

## Leila Chapter 45

Having settled down in thick woodland near the lake, Leila started calming her nerves with some of the things she'd nabbed from the kitchen. Some cheese and crackers she'd bought for him. *He said that was his favourite.* In the distance she could hear them calling her name, but she was in no mood to give up. She checked her bag. Enough food for a few hours. Warm clothes and a coat.

*Sure, they'll find me. Make 'em sweat it out a bit though. All in good time.*

She briefly wondered where Duke was. She hoped that he was not too upset by them going through his house. It was nearly nine o'clock, and her only other concern was that her feet were cold. It occurred to her that they might get even colder during the night.

Was she going to stay out all night? *You bet! That'll show them!* She wondered what it would be like to sleep outside. She had never done it.

She'd been thinking just that when she woke up.

She had slept where she'd sat down. She was right though. It had got cold. She looked at her watch which glowed reassuringly in front of her misty eyes. It was close to midnight. There was a dry cracking sound as she shifted position to relieve the pressure on her back and legs. At least it had not rained.

She settled back into a more comfortable position, her head resting against the backpack she'd used for the provisions, and thought she heard something. Unlike earlier in the day, her head was clear now. Her overactive mind during the day was a superpower at night. Her senses were razor-sharp, and as she inclined her head to the very best angle, she could hear something, or someone, moving about in the undergrowth, not far from where she sat. She knew that she was nigh-on invisible in the darkness, but moving was not an option - she could not be seen but she would definitely be heard.

The shuffling and the rustling seemed to get closer. Perhaps it was an animal. Yes, that would be it. A deer perhaps? That was the largest thing she'd ever seen in here. There was nothing dangerous out there, was there? An inquisitive badger? Did they bite? Weren't they the kind of creature that was more frightened of you than you were of them? The sound moved a little closer still. A regular soft plodding through the dry leaves. Animals didn't do that. Those were human footsteps. But no human would find her out there, would they? Animals used their sense of smell. Humans didn't. It was pitch dark. She was invisible.

The footsteps got closer.

She thought again about moving. Maybe running now. But she stayed calm. Cool. Listening to her own breathing. Listening to the steady parting of the undergrowth as whoever it was made his way, or her way, or its way towards her.