Her daughter would inherit everything. A handsome young servant, Samuel, was second witness. The signing took less than two minutes.

Afterwards, Mr Bruff looked at me, hoping perhaps that I might leave him alone with my aunt. He might as well have expected the Rock of Gibraltar to move. He said something under his breath and left. My aunt lay down on the sofa. 'I haven't forgotten you, dear,' she said. 'You're not mentioned in the will but I intend to give you something to remember me by.'

Here was a golden opportunity! I took a book out of my bag, *The Snake at Home*, by Miss Bellows. This fine Christian work shows how evil lies in wait for us in the most innocent actions of our daily lives. 'Read this book,' I said, 'and you will have given me all I could ever want.' My poor aunt glanced at the book and handed it back to me, looking more confused than ever.

'I'm afraid, Drusilla,' she said, 'that the doctor has advised me to read only amusing books.'

'Aunt,' I said patiently, 'let me leave it here.' She gave me an exhausted look, so I thought it might be wise to leave.

I crossed the hall and slipped into the library, where I noticed two of the 'amusing' books the doctor had recommended. I took two of mine and put them on top of them. I went into the room, and put two more on the piano. I put a whole pile beside my aunt's sewing box, another by the fireplace.

As I folded my clothes that night I thought of the *true* riches I was giving to my wealthy aunt in the form of my good Christian books. I felt so light-hearted that I sang a song to Jesus! And forgot to pray for Rachel.

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