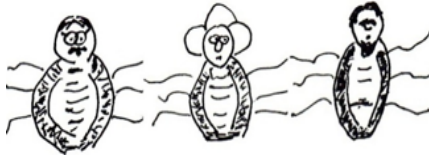


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER TEN NIGHT MARE

The Nice Dream Man sang but two notes into Irene's ear before stopping. He raised his head and turned toward the open window.

The white curtains rose like ghosts. A bone-chilling breeze passed through the bedroom. From somewhere deep in the night came the low rumble of thunder.

"Horrors!" cried Bug One. "Horse hooves!"

"Great heavens! It's Night Mare," said Bug Two. "Why now? Why this peaceful place?"

"Irene has been dreading a spelling test tomorrow at school," Bug Three said. "That must be what brought the mare here tonight."

Everything let loose at once. A shrill shriek, not unlike the sound made by a dentist's drill, pierced the air. A shadow fell across the windowsill, and horse hooves thundered on the bedroom floor. Long black streamers of tail and mane swirled in the wind. The fearsome, black steed, Night Mare, had leaped into Irene's bedroom.



With another bloodcurdling scream, the dark horse reared over the foot of the four-poster bed. Clouds of steam shot from its flaring nostrils. Glassy, black marble eyes glared down at the sleeping girl.

The three bedbugs raced onto Irene's quilt. "Bug off, Foul Steed!" they shouted. "Scat, Black Hack! Away with you, Sorry Sack of Bones!"

Meanwhile, the Nice Dream Man rose to his feet. His legs wobbled like noodles. Shaking a fist at the threatening horse, he declared,

"TONIGHT, IRENE WILL NOT RECEIVE YOUR DREADFUL DREAMS!"

The horse snorted, blasting out more steam. It stepped toward the frail man in white. With one swipe of its massive head, it sent him flying off his feet.

"Go away, Bully Bronco!" the bedbugs called. "Scram, Dud Stud! Stop nagging us, Night Nag!"

Night Mare strutted up to Irene's bedside. Only the three bedbugs stood in its way. Only they could prevent the horse from whispering horrid dreams to Irene that would make her sweat and toss in her sleep all night long.

"Bully!" cried Bug One. "Let's go, boys. We have a duty to do."

"Tally-ho!" shouted Bug Two.

Both bugs dove off the bed. They skittered across the floor toward the horse's front hooves. Although they rarely do, when bedbugs need to, they can bite like pocketknives. Now, as Night Mare lowered its head toward Irene's ear, the two bedbugs, Bug One on the right and Bug Two on the left, sank their sharp fangs into its front legs full force.

The dark steed reared back sharply. It whinnied in pain.

"Good show, bedbugs," said the Nice Dream Man. He rose to his feet, rubbing his bottom. "Now away with you, Night Mare. TONIGHT, IRENE SHALL NOT RECEIVE YOUR DREADFUL DREAMS!"

The horse continued to prance about the bedroom, dodging bedbug bites. Try as he might, however, the Nice Dream Man was unable to return to Irene's bedside to whisper his sweet dream.

"Help, bedbug!" he called to Bug Three, who remained on top of Irene's quilt. "Race to Irene's right ear. Sing the sweetest thing a bedbug can

sing. If you can make a sweet dream for Irene, this nasty nag can do no harm tonight!"

Bug Three scratched his black beard. "A sweet dream?" he said. "A sweet dream? But no bedbug has ever made a sweet dream before."

(Listen [Night Mare song](#))

