

The Butterfly's Evil Spell

Federico Garcia Lorca

Characters

DOÑA BEETLE
WITCHBEETLE
SYLVIA
DOÑA PROUDBEETLE, *Sylvia's mother*
BUTTERFLY
BOYBEETLE, *Doña Beetle's son*
SCORPY
FIRST FIREFLY
SECOND FIREFLY
THIRD FIREFLY
SAINTBEETLE
FIRST FIELDBEETLE
SECOND FIELDBEETLE
OTHER FIELDBEETLES
GUARDBEETLES
TWO GIRLBEETLES

Prologue

Ladies and Gentlemen: the play you are about to watch is of no great consequence and yet disquieting; the sad tale of someone who reached for the moon and discovered the meaning of a broken heart. Love, that same love that passes with its ironies and tragedies through human lives, on this occasion passes through a distant meadow inhabited by insects – a place where once upon a time life was peaceful and serene. The insects were extremely happy and spent their lives quietly drinking dewdrops and instilling in their children a saintly fear of their gods. They made love naturally, without undue concern. For love was something handed down from father to son like an old and exquisite jewel which the very first insect had received directly from the hand of God. With the same tranquility and sureness with which the flower gives its pollen to the wind, so they gave themselves to love's sweet pleasure in the lush, green grass. But then one day there was an insect who longed to go beyond such love; who was seized by a vision far removed from his normal way of life. Perhaps he had struggled to read a book of poems abandoned on the grass by one of the few poets who visit the countryside; perhaps he was enraptured by a line, you know the kind: 'Oh how I love you, impossible dream!' And so I beg each one of you: do not leave your books of poems in the fields, for they cause the insects immeasurable heartache. The kind of poetry that questions the movements of the stars can be harmful indeed to immature souls. It goes without saying that the lovelorn little creature perished. For the truth is that Love is Death in disguise. How often in our prayer books is that skeleton who wields the scythe depicted as a woman who deceives us and opens the doors to darkness. It is as if Cupid himself sleeps often in the hollow chambers of her skull. And in how many

ancient tales does a flower, a kiss, a longing look perform the function of a dagger?

An old wood sylph who had escaped from a play by the great Shakespeare, and who wanders through the fields supporting his withered wings on a pair of crutches, recounted this story to the poet one autumn evening when the flocks had been gathered in; and now the poet himself recounts it, clothed in its own poetic melancholy. But before I begin, I wish to make the same request made by the wood sylph that autumn evening when the flocks had been safely gathered in. 'Why do the clean, bright insects moving so gracefully through the grass produce in you such a sense of repugnance? Why are you men and women, bloated with sins and incurable vices, offended by these good grubs who creep quietly through the meadows, basking in the pleasant morning sun? What right do you have to scorn the lowest of Nature's creatures? For until you learn to love deeply the stones and the grubs, you shall never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' And the old sylph also said this to the poet. 'The kingdom of animals and plants is at hand. Man forgets his Creator, but the plants and animals are near his light. I ask you to inform all men, poet, that love is born with the same intensity at all levels of existence; that the rhythm of a leaf stirred by the wind is the same as that of a distant star; that the words which the fountain speaks in the shade are heard in the waves that lap on the shore. Tell Man to be humble. In Nature all things are equal.' And the old sylph said nothing more. So now the play. Perhaps you'll laugh when you hear the insects speak like men, like young boys. But if you learn some profitable lesson, go to the forest and give your thanks to the old sylph with his crutches, some quiet evening when the flocks have been gathered in.

Act One

The stage represents a green and humble meadow beneath the deep shade of a great cypress-tree. A tiny and barely visible path weaves a simple arabesque across the grass. Beyond the meadow is a small pond surrounded by splendid lilies and blue stones. It is covered with dew. At the edge of the little path the insects' burrows form a tiny, fantastic cluster of caves. DOÑA BEETLE comes out of her house with a handful of grass that serves as a broom. She is a very old cockroach with one leg missing – lost in a confrontation with a brush in a house where she lived when she was young and dazzling. The great hammers of the dawn redden the cold metal of the distant sky-line.

Act I Scene One

DOÑA BEETLE *and* WITCHBEETLE.

DOÑA BEETLE (*looking at the meadow*).

Oh, what a fine and clear morning?

Another day dawning.

WITCHBEETLE (*wearing a cone-shaped hat embroidered with stars and a robe of dry moss*).

May you enjoy God's blessing, good neighbour.

DOÑA BEETLE.

And where are you going, missus,
All covered in dew?

WITCHBEETLE.

To tell you the truth, I was dreaming
I was a flower hidden in the grass.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Why ever would you dream that?

WITCHBEETLE.

And the sweet dew-drops were lips
That covered me with burning kisses
And sprinkled this dark dress with bright stars.

DOÑA BEETLE (*grumbling*).

You know very well . . . for the cause
Of poetry . . .

WITCHBEETLE.

Now what are you going to tell me?

DOÑA BEETLE.

You could easily catch pneumonia,
You wouldn't be with us much longer,
And we'd all be the sadder for that.

WITCHBEETLE.

It's just that my spirit's heavy, neighbour.
It was yesterday afternoon a swallow told me
All the stars would soon be dark.
God's gone to sleep, and there in the wood
I saw a star that was red and trembling,
And all its petals were slowly falling
As from a giant rose.
I watched it lose its glow,
And here inside my heart
I felt a great dark shadow fall.
I cried out" 'Friends, crickets!
Do you see what's happened to the stars?'
'A fairy's dead,' they said. And I went
Across to the trunk of an oak-tree
And there was the fairy of land and sea
stone dead!

DOÑA BEETLE.

Really?

WITCHBEETLE.
Absolutely!

DOÑA BEETLE.
Who did that?

WITCHBEETLE.
Oh, love. Undoubtedly!

DOÑA BEETLE.
Well, it's another new day dawning.

WITCHBEETLE.
How is your son? How's he keeping?

DOÑA BEETLE.
Oh, he's fine.

WITCHBEETLE.
I thought he looked sad
When I saw him yesterday.

DOÑA BEETLE.
Oh yes.
But that's because he's madly in love.

WITCHBEETLE.
Would that be with Sylvia?

DOÑA BEETLE.
According
To him, it's a much greater mystery.

WITCHBEETLE.
Well, he is a poet, isn't he?
Just like his father.

DOÑA BEETLE.
A lot of misery he gave me,
That one.

WITCHBEETLE.
He was a treasure!

DOÑA BEETLE.
You could have measured my bruises and knocks.

WITCHBEETLE.

But he always kept his barn well stocked!

DOÑA BEETLE.

That's no excuse. He could have been
A better man.

WITCHBEETLE.

I liked him, that's for sure.
We'll leave it, eh? I'm no stirrer.
How is your bad leg?

DOÑA BEETLE.

I can never
Settle with the way it aches at night.

WITCHBEETLE.

Try daisy petals. Bathe it with dew
But for goodness' sake don't walk on it.

I'll give you some powder, ground from
The skull of an ant. To be taken at night,
Well mixed with mint.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Good friend, may the Good Lord beetle
Reward you generosity,
And turn you in your dreams into
A flower of true beauty.

Comforting her.

Forget sadness and melancholy.
Life's pleasant but far too short.
We have to be happy while we can.

WITCHBEETLE (*as though dreaming*).

The light of the stars will soon be gone.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Don't think of that, my learned neighbour.
Think of the joy that comes with the dawn.

WITCHBEETLE.

The terrible sight by the oak-tree!

DOÑA BEETLE.

You'll be better after a sleep, you'll see.

WITCHBEETLE (*returning abruptly to normality*).

The fields are silent.

The dew departs to heavens unknown.
The breeze brings with it mysterious perfume.

DOÑA BEETLE.

I didn't know you were a poet too.
We poor folk have enough to do
With our cooking.

WITCHBEETLE.

Don't be coarse!

DOÑA BEETLE.

My class of people can only sing
And suck flowers. What else can we do?

WITCHBEETLE.

No wonder your husband beat you!
Cooking and poetry's a true mix.
I'll see you later. I'm off to bed.
She leaves.

DOÑA BEETLE.

May the light guide you. I'll sweep
My doorstep with the morning breeze.
She begins to sweep, singing.
Last night a little worm
To me of love did sing.
I shan't love him until
He has four feet and tiny wings.

Act I Scene Two

DOÑA BEETLE *and* SYLVIA.

From stage-left comes SYLVIA, a proud insect, an early riser. Amongst the repugnant insects to which she belongs, she is enchanting. She gleams like jet and her legs are quick and nimble. She is the daughter of DOÑA PROUDBEETLE, is more than a year old and the best match in town. A small daisy serves as a parasol. She plays with it gracefully and on her head wears pertly the golden shell of a ladybug.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Sweet, pretty child, you are out early.

SYLVIA.

Oh don't be silly. I'm not a child.
Its ages since I left school.

DOÑA BEETLE.

I can see you don't like being called

A child, so I'll all you a lady,
Little lady.

SYLVIA (*flighty*).
It's not just that.

DOÑA BEETLE.
What is it then?

SYLVIA.
A deep sadness.
No one has the slightest idea.

DOÑA BEETLE.
Oh dear! So sad and yet so young!
You'd expect if of old Witchbeetle,
But you are new to the world.
There's plenty of fun in store for you.

SYLVIA (*naively*).
I haven't seen much of it yet.

DOÑA BEETLE (*thoughtfully*).
Did my learned friend tell you the stars
Were dying on account of some
Fairy or something?

SYLVIA.
No. Nothing.

DOÑA BEETLE.
Then why be sad? What good's it do
But make you thin and haggard before
Your time? What's the matter with you?

SYLVIA.
Old lady, did you not have a heart
When you were young? If I were to say
That I'm all heart . . .

DOÑA BEETLE (*an outburst of indignation*).
Oh, not another dose of poetry!
It's driving you dotty, all of you.
You neglect your duty, your houses are filthy,
You're all shameless hussies, you're out
Half the night and your own beds empty!

SYLVIA
Really! How can I stand here so patiently!

DOÑA BEETLE.

Forgive me, lady! I didn't mean it.
It's just that you have no cause to be
Sad, and it grieves me.

SYLVIA.

I have every cause, believe me.

DOÑA BEETLE (*affectionately*)

Perhaps I can make you feel better, child.

SYLVIA.

My sadness goes deep, deep as the lake
You see there. (*Anguished.*) Where is the water
Whose sweetness can quench my restless thirst?

DOÑA BEETLE (*alarmed*).

Sylvia! For pity's sake be calm.
Be sensible! You'll do yourself
Unnecessary harm.

SYLVIA. (*hurling the daisy to the ground*).

Which path can lead me from this place
To another world where love exists?

DOÑA BEETLE (*strongly*).

Don't be silly. That way madness lies.

SYLVIA.

The way ahead is lined with signs
And tears. I shall bury myself in sand
And await the lover who'll give me his hand.

DOÑA BEETLE.

I do understand how much in love
You are. But when I was young
We didn't exactly burst our lungs
To tell the boys how much we longed
For them; nor did we indulge
In fancy imagery like you are.
In those days modesty was always
Thought to be a greatly prized
Commodity. I knew a very
Saintly beetle lady who lived
A full six years because of chastity.
And here's me, two months old and old
Before my time because I married.
She begins to weep.

SYLVIA

Oh, Love, if only I could find you!
They tell me you are black and sweet,
With small black wings, your shell
As dark as starless night, your eyes
Like emeralds, your feet like violet.

DOÑA BEETLE.

You remind me of a cricket
I knew once. He was just as mad
As you. Lived in a cave and liked
To think himself a great magician
And astrologer. Ask me, he
Was off his rocker. But he did
Give me a potion to cure love.

SYLVIA (*intrigued*).

What did it say?

DOÑA BEETLE.

Administer to lovers twice a day
Two solid clouts across the head.
As an extra precaution, please make sure
They don't lie down on any beds.

SYLVIA.

You are mocking me.

DOÑA BEETLE.

I'm sorry, Sylvia. It's hard for me
Not to when such a pretty girl
Does such silly things.

SYLVIA (*aside*).

If only she knew it's her son I love.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Still, you are very cagey not
To speak of the cause of this great
Malady of yours. Why don't you tell me
Who he is and if he lives very far
From here.

SYLVIA.

He lives so near I feel
His breath upon the breeze.

DOÑA BEETLE.

He'll be
From the village then. Does he love
You ever so deeply?

SYLVIA.
He hates me.

DOÑA BEETLE.
That's funny, and you with all that money.
When I was young . . .

SYLVIA.
He's waiting for
A princess who'll never come.

DOÑA BEETLE.
Tell me what this fellow looks like.

SYLVIA.
A tiny body that's sheer delight,
A poet's eyes so deep and dreamy,
A mole on his let – I think it's the right,
And golden feelers that are perfectly heavenly.

DOÑA BEETLE.
It's my son.

SYLVIA.
And I love him madly!

DOÑA BEETLE (*as if dreaming*).
She may have money but she's crazy
With it. I'll make jolly sure
He falls in love with her.

Full of pretence.

You must be suffering terribly.

Aside.

She has a wonderful legacy,
This one! (*Aloud.*) Child of my flesh!
Blood of my body! I give
My word you shall marry my son.

SYLVIA (*blushing*).
You've guessed my secret.

DOÑA BEETLE (*embracing her tenderly*).
Of course, my pet.
I'm a woman of the world, you see.

SYLVIA.

How happy, how happy you've made me!

DOÑA BEETLE (*excessively tender*).
Come now! Dry this pretty little face
And leave these tiny tears beneath
These lilies. I'll go and get my son.
I know he'll be dying to see you.

SYLIA.
I shall be queen of this green land.
Love and wealth are mine to command.

Act I Scene Three

BOYBEETLE, DOÑA BEETLE *and* SYLVIA.

The BOYBEETLE is a neat, refined little boy. His originality derives from the fact that he paints the tips of his antennae and his right leg with lily pollen. He is a poet and a visionary, a pupil of WITCHBEETLE, awaiting some great mystery which will change the course of his life. In one of his feet – hands – he carries a piece of bark on which he has been writing a poem. DOÑA BEETLE walks beside him, praising SYLVIA's fortune. SYLVIA moves the daisy-parasol from one side to the other. She raises her little foot to her face, sighing deeply. The sun blazes down.

BOYBEETLE
I've told you, mother, I shan't get married.
I've told you a thousand times,
I shan't marry!

DOÑA BEETLE (*weeping*)
I know you have.
You'd rather torture me.

BOYBEETLE
But I don't love her.

DOÑA BEETLE
What's the difference?

BOYBEETLE
Without love it's not worth tuppence.

DOÑA BEETLE
Listen to me. Show some sense for once.
You should see what a lovely piece
Of glass she has. Her grandfather
Found it in the grass one night and,
Seeing it was blue, decided
It must be a bit of sky. Then

There's her house – it's wonderfully
Spacious. She's very well provided for
And, take my word, no wallflower.
So get stuck in and court her properly.
Tell her her shining face is like
A star that drives you crazy, and you spend every moment just thinking
Of her. You've got to marry her,
If only for my sake!

Raising her voice.

I have to go and make the dinner.
You two put your heads together.

She leaves.

Act I Scene Four

SYLVIA AND BOYBEETLE.

*SYLVIA keeps the sun off her with the daisy and sighs longingly. The
BOYBEETLE sits on a pebble and moves his antennae slowly. He reads from the
piece of bark which he carries in his foot – hand.*

BOYBEETLE.

Oh, scarlet poppy, gazing over meadows,
If only I possessed your loveliness.
The sky above ablaze with your colours
Longs only for the dawn's cool tenderness.

You are the star that lights this tiny village,
The sun that calls the insects from their beds,
Oh let my eyes go blind and never see
Your withered leaves, your sadly fading red.

Who'd be an ant and fondly gaze on you,
And save your slender stem from injury.
I yearn to have you always at my side,
To cover you with kisses sweet as honey.

My kisses have a gentle warmth and sweetness,
Born of passion fiery and true.
Until my life is one day sadly ended,
This heart of mine will always beat for you.

SYLVIA (*aside, dreamily*).

How passionately he speaks this poem!

Turning to BOYBEETLE

Good day. How are you?

BOYBEETLE.

Fine. And you?

SYLVIA.

I'm always searching for something.

BOYBEETLE

Something?

SYLVIA.

Love.

BOYBEETLE.

Ah, that's always a problem.

SYLVIA.

My heart needs kisses.

BOYBEETLE

I expect you'll get them.

SYLVIA.

I don't think so. Do you have plans to marry?

BOYBEETLE

My hopes are pinned on that star
That looks like a pretty flower.

SYLVIA.

With the heat of the sun its life
Will soon be over.

BOYBEETLE.

I shall cool
Its fire with sweet water.

SYLVIA

Where is
This star of yours?

BOYBEETLE

In my dreams.

SYLVIA (*sadly*)

I expect one day you'll find it.

BOYBEETLE.

I
Shall sing to it sweet songs of love.
The wind will provide its perfect harmony.

SYLVIA.

You've forgotten the night we walked
Through the flowers there on the path
And you said you loved me.

BOYBEETLE.

I did
Once, Sylvia. But now it's all over.

SYLVIA (*crying*).

I know it is.

BOYBEETLE.

Please don't start crying.

SYLVIA (*aside*).

He doesn't love me. My heart aches.

BOYBEETLE (*consoling*.)

Don't cry any more, for pity's sake!

They are standing close to each other. Two naughty little GIRLBEETLES come along the street. One of them has a fly tied to a blade of dry grass.

GIRLBEETLES (*aloud*).

Coo-ee, coo-ee,
Sweethearts are silly,
All lovey dovey!

SYLVIA.

If only that were true.

BOYBEETLE.

I beg you,
Don't cry any more.

SYLVIA.

My heart hurts so.

GIRLBEETLES (*leaving*).

Coo-ee, coo-ee,
Sweethearts are silly,
All lovey dovey!

SYLVIA.

I'm so unhappy.

BOYBEETLE

Everything
Has worked out badly.

Act I Scene Five

SCORPY, *the woodcutter*, SYLVIA, BOYBEETLE, DOÑA BEETLE, and later, DOÑA PROUDBEETLE.

BOYBEETLE *moves away from SYLVIA when he sees SCORPY approaching. SCORPY is an old woodcutter who lives in the forest and often comes to the village to get drunk. He has an insatiable appetite and is a very bad lot. He speaks in a voice made rough by brandy.*

BOYBEETLE.

Dry your tears.

SYLVIA.

Yes, I shall.

SCORPY (*drunk, singing, staggering*).

The little leaves of mint are nice
To eat. They are so tasty and so sweet.
Ta-ra, ta-ra, ta-ra.

He scratches his head with his great pincer.

Feels like there's a herd of cows in here.

Sings.

Ta-ra, ta-ra, ta-ra.

Approaching BOYBEETLE.

Hello there, matey.

To SYLVIA, comically waving a pincer.

Oh, do excuse me, your lovely majesty.
May the Almighty Saintbeetle grant you peace
Eternally. . .

BOYBEETLE *and SYLVIA are uneasy.*

Am I getting in the way?
I mean you two in this fine meadow
Trying to build a little love-nest,
And me being a proper pest . . .

Winks maliciously and pokes BOYBEETLE in the stomach with his pincer.

I'd best be on my way.
Let you get on with it, eh?

BOYBEETLE (*very angry*).

No, you can stay!

SCORPY.

Oh, if you say so.

SYLVIA.

The cheek of the fellow!

SCORPY.

Love's the thing in the spring, they reckon.
You being a poet, you'll know a thing
Or two about it.

BOYBEETLE (*indignant*).
Do be quiet!

SCORPY.
Be quiet? I'll have you know
I was raised on a diet of silence.
If anyone spoke in our family,
It started a riot . . .

SYLVIA (*sadly*).
Oh Dear!

SCORPY.
What's up with you, sweetie?

SYLVIA.
Nothing.

SCORPY.
Really? I thought you might
Be having tricky mother-in-law problems.

SYLVIA.
Don't be such a silly idiot!

SCORPY (*serious*).
The aristo . . . cocracy
Has its troubles too, you know.
My philosophy of life's quite
Simple, considering how much
I've had to go through. Poor but decent,
That's me. All right, I might get stoned
Out of my silly mind sometimes.
Who doesn't? But all I really am
Is an innocent old man.

BOYBEETLE (*aside*).
A rogue and villain!

SYLVIA.
A greedy glutton!

SCORPY.
There's no one can claim he's all good.
I have to admit I like my food.

Other than that, I'm not so bad.

BOYBEETLE.

Shut up! Get yourself back to the woods!

SYLVIA.

Please leave us alone.

SCORPY (*unmoved, licking his lips*).

You should have seen this great fat worm

I've gobbled up this very minute.

Ever so tasty and squashy,

And just a touch of sweetness with it.

She had her kid with her, a tiny thing.

SYLVIA and BOYBEETLE *are horrified*.

To be quite honest, I didn't fancy him.

SYLVIA.

Holy Saintbeetle!

BOYBEETLE.

Do you have

To be so horrible?

SCORPY (*carried away, not listening*).

Too small

He was, too much of a baby.

I much prefer them fat and tasty!

BOYBEETLE.

You've committed murder. You've broken up

A family so you can get fatter!

SCORPY.

Tell you what, I'll beat my chest

And say I'm sorry, and ask Holy

Saintbeetle if he'll forgive me.

BOYBEETLE.

Murder's a sin he doesn't forgive.

SYLVIA.

And little babyworm will have to live

Without a mother.

SCORPY (*with irony*).

You poets have

Such tenderness! But it doesn't

Compare with the taste of her flesh!

BOYBEETLE.

You horrid monster!

SYLVIA.

You nasty creature!

SCORPY.

Just be quiet, both of you, unless
You want to feature in my dinner.

SYLVIA (*running to hide in DOÑA BEETLE Beetle's house*).

I'm so scared, I'm so scared!

BOYBEETLE (*terrified, hiding behind the stone he was sitting on*).

Someone

Save me. Someone save me from Scorpy!

SCORPY.

I'm telling you, if I ate both
Of you, you'd fill this belly for
A fortnight. But not to worry.
I shan't be horrible. In any
Case, I always fancy friends might be
A little indigestible.

DOÑA BEETLE *emerges from her little cave, angry and limping, followed by SYLVIA, frightened and crying.*

DOÑA BEETLE

You scoundrel! You hopeless alcoholic!
Look at the state of them, sick with fear.

SCORPY (*grinning*)

Just my little joke, my dear.

DOÑA BEETLE (to BOYBEETLE).

Oh, my little boy! (*To SCORPY.*) I ought to poke
Your eyes out for this. Poor Sylvia!

SCORPY (*aside*).

I wouldn't mind a taste of her.
She's got nice legs.

DOÑA BEETLE.

You wretch!

SCORPY.

I do respect grey hair (*To BOYBEETLE.*)
So you've nothing to fear, lad.

BOYBEETLE (*scared stiff*).

I swear I'm not afraid of anything.

DOÑA BEETLE (*angrily, aside to SYLVIA*).

I don't believe it.

SYLVIA.

It's true.

He loves a flower. He's gone very cool

On me.

DOÑA BEETLE.

Then he's a fool. But don't

Worry. I'll make him love you.

SCORPY (*more and more drunk, to BOYBEETLE*).

You see, the spider had a broken

Leg, so I did her a favour . . .

By eating her. She was pretty,

And she did taste lovely.

Peals of laughter.

BOYBEETLE, *frightened out of his skin at the horrible prospect of being eaten alive by this panther-scorpion, speaks in a trembling voice.*

BOYBEETLE

How did you catch her?

SCORPY (*leaping on BOYBEETLE*)

Easy! See?

BOYBEETLE (*shouting*)

Mother, quick, he's going to kill me!

BOYBEETLE *escapes from SCORPY and runs to his mother.*

DOÑA BEETLE (*strongly*)

Go away, you brutish beastly creature!

SCORPY (*staggering*)

Why is everyone so scared of me?

During this episode the GIRLBEETLE with the fly tied to a blade of grass has reappeared. SCORPY sees her, approaches her, seizes the fly and swallows it.

GIRLBEETLE (*shrieking*).

My fly! My fly! It's horrible!

SCORPY

Quite a tasty bit of bluebottle!

SYLVIA (*clutching to DOÑA BEETLE*).

Help me! Help me! He's coming to get me!

SCORPY (*in a very deep voice, to frighten them*).

If I'm going to eat you, why make a fuss?

GIRLBEETLE (*fleeing, terrified*).

Mummy, Mummy, he's after us!

Off-stage, loud voices expressing concern and sympathy.

SYLVIA

What is it?

DOÑA BEETLE

What's going on?

Enter a group of FIELDBEETLES carrying a white butterfly with a broken wing. She is unconscious. Some FIELDBEETLES carry hoes and other sickles. With them comes WITCHBEETLE. All gather round. SCORPY is flat out on the good earth, completely drunk.

WITCHBEETLE

She's hurt, the poor little creature.

FIELDBEETLE.

Do you think she'll die?

WITCHBEETLE.

There's not much life
Left in her, but she'll soon fly again.

FIELDBEETLE.

She fell from the top of a great
Cypress and broke her wing.

WITCHBEETLE.

Such a dreamy, visionary
Creature. She knows the hidden secrets
Of the flowers and the water.
How sad it was to find her this morning,
Dying, and the sweet nightingales weeping.

FIELDBEETLE.

It broke my hart to see her lying
So still by the edge of the path.

WITCHBEETLE.

Sad, miserable creatures such as us
Are truly privileged and blessed
To touch the silky whiteness of these wings,
And breathe the lovely perfume of this dress.

DOÑA BEETLE *brings from her house some long and delicate leaves which are used by WITCHBEETLE to clean the BUTTERFLY's wounds.*

Sweet star, fallen from a dreaming cypress.
When you fell, you tasted the dawn's bitterness.

BOYBEETLE.

What is this sadness I feel deep
Inside me?

SYLVIA (*weeping. To her mother, PROUDBEETLE, who rushes in*)

He doesn't love me,
Mother.

DOÑA PROUDBEETLE (*drily*).

What are we to do?

SYLVIA

He loves a star.

DOÑA PROUDBEETLE.

He's such a so
And so! Who does he think he is?
The way he paints himself goes through me!
It's most unhealthy!
She leaves, shaking her head in annoyance.

FLYBEETLE.

Look she gave a sigh. And I think
She's opening her eyes.

BUTTERFLY (*quietly, half-awake*).

Fly, I want to fly away from here.
The thread is long.

WITCHBEETLE (*to DOÑA BEETLE*).

What do you say
We take her to your house? It looks
As if she's starting to come round.

BUTTERFLY.

Thread reaching to a far-off star
Where all my being's to be found.
My silver wings, my heart of gold,

Thread dreaming of the magic sound.

WITCHBEETLE.

Be sure to carry her with care.

The *FLYBEETLES* *carry her to* DOÑA BEETLE BEETLE's house.

WITCHBEETLE *to* DOÑA BEETLE.

And when you get there, try this remedy.

Clean the wound with dew that's not too fresh,

And then apply immediately

A warm nettle poultice containing

The pollen of a lily.

DOÑA BEETLE

Will it cure her?

WITCHBEETLE.

There's nothing surer. As well

As that, you'll need to bather her

Frequently in moonlight and make her

Take a regular siesta

In the cool forest. Lets go see her.

She's really lovely.

DOÑA BEETLE

She truly is!**Act I Scene Six**

BOYBEETLE, SCORPY, WITCHBEETLE.

BOYBEETLE (*to* SCORPY).

I have seen my magic star.

SCORPY (*flat on his back ion the grass, as though in limbo*)

I've had nine flies so far,

Not counting a lizard, a bee,

Maybe an entire bee-hive . . .

BOYBEETLE.

My heart has come alive. It burns

So fiercely with love!

WITCHBEETLE (*emerging from her little cave, approaching* BOYBEETLE *seriously and placing a hand on his shoulder*).

My boy,

The wings of the butterfly hold

Your destiny. Take care. Don't pin

Your hopes on them, for if you do

You'll surely be lost. I'm telling you

As an old, sick friend who cares for you.

She uses her stick to draw a circle on the ground.

Behold the magic circle. It tells
You clearly that if you fall
In love with her, you'll die. Eternal
Darkness lies in store for you,
Endless night where no stars shine.
I beg you, think of that before the light
Of day begins to fade.
She leaves.

BOYBEETLE (*declaiming like some Don Juan*).
What thoughts inside my head!
As if the wind entangled threads of love's confusion
And what was once the flower of my purity
Becomes the brighter flower of imagination.
Who can she be who steals my happiness?
Whose are these trembling wings of ermine whiteness?
I weep, I am so frightened by this darkness!
I seek, as when I was a child, my mother's sweet caress!
Oh, scarlet poppy, gazing over meadows!
If only I possessed your loveliness!
I beg you, calm the sorrow of this love,
Longing for the dawn's cool tenderness.

*He sits on the stone and weeps, his little head between his hands. SCORPY
pulls himself up with difficulty and sings in his cavernous voice.*

SCORPY
The little leaves of mint are nice
To eat. They are so tasty and so sweet.
Ta-ra, ta-ra, ta-ra.

The scene is full of light.

Act Two

A garden. At the back of the stage is a great cascade of ivy, and the whole of the floor is covered by huge daisies. It is a forest of flowers. Stage-left and towards the back the glint of spring-water which disappears into the forest.

Act II Scene One

FIRST FIELDBEETLE, SECOND FIELDBEETLE.
The two FIELDBEETLES enter from the right. They live at the foot of some mushrooms and are very old. In the neighbourhood one of them is regarded as a saint.

SAINTBEETLE
I tell you, neighbour, it came as
A surprise to me to see young
Boybeetle reciting poetry

In the fields.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE.

I saw him swinging
From a spider's web and singing
Those sad songs. Nothing but day-dreaming.
No thought of earning his living.

SAINTBEETLE.

He's a good sweet boy really, and
He does write some lovely poetry.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE.

You mean a good-for-nothing. No one
Can earn his living from swinging
From a spider's web.

SAINTBEETLE.

Good neighbour,
Don't forget what Holy Beetle
Teaches us: that judging others
Is a sin.

Chanting.

Man's life is as the grass of the meadows.
Learn to accept the sins of your fellows.
My kingdom's for those who sing and play.
Those in work shall be turned away.
Earth and water you shall be,
Petals on roses, bark on the tree.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE (*sarcastically*).

But Holy Beetle doesn't have to eat, does he?
You tell that to a many who's hungry.

SAINTBEETLE

Oh, do be quiet. What's hunger but
The devil in disguise? You have
To learn to exorcize him.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE

I do,
By eating.

SAINTBEETLE.

I mean by praying!

FIRST FIELDBEETLE.

Just leave me, friend. I know you are wise
And saintly, but Holy Beetle

Wasn't talking about this life
Of ours. If that Boybeetle doesn't
Settle down to work, he'll go hungry,
No matter how much he fancies
Himself. If I were his mother,
I'd give him a shaking!

SAINTBEETLE.

But dear friend, he was singing of love
That's impossible, of a butterfly's
Broken wing that's more deserving
Of morning dew than any flower.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE.

Just typical of idle buggers!

SAINTBEETLE.

You should feel pity for true lovers.
'Take on yourselves the pain of others.'
That's what Holy Beetle tells us.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE.

I've never heard such silly nonsense.
In love with a butterfly? He'll
Be sorry. Doesn't he know they
Can never marry?

SAINTBEETLE.

Man always clings to his illusions,
Eager to find the source of perfection.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE (*strongly*)

It comes from the fields.

SAINTBEETLE (*firmly*)

That's your opinion.

First FIELDBEETLE.

In my opinion Boybeetle's crazy.

SAINTBEETLE.

I'll pray that his soul can rest easy.
His song reminded me of long
Ago, when I was once in love.

FIRST FIELDBEETLE (*grumbling*).

It's getting dark. We'd better go.
All that's all over with.

They both exit stage-right, making their way through the ivy where they have their caves. Night has closed in and the first light of moon falls on the forest of daisies. The spring-water trembles with a distant tenderness.

ACT II Scene Two

BUTTERFLY, WITCHBEETLE, DOÑA BEETLE *and* FIELDBEETLES.
Enter from stage right WITCHBEETLE and DOÑA BEETLE. They are talking excitedly.

DOÑA BEETLE.
This meadow seems perfect to me
For her moonlight bath.

WITCHBEETLE.
I couldn't agree
More. Her little wings will be a s good
As new again, just as they were
On the very first morning she flew
In the bright sunlight.

DOÑA BEETLE.
She belongs
To the dawn, you know. She's a wandering
Flower. My son said that last night.

WITCHBEETLE.
Oh, do be sure to watch him carefully.

DOÑA BEETLE.
At night his heart's so full of love.
He sings of her so passionately.

WITCHBEETLE.
Exactly! That's why you must take great care.
To the FIELDBEETLES.
Over here, but nice and slowly.
See that her wings don't scrape the ground.
Hold her antennae firmly, so
The wind doesn't bend them. We don't
Want them ruined. Now over the stream.
To DOÑA BEETLE
She's safe and sound, good friend.
Four FIELDBEETLES carry the BUTTERFLY on their backs.
To the FIELDBEETLES.
Now put her down. Very carefully.
To DOÑA BEETLE
Did you use the fly ointment?

DOÑA BEETLE.

I've
Used it twice.

WITCHBEETLE (*examining the butterfly*)
There's no sign of life
Or movement yet. Her mouth is closed,
Her eyes completely lifeless.

Oh, where do you come from in your white dress?

DOÑA BEETLE (*recalling*).
She comes from the dawn; she's a flower
That flies.

WITCHBEETLE.
With damaged wings and broken
Heart, you make for the place where love dies.
To DOÑA BEETLE
Let's leave her in bright moonlight.
I can still hear that voice that spoke
So sadly in the forest:
'She's died: the fairy of the land and sea.'

DOÑA BEETLE
I fancy my house shall soon be
Witness to pain and death, for my
Poor son can only sing of anguish.

WITCHBEETLE.
Get him to marry Sylvia quickly.
That way he'll use up all his energy.

To a *FLY*.
You stay with the sleeping butterfly.
If she cries out, this holy branch
Will comfort her.

DOÑA BEETLE (*in the same vein*).
Oh, learned friend,
My heart perceives a tragedy!

WITCHBEETLE (*ignoring her*).
Take extra care if you see Scorpy.

To DOÑA BEETLE, *who is weeping silently*.
As for you, don't be so weepy.

DOÑA BEETLE
My husband's to blame for this situation.

To be a poet is such a misfortune.
If only I could, I'd burn every one of them!

WITCHBEETLE.

Don't worry, my dear. Trust in oblivion!
They leave. The stage is empty but for the GUARDBEETLE who leans against the stem of a daisy and is still except for the gentle movement of her antennae.

Act II Scene Three

BUTTERFLY *and* GUARDBEETLES.

BUTTERFLY (*waking up*).

I shall fly by a thread of silver
Far away to distant fields.
There my children are waiting for me,
Working at their spinning-wheels.

I am the soul and spirit of silk,
Child of the magic chrysalis.
Now I must make my journey home,
To the land of dark, eternal mists.

Let the spider sing in its cave,
The nightingale ponder my origin.
Let the raindrop now be amazed,
As it slips from my dead wings.

My heart was spun from my own flesh.
Now I am left alone to darkness.
Death endowed me with white wings,
And then dried up the thread I spin.

I know the source of the water's sigh,
I understand the star's silent cry,
Why the wind moans on the mountain,
Why the bee is angrily humming.

For I am death and beauty too,
As the snow that lies on a green meadow.
Melts in the fierce bonfire-glow;
As the song of the mist on the morning breeze
Slips beneath the roots of trees.

Oh, I must fly by this thread of silver,
Or my little ones will be waiting forever.

Let the spider sing in its dark cave,
The nightingale ponder my origins.
Let the raindrop now be amazed,

As it slips from my dead wings.

The BUTTERFLY moves her wings slowly.

Act II Scene Four

BUTTERFLY, SCORPY, GUARDBEETLE.
SCORPY's *delightful pincer appears stage-right.*

SCORPY.

Is this the scent of raw neat
I sense upon the evening air?

GUARDBEETLE (*angrily*).

You get out of here!

SCORPY (*approaching*).

I only
Want to feast my eyes on her, you know.

GUARDBEETLE.

I've told you. Go away. Back
To the woods, you drunken so-and-so.

SCORPY.

Me drunk? I'd have eaten both her wings
By now if that were true.

GUARDBEETLE.

Go away!
You're a shameless scoundrel!

SCORPY (*pleading*)

But all I want's a little mouthful
Of her. I'd settle even for
The teeniest morsel of antenna.

GUARDBEETLE.

If you don't go, I'll shout for the others.
They'll sort you out.

SCORPY (*serious*).

Lucky for you
I'm half dead, or I'd bit your head off.

SCORPY *moves quickly towards the BUTTERFLY, threatening to eat her.*

GUARDBEETLE (*alarmed*)

Stop! I'll scream.

The BUTTERFLY stirs.

Now you've disturbed

Her sleep.

SCORPY (*leaping about, guffawing*).
I only want to hear the sweet and tasty
Little lady speak!

GUARDBEETLE (*trying to hit SCORPY*).
Don't be so cheeky!

SCORPY (*close to the BUTTERFLY, opening his pincer*).
Who's afraid of big bad Scorpy?

GUARDBEETLE (*terrified*).
Help! Quickly! He's going to eat her!

SCORPY (*backing off*).
Put a sock in it, you ugly creature!

GUARDBEETLE.
Go. Get off home with you!

SCORPY (*singing mockingly*).
Home sweet home! There's nothing sweeter
Than my cave when I've got ten fat flies
For dinner.

GUARDBEETLE (*in a rage, pushing him*).
At once!

SCORPY (*teasing*).
I even fancy you for supper.

GUARDBEETLE.
Villain, rogue, incorrigible sinner!

SCORPY (*leaving*).
And you're a dried-up, miserable spinster!

The enraged GUARDBEETLE goes over to look at the BUTTERFLY and returns to her position. SCORPY's brandy-roughened singing grows steadily more distant.

Act II Scene Five

FIRST FIREFLY, SECOND FIREFLY, THIRD FIREFLY *and* GUARDBEETLES.
A swarm of FIREFLIES flicker in the grass. They slowly come nearer.

FIRST FIREFLY
We'll drink sweet dewdrops soon.

SECOND FIREFLY.

I saw the lilies moving by
The lake. That's what shakes the dewdrops
Down, and leaves them lying on the ground
So sweet and pure.

FIRST FIREFLY

I thought perhaps
They fell from trees, or else they came
When it got colder.

THIRD FIREFLY.

Who can understand
Such mysteries? And now I'm old,
The flame that used to burn in me
Has gone stone cold. I never saw
The dewdrops fall from trees.

SECOND FIREFLY.

Maybe they come from the earth.

THIRD FIREFLY.

A wise man said. 'It's well worth
Drinking them, but what's the point
Of thinking where their sweetness comes from?'

FIRST FIREFLY.

It's true. They do make love much sweeter.

THIRD FIREFLY.

We old ones know that love's just like
The dew. Once tasted gone. No sooner
Done than all of it's forgotten.
And then more dewdrops. And they'll be gone
As well.

FIRST FIREFLY.

It doesn't do to dwell
On such sad things . . .

SECOND FIREFLY.

It wouldn't be
So bad if I still had the glow
I used to.

FIRST FIREFLY.

We've come to this meadow
In search of love.

SECOND FIREFLY.

It won't be long
Before the earth and leaves are shining
With the morning dew.

FIRST FIREFLY.

And that's what makes
The meadows grow so quickly.

They are now close to the BUTTERFLY. She hears them and speaks, as though dreaming.

BUTTERFLY.

I hear the dewdrops speak to me
Of distant fields and far-off mysteries.

THIRD FIREFLY (*turning sharply*).

Dewdrops speak? They never speak a word.
Their only purpose is to feed
The worms and bees. And anyone
Who says they have a soul as well
Is definitely crazy.

BUTTERFLY.

The grain of sand can speak, as can
The leaves, and each so differently.
But all their various songs and voices
Put together are in reality
A single song. A thread shall lead
Me to the forest where I shall gaze
Upon the mystery of life.

THIRD FIREFLY.

You wouldn't be some sort of fairy, would you?

BUTTERFLY.

I can't say what I am.
My heart and soul have slowly slipped
Away, and now this body lies
So cold and empty.

FIRST FIREFLY.

The remedy for all your ills
Is love. It comes with dawn. You
Have to drink the dewdrops to be happy.

BUTTERFLY.

I don't know what love is,

Nor shall I ever know.

FIRST FIREFLY.

Why, it's a gentle kiss
Best given in some quiet place,
While all the leaves are trembling
And each admiring its own reflection.

BUTTERFLY.

My wings are broken, my body frozen.

FIRST FIREFLY.

I shouldn't think that stops you kissing,
Or moving your antennae.

BUTTERFLY.

Even so, I have no mouth for kissing.

FIRST FIREFLY.

Well, never mind, your dress is really smashing.

BUTTERFLY.

Who are you? Tiny stars?

FIRST FIREFLY.

No. Tiny travelers in search
Of love.

BUTTERFLY.

I don't know what love is.
I need to sleep.

THIRD FIREFLY.

We'll leave you in peace,
Then. Just try to be more happy.

BUTTERFLY.

My thread of silver takes me to
The fields where I shall gaze upon
Life's mystery . . .

The FIREFLIES begin to leave, still chatting.

FIRST FIREFLY

She must be a fairy.

SECOND FIREFLY.

She seemed
Extremely sleepy.

FIRST FIREFLY.

It bothered me
To see her so pretty yet so lonely.

THIRD FIREFLY.

She's just a butterfly who's feeling chilly.

SECOND FIREFLY.

All in all, a great mystery.
Let's go back to our meadow.

THIRD FIREFLY.

This body burning for a lover!
Desperate for passion's pleasure!

FIRST FIREFLY (*intrigued*).

I wonder why she said the dewdrops speak.
The FIREFLIES leave.

Act II Scene Six

BUTTERFLY, BOYBEETLE, FIELDBEETLE.

The FIELDBEETLE walks up and down. BOYBEETLE appears, painted a charming yellow. His expression is one of pain and anguish.

BOYBEETLE (*declaiming*).

The leaves and flowers withering.
Round about the stillness of the morning.

FIELDBEETLE (*annoyed*).

That's all I need. Just look at him.
Painting himself with lily-pollen.
And just to make her love him!

BOYBEETLE.

It was a time of happy, joyous poetry
Until she came, this fairy white as snow,
To steal my soul away from me.
What can I do in meadows such as these,
Where love does not exist and where dark thoughts
Of death begin to haunt me ceaselessly?
But no. That vision that my mother holds
Of happiness beyond these trees still drives me
On; that dream of nightingales, of lovely dew,
Of perfect fields where love rules endlessly.
But if it proves that Holy Beetle is
A myth, no more, then what becomes of me?
It cannot be that there is no one there
Above who cares about our destiny!

FIELD BEETLE.

Oh, such a pity! The poor boy is definitely crazy.

Act II Scene Seven

BUTTERFLY, BOYBEETLE, GUARDBEETLES, WITCHBEETLE BEETLE.

BOYBEETLE (*approaching the BUTTERFLY*).

Why are you sleeping, pure queen
Of this green meadow, you who drink
The dew and know the secrets of
The fields, of water's singing?

The BUTTERFLY doesn't answer, starts to dance.

Why aren't you listening to my song of love?

The BUTTERFLY attempts to fly.

Why do you wish to fly
Where only darkness waits above,
Your wing is hurt, and I
Can cure you with kisses of sweet love?
A friend of mine, a nightingale,
Will help you fly tomorrow if only you
Will stay with me tonight and let me
Care for you. You see how darkness fills
The trees and now begins to weigh
So heavily upon our spirits,
Informing us it's time for sleep.

The BUTTERFLY falls to the ground.

If you decide to fly away, my heart shall die.

BOYBEETLE *approaches*.

Please listen. Do not fly away
To the mountains. Stay with me.
I promise, as a token of my love,
I'll find a pet for you, a cricket
That will soothe you night and morning
With its song, and, if you wish,
Some little pebbles from the fountain.

The GUARDBEETLE forces her way through the stems of the daisies in order to hear better.

And tiny ants, and you shall drink
The dewdrops from my burning lips.
What mystery is this I see
In these antennae? Are you the image

Of the fairies, a flower from
Some higher world, a fleck of foam?

BOYBEETLE *embraces the BUTTERFLY. She unconsciously surrenders to him.*

Your poor body's cold. Oh let
Me hold you tight and take you with me
To my cave. From there you'll see
The lovely meadow stretching into distance.

The BUTTERFLY pulls away and dances.

Have you no heart? Has not the passion
Of my words affected you? If not,
Who can I tell my sorrows to?
Oh, magic flower, oh, lovely dew!
Why, if in summer shadow cools
The burning water, and stars burn
Brightly in the dark of night, cannot
My soul enjoy the light of love?
Who gave me eyes to see, these hands
To grasp a love I cannot understand?
Who ends this life of mine?
Who loses me in darkness?
Who denies me wings and so condemns
Me to this suffering?

GUARDBEETLE.

Oh what a sorry sight he is,
And what a lot of noise he makes!
But there you are, that's love for you.
Suffering and constant heartache!

XOXO

PAGE

PAGE 1

Share this Rating. Title: Act One (1963). 6,1/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? Use the HTML below.Â Hart sets out to convince Kaufman of his play's value, and so begins one of the most famous partnerships in the American theatre. Written by alfiehitche. Plot Summary | Add Synopsis. Act One most often refers to the first act of a play, opera, or other dramatic performance. Act One, Act I, ACTI and similar may also refer to: Act One (book), a 1959 memoir by Moss Hart. Act One (film), a 1963 film version of the memoir. Act One (play), a 2014 theatrical adaptation of the memoir by James Lapine. Act One, Inc., an organization for aspiring filmmakers. "Act I: Eternal Sunshine (The Pledge)", a 2007 composition by Jay Electronica. Act I and II, a 1993 concert tour by Prince. Act One is a play written by James Lapine, based on Moss Hart's autobiography of the same title. The play premiered on Broadway in 2014. Act One premiered on Broadway at the Vivian Beaumont Theater in Lincoln Center on March 20, 2014 (previews), officially on April 17, 2014. Directed by James Lapine, the cast featured Santino Fontana, Tony Shalhoub (as George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart) and Andrea Martin. Martin played three women in Moss Hart's life; Shalhoub also played three roles: as the older Hart