

"The twists and turns of the plot are very exciting, and I like the way you gradually get to understand what has happened." SR REAL READS
Tessy, 10

A strange figure stood in front of him, dressed from head to foot in white clothing. The moonlight showed her pale, youthful face.

When Walter Hartright meets the woman in white, it is the start of an exciting and dangerous adventure. Who is she, and what does she want?

At first Walter is happy at Limmeridge House, teaching painting and drawing to Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe, but a wicked plot soon threatens to destroy the woman he loves.

Will their courage and determination be enough to defeat the powerful forces ranged against them? Is the mysterious woman in white their friend, or their enemy?



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THE WOMAN IN WHITE Wilkie Collins

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

WILKIE COLLINS

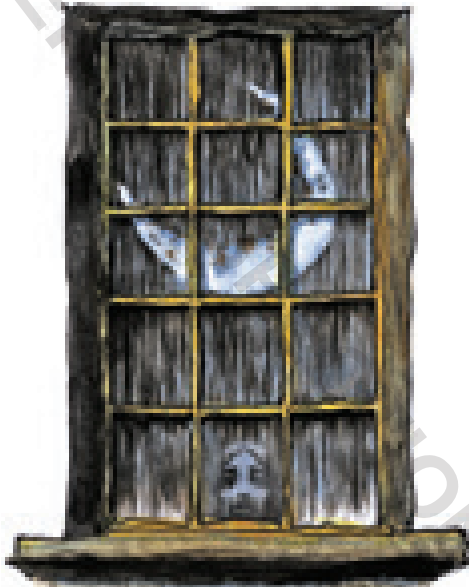


Retold by Tony Evans
Illustrated by Felix Bennett



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CONTENTS

The Characters	4
The Woman in White	7
Taking things further	55

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THE CHARACTERS

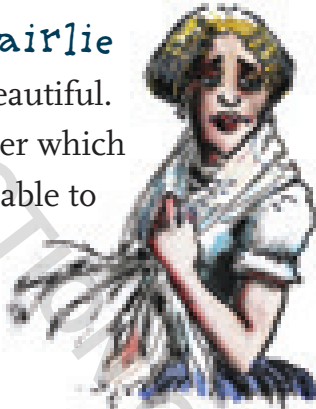


Walter Hartright

Walter is a clever and determined young painting and drawing teacher. Can he solve the puzzle of the woman in white before it is too late?

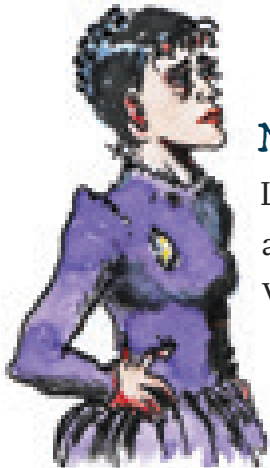
Laura Fairlie

Laura is delicate and beautiful. Can she escape from the danger which threatens her? Will she ever be able to marry the man she loves?



Marian Halcombe

Laura's half-sister, Marian is a brave and determined young woman. When Laura is in trouble, will she be able to protect her?



The Woman in White

Who is the mysterious woman in white, and where does she come from? She looks very like Laura Fairlie – is there some connection between them? Why is she so anxious and afraid?

Sir Percival Glyde

When Sir Percival meets Laura, he does everything he can to please her. Can she really trust him? What secret is he hiding from the world?



Count Fosco

The count is polite and helpful to everyone. Is he Marian's and Laura's friend, or their enemy? What lies beneath his sinister charm?

Mr Frederick Fairlie

Mr Fairlie is Laura's and Marian's uncle. He is a selfish, fussy man who thinks only of his own comfort and convenience.





THE WOMAN IN WHITE

Walter Hartright could hardly believe his luck. He was a young painting and drawing teacher, and had just been offered an excellent job for the next four months, in Cumberland! When Walter had heard the good news, he had hurried to tell his mother, who lived a few miles away from his lodgings in London. As he walked back home from her cottage along the gloomy road, his mind was filled with thoughts about his new job. He would be teaching two young ladies to paint in water-colours. Would he enjoy living at Limmeridge House?

Suddenly, Walter felt the touch of a hand laid lightly on his shoulder from behind. He spun round, his fingers gripping his walking stick. A strange figure stood in front of him, but he soon realised that he was not in any

danger. It was a young woman, not much more than twenty years old, dressed from head to foot in white clothing. The moonlight showed her pale, youthful face and slender figure. She looked tired and worried, as if she had been walking for miles.

‘I am sorry to trouble you,’ she said. ‘Can you tell me if this is the way to London?’

‘You are on the right road, but it is a long way to walk,’ Walter replied.

Her hand tightened round his arm. ‘I am frightened,’ she said. ‘Please help me. Is there a carriage I can get?’

At that moment, an empty cab approached from behind, and she hurried towards it. ‘I have enough money for my fare. Promise me that if anyone enquires about me, you will say nothing.’

‘Very well, if that is your wish, I will tell no one.’ Walter helped her into the cab.

‘Do you live in London?’ she asked.

‘Only until tomorrow,’ he replied. ‘Then I am going north – to Cumberland.’

‘Cumberland!’ she repeated, her face suddenly smiling. ‘I lived there once, and was very happy. If only I could see kind Mrs Fairlie again, and her little daughter Laura – and Limmeridge House.’

When the mysterious woman had left, Walter stood in the middle of the road, amazed. Limmeridge, the home of his new employer! What a peculiar coincidence! A moment later, he heard the sound of galloping horses, and another cab drove past him towards London, then stopped.

A man leant out of the window. ‘Have you seen a young woman pass this way?’ he asked. ‘A woman dressed all in white?’

‘No, Sir,’ Walter replied, remembering his promise. ‘The road has been empty. But why are you looking for her?’

As the cab drove off, the passenger called

Back in time

Many of the buildings and other landmarks constructed in Victorian times are still very much a part of modern-day life. For example, nearly all our railway lines and many of our churches and town halls were built during the reign of Queen Victoria, between 1837 and 1901. Other things, however, have now disappeared, including the Victorian 'lunatic asylums' for people who were thought to have mental illness. These were very large buildings, usually built in open countryside and surrounded by high railings so that no one could escape. They were like separate worlds, often with their own bakery, laundry, farm and gardens. Each asylum contained hundreds of patients. Many of them, like Anne Catherick – the woman in white – did not need to be shut away from the outside world. The Victorians had a poor understanding of mental illness, and the asylums held lots of people who had learning difficulties, or who were anxious

or physically ill. Nearly all the old asylum buildings have now been demolished or put to other uses, and today patients who need help will instead go to their doctor's surgery, or local hospital.

Another difference between mid-Victorian Britain and life today was the position of women, particularly married women. After Laura Fairlie marries Sir Percival Glyde she is very much in his power, and can do little to prevent his bad treatment of her. Until a law was passed in 1882 – The Married Women's Property Act – a woman's money was owned by her husband when she got married. As Laura married Sir Percival in 1850, this means that Sir Percival did not really need to try to force her to sign the document giving him her £20,000 – it already belonged to him! We don't know if Wilkie Collins made a mistake when he wrote this part of the story, or if he intended Sir Percival Glyde to be ignorant of the law.