Restrictive Love and the Resulting Disguises

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Abstract
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The father-daughter relationship dynamic often determines the actions and behavior taken by women in fairy tales. In Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century fairytale, "Donkeyskin", the theme of incest runs throughout the tale, showing the king's inappropriate lust for his daughter. He longs for his daughter, driving her to use tactful cleverness through disguise to escape this twisted love. Another tale, an Egyptian folktale entitled, "The Princess in the Suit of Leather", portrays the same story of a father's unseemly lust and twisted attachment to his daughter after his wife's death. In this case, the princess takes the initiative to cleverly sneak behind the king's back, being assertive to gain freedom from the potential of a horrific marriage. Warner points out that "incest between father and daughter has not dominated Western mythology...but it makes a strong showing in fairy tale" (320). However, in "The Little Mermaid" by Hans Christian Andersen, a more palatable, parental love is demonstrated by the mermaid's father through his support and genuine concern for his daughter's actions as she disguises her "mermaid roots" when seeking her love interest. The mermaid, driven by love for a human, transforms herself, with the assistance of an antagonist, to temporarily be human. During this time, her father actively seeks out her disappearance from the "under the sea" world and once he learns of what she has done, he supports her desire to gain full happiness. His respect shows a benevolent love for his daughter that is hoped for. In fairy tales, both "good" and "bad" love from fathers is restrictive on a daughter's freedom. This is important because the daughters find it necessary to escape the restricting love and use disguises to escape the patriarchal control in order to win their own freedom.

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Restrictive Love and the Resulting Disguises
Ashley Kravitz

The father-daughter relationship dynamic often determines the actions and behavior taken by women in fairy tales. In Charles Perrault’s seventeenth-century fairytale, “Donkeyskin”, the theme of incest runs throughout the tale, showing the king’s inappropriate lust for his daughter. He longs for his daughter, driving her to use tactful cleverness through disguise to escape this twisted love. Another tale, an Egyptian folktale entitled, “The Princess in the Suit of Leather”, portrays the same story of a father’s unseemly lust and twisted attachment to his daughter after his wife’s death. In this case, the princess takes the initiative to cleverly sneak behind the king’s back, being assertive to gain freedom from the potential of a horrific marriage. Warner points out that “incest between father and daughter has not dominated Western mythology...but it makes a strong showing in fairy tale” (320). However, in “The Little Mermaid” by Hans Christian Andersen, a more palatable, parental love is demonstrated by the mermaid’s father through his support and genuine concern for his daughter’s actions as she disguises her “mermaid roots” when seeking her love interest. The mermaid, driven by love for a human, transforms herself, with the assistance of an antagonist, to temporarily be human. During this time, her father actively seeks out her disappearance from the “under the sea” world and once he learns of what she has done, he supports her desire to gain full happiness. The respect shows a benevolent love for his daughter that is hoped for. In fairy tales, both “good” and “bad” love from fathers is restrictive on a daughter’s freedom. This is important because the daughters find it necessary to escape the restricting love and use disguises to escape the patriarchal control in order to win their own freedom.

“Donkeyskin” depicts a king’s lack of true love for his daughter which is then replaced with a lust showing he does not really have any concerns for his daughter’s well-being after all. It is difficult to even categorize and describe this king’s inappropriate love as just that- love. If a father is willing to exploit his daughter in a horrific, incestuous relationship, he is not willing to get past his selfishness and want for a second marriage. This exposes the few worries he has for his daughter’s well-being and that he in fact does not love her. The king’s selfishness and the princess’ distress is shown when, “The king noticed it himself and, burning with a desire that drove him mad, he took it into his head that she ought to marry him...But the young princess, saddened by this kind of love, grieved and wept night and day” (Perrault 110). The words “burning,” “desire,” and “mad” demonstrate the king’s uncontrolability and need for this marriage to take place. However, his daughter is obviously aware of his insanity and cries “day and night,” but yet he is not concerned enough about her to take notice of this. Through the evidence of the father’s uncontrollable lust, the extreme level that he is blinded of all reason by his one-track mind can be seen.

Furthermore, with intentions to please his daughter and bribe her into marrying him, the king gives up his most prized possession, his gold-producing donkey, to make its skin into a dress for her as she wishes. The princess’ fairy godmother advises the princess, “This fairy was very learned, and yet she was unaware that passionate love, provided that it has a chance, takes no notice of money or gold” (Perrault 111). The king’s so-called “love” is so strong for the princess that he would give up nearly all the wealth possible for her. This occurrence brings in Perrault’s essential point that “when Donkeyskin kills her father’s source of wealth- the magic donkey- she refuses to marry him at the same time. When she runs away, she literally takes her father’s fortune with her” (Warner 345). The princess’ fleeing not only takes away any possibility for the king to marry again, a desire of his, but she also takes away his power- his wealth, the other fortune. When the princess flees, she takes his power. As the reader has come to see, wealth is primarily equated with power. Ironically enough, the king’s attempts of incest with his daughter are his ways of demonstrating power and dominance over her and yet she ultimately dominates over him.

Although the king’s motives are done out of complete selfishness to satisfy his own incestuous overtures, it is ironic that he would give up such a
remarkable possession he values so dearly to gain another “possession” he longs for, his daughter as his wife. Marina Warner’s statement, “The absurd priapism of the jackass is not altogether obscured in the fairy tale, however, but underlies Perrault’s choice of beast. For in this early fairy tale, he marks the daughter with her father’s sin: the sign of the donkey conveys his lust. She becomes a beast, after her father has behaved like one” (325). This “priapism”, or the donkey’s continuous erection, only emphasizes more the king’s lack of control over himself and his overall sanity. Once the father crosses the line of appropriateness, this “beastliness” not only affects him, but drives his daughter to ironically take on the disguise of this same beast that represents his uncontrollable lust. Ultimately, this so-called love for his daughter cannot be classified as love because it is truly an ongoing lust for self-gain, while the parental love that most hope for is selfless and sacrificial.

Moreover, the incestuous hope of the king represents the idea of a daughter’s filial devotion taken to the next level. A daughter’s obedience to a father during this era is understandable and expected for the time, but taking it to the extreme of engaging in an incestuous marriage surpasses the appropriate level of filial devotion. For a daughter to give into her father’s demands of marriage in “Donkeyskin”, which she did not, demonstrates a submissive action and representation of female weakness as a result of a father’s treatment. Incest is not exclusively driven by the desire, but also by the power that comes with it. Filial devotion is about a female’s obedience and submissiveness to a superior male. Linda Gordon and Paula O’Keefe comment on the historical evidence of incestuous father-daughter relationships stating they are “characterized by families with a rigid conformity to traditional sexual roles, fathers who dominated families through use of force and expressed no contrition for their behavior” (27). As studies reported by Gordon and O’Keefe have shown, incest is most commonly found among families with a power-oriented father figure, just as in “Donkeyskin”, showing the direct link between incest and male dominance over a female. Not only is this perpetrator the king, and assumes everyone will do as he wishes, but he is also a male that attempts to take advantage of his own daughter.

In order to escape the incestuous advances of the king, the princess takes her fairy godmother’s suggestion and wears the king’s precious donkey skin as a disguise to flee her father’s kingdom without being recognized. Although the godmother’s original proposal fails, the king would not give up his precious donkey for his daughter, and the two women resort to the next plan- to flee and use the skin tactically as a concealing outfit. Because the skin is in fact so hideous to the eye, no one believes that someone as beautiful as the princess is hidden underneath it, the disguise is a successful one. As the princess takes on the new identity of “Donkeyskin”, she journeys to new places in search of work and is continuously denied because of her appearance, but eventually obtains work at a farm owned by a king. The success of Donkeyskin’s disguise is reinforced further through the new treatment that comes with her hideous appearance. Her poor treatment is shown when, “She was put into a back corner of the kitchen, where the valets, those scoundrels, ridiculed, attacked, and mocked her all the time. They played tricks on her whenever they could, tormenting her at every turn” (Perrault 112). Regardless of the fact that these other workers show her no respect and constantly ridicule her, this ridicule is still better than capitulating to the incestuous demands of her father’s so-called “love” for her. This horrific treatment only reinforces that Donkeyskin’s disguise is successful because ugly appearances, as we have unfortunately become accustomed to, are discriminated against. This choice of disguise is ironic for the princess because the king’s donkey is ugly on the outside and therefore obviously does not seem valuable, when in reality it is literally priceless, in the sense of an endless supply of gold. Relating this aspect of the donkey to the princess, she is disguised as ugly and appears worthless to the rest of the world around her, when in fact she is royal, beautiful and of high status.

Donkeyskin successfully makes a new life for herself although it is one of torment, and with her new life she conveniently stumbles upon a true, appropriate love. Through the clever use of the skin of the king’s prized possession, the princess manages to successfully flee, but she is now looking back at the life she once had as royalty. This is evident when Donkeyskin watches the prince “with tenderness from a distance” (Perrault 113). While he sits amongst a court of nobles, the
princess finds self-confidence in the fact that beneath her hideous appearance, she still holds the heart of a princess. The birds in the courtyard, representing a symbol for freedom, show that although the princess is free from the incestuous overtures of her father, she yearns for freedom from the torment she is receiving now. In addition to this interpretation, the courtyard, which is filled with "chickens from Barbary, rails, guinea fowls, cormorants, goslings raised on musk, ducks, and thousands of other types of exotic birds, each different from the other, could fill with envy the hearts of ten whole courts" suggests another interpretation (Perrault 112). This courtyard, filled with an eclectic group of birds, represents Donkeyskin's appearance. In the courtyard there are ordinary birds, such as ducks, which depict the princess' current mundane physical state, while wearing the donkey skin. However, the exotic birds show that regardless of Donkeyskin's present commonality, she is envied by all once she obtains the prince as her groom because her exotic beauty is unmatched.

Moreover, the love Donkeyskin happens to "stumble upon" is a result of the prince's uncontrollable love and lust for her. When the princess is in the privacy of her abode, she takes pleasure in dressing in the elegant clothes she once wore as royalty to maintain her self-pride and personal confidence, especially when among the ridicule from her fellow servants. After the prince observes the princess in this state, he immediately falls in love. He initially loves her physical perfection when he sees her with "the beauty of her face, her lovely profile, her warm, ivory skin, her fine features...But most of all, his heart was captured by a wise and modest reserve that bore witness to the beauty of her soul" (Perrault 113). Ironically enough, the prince's love is initially the same as her father's- a desirable lust based on physical attraction, as he was "at the mercy of his desires." However, the prince takes his love a step further to admire the princess' wise, modest reserve, as well as her soul, making his love an appropriate one, unlike her father's love.

The prince's physical attraction for Donkeyskin leads him to request a cake to be made by her own two hands. Although everyone else amongst the courtyard, who distinguishes the princess as the hideous creature draped in the skin of a donkey, the prince insists she is a "remarkable nymph" (Perrault 113). Upon fulfilling the request of the prince, Donkeyskin strategically drops her emerald ring into the cake batter. During this time, she is not dressed in her disguise but rather in a "silver smock in honor of the work she was about to undertake" (Perrault 114). Dressing in such apparel reveals her true physical beauty, with which the prince fell in love. This shows that she does not need a disguise to fall in love, but she does need a disguise to escape love. Also, by putting the ring in the cake dough, we see the princess' initiative to seek out a husband after taking the initiative to leave her other, inappropriate, love. Paralleling this suggestion, the prince takes action to go looking for the princess out of true love, while her father does not. The king quits with little challenge because his love was incestuous rather than true.

"Princess in the Suit of Leather" depicts a king's restrictive, "bad" love for his daughter by taking the suggestion of an old matron and planning to take the princess, his daughter, as his new wife. The king, so distraught after his wife's death, plans to marry the maiden whose ankle fits his wife's anklet perfectly. When he found the only girl in the kingdom whose ankle it fits is his daughter's, he takes the suggestion of an old matchmaker and "the king summoned the qadi to pen the papers for the marriage. To the princess he made no mention of his plan" ("The Princess in the Suit of Leather" 132). The king's neglect to inform his daughter shows that he knows his plan is twisted and wrong, considering he chooses to hide it from her. He is too concerned with himself getting remarried that he is not bothered by this. He has the power to "marry his daughter off" but chooses to keep the details of the marriage from her. This depicts the king's patriarchal control over his daughter and how unimportant he views her. He decides that she does not deserve to know the details of her own future.

Also, when the wrinkled old matron voices her suggestion, she states, "the princess your daughter" ("The Princess in the Suit of Leather" 131). By suggesting "princess" before "your daughter" to the king, we can see that both she and the king, who jumps to take advantage of the suggestion, put royalty before family, reinforcing the king's lack of true love for his daughter. This princess, described as "the light of the king's eyes" is a girl who "had hardly reached womanhood"
Afreet (cunning demon of spirit)” and a “monster her would think he was seeing nothing but a pile of hides” (“The Princess in the Suit of Leather” 132) and that she “looks like nothing less than an Afrepet (cunning demon of spirit)” and a “monster outside” (133). The disguise is so hideous that no one, including those in search of her for her father and the people of the new kingdom she has fled to, recognizes her. In the new kingdom, where she finds work as a servant girl, the queen wishes to keep her around for both work and amusement.

Again, the princess is seen as an object although she is now unattractive rather than admired as a beautiful, sexual object in the king’s presence. Regardless of her ugly appearance, she is still perceived as an object considering these other women use her solely for the purpose of amusement, entertainment, and servitude. Also, Christine Goldberg comments on the wearing of animal hides, “The nature of the skins can indicate something about the wearer. Leather clothes suggest motorcycle gangs or rock stars, and fur coats identify wealthy matrons” (32). People have become accustomed to women wearing fur coats, exhibiting their wealth and lives of luxury. The princess, Juleidah, juxtaposes this generalization with her suit of leather, reinforcing the success of her disguise. As royalty, she would be expected to wear expensive furs, but in the case of her escape, she conceals herself as unattractive and tough. This is ironic because she is actually very beautiful and as a female is not expected to be tough in any way, but rather passive and delicate.

While the majority of the time Juleidah, the name the princess has created for herself, is in disguise and viewed as a servant, she sheds the disguise to attend the wazir’s feast and shows how she was initially viewed as a beautiful object. As she walks in, clean of her hide and leather coat, she is “with a face like a rose and the silks and jewels of a king’s bride, she seemed to fill the room with light” (“The Princess in the Suit of Leather” 134). This description of the princess wearing jewels of a king’s bride is ironic because she was the bride of the king, her own father. All the women admire Juleidah, the newcomer, and in order to escape their overbearing attention, she scattered a handful of gold sequins on the floor to distract the women. The ongoing motif of gold, including the gold bangle given to the minister’s daughter, the gold coins given to the tanner, and the gold sequins scattered for the women all represent a means by which the princess uses to escape containment and gain freedom. Primarily gold can be equated to wealth and power. Considering her initial discovery of the king’s plan, she ultimately undermines his power and respect.
patriarchal control over her with her ability to give the bangle to the girl in exchange for information, and the coins to the tanner in exchange for a disguise. In addition, the second appearance she makes at the feast, Juleidah uses pearls as a method to escape. Typically, pearls represent truth, love and marriage. This parallels Juleidah in the sense that even though she is disguised in a hideous leather skin, ironically the pearls, a symbol of truth, are a method of continuing the lie of who she really is. Having the jewels of a king’s bride, which include the gold sequins and pearls, initially provided by the king, her father, is ironic because he is providing her freedom, reinforcing this idea because she uses them as a method of escape.

Also, when talking to the prince and the other court members, Juleidah speaks only in riddles which ultimately frees her. Warner conveys the meaning of riddles when she states, “In family relations, incest becomes an analogous activity... It is a form which abolishes linguistic logic, just as incest cancels kinship law” (330). When the father crosses the line of inappropriateness, Juleidah needs the riddle to escape. Just as riddles do not logically make sense to linguistics people are ordinarily accustomed to, neither do the incestuous relationships that the king desires.

In “The Princess in the Suit of Leather,” the queen is so mesmerized by the beauty of the mysterious woman from the feast that she insists her son pursue her. Interestingly enough, the queen states that this woman must be the daughter of something much higher than a king or sultan because she is so beautiful and poised. In the event that the prince attempts to stop Juleidah upon her fleeing the second feast, he insists to know who her father is. The prince is looking to her father for recognition and perhaps permission for marriage, when in fact; she escaped her father and does not look to him as a father figure because he tried to violate her in such an inappropriate way. Also, by successfully escaping the restrictive love of the king, she no longer is his object or “belongs” to him because she resisted and broke away from his patriarchal ways. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to report to him for permission on decisions for her life.

Juleidah’s disguise, originally meant to escape her father, aids her in finding a true romantic love with the prince. After she swipes the prince’s ring clean off his finger when dressed in her finery, the prince sets out in search of this woman to marry her, and happens to find out that the woman was Juleidah, only after nearly eating the ring she strategically placed in the dough of his cake. Meanwhile, Juleidah’s father, continuously in search of her, finds her living with her new prince. Surprisingly enough, the king gives half of his kingdom to his daughter and her prince while he flings the wrinkled old matron, who originally suggested the incestuous marriage, off a tall cliff into a ravine. This event reinforces the king’s patriarchy in the sense that he had the power to take a woman’s life simply because he took her suggestion stated as a question, ultimately blaming his mistake of choice on the person who proposed it.

However, when the princess acquires land from her father, her final triumph over her father’s restrictive love over her is shown. Juleidah’s marriage to the prince shows in these Cinderella type tales that “the path to happy heterosexual unions depends on a successful transfer of filial love and devotion from a father to a ‘prince’, on a move from false ‘perfect fit’ to a true ‘perfect fit’” (Tatar 105). Maria Tatar presents the false, incestuous love of the king that Juleidah was forced to marry, transferred to the true love from the prince.

In addition, the princess is the recipient of a true romantic love with her marriage to the prince. Rather than being seen only as a sexual object, their love is described when “they lived in happiness and contentment until death, the parter of the truest loves, divided them” (“The Princess in the Suit of Leather” 137). Typically a ravine, such as the one the old matron was thrown into, separates two higher points with one low point. The two higher points are equated to father and daughter while the lower point is this wrinkled old matron. Her interference, which transformed the father’s love from appropriate to inappropriate, separated them and ironically her life ended at the hands of a separation. On the one hand, separation was the result of death, in regards to the prince and princess’s happy marriage. While on the other hand, the separation was the cause of her death, symbolically illustrated by being thrown into the ravine. This ravine, again, symbolizes the separation of father and daughter. Ultimately, this illustrates the strength of Juleidah’s love with the
prince and the discrepancy of her father's restrictive love she broke away from.

In contrast to the Cinderella tale types, Andersen's "The Little Mermaid", shows a different kind of restrictive love by a father for a daughter- one of respect and genuine love and care. The littlest mermaid of six sisters deemed as the most beautiful and loveliest of them all, falls in love with the world of humans above the sea, particularly a human prince. However, the sea princess is not allowed to swim to the surface of the ocean because of rules set by her father out of his unconditional love and concern for his daughters’ well-being. One rule entails that no daughter of his shall swim to the surface until they are fifteen years of age. While her older sisters go to the surface consecutively every year before her, we see the ongoing symbol of birds in the sisters’ descriptions. They describe “a flock of wild swans”, “birds singing”, “ships looking like seagulls”, and “a gale sprang up” (218-219). This repetition of birds, representing freedom, symbolically depicts the yearning and anxiousness felt by the youngest mermaid to have freedom from her mermaid tail and sea life. The youngest mermaid, and most anxious to see the upper world, feels contained by her father’s power over her.

In pursuing her love interest, the little mermaid takes the initiative to pursue the evil sea witch’s magic to ultimately disguise her “mermaid roots” for the prince to love her. This need to be of human form comes about when the little mermaid’s grandmother describes, “the very thing that’s so beautiful here in the sea, your fish’s tail, seems ugly to people on the earth; they know so little about it that they have to have two clumsy supports called legs in order to look nice” (Andersen 224). Because this old grandmother of wisdom puts this idea in the mermaid’s head, she is convinced the only way to ever have her love for the prince reciprocated is to have two of her own legs. Hence, the mermaid, without mentioning the plan to her sisters, grandmother or restrictive father, transforms herself into human form, disguising who she really is, with the help of the witch in exchange for her voice. Ultimately, she escapes the restrictive love of her father, considering she does it without his knowledge in attempt to find true love of her own. Although this love is not twisted or incestuous like that of the Cinderella tale types, the mermaid still feels the need to disguise herself in order to gain her own happiness.

Unlike the Cinderella tale types, Andersen’s tale shows a different kind of love by the prince for the mermaid. In this case, he does not recognize her as an individual but rather as an object. This is ironic because in this tale, her father sees her as an individual unlike the characters in the Cinderella tales, such as Donkeyskin, where the fathers saw their daughters only as sex objects. A reason for the mermaid being seen as an object to the prince is that she does not have a voice to speak her opinions and ideas. Therefore, the prince perceives her as dumb and lowered to the level of a pet when Andersen describes the prince’s “little foundling... was allowed to sleep on a velvet cushion outside his door” (Andersen 228). The prince repeatedly calls the mermaid his “dumb child” and “little foundling with speaking eyes.” Much of the prince’s “love” for the mermaid is based merely on physical attraction, just as the witch stated would happen, meaning that the little mermaid does not need a voice because she has a “lovely form, graceful movements, and speaking eyes. With those you can so easily enchant a human heart” (226).

However, in comparing the father of the mermaid’s love to that of the fathers in Cinderella tales, it can be seen that he respects his daughter’s decision and supports her in gaining full happiness. This love is shown when her sisters come to the surface of the sea to visit the little mermaid and “in the far distance, she saw her old grandmother who hadn’t been above the water for many years, and also the Sea King wearing his crown. They both stretched out their hands towards her, but they didn’t venture in so near to the shore as the five sisters” (Andersen 228). While in the Cinderella tales, the other fathers crossed the line to get too close to the daughters in an inappropriate way, the Sea King keeps his distance and respects her decision but still shows her unconditional love and support by reaching out his arms. His crown in the description represents his power and patriarchy; that even though he is so powerful, he still has enough respect for his daughter and concern for her happiness that he leaves the decision up to her, again depicting his benevolent love for her.

After looking at these restrictive loves, determined as both “good” and “bad”, the
disguises the active daughter takes in an attempt to escape this love can be seen and also how the attempt to have power over these women pushes them to rebel. In both "Donkeyskin" and "Princess in the Suit of Leather," the father’s love is not really love at all, but rather sexual desire and an underlying need for complete control over his daughter. His expectation of extreme filial devotion shows the restrictiveness of his love. However, in "The Little Mermaid," the father’s love is restrictive, but in a way that is beneficial to the mermaid- keeping her free from harm and danger. With the evidence previously presented, it is clear that disguises are a method of escape for the daughters who are victims of restrictive love, can be good or bad. In the case of "Donkeyskin" and "Princess in the Suit of Leather," the daughters’ disguises are good ones. In both tales, it leads her to finding an appropriate love, something her father could not offer her. In contrast, the mermaid’s disguise is bad. Her attempt to win the prince with “beautiful” human legs was not successful. The princess lost something great she already had, her father’s benevolent love for her, and never even gained what she had originally put this great love in jeopardy for- the prince’s love. Ultimately, she is not successful unlike the daughters of the Cinderella tale types.

Although the mermaid is not successful and Donkeyskin and Juleidah are, all three can be depicted as active, independent women taking the initiative to obtain the life they truly want, in other words, they escape their fathers love that they see as so restrictive. As for "Donkeyskin" and "Princess in the Suit of Leather," both women were mature enough to see the unacceptable of their fathers’ overtures. They are independent, active, and find new love as a result of having the courage to leave something they thought would always be a place of comfort- their own homes. Both of these women would rather take a vow of servitude than be involved in incestuous love. Their knowledge that the love is inappropriate makes them that much more admirable as female protagonists in these tales. As critic Maria Tatar states, “In staging the attempted violation of our most sacred taboo, [Donkeyskin] stories celebrate daughters as agents of resistance” (106). Although the Sea King’s love is an appropriate one, the mermaid princess can still be praised for her courage to step out of the comfort of her father’s caring protection and enter a world she knows nothing about with a pair of legs she has never used. She goes through extreme lengths and extreme pain to change the fate of her future to one she wants rather than what was intended for her in the sea world. As critic Marina Warner states, “These stories mark awareness that a young woman may step out from paternal control and be praised for it” (334). Warner’s statement only further emphasizes the courage and independence these characters possess and how their actions hold women in a higher light than what they originally were within this era. If the fathers’ restrictive love of these three fairy tales was not present, the females would have never had the chance to exhibit their admirable and revered inner strength.

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