

# TABULA RASA

## E03: UNFAMILIAR CEILINGS

SHUPROVO ARKO

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

Ambien.  
 Restoril.  
 Halcion.  
 Silenor.

He'd managed to amass quite a collection of pills in his six months of being alive. The man who sold them to him said that two would be enough to knock out a horse.

"Three it is then" he said as he gulped them down.

As he lay there, not dying, but floating, he prayed for no dreams.

"I just want to sleep. Please let me sleep."

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"Please look directly into the device when you identify yourself."

"My name is Anthony Blake. I currently work for an advertising firm downtown. I am 27 years old."

"Thank you for your cooperation, Mr Blake. Have a nice day."

All second generation Tabula Rasa clients were contractually obligated to visit the office for weekly evaluations. There would never be any people in the room. Only a small camera set up on a tripod and a dull robotic voice giving him instructions. On the first evaluation, Anthony had been quite nervous and had spent around 15 minutes talking about his childhood and anything he could remember from his past. As more weeks passed, the less he needed to say for the evaluation to end. Soon he left out his childhood, his parents and his hometown. He wanted to leave out his age too because he felt that it wasn't his. But that felt wrong. He'd always end up awkwardly adding that in the end.

Today was his 12<sup>th</sup> evaluation.

"Please look directly into the device when you identify yourself."

"My name is Anthony Blake."

"Thank you for your cooperation, Mr Blake. Have a nice day."

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"I grew up on a farm in upstate Dans- no, Sarcoma, it was Sarcoma. I lived with my family - my parents and my two brothers. I can't remember what we

grew... maize? Maybe. I remember my Dad woke up at like 6 a.m. and practically dragged me and my three brothers up from bed. I used to get furious about that then, but it's pretty funny now. Then my Dad would scream my mother's name at the top of his voice from two floors down and tell her to wake up. He'd be like... he'd be- uhh. The name... my mother's name... uh."

This date was not going well.

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Anthony dreamed of his childhood often. His dreams for some reason would always be monochrome, in varying tones of golden yellow. As soon as he drifted off he would wake up in his room bathed in sunlight, staring at his ceiling.

The house his father built wasn't the sturdiest or best planned, but the sweat and blood that went

into making it kept it upright.

Anthony's room was the smallest in the house (except maybe the broom closet) and had terribly low ceilings. He didn't mind though. The low ceiling with a supply of chalk and crayons made for the biggest drawing board a boy could ever wish for. He drew his family and his farm, his favourite cow and their dog Milo. He wrote down his birthday and the birthday of Clarissa, the girl he used to like, so that he'd remember to give her a present. He incorrectly spelled out his parents' name and corrected them when he grew older, blushing to himself a little. The ceiling was his whole life, weaved through carefully drawn stick-figures.

For the first few weeks he'd dream of other things too.

He dreamt of St. Joan High School and his first heart-

break, that Junior League ballgame trophy he won with his friends, the lazy afternoons beside the river. But soon they stopped and every time he slept he dreamt of the farm and the ceiling. And every other day the ceiling began to change. One day the family portrait vanished. Another day took away Milo and the cow. Soon the names of his friends began to disappear, both from the ceiling and his mind. His birthday disappeared. Clarissa disappeared. And soon enough, every dream was the same. It was of him being strapped to his bed, not being able to look anywhere but upwards, staring at just the one name scribbled over and over a thousand times on the wall.

"Who is Paul Wickens?"

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Today is Anthony's 20<sup>th</sup> evaluation.

"Please look directly into the device when you identify yourself."

"..."

"Please look directly into the device when you identify yourself."

"My name is... Anthony Blake."

"Thank you for your cooperation, Mr Blake. Have a nice day."

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Tomorrow will be Anthony's 28<sup>th</sup> evaluation. Seven whole months of being him. Tonight he drank to himself, not that he needed an occasion anyway. He'd been drinking to himself for a couple of weeks now. With every drink his thoughts drowned out and his voice gained vigour. His bedside table became his soapbox and his neighbours his audience. So what if they complained? He was made to be charismatic. It's not like he could change how he was made.

"Every day of life is another reason to celebrate. I should celebrate even more because my life is more special than yours. I'm more special than all of you. Than. All. Of. You. Special. Yes..."

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Today is Anthony's 28<sup>th</sup> evaluation.

"Please look directly into the device when you identify yourself."

"My name is Paul Wickens. I want to apply for the Tabula Rasa project."

