

# **The Woman in White Study Guide**

## **The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

[The Woman in White Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts I-V.....5](#)

[The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts VI-X.....7](#)

[The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts XI-XV.....9](#)

[The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, of Chancery Lane, Solicitor, Parts I-IV.....12](#)

[The First Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, in Extracts from her Diary, Parts I-II.....15](#)

[The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts I-V.....17](#)

[The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts VI-X.....20](#)

[The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House.....23](#)

[The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Eliza Michelson, Housekeeper at Blackwater Park, Parts I-II.....24](#)

[The Second Epoch: The Story Continued in Several Narratives.....26](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I.....28](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II.....29](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III.....30](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV.....31](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V.....32](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI.....33](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII.....34](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VIII.....35](#)



[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IX.....36](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part X.....37](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part XI.....39](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I.....40](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II.....41](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III.....42](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV.....43](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V.....44](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI.....45](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII.....46](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Count Fosco.....47](#)

[The Third Epoch: The Story concluded by Walter Hartright, Parts I-III.....48](#)

[Characters.....50](#)

[Objects/Places.....56](#)

[Themes.....61](#)

[Style.....63](#)

[Quotes.....65](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....68](#)



## Plot Summary

The *Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, published in 1860, is a Victorian sensationalist fiction novel. Collins might be considered the father of the modern mystery thriller and detective novel genres. Collins, like his friend Charles Dickens, uses the novel to expose social injustices of his time, in particular, the lack of legal rights afforded married women. Collins presents this story as if holding a trial in which characters present their perspective on the events through narrative, diary excerpts and eye-witness accounts. The main story takes place between July, 1849, and August, 1852. Much of the story is told through the narrative of Walter Hartright, an art tutor who falls in love with a student, Laura Fairlie, who is engaged to Sir Percival Glyde. Percival marries for Laura's inheritance, which he seeks to gain through her written consent or her death. Working with him are the Count and Countess Fosco.

An unwitting accomplice in the downfall of Laura is her ineffective guardian, her uncle Frederick Fairlie. Laura has few allies, but they are fiercely loyal to her. Marian Halcombe, her half-sister, and Walter Hartright face terrific odds against formidable men of power to protect Laura. The title character, *The Woman in White*, is also an ally of Laura's and a look-alike half sister. The good people eventually prevail with the aid of decent servants, honest solicitors (lawyers) and some luck.

The story includes spies, secret societies, identity theft, mistaken identity, murder, illegitimate births, false imprisonment and romance. Collins weaves an exciting tale to prove a point about the dearth of women's rights. Using women from both high and low classes, he drives the point home with example after example of injustice. Though this is a persuasive argument told in story form, Collins does not fall into preachy narrative. He tells an exciting story that entertains, enlightens and informs.



# **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts I-V**

## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts I-V Summary**

The *Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, published in 1860, is a Victorian sensationalist fiction novel. Collins might be considered the father of the modern mystery thriller and detective novel genres. Collins, like his friend Charles Dickens, uses the novel to expose social injustices of his time, in particular, the lack of legal rights afforded married women. Collins presents this story as if holding a trial in which characters present their perspective on the events through narrative, diary excerpts and eye-witness accounts. The story begins as if being told in a Court of Justice to introduce the structure of the storytelling. Characters will take turns telling their part of the story, beginning with twenty-eight-year old art tutor, Walter Hartright. He is down on his luck, so he decides to go home to visit his mother and sister.

On July 31, in 1860s London, Walter Hartright walks from his apartment in town to visit his mother and sister Sarah in Hampstead, a northeastern suburb. When he arrives he is greeted by Professor Pesca, who once taught at the University of Padua. Pesca left Italy for "political" reasons. He is an eccentric midget who Walter once rescued from drowning.

Pesca, longing to pay back the favor of being rescued, learns through his employer that Frederick Fairlie, Esquire, of Limmeridge House, Cumberland, wants to hire an art tutor and art restorer for four months at four guineas a week. At the urging of his mother, sister and Pesca, Walter agrees to apply for the job. Three days later he is invited to come to Cumberland to begin. He feels an inexplicable foreboding about the job.

It is midnight when he heads back to London through the heath. He is at an intersection when he meets a woman dressed in white who asks him which road leads to London. She asks if he will help her get a carriage to visit a friend in London. She makes him promise to let her leave when and how she chooses without interference and he agrees. She asks about Baronets and then declares Walter trustworthy when he tells her that he is not a man of rank. He says that he is leaving for Cumberland the next day. The woman says that she is happy at Limmeridge House and she speaks lovingly of the late Mrs. Fairlie. She gets on a carriage heading to Tottenham-court road. Moments later a chaise, or convertible carriage, stops with two men in it. They ask a policeman to help them find a woman in white who has escaped from their asylum.



The woman in white haunts Walter's thoughts that night and all the way to Limmeridge House. He wonders if he has helped a sane woman escape a horrible fate or if he has loosed a mad woman on the city. He arrives too late in the evening to meet anyone but the servants in Limmeridge House.

## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts I-V Analysis**

Clement's Inn is a meeting place for judges to hear cases. On trial are the social injustices inflicted upon women of the 1850s in England with the women in this story serving as individual examples.

Walter rescued Pesca from drowning, and at the end of the story Pesca will again be associated with death in the water.

Walter's unexplained foreboding hints at the intangible future and change. Walter has to travel out of his comfort zone to act on his best behavior in a role secondary to his primary role as an artist. He is placed in a position of responsibility over others. He will take this role to heart for the rest of the story. Pesca's appearances are like bookends at the beginning and end of the story.

The mystery of the Woman in White begins here with her ghostly appearance at night on a highway. The fact that she is woman out alone at night heightens her vulnerability. When the reader learns that she has escaped from an asylum the tension increases. Is she dangerous? Should Walter help her or the men who chase her? His chivalry wins out in favor of the helpless woman. This act of kindness will later bring him great reward.

Collins pushes the suspense by showing Walter's internal struggle over his decision to help the Woman in White.



# **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts VI-X**

## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts VI-X Summary**

At breakfast the next morning, Walter meets Marian Halcombe, one of his art students. She tells him her life history. She is the half-sister of Laura Fairlie and niece of Frederick Fairlie, who she describes as an invalid and her guardian. Marian is lovely from the neck down, but from the neck up sports a swarthy complexion and dark hair on her upper lip. She is direct, blunt and friendly. Walter tells her of his encounter with the woman in white who praised the late Mrs. Fairlie, Marian's mother. Marian vows to discover the identity of this mystery woman by looking through her own mother's letters. A servant calls Walter to meet with Frederick Fairlie.

Walter is lead into the room of Frederick Fairlie. The dark room is ornately furnished, padded with thick carpet and draperies and decorated with fine art, a Madonna and Child painting by Raphael. Frederick Fairlie makes it clear to Walter that he detests children, treats servants with contempt and that noise and bright light tortures him. He impresses Walter as being effeminate, whiny and insufferably selfish. They briefly discuss finances and the instruction of Laura and Marian before Fairlie asks Walter to leave quietly.

At two p.m. Walter goes to the dining room where he finds Marian, who introduces him to Miss Fairlie's former governess, Mrs. Vesey. Passive to the point of being mistaken for a living creature, Mrs. Vesey does not impress Walter. Marian and Walter find Laura in a one-room playhouse with her sketchpad. They then take Mrs. Vesey along on a three-hour carriage ride to choose a scene to sketch the next day. They return, dine and retire to the drawing room. There, Laura plays Mozart on the piano while Marian searches through her mother's letters. In them she finds mention of Mrs. Catherick, who comes from Hampshire with her daughter Anne, to nurse her dying sister Mrs. Kempe. Mrs. Catherick asks Mrs. Fairlie to let her daughter Anne attend school. Anne is a year older than Laura. Mrs. Fairlie mentors little Anne and gives her Laura's old dresses. Anne is so excited she promises to wear all white as long as she lives. At this point, both Walter and Marian see a resemblance between the woman in white and Laura, but they do not speak of it to her.

Marian and Walter ask Laura about her mother and little Anne Catherick, but Laura remembers only that Anne stayed with them a few months before returning to Hampshire. Walter is falling in love with Laura. In the third month of living at Limmeridge



House, Walter senses a change in Laura that shows her discomfort in being alone with him.

At breakfast one fine Thursday, Laura and Walter stay apart until Marian and Mrs. Vesey enter the dining room. After breakfast Marian invites Walter to the garden to speak privately. A lad who works in the garden delivers a letter from an old woman for Laura by way of the garden. Marian sends the lad to the house. Marian confronts Walter about his feelings for Laura and tells him that he has to leave on Saturday because Laura is engaged and her fiancé is to arrive on Monday. Marian says that Laura is engaged to the Baronet from Hampshire named Sir Percival Glyde.

## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts VI-X Analysis**

Marian serves to bring Walter up to speed on the conditions at Limmeridge House, while Walter draws her into the mystery of the Woman in White. Marian's sharp mind seizes the challenge to discover the identity of the Woman in White.

Frederick Fairlie's behavior is consistent throughout the story. He is the extreme example of the self-indulgent, idle rich. If forced out on his own to earn a living, who would bet he'd last a week? Unfortunately, this wimp has authority while he evades responsibility—the worst combination of traits for a person in leadership of an estate.

Collins shows the daily life of women of privilege. They idle their time away with art and music with no concern for earning a living while servants attend them. This situation is presented to establish the "before" picture of life at Limmeridge for Laura and Marian.

Walter as a sensitive soul picks up on the unspoken change in Laura. Marian, the protector of Laura, also senses the change. The fourth person that haunts them is Anne Catherick. So far, only Walter has seen both Laura and Anne.

Collins introduces the first major obstacle to Walter's happiness. Laura is engaged to a man twenty-five years older. This scene also brings the Woman in White back into the story through a letter. Marian observes the growing attraction between Laura and Walter, so she intervenes to cut it off.





# **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts XI-XV**

## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts XI-XV Summary**

Walter goes to his room to finish up restorations for Mr. Fairlie. Marian meets with Walter to tell him that the anonymous letter sent to Laura casts suspicion on Sir Percival Glyde and upsets Laura. Marian shares the letter with Walter. It tells of a dream in which Laura is about to marry an evil man who has a scar on his hand and a dry cough. The letter warns Laura to look into the past of the man before committing to him. Marian confides in Walter that the family's solicitor (attorney) is arriving the next day to help prepare the marriage settlement between Laura and Sir Percival Glyde, who wants to marry Laura before the end of the year. Walter and Marian agree to track down the sender of the letter by questioning the gardener, a stupid lad who can only offer that the old woman who gave him the letter left to the south.

Walter and Marian head south of Limmeridge House to the nearest village, where the schools were founded by the late Mrs. Fairlie. They arrive at one school and overhear the schoolmaster, Mr. Dempster, warning the boys that ghosts do not exist. A boy named Joseph Postlethwaite sits alone on a stool as punishment for claiming to see a ghost. Marian questions the boy who says he saw the ghost of Mrs. Fairlie by her grave stone. Marian leads Walter to the cemetery where Walter says he believes that the woman in white is Anne Catherick and that she wrote the letter to Laura. Marian returns to Limmeridge House while Walter examines the grave stone. It has been partially cleaned. Walter finds a cottage near the cemetery where he meets the wife of the sexton, or caretaker of the church. In this meeting Walter learns that the sexton has not recently cleaned the grave stone, so he suspects that Anne Catherick did. He returns to Limmeridge House with plans to hide by the grave stone to see if Anne Catherick returns to finish the cleaning. He works on his art when he notices Laura heading out for a walk with her pet Italian greyhound, Nina. Later, before sunset, he goes to the cemetery to spy on the grave stone.

From his hiding place in the cemetery, Walter sees two women approach the grave stone of Mrs. Fairlie. The woman in white is covered in a long, blue, hooded traveling cloak and her companion wears plain clothes and a shawl. The woman in the shawl goes for a walk leaving the woman in white alone by the grave. The woman in white goes to a nearby brook where she dips a cloth in the water and then cleans the grave stone with it. Walter cautiously approaches the woman, reminding her that they met on the road and that he is staying at Limmeridge House. He gently brings up the subject of



Laura and the letter, confirming that the woman in white, Anne Catherick, wrote it. He asks her to come to Limmeridge House to talk to Laura in person about the warning in the letter. When he mentions the name of Sir Percival Glyde, Anne screams. This confirms Walter's theory that she was placed in a nearby private asylum by Glyde. Anne's friend, Mrs. Clements, runs to her side and calms her. They leave, pausing at the sexton's house to talk with the woman there. Walter watches them disappear in the darkness.

Walter returns to Limmeridge House where he tells Marian everything about meeting Anne Catherick, and that she is staying at Todd's Corner, a nearby farm. Marian agrees to go to Todd's Corner with Walter the next day vowing to get to the truth about Sir Percival Glyde. The next morning Walter goes about the plan whereby he ostensibly receives news in the mail that compels him to leave. He asks a servant to arrange a meeting with Mr. Fairlie. Instead of meeting, Mr. Fairlie asks that Walter communicate with him by letter so Walter does. Mr. Fairlie replies with an insulting letter that questions Walter's seriousness as an artist and that being upset by this, he tells Walter to leave. Walter then goes with Marian to Todd's Corner where they learn that Anne Catherick became hysterical during a conversation with the Todds, and that she and Mrs. Clements left three hours earlier. Mrs. Todd is insulted that they left without explanation. Marian, determined to learn why, questions the Todd's daughter, Hannah, who works at Limmeridge House. Hannah says that all they discussed was local news, such as the expected visit from Sir Percival Glyde and his engagement to Laura.

On Friday, November second, Walter and Marian welcome Mr. Gilmore, the family's solicitor to Limmeridge House. Marian takes Gilmore inside so Walter roams the gardens on his last full day there. On his sentimental journey, everything reminds him of the past months spent with Laura. When he returns to the house, Mr. Gilmore draws him aside to discuss the anonymous letter; Gilmore says that he has sent men to track down Anne Cathrick and Mrs. Clements. He adds that he has sent a letter to Sir Percival Glyde's solicitor with a copy of the letter, keeping the original to show to Sir Percival on Monday. After dinner, a man arrives with news that Anne Cathrick and Mrs. Clements traveled to Carlisle. There was no report of them at local inns or the railway station. Mr. Gilmore, Walter, Marian, Mrs. Vesey and Laura retire to the drawing room. Laura plays Mozart, Walter's favorite, while the rest play a card game called whist. They say their good nights, and Marian tells Walter that she is his friend for life. The next morning, Laura, Walter and Marian struggle through breakfast making small talk. Laura leaves abruptly. Marian kisses Walter on the forehead and tells him that she will write to him. Walter offers his help if they ever need it. Marian leaves. Laura comes back into the room to give Walter a drawing she has done. Walter wishes her great happiness and then Laura cries asking him to leave.



## **The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, of Clement's Inn, Teacher of Drawing, Parts XI-XV Analysis**

The anonymous letter raises suspicion about the Baronet Glyde, but no proof. Collins creates foreboding and dread by hinting that something is not right about Glyde. Marian and Walter work together toward their mutual interest of keeping Laura to themselves. This is the beginning of their mutual quest to find something wrong with Sir Percival Glyde.

Anne Catherick's wish to be buried beside her beloved Mrs. Fairlie will eventually come true through identity theft, when she is buried in the name of Laura Fairlie. Collins introduces a character detector in the form of a little dog. The reader is clued in to the true nature of Sir Percival and Solicitor Gilmore through whether or not this dog accepts them. The pet dog of Laura mirrors the pet dog of Anne Catherick. Both tender-hearted women own dogs, and the fate of Anne's dog is later used to parallel Anne's fate.

Collins creates a dramatic reaction by Anne Catherick that reveals unspeakable horror at the mention of Sir Percival Glyde. It is not solid evidence against him, but it hardens Walter's conviction against Sir Percival.

Collins creates a dramatic question in this scene—what has Sir Percival done that creates such horror and the need to flee on the part of Anne? How does such a frail, unsettled woman threaten a baronet?

Marian seeks protection for her beloved Laura through the legal system, represented by the noble Gilmore. Unfortunately, Gilmore is hamstrung by Frederick Fairlie because he has to obey the guardian's wishes. The anonymous letter is socially, but not legally, damaging. While Anne's intention is to protect Laura, the letter endangers her in ways yet unseen. Anne's madness is greater than she knows because her intentions pave the way to her own death.



# **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, of Chancery Lane, Solicitor, Parts I-IV**

## **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, of Chancery Lane, Solicitor, Parts I-IV Summary**

Vincent Gilmore has served as the solicitor for the Fairlie family for thirty years. He arrives at Limmeridge House on Friday, November second, to prepare the marriage settlement on behalf of Laura Fairlie. When he meets with the self-absorbed, ever-ailing Frederick Fairlie on Saturday, Frederick impresses upon him that he will sign whatever he has to when the time comes and that he should not be disturbed until then. Sir Percival's solicitor sends a note to Gilmore that he has received the anonymous letter and Gilmore's inquiry. Gilmore notices that Laura looks pale and depressed and that she avoids talk of Sir Percival. Monday brings Sir Percival's arrival. Sir Percival acts courteously and properly toward the others and does not remark when Laura steals away soon after welcoming him. In private with Gilmore and Marian, Sir Percival brings up the topic of the anonymous letter. He volunteers a noble story that he took great care of Mrs. Catherick and her daughter Anna, for Mrs. Catherick's faithful service to his family. He even placed Anna in an expensive private asylum to avoid disgracing the girl's mother. He offers Gilmore the name of two physicians at the asylum and his keen interest in restoring her to the care of these physicians as soon as possible. Marian questions him further so he insists that she write a letter to Anne's mother asking two questions: 1) If she approved of her daughter's placement in the asylum and 2) Was she grateful for his help in placing her there? Satisfied, Sir Percival goes up to his room leaving Gilmore and Marian to talk. Gilmore presses Marian about whether or not Sir Percival's explanations have settled matters. Marian states that she cannot possibly object based on Sir Percival's explanation and that she thinks that Gilmore's guidance is the best she can desire. Gilmore worries why Marian, an independent, smart woman "one in ten thousand," defers responsibility to him.

On Tuesday, Sir Percival goes to Todd's Corner to interview the family there about Anne Catherick. On Wednesday, a curt letter arrives from Anne's mother Jane Anne Catherick confirming that she approved of her daughter's placement in the asylum and Sir Percival's part in it. Sir Percival responds to Laura's ill ease by telling Marian that he will withdraw his engagement if Laura requests it. Marian tells Gilmore about the offer and Gilmore becomes all the more convinced that Sir Percival is a gentleman among gentlemen. Gilmore receives a letter calling him back to London. Marian begs Gilmore to meet alone with Laura, so he does. Nina, the greyhound hops in his lap. After talking with her about her possible marriage settlement and her inheritance, he becomes



convinced that no matter how great a gentleman Sir Percival is, a marriage between Laura and Sir Percival would destroy the sweet girl.

A week after Gilmore returns to London, he gets a letter from Marian that Laura Fairlie accepts Sir Percival Glyde's proposal for marriage. Gilmore draws up the marriage settlement contract. It stipulates that Laura receives 3,000 pounds income per year for life and upon her death, Sir Percival receives 3,000 pounds per year for his life. If she and Sir Percival have a son, then upon Laura's death, Sir Percival inherits Limmeridge Estate for the son. When Laura turns twenty-one, she inherits 20,000 pounds and a life interest in another 10,000 pounds. On Laura's death, the 20,000 pounds goes to whomever Laura dictates in her will, which is Miss Halcombe, if Laura has no children. Gilmore sends off the marriage settlement to Sir Percival's lawyer, Mr. Merriman. It is returned in two days with the change that the 20,000 pounds would go to Sir Percival if there are no children. Gilmore argues in writing that the change is unacceptable. Deadlocked, Gilmore writes to Frederick Fairlie that Sir Percival's debts and greed motivate him to demand a change to the marriage settlement that is not in Laura Fairlie's best interests. Frederick Fairlie writes back dismissing the whole topic as trivial. When Merriman pressures Gilmore, he asks for a few days to consult his client; then Gilmore heads to Limmeridge Estate to confront Frederick Fairlie. On the way, Gilmore is stopped by Walter Hartright, who asks about the marriage plans, then says he is leaving the country for a while.

Gilmore arrives at Limmeridge and is put off until the next day. When he meets with Frederick Fairlie, he has to demand that the servant holding a heavy art book be excused so they can speak in private. Frederick whines, insisting that the marriage settlement be done according to Sir Percival's demand, basically disinheriting Marian against Laura's wishes. Gilmore is so disgusted he tells Frederick that he would never make such a settlement for his own daughter. He returns to London immediately.

## **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, of Chancery Lane, Solicitor, Parts I-IV Analysis**

Sir Percival charms the solicitor and politely bullies Marian, but he cannot charm the little greyhound Nina, who whines and hides from him when he approaches her and calls her by name. The dog even barks at him when he leaves the room. This hints at Sir Percival's true character because the dog knows him and does not like him. Up until now the dog has been friendly.

Here an honest man is forced to assist in marrying a young girl to a much older man with an agenda that is not in the best interests of the young girl. Nina, the greyhound, serves as a character detector. The dog trusts Gilmore and hides from Sir Percival. The author thus judges the characters without preaching narrative.

The reader learns that Sir Percival is probably marrying Laura for her money and potential inheritance rather than for love. Gilmore's narrative also reveals that Laura's father had a sister, Eleanor, who he essentially cut out of the family fortune because she married a foreigner named Count Fosco. Being a male, he enjoyed the power to cut off his sister financially based on nothing more than his opinion of her husband.

Collins shows Frederick Fairlie's sociopathic tendencies through his treatment of the servant, so the reader is probably not shocked when Fairlie treats his own flesh and blood relative with utter selfishness. Could any reader find Frederick Fairlie a sympathetic character? His migraines and his hypochondria come off as affectations of a selfish man.



# **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, in Extracts from her Diary, Parts I-II**

## **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, in Extracts from her Diary, Parts I-II Summary**

Laura's diary begins November 8th. Marian speaks candidly with Laura about the engagement to Sir Percival. Laura feels compelled to go through with the marriage according to her late father's wishes, but she loves Walter Hartright, the art tutor. Marian gets a letter from Walter Hartright that says he thinks he is being followed and that he seeks work abroad. Laura tells Sir Percival that they need to talk, so the next day she sits with Marian to tell him that she will honor her obligation to marry. She adds that it is up to him to break off the engagement because she loves someone else, someone she might never see again. Sir Percival says he will do all he can to earn her love then leaves the room. Laura places a lock of her hair in the drawing album and gives it to Marian with instructions upon her death to give it to Walter Hartright and tell him that she loved him. Marian takes Laura to Yorkshire to visit the Arnolds. Meanwhile, she learns that Walter has taken a six-month job in Honduras to study the ruins. Frederick Fairlie calls them back to Limmeridge.

At Limmeridge on November 27th, Marian and Laura learn that the wedding is set for December 22nd. Laura agrees to the date as inevitable, so Marian informs Frederick Fairlie by barging into his room, shouting that Laura consents to the date, and then she slams the door on her way out. Sir Percival's letters tell of continuing renovations to his home that require him to move Laura to Rome after the wedding instead of to his home. Laura asks Marian to go with her after her marriage, but Marian tells her that she cannot accompany them on their wedding tour (honeymoon). Marian's entries in her diary show her struggling to accept Sir Percival in the face of the lack of proof against him. He arrives on December 17th to complete the plans for marriage at Limmeridge Church. He tells Marian that he and Laura will meet with Count Fosco and his wife in Italy and that when they return, Marian is to come live with Sir Percival and Laura. Among the wedding gifts, Mrs. Vesey's handmade Shetland wool shawl was Laura's favorite. The chaos of wedding preparations and receiving gifts leaves Laura and Marian no time together. The night before the wedding, Marian sneaks into Laura's room and watches her sleep. The diary entries end the day of the wedding and Marian is crying.



## **The First Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, in Extracts from her Diary, Parts I-II Analysis**

Conditions trap Laura into a fateful marriage, and she is helpless to escape the engagement her father began. Collins uses the lovely Laura to create sympathy for the plight of women.

Marian, though powerless to move the tiny heart of Frederick Fairlie, shows her contempt of him by shouting and slamming a door, acts that she knows will ruin his day. Marian mourns that her beloved half-sister is slipping away from her life.





# The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts I-V

## The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts I-V Summary

It is June 11th, 1850, a full six months since the wedding, and Marian anticipates the return of Sir Percival and Laura to England. Marian waits for them at Sir Percival's home called Blackwater Park in Hampshire. Since the wedding, Solicitor Gilmore suffered a stroke and his business partner is abroad. Frederick Fairlie is cataloging his treasures through photography. Marian explores the ancient home and property, which she finds partly in disrepair. She finds a dying dog and brings it to the house, where she is told that the dog was probably shot by the groundskeeper and that it could be Mrs. Catherick's. Mrs. Catherick of Welmingham had been to the house the day before looking for her daughter, Anne.

Marian finds Laura changed. In their first private conversation, Laura insists they never speak of her marriage, but that all other topics are open. This drives a small wedge in their relationship. Sir Percival returns peevish and critical of the servants. He is distressed that they cannot identify a man who visited to ask when Sir Percival would return. Count Fosco and Countess Fosco (Frederick Fairlie's sister) arrive with Sir Percival and Laura, now called Lady Glyde. Marian remembers Eleanor Fairlie as a vain, foolish young woman, but she appears at age forty-three dressed in dark, matronly clothes. Count Fosco once saved Sir Percival from assassination and robbery in Rome, according to the maid. He is corpulent, travels with his pet birds and mice and Marian finds him attractive. On the 16th of June, Solicitor Merriman arrives unexpectedly from London and meets in the library with Sir Percival.

Marian overhears Merriman advise Sir Percival to get Laura to sign documents in the presence of two witnesses, documents that will rescue Sir Percival financially. Marian tells Laura, who promises to act cautiously. Laura confides in Marian that she does not like Count Fosco, who is singing Figaro's song from the Barber of Seville. The next morning Sir Percival accompanies Laura, Marian, a cage of Fosco's mice and the Foscos to the boat house to look at the lake. There Sir Percival jokes about the lake being too shallow to drown someone. Fosco says it is too shallow to hide the body. Laura and Count Fosco gently debate that crime is for fools and wise men are not criminals. Laura adds that "crimes cause their own detection." This irritates Sir Percival and amuses Fosco. Fosco argues that a wise criminal never gets caught, which leads to the assumption that only fools commit crime. While looking for a stray mouse, Fosco finds bloody ground. Alarmed he points it out, but Marian explains that the blood came from Mrs. Catherick's dog. The news that Mrs. Catherick had been to the house disturbs Sir Percival. He goes to question the housekeeper, while Fosco questions Marian. Sir Percival prepares to leave by horse-cart using his long-distance mare Brown Molly, but



before he leaves he asks Laura and the Foscos to join him in the library to sign a few papers, which he calls a "mere formality." He shuts out Marian.

Sir Percival invites Marian to come to the library to be a witness to Laura's signature in place of Countess Fosco. He evades the fact that the real reason for the exchange could be a conflict of interest on Countess Fosco's part by pretending that it would look better to have someone sign who favored Laura's interests. He orders Laura to sign the document and becomes outraged when she asks to read it first. Count Fosco tries to calm Sir Percival, but is rebuffed. Sir Percival accuses Laura of not trusting him, of being ungrateful. Insulted, Laura refuses to sign until she has read every word of the documents. Sir Percival locks up the documents and warns her that she will sign tomorrow when he returns. Laura and Marian speak privately and agree to send a messenger to Gilmore's partner, Mr. Kyrle, to advise them about the papers. Laura also says that she wants to speak to Marian about her marriage soon. When Marian puts the letter to be sent out in a bag in the hallway she is intercepted by Countess Fosco, who takes her on a long walk talking more than ever before. When they return to the house, Marian checks the post bag and finds that her letter has been expertly unsealed and resealed.

After dinner, Laura and Marian go to the boat house where they can talk privately. Laura confides in Marian that Sir Percival's motive for marriage was money, simply money and that he guessed that Laura's secret affection was for Walter Hartright. Sir Percival vowed to make her and Hartright miserable. After dusk they walk back to the house and realize they are being followed. Marian discreetly learns that no one has been outside the house while she and Laura were out. Laura loses the brooch that Marian gave her.

## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts I-V Analysis**

The fate of Anne's dog foreshadows Anne's fate. Both die as a result of Sir Percival's control. Both are equally defenseless against his wishes. The dog is shot capriciously by Sir Percival's groundskeeper with Sir Percival's consent.

Marian is at last reunited with Laura in her new surroundings, but Laura has changed into someone more distant, more troubled. Sir Percival arrives with his entourage of co-conspirators: Count Fosco, Countess Fosco and Solicitor Merriman. Their secretive behavior alarms Marian putting her on the defensive. The change in Countess Fosco from party-girl to dour matronly slave demonstrates Count Fosco's insidious charm and control.

Sir Percival attempts to force Laura to give up her money through legal documents he does not want her to read. When she refuses, it sets in motion plan B, to get the money through her death. Neither Marian nor Laura yet understand the evil determination of Sir Percival, but the reader is given that knowledge. Collins thereby creates suspense for the reader, who knows more than the empathetic characters. The reader, like the helpless Laura, can only watch the dangers build and close in on Laura.

Marian's behavior changes to suit the situation. Once trusting and kind, she grows suspicious and cautious, and then her suspicions are confirmed.

The brooch serves as a means for Anne to connect with Laura and to show her good intentions. She could have sold the brooch for money, but she values her connection to Laura more.



# The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts VI-X

## The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts VI-X Summary

On June 18th Marian sneaks off the plantation to the lodge gate in hope of intercepting the reply from the solicitor so that the Foscos do not discover it. She stops the messenger and reads the letter from Solicitor Kyrle advising that Laura does not sign the documents until he has read them. Count Fosco appears from the woods having followed her. He sweetly offers to escort her back to the house. When they reach the house, Sir Percival arrives demanding his lunch and reminding all that he expects Laura to sign the papers today. Marian excuses herself and overhears Count Fosco telling Sir Percival that they need to talk about business. Marian feels ill and goes to sleep in the drawing room where she dreams of Walter surviving many dangers. Laura wakes her and says that she has just spoken to Anne Cathrick and that Anne found Laura's lost brooch in the boat house. Anne told Laura that she is dying and therefore no longer afraid of Sir Percival and that she has to tell Laura a secret that would protect her from Sir Percival. Skittish, she asks Laura to meet her at the boathouse tomorrow, then she ran off into the woods. That night at dinner Count Fosco and Sir Percival are unusually civil toward Laura. They have put off the signing of the documents, which leaves Marian and Laura suspicious.

The next day Marian and Laura go to the boat house, with Laura going first and Marian to follow. When Marian goes to the boat house, she find nothing but large and small shoe prints in the sand. She follows them through the woods back to the house where she learns that Laura came back with Sir Percival. Sir Percival locked Laura in her room under the guard of the stupid housemaid named Margaret Porcher. Laura's personal maid, Fanny, has been dismissed with a month's pay by Sir Percival. Marian confronts Sir Percival, who is whispering with the Foscos. Count Fosco coerces Sir Percival to unlock Laura. Sir Percival has a paper in his hand which he crushes. Marian goes to Laura's room, and Laura calls the Count a spy, a statement that Countess Fosco overhears at the door. Laura tells Marian that she found a note from Anne promising to meet her again but that she was followed by a tall, stout old man (Count Fosco). Marian writes two letters for Fanny to smuggle out with her. One letter is written to the Solicitor for help, and the other is to Frederick Fairlie asking to allow Laura and Marian to visit.

In the afternoon, Marian sneaks out to the village where she gives letters and instructions to Fanny to deliver the letters and then goes to Limmeridge and waits. When she returns to the house, Sir Percival tells Count Fosco that they need to talk but Fosco puts him off. Countess Fosco suggests to Marian that a walk would improve her color. Marian is so suspicious of the Foscos and Sir Percival that she locks her room every time she leaves. She speaks briefly to Laura, who tells her that Sir Percival



demands to know the secret that Anne told her, by force if necessary. He does not believe Laura's assertion that she told him all she knows.

That evening Marian overhears Sir Percival and Count Fosco making plans to talk privately in the library. They agree to check the stairways and nearby rooms so that they are not overheard. Marian changes her clothes and sneaks out onto the roof over the library so she can eavesdrop. She knows they will leave the windows open because of the heat. A steady light rain soaks Marian while she hides on the roof. Count Fosco sums up the situation facing Sir Percival—he is in deep debts that are due in three months that can be repaid by borrowing against Laura's inheritance or by her death. Count Fosco also asks about Anne Catherick. Sir Percival tells him that she knows a secret that could undo him, and that she looks like a sickly imitation of Laura. The Count tells Sir Percival to leave both matters in his hands.

On June 20th, Marian has crawled back into her room and changed into dry clothes. At dawn she writes in her diary recounting the conversation she overheard, then she falls into a feverish illness. Count Fosco reads Marian's diary while the doctor treats her. He is filled with admiration for her as a formidable foe, one he would have adored to have as an accomplice.

## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Parts VI-X Analysis**

Anne's mental illness allows her to believe that she can help Laura, even though she does not know the content of the terrible secret that her mother holds over Sir Percival. Her conviction alone is enough to convince Laura and Marian that the secret is valuable. Marian understands the need to have some weapon against Sir Percival.

Marian tries to smuggle letters out with the fired maid, Fanny, but Count Fosco is a trained spy. He sends his wife to intercept the letters without Marian's knowledge. Again, the reader sees the impending dangers long before the characters do, which heightens the suspense of the story.

Sir Percival is so weak and suspicious that he does not believe and cannot recognize the truth when he hears it. Laura is powerless to convince him. Collins artfully peels away social, legal and physical protections from Laura Fairlie to reveal the processes that leave Laura helpless. The reader has already witnessed Gilmore's failure to protect her legally. Social isolation and physical threats are next.

Marian puts herself in danger on behalf of Laura by crawling out on the roof in the rain. Collins shows the depths of Marian's devotion to Laura through this act. The payoff is that Marian learns valuable information. She knows that time is running out for Sir Percival to pay his debts, and that he can get the money from Laura in life or by her death. The stakes are raised to the highest level in this scene and Marian learns the truth. Though the reader may be relieved that Marian gained this knowledge, the



tension remains strong because Marian's knowledge does not change her position of powerlessness.

Marian gains knowledge about Sir Percival's situation and the stakes, but it costs her her health. She falls ill from being exposed to the cold rain.



# **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House**

## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House Summary**

Frederick Fairlie receives a visit from Fanny, Laura's maid. She tells him that she delivered a letter for the Solicitor and then she gives the second letter to Frederick Fairlie. She says that she was visited at the inn by Countess Fosco (Frederick's sister), who gave her tea that made her faint. When she awoke she found that the letters were crumpled, but still safely tucked into her bosom. Fairlie dismisses her and reads the letter which asks if Marian and Laura can come visit. He gets another letter, this time from the Solicitor reporting that he received a blank paper from Marian and it seems suspicious. Frederick dismisses the blank letter as meaningless and then he writes to Marian that she can visit first, then possibly Laura. A few days later, Count Fosco arrives to report that Marian is ill and that Lady Glyde (Laura) should come back to Limmeridge by way of Fosco's home in London to save the family from public disgrace. Fairlie writes a letter instructing Laura to come home by way of Fosco's home. Fosco leaves with the letter.

## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House Analysis**

Countess Fosco stole the letter meant for the solicitor from Fanny after she drugged her tea. Fairlie, by trying to remove himself from all human interaction, causes great harm. In the closing lines of his narrative, he pleads his innocence in the tragedy that follows. Contrast Frederick Fairlie with Marian, and one sees that Marian makes a better man and a better guardian to Laura than Frederick. One can also compare Frederick's fake invalid state with Marian's real, life-threatening illness. The situation grows worse for Marian and Laura because their efforts to get help are discovered by Count Fosco.



# **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Eliza Michelson, Housekeeper at Blackwater Park, Parts I-II**

## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Eliza Michelson, Housekeeper at Blackwater Park, Parts I-II Summary**

Eliza Michelson finds Marian Halcombe feverishly ill in her room. They send for Mr. Dawson, reportedly a man of medicine, to treat Marian. On the second day, Count Fosco tells Eliza that he has employed a nurse named Mrs. Rubelle to help care for Marian. When Laura (Lady Glyde) objects to letting Fosco's nurse attend to Marian, Eliza interprets it as prejudice toward foreigners. Mrs. Rubelle is Italian. Doctor Dawson tells Eliza that he suspects the nurse will try quack remedies proposed by Count Fosco, so he enlists Eliza to keep an eye on the nurse. The Count leaves the house for a week and during that time Marian grows sicker. The Count returns and declares that Marian has Typhus. A doctor arrives from London and confirms the diagnosis. After ten days, Marian recovers some health, and Count Fosco drives out Doctor Dawson. Soon after that, Sir Percival tells Eliza that all the household staff is dismissed except for the exceptionally stupid housekeeper, Margaret Porcher and Eliza.

A day later, Sir Percival instructs Eliza to go on an impossible mission to find a house at an unreasonable price on the beach for rent for a trip by Lady Glyde and Marian. Eliza worries about leaving Marian and Lady Glyde in the care of Margaret Porcher, so she stops by Lady Glyde's room to help her dress. They go to check on Marian and Sir Percival tells them that she has gone with the Foscos and Mrs. Rubelle to London. Lady Glyde is so shaken that she pleads with Sir Percival to let her follow Marian, but she is terrified about staying in London at the Fosco's home. Lady Glyde begs Eliza to take a letter to Mrs. Vesey in London because she intends to stay the night in London there rather than at Fosco's if Marian has already gone on to Cumberland and Limmeridge. Eliza puts Lady Glyde on the train to London. Later that evening Eliza walks the grounds at Blackwater Park and finds Mrs. Rubelle in the garden. She asks her why she isn't in London and she says that she never left, nor did Marian. Sir Percival arrives and admits the deception saying that he sent Lady Glyde away for her own good and that Marian is safely up in another room of the house, which Eliza is welcomed to go see. Eliza then agrees to stay with Marian with plans to leave the next morning. She calls for Doctor Dawson to come check on Marian. Sir Percival gets drunk and drives a chaise, or horse-drawn carriage, off to the train station in the middle of the night. Eliza accompanies Marian to London, then Marian continues on to Limmeridge.





## **The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Eliza Michelson, Housekeeper at Blackwater Park, Parts I-II Analysis**

Collins uses Eliza Michelson as an unreliable narrator. Her perception of events and relationships is colored by her lack of education and her Christian forgiveness. It is only after Fosco goes to extremes that Eliza begins to see his character the way Marian and Laura do, but this is hindsight, which is always clearest.

Eliza's rose-colored glasses view of Sir Percival pushes her to risk her job on principle. Her stand comes almost too late to do much good.



# The Second Epoch: The Story Continued in Several Narratives

## The Second Epoch: The Story Continued in Several Narratives Summary

The Narrative of Hester Pinhorn, Cook in the Service of Count Fosco

Hester recounts the arrival of Lady Glyde at the Fosco's home in London. Lady Glyde is agitated and very weak, so she is brought to a room to rest in seclusion. Doctor Goodricke examines her and declares that she has a heart problem. Later he visits and declares her dead. The doctor offers to register the death according to law.

The Narrative of the Doctor

Doctor Alfred Goodricke registers the death as Lady Glyde, aged 21, on July 25th, 1850 of an aneurysm.

The Narrative of Jane Gould

Jane Gould describes how she prepares the body for burial.

The Narrative of the Tombstone

The tombstone identifies Laura Fairlie, and she is buried beside her mother. The inscription gives date of birth as March 27th, 1829, date of marriage as December 22nd, 1849, and date of death as Jul 25th, 1850.

The Narrative of Walter Hartright

Just as in Marian's dream, Walter escapes death three times on his journey back to England. He arrives in October at his mother's home a changed man. He learns of Laura's death and leaves to visit her grave. He mourns over her tombstone. Later, two veiled women approach. Marian Halcombe lifts her veil and cries out about her dream. The second woman comes to the grave and raises her veil to reveal Laura.

## The Second Epoch: The Story Continued in Several Narratives Analysis

By all legal documents, the dead woman buried at Limmeridge Church cemetery is that of Laura Fairlie. It is the body of Anne Catherick, and, thus, Laura faces the challenge of proving her identity to reclaim her name and her inheritance. People of good reputation, such as Jane Gould, Doctor Goodricke and all who attended the funeral agree that



Laura is dead because they have all been tricked by Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Collins piles obstacle on obstacle against the sweet, passive young woman, as if all society worked against her. Collins ends the Second Epoch with death and the symbolic resurrection.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I Summary**

A week later Walter has rented two floors of a news vendor's shop, one for himself and one for Marian and Laura, posing as his sisters. He learns that the woman buried in Laura's grave is Anne Catherick. To help Laura and Marian win back her rightful inheritance, they must hide and plan and gather evidence.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I Analysis**

Walter, Anne and Marian hide in plain sight. By hiding among the poor, they appear as no threat to Count Fosco and Sir Percival, but they are a formidable threat unified.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II Summary**

Walter gathers information to build the legal case for Laura first by writing the stories of Marian and Laura in the tangled events before Laura's presumed death. After hearing of Laura's death, Marian collected information at Limmeridge and hired someone to spy on the Foscos and Mrs. Rubelle, but that did not provide new information. A letter from Count Fosco to Frederick Fairlie stated that Anne Catherick had been caught at Blackwater Park and placed in the asylum, where she persisted in saying that she was Lady Glyde. Marian visited the asylum to find Anne Catherick and found Laura instead. After the shock of her discovery passed, Marian withdrew seven-hundred pounds from the bank and conspired with a nurse to help Laura escape from the asylum to Limmeridge.

Lady Glyde recalls the trip from Blackwater to London into the care of Count Fosco, who met her at the train. He took her to the asylum and checked her in as Anne Catherick, where she stayed from July 27th to October 15th, at which date, Marian helped her escape. At Limmeridge, Frederick Fairlie called Laura an impostor and the servants refused to vouch for Laura's identity, so Marian and Laura left Limmeridge to hide in London. On their way to the train station, Laura insisted on visiting her mother's grave and that is where they found Walter.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II Analysis**

Collins relies on a coincidence to bring Laura, Marian and Walter back together. Though coincidence is a weak plot device, the reader probably accepts it because the rest of the story is so compelling. Collins uses Laura's deterioration to make her appearance more like Anne's, so that even her servants do not recognize her. This device is all the more believable because Collins planted the comparison earlier when Walter considered Anne to be a sickly look-alike to Laura.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III Summary**

Living in the poor section of town, Walter takes work as a woodcutter, while Marian takes care of the household chores and together they save up four hundred pounds. After gathering all the testimonies and evidence he could, Walter leaves to meet with Solicitor Kyrle to determine how to reinstate Laura.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III Analysis**

Marian's deep personal strength sustains them through the roughest times. Marian lowers herself to serving as a servant out of devotion to her frail half-sister, Laura.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV Summary**

Solicitor Kyrle listens attentively to Walter from beginning to end and then declares that he cannot win his case unless he can pinpoint that Laura came to London after the date on her death certificate. Kyrle wants to help but insists that it will be futile to take a baronet to court without solid, unshakable proof. The only people who would know the date that Laura left for London are Sir Percival and Count Fosco, who are unlikely to help. Kyrle gives Walter an envelope to give Marian. Walter declares that his interest in Laura is to restore her and avenge the wrongs inflicted upon her. He learns that Sir Percival is back in London. When he leaves the solicitor's office he is followed by two men, one of whom had followed him long ago, so he takes a winding path and eludes them in Hyde Park.

He returns to tell Marian and to give her the envelope. It is from Count Fosco warning her to stay hidden and to avoid taking action that would require him to take action. Walter hopes he can pinpoint the date that Laura left Blackwater through the housekeeper, Mrs. Michelson or by Doctor Dawson, who visited Blackwater that night. He raises hope to ensnare Sir Percival by discovering the secret that Anne Catherick knew and wanted to give to Laura.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV Analysis**

Though Walter is unsuccessful in proving Laura's identity, he gains an ally in Solicitor Kyrle. Count Fosco pretends to be an ally, but Marian recognizes that Fosco will act in his own interests first, last and always. The men who follow Walter serve as a reminder of danger. They are shadowy figures that generate fear in the same way that darkness does. They are the unknown threat, the hidden evil that can strike when least expected. Collins uses these shadowy figures to increase suspense. They are an extension of Fosco and Sir Percival's evil.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V Summary**

Walter travels to Hampshire, but Doctor Dawson and Mrs. Michelson cannot name the exact date that Laura left Blackwater Park for London. The inn where Sir Percival stayed the night Laura left has been out of business for months and the proprietor gone. Interviews with the few servants left at Blackwater do not help, so Walter returns to London. He plans with Marian to discover Sir Percival's secret through Mrs. Clements, Anne Catherick's friend, or through Anne's mother. Marian writes a letter of inquiry to Mrs. Todd at Todd's Corner asking about Mrs. Clements. Mrs. Todd's reply gives Mrs. Clements' address in London near Walter and Marian.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V Analysis**

Walter meets obstacle after obstacle in his quest to bring Sir Percival and Count Fosco to justice. The delays create suspense because the reader longs for their downfall and for justice. The greater the injustices; the more the reader longs for a severe punishment for Sir Percival and Count Fosco.





# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI Summary**

Marian and Walter immediately go to Mrs. Clements' address and remind her that Walter helped Anne escape the men searching for her when she left the asylum. After earning her trust, Mrs. Clements tells them all she knows. She harbored Anne in London, then in Grimsby until Anne learned about Laura's wedding announcement then she insisted on going to Blackwater Park to tell Laura a secret about Sir Percival. They stayed near the lake village of Sandon three miles from Blackwater Park, and Anne, though ill, walked it daily to speak with Lady Glyde. When Anne became too ill to walk, Mrs. Clements went in her place to give a message to Lady Glyde that Anne and Mrs. Clements had to return to London. Mrs. Clements meets Count Fosco, who wheedles the information from her and offers his medical knowledge to help Anne. When Mrs. Clements takes him to see Anne, he is startled at how much she resembles Lady Glyde. Anne and Mrs. Clements return to London and send their address to Lady Glyde, but it is intercepted by Count Fosco. Countess Fosco then takes Mrs. Clements for a cab ride while Anne is lured out of the house by a letter and is not seen again. Mrs. Clements returns home and finds Anne gone, so she checks at the asylum, but they do not have Anne.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI Analysis**

Mrs. Clements acts with good intentions that are misused by the evil Count Fosco. His charm lures Mrs. Clements into trusting him. Like Eliza Michelson, Mrs. Clements learns too late that her trust has been abused. Collins uses naive and inept characters to inadvertently endanger Laura, Anne and Marian to emphasize the injustices that can be inflicted by evil men. Thus, he makes a strong argument about the social, legal and physical injustices women endure while he also creates moral outrage in the reader. The reader can empathize with Eliza and Mrs. Clements, good-hearted, honest people acting in the best interests of others but being tricked.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII Summary**

Mrs. Clements then tells Marian and Walter about Anne's early life and about Anne's mother. Anne's mother and father had once been neighbors of Mrs. Clements in Welmingham, where Mr. Catherick clerked at Welmingham church. Anne's mother had been a maid at Varneck Hall near Southampton. There was a scandal between Anne's mother and Sir Percival Glyde, who met secretly at the vestry of the church that broke up Anne's mother's marriage. Sir Percival and Mrs. Catherick had known each other before Mrs. Catherick's marriage. Mr. Catherick left for America and sent back money to London for Mrs. Catherick to live on, but she refused it, living instead on money from Sir Percival Glyde. If Anne was Sir Percival's child and the whole of Welmingham guessed it, then it would not be a secret. What then was the secret about Sir Percival? The man who owned Varneck Hall when Mrs. Catherick worked there was a Major Donthorne. Later when Anne knew of Sir Percival's secret, he put her in the asylum. When she escaped, she came to Mrs. Clements' home in London. After learning all they can from Mrs. Clements, Walter tells Mrs. Clements that Anne is out of her misery and decently buried in a church cemetery. Before they leave, they get Mrs. Catherick's address.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII Analysis**

Walter delivers the good and bad news to Mrs. Clements about Anne. Compare Mrs. Clements' reaction to Anne's death with the reaction of her own mother and the reader sees the true character of these women.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VIII**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VIII Summary**

Back at the house, Laura begs to help so she is not a burden. Walter tells her that she can earn money by drawing and this cheers Laura. Marian writes to Frederick Fairlie asking about all that passed between Frederick and Count Fosco. Walter goes to Welmingham by train to get the secret out of Mrs. Catherick. Mrs. Catherick coldly receives the news of her daughter's death and spars with Walter about the secret she holds over Sir Percival. She warns Walter that she is respected in town and even the clergy bows to her. The only time she loses her cool is when Walter states that the secret is not about the identity of the man who fathered Anne. He mentions the church vestry and that arouses anger in Mrs. Catherick. Mrs. Catherick refuses to give up the secret. Walter says he will bring down Sir Percival, and Mrs. Catherick tells him to go ahead.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VIII Analysis**

Mrs. Catherick appears all the more evil because she does not mourn the death of her only child, her own flesh and blood. Collins allows the reader to learn about the injustices inflicted on her that hardened her heart, but the fact that she does not mourn her own child outweighs all else. This character represents the woman molded by an unjust society.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IX**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IX Summary**

Walter sees the same clerk from Blackwater Park come from the house next to Mrs. Catherick's, so he follows him to the railroad station where the man boards for Blackwater. Walter spends the night at an inn in Welmingham where he writes Marian. They use a postal office far from their place in London. He instructs Marian to write back care of the postal office at Welmingham.

The next day Walter goes to the Old Welmingham church vestry. He sees two men waiting for him at the church, one of whom has followed him before, so he continues on to the home of the church clerk. The elderly man greets him warmly and lets him in the old abandoned church to inspect the registry of marriages, births and deaths. The lock on the vestry door is old, so the old man has to wrestle with it to open it. Scattered all around the vestry are old papers, storage and neglected items. Walter finds the registry entry for Sir Felix Glyde's marriage to Cecelia Jane Elster of Knowlesbury and learns that the church clerk who maintained the church registry and kept a duplicate at his home for safekeeping, a Mr. Wansborough, still lives in Knowlesbury five miles away. Walter walks there; the two men who followed him are joined by the man who lives beside Mrs. Catherick. The clerk leaves them. The fact that Sir Percival had men waiting at the church as spies reassures Walter that he is on the right trail to the secret.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IX Analysis**

The dangers become more real and physical as Walter nears the proof of Sir Percival's secret. Collins plants the sticking locks in this scene so they will be accepted later as plausible. At last, a character is introduced whose good intentions and selfless action helps change the balance of power in favor of Laura. The good clerk did not live to see his caution pay off, but his efforts finally do. Exactly the kind of tampering the clerk feared is exposed by the duplicate registry. The reader is given a spark of hope for Laura.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part X**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part X Summary**

On the road to Knowlesbury, the two men following Walter shove him on the outskirts of Knowlesbury, provoking Walter to shove back. They take him to the magistrate and charge him with assault. This requires Walter to stay in custody for three days until trial or find someone locally to bail him out. He calls on Doctor Dawson, who bails him out and invites him home, but Walter politely declines and quickly heads to Mr. Wansborough's before Sir Percival can act. Mr. Wansborough's son hauls the duplicate registry from a vault, and there Walter discovers that the entry of the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde to Cecelia Jane Elster is a fraud. Sir Percival's title is a fraud and that is his terrible secret. The marriage is listed in the old unsecured church registry, but not in the vault-protected duplicate. Walter tells Mr. Wansborough that he will write to him again, and then Walter rushes back to the old church to get the elderly clerk to make a copy of the registry page. On the way, three men attack him. He clobbers one with his walking stick and outruns the other two in the dark. He detours from the road to the old clerk's cottage. The old man is frantic that someone has broken into his home and stolen the church keys. Walter tells him to get a light and go with him to the church immediately. They run to the church and it is on fire. Walter hears someone inside lock the door. A servant of Sir Percival's says that Sir Percival came to meet him.

Walter tries to break into the church to rescue Sir Percival, but the heavy wooden doors are locked from inside. A fire engine and townspeople arrive to put out the fire. A man in authority asks who tried to save the man inside, and Walter is brought into the church to identify the body. It is Sir Percival.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part X Analysis**

The pace of the action quickens to a footrace as Walter finally captures the secret that haunts Sir Percival. In the frantic scene, Walter gains a huge advantage only to seemingly lose it when Sir Percival accidentally kills himself. Defeat snatched from the jaws of victory, it seems, for poor Walter. In keeping with his noble nature, Walter valiantly tries to rescue Sir Percival. The faulty lock is symbolic of the faulty justice that failed to lock Sir Percival up all those years when he usurped his father's inheritance. It is fitting that he locks himself in, essentially sentencing himself to death for his crimes. What society and law could not do to reveal or punish him, the hand of God has achieved. To be burned to death in church seems doubly damning punishment for Sir Percival. The law, if it had caught up with him, would have sentenced him to death. This

is a horrifically satisfying end to Sir Percival. This leaves the reader hoping for justice to catch up with Fosco and perhaps Frederick Fairlie.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part XI**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part XI Summary**

The next day, Walter gets a letter from Marian that she and Laura are well. Walter writes back about the death of Sir Percival begging Marian to keep the news from Laura until he returns. He is worried about her frail mental condition. He then goes to the inquest, where the body's identification is secured by an engraved pocket watch. Walter's testimony is limited to his presence at the parish clerk's house asking about the church and accompanying him to the church. Walter surmises that Sir Percival's intention was to tear out the page of the registry that showed his fraud and in so doing had to light a match to see in the dark. The lock probably failed, trapping him in the vestry. All the dry papers and crates in the vestry probably caught fire, killing him.

Walter is disheartened by Sir Percival's death because it leaves him no way to reinstate Laura's identity and inheritance. He returns to the inn at Welmingham to find a note from Mrs. Catherick.

The Story continued by Mrs. Catherick

In the letter she confesses her fondness for Sir Percival, who gave her gifts and bribed her to get the keys to the church vestry from her husband. It turns out that Sir Percival was the son of Sir Felix and Cecilia Jane Elster, but they had never married. After they died, he added the marriage to the registry and then took possession of Sir Felix's properties. When Mrs. Catherick was discovered in the vestry with Sir Percival, she asked him to tell her husband that her honor was not ruined, but he refused, causing her divorce. Sir Percival gave her a yearly allowance to keep her quiet. She asserts that Anne never knew Sir Percival's secret, only repeating what she overheard from her mother that there was a secret. Anne repeated this to Sir Percival and was then shut up in the asylum. Mrs. Catherick basically thanks Walter for driving Sir Percival to kill himself and she ends her letter by inviting him to tea.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part XI Analysis**

Walter gains the unwelcome gratitude of Mrs. Catherick after Sir Percival dies. Through Mrs. Catherick's letter of thanks, Walter gains a few more tidbits of information that ties up loose ends. In contrast to Mrs. Clements whose good intentions exposed the innocent to danger, Mrs. Catherick's evil intentions lead to good.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I Summary**

Walter saves Mrs. Catherick's letter. He is dismissed by the court in the fire inquest, so he goes to the post office on his way out of town. He finds a letter from Marian that says she and Laura have moved to Gower's Walk, Fulham, an area southwest of London. The letter reports that they are safe and that he should come back. Walter appears in Knowlesbury to learn that the assault charges have been dropped, so he takes the train to London.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part I Analysis**

The dangers are not over for Laura, Marian and Walter because Count Fosco is still at large. Collins tightens the tension again by forcing Marian and Laura on the run from Fosco.





# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II Summary**

At Gower's Walk, Walter learns from Marian that Count Fosco found where she lived and stopped by to talk to her. Count Fosco threatened to turn Laura over to the owner of the asylum if Walter tried to take the Count to court. The Count expressed his deep admiration of Marian, which repulses Marian. Marian took Laura away immediately to Gower's Walk. Walter and Marian agree to take the risk to bring the Count to court when they have enough evidence to charge him with a crime. Walter tells Marian that it is time to tell Laura that Sir Percival is dead.

In December, 1850, Walter asks the owner of the house that the Count rents when it will be available. The Count has a lease until June, which gives Walter more time to gather evidence and take him to court in London. Walter sets his mind to discover the identity of Anne's father by writing to Major Donthorne of Varneck Hall, where Mrs. Catherick worked before her marriage. He learns that Philip Fairlie lived at Varneck Hall at the time that Mrs. Catherick became pregnant and that Philip married someone else soon after. This was Mrs. Catherick's secret.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part II Analysis**

Walter turns his attention to bringing Fosco to justice. He learns Mrs. Catherick's secret. He is also free at last to court Laura without fear of ruining her reputation or harming her socially or financially thanks to Sir Percival's theft and death. Walter and Laura are on equal footing socially and financially.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III Summary**

In April Walter assesses Laura's health as strong, except for her memory of her confinement in the asylum. Walter, Laura and Marian take a short holiday on the south coast. Walter suggests that he should marry Laura, if she will have him, because he loves her and because as her husband he can protect her from the Count and the danger of being sent to the asylum as Anne. Marian joyfully agrees, at last able to unite them after having participated in separating them. She leaves and sends Laura to him. Laura hugs him and declares her happiness. Ten days later they are married.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part III Analysis**

Walter and Laura consummate their greatly delayed romance through a marriage that also offers Laura some legal protection. It seems evident that they are happier in poverty than Count Fosco in stolen wealth or Frederick Fairlie in his self-indulgent isolation.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV Summary**

In May, 1851, Walter scrambles to piece together enough damning evidence to take the Count to court before he leaves, so he reexamines what he knows about the Count. The only other Italian Walter knows is Professor Pesca, so he asks him if he knows anything about Count Fosco. Walter spies on Fosco, following him through town as he buys opera glasses and a ticket to the performance of *Lucrezia Borgia*. Walter gets two tickets and invites Professor Pesca to come with him.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part IV Analysis**

Collins uses a fancy social setting to ensnare Count Fosco, who fancies himself a musician and a gentleman of refined tastes. Collins connects the night at the opera with death by making the opera *Lucrezia Borgia*, an Italian opera about a woman who kills her own family.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V Summary**

At the theater, Walter watches Count Fosco in the orchestra seats while he and professor Pesca sit in the balcony. At the intermission Walter asks Pesca if he recognizes the Count and Pesca says he does not. When Fosco turns and looks up at Pesca, Fosco reacts as if in mortal dread. Walter directs Pesca to look for his students in the audience and then Fosco flees. A slim man with a scarred face notices Fosco and Pesca and follows Walter and Pesca out. Walter loses the Count and the slim man, so he questions Pesca to tell him if there is any reason the Count should know him. They go to Pesca's home. Walter tells Pesca why he needs to trap the Count, so Pesca tells him why he left Italy. He was the Secretary of a secret brotherhood of political assassins who was sent to England to stay until needed. He shows Walter a circular brand on his inner arm and says that all the members have this mark. As Secretary, he would have been presented to all the Italian members and though he would not remember all of them, they might remember him. All members are honor-bound to kill any member who betrays the group.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part V Analysis**

Walter unwittingly reveals Fosco's identity to the slim man, a fellow spy who tracks him from then on. Pesca finally repays Walter for saving his life by revealing his own secret and thereby revealing Fosco's. Pesca, the midget, is an unlikely person to suspect as an assassin. His jolly nature seems to come from not having to be called into service of the brotherhood. His mood changes when he reveals his true identity.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI Summary**

That night Walter goes home and writes a note to Pesca. On the outside he writes instructions to open the envelope at nine the next morning if Walter does not meet him by then. On the inside he writes: Fosco is a member of the brotherhood who has betrayed his trust. He gives Fosco's address and ends with a note that Walter has risked all and paid for it with his life. He sends the note by messenger and waits for a reply. The moment he gets the reply, he leaves by cab and races to Count Fosco's home. There he gains entry to the house by telling the maid his name and that he must speak to the Count immediately. The slim man from the opera walks by on the road. Walter is admitted inside the house.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VI Analysis**

This is the ultimate show down scene between charming evil and plain goodness. Walter is armed with truth that forces Fosco to comply. Collins foreshadows a dark justice to be visited on Fosco through the slim man, an equal, a fellow assassin sworn to avenge the betrayal of his brotherhood by Fosco. This gives the reader a sense of balance of power between Fosco and the forces against him because Walter cannot drag Fosco to court. It is symbolic that Fosco is being forced to sign over something of value just as he tried to get Laura to sign away her inheritance. In the end, it seems, all comes down to paperwork and blood.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII Summary**

Walter enters the house where the Count and Countess are packing. Count Fosco locks the door and puts the key in his pocket. Walter tells him that he knows why he's leaving and tells him that the reason relates to the mark on his inner arm. Fosco goes to a table where he puts his hand into a drawer. Walter asks him to read a paper. He hands the Count the reply from Pesca that says he will break the seal if he doesn't hear back from him. With that, the Count removed his hand from his gun.

Walter demands that the Count write a full confession of his conspiracy against Laura and give him proof of the date that she left Blackwater Park. Count Fosco makes his demands in trade. First, he demands that he and his wife be allowed to leave without interference. Second, Walter is to stay until seven o'clock, when the agent comes to handle the Count's affairs, and that Walter will send for the letter from Pesca to be handed over to Fosco and to give the Count a half-an-hour's head start. The last demand is that Walter will send him news of the outcome to the Continent when Fosco is safely far away. Walter agrees on one more condition—that Fosco tears up his letter to Pesca immediately. Fosco agrees.

Fosco unlocks the door and orders his wife to make coffee. He sits for hours composing his confession until four o'clock when he calls for his wife and takes a nap. He then ceremoniously prepares a letter to the Regent's park zoo to take in his cockatoo and canaries. He keeps the mice to take with him. Mr. Rubelle arrives at seven o'clock so Walter writes his letter to Pesca as agreed. Soon the sealed letter from Pesca arrives and Count Fosco burns it. Countess Fosco climbs into the cab. Count Fosco whispers to Walter to take good care of Miss Halcombe, then he gets in the cab. Walter notices a cab following the Foscos and inside it is the thin man from the opera. He waits with Mr. Rubelle for half an hour as promised.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VII Analysis**

In keeping with his egotistical character, Fosco writes his confession in formal, flourishing language to flatter himself. It seems he wants to be remembered with admiration despite the criminal behavior that the document confesses. Collins creates a fascinating, complex antagonist in Count Fosco.



# **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Count Fosco**

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Count Fosco Summary**

The written confession of Count Fosco begins with a paragraph of his titles. He writes that he was sent to England in 1850, as a spy. He arrives at Limmeridge with Sir Percival and Lady Glyde, where he falls in love with Miss Halcombe. He relates his planning and execution of switching identities of Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick, even including how he switched their clothes to complete the ruse. He is dismayed by Anne's untimely death because it threw off his timetable. At Lady Glyde's faked death, Countess Fosco inherited ten thousand pounds, and Sir Percival inherited twenty-thousand pounds. Sir Percival's money paid off his debts. He ends his confession with a statement honoring his wife, another statement that he would have killed Anne if she had not died and a final note that his only crime is that he stole an identity, nothing more.

## **The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Count Fosco Analysis**

Count Fosco's confession is long-winded, overwritten and ends with a declaration of his innocence. Such audacity and ego could only come from him. It is like an actor's death scene overplayed for attention.



# The Third Epoch: The Story concluded by Walter Hartright, Parts I-III

## The Third Epoch: The Story concluded by Walter Hartright, Parts I-III Summary

Armed with Count Fosco's confession, Walter goes to the livery stables where he finds proof that Lady Glyde was picked up at London station on July 26th, 1850, a day after she had supposedly died at Count Fosco's home. The driver, John Owen, remembered the fat Count and Lady Glyde. Walter gathers a signed statement from John Owen and goes directly to Solicitor Kyrle to present his evidence, which also includes the death certificate falsely named Lady Glyde's. The next day Kyrle accompanies Walter, Marian and Laura to Limmeridge, where they presented their evidence to Frederick Fairlie with the warning that if he did not accept Laura, then he would be dragged to court. Of course the whiny weasel accepts Laura and agrees to sign papers to the effect. Walter then summons all the witnesses to the funeral of Lady Glyde to show them that Laura was alive, so they could change the name on the tombstone to Anne Catherick. They assemble in the drawing room, where Frederick Fairlie says that Walter will speak for him. Walter presents the entire drama of the conspiracy against Laura. At the end, the solicitor said that he is satisfied with the proof. The group cheers for Laura then they all go to the cemetery to watch the tombstone defaced. By the end of the day, the name is changed to Anne Catherick. That night Walter, Marian and Laura return to London vindicated.

Walter is sent to Paris by his employer to learn something about wood engraving. He takes Pesca along. Five days into his work in Paris, Walter overhears the slim man from the opera in Pesca's room. The slim man leaves. Pesca says he wants to go back to London. Walter agrees to leave but he first heads for Notre Dame to take a scheduled tour. On the way, he passes the morgue where a crowd talks about seeing the corpse of a huge fat man with a mark on his arm. Walter joins the line to peek in the morgue and recognizes Count Fosco. Fosco has a wound to his heart and cuts forming a T obscure the mark on his arm. The body had been found in the Seine and the T stood for traitor. He is buried in the famous Paris cemetery known as Pere la Chaise along with the famous dead. Madame Fosco lives in a suburb.

The next February brings Walter and Laura a son named Walter. Six months later, Walter goes to Ireland to make sketches for his newspaper. When he returns home he finds a note that Marian, Laura and baby Walter have gone to Limmeridge House. He takes the next train to Cumberland to Limmeridge House. There he learns that Frederick Fairlie has died. Marian introduces baby Walter as the heir of Limmeridge.





## The Third Epoch: The Story concluded by Walter Hartright, Parts I-III Analysis

At last Frederick Fairlie is forced to take public responsibility, and he is dragged from his precious privacy into the drawing room. In a delicious moment of just payback, the crowd bursts into cheers at the restoration of Laura's identity. The sound tortures Frederick Fairlie, shattering his nerves. Laura is vindicated but it is a hollow victory, it seems, because she is still poor.

Walter witnesses that Count Fosco has been murdered. It is a fitting end for a man who considered murder just another means to an end. The hero, Walter, can walk away unstained by guilt because he did not participate in the killing. Guilty knowledge is as close as he comes to bearing responsibility. The evil Fosco has met his match against a fellow spy and has been brought to bloody justice for betraying his brotherhood. The reader feels satisfaction because his death also delivers justice over the wrongs committed against Laura, who no longer has to live in fear of the corpulent count.

The romance is fruitful and the lovers get the final payoff of justice by being restored to that golden place, the place of their first happiness, Limmeridge House. Walter, who first came here as a lowly servant, returns to manage the estate. It is a great shift of power and authority that Collins builds to believability through the course of the story. It is, in addition to being a sensational thriller, a moral tale and a romance. It is poetic justice that Frederick Fairlie, the anti-social, emotionally bankrupt man of inaction, dies from paralysis. Paralysis would rob him of his only joy in life—playing with his treasures. Collins gives the creepy Fairlie a fitting end.



# Characters

## Walter Hartright

Twenty-eight-year-old Walter Hartright is an artist making a meager living in London. His father, a drawing master, taught him the craft before he died. Walter's mother and sister, Sarah, live in Hampstead, a northwest suburb of London. At his mother's house, his friend, the Italian midget named Professor Pesca, recommends him for a four-month tutoring job at Limmeridge estate for a handsome wage. Walter Hartright is the art tutor hired to teach Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe to draw at Limmeridge House. He is also charged with restoring the art collection of Frederick Fairlie, guardian of Laura and Marian. There he falls in love with nineteen-year-old Laura Fairlie, who is engaged to Sir Percival Glyde. Walter objects to the marriage and leaves for South America at Marian Halcombe's suggestion. In South America, he survives various dangers to examine archaeological sites. When he returns to England he learns that Laura Fairlie is dead, so he goes to the grave to mourn. Marian and Laura find him there and together they work to restore Laura's identity and fortune that has been stolen by Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco. Walter and Marian cautiously build a case against Sir Percival and Count Fosco. After Sir Percival dies, Walter marries Laura to secure their mutual happiness and to give her legal protection. He restores her name and fortune allowing them to live happily ever after at Limmeridge, with their son Walter who is born in February, 1852.

## Laura Fairlie, Lady Glyde

Born on March 27, 1829, Laura is nineteen with long, light-brown hair and turquoise blue eyes. Passive, lovely Laura Fairlie is engaged to forty-five-year-old Sir Percival Glyde, a Baronet. Laura's parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Philip Fairlie, had sanctioned the engagement, so Frederick Fairlie, Laura's uncle and guardian, is pleased to carry through with the plan and be rid of her. Her half-sister is Marian Halcombe. Though Laura loves Walter Hartright, she is forced to marry Sir Percival Glyde on December 22, 1849. She is assumed dead on July 25th, 1850 just after her 21st birthday, but it is her look-alike, Anne Catherick, who is buried under the tombstone of Laura. Laura is institutionalized under the name Anne Catherick from July 27th to October 15th by Count Fosco. Marian bribes a nurse at the asylum and frees Laura. Laura plays piano and prefers to dress in simple linen dresses. She has an uncanny resemblance to Anne Catherick. Laura marries Walter Hartright and they have a son named Walter. After Frederick Fairlie dies, Laura's son inherits Limmeridge House.

## Marian Halcombe

Manly Marian Halcombe is half-sister to Laura Fairlie. She is under the guardianship of her uncle, Frederick Fairlie, at Limmeridge House. Marian is described as beautiful from



the neck down. She is fiercely loyal to Laura and protective of her. Educated, bluntly honest, practical and kind, Marian behaves more like a man than a woman—taking action, building alliances and taking responsibility for the welfare of others—especially of Laura. She is instrumental in breaking up the budding romance between Laura and the art tutor Walter Hartright because Laura is engaged to Sir Percival Glyde, a man twenty-five years Laura's senior. Marian struggles to find evidence to cause the breakup of the engagement, but fails. After Sir Percival and Laura marry, Marian goes to Blackwater Park to live with them. She becomes trapped there and falls very ill. During her illness, Laura is tricked into leaving for London and is then reported deceased. Marian mourns while she tries to gather information against Sir Percival. She travels to the asylum to visit Anne Catherick and finds Laura alive and falsely imprisoned under Anne's name. She boldly rescues Laura from the asylum and goes into hiding. Marian is strong-willed, logical, loyal, brave and formidable. Even her enemy, Count Fosco, admires her greatly. Marian rejoices when Laura and Walter resume their romance, marry and have a child.

## Anne Catherick

The Woman in White is Anne Catherick, a woman who does not know who her father is and is estranged from her mother. When she first appears in the story, she is dressed in all white, walking alone on a highway outside London. She escapes from an asylum and spends the story trying to elude recapture by the man who falsely imprisoned her in the asylum, Sir Percival Glyde. Her mother, a bitter woman, lets a neighbor, Mrs. Clements raise Anne. When Mrs. Clements is hired to work on the household staff at Limmeridge House, she takes young Anne along. Mrs. Fairlie treats little Anne like her own daughter partly because her daughter, Laura, and Anne are the same age and look so much alike. Mrs. Fairlie gives her daughter Laura's hand-me-down white dresses to Anne. Anne, being feeble-minded, vows to dress in white from then on. Anne's father is Philip Fairlie, who impregnated Anne's mother when she worked as a maid at Varneck Hall in London. Anne's mother blackmailed Sir Percival Glyde with a secret. Anne repeated her mother's words to Sir Percival about having a secret, so Percival panicked and sent Anne to a private insane asylum to silence her. Anne escapes the asylum and runs to Mrs. Clements' house in London. Anne loved Mrs. Fairlie so much that she risks her life to warn Laura Fairlie about Sir Percival. Later she is kidnapped by Count Fosco as part of a plot to steal the identity and fortune of Laura Fairlie. Anne dies and is buried as Laura Fairlie (Lady Glyde). At the end of the story, her identity is changed on the tombstone and Laura's identity and fortune are restored.

## Baronet Sir Percival Glyde

Sir Percival Glyde, a Baronet, is forty-five-years old and engaged to a nineteen-year-old Laura Fairlie. He has a hacking cough and bears a scar on his right hand. He is born in 1804, the bastard child of Sir Felix Glyde and his companion, Cecilia Jane Elster of Park-view cottages, Knowlesbury. His father was deformed and reclusive and his mother played piano. His mother dies in the early 1820s and Sir Felix dies in 1825 or



1826. After their deaths, Percival goes to the Old Welmingham church, where he forges his parent's marriage in the church registry by bribing Mrs. Catherick to give him the keys to the vestry. He then assumes the title and property of Felix. Mrs. Catherick is caught in the vestry with him and it ruins her marriage. Though innocent of violating her marriage, Percival refuses to exonerate her. He instead sends her an annual stipend and sends her daughter, Anne, to an asylum because Anne mentions that she has a secret about him. He befriends Philip Fairlie in London and becomes engaged to his daughter, Laura Fairlie. They marry on December 22, 1849. He conspires with Count Fosco to steal Laura's inheritance of twenty-thousand pounds. Fosco's wife, Laura's aunt, profits with ten-thousand pounds when they fake Laura's death, when Anne Catherick, her look-alike, dies. Percival dies by fire when he accidentally locks himself in the vestry of the old church while trying to remove evidence of his fraud.

## Count Fosco

Count Fosco is a corpulent, charming, musically-talented Italian in his sixties. He is married to the forty-three-year-old Countess Eleanor Fairlie Fosco. They have no children. He is a spy in a secret society and has betrayed his brotherhood in Italy. He rescues Sir Percival from robbery in Italy and wins his friendship. He owns a cockatoo, canaries and white mice on which he dotes. He loves Marian Halcombe because she is a formidable enemy. He helps Sir Percival Glyde steal the identity and fortune of Laura Fairlie Glyde. His body is found in the Seine and buried in Paris.

## Uncle Frederick Fairlie

The effeminate, whining, self-proclaimed invalid Frederick Fairlie represents self-indulgence in the extreme. He wants nothing more in the world than to surround himself with art and coin collections and seclude himself from all humanity. He relies on his invalid status to excuse himself from having to decide on or think about anything outside of his padded room. Though appointed guardian to his nieces, Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe, he dismisses their pleas for help as intrusions. His behavior forces Laura into a miserable marriage and later enables Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco to rob her of her name and inheritance. He couldn't care less. He is later forced to endure a public trial of sorts to reinstate Laura and soon after dies of paralysis. This paralysis is ironic because it takes his inactivity just one step more beyond not helping others until he cannot even help himself or indulge in his isolation. He dies soon after Walter and Laura's son is born making way for the son to inherit Limmeridge House. In the end, he could not take his treasures with him.

## Vincent Gilmore, Solicitor

Vincent Gilmore, of Chancery Lane, is the solicitor (attorney) for the Fairlie family. He arrives at Limmeridge House on Walter Hartright's last day there to draw up the marriage settlement between Frederick Fairlie and Sir Percival Glyde on behalf of Laura



Fairlie. He has a stroke and is forced to take a leave of absence from his work while he recovers in the countryside. He regains some health and participates in the christening celebration of Laura and Walter's son. He is an honest man who strives to force Frederick Fairlie to act in Laura's best interests in the marriage settlement, but Frederick cannot be made to bother. Gilmore's business partner, William Kyrle, serves with the same loyalty and wisdom that Gilmore did on behalf of the Fairlie family.

## **Professor Pesca**

Professor Pesca is an Italian midget who once taught at the University of Padua. He adores Walter Hartright for rescuing him from drowning. To repay this debt of gratitude, Pesca recommends a tutoring job to Walter at Limmeridge House in Cumberland. Pesca reappears near the end of the story when he goes to the opera with Walter, who wants him to help identify Count Fosco. Fosco recognizes Pesca. They are members of a secret society of political assassins in which Pesca was a high officer, and Fosco a disloyal member sought by the society or brotherhood. All the members of this secret brotherhood bear a small circular brand or tattoo on the upper arm. Pesca works with a fellow member, a slim man, who catches up with Fosco in Paris.

## **Mrs. Clements**

A friend of Anne Catherick, Mrs. Clements takes in Anne and hides her at the home of relatives, the Todds, farmers in Cumberland near the Limmeridge House. She is formerly of Welmingham, where she was the neighbor of Mr. and Mrs. Catherick; she also served on the household staff of the Fairlies. She brought Anne Catherick to Limmeridge House for a short time, which changed Anne's life. After Anne escapes from the asylum, she finds refuge at Mrs. Clement's home in London. Mrs. Clements also hides her at Todd's Corner when Anne begs to go to Limmeridge. At the end, Mrs. Clements grieves more for Anne's death than Anne's own mother does. She helps Walter in his plan to reinstate Laura's identity.

## **Mrs. Vesey**

Miss Laura Fairlie's former governess, Mrs. Vesey stays on at Limmeridge House doing as little as possible. She is passive to the point of appearing unlife-like, pleasant, dull-witted and passive. This elderly lady helped raise Laura and Marian after their parents died. When the story begins, she is sleepy, slow and used primarily as a chaperon in the evenings when Walter, Marian and Laura relax in the drawing room to chat and play piano.

## **Doctor Dawson**

Doctor Dawson is summoned to Blackwater Park to treat Marian's Typhus. He and Count Fosco bicker about the type of medicines to use to treat Marian until Fosco drives



him out. Later, after Sir Percival and the Foscos depart Blackwater Park, Doctor Dawson returns to care for Marian.

## Major Donthorne

Owner of Varneck Hall, Southampton, he hires a maid who has an affair with Philip Fairlie, a friend who stays at Varneck Hall for a while. The maid, pregnant with Philip Fairlie's daughter, marries a church clerk named Catherick. Philip marries another woman and has a daughter named Laura. The two daughters look alike.

## Countess Eleanor Fairlie Fosco

Born Eleanor Fairlie, she is twenty years younger than her husband, Count Fosco. She adores him, waiting on him in dutiful, loving obedience. Cheated from her inheritance by Laura's father, she helps her husband cheat the fortune from Laura. She dresses in severe, dark clothing, which is the opposite of her dress in younger days. She is fiercely loyal to her husband and jealous of any woman near her husband.

## Sir Felix Glyde

Sir Felix Glyde is the father of Percival through his companion, Cecilia Jane Elster. They never married. If they had married, then their son Percival would have inherited property and title. Because Percival felt cheated, he forged a marriage between his parents in the Old Welmingham Church registry, and he spends the rest of his life protecting the lie.

## Doctor Alfred Goodricke, London

This doctor is brought to the Fosco's rented home in London to care for the dying Anne Catherick. He is told she is Lady Glyde, so when she dies, he registers the death in the name of Lady Glyde and the cause as an aneurysm on July 25th, 1850.

## Eliza Michelson

Housekeeper at Blackwater Park, Eliza oversees the servants. She is horrified when Sir Percival locks Lady Glyde in her room. She protects Marian when Sir Percival leaves Marian behind by calling back Doctor Dawson to treat Marian's Typhus. She calls one of the servants, Margaret Porcher, the stupidest of all the servants when Sir Percival fires all the rest of the staff but her.



## **Margaret Porcher**

Huge, fat, impenetrably stupid, Margaret works as a maid at Blackwater Park. She giggles when Marian shows her the dying dog and asks for help. Later, she is kept on to guard Laura from leaving her room to see Marian at Blackwater Park when Marian is ill. Sir Percival keeps her because she is too stupid to object to the orders he gives. She has no ethical standard but merely follows orders.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Rubelle**

This swarthy couple aid Count Fosco. Mrs. Rubelle poses as a nurse to watch over Marian at Blackwater Park. She also helps Count Fosco move Marian, bed and all, into an unused wing of Blackwater Park as part of a ruse to trick Laura into believing that Marian has gone to London. Mr. Rubelle helps Count Fosco get his papers and finances in order when the Foscos flee London near the end of the story. Mr. Rubelle also blocks Walter from leaving while the Foscos flee.

## **Mr. Wansborough**

Son of the old Welmingham church vestry clerk, Mr. Wansborough lives in nearby Knowlesbury, where he keeps the duplicate church registry in a vault. He helps Walter uncover the fraudulent entry in the other registry that falsifies a marriage between Sir Felix Glyde and his companion, Cecilia Jane Elster of Knowlesbury.



## Objects/Places

### The Asylum, London

A private asylum where Sir Percival Glyde unjustly locks up Anne Catherick to keep her from revealing his secret. Though it is eventually revealed that she never knew the secret, the punishment draws attention to the secret so that it is later revealed. Hence, Sir Percival's wicked action leads to his undoing. Later in the story, Laura Fairlie (Lady Glyde) is locked up in the same asylum under the name of her look-alike half-sister, Anne Catherick. Laura is rescued by her other half-sister, Marian Halcombe.

### Blackwater Park, Hampshire

The creaking, ancient home has one wing in disrepair and the rest is maintained by a scant staff of servants. Nearby is a stagnant, shallow lake with a boathouse. It is in the boathouse that Marian finds Anne Catherick's dog dying. This sets a creepy impression of the place from the start. In this house, Sir Percival Glyde terrorizes Laura and Marian to get Laura's inheritance. His co-conspirators, the Count and Countess Fosco, keep watch on Laura and Marian by reading their mail, eavesdropping and spying on them. This is the place where Laura and Marian discover Sir Percival's debts and his plans to pay them through Laura's money in life or by her death. It is in the boathouse where Laura first meets her half-sister Anne Catherick, who warns her that there is a secret that Sir Percival fears. Marian gets very ill in this place and her illness is used to trick Laura into leaving. Even with Laura's stolen inheritance, Sir Percival cannot maintain Blackwater Park, so he shuts it down and moves to a smaller place in London. At Blackwater Park, in contrast to Limmeridge House, Count Fosco falls in love with Marian, who loathes him.

### Brooch

Marian gives a brooch to Laura. When Laura and Marian sneak out to the boathouse at Blackwater Park to talk, Laura loses the brooch. She is worried about finding it, and when she retraces her steps to the boathouse she finally meets her half-sister, Anne Catherick, who tells her that Sir Percival has a secret that can be used against him. Anne does not know what the secret is but she risks being captured and returned to the asylum by coming to Blackwater Park to tell Laura. Anne gives the brooch to Laura.

### Fosco's House, London

The Foscos rent No. 5, Forest-road, St. John's Wood, in London after they leave Blackwater Park. The Foscos smuggle the drugged Anne Catherick into this home; Anne dies of heart problems on July 25th, 1850 there. The death of Anne complicates their plan to bring Laura to town to place in the asylum under Anne's name. They carry





out the plan, but the death of Anne gives them away later. At their home, Walter Hartright boldly corners the Count to write a confession about how he helped Sir Percival steal Laura's identity and inheritance.

## **Gower's Walk, Fulham**

This quiet, poor neighborhood in the southeastern suburbs of London, is where Marian and Laura flee when Fosco discovers their home over the engraving shop. Walter later joins them there and marries Laura. They have a son named Walter, born while they live there, until Frederick Fairlie dies leaving them Limmeridge House.

## **Laura's sketchbook**

The drawings she made under the tutelage of Walter Hartright are her most treasured keepsake of those days. She keeps the sketchbook near her, often under her pillow, until she resigns herself to marriage with Sir Percival. She then gives the sketchbook to Marian with the pledge to keep it for Laura. Marian keeps it. Later, when she, Marian and Walter are in hiding, Laura resumes drawing to help raise money. Drawing helps Laura recover from her false imprisonment at the asylum.

## **Law Office of Gilmore and Kyrle, Chancery-lane, London**

These two gentlemen serve the legal needs of the Fairlies by writing their wills, marriage settlements and finally vindicating Laura, so that she retains her legal status, name and inheritance. They are trust-worthy, honest men who advise the Fairlies well. They also assist Walter in his dangerous plan to reinstate Laura's identity.

## **Limmeridge Church cemetery**

In this peaceful place, the tombstone of Mrs. Fairlie, Laura's mother, is cleaned by Anne Catherick. Anne spent a few blissful months at Limmeridge under the care of Laura's mother when she attended school with Laura and played with her. Anne is so devoted to Mrs. Fairlie that she tells people she longs to be buried beside her. She later gets her wish when she is mistaken for Laura and buried beside Mrs. Fairlie. Near the tombstone, there is the fateful meetings of Walter and Anne and later Walter, Laura and Marian.

## **Limmeridge House, Cumberland**

This is the golden place, the home where Laura, Marian and Walter found their greatest happiness in life. This is the home where Laura and Marian were raised after their parents died and they were left in the guardianship of their uncle, Frederick Fairlie. This



place dominates the story in the beginning, middle and end because so much action in the story takes place here, both good and bad. It also represents the wealth and inheritance that the antagonists, Sir Percival Glyde, Count Fosco and Countess Fosco, plot to steal. Countess Fosco was born Eleanor Fairlie, sister of Frederick and Philip Fairlie, and she was cheated out of her inheritance, so she harbors the desire for revenge in her heart. At the end of the story, Walter, Marian and Laura have Limmeridge House to themselves through inheritance by Laura and Walter's son, Walter.

## Mark of the Brotherhood

The members of the secret society of political assassins all bear a small circular brand or tattoo on their inner arm. Pesca reveals the mark to Walter so that Walter has leverage to negotiate with Fosco. Walter sees the mark on Fosco's corpse later and the mark has been cut into a T to indicate traitor. Walter knows that Pesca and the thin man are involved in Fosco's death, so he says nothing to the authorities. He feels the death is justice.

## The Opera House, London

At the opera house Walter takes Professor Pesca to the showing of Lucrecia Borgia, where he points out Count Fosco. Pesca does not recognize Fosco, but Fosco recognizes Pesca and flees. Pesca and Fosco belong to a brotherhood of political assassins and Fosco has betrayed the brotherhood, a deed punishable by assassination by any other member who finds him. A third assassin, the slim man, witnesses Fosco's reaction to Pesca and follows Fosco until he kills him in Paris weeks later. It is appropriate that the opera they see that night is about a murderer.

## Todd's Corner, Cumberland

This is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Todd who work at Limmeridge House as does their daughter. Mrs. Todd is a friend of Mrs. Clements, who also worked at Limmeridge House at one time. Their home serves as a refuge for Mrs. Clements and Anne Catherick after Anne escapes from the asylum. Walter and Marian learn, through the Todds, that Anne trusts Mrs. Clements and that Mrs. Clements has a home in London.

## Welmingham

Welmingham is where Mrs. Catherick, Anne's mother, lived alone on Sir Percival's hush money after a scandal arises when she and Sir Percival are caught in the vestry. Mrs. Catherick is wrongly accused of infidelity and her husband leaves her with her daughter to face decades of scorn by the townsfolk. Bitter and ruined, she basically abandons her daughter to the care of a neighbor, Mrs. Clements.



## Old Welmingham

In old Welmingham, Sir Percival Glyde conspired with Mrs. Catherick to forge a marriage entry in the church registry (kept in the vestry) so he could assume the property of his father, Sir Felix Glyde and his common-law wife, Cecilia Jane Elster. This fraud is the terrible secret by which Sir Percival lives and dies. He is unaware that a duplicate of the church's registry is kept in a vault in nearby Knowlesbury by the church clerk, who feared tampering and destruction of the church copy. When Sir Percival tries to remove the evidence of his fraud from the old church's copy, he accidentally traps himself in the church and his lit match ignites the fire that kills him. There is an irony that the beginning and end of the evil wrought by Sir Percival occurs inside a holy place like the church.

## Old Welmingham church registry

There were two church registries, one kept in the vestry at the abandoned church, and one kept in the vault of Mr. Wansborough, the vestry clerk, at his home in nearby Knowlesbury. The registry at the church vestry was the one where Sir Percival Glyde added an entry falsifying a marriage between his father Sir Felix Glyde and his companion, Cecilia Jane Elster of Knowlesbury. Though they were his parents, they never married, but this entry legitimized his claim to his father's properties and title. Percival was unaware that a duplicate registry existed. His fraudulent entry, in effect, was his beginning and his end. It gave him a legal name and, when he tried to cover up his fraud, it killed him.

## Old Welmingham church keys

The keys to the church and the vestry are kept on the same ring by the caretaker, an old man who lives in a cottage nearby. Though the church is abandoned and in disrepair, the old caretaker does his best to maintain the church and the property. The old locks on the vestry need repair and tend to seize up. Sir Percival breaks into the caretaker's house and steals the keys so he can tear out the fraudulent page of the registry kept in the vestry. He is unaware that the keys do not always work on the old locks. When he locks himself in the vestry for privacy, he accidentally locks himself in. Using a match to navigate in the dark, he inadvertently starts the fire that kills him.

## Varneck Hall, Southampton

Varneck Hall is owned by Major Donthorne, who was a friend of Philip Fairlie. Donthorne employed a woman as a house maid. Philip impregnates the maid but does not marry her. He marries a respectable woman and they later have a daughter named Laura. The maid rushes into marriage to a church clerk named Catherick and they live in Welmingham. Their daughter is born and named Anne Catherick. Anne is therefore a rightful heir to the Fairlie estate, but she does not know it and she looks remarkably like

Philip Fairlie's daughter Laura. The fact that Anne is the daughter of Philip Fairlie is Mrs. Catherick's secret.



# Themes

## Women's Rights

Collins hammers home the point that women in England, regardless of their social standing, their education, their moral behavior or their finances, have few legal rights for protection. Laura Fairlie is robbed of her identity and her inheritance by a greedy, unscrupulous husband. Mrs. Catherick has her reputation ruined by a misunderstanding that leaves her divorced and alone at the mercy of the man who caused the misunderstanding. Anne Catherick is falsely imprisoned in a mental institution, as is her half-sister Laura Fairlie. Both escape without the help of any man and go into hiding. Countess Eleanor Fairlie Fosco is denied her rightful inheritance by her older brother Philip simply because he disapproves of her marriage. This drives her to crime to gain back her inheritance. Laura Fairlie is assaulted by her husband and finds no help from the law to protect her, and even her guardian, Frederick Fairlie, fails to help her. Thankfully, Collins does not take the low road by portraying all the women as good and the men as evil. The few men who take action to protect the women and restore their claims are Walter Hartright, Solicitor Vincent Gilmore, and his partner, William Kyrle. Even though the perpetrators of these crimes die horribly at the end, the legacy of their evil leaves a lasting effect on the women. It is only through cautious, courageous effort that Marian, Walter and Laura can take on Sir Percival and Count Fosco. In the end, Laura, Marian and Walter win in the court of public opinion in the witness of friends, family and a solicitor to restore Laura's rights. Mrs. Catherick and Countess Fosco are left alone and broke. Anne Catherick, the most helpless of all the women, dies. The happy ending does not change the resounding effect of outrage at the deplorable lack of civil and criminal legal protection for women in 1860s England.

## Greed versus Self-sacrifice

Three men in this story represent greed: Sir Percival Glyde, Count Fosco and Frederick Fairlie. Though each seeks more than he needs or earns, they approach their goal to attain more through different means. Sir Percival seeks to steal his wife's money to pay his debts. He is willing to lie, cheat, bully, steal and murder to achieve his goal. Count Fosco employs charm and guile whenever possible, but he will use violence to reach his goals. Frederick Fairlie gets what he wants primarily through inaction. He has inherited a fortune and does nothing to maintain or increase it. He enjoys authority without assuming any responsibility, and his inaction places Laura and Marian in danger. In the end, Sir Percival dies a horrid death by fire, Count Fosco meets a treacherous end by being stabbed and dumped in the Seine, and Frederick Fairlie, after decades of hypochondria, contracts a real disease and dies from it.

By contrast, Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright represent self-sacrifice. Both put themselves at risk of financial, social, physical and legal jeopardy when they challenge Sir Percival, Count Fosco and Frederick Fairlie on behalf of Laura, whom they both



love. Marian gives up the relative safety and comfort of Limmeridge to protect Laura at Blackwater Park. She risks her life in the care of Count Fosco, who drugs her when she is ill. She endures degrading treatment from Sir Percival, Count Fosco and Frederick Fairlie in order to restore Laura's identity and inheritance. Walter risks his life in the jungles of South America during his self-imposed exile from England. He is a decent, honorable man, who risks his reputation and his life against the more powerful Sir Percival and Count Fosco, who seek to kill and discredit him. Despite the great odds against them, Marian and Walter win back Laura's name and inheritance without immediate gain. For them, justice satisfies. Later, they gain financially when Frederick Fairlie dies, leaving Limmeridge to Walter and Laura's son. This is not their goal, but it is their reward for their noble risk-taking.

## Class Struggle

Even the lowest rank of royalty enjoys great social, political and financial advantages over the middle and lower classes. Ownership of property, the employment of servants, resources and title can all be used to increase one's advantages over the less fortunate. Sir Percival Glyde gains his title and fortune by deceit, illegally forging a marriage certificate between his parents. He takes what he believes should be his and lives the rest of his life in fear of discovery. He wields his power like a lethal instrument striking at any who interfere with his plans. He marries for wealth, pays hush money to Mrs. Catherick, falsely imprisons Anne Catherick and eventually destroys himself to maintain his false identity as a baronet. Count Fosco is an opportunistic parasite, who works with Sir Percival as an adviser and co-conspirator. He enjoys the advantages of wealth and position beyond his just means. He would argue that he earned the ten-thousand pounds he steals from Laura Fairlie by faking her death.

The most helpless characters in the story come from the lower class, especially the women, such as Anne Catherick, Mrs. Catherick, Mrs. Clements and the other servants. Each suffers at the hands of the powerful upper-class men. Mrs. Catherick suffers social ruin due to a misunderstanding that neither her husband nor Sir Percival bother to correct. Anne is falsely imprisoned in a mental institution for simply threatening Sir Percival with his secret. Mrs. Clements is hired and fired on the whim of Frederick Fairlie and Philip Fairlie before him. The fruits of their labor are enjoyed by the men who control and rule over them.

The most unexpected change in power comes from Walter Hartright. He arrives at Limmeridge House as a lower-class tutor and by the end of the story he is the lord of the manor. He does not seek the position of authority but because he takes responsibility to restore the name of his beloved Laura, he is raised up to a position of authority.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in the story is multiple first-person in keeping with the format that each person is acting as a witness as if in a trial. The story of each person delivers a slightly different perspective on the events as they unfold for the reader. Though this point of view is not the first of its kind, it is markedly different from the standard third person narrative used in Britain during the 1860s. Compare *The Woman in White* to any work of Charles Dickens of this same era and the differences are distinct. The points of view come from the characters Walter Hartright, Solicitor Vincent Gilmore, Marian Halcombe, Guardian Frederick Fairlie, Eliza Michelson, Mrs. Catherick, Count Fosco and a few minor characters. The bulk of the story is told by characters closest to Miss Laura Fairlie. There is no cross-examination of these witnesses, simply the presentation of their pieces of the overall story. The reader, like a juror, assembles the story from the various pieces to derive the truth and the ultimate condemnation of certain characters. By judging the behavior of the characters, the reader also judges the flawed social conventions and laws that enable the wicked to harm the innocent.

## Setting

The story takes place in England between July 1849, and August 1852. At this time in history, women had few legal protections over their safety, identity, property or freedom. Collins focuses the story in and around London, the places his readers are most likely to recognize, so that the point of the story is driven home as a personal warning. Wealthy characters are portrayed in Limmeridge House and Blackwater Park with maids, groundskeepers and various servants tending to their needs. The main victim is the heroine, Laura Fairlie, a young woman raised in privilege and comfort, who becomes stripped of her inheritance and even her name by her husband. Other victims appear in poorer towns and suburbs such as Fulham, Welmingham and Knowlesbury. In Welmingham, Mrs. Catherick is robbed of her reputation by a misunderstanding that haunts her the rest of her life and leaves her financially dependent on a man she hates, Sir Percival Glyde. Every woman in the story, regardless of her station in life, has her livelihood, her reputation, her income and her inheritance controlled by men.

## Language and Meaning

The language used by each character in his or her part of the narrative matches the personality of that character. For example, the Solicitor Vincent Gilmore's writing is precise, formal, focused on legal issues and offers few personal opinions. Walter Hartright's sections suit his romantic, emotional, artistic personality, featuring long, detailed passages of people and places such as the two-page description of his first impressions of Laura Fairlie. The whining, self-obsessed, ever-ailing Frederick Fairlie



when asked to intervene on behalf of his niece Laura blathers on for nearly twenty pages about how inconvenienced he was by the request to take action, and how he dismissed responsibility as quickly as possible. It is clear in his writing that he cares more about being bothered than about the health and welfare of Laura Fairlie or Marian Halcombe over both of whom he has guardianship. Marian's diary passages reveal her logical mind, strong will and pragmatic approach to life and her limited station as a woman. Her writing becomes emotional on the subject of her beloved half-sister, Laura. The evasive, secretive Count Fosco's narrative uses excruciatingly formal language to tell his involvement in the story in a way that excuses him from all blame or responsibility before he flees England.

## Structure

The structure of this story suits the purpose of the story—to put on trial the social injustices and lack of civil rights given to women in England up to and including the 1860s. The whole of the story condemns the society by presenting the examples of rich and poor women alike, who are manipulated, abused and falsely imprisoned by men of wealth and position. The story itself is presented like a trial, with one person after another telling a part of the event, mostly in chronological order. While Walter Hartright serves as the social conscience outraged by the injustices inflicted on his beloved Laura, Marian serves more like an advocate and protector. Her cautious, methodical process of gathering evidence resembles that of a detective or lawyer. The entire story argues the case that women in England can be victimized by unscrupulous men in many ways and that the law is an accomplice. Collins builds the argument woman by woman from rich to poor to create outrage in the reader.





## Quotes

"This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve." *The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, Part I, p. 9.*

"But the idea of absolute insanity which we all associate with the very name of Asylum, had, I can honestly declare, never occurred to me, in connexion with her. I had seen nothing, in her language or actions, to justify it at the time; and, even with the new light thrown on her by the words with the stranger addressed to the policeman, I could see nothing to justify it now." *The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, Part V, p. 32.*

"Upon the whole, he had a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look—something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man, and, at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal appearance of a woman." *The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, Part VII, p. 42.*

"Think of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir. Let the kind, candid blue eyes meet yours, as they met mine, with the one matchless look which we both remember so well. Let her voice speak the music that you once loved best, attuned as sweetly to your ear as to mine. Let her footstep, as she comes and goes, in these pages, be like that other footstep whose airy fall your own heart once beat time. Take her a the visionary nursling of your fancy; and she will grow upon you, all the more clearly, as the living woman who dwells in mine." *The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, Part VIII, p. 52.*

"If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of one another." *The First Epoch: The Story begun by Walter Hartright, Part XIII, p. 96.*

"His talk was to the same purpose as usual—all about himself and his ailments, his wonderful coins, his matchless Rembrandt etchings. The moment I tried to speak of the business that had brought me to his house, he shut his eyes and said I 'upset' him. I persisted in upsetting him by returning again and again to the subject." *The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, Part I, p. 127.*

"When a sensible woman has a serious question put to her, and evades it by a flippant answer, it is a sure sign, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that she has something to conceal." *The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, Part II, pp. 137-138.*

"Seriously and sorrowfully, I repeat here the parting words that I spoke at Limmeridge House:—No daughter of mine should have been married to any man alive under such a



settlement as I was compelled to make for Laura Fairlie." The First Epoch: The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore, Part IV, p. 159.

"If you persist in maintaining our engagement, I may be your true and faithful wife, Sir Percival—your loving wife, if I know my own heart, never!" The First Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Part I, p. 169.

"The largest and fattest of all possible housemaids answered it, in a state of cheerful stupidity which would have provoked the patience of a saint. The girl's fat, shapeless face actually stretched into a broad grin, at the sight of the wounded creature on the floor." The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Part I, p. 203.

"When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police, in nine cases out of ten, win. When the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police, in nine cases out of ten, lose." The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Part III, p. 229.

"'Scruples!' he repeated. 'Your scruples! It is rather late in the day for you to be scrupulous. I should have thought you had got over all weakness of that sort, when you made a virtue of necessity by marrying me.'" The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Part IV, p. 243.

"I lament afresh the cruel necessity which sets our interests at variance, and opposes us to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy I should have been of Miss Halcombe—how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of me." The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Marian Halcombe, Part X, postscript by Fosco, p. 330.

"It is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone. Why—I ask everybody—why worry me? Nobody answers that question; and nobody lets me alone. Relatives, friends, and strangers all combine to annoy me." The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie, p. 332.

"Nothing that he said or did shook my opinion of the disgraceful series of falsehoods that he had told, in my presence, the day before, or of the cruel deception by which he had separated Lady Glyde from her sister, and had sent her uselessly to London, where she was half distracted with anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account." The Second Epoch: The Story continued by Eliza Michelson, Part II, p. 385.

"Is there any wilderness of sand in the deserts of Arabia, is there any prospect of desolation among the ruins of Palestine, which can rival the repelling effect on the eye, and the depressing influence on the mind, of an English country town, in the first stage of existence, and in the transition state of its prosperity? I asked myself that question, as I passed through the clean desolation, the neat ugliness, the prim torpor of the streets of Welmingham." The Third Epoch: The Story continued by Walter Hartright, Part VIII, p. 473.

"Her iron-gray hair hung in heavy bands on either side of her face; her dark eyes looked straight forward, with a hard, defiant, implacable stare. She had full square cheeks; a



long, firm chin; and thick, sensual, colourless lips. Her figure was stout and sturdy; and her manner aggressively self-possessed. This was Mrs. Catherick." *The Third Epoch: The Story continued* by Walter Hartright, Part VIII, p. 474.

"The disclosure of that secret, even if the sufferers by his deception spared him the penalties of law, would deprive him, at one blow, of the name, rank, the estate, the whole social existence that he had usurped." *The Third Epoch: The Story continued* by Walter Hartright, Part X, p. 500.

"But for the fatal resemblance between the two daughters of one father, the conspiracy of which Anne had been the innocent instrument and Laura the innocent victim, could never have been planned. With what unerring and terrible directness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by a father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child!" *The Third Epoch: The Story continued* by Walter Hartright, Part III, p. 546.



## Topics for Discussion

Explain the author's use of multiple first person and how it contributes to the telling of this story. What are the drawbacks and the advantages of using multiple viewpoints?

Which character do you most admire? Describe the character traits portrayed and the actions taken by this character that create empathy and admiration.

What effect did this novel have on the legal rights of women in England in the 1860s?

Which character do you despise the most? Describe the character traits portrayed and the actions taken by this character that create loathing and disgust.

What does *The Woman in White* portray regarding the rights of women and how does Collins achieve this message?

Does the story written in 1860, resonate with today's readers? In what ways does it succeed or fail to entertain, enlighten and inform?

What message does Collins convey with this story and does it convince the reader? Give specific examples to support your answer.

Compare the legal rights of women today with those of the women in this story.