

where Mr. Scatterd, the carpenter, who had hung himself in his own wood-shed last week, had just been buried.

Panic was fast taking hold on Dahlia—oh, if only she had a spirit like that of Iris!—when suddenly a voice squeaked under her, making her almost jump from the chest.

"Young lady," it said "couldn't you ease a bit? My shoulder's nigh well broke with the lid of the chest. It can't be that a beautiful young lady like you would want to hurt a pore fellow that never meant you no 'arm."

It was really better than the eye. For an instant Dahlia did not answer. Then she spoke in trembling tones.

"Who are you?" she asked, "and why are you in the chest? You know you came to steal our things."

"If I did it's no reason for killing me. I'll be a dead man before your sister comes back. I wouldn't have hurt a 'air o' your 'eads. Don't you know that if I wasn't soft-hearted it 'ud ha' been the easiest thing in the world to settle two little kids—I mean young ladies like you and your sister? My soft-heartedness is like to prove my undoing. An' I wouldn't mind for myself, no, I wouldn't only for my pore girl. It'll fair break 'er 'eart, so it will."

Dahlia was silent, her heart thumping against her side. Why, it was

me out, miss, for the love o' 'eaven. I'll never crack another crib—I mean burgle a 'ouse. I'll repent an' live 'appy with Sarah Jane ever after. I didn't think a young lady like you would be a torturer. Oh, lor'! oh, lor'!"

The voice at the aperture ended in a squeak of suffering. Dahlia got off the chest again hastily and began dragging at a bundle.

"You won't want to take any of mother's jewels?" she asked, pausing, and addressing the aperture.

"Me! Jewels!" Again the ghastly merriment as from a toy gramophone. "I'll tell you what, lady; I believe you'll find my pistol on a chair. It's loaded. Don't touch it or it'll go off. Still, you can 'old it over me, turned away from me, you understand, till I'm gone. That's wot the little gels in the story-books des. Once out o' this I swear to you I'll lead an honest life ever after."

Off came another bundle of the gold plates. Dahlia, pale as a sheet, but very determined-looking dragged at the bundle after bundle. At last she lifted the lid of the chest.

"I dare say you'll kill me," she said; but I couldn't leave you in suffering. Come, get out!"

Bill Nixey came out of the chest with a painful effort, but making all



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true that if he was any sort of a burglar at all he could have made short work of her and Iris. And what was it he had said about a girl?

"You ought to have thought of your poor girl," she said, with some indignation, "before you began to burgle. I daresay she's as bad as yourself."

"That she isn't," answered Bill, as energetically as he could, considering his position. His voice by this time whistled like the wind in a keyhole. "I was a burglar afore ever I saw 'er. She knows nothin' on it, or she'd ha' given me the mitten. A downright good girl she is. This was to be my last job. Oh, lor', miss, think o' the 'appy 'ome you're destroyin'! My pore Sarah Jane! You're a cruel-hearted little lady, so you are. I'm endorin' the tortures of the exquisite, so I am."

He groaned horribly, and poor Dahlia turned pale.

"You'll be a murderer all your days if you don't let me out," he went on. "My backbone is pushin' through my ribs. I'll be a dead man before that other 'ard-hearted little lady comes back. I'd ha' never believed it o' you an' 'er. Such pretty little ladies you looked! Oh, my pore girl!"

Dahlia got hastily off the chest; herself again.

"How do I know that you won't kill me," she asked, "if I let you out?"

There was something like a hoarse cackle inside the chest.

"Much good that 'ud do me! I only want to get out o' this before your sister comes back with the toffs. Let

the haste he could. He groaned very much as he stepped over the edge on to the floor. Then he turned and looked at Dahlia. She was wearing an expression as though her last hour had come. She was standing by the chair on which the pistol lay, but she had made no effort to take it up. The candle light flickered on the pale determination of her little face.

"That's right," he groaned. "Don't touch it or it might go off and kill someone."

"I wouldn't kill you for worlds," she said; "and I think it much more likely you will kill me. But I shall have to fire at you if you want to take any of these things with you. We think a great deal of them. The gold plate was given by the City of London to Admiral Sir Hercules Vivash in 1682."

Her hand was on the pistol now.

"Don't touch it," cried Bill Nixey again. "It might go off itself." He was stretching himself with evident pain and discomfort, leaning his hands on the edge of the chest. "Praps if I'd known the family 'istory I wouldn't 'ave come after that there plate. There's a hussy by the name o' 'Annah. I'll tell you what, missy: get your par and mar to give 'em the sack, every man an' maid o' 'em. Bless ye, they don't deserve nobody's trust!"

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