

TABULA RASA

E05: IT'S A GIRL!

MALIYAT ANIQA NOOR

Episode Four of *Tabula Rasa* can be read at: <http://bit.ly/1L4Of2n>

The blur resembling a warehouse shifted and sharpened until an old barn materialised before Paul Wickens. Summer was waning, so he expected the barn to be full of newly harvested maize. But what was he doing here? How had he even gotten here?

The wooden doors of the barn were the colour of dried blood, and Paul suddenly remembered asking his Dad why they couldn't paint the barn blue, like a sky over an ocean. His Dad hadn't bothered to grace the question with an answer. A memory! Paul relished the taste of remembering and he tried to picture his Dad's face. It was futile, he couldn't even decide if his Dad had blue eyes.

So he stood before the doors and ran his fingers over the gnarled planks. *Tabula Rasa*. He didn't know why, but he was here because of *Tabula Rasa*. Smith had interviewed him and told him they'd contact him in a month. No, he never got to his interview because the clinic had disappeared. Smith had held his hand while some sort of helmet was being placed over his head. No, Smith was ignoring his calls. There was an image tucked away at the back of his mind of the white ceiling of a lab and the name Anthony

Blake scribbled across its surface. Too much! Too much! His feet buckled from underneath him as his brain threatened to implode. Glass worms swam into his vision. Without intending to, Paul slid open the doors of the barn and fell inside. Crumpled on the ground on all fours, he lurled.

A girl yelped in surprise. Still feeling giddy, Paul tried to wipe the regurgitated coffee from his lips. He wobbled up to a somewhat standing position and looked over

at the girl. But she seemed just as indiscernible as the people from his memories.

"I'm so sorry to have startled you. I'm not feeling well, as you've seen. I... don't know where I am actually. I... my name is Paul. Paul Wickens."

The girl stared down at the pool of Paul's stomach contents crawling toward the sacks of maize. "Hello. I'd tell you my name too but I don't know what it is. I also don't know where I am. I just woke up over there." She pointed at a corner.

However Paul's gaze didn't follow her hand to the corner she was indicating, it was stuck on her hand; specifically on the tattoo visible just below her wrist. "Can I see that? Your tattoo," he whispered.

"Uhm. Sure." She hesitantly showed it to him.

"*TabulaRasa#30*. What do you know of *Tabula Rasa*? Are you a test subject?" He was breathless.

"*Tabula... Rasa?* Huh? Listen, I don't have any answers. I'm as blank as a slate can get." She smiled a little.

Paul furrowed his brow and wondered. *Tabula Rasa* had probably altered this girl's personality. Why else would she have the tattoo? Could she be an employee? Smith didn't have a tattoo though, did he? But she had no memories, so she had to be a subject; unless she was pretending.

"Hey, I know how hard it is, I'm blank

on a lot of things too," he offered.

The girl said, "Nah, it's not too bad. The world feels new with a silky smooth shine. I can find an ocean inside my heart instead of the clutter of me. You know, I think I like smoking. I'm craving a cigarette now."

"Sorry, no cigarettes on me. But you *need* the clutter of you. Who are you without it?" he said.

"I'm a white-canvas person, free of the burden of the past and exempt of the obligations of personality. I get to collect new marbles for my mind. I'm no one, so I can be anyone."

Paul stared at the dreamy expression on the girl's face. "You might have been a poet before you lost your memories. You sure talk like one."

She grinned. "I might I have been. I don't know. See, I can be a poet all over again if I want to. Memories are seriously overrated, don't you think?"

The girl was ridiculous. She seemed utterly delighted to have no idea of who she was. Ignorance was her bliss.

"What do you think I should call myself, Paul Wickens?" she asked after a minute of silence.

"*Tabula Rasa*, you have a tattoo of it already." He watched her eyes, he wanted to catch a spark of recognition. But she seemed clueless.

"No. It's too conspicuous. A girl with no memory should have an inconspicuous name. I'd call myself Barn. But that's a tad boring for my taste."

"Well if you want to stay true to your origins. The barn's red. You can call yourself Red." Talking to this girl was easy, Paul felt at ease for the first time in what seemed like ages. His head wasn't hurting and the fact that he couldn't remember much didn't seem to matter.

"Hmm. I can't decide if I want to be called Red before I see how red the barn is. I haven't seen the outside yet. Come to think of it, I've loitered here too long. I really should be leaving."

"Wait. Where are you going to go? What are you going to do?" he asked, astonished.

"Haven't the faintest."

"But... that's..." He didn't finish the sentence because he finally realized there was nothing wrong with not knowing. *Tabula Rasa* may or may not have wiped his mind, but this was his chance to be someone else. Wasn't that what he'd wanted all along?

He was about to say goodbye when a gruff voice behind him shouted, "PAUL! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

Paul turned to face the man he recognized as his dad. He expected a rush of memories to come back to him. But he all could remember was, this man with the storm in his eyes was undoubtedly his dad. He was glad he hadn't remembered everything.

The man Paul Wickens knew as Robert Louis phoned Smith.

"Hello?" said Smith.

"He's at his parents' farm and he's found Melody in the barn," Robert reported.

"Great. The tattoo was a nice touch, good thinking."

"What's going to happen to him now?" Robert asked.

"The presence of his parents and being in his childhood home should stabilize him. He might regain Paul or he might become someone else. We've kept both avenues open. We'll have to monitor him closely." Smith replied.

"Is that why we brought Melody here?"

"Yes. For now, she'll retard his reversion to Paul."

"For now?" Robert inquired, knowing he wouldn't receive an answer.

"Goodbye, Anthony." Smith cut the call.

