

Five Nights at Freddy's™

TALES FROM THE PIZZAPLEX

#2 HAPPS

BY

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all these kids with expensive Ivy League degrees who had already done internships or had jobs at the most prestigious companies in the country. Steve had graduated from a local public college, paying for his tuition by working long hours at crappy jobs. And once he earned his degree, he was never hired for anything but *more* crappy jobs. He made his way to the second stall in the men's room. In this case, the term *crappy job* was literal.

Steve's tiny studio apartment was one floor above a take-out place called Cap'n Ernie's Fish Boat. The greasy odor wafted upward so that the carpet, furniture, and bedding in the apartment always smelled of fried fish. Even Steve's clothes hanging in the closet had absorbed the smell. Sometimes stray cats followed him on the street, breathing in his fishy aroma.

As soon as Steve got home from work, a shower was absolutely essential. Sometimes he felt like he should spray himself with the disinfectant he used to clean the gas station restrooms. By the time he showered and

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changed into clean, comfortable—if slightly fishy-smelling—clothes, he was ready to eat something and get to his real work. He popped a frozen burrito in the microwave, grabbed a soda from the fridge, and sat down at the computer.

The project he was working on, *Chip Off the Old Block*, was a family-friendly fetch quest-based game featuring cartoony chipmunks. He was about halfway through the design, and he hoped that a company would be interested in it. But if they weren't, maybe he'd try to just bring it out himself. He was tired of cleaning toilets and waiting for something to happen.

Which reminded him. He should message Amanda before it was past her bedtime.

Recently, Steve's tiredness of waiting for something to happen had led him to join a dating app. He had always dreamed of marrying a smart, kind, beautiful woman. They would live in a comfortable house and have two adorable kids, a boy and a girl. But dreams were one thing, reality was another.

Strangely, one didn't meet many attractive women cleaning toilets and mopping floors at a gas station convenience store. Occasionally, an interesting woman would come into the store to pay for gas or grab a gallon of milk, but it was hard to be suave with a mop in your hand.

For a while, he didn't think he was going to meet anyone through the app, either. But then he had seen Amanda's profile and sent her a cautious message that only

said “hi.” She said “hi” back almost immediately. After that, they progressed to an actual conversation. Well, as close to an actual conversation as texting could be.

Steve had been drawn to Amanda’s profile pic not just because she was traditionally beautiful but because she seemed to radiate kindness. She had shoulder-length brown hair and a winning smile. She was a preschool teacher, and Steve figured she was a good one because of her kindness, patience, and sense of humor. The weird thing about their relationship was that even though they had been chatting for over a month, they had gone out on only two real dates. Steve worked at the gas station from 3:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., and Amanda worked at the preschool from 7:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. They couldn’t have found more incompatible schedules if they had tried.

Steve grabbed his phone and texted her, *I hope you had a good day.*

She texted back, *A kid threw up on my shoes first thing this morning but at least my day had to get better from there LOL.*

Steve chuckled. He guessed they both had to deal with more than their fair share of grossness at their jobs. He typed *LOL if things went downhill from there it would be pretty bad. I’ll let you get some rest. Good night.*

She texted back *night night* with a sleepy face emoji.

Steve smiled, set aside his phone, and settled back in to work on his game until he was too tired to stay awake anymore.

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As soon as Steve opened the door of the convenience store, his manager, a humorless, middle-aged man with the unfortunate name of Gilbert Hurlbutt, looked up from his phone and said, “Some kid spilled about a gallon of blue slushie over by the back left cooler. Go mop it up.”

“No problem,” Steve said, which was what he always said to Mr. Hurlbutt. It was the path of least resistance.

He went to the janitorial closet and set the mop bucket under the faucet in the utility sink. Would it have killed Mr. Hurlbutt to say hello before he started barking orders? Steve poured some cleaning solution into the filling bucket and thought, not for the first time, about the bizarreness of Mr. Hurlbutt’s name. Mr. Hurlbutt’s parents, presumably Mr. Hurlbutt Senior and Mrs. Hurlbutt, knew that they were having a child who would be saddled with their ridiculous last name. So why not give the kid a normal name like Matthew or David or something instead of saddling him with an equally unwieldy first name? Of course, that being said, Mr. Hurlbutt could choose to go by Gil or Bert, but instead the name GILBERT was stitched right over the breast pocket of his uniform shirt.

Steve’s wandering thoughts resulted in the mop bucket overflowing. He tilted it and poured out some of the excess water, then carried the bucket and mop to the back of the store to clean up the sticky mess.

Steve’s hands were mopping, but his mind was on his game and what he would work on as soon as he got home from this meaningless job.

“I said, can you spare me a moment?”

Steve had been so preoccupied he hadn't even noticed that a man was standing right next to him trying to get his attention. The man in question did not resemble the customers they usually got in the store—exhausted, inexpensively dressed people coming from or going to night-shift jobs. Even though Steve didn't know much about clothes, he could tell this man's dark suit was expensive. It was spotless and wrinkle free and seemed to have been tailored to the contours of his body. "I'm sorry. Can I help you?" Steve said.

"I think perhaps you can," the man said. He had strong, chiseled features and a haircut that looked as expensive as his suit. "That is, if you're Steve Snodgrass."

"I am," Steve said, pointing to his name tag and immediately feeling like an idiot.

"Could you step outside with me for a moment?" the man asked.

This situation was getting stranger and stranger. Steve had thought the man just needed help locating an item in the store, but now it appeared that this guy wanted something from him personally. Steve felt nervous. Was the guy a cop? A serial killer?

"I don't know about that, sir," Steve said. "I just started my shift, so I'm not due for a break yet. I don't want to get in trouble with my boss."

"Well, if you'll step outside with me, you may find yourself working for another boss and for a great deal more money." He smiled. His teeth were perfect.

Steve was growing more confused by the moment. Was this man in the Mafia? "I'm afraid I don't understand."

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“Perhaps this will help,” the man said, handing Steve a business card.

Steve looked down at the card and read:

Brock Edwards

Talent Acquisition

Fazbear Entertainment

It took a few seconds for the name *Fazbear* to ring a bell. But then Steve remembered the kids’ pizza places that had once been wildly popular but had suffered a downfall after a variety of criminal allegations. There had been talk of murders, though Steve didn’t remember how many. There was weirder stuff, too . . . stories about paranormal events and that kind of nonsense. Steve was still puzzled, but he had to admit he was curious, too. “Maybe I could step outside for just one minute,” he said.

“Very good, Mr. Snodgrass,” Mr. Edwards said, following Steve out the back door.

They stood out back near the dumpster. The fumes of garbage hung in the air.

“You are familiar with Fazbear Entertainment?” Mr. Edwards asked.

“Kind of,” Steve said. “I mean, I went to the pizza place a couple of times as a kid. Birthday parties and that kind of thing. And also, I know a little about the . . . scandals.”

“Unfortunately, that’s what a lot of people know about Fazbear Entertainment,” Mr. Edwards said. “Over the past few years, there have been a number of individuals

determined to smear our company's reputation by spreading terrible rumors. And of course the public dines on that kind of filth." He straightened his already-straight tie. "And so as a result, Fazbear Entertainment is in need of some rebranding."

"Okay, but I still don't see what this has to do with me."

Mr. Edwards looked Steve up and down. "You are a game designer, are you not?"

"An aspiring one, I guess you could say." How did this guy know he made games?

"You sell yourself short, Mr. Snodgrass. You've posted two games online, and they were quite good."

"Thanks," Steve said, though he still wasn't sure how this guy had found out about his games. He wondered what else Brock Edwards knew about him.

"And so here's where you come in," Mr. Edwards said. "In an effort to laugh off our detractors, Fazbear Entertainment wants to put out a line of video games based on the lies that have been spread about the company. Horror games."

"You mean like horror games based on what people say happened in the old pizza places?" Steve said. The idea seemed distasteful at best, cruel at worst.

"Yes," Mr. Edwards said. "They should be scary, but at the same time, they should poke fun at the ridiculousness of all those libelous rumors and accusations." He put on a smile that looked calculated. "We'd like you to develop a series of four games for us, Mr. Snodgrass. I think you'd find the compensation much more generous than what you're currently being paid for . . . er, mopping."

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A job offer in game development. It was what Steve had dreamed of his entire life. So why did it feel so weird and wrong?

“We’d want you to start right away, of course. We would fly you to a remote location where you’d have everything you’d need to work on the game, plus everything you’d need to live comfortably: a spacious condominium, personal chef, staff to run your errands and do your laundry. A home gym . . . if you choose to use it.” He looked disdainfully at Steve’s gym-free physique. “We could give you until Friday to tie up any loose ends. It’s an incredible opportunity, Mr. Snodgrass. What do you say?”

“Horror games, huh?” Steve said, stalling. If they were horror games based on ghosts and goblins or other purely fictional creatures, he wouldn’t have a problem with them. But horror games based on what he had understood to be real murders made him feel queasy. Fazbear Entertainment said the murders weren’t real, but they *would* say that, wouldn’t they?

“That’s right,” Mr. Edwards said. “They’d need to be based in the Fazbear Entertainment universe, but you’d have a lot of creative freedom within those bounds.”

“But I couldn’t work on them here?” There was something troubling about this whole situation that he couldn’t quite put his finger on.

“No, the company was very specific about that. They don’t want any chance of leaks.”

Leaving town for a long period of time was another sticking point. It was hard enough to see Amanda given their differing work schedules. They hadn’t gotten close