

TREATMENT
by
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FADE IN:

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

A bobblehead of a creepy robot wobbles atop a large desk.

ALICE (20), wearing hospital blues, stares at it from the overstuffed couch as if willing it to stop.

DR. DEFRIES (50s) watches above the rim of his glasses.

DR. DEFRIES

Alice.

Alice startles back to her session.

ALICE

What?

DR. DEFRIES

I asked how you are sleeping.

ALICE

That bobblehead is really annoying.

The bobblehead wobbles, no sign of stopping.

DR. DEFRIES

Did you have the dream again?

ALICE

It's always the same.

DR. DEFRIES

Anything different this time?

Alice closes her eyes.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A large home burns brightly in the night. The lights of fire trucks approach. Smoke fills the air.

YOUNGER ALICE (12) stands across the street among a dozen other onlookers. She stares fixedly at the flames while the people around her talk and shuffle about.

She unclenches her fist and looks at the book of matches in her hand.

People around her shout as a hand bangs against an upper floor window, leaving bloody streaks on the pane.

The faces of two children appear at the window, their hair on fire.

A chair smashes through the window. Flames explode in a jet from the sudden opening, engulfing everything within.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE

Alice opens her eyes and wrings her hands.

ALICE
No. It's always the fire.

Dr. Defries straightens up in the chair opposite her. He pulls a prescription pad from his jacket pocket.

DR. DEFRIES
I'm going to adjust one of your medications. Just a minor tweak to help you sleep better.

A banging startles Alice. She looks at the window in a panic, then at Dr. Defries. He continues writing on the pad.

More banging, all around. Alice covers her head. She peeks out at the bobblehead. It's bobbing faster.

DR. DEFRIES
There we go. We should see an improvement in two or three days.

BANGBANGBANG! Alice leaps up and faces the window. Bloody handprints smear across the lower panes.

ALICE
No, no, no, no, no...

DR. DEFRIES
Is something wrong?

Dr. Defries's hair is gone, his scalp burned. His nose is charred and his face blistered. No lips cover his blackened teeth, but his eyes are completely normal, and he looks at her with concern.

Alice backs away screaming. Behind Dr. Defries, the bobblehead is jumping on the desk.

DR. DEFRIES
Alice! It's Dr. Defries!

Dr. Defries reaches a badly burned hand out to her, the fingers charred to the bone.

Alice screams again and bolts from the room.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Alice collides with the wall opposite the door. She looks up the long empty hallway, confused.

She looks behind her. The large windows are barred with metal grating, and it's night.

Behind her, a dark figure runs across the hall with a pitter-patter. Alice spins around, searching the gloom.

ALICE
It's just a dream. Just a dream.

Alice slowly makes her way up the corridor. She stops at bloody footprints leading into it.

ALICE
Oh, fuck no!

She turns right into the outstretched hands of a BURNED CHILD. Empty eye sockets turn up to her.

BURNED CHILD
(raspy)
Mama?

Alice screams and shoves the Burned Child away. She runs up the corridor.

She rounds a corner and is sent sprawling by a mop bucket. She hits the wall hard as water splashes around her.

JANITOR (O.S.)
You okay, miss?

Alice opens her eyes. A burned hand reaches for her. It's the man in the window, the one in the house.

Alice kicks away from him.

JANITOR
I won't hurt you. I just want to
see what will happen if I do this.

The Janitor flicks a lit match at her. She frantically brushes it off her lap. He throws another. And another.

Alice picks herself up and runs back the way she came as the corridor behind her erupts in flame.

She runs sobbing past the Burned Child, who blindly reaches out for her.

She reaches the psychiatrist's office. In the doorway is a life-sized version of the bobblehead, only it's a charred ruin. It seems to nod as she dashes by.

She runs right up to the barred window and starts banging on the grate, crying and screaming.

Over her shoulder, she sees BURNED CHILD #2 shuffle out of the encroaching flames, hair on fire.

BURNED CHILD #2
Didn't anyone tell you not to play
with matches?

She bangs her fists on the grate over and over, but it's the same sound she heard in the street, the sound of hands banging on glass.

She screams again--

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

The bobblehead wobbles atop the desk.

Alice stares at it from the overstuffed couch.

Dr. Defries watches her above the rim of his glasses.

DR. DEFRIES
Alice.

Alice startles back to her session.

ALICE
What?

DR. DEFRIES
I asked how you are sleeping.

INT. RETCON INSTITUTE - DAY

Alice lies in a brightly lit bed molded to her body. Electrodes connect wires from her head to a console above her. She looks almost peaceful.

Dr. Defries stands at the foot of the bed with a MAN, a WOMAN, and a TEENAGER.

DR. DEFRIES

Our process allows the patient to tap into the subconscious and confront the trauma directly, in a safe and productive manner.

The Man smiles and nods, already sold. The Woman looks more skeptical.

WOMAN

So he'd be plugged in like this for months?

DR. DEFRIES

Three to six months is pretty standard. But compare that to the years or even decades of traditional therapy.

The Woman looks doubtfully at the Teenager. He picks at his elbow and stares at Alice as if willing her to rouse.

WOMAN

And it works? It can bring my boy back?

DR. DEFRIES

He'll be better than ever.

The Woman smiles and nods. The Man puts his arm around her.

The Teenager follows them almost instinctively as they leave. He stops as he passes a desk and picks up the bobblehead of a robot.

TEENAGER

What's this thing?

Dr. Defries stops and looks.

DR. DEFRIES

Just a trinket my kids gave me.

The Teenager sets the bobblehead down and follows them out. The bobblehead wobbles and wobbles.

THE END