

Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER TWO THREE UGLY BUGS

Each bug sitting around Irene's belly button was about the size of a jellybean. Each bug had three pairs of black, wriggling limbs sticking out of its sides. Each bug had two wobbly antennae and two black, bulging eyes that were staring straight at Irene.

"You're bedbugs, aren't you?" Irene asked uneasily.

"Indeed, we are, madam," answered the first bug.

"Correct, my dear," said the second.

"Yessiree, Irene," said the third.

Irene pressed her forefinger against her thumb, marble-shooting fashion. She placed her hand on her stomach and squinted an eye.

"Well, then," she said. "I was warned tonight not to let you bite me. So bye-bye bugs."

The bedbugs laughed.

"Hoo! Hoo! *Bite* you!" the first bug hooted. "Biting bedbugs! What a bugaboo!"

"Dear, dear!" said the second bug. "Children are told the silliest things."

"Oh, my! Oh, me!" the third bug said.

"A bedbug wouldn't hurt a flea."

Irene scowled. "Then what business do you have on my belly?" she huffed.

The first bug stood. He was a good deal fatter than the other two. After

going through some odd wriggling movements to dust off various limbs, antennae, and wings, he took four ticklish steps to the top of Irene's belly.

Irene's gaze grew enormous. She propped her head up with her pillow for a better view. Pinched onto this bug's nose was a tiny pair of wire-rimmed spectacles. And there was something else. Underneath the nose grew a walrus mustache.

"Mercy me."



The bug bowed. His plump brown body gleamed in the moonlight. He cleared his throat importantly and said, "We, madam, are the humble bedbugs, more formally known in encyclopedias as *Cimex Lectularius*, who have the honor, the rare privilege, of making homes in your bed."

Irene made a face. "And why would *I* want bedbugs in my bed?"

"Hoo! Hoo! Because you would rarely get a wink of sleep without us here," the fat bug said. "You would wake up crabby every morning."

"Would I?" said Irene.

Bug One's mustache twitched. "Madam, have you any idea what *trouble* can happen in this bedroom at night? No, I'm sure you don't. You're always asleep, aren't you? Well, let me tell you, madam...*plenty*. Remember the bedbug motto:

ONLY A BEDBUG KNOWS,
HOW IT GOES,
WHILE YOU DOZE."

"Truthfully?" said Irene.

Here, a second bug stood. Waving a staple-size arm in the air, he declared, "A bedbug cannot tell a lie!"



"That's good to know," said Irene. She regarded the second bug closely. On this bug's head sat a curious tuft of white fluff like a pinch of candy cotton.

"What *is* that stuff on top of you?" she asked.

"How kind of you to mention it, my dear. It's my powdered wig. Do you really like it?"

"It suits you nicely, little bug," Irene said diplomatically.

Bug Two grinned. "I took to wearing a white wig when I worked in the bed of the President."

"The President? The President of the United States?" Irene said. "You mean, even the White House beds have bedbugs?"

"Bedbugs are in every bed, my dear," said the bug with the wig. "Wide beds, short beds, lumpy beds, feather beds, flower beds, cribs, cots, cradles, hammocks, and beds that are too hard, too soft, and just right. Naturally, there are king-size bedbugs in the king-size beds of kings, queen-size bedbugs in the queen-size beds of queens and twin bedbugs in twin-size beds as well. You'll find firebugs in the beds of firemen, pill bugs in the beds of doctors, software bugs in the beds of computer whizzes, and don't forget about litterbugs."

"What beds could they be in?" asked Irene.

"In the beds of messy children. Where else?" Bug Two said.

"And what about bunk beds?" asked Irene.

"Ah, in the top bunk of bunk beds live the bravest bedbugs of all," said Bug Two. "The high-climbing mountain bugs."

Now Irene's gaze fell upon the third bug, Bug Three, who was rolling onto his feet.



This bug was taller and skinnier than his partners and hanging under his chin like a baby's bib was a bushy, black beard.

The third bug explained, "Not until you're asleep, Irene, does our work begin. Perhaps now you are sleepy and would like to shut your eyes."

"Sleepy? Me?" said Irene. "Not one wink, blink, or nod." She opened

her eyes wide to prove her point.

Bug Three stroked his whiskers. "Then would you like us to sing you a lullaby, Irene?" he asked. "That might help you sleep."

"I don't think so," said Irene, who wasn't much for lullabies at her age.

"We could go outside and catch forty winks for you," said fat Bug One.

"No, I'd rather you didn't."

"Perhaps we could bring some leaping sheep into your bedroom for you to count, my dear," Bug Two said, patting his woolly wig.

"Forget it," said Irene.

Bug One fixed his spectacles more firmly on his nose. "Well then, madam," he said. "I believe the best thing to do is to tell you a bedtime story."

"Oh, please do," said Irene, who was particularly fond of bedtime stories.

"I shall tell you about the first visitor who comes to your room at night," said the fat bug.

"Visitors?" said Irene. "I have visitors? Here, in my bedroom?"

"You have many visitors, my dear," said Bug Two.

"Our nightly schedule is often fully booked, Irene," said Bug Three.

"It is? I do?" said Irene. "Like *who*?"

"Of course, your first visitor is always the Sandman," said Bug One.

"The *Sandman*? Mercy me."

All this while, the enormous moon continued to crawl across the bedroom window. The moonbeam shone upon the bedbugs like a spotlight. Their bodies shimmered.

Irene studied these ugly bugs sitting so close to her nose: plump Bug One, who kept fingering his wire-rimmed glasses and pulling his walrus mustache; Bug Two, with his silly white wig; and tall, slim Bug Three, still stroking his bushy black beard.

Irene nodded. Yes, she was convinced. These bedbugs were not going to bite her after all.

(Listen to *Bedbugs song*)

