

FRINGE: STAGES OF GRIEF

Part 1: Deception

It had been a long day, hours of riding in a plane across country from a case in Seattle with Walter babbling on about how horrible the movie selection in economy class was, with its 'non-stimulating garbage for children' and 'down-right rude' cabin attendants when he asked for peanuts and received pretzels instead. *He must have missed that switch when he was locked away in the loony-bin*, Peter thought at the time. If only he could have had more than that little bottle of vodka and preferably an iPod that worked longer than an hour, maybe he could have tuned everything out long enough to catch up on some much needed shut-eye.

Stepping into the dark and empty house, Peter flipped on the switch and the lights brightly lit the living room. He set down a heavy, black suitcase next to the door and placed the house and car keys down on a small wooden table beside the door, then turned to look back at the car in the driveway. Walter was still sitting in the passenger's seat, fast asleep. *He was just awake a second ago.*

With a sigh, Peter walked back to the car and opened the door next to his father. Walter looked so old in the dim light of the street lights lining their neighborhood, the lines roughly etched in his skin, carving a somehow sorrowful expression. As Peter reached to touch Walter's shoulder, he stopped halfway when Walter spoke in his sleep.

"I didn't want to, Belly. I didn't want to hurt to him—I love him too much."

He's just having a weird dream, Peter thought to himself, tapping Walter on the shoulder.

"Walter, wake up. We're home."

Jumping awake with a start, Walter looked up at Peter through glossy eyes. "Oh, Peter. I must have fallen asleep."

"That would be an accurate assumption," Peter said, holding out a hand to help Walter out of the car. "C'mon. I'll take your suitcase."

"Why, thank you, son," Walter said as he handed his suitcase over to Peter. Getting out of the car himself and following Peter toward the house, he added, "Since when did you become such a gentleman? No doubt the ladies love that! Maybe Agent Dunham would even let you carry her gun one day."

Peter chuckled at the ridiculous image of walking up to Olivia, saying, 'Good day, madam, shall I take your gun for you?'

“Somehow Walter, I doubt she’d let anyone touch her gun,” Peter said as he used the keys to unlock the front door of the house. He opened the door wide to allow Walter through first.

“Well, maybe if you ask nicely,” Walter added with a flash of hidden meaning in his eyes.

No additional comment was needed, but Peter couldn’t help but laugh as he closed and locked the door. “Here’s your suitcase, Walter,” Peter said, putting the luggage down in the entrance of Walter’s ‘room’. “You need anything else tonight?”

“No, thank you, son. I think I may brew up some coffee before getting some shuteye. I suddenly have a craving for that hazelnut kind. Somehow it reminds me of spring and new beginnings. It’s rather refreshing.”

Puzzled, Peter said, “You’re going to drink coffee before bed? Walter, you’ll be up all night if you do that.”

“Nonsense. The amount of caffeine in coffee is hardly comparable to an LSD buzz, which I would much rather have. You simply can’t get LSD in flavors. Then again, maybe I ought to try that in the morning, hazelnut flavored LSD! Now that would be something...”

“Great, sounds like fun, Walter,” Peter said, picking up his own suitcase and heading upstairs. “Just don’t wake me up in the morning, okay?”

“Of course. I will be as quiet as a lab rat!”

“Goodnight, Walter.”

“Goodnight, son,” Walter smiled as he watched Peter walk up the stairs and out of sight. “Now for some LSD...”

It was the call that came at 2:36am that planted the final seeds of uncertainty in his mind. The infectious and unnecessary desire to know more always got the better of him, although later he wished he could have just ignored it.

“Yeah?” Peter said, rubbing his eyes, half expecting to hear Olivia’s voice on the other line. Instead he heard nothing but static. “Hello?”

“Your father is lying to you.”

It wasn't Olivia, that much he knew. Through the static of the connection, the voice came through raspy and ever so insistent.

Irritated that someone would prank call at this hour and wake him up when he hardly had time enough to fall asleep in the first place, Peter angrily said, "Who is this?"

"Someone who knows the truth," the voice said.

"Well, I'm not interested your idea of truth, whoever you are. Don't call here again."

"Even if it's *your* truth?"

This was not any ordinary prank call. For a moment, he wished they had installed caller ID like the phone company had wanted, for an additional fee, of course. "Who are you?" Peter said again.

"Go to Mt. Auburn Cemetery. The truth has been waiting for you there." And then whoever was on the line hung up.

The next day Peter woke up early. He never actually fell back to sleep after that strange phone call, especially with "Mt. Auburn Cemetery" running through his head.

At 5:30 he gave up trying to sleep and walked downstairs to hunt for a map or something to find the cemetery. As he walked past the kitchen, he noticed several beakers and other mixing utensils out on the counter.

"Wonderful," Peter said, shaking his head. "I guess he couldn't stop the craving for sweet flavored psychotics."

From the kitchen he peeked into Walter's room to make sure he hadn't overdosed in the middle of the night. A lamp was left on next to where Walter was lying on the edge of his bed with an arm and leg hanging out from under the covers. Peter stepped close, picking up an extra blanket from a chair and draped it gently across Walter's fragile frame. Grinning at the awkward feeling of tucking his own father in, Peter reached over to the lamp and turned it off.

Next he walked over to the large bookshelf in the other room and quietly rummaged through some old books and atlases that Walter brought over from the lab one day. Taking out and brushing the dust from one of the atlases, he opened it to find the cemetery. He seemed to recall something about it, but it was too far back in his mind. The only thing he could think of was his mother. He could have sworn that

she had something to do with it. Maybe that's where she was buried; he never really knew.

Turning the atlas to the area of Cambridge, he scanned the map for cemeteries. New Calvary Cemetery, St. Michael Cemetery, Hollywood Cemetery... There it was, Mt. Auburn Cemetery. It was a large, secluded cemetery on the west side of Cambridge. It didn't seem too far from their house.

By 6:00 he was up and dressed, ready to find out what 'truth' was waiting for him at a cemetery. He was very skeptical that he'd find anything there at all, but still there was that lingering feeling of dread that made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. If there *was* some sort of truth waiting for him there, would he like it?

Down in the kitchen, he reached for the phone on the wall, dialing Astrid's number.

"Morning, Astrid. It's Peter. // Sorry to call you so early in the morning, but I was wondering if you could come down here and watch Walter? Something came up and I have to run out. // It shouldn't be longer than an hour. // Great, thanks a lot. He's still sleeping right now, so if you're lucky he'll stay that way while I'm gone. // Yes, I know. I owe you one."

Ten minutes later, Astrid arrived and Peter was out the door to find the truth.