

features, and her heart yearned to her uncle for so caring to decorate the lovely face.

One day Rhoda was at her bed-room window, on the point of descending to encounter the daily dumpling, which was the principal and the unvarying item of the midday meal of the house, when she beheld a stranger trying to turn the handle of the iron gate. Her heart thumped. She divined correctly that it was her uncle. Dahlia had now been absent for very many months, and Rhoda's growing fretfulness sprang the conviction in her mind that something closer than letters must soon be coming. She ran downstairs, and along the gravel-path. He was a little man, square-built, and looking as if he had worn to toughness; with an evident Sunday suit on: black, and black gloves, though the day was only antecedent to Sunday.

"Let me help you, sir," she said; and her hands came in contact with his, and were squeezed.

"How is my sister?" She had no longer any fear in asking.

"Now, you let me through, first," he replied, imitating an arbitrary juvenile. "You're as tight locked in as if you was in dread of all the thieves of London. You ain't afraid o' me, miss? I'm not the party generally outside of a fortification; I ain't, I can assure you. I'm a defence party, and a reg'lar lion when I've got the law backing me."

He spoke in a queer, wheezy voice, like a cracked flute, combined with the effect of an ill-resined fiddle-bow.

"You are in the garden of Queen Anne's Farm," said Rhoda.

"And you're my pretty little niece, are you? 'the darkie lass,' as your father says. 'Little,' says I; why, you need n't be ashamed to stand beside a grenadier. Trust the country for growing fine gals."

"You are my uncle, then?" said Rhoda. "Tell me how my sister is. Is she well? Is she quite happy?"

"Dahly?" returned old Anthony, slowly.

"Yes, yes; my sister!" Rhoda looked at him with distressful eagerness.

"Now, don't you be uneasy about your sister Dahly." Old Anthony, as he spoke, fixed his small brown eyes