

Leena Can't Make Friends

By C. Jade Wyton

Leena, taking the advice of her boyfriend, attempts to make friends with some of the other girls living in Weltaron. However, she simply ends up angry and frustrated.

Contains some depictions of social isolation and cults.

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*Ugh.*

Leena could hear the happy chatter of the girls on the other side of the courtyard. They laughed with each other, chirping like the birds in the tree above them, and Leena watched, scowling, from the patch of loose dirt she had laid down in.

Pauline was with them. *Perfect* Pauline; beloved by the kitchens, beloved by *everyone*.

It made Leena so... so....

She didn't want to admit the feeling was probably jealousy, so instead she rolled over and huffed into the dirt.

It was incredibly stupid to be jealous of a thirteen year old. Leena knew this. It was *stupid*. She herself was only a few months off eighteen, and Pauline was basically still just a baby!

But, still. Leena wished she had Pauline's charisma. Her ability to make friends. She couldn't think of a single person in this stupid family who *didn't* love Pauline.... Even Fourteen put up with her, as much as she put up with anyone.

Everyone adored Pauline. And then there was Leena, who only had *two* friends.

Maybe the best friends anyone could possibly have. But still. It was just *two* friends. And one of those might not even count as a friend... did partners count as friends?

Then, as if summoning him with her thoughts, Ragtheim was standing over her.

'We laying in the dirt?' he asked, humorously, before settling down besides Leena and draping an arm over her. It was heavy with orcish muscle, but still as gentle as a butterfly. 'You alright?'

'What's wrong with me?' she mumbled, flatly, without turning her face out of the ground. 'Why can't I make any friends?'

'Well... have you tried, lately?'

She just heaved a sigh, before feeling Ragtheim's lips press into the side of her head.

'I think *that* could be a part of the problem,' he chuckled. 'You should go talk to them.'

She wasn't sure about that; the thought of humiliating herself seemed even more unbearable than just sitting in the dirt with no friends.

When she didn't answer, Ragtheim pulled her close to squeeze her in a tight, affectionate hug. 'C'mon. It'll be fine. Just go and ask if you can sit with them; you don't even have to say anything else, if they say yes. Just sit down and listen to them for a bit.'

'I don't know....'

'Hey, it'll be alright,' Ragtheim reassured. 'You gotta *try*, right? And Pauline's there. There's gotta be something you two have in common— You're both friends with Wonda, right? That's a starting point!'

'Mm...' Leena rolled herself up into a kneel, and cast a doubtful glance over to the group of girls, before giving another sigh. 'Alright. Fine. I'll go try.'

'You'll do great!'

'Mm.'

Barely answering, Leena rose to her feet and made her way towards the girls. There were seven of them; the youngest being peppy little Astrid at just eight, and the oldest being that cook, Elara, who was... twenty-three? Twenty-four?

Leena knew she *should* fit in. But then, they all stopped talking as she came to their side, and she stared at them a moment before casting a glance back to Ragtheim, who nodded and made a motion for her to talk to them....

And Pauline obviously saw it, too, because when Leena turned back, so did the gargoyle, and they met eyes. Pauline gave an awkward but warm smile to Leena and shifted over to make room for her to join her in the grass.

After a small hesitation, Leena dropped down (perhaps a little too quickly) and crossed her legs. 'So, um.... What's... up...?'

'They're talking about which boy they think is the cutest,' Astrid answered, simply, rocking playfully back and forth. 'I don't get it.'

Leena also didn't get it. She didn't get why boys were such a big topic all the time. And she certainly didn't get why the rest of the girls all giggled like there was some sort of inside joke about them.

Then, Pauline nudged her, and her blank stare turned from Astrid to the young teen.

'Besides Ragtheim, who would you date?' Pauline asked her.

'What?'

Pauline asked again, but a little slower this time: 'Besides Ragtheim, who would you date?'

Leena cast a desperate glance to Ragtheim, begging him to come and save her from this mistake, before looking back and answering, honestly, 'I dunno.'

Elara rested a hand on Leena's back and giggled. 'That boy Wade wanted to date you, didn't he?'

'I'd rather kill myself.'

A chorus of "oohs!" and giggles followed Leena's statement, though she didn't get why. She wasn't joking.

'Okay, okay, for me?' Pauline thought for a moment. 'Willard.'

Leena almost gagged. 'He's like *thirty*.'

'Yeah!' Elara made a face very similar to Leena's. 'Yeah. Don't do that.'

'It's just hypothetical!' Pauline defended, raising her hands in mock defeat as the girls closer to her age giggled, clearly not seeing what was wrong with the situation.

Elara and Leena shared a brief but concerned glance, and Leena got the feeling that Egg would hear about this conversation, later....

Then, Astrid was suddenly in Leena's lap, clambering over her uncomfortably and digging her little elbows into Leena's thigh.

'Uh— *Excuse me?*' Leena, without thinking, shoved Astrid away. 'Can you *not?*'

Astrid landed on the ground with a heavy thump, though she didn't seem half as phased as the rest of the girls, who covered their mouths and frowned at Leena.

'Leena!' Pauline gasped.

'Wh... what?' she glanced around the girls, before copying their frowns. 'I don't want to be climbed on! I think I'm allowed to not want to be climbed on!'

'God says we're meant to use our *words*,' Astrid scolded, climbing back to her feet.

'Alright? So... why didn't you?' asked Leena; causing several of the girls to shake their heads at her. Frustrated, she threw up her hands. '*What?!*'

'Leena, please don't.'

'Yeah. Don't do this again.'

'Don't do *what?!*' Leena snapped. 'I'm not *doing* anything!'

Sighs echoed though the circle, and Leena gave an angry huff.

'I'm not doing anything! I just don't want to be climbed on!'

'Leena, deep breath,' Pauline said, putting a hand on Leena's shoulder— And flinching when Leena pulled away. 'Calm down.'

'I don't need to take a deep breath! *Or* calm down!'

'*You just shoved an eight year old.*'

It was so quiet Leena almost missed it, and she couldn't tell who said it, but it made her so mad she got to her feet and threw her arms up. '*Whatever! I knew this was a bad idea!*'

She turned around to storm away, but instead walked directly into Ragtheim, who gently wrapped an arm around her to stop her from rushing off.

'Hey... what's happening?' he asked. 'Everything alright?'

Leena glared at the girls as they all shrugged or shook their heads. Well, except for Astrid; who was too busy picking up a worm that had come to the surface and examining it.

'She pushed Astrid,' Elara commented.

'Well, Astrid doesn't seem too bothered,' Ragtheim replied.

'I'm not,' Astrid replied. 'I shoulda asked to climb on her, first. Cos, God says that Leena's got something wrong with her, so we all gotta be patient with her—'

'*Excuse me?!*' Leena snapped.

All of the older girls cringed, though Astrid didn't seem to realise she'd said anything wrong.

'God says there's something wrong with you,' Astrid repeated. 'And it makes you act angry when you don't mean to. So we gotta be patient with you when you let it out, cos you can't help it.'

A long quiet followed Astrid's statement, before Leena gripped the arm Ragtheim had around her, digging her short nails into him, in frustration.

'Ragtheim... *let me walk away*,' Leena growled through grit teeth. 'Or I'm

gonna do something *everyone* will regret.'

He didn't need to be told twice, and Leena stalked off to her room; even ignoring Wonda's friendly call as she passed her tending to the dead in the hall.

She slammed her bedroom door behind her, locked it, and then stood a moment, shaking in fury, before stomping to her bed and punching her pillow twice.

'Fucking— Stupid—' she turned around to pace, and instead jumped in surprise as she found an even more naked than usual Ratrick standing in the middle of her room, staring at her. 'What the *fuck* Ratrick!' she snapped, using a hand to block her view of the man. 'Stop *doing* that! *Why* are you naked again?'

He just laughed, and sat in the chair by her desk.

'Can you fucking *not*?!' she growled. 'I *just* got that! I don't need your bare arse on it!'

'More than just my arse is on it, girly,' Ratrick joked, sniffing.

'Oh. My gods!' Leena threw up her hands and turned around. 'You know what? Keep the fucking chair!'

'It'll wash,' he shot back. 'It ain't like it got a cushion, ay?'

Mock gagging, Leena grabbed a dirty sheet from her floor and threw it over Ratrick.

Again, Ratrick laughed. Then he sniffed. Then he nibbled on the corner of the sheet. 'I saw what happened to yer. Yer need to talk?'

'No,' Leena huffed.

'Yer sure about that?' he asked, tearing a chunk out of the sheet and chewing it vigorously. 'Yer seeming like yer needing to.'

'I just—' Leena finally restarted her angry pacing. 'Has the lich *really* been telling people there's something wrong with me?! I can't believe that!'

'Well. Depends on who ye ask,' Ratrick answered, swallowing his fabric and going in for another chunk. 'She tries to make it age-appropriate for the kiddies. But they ain't always understanding what she means.'

'What does *that* mean?!' Leena growled. 'What has she been telling people about me?!'

'That yer been through a lot, with yer parents dying,' he answered, simply, continuing to gnaw on Leena's sheet. 'And yer be needing time and patience to work through it.'

'I don't need her *pity*,' Leena snorted. 'If she cared about my parents, she would have gone back for them!'

'It ain't that simply, girly—'

'I don't want to hear more excuses!' Leena snapped. 'I'm tired of hearing all the reasons we couldn't go back for them! And I'm tired of hearing why I should forgive Blathe for what he did to them!'

'Fair enough,' Ratrick acknowledged. 'It ain't my place to tell ye how t'feel.'

Still feeling a little too angry to thank him for dropping it, Leena paced a little bit more before flopping into bed and burying her face into her pillow to muffle her scream.

She looked up just in time to see Ratrick's ear turn to the door. 'Sounds like Wonda and Ragtheim are chatting 'bout you,' he commented. Then, both his ears twitched curiously. 'Hm. Pauline's there, too.... Yer wanting to talk to 'em? Or do

yer want me to pop my head out and turn ‘em away?’

Leena thought on it, unsure until she heard Wonda’s familiar knock on her door and sighed. ‘Yeah, whatever. Let them in....’

—END—

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