

dow, the patch of back garden was barely visible under fluttering rows of linen hanging out on lines to dry. A pack of dirty cards and some plain needlework, littered the bare little table. A cheap American clock ticked with stern and steady activity on the mantel-piece. The smell of onions was in the air. A torn newspaper, with stains of beer on it, lay on the floor. There was some sinister influence in the place which affected Mr. Ronald painfully. He felt himself trembling, and sat down on one of the rickety chairs. The minutes followed one another wearily. He heard a trampling of feet in the room above—then a door opened and closed—then the rustle of a woman's dress on the stairs. In a moment more, the handle of the parlour door was turned. He rose, in anticipation of Mrs. Turner's appearance. The door opened. He found himself face to face with his wife.

## VI.

John Farnaby, posted at the garden paling, suddenly lifted his head and looked towards the open window of the back parlour. He reflected for a moment—and then joined his female companion on the road in front of the house.

'I want you at the back garden,' he said. 'Come along!'

'How much longer am I to be kept kicking my heels in this wretched hole?' the woman asked sulkily.

'As much longer as I please—if you want to go back to London with the other half of the money.' He showed it to her as he spoke. She followed him without another word.

Arrived at the paling, Farnaby pointed to the window, and to the back garden door, which was left ajar. 'Speak softly,' he whispered. 'Do you hear voices in the house?'

'I don't hear what they're talking about, if that's what you mean?'

'I don't hear either. Now mind

what I tell you—I have reasons of my own for getting a little nearer to that window. Sit down under the paling, so that you can't be seen from the house. If you hear a row, you may take it for granted that I am found out. In that case go back to London by the next train, and meet me at the terminus at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon. If nothing happens, wait where you are till you hear from me or see me again.'

He laid his hand on the low paling, and vaulted over it. The linen hanging up in the garden to dry offered him a means of concealment (if any one happened to look out of the window) of which he skilfully availed himself. The dust-bin was at the side of the house, situated at a right angle to the parlour window. He was safe behind the bin, provided no one appeared on the path which connected the patch of garden at the back with the patch in front. Here, running the risk, he waited and listened.

The first voice that reached his ears was the voice of Mrs. Ronald. She was speaking with a firmness of tone that astonished him.

'Hear me to the end, Benjamin,' she said. 'I have a right to ask as much as that of my husband, and I do ask it. If I had been bent on nothing but saving the reputation of our miserable girl, you would have a right to blame me for keeping you ignorant of the calamity that has fallen on us—'

There the voice of her husband interposed sternly. 'Calamity? Say disgrace, everlasting disgrace.'

Mrs. Ronald did not notice the interruption. Sadly and patiently she went on.

'But I had a harder trial still to face,' she said. 'I had to save her, in spite of herself, from the wretch who has brought this infamy on us. He has acted throughout in cold blood; it is his interest to marry her, and from first to last he has plotted to force the marriage on us. For God's sake don't