

Leila Chapter 50

WPCs Martin and Bayfield walked Leila into the station. First stop, the medical room. An ambulance had accompanied them from the forest and two paramedics in green jumpsuits stood by wondering if they could help. Police Doctor Wu, her stethoscope slung round her neck and clipboard in hand, entered the room and shut the door behind her, ushering out the two officers with a no-nonsense high-pitched grunt. Leila's father stood guard outside, nervously checking his phone.

'Is this a prison?' Leila asked.

'Oh no, Leila, nothing like that. It's where we have some nice people who can help you. Now, let me just check you over please.'

'Check me over? What are you checking?'

'I'm just doing my job Leila. Now, please lay down over there.'

'I'm fine. Look, I'm sorry. I just stayed out. Got a bit cold. A few scratches.'

'I just need to examine you. Please lie down and relax.'

After twenty minutes, the door opened. Leila's dad jumped.

'She OK?'

'She's clearly been through a lot. But apart from the odd lesion she seems fine. We'll get her wounds dressed now.'

'I haven't been through anything,' protested Leila, 'I just stayed out the night.'

'Well, it must have been very scary for you to be imprisoned like that,' said Martin, taking her arm.

Leila had had enough experience of social workers and the police, not to mention the idiot counsellors at school, to know where this was going. She just had to go with it even though only she knew the truth, and they would not listen to it.

'I went for a walk in the forest. I had a falling out with my dad. I decided to stay out all night. I found the shack and decided to take a look around.'

'It's very common, Leila, for people to deny bad things. That's OK. We're here to listen.'

'You're not listening! You don't hear what I'm telling you! Just listen!'

'The brain's amazing isn't it Leila? It helps to protect you. To block out the bad things. It is OK, Leila, we will give you time. All the time you need. Now, the officers who found you are running some tests on the bed. We always find out the truth of what happened.'

Leila laughed in astonishment at what they were suggesting, and in frustration at the pointlessness of her even speaking. They had made up their stupid minds and nothing would change them. She also knew that they virtually never found out what happened.

After three days on and off, back and forth from the station, and interviews at home, they finally played their trump card.

They fetched Nigel.

‘Tell me, Leila. I’m listening.’

‘Tell you what? I’ll tell you something. I’m not listening.’

‘I can feel your pain Leila. Deep down.’

Leila looked down. Deep down. There was no pain down there.

‘You can’t feel my pain, because there isn’t any. And anyway if there was, it would be mine, and you would not be able to feel it.’

‘Maybe it’s time to get back on the horse, Leila.’ He looked quite pleased with himself.

She really thought he’d lost it this time. She stood up.

‘Look, you people have tried to get me to tell you what happened. And I have. I went in the woods and stayed there the night. I’m sorry I did that. The next morning I went in the house, looking for a friend I used to visit. He was gone. And now the problem, and whatever crime you are looking for, is all yours. Where is he now? Harassment, victimisation and bullying. You may be responsible for something much more serious, and much more tragic. And if you are, I’ll be coming for you.’

She got up and left the room.

This time, finally, they did not try to stop her.

At just about the same time, many miles away, a barefooted man slid calmly across the border into South Wales, far from the constabulary that was blundering around, excitedly chasing him for a non-existent crime that he did not commit.