



THE WOMAN  
IN WHITE  
WILKIE COLLINS



EPOCH THREE

**The Story Continued by Walter Hartright, Part II**

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My position is defined—my motives are acknowledged. The story of Marian and the story of Laura must come next.

I shall relate both narratives, not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own guidance, and for the guidance of my legal adviser. So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled.

The story of Marian begins where the narrative of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park left off.

On Lady Glyde's departure from her husband's house, the fact of that departure, and the necessary statement of the circumstances under which it had taken place, were communicated to Miss Halcombe by the housekeeper. It was not till some days afterwards (how many days exactly, Mrs. Michelson, in the absence of any written memorandum on the subject, could not undertake to say) that a letter arrived from Madame Fosco announcing Lady Glyde's sudden death in Count Fosco's house. The letter avoided mentioning dates, and left it to Mrs. Michelson's discretion to break the news at once to Miss Halcombe, or to defer doing so until that lady's health should be more firmly established.

Having consulted Mr. Dawson (who had been himself delayed, by ill health, in resuming his attendance at Blackwater Park), Mrs. Michelson, by the doctor's advice, and in the doctor's presence, communicated the news, either on the day when the letter was received, or on the day after. It is not necessary to dwell here upon the effect which the intelligence of Lady Glyde's sudden death produced on her sister. It is only useful to the present purpose to say that she was not able to travel for more than three weeks afterwards. At the end of that time she proceeded to London accompanied by the housekeeper. They parted there—Mrs. Michelson previously informing Miss Halcombe of her address, in case they might wish to communicate at a future period.



On parting with the housekeeper Miss Halcombe went at once to the office of Messrs. Gilmore & Kyrle to consult with the latter gentleman in Mr. Gilmore's absence. She mentioned to Mr. Kyrle what she had thought it desirable to conceal from every one else (Mrs. Michelson included)—her suspicion of the circumstances under which Lady Glyde was said to have met her death. Mr. Kyrle, who had previously given friendly proof of his anxiety to serve Miss Halcombe, at once undertook to make such inquiries as the delicate and dangerous nature of the investigation proposed to him would permit.

To exhaust this part of the subject before going farther, it may be mentioned that Count Fosco offered every facility to Mr. Kyrle, on that gentleman's stating that he was sent by Miss Halcombe to collect such particulars as had not yet reached her of Lady Glyde's decease. Mr. Kyrle was placed in communication with the medical man, Mr. Goodricke, and with the two servants. In the absence of any means of ascertaining the exact date of Lady Glyde's departure from Blackwater Park, the result of the doctor's and the servants' evidence, and of the volunteered statements of Count Fosco and his wife, was conclusive to the mind of Mr. Kyrle. He could only assume that the intensity of Miss Halcombe's suffering, under the loss of her sister, had misled her judgment in a most deplorable manner, and he wrote her word that the shocking suspicion to which she had alluded in his presence was, in his opinion, destitute of the smallest fragment of foundation in truth. Thus the investigation by Mr. Gilmore's partner began and ended.

Meanwhile, Miss Halcombe had returned to Limmeridge House, and had there collected all the additional information which she was able to obtain.

Mr. Fairlie had received his first intimation of his niece's death from his sister, Madame Fosco, this letter also not containing any exact reference to dates. He had sanctioned his sister's proposal that the deceased lady should be laid in her mother's grave in Limmeridge churchyard. Count Fosco had accompanied the remains to Cumberland, and had attended the funeral at Limmeridge, which took place on the 30th of July. It was followed, as a mark of respect, by all the inhabitants of the village and the neighbourhood. On the next day the inscription (originally drawn out, it was said, by the aunt of the deceased lady, and submitted for approval to her brother, Mr. Fairlie) was engraved on one side of the monument over the tomb.

On the day of the funeral, and for one day after it, Count Fosco had been received as a guest at Limmeridge House, but no interview had taken place between Mr. Fairlie and himself, by the former gentleman's desire. They had communicated by writing, and through this medium Count Fosco had made Mr. Fairlie acquainted with the details of

his niece's last illness and death. The letter presenting this information added no new facts to the facts already known, but one very remarkable paragraph was contained in the postscript. It referred to Anne Catherick.

The substance of the paragraph in question was as follows—

It first informed Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick (of whom he might hear full particulars from Miss Halcombe when she reached Limmeridge) had been traced and recovered in the neighbourhood of Blackwater Park, and had been for the second time placed under the charge of the medical man from whose custody she had once escaped.

This was the first part of the postscript. The second part warned Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick's mental malady had been aggravated by her long freedom from control, and that the insane hatred and distrust of Sir Percival Glyde, which had been one of her most marked delusions in former times, still existed under a newly-acquired form. The unfortunate woman's last idea in connection with Sir Percival was the idea of annoying and distressing him, and of elevating herself, as she supposed, in the estimation of the patients and nurses, by assuming the character of his deceased wife, the scheme of this personation having evidently occurred to her after a stolen interview which she had succeeded in obtaining with Lady Glyde, and at which she had observed the extraordinary accidental likeness between the deceased lady and herself. It was to the last degree improbable that she would succeed a second time in escaping from the Asylum, but it was just possible she might find some means of annoying the late Lady Glyde's relatives with letters, and in that case Mr. Fairlie was warned beforehand how to receive them.

The postscript, expressed in these terms, was shown to Miss Halcombe when she arrived at Limmeridge. There were also placed in her possession the clothes Lady Glyde had worn, and the other effects she had brought with her to her aunt's house. They had been carefully collected and sent to Cumberland by Madame Fosco.

Such was the posture of affairs when Miss Halcombe reached Limmeridge in the early part of September.

Shortly afterwards she was confined to her room by a relapse, her weakened physical energies giving way under the severe mental affliction from which she was now suffering. On getting stronger again, in a month's time, her suspicion of the circumstances described as attending her sister's death still remained unshaken. She had heard nothing in the interim of Sir Percival Glyde, but letters had reached her from Madame Fosco, making the most affectionate inquiries on the part of her husband and

herself. Instead of answering these letters, Miss Halcombe caused the house in St. John's Wood, and the proceedings of its inmates, to be privately watched.

Nothing doubtful was discovered. The same result attended the next investigations, which were secretly instituted on the subject of Mrs. Rubelle. She had arrived in London about six months before with her husband. They had come from Lyons, and they had taken a house in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, to be fitted up as a boarding-house for foreigners, who were expected to visit England in large numbers to see the Exhibition of 1851. Nothing was known against husband or wife in the neighbourhood. They were quiet people, and they had paid their way honestly up to the present time. The final inquiries related to Sir Percival Glyde. He was settled in Paris, and living there quietly in a small circle of English and French friends.

Foiled at all points, but still not able to rest, Miss Halcombe next determined to visit the Asylum in which she then supposed Anne Catherick to be for the second time confined. She had felt a strong curiosity about the woman in former days, and she was now doubly interested—first, in ascertaining whether the report of Anne Catherick's attempted personation of Lady Glyde was true, and secondly (if it proved to be true), in discovering for herself what the poor creature's real motives were for attempting the deceit.

Although Count Fosco's letter to Mr. Fairlie did not mention the address of the Asylum, that important omission cast no difficulties in Miss Halcombe's way. When Mr. Hartright had met Anne Catherick at Limmeridge, she had informed him of the locality in which the house was situated, and Miss Halcombe had noted down the direction in her diary, with all the other particulars of the interview exactly as she heard them from Mr. Hartright's own lips. Accordingly she looked back at the entry and extracted the address—furnished herself with the Count's letter to Mr. Fairlie as a species of credential which might be useful to her, and started by herself for the Asylum on the eleventh of October.

She passed the night of the eleventh in London. It had been her intention to sleep at the house inhabited by Lady Glyde's old governess, but Mrs. Vesey's agitation at the sight of her lost pupil's nearest and dearest friend was so distressing that Miss Halcombe considerably refrained from remaining in her presence, and removed to a respectable boarding-house in the neighbourhood, recommended by Mrs. Vesey's married sister. The next day she proceeded to the Asylum, which was situated not far from London on the northern side of the metropolis.

She was immediately admitted to see the proprietor.



At first he appeared to be decidedly unwilling to let her communicate with his patient. But on her showing him the postscript to Count Fosco's letter—on her reminding him that she was the "Miss Halcombe" there referred to—that she was a near relative of the deceased Lady Glyde—and that she was therefore naturally interested, for family reasons, in observing for herself the extent of Anne Catherick's delusion in relation to her late sister—the tone and manner of the owner of the Asylum altered, and he withdrew his objections. He probably felt that a continued refusal, under these circumstances, would not only be an act of discourtesy in itself, but would also imply that the proceedings in his establishment were not of a nature to bear investigation by respectable strangers.

Miss Halcombe's own impression was that the owner of the Asylum had not been received into the confidence of Sir Percival and the Count. His consenting at all to let her visit his patient seemed to afford one proof of this, and his readiness in making admissions which could scarcely have escaped the lips of an accomplice, certainly appeared to furnish another.

For example, in the course of the introductory conversation which took place, he informed Miss Halcombe that Anne Catherick had been brought back to him with the necessary order and certificates by Count Fosco on the twenty-seventh of July—the Count also producing a letter of explanations and instructions signed by Sir Percival Glyde. On receiving his inmate again, the proprietor of the Asylum acknowledged that he had observed some curious personal changes in her. Such changes no doubt were not without precedent in his experience of persons mentally afflicted. Insane people were often at one time, outwardly as well as inwardly, unlike what they were at another—the change from better to worse, or from worse to better, in the madness having a necessary tendency to produce alterations of appearance externally. He allowed for these, and he allowed also for the modification in the form of Anne Catherick's delusion, which was reflected no doubt in her manner and expression. But he was still perplexed at times by certain differences between his patient before she had escaped and his patient since she had been brought back. Those differences were too minute to be described. He could not say of course that she was absolutely altered in height or shape or complexion, or in the colour of her hair and eyes, or in the general form of her face—the change was something that he felt more than something that he saw. In short, the case had been a puzzle from the first, and one more perplexity was added to it now.

It cannot be said that this conversation led to the result of even partially preparing Miss Halcombe's mind for what was to come. But it produced, nevertheless, a very

serious effect upon her. She was so completely unnerved by it, that some little time elapsed before she could summon composure enough to follow the proprietor of the Asylum to that part of the house in which the inmates were confined.

On inquiry, it turned out that the supposed Anne Catherick was then taking exercise in the grounds attached to the establishment. One of the nurses volunteered to conduct Miss Halcombe to the place, the proprietor of the Asylum remaining in the house for a few minutes to attend to a case which required his services, and then engaging to join his visitor in the grounds.

The nurse led Miss Halcombe to a distant part of the property, which was prettily laid out, and after looking about her a little, turned into a turf walk, shaded by a shrubbery on either side. About half-way down this walk two women were slowly approaching. The nurse pointed to them and said, "There is Anne Catherick, ma'am, with the attendant who waits on her. The attendant will answer any questions you wish to put." With those words the nurse left her to return to the duties of the house.

Miss Halcombe advanced on her side, and the women advanced on theirs. When they were within a dozen paces of each other, one of the women stopped for an instant, looked eagerly at the strange lady, shook off the nurse's grasp on her, and the next moment rushed into Miss Halcombe's arms. In that moment Miss Halcombe recognised her sister—recognised the dead-alive.

Fortunately for the success of the measures taken subsequently, no one was present at that moment but the nurse. She was a young woman, and she was so startled that she was at first quite incapable of interfering. When she was able to do so her whole services were required by Miss Halcombe, who had for the moment sunk altogether in the effort to keep her own senses under the shock of the discovery. After waiting a few minutes in the fresh air and the cool shade, her natural energy and courage helped her a little, and she became sufficiently mistress of herself to feel the necessity of recalling her presence of mind for her unfortunate sister's sake.

She obtained permission to speak alone with the patient, on condition that they both remained well within the nurse's view. There was no time for questions—there was only time for Miss Halcombe to impress on the unhappy lady the necessity of controlling herself, and to assure her of immediate help and rescue if she did so. The prospect of escaping from the Asylum by obedience to her sister's directions was sufficient to quiet Lady Glyde, and to make her understand what was required of her. Miss Halcombe next returned to the nurse, placed all the gold she then had in her

pocket (three sovereigns) in the nurse's hands, and asked when and where she could speak to her alone.

The woman was at first surprised and distrustful. But on Miss Halcombe's declaring that she only wanted to put some questions which she was too much agitated to ask at that moment, and that she had no intention of misleading the nurse into any dereliction of duty, the woman took the money, and proposed three o'clock on the next day as the time for the interview. She might then slip out for half an hour, after the patients had dined, and she would meet the lady in a retired place, outside the high north wall which screened the grounds of the house. Miss Halcombe had only time to assent, and to whisper to her sister that she should hear from her on the next day, when the proprietor of the Asylum joined them. He noticed his visitor's agitation, which Miss Halcombe accounted for by saying that her interview with Anne Catherick had a little startled her at first. She took her leave as soon after as possible—that is to say, as soon as she could summon courage to force herself from the presence of her unfortunate sister.

A very little reflection, when the capacity to reflect returned, convinced her that any attempt to identify Lady Glyde and to rescue her by legal means, would, even if successful, involve a delay that might be fatal to her sister's intellects, which were shaken already by the horror of the situation to which she had been consigned. By the time Miss Halcombe had got back to London, she had determined to effect Lady Glyde's escape privately, by means of the nurse.

She went at once to her stockbroker, and sold out of the funds all the little property she possessed, amounting to rather less than seven hundred pounds. Determined, if necessary, to pay the price of her sister's liberty with every farthing she had in the world, she repaired the next day, having the whole sum about her in bank-notes, to her appointment outside the Asylum wall.

The nurse was there. Miss Halcombe approached the subject cautiously by many preliminary questions. She discovered, among other particulars, that the nurse who had in former times attended on the true Anne Catherick had been held responsible (although she was not to blame for it) for the patient's escape, and had lost her place in consequence. The same penalty, it was added, would attach to the person then speaking to her, if the supposed Anne Catherick was missing a second time; and, moreover, the nurse in this case had an especial interest in keeping her place. She was engaged to be married, and she and her future husband were waiting till they could save, together, between two and three hundred pounds to start in business. The nurse's wages were

good, and she might succeed, by strict economy, in contributing her small share towards the sum required in two years' time.

On this hint Miss Halcombe spoke. She declared that the supposed Anne Catherick was nearly related to her, that she had been placed in the Asylum under a fatal mistake, and that the nurse would be doing a good and a Christian action in being the means of restoring them to one another. Before there was time to start a single objection, Miss Halcombe took four bank-notes of a hundred pounds each from her pocket-book, and offered them to the woman, as a compensation for the risk she was to run, and for the loss of her place.

The nurse hesitated, through sheer incredulity and surprise. Miss Halcombe pressed the point on her firmly.

"You will be doing a good action," she repeated; "you will be helping the most injured and unhappy woman alive. There is your marriage portion for a reward. Bring her safely to me here, and I will put these four bank-notes into your hand before I claim her."

"Will you give me a letter saying those words, which I can show to my sweetheart when he asks how I got the money?" inquired the woman.

"I will bring the letter with me, ready written and signed," answered Miss Halcombe.

"Then I'll risk it," said the nurse.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

It was hastily agreed between them that Miss Halcombe should return early the next morning and wait out of sight among the trees—always, however, keeping near the quiet spot of ground under the north wall. The nurse could fix no time for her appearance, caution requiring that she should wait and be guided by circumstances. On that understanding they separated.

Miss Halcombe was at her place, with the promised letter and the promised bank-notes, before ten the next morning. She waited more than an hour and a half. At the end of that time the nurse came quickly round the corner of the wall holding Lady Glyde by the arm. The moment they met Miss Halcombe put the bank-notes and the letter into her hand, and the sisters were united again.

The nurse had dressed Lady Glyde, with excellent forethought, in a bonnet, veil, and shawl of her own. Miss Halcombe only detained her to suggest a means of turning the pursuit in a false direction, when the escape was discovered at the Asylum. She



was to go back to the house, to mention in the hearing of the other nurses that Anne Catherick had been inquiring latterly about the distance from London to Hampshire, to wait till the last moment, before discovery was inevitable, and then to give the alarm that Anne was missing. The supposed inquiries about Hampshire, when communicated to the owner of the Asylum, would lead him to imagine that his patient had returned to Blackwater Park, under the influence of the delusion which made her persist in asserting herself to be Lady Glyde, and the first pursuit would, in all probability, be turned in that direction.

The nurse consented to follow these suggestions, the more readily as they offered her the means of securing herself against any worse consequences than the loss of her place, by remaining in the Asylum, and so maintaining the appearance of innocence, at least. She at once returned to the house, and Miss Halcombe lost no time in taking her sister back with her to London. They caught the afternoon train to Carlisle the same afternoon, and arrived at Limmeridge, without accident or difficulty of any kind, that night.

During the latter part of their journey they were alone in the carriage, and Miss Halcombe was able to collect such remembrances of the past as her sister's confused and weakened memory was able to recall. The terrible story of the conspiracy so obtained was presented in fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other. Imperfect as the revelation was, it must nevertheless be recorded here before this explanatory narrative closes with the events of the next day at Limmeridge House.

Lady Glyde's recollection of the events which followed her departure from Blackwater Park began with her arrival at the London terminus of the South Western Railway. She had omitted to make a memorandum beforehand of the day on which she took the journey. All hope of fixing that important date by any evidence of hers, or of Mrs. Michelson's, must be given up for lost.

On the arrival of the train at the platform Lady Glyde found Count Fosco waiting for her. He was at the carriage door as soon as the porter could open it. The train was unusually crowded, and there was great confusion in getting the luggage. Some person whom Count Fosco brought with him procured the luggage which belonged to Lady Glyde. It was marked with her name. She drove away alone with the Count in a vehicle which she did not particularly notice at the time.

Her first question, on leaving the terminus, referred to Miss Halcombe. The Count informed her that Miss Halcombe had not yet gone to Cumberland, after-consideration

having caused him to doubt the prudence of her taking so long a journey without some days' previous rest.

Lady Glyde next inquired whether her sister was then staying in the Count's house. Her recollection of the answer was confused, her only distinct impression in relation to it being that the Count declared he was then taking her to see Miss Halcombe. Lady Glyde's experience of London was so limited that she could not tell, at the time, through what streets they were driving. But they never left the streets, and they never passed any gardens or trees. When the carriage stopped, it stopped in a small street behind a square—a square in which there were shops, and public buildings, and many people. From these recollections (of which Lady Glyde was certain) it seems quite clear that Count Fosco did not take her to his own residence in the suburb of St. John's Wood.

They entered the house, and went upstairs to a back room, either on the first or second floor. The luggage was carefully brought in. A female servant opened the door, and a man with a dark beard, apparently a foreigner, met them in the hall, and with great politeness showed them the way upstairs. In answer to Lady Glyde's inquiries, the Count assured her that Miss Halcombe was in the house, and that she should be immediately informed of her sister's arrival. He and the foreigner then went away and left her by herself in the room. It was poorly furnished as a sitting-room, and it looked out on the backs of houses.

The place was remarkably quiet—no footsteps went up or down the stairs—she only heard in the room beneath her a dull, rumbling sound of men's voices talking. Before she had been long left alone the Count returned, to explain that Miss Halcombe was then taking rest, and could not be disturbed for a little while. He was accompanied into the room by a gentleman (an Englishman), whom he begged to present as a friend of his.

After this singular introduction—in the course of which no names, to the best of Lady Glyde's recollection, had been mentioned—she was left alone with the stranger. He was perfectly civil, but he startled and confused her by some odd questions about herself, and by looking at her, while he asked them, in a strange manner. After remaining a short time he went out, and a minute or two afterwards a second stranger—also an Englishman—came in. This person introduced himself as another friend of Count Fosco's, and he, in his turn, looked at her very oddly, and asked some curious questions—never, as well as she could remember, addressing her by name, and going out again, after a little while, like the first man. By this time she was so frightened

about herself, and so uneasy about her sister, that she had thoughts of venturing downstairs again, and claiming the protection and assistance of the only woman she had seen in the house—the servant who answered the door.

Just as she had risen from her chair, the Count came back into the room.

The moment he appeared she asked anxiously how long the meeting between her sister and herself was to be still delayed. At first he returned an evasive answer, but on being pressed, he acknowledged, with great apparent reluctance, that Miss Halcombe was by no means so well as he had hitherto represented her to be. His tone and manner, in making this reply, so alarmed Lady Glyde, or rather so painfully increased the uneasiness which she had felt in the company of the two strangers, that a sudden faintness overcame her, and she was obliged to ask for a glass of water. The Count called from the door for water, and for a bottle of smelling-salts. Both were brought in by the foreign-looking man with the beard. The water, when Lady Glyde attempted to drink it, had so strange a taste that it increased her faintness, and she hastily took the bottle of salts from Count Fosco, and smelt at it. Her head became giddy on the instant. The Count caught the bottle as it dropped out of her hand, and the last impression of which she was conscious was that he held it to her nostrils again.

From this point her recollections were found to be confused, fragmentary, and difficult to reconcile with any reasonable probability.

Her own impression was that she recovered her senses later in the evening, that she then left the house, that she went (as she had previously arranged to go, at Blackwater Park) to Mrs. Vesey's—that she drank tea there, and that she passed the night under Mrs. Vesey's roof. She was totally unable to say how, or when, or in what company she left the house to which Count Fosco had brought her. But she persisted in asserting that she had been to Mrs. Vesey's, and still more extraordinary, that she had been helped to undress and get to bed by Mrs. Rubelle! She could not remember what the conversation was at Mrs. Vesey's or whom she saw there besides that lady, or why Mrs. Rubelle should have been present in the house to help her.

Her recollection of what happened to her the next morning was still more vague and unreliable.

She had some dim idea of driving out (at what hour she could not say) with Count Fosco, and with Mrs. Rubelle again for a female attendant. But when, and why, she left Mrs. Vesey she could not tell; neither did she know what direction the carriage drove in, or where it set her down, or whether the Count and Mrs. Rubelle did or did not remain with her all the time she was out. At this point in her sad story there was a total

blank. She had no impressions of the faintest kind to communicate—no idea whether one day, or more than one day, had passed—until she came to herself suddenly in a strange place, surrounded by women who were all unknown to her.

This was the Asylum. Here she first heard herself called by Anne Catherick's name, and here, as a last remarkable circumstance in the story of the conspiracy, her own eyes informed her that she had Anne Catherick's clothes on. The nurse, on the first night in the Asylum, had shown her the marks on each article of her underclothing as it was taken off, and had said, not at all irritably or unkindly, "Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don't worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She's dead and buried, and you're alive and hearty. Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink, and there you will find it on all your old things, which we have kept in the house—Anne Catherick, as plain as print!" And there it was, when Miss Halcombe examined the linen her sister wore, on the night of their arrival at Limmeridge House.

These were the only recollections—all of them uncertain, and some of them contradictory—which could be extracted from Lady Glyde by careful questioning on the journey to Cumberland. Miss Halcombe abstained from pressing her with any inquiries relating to events in the Asylum—her mind being but too evidently unfit to bear the trial of reverting to them. It was known, by the voluntary admission of the owner of the mad-house, that she was received there on the twenty-seventh of July. From that date until the fifteenth of October (the day of her rescue) she had been under restraint, her identity with Anne Catherick systematically asserted, and her sanity, from first to last, practically denied. Faculties less delicately balanced, constitutions less tenderly organised, must have suffered under such an ordeal as this. No man could have gone through it and come out of it unchanged.

Arriving at Limmeridge late on the evening of the fifteenth, Miss Halcombe wisely resolved not to attempt the assertion of Lady Glyde's identity until the next day.

The first thing in the morning she went to Mr. Fairlie's room, and using all possible cautions and preparations beforehand, at last told him in so many words what had happened. As soon as his first astonishment and alarm had subsided, he angrily declared that Miss Halcombe had allowed herself to be duped by Anne Catherick. He referred her to Count Fosco's letter, and to what she had herself told him of the personal resemblance between Anne and his deceased niece, and he positively declined to admit to his presence, even for one minute only, a madwoman, whom it was an insult and an outrage to have brought into his house at all.



Miss Halcombe left the room—waited till the first heat of her indignation had passed away—decided on reflection that Mr. Fairlie should see his niece in the interests of common humanity before he closed his doors on her as a stranger—and thereupon, without a word of previous warning, took Lady Glyde with her to his room. The servant was posted at the door to prevent their entrance, but Miss Halcombe insisted on passing him, and made her way into Mr. Fairlie's presence, leading her sister by the hand.

The scene that followed, though it only lasted for a few minutes, was too painful to be described—Miss Halcombe herself shrank from referring to it. Let it be enough to say that Mr. Fairlie declared, in the most positive terms, that he did not recognise the woman who had been brought into his room—that he saw nothing in her face and manner to make him doubt for a moment that his niece lay buried in Limmeridge churchyard, and that he would call on the law to protect him if before the day was over she was not removed from the house.

Taking the very worst view of Mr. Fairlie's selfishness, indolence, and habitual want of feeling, it was manifestly impossible to suppose that he was capable of such infamy as secretly recognising and openly disowning his brother's child. Miss Halcombe humanely and sensibly allowed all due force to the influence of prejudice and alarm in preventing him from fairly exercising his perceptions, and accounted for what had happened in that way. But when she next put the servants to the test, and found that they too were, in every case, uncertain, to say the least of it, whether the lady presented to them was their young mistress or Anne Catherick, of whose resemblance to her they had all heard, the sad conclusion was inevitable that the change produced in Lady Glyde's face and manner by her imprisonment in the Asylum was far more serious than Miss Halcombe had at first supposed. The vile deception which had asserted her death defied exposure even in the house where she was born, and among the people with whom she had lived.

In a less critical situation the effort need not have been given up as hopeless even yet.

For example, the maid, Fanny, who happened to be then absent from Limmeridge, was expected back in two days, and there would be a chance of gaining her recognition to start with, seeing that she had been in much more constant communication with her mistress, and had been much more heartily attached to her than the other servants. Again, Lady Glyde might have been privately kept in the house or in the village to wait until her health was a little recovered and her mind was a little steadied again. When her memory could be once more trusted to serve her, she would naturally refer



to persons and events in the past with a certainty and a familiarity which no impostor could simulate, and so the fact of her identity, which her own appearance had failed to establish, might subsequently be proved, with time to help her, by the surer test of her own words.

But the circumstances under which she had regained her freedom rendered all recourse to such means as these simply impracticable. The pursuit from the Asylum, diverted to Hampshire for the time only, would infallibly next take the direction of Cumberland. The persons appointed to seek the fugitive might arrive at Limmeridge House at a few hours' notice, and in Mr. Fairlie's present temper of mind they might count on the immediate exertion of his local influence and authority to assist them. The commonest consideration for Lady Glyde's safety forced on Miss Halcombe the necessity of resigning the struggle to do her justice, and of removing her at once from the place of all others that was now most dangerous to her—the neighbourhood of her own home.

An immediate return to London was the first and wisest measure of security which suggested itself. In the great city all traces of them might be most speedily and most surely effaced. There were no preparations to make—no farewell words of kindness to exchange with any one. On the afternoon of that memorable day of the sixteenth Miss Halcombe roused her sister to a last exertion of courage, and without a living soul to wish them well at parting, the two took their way into the world alone, and turned their backs for ever on Limmeridge House.

They had passed the hill above the churchyard, when Lady Glyde insisted on turning back to look her last at her mother's grave. Miss Halcombe tried to shake her resolution, but, in this one instance, tried in vain. She was immovable. Her dim eyes lit with a sudden fire, and flashed through the veil that hung over them—her wasted fingers strengthened moment by moment round the friendly arm by which they had held so listlessly till this time. I believe in my soul that the hand of God was pointing their way back to them, and that the most innocent and the most afflicted of His creatures was chosen in that dread moment to see it.

They retraced their steps to the burial-ground, and by that act sealed the future of our three lives.