

“THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR.”—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

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N^o 52]

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THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

MISS HALCOMBE'S NARRATIVE CONCLUDED.

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JULY 6TH. Eight o'clock. The sun is shining in a clear sky. I have not been near my bed—I have not once closed my weary, wakeful eyes. From the same window at which I looked out into the darkness of last night, I look out, now, at the bright stillness of the morning.

I count the hours that have passed since I escaped to the shelter of this room, by my own sensations—and those hours seem like weeks.

How short a time, and yet how long to *me*—since I sank down in the darkness, here, on the floor, drenched to the skin, cramped in every limb, cold to the bones, a useless, helpless, panic-stricken creature.

I hardly know when I roused myself. I hardly know when I groped my way back to the bedroom, and lighted the candle, and searched (with a strange ignorance, at first, of where to look for them) for dry clothes to warm me. The doing of these things is in my mind, but not the time when they were done.

Can I even remember when the chilled, cramped feeling left me, and the throbbing heat came in its place?

Surely it was before the sun rose? Yes; I heard the clock strike three. I remember the time by the sudden brightness and clearness, the feverish strain and excitement of all my faculties which came with it. I remember my

resolution to control myself, to wait patiently hour after hour, till the chance offered of removing Laura from this horrible place, without the danger of immediate discovery and pursuit. I remember the persuasion settling itself in my mind that the words those two men had said to each other, would furnish us, not only with our justification for leaving the house, but with our weapons of defence against them as well. I recal the impulse that awakened in me to preserve those words in writing, exactly as they were spoken, while the time was my own, and while my memory vividly retained them. All this I remember plainly: there is no confusion in my head yet. The coming in here, from the bedroom, with my pen and ink and paper, before sunrise—the sitting down at the widely-opened window to get all the air I could to cool me—the ceaseless writing, faster and faster, hotter and hotter, driving on, more and more wakefully, all through the dreadful interval before the house was astir again—how clearly I recal it, from the beginning by candlelight, to the end on the page before this, in the sunshine of the new day!

Why do I sit here still? Why do I weary my hot eyes and my burning head by writing more? Why not lie down and rest myself, and try to quench the fever that consumes me, in sleep?

I dare not attempt it. A fear beyond all other fears has got possession of me. I am afraid of this heat that parches my skin. I am afraid of the creeping and



throbbing that I feel in my head. If I lie down now, how do I know that I may have the sense and the strength to rise again?

Oh, the rain, the rain—the cruel rain that chilled me last night!

* * * * *

Nine o'clock. Was it nine struck, or eight? Nine, surely? I am shivering again—shivering, from head to foot, in the summer air. Have I been sitting here asleep? I don't know what I have been doing.

Oh, my God! am I going to be ill?

Ill, at such a time as this!

My head—I am sadly afraid of my head. I can write, but the lines all run together. I see the words. Laura—I can write Laura, and see I write it. Eight or nine—which was it?

So cold, so cold—oh, that rain last night!—and the strokes of the clock, the strokes I can't count, keep striking in my head—

* * * * *

NOTE.

[At this place the entry in the Diary ceases to be legible. The two or three lines which follow contain fragments of words only, mingled with blots and scratches of the pen. The last marks on the paper bear some resemblance to the first two letters (L. and A.) of the name of Lady Glyde.

On the next page of the Diary, another entry appears. It is in a man's handwriting, large, bold, and firmly regular; and the date is "July the 7th." It contains these lines:]

[POSTSCRIPT BY A SINCERE FRIEND.]

The illness of our excellent Miss Halcombe has afforded me the opportunity of enjoying an unexpected intellectual pleasure.

I refer to the perusal (which I have just completed) of this interesting Diary.

There are many hundred pages here. I can lay my hand on my heart, and declare that every page has charmed, refreshed, delighted me.

To a man of my sentiments, it is

unspeakably gratifying to be able to say this.

Admirable woman!

I refer to Miss Halcombe.

Stupendous effort!

I refer to the Diary.

Yes! these pages are amazing. The tact which I find here, the discretion, the rare courage, the wonderful power of memory, the accurate observation of character, the easy grace of style, the charming outbursts of womanly feeling, have all inexpressibly increased my admiration of this sublime creature, of this magnificent Marian. The presentation of my own character is masterly in the extreme. I certify, with my whole heart, to the fidelity of the portrait. I feel how vivid an impression I must have produced to have been painted in such strong, such rich, such massive colours as these. I lament afresh the cruel necessity which sets our interests at variance, and opposes us to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy I should have been of Miss Halcombe—how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of ME.

The sentiments which animate my heart assure me that the lines I have just written express a Profound Truth.

Those sentiments exalt me above all merely personal considerations. I bear witness, in the most disinterested manner, to the excellence of the stratagem by which this unparalleled woman surprised the private interview between Percival and myself. Also to the marvellous accuracy of her report of the whole conversation from its beginning to its end.

Those sentiments have induced me to offer to the unimpressionable doctor who attends on her, my vast knowledge of chemistry, and my luminous experience of the more subtle resources which medical and magnetic science have placed at the disposal of mankind. He has hitherto declined to avail himself of my assistance. Miserable man!

Finally, those sentiments dictate the lines—grateful, sympathetic, paternal lines—which appear in this place. I close the book. My strict sense of propriety



restores it (by the hands of my wife) to its place on the writer's table. Events are hurrying me away. Circumstances are guiding me to serious issues. Vast perspectives of success unroll themselves before my eyes. I accomplish my destiny with a calmness which is terrible to myself. Nothing but the homage of my admiration is my own. I deposit it, with respectful tenderness, at the feet of Miss Halcombe.

I breathe my wishes for her recovery.

I condole with her on the inevitable failure of every plan that she has formed for her sister's benefit. At the same time, I entreat her to believe that the information which I have derived from her Diary will in no respect help me to contribute to that failure. It simply confirms the plan of conduct which I had previously arranged. I have to thank these pages for awakening the finest sensibilities in my nature—nothing more.

To a person of similar sensibility, this simple assertion will explain and excuse everything.

Miss Halcombe is a person of similar sensibility.

In that persuasion, I sign myself,
FOSCO.

THE NARRATIVE OF FREDERICK FAIRLIE, ESQUIRE,
OF LIMMERIDGE HOUSE.*

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

* 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 of the Story.

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. 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 either the fifth, sixth, or seventh of July; and the name (in my opinion a remarkably vulgar one) was Fanny.

On the fifth, sixth, or seventh of July, I was reclining, in my usual 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 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, 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. (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!

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 tiresome 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 afterwards, 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 very much crumpled. She had been giddy in the night; but had got up 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 entrusted 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 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 curtsied. 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, 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 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) 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 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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