***Woman in White***

***Part 2***

***Section 1***

***Chapter 3***

***Summary:***

* Marian begins a career of eavesdropping.
* She overhears Mr. Merriman telling Sir Percival that Laura must sign her name to a document in the presence of witnesses.
* Marian goes to warn Laura, who promises not to sign anything just because Sir Percival wants her to.
* Marian grows increasingly suspicious of the Foscos and Sir Percival and starts suspecting that Sir Percival is having financial problems.
* Sir Percival grows increasingly belligerent and argumentative and even humiliates Laura at a meal when she disagrees with him during a debate on crime and criminals.
* What a dirtbag.
* Count Fosco launches into a pretentious monologue about how cutting-edge his theories are.
* The story about Mrs. Catherick's dog finally comes out and Sir Percival nearly loses it.
* Sir Percival says he's going out of town but needs to see Laura about a legal matter first.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

That evening, [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) continues her entry about [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde)’s unexpected meeting with his lawyer, [Mr. Merriman](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/mr-merriman). She went for a walk in the grounds that afternoon and, as she was crossing the hall to go back to her room, she overheard Mr. Merriman in the study talking to Sir Percival. Mr. Merriman said that the business was “up to Lady Glyde” and that she must sign the contract, with a witness, for the transaction to be complete.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Marian is curious about the business they are discussing. She wonders what type of transaction Laura may be made responsible for.

***Summary Part 2:***

Struck by the mention of her sister’s name in this context, [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) conceals herself outside the door to eavesdrop. She hears [Mr. Merriman](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/mr-merriman) tell [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) that, if [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) will not sign, then the creditors will accept bills for three months instead. Sir Percival angrily dismisses this possibility and hurries the lawyer out and to a waiting carriage.

***Analysis Part 2:***

This suggests that Sir Percival is in debt and that his creditors (the people he owes money to) are growing impatient as they wait for their loans to be repaid. They are willing to extend for three more months, but Sir Percival seems determined that another type of transaction will take place; one that involves Laura.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) decides to share what she has heard with [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) and rushes up to Laura’s room. Marian is not surprised to find that Laura knows about her husband’s debt and financial worries. She and Marian agree that the anonymous man who called at the house—which irritated [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) so much—is someone that Sir Percival owed money to. Marian tells Laura not to sign anything and promises to protect her as far as she can from becoming involved in these affairs.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Marian suspects that Sir Percival wishes her to sign a document making her responsible for paying some of his debts with the money from her inheritance. She does not want her sister’s money to be wasted like this, and urges her not to sign anything because it may involve her in something that is not her fault.

***Summary Part 4:***

They decide to spend the afternoon in the gardens and leave the house by the front door. They pass [Madame Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/madame-fosco), who is walking back and forth by the fountain, and [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), who bows and sings to them. Once they are out of earshot, [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) tells [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) of her certainty that Count Fosco knows about Sir Percival’s financial trouble.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Madame Fosco and Count Fosco seem to be guarding the outside of the house and make it difficult for Marian and Laura to meet and talk in secret.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) replies that she deeply dislikes [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) and begs [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) not to ask him about what she heard outside the library. Laura admits that she has no reason to dislike the Count because he is always kind to her, but his presence makes her uneasy and she sees that he has a deep, palpable sway over her husband, [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde).

***Analysis Part 5:***

Although Count Fosco is always kind to Laura, she senses that he has malicious motives for this and does not trust him. She feels that Count Fosco manipulates and controls her husband, just as he manipulates his trained mice.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) trust’s [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie)’s judgement. That evening she plays chess with [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) and, perceiving that he is letting her win, challenges him to play properly. He beats her immediately after this.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Marian suspects that Count Fosco is putting on an act and calls his bluff. He rises to this challenge and shows her that he is an extremely intelligent man and a formidable opponent.

***Summary Part 7:***

The following morning, [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) and [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) are preparing to go out for a walk when [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) joins them and announces that he wants [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), [Madame Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/madame-fosco), and Laura to join him in the library to transact some business. When they tell him about their plans for a walk, however—which Count Fosco and the Countess will join them in—Sir Percival seems relieved and accompanies them out, agreeing to take care of the business after lunch.

***Analysis Part 7:***

Sir Percival seems reluctant to carry out the business he proposes and is relieved to have an excuse to put it off. He is not as skilled as the Count at manipulating people.

***Summary Part 8:***

On the walk through the grounds towards the lake, [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) goes off by himself into the plantation, chopping down the grass in front of him with his stick. When they arrive at the boathouse by the lake, they stop to rest and Sir Percival joins them again; though he remains outside and strides restlessly about, while the others sit indoors.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Sir Percival’s restlessness and destructive tendencies reflect his inner turmoil and anxiety about his financial situation and the business he wants to take care of that day.

***Summary Part 9:***

[Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) complains about the ugly view of the lake—which he feels is a “blot on a gentleman’s property”—and says that his bailiff thinks the spot is cursed. [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) laughs at this. He says that, if a murder was committed here, then the water would not be deep enough to sink the body and the murderer would leave footprints through the marsh. Sir Percival complains sullenly that Count Fosco willfully misunderstands; he says the lake is perfect for a murder because it is gloomy. Count Fosco replies that a “fool” would choose this location for a murder but to a “wise man” it would be the last choice of setting for such a crime.

***Analysis Part 9:***

This conversation is very sinister and seems designed to intimidate Laura and Marian, as it suggests that Sir Percival and Count Fosco regularly plan ways in which they can cover up crimes. Sir Percival appears naïve because he only thinks about one aspect of a murder (the setting) while Count Fosco comes across as truly frightening because he seems to have a deep and detailed understanding of what is necessary to get away with killing someone, which possibly comes from real life experience.

***Summary Part 10:***

[Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) contradicts [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) and says that “wise” men do not commit murders because they know better. Count Fosco ridicules this, speaking to his white mice, which he has brought with him, and suggests that it is as easy to teach men not to murder as it is to teach mice not to gnaw the bars of their cage. Laura insists that there are no truly wise criminals, and the Count retorts that this is because wise criminals do not get caught.

***Analysis Part 10:***

Count Fosco suggests that it is natural and instinctive for men to murder each other because it is part of human nature. Again, Count Fosco comes across as very sinister as he seems to have a deep knowledge of an underworld of crime that escapes the attention or punishment of the law.

***Summary Part 11:***

[Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) sneers at [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie)’s suggestion and says that she may as well say that “crimes cause their own detection.” Laura says softly that she does think this, and when Sir Percival laughs at her, [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) defends Laura and agrees with her. Sir Percival strides away, annoyed by Marian’s interference. [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) asks his wife what she thinks, and she tells him that she “waits to be instructed.” Marian scoffs at this and reminds [Madame Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/madame-fosco) that she used to advocate the rights of women. The Countess ignores her and reverently asks the Count for his opinion.

***Analysis Part 11:***

Although he dismisses the idea, Sir Percival seems worried by the thought that criminals may accidentally reveal themselves because of a guilty conscience or a mistake made while committing a crime. He covers his worry up with a show of annoyance and leaves the conversation. Marian points out the contrast between Madame Fosco’s past and her present personality, but her transformation seems complete and she now looks down on women like Marian, whom she used to have so much in common with.

***Summary Part 12:***

[Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) says that epigrams such as “crime causes its own detection” and “murder will out” are simply phrases that are used to comfort people and to make up for the failings of the law and the police, which Count Fosco thinks are very inefficient systems of solving crime. Although the crimes which are solved are the ones which the public hear about, Count Fosco suggests that there are thousands of unsolved crimes which go undetected, and that the act of committing a crime is really a game of wits between the individual criminal and the police. When this individual is intelligent, the Count says, the police generally lose, and society never finds out about the criminal or his crimes.

***Analysis Part 12:***

Count Fosco does not have any faith in the legal or justice system. He believes that the police make a show of the crimes they do solve to distract the public from all the ones they do not, and to make the public feel safe. The Count believes that people are not really safe, as intelligent criminals do not get caught, and he hints that he himself is one of those intelligent criminals. It shows his confidence that he can even boast like this.

***Summary Part 13:***

[Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) saunters back to the shed and agrees with [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), laughing at [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) and [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie)’s naivety. Marian admits that there is probably some truth in Count Fosco’s opinions but thinks this is no reason for the two men to revel in this as though it is some sort of triumph. Count Fosco laughs good humoredly and says that Marian and Laura clearly understand virtue more than he does and may explain it to him. He, on the other hand, has spent time all over the world and knows that virtue is different depending on which country you are in. For example, in China ideas of virtue are very different to those in England.

***Analysis Part 13:***

Marian is not naïve and understands that the justice system does not always solve crimes. However, she is concerned that Count Fosco and Sir Percival feel this is a good thing, as it suggests that they want the law to be ineffectual and that they are immoral people. Count Fosco does not believe he is immoral, but that morality is relative and depends on the culture and society one belongs to.

***Summary Part 14:***

[Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) counters this by complaining that the Chinese government kills thousands of its own citizens, whereas as the English government does nothing of this sort. [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) is amused by this. He says that the English are the quickest to blame others for faults but the slowest to see problems in their own society. There is just as much crime in England as there is anywhere else. In Britain, he says, criminals prosper and are helped by society while “Mr. Honesty” ends his days in the workhouse. Philanthropists in Britain want to help criminals but will not help the poor and, Count Fosco says, women are visited by the minister when they marry wealthy men for their money, even though this transaction is reminiscent of the “vilest of all human bargains.”

***Analysis Part 14:***

Count Fosco believes that English society is hypocritical because it criticizes other cultures while denying its own flaws. This is also a veiled critique of British expansion and colonialism in the nineteenth century, which used criticisms of the morality of other cultures to justify invading new territories and imposing their own rule in foreign countries. Count Fosco claims that, under its veneer of propriety and moral righteousness, Britain is morally bankrupt and only cares about the appearance of respectability rather than the actual practice of moral behavior. For example, women are encouraged to marry for money in Britain because it is hard for them to earn their own wealth, and this is considered respectable even though he says it is essentially prostitution. Though these words are coming from a villainous character, they are a sharp criticism of many norms that Collins’s readers would hold to.

***Summary Part 15:***

[Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), therefore, thinks it is a lie that British society abhors and prevents crime. He says that he cannot bear to lie but must rip off the “mask” and show the “bare bones beneath.” With that, the Count excuses himself and gets up from the bench. He calls his white mice, which have been playing around them. Suddenly, he realizes that one of the mice is missing and becomes distraught. [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) and [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe)—who have been appalled by the Count’s cynical opinions about society—cannot help but laugh at the Count’s overblown reaction to losing a mouse. [Madame Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/madame-fosco) moves reproachfully out of the boathouse and the two young women follow.

***Analysis Part 15:***

Count Fosco uses a violent metaphor to suggest that he hates hypocrisy and feels he must expose it. This is contradicted by the Count’s emotional reaction to losing one of his mice, which Marian and Laura view as contrived and false. At the same time, it’s possible that he does have a genuine emotional connection to his mice—he does seem to like animals more than people, and he certainly treats people like animals to be “tamed.”

***Summary Part 16:***

[Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) locates the mouse under the seat. When he stands up, he is white and shaking, and he shouts for [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde), who has wandered off again along the shore. Sir Percival rushes back and sees that the Count has found a small patch of dried blood under the seat. [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) is frightened by this and glances at [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe), but Marian tells her that it is only the blood of the dog that was killed by the groundskeeper.

***Analysis Part 16:***

Again, it seems strange that Count Fosco, who has spoken so knowledgeably about crime and violence, should be so shaken by a small, unexplained patch of blood. This suggests contradictions within his character, or that the Count is playing the role of someone who abhors violence—or perhaps he is afraid that his beloved mice have been hurt.

***Summary Part 17:***

[Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) wants to know if [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) tried to save the dog and Marian tells her what happened. Meanwhile, [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) grows increasingly agitated and snaps at Marian to tell him whose dog it was. Marian, startled by Sir Percival’s tone and anxious about the connection to [Anne Catherick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/anne-catherick-the-woman), feels pressured to tell the truth and admits that it was [Mrs. Catherick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/mrs-catherick)’s dog and that the housekeeper told her that Mrs. Catherick had been to the house.

***Analysis Part 17:***

Sir Percival is losing his ability to maintain his civil façade and is aggressive towards Marian. He seems to be under enormous amounts of strain, which makes him act out, but the other characters do not know why. He does not have the Count’s self-control, and so is unable to keep up a pretense of civility.

***Summary Part 18:***

[Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) flies into a rage at this and aggressively questions [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe). He is called off by [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), who places a hand on his shoulder and coaxes Sir Percival out of his temper. Count Fosco smoothly suggests that the most sensible thing to do would, of course, be to question the housekeeper. Sir Percival works to gain his composure, apologizes to Marian, and, following the Count’s instruction, rushes back towards the house.

***Analysis Part 18:***

Sir Percival’s behavior is inexplicable to Laura and Marian, as they do not know why he is so upset that Mrs. Catherick, supposedly his old friend, has visited. Count Fosco easily manipulates Sir Percival and gives him the idea to question the housekeeper to get information. This again suggests that Count Fosco is the more intelligent and practical of the two men.

***Summary Part 19:***

Once [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) has gone, the others begin to walk back more slowly. [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) begins to interrogate [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) about [Anne Catherick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/anne-catherick-the-woman) and, although Marian wishes to conceal information from the Count, it is difficult to do this because [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie) also asks her questions, which Marian struggles to find a good reason not to answer. As the conversation progresses, Marian begins to suspect that the Count does not know Sir Percival’s secret, or the reason that he is so desperate to locate Anne, and that he too is genuinely trying to get information from her.

***Analysis Part 19:***

Marian and Walter kept their dealings with Anne Catherick a secret from Laura. Marian, therefore, does not wish Laura to think that she is hiding something from her and must answer her questions even though Count Fosco is present, and she does not wish to tell him what she knows about Anne.

***Summary Part 20:***

As the come up the drive to the house, they see that a horse is being saddled by a groom. Assuming the horse is for [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde), [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco) asks the groom if this horse can run long distances and if it will be worn out by the journey. The groom replies that this horse can go as far as necessary and that Sir Percival uses a different horse for short trips. [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe) wonders if Sir Percival plans to ride to Welmingham to question [Mrs. Catherick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/mrs-catherick).

***Analysis Part 20:***

Count Fosco manipulates the groom by asking an indirect question. Instead of asking where Sir Percival is going, which would show that he is interested in Sir Percival’s affairs, he pretends to be interested in the wellbeing of the horse. This shows how naturally and skillfully the Count can conceal his true motives.

***Summary part 21:***

They find [Sir Percival](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/sir-percival-glyde) in the hall, preparing to leave. He says that he has suddenly been called away but wonders if [Laura](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/laura-fairlie), [Count Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/count-fosco), and [Madame Fosco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/madame-fosco) will join him briefly in the library on a business matter. He needs a quick signature on something and wishes the Foscos to be the witnesses. The group make their way into the library and leave [Marian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-white/characters/marian-halcombe)—almost frantic with anxiety—outside in the hall.

***Analysis Part 21:***

Sir Percival tries to make the business that he wishes to transact seem casual and insignificant; it only requires a moment of attention and can be carried out quickly before he leaves. This seems to contradict his earlier reluctance, though, and his extreme agitation. He lacks self-control, and so cannot manipulate people like the Count can.