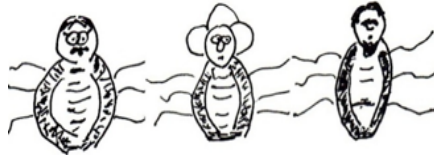


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER FIVE

THE WEST WIND

“IREEEEEN! RISE AND SHINE!” came the voice from the foot of the stairs.

Bug One kicked at the invisible sleeping sand. “We’ve bungled it this time, boys,” he said.

“We’re failures as bedbugs!” said Bug Two.

“Irene won’t wake up for one hundred years,” Bug Three said, pulling his whiskers.

Footsteps pounded on the stairs. The door opened, and a tall woman stepped into the room. Spying Irene still in bed, she said, “All right, Sleepyhead. Up and at ‘em.”

The three bedbugs darted out of sight behind the pillow.

“Come on, Lazy Bones,” Irene’s mother called. “Upsadaisy. Waffles for breakfast.”

When this news failed to rouse her daughter, the woman stepped toward the bed. She shook Irene.

“Irene, is this one of your stunts?” she said. “If you miss the school bus this morning, you will be in *big* trouble, young lady.”

Meanwhile, pandemonium broke out behind the pillow.

“This is it!” wailed Bug Two. “Here it comes! One more shake and Irene’s mother will think...will think...I don’t know *what* she will think!”

Bug Three wrapped two buggy arms over his eyes. “I can’t bear to look!” he said. “Tell me when it’s over.”

The woman pressed a button on the alarm clock to stop the jingling. This allowed a softer sound to be heard at the window. *Tap, tap, tap*. A twig from a nearby tree was striking the glass. *Tap, tap*.

Bug One's antennae quivered with excitement. "Bully!" he said. "It's Zephyr, the West Wind. He's trying to get in! And that gives me an idea!"

Without another word, the fat bug leaped off the four-poster bed. He skittered across the bedroom floor, up the wall, and onto the windowsill.

"The bug has gone buggy!" cried Bug Two.

"What's happening?" said Bug Three, still sightless. "No, don't tell me!" And he wrapped two other arms over his ears.

Meanwhile, on the windowsill, in plain view of Irene's mother, Bug One hopped up and down. He took a deep breath and let it go. Out came a loud buzz, a buzz that would have made any bumblebee jealous.

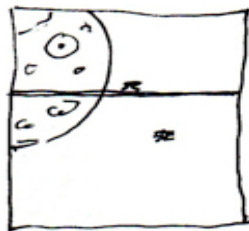
Irene's mother turned toward the window. Upon spotting Bug One, she said, "Goodness! How did a bug get into my clean house?"

The woman grabbed a book, *999 BEDTIME STORIES*, off Irene's nightstand. Raising the volume over her head, she stomped toward the window.

Bug One boldly stood his ground. As Irene's mother drew near, the bug sprang upward. He landed on a windowpane and clung to the smooth glass.

"It's suicide!" cried Bug Two. "He'll be a squashed bug for sure."

Bug Three placed his two spare arms over his heart. "Farewell, old friend. You were a good bug."



Bug One, however, had no intention of being squished by *999 BEDTIME STORIES*. He had seen Irene's mother clean the bedroom many times. He was certain she would never strike him on the window. She would never chance smearing the spotless glass.

Sure enough, when the woman reached the window, she gingerly brushed Bug One off the pane with the book. As the bug fell, his attacker flung open the window and flicked him outside.

Phoosh!

The West Wind rushed into the bedroom. The curtains billowed like ship sails. The closet door banged shut, and the crayon drawings on the walls fluttered like flags.

The sleeping sand on Irene's face must have scattered with the wind, for Irene's eyes popped open. She rubbed her eyeballs with her knuckles. A wide hippo yawn threatened to stretch her face out of shape.

"Mommy," she called out. "Brrr! It's chilly in here. Why is the window open?"

"There was a bug, dear," replied her mother. "And one thing we don't need in this bedroom is bugs."

When Bug One finished telling his story, Irene sighed. The bedbug trio on her belly raised and lowered.

"What a brave bug you were," she said. "And I didn't even miss the breakfast waffles."

Bug One's mustache quivered in embarrassment. "Only doing my job, madam."

Now the bedbugs turned toward the moonlit window and waved.

Irene checked the window and saw nothing. "What are you little bugs up to?" she asked.

"Perhaps, madam, it's time for the Sandman to enter the bedroom *this* evening," said Bug One.

"Oh, but I'm still not the least bit sleepy."

Little did Irene realize, but the Sandman had already arrived. At that very moment, the silver-haired, silver freckled man dressed in the silver suit squatted outside her bedroom window. The bedbugs signaled to him again, and he doffed his silver top hat. Picking up his silver sand bucket, he danced away on his silver shoes. It would be a long time before the Sandman would be needed in *that* bedroom.