

Scars Never Heal

A sticky substance was on the doorknob when Scarlett touched it to enter her dorm. At first, all she felt was disgust as her nose scrunched. However, as she went to wipe her hand on her uniform pants (it was laundry day), she froze in fear. Blood the color of her namesake was drying on her palm. Though it was quickly turning brown, the fluorescent lights in the hall glinted off of the liquid. The door was slightly ajar, and there was crimson spilled on the dusty pink rug which was against regulation. Despite the red flags waving in her head and protocol, only one thing was going through Scarlett's head. One name. *Daisy*.

As quietly as she could muster and ignoring the itch telling her to appear as small as possible, she allowed her military training to kick in, though not enough to call a commanding officer. She drew the pistol at her left hip and carefully pushed the door open with her right hand, fingers clutched around the edges in order to keep control of it. After what seemed like ages, Scarlett stepped into the room where drops of blood led to the bathroom she and Daisy shared. As Scarlett's grip on the door loosened, the stickiness was still quite noticeable. Icy eyes scanning the room, she saw that both beds were still made from the morning and sighed in relief that her roommate hadn't yet made it back to their shared dorm. Knowing that Daisy was no longer in danger should have deterred her enough to back off and call a CO, but something in her soul tugged her toward the bloodied bathroom. From where she was standing, it was obvious that whoever had busted into their dorm was injured. Fresh blood was smeared onto the doorframe, and more was on the doorknob. If Scarlett had been ten minutes earlier, she would have caught the intruder in the doorway. Finding herself conflicted, she glanced back at the front door, which was standing wide open. Her eyes widened as she realized there was no sign of forced entry, and that name was running through her head again. *Daisy*.

Placing her gun back in its holster, Scarlett turned back toward the bathroom. She slithered silently through the hall and cautiously opened the door. The size of the bathroom was surprising compared to the others around the compound. Its once pristine floor was littered with red, and if it wasn't obvious enough, something was very wrong. Ignoring the fact that Daisy was a clean freak and never let any mess stick around for more than a few minutes, especially in the bathroom, blood was puddled on the tile, as was Daisy. Her bloodied knees were touching porcelain, with her feet curled under her. Scarlet stained her socks, seeping from multiple wounds on her back, which were clotting but still lost in all the color. Her black hair, which usually fell in medium curls, was knotted and frizzy as if someone had grabbed it. The first aid kit that was usually kept under the sink was strung out and opened haphazardly, the cabinet still ajar. White gauze soaked thoroughly with ruby red stuck to the palms of the delicate flower sinking into the floor. *Daisy.*

Daisy stared at her hands and seemed completely entranced by the syrupy liquid that suffocated her fingers. Scarlett knew all too well that she was no longer present. Dissociation and flashbacks. Daisy was being held captive by her brain. Scarlett needed to bring her back carefully, otherwise, she might lash out. Scarlett took note of the standard-issue pistol on her right hip and sucked in a breath, leaning forward in an attempt to snatch it from her. Scarlett froze when Daisy let out a whimper, and her shoulders began to move rapidly. The smell of iron filled the air, and Daisy's gasps became desperate. She was hyperventilating. Daisy fainting and hitting her head was Scarlett's top concern. *Daisy.*

She should not have touched her. Scarlett knew that. Scaring someone with PTSD out of a flashback was the worst way to bring them back to reality. It could have major consequences, and someone almost always ends up hurt, especially when the patient has military training. If her

flashbacks had been reported, Daisy wouldn't have been let in. Luckily for her, she managed to convince both Scarlett and her father that she was managing her symptoms. Unluckily for Scarlett, that was not the whole truth. One second, she's trying to keep her girlfriend from falling over and adding more blood to the collection on the floor, and the next, she's lying in it, gun to her head. As she regained orientation of the world around her, she wished she could shrink into something no bigger than a goldfish. Regardless of how frail Daisy looked before, her instincts had kicked in with muscle memory as a guide. Scarlett's wrist and back stung from where Daisy had grabbed her and where she made contact with the floor. She knew better than anyone what they were trained to do in life-or-death situations. Hell, she probably would have shot Daisy herself if she hadn't figured out who she was. There was no convincing Daisy's body that she wasn't being threatened, as the flashback probably had to do with the injury or her parent's death. Scarlett placed both her hands above her head on the tile floor, blood wet on her wrists and in her auburn hair. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath as best as she could with the girl on top of her. Metal poisoned her tongue as she realized her lip had been busted in the turmoil. Scarlett opened her eyes just for them to close on impulse as something ran down her face from the cold steel against her forehead. She had only caught a glimpse of the woman above her. Eyes that Scarlett typically compared to pools of honey were darkened by the absolute terror coursing through their circulatory system. She inhaled once more and spoke, hoping that her voice would be enough to drag Daisy out of the daze. "You're hurt. Let me help you." Eyes still closed, she heard a shuffle, and the barrel was moved off her head and the weight lifted off her chest. However, the gun continued to hover over her, which she could tell by the thick liquid dripping onto her nose, right in between her eyes. Tears welled up behind her eyelids, and she could feel her contact lenses moving. Even if she tried to sneak another peek, they would likely block her

vision until she could fix them. Scarlett moved her arms from above her head to attempt to keep the blood from entering her eyes and felt the need to shift. Her survival instincts were never wrong, so she listened to them, taking the form of a rat. A gunshot rang out, and she was lucky it was mid-morph, or her eardrums would have ruptured. She moved quickly behind Daisy and shifted back. Another gunshot. In all the commotion, her contacts had fallen out, probably from the first shift. The headache following the two successive shifts was piercing. Scarlett stumbled as she stood on her own two feet again. Unsteady, she fell backward and hit her head against one of the white walls, which did not help the migraine that hindered her. Scarlett struggled to open her eyes, especially with the now blinding light coming from above her, but one thought forced her eyes open. *Daisy.*

As soon as she regained her vision, she locked eyes with none other than Colonel Matthew Caylos, his long black hair gathered into a bun on the back of his head. Though he tried to remain stoic, the fear in his grey eyes was obvious. Those eyes seemed to be taking all of the red against white, including her natural eye color. His gun was in his hand, which he quickly holstered, and he approached Daisy with caution. He wasn't looking for an explanation at the moment, which was good because Scarlett wasn't sure she could give him one, but especially because of the state of her girlfriend. She tried to stand, and her vision started saturating with stars. She blinked a few times, and, as her vision returned to her, she recognized the colonel's voice as he spoke. "Colonel Caylos, responding to the gunshots in dorm 1023. Accidental firing. No casualties, no injuries. I will calm the nerves of the lieutenants here and have them sent with the pistol in to be checked with the armory. There are two bullet holes because the first shot made the other lieutenant fire on impulse. One on the north wall and one on the east wall in the shower. The bullet did go through the shower curtain, so they will need another one of those. I will write

up a report later, but all is well here. I will be handling the lieutenants and do not need assistance.” There was a small silence where no one moved or spoke. “Understood.” His service cell was returned to his belt, and he took Daisy’s pistol from her hands, which were still stained crimson. *She’s lucid again.* Scarlett breathed out a thank you to whatever gods existed. The colonel was wetting a cloth under the tap as Scarlett approached Daisy.

“Glad to have you back, love.” Scarlett smiled genuinely toward her, who half-heartedly returned it.

“I almost killed you,” Daisy stated in an apologetic tone. Scarlett waved her off and took Daisy’s hands into her own. The colonel placed the damp towel in her free hand, and she began wiping the blood from her girlfriend’s fingers. Colonel Caylos took to cleaning the blood from the floor while Daisy took the washcloth and began to clean her own hands. Scarlett moved silently behind her and wet another towel under the faucet. After squeezing it out, she went back to her girlfriend’s side and carefully peeled back the white t-shirt that clung to Daisy’s back.

“I can’t get to the main wound from here. I need you to take your shirt off.” Scarlett rolled her eyes as Daisy giggled before responding. She knew the words about to fall from her girlfriend’s lips.

“Well, this was not the foreplay I had in mind.” The smirk fell off Daisy’s face as Colonel Caylos cleared his throat to remind her that he was present. Daisy blushed heavily and muttered an apology. She removed her shirt and winced as her left shoulder’s movement aggravated the cuts. Scarlett tried to stifle the gasp, but she couldn’t. She stared at the wound which now marked her girlfriend as hunted. A capital “D” resided on her shoulder blade as well as several other cuts, which looked to be other attempts, covered the back of this sweetheart. It was no longer a question of if there would be stitches, only how many. The colonel finished with the blood,

gathered the first aid kit, and placed it at Scarlett's side. He took note of the shape of the cut, and his eyes widened. Of course, he would be haunted by the mark. His wife had received it, and so had his daughter. He glanced at Scarlett's left wrist and noticed it there as well. The placement matched that of his daughter's. They made eye contact, bright red and silver clashing questioningly, but neither spoke a word.

Scarlett moved Daisy to the edge of the bathtub and had her sit down facing the wall, the hole she placed there looking her in the eye. The colonel sat to her right, offering moral support as her girlfriend poked and prodded the cuts on her back. Scarlett felt her shudder under her fingertips. Scarlett soaked a piece of gauze in rubbing alcohol and braced her left hand on Daisy's shoulder. "This is gonna sting." As she put the gauze on the mark, Daisy tried to flinch away from the pain, but Scarlett kept her steady. She moved on, giving enough time to disinfect each wound, but as little as possible to keep the added pain to a minimum. Once each of them was cleaned, Scarlett searched the kit for the needle and thread. She found the sterilized items and wondered how they would replace them without reporting the full incident. Pushing that problem off for later, she focused on the task at hand: sewing her girlfriend back together. She pinched the vertical line of the "d" closed and began the task. The silence in the room was deafening, but they all refused to speak, other than the inexorable whimpers from Daisy. A while later, Scarlett said, "Okay. We're done." After the delicate dedication shown to put her girlfriend back together, Scarlett sank to the floor on Daisy's left side and closed her eyes. She felt her girlfriend slide clean fingers through her hair, palm resting on her forehead. She placed a kiss on the top of her head. "Don't bust any of the stitches I just made." Daisy hummed in response and kept the hand in her hair. Scarlett leaned her head against Daisy and stayed there for a few minutes.

Colonel Caylos cleared his throat again, but this time, he was in the hallway. As Scarlett opened her eyes, she saw Daisy turn to him as she did so herself. "You two need to get cleaned up and changed, and we'll have to check Daisy's gun in at the armory." Daisy nodded and took the outfit from him. "Okay. Daisy first." Scarlett stood again, hearing her blood rushing in her ears. She stepped out into the hall with the colonel and shut the door. She stepped past him and noticed they were alone, with the door to the rest of the hall closed. The trail of red had been cleaned up to the best of his ability. Unfortunately, the ruby would never come out of the rug, just as it would never come out of her eyes. He attempted to grab her wrist, but she pulled away, the mark burning where his fingers grazed her skin. Scarlett bore holes in the rug with a fierce glare she wished she could direct at the Colonel, and his arm fell along with his composure, though he gained it back quickly. "We still need to talk, but we can deal with procedure first." Scarlett saluted, though not up to regulation. Colonel Caylos didn't care.

"Sir, yes, sir!"

After checking in at the armory, Colonel Caylos escorted the pair back to their dorm. The three of them entered wordlessly, and Scarlett sat on her bed as Daisy settled next to her. The colonel took a seat across from them on Daisy's bed. Daisy reached for Scarlett's hand as they awaited his harsh words. "So, do either of you want to tell me what the hell happened?" Though his grey eyes had no bite, Scarlett bit her lip and looked at the floor in front of them.

"I had an episode, Matt," Daisy said simply.

"Yeah, I gathered that much, Daisy. That doesn't explain the marks on your back or the one on her wrist or how you ended up in the episode in the first place." The colonel sighed as he removed his cap and ran his hand through his hair. Scarlett could feel his eyes on her, and she

lifted her head to lock eyes with him. His eyes surveyed hers again, though they were back to a normal color, ruby red hidden behind icy blue. He pointed at her and shook his finger a few times before saying, "And don't get me started on your eyes or the shapeshifting." Scarlett froze. She wasn't aware that he had seen her, though, thinking back, it made all sorts of sense. Her eyes fell again, noticing the way Daisy kicked her feet nervously and took in a breath while closing her eyes.

"Sir, those last two things explain the mark on my wrist perfectly." She breathed in again, an obnoxiously clean scent assaulting her nose.

"Did you know?" The colonel's tone had not once betrayed how he felt.

Daisy's voice almost made Scarlett jump. "I did. She's been my best friend since childhood; how would I not?" The bed creaked as Daisy shifted uncomfortably. "Mine is obviously new."

"Right." Scarlett opened her eyes again as the colonel's shoes hit the floor. He walked over to them, and she continued to stare at his boots instead of looking up. "Are you one of them?" Scarlett assumed the question was directed at Daisy. The shadow on the ground that matched shook its head. What followed was almost as silent.

"Just some people wanting me dead."

The colonel was not close enough to hear the words she mumbled and said, "Okay, good. That makes our lives easier. I don't think I could cope with the stress of keeping another identity secret." He chuckled a bit, though it was sour. "Lieutenant, Lynn isn't even your name, is it?" Scarlett was startled again and met the colonel's eyes once more, this time with a mischievous glint in her own.

“Well, technically, sir, it is.” Colonel Caylos rolled his eyes, allowing his rough exterior to break a little.

“You know what I meant, Scarlett.” It sounded almost like a father chastising his daughter. His eyes showed more and more hope as the conversation continued.

“I do, sir. I was simply answering the question you asked.” Scarlett allowed a little of her sass to bleed through her speech. “I **was** adopted.”

“Yeah. I know you were. After your mother died.” He reached out and took her hand in his. “Is it really you?” His eyes had tears in them, matching hers, though she imagined some were for her mom. Scarlett silenced a sob and nodded her head. He pulled her in for a hug, though she couldn’t return it. “I love you, kiddo.” *Daisy is safe, and I am too.*