

The image features several hand-drawn green leaves with black outlines, scattered around the central text. Some leaves are larger and more detailed, while others are smaller and simpler. They are positioned in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right areas of the page.

Fallen leaves

Introduction

Based on the model of Calvino's "*Il castello dei destini incrociati*", I will attempt to write a story using random images created by an **Ai Image Generator**. Of course, I'm not one of the most important Italian writers of the 20th century, so it won't be nearly as good, but the concept of creating a story from imagination after looking at different images can be done by anyone, so here goes nothing.

*Note: Calvino actually used tarot cards, but I think using Ai to generate random images is more fit to our times.

I will start with just a couple of images to have something to begin with, then I will eventually add more if the story needs it or if I get stuck.

Setting



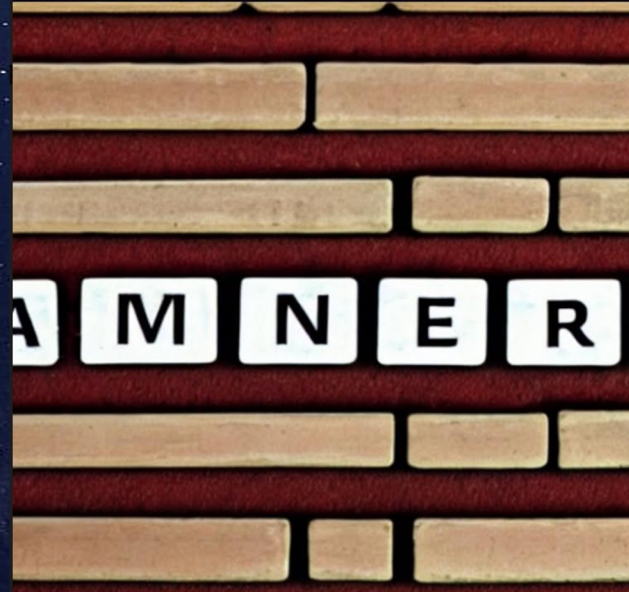
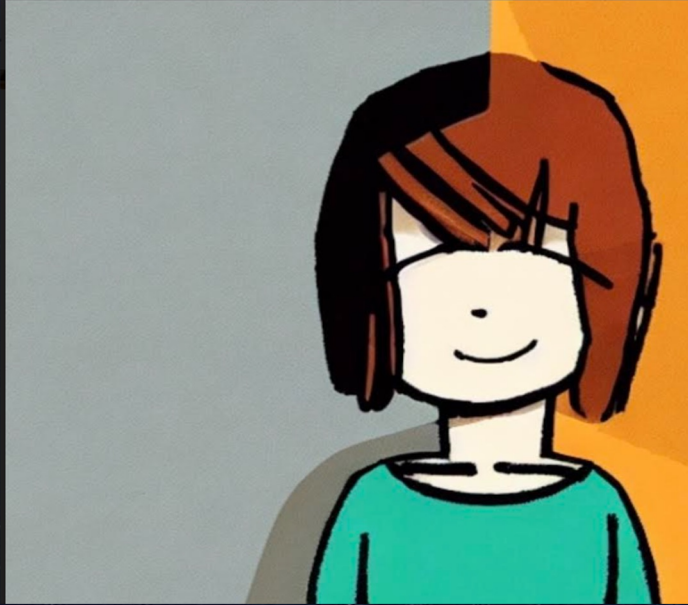
Something random



Character



Another character



Prologue: In the middle of the forest

Once upon a time there was a small village in the middle of a far, far and very dense forest. Life there was simple: there was no electricity or any particular technology, but people lived happily and nature provided them with everything they needed.

In the centre of the village there was a very big and old tree, which was the source of vitality of the whole forest: it provided shelter to animals, nutrients to the environment as well as protection to humans from the outside dangers. People called it

The Old Tree and it was the core of **Nature** itself. Everything was in harmony, peace and happiness reigned and nothing seemed to trouble that calm and joyful life.

However this seemingly everlasting balance was soon to be shaken: if everything went smoothly, this wouldn't be a story worth writing about.

There was this girl in the village, her name was **Amner**. Since she was little, she was different from all the other kids. When others would play with squirrels, she would read a book, when others would climb on trees, she would lay down on the grass and look up over the dense leaves, trying to get a glance of the sky.

<<What lies beyond the leaves?>> she would ask herself.

<<What is there beyond the forest?>>.

She tried to ask these questions to the teachers at school, but they would not answer and her parents would scold her for it. Everyone thought she was awkward and she would often be left alone, but **she never stopped thinking about what there could be beyond the limits of the forest.**

One night she was sitting in front of an elm, when suddenly she saw a little, although very bright light, moving in the dark just outside the village's limits.

It was a **firefly**, though it was different from other fireflies: its light shone brighter than any other Amner had seen before. Curious, she decided to follow it into the forest.

She walked, marched and then started running to follow the insect, deeper and deeper into the forest. She kept running and when she finally got close enough to the firefly, she stretched her arm trying catch it: she was so close, but just as she was about to catch it, she tripped on an exposed root and fell, rolling down a small hill.

She hit her head and everything turned black, nothing could be seen, only **darkness**. A small **light** glowed in the distance and a fading voice could be heard: <<Come, my child...>> it said <<...**I will make you free.**>>.

Amner woke up, it was just a dream. She was still in the forest but she didn't know where she was after she had fallen down. She stood up, looked around her and saw the glowing firefly flying inside a small cave.

She didn't like closed spaces but, although hesitant, she decided to follow it inside. She kept following the light, deep into the cave, until she reached something unexpected.

What's inside the cave?



Deep inside the cave she met a **black cat**, lightened up only by the light of the firefly.

<<Hi, small lady.>> said the cat, with a somewhat hissing voice you wouldn't expect a cat to have.

<<You can talk?>> asked Amner, wondering whether she was still dreaming.

<<I'm a very special cat, you know? And I need your help.>>

<<I... what do you need?>> asked Amner.

<<Oh, I'm very ill and I don't have much time left: I need you to take this firefly and bring it to the big old tree inside your village. This is the only thing that can save me.>>

<<My parents said that things outside the village are dangerous and I don't think I should trust a talking cat with a sinister voice...>> explained Amner, who was a very smart child.

<<Also, why can't the firefly just fly to the tree by itself?>>

<<A powerful barrier surrounds your village.>> explained the cat <<only few living beings can enter.>>.

The cat moved closer to Amner: <<Let's make a deal! I will give you what you most desire and you will help me bring the firefly to the tree.>>

The girl seemed unsure: <<What I most desire?>> said her.

<<Oh yes, yes... I will grant you the power to see what lies beyond your trees, your forest, your world! **I will grant you the power to achieve true and absolute freedom!** And all you have to do is to bring this firefly to the big tree in the middle of your village. Sounds like a fair trade, doesn't it?>>

Amner took some time to think.

<<Everyone at the village keeps avoiding me because I want to know what's beyond the forest...>> said Amner, thinking out loud.

<<But with this power, maybe I will be able to show them that I'm right, that there is something beyond the forest! >> said Amner, looking a bit excited.

<<So...?>> asked the cat, licking its whiskers.

<<I accept!>> replied Amner.

<<Very well...>>

The firefly flew towards Amner and landed in her hands; she then went outside the cave and back to the village. As the cat had asked her to do, she brought the firefly to the Old Tree. The firefly flew up and swiftly entered a small hole inside the thick trunk. Everything went silent: the crickets stopped chirping, the owls stopped their hoots, even the wind stopped blowing... Then, a huge tremble shook the earth. The Old Tree started to turn grey, the leaves started to fall, the animals started to run and the other trees began to crumble.

A violent earthquake shook the whole forest, people ran out of their houses and went to the Tree, but it was too late, it had already lost its vitality.

Amner was standing there, unable to move a muscle, screams all around her, but she couldn't hear them. As everything was falling apart, she looked up, over the now lifeless tree and saw **the most beautiful and shiny starry sky she had ever seen.**

<<So this is the view over the leaves>> she thought.

Then the whole forest and Nature itself fell.

Everything went black, once again only darkness could be seen. There was no light this time, only a familiar voice could be heard.

<<Thank you, small lady... **now you will get the freedom you so desperately desired.**>>.

A new setting



Chapter 1: The chains of advancement

Many centuries later...

After the fall of the Old Tree, Nature all over the planet died. However, people managed to survive thanks to technological and scientific advancements.

The whole world was now **one big and overcrowded city**, with streets, blinding lights and grey, high skyscrapers. So many years had passed from the fall of Nature, that if you were to ask a random stranger what a tree was, he wouldn't be sure what to answer: the only thing left that could be considered nature was polluted waters.

Society continued to advance and science kept bringing new discoveries, but under this veil of seemingly never-ending progress, a side of deep social unrest and disparity was hidden. There were the few overly-rich people who detained the shares of companies on one end, and people who barely had enough money for food on the other.

Society was corrupted to its roots and the media had full control over people's lives: freedom of will was an unknown concept and every action was influenced by what appeared on screens.

However, **a spark of hope** was still shining: it doesn't matter how much a population is enslaved, there will always be someone who seeks freedom. Dreamers, who, even in the most tight spaces, look for a way to go over their limits, to reach liberty and whatever lies beyond it.

While all the other people were melting their brains off on their smartphones and tvs, there was a boy who was just sitting in his room, looking out the window towards the night sky. Sadly, **no stars could be seen** because of the blinding city lights, **but the empty dark above only served as a canvas**, where the boy's **imagination** could paint anything he wanted.

The boy was called **Irkae**, he was a kind and smart kid. His mother had died when he was too little for him to remember, while his father was almost always at work in order to provide money for the family, therefore Irkae wouldn't see him very often and usually spent his nights at home alone.

He went to school, but he didn't like it. His classmates bullied him and considered him weird and he didn't like the fact that he had to learn like a parrot everything the teachers said. He liked drawing, writing and using his imagination and creativity, which were all things unfit for **a society where everything**, from education to free will, **was prefabricated**.

As we have already said, he was looking outside the window, towards the black sky, when suddenly he saw something very shiny that seemed to be approaching him.

<<What the...? Is that a comet? That's so cool!>> he exclaimed, excited.

<<Wait... why does it look like it's getting closer?>>

<<...>>

<<Holy shit! Because it is!>> he screamed, jumping on his feet.

The light entered through his window, leaving him blind for a couple of seconds. After a bit, the brightness had faded and Irkae was able to open his eyes and see again.

In front of him, there was a ghost-like girl, emanating a gentle aura around her and floating like a feather. Irkae was shocked.

<<Hi>> said the girl <<my name is Amner.>>

Chapter 2: A fateful encounter

<<Wha-? Who? How?>> Irkae was having a stutter.

<<Calm down, no need to panic. I will explain everything to you.>> said Amner with a reassuring voice. Irkae tried to calm his breathing, in the attempt to understand what was going on: <<Am I dead?>> he asked.

<<Ahahah! No, you're not dead.>> explained Amner, giggling.

<<Are... are you dead? You look like a ghost.>> asked Irkae.

Amner hesitated, that was a heavy thing for her to talk about: <<No... not really...>> she looked sad, as she was about to reopen a wound of the past.

<<I was cursed, long long ago. I was tricked into doing something very bad in exchange of a wish. I wanted to be freed from the chains that tied me to my home, even though the cost of it was not worth it... if only I had not been so naive.>>

<<Did you at least get the freedom you were looking for?>> asked Irkae, who was now calm.

<<I did, but not in the way I expected. I turned into this spiritual form that enabled me to go wherever I want, but I was also freed from the flow of time and became somewhat immortal. At first I had fun flying around and seeing the world, but before I could realise it, seconds became years, minutes became decades and hours became centuries. **The freedom I so much sought, became a curse from which I can't escape.** Please I need your help to make up for my

Irkae took some time to think, then: <<Why me? I'm nothing special.>> he asked.
<<I was flying around the skies when I felt a kind of... light and... warmth, coming from your building. I can't really explain it, but I feel it! I can feel it from within your heart that you could be the one to revive the Old Tree.>>

<<The Old Tree? What's that?>> asked Irkae.

<<It once was the very core of Nature, everything took vitality from it: animals, humans and plants. However, when I... when it died, Nature itself was destroyed and now only humans and cement inhabit this world. I think, no, I'm sure you have the power to revive the Tree and bring back life to the world. Will you help me?>>

Irkae remained perplexed about this whole thing and found it hard to believe that he had some kind of power.

<<What do I have to do?>> he asked.

<<We need to reach the Old Tree, so we have to go on a little adventure together.>>

<<I don't know about this... but it's not like I have anything better to do here anyways, life here is pretty boring.>>

<<So?>>

<<Okay, I'll help you. Let's go on this adventure!>>

<<Thank you, really. From the bottom of my heart.>> Amner was very relieved; she tried to shake Irkae's hand, but due to her spiritual form the two couldn't touch. They looked at each other with sad awkwardness.

<<Well, anyway, where do we start?>> asked Irkae.

<<We need to get to my old village, where it once was: the Tree is there. Are you ready to go?>>

<<Wha- now? It's like two in the morning!>>

<<Do you have anything better to do?>>

<<I... No... no I don't... Let me pack my things...>>

<<Ahah sure! But don't take too long.>>

Irkae took out a backpack and started packing some essentials. He took his cellphone, a charger, his toothbrush, his drawing book, a pencil and some protein bars he had in his desk, for some reason. He put on a jacket, his beanie, a watch and soon he was ready to go.

Amner was waiting for him, floating around the room and looking with interest at his drawings hanging on the walls. When she saw he was ready, she flew towards him: <<Thank you again. I really mean it.>>.

<<Don't worry>> said he <<thank me when everything's done.>>.

The two got out of the apartment and took the elevator down. As they got out of the building, the city lights turned off for an instant, **revealing the beautiful stars and the shiny moon of the night.**

This dream-like vision filled the two with courage and determination: they were ready to take on this adventure.

When the lights turned back on, and the stars disappeared, the two looked at each other, one smiling like he had never seen anything so beautiful before and the other giggling like she could really understand how he felt.

Then, they started heading in the direction of the village: the journey that awaited them was long, and they knew it would not have been free of dangers...

Note of the author

Where's the rest of the story, you'd ask? I'm sorry to inform you that there is none.

This thing, as awful as it sounds, is actually inspired by Calvino's "***Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore***" for which he wrote ten beginnings of different stories, without ending even one.

You may think he was lazy, but that's not it. His was a critique to **a society full of prefabricated images**, that had lost the use of **imagination**: his aim was to stimulate said imagination, by letting the reader decide how to continue the stories he had started. I'm trying to do something similar here, by giving you the incipit of Irkae and Amner's story. What will happen now? Which places will they visit? Will they reach the Tree? Will there be someone trying to stop them? And what will happen when they reach the Old Tree? This is just a random story made by an inexperienced writer, and it's probably not even a very good one. But you can make it whatever you want. **It doesn't have to be a good story, it doesn't need to have sense: it just has to be.**

Social media, smartphones, tv series... we're all so exposed to them that we forget what it feels like to imagine and create something from within ourselves.