

Leila Chapter B

So we are making a bit of progress here.

We have some characters. We have a setting, of sorts. We don't have much of a plot yet, but let's hope that may develop. There are hints as to what might come. Leila seems a bit troubled at school, and Duke is kind of happy and lonely at the same time. He's had a mixed past, what with his wife passing away, his daughter moving to Australia, and the falling out with his brother.

Did you catch all that in Chapter 3?

Maybe re-read it if you need to.

Sorry.

That was rude.

Condescending. Of course you got it!

You might need to look up *condescending*.

OMG sorry!

Even more condescending!

So I'm trying to imagine in my head the setting I have described. Do you do that? That's what books are good for. Now, don't get me wrong! I would love this to be made into a best-selling film one day!

Oh yes! I've often wondered who would play Leila. Millie Bobby could do it! With maybe Clooney as Duke. There'd be a red carpet outside the movie theatre and I'd be interviewed about my inspiration for the story, my oversized rented dinner suit hanging off my newly gym-toned body! And the after-party - what style - we'd be all over social media...

Sorry!

Unlike films, books require the reader to build their own mental pictures of what is happening in support of the words on the page. Almost everyone will provide that support in different ways, bringing their own experiences and imagination to bear on what is written.

That's why I don't like picture books or graphic novels.

Too much information.

I remember reading *Stig of the Dump* as a child, with those few pencil illustrations. Just enough to help me frame the action in my own imaginary setting, supported by the line drawings. Great.

The setting I have built in my mind goes like this. I wonder if you have something similar?

Leila's house is small but reasonably comfortable. There is a hallway, perhaps leading out to the back door, where the dog lies around in a basket all day doing nothing. If I go out the back door, there is a

basic garden, although in my head Leila's dad has not done much to it, and there is nothing for her to do in it. Perhaps someone else might have put a trampoline or something for her, or a football goal. But no, there is nothing there. Fencing either side maybe, and tall trees beyond.

The most important feature of the garden, at least to Leila, is the gate.

It's a gateway to a different world. Her dad sees the woods as his own back garden, perhaps making up for the inadequacies of the real thing. Leila sees it as an escape - from home, from school, from Dad. Even just beyond the gate she can immerse herself in relative calm, drawing solace from the natural world. The peace and quiet. Nature in all its glory. Some days it forms part of her route to school.

The forest, which is described as being a mix of ancient and coppiced woodland, seems to have some wide pathways in places, and impenetrable undergrowth in others. Perhaps that is a result of some of it being managed, and some not. For me it feels like it is a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees. Deciduous trees like the mighty oaks have seasons, and drop their leaves and their fruit in the Northern Hemisphere autumn. Coniferous trees are evergreens, like the pine family. Although they may drop pine cones (remember every living thing needs to reproduce itself somehow), they don't generally drop their leaves or spines. Unless you cut them down and put baubles on them at Christmas, when you'll still be fishing needles out of the carpet in June.

I'm seeing trees in a variety of shapes and sizes forming a dense, mixed woodland layer, maybe fifteen or twenty metres high in places, and some sparser areas with pathways and walking routes. I can see elms and pines, but oak trees dominate the other species, their round shape giving them a certain regal superiority over the rest of the forest. As most of the forest has been allowed to develop naturally, the fittest and strongest trees have survived, but there are other weaker ones that have been squeezed out and have fallen, perhaps brought down by storms. I can see trees that have fallen into each others' arms, gradually being covered by lichen and moss, green vines gripping and smothering them, in a suffocating embrace.

OK, I've gone a bit too far! *Regal superiority?* *A suffocating embrace?* These are good phrases, but a bit over the top! And I've also mentioned *reproduction*.

That's not a good thing.

Time to move on.