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## The Woman in White

Wilkie Collins (1824 – 1889)

Read by: Multiple readers

Language: English

Length: 25 hours and 26 minutes

Style: Solo

Genre(s): Fiction, Mystery & Detective Fiction

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*The Woman in White* is widely considered the first in the genre of “sensation” novels, one of the first “mystery” novels, and an early example of “detective” fiction. The story centers on Walter Hartright, a young drawing teacher, and begins with his heart-stopping encounter one moonlit night in London with a woman dressed entirely in white, an escapee from an asylum. Soon after, he is engaged as a private teacher to the beautiful niece of wealthy invalid Frederick Fairlie, Laura. He notices a striking resemblance to the woman of his encounter, who is known to the family as Anne Catherick, a mentally disabled child who had been devoted to Laura’s mother. Laura is engaged to Percival Glyde, a local aristocrat, but naturally falls for Hartright. Secrets emerge, revealing strategies to circumvent rigid British inheritance laws. Questions of

identity and sanity arise, leading Hartright to investigate and unravel the intrigues of Glyde and his conspirators. The story was serialized in Dickens’ *All the Year Round* magazine in Britain and in *Harper’s Weekly* in America before appearing in book form in 1860 to great commercial success. *The Observer* listed the book at number 23 of its “top 100 greatest novels of all time” in 2003, and it is ranked at number 77 on the BBC’s The Big Read.

**Wilkie Collins** (January 8, 1824 – September 23, 1889) was a British writer best known for his novels *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. He was born in London the son of noted landscape painter William Collins and spent several years of his youth abroad with his family in Italy and France. He began telling stories at boarding school when he was forced by a bully to tell a story before he could sleep. He left school at sixteen and spent five years as a clerk in a firm of tea merchants, during which time he published his first story and wrote his first novel. At the urging of his father, he entered Lincoln’s Inn in 1846 to study law, graduating in 1851. That same year he met Charles Dickens and began a lifelong friendship. During the 1850’s his writing expanded to include articles, essays, criticism and travel books. In this decade Collins began to suffer from gout, for which he took laudanum. In the 1860s he published *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*, which secured both his reputation and financial stability. Collins never married but in 1858 began living with Caroline Graves and her daughter, who he considered family. Ten years later he began a liaison with Martha Rudd, with whom he had three children, and thereafter divided his time between the two women. In his last decade his health declined and he became increasingly dependent on laudanum. He died following a stroke in 1889.