

Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BOOGEYMAN

“Sleepy yet?” asked Bug One.

Irene shut her eyes. They sprang back open like window shades. The bedbugs sighed.

“What other nighttime visitors do I have, bedbugs?” the girl asked. “Tell me what else happens in my bedroom when I’m asleep?”

“Well, madam,” said Bug One. “Last spring, *Pox* showed up. What a chicken!”

“Another pest, *Fever*, arrived in the winter,” added Bug Two.

“And I shall never forget another pesky guest a few years ago,” said Bug Three. “*Flu* checked in as if he owned the bed.

“*Pox*, *Fever*, and *Flu*! What a sickening trio!” said Bug One.

“I remember those three visitors well,” said Irene. “*Pox* gave me dots, and *Fever* made me hot. And, mercy me! When *Flu* was here, I threw up in bed.”

“Hoo! Hoo! Indeed, you did, madam,” said Bug One, adjusting his spectacles. “But we bedbugs made certain their stays here were as short and unpleasant as possible. Rest assured, madam, each germ left your bed wishing never to return.”

“I certainly see how busy you little bugs can be,” said Irene.

“You don’t know the worst of it, madam!” said Bug One. “Hoo! Hoo! Why, we have yet to tell you about *You-Know-Who*, who lives underneath your bed.”

Irene stiffened. "Who?"

All three beds glanced toward the edge of the mattress.

Bug Two nudged the fat bug. "Come, come, dear bug. You're not going to tell Irene about *him*, are you?"

"How I wish he would stay under this bed and never come out," said Bug Three.

Irene wrinkled her nose. "Now listen, bedbugs. There's nothing under my bed but Dust Bunnies. I checked under there every night before I put on my pajamas."

The three bugs rocked on their heels. "OK," they said together. "Whatever you say."

Irene bent her head forward. She repeated in a whisper, "There's nothing under my bed...*Is* there?"

"Do you ever find your pillow on the floor in the morning?" asked Bug One.

"Uh-huh," said Irene, surprised, for that very thing happened just yesterday.

"Do you ever find your covers completely off you in the middle of the night?" asked Bug Two.

"Uh-huh!" said Irene.

"And do you ever find your hair sticking up in funny ways after a long night's sleep?" asked Bug Three.

"Yes! Yes!"

"THE BOOGEYMAN DID IT!" the bedbugs as one.

"Truthfully?" Irene peeped.

Bug Two cleared his throat. "A bedbug cannot..."

"The Boogeyman is under this bed, all right, madam," Bug One interrupted.

"There's one under every bed," said Bug Two.

"Most likely he's under there right this second, scheming up some mischief for tonight," said Bug Three.

Irene's eyes rolled from one side of the mattress to the other. "Like what, for instance?"

"Well, madam," said Bug One. "If you left your sneakers on the floor, he might hide them, so you can't find them in the morning."

"What nerve!" said Irene.

"Or he might pour a glass of water onto your mattress to make you think you peed in the bed," Bug Two said.

"How cruel!" said Irene.

"Even worse, the Boogeyman has been known to sneak into children's school bags at night and change homework answers," said Bug Three.

Irene's eyes ran from her school bag on the dresser to her sneakers on the floor.

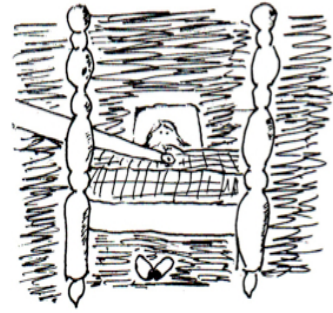
"Teachers should be told of this!" she said.

"So beware, madam," said Bug One. "If you hear the closet door click, a floorboard snap, or an odd bump in the corner, the Boogeyman could be creeping about your bedroom."

"And without the bedbugs here to protect you, my dear, there's no telling what naughtiness he might do," said Bug Two.

Bug Three stepped forward, pulling his beard. "Would you like to hear what the Boogeyman did in one unfortunate house when the bedbugs had to leave, Irene?" he asked.

"Would I!" said Irene, and she snuggled under her quilt to get set for another story.



(Listen *Boogeyman song*)

