

Were You Listening?

It's yours. Make it a place where laughter can live.

It took Lila a moment to process the delicate script written on a half page of paper, the ink faded and the edges soft. It took her another to pull the next few documents out of the brown envelope, one wary eye on the old man in front of her, standing in his worn suit. A quick glance at the papers she held made her gasp, gripping them tightly with shock.

“T-Theo?” The slight tremble in her voice was more than enough to bring her husband running from the depths of the house. Glasses slightly askew on his face as usual, he took in the sight before him and blinked, wide-eyed.

“What’s going on? Why’re you crushing those papers? Who’s this m—” Theo’s typical long string of words was interrupted as Lila thrust the stack of papers she was holding at him.

“Read this. Now.” Turning to the old man on their doorstep, she held out her now trembling hand. “W-Why don’t you come in? I can probably get you a cup of something and we can talk about this.”

He nodded, and stepped into their home, following her into the kitchen. Theo skimmed the documents in the same order Lila had; reading the half sheet of paper and, after puzzling over it for a minute, turning to the next page. He froze.

This is the last Will and Testament of Adela Caterina LeRoux.

And then he was travelling back, back five, no, six years, to a small house by the sea.

They had heard of the storm. 40 years ago, it had ravaged a thriving town by the sea, taking homes, people and livelihoods with it. The big attraction there had been the famous LeRoux Fair.

Filled with rides, small stores and games of all kinds, it had pulled in people from miles away. Young and old had lived and loved at that fair.

Lila had been curious. They were still in university, passionate and starry-eyed with a thirst for adventure and intrigue. So, on the first week off they got, they went on a road trip. They'd wanted to know more, wanted to see the remnants of this famed fair they'd heard so much about, and maybe take a piece back with them.

So they went. They'd driven in and dropped off their things at a bed and breakfast on the coast. After discovering things in the town for hours on end, they had wandered off near the beach, and come face to face with the fair's rusted cast iron gates.

There was, however, no way to get in. The equally rusted padlocks on the gates suggested that they hadn't been opened in decades. He remembered how Lila had looked up at him, cornflower-blue eyes bright.

"Let's ask around! There's gotta be someone around here with a key." Grabbing hold of his hand, she'd pulled him into town.

'Asking around' hadn't gone too well. When they'd been interested in what the town had to offer, the people had been welcoming. As soon as they started asking questions about the locked up fair, doors began to close and windows were shut. The people were closed off. Hours of trying to ask about the mysterious fair and the locked gates led to nothing, until finally, they were given an answer from a little girl playing outside one of the shops.

"Ask the old lady! She lives in a house by the water. Mommy said not to talk 'bout her, but I think she's nice."

Off they'd gone, to find this 'old lady'. Theo was exhausted. He'd been excited at first, but the constant rejection they'd faced for the last few hours had taken a toll on his morale.

Lila showed no signs of stopping. One of the things he'd learned about her was that she was the definition of 'headstrong'. There wasn't any chance of her giving up, so he'd resigned himself to going with her. They had gone back, near the beach where they'd found the remnants of the LeRoux Fair. This time, Lila looked carefully, spotting a small cottage by the shore. She'd pulled him behind her as she raced to the front door, and then paused. The cottage was covered in ivy, and the door seemed like it would fall off at any second.

Theo sighed as Lila pulled back her hand, and knocked on the door. They'd waited, then heard a woman's quiet, tired voice.

"Please leave me be. I'm not selling, no matter how many times you ask." Lila raised her eyebrows in confusion and turned to him. Theo shrugged. Lila turned back to the door, utterly determined.

"We want to know more about the fair that was here. We were told to ask you." There was a pause that seemed to last forever. Just when they'd thought they wouldn't get a response, the woman spoke.

"Leave. I don't ever want to talk about that place." Her voice radiated bitterness.

"Please? It seems like it was wonderful." Theo ran his hands through his hair. Lila did *not* know when to give up.

"*Lila.*" he'd hissed. "She *clearly* wants to be left alone, we're bothering her. Let's g—" She turned to face him.

"NO! I came all the way out here to learn more about this place. I've heard stories for *years*, Theo. I asked, was rejected, and kept going, why? Because I was *determined*. It's my dream, and I'm so close to living it, so close to being able to *know* and you tell me to back out. Well, you

know what? I will *not*. I am going to stand here and keep going... ” Theo’s eyes had gone wide. As Lila had ranted about her dream, her back to the door, it had slowly creaked open.

A wary sea-green eye had peered at his own brown ones as they slowly widened behind his ever-askew glasses. Then, as Lila had said that knowing about the fair was her dream, that lone, sea-green eye had, almost imperceptibly, widened as well. And that was when he saw it. The sadness and regret he could see in that eye was slowly overpowered by curiosity.

As Lila finally looked up at his face, still ranting, and saw his wide-eyed stare, she slowly turned to meet the gaze of the woman behind the door. The eye had judged her flushed face for a second before the door swung open. And there was a small woman, with sun-browned skin, white hair and eyes as green as the sea at their backs. She’d looked up Lila, and her mouth had turned upwards in a small, sad smile.

“I remember a time when I was the same.”

Those simple words from her mouth were followed by more as she opened up to an eager Lila. Her name was Adela LeRoux. She had owned and operated the grand fair, along with her husband, when they were a little older than he and Lila currently were, young and in love.

Theo remembered how he could not stop the tears that had come to his eyes as she had told them how the storm had destroyed everything. How it had taken her livelihood and the love of her life with it. And how, unable to move on, she had closed up and had locked herself away, determined to forget.

She took them back to those rusted iron gates, and for the first time in forty years, they were opened. She had wandered with him and with Lila for hours, bringing them to another world of lights and laughter as she’d told them about how the fair had once been. He and Adela had been looking up at the once-grand ferris wheel when he realised that Lila was missing. After a frantic

search, he found her staring forlornly at her favourite attraction: bumper cars. They'd been rusted and worn, covered with mud and dirt from the past years. She had turned to him, her eyes wistful.

“Wouldn't it be great, Theo, if we could run the place? Imagine seeing children and adults being able to come here and make good memories in a place that has seen so much disaster.” He'd seen the tears in her eyes and held out his arms, as she stepped into them.

Now, thinking back, he didn't know whether or not Adela had heard them. He hadn't seen her there. She had come over to them after, holding a sign for them to take back, and thanked them for allowing her to finally open up about her past. Theo remembered being a bit bewildered about that, not too sure about what he'd done to help, but he'd accepted her hugs anyways. They had left with happy memories and a new dream to chase.

Looking down at the papers in his hands, he smiled. He folded them carefully, and turned his head up to face the sky.

“I guess you were listening after all.”