

Tiny Tale #1

How to Win at Hide 'n Seek When You're a Flea

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Illustrations by: Lucy Mara

Nelson could tell that his friend, Buz, was bored. Both bugs had been trapped in the Patterson home all winter. Nelson thought this was just fine. After all, he had Brown Dog to curl up on and take cozy naps.

Thinking about naps, Nelson tightened his robe and pulled down his eye mask.

"I'm bored," Buz announced loudly.

Startled from sleep, Nelson screamed and jumped two feet into the air. Regaining his footing, he lifted his eye mask and stared at Buz as he looked him up and down. Sometimes, his energetic roommate, a travel bug, could be quite rude.

"I'm bored," Buz repeated.

"I'm aware of that," Nelson replied. "You decided to tell me this just as I fell asleep."

Each bug stared at the other, ignoring the backdrop of melting icicles outside. The bedroom windows, framed by frost, appeared smaller. Nelson shivered.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I shall proceed with my nap."

"Oh, please stay awake!" Buz pleaded, running his back legs over his wings. "If I come up with a fun idea, will you play along? It's been such a long, dull winter."

Nelson sighed and hopped off Brown Dog, landing on the shag carpet. Life as a small flea meant lots of hopping. Part of the problem was his friend was a flying bug and flying bugs, it seemed, craved much more adventure than hopping bugs.

"Fine." Nelson sighed "But, Buzworth, this will be one game and then I'm off to bed."

Buz leapt up and flew around the room. He was excited to do *something*. He never did understand how his friend could stay put all day. Landing on the windowsill, he cleaned his wings and thought about what game to play. After a few moments, he stabbed the air.



“Aha!” he shouted but quickly sagged into himself.

“What’s the matter?” asked Nelson.

“Oh, that game will be too short,” Buz replied.

“What game are you talking about?” Nelson asked.

“Hide ‘n Seek,” Buz answered. “This room is too small and we know every nook and cranny. There are maybe three hiding places in here. Oh, never mind, go back to bed.”

Nelson pulled his eye mask to the back of his neck and looked around the room. There were, in fact, four hiding places.

“Yes, that looks about right,” Nelson said, hands on hip. “But not so fast. You’ve got me up to play Hide ‘n Seek, so we’re playing Hide ‘n Seek!”

“It’s a silly idea,” Buz replied.

Nelson continued, “I’ll wager a bet you won’t find me.”

Puzzled, Buz flew down and landed next to Nelson.

“What do you mean?” he asked. “It will take me three seconds to look in three places.”

Nelson tapped his foot. “I’ll even let you watch where I hide.”

Buz scoffed and crossed four of his arms. His friend was playing a trick on him. Narrowing his eyes, he stared at Nelson. Nelson narrowed his eyes and stared right back. Finally, Buz gave in. “Fine,” he said sarcastically, “This will be a great game: you hide in plain sight; I close my eyes, count to ten, open my eyes, and walk right up to you.”

Nelson smiled and leapt behind the leg of the bed. There, he stood sideways and let his round belly peek out from the ridged wood. Buz finished counting and opened his eyes. “This is ridiculous!” he exclaimed. “I can see you right there.”

“Just come find me,” Nelson replied. “Oh, but first, say that thing you say.”

“You mean, *ready or not...here I come?*” Buz asked.

“Yes, say that,” Nelson answered.

Buz shouted the phrase, took two steps, and froze. He couldn’t believe it. Nelson had vanished. Buz rubbed his front legs together and watched Brown Dog pad out of the room. Nelson certainly wasn’t hiding on the dog; Buz would have seen him hop across the room – the flea was an obvious hopper.

“Nelson?” Buz asked, tiptoeing around the furniture leg. He stopped once and quickly shoved his head around the corner. Nobody was there.

About to give up, Buz looked behind the two other hiding places but still no sign of Nelson. Growing angry, Buz flew around the room and looked down. Once he realized flying was an unhelpful strategy, he landed and ran at full speed around the wooden leg of the bed.

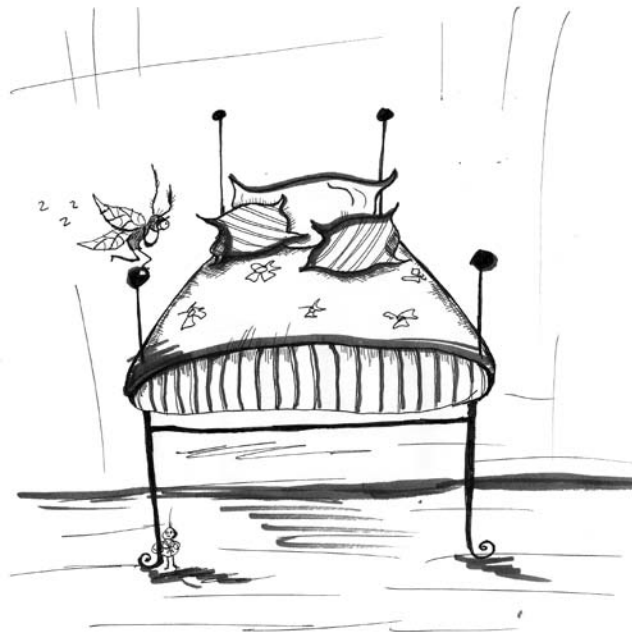
“I’m right here,” Nelson said finally. He had grown exasperated.

“Where?” Buz panted.

“Here!” Nelson shouted, turning sideways to present his portly figure.

“How’d you do that?” Buz asked, scratching his head.

“Buz, I’m a flea,” Nelson explained. Buz remained silent. “So, I’m flat when you look at me dead on. I just turned to the side every time you looked for me. At a certain angle, I’m as flat as the thinnest sheet of paper.”



Buz flew up to the window and buzzed across a pane of glass. After a moment, he landed on the windowsill and looked down. “You’re smart,” he said simply.

“Well, now you see that winter doesn’t have to be boring,” Nelson replied. Looking around, he realized Brown Dog was gone. Outside, it was getting dark. “Guess I’ll curl up on the floor and get back to my nap. Goodnight, Buz.” Nelson pulled his eye mask down over his eyes and crossed his arms over his knees.

“Goodnight, Nelson,” Buz replied and sat for a moment. He wasn’t tired.

While Nelson slept, Buz flew around the room. Circling inside the streaming moonlight, he closed his eyes and dreamed of spring.

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