

on the woman, and at another all but caught the sobbing girl in my arms and challenged the world to touch her. Fortunately, Mr. D——, now fully awakened, and the more inclined to remember decency in proportion as his wife forgot it, recalled me to myself by sternly bidding me see the boys to their beds.

Glad to escape, they needed no second order, but flocked to the door, and I with them. In our retreat, it was necessary for me to pass close to the shrinking girl, whom Mrs. D—— was still abusing with all the cruelty imaginable; as I did so I heard, or dreamed that I heard, three words, breathed in the faintest possible whisper. I say, dreamed I heard, for the girl neither looked at me nor removed the apron from her face, nor by abating her sobs or any other sign betrayed that she spoke or that she was conscious of my neighbourhood.

Yet the three words, "Garden, ten minutes," so gently breathed, that I doubted while I heard, could only have come from her; and assured of that, it will be believed that I found the ten minutes I spent seeing the boys to bed by the light of one scanty rushlight the longest and most tumultuous I ever passed. If she had not spoken I should have found it a sorry time, indeed; since the moment the door was closed behind me I discerned a hundred reasons to be dissatisfied with my conduct, thought of a hundred things I should have said, and saw a hundred things I should have done; and stood a coward convicted. Now, however, all was not over; I might explain. I was about to see her, to speak with her, to pour out my indignation and pity, perhaps to touch her hand; and in the delicious throb of fear and hope and excitement with which these anticipations filled my breast, I speedily forgot to regret what was past.