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Family Plays

The Butterfly

**Drama by
Bijan Mofid
Translated by
Don Laffoon**



The Butterfly

The Butterfly - Drama. Adapted by Bijan Mofid. From the original story Shaparak Khanum by Farideh Fardjam. Translated from Persian by Don Laffoon. Cast: 6m., 3w., or 6 (2m., 2w., 2 either gender) with doubling. In this delicate Persian fantasy of the insect world, a beautiful butterfly is trapped in a barn and falls into the clutches of a spider. He threatens to eat her but agrees to let her go if she will bring him other insects to satisfy his hunger. In her travels about the barn, she finds other insects that will follow her but learns each is performing a useful function. Instead of luring them to their death, she gives each one something of herself, stripping her beautiful raiment until she is quite bedraggled. Returning at last to offer herself to the spider, he releases her and shows her the way out. But as she flies off into the sun, the honeybee (who loves her) hears the song of the spider, and is left to begin his own journey—his own test. *One set. Insect costumes. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: BG1.*

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By

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Translation by

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THE BUTTERFLY

by

BIJAN MOFID

CAST

SPIDER, old, ugly, hunchbacked, but very spry

THE BUTTERFLY, Shahparak Khanum, a very beautiful young butterfly

GRASSHOPPER, elderly, kind, a carpenter by trade

AUNTIE BEETLE, classic folklore character, Persian version of the "Jewish mother"

SUSKI and MUSKI, two of Auntie Beetle's twelve children

LIGHTNING BUG, Shah Farangi, a travelling showman, Persian version of the "Monkey Man"

HONEYBEE, young, handsome, romantic

PROFESSOR ELY, a magician in tie, tails and cape

SETTING

A barn.

The Butterfly was first presented, in 1973, under the title of Shahparak Khanum, by the Theatre Centre of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Teheran, Iran. It was later repeated at the Shiraz Festival of 1973.

For two years, 1978 and 1979, *The Butterfly* was professionally staged and nationally trouped in the United States by the Everyman Players. Direction was by Marilee Hebert-Slater, design by Irene Corey, original music by John Coe. Cover art by Irene Corey.

**PRONUNCIATION GUIDE FOR ORIGINAL FARSI (PERSIAN)
NAMES OF CHARACTERS**

SHAHPARAK KHANUM (*Butterfly*)

SHAH (*as in former king*) PA (*as in pat*) RAK (*as in rack*)

KHAN (*as in ex-con, but with German guttural sound at beginning*) UM
(*as in room*)

MALACK (*Grasshopper*)

MA (*as in mad*) LAKH (*as in lack, but with German guttural sound at end*)

HALESUESKE (*Auntie Beetle*)

HA (*as in Ha Ha!*) LE (*as in let*) SUES (*rhymes with goose*) KE (*as in kettle*)

SHAHRE FARANG (*Lightning Bug*)

SHAH (*as in shatter*) RE (*as in the name Ray, with rolled R*) FA (*as
in fat*) RANG (*past of ring with rolled R*)

ZANBOOR (*Honeybee*)

ZAN (*rhymes with man*) BOOR (*as in boot*)

MAGAS (*Prof. Fly-by-Night*)

MAG (*as in magazine*) AS (*as in lass*)

NOTES:

SHAHRE FARANG — There is no equivalent in the English language. This wonderful object (*see picture*) was pre-theatre entertainment for children in Iran. A storyteller carried the Shahre Frang around on his back and he called out for the children in the neighborhood to gather around (*much like the ice cream man*). The children would then pay a small amount and they would line up for their turn to peer into one of the “portholes” in the Shahre Farang. Each opening contained a crude magnifying glass which would enlarge the pictures that passed by as the storyteller turned the scroll within. He would stop on each picture and tell a wonderful tale and/or sing a song. The Shahre Farang is now nearly extinct in modern Iran.

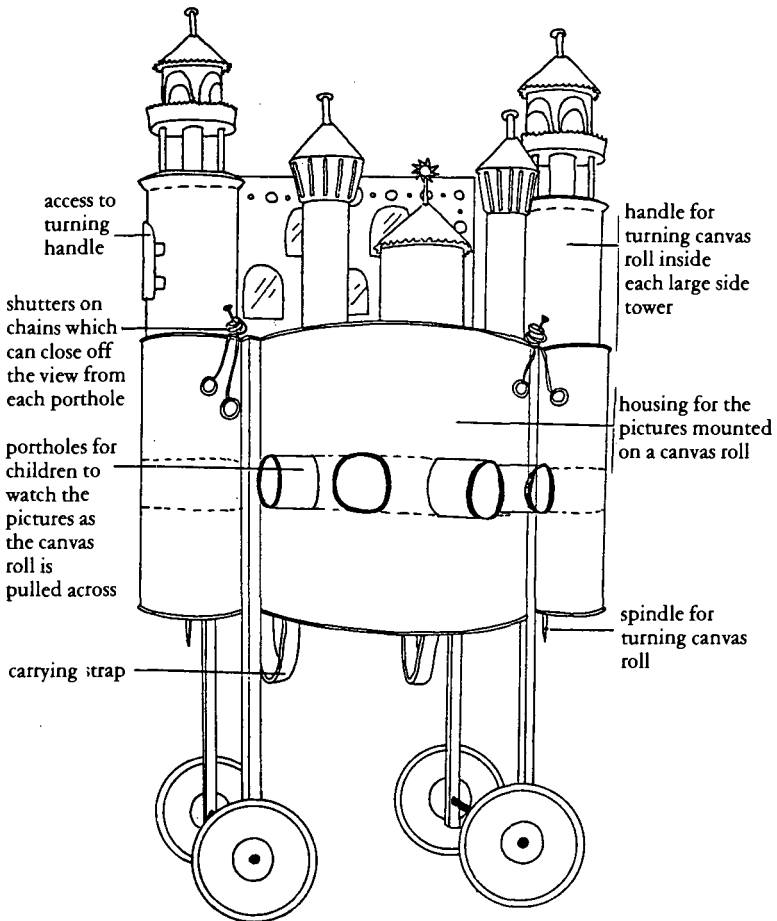
For productions that wish to maintain a purely Persian flavor, the picture gives a detailed model which can be reproduced in wood or some other material. Another possibility is to “Westernise” the character by making him a mindreader with a crystal ball or some other equivalent.

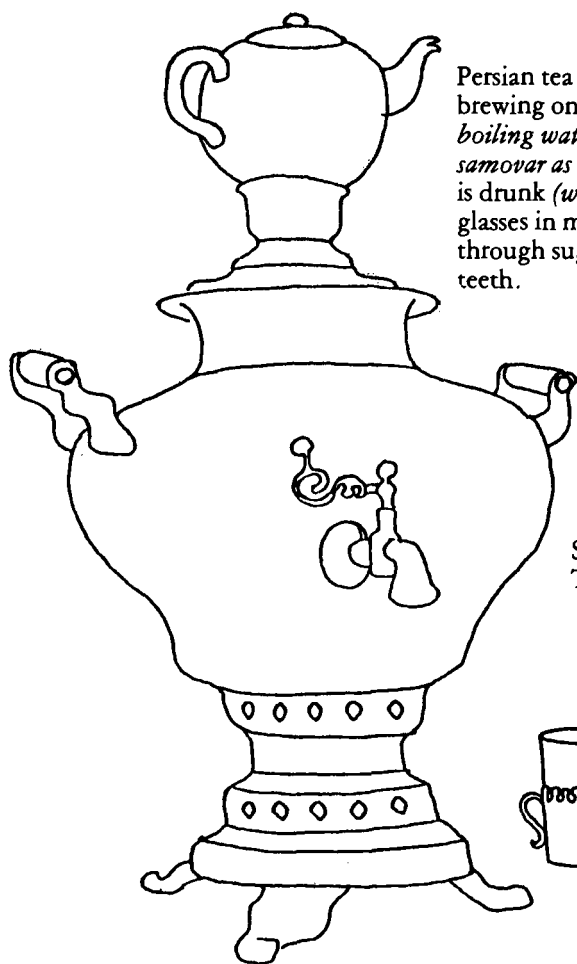
CHADOR — The chador is the head to foot covering (*usually black or a dark print material*) worn by conservative Moslem women. When laid out, it is a perfect half circle and is worn with the straight edge over the head and held so that it covers the hair and most of the face. This is worn in public or in the presence of men.

AUNTIE BEETLE (*on page 25*) whispers a brief prayer and blows in the direction of the house. This is to protect her home and children during her absence.

SHAHRE FARANG

The Shahre Farang was made of brass or tin over a wooden frame. It was carried from village to village on a man's back by means of leather carrying straps. The light source for viewing the pictures was either the sun or candles placed inside. The canvas roll can be changed through a door in the back.

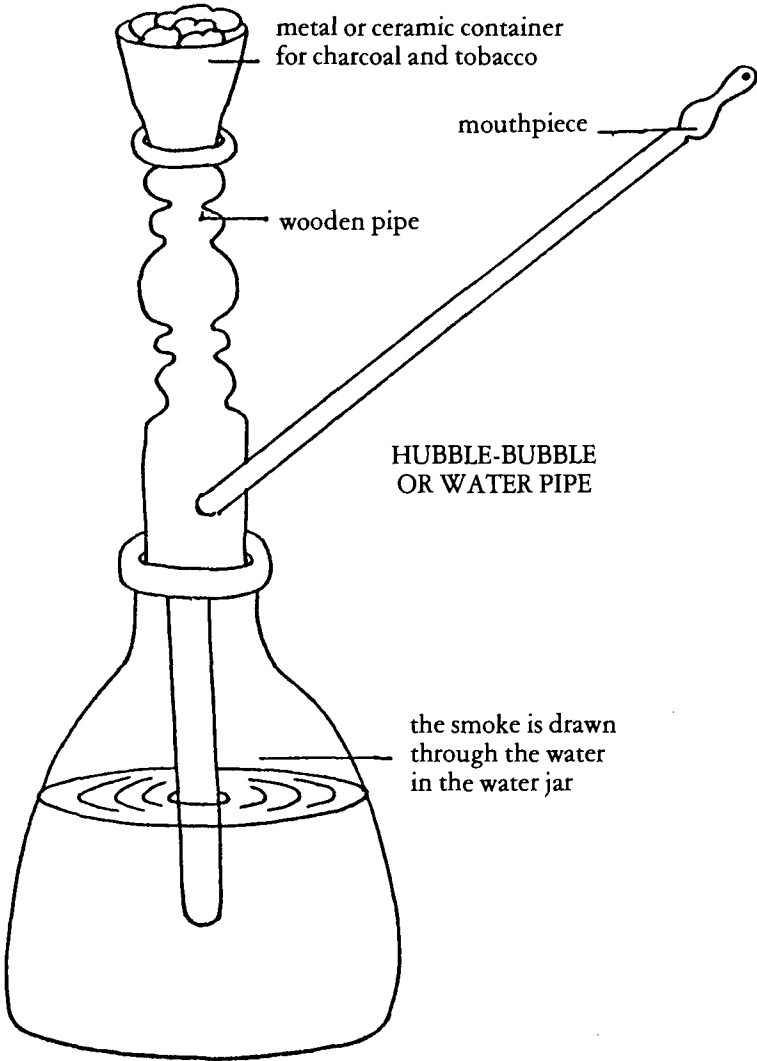




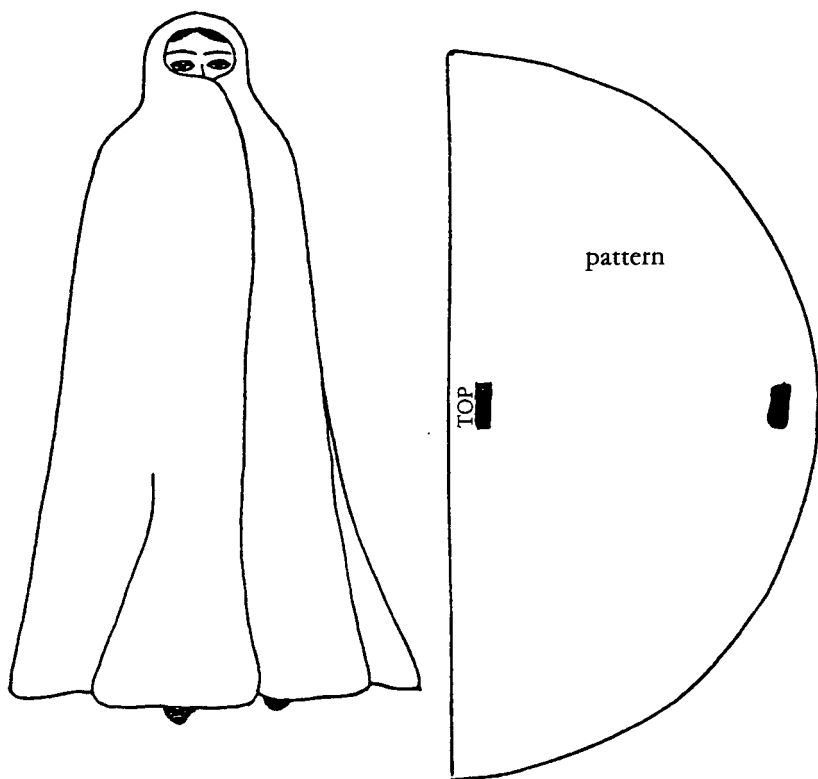
Persian tea is kept continuously brewing on top of a samovar (*with boiling water added from the samovar as necessary*). The tea is drunk (*without milk*) from glasses in metal holders, through sugar cubes held in the teeth.

SAMOVAR
TEA GLASSES AND SUGAR





CHADOR



THE BUTTERFLY

(SCENE: A dark barn. In different areas of the stage we see the Grasshopper, Auntie Beetle, Honeybee, and Professor Fly (who also serve as the Chorus), as they go about their individual work. Their actions, which are not fully apparent in the dimness of the barn, are done to a 2/4 rhythm, and each makes his insect sound in this rhythm. In one area of the stage there is a ladder. The stage is cluttered with old objects such as a broken bicycle, an old bench, chair, etc.)

The Spider is discovered sitting on the ladder, in semi-darkness. He is busily weaving his web. There are some moments of silence, except for the rhythmic sounds of the Chorus. Then the Spider begins his song in the same rhythm.

The Spider puts the finishing touches on the placement of the web, then steps down to appraise his work. Suddenly there is a sharp sound from outside. The Spider hastily climbs several steps up the ladder. From a far corner of the stage, the Butterfly comes running in, terrified as if being chased. She has great difficulty in seeing, as she has just been thrust into darkness from the bright sunlight. She flutters around the stage in fear. The Spider watches her eagerly from above. Suddenly she is caught in the web, and is engulfed. She gives a sharp cry, then falls silent and motionless. There are some moments of silence. Then we hear the quiet laughter of the Spider, and again the Chorus repeats—"He's right, he's right, indeed he's right. He's right, he's right, indeed he's right."

The Butterfly looks around in terror. We can almost hear her heart beating. Then she begins to struggle vigorously, trying in vain to free herself.)

SPIDER: (*Hurriedly coming down.*) Hey! Hey! What are you doing? Don't squirm around so much!

BUTTERFLY: (*still struggling, looks around, but doesn't see anyone*) Ah, sir. Where are you? I—I think I'm caught in here. I don't know what to do.

SPIDER: Alright. Alright. Don't flail about so much, and let me see what I can do. (*Suddenly shouting*) I said don't move so much. Didn't you hear me? Look what you've done. You've completely destroyed my beautiful net.

BUTTERFLY: (*finally stops struggling*) Who — who are you? Where am I?

SPIDER: (*laughing*) Me? Oh, I'm nobody. And this? This is my home. Now tell me, who are you, and what are you doing here?

BUTTERFLY: I—I am a butterfly. They call me Shahparak Khanum. (*Pause. She looks around slowly, as if trying to remember.*) I—I was there in the garden, on a flower, in the sun—I—I think it was a rose. I had spread my wings out under the sun. I think I was dreaming—and then there was a big black shadow hovering over me. It was a black crow. And then I don't know what happened. I escaped, and flew through a hole—and then I found myself here. (*Pause. She is getting more nervous.*) But where are you? Why are you hiding?

SPIDER: (*laughing*) I'm coming, little one. I'm coming, pretty little one. (*He comes down the ladder, and sits near the Butterfly, staring at her in silence.*)

BUTTERFLY: (*looking at him in surprise*) Who are you?

SPIDER: (*not hearing her, sighs*) You know what? You are very beautiful. I have always been ugly, even when I was young. Always ugly and hunchbacked like this.

BUTTERFLY: (*sincerely*) Oh, I'm so sorry.

SPIDER: Ugly and hunchbacked. (*Finally hearing her*) What did you say?

BUTTERFLY: Nothing, sir. I just said that I was sorry.

SPIDER: (*furious*) You're sorry, eh? You pity me, eh? Nobody has ever dared to pity me! Do you understand? Nobody!

BUTTERFLY: (*frightened*) I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to offend you.

SPIDER: (*calming down*) 'M h 'm. Oh, well, it's alright. I just don't like people pitying me. (*Pause.*) I have become used to my appearance over the years. God makes everyone in a different way, and you just can't help the way you look. (*Laughing now*) I may be hunchbacked and ugly, but I am also very clever and swift. Watch! (*He does a series of beautiful, quick movements on his ropes. Butterfly smiles.*) There! How did you like that?

BUTTERFLY: (*forgetting her present condition for a moment, and laughing*) Marvelous! Where did you learn these tricks?

SPIDER: (*happily*) I taught myself. I have climbed up and down these ropes so many times that I have learned how to use them.

BUTTERFLY: I would have applauded for you, but my hands are still tied.

SPIDER: Your hands? Oh, yes. (*Staring at her again*) You are really very beautiful.

BUTTERFLY: Oh, thank you. (*Pause.*) Well, won't you untie my hands now? (*The Spider continues staring at her. She laughs.*) Come on. My hands are aching. This thing is like a spider's web. Why don't you clean your house? Those ropes are very dangerous, you know. You might get yourself caught in them sometime, and then—and then—the Spider will come and—the Spider—(*She suddenly looks at the Spider, with terror in her eyes.*) Are you—you—

SPIDER: (*smiling and nodding his head.*) Yes, my little one. I'm the Spider. It took you a long time to catch on.

BUTTERFLY: But—but you—are so good, so kind. You know such wonderful tricks.

SPIDER: Well, what if I do?

BUTTERFLY: But I've always been told to beware of the Spider. I've been told that I should fear him.

SPIDER: Well, do you?

BUTTERFLY: (*Pause. Looks at him intently*) No.

SPIDER: (*surprised and angry*) No?

BUTTERFLY: No. I'm not afraid of you.

SPIDER: How dare you look me in the eyes, and say you're not afraid? Every other living creature in this barn hides in the darkest corner the moment they see me coming. And you're not afraid of me?

BUTTERFLY: No. Why should I be afraid?

SPIDER: Why were you afraid of that black crow?

BUTTERFLY: It wanted to eat me.

SPIDER: (*laughing*) And that's exactly what I am going to do, little lady.

BUTTERFLY: (*frightened now*) What? You mean you want to eat me too?

SPIDER: M h'm

BUTTERFLY: But—but you're so good, so kind.

SPIDER: I may be good and kind, but I am also very hungry.

BUTTERFLY: But I wouldn't begin to fill your stomach. You can't eat my wings, and my body wouldn't even be a mouthful for you.

SPIDER: I know, I know. But it's better than nothing. It's better than starving. (*He goes closer to her.*)

BUTTERFLY: You mean—I'll never see the sun again?

SPIDER: (*getting closer to her*) It's not my fault, little one.

BUTTERFLY: . . . the flowers . . . the trees . . .

SPIDER: But truly you are beautiful.

BUTTERFLY: . . . the garden . . . the leaves . . .

SPIDER: Very, very beautiful. (*Butterfly begins to cry.*) But wait. Maybe there is a way.

BUTTERFLY: What?

SPIDER: Listen. There are a lot of other insects, like flies and beetles, in this barn.

BUTTERFLY: Yes?

SPIDER: But none of them venture into my web. They don't even come in this direction. Now if you promise to lure two or three of these juicy ceatures into my trap, I will set you free.

BUTTERFLY: But how can I bring those innocent creatures to their death?

SPIDER: Don't you want to live?

BUTTERFLY: Yes, of course.

SPIDER: Don't you want to see the sun, the garden, the flowers again?

BUTTERFLY: Yes, oh, yes!

SPIDER: So it's worth trying, isn't it?

BUTTERFLY: I don't know. (*as if in a dream*) I have something unfinished to do in the garden. I have an engagement. I—I can't quite remember.

SPIDER: (*tempting her*) Yes, yes, little one. The garden . . . the sun . . .

BUTTERFLY: . . . I have an appointment with the sun . . .

SPIDER: The trees, the flowers.

BUTTERFLY: I think I'm invited somewhere . . .

SPIDER: A party?

BUTTERFLY: A banquet . . . a big banquet in the garden . . .

SPIDER: Well, of course. Of course.

BUTTERFLY: I have an appointment with the sun . . . an appointment with the sun.

SPIDER: (*impatiently*) Well, do you accept, then?

BUTTERFLY: (*coming to herself again*) What?

SPIDER: Will you persuade some of those juicy insects to come to me?

BUTTERFLY: No. No. (*She looks down. A pause.*)

SPIDER: (*suddenly*) Watch me.

BUTTERFLY: What? (*He unties her hands, and she steps back, looking at him, puzzled. The Spider begins twisting and moving very slowly to the beat of a drum which gradually becomes faster and faster. The Chorus accompanies his dance with a panting sound. The dance grows more and more intense, the panting and drum sounds become louder and louder.*)
What are you doing?

SPIDER: I'm dancing.

BUTTERFLY: Dancing?

SPIDER: Dying.

BUTTERFLY: Dying?

SPIDER: Dying . . . dancing . . . dancing . . . dying . . . (*The rhythm builds, the dance becomes more and more frantic.*)

BUTTERFLY: (*shouting*) Stop! Please stop! (*The dance reaches a climax, and the Spider falls exhausted, but continues chanting.*)

SPIDER: Dying . . . dancing . . . dancing . . . dying . . .

BUTTERFLY: (*goes to him, caresses his head with affection.*)
What happened? What was that?

SPIDER: It was a dance.

BUTTERFLY: What kind of dance?

SPIDER: The dance of hunger.

BUTTERFLY: Dance of hunger?

SPIDER: (*nodding*) Mh'm. Haven't you ever seen it before?

BUTTERFLY: No, never. It was so strange.

SPIDER: You haven't been around much, have you?

BUTTERFLY: No. I was born only yesterday.

SPIDER: Of course. Of course. But there are a lot of people in the world who know this dance, and dance it often.

BUTTERFLY: Really?

SPIDER: Oh, yes. They dance and dance until they die.

BUTTERFLY: But why?

SPIDER: Because they are hungry. *(Pause.)* You know, I haven't eaten anything for weeks now. If I don't get something to eat in a few hours, I'll die too.

BUTTERFLY: Oh, no!

SPIDER: Yes my dear. I only have two or three more hours to live. Never mind, it's alright. So an old ugly, hunchbacked creature like me dies. So what?

BUTTERFLY: Oh, no! No! You mustn't die! I'm here, aren't I?

SPIDER: You mean I should eat you?

BUTTERFLY: If you must—yes.

SPIDER: *(smiling)* But you have an appointment in the garden.

BUTTERFLY: *(remembering)* With the sun . . .

SPIDER: Yes, you said so yourself.

BUTTERFLY: *(not knowing what to do)* I—the sun—I—*(suddenly making up her mind)* Alright. I'll bring you some food. Don't worry. *(She starts to go.)* Just wait here for me. I'll bring you some food as soon as I can.

FADEOUT

(Lights up on another area of the stage. We see some pieces of uncut wood, unfinished chairs, etc., plus a sign, "CARPENTRY". The Grasshopper is busy sanding a piece of wood. It is apparent that he walks with a limp. Butterfly approaches and stands watching him.)

BUTTERFLY: Hello, Mr. Carpenter.

GRASSHOPPER: *(stops, looks at her in amazement)* Why, hello!

BUTTERFLY: What a beautiful little shop you have!

GRASSHOPPER: You are looking through beautiful eyes, little lady. What brings you here? Won't you sit down? *(He places a stool for her, and she sits.)*

BUTTERFLY: Are you really a Master Carpenter?

GRASSHOPPER: What do you mean? Don't I look like one?

BUTTERFLY: Oh, I didn't mean that, Mr. Grasshopper. It's only that I was surprised to see you in this dark barn. You ought to be hopping around out in the fields among the stems of golden wheat.

GRASSHOPPER: *(sighing, indicating his limp)* My hopping days

are past, I'm afraid, little lady. Oh well, that's life. One afternoon I was playing in the garden with my fiance. She was chasing me, and I was trying to hide. (*He laughs.*) We were playing hide and seek, you know. (*A pause. He smiles.*) And then suddenly—I don't know what happened exactly, but I found myself in here. I've been living in this darkness for a long time now.

BUTTERFLY: But what happened then?

GRASSHOPPER: Oh well, there was nothing useful to do here. I wandered around for a while, and then I met Mr. Termite, who was the Master Carpenter here. I started working for him as an apprentice. I gradually learned the tricks of the trade, and finally I became the carpenter myself when he died.

BUTTERFLY: Who died?

GRASSHOPPER: My master, the Termite.

BUTTERFLY: Poor soul. How did he die?

GRASSHOPPER: (*sighing*) Well, one day he went to fetch some wood from a far-part of the barn, and he never came back. Later one of the neighbors brought the news that he had been caught by the Spider. (*Pause.*)

BUTTERFLY: I'm sorry.

GRASSHOPPER: No one has ever returned alive from the Spider's web, you know. Oh well, let's forget about that. You didn't say how you happened into this place.

BUTTERFLY: (*still thinking about what he has just said*) Oh, me? Yes . . . (*The Chorus begins the refrain, "He's right, indeed he's right, etc."*) We—that is, Mama, my little sister, and I thought it would be a nice idea to come into this cosy, nice place for a short rest. You know, it has been raining outside for the last two or three days.

GRASSHOPPER: Really? Oh, then it's lucky for me that I've been in here safe from the rain.

BUTTERFLY: Yes, and we built ourselves a home up there in that corner of the ceiling. (*She indicates the direction of the Spider.*) Now everything is ready, except the windows. Mama sent me to find a good carpenter, because it might get very cold at night.

GRASSHOPPER: Oh, of course. By all means. You could catch a bad cold at night. (*He hurriedly begins to pack his tools in a bag.*) I'll just close up the shop, and I'll be right with you. (*He gathers up his things, and puts a "Closed" sign up.*) There. I'm ready now. Which way do we go?