

## Leila Chapter 9

Despite the interventions of the counsellor the previous day, or probably because of them, Leila had had another bad morning.

Terrible actually. This always seemed to happen a few weeks into each term. Everything started OK, then just headed downhill.

She'd got in trouble several times, all for what seemed like really small things, but in the end she'd been taken out of the classroom. The teacher couldn't take any more of her questions, even though she was generally someone Leila liked. Maybe that's why she asked lots of questions in class.

*That's what you're supposed to do isn't it?*

Leila stood in the corridor, and thought about who she did like. It was a short list.

She didn't like her father, who she lived with. He seemed to be constantly on the phone, and his conversations never made any sense. He went through girlfriends something like once a week. There was always a different woman in the house, and none of them seemed to have time for Leila, even though she did her best to be nice to them. But they were always swooning at her dad. He was a good-looking dude, but he never had enough money to match the promise of his looks, so they soon lost interest in him. He just moved on to the next one. They literally passed in the night. Even if they were nice enough, they never stayed.

There was one once who Leila did like. She was called Melanie, or Melody or Harmony or something. Something that reminded Leila of a song. And the funny thing was, as far as Leila could be bothered to remember, she always seemed to be singing.

Yes, it was Melody, for sure.

Melody was small and smiley, and although she undoubtedly fell first for the good looks, she also committed for a few weeks to both Leila and her dad. It was Melody who had first introduced Leila to music, and who had even given her one of her own guitars to play around with. She'd taught Leila some basic chords, and before long they had started playing together. *Blues jams*, she called them, which had made Leila smile. For a while, Leila had practised a lot, hoping to play more with her. But then, like the others, she was gone.

Leila occasionally liked one or two of the friends she made at school, but each one of them inevitably did something to annoy her. Nothing big. Just annoying, like the way Lil flicked her hair back from the front of her face, or Olivia's irritating little high-pitched giggle, or the way they all changed the rules of her games at breaktime. Well, maybe they weren't exactly her games, but if the rules got changed...well the game just had to end. Right? It happened almost every day. It always seemed to be her that lost out. Everyone else just carried on, after she'd gone.

*Why was that?*

When she got home, she changed out of her all-blue school uniform. It was neither a nice shade of blue nor a particularly good fit on her. She swapped it for a favourite red dress, past its best but relaxing and familiar. She sat on her bed and contemplated what to do next. She got up and looked out of the window. Five pm in mid-October, it was getting towards dusk, but the day had been unseasonably

warm, and the sun seemed to be lingering just above the horizon. There might be some tea in the kitchen at about six, so she had an hour. She looked at her watch to be sure. It was not good to be late back - her father had a temper.

*Just half an hour. I'll take the dog. We can search for a pot of gold at the end of that smoke!*

Leila looked at the two huge eyes peering out of a ball of fur curled up in the basket near the front door. A King Charles, Cairo was only two years old and was drawn from sweet and docile stock.

But Cairo was more than just a bit laid back. He was lazy. He just could not be bothered most of the time. Leila looked at him and waggled the lead hanging from the coat pegs in the hallway. Most dogs would jump at the chance of a walk in the woods, but for this one it seemed like a chore. He stared back at her as if she'd said something ridiculous just by suggesting a walk. Then he settled back down on his rug, with a shrug.

*No thanks. Not today. I'm happy just lying here.*

What self-respecting pooch behaved like that? Leila couldn't be bothered to pester him any more - if he didn't want to go out, then why should she push him? He just wasn't interested. How odd for a dog! Leila stared at him contemptuously, almost growling. He turned his face back to his rug and settled in for a long night of doing nothing.

Even the dog rejected her.

She opened the back door and made her way down the garden, reflecting briefly on the fact that Cairo was a bit like her dad. A lot of sitting around. A lot of eating. Not a lot of action.

Well they do say that dogs are like their owners.