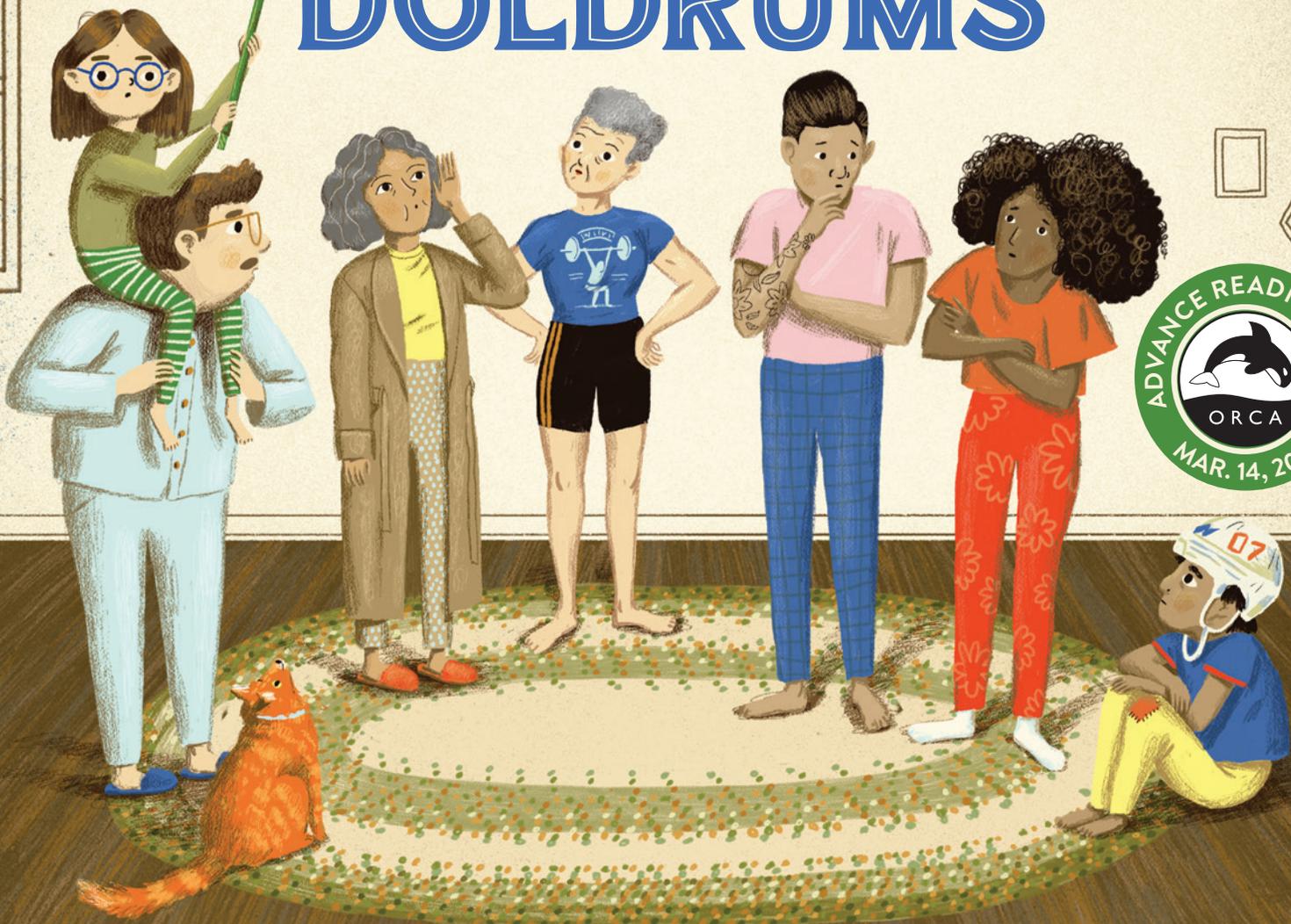




# Waking BEN DOLDRUMS



Heather Smith

Byron Eggenschwiler

# "Ben Doldrums! Are you in there?"

**FRIDA BELLOWS LIVES IN A BIG HOUSE** made up of four apartments. Every morning, she gets on her father's shoulders and taps on the ceiling with a broomstick. This wakes her neighbor, a student named Ben Doldrums, who knocks on the wall to wake the Mercredis, who in turn knock on the floor to wake the Reynolds. Frida likes this morning tradition. It makes her feel like she's part of something big. Things change, however, when Ben stops getting out of bed to wake the Mercredis, which throws off the whole routine. Frida notices that Ben Doldrums is not himself and she wants to help. But how?

*Waking Ben Doldrums* is a story of community, compassion and hope. It is a reminder that, while we can't always fix another person's problems, a simple act of kindness can go a long way.

**Heather Smith** is the author of several picture books, including the award-winning *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden*. Her middle-grade novel *Ebb and Flow* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award and won the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award. Her YA novel *The Agony of Bun O'Keefe* won the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award and the OLA Forest of Reading White Pine Award and was shortlisted for the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award and the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People. Originally from Newfoundland, Heather now lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her family.

**Byron Eggenschwiler** is an award-winning illustrator whose recent books include *Song for the Snow*, *The Strangest Thing in the Sea*, *The Little Ghost Who Was a Quilt* and *Operatic*. Byron's work has also appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Walrus* and *GQ*. He lives in Calgary.



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# Waking Ben Doldrums

**Author:** Heather Smith

**Illustrator:** Byron Eggenschwiler

March 14, 2023

Neighbors come together to support a university student experiencing depression in this illustrated picture book about the power of community and kindness.

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## KEY SELLING POINTS

- A gentle introduction to depression and mental health for young readers.
- Demonstrates neighbors coming together as a community to support each other.
- Addresses the reality of mental health challenges experienced by some university students.
- Quirky illustrations feature cutaways of the apartment building and neighborhood.
- The story's setting was inspired by the Warner Estate in Walthamstow, England, where homes were split into four flats and the walls were so thin that the occupants created a morning alarm system by knocking on the walls.



PHOTO CREDIT: ROBIN SMITH

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

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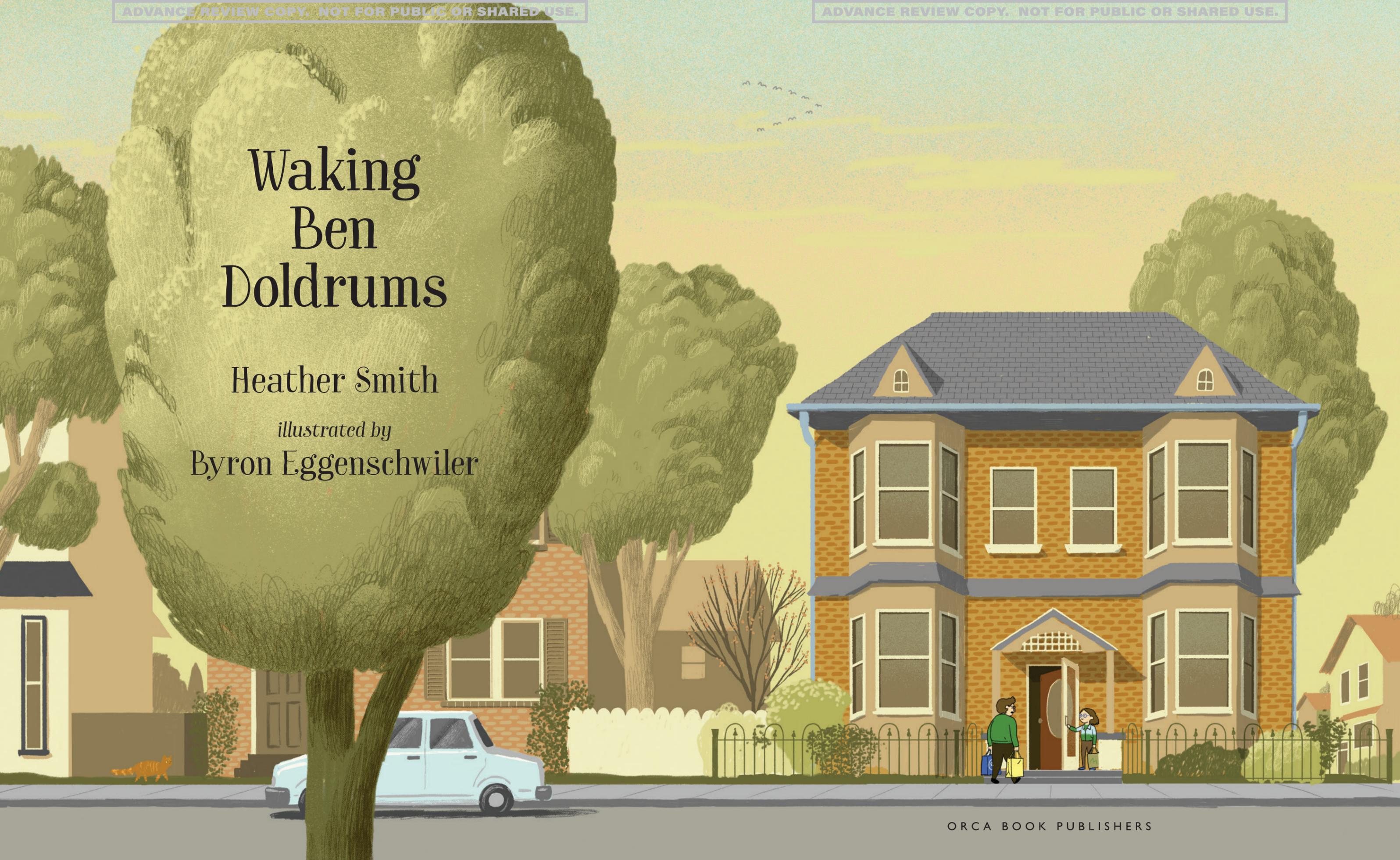
# Waking Ben Doldrums



# Waking Ben Doldrums

Heather Smith

*illustrated by*  
Byron Eggenschwiler



In the Big House, there are four apartments.  
Two up and two down.



I live with my father in the bottom left.



**ARTIE "SQUEEZEBOX" BELLOWS**

**FRIDA BELLOWS**

*accordion player*

*wannabe chinchilla owner*

*collector and fixer*

*mature-cheese lover*

*age fortysomething*

*old enough to take care of a chinchilla*

Ben Doldrums lives above us.



**BEN DOLDRUMS**

*university student*

*video-game player*

*age twentysomething*

The Mercredis live in the top right apartment.

**DAN**



*chef  
practical joker  
age thirtysomething*

**MAGGIE**



*yoga teacher  
meditator  
"age is but a number"*

**BILLY**



*go-kart builder  
go-kart crasher  
age eleven and three-quarters*



Edwina and Martha Reynolds live in the bottom right apartment with their cat, Trouble.

**EDWINA**



*party planner  
party animal  
age sixtysomething*

**MARTHA**



*bodybuilder  
health nut  
age "none of your business"*

**TROUBLE**



*ex-stray  
couch shredder  
age unknown*



Every morning at six o'clock, our parrot, Paul Macawtney, wakes us with a cock-a-doodle-doo. I get out of bed and climb on Dad's shoulders. Then thump-thump-thump! I hit the ceiling with our old wooden broomstick.

A minute later we hear the creak of Ben Doldrums's bed, his feet pattering across the floor, then his knuckles rapping on the interior wall. Tap-tap-tappity-tap!



A moment after that we hear movement at the Mercredis', followed by the sound of six hands knocking on the floor.

Seconds later Trouble is let out and comes to our windowsill. Dad lets her in and gives us each a boiled egg.

I like our early-morning routine. It makes me feel like I am part of something big.





The next morning it was the same.  
“Frida? Go wake the Mercredis.”  
After I woke the Mercredis, I yelled through  
Ben Doldrums’s keyhole.  
“You didn’t wake the Mercredis!”  
He shouted back, “And?”

And so it continued for days on end,  
until my father organized a meeting.





“Ben Doldrums. Are you mad? Are you sad? Are you confused?”

He stared at the ceiling.  
“I don’t know what I am.”

I went back to the meeting and reported my findings.  
“To be honest, he could be all of the above.”

For the next few weeks everyone tried to make Ben Doldrums happy.



Dad gave him a private accordion performance.



Dan Mercredi brought him quail legs with a tamarind glaze and fig chutney.

Maggie Mercredi taught him how to breathe.



Billy Mercredi showed him the ten bruises and five cuts he'd received from a spectacular go-kart crash.





Edwina threw him a party.



Martha demonstrated a dead lift.



Trouble brought him a dead rat.

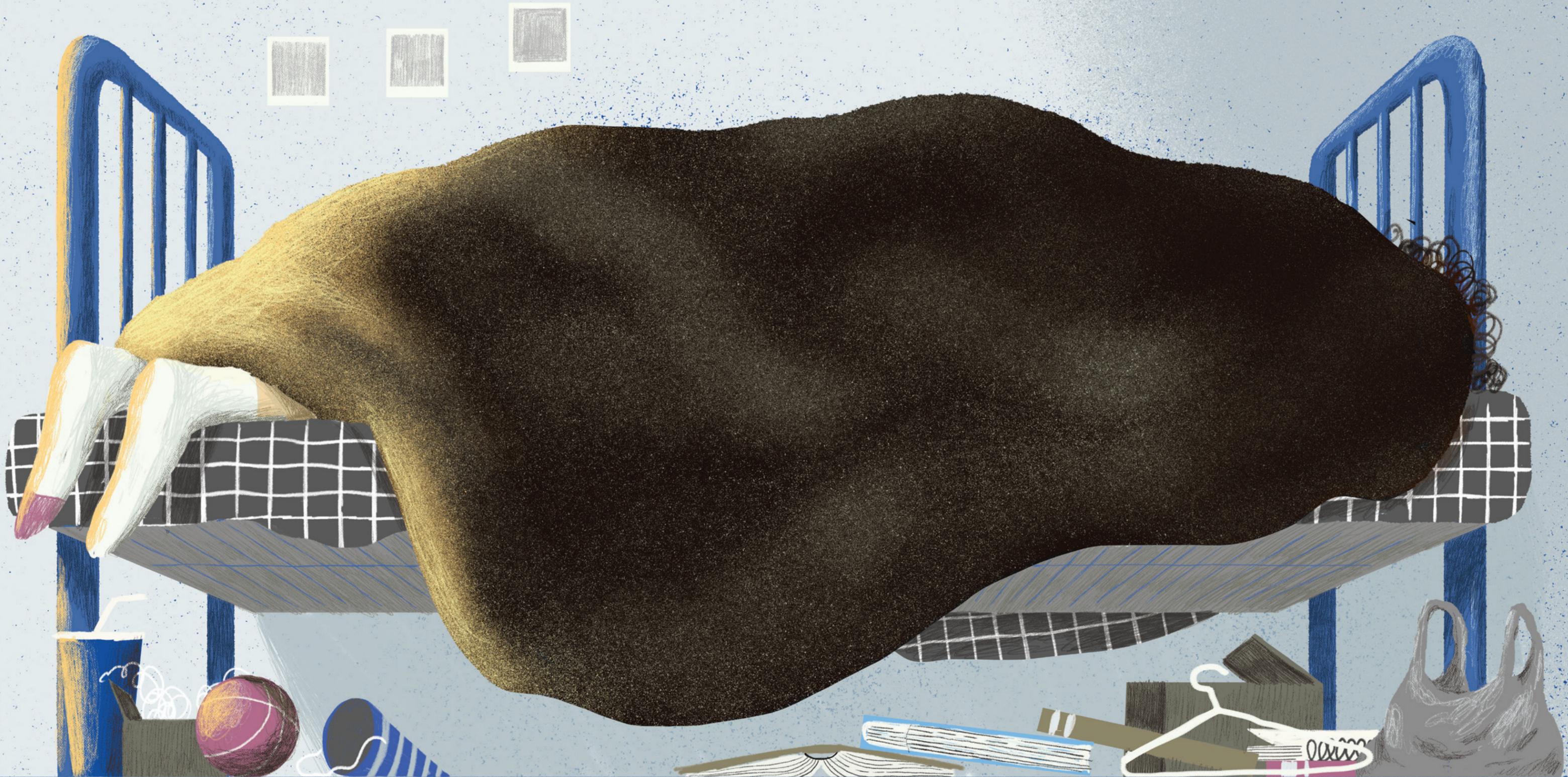


I read him excerpts from my  
How to Be a Good Chinchilla Owner manual.



None of these things helped.  
In fact, they seemed to make matters worse.  
Especially my dad's private accordion performance.





One morning I said, “Ben Doldrums. What would make you feel better?”  
“I don’t know,” he said. “I’m just...tired.”

That night I thought about Ben Doldrums and how awfully tired  
he must be to stay in bed for so long.

The next morning I went straight to Ben Doldrums's apartment.

"Ben Doldrums. I have something for you."



He sat up. "What is it?"

I held out our old wooden broomstick.

"This way you don't have to get out of bed."

He stared at it for a long time. "Don't you need it?"

I shrugged. "It's okay. I have a hockey stick."

I pointed to the wall. "It should reach."

Ben held the broomstick out and leaned forward.

"That's it," I said. "Keep stretching...just a little bit more."

Tap-tap-tappity-tap!

A moment after that we heard the sound of six hands  
knocking on the hardwood floor.

"Well," I said. "I should go.

Trouble will be waiting for her boiled egg."



Every morning Ben Doldrums wakes the Mercredis.

Sometimes he uses the broom.

Sometimes he doesn't.



Either way, he is part of something big.

We all are.



*For anyone who's been in the doldrums.*  
–H.S.

*For Pickles and Mitts.*  
–B.E.

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**Summary:** Neighbors come together to support a university student experiencing depression in this illustrated picture book about the power of community and kindness.

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