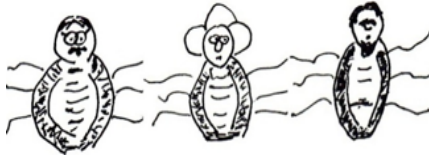


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER EIGHT RESCUE OF BUG TWO

Back on Irene's four-poster bed, Bug Three crawled under Irene's pillow. He came out pushing the bottle cap.

"In short, the Tooth Fairy swiped our fellow bedbug!" he said.



"But before we worry about our wig-wearing friend, we must replace that cap with a proper coin," said Bug One.

Last year, a silver dollar had dropped out of Irene's father's pants pocket when he bent over to kiss Irene goodnight.

Alert for such treasures, the bedbugs hid the coin under Irene's dresser. Now they dove off the mattress to retrieve it. With much huffing and puffing, they rolled the colossal coin across the floor and up Irene's bedstead. Finally, they pushed it under the pillow.

"Bully!" said Bug One. "Now for the rescue."

"Not an easy task," said Bug Three. "The Tooth Fairy travels fast and far. She'd have to bring our bug back herself."

"Hoo! Hoo!" went Bug One. "And that shifty fairy would only return if another tooth sat under Irene's pillow."

Meanwhile, Irene's mouth had opened an inch. Both bedbugs gaped at the gap left by the missing tooth.

Bug Three pulled on his whiskers. "Hmm," he said. "Suppose we jiggle the next tooth a little."

Bug One's spectacles dropped off his nose. "Jiggle it a little?"

"If we jiggle it a little, it'll soon come out," Bug Three said.

"Just what are you suggesting, sir?" said Bug One.

"Suppose I loosen that second tooth tonight," said the bearded bug. "By tomorrow night, it will be under her pillow for the Tooth Fairy to find. With luck, our bewigged bedbug will be with her."

Bug One nodded. "Very unethical, but your plan sounds sound, sir," he said. "That baby tooth will come out eventually. So why not give it some assistance?"

Bug Three climbed upon Irene's chin. He stood on the brink of her upper lip. Fearlessly, he leaned over the dark, windy canyon of her mouth.



"Careful, sir. Don't fall in," Bug One warned. "You'd be swallowed like a pill."

Bug Three's beard blew upward as he took hold of Irene's front tooth. He pushed and pulled until it wobbled.

"Not too loose," called Bug One. "Children enjoy squirming a tooth around a bit before it comes out completely."

While Bug Three worked, the Early Bird's song broke the silence. Dawn showed up and changed the room from black to gray to all its daytime colors. The bedbugs crept away to their hiding hole in the top right bedpost. There they waited.

Five minutes later, the alarm clock jiggled. When Irene awoke, she flipped onto her belly and found the silver dollar under her pillow.

"Yippee!" she said, leaping out of bed. Soon, the coin dropped into her piggy bank on the dresser.

As Irene dressed for school, she discovered the loose tooth in her mouth.

"Yippee!" she said. "Another one!" And she began rocking the tooth back and forth.

That night in the Dead of Night, long after Irene had slipped her tooth under the pillow, the Tooth Fairy returned to the bedroom. Once on Irene's mattress, she

glared at the two bedbugs waiting on Irene's shoulder.

Wringing her hands, she sang out:

"How nice, nice, nice, another tooth for me.

Last night I was generous, so this must be free."

"Boloney! Bunk! Balderdash!" bellowed Bug One.

"Where's the bedbug you bugnapped from his bed?" cried Bug Three. With the white moths whirling around her head, the Tooth Fairy grinned her toothless grin. "Bedbug? I know nothing of a missing bug?"

Even as she spoke, the leather pouch in her hand began to sway. Soon a tuft of white fluff rose from the top of the bag, followed by the pale face of Bug Two. He plopped onto the mattress.

"Ugh," said the bug.

The Tooth Fairy shrugged. "Now how in the world did an ugly bug get in with my nice, clean teeth?" she said.

Tonight, the bedbugs had no trouble getting the correct change from the Tooth Fairy. As soon as Irene's tooth was safely in her sack, she dove off the mattress and sailed out the window.

For the rest of the evening the bedbugs had a welcome-back-to-bed party for Bug Two. Each bedbug invited his favorite ladybug. They guzzled bug juice and danced the jitterbug until Dawn appeared.

During the party, Bug Two told about his adventures with the Tooth Fairy.

"My bumpy ride through the air was worse than being a bedbug in the berth of a battleship," he said. "When I finally climbed from the pouch, I found myself on a tree branch high above the ground. Baby cradles hung on the tree boughs around me! Nearby, I spied the Tooth Fairy talking to a tall, white bird. Guess who? Our good friend Mr. Stork."

"Mr. Stork!" Bug One said. "Why, I haven't seen that good chap in eight years. Not since the night Irene came to this bedroom."

"So why was that miserly Tooth Fairy talking with that good bird?" asked Bug Three.

Bug Two answered with a snicker.

"She was trying to sell him all the baby teeth in her bag!"

"Hoo! Hoo! You mean, she thought that babies needed her teeth?" Bug One said.

"No doubt she was asking a hefty price for each one," said Bug Three.

"Of course, Mr. Stork ignored the fairy and went about his business," Bug Two continued. "While I watched, a bough broke; a cradle did fall; and down came a baby, cradle and all. In midair, Mr. Stork snatched the cradle's handle in his long bill and flew off. I knew that some bedbugs would soon

be needed in a brand-new bedroom.”

