***Woman in White***

***Part 2***

***Section 1***

***Chapter 10***

***Summary:***

* Marian is crazy stressed-out now and doesn't know what to do.
* She starts feeling really bad and then passes out.
* A new entry starts in her diary, written by Count Fosco.
* That's not good!
* Fosco explains that Marian has fallen ill and he's taken the liberty of reading her diary from cover to cover, finding it highly enjoyable. Whoa!

***Summary(Chapter 6-10)***

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

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

In the afternoon, Marian sneaks out to the village where she gives letters and instructions to Fanny to deliver the letters and then goes to Limmeridge and waits. When she returns to the house, Sir Percival tells Count Fosco that they need to talk but Fosco puts him off. Countess Fosco suggests to Marian that a walk would improve her color. Marian is so suspicious of the Foscos and Sir Percival that she locks her room every time she leaves. She speaks briefly to Laura, who tells her that Sir Percival demands to know the secret that Anne told her, by force if necessary. He does not believe Laura's assertion that she told him all she knows.

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

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

***Analysis (Chapter 6-10):***

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

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

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

Marian puts herself in danger on behalf of Laura by crawling out on the roof in the rain. Collins shows the depths of Marian's devotion to Laura through this act. The payoff is that Marian learns valuable information. She knows that time is running out for Sir Percival to pay his debts, and that he can get the money from Laura in life or by her death. The stakes are raised to the highest level in this scene and Marian learns the truth. Though the reader may be relieved that Marian gained this knowledge, the tension remains strong because Marian's knowledge does not change her position of powerlessness.

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

***Critical Study(Ch 1-10):***

Six months later, Halcombe is ensconced at Blackwater Park, Sir Percival's home. She is awaiting Laura's return from her honeymoon in Europe. Halcombe is taken around the residence by Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper, who describes the house in detail. The living areas are in good repair and furnished in the modern style. Certain very old sections of the building are in decent repair but are nevertheless unused. The residence is partially surrounded by a moat, and there is a lake on the grounds. Halcombe walks out to the lake and finds it inhabited by rats and frogs, offering "dreary impressions of solitude and decay." In a summer house (a gazebo), she discovers a dog that has been beaten nearly to death by the gamekeeper. She is told by the kind Mrs. Michelson that the dog belongs to [Anne Catherick](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/character-analysis/#Anne_Catherick)'s mother, who is staying nearby in the town of Welmingham. She tries to rescue the dog, but it dies within the hour.

Laura and Sir Percival return, and Halcombe finds her sister changed. Laura no longer seems to have her previous "freshness, a softness, an ever-varying and yet ever-remaining tenderness of beauty."

With Laura and Sir Percival are the Count and Countess Fosco. The Countess, Laura's estranged aunt, was once a wild young woman but is now nearly silent. Halcombe notices the woman "sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself." The Count, however, is almost the opposite. A hugely tall and fat man, he is attractive both in face and manner. He wears foppish clothing and carries with him a cockatoo, as well as canaries and a cage of white mice. These are all pets that he treats with great tenderness. Despite his idiosyncrasies, says Halcombe, "He looks like a man who could tame anything."

A few days later Mr. Merriman, Sir Percival's lawyer, arrives. After a long meeting, Merriman comments to Sir Percival, "it all rests with Lady Glyde." He later makes it clear that Laura is expected to sign several documents which must be witnessed. Later that day, on a walk around the grounds, [Count Fosco](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/character-analysis/#Count_Fosco) discovers the blood of Mrs. Catherick's dog on the floor of the summer house. Fosco and Sir Percival learn that Mrs. Catherick—and presumably Anne as well—are nearby.

Percival and Fosco attempt to get Laura to sign some legal papers sight unseen, and to get Halcombe to witness the signature. The women refuse unless Laura can read the documents. Sir Percival is furious, but Fosco pacifies him. After threatening Laura that she'd better sign the papers soon, Sir Percival leaves the house in a rush.

Halcombe decides to write to her lawyer. As Mr. Gilmore is ill, she writes to his associate, Mr. Kyrle. Mr. Kyrle responds almost immediately, warning that Laura should by no means sign any papers without reading them. He says, "a loan of some portion of ... Lady Glyde's fortune is in contemplation, and that she is made a party to the deed." Halcombe is convinced the Foscos have been reading her mail, and intercepts this letter before it can get to the house.

Meanwhile, Laura confesses her marriage is a sham. She says Sir Percival is cruel to her and that she intensely dislikes Fosco. Sir Percival has discovered [Walter Hartright](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/character-analysis/#Walter_Hartright) is the person Laura has fallen in love with—and has threatened his life. While walking in the park, Laura and Halcombe believe they are being followed, but aren't sure whether their stalker is a man or a woman. Laura loses her brooch somewhere near the lake.

That evening, to Halcombe's surprise, Count Fosco announces that Sir Percival no longer wants Laura to sign the papers. Later Halcombe dreams about Hartright. She sees him going through a series of terrible dangers but always saying "I shall come back." She is awakened by Laura, who has seen Anne Catherick at the lake. Anne found her brooch and returned it. After telling Laura she has suffered because of Sir Percival, Anne says, "If *you* know his secret ... he won't dare use you as he used me." Anne and Laura are interrupted before the secret can be revealed, but they plan to meet again tomorrow at the same time and place.

The following day, the Count and Sir Percival fire Laura's loyal maid, Fanny, and lock Laura in her room. Halcombe learns that Laura went to meet Anne and found a note from her, which Sir Percival read. In part, the note said, "When we speak next of your wicked husband's secret we must speak safely, or not at all." Sir Percival is now convinced that both Anne and Laura know his secret, although Laura actually knows nothing about it.

Seeing that Laura is now a virtual prisoner in her own home, Halcombe writes to Mr. Fairlie and to Mr. Kyrle. She entrusts the letters to Fanny, Laura's maid, who is about to head back to Limmeridge. Fanny is staying at an inn in a nearby town for the night.

Returning to her room, Halcombe can hear Sir Percival and Count Fosco talking below. As often happens, Fosco is urging Sir Percival to be patient and subtle in his plans, while Percival is hot headed and impetuous. Halcombe realizes that she can overhear their entire conversation if she climbs out her window and eavesdrops.

She does so, despite the fact that it is pouring rain. She hears that Fosco has followed her and knows of her correspondence and her meeting with Fanny. She also learns that Fosco admires her intensely: "Can you look at Miss Halcombe and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man?" The two men discuss their mutual debts and Laura's fortune. Fosco concludes by saying, "If your wife lives, you pay those bills with her signature ... If your wife dies, you pay them with her death." Sir Percival also reveals his anxiety about the possibility that his secret has been revealed. He tells Fosco about Anne Catherick, and mentions that Anne looks remarkably like Laura.

Returning to her room, Halcombe develops a high fever. In a postscript to her journal entries—which Fosco reads during her illness—he writes about his dastardly intentions. He then rashly declares, "Under happier circumstances how worthy I should have been of Miss Halcombe—how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of ME."

[Collins](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/author/) uses Halcombe to incorporate a variety of literary techniques that are common to both gothic novels and the Victorian "sensation" novel. Specifically, he

uses descriptive language to set a mood of foreboding and to evoke anxiety in the reader;

describes clandestine meetings and mentions a secret that, if known, will release the heroines from their peril;

separates the helpless heroines from their masculine saviors. Hartright is in Central America, while their lawyer is ill and unavailable and Laura's guardian is effectively useless;

includes a character of a madwoman roaming the grounds who is under threat and cannot or will not reveal what she knows;

places both heroines in immediate danger of their lives.

This technique makes it easy to set up "cliffhangers"—scenes that end before the reader knows the outcome. For example, Laura describes her encounter with Anne, during which Anne discloses that she knows Sir Percival's terrible secret. The reader knows that whoever has the secret will have power over the villainous Sir Percival. Before Anne can disclose the secret, though, she disappears. She says she will return to divulge her knowledge tomorrow, leaving the reader in anxious limbo about what the secret could be. Just as in modern soap operas, Collins sets the stage for suspense and then leaves the audience hanging.

The reason for Collins's use of suspense and cliffhangers is simple. *The* *Woman in White* was written for a journal, and was issued in serial form. To bring the reader back for the next installment of the story, Collins needed to set up a question to be answered the following week. With Laura and Halcombe being kept in virtual captivity at Blackwater Park, Collins has set up a "damsels in distress" situation. At the end of each section of the narrative, he leaves the reader wondering how Halcombe and Laura can possibly escape their impending doom.

In addition, however, Collins explores some unusual themes and characterizations. [Count Fosco](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/character-analysis/#Count_Fosco) is a unique creation. Although a brilliant, evil mastermind, he is also admiring of—and perhaps even in love with—Halcombe because of her intelligence and strength of character. Fosco, a subtle, educated, patient villain is juxtaposed with the hot-headed Sir Percival—and is presented as having great virtues as well as terrible flaws. Halcombe herself is an unusually strong female character. She uses every opportunity—ethical or unethical—to help herself and her sister and to solve the mystery presented by [Anne Catherick](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Woman-in-White/character-analysis/#Anne_Catherick).

***Critical Analysis (Ch6-10):***

The next day, Marian is careful to intercept the delivery of the reply from the lawyer before it gets to the house. The lawyer expresses worry that what Laura is being asked to sign is a document authorizing Sir Percival to borrow a portion of her 20,000 pounds, which is risky because if he fails to pay it back, it lessens the sum that will pass to her children someday. He suggests that in order to delay, she insist on having the document reviewed by her lawyer, which would be a reasonable step to take. As she dismisses the messenger, Fosco abruptly appears and offers to escort her back to the house. They arrive just as Sir Percival is returning, and he and Fosco have a private consultation. Afterwards, Fosco announces to Marian that the idea of obtaining Laura's signature has been set aside for the time being.

Overwhelmed, Marian collapses and is subject to a series of feverish dreams about Walter. She begs him to return, and he promises that he will, and that he will emerge unthreatened from various dangers. Marian awakens when Laura comes in to tell her that she has just encountered [Anne Catherick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-woman-in-white/study-guide/character-list#anne-catherick). Laura had gone back to the boathouse searching for a brooch she had dropped the night before. While there, she was greeted by a young woman dressed in white, who returns her brooch. The woman mentions having known Laura's mother and identifies herself as Anne Catherick. She knows of Laura's marriage and explains that she had been lurking in the woods the night before, trying to find an opportunity to speak with her. Anne expresses her regret that she was unable to prevent Laura's marriage, explaining that she had previously been afraid of Percival. Now, she knows that she is dying so she is no longer afraid of him, and suggests that she is considering revealing his secret to Laura. Anne seems to think that if Laura knows her husband's secret, she will have more power in the marriage.

Anne explains that her mother has long known Sir Percival's secret, and shared it with her. Percival found out that Anne knew his secret, and she implies that she suffered as a result. Laura tries to get Anne to tell her the secret, but she becomes afraid that they are being watched and flees, asking Laura to return alone the following day. Laura went straight back to the house without seeing anyone else. Marian tells Laura to keep her meeting with Anne the next day; she will secretly hide to witness their conversation. She also tells Laura that she believes that there is in fact some secret that Sir Percival is desperate to hide.

The next day, Laura goes out to the boat house, and Marian follows a short time later. Marian, however, is surprised to find no one at the boathouse, just two pairs of footprints indicating the presence of both a man and a woman. Anxious, she hurries back to the house where she learns from the house keeper that Laura returned upset and accompanied by Sir Percival, who fired her maid. Marian goes to Laura's room to hear what happened but a servant prevents her from entering the room, saying she has been forbidden by Sir Percival to let her in. Angrily, she goes and confronts him. Surprisingly, [Eleanor Fosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-woman-in-white/study-guide/character-list#eleanor-fosco) also takes her side, and backed by [Count Fosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-woman-in-white/study-guide/character-list#count-fosco), she is allowed to go in and see Laura.

Laura explains that when she arrived at the boathouse, no one was waiting for her. She eventually noticed that there was a letter hidden for her from Anne. The letter told her that Anne had been sighted by a tall, fat man who tried to chase. She was able to avoid him, but did not dare to come back to meet her a second time. Laura and Marian realize that Anne's suspicions were right and that Laura and Anne were watched by Count Fosco, who then reported back to Sir Percival. Laura had barely finished reading the letter at the boathouse when Percival appeared. He knew about her meeting with Anne, and he had also already read the letter, which he takes away from her. Percival then demanded to know what Anne had told her, and Laura repeated the conversation but Percival insisted that she was hiding something. In order to try and force information out of Laura, he fires her maid and forbids her from seeing Marian.

Marian and Laura are now desperate and afraid. Marian writes to both the lawyer and to Mr. Fairlie, and has the maid [Fanny](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-woman-in-white/study-guide/character-list#fanny) convey the letters when she leaves the house, since they can trust no one else. Marian is increasingly anxious about the role of Count Fosco and Eleanor as spies and informants for Sir Percival. Knowing that Fosco and Percival are going to discuss their plans in the library, she sneaks out, crawls across the rooftop and hides where she will be able to eavesdrop on their conversation. She is shocked to hear Fosco inform Percival that she has written the lawyer again, especially since she took such care to safeguard the secrecy of the letters. Fosco also confirms that both he and Percival are in debt, and in need of money. Since they have not been able to secure Laura's signature for the loan, they have extended their credit for three months. Percival explains that he has no hope of getting money, but that if Laura were to die childless, he would inherit her twenty thousand pounds.

Fosco seems interested in this possibility, although Percival warns him not to pursue it, especially since Fosco also stands to gain by Eleanor receiving her inheritance in the case of Laura's death. Fosco also attempts to pry into what secret Anne Catherick might know about Percival, but does not get any information. Percival does explain that his position is dangerous, since he is convinced Anne has shared the secret with Laura. He is also worried because he knows that Laura is in love with Walter. Because of Walter's encounters with Anne, he assumes that Walter and Laura both have access to the secret, and have sufficient motive to use it against him so that they can be together. Percival knows he can control Mrs. Catherick, but is desperate to find Anne, which Fosco promises to help him do. Percival notes the strong physical resemblance between Anne and Laura. Fosco promises that he will come up with a scheme that will resolve both the problem of safeguarding the secret, and solving their money troubles.

When the conversation ends, Marian sneaks back to her room undetected. However, the time outside in the rain has chilled her, and she falls into a fever. The narrative ends with an entry inserted by Count Fosco, revealing that after she fell ill, he read her diary, and now plans to use the information found within it as part of his plan.

Marian's dream vision introduces a supernatural element, which is somewhat surprising considering that Marian has thus far been presented as a very rational and logical character. The dream aligns her with the dream vision described by Anne Catherick in her letter to Laura, suggesting that while Marian can participate in the kind of masculine investigations of truth that are linked to uncovering facts, she also has access to a more feminine, intuitive, and perhaps even psychic knowledge. Alongside the information which is conveyed in the dream, it makes it clear that psychologically Marian feels incapable of protecting Laura, and wishes she had a male figure to help her. Considering how empowered she often seems to be, this expression of vulnerability offers a balance, perhaps serving to remind Victorian readers that Marian is not completely violating the expectations of her gendered identity.

Indeed this entire final section of Marian's narrative reveals a tension between her strength and fierce devotion, and the fact that she is still vulnerable to the bodily weakness often associated with women. She falls ill twice, and the second time this illness is particularly disastrous since it leaves her incapacitated and allows Fosco to access and read her journal. As will later become clear, it is also Marian's illness that makes it possible for Fosco and Percival to enact their scheme. However, the illness comes after Marian performs a remarkable feat of climbing out of her window and crawling across the roof in order to be able to eavesdrop on the two men. Particularly for an upper-class woman who would be expected to be very controlled an modest in her physical activity, this is a daring and dangerous move. Marian explicitly comments on how she has to change her clothes in order to be able to do so, because the garments she would usually wear physically constrict her and make this kind of task impossible.

The eavesdropping scene is necessitated by the explicit introduction of some sort of secret which haunts Sir Percival. While Anne has up until this point seemed incredibly vulnerable due to her poverty, gender, and possible mental instability, it becomes clear in this section that she does have a kind of power. Sir Percival is actually afraid of her and what might happen if the secret got out, and while this endangers her, it also gives her a new agency. Now that Anne believes her death is imminent, she is also no longer afraid of being killed or returned to the asylum, so she poses a greater danger to Percival.

Percival's fear and the way in which he is at the mercy of female characters is also apparent when he learns that his wife has spoken with Anne, and becomes convinced that Laura must now also know his secret. On one hand, this false belief puts Laura in greater danger as he begins to isolate her, but it also makes her an actual threat rather than a passive object of abuse. With this sense of threat looming over him, as well as the ongoing financial troubles, Percival becomes more and more desperate.

The conversation between Fosco and Percival is thus extremely dark and foreboding, in that it raises the very real threat that they might conspire to kill Laura in order to access her fortune and ensure she never reveals the secret. In a reversal of previous approaches, Fosco seems more open to this possibility, while Percival cannot bring himself to condone outright murder. This contrast suggests the fundamental divide between the two: Fosco is more dangerous because his appearance is more deceptive, and he is the more truly ruthless of the two. Percival is also particularly troubled by what role Walter might play in all of this. His opinion of women is sufficiently low that he cannot really believe Laura capable of much harm on her own, but he worries about what could be achieved if she is assisted by a man.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Back in her room, [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) sits up the rest of the night frantically writing down everything that she heard. As the night wears on she begins to shiver, feel hot, and lose track of time. She soon realizes she is growing feverish and that she is going to be ill. The diary trails off into illegible scrawl and is taken up again with a “postscript by a sincere friend.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

Marian grows too ill to write and to coherently describe what is going on around her. The postscript has clearly been written by someone else who has accessed her diary. This is ominous, as Marian’s diary is private and she would not let anyone write in it or read it without permission.

***Summary Part 2:***

The postscript is written by [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) and congratulates [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) on the clarity and insightfulness of her diary—which he has read through. He laments that Marian is terribly ill and that he has tried to help the doctor who treats her, but that the doctor refuses his help: “miserable man!” He feels that Marian is so clever and impressive that, in different circumstances, they could have been lovers, but he regrets that her knowledge of his plans will not stop him from executing them.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Count Fosco has gained the upper hand over Marian and Laura, as he now knows everything that they do and all the plans they have made to escape. It is implied that Count Fosco tries to “help” the doctor in order to poison or sedate Marian, and the reader instinctively sides with the doctor, who seems to be protecting her (although this is later called into question, further complicating the issue of the Count’s character). Count Fosco respects Marian’s intellect, but it seems unlikely that he will let these feelings stand between him and his plan to secure Laura’s money. The Count is clearly very confident that he will not be caught, and his intrusion into Marian’s diary feels like a horrifying violation.