CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Woman in White

Wilkie Collins · *1859–1860 · original English text*

A drawing-master walking back to London meets a woman dressed all in white, who has escaped from an asylum and asks the way. From that meeting Collins builds a story of substituted identity, a forced marriage, and a secret in a vestry register—told by many witnesses, and won not by the law's machinery alone but by a woman's patience and a man's resolution.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

When the law can be used to bury a living woman, what may patience and resolution still uncover?

"This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve."

Walter Hartright · Preamble

Marian Halcombe endures, and Walter Hartright will not leave the case. Laura is robbed of her name, her fortune, and nearly her grave; the truth is recovered from documents, dates, and a confession. Collins does not pretend that the machinery of the Law can be depended on to fathom every suspicion. Friends must do the work it will not do.

KEY CHARACTERS

Walter Hartright
The drawing-master whose resolution carries the inquiry

Marian Halcombe
Laura's half-sister: brave, clear-eyed, and the book's great example of patience under trial

Laura Fairlie
The heiress whose name and fortune are stolen

Anne Catherick
The woman in white, like Laura in face, used and destroyed by the plot

Sir Percival Glyde
A baronet by fraud, violent when the secret is touched

Count Fosco
The intelligent villain, polite to canaries and ruthless to women

Frederick Fairlie
Laura's invalid uncle, too refined to be of use

PATIENCE, RESOLUTION, AND A LAW THAT MAY NOT BE ENOUGH

> *"This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve."*
>
> **Walter Hartright** · Preamble

> *"The best men are not consistent in good—why should the worst men be consistent in evil?"*
>
> **Count Fosco** · Fosco's narrative

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Woman on the Road

HARTRIGHT'S FIRST NARRATIVE

A meeting at midnight, and a post as drawing-master at Limmeridge.

- Walter Hartright, late at night, meets a solitary woman dressed from head to foot in white garments
- He helps her toward London; afterward he learns that a woman in white has escaped from an asylum
- At Limmeridge House he teaches Laura Fairlie and her half-sister Marian Halcombe, and loves Laura
- Laura is already promised to Sir Percival Glyde; Walter goes away

> *"This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve."*
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02

The Marriage and the House

MARIAN'S DIARY; THE WEEKS AT BLACKWATER

A baronet and a fat, smiling count take charge of Laura's life and fortune.

- Laura marries Sir Percival; Marian goes with her to Blackwater Park
- Count Fosco, Sir Percival's friend, is courteous, watchful, and dangerous
- The sisters learn that Laura's fortune is the object, and that Anne Catherick—the woman in white—knows a secret about Sir Percival
- Marian overhears a plot, falls ill of a fever, and the protection around Laura fails

03

A Lady Buried, a Lady Shut Up

THE SUBSTITUTION

One woman is buried under the other's name; the other is placed in an asylum.

- Anne Catherick dies and is buried as Lady Glyde
- Laura is taken, as Anne, to the asylum from which Anne escaped
- Marian finds her, broken and disbelieved, and takes her into hiding
- The law, looking at the register and the tomb, is satisfied that Laura Fairlie is dead

04

Resolution

HARTRIGHT'S RETURN

Walter comes home from Central America and begins the long work of proof.

- Walter, Marian, and Laura live quietly in London while he gathers dates, witnesses, and the truth of the death certificate
- He traces Sir Percival's secret to a forged entry in a marriage register: Percival was not born in wedlock, and the baronetcy and the estate were never his by right
- Sir Percival dies in the burning vestry, trying to hide the fraud
- Fosco remains

> *"The best men are not consistent in good—why should the worst men be consistent in evil?"*
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> **Count Fosco** · Fosco's narrative

05

The Count's Confession

THE CLOSE

A foreign society and a written confession restore a name.

- Walter confronts Fosco, using the Count's fear of a secret society to force a written statement of the plot
- The confession, with the true dates, restores Laura's identity
- Fosco is later killed by the society he had betrayed
- Laura's son is born; Walter's resolution and Marian's patience have undone the substitution

Identity and Truth · Patience · Courage · Law and Justice · Friendship · Hidden Sin

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The opening sentence names the book's two virtues: a woman's patience and a man's resolution. Marian and Walter are that pair; Laura's sufferings are what they must endure and undo.
2. Collins tells the story through witnesses, diaries, and documents. The form is part of the meaning: truth is recovered by testimony, not by a single narrator's word.
3. Fosco's line about consistency in good and evil is a villain's proverb. It explains his flexibility; it does not excuse it.
4. The asylum and the marriage settlement are legal instruments used unjustly. The book is not against law; it is against a law that will not look again.
5. The hosted text is Collins's original English (Project Gutenberg #583).

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #583, The Woman in White, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-woman-in-white/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.