

Leila Chapter 6

Leila had been taken back in to lessons by the Deputy Head. She was a reasonable woman and Leila sort of liked her. She knew the woman had a job to do.

But she'd been taken back into a chemistry lesson. Leila didn't get chemistry. It had all been so much easier in primary school when it had just been called science. She quite liked science. But in this particular chemistry lesson she'd lost track of the point of the topic, and then lost the plot completely. She had shouted, *'No more blah blah blah!'* echoing something she'd seen on YouTube. Everyone had laughed but then the same Deputy had turned up and she was back out on her own again.

This happened a lot, and the school tried their best to accommodate her.

Accommodate was a relative term though. She was often held back at playtimes. Occasionally she was given formal detentions either during lunch or after school, and once she'd been suspended for a day. The school prided itself on how it dealt with 'difficult' children, and there were several staff with pastoral responsibilities - mentors, tutors, special needs people. There was also a counsellor. Leila's behaviour had been disruptive enough so that a visit to the counsellor's office was today's solution.

She sat opposite him as he studied his clipboard.

Most of the children who had meetings with him came out crying or laughing, or both. And not in a good way.

'Good morning Leila. How nice it is to see you again.'

Leila didn't reply.

'You can call me Nigel.'

Leila didn't call him Nigel. She didn't call him anything, despite the words coursing through her head. She looked up at him momentarily. The polished top of his head glinted in the light from the single bulb above them. She wondered what was going on inside it.

'You've got to be in it to win it, Leila. You have to realise that. Have a think about it.'

'I am thinking about it, right now, and I have no idea what you're talking about.'

Almost every recent meeting went this way. Often Leila did not feel like talking at all, and simply sat there, her head in her hands or under her hood, saying nothing.

She had once bumped into Nigel Dunsmore out shopping. He was holding hands with what Leila took to be his wife, and was carrying a fold-up shopping bag. Leila remembered him greeting her with a monotone *'Hullo Lyla'* before walking on past. It had been a warm morning.

Why are they both wearing the same colour cardigans? Oh my days! Sandals with socks!

Leila had turned to watch them head for the car park. They had eased themselves into their Honda Jazz and had trouble getting close enough to the payment machine.

Five years earlier, Jane had helped Nigel to enrol at the local technical college which ran an evening course in counselling. It was a good addition to his sociology degree, and he'd studied hard and had done well, but getting a job had been a struggle. The school had offered him a one-year contract, and Jane had been proud. She'd bought him a pocket watch to celebrate, and it had been in the pocket of his slacks ever since. He was now on his fourth one-year contract, so he was doing well. The journey to work only took him seven minutes, and Jane wrapped his sandwiches in clingfilm each morning. Each day brought him the satisfaction he derived from listening to vulnerable young people.

'So Leila, I'm here to help, to reach out to you. Talk to me.'

Leila listened carefully to what he was saying. To her, in her current mood, there was a problem with almost every single word.

Here to help. It sounded like the alliteration was almost designed to madden her. *You may be able to help, but 'here to help'? Please!*

Him reaching out to her was the last thing she needed. Her heart wanted to scream '*Don't touch me you freak!*' Her head just about prevented it.

She still couldn't stop herself saying, 'Please don't reach out to me.'

'It's a metaphor, Leila.'

'I don't do metaphors,' she said, not for the first time.

I could do this job. He has no clue what I am thinking, but I know exactly what he is going to say! In it to win it? Here to help? He's going to talk about my behaviour next. About how I need to respect people and think about the impact of my actions on others. It's like he's read a book on counselling or something, but never got past page three.

'Please just stop talking to me. I can't stand this.'

He carried on with some more *blah blah*.

'Respect your elders,' he said. He'd said it before. She'd ignored it once, and did so again. She found that every time a cliché spluttered forth out of his ridiculous mouth, she could simply ask 'Why?' or for some kind of explanation, and he would backtrack.

'Why should I respect my elders?'

'Well, Leila, it is like this.'

She thought he was going to say, 'reach out' or something again.

'You see, a young person like yourself...'

She hated being called a young person.

Just call me what I am. I am a slightly out-of-control teenager. I'm neither a young person, nor an elder person. I'm stuck in between, because I'm not an adult either. Actually, she thought again to

herself, *it doesn't matter what you call me.*

I'm Leila.

That didn't stop her arguing though.

'Why do you call me a young person?' She knew he would backtrack, probably out of fear that he'd said something inappropriate.

'Well, when I say young person, I mean, er, that you are not yet an adult, Leila. It doesn't really matter, you can ask me to call you whatever you want. I will always respect you Leila.'

He gave her what she considered to be his 'evil eye'. It was a weird combination of smile, grimace and wink. She hated it, and actually recoiled slightly as he said it. So he respected her, did he? His next effort confirmed that he did not. Her eyes did not connect back.

'Well, I've enjoyed our little chat, Leila. I look forward to seeing you next time. Until then, goodbye, and good mental health.'

She wanted to puke! He'd stolen that cliché from somewhere! She couldn't stand him any longer. She stood up.

'Please stop talking to me! You have no idea what you're talking about. It is all just noise. I could talk to myself and get more sense out of it than talking to you!'

'Are you saying that you sometimes talk to yourself Leila? I can help with that. Lend me your ears.'

Lend me your ears? It's getting worse. I'm not lending you anything! Gotta get out of here.

She went to the door, nervously feeling for her ear as she did so.

'I'm never coming here again. Goodbye!'

'I hear you, Leila, and I respect you.' If he said he respected her again, she would go over and punch him.

'And I hope to see you again.'

You really could not win with this bloke. All fluff and nonsense. She vowed then and there never, ever to see him again. Or go to any kind of other therapy. She did not need all that. She was a survivor.

She was *Leila*.