

Every Scar Tells a Story

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Angelo R. Senese

Archway Publishing (Nov 12, 2020)

Softcover \$20.99 (324pp)

978-1-4808-9394-8

Every Scar Tells a Story is an emotional novel in which trauma lives in women's bodies and hearts.

In Victoria K. Mavis and Angelo R. Senese's layered novel *Every Scar Tells a Story*, two women help each other recover from physical and emotional traumas.

Rhonda is a life coach whose freelance business is thriving, though, in her personal life, she's frozen by indecision; in the aftermath of a bad marriage, she's terrified to try another relationship. She also has a hopeless crush on her best friend.

Rhonda's new client, Liz, lives with a different kind of trauma: she survived a horrific brain injury in her adolescence and now walks with a crutch and a limp. Liz is ornery and reluctant to seek help, but she knows she needs to learn to live again. Together, the women navigate their challenges during their poignant, sometimes fraught sessions, as well as through flashbacks, through which they learn why they each struggle with letting go of their old selves.

Though there are melodramatic scenes in the novel, including of slammed doors and teary, adolescent outbursts, balance come through the relationship that Liz and Rhonda form, and as Liz pursues internal healing; Liz's initial flailing, and her adversarial approach to her coaching work with Rhonda, lessens over time. The women's conversations are strong and tense, bringing old hurts to the surface and revealing the deeper causes of their problems. Their frustration, and sometimes mutual dislike, is so palpable at times, though, that their ability to come together is puzzling.

Rhonda's first impression of Liz is stark and physical, underscoring Liz's permanent disability in an uncomfortable way that persists throughout the book, which also uses physical attributes and expressions to mark the progression of Liz's internal healing. Rhonda is not depicted as often; in scenes with her love interest, Justin, she explains why she feels like a wallflower. Her scars are more subtle than Liz's, but also represent deep pain.

When it comes to Rhonda and Justin's connection, the book indulges in romantic tropes, using Rhonda's attraction to, or boldness with, Justin as a yardstick for her healing. More accomplished is the story's consistency with finding the drama in everyday life; its focus on the significance of small events and gestures is a point of strength. From the wear pattern on Liz's boot to the way Rhonda sits back in her chair, the signs of their emotional baggage are inscribed into the minutiae of their words and behavior. This attention to detail is riveting; it transforms the women's ordinary coach-client relationship into a profound, challenging battle of wills.

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CLAIRE FOSTER (September 27, 2021)

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