

No Escaping the Big Bad Wolf

Time is an illusion, a never ending magic trick with the only exit pass being death. An infinite web and we, the flies, eternally caught on its tenacious, spiralling strings. The only way to escape the web is down the tunnelled throat of a creeping, opaque, colossal monster, always eager to devour its next victim.

But what if it wasn't? What if there was some realm elsewhere, in which its people weren't slaves of time? A timeless realm. As Rafael sat there mulling over this realm he had concocted within his mind, the more heavenly it seemed of a place. A place without time. Where it didn't control peoples lives. Where it wouldn't control his mother.

Sighing, he brushed a strand of hair from his forehead as he stared aimlessly at the ceiling above him, lost in thought. He broke free from his wondering mind as he heard the distinct jingling of keys and squeak of the front door being opened. "Rafael! Come help me bring in the rest of the groceries!" He heard his mother shout down the short, narrow hallway.

Groaning, he slowly sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He knew what his mother meant by him 'helping' her bring in the groceries. It meant she would purposely take her time hanging up her handbag, and doing other pointless things like fixing her attire, until he had brought all the groceries in himself, and then she would turn around with a 'shocked' expression and say 'Oh my! Looks as though you've brought it all in!' It was always the same line. You'd think that by now she would've guessed that he knew what she was doing, but either she thought he was oblivious, or didn't care.

As he was putting the last of the groceries into their place, he heard her yell once again, this time from her room, telling him to start on dinner while she changed out of her work clothes and had a shower. He also knew what she meant by him 'starting on dinner'. It meant that she would arrive minutes before he had finished making dinner, mix the spoon in whatever was in the pot, then carry it to the table as if she was the one that had slaved over the stove to make it. Then she would raise an eyebrow and look over expectantly, asking why he hadn't set the table.

It was an everyday occurrence which would cause others to rage like mad bulls, however Rafael just felt a pang of hurt and rejection each time. Not once had she uttered a thank you toward him. He was practically forced to become a gourmet chef at the mere age of fifteen, and not once, not once had she said thank you.

That was what probably got to him the most. Not the coming home late, not the lack of interest in his school life, not that she missed his first soccer match, not even the fact that she didn't come to a single one of his exhibitions or concerts since he started school.

Imagine, first year of school, all these children dressed up in costumes around you whispering excitedly about how they'd wave at their parents as they got onto the stage, ready to sing 'Under the Sea', and being the only one to know that there would be no one in the crowd who he could wave to. No familiar face. Just a sea of figures with no names who didn't care in the least about him.

Nobody cared. His own mother didn't care. And when he asked her after he got home why she couldn't make it, her reply was 'I didn't have the time'. It was her reply to everything. It

was then that the beginning of his hatred for time began, because there was never enough.

But the fact that even after all these hits he took from her, she didn't have the decency to voice a simple thank you when he made her dinner, and instead questioned him as to why the table wasn't set. It made his blood boil. But he never showed it. Instead, he quietly went to the cupboard, took out two plates, spoons and glasses and arranged them neatly onto the table.

They ate in silence, sitting on opposite ends of the table with the only sound being the clinking and scraping of cutlery against their plates.

Once the ever awkward dinner was over, Rafael returned to his room, resuming his position staring up at the ceiling. He woke up in the same position, the blankets rolled up to his waist and drool escaping the corners of his mouth. Yawning, he dragged his feet to the bathroom, scratching the back of his head. After brushing his teeth and combing down his cow licked hair, he made his way to the kitchen.

He knew his mother wasn't going to be there, nor a note telling him that she had left or even a bowl and spoon left out for his breakfast. He didn't expect nor want her to. Because that would give him hope that maybe, just maybe, she might start caring, start wanting to give him just a fraction of her oh so precious time, or just start giving a damn about him all together. No, he learnt the hard way that hoping for nothing at all was better than hoping for something and then being crushed by disappointment.

It was a chilly Saturday morning in the little town of Minuit, and instead of drowning himself in self pity and misery on this particular day, which was a common pass time of his, Rafael decided to walk to the lake not a few blocks away. The lake was one of the few places in the town which Rafael appreciated, with its serene environment, lack of human presence and the fact that hours could pass and it would feel as if it were only a minute. Time stood still at the lake.

Finishing his cereal with haste, Rafael washed his bowl and spoon knowing that if he didn't do it then, he would have have to do it later because it wasn't as if dear old mummy had any time to wash them. Shaking his head to avoid the negative, grey cloud hovering above, he finished washing up and made his way to his room.

Opening his door, he sighed. Clothes were scattered across his floor, undistinguishable between the clean and dirty. What else would you expect to see in a teenage boys room? Conducting his regular game of 'clean or not clean', he picked up a green and blue flannel shirt and brought it up to his nose, inhaling deeply before cringing. Yep, that one was definitely not clean.

His emerald orbs scanned the discarded clothing once more before stopping on a grey hoodie which he knew for a fact was clean, considering he had scrubbed at an oil stain on it for an hour before giving up and throwing it in the wash just a day previous. Slipping it on followed by his socks and sneakers, he wrapped his earphones around his iPod, stuffing it into the pocket of his hoodie. He jogged out the front door closing it behind him, but not before grabbing the spare key from the counter. Getting locked out and having to wait a century for his mother to get home wouldn't do him any good.

As he began walking, he pulled his hoodie up, shivering as he received a harsh slap from the wind. He loved this weather. It made him feel alive. Rafael made his way past the little shops, looking up and noticing for the first time in all his fifteen years of living in that town, that all of them had little bells which jingled every time the door opened. Its funny how you see something almost everyday, but you don't realise it's there.

As he rounded the corner, he came to a halt, noticing that the door to old Mr. Morgory's sweet shop was open. Mr. Morgory passed about a year ago. Rafael felt the sadness creep in as memories of the kind old man flooded his mind. He always used to sneak in a few extra candies and lollies into Rafael's bag when he was little, then tap his nose and wink, giving a throaty laugh which always made Rafael laugh too. He was the father that Rafael never had. His own father left his mother before Rafael even turned one.

When Rafael finally had the courage to ask his mother why his dad left, it was the first time he had ever seen more than one emotion cross her face. There was evident anger and hurt, and Rafael could see that his question had caught her off guard. She told him that his father had gotten a promotion to work overseas for a company that sold overpriced watches, and that he had told her that looking after them and making time for them would only hold him back. He told her that he would come back for them when he was settled and in a position where he could balance his work and be a family man at the same time. He wanted to devote all his time to selling and promoting the watches, as well as impressing the company with how much business he could conduct and buyers he could interest.

Fifteen years later, not a single call had come from him. And if it had, his mother never mentioned anything about it to him. Rafael didn't mind though. If his father ever did come back to them, the first thing he would do was punch him in the face. He had no desire of meeting a man who left as soon as an offer for money arose. In his mind, the dirty scoundrel of a man deserved to rot in hell.

He made his way over to the shop slowly, looking through window once he came upon it. An old man with a pointed nose and spectacles was hunched over the front counter, scrubbing at it ferociously with a cloth. Rafael didn't even know that Mr. Morgory's shop had been sold, let alone reopened. He peered inside but quickly realised he wouldn't be able to make out much due to the slight tint the glass held, before tentatively walking towards the oak door of the entrance.

Pushing down on the curved, shiny silver handle, he pulled open the door, hearing the jingle of the bell above him as he walked through before the it closed behind him. He stopped, eyes wide as he observed his surroundings. Instead of the breathing in and smelling the sweet scent of candy and seeing packets upon packets of sweets and lollipops lined up on shelves, he was welcomed by a thick musty smell and...clocks. Dozens and dozens of clocks.

Most looked fairly old and seemed to be hand carved, with intricate designs decorating their surfaces. The old man peered up from the counter as he saw the tall, wide-eyed boy surveying his shop. Rafael might've hated the concept of time, but there was no denying the eccentric beauty that each of these clocks held. However, he couldn't help but feel as though there was something off about the place the more he looked around.

He was startled from his trance as he heard the old man clear his throat, his beady black eyes trained on Rafael. "Is there anything I can help you with?" The old man asked, his

raspy and scratchy voice sending shivers down Rafael's spine. "Uh... um no thank you, I was just looking around". The old man didn't say anything as he continued to scrutinise the boy before him from on top of his glasses.

Rafael was beginning to feel uncomfortable by not only the man, whose eyes had yet to waver from his frigid form, but the shop itself. He turned on his heel, ready to leave, before something caught his eye. A floor length grandfather clock stood off in one of the corners, looking much older than any of the other clocks in the shop. It was carved from rich mahogany wood which was slightly peeled off in sections and the numbering on the clock was in roman numerals. Delicate and intricate writing was carved into the wood, written just above the face of the clock. However, Rafael couldn't make out what it said from where he stood.

As if being dragged in by a rope, entranced, he made his way over slowly towards the place in which the magnificent clock stood. '*Time takes all except those willing to fall*'. The words carved into wood held a dark meaning, something which Rafael did not expect, nor could he decipher the meaning of, considering how elegantly they were written.

As he looked on, he couldn't help but notice the white, marble hands of the clock. The hour hand seemed to be a statue of a child on his knees, his arms crossed above his head as if protecting himself. The longer minute hand was of a woman, one hand raised up holding what seemed to be a dagger, her long hair flowing to her waist. It was creepy how realistic the features of the statues looked, as if they were somehow frozen in time.

Suddenly, the statue of the woman moved, startling him. It stood tall, dagger pointing towards XII before the clicking sound of gears sliding against each other was heard, followed by a chiming which reverberated through the wooden confines. Rafael imagined what would happen if he brought this beauty home. Oh the madness of these hourly chimes it would cause his mother.

She hated clocks. The incessant ticking sound drove her to the brink of insanity. Rafael remembered when she was sitting at the dinner table once, eating the pasta which he had obviously made, before he noticed her hands clenching unusually tight around the fork. Her eye was twitching, and she kept glaring at something over his head menacingly. Rafael turned to see what was receiving the wrath of her glare, confusion running through him upon seeing the round clock hung above the kitchen counter, whispering quiet but unending ticks to itself. His head whipped back around in his mother's direction, hearing the high pitched scraping of her chair against the tile floor, eyes almost popping out of his head as his mother marched towards the counter, climbed up on top of it, proceeding to rip the clock from the little hook from which it was hung from and then hurling it to the floor, smashing it into tiny pieces.

Jumping down from the counter, she looked at the shattered clock, brushing a strand of hair from her face and grinning triumphantly. Rafael's mouth was open, unbelieving of what had happened. His mother, always composed, always placid, had acted like a wild animal. She didn't even glance at him as she walked around the shattered pieces in the direction of her room, telling him to clean up the mess as she went. It was the first of many times during which Rafael questioned the mental stability of his mother. The clock, to this day, had never been replaced.

Rafael shook his head, reeling himself back from the journey down memory lane. He turned slowly upon feeling a presence behind him, stepping back in haste and almost

tripping over his own feet as he realised that the old man was out from behind the counter, and was now standing directly in front of him.

"You know, time took my wife", the man spoke, staring up at the clock with lost eyes. "I've tried everything to get her back, played my part. But it was too late. All too late". As he spoke, his voice became darker, a menacing air surrounding them.

Rafael couldn't understand what the man was uttering, and began to feel panicked with how close the man was standing. Did his wife die of old age or something? Is that what he meant by time taking his wife? "I played my part!" Rafael's thoughts were cut short as the old man screeched abruptly, spit foaming and flying out of his mouth as he stared at the grandfather clock. The look in his eyes changed from lost and alone to absolutely sadistic and deranged.

Rafael's began breathing rapidly as fear clogged his airway. He turned to leave, ready to run. He tried ducking past the old man, when suddenly it wasn't just the fear gripping his throat.

The old mans hand had reached out just as Rafael passed him, his hand wrapping around Rafael's neck. Rafael didn't have time to be amazed by the mans strength, being more worried and preoccupied by the fact that he couldn't breathe. He was yanked back roughly, and shoved against the clock. Growling the old man gripped Rafael's hair from the back and slammed his head forward onto the wood. Rafael screamed, his head pounding from the abuse.

He tried to struggle free from the mans hold, but could barely keep himself up. His vision was blurred with tears and dizziness, and he could feel the hot trail of blood flowing from his head. The man yelled again, slamming Rafael's head over and over into the wooden edge of the clock. Rafael began losing consciousness, black spots casting a veil over his sight. One final roar from the man, one final hit, and he was out. Darkness.

Opening his eyes slowly, Rafael brought his hand up to his head feeling the searing pain which shot through him. He could feel the wet, sticky blood, still trickling down from the welts where he was hit repeatedly. He blinked, trying to clear his vision, to see something. Anything. He blinked continuously, trying to rid his eyes of the blackness which enveloped them, before realising that it wasn't his eyes that were causing the blackness. Where was he? What in hell's name happened? Wherever he was, it was dark.

A loud note made him jump. It was a sort of ticking sound, continuous and amplified. The throbbing in his head worsened drastically and he squeezed his eyes shut in pain. He stood up shakily, feeling suffocated and panicked. What the hell was going on? The old man...why did the old man try to bash his head in!? Was he dead? Was he in a grave?

He turned his head, trying to make out his surroundings but it was pitch black. Tilting his head up, he squinted upon seeing a faint, circular glow high up, as if someone was shining a torch inside. He saw a shadow within the glow. Two actually, one longer than the other, both pointed. They looked like...hands of a clock?

But wait... that would mean he was inside...no. It wasn't possible. Looking up once again, the likeliness of his thought became more and more of a reality. He was inside the grandfather clock! Bloody hell, how was that even possible. Did he shrink or something!?

His next thought upon instinct was to get out. How was he going to get out!? He looked around again, walking slowly in the darkness, one hand blindly reaching out in front of him, the other cupping his head. Nothing. There was nothing. He began walking faster, running almost, panic choking him. He ran and ran in every direction, but found nothing except the vast, empty darkness which was encompassing him.

Rafael didn't know how much time had passed before he gave up, sinking to his knees and sobbing. He held his head, which now only held a dull throb rather than the feeling of it being sliced open. He was trapped. Trapped in a clock, in time. Rafael thought that he was one of the rare exceptions of people who could escape time, who wasn't caught up in it. Wouldn't ever allow it to be his puppet master and control him. But now he saw how very, very wrong he was.

Eventually, time catches up to you. You can run as fast as you can, hide in the smallest and most overlooked of spaces, hell, you could even become invisible. But even as you try doing these things, time follows you. It's always there, always moving forward, sweeping you along with it. There is no escaping this big bad wolf.

Rafael lay there, lips cracked with dried tears staining his cheeks. His head was hurting, now more than ever due to the unknown amount of time he'd spent crying. His mind was in turmoil but his body was too weak to even sit up-right. There was one thought however, which replayed through his mind constantly till it matched the timing of each tick which reverberated in the hollow confines of the grandfather clock. I have to get out. I have to get out. It chanted itself through his head like a mantra.

Rafael knew he had to find a way out, and that he couldn't give up. Not until his time was up.

