

## Leila Chapter 20

Leila had not forgotten about him.

She'd got scared.

It went like this.

*Stupid Noah!*

He'd blabbed. They had been called in to see the Head. Even his name, Mr Joseph Walsingham, suggested something of how ineffective he could be. The school's approach to what they referred to privately as *challenging children* was a reflection of his own indecision.

'Maybe you've got something to tell us, Noah?'

The school knew Noah well, and were used to his stories, but he'd been telling anyone who would listen about his visit to the shack in the woods. The 'authorities' had got to know.

'So she's got this creepy old dude in the forest that she goes to visit when she bunks off school.'

Almost every word in that sentence was untrue, and Leila found herself standing up for her forest-man.

'Not true. He's not creepy, he's not old, and I don't skip school. He does.' She pointed at Noah.

'So you do go into the woods to meet someone? An adult?' Walsingham's safeguarding instincts were on fire.

'So what if I do. Anyway I don't. It's my time, I can go where I want. It's nothing to do with you. There's no-one there. Anyway, he's going.'

'Who is going? Going where?'

'It's got nothing to do with you. Leave me alone. Leave him alone.'

'You do realise that we'll have to report this, don't you Leila?'

She stood up from the low chair and turned to face him, her arms folded. He smiled uneasily from behind the safety of his desk.

'Right, explain why you're going to report me for something that I do in my spare time. Who do you think you are?'

'We'll make an emergency appointment with the counsellor for you Leila. And you'll be spending tomorrow in isolation. Insolence to an adult.'

Leila turned to leave. She could see Noah smirking behind his hand. She'd give him a good slap some time for that, although there was no way she was going into that school again tomorrow, just to be

isolated. She opened the door and slammed it shut as she left.

She felt like going straight to the woods to warn Duke about what stupidity they might report. But she had a little project on the go that she was determined to finish.

She was making him a Christmas present. It was taking much longer than she'd wanted, but she didn't like to not finish things.

Sitting in her room at home, she worked furiously through most of the night.