

Part 7: Forgiveness

The man in the suit was waiting. After receiving Peter's call and subsequent refusal to do his rightful duty, he came to the Bishop residence for one last plea for help. And if that again failed, perhaps he needed to raise the stakes higher. Standing behind a large oak tree across the street from their house, he waited. It was only half-past noon. Peter would return soon.

Only a few hours passed since Peter was drinking his mind away in the bar, but he still felt very lucid, very much in control of his faculties if not his emotions. The walk to and from the bus stop seemed to help clear his confusion and further solidify his decision. What would he say to Walter? What would he say to Olivia, Astrid? He had said some horrible things to them, the most important people in his life... If he didn't have them, he would have nothing.

He felt his heart race the moment his house came into view, his throat very dry. As he walked up the driveway toward the house, Walter stepped out onto the porch, followed by Olivia, Astrid remained inside but still visible from the door. It was clear they were all waiting for his return.

"Peter," Walter said, his eyes red.

Peter stopped moving closer in a moment's hesitation, but then scowling, opened his mouth to speak, "Walter, I—" He paused, suddenly unable to say anything. He tried to swallow but his throat was very parched. Clearing his throat, he tried again, "Walter, what I said—"

"It's all my doing," Walter said, seemingly more able to speak than Peter was. "Everything. I created the way to the other world, I went there and stole you, Peter, I started this war... It was all me."

Peter took the last couple steps to stand directly in front of his father but still far enough away to prevent Walter from reaching out to him. "Walter, listen. I cannot accept what you did to me and I probably won't be able to forgive you for that, ever."

Quivering like a very old man, Walter flinched at Peter's words, but continued to listen.

"But I can't deny everything you've done for me. I understand what you did, you did out of love—and that's all that matters, Walter," Peter said, his voice cracking, whether it be from parchedness or emotion. He finally reached out to his father and brought him into a close embrace, patting the back of his head tenderly. "You have always tried to do the best for me. I can't turn my back on you now."

Walter began to sob into Peter's shoulder. "Oh, Peter! I thought I had finally lost you forever. I didn't know what I would have done..."

"It's alright now, Walter. I'm not going anywhere," Peter said, looking up to Olivia who said nothing but quietly smiled at him. He could see the relief pour out from her eyes and he smiled back.

As though shattering the warm and fuzzy moment, a scruffy voice came from behind. "Ah, Dr. Walter Bishop. I've always wanted to meet you. This is certainly an unparalleled delight."

Peter whirled around at the sound of the voice. Olivia also took a cautious step forward.

"I'm afraid your son, sir," he said, addressing Walter directly, "does not fully understand the consequences of his decision. If he stays here, two separate worlds will tear each other apart, countless people will suffer and die. You and I included, most likely." Then he turned his black eyes upon Peter. "Can you really live with that on your conscience? The savior will become the destroyer."

"Look, whoever said that going back would solve anything? Where is your proof?" Peter said, aggravated. "Who the hell are you anyway, following me all around town?"

Olivia placed a hand on Walter's shoulder to try and get him back into the safety of the house, but then the man shook his head and withdrew an odd looking black gun from beneath his jacket. "I was really hoping I didn't need to threaten anyone, but you leave me no choice." The man did not aim the weapon at Peter, but rather he aimed it squarely at Walter. "I don't want to hurt him."

"You son of a bitch," Peter spat. "Do you honestly think I would ever help you? Hurt him, and I never will. You have no leverage here."

"Help me, and I won't have to hurt him," the man replied, widely grinning.

Peter attempted to move between the man and his father, but the man shouted, "Don't move!" He clicked something in place on the gun. "Or he dies!"

"How do I know you wouldn't kill him anyway?" Peter said, slowly taking a step forward.

"Get back!" the man shouted.

Olivia anxiously watched as Peter not only stepped in the line of fire but also started walking toward the man. "Peter, stop! What are you doing?"

“Olivia, get him out of here. I’ll be fine.”

Walter was again shaking like an earthquake was under his feet. He fearfully grabbed a hold of Olivia’s arm and pleaded with her, “Olivia, please, do something!” But there was little she could do.

“You’ll be fine,” the man repeated Peter’s words sardonically. “I have a gun pointed at your father, and you don’t care?”

“I don’t care because you don’t have a gun pointed at my father, you have it pointed at me. Now, if you were telling the truth,” Peter said, his eyes flashing angrily, stepping even closer to the man, “would you really point a gun at the only person who can save our doomed worlds?”

“I’m not lying! You have to come with me!” The man once so calm and composed was cracking. “Don’t you care that your decision will cost us our lives?”

Peter was now within arm’s reach of the man’s gun. “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t care!” The next second, Peter reached for the gun, twisting the man’s arm to make him lose his grip. At the same time, Olivia pushed Walter safely into the house as Astrid pulled him inside, slamming the door closed after. Olivia drew her gun, aiming for the man in the suit, but couldn’t get a clean shot.

“You don’t know what you’re doing!” the man screeched through clenched teeth.

Grappling with the man, Peter said, “I think I know exactly what I’m doing!” He had a firm grip on the gun but couldn’t completely rip it away from the man’s grasp.

Then the man said, “No, you don’t!” and kicked Peter in the leg, crushing his knee, which caused him to fall to the ground long enough for the man to get the upper hand. “You were never a threat,” the man said to Peter. “But she always has been.” This time he had a clean shot—at Olivia.

“Put the gun down!” Olivia yelled, still holding her position, her gun aimed at the man’s head.

The man grinned. “Long before you even pull the trigger, I can kill you, girl.” He again clicked something into place with his left hand as his right index finger began to squeeze the trigger.

He had no time. No time for second thoughts, no time for regrets, no time for indecision. The instant he heard the word *kill*, Peter acted solely by instinct, no need for bulky instructions from his brain—he simply acted. Despite the pain in his knee, Peter sprang to his feet between the man and Olivia at just the right moment to save her from certain death. The gun fired invisible shock waves that hit Peter in the chest, flinging him backward.

The man holding the gun stood in sheer horror as Peter fell to the ground, long enough for Olivia to fire five rounds that hit him twice in the head and the rest into his chest as she sprang forward. The man fell to the ground, motionless. Once the threat was nullified, Astrid lost her grip on Walter's arm as he bolted out of the house, running to the side of his son who lie flat on his back, gasping for air.

Olivia was there first, quickly ripping open his jacket to find the whole right side of his shirt a dark, crimson red. She froze, shock and fear gripping her from seeing so much blood. She had to force herself to peel the soaked shirt away from his skin to get a better look at the wound.

She reeled backward at the sight. There was a gaping hole in his lower right shoulder that was unlike any gunshot wound she had ever seen before. It was jagged on the edges as though whatever had pierced the skin ripped it open like the claws of a lion rather than a smooth, aerodynamic bullet. The wound was twice the size any conventional weapon could inflict.

She quickly removed her own black jacket and crumpled it together, pressing it hard against the wound as Peter screamed out in agony. Walter fell at Peter's side, clutching his face.

"Son, Peter! You're going to be okay! You'll be okay!" he said frantically.

Again Peter felt as though the alcohol in his system was kicking in because the whole world around him seemed to be spinning out of control. The pain was intense, draining any and all thought from his mind. He tried to take a breath but only coughed up a half-pint of blood instead.

"Oh, God!" Walter cried helplessly at the sight of Peter's warm blood staining his hands.

But Peter could hear very little and he knew he had to say what he needed to say quickly. With the last of his strength, he reached his left hand up to touch his father's tear-soaked face. "Walter, I'm sorry. You're not...the same man—" He saw Walter's mouth move as though he were saying something, but Peter couldn't hear his words. "Walter, I—I forgive you."

The whole world seemed to flicker and dim. Peter blinked and squeezed his eyes tightly shut to make them focus. He could feel the pounding of his heart in every inch of his body.

Next, he turned his head to Olivia, who still desperately pressed her jacket against the wound to stop or at least slow the bleeding. Although his eyes were clouded with the pending darkness, he could clearly see her green eyes glazing over with unshed tears. Even in emotional distress, she was so beautiful.

“Olivia... I—I’m glad...you’re safe.”

There was no holding back the tears now, for any of them. Peter could feel the familiar sting in his eyes as he looked up at Olivia, her own tears falling on him like a cool rain. She, too, seemed to be saying something, but he was beyond the reach of her words. He felt the pressure leave his chest. Olivia’s hand on him felt so warm, hot even. It was such a comforting feeling that took away the pain and seemed to rock him to sleep, gently pulling a warm blanket of darkness over him. He felt so tired. There was nothing more he could do to keep his eyes open any longer. *At least she’s the last...*

Time slipped from his fingers and *he was gone.*