

TABULA RASA

E02: REARRANGE ME

Episode One of Tabula Rasa can be read at: <http://bit.ly/1Evf8gx>

Foreword

There are Things that come crawling in the night. In the darkest hours. They crawl under your skin and along your spine in the silence that follows the falling apart of worlds. They come alive in your hate, thrive in your screams. These Things, they do not have names. Because people don't have words for everything, especially not for their own darkness. They put aside their Things and wait for time to erode them. But they forget that Things in the dark don't erode, they evolve.

This is the story of Melody Banks(es) and the Things that consumed her in the night.

"Unfortunately I remember who Melody was. Far more unfortunately, I remember what Melody could have been. She could have been *one* of the infinite kinds of Melody that life after seventeen presented her with. Instead, she chose an infinity," she paused and took a long drag from her cigarette. I sat opposite to her on an armchair surrounded by an absurd collection of paintings, books and shoes lined along walls and on shelves. The air was thick with the smell of cigarette and old perfume. As it always was.

"If you don't mind, could I have a cup of tea Ms...?" I asked.

She smiled. "Of course; and call me Red. I feel like Red today."

The apartment was above an abandoned clinic that was part of a run-down warehouse in an industrial area that did not exist. Neither in maps nor in minds. She prefers this place, it reminds her that she does not exist for the world. Her home was a disturbing amalgamation of her 'skins'. I had come often and heard enough to remember how many lifetimes were crammed into those shelves and under the floors. 29 to be exact. She however, never remembered. She came back with the tea that momentarily aired the room with jasmine. "Where did I leave off?" she asked, pouring out the tea in mugs. "Ah -- yes,

Melody."

This was going to be a long day. "Melody's infinity began in a white-washed backroom of a clinic in an industrial area on the outskirts of the city. A few months ago, she had found a business card in the front pocket of her jacket with the address to the clinic and the following -- "You can always change your mind." Melody liked to believe that what eventually led her to the clinic was a series of unfortunate events. It was not. It was the quiet and exponentially increasing exhaustion lodged inside her. The permanence of a dangerous boredom that made her decide that this world was a waste of time. After an impromptu interview that established she would take the risk of being a test subject and would like the name River, they strapped her to the helmet and she was gone." She had been staring at the floor all this time, as if narrating from a memory that would fade as soon as she looked up. When she did look up, there was a puzzled frown, I suspected the memory had muddled. "I'm sorry, was I being a bore?"

"Not at all" I replied encouragingly.

She laughed, "Forgive me,

my head is a warzone."

She recounted all the leftover memories of her 'skins', the further she went into her head, the more disjointed and random her stories became. She used different accents -- sometimes different languages.

"Existing for too long would clutter my heart. So I scrape and fill and scrape again until whatever I was or whatever I needed to be never existed. There is a sweet bright nothingness at the beginning where the world is new with a silky smooth shine. You find an ocean inside your heart instead of the clutter of you; you paint your illusions and simply decide whether you want to like tea or coffee for the rest of your life. When you taste that nothingness, you want to come back to it. Over and over again." She had slumped into her armchair -- the illusion of youthfulness was gone.

Melody, River and Red and everyone after them did not exist anymore. They were fragmented realities inside a head. If you could see it, the inside of her head would be a rusting collection of shattered glass, sharp edges juxtaposed. Forever in collision and collusion. I could see the blankness at the edge of her eyes,

now sunk and wrinkled with decades. Age had left behind cracks that her helmet could not rearrange. The oblivion had settled in. This was entirely normal for a mind that had become too much. Her existence had reduced into a cycle of crash-burn-reboot-repeat.

It was time to leave. "Would you like a change, then?" I asked, standing up.

"I need the change, the darkness, the cold shiver..." she whispered.

I nodded. "And your documents --" "Don't give me that nonsense," there was anger in her whisper. "I don't deal with documents, they are worthless. You know what they look at when they interview you? The eyes. They search for hopelessness and self-pity, the embarrassing kind of self-pity that does not let you get up in the morning or say your prayers. They look at your eyes and they know. If they like what they see, they'll take you in and scrape you out and for the rest of all your lives you will find yourself going back to the helmet. They will convince you to believe it gives you refuge, it gives you hope. And maybe it does, for the first few times. After that it makes you too hollow for refuge or hope. After that, it's an addiction. It's..."

"I understand." I never understand. There were questions I wanted to ask and things I wanted to remind her -- but that was against protocol. She closed her eyes and pointed in the direction of the front door.

"Goodbye, Melody." I whispered to the semi-unconscious figure.

The phone rang as I stepped outside the building -- "Smith, Personal Relations" -- "Yes, I just wrapped it up." -- "No, no. I think we could manage one more change for her." -- "We need to put her under Project Lethe this time."

I looked behind and saw what-was-once-Melody and felt-like-Red-today petting a dog. It was lost, that was only reason anyone or anything came here, and it had an orange collar around its neck. She caught my eyes and smiled.

"There is no cure for living." My words seemed small and apologetic against the decayed gloom of the place, of her eyes. I turned and walked away.

