

The Woman in White



The Woman in White

dramatization of Wilkie Collins' famous novel,

by Christian Lanciai (2006, translated 2018)

Dramatis personae:

Walter Hartright, a drawing-master
Anne Catherick
Count Isidor Ottavio Baldassare Fosco
Sir Percival Glyde
a policeman
Marian Halcombe
Laura Fairlie, later Lady Glyde, her half sister
a butler
Mrs Clements
Vincent Gilmore, Fairlie's family lawyer
Merriman, Glyde's lawyer
Countess Eleanor Fosco, Laura's aunt
Fanny, Laura's maid
Doctor Dawson
Eliza, a maid
Hester, cook
Doctor Goodriche
Rubelle, mental nurse
a mental doctor
another nurse
Lucy, Mrs Catherick's maid
Mrs Jane Catherick
the verger in Old Welmingham
a fire chief with firemen
a butler with Count Fosco

The action is in England around 1850.

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The Woman in White

Act I scene 1. A park in London.

Walter So I am to tutor two young ladies at a fine place by the coast of Cumberland. It's hardly a climb in my career but rather a necessary solution to support myself for at least some time ahead... An artist will never be more than an artist, a creator is always at the bottom of society since he can only be creative in total freedom, and society makes all freedom impossible... But I can refuse the offer. It would be wrong to my teacher, who gave me the job, and I really know how to draw and to teach others...

(The woman in white has sneaked up behind him and now lightly touches his shoulder. He starts and clasps his stick to be ready to strike, when he is surprised by the appearance of a woman in white.)

What is a person like you doing here in the middle of the night?

Anne Pardon me, but is this the road to London?

Walter *(dumbfounded by her appearance, can't answer)*

Anne I apologize if I frightened you, but is this the way to London?

Walter Yes, it certainly is. Are you lost, since you have to ask your way?

Anne I have never been in London before. But I assure you that my intentions are honest. I have friends in London who can help me.

Walter Are you then in trouble?

Anne Not more than that I have been maltreated by a man in a high position. Do you know any people in a high position?

Walter I am only a drawing-master.

Anne Thank heavens! An ordinary simple man! Then I can trust him.

Walter How can I help you?

Anne Could you get me a cab? That's all I need. Then I will probably manage on my own.

Walter But how did you happen to be here in the middle of the night? It's almost one, you know.

Anne I must beg your pardon once more for having frightened you. I must be careful. That's why I had to sneak up to you and accost you very cautiously.

Walter Are you then in danger? Have you been persecuted?

Anne You could say that again, all the way from Hampshire.

Walter By whom? Why?

Anne By a man in a high position, for his crimes against me. Ask me no more. Where are you heading yourself?

Walter Tomorrow I will go to Cumberland to serve as a drawing-master to two young ladies.

Anne I was happy in Cumberland once. It was a place called Limmeridge. *(Walter startles.)* But they are dead and gone now, those I loved. But what is it? Did you hear something?

Walter Not at all. But what did they do to you?

Anne Don't speak about it. Just help me to a cab.

Walter I see one over there. Just go straight up to him, say no more than the address, and he will help you all the way.

Anne Thank you. I owe you a world of thanks.

Walter Not at all. I wish I could do more for you.

Anne Not just now. But remember me. Farewell. *(hurries away.)*

Walter What an apparition! Like from an alien world! And all dressed in white! She seemed on edge but not unbalanced. But who is it now coming haunting down the park?

(Enter Fosco and Glyde panting.)

Fosco You haven't perchance seen a loose woman around?
Glyde There's a policeman. Let's ask him. (Enter the policeman.)
Fosco You don't happen to have seen a lone woman drifting around?
Policeman What kind of a woman?
Fosco A woman all dressed in white.
Policeman No, I definitely haven't. What has she done?
Glyde She has escaped from a mental hospital.
Fosco My mental hospital.
Policeman I see. Is she dangerous?
Glyde As dangerous as a mad woman can be.
Policeman I am afraid I can't help you.
Glyde Come on, Count! We must continue the chase on our own!
Fosco Coming. (The two men hurry on out.)
Policeman (to Walter) She must be really dangerous if a count and his friend go chasing her in the night.
Walter She was the most harmless thing you could imagine, a completely pure and vulnerable woman incapable of anything bad and even incapable of her own defence.
Policeman So you met her?
Walter Yes, I helped her on her escape.
Policeman Good for me that they didn't ask me to help them. For my part, such a woman had better remain at liberty. (walks on)
Walter (alone) Escaped from a mental hospital! Have I helped an unhappy woman escape from an evil and unfair destiny, or did I put anyone at risk by helping her escape? How could I ever forget such a woman before I learn more about her? Now I will have a perfectly sleepless night just in time for my journey.

Scene 2. Limmeridge by the sea in Cumberland.
A fine dining-room. Marian and Walter.

Marian I am afraid you will find it rather dull here. We are mostly women quarrelling between ourselves, and the prize of dullness is with my uncle, Laura's guardian, who is an invalid with no end to his illnesses although no one can understand what he suffers from and least of all himself. I gather he is just a hysterical hypochondriac.
Walter But you and Laura are as different from each other as night and day. Are you really sisters?
Marian We are half sisters but closer to each other than sisters. You are right. We are opposites in everything, practically, physically and characterwise, but we can't live without each other. Laura is lovely and frail, sensitive and vulnerable, talented and unpractical and have some difficulty in finding her place in a man's world, while I am practical and direct, manly if you want and not good-looking, fearless and ruthlessly intelligent, which is why we are a perfectly complementary pair. But what was that strange adventure you had in London?
Walter I have never experienced anything like it. It was the night before I travelled here, and I was on my way home from the cottage of my sister and mother through Hampstead, when I was awakened from my dreams by a slight soft womanly touch on my shoulder. It was a woman completely dressed in white who seemed somewhat lost and wished to know the way to London. She seemed damaged in some way and hinted that someone in a high position wished her harm and already had harmed her considerably. Delicate and brittle like of exquisite glass

she was at the same time very alert and clear in her mind and made no unsound impression. I helped her on, she disappeared, and then the two gentlemen appeared panting on a chase for her and claimed she had escaped from an asylum. That was difficult to believe.

Marian My sympathies are entirely on her side. What did you say her name was?

Walter She never told me her name. But the most astonishing thing was that she knew Limmeridge well and had known your deceased parents and had been at home here.

Marian All in white, did you say?

Walter Completely.

Marian Then it could have been Anne Catherick.

Walter Who is she?

Marian The daughter of one of mother's closest friends. She entrusted us with her care, she went to school here, but she was somewhat autistic.

Walter In what way?

Marian She had difficulties in learning, but the things she did learn went the deeper. Among other things she once was given a beautiful white dress by mother, which gift made such an impression on her and for which she was so grateful, that she vowed to always be dressed in white.

Walter Good lord.

Marian Yes. But Anne Catherick was also almost of the same age as Laura and of the same kind of figure and constitution, why it became a habit of ours to always give Anne the clothes that Laura didn't need any more. She was eleven when she came here, it was about eleven years ago, but as they grew up they grew more and more like each other.

Laura (entering from the outside) Here you sit gossiping. What secrets are you discussing so intensively, or is it just idle gossip?

Walter (startles as he sees Laura, as if he discovered something about her)

Marian It's neither secrets nor gossip, Laura. It's Anne Catherick. Walter met her in London.

Laura How interesting! How was she?

Marian Not very well, according to our dear master.

Walter She didn't know London but obviously had some friends there whom she hoped to help her.

Laura I remember her so well. We always felt sorry for her for being so helpless and lost. As far as I am from Marian in competence, Anne was from me. But she was very affectionate. I will see how our uncle is doing. *(leaves)*

Marian You look as if you had seen a ghost.

Walter We were talking of Anne Catherick as Laura entered. I thought first I was seeing Anne's double.

Marian So you observed the likeness.

Walter Dress Laura like Anne Catherick, and she could be mistaken for Anne Catherick.

Marian My mother made the same observation. They are strangely similar to each other.

Walter But only outwardly. They have the same graceful figure and ethereal looks, the same colour of hair and eyes, about the same features, but Laura is talented and calm while the other made a nervous and tense impression and didn't seem very bright but more simple.

Marian Yes, that's Anne Catherick, and fortunately Laura is her contrary.

Scene 3. The drawing lesson.

Laura I don't know if I make any progress. I don't think I really have any talent.
Walter On the contrary, Laura, like all talents you underestimate yourself.
Laura But I can never get it as I want!
Walter You never do. That's the compromise you always have to make as an artist. Instead of prompting perfection and fanatically demanding it, the trick is to get as near the ideal as possible without actually reaching it.
Laura Do you mean that you shouldn't have what you want to reach?
Walter As long as you go on reaching for it, it will remain an unreachable ideal. If and when you finally reach it you are only disappointed with it.
Laura I never had any ideals.
Walter Not even in love?
Laura Why do you speak of love?
Walter It just blurted out of me.
Laura You must not speak with me of love.
Walter Why not?
Laura Don't ask me.
Walter Of course I won't in that case, but we have already worked together for so long and got to know each other so closely, so it just came natural.
Laura I am sorry that I can't speak about it.
Walter Pardon my importuning.
Laura No, pardon *me*. I am ashamed that I can't be open with you.
Walter Be not ashamed. I should never have brought up the subject. It's my fault.
Laura No, you are so kind and helpful and considerate and so patient with us, you always behaved correctly like a perfect gentleman, and sooner or later you have to confess to your sensitivity and subtler sides when you work creatively and all, but forgive me that I blush and have to feel ashamed in your presence, but it is not your fault.
Walter Whose fault is it then?
Laura I can't say.
Walter Don't you know?
Laura Oh yes, I know, but I never met him. But even he is innocent. We are all innocent. The blame is with the dead...
Walter You speak in unfathomable and fascinating enigmas. May I some day learn the answer?
Laura I am sure you will, but then it will be too late.
Walter Too late for what?
Laura You will know that then.
Walter You sound as if you didn't know it yourself.
Laura I beg of you, don't ask me any more. One day all will be revealed, but at the moment I must keep it all to myself. *(breaks up and leaves the room)*
Walter (alone) If the woman in white was an inextricable mystery, then Laura is an enigma hidden in a problem under the closed lid of a coffin without a name. These sisters of destiny have very much in common which they perhaps aren't even aware of themselves but which hangs around them like an unkind threatening fate. I guess it's lucky for Laura to have such a brave and able sister.
Marian (entering) Laura is crying. No, don't tell me anything. I know all. You love her. But the worst thing is that she loves you.
Walter Wouldn't that rather solve than create problems?
Marian Not in this case. Laura is engaged.
Walter Oh!
Marian Are you surprised?

Walter Of course. No one has mentioned anything about it.

Marian It's a marriage entirely of convenience settled by her parents and judicially decided already at the death bed of her father. You see, Laura is a very rich heiress.

Walter She doesn't make that impression.

Marian No, she makes the impression of being equally humble and poor as I, for she was always as loyal to me as I was to her. We love each other like sisters although we are only half sisters. But do you realize the consequence of this?

Walter I have blundered.

Marian No, Walter, you have comported yourself excellently well. You never made any advances, but still unintentionally managed to touch and move some delicate strings in Laura that never were stirred before. You have made an impression on her and awakened her feelings, and she will never forget it, because you are her first love.

Walter But then she is practically already married.

Marian No one can change that settlement. Walter, I am afraid that you must leave us, so that we may continue being friends. (*takes his hand*)

Walter I see. Who is he?

Marian A man in a high position.

Walter (*reacts*) What's his name?

Marian Sir Percival Glyde from Hampshire.

Walter (*wild*) From Hampshire?

Marian Yes. Is that so unsettling?

Walter The woman in white told me she had come from Hampshire.

Marian Anne Catherick again. You are stuck on her.

Walter I can't forget her.

Marian Forget your love for Laura, though, for her own sake. Be our friend instead, for something tells me that we shall need all friends we have, especially after Laura's marriage. None of us knows anything about this Sir Percival Glyde.

Walter Where did your parents find him?

Marian Don't ask me. We were only to trust that Laura's father knew what he did. Perhaps it was something he owed him.

Walter Or blackmail?

Marian Impossible. We can't speculate in that.

Walter Something tells me that the woman in white knows something that we should know.

Marian If you look for her I hope you will find her. Her secret is our secret.

Walter That's what I mean. I *will* find her. And I shall keep in touch with you as a reliable friend.

Marian That's all we ask for. When will you leave?

Walter At once.

Marian No, wait a few days, so that our uncle will have time to get over it, who employed you. Tell him that you received a letter calling you back to London.

Walter As you wish. I am sorry that I must give notice.

Marian That's for all of us to regret and especially Laura, but it's for her own good. Thanks, Walter, that we may trust you.

Walter Already the woman in white could do that safely, and I give you the same warrant.

Marian For that we are grateful.

Walter I shall see what I can find out about this Sir Percival Glyde.

Marian And I shall watch him.

Walter We understand each other.

Marian Yes. All for the best for Laura.

A butler (*entering*) A letter, madame.

Marian From whom?
Butler An unknown woman.
Marian What sort of an unknown woman?
Butler An unknown of the older sort.
Marian No sender, but addressed to Laura. Then I may open it. (*opens it and is appalled*)
Walter What is it?
Marian An anonymous warning to Laura against her husband.
Walter What is the warning about?
Marian (*reading out aloud*) "Do you believe in dreams, Miss? I dreamed of you tonight. You were at the altar, and your husband was double your age but looked smart, had a dry cough and a scar on one hand. Was that your husband to be? I looked into the depth of his heart and found only self-love, opportunism and ruthless egoism, and it was written all over him that he would only cause misery to others. Behind you there was an angel crying, and behind him there was a devil laughing." (*lowers the letter*)
 Can a warning be more explicit?
Walter It must be possible to find out who wrote the letter.
Marian No, it's in capital letters, but it must be from a woman.
Walter A woman engaged in Laura's case.
Marian An anonymous letter must never be taken seriously.
Walter But she obviously knows what she is writing about.
Marian She recounts her terrible dream and confesses to believe in dreams. This will upset Laura to the core. I can't show it to her.
Walter You must. And we must find out who wrote it.
Marian It reminds me of another curious incident.
Walter Well?
Marian A pupil in our school was recently punished for insisting on having seen a ghost in the churchyard.
Walter Are ghosts not allowed in churchyards?
Marian That was not the issue. The grave matter was that he identified the ghost as Laura.
Walter But Laura is alive. It couldn't have been her.
Marian The boy implied that he had seen the ghost dressed all in white.
Walter Anne Catherick!
Marian You don't mean that she could have been here?
Walter Of course! It must have been she that wrote the letter!
Marian Conjecture only. We haven't seen her.
Walter Let's go to the churchyard. She could have left something there.
Marian You are not serious.
Walter I am indeed.
Marian Then let's go there at once. (*takes him by the arm and walks out with him.*)

Scene 4. The churchyard.

Walter Show me your family grave, where the boy saw the ghost.
Marian Here it is. Here is mother and Laura's father, who betrothed her to Sir Percival Glyde.
Walter Someone has been here. Do you see?
Marian What?
Walter Someone has started cleaning the gravestone but left it unfinished, as if she had been interrupted.
Marian Yes, that is obvious. Who could it have been?

Walter Someone in your family?

Marian Impossible.

Walter Anne Catherick.

Marian You are obsessed by her.

Walter She is obsessed by your family and wants to protect it.

Marian Against what perils would she protect it by cleaning up a gravestone?

Walter The cleaning only proves her care and tenderness towards you. I have an idea. She would probably wish to continue her work. I will wait here and abide her return, if she returns.

Marian It could turn out into a long night for you.

Walter I am used to long sleepless nights, and I am used to trying my fortune. If we are lucky she will turn up, and if we aren't we have lost nothing.

Marian You will take that chance alone. I would only start freezing.

Walter Go home, Marian. I will handle this.

Marian Good luck. *(leaves)*

Walter It's my instinct guiding me, and the more attentive to your instinct you are, the more focused you are in your awareness. Let me wake as long as I can stay awake, and something tells me it could give some results.

(Two ladies appear. Walter hides. They reach the grave. The woman in white has a cloak to conceal her white dress.)

the older Keep your cloak on, dear, so that you don't catch a cold while you work on it.

Anne It won't take long. Half the work is already done. You can go home in the meantime.

The older Thanks. Don't stay out too long.

Anne I will join you when I am ready. *(starts cleaning the grave. The elderly lady leaves. Walter treads forth discreetly with caution.)*

Walter Be not afraid. We have met before.

Anne *(interrupting herself)* I know that voice. It wishes me no harm.

Walter What are you looking for, Anne Catherick?

Anne You know my name!

Walter Your mystery has made me find out as much as possible about you.

Anne You know nothing about me.

Walter What is it that I don't know?

Anne The facts I know about others which they don't know.

Walter I only want to help you.

Anne How?

Walter After we separated on the way to London two elderly gentlemen appeared hunting for you. They told a policemen that you had escaped from an asylum.

Anne *(terrified)* Oh!

Walter Be not afraid. I did not give you away but was wholly content with having helped you on the way. But why did you write the anonymous letter to Laura Fairlie?

Anne Oh dear, I know nothing about it!

Walter What are you so afraid of?

Anne Only the truth and those who fear it and will do anything to quench it, like they want to quench me.

Walter Your care for Laura Fairlie is touching, especially since you look like her.

Anne Do I? I take that as a compliment. Her mother was my best friend in the world and better than my own mother. That's why I offer so much tenderness on this grave, for that's all I have left of her. But my work is soon finished, and the grave will be nice and clean again.

Walter Was it your mother who had you hospitalized?

Anne Please, don't talk about it. No, she was innocent.

Walter In your letter to Miss Fairlie you described in great detail her future husband, as if you knew him all too intimately. Was he the one to cause your misfortune?

Anne You frighten me by already knowing too much.

Walter So the one you fear and who has done you so much harm is Sir Percival Glyde?

Anne (cries out) Oh, you must not mention that man's name! He will only bring disaster, and his mere name is an invitation to disaster!

The older (returning) What are you crying about, dear? What bloke has frightened you? *(to Walter)* What do you mean by making this young lady so upset?

Walter Pardon me. I only wish her the best. She knows me before and knows that I would never harm any woman.

Anne It's true. He is innocent and only wishes me well. I am only so afraid and so easily frightened.

The older You had better come home with me at once. *(to Walter)* And what are you doing at the churchyard at this late hour, young man? Did you also expect to see some ghosts?

Walter I am as engaged as Anne Catherick in protecting the Fairlie family as much as I can.

The older How do you know her name? Has she presented herself?

Anne He found it out by caring for me, like also Miss Fairlie and her half sister do, which is kind and noble of them.

The older Come home with me now, my girl. *(to Walter)* And you also would be wise in leaving this churchyard for the night.

Walter You are perfectly right.

(The older Mrs Clements takes care of Anne and leads her out. Walter leaves at last.)

Act II scene 1.

Vincent Gilmore But you must realize that this letter is written by an unstable woman who can't be held accountable for what she writes. Sir Percival Glyde is a baronet and a citizen in a high position who successfully worked himself to a seat in the parliament without anyone ever having found the slightest blot on his character or past, which is of great significance in a political context.

Walter I still suggest that this letter is deeply felt and honestly written and can't just be ignored.

Marian The woman who wrote it is only concerned about Laura's welfare as much as I.

Gilmore The sensitivity of your hearts are running away with sentimentality. You mustn't take a deranged woman seriously. She has been to an asylum consigned there by her own mother!

Walter No, by Sir Percival Glyde.

Gilmore Well, he will have to explain the matter when he comes here himself. I am certain he will be able to give a satisfactory explanation to the aberrant behaviour of this poor demented woman. I will have her letter copied and sent to Sir Percival Glyde's lawyer, who I know very well. Sir Percival Glyde is one of the indispensably fundamental pillars of our society!

Marian If he can calm us down all is well. If he can't there will be no marriage for Laura.

Gilmore It's fortunate that you are so wise and sensible, Marian, when your sister is subjected to unbalanced anonymous letters from hysterical mental cases.

Marian Don't judge her. You haven't met her.
Gilmore No. Have you?
Marian I would have, if she hadn't left Todd's farm already the day after Walter met her at the churchyard.
Gilmore So it's only young Walter here who has seen this macabre woman in white at all, who causes upsets wherever and however she appears. And unfortunately it appears that our key witness in this affair is about to leave us, which I regret most sincerely, especially since Sir Percival Glyde is arriving here on Monday to explain the whole matter.
Walter I also regret that I have to leave.
Gilmore May I ask why?
Walter Private reasons.
Gilmore I see. And old Mr Fairlie and Laura have accepted it?
Walter Yes.
Marian He has no choice, Mr Gilmore.
(enter Laura)
Laura I hope, Walter, that you will be able to join us for dinner on your last evening.
Walter I can't refuse your invitation, dear Laura.
Laura Let's have a nice moment together for the last time while it's possible, for no one knows what will follow.
Marian We'll make the best of it, Laura, whatever happens.
Laura Yes, as long as you stand by my side it's possible. And as long as Walter is still with us I also have a brother by my side.
Walter Of course I shall never discontinue my contact with you.
Laura I sincerely hope so.
Gilmore So let's make the best of it and enjoy a good dinner and for the moment forget both the future, Sir Percival Glyde and that woman in white.
Walter Her I will never forget.
Marian Just forget her for tonight, Walter. We need you more than her.
Gilmore I am actually starving.
(They go to dinner.)

Scene 2.

Laura (alone with Marian) I miss Walter.
Marian So we all do.
Laura I don't trust him. Even our dog reacts against him. There is no limit to his charm and amicability, but I know that I will never be able to love him.
Marian You don't have to marry him if you don't want to.
Laura Yes, I have to, since father ordained it so, and mother also endorsed it. I never had anything to put against it, and the only one to bring objections was our mysterious woman in white.
Marian I hear him coming.
Sir Percival (entering) Always together. Inseparable. Do you have secrets with your sister that you conceal from me?
Marian Surely you must understand, Sir Percival, that marriage is out of the question as long as the warnings of Anne Catherick's anonymous letters haven't been confuted?
Percival Of course, and therefore I am eager to confute them in a way that will be satisfactory to all by irrefutable evidence. Marian, I asked you yourself expressly to write a letter to poor Anne Catherick's mother to ask her how it really was with

the case and condition of her daughter. Could you still have any doubts after her answer?

Laura What letter is that, Marian?

Marian An inhuman letter to be written by a mother about her own daughter. (*giving it to Laura, who reads it*)

Laura (reading) "Concerning your letter I may give you the following information. My daughter Anne displayed already as a child evident symptoms of debility that grew worse with the years, which finally amounted to such expressions, that we with the aid of good friends were compelled to confine her under professional care. Since I didn't want her put in any horrific mental hospital but wished her to have good treatment, Sir Percival Glyde helped us in placing her in a private hospital. Believe me, mylady, we did everything we could for her and couldn't do anything better. With kind regards, Jane Anne Catherick."

Marian (to Laura) Is that a natural mother who could write a thing like that about her only daughter?

Laura (more worried than ever) I really don't know what to believe.

Percival Could you doubt actual evidence in black and white?

Laura No, I couldn't, for I see no alternative to this authentication.

Marian The letter could be forged or written under strain or extortion, but it doesn't seem like that.

Laura No, it's too genuine. But I have to talk with Gilmore.

Percival Good. I'll go and fetch him. (*leaves*)

Marian It's the very openness and perfection of the outward appearances that make me suspicious.

Laura I also have my misgivings. But whatever happens I shall never leave you, Marian.

Marian And I will see to it that you never get separated from me.

(*enter Gilmore*)

Gilmore Sir Percival Glyde says that he will never try to force you into a marriage against your will, Laura.

Marian The perfect gentleman.

Gilmore Do you still have doubts or concerns about his character, Marian, after his clear evidence of Anne Catherick's chronic mental instability?

Marian He is too perfect to be true. His façade is too spotfree. His career is too much of a one-sided success. He is too nice and charming to be wholly convincing. He is hiding something, and we don't know what.

Gilmore And then we can't even speculate in it.

Marian But it worries Laura and therefore also me.

Gilmore You will get over it. You have to get detached from your wild fancies. You mustn't be prejudicial only because this gentleman happens to be perfect. The marriage couldn't be more favourable. Two fortunes are fused together, and Laura will become the highly respected wife of a highly respected gentleman in a high position and will be promoted to the highest level of society. Could it be any better?

Marian That's what worries us, that the curtains are too impressive not to have something concealed behind, and we have no idea of what is behind. Why did Sir Percival engage in the case of Anne Catherick and place her in a private ward although she came from the lowest class of society in contrast to his own?

Gilmore Compassion, perhaps?

Marian We don't know, Gilmore. And what is the link between Sir Percival and this insensitive businesslike almost inhuman mother who confines her only daughter to a mental hospital?

Gilmore You haven't seen her and can't know how mentally ill she is.

Marian She has written a letter of clear reason which doesn't indicate any mental illness no matter how anonymous it is. Walter Hartwright has met her twice and had on both occasions only good impressions of her gaining only sympathy. We know that she is good, since she on her own initiative washed and cleaned mother's grave. How can a good person be stamped as mentally ill?

Gilmore My erudition of law does not reach your psychology, *Marian*.

Laura Just promise me one thing, *Gilmore*. If I am married to sir Percival, make sure that *Marian* may stay with me and live with me.

Gilmore We must certainly be able to arrange that without any problem. I can't see that Sir Percival could have any objection against that.

Laura And I don't want my fortune to pass to him if I die. I want it to go to *Marian* instead.

Gilmore For that matter your will is my law as your lawyer. As soon as you come of age you are the only one with any right to decide on that matter.

Laura Then I am satisfied and ready to marry Sir Percival.

Gilmore All dark shadows dispersed?

Laura All dark shadows dispersed. With *Marian* by my side, I can go through anything.

Marian *Laura*, you should think more of yourself than of me.

Laura You yourself think always more of me than of yourself.

Marian We are like that, *Laura*.

Gilmore Then everything seems clear and settled, and I shall contact Sir Percival's lawyer. Allow me only to remind you, that Sir Percival always has insisted on the wedding taking place before the end of the year.

Marian That means before *Laura* comes of age in March.

Gilmore Yes.

Laura You know my will and wish, *Gilmore*. I feel safe now in your and *Marian*'s hands. You are my only insurance against the future.

Gilmore I shall keep you carefully and continuously informed about the progress of the matter. (*bows and leaves*)

Marian Do you really mean to marry him?

Laura He wants to marry me. That's all that means anything. My father and mother wanted it that way. Who am I to defy the will of the dead?

Marian I am not at all at ease with Anne Catherick's mother's letter. On the contrary.

Laura I am afraid that we as little can help Anne Catherick as she can help us.

Marian I refuse to resign total helplessness.

Laura That's why I need you, *Marian*, for with all my fortune and this ideal marriage ahead I am completely helpless.

Marian No, you are not, *Laura*. You only imagine that you are, and that's what makes you feel that way, but only until you wake up from your imagination.

Laura I sense the marriage like an evil dream which I can only wake up from by going through with it.

Marian I will follow you through all evil dreams, *Laura*, until we have come through the darkness and wake up to light.

Laura My only safety is you.

Marian You are all I have, *Laura*. I will never let you go.

Scene 3. London. A pub.

Gilmore Walter Hartwright! That I would find you here!
Walter Mr Gilmore. What a pleasant surprise.

Gilmore You look all washed up.

Walter Not entirely. Only half way. You don't happen to know of any boat, any mission or service that could bring me as far away from here as possible?

Gilmore You are in tatters.

Walter Is that so strange? All London society has been informed by the press that the beautiful young Laura Fairlie is to become Lady Percival Glyde.

Gilmore Is that the only reason?

Walter Isn't that enough?

Gilmore My dear friend, I am sorry. Unfortunately there was nothing I could do.

Walter What did you try to do?

Gilmore Stop the marriage.

Walter Why didn't it work?

Gilmore Sir Percival and his lawyer refused to give in, and her guardian made no resistance and capitulated entirely. Laura doesn't come of age until March.

Walter So she wasn't allowed to choose her husband herself, but he is forced upon her by a feeble hypocondriac of a guardian who doesn't understand a thing of what it's all about including her dead parents. What did they really know about Sir Percival Glyde?

Gilmore Nothing except that he was a man born to a high position by birth, which was quite enough overwhelmingly respectable to them.

Walter And what do you know?

Gilmore That Sir Percival is practically without any assets and is in desperate need of his wife's money. Everything indicates that he is only marrying her for her money. He doesn't love her nor she him.

Walter What more do you know? Was that the only reason why you tried to stop the marriage?

Gilmore Laura wanted all her fortune to go to her sister in case of her death. Sir Percival demanded through his lawyer that her assets would go to him instead. They refused to compromise, and Laura's uncle and guardian agreed at once. He found it impossible and unthinkable that Laura could possibly die before coming of age.

Walter (darkly) I see. It's worse than I thought. An opportunist by birth...

Gilmore He is a baronet.

Walter None the less he is just a shallow upstart marrying her only to get at her money for purely egoistic reasons without a trace of love in order to use her money for his career.

Gilmore You haven't met him. He is a positive, nice and charming gentleman.

Walter He is still only an opportunist by birth who wouldn't care for Laura at all if she wasn't rich.

Gilmore I can only agree with you on one point. If I had been her guardian I would never have allowed such a marriage on such terms.

Walter Unfortunately you are not her guardian, while the guardian she has is ignorant and incompetent. Couldn't you have the marriage at least postponed until after her coming of age, so that she could decide anything for herself?

Gilmore I tried. Sir Percival and his lawyer were hard as stone and impossible to get into reasonable discussions with.

Walter Evil is hard as stone.

Gilmore You have no right to judge Sir Percival.

Walter Mr Gilmore, if a man imprisons a young defenceless and innocent woman in a mental hospital for life and makes her own mother agree to it, he is an evil man.

Gilmore But she was obviously mentally ill.

Walter Like I haven't met Sir Percival Glyde, you haven't met Anne Catherick, but I have, and anyone who didn't have covert motives for wishing her ill would

have concluded directly that she was as good, honest, talented and accomplished as Laura Fairlie herself! She was perhaps somewhat original, but that's no fault and even less any mental disease. I would like to speak with those doctors who agreed to have her confined and ask them a few questions.

Gilmore Calm down, Walter! You are raising your voice so that anyone can hear you. (*lower*) People are turning around.

Walter (raising his voice even more) I don't care! Let them listen! And tell the sisters in Limmeridge, if you meet them before the wedding, that I during the wedding will be as far away from England as possible! (*finishes his beer in anger, rises, pays quickly and runs out.*)

Gilmore (to himself) Poor man. He loves her. But worst of all is that she also loved him.

Scene 4. Limmeridge.

Laura Marian, this situation is untenable. I have decided to speak out with Sir Percival.

Marian You should have done that long ago.

Laura I want you to be present when I do.

Marian Of course, Laura. Anything for you.

Laura I can't marry him and keep my love for Walter a secret to him. I could never love him like I love Walter.

Marian But you can never have Walter. He has gone to America. We have lost him.

Laura Still my heart belongs only to him.

Sir Percival (entering) Well, ladies? Laura, you wished to speak with me.

Laura Sir Percival, I thank you for your generous offer to let me break the engagement if I don't wish to go through with it. The less I can therefore accept your offer, since I am bound to my parents' wish and your noble disposition underlines it. Therefore instead I must offer *you* to break the engagement.

Sir Percival And for what reason would I do that?

Laura I love another and could never love you.

Sir Percival I see.

Laura No, you don't see. When I was betrothed to you by my parents I did have love to give you, why there were no second thoughts about the engagement. Since then much has happened, and I have changed. The heart I owned to give you does not belong to me any more. I now have the choice between a marriage with you but without love, or a life as an old maid, since I can never have the man I love. It was this I wanted you to know.

Sir Percival But don't you think that some love could grow between us during the years?

Laura Never. I can be a good friend and a good wife to you, but I could never give you any love.

Sir Percival And would I then abstain from you for your showing your very finest side by appearing completely honest and open, in brief, for your showing your heart of gold? No, dear Laura, only the more motivated I become to never do without you.

Laura Then the cards are on the table, and we know each other, and we know where we stand. If you can accept a marriage without love, Sir Percival, I can be your wife.

Sir Percival You need to say no more. I love you and respect you the more for this cold but honest sincerity. I accept your terms. (*takes her hand, kisses it, and leaves.*)

Laura Who could possibly think anything bad about him?

Marian Still he should have understood to pull out. That he didn't must result in lingering misgivings.

Laura No matter the outcome, Marian, it will be my unhappiness, but my parents ordained it, and I am not yet of age and must obey my uncle. I have given Sir Percival a chance to pull out. He didn't take it, and I am not responsible for the consequences. He must take that responsibility himself. I don't know his motives and don't want to know them. The case is clear and can't be undone. Let Anne Catherick's evil dream prove true or not. What I have to do now is to forget Walter Hartwright.

Marian He will be back.

Laura When? In ten years? Next eternity?

Marian In six months. I managed to get him a place in an expedition for old Indian temples in Mexico. Their draughtsman fell ill, and they needed another. It suited Walter perfectly and will do him some good.

Laura When he will be back I will be married and unhappy, with him all forgotten.

Marian No, Laura, you will not have forgotten him. You will have tried to suppress his memory, but in that you will never succeed. And you aren't married yet.

Laura I tried everything to avoid this! Not even Mr Gilmore could help me!

Marian It's the men's world, Laura. We must endure it. All we can do is to by patience try to turn the men more human.

Laura Did Anne Catherick get a better treatment for that kind of patience?

Marian She is our sister of misfortune. Something tells me that we are in the same clinch of destiny all three of us. She is showing the way. We are only to follow.

Laura I hope Sir Percival never will be able to have her locked up again.

Marian We all share that hope.

Sir Percival (reenters) Pardon me for disturbing again, but I only wanted to make one thing perfectly clear. Since it is now decided that we are going to marry, Laura, your welfare will be my prime interest as long as I live. You asked me to let Marian live with you. Of course she may. Your sister shall be my sister.

Laura Thank you, Sir Percival.

Sir Percival As soon as we are married I want us to leave this winter climate and go to warmer countries in the south. Would Italy suit you?

Laura I have never been abroad.

Marian Italy is the most interesting country in Europe.

Sir Percival What about a honeymoon of six months in Italy? Your aunt is also there, the Countess Fosco.

Laura Do you know Count Fosco?

Percival It was he who saved my life once in Rome when I was attacked by a villain who knifed my hand and gladly would have knifed my heart only to reach my wallet.

Marian Italians are sometimes desperate.

Laura Was that how you got acquainted with my family, by Count Fosco and my aunt?

Sir Percival Yes. It was some years ago.

Laura Can we be separated for six months, Marian?

Marian Yes, if you return afterwards.

Sir Percival In the meantime Marian could in peace and quiet move and install herself in my home in Hampshire, where we are to live afterwards.

Laura What do you think of the prospect, Marian?

Marian I will follow you. If you want me there I will settle there.

Sir Percival Then it's all arranged. Then I determine our wedding day for December 22nd. Will that be all right?

Laura It's only in slightly more than a month, but it is to happen anyway.

Sir Percival The sooner we get over it, the sooner we can go to Italy.

Marian Do so, Laura, so that I may welcome you back for midsummer.

Sir Percival Your sister is so considerate.
Laura So you maybe can understand, Sir Percival, why I impossibly could do without her.
Sir Percival I understand it so well. Then it's all settled. I will write to my lawyer immediately, who will organize everything. Thank you, my ladies. (*leaves*)
Marian (after a while) No, Laura, I am sorry, but I can't bear with that man. There is deep down a falseness buried in him so extensive, that he can't keep it from showing up sometimes.
Laura He has always been absolutely correct.
Marian Yes, but his self-complacency is so unbearable that there could be any rotten secrets buried under the varnished surface.
Laura I must get married to him, Marian. I can't get away from it. The only way out is through.
Marian I am afraid you are right. The law has tied us down by your poor uncle and Mr Gilmore's paragraphic pedantry to a destiny which we don't know the way out of, only the way into it.
Laura We can always deal with it together.
Marian We will have to trust that. But I really hope Walter Hartright will return from his expedition. Something tells me that we will need him.

Act III scene 1. Blackwater Park in Hampshire.

Merriman Take it easy, Percival. It all depends on Lady Glyde.
Percival Take it easy, you say, when my life is hanging by a thread!
Merriman All you need is her signature on a piece of paper.
Percival And that I shall damned well get from her!
(Marian is seen listening.)
Merriman It must be legal. You can't just force her.
Percival Of course I will not force her, but she must sign! Or else I am ruined!
Merriman Take it easy!
Percival That's what I am doing!
(Laura enters and sees Marian.)
Marian I am glad you came, Laura. Something has happened.
Laura Yes, I know. Percival has been very heated all day.
Marian Do you know what it's all about?
Laura His usual bad state of affairs, I expect.
Marian He will ask you to sign a paper. You must not do that without reading it.
Laura Of course I won't, Marian. Lucky me that I at last have an ally on my side again. Alone with Percival, my aunt and Count Fosco I felt like a sparrow among woodpeckers.
Marian They are not woodpeckers. They are vultures.
Laura But it's really only Count Fosco that I am afraid of.
Marian What do you have against him? He is all perfect politeness and gentleness, he charms everyone, he has even won our aunt who used to be the most unpleasant nagging gossip in the world, he is elegant and has an acquired taste and knowledge of culture like none of us, and he is Italian. Who can resist an Italian?
Laura That's just the scary thing about him. He charms everyone into his control. He is unnoticeably manipulative. He has even charmed you. Percival is completely under his control like our aunt, who is frighteningly passive and submissive to him. It is as if everyone was hypnotized into his control without noticing it themselves and against their will and then remain his slaves out of fear for

him, as if he knew more about his subjects than they themselves. Even you are under his spell.

Marian Here they are now.

Laura And he has brought his disgusting mice!

(Enter Fosco, Madame Fosco and Sir Percival.)

Fosco I apologize, my dear ladies, for bringing my small white darlings, but there are dogs in the house, and should I take the risk of leaving them alone in a cage against a dog?

Laura We have unfortunately got used to your mice, Count Fosco.

Percival How do you like it here, Marian? Please answer me straight.

Marian I actually like this place and have managed to make myself at home here. My small room with its writing desk and a chair is all I need with my tiny belongings for which one small bag was enough. Especially I like your lake. It reminds me a bit of Cumberland.

Percival I am afraid it is drying out and getting overgrown. It's really just a shrinking swamp, and unsound mists are coming up from there with mean smells and spells of marsh-gas. Even its surroundings are rather depressing. It's almost like an invitation to murder.

Countess What on earth can give you such an idea, Sir Percival?

Percival You have to admit that the air around the lake smells of murder a long way.

Fosco On the contrary, my dear Percival. The lake would be the most unsuitable place in the world for a murder by its shallowness, where no corpse could possibly be concealed, and by its very muddy shores, where all footprints would be over-conspicuous.

Percival You know what I mean. The dismal atmosphere, the sad weeping willows, the mouldy and slimy stones, the smell of stagnant water, the mustiness, the swamp stench – if you see it you do, or else you don't.

Fosco I see perfectly well what you mean, but only an idiot would commit a murder by this lake while a wise man would commit it anywhere but here.

Laura I can't see how you can associate such a beautiful lake with murder, and even less can I understand how you could regard a wise man as a possible murderer. I always learned that wise men are good men who find all crimes abominable.

Fosco My dear lady Glyde, those are noble views you find an expression for, and as generally accepted concepts we'll never get rid of them. *(Takes out a small mouse from his cage and keeps it tenderly in his hand while speaking to it.)* My dear little friend, here you have a perfect moral cookie. A truly wise mouse is a good mouse. Bring that message to all your fellows, and then never gnaw at your cage any more as long as you live. Be quiet and still and keep calm accepting your moral prison for life, and all will praise you as a wise and good mouse knowing his place in the cage.

Laura You'll not get away that easily, Count Fosco. I don't believe you can give me one single example of any wise man who was a criminal.

Fosco Quite right. You are perfectly right. Anyone who gets caught for having committed a crime could never be considered a wise man, but a wise man who commits a crime will never get caught.

Percival Keep your ground, Laura. Claim now that crimes reveal themselves and punish themselves. There you have another commonly accepted concept, that crimes punish themselves!

Laura (quietly) Sir Percival, I suggest that you are more right than you actually intend.

(Sir Percival bursts out laughing.)

Marian You are right, Laura.

Fosco Do you really believe in such nursery tales, my ladies? What do you say, Countess? Do you also believe in naive truisms?

Countess I do best in not saying anything before I hear more of what such experienced men could know about it.

Fosco It's all very simple, my friends. We get to know everything about all those crimes that are detected and the criminals that get caught, but we never learn anything about the unsolved crimes, whose perpetrators never get caught. That's how the cage of society works, in the commonly accepted moral norms of which we all are stuck like little nice, good and wise white mice in the cage of sanctimony. But ask the coroners how it really is. Ask also the insurance clerks. Read the papers. Are they ever following up all those crimes that never are resolved? No, they only announce resolved crimes and caught criminals, and they always make these seem stupid and ridiculous fools, but the unsolved crimes remain and are piled up in the archives of the police, and there is only one conclusion you can draw from that: the foolish criminals get caught, but the perpetrators of the unsolved crimes must be less foolish. To detect a crime and to get away with a crime is a test of powers between the police and the individual. When the criminal is a stupid fool the police catches him in nine cases out of ten. When the criminal is intelligent, calculating and methodical with some foresight and education, the police in nine cases out of ten never catches him. We only hear about all the stupid criminals that get caught. We never learn anything about all those that never get caught. On that basis society has formed the dogma that crimes don't pay, that criminals are stupid and that crimes punish themselves. But what about all those crimes that we never learn anything about?

Percival Bravo, Count Fosco! (*applauds enthusiastically*)

Marian You reason logically and maybe realistically, but I don't understand why you seem happy about it and why Sir Percival would applaud it.

Percival Soothe them, Count. Tell them that virtue is something noble, and they will be happy.

Fosco They know more about virtue than I, Sir Percival. They may lecture me, and I invite them to.

Marian You are the oldest of all of us and should know most of us about life but have only learned to be cynical. Virtue cannot lecture a cynic.

Fosco When you are as old as I, miss Marian, you will perhaps better understand my wisdom. But where is my little mouse? (*looking for the mouse*) Benjamin! Benjamin! (*searching. Laura and Marian can't hide their pleasure at the contrast.*) There he is! (*takes up the mouse*) But what is this? (*has seen something on the floor*)

Percival What is it?

Fosco (shocked) Look!

Percival I can only see a dirty stain.

Fosco It's blood!

(*All get started and must study the thing and get upset.*)

Marian It's nothing to bother about. It was a dog.

Percival A dog? Not one of mine I hope?

Marian No, it was an alien dog that came here and was shot by your groom.

Percival What kind of alien dog? There are no homeless dogs around here. Whose dog was it?

Marian It was Mrs Catherick's dog.

Percival (seriously shocked) Mrs Catherick? And what the devil was she doing here? Out with it!

Fosco Quiet, Percy, quiet.

Marian She came here with her dog, the dog was shot and lay down here to die. He died while I kept my hand on him.

Percival (bawling) But what the devil did Mrs Catherick want!

Fosco Quiet, Percy, quiet. Come out for a moment and calm down. Excuse him, my ladies. He is sometimes nervous and gets into a high pressure. (*walks out with him. The countess follows her count.*)

Laura What story is this, Marian?

Marian It was before you returned from your journey. I wasn't here at the moment. Mrs Catherick came to ask about her daughter, who had been seen here.

Laura Has Anne Catherick been here?

Marian I don't know. Mrs Catherick lives three miles from here and had obviously heard something about her daughter sneaking around. She came here, had her dog shot and went back home. I only learned it afterwards when I found the dog. I tried to save him and therefore brought him here, but he died here. They tried to wash away the stains.

Laura I have never seen Sir Percival so upset.

Marian You always call him Sir Percival, never your husband.

Laura Our marriage was just a formality. You know that.

Marian And that has turned you colder than you used to be.

Laura Unfortunately I have learned to know him better.

Marian Can he force you to sign that document?

Laura We'll see. No one can guide my hand except myself.

Percival (*outside with the count*) Damn that woman to come here and start haunting me again! Now I must go to Welmingham to hear what has happened.

Fosco Business first. You must get your wife's signature.

Percival Yes, I must. Damn! The worries keep piling! Let's get it over with, and I'll deal with that Catherick woman later. One woman at a time. Is that all that women exist and are good for – giving us trouble and piling up obstructions to whatever we wish?

Fosco We need them, Percy.

Percival You can say that again. She has the money. (*They enter again.*)

Fosco Percival has calmed down but is faced with a new problem which compels him to leave tomorrow.

Percival I am very much pressed, Laura. I would therefore require you to immediately sign that paper.

Laura I will gladly do so, if I may only read it first.

Percival It's long and circumstantial and mostly only technical. You wouldn't understand anything of it. You don't have to read it. Just sign.

Laura But shouldn't I know what I am signing?

Percival No, you shouldn't, because you wouldn't understand it anyway.

Laura Always when our lawyer Gilmore had any paper demanding our signature he first explained the contents, so that we understood what we were signing.

Percival That's not necessary now. He was paid by you to serve you. I am not paid to teach you about law.

Laura I only ask to understand what I am signing.

Percival Can't you see that I am in a hurry! I have to go today! The cab is waiting! I can't wait!

Laura But let me then at least try to read what it is.

Percival Sign, I tell you!

Marian Pardon me, but even if she signs, doesn't the document have to be attested by two witnesses?

Fosco It's you and me, miss Marian. My wife will not do since she is my wife.

Marian I can't attest to anything that my sister has no knowledge of what she has been signing.

Percival Don't you trust your own husband, Laura?

Laura I would trust you completely if you treated me like a responsible human being, but you demand that I sign a legal document in blindness. A responsible person cannot do that.

Percival Now you sign, and that's that!

Laura My scruples forbid me.

Percival Your scruples! What fancy is that! Didn't you throw them overboard when you married me?

Laura (*lays quietly down the pen, looks at him with disdain and turns her back*)

Percival She refuses! Can you imagine! She refuses! My own wife refuses!

Fosco (*quietly to Percival*) Percy, she is perfectly right to refuse the way you are acting. Try to control yourself, and remember that we are among ladies.

Percival It's just an empty formality! Why does she make trouble? Has she no sense of duty towards her husband?

Laura (*to Marian*) This is going too far. I don't want to upset him beyond reason. Shouldn't I sign after all?

Marian You have the right on your side. You don't sign something you haven't read.

Percival Don't interfere, lady! This is none of your business!

Marian It certainly is, since I am required to witness the document.

Percival Next time you invite yourself to a man's house, I advise you not to return his hospitality by taking his wife's party against him!

(Laura is exhausted, Marian embraces her.)

Fosco Percival, the way you go on you only make it impossible for her to sign.

Percival (*furious, to Laura*) Do you refuse???

Laura (*recovering*) I refuse, until I have read every line of what you want me to sign. Come, Marian. We have nothing more here to do. (*wants to leave with Marian*)

Fosco (*intervening*) Just a moment, my ladies. Percy, is it absolutely necessary to sign right now? Can't it wait until tomorrow, until you are back?

Percival I want it settled now! I need the signature now!

Fosco You don't need it now at all. Were you not in a hurry to leave? Have you forgotten? You can't force a signature to be written in blindness. Can't it really wait until tomorrow?

Laura (*wants to leave, Marian retains her*)

Marian Whatever you do, Laura, don't turn the count into your enemy.

Percival Go to hell! Damn all these cursed women! (*rushes out*)

Fosco (*after some while*) I must apologize for my friend's impropriety. I regret that you now had to see him from his very worst sides.

Laura (*coolly*) Unfortunately it's no surprise to me. But it's the first time he has shown them even in the presence of others.

Fosco Tomorrow when he is back he will have calmed down and collected his wits. He has too much about him at the moment. I can only appeal to your female magnanimity and ask you to overlook his bad temper. Come, dear Eleanor. Let's leave the good sisters in peace. (*leaves with the countess.*)

Laura (*alone with Marian*) His bad temper! You saw it yourself. I will never sign that document. It probably concerns obligations upon bonds making it possible for him to release any amount of loans to remedy his business failures, which will only continue from bad to worse.

Marian (*affected*) So all his perfect politeness, all his beautiful phrases and sincere regards of respect, all his charming manners during your long engagement were only calculation?

Laura The only thing he ever saw in me was money.

Marian What shall we do, Laura?

Laura Wait for Walter Hartright to come and save us, but it could take an eternity.

Marian Is that all?

Laura He can't expel you, Marian, and we'll make it as long as we are together. That's the only security we have.

Marian Do you think he went to Mrs Catherick?

Laura I am sure he did. It was the mere mention of her name that ruined his day and unsettled him so profoundly that we might never see him in a normal state again.

Marian What is his normal state?

Laura He is a shallow upstart. Nothing else.

Marian Oh, Laura! (*embracing her*)

Laura (*suddenly misses her brooch*) But where is my brooch? (*searches her womb*) My mother's brooch! I must have lost it on the way.

Marian Where have you been?

Laura Down at the boathouse. It must lie somewhere on the road. I still have time to search for it and find it. (*hurries out*)

Marian What a day! Glyde exposed as a brutal rascal who never loved anything but money and who in Laura only saw her money. A loathsome rogue without character! Walter Hartright was right all the way. He actually had surer instincts than we women. No, I can't take any more now. Perhaps I can be allowed to have some moment's rest now for a change... (*falls asleep in a comfortable armchair*) (*in her sleep*) Walter... Why can't you return... We need you...

Walter (*entering slowly and approaching her*) Don't worry. I will be back.

Marian Back from the dead? From the marsh fevers in the jungle? From the pirates of the Caribbean? From shipwrecks and unknown mass graves?

Walter Others will succumb to plague and malaria. Others will drown in shipwrecks and perish on desert shores as beachcombers. Others will be buried alive but not I.

Marian Who is to be buried alive?

Walter Not me. And if anyone is I shall raise her up from the dead.

Marian We are buried alive among villains, and only you can save us.

Walter Don't worry. I will be back. (*leaves quietly*)

Marian (*uneasy in her sleep*) Can we rely on that? When? Don't come too late. I suspect the worst possible development. Where did you go? Come back! (*wakes up, just as Laura comes back*)

Laura Marian! (*hurries to her side*)

Marian (*observes the brooch*) Laura! You found it!

Laura It wasn't me. You can't guess who found it for me.

Marian Who?

Laura Anne Catherick!

Marian Anne Catherick!

Laura Yes, I met her.

Marian (*on her guard*) Quiet! That's a dangerous name to mention in this house. (*looks around*) I don't think anyone is listening, but lower your voice just in case. So you really met her?

Laura Yes, quite alive, but she is very ill.

Marian Tell me.

Laura I found it nowhere on the way down to the boathouse, and when I searched around where I had been walking I suddenly hear a voice behind me: "Ssst! Miss Fairlie!"

Marian Miss Fairlie!

Laura Yes, my maiden name. I turned around and immediately recognized the woman in her white clothes with only a torn shawl and a shabby hat for a contrast but immediately realized that it was she, although we haven't met since we were girls. But I had a bit of a shock when I saw her.

Marian Why?

Laura She was so strikingly like me! It was like seeing myself in the mirror! The only difference was that she looked older, more emaciated and more harrowed. I immediately felt that she looked badly handled, so I asked how she was and what I could do for her. Then she showed me the brooch and said: "It is I who should and want to do something for you. I have followed you for days in the hope of a chance to speak alone with you, miss Fairlie."

"I am Mrs Glyde nowadays," I said immediately. Then she became another person at once. "Don't mention that name!" And she had a terrible look of hatred in her eyes, and for the first time I could really think of her as mad. "As if I didn't know that you were married! That's why I am here, to help you against him. You must have noticed that he is a beast?" I could only admit that I had observed certain traits of some wants of education. "We are all his victims, we women who met him, my mother, you and I. But my mother knew his secret and revealed it to me. Since then he is deadly afraid of me. For that reason only he placed me in a madhouse!"

Again she had that terrible look of endless hatred, but when she had calmed down I asked her: "What is his secret?"

"That's what you must learn, so that you can protect yourself against him, so that he is forced to be kind to you and fear you. Or else you could end up in terrible trouble."

"What is the secret?" I tried to insist.

There was some rustle in the bushes, and she nervously turned around. "I think I am being followed," she said. "Someone can hear us. We are not safe here now. He could discover me at any time. Come back here same time tomorrow alone. You must learn the secret."

Suddenly she hurried away as if escaping. I called after her: "Thank you for the brooch!" but she was gone, and nothing else was heard. Perhaps we have been too indiscreet. Perhaps I shouldn't have called. But I met no one on the way back, and I don't think anyone heard us or saw us together.

Marian At last something of a breakthrough. Glyde fears Anne Catherick so much that he at any cost wants her locked up in a mental asylum for good, and the reason for his fear is that she knows something about him. We must find out what it is.

Laura Tomorrow.

Marian I will follow you to her tomorrow but at some invisible distance, so that I can hear you without seeing you. That's enough.

Laura But why is she so like me? Can you understand it?

Marian She feels like a sister to us. Perhaps she is some kind of half sister without our knowing it. Perhaps it has something to do with the secret.

Laura I am totally exhausted after all the upsets of today.

Marian So am I. Come, Laura. We have overstrained our souls enough for today. *(takes her arm, and they leave the room together.)*

Scene 2. The following day.

Fosco Can't you see, you blundering idiot, that every new overstep on your side only worsens the situation and counteracts your own interests!

Percival No woman is more dangerous than the weakest. That's my experience.

Fosco But you can't keep your own wife imprisoned!

Percival Yes, I can in my own home, and I must if she conspires!

Fosco And how do you know that she conspires, this good and amiable woman who never protested against your brutal manners?

Percival I know it!

Fosco How do you know it?

Percival She has met her!

Fosco May then a woman not meet another woman?

Percival Not Anne Catherick! Not my wife!

Fosco But you don't even allow your wife to meet her own sister.

Percival That bitch! She is the worst of all!

(enter Marian in that very moment)

Marian By what right is my sister kept in isolation in her own home?

Percival With the same right as *you* will be kept confined in your room in the same way if you continue intriguing behind my back with your damned sister!

Countess (going up to Marian) Gentlemen, with your treatment of the mistress of this house and her sister I can impossibly remain in this house.

Fosco (happily surprised) Bravo, my beloved countess!

Percival (astonished) You don't mean to say that you side with the women – against me?

Fosco My dear Percy, you behave like the greatest fool and idiot in the world! Can't you just for a moment try to collect your wits and stop raving about like a mad bull and ruin all your own possibilities!

Percival We don't know what my wife and that woman have been discussing! I must know!

Fosco And do you think you could get to know it by extortion and force?

Percival I must use any possible means!

Fosco Be kind now and give the key of your wife's room to her sister, so that her only friend here in this house may see her. As it is she has nothing else to do there in her room but to sit and cry, the way you treat her.

Countess Sir Percival, no woman in the world could accept your behaviour and your way of action, and no man either.

Fosco That's right, countess! Steady on!

Percival (after some hesitation, gives the key to Marian) Well, go up to her then. But I warn you! No conspiracies in my house!

Marian We never conspired, Sir Percival, neither I nor my sister, but we are more and more obliged to look around us for means to defend ourselves as you constantly excel yourself in your outrageous treatment of both of us. You have fired the only faithful servant Laura had in this house and sent her away without notice. That can only be understood as a direct action of hostility.

Percival If she is to have a servant, I am the one to appoint her!

Marian Like you appointed that gorilla who is now watching her door?

Percival (calling up the stairs) Gladys, come down! *(milder, to Marian)* You can go up now. *(Marian leaves at once.)*

Fosco Well, my friend, why are you so upset? You have completely run off the rails.

Percival My wife has seen that woman! I must know what they have talked about!

Fosco You already said that, but you didn't answer my question. Why are you so afraid of that woman?

Percival She is mad! She is completely mad!

Fosco But feeble-minded and harmless. I have seen her myself, even if it was only her silhouette, but I heard her exalted voice and silly talk. Except for that her whole being had a striking resemblance to your wife.

Percival I know.

Fosco What more do you know? As your friend I should be kept informed.

Percival You can't imagine how worrisome my position is.

Fosco Eleanor, let me talk alone with him. Try to find out what the sisters are talking about. *(Eleanor leaves.)* Well, my friend, out with it! What's the sore point?

(Curtain.)

Scene 3. Laura's room.

(Laura sitting on her bed crying as Marian enters.)

Laura (immediately happy) Marian! They let you in!

Marian The gorilla is gone. The count took our side against Sir Percival when the Countess also did.

Laura Aunt Eleanor! I never guessed that she could speak out.

Marian It's the first time ever we have had her to thank for anything. But how was your meeting? Did you see her?

Laura No. She wasn't there. But she had left a message, a small letter. She had seen the one who spied on us yesterday. It was the count.

Marian That count seems to insist on controlling us all.

Laura I hate him! I know that he is completely evil inside! My husband is a stupid boar in comparison with his calculating intriguing evil mind. He is a poisonous spider who in secret is working on getting us all tied up in his web.

Countess (opens the door and enters, all white) Pardon me, but I was on my way to my room when I found your handkerchief on the floor, Marian. *(gives it to her)* Here you are.

Marian Thank you, aunt Eleanor. *(exit countess)*

She must have heard you. Oh Laura, didn't I tell you not for all the world to make the count your enemy!

Laura He appeared quite suddenly yesterday. I didn't notice him, but Anne Catherick noticed him at once and hurried away. They are closing in on her. That's why she didn't dare to come today.

Marian So you still haven't learned her and Glyde's secret?

Laura No.

Marian What did she write in the letter?

Laura I don't have it any more. Sir Percival took it away from me. He was there waiting for me when I came to see Anne. I have never seen him so cruel and furious. He forced me to tell him everything. Most of all he was interested in that secret, but I couldn't reveal it since I never obtained it. He took for granted that I knew it anyway and swore to squeeze it out of me by any means. That's why he locked me in, placed that gorilla outside to guard me and forbade me to see anyone, especially you.

Marian He is morbidly desperate. Only a man with a very bad conscience behaves like that. Do you remember what was in the letter?

Laura Yes. I remember it exactly. It went something like this: "We were discovered yesterday by an elderly gentleman, so I had to leave. He tried to follow me but was clumsy while I knew the path and made it, but I dare not return today. I am writing this at six in the morning and will hide it in the sand under a mark which you will be sure to notice. When we next time will talk about your cruel husband's secret it must be in absolute safety or not at all. Try to be patient. I promise you that we shall meet again and soon," signed with her initials A.C.

Marian His secret must be devastating since he gets so desperate only at the mention of it.

Laura Indeed. What shall we do?

Marian I will write to our lawyer in London and to our uncle. He must deal with this. Or else it will only get worse. The best thing would be for you to go back up to Cumberland.

Laura I would be glad to.

Marian But now aunt Eleanor knows that you hate her count. It's possible that we don't have much time.

Laura What could happen?

Marian Anything. Keep the door of your room locked. Don't let anyone in except me. I must also keep my room locked and hide my diary. And I shall keep all ears and senses open, that I promise you, Laura, that nothing will evade my senses of the men's intrigues.

Laura Thank you, dearest sister. So far we have managed.

Marian Every day has become worse, after every eruption it felt as if the worst was over, and then something even worse came along. Be prepared for the worst, Laura. I will send the letters tomorrow.

Laura What would I be without you?

Marian You would have one sister less.

Laura You are fortunate to be poor. My curse is being so rich. Only because of that we ended up in this terrible trap of the men's greed and possessiveness. My fortune has turned me into a persecuted prisoner in my own home.

Marian We will get out of it somehow.

Laura Yes, Marian, but only with your help.

Marian I will never let you down.

Laura I know, Marian, but we are only two vulnerable women exposed to the passions of reckless tyranny and have no male friend at hand. We would have needed that more than anything.

Marian I had better immediately write the letters and send them already tonight. Then I will spy on Sir Percival and the count, like he spied on you.

Laura (with lighted hope, grabs her hands with both of hers) Good luck, Marian.

Scene 4.

Percival Come on, count! It's late. All have gone to bed. We can talk freely now.

Fosco (in front, out on the terrace) We are not safe until all the lights are out with the ladies. Their are all still lit.

Percival Who is paranoid now?

Fosco You don't know how clever women can be. They always excel us men, usually in goodness, often in evil but above all in cleverness.

Percival You overestimate them.

Fosco You underestimate them, and that's why you lose against them. Don't you see how they are pushing you over the cliff, just because you constantly let yourself be affected by whatever they find out to provoke you with? You can never force a woman to anything, which you so convulsively tried with only fiasco for a result. You can seldom convince her or win her by presents, money, letters or beautiful poetry, in which arts you only demonstrated pitiable awkwardness, while you can always win any woman with common decency, kindness and gentleness. A woman can be persuaded to anything but never brought to anything which she doesn't wish herself by any other means.

Percival To the point, Fosco. How shall we solve the problem?

Fosco What is the problem?

Percival I have debts of some thousands and you of some hundreds. I have borrowed from you which almost has ruined you. My wife denied us that obligation on her bonds, so we had to sign some drafts. They are due in three months. How shall we pay all these debts without my wife's money?

Fosco (comes back in and extinguishes his cigarette) Now all the lights are gone. Now we can talk business. It looks dark. There seems to be no other way to come across your wife's money except by her death.

Percival Out of the question.

Fosco I am just stating the facts. Only her death could obviously save you from ruin. That doesn't mean that I in any way proposed any kind of murder.

(Marian is seen sneaking above the terrace and eavesdropping in a simple dark hooded cloak)

Percival Even the mere thought is unthinkable.

Fosco Still her only value for you is her money.

Percival I never had her love. She was completely untouched two years ago when our marriage was decided upon, but shortly before the marriage she fell in love with a drawing-master of no position, a simple vagabond, who also fell in love with her. He has all the time been an obstacle to any possibility of more tender feelings between us.

Fosco And where is that drawing-master now?

Percival In America.

Fosco At a safe distance then?

Percival Yes.

Fosco Forget him. You never owned your wife, and she never loved you. You are no more than like two stones to each other. What kind of marriage is that? Forget all loyalties, since there never were any. But don't forget that only her money can save you.

Percival I could never even speculate in her death.

Fosco So let's leave that matter for the time being and deal with the other problem, which in these days has transformed you into a torn rag doll of shattered nerves. Who is this Anne Catherick really, who haunts you more efficiently and rackingly in her living form than any living dead phantom ever could?

Percival She and her mother know my secret. That's why they are a threat to my life. I succeeded in silencing her mother but not the girl. *(gets upset again)* And now she haunts me in my own home surroundings and have secret meetings with my own wife and could turn anyone against me with her demented fairy tales...

Fosco Don't raise your voice. Don't wake up undesirable listeners. What is your secret?

Percival That's my secret.

Fosco That's no answer.

Percival That secret I must keep secret even to you, Fosco.

Fosco Obviously I'll have to accept that. But obviously her mother told the secret to her daughter. Couldn't she tell it to someone else as well?

Percival No, she can't. I saw to that. She is under my control.

Fosco But not the girl. How dangerous is she?

Percival Dangerous enough to be able to destroy me as long as she is at large.

Fosco Is it really that serious?

Percival Yes, that's how serious it is.

Fosco We must find her then.

Percival Nothing is more important than that.

Fosco Let's concentrate then on that to begin with. The money problem is anyway postponed now for three months. I saw the girl down at the boathouse when I followed your wife there, but she discovered me at once and disappeared without giving me a chance of having a glance at her looks. I must have something to work on. It's not enough to know that she reminds of your wife. Can you describe her more exactly? Can you give any details?

Percival She is like an exact but sick copy of my wife.

Fosco What do you mean?

Percival Imagine my wife after a serious illness and somewhat softer in the brain, and you have Anne Catherick.

Fosco (rushing up, upsetting the chair) What??!!

Percival That's actually how she is.

Fosco You mean to say that in their outward appearance they are almost like twin sisters?

Percival That's exactly what I mean.

Fosco And they are not related in any way?

Percival Not in any way.

(A burst of thunder. You can hear bad weather breaking out and pouring rain. Marian above the terrace moves uneasily as she immediately gets wet and cold.)

Fosco *(lighting another cigarette, far away in new plans, pondering quietly:)* A storm seems to have risen. *(laughs suddenly in a return to reality, seems suddenly relieved and very self-satisfied)* That makes it a lot easier.

Percival You mean in finding her?

Fosco Not only that. You'll see. Let's go to bed now. Trust me. All our problems will be resolved by themselves, if we only get hold of your evil spirit, the notorious, fantastic and fatal woman in white, alias the chronically demented poor and lost girl Anne Catherick once and for all.

(He takes Percival by the shoulder, they go out together and put out the lights. Marian starts climbing back to her room from the roof of the terrace.)

Marian If only it hadn't started raining! I am completely drenched and frozen to the bone. But there is much I still have to write in my diary tonight. Just don't let me get sick! Don't fail me, my heart and health, now that my sister needs me more than ever! *(gets out.)*

Scene 5. At breakfast.

Countess Isn't it rather late? Isn't Marian usually the first at breakfast?

Fosco You are right, my dear. It's ten o'clock. Go up and see why Marian hasn't come down for breakfast. *(A maid goes up. She opens the door to Marian's room and gives a cry.)*

Percival What is it now? Are your mice on the loose again, Fosco?

Fosco No, it's probably something worse. I'll go up and see. *(leaves)*

Countess Something has happened.

Percival Now again. We'll never have peace in this house for new troubles.

Countess We are lucky to have the count with us. He fixes everything.

Percival Don't be too sure. So far he has not fixed everything.

Fosco *(returns, serious)* Marian was lying unconscious on the floor in a high fever. We must call a doctor.

Percival Marian? Sick? Impossible!

Fosco If you don't believe me, get up yourself and listen to her delirium. We got her in bed, so she will manage, but what has she been doing tonight? She was not undressed and has been sitting up all night.

Percival You don't think she could have spied on us and heard our conversation?

Fosco It was raining tonight. She could have been outside listening. She was still wet. That could explain it.

Percival Where is Laura?

Fosco By her side. She refuses to leave her.

Percival How does she appear? Upset or brave?

Fosco In shock and despair. She breaks out in tears all the time.

Countess The worst possible company for a sick patient.

Fosco If she heard our conversation tonight, Percy, she might have drawn any absurd conclusions, and consequently we must act at once. Eleanor, go to the village at once, find that Fanny who was fired, and you know what you must do to get those letters Marian gave her to post yesterday.

Percival (shocked) Has she been writing letters again?

Fosco Two, probably to their lawyer and to their uncle. But that was before our conversation tonight. I followed her to the village and saw what she did. Fanny is going up to Limmeridge in Cumberland tomorrow. You must overtake her.

Countess Trust me. I know your arts. (*rises*)

Fosco (after the countess has left) We must hit at once, Percy. It's now or never. That Marian probably overheard our talk yesterday has evidently brought the advantage of her being disabled and out of the game. She can no longer protect Laura, and Laura is painfully aware of it and brought to desperation.

Percival What do you suggest?

Fosco We must capture the woman in white today. I shall on occasion take care of Marian's diary and see what she knows. Then we shall act accordingly.

Percival How do you know that she keeps a diary? Have you read it?

Fosco My countess knows all. We are both routined spies and match each other perfectly. And I know how we shall get that white woman.

Percival I hope you are right.

Fosco I am always right.

Scene 6. A shabby hotel room.

Fanny in a sofa crying.

Fanny Alas, what will happen to poor Mrs Laura! Lucky for her that Marian is with her! Oh, that terrible villain Sir Percival Glyde! How could she end up married to him! He will be the death of her! (*cries out bitterly*) (*A knock on the door. Fanny hastily blows her nose.*)

Come in! (*enter the countess*)

Countess!

Countess I had to see you, Fanny, since Marian had some extra letters she wanted to take with you to Limmeridge.

Fanny I will leave in a few hours.

Countess I know. That's why Marian was so anxious that I would get you in time. But now we have plenty of time. You seem utterly ruined, dear! That Glyde is a real swine, isn't he?

Fanny If you say so, Countess.

Countess To fire you just like that, just because you didn't do anything and was Laura's only trusted maid! It's a shame!

Fanny (somewhat comforted) If you say so, Countess.

Countess I say so. What about some tea? Have you had it already?

Fanny Thank you, yes, but I would gladly have another cup.

Countess So let's strengthen ourselves with a good cup of tea together. What luck! It's still warm. (*pours the tea*) A cup of tea always does it, doesn't it, Fanny? (*slips unnoticeably some stuff in Fanny's cup*)

Fanny Yes, absolutely, Countess. There is nothing like a good cup of tea.

Countess You will give my brother Frederick my sincerest regards? Laura will probably soon come to visit her uncle, so that you may see her again.

Fanny That would certainly be the best thing for Miss Laura. (*lower*) Or else I fear that Sir Percival will take her life.

Countess Whatever gave you such an idea?

Fanny Everyone knows, that Sir Percival only married her for her money. When she doesn't want to give it to him, he is capable of any means to get it. He is like that.

Countess How do you know?

Fanny I have seen Anne Catherick. (*feels dizzy*) I suddenly feel very strange. I think I will faint. (*faints and drops the cup on the floor*)

Countess Pity I couldn't learn some more. But now we must act quickly. (*searches the room everywhere for the letters, finds them finally in Fanny's blouse and takes them out.*) Aha! (*opens them and eyes them quickly*) The letter for my brother is harmless, she can keep it, my brother won't do anything anyway, but this letter to the lawyer is serious. (*puts a blank paper in the envelope instead*) That will have to do. That lawyer may think whatever he wants. Poor Marian is still disabled for weeks and can't do anything. (*returns the letters into Fanny's bosom, calls a servant, who arrives*)

The poor thing has fainted, but she will soon be herself again. At least we got through the main thing. I must back to Blackwater Park before it gets dark. Stay with her until she wakes up, there's a good boy. Give her my apologies. (*leaves quickly*)

Servant Never before have I seen anyone faint from a cup of tea.

Scene 7. Marian's simple chamber.

Laura (enters, pale and in grief) How is it with her?

Doctor Dawson It's serious. It's very serious.

Maid You shouldn't be here, Madame.

Laura I must be here. My sister is ill.

Dawson She had better not get worse, and you should not risk getting contaminated.

Laura Is it contagious?

Dawson Very.

Fosco (enters) How is our darling patient?

Dawson Didn't I tell you, Count Humbug, that you must not be here?

Fosco You are joking. I am related with the patient.

Dawson You have from the very start constantly disturbed my treatment and jeopardized her recovery.

Fosco And for very good reasons. You failed to diagnose her correctly with typhus.

Laura (alarmed) Typhus? Is it typhus?

Fosco Yes, Laura, unfortunately Marian's cold and fever has by doctor Dawson's mistreatment led to complications by typhus.

Laura (benumbed) How serious is it?

Dawson Not more serious than we can make it, but it could take time. And the greatest help for the patient would be if neither you nor this blundering humbug count would show yourselves any more in the patient's room as long as she is in danger between life and death.

Laura But I must sit by my sister.

Fosco Yes, she must.

Dawson Don't interfere!

Fosco It's *my* relative!

Dawson And how are you related with her? By marrying her aunt for the sake of her money, as she had the bad luck of getting disinherited when her father learned she had married an Italian adventurer? You are nothing more than a humbug, Sir, who only will bring ruin and evil to every human being who gets in touch with you.

Fosco You are somewhat categorical. It's in the interest of all of us that Marian recovers.

Dawson Why then do you harass her?

Fosco Come, Laura. This doctor is not the right watchdog for us. Have you decided for the expedient opportunity to as soon as possible go home to Limmeridge in Cumberland?

Laura I want to stay with my sister.
Fosco You can't for the doctor.
Dawson I actually think it would be best for you, Miss Laura, and for your sister too, that you left the bad company in this house. Marian can join you as soon as she is well.
Laura I will go nowhere without Marian.
Dawson Then you might fall ill yourself.
Laura Rather that than leaving Marian, as you say, at the mercy of the bad company in this house. If she only gets well I will manage also.
Fosco I really wish to stress the appropriateness of both of you going to Limmeridge. Your husband will liquidate the house anyway.
Laura Liquidate the house?
Fosco Yes, hasn't he told you? He has already started to disengage the staff. Your Fanny was only the first to go out of many.
Laura Why does he want to liquidate the house?
Fosco You know too well, that he is deep in debt.
Marian (in fever) Laura! Laura!
Laura (hurries up to her) What is it?
Dawson (holds her back) Still! She is delirious.
Marian Don't let them take you!
Laura Never, Marian, never! And not you either!
Fosco No one shall take anyone of you away from us.
Dawson No one in this house trusts you, Count Fosco, except perhaps such who never can get their hands clean.
Fosco You bite me without reason.
Dawson No, with reason, for I am the watchdog of this patient, and for her sake I have every reason to chase you out, bark at you and bite you. Be now so kind, both of you, as to remove yourselves from here.
Fosco Come, Laura. That doctor is not nice to deal with.
Dawson And he doesn't get any better for your presence here!
Laura Let me know every sign of any change, doctor.
Dawson Of course, Miss Laura. Now get out of the room, please.
(Fosco and Laura leave.)

That count oozes of death and perdition a long way. He shall never touch a patient of mine!

Act IV scene 1.

Percival Laura, I wish you no harm. On the contrary, I only wish you well, and it's only for your own good that I ask you to leave this place before you fall ill like Marian. You are more vulnerable than she, and this is an unsound place which I intend to get rid of.
Laura Yes, I notice that, like as if you wanted to escape it, but what is it you really try to escape? Your bad conscience?
Percival Laura, you can't try that. I have no conscience, and you know it. I have never done anything criminal in my life or anything worth regretting, although I according to your relative Count Fosco's words sometimes suffers from the worst temper in England.
Laura He is not my relative. He is morganatically married to my aunt.
Percival But the other way around, for the count is a count, but your family is only old.
Laura But they disinherited her when she married a doubtful Italian.

Percival All the same she is a countess as much as I am a baronet, but that's not the issue. You must go.

Laura Is that an order?

Percival No, a recommendation, but Marian has already left and expects you to follow.

Laura (shocked) Has she left?

Percival Yes, she left as soon as she was well enough.

Laura She would never leave without saying goodbye.

Percival She left early this morning. If you don't believe me you can see her empty room.

Laura What is this? You dismiss all servants but the worst, the count and my aunt disappear without saying goodbye, and now also Marian has disappeared.

Percival She is waiting for you at the Count's. She wants you to go home together.

Laura Why at the Count's of all people?

Percival In order to better be able to arrange the journey from London, naturally. She is doing everything for you.

Laura You are hiding something.

Percival What would that be?

Laura You plan something abominable.

Percival Not at all. I only follow the good counsel of the Count.

Laura The good counsel of the Count! He is evil itself!

Percival Don't be so paranoid. You are seeing ghosts on a clear day. Don't forget that the Count saved Marian's life. He was the one who discovered that Marian suffered from typhus. He was better than her doctor. That's why doctor Dawson was so angry with him, as he felt inferior to him.

Laura I will never go to the Count. He only wishes me evil.

Percival No, he only wishes you well, and like he saved Marian's life, he wants to save yours from here. The place will be closed up for sale. Would you like to stay here alone in an empty house?

Laura So you compel me to go to the Count?

Percival Your aunt warrants your safety there. Besides, you yourself has assured that you never feel safe except with Marian by your side.

Laura But she would never go away without me. We are inseparable.

Percival That's what I mean. Therefore you must reunite with her as soon as possible, so that you immediately can go home to your uncle.

Laura (makes up her mind) The sooner I am away from here, the better.

Percival That's the spirit. The Count will meet you at the station.

Laura Why not Marian?

Percival She will take care of you at home by your aunt.

Laura There is something else. You are withholding something.

Percival I would rather spare you bad news.

Laura What bad news?

Percival You showed some empathy and engagement in the case of the woman in white.

Laura Yes. What's the matter with her?

Percival She has been found and happily restored to her asylum, and this time she will never be able to get out again.

Laura You monster! How could you!

Percival She was ill, Laura. She was a public danger.

Laura She wasn't ill at all! I met her! She was as clear in her mind and well as I! She had only been abused by life and for some reason consituted some danger only to you.

Percival That's what you imagine. Her secret was only a fancy of hers.

Laura I doubt it.
Percival Why then did she not divulge that secret?
Laura She never had the occasion.
Percival Nonsense! And now she will never get it, and that's just as well.
Laura So there is a secret.
Percival But you don't know it, so it doesn't exist! Go now, before my temper gets sore again!
Laura (quietly) I will go at once, Sir Percival, and it will be permanently never to see you again, and like Marian I will leave without saying goodbye.
Percival Go to hell then, damn it! (*Laura quickly withdraws, in despair.*)
(*Percival at once pours himself a substantial drink and drains it.*)
The sooner we get done with it, the better. It's just a formality.
(*Sits down comfortably.*)
At last, my persecutor, you are behind bars and for good! Never again will you get away or spread some dark secret about me. Thanks, count, for all your support in this business. Without you I would never have made it. Cheers! (*pours himself another hefty drink and drains it. Enter the maid.*)
Maid Madame has left.
Percival I know.
Maid She said she would go to see her sister.
Percival I know.
Maid But her sister is still here.
Percival I know.
Maid Why did you lie to her?
Percival Or else she would never have gone. Believe me, it was for her own good. This house will be sold now.
Maid But it is wicked to lie, and you deceived her on purpose.
Percival And you may leave tomorrow if you like. You are not needed here any more. I hope you didn't mention anything about Marian only having been moved to a better room in another wing?
Maid No. Had I done so you would have beaten me to death.
Percival Quite correct. Now we will have peace in the house and in my life when my wife is gone. Believe me, girl, Laura will be well taken care of at the Count and her aunt. It was all for the good of everyone and for her very best.
Maid And miss Marian?
Percival She is welcome to follow her sister whenever she likes.
Maid I quit and would rather leave at once.
Percival Do as you want. You will have one month's extra pay for your trouble.
Maid (leaves without one word more)
Percival (pours himself another drink) Good riddance! (*drinks*)

Scene 2. St. John's Wood

Countess They will arrive at any moment, so be prepared to give them a warm welcome. Baroness Glyde must have all she wishes at once.
Cook Yes, Countess.
Countess She must lack nothing when she comes. Everything must work perfectly.
Cook Certainly, Madame. I will do my best.
Countess I believe you will. (*A bell at the gate.*) Here they are. (*opens up.*)
Welcome, welcome, dearest niece, and do feel completely at home as long as you are here.
Laura I honestly hope I will not need to stay longer than necessary.

Countess Don't be ungrateful for our receiving you, girl.

Fosco There, Eleanor, our guest's interest is also our greatest interest.

Laura I always suspected a completely different meaning behind your words, Count, than what you express.

Fosco How do you mean, Laura?

Laura For some reason your words always gave an impression of an opposite meaning than the expressed one.

Countess Laura always had a mind of her own.

Laura I beg to retire immediately to my room until I can continue my journey. Where is Marian?

Countess She is not here.

Laura Why isn't she here?

Countess Because she is still at Blackwater Park.

Laura But Sir Percival assured me she had gone here before me.

Countess Why should she be here?

Laura To organize our journey home to Cumberland!

Fosco There must be some misunderstanding. It has never been a question of Marian coming here. She is too ill to travel.

Laura Why then did Sir Percival say that she had gone! What have you done to her???

Countess *(after a moment, since the Count hesitates)* We have done nothing to her.

Fosco It's surely some misunderstanding. So you went here only to find Marian to continue with her to Cumberland?

Laura *(more and more alarmed)* Yes!

Fosco Then we must contact Blackwater Park and immediately ask for Marian to come here.

Countess Sir Percival has already left for the continent. Blackwater Park is closed up.

Laura It's a conspiracy! I knew it!

Countess Take it easy, dear Laura. Have a cup of tea.

Laura Never! I must know where Marian is! You have planned this carefully for a long time! It's a plot against our lives to give Sir Percival access to my money! What have you done!

Fosco *(in an effort to seem calm)* Nothing, Laura. I assure you that we have done absolutely nothing. Marian must still be at Blackwater Park somewhere in supreme safety and comfort. Sir Percival must have let some servant remain.

Laura You only dissemble! You have tricked me here to take my life! And Marian surely doesn't know that I am here! Oh! *(takes to her heart and swoons)*

Fosco Carry her immediately up to her room. Give her the best care she can get. Contact a doctor immediately. There must be no complications.

Countess Nothing can go wrong, Ottavio. Everything is fool proof.

Fosco Only an idiot could have that fancy. Everything can always go wrong, and all you can do to avoid it is to be aware of everything that could go wrong, but no one can foresee everything.

Countess She will wake up again, and there will be no danger.

Fosco And if it is a heart attack? She always had a weak heart.

(enter doctor)

Doctor Goodriche I came as fast as I could.

Fosco Excellent that you could come at once, doctor. I really hope it's just an ordinary fainting fit.

Doctor We will examine that at once. Where is the patient?

Fosco Show the doctor to her room, Hester.

Countess *(when Hester has left with the doctor)* Are you quite sure that you and Sir Percival know what you are doing?

Fosco He never knows what he is doing, but I know everything he does.
Countess But he has now given you the burden of a patient.
Foscoe I have handled patients before. Only trust me like Sir Percy always did and so far infallibly.
Eleanor You know nothing about women.
Fosco On the contrary, dear Eleanor, I know all about women. That's why they so far never failed me.
Eleanor Still I sense a danger, but I don't know from where it will come. Did you ever learn his secret?
Fosco No, he didn't want to confide it to me. But we have reason to believe that Laura never learned it either. Mrs Catherick keeps her silence carefully buried behind a stone wall of firmness, and her daughter is put out of the way. So I need not know it.
Countess The doctor comes.
Fosco Well, doctor?
Doctor I am afraid it's serious. It could have been a heart attack. She must have had a shock of some kind. Do you know what could have frightened her?
Fosco I have no idea.
Doctor And you?
Countess I haven't the faintest idea.
Doctor The cook doesn't understand it either. She was just scared to death for some reason. Well, I have given her a sedative which she will sleep on until tomorrow, when I will be back. Even if she gets better tonight, let no one speak with her. All she needs is rest, and absolutely nothing to stir her emotion.
Fosco We shall obey your instructions to the letter, Doctor Goodriche.
Doctor Then let's just hope for the best. Good evening. (*leaves*)
Countess Do you think he suspected anything?
Fosco Absolutely nothing. He was just an ordinary doctor who observed the symptoms and took the pulse. He didn't think any further than that.
Countess I hope you are right.
Fosco I am always right. Come now, Eleanor. We must take care of our patient.

Scene 3. Blackwater Park.

Marian (*wakes up in her bed, very weak*) Where am I? I don't recognize this room. Why have you moved me?
Eliza I am afraid, ma'am, that they are doing some dirty work here.
Marian What do you know, Eliza?
Eliza They moved you here only to get Miss Laura away from here. They tricked Miss Laura to believe that you had gone to London to that count Fosco to prepare your journey to Cumberland.
Marian We would very much like to go there, but I would never leave Laura alone here. She knows that.
Eliza That's what they made her believe, but that's not the worst of it.
Marian What is the worst?
Eliza That Miss Laura died the other day at count Fosco.
Marian Impossible. What would she have died of?
Eliza A heart attack.
Marian You are perfectly right. Dirty business is going on here. Where is Sir Percival Glyde?
Eliza He went to Paris the other day, to grieve for his wife, they say.

Marian That hypocrite! He has only stuck her away some place or got rid of her to take care of her money. Anyone could see that. She can't be dead.

Eliza Her death has been certified by a doctor, and she is already buried in Cumberland by Limmeridge with a gravestone and all. She rests in the same grave with her mother.

Marian Something here doesn't make sense. Nothing makes sense. So it was Sir Percival Glyde who tricked his wife away by making her believe that I had left in advance?

Eliza Yes, ma'am. He gave me notice, and I pretended to leave, but for your sake I chose to return to you as soon as he was gone. I thought you should know the truth.

Marian Thank you, Eliza. What has doctor Dawson to say about my health? How long must I remain here in bed?

Eliza He says three weeks.

Marian Impossible. I must get up as soon as possible. Help me up, Eliza.

Eliza But ma'am, you are so weak!

Marian Yes, so weak that I can only get stronger. Help me up, Eliza!

(Eliza helps her get out of bed.)

Scene 4. A bleak place.

Fosco How is our patient today?

Rubelle She is getting more cooperative and less troublesome, but she still can't let go of her fixed ideas.

Fosco The main thing is that she lives. Then she may imagine whatever she fancies. She will have a certificate on that she can't be taken seriously.

Rubelle As she is now no one can't take her seriously already. She only chatters and isn't even articulate.

Fosco It's the drugs. The medicines she will have in the ward will unfortunately not have the same effect. They will just keep her down.

Rubelle Even without medicines and drugs she is not a rebellious type.

Fosco That's lucky for us. That woman in white was far too rebellious.

Rubelle This will manage better but also live longer.

Fosco She may live as long as she pleases. No one wants to take her life. May I see her?

Rubelle At your own risk, but keep your position.

Fosco Of course.

Rubelle (opens a door) You have a visitor, dear.

The patient (languid, without being seen) Who is it?

Rubelle An old friend. He wishes you well.

Patient I have no old friends that wish me well. I have only enemies that wish me evil. *(comes out, all dressed in white, sees the count)* Oh, it's you. I am tired of you.

Fosco How can you be tired of your benefactor? Without me you would be dead.

Patient Any news of my sister?

Fosco You have no sister, dear. You are alone.

Patient You are just playing around with me, like with your disgusting white mice. But I am no rat. I am a human being.

Fosco Of course you are a human being, Anne. No one has suggested anything else.

Patient I am not Anne. I am Laura.

Fosco Unfortunately you are Anne, poor Anne, and has always been. The sooner you get it and resume to be who you were, the better you shall be treated. The one occasion when you met Laura Fairlie has turned your head, but we try to turn it

back again. You were even allowed to keep your own white clothes, your favourite clothes, like you always wore them, since you never had any other. Only trust us, and all will be well.

Patient I am so tired of you and your infernal arts. You murdered Anne to let me take her place so that Sir Percival and you could get over my money.

Fosco Laura Glyde died a completely natural death in a heart attack. We could do nothing for her and her doctor even less, who certified her death with cause and everything. She is dead and buried, Anne. Be happy that you are alive.

Patient I am not at all happy that I am alive and would prefer dying like poor Anne, if I didn't know that my sister is still living although you tried to murder her as well.

Fosco (to Rubelle) She has got murder on her brain. It's morbid paranoia. *(to the Patient)* No one has tried to murder Marian Halcombe, if she is the one you mean. On the contrary I saved her life when I discovered in time that she had typhus. I have the highest respect and admiration of her. No one ever wished her or her sister anything bad.

Patient You only befuddle me with your deceitful prattle, but I assume it's intentional. I get sick only by hearing and thinking of it. Leave me alone with my despair, for that's the only thing left to me.

Rubelle You had better leave, Count Fosco. The patient is tired.

Fosco Yes, I notice that. *(to Rubelle, intimately)* Just continue the treatment, and she will soon forget that she ever was Laura. The medication will contribute to the elimination of her memory, which is the only enemy left for us to fear. All we need to think of is not to fall out of our roles. The asylum will do the rest.

Rubelle You can rely on us, Count.

Fosco I trust you and your absolute and permanent silence.

Rubelle As a nurse I have to observe my obligation of silence with absolute strictness.

Fosco Exactly. *Au revoir. (leaves)*

Rubelle Well, my dear, shall we have some rest now? Perhaps the visit has upset and exhausted you. I will give you a nice cup of tea.

Patient What are you really putting in my tea?

Rubelle Nothing except tea. What else?

Patient I am tired of this constant nightmare. Then give me that poisonous tea, since that's the only thing you allow me to drink. I hope they will at least also give me water at the asylum.

Rubelle Of course. At the asylum you shall have all the freedom in the world.

Patient I believe you. *(drinks Rubelle's tea.)*

Scene 5. At the lawyer's.

Gilmore I am terribly sorry, Marian, but there is nothing I can do. I have carefully investigated the case, I have spoken with both doctors, all papers are in order including the death certificate, the grave is authentic with epitaph and all, so there is unfortunately no doubt about it. And unfortunately I also fully understand that you can't accept that Laura is dead.

Marian But don't you find it out of order that my letter to you arrived opened and replaced with an empty sheet?

Gilmore Of course it is strange, but anyone could have opened it on the way, it could even have opened by itself, the letter could then have slipped out by itself, and some clerk could have remedied the awkward look of an empty stamped envelope.

Marian Do you find that credible?

Gilmore I don't know what to think. The whole story was sad from the beginning. I would never have married a warden on those economical premises that Sir Percival Glyde enforced on Laura, and I told that to your uncle. Still he agreed to it just for the sake of his own peace at home, and Laura wasn't yet come of age. Many other details are also questionable, but the actual documents are watertight: the death certificate, the unanimous testimony of both doctors, the testimony of the servants, who all affirm that Count Fosco could have had no mean hand in neither your illness nor Laura's death, and Count Fosco's own account of the tragedy is completely convincing and satisfactory.

Marian But Sir Percival fooled Laura away from his house by letting her believe that I had gone, and she was sent directly to Count Fosco's place, where she died!

Gilmore The nurses and doctors are agreed that the count could have had nothing to do with Laura's most unexpected death. It was a sudden heart attack. It could happen to anyone.

Marian In this case it happened to a young and healthy woman of 21 years after she had been very frightened and upset, and we don't know what frightened her.

Gilmore Unfortunately Sir Percival Glyde is still in Paris. I would like to ask him some questions concerning his trick to lure Laura to the Count with the bait that you would be there. But you forget that another person is involved. I would advise you to locate her for an interview.

Marian Who?

Gilmore The mysterious woman in white, miss Anne Catherick, who Count Fosco succeeded in catching up with and who since then has been confined in an asylum with no chance of an escape.

Marian Which one?

Gilmore I don't know, but with your energy and extreme moral motivation it couldn't be impossible to trace. You know its approximate location by your information from that drawing-teacher.

Scene 6. The asylum

Doctor We have strict rules concerning this patient, who once managed to escape, which then cost her nurse her position. We wouldn't like such an embarrassment to be repeated.

Marian I assure you that I only wish to see her, since she had met with my sister.

Doctor Only for that reason you may see her while no one else may for any reason. Since she after her meeting with your sister got the idea of identifying herself with your sister, your participation could perhaps be of interest.

Marian Does she think she is my sister?

Doctor Yes. She didn't during her last interment here. She has also shown other character changes.

Marian Such as?

Doctor I can't expound on that. Sister, allow this lady to see the patient Anne Catherick.

Nurse Come with me.

(Marian follows the nurse into a garden where the patient is sitting on a bench in the shadow of a tree.)

She is very special. Last time she was here she was our most submissive patient, why it became so easy for her to run away. We are more alert now, and we can't understand at all what is going on in her mind. She is obsessed with the idea that she is a deceased person. Of course we try to treat this anomaly with constant therapy

and medication. (*shows Marian to the patient, who rises. As soon as she recognizes Marian she can't keep herself from immediately embracing her.*)

Laura Marian! (*The nurse can't stop her, stands confused and confounded.*)

Marian (*understands everything at once. To the nurse:*) It's all right, sister. We know each other since of old. You can leave us alone for a while and don't need to get us out of sight.

Nurse (*accepts*) I promise not to. (*goes aside to another bench.*)

Marian Laura, this is the turning-point. You will get out of here. How could they succeed in this?

Laura They were simply two accomplished and experienced cheats, while we were just two defenceless women.

Marian And Anne Catherick?

Laura They let her die in my place.

Marian Indirect murder, legal fraud and burial alive of my own sister. It's too much.

Laura But we found each other again. Do you know anything about Walter Hartright?

Marian Nothing.

Laura Then we have nothing to trust except ourselves.

Marian Everyone thinks you are dead and that Anne Catherick is alive. Our uncle has accepted it, our lawyer has accepted it by the legal evidence, and Sir Percival is well off on your money in France.

Laura For his own good he should never come back to England.

Marian Who is more guilty, he or the Count?

Laura They are both equally guilty. The plot was the Count's, but Sir Percival ratified it.

Marian And aunt Eleanor?

Laura She is the Count's slave.

Marian I will be back tomorrow, Laura. Then we shall arrange your escape. A nurse can always be bribed. An asylum is no jail and no place for a healthy person who isn't more ill than that she can leave it.

Laura Thank you, Marian. I think we can make it.

Marian I know it. (*calling to the nurse*) We are ready, nurse. The patient is better already.

Nurse That's good news to please us all. Come now, dear, and we shall have a nice cup of tea.

Laura Thank you, sister. Even your tea will taste good today. (*leaves with the nurse*) Come soon again and visit me, Marian.

Marian I will come tomorrow.

(They walk out separately.)

Scene 7. Same as in Act I scene 4: The churchyard in Limmeridge.
You see Laura's grave with a fresh inscription.

Walter (*enters, shattered, kneels by the grave with a nosegay in his hands.*)

So this is what you come home to, a grave, the sum of a marriage that never should have taken place, complete disaster as the result of a fiasco, while the one who loved you had to leave you with empty hands and tread into exile just to escape enduring such a shameful mistake of a marriage, love for money, the total prostitution and even onesided at that, for the customer took all her money instead of paying her even with a farthing for his non-existent love. (*crying bitterly and placing the flowers tenderly on the grave.*)

Marian (*showing up with a veiled woman*) Leave him be. Let us hear more.

Laura But it is...!

Marian (*placing her hand on her mouth*) I know. Spare him.

Walter What a lie is not marriage, what a pathogenic dunghill of egoism and violation is not this established institution of lies, what a bluff, what self-deceit, what an hellish trap for innocents to get stuck in and perish by, what a bog of tragedies, what an infernal curse! I tried to force me to forget you in the mosquito jungles of Central America, but it only became worse, you only grew more real and actual and clearer to me every day, I couldn't depart from your soul, for we belonged to each other before we were born, and then you disappear into the hell of a matrimonial lie. I shall do whatever to investigate how it could happen, but it wouldn't surprise me if your husband murdered you on purpose and planned it already at the altar if not before.

Marian (*to Laura*) We can't keep him on the rack any more. Cover yourself just in case! (*comes forth with Laura behind her*) *Walter!*

Walter *Marian!* (*rises at once*) What destiny brought you here?

Marian Without doubt the same that brought you here.

Walter I came home a week ago, learned from my mother what had happened and journeyed here at the first possible occasion just to see if it really was true. Unfortunately I found this all too authentic and irrevocable grave, like the cruellest and sharpest thinkable sword mercilessly struck into my heart by the most horrible of truths!

Marian Yes, the grave is true, but reality deceives you.

Walter What do you mean? Who is the lady behind you?

Laura (*raises her veil*)

Walter *Laura!* Am I dreaming or hallucinating? Are you really true, *Marian*, or are you part of the dream that shows me *Laura* alive here by her own fresh and undeniable grave? Or are you both ghosts?

Laura I am not in the grave, *Walter*. (*embraces him*)

Walter I must trust and believe my senses, when I feel you and can embrace you myself! (*embraces and kisses her tenderly*) So you have really come back alive from the dead. But what kind of an absolutely neck-breaking incredible charade is this?

Marian Everything can be explained, *Walter*, but give us time. *Laura* was abducted and confined to an asylum as *Anne Catherick*, while poor *Anne* was murdered by *Sir Percival Glyde* and *Count Fosco*.

Walter So there was a conspiracy!

Marian To say the least. *Sir Percival* was ruined and needed *Laura's* money, who didn't want to oblige him. *Count Fosco* helped him in catching *Anne Catherick*, and when he saw her likeness with *Laura* he launched the crime.

Walter Haven't they been exposed?

Marian No one believes us.

Laura My own uncle refuses to believe that I am anyone else than *Anne Catherick*.

Marian They did it so cleverly with medical documents and death certificates, they had all doctors and nurses on, even our lawyer was deceived and our uncle, much because of his sister, our aunt, *Countess Fosco*.

Walter I see.

Laura But you recognized me at once.

Walter I could have recognized the true original among thousands of perfect copies, but I can't understand how they could get away with it. You are furrowed and meagred and marked by a suffering which I haven't seen with you before but which belonged to *Anne Catherick*. But even harder times have struck at you, *Marian*. I heard that you had typhus.

Marian I was seriously ill for a very long time, much longer than Laura. Only because of that I couldn't help her. They used my illness and coma for an opportunity to go through with their coup.

Laura They tricked me away from Marian in the trap that was Anne Catherick's place in the madhouse.

Walter Poor Anne Catherick. So you suggest that she is the one to rest here under Laura's name?

Laura Yes, unfortunately.

Walter Then I haven't wetted this earth with my tears nor flooded it with my prayers in vain. May my prayers reach you, Anne Catherick, as much as they were intended for Laura, for it has proved that you needed them better. (*places his hand tenderly on the grave*) Feel my caress from the other side of the grave, and like I promised to avenge Laura, I now promise even more determinedly to avenge you and to go at any length in resolving your mystery. We have never forgotten the secret that you never got the chance to reveal in life. You are gone but live on as a mystery, as also the secret remains, which I will attend to that will persecute Sir Percival unto his death.

Marian That's enough, Walter. Let's not get obsessed here at the churchyard.

Walter So Laura has been denied her existence in her family home at Limmeridge.

Marian We were already on our way to London and just wanted to visit the family grave before departing.

Laura And then we found here a friend we never believed to see any more.

Walter I survived marsh fevers, shipwrecks and every disaster that could befall a tropical expedition. I am now wholly at your disposal.

Marian We thought of going to London to live there anonymously while we start making searches and see what we can do for the official resurrection of Laura.

Laura I own nothing. Sir Percival has taken all.

Marian We are as poor as church mice.

Walter That makes three of us. (*gives them each a hand*) You have lost a sister of destiny but won a brother. Let's help each other.

Marian That was about the highest wish we could have hoped for being granted.

Laura I am yours, Walter, as alive, for to my legal husband I am dead.

Walter And I am just as much yours, Laura, and gladly forever.

Marian Let's start from there. It will be a good beginning. Come now. Count Fosco's hired hoodlums could at any time start hunting for Anne Catherick here again without suspecting that she is dead.

Walter She isn't dead. She will help us from the other side.

Marian Is that a promise?

Walter I can feel it within me.

Laura Me too. Come now. (*They leave.*)

Act V scene 1. Welmingham, Hampshire.

maid Mrs Catherick wonders what your business is with her.

Walter Tell her that I bring news about her daughter.

Mrs Catherick (from the inside) Bring him in, Lucy.

(*The scene opens to the melancholy home of a respectable elderly lady*)

What do you know about my daughter?

Walter Unfortunately I have the sad news to bring you that she is dead.

Catherick (untouched) And why do you bring that news?

Walter (surprised at her lack of reaction) Do you wonder why I bring you the news of your daughter's death?

Catherick Yes. What is your business with her? How come that you know anything about my daughter at all?

Walter I happened to meet her on an escape from an asylum, she pleaded with me to help her, and I helped her on.

Catherick That was wrong.

Walter I am sorry if that is her mother's attitude.

Catherick It is her mother's attitude. How do you know that she is dead?

Walter I can't tell you, but I know it.

Catherick May I ask how you found me?

Walter By Mrs Clements, the only other person who helped your daughter.

Catherick She is a fool. Did she ask you to come here?

Walter No.

Catherick Then I ask you again: Why did you come here?

Walter (*tries to brace himself*) I thought Anne Catherick's mother would have some interest in knowing whether her daughter was alive or dead.

Catherick Did you have any other motive?

Walter (*is quiet*)

Catherick If you had no other motive I thank you for your visit and must ask you to leave. Your explanation of how you know that she is dead is hardly satisfactory but enough for me to put on mourning. As you see I only have to exchange my grey gloves for black, and I will be complete in mourning. Good-bye, stranger.

Walter I did have another motive also, Mrs Catherick.

Catherick I thought so. Let's hear it.

Walter Your daughter's death...

Catherick What did she die of?

Walter An illness at heart.

Catherick Well. Go on.

Walter Your daughter's death has been used to harm a very close friend of mine by two gentlemen, one of them being Sir Percival Glyde.

Catherick (*untouched*) So?

Walter You may wonder how your daughter's death thus could be used to harm others...

Catherick Not at all. It concerns only you. You are interested in my affairs. I am not interested in yours.

Walter Then you may wonder why I mention this to you at all.

Catherick Yes, I do wonder.

Walter I mention it because I intend to take Sir Percival Glyde to court for what he has done to my friends and to your daughter.

Catherick And what have I got to do with that?

Walter You know something about Sir Percival's past that could help me in my procedure.

Catherick Do you have anything special in mind?

Walter I refer to a time when your husband was verger in Old Welmingham before your daughter was born.

Catherick (*shows for the first time some sign of emotion when she mechanically starts smoothing out her black silken dress*) What do you know about that?

Walter All that Mrs Clements told me.

Catherick So you want to get at Sir Percival Glyde, and you believe I could help you with that. You believe that I am a fallen woman who by decades of bad rumours would stoop to any abject baseness. You are wrong. During these decades I stayed on fighting and achieved an impeccable respectability which I refuse to refrain from. You come here preying into my affairs with my daughter's death for an excuse and

thereby believe you could use me for your purposes. You are wrong. Even the parson here lifts his hat to me.

Walter (recovering) I came here because I thought that you if anyone would have reason to even greater procedures against Sir Percival Glyde than I. Because of your daughter's death I thought that you if any woman in England would be able to and have the right to aid me in destroying that man.

Catherick (lower) You will have to destroy him yourself. Come back afterwards and hear what I have to say.

Walter (after a pause) Don't you trust me?

Catherick No.

Walter Are you afraid of Sir Percival Glyde?

Catherick (with increasing sarcasm) Sir Percival is a man in a high position. He is a baronet with enormous property and comes from an old noble family, especially on his mother's side. Check up his mother, and you will see who he really is. Yes, he can frighten you, he can threaten you, he has a position and all society on his side, he stands automatically above all suspicion by his firm standing in society as a pillar of the establishment, so he has the right to scare the life out of anyone. My daughter was only one of them, but even she had a mother.

Walter I don't think you deceived your husband with him and that he became your daughter's father. *Catherick (rising, furious)* How dare you say anything about Anne's father! How dare you speculate in who could have been her father and who not?

Walter Sir Percival's secret has nothing to do with your daughter. It wasn't born with your daughter, and it hasn't disappeared with your daughter's departure. It's still there and threatens him with something worse than the end of his life. It wasn't secret love meetings you had in the sacristy of your old church when your husband caught you by surprise in the holiest chamber of the church...

Catherick (shocked, sits down again)

Walter Dare you still not believe in me?

Catherick (faint) Yes.

Walter Do you still want me to leave?

Catherick Yes. And never come back.

Walter There could be news about Sir Percival that you don't expect, and in that case I will be back.

Catherick There can be no unexpected news about him – except one. That would be the news of his death. *(leaves him with her eyes and goes absent, as if Walter didn't exist any more. He leaves discreetly. Mrs Catherick returns to her state of hard insensitivity.)*

Scen 2. The sacristy in the church of Old Welmingham.

(You hear someone impatiently and clumsily fumble with the lock. Finally he breaks in.

It's Sir Percival Glyde almost on a point of collapse.)

Percival That damned Walter Hartright! He is the one who has ruined my life! My wife would never have reacted against me if he hadn't been there! Well, everything can still be saved. All I have to do is to find that damned church register and tear out the page. I should have done that from the start, but never could I imagine that women could be so hopelessly infernally faithless! That cursed old hag Catherick and her unhangd daughter! Well, she is dead now, but the mother, that witch, is still alive! And that damned Walter Hartright has searched her out! The devil knows how much she might have divulged, but I can still mess with her. She never spited me without my giving her a hell for it in return with interest! Damn! Where are those bloody church registers? *(rummages about in a panic in the sacristy)* I can't see. It's too dark in here. My candle is not enough. You did lock the door

behind you, Percival, didn't you, so that no Walter Hartright can get in to disturb you? If only I can destroy the evidence I am out of all danger. My parents were innocent. They only lived naturally together without getting married, and what the devil should you really marry for? What is marriage but a damnation? But they didn't consider that an illegitimate son can't inherit his father, his titles and property. That's why I had to falsify their marriage in that damned church register, if only I could find it! Where is it? Mrs Catherick knew where it was, open and accessible to anyone, but I can't see a damned thing in this darkness! Don't be careless, Percival! Don't pull everything down! Don't pull all down that you made up of your life! You succeeded in everything so far. You tricked Mrs Catherick, that dragon, with your charm and presents to lend you the key to the sacristy, so that you could get at the church register and forge your parents' marriage license entry, so that you could take over your father's titles, money and property, so that you had no need of her any longer afterwards and could scrap her, whereupon her damned husband, that verger, surprised us and caused a scandal leaving her abandoned without support! then she became dangerous to you, but I fixed her. She received a generous allowance on condition that she remained in this hole forever and never left it without my permission, but then she had that bloody girl, who turned even worse! In all my life I had them on my back as extortioners, but now at least the lass is dead. You were a genius, Fosco, who the moment you caught sight of her came on the idea that she could take the place of my wife! That was the best thing I ever did in my life! I got twenty thousand of her money, and you got ten thousand by your wife, just for letting Anne Catherick die as Laura, that worthless bitch! The more beautiful, talented and higher educated women are, the more troublesome and impossible they become for a man to use; but Laura at least came of use as dead, while she still continued spooking as Anne Catherick... At last, the register! Now let's just tear out that risky page and destroy it... Do it quickly, before anyone arrives and finds the sacristy is haunted... But what's this?

*(A faint light has started increasing behind him to the right.
He turns around and his petrified with fear.)*

Anne Catherick!

Anne I never knew your secret, Percy, but I still know how to scare you out of your wits although I am dead.

Percival What do you mean? Didn't your mother tell you the secret?

Anne She only hinted that there was a secret, which I carefully kept in mind. I wasn't as foolish as you thought. I pretended to know your secret, although I didn't know anything more than that your secret could ruin your life.

Percival So all my frenzied persecutions of you were unnecessary?

Anne That's what I wanted to tell you before you are about to die. Yes, you forced my mother to lock me up in an asylum only because you imagined I knew your secret. I knew that you were worthless, but I didn't know that your secret there in the church register, your forgery of your father's non-existent marriage, confirmed and proved your worthlessness. Sir Percival, you have sacrificed a number of women on your way to further your own worthlessness.

Percival But you are dead, you damned phantom, you witch, you slut, you madwoman, you daughter of a witch and bitch and fallen woman...

Anne Don't stumble on your epithets, Sir Percival Glyde.

(Glyde stumbles and upsets the candle, which immediately starts the fire.)

Percival Help! Help!

(He gets into a panic. The scene turns out to the right and shows another man to the left outside the church: Walter Hartright and the verger.)

Verger Someone is in there.

Walter It's he himself. He can't get out. He has locked himself in.

Verger That lock! It always got stuck!

Percival (*on the inside, fumbles with the lock, can't make it work*) Help! Help!

Walter Can we break in the door?

Verger Impossible. It's of oak.

Walter And there is no other entrance?

Verger Only from the church, but it's in that part of the sacristy the fire started. He can never get out that way.

Walter What about the roof then?

Verger That's the only possibility.

Percival (*on the inside, can't unlock the door*) Help! Help!

Verger (*thoughtfully*) He stole the key to break into the sacristy to lock himself in and set the sacristy on fire. What on earth did he want to get in there for?

Walter The church register! He wanted to destroy a forgery in it he had made himself! I discovered it yesterday when I compared the book with your predecessor's copy...

Verger Who is it?

Walter Sir Percival Glyde.

Verger Great Scott!

Percival (*inside, coughing, rattling and half suffocated, has given up, gasping*) Help! Help!

Walter (*calling*) Hold out, Sir Percival! We'll try the roof!

Percival (*terrorstruck*) Walter Hartright! (*shrinks back, stumbles backwards into the flames, gives up a long terrible scream of pain and terror. You hear Anne Catherick laugh for the first time in her life.*)

Verger I am afraid it's too late. The flames have taken over.

Walter The fire-brigade at last!

(*enter the fire-brigade in full force and action, all starting efficiently to work at once.*)

Verger We can't hear him anymore.

Walter He could be lying unconscious. He could make it.

Verger Hardly. That scream we heard was a scream of death.

Walter I am afraid you are right. I am afraid he got away.

Verger Do you mean to say that he was lucky to die before the law could reach him?

Walter I suspect a higher jurisdiction than our earthly law got him first, to sentence and expedite him at once.

Verger Your judgement is hard.

Walter He was already doomed.

(*A few fireman have succeeded in dragging out Sir Percival's body.*)

Fire chief May we ask you to identify this man?

Verger Not me. I've never seen him before.

Chief (*to Walter*) What about you, then?

Walter Neither can I.

Chief Why then did you try to save him?

Walter He became part of my life by marrying the woman I loved and causing the death of someone in my protection, but I never met him personally until now.

Chief We must have him properly identified.

Walter I am sorry. I am finished with him. (*leaves*)

Chief He obviously had a story to tell about all this.

Verger In that case a story completely incomprehensible to everyone but to him. We shall probably hear it at the coroner's inquest.

Scene 3. Count Fosco's home.

(*Enter a butler with a card where Fosco is sitting by his desk.*)

Fosco (*reading the card*) What does he want?

Butler He didn't say.

Fosco Ask him then.

Butler I did.

Fosco Well?

Butler He said it was no one's business but yours.

Fosco (contemplating the card, sighs) Well, show him in, then. (*Butler leaves.*)

What the devil does he want? I am the one who threatened them, I showed the madhouse doctor their house while they stood fearstruck in the window watching us, and then he comes here himself. Am I then not the one to always keep the initiative in this business?

(*takes out a pistol from his drawer which he loads and returns to the drawer to have it available, devotes himself then to his white mice in the cage.*) What shall I do with these poor people? Let them free? Not as long as it still is fun to play with them. (*coddles with the mice, when the butler shows Walter Hartright in.*)

Butler Walter Hartright, Sir.

Fosco (rising courteously but formally and offers his hand) Although we have known each other long we never met.

Walter Signor Count, I haven't come here to pretend any false friendship with you.

Fosco (withdraws his hand instantly) Very well. So what have you come for?

Walter It concerns our mutual interest.

Fosco We have no mutual interest.

Walter Yes, we do. The woman whom you exposed to the plot to have her confined to a mental hospital although she was quite well in order to force her into the identity of another woman whose death you caused is now my wife.

Fosco (with considered respect) Is that so. Won't you at least sit down and relax? It could be that we actually have something to discuss.

Walter Yes. And I don't intend to leave this room until all is settled. (*takes a seat*)

Fosco Good. Then we can talk like one man to another. (*rises, goes to the door and locks it*) Let's make sure that we aren't disturbed. (*settles again in his chair, apparently quite relaxed, with his fingertips to each other.*)

To begin with, your hypothesis seems somewhat fantastic and will not reach far without actual evidence to undo the evidence of lady Glyde's death. Secondly, I did not murder Anne Catherick. She died a natural death.

Walter I didn't say that you murdered her. I said that you caused her death. You frightened her to death.

Fosco She had a weak heart. She would have died anyway of her illness at heart.

Walter If she hadn't died of a broken heart, would you then have allowed her to live? In that case, how could you have accomplished your scheme?

Fosco There you have me. No, I would not have allowed her to live. She was an unhappy creature, and I would have taken her life with the same mercy as I liberate a sick mouse from her painful life. But the fact remains that Anne Catherick died naturally. And how can you prove that it wasn't Lady Glyde?

Walter Easily. Signor Count, your plot backfired from the beginning by Anne Catherick leaving her life, probably voluntarily, one day too early. According to the death certificate, Lady Glyde passed away on the 26th of July while Lady Glyde was still in Blackwater Park, which she didn't leave until on the 27th. The driver who drove her remembers both her and you. His name is John Owen and could be summoned as a witness at any time.

Fosco I must congratulate you on your skill in finding the only weak point in our ingenious plan. You are right. Anne Catherick died one day too early, which almost overturned our plans completely, but we were desperate. We needed money at any price, and they were only available in case of Lady Glyde's death. By our ingenious coup I saved her life, for Sir Percy, that clout, would have preferred to see

her dead for real. He was all washed up, and all the twenty thousand pounds he inherited from his wife went to his creditors. She can't have a penny back.

Walter (with despite) We are not interested in money.

Fosco (with appreciation) The true artist!

Walter All that interests us is Laura's exoneration.

Fosco How do you intend to accomplish that without a trial which you can't afford?

Walter By you.

Fosco And why should I help you?

Walter It's your only chance. In this country you could be hanged for what you have done. And I promise you, that if you remain here we will never give up until you and your scheme are completely exposed and punished according to law. I offer you a settlement but on certain conditions.

Fosco What have you to offer?

Walter I offer you the possibility to leave the country with your countess for good and to keep what she inherited from Lady Glyde, if you write a full confession here and now of the whole matter.

Fosco (almost admiringly) You are a man of surprises, Walter Hartright. I never had any high opinion of you, but for every step you have taken for the defence of your wife's honour it has risen considerably. The settlement you offer is reasonable and magnanimous. By your investigations you have succeeded in puncturing our scheme, I must admit that I am check mate, I might as well concede defeat at once, and there's no point in prolonging the war with legal procedures. I accept your offer and thereby hope that you could accept me as a fellow gentleman. I never wished Lady Glyde or Anne Catherick any harm. My friend Percival, for whom I was responsible for life after I once saved his life in Rome, blundered on like a bullheaded villain, and all my efforts were wasted on trying to slow him down and minimize the damages. I saved Marian Halcombe's life, when she contracted typhus by an incompetent doctor's dilettantic carelessness. I saved Lady Glyde's life by making her Anne Catherick. Unfortunately I could not save the life of Anne Catherick, whose life Percival already had ruined. Who was she really?

Walter It has surfaced that she was half sister to both Marian Halcombe and Laura.

Fosco That explains it. So Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick had the same father?

Walter Yes. And Laura was especially like her father.

Fosco Neither could I save Percival's life, which I heard that you at least tried to. I beg to thank you anyway, but anyway I don't think his life was much worth saving. He perhaps even actually got away.

Walter Exactly. Had he made it he would have met with a far worse prospect as a ruined and dishonoured man and even more to that.

Fosco So you regret that you could not save his life.

Walter No.

Fosco Very well. We are agreed. I will write a detailed account of the case of the changed identities and then leave the country with my wife and her money, which I am grateful for. You let us get away much easier than Sir Percival.

Walter All my ambition is to give Laura a decent life in safety as my wife.

Fosco You couldn't have a nobler purpose with your life. My compliments. May I not make another effort at peace-making by offering you my hand once again, as a seal on our deal? (*offers his hand once more*)

Walter Very well. (*accepts it*)

Fosco It will be a long wait for you, since the story you ask me to write is quite tall and long. May I not offer you some coffee?

Walter If you are to sit and write for a long time you might need it yourself.

Fosco An adequate observation. Will you keep me company?

Walter I have no option.

Fosco Then we are agreed. It gives me pleasure, Walter Hartright, that we at last finally could meet. In this way we might even leave each other with mutual respect. (*rises, goes to the door, unlocks it and surprises the Countess listening by the keyhole.*)

I hope you didn't miss anything of our gossip, Eleanor. We would be most grateful for a pot of coffee. We have only just initiated our cooperation, and it will be a long story.

Countess I will order the coffee immediately. (*leaves quickly*)

Fosco (*settling down at work, now completely relaxed, with his fingertips to each other.*) It could turn into an entire novel, couldn't it, Walter Hartright?

Curtain.

Pelling, 12.11.2006,
translated 1-5 February 2018.

William Wilkie Collins (1824-89), a close friend of Charles Dickens', with whom he worked for 20 years, was the definite creator of the detective novel, as he wrote "*The Woman in White*" (1860), which still today is regarded by many as perhaps the greatest and best detective novel ever and also the first psychological thriller – pity that Hitchcock never took it on! The author wrote some 20 novels and successful plays, but unfortunately he became an opium addict for his last 27 years, during which his quality as an author constantly deteriorated. He was never married.

In this dramatization the intention is of course to let Anne and Laura be played by the same actress.

Gothenburg, 22.1.2007