



The Equilibrist II: Geniality

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II

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A biographical story and a teaching experiment, this text muses that art might be the key to maintaining balance through hardships.

An esteemed English professor casts aside the standard curriculum, using his own story of love lost and regained to transmit powerful life lessons to his students. At the heart of *The Equilibrist II*, Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's sensitive retelling of his father's story, lies the mystery of his mother's disappearance and sudden return after a forty-year absence.

Growing up in a Welsh hamlet surrounded by books, Erasmus Cromwell-Smith's life was shaped by the wisdom he found in ancient tomes. He earned scholarships to Oxford and Harvard, where he met the love of his life, Victoria. After two passionate years, Victoria disappeared.

Erasmus is seen going about his work without revealing his suffering; no indication is given that he tried to discover Victoria's whereabouts, fought to reclaim her, or sought a relationship with another woman, and no clear explanation is given for his decision to remain solitary. Ever the teacher, he seems to keep his pain at bay through intellectual means.

Erasmus taught at revered New England schools, and his style transformed in 2017. Though his emotions regarding his diagnosis are not explored, with his terminal brain cancer in remission, he began to reach beyond the curriculum and teach essential life lessons through the lens of stories and poetry, reaching his students by pointing to the ultimate triumph of optimism and the power of unconditional love.

This work is a testament to the benefits of taking an openhearted stance toward life and learning, arguing that storytelling transmits truth and wisdom in a way that the critical, analytic mind can't. Passages are poetic, their words chosen to transmit feelings and sensations, not just convey information. The book's free-verse poems could be written out in paragraph form and still remain moving. Rich imagery is frequent: "On those days the oceans seemingly weep in pain against the rocks / and the skies drum a lament in opaque colors of sorrow." However, most poems are missing necessary, subtle rhythms, and their punctuation and line divisions seem random.

In its depictions of passionate love, the book is fresh and evocative. Past writings are shown to infuse Erasmus and Victoria's love with magic: a passage describes "life sorcerers" inhabiting "a land where every moment and every person is precious and irreplaceable," and another illuminates why Victoria left—it is difficult to live with those who may inadvertently make others feel inadequate.

Errors in grammar, syntax, and punctuation, especially around commas, are pervasive, and misspelled and misused words arise too. Several sentences are incoherent. While Victoria's humanity and inner conflict are made clear through her recalled conversations, Erasmus's character is more difficult to discern; no matter what happens, he maintains his equilibrium.

The Equilibrist II makes a biographical story of a teaching experiment, through which ancient wisdom, beauty, art, and optimism are used to provide balance.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 11, 2019)

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