

## The Snow Flea's New Friend

YUSUF HAD SPENT the whole winter hopping in leaf litter under the snow foraging for fungi, sleeping when he was tired, and playing with his brother and sisters around the trunks of the trees buried deep in the snow and ice.

Snow fleas are so tiny that they look like specks of pencil lead when they come out on top of the snow. A snow flea moves by coiling its tail, hooking it under its abdomen, and when it wants to jump it releases it, and as it spikes downward it propels them into the air. They are basically like tiny tiny pogo sticks.

One morning after Yusuf had crawled out from under a rotting leaf he noticed that something was different. It wasn't quite as cold and dark as usual. There was a strange white light all around. Then he suddenly knew - sunlight was penetrating the thick blanket of snow above him. It was melting! Yusuf decided it was the perfect day to go to the upper world to play.

Without saying a word to anyone else he squirmed up in between the packed snowflakes and sprang out into a dazzling white world.

The sun was high in the sky and the sunlight blinded him for a moment. Then, because he was so happy and couldn't help himself, he did a little dance - *coil, spring, flop, coil, spring, flop, coil, spring, flop* until he found himself several inches away from where he had appeared and lay down to catch his breath.

Suddenly he noticed that he was not alone. Another snow flea was lying right next to him!

Now Yusuf had wanted to play by himself and go on his OWN adventure. That is one of the reasons he came out into the upper world by himself without telling his brothers and sisters. And now, there was another snow flea, just like him. Probably a cousin he had never met.

"I want to play by myself today," said Yusuf and coiled his tail to spring away. The other snow flea didn't answer but he too coiled his tail to spring away. "Hey!" said Yusuf. "Don't copy me!"

Still the other snow flea didn't answer.

Yusuf was quite mad by this time, and he turned to shove the other snow flea away. But when he turned, the snow flea turned too, just out of reach.

"Stop playing games!" shouted Yusuf. Poor Yusuf was quite distraught and didn't understand why the other snow flea was teasing him. He sat down in the snow and began to cry. He noticed that the snow flea next to him was wiping a tear from his face as well.

"Why are you crying?" asked Yusuf, more gently. Still the snow flea didn't answer.

*Maybe he can't talk,* thought Yusuf,*and here I have been so mean to him.*

This new idea made Yusuf reconsider and he decided to ask the other snow flea to play with him. Actually he didn't ask, he just said, "come on! Let's go hopping together!" knowing that his new friend would follow as he had done before.

Yusuf and the other snow flea frolicked in the sun and snow for the rest of the day. Just as the sun was setting behind the trees Yusuf's new friend disappeared as quickly as he had arrived. *That is strange!* Yusuf mused. *He must have been a magical snow flea from fairyland that visited me for the day. I hope I see him again!*

Then Yusuf hopped home for bed. He was quite tired. When he got home his mother had a cup of puffball mushroom tea for him to sip before he fell asleep. That night, Yusuf, dreamed of the fun day he had had with the other snow flea. In his dream the sun came to him and told him that the other snow flea's name was Shadow.

**THE END**

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