

# My home is home to many

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Mario Stone

*written @ Saint Matthew's House, homeless shelter in Collier County, Florida*

Here time is sharp, cuts lights  
out at ten as the lingering chatter dies down  
like gossip found out.  
Music persists  
but louder than headphones are the snores  
and sharper than time are the coughs  
sporadically torn from  
dry,  
jagged  
throats and wet  
lungs.

It's half past two  
and a hack of a cough is killed  
in a pillow—a snuffle blips,  
the night's most humble sound,  
and the bite on my thigh  
the loudest by far. Jealous,  
the bites on my arms scream  
to the bites on my calves  
and the bites on my ankles,  
a choir of fire. Nails  
tearing skin add to the din,  
and so it goes on—  
cough itch scratch itch  
itch cough itch scratch.  
Itch.  
Itch.

Sleep's no escape  
as I wake to find  
the black bed  
bugs scurrying

*My home is home to many*

bloated  
off me.

My nose curls  
as I  
jab  
and feel  
them crush  
beneath my disgust  
to red  
fetid memories  
on white sheets.

Relax

I take a deep breath  
and let myself feel  
my shirt shifting on my skin,  
the night's only caress  
except for my pen.