

“Quilla, honey, are you ok? You don’t look so good.” Quilla Lupus looked up from her book at the sound of her mother’s voice, a soft, gentle voice that could truly warmed the soul. A voice she would miss when it was gone.

“I’m fine,” Quilla said bluntly. If she told her mother what was actually bothering her, then she knew her mother would try to make it better, adding yet another item to her mother’s long list of stresses.

“You do know you can tell me anything still, right? Me being sick, it changes *nothing*.” But looking at Andrea Lupus’s frail, decaying form and dull, baggy eyes as they loomed over her, Quilla knew that was a lie. She knew that her mother had enough on her plate, and didn’t need anything else.

“I know Mom,” she lied. Wanting to say more, wanting to tell her mother all of her problems, knowing that they would be taken care of. Knowing that her mother would make everything ok. But times had changed, and Quilla had to take care of her own problems now.

Quilla watched as her mother slowly turned and walked away. The tumors on her spine bothering her again, so it was more of a waddle. She watched as her mother went into the dining room, to where her brother, Felix, was doing his homework. A feat only easily accomplished when bribery with sugary treats is involved.

Setting her copy of *Silverloch* gently on the table next the couch she had been sitting on, Quilla rose and looked around her family’s living room. Her family now that only consisted of three. And was soon to be down another.

Walking up to mantle that sat above the blazing fireplace, Quilla looked at the pictures of her family, when it was complete. Smiling at the family picture taken of the four of them one year at Christmas. Of a newborn Felix being lovingly cradled in his mother’s arms, as she stared down at him as if he was the most precious thing in the world. Her light brown hair falling down around him, guarding him. And of a three year Quilla who wouldn’t sit still, squirming, in her father’s lap. Her jet black hair then pulled back into a short pony tail. The same black hair that lay tousled atop her father’s head. What? Why hadn’t she noticed that before? She had stared at

this exact picture nearly every day, and yet she hadn't noticed she had the same hair as her father. She had always known she had the same deep emerald eyes as her father, the same olive skin. But how could she have never noticed this before.

Baffled at her own ignorance, Quilla moved along the mantle to a black and white wedding picture of her father's parents. Both full blood Italians, Quilla could tell that the wedding was grand from the amount of people crowded behind the vintage bride and groom. Her grandparents. Tranquillitas and Felix Lupus. The people she and her brother were named after. The people who had died before Quilla and Felix were born.

Not willing to lurk on what was not meant to be, Quilla moved along the mantle, forgetting what was next. A blood red vase, with a sealed lid. And a small card, one that Quilla sadly knew by heart.

“In loving memory of Liberius Lupus. A loving father to Tanquillitas and Felix Lupus. A loving husband to....”

Not today! She could not afford to cry day after day over a person she barely remembers. Of a person who died when she was four. A person who died thirteen years ago. No, not when there was work to be done.

Tenderly setting down the card next to the urn, Quilla pulled herself together and ran up stairs. Her room had to be cleaned, as was her mother's request as of yesterday.

Checking the time on her phone, 1:22 p.m., she had all day to do it. Setting her phone down on her night stand, Quilla laid down on her back and stared up at the ceiling. At its simplicity. How it never changed. How she wished her life was like that. Forever the same. Laughing at how naive she was, Quilla sat up and took out her notebook of poems from her backpack.

Quilla had been writing for the last few years. Ever since she learned that there was no such thing as black and white. Just grey. No superheroes, no villains. Just humans.

Turning to the first page, Quilla stared down at the first poem she found worthy of going into her notebook.

Tick, Tock

Clicks the Clock

I'm running out of time

With what is mine

Quilla had written two more stanzas, but she felt almost as if didn't belong in the poem. Yes they held the same formatting and were about the same topic, but they didn't stay together as they should be. There was no proper ending, and as hard as she tried, one couldn't be written. It wasn't writers block; there just wasn't an ending yet to be written.

She turned to the next page, and looked at the second poem she had written into her notebook. She grimaced as she remembered what it was about. Harmony Gold. The most popular girl in high school. The girl who is described as an angle by all. Except Quilla, and any other person who is unpopular. Anyone who is different.

But then again you didn't even have to be unpopular to hear her wrath; you just had to be near her when she was in a bad mood. She once brutally embarrassed her sister in arms, her best friend since as long as Quilla could remember, because she was mad at her boyfriend and he wasn't in the room. But nothing could have been worse than what she did to Quilla yesterday at lunch.

Harmony had heard a "rumor" about Quilla's mom sick, so being the "caring" person she was, she went to investigate. Well that "rumor" turned out to be Harmony just eavesdropping on Quilla's and her friend Lola's conversation. And her "caring", was asking everyone about it, and nobody she asked knew anything, so she would inform them what she knew. Quilla was trying to keep it a secret, her mother being sick. So much for that. Everyone started coming up to her, "Are you ok?" or "I'm so sorry." She had been so embarrassed, 5th hour was spent in the bathroom crying while Lola held her. Then Harmony had the audacity to come up to her and say,

“Your welcome sweetie. I did you a favor, they would have found out eventually, better from me.” Then she had walked off. Her mom had been sick for five years now, and only Lola ever found out. And it would have stayed that way, if it wasn’t for Harmony Gold.

This was what had been bothering Quilla earlier in the day. And having spent enough time today thinking on what can’t be changed, Quilla decided she would do something productive. And that doesn’t mean cleaning her room.

Pulling out her laptop from its case, Quilla hit the power button and waited for it to turn on. Once it did, she clicked on Firefox icon. And typed in *what does lupus mean*. She already knew the answer, but wanted to double check just in case. As she thought, it meant wolf. Her last name meant wolf. Smiling as she reminded herself that wolves were fighters, and never went down without a fight. She hoped that those qualities were for all types of fights.

She then continued typing her families names in till she found out what they all meant. Her brother’s name meant Lucky Wolf; her father’s Free Wolf; her mother’s Strong Wolf. The truth behind the names baffled her. Felix was always shielded from bad news. When Quilla’s mother was first diagnosed with stage four kidney cancer, he was protected by all. And to this day, he still doesn’t know everything, except that it’s a miracle that his mother is alive. Liberius Lupus was set free the day he died. So sincerity is found there. And to face down round after round of Radiation and Chemo therapy and still keep fighting; strength is required.

But what truly eluded Quilla’s mind was when she looked up her own name. Tranquillitas was a Roman goddess of tranquility, whose name meant peaceful. Peaceful? Her name meant peaceful? Laughing aloud at the irony, Quilla closed her laptop. How could this be? There was **nothing** peaceful about Quilla Lupus.

Ring! Ring! Jumping at the sound of the doorbell, Quilla quickly yelled that she would answer it and scurried down the stairs. She knew who it was. Swinging the door open, Quilla smiled up at the man who was waiting patiently at the door, leaning against the frame.

“Zio!” Quilla said as she wrapped her arms around her uncle.

“Quillie *cara mia*.” Asterio Lupus said, using the Italian endearment for my dearest. Squeezing his niece tight, Asterio let go and pulled out a white rose from underneath his black duster and handed it to her. “A beautiful creature, for an even more beautiful lady,” he said smiling, then kissing the top of her head.

“Thank you!” Quilla said, becoming that little girl again. The one that only held innocence in her heart. No pain. No hurt.

“Uncle Ash!” Both turning at the sound of Felix yelling as he ran down the hall, Asterio pulled a video game from his jacket and held it behind his back.

“Guess what I’ve brought for you boy.”

Leaving the boys to their thing, Quilla went to join her mother at the end of the hallway. “He called earlier, I thought it would be better as a surprise though.” Her mother said, her back leaning against the wall.

“Thank you,” Quilla said, thankful that she got to be little once again. Kissing her mother on the cheek, Quilla took her rose into the kitchen to find a vase. Finding a small clear crystal vase, she filled it with water and walked into the living room. Placing the vase and flower on the coffee table that sat in the middle of the room, Quilla turned around as she heard Felix walk in.

“Momma is talking to Uncle Ash know,” Felix said bluntly before he ran out of the room. Seconds after Quilla heard the *thump thump thump* of Felix racing up the stairs. Most likely the boy just wanted to play his new game.

Realizing that the plants along the window needed water, Quilla left towards the kitchen. As she walked by the dining room, Quilla heard whispering. There was never whispering in this house. Not unless something was wrong. Pressing her ear against the wall, Quilla listened in.

“I-I don’t know how to tell them,” she heard her mother sob. *Tell us what?*

“I’m so sorry Andy. I wish I could make this all go away for you and the kids,” Asterio said. Quilla could feel the sincerity in his voice.

“I don’t care about me, it’s the kids. After Liber died, I thought they had to be safe. Nothing worse could happen to them. Oh God I was so wrong!” Andrea cried out, the last sentence not a whisper, but still not audible to any one up stairs.

Go! Go, upstairs! You don’t need to hear this! She kept repeating these words in her head, but her feet were glued to the floor. Her face plastered to the wall.

“Weeks...they said weeks...” Quilla heard her mother, who was whispering again.

Suddenly unglued, Quilla slowly walked back from the wall, careful not to make a sound. *No! No! She had to be lying!*

Tears started streaming down her face. Starting at a drizzle, which quickly escalated into a storm.

Running into the backyard, Quilla hopped into her tree house. Then started to sing her lullaby softly, the one her mother always sang to her.

Shh my little Butterfly

There’s no need to cry

Your dreams are soft and sweet

Your heart is clean and neat

No need to say goodbye

No one more is going to die

Snow falls cold and wet

Dragonflies are in the net

This is your lullaby

No need to ask why

I’m singing this to you

Because I love you

Two Months Later

Cold! Everything was cold. Quilla thought to herself as she stared down at something that shouldn't be. Something that was supposed to have warmth. Her mother's body.

Feeling a large hand on her shoulder, Quilla looked up from the coffin to find her uncle standing beside her with his head bowed low.

"I'm sorry she is not being cremated. Legal issues shouldn't have to interfere with what the..." Asterios paused, trying to find the right word to describe her dead mother. "With what the 'patient' wants." He finished quickly.

"I love you *Zio*," Quilla said, turning around and entering Asterio's embrace. Looking over to where Felix was sitting, alone with his knees pulled up to his chest, Quilla felt a stab of guilt. She should be over there, comforting him. Yet here she stood, seeking it for herself.

Closing her eyes, Quilla imagined her mother's face. Her voice. Anything to find what she needed most. She didn't find it.

Tick, Tock

Clicks the Clock

I'm running out of time

With what is mine

Bye, Bye

I Stare at the Sky

Will I be this bold

If this my future holds

Tear, Tear

I'll Face my Fear

I will be

As if lost at sea

Tick, Tock

Clicks the Clock

I've run out of time

With what is mine