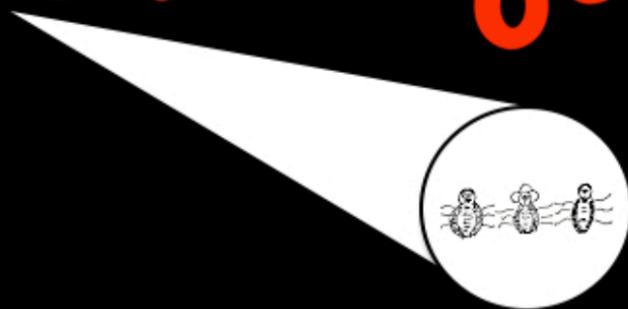


# Bedbugs



**Douglas Evans**

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# Bedbugs



**Only a bedbug knows  
how it goes,  
while you doze!**



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*"good stories; good tunes"*

# Bedbugs



Douglas Evans



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# For Jaana



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# Contents

<b>1. Good Night, Irene</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. Three Ugly Bugs</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. The Sandman</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4. Sleeping Beauty</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5. The West Wind</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6. The Tooth Fairy</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>7. Huggle And Hoodwink</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>8. Rescue Of Bug Two</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>9. The Nice Dream Man</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>10. Night Mare</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>11. A Sweet Dream</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>12. The Boogeyman</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>13. When The Bedbugs Go Away...</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>14. ...The Bogeymen Play</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>15. Irene Falls Asleep</b>	<b>111</b>



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# Chapter One

## Good Night, Irene



**I**rene's parents tiptoed to the bedroom door.

"Goodnight, Irene," said her father.

"Sweet dreams, Irene," said her mother. "Sleep tight."

"Don't let the bedbugs bite!" they said together and left the room.

**Douglas Evans**

“Sweet dreams? Sleeping tight? Biting bedbugs?” Irene told herself. “That’s a lot for a girl to worry about when she’s supposed to go to sleep.”

Irene lay bottom down in her four-poster bed. Her head plopped onto her plump pillow, and her brown braids flopped to the sides. She waggled her bottom to get more snug. She tugged the checkered quilt under her chin and smoothed out every wrinkle with her hands.

Her bedtime routine complete, Irene was usually set for sleep. But not this night. Tonight something was different in her bedroom. Something was off; something was not quite right. The instant she closed her eyes she knew what it was.

“Mercy me,” she said, and her eyes popped open. “My bedroom is *too* dark.

## Bedbugs

There's not a spot of light anywhere. Even the white line under my door is missing."

Irene peered toward her toes and saw nothing. She twisted her head side to side, but found no bedposts. She waved her fingers in front of her face.

"It's as though my hands aren't there at all."

Surrounded by the walls of black, Irene lay as still as a stone. All at once, a glint of light caught her eye. The edge of the moon, white and blotchy, appeared in the corner of her bedroom window. Tonight the moon was extraordinary, easily four times its normal size. Inch by inch more of it rolled into view, until the big, bald thing filled the entire window.

Shivers paraded down Irene's spine. "Mercy me," she peeped. "The moon seems

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too close to my bedroom.”

As she spoke, a single moonbeam, one thin shaft of light, shot toward the windowpane. It passed through the glass, not quickly like a flashlight beam, but it oozed into the room like syrup running across pancakes. Once over the windowsill, the finger of light poured onto the floor.

Slowly, slowly, the beam flowed toward Irene’s bed. It sliced through the blackness leaving a white strip across the floorboards.

Forgetting to breathe, forgetting to move, Irene watched the moonbeam approach. Her eyes grew as big as tiddlywinks. She would have screamed her head off if she could.

When the ray reached her bed, it ran up her quilt. When it reached her mattress,

## Bedbugs

it rolled onto her belly. There it stopped, forming a white puddle on her bellybutton.

“Mercy,” she whispered.

As Irene studied the patch of light, her stomach began to itch. She squirmed, but no, the itch had to be scratched.

Oh, so slowly, Irene slid her hand under her covers and pajama tops. But before her fingers could curl, she heard something that made her freeze. From under the quilt came muffled voices.

“Hold it, madam!” called one voice.

“Do stop, my dear!” said another.

“Don’t scratch us, Irene!” shouted a third.

Irene gulped air. “There’s *something* on my stomach,” she said under her breath.

How Irene wanted to leap out of bed. How she wanted to dash from her room and

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sprint like crazy to her parents. But she dared not budge. She dared not breathe too deeply.

With both hands, she lifted the top of her checkered quilt. She peered underneath.

“Too dark,” she said, and she turned down the covers, so that the moonbeam shone upon her pink pajama tops.

Here came the scariest part. This took guts. With a jerk, Irene yanked up her pajamas and stared at her bare, round belly.

She wrinkled her nose and said, “Oh, ick!”

There, bathed in moonlight, were three shiny, brown bugs, the ugliest bugs Irene had ever seen.

“Oh, ick,” she said again. “Bedbugs.”

## Chapter Two

# Three Ugly Bugs



Each bug sitting around Irene's bellybutton was about the size of a jellybean. Each bug had three pairs of black, wriggling limbs sticking out its sides. Each bug had two wobbly antennae and two black, bulging eyes that were staring straight at Irene.

**Douglas Evans**

"You're bedbugs, aren't you?" Irene asked uneasily.

"Indeed we are, madam," answered the first bug.

"Correct, my dear," said the second.

"Yessiree, Irene," said the third.

Irene pressed her forefinger against her thumb, marble-shooting fashion. She placed her hand on her stomach and squinted an eye.

"Well, then," she said. "I was warned tonight not to let you bite me. So bye-bye bugs."

The bedbugs laughed.

"Hoo! Hoo! *Bite* you!" the first bug hooted. "Biting bedbugs! What a bugaboo!"

"Dear, dear!" said the second bug. "Children are told the silliest things."

"Oh, my! Oh, me!" the third bug said.

## Bedbugs

“A bedbug wouldn’t hurt a flea.”

Irene scowled. “Then what business do you have on my belly?” she huffed.

The first bug stood. He was a good deal fatter than the other two. After going through some odd wriggling movements to dust off various limbs, antennae, and wings, he took four ticklish steps to the top of Irene’s belly.

Irene’s gaze grew enormous. She propped her head up with her pillow for a better view. Pinched onto this bug’s nose was a tiny pair of wire-rimmed spectacles. And there was something else. Underneath the nose grew a long walrus mustache.

“Mercy me,” she said.



**Douglas Evans**

The bug bowed. His plump brown body gleamed in the moonlight. He cleared his throat importantly and said, "We, madam, are the humble bedbugs, more formally known in encyclopedias as *Cimex Lectularius*, who have the honor, the rare privilege, of making our homes in your bed."

Irene made a face. "And why would I want bedbugs in my bed?"

"Hoo! Hoo! Because you would rarely get a wink of sleep without us here," the fat bug said. "You would wake up crabby every morning."

"Would I?" said Irene.

Bug One's mustache twitched. "Madam, have you any idea what *trouble* can happen in this bedroom at night? No, I'm

## Bedbugs

sure you don't. You're always asleep, aren't you? Well, let me tell you, madam...*plenty*. Remember the bedbug motto:

ONLY A BEDBUG KNOWS,  
HOW IT GOES,  
WHILE YOU DOZE."

"Truthfully?" said Irene.

Here a second bug stood. Waving a staple-size arm in the air, he declared, "A bedbug cannot tell a lie!"



"That's good to know," said Irene. She regarded the second bug closely. On this bug's head sat a curious tuft of white fluff like a pinch of candy cotton.

"What *is* that stuff on top of you?" she asked.

**Douglas Evans**

“How kind of you to mention it, my dear. It’s my powdered wig. Do you really like it?”

“It suits you nicely, little bug,” Irene said diplomatically.

Bug Two grinned. “I took to wearing a white wig when I worked in the bed of the President.”

“The President? The President of the United States?” Irene said. “You mean, even the White House beds have bedbugs?”

“Bedbugs are in every bed, my dear,” said the bug with the wig. “Wide beds, short beds, lumpy beds, feather beds, flower beds, cribs, cots, cradles, hammocks, and beds that are too hard, too soft, and just right. Naturally, there are king-size bedbugs in the king-size beds of kings, queen-size bedbugs in the queen-size beds of queens

## Bedbugs

and twin bedbugs in twin-size beds as well. You'll find firebugs in the beds of firemen, pill bugs in the beds of doctors, software bugs in the beds of computer whizzes, and don't forget about litter bugs."

"What beds could they be in?" asked Irene.

"In the beds of messy children. Where else?" Bug Two said.

"And what about bunk beds?" asked Irene.

"Ah, in the top bunk of bunk beds live the bravest bedbugs of all," said Bug Two. "The high-climbing mountain bugs."



**Douglas Evans**

Now Irene's gaze fell upon the third bug, Bug Three, who was rolling onto his feet.

This bug was taller and skinnier than his partners and hanging under his chin like a baby's bib was a bushy, black beard.

The third bug explained, "Not until you're asleep, Irene, does our work begin. Perhaps now you are sleepy and would like to shut your eyes."

"Sleepy? Me?" said Irene. "Not one wink, blink, or nod." She opened her eyes wide to prove her point.

Bug Three stroked his whiskers. "Then would you like us to sing you a lullaby, Irene?" he asked. "That might help you sleep."

"I don't think so," said Irene, who wasn't much for lullabies at her age.

## Bedbugs

"We could go outside and catch you forty winks," said fat Bug One.

"No, I rather you didn't."

"Perhaps we could bring some leaping sheep into your bedroom for you to count, my dear," Bug Two said, patting his woolly wig.

"Forget it," said Irene.

Bug One fixed his spectacles more firmly on his nose. "Well then, madam," he said. "I believe the best thing to do is to tell you a bedtime story."

"Oh, please do," said Irene, who was particularly fond of bedtime stories.

"I shall tell you about the first visitor who comes to your room at night," said the fat bug.

"Visitors?" said Irene. "I have visitors? Here, in my bedroom?"

**Douglas Evans**

“You have many visitors, my dear,”  
said Bug Two.

“Our nightly schedule is often fully  
booked, Irene,” said Bug Three.

“It is? I do?” said Irene. “Like *who*?”

“Of course, your first visitor is always  
the Sandman,” said Bug One.

“The *Sandman*?” Irene echoed. “Mercy  
me.”

All this while, the enormous moon  
continued to crawl across the bedroom  
window. The moonbeam shone upon the  
bedbugs like a spotlight. Their bodies  
shimmered.

Irene studied these ugly bugs sitting so  
close to her nose: plump Bug One, who kept  
fingering his wire-rimmed glasses and  
pulling his walrus mustache; Bug Two, with  
his silly white wig; and tall, slim Bug Three,

## **Bedbugs**

still stroking his bushy black beard.

Irene nodded. Yes, she was convinced. These bedbugs were not going to bite her after all.