<http://farragofiction.com/DearDiary/?truth=true>

# **Witherby**

## **Keeping Witherby's Diary Company :P**

July 10th, 2008

I found this Diary and was reading it. Captain said that it's snooping but I said that if it's online it's public and that means it's okay to read. I think it's a Diary that Witherby was keeping. I think Witherby isn't keeping it anymore. I think it's abandoned. That is so lonely.

So I decided I would write in it so it wouldn't be lonely anymore.

What should I write about though?

Witherby is so silly, why have a diary when you don't write about yourself in it? Does Witherby always think about his friends and nothing else? Doesn't he have a favorite animal? My favorite animal is snails because they are viscous and have little houses.

Thinking about snails reminds me about the new Abnormality that joined us. Her name is River. Witherby and River did not get along when they first met. I wonder why Witherby didn't write about that?

Wait. Or did he? Why does he have to talk himself into circles instead of just saying what he means?

When he met River, it was very confusing. Everything was frozen and everyone was upset. Then Neville went to go see Witherby and everything was fine again.

Captain said "The boy fits in now" and I asked Devona what he meant by that and she said a lot of things and sounded very smart but I was more confused afterwards.

Then I asked Neville and he explained about snails and houses and it all made sense.

River is a snail without a house. She's too big for a house. She's very viscous. So maybe like a slug?

River wanted to save everybody.

She couldn't.

She had to try.

Witherby didn't try to save anyone. Even though maybe he could have? So he's like a snail who has a house but doesn't appreciate it.

So they had a big argument about it.

Witherby got really sad because River wanted a house but couldn't have it and he didn't want a house but couldn't get rid of it. Because Witherby knew it was the right thing to do to try to save everyone even if it hurt you. But he didn't want to be hurt.

And then Witherby started hurting everyone? Or made them hurt themselves? That part I don't really understand.

Captain said it was like wanting something really badly but not being able to get it. He said that's what "guilt" is.

I told him that I can get anything I want.

He didn't want to talk any more after that.

Mood:Meloncholy

## **Birthday Musings #243, December 30th, 2021**

July 10th, 2008

Perhaps I should simply admit, if only to myself, that I only write to you, Dear Diary, when I am feeling contemplative about my important relationships, particularly on days important to them? Birthdays...

As I read over my last entry, I am struck by how... predictable my struggles are.

Once again I am fighting against feelings of guilt for separating myself from someone who I had previously trusted. I'll not claim that Camille's .... unique challenges weighed heavier on me than Ria's, however.

Ria...

We have come to more of an understanding together. I have seen her ups and downs and I trust her to stop well short of the abyss she spent her time sinking further and further into.

And she trusts me to, quite frankly, not allow a single mistake on her part cost her my friendship.

No, it is a different guilt that brings me to you, Diary.

An old one, one well scabbed over and yet... Here we are.  
  
Perhaps there is simply something about this, of all dates, that gets to me. The knowledge that this is the final new year any of us will experience this loop.

It is always a contemplative time for me.

My breath is warm and visible in this cold room. I do not feel overly emotional, nor like I might shatter at the slightest touch.

So what draws me to you, Diary?

Neville would say it doesn't matter. If a cursory glance does not reveal the source of my ill ease, I should just eat something nice and have a good time till it passes.

I do not believe he is wrong.

Yet here I am, picking and scratching at the wound to see what comes of it.

Perhaps I should simply begin listing the facts I know. A tactic, once again, drawn from Devona. How surprised the me new to the training team would have been all those loops ago, to find so much worth in the associations I have with others.

1. Camille was cursed to a life of eternal combat and few social connections long before we came to this universe.
2. Camille arrived to this universe well before anyone else did.
3. Camille appeared to have participated in loops in which we were present but not able to move forward with her to each new Universe.
4. My own first memories of this Universe were once Camille began forcibly throwing us into the Maze so we might enter the new one.
5. I started to hear the Guilt after that.
6. I started to Know things the others didn't. Things they should have known if they hadn't been split off from their own Sin.

I think I would like to stop listing off facts.  
  
 My breath has started to fade.

I must be close to some previously unexplored emotional pocket.

I can still remember... the first time I realized my boss was a monster. The weight of the sin on her was nothing new. The armor's curse ever lead her to be quick to combat.

The sound of Devona's head softly thudding to the carpet changed things.

Camille's expression had not changed a whit, even as the blood soaked into her gentle smile.

The others began screaming.

I.

I performed my duty.

I took her hand and did my best to ignore the corpse chill on it and gently lead her away from the body.

I was careful not to talk to her. Not to offer the tiniest shred of human connection. My instincts screamed at me to do so, to talk to her, to get her to open up and trust me so that she might be defanged.

But that was not the role I had to play.

I lead her to a desk and took out an Incident Report from back in our Corporation Days. I was grateful, in that moment, that Camille had always insisted we keep up the old trappings. I was... well aware WHY she did so. There was a refuge in work, especially bloody work such as ours. The armor allowed the words to flow on paper so long as they were about the job. Even if there were no abnormalities, not really, in this new Universe.

I knew every feeling, every whim, every horror that motivated her, even before my Patron began to make itself fully known. It was my job. To be the social lubricant. The ties that bind and helped us all perform our duty. I knew that inside she was screaming.  
  
So I watched, wordlessly, as she scratched out what had caused the Breach into the appropriate section.

The coffin. Devona had touched the coffin.

She wouldn't meet my eyes then.

But we both knew, we both HAD to have known... that that had not been part of the coffin OR the armor's previous containment procedure. Or part of its curse.  
  
 It couldn't drive you to act. Only punish you for going against its wishes with a swift death.

The curse that had wrapped itself around her throat was changing in this new Universe. Mutating.

And we all knew what to call former employees that had become driven to new action by an abnormality. Especially action that put other employees at risk.

Monster.

Before any of us... she was a monster.

And even as it began to spread, she was always out ahead of us. Plumbing increasingly new and strange levels of monstrousness.

And God help me but still I loved her.

How could I not?

Even as I realized I was the only one to remember fully Devona's death, when next the loop reset.

She kept together the people most important to me in the entire world, bound us with purpose both familiar and strange. She was the light that we flocked to in this strange dark Universe. Our leader.

And so I could not help but bear the guilt. Of the others, Devona probably noticed first. The way Camille started seeking out victims. She said nothing. I do not blame her for this. How could I when my lips were similarly sealed? My gun may have pointed at Camille occasionally, but never could I be sure enough I was in the right to pull the trigger.

When Ria noticed, there was no way to miss it. The tension in every line of Camille was clear as day as she refused to acknowledge the burden of guilt she was reaping. Ria's angry screams made both of the twins flee.

No one talked to anyone else for three days.

On the fourth, I brought a simple form to Camille, signed by Ria.

It documented the changes in the armor, and the new aspects of the curse it inflicted on (perfectly normal otherwise) employees. It was the armor, the form whispered, always the armor. Camille herself was not a monster.She had not changed, it insinuated. And when that same form went on to enumerate the ways in which this curse might be contained...well... Camille accepted it.

And there was peace again. A rotten sort of peace, one that sputtered Ria's flame and caused her to tread lightly around Camille, with the taste of that lie on her lips. But a peace nevertheless.

And so each and every one of us became complicit in Camille's sins. Not merely through the damnation of silence, but in enablement.

Those few loops where any attempted to challenge her world view resulted in our swift deaths.

What else were we to do?

What else was I to do?

And now... Now there is none of us free of sin. Not merely her's on our shoulders but our own. Each of us is a monster in our hearts.

The Twins, I think, are the gentlest of us. Seeking only to punish the guilty and then return home.

I had thought...

Before that day deep in that endless parking lot.  
  
 I had thought myself the lone holdout. Free of any Sin but those of my family I have chosen to take on.

And when the ice froze my heart and a tortured loop of my own endless hate for myself ravaged the world...

No.

I should not think on this now, Diary. It...

It's too much. Too fresh.

I...

Neville truly is the wise one between the two of us, isn't he, Diary.

What benefit have I gleaned from any of this?  
  
That I feel guilty for enabling Camille once upon a time?

That I regret becoming a monster with the rest of my family?

...

oh.

I see.

No.

It's not...

Change, Diary.

It's change.

All of us are changing but.

That's what was nagging at me. Like a shard of ice broken from my heart and racing through my veins.

When did our role change from performing the trappings of our old jobs for Camille's sake to... protecting the Universe?

When did CAMILLE change from doing the best she could with an unfair curse to... Defending it? Loving it? Loving the Universe for its own sake instead of merely as our home?

When did this strange new world go from better than the alternative to... The only thing that matters?

Was it hubris, then, to believe that the changes stopped with merely the monstrousness?

I must go talk with the others.

Thank you for listening, Diary, you have been a huge help.

Mood:Meloncholy

## **Birthday Musings #242, October 4th, 1993**

July 10th, 2008

**2:42pm**

I admit freely that I have not kept up with you as best I hoped, Diary. My previous entry, from a Loop that feels impossibly long ago, dealt with my burgeoning relationship with Neville.

I am happy to report that I do indeed look back on my resolution as a sign of growth.

I do still pursue my solitude for the better part of each of my Birthdays, but Neville has helped me view it as simply what I require to thrive, rather than some failing on my part.

It is a different relationship, and a different birthday that brings me to once again seek the cold clarity you provide.

I... confess I am unsure of how to broach the topic. Perhaps easing into it will help? Devona has provided ample example of ways in which uncomfortable information might be ambushed.

I write to you in a room of ice and frost, deep within the Maze. The chill is pleasant, and I remain unsettled by the lack of my breath hanging in the air. It is a sign, I am certain, of how... emotional. The confrontation that brings me here has left me.

In many ways, she is my opposite. Even before the strange changes this Universe has bestowed upon us, while I...

Perhaps a different angle? I find it hard to talk about this subject still.

Devona has been an invaluable help in understanding her Twin. I even found her 'shotgun' speech as to the consequences of breaking Neville's heart to be rather endearing. I had feared that our relationship would cool as I took her brother's attention from her. Quite the opposite: she appears to have unofficially adopted me.

She says that no one can be another's everything, that it's a good sign that Neville cares for me so much.

I envy the casual ease in which she can make such claims. The clarity she has in knowing that what she has can not be lost in a way that matters.

I really can see what Neville admires in her so much. His fears, though obscured, largely mirror my own. To see such a diminutive woman, afraid of so much, casually weather those same fears is... inspiring.

When I first met her and her brother, I admit to a sort of callous disregard. I was not here to make friends, but to perform a service and to perform it well. My role on the team was well-defined and I was committed to avoiding the same mistake I had made back on Control.

It hurt too badly to lose someone I cared for.

Camille, in her silence, was simple to avoid bonding with, at first. She was a competent leader, largely supportive, and her attention was easily ignored.

Ria...

Ria was a bonfire.

No.  
  
 Not yet.

I need more time.

Perhaps I can approach the topic from yet another angle?  
  
 I have little to discuss about the newest refugees from the Corporation. Lee-Hunter appear to be trapped in their own understanding of their roles from before. I do not understand their obsession with me, nor do I welcome their offer to help me "never be alone again, little man".

I was... Emotional. When I realized how proud I was of Ria. How far she had come. Seeing how Lee-Hunter flocked around her like lost little lambs. How they viewed her as a role model. It was then I realized that the changes she had made were permanent in every way that mattered.

When I realized I should forgive her.

Which is why the guilt that has consumed me for avoiding that very conversation has fed my Patron so very well all this time.

And this morning.

She approached me.

She called me out on my distance.

She told me that she understands it. That I gave her too much, too early, and was burned.

I saw her relapse too many times and could not bear to dance to that tune again.

She understood.

And it burned. I burned. With shame. With guilt. With hope.

Each and every member of Training was someone I loved, against all reason, even before this Universe claimed us. My family. After so long alone.

I am the first to admit I have...difficulty making decisions. Passing judgment. Always I revisited my past choices. Was it RIGHT to let myself have family? Was it moral? Would I be hurt? Would they? Never did I feel settled in my connections.

And Ria just... was a warm glow. A confident and unshakeable conviction in the bonds we all shared. Embers that went cold and dark seeing the disinterest in my eyes as she destroyed herself over and over.

I hate myself for that. And yet, Diary, what else could I do? I could not save her. I could not endure the fire of her self-destruction. All I could do was flee the blaze and watch from a safe distance.  
  
 Always knowing I'd never know, never for sure, that it was truly safe. So drawing ever further away.

And when the blaze was tamed, when it was a hearth once again that warmed those she loved. When she was growing again in that warmth and not in a spiral of rage and destruction...

I did not return.

I was comfortable where I had withdrawn to. Uncertain if I could withstand a sudden flare up.

And so, Diary, for her birthday, she approached me and asked if we could talk. Just talk. She wasn't demanding or expecting anything more. Certainly not forgiveness.

And it all poured out of me. The fears. The hopes. The regrets. The guilt.

And as it did I saw the most wondrous, most terrifying change in her. The cold embers flared to life and even as I flinched did not burn me. She had never reached the point where I could not be forgiven.

And so I went further, spoke of things I had told no one save Neville.

Of sins. Of loops ended in ways only I alone could ever remember. The catalog of ways in which she had killed us all.

The Universe won't let them remember. Knowing the End makes living until it unbearable. The beginning of the Second Arm is mine alone to bear in its fullness.

She stilled, but still that hearth burned and welcomed me.

Diary, I know I speak of times in which I am perhaps imprudent with my emotion. Neville has called me out on this, not, as I would have assumed, in the excessiveness of my feelings, but in quite the opposite. I claim myself out of control merely because I *have* those emotions, even as I impassively take no action. It is, evidently, difficult to tell from the outside when I feel I am uncontrollably emotional.

Ria, dearest Diary, is my opposite.

My heart broke seeing her tears. Seeing the devastation my words brought. But even through them she smiled at me and offered sincere thanks. She understood, now, why I had withdrawn.

How could I not, knowing exactly what her flames felt like?

Still, I was misinterpreted. She began to ready herself to leave, to assume that I had offered up an excuse for my Sin.

And so I embraced that warmth. That terrifying, welcoming warmth. And I told her I didn't want to be a safe distance away. Not anymore. That I wouldn't let myself burn. But nor would I continue to avoid the warmth for fear of that.

I thanked her for the conversation, for helping me find my way out of my own guilt. For helping to thaw my heart and thus return me to my family.

I do not know what the future holds, Diary. Is this a mistake? Is it the first step towards actual healing and growth?

Will the next time I die to her fire hurt all the more for the betrayal? Am I to forever be the Frog to her Scorpion?

I do not know. I *can* not know.

However, Neville has taught me that that is itself a form of grace. I cannot change the things I can not know. I can change how I react to them.  
  
 And I choose forgiveness. I choose trust.

I pray that I will not regret this act of faith.

Mood:Meloncholy

## **Birthday Musings #203: July 10th, 2008**

July 10th, 2008

**7:35 am**

It hardly seems important that today I am another day older, in the face of how many times I have repeated this exact date, even occasionally down to the very year.

And yet, I find myself craving quiet solitude and reflection.

I've let Neville and the others know I will be back in time for tonight's celebration.

I... have regrets that I prefer my alone time when, for every other birthday, we make a day of it. I know it's not to the other's preference. Devona in particular, appears to appreciate a day in which her attention to detail is celebrated. (Without her careful attention we would not even know when our days of birth are, as it was hardly a focal point during our time at the Corporation).

But needs must be done.

**1:11 pm**

It appears that each iteration, it is slightly easier to reach the Maze from our own territory. I really must ask the team to investigate if this corresponds to a decrease in the time humans can remain in our territory safely.

I wish it were possible to map the Maze. Upon entry I was in that disgusting room of pigeons, filth, and insects. I should not have worn a dry clean only suit.  
  
I even encountered that timeless Wanderer that can only be referred to in the second person. Ria claims it is directly connected to our gracious Patron, (and if Parker can be believed in his more lucid ramblings, our Jailor) that corporate monster of mazes and money. I fail to see how, but I have faith in her powers of observation.

In any case, I eventually found my way to a room of desks and chalkboards where I now sit. Its melancholy mood matches my own, so I think it comes time to put my thoughts to paper.

I will engage in the conceit that this journal is a separate entity that I am having a conversation with, as this is a common feature of diaries.

**3:33pm**

Dear Diary,

I have, as of late, had more worries on my mind than ever before. I apologize for not writing more, yet even in this desolate place putting the words outside my own head comes with great difficulty.

I am, to be frank. Dating Neville.

This, of course, goes against my standing policy to avoid attachments. As previous years detailed, my increasing comfort with the team has intermittently been a source of comfort and paranoia.

I do not know why I crave their warmth even as it burns me.

To care is to risk so much.

There is no getting around the fact that they are monsters. If I cared to, I could detail each of their sins in numbers they no doubt have little recollection of.

And yet.

Each attempt I make to separate myself from their messy entanglements leaves me feeling...

Cold.

Alone.

Faded.

Perhaps it is some failing of mine that I no longer feel at my best if I am wholly separated.

But Neville...

It is... unfortunately easy to miss the man's depth. To dismiss him as some form of meat head or, more charitably, someone who cares only about numbers and figures and misses the human element.

Certainly, he has never proven any skill with my line of work.

But I digress. What is essential is that Neville has an uncanny knack to see to the very heart of any truly important matter, even as he misses so many of the fine details.

Recently, I found myself in an argument with him, and, in the wake of it, I felt devastated. How could we make this relationship work if we disagreed? Why didn't he care enough to know how I felt without me having to put things to crude and insufficient words or actions?

Some time after, Neville came to me and asked me, very bluntly, about my other relationships. What made them work, what made them fail. He listened patiently to my halted explanations and...

Suffice it to say he shed light on the matter by scattering my preconceived notions. Relationships take work. It is not a sign of failure when it fails to be effortless. It is not a sign that I am, in some way, unfit for human connection.

I am ashamed to say I lost a bit of control and was quite emotional when I called that a lie. Clearly, I was under the impression, his relationship with Devona is the effortless ease with which all others must be judged inferior.

He got quiet at that.

He said he agreed that he and Devona have a really strong connection. He asked me why I thought that didn't take \*work\*. Work to not be codependent. Work to understand each other when they were so different. Work to find ways to make their values compatible. He told me they had plenty of arguments, that they even had arguments ABOUT their arguments (he is, quite apparently, a processor, emotionally, while Devona can fall victim to anxiety spirals if disagreements aren't addressed immediately).

And yet, both of them care enough to put the work in to find ways to make things work. Over and over again. A choice made each day out of love.

There is an icicle in my heart when I think of just how much they have between each other. When I think that the non-platonic nature of my relationship with Neville in no way automatically trumps the relationship he has with his Twin. To think that even the desire for that may be a Sin.

And yet.

I have endeavored to learn this skill I have shunned for so long as beneath me. I want to learn what Neville has to teach me about putting in the work and risking everything for the right to \*care\* as deeply as I am able.

I can only hope that I don't read back on this entry in future years as a sign of madness or irresponsibility. I hope, genuinely and truly, that I look back on this resolution as a sign of growth.

Mood:Meloncholy