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THE

WOMAN IN WHITE.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE DEAD SECRET," "AFTER DARK," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1860.

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THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

THE STORY CONTINUED

BY

FREDERICK FAIRLIE, ESQUIRE,

OF LIMMERIDGE HOUSE.*

MR. FAIRLIE'S NARRATIVE.

It is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone. Why—I ask everybody—why worry *me*? Nobody answers that question; and nobody lets me alone. Relatives, friends, and strangers all combine to annoy me. What have I done? I ask myself, I ask my servant, Louis, fifty times a day—what have I done? Neither of us can tell. Most extraordinary!

The last annoyance that has assailed me is the annoyance of being called upon to write this Narrative. Is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness capable of writing narratives? When I put this extremely reasonable objection, I am told that certain very serious events, relating to my niece, have happened within my experience; and that I am the fit person to describe them on that account. I am threatened, if I fail to exert myself in the manner required, with consequences which I cannot so much as think of, without perfect prostration.

* The manner in which Mr. Fairlie's Narrative, and other Narratives that are shortly to follow it, were originally obtained, forms the subject of an explanation which will appear at a later period.

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There is really no need to threaten me. Shattered by my miserable health and my family troubles, I am incapable of resistance. If you insist, you take your unjust advantage of me; and I give way immediately. I will endeavour to remember what I can (under protest), and to write what I can (also under protest); and what I can't remember and can't write, Louis must remember, and write for me. He is an ass, and I am an invalid; and we are likely to make all sorts of mistakes between us. How humiliating!

I am told to remember dates. Good Heavens! I never did such a thing in my life — how am I to begin now?

I have asked Louis. He is not quite such an ass as I have hitherto supposed. He remembers the date of the event, within a day or two — and I remember the name of the person. The date was towards the middle of July; and the name (in my opinion a remarkably vulgar one) was Fanny.

Towards the middle of July, then, I was reclining, in my customary state, surrounded by the various objects of Art which I have collected about me to improve the taste of the barbarous people in my neighbourhood. That is to say, I had the photographs of my pictures, and prints, and coins, and so forth, all about me, which I intend, one of these days, to present (the photographs, I mean, if the clumsy English language will let me mean anything) — to present to the Institution at Carlisle (horrid place!), with a view to improving the tastes of the Members (Goths and Vandals to a man). It might be supposed that a gentleman who was in course of conferring a great national benefit on his countrymen, was the last gentleman in the world to be unfeelingly worried about private difficulties and family affairs. Quite a mistake, I assure you, in my case.

However, there I was, reclining, with my art-treasures about me, and wanting a quiet morning. Because I wanted a quiet morning, of course Louis came in. It was perfectly natural that I should inquire what the deuce he meant by making his appearance, when I had not rung my bell. I seldom swear — it is such an ungentlemanlike habit — but when Louis

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answered by a grin, I think it was also perfectly natural that I should damn him for grinning. At any rate, I did.

This rigorous mode of treatment, I have observed, invariably brings persons in the lower class of life to their senses. It brought Louis to *his* senses. He was so obliging as to leave off grinning, and inform me that a Young Person was outside, wanting to see me. He added (with the odious talkativeness of servants), that her name was Fanny.

"Who is Fanny?"

"Lady Glyde's maid, sir."

"What does Lady Glyde's maid want with *me*?"

"A letter, sir —"

"Take it."

"She refuses to give it to anybody but you, sir."

"Who sends the letter?"

"Miss Halcombe, sir."

The moment I heard Miss Halcombe's name, I gave up. It is a habit of mine always to give up to Miss Halcombe. I find, by experience, that it saves noise. I gave up on this occasion. Dear Marian!

"Let Lady Glyde's maid come in, Louis. Stop! Do her shoes creak?"

I was obliged to ask the question. Creaking shoes invariably upset me for the day. I was resigned to see the Young Person, but I was *not* resigned to let the Young Person's shoes upset me. There is a limit even to my endurance.

Louis affirmed distinctly that her shoes were to be depended upon. I waved my hand. He introduced her. Is it necessary to say that she expressed her sense of embarrassment by shutting up her mouth and breathing through her nose? To the student of female human nature in the lower orders, surely not.

Let me do the girl justice. Her shoes did *not* creak. But why do Young Persons in service all perspire at the hands? Why have they all got fat noses, and hard cheeks? And why are their faces so sadly unfinished, especially about the corners of the eyelids? I am not strong enough to think deeply myself,

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on any subject; but I appeal to professional men who are. Why have we no variety in our breed of Young Persons?

"You have a letter for me, from Miss Halcombe? Put it down on the table, please; and don't upset anything. How is Miss Halcombe?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"And Lady Glyde?"

I received no answer. The Young Person's face became more unfinished than ever; and, I think she began to cry. I certainly saw something moist about her eyes. Tears or perspiration? Louis (whom I have just consulted) is inclined to think, tears. He is in her class of life; and he ought to know best. Let us say, tears.

Except when the refining process of Art judiciously removes from them all resemblance to Nature, I distinctly object to tears. Tears are scientifically described as a Secretion. I can understand that a secretion may be healthy or unhealthy, but I cannot see the interest of a secretion from a sentimental point of view. Perhaps my own secretions being all wrong together, I am a little prejudiced on the subject. No matter. I behaved, on this occasion, with all possible propriety and feeling. I closed my eyes, and said to Louis,

"Endeavour to ascertain what she means."

Louis endeavoured, and the Young Person endeavoured. They succeeded in confusing each other to such an extent that, I am bound in common gratitude to say, they really amused me. I think I shall send for them again, when I am in low spirits. I have just mentioned this idea to Louis. Strange to say, it seems to make him uncomfortable. Poor devil!

Surely, I am not expected to repeat my niece's maid's explanation of her tears, interpreted in the English of my Swiss valet? The thing is manifestly impossible. I can give my own impressions and feelings perhaps. Will that do as well? Please say, Yes.

My idea is that she began by telling me (through Louis) that her master had dismissed her from her mistress's service.

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(Observe, throughout, the strange irrelevancy of the Young Person. Was it my fault that she had lost her place?) On her dismissal, she had gone to the inn to sleep. (*I* don't keep the inn — why mention it to *me*?) Between six o'clock and seven, Miss Halcombe had come to say good-by, and had given her two letters, one for me, and one for a gentleman in London. (*I* am not a gentleman in London — hang the gentleman in London!) She had carefully put the two letters into her bosom (what have I to do with her bosom?); she had been very unhappy, when Miss Halcombe had gone away again; she had not had the heart to put bit or drop between her lips till it was near bedtime; and then, when it was close on nine o'clock, she had thought she should like a cup of tea. (Am I responsible for any of these vulgar fluctuations, which begin with unhappiness and end with tea?) Just as she was *warming the pot* (I give the words on the authority of Louis, who says he knows what they mean, and wishes to explain, but I snub him on principle)—just as she was warming the pot, the door opened, and she was *struck of a heap* (her own words again, and perfectly unintelligible, this time, to Louis, as well as to myself) by the appearance, in the inn parlour, of her ladyship, the Countess. I give my niece's maid's description of my sister's title with a sense of the highest relish. My poor dear sister is a tiresome woman who married a foreigner. To resume: the door opened; her ladyship, the Countess, appeared in the parlour, and the Young Person was struck of a heap. Most remarkable!

I must really rest a little before I can get on any farther. When I have reclined for a few minutes, with my eyes closed, and when Louis has refreshed my poor aching temples with a little eau-de-Cologne, I may be able to proceed.

Her ladyship, the Countess —

No. I am able to proceed, but not to sit up. I will recline, and dictate. Louis has a horrid accent; but he knows the language, and can write. How very convenient!

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Her ladyship, the Countess, explained her unexpected appearance at the inn by telling Fanny that she had come to bring one or two little messages which Miss Halcombe, in her hurry, had forgotten. The Young Person thereupon waited anxiously to hear what the messages were; but the Countess seemed disinclined to mention them (so like my sister's tire-some way!), until Fanny had had her tea. Her ladyship was surprisingly kind and thoughtful about it (extremely unlike my sister), and said, "I am sure, my poor girl, you must want your tea. We can let the messages wait till afterwards. Come, come, if nothing else will put you at your ease, I'll make the tea, and have a cup with you." I think those were the words, as reported excitably, in my presence, by the Young Person. At any rate, the Countess insisted on making the tea, and carried her ridiculous ostentation of humility so far as to take one cup herself, and to insist on the girl's taking the other. The girl drank the tea; and, according to her own account, solemnised the extraordinary occasion, five minutes after-wards, by fainting dead away, for the first time in her life. Here again, I use her own words. Louis thinks they were accompanied by an increased secretion of tears. I can't say, myself. The effort of listening being quite as much as I could manage, my eyes were closed.

Where did I leave off? Ah, yes — she fainted, after drinking a cup of tea with the Countess: a proceeding which might have interested me, if I had been her medical man; but, being nothing of the sort, I felt bored by hearing of it, nothing more. When she came to herself, in half an hour's time, she was on the sofa, and nobody was with her but the landlady. The Countess, finding it too late to remain any longer at the inn, had gone away as soon as the girl showed signs of recovering; and the landlady had been good enough to help her up-stairs to bed.

Left by herself, she had felt in her bosom (I regret the necessity of referring to this part of the subject a second time), and had found the two letters there, quite safe, but strangely crumpled. She had been giddy in the night; but had got up

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well enough to travel in the morning. She had put the letter addressed to that obtrusive stranger, the gentleman in London, into the post; and had now delivered the other letter into my hands, as she was told. This was the plain truth; and, though she could not blame herself for any intentional neglect, she was sadly troubled in her mind, and sadly in want of a word of advice. At this point, Louis thinks the secretions appeared again. Perhaps they did; but it is of infinitely greater importance to mention that, at this point also, I lost my patience, opened my eyes, and interfered.

"What is the purport of all this?" I inquired.

My niece's irrelevant maid stared, and stood speechless.

"Endeavour to explain," I said to my servant. "Translate me, Louis."

Louis endeavoured, and translated. In other words, he descended immediately into a bottomless pit of confusion; and the Young Person followed him down. I really don't know when I have been so amused. I left them at the bottom of the pit, as long as they diverted me. When they ceased to divert me, I exerted my intelligence, and pulled them up again.

It is unnecessary to say that my interference enabled me, in due course of time, to ascertain the purport of the Young Person's remarks.

I discovered that she was uneasy in her mind, because the train of events that she had just described to me, had prevented her from receiving those supplementary messages which Miss Halcombe had intrusted to the Countess to deliver. She was afraid the messages might have been of great importance to her mistress's interests. Her dread of Sir Percival had deterred her from going to Blackwater Park late at night to inquire about them; and Miss Halcombe's own directions to her, on no account to miss the train in the morning, had prevented her from waiting at the inn the next day. She was most anxious that the misfortune of her fainting-fit should not lead to the second misfortune of making her mistress think her neglectful, and she would humbly beg to

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ask me whether I would advise her to write her explanations and excuses to Miss Halcombe, requesting to receive the messages by letter, if it was not too late. I make no apologies for this extremely prosy paragraph. I have been ordered to write it. There are people, unaccountable as it may appear, who actually take more interest in what my niece's maid said to me on this occasion, than in what I said to my niece's maid. Amusing perversity!

"I should feel very much obliged to you, sir, if you would kindly tell me what I had better do," remarked the Young Person.

"Let things stop as they are," I said, adapting my language to my listener. "*I* invariably let things stop as they are. Yes. Is that all?"

"If you think it would be a liberty in me, sir, to write, of course I wouldn't venture to do so. But I am so very anxious to do all I can to serve my mistress faithfully —"

People in the lower class of life never know when or how to go out of a room. They invariably require to be helped out by their betters. I thought it high time to help the Young Person out. I did it with two judicious words:

"Good morning!"

Something, outside or inside this singular girl, suddenly creaked. Louis, who was looking at her (which I was not) says she creaked when she curtseyed. Curious. Was it her shoes, her stays, or her bones? Louis thinks it was her stays. Most extraordinary!

As soon as I was left by myself, I had a little nap — I really wanted it. When I awoke again, I noticed dear Marian's letter. If I had had the least idea of what it contained, I should certainly not have attempted to open it. Being, unfortunately for myself, quite innocent of all suspicion, I read the letter. It immediately upset me for the day.

I am, by nature, one of the most easy-tempered creatures that ever lived — I make allowances for everybody, and I take offence at nothing. But, as I have before remarked,

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there are limits to my endurance. I laid down Marian's letter, and felt myself — justly felt myself — an injured man.

I am about to make a remark. It is, of course, applicable to the very serious matter now under notice — or I should not allow it to appear in this place.

Nothing, in my opinion, sets the odious selfishness of mankind in such a repulsively vivid light, as the treatment, in all classes of society, which the Single people receive at the hands of the Married people. When you have once shown yourself too considerate and self-denying to add a family of your own to an already overcrowded population, you are vindictively marked out, by your married friends, who have no similar consideration and no similar self-denial, as the recipient of half their conjugal troubles, and the born friend of all their children. Husbands and wives *talk* of the cares of matrimony; and bachelors and spinsters *bear* them. Take my own case. I considerately remain single; and my poor dear brother, Philip, inconsiderately marries. What does he do when he dies? He leaves his daughter to *me*. She is a sweet girl. She is also a dreadful responsibility. Why lay her on my shoulders? Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connexions of all their own troubles. I do my best with my brother's responsibility; I marry my niece, with infinite fuss and difficulty, to the man her father wanted her to marry. She and her husband disagree, and unpleasant consequences follow. What does she do with those consequences? She transfers them to *me*. Why transfer them to *me*? Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connexions of all their own troubles. Poor single people! Poor human nature!

It is quite unnecessary to say that Marian's letter threatened me. Everybody threatens me. All sorts of horrors were to fall on my devoted head, if I hesitated to turn Limmeridge House into an asylum for my niece and her misfortunes. I did hesitate, nevertheless.

I have mentioned that my usual course, hitherto, had been

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to submit to dear Marian, and save noise. But, on this occasion, the consequences involved in her extremely inconsiderate proposal, were of a nature to make me pause. If I opened Limmeridge House as an asylum to Lady Glyde, what security had I against Sir Percival Glyde's following her here, in a state of violent resentment against *me* for harbouring his wife? I saw such a perfect labyrinth of troubles involved in this proceeding, that I determined to feel my ground, as it were. I wrote, therefore, to dear Marian, to beg (as she had no husband to lay claim to her) that she would come here by herself, first, and talk the matter over with me. If she could answer my objections to my own perfect satisfaction, then I assured her that I would receive our sweet Laura with the greatest pleasure — but not otherwise.

I felt of course, at the time, that this temporising, on my part, would probably end in bringing Marian here in a state of virtuous indignation, banging doors. But, then, the other course of proceeding might end in bringing Sir Percival here in a state of virtuous indignation, banging doors also; and, of the two indignations and bangings, I preferred Marian's — because I was used to her. Accordingly, I despatched the letter by return of post. It gained me time, at all events — and, oh dear me! what a point that was to begin with.

When I am totally prostrated (did I mention that I was totally prostrated by Marian's letter?), it always takes me three days to get up again. I was very unreasonable — I expected three days of quiet. Of course I didn't get them.

The third day's post brought me a most impertinent letter from a person with whom I was totally unacquainted. He described himself, as the acting partner of our man of business — our dear, pig-headed old Gilmore — and he informed me that he had lately received, by the post, a letter addressed to him in Miss Halcombe's handwriting. On opening the envelope, he had discovered, to his astonishment, that it contained nothing but a blank sheet of note paper. This circumstance appeared to him so suspicious (as suggesting to his restless legal mind that the letter had been tampered with)

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that he had at once written to Miss Halcombe, and had received no answer by return of post. In this difficulty, instead of acting like a sensible man and letting things take their proper course, his next absurd proceeding, on his own showing, was to pester *me*, by writing to inquire if I knew anything about it. What the deuce should I know about it? Why alarm *me* as well as himself? I wrote back to that effect. It was one of my keenest letters. I have produced nothing with a sharper epistolary edge to it, since I tendered his dismissal in writing to that extremely troublesome person, Mr. Walter Hartright.

My letter produced its effect. I heard nothing more from the lawyer.

This perhaps was not altogether surprising. But it was certainly a remarkable circumstance that no second letter reached me from Marian, and that no warning signs appeared of her arrival. Her unexpected absence did me amazing good. It was so very soothing and pleasant to infer (as I did of course) that my married connexions had made it up again. Five days of undisturbed tranquillity, of delicious single blessedness, quite restored me. On the sixth day — either the fifteenth or sixteenth of July, as I imagine — I felt strong enough to send for my photographer, and to set him at work again on the presentation copies of my art treasures, with a view, as I have already mentioned, to the improvement of taste in this barbarous neighbourhood. I had just dismissed him to his workshop, and had just begun coquetting with my coins, when Louis suddenly made his appearance with a card in his hand.

"Another Young Person?" I said. "I won't see her. In my state of health, Young Persons disagree with me. Not at home."

"It is a gentleman this time, sir."

A gentleman of course made a difference. I looked at the card.

Gracious Heaven! my tiresome sister's foreign husband, Count Fosco.

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Is it necessary to say what my first impression was, when I looked at my visitor's card? Surely not? My sister having married a foreigner, there was but one impression that any man in his senses could possibly feel. Of course the Count had come to borrow money of me.

"Louis," I said, "do you think he would go away, if you gave him five shillings?"

Louis looked quite shocked. He surprised me inexpressibly, by declaring that my sister's foreign husband was dressed superbly, and looked the picture of prosperity. Under these circumstances, my first impression altered to a certain extent. I now took it for granted, that the Count had matrimonial difficulties of his own to contend with, and that he had come, like the rest of the family, to cast them all on my shoulders.

"Did he mention his business?" I asked.

"Count Fosco said he had come here, sir, because Miss Halcombe was unable to leave Blackwater Park."

Fresh troubles, apparently. Not exactly his own, as I had supposed, but dear Marian's. Troubles, any way. Oh dear!

"Show him in," I said, resignedly.

The Count's first appearance really startled me. He was such an alarmingly large person, that I quite trembled. I felt certain that he would shake the floor, and knock down my art-treasures. He did neither the one nor the other. He was refreshingly dressed in summer costume; his manner was delightfully self-possessed and quiet — he had a charming smile. My first impression of him was highly favourable. It is not creditable to my penetration — as the sequel will show — to acknowledge this; but I am a naturally candid man, and I *do* acknowledge it, notwithstanding.

"Allow me to present myself, Mr. Fairlie," he said. "I come from Blackwater Park, and I have the honour and the happiness of being Madame Fosco's husband. Let me take my first, and last, advantage of that circumstance, by en-

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treating you not to make a stranger of me. I beg you will not disturb yourself — I beg you will not move."

"You are very good," I replied. "I wish I was strong enough to get up. Charmed to see you at Limmeridge. Please take a chair."

"I am afraid you are suffering to-day," said the Count.

"As usual," I said. "I am nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man."

"I have studied many subjects in my time," remarked this sympathetic person. "Among others the inexhaustible subject of nerves. May I make a suggestion, at once the simplest and the most profound? Will you let me alter the light in your room?"

"Certainly — if you will be so very kind as not to let any of it in on me."

He walked to the window. Such a contrast to dear Marian! so extremely considerate in all his movements!

"Light," he said, in that delightfully confidential tone which is so soothing to an invalid, "is the first essential. Light stimulates, nourishes, preserves. You can no more do without it, Mr. Fairlie, than if you were a flower. Observe. Here, where you sit, I close the shutters, to compose you. There, where you do *not* sit, I draw up the blind and let in the invigorating sun. Admit the light into your room, if you cannot bear it on yourself. Light, sir, is the grand decree of Providence. You accept Providence with your own restrictions. Accept light — on the same terms."

I thought this very convincing and attentive. He had taken me in — up to that point about the light, he had certainly taken me in.

"You see me confused," he said, returning to his place — "on my word of honour, Mr. Fairlie, you see me confused in your presence."

"Shocked to hear it, I am sure. May I inquire why?"

"Sir, can I enter this room (where you sit a sufferer), and see you surrounded by these admirable objects of Art, without discovering that you are a man whose feelings are acutely

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impressionable, whose sympathies are perpetually alive? Tell me, can I do this?"

If I had been strong enough to sit up in my chair, I should of course have bowed. Not being strong enough, I smiled my acknowledgments instead. It did just as well, we both understood one another.

"Pray follow my train of thought," continued the Count. "I sit here, a man of refined sympathies myself, in the presence of another man of refined sympathies also. I am conscious of a terrible necessity for lacerating those sympathies by referring to domestic events of a very melancholy kind. What is the inevitable consequence? I have done myself the honour of pointing it out to you, already. I sit confused."

Was it at this point that I began to suspect he was going to bore me? I rather think it was.

"Is it absolutely necessary to refer to these unpleasant matters?" I inquired. "In our homely English phrase, Count Fosco, won't they keep?"

The Count, with the most alarming solemnity, sighed and shook his head.

"Must I really hear them?"

He shrugged his shoulders (it was the first foreign thing he had done, since he had been in the room); and looked at me in an unpleasantly penetrating manner. My instincts told me that I had better close my eyes. I obeyed my instincts.

"Please break it gently," I pleaded. "Anybody dead?"

"Dead!" cried the Count, with unnecessary foreign fierceness. "Mr. Fairlie! your national composure terrifies me. In the name of Heaven, what have I said, or done, to make you think me the messenger of death?"

"Pray accept my apologies," I answered. "You have said and done nothing. I make it a rule, in these distressing cases, always to anticipate the worst. It breaks the blow, by meeting it half way, and so on. Inexpressibly relieved, I am sure, to hear that nobody is dead. Anybody ill?"

I opened my eyes, and looked at him. Was he very

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yellow, when he came in? or had he turned very yellow, in the last minute or two? I really can't say; and I can't ask Louis, because he was not in the room at the time.

"Anybody ill?" I repeated; observing that my national composure still appeared to affect him.

"That is part of my bad news, Mr. Fairlie. Yes. Somebody is ill."

"Grieved, I am sure. Which of them is it?"

"To my profound sorrow, Miss Halcombe. Perhaps you were in some degree prepared to hear this? Perhaps, when you found that Miss Halcombe did not come here by herself, as you proposed, and did not write a second time, your affectionate anxiety may have made you fear that she was ill?"

I have no doubt my affectionate anxiety had led to that melancholy apprehension, at some time or other; but, at the moment, my wretched memory entirely failed to remind me of the circumstance. However, I said, Yes, in justice to myself. I was much shocked. It was so very uncharacteristic of such a robust person as dear Marian to be ill, that I could only suppose she had met with an accident. A horse, or a false step on the stairs, or something of that sort.

"Is it serious?" I asked.

"Serious — beyond a doubt," he replied. "Dangerous — I hope and trust not. Miss Halcombe unhappily exposed herself to be wetted through by a heavy rain. The cold that followed was of an aggravated kind; and it has now brought with it the worst consequence — Fever."

When I heard the word, Fever, and when I remembered, at the same moment, that the unscrupulous person who was now addressing me had just come from Blackwater Park, I thought I should have fainted on the spot.

"Good God!" I said. "Is it infectious?"

"Not at present," he answered, with detestable composure. "It may turn to infection — but no such deplorable complication had taken place when I left Blackwater Park. I have felt the deepest interest in the case, Mr. Fairlie — I have endeavoured to assist the regular medical attendant in watch-

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ing it — accept my personal assurances of the uninfectious nature of the fever, when I last saw it."

Accept his assurances! I never was farther from accepting anything in my life. I would not have believed him on his oath. He was too yellow to be believed. He looked like a walking-West-Indian-epidemic. He was big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever. In certain emergencies, my mind is remarkably soon made up. I instantly determined to get rid of him.

"You will kindly excuse an invalid," I said — "but long conferences of any kind invariably upset me. May I beg to know exactly what the object is to which I am indebted for the honour of your visit?"

I fervently hoped that this remarkably broad hint would throw him off his balance — confuse him — reduce him to polite apologies — in short, get him out of the room. On the contrary, it only settled him in his chair. He became additionally solemn and dignified and confidential. He held up two of his horrid fingers, and gave me another of his unpleasantly penetrating looks. What was I to do? I was not strong enough to quarrel with him. Conceive my situation, if you please. Is language adequate to describe it? I think not.

"The objects of my visit," he went on, quite irrepressibly, "are numbered on my fingers. They are two. First, I come to bear my testimony, with profound sorrow, to the lamentable disagreements between Sir Percival and Lady Glyde. I am Sir Percival's oldest friend; I am related to Lady Glyde by marriage; I am an eye-witness of all that has happened at Blackwater Park. In those three capacities I speak with authority, with confidence, with honourable regret. Sir! I inform you, as the head of Lady Glyde's family, that Miss Halcombe has exaggerated nothing in the letter that she wrote to your address. I affirm that the remedy which that admirable lady has proposed, is the only remedy that will spare you the horrors of public scandal. A temporary separa-

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tion between husband and wife is the one peaceable solution of this difficulty. Part them for the present; and when all causes of irritation are removed, I, who have now the honour of addressing you — I will undertake to bring Sir Percival to reason. Lady Glyde is innocent, Lady Glyde is injured: but — follow my thought here! — she is, on that very account (I say it with shame), the cause of irritation while she remains under her husband's roof. No other house can receive her with propriety, but yours. I invite you to open it!"

Cool. Here was a matrimonial hailstorm pouring in the South of England; and I was invited, by a man with fever in every fold of his coat, to come out from the North of England, and take my share of the pelting. I tried to put the point forcibly, just as I have put it here. The Count deliberately lowered one of his horrid fingers; kept the other up; and went on — rode over me, as it were, without even the common coachmanlike attention of crying "Hi!" before he knocked me down.

"Follow my thought once more, if you please," he resumed. "My first object you have heard. My second object in coming to this house is to do what Miss Halcombe's illness has prevented her from doing for herself. My large experience is consulted on all difficult matters at Blackwater Park; and my friendly advice was requested on the interesting subject of your letter to Miss Halcombe. I understood at once — for my sympathies are your sympathies — why you wished to see her here, before you pledged yourself to inviting Lady Glyde. You are most right, sir, in hesitating to receive the wife, until you are quite certain that the husband will not exert his authority to reclaim her. I agree to that. I also agree that such delicate explanations as this difficulty involves, are not explanations which can be properly disposed of by writing only. My presence here (to my own great inconvenience) is the proof that I speak sincerely. As for the explanations themselves, I — Fosco — I who know Sir Percival much better than Miss Halcombe knows him, affirm to you, on my honour and my word, that he will not come near this house, or at-

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tempt to communicate with this house, while his wife is living in it. His affairs are embarrassed. Offer him his freedom, by means of the absence of Lady Glyde. I promise you he will take his freedom, and go back to the Continent, at the earliest moment when he can get away. Is this clear to you as crystal? Yes, it is. Have you questions to address to me? Be it so; I am here to answer. Ask, Mr. Fairlie — oblige me by asking, to your heart's content."

He had said so much already in spite of me; and he looked so dreadfully capable of saying a great deal more, also in spite of me, that I declined his amiable invitation, in pure self-defence.

"Many thanks," I replied. "I am sinking fast. In my state of health, I must take things for granted. Allow me to do so on this occasion. We quite understand each other. Yes. Much obliged, I am sure, for your kind interference. If I ever get better, and ever have a second opportunity of improving our acquaintance —"

He got up. I thought he was going. No. More talk; more time for the development of infectious influences — in *my* room, too; remember that, in *my* room!

"One moment, yet," he said; "one moment, before I take my leave. I ask permission, at parting, to impress on you an urgent necessity. It is this, sir! You must not think of waiting till Miss Halcombe recovers, before you receive Lady Glyde. Miss Halcombe has the attendance of the doctor, of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, and of an experienced nurse as well — three persons for whose capacity and devotion I answer with my life. I tell you, that. I tell you, also, that the anxiety and alarm of her sister's illness has already affected the health and spirits of Lady Glyde, and has made her totally unfit to be of use in the sick-room. Her position with her husband grows more and more deplorable and dangerous, every day. If you leave her any longer at Blackwater Park, you do nothing whatever to hasten her sister's recovery, and at the same time, you risk the public scandal, which you, and I, and all of us, are bound, in the sacred inter-

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est of the Family, to avoid. With all my soul, I advise you to remove the serious responsibility of delay from your own shoulders, by writing to Lady Glyde, to come here at once. Do your affectionate, your honourable, your inevitable duty; and, whatever happens in the future, no one can lay the blame on *you*. I speak from my large experience; I offer my friendly advice. Is it accepted — Yes, or No?"

I looked at him — merely looked at him — with my sense of his amazing assurance, and my dawning resolution to ring for Louis, and have him shown out of the room, expressed in every line of my face. It is perfectly incredible, but quite true, that my face did not appear to produce the slightest impression on him. Born without nerves — evidently, born without nerves!

"You hesitate?" he said. "Mr. Fairlie! I understand that hesitation. You object — see, sir, how my sympathies look straight down into your thoughts! — you object that Lady Glyde is not in health and not in spirits to take the long journey, from Hampshire to this place, by herself. Her own maid is removed from her, as you know; and, of other servants fit to travel with her, from one end of England to another, there are none at Blackwater Park. You object, again, that she cannot comfortably stop and rest in London, on her way here, because she cannot comfortably go alone to a public hotel where she is a total stranger. In one breath, I grant both objections — in another breath, I remove them. Follow me, if you please, for the last time. It was my intention, when I returned to England with Sir Percival, to settle myself in the neighbourhood of London. That purpose has just been happily accomplished. I have taken, for six months, a little furnished house, in the quarter called St. John's Wood. Be so obliging as to keep this fact in your mind; and observe the programme I now propose. Lady Glyde travels to London (a short journey) — I myself meet her at the station — I take her to rest and sleep at my house, which is also the house of her aunt — when she is restored, I escort her to the station again — she travels to this place, and her own maid (who is

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now under your roof) receives her at the carriage door. Here is comfort consulted; here are the interests of propriety consulted; here is your own duty — duty of hospitality, sympathy, protection, to an unhappy lady in need of all three — smoothed and made easy, from the beginning to the end. I cordially invite you, sir, to second my efforts in the sacred interests of the Family. I seriously advise you to write, by my hands, offering the hospitality of your house (and heart), and the hospitality of my house (and heart), to that injured and unfortunate lady whose cause I plead to-day."

He waved his horrid hand at me; he struck his infectious breast; he addressed me oratorically — as if I was laid up in the House of Commons. It was high time to take a desperate course of some sort. It was also high time to send for Louis, and adopt the precaution of fumigating the room.

In this trying emergency, an idea occurred to me — an inestimable idea which, so to speak, killed two intrusive birds with one stone. I determined to get rid of the Count's tiresome eloquence, and of Lady Glyde's tiresome troubles, by complying with this odious foreigner's request, and writing the letter at once. There was not the least danger of the invitation being accepted, for there was not the least chance that Laura would consent to leave Blackwater Park, while Marian was lying there ill. How this charmingly convenient obstacle could have escaped the officious penetration of the Count, it was impossible to conceive — but it *had* escaped him. My dread that he might yet discover it, if I allowed him any more time to think, stimulated me to such an amazing degree, that I struggled into a sitting position: seized, really seized, the writing materials by my side; and produced the letter as rapidly as if I had been a common clerk in an office. "Dearest Laura, Please come, whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping in London at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Ever affectionately yours." I handed these lines, at arm's length, to the Count — I sank back in my chair — I said, "Excuse me; I am entirely pro-

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strated; I can do no more. Will you rest and lunch down stairs? Love to all, and sympathy, and so on. *Good* morning."

He made another speech — the man was absolutely inexhaustible. I closed my eyes; I endeavoured to hear as little as possible. In spite of my endeavours, I was obliged to hear a great deal. My sister's endless husband congratulated himself and congratulated me, on the result of our interview; he mentioned a great deal more about his sympathies and mine; he deplored my miserable health; he offered to write me a prescription; he impressed on me the necessity of not forgetting what he had said about the importance of light; he accepted my obliging invitation to rest and lunch; he recommended me to expect Lady Glyde in two or three days' time; he begged my permission to look forward to our next meeting, instead of paining himself and paining me, by saying farewell; he added a great deal more, which, I rejoice to think, I did not attend to at the time, and do not remember now. I heard his sympathetic voice travelling away from me by degrees — but, large as he was, I never heard *him*. He had the negative merit of being absolutely noiseless. I don't know when he opened the door, or when he shut it. I ventured to make use of my eyes again, after an interval of silence — and he was gone.

I rang for Louis, and retired to my bath-room. Tepid water, strengthened with aromatic vinegar, for myself, and copious fumigation, for my study, were the obvious precautions to take; and of course I adopted them. I rejoice to say, they proved successful. I enjoyed my customary siesta. I awoke moist and cool.

My first inquiries were for the Count. Had we really got rid of him? Yes — he had gone away by the afternoon train. Had he lunched; and, if so, upon what? Entirely upon fruit-tart and cream. What a man! What a digestion!

Am I expected to say anything more? I believe not. I believe I have reached the limits assigned to me. The shock-

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ing circumstances which happened at a later period, did not, I am thankful to say, happen in my presence. I do beg and entreat that nobody will be so very unfeeling as to lay any part of the blame of those circumstances on *me*. I did everything for the best. I am not answerable for a deplorable calamity, which it was quite impossible to foresee. I am shattered by it; I have suffered under it, as nobody else has suffered. My servant, Louis (who is really attached to me, in his unintelligent way), thinks I shall never get over it. He sees me dictating at this moment, with my handkerchief to my eyes. I wish to mention, in justice to myself, that it was not my fault, and that I am quite exhausted and heartbroken. Need I say more?

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THE STORY CONTINUED

BY

ELIZA MICHELSON,

HOUSEKEEPER AT BLACKWATER PARK.

I.

I AM asked to state plainly what I know of the progress of Miss Halcombe's illness, and of the circumstances under which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London.

The reason given for making this demand on me is, that my testimony is wanted in the interests of truth. As the widow of a clergyman of the Church of England (reduced by misfortune to the necessity of accepting a situation), I have been taught to place the claims of truth above all other considerations. I therefore comply with a request which I might otherwise, through reluctance to connect myself with distressing family affairs, have hesitated to grant.

I made no memorandum at the time, and I cannot therefore be sure to a day, of the date; but I believe I am correct in stating that Miss Halcombe's serious illness began during the first week in July. The breakfast hour was late at Blackwater Park — sometimes as late as ten, never earlier than half-past nine. On the morning to which I am now referring, Miss Halcombe (who was usually the first to come down) did not make her appearance at the table. After the family had waited a quarter of an hour, the upper housemaid was sent to see after her, and came running out of the room dreadfully frightened. I met the servant on the stairs, and went at once to Miss Halcombe to see what was the matter. The poor lady was incapable of telling me. She was walking about her room with

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a pen in her hand, quite light-headed, in a state of burning fever.

Lady Glyde (being no longer in Sir Percival's service, I may without impropriety, mention my former mistress by her name, instead of calling her My Lady) was the first to come in, from her own bedroom. She was so dreadfully alarmed and distressed, that she was quite useless. The Count Fosco, and his lady, who came up-stairs immediately afterwards, were both most serviceable and kind. Her ladyship assisted me to get Miss Halcombe to her bed. His lordship the Count, remained in the sitting-room, and, having sent for my medicine-chest, made a mixture for Miss Halcombe, and a cooling lotion to be applied to her head, so as to lose no time before the doctor came. We applied the lotion; but we could not get her to take the mixture. Sir Percival undertook to send for the doctor. He despatched a groom, on horseback, for the nearest medical man, Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

Mr. Dawson arrived in less than an hour's time. He was a respectable elderly man, well known, all round the country; and we were much alarmed when we found that he considered the case to be a very serious one.

His lordship the Count, affably entered into conversation with Mr. Dawson, and gave his opinions with a judicious freedom. Mr. Dawson, not overcourteously, inquired if his lordship's advice was the advice of a doctor; and being informed that it was the advice of one who had studied medicine, unprofessionally, replied that he was not accustomed to consult with amateur-physicians. The Count, with truly Christian meekness of temper, smiled, and left the room. Before he went out, he told me that he might be found, in case he was wanted in the course of the day, at the boat-house on the banks of the lake. Why he should have gone there, I cannot say. But he did go; remaining away the whole day till seven o'clock, which was dinner-time. Perhaps, he wished to set the example of keeping the house as quiet as possible. It was entirely in his character to do so. He was a most considerate nobleman.

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Miss Halcombe passed a very bad night; the fever coming and going, and getting worse towards the morning, instead of better. No nurse fit to wait on her being at hand in the neighbourhood, her ladyship the Countess, and myself, undertook the duty, relieving each other. Lady Glyde, most unwisely, insisted on sitting up with us. She was much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe's illness calmly. She only did herself harm, without being of the least real assistance. A more gentle and affectionate lady never lived; but she cried, and she was frightened — two weaknesses which made her entirely unfit to be present in a sick-room.

Sir Percival and the Count came in the morning to make their inquiries.

Sir Percival (from distress, I presume, at his lady's affliction, and at Miss Halcombe's illness) appeared much confused and unsettled in his mind. His lordship testified, on the contrary, a becoming composure and interest. He had his straw hat in one hand, and his book in the other; and he mentioned to Sir Percival, in my hearing, that he would go out again, and study at the lake. "Let us keep the house quiet," he said. "Let us not smoke in-doors, my friend, now Miss Halcombe is ill. You go your way, and I will go mine. When I study, I like to be alone. Good morning, Mrs. Michelson."

Sir Percival was not civil enough — perhaps, I ought, in justice to say, not composed enough — to take leave of me with the same polite attention. The only person in the house, indeed, who treated me, at that time or at any other, on the footing of a lady in distressed circumstances, was the Count. He had the manners of a true nobleman; he was considerate towards every one. Even the young person (Fanny by name) who attended on Lady Glyde, was not beneath his notice. When she was sent away by Sir Percival, his lordship (showing me his sweet little birds at the time) was most kindly anxious to know what had become of her, where she was to go the day she left Blackwater Park, and so on. It is in such little delicate attentions that the advantages of aristocratic birth

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always show themselves. I make no apology for introducing these particulars; they are brought forward in justice to his lordship, whose character, I have reason to know, is viewed rather harshly in certain quarters. A nobleman who can respect a lady in distressed circumstances, and can take a fatherly interest in the fortunes of an humble servant girl, shows principles and feelings of too high an order to be lightly called in question. I advance no opinions — I offer facts only. My endeavour through life is to judge not, that I be not judged. One of my beloved husband's finest sermons was on that text. I read it constantly — in my own copy of the edition printed by subscription, in the first days of my widowhood — and, at every fresh perusal, I derive an increase of spiritual benefit and edification.

There was no improvement in Miss Halcombe; and the second night was even worse than the first. Mr. Dawson was constant in his attendance. The practical duties of nursing were still divided between the Countess and myself; Lady Glyde persisting in sitting up with us, though we both entreated her to take some rest. "My place is by Marian's bedside," was her only answer. "Whether I am ill, or well, nothing will induce me to lose sight of her."

Towards mid-day, I went down-stairs to attend to some of my regular duties. An hour afterwards, on my way back to the sick-room, I saw the Count (who had gone out again early, for the third time), entering the hall, to all appearance in the highest good spirits. Sir Percival, at the same moment, put his head out of the library-door, and addressed his noble friend, with extreme eagerness, in these words:

"Have you found her?"

His lordship's large face became dimpled all over with placid smiles; but he made no reply in words. At the same time, Sir Percival turned his head, observed that I was approaching the stairs, and looked at me in the most rudely angry manner possible.

"Come in here and tell me about it," he said, to the Count.

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"Whenever there are women in a house, they're always sure to be going up or down stairs."

"My dear Percival," observed his lordship, kindly, "Mrs. Michelson has duties. Pray recognise her admirable performance of them as sincerely as I do! How is the sufferer, Mrs. Michelson?"

"No better, my lord, I regret to say."

"Sad — most sad!" remarked the Count. "You look fatigued, Mrs. Michelson. It is certainly time you and my wife had some help in nursing. I think I may be the means of offering you that help. Circumstances have happened which will oblige Madame Fosco to travel to London, either to-morrow or the day after. She will go away in the morning, and return at night; and she will bring back with her, to relieve you, a nurse of excellent conduct and capacity, who is now disengaged. The woman is known to my wife as a person to be trusted. Before she comes here, say nothing about her, if you please, to the doctor, because he will look with an evil eye on any nurse of my providing. When she appears in this house, she will speak for herself; and Mr. Dawson will be obliged to acknowledge that there is no excuse for not employing her. Lady Glyde will say the same. Pray present my best respects and sympathies to Lady Glyde."

I expressed my grateful acknowledgments for his lordship's kind consideration. Sir Percival cut them short by calling to his noble friend (using I regret to say, a profane expression) to come into the library, and not to keep him waiting there any longer.

I proceeded upstairs. We are poor erring creatures; and however well established a woman's principles may be, she cannot always keep on her guard against the temptation to exercise an idle curiosity. I am ashamed to say that an idle curiosity, on this occasion, got the better of *my* principles, and made me unduly inquisitive about the question which Sir Percival had addressed to his noble friend, at the library door. Who was the Count expected to find, in the course of his studious morning rambles at Blackwater Park? A woman, it was

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to be presumed, from the terms of Sir Percival's inquiry. I did not suspect the Count of any impropriety — I knew his moral character too well. The only question I asked myself was — Had he found her?

To resume. The night passed as usual, without producing any change for the better in Miss Halcombe. The next day, she seemed to improve a little. The day after that, her ladyship the Countess, without mentioning the object of her journey to any one in my hearing, proceeded by the morning train to London; her noble husband, with his customary attention, accompanying her to the station.

I was now left in sole charge of Miss Halcombe, with every apparent chance, in consequence of her sister's resolution not to leave the bedside, of having Lady Glyde herself to nurse next.

The only circumstance of any importance that happened in the course of the day, was the occurrence of another unpleasant meeting between the doctor and the Count.

His lordship, on returning from the station, stepped up into Miss Halcombe's sitting-room to make his inquiries. I went out from the bedroom to speak to him; Mr. Dawson and Lady Glyde being both with the patient at the time. The Count asked me many questions about the treatment and the symptoms. I informed him that the treatment was of the kind described as "saline;" and that the symptoms, between the attacks of fever, were certainly those of increasing weakness and exhaustion. Just as I was mentioning these last particulars, Mr. Dawson came out from the bedroom.

"Good morning, sir," said his lordship, stepping forward in the most urbane manner, and stopping the doctor, with a high-bred resolution impossible to resist, "I greatly fear you find no improvement in the symptoms to-day?"

"I find decided improvement," answered Mr. Dawson.

"You still persist in your lowering treatment of this case of fever?" continued his lordship.

"I persist in the treatment which is justified by my own professional experience," said Mr. Dawson.

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"Permit me to put one question to you on the vast subject of professional experience," observed the Count. "I presume to offer no more advice — I only presume to make an inquiry. You live at some distance, sir, from the gigantic centres of scientific activity — London and Paris. Have you ever heard of the wasting effects of fever being reasonably and intelligibly repaired by fortifying the exhausted patient with brandy, wine, ammonia, and quinine? Has that new heresy of the highest medical authorities ever reached your ears — Yes, or No?"

"When a professional man puts that question to me, I shall be glad to answer him," said the doctor, opening the door to go out. "You are not a professional man; and I beg to decline answering *you*."

Buffeted in this inexcusably uncivil way, on one cheek, the Count, like a practical Christian, immediately turned the other, and said, in the sweetest manner, "Good morning, Mr. Dawson."

If my late beloved husband had been so fortunate as to know his lordship, how highly he and the Count would have esteemed each other!

Her ladyship the Countess returned by the last train that night, and brought with her the nurse from London. I was instructed that this person's name was Mrs. Rubelle. Her personal appearance, and her imperfect English, when she spoke, informed me that she was a foreigner.

I have always cultivated a feeling of humane indulgence for foreigners. They do not possess our blessings and advantages; and they are, for the most part, brought up in the blind errors of popery. It has also always been my precept and practice, as it was my dear husband's precept and practice before me (see Sermon XXIX, in the Collection by the late Rev. Samuel Michelson, M.A.), to do as I would be done by. On both these accounts, I will not say that Mrs. Rubelle struck me as being a small, wiry, sly person, of fifty or thereabouts, with a dark brown, or Creole complexion, and

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watchful light gray eyes. Nor will I mention, for the reasons just alleged, that I thought her dress, though it was of the plainest black silk, inappropriately costly in texture and unnecessarily refined in trimming and finish, for a person in her position in life. I should not like these things to be said of me, and therefore it is my duty not to say them of Mrs. Rubelle. I will merely mention that her manners were — not perhaps unpleasantly reserved — but only remarkably quiet and retiring; that she looked about her a great deal, and said very little, which might have arisen quite as much from her own modesty, as from distrust of her position at Blackwater Park; and that she declined to partake of supper (which was curious, perhaps, but surely not suspicious?), although I myself politely invited her to that meal, in my own room.

At the Count's particular suggestion (so like his lordship's forgiving kindness!), it was arranged that Mrs. Rubelle should not enter on her duties, until she had been seen and approved by the doctor the next morning. I sat up that night. Lady Glyde appeared to be very unwilling that the new nurse should be employed to attend on Miss Halcombe. Such want of liberality towards a foreigner on the part of a lady of her education and refinement surprised me. I ventured to say, "My lady, we must all remember not to be hasty in our judgments on our inferiors — especially when they come from foreign parts." Lady Glyde did not appear to attend to me. She only sighed, and kissed Miss Halcombe's hand as it lay on the counterpane. Scarcely a judicious proceeding in a sick-room, with a patient whom it was highly desirable not to excite. But poor Lady Glyde knew nothing of nursing — nothing whatever, I am sorry to say.

The next morning, Mrs. Rubelle was sent to the sitting-room, to be approved by the doctor, on his way through to the bedroom.

I left Lady Glyde with Miss Halcombe, who was slumbering at the time, and joined Mrs. Rubelle, with the object of kindly preventing her from feeling strange and nervous in consequence of the uncertainty of her situation. She did not

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appear to see it in that light. She seemed to be quite satisfied, beforehand, that Mr. Dawson would approve of her; and she sat calmly looking out of window, with every appearance of enjoying the country air. Some people might have thought such conduct suggestive of brazen assurance. I beg to say that I more liberally set it down to extraordinary strength of mind.

Instead of the doctor coming up to us, I was sent for to see the doctor. I thought this change of affairs rather odd, but Mrs. Rubelle did not appear to be affected by it in any way. I left her still calmly looking out of window, and still silently enjoying the country air.

Mr. Dawson was waiting for me, by himself, in the breakfast-room.

"About this new nurse, Mrs. Michelson," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir?"

"I find that she has been brought here from London by the wife of that fat old foreigner, who is always trying to interfere with me. Mrs. Michelson, the fat old foreigner is a Quack."

This was very rude. I was naturally shocked at it.

"Are you aware, sir," I said, "that you are talking of a nobleman?"

"Pooh! He isn't the first Quack with a handle to his name. They're all Counts — hang 'em!"

"He would not be a friend of Sir Percival Glyde's, sir, if he was not a member of the highest aristocracy — excepting the English aristocracy, of course."

"Very well, Mrs. Michelson, call him what you like; and let us get back to the nurse. I have been objecting to her already."

"Without having seen her, sir?'

"Yes; without having seen her. She may be the best nurse in existence; but she is not a nurse of my providing. I have put that objection to Sir Percival, as the master of the house. He doesn't support me. He says a nurse of my providing would have been a stranger from London also: and he

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thinks the woman ought to have a trial, after his wife's aunt has taken the trouble to fetch her from London. There is some justice in that; and I can't decently say No. But I have made it a condition that she is to go at once, if I find reason to complain of her. This proposal being one which I have some right to make, as medical attendant, Sir Percival has consented to it. Now, Mrs. Michelson, I know I can depend on you; and I want you to keep a sharp eye on the nurse, for the first day or two, and to see that she gives Miss Halcombe no medicines but mine. This foreign nobleman of yours is dying to try his quack remedies (mesmerism included) on my patient; and a nurse who is brought here by his wife may be a little too willing to help him. You understand? Very well, then, we may go upstairs. Is the nurse there? I'll say a word to her, before she goes into the sick-room."

We found Mrs. Rubelle still enjoying herself at the window. When I introduced her to Mr. Dawson, neither the doctor's doubtful looks nor the doctor's searching questions appeared to confuse her in the least. She answered him quietly in her broken English; and, though he tried hard to puzzle her, she never betrayed the least ignorance, so far, about any part of her duties. This was doubtless the result of strength of mind, as I said before, and not of brazen assurance by any means.

We all went into the bedroom.

Mrs. Rubelle looked, very attentively, at the patient; curtseyed to Lady Glyde; set one or two little things right in the room; and sat down quietly in a corner to wait until she was wanted. Her ladyship seemed startled and annoyed by the appearance of the strange nurse. No one said anything, for fear of rousing Miss Halcombe, who was still slumbering — except the doctor, who whispered a question about the night. I softly answered, "Much as usual;" and then Mr. Dawson went out. Lady Glyde followed him, I suppose to speak about Mrs. Rubelle. For my own part, I had made up my mind already that this quiet foreign person would keep her situation. She had all her wits about her; and she certainly understood

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her business. So far, I could hardly have done much better, by the bedside, myself.

Remembering Mr. Dawson's caution to me, I subjected Mrs. Rubelle to a severe scrutiny, at certain intervals, for the next three or four days. I over and over again entered the room softly and suddenly, but I never found her out, in any suspicious action. Lady Glyde, who watched her as attentively as I did, discovered nothing either. I never detected a sign of the medicine bottles being tampered with; I never saw Mrs. Rubelle say a word to the Count, or the Count to her. She managed Miss Halcombe with unquestionable care and discretion. The poor lady wavered backwards and forwards between a sort of sleepy exhaustion which was half faintness and half slumbering, and attacks of fever which brought with them more or less of wandering in her mind. Mrs. Rubelle never disturbed her in the first case, and never startled her in the second, by appearing too suddenly at the bedside in the character of a stranger. Honour to whom honour is due (whether foreign or English) — and I give her privilege impartially to Mrs. Rubelle. She was remarkably uncommunicative about herself, and she was too quietly independent of all advice from experienced persons who understood the duties of a sick-room — but, with these drawbacks, she was a good nurse; and she never gave either Lady Glyde or Mr. Dawson the shadow of a reason for complaining of her.

The next circumstance of importance that occurred in the house was the temporary absence of the Count, occasioned by business which took him to London. He went away (I think) on the morning of the fourth day after the arrival of Mrs. Rubelle; and, at parting, he spoke to Lady Glyde, very seriously, in my presence, on the subject of Miss Halcombe.

"Trust Mr. Dawson," he said, "for a few days more, if you please. But, if there is not some change for the better, in that time, send for advice from London, which this mule of a doctor must accept in spite of himself. Offend Mr. Dawson, and save Miss Halcombe. I say this seriously, on my word of honour and from the bottom of my heart."

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His lordship spoke with extreme feeling and kindness. But poor Lady Glyde's nerves were so completely broken down that she seemed quite frightened at him. She trembled from head to foot; and allowed him to take his leave, without uttering a word on her side. She turned to me, when he had gone, and said, "Oh, Mrs. Michelson, I am heart-broken about my sister, and I have no friend to advise me! Do *you* think Mr. Dawson is wrong? He told me himself this morning, that there was no fear, and no need of fresh advice."

"With all respect to Mr. Dawson," I answered, "in your ladyship's place, I should remember the Count's advice."

Lady Glyde turned away from me suddenly, with an appearance of despair, for which I was quite unable to account.

"*His* advice!" she said to herself. "God help us — *his* advice!"

The Count was away from Blackwater Park, as nearly as I remember, a week.

Sir Percival seemed to feel the loss of his lordship in various ways, and appeared also, I thought, much depressed and altered by the sickness and sorrow in the house. Occasionally, he was so very restless, that I could not help noticing it; coming and going, and wandering here and there and everywhere in the grounds. His inquiries about Miss Halcombe, and about his lady (whose failing health seemed to cause him sincere anxiety), were most attentive. I think his heart was much softened. If some kind clerical friend — some such friend as he might have found in my late excellent husband — had been near him at this time, cheering moral progress might have been made with Sir Percival. I seldom find myself mistaken on a point of this sort; having had experience to guide me in my happy married days.

Her ladyship, the Countess, who was now the only company for Sir Percival down stairs, rather neglected him, as I considered. Or, perhaps, it might have been that he neglected her. A stranger might almost have supposed that they were

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bent, now they were left together alone, on actually avoiding one another. This, of course, could not be. But it did so happen, nevertheless, that the Countess made her dinner at luncheon-time, and that she always came up-stairs towards evening, although Mrs. Rubelle had taken the nursing duties entirely off her hands. Sir Percival dined by himself; and William (the man out of livery) made the remark, in my hearing, that his master had put himself on half rations of food and on a double allowance of drink. I attach no importance to such an insolent observation as this, on the part of a servant. I reprobated it at the time; and I wish to be understood as reprobating it once more on this occasion.

In the course of the next few days, Miss Halcombe did certainly seem to all of us to be mending a little. Our faith in Mr. Dawson revived. He appeared to be very confident about the case; and he assured Lady Glyde, when she spoke to him on the subject, that he would himself propose to send for a physician, the moment he felt so much as the shadow of a doubt crossing his own mind.

The only person among us who did not appear to be relieved by these words, was the Countess. She said to me privately, that she could not feel easy about Miss Halcombe, on Mr. Dawson's authority, and that she should wait anxiously for her husband's opinion, on his return. That return, his letters informed her, would take place in three days' time. The Count and Countess corresponded regularly every morning, during his lordship's absence. They were in that respect, as in all others, a pattern to married people.

On the evening of the third day, I noticed a change in Miss Halcombe, which caused me serious apprehension. Mrs. Rubelle noticed it too. We said nothing on the subject to Lady Glyde, who was then lying asleep, completely overpowered by exhaustion, on the sofa in the sitting-room.

Mr. Dawson did not pay his evening visit till later than usual. As soon as he set eyes on his patient, I saw his face alter. He tried to hide it; but he looked both confused and alarmed. A messenger was sent to his residence for his medicine-chest, dis-

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infecting preparations were used in the room, and a bed was made up for him in the house by his own directions. "Has the fever turned to infection?" I whispered to him. "I am afraid it has," he answered; "we shall know better to-morrow morning."

By Mr. Dawson's own directions Lady Glyde was kept in ignorance of this change for the worse. He himself absolutely forbade her, on account of her health, to join us in the bedroom that night. She tried to resist — there was a sad scene — but he had his medical authority to support him; and he carried his point.

The next morning, one of the men-servants was sent to London, at eleven o'clock, with a letter to a physician in town, and with orders to bring the new doctor back with him by the earliest possible train. Half an hour after the messenger had gone, the Count returned to Blackwater Park.

The Countess, on her own responsibility, immediately brought him in to see the patient. There was no impropriety that I could discover in her taking this course. His lordship was a married man; he was old enough to be Miss Halcombe's father; and he saw her in the presence of a female relative, Lady Glyde's aunt. Mr. Dawson nevertheless protested against his presence in the room; but, I could plainly remark the doctor was too much alarmed to make any serious resistance on this occasion.

The poor suffering lady was past knowing any one about her. She seemed to take her friends for enemies. When the Count approached her bedside, her eyes, which had been wandering incessantly round and round the room before, settled on his face, with a dreadful stare of terror, which I shall remember to my dying day. The Count sat down by her; felt her pulse, and her temples; looked at her very attentively; and then turned round upon the doctor with such an expression of indignation and contempt in his face, that the words failed on Mr. Dawson's lips, and he stood, for a moment, pale with anger and alarm — pale and perfectly speechless.

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His lordship looked next at me.

"When did the change happen?" he asked.

I told him the time.

"Has Lady Glyde been in the room since?"

I replied that she had not. The doctor had absolutely forbidden her to come into the room, on the evening before, and had repeated the order again in the morning.

"Have you and Mrs. Rubelle been made aware of the full extent of the mischief?" — was his next question.

We were aware, I answered, that the malady was considered infectious. He stopped me, before I could add anything more.

"It is Typhus Fever," he said.

In the minute that passed, while these questions and answers were going on, Mr. Dawson recovered himself, and addressed the Count with his customary firmness.

"It is *not* typhus fever," he remarked, sharply. "I protest against this intrusion, sir. No one has a right to put questions here, but me. I have done my duty to the best of my ability ——"

The Count interrupted him — not by words, but only by pointing to the bed. Mr. Dawson seemed to feel that silent contradiction to his assertion of his own ability, and to grow only the more angry under it.

"I say I have done my duty," he reiterated. "A physician has been sent for from London. I will consult on the nature of the fever with him, and with no one else. I insist on your leaving the room."

"I entered this room, sir, in the sacred interests of humanity," said the Count. "And in the same interests, if the coming of the physician is delayed, I will enter it again. I warn you once more that the fever has turned to Typhus, and that your treatment is responsible for this lamentable change. If that unhappy lady dies, I will give my testimony in a court of justice that your ignorance and obstinacy have been the cause of her death."

Before Mr. Dawson could answer, before the Count could

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leave us, the door was opened from the sitting-room, and we saw Lady Glyde on the threshold.

"I *must*, and *will* come in," she said, with extraordinary firmness.

Instead of stopping her, the Count moved into the sitting-room, and made way for her to go in. On all other occasions, he was the last man in the world to forget anything; but, in the surprise of the moment, he apparently forgot the danger of infection from typhus, and the urgent necessity of forcing Lady Glyde to take proper care of herself.

To my astonishment, Mr. Dawson showed more presence of mind. He stopped her ladyship at the first step she took towards the bedside. "I am sincerely sorry, I am sincerely grieved," he said. "The fever may, I fear, be infectious. Until I am certain that it is not, I entreat you to keep out of the room."

She struggled for a moment; then suddenly dropped her arms, and sank forward. She had fainted. The Countess and I took her from the doctor, and carried her into her own room. The Count preceded us, and waited in the passage, till I came out, and told him that we had recovered her from the swoon.

I went back to the doctor to tell him, by Lady Glyde's desire, that she insisted on speaking to him immediately. He withdrew at once to quiet her ladyship's agitation, and to assure her of the physician's arrival in the course of a few hours. Those hours passed very slowly. Sir Percival and the Count were together down stairs, and sent up, from time to time, to make their inquiries. At last, between five and six o'clock, to our great relief, the physician came.

He was a younger man than Mr. Dawson; very serious, and very decided. What he thought of the previous treatment, I cannot say; but it struck me as curious that he put many more questions to myself and to Mrs. Rubelle than he put to the doctor, and that he did not appear to listen with much interest to what Mr. Dawson said, while he was examining Mr. Dawson's patient. I began to suspect, from

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what I observed in this way, that the Count had been right about the illness all the way through; and I was naturally confirmed in that idea, when Mr. Dawson, after some little delay, asked the one important question which the London doctor had been sent for to set at rest.

"What is your opinion of the fever?" he inquired.

"Typhus," replied the physician. "Typhus fever beyond all doubt."

That quiet foreign person, Mrs. Rubelle, crossed her thin, brown hands in front of her, and looked at me with a very significant smile. The Count himself could hardly have appeared more gratified, if he had been present in the room, and had heard the confirmation of his own opinion.

After giving us some useful directions about the management of the patient, and mentioning that he would come again in five days' time, the physician withdrew to consult in private, with Mr. Dawson. He would offer no opinion on Miss Halcombe's chances of recovery: he said it was impossible at that stage of the illness to pronounce, one way or the other.

The five days passed anxiously.

Countess Fosco and myself took it by turns to relieve Mrs. Rubelle; Miss Halcombe's condition growing worse and worse, and requiring our utmost care and attention. It was a terribly trying time. Lady Glyde (supported, as Mr. Dawson said, by the constant strain of her suspense on her sister's account) rallied in the most extraordinary manner, and showed a firmness and determination for which I should myself never have given her credit. She insisted on coming into the sick-room, two or three times every day, to look at Miss Halcombe with her own eyes; promising not to go too close to the bed, if the doctor would consent to her wishes, so far. Mr. Dawson very unwillingly made the concession required of him: I think he saw that it was hopeless to dispute with her. She came in every day; and she self-denyingly kept her promise. I felt it personally so distressing (as reminding me of my own afflic-

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tion during my husband's last illness) to see how she suffered under these circumstances, that I must beg not to dwell on this part of the subject any longer. It is more agreeable to me to mention that no fresh disputes took place between Mr. Dawson and the Count. His lordship made all his inquiries by deputy; and remained continually in company with Sir Percival, down-stairs.

On the fifth day, the physician came again, and gave us a little hope. He said the tenth day from the first appearance of the typhus would probably decide the result of the illness, and he arranged for his third visit to take place on that date. The interval passed as before — except that the Count went to London again, one morning, and returned at night.

On the tenth day, it pleased a merciful Providence to relieve our household from all further anxiety and alarm. The physician positively assured us that Miss Halcombe was out of danger. "She wants no doctor, now — all she requires is careful watching and nursing, for some time to come; and that I see she has." Those were his own words. That evening I read my husband's touching sermon on Recovery from Sickness, with more happiness and advantage (in a spiritual point of view) than I ever remember to have derived from it before.

The effect of the good news on poor Lady Glyde was, I grieve to say, quite overpowering. She was too weak to bear the violent reaction; and, in another day or two, she sank into a state of debility and depression, which obliged her to keep her room. Rest and quiet, and change of air afterwards, were the best remedies which Mr. Dawson could suggest for her benefit. It was fortunate that matters were no worse, for, on the very day after she took to her room, the Count and the doctor had another disagreement; and, this time, the dispute between them was of so serious a nature, that Mr. Dawson left the house.

I was not present at the time; but I understood that the subject of dispute was the amount of nourishment which it was necessary to give to assist Miss Halcombe's convales-

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cence, after the exhaustion of the fever. Mr. Dawson, now that his patient was safe, was less inclined than ever to submit to unprofessional interference; and the Count (I cannot imagine why) lost all the self-control which he had so judiciously preserved on former occasions, and taunted the doctor, over and over again, with his mistake about the fever, when it changed to typhus. The unfortunate affair ended in Mr. Dawson's appealing to Sir Percival, and threatening (now that he could leave without absolute danger to Miss Halcombe) to withdraw from his attendance at Blackwater Park, if the Count's interference was not peremptorily suppressed from that moment. Sir Percival's reply (though not designedly uncivil) had only resulted in making matters worse; and Mr. Dawson had thereupon withdrawn from the house, in a state of extreme indignation at Count Fosco's usage of him, and had sent in his bill the next morning.

We were now, therefore, left without the attendance of a medical man. Although there was no actual necessity for another doctor — nursing and watching being, as the physician had observed, all that Miss Halcombe required — I should still, if my authority had been consulted, have obtained professional assistance, from some other quarter, for form's sake.

The matter did not seem to strike Sir Percival in that light. He said it would be time enough to send for another doctor, if Miss Halcombe showed any signs of a relapse. In the mean while, we had the Count to consult in any minor difficulty; and we need not unnecessarily disturb our patient, in her present weak and nervous condition, by the presence of a stranger at her bedside. There was much that was reasonable, no doubt, in these considerations; but they left me a little anxious, nevertheless. Nor was I quite satisfied, in my own mind, of the propriety of our concealing the doctor's absence, as we did, from Lady Glyde. It was a merciful deception, I admit — for she was in no state to bear any fresh anxieties. But still it was a deception; and, as such, to a person of my principles, at best a doubtful proceeding.

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A second perplexing circumstance which happened on the same day, and which took me completely by surprise, added greatly to the sense of uneasiness that was now weighing on my mind.

I was sent for to see Sir Percival in the library. The Count, who was with him when I went in, immediately rose and left us alone together. Sir Percival civilly asked me to take a seat; and then, to my great astonishment, addressed me in these terms:

"I want to speak to you, Mrs. Michelson, about a matter which I decided on some time ago, and which I should have mentioned before, but for the sickness and trouble in the house. In plain words, I have reasons for wishing to break up my establishment immediately at this place — leaving you in charge, of course, as usual. As soon as Lady Glyde and Miss Halcombe can travel, they must both have change of air. My friends, Count Fosco and the Countess, will leave us, before that time, to live in the neighbourhood of London. And I have reasons for not opening the house to any more company, with a view to economising as carefully as I can. I don't blame you — but my expenses here are a great deal too heavy. In short, I shall sell the horses, and get rid of all the servants at once. I never do things by halves, as you know; and I mean to have the house clear of a pack of useless people by this time to-morrow."

I listened to him, perfectly aghast with astonishment.

"Do you mean, Sir Percival, that I am to dismiss the in-door servants, under my charge, without the usual month's warning?" I asked.

"Certainly, I do. We may all be out of the house before another month; and I am not going to leave the servants here in idleness, with no master to wait on."

"Who is to do the cooking, Sir Percival, while you are still staying here?"

"Margaret Porcher can roast and boil — keep her. What

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do I want with a cook, if I don't mean to give any dinner-parties?"

"The servant you have mentioned is the most unintelligent servant in the house, Sir Percival —"

"Keep her, I tell you; and have a woman in from the village to do the cleaning, and go away again. My weekly expenses must and shall be lowered immediately. I don't send for you to make objections, Mrs. Michelson — I send for you to carry out my plans of economy. Dismiss the whole lazy pack of in-door servants to-morrow, except Porcher. She is as strong as a horse — and we'll make her work like a horse."

"You will excuse me for reminding you, Sir Percival, that if the servants go to-morrow, they must have a month's wages in lieu of a month's warning."

"Let them! A month's wages saves a month's waste and gluttony in the servants'-hall."

This last remark conveyed an aspersion of the most offensive kind on my management. I had too much self-respect to defend myself under so gross an imputation. Christian consideration for the helpless position of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde, and for the serious inconvenience which my sudden absence might inflict on them, alone prevented me from resigning my situation on the spot. I rose immediately. It would have lowered me in my own estimation to have permitted the interview to continue a moment longer.

"After that last remark, Sir Percival, I have nothing more to say. Your directions shall be attended to." Pronouncing those words, I bowed my head with the most distant respect, and went out of the room.

The next day, the servants left in a body. Sir Percival himself dismissed the grooms and stablemen; sending them, with all the horses but one, to London. Of the whole domestic establishment, in-doors and out, there now remained only myself, Margaret Porcher, and the gardener; this last living in his own cottage, and being wanted to take care of the one horse that remained in the stables.

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With the house left in this strange and lonely condition; with the mistress of it ill in her room; with Miss Halcombe still as helpless as a child; and with the doctor's attendance withdrawn from us in enmity — it was surely not unnatural that my spirits should sink, and my customary composure be very hard to maintain. My mind was ill at ease. I wished the poor ladies both well again; and I wished myself away from Blackwater Park.

II.

The next event that occurred was of so singular a nature, that it might have caused me a feeling of superstitious surprise, if my mind had not been fortified by principle against any pagan weakness of that sort. The uneasy sense of something wrong in the family which had made me wish myself away from Blackwater Park, was actually followed, strange to say, by my departure from the house. It is true that my absence was for a temporary period only: but the coincidence was, in my opinion, not the less remarkable on that account.

My departure took place under the following circumstances:

A day or two after the servants all left, I was again sent for to see Sir Percival. The undeserved slur which he had cast on my management of the household, did not, I am happy to say, prevent me from returning good for evil to the best of my ability, by complying with his request as readily and respectfully as ever. It cost me a struggle with that fallen nature which we all share in common, before I could suppress my feelings. Being accustomed to self-discipline, I accomplished the sacrifice.

I found Sir Percival and Count Fosco sitting together, again. On this occasion his lordship remained present at the interview, and assisted in the development of Sir Percival's views.

The subject to which they now requested my attention,

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related to the healthy change of air by which we all hoped that Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde might soon be enabled to profit. Sir Percival mentioned that both the ladies would probably pass the autumn (by invitation of Frederick Fairlie, Esquire) at Limmeridge House, Cumberland. But before they went there, it was his opinion, confirmed by Count Fosco (who here took up the conversation and continued it to the end), that they would benefit by a short residence first in the genial climate of Torquay. The great object, therefore, was to engage lodgings at that place, affording all the comforts and advantages of which they stood in need; and the great difficulty was to find an experienced person capable of choosing the sort of residence which they wanted. In this emergency, the Count begged to inquire, on Sir Percival's behalf, whether I would object to give the ladies the benefit of my assistance, by proceeding myself to Torquay in their interests.

It was impossible, for a person in my situation, to meet any proposal, made in these terms, with a positive objection. I could only venture to represent the serious inconvenience of my leaving Blackwater Park, in the extraordinary absence of all the in-door servants, with the one exception of Margaret Porcher. But Sir Percival and his lordship declared that they were both willing to put up with inconvenience for the sake of the invalids. I next respectfully suggested writing to an agent at Torquay; but I was met here by being reminded of the imprudence of taking lodgings without first seeing them. I was also informed that the Countess (who would otherwise have gone to Devonshire herself) could not, in Lady Glyde's present condition, leave her niece; and that Sir Percival and the Count had business to transact together, which would oblige them to remain at Blackwater Park. In short, it was clearly shown me, that if I did not undertake the errand, no one else could be trusted with it. Under these circumstances, I could only inform Sir Percival that my services were at the disposal of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde.

It was thereupon arranged that I should leave the next

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morning; that I should occupy one or two days in examining all the most convenient houses in Torquay; and that I should return, with my report, as soon as I conveniently could. A memorandum was written for me by his lordship, stating the requisites which the place I was sent to take must be found to possess; and a note of the pecuniary limit assigned to me, was added by Sir Percival.

My own idea, on reading over these instructions, was, that no such residence as I saw described could be found at any watering-place in England; and that, even if it could by chance be discovered, it would certainly not be parted with for any period, on such terms as I was permitted to offer. I hinted at these difficulties to both the gentlemen; but Sir Percival (who undertook to answer me) did not appear to feel them. It was not for me to dispute the question. I said no more; but I felt a very strong conviction that the business on which I was sent away was so beset by difficulties that my errand was almost hopeless at starting.

Before I left, I took care to satisfy myself that Miss Halcombe was going on favourably.

There was a painful expression of anxiety in her face, which made me fear that her mind, on first recovering itself, was not at ease. But she was certainly strengthening more rapidly than I could have ventured to anticipate; and she was able to send kind messages to Lady Glyde, saying that she was fast getting well, and entreating her ladyship not to exert herself again too soon. I left her in charge of Mrs. Rubelle, who was still as quietly independent of every one else in the house as ever. When I knocked at Lady Glyde's door, before going away, I was told that she was still sadly weak and depressed; my informant being the Countess, who was then keeping her company in her room. Sir Percival and the Count were walking on the road to the lodge, as I was driven by in the chaise. I bowed to them, and quitted the house, with not a living soul left in the servants' offices but Margaret Porcher.

Every one must feel, what I have felt myself since that

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time, that these circumstances were more than unusual — they were almost suspicious. Let me, however, say again, that it was impossible for me, in my dependent position, to act otherwise than I did.

The result of my errand at Torquay was exactly what I had foreseen. No such lodgings as I was instructed to take could be found in the whole place; and the terms I was permitted to give were much too low for the purpose, even if I had been able to discover what I wanted. I accordingly returned to Blackwater Park; and informed Sir Percival, who met me at the door, that my journey had been taken in vain. He seemed too much occupied with some other subject to care about the failure of my errand, and his first words informed me that even in the short time of my absence, another remarkable change had taken place in the house.

The Count and Countess Fosco had left Blackwater Park for their new residence in St. John's Wood.

I was not made aware of the motive for this sudden departure — I was only told that the Count had been very particular in leaving his kind compliments for me. When I ventured on asking Sir Percival whether Lady Glyde had any one to attend to her comforts in the absence of the Countess, he replied that she had Margaret Porcher to wait on her; and he added that a woman from the village had been sent for to do the work down stairs.

The answer really shocked me — there was such a glaring impropriety in permitting an under-housemaid to fill the place of confidential attendant on Lady Glyde. I went upstairs at once, and met Margaret on the bedroom-landing. Her services had not been required (naturally enough); her mistress having sufficiently recovered, that morning, to be able to leave her bed. I asked, next, after Miss Halcombe; but I was answered in a slouching, sulky way, which left me no wiser than I was before. I did not choose to repeat the question, and perhaps provoke an impertinent reply. It was in every respect more becoming, to a person in my position, to present myself immediately in Lady Glyde's room.

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I found that her ladyship had certainly gained in health during the last few days. Although still sadly weak and nervous, she was able to get up without assistance, and to walk slowly about her room, feeling no worse effect from the exertion than a slight sensation of fatigue. She had been made a little anxious that morning about Miss Halcombe, through having received no news of her from any one. I thought this seemed to imply a blamable want of attention on the part of Mrs. Rubelle; but I said nothing, and remained with Lady Glyde, to assist her to dress. When she was ready, we both left the room together to go to Miss Halcombe.

We were stopped in the passage by the appearance of Sir Percival. He looked as if he had been purposely waiting there to see us.

"Where are you going?" he said to Lady Glyde.

"To Marian's room," she answered.

"It may spare you a disappointment," remarked Sir Percival, "if I tell you at once that you will not find her there."

"Not find her there!"

"No. She left the house yesterday morning with Fosco and his wife."

Lady Glyde was not strong enough to bear the surprise of this extraordinary statement. She turned fearfully pale; and leaned back against the wall, looking at her husband in dead silence.

I was so astonished myself, that I hardly knew what to say. I asked Sir Percival if he really meant that Miss Halcombe had left Blackwater Park.

"I certainly mean it," he answered.

"In her state, Sir Percival! Without mentioning her intentions to Lady Glyde!"

Before he could reply, her ladyship recovered herself a little, and spoke.

"Impossible!" she cried out, in a loud, frightened manner; taking a step or two forward from the wall. "Where was the doctor? where was Mr. Dawson when Marian went away?"

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"Mr. Dawson wasn't wanted, and wasn't here," said Sir Percival. "He left of his own accord, which is enough of itself to show that she was strong enough to travel. How you stare! If you don't believe she has gone, look for yourself. Open her room door, and all the other room doors, if you like."

She took him at his word, and I followed her. There was no one in Miss Halcombe's room but Margaret Porcher, who was busy setting it to rights. There was no one in the spare rooms, or the dressing-rooms, when we looked into them afterwards. Sir Percival still waited for us in the passage. As we were leaving the last room that we had examined, Lady Glyde whispered, "Don't go, Mrs. Michelson! don't leave me, for God's sake!" Before I could say anything in return, she was out again in the passage, speaking to her husband.

"What does it mean, Sir Percival? I insist — I beg and pray you will tell me what it means!"

"It means," he answered, "that Miss Halcombe was strong enough yesterday morning to sit up, and be dressed; and that she insisted on taking advantage of Fosco's going to London, to go there too."

"To London!"

"Yes — on her way to Limmeridge."

Lady Glyde turned, and appealed to me.

"You saw Miss Halcombe last," she said. "Tell me plainly, Mrs. Michelson, did you think she looked fit to travel?"

"Not in *my* opinion, your ladyship."

Sir Percival, on his side, instantly turned, and appealed to me also.

"Before you went away," he said, "did you, or did you not, tell the nurse that Miss Halcombe looked much stronger and better?"

"I certainly made the remark, Sir Percival."

He addressed her ladyship again, the moment I offered that reply.

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"Set one of Mrs. Michelson's opinions fairly against the other," he said, "and try to be reasonable about a perfectly plain matter. If she had not been well enough to be moved, do you think we should any of us have risked letting her go? She has got three competent people to look after her — Fosco and your aunt, and Mrs. Rubelle, who went away with them expressly for that purpose. They took a whole carriage yesterday, and made a bed for her on the seat, in case she felt tired. To-day, Fosco and Mrs. Rubelle go on with her themselves to Cumberland —"

"Why does Marian go to Limmeridge, and leave me here by myself?" said her ladyship, interrupting Sir Percival.

"Because your uncle won't receive you till he has seen your sister first," he replied. "Have you forgotten the letter he wrote to her, at the beginning of her illness? It was shown to you; you read it yourself and you ought to remember it."

"I do remember it."

"If you do, why should you be surprised at her leaving you? You want to be back at Limmeridge; and she has gone there to get your uncle's leave for you, on his own terms."

Poor Lady Glyde's eyes filled with tears.

"Marian never left me before," she said, "without bidding me good-by."

"She would have bid you good-by this time," returned Sir Percival, "if she had not been afraid of herself and of you. She knew you would try to stop her; she knew you would distress her by crying. Do you want to make any more objections? If you do, you must come down stairs and ask questions in the dining-room. These worries upset me. I want a glass of wine."

He left us suddenly.

His manner all through this strange conversation had been very unlike what it usually was. He seemed to be almost as nervous and fluttered, every now and then, as his lady herself. I should never have supposed that his health had been so delicate, or his composure so easy to upset.

I tried to prevail on Lady Glyde to go back to her room;

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but it was useless. She stopped in the passage, with the look of a woman whose mind was panic-stricken:

"Something has happened to my sister!" she said.

"Remember, my lady, what surprising energy there is in Miss Halcombe," I suggested. "She might well make an effort which other ladies, in her situation, would be unfit for. I hope and believe there is nothing wrong — I do indeed."

"I must follow Marian!" said her ladyship, with the same panic-stricken look. "I must go where she has gone; I must see that she is alive and well with my own eyes. Come! come down with me to Sir Percival."

I hesitated; fearing that my presence might be considered an intrusion. I attempted to represent this to her ladyship; but she was deaf to me. She held my arm fast enough to force me to go down stairs with her; and she still clung to me with all the little strength she had, at the moment when I opened the dining-room door.

Sir Percival was sitting at the table with a decanter of wine before him. He raised the glass to his lips, as we went in, and drained it at a draught. Seeing that he looked at me angrily when he put it down again, I attempted to make some apology for my accidental presence in the room.

"*Do* you suppose there are any secrets going on here?" he broke out, suddenly; "there are none — there is nothing underhand; nothing kept from you or from any one." After speaking those strange words, loudly and sternly, he filled himself another glass of wine, and asked Lady Glyde what she wanted of him.

"If my sister is fit to travel, I am fit to travel," said her ladyship, with more firmness than she had yet shown. "I come to beg you will make allowances for my anxiety about Marian, and let me follow her at once, by the afternoon train."

"You must wait till to-morrow," replied Sir Percival; "and then, if you don't hear to the contrary, you can go. I don't suppose you are at all likely to hear to the contrary — so I shall write to Fosco by to-night's post."

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He said those last words, holding his glass up to the light, and looking at the wine in it, instead of at Lady Glyde. Indeed, he never once looked at her throughout the conversation. Such a singular want of good breeding in a gentleman of his rank impressed me, I own, very painfully.

"Why should you write to Count Fosco?" she asked, in extreme surprise.

"To tell him to expect you by the mid-day train," said Sir Percival. "He will meet you at the station, when you get to London, and take you on to sleep at your aunt's, in St. John's Wood."

Lady Glyde's hand began to tremble violently round my arm — why, I could not imagine.

"There is no necessity for Count Fosco to meet me," she said. "I would rather not stay in London to sleep."

"You must. You can't take the whole journey to Cumberland in one day. You must rest a night in London — and I don't choose you to go by yourself to an hotel. Fosco made the offer to your uncle to give you house-room on the way down; and your uncle has accepted it. Here! here is a letter from him, addressed to yourself. I ought to have sent it up this morning; but I forgot. Read it, and see what Mr. Fairlie himself says to you."

Lady Glyde looked at the letter for a moment; and then placed it in my hands.

"Read it," she said, faintly. "I don't know what is the matter with me. I can't read it, myself."

It was a note of only four lines — so short and so careless, that it quite struck me. If I remember correctly, it contained no more than these words:

"Dearest Laura, Please come, whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Affectionately yours, Frederick Fairlie."

"I would rather not go there — I would rather not stay a night in London," said her ladyship, breaking out eagerly with those words, before I had quite done reading the note, short

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as it was. "Don't write to Count Fosco! Pray, pray don't write to him!"

Sir Percival filled another glass from the decanter, so awkwardly that he upset it, and spilt all the wine over the table. "My sight seems to be failing me," he muttered to himself, in an odd, muffled voice. He slowly set the glass up again, refilled it, and drained it once more at a draught. I began to fear, from his look and manner, that the wine was getting into his head.

"Pray don't write to Count Fosco!" persisted Lady Glyde, more earnestly than ever.

"Why not, I should like to know?" cried Sir Percival, with a sudden burst of anger that startled us both. "Where can you stay more properly in London, than at the place your uncle himself chooses for you — at your aunt's house? Ask Mrs. Michelson."

The arrangement proposed was so unquestionably the right and the proper one, that I could make no possible objection to it. Much as I sympathized with Lady Glyde in other respects, I could not sympathize with her in her unjust prejudices against Count Fosco. I never before met with any lady, of her rank and station, who was so lamentably narrow-minded on the subject of foreigners. Neither her uncle's note, nor Sir Percival's increasing impatience, seemed to have the least effect on her. She still objected to staying a night in London; she still implored her husband not to write to the Count.

"Drop it!" said Sir Percival, rudely turning his back on us. "If you haven't sense enough to know what is best for yourself, other people must know for you. The arrangement is made; and there is an end of it. You are only wanted to do what Miss Halcombe has done before you —"

"Marian?" repeated her ladyship, in a bewildered manner; "Marian sleeping in Count Fosco's house!"

"Yes, in Count Fosco's house. She slept there, last night, to break the journey. And you are to follow her example, and do what your uncle tells you. You are to sleep at Fosco's to-morrow night, as your sister did, to break the journey. Don't

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throw too many obstacles in my way! don't make me repent of letting you go at all!"

He started to his feet; and suddenly walked out into the verandah, through the open glass doors.

"Will your ladyship excuse me," I whispered, "if I suggest that we had better not wait here till Sir Percival comes back? I am very much afraid he is over-excited with wine."

She consented to leave the room, in a weary, absent manner.

As soon as we were safe up-stairs again, I did all I could to compose her ladyship's spirits. I reminded her that Mr. Fairlie's letters to Miss Halcombe and to herself did certainly sanction, and even render necessary, sooner or later, the course that had been taken. She agreed to this, and even admitted, of her own accord, that both letters were strictly in character with her uncle's peculiar disposition — but her fears about Miss Halcombe, and her unaccountable dread of sleeping at the Count's house in London, still remained unshaken in spite of every consideration that I could urge. I thought it my duty to protest against Lady Glyde's unfavourable opinion of his lordship; and I did so, with becoming forbearance and respect.

"Your ladyship will pardon my freedom," I remarked, in conclusion; "but it is said, 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' I am sure the Count's constant kindness and constant attention from the very beginning of Miss Halcombe's illness, merit our best confidence and esteem. Even his lordship's serious misunderstanding with Mr. Dawson was entirely attributable to his anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account."

"What misunderstanding?" inquired her ladyship, with a look of sudden interest.

I related the unhappy circumstances under which Mr. Dawson had withdrawn his attendance — mentioning them all the more readily, because I disapproved of Sir Percival's continuing to conceal what had happened (as he had done in my presence) from the knowledge of Lady Glyde.

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Her ladyship started up, with every appearance of being additionally agitated and alarmed by what I had told her.

"Worse! worse than I thought!" she said, walking about the room, in a bewildered manner. "The Count knew Mr. Dawson would never consent to Marian's taking a journey — he purposely insulted the doctor to get him out of the house."

"Oh, my lady! my lady!" I remonstrated.

"Mrs. Michelson!" she went on, vehemently; "no words that ever were spoken will persuade me that my sister is in that man's power and in that man's house, with her own consent. My horror of him is such, that nothing Sir Percival could say, and no letters my uncle could write, would induce me, if I had only my own feelings to consult, to eat, drink, or sleep under his roof. But my misery of suspense about Marian gives me the courage to follow her anywhere — to follow her even into Count Fosco's house."

I thought it right, at this point, to mention that Miss Halcombe had already gone on to Cumberland, according to Sir Percival's account of the matter.

"I am afraid to believe it!" answered her ladyship. "I am afraid she is still in that man's house. If I am wrong — if she has really gone on to Limmeridge — I am resolved I will not sleep to-morrow night under Count Fosco's roof. My dearest friend in the world, next to my sister, lives near London. You have heard me, you have heard Miss Halcombe, speak of Mrs. Vesey? I mean to write, and propose to sleep at her house. I don't know how I shall get there — I don't know how I shall avoid the Count — but to that refuge I will escape in some way, if my sister has gone to Cumberland. All I ask of you to do, is to see yourself that my letter to Mrs. Vesey goes to London to-night, as certainly as Sir Percival's letter goes to Count Fosco. I have reasons for not trusting the post-bag down stairs. Will you keep my secret, and help me in this? it is the last favour, perhaps, that I shall ever ask of you."

I hesitated — I thought it all very strange — I almost feared that her ladyship's mind had been a little affected by

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recent anxiety and suffering. At my own risk, however, I ended by giving my consent. If the letter had been addressed to a stranger, or to any one but a lady so well known to me by report as Mrs. Vesey, I might have refused. I thank God — looking to what happened afterwards — I thank God I never thwarted that wish, or any other, which Lady Glyde expressed to me, on the last day of her residence at Blackwater Park.

The letter was written, and given into my hands. I myself put it into the post-box in the village, that evening.

We saw nothing more of Sir Percival for the rest of the day.

I slept, by Lady Glyde's own desire, in the next room to hers, with the door open between us. There was something so strange and dreadful in the loneliness and emptiness of the house, that I was glad, on my side, to have a companion near me. Her ladyship sat up late, reading letters and burning them, and emptying her drawers and cabinets of little things she prized, as if she never expected to return to Blackwater Park. Her sleep was sadly disturbed when she at last went to bed; she cried out in it, several times — once, so loud that she woke herself. Whatever her dreams were, she did not think fit to communicate them to me. Perhaps, in my situation, I had no right to expect that she should do so. It matters little, now. I was sorry for her — I was indeed heartily sorry for her all the same.

The next day was fine and sunny. Sir Percival came up, after breakfast, to tell us that the chaise would be at the door at a quarter to twelve; the train to London stopping at our station, at twenty minutes after. He informed Lady Glyde that he was obliged to go out, but added that he hoped to be back before she left. If any unforeseen accident delayed him, I was to accompany her to the station, and to take special care that she was in time for the train. Sir Percival communicated these directions very hastily; walking, here and there, about the room all the time. Her ladyship looked attentively after him, wherever he went. He never once looked at her in return.

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She only spoke when he had done; and then she stopped him as he approached the door, by holding out her hand.

"I shall see you no more," she said, in a very marked manner. "This is our parting — our parting, it may be for ever. Will you try to forgive me, Percival, as heartily as I forgive *you*?"

His face turned of an awful whiteness all over; and great beads of perspiration broke out on his bald forehead. "I shall come back," he said — and made for the door, as hastily as if his wife's farewell words had frightened him out of the room.

I had never liked Sir Percival — but the manner in which he left Lady Glyde made me feel ashamed of having eaten his bread and lived in his service. I thought of saying a few comforting and Christian words to the poor lady; but there was something in her face, as she looked after her husband when the door closed on him, that made me alter my mind and keep silence.

At the time named, the chaise drew up at the gates. Her ladyship was right — Sir Percival never came back. I waited for him till the last moment — and waited in vain.

No positive responsibility lay on my shoulders; and yet, I did not feel easy in my mind. "It is of your own free will," I said, as the chaise drove through the lodge-gates, "that your ladyship goes to London?"

"I will go anywhere," she answered, "to end the dreadful suspense that I am suffering at this moment."

She had made me feel almost as anxious and as uncertain about Miss Halcombe as she felt herself. I presumed to ask her to write me a line, if all went well in London. She answered, "Most willingly, Mrs. Michelson." "We all have our crosses to bear, my lady," I said, seeing her silent and thoughtful, after she had promised to write. She made no reply: she seemed to be too much wrapped up in her own thoughts to attend to me. "I fear your ladyship rested badly last night," I remarked, after waiting a little. "Yes," she said; "I was terribly disturbed by dreams." "Indeed, my

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lady?" I thought she was going to tell me her dreams; but no, when she spoke next it was only to ask a question. "You posted the letter to Mrs. Vesey with your own hands?" "Yes, my lady."

"Did Sir Percival say, yesterday, that Count Fosco was to meet me at the terminus in London?" "He did, my lady."

She sighed heavily when I answered that last question, and said no more.

We arrived at the station, with hardly two minutes to spare. The gardener (who had driven us) managed about the luggage, while I took the ticket. The whistle of the train was sounding, when I joined her ladyship on the platform. She looked very strangely, and pressed her hand over her heart, as if some sudden pain or fright had overcome her at that moment.

"I wish you were going with me!" she said, catching eagerly at my arm, when I gave her the ticket.

If there had been time; if I had felt the day before, as I felt then, I would have made my arrangements to accompany her — even though the doing so had obliged me to give Sir Percival warning on the spot. As it was, her wishes expressed at the last moment only, were expressed too late for me to comply with them. She seemed to understand this herself before I could explain it, and did not repeat her desire to have me for a travelling companion. The train drew up at the platform. She gave the gardener a present for his children, and took my hand, in her simple, hearty manner, before she got into the carriage.

"You have been very kind to me and to my sister," she said — "kind when we were both friendless. I shall remember you gratefully, as long as I live to remember any one. Good-by — and God bless you!"

She spoke those words with a tone and a look which brought the tears into my eyes — she spoke them as if she was bidding me farewell for ever.

"Good-by, my lady," I said, putting her into the car-

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riage, and trying to cheer her; "good-by, for the present only; good-by, with my best and kindest wishes for happier times!"

She shook her head, and shuddered as she settled herself in the carriage. The guard closed the door. "Do you believe in dreams?" she whispered to me, at the window. "*My* dreams, last night, were dreams I have never had before. The terror of them is hanging over me still." The whistle sounded before I could answer, and the train moved. Her pale quiet face looked at me, for the last time; looked sorrowfully and solemnly from the window. She waved her hand — I saw her no more.

Towards five o'clock on the afternoon of that same day, having a little time to myself in the midst of the household duties which now pressed upon me, I sat down alone in my own room, to try and compose my mind with the volume of my husband's Sermons. For the first time in my life, I found my attention wandering over those pious and cheering words. Concluding that Lady Glyde's departure must have disturbed me far more seriously than I had myself supposed, I put the book aside, and went out to take a turn in the garden. Sir Percival had not yet returned, to my knowledge, so I could feel no hesitation about showing myself in the grounds.

"On turning the corner of the house, and gaining a view of the garden, I was startled by seeing a stranger walking in it. The stranger was a woman — she was lounging along the path, with her back to me, and was gathering the flowers.

As I approached, she heard me, and turned round.

My blood curdled in my veins. The strange woman in the garden was Mrs. Rubelle.

I could neither move, nor speak. She came up to me, as composedly as ever, with her flowers in her hand.

"What is the matter, ma'am?" she said, quietly.

"*You* here!" I gasped out." "Not gone to London! Not gone to Cumberland!"

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Mrs. Rubelle smelt at her flowers with a smile of malicious pity.

"Certainly not," she said. "I have never left Blackwater Park."

I summoned breath enough and courage enough for another question.

"Where is Miss Halcombe?"

Mrs. Rubelle fairly laughed at me, this time; and replied in these words:

"Miss Halcombe, ma'am, has not left Blackwater Park, either."

When I heard that astounding answer, all my thoughts were startled back on the instant to my parting with Lady Glyde. I can hardly say I reproached myself — but, at that moment, I think I would have given many a year's hard savings to have known four hours earlier what I knew now.

Mrs. Rubelle waited, quietly arranging her nosegay, as if she expected me to say something.

I could say nothing. I thought of Lady Glyde's worn-out energies and weakly health; and I trembled for the time when the shock of the discovery that I had made would fall on her. For a minute, or more, my fears for the poor ladies silenced me. At the end of that time, Mrs. Rubelle looked up sideways from her flowers, and said, "Here is Sir Percival. ma'am, returned from his ride."

I saw him as soon as she did. He came towards us, slashing viciously at the flowers with his riding-whip. When he was near enough to see my face, he stopped, struck at his boot with the whip, and burst out laughing, so harshly and so violently, that the birds flew away, startled, from the tree by which he stood.

"Well, Mrs. Michelson," he said; "you have found it out at last — have you?"

I made no reply. He turned to Mrs. Rubelle.

"When did you show yourself in the garden?"

"I showed myself about half an hour ago, sir. You said I

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might take my liberty again, as soon as Lady Glyde had gone away to London."

"Quite right. I don't blame you — I only asked the question." He waited a moment, and then addressed himself once more to me. "You can't believe it, can you?" he said, mockingly. "Here! come along and see for yourself."

He led the way round to the front of the house. I followed him; and Mrs. Rubelle followed me. After passing through the iron gates, he stopped, and pointed with his whip to the disused middle wing of the building.

"There!" he said. "Look up at the first floor. You know the old Elizabethan bedrooms? Miss Halcombe is snug and safe in one of the best of them, at this moment. Take her in, Mrs. Rubelle (you have got your key?); take Mrs. Michelson in, and let her own eyes satisfy her that there is no deception, this time."

The tone in which he spoke to me, and the minute or two that had passed since we left the garden, helped me to recover my spirits a little. What I might have done, at this critical moment, if all my life had been passed in service, I cannot say. As it was, possessing the feelings, the principles, and the bringing-up of a lady, I could not hesitate about the right course to pursue. My duty to myself, and my duty to Lady Glyde, alike forbade me to remain in the employment of a man who had shamefully deceived us both by a series of atrocious falsehoods.

"I must beg permission, Sir Percival, to speak a few words to you in private," I said. "Having done so, I shall be ready to proceed with this person to Miss Halcombe's room."

Mrs. Rubelle, whom I had indicated by a slight turn of my head, insolently sniffed at her nosegay, and walked away, with great deliberation, towards the house door.

"Well," said Sir Percival, sharply; "what is it now?"

"I wish to mention, sir, that I am desirous of resigning the situation I now hold at Blackwater Park." That was literally how I put it. I was resolved that the first words spoken in his

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presence should be words which expressed my intention to leave his service.

He eyed me with one of his blackest looks, and thrust his hands savagely into the pockets of his riding-coat.

"Why?" he said; "why, I should like to know?"

"It is not for me, Sir Percival, to express an opinion on what has taken place in this house. I desire to give no offence. I merely wish to say that I do not feel it consistent with my duty to Lady Glyde and to myself to remain any longer in your service."

"Is it consistent with your duty to *me* to stand there, casting suspicion on me to my face?" he broke out, in his most violent manner. "I see what you're driving at. You have taken your own mean, underhand view of an innocent deception practised on Lady Glyde, for her own good. It was essential to her health that she should have a change of air immediately — and, you know as well as I do, she would never have gone away, if she had been told Miss Halcombe was still left here. She has been deceived in her own interests — and I don't care who knows it. Go, if you like — there are plenty of housekeepers as good as you, to be had for the asking. Go, when you please — but take care how you spread scandals about me and my affairs, when you're out of my service. Tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, or it will be the worse for you! See Miss Halcombe for yourself; see if she hasn't been as well taken care of in one part of the house as in the other. Remember the doctor's own orders that Lady Glyde was to have a change of air at the earliest possible opportunity. Bear all that well in mind — and then say anything against me and my proceedings if you dare!"

He poured out these words fiercely, all in a breath, walking backwards and forwards, and striking about him in the air with his whip.

Nothing that he said or did shook my opinion of the disgraceful series of falsehoods that he had told, in my presence, the day before, or of the cruel deception by which he had separated Lady Glyde from her sister, and had sent her uselessly

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to London, when she was half distracted with anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account. I naturally kept these thoughts to myself, and said nothing more to irritate him; but I was not the less resolved to persist in my purpose. A soft answer turneth away wrath; and I suppressed my own feelings, accordingly, when it was my turn to reply.

"While I am in your service, Sir Percival," I said, "I hope I know my duty well enough not to inquire into your motives. When I am out of your service, I hope I know my own place well enough not to speak of matters which don't concern me —"

"When do you want to go?" he asked, interrupting me without ceremony. "Don't suppose I am anxious to keep you — don't suppose I care about your leaving the house. I am perfectly fair and open in this matter, from first to last. When do you want to go?"

"I should wish to leave at your earliest convenience, Sir Percival."

"My convenience has nothing to do with it. I shall be out of the house, for good and all, to-morrow morning; and I can settle your accounts to-night. If you want to study anybody's convenience, it had better be Miss Halcombe's. Mrs. Rubelle's time is up to-day; and she has reasons for wishing to be in London to-night. If you go at once, Miss Halcombe won't have a soul left here to look after her."

I hope it is unnecessary for me to say that I was quite incapable of deserting Miss Halcombe in such an emergency as had now befallen Lady Glyde and herself. After first distinctly ascertaining from Sir Percival that Mrs. Rubelle was certain to leave at once if I took her place, and after also obtaining permission to arrange for Mr. Dawson's resuming his attendance on his patient, I willingly consented to remain at Blackwater Park, until Miss Halcombe no longer required my services. It was settled that I should give Sir Percival's solicitor a week's notice before I left: and that he was to undertake the necessary arrangements for appointing my successor. The matter was discussed in very few words. At its

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conclusion, Sir Percival abruptly turned on his heel, and left me free to join Mrs. Rubelle. That singular foreign person had been sitting composedly on the door-step, all this time, waiting till I could follow her to Miss Halcombe's room.

I had hardly walked half way towards the house, when Sir Percival, who had withdrawn in the opposite direction, suddenly stopped, and called me back.

"Why are you leaving my service?" he asked.

The question was so extraordinary, after what had just passed between us, that I hardly knew what to say in answer to it.

"Mind! *I* don't know why you are going," he went on. "You must give a reason for leaving me, I suppose, when you get another situation. What reason? The breaking-up of the family? Is that it?"

"There can be no positive objection, Sir Percival, to that reason —"

"Very well! That's all I want to know. If people apply for your character, that's your reason, stated by yourself. You go in consequence of the breaking-up of the family."

He turned away again, before I could say another word, and walked out rapidly into the grounds. His manner was as strange as his language. I acknowledge he alarmed me.

Even the patience of Mrs. Rubelle was getting exhausted, when I joined her at the house door.

"At last!" she said, with a shrug of her lean foreign shoulders. She led the way into the inhabited side of the house, ascended the stairs, and opened with her key the door at the end of the passage, which communicated with the old Elizabethan rooms — a door never previously used, in my time, at Blackwater Park. The rooms themselves I knew well, having entered them myself, on various occasions, from the other side of the house. Mrs. Rubelle stopped at the third door along the old gallery, handed me the key of it, with the key of the

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door of communication, and told me I should find Miss Halcombe in that room. Before I went in, I thought it desirable to make her understand that her attendance had ceased. Accordingly, I told her in plain words that the charge of the sick lady henceforth devolved entirely on myself.

"I am glad to hear it, ma'am," said Mrs. Rubelle. "I want to go very much."

"Do you leave to-day?" I asked, to make sure of her.

"Now, that you have taken the charge, ma'am, I leave in half an hour's time. Sir Percival has kindly placed at my disposition the gardener, and the chaise, whenever I want them. I shall want them in half an hour's time, to go to the station. I am packed up, in anticipation, already. I wish you good day, ma'am."

She dropped a brisk curtsey, and walked back along the gallery, humming a little tune, and keeping time to it cheerfully, with the nosegay in her hand. I am sincerely thankful to say, that was the last I saw of Mrs. Rubelle.

When I went into the room, Miss Halcombe was asleep. I looked at her anxiously, as she lay in the dismal, high, old-fashioned bed. She was certainly not in any respect altered for the worse, since I had seen her last. She had not been neglected, I am bound to admit, in any way that I could perceive. The room was dreary, and dusty, and dark; but the window (looking on a solitary court-yard at the back of the house) was opened to let in the fresh air, and all that could be done to make the place comfortable had been done. The whole cruelty of Sir Percival's deception had fallen on poor Lady Glyde. The only ill-usage which either he or Mrs. Rubelle had inflicted on Miss Halcombe, consisted, so far as I could see, in the first offence of hiding her away.

I stole back, leaving the sick lady still peacefully asleep, to give the gardener instructions about bringing the doctor. I begged the man, after he had taken Mrs. Rubelle to the station, to drive round by Mr. Dawson's, and leave a message, in my name, asking him to call and see me. I knew he would

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come on my account, and I knew he would remain when he found Count Fosco had left the house.

In due course of time, the gardener returned, and said that he had driven round by Mr. Dawson's residence, after leaving Mrs. Rubelle at the station. The doctor sent me word that he was poorly in health himself, but that he would call, if possible, the next morning.

Having delivered his message, the gardener was about to withdraw, but I stopped him to request that he would come back before dark, and sit up, that night, in one of the empty bedrooms, so as to be within call, in case I wanted him. He understood readily enough my unwillingness to be left alone all night, in the most desolate part of that desolate house, and we arranged that he should come in between eight and nine.

He came punctually; and I found cause to be thankful that I had adopted the precaution of calling him in. Before midnight, Sir Percival's strange temper broke out in the most violent and most alarming manner; and if the gardener had not been on the spot to pacify him on the instant, I am afraid to think what might have happened.

Almost all the afternoon and evening, he had been walking about the house and grounds in an unsettled, excitable manner; having, in all probability, as I thought, taken an excessive quantity of wine at his solitary dinner. However that may be, I heard his voice calling loudly and angrily, in the new wing of the house, as I was taking a turn backwards and forwards along the gallery, the last thing at night. The gardener immediately ran down to him; and I closed the door of communication, to keep the alarm, if possible, from reaching Miss Halcombe's ears. It was full half an hour before the gardener came back. He declared that his master was quite out of his senses — not through the excitement of drink, as I had supposed, but through a kind of panic or frenzy of mind, for which it was impossible to account. He had found Sir Percival walking backwards and forwards by himself in the hall; swearing, with every appearance of the most violent passion,

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that he would not stop another minute alone in such a dungeon as his own house, and that he would take the first stage of his journey immediately, in the middle of the night. The gardener, on approaching him, had been hunted out, with oaths and threats, to get the horse and chaise ready instantly. In a quarter of an hour Sir Percival had joined him in the yard, had jumped into the chaise, and, lashing the horse into a gallop, had driven himself away, with his face as pale as ashes in the moonlight. The gardener had heard him shouting and cursing at the lodgekeeper to get up and open the gate — had heard the wheels roll furiously on again, in the still night, when the gate was unlocked — and knew no more.

The next day, or a day or two after, I forget which, the chaise was brought back from Knowlesbury, our nearest town, by the ostler at the old inn. Sir Percival had stopped there, and had afterwards left by the train — for what destination the man could not tell. I never received any further information, either from himself, or from any one else, of Sir Percival's proceedings; and I am not even aware, at this moment, whether he is in England or out of it. He and I have not met, since he drove away, like an escaped criminal, from his own house; and it is my fervent hope and prayer that we may never meet again.

My own part of this sad family story is now drawing to an end.

I have been informed that the particulars of Miss Halcombe's waking, and of what passed between us when she found me sitting by her bedside, are not material to the purpose which is to be answered by the present narrative. It will be sufficient for me to say, in this place, that she was not herself conscious of the means adopted to remove her from the inhabited to the uninhabited part of the house. She was in a deep sleep at the time, whether naturally or artificially produced she could not say. In my absence at Torquay, and in the absence of all the resident servants, except Margaret Porcher (who was perpetually eating, drinking, or sleeping

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when she was not at work), the secret transfer of Miss Halcombe from one part of the house to the other was no doubt easily performed. Mrs. Rubelle (as I discovered for myself, in looking about the room) had provisions, and all other necessaries, together with the means of heating water, broth, and so on, without kindling a fire, placed at her disposal during the few days of her imprisonment with the sick lady. She had declined to answer the questions which Miss Halcombe naturally put; but had not, in other respects treated her with unkindness or neglect. The disgrace of lending herself to a vile deception is the only disgrace with which I can conscientiously charge Mrs. Rubelle.

I need write no particulars (and I am relieved to know it) of the effect produced on Miss Halcombe by the news of Lady Glyde's departure, or by the far more melancholy tidings which reached us only too soon afterwards at Blackwater Park. In both cases I prepared her mind beforehand as gently and as carefully as possible; having the doctor's advice to guide me, in the last case only, through Mr. Dawson's being too unwell to come to the house for some days after I had sent for him. It was a sad time, a time which it afflicts me to think of, or to write of, now. The precious blessings of religious consolation which I endeavoured to convey, were long in reaching Miss Halcombe's heart; but I hope and believe they came home to her at last. I never left her till her strength was restored. The train which took me away from that miserable house was the train which took her away also. We parted very mournfully in London. I remained with a relative at Islington; and she went on to Mr. Fairlie's house in Cumberland.

I have only a few lines more to write, before I close this painful statement. They are dictated by a sense of duty.

In the first place, I wish to record my own personal conviction that no blame whatever, in connexion with the events which I have now related, attaches to Count Fosco. I am informed that a dreadful suspicion has been raised, and that

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some very serious constructions are placed upon his lordships' conduct. My persuasion of the Count's innocence remains, however, quite unshaken. If he assisted Sir Percival in sending me to Torquay, he assisted under a delusion, for which, as a foreigner and a stranger, he was not to blame. If he was concerned in bringing Mrs. Rubelle to Blackwater Park, it was his misfortune and not his fault, when that foreign person was base enough to assist a deception planned and carried out by the master of the house. I protest, in the interests of morality, against blame being gratuitously and wantonly attached to the proceedings of the Count.

In the second place, I desire to express my regret at my own inability to remember the precise day on which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London. I am told that it is of the last importance to ascertain the exact date of that lamentable journey; and I have anxiously taxed my memory to recal it. The effort has been in vain. I can only remember now that it was towards the latter part of July. We all know the difficulty, after a lapse of time, of fixing precisely on a past date, unless it has been previously written down. That difficulty is greatly increased, in my case, by the alarming and confusing events which took place about the period of Lady Glyde's departure. I heartily wish I had made a memorandum at the time. I heartily wish my memory of the date was as vivid as my memory of that poor lady's face, when it looked at me sorrowfully for the last time from the carriage window.

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THE STORY CONTINUED IN SEVERAL NARRATIVES.

1. THE NARRATIVE OF HESTER PINHORN, COOK IN THE SERVICE OF COUNT FOSCO.

[*Taken down from her own statement.*]

I AM sorry to say that I have never learnt to read or write. I have been a hard-working woman all my life, and have kept a good character. I know that it is a sin and wickedness to say the thing which is not; and I will truly beware of doing so on this occasion. All that I know, I will tell; and I humbly beg the gentleman who takes this down to put my language right as he goes on, and to make allowances for my being no scholar.

In this last summer, I happened to be out of place (through no fault of my own); and I heard of a situation, as plain cook, at Number Five, Forest-road, St. John's Wood. I took the place, on trial. My master's name was Fosco. My mistress was an English lady. He was Count and she was Countess. There was a girl to do housemaid's work, when I got there. She was not over clean or tidy—but there was no harm in her. I and she were the only servants in the house.

Our master and mistress came after we got in. And, as soon as they did come, we were told down stairs, that company was expected from the country.

The company was my mistress's niece, and the back bedroom on the first floor was got ready for her. My mistress mentioned to me that Lady Glyde (that was her name) was in poor health, and that I must be particular in my cooking accordingly. She was to come that day, as well as I can remember; but whatever you do, don't trust *my* memory in

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the matter. I am sorry to say it's no use asking me about days of the month, and such-like. Except Sundays, half my time I take no heed of them; being a hard-working woman and no scholar. All I know is, Lady Glyde came; and, when she did come, a fine fright she gave us all, surely. I don't know how master brought her to the house, being hard at work at the time. But he did bring her, in the afternoon, I think; and the housemaid opened the door to them, and showed them into the parlour. Before she had been long down in the kitchen again with me, we heard a hurry-skurry, upstairs, and the parlour bell ringing like mad, and my mistress's voice calling out for help.

We both ran up; and there we saw the lady laid on the sofa, with her face ghastly white, and her hands fast clenched, and her head drawn down to one side. She had been taken with a sudden fright, my mistress said; and master he told us she was in a fit of convulsions. I ran out, knowing the neighbourhood a little better than the rest of them, to fetch the nearest doctor's help. The nearest help was at Goodricke's and Garth's, who worked together as partners, and had a good name and connexion, as I have heard, all round St. John's Wood. Mr. Goodricke was in; and he came back with me directly.

It was some time before he could make himself of much use. The poor unfortunate lady fell out of one fit into another — and went on so, till she was quite wearied out, and as helpless as a new-born babe. We then got her to bed. Mr. Goodricke went away to his house for medicine, and came back again in a quarter of an hour or less. Besides the medicine he brought a bit of hollow mahogany wood with him, shaped like a kind of trumpet; and, after waiting a little while, he put one end over the lady's heart and the other to his ear, and listened carefully.

When he had done, he says to my mistress, who was in the room, "This is a very serious case," he says; "I recommend you to write to Lady Glyde's friends directly." My mistress says to him, "Is it heart-disease?" And he says,

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"Yes; heart-disease of a most dangerous kind." He told her exactly what he thought was the matter, which I was not clever enough to understand. But I know this, he ended by saying that he was afraid neither his help nor any other doctor's help was likely to be of much service.

My mistress took this ill news more quietly than my master. He was a big, fat, odd sort of elderly man, who kept birds and white mice, and spoke to them as if they were so many Christian children. He seemed terribly cut up by what had happened. "Ah! poor Lady Glyde! poor dear Lady Glyde!" he says — and went stalking about, wringing his fat hands more like a play-actor than a gentleman. For one question my mistress asked the doctor about the lady's chances of getting round, he asked a good fifty at least. I declare he quite tormented us all — and, when he was quiet at last, out he went into the bit of back garden, picking trumpery little nosegays, and asking me to take them up-stairs and make the sick-room look pretty with them. As if *that* did any good! I think he must have been, at times, a little soft in his head. But he was not a bad master: he had a monstrous civil tongue of his own; and a jolly, easy, coaxing way with him. I liked him a deal better than my mistress. She was a hard one, if ever there was a hard one yet.

Towards night-time, the lady roused up a little. She had been so wearied out, before that, by the convulsions, that she never stirred hand or foot, or spoke a word to anybody. She moved in the bed now; and stared about her at the room and us in it. She must have been a nice-looking lady, when well, with light hair, and blue eyes, and all that. Her rest was troubled at night — at least so *I* heard from my mistress, who sat up alone with her. I only went in once before going to bed, to see if I could be of any use; and then she was talking to herself, in a confused, rambling manner. She seemed to want sadly to speak to somebody, who was absent from her somewhere. I couldn't catch the name, the first time; and the second time master knocked at the door, with his regular mouthful of questions, and another of his trumpery nose-gays.

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When I went in, early the next morning, the lady was clean worn out again, and lay in a kind of faint sleep. Mr. Goodricke brought his partner, Mr. Garth, with him to advise. They said she must not be disturbed out of her rest, on any account. They asked my mistress a many questions, at the other end of the room, about what the lady's health had been in past times, and who had attended her, and whether she had ever suffered much and long together under distress of mind. I remember my mistress said, "Yes," to that last question. And Mr. Goodricke looked at Mr. Garth, and shook his head; and Mr. Garth looked at Mr. Goodricke, and shook his head. They seemed to think that the distress might have something to do with the mischief at the lady's heart. She was but a frail thing to look at, poor creature! Very little strength, at any time, I should say — very little strength.

Later on the same morning, when she woke, the lady took a sudden turn, and got seemingly a great deal better. I was not let in again to see her, no more was the housemaid, for the reason that she was not to be disturbed by strangers. What I heard of her being better was through my master. He was in wonderful good spirits about the change, and looked in at the kitchen window from the garden, with his great big curly-brimmed white hat on, to go out.

"Good Mrs. Cook," says he, "Lady Glyde is better. My mind is more easy than it was; and I am going out to stretch my big legs with a sunny little summer walk. Shall I order for you, shall I market for you, Mrs. Cook? What are you making there? A nice tart for dinner? Much crust, if you please — much crisp crust, my dear, that melts and crumbles delicious in the mouth." That was his way. He was past sixty, and fond of pastry. Just think of that!

The doctor came again in the forenoon, and saw for himself that Lady Glyde had woke up better. He forbid us to talk to her, or to let her talk to us, in case she was that way disposed; saying she must be kept quiet before all things, and encouraged to sleep as much as possible. She did not seem to want to talk whenever I saw her — except overnight,

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when I couldn't make out what she was saying — she seemed too much worn down. Mr. Goodricke was not nearly in such good spirits about her as master. He said nothing when he came down-stairs, except that he would call again at five o'clock.

About that time (which was before master came home again), the bell rang hard from the bedroom, and my mistress ran out into the landing, and called to me to go for Mr. Goodricke, and tell him the lady had fainted. I got on my bonnet and shawl, when, as good luck would have it, the doctor himself came to the house for his promised visit.

I let him in, and went up-stairs along with him. "Lady Glyde was just as usual," says my mistress to him at the door; "she was awake, and looking about her, in a strange, forlorn manner, when I heard her give a sort of half cry, and she fainted in a moment." The doctor went up to the bed, and stooped down over the sick lady. He looked very serious, all on a sudden, at the sight of her; and put his hand on her heart.

My mistress stared hard in Mr. Goodricke's face. "Not dead!" says she, whispering, and turning all of a tremble from head to foot.

"Yes," says the doctor, very quiet and grave. "Dead. I was afraid it would happen suddenly, when I examined her heart yesterday." My mistress stepped back from the bedside, while he was speaking, and trembled and trembled again. "Dead!" she whispers to herself; "dead so suddenly! dead so soon! What will the Count say?" Mr. Goodricke advised her to go down-stairs, and quiet herself a little. "You have been sitting up all night," says he, "and your nerves are shaken. This person," says he meaning me, "this person will stay in the room, till I can send for the necessary assistance." My mistress did as he told her. "I must prepare the Count," she says. "I must carefully prepare the Count." And so she left us, shaking from head to foot, and went out.

"Your master is a foreigner," says Mr. Goodricke, when my mistress had left us. "Does he understand about register-

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ing the death?" "I can't rightly tell, sir," says I; "but I should think not." The doctor considered a minute; and then, says he, "I don't usually do such things," says he, "but it may save the family trouble in this case, if I register the death myself. I shall pass the district office in half an hour's time; and I can easily look in. Mention, if you please, that I will do so." "Yes, sir," says I, "with thanks, I'm sure, for your kindness in thinking of it." "You don't mind staying here, till I can send you the proper person?" says he. "No, sir," says I; "I'll stay with the poor lady, till then. I suppose nothing more could be done, sir, than was done?" says I. "No," says he; "nothing; she must have suffered sadly before ever I saw her: the case was hopeless when I was called in." "Ah, dear me! we all come to it, sooner or later, don't we, sir?" says I. He gave no answer to that; he didn't seem to care about talking. He said, "Good day," and went out.

I stopped by the bedside from that time, till the time when Mr. Goodricke sent the person in, as he had promised. She was, by name, Jane Gould. I considered her to be a respectable-looking woman. She made no remark, except to say that she understood what was wanted of her, and that she had winded a many of them in her time.

How master bore the news, when he first heard it, is more than I can tell; not having been present. When I did see him, he looked awfully overcome by it, to be sure. He sat quiet in a corner, with his fat hands hanging over his thick knees, and his head down, and his eyes looking at nothing. He seemed not so much sorry, as scared and dazed like, by what had happened. My mistress managed all that was to be done about the funeral. It must have cost a sight of money: the coffin, in particular, being most beautiful. The dead lady's husband was away, as we heard, in foreign parts. But my mistress (being her aunt) settled it with her friends in the country (Cumberland, I think) that she should be buried there, in the same grave along with her mother. Everything was done handsomely, in respect of the funeral, I say again;

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and master went down to attend the burying in the country himself. He looked grand in his deep mourning, with his big solemn face, and his slow walk, and his broad hatband — that he did!

In conclusion, I have to say, in answer to questions put to me.

(1) That neither I nor my fellow-servant ever saw my master give Lady Glyde any medicine himself.

(2) That he was never, to my knowledge and belief, left alone in the room with Lady Glyde.

(3) That I am not able to say what caused the sudden fright, which my mistress informed me had seized the lady on her first coming into the house. The cause was never explained, either to me or to my fellow-servant.

The above statement has been read over in my presence. I have nothing to add to it, or to take away from it. I say, on my oath as a Christian woman, This is the truth.

(Signed) HESTER PINHORN, Her + Mark.

2. THE NARRATIVE OF THE DOCTOR.

To the Registrar of the Sub-District in which the undermentioned Death took place. — I hereby certify that I attended Lady Glyde, aged Twenty-One last Birthday; that I last saw her, on Thursday, the 25th July, 1850; that she died on the same day at No. 5, Forest-road, St. John's Wood; and that the cause of her death was, Aneurism. Duration of Disease, not known.

(Signed) ALFRED GOODRICKE.

Profl. Title. *M.R.C.S. Eng. L.S.A.*
Address. *12, Croydon Gardens, St. John's Wood.*

3. THE NARRATIVE OF JANE GOULD.

I WAS the person sent in by Mr. Goodricke, to do what was right and needful by the remains of a lady, who had died at the house named in the certificate which precedes this. I

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found the body in charge of the servant, Hester Pinhorn. I remained with it, and prepared it, at the proper time, for the grave. It was laid in the coffin, in my presence; and I afterwards saw the coffin screwed down, previous to its removal. When that had been done, and not before, I received what was due to me, and left the house. I refer persons who may wish to investigate my character to Mr. Goodricke. He will bear witness that I can be trusted to tell the truth.

(Signed) JANE GOULD.

4. THE NARRATIVE OF THE TOMBSTONE.

Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde, wife of Sir Percival Glyde, Bart., of Blackwater Park, Hampshire; and daughter of the late Philip Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House, in this parish. Born, March 27th, 1829; married, December 22nd, 1849; died July 25th, 1850.

5. THE NARRATIVE OF WALTER HARTRIGHT.

EARLY in the summer of 1850, I, and my surviving companions, left the wilds and forests of Central America for home. Arrived at the coast, we took ship there for England. The vessel was wrecked in the Gulf of Mexico; I was among the few saved from the sea. It was my third escape from peril of death. Death by disease, death by the Indians, death by drowning — all three had approached me; all three had passed me by.

The survivors of the wreck were rescued by an American vessel, bound for Liverpool. The ship reached her port on the thirteenth day of October, 1850. We landed late in the afternoon; and I arrived in London the same night.

These pages are not the record of my wanderings and my dangers away from home. The motives which led me from my country and my friends to a new world of adventure and peril are known. From that self-imposed exile I came back, as I had hoped, prayed, believed I should come back — a changed man. In the waters of a new life I had tempered my

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nature afresh. In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should.

To face it with that inevitable suppression of myself, which I knew it would demand from me. I had parted with the worst bitterness of the past, but not with my heart's remembrance of the sorrow and the tenderness of that memorable time. I had not ceased to feel the one irreparable disappointment of my life — I had only learnt to bear it. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship bore me away, and I looked my last at England. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship brought me back, and the morning light showed the friendly shore in view.

My pen traces the old letters as my heart goes back to the old love. I write of her as Laura Fairlie still. It is hard to think of her, it is hard to speak of her, by her husband's name.

There are no more words of explanation to add, on my appearing for the second time in these pages. This narrative, if I have the strength and the courage to write it, may now go on.

My first anxieties and first hopes, when the morning came, centred in my mother and my sister. I felt the necessity of preparing them for the joy and surprise of my return, after an absence, during which it had been impossible for them to receive any tidings of me for months past. Early in the morning, I sent a letter to the Hampstead Cottage; and followed it myself in an hour's time.

When the first meeting was over, when our quiet and composure of other days began gradually to return to us, I saw something in my mother's face which told me that a secret oppression lay heavy on her heart. There was more than love — there was sorrow in the anxious eyes that looked on me so tenderly; there was pity in the kind hand that slowly and fondly strengthened its hold on mine. We had no concealments from each other. She knew how the hope of my life had been wrecked — she knew why I had left her. It was on

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