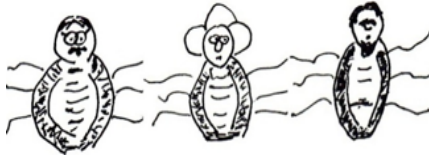


Bedbugs

SERIALIZED



CHAPTER NINE

THE NICE DREAM MAN

“Bedbugs?” said Irene, who was more curious than ever about the nighttime business in her bedroom. “Tonight, my mom told me to have *sweet dreams*. Why do I have sweet dreams on some nights, frightful dreams on other nights, and on many nights I don’t dream at all?”

This is the bedtime story the bedbug told her, the story of the Nice Dream Man and Night Mare:

During the winter, since the nights are longest, the bedbugs must work the hardest. One particularly busy night, Mr. Jack Frost, a short, round man with a head as bald as a snowball, appeared outside the bedroom window. With the bedbugs advising him from the windowsill, he took out his crystal paintbrush and produced a first-rate frosty masterpiece upon the windowpane.



Above the world outside, millions of little stars twinkled, twinkled, flashing their secret messages across the galaxy. Shortly before Dawn was due, from a northern constellation known to bedbugs as the Nice Dream

Scoop, came the crisp tinkle of bells.

Bug One cupped a hand to his ear. "I hear a waltz," he said.

The music grew louder.

"Ah, the Nice Dream Man is riding nearby," said Bug Two.

The music grew louder still.

"I do hope he stops in our bedroom," said Bug Three. "How long it's been since Irene has had a sweet dream."

Soon, the bells tinkled right outside Irene's window. Slowly, the window opened, and into the bedroom drifted the Nice Dream Man, pedaling his white bicycle through the air.

The bike's big balloon tires landed hard on the bedroom floor. The bicycle bounced twice and rolled past the four-poster bed before wobbling to a stop.



"Greetings, sir," Bug One called. "How splendid to see you again."

"Irene has been an extra sweet girl," said Bug Two, crossing his fingers behind his back. "She deserves a special dream flavor tonight."

"Yes, yes," said Bug Three. "Do you have an extra sweet dream to sing to her?"

The Nice Dream Man climbed off his bicycle. He was an ancient and frail man, dressed in a neat, white uniform with a black bowtie. A white cap sat on his mop of marshmallow-white hair. Stiff and stooped, he shuffled to Irene's bedside.

"Sorry to have been away so long, bedbugs," he said in a crackly voice. "But these are busy times. Many people in the world are in need of pleasant dreams."

The Nice Dream Man knelt by Irene's pillow. He pushed back his white cap with a thumb. His eyes twinkled as he studied the snoozing girl.

"Now, let me see," he said. "What would be the ideal dream for Irene?"

A special dream flavor, you say, bedbugs? Ah, I know just the thing.”

The man brushed a curl of hair away from Irene’s right ear. He leaned forward and softly began to sing.

(Listen [Nice Dream Man song](#))

