

SLEEPING WITH MY ALLERGY

Weston Wei



This is a collaboration between the University of Plymouth,
the Association Of Illustrators World Illustration Awards
2023, The Directory of Illustration
and UNESCO Creative Cities Network.



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W!A



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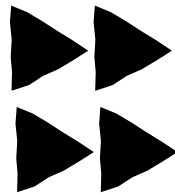
Devised by: Anna Cohn Orchard & Ashley Potter

There is an intimate relationship between words and pictures
in the telling of narratives and the recording of facts and fictions.
The best relationships are supportive and complimentary.

In the creative industries, the normal practice is that a writer produces an article or story and then an illustrator is commissioned to illustrate the text.

We wanted to reverse that practice and offer the illustration
Sleeping With My Allergy by Weston Wei
to writers from several UNESCO Cities of Literature
to explore how they would respond to a particular visual catalyst.

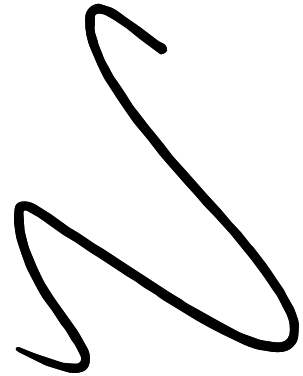
We hope you enjoy the results and feel inspired to write your own...



CAKES AND PILLS

P.J. Reed

I went to a coffee shop with friends,
all over forty, celebrating nothing
but needing something. Cream
cakes and scones tempted with
tasty calorific abandon. I chose
a chocolate brownie - gluten-free,
egg-free, and relatively taste-free too.
Its packet looked more edible
as it thudded against my plate.
Amy, the asthma nurse, would
have been proud, I thought, as
later I lay on my allergen-free bed,
picking brownie from my teeth.
Happily cuddling Rupert, ginger
rather rotund and slightly smelly,
he panted and scratched -
fur flying, me coughing,
eyes watering, chest tightening,
allergy pill popping and Amy
querying but me denying.
No pets in the bedroom is
the golden allergy rule but
what happens in the bedroom
stays in the bedroom and nurse
Amy doesn't need to know.



P.J. Reed is an award-winning, multi-genre author, poet, and playwright with books ranging from high fantasy to haiku.

Her writing is eclectic and never dull. She is an author, historian, and archaeologist by trade.

P.J. lives in Devon, England with her two daughters & Rupert, the ginger rescue dog and is normally found tapping away on her computer in a darkened corner of a coffee shop.x

SLEEPING WITH MY ALLERGIES

Shoba Dewey Chugani

At dawn I love the whisper of the breeze,
the chatter of the birds as they stir in their nests,
the wet grassy fragrance, I breathe in deep,
until those things in camouflage,
They jump a ride on the cool fresh air, and they play
I feel a tease, a tickle, I snuggle close to the warmth
beside me deep in slumber,
but those things, they jaunt on the scent of cloves that
linger on cloth,
finding their way up close to my nose,
another tease, another tickle, then ease, a sigh of relief!

Once amidst evening gowns and black suits,
elegant fragrances thick in the grand ballroom,
as if that was a hint for them to come out and play,
they hopped onto molecules of lavish perfumes and
colognes,
collided with each other like boom-boom cars,
my olfactory senses triggered to a menacing scale of 9.9,
and I burst out for what seemed like an eternity.

Now a waft of cool air glides around me,
touching my bare face, they are at play again.
I sniffle, I brace myself, I couldn't help the reflex,
like a runaway bullet train my sneeze fest rolls,
dead-focused on its tracks to infinity.

A gentle voice breaks the repertoire, asks if I am okay.
Nose in kleenex, I mumble I'm fine.
I pull my blanket over my head, and I lay there until I feel
them quiet down,

Shoba Dewey Chugani is a children's book writer. "Janggan Dragon Kite", a finalist for the Scholastic Picture Book Awards, was published in 2018. 'Arai and the Tall Grass' was listed under the UN SDG Book Club in Singapore. It was also used as enrichment during the MoE's study-from-home program. In her capacity as early childhood specialist she wrote several books on education. Her short stories have also been published in Jakarta Post.

SUBMERGED

Elle Jacobson

As Apollo's light begins to diminish
soft hues of pink and peach fade
against stains of indigo and violet.
With tired eyes and a tired mind,
I await to fall deep in slumber.

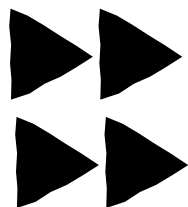
I lie back and begin to drift,
a gondola is gliding me through the city on stilts.
The hand of Morpheus guides me
and the deeper I sleep
the deeper I descend
swimming through emerald waves.

My fingertips brush the seabed
sand running through my
hands quicker than an
hourglass.
Then I sense them.

My eyes open. They are watching me.
Some float in the air I breathe
while others lie by my feet, like seaweed and
kelp, oscillating to the waves of my mind.

My eyes close again.
I submerge my mind
back to the ocean,
the rhythmic waves
hushing my thoughts
to their gentle lullaby.

Elle Jacobson is the Chair of Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature's Youth Advisory Board. She graduated with a degree in Creative Writing from Nottingham Trent University in 2023 and has previously been published in Seaglass Lit, The Nottingham Horror Collective and Firefly Archives.



NIGHTLY BATTLES

Rizal Iwan

My allergies only come to me in my dreams, night after night after night. Going to bed is a nightly ritual of preparing for battle. A box of tissues, a comfy night sweater, a heavy blanket, and a dwindling supply of courage.

I am never sure what they are for — if the tissues are for my snots or tears, if the sweater is an artificial thick skin, or if the blanket is a bullet-proof armor with too many holes on it. One thing I am sure about is I have to march on to the battlefield. Because who can survive without sleep?

The allergies come in all shapes and sizes. Different ones every night, like shape-shifting demons. They are vengeful residues from my waking hours, tracking me down and holding me accountable.

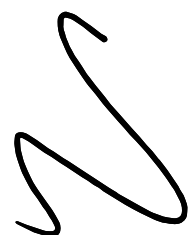
The ice cream I dropped when I was eight. The year I spent away from my dog, who is no longer with me. The promise to visit my ailing mother that I failed to keep two years ago. The shrink appointment I skipped last week. The nods and head-tilts I push deep inside my pocket. The could-have-beens. The would-have-beens.

The nevers and maybes. Why are they so ugly when they become tangible? Prickly, scheming, and poisonous.

Each battle always feels like it lasts the whole night, although I never sleep more than three hours a day. I always wake up with a start, scratching the phantom itches on my arms, or legs, or face. The allergies are gone. The battlefield empty. For now. And I drag myself out of bed to go through another day, dazed and dreamlike, deceptively allergy-free.

Rizal Iwan is a writer living in Jakarta. His short stories were published in national media such as The Jakarta Post, and several anthology books. His newest work is an award-nominated children's book series entitled 'Creepy Case Club'. Rizal is also active in theater.

In addition to being an actor, he wrote a play that became one of the winners in the Jakarta Arts Council's Playwriting Competition (2022).



SLEEPING WITH MY ALLERGIES

Beau Windon

Stars leak from the OHpenings in my bod-e as if I'm not a husk of what I wish I was
as if my MOB had not been denied[i cried] the right to a say in our own live\$
as if others care—d to lO_Ok to me for beautee [[instead of a political fOOTball]]
as if I had the \$trength to pull *myself* out of the darkness [[I AM 2 week 4 fOOTball]]
when the darkness is ALL-consuming and chO-King
joKing about its hold on me with the privileged \$ettlers reaping rewards
for how thoroughly its tendrils have penetrated every fibre of my being and my past and my
present and my future and my few chur.

That's slang from my mum which isn't well known in this c/p/ity where I "live" but my dad's
MOB have started to sea our ways penet—{I}rate the regular rhythms of \$ociety and

I am Proud

no matter how much di\$respect is heaped on me by the people that l e a d
; sometimes I one-durr How I will ever WAKE UP in the mo(u)rning knowing I am doomed
to follow the marching orders of the (d)elite few that *think* they *think* — better than me
I want to be a vac-zine

w

a brief paperbound reprieve from a world turned mad with p[ow='()]er—
I am a hotel room that is run—down, but comfy
a hug from a sparkling c l e a n strangerrrr

Wii should all be Green Lanterns:

Super peep-ill, powered by domineering willp[ow]er and OHverACTIVE imag{e}iNATIONS.
or maybe Wii could just stay in bed

safe

without judge[me]nt . . .

Beau Windon is a neurodivergent writer of Wiradjuri descent based in Naarm (Melbourne, Australia). He writes quirky stories about quirky people and all of the dark goo slathered over his brain.

In 2023, Beau was one of the winners of Griffith Review's Emerging Voices prize. You can find out more at www.beauwindon.com

I HAD A DREAM (Why me AliGee)

Mike Ludgrove

I had a dream, of table laden, a cornucopian delight,
With exotic foods and jasmine, sweet, deep scenting with
the night.

A dream filled with earthly fruits, many now forbidden.
I cannot say quite when, or how this allergy was
bidden.

Why? Within this supine self a battle burns with rage,
Inflammation's wrath takes hold. Can someone turn
the page?

Beware, I must, this Trojan Horse, bent on conflict's
call,
My body has free rein, it seems, to hasten on my fall.
Childish myth I hear you say, hoping for Ambrosia,
Has it always been this way with me, constitutional
Dystopia?

The allergy horse has bolted of course far from tranquillity's stable,
It's then that you learn with a sigh as you turn to the small print on every
food label.

Chin up. Press on. No time to dwell. Gird up your courage, only
time will tell If the pharmacy will be your lifeboat in hell.

Tablets for this, tablets for that, some say it's all hypochondria,
Perhaps it's time to listen much more to the voice of my own
mitochondria.

A pollen release signals breach of the peace for those in thrall to the
spore. Cytokine centre stage, here comes The Macrophage! I can't even
run for the door.

Do I have to avoid overripe pears? Keep eyes peeled for stray dogs
hairs? Careful of the bread I eat, What do you mean I can't eat wheat?
Can I have Fruits de Mer avec Tourteau?

Whether real or imagined, hungry ghosts on the scavenge,
"A little you like does you good." Far more than a challenge
Of overreaction, there's a problem: What going into our
Food?



THE ENTROPY WITHIN

Helpless! Moribund, supine. I lie, bubble-chambered in my bed. All around an abounding miasm. A sea of marauding microorganisms. Sleeping, waking, sleeping. Which? There are no clear boundaries separating them. I anticipate the genesis of some terrible event, hovering in the wings like an angel of darkness. Ravening hordes of necrotic proteins salivate unapologetically when, somehow, having neither nose nor eyes, they sense themselves as being proximate to Me! Mindless emissaries of... ? **I am more than digestible matter**, I want to cry out. But the words won't articulate, remain frozen somewhere between conception and will.

Thought, separated from the moist muscular reality of vocal chords, hamstrung in voiceless paroxysm. **Am I to be denied the right of reply?** I ask. Expressions of free will trapped, as otherworldly forms, myriad in shape, colour and number, rain down upon me. And...What's this? Some have the miraculous ability to crystallise out of thin air. Then disappear as though they had never been. A quantum field of life. If life it is? A fulminating phantasm! In, out, on, off. To Be, or Not to Be. **That is no longer the question**, I hear their sardonic reply. "One and the same," insists Schrodinger's ghost, who, legend has it, found his cat alive, thankfully. Only to find himself host to a new acquaintance: allergy toward animal hair. Cat named Quan-Tom, would you believe? **Personally, I wouldn't!**

Grass pollen, Cedar worse, try not to step on Mermaid's Purse! Though I can't think why. Must be superstition. Dairy, Wheat, can't even eat meat and Vegan's been struck off the menu. Forward lines are already in place for an invasion of Immunoglobulin. Civil War. **Allergens are normally harmless**, the doctor proclaims. **The problem lies within**. All belligerents share the same camp. Me versus Me. No winners here. Cytokines mount their charge, Macrophages stampede.

Entropy consolidates its hold. Breathing more difficult. **Is that the Djinn of the final curtain I see?** No, just a cameo, enrolled from my subconscious. Simple remit: Breathe life into this delirium. Spirit of virulence, permeating into an unravelling, of Me! Warp and weft parting company. Unthreading.

Help!

Until recently I built wooden sailing craft and sailed across oceans. Sometimes serene, occasionally stormy. Out there, I found a landscape infinite in possibility, constantly changing. Where stars provide the only fixed landmarks. Often a vast blank canvas onto which the imagination paints pictures, tells stories, beautiful and otherwise. Even on moonless nights the heavens blaze with starlight, mirrored on the surface of the sea below.

I draw on those experiences, attempting to wrap them in words, hoping to reflect the magic of life, this planet. What a swim we are in.



Mary Alexandra

Shin Alex

“You won’t die because of this ... but half-dead, Gi!”

Alicia sighed. She left a couple of things on the table: some small round and oval shaped knick-knacks and an object the size of a deodorant—the life saving invention that safe me from Ergi’s smell—drew my attention. I snorted when Alicia started babbling about the money she spent.

“I’m sorry, Al! I shouldn’t have ignored.” Ergi seemed reluctant.

I couldn’t less agree with Al. Ergi was terrible. He realized only when he suffered from continuous headaches. When he couldn’t think straight and hardly could focus.

“I couldn’t stand it anymore!”

Didn’t he know? I’ve endured it for so long. Each night felt like being submerged in pond with white rocks.

I’m squeezed from outside and inside. Stuffy. Couldn’t sleep. Ergi would be awake, use mouth to breathe. And apparently, those white rocks were used tissues.

Once, when I was itchy and watery, Ergi would only prepare tissues. He made me blew so he could breathe better.

Shin Alex lives in Jakarta. She loves not only outdoor activities like hiking and climbing, but also music and reading. Inspired by her favourite readings, she started writing stories she loved.

“This is nothing. I’m fine.” Everytime.

I glanced at my friends. They also seemed annoyed. “Are you okay, Ai?”

“I’m not crying! But swollen bothers much.”

“Are you mad, Ir?” I’m worried.

“I felt like sitting in water. Only bubbling could be heard.”

Ergi would rub Eyes and pick Ears. It should be troublesome, but he ignored everything.

“Ouch!” That deodorant-sized thing was poked into me. Water sprayed from its nozzle. It sucks!

Ergi also swallowed those round and oval knick-knacks. After a couple of days, I felt better. My inside was not puffy anymore. I didn’t drown. My friends were joyful.

Al and Ergi need to care more. When Ergi kept sneezing or having stuffy me. When Eyes were swollen or Ears deafened. It was time to see professionals.

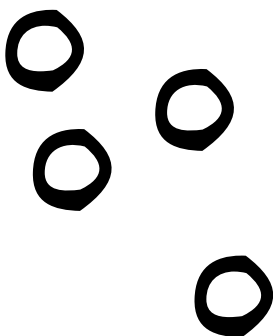
Allergy? Negligible?”

SLEEPING WITH MY ALLERGIES

Clare Helen Welsh

Meet Sniff and Drip and Sneeze and Sniffle,
Cough and Grunt and Snort and Whiffle,
Wheeze and Whistle, Whoop and Snuffle,
Pant and Gulp - a great kerfuffle!
And hidden under Huff and Puff
next to Whimper, near to Snuff,
nearby Mumble, Blow and Splutter,
the other side of Gasp and Mutter,
squashed by Rasp and Chuff and Sigh,
squished by Hiss and Itchy Eye...
is me.
Breathe.

Clare Helen Welsh is a former primary school teacher, turned children's writer. Her work is inspired by nature, her work as a mental health champion and a love of language. Clare lives in Devon with her husband, two children and a dog called Hope.



M Q Taqarrabie



Bedtime. Panda eyes. Panda eyes. Work tomorrow. Work tomorrow.
Achoo! Sore eyes. Sore eyes. Itchy nose. Itchy nose. Achoo! Sore
throat. Sore throat. Headaches. Headaches.
Can't. Get. Out. Of. Bed.
But. Can't. Get. Myself. To. Sleep.
Is there a cat somewhere? Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!
My house is clean, right? Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!
Then, I remember...
Nope. There's no cat. Yup. House is clean.
I remember before bed. What I did.
Open phone. Social media. Scroll. Scroll. Scroll.
Can't. Get. Off. Of. Phone.
Corrupted world. Achoo! Sore eyes. Itchy nose. Scroll. Scroll. Scroll.
Ignorant people. Achoo! Sore throat. Headaches. Scroll. Scroll. Scroll.
Stupid influencers. ACHOO! ACHOO! ACHOO!
From the screen. Allergens. Viruses.
Flying towards me. Greeting me. Sleeping with me.
Way deadlier than molds, dusts, pollens, and pets.
Throw phone away tomorrow. Can I?
Work tomorrow. Should I?
Real-life tomorrow. Must I?
Back to phone tomorrow. Would I?
ACHOO! ACHOO! ACHOO!

Taqarrabie (Bie) is an aspiring filmmaker, author, and storyteller who's passionate about spreading Indonesian stories and her own original stories in Bahasa Indonesia, Minangkabau, and English.

Orlando Murrin

What makes you sneeze? Grated nutmeg, ground pepper, chilli sizzling in a pan, a slurp of red wine – for me, these can all trigger a fit, along with countless other things which remain a mystery.

In theory, sneezing is the body's way of sluicing out your sinuses; I'm told some even enjoy the feeling. Not me; I feel like my head's exploding.

Fortunately, you can't sneeze while you're asleep – it's a physical impossibility – but that doesn't stop me worrying about it. I'm afloat on my bed, in a vast dark tank of water, with tissues floating round my head like exotic blossoms. Weird little fish dart in the shadows. Ranged on the duvet are strange underwater shapes, a mix of animal, vegetable and mineral, shimmering and pulsating under the glare of my bedside lamp.

They started off so soft and small I wanted to reach out and stroke them, but recently they've been getting bigger and spikier, ganging up on me, stalking me, waiting to pounce.

Last night I fell asleep, thinking about where this was leading, when suddenly I jerked bolt upright, took a huge breath and emitted the most enormous sneeze in the history of humanity. It was ferocious – a scream of agony. It woke my apartment block, woke the street, woke the city. The shapes flew out of the window into the night. Today, I see them everywhere. People in the streets are coughing, children snuffle, the train carriage sounds like an otorhinolaryngology ward.

Our little blue planet is the greatest miracle in the universe, yet we poison the air and pump sewage into our rivers and oceans. The shapes are real and they're advancing: fight them, not one another.

Orlando Murrin is a writer based in Exeter with a background in magazine journalism and food writing. He has written six cookbooks and most recently his debut novel, *Knife Skills For Beginners*, a murder mystery set in a London cookery school.

