

Leila Chapter 32

Leila had not left the woods like they had told her.

She wasn't good at following instructions.

Who are they to tell me to go home? I can stay here if I want.

She sat down on the driest bank of grass she could find.

Perhaps they are actually going to throw him out this time? Would they? Could they? What did he say? He wanted my help? What can I do? I'm just a...

Just then, Leila saw the pair heading up the path towards her, away from Duke's house. She'd observed the scene in front of the shack from afar, and knew the gist of what had been said, even though she could not hear it. It even *looked* final from where she hid. Lots of nodding of heads. The envelope and the clipboard. Serious-looking body language.

As they made their way out towards the car, she darted onto the path some sixty yards in front of them, pausing just long enough for both of them to see her, then dodged back to hide within the thick rhododendron bushes, which were just starting to grow buds and leaves. She could see them talking to each other, and then move in her direction.

'Er, come out love, we know you're there!'

There was only one person in the world who she would allow to call her *love*. Or *My dear*. And she knew he needed her. She jumped out again, then started running down the pathway back in the direction of the shack. The young policewoman broke into a clanking jog. Leila darted again, down one of the side paths. Routes she knew so well.

This time she let them get within twenty yards or so, as she reached the main path towards the shack. Walker was puffing hard, and WPC Martin didn't seem to know what to do next. Should they just chase this young girl through the forest? That wouldn't look good on the police report. *The two of us chased her down the path...*

As they panted, staring in an awkward stand-off, Leila screamed.

'Daddy! Daddy! Help! Help!'

The two looked at each other helplessly. Down at the shack Duke jumped up out of his chair, pulled on his boots without lacing them, and clomped towards the path.

Genius!

As soon as she saw him, she started running towards him, turning back over her shoulder for dramatic effect.

'They're chasing me! Help me!' She jumped up onto the deck and leapt into his arms. Martin and Walker continued walking towards them, then stopped.

‘Oh Allie! Allie! I was so worried about you! What happened?’

Leila sobbed dramatically into the shoulder of his trenchcoat.

‘They were chasing me! I was so scared! I was just out for my walk!’

Duke looked up to see them busily whispering to each other. Walker tried to call out.

‘Mr Porter, I’m so... I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had your daughter...your grand-daughter here.’

‘I can’t believe what you’ve just done! Intimidating this poor girl, here. Spying on her and running after her through the forest! I am going to make an official complaint about this.’

He knew that he would be on thin ice if he complained to anyone, but it sounded good.

‘We’re not intimidating her, Sir,’ said Martin, ‘we are just ensuring that she is safe.’

‘They were stalking me Daddy! Stalking me!’

‘Officer, it is clear that you have been following a young girl through the forest. That could be taken the wrong way. You need to explain yourself. I will be talking to your superiors, Officer, er, Martin.’

Walker spluttered again.

‘Well I was just following her to see where she ends up...’

‘That’s the second time you have admitted to following a vulnerable thirteen year old through the woods. Stay here my dear, you are safe now. Ignore this man.’

Leila spluttered and sobbed for good effect.

‘I’m scared of him. He is following me with his clipboard! Please help me.’

Duke turned to Walker.

‘Now it is time for you to get off my land, and to stop bothering me once and for all!’

The man predictably started to read from the rule book, muttering about how it wasn’t his land and how he would have to speak to the relevant child protection authorities. Duke rammed home one final point.

‘Time to go. You are stalking. Goodbye.’

‘Yes. Er. Goodbye.’ When he was as far away as he could safely get he turned and shouted, ‘I will be back you know. Other agencies need to know about this! What’s your name again, young lady?’

He sounded really creepy now.

‘Bye bye Mr Stalker-Walker!’

They both collapsed in gales of laughter on the front porch, high-fiving triumphantly in celebration.

What a plan it was!

And they had both played their parts.

To perfection.

Three more months?

At least!

Maybe six.