

JENNY GOMES

Mua

1.39 am

32 year old Private investigator Marama Walker squinted at the road ahead trying to see past the battering rain pelting against her windscreen. Huddling closer to the steering wheel, she absently pushed a wayward lock of wavy black hair with one hand and steered with the other. As the wind picked up outside, she wondered what the gods were trying to tell her. After all, it's been years since she quit her job as a cop and became a private investigator. A decision made at an impulse after the death of her daughter five long years before. It came as a shock when the Chief of police demanded she meet him tonight. Looking at the time she couldn't help but think just what was so urgent that her former boss the Chief of police sought her out after half a decade. Marama couldn't help but grimace at the thought a niggling feeling of foreboding creeping on the back of her mind. Marama fumbled around the front of her shirt until she felt the touch of a smooth stone, a pounamu touched her finger. Marama often did this to remember who she used to be. Sighing she let go and forged ahead towards her destiny.

Half an hour later, Marama stood outside an abandoned farmhouse with her right arm raised ready to knock. The front door swung open with a sudden force and there stood Police Chief R. J Wickham, a tall, stoic man in his fifties with salt and pepper hair. "Ah, there you are Walker, thank you for coming", he said as Marama stepped over the threshold. "Trust me, I would not have called if it wasn't urgent, I needed to get you to this safe house pronto", said chief Wickham. "There has been an important discovery at a recent drug bust overseas" he continued while closing the front door, "We finally found her". It took a moment for comprehension to dawn on Marama's tired mind. "Her, you mean Kahurangi Taylor, overseas, are you sure?" she asked facing the Chief, "yes", said Wickham. The pair walked inside an old sparse living room, "we found the pastor's daughter, a pair of my detectives recovered her body in an underground location in Bangkok

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along with forty other girls, all shot dead". "But that isn't why I called you, it seems Kahurangi had a daughter while in Bangkok, we need to escort her to safety immediately, her life is in danger and you're the only one I trust". Marama was shell shocked Kahurangi had a daughter?" Wickham nodded "the detectives found her hiding in the attic under five blankets", the chief continued, "poor kid was covered in urine and faeces by the time she was found". Marama's heart twisted with that grotesque image. Poor kid, she thought, the chief continued "we took her to the hospital to get checked out by the doctor, she is not harmed physically, but she was catatonic for the first two weeks". "Given the circumstances it's understandable", added Marama. Wickham went quiet for a moment as if he were best deciding how continue then added "I need you to deliver to her only living guardian, her grandfather". You want me to deliver her to her koro? Questioned Marama shell shocked. "Yes" said the chief, "No" Marama said emphatically, "absolutely not!" she turned to leave. Wickham caught her arm halting her progress as she began to move, "yes Walker, you've lived like a ghost for the past five years, and still I went through the trouble of finding you". He let go of her arm, "you're still are one of my most trusted detectives even though you quit". "Plus, it felt right to let you handle this, since Kahurangi was the reason you..." he stopped looking at Marama's face and cleared his throat. Handing her an envelope Wickham added "just take a look at this file, then if you want to leave, you are free to do so". Reluctantly taking the file, Marama opened the flap at the top and took a picture out. Solemn pair of brown eyes started out at her framing a delicate face, with a mop of dark curly hair, at the bottom was her age, Miriam noticed she was only nine years old but judging by her slight frame looked no older than six. She did not notice her last name written just underneath, she was too busy looking into the sad brown eyes until the chief said it out loud, "Crusadel". Marama glanced up at the chief, colour draining from her face. "That monster is her father? She looked appalled. "Now you see why I need you", the chief told her solemnly. "She is just one more victim in need of our protection. You need to finish what you started". And just like that it all came to focus, all that restlessness, the niggling feeling finally clicked into place. She had to face the monster from her past, a monster that killed thousands of innocents, including her daughter. Crusadel, the notorious mob boss who not only ran one of the largest organised crime

rigs in the world , but was the sole reason why Miriam quit being a cop in the first place.

With her mind buzzing after the news Marama counted to ten, twice. With only a single thought crossing her mind, absolution, Marama slowly nodded her head “fine i’ll do it, where is Grace? Wickham pointed towards the stairs as an answer. Marama made her way upstairs, stopping in front of a tattered and worn red door. Taking a deep breath she opened the door slowly and called out, “Grace, are you in here?” no one answered for a long time. Marama started to close the door just as she heard whimpering coming from a corner. She made her way towards the sound “I want my mama”, came the soft spoken words. Moonlight streaming from the window illuminated a small huddled, dishevelled figure sitting against a wall. Marama looked at the small bent head unsure of how to best approach her, just as Grace lifted her head. Although the stranger’s face was obscured Grace took in the leather jacket and thick wavy hair. The stranger then knelt in front of her as the moonlight brought warm brown eyes into focus. “My name is Marama”, said the stranger. Grace noticed that she held a comforting slightly raspy voice which immediately made her feel relaxed. “I can’t bring your mama back but I can take you to your Koro”, “my Koro”? Grace asked confused, “Your grandfather” Marama clarified. I never met my Koro before” Grace said. Marama held Grace’s eyes as she said, “I am going to take you to him and you will have a whanau, a family again but you have to trust me. We need to start now”. Marama said with urgency. Grace nodded reaching to hold Marama’s hand, hoisting themselves up both made their way towards the door just as Chief Wickham opened the bedroom door. “Walker we need to get moving now my sources say Crusadle is already on the move”, he said in a steadfast voice. A few minutes later all three of them were standing in front of Marama’s car. “We need to hurry” Chief Wickham said ushering Grace to her seat, “it’s best if you leave immediately”. “Yes sir” Marama replied getting into her car and starting the engine before lowering her window to look at Chief Wickham. “I’ve packed a few essentials in a duffle bag and left it in your boot” informed Chief Wickham, “we will rendezvous later”. Then, he stood back as Marama pulled onto the road a look of anticipation on his stoic face.

4.00 am

The winds were much calmer as Marama cruised along an empty road. "Looks like the god of wind is finally being merciful, observed Marama. "The god of wind?" asked Grace. "His name is Tawhiri your Koro can tell you all about him". Grace nodded and looked out the window with a worried expression. "I don't know much about my family", "you will" replied Marama, "beginnings are always hard, but you will adapt". Marama reached to her left to turn the heater on when a pair of headlights blinded her from the rear, instinct kicked in as she swerved her car to the right. She sped up at a breakneck pace. She swivelled her steering wheel to the left, taking the first exit, she tried to dislodge whoever was following behind. Grace was shaking in her seat, "he found me", she cried, "The bad man is here to get me". "Over my dead body". Marama said with cold determination, taking a sharp turn and entering the motorway. She managed a diversion but for how long she thought to herself. Marama kept glancing in her rear view mirror, deciding she had to work fast. Stopping on a side of a deserted road three kilometers from the motorway exit. Marama quickly exited her vehicle taking Grace's hand. She opened her car boot efficiently taking out the duffel bag, she urged for Grace to follow her. "Where are we going?" asked Grace, turning around Marama looked at her "I know you don't know me very well but I am your best chance at surviving, please trust me". Marama picked up Grace and broke into a sprint towards a nearby canopy. With a frantically beating heart Marama prayed to the forest God Tane Mahuta for sanctuary, soon she skidded in front of a sturdy looking tree, an idea forming in her mind, she said to Grace "please climb on this branch and do not come down until I tell you it's safe". She helped Grace climb on. Making sure she was well hidden, Marama quickly got on the forest floor and covered their track. She then shouldered her duffel bag waited. Her suspicion was soon confirmed as headlights flooded her surroundings with light. Marama set to opening the duffel bag as quietly as she could, her heart gave a lurch when she only pulled out a knife. Oh well, she thought steeling herself guess I have to do this the old fashion way.

Leaves crushed by heavy footsteps alerted Marama of her approaching foe. At six feet six inches Crusadle towered over most men. However, what truly set him apart was his burly physique accompanied by a perpetual sneering face. "Come

out come out wherever you are little Walker! You have what's mine, and I don't like to share". He mocked, getting close to Marama's hiding place. "I knew that dumb SOB would send you to end me, I suppose it is clever of him hiring a PI to do his dirty work. Now where is my precious cargo?" taunted Crusadle. "Precious", echoed Marama's voice in the vicinity. "How can the girl be precious to you when you killed her mother". "Her mother was growing insolent", Crusadle spat, enraged, "talking about how much she missed home and her precious papa. I just shot her dead, good riddance! She was a grade A bitch". "You SOB" Marama exclaimed furious, as she carefully maneuvered herself around her surroundings. "She deserved a proper Tangi, she deserved to be set free". "I did set her free", Crusadle replied all the while moving closer and closer to where Marama was hiding. "Why don't you come out and... Arrgh!" he yelled out as coming out of her hiding, Marama threw her knife aiming for his right hand wielding a gun. Dropping the gun he cradled his right hand. Wild eyed Crusadle lunged at Marama taking her down, rolling and grappling on the forest floor Marama punched the side of crusadle's head and missed. Having the upper hand he grabbed Marama by the throat, "you should not have run with Grace, I thought you learned you lesson with your daughter. But here you are nosing around". He sneered moving his outraged face towards Marama. "I killed her he said with malice, she pleaded and pleaded for me not to hurt her, your precious daughter, she cried out for her mommy to save her, in the end it got her nothing and I was snuffed the life out of her". Marama's ears started ringing with rage, she lunged forward kicking him in the groin. "Oooowww, you whore" Crusadle yelled in pain, "you are gonna pay for that", but Marama was too quick. Years of impotent rage washed over her as she punched him in his face repeatedly, tears streaming down her face while delivering blow after blow. Amongst the chaos, suddenly the sound of a branch breaking rang and Grace fell with a thud screaming. Coming out of her haze Marama left her bloodied and barely moving enemy. She made her way frantically towards Grace's unmoving body. "Grace" Marama called in panic kneeling in front if her tapping her face, "Grace are you okay? Open your eyes", cried Marama, "yes I fine" came the slight whisper. "Come on let's get you up". Marama grappled with Grace wiping away the blood streaming from a cut on her face. "DON'T MOVE" shouted a voice from behind. On reflex marama shoved Grace

behind her and faced her sworn enemy. Crusadel having retrieved his gun pointed it towards them and said, "Two birds in one stone" he smirked cocking his head to the side, a shot rang out in cacophony. Crusadel with an astonished look on his face fell to the ground dead. Out came Chief Wickham from the shadows holding a smoking gun in his hand just. "Well?" he asked Marama sardonically, "you didn't think I would let you come without a back up did you?" Looking at Marama's confused face he explained "I put a tracker in your duffel bag, the official police report will say I shot him for assaulting a police officer", looking at Grace he added, "And I also have a key witness for a court case. Well done Walker". "Thank you sir, but why did you ask me to do something you could have done yourself? Marama asked curiously. Wickham looked thoughtful "because I know what it's like having something eat away at you, and you deserve better; you can finally be set free". Marama lost her composure, years of pent up pain came out in heaving sobs. Chief Wickham went over to Grace and together they left giving Marama her privacy to grieve.

7.39 am

Three hours later Grace stood with an apprehensive look on her face as Marama rang the doorbell of Wiremu Taylor. "Coming" called a voice from inside, seconds later the door opened. "Kiaora..." Marama started to say but Wiremu's eyes fell on Grace and he gasped "my god you look just like my Kahu". He fell to his knees as he held open his arms and Grace leaped. "Koro she cried I'm home I'm home". "Thank you" he uttered looking at Marima with tears in his eyes. "Thank you for bringing my little Kahu home". "Of course, I'm sorry I couldn't save kahu" said Marama. Wiremu nodded "I heard we share the same pain", Marama's eyes welled up. "I couldn't save my baby, I can never sleep fully at night but, after today I hope my angel forgives me". Marama nodded at Wiremu and turned to head back to her car with Chief Wickham on her side. As a gentle breeze picked up Tawhiri gave her a gift; Miriam swore, she could hear her baby's laughter in the wind. "So you ready to come back to work Walker, your old desk is waiting". Marama smiled as she touched her pounamu and got in her car, "yeah Chief, I think I'm finally ready to come home" she acknowledged as she pulled into the road once more.