

Chapter 4: The Reflection and Decision

He was such a rude, inconsiderate ass the first time she had met him in Iraq when she went to plead for his help in reaching the committed Walter Bishop almost two years ago now. But that outward appearance and attitude was just a mask he learned to wear to shield himself from caring, from hurting. There was so much to his story that she didn't know, so much of herself she wanted to share with him.

But Peter had stayed, despite the risks he faced by staying. Whether he stayed for Walter, to find the answers of his life, for a deeper pull in his guarded heart that had been left untouched for so long, she didn't know. Whatever the true reason was, Olivia was thoroughly glad he had stayed. It was those long, boring moments of digging through piles upon piles of paperwork, those long hours flying across country, those long nights driving through the middle of nowhere together that made her feel like she had gotten to know him. Because there he was, deeply planted in her heart and mind so firmly that nothing could free her from the anguish that gripped her whole being at the sight of the endotracheal tube tapped to his mouth. The sound it made was so unnatural, so forced, it was painful to watch. In and out the machine forcefully pushed the air into his lungs, as though squealing, "You shall live" with flow of air.

Alone in the room, Olivia sat beside Peter, leaning over the sidebar to take his hand. It was cold, almost lifeless and without any reactionary sign to her touch. It was almost as though he was already gone, and the fear it conjured deep in her soul paralyzed her. What could she do? Was there nothing she could do to save him? Walter had said Peter's only hope would be if Olivia could cross over to the other side to retrieve the cure alter-Walter was successful in making. How could he even be certain that there was a cure over there? And how could she travel to that place she had only just witnessed yesterday for the first time? And yet she wished she knew how, how to merely take a step and be in that other place—just like she had done when she saw Broyles' office and the other Charlie with a scar down the side of his face. It happened so easily then, maybe it was possible.

Sitting there, holding Peter's still hand, she had a feeling that although Peter was completely unconscious, she felt like he was there, whispering words of encouragement to her, telling her to keep fighting, to not give up—to not give up on him. He didn't want to die, not like this, not now. Especially when the future began to look so prosperous. He was happy in this new life in Boston with his father, Olivia, and the others of the Fringe Division. He had only just begun his journey back to a real life, back to discovering himself to have it stolen away. Was God that cruel? Why would he dangle the one thing you've wanted all your life in front of your face, allow you to find it, have it long enough to wonder if it could be true only to take it away in the end? It was the cruelest form of torture, and Olivia could feel the same.

Giving Peter's hand a final squeeze, she stood and with the pulsating sounds of the breathing machine, she stepped from the room, a hand clutching the shirt at her chest.

Walter was sitting in the waiting room, silently staring at the saltwater fish swimming around the tank. He was quickly digging a hole to hide in, to burry his fear and pain—perhaps it was his own grave. As Olivia sat in a chair to Walter's left, she placed a hand on his shoulder, although he gave no impression that he knew she was there. Maybe he was already dead and buried inside to notice.

But then he opened his mouth to speak. "The doctors came to ask if I wanted to stop life support. They said they are unable to make an accurate diagnosis in order to cure Peter's illness. They gave him two days, even on life support," he said, his eyes still locked on the fish as a single tear fell from his left eye.

Two days on life support? How could such an illness kill you so quickly, even with advanced technology to keep you alive? The thought of merely standing by as Peter died ripped her apart inside, and like a frightened little girl, Olivia fell into Walter's arms, both seeking shelter from the pain, release from the anguish.

They sat there for many moments until Olivia opened her eyes and saw black and white angelfish swimming around in the tank. Freshwater angelfish. She blinked back the fog in her eyes and freeing herself from Walter's clingy hands, she peered into the tank. Only a moment ago there had been green and yellow saltwater fish inside the tank; not only were they different fish now, but they were an entirely different type of fish.

Then her eyes went past the fish in the tank and through it to the other side of the waiting room.

"Walter, I can see it, right here, on the other side of the tank," Olivia said. It was an unfamiliar, cold hospital waiting room with blue velvet cushioned chairs. Without regard to Walter, Olivia slowly walked to the other side of the room, bending over to feel the soft texture of one of the blue chairs with a slightly shaking hand. It was real, she could touch it just as any other tangible object even though she felt like she was suddenly swallowed up in a demented nightmare. The thought occurred to her that this was no longer her world. She had somehow slipped to the other side again, perhaps by accident, perhaps from the fear.

She turned back toward the hallway she had come from with a single thought—Peter. She ran down the hall, past the nurses' station and stopped at Room #704. He wouldn't be there, she knew, but something forced her, pushed her from behind. As she opened the door and stepped inside the dark room, she felt the side of the wall for the light switch but could find none. The curtain over the windows was

parted just enough to let some light into the room, illuminating a figure in the bed. Stepping closer, she could see it was not Peter in that hospital bed. Although her eyes were not yet adjusted to the dim light, she could see the soft contours of a woman with a similar breathing devise taped unceremoniously to her pale face with long blonde hair hanging lifelessly at her shoulders. Olivia's heart pounded rapidly in her chest. She knew that if that woman would open her eyes, they would be bright green—the same as her own. This was her, the other Olivia Dunham.

Shock gripping around her neck, she stumbled backward in the dark hospital room, unable to breathe until something grabbed her shoulders, shaking her back to reality. It was Walter, peering into her green eyes as though looking through a clear window. Gasping, Olivia tried to focus her eyes, her head whirling with an uncomfortable feeling that could only be motion sickness. As her eyes focused, she took in her surroundings and discovered she was standing before Peter's hospital bed, the breathing machine whizzing and whirling as it filled his lungs with air. He hadn't been there just a second ago—it was her in that bed, not Peter. She was the one with the breathing machine commanding her body to live. But it wouldn't last forever, because without the cure soon, she would die.

"Walter, I was there, in that other place. But he wasn't there," she said, pointing at Peter.

"Of course not, Olivia. He wouldn't be there because he is here, with us."

"No, it was me in that bed, I was there, with the breathing machine."

"You were there? Actually you or the other you?"

"I was looking down at her," Olivia said frantically, ignoring Walter's question. "It was me in Peter's place."

Walter's eyes fell to the floor as he took a step away from her, suddenly realizing something that almost devastated him more than the thought of losing his son a second time. "This won't work," he said at last.

"What do you mean? What won't work?"

Looking back into Olivia's eyes, he answered, "Even if you go back to that place, find the cure and bring it back to save Peter's life, you will die. If you are indeed correct with what you saw, it is you who is inflicted with the same illness as Peter is here, which suggests that *you* need the cure to survive."

"But it's not me," she said, suddenly lost in confusion. "I am not in that hospital bed."

“No, you are not, but another *you* is! I can’t do this,” Walter said, shattered. “What right do I have to trade one life for another? I’ve already done that once, I cannot do it again.”

Olivia grimaced at Walter’s painfully truthful statement. Who was she, though, to make the same decision Walter had done when he decided to steal the other Peter? She wanted Peter to live more than anything, but at what cost? The cost of her own life? She couldn’t make that decision, she couldn’t take that step from humanity to that of a god, because that is what she would be, a god determining who lives and who dies. If only someone else could make that decision for her, she could be let off the hook and relax, but she knew there was no chance of that. Peter would be dead and buried long before God would ever give her a sign. That is, if she could decide whether or not she still believed in God.

She faltered in her place, hands going up to her head as she dragged them through her loose hair, utterly frustrated and scared. She hated staying in one place for too long, and she hated this place where she found herself, unable to make a clear decision to move forward. She had to get out, out of this place, this tragic world distraught with human imperfection. Storming from Room #704, she raced down the hall and back to the elevator.

All she wanted was escape, but she would not find it. All she wished for was Peter’s speedy recovery, but she could not make it happen because she was lost at the crossroads of her own morality and ethics. All she wanted was for everything to go away and leave her be, but she would still be haunted by the world she turned her back on.

In front of the elevator, she raised her hand to press the down button but only grabbed the side of the wall instead, angrily punching the corner with the palm of her hand. She couldn’t turn her back on those she cared for, neither Walter or Peter. When did they find their way inside her damaged heart? When did she become this vulnerable, this weak? Since when did she ever run away from her problems? These problems and consequences were not going anywhere whether she ran or stayed, but which way could she feel right with herself, feel as though she could live with her choices? She had to do what she could, even if it meant actively killing herself in another reality.