



with the scent of cotton candy. Pete was slouched against a wall, ankles crossed and ball cap turned backward, drinking a cherry-flavored cola while chewing watermelon gum. His little brother and his friends were crowded around an arcade game.

Pete didn't want to be there, but his mother had to work and Chuck *had* to be with his friends after school again. So that left Pete to play babysitter. For the hundredth time, he asked himself, why was it always *his* job? And was the little snot grateful?

Nope.

Chuck was always whining about his inhaler. Always whining he was hungry. Always asking a bunch of questions. Always something. Since their dad had left, Pete was saddled with everything Chuck.

His mom's words were stuck in his head. *You're the man of the house now, Pete. Take care of your little brother.*

How was Pete supposed to be the man when he was just sixteen? Did anyone ask him what he thought of his new responsibilities?

Double nope.

Pete watched a little kid walk up to a couple of employees cleaning up birthday tables. He pulled on a guy's sleeve. The man looked down at the kid and smiled. "Can I help you with something?" he asked.

"I was wondering, where is Foxy the Pirate?" the kid said.

The man's voice was syrupy sweet. "Oh, Foxy's on vacation at the moment. We hope to have him back soon."

The little kid stuck his lip out, but nodded as he walked away.

The other employee chuckled. "Good one," he told the man.

"Yeah, on vacation in the maintenance room. Don't know when they'll bring the show out again."

Pete was thinking that over when he realized someone was saying his name. "Pete?"

He pulled his attention from the conversation and moved his gaze toward Maria Rodriguez, who was standing beside him. Her black hair brushed her shoulders and her lips were glossy red. She had these bright green eyes with long lashes and a few freckles on her nose. She was a cheerleader at their high school and he'd known her since the sixth grade. So why did he suddenly feel so nervous around her?

“Hey, Maria,” he said.

“Stuck here with little Chuckie, huh?”

Pete scowled. “Yeah.”

“Same here. My little sister’s birthday.” Maria motioned to a birthday table in front of the stage, with little kids wearing cone hats and eating cake. “Can’t believe we used to be like them.”

He smirked. “Don’t know about you, but I was never like that.”

Maria smiled. “*Sure*. So, where you been? Haven’t seen you at practice lately.”

He’d been benched from football for unnecessary roughness and having a bad attitude on multiple occasions. Hello? This was football! So he’d just quit altogether. The truth was, Pete never used to quit anything. He used to finish whatever he started. But after seeing his parents quit each other, finishing things didn’t matter so much anymore. Plus, he didn’t need any more grief from the coach—he got enough of that from his teachers and his mom. A kid could only handle so much griping.

He shrugged. “Got tired of it all, you know?”

“Yeah, I guess. So, what are you going to do with all your free time now?”

“Well . . .”

Someone waved to Maria from the party table and her face lit up. “Yes! Finally time to leave.” Before she left, she added, “Hey, a bunch of us are meeting under old Beacon Bridge if you want to come to hang out later.”

Pete smiled. "Yeah?"

She nodded. "It'll be fun."

Then he shook his head. "Can't. I have to watch Chuck the Chump."

"Oh, okay. Maybe next time. See ya around school."

Irritation washed over Pete as he watched Maria walk away. This was all Chuck's fault. Little brat. Everything was always about his little brother. Didn't matter what Pete wanted because *nothing* mattered when it came to Pete. Dad had left. Mom was in her own little world. They figured they'd just put Pete in charge of Chuck because they didn't have the time to deal with him themselves. But Pete had never signed up to take over their responsibilities. He was a kid and kids should be free, not worrying about stuff. They should be able to do what they wanted, like hanging out with other kids instead of watching little brothers. But his parents didn't care about any of that, obviously. After all, they never asked Pete if he had wanted them to split up in the first place. They just divorced, and that was that. None of it was fair.

Pete had so many emotions inside of him that sometimes he just didn't know what to do with them. Sometimes he felt like a ticking bomb about to explode, like the tension in his body was just under his skin, begging for release. For a while, football had helped. He'd been a beast on the field, taking down players, throwing people out of the way. By the end of practice, he'd been exhausted and empty. Empty was better. It was good. But since he was off

the team, Pete was stuck without an outlet. He hated these feelings. He hated *everything* sometimes. He watched his brother break off from his friends to head to the bathroom and his eyes narrowed on the fresh opportunity. Pete tossed his soda at an empty table and walked quickly to his brother's side, latching on to his arm forcefully.

Chuck's face screwed up. "Ow, Pete!"

"Shut up and walk," he muttered, then blew a bubble till it popped.

"Why? Where are we going?"

"You'll see." With a quick look over his shoulder, Pete hustled his little brother down a long and darkened corridor. The floor was faded and old, and peeling posters of animatronics lined the walls. The place needed a serious upgrade. Pete had wandered down here before and discovered the large maintenance room. Now that he knew what was taking a vacation inside, he couldn't wait to take Chuck along for a little adventure, considering his brother had always been scared of a certain animatronic.

Chuck started to protest. "Where are we going?"

"What's the matter, you scared?"

"No! I just want to stay with my friends!"

"We're going to check something out."

Chuck hiccupped and licked his dry lips around his braces. He sounded like a toad when he was nervous. "Just leave me alone or I'm telling Mom."

"You're such a little snitch. Now you're really going in."

Pete dragged his surprisingly strong little brother

through the entrance of the maintenance room to meet Foxy the Pirate.

The heavy door slammed behind them engulfing them in darkness.

“Pete, let me go!”

“*Quiet.* Someone might hear and I don't want to listen to you whining like a baby. Do you know how annoying that is?” Pete wouldn't let loose of the vise grip he had on his brother. No, it was time to teach Chuck a lesson. It was time for Pete to do what he wanted and right now that meant giving his brother a good scare.

Little Chuck the Chump might even pee his pants.

Pete chuckled at the idea.

With one hand still firmly on his brother's arm, he fished his phone out of his pocket and turned on the light to guide them slowly through the darkness. The area was strangely quiet, as if it wasn't connected to a boatload of people just down a hallway. The smell here was stagnant and musty, and the air seemed . . . lifeless. As if no one had set foot in the place recently. Which was weird when the rest of the building was full of activity.

“*Hiccup.*”

Pete's foot knocked a bottle across the floor. It hit something and shattered. Pete and Chuck froze, wondering if someone would hear, but no one seemed to be around.

“*Hiccup.*”

Pete scanned the floor with the light, revealing scuffed

black-and-white checkered tiles. Dusty tables and a few broken chairs were scattered about the large room. There were cardboard boxes on the tables, half empty with party hats and plates scattered around them. His light flashed on a big, black spider sitting on the edge of one box.

“Aw, look at that sucker. It’s huge!” Pete said.

The spider jumped away and the boys leaped back.

“*I hate spiders.* Let’s get out of here,” Chuck whined again.

“Not yet. There’s so much more to explore. Think of it like one of those adventure games you like to play. We have to find the secret treasure.” Pete said, laughing under his breath. More like he had to scare the crap out of his brother a little more.

He flashed the light back down to the floor. He stopped on what looked like dark melted candles and strange, black markings.

“What is that? Are those symbols?” Chuck wanted to know.

“Who cares.” Pete continued to wave the light around. Then he saw the small stage with the closed purple curtain, and a grin split his mouth. Pinned to the curtain, there was a crooked sign with the words *OUT OF SERVICE*.

“Score. Hopefully, it still works.”

“*Hiccup.* Pete . . . we shouldn’t be here. We could get in trouble. Like *big* trouble. Like trespassing, you know? That’s against the law.”

“*That’s against the law,*” Pete mimicked him in a tiny



voice. "You're such a nerd, you know that? What are you going to be when you grow up, Chuck? A cop? I'll be sure to buy you a donut on the way home."

Pete shined the light next to the stage, revealing a rusted control box on a side table. The cover was broken off the box.

"This is going to be so good." He dragged his brother to the foot of the stage. "Enjoy the show, little brother."

"Stop it, Pete!"

He grabbed Chuck by the shirt and pants, giving him a good wedgie as he launched him onto the little stage. Chuck crashed onto the platform with an "ugh," and Pete rushed to the control box.

He slammed a palm on a button that said *START*. Again, and then again. A low hum sounded, followed by a muffled click and clank.

"Aw, come on!" Pete yelled when nothing happened.

Finally, the small curtain began to open.

*"Hiccup—hiccup—hiccup."*

In a quick motion, Chuck rolled to the side.

"Chuck, you wimp!" Pete rushed to the stage, grabbing Chuck by his sneakers to keep him there. In the quick moves only fear can bring on, Chuck managed to evade his brother. He climbed to his feet, jumped off the platform, and ran.

That was the fastest Pete had ever seen his brother run. If he hadn't been running from Pete, he might even be impressed. Pete moved to get him back, then came to halt

in front of the stage as his shirt caught on something.

“Dang,” he muttered. He tugged on his shirt, but it was caught on a stupid nail.

Choppy music sounded through the air as the curtains opened fully. Pete stood frozen in front of a fractured Foxy animatronic that was glaring down at him. The yellow eyes glowed under red brows, and an eye patch flipped up over his right eye. A jaw with sharp, pointy teeth hung loosely as the big fox began to sing a disjointed song about becoming a pirate. One arm had a hook for a hand and the other hand was stripped of fur, showing its robotic skeleton. Strange sounds of whirling gears screeched and seemed to echo in the quiet of the room. The robot’s chest appeared ripped open, exposing more of his mechanical body. Foxy moved slowly, eerily. Even though Pete knew he was a robot, his deteriorated body looked to be half-eaten away by who knew what.

A shiver skittered down Pete’s spine.

He swallowed his gum.

He couldn’t move his gaze away from Foxy’s yellow eyes as he sang.

Didn’t know why . . . just a dumb, old robot . . .

*“You can be a pirate, but first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg! —first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg! —first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg! —first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg!”*

The old animatronic was stuck on the same lyric . . .

*“—first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg!”*

Pete blinked as a strange feeling came over him like an invisible cold, heavy blanket was covering every inch of his body, then sinking through his skin and into his bones.

*“—first you’ll have to lose an eye and an arm! Yarg!”*

The room grew still with a sudden silence, yet Pete remained standing there in the dark. Unmoving.

He blinked and looked around, trying to remember where he was. He was in the dark. Alone. His pulse scrambled as he stepped back. Then he saw his shirt was caught on a nail, and it all came back to him. He rubbed at his eyes, yanked his shirt from the nail, and stormed away from the stage to find his brother.

“Dang it, Chuck!”

Pete watched Chuck suck in a puff of his inhaler before he sat down at the dinner table. He could tell his little brother’s nerves were still shot from when Pete took him to see Foxy the Pirate. Chuck eyed Pete across the table and squirmed. Pete didn’t know what he was so upset about. The little brat didn’t even get to see the best part of the show. He’d run away and stuck closely to his friends until it was time to come home.

“How was Freddy Fazbear’s Pizza, boys?” their mom asked as she set plates of ham and potatoes in front of them.

“Fine,” Chuck said, without looking up from his plate.

“Yeah, just dandy,” Pete muttered, swallowing mashed potatoes.

“What? Did something happen?”