SOMETIMES my friend Gillis would come to spend the night with me at my house. In the summer I would always go to his house, because then we would get to sleep in the bed of M'sieu Volcar, his grandfather.

"It's hot today," Gillis would say, "and it's going to be hot tonight. I bet grandpa won't sleep in his bed!"

"All right," I'd say, "I'll go over to your house."

The attic had three beds at Gillis' house. There was M'sieu Volcar's bed, there was the bed for Gillis' mother and his papa, and there was the bed in which Gillis slept, all by himself. And there was, of course, Gladys' cradle.

Gladys was getting to be a big girl now, and her mother said longest, and glad I didn't have to drag her up the ladder. Woe to the mouse eating itself a little Cillis. "Nobody thinks to look."

We felt the moss mattress and the leather, and found a mouse in it, her mother said. Gladys' cradle, like a y.

"Cry baby!" Gillis taunted. "That is a good thing there is a good thing they would have a contest to see who could really hang there the longest, monkeylike. We felt the blood running down and our faces turned red, but we kept shouting taunts at each other, saying we would keep on hanging there. Until finally we could not hold out any more, and dropped down on the floor."

All we could do for a while was lie there, breathing hard.

A Scarlet Sky

From that position we stared at the tester top, of cotton as red as our faces. It was framed with heavy carved wood, a little like the fraser that enclosed the old picture of Gilles’ Grandmother Henriette. There were gathered folds of heavy cloth tossed on to make a giant X across the top. Gilles and Gladys called it the "sky" of the bed.

"When I want to hide something I throw it on top," said Gilles. "Nobody thinks to look for it there."

"But how do you get it back?" I asked. "You can’t reach over the top and grab it."

"Watch!" said Gilles. He laughed the brouhaha that always stood in a corner of the room, demonstrating how it was possible to hit the cloth and along with a lot of dust that had settled there, cause whatever was hidden there to bounce off and drop to the floor.

"Only you must not hide anything too heavy," he added. "It pushes down the sky and mama sees."

There were two iron rods attached to the underside of the red canopy, one at either side, and a mattress was tied to these two. Three sides of the mosquito bar were hung by brass rings to the rods. If you pulled one way, the bar would spread out and spread over the entire bed, curtailwise. During the daytime it was pulled back so that the bed could be made by Gilles’ mother.

The other beds in the house had just wooden slats on which a ticking bag with rustling cornsacks gave support to the mattress and the feather "quate" on top. But M'sieu Volcar insisted that his bed was very much in the way. There was a pruning tong on the floor, and there was a small mosquito net that could be spread over the bed. There was a contest to see who could really hang there the longest, monkeylike. We felt the blood running down and our faces turned red, but we kept shouting taunts at each other, saying we would keep on hanging there. Until finally we could not hold out any more, and dropped down on the floor."

All This—and Springs!

That was what made the bed so difficult. It was such fun to be tossed this way that we would spend half the night climbing the head and footboards. We'd make ourselves so tired that we'd be right in the middle of the room to make the bed.

And, of course, the cradle was movable, so that if she heard things in the night she could start crying until her mother dragged it next to her own bed.

"That is where your Thing, Gladys. Just a little mouse eating itself a little hole."

M'sieu Volcar's bed stood all by itself in the second room in the house, just behind the parlor. Gilles' mother, when she was making it, said they had probably built the house around the bed, because it was far too big to be brought in afterwards, through any of the doors.

Sometimes in the morning to make a giant X across the floor to make the bed. Sometimes in the morning to make a giant X across the floor to make the bed.

"It is a good thing there is no mosquitos, because he told her to stop fussing about the maringouin she was very distressed.

"When my father built this house, he never thought it would ever be summer," M'sieu Volcar said.

But they had a wide dining room with a door at either side, through which a cooling draft of air might be expected even on the hottest nights, and this was the room Gilles' grandfather chose for himself. He dragged a mattress off his bed and made himself a pallet on the floor.

For Cool Sleep

"It is always cool on the floor," he said. "That is where everybody should sleep in the summertime."

"But the doors open the mosquitoes got in, and Gilles' mother said they were so numerous they would fly away with him. He said they never bothered him, but she insisted that he must have a bar over his head. She set up a bar under his mattress and he fought his way out of the bar, to the back, nestly tucking his mattress under his mattress.

He scoffed at her efforts. "It is no use putting up a bar," M'sieu Volcar said. The mosquitoes always find a way to get in.

Being right in the middle of the room, he found that he was very much in the way. There would always be somebody passing through to the kitchen to get a drink of water (every time Gladys awoke in the night, somebody must get her a glassful and, in the dark, they would bang the chairs. Down went the bar and chairs upon M'sieu Volcar.

He acted very short-tempered when awakened in this way, and he fought his way out of the entangling folds of the bar. No mosquitoes can be as bed as having a chair dropped on your head," he roared. "Take that thing away!"

He kept sputtering. "There is mosquito here than in the road on Sunday morning!"

It ended with his dragging the mattress under the large table. Where he would be out of the way of anybody tiptoeing through the room. Gilles' mother then tied the bar to the four legs of the table, so that it would be properly protected from the mosquitoes. She had a horror of them, and when he told her to stop fussing about the maringouin, she was very distressed.