

defence, it is simply a long tube by means of which the insect is able to deposit its eggs in suitable crevices in the bark of trees. I had written thus far the description of my snake-fly when, a few days later, whilst sitting under a tree, there dropped upon the book I was

reading a wriggling creature which I saw at a glance must be the larva of the said fly.

There was the snake-like head, the long neck and slender body, only no wings and no ovipositor.

I secured my captive and supplied it with

some raw meat which it pounced upon and devoured with avidity.

Whether I can succeed in keeping the creature until it turns into a perfect snake-fly remains to be seen, at any rate I shall keep and feed it hoping it may prosper in my hands.

"THAT PECULIAR MISS ARTLETON.

By FRANCES LOCKWOOD GREEN.



CHAPTER III.

"H, mother, what do you think has happened?" cried Clarice Day as she entered the room where her mother was sitting. "That quaint little person whom I described to you has invited me to have lunch with her, and I believe the lunch is here in this parcel—potatoes, unpeeled, uncooked, mother, and I am dreadfully hungry! I'll come home as soon as I can, but she lives in Artleton, so when Charlie comes you can tell him to walk over to meet me. He'll be sure to find me in the village, though I never asked the old lady her name—how funny! She knows my name. I expect she heard it in the shop. I'm awfully sorry to leave you alone, mother, but you have me every day. My heart really ached for the poor little creature, and the girls were so rude to her, but I must tell you more when I return."

"But, my dear, are you sure this old person is not deceiving you; there are so many wicked people in the world?"

"Oh, mother, she is as simple and transparent as the daylight. I am sure if you were to talk to her you would say so. One seems to read her heart in her face. And really I feel I ought to be kind to her to make up for the rudeness of Miss Martin and Miss Pringle. I never was so ashamed in my life. I think I'll put my lace fichu on, mother, in honour of the occasion, and I will take this bunch of mignonette for my hostess. I will buy you another. And do you think she would fancy two or three of your nice wheatmeal scones? Just put a few in a paper bag while I run up-stairs to smooth my mop, there's a good mother!" and Clarice rushed away.

"I think you might take a few songs, dear, your voice is very soothing when I am tired," said Mrs. Day, when Clarice reappeared with face fresh and rosy.

"Thank you, mother. Good-bye!"

"More parcels, my dear, what have you there?" asked the little person as Clarice met her in the street.

"Once mother lived in Scotland, and she learned to make lovely scones," said Clarice shyly, "and I—I—thought you might fancy two or three."

"I shall enjoy them very much, my dear. We shall have quite a treat!" and the little person's eyes danced merrily.

"Poor thing, even a trifle gives her pleasure!" thought Clarice.

Presently the little person paused at the door of a confectioner's shop and asked—

"Do you like bon-bons, my dear? I do."

"And so do I!" laughed Clarice. "But they cost so much money."

"Oh, this dreadful poverty!" groaned the little person. "But never mind we'll be extravagant to-day, we'll walk in here and buy some chocolate creams."

"But this is a very dear shop!" whispered Clarice. "All the aristocrats come here. I know the sweets are lovely, but they are very expensive."

"My dear, when you were showing me some ribbons the other day, you informed me very gravely that the high-priced ribbons were often the cheapest in the end, and the same truth applies to the sweetmeats. This is a festive occasion—come along! I know the proprietor of this shop, he is always attentive to his customers." And, as if by magic, the doors opened and the little person and Clarice walked in.

"I am afraid I am leading her into unnecessary extravagance!" thought Clarice.

Then with surprise, she saw a new expression in the worn, old face, and noting the deferential tones of the shop-assistants she felt more and more ashamed of Miss Martin and Miss Pringle. Presently she saw the little person look to the door with an air of embarrassment. Clarice followed the direction of her eyes. She saw nothing but a brougham and a handsome pair of greys advancing towards the shop.

"What lovely horses! I should love to ride behind them," she whispered.

"And so you shall, my dear," cried the little person, with an expression of relief.

"No, oh, no! I was joking!" pleaded Clarice, in distress.

"But I say you shall; they are my horses."

"Oh, dear me, what shall I do? Is she often subject to these attacks? Poor little creature, I must persuade her to leave the shop quietly," thought Clarice.

Aloud she said soothingly, "Let us go home and prepare the lunch. We'll have such a pleasant time. Look, I have a bunch of mignonette for the table. We can leave these parcels." Then, turning to the astonished shopman, she said, "They have been ordered in a mistake."

"No, they have not!" cried the little person shrilly. "Take them to my carriage, and be sure to send that hamper of confectionery to No. 1, Hamer Street this evening without fail—Day is the name."

"Oh, what shall I do; she is quite insane! I must return and cancel the order. My poor little person!" groaned Clarice inwardly.

Once more the shop-doors swung open and Clarice and her companion were bowed into the street. Then a stately footman advanced and asked, obsequiously, "Have you any further calls to make, ma'am?"

"Home now, Calvert."

And, stepping into the brougham, the little person waited for Clarice to follow her. But Clarice stood upon the pavement with a look of stunned surprise in her face. The little old person was wealthy after all. How deceitfully she had acted!

"I think you won't require me any longer."

"Come, come, step in. Scold me afterwards, but don't make a scene in the street,"

whispered the little person; and stretching out a gloved hand she drew Clarice towards the door of the carriage. With quivering lips the girl stumbled in.

"Now scold me, and then I will scold you, for I have a crow to pull with you, Miss Clarice Day."

But Clarice could not speak a word.

"I suppose I must do all the scolding, then. In the first instance, you, or rather your shop-friends, concluded that I was a broken-down governess—you need not deny it. They gauged my position by my clothing, a very natural way of thinking, the way of the world, my dear. Finding that they worshipped the rich and despised the poor, I thought I would humour their fancy, and see how rude they could be to a poor, defenceless old woman. You see, I had my eyes open all the time. No, don't cry, my dear; you were never rude. Your education is defective, but you have the instincts of a lady, and you are a Christian, which is the best of all. But I haven't forgiven you for thinking that I was a lunatic. I am sane, perfectly sane, my dear, but all my friends say that I am peculiar, and of course I have grown to believe them. No, don't cover your mother's scones with the corner of your jacket. Believe me, I shall enjoy them immensely, for they are flavoured with love. My dear, though I am rich I am really a lonely old woman. But I am thankful that to-day I have found a little girl who has proved herself a friend indeed. Character is greater than clothes, my dear, and a loving heart than a mine of gold. Now, you would like to know why I carry my potatoes wrapped in a newspaper? My dear, last week I carried home a bunch of carrots uncovered, but I told my costermonger friend that if he did not provide paper for his customers I should withdraw my patronage—hence the newspaper this week. The fact is, I bought a poor lame lad a barrow, and started him in business, and of course I patronise him. My cook doesn't like his vegetables, so I send them to the cottage of a labourer on my estate. Now, tell me about yourself. Imagine we are going home to a garret to feast upon potatoes and milk."

Presently the carriage passed through the gates of a lodge into a sweeping avenue, and Clarice looked up with a startled face.

"We are going to Artleton Manor."

"Yes, my dear; that is my home."

"But you are not Miss Artleton, the lady of the manor?"

"Yes, my dear, I am. Now, don't look so disappointed. I know I am not half so interesting as I was half an hour ago, but you will forgive me, dear, won't you? You intended to bring a little sunshine into my lonely life, didn't you?"

Clarice blushed, and the tears gathered in her eyes.

"Clarice, you may do so still. Here we are. Jump out. Lunch will be waiting."

With the feeling that she was acting a part in an Arabian Night's story, Clarice alighted from the carriage, and entered a lofty domed hall, adorned with exquisite paintings. If only Charlie and her mother were with her,