CHAPTER ONE

A Strange Adventure

This is the story of a crime committed against a woman. I - Walter Hartright, drawing teacher - have asked several people to contribute narratives. Each narrator will describe what he saw with his own eyes, so that the narrative will be as truthful as possible, and the evidence will be presented as in a court of law.

l. Walter Hartright's narrative

One evening in July 1849, I went to see my mother and sister at their house on Hampstead Heath. My Italian friend Pesca was there, and he had good news for me. He had found me a job in Cumberland in the north of England: four months teaching drawing to the nieces of Mr Frederick Fairlie of Limmeridge House. On the evening before I left for Cumberland, I went to say goodbye to my mother and sister. It was past midnight when I left their house to walk home to my apartment in London. As I stood at the crossroads, I felt someone suddenly touch my arm. I turned around quickly in fear and surprise. There, behind me, stood a woman dressed completely in white.

'Is this the road to London?' she asked.

She was young and thin with a pale, worried face. After a pause, I replied, 'Yes. Sorry for not answering you before. I was surprised to see you - the road was empty just a moment ago.'

She indicated a tree nearby. 'I hid behind that tree to see what kind of man you were. Don't worry, I've done nothing wrong - but there's been an accident. Will you help me?'

'Certainly.'

'I need to go to London. I have a friend there. Could you help me to get a carriage?'

As we walked together down the London road, looking for a carriage, she said, 'Do you know any aristocrats?'

'Some,' I replied, surprised by her strange question. 'Why do you ask?'

'Because I hope that there's one you don't know - one who lives in Hampshire.'

'What's his name?'

'I can't say his name; it upsets me too much! Tell me the names of the aristocrats you know.'

I named three gentlemen in whose houses I had taught drawing.

'You don't know him!' she cried with relief.

'Has this gentleman treated you badly? Is he the reason you're here alone at this hour?'

'I can't talk about it,' she said.

We left the Heath and entered an area of houses. After a while she asked me if I lived in London.

'Yes, but tomorrow I'm going to Cumberland for four months.'

'Cumberland!' she cried. 'I was happy there once, in a village called Limmeridge. A lady called Mrs Fairlie was kind to me, but now she and her husband are both dead.'

I looked at her in surprise and was about to ask her more, but just then I saw a carriage. I stopped it and asked the driver to take the young woman into London. She got into the carriage, then turned to me and kissed my hand. 'Thank you!' she said, then the

carriage drove off, and the woman in white was gone.

I walked on, thinking about this strange adventure. As I passed a policeman, I heard a carriage on the road behind me. The carriage stopped and the driver spoke to the policeman: 'Have you seen a woman dressed in white?'

'No, sir.'

The man gave the policeman a piece of paper. 'If you see her, stop her and take her to this address.'

'Why?' asked the policeman. 'What's she done?'

'She's escaped from my asylum!' the man replied, and he drove off.

Late the next evening, I arrived at Limmeridge House. Mr Fairlie and his nieces were already in bed. A servant gave me dinner and showed me to my room. The next morning I went down to breakfast at nine. The dining-room was long with windows overlooking the sea. A lady was standing by a window at the far end of the room, looking out. She was tall and had a beautiful figure. She turned and walked gracefully towards me. 'What will her face be like?' I asked myself as she got nearer. First I noticed that she was dark, then that she was young, and finally (to my great surprise) that she was rather ugly! She had a large, strong masculine jaw. Her expression was honest and intelligent, but it had none of the gentleness that is the greatest charm of a woman.

'Mr Hartright?' she asked, shaking my hand. 'I'm Marian Halcombe, one of your new students. I hope you won't be bored here. You'll have no men to talk to. Mr Fairlie never leaves his room. He's an invalid, or so he thinks. This morning I'll be your only company for breakfast since my sister Laura is in her room with a headache. Your life here will be very quiet. I hope you aren't the kind of person who's unhappy without adventures.'

'Oh, no,' I replied. 'I like a quiet life, and recently I had such an adventure that I don't want another one for years.' As we ate breakfast side by side like two old friends, I told Miss Halcombe about the woman in white. She listened with interest and looked surprised when I told her the part about Mrs Fairlie.

When I had finished, she said, 'Mrs Fairlie was my mother. She was married twice: once to my father, who was a poor man, and then to Mr Philip Fairlie, who was rich. My sister Laura is the daughter of her second marriage. My mother died, then Mr Fairlie died. His brother Frederick Fairlie is Laura's guardian. Laura and I are very different: she's blonde, and I'm dark; she's beautiful, and I'm ugly; she's rich, and I'm poor. But even so we love each other very much. When my mother came here, she started a school in the village. This woman in white was probably a student there. I wonder who she was?'

After breakfast, I went to see Mr Frederick Fairlie in his room. He was a weak, lazy hypochondriac who considered himself a man of artistic sensibility. I left his room with a feeling of relief and spent the morning looking forward to my meeting with Miss Laura Fairlie. That afternoon I went for a walk with Miss Halcombe. In the garden we met her sister, Miss Fairlie. She was a fair, delicate girl in a simple white dress. She looked at me with kind, honest and innocent, blue eyes. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and yet there seemed to be something missing - I did not know what.

'Laura,' said Miss Halcombe, 'you have your drawing book with you. You see, Mr Hartright, she's the perfect student: she can't wait to begin her studies.'

'No, I'm afraid to begin,' said Laura gently. 'I know my drawings aren't good, and I'm afraid to show them to you.'

'Well,' said Miss Halcombe, 'I'm sure that Mr Hartright will pay us compliments even if our drawings are horrible.'

'I hope he won't pay me any compliments,' said Miss Fairlie.

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because I'll believe everything you say to me,' she answered simply.

I, a humble drawing teacher with no money, fell in love with the rich and beautiful Miss Laura Fairlie as soon as I saw her. That evening, after dinner, Miss Fairlie went outside to walk in the garden. I started to follow her, but then Miss Halcombe called me, and I returned to the drawing-room. Miss Halcombe was holding a letter. Beyond her, through the window, I could see Miss Fairlie walking in the moonlight.

'After the story you told me this morning, I've been reading my mother's old letters,' said Miss Halcombe. 'She wrote this to her second husband, Mr Philip Fairlie, when he was in London on business. Listen: "There is a new student at the village school, a little girl called Anne Catherick. She has come to Limmeridge from Hampshire with her mother for a few weeks. Her mother is a respectable woman but there is something mysterious about her..."'

As Miss Halcombe read, I watched Miss Fairlie walking in the garden.

"I like little Anne a lot. I noticed that she was slow in her studies, so I asked the doctor to examine her. He says that she'll get better. Her clothes were old, so I gave her some of Laura's white dresses. I told her that blonde girls look nice in white. She kissed my hand and said, 'I'll always wear white! It'll help me to remember how kind you've been to me!' Poor little soul!'"

Miss Halcombe looked up from the letter. 'The woman in white must be Anne Catherick!' she said.

Just then, Miss Fairlie passed by the window again. Her white dress shone in the moonlight. My heart beat fast.

'Listen to the last sentences of the letter,' said Miss Halcombe. '"The other reason I like Anne is that she looks very much like Laura. She isn't as pretty, but her hair, eyes, and figure are exactly like Laura's."'

I stood up quickly, feeling the same sudden fear I had felt when that hand touched my arm at the lonely crossroads. There stood Miss Fairlie, alone outside in the moonlight, looking exactly like the woman in white! I suddenly realised that the 'something missing' was this: my realisation of the disturbing similarity between the fugitive from the asylum and my student at Limmeridge House.

CHAPTER TWO

The Aristocrat from Hampshire

2. Walter Hartrights narrative continued

The days and weeks at Limmeridge House passed so quickly! What a happy time that was! I spent every day in the company of two excellent ladies. Marian Halcombe became my good friend and Laura Fairlie was my secret love. The touch of her fingers or the sweet smell of her hair made my heart beat fast. A drawing teacher must spend his life in the company of beautiful women who can never be his. I had always known this, and I had never before felt anything more than a teacher's interest in my students. But with Laura it was different.

One day, when I had been at Limmeridge for three months, Miss Halcombe asked me to walk with her in the garden. 'I know your secret,' she said. 'You're in love with my sister. I don't blame you; I feel sorry for you, because your love is hopeless. I know you haven't told Laura that you love her. You've behaved honourably. Take my hand. What I'm about to say will hurt you, but it must be done.'

Her sudden kindness and sympathy was too much for me. My eyes filled with tears. 'You must leave Limmeridge at once,' she said. 'It's not because you're only a drawing teacher but because Laura's already engaged to be married. Her future husband is coming to stay next Monday. She's never loved him. He was chosen by her father just before he died. Until you came here, Laura was like hundreds of other women who marry without being attracted to their husbands. They learn to love them (if they don't learn to hate them!) after they're married. Tell Mr Fairlie that your sister's ill, and that you must return to London. Go before Sir Percival Glyde arrives.'

'Sir Percival Glyde?'

'Yes, Laura's future husband. He has a large property in Hampshire.'

'Hampshire!' I cried. 'Anne Catherick spoke to me of an aristocrat from Hampshire who'd caused her suffering. But it can't be the same man! I must be going mad! Ever since I saw the similarity between Miss Fairlie and the woman in white, I've connected them in my mind. The Lord knows, I don't want to do so! I don't want that sad woman to be connected in any way with Miss Fairlie. Will you please ask Sir Percival Glyde if he knows Anne Catherick?'

Miss Halcombe looked surprised. 'I've never heard anything bad about Sir Percival., she said. 'But yes! I'll ask our lawyer, Mr Gilmore, to ask Sir Percival about it.'

The next day, I returned to London. My narrative ends here, at the end of the happiest period in my life.

3. Vincent Gilmores narrative

I, Vincent Gilmore, am Laura Fairlie's lawyer. I arrived at Limmeridge House on the second of November. I had dinner with Miss Halcombe, Miss Fairlie, and Mr Hartright, their drawing teacher. They all seemed sad. The next morning, Mr Hartright left for London.

After lunch, Miss Halcombe told me about Mr Hartright's adventure on Hampstead Heath and her mother's letter describing Anne Catherick. She explained Mr Hartright's concern that Sir Percival Glyde might be the aristocrat the woman in white had talked about. She also showed me an anonymous letter that her sister had received that morning:

Dear Miss Fairlie,

I hear that you are going to marry Sir Percival Glyde. Do not do it! He is an evil man. Please believe me. Your mother was very kind to me, so you and your happiness are important to me.

I made a copy of the letter and sent it to Sir Percival's lawyer, asking for an explanation. On Monday, Sir Percival arrived at Limmeridge House. He is a charming man of about forty-five years old. He treated Miss Halcombe like an old friend, was polite and friendly to me, and treated Miss Fairlie with tenderness and respect. He was obviously concerned about her pale face and sad expression. Miss Fairlie seemed to be uncomfortable in his company and left us soon after dinner. Sir Percival then turned to Miss Halcombe and

said, 'My lawyer sent me the copy of that letter. I'm not surprised that it made you worry, but I can explain everything.'

His manner was open and honest. He told us that Mrs Catherick, Anne's mother, had been a servant in his family for many years before leaving to get married. Years later, Sir Percival heard that her husband had abandoned her and her daughter was mentally disturbed. He wanted to do something to help the poor woman. Mrs Catherick told him that she wanted to put Anne in a private asylum, but she did not have enough money. Sir Percival offered to pay. Years later, when Anne discovered this, she considered him responsible and developed a passionate hatred for him.

This explanation seemed satisfactory to me, but Miss Halcombe still looked concerned.

'Please, Miss Halcombe,' said Sir Percival, 'write to Mrs Catherick and ask her to confirm my explanation.'

Miss Halcombe wrote a brief letter, Sir Percival wrote the address on the envelope, and a servant posted it.

Two days later, Miss Halcombe received a reply:

Madam,

My daughter was put into a private asylum with my knowledge and approval. Sir Percival Glyde very kindly paid for the asylum, and I thank him for that.

Yours truly,

Jane Catherick (Anne's mother)

On my last day at Limmeridge House, I talked to Miss Fairlie, explaining the details of her father's will. 'Next March, on your twenty-first birthday, you'll inherit thirty thousand pounds. If you die before your aunt Eleanor - Madame Fosco - she'll inherit ten thousand pounds of that money. You must now write a will saying who you wish to leave the other twenty thousand pounds to when you die.'

'Can I leave it to Marian?' asked Miss Fairlie.

'All of it? Is there no one else you wish to include in your will?'

'Yes, there is someone,' she said in a trembling voice, and she burst into tears.

'Don't cry, my dear,' I said. 'We'll discuss the details another time, when you're feeling better.'

I returned to London and wrote Laura Fairlie's marriage settlement. Her father had been my good friend, and his daughter was like a daughter to me. I wanted to make the best marriage settlement I could in order to protect her interests, if Laura Fairlie dies, I wrote, 'the twenty thousand pounds will be left according to her will.' That evening, I sent the settlement to Sir Percival's lawyer.

The next day, it was returned to me. In the margin, by my statement about the twenty thousand pounds, the lawyer had written, 'No - if Laura Fairlie dies, Sir Percival will inherit the twenty thousand pounds.

I knew that Sir Percival had many debts. This worried me, so I wrote to Mr Frederick Fairlie and explained the situation. I told him not to sign the settlement unless the part about the twenty thousand pounds remained as I had first written it. The next day I received his reply:

My dear Gilmore,

I am too ill to argue with Sir Percival. Please agree to whatever changes he wants to make in the marriage settlement.

Yours truly,

Frederick Fairlie

This letter made me very angry. The man was too lazy to look after the interests of his own niece! I went to Limmeridge the next day and told him that no one should sign a marriage settlement like this - it gave the husband a large financial interest in the death of his wife! But Mr Fairlie did not want to listen. He closed his eyes and asked me to leave him in peace.

CHAPTER THREE

Blackwater Park

4. Marian Halcombe's narrative (extracts from her diary)

Limmeridge House, Cumberland 8 November

The date of the wedding is the twenty-second of December of this year. The married couple will go to Italy for the winter months. When they return - with Sir Percival's friend Count Fosco and his wife (Laura's aunt Eleanor) - will go to live with them in Hampshire. Laura asked Sir Percival if I could, and he very kindly agreed. Sir Percival has noticed that Laura seems unhappy in his company. This morning he spoke to me, and this afternoon I told Laura what he had said: 'He was very generous. He said that if you want to break your engagement, you can.'

'I can never break my engagement,' said Laura. 'It was my father's dying wish that I marry Sir Percival. But I can tell him that I love someone else. Then, perhaps, he'll break the engagement himself.'

Suddenly she seemed the stronger sister: she would not change her mind. After dinner, Laura explained to Sir Percival that she loved someone else. She told him he was free to break the engagement.

'After what you've just said, I want to marry you more than ever,' said Sir Percival. 'You've been so honest that I value you even more than I did before.'

Laura's eyes filled with tears. 'If you insist on our marriage, I'll be your faithful wife,' she said, 'but I'll never love you!'

'I'll be satisfied with that,' he said gently, and left the room.

After he had gone, Laura gave me a book of drawings that Mr Hartright had given her. 'Marian, you must keep it now,' she said. 'If I die, please tell Walter that I loved him!' Then she put her head on my shoulder and burst into tears.

Sir Percival is a good-looking, charming and friendly man. His actions towards Anne Catherick and her mother have been generous. I cannot even blame him for not breaking his engagement this evening. Sir Percival is certainly an admirable man - and yet,

in three words, I hate him!

28 November

Our dear friend Walter has gone to Central America. He wrote to me, asking me to use my contacts to find him a job in a distant country. I knew of a scientific expedition to Honduras.

They needed someone to draw the plants and animals they found there. I recommended Walter, and now he has gone.

22 December

They are married! My dear sister has gone! I am crying so much I cannot write anymore.

[Six months later]

Blackwater Park, Hampshire

15 June 1850

Six lonely months have passed, and I am with dear Laura once more, but we now live at Blackwater Park, Sir Percival's house in Hampshire. It is a big old house, surrounded by trees. I find it dark and depressing. I arrived here a few days ago. Sir Percival, Laura, Count Fosco, and Madame Fosco arrived yesterday.

Laura has changed in the last six months. I noticed it in her letters, and now I see it in her face. That honest, open look has gone. There are things now that she will not discuss with me - her husband, her married life - but before we kept no secrets from each other.

Sir Percival has changed too. At Limmeridge, he was always friendly, but when he saw me yesterday he was cold. His manner, towards Laura has changed: he does not look at her with tender interest anymore.

Madame Fosco is different from the Eleanor Fairlie I once knew. Eleanor Fairlie was an irritating woman who talked too much and wore expensive clothes. Now she dresses very simply and sits silently, rolling cigarettes for her husband.

And her husband? What can I say of Count Fosco? He has certainly tamed his wife, and he looks like a man who could tame a tiger. He interests and attracts me; he forces me to like him. He is enormously fat, and his face looks like Napoleon's. He has intelligent grey eyes; when I look into them, I feel things that I do not want to feel. He speaks English fluently with no accent. He tells me that he left Italy a long time ago, for political reasons.

The Count has been Sir Percival's friend for years. They first met in Rome. Percival was attacked by thieves, and Count Fosco saved his life. The Count's influence over Percival is much stronger than Laura's. I have never before met a man like Count Fosco. I am very glad he is not my enemy, but is this because I like him or because I am afraid of him?

16 June

This morning Sir Percival's lawyer came to see him. As I was walking to my room, I heard them talking.

'Don't worry,' said the lawyer. 'If your wife signs the document, everything will be all right. If not - '

'Of course she'll sign the document,' said Sir Percival angrily.

I went to Laura's room and told her what I had heard. 'I know that Percival has debts,' she said, 'but I won't sign anythin without reading it first.'

After lunch, Sir Percival said, 'Will you sign this, Laura? It's just a formality. Miss Halcombe and Count Fosco, will you be our witnesses?'

He folded the document and placed it on the desk with his hand resting on the

folded part. The only part of the document that was visible was the line for her signature and the lines for the signatures of the two witnesses. 'Sign your name here,' he said.

'What is the document about?' asked Laura.

'I've no time to explain,' said Sir Percival. 'A carriage is waiting for me outside. I have to go away on urgent business. Come on. Sign it.'

'I can't sign it unless I've read it. Mr Gilmore always asked me to read documents before I signed them.'

'Gilmore was your servant, I'm your husband. Don't you trust me?' cried Sir Percival angrily.

'It's not fair to say I don't trust you,' said Laura. 'Ask Marian if she thinks I should read the document first.'

'It's none of Miss Halcombe's business!' said Sir Percival.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'but, as a witness to the signature, it is my business. Laura's objection seems to be fair to me. I can't be a witness unless Laura understands what she's signing.'

'What disrespect!' cried Sir Percival. 'You're just a guest in this house!'

I wanted to hit him, but I was only a woman, and I loved his wife so dearly!

'Percival!' said the Count. 'Remember you are in the company of ladies!' They looked at each other, and Sir Percival was the first to look away. Those cool grey eyes had tamed him.

'I don't want to offend anybody,' he said. 'Just sign the document, will you?'

'I'll happily sign when I know what's in it,' said Laura. 'I'll make any sacrifice, so long as it's honest. I simply think it's wrong to sign a document I haven't read.'

'Who said anything about sacrifice?' cried Sir Percival, furious again. 'And it's strange to hear you talk of right and wrong; a woman who had a passion for her drawing teacher!'

Laura looked at him coldly then turned her back on him. When I left my chair to go to her, I heard the Count whisper to Sir Percival, 'You idiot!'

Laura walked towards the door, and I followed her.

'One moment!' said the Count.

Laura continued walking, but I whispered to her, 'Stop! Don't make an enemy of the Count!' We stopped and waited.

'Percival,' said the Count. 'Can it be signed tomorrow?'

'Yes, I suppose it can.'

'Then let's wait until tomorrow.'

'All right,' said Sir Percival. He left the room, went straight to his carriage, and drove away.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Note by the Lake

5. Marian Halcombes narrative continued

Later on that afternoon, I went for a walk with Laura.

'I can tell you everything now, Marian,' she said. 'After what Percival said to me this morning, I don't feel any obligation to him. At first, just after we were married, I tried not to think of Walter. I tried to be a good wife, but Percival was so cruel! One day in Rome, a lady called Mrs Markland came to visit us. She started talking about drawing. I tried to change the subject, but she went on. She said that her favourite drawing teacher was Mr Hartright. I looked away from her and saw my husband looking at me closely. I suppose my face gave away my secret. Later, when we were alone, he told me he had only married me for my money. After that, I thought about Walter often, especially on the nights when Percival left me alone and went to parties with the people from the opera house.'

I remembered my conversation with Walter that day in the garden with horror. I had placed myself between those two young lovers! It was all my fault! Now Walter is thousands of miles away in a foreign country. His heart is broken, and so is Laura's! I did this, and I did it for Sir Percival Glyde!

18 June

Sir Percival returned yesterday just before lunch. The Count took him for a walk in the garden. Later, the Count came to me and said, 'Miss Halcombe, Sir Percival has changed his mind. He won't ask Lady Glyde to sign anything today.'

I told Laura the good news, then she went for a walk alone by the lake, and I went to my room. An hour later, she came to my room looking agitated.

'Marian!' she said. 'I just met Anne Catherick by the lake! She looked ill and talked to me strangely. Marian, she looks like a paler, thinner version of myself! She says that she's dying. She spoke of how kind Mother had been to her and said that she wanted to die and be buried beside Mother. Then she spoke of Percival. How she hates him! She said that her mother had told her a secret - Percival's secret - and when he discovered that Anne knew it, he put her in the asylum.-'

Then she suddenly stopped speaking and listened.

'Did you hear anything?' she asked me. I'd heard nothing. Then she said, 'Someone is nearby. It's not safe to talk. Meet me here again tomorrow at the same time,' and she ran away.

After lunch today, Laura went down to the lake alone again. She waited in the same place. After some time, she noticed that someone had written the word 'Look' on the ground with a stick. She dug in the earth under the word and found a piece of paper. On it, Anne Catherick had written this:

I was seen with you yesterday by a fat old man. When I ran away, he followed me, but I ran faster than he could. I am afraid to come back this afternoon, so I am leaving you this note at six in the morning. When we speak of your husband's secret, we must be in a safe place, where no one can hear us.

A. C.

As Laura was reading Anne's note, she heard footsteps behind her. There was Sir Percival, looking furious. 'What did Anne Catherick tell you?' he cried. 'It's no use lying to me. I know you spoke to her yesterday.' Laura told him everything, but he did not believe her. He was certain that she knew the secret. He held her arm so tightly that he left dark bruises on her white skin. She showed then to me later, and that made me want to kill him.

He took her back to the house and shut her in her room. 'You'll stay there until you tell the truth!' he cried. When I went to see her, I found the room was locked. Laura told me

what had happened through the door. I went to the drawing-room. There Sir Percival, the Count and Madame Fosco were speaking quietly. I walked up to Percival and said, 'You can't keep your wife as a prisoner in her own house! There are laws in England to protect women from cruelty and injustice!'

'I'll lock you up too, if you threaten me,' he replied.

I felt the Count's cool grey eyes on my face. Then he turned from me and nodded to his wife. She came to my side and said, 'Sir Percival, I must leave. I can't stay in a house where women are treated like this.'

Sir Percival looked shocked. The Count took his wife's arm and said, 'She is simply wonderful! I'm at your service, Eleanor. And at Miss Halcombe's service too.'

'Damn it! What do you mean?' cried Sir Percival.

'I mean I agree with my wife.'

'All right! Do what you want!' said Sir Percival, and he left the room.

'We've won,' said the Count. 'Lady Glyde will be released from her room.' Then, turning to me, he added, 'Let me express my sincere admiration for your courage.'

I went to Laura's room and found the door unlocked. 'Laura, dear,' I said. 'The Count persuaded Percival to unlock your door.'

'Don't speak of the Count!' cried Laura. 'The Count is a spy!'

Just then there was a knock at the door. I opened it and found Madame Fosco there, holding my handkerchief. 'You dropped this downstairs,' she said. Her face was pale, her hand was trembling, and her eyes looked at Laura with hatred. I realised that she was listening at the door a moment ago.

When she was gone, I said, 'Oh, Laura! You shouldn't have called the Count a spy!'

When I left Laura's room and went downstairs, I saw Madame Fosco alone in the drawing-room. She had never liked Laura. Laura's father (her brother) had been angry with her for marrying an Italian. She had no money of her own and had to rely on her brother's generosity, but he wasn't generous. And then, instead of leaving ten thousand pounds to his sister directly, he left the money to Laura. Madame Fosco would only inherit the money if Laura died before she did. However, since Madame Fosco was forty-three and Laura was twenty-one, that was unlikely. Because of this, Madame Fosco had always disliked Laura. Now she had a new reason to dislike her.

'Countess,' I began. 'I'm afraid that when you so kindly brought my handkerchief to me you probably heard Laura say something very offensive. I hope you didn't tell the Count.'

'There are no secrets between my husband and me,' she said. 'He saw that I was upset, and I told him why.'

'I hope that you and the Count will understand that Laura wasn't herself when she spoke those words. I hope you can both forgive her.'

'Certainly!' said the Count's voice behind me. 'I've already forgiven Lady Glyde.'

'You're very kind,' I replied.

'Let's forget about it,' he said, then he took my hand and put it to his lips. I tried to hide my disgust behind a false smile.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Death

6. Marian Halcombe's Narrative continued

20 June

Laura and I have no father or brother to protect us. Our dearest friend Walter is in Central America, where no letter can reach him. Mr Gilmore is ill and is staying with relatives in Germany. Our uncle Frederick Fairlie is a lazy hypochondriac, but he is also our only hope. This afternoon, I wrote him a letter, asking if we could return to Limmeridge House.

After dinner, Percival said to the Count, 'I want to talk to you in private. '

The Count replied, 'Later, when the ladies are asleep.' I said that I had a headache and went up to my room earlier than usual. I thought to myself, I must hear their conversation.

I took off my dress and put on a simple cloak. I climbed out of the window and moved along a narrow ledge to the library roof, where I sat down. There I could hear the voices of Sir Percival and the Count through the open windows.

'Percival, we are now at a financial crisis,' said the Count. 'I owe hundreds of pounds; you owe thousands. We must find the money to pay those debts. Recently you've acted very foolishly. Can't you see that Miss Halcombe has more intelligence than most men? She is a noble creature, full of strength and courage, and she'll use it all to protect that foolish little wife of yours. Now, explain to me about your wife's money.'

Sir Percival said, 'It's very simple. While my wife lives, I get three thousand pounds a year, but that's not enough to pay my debts.'

'And if she dies?' asked the Count.

'If she dies without children, I'll get twenty thousand pounds.'

'Ah!' said the Count. 'The rain has come at last.'

He was right. Up on the roof, I was getting wet, but I had to hear their conversation to the end.

'Do you love your wife, Percival?' asked the Count.

'What a question!'

'If she dies, you get twenty thousand pounds.'

'Yes, and your wife gets ten thousand pounds!' cried Sir Percival. 'Don't forget that. Anyway, the money isn't my only problem. I have a secret.'

'Don't tell me the secret; just tell me who knows it.'

'My wife knows it, and a drawing teacher called Walter Hartright knows it. I know that Hartright's left the country. He's in love with my wife, and she loves him too. Anyway, the important thing is that they know the secret. Anne Catherick knows it, and she hates me. I'm sure she told them. I've tried to find her, but I can't.'

'What does she look like?' asked the Count. 'I saw a woman by the lake, but I only saw her from behind.'

'She looks like my wife. She's not as pretty, and she's very ill, but still she looks very similar.'

'Really?' said the Count in surprise. He then smiled to himself and laughed. 'Don't worry, Percival. You'll pay your debts, and you'll find Anne Catherick, I promise. Good night!'

Up on the roof, I was cold and wet. I moved slowly along the ledge to my bedroom window and climbed back in. I changed into dry clothes, lit a candle, and wrote down the conversation. But now I am ill! I have a fever! I cannot get ill now, when Laura needs me

more than ever!

[Note: Here the diary becomes impossible to read. On the next page, another entry appears, but it is in a man's handwriting.]

Postscript by a Sincere Friend

The illness of the excellent Miss Halcombe has given me the opportunity to read this interesting diary. There are hundreds of pages here, and I have read them all with pleasure. I admire Marian greatly; her intellect, graceful style and courage. The description of my own character is brilliant. I'm sorry that our interests are opposed. And even though they are opposed, and even though I will be victorious, I want Miss Halcombe to know how much I admire her diary and that nothing in it contributed to my victory and her failure.

FOSCO.

7. Eliza Michelson's narrative

I am the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, and I took care of Miss Halcombe when she was ill. During that time, Lady Glyde was so worried about her sister that she herself became ill and stayed in her room.

One day, Sir Percival called me into his study and said, 'I plan to leave Blackwater Park. As soon as Miss Halcombe and my wife are well enough, they'll go to stay with their uncle in Cumberland. Count Fosco and the Countess will soon go to their new house in London, and I'll go to Paris. Send away all the servants tomorrow. You'll stay to manage the house while I'm away.'

The Count spent his days by the lake (I have no idea why). The next day, when the Count returned from the lake, I heard Sir Percival ask him, 'Did you find her?' The Count did not reply but he smiled. The next day was my day off. When I returned, Sir Percival told me that Count Fosco and the Countess had left for London. I then went to Lady Glyde's room to see how she was. She was still weak and depressed, and she asked me to take her to her sister's room. As we walked along the corridor, Sir Percival came up the stairs and said, 'She's not there. She went to London with Count Fosco and the Countess. Then she'll go to your Uncle in Cumberland.'

'That's impossible!' cried Lady Glyde. 'She didn't tell me she was going or say goodbye! I must go to her immediately!'

'You must wait till tomorrow,' said Sir Percival. 'I'll write to Fosco. He'll meet you at the station and take you to his house.'

Lady Glyde began to shake. 'I don't want to sleep in London,' she said.

'You must. The journey from here to Cumberland is too long to do in one day.'

Lady Glyde was ready to leave the next morning. I took her to the station. When we got there, she suddenly seemed frightened. 'I don't want to go alone!' she said. 'You've been very kind to my sister and me. Thank you!'

She looked so lonely as she said those words that my eyes filled with tears. 'Goodbye, my lady!' I called, as the train moved off.

When I returned to Blackwater Park, Sir Percival said to me, 'Go and see if Miss Halcombe is all right. She's in the guest room on the second floor.'

'Miss Halcombe?' I cried.

'Yes,' said Sir Percival. 'I had to lie to Lady Glyde. You heard the doctor say that she needed fresh air. The only way to make her go to Cumberland was to tell her that her sister had already gone. It was done with the best of intentions.'

'Sir Percival,' I said firmly. 'I can't work here anymore. I'll stay until Miss Halcombe is well enough to leave, but then I must go.'

That night Sir Percival left Blackwater Park. I never saw him again, and I hope I never will.

8. The cook's narrative

I am the cook at Count Fosco's house in London. When the Count and Countess arrived from the countryside, they brought a guest with them: the Countess's niece, Lady Glyde. She was a pretty blonde lady with blue eyes, but she looked very weak. The day she arrived, she became very ill. Dr Goodricke examined her and said, 'This is a serious case of heart disease. Lady Glyde won't live much longer.'

The next day she died. Dr Goodricke registered the death, and my mistress made all the arrangements for the funeral. The dead lady's husband was out of the country, so my mistress arranged for the lady to be buried in her home town in Cumberland in the same grave as her mother.

In conclusion, I'll answer two questions that Mr Hartright asked me.

1.) I never saw Count Fosco give Lady Glyde any medicine.

2.) He was never alone in the room with her.

9. The doctors narrative

I certify that Lady Glyde, aged twenty-one, died on 25 July 1850 at 5 Forest Road, London. The cause of death was heart disease.

(Signed) Dr Alfred Goodricke

10. The gravestones narrative

Here lies Laura, Lady Glyde, wife of Sir Percival Glyde, born 27 March 1829; married 22 December 1849; died 25 July 1850.

CHAPTER SIX

Sir Percival's Secret

11. Walter Hartright's narrative

On 13 October 1850, I returned to England. I still loved Laura, but I knew I had to live without her. First I went to my mother's house. When she met me she told me - very gently - that my love was dead.

In the deepest misery, I went to Limmeridge to see her grave. The countryside and the sea reminded me of the happy months we had spent together. I went to Mrs Fairlie's grave. There was a new inscription written on it: 'Here lies Laura, Lady Glyde...' In the near distance I saw two women with veils over their faces. When they saw me, one lifted up her veil. It was Miss Halcombe, her face sadly changed by suffering and sadness. The other woman walked towards me. I looked at her closely. She stopped in front of me and lifted up her veil. Standing before me - beside her own grave - was Laura, Lady Glyde!

***

I cannot describe my feelings of shock and joy at that moment. Miss Halcombe

said, 'Walter, we must all go to London immediately! We're probably being followed!'

On the train Miss Halcombe told me everything that had happened since she last wrote to me.

'When I woke up from my illness,' she said, 'I found myself in a strange room. Mrs Michelson told me that Laura had gone to London, where she'd become ill and died! This terrible news made me ill again, and I was unable to leave that house for another three weeks. Then I went to London to see Mr Gilmore's partner, Mr Kyrle. I told him I was suspicious about the circumstances of Laura's death. Mr Kyrle investigated and told me that he saw nothing suspicious. I then went to Limmeridge and saw my uncle. He told me that Count Fosco had accompanied the body from London and had gone to the funeral (which my uncle himself had been too ill to go to). The Count had left a letter for my uncle, telling him that Anne Catherick was back in the asylum, but she now believed that she was Lady Glyde! I left Limmeridge and went to the asylum. I explained who I was and asked to see Anne. Imagine my feelings, Walter, when I saw my dear sister there in the asylum, and that everyone believed she was Anne Catherick! I gave the nurse one hundred pounds to help Laura escape. We came to Limmeridge and explained everything to my uncle, but he said that I was a fool. He doesn't recognise his own niece! He's sure that she's Anne Catherick!'

Laura had certainly changed. Her face was pale and thin, and her long suffering in the asylum had affected her mind, so that her expression was vague and her memory confused. Now the similarity between Laura and Anne Catherick was stronger than ever. Because of our great love for her, Miss Halcombe and I had recognised her immediately, but the Count's letter had influenced Mr Fairlie, and even the servants at Limmeridge House had not recognised her.

***

I found two apartments in the same house in London. I took one, using a false name, and Marian and Laura lived in the other under the same name; I said they were my sisters. I spent my days drawing and selling my work at nearby shops. Marian cooked and cleaned for us. My one hope now was to prove Laura's identity, but Mr Kyrle, having heard the whole story, said that it would be impossible. When I left his office, he gave me a letter to give to Marian. In the street, I noticed two men following me. I got in a cab and escaped from them.

At home, I gave the letter to Marian. It was from Count Fosco.

This was the letter:

I write, magnificent Marian, to console you. Fear nothing! No one will follow you or your lovely companion if you leave us in peace. If Mr Hartright returns to England, do not contact him. Be happy, dear lady, with what you have.

F

The only signature was an 'F' at the bottom of the page.

'Marian,' I said. 'We must bring them to justice! We must give Laura back her true identity! Mr Kyrle says we can't prove that she is Lady Glyde, so we must force one of them to confess it. The Count has no weak point that we know of, but Sir Percival does.'

'The secret!' cried Marian. 'But we don't know it.' 'Anne's mother, Mrs Catherick, knows it,' I said, 'and I'll find out what it is. Then I can use the secret to force Sir Percival to tell the truth about Laura.'

The next day I went to Mrs Catherick's house in the village by Blackwater Park.

Mrs Catherick was a hard-looking woman dressed in black. 'Say what you've come to say and then leave,' she said in a cold, aggressive voice.

'I've come to tell you that your daughter is dead.' 'How do you know?' she asked indifferently.

'I can't tell you, but it's true,' I said. 'Sir Percival Glyde was involved in your daughter's death and has committed a crime against someone I love. I know that he's your enemy as well as mine. I know that you know his secret. Tell me his secret, and we'll both get our revenge! He has used you - he, a rich man from an aristocratic family -'

'Oh, yes,' she cried sarcastically. 'A very aristocratic family! Especially on his mother's side!' She stopped speaking suddenly, as if she had said something she did not mean to say.

***

So! Sir Percival's secret was something to do with his mother! Mrs Catherick said no more. When I left her house, I saw two men following me, but I did not care. I went to the village church and spoke to the parish clerk.

'Please can I see the register of marriages in this church for the years just before 1804?' I asked.

Chapter six

Sir Percival's Secret

I followed the parish clerk into the vestry, a small building attached to the church. The room was full of old papers. The parish clerk took a register from a shelf. 'Those registers are full of important documents,' I said. 'Surely they should be kept more safely?'

'That's just what the old parish clerk said,' the man replied. 'Not the one before me - his name was Catherick - but the one before him. He was so concerned about the registers that he kept copies of them locked up at his home, in case anything happened to the originals. Every day, he copied down the births, marriages and deaths recorded that day. Here's the register for 1804 and the one for 1803, sir.'

'Did you say that the parish clerk before you was called Catherick?' I asked in surprise.

'Yes, sir. Well, I'll leave you to look at the registers.'

I found the record of the marriage of Percival's father, Sir Felix Glyde, to Cecilia Elster in September 1803. It was written in a very small space at the bottom of the page. The entry above - recording the marriage of a man called Walter - took much more space. The entry on the next page also took a lot of space, recording a double marriage. I wondered why so little space had been given to the record of Sir Felix's marriage, but apart from that there was nothing unusual about it. I was disappointed. As the parish clerk put the register back on its shelf, I said, 'You spoke of old copies of the register. Is there a copy of the records of 1803?'

'I think so.'

'Can I see it?'

'Well, I suppose you can. The old parish clerk is dead now, but his son lives in the village. He probably still has the copies.'

I went to the house of the old parish clerk's son and asked if I could see his father's

copy of the register for 1803. He let me in and brought me the heavy book.

I found the record of the marriage of the man called Walter, but the space at the bottom of the page was empty! On the next page was the record of the double marriage. The copy had no record of Percival's father's marriage! I realised that the record in the original register must be a forgery, added in years afterwards. The truth was that Percival's father had never married Percival's mother. I knew I had to get the original. It was not safe in the vestry, and it was the only evidence of Sir Percival Glyde's secret: that he has no right to his title and his property!

As I ran back towards the church, I saw flames against the evening sky. The vestry was on fire! I heard the sound of a man crying for help. A crowd of people had gathered. 'Someone's inside!' I cried. 'Who is it?'

A man close to me said, 'It's my master, Sir Percival Glyde.'

For a long time I had felt nothing but hatred for Sir Percival, but I could not watch as he burnt to death in the vestry. I saw a window on the roof. Quickly I climbed onto the wall beside the vestry then onto the roof. Perhaps he could escape through the window! I broke the glass, but then the flames jumped out of the open space.

Just then, the fire engine arrived. Firemen broke down the door and went in. They came out carrying the dead body of Sir Percival Glyde.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mrs Catherick's

12. Walter Hartright's narrative continued

At the inquest the next day, the parish clerk said that the key to the vestry had gone missing just before the fire. Perhaps somebody had stolen it. Nobody could understand why Sir Percival had been in the vestry. The inquest concluded that Sir Percival's death was an accident. He had probably taken a candle with him into the vestry, because by then it was dark. The vestry was full of dry papers. Somehow they had caught fire, and Sir Percival could not get to the door.

I did not tell them what I knew. I had no proof now of the forgery in the register because the register was burnt. Feeling depressed, I returned to my hotel. There I found two letters for me. One was from Marian:

Dear Walter,

Please return to London. We have moved to a new house. Do not worry - we are safe - but come back quickly. Our new address is 5 Gower's Walk.

Your friend,

Marian

I put the other letter in my pocket and ran to the station to get the first train to

London. On the train, I opened the other letter. It was from Mrs Catherick.

13. Mrs Jane Cathericks narrative

Sir,

I have heard the news of a certain gentleman's death. I also heard that you were foolish enough to try to save him. Even so, your investigations were the cause of his death, and I thank you for that. To show you how thankful I am, I will tell you what you want to know: that gentleman's secret and mine. I will not sign this letter, and I will not name the gentleman in question - let's just call him Sir P...

Twenty-three years ago, Sir P admired me. I was married to a parish clerk who was a fool with no money. Before I married him, I had worked for Major Donthorne of Varneck Hall, and I had seen how rich ladies lived. I liked beautiful things, and Sir P gave me beautiful presents. What did he want in exchange for the presents? Only the key to the vestry. I gave it to him.

My daughter Anne was born three months later. My foolish husband found the presents hidden in my room. He told everyone in the village that Sir P had been my lover and that Anne was Sir P's child. Then he left me. He was wrong, of course. I had only known Sir P for four months.

I went to Sir P and asked him to tell the villagers that my husband was wrong. He laughed at me. He then told me what he had done to the register and he explained what the law does to people who commit that crime. 'By giving me the key to the vestry, you became my partner in the forgery,' he said. 'If the police find out, they'll put you in prison for years!'

Then he said, 'You've been very helpful to me, so now I'll help you. I'll send you money every month on two conditions: you must keep the secret and never tell anyone, in your own interest as well as mine; and you must never leave the village.'

He knew that none of the village women spoke to me because 6 they thought I had lost my virtue. He knew his secret was now safe, so he explained it all to me. His mother was already married when his father - Sir F - met her. She had married in Ireland but returned to her parents in Hampshire when her husband treated her badly. No one in Hampshire knew anything about her marriage, so when Sir F said that he had married her, no one suspected anything. Sir F told Sir P the truth when he was dying. As soon as Sir F was dead, Sir P claimed the title, Blackwater Park, and the land. No one suspected that he wasn't the legitimate heir. But then he got into debt, and in order to borrow money he had to show a birth certificate and a certificate of his parents' marriage. That is when he came to me.

How I hated him! He forced me to stay here in this village, where they all talked about me but no one spoke to me! Finally, now, after all these years, I have earned their respect. The vicar says hello to me! But back then, when Anne was a child, my life was very hard. Sir P sometimes let me go away for a short while. He let me go to Limmeridge for a few weeks once. Mrs Fairlie of Limmeridge House liked Anne. That made me laugh. Mrs Fairlie was a foolish ugly woman who had somehow managed to marry one of the most handsome men in England.

Another time I wrote to Sir P to ask if I could go away for a few weeks. His reply was very rude. As I read it I became so angry that I insulted him out loud in front of Anne - I said he was a miserable impostor. The next day he came to my house to say that he had changed his mind. Anne was in the room, and he told her to leave rather rudely. Anne turned to him and said, 'You're a miserable impostor.' She had no idea what it meant - she was just repeating my words - but Sir P was terrified. He was sure that she knew his secret,

so he put her in the asylum. I did not object: I have never loved my daughter.

14. Walter Hartrights narrative

When I got to our new house, Marian and Laura were waiting for me. Marian had told Laura that we had moved to a new house because it was in a nicer part of London. When Laura had gone to bed, I asked Marian, 'What's the real reason?'

'Count Fosco,' said Marian. 'Yesterday, I looked out of the window in our old house, and I saw the Count standing outside with the doctor from the asylum! Then they went away. Later the Count came back alone. When I saw him, I told Laura that I was going for a walk, and went out to him. He said he'd come for two reasons: first, to express his feelings for me (I refused to listen to them) and secondly, to repeat the warning in his letter. He told me that Percival was dead, and that you were investigating Percival's secret when he died. The Count had contacted the asylum doctor and said he knew where Anne Catherick was. But, when he and the doctor were outside the house, the Count changed his mind and sent the doctor away, saying that he'd been mistaken.'

'Why?'

'It's embarrassing, Walter, but I must tell you: he changed his mind because of me. The one weak point in that man's iron character is the admiration he feels for me. He said, "Tell Mr Hartright to stay away from me! If I must put your pretty sister back in the asylum to stop Mr Hartright from investigating me, I shall do so. But I prefer not to, because I don't want to cause you pain, Miss Halcombe." As soon as he left, I decided to take this new house.'

The next day we told Laura that her husband was dead and that her marriage, the greatest error of her life, was over.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Night at the Opera

15. Walter Hartrights narrative continued

We lived quietly in our new house. Laura was getting better. Now she looked like the Laura I first met at Limmeridge: her expression was lively once more, she smiled frequently, and she had lost that sad nervous look that made her so very like Anne Catherick. The only thing that had not improved was her memory of the period between her departure from Blackwater Park and her escape from the asylum. She remembered nothing of that painful time. Mr Kyrle told us that if she could not remember what had happened to her, we had no hope of proving her identity.

During that time, I thought often of Anne Catherick. Some parts of her mother's letter were of particular interest. I had certain suspicions, so I wrote a letter to Mrs Catherick's old employer, Major Donthorne of Varneck Hall. I asked him some questions about the time when Anne Catherick's mother had worked at his house. This is the reply I received:

Dear Mr Hartright,

In answer to your questions, I never met Sir Percival Glyde, and he certainly never came to Varneck Hall. Mr Philip Fairlie, however, was a frequent visitor here, and, yes, he was here in September 1826. I hope this helps your investigations.

Yours truly,

Major Donthorne

Anne was born in June 1827. She was very like Laura, and Laura was very like her father. The conclusion was obvious. I thought of those famous words from the Bible: 'The sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children.' The fatal similarity between two daughters of one father had caused all this suffering.

I thought also about Laura's meeting with Anne Catherick by the lake. Anne had said that she wanted to die and to be buried beside Mrs Fairlie. A little more than a year had passed since she had said that, and now her wish had come true. The mystery of the woman in white had finally been solved. I could now say goodbye to the ghostly figure who has haunted these pages as she haunted my life.

April came - the month of spring - and things were beginning to change between Laura and me. Throughout her long illness, I had been like a brother to her. Now that she was better, my heart began to beat fast again when she was near me, our hands began to shake when they met.

One day I spoke to Marian. 'You know that I've loved Laura since the day we met. I want to protect her and fight for her interests with all my strength. I want to marry her so that I'll have the right to protect her. What do you think?'

'I agree,' said Marian, kissing me on the forehead. "I'll go and speak to her now.' She ran out of the room, and I waited, trembling. After a few minutes, Laura ran into the room and threw her arms around my neck. 'My darling!' she whispered. 'Can we say that we love each other now?'

Ten days later, we were even happier: we were married.

At the beginning of May, I began watching the Count's house. One evening he got into a cab and told the driver to go to the opera house. I took a cab to my friend Pesca's house and asked him to come to the opera with me. I knew that Pesca had left Italy for political reasons. I also knew that the Count had left Italy many years ago. Perhaps Pesca knew the Count? Perhaps the Count really was a spy - a spy in a much more important sense than Laura had intended when she called him by that name.

At the opera, I asked Pesca, 'Do you recognise that fat man over there?'

I noticed that a man close to us was listening with interest to our conversation. He was a thin blond man with a scar on his cheek.

'No,' Pesca replied. 'I've never seen him before.'

Just then, the Count looked up and saw Pesca. The Count's face - which had been happy a few seconds before - was suddenly full of fear! He stood up and quickly left the theatre. We tried to follow him, but the corridors were crowded. I noticed that the man with the scar on his cheek ran through the crowd and followed Fosco out of the theatre.

We went to Pesca's apartment. 'My dear friend,' I said. 'I know you left Italy for political reasons. You told me long ago that you couldn't explain them to me, but this is an

emergency. Please help me if you can. You say you don't recognise that man, but he recognises you, and he's afraid of you. Can you explain why?'

Pesca got up and walked around the room nervously. After a few minutes of intense thought, he sat down again and said, 'What I'm going to tell you now is a secret, and I could be killed for telling it to you. When I was young, I joined a secret political association in Italy called the Brotherhood. The aim of the Brotherhood is to stop the abuse of power and to maintain the rights of the people. Members murder people who abuse their power. Anyone who joins the Brotherhood must stay in it for his lifetime. Anyone who betrays the Brotherhood will be killed by another member. When I was young, I had passionate political beliefs. Now I'm older, I want to leave the Brotherhood, but I can't. That's why I left Italy and came to live in England as a teacher. Here I'm of no use to the Brotherhood. Each member of the Brotherhood has a scar like this one on his arm.' Pesca rolled up his sleeve and showed me a small red scar. 'I was a leader before I left Italy. This man recognises me, but I don't recognise him. I haven't changed much over the years, but perhaps this man has. Perhaps he wasn't always so fat. Perhaps he had a beard or different coloured hair. One thing is clear: he looked afraid when he saw me, so he has probably betrayed the Brotherhood; he probably thinks I'm following him so that I can kill him. Listen, Walter, I don't want to have to kill this man. Please tell me nothing about him. If I discover that he has betrayed the Brotherhood, I'll have to act.'

CHAPTER NINE

Confronting Count Fosco

16. Walter Hartrights narrative continued

I was still thinking about what Pesca had told me when I walked back from his apartment that night. As I came closer to home, an idea started to form in my mind.

When I got home, I wrote this letter to Pesca:

The man you saw at the opera is a member of the Brotherhood and has betrayed the cause. I am sure of this. His name is Fosco and he lives at 5 Forest Road. Find him and look at his arm. The scar is there. By the time you read this, I will be dead. Please get revenge for my death.

As I was leaving our house, Marian touched my arm. 'Where are you going?'

'It's Fosco,' I said. 'He'll probably leave England tonight. I must act immediately.'

I got a cab and went to Forest Road. It was midnight. As I walked up to the Count's door, I noticed the blond man with the scar on his face from the opera. He looked at me and walked on down the road. I rang the doorbell. The servant showed me into the drawing-room where the Count was packing his bags. 'Sit down, Mr Hartright. I'm in a hurry.'

'I know,' I replied.

'What do you know?'

'I know you're leaving England, and I know why.'

The Count went quickly and quietly to the door and locked it. 'I don't believe you,' he said.

'Roll up the left sleeve of your shirt,' I said. 'And you'll see the reason.'

Count Fosco put his hand into the desk and took out a gun. 'Perhaps I should kill you,' he said.

'Read this first,' I replied, handing him the note from Pesca.

The Count read the note and immediately knew that I had won. 'What do you want?' he asked.

'I want a full confession, written and signed, of your conspiracy with Sir Percival Glyde against Laura Fairlie,' I said, 'and I want proof of your story so that everyone knows the truth at last.'

'I agree,' said the Count. 'Now I'll tell you what I want. When I've given you the confession and the proof you ask for, the Countess and I will leave this house without any interference from you.'

I agreed.

The Count began to write. He wrote quickly, with great intensity and pleasure. When he had finished, he cried, 'Done, Mr Hartright!' He gave me his confession and a letter from Sir Percival to him, dated 26 July 1850. The letter said, 'Lady Glyde will arrive in London this evening. This was the proof I needed! The death certificate said that Lady Glyde had died on 25 July, and here was a letter from Sir Percival proving that she was still alive on 26 July!

At eight o'clock the messenger went to Pesca's house. He returned at eight-thirty with the unopened letter. The Count burnt the letter, and, half an hour later, he and the Countess were gone.

17. Count Fosco's narrative

My story begins with this simple fact: Percival and I needed money. Immense necessity! Universal want! We discovered this common problem when we met in Europe after Percival's marriage. We discussed it as we travelled to England. There, at Blackwater Park, I met the magnificent creature who is inscribed on my heart as 'Marian'. At sixty, I adored that woman with the volcanic passion of an eighteen-year-old. Marian herself has described our time at Blackwater Park with perfect accuracy. My narrative must therefore begin with Marian's terrible illness.

At that time, all my energy was directed at finding Anne Catherick. The fact that Anne had escaped from the asylum first gave me the idea for the conspiracy. I said to Percival, 'We'll simply exchange their identities: Lady Glyde and Anne will exchange names, places, and destinies. Anne is dying. When she dies as Lady Glyde, our money problems will be solved, and your secret will be safe! Anne spoke to your wife by the lake. One day she'll come back to the lake, but this time I'll be there!'

On my third day by the lake, I met Anne. I told her that Lady Glyde had sent me. I said that Lady Glyde had gone to London and wanted Anne to go there too to meet her. Anne believed me. I told her to meet me in the village the next day. Anne, my wife and I then drove to London.

We wrote to the servants at Forest Road to tell them that Lady Glyde was coming to visit. When we arrived, Anne was immediately suspicious. Her anxiety caused her to become very ill indeed, and the next day she died. This was a great shock to me. The plan depended on Anne staying alive until the real Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park.

I met Lady Glyde at the station with a carriage, but it was not my carriage: it was the carriage of the doctor from the asylum. He never for a moment doubted that she was

Anne Catherick. He did not listen to what she said. Why should he listen to a mad woman? I told him that Anne was even more confused than before; she now believed she was Lady Glyde. That, in short, was our great conspiracy. So simple! So brilliant! So interesting!

FOSCO.

18. Conclusion by Walter Hartright

Over the year of my investigation, I had asked the people involved to provide the narratives that have been presented here. We took the narratives and Sir Percival's letter to Mr Kyrle's office. After having read them all, Mr Kyrle said that Laura's identity was now proved. The next day, we went to Limmeridge House. Mr Kyrle confirmed to Mr Frederick Fairlie that Laura was in fact his niece and not Anne Catherick. The people who had been at the funeral were all invited to come and see that Laura, Lady Glyde, was in fact alive and well. I copied down the words on the gravestone before it was removed.

A few weeks later, I read in the newspaper that the Count had been murdered in Paris. The murderer had not been caught, but witnesses described him as a blond man with a scar on his cheek. The newspaper said that the murderer was believed to be a member of the Brotherhood. He had left a note on the Count's body with the single word 'Traditore' - the Italian word for traitor - written on it.

Sir Percival and the Count had spent all Laura's money, so we could not get it back, but the following year Mr Frederick Fairlie died, so Limmeridge House was Laura's. Marian, Laura, and I lived there happily. The following year our son was born, and he is now the heir of Limmeridge House.

- THE END -