

Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



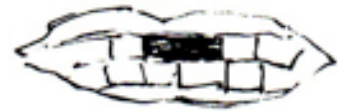
CHAPTER SIX TOOTH FAIRY

Irene smiled. She was getting used to having three ugly bugs sitting inches from her face. Her grin exposed a gap where two front teeth on top were missing.

After a moment of thought, she asked, “Bedbugs? What’s the Tooth Fairy like? Is she kind and generous? Is she beautiful? She *must* be rich! And what does she do with all those teeth she collects?”

The bedbugs looked upward and whistled.

Irene placed a finger on the gap in her teeth. “You see, last Tuesday I lost *this* front tooth,” she explained. “The next morning, weird, but the tooth beside it also came out. Now the kids at school call me Jack-o’-Lantern Mouth, but I don’t mind. It was great finding a silver dollar under my pillow two mornings in a row.”



Straightening his powdered wig, Bug Two stood. He clasped four arms behind his back and stepped forward. “If you insist, my dear, I shall be the bug who tells you about the Tooth Fairy.”

Irene adjusted her pillow and snuggled farther down under her quilt. “Oh, please do.”

“But be warned,” said Bug Two. “The Tooth Fairy is hardly the kind, generous fairy that children are led to believe.”

Irene smiled again. Who wanted to hear about a *good* fairy anyway? Here is the story Bug Two told her:

Considering all the pillows in the world, it is a mystery how the Tooth

Fairy knows when a tooth lies under one. Yet she always does. In the Dead of Night--the blackest, quietest time of night when clocks don't even tick--she appeared at Irene's bedroom window.

This fairy looked nothing like the short, slender ones with sparkling wands and wings shown in picture books. Not at all! This fairy was as plump and tall as a loaf of bread, and her face was as wrinkled as a walnut. Her raisin-like eyes shifted side-to-side, alert for cats that might pounce on her.

A blue bandanna covered the Tooth Fairy's head. Then, for reasons no bedbug can explain, seven white moths constantly swirled around it. The patchwork wool dress that she wore, now full of holes, provided the moths with their meals.

The Tooth Fairy flattened her long, crooked nose against the windowpane. Spying Irene asleep, she grinned broadly, exposing two rows of toothless gums the color of raw liver. Yes, it's the truth. The Tooth Fairy had not a single tooth in her mouth. However, a dozen teeth, the ones she had collected already that evening, rattled in the leather pouch that she clutched in her hand.



Opening the window a crack, the fairy slipped into the room. Like a fat soap bubble, she floated across the floor, landing on Irene's mattress.

"Nice, nice, nice," she hissed, eyeing the one-tooth gap in Irene's teeth. "Yesss, nice, nice."

"Good evening!" the three bedbugs called from the top of Irene's shoulder.

The Tooth Fairy's lips curled when she spotted the bugs sitting there. The white moths fluttered faster around her head.

"Evening, buggies," she said. "I hope you vermin are well tonight."

"Hoo! Hoo!" said Bug One. "And we hope we can do business with you, Tooth Fairy, fairly and squarely. That is a first-rate tooth Irene put under her pillow."

"I always want to give children the best possible deal," said the Tooth Fairy.

The bedbugs chuckled. They had dealt with this dental sprite before.

(Listen *Tooth Fairy song*)

