

Tattoo

Michelle Rene

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A hospitalized girl is roused from a coma, waking to a world where Judgment Day has come and gone. Michelle Rene's *Tattoo*, a novella from a press specializing in the form, juxtaposes postapocalypse with rebirth as old forces revisit a new generation.

Because the Maker's hand tattoos citizens' stories on their bodies as they're happening, there are no secrets anymore. Whole professions are reimagined; police read skins rather than collecting evidence, while tattoo artists traffic in illegal skin alterations. Skin's not just a testimony to the outside world, it's also a record of a person's individual identity and memory. Change the skin, change the person.

When Jane Sparrow, a bald young woman bearing no tattoos, suddenly appears on the streets of Dallas, she's an unknown quantity, even to herself. For most, her blank skin threatens the status quo. No tattoos means she's accountable only to herself. While the system seems intent on making her disappear, five people—an insane mother, a young savant, a prison guard, a tattoo artist, and a lawyer—see something quite different: “everything frail and true left in the world.”

When people's bodies are inscribed with their stories, there's no such thing as merely skin-deep. In Rene's redemption story, surfaces reveal deep truths about humanity. And according to the powers behind Jane Sparrow's advent, nothing signals this more than blank skin, symbols of frailty and fragility, “precious treasures to be treated with kindness and love.” Of course, this is also a world where gods and people are trying for redemption one more time, so there are no guarantees that they've got the formula right just yet.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March/April 2018)

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