

Chapter 3

Annabelle's Playroom

“Wow!” said Kim. “Look at all this stuff!”

Inside Annabelle's playroom were all kinds of toys and furniture. Everything in the room was covered with a thick layer of dust. Clearly, the room had not been used for many, many years, but it was evident that the room had belonged to a little girl just like them.

“Who owns all this stuff, Erin?” Kim could barely contain herself as they climbed up the last two steps into the room.

“Annabelle. Whoever that is.” answered Erin. “It was her playroom, after all.”

The girls walked over to a large wooden cabinet and opened the heavy wooden doors. Inside were three shelves filled with beautiful dolls. On the bottom of the cabinet was a drawer with beautiful brass handles dangling in front of it.

“Oh!” exclaimed Erin, staring at the wonderful collection. “This one is so beautiful.” She picked up a porcelain doll with

a long lace and red velvet dress. The doll had very long, soft hair that someone had brushed and braided carefully.

“I think I'll name her Annabelle after her owner,” she whispered. She hugged the doll close to her chest.

Kim reached up and grabbed a doll dressed in a stunning evening gown. “I want this one.”

She also hugged the doll closely to her chest, copying her big sister.

Erin reached down and opened the bottom drawer of the cabinet. There, neatly folded, were dozens of dresses and outfits, waiting to be put on the dolls. There was every imaginable accessory a young girl could wish for. There were even tiny ivory brushes and combs to groom the dolls' hair.

“Why would Annabelle leave all of this stuff in here?” asked Kim, her arms gesturing around the room. “Why wouldn't she take any of it with her?”

Erin scrunched up her face, deep in thought. “I don't have a clue. Maybe she died a tragic death with her parents and we are the very first ones to find her secret playroom. Or maybe she just left and didn't have time to take all of her stuff with her.”

“Na-ah,” said Kim with absolute certainty. “She would never leave all this stuff here on purpose.”

“This mystery is getting more and more interesting. We will just have to discover what happened for ourselves.” Erin rubbed her hands together with a big smile on her face. “Let’s start looking for some clues.”

They carefully placed the dolls back into the cabinet, and for the next few minutes, the girls made a quick search of the room. In the center was a small, child-sized table with four chairs. The table was set for two with big, beautiful china plates, covered in a thick coat of dust. In fact, there was a layer of dust on everything in the room. Kim picked up one of the plates and blew on it. A small cloud filled the air around them.

“Oh no, Kim! Look what you’ve done.” Erin coughed, waving her hands in front of her face.

“I’m sorry,” she said. She couldn’t help but giggle. Erin had a layer of film on her face, making her look rather silly and as pale as a ghost.

“Quick, open up one of the windows,” Erin sputtered, wiping her cheeks.

Kim went over to one of the windows and tried to lift the heavy latch. She grunted and groaned, but no matter how hard she lifted, it wouldn’t budge.

“Erin, I need help.”

Erin walked over and the two of them lifted with all their might. The window screeched as it slowly slid open. They stuck their heads outside and gulped in the fresh air. Erin looked over at the old woman’s house. She could see her staring at them out of the second story window.

“Look, Kim!” exclaimed Erin. “There she is again!”

Kim looked up just in time to see the old woman disappear behind the curtain.

“I wonder why she keeps watching us,” said Erin, thinking out loud.

“I don’t know. But she gives me the creeps.”

They stared at the old woman’s house but neither of them saw her again. After a short time, Erin stuck her head back into the room. The dust had cleared enough for them to continue their search for clues.

“Come on, Kim. Let’s keep looking.”

Along with the chest full of dolls and the table, chairs, and china set, they found a large doll house in one corner of the room and a carved wooden chest in another. They walked over to the doll house and peered through the detailed windows. Every single part of the doll house was exactly the same as their new home.

“Look!” exclaimed Erin. “It’s this house! It even has furniture! I bet this is the way the original furniture looked in the house.”

“And look,” pointed Kim. “Here is the secret playroom.”

Erin slid around to the side of the doll house where Kim sat. Sure enough, there was the playroom, complete with the same hand-carved miniature furniture. Even the turret room and windows were identical.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” said Kim in a dreamy voice.

“It sure is,” said Erin. “Come on! Let’s keep looking.”

Erin tugged at Kim’s sleeve. Kim reluctantly turned away from the doll house and continued the search with her sister. They crossed the room and stood over the wooden chest. On the surface were beautifully carved flowers and some carefully-etched lettering.

“What does it say?” asked Kim.

Erin reached down and wiped away the dust. “It says, ‘Annabelle’s Hope Chest.’”

“What’s a hope chest?”

“That’s a chest, in olden days, kids would fill with all kinds of useful items they might need when they got older. They would put all kinds of things in it. Like blankets, pots and pans, silverware—you name it.”

“Oh,” said Kim not really listening to Erin’s explanation. She reached down and lifted the lid of the chest.

Inside was a hand-knitted comforter and a fancy set of silverware. There was also a full set of plates, cups, and saucers wrapped in tissue paper. The girls carefully took out and inspected each item.

“What’s that?” asked Kim, pointing at a book wedged in the bottom corner of the chest. She reached down and pulled the book out from under the remaining plates. It was thick and looked like it would be expensive. The cover was leather with flowers imprinted on it. She opened the cover and inside, neatly lettered in pen and ink, were the words, *To My Darling Daughter, Annabelle, on her Eleventh Birthday, September 17th.*

“That’s my age and birthday!” exclaimed Erin. Standing next to Kim, she had read the inscription out loud. She stopped reading and glanced over at her sister.

“This is toooooo spooky,” said Kim. She handed the book over to Erin. “I’m getting out of here.”

Erin tucked the book under her arm and the two of them went down the stairs to their bedroom.

When they got back into the bedroom, Erin shut the secret panel and crossed over to the bed. “I’ll bet the answer to the whole mystery is in this diary,” she proclaimed, flipping through the pages.

Over half of the pages in the book were faithfully filled in by who the girls assumed could only be Annabelle. Each new entry had a month and day printed on the top of the page.

“We’ll read this tonight after we go to bed.”

Erin took the book and slid it under the mattress. “Don’t tell Mom or Dad about this book until we’ve had a chance to read it and solve the mystery.”

“Let’s show Mom and Dad the secret room!” said Kim excitedly.

“Not yet,” said Erin, putting her hand on Kim’s shoulder to hold her back. “Let’s wait till we’ve read the diary first to see if there are any clues about what happened to Annabelle. We can show Mom and Dad the secret room anytime. But first, we should solve the whole mystery.”

Chapter 3 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

What is your favorite toy and why?

If you found a secret playroom in your house, what would you do?

3 & 4th Grade

Why do you think Erin wanted to keep the playroom a secret from their parents?

Have you ever kept a secret from someone you loved?

5 & 6th Grade

Make a prediction: What do you think the diary will say?

Why do you think the owner left all of the items in the playroom behind?