

Leila Chapter 31

Duke smiled warmly as the planning officer strode up the path. Walker looked a foot taller than before, his confidence boosted by the presence of the policewoman to his side. A brown envelope nestled in his hand, silently ominous. Duke invited them inside, but this time the offer of tea was brusquely turned down. The little man raised himself to his full five foot four, and came straight to the point.

‘Mr Marmaduke Porter, this is a court order for you to have this structure, located at 51°41'48.7" North, 1°29'22.9" West, removed from this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, within 90 days. This procedure must be carried out at your own expense, and should include the restitution of the land to its former natural state. Good day to you.’

Seemingly even taller as he completed his little speech, he handed Duke the envelope and turned smartly to leave. Duke took the unopened document and placed it at the centre of the fire which was roaring in the hearth. It went up just nicely, curling and twisting in the flames before flying up the chimney and out into the wild forest beyond.

‘We will come and check that the procedures are being carried out to our satisfaction, Sir.’

Duke stooped forward slightly to read the woman’s name badge.

WPC C. Martin? I wonder what the C stands for? She looks like a Catherine, or a Cathy. Uniform’s like new. She hasn’t been doing this for long.

‘You can’t do this.’ Walker turned round in the doorway as Duke spoke. Lines he’d rehearsed for several weeks.

‘We can, Sir, and we will.’

Emboldened by the months of paperwork that had led to this moment, Walker turned and looked up at WPC Martin, ‘We will, won’t we?’ The young constable was on one of her first serious jobs. She turned away, fiddling with the buttons on her radio.

‘I know my rights.’ Duke didn’t, but he sounded like he did, ‘It’s my granddaughter you see. She needs constant care. Round the clock. You can’t just take away her home. The only home she has ever known.’

Duke stood leaning with both arms outstretched against the door frame. His little speech had come out just right. Worth all the rehearsals in his mind. It was enough to stop Walker. He studied his clipboard.

‘It doesn’t say anything about a granddaughter here.’

‘Paperwork, eh? It’s never quite what it seems is it?’ There was a jauntiness in his voice now.

‘You say that your granddaughter lives with you here?’

‘That’s right, little Allie.’ He hadn’t prepared a name. It just slipped out naturally.

‘Little Allie? Is that her name?’

‘Yes, that’s right. Allie.’

‘Well can I meet her please? I need to talk to her. This paperwork will need amending.’

Duke could already feel the plan starting to work.

‘Er, I’m sorry, she’s not here right now. She’ll be back later.’

‘I thought you said she depended on you, and needed constant care?’

He had to think on his feet.

‘Well, she can just about manage a few steps into the forest, and she does like to take a walk at this time of the day. Thank you for your visit. I’ll tell her you called. Good day.’

‘May I take a walk around the property to search for her?’

‘You may not. Goodbye.’

He knew his rights well enough to know that searching any property without a warrant, signed by a magistrate, was not legal. Even an illegal shack. The man had no rights to snoop about.

‘You won’t mind if we wait for her to return, then?’

He hadn’t anticipated this one, and was lost for words. The plan might unravel.

‘You do realise, Sir, that it’s an offence to lie to the police? If what you are telling us is untrue, I could have you arrested.’

The WPC sounded serious.

‘I know lying is wrong.’ Duke tried to maintain his confidence, despite the plan feeling a little shaky at that moment.

‘Please, sir, just follow the instructions you have been given.’

Walker and his minder strode out of the house and set off back down the path, looking left and right as they walked.