

FALLEN STAR

A small growl sounded in John's throat. "You have no idea how happy I am to hear you say that."

In one fluid movement, he slipped his hand into her hair and brought his lips down to hers. The kiss was hard, demanding, and she melted into him, relishing the feel of his soft, eager lips. His hands smoothed over her shoulders, her sides, igniting her skin and making her body cry for more.

Drawing a slow, long line up her throat with his tongue, John snickered into her ear before drawing her earlobe into his mouth.

Squirming, reeling from the sensations, she grabbed his wrist and placed his hand on her breast. He granted her one gentle squeeze before his fingers moved to the top of her blouse. His mouth claimed hers again, his tongue forceful and searching as he released the top button, then the second.

The cool air heated as he dragged his fingertips down her cleavage. She bit her lip, trying to deny her quivering skin. God, she wanted this. She wanted him.

She raked her teeth against the slight stubble shading his neck as her blouse fell to the floor. Fisting her hair in his fingers, he leaned her head back again, his mouth claiming her greedily as she removed his shirt one agonizing button at a time.

The room heated as he eased her against the wall. She felt trapped, but her skin ignited as he pushed against her. She wanted to steer him to the TV room, where they could sink into the couch, or even better, the bedroom, but the wall, shit, the wall would do just fine.

John pulled her leg up to his waist and pressed his erection against her. She groaned and sucked his tongue into her mouth, taking control and staking her own claim as she brushed the shirt from his shoulders.

He released the kiss. "Wait." He stepped back, exposing a clean, well-muscled chest and abs to die for. She had to contain herself from running her fingers across the ridges on his stomach before he reached for his shirt.

Tracy frowned. "What's wrong?"

John shifted and the change in light revealed three deep, round scars centered over his heart. Tracy gasped. Bullet wounds?

He fumbled with his shirt, slipping one arm back through the fabric, but she pulled the still-warm cotton from his hands. Now that he was bared to her, she didn't want him hidden from her ever again.

"Don't cover up," she said, moving closer.

John paled, clutching the fabric in his left hand and holding it over his heart, covering the scars. Tracy took his hand and gently drew it downward.

He tensed, stopping her. "Don't."

"What are you hiding from me?"

He lowered his gaze. "Bad memories."

He relaxed, and she eased the shirt away from his chest. The whitened indents stood proudly on his otherwise flawless skin. A long, white line trailed between them, maybe a surgeon's doing; a mark of courage. Survival. She reached toward the indents, but he grasped her hand. His fingers were cold.

"That's where you were shot?"

He nodded, looking away.

Her gaze traveled back over the indents. They were too close together to be an accident and all centered over his heart. Whoever shot him had intent to kill. She tugged lightly against his grip and he released her to explore the marks with her fingertips. The whitened skin seemed softer than the tanned flesh surrounding it.

He trembled slightly, his eyes closed. "I know it's awful. Let me put my shirt back on. I don't want you to have to look at this."

She ignored him, continuing to explore the scars with her fingertips. John's eyes remained closed.

"They're far from awful." She moved closer, placing a kiss on each circle.

John eased her away, holding her face between his palms. His shirt fell across the tops of her feet. "How can you say that? They're a constant reminder of that night."

His eyes quaked. So much pain. So much uncertainty. She wished she could whisk the hurt away, so they could truly be alone without the past wedging between them.

A gentle tug brought his hands to her lips. She kissed the backs of his fingers. His lips parted, his face worn, sad. She slipped her hands around his back, drawing him closer, and dragged her tongue along the surgical scar. He trembled with each movement.

She met his gaze. “They’re beautiful. These are the reason Dak came to you. They’re part of who you are, and without them, we never would have met. How could I ever think they were something awful?”

His face softened; his hands smoothed up her back. “Tracy?” John’s voice came as a whisper, a tentative sound that didn’t match the intensity that had resurfaced in his eyes.

She leaned up, her lips parted, inviting. She could take a kiss, force it, but she wanted him to break through this pain. She wanted to feel that he wanted her enough to push away the past, step away from his fears and into her heart.

His lips closed over hers. Warmth shot through her: firm, demanding, but gentle and honest at the same time. She relaxed into his embrace, soaking in his strength as he drew her closer. His tongue worshiped hers as her hands explored the curves of his sides, his back. His palms roamed her in turn before hesitating on the clasp of her bra.

“This needs to come off.” He unhooked her hands from his neck and slowly spun her. She held her hair up and shivered when the clasp released. His hands roved over her naked back, pushing the garment from her shoulders and to the floor. Suddenly bare, her skin drank in his heat, combatting the chill of the air conditioning. He kissed her cheek. His hands explored her stomach as he held her from behind. She lolled her head back and he rewarded her with a deep, searching kiss.

Humming with delight, she drew him deeper into her mouth. They’d waited too long to reveal this much desire to each other. Now that they’d started, she didn’t ever want to stop.

His hands inched up, stopping teasingly close to her breasts. She arched her back in offering, still languishing in the heat of his kiss. He swallowed her desperate whimper as his hands rose, worshiping her soft flesh.

“So beautiful,” he whispered, ushering her toward the couch.

He eased her back, placing soft kisses on her stomach while he unzipped her pants. She raised her hips, giving him easier access to shimmy the fabric down her legs and off.

She lay before him, naked except for a thin, lacy thong. His lips parted, and his glossy gaze traveled over her body. It was as if his eyes touched her, her skin shivering as he drank in all she had to offer.

Tracy reached for him and he eased his body over hers, pressing their chests together. He tensed as a fire erupted between their skin.

