

Part 8: Resolution

It was like floating on water, or maybe slipping beneath the surface until all feeling, all pain was gone. All physical sensation—everything but the heat that still clung to him as though keeping him from falling too far—was numb. It was that warmth that kept his heart beating, kept his mind and body restfully asleep until he was ready to come back to life.

Still partially submerged under the waves sloshing over him in his head, Peter began to feel something warm squeezing his hand. The emptiness around him began to open up as soft beeping sounds and a sudden gasp reached his ears.

“Olivia, Olivia!” said a familiar voice. “I believe he’s coming back to us.”

At the sound of the voice, Peter fought against the weight holding his eyes fast. Slowly managing to open them, light flooded over him and triggered a sharp pain in his head. Even through the pounding pain, he forced his eyes to focus on his surroundings.

“Welcome back, son,” Walter said with newfound tears of joy in his eyes as he squeezed Peter’s hand again.

Next to him was another familiar face. Olivia, her hair hanging down low over her shoulders, smiled softly as she placed a warm hand on Peter’s arm. Although she said nothing, her touch said volumes.

Peter tried to take a breath to speak but found that only a broken voice, weak, escaped from his lips, “Where...where am I? What happened?”

Walter spoke quickly, eager to fill in the gaps in Peter’s memory. “You’re in the hospital, son. We nearly lost you. So nearly...” Walter faltered briefly but then his eyes flared brightly, speaking quickly. “Olivia saved your life, Peter.”

Unable to fully understand, Peter scowled as his dim eyes peered up at Olivia on his right side. “Olivia?”

“You were losing far too much blood. We needed to stop the bleeding...but there was nothing we could do,” Olivia answered, swallowing hard as though remembering those moments was very emotionally straining. “I put a hand on the wound and before my eyes, it—my hand—turned to flame, scorching your skin...”

“It was a crude form of cauterization but it worked nonetheless,” Walter added, completely okay with the fact that Olivia’s hand spontaneously caught fire. It wasn’t anything out of the ordinary, apparently. “You will most likely carry the mark of her hand for some time to come, son, but it will heal eventually.”

Olivia's ability must have flared to life in that moment to save his. She was, after all, able to conjure up flames by merely thinking of it as a child. It seemed so fantastical, Peter couldn't believe it and yet he knew it was very possible. He never doubted Olivia's potential.

"How long...have I...?" Peter asked.

"You were in a coma for nearly a month," Walter said, his eyes growing increasingly distant. "You developed an unknown form of sepsis from the shooter's weapon after Olivia sealed the wound closed. There was no way for us to know there were toxins circulating through your bloodstream until it was too late. You went through severe septic shock, you broke out into a terrible fever, your heart and respiratory rate skyrocketed, your kidneys began to fail, leading way to cardiac arrest..." Walter, lost in the swarm of memories, stood silently, unable to continue for several moments. Then, swallowing hard, he said, "They said you were dead, Peter. For three minutes and fourteen seconds. That's how long your heart had stopped beating..."

"Walter," Olivia called his name to break his fixation on all the *what ifs*. It seemed as though Walter had been swallowed by this obsessive play-back of the past more than once. "None of that matters now."

Walter tried on a smile as he looked up to Olivia. "Yes. Yes, you're right." But the smile faded away a second later when he returned his gaze back to his son. "Peter, you are going to have to make a difficult decision, where you belong." Walter spoke as though his words were as daggers, stabbing his own heart. "If you wish to cross over to the Other Side, I will not hold you back..."

"Hav—" Peter's voice cracked. "Haven't I...already made my decision?" He looked up at Walter with insistent eyes.

Walter simply responded with a soft smile of relief. "Yes, I suppose you have," he said softly, tears slipping from his eyes. He gently stroked the side of Peter's face like a father tucking in his son at night. "Thank you, son. You'd better get some rest." He took a step away from Peter's bedside, grabbing his light brown jacket. "I'll go back to the lab and whip up some of your favorite custard to bring you."

"Walter... I hate—" Peter spoke before realizing that every time Walter said something like this, it was because he was remembering the other Peter—*his Peter*. He suddenly regretted saying anything at all.

"Oh... That's right. You've said that before..."

"Circus peanuts," Peter said, thinking fast. "I'd love a...bag of circus peanuts, the orange ones." He could never fit into someone else's shoes, but Peter could allow his father to get to know him better; *his* likes and dislikes, *everything*.

"You like circus peanuts, too?" Walter repeated, smiling. "I love circus peanuts."

Peter grinned. "...*banana* peanuts."

"Yes, it's—so curious," Walter said with sudden clarity, and the freedom it gave him melted away the dark sadness eating away at his heart. Looking back to Olivia, Walter added, "Let's go, Olivia. Peter needs his rest. And I need to go shopping!" With his coat in his hand, Walter bounced happily out of the hospital room, the door swinging closed.

"I'd better get going," Olivia said at last. "Walter might take a wrong turn down the hall and end up—"

"—Olivia, wait." Peter grabbed a hold of her hand.

Gasping slightly, Olivia looked down at Peter. There was a certain strength in his grasp.

"Thank you. I-I don't know...how you did what you did but... thank you," he said, smiling. His eyes were beaming, released from their inner darkness. Olivia could see the promise of hope glisten in his bright eyes.

Shaking her head, Olivia returned his gleaming smile, although there was a slight hint of sorrow in her words. "It should be me, thanking you, Peter. You wouldn't be here if you hadn't—"

"—and where would you be?" Peter interrupted, his voice somehow finding the strength to sound clearly adamant.

She knew very well where she'd be, but still it did little to make her feel better, or convince herself otherwise that Peter nearly died because of her. She wanted to say more, to argue or *something*, but she was at a loss for words. As seconds whisked by in silence, her hand slipped out of Peter's grasp and found its way to the tightly bandaged wound on his chest.

Neither of them said a word but simply let time trickle past, finding comfort in each other's presence. At the touch of her hand, her warmth spreading throughout his entire body, Peter suddenly felt the heaviness weigh over his eyes again. It only took a few moments for him to lose sight of everything as he slipped into a peaceful sleep.

A little over three minutes passed before Olivia reclaimed her hand from Peter's chest. Again she thought of Walter getting lost in the halls of the hospital. She leaned over Peter one more time and gently kissed him on the forehead.

"Sweet dreams," she said with a smile as she stroked the side of his scruffy face with a soft hand, warm and confident.

Picking up her coat from the chair on the right side of Peter's hospital bed, she turned and walked out of the room.