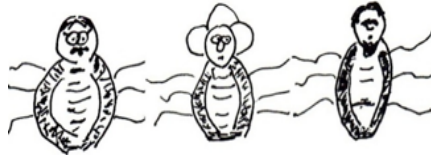


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER ELEVEN

A SWEET DREAM

Bug Three skittered up Irene's brown braid. He leaped onto her right ear and sat on the fleshy earlobe. The long ear canal stretched out before him. *Thump! Thump! Thump!* From far down the deep tunnel, Irene's eardrum beat slowly.

Meanwhile, Night Mare had knocked the Nice Dream Man off his feet again. "Snap to it, bedbug!" the man in white called from the bedroom floor.

"Sing! Sing! Sing, sir!" said Bug One, dodging Night Mare's pounding hooves.

"And a-one! And a-two!" said Bug Two.

As Night Mare's shadow fell across the four-poster bed once more, Bug Three leaned forward. He whispered into the ear, *"Big blue bugs, friendly fleas and fireflies, six slick walking sticks, and eight antsy ants."*

But nothing happened.

"No, no, bedbug! Not sweet enough!" said the Nice Dream Man. "Sing as a June bug sings in June. Sing as a cricket sings to the moon."

Night Mare shrieked. Its hooves hammered the bedroom floor.

Bug Three's antennae quivered. Again, he leaned into the ear hole and whispered, *"Baby buggies, bugging babies, rubber baby buggy bumpers."*

Irene's eyes fluttered. Her lips moved slightly, making clicking noises. But that was all.

"Land sakes, bedbug! Sing sweeter still!" called the Nice Dream Man.

"Sing as a bee sings to a rose. Sing as a stink bug sings while holding its nose."

Bug Three pulled his beard. How hard it was to think of sweet things with all the racket in the room. His gaze fell upon Irene's dresser across the way. On top was a picture of Irene with her parents at the beach.

The bug snapped his fingers. "I have it!" he said. Then, leaning far into Irene's ear

hole, he sang, "*Mountains of gumdrops, millions of lollipops, miles of licorice rope, and ... Mom and Dad's good-night kiss!*"



The bug's words echoed deep inside Irene's head. Slowly, slowly, the ends of her lips spread.

A hush fell over the room. The bedbugs, the horse, and the Nice Dream Man stopped and stared at Irene.

"She's smiling," Bug One said.

"That's a grin all right," said Bug Two.

"By cracky! You did it, bedbug!" cried the Nice Dream Man. "Irene is having a sweet dream!"

Night Mare threw back its head and whinnied. A cold chill filled the room. With a final snort, the dark horse turned and hurdled out the bedroom window. It

disappeared into the morning mist.

Bug Three stepped out of Irene's ear and bowed. His fellow bedbugs sang a rousing chorus of *For He's A Jolly Good Bug*. After this came much laughing, handshaking, back-slapping, and silly dancing.

The Nice Dream Man pulled down the brim of his cap and straightened his bowtie. "Time for me to leave, bedbugs," he said. "The sun will soon rise here, but will be setting in other parts of the world. I must keep moving to stay ahead of that black steed."

The Nice Dream Man mounted his rickety white bicycle and pedaled toward the window. There came the tinkle of bells, and the bike rose into the air. The bedbugs watched the man in the white uniform sail out of the bedroom. He soared into the star-spangled sky until he became a twinkling dot in the northern sky, right at the end of the Nice Dream Scoop.

As Dawn approached, one by one the stars blinked out. At the sound of the alarm clock, Irene awoke. She stretched and rubbed the cobwebs from her eyes.



“Mercy me!” she said. “I just had the sweetest dream possible.”

Of course, Irene was unaware that from their hiding place in the bedpost, three bedbugs were listening. And these bedbugs felt extremely proud.