

## Leila Chapter N

So we're ready with some of the proposals for the new editions.

I've done a little re-writing here and there, and added a new chapter to *Leila*.

Allie has done some fabulous work.

She's an odd one. She keeps herself to herself. Often I can see the light burning bright late into the night and the next morning she has invariably produced something absolutely stunning. She has real talent, and she is helping to push the series to a whole new level.

Although I don't like picture books or graphic novels, we have extended Allie's brief to include a range of illustrations that might sit within a chapter, rather than just at chapter or section headings. The style is always the same, but each picture is unique and is a little work of art in itself. To me it brings to mind Quentin Blake, or Edward Ardizzone, who illustrated kids' books when I was reading them back in the sixties and seventies. *Stig of the Dump* with that distinctive cover art and writing.

This morning we have a meeting with my publisher to show off these latest efforts. They have reviewed the text changes and their editors are busy 'working' on them. I always hate editors! How dare they think they can do better than me! Actually I'm lucky - mine are quite benign.

Normally we'd take the train up to London Bridge, and jump in a cab to their offices just off Fleet Street. We'd work through lunch - normally a bought-in buffet of fancy wraps, cheese and fruit, with wine for anyone who wanted it. The whole bunfight would last until about four and we would stagger home, perhaps via a show or something in London. I don't get to London much any more and I miss it.

Problem! Allie flatly refused to travel.

I remember her face as soon as I proposed the meeting. She went a little pale, and I thought I saw her shaking slightly. She immediately started talking about aspects of the trip and asking a million questions! *How long would it take? What sort of train would it be? How would we get from the train to the car? Who would be there? What are the offices like?* Lots and lots of questions. She actually got quite upset, and I had to drop the subject for a few days. When I revisited it later, she was a little calmer, but eventually just dropped her head and said, 'Sorry. I can't go.'

I know now not to push these things with her. She's very sensitive to these kinds of unfamiliar things, although a trip into London is something that most people round here do quite regularly, and even relish.

Clearly not her.

So Susan and I were going to go by ourselves, until Allie came up with an idea.

'Why can't they come here? Day out for them! I could show them my studio.'

She has really made the most of the space we have given her! Over the last few weeks she has cleared more of it so that she can hang up some of the ongoing work and display it - largely for herself. I have to admit the whole scene looks pretty cool - she works in just the way I would imagine a brilliant creative to work! A bit eccentric. Odd hours. No timekeeping. But just fantastic! Her sketches and

some of the finished drawings cover one wall. Another wall is stripped bare so that she can work without distraction.

When I spoke to Susan about it, to my surprise she was quite enthusiastic. She pointed out - correctly - that I was in charge here. I've sold a lot of books for them, so I can call the shots! That's true - half a dozen first class train tickets out to Lewes is the least they could spend! So it was arranged. They'd come here, we would get some catering in, and we could show them around a little.

They might even enjoy it.

They are due in a few minutes.