

Five Nights at Freddy's™

TALES FROM THE PIZZAPLEX

#5 THE BOBBIEDOTS CONCLUSION

BY

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A BARRAGE OF THUNDER RATTLED THE SCHOOL'S OLD, MURKY WINDOWS JUST AS MRS. SOTO WROTE ON THE BLACKBOARD, "FICTION STRETCHES THE BOUNDARIES OF REALITY." TONY GLANCED FROM MRS. SOTO'S PRECISE BLOCK LETTERS TO THE PLUMP RAIN-DROPS THAT WERE NOW PELTING THE WINDOW NEAREST TO TONY'S DESK IN THE BACK ROW OF THE MUSTY, HIGH-CEILINGED CLASSROOM.

Tony blinked. No longer interested in anything Mrs. Soto was doing, he put all his attention on the storm.

For just an instant, Tony could have sworn he'd seen something moving in the downpour. An elongated, human-size shape seemed to have slithered through the torrents of water just as the thunder's rumble had faded away.

But that, of course, wasn't possible because Mrs. Soto's creative writing class was on the third floor of the 120-year-old limestone school building. The only thing Tony could have seen out in the rain, forty-five feet above the ground, was something falling or flying.

Tony wished he could get up and go look out the window to see if anything had hit the ground. But getting

out of his seat would have earned him one of Mrs. Soto's dirty looks. He hated those.

Letting Mrs. Soto's voice merge with the rain's thrumming rhythm, Tony resigned himself to simply wondering about what he'd seen. And that was okay. Tony liked life's little mysteries. Poking around to find answers to why things happened fascinated him.

Tony continued to watch the rain as he pondered what he might have seen. It hadn't been a person, obviously. If a person had fallen through the rain, Tony would have heard the splat even over the sound of the storm. And surely someone would have screamed. Or maybe not. Sometimes bad things happened right under people's noses. Danger lurked everywhere, even in the places you thought were safe. Many of Tony's investigations had taught him that.

Thunder boomed again. The whole building shook this time. Two seconds later, Tony saw piercing white tendrils of light streak down in front of the hills beyond the school's grounds. *That was close*, he thought.

On the heels of the lightning, a tree branch speared through the rain. It shot downward, then disappeared out

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of view. That must have been what he'd seen, Tony realized. Some of the trees on the school grounds had pale gray bark. He wasn't sure what kind of trees they were.

The sudden squall had come out of nowhere. One minute, the hundred-foot trees that guarded the school grounds like a stolid line of stern principals had been still, their branches limp and relaxed. The next minute, the trees' branches had begun to whip around, tossed by wind gusts that arrived with no warning.

Life was like that, Tony thought. He'd learned that from his investigations, too. One second, all was well. The next second could bring surprises of the worst kind.

Something prodded Tony's shoulder. He gasped as he spun to his right.

"Space out much?" Tony's best friend asked as he leaned across the space between his desk and Tony's. He handed Tony a stack of pale blue papers.

Tony grinned nonchalantly, as if he hadn't nearly just jumped out of his skin. He took one of the pieces of paper. They were assignment sheets, he realized; Mrs. Soto color-coded her handouts. Blue was for writing homework.

Tony leaned across the aisle and handed the rest of the assignment sheets to Zoey, the pretty blonde girl who sat in the desk next to his. Zoey didn't even look at him as she took the stack. She was one of the popular girls in the seventh-grade class, several rungs above Tony and his friends on the social ladder.

Tony glanced down and read the assignment. He sighed. Another fiction story.

In preparation for his goal of becoming an investigative reporter someday (he was only twelve, but he believed in planning ahead), Tony had been eager to hone his writing skills in Mrs. Soto's class . . . his *nonfiction* writing skills. The class syllabus had said that it would be about

all aspects of good composition, but so far, Mrs. Soto was focusing only on fiction.

Outside, the rain stopped as suddenly as it had started. A shaft of sunlight shot through the wet window, throwing prisms of refracted light across Tony's desk. He put his finger in the pink-and-yellow streaks that played across the scarred, dark-stained oak. *See*, he thought. Reality was much more interesting than fiction.

Now that the rain had stopped, Tony could hear the assignment sheets rustling as everyone in the class read over what they were supposed to do. Several kids started murmuring to one another. Tony could hear his friends whispering next to him.

The creative writing classroom was, surprisingly, not particularly creative in its appearance. Although nearly all the other classrooms in the building were decorated with posters or charts—whatever was related to the subject matter being taught in the room—this one was oddly bare. The yellowish plaster walls held nothing but the blackboard at the front of the room, a whiteboard on the inner wall, and a shelf of novels at the back. The fifteen desks that were lined up neatly in the middle of the room weren't enough to fill out the vast space, so sound tended to bounce between the bank of windows and the other barren walls. Even the quiet noises seemed amplified.

"Okay, hush, please," Mrs. Soto called out.

Tony looked up from the blue paper he held. Mrs. Soto's gaze met his. He smiled at her. She didn't smile back.

Although she was one of the younger teachers in the school, Mrs. Soto wasn't one of the friendlier ones. Tall and thin, Mrs. Soto dressed solely in dark brown and tan, and she wore her brown hair in a blunt, chin-length style. The bottom edge of her hair was so straight that it looked sharp, like it could cut her jaw if she moved

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wrong. Mrs. Soto was a good teacher; Tony had learned a lot from her, even though she didn't assign enough nonfiction. He often wondered, though, why she was so unhappy. He'd like to write a story about that.

"The goal of this story," Mrs. Soto said when the paper rustling and murmuring died down, "is to focus on a mystery while also wrapping it in subplots that seem to have nothing to do with the plot but actually are essential to it. You'll work in teams of three. You can pick who you work with. If anyone needs help partnering up, let me know. Any questions?" She looked out at the class.

Tony raised his hand. "What if we can find a non-fiction mystery that fits that description?" he asked.

Mrs. Soto shook her head. "You can let reality spark your imagination," she said, "but I want you to look past the real world."

Just as Mrs. Soto finished speaking, the bell rang. It was Friday, and this was the last class of the day. Half the kids in the class were out of their seats before the bell's insistent buzz ended. Tony didn't move. He frowned at the assignment sheet, his mind already starting to toy with ideas for the story. He was going to be the one who would take the lead on it; he always was.

"As usual, the three amigos, oh great and wondrous Great American Writer?" Tony's best friend asked, pulling Tony's attention from his thoughts.

Tony glanced at his friends.

"We've already picked our numb de plumbs." The curly-black-haired kid—who Tony had been friends with ever since their moms, across-the-street neighbors, had brought them together for a playdate when they were four years old—flashed his signature lopsided grin. "I'm going to be Boots," he said.

Tony shook his head. When his friends had learned the

term *nom de plume* at the start of the school year, they'd twisted it into "numb de plumb." Since then, they'd insisted on choosing different pen names every time they got a new writing assignment. For the duration of the assignment, they demanded that they had to call one another by the crazy names they picked out.

Tony stood and stuffed his assignment sheet into his backpack. "Why Boots?" he asked.

"For Puss in Boots. Clever cat. That's me."

"Okay. Got it, Boots," Tony said.

"He's going to be Dr. Rabbit," "Boots" said, pointing at the last of "the three amigos."

Tony looked at "Dr. Rabbit" and lifted an eyebrow. "Why Dr. Rabbit?"

"You can call me Rab for short," "Rab" said. He shrugged. "The name just came to me." He grinned as he ran a hand through his unruly brown hair. He'd admitted the week before that he cut it himself; it looked it.

"Rab" was a relatively new friend. Spotting the unfamiliar kid who'd looked a little lost at the start of the school year a couple months before, Tony had introduced himself just to be friendly. He and "the new guy" had hit it off, and Tony had invited him to work with him—and Boots—when they'd gotten their first creative writing assignment.

Rab pointed a finger gun at Tony. "What about you?"

Tony thought for a second. "I'll be Tarbell."

Boots grabbed his backpack and started toward the classroom door. "Don't tell me," Boots said, looking back over his shoulder. "A reporter, right?"

Tony nodded. He didn't bother to explain that Ida Tarbell was a famous muckraker in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Neither Boots nor Rab would have cared. Their interest in history was even more non-existent than their interest in current events.