

The Unfortunate Fireflies

by Clara Dillingham Pierson

- 1 SEVERAL very large families of Fireflies lived in the marsh and were much admired by their friends who were awake at night. The older Fireflies told the younger ones that they should get all the sleep they could during the daytime if they were to flutter and frisk all night. Most of them did this, but two young Fireflies, who cared more about seeing the world than they did about minding their elders, used to run away while the rest were dreaming. Each thought herself very important, and was sure that if the others missed her they wouldn't sleep a wink all day.
- 2 One night they planned to go by daylight to the farthest corner of the marsh. They went to bed when the rest did and pretended to fall asleep. When she was sure that the older Fireflies were dreaming, one of them reached over with her right hind leg and touched the other just below the edge of her left wing-cover. "Are you ready?" she whispered.
- 3 "Yes," answered the friend, who happened to be the smaller of the two.
- 4 When well away from their sleeping relatives, they lifted their wing-covers, spread their wings, and flew.
- 5 "Oh, wouldn't they make a fuss if they knew!" exclaimed the Larger Firefly.
- 6 "They think we need to be told every single thing," said the Smaller Firefly.
- 7 Just then a Flycatcher darted toward them and they had to hide. He had come so near that they could look down his throat as he flew along with his beak open. The Fireflies were so scared that their feelers shook.
- 8 "I wish that bird would mind his own business," grumbled the Larger Firefly.
- 9 "That's just what he was doing," said a voice beside them, as a Garter Snake drew himself through the grass. Then their feelers shook again, for they knew that snakes do not breakfast on grass and berries.
- 10 "Did you ever see such luck?" said the Smaller Firefly. "If it isn't birds it is snakes."
- 11 "Perfectly dreadful!" answered the other. "I never knew the marsh to be so full of horrid people."
- 12 Then they reached the farther corner of the marsh and crawled around to see what they could find. Their eyes bothered them so that they could not see unless they were

close to things, so it was useless to fly. They peeped into the cool dark corners under the skunk cabbage leaves, and lay down to rest on a bed of soft moss.

13 While they were resting, they noticed a plant growing near. It had a flower of green and dark red which was unlike any other blossom they had ever seen. Each [leaf] was stiff and hollow and grew right out of the ground instead of coming from a stalk.

14 “I’m going to crawl into one of them,” said the Larger Firefly. She balanced herself on the top of a fresh green leaf.

15 “I’m going into this one,” said the other Firefly, as she alighted on the edge of a brown-tipped leaf. “It looks nice and dark inside.” Each dropped quickly into her own leaf.

16 Then there was a queer sputtering, choking voice in the fresh green leaf and exactly the same in the brown-tipped one. After that a weak little voice in the green leaf said, “I fell into water.”

17 Another weak voice from the brown-tipped one replied, “So did I.”

18 On the inside of each leaf were many stiff hairs, all pointing downward. Now that they wanted to get out, these same hairs stuck into their eyes and pushed against their legs and made them exceedingly uncomfortable.

19 After a while they gave up trying to get out until they should be rested. It was after sunset when they tried the last time, and the light that shone from their bellies brightened the little green rooms where they were. They went at it carefully. Slowly, one foot at a time, they managed to climb out of the doorway at the top. As they came out, they heard the squeaky voice of a young Mouse say, “Oh, where did those bright things come from?”

20 They also heard his mother answer, “Those are only a couple of foolish Fireflies who have been in the leaves of the pitcher-plant all day.”

21 They flew toward home. “I’m dreadfully tired,” said one, “but I suppose we shall have to dance in the air with the rest or they will make a fuss.”

22 “Yes,” said the other. “It spoils everything if we are not there.”

23 As they came near the middle of the marsh they were surprised to see the mild summer air twinkling with hundreds of tiny lights as their friends and relatives flew to and fro in the dusk. “Well,” said the Larger Firefly, “I think they might have waited for us!”

24 “Humph!” said the Smaller Firefly. “If they can’t be more polite than that, I won’t play.”

25 So two very tired and cross young Fireflies sat on a last year’s cat-tail and sulked. “We were not even missed!” they cried.

26 They were much wiser after that, for they had learned that two young Fireflies were not so wonderfully important after all. And that if they chose to do things which it was never meant young Fireflies should do, they would be likely to have a very disagreeable time, but that other Fireflies would go on eating and dancing and living their own lives. To be happy, they must keep the Firefly laws.

