

Five Nights at Freddy's™

TALES FROM THE PIZZAPLEX

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BY

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THE VOICES WERE FAR AWAY BUT GETTING CLOSER. THEY WERE LIKE SCRATCHY STATIC MARRING THE CLARITY OF A PERFECT MELODY. UNTIL THE VOICES HAD INTRUDED, BILLY HAD BEEN FLOATING IN A SWEET HAZE OF SENSATION-FREE BLISS. NOW THE VOICES CUT THROUGH THAT BLISS, YANKING BILLY INTO A MUDDLE OF NOISE AND PAIN.

Billy threw up a hand, wanting to ward off the invading unpleasant feelings. His raised hand, though, brought even more pain—a sharp, cutting sting. Billy gasped and opened his eyes.

The pinpoint lights were blinding. He snapped his eyes shut again. The bliss was well and truly gone now.

Billy's senses flooded with information. Even through his closed lids, he could see the spears of bright light. He could hear loud chatter and a few shouts combined with an insistent and grating beep, the patter of footsteps, and the occasional metallic clatter. He smelled the pungent scents of bleach and disinfectant, the acrid odor of urine, and the nauseating smell of overcooked vegetables—maybe broccoli and cabbage. He felt something pricking

at the back of his right hand, but that was the least of the pain he felt. It seemed like nearly every nerve ending in his body was firing a barrage of throbs and aches and twinges. Everything hurt. And the taste in his mouth . . . Billy tried to move his tongue around to erase the bitterness that was so powerful, and he had to swallow down a gag. But then he remembered that he had very little tongue remaining. Only the barest nubbin of tissue was able to wiggle around in his mouth, and it could do nothing to wipe away the caustic flavor.

Billy opened his eyes again. Turning his head away from the lights, he blinked several times and looked around. He was definitely in the hospital. But why?

Frowning, Billy dug through his distorted memories. He saw himself looking in the mirror, gazing at his unnaturally square face and his mutilated body. He saw the floor of his home, and he remembered lying on it, crying. He saw his neighborhood, and he remembered lurching through it, walking and walking. He saw a junkyard and an old station wagon, and he felt himself climbing into the back of it.

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The compactor, Billy thought. The last thing he remembered was the feeling of compression, a system-wide pain that blotted out all his sadness and regret.

The memory acted like a catalyst, and now his mind replayed his recalled experience of listening to the rumble of the big machine that bore down on the car he'd hidden in. That sound, for some reason, pulled him back into his identity. He instantly became aware of it all; he simultaneously integrated the personality of a boy whose play had turned into a yearslong delusion and of a man who had realized his horrible mistakes and had to face his remorse and self-hate.

That compactor had been Billy's way out of all of it—his surrender. So how did he . . . ?

"Well, look who has joined us!" a perky voice cried out.

Billy turned his head toward the open doorway. A compact woman with short, strawberry blonde curls and a heavily freckled oval face bustled up to the side of the bed Billy lay in. The woman wore a bright blue cotton uniform; maybe she was a nurse. Glancing at the beeping monitors, she put warm, smooth fingers against the back of Billy's right hand. And he could feel them.

Why could he feel the nurse's fingers?

As quickly as Billy had cycled through the mind pictures that reminded him of the last thing he remembered before being in this room, Billy's brain flooded him with an awareness of his life. Instantly, Billy knew that he had prosthetic limbs—he *knew* he did. And although the limbs often seemed real to him, he wasn't able to feel anything with them.

Billy lifted his head so he could get a better view of his right arm. He groaned involuntarily when sudden

dizziness and a knifelike pain made it clear that his head protested the sudden movement.

“Careful there,” the nurse said. “You’ve been through a lot, and you’ve been unconscious a long time. You’re going to feel discomfort and disorientation.”

Billy looked around, hoping to see the computer he’d used to communicate with after he’d had his tongue removed. There was no computer. He’d have to try to talk.

He opened his mouth. But the words he wanted to say wouldn’t come out.

“Here,” the nurse said. “Your mouth has to be super dry.” She reached over to a nightstand that Billy hadn’t noticed when he’d looked around.

Billy focused on the gray metal stand now, and he saw it held a mustard-yellow plastic pitcher and a couple of small paper cups. One of the cups held water and a little sponge on a stick. The nurse moved the sponge, pulled a straw from her pocket, and put the straw in the cup. She held the straw to Billy’s mouth.

“Go slow,” she warned.

Billy tentatively raised his head. This time, the room didn’t spin as much, and the pain wasn’t as intense. He used his lips to suck water through the straw. As he did, he glanced at the white name tag pinned to the nurse’s uniform. Her name was Gloria.

When Gloria pulled the straw away from Billy and set the cup back on the nightstand, he said, “Thank you, Gloria.”

Or at least that’s what he tried to say. What came out was actually more like “Ank oo, Oria.” And the *K* was off. It wasn’t crisp and clear—it sounded like something stuck in Billy’s throat.

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“Not bad!” Gloria said brightly. “Without a full tongue, you’re going to have trouble with a lot of the letters. But don’t worry—we’ll get you set up with a speech therapist. That will help you out.”

Billy nodded, but he didn’t care about that. He had so many questions he wanted answered now.

“How?” he asked. What he really wanted to get out was *How did I survive being crushed in the car?* But that was too many words.

“I’m going to call for Dr. Herrera,” Gloria said. “She’s been in charge of your surgeries and has overseen your recovery. She’ll explain everything. You’ll like her. She’s super nice.” Gloria leaned over and checked the line that was connected to the back of Billy’s right hand. “Looking good,” she said. “But if the line starts to bug you, or you need anything else, just press this.” She pointed at a button on a small remote control that dangled from a thick white cord over the railing on the right side of Billy’s bed. Billy stretched out his fingers to make sure he could reach the button. He was in awe that his fingers were still there.

Gloria walked around the bed and adjusted his covers. Then she patted his left leg.

Billy widened his eyes in surprise. He could feel that, too. How was that possible?

“Just hang tight,” Gloria said. “Dr. Herrera will be in here in a jiff.”

A “jiff” turned out to be about a half hour. Billy was able to note the time because he could see a big black-numbered clock on the wall above the nursing station outside his room. It was 1:42 (p.m., obviously, because

the sun was out) when Gloria left the room, and it was 2:14 when Dr. Herrera walked in.

Even wearing a baggy white lab coat over the same blue cotton uniform that Gloria wore, Dr. Herrera looked more like a Hollywood star than a doctor. Dark skinned and black haired, the thirtysomething, tall, slender woman had large, deep-set, heavily lashed brown eyes; sculpted cheekbones; a strong jaw; and a full mouth with even, white teeth. Obviously adept with makeup, Dr. Herrera had accented all her naturally beautiful features perfectly. Billy thought that her smoky eye shadow and red lipstick made her look like she was ready for a photo shoot. He had never met a woman as stunning as Dr. Herrera; he'd only seen women like her in pictures or on TV.

"Billy," Dr. Herrera said with a smile as she approached his bed, "it's wonderful to see you awake and alert."

Dr. Herrera's deep, even voice was as warm as her eyes were. Billy, however, found himself tensing when she stepped up next to the bed, pulled a stethoscope from her pocket, and put it to her ears. When she bent over him and pulled down the neck of the baby-blue thin cotton hospital gown he wore, he held his breath. He suddenly was aware that the gown only covered the front of him. He felt exposed and vulnerable, and he flinched as Dr. Herrera placed the hard, cold end of the stethoscope against his bare chest.

In spite of the way Dr. Herrera seemed—nice—her white coat and stethoscope and her title—*doctor*—immediately brought up memories of Doc, the grizzled old guy who'd turned Billy into the monster he'd discovered himself to be hours before he'd made his way to the junkyard. Billy knew that Doc had only done what Billy had asked him to do,

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but that didn't mitigate Billy's association of Doc with all the pain he'd gone through. Billy hated the idea of another doctor looming over him. He didn't want to be in a doctor's control.

"Your heart sounds good," Dr. Herrera said, straightening.

Billy exhaled in relief when Dr. Herrera stepped away from his bed and pulled out the brown vinyl chair, which was straight-backed and didn't look comfortable, toward the foot of the bed. She placed the chair where Billy could easily see her without craning his neck, and she took a seat.

"Okay," Dr. Herrera said. "Let's get you caught up on what's been going on. Sound good?"

Still feeling intimidated and wary, Billy managed a nod. He needed to know what had happened, so he forced himself to stay calm and listen.

Dr. Herrera clasped her large hands together.

"Okay," Dr. Herrera said again. She said the word with a long O sound: oookay.

Dr. Herrera opened her mouth and then closed it. "Perhaps we should start with what you remember," she said.

In spite of his nervousness, Billy found himself relaxing a little. Dr. Herrera spoke with a slight accent—Billy thought it was maybe Spanish—and the ebb and flow of her words were strangely soothing.

Billy cleared his throat. "I remember going to the junkyard and getting in the old car, and I remember the car was being crushed."

These words were what Billy heard in his mind when he spoke, but what he heard in his ears was much different. Without a tongue, Billy could only clearly use a few

letters—*A, B, E, F, I, M, O, P, R, V,* and *Y*—without distortion. Some letters—*K, Q, U,* and *X*—were close but somewhat garbled. The rest of the letters—those that required pressing his tongue to the roof of his mouth in any way—weren't accessible at all. Consequently, his speech was mushy and difficult to understand. Somehow, though, Dr. Herrera managed to grasp the gist of what Billy had said.

“That’s what I thought,” Dr. Herrera said. “After you were found, the police at first thought you’d been attacked and placed in the vehicle compactor against your will. They had to go to your home and investigate. When they did that, they found out the truth.”

Billy pressed his lips together. He hated the idea of strangers going through his things. He could feel his heart rate speeding up. He forced himself to breathe slowly. At least he didn't have to explain anymore.

“Why am I alive?” Billy asked.

“Well, to start with,” Dr. Herrera said. “Dumb luck apparently. No one is sure why you survived the machine, but you did. And you were found just in time because the junkyard owner is a bird-watcher. He said he spotted a rare bird on the hood of the station wagon. That’s when he noticed blood coming out from under the wagon’s back door. It was almost too late. You suffered severe injuries. You had a cracked skull, jaw, collarbone, and pelvis, and your right arm and left leg were fractured. You also had internal injuries—some damage to your liver, kidneys, spleen, and gallbladder. Plus, you had a collapsed lung when they brought you in. In addition to that, you had all the modifications you underwent before the compactor injuries. We dealt with your injuries and we removed all the foreign materials and parts

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from your body in a series of surgeries. During that time and for several weeks after, we've kept you in a medically induced coma to give your body the time it needed to heal." Dr. Herrera studied Billy's face. "And your body has done a fine job, I have to say."

Considering how much Billy hurt, he wasn't sure about that. But he didn't say anything. He was struggling to comprehend the fact that all the additions he'd made to his body had been removed. So why was so much of him still here? His memory told him that he'd been nearly entirely replaced with metal and wire and plastic.

Glancing down at his clearly intact right hand, Billy had to question his take on what he'd done to himself. Obviously, he had it wrong. But why?

Dr. Herrera shifted in the brown chair. Billy refocused on her.

"Some of the work you had done couldn't be undone," Dr. Herrera said. "Your right leg and left arm were amputated. The exterior cartilage of your ears has been removed, and most of your tongue is missing. The rest of your body, however, was integrated with the foreign material. Oddly, your left leg had been surgically altered to appear as if it had been amputated, and prosthetic materials had been incorporated with your flesh. According to the files the police found in your house, you asked the doctor to remove all your limbs, but it appears he got lazy, or maybe greedy—he took your money and didn't do one of the amputations. He just made modifications so it appeared that the amputation was done." Dr. Herrera shook her head then went on, "The police raided the old mental hospital where your doctor did his surgeries, and they found body parts in a freezer. Not all were yours, but

some were . . . including your right arm. We're able to reattach parts when they're preserved well enough."

Billy looked down at his right arm in awe. Dr. Herrera smiled and crossed her legs.

"As for the rest," Dr. Herrera said, "when I removed all of what shouldn't have been there, it came out as one coherent piece, all the extraneous parts held together with wires and your own connective tissue and flesh."

Billy winced at the idea of what must have gone into removing that from his body and at the idea of losing even more of himself in the process. His stomach clenched.

Dr. Herrera leaned forward and touched Billy's right hand. Billy thought she meant the gesture as one of comfort, but it just made his stomach flip over again. He wanted to yank his hand away from her, but he was too scared. The idea of this woman slicing him open and taking out what had essentially been a cobbled-together animatronic endoskeleton brought up memories of the time Billy had spent in Doc's basement. Billy couldn't contain a shiver, but Dr. Herrera didn't seem to notice it.

"The work that was done on you," Dr. Herrera went on, "although unconscionable and gruesome, was unlike anything I've seen. Because of that, I had put what we removed in one of our storage vaults downstairs." Dr. Herrera cocked her head. "Do you have any questions, Billy?"

Billy had a lot of questions, but he didn't want to ask any of them. Still marveling at his intact right arm, he finally managed to lift it. Trailing the line that was inserted into the back of his hand, he brought his fingers to his face. Not sure what he'd feel, he tentatively touched his cheek.

"Would you like a mirror?" Dr. Herrera asked.

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Billy hesitated, then nodded.

“I thought you might,” Dr. Herrera said.

She reached into the pocket of her white coat and pulled out a hand mirror. Standing, Dr. Herrera stepped toward the head of Billy’s bed and held the mirror out in front of him. Billy took a deep breath and looked at his reflection.

The last time Billy had inspected himself, what he’d seen was nothing like what he was seeing now. Gone were the hard edges created by the metal plating. Gone were the black eyes. Gone was the bare skull.

Yes, Billy’s ears were still missing, but other than that, he looked pretty normal. He even saw a bit of his dad in the small eyes and nose, round cheeks, and wide mouth that he saw in the mirror.

As it had when Billy was a child, Billy’s brown hair was sticking up haphazardly in a variety of directions. His hair was maybe three inches long—obviously, he’d been in the coma for quite some time.

If the hair itself hadn’t been a hint of the passed time, the condition of Billy’s scars told the rest of the story. When Billy had imagined Dr. Herrera cutting into him and taking out all the extra parts, he’d envisioned jagged incisions crusted with blood and tied with stark black thread. Instead, what he saw were faintly red scars bracketing his cheeks, forehead, and jaw. Clearly, he was well on his way to healing from his wounds.

Billy tried to take the mirror from Dr. Herrera’s hand, but he found that his fingers wouldn’t work quite right. Dr. Herrera shifted the mirror as she gestured with her other hand at Billy’s right arm.

“You’re going to be a little stiff after being out for so

long,” she said. “You got passive physical therapy while you were out—manual movement of your limbs to keep the muscles limber and prevent too much loss of muscle mass. However, you’ll need physical therapy so you can learn to use a crutch with the right arm until your right leg is ready for a new prosthetic.”

Billy shook his head violently. “No!” he shouted. The word came out as a long and loud “Oh.” Billy locked his gaze on Dr. Herrera. “No more prosthetics!” The words sounded like “O or rohehik.”

Dr. Herrera seemed to get it. She pulled the mirror away from him and stuck it back in her pocket as she soothed, “It’s okay, Billy. We won’t do anything you don’t want.” She gently put a hand on Billy’s shoulder. In spite of his fear of her, the touch felt good.

Dr. Herrera backed up and sat down again. “Obviously,” she said, “we had to do everything we did without your consent because you weren’t able to give it.” She leaned toward Billy. “Some of my colleagues didn’t think we’d be able to save you, but I knew we could. And we have . . . with a lot of help from you.” She gestured at Billy’s prone form. “Your body’s ability to heal has been quite extraordinary. You’ve come much further much faster than anyone could have predicted, and I expect you’ll get your strength back in no time. Our part is pretty much done. From here on out, with some exceptions, choices about what’s done to continue your healing will be up to you.”

Billy scrunched up his forehead. Exceptions? He opened his mouth to try to form the word.

Dr. Herrera held up a hand. “I know what you’re thinking. ‘What exceptions?’ Right?”

Billy nodded.

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Dr. Herrera nodded, too. She took a long breath and exhaled. “I don’t want to overload you with too much right now,” she said. “You’re still healing. But you might as well know that social services assigned you an advocate. Because of what the police found in your house, the state is requiring a psychological evaluation now that you’re out of your coma. That’s nonnegotiable. But if you’re deemed competent, you’ll get to call the shots going forward.”

You’ll get to call the shots. Dr. Herrera’s words echoed in Billy’s head long after she left his room.

What would that be like now? Billy wondered. Would he be able to make good decisions about his life?

The last thing Billy remembered before succumbing to the pain of the compactor had been a crushing feeling of loss. That was why letting the compactor press down on him had felt so right, so welcome.

Now Billy was being given a second chance. He could make a whole new set of decisions. He could have a new life—the life he’d thought he’d missed out on forever.

That thought was both exciting and terrifying. Given that Billy couldn’t remember choosing anything for himself that wasn’t part of his animatronic delusion, he didn’t know how he’d decide what to do next.

But he didn’t have to face that right away. He would be in the hospital for a while longer. For that, Billy was grateful.

In just the short time Billy had been conscious in his barren hospital room, it had started to feel like a welcome haven. He liked its plain walls and its louvered blinds, which he asked Gloria to lower after Dr. Herrera left. Billy liked the little room, but the big blue sky outside

felt threatening for some reason. All that sunshiny openness was too much for him to process.

A couple hours after Dr. Herrera left him, Billy got to eat his first meal as his new self. Having spent most of his life eating the “animatronic diet” of only white foods, he was eager to try something new. Unfortunately, the evening meal was chicken and rice with green beans. The chicken and rice were familiar, and therefore unwelcome. But he eagerly dug into the green beans. They didn’t taste as good as he’d hoped they would, but the red Jell-O dessert was wonderful. In his new life, Billy decided, he’d eat a lot of red foods.

The second day of Billy’s new life, he met his physical therapist, Angie. On one side of Angie’s head, her hair was shorn into a buzz cut; on the other side, her hair was long and woven into a complicated braid. Angie didn’t look like she was very strong, but Billy quickly found out that she was.

Angie came into Billy’s room carrying an armful of bandages, a leg brace, and a crutch. “Okay, Billy,” she said after she’d introduced herself. “We need to get you up on your feet. Or foot, as the case may be.” She grinned at him.

Billy laughed, but his muscles were tense. Did he really want to try to stand up?

Billy’s memory of being on his feet wasn’t a good one. He clearly remembered the way he’d careened down the sidewalk to the junkyard where he’d thought he was going to die. And that had been with both prosthetics. Now he had one leg still recovering from surgery, and the other leg was completely gone. How would he stand?

“I hear you,” Angie said.

“I didn’t say anything,” Billy said.

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“You didn’t have to. Your trepidation is written all over your face.”

“*Trepidation* is a good word,” Billy said.

“Glad you like it.” Angie lowered the railing on the left side of Billy’s bed.

Earlier that morning, Gloria had removed all the lines that had connected Billy to the monitors that had clustered around his bed. “Your vital signs are perfect,” Gloria had said. “Dr. Herrera says you don’t need monitoring anymore.”

Gloria had then looked at Billy’s IV. “How’s your pain?” she had asked.

Billy thought about it. He was surprised to realize that the aches and throbs he’d felt when he’d first woken up had abated a lot. He was sore, but he wasn’t in agony. “Not bad,” he said.

“Good,” Gloria said. “You haven’t had any meds going through this line since last night. Just glucose. And now you’re eating on your own. So, let’s get this thing out of you.” She proceeded to remove the IV that had been poking into the back of his right hand. Billy was happy to get rid of that.

Now that he was no longer plugged into anything, Billy could move more freely. Even so, he was wary when Angie leaned over him and said, “Go ahead and put your arm around my neck.”

The idea of doing this made Billy very uncomfortable. He felt hesitant and self-conscious.

“Come on,” Angie said. “Don’t be shy. I’m tough.” She grinned at him.

Billy smiled. He did as she told him to do.

Over the next hour, Angie got Billy sitting up and

then, after bandaging his remaining leg and encasing it in a black, padded brace, she taught him how to use a crutch with his remaining arm. Between the crutch and braced leg, Billy managed to not only stand but also walk out of his room and down the hall.

“You’re amazing!” Angie said at the end of the hour. “Dr. Herrera said you healed unusually fast. She was right.”

Angie helped Billy get back into bed, which was harder than he’d thought it would be. *Maybe he’d overdone it*, he thought. Some of the pain he’d felt the day before was returning.

“You’re probably going to be sore,” Angie said. “Using a crutch is no picnic. When you get new prosthetics, moving around will be a lot easier.”

Billy immediately felt the same horror he’d felt when Dr. Herrera had mentioned new prosthetics. He vehemently shook his head. “I don’t want new prosthetics,” he told Angie.

Angie crossed her arms over her hot-pink cotton uniform top. “Whyever not? They’ll give you a much better life.”

Billy kept shaking his head. He was surprised when his eyes even filled with tears.

Angie perched on the edge of Billy’s bed. She put her hand lightly on his chest. “It’s okay,” she said softly. Her voice was much gentler than it had been when she’d been barking orders at him while she helped him learn to use the crutch. “I get it,” Angie said. “I heard what happened to you. You went through hell. And if I was you, I’d feel the same way about adding something else to my body. But, Billy,” Angie’s voice softened even more, “before, you were using the prosthetics to try to be something

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you weren't. If you get them now, you'll be using them to become yourself again."

Billy pursed his lips. He understood what Angie was saying, but the idea of doing anything else to his body was terrifying.

"You don't have to take any action now, obviously," Angie said. "But if I were you, I would keep the option open. Revisit the idea when you feel better."

Billy nodded. He was too rattled to speak.

Angie pushed off the bed and gave him a thumbs-up. "I'll be back in the morning for another torture session." She winked at him.

That made Billy laugh. He decided he'd do what she suggested. Maybe sometime in the future, he'd rethink the prosthetics.

The third day of Billy's new life started with another walking session with Angie. In addition to helping him get more comfortable using the crutch, Angie showed him how to raise and lower the rails on his bed, and she had him practice—three times—getting himself from the bed to the bathroom so he could use the toilet. Billy was surprised and pleased when he was able to manage that task.

Not long after Angie left him, Billy had the psychological evaluation Dr. Herrera had told him about. This was done by a grim-faced bald man named Dr. Coleman, someone Billy didn't like at all. *Dr. Coleman*, Billy thought, *didn't like Billy, either*. Dr. Coleman's questions were curt, and Dr. Coleman kept staring at Billy's ears—or rather, where Billy's ears should have been. Billy was glad when Dr. Coleman left.