



THE WOMAN
IN WHITE
WILKIE COLLINS



EPOCH ONE

The Story Continued by Marian Halcombe, Part I

Extracts from Marian Halcombe's Diary

LIMMERIDGE HOUSE, Nov. 8.

[The passages omitted, here and elsewhere, in Miss Halcombe's Diary are only those which bear no reference to Miss Fairlie or to any of the persons with whom she is associated in these pages.]

This morning Mr. Gilmore left us.

His interview with Laura had evidently grieved and surprised him more than he liked to confess. I felt afraid, from his look and manner when we parted, that she might have inadvertently betrayed to him the real secret of her depression and my anxiety. This doubt grew on me so, after he had gone, that I declined riding out with Sir Percival, and went up to Laura's room instead.

I have been sadly distrustful of myself, in this difficult and lamentable matter, ever since I found out my own ignorance of the strength of Laura's unhappy attachment. I ought to have known that the delicacy and forbearance and sense of honour which drew me to poor Hartright, and made me so sincerely admire and respect him, were just the qualities to appeal most irresistibly to Laura's natural sensitiveness and natural generosity of nature. And yet, until she opened her heart to me of her own accord, I had no suspicion that this new feeling had taken root so deeply. I once thought time and care might remove it. I now fear that it will remain with her and alter her for life. The discovery that I have committed such an error in judgment as this makes me hesitate about everything else. I hesitate about Sir Percival, in the face of the plainest proofs. I hesitate even in speaking to Laura. On this very morning I doubted, with my hand on the door, whether I should ask her the questions I had come to put, or not.

When I went into her room I found her walking up and down in great impatience. She looked flushed and excited, and she came forward at once, and spoke to me before I could open my lips.

“I wanted you,” she said. “Come and sit down on the sofa with me. Marian! I can bear this no longer—I must and will end it.”

There was too much colour in her cheeks, too much energy in her manner, too much firmness in her voice. The little book of Hartright’s drawings—the fatal book that she will dream over whenever she is alone—was in one of her hands. I began by gently and firmly taking it from her, and putting it out of sight on a side-table.

“Tell me quietly, my darling, what you wish to do,” I said. “Has Mr. Gilmore been advising you?”

She shook her head. “No, not in what I am thinking of now. He was very kind and good to me, Marian, and I am ashamed to say I distressed him by crying. I am miserably helpless—I can’t control myself. For my own sake, and for all our sakes, I must have courage enough to end it.”

“Do you mean courage enough to claim your release?” I asked.

“No,” she said simply. “Courage, dear, to tell the truth.”

She put her arms round my neck, and rested her head quietly on my bosom. On the opposite wall hung the miniature portrait of her father. I bent over her, and saw that she was looking at it while her head lay on my breast.

“I can never claim my release from my engagement,” she went on. “Whatever way it ends it must end wretchedly for me. All I can do, Marian, is not to add the remembrance that I have broken my promise and forgotten my father’s dying words, to make that wretchedness worse.”

“What is it you propose, then?” I asked.

“To tell Sir Percival Glyde the truth with my own lips,” she answered, “and to let him release me, if he will, not because I ask him, but because he knows all.”

“What do you mean, Laura, by ‘all’? Sir Percival will know enough (he has told me so himself) if he knows that the engagement is opposed to your own wishes.”

“Can I tell him that, when the engagement was made for me by my father, with my own consent? I should have kept my promise, not happily, I am afraid, but still contentedly—” she stopped, turned her face to me, and laid her cheek close against mine—“I should have kept my engagement, Marian, if another love had not grown up in my heart, which was not there when I first promised to be Sir Percival’s wife.”

“Laura! you will never lower yourself by making a confession to him?”

“I shall lower myself, indeed, if I gain my release by hiding from him what he has a right to know.”

“He has not the shadow of a right to know it!”

“Wrong, Marian, wrong! I ought to deceive no one—least of all the man to whom my father gave me, and to whom I gave myself.” She put her lips to mine, and kissed me. “My own love,” she said softly, “you are so much too fond of me, and so much too proud of me, that you forget, in my case, what you would remember in your own. Better that Sir Percival should doubt my motives, and misjudge my conduct if he will, than that I should be first false to him in thought, and then mean enough to serve my own interests by hiding the falsehood.”

I held her away from me in astonishment. For the first time in our lives we had changed places—the resolution was all on her side, the hesitation all on mine. I looked into the pale, quiet, resigned young face—I saw the pure, innocent heart, in the loving eyes that looked back at me—and the poor worldly cautions and objections that rose to my lips dwindled and died away in their own emptiness. I hung my head in silence. In her place the despicably small pride which makes so many women deceitful would have been my pride, and would have made me deceitful too.

“Don’t be angry with me, Marian,” she said, mistaking my silence.

I only answered by drawing her close to me again. I was afraid of crying if I spoke. My tears do not flow so easily as they ought—they come almost like men’s tears, with sobs that seem to tear me in pieces, and that frighten every one about me.

“I have thought of this, love, for many days,” she went on, twining and twisting my hair with that childish restlessness in her fingers, which poor Mrs. Vesey still tries so patiently and so vainly to cure her of—“I have thought of it very seriously, and I can be sure of my courage when my own conscience tells me I am right. Let me speak to him to-morrow—in your presence, Marian. I will say nothing that is wrong, nothing that you or I need be ashamed of—but, oh, it will ease my heart so to end this miserable concealment! Only let me know and feel that I have no deception to answer for on my side, and then, when he has heard what I have to say, let him act towards me as he will.”

She sighed, and put her head back in its old position on my bosom. Sad misgivings about what the end would be weighed upon my mind, but still distrusting myself, I told her that I would do as she wished. She thanked me, and we passed gradually into talking of other things.

At dinner she joined us again, and was more easy and more herself with Sir Percival than I have seen her yet. In the evening she went to the piano, choosing new music of the dexterous, tuneless, florid kind. The lovely old melodies of Mozart, which poor Hartright was so fond of, she has never played since he left. The book is no longer in the music-stand. She took the volume away herself, so that nobody might find it out and ask her to play from it.

I had no opportunity of discovering whether her purpose of the morning had changed or not, until she wished Sir Percival good-night—and then her own words informed me that it was unaltered. She said, very quietly, that she wished to speak to him after breakfast, and that he would find her in her sitting-room with me. He changed colour at those words, and I felt his hand trembling a little when it came to my turn to take it. The event of the next morning would decide his future life, and he evidently knew it.

I went in, as usual, through the door between our two bed-rooms, to bid Laura good-night before she went to sleep. In stooping over her to kiss her I saw the little book of Hartright's drawings half hidden under her pillow, just in the place where she used to hide her favourite toys when she was a child. I could not find it in my heart to say anything, but I pointed to the book and shook my head. She reached both hands up to my cheeks, and drew my face down to hers till our lips met.

"Leave it there to-night," she whispered; "to-morrow may be cruel, and may make me say good-bye to it for ever."

9th.—The first event of the morning was not of a kind to raise my spirits—a letter arrived for me from poor Walter Hartright. It is the answer to mine describing the manner in which Sir Percival cleared himself of the suspicions raised by Anne Catherick's letter. He writes shortly and bitterly about Sir Percival's explanations, only saying that he has no right to offer an opinion on the conduct of those who are above him. This is sad, but his occasional references to himself grieve me still more. He says that the effort to return to his old habits and pursuits grows harder instead of easier to him every day and he implores me, if I have any interest, to exert it to get him employment that will necessitate his absence from England, and take him among new scenes and new people. I have been made all the readier to comply with this request by a passage at the end of his letter, which has almost alarmed me.

After mentioning that he has neither seen nor heard anything of Anne Catherick, he suddenly breaks off, and hints in the most abrupt, mysterious manner, that he has been

perpetually watched and followed by strange men ever since he returned to London. He acknowledges that he cannot prove this extraordinary suspicion by fixing on any particular persons, but he declares that the suspicion itself is present to him night and day. This has frightened me, because it looks as if his one fixed idea about Laura was becoming too much for his mind. I will write immediately to some of my mother's influential old friends in London, and press his claims on their notice. Change of scene and change of occupation may really be the salvation of him at this crisis in his life.

Greatly to my relief, Sir Percival sent an apology for not joining us at breakfast. He had taken an early cup of coffee in his own room, and he was still engaged there in writing letters. At eleven o'clock, if that hour was convenient, he would do himself the honour of waiting on Miss Fairlie and Miss Halcombe. My eyes were on Laura's face while the message was being delivered. I had found her unaccountably quiet and composed on going into her room in the morning, and so she remained all through breakfast. Even when we were sitting together on the sofa in her room, waiting for Sir Percival, she still preserved her self-control.

"Don't be afraid of me, Marian," was all she said; "I may forget myself with an old friend like Mr. Gilmore, or with a dear sister like you, but I will not forget myself with Sir Percival Glyde."

I looked at her, and listened to her in silent surprise. Through all the years of our close intimacy this passive force in her character had been hidden from me—hidden even from herself, till love found it, and suffering called it forth.

As the clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven Sir Percival knocked at the door and came in. There was suppressed anxiety and agitation in every line of his face. The dry, sharp cough, which teases him at most times, seemed to be troubling him more incessantly than ever. He sat down opposite to us at the table, and Laura remained by me. I looked attentively at them both, and he was the palest of the two.

He said a few unimportant words, with a visible effort to preserve his customary ease of manner. But his voice was not to be steadied, and the restless uneasiness in his eyes was not to be concealed. He must have felt this himself, for he stopped in the middle of a sentence, and gave up even the attempt to hide his embarrassment any longer.

There was just one moment of dead silence before Laura addressed him.

"I wish to speak to you, Sir Percival," she said, "on a subject that is very important to us both. My sister is here, because her presence helps me and gives me confidence. She has not suggested one word of what I am going to say—I speak from my own

thoughts, not from hers. I am sure you will be kind enough to understand that before I go any farther?"

Sir Percival bowed. She had proceeded thus far, with perfect outward tranquillity and perfect propriety of manner. She looked at him, and he looked at her. They seemed, at the outset, at least, resolved to understand one another plainly.

"I have heard from Marian," she went on, "that I have only to claim my release from our engagement to obtain that release from you. It was forbearing and generous on your part, Sir Percival, to send me such a message. It is only doing you justice to say that I am grateful for the offer, and I hope and believe that it is only doing myself justice to tell you that I decline to accept it."

His attentive face relaxed a little. But I saw one of his feet, softly, quietly, incessantly beating on the carpet under the table, and I felt that he was secretly as anxious as ever.

"I have not forgotten," she said, "that you asked my father's permission before you honoured me with a proposal of marriage. Perhaps you have not forgotten either what I said when I consented to our engagement? I ventured to tell you that my father's influence and advice had mainly decided me to give you my promise. I was guided by my father, because I had always found him the truest of all advisers, the best and fondest of all protectors and friends. I have lost him now—I have only his memory to love, but my faith in that dear dead friend has never been shaken. I believe at this moment, as truly as I ever believed, that he knew what was best, and that his hopes and wishes ought to be my hopes and wishes too."

Her voice trembled for the first time. Her restless fingers stole their way into my lap, and held fast by one of my hands. There was another moment of silence, and then Sir Percival spoke.

"May I ask," he said, "if I have ever proved myself unworthy of the trust which it has been hitherto my greatest honour and greatest happiness to possess?"

"I have found nothing in your conduct to blame," she answered. "You have always treated me with the same delicacy and the same forbearance. You have deserved my trust, and, what is of far more importance in my estimation, you have deserved my father's trust, out of which mine grew. You have given me no excuse, even if I had wanted to find one, for asking to be released from my pledge. What I have said so far has been spoken with the wish to acknowledge my whole obligation to you. My regard for that obligation, my regard for my father's memory, and my regard for my own promise, all forbid me to set the example, on my side, of withdrawing from our present

position. The breaking of our engagement must be entirely your wish and your act, Sir Percival—not mine.”

The uneasy beating of his foot suddenly stopped, and he leaned forward eagerly across the table.

“My act?” he said. “What reason can there be on my side for withdrawing?”

I heard her breath quickening—I felt her hand growing cold. In spite of what she had said to me when we were alone, I began to be afraid of her. I was wrong.

“A reason that it is very hard to tell you,” she answered. “There is a change in me, Sir Percival—a change which is serious enough to justify you, to yourself and to me, in breaking off our engagement.”

His face turned so pale again that even his lips lost their colour. He raised the arm which lay on the table, turned a little away in his chair, and supported his head on his hand, so that his profile only was presented to us.

“What change?” he asked. The tone in which he put the question jarred on me—there was something painfully suppressed in it.

She sighed heavily, and leaned towards me a little, so as to rest her shoulder against mine. I felt her trembling, and tried to spare her by speaking myself. She stopped me by a warning pressure of her hand, and then addressed Sir Percival one more, but this time without looking at him.

“I have heard,” she said, “and I believe it, that the fondest and truest of all affections is the affection which a woman ought to bear to her husband. When our engagement began that affection was mine to give, if I could, and yours to win, if you could. Will you pardon me, and spare me, Sir Percival, if I acknowledge that it is not so any longer?”

A few tears gathered in her eyes, and dropped over her cheeks slowly as she paused and waited for his answer. He did not utter a word. At the beginning of her reply he had moved the hand on which his head rested, so that it hid his face. I saw nothing but the upper part of his figure at the table. Not a muscle of him moved. The fingers of the hand which supported his head were dented deep in his hair. They might have expressed hidden anger or hidden grief—it was hard to say which—there was no significant trembling in them. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, to tell the secret of his thoughts at that moment—the moment which was the crisis of his life and the crisis of hers.

I was determined to make him declare himself, for Laura’s sake.

“Sir Percival!” I interposed sharply, “have you nothing to say when my sister has said so much? More, in my opinion,” I added, my unlucky temper getting the better of me, “than any man alive, in your position, has a right to hear from her.”

That last rash sentence opened a way for him by which to escape me if he chose, and he instantly took advantage of it.

“Pardon me, Miss Halcombe,” he said, still keeping his hand over his face, “pardon me if I remind you that I have claimed no such right.”

The few plain words which would have brought him back to the point from which he had wandered were just on my lips, when Laura checked me by speaking again.

“I hope I have not made my painful acknowledgment in vain,” she continued. “I hope it has secured me your entire confidence in what I have still to say?”

“Pray be assured of it.” He made that brief reply warmly, dropping his hand on the table while he spoke, and turning towards us again. Whatever outward change had passed over him was gone now. His face was eager and expectant—it expressed nothing but the most intense anxiety to hear her next words.

“I wish you to understand that I have not spoken from any selfish motive,” she said. “If you leave me, Sir Percival, after what you have just heard, you do not leave me to marry another man, you only allow me to remain a single woman for the rest of my life. My fault towards you has begun and ended in my own thoughts. It can never go any farther. No word has passed—” She hesitated, in doubt about the expression she should use next, hesitated in a momentary confusion which it was very sad and very painful to see. “No word has passed,” she patiently and resolutely resumed, “between myself and the person to whom I am now referring for the first and last time in your presence of my feelings towards him, or of his feelings towards me—no word ever can pass—neither he nor I are likely, in this world, to meet again. I earnestly beg you to spare me from saying any more, and to believe me, on my word, in what I have just told you. It is the truth. Sir Percival, the truth which I think my promised husband has a claim to hear, at any sacrifice of my own feelings. I trust to his generosity to pardon me, and to his honour to keep my secret.”

“Both those trusts are sacred to me,” he said, “and both shall be sacredly kept.”

After answering in those terms he paused, and looked at her as if he was waiting to hear more.

I have said all I wish to say,” she added quietly—” I have said more than enough to justify you in withdrawing from your engagement.”



“You have said more than enough,” he answered, “to make it the dearest object of my life to KEEP the engagement.” With those words he rose from his chair, and advanced a few steps towards the place where she was sitting.

She started violently, and a faint cry of surprise escaped her. Every word she had spoken had innocently betrayed her purity and truth to a man who thoroughly understood the priceless value of a pure and true woman. Her own noble conduct had been the hidden enemy, throughout, of all the hopes she had trusted to it. I had dreaded this from the first. I would have prevented it, if she had allowed me the smallest chance of doing so. I even waited and watched now, when the harm was done, for a word from Sir Percival that would give me the opportunity of putting him in the wrong.

“You have left it to ME, Miss Fairlie, to resign you,” he continued. “I am not heartless enough to resign a woman who has just shown herself to be the noblest of her sex.”

He spoke with such warmth and feeling, with such passionate enthusiasm, and yet with such perfect delicacy, that she raised her head, flushed up a little, and looked at him with sudden animation and spirit.

“No!” she said firmly. “The most wretched of her sex, if she must give herself in marriage when she cannot give her love.”

“May she not give it in the future,” he asked, “if the one object of her husband’s life is to deserve it?”

“Never!” she answered. “If you still 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!”

She looked so irresistibly beautiful as she said those brave words that no man alive could have steeled his heart against her. I tried hard to feel that Sir Percival was to blame, and to say so, but my womanhood would pity him, in spite of myself.

“I gratefully accept your faith and truth,” he said. “The least that you can offer is more to me than the utmost that I could hope for from any other woman in the world.”

Her left hand still held mine, but her right hand hung listlessly at her side. He raised it gently to his lips—touched it with them, rather than kissed it—bowed to me—and then, with perfect delicacy and discretion, silently quitted the room.

She neither moved nor said a word when he was gone—she sat by me, cold and still, with her eyes fixed on the ground. I saw it was hopeless and useless to speak, and I only put my arm round her, and held her to me in silence. We remained together so

for what seemed a long and weary time—so long and so weary, that I grew uneasy and spoke to her softly, in the hope of producing a change.

The sound of my voice seemed to startle her into consciousness. She suddenly drew herself away from me and rose to her feet.

“I must submit, Marian, as well as I can,” she said. “My new life has its hard duties, and one of them begins to-day.”

As she spoke she went to a side-table near the window, on which her sketching materials were placed, gathered them together carefully, and put them in a drawer of her cabinet. She locked the drawer and brought the key to me.

“I must part from everything that reminds me of him,” she said. “Keep the key wherever you please—I shall never want it again.”

Before I could say a word she had turned away to her book-case, and had taken from it the album that contained Walter Hartright’s drawings. She hesitated for a moment, holding the little volume fondly in her hands—then lifted it to her lips and kissed it.

“Oh, Laura! Laura!” I said, not angrily, not reprovably—with nothing but sorrow in my voice, and nothing but sorrow in my heart.

“It is the last time, Marian,” she pleaded. “I am bidding it good-bye for ever.”

She laid the book on the table and drew out the comb that fastened her hair. It fell, in its matchless beauty, over her back and shoulders, and dropped round her, far below her waist. She separated one long, thin lock from the rest, cut it off, and pinned it carefully, in the form of a circle, on the first blank page of the album. The moment it was fastened she closed the volume hurriedly, and placed it in my hands.

“You write to him and he writes to you,” she said. “While I am alive, if he asks after me always tell him I am well, and never say I am unhappy. Don’t distress him, Marian, for my sake, don’t distress him. If I die first, promise you will give him this little book of his drawings, with my hair in it. There can be no harm, when I am gone, in telling him that I put it there with my own hands. And say—oh, Marian, say for me, then, what I can never say for myself—say I loved him!”

She flung her arms round my neck, and whispered the last words in my ear with a passionate delight in uttering them which it almost broke my heart to hear. All the long restraint she had imposed on herself gave way in that first last outburst of tenderness. She broke from me with hysterical vehemence, and threw herself on the sofa in a paroxysm of sobs and tears that shook her from head to foot.



I tried vainly to soothe her and reason with her—she was past being soothed, and past being reasoned with. It was the sad, sudden end for us two of this memorable day. When the fit had worn itself out she was too exhausted to speak. She slumbered towards the afternoon, and I put away the book of drawings so that she might not see it when she woke. My face was calm, whatever my heart might be, when she opened her eyes again and looked at me. We said no more to each other about the distressing interview of the morning. Sir Percival's name was not mentioned. Walter Hartright was not alluded to again by either of us for the remainder of the day.

10th.—Finding that she was composed and like herself this morning, I returned to the painful subject of yesterday, for the sole purpose of imploring her to let me speak to Sir Percival and Mr. Fairlie, more plainly and strongly than she could speak to either of them herself, about this lamentable marriage. She interposed, gently but firmly, in the middle of my remonstrances.

“I left yesterday to decide,” she said; “and yesterday HAS decided. It is too late to go back.”

Sir Percival spoke to me this afternoon about what had passed in Laura's room. He assured me that the unparalleled trust she had placed in him had awakened such an answering conviction of her innocence and integrity in his mind, that he was guiltless of having felt even a moment's unworthy jealousy, either at the time when he was in her presence, or afterwards when he had withdrawn from it. Deeply as he lamented the unfortunate attachment which had hindered the progress he might otherwise have made in her esteem and regard, he firmly believed that it had remained unacknowledged in the past, and that it would remain, under all changes of circumstance which it was possible to contemplate, unacknowledged in the future. This was his absolute conviction; and the strongest proof he could give of it was the assurance, which he now offered, that he felt no curiosity to know whether the attachment was of recent date or not, or who had been the object of it. His implicit confidence in Miss Fairlie made him satisfied with what she had thought fit to say to him, and he was honestly innocent of the slightest feeling of anxiety to hear more.

He waited after saying those words and looked at me. I was so conscious of my unreasonable prejudice against him—so conscious of an unworthy suspicion that he might be speculating on my impulsively answering the very questions which he had just described himself as resolved not to ask—that I evaded all reference to this part of the subject with something like a feeling of confusion on my own part. At the same

time I was resolved not to lose even the smallest opportunity of trying to plead Laura's cause, and I told him boldly that I regretted his generosity had not carried him one step farther, and induced him to withdraw from the engagement altogether.

Here, again, he disarmed me by not attempting to defend himself. He would merely beg me to remember the difference there was between his allowing Miss Fairlie to give him up, which was a matter of submission only, and his forcing himself to give up Miss Fairlie, which was, in other words, asking him to be the suicide of his own hopes. Her conduct of the day before had so strengthened the unchangeable love and admiration of two long years, that all active contention against those feelings, on his part, was henceforth entirely out of his power. I must think him weak, selfish, unfeeling towards the very woman whom he idolised, and he must bow to my opinion as resignedly as he could—only putting it to me, at the same time, whether her future as a single woman, pining under an unhappily placed attachment which she could never acknowledge, could be said to promise her a much brighter prospect than her future as the wife of a man who worshipped the very ground she walked on? In the last case there was hope from time, however slight it might be—in the first case, on her own showing, there was no hope at all.

I answered him—more because my tongue is a woman's, and must answer, than because I had anything convincing to say. It was only too plain that the course Laura had adopted the day before had offered him the advantage if he chose to take it—and that he HAD chosen to take it. I felt this at the time, and I feel it just as strongly now, while I write these lines, in my own room. The one hope left is that his motives really spring, as he says they do, from the irresistible strength of his attachment to Laura.

Before I close my diary for to-night I must record that I wrote to-day, in poor Hartright's interest, to two of my mother's old friends in London—both men of influence and position. If they can do anything for him, I am quite sure they will. Except Laura, I never was more anxious about any one than I am now about Walter. All that has happened since he left us has only increased my strong regard and sympathy for him. I hope I am doing right in trying to help him to employment abroad—I hope, most earnestly and anxiously, that it will end well.

11th.—Sir Percival had an interview with Mr. Fairlie, and I was sent for to join them.

I found Mr. Fairlie greatly relieved at the prospect of the “family worry” (as he was pleased to describe his niece's marriage) being settled at last. So far, I did not feel



called on to say anything to him about my own opinion, but when he proceeded, in his most aggravatingly languid manner, to suggest that the time for the marriage had better be settled next, in accordance with Sir Percival's wishes, I enjoyed the satisfaction of assailing Mr. Fairlie's nerves with as strong a protest against hurrying Laura's decision as I could put into words. Sir Percival immediately assured me that he felt the force of my objection, and begged me to believe that the proposal had not been made in consequence of any interference on his part. Mr. Fairlie leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, said we both of us did honour to human nature, and then repeated his suggestion as coolly as if neither Sir Percival nor I had said a word in opposition to it. It ended in my flatly declining to mention the subject to Laura, unless she first approached it of her own accord. I left the room at once after making that declaration. Sir Percival looked seriously embarrassed and distressed, Mr. Fairlie stretched out his lazy legs on his velvet footstool, and said, "Dear Marian! how I envy you your robust nervous system! Don't bang the door!"

On going to Laura's room I found that she had asked for me, and that Mrs. Vesey had informed her that I was with Mr. Fairlie. She inquired at once what I had been wanted for, and I told her all that had passed, without attempting to conceal the vexation and annoyance that I really felt. Her answer surprised and distressed me inexpressibly—it was the very last reply that I should have expected her to make.

"My uncle is right," she said. "I have caused trouble and anxiety enough to you, and to all about me. Let me cause no more, Marian— let Sir Percival decide."

I remonstrated warmly, but nothing that I could say moved her.

"I am held to my engagement," she replied; "I have broken with my old life. The evil day will not come the less surely because I put it off. No, Marian! once again my uncle is right. I have caused trouble enough and anxiety enough, and I will cause no more."

She used to be pliability itself, but she was now inflexibly passive in her resignation—I might almost say in her despair. Dearly as I love her, I should have been less pained if she had been violently agitated—it was so shockingly unlike her natural character to see her as cold and insensible as I saw her now.

12th.—Sir Percival put some questions to me at breakfast about Laura, which left me no choice but to tell him what she had said.

While we were talking she herself came down and joined us. She was just as unnaturally composed in Sir Percival's presence as she had been in mine. When



breakfast was over he had an opportunity of saying a few words to her privately, in a recess of one of the windows. They were not more than two or three minutes together, and on their separating she left the room with Mrs. Vesey, while Sir Percival came to me. He said he had entreated her to favour him by maintaining her privilege of fixing the time for the marriage at her own will and pleasure. In reply she had merely expressed her acknowledgments, and had desired him to mention what his wishes were to Miss Halcombe.

I have no patience to write more. In this instance, as in every other, Sir Percival has carried his point with the utmost possible credit to himself, in spite of everything that I can say or do. His wishes are now, what they were, of course, when he first came here; and Laura having resigned herself to the one inevitable sacrifice of the marriage, remains as coldly hopeless and enduring as ever. In parting with the little occupations and relics that reminded her of Hartright, she seems to have parted with all her tenderness and all her impressibility. It is only three o'clock in the afternoon while I write these lines, and Sir Percival has left us already, in the happy hurry of a bridegroom, to prepare for the bride's reception at his house in Hampshire. Unless some extraordinary event happens to prevent it they will be married exactly at the time when he wished to be married—before the end of the year. My very fingers burn as I write it!

13th.—A sleepless night, through uneasiness about Laura. Towards the morning I came to a resolution to try what change of scene would do to rouse her. She cannot surely remain in her present torpor of insensibility, if I take her away from Limmeridge and surround her with the pleasant faces of old friends? After some consideration I decided on writing to the Arnolds, in Yorkshire. They are simple, kind-hearted, hospitable people, and she has known them from her childhood. When I had put the letter in the post-bag I told her what I had done. It would have been a relief to me if she had shown the spirit to resist and object. But no— she only said, "I will go anywhere with you, Marian. I dare say you are right—I dare say the change will do me good."

14th.—I wrote to Mr. Gilmore, informing him that there was really a prospect of this miserable marriage taking place, and also mentioning my idea of trying what change of scene would do for Laura. I had no heart to go into particulars. Time enough for them when we get nearer to the end of the year.

15th.—Three letters for me. The first, from the Arnolds, full of delight at the prospect of seeing Laura and me. The second, from one of the gentlemen to whom I wrote on Walter Hartright's behalf, informing me that he has been fortunate enough to find an opportunity of complying with my request. The third, from Walter himself, thanking me, poor fellow, in the warmest terms, for giving him an opportunity of leaving his home, his country, and his friends. A private expedition to make excavations among the ruined cities of Central America is, it seems, about to sail from Liverpool. The draughtsman who had been already appointed to accompany it has lost heart, and withdrawn at the eleventh hour, and Walter is to fill his place. He is to be engaged for six months certain, from the time of the landing in Honduras, and for a year afterwards, if the excavations are successful, and if the funds hold out. His letter ends with a promise to write me a farewell line when they are all on board ship, and when the pilot leaves them. I can only hope and pray earnestly that he and I are both acting in this matter for the best. It seems such a serious step for him to take, that the mere contemplation of it startles me. And yet, in his unhappy position, how can I expect him or wish him to remain at home?

16th.—The carriage is at the door. Laura and I set out on our visit to the Arnolds to-day.

POLESDEAN LODGE, YORKSHIRE.

23rd.—A week in these new scenes and among these kind-hearted people has done her some good, though not so much as I had hoped. I have resolved to prolong our stay for another week at least. It is useless to go back to Limmeridge till there is an absolute necessity for our return.

24th.—Sad news by this morning's post. The expedition to Central America sailed on the twenty-first. We have parted with a true man—we have lost a faithful friend. Walter Hartright has left England.

25th.—Sad news yesterday—ominous news to-day. Sir Percival Glyde has written to Mr. Fairlie, and Mr. Fairlie has written to Laura and me, to recall us to Limmeridge immediately.

What can this mean? Has the day for the marriage been fixed in our absence?