

# THE FIREFLY



BY STRIPES THE ECO-CAT

It was a lovely warm spring evening so I decided to lie on my favourite log to look at the stars. I really like their twinkling lights. One day I'll ask my humans what stars really are and why they twinkle in the night sky.

I was lying there half asleep when suddenly the stars fell down from the sky and flashed their lights all around me. I thought surely I

must be dreaming. So I blinked my eyes to make sure I was awake - but they were still there! I put out a paw to catch a falling star and wondrously it stayed on my paw. What a surprise! It wasn't a star at all, but a tiny little insect with a little light on his bottom that was blinking on and off, on and off.

"Good grief," I exclaimed, "who are you and do you know your tail is on fire?"

"Well hello to you too", he replied.

"People call me a firefly. But I'm not a fly at all - I'm actually a beetle", he

said proudly. "And I'm really in a big hurry because I have to find a wife before the night is over. That's why I'm flashing my light so she can see where I am in the dark. If she likes my flashing, she will answer with her own flash - and that's how I find a wife."

"And do you live happily ever after?" I wanted to know.

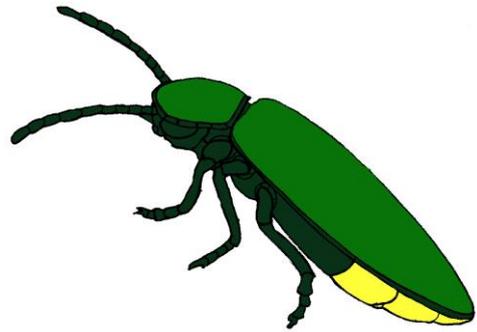
"Well no, not really. She will lay some eggs, and then our life is over.

But the eggs will hatch into little larvae that look a bit like worms with armour plating. But they are definitely not worms, even though humans call them

glow-worms. We are beetles, after all, and our larvae are not worms, but carnivorous predators. Our children eat meat! Lots of meat!"

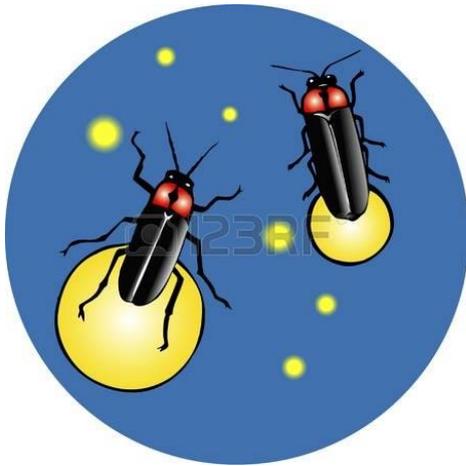
"Oh dear, will they eat me?" I was now really worried, even though the firefly beetle seemed very small and friendly.

"No, silly, my babies eat slugs and snails and other bothersome insects. They inject some spit into the slimy prey that turns their insides into mush and then suck out their juices. So we are actually the gardener's best friends."



"Wow, Mr Firefly, how on earth do your slug-munching zombie-bug children grow up to be fireflies?"

"That's the wonderful thing about insects - we change from one wondrous form to another, just like shape-shifters. Humans call it metamorphosis. After a year, when my larva has eaten enough, it turns into a pupa. An amazing thing happens inside the pupa. The whole body changes from a larva into an adult beetle like me.



When warm weather comes, we beetles hatch out and immediately start to flash our lights to find a mate. You can see our flashing lights everywhere."

"I know," I said. "It looks just like Christmas came in October!"

Text by Anina Lee

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