

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

5
Compact
Discs



Wilkie Collins

The Woman in White

Read by

**Allan Corduner,
Glen McCready,
Rachel Bavidge,
Hugh Dickson,
Teresa Gallagher
and Marie Collett**

NA586312D

1	The Story begun by Walter Hartright	5:36
2	I had now arrived at that particular point of my walk...	6:59
3	My travelling instructions directed me to go to Carlisle...	5:36
4	I found myself in a large, lofty room...	5:50
5	When dinner was over...	5:44
6	The days passed on, the weeks passed on...	5:02
7	I had been engaged with the drawings...	7:13
8	As soon as we were alone again...	5:40
9	She was so absorbed over her employment...	6:26
10	Half an hour later I was back at the house...	3:36
11	On the west terrace walk I met Mr. Gilmore.	5:14
12	The Story continued by Vincent Gilmore	7:21
13	A week passed, after my return to London...	8:33
14	Leaving by an early train, I got to Limmeridge...	3:20
15	The Story continued by Marian Halcombe	7:29
16	November 15th – Three letters for me.	6:02
17	The 2nd Epoch – The Story continued by Marian Halcombe	7:02
18	June 15th – I think I must begin...	4:25
19	He looks like a man who could tame anything...	4:42
20	June 16th – A visitor has arrived...	5:29
21	The boat-house was large enough to hold us all...	5:36
22	June 17th – Just as my hand was on the door...	6:05

23	After some pondering, I determined to write...	6:53
24	June 18th – The speculations in which we might...	4:35
25	I was aroused by a hand laid on my shoulder...	6:32
26	It took me, for some distance, in the direction...	5:19
27	I closed the door again...	5:00
28	June 19th – Madame Fosco was alone in the hall...	5:40
29	Once safely shut into my own room...	7:40
30	There was another pause. The Count moved...	6:14
31	June 20th – Eight o'clock. The sun is shining...	3:40
32	The Story continued by Frederick Fairlie	6:41
33	My letter produced its effect.	5:57
34	The Story continued by Eliza Michelson	5:25
35	On the evening of the third day...	7:05
36	The Count and Countess Fosco had left...	5:34
37	I could say nothing. For a minute or more...	5:32
38	The Story continued in Several Narratives – Hester Pinhorn, The Doctor and The Tombstone	6:16
39	The Narrative of Walter Hartright	4:14
40	The 3rd Epoch – The Story continued by Walter Hartright	8:18
41	Lady Glyde's recollection of the events...	6:49
42	After consulting with Marian, I resolved to begin...	7:28

43	The way to the Secret lay through the mystery...	6:12
44	The Count, after looking at her very attentively...	7:42
45	My heart beat fast – I thought I had my hand on the clue...	6:16
46	The next object of inquiry...	5:14
47	When the third day came I was ready for my journey...	7:01
48	The vestry of Old Welmingham Church...	6:01
49	He opened the door of one of the presses...	8:00
50	It was just getting dark.	6:13
51	I saw the fire slowly conquered.	5:20
52	The Story continued by Mrs Catherick	5:51
53	Well, being settled in this way...	4:02
54	The Story continued by Walter Hartright	6:58
55	It must not be supposed that the interval of rest...	6:44
56	Up to this time I had never once set eyes on Count Fosco...	6:35
57	As soon as we two were alone in his room...	6:41
58	Not the shadow of a doubt crossed my mind...	6:38
59	I took Pesca's acknowledgement of the receipt of my letter...	8:41
60	The Story continued by Isidor Ottavio Baldassare Fosco	6:46
61	The servants were the next encumbrances...	6:02
62	On the morning of the 26th...	4:57
63	The Story concluded by Walter Hartright	6:15
64	My journey to Paris was not undertaken alone...	5:26
65	The summer and autumn passed after my return...	2:52

Total time: 6:32:56

Wilkie Collins

The Woman in White

A dark and humid night on a London highway... a hand on a shoulder... a ghostly woman asking directions... and the reader is away on a tale of deceit, murder, nightmares, bigamy, madness, stolen identities and scheming cads, elaborate plots and outrageous coincidences, lost love and redemptive happiness, in the company of some of the most extraordinary characters in fiction. *The Woman in White* is regarded as one of the first (and probably the best) of the 'Sensation' novels of the mid-nineteenth century, books which told stories that were inspired by a combination of the reassuringly believable and the terrifyingly unlikely. For Wilkie Collins (1824–1829), the combination was ideal – it gave him a chance to discuss some of his particular concerns in a manner that had the audience almost literally baying for more when it was serialised; and it allowed him the licence to sensationalise a matter that was a genuine concern at the time.

There had been a case in France some fifty years earlier, and reported in a book that Collins picked up in Paris in 1856, that formed the basis for much of the plot of *The Woman in White*; but there was also a scare in England at the time about the possibility that husbands would lock their wives away in asylums for the financial gain their incarceration would bring about. The issue was so much of a concern that Parliament established a committee to look into it, and given the atmosphere of the time – which was much the same as it always is; the public ever on the look-out for the latest reason to be scared out of its wits and keen to be terrified and intrigued by fictional variations – it was no surprise that writers thought there was mileage in it. Collins was also in the position of knowing someone who, after a very public falling out, had actually had his wife forcibly incarcerated (Bulwer-Lytton, the writer and politician who coined two phrases that writers everywhere recognise

as ennobling their profession – ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’ – and deflating any pretension that believing it might entail – ‘It was a dark and stormy night’. The wife was released and spent much of the rest of her life continuing her attacks upon him). So while the newspapers and novels of the time were alive with this paranoia, depending as it does on the impossible definitions of sanity and who determines them, Collins was personally involved in it. As a result, when he was asked for a new story to be serialised in Charles Dickens’s magazine *All the Year Round*, he realised he could use the Parisian case he had read about, his personal experience, and the growing desire for freakish insanity-based thrills that seemed to be taking over the nation at the time to create a sensation. And he did. The serial was wildly popular, the book followed shortly afterwards, and there were pirated and legitimate theatrical versions almost immediately, as well as a satisfyingly wide range of associated merchandise (you could get *Woman in White* shawls, perfumes, hats and even dances) that just goes to prove how little tastes have changed.

Collins was a typical figure of his time in some ways, unconventional in others. He was fired by an energy that created nearly thirty novels, fifty short stories, a dozen plays, non-fiction work and more. He was a good friend of Charles Dickens, who published his works in serial form and almost certainly helped him develop his style. He never married, but had an extraordinarily complex life with a widow, Caroline Graves, with whom he lived until she married someone else. At that point he began having children with his mistress, Martha Rudd, until Caroline Graves returned two years later. The three of them seem to have reached some sort of accommodation, with Caroline Graves being effectively his wife, and Martha remaining the mistress and mother of his children. Caroline Graves is buried beside him. But Collins also suffered acute pains that he treated with laudanum (a mixture of alcohol and opium, readily available over the counter with such trade names as ‘Mother’s Quietness’). As a result, he became quite well-versed in narcotics and their effects; and he became an addict, suffering paranoid delusions and

being convinced he was being followed by a ghostly double. It seems hardly coincidental that so many of his works feature delusions or apparitions or drugs and their effects – works such as *The Woman in White*.

The book is a Gothic thriller, a detective story and a romance, and in many ways the forerunner of current detective fiction. Rather than set the tale in an imaginary or distant country, it places the action – and the threat – firmly in suburbia, bringing the horror-show of the Gothic into the back-gardens of the readers. This is one of the ways that Collins makes the story more immediate to his readers; but the other is in the narrative style. Rather than have an omniscient narrator telling the tale from an objective position above the action, Collins lets each of the major players have his or her say in their own narrative. In one sense this was a technique as old as the novel in Europe (which had grown out of the epistolary style, in which the action is described in letters from the protagonists), but it was a fresh variation, and the directness of the first-person narrative takes the reader straight into the heart of

the teller's story. What was more, Collin's great inspiration was not just for elaborate plots but for memorable characters. *The Woman in White* is peopled with brilliant creations and wonderful names: the sly and evil Sir Percival Glyde; the preposterously magnificent Count Fosco; the effete invalid Frederick Fairlie; the supremely self-righteous Mrs Catherick; even the tiny character of Hester Pinhorn seems to be more fully realised than the heroes of smaller imaginations. And in Marian Halcombe he created someone forthright, strong, self-willed – and ugly, with a moustache. This is something rather beyond what might be expected of a typical Victorian heroine, and she comes out of it rather better than the passive, wilting Laura, who boasts all the usual womanly charms.

But there is also – beyond the concerns about locking perfectly sane people up for the money – a quietly serious undertow throughout the book. At almost every turn, the hero is presented with a certainty that there has been a grievous wrong done; and each time even the most sympathetic of lawyers is incapable

of helping him. He is faced with a choice: follow the law and fail for lack of funds or evidence; or follow his instinct – even to the point of criminality – in order to reveal the truth. Collins had trained as a lawyer, and while he was by no means alone in feeling that the system needed reform, he pointedly explains on several occasions how the legal profession is unable to help those who clearly deserve it. This was not his only attempt at reform – many of his later works would include similar concerns, and he began to lose his

enormous popular appeal as the issues became more important to him than the stories (Swinburne said: ‘What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition?/ Some demon whispered – ‘Wilkie! have a mission’). But in 1860, although social concerns were prompting public interest in the themes of *The Woman in White*, it was Wilkie Collins’s acute ear for a thrilling tale that made it into one of the most popular novels of its time and since.

Notes by Roy McMillan

Cast in order of appearance

Glen McCready: Walter Hartright

Hugh Dickson: Vincent Gilmore and Frederick Fairlie

Rachel Bavidge: Marian Halcombe

Marie Collett: Eliza Michelson and The Tombstone

Teresa Gallagher: Hester Pinhorn and Mrs Catherick

Allan Corduner: Count Fosco and The Doctor



Glen McCready trained at The Webber Douglas Academy. Stage credits include: Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Son in *A Voyage Round My Father* and Walter Langer in *Five Finger Exercise*. Television includes Arthur Symons in *Casanova's Lost Letters*. He has narrated numerous audiobooks including: *The Finishing School* by Muriel Spark, *Divided Kingdom* by Rupert Thomson, *Past Mortem*, *The First Casualty* and *Chart Throb* by Ben Elton, *Seventy-Two Virgins* by Boris Johnson, *The Act of Roger Murgatroyd* by Gilbert Adair, *Winter Quarters* by Alfred Duggan, *The Burning Blue* by James Holland and *The Society of Others* by James Nicholson. He has also read *The Lost World* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Rachel Bavidge was born in North Shields in Tyneside and moved to Oxford in her early teens. She has narrated numerous audio books and has just completed six months as a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. Theatre credits include Mrs Boyle in *Whose Life is it Anyway?* (West End) and Margaret in *Much Ado* (Theatre Royal, Bath) both directed by Peter Hall. TV includes *The Bill*, *Casualty*, *Doctors*, *The IT Crowd*, *Inspector Lynley*, *Wire in the Blood*, and *Bad Girls*.



Hugh Dickson is a former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the BBC Radio Drama Company. He has specialised in verse-speaking, working with many leading poets on radio, platform and recordings. Stage appearances include Escalus in *Measure for Measure* and Prof Riley in *Shadowlands*. Radio work includes Camillo in *The Winter's Tale* and Guy Crouchback in *Sword of Honour*. He has also read the part of the Archbishop in *Henry V* and the part of Lucretius in *The Rape of Lucrece* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End and Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy Turvy*. For Naxos AudioBooks she has recorded the *Biography of Jane Austen* and selections from *The Decameron* by Boccaccio. She has also read *Classic Women's Short Stories*, *Heidi*, *The Treasure Seekers*, *The Wouldbegoods*, *The Story of Jesus*, *Thailand from after the quake*, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.



Allan Corduner's distinguished acting career spans over 30 years. He is currently filming *Defiance* with Daniel Craig, directed by Edward Zwick. His theatre work includes the critically acclaimed *Two Thousand Years* at the National Theatre, *The Comedians* at the Acorn Theatre in New York, *Fucking Games* at the Royal Court, and Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money* at the Royal Court, which later transferred to Broadway. Radio credits include *Insignificance*, *Dr Freud Will See You Now*, *The Irresistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (all for BBC Radio 4) and *The Night Listener* by Armistead Maupin.



Marie Collett was born in New Zealand but has lived in England for many years. Her theatre work has included productions at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, (which transferred to London's Theatre Royal, Haymarket), and *The Happiest Days of Your Life*. She was in *Mr Heracles* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and Lindsay Anderson's production of *Holiday* at the Old Vic. Audio work includes *Dr Who* and several Talking Books for the Royal National Institute of the Blind.

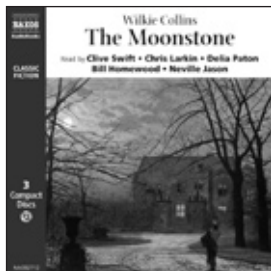
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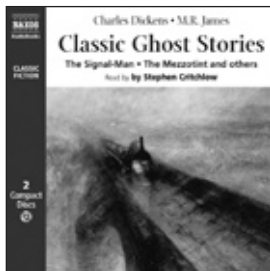
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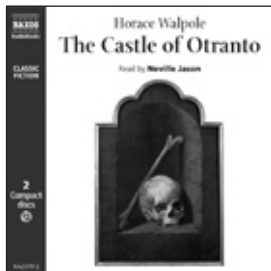
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Wilkie Collins

The Woman in White

Read by **Allan Corduner, Glen McCready, Rachel Bavidge, Hugh Dickson, Teresa Gallagher** and **Marie Collett**

A dark and humid night on a London highway... a ghostly woman asking directions... and the reader is away on a tale of deceit, murder, madness, stolen identities and scheming cads, elaborate plots and outrageous coincidences, in the company of some of the most extraordinary characters in fiction.

Hailed as a classic the moment it was written in 1859, *The Woman in White* uses ten different narrators to tell the tale of a man's determination to save the woman he loves, in the face of the worst intentions of the sly Sir Percival Glyde and the magnificent Count Fosco.

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