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The Woman in White

A play by

Constance Cox

Adapted from the novel by

Wilkie Collins

Samuel French — London



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CHARACTERS

Mrs Vesey, the housekeeper, elderly

Walter Hartright, late 20s

Marion Halcombe, 25

Mr Gilmore, a solicitor, elderly

Mr Frederick Fairlie, middle-aged

Louis, his valet, Swiss

Laura Fairlie, Marion's half-sister, 20

Anne Catherick, 20s

*played by the
same actress*

Sir Percival Glyde, 40

Count Fosco, middle-aged

Countess Fosco, middle-aged

Mrs Catherick, Anne's mother, middle-aged

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in the drawing-room of Limmeridge Hall in Cumberland

Time —1861 and 1862

ACT I

SCENE 1 The drawing-room. July 1861. Evening

SCENE 2 The same, a month later. Early evening.

ACT II

SCENE 1 The same. November 1861. Afternoon.

SCENE 2 The same, two days later. Early evening.

ACT III

The same. March 1862. Early evening

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(See also page ii)

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ACT I
SCENE 1

The drawing-room at Limmeridge Hall, Cumberland. July 1861

French windows in the back wall lead on to a terrace which overlooks the garden. Double doors UL (with a bellrope to their L) lead to the hall, and the major part of the house, and there is another door R. The room's furniture and hangings speak of wealth. There is a fireplace R, with a small chair and footwarmer DS of it, a mirror over it, and fire-irons and bellows. There is a clock on the mantelpiece. An armchair is set RC with a small table beside it. A sideboard with a lamp on it stands against the back wall R of the windows, with a screen between it and the windows. L of the windows and against the back wall is a desk with a chair in front of it and pens, an inkstand, notepaper, blotting paper, a lamp and two sketch-books on it. A sofa is angled at LC with a small table at the R end of it. An occasional table is against the wall DL, with a small chair slightly in front of it; also DL is a small footstool

When the CURTAIN rises the windows that lead to the terrace are open, as are the curtains. A fire burns in the fireplace though the evening is warm

Mrs Vesey, an elderly housekeeper, enters UL, speaking as she comes. She is followed by Walter Hartright, a young man in his late twenties

Mrs Vesey *(moving c)* And this is the drawing-room, Mr Hartright. We generally sit here of an evening, so I do hope you'll join us sometimes.

Hartright Will I be permitted, Mrs Vesey?

Mrs Vesey But of course! Mr Fairlie won't object, and the girls and I see so few new faces you'll be doing us a favour. Now, are you quite sure you won't rest before dinner? You've had such a long journey from London.

Hartright Quite sure, thank you. I'm not in the least tired.

Mrs Vesey Then you must take a glass of sherry and a biscuit. *(She moves to the sideboard and pours a glass of sherry during the following)*

Hartright You're very kind. *(He moves to the sofa)* Can you tell me if Mr Fairlie will see me tonight?

Mrs Vesey Oh, I couldn't say. You see, Mr Fairlie is such a sad invalid. But no doubt if he finds himself strong enough he will send for you. *(She places the glass of sherry and a plate of biscuits on the small table R of the sofa)* Now make yourself comfortable while I go and acquaint him of your arrival.

Hartright (*sitting on the sofa*) Have you any specimens of my pupils' work that I could see while I'm waiting?

Mrs Vesey Why, certainly. (*She fetches the two sketch-books from the desk*) Here is Miss Fairlie's sketch-book; you'll be pleased with that, Mr Hartright ... And — I'm afraid this is Marion's.

Hartright (*smiling*) Why afraid?

Mrs Vesey Marion is a dear girl, Mr Hartright, but she really only draws to keep Laura company.

Marion Halcombe enters through the french windows. She is a young woman of about twenty-five, of strong character and forthright speech

Marion (*moving c*) Mrs Vesey, did I hear the trap come back from the station? (*She sees Hartright*) Oh!

Hartright rises

Mrs Vesey Yes, this is Mr Hartright, dear. Miss Marion Halcombe, sir.

Marion Welcome to Limmeridge Hall, Mr Hartright. (*She holds out her hand*)

Hartright (*moving to Marion*) Thank you. (*He shakes her hand*)

Mrs Vesey I'm just going to your uncle, my dear, to tell him Mr Hartright has arrived.

Mrs Vesey exits UL

Hartright I've just been looking at your sketches, Miss Halcombe. (*He moves back to the sofa, and picks up the books*)

Marion Oh, dear! (*Laughing*) Well, at all events, you know the worst about me.

Hartright I dare say your talents lie in another direction.

Marion Do you? Then I wish you'd tell me where, for I can't find them. (*She sits R*)

Hartright The piano?

Marion No.

Hartright Then — needlework, perhaps?

Marion No.

Hartright Well — er ...

Marion (*laughing*) You're determined to be polite, Mr Hartright, but it's no use. Let's face the fact: I'm an unaccomplished woman.

They laugh together

Now forget about me and look at my sister's drawings. *She* really is clever enough to repay your tuition.

Hartright (*surprised*) Is Miss Fairlie your *sister*?

Marion Yes. (*She understands his perplexity*) Oh, I see, you're wondering about the name. My mother was married twice. First to Mr Halcombe, my father. Then to Mr Philip Fairlie — *this* Mr Fairlie's brother.

Hartright I see. So you and Miss Fairlie are really half-sisters. (*He puts the sketch-books down on the table* DL)

Marion That's right. Only Laura's father died rich and mine didn't, so she's an heiress and I'm penniless. However, on his brother's death Mr Frederick Fairlie was persuaded to take charge of us both, which is why you find me in this great house in spite of my poverty.

Hartright That was very good of Mr Fairlie.

Marion Yes — perhaps. Well, now that you know all about us, suppose you tell me something about yourself. How did my uncle persuade you to give up all your pupils, and bury yourself for three months in the wilds of Cumberland?

Hartright (*sitting on the sofa*) Most of my pupils are away for the summer, and I was very glad of the employment. But even if I hadn't needed it I think ...

Marion (*after a pause*) Yes?

Hartright I think curiosity would have brought me here.

Marion Curiosity? To see my uncle's art collection, do you mean? It is considered very fine.

Hartright No, not that. Because of an experience I had in London.

Marion Oh?

Hartright I heard this house and your mother's name mentioned in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Marion But my mother has been dead for years!

Hartright I know.

Marion You know?

Hartright (*nodding*) I also know she did much good here. Amongst other things she founded the village school.

Marion (*astonished*) Have you been in this part of Cumberland before?

Hartright No. I learnt all this in London — or, to be more exact, on the *road* to London.

Marion The road?

Hartright It was just before I came here — very late at night. I'd been spending the evening with some friends and I was walking home. All of a sudden I heard a step behind me — then there was a touch on my shoulder. I turned round — and before me stood a woman — dressed from head to foot in white!

Marion You mean — her bonnet, dress and everything?

Hartright Yes. For a moment I thought she was a ghost. Then she said, "Is this the road to London?"

Marion What kind of a woman was she? Was she young?

Hartright Yes — not more than twenty at the most. She would have been pretty if she hadn't looked so ill — and so dreadfully frightened.

Marion Go on, Mr Hartright. What happened then?

Hartright I assured her she was on the road to London, and we began to walk along together ...

Marion Did she speak again?

Hartright Not for some time. She kept glancing over her shoulder, as if she were afraid of being followed. Then, quite suddenly, she asked me a most curious question.

Marion What?

Hartright She asked — it so astonished me I had to make her repeat it. She asked if I knew many men of rank and title.

Marion How extraordinary. What did you say?

Hartright I told her I had met a few, and asked her why she wished to know. "Because", she said, "there is one — a baronet — I hope you will never, never meet."

Marion A baronet? Did she tell you his name?

Hartright I asked her, naturally. But — "I can't — I daren't tell you," she said. "I forget myself when I speak of him." Then, as we were now on the outskirts of London, she asked me abruptly if I would get a cab for her.

Marion Had she told you where she was going?

Hartright No, and I didn't like to question her. But just before the cab drove off, she asked me if I lived in London. It occurred to me that she might be thinking of applying to me for help. So I felt bound to tell her I was taking up a temporary position in Cumberland.

Marion And it was then that she mentioned my mother?

Hartright Yes.

Marion And spoke of the school she founded and this house?

Hartright Yes.

Marion What was she like — apart from being dressed all in white?

Hartright Young, as I said. Slight — pretty, fair hair.

Marion But it was dark. You never really saw her clearly?

Hartright I saw her face once — by the lights of the cab. I shall never forget it ... It was so unhappy.

Marion And that was the end of your adventure when she drove off in the cab?

Hartright Not quite the end. (*He rises and moves L*) Something more happened.

Marion What?

Hartright I'd barely reached the ——

Mrs Vesey enters quickly UL and comes C

Mrs Vesey Oh, Mr Hartright, Mr Fairlie wishes to see you. He's coming right away.

Marion (*rising*) Not here, surely?

Mrs Vesey Yes, dear, so you'd better go. (*She moves to the fireplace*) You know how he dislikes a crowd. (*She blows up the fire with the bellows*)

Marion (*moving* *UC*) I'll come back later, Mr Hartright. I must hear the end of this.

Marion exits R

Mrs Vesey Oblige me by shutting the windows tight, Mr Hartright.

Hartright moves to the windows and closes them

Mrs Vesey Oh, and the curtains drawn, if you please.

Hartright The curtains *drawn*?

Mrs Vesey Mr Fairlie cannot stand a glare of any kind.

Hartright closes the curtains

Thank you so much. Now where did I put that foot-warmer? Ah, here it is.
(*She finds it near the fireplace*)

Hartright A footwarmer in July?

Mrs Vesey Mr Fairlie feels the cold exceedingly. Now, if you'd be so good as to draw that screen forward to exclude the draught ...

Hartright moves the screen in front of the windows

Thank you, thank you.

The door UL opens and Louis, a Swiss servant, enters carrying a fumigating spray. He gravely examines the footwarmer, the fire and the curtains, then proceeds to fumigate the room with the spray

Hartright watches in astonishment

Louis puts down the spray and goes out again UL

Mr Fairlie (*off*) Is the room fumigated, Louis?

Louis (*off*) Yes, m'sieur.

Mr Fairlie (*off*) Are the curtains drawn?

Louis (*off*) Yes, m'sieur.

Mr Fairlie (*off*) You're quite sure there are no draughts?

Louis (*off*) None, m'sieur.

Mr Fairlie (*off*) Have you my smelling salts and my eau-de-Cologne?

Louis (*off*) Yes, m'sieur.

Mr Fairlie (*off*) Then you may take me in.

Louis appears, wheeling Mr Fairlie in an invalid chair. Mr Fairlie, who is middle-aged and extremely well-preserved, is a perfect example of the imaginary invalid. A shawl is round his shoulders and a rug over his knees. A portfolio of drawings is by his side in the chair, as is a fan. During the following preparations he lies back with his eyes closed. Louis pushes him c then adjusts the screen between his chair and the door, then produces and holds out a box of lozenges to Mr Fairlie, who takes one

Hartright (*unable to bear the silence any longer; moving DC*) I would like to thank you, Mr Fairlie, for the generous way in which I've been welcomed. I hope I ——

Mr Fairlie (*interrupting; holding up his hand*) Are you Mr Hartright?

Hartright Yes.

Mr Fairlie Then would you be so kind as to speak a trifle less heartily? The slightest sound goes through my head like a knife.

Hartright I beg your pardon. As I was saying, I ——

Mr Fairlie (*holding up his hand again*) Would you mind standing a little further off? Germs fly to me, you know. Positively fly to me.

Hartright moves away to stand in front of the armchair

Thank you. Forgive me for not shaking hands with you, but I never touch anybody — not even my nieces. You won't mind if I occasionally close my eyes, will you? The fatigue — coming from my own apartments — all those corridors ——

Hartright I'm sorry you went to so much trouble. I could easily have come to you.

Mr Fairlie Ah, but my apartments have been fumigated, and you've just come from a train. I don't hold that against you, Mr Hartright ——

Hartright I should have found it difficult to come to Cumberland otherwise.

Mr Fairlie Quite, quite, I appreciate that. But in my experience I've found there is no place so germ-laden as a train, and as I said before, germs simply fly to me. Mrs Vesey ——

Mrs Vesey (*moving DR and curtsying*) Mr Fairlie?

Mr Fairlie I can hear you breathing. Go away.

Mrs Vesey moves between Hartright and Fairlie and exits UL

Hartright (*ironically*) Does my respiration offend you, Mr Fairlie?

Mr Fairlie Yes, exceedingly. But as I have to speak with you I must bear with it.

Hartright controls his feelings

Kindly make it as gentle as you can. Now to business. As I explained in my letter, I wish you — in the intervals of instructing my nieces in drawing and painting — to repair and mount some valuable water-colours I purchased recently. You may know I have something of a reputation as a collector.

Hartright nods

I am a wretched invalid, of course, but one must do what one can to imbue a vulgar world with an appreciation of beauty. Louis, the portfolio!

Louis takes the portfolio from the side of the chair

You may sit down, Mr Hartright.

Hartright sits in the armchair

Ah, don't move the chair! It may scroop! Hand that to Mr Hartright, Louis.

Louis hands the portfolio to Hartright, then returns to stand behind Mr Fairlie's chair

Pray give me your opinion of them, Mr Hartright.

Hartright (*looking in the portfolio*) Some of them have been badly misused, but I'm sure I can restore them. (*With enthusiasm*) They're superb examples, Mr Fairlie. I do congratulate you on having acquired them, and ——

Mr Fairlie (*holding up his hand*) Listen!

Hartright I beg your pardon?

Mr Fairlie I'm sure I heard some horrid children in the garden.

Hartright I heard nothing.

Mr Fairlie Possibly not. You were talking. Kindly oblige me by making sure.

Hartright rises, goes to the french windows, and opens the curtains during the following

There are no children in the house, but sometimes the servants encourage the brats from the village. Ah, be careful! The light!

Louis holds the fan before Mr Fairlie's eyes as Hartright looks out

Hartright (*closing the curtains and moving R*) The garden is quite empty, Mr Fairlie. (*He glances again at the portfolio*)

Mr Fairlie Thank you. My poor nerves, I suppose.

The door UL opens and Laura Fairlie enters. She is about twenty, gentle and lovely

Now who is that? I can feel a draught round the door!

Laura (*moving C*) It's me, uncle. Laura. I came to make myself known to Mr Hartright.

Mr Fairlie Really? I should have thought there was plenty of time for that. However, as you're here This is my niece Laura Fairlie, Mr Hartright. Give her plenty of paper to spoil and keep her out of my way.

Hartright looks up from the portfolio and sees Laura. The portfolio slips from his hands to the floor and he stands staring at Laura

Mr Fairlie (*of the crash of the falling portfolio*) Oh, dear. I knew that would happen. How very clumsy of you, Mr Hartright. My poor head!

Hartright I beg your pardon. (*He picks up the portfolio*)

Laura (*holding out her hand*) How do you do, Mr Hartright.

Hartright moves to her and takes her hand, still looking at her

Mr Fairlie Now there are so many people in the room my strength is going.

You can manage the work then, Mr Hartright? Mr Hartright!

Hartright (*pulling himself together and moving DR*) It will be a pleasure to undertake it, Mr Fairlie. I shall perform it to the best of my ability.

Mr Fairlie Thank you. Yes would have been sufficient. Would you like Louis to carry that portfolio to your room?

Hartright Thank you. I can manage it myself.

Mr Fairlie Can you really? How delightful to be so strong.

Louis prepares to take Mr Fairlie out

I hope you'll enjoy your stay at Limmeridge Hall. Unfortunately, I shall have to deny myself the pleasure of your company, but you see what a sorry state I am in.

Louis turns the chair. Hartright puts the portfolio on the desk and opens the door UL

Thank you so much. You won't bang the door after me, will you? So kind of you to come all this way. Good-evening, Mr Hartright. Good-evening.

Mr Fairlie and Louis exit

Laura opens the curtains. Hartright moves the screen L

Laura I'm sorry my uncle was rude to you, Mr Hartright, but he's the same to everybody.

Hartright (*smiling*) I could forgive much more in anyone who gave me the chance to handle such treasures.

Laura Which of the water-colours has he given you to restore?

Hartright (*going to the portfolio*) These. The John Cromes.

Laura Oh, they're beautiful! (*She joins Hartright by the desk*)

Hartright Aren't they?

Laura (*looking at him, smiling*) What a fortunate man you are, Mr Hartright.

Hartright (*smiling back*) Am I? In what way?

Laura You are able to make what you love your work. And you *do* love your work. I can tell that from the way you handle those beautiful things.

Hartright Yes, that's true.

Laura How I envy you men! To be able to choose your professions — to go where you please — unhampered and free of control.

Hartright (*smiling*) We still have to work, you know. And the work isn't always as congenial as this.

Laura No, but ... (*She moves to the armchair*) Oh, it's no use ... I can't express it. Forgive me if I sounded stupid.

Hartright (*following her*) I think I know what you mean.

There is an immediate attraction between them of which both are conscious

Laura How long will you be staying?

Hartright Three months.

Laura Oh — then you'll be gone before I go.

Hartright Go? Are you leaving Limmeridge Hall?

Laura Yes. (*She moves DR with sudden reticence*) In the autumn.

A gong sounds, off

That's the dressing gong. I must go and change. (*She moves to the door R*)

Gilmore (*off; briskly*) I don't care if he's dying!

Mr Gilmore, an elderly and fiery solicitor, enters UL followed by Mrs Vesey

He's got to see me tonight! Ah, Laura, my dear.

Laura Good-evening, Mr Gilmore. Are you staying to dinner?

Laura and Gilmore shake hands

Gilmore I might — if that uncle of yours doesn't take away my appetite. Got to get that settlement of yours made out, you know. No time to lose.

Laura No ... I suppose not.

Laura glances at Hartright momentarily and exits R

Gilmore (*looking after Laura; to Mrs Vesey*) Well, go and tell him!

Mrs Vesey Couldn't it wait till after dinner, Mr Gilmore? Mr Fairlie says that if he discusses law before dinner, it gives him indigestion.

Gilmore You go and tell him if he doesn't see me now, I'll slam every door in the house and give him palpitations! Go on! Go on!

Gilmore pushes Mrs Vesey out of the door UL

Phew! The room stinks of him! (*He sees Hartright*) I beg your pardon. Staying here?

Hartright (*smiling*) Not exactly. I'm the new drawing master. My name's Hartright — Walter Hartright. (*He moves to Gilmore*)

Hartright and Gilmore shake hands

Gilmore Gilmore. Chancery Lane. Here to do some legal business for the family. Do you play chess?

Hartright (*startled*) Yes — as a matter of fact, I do.

Gilmore Shake hands again. It's a pleasure to meet a civilized man in this house. You must come and give me a game at my inn, while I'm forced to remain in this benighted country.

Hartright Doesn't Mr Fairlie play?

Gilmore Fairlie! (*He sits on the sofa*) Don't talk to me about him! I tell you, Mr Hartright, this house hasn't been the same since the other Mr Fairlie died.

Hartright There've been some changes since his time, I suppose?

Gilmore Changes! You may well say so. Time was when you could meet every family in the county in this drawing-room. Philip Fairlie was a man — not a fossilized mummy like his brother. Yes, there used to be some characters meet here, I can tell you. Old Joshua Wansborough, the magistrate — Andrew Weldon, who kept the village school —

Hartright (*eagerly*) Would that be the school Mrs Fairlie founded?

Gilmore Why, yes, I think it was. What makes you ask?

Hartright I'm interested in it, that's all. (*He sits in the armchair*) Do you think it would be possible for me to see this Mr Weldon?

Gilmore I shouldn't advise you to try. He's been dead eleven years.

Hartright Oh.

Gilmore What's your interest in him?

Hartright I was — hoping to trace a pupil of his.

Gilmore No, afraid I can't help you there. Death's taken his toll pretty freely amongst us, Mr Hartright. Poor old Andrew! I'd like a sovereign for every quarrel I've listened to between him and Joshua Wansborough, when Josh had been riding his hobby horse a bit too hard. Josh had the strangest hobby you'd meet in a day's march.

Hartright Oh. What was it?

Gilmore (*rising*) Copying the Marriage Register of the Parish Church. (*He moves to the french windows*) The church you can see from here. Old Welmington.

Hartright (*rising*) What a curious hobby! (*He follows Gilmore to the windows*)

Gilmore I tell you, he was a character. "You can laugh", he used to say to us, "but the register's not safe lying about the vestry the way it is. Supposing there was a fire, or you wanted to check the date of a marriage. Then you'd thank me." And he kept that copy up-to-date for thirty-five years.

Hartright And did anyone ever use it?

Gilmore No, and there was never a fire. (*He produces a snuff box and taps it*) Poor old Joshua! All that effort and work for nothing! (*He takes snuff noisily*)

Hartright What happened to his labour of love?

Gilmore Heaven knows! Buried in the dust somewhere, I suppose.

Mrs Vesey enters UL carrying a pair of slippers

Well, can the poor suffering invalid see me?

Mrs Vesey Mr Fairlie is very low. I wish he were ten feet lower! Does he think his niece can get married without a proper settlement?

Hartright reacts to this

(*To Gilmore*) He says he'll see you if you put on these slippers so as to make no noise.

Gilmore Slippers! I'll be hanged if I will! He'll see me shod as I am and like it! Slippers, indeed! What does the man think he is? A Hindu temple!

Gilmore stamps out UL

Mrs Vesey But he expressly said ——

A door slams, off

Oh dear, oh dear!

Hartright (*crossing to Mrs Vesey*) Mrs Vesey — did Mr Gilmore say Miss Halcombe was to be married?

Mrs Vesey Not Miss Halcombe. Miss Fairlie.

Hartright Miss Fairlie! In the autumn?

Mrs Vesey Yes, to Sir Percival Glyde. Such a delightful gentleman. He's coming to stay next month, so you'll be able to meet him.

Marion enters UL, a letter in her hand

Another door slams, further off

Marion, do you hear Mr Gilmore? I believe he does it on purpose. Oh, dear, oh, dear!

Mrs Vesey hurries off UL

Marion (*moving to Hartright*) Mr Hartright. I want you to look at this. It's an old letter of my mother's, written twelve years ago. (*She hands him the top sheet*) Read it.

Hartright (*moving DR, reading*) "We have a new pupil at the school, dear Philip ——"

Marion Laura's father.

Hartright "— and I have taken a violent fancy to her. (*He sits in the chair DR*) The poor little thing's intellect is not as developed as it should be at her age, but I have every hope of remedying that."

Marion You said the woman you met on the high road was young?

Hartright Twenty. Perhaps younger.

Marion Now see what it says further.

Hartright "I arranged yesterday that some of Laura's old white frocks and hats should be altered for little Anne Catherick, explaining to her that little girls of her age and complexion looked better in white than anything else ..." Miss Halcombe!

Marion Go on!

Hartright "Her little hand clasped mine and she said, 'I will wear white as long as I live, dear Mrs Fairlie. It will help me to remember your goodness when I go away and see you no more.'" Then the woman I met on the road was ——

Marion Anne Catherick!

Hartright Have you the rest of the letter?

Marion Yes. Listen to this. I think it will surprise you. (*Reading from the second sheet*) "Now for the real reason for my fondness for little Anne Catherick. Although she is not half so pretty, she is, nevertheless ..."

Hartright rises, slowly

What is it?

Hartright I think I know what is coming next. But go on.

Marion (*reading*) “She is, nevertheless, in her complexion, the colour of her hair and eyes, the living, speaking likeness of my own dear Laura.” (*She lowers the letter*)

Laura, in a white dress, appears on the terrace outside, looking across the garden, her profile to those inside. Hartright sees her, Marion does not

Hartright (*looking towards Laura*) Yes ... It’s true ... They are horribly alike.

Marion Why do you say horribly? There’s nothing dreadful in an accidental resemblance.

Hartright I never told you the sequel to my meeting with Anne Catherick, Miss Halcombe.

Laura moves out of sight along the terrace

Marion Sequel?

Hartright Not ten minutes after she left me, a carriage drove past me at a furious speed. It pulled up just ahead. Then a man jumped out and approached a constable on patrol ... He asked if a woman dressed all in white had passed that way.

Marion Why did he want her? Did you hear?

Hartright Yes. She had escaped from — an asylum.

Marion An asylum! The poor, poor thing! (*She sits in the chair DL*)

Hartright (*moving to her*) I’m glad I helped her, but I can’t bear to think of any association, however remote, between that helpless, sickly, frightened creature and Miss Fairlie. The one seems to cast a shadow over the future of the other.

Marion You’re being fanciful, Mr Hartright. Laura has a brilliant marriage and future before her.

Hartright With someone she loves?

Marion (*with slight reproof*) With someone she respects.

Hartright I beg your pardon. I had no right to ask.

Laura reappears on the terrace

Please don’t tell her what we’ve discovered

Laura enters, coming to the table at the end of the sofa. She is surprised at the expressions of Marion and Hartright

Laura (*smiling*) Is anything the matter? You look like a couple of conspirators.

Marion (*rising, startled*) Why are you wearing white, Laura? You never do.

Laura You say that as if you don't like it. Don't you like white, either, Mr Hartright?

Hartright Yes — yes, of course.

Laura Then I'm glad I've pleased one of you.

A gong sounds, off

Let me show you the way, Mr Hartright.

Hartright offers Laura his arm, and they exit through the door UL

Marion looks at the letter in her hand, then, with a shrug, tears it across and drops the pieces into the fire. She moves to the door UL as —

— *the CURTAIN falls*

SCENE 2

The same, a month later. Early evening

When the CURTAIN rises Hartright is sitting at the desk working on a drawing. The light outside fades slowly during the scene

After a moment Mrs Vesey enters R

Mrs Vesey Why, Mr Hartright, you'll strain your eyes! It's almost dark.

Hartright So it is.

Mrs Vesey lights the lamp on the sideboard

Can I help you with those? (*He rises*)

Mrs Vesey Thank you, if you would.

Hartright lights the desk lamp

I was so surprised when the young ladies came back from their drive alone. I thought you'd gone with them.

Hartright No.

Mrs Vesey But you haven't been out with them at all this week, and you used to enjoy it so much. You mustn't work too hard, Mr Hartright. All work and no play, you know. (*She mends the fire, then closes the curtains*)

Hartright Mrs Vesey — do you think Mr Fairlie would see me for a few minutes tonight?

Mrs Vesey I don't know, I'm sure. Is it very important?

Hartright Very.

Mrs Vesey Then I'll see what I can do. (*She rises and moves near him*) Mr Hartright —

Hartright Yes?

Mrs Vesey It isn't my business, I know, but you haven't seemed very happy these past two weeks. Is anything the matter? Is there anything I can do?

Hartright There's nothing you can do, Mrs Vesey, but thank you all the same.

Mrs Vesey Well, if ever I can ... (*She moves up to the desk and sees his work*) Oh, what a pretty drawing! It's Old Welmington Church! How clever you are! (*She picks up the drawing*)

Hartright It's a little wedding gift for Miss Fairlie.

Mrs Vesey Oh, how kind of you! She'll love it. It's quite beautiful. (*She puts the picture back on the desk*)

Hartright Thank you.

Mrs Vesey I'll speak to Mr Fairlie now. (*She moves to the door UL then turns*) And, Mr Hartright, I do hope you'll join us after dinner tonight, and not go up to your room again. We've missed your company sadly.

Mrs Vesey exits

Hartright takes up his drawing and looks at it. The handle of the terrace window is tried gently. He notices nothing. Then he takes the drawing to the mantelpiece, places it upon it and stands back to look at it. The handle moves again. This time he hears it and looks round. The window begins to open slowly. Hartright moves swiftly to the corner UR and presses himself against the wall

A hand parts the curtains, and Anne Catherick, dressed all in white, enters timidly. She is the exact counterpart of Laura, but looks pale and ill. She carries a letter in her hand

Anne moves softly towards the table by the sofa, and is about to lay the letter down, when Hartright moves and shuts the window. She spins round, terrified, a gasp escaping her, her body bent with fear. She looks all round and takes a few steps, backing DL, trying to escape

Hartright (*moving c*) Don't be frightened. I won't harm you, Miss Catherick.

Anne gasps

That is your name, isn't it?

Anne (*whispering*) How do you know my name?

Hartright Don't you remember me? We've met before.

Anne shakes her head

Yes, we have — on the road to London.

Anne The road — to London?

Hartright We walked quite a way together.

Anne Oh, yes. I do remember now. You were very kind to me. (*Quickly*) You won't betray me now?

Hartright What are you doing here?

Anne I came because I saw it in the newspaper — I wanted to warn dear Mrs Fairlie's daughter.

Hartright Warn Miss Fairlie? (*He moves closer to Anne*) Against what?

Anne Against — never mind. (*She breaks DL*)

Hartright Won't you trust me, Miss Catherick? After all, I did help you to escape.

Anne (*gasping, moving behind the sofa, retreating from Hartright*) You know — about that?

Hartright I know where you'd run away from.

Anne (*moving c*) I'm not mad — truly I'm not! I've been very frightened — it was so awful in there. Promise you won't tell them that you've seen me?

Hartright I give you my word. (*Moving to her*) Now won't you tell me what you came to warn Miss Fairlie about?

Anne looks all round the room

Anne (*whispering*) Is it true she is to marry — *him*?

Hartright Sir Percival Glyde, do you mean? Yes, it's true.

Anne (*drawing a long, shuddering breath*) Oh, no!

Hartright What's it to you?

Anne retreats from Hartright DR. He follows

Miss Catherick, I'm Miss Fairlie's friend as well as yours. Can't you tell me?

Anne No, I dare not. But —

Hartright Yes?

Anne If you will give her this. (*She makes to hand over the letter, then draws it back again*) You won't say that it came from me?

Hartright Providing you assure me that it contains nothing that will distress Miss Fairlie.

Anne It will help her — really it will. Please give it to her.

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