
The Persistence Of Memory

IT took a few days for Celes to realise that Terra really didn't remember *anything*. When she eventually raised the subject with Locke, who seemed the least likely of their companions to brush it off or make a joke of it, he said, "Oh, but she's doing better. She didn't even know her own name at first. Give her time, yeah?"

For all his patience, Locke didn't seem to understand that Terra's name was the least important thing for her to know. Celes could have told Terra who she was, passed on dry information like her date of birth and her rank in the army – all that was just facts. It was experiences that mattered, events, feelings: none of those could be brought back simply by repetition. They had to be retrieved in the mind and strung together to form an impression or a belief. From the way Terra looked at her, unmoved and unsure, it was clear that those memories were gone.

They shared a tent each night, and Celes painstakingly answered Terra's halting questions about things even a child would know; perhaps, she thought, some banal piece of information might be the trigger, and everything would suddenly come back. She talked about the great feasts Gestahl had forced them both to attend, neglecting to mention that at the most recent of them, Terra had already had that horrible contraption attached to her head, and that Celes had scarcely been able to look at her, much less eat the seven-course meal she had been served. Terra seemed to remember more and more – Locke's optimism had been well-founded – but the look of recognition that Celes longed for remained absent from her face.

It was a long journey through deserts and forests, occasionally hiding from an Imperial patrol, but they were close to the next town now: that much was obvious from the fact that the night was no longer still and quiet. Now, they could hear the noises of skirmishes as troops crossed paths with people who had evidently been deemed unsympathetic to the Empire's aims; there were sounds of shots fired by Magitek armour, and pitiful attempts at retaliation with ordinary mechanical weapons, and the clamour of battle continued long into the night.

"I'm scared," said Terra, and although the phrase would have meant nothing special to her as she spoke it, it took Celes right back to those nights in Vector, barely a year ago. At

the time, there had been a vogue for poor attempts at uprisings, which were always noisy and brutal, and even though both young women were quartered in the securest part of the palace, the possibility of sleep had been minimal. Terra had come to Celes' rooms, pale and insubstantial in her nightdress, and said the same words to her then; and Celes had let her climb into her bed, because it was a comfort to both of them, and –

She couldn't let it pass; she couldn't go on politely pretending to Terra that the two of them had never been more than acquaintances. "You used to say that before," she said.

Terra, of course, didn't remember it, and Celes pressed on: she had begun now, and she had enough memories for both of them. She told Terra about those nights, about how they used to watch from her bed as the sky beyond her window lit up with all the colours of combat; how Terra used to bury her head in Celes' neck so she wouldn't see it; how they held each other, the two of them just about covered by the blanket.

"That sounds nice," said Terra distantly. "It sounds like it was comforting."

"It was," said Celes. "You don't," – she hated herself for being weak enough to have to ask, but, Locke be damned, this was so much more important than a name – "you don't remember it at all?"

"Sorry," said Terra. Then she frowned, and said, "Do you think it would help? If we did it now?" And before Celes

could even answer, Terra shuffled closer to her and wrapped her arms around Celes from the back, clinging on in exactly the same position that she had always assumed before. Celes closed her eyes; it would have been just like being in her bed in Vector again, were it not for the lumpy soil she could feel through the groundsheet. Even if Terra's mind had no access to those memories, her body was still the same, still grasping Celes' arms with the same strength, and Celes felt her own body mould to it as if those months when they had been apart had never taken place.

"What was it like," said Terra, "being the only ones?"

Celes wasn't sure what she meant. The only girls in the Imperial army, perhaps; the only mages? There was Kefka, of course, but at the time Gestahl had mostly viewed him as an embarrassment. "It wasn't all so bad," she said, and she twisted around so she was facing Terra, Terra's hands now meeting on her shoulderblades. "We had each other."

"Did we do this a lot?" Terra asked, nodding down at their embrace.

"Only when there was fighting, at first," said Celes, "but then ..." She sighed. "We spent a lot of nights together. It was ... an unusual time."

"I'm sure it helped," said Terra, and at that moment, there was the sound of something exploding in the distance; Terra yelped, and buried her head into Celes' chest, and Celes found herself running her hands through Terra's hair, tugging gen-

tly at the curls and watching as they sprang back into place, just as she had used to do back then. Terra slowly tilted her head back upwards to meet Celes' eyes – their faces were so close now – and then she leant forward and pressed a soft kiss against Celes' lips, and Celes thought for a moment that Terra had suddenly remembered everything.

“Did we do that, too?” Terra murmured.

Celes nodded, scarcely daring to breathe. “Yes,” she said. “Yes, we – is it coming back?”

“Sorry,” said Terra again, and then she moved forward and kissed her again, pushing delicately against Celes' lips. “Maybe a little,” she said when she drew back. “Maybe I'll remember more if I –” And she leant forward for a third kiss, and Celes felt her lips curl into a smile.

“We were special to each other, weren't we?” said Terra. “I wasn't sure, but – it all just fits. I'm glad we met again, even if I'm not the same – you're happy, aren't you? That we – that we're doing this?”

“I never really knew how long it would last,” Celes admitted. “I thought it was maybe just because of where we were – stuck in that so-called palace; we hardly had a huge choice of friends.”

“And now we're out here, free,” said Terra, “and there are so many kind people, and I don't even remember who you are properly, and – even so –” She kissed Celes again. “You see?”

Celes let herself smile for the first time. Terra was right:

they had found each other again; and this time, she would do everything she could to make sure things stayed that way.