The Persistence of Memory

by paynesgrey

Summary

The most precious memory is taken away from him, for the sake of family. Peter x Claire.
One-shot.

Notes

Written for the "Favorite Couple" prompt at heroes-contest on Livejournal. This will not be continued.

She tasted like sunshine and chocolate, and when her lips met his, he felt a thousand needles jackhammer through his heart. It was so wrong, but he’d never ever felt anything like this, not with anyone else ever. She was perfect, and yet she was so perfectly wrong for him.

It only made him want her more. In that dizzying moment, Peter grabbed her shoulders and pushed her against the closed door, his lips on hers, his tongue pushing past boundaries as she arched to submit. (His mother and brother were downstairs blissfully unaware - a notion that both frightened him and bore a temptation to rebel.) Her hands were in his hair, pulling, teasing, and he could feel her body shaking against his. His hands fell to her waist and she pushed herself into him, rubbing against the shameful excitement he was desperately trying to keep at bay.

He did, and they pulled apart like nervous, guilty children, getting into something dangerous that they could never hold any excuses, or forgiveness. If he’d taken her, and did all the things he’d want to do to her, he’d be betraying his family, his brother, and he’d commit an unimaginable sin.
He couldn’t do that. It wasn’t right, and yet in this kiss, he knew he’d never feel this magic again. Peter Petrelli wanted Claire Bennet, his niece, and she was perfectly willing to sin with him.

(So young, so naive, and so brave. Peter knew she was invincible, but he also knew that he could hurt her in such a different, more terrible way.)

It was a kiss that fluttered his heart and made him feel more at peace with his life than he’d ever had.

Then, it was all taken from him, scooped out of his brain with only the melted remnants left to quickly fade away.

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Angela had the dreams. They disturbed her, but they did not surprise her. It was like a fairytale, twisted and so like something their family would be tainted with if given the chance.

So of course she had to stop it. She had to stop her son from falling in love with his long lost niece.

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Peter and Claire were the closest they could ever be. They bonded over being outcasts, to understanding each other when no one else possibly could.

Peter would have gone through burning buildings for Claire, even if she could go through them herself unscathed. Claire would go along with Peter’s impulsive ideals, and when he disagreed with her, she relented, and she was mindful enough to not rebel, and through her aggravation would see his logic.

Claire barely ever disobeyed Peter, mostly because he usually agreed with her. They were like the same in that, and it was a deep understanding, almost like their own dogma, that neither one of them could betray.

Yet, in all of this bonding, in this depth of family and friendship, there was always something missing. There was always a line that Peter dared not cross.

Claire, on the other hand, knew what it was. Peter didn’t remember, and when the Haitian had stripped away the memories of their clandestine kiss before she was almost sent to France, he had kept her memories intact, possibly to ward her off.

Yet, Claire didn’t think it worked that way. It was unfair, really. She had fallen in love with Peter, but he couldn’t be in love with her. Not anymore, and any chance they had was stripped away because of what they were - family, and not as what they’d started - a hero and his rescued love.

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Over time, it was only smart that they both move on. Claire couldn’t recover Peter’s memories any
more than he could fall in love with her again. It pained her to let him go, but the older she got (the more she died, or had to put her ribs back into her own body) she realized that maybe Angela was right.

There was no place for such love within the Petrelli family. They had suffered enough. They would probably suffer more.

Claire smiled at Peter through her thoughts. He was handing her a Venti latte before taking a modest slurp of his own. He winked at her and talked about all the people he’d save that day on his job: the boy who’d broken an arm in a car accident, or the grandmother that had flown out her windshield and he had to save with CPR.

Peter was, and always would be, amazing. There was no way Claire would ever ruin him. (Being like they were now was enough.) And no matter how many times she wanted to kiss him again - like that fated time before the city almost exploded - she wouldn’t.

Claire wouldn’t ruin anything else, especially not the person she loved most.

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Peter had dreams too. Pieces and bits of desire forming into memory, like a faded movie that could only be played on a film reel.

He remembered the first time he’d spoken to Claire Bennet. Just a pretty, sad girl lingering in the hall, wondering about life and what it had to offer her. He’d felt her loneliness, and it sent his empathy soaring. In Claire, he saw a little bit of himself.

In Claire, he saw the kind of woman he wanted to have and love until he died.

He used to believe having Claire turn out as his niece as the best thing in the world. His dreams, however, disagreed with him.

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He’d watched her thoughtfully at Nathan’s funeral. Honestly, he was relieved she was here. He didn’t know if he could handle this day without her.

Moreover, he didn’t know if he could handle the rest of his life without her. If it wasn’t for Claire Bennet, he didn’t know if he could live on at all. In Claire, Nathan still lived. And in Claire, there was still hope left for his family.

The dreams of her became frequent. Dreams of touching her, laughing with her, and nuzzling his face in her hair. Other dreams came too, ones that painted a filthy desire over his noble heart.

Those dreams roused him from bed, sheathing him in sweat, and surging with shameful desire. He’d vomit sometimes, but mostly, he felt the nausea of being betrayed - of having something stolen from him when he hadn’t had a chance to enjoy it, no matter how tragically dark it had been.

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His friendship with Emma had turned stale, and Peter had to step away and look on from the sidelines as Sylar, who was now going by Gabriel, became closer to her.
Peter didn’t even feel the jealousy from it. He forced himself to be happy for them, and in the end, he really didn’t have to try hard at all.

If anything, the missed opportunity had driven him back to Claire, in a way, and though she had someone, she never said no to spending time with her uncle.

It was almost ten at night when he met her at Denny’s, and she greeted him with a bright smile. As usual, Gretchen wasn’t with her, not when she met with him. (Even though he said he didn’t mind if she came.)

So, he had Claire alone, and they talked about her day, and Peter tried to push away the thoughts of his dreams of her. His thoughts pushed him into brooding, and Claire noticed immediately that something was wrong.

“Bad day at work?” she mused as she shoved a piece of bacon in her mouth. Peter stared into his coffee, and it still felt hot against his hands as he clutched the mug.

“No...” he responded, distracted. He didn’t know how to ask her. Where did he even start? Somewhere in the middle?

“I think...” he began, “I’m missing memories. Important memories that perhaps my mom didn’t want me to have.”

He looked up at Claire, and he saw her frown. She tilted her head at him, but he could feel just by looking into her eyes that she had some idea. She knew. Did she have the memories that he wasn’t allowed to have?

How fair was that to either of them?

“Are you surprised? She’s done that to everyone,” she said nonchalantly.

“Claire, do you know something?”

His niece shrugged. “It could be anything. You know her.”

“Has...” Why was he stumbling over his words? She did know something! The fact was making him angry, hurt. “Does it have something to do with you?”

He saw Claire tense. “It could.”

“Tell me,” he stressed, and Claire shot him challenging, cold eyes.

“Peter, listen to me, you don’t want that memory. You don’t want to go back,” she warned.

“Why? What’s so terrible that you are keeping something from me? You, Claire, of all people!” he lashed at her.

She rose abruptly from her seat and he saw her fists clenched at her sides, shaking. “You’re not the only one who’s had to deal with this, Peter. If anything, your mother gave you a pass.”

She walked away, and no matter how much Peter called to her, she didn’t come back. He could only imagine, but she was probably crying. He knew her well enough.

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“I need something,” he told Gabriel, or rather Sylar, for he could not bring himself to call him anything else. His friend, and even stranger, roommate, looked up from a large book about Japanese history and raised an eyebrow.

“A power? Again?” Sylar slid an orange kitten bookmark into the pages and closed the book. He met Peter’s determined eyes and realized that this was a serious request.

“I need a power...that can figure out the history of things, can see the memories in inanimate objects.” Peter lifted his chin. “I know you have this power.”

“I do, thanks to your mother,” Sylar said dryly. “It’s a jarring power. Whatever you try to find, it may upset you.”

“Nothing can upset me more than knowing my mother had the Haitian extract memories from me, memories that Claire won’t even tell me,” Peter explained with a defiant pout.

“Well, anything to go against your mother,” Sylar said, and he held out his hand. “Now, as we’ve been practicing...find it, and take it.”

Peter put his hand over Sylar’s wrist. He felt a buzz underneath the man’s skin, and he closed his eyes. Powers bubbled within Sylar like random gunfire, and Peter had to concentrate hard to find the right power. When he did, his eyes snapped open and he fell back, putting his hand on the table behind him for support. Immediately the history of the object stormed in his mind like a memory. He saw the tree it was carved from, how it had been formed, and the work that went into staining it. He’d saw other things, mostly trivial, but historical of the table nonetheless.

“It’s a little overwhelming at first,” Sylar admitted, and he gave him a Cheshire grin. “But it can be really fun.”

Peter wasn’t interested in fun, however. He knew Sylar’s initial warnings would ring true. He wasn’t going to like what this power was going to help him find.

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Peter met his mother at her house after agreeing to her invitation to lunch. He’d called her, and he’d told her he was looking for an old book of his, something he knew was still at the house where he’d grown up.

“Well, I don’t know where it could be,” she said, sipping on her wine. Peter watched her with calculating eyes. He could feel nervousness on her. It was not unusual for his mother to be cautious and suspicious of any intentions to dig through the house. After all, this place held many memories, and now he could really see any one of them.

She didn’t know that, however. Though, he was sure she suspected a secret plan on his part. He wasn’t sure after dinner if she’d let him get away from her sight.

“I’ll help you,” she said. “What is the title of the book?”

“It’s an art book. You remember it, don’t you? The one I always used to flip through,” he said.

“Ah yes, the works of Salvador Dali,” she said with a curt nod. “I can’t imagine it’s here. I thought I remember you taking that with you the first moment you moved out.”

“So did I.”

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Peter narrowed the field by looking in every room that Claire Bennet had been in while at her stay in this house. It was hard considering she’d been in almost every room, but he focused on the rooms she spent the most time in, the spare bedrooms she’d been in, the kitchen, and even Nathan’s study.

He hesitated at one of the spare rooms, frightened that the memory may be on the bed, and then the dreams he’d had would ring true, and he’d be right.

His mother had found out something that he’d done, that they’d done, and she wanted to erase it away, like she always had when unpleasant scandalous things arose in this family.

In the one room, his fears were alleviated a little, but the memory hit him like a rush of hot air after leaving the freezing cold. Putting his hand against the bedroom door, he saw the memory immediately, as if it was waiting for him all this time.

His blood immediately warmed with heated passion, and he saw himself kissing her, and almost taking her beyond propriety, and essentially, damning them both.

Tears wetted his eyes as he saw everything, felt everything, and memories flooded back to him as if they had never been gone. He sucked in a strangled breath and felt the missing piece of him finally come home.

He had loved Claire once. Loved her more than he possibly could now. Yet it was denied from him, and though they both knew how very wrong it was, the feeling - the glorious acceptance and completion he felt from her kiss was taken from him. The piece of his life that had finally made him whole was ripped away and smothered, leaving him to forever feel that his life was missing something important - something beautiful that he would never have or deserve.

His hand began to sweat against the door and fury simmered in his blood. Peter felt cursed, always, and now he was beginning to see why. He had loved once, loved perfectly, or at least it was perfection in that moment, and everything, every woman, after that had been a disaster.

His endless disasters with relationships with women who would never truly understand him, feel him or know him. They never would work because only one woman could.

He couldn’t have her, truly, and he knew that as plain as any truth.

But to deny him the memory?

There was a light knock at the door, and when it creaked open, his mother was there, staring at him with knowing eyes. She looked at his shaking hands, and knew that he had his memories back.

“I was afraid for you. I knew...I knew Claire could be turned away. She was young, but you, Peter, your wide-eyed ideals and your pure heart, that was something I couldn’t risk,” she said.

“You had no right,” he said stiffly. “That memory was mine.”

“You can’t do anything about it,” she said brusquely. “You and Claire can never have anything.”

“Because you ruined it,” he said.

She shook her head. “No, because it’s wrong. It’s not normal,” she said, and before he could protest her words, she held out her hand and squeezed his wrist. “Please, Peter, let our family have at least some kind of normalcy.”
Peter tore his hand away and strode out the door. “It’s already done, but I came for what I lost. What you took from me.” He turned to her and gave her a trembling frown. “You’re right, Claire and I can never be anything more than what we are by blood.”

“But?” She was waiting for his argument.

“But nothing. I have my memory back, and I know what love I have lost, the best love of them all,” he said, and he shook his head and his lips tightened into a mocking smile. “What a cruel joke. Cruel, disgusting joke.”

When he turned away, he felt her stare on him. He was sure she was disappointed in him, and maybe she was a little worried of what he might do next.

Truthfully, there was only one thing Peter could do next. He had to find Claire.

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“So you know,” Claire said. They sat together, face to face, enjoying frozen yogurt. He stared blankly into his chocolate and cherry bits and sighed.

“She’s right that we couldn’t do anything back then, but she wasn’t right to take it away,” he said.

“No, and to take it away only from you,” she agreed.

Peter looked at her. “I can’t imagine what you went through.” She shrugged again, and he knew she’d made peace with her pain long ago already. The feeling was still there though, raw and scorched, a wound Claire couldn’t heal from.

“I still love you, Claire,” Peter said with vindication.

“I know,” Claire said, and she tilted her head and put a hand over his on the table and squeezed. “I know, and I love you too.”

“But this is how things are,” he said, feeling the loss in his words. Claire seemed less worried, which was both a relief and aggravation to him. Did she not feel as strongly as he did?

“I don’t know,” Claire said. “I like how things are. We’re still pretty close, and even though my feelings have evolved, they have never lessened for you, Peter.”

She was right, and Peter knew it immediately. Claire’s logic was always a balm to him, and he knew more than ever he needed her. Something like this couldn’t shake their foundation; it could only strengthen it.

“I don’t know if I can be happy like that with anyone else. I’ve messed up any chance I’ve ever had like that,” he said.

“Join the club,” Claire said, spooning her last bite. “Listen, Peter, I know better than anyone how hard it is to have these abilities and try to have relationships with people that don’t completely understand, but honestly, I think you’re idealizing what happened between us.”

“You really think so? Is that what you’ve told yourself all these years?” Peter asked, a little hurt. Claire looked at him with clear eyes.

“Yes, because you know why? I like that we’re family. I’ve accepted it,” she said. “I had that
moment with you, and it made things so clear for me.”

He paused, listening as he knew she would continue.

“Things are clear because Peter, through everything, we’re still here, we’re still together despite all the failures and mess-ups and family curses.” She squeezed his hand again.

“We’re still here, and we still love each other, and when the day is over and the sky has fallen and people start another war around us, that’s the one thing about us that will never change.”

Peter nodded. She was right. His Claire was right, and lost memory or no memory, he loved her too, and more than anything, having her, in any way, was the only true love that he needed.

END

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