

Part 4: Bargaining

It was still well before noon when he emptied multiple glasses of scotch, whisky, beer...anything he could get his hands on, which meant just about anything the bartender placed in front of him. He didn't care what it was. If he were given an entire bowl of nuts, he probably would have drunk them down, too.

Even through all the drinks, he still couldn't get the image of his—no, it wasn't his!—grave out of his head, couldn't understand how, after all these years, Walter still withheld such devastating information. And Olivia knew, too! Knowing that was much more of a shock for many reasons, first and foremost because she was a friend and maybe lastly because of her profession. She should have been obligated to report a known kidnapping, even if it happened twenty-five years ago. But she kept Walter's secret, let Peter keep living a lie. That's all his life was, nothing more than a lie. So why not drink it away?

Stretching out his arms across the empty bar counter, Peter rested his chin on the top of the counter, turning his half glass of Jack Daniel's with the tips of his fingers as he watched the light dance on the surface of the glass. If only he didn't have to know, maybe he could have been happy. Maybe he could have kept a relationship with his father, Olivia, everyone... If only he could have his life back...

He sat up and drank the remains of the glass in one gulp, grimacing from the warm sting it had going down.

"Rough night?" It was the bartender again. She was a beautiful young woman, probably around 26, 27. Her long, brown hair was braided in the back, which she often liked to play with, whipping it back and forth with her hand. "Starting early and there's no stop in sight."

"Leave me alone," Peter said. He put his head down a moment only to change his mind as he looked back up. "And hit me again."

"Listen, if you want someone to talk to," she said, filling his glass, "bartenders like me are usually good listeners."

"Who said I wanted to talk?"

The bartender simply smiled. "Those eyes did, hun."

Peter shook his head, smiling quietly. What hurt could it do to talk a little? It was just the alcohol speaking anyway. "I just found out something that changes everything in my life. My family, friends, me..."

The bartender smiled, curious. "Just by learning one thing?"

Peter nodded, still trying to come to terms with the fact. It all seemed so unreal. "Apparently, I was kidnapped when I was seven. Oh, and guess what? It was my own father who did it."

"And you never knew?"

"No, never knew," he said, still shaking his head as he took another swig of whiskey.

"So then, you find out this deep, dark secret and you come here to make everything better. Well, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this but, drowning yourself in alcohol isn't going to solve anything. The only thing that will do, my dear, is give you one hell of a headache to deal with in the morning."

"Maybe that's the point... Maybe that way I might feel something," Peter said as though trying to convince himself of something. "I don't feel anything any more."

"Well, duh. Whiskey!"

"No, I mean, I don't *feel* anything," he said, holding up his left hand that was wrapped in some sort of make-shift bandage. Whatever was underneath must have been pretty bad because the cloth was stained red on one entire side.

"Are you all right? What did you do?"

"Smashed a vase. It was one of my mother's favorites, though I guess she was never really my mother, either," he said, his eyes falling to his wounded hand. He poked at the stained bandage as though trying to find the right spot, trying to feel the pain. But he couldn't. He was numb inside and out, and he knew it wasn't because of the booze.

The bartender, both intrigued and worried, planted her elbow firmly on the counter to rest her head in her hand thoughtfully. "You know, sometimes people do horrible things for a very good reason. Maybe you will never be able to understand because it happened directly to you, but if you can try to understand the 'why', maybe it can give you some peace." With another smile, she picked up Peter's empty glass before he could ask to refill it again and replaced it with a clean glass of water.

Understand the 'why', Peter thought. Was there a reason good enough that would free him from feeling this betrayed, this changed? Who knows what sort of person he would have become had he been able to stay in his world with his real family. Maybe he could have had a real relationship with both of his parents, maybe he didn't have to get involved in a shady, nomadic life, maybe...maybe... The maybe's would never stop coming, he knew, but he couldn't stop the waves coming one by one to wash over and drown him in hopeless despair.

It amazed him, that after everything he'd gone through in his life, that something like this would make him fall to his knees, defeated. It was sad, actually. Since when had he become this weak? Perhaps the moment he allowed people back into his well guarded heart. That was his mistake and no one else's.

"You're very good at therapy," Peter said to the bartender. "What's your name?"

Playfully brushing the tip of her braid against the side of her face, she answered, "Name's Terra, and if my friends could hear you say that, they would so totally laugh in your face. I'm not usually one with such brilliant advice."

Peter attempted a smile but only managed a small whimper.

At that moment, a man who had been sitting at a small, round table behind him stood up and approached Peter.

"Excuse me," the man said. "I'm sorry for listening in, but that's really something. Your own father kidnapping you and not having the guts to say anything until you find out for yourself. What a coward."

Rather disinterested, Peter turned to look at the man. He wore a fancy black suit with red tie, nothing too out of the ordinary given the fact that it was noon on a work day. It was the man's raspy voice that caught Peter's attention even through the fog of alcohol in his head.

"You're the one who called me, aren't you?" Peter said, quickly losing his coveted emotional strength. "Why did you make me go there? I didn't have to know..." He felt himself losing the will to fight back and be angry at the world for his troubles. "I'd do anything to not feel like this..."

The bartender smiled, "Maybe you want to pack it in early? I can arrange to get you a ride some place."

Sitting in an empty seat next to Peter, the man leaned in close and whispered, "I've seen the coming of this war and I have been unable to see a pleasant outcome for either side. Until now. That's why I've come, to stop the war!"

Lacking the energy to think critically, Peter groggily accepted everything out of the man's mouth as truth. "And you can do that. Stop the war."

The man grinned darkly like a used car salesman who was about to make a sale. "You see, the two universes oppose each other because they are out of balance; however, if they were to be properly balanced, put back in order, neither one needs to be destroyed. They can both exist with no harm to the other."

“Sounds good in theory, but do you know how many things you’d have to ‘put in order’ to balance things out? I’m afraid that’s more than one person can do.”

“And that’s where you are wrong,” said the man, his black eyes cutting through the fog in Peter’s head, instantly sobering him up in a single glance. “I am not the one who can save our two worlds. You are, Peter Bishop. You are the missing piece. If you go back, leave this universe, everything will be in perfect, harmonious balance and no war will ever occur.”

If you go back...leave this universe... The words shocked and cut him through the center. Even if Peter didn’t come from this world, he still lived here for more than half of his life. How could he be expected to give everything up...

“I know you love this world, and the people in it,” the man tried to appeal to Peter’s weakened emotional state as a form of manipulation. “You have a family, people who care about you. They will all die, casualties in the coming war. If you go back, they can keep their lives. And you can have your life back, your *true* life you were meant to live.”

He would have to leave this place for the Other Side, leave everything behind for a whole new world he knew nothing about, had no attachments to. Perhaps he still had blood relatives waiting, dreaming, praying for his return, but it would mean nothing to him. He had already lost the only family he had ever known. There was no room for another.

“You think it over,” the man said, passing Peter a napkin with something written in black ink on it. “Call me when you’re ready.” As the man stood up to leave, Peter noticed something black hidden beneath his suit jacket. Quickly pulling his jacket closed, the man buttoned it properly before disappearing out of the bar.

The bartender, still playing with her hair, looked at Peter. “You don’t actually believe that story, do you?”

“I don’t know what to believe anymore.” Blankly getting to his feet, he added, “Charge my bill to the FBI, honey. Tell them they owed me.”

“And what’s your name again, dear?”

“As far as I know? My name’s Peter Bishop.”