

'Hello Peter'
by James M. (age 17)

Part One

"What on Earth are you screaming about?" Andrea asked, looking over from her newspaper to her son.

"Look at my cereal!" Peter shoved the bowl toward her. "I swear I didn't do this! It formed the words on its own!"

The letter shaped pieces of cereal in his bowl spelled out clear words — 'Hello Peter'. "It's like a greeting from the spirit world!" he continued, grabbing his head, eyes frantic. "Ghosts are real! *Ghosts* are *real*! AAAAAA!" he screamed, voice shaking and chest heaving.

"Calm down. Random letters are bound to form words now and then," she offered, trying to soothe him.

"But 'Hello Peter'?" he refuted. "That's like one-in-a-gazillion!"

"Peter," she said, making eye contact, "think about how many bowls of cereal you eat in a week."

That seemed to mollify him. His breathing returned to normal.

"Ok, good point."

He scooped up the message and ate it.

Peter sat dramatically in a bus seat, third from the back, sideways, his legs in the aisle. His friends — Owen, Jack, and Other Peter — were engaged in conversation already. "Do you believe in ghosts?" he interjected.

"Yes, absolutely," Owen said immediately. "See, I was eating cereal one time — " Other Peter laughed, talking over Owen, though. "I don't believe in anything supernatural at all — "

"I'm with Owen on this." Jack entered the debate. "Ghosts are definitely real, but they're not quite like how the movies say — " Jack and all the others stopped dead at the sound of loud *crack!*

Peter turned around to look at the window. There was a small chip near the right edge of the glass, with small fractures extending outward. The cracks spread to the left, slowly and silently. By the time they reached the left edge, there were undeniable words formed. 'Hello Peter.'

The four stared in silence for a moment.

Peter walked into the school with a sense of mounting dread. His friends laughed and joked, as they always did, the incident on the bus seemingly forgotten. It made sense they would be able to. He could not, however. Twice now, a message had been sent, it seemed. Who was sending the message, and why?

Down the hallway, there was a repairman on a ladder, pulling a tile out of the off-white, pinpricked ceiling.

As Peter walked past, the man dropped the tile. It bounced off the top of the ladder, exploding in a cloud of dust, and landed at Peter's feet.

The dust settled into a familiar literary pattern.

'Hello Peter.'

He swiped it away with his left foot.

"Oh, jeez, kid. I'm sorry. Ya alright?"

Peter nodded. "I'm fine."

He kept walking.

Two was a coincidence; maybe he'd have been able to brush it aside with some convincing. Three was a definite pattern.

Ghosts, he thought again? Demons? Angels, perhaps?

He hoped it would be angels. Those were usually nice enough, if a bit frightening.

Peter sat in math class, mind refusing to settle.

"Alright," the teacher said, "turn to your partner; we're going to do a probability activity. With these dice" — he was passing out sets of five dice to each partnership — "you're going to analyze the chances of certain numbers being rolled. Follow the instructions on the worksheet and ask me if you have any questions."

Peter hadn't even realized there was a worksheet on his desk. Yawning, he read it. It was easy, if a little mundane. He would take anything easy.

His partner was a girl named Becky. Peter knew her only vaguely, despite her being Other Peter's twin sister. They couldn't be more different, really. Other Peter was fun, for one.

Becky took the dice as they were offered and handed them to Peter.

"You can be the dice-roller."

Peter took the dice and immediately gave them a practice roll.

All five landed on sixes.

"That's gotta be like one-in-a-gazillion."

"This is statistics, Peter; you could figure it out," Becky said. "In fact, that's Part 'C' of the worksheet."

"Uh..." Peter stalled. How did dice work again?

"Never mind, it's one in seven-thousand, seven-hundred, seventy-six," Becky said, jotting it down.

Peter rolled the dice again.

Five sixes again.

Becky stared at them in confusion. "You did roll them again, correct?"

Peter rolled them while she watched.

Five sixes.

"Oh, wow."

His hands seemed to move on their own as he rolled the dice again and again and again.

Sixes. Every. Single. Time.

"That's gotta be like one-in-a-gazillion," Becky breathed.

Peter nodded numbly as he continued rolling these improbably lucky numbers. "Mr. Carrera?" Becky called. "I have a question."

The teacher ambled over to their desks.

Peter rolled the dice again, sensing Becky's intentions.

Once again, they were all five sixes.

"Huh," he said. "How'd you do that?"

Peter rolled them again.

"That's odd. Let me try them."

Mr. Carrera rolled the same dice. This time, they came up a one, five, three, two, and another five. He rolled them a few more times, getting an appropriately random distribution of numbers.

"Roll them again, Peter."

He did, getting his customary set of sixes.

"Now you, Becky."

The dice worked normally for her.

"Let's try a different set of dice," Mr. Carrera suggested. He swapped their dice was a nearby pair's and had Peter roll these as well.

Straight sixes.

"Hmm," Mr. Carrera said shakily, then continued in a clear voice. "I would like you to roll ones now."

Peter rolled them again.

Ones, to his great surprise.

"Twos," Mr. Carrera said.

Five twos.

"Threes."

Threes.

"Ones again."

Ones.

"Three fours and two fives."

Just as he said, Peter rolled.

"You try now, Becky."

"Uh, one through six, in order."

After he rolled them, the dice stayed spinning for longer than they had before, then stopped, one by one, falling into the sequence Becky had requested.

The door to the classroom swung open, hinges whining. A secretary from the main office walked in, handed a note to Mr. Carrera, then left. As she left, she waved to Peter. Peter waved back, though he had never met her before.

"Hello Peter," she said softly, in her southern accent.

Peter slunk into a seat by his friends at lunch.

"Poker?" he asked.

"For now," Other Peter said, shuffling the deck. "Owen wants to play blackjack later." Peter nodded his consent as he pulled his lunch from his backpack. "Cool. What are we gambling?"

"I brought some cookies," Jack said, starting to distribute them as Other Peter dealt the cards.

If the dice had taught him anything, Peter could guess exactly what his hand would be. It would be a royal flush. Hearts, he decided, though the suit didn't change the value of the hand. When he looked at his cards, he saw that he was right. He kept his cool, controlling his face. He bet conservatively, raising in as small amounts as possible, trying to get the highest amount of cookies in the pot as possible. If he went all in from the beginning, he risked scaring his friends into folding. Like this, they would be more likely to bet a high amount in total because each increase was comparatively small.

Eventually, it came to the end and Peter put his last cookies in.

"All in," he said calmly.

His three friends matched the bet. Owen struggle to contain his excitement. What did he have, a straight flush? Peter's royal flush would beat that.

When they revealed their cards, all four burst out laughing at the absurdity of it all. They all had royal flushes, one from each suit.

Peter washed his hands and looked in the mirror. His hair looked fine. Was that a new pimple? He sighed. They were common, no matter how much he tried.

Something dark rushed behind him. Startled, Peter looked behind him. There was nothing there.

Peter turned back to the mirror. Around his reflection, a dark cloud was swirling. A face began to appear, teeth yellowed and dripping saliva. The monster set a gnarled hand on Peter's shoulder, though he couldn't feel it.

"Hello Peter," it rasped.

With a yelp, Peter ran out of the bathroom.

Peter sat in a dark corner of the school library, rocking back and forth.

A real ghost was haunting him.

He screamed, but it only came out as a whisper.

The monster seeped out of the shadows, forming in front of Peter.

"Hello Peter," it said.

"What do you want from me?" he asked.

It screamed, a shrieking sound louder than anything Peter had ever heard before. The monster jumped toward Peter.

Darkness surrounded him, infiltrating him, consuming him.

Part Two

In the streets of the city Hur'ki'lo, on the planet Ger'la, numberless concourses of its people glided. They moved in complete silence and grace. None of them spoke or stumbled. Those were follies of lesser creatures, according to the Ger'lans. They communicated in a way that humans would call telepathic, but the Ger'lans simply called communication. The Ger'lans were creatures of more energy than matter, and existed in a state of polydimensionality.

One of the Ger'lans was named after how soft rain feels on a warm summer night and the way the sunset looks over the ocean when one is sitting beside one's true love and the multitudinous beauty of the stars.

This Ger'lan, Rain, arrived at her destination. Ger'lans do not have intrinsic gender, but would've considered herself female, if she was aware of the concept.

Rain entered the Forum on Space Exploration; she had been summoned by Flowerbud and Gemstone, the Forum's administrators, during the previous lunar cycle of the Sixth Moon.

"Hello," Rain said to the receptionist, with the image of a kind friend. "I have an appointment with Flowerbud and Gemstone."

"They've been awaiting your arrival," Mountain Spring, the secretary, said, with the image of a calm tree. "The conference is around that corner." He gestured in the

seventh dimension.

Rain gave Mountain Spring her thanks and glided to the room indicated.

When Rain entered the room, she saw Gemstone, Flowerbud, and two other Ger'lans, Tidal Wave and Petrichor.

"Thank you for joining us," Gemstone said, with the image of a stern general. "We still have one more participant we're waiting on."

Rain took a seat while awaiting the last Ger'lan's arrival. It was only a moment later that Sunrise entered.

"Thank you," Flowerbud said, with the image of an understanding parent. "Let us begin. You four have been selected to participate in a new, experimental program. If, after hearing the offer, you do not wish to participate, there will be no shame in leaving."

The Ger'lans murmured their understanding and Flowerbud continued, now with the image of an excited scientist.

"Our telescopes have discovered the beginnings of intelligent alien life, in a distant part of the universe, thousands of lightyears away. Our desire is to send you four out to investigate the world. Know that if you go, it is unlikely you will return."

Rain considered. She would go, she decided, based on what she knew now. Perhaps something later would push her away.

It was too much to ask of Tidal Wave, apparently, and that Ger'lan left the room without a word. As Flowerbud had requested, Rain would not think of Tidal Wave as shameful. "The life on this planet," Flowerbud continued, unperturbed, "is contained to three dimensions, but like the various extinct species of birds on our own planet's history. We have records of those who connected their minds to those lower-dimensional creatures in hopes of further understanding. We ask that you bond with this planet's creatures and learn everything you can about them. If possible, remain and shepherd the planet to greatness, so that we may no longer be alone in this universe. The great distance the light has to travel to reach us means that whatever information we have is completely out-of-date, as concerning the current affairs of the planet. If you go and find that the planet is unpopulated, return at your earliest convenience." Rain nodded. At some point during the explanation, the rest of the Ger'lans had left the room, leaving only her and the administrators.

"I will go," Rain said, with the image of a loyal friend. "I will bond one of these creatures and guide them to prosperity."

Gemstone and Flowerbud nodded appreciatively.

"Thank you for your sacrifice," they said, with the image of the multitudinous beauty of the stars and the tears that come when a dear friend leaves forever, but does not die, and the way that sunrise looks over the ocean when one's true love has gone away and the melancholic joy of losing one's path in a forest for just a moment and seeing the endless beauty of the forest and the trees and the way that it feels after a soft rain on a warm summer night and the multitudinous beauty of the stars.

For thousands of years, Rain flew through the cosmos, toward the planet with life. She did not require food nor rest nor companionship. She had the multitudinous beauty of the stars to guide her.

As she approached the planet, she gave it a name.

It was the way the sunset looked on a mountaintop and the feeling of the cool night until the sunrise on the same peak and the rejuvenation felt while one sits beneath a canopy of

trees and the unending memory of a first kiss and the smell of the first rain breaking the famine-parched dust of the earth.

It was the Earth and she arrived.

She swam for a hundred years with the greatest whales and the smallest krill and did not find what she was looking for.

She sat for a hundred years on hundred mountaintops and watched all their sunsets and sunrises and did not find what she was looking for.

She rested for a hundred years in a peaceful glade, speaking to the Earth itself, until the forest died away and did not find what she was looking for.

She watched rainstorms for a hundred years and smelled the many new days dawning and did not find what she was looking for.

She watched one boy for one day and found exactly what she was looking for. It began with cereal, altering probability, to spell his name. A rock, flicked by a wheel, to crack a window into his name. A dust pile, settled into his name. Yet still, he did not see her. She showed him her power, controlling the dice for only him. She shared her power with all his friends and yet he still did not see her.

Rain showed herself to him, but he rejected her.

And so Rain came to bargain.

Part Three

The darkness settled inside his head, bending his mind. Peter suddenly couldn't fathom perceiving the world in less than the many dimensions he could now inhabit. How had he lived in only three? Before, he had been blind to reality. Now, he could see without limits.

Rain appeared before him as a beautiful, androgynous creature, vastly different from the ghastly creature in the mirror.

"What do you want from me?" he asked, with the image of a ravaging shark. "I desire to accompany you for a time, to learn of your people and to teach yours of mine," she replied, with the image of a surrendering army.

"Why me?" he replied, with the image of a confused, uncertain boy being conscripted into an army to fight a war he neither understood nor desired.

"It was you," she explained, with the image of a loving friend explaining a topic of their fascination, "that I first found while wandering. It was you that first taught me how humanity is a multitude of contradictions. My people are consistent. We've never had wars like yours, but we've also never had the kind of love that transcends flaws and continues to return and trust despite a thousand misgivings. Humanity can wholeheartedly believe two opposing ideas and find a way to proceed despite them."

She smiled with the image of hope.

"How would I guide you?" he asked, with the image of one willing to sacrifice themselves for those they loved.

"I would connect our minds together. We will share perception, knowledge, and communication, but retain our unique individuality. Be aware that once we are connected in this manner, we can sever it," she explained, with the image of those ancient Ger'lans who had bonded to the extinct creatures of Ger'la.

"What happens if I refuse?" he asked with the image of a simply curious boy. "I will find another to be my host. You will return to your life, with this being only a memory."

Suddenly, he couldn't bear the thought of living in only his three dimensions. It would seem like a prison, with such a limit in perception. Peter *would not go back*. "I'll do it. I will host you," he said, with the image of a loyal friend and soldier. Rain gave thanks with the images of both a citizen saluting a soldier and a wife hugging her husband.

Peter collapsed back into his old world, back into his confines. Just as he thought, he could barely remember what it had been like to experience higher dimensions. His mind now struggled to comprehend what it had been like.

He felt like crying for the loss of such inconceivable beauty.

Rain entered his mind, bonding to him.

As his mind expanded once again, it felt like going home.

"Now," Rain said, with the image of a champion winning a race, "tell me everything about being a human."

The End



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