

BILLY, BADGER, AND BUGS

"Bugs Day is going to be so cool! If only Badger Smogl doesn't ruin it," said Rabbit Billy to Mother and Father Rabbit over dinner one day in late spring.

"What's happening for Bugs Day?" asked Mother.

"Oh, it's really great! We've been studying about insects during our science class, so tomorrow we're going into the forest, and we'll have a contest to see how many different kinds of bugs each team can put into a glass container. The only bad thing is Badger Smogl is my buddy. I don't know why Teacher Reamus put me with him. I really wanted to do Bugs Day with Alex, and now I'm doing it with Smogl instead."

"What's wrong with Smogl?" Father inquired.

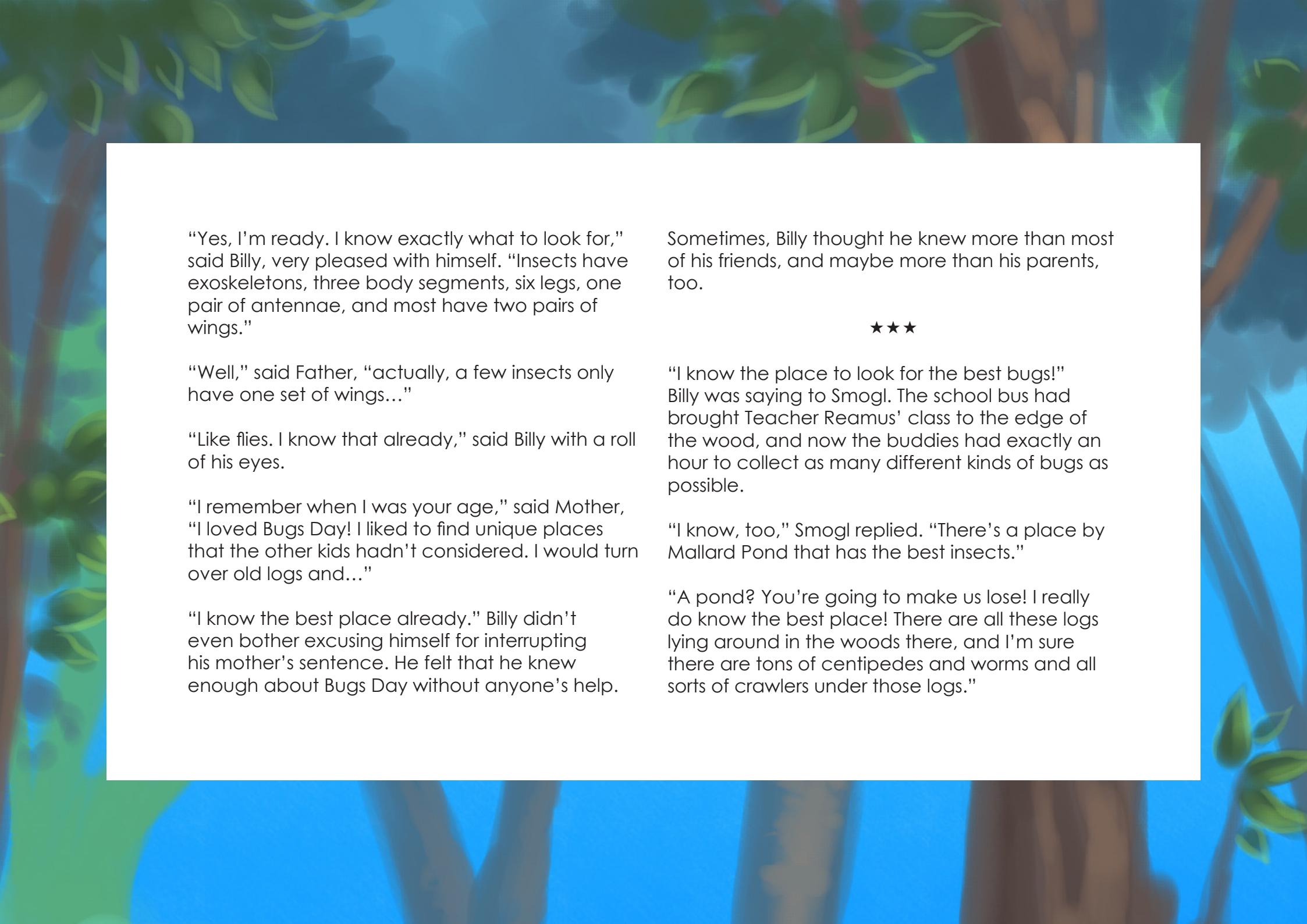
"He thinks he knows everything, so he won't let me talk. He's so pushy and he wants his way all the time," Billy huffed.

"Oh, that's difficult," agreed Mother. "Have you suggested taking turns? Sometimes that works."

"I know. I tried that already, and it didn't work."

"I'm sure you'll be fine, son," said Father. "Learning to work with others—even people you think you may not get along with—is a very important lesson. Aside from that, are you ready for your big day tomorrow?"





"Yes, I'm ready. I know exactly what to look for," said Billy, very pleased with himself. "Insects have exoskeletons, three body segments, six legs, one pair of antennae, and most have two pairs of wings."

"Well," said Father, "actually, a few insects only have one set of wings..."

"Like flies. I know that already," said Billy with a roll of his eyes.

"I remember when I was your age," said Mother, "I loved Bugs Day! I liked to find unique places that the other kids hadn't considered. I would turn over old logs and..."

"I know the best place already." Billy didn't even bother excusing himself for interrupting his mother's sentence. He felt that he knew enough about Bugs Day without anyone's help.

Sometimes, Billy thought he knew more than most of his friends, and maybe more than his parents, too.



"I know the place to look for the best bugs!" Billy was saying to Smogl. The school bus had brought Teacher Reamus' class to the edge of the wood, and now the buddies had exactly an hour to collect as many different kinds of bugs as possible.

"I know, too," Smogl replied. "There's a place by Mallard Pond that has the best insects."

"A pond? You're going to make us lose! I really do know the best place! There are all these logs lying around in the woods there, and I'm sure there are tons of centipedes and worms and all sorts of crawlers under those logs."

"Fine. You go by yourself then, and I'll go to the pond!"

"But we're supposed to be a team..."

"Well, you can always come with me to the pond," said Smogl, turning in the direction of Mallard Pond. "Besides, I'm a month older than you, so you should listen to me."

Billy stood there a moment watching Smogl walk away. *I'll show Smogl*, he thought to himself, and then he marched toward the wood.

Billy found that flipping over logs to find insects underneath was easy to think about doing but harder to actually do, and he wasn't as strong as he had thought he was. He noticed other buddy teams helping each other to flip over some logs, and he quietly grumbled that Smogl should have come with him instead of going off on his own. After quite a few heaves he was able to flip over one log, but it took him so long that by the time he had done so, most of the insects had scampered away.



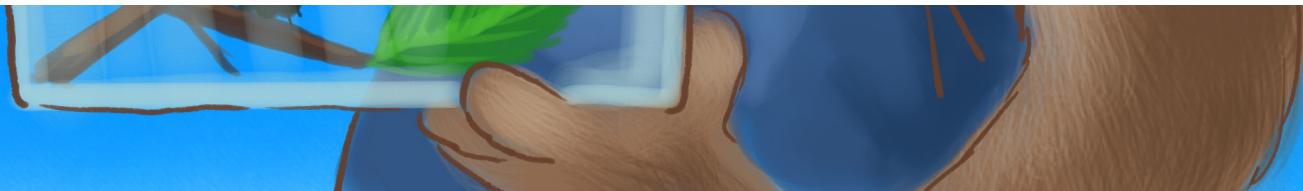
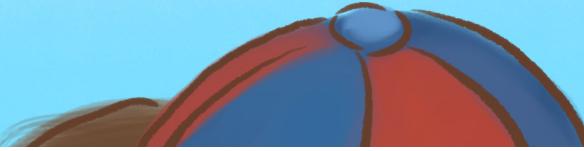
All too soon, Teacher Reamus blew his whistle and made sure that everyone had flipped the logs back into their original positions. All the other buddy teams had containers full of wriggling insects, but Billy had only managed to coerce one centipede into his bug container. *This is terrible*, thought Billy. And then he saw Smogl making his way to the school bus. Smogl did not look pleased either, and in Smogl's container was one lone dragonfly.

"It's all your fault we're going to lose," whispered Smogl to Billy on the way back to the school. "There were so many insects that I didn't know where to start, so I only caught one."

"Well, if you would have come with me, you could have helped me turn the logs over, and then I would have gotten tons and tons of bugs," Billy said with a huff.

Billy and Smogl ignored each other for the rest of the ride back to school.





Billy arrived home that day from school feeling very out of sorts.

"Bugs Day was horrible! I don't want to go to school tomorrow."

"Why? What's the matter, Billy?" asked Mother.

"Smogl and I only gathered a total of two bugs, but Alex and Fisk got at least twenty! And it's all Smogl's fault! He thinks he knows everything, and he never lets me finish my sentences. He never listens to me, and I'm sure I would have won if I had gone with Alex. Alex always listens to me and does what I tell him to."

"Alex is a really good friend to you," agreed Mother as she helped Billy take off his jacket and school bag. "I certainly don't like it when others don't listen to me, or when they interrupt when I'm trying to say something. I think most of us feel like this."

Billy flushed. He remembered how he had behaved over dinner the day before.

"You know," Mother continued, "I think Smogl might be feeling the same as you are right now. What if your father or I said 'I know that already' when you tell us about what you learned in class? How would that make you feel?"

"But you wouldn't do that," protested Billy.

"No, of course not, because we love you. We listen to you to show our interest even if it's something we might know about already."

"Oh," said Billy, "I see."

"You know, Billy, if you tried listening to Smogl, you might learn things you never knew. And even if you only heard things you already knew, you might find something else instead."

"What would I find, Mother?" asked Billy.

"A friend," replied Mother.

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The next day, Billy and Smogl were sitting together as the various teams huddled around their glass containers and notebooks writing short explanations of each bug's characteristics and where the bugs had been found.

Smogl hadn't said much when Billy had met him out in the hall. Billy thought about what his mother had said the day before, about maybe finding a friend.

"I like your dragonfly," said Billy.

Smogl looked surprised. "You do? It's a rare dragonfly, and that's why I spent all my time trying to catch it. Did you know that when dragonflies are young, they have this special thing on their head like a spear that they use to catch small fish?"

"No, I didn't know," said Billy, quite amazed.

"And they eat mosquitoes, and once they found a mosquito fossil that was two and a half feet long! And there's one kind of dragonfly that lives today that's seven inches long!"



"Wow! Will you say all of that today for our presentation?"

Smogl suddenly looked unsure. "Do you think that's good enough? Everyone else has so many bugs..."

"But no one has a dragonfly!" said Billy triumphantly.

"That's true!" Smogl paused. "You know, if we had worked together yesterday, I think we could have had a chance at winning."

"We can work together next year and win then," said Billy. "And this year we'll win for most interesting facts!"

Smogl and Billy smiled at each other. And maybe *this* year, I got something else too. Maybe I made another friend, thought Billy.

The End

