Tommy and the Bedbugs

A Christmas Adventure



Benedict John

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Chapter 1

Tommy yawned. Fresh out of a hot bath, and cosseted in his warm dressing gown, he felt distinctly contented.

‘Come on you,’ said Tommy’s Mum, ‘Let’s have you off to bed.’ She kissed him on the forehead.

‘Oh, Mum!’ squealed Tommy with embarrassment. He took off his dressing gown and, dressed in his pyjamas, took a running jump and landed on his bed. This was a habit of his, as he was always wary of the large black shadow that lurked beneath the bed. He always imagined that if he got too close, something might reach out and grab his leg as he got in. Of course he knew that nothing really lived under there, but then again you can never be too sure about these things. Deciding not to take any chances, he had perfected his jump over many years, to the point where he could spin sideways through the air, to land perfectly aligned in bed.



‘Night-night. Don’t let the bedbugs bite,’ laughed Tommy’s Mum, as she turned off the light and closed the bedroom door.

Tommy watched the crack of light from under the door, and heard his Mum’s footsteps receding down the stairs, to join the sound of his Dad’s voice wafting up from the living room.

As his eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, and as the trees outside his window threw dancing shapes against the curtains, Tommy thought about his day. Not a bad day, all told, for today was possibly the most exciting date on any nine-year-old’s calendar. Today was Christmas Eve, and as the moon began to glow and as the clouds hurried home across the winter sky, children the length and breadth of the country lay in bed unable to sleep for the eager anticipation of what presents and merriment were to come tomorrow.

Tommy had spent most of the frosty afternoon with his best friend Dan, playing and chatting in the small garden at the back of No.2 Prentice Street which had been Tommy’s home for as long as he could remember.

‘What are you getting for Christmas?’ inquired Tommy as he expertly drove a large Tonka truck through the rose beds.

‘Dunno really, but I hope it’s a truck like yours, coz then we could both play and we wouldn’t have to share,’ said Dan looking on wistfully at Tommy’s truck.

‘Oh this old thing’s boring,’ scoffed Tommy. ‘I’ve had it for a year now. I want that remote-controlled car in the window of Barker’s!’

Ahh...Barker’s - both boys daydreamed for a second about the scale model shop on the high street, which had become a Mecca for Tommy and Dan. Every day on the walk home from school, they would stop and gaze in the window at the boxes of model aircraft, stately ships, and the vast train set that snaked its way around the window display.

Above all, though, the boys found themselves captivated by the generous selection of 1/12th scale remote- controlled cars. There were Ferraris, Jaguars, even articulated lorries until, one frosty afternoon in late November, the car to end all cars appeared in the window. It was a flame-red Lamborghini Countach, correct in every detail with full suspension and pop-up lights that actually worked! The boys' eyes had eagerly devoured every inch of the car, from its sparkling chrome wheels to its swing-wing doors, awesome spoiler and four exhaust pipes at the back. It was the stuff of dreams, and Tommy had set his heart on it.



Dan however did not even bother to dream, and instead gazed forlornly at the price tag. His father had sadly passed away when Dan was a toddler and, since then, his mother had struggled to maintain a modest existence on a small income. Dan knew that to get a present this expensive would take nothing short of a miracle.

'Don't worry Dan, 'coz when I get the car I'll let you play with my old truck.'

‘Cheers’, said Dan with a hint of sarcasm and annoyance. At times like this he envied Tommy and resented his constant bragging about his latest toy. He wasn’t a bad sort, Tommy, but he was definitely spoilt, and he needed to be taken down a peg or two every now and then. ‘Anyhow,’ continued Dan, ‘You can’t be sure you’re going to get that car for Christmas.’

‘Oh it’s definitely in the bag,’ said Tommy, ‘and if I don’t get it I’ll be very annoyed!’

Indeed, Tommy had spent the past few weeks pestering his poor parents, dropping hints like hot bricks, until they were surely in no doubt as to what he wanted for Christmas.

‘Well, if you ask me’ said Dan tersely ‘you should be grateful for whatever you get!’

But it was no use, as Tommy was lost in the daydream, and in his mind the car was already his.

Now, lying in bed and staring at the ceiling, the knot of excitement in his stomach was making sleep impossible. As the time dragged on, the minutes turning to hours, he heard the sounds of his parents going to bed, and Tommy began to wonder if time had actually stopped altogether.

Away in the distance he heard the faint chimes of the village church bells - half past ten. The night seemed to stretch on forever.

‘At this rate’ thought Tommy grimly ‘Christmas will never even get here.’ Gradually, though, a silence descended over the house as, outside, cotton wool flakes of snow began to float down over Prentice Street.

For the next hour or so Tommy tossed and turned in his bed trying to get comfortable, but sleep was still eluding him. All he could think

about was the pile of presents under the tree in the living room and whether the precious car was amongst them.

‘This is no good,’ thought Tommy. ‘I’ve got to sneak a peek under the tree - then I might stand a chance of getting some sleep. Anyway’, he reasoned, glancing at his bedside clock, ‘it’s nearly midnight, so technically it’s almost Christmas now!’

Having absolved himself of any moral responsibility he gingerly edged his way out of bed, slipped on his dressing gown, and gently opened his bedroom door on to the landing at the top of the stairs. Slowly and carefully, so as not to make any noise, he began to creep along the landing, passing his parents’ door from behind which the muffled sounds of snoring could be heard.

Suddenly the floorboard underfoot let out a groaning creak and Tommy froze, his heart pounding wildly. The snoring had stopped! Had he woken his parents? For Tommy knew that if they found him ‘sneaking a peek’ there would be hell to pay!



He stood stock still like a statue for a full minute listening intently before the sound of the snoring drifted out once more from under the door. ‘Phew!’ thought Tommy, as he wiped away imaginary beads of sweat from his brow, and cautiously made his way down the stairs into the living room. The room was lit only by the faint glow of dying embers in the fireplace bathing the Christmas tree in a fairy-tale light. Beneath the tree was a mountain of presents, which threw its shadow halfway across the floor.



‘Oh crikey’, mused Tommy, ‘I’m never going to be able to find it amongst this lot.’ He kneeled at the foot of the present mountain and began to gently lift off the boxes, taking care to remember in which order they had to go back. After five or six of the smaller presents had been removed he came to a large box underneath, and the nametag on top read ‘To Tommy with love from Mum and Dad.’

Tommy began to expertly peel the sticky tape on one edge - slowly, so as not to rip the paper - and as he folded back one side, there it was! The remote controlled Lamborghini in flame red, just like the one in the shop window! Tommy's hand was trembling with excitement as he looked at the box. 'Batteries included!' screamed the label, as the transparent box top revealed tantalising glimpses of the gleaming car within.

Just then, a stern voice in Tommy's head said:

'Right, you've had a look - now get on back to bed before you get caught!' The voice was speaking common sense and Tommy knew full well that if he got caught the consequences would be dire. But temptation had set in and Tommy was dying to give the car a little spin.

'After all,' he thought 'I've already seen my present - what harm could come from giving it a little go? Just a test run to make sure it's all working properly,' he pleaded with his conscience. His conscience was not amused. Tommy stood agonising for a full five minutes

'Oh come on!' he thought. 'It'll be strictly for research purposes only - promise I won't have any actual fun!'

The temptation was too great and, grasping the box with both hands, Tommy began a slow tiptoed ascent of the stairs back up to his bedroom, skilfully avoiding the second- to-last step, which had creaked earlier. He carefully edged his way along the skirting boards of the top landing, scarcely allowing himself to breathe until, finally, he was safely back inside the confines of his room.

He flicked on his bedside lamp and squinted as his eyes adjusted to the light, hands shaking with anticipation as he gingerly lifted the car from its new box. 'Wow!' he thought as his gaze fully appreciated the sleek lines of the Lamborghini. The half-light of his lamp threw shards of reflected light from the chrome wheels and exhaust pipes,

and the sleek bodywork glowered an aggressive fire-red. This was truly a work of art and something to behold! He reached inside the box to find the batteries, flipping the car over to place them in the slot beneath, remembering to put two batteries into the controller. Then, ever so gently he put the car down on the carpet and powered it up.



The retractable lights sprang up, emerging from the bonnet to shine their powerful beams ahead of the car. Tommy slowly pushed the joystick forwards and the car rumbled into action, gently at first, then faster as he got a feel for the controls. Within a few minutes he was speeding expertly around the various obstacles on his bedroom floor - powering through corners and braking at the last minute to try and squeeze every drop of performance from the car.

Gradually Tommy started to relax and enjoy himself, getting lost in the fun of the moment.

‘I want to see how fast this thing can go in a straight line’, he thought recklessly, as he lined up the car to face him at the far end of his room. With the lights blazing he let rip, pushing the joystick as far forward as it would go. The wheels spun, digging into the carpet and the engine growled as the car rocketed towards him

Just then Tommy heard a sound from outside his bedroom. It was the unmistakable creak of his parents’ door! ‘Crikey!’ he thought ‘I must be making a racket!’ He panicked and, with the car still hurtling towards his bed he threw the controller down and dived across the bed to switch off the lamp. THUMP! The car sped straight under the bed, connecting with the wall behind.



Tommy lay stock-still and silent, his heart pounding in his chest, squinting in the darkness to read the time on his bedside clock. The LEDs glowed 11.55. For a full five minutes he must have lain there, convinced that he was in deep trouble, when at last he heard the

sound of the bathroom door closing, followed by the door of his parents' bedroom. He let out a long breath like a deflating tyre:

'Phew!' he murmured to himself 'that was a close one! I'd better get this thing packaged up and back under the tree before my luck runs out.'

Tommy timidly leaned over the edge of his bed and craned his neck to try and spot the car in the blackness. But it was no good - it was way too dark, and he dare not turn the light on in case his parents were still awake.

He considered the situation. It was widely believed by Tommy, his little sister, and all of their friends that if you dropped anything behind your bed, it must be retrieved before too long 'or else the Beddy-Monsters will have it', as his little sister would say. Although no one had ever seen or heard these so-called Beddy-Monsters, things just seemed to disappear behind there, never to be seen again. Now Tommy didn't mind the loss of the odd bit of Lego or a Kinder Egg toy, but this was a serious piece of kit, and it had to be retrieved at all costs. Above all he dared not even think of the trouble he would be in if his little escapade was discovered by his parents.

'There's nothing for it', he muttered, 'I'll have to go under!'

Mustering up all his strength and bravery, Tommy clambered onto the floor and slowly extended his arm underneath his bed, trying not to think of what might be lurking in the darkness beyond. He stretched as far as he could, but could feel nothing and so he pushed himself further and further until half of his body was submerged beneath the bed. 'This is impossible' he thought 'I must be able to feel the car somewhere' as he continued to wriggle and contort himself to get even further under.

All of a sudden he felt a strange sensation as if the floor was melting

away beneath him! He began to feel a numbness spreading through his arms and legs. The air turned cold and he felt as if he was falling and being pulled by a force far stronger than he - he tried to pull back, but found himself powerless. He just kept falling and falling until he finally hit the cold ground with a painful thud and - for just a moment - he passed out.



The adventure continues in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Tommy was dazed for a few seconds before he started to look around him. Only there was nothing to see: nothing in front; nothing to the sides; and nothing above or behind - only an inky blackness all around, as though someone had thrown a thick blanket over the world. Except this blanket gave no warmth and Tommy shivered - it felt as though he were outside and the ground beneath his hands and belly felt distinctly cold and damp. He struggled to his feet and found, to his utter amazement, that he could stand fully upright!



‘This is crazy’ Tommy felt his heart racing, ‘I’m supposed to be under my bed!’ He took a step forward and felt the crunch of what felt like

fresh powdery snow beneath his slippers. A sense of panic started to grip him.

‘This is not right’, he thought ‘I’ve got to get out of here now before I run into some serious trouble!’ He turned to face the way he had come and edged his way gingerly back through the darkness, hands outstretched in front of him like a sleepwalker. But there was nothing - the blackness seemed to stretch on forever.

Just when he thought things could get no worse Tommy suddenly felt all the hairs on the back of his neck stand to attention and a shiver run through him - he had the strong sensation that he was not alone!

As Tommy shuffled forward slowly he could hear someone else’s shuffling feet out there in the darkness. Tommy stopped and stood stock still for a few seconds. The shuffling stopped. Tommy inched forward again…and again he heard the shuffling. Just then he heard the snap of a twig breaking followed by a hoarse ‘Shhhhh!!!’ from somewhere behind. That was it - Tommy could take no more. What little bravery there was left in him disappeared as he turned and fled, running blindly through the blackness, arms flailing wildly in front of him.



He had managed about a dozen sprinting paces before colliding, painfully, with something solid but soft and furry. The sturdy blob connected squarely with Tommy's midriff, knocking the wind out of him and felling him to the ground.

'Yeoooowch!' cried the blob 'My giddy aunt! You've squashed my little toe!'

Whilst Tommy lay struggling for breath on the ground he heard another voice - more timid than the first - coming from behind him:

'Shut up Iggy!' said the voice in a stage whisper 'you'll give us all away!'

'Oh thanks!' replied the blob, 'Now he knows my name. Why don't you just read out my address and postcode while you're at it!'

To his utter amazement Tommy then heard a third voice behind him - this time calmer and more authoritative:

'Now you two - bickering isn't going to sort this out.'

This time it was Tommy's turn to speak. Still lying on the ground and trying to catch his breath, his voice was frail and faltering with fright.

'Wha..er..who are you people?' he croaked, 'where am I? What's happening to me?' His voice tailed off as tears welled up in his eyes. 'I want to get back to my bed,' he sobbed.

'Hey there' comforted the third voice, in kindly tones; 'We're not going to hurt you.'

Tommy turned slowly to face the voice and saw a smouldering glow growing from within the dark. The glow grew brighter and started to throw a warm light on the surroundings. As the light began to burn more fiercely Tommy could barely believe what he was starting to see. The light was emitting from a large over-fed glow-worm, which languished lazily in the bottom of an old Victorian wrought iron

lantern. The lantern was being held aloft by what could only be described as a two-and-a-half-foot mound of fur with eyes.

‘My name is Lou’ said the mound of fur in a warm friendly voice with a hint of a Scottish accent, and Tommy could just about make out a hand from within the fur, outstretched towards him. Tommy hesitated for a few seconds before timidly meeting the hand with his own, to be clasped by a warm, generous handshake.

‘Tommy’ said Tommy, nervously.

‘This is Ziggy’ Lou motioned to a slightly shier, but equally furry creature to the right of Tommy.

‘Hello’ said Tommy, to which Ziggy gave a sheepish smile.

‘Sorry to have scared you back there’ Ziggy muttered softly, whilst his toe traced self-conscious circles in the ground.

‘Oh let’s all pat each other on the back, why not! Are you all forgetting I need hospital treatment over here?’

Tommy spun round to see the third furry mound sitting on the ground, indignantly nursing a swollen toe.



‘And this,’ said Lou ‘is Iggy.’

‘He’s broken my toe!’ exclaimed Iggy - more from hurt pride than from any real pain. ‘My giddy aunt - I think I’m going to pass out!’ he wore an expression on his face of exaggerated pain for full theatrical effect.

‘Come on now’ said Lou, ‘you’re going to be just fine. Now you know it was an accident - you scared the poor lad half to death!’

‘I’m sorry’ Iggy grudgingly apologised to Tommy, ‘but that really hurt!’

‘I’m sorry too’ Tommy returned, ‘I was really, really scared. Where am I? And how am I going to get back to my bed?’ The panic was rising in Tommy’s voice again, ‘And who..or what are you people?’

Lou gave a long sigh.

‘You’d better sit down over here.’ In the dim light he gestured to a log next to him, which appeared to be sitting in a shallow dusting of snow.

‘Am I outside?’ asked Tommy ‘it’s awfully cold’

‘Son,’ Lou started, ‘You’re in the Twilight Zone and we are the Bedbugs. You’re not supposed to be here, but somehow the door was left open beneath your bed and you fell into our world. And I’ve got a fairly good idea who left that door open.’ Lou glared sternly at Iggy.

‘Oh, that’s right,’ blurted Iggy, ‘blame the whole debacle on me. I get a broken toe and all the blame. There’s just no justice around here!’ he tailed off, muttering grumpily.

Tommy rounded on Lou again: ‘Well what are you doing here, and what’s this ‘world beneath my bed’?’ he inquired.

‘The Twilight Zone is our world. Although we occupy the same planet as you, we live in a different dimension – you can’t see us and we can’t see you. Well - most of the time, anyway. Things that are

fantasies in your world exist in our world – things like fairies, elves and, of course, bedbugs. Occasionally these things stray into your world, but only very rarely does a human being make it over to our world.'

'But what were you doing beneath my bed, then?' demanded Tommy.

'We work for a company called Lucas Toy Recycling Inc.,' Lou started to explain. 'Basically son, we're in the recycling business. The job we do for Mr Lucas is to collect all the unwanted toys that have been left to gather dust under the beds of every child, the length and breadth of the country. Under every bed is a secret door to our world. Every now and then we come along, open the door, and all the forgotten toys that have piled up under the bed fall straight into these sacks here.' He nodded to several large, lumpy sacks on the ground behind the log. 'We then take those toys all the way back to Mr Lucas' sorting office, and we get paid according to how many toys we've collected.'

'What happens to the toys after you've dropped them off?' asked Tommy.

'Don't know, don't care.' said Iggy. 'Mr Lucas' warehouse is off-limits to us bedbugs. It's all very hush-hush and top-secret. We get paid to collect the toys, and that's all that concerns us. What happens to them after that is a mystery – no one we know has ever been allowed into the warehouse.'

'Well…' corrected Lou, 'we don't know exactly what happens to the toys, but it's pretty obvious to us that they get shipped out and resold. Nothing's wasted, everything is recycled – keeps the planet tidy!' he finished, proudly.

'Yep,' said Ziggy, 'our aim is to make good use of the old toys that children don't want any more, instead of wasting valuable energy on manufacturing new ones.'

‘But this is crazy’ said Tommy ‘my remote controlled car was brand new! In fact my parents will be expecting me to be unwrapping it for the first time in the morning, and if I’m not back with that car safely under the tree there’ll be hell to pay!’ Tommy’s voice became more pleading as he started to realise the full extent of the trouble he was in. ‘Can’t you just give the car back and I’ll find my own way home?’ he pleaded desperately.

‘I’m afraid not, son’ Lou shook his head gravely. ‘These bags,’ he gestured behind him ‘are what’s called Inversion Bags. They’re much, much bigger on the inside than on the outside. Each bag contains thousands of toys, and in order to retrieve the contents, each bag has to be processed and re-inverted back at the Warehouse.’



‘Well then I’ll have to go home without the car and just face up to my parents. I just want to get back to my bed.’ Tommy shivered. Again Lou shook his head:

‘Sorry Tommy, but you are currently locked outside your own world. The only way back is through your bed-door. The bed-doors are guarded by the bed lice, whose job it is to ensure that no one gets through without the correct authority. They take their job very seriously. In order to pass the wrong way through a bed-door you must first possess a bed license, and these are issued only by Mr Lucas at his warehouse. I am afraid, young Tommy, that there’s only one person who can help you.’ he concluded with an air of final resignation.

‘No!’ chorused Iggy and Ziggy ‘we can’t take him back to Mr Lucas - we’ll all be for the high-jump!’ begged Iggy.

‘Bang goes my Christmas bonus,’ sighed Ziggy.

‘Oh Ziggy - you’re such a goody-two-shoes’ snapped Iggy. ‘Bang goes my Christmas bonus!’ he mocked in a comedy high-pitched voice.

‘Oh shut up Iggy’ mumbled Ziggy, ‘I’ve really had enough of you tonight!’

‘Now, now fellas’ Lou’s calming tones came again, ‘I think we’ve got more pressing problems here than a few Christmas bonuses - we’ve got to help this lad get home.’

‘And how do you suggest we do that?’ demanded Iggy; ‘We can’t sneak him back through the bed-door without a bed license.’

‘Sorry fellas’ sighed Lou, ‘but we can’t sort this one out ourselves. It’s time to face the music. And we need to get a warm coat and a pair of shoes on Tommy - he’s freezing cold and we’ve got a long journey ahead of us.’ he finished sombrely.

‘Oh my giddy aunt!’ moaned Iggy

‘That’s brilliant Iggy! Your great aunt lives somewhere nearby.’ Lou exclaimed triumphantly. ‘She’ll have some warm clothes!’

‘Oh great!’ grumbled Iggy ‘now I’m in trouble with my family. This Christmas Eve just gets better and better!’ he tailed off sarcastically. ‘Anyway’ he pleaded ‘I don’t even know the way from here, and unless any of you have suddenly developed the ability to see in the dark…’

‘No,’ interrupted Ziggy ‘but I know someone who can! We need Charles!’

‘And who might Charles be?’ Tommy asked timidly.

Before Ziggy had time to explain further there came the sound of wings beating through the air from the treetops above and, with an off-key ‘Hoot!’ a large owl came bursting out of the darkness, attempted to land and went skidding across the snow and headlong into the log. The owl sat up, amongst giggles and smirks from the other four and, shaking off a shower of powdery snow announced himself in well spoken tones:

‘Charles Heatherington-Fitzgerald, at your service - someone called my name?’ he extended an elegant wing tip ingratiatingly.



‘You’ll have to forgive Charles’ laughed Iggy, ‘he’s never been the sharpest tool in the box.’

‘That’s so unfair’ Charles defended ‘It’s not my fault’ He continued, huffily: ‘You know I suffer from insomnia - I just can’t seem to get to sleep at night and yet I can’t stay awake during the day. It’s playing havoc with my flying skills!’

At this, the assembled throng burst out laughing, and Iggy turned to Lou, wiping the tears from his eyes:

‘Tell him Lou’ he chortled, as Lou tried to keep a straight face.

‘Charles’ began Lou ‘you are an Owl - you’re supposed to be nocturnal. That means you sleep during the daylight hours.’

‘Oh dear,’ mumbled Charles. ‘there goes my social life!’

‘What social life!’ howled Iggy, unable to contain himself any longer.

At this Charles peered down his beak, fixing Iggy with a disapproving stare: ‘Do you want me to show you the way to your aunt’s house or not, young man? Because I can happily be on my way - I’ve got things to do and people to see, you know!’

Lou hastily interjected:

‘We would be very grateful for your help Charles, thank you.’ He silenced Iggy who was chuffing like a steam train in his attempts to not laugh out loud.

‘Yeah, yeah - keep your feathers on, Charlie’ giggled Iggy.

‘Iggy - do you have to be so rude!’ scolded Ziggy

‘Oh shut up Ziggy!’ retorted Iggy.

Lou broke in: ‘I suggest we all keep our cool and get going as quickly as we can before young Tommy gets frostbite!’

‘Well then, if you would care to follow meeee’ hooted Charles, and with a graceful flap of his generous wings he rose up through the treetops above.

Tommy started to become acutely aware of the cold snow seeping through the soles of his slippers and he shivered involuntarily. Turning to look behind him he could just about make out the distant glow of the streetlights from his home village of Lavenham in the valley below, and suddenly all he could think about was the warmth and safety of his bed.

‘How on earth did I get into this mess?’ he muttered.

‘You think you’ve got problems’ said Ziggy ‘I had plans for that Christmas bonus!’

‘Oh do grow up Ziggy!’ said Iggy.

‘You grow up!’ pouted Ziggy

‘Quiet down - the pair of you!’ countered Lou sternly ‘and don’t lose sight of that owl!’

And so, with Charles elegantly silhouetted against the full moon and the night sky, the rag-taggle bunch comprising the three furry bedbugs and one small boy silently fell into line behind, making a strange sight and throwing long shadows across the cold winter landscape.



The adventure continues in Chapter 3.

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