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The sun began to slide over the horizon in disgust. I knew how it felt. It had been a long day, and it wasn't over yet. I felt like I had covered the entire Garden ten times over. I had. My legs were aching—all six of them—and I was getting awful tired of this case. I just wanted to crawl under a rock someplace. Still, an insect's gotta do what an insect's gotta do, especially when he's being paid.

The name's Muldoon—Bug Muldoon. I'm a sleuth—a private investigator, if you want the full title. I'm the best sleuth in the whole Garden, not to mention the cheapest. Fact is, I'm just about the *only* sleuth for hire in the Garden. The only one still alive, that is.

I was working a missing-insect case. It was nothing special, but in my line of work you take whatever you're offered. It pays the rent.

I had been sitting around in my office that morning, wondering what to do. I had just finished a big case out of town, but now I was

back and looking for work. A beetle has to eat, you know? Things were so slow I was even starting to think that I should give the place a spring clean. I was still thinking about it an hour later, when I saw potential clients—three earwigs crawling up by the flower beds. I was curious—you don't see many earwigs down this end of the Garden. They tend to stay up by the garbage cans near the House, the exclusive end of the Garden.

They mooched around nervously by a clump of grass for a while, whispering to each other. Me, I just waited. When they had worked up enough courage, they approached my office, which is a patch of soil underneath a rose bush. They slid their slender brown bodies through the weeds that form my front door. The biggest of the three spoke.

'Mr Muldoon?' he asked.

'Bug. The name is Bug.' (It makes me tense when people call me Mister.) 'What do you guys want?'

The big one introduced himself as Larry. Nice name, I thought. Larry did all the talking. The other two nodded their heads in encouragement.

'It's our brother, Eddie,' said Larry. 'He's gone missing . . . ' The other two jiggled their heads.

They needn't have bothered—this sounded like a story I'd heard a zillion times before. A bug

going missing isn't exactly big news in the Garden. Still, the three earwigs looked like they expected me to ask some questions, so I did. Anything to oblige a client.

'When did he disappear?' I asked. It seemed like as good a place to start as any.

Larry's antennae waved nervously as he spoke. He was an edgy kinda guy.

'Late last night was the last time we saw him . . .'

'And did he say anything—any indication that he was going somewhere?'

Larry hesitated. It gave one of the other two a chance to chip in.

'He said he was going to the meadow!' he blurted.

Larry shook his head. 'Eddie was always talking about taking off for the meadow some day. That's all it was—talk. It didn't mean anything . . . Eddie was all talk, he'd never really do it—'

I nodded, but I knew better. How many innocent young insects had I met who dreamed of a better life outside of this Garden—in the meadow on the other side of the stream? They thought that life would be easier. They thought they could spend their days there without always worrying about being eaten by a spider, a bird, or just by the bug next door. Now, I like fairy stories as much as the next beetle, but I knew one thing: life was as hard in the meadow

as it was in this hellhole of a Garden that we call home. If Eddie had struck out for the meadow, there was no guarantee he had made it. Still, I didn't see any point in turning away clients.

'Could be he headed for the meadow, could be he got stuck along the way. If the second is true, I might be able to find him,' I said.

I told them that I would look for Eddie, or at least try to dig up any information on where he had gone. I told them my daily fee—plus expenses—and they didn't look too worried.

Before they left, Larry leaned forward.

'One thing, Mr—one thing, Bug,' he said. His voice was low so his little brothers could not hear. 'Eddie runs around with a rough crowd. A lot of his friends are wasps. But he's a good kid at heart . . .'

'I'll do what I can, Larry,' I said. 'If I find anything out, where can I contact you?'

Larry looked me straight in the eye. 'We have a little place near the trash cans. We'll be there.'

And then they were off, scurrying into the grass like a trio of amber torpedoes.