

Scarred by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/scarred/>

Story Notes:

This is a birthday story written especially for Sergeeva - so it contains plenty of Walter-worship!

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Perfect Pic by **CDavis**

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I would know Walter's body by touch alone. Even if I were blindfolded, I know that I could single him out using only my fingertips. In the dark, as he lies sleeping, and I lie awake as usual, I can trace my fingers along the lines that tell the story of his life without moving my head from the comfortable pillow of his broad chest. My Walter is like a map. My fingertips follow the tributaries of the several long scars on his shoulder as they curve and flow into the river that is the deep, slightly ridged scar beneath his left armpit. It trails down into a

valley just below his ribcage, and comes to a sudden stop in a circular lake of shiny flesh just above his left hip. In the light it's hard to see the scars – they're very old, and faded to the palest of faint white lines, but in the dark they're old familiar friends, easily accessible to the touch of my idly questing fingers.

It's late...or maybe I should say early. I can see the moon making its steady journey across the sky outside through the cabin window. Walter always wears his watch – and only his watch – in bed, and the illuminated face tells me that two o' clock has turned into three o' clock – so daylight is still a long way off. I'm content though, even in my insomniac state. I always did have trouble sleeping, but now it's much worse. It doesn't matter; I'm content to just lie on my warm, comforting, human pillow, and trace my fingers over his sleeping body. I used to be more restless, but now I can spend hours just staring into space. Sometimes the moon moves from one side of the window to the other in the time it takes for me to blink.

I move my fingers, leaping over the landmarks that form the topography of his body. From his ribcage, across the furry forest of hair on his chest, down to the next major landmark – the small, round, slightly splayed scar on his lower belly. In the dark it reminds me of a cloud, or a nebula, with an intense, dense centre, and a swirling outer mass. This is where he took a bullet because he refused to give up looking for the man who murdered Scully's sister. I remember sitting outside his hospital room all night, just watching him sleep, and he never knew. We weren't lovers then. It strikes me suddenly, that he doesn't know that I watched him that night. He, who knows more about me than anybody else in this world – he doesn't know that. I'm intrigued by that thought for a moment, and consider it, my fingers still resting on the healed bullet wound on his belly. Every blemish on his body tells a story. He is the sum of each and every one of them because they are all a part of him, and, in some way, helped to form him, and make him the man he is – and yet there are some parts of him I do not know, some stories as yet untold. What, for instance, is the story of the star-shaped scar on his right arm? Or the long jagged tear on his inner thigh?

"Fox, what are you thinking?"

His voice startles me. I had no idea he was awake. I move his wrist and glance at his watch again. 4 a.m. I don't know where the last hour went.

"I was thinking about your scars." I move my lips to caress the blemished skin on his shoulder, and his hand moves down my back to cup my buttocks.

"Uh-huh." So Walter - wary, amused, and encouraging, all in one tone of voice.

"I was thinking that there were stories here – parts of you that I don't know," I whisper. "I know the story of this..." My fingers find the bullet wound on his belly unerringly in the dark, and he gives what might be a groan, or a chuckle, or maybe a whimper of arousal bearing in mind the proximity of my fingers to his groin. "...But not of this." I move my hand down even further, to caress the jagged tear on his inner thigh, and now there's no doubt about his arousal. I can feel it rise up and bump against my arm.

“How long have you been awake, Fox?” His hand is warm and comforting on my ass. I slide my fingers along his hardening shaft, and stroke it firmly, loving the way it becomes even harder under my caress.

“A few hours I think.” I tighten my fingers around his cock, squeezing hard and rubbing up and down, and he gives a little gasp. His thumb slips easily into the cleft between my ass cheeks. My own cock is hard now. His other hand finds it easily, and wraps around it. For a few moments we are incoherent, my mouth working his lips with my own as purposefully as our two hands are working in tandem on each other’s cocks. I think I come first, and he follows a little while later, but I might be mistaken. I reach across his body and find the washcloth we keep on the nightstand for just these kinds of night-time occurrences, and clean us both up. As I return the cloth to the nightstand, I slide across his body until I am almost lying on top of him, and gaze down into those dark, knowing eyes. I shift away from that searching look, and trace one finger over his scarred shoulder, musing out loud.

“It puzzles me, Walter...all these untold stories written on your skin.” I don’t meet his gaze again - he knows what is in my eyes in any case. He understands. I dip my face to his golden body, and gently nuzzle at the unmarked skin where his neck meets his shoulder. This is the part of him I love the most. This particular place on his body is so sensitive, and very soft. I drink in the smell of him, and his arms wrap themselves around my torso, holding me very gently. I don’t like to be held too tightly these days. I don’t like to feel immobilised or tied down. I have no idea why - I used to be fine with it.

“A whole lifetime written in your flesh...like a book, if only we could read the words.” I move my head, and kiss his right arm, finding the star-shaped scar just above his elbow. “This one here for example - this one is a mystery. I don’t know this one’s story.” Some I can guess, but not this one. I think it’s quite old because it has a weathered, faded feel to it. It isn’t very big - about the size of my thumbnail, maybe.

“All this talk of stories when you should be asleep,” he grunts, but he takes pity on me all the same. He always does. He always did, even before we were lovers. So many times in his office he told me “no” but did the exact opposite of his words. So many times he warned me against a course of action for being too dangerous but then took it upon himself, dangerous or not. My man’s bark is, and always has been, much worse than his bite...although I like those too! His white teeth shine in the moonlight, fascinating me, as he smiles at me. I smile back, teasingly, and he swats me lightly on the rump.

“All right, my insomniac friend, I’ll tell you the story of the scar on my arm.” He puts one hand behind his head, and muses for a moment. I like the way his pectorals bunch beneath his skin, and the mixture of shadow and light painted on his features by the moonbeams shining through the window. His wide jaw is covered in a fine layer of dark stubble, and the planes of his face are flatter, and more angular in the dim light.

“Once upon a time...” he begins and I laugh out loud, and pinch the fleshy part of his underarm. “All the best stories start like this,” he says reprovingly. I subside, and, with one last grin at him, rest my head on his chest once more, allowing the sound of his voice to lull and soothe me. “Once upon a time, there was a boy who grew up on a farm in Iowa,” he

says, and I close my eyes. I know that he spent his childhood in extreme poverty on a farm. He doesn't talk about it very often but I know those years weren't the happiest of his life. "One day, the boy went out on a cold night in midwinter and..."

"Stop!" I raise my head and frown at him. "That's way too fast. How old was the boy? And what was he wearing on this cold night? Was there a moon, and why was he going out at all if it was so cold?"

He sighs and fixes me with his patented Walter glare – the one I long since stopped being remotely scared of.

"Details are important, Walter," I tell him, and I suppose that I can't keep the despair out of my voice, because a sadness that we both understand far too well to talk about flits into his eyes, and his expression softens. He nods.

"All right. Details." He takes a deep breath and I go with his chest as it rises beneath me. "The boy was about 8. He was dressed in jeans and two thick sweaters that his grandmother knitted for him out of mismatched balls of wool – she didn't have enough of the same colour. So they were...imaginative." He winces, expressively, and I laugh. "Blues and oranges and yellows and reds all jumbled up next to each other. The boy looked like a beacon - which wasn't a good idea, because he was going out poaching."

That brings me up short. I lift my head again. "Poaching? You? Walter Skinner? Assistant Director of the biggest law enforcement agency in the world. You went poaching?"

"I **was** eight," he growls, poking his finger into my thigh reprovingly. "Now, do you want to hear the story or not?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything. Poaching..." I shake my head and then replace it on his body. He chuckles, and the sound reverberates through the deep cavity of his chest, making my ear tickle.

"Okay. The pantry was empty, and the boy's mother had spent the evening crying because they had no food – and the boy's belly was so hungry that it gnawed and gnawed at him until he couldn't bear either the sound of it or his mother's tears any more." He says all this very quickly, and I don't think he'd have said it at all if I hadn't made the crack about him going out poaching. I stroke his chest gently, and he continues in a less strained tone of voice. "The boy crept out of the house, because he knew his mother wouldn't approve. His father was in town drinking away what little money they had which was why the boy was having to go out poaching in the first place."

"How was the boy going to explain several dead animals to his mother the next day without giving away that he'd gone out poaching?" I interrupt again.

"He was a boy," Walter explains, with an infinitely patient sigh. "He didn't think about the consequences of his actions – like some other people we could mention," he growls, and I laugh, and bestow a quick kiss on his nipple.

"Anyway, the boy set off. It was dark, and he was cold, and lonely. In Iowa, in the countryside, away from the big towns, it gets darker than you can ever imagine. The sky seems so near, and the stars far brighter and more numerous than you'd ever know they could be if you live in the city." He pauses for breath and I close my eyes and snuggle against his furry chest hair. I can see him quite vividly – 8 years old, a little skinny, wearing those ludicrous, brightly- coloured sweaters, his brown eyes big within a pale face, framed by dark black curls.

"Did you have curly hair?" I glance up, and he frowns, exasperated, and then rolls his eyes, giving in.

"It's true that my hair wasn't exactly straight," he admits, making it clear that's all he's going to say on the subject.

"Curls." I nod, satisfied, and put my head back down on his chest. I can hear a distinct 'hmp' from deep inside his chest, and grin.

"**Anyway,**" he says, stressing the word loudly to get us back on track, "this boy went out in the dark, in the cold, taking his father's shotgun with him. He walked for about a mile through the snow..."

"Snow? You didn't mention snow before. Were you dressed warmly enough in the sweaters? Shouldn't you have worn a coat?"

"Yes, of course I should," he sighs. "But the coats were kept downstairs by the door, and my mother was waiting in the front room for my father to come home, so I let myself out by shinning down the tree outside my bedroom window."

"Ah-ha. I see. What about mittens? Or a hat?"

"I did have some mittens which I found in my closet, along with an old toboggan hat which my grandmother had knitted for me – it was red and blue and had a little bobble on top as I recall. Are there any **other** questions of a sartorial nature before I continue?"

"Yes." I take my life into my hands, grinning at him cheekily. "What kind of mittens please?"

"The kind on a string that little kids wear so they don't lose them – only I had to string them through the sleeves of my top sweater rather than inside the sleeves of my coat because, as we've already established, I wasn't wearing a coat," he tells me and I sigh dreamily, thoroughly enjoying the mental image of my lover as a small boy, all dressed up for his night-time adventure.

"Is it safe to continue?" He asks. I nod, and he gives a little grunt. "Okay...so, to recap - he's borrowed one of his father's guns, which, before you ask, was kept upstairs in his father's den, and he's climbed out of the house and walked through the snow - and now we pick the story up again." He takes a deep breath and then launches into the next part of the story at top speed, clearly labouring under the misapprehension that I won't interrupt if he talks really fast. "The boy came to a neighbouring farm, which he knew to be well stocked with

fat pheasants. So, he snuck in over the barbed wire fence, tearing one of his sweaters in the process, and..."

"He snuck?" I raise my head again, catching him in mid-flow. "You snuck somewhere, Walter? Boy, does that change my worldview. I never would have imagined that you'd sneak anywhere."

"I'll have you know that I've snuck with the best in my time," he tells me, grinning.

"So, you snuck into this farm looking to poach some hapless pheasants, and what? An irate farmer shot you? You tripped over your own feet and shot yourself with your father's gun?" I press my lips against the faded, star-shaped scar on his right arm.

"Nope." He shakes his head, looking a bit shame-faced. "You see, it isn't actually a good idea to try and hunt pheasants without a dog to flush them out of the undergrowth, but the boy was just a boy, and he didn't have the whole plan figured out. He just thought he could go in there, shoot a couple of birds, and take them back home to his mother to stop her crying." I kiss his scar again, and he wraps his arms around me, and squeezes for a second before releasing me, and continuing. "So, he found himself in a dark wood, and he knew there were plenty of pheasants there somewhere but he couldn't **see** them – which is why he needed a dog. As he was tiptoeing through some trees, he felt sure that someone was following him...or **something**." He pauses for dramatic effect.

"**Something**? What? Like Bigfoot? Oh boy!" I can't help laughing again.

"I was an imaginative child." He shrugs. "My head was full of monsters and werewolves."

"Ah! So that's why you signed off my reports for all those years!" I grin insanely, and he grins back, those white teeth of his shining in the moonlight. "You already believed in monsters!"

"It's true." He sighs. "I want to believe."

I roll my eyes and pinch him soundly for **that** comment.

"So there was the boy, walking through a forest on a cold night in winter, his breath steaming the air in front of him, and he was so sure that something was following him that he started to run...and as he ran, it began to run too...the boy could hear it panting behind him, could feel its warm breath on the back of his neck...and he started screaming but he didn't dare look behind him because he was too scared of what he might see...and he was running so fast that he was out of breath, and it was getting closer, and closer...so close that he knew that all it had to do was to reach out one wizened, gnarled, seven-fingered hairy hand, and then he would be dead...and that was when he fell down a slope, and got tangled up in the bushes at the bottom." He stops, and I look at him, enthralled.

"You missed your vocation. Someone should have hired you to make horror movies," I comment, and I can see he's rather flattered by this. "Well, what happened next?" I prod

him with my index finger. “How did you get the scar? Did the monster sink his long, curved fangs into your arm?”

“No... the ‘monster’ turned out to be the owner of the farm. His dog had heard me when I cut my sweater on the wire fence and started barking, so the farmer had come out to investigate. He’d tried calling to me but I was running so fast I didn’t hear him.”

“Was he angry?”

“No...” Walter shakes his head, ruefully. “I think he felt rather sorry for me actually. I must have looked pretty bad – wearing all those threadbare sweaters, my face as white as a sheet...and with a great big thorn sticking out of my arm – I’d fallen onto a thicket of prickly ash, and been speared straight through. I’d also twisted my ankle, and grazed the side of my face. Now, Iowa farmers are a surly, self-sufficient breed, but that steely façade usually hides the kindest of hearts, so...”

“You don’t say,” I murmur, smiling into the chest of **my** own former denizen of Iowa.

“...so he just picked me up and carried me back to his house, while I told him an unconvincing story about having been sleepwalking.”

“You lied? Walter! I’m shocked.”

“I did indeed lie.” He nods gravely. “Anyway, he sat me in a chair by the fire, gave me a glass of homemade apple brandy to warm me, and called his wife. She clucked over me, and brought a bowl of warm water to bathe my grazes, while he explained to me, man to man, that he’d have to pull that thorn out of my arm and that it would hurt. He told me to be brave, and explained that when he was in the army in World War Two, he’d once had a bullet lodged in his leg. They had been miles away from medical help, so his buddy had stuck a bullet between my farmer’s teeth for him to bite down on so he wouldn’t scream and alert the enemy to their whereabouts, and then he’d dug into my farmer’s leg with his knife to get the bullet out. My farmer told me that I had to be similarly brave while he pulled that sharp spear out of my arm. I very solemnly asked him for a bullet to bite on to help me be as brave as him, and he laughed and gave me a wad of cloth instead. So I closed my eyes, bit down hard, and he removed that sharp thorn from my arm – and his wife bathed it and wrapped it in a bandage.”

I can see him so clearly in my mind’s eye: eight years old, eyes wide, still wearing those absurd mittens on a string, his sweater stained with blood, being as brave and stoic then as he is now.

“And what did the farmer do about the poaching?” I ask, and a gentle smile plays across his warm, sensual lips.

“Well, like I said, the farmers of Iowa are a kind-hearted breed beneath the gruff, no-nonsense exterior. He gave me a little lecture about stealing, but he obviously knew a bit about my family, and how poor we were. He and his wife didn’t have any kids, and were relatively well off, so he told me that if I came and worked for him after school for a couple

of hours each day, he'd pay me for my labour. He was a good man. I spent some of the happiest times of my life on his farm, listening to his stories about the war. I think it was because him that I decided to enlist for Vietnam on my 18th birthday...well, that and a desire to get as far away from home as I could." He gives a little shrug, and my fingers go, unbidden, to the ridged mass of scars down the left hand side of his body, and I caress them gently.

"Vietnam." I kiss the long snaking scars on his shoulder, and he strokes my hair. He is quite still beneath me, and I know that this memory is one that he might find too hard to share.

"Yes. Vietnam." He puts his fingers over mine, and stills their ceaseless exploration. "But that's another story, Fox."

"Is it one I'll ever hear?" I glance up at him hopefully, and he smiles, his eyes sad.

"Yes, but not tonight. It's late. Let's save it for the next night you can't sleep."

"Tomorrow night then," I predict and he sighs, and kisses my nose.

"Tomorrow," he agrees. "Now sleep." He wraps his arms around my body, and I close my eyes, and find, much to my surprise, that sleep comes quickly.

I'm not sure how many long, lazy days we've spent in Walter's cabin out here in the woods. I just know it's been peaceful, and the sun always seems to shine, and the sky always seems to be blue, although there's a definite chill in the air. It's late fall and winter will be upon us soon. I'm not sure how long we'll stay here – I don't think Walter intends for us to spend the winter here, because it gets pretty cold up here in the mountains, and it will inevitably snow, but I'm happy enough to do whatever Walter thinks is best. That's another thing that's changed about me but I figure that as long as I'm happy and he's happy, nothing else matters. Walter seems to be pretty much in agreement with me on that. I worry a lot less about the future these days. I know that I used to want to be out there, chasing the truth, but now I guess I'm more preoccupied with the past. Walter says that's fine, and we should just take it one day at a time, and he's right of course, as always.

I sit and watch him while he chops the wood for the fire. I started reading a new book this morning and it's so good that I'm about half way through already, but to be honest, no matter how good the book is, it's much more interesting watching **him**. It's kind of a ritual. First of all, he strips off his thick, red and black plaid shirt, and hangs it on a nail on the side of the cabin, and then he picks up his axe. It's heavy – I can't lift it but then I'm not as strong as I used to be. He strides out into the clearing behind the cabin, puts some wood on the block, and then concentrates for a second, before swinging that axe high and fast over his head. All the muscles in his arms and torso move under his skin, rippling effortlessly as he demolishes the firewood with his axe. He's got such a smooth style, all fluid grace, that taut golden skin glowing in the sunlight. After a little while he starts to work up a sweat, and that's when he becomes particularly mesmerizing. I give up any pretence of reading, put my book aside, and just watch. The sun is anointing him in its balmy, yellow glow, and the small fringe of hair at the back of his head is wet with sweat, making it seem darker than the steel

grey colour I know it to be. His chest hair sparkles with little droplets of moisture, as if it has been laced with hidden diamonds that catch the light periodically, and his lean waist is accentuated all the more by the sheer width of his magnificent shoulders. His naked upper body forms a perfect triangle from shoulder to waist, and then he tapers down to endlessly long legs clad in faded denim jeans, and finishes at the soft, mustard-yellow leather timberlands that grace his feet. I'm fond of those jeans of his – they hug his ass tightly, revealing that rounded, biteable butt in all its glory. Somehow this seems to be Walter's natural environment. It's strange, because for most of the time I've known him, I've only ever seen him in his office uniform of white shirt and exquisitely tailored suits, and he always looked perfectly at home in them so I would never have guessed that those suits were hiding this backwoodsman that he is at heart.

"You okay?" He asks, pausing for a moment, and leaning on the axe, sweat dripping down his wide forehead, and splattering on the ground.

"Oh, I'm fine. Just enjoying the view." I wink lasciviously, and he snorts.

"Do you ever think about anything other than sex?" he growls, picking up the axe again.

"No - is that a problem?" I grin, and he laughs out loud. I like making him laugh. It didn't take me long to learn how to do it, and now I can't stop because it's such a good sound.

"No." He grins back at me. "But first I have to finish chopping this wood – sex will only keep us warm for so long."

"Spoilsport." I make a face at him, and pick up my book again, but maybe I'm tired because the words seem jumbled and meaningless, and anyway I'm finding it hard to concentrate with this half-naked vision of masculine perfection standing in front of me, grunting with effort as he heaves the axe over his shoulder again. It's late afternoon now, and Walter is dappled in the shadow of the nearby trees. It settles over him like camouflage, obscuring some parts of his body and revealing others. It's tantalising, almost like a striptease – but then, as he so rightly pointed out, I do have sex on the brain. I can barely see those scars that I caressed last night. I know them intimately, each curve and dip, but in the blend of sunlight and shadow shading his body they're virtually invisible.

"Would you like a beer?" He's been sweating steadily for ages, and has piled up an impressive amount of chopped wood.

"Yeah." He pauses again, and wipes his hand over his forehead, then pulls a luridly checked handkerchief from his back pocket, and ties it, bandana-style, around his head to soak up the sweat.

"Mmm - that looks good. Maybe we can play pirates later," I tease and he rolls his eyes.

"Where's my beer?" he demands, that good-humoured smile never leaving his face.

I put my book aside and wander into the cabin. The fridge contains an entire section devoted entirely to beer, because we're the kind of guys who have our priorities straight in

life. I grab a couple of cans, open one, take a long gulp of the cool nectar inside, and then leave them both on the kitchen table because I need to take a leak. After I've peed, I wash my hands, gazing absently at myself in the mirror, lost in thought. Outside, Walter is grunting as he chops firewood. I open the bathroom window, and poke my head through it.

"Hey, you must thirsty – want a beer?" I ask him.

He stops what he's doing, and smiles at me, gently, maybe even a little sadly. "That would be great," he says softly. "But I'm about ready to finish up out here. Why don't I come in and wash up, and then we can read for a while?"

"Sounds good to me – I need to start a new book. I finished mine last night." I close the bathroom window, and wash my hands. When I wander back into the living room, Walter's just coming in from outside, where he's been chopping wood. He's wearing this sexy bandana and looks like some kind of pirate captain. I feel a need to be ravished coming on...

"I like the pirate look," I leer at him. He chuckles, but his brown eyes are looking at me keenly. "Have you finished already?" I watch him button up his shirt. "Or did you just stop for a beer? Want me to get you one?"

He looks at me with that same searching, dark-eyed gaze.

"Sure." He nods, a tight little smile on his lips. I go into the kitchen, and open the fridge – and then I see that there are a couple of beers on the table, one of them already opened. They're cold to the touch, so maybe he snuck in for a drink when I was in the bathroom. I grab them and wander back into the living room where's he lying on the couch. He beckons me over.

"I'm tired. Want to take a nap with me?" I know this is Walter-speak for "you're tired, I want you to take a nap, Fox," but I indulge him anyway, and climb between his legs, lying with my back on his chest. He covers us both with a blanket, and I relax against his warm body. This feels good. He smells of a combination of sweat and fresh air, and I love that smell.

I don't know why he worries about my sleeping habits – even after napping half the afternoon I'm about done in when bedtime comes. I blame the fresh mountain air – it knocks us both out. I'm wide awake at 2 a.m. as usual though. The moon is just peeping through the window – Walter doesn't bother with drapes up here in the mountain, and I'm glad about that because I love looking out, my head arranged on his chest, my fingers idly playing with his body. The mass of scar tissue on the left hand side of his body is thick, and furrowed beneath his armpit, and I can't even begin to think how such injuries were caused. He told me once that his wounds were so bad that the VC stripped his uniform and left him for dead, and even the corpsmen clearing up the next day were going to stick him in a body bag. There had to be tangible evidence of that on his body, and I know, without him ever saying as much, that it's this scarring on his left shoulder, reaching all the way down to his hip, that is a legacy of Vietnam. There are other scars too, which I suspect also date back to that time, but this is the main one.

"Awake again?" His voice rouses me from my reverie.

“Yes. You owe me a story, big guy.”

“So I do.” He sits up a little way and rearranges his pillow, and I wait until he’s done and then settle down on his chest, where I belong. I like listening to his voice, distilled through the cavities of his body, part vibration, part speech. “Okay. Let me tell you how this scar was formed.” He covers my hand with his own, and we linger for a moment over the scar in question. “It was January 1971...” he begins, and I have to interrupt him straight away.

“What happened to ‘Once Upon A Time’?”

“Once Upon A Time is for fairy tales...kid’s stuff,” he says with a little smile. “This is a different kind of story – a war story.”

“Okay.” I look up at him, suddenly worried. “Are you sure you’re okay with this? We don’t have to do this. We could start with this one instead.” My hand wanders down to between his thighs, and finds the long, jagged tear there. He gives a little moan.

“Keep your hand there much longer and there won’t be any kind of storytelling going on in this bed tonight,” he says through gritted teeth. “There will be a different kind of activity entirely.” I laugh, and remove my hand, placing it back on his scarred chest.

“Seriously though – are you sure you’re okay with this?”

In the moonlight, and without his glasses, his eyes seem larger and darker than ever. He nods thoughtfully.

“It was a long time ago, Fox. It happened. I’ve lived with it for a long time. Talking about it doesn’t change anything – it’s always here, with me, marked on my body, reminding me, every day of my life. I should have told you a long time ago, anyway.”

“No ‘shoulds’,” I shrug. “I hate shoulds – they take all the fun out of life.” I settle back down on his chest and he strokes my hair for a long time before starting again.

“Okay. It was January 1971. I was out on patrol – we were officially on a recon mission... Reconnaissance,” he amends, seeing me raise my head, unfamiliar with the military jargon. “It was cold – I know people think it was sweltering hot all the time in the jungle in ‘Nam but let me tell you that out in the highlands, in the middle of winter, it got pretty chilly as well as wet. Hmm, no interruptions to ask me what I was wearing?”

He nudges me playfully, and I shake my head solemnly. “Nope. I figure this is one story that you have to tell your own way...and anyway, I kind of guessed you’d be wearing a green uniform.” I grin cheekily, and he swats the side of my butt lightly in retaliation.

“Well I **was** wearing a uniform of course. I was also carrying an M-60 machine gun, and I had a sawn off shotgun strapped over my back as well, to say nothing of the 45-caliber pistol I had stuffed in my shoulder holster.”

“Was it usual to carry that much weaponry?” I wonder how he could even lift it. I have a different mental image of him now than I had last night. This time he’s grown a few feet, but he’s still skinny. I can see the beginnings of the raw musculature that will become the honed body I’m cushioned on now, but he isn’t quite as bulked up back then. He has a buzz cut, his dark hair barely more than stubble on top of his head, but his deep dark eyes haven’t changed – only they’re a bit younger, a bit wider, and more naive.

“No it wasn’t usual,” he says softly. “You see, Fox, the thing is that I had become the kind of guy that the rest of the platoon kept well clear of. I was one of the ones who’d lost it – gone kamikaze was how my friend Jason used to refer to it. When I started my tour of duty I was such an innocent. I was just a farm boy from Iowa – I’d never even been to a different state before I joined the marines, let alone another country. I was full of high ideals about patriotism, and serving my people. I came crashing down to earth on the day, two months into my tour, when I shot that 10 year old Vietnamese kid who wandered into our camp covered in grenades.”

I remember, vividly, every detail of that conversation he had with me, years ago, long before we became lovers, when he was trying to stop me resigning over Scully’s abduction. I hated myself then, and he understood those feelings of hate and self-punishment all too well.

“When I told you I shot that boy’s head off, I’m wasn’t lying,” he says softly, and I look up. “You do recall me telling you that?” he asks, and I nod.

“Of course. Eidetic memory remember?” I point my index finger at my forehead, and then our eyes meet and I realise what I’ve just said. “Well, you know.” I shrug. “I do remember it, Walter. I can’t imagine what it must have been like but you had to do it – if you hadn’t shot him then even more people could have been hurt.”

“I know. Rationally speaking I know that, but like I said, I meant it literally – that boy’s head came off his shoulders. It burst in front of me like a watermelon smashed to pieces by the wheel of a car.” He takes a deep breath, and I sit up, suddenly ashamed of myself.

“No more, Walter. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you re-live bad memories.”

“No...you see, I’ve never told anyone exactly what happened, not even Sharon. I used to think it was because I was protecting her, but I was just shutting her out, as usual. I’d like to tell you the story, if you think you can stand to hear it. I think that, after all these years, I’d like to tell someone, and I’d very much like it to be you.”

He wraps his arms around his body, as if hugging himself, and I unwrap them, and wrap my own arms around his body instead, angling my face so that it rests just under his chin, my body draped over his. He isn’t alone, and I can take as good care of him as he takes of me. His hands settle on my back, stroking absently, and I hold him tight until his heartbeat has slowed back to normal.

“Go on, Walter. It’s okay,” I whisper, and he nods, his chin tapping the top of my head.

“After that I changed. I started taking drugs – hell, most of us did, but I took more than my fair share. I stopped being that clean-cut, innocent little farm boy from Iowa, and I became a disillusioned, desperate junkie. I volunteered for every dangerous mission going because I knew - I just felt in my bones - that I was going to die out there. It was like a premonition – and it came true.”

He pauses for a while, and the fingers stroking my back are shaking slightly.

“I was 18 years old, full of fire, and I decided that when I died I was damn well going to take as many VCs with me as I could. So, I made sure I was fully armoured up for every mission, and I went at each and every engagement like a man possessed. I was a damn good fighter – a killing machine my commander called me, and he liked that about me. You see, there were some commanders back then who used to send out patrols not to gather information, or to perform a search and destroy mission. No, they used to send us out deliberately to be the target for enemy ambushes.”

I look up, startled by this information. “They deliberately sent you into traps?” I ask him. “Why?”

“Because their goal was to get a fight going, and they didn’t care how it was done. We were bait, canon fodder, but we weren’t stupid, we knew what was going on – and I volunteered for each and every one of those missions because if I was going to die I damn well wanted to meet my death head on – I didn’t want to skulk around the camp trying to avoid it.”

“Sounds like you,” I comment, kissing his collarbone.

“Really? I thought I’d lost that kamikaze tendency during all those years spent sitting behind a desk,” he retorts.

“Nah, it just became more covert. It usually came out to play every time I got myself up shit creek without a paddle as I recall.”

He grins, and I’m delighted to have won a smile from him at this time of all times.

“Maybe you’re right. Although I like to think that death changed me,” he murmurs.

I lie on his chest, still holding him tight, waiting for what must, inevitably, come next. Finally, he clears his throat.

“It was a well planned ambush. They had laid claymore mines at a bottleneck point on one of our regular patrol paths. The mines were operated by remote – the first thing I knew about them was when bits of my buddy in front of me were suddenly plastered all over my uniform. There was a terrible roaring noise...took me a while to figure out that it came from my own throat. I was screaming my head off as I ran, ducking and firing my M-60 crazily into the bushes. Half my squad was killed outright by the shrapnel from the mines, and they picked the rest of us off from behind with grenades and gunfire. I remember leaving my body...”

His voice falters, and I tighten my grasp around his chest, keeping him warm, and safe. I know he isn't comfortable with his near death experience, but I also know that it fascinates him as well. That 8-year-old boy with the vivid imagination is still there, inside him, painting even more monsters and demons when enough exist already in what he suffered.

"What's strange is how calm and peaceful I felt," he whispers. "I was surrounded by the most intense, healing white light, and I felt so good. I watched the VCs strip my body, and take my gun...and then, because they wanted to make sure we were all dead, or maybe just for the hell of it, one of them stabbed his bayonet into my side. I didn't feel a thing, because, I guess, I wasn't even there – I wasn't **in** my body - I was dead."

My fingers spider down his side, and find the deep, circular indentation just above his hip. This was where that bayonet went into him.

"I might not have felt it then, but I sure as hell felt it two weeks later when I woke up in a hospital in Saigon," he says, with a wry chuckle. "My injuries were mainly shrapnel wounds, but..." He takes a deep breath, then grabs my hand, and traces it all over the dense network of scar tissue on the left hand side of his body, "...some of them were caused by my buddies bones and bits of their gear being blown into me from the force of the mine explosions."

Oh shit. I had no idea.

"Oh, Walter." I sit up, take his face between my hands, and kiss him gently on the lips. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." I'm kneeling with my legs on either side of his thighs, holding his face, and his intense, dark-eyed gaze meets mine.

"Like I said, it was a long time ago," he murmurs. "And I've learned that I have nothing to fear from memories. They're part of me and I'm lucky that I know how and why they shaped me." He presses his lips to mine, and I open my mouth to accept his questing tongue. He understands. Of course he understands.

"There are times to remember and times when it's fine to forget," I whisper when we draw back from the kiss. I hold his face in my hands again, and look deep into those dark, expressive eyes. "I'd like to make love to you," I tell him, feeling his cock hardening beneath me.

"I'd like that." He smiles, and I kiss him again, then move my lips down to his neck, and hold him there, pinned against the pillows, while I suck urgently at his skin. My lips continue travelling down, licking over a collarbone and then settling on a nipple. He groans, and twists under me, bucking slightly, but I hold him down. He likes it when I take charge, and make him accept my caresses. He's a man more used to pushing comfort aside, but one of the things he loves about me is that I don't let him. I make him take it, and he can't put up all those walls, and hide behind those stony buttresses of silent strength with me. I make him take the journey, make him take my love, and he has a chance to rest awhile, away from the memories – inside **my** strong arms for a change.

He whimpers as I push him down, my hands, lips, and tongue devouring his golden-skinned, tautly muscled body. I grab some lube from the nightstand, and he lies completely open and

uninhibited, as I push his thighs apart, and position myself in his entrance. He always looks beautiful to me, but never more so than in this moment, when he has shared so much of himself, and is lying, legs akimbo, waiting for me. He trusts me - with his memories, with his body, with his heart and soul, and that is a trust that I would never betray. I love him you see, and while I think that he has much the worse part of the bargain, I know that he loves me too. I prepare him with my fingers and he moans and writhes underneath me. He's very open, and it doesn't take long before he's ready for me. I smile down at him and he smiles back as I snub my cock into his anus. He gasps and pushes up under me, trying to take as much of me as he can into his body. I guide myself into him, until I'm lodged to the hilt, and then take hold of his cock in my hand. It's hard, and responsive under me – just like him – and we lock gazes as I begin to move slowly, in and out of him, stroking his cock in time to my thrusts. The sadness of the past will always be in his eyes, but so is the joy of the present. He is whole, one, the living sum of all that has happened to him, and a better, nobler soul I never knew or could ever hope to. I make sure that he comes first, and follow on after, before withdrawing. I clean us both up and then fall, sated, on top of him, my head on his shoulder, which is where I always seem to come to rest.

He nuzzles at my hair with his lips, and strokes me idly, languidly, lost in a post-coital haze.

"It's four a.m.," he murmurs. "Will you be able to sleep now?"

"Probably." I rest my hands on his chest and prop my chin on them, gazing up at him. "Now that I've heard my bedtime story. Thank you for that, Walter."

His fingers trace their way down the three circular scars on each of my cheeks, and then to the top of the long, thin line of puckered flesh on my chest. He picks up each of my hands and gently presses a kiss to the deep scars that disfigure my wrists.

"You're welcome, Fox," he murmurs.

I'm feeling tired now. I turn onto my side, and lie, still draped over him, gazing into the darkness outside the cabin. Walter brought me here after I begged him not to let them run any more of their damn tests on me in the hospital. Despite all those tests, the truth remains that they don't know what happened to me during my abduction, and I can't tell them because I don't know either. It's strange sometimes, to look into the mirror and see these scars on my face, and not know how they got there. Did I suffer much, I wonder? Was I in pain? Sometimes I think I remember little details, like a light shining in my eyes, and a man leaning over me, his features morphing into a different face as he spoke to me, but they're few and far between.

The doctors say I'm unlikely to ever recover the memory of those six missing months, and to be honest that scares me a little. Six months missing. Six whole months gone from my mind, leaving only these scars behind to show that I was even alive during that time. Six months. How can time just disappear like that? My short-term memory is still shot to pieces, sometimes jumbled, sometimes lucid, although, strangely, my memories of my life up to my abduction are crystal clear. I can remember specific incidents from my childhood as if they happened yesterday, but yesterday itself is often hazy to me. It's usually worse when I'm

tired – then everything can get mixed up in my mind. I’m getting better though, with Walter’s help. We’ve been lovers for two years - ever since I watched him almost die after being poisoned because of his involvement with me, and my work. That was the second time I sat in a hospital corridor all night, watching over him and worrying about him. His beautiful body was covered in ugly dark veins, and he was having trouble breathing. I would have done anything to save his life, and I vowed then and there that if he lived I would tell him how I felt. The memory of the first night we spent together is still as sharp as ever in my mind, thank god. I’m grateful that I have that much at least – they’re the most important memories, after all. I’m hoping my condition will improve enough for me to return to work - and to give Walter back that old Fox, the one he fell in love with, but in the meantime he never complains. Being out here in his cabin in the mountains has made me calmer, and helped me recover physically from what was done to me. I’m getting stronger every day. Some days, like today, I don’t forget anything at all.

As I lie here, tracing Walter’s Vietnam scar, I wonder whether some memories might be better off lost. Maybe what they did to me during those six months is too horrible to ever be remembered. Maybe it’s a merciful blessing that I **don’t** remember, but I do so hate mysteries. I’m too curious. It pisses me off big time that I bear these marks on my body but don’t have any recollection of how they were made. Walter understands – that’s why he indulges me in this storytelling. I nuzzle my way over his chest to his right arm, and find the star-shaped scar just above his elbow. It’s clearly pretty old, and is about the size of my thumbnail. It looks as if he was stabbed with something pointed.

“Maybe tomorrow night you’ll tell me the story behind **this** scar,” I whisper, kissing the star-shaped scar, and he smiles, a little sadly, and nods.

“Maybe I will, Fox,” he murmurs. “Maybe I will.”

I smile contentedly, and snuggle up against his shoulder, closing my eyes. Perhaps it doesn’t matter that I can’t remember after all; Walter has stories enough for both of us.

The End

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