

# **Bartholomew and Barry**

**By Sean Boettger**

The oh-so familiar sound was played once more, and yet another message arrived just waiting to be analysed without context nor a familiar face. Bartholomew considered their words for but a moment before spuriously typing their inane comment on how much they hated their “stupoid mum” and how “retaded” their sister was. Dickmeistro, yet another bizarre username – also with an unusual lack of numbers at the end – typed up their next reply which lead the conversation into the depths of the falseness of celebrities and how “our culture is created purely around the stigmatisation of creative individuals”. Bartholomew replied with 'lol'. A minute passed.

Bartholomew sat at their computer, patiently waiting. Their patience was the type of patience you would find in a little kid asked to sit still. They'd squirm. They'd squirm a lot. Bartholomew was squirming. The anticipation was too much, the little notification at the bottom of the screen slowly ticking away, dot after dot, “dickmeistro is typing...”.

“Come on...come on!” the screen engulfed their vision, time became a fluid entity slipping through their arthritis affected fingers, the pixels slowly mimicking a swirling vortex of colours, the dreaded beach ball of doom...

“Hey Barry I'm fucking bored.”

The screen whisked away and Barry was pulled back into the dark depressing world that was his dorm room.

“Can we go now?” Peter tossed the slinky and sat upright, the bed creaking under his weight.

“One second Peter, dickmeistro's just replying,” Barry leaned inwards again. Peter grabbed out his phone and checked his texts

for what seemed like the millionth time.

“Yeah, well Richard can go fuck off too.”

“That's not very nice,” Barry muttered innocently as the computer finally unfroze; he swiftly typed in 'gtg' and put it to sleep. He pushed off from his desk chair and subtly stretched. “What time did we have to get to class again?” He checked his phone, it was 12:15pm. The mid-day sun was blocked by drawn curtains - Peter didn't like anyone looking in - but he could tell it was way too warm outside for his favourite jumper.

“Uh, twelve, thirty... Or something,” Peter shrugged and hopped off his bed. He grabbed his coat and they both headed out the door.

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“I am going to pull the rug out of the reader, they'll never guess the amazing plot twist. Simon...was Jessica the entire time!”

Richard stood there, waiting for applause, or, any sort of reaction really. Had his idea been done before? Had it been ravaged by many of the creatives before him? He could have sworn it was original, maybe he could add another twist.

As time ticked on he realised how desperate his situation was, and then noticed the bird. Everyone was looking at it, had been looking at it for quite some time; smug bastard was pecking at his sandwich.

“Guys, guys, save your applause, I know it's great,” Richard continued addressing them as if their rickety wooden bench was some sort of varnished round table in his best attempt to win back their attention. He was no match for the bird.

He removed the grimace from his face and continued onward. “Alright, fine then. I'll take my story elsewhere. You brats won't get a chance to beta-read the first page,” and with that started walking off. He hoped at least Nicole would try to catch up to him, she was the one who'd suggested the whole meeting...meet-up. He began to see the flaw in his methodology. He looked up at the trees that shadowed the campus grounds; at least it was a nice day.

“Rick wait a sec!”

His face lit up. He turned around to see Nicole trip over her own feet and only manage to regain control through sheer awesomeness. She was awesome. Richard liked to consider her his muse even though they didn't talk particularly much outside of their philosophy class. Her light jog came to a stop and she wiped her forehead.

“Sorry. I know that didn't work out how you'd hoped,” she shrugged and raised her hands in a friendly gesture.

“Yeah, yeah you could say that,” he glanced to the side. He could tell that wasn't all she had to say.

“However...you really do need to stop being such a tool,” she joked, grinning and shaking her head.

“Hey that isn't fair.”

“Sometimes people aren't going to care about your latest book. A lot of the time actually.”

Richard looked down and let out a heavy sigh – the dramatics were necessary, even if he appreciated her honesty. Nicole raised an eyebrow. “Cheer up, I'll beta-read the first page,” she grinned, and

Richard perked up a little. “As long as you 'beta-read' my essay alright? Identity politics are a messy thing right now, want to make sure I-”

“Dot your T's and cross your I's, got it,” Richard nodded obliviously. Nicole shook her head in amusement, then checked over his shoulder for a second.

“Anyway, I've got to get to my next bio lecture, email me the draft and I'll send you mine alright?”

Richard nodded and Nicole continued on down the path. He looked back at the bench and wondered how else he could have directed attention to himself.

Nicole strolled quickly down the path to lecture hall B1, having memorised the university's layout since last year's open day. Something nagged at the back of her mind, wasn't quite right. She kept thinking about something her philosophy teacher had said, A stable identity poses many issu-

No...she'd left her notebook at home; she'd have to use her physics one temporarily. She let out a dissatisfied grunt.

From the other side of the campus crossed Barry and Peter, although unfortunately their path would lead to the wrong side of the building and they'd have to double back. Barry already knew this but Peter seemed fond of navigating – of being the leader – and who was he to challenge that?

Peter may have been the tiniest bit lost, but he wasn't about to admit that. He disguised his lack of direction by leading them through a set of doors, that luckily enough had several large signs pointing them in the right way.

They eventually made it to the hall, a large round room with notably terrible acoustics due to the varnished wood and relative emptiness of most classes. As usual the small group of students spread themselves as evenly throughout the hall as possible, optionally clumping with one or two others they considered friends. Peter made his way quickly over to Nicole, the abandoned Barry chose a seat in a poor location to let others sit a bit closer; no one ever took the opportunity but it helped him feel valid.

Nicole really thrived in this sort of situation, the classroom environment. Peter sat next to her hoping mostly to copy off her notes; he was lost. Barry knew most of the answers to what the lecturer - a rather excitable woman who always let the class organically evolve - posed; but he couldn't help himself, he always felt this bizarre need to have flawless answers, and while amusingly enough he could answer most questions more than adequately he remained silent. He didn't talk much outside of class either, he shrugged. While he would have found Nicole's outgoing spirit inspiring, he'd long since resigned to his current nature.

“Hey Barry!” It took him a few seconds to register what was happening.

“Hi, hello, Nicole, sorry” he glanced every so often but kept his focus mostly on Peter.

“I'm trying to get people to proof read my friend Richard's draft, would you like a copy?” she asked. Barry quickly glanced down from his seat, the lecture had finished - he must have blanked out for a second.

“Sure, ok yep” he said unsurely; he knew nothing of the book, but it probably couldn't hurt. Wait-“Richard?” he asked.

“Uh yeah, what about him?”

“I've spoken to him online, but I have never seen him, is he in this class?”

“No, the sciences aren't his strong suite. I could introduce you two though, you could talk about the book or something. He'd love that” she grinned, “tomorrow 'round midday just come over to the central courtyard, the one with all the trees and the library and stuff.” Barry nodded.

“Is tutoring still on this week Peter?” Nicole turned.

Peter glanced up, having been – to Barry's surprise – lost in thought. “What, no I'm really busy currently. Stupid shit. Don't worry about it,” Peter choked out, clearly avoiding something. Barry glanced in concern, and Peter quickly headed towards the exit bumping past him. “Come on asshole, I don't have my key.”

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“So you have a twin. They looks just like you but are nicer.”

“True. But that's the setup?”

Barry scanned the words one more to be sure; “yep”. The book was terrible. Numerous grammar mistakes, tense changes, underdeveloped characters; Barry knew it was only one page but damn...damn it was bad.

“Well that's whatcha get for some philosopher geek trying to write. Shit.”

Barry couldn't argue, although he felt Peter was being a bit crass.

He glanced at his chat log and immediately closed that line of thought; he could recognise hypocrisy when he saw it. He wouldn't...say it though...

A phone rang. Both Barry and Peter searched through their pockets, Peter quickly grabbed his out and answered.

“Sup.”

Barry immediately recognised the voice on the other end and decided to hightail it out of there; things tended to get a bit loud. He gestured towards himself, then the door, and then was on the other side. The cold night's air froze his skin quickly, and he wished he had brought his jumper. There was still a hint of the sun in the deep purple clouds, but the dry wind countered the inherent beauty of dusk and just led to Barry getting mad; why couldn't Peter just be like every other jock. He crossed off campus and headed down the street.

The street lamps were rare and the light was dying quickly, shrouding areas in darkness; Barry had extremely good vision, unlike Peter who refused to wear glasses or contacts. He theorised his luck was in part due to his own parents prohibiting technology for the first decade or so of his life, but also likely genetics. Didn't help him one bit though, he chuckled, as he thought about Peter and his extremely rich parents; didn't seem to help him either. Every time they called they'd argue for hours on end.

He started heading towards a café in the distance, the streets around it were empty except for the one person walking towards him. Barry tried to avoid him but the man pushed past Barry's shoulder, knocking him back. Barry squinted for a second, trying to pick out the face in dark; it looked kinda like Peter, but then again he was on Barry's mind. He shrugged and kept moving.

“u there?”

Barry hunched over his phone, sitting on a chair outside 'le petite'. He'd forgotten his wallet (and more importantly his water bottle), but luckily his phone was a permanent fixture.

“Yeah, what do you want to talk about?” dickmeistro answered. Barry considered for a second bringing up Richard's book, and he and Nicole's conversation, but figured it was probably best not to.

“Noting am just board,” he wondered how long Peter would be, even with the outside furnaces at full blaze he could feel chills continuously sizzling his arms; they were starting to become numb.

“God my 'frend' roommate suks, hes taken over the room adns yelling a lot, am freezing outsid” Bartholomew started the conversation.

“People like him are a large part of what's wrong with the world.”

“Yeh.”

Dickmeistro loved having a soap box to complain into, he felt such contempt for society and humanity in general. He was so much...better...than them.

Barry returned to his room a few hours later, and was surprised to find the door left unlocked. It was silent inside and the light was off, a small draft flowing from a window left open a crack. Barry didn't know any of Peter's plans, and presumed he had gone out for the night. The room was empty.

It is dark, vague shapes surround the vessel. The two faces buzz and hum around them as they dangle from invisible threads. Barry's vision was immediately plunged into light as he awoke, vision blurry and unaccommodating. He immediately shut them again, then turned to the left and squinted to see Peter's bed; no Peter.

He didn't understand why he wasn't glad, but shrugged and snuggled back into his warm blanket. He could tell it was pretty early morning, it felt cool and the light was sharp and bright, hitting the back wall from a near perpendicular angle; it was Saturday anyway, he could afford to sleep a little longer.

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It was an 8am start for Nicole every weekday, and sadly her routine led to a natural wake up at 8:12am. Her unit was awfully silent as usual, other than for the occasional buzzing from her fridge. She groaned as she instinctively reached over for her phone, both to see the time and make sure she stayed up to date. *With what*, she always pondered, dismissing notifications from vapid posts on her friends' Facebook accounts. She frowned as her stomach made a bizarre growl, and decided food was in order.

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Richard was fast asleep (if awoken he'd have proclaimed that creativity requires a healthy rest, and likely brunch in bed) until sometime just before noon, when Nicole called and requested him meet her where they'd spoken the day before. His bedroom was cramped, having been moved out of his previous one due to his parents' frequent disagreements and subsequent desires to sleep separately. He wished he'd had a sibling at times purely so they could have been the one to move; wished he had put a bit more of a

fight up too.

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Barry was the second to show, Nicole having arrived earlier to make sure everyone knew where to meet. He made a muted wave gesture as he neared, then sat at the bench. He glanced up nervously, there were dark clouds on the horizon.

“Hey Barry, I forgot to mention it yesterday but nice job with those questions, Mrs. Vrisk really stuck you with some tough ones.” Barry had no idea how to respond, he couldn't remember. He grinned and nodded. He could see a few people heading in his direction, none of them looked right though.

“Hey Rick!”

Barry could see some guy heading in the wrong direction perk up, but, no that couldn't be it. Dickmeistro, despite his name was intelligent, succinct, clued in; the dork walking towards them looked, clueless, both in his appearance and in his eyes. He wore a brown coat, almost certainly second hand and poorly treated, his hair was messy, everything about him was unrefined.

“Hi Nicole,” he waved, noticing Barry as he walked up to them.

“So Barry, this is Richard,” she gestured at Richard then Barry, “you two have spoken online apparently, thought it'd be cool if you met.” Richard looked at Barry in confusion.

“Bartholomew?” He asked, and Barry meekly nodded. Richard raised an eyebrow, then stood there for a bit. Nicole glanced back and forth between the two, their reaction wasn't quite what she had expected. “Anyway, what did you guys think of the book?”

“Look, it's clearly early stages, but I think it has potential,” Nicole said, Barry could tell she was sugar coating it to oblivion; Richard wasn't buying it; he was however curious as to what Barry would say, considering Bartholomew's scathing remarks on most things. Barry sat there for a second, going back and forth. No one was who they'd appeared to be.

“Well, I mean, -”

“Hey everyone!”

The small group turned their heads to Peter as he ran up to them from a different path. Barry lost his thought.

“Hi Peter, did you get a chance to read Richard's draft?” Nicole asked, immediately regretting it once she noticed Richard's increasingly frustrated expression; this was really awkward.

“I can't remember, maybe, I'm sure it was great though,” he replied, grinning. The lighting darkened. Barry presumed he'd had the kind of night he didn't like to think about much, he wasn't normally in this decent a mood. Richard at this point was just confused and irritated; he didn't like the general tone the book was discussed in, and everything kept shifting off topic. And it was starting to rain.

“Alright everyone, I think the talking about my book train has set sail, I'm gonna head home,” Richard eloquently stated, and started walking off. Everyone else shrugged and the group parted.

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Barry tapped away at his desk, slowly propelling his chair back and forth along the carpet. He was hoping dickmeister would message him, but at the same time felt off; the name refused to mesh with the face. Peter hung around in the background, looking through

drawers and cupboards.

“Hey Peter, Richard seemed, weird, right?” Barry spun around, looking for confirmation; *that* Richard couldn't be dickmeister, how he knew he was Bartholomew, that was a fluke, Nicole had told him, surely.

“I don't know, he seemed alright,” Peter smiled, continuing his search.

“Yeah, exact...ly. He didn't look like a moron to you?” Barry frowned, he'd wanted Peter to say it, not him.

“Not from what I could tell, also could I read his book?”

Barry leaned into his hand, elbow pressed into his leg and looked at the carpet, his shadow was cast starkly in the floor by the descending sun.

There was a knock on the door.

Barry stood up to go open it, Peter immediately moved over and sat on his bed. The door swung open to reveal two police officers, Barry was taken aback.

“Hi, I'm officer Jane Lue and this is officer Andrew McLaughlin,” they both flashed their badges, “we were wondering if we could have a moment of your time?”

Barry had nothing to hide, but still felt intimidated. He nodded and they walked in, looking around. “Are you Peter?” Barry shook his head and vaguely pointed at Peter. He looked up from his phone. “Hi,” he said, and fleetingly grinned at them.

“Nice room,” Mrs Lue looked around, “Peter, have you been in

contact at all with your brother Liam?” She turned to him.

“No, we don't really talk much, ever since I, left.”

Barry felt uncomfortable, but sat down at his desk. He felt separated from the conversation, like some interesting plot was unfolding before him but he had no part in it. He could see McLaughlin wandering around the rest of the room.

“Alright, well I'm not sure if your parents have been in touch yet, but your brother has been connected with the disappearance of his partner, Jennifer Palmer.”

“I don't think I've ever met her.”

“Alright, well, please be safe and let us know if you see or get in contact with either of them, ok?”

Peter grabbed out his phone and entered in the two's contact details. Barry noticed something but figured he could probably wait out the police. After some closing words they left, and Peter shut the door.

“Is that, is that a new phone?” Barry asked, worried about prying - who knew what Peter got up to in his spare time - but curious all the same. Peter glanced at the phone.

“Oh, no I accidentally picked up someone else's phone last night, we're going to switch back the next time we see each other.”

Barry nodded. He was skeptical, but he had no real reason to question it. Inevitable he frowned, then took out his phone and sent Peter's usual phone several texts: “phoneGPS”, “WheresMyDroid”, “PhoneGPS”, amongst others. To his surprise one of them must have worked; five minutes later he got an automatic response. The phone was near the theatre hall, so someone else from the campus

likely had it. He felt satisfied enough, and figured it was time for bed.

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Richard kept working on his book for a large portion of the night. His level of confidence, small as it were, had been butchered by the latest events and he needed to get something on page. It made him feel better, not just the expression but the extrinsic value he predicted it would eventually acquire. He glanced at the chat every so often, but didn't say anything.

He'd lost his mask.

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Gradually it seemed Peter's good mood declined and within the next few days his previous phone returned, as he had said. Barry's concern over the police's visit faded as it seemed like nothing had arisen from it; dickmeister hadn't returned yet, although Richard continued attending his classes, and Nicole had caught some bug which put her in bed for a bit. Barry started to return to his previous dynamic, and everything was relatively normal.

It was two weeks later when Barry received the strangest of emails:

*“Hello Barry Lankin,*

*I am Daniel Price, your room-mate Peter's father. If possible me and my wife would greatly appreciate if you could send us a copy of Peter's text messages and call logs. His phone's pass-code is 6969.*

*Thank you for your help.*

*Regards,  
Daniel Price*”

Barry looked at the message cautiously. How did they get his email address? Barry wanted to shrug it off and continued to try and forget about it for the next few days, but a level of curiosity built up in him. He didn't normally feel this strong about anything, but something inside him was changing. He had to find out; something was up with Peter, and he needed to know.

It took a bit of waiting before Peter went to the bathroom without the phone in his clutches; Barry waited until the door was closed. He crossed the room and grabbed it off Peter's bed, and entered in the pass-code. He knew he had around two minutes to take a peek; he wasn't going to copy anything until he knew what was going on...not that he had any clue how to.

Alright, texts, Liam. That was his brother right? Messages as recent as two and a half weeks ago, he'd lied to the police. He copied down the number onto his own phone. The messages were weird, mostly Peter telling him to go away and leave him alone. Onto his parents, Dad, there were many messages of condemnation, apparently he'd run away as a form of rebellion, he said they were “constricting” both he and his brother – big word for Peter – and he'd started using their funds to pay for something. Both parents kept telling him to stay saf- he heard a door creak, he almost let go of the phone, instead quickly placing it in his pocket. He walked over to the door, grabbing his jumper.

“Hey, you're going out?”

Barry froze, then took a deep breath.

“Yeah.”

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The doorbell rang, and she had to decide; the tissue box or the door. “Hold on a sec!” She called out, quickly blowing her nose. Time was ticking, she ran to the door. She rotated the handle and pulled strongly. The door grated against the floor as it opened, and her eyes briefly widened when she saw Richard at the door.

“Rick, hey, I didn't expect to see you!” She said, and with that sprinted away. Richard heard a sneeze. She popped back into the door-frame. “So, um, why are you here?”

“It's just been a while, since we talked, you know. I just felt like I should say hi, and I don't have your number or like Facebook or anything,” he said sheepishly.

Nicole chuckled slightly, “come on in, I'll make some tea.”

Her house wasn't quite what he'd expected based on her friends description. There was a pretty noticeable lack of windows, and the floor was some sort of dark and noisily textured wood; it seemed pretty dumpy. Then again it was really cool that she was paying for it herself. He took a seat on one of the antique chairs in the kitchen, and she came over with the tea.

“Sooooo, how've you been? School going alright?” she asked as she took a seat.

“Yeah, yeah I've just been doing what I normally do I guess,” he said reluctantly. He paused for a second, “stop doing that eyebrow thing you always do, it's cruel.”

She relaxed her eyebrows, “hey, it tends to get people to say what

they mean.” Richard smiled at the ceiling before looking back at Nicole. A buzz came from Richards pocket and he hesitated for a second before taking out his phone.

*“were r u? Urgent” - Bartholomew*

He ignored it.

“Yeah, I've been kind of down, I can tell people thought what I'd written was total crap, I, just, wish you would have said it,” he lowered his eyes to the table. “Also I was really thrown off by Barry, he's, completely different online,” he grinned, realising the parallel to him. Nicole was curious.

“Different how?”

Another buzz, Richard took out the phone.

*“ples answr me asshole, relly impotent!! !!!” - Bartholomew*

He looked at Nicole with a pleading grin.

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Barry placed Peter's phone on the table. Nicole and Richard looked at eachother.

“Thanks, first, for, talking to me,” his mouth twitched a subtle smile at the table, then continued, “I got an email from Peter's parents asking me to send him his phone messages and calls and stuff, but when I checked his messages, I found some really weird stuff.”

Barry was enjoying this, there was some level of certainty in his

knowledge that helped the sentences come out fluidly. He described what he'd seen, and both Nicole and Richard got drawn in.

“So now, I think I saw Peter with Liam's phone, if we can somehow confirm that then, well, either Peter is mixed up with Liam in something weird and I should contact the police, or Peter is, now, Liam.”

Nicole considered everything she'd heard and said, “are you sure we shouldn't just go straight to contacting those officers?”

Barry thought for a moment - that would be the reasonable thing to do - but something stopped him saying it.

“No, I, uh, don't want to bother them in case I'm off base, anyway confirming the phone can't take too long right? If he has some sort of tracking app we should be able to locate it and check,” he looked at Richard.

“You want me to send the message right? So he can't know it was you who's trying to figure this out?” Richard looked at Barry unimpressed. Barry grinned back, and Richard sighed and grabbed out his phone.

“I really don't think this is a good idea, either of you, you're jumping into this as if it's something crucial that you need to be a part of,” Nicole frowned at them and continued, “but it's not. This is something the police need to handle, not three uni students.”

“This is something I need to do, we, need to do,” Barry turned to Richard as his phone buzzed again.

“Alright, it's...right at your dorm Barry,” Richard looked up

concerned. Barry nodded in understanding, and got up from his chair.

“Alright I'll go find and check the phone, and, you two should stay here,” Barry said. Richard looked at the Barry in front of him and saw neither the Barry from their initial meeting nor Bartholomew, but something inside him was growing through this, and Richard could feel it growing too – a level of control, of one's self and one's path. He had a new idea for his book.

Nicole sighed. “Barry...at least...I think someone should go with you just in case, from what you've said Liam's a bit of a creep and, honestly this entire situation is really weird,” Nicole stood up too.

“I want to,” Rick said, and finally all three of them were standing. “We'll text you in about half an hour, if we don't then call the police ok?” Nicole nodded, and both Richard and Barry walked towards the entrance. They crossed over and Barry pulled the door closed fully; the lock sounded.

Once again the freezing nights air did what it always does, but it felt, alright, Barry and Richard knew where they were going. The campus was in walking distance, and so they started heading there.

“Thanks for this,” Richard turned to Barry. Barry glanced over.

“No, it's ok, I, I don't know.”

“Is it bad I almost wish I had been in on this from the start? If I'd written this things probably would have moved a little slower from the 'getting the team together' part,” he jested.

Barry grinned.

“Yeah, I get you. It feels good, to have, something to, move me, or us, I guess.”

Dickmeistro considered for a second, and said, “this all makes me think of an Oscar Wilde quote. Give a man a mask and he'll show you his true face.” Barry thought about it for a second and wondered what separated Richard and he from everyone else; the others', what were their masks?

“Stop it with your dumb philosophy,” Bartholomew joked, then looked a little more serious. Barry gestured to the left, “Alright my dorms just around the corner. Do you think you could ring the phone?”. Somehow he felt something bad was going to happen here. He was excited.

Richard nodded, and called it. They could hear a buzzing coming from one of the bushes outside a window. Barry gestured for Richard to stay, then wandered over to the bush. He bent down and picked up the phone, and waved it at Richard. The sound of thunder boomed overhead and Barry noticed for the first time the dark clouds above him. He looked back ahead, and cocked his head when he noticed Richard staring to the side of him. Barry turned around and jumped backwards when he saw Peter, or Liam, or someone.

“Hey Barry, what the hell are you doing?!” the man aggressively walked towards Barry. Barry took a step back but tried not to shrink like he would have usually.

“I I I I, know, you're not Peter,” Barry stated back, he blamed his stutter on the cold. Richard looked around behind him, he had no idea what to do.

“What? I'm Peter. What the hell are you on?” he said, but Barry held his ground.

“You, you, Peter, left a few weeks ago and when you came back you were nice, and you had a different phone, and your parents sent Peter messages warning him about you,” Barry spurted out. Richard started to consider running.

The man who looked like Peter stood there for what felt like eternity. Time dripped as if being fed through a fine wire mesh, but Barry held his stare and didn't dare blink, Richard slowly started backing away. Finally the clouds could wait no longer and rain began to pour downwards. The pitter-patter would have sounded calming to Barry were he not frozen in fear.

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Nicole sat at the table, her phone in hand. She hated this, should she just call the police? From what she had heard Liam seemed dangerous, something Peter had been scared of. She recalled his odd reaction after class, then looked down at his phone.

“Screw it,” she said aloud, and called Peter's parents from his mobile – a landline number. She sat impatiently as the dial tones sounded, and was finally met with, “Hello, this is Daniel Price speaking.”

“Hi Mr Price, my name is Nicole and I'm calling to ask about Liam,” her tone softened, “how, dangerous is he?”

Mr Price's calm demeanour dropped, “Do you know where he is?” She could hear in the background another voice start becoming frantic.

“Um, sort of-”

“Listen to me, tell me where he is, and stay away from him. If you talk to him be careful not to mention us or Peter,” and Nicole's eyes started to widen as he continued to describe him. She looked towards the door, then pushed off from the table and bolted; she had to get to Richard and Barry quick.

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“I. Am. Peter.” the man growled.

Barry kept staring, getting ever the more concerned. His hair was drenched, and every drop of rain was like ice on his skin. “No, no, you're n n n n nnot, your parents, w w w w wwarned Pe, Peter,” he wasn't sure if he should keep going or just pretend he was Peter, maybe he was? But no. Even though he had never been in one, part of him wanted an altercation. Part of him wanted to fight. Richard didn't want to fight at all, but stood there for Barry.

“I. Am. Peter.” the man repeated. “I. Am. Peter.” he kept saying it over and over again and Barry's concern went from the man being aggressive to the man being a mental patient. He still felt like he had been thrown into something that he only saw some small part of; but he couldn't think of that, there was an antagonist now.

“Barry I think, I think we should go...right now,” Richard said, and having slowly crept forward started tugging on Barry's shoulder.

“I. Am. Peter.”

Barry couldn't keep his eyes off of the man, Liam, right? He started walking backwards with Richard when Barry noticed Liam's arm move slowly towards his jacket pocket. Richard noticed the movement too and started to tense up.

“I. Am - you are all crazy. You all want to control me again, don't you? Lock me up? I have control, I have,” Liam's knife glinted from the moonlight and his voice started wobbling, “control”. His eyes widened in terror and both Barry and Richard turned around and started running.

His heart was pounding, Barry had never run this fast in his entire life. The ground was becoming muddy and difficult to trudge through. He could feel his legs starting to burn and go numb at the same time and he could hear someone else's footsteps outside of he and Richard's. Finally they made it onto a path. Barry's vision was collapsing in on itself, darkness clouding any peripheral he may have had and speckles glimmering and populating every inch. Both he and Richard had started heading towards the theatre instinctively but Barry knew he wasn't going to get there, his joints couldn't take it any more. His legs crumbled and he fell onto the concrete path. He could hear the rantings of the mad man behind him but he felt no power nor control in his legs, he pushed himself over with his arms as he saw Liam run up to him.

The next few moments were a blur to him, Liam had plunged the knife somewhere and the sound of gravel being grated against filled the air as Bartholomew spun around somehow and there were crashes of lightning and screeches of pain. Barry's head was throbbing and his hands were stained, some part of him was in excruciating pain and yet numb at the same time and there was a body next to him.

Barry looked at Liam's frozen face and pushed himself backwards into some metal bar, water splashing at his feet. He couldn't see where Richard was but he thought he heard Nicole's voice. His vision was getting darker and darker and even with his eyesight he could no longer make out shapes or colours, just patches of varying darkness. He had come so close, he could feel himself tearing up.

The theatre had been just up ahead. Something pierced the dark, red and blue and loud and he couldn't hold on any longer.

