

## Numb

Sirens wailed outside Paul Richard's office. He looked up from the stack of papers he had been organizing, and lifted the blinds of his window. Two police cars sat in the parking lot, lights flashing as a policeman walked to the psychologist's office.

Paul opened the door, staring into the face of a policeman with a rather impressive moustache.

"Paul Richard?" the man asked. Paul nodded.

"One of your patients has set their school on fire."

*Last Week . . .*

Paul opened the door of his office with a sincere smile. It always helped soothe the patients and reassure their parents that their children were in good hands. Paul was a child psychologist, and loved his work.

"Hello Dr. Richard, we have Annabel Wilson for her appointment," a pretty woman with brown hair explained, holding the hand of a blond child. A tall man stood behind them.

"Yes, of course, please come in Mrs. Wilson," Paul smiled, stepping aside to let them through.

"I see you have no waiting room, that's quite unusual," Mr. Wilson commented, looking around the room. There was a large sofa and a chair, both comfortable looking. Scattered about the room were various toys and art supplies meant for the patients.

"My practice is still not big enough for a waiting room, Mr. Wilson," Paul explained as he sat down in the chair. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson sat down on the couch, letting their child play. She immediately grabbed a crayon and started drawing a flower.

“Please call me Joe,” Mr. Wilson insisted.

“And you may call me Mary,” his wife added.

“Of course. Please tell me a bit about your family life. Does Annabel have any nannies or babysitters? Does she go to a daycare?” Paul asked, picking a clipboard off of the table that sat next to his chair.

“No, I stay at home and watch her when she’s not at school; she just started kindergarten,” Mary replied. “And before you ask, there are no problems at home, Joe and I are very happy together.” She squeezed her husband’s hand for good measure.

“So, now that I have a bit of background information, what seems to be troubling you about Annabel?”

“Annabel has been doing some things that are very out of character for her . . .” Mary trailed off. “She’s been saying that there are voices in her head, and that they tell her to do things. We’re worried she has schizophrenia.”

“She’s not a very imaginative child, so it worries us,” Joe explained. Paul nodded, deciding not to rule out schizophrenia yet.

“Has she ever acted out because of these voices?” Paul asked.

“Not at home. Her teacher says that a few of the students have started to stay away from her. She scares them. She could be starting to act on the voices, but this only started a few days ago. Please help us, we’ll do anything we have to in order to make her well again,” Mary practically sobbed. Her head was pressed into her husband’s shoulder. Paul could see that this was a very serious case.

“She’s such a sweet child, and we love her with all our hearts. But the thought that she could be terrifying to other children, the thought that she could be something other than our little girl . . . it’s a terrible thought,” Joe said.

"I would like to speak to Annabel alone. Please wait in my office, it won't take any longer than five minutes," Paul said, ushering the Wilsons into his office, which was much more sophisticated than the room they had just left.

Paul closed the door and turned to Annabel. She had stopped drawing and was looking at him.

"Do mommy and daddy think I'm a monster?" she asked. Paul softened a bit.

"No, sweetheart, they're just worried about you. Would you like to talk about your imaginary friends?"

Paul asked, crouching down to her level.

"Do you mean Gabe and Luke? They're not pretend, they came to me," she said, twirling a strand of her hair.

"Gabe and Luke?" Paul felt that he knew the names, but shifted it aside. "Have they ever told you to do things? Bad things?"

"No, they both want me to do good things. But different good things. There are some kids I don't like in class, Mandy and Lucy. They hog all the crayons and never get any questions right in class. I think they're numb," Annabel said, frowning.

"Numb?" Paul asked. What was that supposed to mean?

"Mommy says dumb is a bad word, so I use numb. Anyway, Gabe said I should make friends with them, but I didn't think that was a good idea. Luke said that maybe I should stand up to them and tell them what I thought, so I did that. Gabe got mad at me and said Luke was a bad boy. Then Luke and Gabe got into a fight and Gabe hasn't come back. I don't want him to," Annabel stated. "They also tell me how to use my powers. Gabe wasn't much help. He only taught me silly things. Luke taught me better things, that's why I like him."

“What powers do you have?” Paul asked. For a kid that supposedly wasn’t that imaginative, this was very intricate.

“I can do things. But mommy and daddy don’t know. I can’t use them around people that love me, it’s a rule. Do you want to see?” Paul nodded, expecting a little magic trick. But it was far from it. Across the room, a teddy bear rose into the air, and flew into Annabel’s grip. Paul was openmouthed. This wasn’t possible. It just wasn’t.

Paul had spoken to Mary and Joe afterwards, but hadn’t mentioned Annabel’s trick. He just kept his mouth shut, but he knew he would pay the price later.

*Present Time . . .*

The policeman had said two children were seriously injured and might not make it, the same two that Annabel didn’t like. The K-9 unit had reported no evidence of a starter fluid for the fire, which was impossible. The fire had spread so quickly there had to be *some* accelerate. Eyewitness reports said that Annabel raised her hands and yelled “No one defies the righteous!”, causing the fire to ignite.

Paul was now in an interrogation room with Annabel. Despite himself, he was scared. Policeman stood guard outside the room.

“Annabel? What happened? You can tell me, you know,” Paul cooed, trying to coax a confession out of her so he could leave.

“You know what I can do. *He knows what we can do, Annie.* Yes, you know what we can do. I should never have told you. *Do what I told you to, Annie. He’s just like those other two, mean and dumb*”

The two voices vibrated throughout the room, and Paul knew something was wrong. One of the voices sounded like a man's. Paul made for the door, but crumpled to the ground as a searing pain shot through his arms and into his heart. The police ran through the door.

"And now you are just numb," Annabel whispered, with a devilish smile.