

I decided not to say anything to Laura about this. From what Walter said in his letter, the expedition was going to be dangerous. If I told her, it would only upset her more.

I suggested to Laura that we visit some old friends in Yorkshire as I thought the change of air would do her good. She agreed and we spent a happy week there. However we were then called back to Limmeridge by a letter from Mr Fairlie, commanding us to return at once.

As soon as I got back to Limmeridge, I went to Mr Fairlie's room. He informed me that he had had a letter from Sir Percival Glyde, proposing the date of 22 December for the wedding. This was in only four weeks' time.

'Please, dear Marian, tell Laura to get ready for the wedding,' said Mr Fairlie. 'I'm afraid I can't because, as you know, my nerves are very delicate. You're very lucky that your nerves are so strong. Thank you so much, Marian, and please don't bang the door on your way out!'

I went immediately to find Laura. When I told her the news, her face turned very pale and she began to tremble. She cried out, 'Not so soon, Marian, oh, not so soon!'

'Very well,' I said. 'I'm going to tell your uncle and Sir Percival that they can't have everything their own way.'

I was just going out of the door when Laura stopped me.

'No, Marian,' she said. 'What's the use? I've caused enough trouble and anxiety to everyone. I don't want to cause any more. Tell my uncle I agree to the date. It makes no difference to me.'

My heart felt as if it would break when I heard her words. I went back to Mr Fairlie, feeling angry and upset. When I got to the door of his room, I opened it and shouted inside, 'Tell Sir Percival that Laura agrees to the twenty-second!'

After that I banged the door as loudly as possible and went downstairs, feeling a little better. I really hoped that Mr Fairlie's nerves would be damaged for the rest of the day.

Now the preparations for the wedding began. The dressmaker came to measure Laura for her wedding dress but although Laura tried hard to be interested, I could see that she wasn't. How different and how excited she would be, I thought sadly, if she was going to marry Walter.

After the wedding, Sir Percival planned to take Laura to Italy for six months. He had arranged to meet up with an old friend of his there, Count Fosco. In June they were all going to come back to Sir Percival's home, Blackwater House. I would live there with them too, and I was certainly very grateful that I could still be close to Laura.

On 20 December, two days before the wedding, Sir Percival arrived at Limmeridge House, bringing with him some really beautiful jewellery for Laura. He appeared to be very happy and didn't seem to notice how pale and quiet Laura was.

The next morning, while I was out walking, I took the road that led to the farmhouse at Todd's Corner where Anne Catherick had stayed. To my surprise I saw Sir Percival coming towards me from the farmhouse. When we met, he told me he had been to the farm to ask if there had been any news of Anne, but the farmer's wife had told him there was none.

'I'm most anxious to find the poor woman,' he said. 'She should be in the care of the asylum again, where she'll be safe. Do you happen to know if the art teacher, Mr Hartright, has seen her again?'

'He hasn't seen her since he left here,' I replied.

'How very sad,' said Sir Percival in a disappointed voice. Yet he didn't look disappointed at all. He looked relieved.

Why was Sir Percival so keen to find Anne Catherick on the day before his wedding, I wondered? Then I put the thought out of my head. It must be because he was really worried about her safety and wanted to help her.

The twenty-second of December came. The weather that day was terrible – wild and stormy. Laura and Sir Percival were