

## Leila Chapter 8

There was a knock on the rickety door. It was the planning guy again. Duke stepped out onto the new deck.

‘Oh good morning Kevin, how are you?’

The man was not on the lowest rung of the Council’s planning ladder, but he was pretty close. The familiarity of the greeting made the poor man shudder slightly.

‘Er, fine thank you. I’ve got some...more...paperwork for you.’

‘Well, that can wait! How about a nice cup of tea?’

Duke always did this. The planning officer sat down reluctantly and took the foul-looking brew.

‘Thank you. Er...tea again? Nice. Now we do have a few things to discuss.’

This was the fourth visit. Each one had got slightly more serious. At first it was a few questions, about how the structure had been built, how long it had been there, and why he had built it. He'd always started by offering them refreshments, and he'd sat them on the terrace. When they had wanted to come in to do their inspections, he let them in.

By the third visit, they had brought someone with them called a *structural engineer*. He'd worked his way through the building, including crawling around the roof spaces and exploring the foundations of the basement. Duke could tell he was impressed with what had grown out of nothing, but even so the man claimed to have found *major structural flaws* and *design issues*. With a professional sigh he'd written the word *condemned* in his notebook, and apologised to Duke at the inevitable outcome of his visit.

Kevin Walker had come to discuss just that.

‘Thank you,’ the planning officer spluttered, as the so-called tea hit the back of his throat, ‘so you’ve seen the structural engineer’s report?’

‘Oh no, I haven’t actually,’ replied Duke casually. He always seemed to maintain his cool, despite the seriousness of his current situation.

‘Well it was sent on the Fourteenth...’

‘Of which month?’

‘Er, well of course that would have been September.’ Duke pretended to write something down.

‘And which year was that?’ He knew that his questions would stall the investigation, even if he also knew he'd put the house together with no permission, and virtually no training or experience.

‘Well of course, it was sent a few weeks ago. 2022.’

‘I’m afraid I never received it.’ He looked around him and waved his arms expansively.

‘As you can see, we are not on any regular postal routes, and if you say this dwelling is illegal, then there is no way we can be.’

He was quite proud of using the word *dwelling*. It sounded good. So did his logic. He continued.

‘So actually what you are saying is that you are sending letters to an address that you say is not allowed to exist. How does that work? No wonder I never get any post!’

Duke smiled with satisfaction at the nonsense he'd just concocted.

The man looked as exasperated on this fourth visit as he'd done on the previous three. The absurdity of trying to send something about removing an address, to an address that did not exist, was actually stopping him doing his job. He sighed another deep sigh and sank the dregs of the tea - mostly the silt and leaves and unknown remnants left at the bottom of the cup. He gagged slightly on it.

‘Erm...well, OK, so I will have to get a courier to bring out the documents to you, is that what you are saying?’

‘Yes it is. So what address will you use for the courier?’

Duke smiled as he said this. The man turned away slightly, his lips pursed in frustration.

‘I will return with the required documentation, sir, if necessary with reinforcements.’

‘Oh I do look forward to that. I’ll boil the kettle. Thank you so much for your visit. See you next time!’

With that Duke got up and pointed the route out for the poor man. Kevin Walker raised himself to his full five foot four and turned to go. He hoisted up his shoulder bag, containing the all-important letters and files, but failed to lodge it securely in place, eventually gathering up the straps and cradling it like a baby as he left. Duke was sure he heard the man *tut tut* disapprovingly as he went out of earshot, or perhaps he was mumbling about the documents.

Duke didn’t care! He knew he'd gained another couple of months. These people don’t work quickly.

He picked up the two mugs with a flourish and almost skipped back inside.