

Leila Chapter 41

She wandered miserably home.

I get it, sort of. But why did he send me away? What's up with him?

Even marking every fifth tree didn't calm her. Every fifth tree, four notches, yes. But now crossed out. Leila didn't notice.

She left the path and sat on a fallen trunk in a small clearing.

Why was he so worried? Did they come back to chuck him out? He didn't say that. He just said 'I can feel it'. And why did he tidy up if he was going to leave? And why did he say that I was in danger?

She fiddled with the lichen growing beside her, scratching patterns in the bark with her nails, her thoughts coursing with his rejection of her. That had never happened before.

She should go back.

She couldn't go back.

It was nearly dark.

She couldn't go back.

She didn't go back.

Duke sat on his bed, head in hands. Beside him was the bag, full now with tools and ropes and tapes and survival rations. Enough to see them through. To a new life.

He looked out of the window and wondered what she was doing, and whether she would return. Why had he told her to go? He needed her, and she needed him. They could have gone together. He should have explained, told her the truth. She would forgive, and in time she would forget.

He took out a notebook and started sketching what he could see. The trees that were his home, now puffed out in their greenest shade of leaf, forming a thick canopy across the forest. The type of cover that he needed to continue his fruitless concealment, that was about to come to an end. He drew quickly, roughly, what was in his head, filling the page with rough scrawls, of trees and bushes and pathways. He tried to draw her face from memory, but his talent was nothing like hers, and he quickly discarded the cartoonish result. He pulled out the neatly-folded portrait she'd given him from the bag, and looked intently into the eyes. He tried to read what they were telling him. He spilled out what he was thinking. The forest. The pathways out. The road ahead.

Run! Run! they said.

He decided he would stay for one more night, in the hope that she would come.

Then he would set off.

She didn't come.