



# ABC CLARION

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## An Explanation for the Allergy Epidemic? by Victoria Tian

At the moment, allergic diseases such as asthma, eczema, and hay fever are among the most common chronic illnesses in developed countries around the world. The nut allergy now affects one in seventy of the general American population. Inhalers are becoming increasingly commonplace since more than seventeen million American adults have asthma. The seriousness of this issue cannot be understated, as an average of nine adults die from this condition daily. Likewise, nearly one in ten American children experience seasonal allergies in the spring, compared to a mere five percent back in 1996. In the past several decades, there has been an almost three-fold increase in allergic conditions exclusively appearing in wealthier, more modernized regions. Why is this

happening, and why is it only happening in these areas?

Although no definitive explanation has been discovered, many scientists and researchers have proposed a theory known as the "hygiene hypothesis." It basically means that a child's environment can be too "clean" to effectively stimulate his or her immune system to develop properly. Increased contact with various bacteria and parasites allows the body to learn how to differentiate harmless substances from the harmful ones that are truly dangerous. Unfortunately, in more modernized areas where sterility is emphasized and enforced, when one of the body's defense systems isn't trained enough to fight off illness, the other defense system overcompensates for it. This results in what is commonly known as an allergic reaction.

Findings from numerous studies have actually supported the concept behind the hygiene hypothesis. In countries around the world, for instance, the children of farmers have consistently been proven to have fewer allergies and allergic symptoms than children who do not grow up on farms. Scientists reasoned that this was because of all the bacteria that farmers' children were exposed to due to the presence of animals on the farm—the cowsheds, stables, and pigpens were all overflowing with it. And, the more of the substance these farming children encountered, the less likely they were to develop allergic disease.

In 1989, David Strachan investigated the records of 17,000 British children born during a single week in 1958, and tracked their progress to adulthood. He

found that the single variable which most correlated with one of these individuals' odds of eventually developing hay fever or asthma was the number of older children present in the house at age eleven—in other words, the number of older siblings. Only eight percent of those with four or more older siblings were allergic, while a whopping twenty percent of first-borns were. In general, it was deduced that the numerous colds and other infections older siblings brought into

households increased the immune challenge for younger siblings, strengthening their immune systems and lowering their risk of developing allergic disease later on.

Although this theory is still inconclusive, today's modern world and the sanitation people are taught to value may be one of the most important factors in contributing to this influx of allergic diseases. At the end of the day, maybe mom was wrong—there is such a thing as "too clean."

## Poland Spring by Alena Zhang

somewhere in Poland  
water crawls beside  
a fresh spill of glitter lava

trees paint a cowhide black and white  
silhouettes of spotted embers  
glowing by the hands of the sun

and where darkness erupts into light  
a maelstrom of dragonflies  
jets across the scorching stream.

## How Could It Be?

by Adam Deng

It was another stupid freshman day at school. The teacher, epitomes of respect and chivalry, abruptly turned on the class. Actually, all the teachers Mark had that day. And each class it kept getting worse.

"If you do not tell your parents about this, you will get an A-."

"If you keep it a secret, you shall witness a close one suffer."

"If the message is not relayed, then your A-list standings will drop and you will toil in 5 years of high school."

"Ignoring this admonition will cause you to DIE."

Obviously, Mark was oblivious to the rumors, but he couldn't help believing. But as he walked home, he happened to notice a large shadow above him. It was a ladder. It couldn't be. How? Walking under ladders was fatal, especially in a country as grandiose as the United States. Simply put, it was a bad omen.

Less than halfway back, he sighed and suddenly saw some emptiness ahead. The emptiness happened to be a black cat. Espe-

cially true was the fact that black cats were meaning unfortuitous adventures for him.

He decided not to care. The day had been morbid enough.

As Mark arrived home, his mother seemed to have a notice of his unexpected state. While it was just a feeling, the somewhat paled and enervated appearance was... once in a year, but it was actually a harbinger of things to come.

Usually able to finish his homework rather quickly, Mark had instead chowed down on a facile math problem that was somehow taking him ages.

A man and a black cat meet under a ladder...

So startled with the discovery, he shrieked "MOM!"

"What is it, honey? Oh, my, it's already 5 o'clock!"

"NO!" Mark quickly scribbled an answer, just a 19. His respite would be a football game, his prize, the Crazy Offbeat Underaged Gamers' Heaven, also known as the COUGH.

An avid fan of the Cheesers, they were facing a 0-17 team, the

Scissors. Undefeated, victory seemed imminent. But it was not so.

The Cheesers' quarterback, the helm of the coveted team, looked back in the clutch, but he threw it wide left and it was a pick six, after the Scissors cruised from a deficit of 17-0 to an unthinkable 28-20 victory all because of a couple of bad throws!

Mark couldn't believe it. The curse was real! Immediately he dialed his friend, George. But George wasn't there, and his mother answered instead.

"Hello, Mark. George has suffered under torpor. I think he needs to rest for awhile. Sorry he couldn't talk to you."

The terrifying night, Mark suddenly remembered he had a graduation ceremony—and that, as the role of Vice President, he would need to host the event. When he got there, realistically remembering his role to say the Pledge of Allegiance, he botched it right in the place where it hurt the most, which left people wondering if the Arctic Circle's flag had stars and stripes. With his tri-

umph trumping talented trumpeteers, when Mark went on stage to blow the Star Spangled Banner along with fellow brass players, he once again bungled it. Instead of ending on "Home of the Brave", it sounded like a whale, clearly an anomaly. Immediately the crowd of 3,000 booed. Quickly he glanced up at the audience, angrily vowing to destruct the entire gymnasium. His dream would come true, but not to him.

After he took an egress because of embarrassment, the long-standing rival of his, the President, took over control and proceeded to deliver the sensational charisma to the audience. Meanwhile, Mark was strolling around when suddenly the world seemed to become diminished. It was nearly obscure, and yet there were zebras all over, with their stripes.

But they weren't zebras; moving more like humans.

As Mark inched closer, he made out a face, then 1, 2, 3... no, 5 eyes! The creature jumped

up and suddenly hugged him. For an infinitesimally transient moment, he thought about the final warning: he could die. And then something cracked near Mark. Was it all a dream?

Angry sounds of "Mark, Mark!!" Then shrieks of anger. The cacophony of a huge thud came. Then an iceberg was in view, and he fell down some 5 feet. The teachers were right.

Ten days later, the grades became a fountain of gruel, the despair foaming. Mark actually had straight A minuses. He couldn't take it anymore. The pretty ugly homework took its toll. If only he could escape his future, of going to community college.

"Mark!" The exact same noises supervened. But he couldn't hear, yet he opened his eyes.

It was all a dream.

Meanwhile, 10 miles away, the President, who was George, told Mark, "I don't believe in curses."

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