A Modern Day Fairy Tale: Leise in Search of Self

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Once upon a time, in a distant land known as Krestiva, there lived the miserable young princess, Leise. She was the frail, unhappy daughter of the King and Queen of Krestiva, Malgar and Tangeeta Olacrast.

Malgar was rotund. He was round, heavy, loud and usually drunken with thick curly black hair only in the edges of his otherwise bald and shiny thick head. He spent his time inside the castle nestled in his leather La-Z-Boy recliner, whiskey in hand, watching cock fights in his basement. Leading the nation he left up to his boldly overwhelming mate, Tangeeta.

Tangeeta was also heavyset in a stocky rather than fat way. Her weight was evenly distributed, from her frizzy head to her red polished toes. She stood about two to three inches taller than her other half, to whom she rarely paid any attention. She spent her precious time out and about making appearances in influential community groups and legislatures attempting to give the impression that she honestly cared about the "little people." When she wasn't out glamorous politicking, she was inside the stone castle recreating herself.

The sad product of these two characters was the young, robotic Leise. With only eighteen years under her small, inexperienced belt, she knew only what she had been taught inside the castle boundaries. However, she did know that she could not exist like her mother or father, but after remaining captive of the pointed gates of their castle, she knew no other possibilities. The only life she was familiar with was friendless and hopeless. Our poor moldable Leise stood about five feet, five inches tall. Through her gray eyes
the castle looked like a cage, and had for many years. Leise took little care of herself. Her auburn hair had grown long and straggly, and her skin lifelessly pale. Only two people had seen her become this way, and even they did not take notice. You see, Tangeeta and Malgar conversed on only one topic, money, which they refused to spend on their daughter. Otherwise, they abided by the unwritten rule of remaining out of each other's affairs. Tangeeta made all of the rules concerning her nation and her puppet, all of which went unquestioned.

From the beginning, the decision was made that Leise would be strictly confined to the boundary of the estate and would be taught to walk in the exact footprints of her mother. To Tangeeta, who simply had no love or compassion for her daughter, the only way Leise would be of any worth would be if she carried on her mother's work. Since she was an infant, Leise was taught politics and pushed to uphold her mother's strongly biased opinions unquestioningly. Tangeeta's methods in programming her daughter had worked successfully until recently.

Eighteen years down the narrow, sheltered tunnel and Leise had lost all ambition to obey her commander. Her carefree youth, which had passed her by, was undoubtedly gone. She had no idea of what to do with herself. Never having had opportunities to make decisions and mistakes, she felt like a lifeless marionette. And so, seeing no other options, she was in search of a model, someone to mold herself into, to make her feel human.

Her thin body lay limp on the stained white cotton comforter which barely covered the stiff twin bed. "BZZZZZZZZZZZ!!! BZZZZZZZZZ- ZZZ!!", the alarm sounded which signaled the end of her midday nap. She scurried mechanically down the cold stone steps which eventually led to the main floor. Here she stood in the lavish living room, tired body erect at full attention to her commander, not forgetting to close the door behind her, of course.

"It's about time, child," Tangeeta said coldly.

"Please excuse me, ma'am."

"Now, what have I always told you, Leise? To be on time is to be late, and when I say three o'clock, it should be instilled in you to be here at quarter 'til. Tell me, how can I ever expect you to succeed if you are so
incredibly rude and show such little interest? Hmmm?"

"Please excuse my shameful behavior, ma'am," Leise said robotically. Leise had mastered the skill of saying exactly what Tangeeta wanted to hear at any given time. After all, she had been programmed from the beginning.

"Anyhow, it seems to me that your lesson this evening should be doubled. You haven't been as attentive lately and what better to arouse your interest than more work? Be in the library at five o'clock, and you had better know what is meant by five o'clock." Tangeeta began to walk away, but turned back. "Oh, and if you even think about entering those library doors before I arrive, you can expect to see nothing other than the cold gray walls of the attic for a couple weeks. Now, get out of my sight."

Leise quickly nodded and turned away, swiftly making her way up the cement steps through the stone hall three levels up to her quiet abode. She plopped herself down on the small bed and looked around at the shell of a room. It seemed to get smaller everyday. The creaky, unstable wood floor seemed weaker and the tattered gray curtains seemed more suffocating. She picked up her small wooden mirror and studied the mysterious face that looked back at her. The gray eyes were sunken and dull. The flesh was pale, and the lips were thin and tight. There were lines which had formed from tension and a few scars which told stories of censures. She watched for the first time the left eye twitch, and then the right as they swelled and filled with drowning water.

Five o'clock came slowly. As told, Leise arrived at the thick oak doors of the library promptly at quarter 'til five. To her surprise, the master was not there waiting. She began to think about what forbidden treasures were hidden on the other side. What wonderful secrets were kept on the thin pages? The only books she had ever touched held statistics, facts and dates. There must be something better than governments and committees locked in those bindings. Although she had been instructed not to enter the dark doors, temptation overcame her and she gave in.

The heavy portal creaked as she used all of her strength to slip inside. Quiet, yet swift, she swept over to the very first book she saw. It was small and thick, with a picture of a strong, barechested man embracing a
voluptuous, scantily clad woman on the cover. She ran her bony fingers over
the raised gold letters which spelled "Danielle Steele." Carefully, she flipped
the cover over and began to read.

About ten minutes later Leise heard the faint sound of the door
opening and the "click click" of high heeled shoes on the tile floor. She
quickly put the novel under her sweater and ran tip-toed to the table, unseen
by Tangeeta. Tangeeta stormed up to the dark ebony antique table where her
angry glare bore into the pupils of her disobedient pawn.

There was no exchange of words. Tangeeta only pointed and the girl
rose to accept her punishment. She was directed to the Tower. The meek
child solemnly trekked up eleven flights of steep, narrow, cement steps while
her overseer had ridden the elevator and was waiting at the top. When she
finally reached the apex of the exhausting climb, her possessor struck her
violently and pushed her into a tiny chamber which was completely vacant
aside from the ineffective boarding on the small window. With one final
blow, Leise found herself on the freezing, dirty, floor. Her master turned
away saying, "Maybe this will teach you a lesson more valuable than that of
the library." The thick door slammed and locked behind her. However all
was not lost, for she had managed to smuggle in the paperback undetected.

Leise was surprised to see the ray of yellow sun emerge through the
wooden board the next morning. She had stayed up all night reading her love
story, and hardly noticed the time pass. When she finally closed the back
cover she was dumbfounded. An entire world was revealed to her which
evoked in her new, astounding emotions. She set the sacred book down on
the floor and rose up to peer out of an aperture in the rotten board. She
gazed out at the town of Krestiva and along the green countryside. Her stare
wandered back to the royal land where she beheld a dark-skinned muscular
man laboring in the gardens. It was then that she grasped what she must do.

All day long, Leise worked to discover an escape from the stifling
quarter. Finally, as the sun began to dip behind the thin clouds and paint the
evening sky shades of orange and red, she made a breakthrough. After
working incessantly on the small brass lock with two tacks she found on the
floor, it finally unlocked and she was freed.

Determined to find her love, she trod down eleven flights of stairs until she came to the ground. She stopped and stared at the massive door. It was the escape from everything she hated and the entrance to all she knew she'd love. Tangeeta would lock her up for the rest of her life if she found out, but that didn't seem to matter much anymore. Since reading the sacred novel, a new Leise had emerged and taken over. This Leise needed only one thing, her true love.

Without another thought, she pushed open the door and stepped into the cool fresh outdoors. She looked around the landscape, but could not find what she was in search of. Walking around the bushes and on to the wet green grass, she thought of her book. She must remember to stand up straight, smile and bat her lashes and surely her true love would run to her and take her away to Europe where she would learn about theatre and classical music. What a wonderful life they would have together forever. She would get a job in (wait, what was it?)--architecture, and her love would cook and garden, and put rose petals on her pink satin sheets.

"What you doin' out here?" were the words which ended her day dreaming. She looked up, startled, to see the man whom she was searching for.

"I've been looking for you, my darling."

"Girl, you must be crazy. My name ain't darling. It's Carlos, an' you best git inside befo' yo' mama sees you.

"Carlos, I love you."

He looked at her, astonished. "What you talkin' 'bout, girl? You must be crazy."

Leise was a little hurt, but she knew she could show him that they were destined to be together. "Come on, Carlos, we need to go. I know you love me, and we really must get going."

"Git goin'? The only place I'm goin' is away from you. I don' need no trouble."

"What are you talking about?" she said, beginning to cry. "We are meant for each other and we need each other to survive."

"I don' know what you is talkin' 'bout. I don' even know you. All
I know is dat I best git away from you 'cause if yo' mama sees me, de only gardens I be seein' is doze in my own graveyard." Having said this, he turned away and began to jog in the opposite direction.

"Wait! Please, my love!" she called after him with tears running down her face, beckoning for his return. He did not turn back and Leise just stood there, numb. She had lost her love, and she watched, heavyhearted as he was enveloped by the cool night air.

What would happen now? Her only chance for love was gone and now she couldn't go to Europe and live peacefully in splendor. Her lover was gone and she was left saddened and hopeless. She began to run across the wet grass, through the lush trees until she reached the tall, pointed wrought iron gates which were the only obstacle that stood between her and freedom. Although the columns were bound very closely together in the middle and top sectors, the bottom columns were fairly far apart leaving just enough void for her to squeeze through. Once on the other side, she began running. There was no hope for her, she thought. Leise ran up the brick road through the midnight air, tears streaming down her cheeks. The small, quaint homes of the town of Krestiva rushed past her as she fled. At last, she stopped running and found herself on a fairly tall metal bridge which connected East and West Krestiva.

She leaned against the railing and peered down at the deep black waters far below. She thought about what it would be like to jump and end her miserable life. Nothing could possibly feel worse than how she felt right now. Besides, what exactly did she have to live for? She couldn't possibly go back to the castle and she didn't know how to survive in the city. Suddenly, she was startled by the sound of someone approaching. Leise looked up to see a middle-aged woman who had black circles around her eyes and wore ripped, battered clothing.

"Hello," said Leise.

"What's your reason, hon?" the woman said.

"What do you mean, ma'am?"

"I mean, what is your reason for jumping?"

"Why would you think that I would, ma'am? Are you?" she inquired.

"Well, it seems to me that that is what most people who come here
crying in the middle of the night intend to do. And yes, I am."

"Why will you be jumping, if I may be so bold, ma'am?"

"I am going to jump because I have nothing to live for," the woman said matter-of-factly.

"I have nothing to live for either," replied Leise sadly.

"Really, a young girl like you has nothing to live for? You're not very convincing, kid."

"What do you mean?" Leise asked, confused.

"You are so young and have your entire life ahead of you." She hesitated. "Are you on the run or something?"

"Yes, I ran away. I have nowhere to go and no lover to take me to Europe."

The woman laughed. "Why do you need a lover to take you to Europe? God, I'm forty-eight, and I'll be damned the day some babe sweeps me off my feet and takes me to Europe. Hell, I've been married twenty years, got four kids and I've never had anything close. You don't need a lover, kid."

"Well, since I have run away, I won't be becoming a politician like Tangeeta wanted."

"Tangeeta?! You must be kidding me! You're the princess?!"

"Yes, ma'am," she replied.

"No wonder you're all confused. I've heard all about the way they treat you. Anyway, why do you need to be a politician now, you're free?"

"I don't, I guess. Then what will I be?"

"What do you want to be?"

"I don't know," Leise said thoughtfully.

"You don't know? What do you like to do?" she asked.

"I don't really know."

"How can you not know, child? Then what do you know?" There was no answer. "I guess I see how it is then, kid. Leise, let me tell you something. You have got to live for yourself, whoever that is. I don't even think you know. Anyhow, you can't live for your mother, and not for some nonexistent lover, that's for sure. By the time I figured that out, my parents had already married me off to some abusive scum who beats me and my kids."

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So, here I am, ready to do myself in, never living a day for myself in my life. And now it’s too late for me, but it’s not too late for you. Leise, you go out there and figure yourself out." She stuffed her hand in her pocket, pulled out the last of her money, and handed it to Leise. "Take this. Go and live."

"I don’t know what to say," Leise said as she watched the woman mount the railing. "What are you doing?"
"I’m jumping. You turn your head. You don’t need to see this."
"Please, don’t do it," Leise begged her.
"You don’t know what you’re saying, kid. You have no idea of the problems I got, and if you did, you’d be up here with me."
"You are right, I don’t know what kind of problems you have, but I do know that you have four kids who need you."
"I can’t go back there," she said sadly.
"Please, yes you can. You can’t leave them there. They need your love." Leise took out the money and handed it back to her. "Here, take your money back and save them like you saved me."

The woman looked down at the rushing waters and then at Leise. She carefully got down from the railing, took Leise’s hand and they disappeared down the long winding road.