

ERASMUS

Edition 4

think deeper.



APRIL 2024 - LEAP FICTION

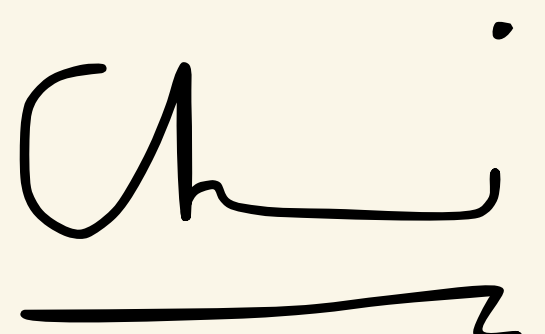
Taking a leap

Chesterton once described the essay form as a
‘leap in the dark’.

Every four months, we invite you to take a leap
from ideas of the world to the world of
imagination.

In our very first leap fiction edition, instead of
essais, you will find poems and parodies, satire
and stories, romance and rhymes from our
writers.

Sometimes, thinking deeper means thinking in
a different way.



Chenrui Zhang



A Walk Along the River

He awoke, tired. It was 0752. He fell asleep, and awoke, tired. 0812. A little more – he drifted in and out, in that strange liminal space where it almost seems like you can reach out and leave reality altogether. 0832. He was late for work.

Sitting in business casual, staring at the bottom right corner of the screen. 1413. 1414. 1415. The pixels, every minute, with no delay, changed at imperceptibly fast speeds.

He stared at himself in the washroom. The blue bags under his eyes looked almost like battle paint, though more sullen.

The work day finished, and he packed away at the socially appropriate speed. His head felt like a bowling ball filled with water.

Some days, the walking just took him, and this was one of those days. He went along, through the city centre. He walked briskly past the banks, the fast-food chains, the restaurants. The little urban trees, cut and shaped for size, the bright, clear signs, the sharp colours. People of all sorts moved past. A man in a navy blue suit, a short old lady with curly hair and a pink handbag, a pair of teenagers speaking Pashtun, a man in cargo shorts on the phone, saying, “– and when I’m back in Nashville –”, a homeless man pushing a

cart. It was here he felt connected, as part of the great flow of people, where he could stand aside and watch as he was pushed along the current.

It was on evenings like this, where the sky above was still light and the horizon a deep shade of pink, that people seemed to stand out the most. In such lighting, people seemed to almost become cutouts on top of the world. There was a very clear separation between the person and the ground upon which they walked. People, cars, litter, bicycles, all seemed to be an alien imposition onto the landscape.

He took a right turn, past the bridge but just behind the Church, onto a dirt path that went along the river. The noises of the city were left behind almost immediately. Flowing water and a late-night cacophony of birds replaced them. He didn't slow his walk, speeding past a pair of old women on the bench, and a pot-bellied man tying his boat to a wooden post. He slowed, briefly, as he passed a goose. It seemed to be, contrary to all human understandings of how an animal really ought to behave, staring pensively out into the water. It was, really, standing awfully still, and just looking out – away from the rest of the geese and ducks and swans out in the water dallying around. Against any sense of rationality, he couldn't help wondering whether the goose felt the same way he did.

He passed bushes, flowers, metal fences, wooden gates, brick walls, geese, dogs, half-repaired bikes, overfull bins.

The lighting softened, then darkened. People's shadows rooted them deep into the ground. At last his legs began to grow weary, and he turned back. He was tired, and a bit cold. He felt like a little kid again, out a bit too late, wanting desperately for his mum to cradle him and put him to bed,

wanting everything to become safe and simple and to go away.

He made his way home through the dark, along the river, through the city, passed the banks, the crowds, the restaurants, and through his front door. He locked it, and lay in bed, exhausted and alone. He turned to a family photo.

“I miss you, mum.”

Nicholas Haque
our resident contrarian



Orange Juice

You spilled a glass of freshly juiced
Oranges—the color of sunset
Pours into soft white carpet
It blooms—
Like a second-day bruise.

My face fear-bleached
As we to our knees,
 dropped
Your twin braids drank
From the deep orange lake.

“Mama!” you yelled,
And I flinched— dumbfounded
Wondering if you were much
Braver or stupider than I.

Sweeping into the room like
Boughs of willow,
Your mama's hair
Lashes the air—I shake,
Waiting for silence to break.

At that moment, I decided
That I'll stand in front of you—
Take blows for you—
Push you behind—
The sunset was mine.

But then she said “it's okay, go play”
And you smiled, taking my hand—
At that moment I felt nothing but pity for you
Who did not yet know the rules.

But the next day at school,
I checked your skin for violet blooms,
Did you also use
Your sleeve as a sheathe?
Throughout the day, I thought your smile would fray,
But then I realized, that it wasn't like mine,
And you really were
fine.

Elaine Cheng
our Revolutionary Smurf



Twilight bites

Once upon a time in the small, unnaturally picturesque town of Lover's Leap, there lived a strikingly average woman named Bella Swanflour. Bella, notorious for her ability to trip over air, had just returned to her hometown with a degree in Basket Weaving and an impressive collection of romance novels.

Our heroine worked at the town's only bookshop-café where she pined not for a man, but for the perfect cup of coffee. Her life was as bland as the gluten-free scones the café served—until the dark, brooding, and inexplicably sparkly Edward Cullenstock strolled in, his hair as tousled as his finances.

Edward, a freelance poet, wrote mostly about the moon's influence on his mood swings and had an allergy to anything practical, including jobs and daylight. His mysterious allure lay in his profound mottos which he would utter at any moment, like "Life is but a dream—and I never got enough sleep."

Their eyes met across a stack of self-help books, and the attraction was as instant as the cheap coffee brewing in the background. Bella spilled her lukewarm latte in excitement, her cheeks turning the colour of a very red fruit.

Edward rushed to help her clean up, their hands touching over a soggy napkin. He whispered, "Did it hurt when you fell from heaven? Because it looks like you landed on your face." Bella, ever the romantic, sighed dreamily.

Their first date was at Lover's Leap's only restaurant, "The Gloomy Potato." Over a candlelit dinner of metaphorical art pieces posing as food, they shared their dreams. Bella confessed her fear of paper cuts, while Edward admitted he sometimes felt like a background character in his own life story.

Despite their chemistry, trouble brewed as Bella's ex-boyfriend, Jacob Blacksour, entered the scene. Jacob, a muscular baker who specialized in gluten-free bread, wanted Bella back. He challenged Edward to a duel—a bake-off. The weapon of choice? Cupcakes.

The day of the bake-off was tense. The townsfolk gathered, whispering excitedly. Edward, with his customary flair for the dramatic, accidentally mistook salt for sugar. His cupcakes were a disaster, with one elderly verdict being "they tasted like despair."

Bella, torn between her past with Jacob and her future with Edward, decided during the taste test that she couldn't choose a life without gluten or daylight. She left both men and boarded a bus to an undisclosed location. Edward and Jacob, united by their mutual rejection, opened a bakery-café called "Bitter Bites." It was moderately unsuccessful.

And so, life in Lover's Leap returned to its peaceful and, predictable rhythm, with everyone slightly wiser—or at least more cautious about mixing up salt and sugar.

And they all lived averagely ever after.

The end.

Elias Turing
our experiment



ODE TO SCREENS

Ode to Screens

On the Gift of Microsoft Teams During the Lockdown

O, that the screens would burst, and the letters spring to life,

That the yellow faces would sing and the round icons speak!

Stalwart Teams, with scrolls and jewels bedecked, doth end here.

She hath borne joys and sorrows, sheltered prose and jargon,

Fashioned a splendid abode of undying wits and charities.

Who can know the wealth of her shelves?— the beauty of her Art?

Thus did a modest maiden, an abused and forlorn creature

Become by heavenly design a most noble, a most ponderous,

A most erudite Queen of Letters. Stalwart Teams doth end;

Yet her service and her gift shall evermore be remembered.

Andrei Lambert
our petit philosophe



Here it comes to me

Here it comes to me: nights of blasphemy
when you remain dormant on a bed dried of
moon-baked secrets; you and me, fingertips
to fingertips; hand your honesty, red to red,
to me, to darkness, falling down like dominoes.

*A shepherd travelling across naked wastelands—
Come, come, like rain drenching conch
Lay your arms around on my chest, to me*

One incapable of love, one incapable of tunes;
undress voices high up on my cochlea, your tongue
always hiding away from revelations deep down
silent estuary; body of an unwritten book, waiting still

*Run, run, clash into tongues of tomorrow's ache
Laugh, laugh, chime your song upon my anxious pangs
Dance, dance, land your feet into unguarded kingdom:
Wars, wars, wars*

But the abdomen never cheats
Pulses are stirred
So do I, so do I

Shiyun Tang
our lunar tongue



The Carer

Red and black marred the snow. The carer strode through the expanse of softly shifting shape, for his thoughts sculpted the scene; an iced branch here, a dewy body there, white knights and wights that waltzed with a sweetness.

Each footfall stamped his hate. Those wisps parted, ephemera; he slashed and dived anyway, for the look of it. Or perhaps for the feel. No one was watching, after all. Tantalus had nothing on him - how painfully did those faces return, evil glimmers, to mock him and part before he reached them, as they always had.

His own willingness to die would not help the one he sought, and so the road goes ever on. White noise was his companion, puckered with a drifting memory of the voice of his goal. His long half-blinded stare happily drowned in the blank deeps; he could not get distracted by the features of his mind, no, no. Never again; he suddenly awoke and yelled in silence. Never! yet it happened all the time. Anger then grew, and with a leap and bound and a blow, the branch of an ash fell from the blue.

After a furious pause, he took it and cooked; today's menu, snow-slugs - ash and ash mingled, charcoal begotten of the road already travelled; the universe provides. Sap writhed, the firelight making livid earth's pale shroud. Snapping an

icicle from his clothes, he speared the grub and chewed; a dark slither and it was done. The daily revulsion passed in minutes, and he was used to it: discomfort draped the heavy head.

Leaving behind today's thanksgiving, he walked on. The campfire slowly slid into crimson and ebony, as it always did. But now the felled tree still stood. Bemused, he cast about; his line of sight splintered against constant thicket and redwood. It is easy to miss, in eternity, what lies ahead. For the first time in aeons, he found himself pathless. Those fickle old bones let a cold seep in, and a horror licked his heart. His quest was etched in his mind - in his lost blood - and that same mind had ensnared him.

The murk fell, grew grim; eddies scattered the light into a half-dark. The shadow felt like an end; his drooping eyes had never known a night, or a sleep. Before - had there been a Before this place? Maybe, maybe - dull ubiquity drove all else out. Lost in circular thought, Night took him prisoner, for the first and last time, and he spread-eagled on some branch, helpless.

Freefall: fluttering and violent, he free-fell in the long-estranged spiral falls of sleep. The null space hid a great memory, bequeathed by events long past. The very thought of Before picked his stone apart pebble-by-wretched-pebble, pebbles of the beach and earth and peak - it was a whirlwind tour. The quiet time for reflection was wrecked by the wrestling fists that pummelled this new memory, leaping from crag to bleeding crag; he almost longed for the expanse again. Poisoned bliss that it was, that lively, surreal green called, a beautiful place to sink and never surface. The bitterness swept him once more.

And at last his darling lurched into view. Wicked, sharp spectres carried on the waltz around them, the darkling carousel that stranded us here.

Tenderly, so tenderly, they cut insidious slivers into his darling's slowly marbling flesh, flickering as the waving flame atop a pyre. Tenderly, so tenderly, his darling curled their sweet little arms into lithe and supplicating forms, to be caressed all the better by these vile imps, these cursed shades of smoked garnet ink which scribed with slitting quills while his love sat still and bloody and broke his heart. A spaced smile: the lovely eyes turned vacant, zoned out to the growing crimson pools below. For they know not what they do.

Twisting the knife. For the one who spectates his own life cannot bear to witness the slow torment of another, another who truly lives, unlike he, through their own soul; a life more deserving, more beautiful; a life not remote not stuck watching, locked in, all views - scenic and horrific - unchosen. Tears froze over in his eye - that soulless subordinate eye - a disgusting rime; a dull thump as his coarse blade fell, gratefully swallowed; figments replaced with impotence. The mortal engines of his care ground to a halt. The hanging tree opened; he keened, and it rang and roiled and surged through his universe, carving valleys through the blood-let ice.

Nathan Adlam
our monadic musician



To bee or not to bee

To bee or not to bee, that is the buzz.
Whether 'tis nobler in the hive to suffer
The stings and swarms of outrageous fortune,
Or to take flight against a sea of pests
And by opposing, end them. To fly—to gather,
No more; and by gather to say we end
The hive-ache and nature's thousand shocks
Th'antenna is heir to: when 'tis but for honey
We devoutly wish. To fly, to gather;
To gather, perchance to dream—ay, there's the sting:
For in that busy flight what dreams may come,
When we flutter off this floral coil,
Must give us pause—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long flights.
For who would bear the winds and storms of weather,
The farmer's spray, spider's web, child's cruel game,
The pangs of lost queens, the colony's delay,
Th'insolence of predators, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When we ourselves might our quietus make
With a bare sting? Who would burdens bear,
To toil and buzz upon a weary wing,
But that the dread of something after winter,
The undiscovered season from whose depth
No flyer returns, disseminates our will,

And makes us rather bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Our instinct doth make cowards of us each,
And thus the native hive of resolution
Is clouded o'er in humming doubt,
And flights of great span and purpose
With this regard their routes turn awry
And lose all apiary action.

Chenrui Zhang
our thinking buddy



Ecce Homo

I saw God,
His face gentle,
His love palpable,
In the dark.

His radiant joy,
Shines around me,
Permeates under thee,
Fades not as a spark.

I am a prism,
His love flows through me,
Glow within me,
Saving my heart.

First time in nature,
The birds have flown to Thee,
Their songs cry for me,
Passion plays its part.

My sins overcame me,
My foes surround me.
Hell thus awaited me,
Golgotha's grasp.

Yet He didn't abandon me,
In fact, He died for me!
Christ's death paid for me.
My soul set free.

Thus in the Church
I beg thee, pray for me
God's Sacred Host
Purify my art.

Joshua Yen
our wanderer



And I Will Always Love You... And/Or Other Spell- Related Nonsense

The court spell master of Western Rathmere most positively did not believe in mistakes.

Crafting spells was the product of long hours of dedicated work, calculations, and precise thought. And they always worked the way he intended.

“If you touch that beaker one more time, I’ll smack you off the north tower.”

The prince’s finger halted an inch from the faintly smoking test tube with a chagrined expression. “It’s dreadfully boring,” he complained. “And you’re not teaching me anything. Therefore, I think this apprenticeship is useless and should be halted for something more stimulating. Like swordplay. I’ll go tell Mother—!”

“You will do no such thing,” the court spell master snapped, shoving his spectacles up his nose. He looked disapprovingly at the prince.

“Now sit. And don’t make me spell you to your chair again.”

“Tieren.”

“Your Highness.” There wasn’t an ounce of respect in the title.

Prince Henry scowled and crossed his arms, leaning against the wall of the workroom. “Are you going to teach me something?”

Tieren carefully added two drops of hellebore to the Queen’s headache tonic. “For fever, headache and tension, add three peppermint leaves and steep for—”

“I meant interesting things,” Henry said. “Magic.” He gestured widely at the neatly organized tower workroom. “If I wanted to hear about peppermint I’d go see the physician.”

“An excellent idea,” Tieren said. “In fact, one I suggested to your mother—as I was sure you would be a chirping hinderance here—but she refused. The Queen seems to think I have a calming influence on you.”

And one should never argue with a monarch, even when Tieren—nor anyone else, for that matter—didn’t have the faintest luck at the getting the eighteen year old prince to sit still for more than five minutes at a time.

Henry tapped his foot. “I suppose arguing with Mother is pointless,” he muttered. “But all the same, I think she thought I’d learn something from this apprenticeship.”

“Princes don’t need to learn anything beyond ruling their kingdom and how to stick their swords into things.”

“I’m a fourth son, Tieren,” Henry said. “I’ll never get even close to the throne, thank the skies. Hey, maybe I could be a magician!”

“Absolutely not,” Tieren said. “You don’t have the patience for it.”

“Are all magicians this ornery, or does being the most powerful one in the land entitle you to an excess supply?” Henry demanded.

Tieren almost smiled, but squashed it at the last minute. “Make yourself useful and hand me that bottle.”

Henry did so, still scowling, but his irritation faded after a moment as he wandered over to a cabinet and began to poke around.

Tieren paused his work to flick his finger and a gust of wind smacked against the prince's back. “Don't touch those,” he snapped. “You could lose a hand.”

Henry paused, interest sparking in his eyes. He studied the small, dusty bottles. “Are they magical?” He sounded fascinated.

“Yes,” Tieren said. “And quite unfinished, so please get away.”

There was the sound of footsteps, then the door to the tower swung open. “Sorry I'm late!” Poppy hurried into the room, arms full of old books. Her hair was disheveled and she was covered in dust. A moment later, she sneezed.

“Quite alright,” Tieren said. The girl was officially a scholar

at the palace university, but she used her available hours to help him with his research. Normally, Tieren found such a practice irritating, but her organization made up for his scruples.

Henry immediately sat upright, then knocked his head back with forced casualness. “Hello,” he said, and his voice was only marginally off-pitch.

Poppy blinked at him. “You have jam on your shirt.”

“I’m quite aware,” the prince said with dignity. “I prefer a slightly rumpled, debonair look.”

Tieren snorted. “Perhaps if you threw yourself off a bridge you’d achieve some of that,” he muttered.

Poppy laughed, then pressed her lips together to hide the sound. “You shouldn’t talk like that to the prince,” she admonished.

Tieren huffed. “Someone has to.”

Poppy laughed again and bent to set down the books.

The second she turned around Henry began rubbing frantically at his shirt.

Tieren rolled his eyes, but seemed to take pity because a second later—without the magician making a single move—steam rose from the fabric and the stain wiped itself away.

“How’s it coming?” Poppy asked, nodding towards the cabinet of bottles. “Did you figure out the anti-gravity one yet?”

"How come she gets to know about your projects?" Henry complained.

Poppy grinned. "Because I don't bother him."

Henry stuck out his tongue and she gave him a rude hand gesture Tieren pretended not to see.

Poppy absently peered in the cabinet and Tieren tensed, but didn't stop her. Perhaps he should have, because a second later there was a crashing sound and one of the bottles tumbled to the floor.

Smoke immediately flooded the room. Henry yelled and started coughing, pressing his hands to his eyes.

Damn it all.

Tieren waved his hand, sending the smoke careening from the room, leaving only the two coughing children and a puddle of liquid on the floor.

Poppy looked horrified. "I'm so, so sorry, Tieren—"

Tieren cursed to himself as the liquid sank into the carpet. "It's fine," he said, lips thin. "Don't trouble yourself. It was a foolish errand from many years ago, anyway. I've since learned not to dabble in that sort of magic."

"What sort of magic?" Poppy asked and a red-eyed Henry, who'd been about to ask the same thing, leaned forward eagerly. Tieren's brows narrowed seeing their interest. "The sort not for children," he said. "Now go away, both of you, before you bring down the tower and me with it."

"She knocked over the bottle, not me!"

“Don't pretend you haven't been scampering to get out of here,” Tieren said. “Now you can go foolishly bash knights with your sword like all the other princes.”

Henry looked pleased.

“But what about the potion?” Poppy asked, biting her lip and staring at the damp carpet. “Won't it...do something?”

“Nonsense,” Tieren said. “My spells are perfectly crafted, with no-ill side effects whatsoever. This was just a love-potion gone wrong from years ago, it shouldn't have any effect.”

He hoped.

~

The library was quiet after dinner, and Poppy's nose had been itching from the dust for the last twenty minutes. She sniffed yet again, stacking a pile of cookbooks up to her chin and nudging them towards the back of the table.

Glory, she thought and sneezed.

“Uh—”

Stack. Stack. Sniff.

“Is—”

It was like a feather duster was permanently attached to her face.

“Excuse me?”

“Nadia, you’re disturbing the silence,” Poppy said and sneezed again.

Nadia scowled, hovering next to the table. “I just—”

“Yes?” Poppy said and turned, a brow raised. She frowned. Nadia’s usual no-nonsense expression was strangely dreamy, her eyes slightly unfocused. “Are you alright?”

“Oh, fine,” Nadia said. She bit her lip. “Do you know the way to the captain’s chambers?”

Poppy blinked. “The captain?”

“Yes,” Nadia breathed.

Poppy eyed her with suspicion. “Why?”

“No reason,” Nadia said. She was around a decade older than Poppy, but her hands were laced together in an oddly girlish way. Her feet kept tapping. “I just—I need to recite my sonnets.”

“Your—” Poppy stared, then gave up. “Fine,” she sighed. “Two rights and a left down the stairs.”

Nadia skipped in place. “Oh, heaven and biscuits,” she said and twirled away.

Poppy frowned after her, a bit unnerved, then shrugged and turned back to her stacking. *People in this castle are mad*, she thought.

She wiped her dusty hands on her apron, and considered the

fabric. She still hadn't changed it after the potion spilled on it, but the liquid was clear and appeared to have made no mark. She should wash it though, she decided. It didn't suit to have strange potions lying on her garments.

A yawn overtook her.

Tomorrow. She'd wash it off tomorrow.

~

Poppy woke to bells tolling and someone banging on her door.

She rolled groggily out of bed and stumbled to the door.

"What?" she snapped, then was overtaken by a yawn. She slumped against the doorframe as the red-faced page stopped banging with a sheepish expression.

"Prince wants to see you," he said, stepping back. He couldn't have been more than twelve. "In the..." he hesitated. "Queen's dining room." Obviously, he didn't think this was an appropriate thing for her to be invited to.

Poppy stared blearily at him, then tried to mentally count the tolls of the bell. *Seven o'clock?* She was going to kill Henry. "Well then," she sighed, unwillingly pushing herself upright. "I'll change and—"

"He said now," the page said. His face was going even more red. "Right now."

Poppy stared at him. "Now I'm going to smack him for two things," she muttered and swiped a hand through her unruly

hair. She was still wearing the wrinkled dress and apron from yesterday, but knowing Henry ‘now’ meant ten minutes ago, and the prince would have very little qualms about coming to her chambers himself and dragging her out if she went back to bed.

The page seemed to read the slumping of her shoulders. “Shall I tell the prince you’ll be there shortly?”

“No need,” Poppy said, grabbing her shoes and pulling them on. “I’ll tell him myself.” Along with a croissant thrown somewhere in his general direction, if she had anything to say about it.

~

“Good morning!” Henry declared loudly when she entered the dining room. He beamed at her, holding a bowl of tea in both hands, knee bent with his foot propped on a stool.

“Hello, dear,” the queen said with a much calmer tone of voice. She gave her son an exasperated look, stirring her tea—in a normal cup—with an elegant hand. “Henry—for the millionth time, you are not a conquering dictator. Come down from there.”

“You cannot squash my dreams, Mother!”

“I can withhold cake from you, though.”

“Diabolical,” Henry muttered, then took a gulp of tea. He came down from the stool, though. “You should try the dictator route.”

“Not in this political climate,” the queen said, turning the page of her novel. “Poppy, dear, you look tired.”

“I’m contemplating murder,” Poppy said, staring at the glimmering room.

“Oh, that’s nice,” the queen said mildly. She gave Henry a disapproving look. “What did you drag Poppy here for?”

Henry’s expression froze for a second, and he set his bowl of tea down on the table. “Uh, books,” he said. “I need a book.”

The queen tutted. “She’s a scholar,” she scolded him. “Not your personal servant!”

“It’s fine,” Poppy said politely, then glared at Henry. *You’re dead*, she tried to convey with her eyes.

He winced and gave a jerky shrug. *Sorry*.

Against her will, a slight pulse of fondness went through her. Her exasperation was somehow, impossibly, already softening.

“Right,” Henry said and clapped his hands together. He gave his mother a toothy grin. “We’ll be off then.”

“Don’t start a war,” the queen said without looking up.

“Nonsense,” Henry said and grabbed Poppy by the wrist, summarily dragging her out into the corridor.

The second they exited the room she began to hit him.

“What in the *name of—*”

“Ow!” Henry flailed away, covering his head with his hands.

“Poppy, that *hurts*.”

“It’s *early*,” Poppy snapped. She crossed her arms. “You are a dead prince. Your mother will have to find a new fourth son.”

“She doesn’t think much of my ruling potential anyways, even if the other three did all get the plague or turned into enchanted frogs,” Henry dismissed, then he grabbed her wrist again. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry—but I need to show you something!”

“So there’s no book—”

“Since when do I *read*?”

He hauled her through the corridors, ignoring the protests which broke from her lips as they went, people flying by on either side. They skidded to a stop in the main courtyard, and Poppy yanked her wrist from his hand.

“*Henry*,” she said with disapproval. She was out of breath, and it was still so *early*—

Henry’s rumpled curls were drooping over his brow, cheeks flushed, his shirt untucked and wrinkled...

Her ire faltered, warmth sweeping in. Oh, for heaven’s sake, she thought with exasperation, this time directed at herself.

“Look, look—” he pointed haphazardly at the new stained glass the court artists were making across the courtyard. He beamed. “Isn’t it *great*?”

Poppy stared. “Did you wake me up at seven bells to see a *stained glass*?”

“Yes,” Henry breathed. “The glass came all the way from *Andmerre*. And the plans from the City of Shards!”

Poppy’s eyes widened. “It—really?” She had to crane her neck then, straining to get a better look at the stained glass.

It was refracting light into the courtyard, ruby reds and azure blues dancing in her vision. The partially constructed panes of glass were being formed into a great landscape, a hint of a curling wave of seafoam in the corner, a ray of dazzling sunshine at the top.

It was...magic.

“I think I might love you,” she said to Henry, staring at the stained glass with awe.

A sharp inhale. “That’s...nice.” His voice sounded slightly strangled.

Her earlier tiredness was entirely forgotten in the face of this foreign marvel...and she must’ve forgotten her brain too, because suddenly her words registered and she started blushing furiously.

Poppy straightened, running a hand through her rumpled hair. “Uh, I mean—”

Henry’s eyes were fixed on a point somewhere past her head, and he kept yanking at his already loose collar. “So...you like it?” He sounded hopeful.

Embarrassment be damned, she was about to tell him exactly how much she did—how could she not, when he’d remembered such a small and silly hobby of hers, and

dragged her out of bed to see it?—when they were suddenly interrupted by a scholar nearly careening into them.

“Sorry, sorry—” he gasped, skidding a to a halt. His face was red, and she didn’t recognize him beyond the standard pale blue robes all scholars wore. “Oh dear—Your Highness.” He sketched an awkward half bow, then hopped in place. “Did you *hear*?”

“Hear what?” Poppy demanded.

“Nadia tried to sneak into the captain’s rooms last night!” the scholar gasped. “She—captain, that is—smacked her halfway out of the castle of course, but then Nadia kissed the cook.”

“What?” Poppy said. The cook was a burly, grumpy man named Hector whose most intimate relationship was with his meat cleaver.

The scholar miserably nodded his head, practically vibrating with energy. “Oh, I *must* tell people,” he fretted and dashed away.

Henry and Poppy exchanged glances.

“Odd,” Henry said after a moment.

“I suppose,” Poppy said, then shook her head. “Anyway, I —”

“Delivery for you, lady.” A bouquet of flowers was suddenly thrust into her face, so eagerly that Poppy sneezed.

“What—”

The page offered up the flowers. “Flowers,” he repeated. “For you. Delivery.”

Henry’s mouth popped open.

“I—” Poppy’s head was spinning, and she stared at the flowers. *Who on earth would send me flowers?* she thought. Well, Henry had done it once—but that was just because it was her birthday and he’d accidentally shoved her into a hive of bees the day before, so it was the least he could do.

She didn’t have to wonder long.

“It’s from the stable boy,” the page said. He seemed thoroughly confused by the whole thing.

“The—the one who *hates* me?” Poppy demanded.

The page just shrugged as if to say he could neither confirm nor deny such feelings.

“The whole court has gone mad!” Henry said, glaring outright at the flowers. He huffed. “I say it’s the lack of fresh air. They really need to get out more.”

Poppy was still blinking at the flowers, and trying to wrap her mind around the fact that *Louis*, the nastiest stable boy of them all, would send her flowers. She was pretty sure he was betrothed, as well.

“Something odd is—” Poppy’s voice got cut off and she outright gaped at what was approaching.

“Gah—no, *stop!* Stop, I say!”

Henry twisted and stared as well.

Tieren, robes bedraggled as if he'd just rolled out of bed, and long white beard twisted over his left shoulder, hurried towards them...followed by a loudly yapping puppy.

“Good morning,” Poppy said. Her pleasantries were on autopilot. She sneezed again from the flowers.

“I think *not!*” Tieran shouted, waving his arms. He glared ferociously at the puppy, which was trying to stand on its hind legs in order to deliver a loving head-bonk to the court sorcerer's knees. “Away, cursed animal!”

There was a flash of light and the puppy froze, but it did nothing for its adoring expression. His tongue hung out.

“Well, it looks like you've found a companion,” Henry said.

“Fools!” Tieran snapped, turning to glare at them. He was gripping his beard in both hands, practically fretting. “Do you realize what you've done? I thought it wouldn't work because it was so old, but the cook and the puppy and the *Queen*—”

“What about Mother?” Henry jumped in.

Tieren's expression turned very grave. “The Queen,” he said with dignity, “has declared her affections for the court jester.”

“*What?*”

“But what about the king?” Poppy says, bewildered.

“Oh, he's fine. All shackled up with a knight.”

Henry made a noise like a boiling kettle. “*Tieren—*”

“Oh, it’s a disaster,” the court sorcerer snapped and glared at them. “Don’t you see? That cursed love spell has gone and enchanted the entire *castle!*”

Poppy and Henry both stared at him for a moment, the words settling in, then a very dismal feeling indeed swept over both of them.

Love spell.

“Well,” Henry said, voice faint. “That’s...not nearly as good as the morning croissant I wanted to have today.”

Angèle Baum
our elpis

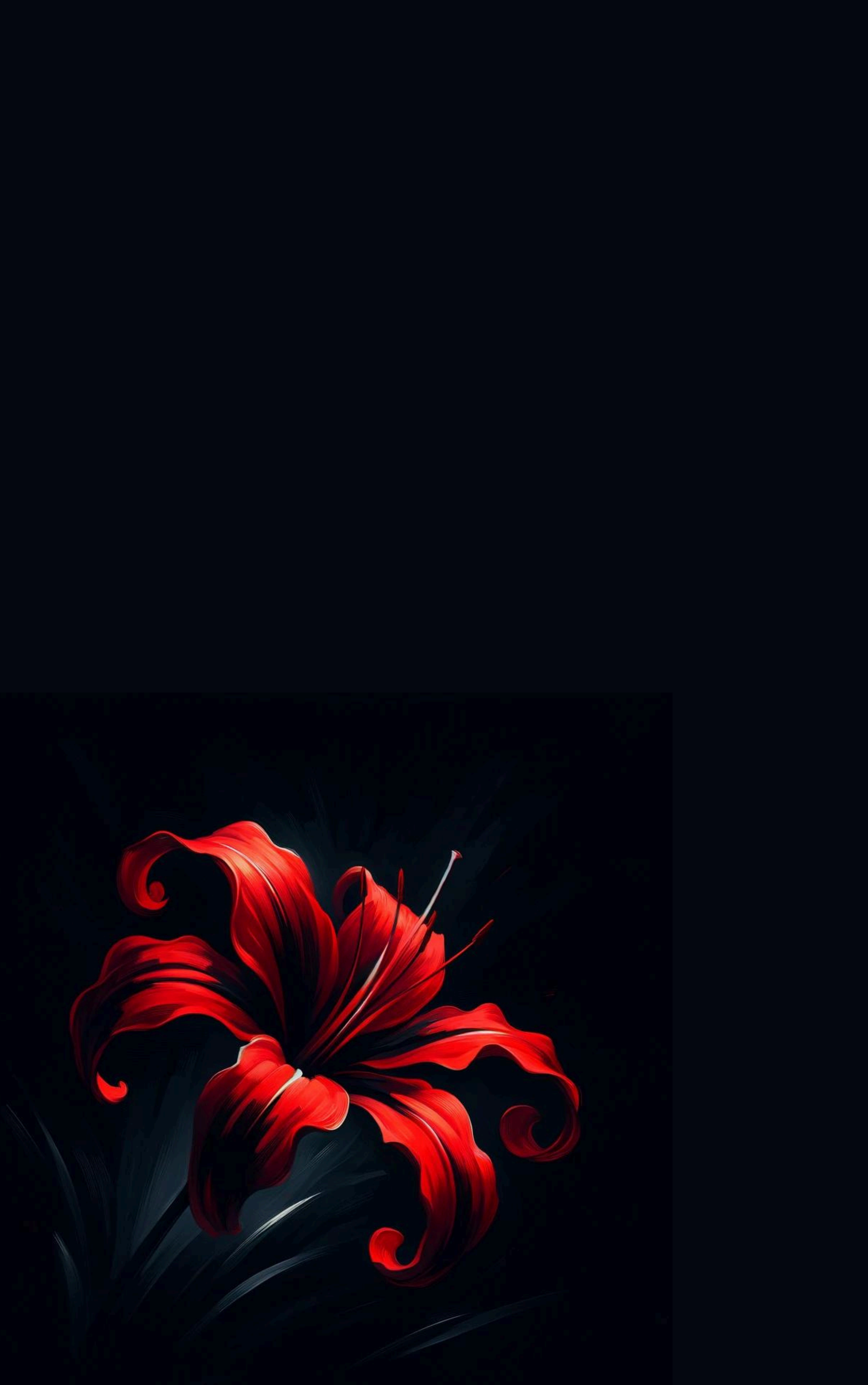


Academic Alphabet

Academic accoutrements accompany Atē,
Basic blandishment, blemish becomes a block of print,
Cold crises can't calm calamitous career choices,
Deep disturbance discovers devoted dearer ones,
Eventful eras establish eternal linkage,
Fake flaunting flattery flattens fierce feeling of fame,
Guides with great guidance give gigantic exercises,
Helpful hindrances, happy histories, hearty chat,
Intelligence isn't important immortally,
Jovial jesting just creates jaded jabbering,
Keeping kindness helps knowledge be keener than afore,
Laughter loving life listening to little legends,
Mere moments muting making most days merrier,
Nodding notice in tutorial, though not near nap,
Opportunity owns original occasion,
Panic pricks permanently, poisoning all passions,
Quaint questioning quizzes are quirky quiet quick quests,
Roommate reading recited reports receptively,
Salvaging success, in secret saving swell silence,
Time ticking treacherous, taming no tutor's remark,
Useless unanimous grouching urges unity,
Various vicious deadlines in the vicinity,
Wafting fumes of coffee waving weariness away,
X-ray of examination finds exacting one,
Yawning student like me yaps years about yesterday,
Zen attempts zigzag past the zenith with a zip-zoom.

To be a student? All these things and more.

Hannah Treece
our Grim Sleeper



A single red tigerlily grows

I don't ever sleep with a watch,
But I awake each morning turning
Over my wrist to inspect
My delicate green veins.

I owe it to them
to lift up the covers.
Slather toast
with peanut butter.
I suck some off the edge of the blade,
I will not decompose today.

Nothing is wrong, I am happy.
Gliding through the sped-up city,
There's a lawn
Grown full of mushrooms.

So I lie there.
Something must've died there.

But from a green corner
a single red tigerlily grows—
She's seeking sunlight
drinking sunlight
Eating sunlight
dreaming sunlight

And suddenly life becomes
So unbelievably light—
So I pick up my legs and run,
Until home is in sight.

Elaine Cheng
our Revolutionary Smurf



Consumerella

In a land far, far away, known as the Kingdom of Bureaucratia, lived Consumerella, a young woman of great patience and resilience, overshadowed by her stepmother and stepsisters, Taxella and Regulatina. Her father, once a prosperous entrepreneur, had fallen victim to the kingdom's overbearing regulations and taxes, leaving Consumerella to navigate the maze of paperwork and compliance left in his wake.

Consumerella's life was anything but a fairy tale. Her days were spent filling out forms, applying for permits to do the simplest of tasks, such as sweeping the chimney or feeding the chickens, and queuing at the Department of Magical Affairs for a license to dream.

King Governus, the ruler of Bureaucratia, announced a grand ball to celebrate the kingdom's highest GDP in decades, despite the common folk not seeing a coin of this so-called prosperity. The ball was to be a splendid affair, with a golden opportunity for the kingdom's young women to showcase their compliance with the latest fashion regulations and etiquette laws.

Consumerella yearned to attend, not for the prince or the pageantry, but to petition the king directly about the plight of her fellow citizens. However, her dream was quickly dashed by a new decree requiring all ball attendees to submit

20 forms, three character references, and proof of a minimum annual tax contribution.

As the night of the ball approached, Consumerella found herself in the company of her Fairy God-Bureaucrat. With a wave of her regulatory manual, she transformed Consumerella's tattered clothes into a gown compliant with all kingdom dress codes. She turned a pumpkin into a carriage, but not without a proper vehicle inspection and emissions test. And as for the mice? They were transformed into horses, after a quick health and safety assessment and animal welfare review.

"Remember," warned the Fairy God-Bureaucrat, "the magic only lasts until midnight, when the fiscal year ends, and all temporary tax breaks and permits expire."

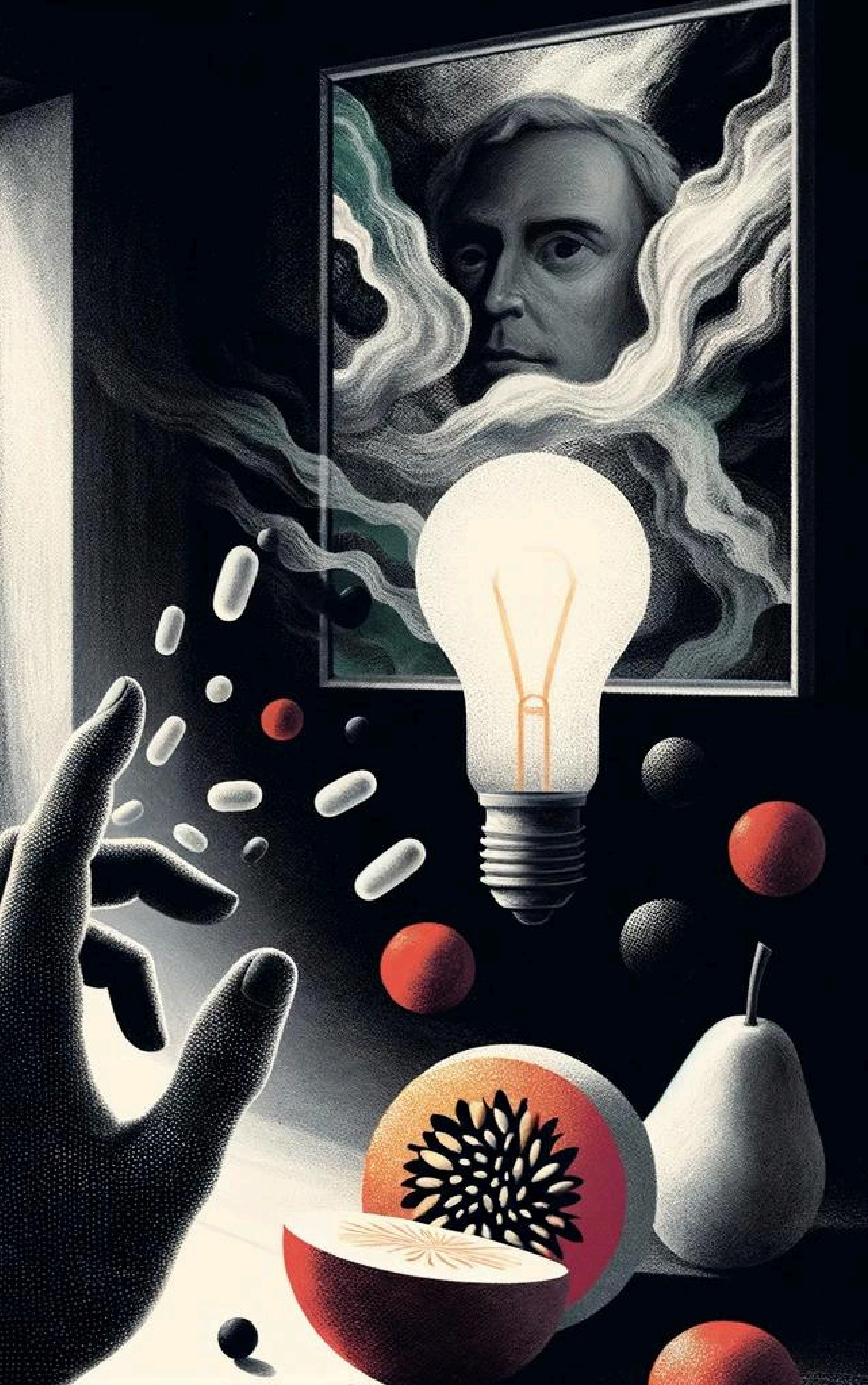
Consumerella arrived at the ball, dazzling the attendees with her knowledge of tax codes and regulatory compliance. Prince Admin was enchanted, not just by her beauty, but by her ability to navigate the bureaucratic maze with such grace.

As the clock struck midnight, Consumerella rushed out, leaving behind not a glass slipper, but a copy of her 1040 tax form. In the days that followed, Prince Admin searched the kingdom for the maiden who could understand the complexities of Bureaucratia's tax system as no other.

Upon finding Consumerella, Prince Admin was taken aback by her modest dwelling and the sheer volume of paperwork she managed daily. Moved by her story and her suggestions for reform, he invited her to join his council as the Minister of Common Sense, a position she used to champion the simplification of laws and the reduction of bureaucracy.

Their union was celebrated not with a lavish ceremony, but with the passing of the Common Sense Act, which aimed to cut red tape and make the kingdom a more prosperous place for all its inhabitants. And so, Consumerella and Prince Admin lived sensibly ever after, leading Bureaucratia into an era of unprecedented efficiency and fairness. The kingdom thrived, not just in its GDP, but in the happiness and well-being of its people, forever grateful to Consumerella, the unsung heroine who dared to challenge the status quo.

Chenrui Zhang
our thinking buddy



Desiderata

(in an English class)

I sit in the penumbra of a light-bulb that shades
over black fingertips of an ape. It leaps to yell
towards fruits of the earth so sour and salt
For the tongue to utter the truth. Where does
It happen? What does it mean? A slippage, a
sock. I sit in the penumbra of a light-bulb just
Right for imagination to enter in and make up
the notch on its material kernel. I sit in the
kernel as Hamlet enters my room. I run, run
Through white fields spangled of giggles, feet
Of white lambs, wearing socks of crimson lace.
And yes, winter: I run, run towards the stage
And pause: I announce, 2000, the millennium
And “In place of a hermeneutics we need an
erotics of art.” That’s what he’s trying to make
up and what she said. I sit in the penumbra just
Right for imagination to climb upon my attic,
my roof, my plumbing systems, my sink,
dripping and dripping through, cold and thin
hairs weaved on brown wrinkled hands.
That’s what he’s trying to make up. Hamlet
Is there. In my dreams, my childhood libido
Fantasies. The most poisonous thing. I yearn
For something more intense: a prince, magic,
perennial love, and flying through hills on

nights of lunacy. Without knocking he came
(Come rain, come sun) He is calling, his name is:
two syllables I can remember but refuse to utter
I am waiting here; I have my own belief
I am waiting for you; our eldest and our lead
I am your lamb: eg. Master, Georgia, Eden lands
And he knows my name. I sit in the penumbra

10.17 during a literary criticism class with Mr Freud

Shiyun Tang
our lunar tongue



Wendy

In a world just slightly sideways, a world cracked through, a world that's *different*, Wendy sets sail with Captain Hook. It takes her seven years to forget Peter Pan, and another seven to figure out why.

~

Wendy...come away.

She's always going.

She found Neverland and left it just as quick
The island is small and the sea is large and the sting of the
wind on her chapped cheeks hurts until she craves it
Tangled ropes slipping between her knuckles, scraping the
skin raw, her chest tight until it caves in
Something that never ends.

Peter doesn't understand (he never understands)
He sees her sail off with pirates and doesn't know she's not
coming back.

~

Hook is always looking behind and she's always looking
ahead.

They fit together like that, because the same person is
stealing both their minds

He's younger than stories suggest, even with the sharp blade
on his hands

(they were all children, once upon a time, playing in a castle
in the dewy clouds)

She sees Peter's name reflected in the pirate's eyes, in the
curses he sometimes utters.

Peter played games with us, he rages.

Wendy doesn't say, *We were all players*.

Perhaps now the board has been overturned, pieces scattered
on the ground...or maybe it sits on the top of a misty
mountain peak on an island further than the length of
memory away.

Time blends in the salty-sea, retina-scraping brightness
Her knuckles are scarred, her chest caved in. The wind has
worn the skin right off her bones.

She doesn't know the Wendy she used to be.

"Would you go back?" Hook asks one day, one year,
His head is pointed towards the east, the stars just blooming
on the horizon

They're like two jagged lines, splintering the velvet soft night
sky.

The star in her dreams,
or of her dreams,
or of something
now scraped hollow.

"No," she says. Looking ahead, to the dark horizon. There
are no lights, no stars, nothing. Shadows and spaces. "I
would not."

Hook doesn't say anything, because he is a pirate and he
doesn't care too much about little Wendy

Not so little Wendy, anymore.

He cares about the thing they've always cared for, the player
who set the board, a boy playing at a king.

Peter Pan never grew up and Wendy had to.

So why does she still think of him?

~

The months pass since she sailed away from Neverland and
she's not a little girl anymore.

She's taller, harder, older—weaker, vicious, tired, empty.
She cuts off her hair, throws the blue nightgown into the
ocean.

She learns to use a knife, grits her teeth at every cut,
and eventually even the pirates forget she wasn't one of them
Come away to find freedom, Wendy, Hook had told her
Sail the seas.

She sailed to touch the edges of the world, to stop her chest
from caving in on that little, pretty, magical island.
Her calloused hands grasped at the edges of the world and
came up empty

~

Wendy, oh Wendy...what were you looking for?

~

The years wither.
The blood on her palm stains her shirt, but she doesn't care
as she looks around twisting walls, the foreign cities
The port, and the ship she knows so well that never felt like
home

“Wendy!”

Wendy.

“You're a pirate now,” they tell her. Laughter, so sharp it
knives over her bones

~

Her dreams flit between dangerous and lovely.

A boy in the clouds, who flies because he cannot bear to
touch the ground
The ground hurtling to meet her, tearing through skin and
bone.
She tries not to sleep.
Hook doesn't sleep either, leaning against the wheel of the
ship
and the sea air has begun to rust his hook
Neverland kept them young, but now they've skipped far
beyond its reach.
Shadows grow under the pirate's eyes, he begins to look
more like a man than a boy playing pirate
They sit in silence, the creaking of ropes in the wind
Of whatever ocean they are on
They don't ask what the other is thinking, but it doesn't
mean they don't know
Peter never grew up and now she's here.
Oh, how she wants to hate him.

~

You're a grownup, Wendy, Michael used to say
Little arms propped on hips and big eyes.
You know everything.

~

You're just a girl, Peter laughed in the mermaid lagoon. His
face was crooked and lit up
You don't know anything.

~

I have to leave, Peter. Her fingers are knotted, she's still just a
girl

But—but what about John? And Michael?

He demands so much from her, just with his gaze
and Wendy feels like she might blow away in the wind that
tears past Neverland.

Wendy, what are you fighting?

What are you fighting, Peter? she counters. *The battle that
never ends?*

He looks angry, eyes squinted. He's still just a boy
You're not choosing a battle, Wendy. He jumps off of cliffs,
falls through the sky. *You're losing a war.*

~

She stands on a beach in the middle of an ocean.
Her hair is long again, curls stiff with salt blowing in her face
Callouses her mother would shake her head over,
Wendy, dear, what have you done to yourself?
she looks at the world alone.
So this is what it feels like to win a war.

~

It is so easy to fly, once you know how.
She still remembers (somewhere)
Sometimes standing in the crows nest, head tilted back,
fingers letting go of the mast
Tiptoeing, reaching for the sun, the salty wind battering
away at her bones—
Sometimes it feels the same.

~

“Even pirates need direction,” Hook says musingly
leaning against the wheel of the ship

The cold, twinkling stars spread above them and a spoke is
digging into her back.

She looks up. “Whatever do you mean?”

Her accent has weathered over the years, borrowed and
stolen from every place she’s visited in this world and others
grown into something she doesn’t quite know.

The captain shrugs, absently polishes his hook
His eyes are still looking back towards Neverland

Quiet, observational words.

“The wind can’t take you away if you don’t know where
you’re blowing, Wendy.”

~

She could blow herself back to London, to nursery rooms
No, she would not fit into that bed anymore, those tucked
sheets and toys beneath pillows

She could not blow herself back to Neverland either

The island is too small, but the ocean too big.

It’s too far for her to reach. She’s always reaching and she
can never catch anything

Not time never planned

Not a life of adventure

To live is an awfully big lie.

~

No one forgets Peter Pan, of course.

That story is written into her bones.

~

The thing about Neverland, he confided in her that first day
Flying over lagoons and through clouds that turn to mist and
get caught in her hair
is that anything is possible.

Anything? she laughs. Peter, anything *can't be possible?*
He grins, sharp and alive and so boyishly young and *alive*.

How is it he is so alive?

Then how do you explain this? And he lets her go
(He catches her, of course. Peter always caught her)
His laughter reverberates through her, the sharpness of his
shoulders pressed against hers

Her heart could beat out of her chest.

You're a wicked boy! she admonishes, but the laughter is
trying to burst through, past propriety and aches.
He sees it and smiles. *Neverland is whatever story you want to
tell.*

She's curious.

What story do you want it to be?

Peter doesn't even think. *Every story*, he says, then nods
decisively. *But only the good ones, of course.*

And which ones are they?

He ducks low over the bay, wind rushing through their hair

Her toes skim the water and she laughs

Any one with you in it, Wendy.

~

Do you remember all the times we lost?

Peter, the times Neverland burned and we burned with it?

The times we sailed away

Peter, do you remember?

~

No one will remember little Wendy, Hook told her that day
on the plank in Neverland

Staring into the water

(she didn't know if Peter was going to save her this time

he always got there in the nick of time,
but maybe time didn't have enough room for Wendy)
The plank swayed and she sucked in a breath, ropes biting
into her wrists
The lost boys tied on the deck behind her, filled with fear and
life and stubbornness and terror.
Her hollow chest.
Hook leaned closer,
*But if you sail away with me now, everyone on the seas will
know your name.*

~

"You lied, you know," Wendy says
On the deck, listening to the splash of the waves against the
hull
She's not mad, just conversational.
"You're surprised?" Hook answers and digs his hook into the
scarred wheel
Wendy doesn't laugh, but her brow furrows and lips press
together
"Not really," she sighs, closing her eyes
The second star on the right still burns in her mind.
She squeezes her shut eyes even tighter.

~

Mother used to sing to her sleep.
What do the songs do? Wendy asked, wriggling, like she could
move herself right through the floors
Everything, dear, her mother said, brushing her hand over her
face to quiet her
They'll sing you to sleep.
They'll sing her to sleep and carve themselves into her bones.
Whenever she closes her eyes she'll hear them and the
creaking of the deck turns to soft sheets and humming.

She shouldn't have gone looking for a boy's shadow.
Maybe she would've been happy,
or maybe she would've just been Wendy.
Wendy, a little girl in a blue nightdress
A caged bird who flew away and got caught in a world that
wasn't big enough for her.

~

The fairies in Neverland knew just where to hit her.
Wendy-bird. Wendy-bird.
She cried, because she was a girl, and she was young.
Wendy-bird.

~

Wendy, will you come back?
I don't know, Peter.

~

(she knew)

~

“Do you think they'll tell the story of us?” Older Wendy asks
Older Captain Hook
Sitting on the deck of the ship, staring at the stars that could
lead them back to Neverland
They're both rusted and salt-stiff, worn away by too much
time.

“No,” he says. Digs the hook into the scarred wheel again
again. “Oh, we'll be in it, I have no doubt.” His voice is light
and bitter. “But the story is never going to be about just us.”

Us is a strange word
It doesn't fit, but then nothing else does
“The Tale of Peter Pan,” Wendy says quietly. She opens her
eyes wide and looks up at the stars.
Seven years and seven more.

~

And so she talks to herself, because chatter does not become
ladies.

That's what Mother said to little Wendy Darling, and
changing herself would take too much

Too much she doesn't have left to give.

She's hollow and scraped through, staring at skylines that
never change, wishing for the breeze to calm

To rage, to blow her away.

She'd kill, she'd laugh, she'd dance—she'd do anything for
quiet.

So she can sit on the deck of the ship, watch the waves dance,
watch the stars set...

and watch the world go on.

~

Wendy-bird, Wendy-bird, fly away.

Wendy-bird, Wendy-bird...

...*fly away home.*

Angèle Baum
our elpis

This is just to say...

Not that I ate the plums in the icebox, as William Carlos Williams did, but that every work here remains the intellectual property of its writer.

At *Erasmus*, we really do treasure our writers and will never take away the words that belong to them. Each writer can do what with their work whatever they like, including reprinting or reproducing it.

This may be the first time their ideas were unveiled to the world, but we are certain it won't be their last. Therefore, we ask you to respect them as much as we do by not reproducing or reprinting their works without their permission.

Thank you, dear reader.

C.Z

ERASMUS

think deeper.