

Pursued

So here I am, panting and puffing, running through the vast and seemingly endless forest. Desperate and alone, I frantically look over my shoulder. All because of her. Further into the forest I run, seeking refuge.

The damp leaves squelch underneath my bare feet. My muscles groan and creak, the strain from each massive stride as my lungs fight for every breath. Yet I persist. I am driven by fear. Scared of what will happen if I am caught in that sharp, ruthless grip. Dodging tangled roots and jagged rocks, I pick up my pace.

The forest grows quieter and dimmer, the night sky obstructed by the dense canopy. The trees seem monstrously large. Silver ferns rise up towards the branches. The shimmering fronds brush against my thick, brown coat. I seize the opportunity, listening for any sign of my pursuer. I pause. The only noise I can hear is the distant chirping of birds up above, and the soft gushing of a river nearby. The native forest is so peaceful, it would almost be serene if I wasn't being hunted. All I can hear is the constant thumping of my heart against my chest. It might be safe to take a break. She won't be able to find me in this immense wilderness. I find an adequate hiding place nestled between tree roots and rocks on a deep, inviting bed of moss. My muscles relax, eager for the break. At last, able to exhale, I enjoy my tranquil surroundings. Slowly calm fills my body, and my eyes close.

Snap.

I wake with an abrupt start, my heart instantly racing. The bushes rustle around me.

Scratch. The sound of sharp nails against rock.

Has she finally caught up? She was fast. Hiding had been the only reason I made it out alive before. My thoughts swirl around me in a tempestuous, turbulent rage. The cruel murderer. Heartlessly and savagely killing my family. They deserved better. Why had she done it? The cold-blooded murderer - she forced me to be alone in this bleak world.

My foe steps out from behind a rock, revealing herself. I curse my poor eyesight for missing her lurking in the shadows earlier. I would not have detected her without my acute hearing and the strong musky scent that emanated from her. Shivers run down

my spine. This is the moment. I face her, desperate for answers. I let out a sharp, trembling cry into the dark.

“Why? Why my family? What did we do to you?”

No spoken words answer me. Only a low, terrifying chittering. The moonlight catches her elongated, slick body and the stark white tip of her tail as she bares a row of blood-stained canines. I shrink, pressing my shaggy, brown plumage against a tree, realizing too late that to an introduced predator like her, survival isn't personal. I'm just a flightless kiwi chick, and she is the apex predator.