

# My Book of Scars

WORDS BY

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Let me tell you a story about a scar I have. I have a scar in the middle of my belly button. You probably wouldn't notice it, but it's there. My surgeon made that cut like she's made a million others. I wonder if she has made that exact same cut in that exact same spot on so many women's bodies that she can let her mind wander while she does it. Maybe she was thinking about what she was going to have for dinner, or her plans on the weekend, or that she needed to pick up cat food on her way home. She had a student in the operating room with her, but this scar was made by her hand. I have no reason to know that, but I do. The scar in my belly button was made with experience and surety. But this story isn't about that scar.

I have twin scars inside my hips that make the bottom corners of a triangle with my belly button scar at the peak. You might not notice these scars either. My triangle of scars came from the same surgery. They were exit ports for parts of my body I have never seen. What came out of those surgical nicks looked very much like earbuds connected to a wire. If that part of my body was laid out on a surgical tray next to a pair of earbuds, it would look like an organic and robotic female body part. It's strange to think I have lost a part of myself I have never seen. This makes the surgery and the loss less real. I believe that the procedure took place, but I have no attachment to what was removed because I've never touched it, and I've never seen it. No one can see this part of me is missing. But this story isn't about those scars.

I have two little oval scars the size of the tip of my pinky finger on my chest. They sit high and uneven, the one on the right trying to peek above my collar. These scars are afterthoughts. They appeared during a healing phase. I don't even really know what caused them, and I never thought to ask anyone. They were overshadowed by the big scars. Because they pale in comparison to the big scars, I often mistake them for small bruises. Then I remember they are the mystery scars, and the cycle repeats. All the tiny scars make a constellation shaped like a crystal on my abdomen. It's an imperfect crystal with marbling that makes it unique. But this story isn't about those scars.

I have matching gashes across my chest. The symmetry of these scars is missing. One scar is angry. It's jagged and red. It invokes pain and heat. On my body this scar is the queen. It is great, inspiring awe and fear, and it offers no apologies for the mark it makes. This scar is bold and brazen, daring to cover the area loudly. The crags and ridges of this scar scare me. The other scar is subdued. It is meekly apologizing for the chaos it caused. This scar is dressed like a lady in pale pink and pearls. It is dainty, petite, and gentle. With a delicate intent, it is trying to blend in and seep back into the landscape that it came from. It gracefully meanders, demure and quiet. Unlike the triangle of scars on my abdomen that were exit wounds for parts

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of me I have never seen, I felt the loss of my body acutely where these scars mark what used to be. These scars represent betrayal, loss, grief, despair, vulnerability, strength, will, and determination. These scars still catch me by surprise. There is so much meaning tied up in these scars. But this story isn't about those scars.

This story is about a scar that is an inch above my pubic bone and about three inches wide. This scar is the oldest scar on my body, and I love it the most. This scar gave me one of the greatest joys of my life. It is faded and fine. It reminds me of the gifts this body has given me. It is the mark of a dream come true. This scar represents a fierce, protective, unwavering connection. This scar tells a story of family and of love. This scar tells a story that has been told a million times and one time only. This scar marks a turning point in my life. It joins me to a sisterhood of women as old as time.

Until now, my cancer scars were a sign of ravagement and helplessness. But my favorite scar reminded me that I do have power over the scars that map my body. My scars have taught me that my truth is malleable. I can't tell the story of one scar without acknowledging the rest of my scars because they belong to the same body, to the same life. I wanted this story to be about my first scar, but the other scars are still too vivid not to warrant attention. What is new is that the scope of my story has changed. It is a welcome revelation that all my scars can be equal, none better, none worse. For the first time in a long time, I wanted to choose uncomplicated joy. I wanted to share the story of the love of my first-born child, and the hope and joy he gives me. This is how I am telling my story today. Tomorrow I might be on a different page. What marks this story as momentous is that now I have this page in my book. ♡

*Author's Note:*

*This story is dedicated to my Cancer Breastie, Marcia Lemon. I have had the privilege of walking my cancer journey with her, hand in hand, every step of the way. Our stories are so intertwined we can't tell one without the other. Ours is a friendship written in the stars. I can't thank Marcia enough for saying to me, "I found this fabulous magazine and podcast called WILDFIRE. There are these amazing writing prompts too. I really like the one that says, "Tell me a story about a scar you have." Thank you, Marcia, for always seeking new ways for us to heal, to connect, and engage with our sisters in breast cancer. I love you very much.*