

“Beauty Marks”

Published by *Blood and Thunder*

Many cuts and scrapes have led to scars, like the small, inconspicuous scar centered in the middle of my upper chest. It came about one boring summer day, when I rode my bike outside. I leisurely encircled the gravel driveway and weaved around the trees in the side yard of our country property. I thought it would be more adventurous to ride to our abandoned, half dilapidated barn in the middle of the pasture. Estimating the knee-high weeds would be more unsteady to peddle through, I picked up speed, riding full force. As I rode between the two fence posts, my ride abruptly stopped. A pressure halted my chest mid-air; the momentum took my lower body out from under me. I fell heavy to the ground with my legs tangled in my bike. The blue skies and towering trees swirled together in my dizzy vision, while my head pounded. Then my eyes focused above me on a single line of barbed wire strung tight where a gate would typically go. Unknown to me, Dad strung the line to deter the weeds from escaping the vacant lot. My chest ached; I touched a wet spot where I started to bleed from a barb that stabbed me. After catching my breath, I stood up, my legs feeling wobbly, and toddled my bike to the house, feeling stupid and humiliated. In the bathroom, I dabbed peroxide with a wash rag to clean the bloody indent as I held back tears. *Why would he put barbed wire there? I guess I'm the dummy for not looking.* I don't know why I felt shame, but today I don't mind my scars. They're all little symbols of past experiences.

I received another scar at a nursing home I impassively attended with Dad, who sang gospel music for the residents with some friends. Sometimes Michael would tag along with his dad. He was a gangly, dorky kind of kid in my class who picked his nose. I'd never sit by him at lunch or play with him on the playground, but given my options at the nursing home, I'd curiously see what he was doing. This day, I followed him into the row of giant pine trees that

lined the parking lot. The trees were grown, making the branches thick and easy to climb. He was only a limb or two in front of me when a lengthy branch stuck against his body whacked my face. I didn't want to cry in front of a boy, especially a classmate, so I ran to our passenger door mirror, where I saw an open gash ooze blood by my eye. I snuck to the bathroom to wash the blood with crunchy brown paper towels wilted by cold water. I moaned as I cleaned the bloody mess. I avoided Michael and never told anyone about it. Now, it's somewhat faded, but when I'm not smiling, that indented striped scar is still visible.

When I was sixteen, I had an incapacitating car accident that led to a collection of scars. One, the five-inch pink scar from mid-neck to past my collarbone, is not as noticeable as one would think, given its prime location on the front left side of my neck. I acquired it from my spinal fusion surgery to stabilize the broken and shattered vertebrae. Sometimes queasy thoughts about the surgery come to mind, wondering whether they had to dig through all my muscles with their fingers to get to the vertebrae. I can imagine lying in the operating room with the big, bright lights hovering over me like strange mini spaceships, my neck sliced open in the front and back with doctors standing around using their silver surgical tools to dig through a lasagna of blood and muscles. The thought of doctors drilling screws into the bones in my neck grosses me out. The slanted scar is still uncomfortable with the skin around it always numb. I bought a \$20 tube of scar reducing cream, but didn't use it because I don't like it touched. Even though it's all unsettling, I wouldn't erase it or the experience, if given the opportunity.

I have twin scars on either side of my forehead, just above the ends of my eyebrows. They are circular and jagged around the edges. These two beauty marks came after the accident from the Halo brace to stabilize my head, neck, and shoulders. I assume it's called "Halo" from the metal ring that's screwed into the forehead. Four metal poles go from this ring and attach to

the chest and back brace made of hard, thick plastic. At the time, my groggy moments of consciousness eluded me from knowing I'd been so encaged. The nurses told my parents the *correct* way to move my body was to grab the front bars and lift up – pulling the weight by the screws in my head. The doctor saw my parents doing this, stormed to the nurse's station, and didn't come back for a while. They posted signs around my room stating – Do Not Pick Patient up by Bars on Halo. I was oblivious when they took the Halo off. I looked up toward my eyebrows and wondered what was going on, similar to taking staples off my scalp. Glass from the windshield cut my head, requiring multiple staples. The nurse said, "Don't worry, Rose; we'll pop these staples out quickly." I didn't even know I had them. These turned into tiny scars that itch so bad it burns like fire.

The most noticeable scar is from the tracheotomy I had for five months. I don't notice it much now, but initially I couldn't accept seeing it in my throat; I avoided all mirrors. And I hated the feeling of the plastic tube-y thing stuck in my throat. I had to be suctioned to get the phlegm since I didn't have a strong cough. The nurses used a suction machine, which was uncomfortable and sometimes painful. To add to the discomfort, the actual tracheotomy piece had to be changed. I'd lie still as a nurse took the mucus-crusted tracheotomy out and slid a new one in. I'd lie there mentally freaking out with the open hole, hoping she wouldn't bump it around. Given all the anguish the tracheotomy caused me, I couldn't help but dismiss those emotions when a young child aimlessly came up to me at a restaurant and asked, "Why do you have a hole in your neck?" I simply replied, "Oh no, it's just a little scar from an owie I had a long time ago."