

Scars

by marci stillerman

Ten minutes to closing the bartender warns the fourth time. Five geezers as if stuck by elastic glue to their chairs, rise to various elevations and sink back, still ten minutes to go. Dreading the finality of closing time, of exchanging warmth, light, conviviality for the loneliness of a rented room, hideous dreams, insomnia--the endlessness of night, they start a new game, comparing scars. Who hasn't got a scar to show, some flesh wound of memory. They ante fivers for the prize. . Alf bares his calf. Flat white ziz-zag ten inches long. Shard of glass fell from the Hancock Building in Chicago, a window on the 90th floor shattered during a wind storm, slashing through trousers as he crossed the street to meet Donna in the lobby of the Drake Hotel, Donna Utrelle from Roma, his new mistress. A deep blue scrawl links Johnny's left eyebrow to his scalp, puckering the skin between his eyes in a horizontal frown: New Years Eve--1944--a drunk poet signed his name on Johnnie's face with a syringe filled with indelible ink. You really want to see this? Martin, bending to show butt stitches, Unzipped pants settling around waterlogged ankles. Raped during college Hell Week in the wine cellar of Alpha Zeta Tau. The guy spread me wider'n the Grand Canyon, and rrrriiip! Another pitcher of beer is cajoled--the bartender palms the c-note--you're getting no change from this--drink up and get out. Ten fucking minutes and I call the cops. Time's running out. Who's next, who's next---Show your scar. Win the jack-pot. Max's chest is a mess of scar tissue, lung cancer. They gulp beer in a ferocity of pity and fear. Well, the Hell--- Max drains his mug__ Time's already run out for me. Hard act to follow, Paulie says, opening his shirt collar to reveal a necklace of luminous dots and dashes` stretching from shoulder to shoulder: Nosey reporter covering one of Africa's endless wars--- attempted decapitation by gin-crazed Zulu waving rusty blade. Genius Army surgeon sewed his head back on in a tent hospital buzzing with carnage flies. Eric's up--two minutes left, beer's warm and running low in the pitcher.

Lights out. Bar-tender waiting at the open door. Eric shrugs. No big deal. Quietly bares his arm, Right arm, just above the wrist tattooed in concentration camp blue, the numbers 375839. Prize goes to.....

