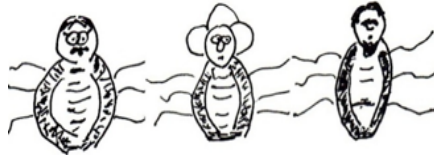


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER FOUR SLEEPING BEAUTY

At half-past midnight, the Sandman arrived outside Irene's bedroom window. His silver jacket was rumpled. His top hat was cocked to one side. No doubt he had been doing more than delivering sleeping sand that evening.

Inside, on the four-poster bed, Irene flipped back and forth like a strip of bacon. To avoid being squished, the bedbugs skittered from one side of the mattress to the other.

The instant Irene's eyelids lowered, the Sandman sprang through the windowpane and leaped to the floor. He danced toward Irene's bed, twirling and leaping. He did a fancy tap dance and clicked his heels in the air. The silver bucket swung in his hand, flinging silver sand every which way.

"Careful, sir!" Bug One called out.

"Easy does it, Sandman!" Bug Two cried, waving four buggy arms.

"Watch your step!" warned Bug Three. "That's a good fellow."

But the catastrophe happened nonetheless. As the silver man approached the bed, he stumbled over Irene's furry slippers. His bucket toppled over, and every grain of sand spilled on top of Irene's face.

The bedroom grew deathly quiet. Irene's head lay on her pillow with only the tip of her nose visible through the pile of silver sand.

The Sandman pushed back his top hat and shrugged. The bedbugs knew what this meant. This visitor had no time to clean up the mess. He

must return to the Sandwich Islands to collect more sand. Millions of sleepy-headed children still lay awake awaiting his arrival.

In a streak of silver, the Sandman shot from the bedroom. At once, the three bugs raced up Irene's braid and onto the sand heap.

"What now, boys?" said Bug One. "We've cleaned up the Sandman's messes before, but never a whole sand dune!"

Bug Two kicked the sand, stirring up a glittery cloud. "This fine sleeping sand is impossible to pick up. Even with our tiny hands."

Bug Three paced from Irene's right ear to her left. He dabbed his eyes with his long beard. "Poor, Irene. She'll sleep for years," he sobbed. "She will be like that girl in the fairy tale."

"*Sleeping Beauty*," the others said grimly.

The three bedbugs sat on the end of Irene's nose. They thought into the Wee Hours of the night.

"You know, Irene sticks chewing gum on her bedpost each night," said Bug Two. "Suppose we roll a sticky wad across the sand to mop it up."

"Too much sand and not enough gum," Bug One said.

"Let's go find a prince," Bug Three suggested. "One kiss from a prince is just the thing to wake up a pretty girl."

"The nearest prince is across the ocean in England," said Bug One. "And there's not enough time to fetch him."

By the time the Early Bird tweeted outside the bedroom window, the bedbugs still had no plan. When Dawn arrived, and the first rays of her sunlight reached Irene's pillow, the sleeping sand disappeared. But the bugs knew it still covered Irene's face.

At seven o'clock, the alarm clock on Irene's nightstand jingled. And since no one awoke to turn it off, it went on jingling.

"I know what will happen next," Bug One said.



"Any second now," said Bug Two.

“Poor, Irene,” said Bug Three.
From downstairs, a voice shouted,
“IREEEENE! TIME TO GET UUUUUP!”
It was Irene’s mother.