

Five Nights

at Freddy's

FAZBEAR FRIGHTS #7

THE CLIFFS

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Robert had met Anna his junior year in college. He had never believed in the “finding the one” theory of romance—surely there wasn’t just one person in the whole world who was right for you—and yet his and Anna’s connection was immediate. They loved the same books and movies, and when they started having more serious conversations, they discovered that they shared deeper values, too. They dated through the rest of college and got engaged right after graduation, agreeing on a one-year engagement to give them some time to get used to being real grown-ups with real jobs before they got married.

Robert settled into a steady but not terribly exciting job with a local lifestyle magazine, and Anna got a position as a first-grade teacher. They got married barefoot on the beach, and both sets of their parents chipped in to help them out with a down payment on a house. Their little bungalow had seen better days, but it still had plenty of charm, especially for young, energetic first-time homeowners who were willing to put some elbow grease into renovating it.

The only downside, as far as Robert was concerned, was the house’s location, right next to the town’s most notorious geographical feature: the Cliffs. Although these rocky outcroppings possessed a rugged beauty, they also had a grisly history. The highest of them was nicknamed “Jumper’s Cliff” by the locals because it was a common site for suicides over the generations.

It seemed that everyone knew of someone who had chosen to end it all at the Cliffs. The jilted high school homecoming queen from Robert's mother's generation, the businessman who lost all his money due to bad investments, the grandmother with a terminal cancer diagnosis. There were stories about the Cliffs that were fact, and stories that were fiction, but true or not, these tales made people look at the geological features with a mixture of fear and awe, especially Jumper's Cliff. Teenagers gathered there and creeped each other out with scary stories. Younger kids whispered that the ghosts of the departed still haunted the place where they had chosen to make that final leap.

Robert had grown up hearing those stories, and the Cliffs creeped him out. Anna insisted that, while the suicides themselves were sad, the Cliffs were just rocks; they didn't really mean anything. Besides, the house's proximity to the Cliffs was why it had been such a steal. Attributing any dark meaning to the Cliffs was nothing short of superstition.

Robert knew she was right. And once they moved into the house, he was so happy with his new wife and his new life that he hardly thought about the Cliffs at all. When he looked back on it, the first year of their marriage was a blissful blur of love and laughter.

In his mind, he could play out scenes from that first year like a montage in a romantic movie: the two of them riding bikes together, cooking dinner together,

cuddling in front of the TV with a big bowl of popcorn between them. Sure, one of them would sometimes have a bad day at work or come down with a cold, but these problems were minuscule compared to the happiness they took in each other's company.

Although the first year of their marriage had been great, the happiest time in Robert's life had come when Anna was pregnant with Tyler. They had been married two years when they found out she was pregnant, and they were both over the moon with delight. There was something about the idea that they had created a new human being because of their love—it seemed almost magical. As happy as they had been as a couple, they knew they would be an even happier family.

Throughout Anna's pregnancy, she had glowed like some kind of ancient mother goddess from mythology. Robert had glowed, too, so full of love he didn't know what to do with all of it. He massaged Anna's feet when they were sore after she came home from teaching all day. He went out to fetch her mint chocolate chip ice cream when she said it was the only thing in life that could possibly satisfy her cravings. They were in perfect harmony during her pregnancy, two dedicated gardeners growing their baby together.

But then things went wrong.

Two months before the baby was due, Anna started complaining of swelling in her hands and feet. When she called the nurse at the obstetrician's office, she

had said not to worry about it, that swelling was common among pregnant women, especially in the hottest months of the summer. Reassured, Anna had bought bigger shoes and soaked her feet in Epsom salts and otherwise ignored her symptoms. But when she went in for her regular checkup, her blood pressure was so alarmingly high that the doctor insisted that she be admitted to the hospital immediately.

After that, things were a nightmarish blur in Robert's mind: all the IV drugs the doctors gave her in a failed attempt to bring her blood pressure down, the decision to deliver the baby early by Caesarean section in hopes of saving her life, the massive stroke she suffered on the operating table that left Robert a single father. For a long time, he was numb. None of it even felt real.

Since Tyler was born early, he was tiny and unable to breathe on his own without exhausting himself. He had to stay in the hospital for a few weeks until he gained weight and his lungs developed more. In a shocked daze, Robert would visit his new baby in the neonatal intensive care unit. He would scrub his hands and put on a face mask before entering the brightly lit white room lined with plastic incubators in which impossibly tiny babies lay. Robert would stand by his own son's incubator and look at Tyler's small, skinny body, wearing a diaper the size of a fast-food napkin. The parents of other babies in the NICU always

looked tired and worried like Robert did, but they arrived in couples, so at least they had each other.

In horror, Robert would look at his son and think, *Kid, I'm all you have in this world.*

It was not a good way to start out in life—motherless and stuck with a father who couldn't eat, sleep, or go a full hour without crying. In his exhausted, grief-stricken state, there were only two facts Robert knew for sure:

1. He was all that Tyler had.
2. He was not enough.

Robert had muddled through the last two years, managing to hold down his job somehow and provide Tyler with food, clothing, and shelter. Robert had withdrawn from his friends because he didn't want their pity and because for a single father of a toddler, grabbing a bite to eat after work with his buddies was not an option. At five o'clock sharp, he had to leave the office to pick up Tyler from day care. After that, it was time to go home and fix his supper. Then came playtime and bath time and—if Robert was lucky and Tyler would actually fall asleep—bedtime. The toddler owner's manual was clear: Without a regular schedule, life with a toddler descended into chaos. Robert had quite enough chaos in his life, so he tried not to deviate from the daily schedule.