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*Dramatic Publishing*

# THE MOONSTONE

by

**R.N. SANDBERG**

**Adapted from the novel**

by

**WILKIE COLLINS**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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# THE MOONSTONE

A Play in Three Acts  
For 6-7 men, 5-6 women and 1 child

## CHARACTERS

THREE INDIAN SENTRIES

COLONEL HERNCastle, a British officer

GABRIEL BETTEREDGE, Lady Verinder's loyal steward

LADY VERINDER

RACHEL, her daughter

PENELOPE, Betteredge's daughter and Rachel's maid

THREE INDIAN STROLLING PLAYERS

A BOY

NANCY, the kitchen maid

EZRA JENNINGS, a strange man with piebald hair

ROSANNA SPEARMAN, second housemaid

FRANKLIN BLAKE, nephew of Lady Verinder

GODFREY ABLEWHITE, nephew of Lady Verinder

DR. CANDY, the local physician

SERGEANT CUFF, a renowned detective

LUCY YOLLAND (Limping Lucy), Rosanna's friend

SEPTIMUS LUKER, a dealer in expensive stolen objects

The minimum cast may be achieved by doubling as follows:

HERNCastle / GODFREY  
BETTEREDGE  
PENELOPE / INDIAN  
LADY V.  
RACHEL  
FIRST INDIAN  
BOY  
NANCY / INDIAN  
JENNINGS / INDIAN  
ROSANNA / LUCY  
BLAKE  
DR. CANDY / INDIAN/LUKER  
CUFF / INDIAN

With standard casting, this would be 7 men, 5 women and 1 boy. If females play the First Indian and the Boy, the cast would be 6 men, 7 women.

Running time: 2 hours

## SETTING

Prologue – Seringapatam, India, 1799:

The Shrine of the Moon God

Act One – Yorkshire, May-June, 1848:

In and around the Verinder estate

Act Two – Yorkshire, June 1848:

In and around the Verinder estate

Act Three – London and Yorkshire, June, 1848-June, 1849:

Various locations

(A simple unit set with a minimal number of pieces that move on and off.)

# THE MOONSTONE

## Prologue – Seringapatam, 1799

*(An Indian gong sounds sharply. A dimly lit chamber. The strongest light glistening from a sparkling stone which rests on a large sculpted object, center. Two figures, turbaned and robed in Indian garb, recline by the sculpted object. A third figure, similarly clad, stands alert, the on-duty sentry.)*

A MAN'S VOICE. It is said that, long ago, on the night when the shrine of the moon god was completed, Vishnu, the preserver, appeared to three Brahmins in a dream. Vishnu breathed his divinity on the diamond in the shrine and commanded that, from that time forth, the moonstone should be watched by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of generations of men. To the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem and to those who received it after, Vishnu predicted certain disaster. *(The sentry hears something.)* This may seem mere legend; but my own experience has proved it to be true.

*(The sentry makes a sharp, quiet sound, alerting the others. As they rise, a British officer, COLONEL HERNCASTLE bursts into the room. A violent struggle ensues. HERNCASTLE slays all three of the Brahmins. He turns to the large sculpted object and grabs the shining stone.)*

*The sentry, with great effort, starts to rise. HERNCastle runs him through.)*

THE SENTRY (*as he dies.*). The Moonstone will have its vengeance.

*(HERNCastle laughs, shaking the stone at the dying Indian, tauntingly. The Indian drops. HERNCastle kisses the stone, passionately. Blackout.)*



## ACT ONE

### Scene 1 – Rose Garden outside Lady Verinder's House

BETTEREDGE. Fifty years ago, when Colonel Herncastle, my lady's brother, stole the Moonstone, he thought he could defy its curse. Eighteen months ago, when the Moonstone was brought here to my lady's house in Yorkshire, we should have foreseen the disasters that were to come. Mr. Franklin Blake, himself, has asked me to tell you of our trials; but now that I must begin—*(He hesitates. He holds up a dog-eared book.)* This is what I read a moment ago. Robinson Crusoe, page one hundred, twenty-nine. "Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost." I have learned that this book is like no other: it reveals the truth. But I have agreed to tell this story, and so I must—despite the costs. It was late May 1848—

*(PENELOPE rushes on.)*

PENELOPE. Father! Father! You'll never guess!

BETTEREDGE. Then I shan't even try my dear.

*(LADY VERINDER and her daughter RACHEL enter more subdued but no less excited.)*

LADY V. My nephew has come back from abroad, Gabriel.

BETTEREDGE. Mr. Franklin?!

LADY V. He will arrive today and stay to keep Rachel's birthday.

BETTEREDGE. It will be a celebration like we haven't seen in years, my lady.

RACHEL. Brimming over with trouble, no doubt.

LADY V. Rachel.

BETTEREDGE. He was the nicest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window, Miss Rachel.

RACHEL. I remember him as the most atrocious tyrant that ever tortured a doll. I burn with indignation when I think of Franklin Blake.

LADY V. And I expect you'll tell him so the moment you see him.

RACHEL. I expect I will. *(She smiles.)*

BETTEREDGE. Will you still lunch at the Ablewhites, my lady?

LADY V. Yes, Gabriel, the boy tyrant will not arrive until dinner. You may expect us home for his return.

BETTEREDGE. The carriage is ready.

LADY V. Thank you. *(To RACHEL, as the three women exit.)* You may have the pleasure of telling Godfrey of the prodigal's return. I shall look forward to the two of them meeting.

RACHEL. What does that mean, Mother?

*(They are gone. BETTEREDGE, a huge smile on his face, grasps his book warmly.)*

BETTEREDGE. A day of joy, my friend, true joy. *(He opens the book and starts to read.)*

*(Unaware of BETTEREDGE, THREE INDIANS enter. They are dressed in white linen frocks and trousers and carry small hand drums slung in front of them. A delicate-looking fair-haired English BOY is with them. The INDIANS move cautiously, looking toward the house. The FIRST INDIAN signals them to stop. He takes out a glass bottle filled with black liquid. He turns to the BOY.)*

BOY *(backing away nervously)*. No.

BETTEREDGE *(approaches them)*. May I help you?

FIRST INDIAN *(conceals the bottle as he speaks)*. My dear sir, you may. We, as you can see, are strolling players. We provide fine entertainment, sir. If you'll conduct us in, your lady will be amused by us and grateful to you.

BETTEREDGE. I warrant she'll be greatly disappointed to miss that amusement, sir, but my lady is—occupied at present.

FIRST INDIAN. How unfortunate.

BETTEREDGE. And these are private grounds. Good day to you.

FIRST INDIAN. The other ladies have been so enchanted—if they shall recommend us, your lady will deign to receive us on another occasion, I hope?

BETTEREDGE. Perhaps.

FIRST INDIAN. Your servant, sir.

*(They all bow low and leave. BETTEREDGE watches them as they go. He is distracted, however, by the entrance of NANCY, the kitchen maid. She is sulkily mumbling to herself as she crosses.)*

BETTEREDGE. What's wrong, Nancy? You've left your lunch, haven't you?

NANCY. Rosanna's late again for table, and as usual I'm sent to fetch her in. All the hard work falls on my shoulders in this house. Of course, it wouldn't be fair if it fell on her humpy old shoulder, now, would it?!

BETTEREDGE. Where is Rosanna?

NANCY. At the Sands, of course! She had another of her fainting fits this morning and asked to go out and get a breath of air.

BETTEREDGE. Go back to your meal, my girl. I'll fetch her in.

NANCY. You?

BETTEREDGE. I'll have a word with her.

NANCY. Thank you, sir. *(As she goes.)* Ought to be left to rot out there.

BETTEREDGE. Nancy.

NANCY. Yes, sir, all right, sir.

*(She exits back to the house. BETTEREDGE exits for the Sands. The INDIANS, who have been hiding behind the rose bushes, reenter. They look up and down to make sure they are alone.)*

FIRST INDIAN *(to the BOY)*. Hold out your hand.

BOY *(shrinking back, shaking his head)*. No.

FIRST INDIAN. Would you rather we sent you back to London where we found you?

*(The BOY holds out his hand. The FIRST INDIAN once again takes out the bottle and pours some dark liquid into the BOY's palm. The other TWO INDIANS begin a*

*soft chant. The FIRST INDIAN touches the BOY's head and makes some signs over it in the air.)*

FIRST INDIAN (*commanding*). Look. (*The chants stop. The BOY becomes stiff like a statue and stares into his hand.*) See the English gentleman from foreign parts.

BOY. I see him.

FIRST INDIAN. Is it on the road to this house, and no other, that the English gentleman will travel today?

BOY. It is on the road to this house, and no other, that the English gentleman will travel today.

FIRST INDIAN. Has the English gentleman got it about him?

BOY. Yes.

FIRST INDIAN. Will the English gentleman come here, as he promised to come, at the close of day?

BOY. I can't tell.

FIRST INDIAN. Why?

BOY. I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more today.

*(The FIRST INDIAN says something in Hindi to the others. They think for a moment. A strange looking MAN with piebald hair enters. He holds a piece of paper in his hand. He and the INDIANS look at one another. The INDIANS bow low. The MAN nods and exits. The FIRST INDIAN quickly makes some signs over the BOY and blows on the BOY's head. The BOY awakes.)*

FIRST INDIAN. Come. Quickly, now.

*(The lights shift.)*

**Scene 2 – The Shivering Sands**

*(A pond of trembling quicksand, surrounded by rocks. The sound of waves crashing. ROSANNA SPEARMAN, her back to us, stands alone, staring into the quicksand. We cannot yet see that she is a very plain woman; we can see that one of her shoulders is deformed and much larger than the other. BETTEREDGE enters. He goes to her and turns her around. She's crying.)*

BETTEREDGE. What is it, my dear? What is it that gives you such pain?

ROSANNA. The years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge.

BETTEREDGE. Come, come, my girl, your past life is sponged out.

ROSANNA. Prison don't wash so easy, Mr. Betteredge. *(Caressing his lapel.)* It's like this here—where I wiped that stain, yesterday? The stain is taken off, but the place shows. It shows!

BETTEREDGE. Come on, now. You're late for your lunch, and I've come to fetch you in.

ROSANNA. You, sir?

BETTEREDGE. I thought you'd like your scolding better if it came from me.

ROSANNA *(gives his hand a squeeze)*. You're very kind, Mr. Betteredge. I don't want any lunch, today—let me bide a little longer here.

BETTEREDGE. Why you come to this miserable—

ROSANNA. I try to keep away and I can't. Sometimes, I think my grave is waiting here.

BETTEREDGE. What's waiting for you is roast mutton and suet pudding back at table.

ROSANNA. You know I am grateful, Mr. Betteredge. I try to deserve your kindness and my lady's confidence. But I wonder sometimes whether life here is too quiet and too good for such a woman as I am. (*Pointing to the quicksand.*) Look, sir, look at the Sands! Isn't it wonderful—and terrible?! Do you know what it looks like to me? It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps! Throw a stone in, and let's see the sand suck it down! (*A voice calls from off, startling them.*)

VOICE (*off*). Betteredge? Betteredge, where are you?

(*They look off toward the voice. ROSANNA brightens all over with a kind of breathless surprise.*)

ROSANNA. Oh.

BETTEREDGE. Who is it?

ROSANNA. Oh, who is it?

BETTEREDGE (*as a young GENTLEMAN enters*). Yes, who is it?

THE MAN (*going to BETTEREDGE, hugging him*). Dear old Betteredge! (*BETTEREDGE is shocked.*) I owe you seven and sixpence. Now do you know who I am?

BETTEREDGE (*hugging him*). Mr. Franklin!

(*BLAKE turns to ROSANNA and smiles at her. She runs off.*)

BLAKE. That's an odd girl.

BETTEREDGE. Welcome back, Mr. Franklin. All the more welcome, sir, that you have come some hours before we expected you.

BLAKE. I have a reason, Betteredge. I traveled by the morning rather than the afternoon train because I wanted to give a certain Indian stranger the slip. I suspect that I have been followed in London for the last three or four days. (*BETTEREDGE has been looking nervously back toward the house.*) What is it?

BETTEREDGE. We have had Indians prowling around the grounds not half an hour ago. Roving jugglers looking to entertain my lady.

BLAKE. More than likely it was this rather than entertaining they were looking for. (*He produces a small sealed paper parcel.*) My uncle Herncastle's famous diamond, the Moonstone.

BETTEREDGE. Good lord, sir!

BLAKE. The Colonel's dead, Betteredge, and my father executor of his will. The diamond has been left as a birthday present to my cousin Rachel—as proof of my uncle's forgiveness for the insult he received two years ago on her birthday.

*(In a dim light, HERNCASTLE appears. He is aged and worn, but still wearing the same uniform from the Prologue.)*

HERNCASTLE. I am here to see my sister!

BETTEREDGE. You didn't know your uncle, Mr. Franklin. He was an outcast, snubbed by everyone after the strange happenings in India and his dismissal from the army. For almost fifty years we hadn't seen him, only



heard rumors that he was smoking opium, experimenting with strange chemistry, inhabiting the lowest slums of London.

HERNCASTLE. Go up to my sister and say that I have called to wish my niece many happy returns of the day!

BETTEREDGE. I told my lady, but she refused to see him. I gave him as polite a refusal as possible.

HERNCASTLE (*laughs in a soft, mischievous way*). Thank you, Betteredge. I shall remember my niece's birthday. (*The light on him snaps out.*)

BLAKE (*holding up the packet*). Then this is to be his revenge.

BETTEREDGE. What do you mean, sir?

BLAKE. All these years he has kept it under extraordinary circumstances—at a bank with instructions that it should be sent to Rotterdam to be cut into pieces unless the bank received word every year that my uncle was alive and well. He dared not keep the gem himself, because he believed there were three Indian Brahmins who would stop at nothing to regain it. My father thought all this the result of his deranged mind. I believe it is true, and my uncle's ruined life the result of a Hindu curse associated with the diamond. And now he wants that curse to strike the rest of the family.

BETTEREDGE. Then why have you brought it, sir?

BLAKE. I didn't want to, Betteredge, but the will seemed sincere and my father convinced me that someone must put my cousin's legacy into her hands. This is worth a fortune.

BETTEREDGE. I should like to shy it into this quicksand, and settle things once and for all.

BLAKE. If you've got twenty thousand pounds in your pocket, say so, and in it goes! The question is what do I do with the damnable thing? It's four weeks until Rachel's birthday, and these fellows are prowling about already.

BETTEREDGE. Do what Colonel Herncastle did, sir. Lock it up in the bank. Straight away, before the ladies—or the Indians come back.

BLAKE. Betteredge, you are worth your weight in gold.

*(BLAKE rushes off as the scene shifts.)*

### Scene 3 – The Parlor

*(RACHEL and PENELOPE stand looking off. PENELOPE, amazed, holds a glass of brandy in her outstretched hand. RACHEL is beside herself. LADY VERINDER watches them, quite amused.)*

RACHEL. He hasn't changed one bit.

LADY V. Perhaps he thinks the same of you.

RACHEL. I wouldn't bolt from a room in the midst of conversation.

LADY V. No?

RACHEL. You've raised me better than that, I think.

LADY V. *(with a smile)*. I'm afraid I can't take credit for how modestly you conduct yourself.

RACHEL. He may even be ruder than when he was ten.

LADY V. Years on the continent do wonders. You're rather flushed, Rachel. Why don't you sit down? I'm sure he'll be back.

RACHEL. I'm going to bed. I won't be made a fool of.

BLAKE (*rushing in, holding something behind his back*).

I'm sorry. (*He stops, sees PENELOPE still with his drink in her hand. He takes it from her.*) Thank you. Since it's a special occasion, I will. (*Drinks it down and hands her the empty glass. To RACHEL.*) When you asked me what interesting customs I'd learned abroad, I remembered the rose garden. (*They look at him quizzically.*) Well, it's what the Spaniards do to pay tribute to those they— (*He stops.*) To their gracious hosts. (*He holds out a rose to RACHEL.*)

RACHEL. That should be for my mother, I think.

BLAKE. No. I mean—it's for both of you.

LADY V. You may accept for us, Rachel.

BLAKE. It'll make your room smell quite good actually.

RACHEL. I know how they smell, Franklin. It's our garden you've snatched it from. (*She reaches for the rose.*)

BLAKE. Watch out for the—thorns.

RACHEL (*winces only slightly*). Thank you for the gift of one of our roses.

PENELOPE. Oh, you've cut yourself!

BLAKE. You needn't worry; she's invincible, you see. (*To RACHEL.*) Always has been. Though I didn't used to realize how charming that made her.

(*He smiles at RACHEL. She smiles back. BETTEREDGE enters.*)

BETTEREDGE. More sherry, my lady?

LADY V. No, Gabriel. And no more brandy for Mr. Blake, either. One has been more than enough. Rachel, my dear, I'm afraid the bewitching hour has come.

RACHEL. Oh, Mamma.

LADY V. We shall have weeks of this gaiety. Let us not tire ourselves before we've begun.

RACHEL. Good night then. *(She hits BLAKE gently on the cheek with the rose and runs out.)*

LADY V. *(takes BLAKE's hand)*. I'm glad you've come, Franklin. *(Exits.)*

BLAKE. This is still the most wonderful house on earth, Betteredge! Good night. *(Exits.)*

*(BETTEREDGE and PENELOPE collect the empty glasses.)*

PENELOPE. I shan't be surprised if there's a wedding before summer's out.

BETTEREDGE. No one likes Mr. Franklin any better than I do, but if there's a wedding, Mr. Godfrey will be Miss Rachel's choice.

PENELOPE. Oh, yes, Godfrey Ablewhite's a great man.

BETTEREDGE. The sweetest tempered—

PENELOPE. Oh, yes.

BETTEREDGE. The simplest, pleasantest, easiest to—

PENELOPE. Oh, yes.

BETTEREDGE. Penelope, Godfrey Ablewhite is a man of public standing. He loves everybody and everybody loves him. What chance has Mr. Franklin against that?

PENELOPE. Miss Rachel is not everybody. *(She gives a little laugh and chucks him under the chin.)* Oh, by the way, Father, do you know anything about this? *(She holds out a small glass bottle.)* Samuel found it on the gravel path by the roses. It's full of some black, sweet-smelling stuff.