

delay her; from one cause or another she might not have been able to slip out as quickly as she had thought. She might come yet; and so, though the more prolonged my absence, the greater risk of detection I ran, I composed myself to wait with what patience I might. The town was quiet; human noise at an end for the day; but Mr. D——'s school stood on the outskirts, with its back to the open country, and between the sighing of the wind among the poplars, and the murmur of a neighbouring brook, and those far-off noises that seem inseparable from the night, I had stood a minute or more before another sound, differing from all these, and having its origin at a spot much nearer to me, caught my ear, and set my heart beating. It was the noise of a woman weeping; and to this day I do not know precisely what I did on hearing it —when I made out what it was, I mean—or how I found courage to do it; only, that in an instant, as it seemed to me, I was on the other side of the fence, and had taken the girl in my arms, with her head on my shoulder, and her wet eyes looking into mine, while I rained kisses on her face.

Doubtless the darkness and her grief and my passion gave me boldness to do this; and to do a hundred other mad things in my ecstasy. For, as I had never spoken to her before, any more than I had ever held a woman in my arms before, so I had not thought, I had not dreamed of this! of her hand, perhaps, but no more. Therefore, and though since Adam's time the stars have looked down on many a lover's raptures, never, I verily believe, have they gazed on transports so perfect, so unlooked for, as were mine at that moment! And all the time not a word passed between us; but after a while she pushed me from her, with a kind of force that would not be resisted, and holding me at arm's length, looked at me strangely; and then thrusting me altogether from her, she bade me, almost roughly, go back.