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Two

The Day I Died—My New Beginning

For miracles are merely change of purpose from hurt to healing.

— *A Course in Miracles*

It's a quiet Tuesday morning just three days into the new year. I sit alone in my office with my legs crossed and my eyes closed. I am deep in meditation, so deep that what I envision appears to be reality. I see myself desperately grasping a shard of glass between my fingers. The tip of my thumbnail is white from the grip I maintain on the glass,

T.E. Corner

which is cemented to the edge of my forefinger. I observe dozens of scars hidden beneath the hair covering my arms. I stroke the hair of my left forearm to uncover the letters *DIE* carved into my flesh. For decades they have been sunk deep in my skin as a constant reminder of who I once was. For far too long I carried this past with me in anger and shame.

I continue inspecting my arms, rolling up the sleeve on my left arm to reveal a trail of scars appearing to be without end. The farther up I go, the less hair there is to cover up my past hurt, revealing my scars for all to see. *Thirty, thirty-one*. Releasing my sleeve, I focus on my opposite arm. *Thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four*. I continue counting until I pause to gaze at my initials, *TC*, carved into my right forearm, surrounded by scars—all the result of self-inflicted slashes from a razor long ago.

My scars glisten in the light while I replay past hurts in my mind. *Thirty-five, thirty-six* ... I grasp the tender flesh on the inside of my bicep between my fingertips to see my skin bend with each squeeze. My scars are the exception. They are rigid, not as forgiving as the rest of my skin. The tighter I squeeze my skin together, the deeper the scars seem to dive into my flesh. My wounds seem to be reopening to reveal my past and to remind me of my self-hatred long ago. Even after all this time I still haven't quite landed on the exact number of scars; I usually lose count after seventy or so. I've worn them in shame for decades, keeping them hidden to avoid inquiries from acquaintances and friends, afraid to face my fears.

I have a lingering fantasy about a time of revelation when I feel safe enough to unveil my scars. I cling to a faint hope that someone will appear with an answer and with understanding. I imagine this person's hands lovingly placed upon my arms, caressing my scars and healing my pain. Angelic words arise from within, telling me all is well. But this fantasy has eluded me for far too long now.

I cannot keep my scars hidden forever. It's quite a task to do so, especially in the summer when wearing long-sleeve shirts in ninety-degree heat invites questions. Every now and again I field questions

from those who are curious, typically children. “Hey, where did those scars come from?” or “What happened to your arms?”

Even after all these years there is still that moment of awkward silence while I ponder the question in search of *the* answer, the one that will release me from the shame and judgment that are soon to come. “They are scratches from a dog” is my usual reply.

My white lie reply often becomes even more obtuse when I jokingly claim that I wrestled with a bear or a tiger. Then the conversation usually goes elsewhere or a parent interjects, telling the youngster not to ask such questions. Whew! I am off the hook again, still avoiding my truth.

Some youngsters press on, though, unable to resist their intense curiosity. This is the point in the dialogue when I feel a little bit of pressure, a sense of shame and embarrassment that will soon overwhelm me.

This strange power of innocent curiosity that a child wields amazes me and quite often intimidates adults. A child’s natural persistence makes a conversation feel more like an interrogation—to the point where most grown-ups become visibly uncomfortable. They often reprimand children and tell them to stop their incessant questioning.

Even though this sort of questioning makes me uncomfortable, I am equally intrigued by it. Why do children ask so many questions with absolutely no fear? They have no ulterior motive and simply seek understanding. I wonder if there is a point in time when that curiosity deserts us. Do our fears repress it so much that it is silenced forever? What changes our view of the world from ease and acceptance to trepidation and judgment? Do children persist out of sincere curiosity and love while we adults resist because of our judgments and fears?

When a child’s questioning endures, I am pushed into a corner, and my vulnerability leads to my next canned response. I might say, “They are scars from when I was a kid. I did the silly things most boys do. These were not the smartest moves, and I have these scars to show for them.”

At that point, the dialogue typically ends awkwardly. I am

T.E. Corner

avoiding the truth, but I am not certain anyone is prepared to hear me say, “When I was younger, I didn’t like myself much. As a matter of fact, I hated myself, so I found a way to release my hatred and anger by cutting myself with razors and burning myself with cigarettes.”

Facing our fears and unearthing the truth can hurt on many levels. It can also be the breakthrough necessary for healing to begin. This is beautifully reflected in a line from *A Course in Miracles*: “For miracles are merely change of purpose from hurt to healing.”

I cut myself under the delusion that I could avoid my pain. I created physical pain to mask my mental pain. All I wanted was an answer, something that would cut to the truth I was seeking. My anger festered during my youth, eventually infecting my adulthood.

I misperceived all of my parents’ heartfelt expressions of love and concern as insincere garbage, especially because it came from people who couldn’t understand and whom I held responsible for my pain in the first place.

Regrettably, the thousands of hugs, kisses, and “I love yous” my parents gave me fell short because of my inability to receive any of these things. My parents were in a predicament. Unable to understand my plight, how could they express any sort of empathy? No matter how much effort they put forth, I didn’t allow myself to receive their love, their advice, or any attempt they made to understand my situation. I left them stranded in a place of helplessness and hopelessness. How in the world could I expect anyone to understand my insanity?

I had been running from the truth, fearing I could not share it with anyone because I would face ridicule and indifference. This inevitably changed the way I saw the world.

Still deep in meditation, I envision the piece of glass grasped tightly between my forefinger and thumb, causing my fingers to ache and tremble. Tears paint my cheeks in the sadness and suffering of my past married with the happiness of my new beginning.

I firmly press the razor-sharp glass into my wrist. Beginning just below the palm of my right hand, slicing through my flesh straight down the center of my wrist, the glass glides between the tendons surrounding the median nerve. The small indent formed by the

tendons in my wrist creates a runway to guide the glass through my flesh.

My delicate skin gives way to this intruder without resistance like a speedboat ripping through the water. The boat's wake affects everything in its path. Nearby vessels suddenly rock up and down and side to side. Then, just as suddenly as the water is torn apart, peace is restored and the ocean again becomes one.

Tendons and ligaments are now exposed, an image my eyes were never meant to see, and I wince from the pain. Blood soaks my fingers with the dark red hue of life. Or is this my death? Am I cutting through my harsh exterior to reveal my true self? For decades I have known who was underneath this exterior, but my anger and fear prevented me from revealing this identity. Relief soon follows the excruciating pain. This is the moment when peace is restored and I become one again. I have been awakened to my new beginning.

I snap out of my deep meditative silence, returning to consciousness. I feel free, as though a burden has been lifted. The storm clouds of my painful past have broken to reveal a shining light of love.

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