C'est Toi, C'est Moi

by bijoukaiba

Summary

The summer of 1987 is drawing to a close, and Jeremy Fitzgerald needs a job - or two - to make it through college. Freddy Fazbear's Pizza doesn't exactly seem like the coolest place to
work, but Jeremy doesn't have much of a reputation for being cool anyway.

But the friendships he forges? Unbreakable. The memories he makes? Unforgettable. Falling in love? Indescribable.

Notes

"Five Nights at Freddy's", its sequel, and all related canon characters are property of Scott Cawthon.

Also features some OCs and my own interpretations of the characters and plot events that may or may not be canon depending on the story of any potential FNAF games in the future. That's what fanfiction is for.
Meet the Faz-Heir

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

August 3, 1987

Whitney Houston's voice on the radio faded out as Jeremy Fitzgerald parked his Ford Escort. He was just a fairly ordinary college student who would've been starting his junior year... if money had allowed it.

It might not have been a major university, but college still demands tuition, and Jeremy was finally reaching the last of his money alloted to him by a few scholarships and prepaid funding that had been saved up during his childhood. He had decided to take a year off from classes, figuring that it wouldn't hurt his biology major too much, in order to focus on saving up money.

And sure enough, at the far reaches of the town, at what was practically an abandoned strip mall, some kind of kid-friendly diner known as "Freddy Fazbear's Pizza" was preparing to open in a few days. A day job here, and a night job possibly as a waiter, and he would be able to live "comfortably" in his apartment as his college fund climbed again.

One of the benefits of working here was one free meal per day, so being given the bare minimum wage couldn't be too bad. Now he just hoped his wild brown hair wouldn't have to be cut in order to meet the dress code standards... he really liked that fluffiness.

As he walked up to the building, he peered through his glasses at several other cars that had been parked outside, suggesting that Jeremy wasn't the only one coming in for a job interview today.

A decal of the smiling mascot greeted him with a printed "Welcome!" on the door's window, and Jeremy stepped inside.

"Here for the interview?" asked the man in a goldenrod polo shirt standing near the door. He appeared middle-aged, plump, and had brown hair swept to one side with an odd gray hair or two.

"Yes, sir," Jeremy confirmed, extending a hand. "I'm Jeremy Fitzgerald."

"Nice to meet you. The name's Frank Fazari, I'm the manager of this establishment." (1)

"Faz...?" Jeremy's voice started to trail off, but Frank shook his head.

"No, no, I'm just a manager. My older brother is the one who started the business. Even gave me a position as manager out of the 'kindness' of his heart," Frank explained, his voice turning bitter at the end. "So, I guess I should take you over to meet the other recruits, huh? All right, it's over here to the left in the main area."

He stepped through the doorway, leading him into a much larger room decorated with the same checkerboard tile. The actual renovations of the building were probably done, with colorful wallpaper decorating the walls and posters of the franchise's characters scattered everywhere. Five round wooden tables had been set up, already with a number of people seated around each of them.

"Just take a seat wherever you want," Frank stated, before walking off towards what appeared to be
Jeremy meandered over toward one of the tables in the middle, where the five people seated stared back at him, silent and practically expressionless. No room for him here, he supposed.

"Hello, hello!" a friendly voice called out to him. Jeremy turned around, a young man waving his left hand at him. "Hey, uh... if you need a seat, we've got an empty spot here!"

"Thank you," Jeremy replied quietly, taking the seat between the guy who had called him over and a girl with curly blonde hair.

"TESTING? TES... okay, yeah, it's on," Frank stated into the mic on stage, lowering his volume. "Okay, so... shoot, I should have brought the script... okay. Listen up. We, or rather, Fazbear Entertainment, recently made an investment in a family dining business... and now they're shooting for - er, no - they're trying to make the business more family-friendly. Or family-friendlier, especially with kids."

"He really should've brought that script, huh?" muttered a different girl at Jeremy's table. Her skin had a faint olive tone and her hair was a lovely dark color, like ebony. The other young man at the table, who appeared to be Hispanic, looked silently over at her and back at Frank onstage, his brows furrowed slightly.

"So, that is where you, the potential future employees of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza come in. Um, our CEO, Federico Fazari, believes that teamwork and support is essential in reaching one's goals. There's no 'i' in 'team', as the saying goes. So, we've decided we'll work with everyone in, uh, team units and figure out what you're good at, and if I like what I see, then I'll hire you. There was probably some better way on deciding teams, but... I think it would just be easier to have you teamed up with the people you're seated with. So, just take a few minutes to introduce yourself to everyone, talk about what position you're aiming for, and whatever else you're supposed to talk about in ice-breakers like this."

The room grew louder as everyone began chatting and introducing themselves.

"Sheesh, they make it seem like it's some kind of summer camp," the same girl from earlier remarked, rolling her eyes. Blonde girl, on the other hand, was eager to start, her curls springing wildly as she bounced up out of her seat.

"Okay! Can I go first?" she asked, looking around at everyone at the table. "All right! My name's Sophia Baldwin, I'm nineteen, and I'm getting this job to help pay for college, probably like a lot of you guys."

She laughed, as did the friendly guy from earlier. Jeremy exchanged a smile with the Hispanic guy seated across from him.

"Um, but to be more specific, I'm hoping to earn a degree in nursing. I really like the idea of helping people, so I want to get a spot on 'The Crew' as part of the first aid unit. Aaand just to throw in a silly summer camp answer, my favorite character at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza is Chica!" she took her seat, looking over at Jeremy. "Come on, your turn!"

"Oh! Uh, sure..." he stood up, looking around at the others.

"Hi, I'm Jeremy Fitzgerald. I'm twenty-one and I'm... taking a year off from college to save up some money. I'm majoring in biology right now. I don't really know what kind of job I'd take here..."
kind of in the same boat as you, Sophia, in that I'd like to make people happy... so maybe just some
kind of supervisor to make sure parties are going okay? And, uh, favorite character... um... I think
there was some kind of pirate, like a coyote? He seems pretty cool. Uh... whoever wants to go next
can go ahead."

Jeremy sat back down. Sophia had already nudged the girl next to her, who sighed heavily, but stood
up with a resigned smile.

"Hi, everyone. My name's Heather Carras, and I'm twenty-three. I actually already have my degree...
my major was engineering... but I really want to pursue grad school. So I'm also saving up money for
college. I'm technically already working here, though, as I'm taking part in an internship by helping
assemble the animatronics. Too bad it wasn't a paid internship. I don't really know what kind of job
I'd get here, I just want something that preferably isn't janitor work or sitting inside one of those
stuffy costumes for an hour while kids kick you in the knee."

She started to sit back down, but Sophia stopped her.

"Nooo...! You have to say which one's your favorite!"

She let out a long sigh.

"Okay, fine. Uhh... well, based on some of the party scripts I've seen programmed into their audio
files... it kind of sounds like Bonnie is supposed to be some kind of rock-and-roll scientist... so he
seems pretty okay."

Heather took her seat, and Sophia was already eagerly pointing at the Hispanic guy at the table.

"C'mon, you too!" she insisted cheerfully. He shook his head, chewing on his lip. "... Are you okay?
We won't make fun of you."

When her tone softened, he relaxed a little, finally standing up.

"Don't speak English a lot. Sorry," he explained, speaking slowly. "My name is Ronaldo Sanchez.
Nice to meet you. I am from Costa Rica, and I speak Spanish. I am twenty years."

He paused, worriedly looking around, but everyone nodded encouragingly. He smiled sheepishly.

"I am in English classes, and I need money. Then I get a good job and more money. I know... my
English is bad. So, I cook food, I speak less. Or... ... disfraz," he pantomimed putting a large item on
his head and waving hello. The confused looks at the table gave way to little "ohhh"s of
understanding.

He started to sit down, but once again, Sophia quickly stopped him.

"Who is your favorite character? Or, um, wait... think Spanish... um... kay. An-ee-muhl. Fay-vo-ree-
to?" she asked with terrible mispronunciation. "I think I said that right?"

"Animal?" he asked. "El oso... brown."

"You mean Freddy!" Sophia chirped. "... okay, Ronaldo! Then that just leaves you, mister!"

"I guess so!" the last guy at the table replied, standing up.
"Hello, hello! Uh, my name's Phil... and I actually already have a job here. We, uh, we were open briefly, but wanted to take care of some... renovations. Fazbear Entertainment really wanted to invest in improving the image of the restaurant after some rumors started flying around... and with business being closed, a lot of employees flocked to find different jobs since they couldn't wait around for their money, so we ended up having to do a lot of re... hiring..." his voice trailed off as he noticed the way Heather narrowed her eyes and twisted her lips. "... Uh, is something wrong, Heather?"

"What's your real name, Phil?" she asked. "You seem really professional, and yet you skipped out on giving your full name. Unless... you're nervous about the impression people will have of you? It's okay, I already figured it out, so you don't have to worry about said impression."

"Uh..." he was left absolutely flabbergasted.

"Impression?" Sophia asked.

"What, you haven't heard the rumors? Aside from the ghost story ones, I mean... those are for middle-schoolers," Heather asked, leaning back in her seat, folding her arms behind her head.

"Ghost stories?!" Sophia gasped.

"They're- they're just dumb rumors!" Phil snapped.

"The real interesting rumor... is that apparently the son of the CEO works at one of the restaurants," Heather remarked. "... And considering the franchise is still pretty small... there's only a few possible places he could be working at."

The pieces slowly fell into place as Jeremy turned back to Phil, his jaw hanging slightly open.

"Uh, heh, yeah. Let me start over. Uh, my name's Phil Fazari, and I'm twenty-one years old. And, yeah, my father is Federico Fazari, CEO of Fazbear Entertainment."

"But..." Sophia appeared saddened by this revelation. "If your dad's a CEO, how come you're stuck working minimum wage at a place like this?"

"To be fair, I've had my job for a few years, so I've gotten a raise or two over the years. I work as a general supervisor, though I have hosted a few parties, and I'm currently being reviewed for a management position. My parents were kind of divided on how they wanted to raise me... I'm an only child, you see. My dad was the one who liked to spoil me and give me really nice gifts... my mom argued that I needed more discipline and that I should be independent. So, they met in the middle and decided that I had to start taking care of myself once I got into college. Of course, my dad kind of bent the rules and made sure I could land a job at the first Fazbear Pizzeria... and he got me a car for my twentieth birthday... oh, uh, sorry, I kind of started rambling, huh?" Phil cleared his throat. "My major is currently undeclared... though I have taken a lot of business and communications classes. That just about wraps it u- oh, right! My favorite character is Foxy."

Phil took his seat as his uncle returned to the stage.

"Now that that's out of the way, we'll start touring the facility. For example, this - " Frank waved his arms around. " - is the major attraction area. We're going to have animatronics installed on stage to entertain the children, but they have surprisingly advanced AI for our time - they're going to be able to walk around and interact with the kids! We've also got some games along the southern side of the
room - skee ball, Whac-A-Mole, that sort of thing - for kids to earn tickets and exchange them for prizes in the corner over there."

Frank hopped down from the stage, walking across the room to a doorway into a room with pastel paint decorating the walls.

"This is going to be the area meant for the younger kids, with a smaller ball pit and playground. The running name we have going for it is just the 'Kids' Cove', since that sounds better than just 'the toddler area'. And over to the left is more of the behind the scenes stuff, namely the kitchen and first aid station, but most of you probably aren't looking for that sort of work," he looked around the room. "Come on, everyone out of your seats, there's more than just this room!"

Everyone exchanged looks and stood up from their tables, following Frank down the hallway.

"Sooo..." Sophia's voice trailed off, playfully walking into Phil's side, bumping him slightly. "What was your childhood like, then? Did your dad buy you lots of toys?"

"Yeah."

"Does that mean your mom was the one buying the books?" Heather added with a chuckle.

"...Yeah," Phil sighed.

"All right, up ahead is the room where we keep the spare parts for the animatronics," Frank announced, pointing to the door with several large signs on it. "We wanted to wait to assemble the animatronics when we had more active staff members available. Just to keep an eye on them during the first few days."

'NO CHILDREN', 'NO GUESTS', 'PARTS AND SUPPLIES', 'EMPLOYEES ONLY', 'HAZARDOUS EQUIPMENT' - all the signs were bright orange or yellow, their letters printed out in all caps and in black to really send the message home that this was not a place for the general public.

It kind of left Jeremy feeling rattled but insatiably curious. As Frank started to lead the others down the left hallway, he quietly approached the door, turning the knob. It gave way, and he slowly opened the door. Two bulging white eyes stared back at him from the dark depths of the room, and oh god did he just see some flashy metal teeth grin at him-

Jeremy yelped, trying to close the door as he fell backwards, trying to get away from the thing, and he probably would have crashed onto the floor had Phil and Heather not caught him first.

"Whoa, easy there!" Phil tried to reassure, looking down at Jeremy. "Why'd you go wandering off from the group?"

"You look like you've seen a ghost," Heather commented, before realizing what room they were standing in front of. "... Oh, you gotta be kidding me."

She chuckled slightly, releasing her hold on Jeremy. Phil stumbled to keep him off the ground, shooting a glare at Heather, as he heaved to pull Jeremy upright in one motion. As Jeremy caught his balance, he flinched as Heather swung the door wide open, turning on the lights in the room. It seemed as though the bulging eyes and metallic teeth belonged to some kind of purple rabbit leaning upright against the wall.
"It's Bonnie! He's an animatronic nerdy bunny rabbit, and you're scared of him?" she asked. "Foxy looks way more spooky, yet he's somehow your favorite? What is up with that, Jim?"

"It's Jeremy. And I didn't see the whole costume... just the eyes and the teeth in the dark..." he argued, a small pout on his face.

Heather rolled her eyes, swinging the door shut behind her, the force strong enough to create a sweeping gust of air. Everyone visibly cringed, and Phil gagged briefly.

"Huele a muerte," Ronaldo commented with a frown, his hand pinched over his nose.

"If you said that it stinks... I agree," Sophia wheezed with a cough.

"That's part of what sparked the ghost stories," Heather remarked, sneering.

"The ghost stories..." Sophia's face paled. "You're not suggesting - "

"That is not what happened!" Phil started to argue.

"What is going on here?!" Frank walked up to the five of them.

"Uncle - I mean, Mr. Fazari," Phil cleared his throat. "Uh, we were... I was just leading everyone back to the tour. We got a little side-tracked."

"I'll say! You'll never land a management position if you keep getting distracted. Now get moving!"

Phil shifted his eyes to the floor with a small frown, walking quietly with the others back to the main group.

"Sorry about the interruption," Frank apologized loudly. "We have four rooms here, two on each side of the hall, that will be rented out for private parties. They're all basically the same, but go ahead and look around them if you so desire."

The bottoms of Phil's shoes scuffed against the tile floor as he swiftly walked into one of the rooms, hands in his pockets and arms tightly tucked against his body.

"Hey, Phil..." he turned at the sound of his name, to see that Jeremy had followed him into the room. "Hey... are you okay?"

He sighed, relaxing his arms and shoulders.

"I'll be okay... just gotta take a few deep breaths, you know?" Phil forced a smile and took a deep breath for emphasis. "My uncle's probably just stressed out from all this renovating and rehiring we have to do. He's all alone as manager, so once some assistants have been hired, he'll probably lighten up a bit... uh, although that might mean I'll be the one stressed out if I land the spot in management."

He smiled wryly.

"Hard to believe he's my dad's brother and not my mom's. I-I mean, she's hard on me, but she's not mean about it. That's not what I meant to say. I probably shouldn't, uh, say stuff like that. It's just... even outside of the family business, my uncle and I never really got along."
Phil scowled and for a brief moment, Jeremy considered asking him to elaborate, but Phil straightened up again with a smile.

"B-but hey, when we're at work, we leave our family troubles at the door... outside... n-never mind. I'll just, uh, try to keep it out of my mind," Phil started to say with a smile, but it faltered. "So, Jeremy, you want to supervise parties?"

"Uh... yeah," he confirmed. It felt like Phil had mostly been talking to himself, so he was surprised that the conversation had turned back to him. "I have a younger sister who's going to start ninth grade in a few weeks, so I'm familiar with babysitting and watching kids. I can handle playing for hours and cleaning up after them."

"Well, that's just one kid. Now imagine parties of four, ten - one time, I had eighteen - kids showing up," Phil stated. Jeremy whistled in amazement, which made him chuckle. "Yeah, you, uh, wouldn't believe some of the things I've been through. A little over two years ago, I was hosting a birthday party among eleven kids. The party atmosphere was admittedly kind of exciting, because it was late June, so it was only a week or two before my own birthday. Well, I wound up getting excited for nothing, heh. There was a fight over a party game, cake was thrown, a kid got punched in the gut and threw up pizza all over the carpet - part of why we switched to a tile floor for easier cleaning - and... and one kid even bit me."

"Yikes," Jeremy murmured, wincing at the thought of it.

"Everything worked out, though... I mean, it didn't hurt and it didn't draw blood, so that- that was good. Actually, one of the employees in-costume at the time came in and helped me out. I felt kind of bad for the kids... they got so excited to see Freddy, but instead he had to break character and just silently lead the five troublemakers, including 'Bitey', out... probably to give them a proper timeout. But one of the parents felt bad and tipped me extra, so, hey, I guess it all turned out okay."

Jeremy laughed nervously, looking at his arms.

"It was only one bite, Jeremy," Phil reassured. "It was a one-time thing. If you're good with kids too, it shouldn't be a problem."

"Yeah..." Jeremy looked up at him with a smile. "Thanks."

At that moment, Sophia poked her head into the room.

"Psst! Guys!" she hissed. "We're gathering in the main hall again... might want to catch up!"

"Oh, uh, right!" Phil agreed, heading out with Jeremy.

"And finally, down here at the end of the hall is the security office. Usually someone just sits at the desk until - I mean, unless - something goes wrong... but we shouldn't have that problem anymore. You see, I wasn't kidding about those new animatronics having impressive AI. They're going to have facial recognition capabilities, and these sensors are going to be tied into a criminal database. Impressive, huh?"

Heather nodded soundly at this statement.

"All right, then..." Frank checked his watch. "It's getting close to one, so how about we take a break
for one of those free lunches, and then we'll start filling out paperwork?"

There was a collective mix of groans and cheers as everyone returned to the dining area. Frank and a few of the returning kitchen staff stepped into the kitchen as everyone took their seats and chatted.

"Please tell me the pizza's good," Jeremy prayed, taking a seat with his 'teammates'.

"Well... the kids certainly like it! So, you never know, maybe you'll like it too!" Phil offered with a shrug.

"... stuff sucks," Heather murmured under her breath.

Phil glared at her as one of the staff members passed around five purple paper plates with a slice of cheese pizza to everyone at the table.

"Well... here's to us hopefully getting jobs!" Phil toasted, lifting his slice with one hand.

Jeremy and the others lifted their pizzas in a toast as well, before the five of them took a bite out of the pizza. Fluent English may not have been a common language between them, but groans of displeasure and twisted faces certainly was.

For oven-fresh pizza, it had turned to room temperature by the time it arrived to the table, which didn't help the flavor or texture at all. The cheese was somehow greasy and rubbery at the same time, the crust could be compared to a slab of cardboard, and the sauce was the only thing with flavor, in the sense that it was just... 'there', it didn't really have a defined flavor.

"Hard to believe I used to think pizza like this was the best in grade school," Sophia laughed pitifully.

"Well, I gotta get used to it," Jeremy sighed, finishing off another bite. "One of the reasons I came looking for this job was the free meal to help lighten my budget."

"... Same," replied Sophia and Heather.

"Same?" Ronaldo asked. "Same... what?"

"If you work here - " Phil paused to pantomime wiping a table and sweeping the floor. "You get two free slices of pizza..." he held up two fingers and pointed at the slice on his plate. "... You know, free? You do not pay money?" He removed his wallet from his pocket and shook his head.

"No money? Oh, that's good," Ronaldo nodded with a chuckle. "Not much pizza, not good pizza, but not paying is good."

The five brave young adults finished their pizza, and stomachs full yet unsatisfied, disposed of their plates. Like factory rotation, they returned to their seats to find several pencils and a few pages of paperwork stapled together at each of their seats.

"After that... filling... lunch, we'll conclude today with filling out the actual job applications," Frank explained as many of the recruits started looking over their paperwork. "Just check off the positions you want, and we'll review your performance as the week goes on."

With that in mind, Jeremy started filling out his application, speeding through the identification
section. Name? Jeremy Fitzgerald. Date of birth? May 5, 1966. The address of his apartment, his phone number, education, this was all stuff he already knew.

*Check off the positions you would like to apply for.* He didn't have enough experience for management... and a tiny part of him hoped that having less applicants for management might help Phil get the job.

Let's see... party supervision? Sure. Receptionist? Why not. Cashier, janitor, kitchen, prize counter, first aid, gameroom monitor... he probably checked off at least ten boxes before moving on to the next section. The typical 'what experience do you have', 'what can you bring to the company'... and a curious third question. He paused to wipe his glasses, just in case he had read the question wrong, but sure enough...

*How good are you at dispelling rumors?*

Jeremy wiggled the pencil between his thumb and index finger, tapping it against his cheek a few times as he pondered his answer.

*Pretty good. I am capable of doing effective research and thinking logically. I consider myself to be an organized person, so I would not get any facts mixed up.*

He smiled as his pencil moved across the paper. Yes, that was sure to impress. A few minutes later, he was done. Like the few other employees who had left before him - one of them being Heather - he walked up and handed in his application before leaving.

Stepping outside, he was greeted by the sunny blue sky of another summer day. As he put up his hand to shield his eyes, he heard Heather's voice.

"Hey, Geronimo!"

"... It's Jeremy. What is it?"

She tried to conceal a playful smile by biting her lip.

"Not much. Just enjoying the sunshine. Just because I love technology doesn't mean I don't appreciate nature too. What about you, Mister Bio Major?"

"Same goes for me... except for that one lab where we walked over to the local lake and compared the number of trees with moss to determine what growing conditions were best. It was the most boring lab ever AND I got covered in mosquito bites! So that's one thing I probably wouldn't miss if I worked with technology like you."

"You're right, no mosquito bites... we get electrocuted," she teased, Jeremy's eyes widening in horror. "As long as you aren't working with anything too powerful, it isn't too bad. Just the little -jump!- of fright you get when you get zapped and maybe a small burn. One time, I actually got a pretty nasty zap and I think it must have messed with my hearing because I swear I hear a tiny bit better out of my left ear than my right."

"Oh... oh, well, *that explains a lot,*" Jeremy half-mumbled to himself.

"What?"
"Nothing."

At that moment, Phil came walking out of the pizzeria with his hands tucked in his pockets and a smile on his face.

"That wasn't too bad for the first day of the recruiting process," he commented. "Now we have the whole afternoon off! Better enjoy it while we can, huh, since that's going to end when we get those jobs, y'know?"

"That's true..." Jeremy admitted.

Heather took a deep breath and shrugged.

"All right. I'm gonna head back to my apartment, maybe watch TV for a little while, get a good nap... something. I'll see you guys later," she stated, starting to walk further into the parking lot.

At the same time, Sophia and Ronaldo walked out of the pizzeria together with frowns - Sophia's in anger, Ronaldo's in sorrow.

"Uh, hey, everything okay?" Phil asked.

"No!" Sophia snapped, causing Phil to step back. "I thought Ronaldo might need help with his application - and he did - so I showed him what to check off and what to write, and Mr. Fazari snapped at us! Like... it's not a test, it's not like it was cheating!"

"Uncle..." Phil muttered under his breath, letting out a long sigh. "I'm sorry about that, Ronaldo. You too, Sophia."

"So, the two of us -" Sophia hooked her arm with Ronaldo's. "... are going to head down to the bookstore and get pocket dictionaries so we can communicate easier! Don't worry, Ronaldo, we're going to get you that job!"

He smiled and nodded. Some things didn't need translating.

The two of them left together, leaving Jeremy and Phil standing around outside.

"So..." Phil's voice trailed off, breaking the awkward silence. "What about you? Do you live in a dorm, or some kind of apartment?"

"I have an apartment, but I don't think I'm going to head back quite yet," Jeremy replied. "I was planning on filling out a few more job applications, since I'll probably need a second job."

"What kind of job are you looking for?"

"Maybe a cashier or bagger at Picnix, or a waiter at The Bird and Barb," Jeremy answered, waving his hand around in idle circles.

"Ah, okay! I'm... probably just gonna follow Heather's example and head back to my apartment as well," Phil stated with a sheepish grin.

"Best wishes with the management spot," Jeremy offered, extending a hand to shake. Phil forced a small laugh, looking at his hand uncomfortably, before finally extending his left hand.
"Pardon the, uh, left-handed shake," Phil apologized. He moved his right arm, shifting it out of his pocket, only to reveal that his arm ended at the wrist.

"Oh, sh-shoot, I'm sorry, I didn't - I never noticed - " Jeremy stammered, switching to his left hand to shake with Phil.

"I know they say shaking with the left hand is bad luck, but I can't help it, you know? Besides, it's all just dumb superstitions... I mean, I've made it this far, right?" he affirmed.

"That's a good way of thinking," Jeremy agreed.

Better than Heather's way, Phil thought to himself, as he nodded.

"So..." Jeremy kicked the toe of his shoe against the pavement a few times. "This has been an unusual first day of interviews and recruiting -"

"Yeah, right? We're just trying to pick staff in a way that we get the best individuals and the best teamwork among them. Like seeing the trees or seeing the forest, but doing both at... the same...? Where am I going with this...?"

"About that, um, I was really happy to meet you, and Sophia, and Ronaldo and Heather and all, but... I should probably head over to Picnix and B&B for those other job applications."

"Good idea, you definitely need a job, no matter where it is."

"I agree, and that's kind of why I need to get, uh, going," Jeremy glanced down from Phil's eyes to their hands several times in rapid succession. "Kind of like now, maybe."

"Oh, right!" Phil released his hand.

"Don't get too attached, in case I don't get the job here," Jeremy warned with a smile, starting to head for his Ford.

"Just because you don't get the job doesn't mean you can't stop by and see your friends every so often," Phil teased. "Besides, why wouldn't you get the job? You seem competent enough to handle kids. What's stopping you?"

Jeremy paused in his steps, looking back at Phil.

"I just... well... uh, forget it. No. No, you're right, there's nothing stopping me," he restated, but spoke with renewed determination. "Everything they need to know about me is on that paper, and that's all they need to see."

He managed a smile, waving to Phil one last time before jogging off to his car. As Phil slid into the driver's seat of his own car - a Mercury Sable in a shade of cool blue - he took a deep breath. He had only known Jeremy for a day, yet somehow he already trusted him. And the other three friends he had made today. Trust shouldn't be given out so easily - he had learned that at the previous location - but he tried to be optimistic, and the five of them were just young kids anyway, with their whole lives ahead of them.

Four more days at Freddy's, and the real challenge would begin on Monday.
(1) It turns out there's actually a restaurant called "Fazari's Cucina", and it's also a pizzeria. I was just trying to pick out an Italian last name starting with 'Faz', so that was nothing more than pure coincidence.

Side Note: I looked through various theories regarding timelines and there was one that I really liked that will be used as the basis for the plot in this story. I am not saying the name of the person who wrote this theory since, obviously, that would entail spoilers. There is a minor discrepancy with it, possibly minor enough that future game(s?) may retcon it, but since we are still awaiting more information regarding the game's backstory, I hope you will be understanding if any plot holes or discrepancies happen. One thing I have seen the FNAF fandom get into fights over is theories (especially the prequel vs sequel idea). I do my research to the best of my abilities to write as accurately as possible, but human error is inescapable.

Please keep that in mind before you say something like "You forgot about what it said in The Living Tombstone's song!" This is going to be relying on game canon (aka not any songs, videos, creepypastas, etc. made by fans) and theories regarding it.
August 4, 1987

"Good morning, Ronaldo!" Phil greeted at the door, clutching a clipboard close with his right arm. "Ready for another day?"

Ronaldo held up his pocket dictionary with one hand, patting it with the other.

"Ready," he affirmed with a smile.

As a potential candidate for management - so far the only one, it seemed - Phil was taking on one of the various duties of being assistant manager - filling in at any empty position, such as the greeter.

"Just head to the main area, like we did yesterday," Phil instructed, gesturing to the left. "... Heather and Sophia are already here."

Ronaldo beamed and headed towards the large room.

As he left, Phil checked the box beside "Sanchez, R." on the attendance sheet on the clipboard. There were only three recruits unaccounted for now, one of them being Jeremy. Had he been too weirded out by him to come back? Phil tucked the pen behind his ear, switching the clipboard over to his left arm, and agitatedly stuffing the end of his right arm into his pocket.

The clock on the wall indicated it was 10:25, meaning they were five minutes away from starting the session for the day. He turned at the sound of the door opening, as two recruits walked in together - Bradley Fowler and Andrea Owens - and Phil marked them off.

"Jeremy..." he muttered between his teeth. "... Where are you?"

As the clock turned to 10:28, Jeremy came running through the door.

"Note to self," Jeremy panted, bent over with his hands on his knees. "Leave five minutes earlier next time."

"Jeremy," Phil repeated with a sigh of relief. "You really cut it close! You should know that doesn't look good when you're applying -"
"Yeah, yeah, I know..." Jeremy replied, as he finished catching his breath, before looking at Phil. "... Sorry, I shouldn't have interrupted you. You're right."

"It's okay... I did kind of sound bossy. Almost like my... uncle. A-and I don't want to be like that," Phil asserted, as he marked Jeremy's name off the list. "Come on, we'll want to grab our seats."

The two of them walked into the main area, where - sure enough - Sophia was already waving them over, Heather and Ronaldo seated on either side of her.

"Hey, what's with the stage?" Jeremy asked, pointing at the closed curtains, as he took a seat between Heather and Phil. "Those weren't there yesterday."

"They sure weren't!" Heather exclaimed, a grin spreading across her face. "This is the final week of setting stuff up... and that includes the animatronics and the stage!"

"No wonder you're excited!" Sophia was beaming now too. "Did you help set this stuff up?"

"Sure did," Heather confirmed proudly. "I've already assembled one of the endoskeletons. The 'professionals' who get paid were amazed at how easily this stuff comes to me."

"... Endoskeleton?" Ronaldo tried to repeat slowly.

"Here, lemme show you," she explained, gesturing for him to hand over the pocket dictionary. She flipped through the pages, trying to pronounce the words she was looking for. "It's like metal bones... meh-ta-lih-co... hoo-ay-sos..."

"Oh, the 'h' is silent in Spanish words," Sophia explained. "Ronaldo taught me that."

"Huesos metálicos... metal bones... are an endoskeleton?" Ronaldo asked slowly.

Everyone at the table nodded.

"I see," Ronaldo said with a smile.

Before they could continue chatting, Frank wheeled a platform with a large television and VCR on it in front of the stage.

"Good morning, everyone!" Frank boomed, wheezing at the end. "... Welcome to your second day of training at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. I kind of fudged up with forgetting the script yesterday, so I had to wing it, and I gave you the tour. What was supposed to happen was... I introduce everyone to the general idea of the company, and then the next day we take the tour and have everyone apply for the jobs that interested them. So we're just gonna switch the order of the first two days... the next few days will proceed the same - as 'try-outs', essentially, until the big lucky day - Friday! - when we announce our new team, before we open on Monday!"

With that, Frank loaded a videotape into the VCR, hitting the play button. Someone in the back of the room was kind enough to hit the lights, surrounding everyone in darkness, as the screen turned a goldenrod color.

"Freddy Fazbear's Pizza - Introduction" was spelled out in black letters, and below it, in smaller letters, "Fazbear Entertainment, 1984"
"No!" Phil hissed, trying to keep his voice down, as he slouched down in his seat like a student trying to avoid being called on in class. "I thought we destroyed all the copies of that tape! They're supposed to use the 1985 ones!

"What's wrong?" Jeremy whispered, before noticing the screen had faded to a real-life video, showing the image of a man in a casual light blue business shirt standing outside the doors of an older Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, based on the brown bear on the window's decal. Freddy still looked roughly the same, only with bigger eyes and lacking the prominent pink cheeks of the current design. Come to think of it, the man looked fairly familiar as well - almost like Frank, actually, with their hair in similar shades of graying brown - but he had a medium build, his face was a little more angular, and his eyes were a lighter shade of brown... in that regard, he looked almost like...

"Hello, hello! My name is Federico Fazari, the CEO of Fazbear Entertainment!" the man on the screen greeted.

... almost like Phil.

"And if you're watching this video, I'd like to congratulate you - yes, you! - because you're on your way to becoming an important member of our family here at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. Since you're new around here, why don't I tell you a little about our family history?"

The screen faded into the image of a different restaurant, with a large sign out in the parking lot reading "Fredbear's Family Diner".

"Back in 1973, Frederick Derbassier wanted to take family dining to a different level with restaurants that were more kid-oriented, leading to the first Fredbear's Family Diner being opened. It featured a stage show with four animatronics, a gameroom near the lobby, and a private room for rental purposes, such as birthday parties."

Phil groaned, burying his face in his arms on the table, as his father's voiceover continued.

"I was a business man looking to invest in the children's entertainment industry, and...

Federico laughed during his voiceover, as the image of the restaurant faded to a picture taken inside, with a person wearing a Foxy costume receiving a hug from a dark-haired little boy, roughly six or seven years old, his most noticeable traits being the two or three baby teeth missing from his giant grin and the fact that his right arm ended at the wrist...

"... well, let's just say I had been to a few of those birthday parties and was starting to get familiar with how the company worked."

"Oh... my... god," Heather whispered, a gleeful grin spreading across her face.

"Oh my gosh, was that you, Phil?" Sophia squeaked, trying to cover her smile with her hands. "Oh my gosh, look how little you were! That's so cute!"

"Cute!" Ronaldo repeated with a smile.

"It's not cute!" Phil hissed, lifting his head up. If the room was properly lit, the crimson hue of his cheeks would be visible to all. "It's embarrassing!!"
A person on the other side of the room shushed them, and they resumed watching the video.

"... trouble in 1977, when we decided on a business merger, and thus Freddy Fazbear's Pizza was born!"

"Trouble?" Jeremy asked softly.

"There was an... incident... at the original Fredbear Diner," Phil kept his head down, but tilted his face toward Jeremy. "I wasn't told a lot about it, since I was only eleven at the time... but there was some kind of drive-by shooting that wound up killing a child."

"What?!"

"Fitzgerald!" Frank snapped from the front of the room. "Save your questions for after the video!"

"Even worse, they never caught the guy," Phil added softly. "Which started spreading around rumors that maybe they let him get away, suggesting that he had ties to my father and that this was a conspiracy to get the companies to merge."

He frowned.

"... But it's not true. My father's not that kind of man."

Some graphic displaying a bar graph with the predicted growth for the company faded back into the video footage of Federico Fazari standing just outside the doors of the restaurant with an eager grin on his face.

"... what matters is that you're here TODAY to help shape the Freddy Fazbear's Pizza of TOMORROW! Oh, haha, guess we better go inside and get started then!"

The screen faded to black, before changing to orange, now displaying "Freddy Fazbear's Pizza - Your Uniform" in black letters.

"Whether it's birthday parties or just making sure everyone's having a good time in general, there's a lot to be done at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, and we want to make sure you're dressed for the part!" Federico explained, walking backwards into the main hall of the restaurant.

"Uh-oh! Uh... I don't think I'm ready yet!" a deep yet silly voice-over commented. Federico looked over to his right with a laugh.

"Oh, don't worry! You look great, Freddy!"

"You really think so?"

A person dressed in a Freddy costume walked out, stopping to stand at Federico's side.

"Of course I do! You just keep on singing with your buddies, and we'll worry about the uniforms for the employees - or as we like to call them, 'The Crew'!"

"These videos are so cheesy," Heather whispered, a big smile on her face. "Heheh... I love it!" She unashamedly snorted with laughter, and Phil went back to burying his face in his arms with another groan, as the screen cut to an image of what was obviously Phil in his teenage years, based
"Your initial uniform will be provided by Fazbear Entertainment free of charge, but additional pieces can be purchased by speaking with your manager to order them. Most of The Crew will be wearing the uniform shown. It comes with an orange polo shirt and your nametag. You, the employee, will have to provide the dark-colored business slacks - preferably in black, a belt, black socks, and black shoes - no sneakers allowed! Make sure they're slip-resistant, because we have a lot of tile floors! As you can see, we've kept the uniform unisex, so there's no need for our female employees to worry about skirt length or heeled shoes."

"That's a relief," Heather mumbled.

The screen cut to a different employee, wearing a bright lemon-yellow polo, khakis, and a white apron, and Federico's voiceover explained the kitchen uniform.

The screen cut away to Federico once again, now clad in a similar uniform to Phil, the only differences being his polo was goldenrod and he wore a black bowtie.

"Wow... looking snazzy, Mr. Fazari!" Freddy complimented. "... if I do say so myself."

"Why, thank you, Freddy!" Federico said with a laugh. "It's important for these uniforms to stand out, as they belong to our management staff, including the assistant managers!"

As Federico said this, Jeremy cast a quick glance at Phil.

"In addition to the goldenrod polo, we ask that our management staff also wear a plain bowtie in a dark color..." the screen changed suddenly, and it was clear Federico had changed clothes between takes. "... or a plain necktie in a dark color. Remember, black is your best bet! Oh, but don't worry, management..."

The screen changed again, and Federico was back in the same business shirt he was wearing at the start of the video. Freddy jumped back in amazement.

"... you can wear business-casual of your choice on Fridays!"

The screen cut away to an image of two men, standing side by side in near-identical uniforms, save for the colors.

"Finally, we have our extremely important security guards! We'll be providing the long-sleeved shirt for you, as well as a badge and hat. Daytime security wears the purple uniform, and nighttime security wears the brown. Wearing the hat is optional, but we ask that you please bring some form of ID with you, since you will be wearing a badge instead of a nametag to indicate your position. Like the rest of The Crew, we ask that you wear dark slacks - preferably black, a belt, and some dark socks and shoes that are slip-resistant."

The screen faded back into the video footage of Federico and Freddy.

"That makes sense!" Freddy commented.

"I'm glad you think so! And remember, if you have any questions about your uniform, you can always speak with your manager," Federico stated. "Other than that, you should be -"
The screen suddenly changed, and Federico was wearing the goldenrod polo once again, and the Freddy costume had changed from brown to a golden yellow as well, Freddy's voiceover making a little "Ooh!" of amazement.

"- golden!"

The screen faded to black, before changing to lavender, with white text that read "Freddy Fazbear's Pizza - Potential Careers". At this point, however, Frank stepped over to hit the pause button on the VCR.

"Do you want to eat lunch now, or after the next section? Because the next part is about an hour long..."

The voices in the room made it clear that they would rather eat their pizza now and get it over with.

"Finally! Man, I can't wait to eat!" Heather cheered, throwing her arms above her head, as she walked out of the building.

"The pizza's not - " Phil started to protest, but based on the looks from his friends, he was fighting a losing battle. "... it could use some improvement."

"You sure you'll be okay after skipping a meal?" Sophia asked, concerned.

"Come on, people fast all the time. It's like, what, two right now?" Heather asked, shrugging. "I'll just grab a late lunch. There's a Taco Shell not too far from here, and the line probably isn't that bad at this hour."

"If you think you can hold out for another hour, I hear Taco Shell is running their Happy Hour 3-to-5 promotion, and you can get any size drink for fifty cents," Jeremy added.

"Whoa, really? Awesome," Heather replied, then snapped her fingers. "Hey, Jer-Bear, that gives me a great idea!"

"... Could you please not call me that...?" Jeremy mumbled, looking off to the side with a blush.

She raised an eyebrow at him, before continuing her train of thought.

"Look, they're announcing the jobs on Friday, right? And we're all totally going to land a spot on the staff, right?" Heather proposed. "So, why don't we all go out for drinks Friday night? Do you know any good bars, Jer-man Chocolate Cake?"

He let out an exasperated sigh.

"Well... I really like the sangria they serve at..." Jeremy's voice caught in his throat, his eyes wide, tapping the tips of his fingers together. "Oh, wait... they closed down about, um, a month ago... I forgot about that."

"Besides, Heather... some of us aren't, you know, old enough to drink," Phil reminded her, nodding in Ronaldo and Sophia's direction.
"Oh, shoot, my bad," Heather clapped a hand to her forehead. "How about this... the *five* of us go out for wings, and the *three* of us get something to drink while we're there? Sound like a plan?"

"It sounds great, I love wings!" Sophia chirped. "*En viernes, comer pollo!*"

Her Spanish was still poor, but Ronaldo figured it out, nodding excitedly.

"All right, where should we meet? You guys know where Wings N Things is, right? You wanna eat there?" Heather asked.

Her four friends looked around at each other, nodding.

"All right, it's a date! I'll see if I can call in a reservation when I get home," Heather stated with a smile, before walking off to her car. "See you later!"

"All right, guys, have a good night!" Sophia exclaimed, sidling up to Ronaldo. "We're gonna head over to the library and do some studying. Right?"

"Right," he answered, before the two of them walked off.

"I'm gonna head back in, see what I can help my uncle with," Phil said, pointing back at the door.

"Yeah, I'm just... I'm just gonna head home too," Jeremy commented, starting to turn towards the parking lot.

"Oh, Jeremy, wait!" Phil held up his hand to stop him. "Hey, so, uh... how did the other applications go?"

"The other...?" Jeremy shrugged one shoulder then the other. "I think it went okay, the Picnix manager seemed to like me... so if she gives me the job, that might create a conflict with working here."

"Yeah, but... maybe you could work the evening or night shifts there, so you could still work here?" Phil asked. "I really want you to get the job here."

"You're already starting to sound like management material," Jeremy commented with a wry smile.

"Do I?" Phil asked with a small laugh. "I-I just meant in the sense that it'd be nice to have our little group of friends around all the time... B-but, I mean, as long as you get a job and you're happy, then I'm happy too, you know?"

He kind of blurted out the last part, and Phil wondered if it was a mistake for a moment, until he saw Jeremy's smile turn genuine.

"Thanks."

"Uh, yeah, you're welcome," Phil replied awkwardly. "Right, so, I'm gonna see about helping my uncle clean up... see you tomorrow, Jeremy."

"See ya," he waved briefly, before turning to walk to his Ford Escort, another day done.
"The k-kitchen. We j-j-just ha-ha-had to g-get the k-kitchen f-first," Phil complained through chattering teeth, clutching his arms close to his body.

"I am c-cold too," Ronaldo agreed, holding himself the same way.

"Well, don't forget your dang umbrellas next time," Heather chided, as another soft rumble of thunder lightly shook the building. "Or you could, I dunno, stand closer to the oven?"

Phil took her advice pretty quickly, and Ronaldo followed suit, standing next to the pizza oven. Meanwhile, Sophia and Jeremy emerged from the giant walk-in fridge, Sophia with a box of thawed pizza dough and Jeremy with several bags of pizza toppings, such as cheese, mushrooms, onions, and peppers.

"So, this is kind of like a cooking competition? To see who can make the best pizza?" Sophia inquired, as Jeremy filled the toppings stations.

"I think it's just about making sure you can actually get the job done, like passing or failing," Jeremy remarked, as he finished pouring the last of the diced onions into one of several metal bins situated in a cooling station along the wall.

"That, and this way you have no one to blame but yourself if you don't like your lunch," Phil commented, already kneading out the crust with one hand to fit the individual-sized pan in front of him. "You eat your first pizza, remember?"

"Yeah, but... this early in the day?" Sophia debated.

"First pizza... you make it sound like a memorable experience," Heather laughed, as she too started working on her pizza crust. "Kinda makes me wish I'd brought a camera."

Jeremy pressed a finger into the dough, staring at the little indentation left in the crust. It... was good that it was still there, right? Or was the indentation supposed to rise again in order to indicate a good crust? He glanced over to his side, where Phil already had the sauce and cheese spread out - rather uniformly, too - all over his crust, and was now weighing out the proper amount of pepperoni to top his pizza.

Jeremy measured out the sauce and cheese, trying to rotate the pan for a uniform spread as he poured on the sauce and sprinkled the cheese. Now for toppings - pepperoni, mushrooms, onions, and black olives sounded like a good mix. He started distributing the mushrooms when he paused - Phil had put pepperoni on first, and come to think of it, there was a certain order to follow when putting toppings on - and quickly switched to pepperoni before finishing up with the mushrooms.

He found himself in line to use the oven right behind Sophia and before Heather, Phil's pizza already on the way through.

"Man, it almost looks pretty good when you see it come out of the oven," Heather admitted.

"Well, I have had experience," Phil shrugged, as he placed the pan down on the counter and fumbled with trying to get a spatula between the pizza and the pan with no way to hold it down. "This... is... always... the hard part though!"
With his pizza already on the way through, Ronaldo stepped over to hold the pizza steady with another spatula until Phil finally slipped it off onto a plate.

"Thanks, Ronaldo!" he expressed with a grin. "Hey, uh, just curious, how do you say 'thank you' in Spanish? It starts with a 'g', I know that."

"Gracias."

"Gracias," Phil repeated.

"De nada. You're welcome," Ronaldo replied with a smile, before turning to move his pizza.

Sophia's pizza went through next, and Jeremy's pizza followed. It came through... just fine. There was a tiny black spot on the crust where a splash of sauce had been burnt, but if kids couldn't notice the bland flavor of the pizza as it was, they wouldn't notice a burn this minor. Heck, it might even make it taste better, Jeremy smirking at the thought. Despite his clumsy maneuvering, he managed to get the pizza onto the plate with no problem. After a few minutes of allowing their pizzas to cool, everyone sat together in the dining area to eat, even though the game room group hadn't rotated out yet. When they finally left, Heather immediately stood up.


"Sneak p-" Phil folded his arms. "Heather, no."

"Come on, it's cool, and it's like... a much better demonstration of my talent than baking some darn pizza," she dismissed, walking up to the stage. "Gentlemen... and Sophia... behold!"

Heather pulled the stage's curtain back with a masterful sweep on the final word. Mother Nature even threw in another rumble of thunder for dramatic effect.

"Endoskeletons!" Ronaldo exclaimed.

Sure enough, there were three of them already situated on the stage, just erect metal framework with those unsettling bulging eyes.

"They aren't plugged in yet, and obviously we haven't 'dressed' them, so I'd like to introduce my three nudist friends here..." Heather continued, before pointing from left to right. "... Bonnie, Freddy, and Chica."

"Not quite as 'charming' like this, are they..." Jeremy muttered, comparing the endoskeletons to a poster on the wall. "Wait... isn't there a fourth one?"

Phil let out a sigh of disappointment, resting his head against his hand.

"I tried to reason with my father, but... I don't exactly have any power in the company..." Phil stated, looking over in the direction of Kids' Cove. "Foxy is going to be moved to Kids' Cove. And he's been redesigned and reimagined. He's not a pirate anymore... he's not even a guy anymore. Loxy is going to just smile and wave and recite nursery rhymes and remind people of the rules, kind of like a motherly figure. Of all the ones to make 'kid-friendly', why'd it have to be him? Or... 'her', now, I suppose."
"It's just a fictional character, Phil," Sophia tried to reassure.

"I know, but... it's Foxy! It's dumb, but he was always special to me..." Phil's voice grew soft, looking at the end of his right arm, a scowl forming on his face. "And the idea of forcing him to change who he is, just so he fits some 'kid-friendly' standard, even though he was fine the way he was... it... it kind of pisses me off."

He shook his head, resting his arms in his lap.

"Sorry, I got carried away. Kind of happens when you've known these characters for most of your childhood," Phil laughed weakly. "I guess the newer models are kind of cute..."

"The new Bonnie definitely seems like an improvement, for sure," Jeremy remarked, recalling his encounter with the animatronic rabbit only two days ago.

"Ha! Oh, Bonnie... you should see that nerd now," Heather chuckled, climbing off the stage, returning to the table. "Had to tear off part of his face just to get to the wires I needed. You know, for the facial recognition software in the eyes."

"... Hey, Heather?" Jeremy asked.

"What?"

"I'm kind of glad you're an engineer and not a surgeon."

Everyone at the table laughed.

"All right, well, I'm done with my little show and my little lunch," she remarked, removing her plate. "What area are we practicing in next, Phil?"

"The game area, where else?" he commented, looking over his shoulder.

In the next section of the room, the games and even a few rides - such as a miniature carousel - could be seen.

"Games, juegos, correct?" Ronaldo asked, before quickly flipping through the pages of his dictionary. "We... play?"

"Yes," Phil confirmed, though he was trying to bite back a childish grin. "We, uh, also gotta make sure we know how to fix ticket jams, how to unlock the token boxes, what to inspect, how to clean them... you know. It's still pretty easy."

After finishing their pizzas, the five of them walked into the other half of the room. Jeremy cast one last look over his shoulder, the large eyes of the animatronics seeming to stare at them, as the thunder rolled outside. Better not to look and focus on the task at hand.

"So, how do you wanna do this? Should we split up?" Heather asked Phil, who shrugged. "All right, then we'll split up."

"I thought I was the one training to be assistant manager," Phil mumbled to himself, earning a small smile from Jeremy, who had overheard him.
"So... Ronaldo and Sophia. You two are always running off together. How about you guys practice loading the tickets on Whac-A-Mole? I'll check on the wires and do some cleaning. Phil, you and Jeremy go check out the skeeball machines."

"It's like an episode of 'Scooby-Doo'," Sophia noted with a giggle, before heading off to the left with Ronaldo.

"She had to make the comparison," Phil sighed, as he and Jeremy walked over to the skeeball machines.

"What, you didn't like Scooby as a kid?" Jeremy asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Are you kidding? I love Scooby-Doo!" Phil countered. "I-It's just... c-comparing us to..."

He looked down at his shoes, his hand and other arm tucking into his pockets as he thought for a moment.

"... uh... comparing us to a group of f-friends that... solve mysteries... and how I mentioned the other day... about the, uh, drive-by shooting and the criminal that got away... ehhh... I-I just felt kind of..." Phil cringed, shaking his head. "I-I just kind of feel like it's comparing the family company to sleezy criminals... and it just - ergh! - just bothers me a lot!"

"Yeah, I can see why that would rub you the wrong way," Jeremy agreed sympathetically, kneeling in front of one of the machines.

He removed the keyring he had been given for the day from his pocket, and flipped through the keys until he came to the one for the token boxes in the gameroom. He unlocked the box and hit the 'test' switch inside, causing a line of balls to roll down the chute.

"... if it makes you feel any better, I believe you. About your dad and everything," Jeremy commented, as Phil inspected one of the balls for any scratches or deformities.

"... You do?" Phil asked, looking up from it.

"Sure," Jeremy continued, as he inspected a different one. "I mean, he seemed friendly in the videos from yesterday, and you wouldn't defend him as much as you do if you didn't love him a lot, so I can only presume the feeling is mutual."

"I... uh..." he suddenly went quiet, keeping his eyes on the ball in his hand, but he had the biggest, most adorable smile imaginable.

"All right, they're all accounted for. Let's test the lights," Jeremy declared, holding up one of the balls. He rolled it quickly up the ramp, watching it climb into the air before rolling down the 20-point hoop. The score lights changed to match, as well as switching the ball count from nine to eight.

"You wanna roll?" Jeremy asked, pointing to the ball still in Phil's hand.

"Huh? Oh, uh, sure."

He rolled the ball up the ramp, aiming for one of the small 100-point holes on either side of the game, but it bounced off the rim and even missed the large 10-point hoop, rolling down the ball-return instead.
"You know... I've always wondered if I was supposed to be born right-handed," Phil muttered, looking at his left hand. Jeremy laughed and rolled another ball up the ramp, this time landing in one of the smaller center hoops for 40 points. "Oh, sure, just show off some more."

They laughed and sped through rolling the other balls to test the machine, before moving on to the others.

"All right, what should we test next?" Phil asked, as Jeremy finished locking the final token box back into place.

"More like, what area do we visit next?" Heather butted in, walking over with Sophia and Ronaldo. "Geez, you guys, if you wanna chat that much, do it after hours, y'know?"

"Well, to be fair, we haven't covered the Prize Corner yet..." Sophia defended.

"Yeah, but what is there to cover, really?" Heather argued, as they all walked over to the area. "I mean, you just keep the glass clean, restock stuff, display the ticket exchange rates, show off the really fancy prizes... and..."

"Music," Ronaldo reminded her.

"Music, right, the little music box..." she turned the crank on the box on the counter, a few little notes chiming out slowly. "With all the arcade sound effects, kids yelling, and music playing over the speakers, I don't see how this is supposed to 'draw kids in', but whatever."

"Rachel loves cute stuff like this," Jeremy commented, holding one of the Bonnie plushies in his hands.

"Rachel...?" Heather's voice took on a mischievous, sing-song tone. "... I didn't know you had a girlfriend...!"

Jeremy gave her a horrified look.

"Rachel is my little sister!" he shot back.

"Whoa, geez, okay, protective big brother much?" Heather backed off, raising her hands.

"Hey! Not to change the subject, but maybe we should run through the other sections of the building for pra- "

Phil's voice was cut off by a particularly loud clap of thunder, and the lights blacked out. A horrifying scream filled the air, and someone grabbed onto his shoulders.

"Whoa! Sheesh, Heather! Watch the voice! I-It's just a black-out, the power will be back in no-" Phil complained, as the power returned to the building.

"... Okay, I... I may have a little fear of the dark..." she confessed, practically clinging to Jeremy's back the way a cat clings to the person trying to give it a bath. He was the one who grabbed onto Phil's shoulders, probably startled by Heather's scream.

"A little," Jeremy scoffed, letting go of Phil.
"Oh, you," Heather rolled her eyes, letting go of him, as the five of them walked out into the main hallway, to resume practice.

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"The rain is becoming worse," Ronaldo grumbled, looking out the front window. "And I do not have a umbrella. I have to run fast."

"No, you don't have to run!" Sophia assured, holding up her umbrella. "You can share mine!"

"Share?" he asked.

She nodded, stepping outside and opening it in one motion. Holding it up over her head - her arm outstretched so she could shield the much taller Ronaldo - she waved for him to follow her outside. He ducked under her umbrella, tucked close against her.

"Um... I can..." He took the umbrella from her grasp, since he could hold onto it at shoulder level to cover them both, walking with her out into the parking lot.

"The power better not go out again... I've still got work to do..." Heather grumbled, starting to head for the storage room where the spare parts were kept.

"So, um..." Jeremy's voice trailed off as he picked up his umbrella. "... Do you need someone to walk you out to your car?"

"Oh, that would be great, thank you!" Phil replied, as Jeremy started to open the umbrella as he stepped out of the doorway. Phil stepped out as well, close by Jeremy's side underneath it. It was a little awkward, their sides practically pressed together to fit under that one umbrella, but at least it kept them fairly dry.

"I, uh, tend to park near the front... but with all the rain, I-I missed my usual spot," Phil explained, raising his voice over the sound of the pouring rain colliding with the pavement and umbrella.

"That's all right, just lead the way," Jeremy replied.

"I'm in the third row, over to the left. The Mercury Sable."

"Oh, nice. You weren't kidding about your dad buying you a car for your birthday, huh."

"Haha, nope!" Phil looked up at him, flashing a brief grin, before something in his demeanor changed. His smile softened and he forced himself to look down at the pavement. "You know, uh... earlier... back at the skeeball machines..."

"... Yeah?"

"Well... I was being dumb and quiet about it, but... uh..." Phil's train of thought stopped when he realized they were already standing at the driver's side of his Mercury Sable, only for it to take off sprinting. "Hey, I wanted to, uh, actually... I wanted to thank you for what you said. It sounds really irrational, but i-in all the years I've worked here, nobody's ever stood up for me or my father."

"Like I said, he seemed nice in the videos, and it probably was just an unfortunate coincidence..."
Phil smiled sadly, the thought of things Jeremy didn't know eating away at his insides, as he bent over slightly to keep Phil sheltered as he climbed into the driver's seat.

"... and... well... it's also evident in how he raised you... since you're a really nice guy too..."

"I - uh - " Phil stammered, this time it wasn't a smile he tried to hide, but a faint blush, a particularly large bite taken from inside him.

"... I-I-I should go," Jeremy stuttered, straightening suddenly with his back to Phil. "... S-see ya, Phil."

"... Bye, Jeremy," Phil spoke quietly, before closing his door. As he started his car, he watched him walk off until he was a blur of color amid the raindrops trailing down his window.

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August 6, 1987

"... Good to hear! We didn't have too many applicants for night security, so there won't be too much disappointment from the newbies."

Phil had just walked into Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, early as always, on a nice sunny day, when he overheard his uncle.

"It's always been my job," replied a familiar voice nonchalantly. "... I mean... what would I do without it?"

"Mr. Burgess!" Phil exclaimed, turning down the main hallway, to see his uncle chatting with the man.

"Oh, Phil, I've told you before, call me John," he laughed lightheartedly. It was nice to see him in high spirits.

John Burgess was a gangly man of above-average height, pretty much the human equivalent of a beanpole. His light brown hair had started to fade over the years, most noticeably in the wide, bushy mustache across his face. He held in his hands the familiar long-sleeved brown uniform shirt of the night watchman.

"Well, that's one less position to hire for..." Frank wiped his brow. "Sheesh, this week has been getting to me... better make sure I pick up my blood pressure meds at the pharm tonight..."

"Please do, sir," John advised, his tone heavily concerned. But he brightened up shortly afterwards. "Other than that, it's been a pleasure chatting with you, and I will see you again soon, Frank. Maybe you too, Phil. Best wishes with the assistant management position!"

"Uh, yeah, thank you!" he shook hands - John already familiar with Phil's left-handed shake - with the soon-to-return security guard, as he left.

"What a nice fellow," Frank remarked, as the door closed behind him. "Hard to believe that he's the brother of such a disgusting creep."
The words were a chilling reminder. Phil just nodded silently in agreement, remembering those things left unsaid to Jeremy... he kept his eyes on the fan in the office, trying to think of anything else but those memories. Come to think of it, how was Jeremy doing today? Would he be on time again?

He let those thoughts fill his mind instead as he went to help his uncle set up tables and chairs for the session that day.

"Yes. Yes, yes, yes! I can't believe this is finally the big day!" Heather exclaimed gleefully, wriggling in her seat like an eight-year-old at their birthday at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

"The big day?" Ronaldo asked. "Is there something important?"

"You'll see," Phil commented, though he also appeared fairly excited.

Suddenly, the lights around them dimmed, and a spotlight centered on the curtains.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" boomed a voice over the speakers, some kind of generic announcer. "Put your hands together fOOOOOOOO00000000000000000000000000... Freddy and Friends!"

"Freddy and Friends? ... Is that really the name of the band?" Jeremy asked. "Couldn't they have been more... creative?"

Heather shushed him, as the curtains pulled away and the spotlight now shone on the blue rabbit, brown bear, and yellow chicken on stage.

"How's everyone doing? I hope you're ready... to PARTY!" Freddy cheered, his robotic arm raising his microphone to his mouth.

A few enthusiastic shouts and a few half-assed cheers rang out amidst the group of college students, Heather among the ones who seemed genuinely excited.

A pop song for kids started playing, with Freddy introducing his friends and talking about parties and fun and all the generic childhood joys. As the song came to an end, this time two new voiceovers were heard - a feminine voice with a hint of a Spanish accent, as well as a nasally, stereotypically nerdy voice.

"Ooh, I just love singing!" Chica commented, her head nodding as her body shifted to turn towards the other two band members. "Almost as much as I love a good slice of pizza, mm-mmm!"

"We'll have time for pizza in a little, Chica," Freddy laughed, an animatronic hand pressed to his belly. "I think we should give our guests one more song!"

"Um, I beg your pardon, Freddy, but -"

"Yeah, Bon-Bon!" Heather cheered in a loud whisper.

"... what's up, Bonnie?"

Bonnie looked down at his guitar, then back at Freddy.
"...I was thinking... would you mind if I tried singing the lead vocals for once? I've... I've been practicing a whole lot!"

"Bonnie... that would make me super happy! It's good to try new things, and as we all know, it's important to share!" Freddy exclaimed. "Why don't you take center stage?"

"Oh my gosh, here we go," Heather whispered breathlessly, watching the scene like Dr. Frankenstein. "Do it, Bon-Bon."

Despite most of the recruits being college students, there were 'oohs' of amazement and even some applause as Bonnie took a few steps to his left to take the center stage. His robotic hands tweaked at his guitar a few times, a random variety of sound effects - acoustic guitar, electric synth, the croak of a frog, a trumpet - coming from the speakers.

"Okay. Here goes..." he took a deep breath. "...first, it's important for a singer to warm up! That's why Freddy always practices backstage before each show! So, I'm just going to perform my favorite warm-up song! A-hem-hem...!"

The singing voice that took over was obviously not Bonnie's, but a pre-recorded track by a professional musician, as the baritone operatic voice graced the speakers.

"Toréador, en garde! Toréador! Toréador!
Et songe bien, oui, songe en combattant,
Qu'un œil noir te regarde...
Et que, l'amour t'attend, toréador!
L'amour, l'amour t'attend!"

There was a sound effect of a record scratching, as well as Bonnie taking a deep breath to continue.

"Bonnie!" Freddy and Chica called out.

"No-good interruptions... that was the best part of this show..." Heather grumbled, someone at the nearby table shushing her. "...you shush!"

"That was a great performance - am I right, everybody?" Chica called out, turning to the audience. Heather stood up in her seat cheering. "...but that's not exactly what the kids are listening to these days!"

"Oh... well, I'm not very good at those songs yet..." Bonnie sighed.

"That's okay! Practice makes perfect, and you're well on your way!" Freddy reassured with a laugh. "...but until then, maybe you should let me handle the BEAR-itone!"

The recruits groaned as the three animatronics laughed and returned to their usual places on stage, starting to perform a different song. As they sang, Frank took the opportunity to start distributing paperwork amongst the tables - facedown. When the song came to an end, an employee activated the stage to close the curtains, giving the animatronics the signal that performance time was over.

"...Thought that little performance would be a nice way to lighten the mood before the big test," Frank offered. "Speaking of which, a special thanks to Miss Carras, an intern who helped set up our three friends here and the others in the game area and Kids' Cove."
Heather took a moment to stand up and wave, greeted with applause - especially from her own table.

"All right, you've got your pencils, just answer the questions," Frank instructed, lazily waving a hand around.

"I thought he said he would hire if he liked what he saw!" someone complained in a fairly audible whisper.

"And I would like to see your tests!" Frank snapped. "No talking, no notes, and eyes on your own paper!"

"Now, hold on a second!" Sophia argued, standing straight up. "Some of us need help reading this stuff!"

"If you aren't smart enough to read plain English, why'd you even bother trying to get the job?" Frank grumbled.

"No," stated Ronaldo, now standing up as well. "I am smart. My problem is I do not speak English good."

"Yet," Sophia added, looking back at him with a smile.

"Yet," he repeated, smiling back, before turning to Frank again. "When I finish the test, I give you the dictionary. You see no notes. I use it for translation."

"Fair enough," he relented. "Now, sit down and take your tests."

"Good job, Ronaldo," Jeremy whispered, keeping his voice and his eyes down.

"Thank you."

The questions were, for the most part, simple, but they were some of the most important things to remember around the pizzeria - how many cuts do you make on a large pizza? Which of the following cleaning products would you use on the tables? Which of the following properly lists the order of how to check the skeeball machines? And so on. Jeremy smiled at the skeeball question, remembering the sour face Phil had made when he rolled that 40-pointer.

The minutes passed, and people began to filter out of the room, handing in their tests.

"Shoot... old man had to make it a test..." Heather grumbled, as Sophia stepped outside. "I hope Ronaldo won't be too long..."

"I'm sure... he'll be okay..." Sophia tried to reassure, looking to Jeremy and Phil for back-up.

"Uh, from what I remember, it seemed pretty easy. And the chemical names are pretty specific, so I'm sure those parts won't be too hard..." Phil offered.

"Can you guys hang around for a while?" Heather asked. "So we can wait for Ronaldo?"

"Your patience is surprising, you usually like to bolt back to your apartment," Phil commented.
"Yeah, well..." Heather's voice trailed off, as she reached into her pocket. "... I remembered what we said the other day, and..."

She removed a camera.

"I kind of thought we should get a group picture, you know?"

"And to think, you're the one always complaining about the summer camp stuff," Sophia laughed. "I think that's a great idea!"

"I'm willing to wait if you guys are," Phil stated.

"I can stay a little longer," Jeremy agreed. "I mean, I can't wait around for another hour -"

"I'm sure he won't be that long," Sophia defended.

"True, it's just... I have plans," Jeremy explained. "I'm meeting a friend for drinks tonight."

"Uh, you haven't forgotten about Friday, right?" Heather asked. "Because I got the reservations at Wings N Things."

"I know, I still plan on going," Jeremy confirmed. "This is more about... her. My friend, I mean. I'm taking her out to try to cheer her up."

"But I thought you didn't know any good bars?" Sophia asked.

Jeremy's eyes widened, and he started tapping his fingertips together.

"I, uh... it's nothing special, it just has good drinks."

"How is it nothing special if it has good drinks?" Heather inquired.

"It's just one of those chain restaurants, like Philly's or Apple-T's, you know. It's just the bartender, uh, Dan, is really good at making drinks. It's not the establishment, it's the person doing the mixing, you know?"

"I guess that's... true..." Heather agreed, though she kept an eye on Jeremy. "Makes me hope Robert will be in on Friday. You two gotta try his ginger beer mojitos."

"I'm sure it'll be great," Jeremy said weakly, forcing a smile.

"Done!"

At that moment, Ronaldo came walking through the doors, a triumphant smile on his face.

"Ronaldo! Was everything okay?" Sophia asked.

"Yes. Some difficult questions. But I remember a lot of things."

"That's great!" Phil complimented, as another person walked out the door. "Oh, we should take that picture now! Sabrina!!"
"What?" she asked, looking over her shoulder.

"Could you, uh, take a picture of us? Give her the camera, Heather."

Heather handed it over to Sabrina.

"All right, where do you wanna take it?" she asked.

"Um..." Phil's voice trailed off. "I guess right in front of the building?"

"It's simple enough," Sophia supported.

The five of them crowded together, the tallest two - Ronaldo and Jeremy - in the back, with Heather, Sophia, and Phil in front of them.

"Is the light okay?" Heather asked.

"It's fine. Are you good?" Sabrina asked. "Okay, uh, say... I dunno... 'ready for Freddy'..."

"Ready for Freddy!" the five of them chorused.

She clicked the button, and the camera flashed briefly, taking the snapshot.

"One more?"

"One more," Heather answered.

"One, two... 'ready for Freddy'...!"

"Ready for Freddy!"

The camera flashed again, and Sabrina handed it back to Heather once they were done, walking off.

"I'm really glad she asked for that second picture, cause I think I may have blinked in that first one," Heather remarked. "All right, see you guys tomorrow...!"

Everyone said their goodbyes and walked off, a little extra spring in their step, as they were all confident - even Ronaldo - that they had landed a spot with The Crew.

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August 7, 1987

"Jeremy is late again?" Ronaldo asked, as Phil took his seat among his friends, as usual.

"Yeah," Phil laughed half-heartedly. "It was only by like one minute, but... Jeremy wasn't too pleased. Poor guy, I think he's being too hard on himself. He said something like 'Why did I even bother coming'... probably because my uncle was there when he showed up. Knowing him, he's probably giving him a scolding about being late... but he should be fine. Jeremy's a smart guy, he'll learn from his mistakes soon enough."
"Oh, Jeremy!" Sophia called out, waving to him as he walked into the main room. "Over here!"

Jeremy walked over and took his seat, silent and expressionless.

"Hey, uh, Jer... emy," Heather commented. "... You feeling okay?"

Frank walked onto the stage with a sheet of paper - likely a script, his face flushed with a hint of sweat, the corners of his lips turned up in a fake smile.

"Testing? Okay, good. Hello, everyone. Welcome to the last day of training, where we announce our new staff members. We'll also have pizza for lunch again, as well as cake this time, so help yourself. This is a short day, so let's keep it that way and just have the ceremony and get it over with," he beckoned for two of the returning staff members to come on stage, each carrying a cardboard box. "When I call your name, come get your uniform and nametag."

Frank took a few deep breaths, and began to read from the paper.

"What makes an effective leader? Someone who knows what it's like to have been on the bottom, as they slowly climb their way to the top. It is my pleasure to introduce our newest assistant manager..."

there was no need for him to check the paper, as he already knew how to pronounce the name.

"... Phil Fazari."

Phil let out a gasp, locking eyes with Heather.

"I got it?!!"

"Yes, numbskull, good job!" she teased. "I mean, Mr. Numbskull, sir, now go onstage!"

Phil excitedly made his way onstage, one of the employees handing over the famous goldenrod polo and his new nametag.

"He only got the position because he's family with the higher-ups," someone at a nearby table muttered.

"You shut your fucking mouth," Heather snapped.

"I, uh, I-I don't really know what to say," Phil commented on stage, looking out at the table where his friends were seated. Ronaldo, Heather, Sophia, and Jeremy were applauding... and a small smile had even returned to his face.

"That's because you aren't making a speech, go sit down so we can get this over with," Frank ordered, trying not to let the microphone pick up what he was saying.

Phil quickly shuffled off-stage, as his uncle continued speaking.

"A leader can only be as great as his team, though, so it is important to have plenty of great workers to go around. Freddy Fazbear's Pizza prides itself on the excellent parties it hosts, and we need great hosts to make it happen, such as..."

Phil took his seat, looking excitedly over at Jeremy.
"... Anita Horton, Emmett Campbell, and Daisy Floyd."

The three employees stepped onto the stage, taking their new orange polo shirts. Phil's smile disappeared as Jeremy took a long breath, closing his eyes.

"Parties aren't that fun anyway... remember 'Bitey'? I-I bet they'll be dealing with all kinds of tantrums, heh," Phil tried to reassure.

"Parties are a big source of income and fun at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, and part of that comes from our game room. We need lots of help keeping the games running correctly and checking on the animatronics from time-to-time. Supervising our gamerooms... are Bradley Fowler and George Thornton."

"Damn it," Heather cursed.

"Something's not right," Phil mumbled. "Uncle said there would be three gameroom supervisors..."

"Tying into that, it's important to keep our guests safe and to prevent any mischief, such as fights over using the games. Our newest daytime security guard, and gameroom-supervisor-on-the-side, is Heather Carras."

"WOO-HOO!" she cheered, dashing onto the stage to accept her violet uniform. She paused to point and wink at something behind the curtains (Phil rolled his eyes but laughed), before coming off-stage.

"Only a supervisor 'on-the-side', though? Does your uncle realize he gave the position to George Thornton, Mr. Trips-Over-the-Cord-He's-Supposed-to-Tuck-Away, over me? I guess I do kind of match with the old Bonnie, so that'll be okay."

Frank called out the names of the first aid staff - Sophia being one of the two new recruits, the cashiers, the waiters... and Phil shifted uncomfortably in his seat by the time the kitchen staff had been called up - Ronaldo being among them.

"... And of course, we don't want things just to be safe and fun... we want to keep things clean. EVERYONE matters at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, so I'd like to close with our two new janitors... Irene Hogan and John Atkins!"

Phil felt his stomach sink, and everyone else at the table shared similar looks of discomfort or confusion. He looked at Jeremy for any kind of response, but he kept his eyes focused on the stage and his lips straight. With his cold expression and the gray-blue dim lighting of the room, it almost looked like he had turned to stone, a solemn sculpture always watching, never flinching.

"Thank you all for coming, and congratulations to our new recruits... we look forward to seeing you on Monday or whatever day your shift begins!" Frank concluded.

Everyone - or rather, almost everyone - in the room cheered, some of the people starting to leave. In one fluid motion, Jeremy stood up and made a beeline for the door.

"Jeremy?!" Phil exclaimed, now getting to his feet. "Jeremy, wait!"

He chased after him, out the front doors, the bright blue sky and smiling mascot decals contrasting with the dark mood that surrounded them.
"Jeremy!" he finally grabbed hold of his wrist, stopping him. "What's going on?! Why didn't you... I-thought you made the cut for sure!"

He shot a glare at Phil, who took a step back, letting go of him. Guilt overtook him when he realized Phil was genuinely concerned, and he looked down, squeezing his eyes shut.

"... I fucked up," he sighed. He let out one masochistic chuckle, repeating it again. "I fucked up. I fucking up so BAD!"

He let out a heavy breath of air and turned on his heel, the knuckles of his fist connecting firmly with the rough brick walls of the pizzeria.

"Jeremy!!" this time it wasn't just Phil calling his name, but Sophia as well. He had grabbed onto Jeremy to pull him away from the wall, whereas she had grabbed his arm. Jeremy was panting heavily, almost to the point of hyperventilation, and they gently eased him into a sitting position.

"Jeremy, calm down, take it easy, it's okay..." Phil repeated over and over, almost wondering if it was also to soothe himself, as he gently squeezed and massaged Jeremy's shoulder, trying to relieve some tension.

Sophia took Jeremy's hand in both of hers, examining his knuckles. The bricks had left his knuckles abraded, dark pink with small amounts of thin skin peeling off - the most notable damage at the knuckle of his middle finger, where a small amount of blood was beginning to trickle through the tiny crevices and pores of the skin on his hand.

"It's not that bad..." she observed, trying to remain optimistic, but she glared at Jeremy. "Why would you do something like that to yourself?!"

"Jeremy!"

"Jeremy, what the hell?!!"

Ronaldo and Heather had arrived outside too. She looked back at them, then at Jeremy and Phil.

"I'm going to run back inside and grab some bandages and ointment, and maybe get a bag of ice," Sophia declared, before darting back inside the building.

When his other two friends walked over, Jeremy lowered his head, not wanting to be seen. A few other employees started to walk over, curious as to what was going on, but Heather shooed them off.

"Jeremy...? Are you okay?" Ronaldo asked. Jeremy shook his head with another deep sigh.

"It was the test, wasn't it...?" Phil asked, still holding onto Jeremy's shoulder. "They... my uncle... couldn't have made them all the same, so he probably included a difficulty curve..."

"I passed the test just fine," Jeremy stated dryly. "The problem was me."

Before Phil or Heather could ask, Sophia came bustling back outside, rubber gloves on her hands - a box of band-aids in one and antibacterial gel in the other.

"Sorry, no ice!" she exclaimed, before kneeling in front of Jeremy. She dabbed a thin layer of gel
over the cut on his knuckle, before applying the bandage.

"Look at you go, girl," Heather remarked.

"I have to be professional now," Sophia shrugged with a sheepish smile.

"I-It's just a tiny little cut and a few bruises, it's no big deal," Jeremy stated calmly.

"Yes it is, Jeremy! Y-You can't just hurt yourself like this whenever something goes wrong!" Phil insisted, his brows furrowed.

"Speaking of which, what do you mean the problem was 'you'?” Heather asked.

"I can't tell you..." Jeremy mumbled, keeping his eyes low.

"Yes, you can, we're your friends!" Phil assured. "Please... I-I'm assistant manager now, remember? Maybe... maybe there's something I can do, you know?"

Ronaldo had been flipping through the pocket dictionary Sophia always carried around with her, before looking up and speaking to Jeremy.

"We will not... judge... you."

Jeremy let out another sigh, before getting to his feet. He turned around, keeping his back to his friends, before he spoke again.

"Why would your uncle even bother going to that Packard pharmacy, Phil?"

"My... I-I don't know what pharmacy he goes to. Well, n-not exactly, anyway. He's still got a bit of, uh, a sweet tooth, so I knows he likes to buy lemon drops from time-to-time, heheh. I guess it's the only one that still carries his favorite?" Phil shook his head. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Your uncle saw me last night with my friend, Laurie. You see... that Packard, unfortunately, happens to be right..." Jeremy took another deep breath, blinking rapidly a few times as he turned his gaze skyward. "... right next door to Paradise Lounge."

He heard Heather gasp, but everyone else was silent.

"I don't get it," Sophia looked over at Heather. "What's so bad about Paradise Lounge?"

"Paradise Lounge is..." she shifted uncomfortably. "Well, it's not bad, first of all."

Heather noticed Jeremy relax his shoulders when she mentioned that, and she smiled briefly.

"But, uh... Paradise Lounge is... well... Jeremy, should I say - "

"... it's a gay bar," he stated simply.

"... Yeah," Heather said, breaking the awkward silence that followed.

"But... I thought you just said you went with a girl?" Sophia asked. "So... uh... wouldn't that
"Laurie broke up with her boyfriend about a week ago, and she wanted to try having a drink with a friend to ease the pain. Don't get me wrong, she's not like... drowning her sorrows in alcohol... she's smarter than that. It was more of the wanting company factor. But she didn't really want any guys hitting on her at the bar so soon after the split, since it's still a sensitive subject for her, and she is really pretty, so she tends to draw attention... so I offered to take her out for a drink."

He smiled sadly.

"Out to the bar with the finest sangria and where there'd be no men hitting on her. Paradise Lounge. And just as we were leaving, Mr. Fazari pulled up to the Packard right next door. He just stared at me for a moment, until he recognized me, because he immediately sneered and stomped right into the drugstore."

"Oh no," Phil whispered, clutching his head. "Then when my uncle got angry and wanted to see you in the office..."

"Yeah," Jeremy stated dryly, his voice cracking slightly. "He told me that he had seen right through my scheme, and there was no way he'd let some... s-some... s-some 'sick faggot' spread 'its' diseases to children."

"That fucking bastard!" Heather growled, pounding a fist into her hand. "I oughta go in there and shove some of that raw pizza dough up his ass... then see who he's calling 'diseased'!"

"Heather!" Phil hissed.

"What, you're not actually taking his side, are you?!"

"No! Don't you ever think that I'd - " now Phil was the one pacing, trying to keep his breathing and volume under control. "I disagree with my uncle on a lot of stuff, and this is definitely one of those things, but... h-he's still our boss, and he can change his mind about our jobs just like that."

She let out a resigned sigh.

"Jeremy, I-I'm sorry, I really am," Phil tried to circle around Jeremy, to get him to look at him, but he kept his eyes fixed on the sky. "Maybe... maybe we can fix things! We can, uh, tell my uncle that Laurie was your girlfriend... a-and that you didn't know what Paradise Lounge was! So that way you can get a job here... just... just like we all promised!"

"He won't listen. He won't listen to any of us. And besides, once the truth is leaked, there's no use trying to deny it," Jeremy cleared his throat, removing his glasses from his face to wipe his arm across his eyes before replacing them. "You were right, Phil. What you said about Foxy, or Loxy, or whoever... it was so, so right."

Phil sighed deeply, his heart and lungs seeming to sink into his gut. It appeared to be contagious, because Ronaldo sighed as well.

"No... no more sighs!" Sophia suddenly blurted out. "We can't just stand around outside of this building and be sad forever! What about wings?"

"That was supposed to be a celebratory dinner," Heather reminded her. "We can't exactly celebrate
"So change it, then! We won't go out for wings to celebrate jobs... let's celebrate the fact that we're all going to stick together! And to stand up for Jeremy! It'll be our... our..." her rosy cheeks had turned even redder in her frustrated fury, and clutching her fists tightly, she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "... our 'F-You Frank Fiesta'!"

Much to everyone's surprise, Jeremy burst out laughing, and Heather soon followed.

"... 'F-You'... you just said... you can't even bring yourself to say..." Heather tried to speak in between breaths and laughter, but she rolled her head back and kept laughing.

"We'll even take my car... so I can drive and you guys can drink a little more if you want. Not TOO much, but... you know, within reason," Sophia offered.

"Whenever I've been sad, I usually just sit around alone and brood for a while... eventually, I feel better, but... I dunno, maybe I should see if having fun will take my mind off it faster," Jeremy commented, finally facing his friends again. "I mean, you already got me to laugh."

"Then... then you'll come with us?" Phil asked, feeling like his organs had floated back into place.

"Let's give this fiesta thing a try," Jeremy confirmed, his voice solid and his smile unwavering.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, long chapter, and talk about mood swings.

I apologize if anyone was offended by the self-harm and homophobia in this chapter. I do not hold such views, obviously (I'm pansexual). Writing the self-harm scene for Jeremy was also uncomfortable for me because that scene was partially based on personal experience, and let's leave it at that.

But based on my drafted plans, the stuff next chapter should be mostly lighthearted.
The F-You Frank Fiesta

Chapter Notes

This chapter features alcohol, and while none of the characters actually drink to the point of becoming intoxicated, I just want to include a disclaimer to please practice healthy drinking habits - such as waiting until the legal age, know your limits, designate a driver, don't leave your drink unattended, don't buy alcohol for people under the age limit, and so on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Yesss...!" Heather pumped her fist as they stepped into Wings N Things, her first instinct to look at the bar. "Robert's in. Ginger beer mojitos tonight!"

She gave her name to the hostess, and they were led to a booth, under the dim orange glow of the overhanging lights.

"I wanted to be closer to the bar, but..." Heather shrugged, as she slid into a seat at the booth. "I can't stand the smell of cigarettes, and I figured everyone else would be more comfortable with non-smoking anyway."

"Yes, thank you very much," Sophia affirmed, taking a seat between Ronaldo and Phil.

The waitress arrived shortly after, taking orders for drinks - sweet tea for Sophia, cola for Ronaldo, and Heather was quick to order for her and her other two friends.

"Three ginger beer mojitos, please!" she demanded. "Tell Robert that Heather says hi."

"All right, but may I see your IDs, please?"

Phil, Jeremy, and Heather quickly produced their IDs, allowing the waitress to read them over briefly, before she handed them back with a satisfied "okay".

"So..." Sophia folded her hands together, lightly tapping them against the table. "... uh... classes. What kind of classes is everyone taking? ¿Cuáles clases acudes este semestre?"

"English."

"I actually don't really know..." Phil commented with a shrug. "I have a temporary schedule figured out - just some business stuff - but it might change, since each manager can get a day off each week. It can't be Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, since those are our busiest days... so I'm hoping for Monday or Wednesday, since a lot of classes tend to follow that Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule."

"And neither of us are in classes right now," Jeremy added, pointing to him and Heather.

"Oh, right... I'm sorry, that was a silly question!"

"No, it's not!" Phil stopped her. "You're interested in being a nurse, right, Sophia? What are your classes like?"
"This semester? I've actually got two labs, so that should be... neat," she winced. "They're tied in with the applied human anatomy and microbiology classes I'm taking. Maybe you can give me some pointers, Jeremy! You're a bio major, right? Or have you not taken micro yet?"

"I haven't taken micro yet, actually," Jeremy remarked. "I tried to stick to the semester plan they recommended at the college, so I'll be taking it in my senior year. It might be at different levels, though, because I'm supposed to take MCB 3020 and its lab."

"Oh... yeah, mine is 2000-something, so it might end up being easier..." she perked up. "That's okay, maybe I'll be the one who helps you study!"

Jeremy laughed.

"Easier?!" Heather scoffed. "All those gen-ed classes are like 2000-ish classes, but they always end up being the make-or-break ones!"

"That's true," Jeremy leaned back in his seat, knitting his brow, looking up at the ceiling. "CHM 2211... Organic Chemistry 2... I spent many a sleepless night thanks that damn class. So many carbons and oxygens and memorizing bond types and how they split... while I was swapping 'C's and 'H's and 'O's, I wound up swapping a lot of 'Z's for just one B."

"Poetry," Heather commented with a slow nod. "I didn't go through bio and chem hell, but I did have the joy of taking 3 semesters of calculus as well as physics classes that already had calc blended into them at the same time. I look at any numerical expression and it's like - bam. I know what that derivative is. Oh!"

She snapped her fingers, pointing at Jeremy.

"You know, you would like this friend of mine - Fritz - he kind of works in-between both our fields, 'cause he's pursuing bioengineering. He'll actually be starting his senior year at the university, so you might be able to get in touch with him."

"Really?" Jeremy and Phil both asked, before exchanging a look.

"You go ahead," Phil said.

"Oh, no, I was just going to say it sounds like a promising career, because there's a lot that can be done with it - like researching better soils and stuff - but that wasn't really my thing. There's probably more to it, but at face value, when it sounds like you're just researching dirt... it just kind of sounds boring," Jeremy opined with a shrug.

"Don't let Fritz catch you saying that. He's not interested in soil research, he's looking into biofuels and alternative energy. With all the fuss about fossil fuels contributing to pollution and stuff, he wants to reduce the need for gasoline and coal with water and wind and stuff. It's got merit, but I don't know if it'll catch on. Might take a decade or two," Heather cracked an awkward smile. "... Sorry if this doesn't make sense, Ronaldo."

"It's okay. I work hard in English, then I understand."

"Yeah, we're talking about 'bee-oh-lo-gee-ah'?" Jeremy tried to pronounce.

"Biología," Ronaldo corrected. "Science with animals and plants, right?"

"Right, biología," Jeremy repeated back. "So, what were you gonna say, Phil?"
"Oh, uh, I was just going to point out that one of our employees from the old place studied bioengineering when he went to college. It's kind of funny, Heather, because he also works in security... but he's on the night shift, so... uh, it might be hard to meet him," Phil commented.

"If he got his degree in bioengineering, what the heck is he doing working minimum wage?" Heather asked.

"No, he... he only studied the subject. He didn't get his degree. So that's, uh, kind of why he's stuck with us. Mr. Bur... uh, John doesn't seem to mind too much, though. He's really got nerves of steel, nothing seems to phase him... which is a pretty good quality for a night guard, I guess. Especially since his broth-" Phil's eyes widened and he quickly changed the subject. "Uh, n-never mind, I've said too much. Hey, I think that's our waitress!"

Sure enough, she walked over with a tray carrying five glasses. She dropped off the tea, cola, and three mojitos before offering to take orders.

"Oh, shoot, we got so caught up in chatting, we forgot to look," Sophia noted.

"Yeah, we might need a few minutes," Heather stated.

"All right, take your time, and I'll come check on you in a little bit."

"There's so many flavors, though...!" Phil commented, eyes wide at the list of sauces, ranging from mild to hot. "How many are there, fifteen?"

"Twenty-one," Heather said with a wink. "But we'll take a look at that in a sec! First things first...!"

She raised her glass, and her friends did the same.

"Here's to our..." Heather paused to think for a moment, recalling whom she was sitting next to. "... friendship, and for those of us in school, here's hoping it's a good year!"

"Cheers!" everyone tapped their drinks together, the familiar clinking of plastic and glass colliding in a jovial promise before cups were tilted and beverages were consumed.

The mint in the mojito was pretty strong, but what really overwhelmed was the ginger beer - the flavor of the ginger tickling the nose while its carbonation - and the rum itself - created a rich burning sensation in the throat.

Phil was first to set his drink down after the first few sips, trying to breathe as he patted his chest with his other arm.

"Whoo!" Heather cheered with a hearty breath of air. "Now that's a mojito!"

"Yeah, it's really good," Jeremy complimented, feeling the burn subside as he resumed reading over his menu.

"Isn't it? Like, I really love the ginger in it, because it burns you twice, like you have it going down your throat and also your nose at the same time, like..." Heather brought two fingers up, side by side, before separating them by drawing spirals in the air in opposite directions, almost like she had drawn out the symbol for Aries. "... I just love it! ... Uh... are your drinks okay too?"

"The tea's nice and sweet, just how I like it!" Sophia assured.

"My cola is... uh, it's cola. There's nothing special, I like it," Ronaldo commented with a shrug, but
grinned. "Next year, I can have coke and rum."

"Good plan, man!" Heather praised, toasting briefly, before taking another drink. "So, about those wings..."

There was a platter for fifty wings available, allowing a party to pick from up to five flavors, so they decided to split one of those, with a flavor for each of them. 'Dragon Duo' - with the Asian flavors of sweet chili peppers and teriyaki. Sweet habanero. Spicy garlic. Honey barbecue, sweet and mild. And classic buffalo sauce... in the hottest variety available.

"Hey, Ronaldo... when you know more English, what do you think you'll major in?" Jeremy asked, gesturing for Sophia to hand him the pocket dictionary. "Tu área principal de estudio, your major?"

"Oh! Hmm..." Ronaldo furrowed his brow. "I don't know."

"Undeclared too, huh?" Phil asked with a sheepish grin. "We'll think of something eventually, right?"

"Right."

"Speaking of majors... heh, we keep coming back to biology, but..." Phil took a sip of his mojito before continuing. "Are you into anything specific in biology, Jeremy? For example, my aunt, Flora, got a degree in..."

"... Botany?"

"Nope, zoology, heheh. Or were you just thinking of pursuing generic biology to get into something big, like medicine or veterinary school?"

"Nah, I think that's too much pressure," Jeremy dismissed, waving it off. "I'm actually thinking of pursuing zoology too, to be honest. What's wrong, Sophia?"

She was frowning, appearing to be deep in thought.

"Is Flora... the sister of Federico and Frank, Phil?" she asked him.

"Uh-huh."

"... What's your mom's name?"

"Yoko. Why do you ask?"

"Oh... just curious," she shrugged and looked around the restaurant, at the televisions, trying to change the subject. "So, um, anyone into football?"

"Yes," Phil and Ronaldo quickly confirmed.

"I know it is American football. I like it too."

"So, who are you picking this year?" Sophia asked.

"Well, John Elway might be young, but he's looking really good. I bet this is the year the Broncos pull it off for sure," Phil pointed out.

"I think the Giants win again," Ronaldo offered.
"I dunno, I'm hearing a lot of good things about the Oilers...!" Sophia teased.

Some more small talk was exchanged before a server came out with their wings.

"Okay, Dragon Duo...!" he called out, his eyes on Phil.

"Oh, that's me," Jeremy answered, raising his hand.

The server carefully placed them in front of him, an embarrassed slowness to his pace, before moving onto the next plate of wings.

"Habanero...?" he asked, eyes on Ronaldo.

"Those are mine," Phil stated with a nod.

The server didn't really try to guess anymore, just naming the wings and passing them out to everyone - spicy garlic for Ronaldo, mild barbecue wings for Heather, and the atomic buffalo for Sophia. The next few minutes were relatively quiet, with everyone stuffing their faces with chicken wings.

"Ahhhh... that was great!" Heather sighed contentedly, placing another bone into the small pile on the side of her plate.

"How did you manage to eat those, though?" Phil asked Sophia, who had been licking some extra sauce off her fingers.

"Practice! My dad always loved spicy food, so I was often eating it, even as a child."

"I had you pegged as a spicy fan for sure," Phil commented to Heather, now turning his gaze to her. She shrugged.

"I can handle spicy stuff fine. I was just in the mood for somethin' sweet, that's all."

"How's everyone doing? Are we gonna need some boxes?" the waitress asked, stepping over to the table.

"Yes, and... are we ready for the check?" Phil asked, looking around at everyone, who nodded in agreement. "... and we're ready for the check."

The waitress nodded and left, leaving the five of them alone for a few minutes.

"So..." Heather's voice trailed off lazily, as a little smirk crept onto her face. "Anyone wanna play a quick round of 'Never Have I Ever'?"

"A game?" Ronaldo asked.

"Yeah, it's a drinking game," she tipped her glass to her mouth, pretending to take a sip. "You say something you have never done before. Like... 'never have I ever been to Antarctica'. If you have been to Antarctica, you drink. If you have not been to Antarctica, you do not drink. If nobody else drinks, the person who said 'Never have I ever...' has to drink. Do you understand?"

"I think so, but..." he held up the dictionary. "... I am sorry if I am slow."

"Don't worry about it, it'll be okay. We'll try to keep the questions easy. Sophia, you keep track of who drinks."
"I, uh..." she quickly grabbed a pen and removed the paper with her friends' addresses and phone numbers on it, flipping it over to keep a tally. "... okay!"

"Do you want to start, Ronaldo?"

"I think I can," he said, turning to a page in the dictionary. "I have a good question."

"Ooh, okay!"

"Never have I ever worn... opposite... clothing!"

"That's kind of hard to define, because so much of men's clothing is treated as unisex nowadays, whereas traditionally feminine clothing like skirts and dresses are still seen as feminine and 'bad' for men, which says a lot about how society still views women..." Heather lectured. "... right, almost forgot, I'm the engineer, not the psychologist or activist. Anyway, I've always worn a lot of blue jeans or overalls, so I guess that counts."

She took a sip of her mojito, smiling as Sophia raised her tea in a toast, before she took a sip of tea. Slowly, Jeremy lifted his mojito to his lips as well.

"Rachel was sick on her 8th birthday... and I had the day off from school, so... we kind of had a 'fashion show'..." he mumbled against the glass.

"So that was only like, what, five or six years ago?" Heather asked, but raised her glass. "You're, like, the best big brother ever. If Rachel ever needs reminding, tell her I said so."

Jeremy chuckled but didn't look anyone in the eyes.

"Sophia, you go?"

"Oh, okay! Hmmm... never have I ever..." her voice trailed off as she looked at Ronaldo seated beside her. "... traveled - viajar - outside my home country... país de origen."

"Oh! ... Unfair... sneaky!" Ronaldo complained teasingly with a pout, taking a sip of his cola. Phil and Heather each took a sip of their mojitos as well.

"All right, Faz-Heir, where have you been?"

"Oh, uh, nothing too fancy... some family-related travel. I was too young to really remember much, but I went to Italy when I was about five or six... and I got to visit my grandparents in Japan the summer I graduated high school."

"'Nothing fancy', says the guy who's traveled to two different continents," Heather scoffed with a grin. "I just went to Canada to see Niagara Falls. So, do you speak Japanese?"

"ああ。。。僕は日本語を少しだけ話せます。"

"Uh... yes?"

"Oh, I just said that I can speak only a little Japanese. Same with Italian. Just basic conversational stuff," Phil explained with a shrug. "So, uh, my turn? Oh, uh, hold on..."

He paused just as the waitress dropped off a few foam boxes and a check presenter made of black faux leather.

"Um, does everyone have cash? Dinero?"
Everyone began shuffling through their pockets or wallets, eventually producing some bills and coins.

"I think it's fair that we each pay for a fifth of the wings, as well as whatever our drinks cost..." Sophia commented, taking a peek at the bill. "Oh, and contributing to the tip, of course!"

Everyone handed over a bill or even a few bills, and maybe even a few coins just to add a little more to the tip.

"So, Phil, do you have your question?"

"Oh, I think I do, heheh," he grinned cheekily. "Never have I ever... been kissed! By someone outside of the family, I mean."

Sophia took a quick sip of tea, before flipping through the pocket dictionary to translate for Ronaldo. He took a sip of cola as Heather and Jeremy set their mojitos down.

"Wh- really?!!" Phil exclaimed, now in shock.

"Ooh, we got us an innocent one here!" Heather grinned. "Twenty-one years and you've never kissed anyone?"

"Well, I-I have been on a date at least!" he defended. "... Granted, it was only one date... to the movies... and the most I-I did was put my arm around her... which, uh, wound up being kind of awkward, since she was sitting on my right, so... uh... yeah, sh-she wasn't exactly comfortable with... with my... I-I didn't really think that move through."

He moved his hand and other arm beneath the table as he finished the story. Everything went quiet, until Jeremy realized that now everyone's eyes were on him.

"... I've kissed one of each."

"Cheers," Heather chuckled.

"The first one was actually a girl, for a silly party game... and no, that wasn't that 'definitive moment where you realize your preferences'. I already knew I was..." Jeremy's eyes shifted around the other tables, lowering his voice for one word, before resuming his original - and already low - volume. "... gay... even before that kiss. And the other one, well, that's... I don't really like talking about that one."

Jeremy frowned, and everyone decided to just write it off as just a bad ex. The waitress came by and picked up the check from the surprisingly silent table.

"Hey, uh, Jeremy, how about you ask the next question? I-I mean, if you want."

"Okay... never have I ever broken a bone. Hueso..." he checked the pocket dictionary. "... roto."

Ronaldo was first to take a sip, before pantomiming his fingertips jamming into his hand.

"Ooh, you broke a finger?" Heather asked with a wince, pointing to one of her fingers. "It seems so minor, but it probably hurts a lot."

Phil took a drink as well, holding out his left hand.

"Nine years old, I joined a junior football league. At nine, they start putting you in the tackle division. The coach put me on defense, because I wasn't expected to be good on offense, y'know,
with receptions and stuff," Phil rolled his eyes, waving his hand, but smiled. "My third play, I put my hand up to block a pass and caught the ball. I remembered to tuck it against my body to hold onto it, but I wasn't very smart about how I held it, and wound up falling right on my wrist. I really wanted to continue playing when I got better - heck, the coach even wanted me back - but my dad didn't want to risk more injuries. I played a little bit of soccer, but it just wasn't the same, you know?"

Sophia lowered her glass too, shaking her head.

"I broke my leg on my friend's trampoline when I was like six," she explained with a grimace, earning a few pained "ooh"s from her friends.

"All right, my turn!" Heather cheered, before lowering her voice.

"Okay, but - oh, thank you," Phil paused to thank the waitress as she left their receipts and a few mints before wishing them a good night. "... but make it a quick one, because I don't want to camp here... I know first-hand that it's a pain." (1)

"Okay, okay, it's the classic one... never have I ever had sex."

Everyone grew silent, even Ronaldo well aware of the statement - some things didn't need translating - casting glances around at each other.

Until finally... slowly, silently, hesitantly... Jeremy lifted his glass to his lips.

"NO WAY," Heather gasped.

"Keep your voice down!" Jeremy hissed, as he set the glass down, his cheeks red.

"So then... you did it with-"

"Yes," Jeremy quickly interrupted Sophia.

"... How was it?"

Jeremy rolled his eyes and gagged.

"O-Oh, you...!"

"WHOA, wait, no, it wasn't like that," he had to chuckle a little bit at her reaction. "It just... wasn't as great as I thought. I mean, nobody expects their first time to be amazing, but..."

He let out a resigned sigh.

"It could have been better, you know?"

"I'm sorry, Jeremy... um, I think Phil was right... we shouldn't camp too long," Sophia changed the subject, noticing Jeremy's discomfort, and picked up her box of leftovers. Everyone quickly and quietly did the same, starting to leave before Phil suddenly halted.

"Oh, shoot!" he reached into his pocket. "I think we forgot to tip!"

As he pulled out his wallet, a small trinket fell out as well, hitting the floor with a little 'tink'. Jeremy knelt down to pick it up - a decorative pin of some kind, resembling the custom tokens used at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

"You dropped this," Jeremy stated, holding it out to Phil as he returned from placing some money on
"Oh, yeah, I must have put that back in my pocket the other day when I helped my uncle straighten up around the Prize Corner," Phil recalled. "It's just one of the little pins they give out as prizes. You can keep it if you want."

He mentally slapped himself, no, look what his uncle had done to Jeremy, why would he want anything to do with Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, with him, with -

"Sure, thanks," Jeremy smiled and tucked it into his pocket.

They stepped outside, heading for where Sophia had parked her car.

"Good thing we had everyone drive their cars back home before coming here... can't risk anyone driving home drunk," she remarked, opening the door to the driver's seat.

"We only had one drink, I'd say we'd be fine driving home," Heather remarked. "But I guess it's better to be safe. We'll all chip in to pay back your gas money, Soph."

'Paying back'... Ronaldo frowned at this thought, handing his box of leftovers to Jeremy.

"Hey, what's up, do you need me to hold these?" he asked, balancing it on top of his own takeout box.

"Yes, take them," Ronaldo stated seriously. "I am... worried. If you do not have a job, you cannot buy food. If you cannot buy food, how will you eat?"

"I'll be okay, but thank you for your concern," Jeremy assured, handing the box back to Ronaldo. "My parents will give me money if I really need it... I'm sure. And I might find another job. In the worst scenario... I could always apply for a government program."

"Hey, come on! This is our F-You Frank Fiesta! We can't let this stuff get us down tonight!" Heather insisted, already claiming the front seat. "Sophia, your radio better have good speakers, because we're gonna sing our asses off!"

Songs by Bryan Adams, Duran Duran, Queen, Tears For Fears, Phil Collins, and Cyndi Lauper were part of the concert's program, as was a particularly breath-taking rendition of everyone practically screaming "Footloose" at the top of their lungs when they weren't overcome with laughter.

After Ronaldo had been dropped off, Jeremy's apartment was the closest, so he was dropped off next.

"Good night, Jeremy!" three voices called out from the car.

"Good night, guys! Thanks for the ride, I'll call you again soon!"

It was hard to stay in a bad mood with friends like these, Jeremy thought, as he strolled up the steps and unlocked his apartment door.

"Hey, Pat," he greeted his housemate, lounging on a couch in the small living room they shared.

"Hey. Have a good night?" Pat replied, as Jeremy tucked his leftovers into the fridge.

"Yeah. How was your night?"
"Eh. Just stayed home and watched TV, you know," Pat shrugged. "By the way, someone named Leslie called while you were out... you should probably call her back tomorrow, she said it was important."

Jeremy removed the pin Phil had given him from his pocket - just like the tokens, with a big capital 'F' engraved in it. 'F' for Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, for friends doing stuff together, for fortune, and for a big fat 'fuck you, Frank'.

He smiled, tucking it back in his pocket, as he took a seat by Pat and watched the news.

Chapter End Notes

(1) Camping is a term used by restaurants to describe patrons who overstay their welcome, like sitting around and chatting despite having paid the bill.

Sorry that this chapter turned out shorter than the other two, and that there wasn't as much Phonemy. Next chapter should fix that.

Also! I recently found out about the teaser for FNAF 3. Since this story was in the works prior to the game's release, the canon between this story and the actual game may differ.
August 10, 1987

Was it the narrow side that crossed over first... or the wide side?

Phil faced his expression in the mirror with a frown, already dressed for work, save for the necktie draped around his neck. He held up one end of it with his hand. Sure, he had learned to tie a necktie with one hand, thanks to a video for stroke survivors... but that didn't make it easy, fidgeting with fingers and even using the end of his other arm to try to get the narrow end to sweep around correctly.

Of course, his uncle would be in for an entire shift that day - the hours for Monday through Thursday were twelve to nine, but allowing an hour for opening and closing, it technically came out to an eleven-hour workday - so goodness knows a knot in a necktie would be one of many things Frank would gripe about. That and children. Children, wanting to savor their last days of freedom before elementary school resumed next week. And the week after that, college classes would resume, and Phil would most likely be taking on the afternoon and evening shifts at work. Much to his dismay, the guaranteed free day given to him by the company was Thursday, which didn't offer as many classes as the Monday-Wednesday-Friday scheme.

However, that had given him a new idea for planning his schedule. No classes Thursday, that would be his goal, as he already had plans to reschedule his classes on the upcoming Thursday. That would be his big day off to study or hang out or do whatever he wanted. And once he had his schedule figured out, he might have limited availability on any given day, so that was another day off too. Of course, that didn't change the fact that almost his entire work schedule would probably come from Saturdays and Sundays... trying to work a job and get an education at the same time was no walk in the park.

Right, walk. Or rather, drive. Phil needed to get moving. He grabbed an apple and a pack of Pop-Tarts from the kitchen and headed out the door, locking it behind him. He lived alone, so there was no need to worry about waking up any housemates. He headed down the steps, climbed into his Sable, and took a big bite out of the apple as he pulled out of his parking spot.

"Morning... Phil," Heather greeted with a yawn, unlocking the door for him, a large styrofoam cup with a lid in her hand. "... Do you remember if we have a coffee pot?"

"Uh... I don't think we do...? I mean, I can speak with my uncle about buying one for the employee lounge... but..." he pointed to the cup in her hand. "... why are you asking if..."

"Oh, this?" Heather asked, looking at the cup in her hand with a smile. "That guy, John... he was on
his way out when I stopped by. Saw me yawning and said 'oh, I know how you feel. I was on my way to buy some coffee, would you like a cup before your shift starts?' so I just told him yes, and several minutes later, he drove back with some coffee for me. There's not enough creamer and too much sugar in it, but it's not like he knows my tastes. Plus... how many guys do you know who are nice enough to go out and buy you coffee despite hardly knowing them?"

"Oh, yeah, John's super friendly! I saw him a few days ago when he came back to be our night guard. He's actually been with the company for quite a while, three or four years, I'd say," Phil agreed with a nod.

Heather silently sipped her coffee as they walked down the hallway together, heading to the game room, the area silent save for the clinking notes of that familiar music box.

"... John wouldn't happen to be related to Martin Burgess, would he?" she asked, as a few cheerful notes rattled away. Phil stared at her blankly.

"Friday night, you briefly spoke about John... you stopped yourself from calling him Mr. B-something, and you also mentioned a brother..." Heather investigated.

"H-how would you remem... uh, what makes you think that? You were drinking!"

"Drinking, yes... drunk, no," Heather clarified. "Not to mention I saw the news story on Sunday night... the resemblance is uncanny."

"I-I don't know what you're talking about..."

"You didn't watch the local news?" Heather asked. "Of course, Frank 'declined an interview', but they still covered the pizzeria's reopening. And when they did, they talked about the incident at the old pizzeria a few years ago."

Phil remained silent, his face paling.

"A total of five children went missing, and security footage identified the suspect as Martin Burgess, who worked the later hours of -"

Phil clapped his hand over her mouth, noticing one of the kitchen staff members arriving, pushing Heather backstage. Once there, he removed his hand from her mouth.

"You know, rude guy, I don't think curtains are soundproof..."

"Oh, hush. Look, what happened is awful, a-and tragic, but for the company's sake, we have to avoid bringing up the incident. It's a touchy subject, you know?" Phil asked. "Martin was also a nice guy... we didn't think he would be capable of such a thing, and h-he even broke down in court when they issued the sentence... but life cannot be replaced, and what happened to those kids was far, far worse... it's bizarre that he only got a life sentence rather than... the death penalty..."

"Gives him a lifetime to think about what he's done. If he's as remorseful as you say, just knowing that he has to look at himself each day and think 'it was me' will be punishment enough. Almost."

"We never did solve the mystery of how Martin fit in the suit... there were some cuts along the seams, uh, probably to make it easier to move in... but it would still be such a tight fit," Phil wondered, imagining John and Martin standing side by side.

The Burgess brothers were only a year apart, but the contrast in their body frames and - curiously - mustache size was almost comedic. Unlike John's gaunt figure, Martin had more than enough meat
on his bones; whereas Martin's mustache barely reached the corners of his lips, John's mustache was bushy and wild, almost to the point that it reached nearly halfway across his bony cheeks. Frank had criticized him for his unruly facial hair, but John smooth-talked him into letting him keep it, considering that he wasn't seen during regular hours by the customers anyway.

"Okay, fine, I'll keep quiet," Heather grumbled. "... but what about the other rumors? There has to be a good reason why the old Bonnie and his buddies stink so bad."

"The original mechanics stated that it was... you know the old establishment? We, uh, we kind of ran into health code violation issues. For one thing, uh, let's just say we don't use the cotton candy powder for cleaning purposes any more... it was gross already, using it to soak up 'messes', but... uh... it kind of made some local wildlife want to join the band. Some raccoons infested the place, and a few curious ones tried to climb inside the heads of the animatronics... until they, uh, got stuck and then... moving jaws and gears... yeah."

"Dead animals trapped in animatronics, huh?" Heather scoffed.

"That is what happened. Our company did nothing wrong," Phil argued. "L-look, let's just drop the subject. We really need to set up for work."

"... All right," Heather smiled briefly, realizing she had wound up sitting next to Bonnie, and patted his robotic leg. "Better go make sure George isn't tripping on wires... if he's even here yet."

She stood up, helping Phil to his feet as well, before opening the curtain to walk out and find a limp slender figure hanging in front of them - a marionette suspended by wires that ran along the ceiling, large enough that its head rested near the ceiling yet its gangly legs dangled down to the floor.

"OH, GOD, NO!" Phil practically shrieked, shielding his eyes.

"I can't believe this," Heather laughed, holding the puppet's hand. "First Jeremy and Bonnie, now you and Merry?"

"Merry? You named it?!"

The puppet's head actually turned, its dark soulless eyes staring back at Heather.

"Okay... so maybe it is a little unnerving," she admitted, looking away. "But Merry just hangs out in his box as long as his music's playing. Guess we better crank up that song for you, huh?"

Still refusing to look it in the eyes, she held onto the puppet's hand and led it back to the Prize Corner. Phil's path diverged slightly, heading for a small equipment station near the back of the Game Area where two or three tanks of helium lined the wall. Phil removed a pack of balloons from a shelf, slipping the neck of a purple one over the nozzle before filling it.

Oh, yeah... Jeremy... how was he doing today? Did he ever hear back from the other places he applied for? Or had he spoken with his parents about money? What if he was in some government office right now, so overcome with desperation that he felt like he would -

**POP!**

The balloon Phil had been inflating popped and he jumped slightly... he had forgotten how quickly they filled up. Actually paying attention this time, he filled up a few balloons, knotting their ends and tying them to the ends of foil ribbons, keeping the opposite end of the ribbons pinned under his shoe as he worked.
Another testament to the impressive AI in the animatronics, one of the newest models had walked over. The new character introduced by Fazbear Entertainment, BB, who gave out balloons in the Game Area.

"Hello, hello!" Phil replied, gathering the strings of the balloons in his hand. "How about we go put these at your station?"

BB laughed, walking beside Phil, practically half as short as the man in the goldenrod polo. Of course, once he realized he needed to tie a knot to secure the balloons to a nearby stand, he quickly called for assistance.

Next, Phil went to help out in the arcade section of the Game Area, just in time to stop George from winding up the tickets in the opposite direction on one of the skeeball machines. Phil briefly caught a glance of Heather shaking her head out of the corner of his eye, as she turned on the *Rygar* arcade game.

He went through all of the stations systematically - even peeking in on Kids Cove, where Loxy greeted him with her Southern belle accent.

"Why, stranger! I don't think we've seen you around here before!" she gasped. "Have we, Foxanne?"

"Nope! What's your name?"

Heather had described Loxy as interesting to put together, as she was basically two endoskeletons-in-one - the second one functioning as her ventriloquist dummy, 'Foxanne', basically a smaller version of her. The metallic head was actually the only part of an endoskeleton needed for Foxanne; the rest of her was more comparable to an actual doll, like a true ventriloquist dummy.

"Uh, Phil... and I-I was just... uh... checking things," he explained.

Not that there was much to check on the first day... after all, the ball pit was clean and full, there was no need to clean out the neon-colored cylindrical cubbies where children would store their shoes, the crawling tunnel that ran around the room was fine, and Loxy was just... Loxy.

"Be seeing you around!" Loxy called after him as he left, with Foxanne throwing in a little "Bye-bye!"

"Uh... yeah!" he replied over his shoulder.

Granted, these were just automated responses - there was no way animatronics were smart enough to communicate with people - but it felt strange that he could almost have a basic conversation with these things.

Phil checked his watch as he walked into the main hallway - 12:07pm, right on cue to open. He looked up with a smile at Janet, situated by the door as a greeter, as he braced himself for the onslaught of children.

"Are you kidding me?" Frank roared, clutching two handfuls of his hair. "It's been six hours, and we haven't had a freaking customer?"
"W-well, it is a Monday," Phil tried to write it off. "There's probably parents at work who can't bring their kids in, so they settle for summer camp... or something. It'll get better - "

"It was because of that damn news broadcast, I know it," Frank snarled, pacing down the hallway. "It's the last week of summer, and there's going to be over-protective parents keeping their kids at home, instead of letting them come here, and our prime business week is going to go down the drain. Ugh!"

He grumbled a few more things under his breath, barely audible thanks to the sound effects of some of the employees "testing" the arcade games.

"Look, Phil, why don't you just go back to your apartment and do some studying? We might as well close EARLY tonight at this rate..."

"But Uncle, I'm not in class yet, and some of our employees might need those hou-"

"Around here, I'm your manager, not your uncle, so just go home and... I dunno. Watch TV? Play one of those 'Aterry' video games? Whatever. Anything's better than sitting around here and doing nothing."

It was highly unprofessional, but Phil complied, clocking out and bidding farewell to Ronaldo - the only friend of his still working on the clock. Phil couldn't help but smile proudly, as the other kitchen workers were among those 'testing' the arcade. Ronaldo was the only one in the kitchen, seated against the wall, intent on studying some of the words in his dictionary.

August 11, 1987

"YESSSS! Haha! I knew it was just an off day!" Frank cheered, pumping a fist into the air, as Phil arrived to start his shift.

"Unc- Mr. Fazari?" he asked, starting to head for the punchclock in the back.

"Go punch in, I'll explain in a sec," he stated, waving him towards the back.

Phil punched in and hurried back quickly.

"What's got you so, uh, excited? I don't normally see you this happy..." Phil remarked.

"We already got our first party planned!"

"Oh!" Phil exclaimed in excitement. "... oh. Um, when is it?"

"Friday!"

"Friday. And we can handle-"

"Oh, sure, I already placed Emmett in charge, and I'm sure he'll do fine."

"Emmett. Who is new."

"It's going to be fine, Phillip, he can handle it," Frank's tone soured. "There's only supposed to be, like, seven kids anyway."

"I guess seven isn't too much for a first party. How bad could it be, right?"
Before Phil could say anything else, a child's whining could be heard from Kids' Cove, and he looked over in that direction.

"Mooooom! Toby peed in the tubes!"

Phil grimaced and looked back, only to find that in one of his rare shows of agility, his uncle had completely disappeared. He sighed, yelled that he would be there in one second, and departed to one of the storage rooms for gloves, sanitizer, paper towels, and a trash bag.

August 14, 1987

Phil let out a huff of air as he stepped into Freddy Fazbear's Pizza for the day.

Lucky Emmett.

Emmett Campbell was a linebacker for the university's football team, but only as a walk-on, meaning he never actually played and dressed on the off chance the starting linebacker and the back-up both were injured... which was probably never going to happen. And though the gods had granted him a nice beefy figure for football, they had not been so generous when it came time to distribute brains. As a result, he was sometimes careless when he had practiced for setting up for parties - such as making four cuts into a cake rather than making three cuts to produce four rows of cake slices.

However, both he and his uncle would be there to catch any mistakes Emmett might make. But with Emmett hosting the party, he was sure to earn a few tips that afternoon... and considering he would likely boast about being on the football team, there might even be some sporty parents who would chip in a little extra for him.

Why, Dad, why did you not let me be a football player? Phil thought to himself with a sigh. He closed his eyes and braced for the worst when he heard an angry roar from his uncle down the hallway.

"SICK?! YOU CAN'T BE SICK, THE PARTY IS TODAY!" Frank yelled.

Phil's eyes snapped open and he hurried into the managerial office.

"Your stomach...? Well, can't you just hold it in?! ... Maybe it was just something you ate, and it left your system! ... You could be lying about that fever for all I know!" Frank looked over his shoulder as Phil stepped in through the doorway. "... All right, I'll believe you this ONE TIME... Yeah, bye."

He slammed the phone down with a growl.

"Campbell's out sick," Frank grumbled, kneading the wrinkles in his forehead with one hand.

"I, uh, I kind of figured that was the case," Phil replied, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Well, at least the papers are still here," Frank muttered, holding up the party brochure, before shoving it against Phil's chest. "You have experience hosting parties, so I'm gonna leave this up to you."

"M-me?!" Phil squeaked, gathering up the papers in his arms.

"I'm the manager, you have the experience, what's not to understand?" Frank grumbled. "Look, I'll help you roll out the tables and carry out cake, but the planning and entertaining shtick is more of
"Okay, okay..." Phil flipped through the papers, finally coming to the initial order brochure, written out in Emmett's blocky handwriting.

**Party For: Tyler Proper**

**Guest will be 6 years old.**

**Expect 6 additional guests.**

"Uncle... you said there would be seven children at this party, right?"

"Yeah, why?"

Phil let out a groan.

*Darn it, planners have to account for parents as well! Nice going, Emmett.*

Okay, no biggie. He could at least make an estimation. One of Tyler's parents might still have work, so the other one would have to bring them by. These were still fairly young children, so there may be a few who needed a parent around... and there was always a chance of the "last minute guest addition", even though it was highly unprofessional.

Food allergies was listed as no, so Phil could only hope Emmett had written that down correctly. **Cheese** was the only type of pizza requested, and the cake requested was **white chocolate**. So, a half-vanilla, half-chocolate cake. Darn Emmett, he'd probably tell someone his favorite flavor of candy was 'red' rather than 'cherry'. Okay, maybe that was kind of rude.

Phil hurried into the kitchen.

"Okay, everyone! Uh... our first real party is today, a-and I know everyone's a little nervous, but just remember what we've practiced, and everything should be fine. We're going to need two medium cheese pizzas and a vanilla-chocolate cake for a party at two, and I know you guys can do it. How about... Ronaldo and Kim make the pizzas, and Bruce makes the cake?"

"Yes, sir!" Ronaldo agreed, Kim and Bruce also going along with it.

What next? Right, decorations. Sophia helped him lay out the paper placemats, cups, and party hats in Party Room 1, while Frank and one of the waiters, Jason, hung up banners. The second Phil had put down the last party hat, he immediately headed for the registers, gathering the special plastic cups for holding tokens and filling them up - six tokens for the child guests, fourteen for the birthday guest. He got a little side-tracked when he realized that a woman and two boys had walked in - panicking briefly that the party guests were arriving an hour early - but she was just a mother wanting an hour of peace to read while her sons played.

As Phil did a quick sweep of the restrooms and main halls to make sure they were clean and spotless, he was interrupted by the screams of two children and a horrifying metallic *crash.*

Oh no, oh no, he began to panic, first the issues at the old restaurants, now one of the games must have tipped and fell on one of the boys or maybe even their mother and he uncle was nowhere to be found and-

"CHICA, NOOO!" Heather's cries shook Phil's thoughts and he bolted into the area just in front of the stage.
The two boys stood several feet away from where Heather knelt over Chica's face-down figure. As a whole, the animatronic didn't look too bad... except for the metallic beak, eyelids, and eyeballs that had scattered a few feet away.

"It's just a boo-boo, I'll be fine!" the animatronic chirped.

"All right, that's good," Heather replied, looking up at Phil. "Well, if it isn't our assistant manager! Responsibly checking on everything!"

Her smile indicated her words were genuine, and he nodded.

"Yeah, I-I got worried when I heard the crash. Are the boys okay? A-and what about Chica?"

"The kids are alright," Heather confirmed, nodding over her shoulder to the boys. "As for Chica, all the animatronics have some basic self-diagnostic programming that can check for any mechanical issues, and they use codenames for it to keep things in-character around the kids. 'Boo-boo', as you can guess, just means a minor mechanical error... since I've gotta give her a little facial before the party gets here."

She helped Chica off the ground, giving Phil a chance to see her face. Even without her eyes and beak, Chica still appeared to have a big smile on her face... even if her eye sockets and mouth looked like a dark void. Kind of off-putting, actually.

"But... what caused her to break in the first place?" Phil asked.

"A programming error. She walked straight off the stage, rather than taking the steps. I've seen Freddy and Bon-Bon take the steps just fine, but Chica doesn't for some reason..." Heather frowned. "But I can't do anything about that - I'm a mechanic, not a programmer. I put the parts together, I don't tell them what to do."

_Sounds like a metaphor for bad parenting_, Phil thought to himself with a small smirk. Speaking of parents, he turned around to look at the boys.

"Hey guys! Uh, Dr. Carras is going to have to give Chica a check-up, so... why don't you go play some skeeball? Yeah! Come on, the machines are over here, show me how a champ rolls the ball!"

Phil lead the kids over to the skeeball machines, and after watching them roll a few balls up the lane, he swiftly dashed away to finish the party preparations.

"Are you gonna be okay, Ronaldo?" Phil asked.

Ronaldo - or rather, Freddy Fazbear - clapped his hands together and gave him two thumbs up before they both stepped outside, Phil carrying a clipboard with the attendance sheet on it. A few minutes passed, until finally a car arrived in the parking lot and a woman and her son came out, the woman carrying a few wrapped presents in her arms.

"There they are...!" Phil whispered loudly, bouncing slightly in excitement. 'Freddy' clapped his hands together a few times, before crouching down to make himself appear smaller.

"Hello, hello, and welcome to the new and improved Freddy Fazbear's Pizza!" Phil greeted brightly with a sparkling smile. "Would your name happen to be Tyler?"

"YEAHHH!" the little boy yelled at the top of his lungs.
"Haha, I think someone knows it's his birthday, right, Freddy?" Phil asked. Freddy put a hand to his belly and one to his mouth, leaning back and rocking as though he was shaking with laughter. "And you must be Ms. Proper!"

"Yeah, I sure am!" she laughed half-heartedly. "Now, could you give me a hand with these?"

"Yes, ma'am, right this way!" Phil agreed, opening the door for her and her son, glancing inside to catch the eye of any employee he could find. Luckily, it was not George Thornton.

"Hey, Irene, can you help the Propers to Party Room 1, please? Thank you!"

Irene may have just been a janitor, but that meant she was at least good at carrying heavy objects, and she was quick to step in and help out. Phil checked off Tyler's name on the list - one down, six more to go.

Another few minutes passed, and another guest arrived - unfortunately, she screamed and cried at the sight of Freddy, so he covered his face and gave her a shy little wave of his hand as her father carried her in - so Mikaela Vaneer was accounted for.

Austin Carmichael, Troy Finch, Mark Lepier, and Kylie Foust all arrived together a minute later, one parent agreeing to chaperone the four.

Finally, one last mother arrived, her son compliant to walk up with her to the door... before giggling and trying to run down the sidewalk. Despite his heavy suit, Freddy only needed to sprint a short distance to get in front of the boy's path, putting his arms down in front of him like a football player about to make a block. The boy copied the gesture, just in time for his mom to snatch him right back up and carry him inside - Alexander McDaniels, the final guest.

"All right, that's everyone, 'Freddy'!" Phil affirmed, patting his shoulder. "Let's get you back inside."

As they walked down the main hallway, Freddy exchanging a few limp high-fives with some of the kids... he started to lean... a little... too far... to the... right...

... and Phil quickly wrapped his arms around his left arm, pulling him upright.

"Uh-oh, I-I-I think Freddy needs a little bit of time to practice for, uh, hi-BEAR-nation!" Phil flashed an uncomfortable smile, still holding onto his arm. "We'll be right back!"

Almost dragging him now, Phil hurried 'Freddy' back into the employees-only area, pulling the Freddy head off as soon as they were out of sight, and heading straight for the first-aid office rather than the costume and props area.

"Phil? Ronaldo?" Sophia gasped, as Phil lead him in, seating him on the foam cot, removing his gloves and starting to pull the feet and the leggings off of the costume.

Sweat trailed down Ronaldo's face, only accentuating the faint pallor his skin was taking on. Sophia immediately started running some cold water, filling a paper cup in one hand and dampening a paper towel in another. She helped him hold the cups to his lips, placing the towel against the back of his neck.

"Gracias," he whispered faintly, trying to smile.

"De nada, what happened to you?" she asked, placing her fingers to his wrist to check his pulse.

"It was my fault," Phil explained quickly, now darting over to the sink for more wet paper towels.
He removed Ronaldo's shoes and socks, and wrapped them around his ankles. "I-I'm sorry, it was my fault... it was close to the twenty minute cut-off time, but the last guest arrived and the kid tried to run, so Ronaldo ran to stop him... I-I should have done something, I'm sorry, lo siento, uh..."

He kept silently removing the costume, slipping the outer body off and removing the suspenders that held up Freddy's "thighs".

"The... party..." Ronaldo said, standing up briefly so Phil could remove the thighs.

"Don't worry about it," Phil stated, fanning him off with the clipboard. "I... I'll find someone else to wear it..."

Unfortunately, the only two candidates at work at the time who would fit the Freddy suit were George Thornton... and Frank. And Frank, as much as he hated it, had at least some experience with wearing the costume.

"Is he going to be okay?" Phil asked, looking between Ronaldo and Sophia.

"He's sweating, and he didn't throw up, so that's a good sign... he got overheated, but as long as he keeps drinking water and staying cool, he'll be okay. Phil, you're my friend, but don't you EVER let him stay in that costume for too long EVER again."

"I-I know, I swear I'm usually way more careful, honest, I... I, uh..."

"Party..." Ronaldo reminded him slowly, pointing toward the door.

"I... okay. I-I'm going to try asking my uncle to take on costume duty. I mean, it's just for the cake a- and a little bit of interaction afterward..." he looked over at the Freddy head in the corner of the room. "I'm so sorry, Ronaldo... feel better soon."

He patted Ronaldo's knee and swiftly hurried out of the room, on a quest to find his intimidating uncle.

Aside from the scare with Ronaldo, the rest of the party seemed to go pretty smoothly. After spending an hour running around the facility and spending their tokens, the kids were content with the animatronic show as they ate their pizza - though there had been a complaint about no pepperoni - with Chica functioning properly onstage as if she had never taken that terrible fall.

As the curtains closed, Phil stepped up to the front of the stage.

"All right, everybody!" He cheered, throwing his arms up over his head to get the kids pumped up. "Are you ready for Freddy?!"

"YEAH!" The children echoed, also throwing their hands into the air.

And then, of course, came the inevitable child who would always say that one thing that always made Phil's gut twist inside.

"Hey, he's missing a hand!"

Oh, and pointing fingers, too. That always helped. But he always had that creative comeback that always won parents over as well -

"Aye, matey, ye be right!" Phil confirmed, putting on his best pirate accent, sweeping his right arm
for show. "Can't go wearin' me pirate hook around the kids... the last time I swung me arm like that, I nearly gave Cap'n Foxy another eyepatch!"

"Who's Foxy? Who's Cap and Foxy?"

"Where are the pirates?"

"I know - I know - I know, you mean Loxy! Loxy has a puppet, she's not a pirate!"

Oh, right... these kids were only about five or six... too young to remember the original gang and the original Foxy.

"Oh, heh... I-I almost fergot..." Phil's voice trailed off, his accent growing weaker. "Uh... Foxy went away on another voyage and asked me to keep an eye on things here."

"Did another pirate cut it off?"

"I bet a shark bit it off!"

"What happened to your hand, why is it gone?"

In parties in the past, the kids just went with the hook story, thinking Foxy and Phil made a cool pirate team. They had never pushed questions this far, and even if the answer was as simple as 'I was just born this way', it still left feeling Phil kind of flustered. But Miss Proper - a fitting name for that one parent who was kind and apologized for their kids behavior - beckoned him over with a smile on her face.

"Yes ma'am?" he asked softly.

"... Maybe you should just, you know, keep your 'bad hand' in your pocket, so the kids don't have to see it?" she suggested softly. "No offense, but I think it would make things less weird for the kids."

He forced himself to smile in return, tucking the end of his arm into his pocket.

"O-oh, right... good idea, I-I hadn't considered that..." he agreed submissively, returning to the front of the stage.

"C-Come on, we don't want to wait for cake forever...!" Phil pumped his left arm above his head. "Who's ready for Freddy...?"

"READY!" screamed the children in joy, some of them bouncing in their seats.

"Okay! I-I'll go get him...!"

He practically bolted out of view, heading towards the employee-only area. Frank saw his nephew approaching, nodded with a drawn-out sigh, and stepped into the costume and props room to change. While he waited, Phil took a second to peek in the first aid area.

Ronaldo was asleep on the cot now, his head propped up against Sophia's thigh, as she read through her dictionary. She looked up when she heard Phil approach, quickly placing a finger to her lips.

Phil pointed at Ronaldo, mouthing 'is he okay' to her. Sophia smiled and nodded back. Phil smiled, giving her a thumbs up, before heading to the kitchen, where Kim and Bruce had the cakes ready. He struck a match, lighting up the candles on the circular cake reserved for Tyler, having Kim carry it while Bruce handled the larger cake for the rest of the guests. Phil collected the cake slicing and serving tools and nodded for them to head out of the kitchen.
Frank - now clad in the Freddy costume - stood out in the hallway tapping his foot.

"Okay, let's go!" Phil confirmed, walking ahead to open the door.

Freddy led the birthday parade, clapping his hands together as he lead Kim and Bruce through the Game Area and out to the show stage area, Kim and Bruce awkwardly cheering little "woohoo!"s and "yeah!"s with their hands full carrying cake. Phil brought up the rear, passing off the supplies to Kim like a baton as she placed the cake in front of Tyler.

"Okay, everybody sing! One, two, three...!

The usual chorus of 'Happy birthday' filled the air, a few of the guests from the general public even joining in and cheering at the end. Tyler silently made his wish and blew out the candles, followed by everyone applauding. A few of the kids had dashed over to immediately hug Freddy - one of them even trying to push him over - but they were quickly drawn back to their seats when Bruce's voice filled the air.

"WHO WANTS CAKE?!!"

As Kim sliced the cake and distributed it among the children and parents who wanted it, Tyler had immediately plowed into his personal cake, wolfing it down with a sugar-happy grin. Ms. Proper took a slice of cake, examining it.

"... This isn't the cake we ordered."

"I-I'm sorry?" Phil asked.

"I told Emmett that I wanted white chocolate cake for my son's birthday," Ms. Proper stated, folding her arms, tilting her head in the direction of the slice on her plate - a layered cake, half-vanilla, half-chocolate. "And he agreed. That chocolate is brown, and I have a feeling the white is vanilla."

"We, uh, we don't have white chocolate batter, ma'am, I'm sorry... I-I don't know if they even make such a th-"

"Then Emmett should have said something."

Nice going, Emmett.

Ms. Proper let out a sigh, looking over at her son who continued gobbling down his cake happily.

"Can't you see you're ruining his birthday? We didn't get the cake we wanted, so I'm not paying."

Phil looked over at Freddy - despite dancing with some of the kids, he could feel his uncle's eyes boring into him from within the suit. Oh great, Ms. Proper had turned out to be the 'customer-satisfaction-guaranteed-so-i-want-it-free' type.

"We'll just, uh, we'll scratch the cake off the bill for you, ma'am," Phil reassured, his voice growing quiet.

Tyler ended up having a fantastic birthday, receiving all kinds of neat toys from his friends, taking home a cool plastic spider he exchanged tickets for, and he and his friends left happily at 4:30 - not to mention his mother, with a discounted bill and even the store manager himself offering an apology and a few extra tokens to Tyler... on behalf of Freddy, he said with a wink.

"Well, time to clean up..." Phil sighed, heading out of the parking lot after escorting the Propers to
"No, you're going on break," Frank insisted, his brow furrowed. "After that performance, I'm not really in the mood to deal with you right now, so why don't you go eat your pizza with your friends in the kitchen or something."

"N-nah, I'm good," Phil waved it off with a smile. "I was in the mood to buy lunch today, you know, just because."

He hurried past his uncle, punching out for his break, and hurried right back out of the pizzeria, climbing into his Mercury Sable, his lips pressed in a solemn straight line the entire way.

To be honest, Phil didn't really know what he wanted for lunch. He wasn't even that hungry. All he wanted was an escape, to get out of there, to leave the memories of that terrible afternoon behind as he drove out of the parking lot.

Music. Music would make him feel better. He turned on the radio. Commercials. He turned off the radio.

Classes. Think about classes. He had been to the counseling session on Thursday, and sure enough, he managed to schedule around Thursday completely - the one day of the week he could do whatever he wanted or needed. Thursday was his guaranteed escape. His Monday schedule was packed, so he would likely wind up getting that day off as well once he changed his work availability hours. Biology first thing in the morning, to meet his general education requirements. A public relations class immediately after that, and a double-block of a course on advertising immediately after that. He had a class period off to eat lunch, and then a three-period-block for an elective that interested him... 'Happiness Psychology'.

Happiness. He was an optimistic guy, it was a fitting class for him. He curled the corners of his lips upward - there, he was smiling, like he always was. His uncle was just being grumpy, like he always was, and the next event would go better, like it always did, and therefore he was happy, Phil told himself.

Wiping at his eyes, trying to soothe the growing stinging sensation, he decided to quickly pull over to the next fast food place or store he saw and just grab whatever he saw before his darn vision got too blurry.

There was a Picnix grocery store at the corner, only five minutes away from Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. They had a deli that sold subs, so that would be a nice change. He pulled into the grocery store's parking lot and walked inside, eyes on the ground and hands in his pockets.

The lady who prepared his sub, Shelby, seemed really nice. She didn't say anything, aside from asking what vegetables and condiments he wanted on the sub, but she seemed to know he was having a bad day, so she made sure to put the largest slices of provolone on his ham sub before putting it in the toaster oven. It came out warm and with gooey melted cheese thirty seconds later, just asking for lettuce, tomato, onions, mayo, and brown mustard on top.

Sub in hand, he thanked her and left. There were a good number of people in Picnix now - probably not on lunch break like he was, but rather to buy groceries. He still couldn't shake the feeling of having people stare at him, even if he was just another customer here and not one of the assistant managers of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

Just don't look at anybody and just check out, nobody knows you, nobody will recognize you, you can go back to work and you will be that much closer to the end of this miserable-
"Hey, Phil. I can take you over here."

Cashiers reading nametags didn't count. He frowned, eyes still low, as he placed his sub and a can of cola on the belt.

"... Not the best day at work, I take it?"

Phil shook his head, letting out an exasperated sigh.

"Ugh, Jeremy, you would not believe how badly Em-" he froze in mid-sentence, looking up with a completely stupefied look on his face. "Jeremy?!

"Yeah, it's me," he confirmed, smiling a little brighter.

It was him, now dressed in the Picnix uniform of a green polo, black slacks, and a black apron - complete with a plastic nametag with a sticker bearing his name, as well as...

"That pin..." Phil commented, eyes on the pin he had just handed over to Jeremy only a week ago without a thought.

"Yeah, the same day you gave it to me, I found out from my housemate that Leslie called me about the job. I went in on Saturday, and sure enough, she offered me a spot on registers immediately," Jeremy adjusted the pin between his fingers, straightening his posture as though he was showing it off like a medal. "I like to think of it as my good luck charm."

A smile - a real one - spread across Phil's face.

"That's great! Oh, Jeremy... I'm not gonna lie, I was worried about you," Phil admitted, placing a hand to his chest.

"Well, now you've got nothing to worry about! I'm going to be alright," Jeremy's voice softened. "... How about you?"

"Me? Oh, pff, come on, it's me! Phil! I-I'm like everyone's go-to guy for motivation and happiness, you know?" he laughed, wiping away a lone tear that escaped down his cheek. "Just these... darn allergies have my eyes all red and watery lately, you know?"

"Yeah, we all have bad days with allergies," Jeremy agreed, scanning the barcode on the sub's label and pressing a few keys on his register. "As long as you don't let the bad days drag you down. You've got a good attitude, Phil... don't ever let that change. Need a bag?"

"Nah. Words of wisdom from the local cashier," Phil chuckled, tucking his wallet against his body with his arm so he could fish out a few dollar bills with his fingers.

Jeremy counted out the bills, pressing a few keys, before the register made its familiar 'Kaching!' and opened up the drawer for money.

"... And fifty-five cents is your change," Jeremy calculated, gently depositing the coins and receipt into Phil's hand. "Thank you and come visit Picnix again."

"I will," Phil agreed. "I'll tell the others you're working here, so maybe they can drop by sometime."

"Yeah, maybe. Tell them I said 'hi', okay?" Jeremy asked. "See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."
Phil left Picnix in almost the exact opposite way he had come in. His head high, to see where he was going. His radio on, Cyndi Lauper accompanying him on his drive back. And once he finished that excellent sub and returned from break, he was delighted to find the place hadn't seen too many customers despite it being a Friday, so everything was relatively clean.

Best of all, Ronaldo appeared to have been waiting for him, holding onto a sheet of paper with a smile.

"Here!" Ronaldo said, handing the paper to him. "Heather went home. She said to give this to you. She got it before they threw the party trash away."

The opposite sides of the basic paper placemats actually served as a coloring sheet, where children could draw a picture depicting their big day at the new and improved Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

As drawn by "austin carmichael", a big brown box rested on top of some wavy blue lines - a boat upon the high seas. And standing upon the brown box were four stick figures in different colors - a motley crew. A small one in red, holding up a treasure map with a red 'x'. A taller pink one... with fox ears. Another fox of the same height, drawn with green crayon with a black hat. And finally, another stick figure drawn in yellow, with a purple hook on the end of his right arm, as tall as the foxes.

The last few hours of Phil's shift passed quickly, telling his friends about Jeremy before heading home. Only a few minutes after walking in and changing into comfortable clothes, he was surprised by the ringing from his kitchen phone.

"Hello, hello?"

"Hello, hello!" greeted the voice on the other end. "So, Mr. Assistant Manager, how was your first Friday?"

"Definitely not the greatest party I've ever hosted, Dad," Phil laughed, leaning against the wall.

"Oh... I'm sorry."

"Nah, it's all right," Phil looked over at his refrigerator, a familiar drawing pinned to it with a magnet. "You've gotta dig through the dirt to find the gold, after all."

Chapter End Notes

I want to apologize for taking a little longer to upload this chapter. I recently dealt with a stressful week of work, which not only took up a lot of time (imagine working for nearly ten hours... then doing it again the next day), it really killed my motivation.

I've also been putting in some more effort in improving my drawing skills, so I might be posting pics of Jeremy, Phil, and the other major characters soon.

Also, how about that new teaser image? Remember, this was written prior to FNAF 3, so canon events may not match.
August 16, 1987

"... And six twenty-six is your change - five, one, twenty-five, one," Jeremy stated, counting out the bills and coins and placing them into Heather's hand.

"Thanks, Jer. So, how are things working out so far?" she asked, tucking the money into her pocket.

"Well, I already got my first paycheck. Based on the numbers, I'm probably gonna have to pull a little money out of my savings account to pay off my rent when September comes," Jeremy shrugged. "It isn't excessive, but I still feel bad about the fact that that's money I'm supposed to be saving. Next month, though, I'll have four paychecks, and that should pull me through just fine."

"Good, good," Heather agreed with a nod. "We gotta figure out some way to get everyone together for something. Preferably for free or at least cheap."

"That's going to be harder when classes start for the others again," Jeremy pointed out.

"Yeah, well..." Heather tilted her head left and right, as though trying to balance out the thoughts in her mind. "We'll figure something out. Thursdays might be our best bet."

"Thursdays?"

"Yeah, Phil has Thursdays off, and Sophia and Ronaldo have classes near the middle of the day, so it's fifty-fifty on whether they get the evening off. And I'm usually called in for security duty in the early half of the day, so..." she flicked the metal badge on her purple uniform. "You never know. Maybe something will happen and we can meet on a not-Thursday. Even if it's something dumb, like renting movies and eating take-out at someone's apartment. It'd still be fun, you know? Or maybe the student union at the university will host some kind of event, since those tend to be free."

"That could be fun," Jeremy agreed with a smile, his eyes glancing over to the right as an elderly lady stepped into line. "All right, Heather, I gotta let you go. Thank you for shopping at Picnix, and come see us again."

The hours flew by, and Jeremy found himself finishing his shift close to seven thirty that night, ringing up a large tin of coffee beans for a man in his forties or fifties, something about him oddly familiar - he had seen him before, but where?

"Hello, hello!"

Now that was a voice and face he recognized.
"Why, hello there, Phillip!" the man in line had greeted him before Jeremy could even open his mouth.

"Hello, John! And Jeremy, hey!" Phil also had a tin of coffee among the groceries in his basket, as well as another one of the deli's subs. "Jeremy, this is John B- uh, John, he works at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza as well. He's our night security."

"Well, nice to meet you!" John declared pleasantly, extending a hand to shake. Customers were usually nice and said hello, but never as openly as this. Jeremy was left slightly dumbfounded, but he shook hands with him. "Just call me... John."

"And I'm Jeremy... Fitzgerald," Jeremy stated, noticing the way John left off his last name like Phil had at his introduction nearly two weeks ago. Speaking of which, even Phil seemed to be left uneasy by the introduction, eyeing John with his lips drawn tight. He looked back at Jeremy, who quickly glanced away. "So... I take it you're stocking up for the night shift?"

"Sure am," John confirmed, as Jeremy scanned the tin and rang it up on the register. "I'm a sucker for the flavored, fancier brand, what can I say?"

"Well, yeah," Phil let out a breathy laugh of bewilderment. "... but to think you'd also buy in bulk... I was buying this for the employee lounge..."

"Well, you know what they say about buying in bulk," John shrugged it off, pointing a finger at Jeremy in a pistol-like gesture. "'More 'bang' for your buck, right?"

"Uh, right," Jeremy agreed. "Your total comes out to four dollars and two cents." (1)

John fished a five dollar bill and a nickel out of his wallet, and Jeremy gave him the proper change and the usual Picnix farewell. As Phil removed the items from his grocery basket, Jeremy hit a switch beside the register, and the lit-up number faded out.

"I'm clocking out. You're my last customer for the night," Jeremy explained.

"Oh, lucky me," Phil remarked with a little smile.

"Stocking up on the coffee too?" he asked, ringing up the tin.

"Well, it's not for me... I'm buying it for the employee lounge. John and Heather weren't the only ones requesting coffee, so my uncle caved in and bought that coffee pot. He told people to bring their own coffee, but..." Phil watched as Jeremy rang up the package of non-dairy creamers. "I figure having everyone try to bring in all this stuff would be too much of a hassle."

"So Frank just bought the coffee pot?" Jeremy asked, a mix of amusement and scorn in his voice. "Didn't even bother with the filters or anything?"

"His argument was that 'he only agreed to the pot', and nothing else," Phil shook his head. "My uncle is... crafty. No... perhaps 'sharp' would be a better word. Because he's pretty smart... but he tends to hurt people."

"Unlike you and your father. You are..." he paused, scanning a box of sugar packets. "... nice."

Phil let out a tiny laugh, and Jeremy smiled, finishing ringing up the groceries.

"Your total is twelve seventy-one," he stated, as Phil took out his wallet. He handed over a ten and a five, and Jeremy was already sorting through the bills before pressing any buttons on the register.
"... So you're good at math, too?" Phil asked, as Jeremy hit the keys. He smiled at the number that came up on the register.

"It kind of comes hand-in-hand with science. The register is supposed to be used to calculate the change, but... I only use it to check my answers. Two twenty-nine is your change... One, two, twenty-five, and four," Jeremy placed the bills and coins into Phil's hand. "Thank you for shopping at Picnix, and come see us again. Although... I'm taking my leave now too."

He walked Phil to the door - granted, it was only a five-step trek - and they exchanged their usual farewells.

"See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

Phil had only walked a short distance out of the grocery store and into the parking lot, back out into the warm air of another summer evening, the sun not quite down yet and painting everything in the sky. By next week, he would be working the later shifts in order to accommodate the classes he took in the morning, and he probably wouldn't witness the sun set as often. Gazing out into the blues and purples ahead, it left him with a sense of melancholy. Not really sure why, he leaned his head back and turned on his heel, his eyes following the gradient of colors, through lavender, through pink, to radiant orange still leaking out from behind the Picnix. Jeremy had just stepped out of the store, now walking to a different area of the parking lot. His gaze shifted to the right, and his eyes fell on Phil.

Not wanting to linger, Phil quickly turned away, heading back to his Mercury Sable.

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August 17, 1987

"Oh, my... I'm feeling under the weather... what about you, Foxanne?" the Southern accent that usually came from Loxy's voice box warped, deepening the pitch of her voice. A staticky gurgling noise came from the voice box, possibly Foxanne trying to add commentary to the state of the animatronic, in a desperate attempt to offer additional diagnostics.

"I know, Loxy, I know..." Heather spoke soothingly to the animatronic, almost as if it was a child laying in her lap rather than a large robotic fox. Loxy herself wasn't too heavily damaged... save for a large dent in her white chest piece, and the voice box would definitely need to be replaced. On the other hand, the doll-like body that was supposed to be Foxanne had clearly been mistaken for a doll, and she had been almost completely ripped off by two bratty little girls, with a plush arm ripped off and lying by the cubbies where the shoes were kept, stuffing and pieces of her furry coat and dress strewn around the floor of Kids' Cove.

"Ronaldo's in-costume, distracting the kids, and Anita's keeping an eye on him and the clock," Phil explained, stepping into the room. "How's, uh, Loxy?"

"Loxy's probably going to have to be taken out of commission for a week or so," Heather remarked, tapping the tip of her screwdriver against her cheek. "You'll need to order another voicebox, and Foxanne needs a completely new body and head."

With only an endoskeleton head - skull? - left attached to Loxy's arm, Foxanne certainly looked different from the doll she had been before. Phil picked up a little piece of stuffing off the floor, rolling it between his fingers and thumb with a frown.

"Hey, will you run to the kitchen and get my daily rations?" Heather asked with a wry smile. "I'll see
if I can get this dent out of Loxy while I'm on my break."

"Oh, uh, I suppose... but..." Phil shrugged. "... I was thinking about taking my break early... and I could go get you something for lunch, if you've got money."

Her mouth twisted into a confused frown.

"... But the food here is free," she argued.

"Well, y-yeah, but," Phil scoffed. "Come on, you have to be getting tired of the pizza you dislike so much."

"I dunno, I mean, it's still not great, but when Ronaldo or Bruce cook it, it tastes more tolerable. Plus, it's... free," Heather restated her point.

"I suppose..." he shrugged. "Well, I'm still going out. I'll bring you some pizza and then I'm going out to eat."

"What are you getting?" she inquired.

"Oh, uh..." he tucked his hand and opposite arm into his pockets, rocking on his heels. "... just... you know... fast food. Burgers. Yeah, burgers. I-I haven't had a good burger in a while, mmm!"

He turned and bolted out of Kids' Cove before Heather could say another word.

Roast beef. That would be a good sandwich to try today. He'd already had a ham and cheese melt, and he'd sampled a turkey sub here, so why not a roast beef sandwich? Shelby was in once again, and the sandwich she prepared looked as delicious as the others. Phil really wished the store didn't have a policy against tipping.

Since the sandwich was the only thing he came for, all that was left to do was check out. The ten-items-or-less line was pretty packed. One register had two people in line... that one had a coupon-clipper with several bulk packages of product... that one had a little old lady with only a few groceries, but sometimes the elderly took up extra time to write out checks or didn't understand how to use a credit card, so that register was out...

The next register had two people in line, one buying lunch as well and one with a fair number of groceries, but it would be fine. Coincidentally, Jeremy was the cashier at this register today. It took a little while to move through the line, but Phil finally got to check out.

"Hello, hello!"

"Hello, hello," Jeremy repeated back, scanning the barcode on the sticker used to seal the sandwich bag. "You really like these subs, don't you?"

"What can I say? Shelby's really good. Have you tried any of the Picnix subs yet? Because if she's the one cooking, you're in for a treat," Phil commented.

"I'm afraid not..." Jeremy apologized. "I usually grab one of the microwavable lunches that cost a little under a dollar. I can't afford to eat subs every day."

Phil didn't say anything, looking down. That turned... incredibly awkward in just a few seconds. Did Jeremy feel like he was being mocked, since he came in here so frequently to buy lunch despite the
"You okay?" Jeremy asked.

"Hmm? Oh, y-yeah, I was just thinking... about classes. They start next week, and I'll probably be buying textbooks on Thursday. That's one paycheck down the drain. Huh... maybe... I should cut back on going out to eat," Phil lied, as Jeremy rang up his sandwich for $3.39.

He had almost perfect change today, with three ones and two quarters. Just like the day before, Jeremy fished out a dime and penny from the register, before hitting the keys to calculate the price. Eleven cents indeed.

"I still can't get over how good at math you are," Phil commented.

"Calculating an eleven cent difference isn't exactly difficult," Jeremy shrugged, although he couldn't hide the smile on his face. "... but thank you."

"Listen, um..." Phil shifted from one foot to the other. "My uncle gets every Wednesday off, so... if you wanted to come by Freddy Fazbear's Pizza to visit on your break, you're more than welcome to."

"It would be pretty nice to see everyone together again," Jeremy admitted. "All right. Thank you and come visit Picnix again. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

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August 19, 1987

It had been just short of two weeks since he had last come here, Jeremy noted, as he pulled into the parking lot outside Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. In all honesty, it didn't seem as different compared to when he had first arrived for orientation - the parking lot was devoid of cars save for the ones belonging to employees then, and it was still relatively empty now, considering it was the middle of a school day.

By the time he had walked up to the door, the memories started coming back. Fitzgerald... I'd like a word with you. Keep an eye on the door, Phillip. Phil had just smiled weakly, probably thinking it was because he was late... when in actuality things had been far, far worse.

Jeremy's eyes wandered down to his hand, frozen in front of him. While they had faded away for the most part, some of the bruises on his knuckles from his breakdown still remained. A knot formed in his stomach, wondering if maybe coming here was a bad idea...

He jumped back half a step when the door opened in front of him, and Phil stepped out, his smile as bright as the goldenrod polo he wore.

"Jeremy! I'm glad you could come!" he greeted, holding open the door. "... Well, come on in!"

There was another girl in the usual orange polo standing by the small podium where people were greeted - who looked over at her assistant manager in confusion.

"I was going to let him in, sir, you didn't have to."

"Nah, Janet, it's fine," Phil waved it off and beamed up at Jeremy. "He's with me, right?"
"Right," Jeremy agreed, following Phil inside, back to the game area.

So the place wasn't completely empty... there were two boys over in the corner by an arcade game, most likely brothers, as the taller one seemed content to wiggle the joystick and mash the buttons while the smaller one held onto his shirt with one hand, the other hand holding some kind of goody bag, as he stared at the large box decorated like a wrapped present in the Prize Corner. One girl was playing skeeball, and another one seemed content to sit at one of the tables and color. Bonnie and Freddy silently watched everything from the stage, their eyes -

"Hold on," Jeremy remarked, gently tapping Phil's shoulder. "Chick, or whatever her name was... she's missing from the stage!"

Phil shrugged it off.

"Chica? She probably walked off the stage again... Heather's probably - " he froze suddenly, his eyes widening.

"What's wrong?"

"Heather's not in today, the other guard is..." Phil whispered, his hand clasping the side of his face. "Did NOBODY realize one of our animatronics is missing?!"

"Phil?"

He was now pacing in a little circle, mumbling his worries to himself.

"... Uncle will be furious... what if it's stolen?... still have to file a police report... show up on the news again... don't want to stress Dad out..."

"Phil, hey, listen," Jeremy stepped in front of him, stopping Phil in his tracks, and comfortingly placed his hands on his shoulders. "Take a deep breath, okay? We're trying to find a robotic bird, not a lost child or an engagement ring. It can't be too hard to track down, right?"

He closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, before opening them again.

"... Yeah, you're right," he agreed, his eyes meeting Jeremy's.

Up close like this, he noticed just how rich the shade of brown in Jeremy's eyes were. Like... chocolate brown.

Okay, no. Phil mentally scolded himself. I'm not supposed to be getting lost in the eyes of a friend. Especially a guy friend.

Jeremy blinked a few times, a small frown of confusion on his face, before his eyes darted upward. He turned his head, surveying the ceiling, until he froze upon spotting a camera.

"What if we check the video footage on the security tapes?" Jeremy asked, still looking up at the camera.

"... That's a good idea," Phil agreed, slapping his hand to his forehead. "I'm so dumb. I should've thought of that sooner."

"You're not dumb. You just have a stressful job that makes you worry a lot. Usually for good reason," Jeremy turned back to Phil, offering him a smile. "But just remember to stay positive, you know?"
"Okay. You're right. I'm going to believe we can find Chica."

"That's a step in the right direction," Jeremy agreed.

"A step... a STEP!" Phil grinned brightly, his hand wrapping around Jeremy's wrist as he turned and tugged him along toward the stage. "Jeremy, you're a genius!"

"I, uh..." It was a good thing Phil was turned around, or he would've noticed the blush threatening to consume his cheeks.

He let go of Jeremy's wrist, now wandering around the area surrounding the stage.

"Let's see... There should be something..." Phil mumbled to himself, getting down on his knees to check under a nearby table. "... around... here!"

He crawled under the table for a moment, before crawling back out, turning around to present his treasure to Jeremy.

"It's something... metal," Jeremy observed, peering through his glasses at the pink object with tiny black extensions in Phil's hand.

"It's an eyelid," Phil clarified. "You were right, I got so worked up that I forgot about how the animatronics have a free-roaming mode."

"Free-roaming? Like they can wander around as they please?" Jeremy asked.

Phil nodded and continued.

"Chica's been way more active than Bonnie and Freddy, but she has some kind of bug. The other two walk down the steps from the stage fine, but Chica always walks straight off," Phil let out a sigh. "I really think Chica should be kept out of commission until she's repaired, but my uncle thinks taking her down for a day would be too 'noticeable'. And yet, he's fine with Loxy being removed from Kids Cove until her parts are brought in. Oh, there's another piece."

Phil wandered over to the steps of the stage, where a fake eyeball was found.

"So, talk to him about it," Jeremy insisted, trying to help out by peeking under a nearby table.

"What? N-no, I can't - " he went quiet for a moment, looking back at Jeremy. "... I-I guess I won't know until I try."

Jeremy smiled and nodded, moving to check underneath another table. Sure enough, he found a metal beak, with a set of intact pearly white teeth.

"I found the... uh, mouth!"

Beaks were NOT meant to have actual teeth, Jeremy thought to himself - half of the sentiment coming from the part of him that found the visual image eerie, the other half coming from the part of him that was a studious biology major. (2)

"Oh, hey, good job!" Phil popped up from behind a different table, now with a second eyelid and eyeball.

"So, if we place all the parts in a circle with candles, will we summon the actual body?" Jeremy asked with a playful grin, as he walked over to hand the beak to Phil, who laughed.
"No, but it likely means that Chica is somewhere in the building. Checking the monitors in the security office would probably be a good idea. C'mon, you remember the way?" Phil explained, nodding over his shoulder.

Jeremy followed him out into the main hallway, turning down the part that went past the four private party rooms, until they stepped into the security office at the end of the hall. A note was left on the desk - *went to restroom, be back shortly*.

"I can't help but feel like security should be more... secure," Jeremy remarked, picking up the note.

Phil laid the parts on the desk, before turning to the monitor behind it, which currently showed the children playing in the game area, a green '10' in the corner, indicating the channel. On the small area of the table space left in front of the monitor was a laminated map, with numbers written in boxes to indicate the rooms with cameras, as well as a remote.

Phil studied the map for a moment, before picking up the remote and pressing one of the arrows to try jumping channels. The screen flashed, before switching over to a view of what was most certainly the Prize Corner, based the plush dolls lining the shelves and the chiming notes of the music box that could be heard through the audio feed. The number in the corner of the screen had changed to an '11' as well.

"Okay, so... based on the map and what we know, Chica's probably not in the playing areas or the main hallway... so we can rule out cameras nine through eleven, as well as seven..." Phil mused.

Jeremy looked over his shoulder at the map, frowning, and glanced at the sides of the office.

"There's no cameras in here... where's Cam Five and Cam Six?" he asked.

Phil tapped the 'channel down' button repeatedly, the screen going blank save for the number in the corner descending in value, until he came to a screen showing an empty metal corridor, the number '6' in the corner of this screen.

"Ohhh," Phil realized, turning around to look near the bottom of the right wall. "I think the camera must be inside the vent."

"Why would they need cameras in the vents?" Jeremy asked.

"Maybe there were other locations with kids trying to climb into the vents? I don't know," Phil admitted.

He pressed the 'channel up' button to examine the Parts & Service room, when he heard the sound of clanging metal coming through the audio feed, and he exchanged a look with Jeremy.

"Chica!" they both exclaimed, now darting toward the Parts and Services room.

Phil swung the door open, flinching as the familiar stench greeted him, and flipped on the light. Sure enough, Chica was in the corner of the room, although only her back was visible to the guys.

"What is she...?" Phil asked, interrupted when Chica suddenly moved, the sounds of metal parts clicking and fastening making him jump.

"It looks like she's holding something," Jeremy pointed out.

They exchanged a curious look, stepping over the old Freddy Fazbear animatronic that had collapsed
in the center of the room. Sure enough, Chica was actually hunched over a white animatronic.

"Loxy!" Phil gasped.

Chica turned around at the noise, giving them a full view of the scene. She had been inserting an endoskeleton into the 'costume' used for Loxy.

"She must've wandered in here and started following programming," Phil concluded.

"Her programming?"

"Well, the animatronics have another neat feature to their AI," Phil commented, looking down at Chica, as she put Loxy's head over the part of the endoskeleton that was comparable to a skull. "They can put together animatronics at the most basic level... that is, putting an endoskeleton inside the character's costume. They aren't advanced enough for the minute details, which is why Bonnie and Freddy haven't tried to reassemble Chica's face each time she falls off the stage."

"Who even programs this stuff?"

"I dunno, but we picked a good company!" Phil grinned. "Well... aside from the glitches that still have to be sorted out. Uh, but for the most part, their programming skills are impressive."

"Yeah."

"It's just a boo-boo, I'll be fine!" Chica's voice chirped from her voicebox.

"And that's the diagnostic part of their AI. It keeps them in-character while letting the mechanics know what's wrong. I think Heather said that's just the code for a minor mechanical error, since it's just pieces of her face that fell off. Since she's out for the day, we'll probably have to call someone in, though..." Phil's face fell for a moment, but he snapped his fingers and perked back up. "All right, here's what we'll do! I'll call in the other mechanic, and then we'll go have some pizza, okay?"

"All right, but..." Jeremy frowned, looking over at Chica. "What are we supposed to do about her until the mechanic gets here?"

"I'll have someone watch her until the mechanic arrives. I think George can handle keeping an eye on her," Phil stated, leaving the room with Jeremy.

Sure enough, they found George in the gameroom, trying to stand nonchalantly by one of the arcade machines as though he hadn't been playing. Phil explained the situation and he reluctantly left.

As they stepped into the back area, Jeremy and Phil were greeted by Sophia's voice, speaking excitedly to someone - and then they realized whom.

"Oh, yes, I'd love to... I mean, me gustaria salir contigo!"

Sure enough, around the corner, she was beaming up at Ronaldo outside the kitchen, his cheeks rosy as he awkwardly fiddled with his hands.

"Oh... I understood you in English," he mumbled shyly, but smiled, his voice a little stronger. "But I am happy you said yes."

Ronaldo turned his head at that moment, and did a double take upon spotting his other friends in the room.

"... Phil...? ... Jeremy!"
"Jeremy?! Oh my gosh!" Sophia squeaked. She ran up to him, arms outstretched, and he accepted her hug. "It's been so long, how are you doing?"

"It hasn't been *that* long, Sophia," he laughed softly, patting her back. "But I'm good, how about you?"

"Good, good!" Sophia let go of Jeremy, glancing back at Ronaldo with a smile at the second 'good'. "So, did you come by to chat?"

"Pardon me, uh, you guys go ahead," Phil interrupted, taking a few steps back. "I have a phone call to make."

"Mechanic. Chica fell and broke a few small parts," Jeremy explained, as Phil exited the room. "Or, uh..."

He looked over at Ronaldo, holding out a hand, as though he wanted to see the familiar dictionary once again.


"Oh, that's great, man!" Jeremy praised.

"Speaking of which, I'm sorry Heather wasn't here to see you," Sophia apologized with a sad smile.

"You've got nothing to apologize for. Everybody has to take a day off at some point. I happened to have the day off as well, so I came by to spend it with you guys," Jeremy offered.

"Have you had lunch?" Ronaldo asked. Jeremy shook his head.

"No, but I was planning on eating here," he answered. "I hear you've improved the pizza recipe."

Ronaldo put a finger up to his lips.

"It is a secret," he reminded him. "I put more garlic and butter on cheese and crust."

"It's okay. I'll keep it a secret," Jeremy assured with a nod. "What about what you guys said in Spanish? Is that a secret too?"

Sophia exchanged another look with Ronaldo, a tiny playful smile on her lips.

"Maaaaybeee...!" she giggled.

Jeremy just smiled. Some things didn't need translating. The three of them heard footsteps come down the hall, and Phil re-entered the room.

"Okay, someone's on the way. How about that pizza?"

The four of them spent lunch in the employee lounge, discussing classes and plans for the week and next.

"Phil has Thursdays off, so that's probably our best starting point for figuring out when to schedule our next get-together," Jeremy stated, gently pushing his paper plate aside. "Preferably for the five of us."

"Oh, Jeremy, it's alright," Phil assured. "If there's a day where I can't come but the four of you *can* get together, please, don't feel bad about leaving me out! I mean, we have a whole semester
ahead of us! There's bound to be several get-togethers, and there's bound to be a few where one or two of us can't attend."

"Heather herself even argued in favor of Thursdays," Jeremy pointed out. "She told me about Sophia and Ronaldo's classes, and about how she usually works the morning half of security."

"All right," Phil agreed. "So, what would we do on a Thursday night? We can't go out to eat all the time."

"Getting together at someone's apartment might be fun!" Sophia suggested. "Well... I live in a campus-run apartment, so my place is pretty much like a dorm room... and small."

"I live in a dorm too," Ronaldo added, disappointed.

"Pat doesn't mind guests as long as they're not too loud, so my apartment might work as well," Jeremy added. "I don't know about Heather's situation, though."

"She probably has an apartment and a roommate or two as well," Phil theorized. "But if there's any concern about roommates, uh... I do live in a single-person apartment."

His three friends gave him an impressed look.

"Like I said... I-I did earn a few raises over the years, so I've had time to save up some money... but being an assistant manager full-time pays much better than any part-time position I've ever had."

"Are you going to be able to balance that with classes, though?" Sophia asked, concerned.

"... I'm sure I'll find a way," Phil stated, giving a thumbs up.

Jeremy's eyes wandered over to the clock on the wall, and Phil followed his gaze.

"Oh, shoot... our break's over," Phil complained, but he smiled. "I'm glad you came to visit, Jeremy."

"I'm glad I came, I had a good time," Jeremy confirmed, standing up to throw away his trash. "So I guess we'll try to figure out a Thursday where we can get together at one of our apartments and order a... no, you guys have to eat that so often..."

He looked down at the paper plate in his hand with an awkward frown.

"... Chinese take-out! We'll get take-out!" Sophia suggested eagerly.

"Take-out it is!" Phil agreed with a grin.

After Jeremy had thrown out his trash, Phil walked him out. Or, at least they were about to, had someone familiar not walked into the main hallway of the pizzeria.

"HOLY...!" Heather started to exclaim in excitement, before glancing beyond them into the game area. "... cow."

"Oh, the gang's all here!" Jeremy remarked with a small laugh. "What are you doing here?"

"I came by to visit, probably the same as you. Except... I've got big news!" she grinned from ear-to-ear. "Any chance you know what your schedule will be like next week, Jeremy? Like what days you have off?"

"Umm..." he looked upward, trying to recall. "I only have Wednesday off, but I'm working shorter
hours on Tuesday and Thursday to compensate."

"Do you have some kind of arrangement planned for us?" Phil asked. "Because we won't know our
schedules until tomorrow, and..."

"It's cool, I'm just comparing our schedules to Fritz's. You remember my friend Fritz I mentioned?"
Heather asked. "Over the summer, he joined one of those 'amateur theater groups'. You know, to
find something to pass the time. And anyway, he landed a part in a production and offered me some
vouchers for free tickets. He could only give me two, though, so we'll have to chipping in to get the other
three. But this is an amateur production being shown at the theater of the community college, so it
shouldn't be too expensive."

"A theater production?" Phil asked, his voice rising in pitch as questions started to fly from his
mouth. "What are they performing? Is it something classic, like Shakespeare? Or something modern?
Is it a musical?"

"Uh... kind of a mix of both, actually. It's an opera," Heather explained. "Fritz is going to be a part of
a production of Carmen."

"Carmen?!" Phil gasped. "I-I haven't seen it myself, but this will certainly be something to tell my
father about... wow!"

"Your father?" Jeremy asked.

Phil nodded.

"The first Friday night after my father and Frederick Derbassier made their business deal to form
Fazbear Entertainment, Mr. Derbassier invited my parents out to go see Carmen. And I, being about
eleven years old, was deemed too young to appreciate opera and thus stayed home with a babysitter.
Mom thought it was alright, but Dad loved it," One could practically see stars glimmering in his eyes.
"And now I'm going to finally see it."

Jeremy let out a sigh.

"I'm gonna have to buy a suit, though..." he commented, tugging at the sleeve on his t-shirt.

"No way, man," Heather waved it off. "Fritz says it's supposed to be a pretty casual affair. Just wear
something 'nice', maybe throw on a necktie, and you should be good."

"... All right. I think I've got something that would work," Jeremy mused.

"Cool. We'll see what everyone's schedules are like, and then I'll order the tickets," Phil offered. "I
mean, since I'm currently in classes, maybe I can also get a student discount?"

"Worth a shot," Heather encouraged. "All right, well I just stopped by to say hello and share the
news, I'm gonna go do some shopping."

"I'm heading home, so I'll see you later as well," Jeremy added.

"You still have your sheet with everyone's number, right?" Heather asked, looking over at Phil.

"Oh, uh, yes!" he nodded quickly. "I'll call you and let you know when I'm available... though I'd
wager it would be Monday or Thursday because of classes and whatnot."

"Okay, I'll see you guys later," Heather gave one more quick wave before turning on her heel and
dashing out the door.

In contrast, Jeremy walked to the door and calmly let himself out.

"Thanks again for today. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

Carmen... Carmen... Phil thought to himself. It was a famous opera, and he was sure he had heard at least one of the songs before...

But where?

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Augusr 25, 1987

Class was officially underway again, and while Tuesday mornings would have normally meant biology lab, there was no class scheduled for the very first week.

Which, of course, gave Phil ample time to study up on all the notes he had taken his first day. Four classes in one day didn't sound too hard on the surface, but when one of them was a double-period class and the other one lasted for three periods, it was easy to see how one could feel overwhelmed.

But it's not going to get to me, Phil reminded himself with a little smile, as he once again pulled into the Picnix parking lot. Perhaps he would try the Italian sub for lunch today? He had Italian blood in his veins, it was like a duty to determine if the sub was worthy of its name. Shelby wasn't in today, so a guy named Nick made the sub for his lunch.

Now the half-Italian with a whole Italian sub (and a can of cola) made his way to the registers, unable to resist the urge to find the one where Jeremy was working at, just to give him the usual 'hello-hellos' and also let him know how classes were going.

However... today he could not find Jeremy at any of the registers. Of course, he didn't know Jeremy's schedule, so he might have been scheduled for later in the day, so he might just have to swing by later. He checked out, mildly disappointed...

"Phil?! Hey, Phil!" Jeremy's voice called out to him.

He turned his head to the left. Sure enough, Jeremy was waving him over, seated alone at a picnic table underneath a towering maple tree, one of those instant soup bowls in front of him. Phil smiled, jogging up to the table.

"Did I catch you on your lunch break?" he inquired, standing at Jeremy's side.

"Yeah, but I didn't catch you on yours," he replied, looking Phil up and down. A black tee shirt bearing the words "Pirate Cove" scrawled out in red with a minimalist design of Foxy, and denim jeans... he didn't see him in casual attire that often anymore. It didn't surprise Jeremy too much that he owned clothing related to the Fazbear franchise, either. (3)

"I've got about thirty minutes left on my break... you wanna stay and chat?" Jeremy offered.

He scooted a little further down on the picnic bench, opening a spot for Phil. He took a step forward, delighted, but stopped in his tracks.
"I just thought of something. Give me one second, I'll be right back," Phil excused himself, dashing into the parking lot.

"Watch out for cars!" Jeremy yelled after him.

Phil didn't turn back or reply, save for raising a hand to let him know he had heard him. He stopped at his Mercury Sable, catching his breath as he unlocked and opened the door. Phil reached into the bookbag he kept in the backseat of the car. He removed the blue spiral notebook from the bag, and reached for the biology textbook among the textbooks on the floor of the backseat. Oh, right, he should probably take a few pencils, too. His original plan was to stop by the library to review each of his subjects... even if only one day of class had passed. But suddenly, this was feeling like a much more appealing idea.

Now with one pencil tucked behind his ear and the others gripped in his hand, his arms cradling his books and sub, he hurried back to where Jeremy was seated.

"Hey, so, I had my first biology lecture yesterday..." Phil started to say.

"... and you want me to help you go over your notes?" Jeremy finished.

He merely nodded in reply. Jeremy patted the empty spot beside him, and Phil took a seat. The first section of the chapter was barely covered in the lecture, as it was just reviewing the scientific method. The second section started to cover actual biology, by presenting the concepts that defined life.

"Hmm... what defines life..." Phil mused aloud, gently closing the book on his finger to mark his place so he couldn't peek at the answers. "Well... I think all living creatures are made up of cells... even if they're only a single cell, like bacteria."

"That's one thing," Jeremy confirmed.

"Wait, do you know all of the criteria?"

A small but proud smile formed on his face.

"Wait, do you know all of the criteria?"

A small but proud smile formed on his face.

"I have a general idea. Keep going, how many do you remember from yesterday?"

"Okay... uh... all living things require some form of energy, like photosynthesis or actually eating things..." Phil recalled, looking over at Jeremy, who nodded. "Okay... uh... uhh... oh, come on..."

"I'm talking to you, giving you hints, because you are stuck... so I am 'blank' to your needs," Jeremy hinted, pinching his own hand and faking a look of pain.

"Oh, uh, responding! Living things respond to stuff, like pain or light... oh, and this also helps them regulate their body. Well, plants and mushrooms don't really have bodies. Or... um... what am I trying to say...?"

"Regulation, that's one of the requirements. Keep going."

Phil remained quiet, chewing on his lip, looking at Jeremy in desperation.

"Okay... think about all the different kingdoms of life. You know what those are, right? Try and think about what they have in common."

"Hmm... animals... plants... fungi... protists... bacteria and viruses - "

"Hmm... animals... plants... fungi... protists... bacteria and viruses - "
"Nope!"

"N-no?" Phil asked.

"Viruses are *not* considered living creatures. And this is because of another reason you haven't named yet," Jeremy lectured.

"Do viruses have cells? No, I already said that, and they have DNA..." Phil's voice trailed off as Jeremy nodded suddenly.

"DNA. That's the right track, you're so close."

"Uh, something to do with reproduction?"

"Right!" Jeremy cheered. "Whether sexually or asexually, all living organisms are capable of reproduction. However, viruses rely on host cells to reproduce, so since they can't do it on their own, they can't be considered living creatures."

"Hmm..." Phil looked up at the looming maple tree. "... All living things have to grow, then, right?"

"That's right, good job," Jeremy said with a nod. "I think there's only one that you're missing."

Phil shook his head.

"I don't have the slightest idea, just tell me, please."

"Homeostasis," Jeremy stated. "The organism's cells require appropriate conditions, such as temperature, and the organism has to be able to maintain these conditions despite the environment it's in."

"It sounds a lot like regulation, but okay," Phil resigned. "So... cells, reproduction, growth, energy processing, homeostasis, regulation, and... responsiveness."

"Right."

"Moving on, then," Phil said, opening his textbook on the page he had been on, before letting out a little groan. "Evolution."

"Evolution?" Jeremy inquired, perking up. "I love evolution!"

"Oh, maybe you can explain it better to me, then," Phil sighed, opening his notebook. He took a pencil and sketched out a single arrow. "Like... how come we still have chimpanzees if we evolved from them?"

"Because people word things incorrectly," Jeremy stated, beckoning for Phil to hand him a pencil. "We didn't evolve from them... we shared a common ancestor."

He tapped the eraser end of the pencil to his cheek a few times, turning to the next page in the book. A branching diagram of bacteria and eukaryotes was presented on the page, and Jeremy pointed to it.

"Just like when you think about family trees on the smaller level, like how your grandparents had your father, Frank, and Flora, and then your dad married your mom and you and your cousins were born... you kind of have to think of evolution like a branching tree," Jeremy lectured.

"... Except I don't have any cousins, but okay."
"... Oh. Well, the point still stands, you have to think about it like a branching tree. Organisms reproduce, and genetic mutations occur. Maybe there's a family of gray..." Jeremy paused, looking at Phil's shirt. "... foxes that live in a forest environment."

Phil couldn't hide his childish smile, and Jeremy smiled as well.

"But then, a variable changes in the environment and throws everything out of balance. In this case, it's... uh... a second coming of the Ice Age. In other words, there's snow everywhere."

He sketched out four circles and added little triangular ears to them, writing 'G' in two of them, 'R' in one, and 'W' in the last one.

"Now, in one family, some mutations occur, causing one kit to be born with bright red fur, one kit to be born with white fur, and the other kits are born with the usual gray. The red one stands out too much, so it has trouble sneaking up on prey or it can't hide from larger predators like wolves, so it dies without the chance to reproduce," Jeremy remarked, now striking an 'x' over the fox with an 'R' written on it. "On the other hand, the white fox has the advantage of camouflage, so it can hide from predators and has an advantage while hunting. So it..."

He sketched out another fox with a 'G', and drew a line between the two of them, then a line stretching down perpendicular from the previous one. He then drew four more little foxes, but this time with two 'W's and two 'G's. Phil was content to watch Jeremy work, eating his sub as he looked on.

"... lives long enough to breed and pass on its genes to its offspring, giving some of them the same white coat that gave it an advantage to survive. Of course, the foxes may breed multiple times, so the number of offspring with white fur will vary, and sometimes the white ones will get unlucky with predators or just get sick and die, but eventually the white foxes will start to become the majority of the fox population in the area. But you pretty much see how natural selection works with genetic mutation according to Darwin's theory of evolution."

"Yeah... yeah, I think I get it!" Phil agreed, before taking another bite out of his sandwich.

"It's the same thing will all life forms, just stretched out over one or two billion years," he scooted a little closer to Phil to draw in the notebook again.

"Uh, all right," Phil agreed, trying to ignore the fact that his pulse had sped up slightly.

Jeremy drew a line and then drew an 'x' at the end of it.

"Sometimes life can't find a way, and extinction happens. It's surprisingly more common than you'd think, but it is a very dark ending."

"Like with the dinosaurs," Phil commented.

"Yeah," Jeremy agreed, now drawing a new line. This time, however, he branched it off in two directions. The left branch he kept short, labeling it "prokaryotes". The right branch, he made a little longer, labeling it "eukaryotes".

"But there are also times where life does find a way, through mutations, and it goes on. This little spot," Jeremy stopped to circle the place where the two branches met. "Is the common ancestor of both single- and multi-cellular organisms. Then the multicellular organisms start to get more complex as life develops in the water, specifically the oceans... uh, for example..."

He went through more branches and labeled them as he went... Porifera... cnidarians... mollusks that
branched off into gastropods like snails, and cephalopods like the ancient ammonite and the modern day nautilus.

"So they survived by being 'nautie', I guess you could say?" Phil joked.

Jeremy shook his head at the awful pun and continued. Phil admittedly zoned out as Jeremy continued drawing branches and labeling them... branches... he gazed back up at the maple tree. Its leaves were green now, but in a few months, they'd be changing to beautiful hues of vermilion and saffron.

"... So then we finally have cute and fluffy creatures like foxes and rabbits, and we also get primates... I am running out of room on this page," Jeremy mused to himself, having reached mammals.

"It's just the same thing, right? Like there's a branch for chimpanzees and a branch for humans?"

"Yeah," Jeremy confirmed, before checking his watch. "Oh, shoot... sorry, Phil, I gotta head back." (4)

"Uh, Jeremy, I just have one last question!" Phil quickly exclaimed, as Jeremy threw out his trash in the nearby can. "Um... why biology? And why do you like evolution so much?"

"Well... I would be lying if I didn't admit it just started as simply thinking 'it was cool'," Jeremy stated, sheepishly rubbing his neck. "All those varieties of animals, plants, and other life forms... some are cute, some are beautiful, and some inspire fear. Like spiders... I-I don't really like spiders or stinging insects all that much..."

He clutched at his arms, and Phil could've sworn he saw him tremble for a second. Jeremy shook his head and smiled.

"But evolution is not just a scientific theory. It is an inspiring story of overcoming the odds, told generation after generation, a language of life that transcends any form of communication. There are so many 'could-have-been' stories throughout evolutionary history... but we are the stories that 'are'. The same stardust that formed our universe billions of years ago is in you and me, and there will never be another Phil Fazari or Jeremy Fitzgerald like us. Just our mere existence is the purest form of art, and that is why no painting or sculpture can ever truly capture the beauty of a flower or the human figure," Jeremy laughed, his face slightly red, as he looked off to the side. "I know it's overthinking things, and I'm weird, but I just find so much beauty in it."

"I don't think you're weird at all," Phil reassured him with a smile, gathering his school supplies in his arms. "When you put it that way, life just seems even more beautiful."

Jeremy's cheeks turned even redder, if that was somehow possible, and he smiled sheepishly down at his shoes.

"Oh, well... you're the only person to ever tell me I'm not weird for thinking that way... although... you're the only person I've ever confided in about that anyway."

He stood there silently for a moment or two, before turning to look back at the Picnix.

"Right, so... um... I'm gonna head back now," Jeremy stated. "See - "

"C-Call me," Phil requested, the words shooting out of his mouth before he could process what he was asking.
For such an intelligent young man, Jeremy continued to stare at him, dumbfounded.

"Call me," Phil restated, trying to collect his thoughts like a child snatching up Easter eggs. "I-I, uh, I want to do something like this again... where, uh, you help me with my notes... a-and we can get something to eat, too, only it'll be my treat. So... uh... I-I should definitely be home by 10:30 tonight. Um, maybe you should call me, a-and let me know what your schedule's like, so that way the... the phone ringing won't wake up Pat. You know, uh, just to be safe. Okay?"

Jeremy's brow furrowed, thinking it over for a moment.

"... Okay," he replied, smiling before he turned and left. "See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

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**August 27, 1987**

The sun was starting to descend in the west when Phil walked up to the small theater at the community college. Sure enough, everyone's plans had aligned, and tonight was the night they would all be watching *Carmen*.

Even if it was just a small production, the moment his uncle had heard about his plans, he insisted that Phil wear a suit to the event. So here he was, on a summer evening, in a black suit and pants, with his usual black necktie flimsily knotted over a white shirt underneath.

Heather was already waiting outside the theater, clad in a long-sleeved cerulean blouse made of satin and black slacks. Much to his surprise, however, she had also brought along a black mini purse.

"Yo, Phil!" she waved him over. "Hey, man, how's it going?"

"Um, it's alright..." he answered with a shrug, walking up to her. "Have you been waiting long?"

"Not that long," she dismissed. "I came early to say hi to Fritz, plus I wanted to make sure everyone arrived like they were supposed to. Speaking of which, you got your ticket?"

"Yes," Phil confirmed, reaching into his pocket and removing the ticket for her to see. After classes on Wednesday, he had picked up the tickets for the Thursday evening showing, in order to get the student discount. He had then distributed the tickets among their group of friends at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, including Jeremy, who had driven by to pick his up.

"As do I," remarked another voice.

Clad in a navy blue button-down shirt with a black-and-gray-striped necktie with dark gray slacks, it was hard at first to recognize Jeremy with his hair slicked back. But he was holding the same ticket, and he still had the same glasses and voice and everything else that made him Jeremy.

"Hey, Jeremy! Good to see you again!" Heather greeted.

"Same to you. And you, Phil," he replied. "So, I guess we're just waiting on Sophia and Ronaldo?"

"Yeah. Buuut..." Heather grinned. "I'm willing to bet they arrive together."

Come to think of it, Phil had noticed they had been spending even more time together ever since he had seen them chatting the day that Jeremy first came to visit. But what the heck, it was natural for people his age to date. Even if he hadn't been on one since that girl he'd tried to wrap his arm around.
Sure enough, a few minutes later, Sophia and Ronaldo arrived together, her arm linked with his, as he escorted her to their circle of friends. They had even come with a matching color scheme. Sophia wore a sleeveless red dress with a rather deep neckline that seemed tighter up top but more flowy where her dress ended just above her knees. It accentuated her large curves rather nicely. Ronaldo had come in a red evening shirt and black slacks with a black necktie.

"Good evening!" they both exclaimed excitedly.

"Good evening!" their three friends echoed.

"You've still got our tickets, right?" Sophia asked, looking up at Ronaldo. He reached into his pocket and produced them with a nod. "I know we're kind of early, but that just gives us a little more time to chat before the show, you know?"

"More than just chat," Heather pointed out, starting to open up the mini purse she had brought along. "Help me remember after the performance, I want to pass out these."

She removed four photographs from the purse. They were still in pretty good condition, although they had one or two bent corners. It was actually the picture they had taken two weeks ago, outside Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

"I still have the original, since it was my camera, but I thought you guys might like copies?" she offered.

"Oh, definitely!" Phil agreed, as did everyone else. Jeremy seemed just as eager as the others, he noticed, which was good. He still worried about how the place might have affected him.

"Well then, speaking of cameras..." Heather tucked the photographs back in, only now she removed the same camera from before. "I definitely want us to get a picture like this, while we're all spruced up!"

"That is a great idea!" Ronaldo said gleefully, although he had inserted Spanish into his statement.

"Idea," Sophia said in English with a smile, gently poking a finger against the knot in his necktie. As Heather tried to wave someone over to take their photo, Phil quickly tried to straighten his own necktie.

"Do you need a..." Jeremy paused for a second. "Do you need a little help?"

"Oh, yeah, that would probably be easier," Phil admitted, lifting the tie in Jeremy's direction. Jeremy stepped closer and took the tie in both hands, undoing the flimsy knot that had been there previously. Phil had always known Jeremy was taller, but up close like this, it was that much more apparent. Heck, he was probably almost half a foot taller, if he had to guess. It also felt like that was how much space was between them. Phil swallowed hard, keeping his eyes on Jeremy's hands as he wove the ends of the tie around to form the knot.

"I-I had to learn how to knot ties from a video for, uh, stroke survivors, because of the whole... 'one-handed' thing. Can you believe that?" Phil sighed. "But e-even that's not good enough for my uncle, he still grumps at me if my tie isn't, uh, perfect, and then he'll fix it. Life would be so much easier if I-I didn't have an arm like this, you know?"

"I... uh... I wouldn't know about that. But I'll take your word for it, sounds like it makes a lot of things difficult," Jeremy affirmed, as he pinched the spot under the knot to draw the tie a little bit
"Tighter. "That's not too tight, is it?"

"Nah, I'm good. Thank you, Jeremy," Phil said, taking a few steps back to admire the new knot.

At that moment, Heather came walking back over, some random lady behind her with her camera.

"Come on, guys, it's picture time!" she announced. "Come on, we're just gonna stand in front of the tree over there."

Heather pointed to it, and the five of them gathered in front of it. Much like the original photo they had taken together, Jeremy and Ronaldo stood in the back while Heather, Phil, and Sophia stood in front.

"Okay, everyone, say 'cheese'!" the lady exclaimed.

"Cheese!"

The lady snapped two pictures for Heather, just to be safe, before handing the camera back to her.

"Thank you, ma'am," she expressed her gratitude as the lady left, before turning back to her friends.

"So, how about we go find our seats?"

Jeremy looked over Phil's other shoulder to read the cast list.

"Oh, that's neat. When do the Roma show up?" Jeremy asked.

"I don't know, I haven't seen the show!" Heather shrugged.

"I don't think any of us have," Sophia commented from the other side of Jeremy. "Oh, this is so exciting! It'll be like a grand adventure for us all!"

They chatted for a little while longer, discussing their expectations and predictions for the plot, until the lights in the theater faded. Around the stage, however, a few screens lit up, displaying the words "Act I".

"What are those for?" Sophia whispered to Jeremy.

"I dunno," he replied. "They might - "

Jeremy's speech cut off and he jolted up in his seat in surprise as the orchestra in the pit began to play a riveting overture. It slowed pace, with the strings taking over, and Heather and Phil - particularly Heather - gasped in surprise. They knew that melody. Even Jeremy recognized the tune after a few more seconds - the same song Bonnie had suddenly belted out two weeks ago.

At last the overture finished and everyone in the theater applauded. The curtains pulled back and the stage lit up as a new piece of music started, revealing a set designed like a small city square, one
building notable for the words "Fábrica de Tabacos" printed on it.

"That is Spanish," Ronaldo commented to Sophia. "Is this Spain?"

Before she could answer, the screens around the stage had changed their displays from "Act I" to "Seville, Spain, circa 1820".

"Oh," they both murmured.

A few of the townspeople and several of the soldiers appeared on set, walking around the 'city' until the music shifted and they began to sing, although the language was not English. Once again, the screens changed, displaying surtitles for the lyrics.

"In the square, everyone passes, everyone comes, everyone goes."

Jeremy couldn't help but feel bad for Ronaldo. He couldn't say for sure, but based on all the 'j' and 'v' sounds used in the music, the lyrics were probably French. And the surtitles were presented in English, so he was probably going to be lost in translation for a few hours.

Everyone applauded as the first musical number came to an end, as a young lady unsuccessfully tried to find a soldier by the name of Don José. One of the soldiers spoke to another one, but in English.

"A lovely girl came by, asking for you!" he jested, nudging the other soldier. "She said she'd return."

"A lovely girl?"

"Yes!"

"Ah, that must have been Micaëla!"

So, this was Don José. He and Micaëla had both been listed as two of the major roles in the performance, so what about the other two?

Who was Carmen, and who was Escamillo?

That question... was partially answered a few minutes later, as a large group of workers stepped out of the tobacco factory.

"There he is, there he is!" Heather whispered excitedly.

It appeared that a lot of the workers must have been part of the Roma, but there was no way to tell who exactly Fritz was. Even so, he wasn't the highest priority at the moment, for Carmen herself had taken the stage.

The actress chosen to portray her was utterly beautiful, with rich coffee-brown hair that rippled halfway down her back. She sang the Habanera, warning about the dangers of her love, which earned her a hearty amount of applause at the end of the song.

Eventually, Act I came to an end, with Don José stripped of his rank after allowing Carmen to escape from her arrest. There was a brief intermission, allowing everyone to chat for a few minutes.

"Do you like it, Ronaldo?" Jeremy asked hesitantly.

"I do!" he affirmed with a grin. "The music words... I do not understand."

"I think that's because it is sung in French," Jeremy explained. "The words in music are called
'lyrics'. So, the lyrics in Carmen are in French."

"'Lyrics'," Ronaldo repeated. "I see. The English on the TVs and what they say... I can understand a little of it. But I like the music and I like to watch them..."

Ronaldo made a few dramatic gestures in his seat, swinging his arms for show, careful not to hit Sophia.

"... Move? Act?" Jeremy tried to finish.

"Yes, how they move," Ronaldo confirmed. "I like the music, the moving, and I understand a little of the English."

"Maybe we can find a video of it in Spanish at the library," Sophia suggested, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"Maybe," he agreed, smiling back down at her. "And if not, maybe I can learn more English and we can see it again one day."

Jeremy smiled at that comment, deciding to let them chat amongst themselves for a little while, silently admiring the atmosphere of the theater.

The intermission came to an end, and Act II began, now in the inn of Lillas Pastia. It seemed that at least a month had passed, and Don José was about to be released from detention.

Carmen's story was starting to intrigue Phil. Don José appeared to be a man of order, yet Carmen seemed so free-spirited, seemingly perfect foils for one another. Her character was bold, almost enviably so, able to speak her mind and wear her emotions on her sleeve without fear. Was Carmen, perhaps, the antagonist, trying to tempt Don José into a life of evil? Or would they find their happy ending after facing a common foe? Come to think of it, one of the prominent characters mentioned in the program hadn't -

"Vivat! Vivat le toréro! Vivat! Vivat Escamillo!" chorused an unseen group backstage.

All five of them perked up.

One lady came running through a doorway onset, gleefully exclaiming, "It's the great bullfighter from Grenada, Escamillo!"

Save for Carmen, all the characters onstage grew excited, applauding wildly. A few of the extras even looked out to the crowd, encouraging them to applaud and cheer as well, as the actors and actresses resumed their cheers of "Vivat! Vivat le toréro! Vivat! Vivat Escamillo!"

And then, at last, the man of the hour emerged from the doorway, and everyone onstage cheered again, as Escamillo began to sing, proudly marching around the stage. Heather let out a soft gasp as he performed the all-too familiar lyrics.

"Toréador, en garde! Toréador! Toréador!
Et songe bien, oui, songe en combattant,
Qu'un œil noir te regarde..."

Jeremy exchanged a brief look with Phil. It might have been so dark that they could barely see one another, but they both knew the other was smiling. Jeremy looked back up at the stage, reading the translated lyrics on the surtitles.
"And that love awaits you, toréador! Love, love, is waiting for you!"

Was there anything else in Act II? It was hard to say. Escamillo's performance had blown the five of them away, content to talk about how good everything had been during the intermission. Until that finally came to an end, as Act III was about to begin.

Darn, Jeremy realized, he should've taken the opportunity to ask Heather about what Fritz actually looked like, to see if they could spot him during another point in the enough, she grew excited as the Roma appeared onstage again, now with Don José among them. But it appeared Carmen was growing tired of him, especially as he continued to think about how his mother was doing.

At another area of camp, two of the Roma women, Frasquita and Mercédes drew fortunes from their deck of cards, until Carmen grew intrigued and joined them.

Frasquita found promises of love. Mercédes beheld a future of fortune.

And Carmen? She tossed her cards to the ground with a sneer.

Death.

Love, fortune... despair, death... the words mingled among the trio until another man ran along, to warn them of strangers approaching. The first one, Micaëla, was harmless - even hiding behind a rock when she spotted someone aiming a gun in her direction. It turned out to be for the second stranger.

Escamillo.

Don José was rather surprised, asking him to confirm his identity. Escamillo flashed that charming grin and declared boldly,

"C'est moi!"

Don José was actually rather hospitable at first - at first - until Escamillo revealed his true intentions.

"For who wouldn't risk their life to see their beloved?"

A few members of the audience 'ooh'ed as they read the surtitles. A few more gasps arose when Don José grittily explained to Escamillo that the price of loving was paid with a knife.

Escamillo drew his own knife, sparring with Don José, until he was thrown against a rock, the blade knocked from his hand, Don José towering over him, drawing his hand back to deliver the fatal blow, Phil almost looked away -

"Holà, holà, José!"

When Carmen dashed in, grabbing his arm and pulling him back. Escamillo thanked her for saving his life, giving her a parting kiss before he left.

One of the camp's men emerged from off-stage, dragging Micaëla along, stating he had found her hiding. She explained that Don José's mother had requested to see him. Even Carmen insisted that he leave, that he was not meant for this life, but Don José snapped back at her, clutching her in a chokehold, that he would not allow the chains binding them to be broken.

It was only when Micaëla explained that his mother was dying, that Don José submitted to her
request. Carmen laughed as he left, though that laughter faded as she heard singing in the distance.

"Toréador, en garde..."

She finally grew quiet, looking off in the direction Escamillo had departed, before the stagelights grew dark.

Another intermission? Jeremy wondered. But no, the music was quick to resume, and the surtitles indicated the scene was now set outside a bullring.

Escamillo and Carmen came out, arm-in-arm, professing their love to each other in a duet before he departed for his fight. Sophia let out a soft gasp, as she recognized the figure silently creeping onto the set.

Don José, now lurking behind one of the walls of the bullring.

Her friends even tried to warn her, but brave Carmen waved them off, stating that she refused to tremble before him. Frasquita and Mercédes departed, leaving Carmen be. She nonchalantly strutted around the stage with her paper fan, until at last, Don José came running in.

"C'est toi!" she declared coldly.

"C'est moi!" he replied darkly.

Everyone in the audience fell silent, for they knew the finale was near.

Don José begged her to come back with him, but Carmen laid down the truth - that she was done with him... and that she knew that he would kill her.

"No," Sophia gasped softly.

The two of them bickered, Carmen declaring that she was a free woman, as the crowd cheered in the bullring. A smile flashed across her face as the crowd cheered "Victoire!" and she started to head for the ring.

Until Don José grabbed her. She struggled and struggled, demanding him to let her go. He snarled and demanded to know if she loved the man in the bullring. She jerked one arm free, shoving Don José off of her, and turned around, standing tall.

"Je t'aime!" she declared, drawing a knife and holding it between herself and Don José. "Je t'aime et devant la mort même, je répéterai que je t'aime!"

The crowd cheered some more, and she turned to leave, but Don José grabbed her from behind, knocking the knife from her grasp, insisting that he was damned because of her and that he would never let her go.

Sophia fidgeted in her seat, surely the bullfight was done, where were the spectators to break up this fight?

But once again, Carmen threw Don José off, and this time, threw the ring he had given her at him, the crowd triumphantly singing Escamillo's toreador song in the background as she flounced away -

Until Don José, now back on his feet with the previously flung-aside knife in his clutches, stabbed her in the back.

"... L'amour, l'amour t'attend!" the crowd sang out, as Carmen finally fell limply into Don José's
arms.

Sophia let out a pained cry as he confessed to his crimes before the soldiers who had now gathered around, as the spectators filed out of the arena to stare at the scene... including Escamillo at the very rear.

The stage went dark as the music faded out and the theater filled with applause, the crowd rising to their feet as the cast took their bows. (6)

"All right, shall we - whoa, Sophia, are you okay?" Heather commented, now noticing her friend's reaction.

Her eyes were red and a little bit of her make-up had started to run, making the faint tear stains down her cheeks more prominent.

"Hey, come on, it's okay! They're actors!" Heather awkwardly stumbled past her three male friends to hug Sophia comfortingly.

"I-It's not that...!" Sophia fought hard to choke back a sob. "... sh-she really did love him l-like she said, and Escaramel loved her t-too... I didn't know this was going to end in a tragedy...!"

She hiccuped softly, Heather gently rubbing a circle against her back. Sophia gently patted Heather's back, pulling away.

"I-I'm sorry," she ran a knuckle under her eye to brush away a tear, before noticing a smudge of her make-up, which made her laugh slightly. "I probably look like a mess...! I'm going to head to the restrooms to freshen up a little."

"I'm heading that way too," Jeremy added. "I was hoping there would be an intermission after Act III, but instead I had to hold it. We'll meet you guys out in the lobby."

The five of them scooted out of the theater's main hall amidst the crowd of people, before Jeremy and Sophia diverged their paths to the restrooms.

"As for you guys..." Heather's voice trailed off, looking at Ronaldo and Phil, before she grinned. "... there's someone I'd like you to meet. Wait here."

She hurried off down one of the smaller hallways in the theater's lobby.

"So, did you like it?" Ronaldo asked.

"Oh, yeah!" Phil nodded eagerly. "It was good. I see why my father and Mr. Derbassier liked the opera so much."

"Is that why Bonnie has the same song?"

"I think that might be part of it, yeah," Phil agreed. "I wouldn't be surprised if one of the other animatronics has a recording from the opera too. It would probably be Freddy, though, since he was the original. Maybe I'll get to hear it someday."

"All right, guys, here he is!" Heather cheered. "The man of the hour!"

"Heath - oh my," Phil's voice caught in his throat.

She walked up to them, arm-in-arm with a very tall man - taller than Ronaldo by an inch or two, even. He had clearly changed out of whatever his Roma costume had been, because he was now
clad in simple black gym shorts and a gray tank top, leaving nothing to the imagination regarding his muscular body. This guy looked more like an Olympic athlete than an engineer who happened to be into theater.

He chuckled, his deep voice seeming to echo from his chest.

"Please. I am just an extra on the set," he insisted. He almost certainly had sung a tenor or baritone part in the play, based on his voice.

"Phil, Ronaldo, this is my friend, Fritz Smith," she introduced.

"Nice to meet you," he stated, offering a hand to shake. Unlike Ronaldo, who spoke broken English with a heavy Spanish accent, Fritz seemed to speak fluent English with only a hint of an accent in his voice. Most likely German, based on his blond hair and blue eyes.

"Nice to meet you," Ronaldo replied, shaking hands.

"Uh..." Phil remained quiet, tucking his hand and arm into his pockets. "... hi."

"Don't be shy," Fritz reassured, though he couldn't help but chuckle. "I don't bite."

Phil mumbled something under his breath, reaching out his left hand to shake. Fritz took it and shook it heartily.

"What's up with you, Phil?" Heather asked.

"N-nothing!" he quickly insisted, letting go of Fritz's hand, keeping his eyes on the floor.

"Why are you so sh- oh," Heather remarked, looking up at Fritz. Her eyes grew wider and she spoke louder. "OH...!"

"I-it's not that!" Phil tried to defend, his voice cracking as his face turned redder.

"Then what is it?" Heather asked, putting her hands on her hips, keeping her voice lower so other attendees wouldn't notice them. "One of our friends is gay, why would we treat you any different? You have nothing to be uncomfortable about."

"Why would you say that?!" Phil hissed. "A-and besides, I like girls!"

"You can like both," Heather argued. "... I do. I just don't feel any sort of romantic attraction to people."

"The same is true for me," Fritz agreed. "I have had to explain to girls that I am not attracted to them... and when boys ask, I explain that I am not attracted to them either."

"Look... okay... I-I just want to keep this a secret, okay? N-none of you can tell anybody!" Phil demanded adamantly.

"Because of your uncle. It's cool, man, we know," Heather reassured. Ronaldo held up a finger to his lips and nodded.

He let out a heavy sigh of relief.

"Hey, guys, how's it going?" Jeremy asked, walking up with Sophia. "Oh, hey, are you Fritz, by any chance?"
"I am," he confirmed, extending a hand to shake.

"I'm Jeremy, pleased to meet you."

"Oh, and I'm Sophia!" she shook hands with him after Jeremy, her face clear of make-up but her expression was brighter than before. "You guys were great!"

"Thank you," he said with a smile, before turning back to Heather. "It was nice to meet your friends, but I'm sure the rest of the cast wants to see me backstage. If you'll excuse me..."

She exchanged a hug with him, and let Fritz leave.

"Well, I had fun tonight!" Jeremy commented. "We should try to get together again soon!"

"For sure," Heather agreed. "I wonder what we should do? Are you thinking, Sophia?"

"Mnhmm," she nodded, and looked around at her friends. "Hey, you guys remember how we exchanged phone numbers and addresses, right?"

"Right," Heather replied.

"... what about our birthdays? I mean, we could try to get together and celebrate one of those at some point. Although it probably wouldn't be my birthday, since it's so far away... February 26, actually."

"And my birthday was over the summer. July 8th," Phil stated.

"I'm a summer boy too," Jeremy agreed. "May 5th."

"Okay, whoa, we should be writing these down," Heather remarked, holding her hands out in front of her. "... but yeah, mine's December 16th. How about you, big guy?"

"Oh, me?" Ronaldo asked. A grin spread across his face as he began to speak excitedly. "Actually... very, very soon! September... uh... 'oneth'?"

"September 1st?" Sophia corrected. "Wow, how exciting! You should have told us sooner!"

"Yes, I am very excited. I do not know if Frank was nice and did it on purpose, but he gave me that day off."

"No kidding?" Jeremy asked. "I actually have that Tuesday off as well."

"Oh, we can 'hang out'!" Ronaldo exclaimed.

"Sure, if that's what you want!"

"Yo, we might have to go out that night," Heather stated. "... you'll be twenty-one, right?"

"Yes."

"Yeah! You finally get your coke and rum, man!" she exclaimed. "And I have the night off, so I can take the three of us out to a bar!"

"Oh... couldn't we make it another night out somewhere?" Sophia asked. "I work the morning shift on Tuesday, so I'm available that night."

"Phil, what's wrong?" Jeremy asked.
His excited smile had slowly fallen as everyone else had chatted about planning something for Ronaldo's birthday.

"... I'm stuck working Tuesday night," he confessed.

"Oh no!" Sophia gasped, clutching her hands to her face. "Well, maybe on Thursday, we can - "

"I work a night shift on Thursday," Ronaldo stated.

"H-hey, remember what I was saying to you earlier in the week?" Phil commented to Jeremy.

"There's bound to be a few occasions where we can't all get together. So... it's okay. I'm sorry I'll miss your birthday, Ronaldo, but I hope you have a good time."

"Thank you, Phil. I'm sorry."

"I-it's not your fault! There's nothing to worry about!" he smiled. "I'll only be upset if you don't have a good time on your birthday."

The five of them walked outside, admiring the stars and moon.

"All right. I'll call you guys and we'll talk about plans for Tuesday, okay?" Heather commented, starting to head for her car in the parking lot. "Good night!"

September 1, 1987

Phil wiped his brow as he turned off the lights, knowing that John would be arriving in an hour to handle the night watch.

It was a good thing he'd had a fun night on Thursday, because Friday and the rest of the weekend brought in a number of parties. And Monday was packed with classes. And today was... well, it was his first biology lab, but that wasn't the stressful part. A few parents felt like letting a few of their kids stay after school. Kindergarteners, to be specific. And he'd had to deal with Loxy suffering some more damage. She and Foxanne were starting to look like a mess, but he decided he'd rather wait for Heather to fix the damage in the morning than try to call in a mechanic and pay extra. Although he had wished his friends well, he still couldn't help but envy them for having the night off to drink and eat and be merry.

At least September meant autumn was on the way, and tonight seemed to reflect that, as the breeze was a little cooler tonight as he walked up to his Mercury Sable. He got in the car and leaned back in his seat, closing his eyes with an exasperated sigh. It was so early in the semester, but the pressures of a full-time job and being a college student at the same time were starting to catch up with him.

Knock-knock-knock.

His eyes fluttered open, and he glanced at the window where he heard the knocking. His eyes widened a little more when he recognized the face outside.

"Jeremy?" he asked, opening the door.

"Hey, Phil. Car trouble?"

"Oh... uh... no," he replied.

"Oh," Jeremy laughed, nodding over to the van in the parking lot. "Lucky you."
"Oh, Jeremy... I'm sorry..." Phil apologized. "But, uh, what are you doing here?"

"Well, everyone else went home... but..." he shrugged and smiled sheepishly. "... I couldn't help but wonder how you were doing. You come to visit me everyday at work... I thought it was only fair I did the same. You wanna take a look at my new van?"

Why not? It would take his mind off work.

"All right," Phil agreed, stepping out of his car.

Jeremy took Phil by the hand, leading him over to the van. He opened the side door, allowing him to take a proper look inside. It appeared to have undergone some modifications, since the seats that usually went in the middle had been removed, leaving only the front seats and a large amount of space in the back.

"It's pretty spacious," Phil commented, climbing inside. He flopped down on the back seat. "What would you need with all that space?"

Jeremy stepped into the van as well, closing the door behind him. His smile faded, and he sighed.

"You can't hide it forever, Phil. Heather's not the only one with good perception."

"I-I'm sorry?" he stammered.

"Phil," Jeremy whispered, his voice lower and surprisingly huskier. "I know."

He took a few steps toward the backseat, Phil unable to take his eyes off him.

"You can stop me, you know. Just say so, and I'll stop," he sat on the edge of the backseat next to Phil.

Jeremy leaned in close, surprisingly bold, his face only inches away from Phil's.

"Are you going to ask me to stop?" he whispered again in that lowered voice.

His breath was warm in contrast to the cool September air around them, even in the car, and it burned deep inside Phil, until the smoke finally escaped him in a definitive whisper.

"No."

After the words had passed his lips, Jeremy pressed his own against them. Phil clutched at the shirt he had been wearing with his hand, his other arm draped across his shoulders, pulling him in. Their kiss deepened, Phil letting out a soft but satisfied moan as Jeremy clutched his hips.

His thoughts swirled in his head, a convoluted cloud of "please don't let anyone catch us" and "more" and "Jeremy" and "MORE".

Phil pulled out of the kiss for a moment to catch his breath, only for Jeremy to move his lips down his neck - gently, to avoid leaving any evidence. So much for catching his breath, as he let out a ragged gasp, the touches light enough to send chills down his spine and make the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

Jeremy's hands moved, undoing the buckle of Phil's belt, followed by the button of his pants. Phil reached out a trembling hand toward the fly of Jeremy's jeans, but he gently took it and placed it to his lips.
"You work so hard, Phil," Jeremy commented, lowering his hand. "It's all about you tonight, okay? Don't worry about me."

With that, he let go of Phil's hand and unzipped his pants, sliding them down a little. He was already bulging against his underwear, and he looked away from Jeremy, who let out an amused breath.

"Wh-what...?" Phil asked, his face red, still not able to face him.

"It's natural, don't worry," Jeremy reassured, leaning in to kiss Phil on the cheek. "... But damn, you're so cute..."

With that, Jeremy let his hand slide down the front of his underwear, gently massaging him through the fabric with his palm. Phil let out a ragged gasp, his arms pressing firmly against the backseat. He raised his hips off the seat, allowing Jeremy to slide his pants and underwear down to his knees, exposing his erection.

Gently, he wrapped his hand around it. He stroked down slowly, then back up, letting his thumb circle around the head before sliding back down. Phil closed his eyes, breathing deeper, noticing that the air around them no longer seemed that cool, as sweat started to trickle down the side of his face. Jeremy released his hand, now letting two fingers slowly glide along the underside of his shaft. Oh fuck, oh fuck, Phil repeated in his mind each time he shook his head. Jeremy resumed pumping his hand, and Phil let out a desperate moan, wrapping his arms around Jeremy's back, burying his face in his shoulder.

"M-more... Jeremy... more... fuck, it's not enough..." Phil groaned, trying to rock his hips into Jeremy's hand for that extra little bit of friction that would finally push him over. "P-please, Jeremy..."

"Okay," Jeremy whispered in reply, his breath hot against his ear.

His hand picked up speed and Phil shuddered, burying his face deeper into Jeremy's shoulder. Jeremy's other hand, however, gently cupped Phil's chin and lifted his face from his shoulder. They locked lips again as Jeremy continued to move his hand, faster, faster, fuck YES, oh, YES, he was almost there, come on, just -

He pulled back suddenly from the kiss with a gasp, throwing his head back as he came in Jeremy's hand with a cry of raw pleasure and suddenly he felt like everything around the two of them had exploded into nothingness, his hips rocking involuntarily as he came down from that orgasm. Jeremy planted another gentle kiss to the exposed area of his neck as Phil caught his breath.

Phil sighed contentedly, slumping forward, completely spent, to rest his forehead against Jeremy's shoul-

Steering wheel. His forehead connected with the steering wheel, and now half-awake, Phil jerked back, clutching his forehead with a disgruntled groan. He looked out the front window of his car. It was still night time, but he recognized John's car in the parking lot as well.

He leaned forward in his seat to insert the key into the ignition, when he froze. There was definitely a sticky, moist spot in his pants, and he blushed upon realization. He shook his head, starting up his car, the digital clock on the radio indicating it was about 4:14 am.

Perhaps it was just because he had dreamt about him, but he still remembered Jeremy's words from their study session a week ago.
"... But then, a variable changes in the environment and throws everything out of balance."

He let out a frustrated sigh and drove out of the parking lot, heading back to his apartment.

Chapter End Notes

(1) It's so hard writing about prices from a time period you weren't alive in or have documented grocery ads for. I calculated the coffee price by comparing inflation rates from 1987 to 2014 (pretty much everything has doubled in price), so I divided the cost of a 33 oz container of coffee (about $8) by the same inflation rate and got about 3.79... but I also factored in a sales tax of 6 percent because numbers. So if there's anybody who remembers buying coffee at a different price... please let me know so I can correct this.

(2) Jimjam brings up a good point! While some birds do have toothed beaks, such as some varieties of geese, these are not actual teeth! They are actually serrations known as tomia. Just wanted to drop a neat bird fact in your lap.

(3) Credit to phxnegxy on tumblr for the cute tee shirt design featured in one of his drawings!

(4) I SINCERELY APOLOGIZE FOR THE BIOLOGY LECTURE... however, I assure you, it actually does serve a purpose.

(5) The Roma are a nomadic people, but the more common name for them (g-psy) is actually a slur, so I chose to omit it even though that is how it is traditionally presented in the opera. Also, fun fact to lighten the mood, Brenda Thompson is actually the name of one of my OCs.

(6) If you made it through my new theater production known as "My Poor Attempt at an Abridged Carmen Retelling for the Sake of Plot Devices: A Love Story", and want to actually see the real opera, I watched the Wichita Grand Opera's performance (twice) to help create this part of the story. They have the whole opera posted on Youtube. I would advise you to stay away from making too many FNAF references, as they are on pretty much every video of the Toreador Song, and you can see why it would get annoying.
Flame

Chapter Notes

Although it is mentioned as part of a flashback, please be aware that this chapter contains the use of a homophobic slur.

September 2, 1987

Phil reached into the fridge for some orange juice to wash down his breakfast.

"It was a dream," he reminded himself, now dressed in more casual attire for his classes, the sound of the dryer rattling in the utility room.

He poured a small glass and tucked the carton back into the fridge.

"I-it was probably the pizza I ate that day... Ronaldo wasn't cooking, so maybe Kim tried something different with the recipe..." he tried to justify, looking at the door of the fridge as he drank the juice. In addition to Austin's drawing, he now kept the photo he had taken with his friends pinned to the door with another magnet.

"... I need to stop talking to photos and get to class..." he mumbled with a sigh, setting the empty glass on the counter and heading out of the kitchen.

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One hundred percent.

It seemed so hard to believe. There had been a pop quiz on Monday with a single question - name the seven factors to determine if something is alive - and he had aced it, as evidenced by the paper he had gotten back.

And it was probably all thanks to...

"I know."

Phil shook his head, as if that would somehow dislodge Jeremy's voice and that line from his head. Nobody had to know about that dream. He could carry the secret with him for fifty more years to his grave if he had to.

... Until then, however, he had work. After a quick stop at his apartment to eat lunch and to change into his uniform, he was now back at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. There was also a little bit of a guilty pleasure in knowing that his uncle would be out today. And, hey, tomorrow would be his day off as well!

"Hey, Phil."

"Hey, J... J..."
The moment he had stepped inside, he had spotted Jeremy in his Picnix uniform heading down the hallway towards him, and now he was a stammering mess in the doorway.

"Phil, is everything - "

"Why are you here?"

"Oh," Jeremy glanced over to the main area. "Heather invited me over on break today. She offered me her share of pizza, but... I can't stop feeling like I'm mooching off you guys."

His brows furrowed.

"But enough about that, what about you? You're... are you sweating? You're not feverish, are you?"

"Sorry, I have to clock in!"

"Oh, uh, see ya, Ph."

He bolted past Jeremy before his face turned any redder. Thank goodness for having a legitimate excuse to get out of there. Although, by the time he had punched in - only seconds before he would've been counted as tardy - he started to feel guilty. Generic as the phrases were, they did have their own sort of special farewell to each other.

Phil silently returned to the main hallway, hoping for some trace of Jeremy - even poking his head out of the front door in case he was still in the lot - but he had already left. He sulked back towards the main area, only to find Heather had come after him.

"Yo, Phil, is everything okay?"

"Fine, Heather, e-verything's fine," he took a deep breath, tucking his hand and arm into his pockets, and straightening his back.

"What's up with you?"

"Nothing's up. I-I'm fine," he lied - curse his infernal stammering! - keeping his eyes on her.

"Really?" her tone was not inquisitive, but flat.

Shit. She could tell he was starting to get antsy.

"Well, you're a good assistant manager. You know there are some discussions that are best kept private," as she said this, she glanced up in the direction of the security camera in the corner of the ceiling. "Perhaps we should discuss this elsewhere."

Even if his uncle never really paid attention to the security footage - he usually left it to the guards, like Heather and John - taking special precautions couldn't hurt. Phil slowly nodded and followed her through the game area to the employees-only area... where there were no security cameras. Phil still couldn't help but think this was a major oversight, but at least the safety of the children was still first priority.

"All right, spill the beans," she demanded. "What's got you so jumpy? Did you see someone suspicious?"

"No, safety-wise, everything's fine. Although that's your job, not mine."

"Jobs... yeah..." she leaned against the wall and sighed. "Maybe we should call Jeremy and invite
"But he's already back at - " he clapped a hand over his mouth.

"How would you know he's back at work? Like he had just gotten off his break?" she asked slyly.

"S-so I ran into him in the hallway..." Phil dismissed. "So what?"

"Well, you're redder than a tomato, for starters," Heather pointed out. "Second, the last time I saw that happen, you bumped into Mr. West Germany in all his muscular glory."

"I-I still don't know, uh, what you're talking about..." Phil denied, his arguments growing as weak as his knees as he leaned backwards against the opposite wall.

Heather flashed a mischievous grin.

"Someone's got a crush...!" she declared in a sing-song voice.

"Heather! Ugh!" Phil rolled his eyes. "I-I don't understand how you're the oldest among us, a-and yet, somehow, the m-most childish!"

She straightened her posture and folded her arms.

"... Real talk. Are you into Jeremy?" she inquired.

"I... uh..." Phil thought for a moment. "You can't tell anyone, okay?"

"Keeping secrets is what I do... second-best. The first thing is engineering," she couldn't help but chuckle. "Okay, so 'fess up!"

"... Yes," he admitted, lowering his head and the volume of his voice.

"All right. You like Jeremy. That's all there is to it," Heather stated simply. "I mean, you already know he likes guys, so... that's one bridge you've crossed."

"Well, yeah, but just because a person likes guys doesn't mean they like every guy!" Phil argued.

"True, true," Heather agreed. "... so just start dropping hints. Little breadcrumbs to your gingerbread love shack!"

"Heather!"

"Yeah, that joke was too forward... I'm sorry," she apologized, before quickly resuming her speech. "But all the same, if you let him know you're interested, maybe he'll open up a little! Like... I wouldn't make it the first thing you ask, but figuring out if he's seeing anyone is important. Just... take some time to think about it, develop a game plan."

"This isn't a game," Phil argued, then shook his head. "L-look, we can talk about this another time, okay? Right now, we should be keeping an eye on the kids."

He walked past her quickly, back into the game area, before Heather had a chance to object.
"Brace yourself. Labor Day weekend is coming."

Those were his father's words last night on the phone, and Phil was certainly going to take it to heart. Ibuprofen, creamer, sugar, coffee filters, a box of bandages, and an industrial-sized tin of coffee filled his cart as he made his way to the registers at Picnix.

Or rather, the register.

"Good afternoon, Phil," Jeremy greeted him with a smile. "Gotta restock the employee supply again, huh?"

"Oh, no, this is for me," he replied nonchalantly. "I need it for the weekend."

"For you?" Jeremy asked incredulously. "For one weekend? Phil, that's not exactly healthy..."

"I-I can't help it!" he defended. "I've got a project due in my advertising class on Wednesday, a-and I'm working the next four days straight, since I won't have classes on Monday. What about you?"

"Well, I'm working on Monday as well," Jeremy said, ringing up Phil's groceries. "But I have Tuesday and Friday off."

"Ah, bene!" Phil exclaimed. "I have Tuesday off as well. We should hang out."

"'Bene'? And what about your project?" Jeremy asked.

"Oh, bene is Italian for 'good'. I just... wanted to show off a little, heh. I can teach you a little if you'd like, even if I don't know that much of it. A-and don't worry about the project, I'll have enough spare time over the four days to get it done... e-even with my job."

Jeremy looked down, appearing to think it over for a moment.

"... Yeah. I'd like that. Every time you come visit Picnix from now on, you have to teach me a new word in Italian, all right?"

"All right. So, I guess I'll see you Tuesday, then!"

"Bene!" Jeremy agreed, as he finished scanning the items. "Your total is eleven twenty-four."

Phil handed him a few bills and a quarter, needing only a penny in change.

"Thank you for shopping at Picnix and come again," Jeremy stated. "See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

Phil left the store, groceries in hand and adequately prepared (or so he believed) for the next four days, but somehow the most fulfilling part of the trip was giving Jeremy a proper goodbye this time.

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September 4th, 1987

Fridays usually wound up being big hits with the kids, there was no surprise there. Sure enough, two parties had been booked for that afternoon - the first one to be hosted by Emmett (with Phil nearby to supervise), and the second one to be hosted by Daisy. She was a food science major at the local university, and a very bright girl, capable of handling things on her own. Much like Anita, the English major.
There would be five parties tomorrow, each one to be officially covered by a different host - the first and second by Frank, the third by Phil, the fourth by Daisy, and the fifth by Anita.

"Hi, um, Phillip?" Anita asked, as he finished clearing a table. She picked up a few cups from the other table. "Can I... have a word with you?"

"Sure, what's up?"

"I'm... um..." she hesitated, biting her lip and kicking the toe of her shoe against the floor. "... I'm starting to think I can't handle this party on my own..."

"Come on, that's no way to think! You'll do fine!" Phil reassured, placing his hand on her shoulder. She tried to bite back a little smile, glancing over at his hand.

"Still... I... I just think I'd feel better if I had someone with me. I've handled parties on my own, but I've got the largest one, and it's the latest one I've hosted yet..."

"It's only three guests extra, you can do it!" Phil continued trying to motivate her.

"I dunno, I just think I'd feel better with someone there to help me. Someone with more experience..." her voice trailed off as she twirled a strand of her short brown hair around one finger. "... like Frank."

"Frank?" Phil asked with a frown. "Uh... he's going to be hosting two of the parties tomorrow... you can see why he might not be the best option, right?"

"There has to be someone else with a good amount of party experience... right?"

Phil looked around the empty party room before letting out a sigh.

"I-I guess... I could help you out with the party..." he offered reluctantly.

"Would you really?" she asked, batting her eyelashes. "Thank you so much, Phil, you're the best assistant manager a girl could ask for."

Anita poked his nose playfully before leaving to throw away the other cups she had collected, but Phil couldn't shake the feeling that she hadn't been 'playing' at all.

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September 5, 1987

"Day two out of four is almost done..." Phil stated as he handed his turkey sub to Jeremy. "... I can make it."

"I dunno, man, you don't look so good..." Jeremy countered with a frown.

"I'll be okay, really. Ciao," Phil dismissed, walking off with a wave. "That's the word of the day. It means 'bye'."

"Don't you 'ciao' me. You don't even have your 'chow'," Jeremy snorted, as he rang up the sub. "Your total is three thirty-eight."

Phil huffed and handed over a five.
"Your change is one sixty-two," Jeremy remarked, before entering the numbers in the register. Right as always. He handed over a new bill and a few coins to Phil.

"Take it easy, okay?" Jeremy suggested. "Don't go overboard on the coffee. Thank you and come visit Picnix again. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

He drove back to Freddy Fazbear's Pizza and ate in the car, before clocking back in, the end of his break only twenty minutes before the party started. He smiled at the faint sound of the animatronics entertaining the kids... they were performing the routine where Bonnie sang the Toreador Song.

"Phil! Heeey!" Anita called out to him from Party Room 3. "Check it out!"

He looked around, finding - much to his delight - that decorations had been set up, the tables were set... the only things missing were the kids and parents.

"Anita, this is fantastic!" Phil marveled, gazing up at the glittery banners that declared 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' in bold blue letters. "Is everything ready?"

"Everything is ready," she confirmed with a nod. "The cake and pizza orders are in, I made sure Ricardo-"

"Ronaldo."

"... whatever. I made sure he's going to be okay for the costume, since it is his turn... lucky I didn't get stuck with George."

Phil sighed and nodded.

"But, yeah, everything is good to go!" she chirped. "So... do you wanna hang out for a little while? Until the guests actually arrive?"

"I, uh... I suppose that would be nice..." he mumbled. "But let's at least do something while we're at it, so we stay productive... maybe do a little bit of cleaning around the main area."

She agreed, but rolled her eyes as soon as he turned around.

They went around, tossing out an abandoned paper cup here, a wadded-up napkin there, or picking up a dropped token off the floor and giving it to the nearest child. They chatted as they went... or at least, Anita tried to. Phil often found himself going off on other tangents, or stopping to chat with the children or see how the parents were doing.

"Oh, great!" Phil exclaimed, looking up at the clock. "We made a full lap of the area, and just in time for the party! Let's go get Ronaldo and start greeting the guests!"

Anita let out a heavy sigh but forced herself to smile.

The party wound up going fantastically. Since it was night, Ronaldo had no troubles with the costume, even though he still stuck to the twenty-minute rotation, just to stay safe. Anita actually seemed to have no trouble at all, though she still hung around close to Phil's side. After the parents had left (several of them tipping Phil and Anita), and the entire facility had been cleaned for the night, Anita once again approached Phil.

"So, good party tonight, right?"
"Y-yeah! You did great, Anita. I told you you'd be okay!"

"You were right, Phil! Thank you sooo much!" she swooned, before wrapping her arms around him suddenly, knocking the breath out of him.

He chuckled awkwardly and patted her shoulder.

"Uh... you're welcome," Phil wheezed. "... I would've done the same thing for Daisy or Emmett."

"Oh, you're just saying that," she teased, letting him go. "You're so sweet."

He laughed softly, looking off to the side.

"Speaking of which... I know a pretty nice ice cream parlor," Anita remarked, her voice trailing off into a seductive whisper. Her hand slid up his against his shoulder. "I think it's a pretty sweet place for dates... if you know what I'm saying."

"U-um... no..." he jerked his shoulder away from her.

She raised an eyebrow.

"No, you don't know what I'm asking...?" she asked playfully.

"N-no... I mean... I'm not interested at this time, but thank you."

"Wh-but-" she spluttered. "I thought... are you seeing someone?"

Phil shook his head.

"No..."

"Then what's stopping you?"

He tucked his hand and his arm into his pockets.

"Oh, y-you know... just... busy with work... i-it can be hard to find an opening..."

"That's a lie!" Anita snapped with a pout. "You always have Thursdays off!"

He let out a heavy sigh, untucked his arms, and folded them defensively.

"Okay, fine. I admit it... there is someone I'm interested in. A-and I'm sorry, but... I want to wait and see if we have a chance at a relationship."

"So, wait, you don't even know-"

"We should really clock out now. It's unprofessional to stay longer than necessary."

He dropped the subject and walked past her to clock out, telling himself over and over not to look back. Besides, he could get in a few more hours on his advertising project if he made it home early.

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September 6, 1987

"I really don't like this," Jeremy shook his head, as he rang up the chicken tender sub for Phil. "Phil... I know it sounds unprofessional, but... maybe you should consider calling out sick tomorrow."
"I can't do it, Jeremy..." he shook his head limply. "I can't do it."

"You need to get some sleep-"

"I AM!" Phil snapped suddenly. The volume of his own voice seemed to jar him, and he returned to his usual calm demeanor quickly. "I-I mean... I am getting sleep, okay."

"How much?"

"You're not my doctor..." Phil grumbled. "About four hours each night. L-look, when I'm done with the weekend, I'll get plenty of sleep. I won't be staying up past 3 am for multiple nights ever again. Okay, ciao. N-no, I think I did that one already. U-um... what haven't I taught you yet..."

"What areas of Italian do you know? I know you know the basics, but what about, say... animals? Or numbers?"

"Oh, uh, I pretty much just know the basics. And food. And also some lovey-dovey stuff, since Mom enjoys it when Dad speaks Italian."

"I see. Your total is four forty-five, please."

"Yeah, please..." Phil mumbled, as he fished out a five from his wallet. "In Italian, you say 'per favore'. Or 'prego', but you can also use 'prego' to say 'you're welcome'."

"'Per favore' and 'prego', huh?" Jeremy asked, as he handed Phil his change. "I'll keep that in mind. Thank you and come visit Picnix again, per favore. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

Phil's lunch may have been pleasant, but his arrival at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza? Not so much.

"Anita can't come in today," Frank grumbled, as Phil clocked in. "She's not 'emotionally stable' enough to handle work today."

"Are you kidding me? Really, Anita?" Phil griped, slapping his hand to his forehead.

"What?" Frank asked, folding his arms. "Do you know something about this?"

Phil let out an exasperated sigh.

"Last night, I... kind of turned her down for a date," he frowned, now sympathizing with her. "I-I guess that would be kind of upsetting... a-and to be fair, everyone's, uh, emotional stability is different..."

"Why would you even turn her down?"

Maybe it was the caffeine from all the coffee, but Phil could've sworn he felt his pulse skyrocket. No, stay calm, stay calm, he had to stay calm.

"I-I, uh... I-I'm just not interested in her," he stated nonchalantly with a shrug, hoping it would help him appear indifferent.

"... I see," Frank replied, narrowing his eyes.

Why did he do that? Did he know something? What if something had been leaked... maybe there were tiny hidden cameras in the employee area, and Heather wasn't aware, and maybe -
"You need to quit drinking all that coffee, Phil," Frank stated, shaking his nephew by the shoulder. "You're paler than snow, and you're shaking like you've been buried in it, for pete's sake!"

"S-sorry, Unc... Mr. Fazari."

He shook his head.

"Well, Anita was scheduled to host a party, and she had previously volunteered to help Emmett with his party," Frank recalled. "You were hosting the other party so... how about you be the one to help Emmett, and I'll take over for Anita's party."

Phil nodded weakly, before dashing away from his uncle's presence. He couldn't run for long, as his heart started pounding like a timpani, and he practically collapsed against the wall to catch his breath. He mentally cursed himself for feeling so weak, willing his body to keep going, and he pushed himself off, walking out into the game area.

Emmett's party was first, so he'd have to be ready for anything...

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September 7, 1987

At long last, Labor Day had finally arrived. And while his professors were probably relishing in the chance to do something other than lecture, Phil still had to come in to work. After all, the elementary schools were closed for the day as well, so what better place to send the kids than Freddy Fazbear's Pizza?

_Freddy Fazbear's Pizza... where magic and fun come to life... we can't BEAR to wait, so come see us soon..._

Part of his advertising project had involved making slogans for at least ten products, and now his mind seemed stuck on slogans.

"Mister!"

"... A beary good time for all..."

"Mister Phil!"

A sharp tug on his hand woke him from his stupor.

"Beary sorr... I-I'm sorry, what?"

"Mister Phil!" the girl insisted. "The little kids broke Loxy again!"

"They WHAT?!"

He ran after her into the Kids Cove, appropriately filled with childish laughter and screaming, just in time for a child about four years old to run past the doorway with a trophy lifted high above his head - Foxanne's head. Two of them jumped on Loxy's now-exposed exoskeleton, her actual body frame... who knows where. Stuffing and fabric littered the room like it had only a week or two prior.

"E-everyone!" Phil tried to call for the kids' attention. "Um, everyone, please... let's settle down now, okay?"

They continued ignoring him, two boys tossing an animatronic eyeball like a baseball between them.
"Hey, don't do that!" Phil snapped, trying to grab the eyeball in mid-air.

Unfortunately, his hand-eye coordination was pretty off, thanks to a lack of sleep, and the other boy caught the eyeball just fine. Even more unfortunate, Phil's foot-eye coordination was even more off, and he stumbled forward onto his stomach after missing the ball.

The children laughed at the silly grown-up lying on the floor, but they all gasped at the voice of Phil's salvation.

"FREE CANDY!"

George Thornton's voice rang out loud enough to be heard from the Prize Counter, and all the kids squealed and screamed in delight, running out of Kids' Cove in a stampede. Phil let out a few cries of pain as the occasional foot managed to land on his arms or fingers. One kid, however, apparently decided they wanted bragging rights and used his back like a springboard to jump, Phil letting out a terrible mix of a grunt and a wheeze as the wind was forced out of his lungs. He didn't even have a chance to see the kid, so there was no way to report to the parents. He curled up into a ball on his side, looking across the room at what remained of Loxy's endoskeleton.

*I can't tell if she's more mangled looking than I am,* Phil thought to himself in bitter amusement.

"Phillip!"

He rolled over pretty darn quickly, wincing at the pain in his back, at the sound of his uncle's voice.

Frank stood ominously in the doorway to Kids' Cove, looking down at his nephew and tapping his foot impatiently.

"I, uh... I-I..."

"... You said they broke her again, right?" he could hear Heather's voice drawing near, toolbox in hand, and she was with the same little girl from before. "... Oh, wow."

Stepping into the room, the first thing she did was help pull Phil up off the floor, before settling in the corner near Loxy's endoskeleton.

"I know everyone has their 'off-days', but this is ridiculous!" Frank snapped. "You're supposed to be management, but if someone like George Thornton can get a group of kids under control, why can't you?!"

"I-I'm sorry, Unc... sir..." he replied, a lump threatening to form in his throat.

He swallowed away the pain, trying to push it out of his mind. He didn't want Heather to see him in a mess, and if his uncle ever saw him crumble... he would be demoted for sure.

"I-it..." Phil took a deep breath. "... it won't happen again."

"It better not! Look at this! We've had to fix this animatronic so many times now! We can't keep pulling money out of our budget for this!" he ran a hand down his face with a heavy groan. "... One more try. We'll try to keep Loxy intact one more time. After that... I dunno. I'll figure something out. I always do."

With that, Frank turned and left Kids' Cove.
"Maybe you should have Sophia take a look at you, make sure nothing’s seriously hurt or something," Heather suggested, an unusually gentle tone to her voice. "Even if you just drink a glass of water, do something to make yourself feel better, okay?"

"Okay," Phil murmured, slowly dragging himself out of Kids' Cove as well.

He immediately headed to the first-aid station, having Sophia check his arms, legs, and back. Nothing seemed seriously injured as far as she could tell, aside from apply a few bandages to an abraded elbow and a cut on his arm, but she did advise him to take it easy for a few days, as he’d definitely be seeing some bruises show up. Sophia gave him a glass of water, some ibuprofen, and a piece of candy - for being good, she’d told him with a wink - and let him return to work.

The rest of the day went by slowly, but not painfully, at least. Phil even found his mood brightening as his shift came to an end, and he clocked out, and finally drove home - except for the part where he almost ran a red light, that wasn't very pleasant.

But he switched on his electric coffee pot, feeling motivated to finish the project tonight, and made the phone call he had been waiting all day for.

"Hello?" asked the voice on the other end. It... definitely wasn't Jeremy.

"Hello, hello, uh, is this Pat, by any chance?"

"Yeah... uh... do I know you?"

"Oh, uh, my name's Phil. Is Jeremy available?"

"Oh, yeah, you're one of the friends Jeremy's told me about. Hang on."

It sounded like Pat put the phone down on the table, before yelling Jeremy's name. Funny... there wasn't that much caffeine still in his system, yet his heart skipped a beat when he heard Jeremy's voice. He heard the receiver shuffle against the table before Jeremy's voice came through more clearly.

"Hello, hello!"

"Hey, Phil! The weekend's finally over, you made it! Are you heading to bed soon?"

"Uh... not quite yet..." Phil admitted.

"Phil..."

"I'm almost done with my project, it shouldn't take too long. And I also wanted to call you regarding our plans for tomorrow!"

"... O-oh. Right."

"Is something wrong?"

"N-no. I'm okay. What did you have in mind?"

"Well... I'd like to study some biology with you, if that's okay. But I... I've been thinking... you're working so hard to help me without any kind of... payment. It kind of feels like you're, uh, tutoring me for free, and that doesn't seem fair, you know?"

"I really don't mind, it's fine."
"But I do! A-and besides, we might as well do something fun while we have the day off," Phil pointed out. "So, since you're worried about money... and since the weather has been so great this September... I was thinking we could go out to... uh... what's it called? Lakeview Park."

"Is it an aptly named park?"

"It sure is," Phil replied with a chuckle. "So why don't we go to a cafe, uh, I'll buy us some coffee and something sweet while we study, and then we'll go take a walk around the park and look at the lake to relax after that. Oh! Maybe... maybe I could even bring some bread, and we can feed any fish or ducks we see!"

"We really shouldn't make them dependent on humans for food, though..." Jeremy let out a small sigh on the other end. "... but... I guess it would be kind of fun. And if you're happy... then I'm happy. Just don't feed them too much."

"We won't."

"And don't overdo it tonight or tomorrow with the coffee, okay?"

"I won't!" Phil insisted playfully. "I'll be fine."

"You sure?"

"I'm sure, really!"

"Okay... what time should I meet you?"

"Oh, um... well, with my lab, I-I guess one o'clock is our best bet..."

"Do you still have to go to your lab even though it's the week of Labor Day? Because when I-

"Oh! You know, I think you're right, maybe we can go earlier. Then again, I don't think we should let coffee and sweets take the place of our lunch."

"How about this? We'll go out for coffee around eleven-thirty or something, we'll grab something to eat - Taco Shell, maybe? - and then we'll go eat by the lake around one."

"Yeah, that sounds great!" Phil agreed.

"Alright then, it's a date. W-wait, no, I-I mean - Pat, stop laughing! - ugh, you know what I meant."

"Y-yeah," Phil replied.

"So, uh, what cafe am I looking for, exactly?"

"Uh, I-I've heard good stuff from Sabrina about a place called The Wizard's Brew, actually..." (2)

"Sounds interesting. Where exactly am I heading?"

"Oh, uh, lemme think... uh, I can't recall the name of the road, but it's actually north of the Picnix you work at, actually..." Phil continued to relay the directions to Jeremy as best as he could, and if he could have seen him on the other line, he would have seen how diligently Jeremy took notes from the info he was given. "... and you just turn right, and you're there!"

"Okay, but... I do want to make a suggestion."
"Yeah, anything!"

"I have a fair idea of where your apartment complex is, based on the addresses and phone numbers we exchanged... would it be okay if I just picked you up rather than having you drive out to meet me? It would be more efficient to use one car instead of two, in my opinion."

"Yeah, you have a point. So, uh, come pick me up at about eleven-fifteen, and that should give us time to get to The Wizard's Brew by eleven-thirty. I wonder why Sabrina likes the place so much?"

"Who knows?"

"Oh well. I-I'll see you tomorrow then, okay?"

"I will. Good night, Phil."

"Good night, Jeremy."

With that, Phil hung up the phone and poured a fresh cup of coffee, adding the sweetener and creamer as he always did, before taking a seat at the kitchen table and turning to a fresh page in the notebook he used for his project. He blew on his coffee a little bit before taking a sip.

How odd... it seemed warmer and sweeter than usual.

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September 8, 1987

Bookbag slung over his shoulder, dressed in a blue and white baseball shirt and denim jeans, Phil stood out on the corner of his apartment, eagerly awaiting Jeremy to drive by and pick him up. According to his watch, it was about 11:13 am, meaning he should be there at any moment.

Sure enough, just as he looked up, that familiar cream-colored Ford Escort pulled up to the corner before slowing to a stop. Phil smiled, running up to the car and opening the passenger door.

"Hello, hello!"

"Hey, you. Come on in," he patted the seat next to his. "Let's go find that wizard place."

Phil slipped the bookbag off his shoulders as he slid into the carseat, placing the bag at his feet. He reached over and buckled his seatbelt as Jeremy started driving again.

"Well, I'm pleased to announce that my advertising project is done!" Phil declared, as Jeremy started to pull out of the complex.

"Very nice!" Jeremy congratulated, quickly throwing a smile in Phil's direction before turning his attention back to the road. "... how'd you sleep?"

"Uh, good enough..." Phil replied quickly, turning his head.

"I already saw them," Jeremy replied coolly, pointing underneath his own eyes, in regards to the dark circles that had formed under Phil's eyes over the course of several days. "... I know we're going to get coffee, but maybe you should order something decaf. Or not as strong. That way, you can get plenty of sleep tonight."

"Yeah, I know you're right," Phil admitted. "Six hours of sleep isn't a 'much-needed rest', to be honest."
"Sure isn't. I mean, yeah, you can pull the occasional all-nighter - I certainly have - but you shouldn't be trying to pull them off on consecutive nights. I turn right here, correct?"


Jeremy chuckled, driving further down the road, until Phil pointed out the spot where he had to turn right. It wasn't a very big parking lot, considering it was such a small building. But it certainly did have character - the wooden sign out in the lot was cut and painted to look like a pointed navy blue hat adorned with stars that spelled out "The Wizard's Brew", even though time and weather had apparently caused the sign to fade a little.

"Well then," Jeremy parked his car and removed the keys. "Let's see what's on the menu, shall we?"

Phil smiled and nodded, grabbing his bookbag, and both of them left the Escort. They stepped up onto the wooden porch and Jeremy opened the door, tiny bells jingling against its window, as they entered the building, the wooden floor creaking beneath their feet.

It appeared to not just be a cafe, but also a bookstore, as every wall was lined with bookshelves. And a very unique bookstore at that; the sections weren't divided by 'Romance' or 'Non-fiction'; they were divided into groups like 'Astrology', 'Zen', and other spiritual stuff that neither of the young men recognized. Between every other bookshelf along the wall on the right, however, were tall windows that let in plenty of sunlight to allow for natural lighting. The aroma of coffee and tea filled the air, as did another scent that neither of them were familiar with. They exchanged a look, following their noses to a small table in the corner of the room with a small stand to hold a lit incense stick. The box that the stick had come from was still there, with the fragrance written on it.

"'Sex on the Beach'," Phil read aloud, trying to stifle a laugh. "I... uh... kind of doubt that's what it smells like."

"Definitely not," Jeremy confirmed, managing to laugh despite the fact that his face had turned slightly red.

They both overheard the soft rumble of thunder, and turned to check out the window - it was still bright and sunny outside. Now it was time to 'follow their ears' - this time to a cassette player in the center of the room, with various cassettes around it for sale. It appeared they were currently listening to "Falling Water - Rain and Waterfalls".

"Aptly named," Jeremy noted sarcastically, Phil stifling a chuckle with his hand.

"Although... I guess in all honesty, this place is pretty... quaint," Jeremy commented, looking up at the ceiling. Some paper stars hung from strings pinned here and there, the ceiling itself painted in shades of violet and blue to mirror the night sky, complete with glow-in-the-dark stars - likely stickers - mapping out the constellations.

"It does have its charms," Phil agreed.

They meandered around the store until heading into the room next door - the part of the building that was actually the cafe. Here, there were no bookshelves - although the walls were painted in lively shades of purple and the ceiling still had the same "starry sky" motif to it.

The cafe was actually rather empty, probably due to the fact it was the middle of the day on a Tuesday. The barista was already eager to serve them at the counter, the menu written up in chalk on a blackboard behind her.
"So, what sounds good?" Jeremy murmured to Phil, standing beside him.

"More like what looks good," he remarked, looking over at a glass case displaying samples of the desserts they offered. "Eating dessert before lunch... I love it, haha!"

Jeremy surveyed the case as well, not really keen on the idea of eating something fruity like strawberry shortcake with his coffee.

"So, what do you think we should order to eat?" Jeremy inquired, as Phil stood up a little straighter.

"I was thinking the cinnamon crumb coffee cake. I mean, it's called coffee cake for a reason, so it probably goes good with it."

"I like the sound of that. Do you know what you're going to drink?"

"Yeah! I'm ready to order if you are," Phil stated, starting to reach into his pocket for his wallet.

"What can I get for you today?" the barista offered.

"I'm going to have a vanilla latte, please," Jeremy requested.

"And I'm going to have... uh... a mocaccino," Phil added. "Oh, and we'd also like one of those, uh, coffee cakes, please."

"Okay, that'll be four seventy-seven."

Phil handed over a five and two quarters, telling the barista to 'keep the change'.

"All right, I'll have everything ready in a few minutes, if you'd like to grab a seat."

"Oh, great!" Phil looked up at Jeremy. "C'mon, let's grab a table with good lighting... oh, like that one!"

He pointed to a circular table that seated two people, large enough for his books, situated by one of those tall windows.

"Yeah, that should be good."

Phil took a seat in one of the metal chairs, the cushion squishing underneath him.

"I still can't thank you enough for helping me out with this, Jeremy," Phil commented, as Jeremy took a seat across from him. "We're currently covering microbiology, and there's... a lot to remember. A-and my lecture notes on Friday weren't exactly the best, so... I might need a lot of help with that stuff, something about cell metabolism and parts and... stuff."

"Micro wasn't my favorite area either... I applaud the people who get into and study that stuff though. I'm among the many who find the bigger organisms preferable."

"Yeah, me too!" Phil agreed, swinging his bookbag onto his lap. Jeremy appeared amazed, and then lowered his brows, confused. "... Uh, what's up?"

"You're swinging around your bookbag like it doesn't weigh a thing," Jeremy observed.

"Oh, yeah, it does seem lighter than u-" Phil froze, looking up at Jeremy in horror. "Oh no..."

"What?" Jeremy asked, as Phil zipped open his bag, continuing to repeat 'no' over and over again.
He rummaged around and threw a single notebook onto the table - the words "BIO LAB" written on the front.

"I thought I was packing my bag for Tuesday," Phil groaned, putting his bookbag back on the floor beside his chair. "I'm so stupid!"

"Phil, it's just a little mistake-"

"Why do I ruin everything?!" he slouched over in defeat, burying his face in his arms on the table.

"You didn't ruin anything, it's fine, I don't..." Jeremy tried to reassure, but Phil still wouldn't look up at him. "... Phil?"

"I-I can't do it," he whispered, his voice wavering and threatening to crack.

"Phil..." Jeremy sighed, scooting his chair around the table to sit closer to him. "College is stressful. A full-time job is stressful. Trying to do both at the same time, especially without any sleep... would bring anyone down."

"... 'm sorry... trying so hard not to..." Phil mumbled, curling up even tighter.

"If you're not feeling well, we can go. It's okay," Jeremy gently patted his shoulder. "Would you like to leave?"

Phil didn't say anything, but he appeared to nod despite keeping his head down.

"Is he okay?" whispered the barista, bringing over their coffee and cake.

"Um..." Jeremy looked down at Phil. "... Could we make this a to-go order?"

The barista silently nodded and headed back behind the counter.

"It wasn't my best area, but I remember some things about cells... maybe I can quiz you in the car. Would you like that?"

Phil nodded again, as the barista dropped off a small box for the cake and their drinks in reinforced paper cups.

"Thank you," Jeremy whispered, slipping the barista another dollar, before he collected their items.

Phil quietly collected his bookbag, keeping his eyes down, and left with Jeremy - who willingly hurried alongside him back to the car.

"All right, there you go... I think the barista wrote the 'm' for 'mocha' on yours," Jeremy commented, placing one of the drinks in a cup holder, as Phil sat down and buckled his seatbelt. "So, what would you like to do? Do you want me to take you home? Or would you like to visit the park?"

"Park..." Phil replied, his voice dry and his eyes red.

"All right," Jeremy replied calmly, buckling his seatbelt and starting the car. "Would you still like us to stop at Taco Shell?"

"Yeah," Phil replied, looking out the window.

"Music?"
"No thanks."

Jeremy continued driving in silence for a little while until they came to a stoplight.

"Hey, that gives me an idea. Can you tell me the two parts unique to plant cells that animal cells don't have?"

"Umm..." Phil squeezed his eyes shut tight, as though it would help him somehow. "... chlorophyll...?"

"Chloroplasts. And one more. Can you figure it out before the light changes?"

"Uh... riboflavin - no, those are ribosomes, and that's not even right. Uh... uh..." he looked over at Jeremy, who patted a free hand against the car door. "... some kind of entry-portal?"

"No... oh," Jeremy hit the gas as the light turned green.

"I failed," Phil mumbled in disappointment.

"No, there's no grades in this... and your exam is... uh... when is it?"

"Not until the thirtieth."

"So you have plenty of time. Plant cells are unique in that they have chloroplasts and a cell wall. Their vacuoles are also significantly larger than animal cells, so that might be something to keep in mind. And now you'll never forget it."

"Yeah."

"Okay, an easy one. What is the outermost covering of a cell?"

"The cell membrane."

"Right, good job. What is the function of the mitochondria?"

"Um... that one processes energy, I think?"

"Right again. It's basically the powerhouse of the cell. Speaking of which..." Jeremy hit his turn signal, and Phil noticed the Taco Shell on the right. "... I think it's time we grab lunch. Do you know what you wanna order?"

"Probably just... uh... two soft tacos," he reached over and took his coffee, drinking it as Jeremy pulled up to the drive-thru to place their orders.

"... I do have one rule about my car..." Jeremy stated, as they pulled out of the Taco Shell with their food. "I don't really want people eating in it. Drinking is okay, since usually it's water or soda... and these carpets are pretty dark, so nobody would notice a coffee stain. But food isn't contained in a cup, bottle, or can... it's usually out in the open, waiting to be spilled, and it tends to leave a much stronger odor. Last year, someone dropped their groceries outside their apartment and wound up breaking a bottle of Worcestershire sauce all over the concrete steps. The complex took their sweet time in hiring someone to clean it up, so I had to put up with the smell of... whatever is in that stuff, it smelled like dead fish... for a few weeks."

"Ugh, that sounds awful..." Phil agreed, wrinkling his nose.

"Besides, it'll be much nicer to eat out by the lake, you know?"
Phil nodded, though he stopped suddenly.

"You bought the food," he realized.

Jeremy glanced over at him in concern quickly, before looking back at the road.

"It's all right... I mean, it's fast food, it only cost me a couple of dollars."

"I-I know, but... I was supposed to be treating you today."

"I assure you, it's fine," Jeremy repeated.

Phil looked down at the cup of coffee in his hand, swirling his cup around gently, watching the liquid whirl inside.

"Ah, here we go!" Jeremy exclaimed. Phil looked up just in time to see the sign as the car turned to enter the park.

Phil looked out the window, lush oak and elm trees seeming to make up most of the population of the forested area, a few of them with leaves starting to yellow.

"I wonder what kinds of animals live here?" Jeremy wondered, as they drove further in.

"... Probably not bears," Phil joked, starting to feel better. Jeremy noticed as well, smiling over at him.

"Wow, would you look at that!" Jeremy marveled, as the trees started to clear up. The lake was in full view, and it was enormous, another car on the opposite side visible as a tiny red dot.

Jeremy turned left, so that Phil would have a full view of the lake from his window, blue and green where it reflected the sky and surrounding trees.

"Picnic area, two hundred feet," Jeremy read aloud, looking over at Phil briefly. "Sounds like our - whoa!"

He slammed the brakes as a squirrel darted across the road, Phil jerking forward against his seatbelt. Momentum was not so kind to his grip, however, and his cup of coffee slipped out of his grasp, spilling all over the floor.

"Shit!"

"Are you okay?!" Jeremy asked. He had never heard Phil curse so openly before.

"Th-the coffee..."

"I think there's some napkins in the Taco Shell bag. I'll just clean this up before we eat," Jeremy stated, as he pulled up to the picnic area.

It was about as bare bones as could be - a picnic table on a small area of pavement and a trash can nearby, as well as signs reminding guests of three basic rules - don't litter, don't start fires, and don't swim. Jeremy parked and quickly climbed out of his seat, heading over to the passenger side. Phil had already unfastened his seatbelt, bending over awkwardly in his seat to try to mop up the coffee.

"It's alright, I've got it," Jeremy stated, beckoning for him to climb out of the car. "The food didn't get wet, so that's good. Just put the stuff on the picnic table, I'll be there in a second."
After Phil had left the car, Jeremy immediately got to his knees, examining the damage.

"Oh, most of it was on the mat," Jeremy observed, removing it from the car. "That's good. I can probably wash this off with... a hose or something."

He wiped up the extra coffee as best as he could, though there wasn't too much on the actual floor.

"There we go! That wasn't so bad, although the coffee was still kinda hot," Jeremy commented, turning around. "Speaking of which, you didn't burn yourself, did y-"

Phil had his back turned to him, shoulders curled down and in, clutching his arms close to his body. But it was the soft sob he tried to choke back that caught Jeremy's attention.

"Phil? Hey..."

Jeremy tossed the mat aside, walking up to him.

"It's okay, I'm not mad at you!" his tone was light as he tried to reassure him.

"I-I just... f-ucked everything up again. My uncle was right, it's r-ridiculous!" Phil's voice trembled as he pulled his arms tighter against himself.

"Your uncle? Frank's causing trouble again?! Doesn't he realize you're trying to balance a college education at the same time as your job?" Jeremy shook his head. "And for goodness sake, you've gone, what, FOUR nights without a good night's sleep?! You have every right to feel this way, don't let him tell you otherwise!"

He circled around in front of him, gently placing his hands on Phil's shaking shoulders.

"Just let it out."

Phil looked up at him, his lips curling in and trembling, as tears started pouring out of his eyes.

"It's okay to feel upset... but don't ever think you deserve it, okay?" Jeremy gently patted his shoulder again.

Jeremy let out a small grunt, staggering back a step, as Phil threw his arms around him and started crying against his shoulder.

"It's gonna be all right," Jeremy reassured softly, wrapping his arms around him tenderly. "It's finally all over."

The red car from before drove past, and for a moment, Jeremy was scared of being seen like this, with another man in his arms... but fuck them. There were more important things than being scared right now, he decided, gently rubbing his hand in a circle on Phil's back.

They stood there for a few more 'moments' - seconds, minutes, who could say? - before Phil finally lifted his face, his eyes red but now dry.

"I-I'm good," he confirmed quietly, looking up into Jeremy's eyes.

"Yeah?" Jeremy asked softly, his heart pounding loudly in his ears.

"Yeah, I'll be o- ... oh," Phil looked over at the bag situated on the picnic table. "... Our food probably isn't hot anymore."
"Oh well, we're college students, we eat what we can," Jeremy teased. "Lukewarm Mexican fast food and coffee cake included."

Phil smiled up at Jeremy, before they both took a seat at the table, quietly scarfing down their food - too hungry to remember to talk, it seemed, and Taco Shell was surprisingly pretty good for a fast food place. The coffee cake was exquisite as well, the cake itself soft while the cinnamon and brown sugar crumbles on top had a fine granulated texture to them. As they gathered up their trash, Phil looked down and spotted a few ants surrounding a crumb of coffee cake.

"They're eating. It's part of what makes them alive," he commented, as Jeremy tossed out a few wadded papers. "As does reproduction, regulation, growth, responding to the environment, being made of cells, aaaand... homeostasis."

"Nicely done," Jeremy complimented.

"There was a pop quiz," Phil explained, as he threw out his share of trash and walked with Jeremy back to the car. "For a little bit of extra credit. And I aced it, a-all because of you."

"Nah, you worked hard and earned that grade. And just wait, when the exam comes around, you're going to do great on that as well."

They got in the car, and Jeremy quickly chugged down the last of his coffee.

"... Why would you do that?" Phil asked. "I-I mean, isn't it gross by now?"

"I can confirm room temperature coffee is gross," Jeremy agreed, his nose wrinkled and his lips pulled to the side in a disgusted sneer. "But again, we're college students, we gotta eat and drink what we can get."

"Oh, speaking of coffee!" Phil unbuckled his seatbelt and stepped out of the car as Jeremy started up the engine. He returned quickly, with the slightly stained mat in his hand. "... You, uh, might not want to forget this."

"I sure wouldn't," Jeremy agreed. "Let me pop the trunk, just throw it back there."

He pulled the small lever near the wheel, hearing the familiar thunk, and Phil headed to the back of the car. He heard another thunk, Phil closing the trunk, before climbed back into the passenger seat.

"All right," Jeremy commented. "Where to next?"

"Oh... hmm..." Phil thought it over as Jeremy started to pull away from the picnic area. "Well, I... I don't want to head home just yet. Maybe we can drive a lap around the lake and chat?"

"That sounds nice," Jeremy agreed, turning out of the parking space so that the passenger window had the same great view of the lake. "... So, I think you said you've been to Japan?"

"Oh, yeah, i-it was beautiful," Phil said, looking over at Jeremy. "The only problem was the, uh, time difference... Japan is nearly half a day ahead of America, no matter what time zone you're in. So, heh, guess who was dealing with funky sleep patterns back in the day, too? But, let's see... what were some of the things I saw..."

Phil went on and on about his trip to Japan, Jeremy content to drive circles around the lake as he talked.

"... so, yeah, go figure I would like foxes so much," Phil finished up his story, before looking out the
"Have we been... here all this time?"

"I just wanted to wait until you finished your story," Jeremy confessed. "Sorry about that. But the exit's right here, I'll take you back now."

"Oh, I don't mind. Yeah, we can head back," Phil said, leaning back in the car seat a little. He gazed out the window, as the trees started to appear in greater numbers. "... Hey, Jeremy?"

"What's up?"

"Uh... why'd you go through all this trouble for me?"

He looked over at Phil briefly, before looking back at the road as they exited the park. His grip on the steering wheel tightened, but he relaxed it a second later.

"Don't get me wrong, I'd do anything to help our other friends out, but..." the grin on Jeremy's face was so childish it almost seemed fake. "I've always kind of felt like there was something special between us, you know? Um, wait, I don't mean-"

His grin disappeared as he slapped his forehead with a hand, before placing it back on the wheel.

"What I mean is, among the four of you guys..." he seemed to concentrate even harder on the road, even though there weren't many cars around. "... you're probably the one I would call my best friend."

"Oh!" Phil looked over at him with a delighted smile. "Yeah, I-I completely understand! We've always had a special friendship, haven't we?"

"Yeah," Jeremy replied in a low voice, his eyes still on the road.

"... What?"

"Nothing," Jeremy shook his head, and looked back over at Phil. "I think we're getting close to your apartment. You wanna teach me a little more Italian?"

"Sure, I can do that... um... let me think..." Phil smiled as an idea came to him. "Oh, how about this, it's perfect! The Italian word for friend is *amico* when you refer to a guy, and *amica* when you refer to a girl."

"All right, *amico*, now how do you say 'good night'?"

"That's *buona notte*, but you use it when someone's going to bed."

"I see," Jeremy remarked, but smiled. "... I wonder if this is how Ronaldo feels, learning so much English? Well... except he's learning lots of words over the course of a few days, and working with grammar and verbs... he's a pretty smart guy."

"I know, you can really tell how much he's improved, even after only a month!"

Jeremy nodded in agreement, as they pulled back into the apartment complex.

"So, what are you gonna do when you get back inside?"

Phil shook his head and chuckled.

"Take. A. Nap."
"Good answer," Jeremy replied, pulling up to the corner Phil had been waiting at earlier in the day. 
"Buona notte, okay? Sleep as long as you need. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy," Phil answered, stepping out of the car.

He watched Jeremy drive off with one final wave, before heading back to his apartment. The coffee hadn't been as strong as he expected... and the full stomach was making him kind of sleepy... plus the car ride had been pretty relaxing...

Yeah, a nap would be pretty nice.

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September 9, 1987

A nap for almost the entire afternoon - he had been too hungry to go back to sleep, so he had just eaten cold leftovers from the fridge for a quick dinner before crawling back under the covers - and a full night of rest later, Phil was finally back at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza after his classes had ended for the day.

"Hey, Phil... uh..."

He turned around in the hall, surprised by the voice.

"... you seem like you're feeling better... that's good."

Phil smiled.

"Thanks, George... I-I'm feeling a lot better than I did Monday, that's for sure."

George nodded and went on his way, heading back the game room. Phil, meanwhile, headed towards the Parts and Service room to see if Loxy and Foxanne were being repaired. Sure enough, Heather was hard at work, her hand twisting one of Loxy's eyes back into its socket. Jeremy was right - it was a good thing she wasn't a surgeon.

Phil chuckled at the thought, and Heather turned around, startled.

"Phil! Hey," she got to her feet, dusting off her uniform. "Just arrive?"

"Yes."

"Feeling better?"

"YES."

"Cool. All right, I'll go do a quick walkthrough of the building, and go see what's up," she stated, starting to walk past.

"H-hey, um... is Anita here today?" he asked, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Yeah, but... she's still not in the best mood. You might wanna wait to sort things out on a later date."

"I suppose..." Phil sighed.

"Everything gets better with time, man," Heather assured.
He walked around the building with her, checking things out, until they had made a full lap over the course of twenty minutes. Considering it was roughly two in the afternoon, there still weren’t many kids to watch, so Phil relented and spent some time with Heather on her break as well. As did Ronaldo and Sophia.

"The ice cream parlor turned out to be a disappointment," Sophia sighed, shaking her head. "Their soft serve machine was out of order, and they said it was apparently the second time this month that it’s happened! It’s only the ninth day of September, you know!"

"Not a fun date," Ronaldo added with a frown.

"Oh! Um, if you guys want something sweet on your next date, I know a place you can try!" Phil piped up. "It’s called The Wizard’s Brew. Jeremy and I actually visited it yesterday!"

"The Wizard’s Brew... certainly sounds like a fun place for a date," Sophia commented.

"Y-Yeah, so, uh, you and Ronaldo can go, uh, on a-a date there..." Phil replied, tucking his hand and arm into his pockets.

"So, you and Jeremy spent some time together yesterday? That sounds lovely!" Sophia continued. "How did you spend the day?"

"Oh... well... i-it wasn't like amazing or anything," Phil tried to dismiss. "I-I mean, it was still nice, but all we did was go to The Wizard's Brew and then w-we ate lunch by the lake. I-It was just supposed to be one of our study dates."

"Supposed to?" Heather repeated.

"Well... uh... I kind of forgot my books, thanks to a lack of, uh, sleep over the course of four nights," Phil explained. "So we didn't really spend a-a lot of, uh, time studying. We just talked about stuff for a few hours, a-and then Jeremy took me home."

"I am confused," Ronaldo stated. "You said it was a 'study date'. But you did not study. Does that make it a da-"

"No!" Phil quickly insisted. "N-no, no. I-it's different. That was not a date. The two of us just, uh, hung out together."

"Uh-huh."

Oh, great, Heather sounded one hundred percent convinced.

"I-it's true!" Phil stammered, his cheeks turning red.

"So, if you weren't studying, how did you spend your time together?"

"Heather..."

"Hmmm...?"

He let out an exasperated sigh.

"I-I wasn't feeling well at the cafe, so Jeremy took me out to lunch, and then we ate over in, uh, Lakeview Park. A-And there was talking. For example, uh, I-I told him about my trip to Japan. L-look, I'm the assistant manager of this facility, I can't spend too much time idling around," Phil stood up suddenly. "I'm going to go, uh, keep an eye on things. For a while."
He quickly stormed out of the employee lounge.

"What's with him?" Sophia asked.

Heather and Ronaldo exchanged a look.

"It's private," Heather stated. "I'm sure Phil will explain it to you when he's ready."

"Wait, you both know?" she asked, looking over at Ronaldo.

"... It is a secret. I cannot and will not say it," he shook his head. "To be... safe, I think that is the word."

"Oh..." Sophia's expression turned serious. "... very well. If it's that important, I'll let it be."

"You're a good girl, Soph," Heather praised with a wink. "Come to think of it... I was kind of pressuring him too... an asshole move on my part. I'll leave him alone for the rest of the day."

The hours passed, kids coming and kids going, until finally Freddy Fazbear's Pizza had closed for the night. Phil had just finished mopping around the Prize Corner when the phone rang, much to his surprise.

"They... know we're closed, right?" Janet asked, looking over at him.

He shrugged and picked up the phone, resting it against his right shoulder.

"Hello, hello, Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, this is Phil speaking."

"Phil! Hey, it's Frank."

"Un... I mean, sir... why are you calling so late?"

"Well, I had the day off... so, naturally, a smart guy like me does some thinking..."

"Uh-huh?"

"And I got to thinking... maybe I was a little too hard on you the other day... so I'd like to apologize for that."

Phil smiled a little, toying with the phone's cord in his fingers.

"Oh, i-it's okay..."

"... That being said, there's an important matter I'd like to discuss with you."

Phil's fingers ceased to move.

"... important?"

"Yeah. I don't think school and your job are the only things weighing you down."

"I-I don't know what you're, uh, talking about..."

"No, Phillip, I'm pretty sure you do."

He swallowed hard.
"Listen, your day off is tomorrow, right? Have you made any plans with your friends?"

"N-no..."

"Good. I'd like to have a little conversation with you, man-to-man. And to help make it up to you for Monday and all that jazz, I'm going to treat you to dinner. You remember where my house is, right? My brother might be a far better cook than me, but a nice home-cooked meal is sure to be a nice change from that microwaved stuff you probably eat everyday, right?"

"I-I guess that sounds pretty nice..."

"You bet it does. I'll be getting out of work early tomorrow, right around five, so come meet me for dinner at six, okay?"

"Um..."

"Okay, Phillip?"

"Uh, y-yes, sir! I-I'll be there."

"Great, see you tomorrow!"

"Okay, see y-" Phil was cut off by the sound of the phone hanging up on the other end.

He hung up the pizzeria's phone with a heavy sigh, resting his forehead in his palm.

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September 10, 1987

Frank's house might have been small, but it was certainly cozy once you got past the metal fence and latticed gate surrounding the actual house. The exterior walls were painted white, one side of the house accented with ivy that crept all the way up to the roof. Ornamental plants grew along the small path from the gate to the doorstep, where Phil stepped up to ring the doorbell.

"Phillip! Good to see you, come on in!" Frank exclaimed, opening the door.

"Thank you, Uncle..." he replied meekly, stepping inside.

The hallway was lined with picture frames, photographs of the Fazari family. Phil stopped in the hall to admire one photo in particular - its color was fading as a result of the times, but it was a photo of his father, roughly twenty years younger and sitting in a chair in a hospital room, his eyes shining and his smile bright as he cradled a tiny bundle in his arms.

"Well, come on!" Phil jumped at the sound of his uncle's voice. "You gonna stand around in the hall all evening, or are you gonna have some dinner?"

"Sorry, I'm coming," he replied, heading into the dining room.

The square wooden table had a dark maroon tablecloth laid over it, with silverware already set at opposite ends of the table.

"Come into the kitchen and fill your plate," Frank instructed, nodding in that direction.

Sure enough, on the stovetop, there were two pots - one with freshly drained spaghetti, the other with the actual tomato sauce, loaded with mushrooms and meatballs. He might not have been a good..."
cook, but that did not mean his uncle had bad taste, as it seemed he had picked out a very nice pasta sauce from the store. Phil picked up his ceramic plate from the counter and loaded it with noodles and sauce, a large and delectable meatball seated at the top of his plate like a cherry on a sundae. He returned to the table, taking a seat across from his uncle. Shortly after saying grace, his uncle's smile disappeared dramatically.

"Now then, Phillip, it's time to talk business," he stated darkly.

"B-business...?" he asked, shrinking down in his seat.

"A good manager has to keep a close eye on his employees... remember how I found that cigarette butt in one of the party rooms a few weeks ago, and sure enough, Daisy caught Irene having a smoke in the ladies' room?"

"I-I don't smoke, Uncle."

"I know you don't. This is about something completely different," he stated, reaching into his pocket. Phil swallowed hard as he held up a paper receipt and read it aloud. "Picnix. Roast beef sub and a coke."

"I... well, you know how it is!" Phil tried to laugh nonchalantly. "Y-you just get bored with the same old pizza and, uh, crave something different from time-to-time, you know? I-I mean, you don't eat the pizza that often either."

Frank continued to give him that ominous glare, placing the receipt between them on the table, before reaching back into his pocket.

"Picnix, chicken tender sub. Picnix, coffee and some other stuff. Picnix, turkey sub..." he continued listing off the stuff he had purchased, placing the receipts between them on the table. "I started wondering, what's the big deal about Picnix anyway?"

Phil remained silent, staring at the line of receipts in front of him. *Oh, God.* He hadn't noticed it before, but at the bottom, of the receipts were the words 'Your cashier today was'... and almost all of them were followed by 'JEREMY'. Jeremy, Jeremy, Jeremy.

"So I took a look around after work on Tuesday," Frank shook his head. "That's where I bought all of tonight's supplies, after all. And you thought you could hide it from me."

"U-U-Uncle, please, j-just hear me out, we're f-friends, I-I just wanted to see-"

Frank had been putting on an act, it seemed, as he grinned devilishly at Phil and interrupted him.

"There's a GIRL involved, isn't there!" he teased with a wink.

"O-oh! Uh... uh, y-yeah," Phil sat up a little taller, only to recline against the back of his chair.

"So, which one is it? That Shelby girl in the deli? Alexa, one of the cashiers?"

"I... uh... I-I never really got a chance to see, uh, her nametag..." Phil fibbed quickly, twirling some spaghetti with his fork.

"Oh, good point, we should eat before this stuff gets cold. Hold on a sec," Frank got up from the table, heading back into the kitchen, returning with two wine glasses in his hands and a bottle and corkscrew tucked under his arm.
"Uncle... really?" Phil asked in surprise.

"Sure, why not?" Frank said, placing one of the glasses in front of Phil. "After all, chianti classico goes great with spaghetti."

He twisted the cork out and poured the wine into Phil's glass and then his own, a luxuriously dark shade of ruby red.

"Well then," Frank placed the bottle on the table and took his seat, lifting his glass. "Here's to young love, am I right?"

"I... uh... right," Phil agreed, taking his glass and gently tapping it to his uncle's.

Usually, he didn't care for red wine, but he found the chianti's flavor to be rather pleasant, comparable to cherries with a light floral fragrance.

"Well, like I said, I did see some girls working around Picnix on Tuesday... maybe I can figure out who your little crush is!" Frank teased, taking a sip of wine. "What's she look like, huh?"

"Oh... um..." Phil stared down at his glass, his mind going blank.

"That beautiful, huh? Come on, you gotta give your uncle a hint!"

"O-okay, um... h-her eyes... the girl, I-I mean... are... uh... th-the richest chocolate color imagineable..." his voice softened as he spoke, still keeping his gaze down. Phil only knew one person with 'chocolate-colored eyes'.

"Aww, that's no fair. I can't get that close to the ladies... it'd be too creepy, you know?" Frank grinned, twirling up some spaghetti on his fork. "But you, wow, you're already at the 'gaze-lovingly-into-each-others'-eyes phase."

He shoved the bite of pasta into his mouth with a satisfied 'mmhmm', Phil quick to shovel some food into his mouth as well. Maybe, if he was lucky, constantly having a mouthful of food would deter his uncle from asking too many questions.

"So, how'd - how'd you two meet?" Frank asked, pausing to cough after not completely swallowing the previous bite of food.

"Oh, uh... well..." Phil pushed a meatball around on his plate with his fork, remembering how he had simply waved Jeremy over because their table had a place where he could sit. "S-sometimes things just happen, and then you start talking and stuff. You know?"

"I do know," Frank nodded heartily, taking a long drink from his wine glass, before gazing over Phil's shoulder down the hallway. "... Did you ever hear the story about how your mother and father met?"

Phil chewed on a mushroom contemplatively. After twenty-one years, he still hadn't heard the story of how his parents met - he had never thought to ask, especially since romance and dating had been touchy subjects for him as a teenager, and his father had gradually become more preoccupied with running a business. He swallowed.

"I... no, I've never asked them how they met," Phil admitted.

"Aaaaall right, it's story time for you, then!" Frank stated with a grin, pouring a little more wine into his glass.
Okay, so, about twenty-four years ago, they were starting to open up air travel to Asia again. So I've been out of college - graduated - for a few years at this point, when your father says to me 'Frank, we're still young, and we still haven't seen the world. You wanna go on a trip this summer?' So I say, 'Sure, 'Rico, where are we going?' And I'm thinking we're probably going to check out the best beaches in Florida, or we're going to see Mt. Rushmore, but no, your father makes sure we get passports and he gets us pretty cheap tickets to Japan."

Frank took a few more bites of spaghetti, washing it down with a few sips of chianti, then continued.

"Now, this was just some pretty spur-of-the-moment trip thing your papa decided on, since he wasn't a big CEO at this point. So we're pretty much staying for about a week in Kyoto in this cheap little hostel room - we're grown men sharing a bunkbed - and eating nothing but rice since it's the most affordable thing around. So one night we're bored, and your dad decides that 'hey, why don't we go see if there's anyone who wants to chat in the lobby', even though I'm telling him 'Rico, you don't know any Japanese', and he insists that he wants to at least try. So we go out to the lobby, and there's no guests around because it's evening and everyone's eating dinner in their rooms..."

Frank smiled and nodded.

"... except for one young Japanese lady, also in her twenties, over by the phones they use to make international calls. And it's a good thing she's not paying attention to us, because your father just stands there staring at her, completely stupefied."

"... My mother?"

Frank nodded.

"And he hears her talking on the phone, what we can only presume is Japanese, and the only thing he picks up on is moshimoshi. So he's finally snapped out of it and he just says to me, 'Franco, I've gotta meet her, I've gotta say hello'. But like I said, he doesn't know a lick of Japanese. So he waits for her phone call to end, and just walks right up to her and says 'Moshi'!"

Phil chuckled.

"And she just stares at him a moment, and he asks, 'That's how you say 'hi', right? I heard you say moshimoshi, like 'hello, hello' on the phone, like your own little greeting, so you seemed like a friendly person and I wanted to say hi' and then Federico starts panicking because he realizes 'wait, I'm saying all of this to a Japanese girl, you have no clue what I'm saying and I probably sound ridiculous'... but she smiles and says, 'It's okay, I can speak English too, I understand completely'. So, yeah, it turns out that she can speak English just fine. And he explains that he and I are bored, and we just wanna chat, so they talk for a while, and she introduces herself as Yoko Tanaka, and she writes down a list of Japanese for him to use while he's visiting the country, so he knows how to ask where the bathrooms are and how much stuff costs, and she makes it a little joke to say 'hello, hello' to him every time they see each other in the hostel, and he always answers her with 'hello, hello', and now you know where your little family greeting comes from."

"Oh!" Phil took a sip of wine. "How about that."

"How indeed. Now... I didn't really see too much of them that week, but let me tell you, your father... just blew her mind - not in that sense, he waited until marriage - "

Phil blushed and shook his head.

"... Right, too much information. Okay, but... in that one week, he somehow managed to get her a
job offer in the States at the same company as him, and gave her his contact information... and the next thing you know, Yoko Tanaka is an American citizen and she's dating my brother, and by the next year they're married."

"... Wow."

"Yeah, wow."

"How did my dad do it?"

"He always told me that 'it wasn't just him, it was also her'. There was no defining gift or smooth talk that told her that he was the one, he just... gave her everything he could, and that included his heart. And she did the same thing too. Now, I thought it was crazy, I mean, they literally got to know each other in a week, and all of a sudden she's willing to come all the way to America to be with him. I even asked him, 'aren't you afraid there's some kind of scandal with her? That things are moving too fast?' And Federico just shook his head and smiled and said 'no'. And, admittedly being the smarter brother, I just asked to make sure, and he insisted he didn't have to, he knew that he loved her and she loved him. And how was he so sure? Because, he said, if you're ever scared of giving your heart to someone... there is no love there. At least, not at the moment, or something like that. To trust someone so fully, to have no fear of them hurting you... that is how you know the love is real."

Frank shrugged.

"... Maybe that's why I couldn't get either of my marriages to stick," Frank's tone turned bitter, and he drank a sip of wine to wash the words off his tongue.

"Uncle..."

"Oh well. They had some difficulties having kids, both before and after you. And even though you had your... birth defect..." Frank looked at the wine glass he held in his right hand. "Your father just kept saying, 'Defects or not, I love my son, my little Phillip'... oh man. I know they say some kids are 'Mama's Boys' or 'Daddy's Little Girl'... but I think you're the only 'Daddy's Boy' I've ever seen, Phil."

Phil shook his head with a wistful smile.

"Wow, I got off track!" Frank laughed, scooping up a few more mouthfuls of spaghetti. "Mmm... right, so, now that you've heard the story... do you love her?"

"Uh..."

Oh great, it was back to awkward interrogations.

"Eh, then again, you're from a different generation. Not to mention you've always been a skittish kid. Love probably doesn't have the same meaning to you kids these days. But, I like to think maybe you got a little bit of your father's heart - and your uncle's brains - " Frank pointed to his head with a wink. "... to pick a winner. Even if she's just a girl at the grocery store. Appearances can be deceiving - she might turn out to be some kind of rocket scientist that rakes in millions!"

"Oh, uh, a scientist... y-yeah..." Phil tugged at the collar of his shirt with a finger, his cheeks starting to turn rosy again.

"You won't know until you ask. You gotta take the plunge, like your father! Man up, Phillip!"

"I-I guess? I-I mean, I don't even know if the girl is single or not..."
"That's why you gotta ask, dummy!" Frank stated, pouring some more wine for himself.

Phil just shrugged quietly, eating a few more bites of spaghetti, noticing the temperature wasn't quite as pleasant as before.

"... But you really got this excited over me being interested in some girl?" Phil asked. "Like, a whole dinner?"

"It was really meant to be part of the apology, but there's no harm in being excited about you getting a girlfriend!" Frank laughed, drinking more of the chianti. "And hey, if you think I'm excited - oh! That's a great idea!"

"... Wh-what?" Phil asked through a mouthful of food. Somehow, he got the feeling this was not the time for manners.

"We gotta tell your father all about this! Heh, he'll probably be more excited than I am! Just because I got more of the brains of the family, doesn't mean we don't think alike!"

"He told me that he had seen right through my scheme, and there was no way he'd let some... s-some... s-some 'sick faggot' spread 'its' diseases to children."

Jeremy's words ran through his head, and Phil nearly swallowed a meatball whole, had he not choked it up.

"Whoa, Phil, you gotta slow down and enjoy the flavor!" Frank scolded him.

"Um... n-no thank you... I-I'm feeling pretty full," Phil said, looking down at his half-empty plate. "I-I have, um, a report due tomorrow a-anyway."

"Oh, you're just antsy... believe me, your father-"

"No!" Phil exclaimed, bolting upright. "N-no... I'll tell him when I'm ready. I-in case things don't work out. A-and I should have the honors of telling him, in case things, uh, do work out... g-good night, uncle!"

"Wait, what about dessert? I bought some cannol -"

"Good night!" Phil called out one more time from the hallway, before Frank heard the door shut.

Phil ran straight for his car, hopping in and starting the engine. He pulled out of the driveway as swiftly as a bank robber after committing their greatest heist.

Jeremy. How ironic, his thoughts always seemed to come back to him and his words.

"... you wouldn't defend him as much as you do if you didn't love him a lot, so I can only presume the feeling is mutual."

Those words and that picture of his father and the thought of his voice - 'I love my son, my little Phillip'... Impulsively, he cranked up the volume on his car's radio, Lionel Richie bellowing through his speakers and into his eardrums, until he finally felt like all those words and voices had been purged from his mind... although his ears would keep ringing all night long.
Classes were halfway done for the day, and Phil once again didn't have work that night. He had calmed down over the course of the past few days... though he had settled for the pizzeria's pizza for lunch for those same days as well, nor did he make any phone calls. He just wanted an equal amount of space from his father and from Jeremy for a little while.

But the call of the Picnix sub is too strong for any mortal to resist, and Phil decided that since he'd had such a good day in his public relations class - correctly answering a few of the professor's questions for the rest of the lecture hall to hear - that maybe it was time to treat himself a little. And besides, he couldn't stay away from Jeremy or his father forever.

He gave Shelby his usual 'hello, hello', ordered an Italian sub today, and found his favorite cashier... who seemed a little distraught today.

"... Phil! Hey... it feels like I haven't seen you for a while..." Jeremy commented, forcing himself to smile.

"I've just been... busy. Weekend, lots of kids, you know how it is. But, uh, I still managed to get plenty of sleep, so there's no need to worry about that..." Phil's brow furrowed. "... since it seems like you're worried about something already..."

"Rachel."

"Rachel?!” Phil exclaimed. "Wh-what's going on, is she okay...?"

"I... I want to hope she'll be okay. I want her to be happy, and it seems like she is, so far... but..." Jeremy shook his head with a sigh. "It's something so simple, but it's making things complicated."

Phil looked over to see if there was anyone else coming to get in line. Nobody. Picnix was surprisingly empty despite it being lunch time.

"I'll hear you out," he offered.

Jeremy took in another breath of air, looking off in a different direction.

"I got a phone call from Rachel last night. She was super excited," Jeremy recalled. "... it seems she officially has her first boyfriend."

"Oh... and you're worried about it because she's still pretty young? I-I mean, I think you said this is her first year in high school, right?"

"That's part of it, but it's also just... me being a big brother, I guess. I mean, I've never met the guy, how do I know he's going to treat Rachel right? I don't want to be overbearing, but I'm... a little protective about my sister. It's kind of a sibling thing."

"... So she's trusting you with keeping it a secret from your parents?"

Jeremy sighed.

"On the contrary, both of our parents know... and while I can tell they're still trying to be protective of her..." Jeremy frowned. "They're still surprisingly happy about the whole situation. I can only assume that it's because one of their kids turned out to be... normal."

Although his bruises had healed, Jeremy still cast a glance down at the hand he had once injured.
"My parents just tried to ignore it, or write it off as a 'phase' when I told them..." Jeremy explained. "But as the years passed, and I remained the same, they eventually quit caring about my personal life. They still ask about how I'm doing in school, and they make sure that I'm healthy... but they don't care about any friends I've made or if I'm dating anyone. A part of me wants to hold onto the belief that they still love me... I just don't think they love me as much as they used to."

"That's awful!" Phil opined. "They're your family, they're supposed to love you no matter what! I-If you don't have your family... wh-what else is left?"

"I have my friends," Jeremy reassured. "And even so... it's only my parents who don't accept me."

"Rachel..." Phil realized.

"Just another reason why she's so dear to me," Jeremy stated, smiling again. "I once heard someone say that your siblings are the people you should hold dearest in your life... since they are the members of the family who will be with you for life... so I'm thankful I have someone like her."

"Being an only child seems a lot more lonely now," Phil admitted.

"But you do have parents who love you. A lot. Especially your dad, if I remember correctly."

Phil smiled weakly and nodded, looking down at his sub.

"Sorry... I guess I started venting and it turned into a big family discussion all because of some dumb boyfriend," Jeremy apologized, scanning the sub. "Your total is three forty-nine."

"Jeremy, do you have a -"

Phil had barely even registered that he had asked the question, cutting himself off before he could finish. He glanced over to see if there was anybody else in line, but there was no one there.

Jeremy appeared upset for a moment, but he looked away. It appeared he needed a moment to gather his thoughts. He cast a quick glance behind him as well, the nearest cashier two registers down.

"... No. I am not in a relationship at the moment."

"Sorry, I-I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories..." Phil apologized, realizing it was probably the same ex Jeremy had hinted at before, as he handed over the exact change. "I-I was just curious, that's a-"

"Wait," Jeremy stopped him, and Phil suddenly grew terrified he was about inquire further. "... Don't you have any new Italian words for me today?"

"Um..." Phil thought for a second. "Ti am... no, uh... ti voglio bene."

"Ti voglio bene," Jeremy repeated. "I recognize the bene in there, is it some sort of well-wishing statement?"

Phil nodded.

"I-It's how you tell someone you love them. You can use it with anyone, but it's better for, uh, family members and friends. The o-other one... ti amo... that has more romantic implications."

"So I can tell Rachel 'ti voglio bene' the next time we talk on the phone?"

"That is exactly why I-I wanted to teach you those words," Phil confirmed, beaming at him.
"Oh, grazie," Jeremy replied. "Come visit Picnix again. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

He grabbed his sub and quickly left, not wanting to risk Jeremy asking why he was so curious. It wasn't curiosity that had made him ask.

It was hope. And Phil had gotten the answer he had been hoping for.

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September 17, 1987

Phil scooped another spoonful of mashed potatoes into his mouth, glancing over at the phone, as another commercial aired on TV. His father hadn't called him, and while he missed talking to him, it at least meant Frank was staying true to his word of letting him 'wait to date'.

Or so he thought, as the phone started to ring.

He quickly hit the mute button on the remote, swallowing his food, and dashed to answer the phone.

"Hello, hello?"

"Phil? H-hey, it's Jeremy."

"Jeremy?" Phil smiled. "Hey, how are you doing?"

"... Not too good, actually."

Phil's smile immediately fell away.

"What's wrong?" he asked, only to realize he could hear the sounds of cars passing by in the background.

"I'm at Mel's, the gas station, the one between Prather Road and Twenty-Fourth Street."

"O-okay, I know where that is."

"I'm sorry for calling you on your night off, but you were the first person I thought of... that was probably at home. I need you to come pick me up... I've been having a little bit of trouble with my Escort, and my engine broke down while I was driving."

"Oh, God, y-you weren't in an accident, were you? Are you okay?"

"No, no car accidents. I was able to get off the road before my engine failed, so i'm okay. A little shaken, I'll admit, but no physical harm done - I was able to walk to Mel's just fine."

Phil let out a sigh of relief.

"Okay. Prather and Twenty-Fourth. I'll be right there."

"Good, because I'm out of quarters and I think my time is almo-"

The call cut off on the other end, and Phil hung up, grabbing his keys and heading out the door.

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"So they towed your car to the mechanic, and you can expect a diagnostic by tomorrow afternoon?" Phil asked, looking over at Jeremy.

"Yeah," he replied, unusually quiet, looking down at his hands in his lap.

"This is, uh, kind of the opposite of last Tuesday, isn't it?" Phil asked, trying to make conversation.

"Yeah," Jeremy replied, not looking up.

"Would you... like to listen to music?" Phil asked.

Jeremy nodded, and Phil turned up the volume. Commercials. He switched over to the next station, probably a 60s and 70s station, as Redbone played through the speakers.

"Oh... heh... I-I always loved this song," Phil commented. Jeremy smiled a little, looking out the window, his fingers tapping on the armrest to the beat of the song.

He quietly drove them to Jeremy's apartment, the song coming to an end as he pulled into the complex.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" Phil asked, turning down the volume so Jeremy could hear him.

"W-We need to talk," Jeremy stated, still looking out the window.

"O-okay," Phil agreed, as he pulled into a parking space.

"Do you remember... the thing I told you last Tuesday? That you're my best friend among the four of you?" Jeremy looked over at him briefly, before turning his gaze back to his hands.

Phil nodded.

"And as my closest friend... I feel like there shouldn't be secrets between us."

Phil swallowed hard. Surely Heather or Ronaldo hadn't said anything?

"Okay," he waited for Jeremy to go on.

"A-and I know you're a really nice guy."

Phil forced himself to smile, though he was flexing and relaxing his hand in an attempt to calm himself down.

"So I'm going to confess that I... I like you," Jeremy took in a heavy breath. "I-I've liked you for a long time, like I-I had a little crush on you during the first few days of the summer training thing, but it kept getting worse and worse, and it's like that anxiety paradox, the longer you stay away from something, the harder it gets to go back. Well, as I started to like you more, the more I started to worry about liking you too much and getting even more hurt when I finally owned up to it, so I'm just - I just - well, now you know, and I'm sorry, I don't want this to ruin our friendship, but I really thought you should know."

Phil stared at him silently in shock.

"I... oh, man, I fucked up again, didn't I..." Jeremy's breathing was starting to speed up again. "I-I-I'm sorry, I should just-"
The clicking of an unbuckled seatbelt snapped Phil out of his stupor, and he quickly unbuckled his, giving him time to lean over and grab Jeremy's hand as he opened the door, ready to bolt.

"Jeremy, wait!" Phil tried to catch his breath as well. "Close the door."

Poor Jeremy was shaking despite the gentle hold on his arm, looking back at Phil, all the anxiety evident on his face thanks to the automatic light overhead.

"It's okay, I promise. Just close the door," Phil repeated.

Jeremy cast one last look out the door, before looking back at Phil. He closed the door, now leaning forward in his seat, resting his forehead against his palms with a small sigh.

"Everything's okay, Jeremy..."

"No..."

"Yes, shh, it's okay. I'm glad you told me," Phil reassured.

He gently took one of Jeremy's hands in his own, lowering it from his face. Phil swallowed hard - now he was the one trembling.

"Do you, uh, remember the little bits of Italian I taught you? Look at me, per favore."

He lifted his head, chocolate-colored eyes gazing back into his, and Phil was silent, the words stuck in his throat, as he slowly lowered his gaze to Jeremy's lips.

It was his turn to take the plunge.

"Baciami," Phil whispered, gently placing Jeremy's hand against his cheek as the lights faded out.

Jeremy's other hand shook as he reached out, but he steadied it as it came to rest on Phil's other cheek. He leaned forward and Phil did too - perhaps too quickly or too far, as they wound up bumping noses. However, much to Phil's delight, Jeremy let out a small laugh - the happiest he had been so far that night.

Phil smiled and closed his eyes, blissfully melting into the touch, as his lips met Jeremy's in a soft and slow kiss.

It was true - some things didn't need translating.

Chapter End Notes

(1) Both buono and bene can mean good in Italian, they just have different uses; buono is used as an adjective (un amico buono means "a good friend"), whereas bene can be used as an adverb or an interjection (like "You passed the test? Good!")

(2) Fun fact, this one just a personal anecdote. This is based off of a real cafe (of a similar name) I visited several times during high school.

(3) Another fun fact - this was actually a thing that happened during my fourth year at college.
September 18, 1987

Already dressed in a pair of khakis and a violet business shirt with short sleeves, Phil let out an exasperated sigh as he finished tying his red bowtie in a lopsided knot. He could get neckties to look somewhat decent with one hand... bowties, not so much.

But it would be okay, he reminded himself, tucking his nametag and car keys into his pocket, before swinging his bookbag over his shoulder. He had bigger priorities than bowties this morning. Phil smiled, grabbing an apple from the kitchen, before heading out the door for his car.

"If only fixing cars were as easy as straightening bowties," Phil remarked, briefly smiling over at Jeremy, seated beside him. "And Lisa won't mind you coming in early, right?"

"Leslie? Nah, she's fine with it. My shift won't start for another hour or two, but... I didn't want to get in the way of your classes," Jeremy replied. "But, yeah, the mechanic's supposed to call me back this afternoon, give me an estimate."

He swallowed and adjusted his glasses.

"... Both on the price and the time it'll take to fix. But... I should be able to afford it."

"A-are you sure?"

"I'm... pretty sure," Jeremy said. "... And if not, I'll ask my parents for help. Don't worry about me, it'll be fine."

Phil nodded, starting to pull into the Picnix parking lot. As he did, they noticed a girl, in uniform, kissing a boy out in front of the store in broad daylight.

"Probably Dinah and her boyfriend," Jeremy stated.

"That's not very, uh, professional of them..." Phil commented.

Jeremy looked down for a moment.

"Hey, uh... pull around to the back of the parking lot, okay?"

"Huh?" Phil looked out the window, having pulled up to the front of the store to drop Jeremy off.

"Please?"

"Okay," Phil agreed, shifting the car back into drive. He looped around to the far end of the lot, where there weren't many cars. "Um... is everything all right, Jer?"

He had been glancing behind them, out the rear window.

"Yeah... I don't think they were paying attention to us. I sure hope not, anyway..." Jeremy mumbled,
unbuckling his seatbelt. "I just wanted to say... uh..."

He placed a hand on Phil's shoulder, leaning over to give him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Thanks. For the ride and everything."

"Oh!" he quickly unbuckled his own seatbelt, leaning over to gently clutch Jeremy's apron. "... You're welcome."

They both smiled, exchanging a quick and gentle kiss.

"So..." Jeremy commented, pulling back. "Thursday is still good for you, right?"

"Mmhmm..." Phil hummed dreamily. Jeremy chuckled softly.

"All right, I better let you get to class. Work hard, okay?"

"Okay."

Jeremy smiled, opening the door.

"See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

With one last tiny tug to make sure his bowtie was straight, Phil stepped into Freddy Fazbear's Pizza with a little extra spring in his step, still humming as he strolled down the hallways, punched in, and entered the game area.

"Well, look at you!" Heather remarked in a chipper voice, her hands on her hips. "This is quite the change."

"Hey, Heather?"

"Hmm?"

With a grin, Phil threw his arms around her in a hug.

"Thank you."

She patted his back, unsure of what to make of the situation.

"Wow, wow, wow, wooooowww!"

Phil stiffened, letting go of her, at the sound of his uncle's voice. He hadn't been speaking; rather, he had been trying to mimic the sound of the funky guitar notes in a Marvin Gaye song.

"Well, well, well!" Frank remarked, rubbing his hands together excitedly. "So the smarty pants security guard was your sweetheart all along!"

"Uh..." Phil exchanged an embarrassed look with Heather. "N-no, remember what I told you? I-I'm just happy because I spoke with Heather knew about my situation with... the, uh, girl at Picnix."

She looked over at him in confusion.
"Well... last night, I spoke with that Picnix, uh... girl... and I owned up to my, uh, feelings," he explained, looking Heather in the eyes, with a smile and a wink. "And now everything is okay between us, a-and we're going to start dating."

"For real?!" Heather hugged Phil again. "I knew you could do it! I knew that... uh, she liked you!"

He laughed as she let go of him.

"Oh, and before you ask, Uncle... I, uh... I am going to call my father about this. I-I'll even do it tonight."

"That's great!" Frank declared with a laugh. "Well! This day's off to a nice start! It's certainly a pleasant change from yesterday!"

Phil's smile faded a little.

"Uh, yesterday? Did something happen? There weren't any, uh, issues with the children, were there?"

"No, no, don't worry about that," Frank waved it off with a snort. "... it was actually John."

"John?" Phil repeated incredulously. "B-but he's never been a problem...!"

"That's right, you weren't here yesterday. Well, yesterday morning, John's waiting for me in front of the pizzeria. Starts yammering about the animatronics trying to get in the security office."

"That's odd," Phil commented, looking over at Heather. "They're only programmed to roam from the stage to the party rooms, aren't they?"

"Yeah, except for that one time with Chica, but... she's also got that glitch in her system that makes her walk off the stage, you know?"

"Well, whatever. The point is, he's claiming that their technology is funky. And he doesn't feel safe if the animatronics aren't going to leave him alone."

"Which doesn't sound right at all," Heather added. "Why would they go against their programming like that? I mean... I guess it's possible that it's due to the lack of guests and lighting, but... they still shouldn't be wandering into the office. Unless it's the presence of a person that overwrites it? UGH! I don't know! I'm not a programmer!"

"I'm not either, but... that sounds like a good guess," Phil commented. "That they work differently at night because of the lack of guests, I mean. Heh, maybe we should actually call the programmers and see what they think."

"I've already done that. For now, the gang'll just run on their usual codes and John will just have to suck it up," Frank muttered. "Anyway, I think we've got a few parties planned, since it's a Friday, so we'd better start getting ready."

Heather cast one last look over at the trio of animatronics, motionless on the stage, before heading for one of the party rooms with Phil and Frank to see how she could help out.

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Since it would take a few minutes for his dinner to cook in the toaster oven, there was no point in continuing to wait for the right time to call. Phil took in a deep breath before dialing the phone,
listening to the other side ring for a while, before someone picked up on the other end.

"Hello, hello?"

"... Hello, hello, Dad."

"Phillip! Oh, it feels like forever since I last spoke to you. You sound quiet, is everything alright?"

"Yeah, I-I'm good," Phil stated, resting the phone against his right shoulder. "I'm healthy, and eating well, my job and my classes are fine..."

"Are you happy?"

Phil smiled.

"Definitely! I have several good friends around the workplace, and, uh, I have a few friends on campus, like my lab partner... and..." his voice trailed off.

"... And?"

Phil twirled the telephone cord around his finger.

"I, uh... as of last night, I finally have a... a-a girlfriend."

His father gasped on the other line.

"Phillip! Oh, do you really?"

He could hear another voice in the background, and he recognized it all too well - his mother.

"... Yoko! Honey, Phillip has a girlfriend!"

His parents conversed in the background for a little while, Phil weaving the coiling cord over and under his fingers a few times, as he waited for his father to get back on the line.

"Phillip?"

"O-oh, hi, Mom..."

"What's her name?"

"Oh, um..."

Shoot. He really should've planned this lie a little more carefully.

"Uh..." he looked around the kitchen, his wallet on the counter the first thing to catch his eye. "... Penny."

"Penny?"

"Y-yeah..." Phil continued, looking over at the knife holder. "Penny... Sharpe."

"Come on, you gotta tell us more than that!" his father pleaded on the other line. "What's she like?"

"Well, she's uh... she's really smart. So I guess you could say she's, uh, as 'sharp' as her name implies, heheh," Phil laughed weakly, looking over at the fridge. "A-and she's got a magnetic personality. And... um... she has beautiful chocolate-brown eyes... and she's got the sweetest smile..."
and, uh, Penny is just a great girl all-around!"

"Sounds great! You're a good man, Phillip, I know you'll treat her well. I'll even slide a few dollars your way for a nice date."

"Federico-

"I know we're supposed to let him do his own thing, dear... but it's his first girlfriend! This is kind of an exciting affair for everyone. Are you her first boyfriend, Phil?"

He frowned.

"Um... I'm pretty sure, uh, she's dated someone before. But I don't think i-it went very well, because he - uh, h-he being the ex, uh, I mean - he has only been mentioned once. And, uh... Penny didn't seem too happy about it. So I'm not asking any questions about the ex because it's clear she has bad memories of the guy. I'll wait for her to open up about it when she's ready... you know?"

"I think that's a good idea. You let Penny know we'll keep her in our thoughts, okay?"

"Uh, sure!"

Phil went quiet, his fingers no longer toying with the phone cord.

"Hey, Dad... you and Uncle Frank are pretty close, right? Like... uh... do you agree with each other on a lot of things?"

"Not EVERYTHING, naturally... but for the most part, yes, I think my younger brother and I agree with each other on a lot of things. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it was just... something he said a-a few nights ago," Phil dismissed, his heart racing. "Well, the weekend's coming up, so... I'm going to do a little more studying before bed. Uh, gotta have plenty of sleep for the weekend rush, you know?"

"All right. Get plenty of rest, okay? We love you."

"Yeah..." Phil said, his chest starting to hurt. "Love you too. Bye."

He hung up the phone and slid down to the floor against the wall. Penny Sharpe, huh? He'd have to memorize more than just vocabulary terms for the next few days...
"Yeah, it's okay," Jeremy reassured. "So... what are we going to watch today?"

"Well... to be honest, I-I don't really want to see anything scary, like *Hellraiser*..."

"Thank you," Jeremy replied, letting out a sigh of relief.

"I did get a movie recommendation from Sophia..." Phil's voice trailed off, as they passed the movie posters.

"Yeah? And what did she recommend?"

"Well, she went out with Ronaldo to see..." Phil's voice trailed off, stopping by a poster depicting Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. "... *Dirty Dancing*.

Jeremy studied the poster a little while longer, before looking back at Phil.

"... All right, let's give it a shot."

Phil bought their tickets, Jeremy bought their snacks, and they both grabbed seats in a relatively full theater.

"You don't think someone will say something, do you?" Jeremy whispered, as the lights began to dim.

"Nah, I'm sure everyone will be watching the movie."

Everyone being the single ladies or the couples who had also been in the theater. Johnny Castle earned the occasional sigh or squeal from a girl in the audience, and Jeremy even found himself transfixed during a couple of scenes.

But it was Baby confronting her father that drew the most reaction from Phil.

"*There are a lot of things about me that aren't what you thought. But if you love me, you have to love all the things about me.*"  

It was hard to make out his facial expression in the dark, and the sound that had passed his lips... he couldn't tell if it was a sigh or a very faint sob. Jeremy lowered his hand to the armrests, gently placing it over Phil's. His hand turned palm up underneath Jeremy's, and he let their fingers intertwine with a small squeeze, which Jeremy returned.

Their hands stayed that way up until the end of the movie, when everyone applauded as the credits rolled.

"Why do people clap when movies are over?" Jeremy asked, clapping anyway. "The actors can't hear them."

Phil shrugged in reply, applauding by clapping his hand against his forearm just below the wrist.

They left the theater together, Phil driving Jeremy back to his apartment as the sun started to set.

"I liked it... what about you?" Phil finally asked.

"Eh... it was all right. I kind of wish there was some more comedy to it. I'd give it a six out of ten."

"I just realized... you remember how I told our friends that my first date was at a movie theater?"
"Yes?"

"Well... going to the movies, i-it made me remember... not the actual date, but the drinking game we
were playing when we brought it up..." Phil commented, as he pulled into the parking space outside
Jeremy and Pat's apartment. "I started talking about it because I was the only one who hadn't been
kissed at the table."

"... Oh," was the only thing Jeremy could say, as he came to the same realization.

"Yeah, uh, last week... in this car... e-even in the same parking spot, too, I think... you gave me my
first kiss," Phil stated with a smile, unbuckling his seatbelt as Jeremy did the same. "So, uh... thank
you. It was a good one, heh."

He closed his eyes, starting to lean in, but he felt Jeremy's hand on his shoulder.

"Jogger," he stated, looking over Phil's shoulder.

Phil leaned back, turning around. Sure enough, he spotted the young man who had just turned the
corner and was heading in their direction. He let out a disappointed sigh.

"... really makes you wish things could be a little easier... you know? L-like those coworkers of
yours... who can kiss in front of the building and go to work like it's no big deal," Phil let out a
wistful sigh. "On Tuesday, my uncle caught Anita kissing Jason, one of the waiters, over by the
security office. A-and all he did was scold them. If it was me... us... I-I'd probably be fired on the
spot."

"I know it's not going to be easy... keeping it secret from so many people. But we've got friends who
support us. And I'm here for you, too. I want to make this work," Jeremy reassured, giving Phil's
shoulder a gentle pat. "Your exam's in less than a week, and my car will be ready by tomorrow, so...
I'm available on Monday, if you want to meet in that window of time between your classes. I'm
thinking The Wizard's Brew... and we'll have a proper study date?"

"I-it would beat spilling hot coffee in a car," Phil said with a small chuckle. "Sounds like a plan."

"I'll see you then," Jeremy replied, getting out of the car as the jogger passed. "See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

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September 28, 1987

"How many essential amino acids are there, and can you name them all?" Jeremy quizzed him from
across the table.

"Th-that's way too much information to memorize, you know?"

"Phil, it's your exam, not mine."

He growled, chewing on the eraser end of his pencil.

"... I know there's nine."

"Right, that's a good start."

"I remember, uh, tryptophan is one of them... because that one's common in turkey. Um... and the
'phen-lalaline' something or other, is the one that some people are sensitive to and it gives them seizures."

"Good start... only seven more to go."

"What, like you name them all?" Phil asked skeptically.

Jeremy gave him a knowing smirk.

"I learned them all, thanks to Private Tim Hall," he stated in a rhyme.

"... Come again?" Phil asked, opening his textbook.

"Private Tim Hall. PVT, TIM, HLL... phenylalanine, threonine, valine, tryptophan, isoleucine, methionine, histidine, leucine, lysine," Jeremy recited.

Phil looked up from his textbook, narrowing his eyes as Jeremy grinned.

"Show-off," he mumbled, trying not to smile. "Right, so... let me write that down. 'Private Tim Hall'?"


"I think I almost have that one down pat," Phil stated. "It's kingdom, phyla... then order, family, and class in some order... and then genus and species."

"Very good. Kingdom, phyla, class, order, family, genus, species."

Phil leaned his head against the end of his right arm.

"... Okay, hot-shot, what's your word trick this time?"

"King Paul came over for great spaghetti," Jeremy recited.

"Umm... excuse me?" Phil put on an offended face. "I think you mean King Phillip, thank you very much!"

They both laughed as the barista brought over their coffees and a coffee cake, the exact same order they had made nearly three weeks ago.

"Oh, this is so much nicer," Phil commented, lifting the cup to his lips. "Mmm..."

"... Do you still remember the defining qualities of a living creature?"

Lowering the cup of coffee from his lips, it was Phil's turn to give him a knowing smile.

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*October 1, 1987*

"Are we there yet?" Jeremy asked, annoyed.

"Oh, shush. We're almost there," Phil confirmed, flicking his turn signal on. "You still have your eyes closed, right?"

Jeremy let out a heavy sigh.
"... Yes, Phil."

"I'm telling you, this would have been so much easier if you agreed to wear the blindfold," Phil nagged jokingly.

"Yes, but people have a tendency to call the police when they see a person blindfolded in a car," Jeremy argued.

"Fair enough," Phil said with a laugh, as they arrived at their destination. "Okay, when I tell you, you can open your eyes."

He made sure to find a parking spot near the front, so Jeremy would have a great view, and finally parked.

"All right, you can look!" Phil announced excitedly.

Jeremy opened his eyes, recognizing the tan paint job on the stone building, and more importantly, the words on the sign out front.

"'The Museum of Natural History'," he read aloud, a smile starting to spread on his face. "... you took me to the museum?"

"Yeah, if that's okay with you?"

"Of course it's okay!" Jeremy exclaimed. "I haven't been here before!"

"Oh, well... then you're really in for a treat!" Phil added. "See that greenhouse-looking attachment? It's got all those plants because it's a butterfly habitat. Or, uh... I know you said you don't like spiders or stinging insects... are butterflies okay? Because if they're not, we don't have to -"

"Butterflies, I can handle," Jeremy assured, putting a hand up.

"That's great! Because they're having a promo this week, and usually it costs about five dollars to go see the butterflies, but for this Monday through Friday only, they're letting students with IDs come in for free. You, uh, did bring yours, right?"

"Right," Jeremy confirmed, reaching into his pocket and pulling it out.

"Great! And since the museum is free to students all year, we've got nothing to worry about! We can stay as long as you like. And, if you're worried about people asking..." he nodded over his shoulder to the backseat, where there were two spiral notebooks. "... we just tell them we're taking notes for class!"

"Wow, you really planned this out," Jeremy marveled, as Phil passed him a pencil.

"I-I had to get something right eventually, didn't I?" he teased with a laugh.

Jeremy frowned.

"Hey... don't say it that way. You're doing a great job."

"You think so?" Phil blushed, looking off to the side.

"I know so," Jeremy said with a smile, before frowning again. "... That sounded so corny. I guess that's why people only say it on TV and not in real life."
Phil just laughed, finally getting out of the car, making sure they had their notebooks. After presenting their IDs and entering the museum, they took a look around the lobby, noticing the signs for the various wings, as well as a small group gathering for a tour.

"Should we take a tour?" Phil asked.

"I... don't think we should," Jeremy opined. "That way we can go at our own pace and look at stuff in whatever order we want."

"Fair enough. So, uh, what should we look at first?"

"I think we should save best for last, which is probably the butterfly habitat."

"Agreed," Phil said with a nod.

"So... maybe we'll go look at some archaeological stuff first?" Jeremy suggested.

"Yeah, sounds good!"

They spent their afternoon wandering through the exhibits, finding themselves interested in the archaeological history of the surrounding area, and in the displays presented in the other wings. Broken pottery from ancient civilizations... stone tools... it was when they got to the science exhibits that Jeremy completely changed, like a giddy schoolboy on his first field trip.

"Look at that one," Jeremy commented, pointing at what Phil thought was just a finely grooved orb in the glass display case. "You usually see fossil molds of trilobites presented flat... I've never seen them display one rolled up like that. They could curl up into little balls, like pill bugs, as a form of defense."

"Oh, do they share a common ancestor?" Phil inquired, earning a nod from Jeremy.

It almost felt like they had taken a tour; with Phil content to walk around and listen to Jeremy gush excitedly about one thing or another in the display cases. Egg shells, bones, feathers, teeth, even pointing out the occasional inaccuracy in exhibits.

"Like this, see?" Jeremy commented, pointing at a tiny turtle shell. "It talks about how 'like other reptiles, the infants are left to fend for themselves'. But that's not true. Mother alligators actually raise their young until they're about two years old."

"I'll keep that in mind if we study reptiles," Phil replied.

"If the course structures are the same, you'll study them next semester," Jeremy stated. "That being said, the third part of the semester deals with evolution, so remembering that there's a trade-off in caring for young versus the number of young produced might help."

Phil opened the notebook he had brought along, resting it against one of the display signs, to try and write down everything Jeremy said.

"If the mother gives birth to a large amount of offspring - like with insects and fish - they can just leave them be. Because while it's likely most of them will die, the few who survive will go on to do the same thing and produce large amounts of offspring. On the other hand, animals that typically produce small numbers of offspring, like elephants or birds, will focus on raising the infant to ensure it survives and has a chance to breed."

"Maybe being an only child has its perks after all," Phil commented with a smile.
They finally made their way out of the science exhibit, leaving only the butterfly garden for them to visit. Displaying their IDs and picking up two information pamphlets, they made their way out into the building, its walls constructed of reinforced glass to allow plenty of sunlight in. The tropical trees inside reached up to the ceiling, forming a green canopy over their heads. All around them, however, were colors from all over nature's spectrum in the form of butterflies and flowers.

"Oh, look at that one! It's a..." Phil pointed to a black and yellow butterfly at one of the feeding stations, before looking it up in his pamphlet. "... Three-tailed tiger swallowtail!"

"How about that one," Jeremy placed a hand on Phil's shoulder, turning him to look a little more to the left. He pointed upward, at a beautiful butterfly with iridescent blue wings. "Now THAT is a blue morpho butterfly if I ever saw one."

"... I'll probably study insects next semester too, huh?" Phil asked.

"Yep."

Phil glanced at Jeremy's hand, still on his shoulder, then up at Jeremy.

"... If it's all right with you, will you keep helping me study?"

"Absolutely," Jeremy confirmed. "It's been helping me stay sharp - no joke intended - for when I return to classes, you know? Oh, speaking of class... if you don't mind me asking... how do you think your exam went yesterday?"

"There were one or two questions I got hung up on... but otherwise, I felt pretty confident about the whole thing. I think it's safe to say I at least passed."

"That's good. You'll probably have your exam back by... next week, right? Let me know how you did," Jeremy said, gently pulling Phil a little closer to whisper into his ear. "... If you did really good... I'll, uh, make sure you're rewarded."

How fitting that they were surrounded by butterflies... Phil's face turned about as red as the wings of the *Callicore pitheas*, and he felt his heart flutter.

They wandered through the habitat, Jeremy pointing out all the different kinds of butterflies or just making general small talk, until they had made several laps around the area.

"This afternoon has been great!" Jeremy commented, as they finally left the habitat.

"It sure has," Phil agreed, casting one last look behind him at the butterfly habitat. "... Do you think we saw all the species?"

"It says there's at least sixty species kept here, so... probably not," Jeremy pointed out, then laughed. "It's all right! We'll come here again someday and see some new ones. Maybe Sophia or Ronaldo can come with us, too. Heather doesn't strike me as the butterfly type, although I could be wrong."

"I guess we'll wait and see," Phil said with a shrug.

"... Did you want to see anything else one more time while we're here?" Jeremy asked. "... Or... would you like to call it a day?"

"You know, there's one thing we technically haven't seen..." Phil remarked.

"What's that?"
"The gift shop," Phil suggested with a bright grin.

"Might be fun to at least look around," Jeremy added, as they both headed to the small section near the front of the museum.

They wandered around the gift shop, content to admire children getting excited about books and science-related toys. There was even a large bin of stuffed animals, most of them reptiles curiously enough, but there were a few mammals thrown in. Phil tried to hide a little squeak of delight when he found a small plush fox among the stash. He was content to hold it in his hand and admire the texture of the soft orange fabric before placing it back in the bin. He spotted Jeremy in a corner of the store that actually had a window; there was also a sign by the display indicating a sale. It seemed he had been examining various potted plants, specifically flowers, ideal for starting a butterfly garden. However, due to the upcoming fall and winter, the small plants were being sold at discounted prices.

"What do you think?" Jeremy asked, as Phil came walking up.

"Oh, they're all really pretty," Phil commented, admiring the colors. "... were you, uh, thinking of getting one?"

"The prices aren't half bad, and... I am kind of feeling inspired after all that walking we did," Jeremy admitted. "I think I'll take... this one."

He lifted a potted plant with tiny flowers arranged in spherical clusters. There were five petals on each of the tiny flowers that were darker pink near the center, fading to a light shade of pink - practically white - near the tips of the petals.

"Pentas," Phil read the tiny tag sticking out of the soil. "They're really pretty! But... uh... do you think the plant will be okay? Winter is coming, after all."

"It'll be all right. I'll move it indoors when it gets cold out. We have a sliding glass door to our porch, so it can get plenty of sunlight there when it's too cold to keep it outside."

"But what happens when it gets too big?" Phil asked. "Plants grow, Jeremy."

"I know, I know. And if that's the case, then I'll just plant it outside our apartment. It probably violates some kind of code about the property, but let's be honest, there's only trees and plain bushes around the complex, nothing but greens and browns. A little color would be a nice change. The complex might even thank me," Jeremy remarked.

"Can't argue with that," Phil smiled up at him.

"If you want to..." Jeremy looked over at the opposite corner of the store. "... wander around a little more, I don't mind. I'm going to look at a few other things before I check out."

He appeared perplexed for a moment, but Phil smiled and nodded, heading over to the other side of the store to check out the shirts.

"'Natural selection',' Phil read from the front of one of the t-shirts. "... 'good things come to those who mate'. Ha!" (2)

He browsed through shirts contentedly until Jeremy came up behind him, a shopping bag on the arm he used to carry the pentas, its plastic pot wrapped in a plastic bag to prevent soil from spilling on the floor.

"You ready to go?" Jeremy asked.
"Ready if you are," Phil confirmed, then looked over at the other bag. "What's in that one?"

"This one?" Jeremy asked, raising the bag by lifting his arm. "Well, you know how some gift shops are... they sometimes have free brochures, and I wanted to take a few. Other than that, yeah, I'm ready to go."

Phil drove Jeremy back to his apartment, this time allowed to keep his eyes open, chatting about everything they had seen that day and about what their next plans should be.

"All right, so... another Thursday date? A... Thursdate? No, that sounds silly..." Phil stated. "So, um, what would you like to do?"

"Depends on what you'd like to do," Jeremy said. "I'm treating you, remember?"

"Oh, um... I don't need anything special," Phil commented, as he pulled into the complex. "... why don't you just surprise me?"

"Hmm..." Jeremy scratched his chin. "... I think... I have an idea for something. I'll see if I can make it work."

"Sounds good! I can hardly wait!" Phil said, as he parked outside Jeremy's apartment. "Will you, uh, be able to get your stuff up to your apartment?"

"It's fine, only a plant, won't be a problem at all," Jeremy dismissed, picking up the bag with brochures by his feet. "I will confess... I lied to you earlier."

Phil appeared concerned, but Jeremy grinned and elaborated further.

"No, no, it's okay... no need to give me that look. Ha, don't give me that look either," Jeremy said, reaching into the bag. "I guess you could say that the surprise starts now?"

Phil gasped, a small smile on his face, as Jeremy removed the plush fox he had seen at the gift shop from the bag and handed it to him.

"I saw you eyeing it earlier, so I just... went ahead and got it for you. Like my way of congratulating you for getting through the first exam, and more importantly, for taking care of yourself."

"Oh, Jeremy..." Phil cooed, still gazing at the stuffed animal he held in his arms. He lifted his gaze, beaming at Jeremy, who smiled back. He cast a quick glance out the front window - only to spot a man cleaning up after his dog on the lawn. Phil let out a small sigh.

"... Better let you go before this car stalling here gets too suspicious, huh?" he asked, looking down in disappointment.

Jeremy reached out a hand, gently tilting his chin up so their eyes met again.

"Hey..." Jeremy spoke gently, lowering his hand. "... pass or fail... celebration or comfort... I'll make sure you get a kiss next Thursday, if not earlier."

That adorable excited smile returned to Phil's face.

"Now I really can't wait!"

Jeremy laughed and stepped out of the car.
"See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

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October 8, 1987

Phil ran out of his apartment, exam in his hand, the moment he saw Jeremy's car pull up outside. He'd gotten the score back yesterday, and he had been waiting for Jeremy's afternoon shift to end so he could finally show him in person. Even if it was dark out.

"I can only presume you did well," Jeremy commented, opening the door, the interior lights of the car turning on.

"Oh, I did more than just well, Jer! Look at this!" Phil's voice nearly squeaked at the end, as he practically shoved the paper in Jeremy's face. "A ninety-eight percent!"

"Very nice!" Jeremy complimented, holding the paper at a more acceptable distance to read over the exam.

"So, uh... what are we gonna do?" Phil asked quietly. He didn't really want to stand outside for too long, as October was quickly proving to be much chillier than September.

Jeremy placed the paper aside in the front seat, then held out a hand to him. Phil took it, Jeremy gently pulling him in closer.

"Should I, uh... get in the car...?" Phil asked, his face inches from Jeremy's.

"Yeah."

"But, uh..." he hadn't really noticed before, but Jeremy must have been doing some kind of side job for work, because the back seats and even the front one were loaded with boxes. "... there's no room..."

Silently, Jeremy let go of Phil's hand to unbuckle his seatbelt and pull on a small lever underneath his seat. Pushing with his legs, he slid the driver's seat as far back as it could go.

"It's okay... I didn't plan to take us anywhere, anyway. Save some money," Jeremy explained with a mischievous smirk, extending a hand to Phil again.

He couldn't help but grin as he took Jeremy's hand, stepping into the car and closing the door behind him. His knees straddling Jeremy's lap, he placed his hand on his shoulder and leaned down to kiss him. Jeremy's hands glided up and down his back slowly as they kissed, a deep moan rising in his chest. Then his hands trailed around to the front, finding the top button on Phil's shirt, and slipped it out of its hole.

"Very nice..." Jeremy mused thoughtfully, as their lips separated.

Phil leaned back a little, content to watch Jeremy's handiwork, as he continued undoing the buttons all the way down his shirt. He kissed him again, this time placing his hands on his waist, cool against his bare skin. Jeremy gently traced his hands up, past his ribcage, bringing them around closer to the front of his chest. Phil moaned against his lips as Jeremy's thumbs pressed against his nipples, kneading them, massaging tiny circles around them.
"You're still okay with this?" Jeremy asked, pulling out of the kiss, lifting his thumbs for a moment.

"Oh, G-God, yes," Phil whispered, resting his forehead against Jeremy's.

Jeremy let out a satisfied chuckle, before moving his hands down to the waistline of Phil's pants. He undid one final button, content to let a hand slide teasingly down the front of Phil's stomach. Phil shuddered, his breath shaking and his hand trembling on Jeremy's shoulder. Jeremy gently let his lips trail down Phil's jawline, down to his neck - God, he was so sensitive there - planting his lips against one side before he sucked, Phil letting out a pleased moan, as Jeremy's hand finally trailed down below the line of his pants. The way his mouth moved, it was sure to leave a -

At that moment, logic suddenly took over, and Phil tried to gently separate himself from Jeremy with a light shove, but he pushed off too hard and fell backwards, his hand hitting the knob that controlled the volume of the car's radio.

All of a sudden, the voices of Chicago filled his ears, and all of a sudden, Phil was pulling himself up out of bed. Turning off the radio alarm and throwing the covers off, he hurried over to the mirror by the dresser, checking both sides of his neck. No spots. He let out a relieved sigh, gathering his clothes for the day.

Heading into the bathroom, he placed his clean clothes on the counter, stripped down, and stepped into the shower.

A ninety-eight percent? Phil smiled wryly, turning on the faucet and letting the hot water rain down on him. In his dreams.

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It was finally six o'clock, and this time it was Jeremy's turn to pick up Phil. Dressed in his Pirate Cove shirt and a pair of gray sweatpants, Phil hurried out to the parking lot. Sure enough, Jeremy's Ford Escort was already waiting for him. He slowed down a little... just to make sure he didn't see anything occupying the passenger seats. Nope, it was just Jeremy.

"Hey, you," Phil said, as he opened the door to the front seat and crawled into the seat beside Jeremy.

"Hey, you," Jeremy replied, shifting gears and pulling out of the parking space once Phil had buckled his seatbelt. "... Don't leave me hanging, how'd you do?"

Phil smiled proudly.

"King Phillip... made an eighty-eight!"

"Nice!" Jeremy exchanged a high five with him before they pulled out of the complex. "And your other classes are still going okay?"

"Yeah," Phil confirmed. "Soo... where are we going?"

"Hey, come on, you know how this stuff works," Jeremy said with a grin. "If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise."

"Not even a hint?"

"Nope."
Phil rolled his eyes but smiled, content to look out the window until the scenery started to look familiar.

"... We're going to Lakeview, aren't we?" he asked.

"I'm not saying," Jeremy teased, his eyes on the road, unable to conceal the little smile on his face.

Sure enough, Jeremy activated his turn signal as they approached the sign outside the park, and he pulled in. The trees that had been mostly green exactly a month ago had now turned yellow, starting to lose their leaves as the weather got colder. He could even hear acorns cracking underneath the tires as Jeremy drove the car, until at last they were greeted by the view of the lake, its waters aquamarine as the sun started to set.

Jeremy pulled into the same parking spot they had used a month ago, but didn't completely turn the car off. He opened the compartment hidden in the armrest between their seats.

"How about some music with dinner?" Jeremy asked, removing a cassette tape from the compartment.

"I'd love it," Phil agreed with a smile. "... I take it, uh, the music on the tape is a surprise?"

Jeremy just smiled and popped the cassette into the built-in player. A few moments of static later, the rich tones of a trumpet floated out of the speakers.

"Is that..." Phil raised an eyebrow. "... is that ol' Satchmo?"

"Yep," Jeremy confirmed, unbuckling his seatbelt.

He waited for Phil to get out of the car before turning up the volume, then he pressed the lever to pop open the trunk. Jeremy stepped out as well, leaving the windows rolled down so they could still hear the music. He walked over and opened the trunk all the way, revealing two foldable chairs and a cooler.

"Just please be careful with handling your chair, like avoid spills and stuff. I'm sure you will, but I wanted to be safe and ask," Jeremy requested, handing one of the chairs to Phil. "... Pat let me borrow them."

"Oh, nice!" Phil commented. "And yeah, no worries, I-I'll be careful."

Jeremy nodded in agreement, tucking a chair under his arm and carrying the cooler in his free hand. They both walked a few steps away from the car, out into the grass, stopping a safe distance from where it sloped down to meet the lake's water.

"Nice view of the lake. We can watch the sunset. The park... technically closes at dark, but there's still some light out even after the sun goes down," Jeremy commented, setting down his chair to the left of Phil's and placing the cooler in front of him.

"All right, what's for dinner?" Phil asked, leaning over in his seat to try to sneak a peek.

Jeremy opened the cooler, two plastic bags on the top. He reached into them to pull out two sandwiches wrapped in paper.

"Two Picnix half-sub," he stated, handing one to Phil. "... I figured you'd be okay with an Italian?"

"That is fine by me," Phil confirmed, eagerly taking it from him.
"And for drinks..." Jeremy dug around in the ice, before fishing out two glass bottles of root beer. "... sorry. I came here on Tuesday on my day off to double-check the park rules, and sure enough, they don't allow alcohol. So I thought these might compensate. I probably would've bought a root beer for myself anyway, since I'm driving."

"Can't go wrong with a frosty root beer," Phil chimed in, as Jeremy handed him one of the bottles.

Jeremy removed a keychain from his pocket with a bottle opener attached. Showing it to Phil, he smiled and held out his bottle for Jeremy to pop the cap off. After doing the same to his own bottle, Jeremy held it out towards Phil with a smile. Phil smiled as well, tapping his bottle of root beer to Jeremy's with a harmonious clink.

"So, what kind did you buy?" Phil asked, setting his bottle down on the ground near his feet.

"I went for the ultimate," Jeremy replied. "Turkey, roast beef, and ham."

"You know, I actually haven't tried that one," Phil commented, now patiently unwrapping his sub. "Maybe I'll get it next time."

They sat there silently, content to eat and listen to the sprightly trumpet and deep rumbling voice of Louis Armstrong as the world changed color around them. The park ranger did drive by, giving them a heads-up about the park closing in about fifteen minutes, but Jeremy assured her they were close to leaving, the sun now looking like an orange slice lying on the horizon.

"Are we really leaving already?" Phil asked, lowering the now empty bottle of root beer from his lips.

"Not really." Jeremy confessed, walking over to take his seat again. "We gotta wait for it to go all the way down."

The slice was looking more like a sliver now, Phil trying to time when the sun would completely disappear.

"Five... four... three... two..." he laughed and started over, the sun not quite down. "Five... fo-"

Phil's voice cut off when he felt Jeremy take his hand.

"... Countdowns are childish, anyway," Phil dismissed with a chuckle.

They both leaned in, exchanging a quick kiss as the sun finally dipped below the horizon, the sky and lake now shades of lavender and blue. As soon as it had happened, it was over, both of them looking over to make sure the ranger or any other departing visitors hadn't been gawking.

"Looks like we're clear," Jeremy stated softly, standing up. "... though we should probably head back now."

"Yeah," Phil muttered reluctantly.

Throwing away their trash, and tucking their chairs and cooler back into the trunk, Jeremy quickly turned down the volume on his car's stereo before he and Phil sat down inside.

Louis Armstrong serenaded them quietly as Jeremy drove Phil back to his apartment.

"... Was it okay?" Jeremy asked quietly.

Phil looked over at him, smiling.
"Of course it was, I had a good time," he reassured.

"You did?" Jeremy seemed to be in disbelief.

"Yes, really," Phil placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I-I know the money situation is tough, and I know that you're worried about trying to, uh, put on a good impression or something... but, really, after all the stress of this job and class... nothing makes me happier than just being with you. Money can't buy that, you know?"

He rubbed Jeremy's shoulder.

"Just take me to... the park, the library... uh, anywhere that's free, really. Save the money for your needs," Phil reassured, giving Jeremy's a shoulder a gentle squeeze. "I-I want what's best for, uh, my boyfriend."

Jeremy smiled, reaching over with his left hand to gently squeeze Phil's hand in his own for a brief moment as he drove.

They finally reached Phil's apartment complex, but... Jeremy stalled in the lot instead, looking up at one of the streetlights.

"Hey, Phil..." Jeremy said, looking away from the light so his vision could return to normal. "... Are there any parking spots further away from these lights?"

"Um..." Phil thought for a moment. "Well, it isn't exactly far away from a light, but... down in the next lot, there's a really big tree that might offer some shade..."

Quietly, Jeremy drove ahead, sure enough spotting the large tree. And there was one parking space available underneath it, on the side further away from the streetlight. Jeremy pulled in and parked the car, even turning the engine off.

Phil sat there quietly, waiting for Jeremy to say something.

"... Backseat?" he asked, his voice above a whisper.

Phil nodded silently, his heartbeat starting to speed up, as both of them stepped out of the car to move to the backseat. Closing the doors, they waited until the automatic light overhead went off, Jeremy checking out each of the windows one last time.

They both sat there quietly for a moment, waiting for the other to make a move. This time it was Jeremy who took the initiative, gently resting his hands against Phil's cheeks like their first kiss.

"Umm..." Jeremy mumbled. "... May I...?"

He could feel Phil's cheeks move against his hands as he smiled.

"Yes."

Closing his eyes, Jeremy leaned in slowly and kissed him, Phil's hand scooping underneath his arm to rest against Jeremy's shoulder, pulling him in a little closer. They hadn't ever been this close before. Save for Phil's dreams, but... he wasn't quite ready to talk about that. Just the thought of it, though... his fingers curled slightly in Jeremy's shirt and he let out a soft moan.

Jeremy's lips parted against his own, brushing against his upper and then his lower lip. Phil tried to move his mouth to match... it sucked not having any experience kissing... it would probably make
things a lot less awkward. But Jeremy slowed down his pace, kept his movements smaller... and Phil was starting to get the hang of it. A warm rush was starting to spread through his body, and he let go of Jeremy's shirt.

Phil gently took hold of Jeremy's hand and lowered it down to his waist, just... curious... to see what would happen. Jeremy placed his other hand on the opposite side, gently drawing him in a little more. It felt pretty good, Phil decided, letting a hand run through Jeremy's brown hair. God, he just wanted to pull him in closer somehow, reel him in, just -

Phil had started leaning backwards as his thoughts raced through his head, to the point that he lost his balance, falling against the car door with a grunt, Jeremy on top of him.

"Are you okay?" Jeremy asked, helping Phil sit up straight.

"Yeah, mmmhm," Phil said, now rubbing the back of his head. "Probably won't even leave a bump."

"Okay..." Jeremy said, straightening his glasses. "So, um, how was it?"

"It felt really good," Phil complimented.

"I-it did?" Jeremy asked. "Oh, uh... thanks."

"... What's wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing!" Jeremy assured. "I-it's just, well... just because I have kissed someone before doesn't mean I'm good at it."

"You've kissed more people than me, so I can't judge," Phil shrugged. "... but really, I did enjoy it."

Jeremy fiddled with his glasses with a modest laugh. Phil leaned in for another kiss, but Jeremy pulled out of it shortly after.

"Sorry..." Jeremy apologized. "I just think it's getting a little late..."

"No, it's fine. You're right," Phil agreed. "Although... uh... maybe we could make plans for next week?"

Jeremy let out a disappointed sigh.

"Of all the possible days... Picnix is going to work me to the bone next Thursday."

"What? Really?!" Phil asked.

"I'm in from eight until seven," Jeremy groaned.

"Yeesh, and I thought Freddy could be cruel. I'm sorry, Jer," Phil sympathized. "Maybe next week will be better?"

"... Maybe," Jeremy replied, though he didn't seem convinced.

Phil reached out his hand, gently resting it on Jeremy's cheek, leaning in to give him a kiss on the other. Jeremy placed his hand over Phil's, gently holding it there, Phil leaning in to press his lips against Jeremy's one more time.

"I'm here for you too, okay?" Phil whispered. "If things are getting rough, just... call me and let me know."
"... I will."

Jeremy leaned in to give him one more kiss, before letting go of his hand.

"Alright, I'm gonna let you go. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy," Phil replied, before climbing out of the backseat.

October 12, 1987

Curiosity ate away at Phil as he drove down the road, remembering Jeremy's phone call last night.

"... So, I wanted to call and ask if you were available for lunch tomorrow?"

"This is kind of sudden, Jer, but... yeah, my schedule's open."

"Great! Um, just head to The Wizard's Brew, and look for us when you get there. This is going to be great! Have a good night, okay? See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

The sudden invitation was certainly curious, but he was far more intrigued by one word in their conversation.

*Us.*

Jeremy would have said something if it was one of their friends, like Heather, so why the vagueness? Was it meant to be a surprise? Perhaps he was finally going to meet Pat?

Well, he was sure to get an answer soon, as he pulled into the parking lot. Right next to Jeremy's car, no less. His feet pattered up the wooden steps as he ducked inside the main store, the floorboards creaking welcomingly, as he walked into the cafe portion of the shop.

Phil spotted Jeremy at a round table on the other cafe, looking over something in a notebook with the girl seated next to him. She wore glasses, like Jeremy, although hers were circular compared with Jeremy's elliptical ones. Her hair reached down to her shoulders, and it was a lovely shade of brown... like Jeremy's hair.

It was at this moment that Jeremy looked up and immediately spotted Phil, eagerly waving him over with an excited grin. Phil walked over, still slightly shocked, as Jeremy said something to the girl.

"So... you're Phil, right?" she asked, her voice light and friendly, as she extended her right hand to shake. Jeremy gently nudged her with his elbow, and she pulled her hand back, sticking out her left one instead.

"Yeah, uh, it's nice to meet you, too..." he shook hands with her. "... Rachel...?"

She beamed and nodded.

"Grab a seat," Jeremy invited. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Oh, uh... maybe... I might try something new," Phil commented, looking over at Rachel as he took a seat across from Jeremy. "What did you order?"
She shrugged.

"Water," she stated with a small laugh.

"You know, I've got plenty of coffee at home, even if it isn't this fancy stuff. A glass of ice-cold water would be a nice change of pace."

Jeremy got up to place Phil's order with the barista, leaving Phil alone with Rachel for a moment.

"So, uh... what brings you here?" he asked. "I mean, don't you have classes?"

"Nah," Rachel waved it off. "Don't you know? It's Columbus Day, so we have the day off."

"Oh... kinda wish the university did the same thing," Phil muttered, earning a laugh from Rachel. "But, uh, anyway, how did you get here? Like... you're in ninth grade, right? So, uh, you don't have your license yet..."

"No," Rachel admitted. "...but my boyfriend drove me here, since the university is already trying to recruit him for the football team."

"Oh, so he's, uh, older than you by a few years, huh?"

"That's probably why Jeremy's so protective," Rachel sighed, shaking her head. "...Then again... I could be the junior and he could be the freshman, and he'd still be a worrywart."

Phil couldn't help but chuckle slightly. Before he could ask another question, Jeremy had brought over his glass of water.

"So, you know, I'm studying biology right now, just like you," Rachel commented, quickly changing the subject. She was a pretty smart girl.

"...Did I miss any details about your boyfriend?" Jeremy inquired, raising an eyebrow. Scratch that, both the Fitzgerald children were pretty smart.

She stuck her tongue out at her older brother indignantly, before resuming her conversation with Phil.

"Anyway, I think Jeremy said that you were studying genetics right now...? We aren't going as in-depth as you, since you're spending about a third of the semester on it, but maybe you'd like to help me with my homework for practice?"

"I, uh..." he looked over at Jeremy, who nodded encouragingly. "Yeah. Show me what you're working with right now."

She sketched out a square in her notebook, then divided it into four sections.

"Punnett squares," Rachel stated.

"All right, um... what are the potential genotypes that can come from...?" Phil thought it over in his head a moment. "A dominant heterozygous parent and a recessive heterozygous parent?"

"I think you mean homozygous," Rachel corrected. "Because the letters are the same - two capitals for the dominant gene and two smalls for the recessive gene."

"Oh, r-right, uh... sorry. So, um, we write the letters along the sides," Phil instructed, writing out the letters 'AA' and 'aa'. "...And then..."
Oh, all the children will have the same genotype!" Rachel exclaimed. "Because every potential offspring is heterozygous!"

"Okay, but you have to write it out," Jeremy stated. "High school teachers want to see your work... even if you can figure out stuff in your head."

"Like math," Rachel grumbled, starting to fill in the square. While she had her head down, Jeremy smiled and winked at Phil.

"They have you learning about just monohybrid crosses," Jeremy commented to Rachel, before looking over at Phil. "You learn about dihybrid crosses when you get to college. Wanna see?"

"Yeah!" Rachel piped up excitedly.

Jeremy sketched out a larger square, big enough to create sixteen squares inside it.

"Now, we could do this the easy way and combine parents with homozygous genotypes on two traits - two, because it's dihybrid - but let's do this the fun way with heterozygous genotypes. Because we have two traits we're working with, however, we have to take all the possible typings into account. So one parent might pass on... 'dominant A, dominant B', but the other might pass on 'dominant A, recessive b'."

He wrote out the various combinations along the top and the side - 'AB', 'Ab', 'aB', and 'ab' - one per column and row.

"After that you just kind of make the matches and determine the phenotypes," Jeremy stated, drawing a circle and a square, writing 'A' in the circle and 'a' in the square. He also wrote out the letters 'B' and 'b', lightly running the edge of the pencil tip over the 'b' to give it shading. "How many of each shape and color will you get?"

With that, he passed the paper back to Rachel. As she began to fill in the table, Jeremy looked over at Phil.

"I should have you do one of these too," Jeremy commented.

"I'll just, uh, watch and learn from the pro," Phil replied, content to watch Rachel work, already halfway through filling out the letters. "... Hey, Jeremy?"

"Yeah?"

"I think you've said you're not really interested in, uh, pursuing medicine... but what about grad school in general?" Phil asked. "I mean... you really seem to like teaching this stuff, so... why not become a professor? Or maybe just do research?"

Jeremy's lips tightened, slouching forward to rest his chin against his hand.

"Actually? I've... I've been considering it more and more, lately. Maybe helping you study is helping me remember why I love the subject so much," Jeremy let out a sigh. "... I don't know. I kind of feel like I should focus on getting my bachelor's degree first. And that means making it through this year first, too. It gets harder to get scholarships when you reach grad school, and the fact that it already costs more doesn't help."

"... But... you're okay with money now... right?" Rachel asked quietly, tilting her head away from her paper to look up at her brother.
"Yes, I'm fine, don't worry," Jeremy reassured quickly, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Don't forget to draw the phenotypes, okay? You remember the difference between phenotype and genotype?"

"'Ph' for physical, 'ge' for genetics. I got it," Rachel replied, lowering her view to the notebook.

"'Ph' for physical, 'ge' for genetics. I'll remember that too," Phil stated.

"How about you, Phil?" Jeremy asked. "You're taking business classes, but you still haven't declared your major."

"This conversation got deep really fast," Phil observed, taking a sip of water. "I, uh... I-I always thought I would just inherit the company from my father... I mean, I just figured that was e-expected of me, so I... I-I thought I'd plan accordingly..."

He watched a small droplet trail down the side of the glass.

"... But...?" Jeremy asked.

"I-I don't know... I've never really felt like the kind of guy meant to run a business... and my psychology of happiness course just made things even more, uh, confusing. I've worked as a dish boy, a cashier, and a party host at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza over the years prior to becoming an assistant manager. And out of the four positions... I'd probably say hosting parties was my favorite thing to do. I-It's a lot less stressful than management, first of all. And second, the reason I loved it so much was simple... I just really liked making people happy."

Jeremy smiled and nodded.

"So it's like... I want to help people find more joy in their life, maybe share some of my happiness with them, you know? So, um... I don't really think being a psychologist or counsellor would be my thing... too complicated. And too much education," Phil scratched his head.

"I know it's kind of... putting you back at square one... but maybe that business degree would be a good idea," Jeremy offered. "But instead of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, maybe you could start your own business."

"My own business?" Phil repeated.

"Yeah, and then you would just do business stuff, like... offer products or services to make people happy."

"... Like toys? O-or maybe a little shop that sells cards and little gifts, like those tiny paperweight statues people give out when they don't know what to give the other person?"

"Or flowers!" Rachel suggested, then looked over at Jeremy. "Done. There's a nine to three to three to one ratio."

"One hundred percent correct," Jeremy commented, grinning over at her. "Looks like someone could be on their way to valedictorian in a few years."

Phil gasped in excitement.

"Jeremy...! What about, uh, that butterfly garden, like at the museum last week?" Phil exclaimed. "What if I make it like an outdoor shop, where people can wander through the flowers and admire the butterflies?"
"Putting a restaurant or a drink stand in there might help, too," Rachel added. "Who doesn't love the thought of drinking a tall glass of something nice and cool surrounded by flowers and butterflies?"

"It certainly sounds beautiful," Phil marveled, picturing himself sipping lemonade and surrounded by yellow daffodils and tiger swallowtails.

"And what would you call it?" Rachel asked.

"Phillip's Kingdom," he stated with a snicker, earning a laugh from Jeremy. "... Hmm... I'd have to think about that. It would be best if customers knew what they were getting when they came to the store."

"The Mellow Morpho," Jeremy stated quietly, looking up at Phil in surprise as if he hadn't meant to say that.

"Oh, that's lovely! Uh, lemme write that down..." Phil stated, Rachel immediately tearing a page out of the notebook and passing it to Phil with her pencil. "Oh! Thank you, Rachel."

He wrote the name down on the paper, adding a few notes, then folded and tucked it into his pocket. As he handed the pencil back to Rachel, she noticed his watch.

"Oh no!"

"What's wrong?" Phil asked, checking his watch.

"My boyfriend..." Rachel stated. "I think he's probably almost done with the interview... he said it would be around one... so I need to head back to the stadium, since he's my ride home!"

Jeremy let out a sigh.

"Okay, fine... I'll take you back to campus to see him," he relented. "But I'll make sure he- "

"He knows his boundaries and respects me," Rachel recited, rolling her eyes, as they stood up at the table. "I get it, Jer, I'll be fine."

"Sorry, Phil," Jeremy apologized. "We probably should've spent more time studying."

"No, no, it's fine!" he reassured. "With Rachel here, I think it was for the best that we just had fun talking for a while."

Phil walked with them out into the parking lot - he would have class in under an hour anyway - to bid them farewell.

"Bye, Phil!" Rachel said, hugging him. "It was so nice to meet you."

"Oh, heh, it was nice to meet you too," he replied, awkwardly patting her back.

"And we can keep in touch through Jeremy," Rachel added, as she let go of him.

"Oh, um, how about if I just jotted down your number really quick?" Phil suggested, starting to reach into his pocket for the sheet of paper, but cast a glance at Jeremy. "... or, uh, does that sound too weird?"

"Phil, I trust you. Of course I'd be okay with it. The problem is..." Jeremy let out a sigh.

"... I'm still in high school, remember?" Rachel said, looking over at her brother. "You'd technically
also have our parents' number as well, and... they might not be too happy if they knew who you were."

"Oh... right..." Phil recalled, looking over at Jeremy. "We're always having such great times together and... sometimes I-I forget how hard it is."

"You guys will find a way," Rachel encouraged. "You've got my support."

"I... think I'm going to take her over to the stadium now," Jeremy stated. "I'll talk to you later, okay? See ya, Phil."

"Bye, Jeremy."

The Fitzgerald siblings climbed into the Ford Escort, Jeremy (and Rachel) waving to Phil one last time before they pulled out of the lot. He stood in the lot for a little bit longer, noticing the breeze whirling around him briefly, and he remembered just how cold autumn could be.

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October 16, 1987

"You're up early," Jeremy commented, as Heather stepped into the checkout line.

"Eh, figured I'd grab a little bottle of OJ before heading to Freddy's," she remarked, waving the bottle around before setting it on the belt. "I heard about that terrible shift they gave you on Thursday."

"I needed it," Jeremy replied. "They gave me Monday through Wednesday off, as well as Saturday, and I'm in for only two more hours today."

As he scanned the bottle of orange juice, Heather's eyes narrowed.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold the phone. Are... are your hours getting cut?" she questioned.

"Your total is ninety-five cents," he stated, keeping his eyes down. "... Someone with connections to the manager was hired... he let them come on as full-time, so all the part-timers are getting their hours cut. I was already short an hour or two because of the new part-timer, but this was a dramatic change."

"Oh, Jeremy..."

Jeremy couldn't help but smile wryly.

"I've never seen you look so worried before, Heather."

"Well of course I'm worried about you, damn it!" she snapped. "... are you going to be able to afford food and rent this month?"

Jeremy sighed and shook his head.

"I can pay this month, and I've got a good share of food with a few dollars left in my budget," he tightened his lips as Heather handed him a dollar. "But I'm probably gonna have to find a second job in November if I'm going to keep eating. The sooner, the better. Here's your change."

He handed her a nickel.
Jeremy, listen, I know there's some stubborn or proud part of you that doesn't want to ask for help from us, but PLEASE. JEREMY. We can lend you money and HELP YOU.

"I can borrow money, I know, but where does it stop? If my hours keep getting cut, to the point that they just let me go, what about borrowing then? We're all basically in minimum wage jobs at one of the most expensive points in our lives. I appreciate the concern, I do, but I still have a little time left... and I'd like to try to figure things out on my own. If I can't, I will ask you guys for help, okay?"

"Alright," Heather replied, taking her juice, keeping her eyes on Jeremy. "See you later."

Oh... thank goodness... you're just in time...!" Phil panted, running up to Heather in the Game Room. "I-I managed to... get the kids out... but-

"Loxy?" she raised an eyebrow.

Phil nodded, still trying to catch his breath, as Heather shook her head.

"Let me clock in first."

After punching in to work, she hurried to the Parts & Service room. She collected her toolbox and met up with Phil in the hallway, before they headed back to Kids' Cove. Upon their arrival, however, they were surprised to find that a girl, possibly about ten years old, had returned to Kids Cove, attempting to put one of the eyeballs back in place. Upon noticing the adults in the room, however, she gasped and backed away.

"I-I didn't do it!" she exclaimed. "My little brother was one of the kids in here earlier... I just wanted to see if I could fix anything."

"You're into fixing stuff?" Heather asked, walking over and sitting beside her. "Well, first of all, you can't just shove it into place."

She held up the eyeball, turning it to reveal the peg on the other side.

"See the grooves? You gotta twist it in, like a screw," she handed it to the girl, who began trying to twist it back into place to no avail. "Nope, other way - 'lefty-loosey, righty-tighty', okay?"

Heather worked and chatted with the girl, showing her where the parts went together and talking about mechanical work. Phil smiled, wondering if this was similar to how Heather developed her love of engineering, before he turned to leave.

"Another break, huh?"

He had almost walked straight into his uncle.

"U-Uncle, uh, yes... I-I was just about to report this to you. I found Heather just as she arrived, uh, and had her come take a look as soon as she clocked in."

Frank looked over his shoulder.

"That girl actually trying to help fix it?"

"I... w-well, I don't think at her age and uh, skill level, she'd be able to do much... but at least it's a good learning experience, you know?"
Frank raised his eyebrows.

"... Learning experience, you say?" he rubbed his chin. "Carras!"

"Yes, sir?" Heather asked, standing up abruptly.

"Step away from the animatronic. It's fine the way it is," Frank stated. "We aren't wasting another dime trying to fix that thing."

"But, sir," Heather protested. "She's just a mangled mess of parts now!"

"What's wrong with that?" Frank asked, shrugging. "Kids like puzzles and hands-on activities. Think of this as like... an educational attraction. Parents these days are DRAWN to that educational stuff. And when the kids talk about how 'I learned how robots work thanks to... uh, Mangle', their parents will think about how glad they were they sent their kids to this Freddy Fazbear's Pizza location."

"But Uncle, those teeth are kind of sharp... and if Loxy's getting broken apart, what about sharp metal edges or, uh, fingers getting pinched?"

"What about kids getting stepped on in a ball pit? What about kids getting hurt because they chose to go down a slide the wrong way? Let kids be kids and get some bumps and bruises. If there's anything real bad, I'm sure Troy or Sophia can just slap a bandage on it," Frank laughed. "Freddy better watch out... Mangle might be the new face of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza after this!"

October 22, 1987

It was a little hard to move furniture with two arms and only one hand, but Phil had finally managed to adjust the large TV in his living room to face the sofa, recliner, and two of the chairs he had dragged out of the small dining room, all circled around a mahogany coffee table with a take-out menu placed on it. Phil had already decided he wanted the 'Happy Family' special, and would order some steamed dumplings for everyone to share as well.

Shortly after the 'Mangle' incident on Friday, he'd had a chance to speak with Heather, Ronaldo, and Sophia about their schedules, pleased to find they all had Thursday night available. He had called Jeremy and was excited to hear that he would be available that evening as well. Phil even went a step further, telling Heather and Jeremy to invite Fritz and Pat, but neither of them had been available. He considered even inviting George, but... Phil decided to be selfish and just stick with the same four friends as always, since he knew they wouldn't judge if he and Jeremy got a little... 'cuddly'... during the movie tonight.

Far less expensive than going out to eat, they had decided on following Sophia's original suggestion of getting Chinese take-out, leaving the decision of renting a movie to Ronaldo, suggesting he pick something in Spanish that everyone was familiar with so no translations would be necessary. All that was left was deciding on whose apartment to crash... and considering that one of Heather's roommates was already having guests over, and that Pat had declined due to the stomach flu, it left Phil's apartment as the prime choice for the get-together.

There was a knock at the door, and Phil hustled over to get it, hoping it would be who he thought it was.

"Hey... I hope you don't mind if I showed up a little early?" Jeremy asked, holding up one of the pentas clusters between his finger and thumb. "I even picked a whole bouquet of flowers for you."
"Get in here, you," Phil chuckled, closing the door behind Jeremy before leaning up on his toes to give him a little kiss. "How've you been?"

"Uh... pretty good," Jeremy said, gently placing the pentas on one of the sofa's armrests.

He pulled Phil in for a longer kiss, his hands against the small of his back, a small but pleased moan passing from Phil's lips.

Of course, that wasn't going to last for long, as a knock came at the door once again.

"I'll get it," Phil stated, opening the door.

Ronaldo, Sophia, and Heather were all waiting outside excitedly.

"Hi, Jeremy!" the trio exclaimed when they saw him.

"... Hello to you guys too," Phil muttered, but laughed.

Some hugs were exchanged as everyone chatted briefly, before settling in the living room.

"Okay, so, uh... maybe we should have everyone pick out what they want to order first," Phil commented, taking a seat in one of the dining room chairs as he pointed to the menu on the table.

"What are you doing sitting on that?" Sophia asked, pointing over to the sofa. "Sit on the couch, it's much comfier... and has room for two."

She winked at the last part, as Phil tried to hide a smile as he sat down on the sofa by Jeremy, who draped an arm over his shoulders.

"Okay... I'm going to get the Szechuan chicken... and you probably want the beef and broccoli, right, sweetie?" Sophia said, looking over at Ronaldo, who nodded.

"General Tso's chicken for me," Heather stated. "What about you guys?"

"Oh, uh, I already know what I'm going to order," Phil stated, then looked over at Jeremy. "What would you like, Jer?"

"O-oh... um..." he looked over the expansive menu - chicken, pork, beef, seafood, vegetables, lo mein, so many choices... "... um... I just want a small order of white rice."

He noticed the look Heather gave him.

"Pat's sick, okay? I just want to be easy on my stomach in case I get sick soon," Jeremy defended.

"It's okay, Jeremy, you can order whatever you want. But, uh, my order's pretty big, so maybe you can have some of that if your rice isn't enough? Oh, and I also plan to order dumplings for everyone, too."

"Awesome, this is the life!" Heather sprang up and flopped down into the recliner, popping out the footrest.

"Heather! Be careful! The apartment was pre-furnished, so that's not my chair!" Phil scolded, standing up, before heading to the kitchen. "I'm gonna call in the orders..."

"Sorry man, I'm just kind of excited... we haven't all gotten together for like... what, almost two whole months? Geez, be nice to your guests, _tu casa es mi casa_ and all!"
"That is... not how you say it," Ronaldo stated slowly, sitting in one of the dining room chairs with Sophia by his side.

As Phil called in their order, Heather looked over at Ronaldo, tape still in his hand.

"So, what'd you pick for us to watch?"

"I found this at the library," he stated, holding up the tape. "It is called *Rosemary's Baby.*" (3)

"...I've never seen that one, have you?" Jeremy asked, looking over at Heather, who shook her head. Sophia shrugged as well.

"Oh, this is good!" Ronaldo exclaimed. "I have not seen it either. But it says 'subtítulos en español', so that means I can read Spanish words on the movie, but the people speak English. It will be a new experience for us all!"

"All right, the orders are in, they'll deliver our food in about half an hour. Should we start the movie, or should we eat *while* we watch the film?" Phil asked, sitting down next to Jeremy again. "By the way, what are we watching?"

"*Rosemary's Baby,*" Jeremy explained.

"Oh, uh, I haven't seen it..." Phil commented.

"Neither have we!" Sophia exclaimed. "So it's going to be a new experience for everyone!"

They turned on the TV, watching part of an old Star Trek episode, until the Chinese food arrived. Once the delivery man was paid and tipped, the food was set out on the coffee table for everyone to enjoy as Phil popped the tape into his VCR.

It was a charming tale of newlyweds moving into their new apartment and meeting the fellow tenants... even though the first one they met was keen on telling them eerie stories about previous residents. It got worse when the couple heard chanting one night... and then a few nights later, Rosemary's friend, Terry, was found dead shortly after they had met.

Things lightened up for a while, Phil even taking a moment to pause the tape and tuck leftovers in the fridge, just in time for Rose and Guy to enjoy chocolate mousse together.

"Makes me wish we could've gotten dessert," he whispered to Jeremy, leaning against him.

"NO," Jeremy whispered loudly, clinging to Phil, catching the attention of the others.

"No dessert?" Phil asked wryly.

"No, th-the mousse... sh-she said it tasted chalky..." Jeremy stammered.

"OH," Heather gasped in realization, a hand over her mouth. "Oh shit..."

"What?" Phil asked.

"... I'll explain later, just watch the movie... I'll... I'll let go in a sec," Jeremy said in a low voice.

Phil shrugged, even snuggling closer to Jeremy on the couch.

One dream sequence later and they were clinging to each other.
"Ro-Ro-Ronaldo... I don't think this was the best choice of a movie...!" Sophia whimpered, tightly grasping his hand.

"No, it's okay! It isn't real!" Ronaldo reassured.

"The effects were kind of silly-looking," Heather added. "... But, uh, let's keep the lights on."

The rest of the movie continued to fuel the fear and anxiety of the protagonist, until the very end of the film, when everyone was admittedly chuckling.

"I didn't really like the stereotyped Japanese guy," Phil commented, as the credits rolled, shaking his head with a laugh. "But when he took out that camera... I couldn't take the film seriously anymore."

"I know, right? And all the old people cheering or standing around naked... fucking weird," Heather chimed in.

"Also! Don't forget that lady at the end, I think everyone has the common sense not to rock that fast," Sophia added.

"It left me kind of paranoid, but the part where she was trying to solve the mystery... like the anagrams, and trying to do her research without being seen... that was pretty interesting," Jeremy admitted, still holding onto Phil's arm. "But yeah, the ending kind of killed the mood of the movie. It did a good job of being scary, just not as much at the end."

Everyone mumbled in agreement, Phil reaching over to pick up the large bag that had been used to bring their take-out food, only to notice the sound of something shifting inside when he moved it.

"Oh, how could I forget?" he commented, tilting the bag to spill its contents onto the table - five fortune cookies. "We all gotta have one."

Everyone took a fortune cookie from the table, opening the package and splitting open the cookie to remove the paper inside.

"'Don't stop to smell the roses... there is work to be done'," Ronaldo read aloud.

"That's weird," Sophia commented. "Mine says 'Stop and smell the roses, it's nice to enjoy the little things'."

"'New opportunities are coming your way'," Heather read hers next.

"I think this is the laziest fortune cookie factory ever, I have the exact same 'new opportunities' one," Jeremy remarked.

"And mine is... 'Big changes are coming, be strong'. Okay," Phil shrugged.

"All right, now you have to eat the cookie or it won't come true!" Sophia declared, before proceeding to eat the cookie.

"... It's a good sentiment, at least," Jeremy stated, eating his cookie.

Phil ate his as well, switching the TV from VCR mode to television mode, the news appearing on screen.

"... if you have any more details regarding the robbery, please dial the number on screen, all tips will be kept anonymous and you may be eligible for a reward."
"The news is boring," Sophia complained. "Find something else."

Before Phil could change the channel, a new story came up. The remote fell out of his hand as he stared at the screen in disbelief.

"Last night, new video evidence was released regarding the Martin Burgess case," the reporter on screen stated.

Phil's eyes grew wide as he watched the video footage roll. It was a clip from one of those funny home video shows, but despite the teenager crashing after an attempt to do a jump on his bike, all his focus was on the background. On a man, staggering like he was drunk, out from the door of the house to the car in the driveway. He could audibly be heard saying "Holy -" before the censor cut him off.

"What was thought to just be an ordinary home video may actually bring new evidence to the case, providing an eyewitness account that Martin Burgess was indeed home at the time the murders occurred. Martin Burgess was a former security guard at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, a restaurant and children's entertainment center, and was accused of murdering five children there two years ago. He plead not guilty, however the jury found him guilty and Burgess was charged with five accounts of first degree murder and tampering with evidence, as security footage was edited to the point that he was only present on screen for a split second."

Sure enough, the news played that familiar security footage, the halls appearing empty, save for when the screen paused on the fuzzy image of a mustachioed man with a similar build to Martin heading down one of the hallways of the facility.

"The bodies of the children were never found, and Martin was sentenced to death row. We will release more details as the investigation continues. In other news -"

The television shut off, Phil holding the remote in a shaky hand.

"That... That was him," Phil whispered. "O-Oh god, th-that was Martin, voice and all..."

"Are you okay?" Jeremy asked, as Phil set the remote down on the coffee table. The room had become uncomfortably quiet.

"I-I don't know what to think... he was nice - I mean, he wasn't expressive and charming about it like John, but he-he was still, uh, he had a gentle heart. Then the murders happened and I-I was so confused, I-I hated the idea that someone who seemed so genuinely nice was just... manipulating everyone all along. A-And I still wanted to hold onto the idea that he was nice, but I had to accept that he wasn't... and now everything's changed."

Jeremy gently patted his back.

"Not only that!" Phil exclaimed suddenly. "But what is this going to mean for those parents?! They obviously want justice, and I don't - I don't blame them! Where do they pick up looking? And what is this going to mean for the business... a-and my dad...?!"

"It's okay, it's going to be okay," Jeremy reassured, rubbing circles against his back. "We'll figure something out. Your father's too nice to get involved with this stuff, so there won't be any troubles in your family, okay?"

"We're here for you too, Phil!" Sophia affirmed, Ronaldo and Heather nodding.

Eventually, it got late, and everyone bid farewell to Phil, thanking him for the fun evening and
wishing him the best with the new investigations surrounding Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

October 24, 1987

John drummed his fingers against that same old bear head. Heather had conducted an experiment on a Sunday night, when the animatronics would be less active, to see how they would respond to the sight of another animatronic. She had borrowed the top of the old Bonnie’s purple head for that experiment, taking a seat in the dining area, music box at her table, with a dazzler in hand to stun any animatronics that became too hostile. However, Bonnie, Chica, Freddy, Balloon Boy, and ”Mangle” had been content to ignore her. Frank had applauded the experiment, save for the idea of the dazzler potentially damaging the internal cameras in the eyes of the animatronics. She had argued that while she valued technology, she valued her life a little more.

He turned around to face the monitors, adjusting the remote to wind up the music box in the Prize Corner. Heather had also stated... that a different head should be used to conceal the identity of the security guard, because Bonnie stank too much of ‘dead raccoon’. Frank did not like the tone she had used to describe the odor, and it even made John uneasy when he heard the story from Frank himself, but he was given a clean Freddy Fazbear head to wear when he needed to hide from the animatronics.

Sure enough, he could hear garbled static coming from the vents, meaning that Mangle was on her way. With a soft exasperated sigh, he slipped the giant head on to disguise himself, glaring out of the eyeholes at the vent. The head of the animatronic peeked out, staring at him for a moment, before crawling backwards, retreating into the vent.

That's right, get out of here, you shit excuse for a Swiss army knife.

John froze at the sound of metallic footsteps in the hallway - these ones were coming from the left. They weren't supposed to come from the left.

The sound of metal against the tile floor began to speed up. And get louder. God, no, it was almost 6 am and he was almost done for the night, why was there suddenly this thing he didn't know how to deal with?

He clicked on his flashlight, quick enough to spot Foxy down at the end of the hall. Foxy?! John was pretty damn sure Foxy wasn't supposed to be active! Well, time to put on that stuffy head again.

... But the footsteps returned, accelerating, and before John could let out a scream, Foxy leapt.

"Look, I'm sorry the old ones attacked you," Frank apologized in a half-assed manner. "I thought reactivating them to walk around and scare kids would be great fun for Halloween. I thought Heather would be in on it for sure, I even told - "

"You know something? No! I'm not having this today!" John snapped, standing up. "It was just like last month, when the new ones started wandering off course, something ain't right with these things!"

"John, please!" Sophia pleaded. "Sit down, so I can bandage your arm."

He had a thin but long gash along his right forearm, where Foxy had managed to drag his hook before the clock rolled over to 6 am and his programming dictated his return to the Parts & Service Room.
John complied, letting Sophia dab some hydrogen peroxide along his arm before wrapping it in gauze.

"What do you want from me, John?" Frank asked.

"Well, you know I need a job, but I sure ain't working the night shift anymore, you hear me?"

"John, there's no one who can fill in for you, it's either this or nothing."

"Fine! I'll stick around. There's bound to be some employee who fu- who messes up a lot. The next time he or she screws up - " John dragged a finger across his throat. "... Fire em. I'll take any spot you got, whether it's in the game room or a janitor. Just not this."

"... I'll keep that in mind. Until then, you gotta be patient, John," Frank cautioned. "It's gonna probably take a while to find an opening for you."

October 25, 1987

Phil had been right to worry about the news story; several parties had been cancelled, mainly the Friday and Saturday ones. However, all of Sunday's parties were still good to go, and with only three of them to host - one for Daisy, one for Anita, and one for Emmett, who was now being praised for his hosting competence rather than being part of the football team - it seemed like today was off to a good start.

As Phil stepped inside, removing his jacket, he was surprised to see Heather in casual attire heading towards him.

"Hi, Heather," he greeted with a smile.

"Bye, Phil," she replied with a grin.

"I'm a little surprised to see you, I-I thought you had the day - " he froze in mid sentence, his expression falling. "... Bye?"

"Oh, right, I should probably tell you, too!" Heather realized, placing a palm against her forehead. "Fritz found a great new job for me! It's about 30 minutes away from my apartment, but I get to build and fix animatronic dinosaurs for a theme park! Dino Lagoon, you've heard about it opening in March, right? Yeah, it pays better, and I actually get to do my job instead of pace the building and be a security guard that sometimes reattaches a beak or screws an eyeball back into place. So, all that was left was to file my resignation form... which I just did."

"Wow... that's... that's a lot of information to take in first thing in the morning," Phil commented, trying to smile again. "But it sounds like it'll be great! Although... I'm gonna miss you."

"Hey, come on!" she reached over and gave Phil a hug. "Ronaldo and Sophia did the same thing, and I had to hug it out with them too! I'm just changing jobs, not moving away! I mean, I might move eventually, to be closer, but I'm still gonna be in the area for now! You guys have my number and I've still got all of yours. We'll keep in touch, maybe do something fun before Thanksgiving break."

"Oh, right... hard to believe it's gotten that late in the semester already," Phil let out a groan. "Almost forgot about the bio exam on Wednesday. I'll be ready for it, though, I've been studying frequently with Jeremy, and I'm even going to see him tomorrow."
"Sounds good. Once I'm done with this week, I'm done with Freddy Fazbear's Pizza," she affirmed with a nod. "... Just not with you guys."

Heather started to exit, but paused at the door with a smile.

"Make sure goofy ol' George doesn't forget to tuck the wires away. I didn't see him, so... tell him I'll miss him," she said. "Also... just a thought... but after hearing about the drama from yesterday, maybe you can offer John the spot on daytime security once I'm gone? He's always been a good buddy to me, so I'd like to do something nice for him as well once I'm gone. Anyways, I better get going. See ya 'round, Phil."

He smiled and waved farewell.

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October 27, 1987

That lab had gone excellently, Phil told himself, as he stepped into Freddy Fazbear's Pizza for the day. He could hardly wait to see his paper, when -

All of a sudden, a newspaper was shoved into his face.

"Phil!" John grumbled from the other side of the paper. "What does your uncle think he's doing?!"

"John?" Phil asked, lowering the newspaper from his face. "Uh, it's kind of late for you to be here, shouldn't you be slee-"

"I would have a much easier time sleeping if I didn't go to bed thinking each night might be my last!" he snapped, taking a few deep breaths.

Phil looked over the newspaper, realizing it was the classified section - specifically, the job listings - and finally found the ad in question.

Freddy Fazbear's Pizza seeking new daytime security guard. Must be flexible and be available on weekends. Contact Franco Fazari at -

Phil didn't have a chance to read the rest of the ad, as John had snatched the paper back.

"John, I... I know this job is stressful. The way it affects your sleep probably doesn't help either... b- but to be fair, I think my uncle was trying to do what's best for the business... i-it's probably easier to hire someone for the day shift than it is to try to find someone for the night sh-"

Phil was cut off when John lunged forward, grabbing him roughly by his shoulders.

"You listen to me!" John growled, shaking Phil. "I'm not putting up with that shit anymore! You saw what they did to my fucking arm!"

Underneath his mustache, his lips curled into a twisted little smile.

"We've known each other so long, Phil... I thought we were friends. Surely a nice guy like you knows that friends do each other favors, right? So you're going to do me a favor and tell your uncle to change that goddamn ad to the night shift. You cannot let your uncle hire a new day guard, okay?!" John demanded, giving Phil's shoulders another shake for emphasis. "YOU. CAN'T."

"I... I-I..." Phil was too scared to think straight. "O-okay, I'll see what I can do. But even if we, uh, change the ad, i-it's still probably going to take a while."
"This is a college town, there's probably some student desperate enough for the money that he'll take it," John let go of Phil's shoulders, finally simmering down enough to smile. "Thank you, Phil, I'm sure things will be fine. Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to go home and get some rest."

With that, he briskly walked out of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

November 1, 1987

Jeremy took a seat at the dinner table, placing the Sunday morning paper in front of him. His application for the evening shift at a gas station had tanked, and The Bird & Barb hadn't called him back about the waiting position for the dinner shift, so it was likely that application had sunk as well.

He flipped through the pages to find the classified section, jumping when a mug of coffee was placed beside him.

"... I noticed you skipped dinner last night," Pat commented quietly, placing a plate with a fried egg and a slice of toast on it near Jeremy as well. "I can't afford to feed two people, but I can fill in a meal or two for you if it helps you save money."

"Thanks," Jeremy replied quietly. "Do you want a section of the paper?"

"Gotta have my Sunday morning comics," Pat remarked with a grin.

Jeremy shook his head with a smile, handing over the rest of the paper, before browsing through the job listings.

Accountant? No. Bartending? He didn't have the experience and the thought of bar fights was... unpleasant. CNA, CNA, CNA... he wasn't certified in anything...

He froze once he saw the 'F' section, recognizing three familiar mascots.

Come be a part of the new face of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza! Security guard needed for night shift, 12am-6am, $100.50 per week! Call 1-888-FAZ-FAZBEAR for more information.

Jeremy stared at the ad a little longer. If he took a job with evening shifts, he had to cut back on his availability at Picnix, which could affect his hours. However, this... this didn't overlap with the hours Picnix was open at all.

Of course, dealing with Frank again would be an issue... Jeremy could already feel his stomach twisting in knots (or was that just the hunger?) at the thought of it. But maybe...

He swallowed.

Maybe he could talk him into it. If he wasn't comfortable with Jeremy being around kids because he was gay... surely the argument that he wasn't around the restaurant during the day would be enough. He couldn't keep borrowing bagels every morning. Circling the ad with a red pen, Jeremy quickly finished his small breakfast and put his dishes in the sink.

"Thanks for breakfast, Pat," he stated, as he stepped into the small hallway between their rooms. "... That might've been the boost I needed to make this call."
"... police are now starting to question additional suspects or anyone familiar with Martin Burgess or the victims' families. We tried to contact Martin's brother for an interview, but he was unavailable f -"

John clicked the television off, not wanting to feel any more anxious about starting the day shift than he already was. Yes, Frank had said he had managed to pass the night shift over to 'some loser', but he still remembered their arguments, the way he was treated like a coward for being rightfully afraid of that job.

Cowardly... weak... he gingerly traced his fingers against the gauze bandage. No, powerless was more like it. Powerless as a desperate college senior caught cheating on a final exam and subsequently expelled. 'Powerless', 'worthless', 'pathetic', and 'weak', his mind bellowed at him for several days, until he had finally grown so sick of the feeling that he purchased a gun, planning to end his life.

Powerless, powerless, he had told himself, driving back from the firearm store that day. He looked out the window, at some rinky-dink restaurant called Fredbear's Family Diner. Some kid, probably about eight years old, was crying on the doorstep. Probably not invited to a party, or didn't want to eat his vegetables, or whatever made kids cry.

There was roadwork ahead, so John had to take a detour to the left, driving down the road behind the diner. That stupid child... he thought one simple party was worth crying over. Didn't he know there were worse things? He didn't know just how cruel the world could be, and quite frankly, it pissed him off. He pulled over, picking up the gun from the passenger seat and loading a few bullets, before pulling back onto the road, one hand on the steering wheel and one hand on the gun.

John had turned left again, looping back around to the front of the diner, slowing down a little. The child had moved, now peering in through the front door, probably still crying his eyes out. "If you think your part of the world is cruel," John muttered, rolling down the window and aiming, his finger on the trigger. "You might as well not live in it at all."

Then he pulled the trigger, watching the child slump to the ground as he drove off. Now all that was left was his own life, but... suddenly he was feeling different. He had been through so much worse than some little boy... but he was the one still alive. He was more than capable of deciding who lived and who died, like he had decided just now. Nothing was stopping him from making that decision. It was bizarrely empowering... and he liked it.

I'm the one who lived, John reminded himself with a smile, morning after morning, as the years passed. It's me.

He had run into some financial troubles and was taken in by his brother. But since it was his house and he was the one with the job - go figure it was at some other Freddy Pizza place - Martin was the one who called the shots. Sure, he could have just killed his brother, but he was happy and confident and didn't know what it was like to be powerless. So, why not frame him for a crime and let him sit in jail for a while? He'd slipped an assortment of drugs into Martin's coffee that morning, before slipping on a fatsuit and then his brother's purple uniform, taking care to firmly attach the rubber molds to his face to make it look round and thick, like Martin's. As for the crime, well, he'd already killed one child, why not another? John had snuck in, switching out his disguise for... one of the character costumes in the storage area. There had been a ruckus at a party, and this was the perfect time to come in and distract a child. Only he wound up luring away not one, but five. And they were all in for a marvelous surprise backstage.
He had even botched the security footage beautifully. He could have easily deleted all the footage, but why not make it look like it was sloppily done in a hurry? John left one little snippet of himself disguised as Martin, just to fool anyone checking for evidence before slipping out.

But no, that home video had come along and thrown everything out of balance. The media had already tried to contact him. Sure, he could run away - he could run away any time he wanted - but that was for the weak.

John was a smart man, a strong man, and if he was going to run, he was going to make one final display of his power before he left.

Chapter End Notes

(1) Quote is from the movie Dirty Dancing (1987). Obviously, I don't own that.

(2) There is, in fact, a real shirt like this. Obviously, I own one.

(3) Since it's 1987, they're watching the one that came out in the 1960s with Mia Farrow, so I don't know what was changed in the 2014 remake with Zoe Saldana. If the description of the character's reactions didn't give it away, it is a horror movie, so if you want to watch it, you may want to proceed with caution, especially since there is a scene where a character is raped.

Something I feel is worth mentioning - while I can't reply to every comment or simply don't have a reply (since there are some comments that are just 'Update soon!'), please remember that I appreciate all the feedback I get! You all are great!
Four Nights at Freddy's

Chapter Notes

Since this is the chapter where the events of Five Nights at Freddy's 2 start taking place, I want to make a disclaimer that I will be modifying some of Phone Guy (Phil)'s dialogue since (a) it will help fit the events of the plot a little better, (b) I don't want to be accused of plagiarism, and (c) nobody likes a copy-paster anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

November 7, 1987

"... Be honest. It doesn't look TOO bad, does it?" John asked, turning his head at a few different angles.

"It... certainly makes you unrecognizable," Phil opined. "That mustache of yours was, uh, pretty hard to miss."

"Sure was, wasn't it?" John asked with a chuckle.

"Okay, so, uh... I guess you're already pretty familiar with the building's layout... considering you've been on the night watch... but maybe I should just walk you through, uh, just to make sure you know the ropes?"

"I just make sure nothing bad happens, keep kids out of the employees-only sections, that sort of thing. Relax, Phil, I got it," John waved it off.

"Sounds like you'll do great. I'm going-"

"Hold that thought, Phil," John said quietly.

"Oh, uh, was there something else?"

"Just to say thank you for the spot on the day shift. I probably wouldn't have gotten it without you, after all," John complimented, beaming, his smile much easier to see without all that facial hair.

"My pleasure!"

"Oh, and, I also wanted to apologize for how I've acted the past few weeks. Lack of sleep not exactly good for one's mood or health, you know?"

"Well, here's hoping tonight is the first of many great nights of sleep!" Phil paused a moment. "... Kind of makes me hope the new guy will be okay."

"He'll be fine, don't worry about it," John was quick to dismiss.

"I'd like to think so too, but when I asked my uncle about it, he just kind of shrugged it off. Kind of like hiring the guy was a last ditch effort, you know? I mean, it's not like he picked up some guy off the street... my uncle might like saving money, but he's no fool... this person could be a parent or just an ordinary college student, I-I literally have no idea who my uncle hired..."
"Like I said, you're overthinking things. Don't worry about it. Are there any parties today? Maybe you should go see if... whatshisface... Emanuel needs any help or something. I'm going to take a look around the facility."

With that, John walked off toward the game area. Phil shook his head with a sigh, heading down the other side of the hallway, towards the party rooms.

"Make sure nothing gets in, but more importantly, make sure nothing gets out."

That was how Frank had described the job, not even willing to look Jeremy in the eyes as he fetched a uniform out of a cardboard box for him that Monday. Now it was a Saturday night, only a few minutes away from midnight, and Jeremy was entering Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, clad in that long-sleeved brown shirt, a badge, and black slacks with a tie to match. Only he'd added one extra piece to his uniform - the little token pin, attached to the bottom of the tie. Just in case he needed some good luck.

The building hadn't changed much, the usual posters and drawings by the children pinned on the wall. Jeremy silently walked down the hallway, finally reaching that little security office at the very end. It seemed this area had a panel for punching in, so he could wait here until it was finally midnight to clock in. Papers were scattered everywhere on the desk, and whoever had been sitting here last seemed to have left the fan on. Jeremy frowned, straightening the papers into a single pile, gently pushing it out of the range of the fan's air so they wouldn't be blown about again. Yes, this was starting to feel familiar... he remembered coming here with Phil that one time to try to locate Chica.

He was about to sit down in the chair with wheels, but stopped when he noticed what was situated in the seat. An empty animatronic head - Freddy's, based on the brown color - and a flashlight. Why hadn't the person in the office earlier just left these items on the table instead? It could have even helped hold the papers down instead of letting them get blown around. He set them on the desk and took a seat, turning around to flip one of the monitors on... it had been left on channel 9, where he could see Freddy, Bonnie, and Chica standing on stage.

He flipped through the channels, observing all the rooms. Six hours, huh? It would be boring, and it was a little unnerving to imagine someone breaking in, but he could probably handle it. He glanced at his watch, a few seconds away from midnight. Time to clock in.

November 8, 1987

"I just told him 'make sure nothing gets in, but more importantly, make sure nothing gets out'. It's not that hard to grasp."

That was what his uncle had told him when Phil asked if the new guard would be ready for the night shift, and quite frankly, it had left a sour note with him. These animatronics were special, and as such, they required special treatment. He still remembered the gash Foxy had left on John's arm... the new guy would probably quit if something like that happened to him.

And he definitely didn't want the new guy quitting. He was still up after finishing an assignment for his public relations class, so... why not do the professional thing and call to check on him? A little bit of advice certainly couldn't help.
Phil got up from the kitchen table and walked over to the phone. It was just after midnight, so the new guy would definitely be in. He picked it up and dialed the number for Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

Jeremy literally jumped at the sound of the phone ringing. Who would be calling at this hour? No, wait... he knew who would call. He smiled and reached over to the left of the punch-in panel, where the phone was.

"Hello, is that you, Phil?"

"Uh, hello? Hello, hello! Uh, first things first, I should probably let you know that... the phone in that office is damaged. So, while you can hear everything I have to say, uh, I can't hear anything that you try to tell me."

Well, that certainly put a damper on the 'conversation'.

"Uh, all that aside, I'd like to welcome you to your new job at Fr - uh, at the new and improved Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. I just wanted to take a moment to walk you through some of the things you can expect to see during your first week and help you get started with your new career. Uh, so, I want you to forget anything you might have heard about the previous location."

... The previous location? Was he talking about Freddy's Diner or whatever it was called?

"That place... kind of gave the company a negative reputation. B-but let me assure you, Fazbear Entertainment is committed to providing quality family entertainment and most of all, safety. Speaking of which, maybe you should, uh, take a quick peek on the monitors... make sure everyone's in the right place."

Jeremy switched the channel back to nine, pleased to see that the animatronics were all still situated on stage.

"You're probably looking at the animatronics right now, I bet! Heh. Uh, the company actually invested a decent amount of money in those guys. They've got facial recognition that's tied into a criminal database, and their mobility is so advanced that they can walk around during the day... pretty cool, huh?"

Jeremy shook his head with a smile. Even after a few months, Phil still got so excited whenever he spoke about the animatronics.

"Of course... every system has its... 'kinks'... You're actually the second guard to work at this location. The first guy complained about 'conditions'... so we moved him to the day shift after he finished his week, so... lucky you, right?"

The smile on Jeremy's face slowly disappeared. Suddenly he wasn't feeling so lucky.

"You see, his main concern was the characters trying to get into the office, since we let them roam the facility at night. Our main engineer didn't really have an explanation for this, so her theory was that... the animatronics don't have a proper 'night mode'. Since everything's so quiet, they try to find where the people are... and in this case, that's you, in the office. One thing we're trying is... the music box, over in the Prize Corner... I think that's on channel eleven."

Jeremy clicked the button on the remote, switching to channel eleven, greeted by the delicate melody of the music box coming through the audio feed and the sight of tiny adorable plushes of the
characters staring back at him.

"It's been rigged to wind remotely, using the 'play' button, so just check on this particular channel every so often to make sure that music box is wound up and playing... uh, we don't know about the other animatronics, but... it definitely affects one of them."

"It's that one, isn't it?" Jeremy mumbled, noticing a puppet-like figure on a drawing posted on the wall, its limbs eerily long.

"Uh, and as for the other characters, we have an alternate solution. Um, there might be a glitch in the system, causing the robots to think that you're an endoskeleton... and it's in their programming to keep other animatronics in-character by fitting an endoskeleton into a costume, so... you can imagine how... uh... uncomfortable that would be. So, hey! We've given you an empty Freddy Fazbear head! Our engineer tested it and found that she basically blended right in with the other characters, so you can put it on at any time, for as long as you want. Ta-da! Problem solved!"

Jeremy wished he could be that enthusiastic, turning back to look into the empty eye sockets of the animatronic head on the desk.

"So, uh... sorry about the design of the building... I know it would've been easier if you had a door to close or something... but you've got the flashlight to check the hall, the cameras, the music box, the Freddy Fazbear head... uh... I don't think there's anything else, so... you should be golden! Have a good night, and I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Okay, so... Jeremy was supposed to sit in this office with a giant gaping doorway that may as well have a welcome mat spread across the floor for the next six hours, hoping that the animatronics wouldn't stuff him into some kind of suit. Minimum wage was definitely fair pay for this. Fuck. You. Frank. Just like that party he'd been at with his friends. He smiled bitterly, going back to the monitor. He switched back to channel eleven, winding up the music box a little more, and checking on the stage.

He switched between the two every minute or so, starting to become a bit daring and check out the other channels. Jeremy clenched his teeth uncomfortably at the sight of camera eight's feed, clearly the parts and service room, based on the slouched figure of Bonnie leaning against the wall. He could make out the figures of Freddy and Chica along the dark edges of the camera's perspective. God, he hoped those things weren't active too.

One hour passed, then another, Jeremy making sure to stretch his arms and legs to keep himself comfortable and awake as he checked on the various surveillance channels. He even turned on the flashlight to check the hall in front of him, just to be safe, and was pleased to see nothing but the wall at the far end of the hallway.

It was already three am, and it seemed like this wasn't going to be so bad. Jeremy checked on channel eleven, winding up the music box, but nearly dropped the remote at the sound of faint, metallic footsteps coming from the audio feed. He switched over to channel nine.

Bonnie was gone.

"Oh, fuck, oh, fuck," Jeremy repeated under his breath, checking channel eight - nothing. Channel seven - nothing. Six, five, four, three -

Channel three. Bonnie clutched his guitar in his hands, turning his head to look up at the camera. Did the cameras make some kind of noise when they were activated? Was Bonnie going to come into his office now? No, it seemed that he was content to stand and stare at the camera, as though he was
transfixed by it.

The music box wasn't going to wind itself, though... Jeremy turned away from the monitors to place the Freddy Fazbear head in his lap, before looking back at them, flipping through the channels. He went up one too far on accident, however, and found himself greeted by the sound of heavy static as well as... whatever that thing lying on the floor was. Some kind of dismantled animatronic that probably belonged in the parts and service room. He checked back on the Prize Corner, winding up the music box a little more, before checking on the Show Stage. At least Chica and Freddy were content with their positions.

And then came the sound of metallic footsteps once again. Only this time, it wasn't from an audio feed; he could literally hear the footsteps in the hallway behind him. Jeremy quickly removed his glasses, tucking them against the collar of his shirt, and put on the Freddy Fazbear head, turning around. Nothing. It was a little hard to keep it balanced on his head so he could see - or at least, strain his eyes to figure out if there was anything in the room, requiring two hands to hold it on. He slipped the head off and put on his glasses once again, checking the hall with the flashlight. There was no trace of Bonnie.

Jeremy checked the monitors again. Sure enough, Bonnie had left the third party room. Then where...?

He clicked up one channel and pushed the chair away from the monitors in surprise, startled by Bonnie's face so close up to the camera. It was very chilling to stare back into unblinking eyes. Jeremy changed the channel to eleven to wind up the music box, trying to collect his thoughts.

He checked back on channel four, Bonnie now backed away from the camera, pacing around the room.

"Yeah... you just stay there..." Jeremy mumbled under his breath. He turned around, checking the hallway, before turning back to the monitors. He switched between checking on Bonnie, the thing, and the music box in the Prize Counter, another hour finally passing, when he heard a terrible crash while winding the music box. It had only now occurred to him that he should have been keeping an eye on the Show Stage.

Sure enough, Freddy now stood alone. He could hear metallic footsteps not too far away, and switched through the channels. In the shadowy corner of channel seven's camera feed, he could see Chica's head. Jeremy watched her pace down the hall - he could even hear her footsteps without the camera feed - stopping at the Parts and Service door, before turning and walking back the way she came. After watching her continue the route two more times, Jeremy concluded that she was probably content to take a few laps, and switched back to check on the stage - Freddy was still there, that was good - and the Prize Corner, winding up the music box some more.

Jeremy heard the metallic footsteps again, this time getting closer. Should he flash a light down the hall and see what was going on? Was Bonnie getting closer? Or was he hearing things? After all, if Chica was content to pace the other hallway like she was, he might risk drawing her attention with the light. Jeremy decided it would be best to check the cameras. Sure enough, Bonnie had disappeared from Party Room 4. Channel three, channel two... yep, Bonnie had just stepped into Party Room 2, curiously examining the tables. Jeremy tapped the button on the remote rapidly, checking on Chica on camera seven, on Freddy on camera nine, and then on the Prize Corner, winding up that music box. After one last check on camera twelve, he went back down, back to camera two.

Bonnie now stood facing the wall, only his gaze was slightly angled down. It was hard to see what he was staring at in the dark. Did a picture fall off the wall? It would be kind of neat if hanging up
pictures by the children was in the animatronic programming. Then Bonnie squatted in front of whatever he had been eyeing. Jeremy's eyes weren't fully adjusted to the dark, but he soon realized there was a large hole in the wall. That was what Bonnie was looking at.

And then Jeremy came to the grim realization that, on the map of the pizzeria's layout, there was some kind of corridor between the office and Party Room 2.

_The vents!_ Jeremy realized, glancing over at it. It even had a button over it, labeled "Light", likely used to illuminate it.

As if mocking his realization, Bonnie turned his head to look straight up into the camera, before turning to crawl into the vent.

Jeremy's breathing started to pick up speed. Bonnie would be in the office soon. He could already hear the _thunk-thunk_ of Bonnie's metallic limbs echoing in the vent as he crawled toward the office. Yes, he had the Freddy head to hide, but... surely he had something to defend himself with! He opened one of the drawers, finding masking tape and two eighteen-inch rulers inside. Those items couldn't serve him as a weapon, but...

He pulled them out, taping the ends of the rulers together, the ominous thunking growing louder. He slid to the right end of the desk and reached the elongated tool forward to press the light button - better than walking over to it and having a metallic hand reach out and grab his leg when he least expected it. The light in the vent flickered, and he could see the shadow of Bonnie's ears. He pulled the tool back and immediately placed the Freddy head over his own, despite the fact that it nearly knocked his glasses from his face. His breathing was already fast and heavy, but it only picked up speed when he heard the sound of metal on the tile floor. Bonnie was in the office.

He cast a glance to the right and immediately regretted it; Bonnie was about three feet away from him and staring him dead in the eye, a robot that basically had the ability to kill him whenever it so desired. Jeremy's palms were covered in cold sweat, his arms were shaking, his breathing was fast and anxious and light and he was not getting enough oxygen in his lungs so he closed his eyes and tried to think of a happy memory, preferring the concept of his final thoughts being good ones.

It was dark inside the Freddy head, kind of like the theater had been on the night that they all went out to see _Carmen_. He remembered sitting next to Phil, and how excited he and Heather had gotten when they recognized the Toréador song - maybe it was because Bonnie was in the room that he was having these memories. Or maybe it was because he basically had been thrown into a bullring of animatronic characters that could seriously hurt him. 'Jeremy the Toréador'... no, it just didn't carry the same strength as 'Escamillo, the greatest bullfighter in all of Grenada!'

He might not have remembered _all_ the lyrics, but he at least remembered the melody. He took in a slow deep breath as the first line of the chorus played through his head, then let it out as the second line came to mind. He took in another breath as the song went through his mind, and another one out.

There were two lines of the song that had stuck with him, though, and he mentally sung them as he took in another deep breath.

_Et que, l'amour t'attend, toréador! L'amour, l'amour t'attend!

... He was still alive, still okay. Jeremy slowly opened his eyes to find that Bonnie was gone from the office. He grabbed his ruler-tool... fuck it, it was just a stick - he grabbed his stick and checked both the vents to make sure Bonnie wasn't hiding, flashed a light down the hall - no animatronics - then immediately turned back to the monitors.
The music box's melody was eerily slow, probably close to unwinding, but that wasn't the eeriest thing in the Prize Corner. Sure enough, his prediction was correct; that puppet - specifically a marionette, based on the way it seemed to be hanging from the ceiling - was slowly rising out of the gift box. Jeremy held down the 'play' button as hard as he could, as if it would somehow wind up the music box faster. But sure enough, as the melody resumed playing at its usual tempo, the puppet retreated back into the gift box, even lifting the lid back over the box.

That thing... was not to be trusted. Jeremy made a vow to himself not to let the music box ever stop playing. He checked the other channels - Freddy was still on stage, Bonnie had resumed patrolling Party Room 3, and Chica was still pacing up and down the main hallway. They were content to keep up this routine for another hour or so, Jeremy also making sure to check on the music box, until he noticed Chica was missing from the main hallway. He checked in front of him with the flashlight, and sure enough, he was greeted with the sight of her eyeless and beakless figure standing out in the hallway leading to the office.

He recalled the Toréador song yet again, feeling a little bit of courage building up in him. Maybe... if the Freddy head trick worked on all the animatronics... maybe he could lure her into the office and immediately be disregarded once she detected the animatronic head on him. Jeremy flashed the light on and off at her a few times, and she moved - turning to her right into one of the Party Rooms. Well, at least it was something.

He resumed winding up the music box, checked the stage, the echoing banging in the vents returned. Jeremy checked the rest of the channels quickly - Chica was stooped over by the vent in Party Room 1, so it seemed Bonnie wasn't the only one who enjoyed - thunk, thunk - travelling that way. Jeremy quickly tapped the vent light, realizing Bonnie was already on his way into the office. He quickly pulled on the Freddy head, already concentrating on his breathing and the melody in his mind. However, Bonnie crawled out of the vent and immediately left down the hallway. Jeremy turned his flashlight on and off, surprised to notice that Chica was also walking away, both of them apparently heading towards the Show Stage. Jeremy checked that channel, just in time to watch both of them take their usual spots on stage.

Was it... possible...?

He checked the clock on the machine that he had punched in on. Sure enough, it was 6:01 am. One night down... several more to go. He punched out and left the pizzeria. Yes, he would need to have a word with Phil, but... he was working at Picnix from seven until twelve, and after that, he would need to go home and get some sleep. They'd have to have a chat another time, Jeremy decided, as he got into his Ford Escort.

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The Parts and Service room was empty... good... that was good...

Phil stepped out of the room with a sigh. Why did his uncle try to cut corners and do things the easy way? It seemed the new night guard had taken his advice, allowing him to survive the night. But it wasn't going to just be this night. He still had a whole week ahead of him. And considering that the animatronics were going to become more active as the week went by... it was only fair that he made sure the new guy knew what to expect.

It was going to be a busy week too... it kind of made sense, Phil thought with a wry smile, since this week was roughly nine months after Valentine's Day... no wonder there were so many birthdays, and by extension, parties. Four today, one on Monday, one on Tuesday, two on Wednesday, three on Thursday, and five on Friday.
He could only hope that none of the kids that came in had some kind of throat virus... he was going to need his voice in order to keep making phone calls the rest of the week.

November 9, 1987

It really went against all common sense to come back to a place where he could potentially be severely injured or even killed. Maybe it was the change in his sleeping patterns messing with his brain, or the slight hunger pangs that lingered in his stomach due to the smaller meals Jeremy was now eating.

But here he was, clocking back in for a second night, the phone going off as he finished entering his personal code.

"Uh, hello, hello! It's P.F., from yesterday! Get it? It's short for... uh... Ph... one... Fellow... yeah, that sounded much better in my head. I guess Phone Guy has a better ring to it anyway... heheh. 'Ring'. Phone humor."

Jeremy smiled bitterly. If only Phil knew what really went on here...

"Well, I'm glad that your first night wasn't a problem! So, uh... you've probably looked through all the cameras, and I'm sure you've noticed the back room where the older models are kept. Um, we're only using them for spare parts... they actually came from the old location."

As Phil rambled on, Jeremy carefully made his way back to the desk, the telephone cord stretching as he went, until he took a seat. He decided to follow up on that 'cameras' comment and make sure that the music box was properly wound up.

"Originally, we were going to repair them, but... the models were kind of creepy... and they had that... smell... to them. So, uh, you can kind of see why they decided to take things in a new direction and make the characters more cuddly-looking for the kids. We actually did retro-fit them with the new technology, because we considered having them walk around looking spooky for Halloween... but, uh, we wound up scrapping that plan. They were supposed to be shut down, but the old guard complained about them walking around. If they are walking around, for whatever reason, then the Freddy head trick should fool them too."

Supposed to. This whole situation felt like something out of a horror movie, and if there was one thing Jeremy had learned from the few horror movies he had seen, it was that if a thing was 'supposed to' be something, then most of the time it wasn't. He moved the Freddy head from the desk to his lap.

"Kids these days... I don't see what's wrong with the old designs, I loved them when I was younger! Like Foxy the Pirate! Oh, right, Foxy! Uh, he's cool, but he's always had a few... issues with his programming. The Freddy head trick might not work on him... that's what the guy on day shift said, anyway. So, uh, if he's active during the night, you should use your flashlight on him. The old models had this, uh, glitch... they would get disoriented when exposed to bright lights, like it would restart their systems or something. Come to think of it, since we've been using the old ones for extra parts, uh, I wouldn't be surprised if that glitch is in the newer models as well."

Jeremy held up the flashlight. He sure hoped that Frank or Phil or somebody was putting new batteries in it every day for safe measure. Then again, that would cost money... so that ruled Frank out.
"So, since you're... alive... I probably don't have to remind you about the music box. Personally? I never liked that... puppet... thing... it's like it has a mind of its own... so it's hard to say if the Freddy mask will fool it, since our engineer didn't test it on that one. So, uh, yeah, maybe you should go take a look at the Prize Counter and make sure that music box is still playing. I'm sure you'll do fine. Have a good night, and I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"See ya, Phil," Jeremy mumbled, before walking back over to hang up the phone. Upon returning to his seat, he wound up the music box a little more, before checking on the characters. He also checked the hallway every so often, even if he wasn't hearing footsteps, before going back to wind up the music box.

An hour passed, Jeremy starting to care less and less about checking on the stage and the other place... what was it called, Kids' Cove? Yeah, come to think of it, the warped animatronic did resemble the posters of Loxy. She probably couldn't do much harm in her damaged state, though.

Footsteps.

Jeremy checked the hallway, and - much to his surprise - found Freddy himself staring back at him. He flashed the light on and off a few times, hoping it would disorient him, before turning his attention back to the music box. He turned back around, checking the hallway. Still there.

Jeremy narrowed his eyes, letting out an exasperated sigh, before turning back to the monitors to check on the music box. Back and forth, between Freddy and the Prize Corner... before he knew it, another hour passed. Freddy still content to stand and watch him in the hallway, Jeremy turned back around to check the monitors, to wind up th-

NO.

That... dismantled animatronic was dangling from the ceiling of the Prize Corner, emitting some kind of staticky radio signal. Surely it wasn't going to affect the puppet, was it? Phil hadn't said anything about that! Was he supposed to lure it away somehow? For now, Jeremy just wound up the music box, figuring it was worth a try, before turning back to face Freddy.

He had moved closer, almost leaning into the office's doorway by the time Jeremy was flashing the light in his face again.

Go away, go away!

"Hello."

Jeremy could hear faint banging in the vents, this time from the one on his left. The voice sounded like it belonged to a little boy... so there was no way it was Chica... and he highly doubted someone was careless enough to leave a child in the pizzeria overnight... which animatronic was it?

Time to face the facts, he was being approached on two sides, and he needed to hide. Jeremy pulled on the Freddy head, breathing at a deliberate pace as he went through the Toréador melody in his brain. Slowly, the banging noises grew quieter, as whatever animatronic that had been in the left vent retreated. Jeremy carefully slipped off the Freddy head, flashing the light down the hallway. Freddy had apparently left as well.

Jeremy checked the vents, the hallway, and the music box in rotation for another hour, until he was startled by the laughter of a small child... was it the same animatronic? He heard movement in the vent again, this time checking the camera for the left one. Chica?! But... she didn't laugh like that! The banging grew louder and Jeremy donned the Freddy head again. The banging came to a halt and
then retreated, meaning Chica had left the office. He took the head off and checked the hallway.

"Oh, it's you," Jeremy mumbled under his breath, as he caught sight of Freddy in the hallway.

"Hi," greeted the childish voice again.

"Go away," Jeremy grumbled, turning around to focus on winding up the music box.

He heard footsteps approaching. Hell no, surely Freddy hadn't -

Jeremy pulled the animatronic head over his own just in time, as the back of the chair was suddenly swung around violently and he found himself face-to-face with the empty eyes of Freddy. Jeremy quickly squeezed his eyes shut, his mind screaming at him to keep his breathing steady and his mouth shut, as he finally heard the footsteps retreat.

Heather and Phil were right; the head trick was working. Jeremy's clammy hands trembled as he slipped the head off once again. Vents, music box, hallway... Chica briefly appeared in the hallway, but she was quick to diverge her path... another hour passed.

Jeremy let out a disgruntled sigh as the childish voice laughed, conveniently right as Freddy turned in the hallway to approach the office. He went to check the left vent and - oh, okay, that mystery was solved. There was another animatronic, and it even resembled a human child, most likely a boy. Jeremy put the head back on, breathing slowly and evenly, until he finally heard... 'Bobby' - or whatever his name was - retreat into the vent.

Jeremy removed the head and swiveled around in his chair to check the monitors... displeased at how slow the notes of the music box were playing and the way the lid on the gift box was slowly starting to open. He held down the button, winding and winding it up, until the puppet retreated back inside. A combination of banging in the vent and footsteps alerted Jeremy, and he turned around, slipping the Freddy head on. Sure enough, Bonnie stepped into the office, Jeremy closing his eyes the moment Bonnie looked into the eyes of the Freddy head. Deep breath... deep breath... finally, Bonnie had left the office, and it seemed that Freddy had departed with him.

For the next thirty minutes, everything was relatively calm, save for Chica taking a short stroll towards the office and the occasional laugh from 'Bobby'. However, after winding up the music box, Jeremy was startled by four beady eyes staring back at him from the hallway, one pair brighter than the others. He flashed the light again, moving it around. How peachy keen... the 'duller pair of eyes' weren't eyes at all... just the parts of a metallic hook that reflected the most light. Good ol' Foxy the Pirate was staring back at him from the hallway.

Jeremy placed his other hand against his throat. He really did not like the possibilities of what that hook could do to him. On and off, he hit the button repeatedly, hoping the flickering lights would deter Foxy. Sure enough, the animatronic turned around and started walking back to the Parts and Service room.

Please, STAY THERE, Jeremy mentally pleaded, as he heard banging in the vents. He put the animatronic head on as Chica poked hers out of the vent, before retreating back inside. Jeremy flashed a light down the hallway for safe measure and checked the right vent before turning back to the Prize Corner's camera feed.

Was it just him, or was the music box demanding more and more attention? The notes were playing at a dangerously slow pace, and the puppet was slowly rising out of the box, the upper part of its torso already visible. Jeremy held that button down, waiting until it had finally retreated. He spent a long time checking empty vents and hallways and boxes on camera feeds.
Jeremy didn't want to risk getting up to check the time on the machine he punched in on, but... it had to have been several hours by now. Surely the night was almost done...?

The sound of banging in the right vent accompanied by static quickly shook Jeremy from his thoughts, immediately slipping the Freddy head on. The noises soon vanished as the banging noises retreated.

"Hello."

Was Bobby back? Based on the banging noises, he was. However, the left vent proved empty. Jeremy checked the right vent just in time to watch a blue arm creeping forward, practically slamming the Freddy head on, disregarding his glasses falling into his lap. Bonnie was in and out of the office pretty quick this time.

Bonnie, Bobby... he'd have to figure out a different name for the human animatronic so he wouldn't get them mixed up. More time passed as Jeremy rotated through checking everything, coming to a halt when he spotted not one, but two animatronics in the hall.

Foxy, standing down at the very end, and Loxy hanging from the ceiling just outside the doorframe. Jeremy mashed the button on the flashlight as fast as he could, please let it be enough, please make them leave...

As he pressed the button, however, he noticed that the light was slower to come on... and the brightness was diminishing...

"No," Jeremy whispered.

He looked over at the Freddy mask - no, it probably wouldn't fool Foxy - all he could do was clutch the stick he had made in both hands, preparing for an attack.

But everything was quiet.

Jeremy reached for the flashlight, checking the hallway - Foxy and Loxy had both left. He checked the cameras, feeling his hopes rising as he stopped on channel nine just in time to watch Chica step up to her usual spot onstage.

Jeremy took the opportunity to see if he could clock out - sure enough, it was six am. He really needed to get in the habit of wearing a watch more often. He punched out and quickly scrawled a note on a sheet of paper on the desk - Flashlight needs new batteries! - before Jeremy took his leave.

Okay, so maybe he was a little bit of a bad employee for constantly being bored when he had nothing to do but check on the game area (WHY didn't he just go for hosting parties? He probably could have handled it in hindsight), and sometimes that meant George would wander off a little... but surely Frank wouldn't be too mad when he heard that he had changed the batteries in the flashlight like the night guard's note requested.

Of course, the fact that Frank had called out sick, and Phil having the day off due to his class schedule, meant that the other staff members were a little more lenient with the rules.

"Ronaldo!" he marveled with a whistle. "Lookin' pretty snazzy! Or, uh, I mean 'good'. Did you guys wash the costume or something? I always thought Freddy was supposed to be brown, but you practically look... yellow."
'Freddy' did not move for a moment, then put his hands to the sides of his face, looking around.

"What's wrong? Did you forget something?"

Freddy drummed his fingertips together a few times, before clapping his hands together with a nod. He pointed to George, then back at himself, before pretending to fan himself off.

"Oh... uh... you're too hot?"

Freddy nodded, pointing a finger at George.

"Oh, okay! I've worked with..." he froze. "Wait, you work with costumes more than I do! You should know how to get it off."

Freddy stomped his foot a few times.

"Wait, are you trying to tell me something? You know, there are no kids here - I promise - so you can just tell me."

Freddy clenched his fists, stomping his foot a few more times, before his posture suddenly straightened and he seemed to calm down. He placed a hand on George's shoulder and began to lead him into the main area.

The three people on kitchen duty had all apparently decided to start their break at the same time, Bruce pulling up a seat to join the other two as they ate their free pizza and watched the animatronics entertain a small group of children.

"Even I know better than that," George scoffed. "Then again, a day without Frank is practically like getting the day off. You work in the kitchen, Ronaldo, make sure they don't come back from their breaks too l- oof! Okay, I'm going man!"

Freddy had given him an extra shove, urging him towards the employees-only area, then steered him into the kitchen.

"Brings back memories of baking pizza during the training session. I... burnt mine, so I didn't have the best time."

Freddy resumed fanning himself, pointed to the faucet, and then pantomimed holding a glass to his lips.

"OH! You're thirsty! Well, here, man, we should probably get this costume off first - " George started to reach for the head of the yellow Freddy, but he immediately recoiled, holding his arms out in front of him and shaking his head. "Okay! Okay, you don't like that. Uh... I guess I can try to give you some water... uh... through the mouth... of... the suit...? Just try not to get it too wet, or else I'm a dead man."

George looked around the kitchen, finally spotting the boxes where the different sizes of paper cups were stored. He walked over to it, grabbing a small one, only to notice Freddy waving his arms back and forth as he shook his head.

"No...?"

Freddy nodded.

"... Uh, 'yes' as in 'no', or 'yes' as in 'this cup'...?"
Freddy stomped his foot before spreading his arms apart.

"Oh, a bigger cup? Uh, okay..." George relented, grabbing one of the large cups. "Really, man, you should just say something. I know you're not fluent in English, but I'll figure it out. It's okay."

George poured a little bit of water from the faucet into the cup, before holding it out to Freddy. Freddy shook his head, pointing to the faucet again, before rotating a hand in the air in front of him.

"You want... more...?" George questioned. "Look, if you damage that suit, man, you're taking all the blame."

He filled the cup a little more, only for Freddy to insistently gesture on adding more water. He finally decided to just let the water pour in until Freddy gave him some kind of signal that he could stop. Sure enough, once the water was almost to the top, Freddy showed off his fuzzy palms.

"Stop? Okay," George complied, turning off the faucet. "Uh... there is a lot of water in here... maybe you should be the one to hold it."

He held out the paper cup until Freddy clutched it with both hands, slowly taking it from his grasp.

"Are you gonna drin - WHAT THE FUCK."

Freddy had violently jerked the cup forward, throwing the water all over George, including his uniform.

"Ronaldo, what the hell, you're not the kind of guy to - "

A furry hand shoved itself over George's mouth, the person in the Freddy suit wrapping an arm tightly around George's arms, holding him close as he dragged him along. He clenched his hand tighter against George's mouth, freeing his other arm to open the freezer door, before shoving him inside.

"RONAL."

Freddy slammed the door before George could even finish his sentence or think to get to his feet. He banged his fists helplessly against the door, no handle to open it from the inside, as the person in the Freddy suit lodged a broom under the exterior handle for safe measure.

As he stepped out into the Game Area, he was pleased to notice the kitchen crew were still being entertained by the animatronics. That was good... they still had about forty-five minutes left on their break. They should enjoy it.

John turned his eyes back to the kids watching the show. Now it was time to get to work.

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What a day. For Phil, it seemed like getting his exam scores back was the only good thing about today.

He had made a ninety on the most recent bio exam, his speech in public relations class got an A, and he had made an eighty-four on the most recent exam in his psychology of happiness course.

However, he had received a grim phone call from his uncle earlier in the evening. Parents were reporting their children missing - another five of them, to boot - and to make matters worse, one of the employees had apparently been in an accident.
'Only clumsy ol' Thornton could spill water all over himself and accidentally lock himself in the freezer... the doctors said he'll pull through, especially since he had enough brains to know to remove his wet clothing, but he'll need some time off from work. And thanks to the previous restaurant, people are already trying to call foul play. We can't exactly ignore them, so just remind them that the company had nothing to do with this, okay?' That was what his uncle had said.

John, though... Phil smiled weakly. It seemed like a good night's rest had been what he needed after all, as Frank mentioned that he had thrown in his support with Fazbear Entertainment, fully believing it was an accident as well, and that he was carefully combing through the security footage for any traces of the children.

Speaking of security... Phil looked over at the phone. It was close to midnight, so he should probably make another call.

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November 10, 1987

Jeremy picked up the phone on the first ring and hurried to take his seat, not wanting too much noise in case it drew the animatronics in.

"Hello, hello! See? I told you you wouldn't have any problems! You're a natural!"

Thanks, Phil, Jeremy thought to himself, already checking on the music box.

"So, hey, did you see Foxy in the hallway? Well... I guess you can't exactly tell me. I was just curious... he's always been my favorite, you know."

If there was one thing that could have made Jeremy smile that night, that was it.

"Going back to the whole, uh, redesigning thing... they tried to make Foxy more kid-friendly. They completely changed his character into 'Loxy' by making him a girl, and programmed him - uh, her - to entertain toddlers... but kids can't keep their hands to themselves. We had to have Loxy repaired so frequently that we eventually gave up and let her be a 'take-apart-and-put-back-together' she's just a mess of parts we like to call 'Mangle'. Other than that, uh..."

There was a pause on the other end.

"Uh, I just want to ease your mind about any rumors you might have been hearing... like I said before, the company didn't exactly get off to the best start, so lots of rumors tend to go around, and sometimes people try to make a buck off of these things. I know that whatever's going on... is pretty tragic. And I feel bad for the parties involved. But I want to reiterate that this has nothing to do with our establishment. Our guard during the day shift has reported nothing unusual, and he's on watch from opening until close."

An accident? Jeremy wondered, checking the vents and hallway.

"For now, just hang in there, and I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Jeremy did one more quick check on everything before walking over to hang up the phone. He had remembered to wear his watch this time, making sure he kept it in the pocket of his slacks before he went to work at night. It was only about 12:06 am. The last time a few minutes had felt so slow, he was listening to a lecture in organic chemistry.

After several more rounds, Jeremy found himself getting bored. After his next sweep, he checked the
drawers on the desk. The first one he opened held blank sheets of paper and a few pens... just what he needed. He did another sweep before taking one of the pens and starting to write on the paper. With each sentence, he did another round of checking - sometimes two or three if the sentence was particularly long.

To whom it may concern,

If you are reading this letter, I am either dead or gravely injured. This is the closest thing to a will I can offer, if it counts. Please give all money in my name to my sister, Rachel Fitzgerald. My possessions are to be given out to my sister (who has first pick if conflict arises over ownership, such as my car) and my closest acquaintances. My closest acquaintances are Phillip Fazari, Ronaldo Sanchez, Heather Carras, Sophia Baldwin, Shelby Iverson, Pat

Jeremy looked up from the paper at the sound of metallic footsteps, immediately dropping the pen to grab the flashlight. Sure enough, he could see light reflecting off of Foxy's eyes down at the end of the hallway.

Can't even let a man write out his will just in case he needs one, Jeremy thought bitterly as his thumb tapped the button several times. He checked the vents, then turned around to wind up the music box via remote. As he swiveled back around in the chair, he checked his watch.

12:47 am? Nice to see that a good chunk of time had passed. After a few rotations of flashing Foxy, viewing vents, and minding the music box, Jeremy was pleased to find that Foxy had left the hallway. He was able to rotate between writing and checking, probably for a fair amount of time, as he was able to finish writing up his makeshift will.

The metallic footsteps returned, however, and Jeremy checked the hallway, letting out a yelp - and quickly clapped a hand over his mouth. How fitting he would react to Bonnie the exact same way as he did when he first met the animatronic rabbit? Well... the old one, to be precise. It was clear Heather seemed to favor using him for spare parts, based on the complete absence of his face. That didn't stop the beady eyes of his endoskeleton from staring back at Jeremy, though. He flashed the light a few times, before slipping on the Freddy head for a few seconds, hoping one of the techniques would make the old Bonnie leave.

Jeremy took in a deep breath for five seconds, held it for five seconds, then let it out for five seconds before taking the Freddy head off. He checked his watch. It hadn't even been thirty minutes since Foxy showed up. Jeremy checked the hallway again, only to find Bonnie was still 'staring' back at him. He checked the vents, the music box, then tried putting the Freddy head back on. The footsteps only grew louder.

What do you want from - oh COME ON! Jeremy gritted his teeth as he flashed the light down the hallway, revealing that not only had Bonnie Sr. stepped closer, but Foxy had returned as well. He flashed them a few more times, checked the vents, wound up the music box - oh, great, he could hear 'Little Boy Blue' laughing - and went back to trying to flash them. As long as Foxy was out there, the head probably wouldn't work, so he might as well try resetting their systems. Over and over, Jeremy kept at it, trying to ignore the laughter - it was like being mocked - until he finally noticed Foxy leaving. It was like Bonnie Sr. was glued to the floor.

Jeremy tried the head again, taking a few deep breaths, before checking the hallway. It seemed Foxy had changed his mind about leaving. Oh man... he had left the music box alone for a fair amount of time. He flashed the hallway, hoping for the best, and turned around. The puppet was almost entirely out of the box by the time he started winding.

One, two, three, four, five... Jeremy counted out the seconds before he turned around to check the
vents and hallway. Back and forth, between the lights and the music box, until Foxy had left once again and the puppet was back in its box.

**Bonnie? Why?! I bet if I was Heather, you'd be much nicer...** Jeremy thought with a wry smile, before peaking at his watch. 2:41 am... he was almost halfway through the night.

Time continued to pass, Bonnie Sr. content to stand and watch Jeremy as he went through the routine, with Foxy sometimes joining him until the flashlight proved too strong for his system.

After swiveling around in his chair, Jeremy checked the hallway - and let out a sigh of relief. Finally, Bonnie Sr. had left him alone. It only took... a little under two and a half hours for him to leave. One rotation later, however, he huffed at the sight of Foxy back in the hallway. It was like they were a tag-team.

And the vents... he could hear something in the vents... he didn't want to check the monitor, because he didn't want to risk going too long without flashing Foxy. But when Jeremy checked the hallway, he let out a little sigh of relief - empty once again. And at 3:35, he was over halfway through the night. **NOW** he could check the monitors. Winding up the music box a little more, he checked on channels six and five. Jeremy had to quickly look away from channel six, though, because... because birds shouldn't have teeth, and Chica - the older one - was poised in the vent, her eyes bulging and her beak opened wide enough to reveal not only her teeth, but the ones on the endoskeleton within as well. He was almost relieved to see Blue Boy on channel five... that animatronic was far less horrifying.

He checked the hallway, the vent lights, the music box... the hallway -

"**Hi.**"

Jeremy let out a small sigh, checking the left vent light. Sure enough, Blue Boy - he might as well just call him BB at this point - **BB** was peeking out at him from the vent, part of his face visible from around the corner. Back to the Freddy head. He waited a few seconds, until he could hear BB leaving through the vent. He checked the hallway and both the vents - nothing - before he immediately went back to winding up the music box.

For a while, it wasn't that bad - everything seemed back to normal, even though old Chica hadn't left the vent (Jeremy hoped she wasn't **stuck**, though, because that might be complicated to fix) - until his flashlight caught a glimmer of an eye down the hallway. Foxy turned his head. Jeremy narrowed his eyes, flashing the light as he checked his watch once again. 4:10 am... he was getting so close...

Vents, music box, hall - Foxy had left once again. Jeremy turned around in his seat to check the music box when he heard something clamber through the vents. Whoever it was, they were out to get him, and he quickly shoved the Freddy head on - just in the nick of time, too, as he suddenly felt the back of the chair get forcibly grabbed and he was spun around, forced to look up at the towering purple rabbit.

**Breathe, breathe, breathe, BREATHE, DAMN IT!** Jeremy commanded, starting to feel a 'rush' in his head. He closed his eyes, tried to think of something - Heather! - he remembered how excited she had been taking apart and building the very things that were now out to kill him. Not that that was her fault... she'd never knowingly hurt him. Air was starting to fill his lungs again... 'Keep breathing, Jer-man Chocolate Cake!'... he could practically imagine her scolding him, and he slowly began to realize that he was still breathing. Still alive. Still safe.

Jeremy opened his eyes to find that the office was empty once again, and he carefully removed the Freddy head. Even when he checked the hallway with his flashlight, there was no trace of the old
Bonnie - though he might have ducked into one of the Party Rooms. At least Foxy wasn't out.

Jeremy checked the vents and then went back to winding up the music box.

It seemed like he was alone for a while - heck, when he heard banging in the vent and went to check, it turned out the old Chica had left - up until the banging returned soon after. Sure enough, a minute or two later, he spotted Bonnie crawling through the vent on the right. Jeremy put the head on again - his face was starting to get rather sweaty from the stuffy atmosphere - and closed his eyes, not wanting to stare into those emotionless green eyes. He finally heard Bonnie leave, and checked on the vents and hallway again. It was nice to finally have some alone time. He checked his watch as he turned to check on the security footage. It was 5:00 am on the dot. Just one more hour, and he could leave.

He never realized empty vents and halls could give him such glee, the minutes ticking down... until the old Bonnie returned to the hallway. Maybe it wouldn't be that bad. Jeremy flashed him, put on the head... and took it off after a few seconds to check the hallway again. Still there. He checked the vents, checked the music box... maybe he'd get lucky and Bonnie Sr. would just stand there for the rest of the night. He turned back around, lifting the flashlight off the desk to check the -

Check the -

Jeremy hit the button over and over. The last time the batteries came close to dying, the light had at least been weak enough to serve as a warning! He shook the flashlight in desperation and tried again. No light. And he could hear the footsteps getting closer. And then a second pair of footsteps joined it.

No. No, no, no, not like this. Jeremy hastily unscrewed the bottom of the flashlight, dumping the batteries out into his hand, then tried placing them back in. The footsteps were getting louder, picking up speed - Jeremy screwed the bottom back on and held out the flashlight, desperately pressing the button.

On and off, the lights flashed weakly, reflecting off of Foxy's eyes, his hook, the exposed parts of his endoskeleton, and his bared teeth. It was like he had stopped him before he could lunge. The animatronic relaxed its pose to stand naturally, before turning and walking back down the hallway. Jeremy could barely see Bonnie Sr.'s leg in the corner of the dimly lit hall. It appeared that animatronic was leaving as well. Jeremy checked his watch, letting out a relieved sigh.

Watching the second hand reach the '12', officially starting a new hour, had never been so amazing. He clocked out immediately... but decided to wait a few minutes to give the animatronics time to return to their stations.

Tomorrow. He had to speak with Phil tomorrow. He had the day off, and considering it was Frank's day off, it would hopefully make things less stressful for Phil as well. Jeremy wrote another request for new batteries, folded up the 'will' he had written up and tucked it into his pocket, and finally made his way out of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0

Okay, good, the new guy had left.

John had driven in a loop around the pizzeria - much like he had for the first murder - after noticing that Ford Escort parked out front. Undoubtedly the new guy hired by Frank. But sure enough, shortly after 6 am, he had finally departed.

*That's right, buddy... go home, close your eyes, and take a nice long nap...*
Clad in the familiar purple uniform to avoid any suspicion, John entered the pizzeria, keys in one hand... a tool box in the other.

"Look, I'm telling you! The pizzeria had nothing to do with the case!" Frank insisted, before he coughed heavily.

"Sir, we received a tip that the five children who went missing were a group of friends who were thinking about secretly hanging out here instead of going home immediately after school," the officer stated.

"Pssh, I know kids can be crafty, but... you really think a couple of nine-year-olds would do something like this?" Frank shook his head.

"They weren't all the same age, including one victim as young as four. Sir, we're going to need you to tell us everything you know."

He let out a heavy sigh, fidgeting with his black bowtie.

"I'm not the guy you want to ask, then," he explained, clearing his throat. "Both my nephew - he's the assistant manager, currently busy with a party - and I were out yesterday. He's got classes, and as you can tell, I'm not exactly the healthiest guy to be around - "

Frank fell into another coughing fit, before he resumed speaking.

"The guy you'd wanna speak to is probably John. He's our security guard during the day."

"I see. Do you know where I might find him?"

"Probably at home. Must be awful sick or something," Frank remarked, trying to choke back a cough. "Asshole didn't even call ahead to let us know he'd be out. I've got his number, I'll see if I can call him."

Frank reached over on his desk for the phone number organizer, flipping through a few of the cards, before reaching over to the phone and picking up the receiver, dialing the number. He waited a minute before hanging up, his brow furrowed.

"Answering machine?" the officer inquired.

"No, it... it said the call couldn't be completed... his phone was working fine just a few days ago, and it's nowhere near the billing period..." Frank mused.

"Any chance I could see that card, sir?" the officer asked.

"Just let me copy down the contact information," Frank muttered, grabbing a pen and a piece of scrap paper.

As he scrawled out the information, the officer spoke up suddenly.

"Burgess... does that say John Burgess?"

"Yeah, he's related to Martin, if that's what you're wondering."

The officer snatched up the card, inspecting it carefully.
"Thank you for your help, Mr. Fazari. But you can probably expect us to return tomorrow, with a full investigative team... you may also want to suggest that any guests with reservations cancel them."

The officer swiftly left the managerial office, and Frank could've sworn he heard him curse under his breath as he left.

Wasn't eleven-eleven supposed to be a day for wishes? If that was the case, Jeremy wished for...

It'd be silly to wish for "making it through the night okay"... he had made it through the three previous nights without any wishes.

He looked over at the phone, unable to contain the sheepish grin on his face.

... A 'happily ever after' with Phil. Maybe it had only been about two months, but... there was no denying Phil was the kind of person he wouldn't mind spending the rest of his life with.

As if on cue, the phone rang.

November 11, 1987

"Hello, hello! Look at you, night four! I knew you'd get the hang of it!"

Cheerful as always.

"Okay, so, I think it's only fair that I update you... uh... there's going to be some kind of investigation. We might end up having to close for a few days... I dunno. I just want to emphasize that this is merely a precaution, and Fazbear Entertainment denies any wrongdoing. I-I'm sure it'll all get sorted out in a few days... uh... so just keep an eye on things, and I'll keep you posted, okay?"

Newspaper. Jeremy made a mental note to check yesterday and today's newspaper... assuming Pat hadn't already thrown them out. Something was going wrong, he concluded, as he checked the music box.

"Oh, one more thing... try to avoid eye contact with the animatronics. Someone may have tampered with their facial recognition systems - we're not sure. But the characters showed signs of aggression towards the staff - they interact with the kids just fine, so that's good. But... whenever they see an adult, they just... stare..."

Well, good thing he typically kept his eyes shut when those things stared at him.

"Just keep hanging in there, okay? It'll all pass. Okay, good night!"

The line clicked off on the other end, so Jeremy checked the hall and the vents before going to hang up the phone. Someone had switched out the batteries once again, so that was good. He did one more quick check before returning to check the Prize Corner.

It didn't even take fifteen minutes for "Mangle" to show up on the monitor, dangling from the ceiling in the Prize Corner. Another fifteen minutes later, Mangle had left, but now Foxy was back in the hall.
Another long night, Jeremy supposed, already moving the Freddy head into his lap for closer reach. He let the light flicker on Foxy's eyes for a few seconds, before turning back around to check on the Prize Corner. A few rotations later, Foxy had retreated from the hallway. With the vents also empty, Jeremy took advantage of the free time he had been granted to stretch his arms out, checking his watch. Only 12:50 am, but he was almost over the first hurdle.

Then came the clambering clanky noises, along with the faint sounds of static, and Jeremy whirled around in his chair. Sure enough, Mangle was hanging from the ceiling in the hallway... and it seemed that she was polite enough to invite Foxy along for a visit. Back to the flash-and-dash routine. Several minutes passed, and eventually Foxy left. Leaving only Mangle, now edging down the side of the wall. Like a spider. 'Spider-Fox'? It was too early in the morning for proper cognitive function. Music, vents, hall... music, vents, hall... Music...

Jeremy could hear rattling and clanking behind him - this time turning fainter. Please, oh, please...

He turned around and found that Mangle had left. Jeremy pumped his fist in celebration, before checking his watch.

1:31 am, meaning he was over a fourth of the way through. The rotations were actually starting to get boring, from how inactive his performance was. Okay, so Foxy showed up at the back of the hallway. Only to leave again after a few flashes.

Bored? Jeremy wanted to slap himself. He should be glad that he was bored, rather than panicking over his life. He checked other channels, figuring that might make things a little more interesting - and help him keep tabs on everyone. He had been hearing that clanking noise from Mangle, even if she hadn't been in the hallway, so it could mean she was hanging out nearby in one of the Party Rooms. Channel Four, Three, Two... oh.

It seemed that the older Chica had come along for a party with Mangle, the latter creeping along the wall toward - oh, surely not!

But as Jeremy flipped back up through the channels to wind up the music box, he could hear a faint banging noise in the vents. Sure enough, as if the banging wasn't enough, he could hear static echoing off the metallic walls of that cramped space. It certainly was enough to draw Foxy back into the hallway, and he could hear BB's laughter coming from some other part of the restaurant.

If the noise from the music box was intended to draw the animatronics away... then all this static was a great big invitation for them to join the office party. Jeremy flashed Foxy once more before slipping on the Freddy head, as Mangle poked both of her heads into the office before retreating.

Jeremy checked the hallway - yes, Foxy was gone! - before checking the vent lights. How much longer did he have? It was now 2:42 am... just about halfway there. He wound up the music box some more, checked the vent lights and the hall... the usual routine, until he once again noticed things seemed to be too quiet. Until he heard rumbling in not one, but both the vents. He was already checking on the Prize Corner, why not see what was going on?

Bonnie Sr. and old Chica appeared to be squirming around the corners in the video feed for the vents... although they seemed a little stuck. Probably due to the fact that they seemed much larger than their present-day counterparts.

Just... stick around, okay? Jeremy thought to himself with a little smirk, as he turned back around to check on the hall.

Larger than their present-day counterparts indeed. The face of Freddy Fazbear's Pizza himself,
hunched over in the hallway. He... he wouldn't be 'aggravated' by the sight of his own face, would he? Jeremy tried flashing him a few times, before going back to the music box. There it was - that scrambling in the vents - and Jeremy whipped around in his chair with the Freddy head on. He kept his gaze low, just in case the comment about eye contact was true, focusing on the wear and tear of Bonnie Sr.'s leg. He listened for Bonnie to leave, before removing the head - making sure to flash Freddy before he turned around to wind up the music box a little more.

The vent on the right rattled violently, and Jeremy donned the Freddy head, turning around, keeping his eyes on Chica's bib.

"Let's Eat!" was printed on her bib. *Let's not*, Jeremy thought to himself, remembering all of those grotesque teeth. She finally turned around and left. Jeremy let out a sigh and turned around, winding up the m-

*Not again...!*

Jeremy spun around, keeping the Freddy head on and his eyes low - although he could see the old Freddy's hand out of the corner of his eye. It appeared he was about to grab his chair and spin him around, like his newer counterpart had that one time. Go figure the main characters would be the most aggressive ones. He closed his eyes for safe measure... until finally, he heard the footsteps retreat. He checked the hall and vents before turning back to the monitor.

And then, the right vent clambered once again. God damn it, why?! Jeremy pulled the Freddy head back on as old Chica stood before him in the room. She left him alone, once again - probably ducking into a Party Room, as the hallway was empty again - and the vent lights indicated everything was clear. Jeremy turned around to wind up the music box, checking his watch as it wound up. Hard to believe it was 4:16 am... it felt like only a few minutes had passed in all that peril, yet he still had over an hour and a half left on his shift.

Based on the ruckus in the left vent, Bonnie Sr. had returned for him. Jeremy put on the head and turned around as the animatronic stood before him. He couldn't help but wonder if the fact that both the uniform and the head were brown - like Freddy - helped him blend in with the animatronics. He heard Bonnie Sr. walk away, and Jeremy slipped off his disguise.

*Not far* away, though, as he was now standing with Foxy out in the hallway. Well, wasn't that great? He flashed them and went back to winding up the music box. Static echoed through the right vent, and Jeremy pulled on that stuffy head once again, to fend off Mangle. She retreated, but it appeared BB was coming over to take her place, based on the voice in the left vent.

*Come. ON!* Jeremy mentally complained. He checked the time as he flashed the light down the hall, revealing that Bonnie Sr. had left, but Foxy remained in the hallway. 5:28 am... 5:28 am... just over half an hour to go.

Several rotations later, he heard static out in the hallway. Mangle and Foxy both peeked out at him. Jeremy flashed them, before going to check the vents. Darn it... Bonnie must have heard the static, as he could see the shadow of his ears in the right vent. Back into the Freddy head.

*But wait...* Jeremy realized, as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. *I haven't checked the music box in a while...!*

He opened his eyes, relieved to see Bonnie had left, and took off the head, whirling around to check on the monitor. Yep, that puppet was itching to leave the box. Jeremy held down the 'play' button, watching as it started to sink back down -
He heard a childish giggle. Was... BB in the office? Jeremy put the Freddy head on and spun around, expecting to see the small figure in the office.

But he wasn't there.

Jeremy removed the head, lifting the flashlight from the desk. Had he left down the hallway, where Foxy and Mangle were?

He heard another high-pitched giggle.

*Where are -*

Jeremy's thoughts were cut off as something from underneath the desk *yanked* on his tie. His forehead connected with the edge of the desk, stars flashing behind his eyelids, and he mentally cursed as he felt his glasses slide off his ears and down the tip of his nose. Amidst the confusion, he'd failed to notice the flashlight had rolled off the desk and out of his grasp. BB laughed at him. And laughed. And laughed.

If he didn't do something, that noise was going to draw the animatronics in!

Jeremy's view of the room was much more blurred and hazy, now that he didn't have his glasses, but he could see a smudge of contrast against the tile floor - the flashlight! He rolled the chair back, and stood up - wincing as he heard the sound of plastic snapping underneath one of his shoes. Well... now he knew were his glasses were. He could've sworn BB laughed even louder. He was about to reach down for them, when he heard footsteps down the hallway.

*No!*

Jeremy scrambled around the desk, tripping, the flashlight slipping out from his fingertips as he fell. He crawled forward on his elbows, the footsteps louder and picking up speed, grabbing the flashlight and pressing the button - he squinted, realizing it was facing the wrong way - before turning it around and flashing it at the hallway. Rather than pounce, Foxy was looming over him, staring down ominously with his jaw hanging open.

On and off, on and off, Jeremy kept flashing the button, waiting for Foxy to reset as he listened to BB laugh. He couldn't lie here on the floor forever - what if one of the other animatronics came along? And what about the puppet?

All of a sudden, BB went quiet, and Foxy straightened his posture, before they both marched down the hallway.

Could it be? Jeremy checked his watch - oh, right, he couldn't see. Jeremy crawled slowly and quietly back around to the other side of the desk, feeling around on the floor for his glasses. He finally found one half, apparently snapped apart at the bridge, and held it up to his eye. He spotted the other half on the floor, and also checked his watch.

*SIX. A. M.*

Jeremy reached over into the drawer for the masking tape from a few nights ago, crudely fixing his glasses. At least the lenses seemed to be intact... he was pretty lucky in that regard.

Now that they could fit properly on his face, Jeremy clocked out and left the pizzeria. Of course, this would only be temporary. Once he had a little more caffeine in his system, he would need to have a
George would be out of the hospital tomorrow. Considering the sight of police cars out front, and numerous phone calls cancelling birthday parties, it was quite possibly the last ounce of hope he had to hold onto.

That is, until he stepped into the pizzeria, and everything seemed that much brighter.

"Jeremy!" Phil exclaimed, walking up to him.

"Phil," Jeremy said, stepping towards him as well. "Phil, we need to talk -"

"Alright, give me one second... still gotta clock in, you know?" Phil replied, hurrying down the hallway.

Jeremy let out a sigh, leaning against the wall, waiting for him to return.

"I'm kind of surprised," Phil remarked, as he approached Jeremy once again. "Shouldn't you be... at... work...?"

His speech had slowed down as he finally recognized the brown uniform.

"I took the night shift job," Jeremy stated.

"Why?"

Jeremy let out another sigh.

"Because Picnix cut my hours and I needed the money. I didn't want to make anyone worry, especially not you," he confessed.

"Well, I'm worried now!" Phil scolded, looking Jeremy over.

The bags under his eyes, the masking tape patching up his glasses, the bruise centered on his forehead... his stomach growled and he looked away in shame. Phil reached down and gently took Jeremy's hand.

"Come on. Let's finish this conversation in the back," he stated, starting to lead him away.

Jeremy cast a glare over his shoulder at the animatronic situated by the balloon stall. So that's where he had been all this time. He continued leading him, all the way back into the managerial office.

"I'll be right back."

Jeremy took a seat in the chair across from the desk, trying to ignore the slight tremors in his legs. Was it the anxiety from the past few nights? The colder autumn temperatures? The lack of sleep and food?

Phil walked back into the room, carrying a hoagie on a plate.

"They aren't as good as the Picnix subs, but..." he noticed the doubt in Jeremy's eyes. "I-I know you're trying to be tough, but you've gotta eat. Jeremy, please."

It broke his heart, honestly, watching Jeremy nearly wolf down a sub of cafeteria-lunch-quality.
"... When's the last time you ate?" Phil asked quietly.

"Last night, at dinner," Jeremy stated between bites. "A bowl of instant soup and a handful of crackers... and a few carrot sticks, courtesy of Pat. I'm trying not to skip meals, but... I've certainly had to make them smaller."

"Is the night shift job as dangerous as John said it was?" Phil asked.

Jeremy nodded, before swallowing the bite of food in his mouth.

"That's why I wanted to speak with you... I don't think I can take another week of this. I don't know what I'll do to make up for the cut hours at Picnix, but... working a second day job would beat a night job that could result in me getting hurt," Jeremy smiled wryly. "You might not be able to call Foxy your favorite if you knew what a pain in the ass he is."

"Maybe you could work here!" Phil offered. "There's actually an opening, we could..."

He didn't even need to keep talking, he knew what Jeremy was going to point out just by the look in his eyes.

"... There's gotta be some way to reason with my uncle..." Phil mumbled in defeat. "Surely someone could make him keep his beliefs out of this... maybe there's a district manager I could speak with, o-or..."

"Phil, you'd practically be asking for a favor, so there's no way that some random higher-up would do it. You'd pretty much have to..." Jeremy stopped suddenly, his expression turning painful.

"What? What would I have to do?" Phil asked, leaning forward, a hand on Jeremy's knee. "I'll do anything if I can keep you safe. If you have an idea, please, let me hear it!"

"... There's one person who would definitely listen to you... someone with power over your uncle... someone who sits at the very top of things," Jeremy stated quietly.

"My father," Phil realized, his expression also turning blank.

"But that's the thing, I think it would be taking things too far..."

"It could work," Phil commented, then sighed. "But I'm sure he'd ask why I'm doing this... I-I don't know if I'm ready to tell him about me, or us, but... I also don't want to lie to him..."

"... Remember what I said before we started dating?" Jeremy asked, placing his hand over Phil's. "That you were like my best friend? That hasn't really changed that much, has it? You could... always tell him that. And there's a chance he won't ask. But that's why I didn't want to suggest it, I knew it would put you into an uncomfortable spot."

"I think it is worth a try, though..." Phil commented, taking a deep breath. "Tonight. I'm gonna call him tonight. It's my responsibility to worry about now, okay? You go home and get some rest."

He leaned down a little further and placed a gentle kiss to Jeremy's forehead, before he stood up and held Phil in his arms.

And he held him right back, because Phil was hit with the reality that there was so much crumbling away around him and he needed something - someone - to hold on to.
Phil's shift had ended... but he wanted to head over to Picnix to do a little shopping. He came back to Freddy Fazbear's Pizza shortly after, tucking some snacks, a few cans of caffeinated soda, and a package of batteries into the drawer of the desk, making sure to leave a note for the night guard.

... But then he had to eat dinner. And then he had to do some studying. And then he thought a nice hot shower would feel great. And now that he was clean, he started cleaning the kitchen, since 'there were a few things that could be dusted or polished'.

And then Phil shoved the feather duster back in the small utility cabinet, glaring at the phone, because he knew what he had to do, and it was already past ten o'clock, and he shouldn't have been trying to push it out of his mind for so long.

He leaned against the wall as he picked up

"Hello, hello?"

"... Hi, Dad."

"Phillip! It's... kind of late... how are you doing?"

"Oh, uh... I-I'm... good."

"Good! You sound healthy, at least. I spoke with Franco on Monday... he doesn't sound too good with all that coughing, huh? Don't catch a cold from him, okay?"

"Uh, okay. A-actually, speaking of Uncle Frank, I... uh..."

"Recent events are getting to him? I know... I plan to make an official statement once the investigation is complete, probably over the weekend. I hope they find those kids... no parent should ever have to outlive their child."

"Yeah," Phil whispered, looking up at the picture on his fridge. Austin Carmichael had been one of the children reported missing. "But... um... I-I didn't want to actually talk about Uncle Frank directly, just... uh..."

"Is everything alright, Phillip?"

"Y-yeah, I'm fine, really..." he lied, his palm growing sweaty. "I just wanted to ask if you could... tell him to hire someone."

"Hmmm..." his father's tone on the other line grew deeper. "Hire someone for what?"

"Th-the, uh, day guard shift that opened up. J-John appears to have left suddenly... and with the recent events, uh... there might have been a reason why he ran away..." Phil scowled at the thought.

"Okay, so... who would you want to be the new day guard?"

"Oh, uh, his name's Jeremy Fitzgerald. He's currently working the night shift, but he'd much rather have the day position," Phil stated. "He's... also my, uh, best friend, in case you were curious."

"I see! If he's your best friend, I'm sure he's a fine young man. Why wouldn't Franco hire him?"

Phil swallowed hard.

"Uh..." his heart was starting to pound. "Uh... b-because..."
"Is there something I should know about this 'Jeremy' fellow?" Federico asked calmly.

Phil stood up, looking straight at the knife holder, his grip tightening on the phone.

He was cracking.

"I-I'm sorry, Dad. I lied to you... I've been lying to you for a long time."

"Lying...?" his voice on the other end sounded so pained.

"A-about... uh, Penny. I'm not dating her. She... she doesn't even exist," Phil confessed, his hand trembling.

He was breaking.

"... I see. Why are you telling me this now?"

"I... B-because... I-I..." he tried to fight back the lump in his throat.

"Phillip...?"

He shattered.

"B-because Jeremy's m-my boyfriend, a-and I can't tell Frank because he-he refused to hire him for being gay i-in the first place, a-and if he knew about us th-then I'd lose m-my job and Jeremy didn't want - didn't want that to happen, and Frank s-said stuff about you guys being similar, but I-I don't want to believe that you're - you're cruel like him because y-you've always been my father and I-I-I love you and Jeremy believes you're good too, b-but the night shift job is dangerous and I-I don't want him working there anymore, p-please, i-it shouldn't matter if he's gay, he's smart and kind and helpful and... I... I-I'm so in love with him...!"

Before his father could say anything, he slammed the phone back onto the base, effectively hanging up the call. His hyperventilating gave way to sobs as he slid against the wall to the floor, curling his arms around his legs as he cried against his knees.

The apartment was silent around him for a short while, until the phone rang. Phillip didn't move, waiting for the ringing to stop.

But it didn't. It continued to ring, over and over, the repetition having a calming effect on him. Phil finally stopped crying, wiping the tears from his eyes as his breathing returned to normal.

He finally stood up and picked up the phone.

"Phillip! Oh, thank God, I was worried..." Federico's voice cracked on the other line. "I thought you were doing something drastic, and I... I didn't know..."

"... I didn't hurt myself, no."

"Franco really said all of that, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Look. We agree on a lot of things. We even agree that he's the brains of the family. Although, I'm starting to think it might be Fiorella," he chuckled. "But as smart as Franco is, I know one thing he doesn't."
"What's that?"

"What it means to be a father. I don't know if he can remember anything as clearly as I remember that July 8th, way back in 1966. The day I finally got to meet you and hold you in my arms for the first time. I still remember when you looked me in the eyes for the first time and I... I swore that I was going to do everything I could to make you happy, to give you the best life possible. Because I loved you so much."

Phil could feel tears threatening to well up in his eyes again.

"Franco also seems to have forgotten that the world around us is constantly changing. I remember when they took down the 'colored' signs at the local restaurants, and watching a man set foot on the moon. I was raised to believe it was 'wrong', but my son is far more important than some outdated idea. I love you, Phillip. Nothing's ever going to change that, and don't you forget it."

"Dad... you're - you're going to make me cry again...!"

Federico laughed on the other line.

"So, your boyfriend... Jeremy Fitzpatrick, right? He's the one on the night shift?"

"Fitzgerald, but yes."

"Alright. I'll let Franco know he's going to be reassigned to the day shift."

"... A-And what about Uncle Frank?"

"I won't say a word about what you told me to him. Only that Jeremy is going to be moved to the day shift. And if he singles out Jeremy to give him a hard time... you report it to me immediately."

"Alright."

"Is there anything else you want to talk about? Are your classes going well?"

"They're going very well... Jeremy's been helping me study biology, since that's his major."

"Oh, that's good."

"It is! And other than that, everything's been fine. Although... I should probably let you go to bed."

"It has gotten pretty late, hasn't it? Don't stay up too late. Good night, Phillip, I love you."

"I love you too, Dad. Good night."

He hung up the phone, looking over at the clock, before heading into the living room to watch some television. He couldn't go to bed for another hour or so.

After all, Phil had another phone call to make.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, I actually used footage of the games from LPs and such to properly write the nights.
Night 1 was based off of MrKravin's playthrough of Night 1. Nights 2 and 3 were based off of xxProClassGamerxx's playthroughs of the same nights. Night 4 was inspired by HarshlyCritical's playthrough of... you guessed it! Night 4.

(Although I watched Markiplier's LP of the entire game, he just had too much editing and deaths to base a chapter on. I really wanted to do it, since his LPs are the reason I got into the series. Sorry, Mark, hope you feel better soon!)

If you're ever curious about how the next chapter is coming along (since I'm frequently blogging about my writing), you can find me on tumblr! I go by the same username, bijoukaiba, and everything. Even if you don't have an account to follow me, you're welcome to take a look!
I want to make a disclaimer that I will be modifying some of Phone Guy (Phil)'s dialogue in this chapter since (a) it will help fit the events of the plot a little better, (b) I don't want to be accused of plagiarism, and (c) nobody likes a copy-paster anyway.

To those who may be sensitive, please be warned this chapter contains explicit sexual content.

"Five Nights at Freddy's", its sequel, and all related canon characters are property of Scott Cawthon.

Also features some OCs and my own interpretations of the characters and plot events that may or may not be canon depending on the story of any potential FNAF games in the future. That's what fanfiction is for.

Also! I want to make a disclaimer that I will be modifying some of Phone Guy (Phil)'s dialogue since (a) it will help fit the events of the plot a little better, (b) I don't want to be accused of plagiarism, and (c) nobody likes a copy-paster anyway.

Chapter 9: Just Like This

November 12, 1987

It was finally midnight, and time to make that phone call. Hopefully Jeremy had seen the note he'd left for him... maybe he was even enjoying a drink right now.

"Hello, hello! Good job, night five!" Phil said, after hearing the phone pick up on the other end. "Listen, um, I need you to keep a close eye on things tonight, okay?"

Many parents had cancelled their reservations for parties after the accusations arose and the investigation began. With all of Thursday's reservations gone, Frank and the police agreed it would be the ideal day to scour the pizzeria.

"From what I understand, we're pretty much going to be putting the pizzeria on lockdown for the day, not allowing anyone in or out, especially in regard to... any previous employees. Uh, they did make an exception for you, since you're only here at night and wouldn't have known. And considering all the animatronics wandering around... yeah, they're pretty much just going to wait until six in the morning," Phil explained.

"But you know... we may end up moving you to the day shift. A position just became... available," Phil couldn't help but smile, imagining the relief Jeremy must have been feeling at that moment. "Uh, we don't have a replacement for your shift yet, but we're working on it. In the meantime, we're also going to try to contact the original owner of Fredbear's Family Diner, but... it's been closed for so
long, we might not be able to find him. Anyways, just one more night! Hang in there! Good night!"

He hung up the phone, unable to contain his excitement, as he reached over on the kitchen counter for his checkbook and a pen. As the son of the CEO and as an assistant manager, it was no surprise that Phil had his own version of the checkbook used by the company - at least for the pizzeria he worked at.

He wrote out the date, Jeremy's name, the dollar amount - both shorthand and in word form - and finally signed it as 'Fazbear Entertainment'. His satisfied smile perked up even more as he thought of the perfect way to fill out the memo section.

*Welcome to the family!*

Phil could hardly wait to tell Jeremy the news... but he knew that was still hours away. Might as well get some rest until then. He left the check on the table and left for his bedroom.

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Flashlight in one hand, Picnix sub in the other, Jeremy checked the hallway, the light reflecting off Foxy's eyes and hook.

"Yeah, you just wait," Jeremy mumbled, taking one final bite. "I'm halfway through, pal."

He checked the vents before turning to wind up the music box.

All of a sudden, he felt the chair jerk backwards as something grabbed it, spinning him around. Jeremy shoved the head on quickly, but it must have been switched out for a smaller one, because it took him a second to properly put it on, trying to ignore the glare from the older Bonnie's beady eyes.

*Was it good enough?* Jeremy wondered, keeping his eyes shut.

A powerful mechanical hand around his throat quickly answered his question as he was slammed backwards, again and *again*, against the video monitors, until -

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Phil shot up in bed, breathing heavily.

A dream... it was... it was just a dream. A nightmare, rather.

But everything... everything was going to be okay. Jeremy had been okay the past few nights... why would this one be any different? He was probably almost done.

Phil looked over at his alarm clock. 1:31 am, according to the bright red numbers. Damn.

He was too freaked out to fall back asleep. No matter how much he tried to reason with himself - like the fact that he definitely didn't leave a sub with perishable items sitting out for several hours - fear kept overpowering logic in his mind. He needed to get his mind off it, Phil decided, pulling the covers off. Well, okay, even with the heater on, it was still a little nippy in his apartment. He took a blanket from the bed, draping it across his shoulders like a cape, and walked out into the living room.

It made him remember being a child, coming out into the living room to see what was on television during the weekend. Phil took a seat on the couch, browsing the channels. An infomercial... a Christian broadcast... *oh.*
For whatever reason, Channel 5 was showing re-runs of *Scooby Doo*. Except this one was... different. The tone of the show seemed much darker, and although he recognized Scooby, Shaggy, Scrappy, and Daphne... the other two characters weren't so familiar - a boy in a sweatshirt and sweatpants... and animated Vincent Price in a crystal ball. There was no better way to describe him. Where were Fred and Velma?

Oh, well. The show was actually pretty charming, the episode ending up playing out like *It's a Wonderful Life*, as Scooby Doo watched what happened to his friends' futures without him. There was also something about putting ghosts into a demonic chest. It kind of seemed like the series had an overarching plot, rather than being episodic like all the previous *Scooby Doo* series had been... that was a pretty interesting decision by the writers.

It was now 2 am and he was starting to feel better, he realized, as another episode started. He was still worried, of course, but it felt like Scooby... was helping him... relax...

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*How*?! Jeremy wondered. *How did three of them get into my office*?!

For whatever reason, they were no longer deceived by the mask... and now the old Freddy, the old Chica, and the current Bonnie were now standing in front of the desk.

Bonnie turned his head to Freddy with a mechanical motion.

"Oh boy, Freddy!" he exclaimed, the voice from his voice box sounding *very* familiar, almost *annoyingly* so. "I can't wait to splat 'em!"

Apparently Freddy did not want others encroaching on his territory, as he took this opportunity to swing a fist into Jeremy's face, sending him sprawling on the -

0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0

Phil jolted up from the couch with a gasp, his heart racing.

Having nightmares about oneself were terrifying, but nightmares about another person, with no way to see if they were okay... it was almost enough to make him sick.

The television was still on, now playing reruns of *The Jetsons*. He went two channels down, to the news. 3:08 am. He wasn't going to get any sleep tonight at this rate.

Phil wanted so badly to just pick up the phone and dial the pizzeria's number... all he needed was to hear the line pick up on the other end to know that Jeremy was okay. But if he was okay, he couldn't risk the phone's ringing drawing in the animatronics. He could just be waiting for nothing - for all he knew, Jeremy had been hurt hours ago, or even -

*No, no, no, no, no, no!* Phil wadded up the blanket and threw it to the floor. He couldn't think that way - he *wasn't* going to think that way. He was going to watch more TV and just wait until he calmed down enough to go to sleep. Phil lifted the blanket from the floor, placing it over him briefly, before setting it aside. Come to think of it... there was one thing that might help him keep calm.

He stood up and headed back into his bedroom. On his dresser, right by a family picture, was the stuffed fox Jeremy gave him when they visited the museum last month. He held it in his arms, squeezing it tightly against him for a moment, before carrying it out into the living room.

He wasn't really the biggest fan of *The Jetsons*, but that was okay. Anything to take his mind off the
nightmares. He hugged the plush fox in his arms once again. It took an hour of robotic housemaids and aggravatingly noisy space travel (so many beeps!) before he found himself growing tired again. Blanket draped over his shoulders and fox still in his arms, Phil turned off the television and went back to his bedroom, hopefully to get some sleep.

Jeremy flashed Foxy in the hallway, hoping it would get him to finally leave.

"Hello!"

Jeremy quickly checked the vent on the left, sure enough finding BB peeking out at him. Time to put the Freddy mask on. He had checked his watch a while earlier, at 5:38 am, meaning he was super close to getting through the night.

He heard banging in the left vent and rechecked the light, confirming that BB had left. He flashed the hallway again - apparently Foxy had tagged the new Freddy into the match. Jeremy flashed him with a scowl before going back to the vents. The left one was empty, but he spotted the familiar shadows cast by Bonnie's ears on the right, slipping the Freddy head on. He ignored the glare of the animatronic eyes as he listened for Bonnie to step out of the room.

Slipping off the Freddy head, he was pleased to find that the hallway was now empty. He spotted the yellow hand of Chica starting to reach out of the vent on the left, but her movement halted suddenly. Then she slowly retreated backward into the vent. Jeremy checked the right vent, only to find it was empty as well.

Was it possible...?

He checked his watch.

5:52 am.

They never retreated this early! Unless...

Jeremy's eyes widened and he cursed audibly, leaping out of the chair to turn on the monitor.

The box at the Prize Counter was empty, and the music box... it had somehow switched over to playing the melody of 'Pop Goes the Weasel'. And quite frankly, Jeremy did not think the change 'twas all in fun'. He held down the remote to wind it up again, bring that puppet back from wherever it was lurking, but the melody kept playing. Almost like the music box had taken on a mind of its own.

"No, no, n-!"

Jeremy's words were cut off when rope-like appendages wrapped around his neck, cutting off his air supply. His hands clutched desperately at what he could only assume were the arms of the puppet behind him, desperately mouthing 'stop' and 'let me go' and 'please'... his vision growing fuzzy... a rushing sound overtaking his hearing... it suddenly didn't hurt so much... his arms dropped limply to his sides... Phil...? ... tired... close eyes...

Cool sweat dripped down Phil's temple as he awakened suddenly, now aware of how tightly he had been clutching the fox against his body. Surely, by now, Jeremy was...
Nope, his alarm clock indicated it was 5:27 am.

"I give up," Phil admitted to the little fox in his arms. "I'm just gonna find something on TV until his shift ends. I just can't sleep like this."

He tucked it back under the bedcovers and stepped back out into the living room, turning on the television, doing a little browsing.

Early morning news coverage was talking about the investigation that was about to begin... and how Martin Burgess was soon going to be released from prison. The mother of one of the victims from the previous missing children incident had even stepped forward to offer commentary, saying that she now believed Martin wasn't guilty and she was sorry for everything that had happened to him.

Heartwarming as it was, Phil didn't really want to listen to stories about deaths linked to the pizzeria after last night. There was another cartoon on the next channel - he didn't recognize this one, with colorful bears in medieval clothing that had magical bouncing powers.

... Maybe bears weren't the best choice, either.

He settled on a documentary about the rainforests around the world. Colorful poison dart frogs of South America... the small duikers of the Congo... the fascinating nests of the bowerbirds in Australia... Jeremy would have loved it, Phil thought to himself, as the credits rolled.

Jeremy...!

The time in the corner of the screen indicated it was 6:00 am on the dot. Phil bolted from the couch to the phone in his kitchen. The time on the television wasn't too different from what the clocks at the pizzeria said, right...?

He dialed the number for the pizzeria and held his breath as he listened to the line on the other end ring.

Pick up... pick up...!

His breath caught in his throat as he heard the other line pick up.

"I-I'm coming over, okay? Don't leave," Phil requested. "... This... th-this is Jeremy, right? Um... if you're an officer, uh, s-stay on the line... i-i-if you're Jeremy, j-just hang up the phone as fast -"

That was the first time Phil could ever recall being glad that someone hung up on him. He hurried to his room, changing out of his pajamas as fast as possible, grabbed his car keys and wallet, grabbed Jeremy's check off the table - that was everything, right? - and practically dashed out of his apartment toward his beloved Mercury Sable.

The sun hadn't fully come up yet, but it was still bright enough to see the violet hues of the sky at dawn. Aside from a watch, Jeremy should've really thought about bringing a jacket to work. Normally, he would've been just fine, as he would've been on the road back to his apartment, but... today was clearly going to be different.

As he ran his hands up and down his arms, trying to generate some friction from those thin brown sleeves to warm up his body, he noticed the faint trace of his breath in the air. Who would've thought November could be so cold?
He recognized the blue Mercury Sable immediately, pulling into the back of the lot before parking. Phil nearly burst out of the side door and bolted straight to the front of the restaurant, throwing his arms around Jeremy without any regard to the rest of the world. Jeremy held him close, a much-needed 'welcome back' after spending another night in the pizzeria - it had become its own horrifying world so quickly.

"Jeremy!" Phil exclaimed, although his voice was muffled against Jeremy's shoulder. He pulled out of their embrace to look up at him. "... Did they hurt you?"

"No, no, I'm okay," Jeremy reassured, shaking his head. "So, uh... what brings you out here first thing in the morning?"

"Let's just say that was the first time in a while I've had trouble sleeping," Phil admitted, looking off to the side. "Oh! Uh, here! I should give this to you... now that your first week on the job is done!"

Phil reached into his pocket, pulling out the check and handing it to Jeremy. He smiled as he watched Jeremy's expression brighten.

"... Does this mean everything's okay with your father?" he asked hopefully.

"He supports us one hundred percent," Phil confirmed.

Jeremy let out a sigh of relief, about to comment further, before the first police car pulled up.

"Officer," Phil addressed the cop. "I'm Phillip Fazari, the assistant manager of the restaurant. And, uh, this is Jeremy Fitzgerald, the current guard for the night shift. We were, uh, just on our way out."

"Former," Jeremy murmured, earning a little smile from Phil.

"Jeremy Fitzgerald?" the officer inquired, handing over an envelope. "Here. Mr. Fazari said to give this to you if you were still on the premises."

"Probably... uh... your paycheck," Phil commented, a yawn escaping him. "... I'll have to tell him to void it."

"Alright, sleepyhead, we probably shouldn't linger," Jeremy teased. "Let the officers do their job."

"Right," Phil agreed. "I wanted to speak with you anyway."

They walked over a different part of the empty lot, out of earshot.

"Do you have any free time today?" Phil asked.

Jeremy couldn't help but grin.

"Let's put it this way... guess who finally got a Thursday off?"

"Ha! For real?" Phil exclaimed. "That's great!"

"We might also be able to squeeze in a little bit of time to hang out with Ronaldo and Sophia, since I think their classes are close to the middle of the day, if you'd like," Jeremy suggested. "And of course, there's Heather..."

"I think... I'd prefer it to be just the two of us today. Especially after everything that's happened," Phil offered quietly.
"That sounds great too," Jeremy agreed. "But, uh... there aren't a lot of places open at 6 am."

"We can just grab coffee at a gas station or a fast food restaurant," Phil suggested.

"I'm alright with that. I should probably also stop by the bank to deposit my check, but I can just use the ATM," Jeremy added, patting his pocket. "Should we take your car, or mine? Or should we each take our own, so we don't regret leaving one of them in the parking lot?"

"Uh..." Phil thought it over a moment, glancing between the police officers in the distance and Jeremy. "Hmm... I think your car will be fine."

"Cool," Jeremy said, removing his keys from his other pocket, as they strolled back over to the Ford Escort.

As Jeremy drove the car, they kept an eye out for fast food restaurants that offered breakfast options. When they pulled up to a stoplight, however, Jeremy resumed speaking.

"I'm not gonna lie... I had a few nightmares after starting the night shift," he admitted. "I dreamt about that mask being stuck on my head and being forced to stare that puppet thing in the eyes... I can see why you don't like it."

"Y-yeah," Phil agreed, nodding grimly.

"I did have one good dream, though," Jeremy commented with a smile.

"What was it about?" Phil asked.

"It was about you... and me," Jeremy stated, placing his hand over Phil's. "We walked into the Wizard's Brew together, and the barista smiled and took our orders. A couple at a nearby table smiled and waved to us as we took our seats, and we waved back. And we talked and enjoyed our coffee, and I guess it must have been the dream-coffee that woke me up."

They both laughed.

"But what made that dream so beautiful to me... is we were holding hands the entire time," Jeremy added.

"Just like this?" Phil asked, adjusting his hand to hold Jeremy's.

"Just like this," he confirmed, giving Phil's hand an affectionate squeeze. "And nobody looked at us as if we had narwhal horns growing out of our foreheads."

Phil chuckled slightly.

"It sounds like a lovely dream," he commented, his thumb brushing against Jeremy's skin.

"Here we go... Winry's!" Jeremy declared, flipping on his turn signal. "You want a small coffee, right? Maybe a breakfast burrito?"

"I, uh... heh... I'm worried that might be too much for my stomach to handle. Maybe just an English muffin, a fruit cup, and two hash browns. You're... going to eat something too, right?"

"Um... I was just gonna get a hash brown," Jeremy admitted, before Phil held out two quarters to him.

"Their biscuits are pretty filling too, aren't they?"
"I suppose so," he agreed, taking the coins from him.

They wound up splitting the cost for their orders, driving off with a cup of coffee and a paper bag full of fried sin... and fruit.

"Do you want your hash brown now?" Phil asked, holding the bag in his lap.

"That would be great... I went through the beef jerky and those sandwich crackers pretty quick last night," Jeremy admitted, winking at Phil.

He smiled and removed two hash browns from the bag - one for Jeremy, and one for himself.

"A toast," Jeremy declared, raising his hash brown in his right hand. "To that dream coming true someday... and to getting my paycheck."

"Cheers!" Phil agreed, raising his hash brown alongside Jeremy's, before they both ate.

Dreams coming true... blood rushed to Phil's cheeks, as he remembered that Jeremy wasn't the only one who dreamt about them spending time together. The feeling soon subsided, however, as he recalled his nightmares from only a few hours ago.

"Since there isn't really anyplace open, would you like to hang out at my apartment for a while? Pat's first class is at 8:30, so... you guys would finally have a chance to meet face-to-face!"

"Yeah, it sounds... it sounds good," Phil let out a small sigh as Jeremy pulled into the bank's parking lot. "L-Listen, Jeremy, I-"

"Give me one second, I wanna deposit this really quick," he requested, as he drove up and parked near the ATM on the side of the building. "Hey, will you do me a favor? Reach into the glovebox and see if there's a pen in there."

Phil complied, finding a blue pen and handing it to Jeremy, who signed the back of the check. He waited in the car as Jeremy deposited the check in the ATM, before he finally returned.

"That was so satisfying," he remarked with a grin. "Sorry about the wait, what's on your mind?"

"Jeremy, I... uh... I-I was wondering if I could ask you... a-a bit of a personal question," Phil requested, his hand crinkling and folding the top of the paper bag.

"... Okay," Jeremy consented, though there was a hint of caution in his voice.

"Aside from... uh... your ex... have you had sex with anyone else?"

Sure enough, Jeremy seemed to wince at the question.

"No," he answered, starting the car. "Although... I wouldn't exactly call him my 'ex'. That would imply we had a relationship. And we didn't. It was a one-night stand, and a mistake."

"I'm sorry," Phil apologized.

"Everyone makes mistakes. No matter how smart you are, you can always end up doing something stupid. And that night definitely qualified as 'something stupid'. I went to the doctor soon after for tests, to make sure he wasn't just some guy going around seducing people to transmit diseases like some kind of cruel game. And fortunately, everything came back negative."

Jeremy's hand rested on the gear selector.
"... Was there something you wanted to tell me?" he asked quietly.

"I... I've been thinking about this for a while, actually... I mean, we- we talked about it casually once or twice, but we never really, uh, had a serious discussion... m-mostly 'cause I was nervous a-about asking, because I, uh, figured it might be a sensitive subject... a-and now I'm nervous because this is so sudden... but the fact that you're alive a-and okay, the fact that my father supports our relationship, and the fact that we've got a lot of free-time to ourselves... it made me remember something that my father once said... and suddenly... I-I'm not so scared anymore..."

Jeremy stared at him, as though he was still processing all the information conveyed in that timid little speech. And then his cheeks turned red.

"Phil... are you..." he seemed to realize he was staring, as he glanced away briefly, before looking Phil in the eyes. "... Are you asking if I want to have sex?"

Phil took in one deep breath, before answering.

"If you're comfortable with it, then yes."

"... I'll admit, I've also thought about this a few times," Jeremy confessed, finally smiling a little. "We have a good relationship, and you're a good person... I think we're ready to take it to the next level."

Phil let out a little sigh of relief, beaming up at Jeremy.

"Hey, don't get excited too fast," Jeremy warned teasingly, as he backed out and drove away from the bank. "We can't go back to my apartment right away. We'll have to stop at a Packard pharmacy. And don't worry, the one by Paradise Lounge is nowhere near here."

"Uh... stop for what?"

"Condoms and lube," Jeremy replied.

"Uh... should I go in too? Or... do you think people might stare?"

"If you're worried about people staring, I can handle it on my own," Jeremy assured. "Oh, there's a Packard right here!"

He turned right and drove into the parking lot, finding it was almost vacant due to the early hours.

"Here, um..." Phil handed him a ten dollar bill as Jeremy parked the Escort. "I kind of feel like I should help pay for it."

"If you say so..." Jeremy said, looking over the bill in his hand, before stepping out of the car.

The sky was much brighter now that the sun was rising, Phil noticed, reaching into the bag for his English muffin. Toasted and lightly buttered, it was hard to believe there weren't many fast food places that offered breakfast when it was so easy.

... This was going to be easy too, right?

A little after he had finished the English muffin, Jeremy stepped out of Packard, a plastic bag in his hand.

"Thank you for the cash... I was a little short," Jeremy commented as he got back in the car. "Here's your change."
He handed over a few bills and almost a handful of quarters to Phil.

"Thank you," Phil mumbled quietly.

"It's not like we're gonna drop our clothes at the door or anything," Jeremy reassured, as he started the car. "You can chat with Pat, we can try to find something on TV, we can talk... we don't even have to have sex, we can do something else, like go to Lakeview..."

"I'm just a little bit of a mixed bag... so excited I'm nervous, or something, heheh..." Phil admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. "I'll be okay in a little while, I'm sure."

"Well, here we are!" Jeremy announced, opening the door, before lowering his voice. "... It's not much, but it's home, as they say."

Phil stepped inside as Jeremy hit the light switch near the door. 'Not much'... the kitchen and dining room were on his left, along with the living room on the right - and despite it being listed as a two-person apartment, the living room was definitely smaller than the one in Phil's apartment. There was an armchair and a sofa, however, the TV was smaller and seemed to be an older model, and the wooden coffee table appeared to have a few stains from previous residents forgetting to use coasters.

"Do you think Pat's still here?" Phil asked, taking off his jacket and hanging it on the coat rack by the door.

"Should b-" Jeremy's voice cut off when he walked over to the dining room, lifting a paper from the glass table.

"'Left early to cram for exam.' Oh, that was today? 'I will be back late tonight, so go ahead and get some sleep or invite a few friends over. There's a snack for you in the fridge. Your friend, Pat'. Oh, wow, that was really nice!" Jeremy remarked, reading over the note.

"Yeah!" Phil agreed, taking a seat on the sofa and reaching onto the coffee table for the remote. "So what's the deal with the meal reveal?"

He heard the fridge door open, as well as a delighted 'ooh!' from Jeremy.

"A mix of berries, probably from Picnix!" Jeremy revealed, carrying the clear plastic container into the living room.

"Ooh! Guess I, uh, bought that fruit cup for nothing," Phil commented, scooting down on the sofa to give Jeremy some room.

Jeremy sat down, draping an arm across Phil's shoulders, Phil leaning close to rest his head against Jeremy's shoulder. He smiled, tilting his head a little to press a kiss to Phil's temple.

"So, uh... do you know any good programs on at seven?" Jeremy asked.

"Nope!" Phil replied, which made Jeremy laugh. "Oh, but I did find this one channel with really good nature documentaries...!"

They had finished off the berries before the first documentary was even done, describing the interesting societal structures of prairie dogs and meerkats. And then they watched another one - this time about owls. And then another one - a cautionary tale about humans taking over the natural habitats of animals. It had started out with the usual sad stuff - the scenes of seagulls or sea turtles
tangled up in litter at the beach, deer panicking to cross the road... but it turned around quite a bit as a home video showed a bear invading someone's house to eat some pizza that had been left out. Jeremy and Phil found themselves clinging to each other in terror as the bear let out a threatening roar, starting to approach the person filming, before it decided to finish eating the pizza and leave.

"That felt... way too familiar..." Jeremy remarked, still clinging to Phil.

"I'm sorry, Jer... b-but hey!" he looked up at him, offering a supportive smile. "You never have to deal with the night shift ever again!"

"That's true," Jeremy said with a relieved smile.

"Um... not to change the subject, but... uh..." Phil lightly drummed his fingertips against Jeremy's knee. "Well... uh... would you mind if we watched another documentary?"

"I'm alright with that, these are great!" Jeremy replied excitedly.

The next one described wildlife found in the deserts of New Mexico - roadrunners, jackrabbits... Phil was delighted when red foxes were also mentioned. It was the reptiles that really took the cake though - as wicked as the rattlesnake was, nothing was as fascinating as the whiptail lizard.

"... there are no males, but despite this, the all-female population are still capable of mating and producing fertilized eggs. This has often earned them the nickname of 'lesbian lizards'..."

"It's not just people?" Phil asked in surprise.

"Hardly! There's plenty of animal species that engage in homosexual behavior. Humans are the only ones that make a fuss over it, that's all," Jeremy assured.

As a commercial break started, Phil noticed Jeremy yawning, and he had to resist the urge to do the same.

"Is it almost your bedtime?" Phil asked. "Maybe... we should start soon, or you should just go ahead and get some rest."

"I'm a little drowsy, I'll admit," Jeremy replied. "But we haven't even had lunch... and I've been going to bed around one anyway. How about... at the end of this documentary, we get something to eat, and then see how you feel?"

"I can agree to that," Phil replied, snuggling against Jeremy again.

There was only one more part left in the documentary, discussing the famous 'dogs' of the desert - the coyotes. After that, Jeremy carefully removed his arm from Phil's shoulders and stood up.

"I feel like I should actually cook something... but I also want to keep things light on the stomach. Would... uh... would chicken noodle soup be alright?" Jeremy asked.

"On a cold autumn day? Some hot soup would be great!" Phil assured. "Hey, uh... want any help in the kitchen?"

"Nah, it's just opening a can and putting a bowl in the microwave," Jeremy shrugged it off, already in the kitchen, cranking the can open.

He put one bowl in the microwave, before heading back to watch a little more of the next documentary - this one about the Felidae family.
"Half a can... that will be light enough, won't it?" he asked, looking over at Phil.

"Should be fine, I usually eat a whole can's worth of soup!"

"Oh man... I miss being able to eat a whole can in one sitting. I've had to ration out my soup to three helpings per can. But now that I've got some more money in the bank, I'm going to go out and buy some more food! I miss feeling full!"

It was a good thing he turned at the sound of the beeping coming from the microwave, or he would have noticed the distraught expression on Phil's face. He heard the microwave whirr to life again, and he quickly shook off his worry - Jeremy wouldn't want to see him like that.

"Here we go...!" Jeremy announced, carrying out the first bowl and placing it on the coffee table in front of Phil. "That one's for you... sorry I don't have crackers to go with it."

"I-It's fine, really!" Phil assured, lifting the spoon from the bowl and blowing on the soup before taking a bite.

"The next time the complex has grocery bingo... I'm going to win for sure," Jeremy declared, clenching a fist. (I)

"King Phillip hereby bestows a smooch of good fortune to the brave knight," Phil decreed, leaning over to kiss Jeremy on the cheek.

"I am certain I will come back victorious at the end of this month, your Majesty," Jeremy stated with a nod, getting off the sofa to kneel before 'the King'.

They both laughed, as the microwave beeped once again.

"Alright, lunch!" Jeremy cheered, rising to his feet and racing back into the kitchen.

After a few mumbles of 'hot, hot, hot!', he took a seat next to Phil and started eating.

"Hey, uh... I don't know how much foreign food you've eaten, but... have you ever tried miso soup?" Phil asked.

"... Miso?" Jeremy repeated after swallowing a spoonful of soup.

"Yeah, it's a Japanese soup. It's usually used as a base for more complex recipes, but it's pretty good on its own, too, especially with some leeks thrown in," Phil explained. "The next time you come over to my place, I'll make sure to get some for you."

Jeremy smiled back, lifting another spoonful of soup to his lips.

Of course, with such limited rations, it wasn't long before they had both finished eating. As a commercial break started, Jeremy went to put their bowls in the dishwasher. Phil, meanwhile, turned the television off and walked into the dining room, less than ten steps away.

He picked up the plastic bag from Packard as Jeremy stepped out of the kitchen.

"So, uh... which one's your bedroom?" he asked.

"The one at the end of the hall," Jeremy replied, placing a hand on Phil's shoulder and walking with him. He opened and closed the door behind them.

Jeremy's room was... about as neat and tidy as he expected it. He had his own bathroom,
immediately on his left, and he had a walk-in closet on the right - his Picnix apron hanging on the
doorknob. The curtains were drawn over the windows, and the blinds were likely closed as well -
having the room as dark as possible probably helped Jeremy sleep in the afternoon. There was one
large dresser immediately in front of him, with a single picture frame on top of it. Phil didn't have to
to get up close to know who was in the picture.

Walking further into the room, he could see Jeremy's bed, neatly made with dark blue bedsheets, a
small nightstand with a digital alarm clock, and a desk along the opposite wall. It only served one
purpose since Jeremy didn't have class that year - to hold a small television.

"So, I guess we..." Phil's voice trailed off as he looked into the plastic bag. "Are there three boxes of
condoms in here?"

"I bought a box in each size, since... I didn't really know what kind would fit who," Jeremy
explained.

"Oh, that was a pretty good idea. And thoughtful. But... um..." Phil blushed, reached into the bag,
and handed the box of regular-sized condoms to Jeremy. "Since you're the one with experience, I-I
kind of thought you should be the one to lead... i-if you know what I mean. I-if that's okay with
you?"

"Yeah... I think I can do that," Jeremy confirmed. "Even though... uh... I was on the opposite end of
things my first time."

"I-I just feel bad that you might have bought these other boxes for nothing," Phil said with a frown.

"Nah... one of those sizes might fit you," Jeremy pointed out.

"You're not implying I-I'm small, are you...?!" Phil mumbled, narrowing his eyes, but laughed it off.

"I don't know, we just have to figure out what size works for you. And once we know that, you can
take the lead next time, if you'd like."

"Hmm... I guess that would be ideal," Phil agreed, setting the bag aside on the desk.

He nearly jumped when he heard something hit the wall - Jeremy had taken a seat on his bed and
kicked his shoes off, one of them flying a little too far. Phil started removing his shoes and socks as
well, hobbling over in an awkward motion of half-walking, half-undressing. He gently tossed them
aside, landing near Jeremy's shoes and socks.

He took a seat next to him on the bed, feeling Jeremy's arm wrap around his waist as they kissed.
Not like the cute little kisses on the couch - this one was passionate and methodical, lips carefully
moving together, trying to stay in sync with the other.

As they pulled apart to catch their breath for a moment, Phil scooted a little further back on the bed,
Jeremy following suit as he carefully removed his tie. Phil turned his body to face Jeremy's, placing a
hand on his collarbone, temptingly close to the top button of his brown uniform.

"You... do know how this works, right?" Jeremy asked.

"I have, uh, something of a general idea, yeah," Phil assured with a small laugh.

"Okay," Jeremy agreed, before leaning in to kiss him again.

Impressively dexterous, Phil's hand went down the front of Jeremy's uniform, gradually undoing the
buttons one-by-one. He tilted his head a little, capturing Jeremy's lips in a different angle, as he started to pull the parted uniform down his shoulders. Of course, with only one hand, this was proving to be a little more difficult. Jeremy quickly caught on, however, and pulled back to slip his shirt completely off.

Phil let out a little 'oh' of wonder, his first time seeing Jeremy like this. His build was on the medium side, a little more pudgy near his belly, and his upper arms had developed a fair bit of muscle - possibly from helping customers with heavier items. It made Phil a little sad, though, when it occurred to him that Jeremy might have lost some weight and muscle when he started cutting back on eating.

Deciding fair was only fair, Phil slipped out of his long-sleeved pullover shirt and tossed it into a growing pile of clothing near the foot of the bed. His figure was far more lithe than Jeremy's, and he kept his eyes down, the realization that 'I'm actually going to have sex with my boyfriend' starting to creep back on him.

He felt Jeremy gently take hold of his wrists, one in each hand. He placed a kiss to the back of his hand, and a kiss to the spot where his other arm ended.

"It's okay. You look great," Jeremy reassured. "And we go as far as you want, remember?"

"Yeah, I..." Phil couldn't help but giggle, starting to feel better. "I-I can keep going."

His heart aflutter, he draped an arm behind Jeremy's neck, pulling him back in for a kiss, as he tried to slowly pull him down onto the bed at the same time. Jeremy moved to lower him a little too quickly, though, and they bumped foreheads when Phil was lying on his back, his head cushioned against one of Jeremy's pillows.

They both laughed, Jeremy pausing to readjust his glasses, before they resumed kissing. They were becoming more experimental with their mouths, the tips of tongues starting to lightly flick against each other, as Phil let his fingers run through Jeremy's hair. He moaned into the kiss and arched his back, his bare chest pressing against Jeremy's, eliciting a moan from him as well.

Jeremy pulled back suddenly, an apprehensive look on his face. His cheeks rosy and his gaze hazy, Phil looked back up at Jeremy in confusion...

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It started with a casual talk at the club that progressed into flirting, and on an impulse, he had wound up here in this simple hotel room.

Jeremy gripped the sheets, panting with the occasional moan thrown in, as his hips rocked back and forth, the other young man pounding into him.

"Vi-Victor... aah... please, slow down a little... th-this is a little too - too much for me...!" Jeremy gasped out, flinching as Victor merely tightened his hold on his hips and thrust in particularly deep.

"Come on, I-I'm so close... it's gonna f-feel sooo good... mmm... raise your hips just a little m-more..."

Still new to the whole thing, he followed the other man's lead, practically burying his face in the sheets to raise his hips at a slightly higher angle than before.

"There we go, there we go! Oh, fuck, oh, fuck, ohhh, Sarah, YES...!"

Jeremy's eyes widened at the sound of that name, as Victor shuddered and released inside him.
Come to think of it... Victor hadn't called him once by name tonight... and aside from the kisses in the hotel room they now shared, he hadn't really touched him or looked at him.

Jeremy was just a replacement.

"Oh... you didn't come?" Victor asked as he pulled out. "I thought for sure I had turned you on..."

Yes, he was physically aroused... mentally, not so much.

"I... guess it's just me," Jeremy lied, crawling away from him. "... I'm going to take a shower."

"Okay," Victor replied nonchalantly. "I'm gonna get some sleep. Don't be too loud, and don't use up all the hot water."

In the privacy of the bathroom, under the hot water raining down on him, Jeremy finished himself off, more frustrated than pleased.

'Just let me lead. It'll be great, I promise. This could be the start of a beautiful relationship.'

That was what Victor had told him, Jeremy recalled, as he continued cleaning himself. BULLSHIT! He was ending this tonight. He was a person, not a means of pleasure.

After drying himself off and dressing, Jeremy lied down in the other hotel bed, doing his best to stay quiet as a few hot tears escaped him before he finally drifted off to sleep...

... eremy! Jeremy!" Phil repeated, this time snapping him out his stare. "Hey, uh... is everything okay?"

"Sorry," Jeremy sighed. "I was just... thinking..."

"About what?"

About how Victor can go fuck himself.

"This isn't... this isn't bringing bad memories of your first time, is it?" Concern in his eyes, Phil gently rested his hand against Jeremy's cheek. "I-I know I'm the one that asked, but... you're allowed to say 'no' too, you know."

"I'll admit, I did kind of remember Victor for a moment there. It was a bad memory, but other than that, it didn't have any negative repercussions. It's in the past, and I've got to put it behind me," Jeremy assured. "I'm not going to let it stop me from having a good time... or more importantly, making sure your first time goes much better than mine did. Much better."

With that, he gently cupped Phil's cheeks in his hands and kissed his forehead.

"So then..." Jeremy whispered. "What would you like me to do?"

"O-Oh, um..." Phil stammered, a grin between his bright red cheeks. "I-I just figured y-you could do what felt natural, or something, a-and I'd let you know if it was, uh, okay or not. I trust you, Jeremy."

He smiled and nodded in reply, lowering his head to kiss Phil once more, descending from his lips down to his jaw... and light as a feather down his neck. He should've known Jeremy would know not to leave any marks, he thought with a smile, running his fingers through Jeremy's hair a little more.
Sensing that he liked it, Jeremy let his lips glide back up his neck, then back down on the opposite side, delicate like fingers on the strings of a harp. Do what feels natural... well, he was a science major, so why not put some of that experience with experimentation to use?

"Hey, Phil," Jeremy said, lifting his head.

"Hmm?"

"You're so..." he paused to think of a good word, something smooth. "... beautiful. You know that, right?"

Phil chuckled shyly, tilting his head to look off to the side.

"I mean it," Jeremy affirmed, letting a hand run up Phil's side. "Like, uh... I know most guys prefer to be called 'handsome', but you don't hear people calling works of art - masterpieces - uh, handsome. They call them beautiful. And you are... one hell of a masterpiece."

Phil blushed with a bashful smile, which Jeremy soon captured in a kiss. He tentatively let his fingertips glide down one of his pectorals, stopping at the nipple. He gently kneaded it, before letting his thumb massage it in circular motions, Phil moaning gratefully against his lips.

"After all, you're kind..." Jeremy added, pinching his nipple and rolling it between his thumb and index finger.

"Too tight," Phil whispered, wincing.

"Sorry," Jeremy apologized, lifting his fingers.

"I, uh, I-I did like the thing you did with your thumb, though," Phil offered.

"Oh, okay," Jeremy replied, shifting himself so he was straddling Phil's waist, so he could use his hands on both nipples. Phil groaned at the touch, arching his back. "... And you're honest, that's another thing."

As his thumbs continued to work, Jeremy continued to shower him with compliments in-between kisses - to his lips, his cheeks, his neck - Phil's only replies coming in the form of moans and breathy gasps.

"... Polite... hardworking... optimistic... humble... generous... helpful... very handsome... intelligent... all-around wonderful..."

"S-so are you," Phil complimented, his face flushed with color, stopping Jeremy from continuing by pressing a finger to his lips. "Like... you're really smart. Biology is currently my best subject."

"Hey, good job!" Jeremy praised with a grin. "Are your other classes going well?"

"Yeah. You know how it is with classes pertaining to majors, some common ideas tend to bounce around... so it's easier to memorize them. A-and I really like my psychology of happiness class, too. I'm starting to think about taking developmental psych in the spring..." Phil shook his head. "Sorry, heh, I-I guess I started to ramble. We should add 'patient' and 'good listener' to your list of positive traits, huh?"

"My list?" Jeremy asked, amused.

"Y-yeah, I mean... you're also really nice... a-and smar- no, I said that already... uh..."
Phil's thoughts wandered from that 'list' to the way that Jeremy shifted his body weight again, back to hovering a few inches above him, their bodies parallel. He moved his lips down his neck, this time all the way down to his collarbone.

"And you are... um... well, you're very handsome too, heheh... and... uh, a good role-model...?"

"Mnhmm?" Jeremy hummed, his hands gently clasping the sides of Phil's waist as he kissed his way down his sternum.

"And... um..." Phil had to crane his neck to look up at Jeremy, expecting to see him anticipating more compliments, but he was still intent on kissing him, his thighs tracing soft spirals and figure-eights against his sides.

Jeremy looked up at him briefly, his expression curious rather than anticipatory. Phil opened his mouth, about to speak, only for a shaky gasp to escape him as Jeremy's tongue lightly traced a ring around his areola.

"And... a-and... ahh... you a-are..."

His mind clouded over, laying his head back against the pillow, as Jeremy's tongue continued toying with him. Phil was reduced to outright moaning when Jeremy started sucking on it.

"Jeremy... oh, f-fuck..." Phil croaked, a tingling sensation spreading from his head to his curled toes. "W-wait..."

Jeremy stopped, lifting his head.

"Are you alright?"

Phil sat up and nodded, his face red, leaning in to give Jeremy a quick kiss before fumbling with the button on his jeans.

"Do you want me to...?" Jeremy started to suggest, Phil nodding quickly again.

Jeremy reached down, slipping the button through the hole and even unzipping his jeans, Phil raising his hips briefly so Jeremy could slide them down and off his legs. Jeremy un buckled his belt, snaking it through the loops on his pants, before tossing it aside. His black slacks landed in the same pile a few seconds later.

"You're still okay with this?" Jeremy asked.

"Yeah."

Phil gently reached out, his hand approaching the bulge in Jeremy's underwear. Unlike the dream, he didn't grab his hand, nor did he move away. With that, he gently massaged him through the fabric, Jeremy closing his eyes and letting out a shaky moan.

He was hard. He was hard for him, Phil remembered with a blush, and looked down. The feeling was obviously mutual.

Jeremy groaned in disappointment as he felt Phil remove his hand. He opened his eyes as he felt the bed shift, watching as Phil reached into the bag to remove the bottle of lube and the box of regular-sized condoms.

He didn't really know what to say; he wordlessly placed the bottle and box in Jeremy's hands before
lying down on the bed again.

"I wasn't sure about allergies or sensitivity... so I just went with rubbers and water-based."

"Sounds logical," Phil agreed. "... let's keep going."

Jeremy set the bottle and box aside for a moment, dipping his fingers under the waistline of Phil's underwear. He lifted his hips and Jeremy pulled his underwear down and off his hips, a soft and content moan passing Phil's lips as his erection was no longer contained. Jeremy admired his nude figure as he twisted the cap off the bottle and coated one of his fingers with lube.

"Alright, I'm going to start with one finger," Jeremy explained, as Phil parted and bent his legs. "You just tell me - anytime - if it hurts or if you just want to stop for whatever reason."

"Okay," Phil replied, lowering his head back against the pillow.

He stiffened as he felt a cool fingertip press against his entrance. Phil closed his eyes, bracing for it to enter, but Jeremy didn't move his hand.

"Phil."

"I-I'm ready."

"Look at me."

Phil opened his eyes, gazing up at Jeremy.

"Phil, I need you to relax your muscles, okay?" Jeremy requested, lightly pressing the spot again. "I'm not going to force myself in. Remember, I've been in your... 'position' before, and it hurts if you don't relax."

Jeremy shifted himself over to Phil's left side, glad that he was using his left hand on a whim, so he could intertwine his fingers with Phil's. He pulled himself up a little more, now halfway leaning over Phil.

"It's okay. I'm right here. I don't want to hurt you, and I never will. Tonight - or, uh, this afternoon - is all about feeling good," he gently squeezed Phil's hand, which he reciprocated. "Just focus on your senses, and let your body relax. You're doing great."

Phil closed his eyes once more, focusing on keeping his muscles relaxed, as he felt Jeremy's finger press against him once again.

"Alright, I'm going to put it in," Jeremy whispered.

With one gentle push, Jeremy carefully slipped his finger inside, inserting it slowly as he peppered kisses along Phil's shoulder. When he couldn't press it in any further, he looked up at Phil.

"How are you doing?" Jeremy asked.

Phil's lips twisted.

"I-it's cold... but it wasn't as bad as I feared. I-I mean, it's not bad at all," he couldn't hold back a grin as he peeked out of one eye at Jeremy. "... I've got a finger up my ass, I wasn't too sure what to expect, you know?"

Jeremy chuckled softly.
"As long as you're okay. I'm gonna move it a little, and then we'll try another finger, okay?"

"Okay."

Jeremy slowly thrust his finger in and out a few times, mindful of Phil's reactions, gently kissing him and reassuring him as he moved his hand.

"I'm going for two now," Jeremy stated as he withdrew his finger, applying more lubricant.

"Going for two? The football game's not 'til Saturday," Phil teased. "I know you're not the biggest sports fan, but maybe the five of us - or we could bring Pat, George, and Fritz - could watch the game at my apartment if you're not busy."

"Yeah, why not? It'd be nice to see everyone together again one more time," Jeremy agreed, leaning forward to kiss him on the cheek. "Alright, I'm ready if you're ready."

"Deep breath... and relax..." Phil reminded himself, closing his eyes and nodding.

Jeremy slipped both fingers into him, and he definitely felt his muscles stretch that time, wincing and clutching Jeremy's hand.

"Are you okay?" Jeremy asked, immediately freezing.

"I'll be good... just stretched a little more than I expected..." Phil opened an eye to look at Jeremy. "... Yeah, I'll be fine... keep moving. I'll let you know if you need to stop."

"Okay. You're doing great, Phil."

He moved his fingers a little more slowly, stopping once he had inserted them all the way, to give Phil some time to adjust. Jeremy felt him squeeze his hand, and he slowly pulled back, before gently pressing forward once again. In and out, gently, over and over. Jeremy let his fingers relax as he pushed in, his fingertips curling upward inadvertently.

Phil cried out, bucking his hips, squeezing his hand much tighter.

"Sorry!" Jeremy exclaimed, tensing up.

"Y-you're good, s-sorry..." Phil tried to explain, catching his breath. "I-I mean, it felt g-good, and it took me by sur-surprise... i-it was like... I don't know..."

Jeremy couldn't help but grin, remembering the story Heather had told him on the day they met.

"It's like... electricity flowing through you. But you don't get hurt and there isn't any damage."

"Y-yeah, it was like this... vwoosh... going through my body..." Phil's voice took on a pleading tone. "D-do it again, please...!"

He moved his fingers again, curling them at the tips, finding that spot that made Phil howl again. And again.

"Okay, I'm going to add another finger... and then I think you'll be ready," Jeremy stated, applying more lube to his fingers.

He continued to be slow and careful, keeping an eye on Phil. He asked every so often how he was feeling, and reassured him he was doing well. He didn't have to curl his fingers nearly as much to hit that sweet spot.
"Wait! I-I think I'm ready," Phil commented, before Jeremy could move his fingers forward.

"You do?" Jeremy asked.

"Yeah, m-mostly because, uh..." he grinned sheepishly. "I-If I'm going to go over the t-top, I'd really like it if we were... uh... 'together', i-if you know what I mean."

"Oh," Jeremy blushed in realization. "... alright."

He slipped out of his underwear now, admittedly a little flustered as Phil admired his naked figure. He wiped off his fingers on the covers near the foot of the bed - he could always wash it tomorrow - before grabbing the box of condoms. He removed one and tore the wrapper off, figuring out the right way to unroll it, before tucking his erection into it, making sure to roll the sides all the way down. Yes, the regular size fit him just fine. Next, Jeremy applied more lubricant - although he made sure to cover the condom entirely, he was particularly generous in applying it to the head.

Jeremy placed a hand on Phil's knee, taking his place between his legs, looking down at his boyfriend.

"Hmm..."

"Is something wrong?" Phil asked, noticing the contemplative look on Jeremy's face.

"Nothing's wrong, I was just thinking... maybe we should try something else," he explained. "A different position, I mean. Here, sit up for a second."

He reached out a hand, helping pull Phil up, before crawling past him to lie on his back on the bed.

"What if we tried it with you on top? That way, you'd have more control over how fast and how far you wanted to go," Jeremy suggested.

He held out his hand to Phil again, guiding him to straddle his lap. Phil reached underneath him, gently taking hold of Jeremy's erection, and scooting himself a little further back until he finally aligned himself with the tip.

"I'm not gonna move," Jeremy reassured him. "Go at your own pace."

Phil took in one more deep breath and lowered himself onto Jeremy, who let out a heavy moan and buried his face in his hands.

"You're not in pain, are you?" Phil asked, as Jeremy shook his head.

"N-no, you just feel so damn good..." Jeremy explained, his voice breathy.

Phil continued to slowly lower himself, his breathing deep with desire. He moved his hand off to the side to help keep his balance as he went further down - until he finally came to a stop against Jeremy's hips. He could've sworn Jeremy trembled, trying his best to stay still, as he waited for his muscles to adjust.

"Jeremy?"

He lowered his hands from his face, looking up at Phil.

"You feel really good too," he whispered in a low voice.

He raised his hips slowly again and brought them back down, Jeremy's breathing becoming erratic.
Phil's legs were already starting to feel a little sore from trying to hold himself up, so he practically slammed himself down - a cry mixed between pain and pleasure escaping him. He had moved too fast, but he had hit his prostate spot-on.

As he sat there for a while to wait for the pain to subside, he lazily traced a hand up Jeremy's torso, his finger drawing idle patterns on Jeremy's chest as his breathing shook. Wait, was he ticklish? The idea was pretty cute to Phil.

Phil resumed moving again, panting as he picked up his pace, even if it was a little hard on his legs. He managed to brush against that spot, a second time, a third, throwing his head back and moaning - he couldn't even hear Jeremy over his own voice. He was getting so close, but he could tell his legs were falling asleep.

He slowed down and climbed off of Jeremy.

"Everything alright?" he asked, raising his head, his face red and his glasses crooked. "Do you wanna call it a night? Or, uh, a-

"My legs are getting sore... can we go back to our original position?" Phil asked, helping Jeremy up.

"Yeah, hold on," Jeremy replied, placing his glasses on the night stand.

As he reapplied a little more lube, Phil took his spot on the bed. He crawled over and cupped his hand under one of Phil's knees, gently lifting it a little more to the side, as he used his other hand to position himself.

"You ready?"

"Yes, please," Phil practically begged.

Jeremy still moved into him slowly and gently, stopping once he was all the way in. Phil wrapped his legs around Jeremy's waist, his heel gently tapping against his lower back, signalling him to move. He leaned a little further down, however, to lock lips with him, before he began to move his hips.

Phil moaned against his lips, wrapping his arms around him too, just trying to pull him in close because he was getting closer and he wanted to finally hit that orgasm.

Jeremy could tell Phil was close too, by the way his muscles were starting to contract around him, and the way his back arched as he cried out Jeremy's name again.

"Say my name again," Jeremy was so into it, he almost didn't realize he had barked an order. "... Please."

"God! Oh, J-Jeremy, I'm s-so..."

Jeremy was really turned on, but there was no way he would let Phil come after him. He gently wrapped his hand around Phil's erection and pumped it in tandem with his thrusts, reducing him to garbled whimpers and babbling.

"Y-yes! Oh, f-fuck, Jeremy, I-I love you so m-"

That was the last thing he was able to say before Phil moaned louder than he ever had that night, ejaculate spilling across his torso as he shuddered, his breathing uneven, sweat glistening on his chest. Jeremy gently stroked him a little longer, trying to extend his orgasm a little more, as his muscles contracted wildly around him until -
Jeremy cried out, stopping deep inside Phil, as he finally had his orgasm.

"I love you too..." he whispered, but his breathing was so shaky, Phil almost hadn't heard him.

His hand holding onto the base of his shaft, Jeremy gently pulled out and took off the condom.

"I'll be right back... help you clean that up," he assured, hurrying into the bathroom.

Jeremy came back out a few moments later, some folded toilet paper in his hand, as he carefully wiped off Phil's stomach.

"How're you feeling?"

"Really good," he mumbled dreamily, smiling up at Jeremy.

"I'm glad, I had a good time too," Jeremy replied, smiling back.

He started to get up to throw away the toilet paper, but Phil's hand caught his wrist.

"Would you mind if I... stayed the night? Or, uh, the afternoon...?"

"Of course I don't mind, I know you're tired too," Jeremy assured, as Phil let him go.

After throwing away the trash and washing his hands, he returned to bed - carefully crawling over Phil, since he had taken the spot closest to the edge. As soon as he laid down on his back, settling under the covers, Phil rolled halfway onto him, draping his arm across his chest.

"Good ni - or, uh, afternoon," Phil whispered.

"Good afternoon," Jeremy chuckled softly, bending his neck to exchange a kiss with him.

Phil rested his head against Jeremy's shoulder with a contented sigh, a little smile on his face as he felt Jeremy wrap his arm around his shoulders. Jeremy smiled and closed his eyes.

No 'bad first time' would ever haunt him again.

Who would have thought that a crush in August would have lead to something like this? Sometimes it felt like the whole world was against him, but as he made friends, he started to remember that the Earth was just a tiny speck in the cosmos, and it was the people he held dear - his coworkers at Picnix... Pat, Heather, Sophia, and Ronaldo... and Rachel... and Phil - that made up his universe.

He remembered that wish he had made a few nights ago, about spending forever with Phil. It had seemed so silly at the time, but holding him in his arms, just like this... suddenly it didn't seem so silly anymore.

Jeremy opened his eyes, gazing up at the ceiling.

"Hey, Phil. I know people sometimes say things... in the heat of the moment without meaning to," he stated. "But I want you to know I meant it. I love you, I really do. I know having sex might not be the best time to confess your love, but - "

He stopped short when he noticed Phil was already fast asleep. The guy knew how to catch up on a good night's rest. Jeremy should probably follow his example - after all, he could share his feelings the next morning - or rather, that night.

Jeremy pulled the covers up over their shoulders and closed his eyes, letting sleep take him.
Phil's eyes shot open at the sound of loud, incessant beeping, and he nearly shot up in bed - had his head not collided with Jeremy's jaw. They both groaned in pain as Jeremy recoiled.

Phil's thoughts were slowly coming back to him, as he realized this was neither his bed nor his room, and that he was lying on his side, his back pressed against Jeremy's chest. They must have rolled over at some point overnight... he was too groggy to remember.

Jeremy finally reached over and hit the switch on the alarm clock, turning off the beeping, as Phil sighed and let his head flop back against the pillow. Jeremy's arm draped over his side, pulling him a little bit closer, planting a gentle kiss to his cheek.

"How'd you sleep?" Jeremy asked in a whisper.

"Five more minutes," Phil mumbled, tucking Jeremy's arm tighter around him.

He could feel the rumble of Jeremy's chest as he tried to keep his chuckling quiet.

"I have to get up and get ready for work, Phil," Jeremy explained, although one could hear the smile in his voice.

"Can't you just... stay like this?" Phil mumbled groggily, tugging gently on Jeremy's arm for emphasis.

"Maybe a few more minutes wouldn't hurt," Jeremy relented, gently kissing the back of Phil's neck.

Jeremy lay there for a few minutes longer until he finally felt Phil relax, letting go of his arm. By the sound of his breathing, it sounded like he had fallen asleep again.

Jeremy mentally cursed, however, as he realized he would probably need a shower after how messy he had gotten that afternoon...

Phil thought he had just drifted off to sleep for a few moments, but when he woke up feeling even groggier, he realized he had overslept.

"Jere...my?" he mumbled, pulling himself up in bed as the sheets rolled down his shoulders.

He glanced down at the alarm clock. It was about ten until noon, he really had overslept. Jeremy was probably eating lunch in the dining room, or working a shift at Picnix.

Phil sighed and sat up all the way, stretching his arms, when he noticed his clothes were folded and placed on the foot of the bed.

Well, wasn't that thoughtful!

He smiled as he put his clothes on - he was a little sore, but mostly it was his legs bothering him from that awkward position they had started in. Getting that button through the hole of his jeans was a little challenging with one hand, but he finally slipped it through. It sure was much nicer than leaving his clothes on the floor.

Phil clutched his shirt tightly in his hands.

Jeremy's clothes - the security uniform - it wasn't there.
Maybe he had folded it up and put it away - maybe he had thrown it in the laundry hamper - maybe he decided 'fuck that job' and was using it as fuel to enjoy a bonfire with Pat.

But he slowly looked up and realized the Picnix apron was still hanging on the closet door, and it finally clicked.

It wasn't almost noon... it was almost midnight.

"No," Phil whispered, shoving his shirt on as quickly as he could. "No!"

He darted out of the room - Jeremy was no longer in the apartment. The envelope he had gotten was still on the table, still untouched. Was there some kind of clue in there? Phil was desperate, mentally apologizing to Jeremy, before opening it. Sure enough, another version of his paycheck was there, but so was some kind of memo. He skimmed it briefly.

Attempted to murder witness... described seeing a gold version of Freddy, one of the restaurant's characters... probable chance the five children missing were...

Phil threw the note onto the table and bolted outside.

"JEREMY!" he yelled, hanging on to the faint hope he hadn't left yet.

"JEREMY!" he screamed, hoping he would see or hear him in the parking lot.

"JERE-" the cold air stung Phil's lungs and he coughed heavily.

He was too late, Phil realized, falling onto his knees. Jeremy had gone back to the pizzeria, probably too drowsy to know better. Possibly too drowsy to do his job correctly. The fact that it was Friday the 13th certainly didn't bode well.

It wasn't fair, Phil thought, trying not to helplessly cry in the middle of the parking lot. But all it would take was a little bit of bad luck... and he would lose the man he loved, just like that.

Chapter End Notes

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(1) Grocery bingo was a game played at my complex, and it's pretty much what the name implies - all the residents attending got bingo cards, and whoever won a round got one food item (like a jug of milk or a ten-pack of ramen) or in some cases, "special packs" (like hotdogs, buns, a bottle of ketchup, and a bottle of mustard). I never won a special pack, but I did win some of those sinful chocolate & peanut butter wafers.
The Best Day of My Life

Chapter Notes

I want to make a disclaimer that I will be modifying some of Phone Guy (Phil)'s dialogue in this chapter since (a) it will help fit the events of the plot a little better, (b) I don't want to be accused of plagiarism, and (c) nobody likes a copy-paster anyway.

WARNING: To those who may be sensitive, this chapter contains graphic violence with blood and mild gore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was funny how something as simple as a 'CLOSED' sign could make a building feel like an entirely different place.

But it wasn't just the sign, Jeremy soon realized, as he walked down the halls. The walls were now barren - all the drawings by children had been taken down, possibly to check for prints or other evidence. The faint smell of cleaning supplies no longer permeated the halls, as cleaning was the exact opposite of what the investigators wanted. The melody of the music box still echoed from the Prize Corner, however, and Jeremy picked up his pace.

And nobody had thought of the security guard, apparently. The desk was pretty much left the way it always was, with the flashlight and Freddy head still placed on top. Looks like snacks and caffeinated beverages were going to be a one-time luxury. Still, maybe the officers could have taken pity on a poor college student finishing off his last night on the -

Jeremy smacked a palm to his forehead. He had come here out of pure habit, following his nightly routine. As the phone rang, however, he realized he wasn't the only one caught up in this routine.

November 13, 1987

"Hello, hello, uh... what on earth are you doing there?"

Jeremy felt guilt eating away at him, as he could practically picture the worried look on Phil's face right about now.

"Surely th-there were signs out front? I-it was in the memo. They're... they're going to close the place down... f-for a while," Phil explained. "We had a spare suit in the back - a-a yellow one... someone used it... i-it might be the, uh, same person who m-messed with the animatronics... that's why n-none of them are acting right."

So, the envelope had some kind of memo in it. Jeremy hadn't even thought about reading it, and if he had, he wouldn't be sitting here feeling totally brainless.

"Listen... j-just finish your shift, it's safer than, uh, trying to leave in the middle of the night... with all those animatronics on the prowl, as you're well aware."

Just one last night shift? He could do it. Jeremy couldn't help but feel bad as he wound up the music box... Phil had gone through all that work to get him a job on the day shift, and it was for nothing?
"I know what you're, uh, probably thinking right now... but even though we're technically closed, we still have an event booked for tomorrow. A-a birthday party," Phil sighed on the other end of the line. "That parent must've gone through a lot to book that reservation, huh? But, yeah, this means we're going to need you on the day shift. The uniforms should be in the managerial office. Then you just do, uh, day guard stuff... stay close to the animatronics, keep an eye on everything, make sure the rules are followed... uh, stuff like that. I'll give you more details later. For now, just... just make it through the night and stay safe, okay? I'm sure the place will reopen eventually... a-and when it does... I'll probably take the night shift myself."

The flashlight slipped out of Jeremy's grip, crashing to the floor. No. No way was he letting Phil anywhere near these things, he promised himself, as he quickly picked it up from the floor - and with good timing, as Foxy's metallic teeth glistened when he flashed the light down the hallway.

"O-Okay... good night, and good luck. I..." Phil hesitated on the other line. "... I-I'll see you tomorrow."

After hearing the line click on the other end, Jeremy briefly checked the vent on the left before going to hang up the phone. A moment of silence could convey so much. After making sure the other vent was clear - as well as the hallway - Jeremy reached into one of the drawers on the desk, removing a sheet of paper.

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He couldn't let the fear overtake him. He couldn't.

An unlicensed car parked deep in the forest, far from civilization, was home now. Four Skedaddles fruit candies and a sip of water was a meal now. Twenty minute periods of sleep every two hours, carefully measured with a battery-powered alarm, was a decent rest now.

John had gotten away with it - or was it, 'he could get away with it'? Surely he had edited the security footage properly? Surely that one loser - Greg Thoreau or something - was the only witness? He had been disposed of, after all.

Surely... surely he hadn't forgotten anything? He licked his parched lips, looking over at the handgun in the front seat.

He could go to the pizzeria, just to make sure - he could eliminate the night guard without a problem. Or were they going to start arming the guards, now that five new murders had taken place in the pizzeria? Not to mention, evidence or not, he could be wasting valuable time distancing himself from the pizzeria.

The further away from the pizzeria John was, the less likely the police would be able to catch him. Challenges were fun, why not see how many more years he could keep this up? And it wasn't like the animatronics were going to come after him, right? That nightmare of Bonnie's empty eyes staring straight at him was just a one-time thing and meant nothing.

... Right?

John grumbled, shifting himself in the driver's seat to properly buckle his seatbelt.

I've made up my mind, he told himself, as he started the car.

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The television screen was small, and the color sometimes faded into monochrome, but Phil didn't
want to go out into the living room to watch television - Pat was probably asleep, considering how close it was to 2 am, although it wasn't rare for students to be up this late to study.

It was a shame how one bad night of sleep could ruin one's circadian rhythm. At least with a party to keep him active, he'd be plenty worn out by tomorrow night. Or rather... tonight.

One of Taco Shell's commercials came on, showing off some of that... disturbingly shiny yet oh-so-melty signature nacho cheese sauce, and Phil's stomach growled. He had been awake for a few hours, it was no wonder he was hungry. He frowned and tried to ignore it - Jeremy's food supply was limited, and he wasn't going to be a dirtbag to Pat. He could go a few more hours without eating.

Of course, the next commercial after it was a Picnix ad, showing off all kind of food... including some of those subs he loved so much. Phil scowled and turned down the volume. He might as well get a glass of water - maybe getting something to drink would make him less hungry.

He quietly stepped out of Jeremy's room, surprised to find the kitchen light was still on. As he walked into the kitchen, he was surprised to find a note on the fridge - that hadn't been there before. 

*Help yourself  
(within reason)*

- Pat

Jeremy couldn't have asked for a better person to share an apartment with, Phil thought to himself, as he opened the fridge. The first thing to catch his eye was one of those white boxes used for Chinese takeout, but he decided on plucking a handful of grapes from the bag next to it. He picked up a can of cola and returned to Jeremy's room.

Only a few more hours...

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Nodding off for half an hour wasn't so bad - it helped pass the time, after all.

What didn't help was the fact that it had been about 5:40-ish when Phil had dozed off. And now it was 6:14 am as he hung up the phone, giving up after listening to constant ringing for the past two minutes. Jeremy was probably close to the apartment complex by now - he could drive up any minute, as a matter of fact.

But there was always that lingering 'what if'. What if Jeremy had been shoved into one of the animatronic suits? What if somebody had tried to break into the pizzeria, and Jeremy got caught in the crossfire? What if he had been in a car crash on the drive home? He regretted leaving his car back at the pizzeria. Hopefully the police had left it alone.

Phil sighed, walking over to the porch door. The pentas was still growing nicely, he noticed with a little smile, before looking through the blinds at the violet sky.

*Jeremy survived the night. He's okay right now,* Phil promised himself, gazing up at the few remaining stars. He repeated it in his mind each time his eyes hopped from one star to another. These weren't childish wishes out of desperation, he tried to convince himself.

Phil was seeing stars again when he slammed himself forward against the window with a sharp and sudden gasp, startled by the sound of the front door opening.
"Sorry, did I scare you?" Jeremy asked in concern, a purple uniform wrapped in clear plastic casing tucked under his arm, as he stepped into his apartment.

"Jeremy!"

Angry, frustrated, worried, startled, relieved, joyous... Phil himself couldn't even tell what he was feeling, except that it was overwhelming. He just ran at Jeremy and threw his arms around him, burying his face in his shoulder.

"Whoa! Ph-"

"Why?" he asked, looking up at Jeremy. "Why did you go back?! I-I was so worried..."

He just stared down at him silently, trying to figure out what to say, and quickly. Apologize? Explain it was a dumb mistake out of habit? Try to laugh it off? It was so much easier figuring out what to say when one was writing a note over the course of six hours to properly express how much -

"I love you."

"What?"

"What?" Jeremy repeated, then his eyes went wide. "Oh, geez. First the night shift and now this. I'm messing everything up."

"Uh..." Phil chuckled shyly, his cheeks red. "I guess everything's moving kind of fast, huh? A-and you probably just want to take it easy... oh! And Pat's probably still..."

Phil looked over to the side.

"How about you take a seat on the sofa, and I'll get you something to eat and drink, okay?" he offered, letting go of Jeremy.

"I thought you were the guest?" Jeremy teased with a little smirk, slipping off his shoes as he took a seat on the sofa.

"I'm not the one who's been in a scary job for almost a week," Phil countered, as he stepped into the kitchen.

As Jeremy listened to the sounds of Phil rummaging around in the kitchen, he frowned up at the ceiling.

"You're an assistant manager. You're too high up to be on the night watch," Jeremy remarked.

"Part of the duties of being an assistant manager is filling in when a position is empty," Phil stated. "And I'm not going to let them try to move you back into that spot when the pizzeria reopens."

"Well, I don't want you getting hurt," Jeremy argued back. "Look, we... we don't even know if the place is going to reopen. And even if it did, why not get a job somewhere else? You're a people person, very oriented to customer service... Picnix would probably hire you on the spot."

"Do you think so? I just... eh... I-I feel like I'd be breaking some kind of loyalty code if I didn't work for the family compa-" Phil went silent for a second. "I'm trying too hard for my dad, aren't I? He loves me no matter what, he told me so himself. He won't care about a part-time job in the long run. Maybe I'll apply for a spot at Picnix next week! Uh, but probably not on registers... don't want to cut your hours."
"You're too kind," Jeremy replied.

Phil hummed in satisfaction, carrying out a breakfast arrangement for Jeremy. A simple turkey sandwich, some toast with strawberry jam, and a small bowl of cereal.

"Hey, wait, isn't this Pat's food?"

"There was a note that said to 'help myself within reason', so I'm helping you! Besides, I figured I'd leave a little grocery money as a thank you. I'll get you some iced tea."

Phil hurried in and out again, this time with two glasses of iced tea - one in his hand and one tucked against his body with his arm, murmuring 'cold, cold, cold!' as he went. He placed them on the table before taking a seat next to Jeremy on the couch.

"First, welcome back," Phil said with a smile.

"Thanks, glad to be back. How are you feeling?" Jeremy asked, reaching for his sandwich.

"I've calmed down a little, but I still - "

"I know... I know. I, uh... I meant more like..." Jeremy cleared his throat. "How are you feeling after yesterday?"

"O-oh. My legs are a little stiff, but I'm fine," Phil reassured. "Now then, why did you go back?"

"Out of pure habit. It's dumb, but it's as simple as that. About a split second after I sat down, I realized what I was doing, and then you called. So, hey, perfect timing. There's no additional debts I'm hiding or anything like that, it was a mistake on my part, and I apologize for making you worry so much."

"I believe you. Apology accepted," Phil replied with a smile.

He waited for Jeremy to finish eating before saying anything else.

"So..." Phil's voice trailed off, sliding over to lean his head against Jeremy's shoulder. "... What was that other thing you were going to say?"

"You want me to repeat it?" Jeremy asked, blushing. "Uh, should I read you the note? Or would you rather read it?"

"Whatever's more comfortable for you."

"Okay," Jeremy said, starting to reach into his pocket, but stopped. "... You know what? Forget the note."

He shifted on the couch, forcing Phil to sit up straight. He turned and took Phil's hand in both of his.

"I love you, Phil. What I said last night... I meant it. I think - " Jeremy paused to chuckle. "I think right after we kissed in your car for the first time, I think that might have been the moment I fell in love with you. Pretty cheesy, I know. I hope it doesn't sound weird, because it hasn't been that long - "

"It's not cheesy or weird at all!" Phil insisted, shaking his head with a smile. "There's no rule on how long it takes to fall in love! As long as there is love, and you're both happy, that's all that matters!"

He draped his arms around the back of Jeremy's neck, leaning in to gently press his nose to Jeremy's.
Phil closed his eyes and smiled.

"And I am very happy, and very much in love with you, too," he whispered, before leaning in to kiss him.

He could feel Jeremy smile against his lips, placing his hands on Phil's waist, the flavors of sweet tea and strawberry intermingling as they kissed.

"I just realized..." Jeremy commented, pulling away from Phil briefly. "You have to be ready for class in a few hours, don't you?"

"Class, shmass," Phil dismissed. "I can skip a day. I only have two classes today anyway."

"Phil..."

"I've been healthy and studious and haven't missed any classes up until now. Besides, I want to enjoy the rest of our time together while it lasts!"

"Okay, but make sure you get a copy of the notes or whatever from someone on Monday. I'll help you catch up on them when my schedule permits," Jeremy couldn't help but grin. "So, where were we?"

Phil grinned and leaned in to kiss him again. After a little while, they eventually decided to turn their attention to the television, keeping the volume low so Pat could rest. The low volume of the local news and talk morning program was rather soothing, and Jeremy couldn't help but yawn.

"You're probably tired, huh?" Phil asked.

"Just a little," Jeremy replied.

"Here, what if we..." Phil scooted further down the couch, then patted his thigh invitingly.

Jeremy sighed contentedly, lying down on his back, his head resting in Phil's lap.

"Good?" Phil asked, brushing Jeremy's bangs away from his eyes.

"Great," Jeremy replied with a little smile, closing his eyes, enjoying the way Phil ran his fingers through his hair.

"Jeremy, uh, when does your lease end?" Phil asked quietly.

"It's like a 9-month-long contract, so... right about when the spring semester ends, in late April," Jeremy replied, opening his eyes, his smile turning mischievous. "... What are you planning?"

"Well, for starters... I've come to find that living alone can be peaceful sometimes, but for the most part, it gets kind of... boring. Not to mention the fact that my complex only has walk-in showers in our bathrooms, but you guys get a shower AND bathtub! Needless to say, there have been some nights where I have really yearned for a long, hot bath..."

"Well, give me a heads up, and you're welcome to come over for one anytime," Jeremy teased with a wink.

Phil laughed and continued.

"Well... I'll have one more year of college after this... and you'll probably go back to class next year... and the rent is probably a little cheaper here too, so..." Phil shrugged. "Would you... maybe want to
get an apartment together?"

Jeremy closed his eyes again.

"Yeah. I'd really like that."

Phil silently played with Jeremy's hair for a little while, before speaking again.

"Hey, Jer?"

"Hmm?" he opened his eyes again.

"Uh, how's Rachel been?"

"Good, good..." Jeremy replied. "She got super excited when she called me last Sunday - the first of the month. Apparently, her boyfriend broke the school's record for rushing yards in a single game, and she was there in the bleachers to witness it all. I didn't think she was really into football, but Rachel was just blown away by how fast he was. He's among the top... 'runner-backs'... in the state, apparently."

"A running back, huh? The university's football team has had a pretty weak offense the past two seasons... it's no wonder they're trying to recruit him," Phil remarked. "Also, I think that's the first time I've seen you talk about Rachel's boyfriend without being grumpy about it."

"Yeah, well, having my own boyfriend kind of made me see things differently," Jeremy confessed with a playful smirk, reaching his hand back to hold Phil's hand. "Look how happy we are. Maybe the way I feel with you is the way Rachel feels with him. If she's that happy, I would never want to take that away from her."

"I think that's very sweet of you, Jer," Phil commented, going back to lovingly running his fingers through Jeremy's hair.

Jeremy closed his eyes and didn't say anything else for a while - he must have drifted off to sleep. Phil sat there, quietly watching TV for a few more hours, until he had to finally nudge Jeremy awake.

"Sorry... mmm... what's going on...?" Jeremy asked groggily.

"I, uh, just need to run to the restroom for a second," Phil admitted, as Jeremy sat up.

In the minutes he was gone, Phil overheard Pat's voice, followed by a door slamming. He came out of the bathroom, looking over at Jeremy in concern.

"That was Pat, wasn't it? I-is everything okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry," Jeremy waved it off. "Just late to class."

Phil groaned, returning to take a seat next to Jeremy.

"I'm never gonna meet Pat at this rate!"

"Of course you will," Jeremy chuckled softly, wrapping an arm around Phil's shoulders.

"Oh, uh... speaking of Pat... would you guys still wanna live together?"

"Pat would probably be okay with it, but..." Jeremy pulled Phil a little closer. "... I would kind of
prefer it if it was just the two of us in an apartment."

"No offense to Pat, but that was my preference, too," Phil confided.

Just as he rested his head against Jeremy's shoulder, the phone rang. Phil let out a disappointed sigh.

"I'll get it," Jeremy chuckled, gently pecking Phil's temple before getting up to answer the phone.

"Hello? ... Mr. MacLaine? ... Yes, sir... y-yes, I am! ... Unfortunately, I'm not available this afternoon... tomorrow?" As he spoke on the phone, Jeremy glanced over at Phil. "I can come in tomorrow afternoon, yes... that sounds great! ... Thank you so much, sir... alright. Bye."

He hung up the phone, a grin on his face, as he dashed to the couch. In one sweeping motion, he lifted Phil from the couch, bridal style, and spun around with him in his arms.

"J-Jeremy...!" Phil stammered amidst his laughter. "Wh - what's going on?"

"That was the manager of The Bird and Barb. He told me a spot opened up among the waiters, and he wants to speak with me tomorrow about the job."

"Jeremy, that's great!" Phil wrapped his arms around Jeremy's shoulders in an awkward hug.

"Yeah!" Jeremy agreed, as he gently lowered Phil back onto the couch and sat next to him.

"I'm so glad..." Phil said with a tender smile. "Your jobs, my father, our relationship... everything worked out okay in the end."

Jeremy chuckled.

"It's a Friday the thirteenth... and I might just be having the best day of my life," he commented, standing up. "Come on. Let's go out and enjoy the morning... after I change my clothes."

After stopping at the Wizard's Brew for brunch and Phil's apartment - giving him a chance to change clothes - Jeremy finally drove into the parking lot for Freddy Fazbear's Pizza.

"Kind of strange to think I clocked out of here only a few hours ago," Jeremy commented, as he parked near the front. "... I wanted a job here hosting parties, and instead I'm serving as security."

"It's not like you're a Secret Service agent or anything," Phil assured. "Heather spent some time playing with the kids here, as did... as did John."

He sighed, a forlorn expression on his face, as he unbuckled his seatbelt.

"Hey. Don't worry, everything's going to be fine today, you'll see," Jeremy assured, reaching over to place a hand on Phil's shoulder. "I'm going to make sure all those kids leave the party safe and happy. I'll make you proud, I promise."

A smile returned to Phil's face.

"I love you."

"I love you, too," Jeremy replied, smiling back. "Now let's get in there and give some kid the best birthday ever."
Walking through the front doors together actually brought a tiny smile to Phil's face - Jeremy didn't seem to hesitate like he used to when he came here. However, once they stepped into the Game Room, their resolve diminished a little.

"Good timing, Phillip," Frank commented, already carrying a set of paper plates. "Go clock in and help me set up Party Room 1. Fitzgerald... clock in and take a quick lap around the premises. Make sure everything's looking okay."

"Y-Yes, sir," Jeremy replied, his stance stiffening a little.

Once Frank had walked past, they exchanged an awkward look, before continuing to the back to clock in.

"It'll be okay," Phil reassured, as Jeremy punched in. "I'll handle your overtime check for last night, okay?"

"Yeah, thanks," Jeremy agreed. "It's only one day, after all!"

Before they could leave the area in the back, someone came running in.

"Jeremy! I thought I heard you!"

"Ronaldo!" Jeremy exclaimed, exchanging a hug with him. "How have you been?"

"Good! I have got much better at speaking English, too!"

"I can tell, I'm so proud of you! Good job!" Jeremy praised, as the three of them walked out into the Game Room. "How's Sophia? Is she here?"

"No, she is not on the schedule today. But she is doing well!"

"You know, uh, we were talking about the five of us - well, I guess it's more like the eight of us - potentially hanging out to watch the football game tomorrow," Phil invited.

"Sophia and I do not have plans... I think she would like to come!"

"Then that just leaves Heather, Fritz, George, and Pat," Phil remarked, looking over at Jeremy, who chuckled at the grin on his face. "What? I can't help being so giddy! It's like we're having a party of our ow-"

"PHILLIP!"

The three of them winced, able to hear Frank from nearly halfway across the pizzeria.

"I, uh, I better get going..." Phil apologized, hurrying off. "Keep up the good work, guys!"

"I hadn't even thought about that... he's technically my boss as well," Jeremy commented, looking up at Ronaldo. "I'm going to take a lap around the pizzeria and make sure everything is okay."

"Okay. I will get back to work too."

As Ronaldo returned to the kitchen, Jeremy took in a deep breath and walked up to the show stage area, stopping in front of Freddy Fazbear himself. The trio of animatronics stared off into space onstage, including Chica, her facial features already repaired for the day.

Jeremy smiled at the now-harmless animatronics one last time, adjusting the lucky pin on his tie,
before heading out into the hallway.

Jeremy, previously seated in one of the chairs in the Game Area, stood up when a young boy and his mother entered the area. He glanced over at the animatronics - it was his turn to put on a good performance too.

"Uh, hello, hello!" Jeremy greeted with a grin. "What's your name, buddy?"

The little boy grinned back at him.

"You said the same thing as the man without a hand!"

"Oh, you mean Phil!" Jeremy remarked. "Yeah, he's my best friend!"

"Is that why you both wear purple?" the boy asked.

Phil had worn that purple shirt with the red bowtie again today, hadn't he?

"Yeah, that's part of it!" Jeremy answered.

"You still haven't told him your name, sweetie," the boy's mother commented to her son.

"Oh, yeah! I'm Tyson!" he exclaimed.

"Nice to meet you, Tyson, I'm Jeremy. I don't suppose today is your birthday, is it?"

"Yeah! I'm six years old!"

"Congratulations! Well, Tyson, how about we get some tokens for you? Phil and I really like the skeeball machines, what about you?"

Jeremy made sure to show around the other guests and get them tokens as they arrived, until Phil and "Freddy" came back inside.

"That's everyone!" Phil commented, as Ronaldo gave a thumbs up from inside the costume. "I'm going to help Ronaldo put away the costume, and then the three of us can have a quick snack, okay?"

"Sounds good," Jeremy agreed.

They smiled at each other, their gazes lingering an extra moment, before Phil helped lead Ronaldo to the back area.

Everyone in the room applauded as Tyson blew out all the candles on his cake with a single breath. Even though they were standing on opposite sides of the room, Jeremy and Phil exchanged a smile with each other. Unlike the first one for Tyler Proper, the final party for Tyson Prim had gone perfectly fine, and it was finally drawing to a close.

"Michael?!"

Phil froze at the sound of the mother's voice.
"Oh, Mrs. Schwartz, he's just being a kid! He probably ran off to go see the characters again," Mrs. Prim tried to reassure.

"It's not Schwartz, it's - "

"Ma'am?" Phil asked, stepping over to her. "Uh, if you'd like, I could go find him for you."

"Oh, thank you, I would appreciate that a lot," she said.

"I'll be right b-"

"Nah, it's okay, I've got it," Jeremy assured, patting Phil on the back. "I'm security around here, remember?"

"Just... as long as someone finds my son, okay?" Michael's mother asked impatiently, her voice lowering to a murmur. "... I should've known better than to bring him to this... murder hole..."

"It's alright, Mrs. Schwartz, I'll be back before you know it!" Jeremy assured. "Leave the kid to me, okay? See ya, Phil!"

Before Phil could reply, Jeremy had darted out of the Party Room.

Jeremy ran down the hallway, deciding to check the Game Room first, peeking under tables. As he went towards the stage, hoping he wasn't about to find Michael playing on the stage itself, he paused when he heard a metallic clatter.

Kids Cove, Jeremy concluded with a grin.

Sure enough, as he stepped into the small room, he spotted a boy about five or six years old standing near a toppled-over Mangle.

"Is your name Mike Schwartz?" Jeremy asked, walking over to him.

"No," he answered. "It's Mike Schultz."

"Oh," Jeremy shook his head. "Hey, Mike, my name's Jeremy. You know your friends and your mom are all waiting for you back at the party, right? You wanna go over there and play with your friends?"

"Nah," Mike answered, looking back down at Mangle. "I have more fun playing with Mangle."

"Yeah, one of my friends had a lot of fun with Mangle, too, because she was responsible for constantly fixing her," Jeremy commented. "But you know, uh... you'll be missing out on cake if you don't go to the party..."

Mike looked up, intrigued.

"I do like cake..." he shrugged. "Okay."

Mike ran up to Jeremy, completely fine and eager to return to the party.

But that's not how everyone in the room saw it. A man in purple and a small child, about to leave... it was a familiar scene to Mangle, but not a pleasant one.

Both Jeremy and Mike jumped when Mangle started emitting that familiar staticky radio signal.
"What's that noise?" Mike asked, covering his ears. "I don't like it!"

"I think you must have hit a switch or something when you pushed Mangle over!" Jeremy hypothesized, raising his voice.

"Turn it off!" Mike whined.

"I don't know how!"

The man in purple was raising his voice. The child was showing discomfort. These were not good signs.

Mike let out a small shriek as Mangle started to stir to life, positioning herself on all fours in a crouching position.

"What's she doing?" Mike cried out.

"I don't know!"

She leapt, causing Mike to let out a piercing scream. Despite her rickety appearance, Mangle still certainly seemed capable of impressive movement, one of her limbs reaching through a panel in the ceiling to support herself near the corner of the room.

"A-A-Alright, come on..." Jeremy stammered, reaching out a hand to Mike. "We need to let Mr. Fazari know something's gone seriously wrong!"

Mike wiped his eyes and nose, trying not to cry as loudly, looked over at Jeremy.

"Everything's going to be okay. Remember my friend? Her name's Heather. We're going to find someone like Heather to fix Mangle, so she doesn't do this again. Will you help me call someone to fix Mangle?"

Even though his hand glistened from nasal mucus, Jeremy didn't pull back at all when Mike placed his hand in Jeremy's. He gently held his hand for a moment to reassure him, and Mike seemed to quiet down a little.

That is, until Mangle started to crawl along the ceiling, almost directly overhead of them - Mike screamed his tiny lungs out.

"Michael Peter Schultz!" his mother scolded, as the teary-eyed boy ran into the room. "Don't run off like that!"

"Mangle!" he sobbed, clinging to the shirt she wore. "Mangle...!"

"You can play with Mangle some other day, we are LEAVING as soon as - "

"Mangle's going to eat him! She's going to eat Mr. Jeremy!"
"They're dumb robots, they can't possibly hurt - "

A purple blur ran past her out of the room, as voices in the room began to raise their concern.

"Wasn't that the assistant manager?"

"If that's how he's reacting... how dangerous IS this place?"

"I knew this place was going to lead more people dying!"

"Daddy, what does 'dying' mean?"

"Hello there, everyone! I'm the manager of this establishment, and I just wanted to make sure..." Frank commented with a smile as he stepped into the room to check on things, although that quickly disappeared once he noticed the panic rampant among the parents and children.

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It wasn't supposed to go this way. It wasn't right. This couldn't be happening. He had gotten Jeremy moved to the day shift to try to protect him!

The Game Room blurred around him as tears filled his vision, already fearing for the worst, as Phil finally ran through the doorway to Kids Cove.

Jeremy's arms were braced above his head, one hand on each part of Mangle's jaws, forcing them closed. However, her hands were clasped around Jeremy's forearms, trying to pry his arms away.

"Jeremy!"

"Phil, see if you can - "

Another purple man. This situation was far more dire than before. Mangle began thrashing in Jeremy's hold, as he struggled to restrain her.

"Jeremy, hang on!" Phil called out to him. "I'll see if - "

"No!"

Phil had run only two steps forward before Jeremy's shout had stopped him.

"No, Phil, you can't come near this thing."

"I'm not gonna leave you!"

"I don't - ngh! - want you to get hurt!" Jeremy insisted, grunting as Mangle tried to shake his arms off.

"But what about you?!" Phil exclaimed. "I-I have to try! There must be something I can use... m-maybe in the room with spare parts...!"

"As long as you stay safe, if there's nothing there, just call someone...!" Jeremy suggested, quickly adjusting his grip on Mangle's jaws as she shook her head. "... And Phil..."

Phil looked back one last time.

"... If... if something happens... it's not your fault," Jeremy reassured with a sad smile. "Just
"Y-yeah...! Love you too!" Phil choked out, before he turned and ran. He dodged past a mother and father, hurrying into the Parts and Service room. He needed something that he could use from a distance, but also stop Mangle quickly. An electric cattle prod sounded pretty useful right now... even if he had never really liked the concept of them. He stepped carefully around the dismantled animatronics, ignoring the odor, keeping his eyes peeled for anything -

Foxy's hook was practically pointing at an open toolbox, and right on top of everything was a pair of lineman's pliers - with insulated handles no less.

"You always were my favorite," Phil marveled, clutching the pliers in his hand, before he turned and ran back.

He could do it. Everything would be okay, Jeremy was going to be okay, Phil just had to -

"Phillip!"

He was yanked backwards so hard, for a split second it almost felt like his right arm could've been torn off. Phil stumbled to catch his balance, Frank keeping a tight grip on his arm.

"Uncle Frank, please!" he begged.

"Where do you think you're going?! You idiot, help me evacuate the building! We have to make sure everyone's accounted for!"

"U-Uncle Frank, I-I can't, I-I-I have to - I-I need to - "

"Need to what? What's more important than all these peo-"

They both looked in the direction of the Game Area, faces pale with horror, as a blood-curdling scream filled the air.

"JEREMY!" Phil screamed, about to run, but his uncle's grip remained firm.

"We'll call someone, okay?! But we also need someone to make sure everyone else left the building safely, and I can't do both things at once!" Frank snapped.

"But Jeremy... J-Jeremy...!" Phil squeezed his eyes shut and clenched his teeth, trying to contain his tears and the urge to scream; Jeremy could be severely injured or even dead right now and there was nothing he could do about it.

"I can do it!"

They both turned their heads to look at Ronaldo.

"My English is not perfect... but I can call 9-1-1 and I am sure they will understand."

He didn't even wait for Phil or Frank to give him permission, sprinting off into the Game Area, en route to one of the phones in the back.

"... Come on, we have to go count the guests."

"No! I'm not going with you!" Phil insisted, trying to wrench his arm free.
"Why are you so intent on saving him?" Frank let out an exasperated sigh. "Why did I ever listen to Rico, nothing good was ever going to come out of hiring that..."

Phil was already terrified at the thought of losing Jeremy... and the way his uncle's expression darkened did not help things.

"... You haven't been lying to me, have you?" Frank interrogated, his voice low, tightening his hand for emphasis.

"Th-this isn't the time!" Phil tried to pull away, but his uncle still did not let go, continuing to raise his voice as he spoke.

"Is that man the one you love?!"

"Let me go!" Phil cried out, a tear rolling down his left cheek, more threatening to escape him.

"So you don't deny it?!"

"Uncle, s-stop!"

"Do you love him or not?!" Frank demanded, yanking Phil with him towards the front door.

Hot tears poured out of Phil's eyes as his lips curled angrily.

"I LOVE HIM!" he yelled. "I love him, and I swear on my life, I won't let him DIE!"

With that final word, he ripped himself from his uncle's grasp with all his strength and sprinted down the hallway, his pulse pounding in his ears, as only two words echoed in his mind.

SAVE HIM.

He came to a halt once he reached Kids Cove, however, his anger and energy replaced by fear and paralysis. Jeremy was lying on the floor on his back, unmoving, a puddle of blood forming around his head as Mangle continued gnashing her teeth into whatever was left of his forehead.

Phil swallowed down the bile rising in his throat and started sneaking closer, trying to find the optimum balance between silence and speed. The eye on the endoskeleton head attached to Mangle made eye contact with him, causing Mangle to turn her head.

Phil froze in a panic for a second, before running straight at the creature. His early days of tackle football seemed to come back to him, because he jumped right onto Mangle's back. He clung onto her desperately as she thrashed around, his legs wrapped around her torso and his right arm wrapped around her neck as he shakily moved the pliers towards the various wires running along the endoskeleton leading to her blood-stained animatronic head.

Mangle rocked forward and back like a bucking bronco, nearly shaking Phil off, his legs the only thing still clinging to Mangle as his arms flailed up in the air.

Which would soon prove to be his undoing, as Mangle took advantage of the opportunity to sink her teeth right into his forearm, just below the elbow. Phil screamed again, his throat raw, as he shakily reached his left arm out to the endoskeleton's wires.

Chomp. Chomp. Chomp.

Mangle was literally tearing him apart, he realized, his vision growing hazy as his entire body trembled. He leaned forward, his weight pushing his body against Mangle's endoskeleton, as that
final push allowed him to catch the wires in the pliers and clip them almost effortlessly.

Immediately, Mangle stopped moving, collapsing in a heap on the floor, though her jaw still remained clamped around his torn up arm.

A rushing noise was starting to fill Phil's ears, as his vision turned white and staticky. He rolled his head to the left, still barely able to make out the figure of Jeremy lying nearby. His heart was still pounding and his stomach was churning and it occured to Phil that he should probably try to breathe. He could faintly hear Ronaldo's voice, almost like it was a yell echoing from deep inside a cave, although he couldn't figure out what he was saying, too garbled to even figure out the language.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. This job was supposed to keep Jeremy safe, just like how the animatronics were intended to keep children safe as well as entertain them. Phil's stomach rolled again as a terrible realization hit him.

Mangle was only following her programming; she hadn't asked a favor from a CEO to give someone a job that would ultimately lead to a nightmare come true. She wasn't the one who had set these events into motion.

The last thing Phil saw was Ronaldo's shadowy figure kneeling over him before everything faded into darkness, his final thoughts grim.

It wasn't Mangle's fault... It's... me...

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"... me...? ... ake up... can you hear me? Phil...?"

Chapter End Notes

Remember back in Chapter 5, when I recommended you guys try watching the opera 'Carmen'? I still highly suggest it. Especially that song from the finale... whatever it's called. Probably nothing relevant.
Phil's eyes fluttered open as his vision adjusted to the darkness around him. Even though the only light in the room was the traces of moonlight seeping through the blinds, he could faintly make out Jeremy's face as he lay in bed nearby.

"Phil..." Jeremy whispered his name again. "Did you have a nightmare?"

"Yeah," Phil replied, his voice cracking, as tears slipped down his face. "I-I dreamt that you died... and it was so realistic, I... I probably look so dumb right now..."

"Sshh... no, you don't... come here..." Jeremy whispered gently, wiggling a little closer to Phil.

Jeremy's hands tenderly cupped Phil's face, his thumbs gently brushing his tears away.

"I'm here right now, aren't I?" he asked softly, as he let a thumb trace one of Phil's cheekbones. "Dreams can't hurt you."

Phil closed his eyes as Jeremy gently pressed a kiss to his forehead, then to each of his eyelids. He let out a contented sigh as Jeremy wrapped his arms around him, pulling him in closer.

"Jeremy," Phil commented, keeping his eyes closed.

"Hmmm?"

"Promise me you'll still be here in the morning... okay?"

He felt the soft rumble of Jeremy's chest as he chuckled.

"I promise, I'll be here when you wake up," Jeremy promised, gently pressing Phil closer to him for a moment to emphasize it.

"Ti amo," Phil whispered, snuggling against Jeremy to tuck his head underneath his chin.

"Ti amo," Jeremy replied, planting one last kiss to his head before they finally drifted back off to sleep.

It felt like someone was pressing a boot against his forehead when Phil woke up, as he groggily opened his eyes to stare up at the ceiling. The alarm must not have gone off.

Beep.

There it... was? No, the beeping was too slow and soft to ever serve as an alarm clock. Phil turned his head to the left and stiffened.

This wasn't Jeremy's room. Jeremy's bed wasn't this small, it didn't have railings, and it was pressed against the wall, whereas there was a little bit of floor space between the bed and a wall with a window, complete with a view of a cloudy morning. Nor was there ever any sort of machine hooked up to him to track his vital signs.
"Phil-"

A voice to his right caught his attention and he turned his head again, a weak smile on his face as he greeted his distraught visitor.

"Dad...!" Phil croaked.

"Phillip! Oh, I've been so worried..." Federico sighed, doing his best to smile despite constantly wringing his hands. "W-well, we've been worried... your mother's here too, but I let her sleep in at our hotel room... she probably didn't fall asleep until four in the morning..."

"What about you?"

"Well, uh... I wasn't able to sleep at all," Federico laughed awkwardly. "But that doesn't matter, I'll sleep much better tonight. How are you feeling?"

Phil groaned, placing his hand to his forehead.

"Kind of woozy... and my head hurts..."

His eyes suddenly went wide and Federico braced himself, because he knew what was coming.

"Jeremy...!"

"Phillip..."

"Dad, where-"

Phil forced himself to sit upright, turning towards his father, by pushing himself off the bed with his right arm -

- only his arm wasn't able to support him, and he nearly fell against the rails on the side of his bed, had his father not leaned in to catch him by the shoulders.

"My arm..." Phil's voice trailed off, looking down at his arm, as the beeping of the monitor beside him began to pick up speed.

There was no arm; only a bandaged stump ending right about where his elbow would have been.(1)

"What... w-what happened...?"

"The animatronic that bit you... damaged a lot of tissue, to the point that your arm might not recover. And considering that another person's blood was present... there was a high risk of infection even if your arm could have been repaired... the decision was left to your mother and I, and we just couldn't take that chance..."

"A-and what about Jeremy?!" Phil's voice cracked as tears fell down his face. "Wh-where is he? He's not - he's still - he can't - p-please, Dad, tell me-"

"Phillip, slow down, you need to breathe!" Federico requested, nervously glancing at the monitor letting out the rapid beeps.

"I NEED - "

"I don't know, Phillip, I'm sorry! I tried to ask, I know how much he means to you, but the hospital can't release his information."
Phil shook his head, laughing weakly.

"Okay, where is it? Where's the monster under the bed... or the guy who's going to tell me I won the lottery?"

"Phillip - "

"I'm DREAMING!" Phil screamed. "YOU'RE NOT HERE, I'M GOING TO WAKE UP AND I'LL BE BACK IN JEREMY'S ROOM, AND - A-AND - PLEASE, HIT ME, HURT ME, JUST PLEASE WAKE ME UP!"

"I'm not going to hurt you," Federico stated, his voice low, as his brows furrowed.

Phil yanked his left arm out of his father's clutches, starting to hyperventilate at this point, looking anxiously over at the rails on the opposite side of the bed. He raised his arm, ready to forcefully swing it down, only for his father to quickly reach out and catch it.

"Phillip! This isn't a dream. You're awake," Federico insisted, still holding Phil's arm.

"I'm not!" Phil exclaimed, struggling, as a nurse came running into the room.

"Is everything alright, sir?" the nurse asked calmly. "Do you need some help calming down?"

"NO!"

"I'm trying to bring him back to reality, and get him to breathe normal!" Federico pleaded, still clinging to his son's arm.

"Phil, listen to me," the nurse stated, stepping in front of him. "I want to help you relax. You'll be able to think more clearly if you're calm. I want you to take in a deep breath for six seconds. Ready? One..."

She continued to count off the seconds, all the way up to six, noticing that Federico had also joined his son in the breathing exercise.

"Hold it! Six... five... four..." she counted down to one, before giving the next instruction. "Now exhale for six. One..."

They exhaled until she finally counted to six, before having them repeat the same pattern two more times.

"... six. Phillip, can you tell me the names of your parents?"

"F-Federico and Yoko...!" he answered, coughing slightly.

"Good job. Take a few more deep breaths like you did before."

As he breathed, his father gently let go of his arm.

"Can you tell me who the current president is?"

"Ronald Reagan," Phil replied, sniffling.

"That's right. Take some more deep breaths."

As the air passed in and out of him, he was starting to feel more aware of the room around him.
"Do you still think you're dreaming?"

"No," Phil admitted in defeat, wiping his eyes. "I wish it w-was a dream, I-I wish it never happened... J-Jeremy, I mean."

"Do you want to talk about Jeremy?" the nurse asked.

"I... I'd prefer to talk about him with my father, if that's okay," Phil responded quietly.

She nodded in understanding, leaving the room.

Phil sighed, his shoulders sagging slightly, as he gently rested his fingers against his bandaged stump.

"How long have I been out...?"

"Almost a day. Today's date is November 14th, 1987. It's a Saturday," Federico answered.

Phil toggled with the controls on the side of the bed, adjusting the mattress so he could sit back, almost reclining.

"So, what do you want to know?" Phil asked quietly.

"About... Jeremy?" Federico inquired slowly.

Phil nodded, as Federico rubbed the back of his neck.

"I'm not even sure where to start, or what's too much..." he admitted. "So, I'll just be a good listener. Start at the beginning and tell me as much as you want. I should be the one sitting back... maybe with a good... cup of coffee..."

Federico yawned as he finished that statement, and Phil couldn't help but smile slightly. It even made him feel a little less sad for a brief moment.

"I guess... I should start at the very beginning, huh?" Phil asked. "I was sitting around in the dining area, waiting for the other recruits to arrive. Just before we were about to start the orientation, some guy with glasses wandered in, looking for a place to sit."

Federico smiled sadly, remembering all too well the stories of the first day of first grade, second grade, and several years after that, with Phil being shy about finding someone to sit with.

"And I knew that feeling, so I waved him over. And then we all introduced ourselves, and I met not only Jeremy, but Heather, Ronaldo, and Sophia as well. The next day we watched the introductory tapes from 1984 - we need to destroy those, by the way - "

Federico chuckled slightly.

"And we wound up talking a little bit about you, since the... Fredbear Diner issue was brought up again," Phil's eyes widened. "Th-that reminds me, has there been any news about - "

"No," Federico shook his head with a solemn frown. "John is still on the run."

Phil snorted.

"It's not fair. I-it's not fair."

Phil sniffled.
John's survive. He isn't hurt at all, but he hurt so many people! Tears streamed down his face once again. "Jeremy did nothing wrong, he... he was nice and honest, why is he the one to suffer? It should have been John!"

"I know, Phillip," Federico sympathized, scooting his chair closer to the bed.

"And now I can't see him... I can't be there... for him, I don't... I don't even know if he's... if he's..."

Phil leaned towards him and Federico wrapped his arms around him, feeling Phil's hand clench his shirt against his back, as he buried his face in his father's shoulder and sobbed. Federico rubbed his back and offered comforting "I know"s as Phil continued spilling his heart out.

The coughing and sobbing mixed in with his muffled words practically formed an unintelligible language, but Federico still understood, he still knew, because there were some things in this world that didn't need translating.

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November 19, 1987

Following his outburst and a few days of counseling and rehab, Phil decided he was ready for visitors... and sure enough, they had showed up on the first day visitation was available.

Phil muted the television after hearing the knock on the door, quickly pulling the sheets on the bed up and around his shoulders, effectively cocooning himself.

"Come in!" he invited.

Ronaldo opened the door and held it, allowing Sophia to enter the room first, carrying a glass vase with flowers in her hands.

"It's not dumb for me to buy you flowers, is it?" she asked, poking her head out from behind the arranged flowers.

"No, I like flowers! Thank you, Soph, they're lovely. Just, uh, put them here," Phil assured, nodding to the bedside table. "What kind are they?"

"The white ones are daisies, and the light purple ones are asters," she stated, setting the vase down on the table as Ronaldo and Heather stepped into the room.

"The hospital is too cold for you?" Ronaldo asked, observing Phil's blanketed form.

"O-oh... well, uh..." Phil cracked a grin. "Uh... 'too cold', s-says the guy in the windbreaker and sweatpants."

"It's like forty degrees outside," Heather pointed out. "It's November, remember?"

"Oh, yeah... uh... I haven't exactly been outside in a while... although I guess that's going to change soon. They're planning on releasing me on Monday if my arm -"

Phil clammed up quickly, pulling the sheets up to his mouth, recognizing that all-knowing look in Heather's eye.
"... Well... however badly your arm is hurt... we hope it feels better soon," she stated, Sophia and Ronaldo agreeing with her.

"You're... not going to ask?" Phil asked slowly.

"Ronaldo saw what happened to you, it's clear you've been through shit. We just want you to feel better, you know?" Heather offered.

"I-I just..." Phil took in a deep breath, lowering the sheets from his mouth. "... I-I didn't want you guys to freak out."

He lowered the sheets all the way, revealing his stump, freshly bandaged about an hour earlier.

"Oh, Phil..." Sophia whispered, looking up from the stump to meet his eyes. "... I'm so sorry."

"You don't have to apologize, Sophia..." Phil's sad smile changed into a frown as he let out a soft sigh. "... my arm isn't my greatest concern anyway."

Everyone in the room fell silent, keeping their eyes low.

"... So the Fitzgerald family didn't release Jeremy's information to you either," Heather finally managed to speak, though her tone was dismal.

Phil shook his head.

"No, but I'm not giving up hope," he said, looking around at his friends. "His family is going to be in town this weekend. There are some... legal matters to attend to, after all. Plus they 'didn't have the time' to come by earlier."

Phil scowled, clenching his fist, but relaxed as he looked over at the flowers on his bedside table once again.

"But I figure... if they're coming to stay the entire weekend... then Rachel's bound to come along. And I know that even if her parents don't like me, she does. I, uh, got to meet her once... she came to visit Jeremy at the local cafe."

He smiled, even though a tear fell down his face as the memory replayed in his mind.

"About Jeremy..." Ronaldo commented, removing a folded paper from his pocket and handing it to Phil. "I think it is a letter. I saw it near him after I called 9-1-1. I didn't think at the time, and I took it. I'm sorry. It has your name on it, so I did not read it."

He looked it over, recognizing Jeremy's handwriting, 'For Phil' written on the folded note.

"... I think I'll read it later... it might contain some heavy stuff..." Phil remarked, his voice cracking slightly as he smiled weakly, looking around at his friends. "... Don't want to break down, right?"

"Right," Heather whispered, wiping her eyes with the sleeve of her sweatshirt.

"I'll keep praying for you both," Sophia added, her face red and her eyes watery.

Ronaldo nodded, sniffling.

"Maybe... maybe we should watch something on TV," Phil suggested, reaching for his remote.

The four of them wound up watching Return of the Jedi and exchanging hugs before Ronaldo,
Heather, and Sophia left, giving Phil a chance to change the bandage on his stump. After disposing of the old bandage, he recalled the letter from Jeremy. He lifted it from the bedside table, unfolding it for the first time.

Dear Phil,

Thank you so much for being in my life.

Just one line in, and he was already tearing up.

I wanted you to know that I meant what I said that afternoon.

I love you, Phil.

I wish a letter was enough to convey how much I love you. I could write a hundred letters and it wouldn't be enough. I thought I should write it down, so you'd have some way of knowing, just in case things don't go so well tonight. But I don't plan on letting that be the case. I want to tell you in-person how much you mean to me.

The bottom of the letter had a few crossed-off valedictions - 'Sincerely', 'Yours truly', 'With love' - before Jeremy had finally decided on how to close the letter.

Love always,

Jeremy

He held the letter close to his heart, tears falling down his face, as he closed his eyes and leaned back in bed. A bittersweet smile crossed his lips a few minutes later, however, as he realized that for the first time this semester, he couldn't wait for the weekend to arrive.

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November 21, 1987

Getting dressed was admittedly more difficult than before in terms of getting arms through sleeves, but Phil still did his best to dress nicely for today.

He was hoping for a special guest, after all.

It was right around two o'clock, during the third quarter of the university's football game, that the fated knock on his door finally came. Phil turned off the television, trying to ignore the way his heart had practically leaped into his throat.

"Come in, please," he requested.

Sure enough, Rachel Fitzgerald stepped into the room, a small envelope clutched in her hands. She took a step back - he was expecting her to be pretty shocked when she saw what happened to his arm - before she hurried over to him, her arms out, as he reached out and accepted a hug from her.

"Hi, Phil," she whispered, pulling back. "How are you?"

"I'm... I'm slowly starting to do better. I've learned some new stuff to take care of my arm and readjust to life, even though I was already left-handed. It's all just a matter of picking up the pieces, you know?"

She nodded, before holding out the envelope to him.
"Here, um... I got this for you at the gift shop," she remarked.

He opened it and read it, a simple but sympathetic 'get well soon' card, with a few extra well wishes written in from Rachel.

"Thanks, Rachel," Phil said, gently setting the card by the vase of flowers. "It means a lot."

"...So... I think you know why I came to see you," she commented, taking a seat in one of the chairs in the room.

He nodded slowly, although his heart was racing.

"I'm sorry I didn't come see you sooner... we got here yesterday, and I... I just needed to have a day to deal with my emotions after seeing my brother," Rachel explained.

"It's okay," Phil reassured, though he was pretty much holding his breath at this point. "How... is Jeremy?"

"He's still alive," she replied, as Phil let out a heavy breath of relief. "... I thought that would be the first thing you'd want to know."

"How badly is he hurt? I-Is he going to recover?" Phil was sitting up straight in bed now. "... Does he need a transplant of some kind? Because if our blood types are the same or something, I'll gladly - "

Rachel held up a hand to calm him, and he fell silent, relaxing in his chair. Her expression had turned solemn, looking down and to the side, before she continued speaking.

"The animatronic... did hurt him pretty badly. I don't remember everything the doctor said, but the frontal lobe of Jeremy's brain was pretty much destroyed, and the surgical team had to remove the damaged tissue. It's going to affect how he thinks and feels, so... Jeremy will be a completely different person if he wakes up."

"... 'If'?" Phil asked, his face paling.

"... Jeremy lost a lot of blood, and fell into a coma. The lack of oxygen to his brain might also have caused permanent damage, according to the doctors," Rachel paused to take a deep breath or two, trying to blink away the tears in her eyes. "If Jeremy wakes up, his life is going to completely different. But... the doctors don't know... when he's going to wake up. There's... there's even a chance... he... he w-won't wake up at all..."

Rachel sniffled, wiping at her eyes.

"I-I'm sorry, Rachel," Phil apologized, lowering his head, his shoulders trembling. "I'm so sorry... i-if I had just been faster... if I had gone after the child instead..."

"Then you'd be the one in the coma and Jeremy would be the one worrying," she stated, reaching forward to hold Phil's hand in both of hers. "Phil, don't blame yourself. It's not your fault."

He didn't speak, as she gently squeezed his hand.

"I know you're sad. I'm sad too. But it's nobody's fault. In fact, I should probably be thanking you," Rachel said, looking up at him. "We were told about how Jeremy's injury happened... about how the building was evacuated. But you stayed behind to stop the animatronic. Phil... you saved his life. I can't thank you enough."
Phil finally returned the gesture, gently clasping one of her hands in his own.

"Is there... any way I can see him?" Phil asked softly.

Rachel frowned.

"I think my parents figured out that Jeremy was seeing someone - not you, specifically, just that he had a boyfriend in general - because they've decided that visitation is limited to family members only. A family member can bring in a guest from outside the family... but minors can't bring in guests. I'm sorry, Phil... I don't think you should try asking my parents."

She gently patted his hand, managing to form a small smile.

"The doctors... told me that patients in comas can sometimes hear things, even if they can't wake up. So I made sure to tell Jeremy that you love him... that was okay, right?"

Phil didn't speak, back to blinking away tears, just nodding with a small smile on his face.

"Yeah," he confirmed. "Thank you, Rachel."

They both looked up when they heard knocking on Phil's door once again.

"Yes?" Phil asked, raising his voice.

"Hey, Phil, we - whoa," Heather was cut off when she noticed the new guest in the room.

"Hello," Sophia greeted, from behind Heather.

"Hi, I'm Rachel," Rachel replied.

"You're Jeremy's sister, right?" Ronaldo asked.

"Right," she replied with a nod. "I guess you guys are all the friends he talked about? Well, almost all of you... I've already met Phil, and we bumped into Pat yesterday, so I think you three must be Sophia, Ricardo, and Heather."

"I'm Ronaldo," Ronaldo corrected. "And this is Sophia, and this is Heather."

"Nice to meet you all," Rachel replied, then looked over at Phil. "I guess I better start again from the top, huh?"

By five o'clock, Rachel's parents had returned to the hospital to pick her up.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have stayed longer... we're heading back home in the morning. It was great meeting all of you..." Rachel sighed. "... I just wish it could have been under different circumstances."

"Hey, I know it sounds weird, but... if you're ever in the neighborhood, drop by and say hi, okay?" Heather commented, as everyone stood up.

"I'll... try," Rachel hesitated. "They - my parents - they're talking about moving Jeremy to an assisted living facility or something... so it'll probably be closer to our house. And we live nearly three hours away."
"Guess that means you've gotta start working on getting that driver's license, so you can visit us sometime!" Sophia commented, gently swinging a fist in enthusiasm. "Or, uh... I guess it would be easier if we came down to visit you..."

Rachel smiled, before her eyes suddenly went wide and she snapped her fingers.

"That gives me a great idea! Give me one sec..."

She looked around Phil's room, finally grabbing one of the clean napkins left over from Phil's lunch that day.

"... Anybody have a pen? I think I left mine in the gift shop."

Ronaldo removed one from his back pocket, passing it to her. She scrawled out a phone number, tore that section off the napkin, and proceeded to write and tear three more times.

"This is our phone number," Rachel explained, handing out the napkin shreds to everyone in the room. "Can I have everyone's numbers?"

"I guess exchanging numbers would be a good idea if we want to stay in touch," Sophia realized.

"Well, that, and..." Rachel shrugged with a smile. "... Like I said, the doctors say people in comas can sometimes hear what you say. We have a tape recorder at home... maybe I could set it up to record messages you guys leave... and I could play it back for Jeremy on the days I go to visit him."

"Aww...! Oh, Rachel, I think that's a great idea!" Sophia praised. "Here, my number is..."

As everyone took turns sharing their phone numbers, she eagerly wrote them down with a smile.

"All I have to do is just call my brother's apartment to speak with Pat... so other than that, maybe share my number with other people Jeremy was friends with?" Rachel suggested.

"Fritz and George didn't really know him that well, but I figure they might be able to send a 'get well soon' message or two," Heather commented.

"You're a really clever girl, Rachel," Sophia complimented, though she tried to wave it off.

"And I'm sure... I'm sure Jeremy appreciates everything you're doing for him," Heather added. "I hope you know that you've probably got the best big brother in the world."

Rachel smiled and nodded.

"I always knew."

She bade everyone farewell, the list of numbers tucked carefully in her pocket, before she turned and left Phil's room.

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November 23, 1987

"Do you have everything?" Yoko asked one last time, a bundle of books and paperwork on self-care in her arms.

"Yeah, mom... I didn't exactly pack a suitcase before coming here," Phil replied with a small chuckle. "You guys were the ones who brought all my stuff."
"We just want to make sure, that's all," Federico added, a suitcase full of clothes in one hand and a plush fox tucked under his other arm. "You should be all checked out and ready to go."

"Yeah."

The Fazari family left the hospital room, walking down the hall. It seemed so surreal to Phil, to finally be leaving. As he looked up at one of the signs in the hospital, indicating the way to the ICU, he was also struck with the crushing reality that he was basically leaving Jeremy as well. He hadn't noticed that he had slowed to a complete halt until he felt his father's hand on his shoulder.

"Since your mother and I will be in town one more night, would you like to go out to dinner? Or... would you prefer we get some take-out?" Federico invited, as they resumed walking.

"I think it would be nice to go out to eat," Phil replied. "But... uh... how about I show you guys around town a little? There's a lovely park we could visit... Mom, you should see the butterfly garden at the local museum... I know where there's a nice little café, we could go grab some coffee..."

"It all sounds lovely," Federico agreed with a nod, as they finally stepped outside.

Phil had to shield his eyes briefly, not used to the sunlight after so long. Yoko led them through the parking lot to the car, and they tucked Phil's belongings into the trunk.

"That reminds me, you should... try to get in some practice driving this afternoon. Or maybe one of your friends can help you during the week," Federico suggested, climbing into the driver's seat.

"I've seen student drivers around Lakeview Park a few times," Phil commented, taking a seat in the back. "Maybe I can get in some practice there."

"Speaking of practice... I know it's an 'elephant in the room', as they say, but maybe you should start catching up on your studies tonight," Yoko remarked, as the car started pulling out of the parking lot.

"Honey, I think that's a good idea, but Phillip's just gotten out of the hospital. Maybe he should have one more night off before - "

"No, Dad, I think it's a good idea," Phil remarked. "It gives me something else to do tonight after dinner."

"Something else...?"

Phil turned around, looking out of the rear window, until the hospital was no longer visible behind them.

"... Let's just say I have another important phone call to make."

Chapter End Notes

(1) DA-DA-DA-DA! After the recent grim events in the story, I get to finally make the super excellent shout-out I've been waiting to reveal! A HUGE HUGE HUGE thank you to guronenko for giving me permission to use her design for Phone Guy. Sorry we had to wait so long for the big reveal.

If you do check out her art blog, please be warned that there is mature content,
particularly gore (if 'guro' didn't give it away), and of course, to respect the artist's wishes - she draws what she wants, so please don't harrass her for more art of Phone Guy, FNAF art, etc. if she doesn't wish to draw it. There are additional artists in the fandom who also draw the same design, and I ask again that you respect their wishes if they do not wish to draw requests for you. I believe most of my readers are mature enough to know better, but I wanted to at least say something just to make sure. If you want it that badly, consider commissioning her (or any of the other artists)? It's kind of odd that such a dark event in the chapter gets such a bright and cheery footnote.

But I am seriously super grateful (hence why this footnote gets not one, not two, but THREE paragraphs!). This story probably wouldn't have felt the same with a different PG. Thank you again so much, guronenko.
May 7, 1989

"Phillip Fazari."

Clad in his cap and gown, he strolled onto the stage to shake hands with the dean, before taking his certificate - making sure to smile brightly as one of the photographers snapped a graduation photo. He tucked it under his opposite arm and proceeded to the center of the stage, shaking hands with the chancellor - another photo opportunity - before finally stepping down from the stage... just in time for one last graduation photo.

And just like that, his time had come and gone, and he was returning to his seat in the auditorium. He looked around at the thousands of faces above him, trying in vain to spot his family among the crowd.

Two hours later, he was singing the school's alma mater, as he officially graduated with his Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. Once all the graduates had left the auditorium, he carefully made his way through the crowd of students, out to the small garden near the football stadium, where he found his family waiting for him.

"Congratulations, Phil!" Aunt Fiorella was the first to speak up, as he approached them.

"We're all very proud of you," his mother added.

"How are you feeling?" Federico asked.

"Thank you! Uh... I'm feeling... I don't know. Kind of excited, but also kind of relieved," he tried to fan himself off with his hand. "... And hot. I'm ready to head back to my apartment and change."

The four of them made their way to the parking lot, getting in Federico's car, before making the slow but steady drive through traffic to Phil's apartment. He now lived in the same complex that Jeremy had lived in, though he was housemates with a guy named York. He had lost contact with Pat after last year, due to changing apartments and phone numbers as a result. Federico pulled up beside Phil's Sable, as Phil climbed out of the car and headed up to his apartment.

All his belongings had been properly packed; now it was just a matter of bringing suitcases down to the car, he recalled, slipping out of his cap and gown and carefully packing them in a small bag.

His parents and aunt helped him make two trips to properly pack everything away in Phil's car. This was the part where Fiorella bid Phil farewell, giving him a hug, as well as an envelope from her purse.

"We're going to take Fiorella to the airport, so we're probably going to be late getting home," Federico remarked calmly. "So... if you're planning on heading straight home, we might be a little late."

"No, I..." Phil took a deep breath. "I plan on making a quick stop before making the drive home. At the longest, it should only be an hour."

Waiting and Hoping Are Sweet
"Phillip, if it makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to - "

"He called me," Phil pointed out. "Uncle Frank said he wanted to congratulate me for graduating. I know we haven't spoken in nearly two years, but... maybe it's time to make peace? I mean, you haven't even spoken with him since - "

"Yes, but that's because he had some... choice words after the 1987 incident. I knew you were going to be upset after everything, and I didn't want him making things worse," Federico sighed. "You're a strong young man, Phillip, and you can make your own decisions. If you want to visit Franco, that's your decision. But if he says anything to upset you - "

"Then you'll be here for me. I know," he reached out and hugged his father. "Thanks, Dad. I love you guys."

"We love you too, Phillip," his mother added, hugging him as well.

With that, they got into their respective cars and went their separate ways.

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"Uncle?" Phil asked, knocking on the door.

He could hear movement inside the house, as well as a muffled "I'm coming!", as he heard his uncle on the other side. Finally, the door opened.

"Phil! Good to see you. I was startin' to think you forgot about me, after... how long has it been? A year and a half? Well, come on in!"

"I, uh... I can't stay too long... I'm going to spend a few weeks at my parents' house, so I have to hit the road soon."

"That's okay, I only prepared enough dinner for myself anyway," Frank shrugged it off. "At least let me give you your graduation present! Wait right there."

He hurried down the hallway, turning the corner, probably heading for his bedroom.

"Okay, close your eyes!" Frank ordered from down the hallway.

"Okay!" Phil replied, doing as he was told, listening to the sound of his uncle's footsteps.

"You've still got 'em closed, right?"

"Yes, Uncle Frank."

"Alright, good. Now, hold out your hand."

Phil held out his hand, palm facing up, expecting his uncle to place something in his hand. Instead, he felt his uncle gently hold his wrist and turn it so his palm faced down, before slipping something onto his middle finger.

"I hope you like it, it cost me an arm and a... uh... well, it certainly wasn't cheap. Go on, open your eyes!"

Phil opened his eyes, baffled by the sight.

"You got me... a class ring?"
It was gold, with the university's initials as well as '89 engraved along the sides of the band. The gemstone set in the face was a... Phil was too surprised to remember the name of it, only that it matched one of the school's colors.

"Pretty spiffy, right? Now, you're actually supposed to wear a class ring on the ring finger of your right hand, but... well, that was never meant to be."

Frank cleared his throat awkwardly.

"W-well, uh, I could always wear it on the ring finger..." Phil remarked, already trying to slip it off his finger using his thumb - it was feeling peculiarly uncomfortable.

"The ring finger? Oh, Phil, no!" Frank laughed as though he was talking down to him. "You don't want to wear a ring on that finger, you'll turn the ladies away! You gotta save it for the day you marry some nice girl and get a wedding band."

Frank's voice seemed to tighten with the last statement, though he kept on smiling the same old smile. It actually made Phil kind of feel sick to his stomach. Surely, after all this time, Frank didn't have the same views? Especially now that he knew his nephew -

"Right, Phillip? You're going to fall in love with some beautiful girl and get married, like every normal man does?" Frank repeated, his voice a little louder.

"I... uh..."

"Oh, for Pete's sake, Phil! It's been over a year! You're not hanging on to the hope that this Gerald guy is going to wake up, are you?!" Frank snapped.

"His name's Jeremy," Phil mumbled, resting his hand against his opposite arm - it was the closest thing to crossing his arms he could do when he was upset.

"Look, everyone makes mistakes. Just little roadblocks on finding our true path and all that jazz," Frank narrowed his eyes. "So just treat this Jeremy guy like the bridge he is and GET OVER IT."

"Goodbye, Uncle," Phil spat, turning swiftly on his heel. "Goodbye forever."

"You little -"

Phil had slammed the door behind him before his uncle could get one more word in. Without looking back, he marched straight back to his Mercury Sable, climbed in, and drove off silently.

It wasn't until the road curved at a slight angle, causing sunlight to reflect off his new ring into his eyes. As Phil's eyes stung, everything started replaying in his mind.

"There's a GIRL involved, isn't there?"

"Here's to young love, am I right?"

"You haven't been lying to me, have you?! Is that man the one you love?!"

Phil's grip tightened on the steering wheel, biting down on his lip. Now was not the time.

But that last smile... those last words...

"Just remember I love you, okay?"
It finally registered in his mind that tears were falling down his face. He hadn't cried in over a year. Anger and sorrow boiled within Phil until it became too hot to bear. He hit his turn signal, quickly and carefully pulled over, and parked in the grass along the road, allowing him to cry as long as he needed without any risk to himself or the drivers around him.

The worst part of it all, being slouched over his steering wheel in a crying heap, was the tiny fragment of him that kept waiting, kept hoping, that he was going to feel the familiar touch of a gentle hand against his back, and he would look up and see Jeremy there, comforting as always.

But hoping was sweet, and the bitter truth was that Jeremy was lying in a hospital bed in a different part of the state. Phil's breathing slowly returned to normal as he wiped the last of his tears away. He needed to make it home on time, after all - not only to keep his parents from worrying, but... a day like this definitely warranted a phone call.

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June 4, 1989

"Get outta town," Phil whispered, a small smile starting to form on his face.

"No, no! I'm serious!" Ronaldo insisted, grinning widely. "We went out to dinner on Friday night. Sophia thought it was a nice date at her favorite restaurant, but I surprised her and proposed! And... we are now planning for a spring wedding, maybe March."

"Ronaldo!" Phil exclaimed with glee, pulling him in for a hug. "Congratulations! I wish Sophia had come along so I could congratulate her too... where is she?"

Ronaldo's smile disappeared.

"Since you were busy returning to town yesterday... we told Heather the news first."

"Is something wrong?" Phil asked in concern.

"I am not sure... Heather was excited at first, like you. Sophia even told her that she wanted Heather to be one of the bridesmaids."

"Oh, wow!"

"However, this made Heather upset, and she said no. She was so upset that she had to leave," Ronaldo let out a sigh. "Sophia said she wanted to try to fix things with her, to not have any bad feelings."

"So... that must mean she's with Heather right now," Phil concluded.

Ronaldo simply nodded.

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Fortunately for them, the Wizard's Brew was rather quiet at this time of day, allowing Heather and Sophia to privately discuss their thoughts.

"I think I should apologize first," Heather confessed, taking a sip of her coffee. "I kind of exploded at you guys yesterday. You're going through an exciting time in your lives, you don't need me being anxious about something to kill the mood."
"It's okay, I'm sorry for upsetting you in the first place. I don't know what I said, but I never meant to make you unhappy," Sophia laced her fingers together. "I... uh... I was thinking..."

"Yeah?"

"Um... if you can... is there any chance you could tell me why you're upset? If you want to, I mean. I really would love for you to be a part of our wedding, so... maybe if I knew what the problem was, we could figure out a solution?"

"It's just... well..." Heather took another sip of coffee, keeping her voice low. "I've tried wearing dresses before, and... I'm not exactly, uh, a busty girl... they just aren't for me."

"You can't let other people's opinions stop you from wearing the dress of your dreams!" Sophia argued, trying to motivate her. "Take it from someone who's been told I'm 'too fat' to wear certain kinds of clothing, this is going to be the only time I get to wear a wedding dress... so I'm gonna wear the dress of my dreams!"

Heather smiled weakly.

"Look, that's... a really great attitude to have, but... my situation is different. And... a lot more complicated."

"What if all the bridesmaids wore blouses and skirts? You had that really nice cerulean one from when we went to the opera a few years ago... are you okay with skirts?"

Heather nodded.

"Alright! Then, once I've picked out the other bridesmaids, I'll tell them to pick out their best blouses and skirts. If... if all the bridesmaids dressed that way, would you be one too?"

"I think I could handle it, yeah."

Sophia let out a squeal of delight, getting out of her seat to scurry around to the other side of the table to hug Heather.

"I'm sure you'll be a great bridesmaid!" she complimented. "Should we pick out a color scheme for blouses, or skirts? Maybe both? Oh, we'll figure it out later. A woman like you looks great in anything."

Sophia might have had to rely more on hard work than brainpower to make it into the nursing program, but sometimes that girl knew the right thing to say. It must've come with a such a kind heart, Heather figured, tightly hugging her in return.

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October 28, 1989

"Here?" Heather and Fritz asked in unison, their voices strained, as they attempted to set down a couch along the wall.

"Yeah, that's good!" Phil replied from the opposite side of the living room, setting a lamp down on a small table.

Heather and Fritz lowered the couch, letting out a combined sigh, before immediately flopping down to take a seat on it. Phil noticed this and hurried into his new kitchen. He came back a few moments later...
later, carrying out a small basket with two bottles of water.

"Here," Phil held out the basket to his friends, as they each took one of the bottles. "Uh... I'm sorry I had to ask you guys for help like this, but... moving in is a lot harder with one person, especially with... uh, my circumstances and all."

Heather finished a few gulps of water before she spoke.

"It's not your fault! And hey, at least this is the last of the furniture, right? All that's left is putting away stuff like clothes," she remarked, then grinned. "So...? Tell us about the new job!"

Phil grinned sheepishly.

"Well, it's nothing too fancy. Just your standard nine-to-five office job. Gotta start somewhere, after all."

"And then what?" Fritz asked.

"I... uh..." Phil rubbed the back of his neck. "I guess I just move up in the company after that, or maybe... uh..."

"Go on," Heather encouraged.

"... I dunno, maybe I'd try to start my own business?"

"Do you know what you'd sell, or is that... none of my business?" Fritz asked, earning a nudge from Heather.

"I hate to say it, but... uh... I don't really know!" Phil lied. "I guess that's why it's good that I stick with the company, huh?"

"You'll do fine. Business success runs in your blood, am I right, 'Faz-Heir'?"

Phil looked down.

"Uh... I hope so... the company hasn't really recovered since... since all the incidents," Phil's frown darkened. "And the fact that they still can't find John..."

"I can't believe I thought that asshole was a decent guy," Heather huffed. "He fooled everyone."

"I still remember how awful everything smelled when I covered that last night," Fritz added. "I made it through fine, since I came early to disable the animatronics, but your uncle certainly wasn't pleased."

"I don't even know what's going on with my uncle. I've broken off all contact from him."

"Good to hear! You don't need people like that in your life," Heather approved, raising her water bottle. "So, enough talk about the past. Why don't we order something to eat for dinner and get excited for the future?"

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December 22, 1989

"What are you getting so flustered about?" Shannon asked, taking another sip of her drink. "Plenty of women ask men out these days. I'm just inviting you out to a New Year's Eve party with a few of
our friends. It wouldn't go anywhere beyond that - I have standards."

"Oh, um, it's nice of you to ask, really..." Phil replied, fiddling with his tie. "It's just that I'm already -"

He froze in mid-speech, looking out at the office party going on. Two years... it had been over two years since the incident, and here he was, employed and living on his own. Alone, just like in that apartment two years ago. Jeremy continued to sleep in some other part of the state, yet he was always on his mind. Two years, countless changes... but when his mind wandered back to Jeremy (it always did, at least twice a day), it sometimes felt like nothing had changed at all.

"You're already... seeing someone?" Shannon asked, trying to finish his statement. "In that case, I apologize. I didn't know."

"It's okay. I-I meant to say I'm not ready - no, uh, that's not quite it - uh..." Phil laughed awkwardly. "It's... uh... i-it's kind of complicated. I guess I would say I'm... not interested in dating at the moment? Sorry, Shannon. B-but we can still be friends, right? Because, uh, I knew this one girl -"

"Like I said, it's fine," Shannon assured, smiling gently. "Of course we can still be friends."

He smiled back, before walking over to the beverage table to get his own drink. Of course, since this was an office-hosted party, there wasn't any alcohol available. Phil shrugged at the sight of the punch bowl before heading to the table where the cooler full of sodas were kept. He plunged his hand into the ice, finally grabbing a can, and pulled out.

Ginger ale.

After managing to open it and take a few sips, Phil noticed the faint sounds of Chicago playing in the background. Obviously, with all the people talking, it had been hard to hear earlier, but the music was definitely there. Was it the lyrics of the song, or the familiar ginger flavor of the soda that brought back memories of Wings N Things, of the 'Never Have I Ever' questions, of that first kiss...

Phil chugged his drink as he stepped out of the building, strolling to the public phones lined against the wall. He set the can down, reached into his pocket for some change, and shoved a few quarters into the machine.

"Hello, hello?"

"Hello, Dad."

"Phillip! It's always great to hear from you. Is the job getting any better?"

He let out a sigh.

"Not really... still as dull as ever. Guess that's why they threw a Christmas party, huh?"

He could hear his father chuckle sympathetically on the other line.

"So, um... I wanted your advice on something."

"What's on your mind?"

"I'm... um... I'm kind of having conflicted feelings at the moment. I just got asked out for the first time in two years... and I told her that I wasn't interested in a relationship at the moment. I kind of answered in a hurry because I started feeling awkward. I just... I don't know what to think, since my
relationship with Jeremy is kind of... uh... on hold? Or not? Like I said, I-I don't know."

"Well, since you mentioned him, what do you think Jeremy would have wanted you to do in a situation like this?"

"He'd probably tell me to do what makes me happy."

"I agree with Jeremy, you should do what makes you happy. So, would dating someone else - even on a single date - make you happy?"

Phil thought about it a moment, his fingers lingering on another quarter in his pocket.

"Not really."

"Then you don't have to do it. Just because someone is nice to you and asks you out, doesn't mean you're obligated to date them."

"Alright. Thanks, Dad."

"You're welcome. Any time. Is there anything else on your mind?"

"Nah... I think I might head home for the night. I mostly came for the food... I don't have as many friends around the office as I did at the pizzeria."

"Okay. You have a good night and drive safely. We love you, good night."

"Love you too. Good night."

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April 15, 1990

'Just like we practiced.'

Phil could practically hear Heather say that, as she silently linked arms with him on his left with an excited wink as they walked down the aisle. Like the other bridesmaids, she had come dressed in a blouse and skirt - her blouse was a pale yellow with long sleeves, while her skirt was dark blue and ended just above her ankles. As one of the groomsmen, Phil matched the other young men in a black suit, black pants, and a white shirt... with a light purple rose serving as his corsage.

But Sophia stole the show in her wedding gown, with a lovely pearl necklace. Her father was already in tears walking her down the aisle, telling her he was proud of her, that Ronaldo was a good man... Phil had to wipe away a few tears as well. He wondered if this was how his grandfather had reacted to his own father's wedding... Phil smiled a little brighter. If he ever got married, his father would definitely cry.

As Ronaldo and Sophia exchanged their first kiss as husband and wife - he had to bend over a little, considering he was almost a foot taller than her - Phil couldn't help but exchange a smile with...

The groomsman standing next to him was too busy admiring the scene of the newlyweds to notice the loving gaze Phil had given him. Phil quickly looked away before he was noticed and the scene became awkward.

For a moment, surrounded by all that love and happiness, he had forgotten that there was someone among their circle of friends who hadn't been able to attend the wedding. But once all the parties had been thrown, all the celebrations were complete, there would be time to remember.
Rachel's probably going to have a handful of phone calls this afternoon, Phil realized with a smile, as he hooked arms with a teary-eyed Heather and they joined the others in the recessional.

July 11, 1990

Phil shot up in bed, covered in sweat, that blood-stained scene still familiar in his mind.

The nightmares had left him alone for almost two years... why were they coming back? Was it the disappointment of not getting that promotion? Was it the daily reminder that he worked a stressful job, 8 to 5, constantly counting up numbers all the while becoming just another number in the system?

There was a bright flash of light outside his window, and the thunder that followed boomed so loudly that the walls of his room vibrated. No, no, no... he needed to go back to sleep, he had to get up in three hours.

Another faint flash of light and another low rumble convinced Phil to crawl out of bed. He walked over to his closet and flicked on the light switch, recoiling from the illumination. As his eyes adjusted, he stepped inside, heading to the back of the closet, where a few boxes were kept for storage. He opened the first one and found what he was looking for sitting right at the top.

Yes, he might have turned twenty-four a few days ago, but he'd gladly sleep with that plush fox every night if it meant sleeping better.

Phil crawled back under the covers just as everything went bright and a loud crackling thunderclap shook his house. He held the fox a little tighter.

When, when would things start getting better?

October 10, 1990

It seemed like things were never going to get better, Phil thought to himself, trudging through the door with a heavy plastic grocery bag - the handles had torn from the weight - carried in his arm. He set it down on the table, removing the microwavable chicken potpie he had picked up from the local Picnix.

He hated his job, and it seemed like there was no moving up, even when he sank low enough to do some ass-kissing. Stuck here, for the next thirty or so years... he ripped open the cardboard box and shoved the pie in the microwave, setting the time and letting it cook. As it heated up, he let out a heavy sigh, clutching his forehead. Thirty years... he did not want to think about getting older...

Fortunately, the phone rang, distracting him from his thoughts.

"Hello, hello?"

"Hi, Phil, it's Rachel!"

"Oh, hi! Uh... I wasn't expecting you to call me... usually it's the other way around and all... heh," he managed to smile. "So, uh, what's on your mind?"

"Not much... having a pretty nice day... we just got back from going out to dinner... because today's
"my birthday!"

"O-oh! Happy birthday, Rachel! I'm sorry I didn't call you about it, I, uh, I don't remember if I wrote it down somewhere or..."

"No, it's okay, Phil. I probably never thought to tell you."

"Oh... uh, okay... so, uh, let's see... I think that means you're..."

"I'm eighteen."

"Eighteen already? Wow, time flies, huh?"

"Phil -"

"You'll get to vote for the first time in the next presidential election too... how cool is that? Uh... I'm not sure who's in the running at the moment... Bush will probably try to run again, but..."

"Phil, as important as voting is, I don't think you get what I'm saying right now."

He went silent, waiting for her to continue.

"I'm eighteen. A legal adult... and a member of the Fitzgerald family..."

Phil's eyes went wide as her words finally sunk in.

"... As of today, I'm now allowed to bring a guest to see Jeremy."

His knees shook to the point that he had to lean against the wall to keep his balance.

"If you'd like, I'm available on Saturday. If you aren't available, or not interested, I understand, I know a lot can change in three yea-"

"No, n-no! I..." he swallowed a lump in his throat. "I want to see him. Nothing would make me happier. Please... please, take me with you."

"I will. I guess I should give you the address of the facility, huh? It's located at..."

Phil hurriedly grabbed a napkin and a pen, jotting down the information she listed off.

"So, remember - if you see all those rose bushes, you know you're getting close."

"Roses. Got it. Is there anything else you wanna talk about?"

"Sorry, but I really have to go. AP Chemistry homework doesn't complete itself."

"Oh, yikes. Alright, I'll let you go. Have a good night, Rachel, and thank you so much."

"You're welcome. Good night."

Phil hung up the phone and stared up at the ceiling. Three years. He hadn't seen Jeremy in nearly three years.

The microwave beeped at him, indicating his potpie had finished cooking, but he suddenly wasn't feeling all that hungry; on the contrary, he felt pretty full.

Full of joy.
October 13, 1990

It had felt like his body was just a vessel, automatically piloting an old Mercury Sable down the road for almost three hours. But once Phil saw those roses, tiny pink beacons welcoming him back to reality as he pulled into the parking lot by the facility, it finally began to sink in that he was here. There was no running through seemingly endless mazes, no blood-soaked tile floors, no enveloping bedsheets... just the blue-gray building that Jeremy now resided in.

Phil walked into the lobby, finding Rachel sitting in one of the chairs, already waiting for him.

"Hi, Phil," she greeted quietly, her voice little more than a whisper. "Are you ready?"

"I... uh..." he looked around. "I wasn't supposed to bring, uh, paperwork or anything, was I? Are there any check-in procedures I need to follow?"

She shook her head with a trembling smile, her cheeks slightly red, as she stood up and walked with him to the front desk.

"Hi, I'm here to see Jeremy Fitzgerald. I've brought a guest with me," she explained to the receptionist, sliding her driver's license across the counter to her. "I'm his sister."

The receptionist read over her license, briefly looking up at Rachel, before stepping back into the office, where towering shelves of files were kept. The receptionist pulled a file from the shelf, read it over, then gently returned it to its spot, walking back to take her seat at the counter.

"Alright, you're good. Room 112, on the right."

Rachel thanked her, beaming up at Phil, before they walked down the hallway to the right.

It seemed so surreal... all this time, being miles away, and even with a hallway between them, the distance separating Phil from Jeremy felt the same. After all, there had always been that door and that rule in his face. But now Rachel was here to open that door.

Phil felt a gentle tug at the back of his shirt, and realized Rachel had gently pinched the fabric - he had been so lost in thought he had almost walked right past Jeremy's room. She gave him one more silent, gentle smile before her hand turned the handle and gently pushed the door open. As it opened, Phil could already hear a faint beeping noise. He was still a moment, fearing he would see a number of machines hooked up to Jeremy, but he took a deep breath and finally set foot in the room he had been kept out of for years.

"... Jeremy?" Phil whispered, walking further in.

There was a machine by Jeremy's bed, hooked up to the cannula in his nose and the small clamp on his finger, as well as an IV line.

But Phil only saw Jeremy, tears welling up in his eyes as he walked up to his bedside. Whatever reconstructive surgery they had done to his skull seemed to have worked, as he looked almost the same as he had three years ago, except for the shorter haircut Jeremy now had. He appeared to have also lost some weight, considering that the IV line was most likely his feeding tube.

"I've really missed you," Phil commented, as he brushed away some of his tears on his sleeve, pulling up a chair to sit by Jeremy's side. "I never forgot you. N-nobody has. Heather, Ronaldo, Sophia... Pat too, I'm sure, although we kind of lost touch with each other."
With no hesitation, he reached down and gently held Jeremy's hand. He was so happy to see him again, but at the same time, it was agonizing. Phil wanted so badly for this to be like one of those scenes in the movies, where Jeremy's hand would suddenly hold his hand in return, and he would slowly stir awake, opening his eyes and asking the classic 'why are you crying?' line before Phil would throw his arm around him and happily sob against his shoulder because Jeremy was going to be fine.

It was practically killing him, the way Jeremy's hand remained limp in his grasp, the way his eyes stayed shut, the way he continued to sleep.

"I love you," Phil remarked with a sad laugh, getting out of his seat to gently press a kiss to Jeremy's forehead. "Uh, I know I say it all the time, but it's nice to be able to tell you in person again. I could go on and on saying I love you, but, uh, I think Rachel wants to speak with you now."

He smiled over at Rachel, her eyes full of tears, as she took a seat in the chair where Phil had been sitting. She held Jeremy's hand in both of her own, tears falling down her face.

"I-I'm sorry... I-I can't do this today...!" she sobbed. "Y-You're my big brother, a-and I love you so much... but I... I'm sorry..."

"Rachel," Phil whispered gently, placing his hand on her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

She shook her head.

"Phil... I... I really need to speak with you."

"Do you want to talk about it here, or...?"

Rachel shook her head again.

"There's... there's one of those 'built-in-chapels' at this facility... I think we should talk there," she suggested. "... When you're done visiting, I mean."

Phil looked over at Jeremy, "the best big brother in the world", who couldn't be there for his little sister in this time of need.

"I'm done visiting for now. We can come back later, once you've had a chance to clear your mind," Phil reassured. "Shall we?"

Rachel nodded quietly, standing up. As Phil walked her out of the room, his gaze lingered on Jeremy for one last time, before closing the door behind them.

Rachel had changed her mind after seeing the chapel already had some visitors, so now she and Phil were sitting in the front of her car in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant, each of them with a milkshake for comfort.

"Are you ready to talk?" Phil asked her gently, as she set her milkshake down in a cupholder.

"Yeah," she replied. "Pretty much... I had an awful birthday."

"Oh, Rachel, I'm sorry..." Phil frowned. "Did something happen? Boyfriend troub- oh, uh, sorry, forget I said that... it's none of my business."

Rachel smiled bitterly.
"No boyfriend troubles... I haven't dated anyone since last year. My first boyfriend broke up with me at the end of freshman year... he was going to be eighteen in August, so... you can see how that would make him uncomfortable. I was upset, but I understood how he felt - even he felt bad about breaking up. I dated Don for a few months, but we just didn't click like - " she shook her head. "... The point is... it's not a boy I'm having an issue with. It's my parents."

Phil hummed knowingly, nodding.

"They... they actually thought the day after my birthday would be the best time to tell me. Especially since I'm an adult now. Not like I was still in high spirits or anything," she muttered.

"... Tell you what?" Phil asked hesitantly.

Rachel picked up her milkshake and took a heavy sip through the straw, drawing it out, until she set it down to take in a deep breath.

"They know Fazbear Entertainment is on its last legs. Because it's getting harder for the company to pay for Jeremy's care, some of the funds have had to come from my parents' pockets. And the amount they have to keep putting in keeps getting higher and higher, and they kept complaining, to the point that I willingly started using the money from my college savings to help pay."

"Oh, Rachel, no! You need that money!" Phil scolded.

"I'm in the lead to be valedictorian, so I think it's safe to say I'll be seeing some scholarships head my way," she pointed out. "But my parents don't like it either... they've told me to stop. They're ultimately the ones who decide on what happens to Jeremy. And... and I was forced to come to a compromise with them."

That familiar cold October air breezed through the car's windows. Rachel swallowed forcefully.

"If... if Jeremy doesn't wake up by the time I graduate... they're going to take him off life support."

Phil's face paled.

"But... but there's a chance he might not wake up by then...!" he chewed on his lip. "I... I don't have any power in the company, but... but maybe if I meet your parents... I have an office job, I-I can help pay to keep Jeremy alive...!"

"The worst part is, money's not the only thing affecting their decision," Rachel complained, digging her nails into her palms as tears pooled in her eyes again. "They... they've said they're just tired of waiting. It has been three years, I know it's been long, but... but I don't want them to just... j-just let him die..."

Phil's hand rested against his stump.

"I... I still don't want you giving up the money you need for college, Rachel. I've got a decent job, let me chip in a little money to help you out. Please, I... I-I insist."

"Alright," Rachel replied, swallowing as she fought back tears. "As long as you keep calling. Not just to leave Jeremy messages, but... to let me know when you want to visit him. Or maybe if one of your friends wants to come see him. Jeremy... might only have a little over half a year left, after all."

Phil sighed, slumping in the passenger seat.

"Other than that... there's nothing I can do?" he asked desperately.
"Nothing but hope and pray."

May 30, 1991

The voices of Linda Ronstadt and Aaron Neville lit up the airwaves as the radio alarm came alive. Phil reached out a hand with the speed (or lack of) of a zombie, shutting off the alarm. He hadn't needed it, considering he hadn't slept at all that night.

He slowly pulled himself out of bed, numb to the cool air drifting out of the vents. Phil just sat there, staring at his hands through the blurred vision of his red eyes. That was how he had spent most of the night, after all, so what difference would a few more hours make?

There was no hurrying into the shower, no picking out a tie, no hurriedly scrambling eggs and practically eating them straight from the skillet. He just sat and stared.

The phone rang, disrupting his thoughts, and he meandered into the kitchen to pick it up.

"... lo, hello," Phil mumbled.

"Phil? Where are you? Work started thirty minutes ago."

"... sorry, Shannon. I'm not feeling well today."

"Oh... then that friend you mentioned last week..."

"Yeah," Phil choked back a sob, his eyes leaking and his nose running. "I got the call last night."

"I'm so sorry, Phil... I'll cover for you, you don't have to come in. You might need some additional time off, so... make sure you file the appropriate paperwork when you're ready to come back to work. Take care of yourself, okay?"

"I will."

"Goodbye, Phil."

"Bye."

He hung up the phone, before falling to his knees and crying. It was the exact same thing he had done the night before, when Rachel had called him and told him the news as she wept.

She had actually graduated on the twenty-third of May... and since Jeremy's status had not changed, he was officially taken off life support and given a morphine drip in its place - to ease any pain as he passed. The problem was that it could take anywhere from days to weeks for Jeremy to pass. Phil and his friends had all gotten their chance to say goodbye over the weekend - Sophia, Heather, and Ronaldo had come in on Saturday, and Phil and Pat came in on Sunday. It was probably the worst way they could have met after waiting for several years.

Rachel had been checking on Jeremy every afternoon, between the hours of three and four... and she was racked with guilt upon finding out Jeremy had died around 5:45 pm on that tragic Wednesday.

Did Rachel want to be left alone, or did she need someone during her grief? He could do nothing, when she actually did need help, or he could reach out to her and then be told she wanted to be alone. Wiping away his tears and bringing his breathing back to a calmer pace, he stood back up and picked up the phone, dialing Rachel's number.
"Hello?"

"Uh, hello, Mrs. Fitzgerald," Phil replied. "Is, uh, Rachel there? I-I'm that friend of hers, and I wanted to see how she was feeling? See if she wanted to talk, if that would make her feel better?"

"... I guess you can try. She doesn't want to talk to us."

He heard the phone being set down, probably on a table or countertop, as well as the muffled voice of Mrs. Fitzgerald calling for her daughter and a reply too quiet for Phil to discern. He heard the phone pick up again.

"Is your name Phil?"

"Yes, ma'am."

He heard the phone get set down, as well as a muffled 'It is!', followed by footsteps until the phone picked up again.

"Hi, Phil," Rachel said from the other line, her voice hoarse.

"Hey, Rachel... I'm sorry for your loss. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No," she answered. "Well, there is something... but you'd have to actually be here in order to do it."

"Say no more. My coworker called to check on me since I didn't come in to work this morning. She suggested I take some time off to mourn. So, if you need me for something, I can come over today. Should I meet you at your place, or...?"

"Do you remember the burger place we usually stopped at for milkshakes? I know fast food isn't really a place for formal meetings, but... I know it's one of the spots you're more familiar with."

"Sounds good. I'll call you when I'm almost in town."

"Alright. See ya, Phil."

"Bye, J-" he froze. "... uh, see you then, Rachel."

He hung up the phone and went into his bedroom - specifically, the closet, where his suitcases were kept. Come to think of it, the funeral would probably be in a week, so he might as well stay in town and save himself the trip.

Once his bags were packed with clothes and a few other necessities, he locked the door behind him and carried them out to his Mercury Sable.

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Sure enough, when he pulled into the parking lot, Rachel was already standing outside her car. And once he got out, it didn't take long for her to run up to him and hug him. Phil held onto her gently as she cried against his shoulder, before she calmed down enough to pull back and speak to him.

"... Sorry, I guess I should've said 'hi' first," she apologized.

"No... it's okay... everyone's emotions are a mess," Phil reassured, wiping his eyes on his sleeve.

"What's on your mind?"

"I... I wanted to give you some stuff," Rachel explained, leading him back to her car, and opening
one of the back doors to reveal a fairly small cardboard box. "We're still sorting out Jeremy's possessions, but... there were a few things I immediately knew you'd want to have."

She lifted the box with no trouble, carrying it back to Phil's car and setting it in the passenger seat in the front.

"I think I'll open this once I find a hotel to stay at... hopefully it won't be too hard to find one..." Phil mused, then managed to smile. "But before I go... would you like a milkshake for old times' sake?"

She wiped her eyes and nodded, with what was possibly the first smile she had in days.

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He'd had to ask for someone from the hotel staff to help him out, but Phil finally managed to open the cardboard box.

There were a few snazzy neckties - those would be nice for work. And there was an envelope that turned out to have some cash for him. It hadn't been sealed, but had the top fold tucked into the bottom part - Rachel had taken his single-handedness into consideration. Jeremy had probably asked that most, if not all, of his money go to Rachel, but she had probably decided to divvy up a portion of it among his friends.

Underneath the envelope was Jeremy's smiling face, and Phil felt his heart stop. It was a small framed picture of Jeremy, the right size to fit on his nightstand. He couldn't even tell what the occasion for the picture was - maybe his first summer home from college? - since he looked roughly the same age.

He gently lifted the picture frame out of the box and set it aside on the bed. The last items, at the bottom of the box were... a cassette deck, two cassette tapes in their cases, and another small envelope.

He opened the small envelope first, wondering if there was another letter inside, only for a small item to slide out onto his lap.

A wearable pin crafted out of a Freddy Fazbear's Pizza token. It had to have been the one he had given Jeremy... it just had to.

He clutched it tightly in his hand, holding it close to his heart, as he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath before gently putting it back in the small envelope and setting it near the small pile of neckties.

One of the cassette cases was labeled 'For Phil' - written in Jeremy's handwriting no less. The other one had the word 'Jeremy' written on it, and the neat handwriting was presumably that of Rachel's.

He had a feeling he knew what the Jeremy tape was - he put it in the cassette deck and hit the play button, to test if the batteries even worked.

"Okay, we're gonna test to make sure the recording works. Let's give it a shot. Say something."

"Uh... testing? One, two, three?"

"Okay, time to see if it recorded!"

He recognized the first voice as Rachel's, but he didn't know the second voice - it was definitely masculine though.
Rachel's first boyfriend, Phil realized, as the next message played.

"Hello, hello! Uh, hey, Jeremy. It's November 23rd, 1987... it's about ten til eight... and I'm gonna try not to keep your sister on the phone too long."

"Phil, I can do homework while you talk."

"Oh, okay. I know Jeremy wouldn't want me to distract you, that's all."

"I'll be okay. Keep going."

"Okay, so, uh... I just got out of the hospital. Um... if - no, uh, when you wake up... I'm going to look really different. My right arm... kind of got amputated. Yeah. I just don't want you to be too surprised when you see me again. I'm going to try out physical therapy for a few months, and... maybe a little bit of counseling, too. I'm sorry I can't be there for you in person, but I'm not going to forget you. I'll keep you in my heart... or, uh, does that sound too corny? Heheh. But, um, I probably shouldn't let the first message be too long. Don't want to take up all the space on the tape. Alright, I'll talk to you later. I love you."

The tape clicked, and the next message played.

"Okay. Hey, Jeremy... it's Pat. I was really worried when I found out about what happened. I'm glad Rachel called. The apartment's doing fine... I haven't messed with anything in your room, honest. I'm also taking care of that... what... pentagram? The flowers you brought home after you went out with Phil that one time. I've never tried tending a garden before... but watering flowers everyday can't be too hard, right? Okay. I'll talk to you later."

Another click.

"Hello, hello! Um, hey, Jeremy... I'm calling you on November 27th, 1987. I thought about calling you yesterday, but... um... I was worried about how it might affect your family. Yesterday was Thanksgiving, so I went home to spend it with my family. Neither of my parents really like turkey, so... we just have kind of a potluck of dishes, both Italian and Japanese. That's not too weird, is it? I... um... I can't decide whose cooking I like better... mostly because I shouldn't judge in front of them... yeah, uh, surprise! My parents wanted to leave a message for you too, so here they are."

Phil smiled as his parents' voices played back.

"Hello, hello, Jeremy! Oh, uh, that wasn't too loud, was it? Anyway, this is Federico Fazari... I've heard a lot about you. You sound like you're a great young man. Thank you for helping Phillip study for biology, and for being so kind to him. I don't know what your parents think, but I fully support the relationship you have with Phillip. Once you've recovered... if you're still in a relationship with Phil and worried about future holidays being awkward, you're more than welcome to spend a Thanksgiving or Christmas with us. Okay, honey, your turn!"

"... I think you pretty much covered everything, dear. My name's Yoko, and I'm Phil's mother. I also fully support the relationship you two have... あの... I can't think of anything else! Just know that we all wish you the best and hope you recover soon, and quickly."

He heard his voice come back on the tape.

"Alright, Jeremy - and Rachel - here's hoping you have a happy belated Thanksgiving. I'll talk to you again soon, Jeremy. Love you. Bye."

The tape clicked again, playing a message from Heather, before another message played.
"Hi, Jeremy... it's Sophia. I just... I wanted to apologize. I regret not talking to you more before you got hurt. You're really nice, and smart, and I really was interested in studying micro together. And I mean... I know that people in comas can apparently hear what people are saying to them, but... it's not the same. You're in a hospital or something, far away, and I'm just now saying this nice stuff about you? Why didn't I tell you this while you were here? It just... it makes me really upset at myself. When you get out of your coma... well, I suppose the first people you're going to want to see will be your family and Phil. But... maybe after that, we can spend some more time getting to know each other over some coffee? I miss you, and I hope I can see you soon.

Tears rolled down his face, though he remained quiet, as he listened to more of the tape. Many wishes for a merry Christmas (and a happy New Year), simple 'I thought about you today and wanted to say hi' messages, and other things. Most of the calls were his.

"Hello, hello, Jeremy. Today is May 7th, 1989. Can you believe it? I just got my degree. Uh, you haven't forgotten that you still need to get that bio degree, right? I don't remember all that much, but... King Phillip still remembers a few things, heheh. I'll help you study if you're rusty, okay? I'm applying for work at a few businesses in the same area we went to college, so... uh, just come on back when you're ready. I-I'm not trying to pressure you, I know it's going to be hard... but I'll work as hard as I can to support you. Oh, I almost forgot! Happy belated birthday! Um... so, you're twenty-three now. Just about two months older than me, huh? Uh... I just feel much better. I had an argument with my uncle... and I thought he was going to make peace! Well, I've decided that I don't want him in my life any longer. So you don't have to worry about him anymore. My parents will help make sure he doesn't harass us. Oh, but you won't have to worry about my aunt, Fiorella - or Flora - she's much nicer. She even asked me to tell you hi! She studies zoology, remember? You two should have a conversation some time. Alright, I'm gonna start getting ready for bed. You have a good night, Rachel, and I hope you wake up soon, Jeremy. I love you. Bye."

He was surprised by the next voice on the cassette.

"Hello, Jeremy! It's Ronaldo. How do I sound? I've gotten much better at speaking English. I may not know fancy science words like you do, but the next time I speak with you, it will be much easier to talk... and probably more fun, too! I'm really excited... and nervous. I'm taking Sophia out to dinner next week, but... what she doesn't know is, I'm planning on proposing. I hope she'll say yes. Heather and Phil don't know, and obviously Sophia doesn't, so... this is our little secret. That goes for you too, Rachel! I hope you get better soon, Jeremy. Goodbye."

Click.

"Hello, Jeremy? Hey, it's Pat! Guess who's now the proud owner of a new house? Me! ... Why do people bother asking those 'guess who' questions, it's always about themselves... uh, anyway, yeah! I've got a new home now! But the real kicker... get this... is my new garden. Yeah, I got really into caring for that pentas you left all those years ago, and now I've got a wide variety of stuff. Pentas, a rose bush, some spices... and let me tell you, garden-grown tomatoes taste better than anything they sell at the store. Once you're better, come over some time, and I'll make you the best salad you've ever had. Okay, see you later."

There was a flurry of messages following the wedding, to the point that he had to flip the cassette over to the other side. He had called, Heather had called, Sophia and Ronaldo left their message together... and they had left another message together during their honeymoon in Paris.

As he listened to another year pass on the tape, he was surprised by one of the calls Heather had left.

"Hey, Jeremy, it's Heather. Now, I know I've had Fritz and George leave a message for you, but I went out to The Bird and Barb, and... you'll never guess who happened to wait on me. Martin!"
Martin Burgess, John's brother, the guy who got falsely charged. John's still on the run, but everyone's pretty much convinced that he murdered the kids. I chatted a little with Martin, and he said he feels bad about what happened to those children, to the company, to Phil, and to you. John might have faked his charm, but I can tell Martin is genuinely nice. Makes you wonder how people could ever think he was capable of hurting someone. Theme park's looking good, I love this job so much. I'd have to pull some strings but... everyone in management really likes me, so I might be able to get you a free ticket to visit sometime. Talk to you again soon.

The cassette clicked again, and he remembered how distraught he was during the call that followed.

"Hello, hello? Hey, Jeremy... I-I just need someone to talk to... you and Rachel, I guess. Um... it's July 18th, 1990... and I'm a little worried. My dad finally sold the company. Now, I wish I could be okay with this, be glad that the stress of the missing children and catching John was off his back... but it really isn't. Unc- Frank bought the company from him. He's trying to bring in a lot of money to re-open a single location - but go figure he'd pick the building where everything started going wrong. But since the company is still owned by someone in the Fazari family, people are pointing fingers at my dad and calling him a weak business man for giving away the company to someone else... and Frank is just eating it up? He's telling the media he was always better suited anyway. He's promising there won't be any more murders. I hope he's right. However, he's more suited for the money side of the job... he's not as good with figuring out how to make guests happy. He's not a people person like my dad. I haven't been feeling well lately... kind of lonely, actually. It's hard to get in touch with all our old friends now. Once you're better, we'll all have another F-You-Frank Fiesta. Okay, talk to you again soon. I love you. Bye."

There were several more bittersweet messages... once everyone had heard the news from Rachel about the ruling on Jeremy, they became a lot more encouraging... practically cheering Jeremy on, rooting for him to wake up... until the dates on the messages changed to that final week in May, when pretty much everyone started 'saying goodbye, just in case', until the calls from the 29th came in.

"... Thank you again for being my friend, Jeremy. Take care." Ronaldo said.

"... It's... scary... to think about death. But no matter when it comes for us, I hope we'll get to have a big happy reunion in Heaven, Jeremy. Goodbye." Sophia said.

"... p-please, you've gotta keep trying... I practically lost my parents... I-I don't want to lose one of my friends... I-I'm sorry, I can't do this...!" Heather's final message broke Phil's heart... he'd never expected her to be the one to break down.

"... I, uh, don't know what else to say... everyone's saying their goodbyes, and I've been preparing myself too... I'll keep rooting for you to wake up, but... if it's your time to go, I'll understand. I'll be sad, but... I still have our other friends. We'll be there for each other, don't worry. Oh, and you too, Rachel. I always keep saying this, but... just in case this is the last time you hear me say it, I want you to know I love you."

Phil wiped his eyes as the cassette continued to roll, but only silence played. Who would've thought he'd be the one to leave the last phone call? But Phil finally managed to crack a small, bittersweet smile.

At least the last thing he had gotten to tell Jeremy was that he loved him.

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June 7, 1991
His eyes still red after the funeral service, Phil continued to stare down at the headstone.

Jeremy Fitzgerald
Beloved son and brother

He knelt down and let his fingertips press gently into the soil that now covered Jeremy's grave.

"I'm never going to forget you," Phil whispered. "You know how one of the last things you said to me was that you'd make me proud? Well, now I'm going to make you proud. A long time ago... I spoke with Heather and Fritz about opening my own business. Well, I'm gonna do it. You remember The Mellow Morpho? I'll have to find a good property to open it on, but we'll sell food and drinks, and we'll have a garden, and we'll sell potted plants for people to start their own gardens and share in that joy. It's like we told each other... as long as you're happy, I'm happy. Thank you for being in my life. I love you so much."

He looked over his shoulder, noticing that the guests were starting to leave. And he wouldn't be able to get started on The Mellow Morpho if he stayed here forever. He brushed the dirt off onto one of his knees, wiping his eyes with his opposite shoulder, and finally got to his feet.

As he stood up straight, he could've sworn he heard Jeremy's voice one more time.

"See ya, Phil."

Phil smiled.

"... Bye, Jeremy."

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Chapter End Notes

I hope that turned out good...!

Thank you so much to everyone who's been reading! Remember... Chapter 13 is going to be the FINAL CHAPTER!

It's also special because I've set a deadline for it... expect it to be up sometime between June 14th to June 19th! That's because I'm hosting a stream for the opera Carmen before posting the final chapter! You can find out more about it on my tumblr (also "bijoukaiba") or by checking the tumblr tag for 'ctcm'.

Thank you all once again, as we prepare for the end.
L'amour T'attend, Toréador

Chapter Notes

Since this is the chapter where the events of the first Five Nights at Freddy's game takes place, I want to make a disclaimer that I will be modifying some of Phone Guy (Phil)'s dialogue since (a) it will help fit the events of the plot a little better, (b) I don't want to be accused of plagiarism, and (c) nobody likes a copy-paster anyway.

Let the ending begin.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

0-0-0- Je l'aime! Je l'aime, et devant la mort même, je répéterai que je l'aime! -0-0-0

April 13, 1992

Flipping over a 'closed' sign to 'open' for the first time had never felt so invigorating. But it was finally Monday, finally 9 am, and at long last, The Mellow Morpho was having its grand opening on a beautiful sunny day.

It had been hard to decide on a property to build off of, but after factoring in price, location, and size... Phil had settled on moving out of the city where he had attended college, and moving back to the city where his property was located... even if the city held a few bad memories for him. But Phil promised himself that he would make good memories here from now on. Especially since this city was also a college town... and Rachel would be attending the university about twenty minutes away.

It had actually baffled Phil when Rachel had told him that she would be attending university here. As valedictorian, it was no surprise that she had been accepted into the best university in the state. However, she had turned it down to attend college here, for... some reason. Granted, the local university was also pretty good... but it didn't have as many credentials or awards or 'Top 20' rankings. Maybe it was for personal reasons? Like it was supposed to be the 'family university' and part of a 'tradition' of attending college there, sort of like in some high school TV dramas... not that he had ever watched those.

Already excited about potential customers, Phil couldn't help but step outside, taking a look around the building. It was constructed out of concrete and had been repainted in a pastel orange color. What really stood out, however, was the large wooden sign secured on the roof. It was cut out in the shape of two butterflies on both ends of the rectangle. The rectangular part was black with white lettering; the butterflies were painted blue with some black and white detailing, giving them the appearance of blue morpho butterflies, true to the name of the shop.

The garden was already serving a variety of customers for free; butterflies of various colors and shapes were drawn in by the milkweed, phlox, asters, Mexican sunflowers, and pentas growing around the facility. Phil remembered how tedious it was to weed out the garden patch with only a single hand. Further out into the garden was a small kiosk, where seeds and potted varieties of all the plants in the garden could be purchased, as well as a few souvenir items like t-shirts and coasters.

He had also managed to hire a small staff of workers, especially since they were mostly college students looking for help paying for their education or rent, as the weekly paycheck was slightly
above minimum wage and also came with a voucher for a free drink. Phil trained them in providing
good customer service, giving them tips on suggestive selling, helping them practice replying with
"my pleasure" rather than "no problem" when they were thanked, and to always thank the customer
and invite them back. As an added incentive, any employee complimented by a customer for their
services was given a voucher for a free item of food.

The Mellow Morpho didn't draw in too many customers on its first day, aside from a few curious
college students. They mostly came for the drinks and the quiet atmosphere to study, but one girl said
she would be interested in coming back to buy a plant for when she went back home for the summer-
even looping a green piece of yarn she had kept with her around her finger as a reminder.

The first day was expected to be slow, but with fliers around campus, word of mouth, and a billboard
on the interstate that lead into town, their business was sure to grow. After closing The Mellow
Morpho for the day after sunset, Phil got back into his old Mercury Sable and drove back to the
apartment he shared with three other guys.

It was by no means a luxury apartment, but at least it came with a lower rent. The first few months
would probably be rough, especially with most of the students returning home for the summer, and
there was no telling how much of his money it would take to cover the little bits and pieces not
covered by the shop's profits.

After dinner, he spoke with his parents about The Mellow Morpho's first day, watched the news,
took a quick shower, and then dressed in a loose shirt and shorts for bed.

"One day down, years to go," Phil commented to the picture of Jeremy on his nightstand with a
smile.

He switched off the lights and crawled into bed, murmuring a small 'good night' before closing his
eyes.

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August 9, 1992

"... should be inside, right this way."

Phil had been wiping down a table when he overheard Tracie, one of the gardeners, speaking with a
customer. Or rather, customers. He had been expecting company. (1)

He hurriedly cast his paper towel into a trashcan, dashing out the front door to meet his guests, but
slowed down once he spotted them.

"Ronaldo! Sophia!" he greeted with a grin, before softening the tone of his voice. "... And how are
you doing today, Maria?"

The little girl with dark hair in Sophia's arms gave him a tiny smile, before sticking most of her hand
in her mouth.

"Come on, silly! You'll make your hands messy," Sophia scolded jokingly, gently lowering Maria's
arm. "Almost seven months old... Can you believe it?"

"Time just goes by so fast," Phil marveled, still smiling at Maria.

He couldn't help but wonder if, to his father, it seemed like 'just yesterday' he was the size of Maria.
And sometimes it felt like 'just yesterday' he was introducing himself to Ronaldo and Sophia, to
Heather... to Jeremy.

"So, Ronaldo, are you looking forward to your first class?" Phil asked.

"Definitely!" he exclaimed. "It's certainly going to feel different, though, being the teacher rather than the student."

"I know you teach Spanish, but remind me again... uh, what level are your students at?"

"There's only two levels, Spanish I and Spanish II, because it's a middle school. I teach mostly Spanish II, but I do have one period for teaching Spanish I."

"Oh, okay! And is everything going okay at the new hospital?" Phil asked Sophia.

"It's pretty nice... I have to admit I preferred the old one, though..." she shrugged and smiled, kissing the top of Maria's head. "With a little hard work and luck, I was able to find another job and a local daycare... No matter how nice the hospital, Maria comes first."

Ronaldo beamed at his daughter, before looking back at Phil.

"So, how's The Mellow Morpho doing? Did you make it through the summer okay?"

Phil's grin changed to a weary smile as he wiped some sweat from his brow.

"Well... with my primary customers gone, uh, I definitely had to chip in a fair share of my personal savings to cover loose ends. But, hey, macaroni and cheese isn't THAT bad! And classes will be starting in about two weeks, so there's bound to be returning students and new ones curious to check this place out. There was even an entomology professor who said he'd put in a word with his students. Go figure, Mellow Morpho and all, am I right?"

"One thing you might consider is charging for parking when football season picks up," Sophia suggested.

"I could, but... I dunno, it seems kind of mean. Well, I won't let the fans take up the parking lot for free... uh, maybe I'll just use the 'parking for paying customers only' policy," Phil thought for a moment. "I wonder what the football culture is like around here."

"Probably bittersweet. That one running back from a year or two ago... what's his name... he was a recruiting success! He was a great person on and off the field... some people were starting to talk about him being a Heisman candidate..." Ronaldo shook his head sadly. "... hard to believe one tackle is all it takes to end a career and change a life."

Phil wiped away a little more sweat, earning a small chuckle from Sophia.

"I agree with what you guys are saying, but maybe we should continue this conversation indoors, where there's shade and ventilation. Not to mention, I would love a nice cold glass of lemonade!" Sophia remarked.

"Lemonade it is!" Phil agreed, as they all walked inside.

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September 6, 1992

When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.
If only it was that simple.

Phil poured the last of his cereal into his bowl, only getting less than a handful of flakes to fall out. The rest was dust, cascading out as a mix between disintegrated cereal and pure sugar. It really made him wish he could afford milk.

By dipping into his personal money, he was keeping The Mellow Morpho afloat... but it was starting to sink him into debt. The fact that the years were starting to get to his car was also a matter of concern. If he didn't see a sudden boost, he might even have to ask for something that downright terrified him.

A loan.

And Phil just wouldn't have it. Not from his parents, not from a bank. He was going to power through this by taking on a second job.

*Just like Jeremy*, he thought, smiling bitterly.

And so here he was, tipping the bowl of cereal particles to his lips to eat his entire breakfast in a mouthful, with the classified section sitting in front of him. What he really wanted was a weekend job, maybe as a tutor, or working at the football stadium.

What he got instead was a knot in his stomach, as a familiar face in one ad stared back at him.

**Freddy Fazbear's Pizza**

*Looking for security guard to work the nightshift, 12am - 6am.*

*Monitor cameras, ensure safety of equipment and animatronic characters.*

Phil frowned. *This* was the reason this town brought back bad memories. Those first five - no, only five among who knows how many children. At least eleven. With John *still* on the run, he could very well have found a way to add to his body count.

Speaking of bodies, there was one more detail included in the ad that twisted the knot and pulled it tighter.

*Not responsible for injury or dismemberment.*

Now that Frank was in charge of the company, he had probably pulled out all the stops to seal every loophole, keeping lawsuits away from his money.

However... the hours certainly didn't interfere with when The Mellow Morpho was open. In fact, he could probably change the hours - they didn't see much business between 9 am and 11 am anyway. That would give him a nice chunk of sleep just short of five hours... and he could nap during his lunch break, and sleep a little longer in the evening.

And the numbers on the page seemed to call out to him, he could practically hear the different notes of the beeps the telephone keys made when pressed, playing out in a persuading aria.

"Damn it," Phil muttered, getting up to use the phone.

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*September 19, 1992*
"Hey, Dan?"

"Hmm?"

"Could you help me with my tie, please?"

Phil stepped closer to him, clad in his brown security uniform, black necktie in his hand. Even after all these years, the uniform hadn't changed.

Dan carefully looped the tie around the collar of Phil's shirt with a slight yawn, considering it was roughly 11 pm. He secured the knot with a gentle tug.

"There... ready to go," Dan declared.

"I'm - oh, wait, hang on - I just need your help for one last thing, I promise."

Phil scurried back into his bedroom and then back out, before showing off the pin in his hand.

"Could you pin this on for me?" Phil requested, smiling gently at the pin. "On the tie, I mean. I... uh... I'd like to think that it'll be my 'good look charm'."

Dan rolled his eyes with a smile, pinning it to the tie.

"Now I'm ready," Phil confirmed.

"Not yet," Dan argued, heading into the kitchen.

He came back out a moment later with a cold can of cola, handing it to Phil.

"... Just in case that coffee starts wearing off."

"Thanks, Dan," Phil replied with a grin, before heading out the door.

Since it had been seven years since the incident, it was no surprise that the manager of the local Freddy Fazbear's Pizza had changed as well. Only recently, too - Gilbert had only been here for a year.

Unlike the previous manager, Gilbert was actually fairly social, surprisingly laid back and carefree. He had shown him around the restaurant earlier in the afternoon when Phil came in to pick up his uniform, and explained how to work the doors and cameras, but that was it.

"That old restaurant was left to rot for quite a while."

He could still remember telling Jeremy that. And it certainly seemed to be the case as he walked through the door, already able to spot a few cobwebs here or there. Gilbert was aware that that could be a health code violation, wasn't he?

He followed this hallway a short distance, until he stepped out into the main dining area. To his right, he could see the stage where Bonnie, Freddy, and Chica entertained the children. Further down, against the wall, he could faintly see the familiar starry purple curtain of Pirates' Cove.

Phil cast one last look over his shoulder back at the animatronics as he went down one of the hallways to the security office, and he could've sworn he saw Bonnie twitch. He shivered and walked faster, the sound of the soles of his shoes click-clock-ing against the tile floor echoing off the
dark walls. The certifications and licenses of the pizzeria were pinned to the wall by the security office, as well as a list of rules for the customers to follow.

Really, Gilbert? Don't you think this should be out by the DOOR, where the customers can see?

Phil stepped into the security office - much smaller than the one at the last Freddy's he had worked at. To his right was his desk, with another fan and some assorted paperwork, as well as the security monitors. Whereas the last pizzeria had relied on one monitor, this one had multiple smaller ones, each one with wires trailing up through the ceiling. To his left was his chair, as well as the clock for punching in, the telephone, and what appeared to be some kind of answering machine. On the wall was some kind of meter indicating how much of the building's power remained, since the pizzeria ran on a reserved power supply at night.

It was only a few minutes away from midnight, so he might as well get comfy, Phil figured, setting the can of soda down on the table near the answering machine. He hadn't noticed it before, but the tiny red light near the text reading "New Message" probably indicated that someone had left a phone call. Curious, Phil pressed the 'Play' button.

"Hey, Phil, it's Gilbert. Uh, it's about nine thirty, so we're all done closing up the pizzeria for the night. I realized I forgot to give you the proper greeting according to company policy... but hey, we all make mistakes, and at least I got the chance to correct mine."

He should really have memorized that if it's so important to company policy! Phil mentally chided him. Based on the flat tone of Gilbert's voice, it sounded like he was reading the policy off of a notecard.

"Welcome to Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. A magical place for kids and grown-ups alike, where fantasy and fun come to life. Fazbear Entertainment is not responsible for damage to property or person. Upon discovering that damage or death has occurred, a missing person report will be filed within 90 days, or as soon property and premises have been thoroughly cleaned and bleached, and the carpets have been replaced..."

Phil's stomach sank at the word 'death', and the way that Gilbert continued to ramble off things about lawsuits and how loopholes were being filled for almost five minutes didn't help either.

"... At least doors are better than the flashlight and bear mask trick they used prior to all the renovating, and there's fewer animatronics and suits. I think you're probably safer here than you would've been at that place back in the day. So while there's still some risk, we probably won't have another incident like... what's it called... 'The Bite of Eighty-Seven'."

The Bite of 87. They had given a tragedy a nickname befitting a cheesy vampire movie. Phil took in a deep breath and slowly let it fume out of his nose, knowing that getting upset wouldn't help at all.

"It's funny... I don't want this call to last too long in case you're at work. But I also kind of want it to be long enough to get rid of the weird audio on the answering machine. I took it and the tape to a repair shop to test it, figure out what was wrong, and there was nothing on the tape! Yet when I got back to the pizzeria, it started acting up again. Maybe the place is haunted! OOOooooooOOOOHHH! Anyways, yeah, I'll let you go. Don't let the audio freak you out. Bye!"

Weird audio?

The tape continued to roll, before the sound warped and distorted, producing... an eerie voice, garbled and deep. Phil couldn't figure out what... 'it' was saying, so he quickly shut off the machine. The clock said 11:59 anyway; it was bound to roll over and let him clock in any second now.
There were fewer animatronics, and he did have physical protection thanks to the doors... but as Phil gently pinched the pin on his tie with a small smile, he knew it was thanks to some extra good luck that he would make it through tonight - and however many other nights - just fine.

October 18, 1992

Despite the brief drought in customers, The Mellow Morpho was once again spreading its wings as a popular restaurant and shop in the area. Phil's income had increased dramatically, to the point that he was able to eat properly without a side job, and so he had handed in his resignation form earlier in the week and was now spending his last night on the job - training the new security guard, no less!

Much to his surprise, the new guard had beaten him to the location, already seated in the chair.

"Hey, Ned!" Phil greeted, trying to keep his voice low. "It's nice to meet you. How are you feeling tonight?"

Ned did not answer him, nor did he turn around in the chair to face him.

"Ned," Phil repeated, a little louder.

He still did not answer. Phil walked up to him and placed a hand on his shoulder... Ned's posture felt so rigid.

"I... I know you're nervous... I-I was too, on my first night... but hey, it's Sunday, so the animatronic characters aren't as active as they are the other days of the week, so... lucky you, you got to start on the easiest - "

He had started to turn Ned around in the chair, but Phil's voice caught in his throat when he had turned Ned around to face him. Ned's skin had a ghostly pallor, his body still rigid in the seat, his eyes closed as though he had simply fallen asleep at the job.

"N-Ned! Sh-shit!" Phil hissed between his teeth, reaching out his fingers to check Ned's throat for any sign of life.

The second his fingers made contact, Ned's eyes shot open, staring right back into Phil's eyes, before his mouth opened wide, taking in a desperate gasp of air so deep that Phil could've sworn he was trying to swallow the Earth whole.

"Ned! O-Oh, God, what happened to you?! Say something!"

Ned took in a few more gasps of air before he started retching and gagging. Some... liquid... poured out of Ned's mouth. Or was it solid material? Either way, Phil wasn't willing to touch it. Tar... that was what it resembled. He wasn't even vomiting it up, it just kept rolling out of his mouth... and now out of his eye sockets.

"Ned!"

Ned's mouth moved, trying to speak to Phil... what would possibly be his last words... but all Phil could hear was that same deep, garbled voice. Phil picked up the phone, terrified, dialing a number for help and listening to the ringing on the other side.

Ringing, ringing...
Until Phil lifted his head from the kitchen table, now aware that the ringing wasn't coming from his nightmare. It was the phone in the kitchen. He hurried to pick it up.

"Hello, hello?"

"Hello, hello, Phillip!"

"Oh! Hi, Dad, what's up?"

"Well, the weekend is coming up... and I haven't seen you in a while. And I know you're busy with your new business, so... I was wondering if you wouldn't mind if your mother and I came by to visit The Mellow Morpho, and maybe we'd go out for dinner?"

"O-Oh! Yeah, yeah, that sounds great! Um... what day would be best for you?"

"Well, Yoko made an earlier arrangement with a friend for Sunday, so... I'd have to say Saturday would be the best option."

"Saturday!" Phil exclaimed, his voice cracking slightly. "Oh, uh, that sounds great! Do you remember how to get there?"

"I remember. I look forward to seeing you soon, Phillip. We love you."

"I love you guys too. I-I love you a lot. See you then."

"Bye."

"Bye."

He hung up the phone and let out a heavy sigh. There had been a few nights with close calls with the animatronics, which had given him an occasional cut or bruise, but... what if something went really wrong? Especially since Saturday was the day the animatronics were most active. And if his parents knew about what was going on, with his business still having trouble making ends, as well as being thrust into this dangerous job, he would be worried sick.

He'd just have to be extra careful, Phil reminded himself, as he opened the cabinet for another mac and cheese dinner that night.

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October 24th, 1992

The familiar deep "bearnitone" voice of Freddy echoed off the halls as he laughed, just outside Phil's door. Over the past month, he had picked up on the pattern of Freddy laughing when he moved.

He hated the waiting, wondering when Freddy would leave, as every few minutes the meter on the wall behind him indicated the remaining power had dropped by another one percent. He could check the camera, to see if Freddy was still out in the corner, but -

The cameras.

OH GOD, THE CAMERA.

Phil turned on the monitor for Pirate's Cove, a horrified gasp passing his lips as he saw the curtains spread wide open. He shut the monitor off, trying to conserve power, but already out of the corner of his eye, he could spot Foxy's red fur in a blur as he passed the west window.
His hand desperately shot out to hit the door button, only for Foxy to swing his hook at his arm. Phil cried out as the metal point tore a gash down his sleeve and arm as Foxy let out a shrill yell.

He raised his hook and swung at Phil again, as he dodged backwards, his back slamming against the east door. Foxy shrieked again, seeming to alert Freddy, as he could hear the door being pounded on on the opposite side.

*Come on, clock, roll over to 6 am! Roll over!*

Foxy lunged toward him, jaws first, and Phil dodged to the side, causing Foxy to slam into the door face-first. It looked like something out of a slapstick cartoon; he might've even thought it was funny if it weren't for the fact that Phil could potentially be killed at any second!

Foxy's right hand gripped Phil's shirt, and he struggled to pull away.

"N-no! Please! I don't wanna die!" he begged, trying to wrench the metallic hand off of him. Foxy opened his mouth, lunging forward to bite Phil's only arm, only to stop mid-assault.

Phil let out a small sigh of relief, knowing all too well what time it was. Sure enough, Foxy released his grip and walked out of the security office as though he had simply wandered into the wrong room. Peeking out the east window, he could see the back of Freddy's head as he walked back to the stage.

As his adrenaline started to wear off, Phil became more aware of the stinging pain of his arm. His knees buckled as he delicately rolled back his slightly blood-stained sleeve to examine the wound - it must have been about three or four inches long, slightly diagonal along the side of his arm and almost perfectly centered between his wrist and elbow. Though the length of the cut was concerning, based on the rate he was bleeding, Foxy probably hadn't cut too deeply into his arm. At least he had clipped the side of it, rather than the bottom, where his veins and arteries could have given him a major problem.

stuff like this was the reason he had written out a will after only his first week at work.

Clocking out, Phil removed the set of keys from his pocket as he walked down the hall, heading to the small arcade area to the right of the animatronic stage. Phil thumbed through the keys until finding the one for the token boxes, before proceeding to unlock one of the skeeball machines and activate its test switch.

After his stressful first week, he had found that having some sort of mindless task helped get his mind off his anxiety - and skeeball was the perfect way to calm him down. Not only did he set goals of trying to beat whatever his high score was... it also brought back good memories.

"... if it makes you feel any better, I believe you. About your dad and everything."

Phil smiled as the balls rolled down the chute and the machine's score display lit up. He took one of the balls in his hand and rolled it up the ramp, though he flinched at the way his sleeve brushed gently against his wound. Despite his injury, the ball still managed to sail into the 40-point loop. He had gotten pretty good at this after a month of practice. Phil picked up the next ball, took a deep breath, and launched it as he planned on how he would deal with his injury.

For starters, even though it would have been his best option, visiting the hospital was out of the question. Despite having insurance, he probably couldn't afford the rest of the medical bill. Phil would just have to bandage this up when he got home. He was pretty sure one of his housemates had a first aid kit in one of their bathrooms anyway. And once he was bandaged up, he'd make sure to
wear something with long sleeves so the bandages wouldn't be evident - it was late October, and it had started to get cooler, so his parents wouldn't suspect anything.

Getting through two to four hours with his parents would be a cakewalk compared to spending six hours with deadly animatronics.

Sam was just a humble college freshman, starting her first weekend as a waitress at The Mellow Morpho. And yet it amazed her how her manager could go from a 26-year-old man to an ecstatic 6-year-old child at the sight of his parents' car pulling up in the lot.

Phil ran out to the car, hugging his mother, and then his father, clad in a white polo shirt and his alumni jacket.

"It's great to see you guys again," Phil commented, beaming at them. "How are you feeling?"

"Old," Yoko teased, her husband chuckling.

Phil's smile softened a little. It was an inescapable truth; his parents' faces had more wrinkles than they did six years ago, their hair was turning grayer, they needed glasses to read and drive, and their movements were slower.

"... Are you alright, Phillip?" Federico asked. "You've just been staring at us."

"Sorry... I-I was so excited I didn't sleep much last night," Phil lied.

"Just last night?" Yoko inquired.

He sighed. Phil was hoping for a chance that one of his parents wouldn't bring up the dark circles that had formed under his eyes since he had started the night shift.

"Well... sometimes I have trouble sleeping... I worry too much about the restaurant," Phil shrugged. "Uh... it's fine, though! Really! I'm just being nervous. I'll get over it soon, it's only been half a year."

"I did have some stress when I started up Fazbear," Federico pointed out. "... But Phil, don't let it get too far out of hand. I know it's important not to rely on sleeping medication, but they really helped me out during a rough patch at the beginning... and after Fazbear was no longer mine."

"Well, speaking of business, how about we have something to drink?" Yoko suggested.

"Absolutely," Phil agreed, leading them inside. "You'll have to give me a second to clock out, so I can join you... I postponed my break until you guys arrived."

He took them to his favorite table in the restaurant - the one with the best view of the garden, before excusing himself to clock out. He got back just in time for Sam to arrive to take their orders.

"I've never had a cherry limeade before... I'll try that, please," Yoko ordered.

"I'd like a raspberry lemonade, please," Federico requested.

"I'll, uh... just have water, please," Phil put in.

As Sam walked off, his parents admired the view outside.

"... What kind of flowers grow in your garden?" Yoko asked.
"Oh, um, I had to do a little research at the library, but I picked out a lot of stuff that attracts butterflies. Uh, we've got pentas, asters, phlox, milkweed... uh, I can show you around after we get our drinks."

"This is such a lovely concept... this is just an ordinary weekend, but it feels like I might as well be on vacation!" Federico complimented. "What gave you the idea?"

Phil smiled gently.

"Jeremy. Although, uh, Rachel - his sister - probably deserves some credit too. For one of our dates, I took Jeremy out to the museum, because they were allowing students to visit their butterfly garden for free. It usually cost a few dollars otherwise. So, uh, we went out and admired the flowers and butterflies. Although, that had university funding behind it, so the museum was able to create a more controlled environment, allowing them to grow a variety of plants, including some from around the world, and so they were able to keep like sixty-something different butterfly species. The Mellow Morpho mostly gets monarchs, zebra longwings, swallowtails... pretty common butterfly species native to the area. Jeremy and I often visited a cafe in town called the Wizard's Brew. And on one occasion, Rachel was in town, because her boyfriend at the time was touring the local university thinking about recruiting him - he's a football player. And the three of us talked about cafes, biology, and gardens... and at some point, the name 'Mellow Morpho' came up. And now, five years later, here we are."

Phil went quiet, looking out the window.

"... I'm sure Jeremy would've loved it," Yoko commented, her voice soft and comforting.

"Yeah," Phil agreed. "I'm not grieving anymore, but... sometimes it still hurts to think about it."

He looked over in time to see Sam struggling to carry their tray of drinks.

"Do you need help, Sam?" Phil asked.

"I-I think I got it..." her voiced wavered. "It's just a little... uncomfortable on my shoulder... if I just..."

She tried shifting the tray forward... only for it to lean too far. Yoko let out a small cry as the tray dipped down and the drinks started to slide off. Phil managed to grab the low end of the tray, trying to set the balance right, but the impact of his hand hitting the bottom of the tray caused the glasses to shake violently, tipping over -

Sending lemonade, limeade, and water down his arm, and soaking his sleeve. Phil recoiled with a cry, holding his arm close to his body, as he hissed between his teeth from the pain, trying to act professionally and not curse.

"Phillip! Are you alright? What's wrong with your arm?" Federico asked, starting to reach out a hand to pull down his sleeve.

Phil drew back sharply, staring back at his father like a deer in headlights.

"Nothing! N-nothing! S-Sam, it's okay, don't cry... I'll grab some towels and help - " he cut off as he winced. " - j-just let me run to the bathroom, I-I can't take this...!"

He darted into the bathroom, slipping the opening of his sleeve over one of the handles of the sink, and tugging his arm so that the handle would pull his sleeve down. Unfortunately, this meant his citrus-soaked sleeve dug into his bandaged wound as he pulled, and Phil groaned in pain until his
sleeve had been pulled down to the elbow. He caught his breath for a second, trying to ignore the
stinging pain that practically brought tears to his eyes, before unbandaging his wound by gripping the
end of the bandage with his teeth and swiveling his arm. Unwilling to show his wound to his
housemates, in case they had tried to call the hospital, he'd had to fasten the bandage to his arm
before wrapping it with a piece of masking tape.

Hand shaking, he turned on the faucet, letting the water clean out his gash. *Oh*, he was already
starting to feel much better! Of course... now that his bandages and sleeve were drenched in lemon
and lime juices, it would be harder to sit and act naturally... he'd have to slip out of his jacket,
submerge the sleeve in water until the acidity had been neutralized, hide the bandages, and just let his
wound sit open underneath it. It could work, as long as nobody stepped into the bathroom for the
next few minutes.

"Phillip, are you in - " Federico started to say as he opened the door, but froze, Phillip's arm dead-
center in his gaze.

"D-Dad..."

"Phillip, your arm - " Federico stepped closer to him, still shocked by what he had seen.

"It's okay, I can explain - " Phil tried to reassure him.

"How did this happen? You didn't..."

"No! No. I-It's not like that..." Phil stammered, letting the water run over his arm some more.

"Then how?" Federico asked, his brows furrowed. "My god, why didn't you go to the hospital?"

And with that question, he was trapped. There was no use trying to lie now. He turned off the water
so he could properly speak.

"... I couldn't afford a trip to the hospital," Phil admitted quietly, lowering his head.

"You couldn't?" Federico asked. "But why not? Your business..."

"The Mellow Morpho has been having trouble making ends meet, so I've had to use some of my
personal money to help cover the losses. And when my personal money started running low... I had
to take on another job," Phil explained, his mouth feeling dry. "... At night."

Federico went silent, shaking his head, staring back at his son.

"I knew this city was... but surely... surely you didn't..."

"... I'm sorry, Dad."

"Resign," his father demanded sternly. "Tomorrow. I want you out of there. I might not be CEO
anymore, but I'm well aware of the changes that were made to the safety policy, and I know they
have to have been put there for a reason. I'm NOT going to lose you."

"But, Dad, if I don't have a job - "

"I'm still a businessman... I might not be raking in millions of dollars, but I can still afford to send
some money your way. I want The Mellow Morpho to be your future, not Freddy Fazbear. Even if
you love the old characters like Foxy."

"I, uh..." Phil laughed nervously, looking down at his arm. "... I don't really know if I can call Foxy
my favorite anymore."

"Just... please. Resign. I'm sure the company gives you sick days... make sure you use them before you leave, maybe if there are nights that are harder than others."

"Oh, there are," Phil huffed. "Saturdays are the worst, if you couldn't already tell."

"... But you'll resign?"

"I'll do it," Phil agreed. "I... did kind of miss getting seven or eight consecutive hours of sleep, heh."

His father leaned forward, embracing him.

"Not as much as your mother and I would miss you," Federico stated, gently tightening his embrace. "Now then... I know you were looking forward to spending time with us today... but we can have another rendezvous in the future. I think we should focus on getting that arm properly stitched up."

October 25, 1992

"What? Resigning?" Gilbert whined. "But you were doing such a great job!"

"I'm sorry," Phil replied, doing his best to keep a firm tone. "But considering how this is affecting my sleep and my performance at my other job, I think it's for the best that I resign."

"Alright... lemme just take a look at the calendar," Gilbert grumbled, lifting the current page of the wall calendar in his office to examine the one for November. "... It takes a minimum of two weeks to process a resignation so... your last day will be November 8th, which is also a Sunday."

"That long?" Phil asked.

"Look, I don't write the terms and conditions of the job. Two weeks. Not only for paperwork and paychecks, but it also gives the company time to put out ads to hire a new worker," Gilbert shrugged. "Life isn't fair, you know?"

"Alright... I think I can make it," Phil relented, glancing at his arm - even though the sleeve of his uniform concealed it, his wound had been properly stitched yesterday.

"Sir... would you mind if I asked one last question before I left for the day?"

"No, go ahead."

"Just curious... uh... does someone named 'Ned' work here?" Phil asked.

Gilbert's usual nonchalant demeanor disappeared, as he glared defensively at Phil.

"No," he answered, swiftly and defiantly.

"... Oh," Phil replied timidly. "L-like I said, just curious."

"Curiosity killed the cat, and you don't want to be a cat," Gilbert argued.

"N-no, sir... I'll just go now. Take care."

Nightmares being bad omens were the sort of thing you would expect from a movie, but Gilbert's
reaction to 'Ned' had certainly left Phil rattled. But that was nothing compared to the worry he had for the night guards who would come after him - and the ones before him - who would be signing a contract for their deaths. There was no telling how many people would come to this job, only to potentially "go missing". But as bad as he felt, he had to put his safety first - the guards after him would just be strangers, after all. The only person in town he had a personal connection to was Rachel, and she was too busy with college to ever apply for this job.

As long as he was safe... no random guard's fate could guilt him into staying.

"Two weeks?" Federico asked with a groan. "... I don't suppose they give you two weeks' worth of sick days, do they?"

"I'm afraid not," Phil replied, gently plucking at the telephone cord. "The policy gives you four days without repercussions. The fifth day, you have to discuss the circumstances with the manager, the sixth day gives you a week's suspension, and a seventh day is grounds for termination."

"That's for a six month period and not a year, right? That would be an awful attendance policy."

"It sure would," Phil agreed. "But, um... I don't really plan on taking a whole week off. Or six days. Or even just five. I dunno, if I have to get another job to keep The Mellow Morpho on its feet, I don't think bad attendance would look good on my resume."

"That's a fair point. So, what will you do with your four days off? I think you said Fridays and Saturdays were the roughest days while we were at the hospital... maybe take both Fridays and both Saturdays off?"

Phil let out a small sigh.

"I know it would be safer, but... I just can't do it. Putting in new guards on the toughest nights? They'd never stand a chance. I know I should just 'put the guilt behind me', but they need a fair chance! I was lucky that I started on the easiest night."

"You have a point. So, what's your plan?"

"I think I'll call out sick for four days in a row. A mild case of the flu? Or maybe taking time off to grieve a loss. I would skip... Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of my final week, so I would come in on Sunday for an easy final day. Wednesdays and Thursdays aren't easy, but they're not as bad as Friday and Saturday. The new guard would at least have a chance."

Phil smiled, even though his father couldn't see him.

"This week will be my last Friday and Saturday... I'm sure I can make it. Believe in me, okay, Dad?"

"I believe in you, Phillip. I always have. Now get some rest before your shift starts. We love you."

"I love you guys, too."

With that, he hung up the phone and went to get some rest before the Monday shift.

November 3, 1992
Bonnie and Chica were probably both outside his doors, waiting for the final 2% of the power to drain. Keyword being *probably*. Phil didn't dare turn on the doorlights, lest it potentially drain the last of his electricity. Despite the circumstances, Phil wore a smile on his face.

After all, he loved it when the clock finally changed from 5:59 to 6:00.

He let out an exasperated sigh, listening to Bonnie and Chica's retreating footsteps, before throwing his arm into the air with an excited yell. FINALLY! Finally, he was done being a night guard. He might not have gotten any new wounds, but after a particularly stressful Saturday, he was SO READY for this job to finally come to an end.

He clocked out quickly, spinning the key ring around his finger, before treating himself to one final game of skeeball.

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Only two hours later, Phil was back in the pizzeria - having left his wallet there on accident. He was surprised, however, to find that there was a car already parked out front - and that the door was indeed unlocked. Freddy Fazbear's Pizza wasn't supposed to open until about noon... was this Gilbert's car? And if so, why had he come here so early?

Phil shrugged it off, walking inside, not even looking at the animatronics as he walked right over to the skeeball machines. He froze.

His wallet was no longer resting on the machine he had been using.

"Okay, don't panic... it's probably around here somewhere..." he assured himself quietly, checking the floor near the machines.

Still nothing. He cast a glance over to Pirate's Cove; after his injury from Foxy, Gilbert had deactivated the animatronic's functions during the day time, closing the curtains on Foxy's small stage and even putting up an 'Out of Order' sign. Surely he wasn't a true pirate and actually stealing other people's loot...?

*Crack!*

Phil squeaked, jumping slightly, at the sound of something colliding with the laminated glass door. Was it a bird?

*Crack!*

Apparently not. Someone, probably some punk in middle school, was intent on creating a ruckus. Phil frowned, heading over to the door, surprised when he realized who was outside.

The guy outside wasn't a middle schooler at all; if anything, he looked more like a college student. He was a muscular African American, a few feet away from the door, seated in a wheelchair with something in his hand - probably whatever he had been throwing. Phil opened the door.

"Hey, uh, would you mind not doing that?" he requested.

"If I could avoid doing it, I would," the young man retorted, flipping a quarter - he had been holding coins, apparently. "... but you don't got a ramp for me to get to the door."

"... Oh," Phil went quiet, instantly feeling embarrassed. "... Sorry about that. Uh... I'll see if I can find something to use as a makeshift ramp, okay? Be right back!"
This building didn't have a handicap ramp? The Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted two years ago, for goodness sake! Phil huffed, hurrying across the dining area to the backstage section. A piece of plywood was sitting against the wall - would that be strong enough? It was worth a shot.

He struggled a little, carrying it under one arm all the way, including walking backwards out the door. But he finally made it outside, lowering it so that it created an angular ramp for Mike.

"Uh... I'm sorry about the building not being... you know, accessible."

"You're not the one who built it, don't apologize," the other guy shrugged it off. "Just keep some weight on the top of the board so I can get up there."

Phil kept his feet on the board, while the other guy propelled himself up the ramp. His upper arm strength was impressive.

"Thanks," he commented, starting to hold out his right hand, before switching to his left to shake. "The name's Mike, by the way."

"Oh, uh, I'm Phil. Nice to meet you," he replied, shaking hands with Mike. "Uh, let me get the door for you."

He seemed to have brightened in mood a little, now that he had gotten past that obstacle. Mike seemed like the kind of guy who'd be easy to warm up to, despite his frosty blue eyes. His eyes were really quite striking... Phil could've sworn he had seen Mike somewhere before, he just couldn't recall where. Was he a regular at The Mellow Morpho, perhaps?

Regardless, he was glad Mike hadn't commented on how sweaty his palms were... he had just pieced together that Gilbert had probably come in early for a reason, and Mike was probably here for a job interview. HIS job, most likely.

"Which way to the manager's office?" Mike asked, as he wheeled himself into the dining area.

"Uh, just take one of those halls down there," Phil explained, pointing out the entrances to the west and east halls. "The security office doubles as the management office... even though I don't think it's a good idea. Also, let Gilbert - that's the manager - know about the issue with the ramp."

"Yeah, I do have a portable ramp. I keep it in the trunk of my car, or sometimes my girlfriend's car. But I chose to come by bus... she's got a big exam today, and I wanted her to sleep in."

Oh, God... he could feel his heart breaking. Phil needed to get away.

"I-I'm going to run to the restroom... you go ahead and speak with Gilbert."

They went their separate ways, with Phil splashing some water on his face from the faucet as soon as he ducked into the men's restroom. He looked up in the mirror at himself... twenty-six years old, but he honestly looked ten years older with the dark circles under his eyes. For a brief moment, he pictured Mike, looking up at his own reflection, dark circles under his eyes -

No. No, just look for his wallet and leave. He checked each of the stalls, even peering into the toilets - thank goodness they were clean - but there was still no trace of his wallet.

Wait, duh! Gilbert! He probably was holding onto it, like a lost-and-found for the employees. He ambled down through the dining area and down through the left hall, when he heard Gilbert's voice.

"... believe you're really THE Mike Schmidt! Why would you ever work at a place like this?!"
Mike Schmidt. NOW he remembered - the famous running back, having a great career... until a particularly nasty tackle permanently injured him, paralyzing him from the waist down. Phil must have seen him on television at some point, and that was why he looked so familiar.

"Well, like a lot of football players, I was expecting to make football my career. Of course, going to college means you have to get a degree, and they push for you to take the easy stuff so you can focus on football. So, naturally, I got a degree in something meaningless to the real world," Mike answered. "I couldn't get a job - or at least, a job I liked - and that just added to the misery I was already dealing with after I was injured. You can't imagine what it's like to be told you're never going to walk again."

"What about the donors?" Gilbert asked. "I mean, you were a REALLY popular player, people must have been donating money to help you out."

"Yeah, but eventually the donations stopped. Once there was some great new talent on the field, they turned to give their money to the school again. I've got money to pay for medical bills and even a good portion of college tuition, since I'm planning to get a degree in something I like."

"What are you going to study? I hear there's promise in the computer industry," Gilbert remarked.

"English literature," Mike stated. "I loved reading as a kid, and I've had a lot more free time for reading for the past few years. I know everyone thinks reading and lit are the 'girl subjects', but I don't care, I love it. It's kind of funny, though... my girlfriend's the science and math one. She's majoring in chemistry... pretty hardcore stuff. She was my high school sweetheart for a little while... I really regretted breaking up with her, but it was for the best at the time. We wound up meeting when she became my tutor for math way back then... can you believe it?"

Phil couldn't help but smile at the touching story. Yes, he knew that he should go in there and ask for his wallet, but his feet wouldn't move for some reason.

"Ah, a girl in your life!" Gilbert's tone turned mischievous. "... I don't suppose you took on this job to save up for an engagement ring, did you?"

"No," Mike answered bluntly. "... I... I used some of my donation money to buy one, though. I was going to propose last Christmas, but she had a really rough year... she lost a family member. She's doing better, though... I plan to propose this Christmas."

"... Oh! Sounds great! You must be excited!" Gilbert exclaimed, though his voice had turned slightly nervous.

Phil didn't blame him, knowing the implications of what could happen on the job.

He supposed he could wait to pick up his wallet, so Gilbert and Mike could have their interview in peace. Phil was about to leave, about to let them continue their conversation in private, about to move on with his life... had Mike not commented further.

"I want to be there for her, always. To make her happy. I've lost loved ones too, but like... they were my grandparents. They were old, but they had gotten to live their lives... that's way different from losing your older brother."

"Rachel?!" Phil exclaimed, his face paling.

He could hear movement in the office, and sure enough, Gilbert poked his head out the doorway.

"Phil! Oh, you must've come back to get your wallet. Let me grab that for you."
"Hey," Mike raised his voice, since leaving the room just to chat would be needless effort. "You know Rachel Fitzgerald?"

"Yeah..." Phil replied, even though he couldn't see Mike. "She's a friend. I was... friends with her older brother."

Gilbert stepped out into the hallway, Phil's wallet in his hand.

"Here you go, Phil!"

Phil didn't move, he couldn't move, he wanted to warn Mike but it felt like opening his mouth would just make him scream. Gilbert grabbed Phil's hand and placed the wallet in it.

"Here you go, Phil," he restated, a little more sternly. "With all due respect... I think some privacy is in order for our job interview."

Phil silently tucked the wallet into his pocket, his face void of emotion, as he turned and walked down the hallway. As he departed, he could still hear traces of Gilbert and Mike talking.

"Oh, yeah... I guess we were having an interview. Sorry I rambled. Should I tell you my experience?"

"Nah, you seem like a nice young man, capable of learning new stuff... you're the only person who's applied to the job, so... what the heck, consider yourself hired!"

_How_ did someone so irresponsible ever end up as a manager? _HOW_?! Phil clenched his fist, shoving the door open to step outside.

_HOW_? He thought, as he drove back to the apartment to get some rest. Phil found he was too stressed out to properly rest, though. He prepared his usual brunch, macaroni and cheese, as his mind wandered back to the interview.

Mike was clearly physically fit. He could probably hold out for a little while against a single animatronic if he was attacked. But if it pulled him out of his wheelchair... or if there was more than one... he was a goner. Heck, most - if not all - of the guards before him were probably able-bodied, but they still wound up being victims.

If only he had Rachel or Mike's phone number! With Rachel going to college, and with Phil moving into this new apartment, they had unfortunately lost contact with each other... and even though she had stopped by The Mellow Morpho a few times, they hadn't exchanged numbers - it would've looked unprofessional, after all.

He drained the pasta and stirred the cheese powder in, his eyes wandering over to the phone. He was one phone call - and four sick days - away from freedom. It was practically within his grasp.

He was slow to eat his lunch, to the point that his mac and cheese cooled to room temperature and The Mellow Morpho had technically opened its doors for the day - he had hired an assistant manager back in early October in case of a really bad day that kept him from coming in.

So, great, he was late for work and he had a heavy decision lingering in his mind. His gaze kept wandering back to the phone.

_Just say you're sick and it's all over._

Phil took in a deep breath and stood up, silently walking over to the phone. He picked it up and
pressed the buttons, one-by-one, sealing his fate. As soon as he heard the line pick up on the other end, he immediately faked a cough, forcing himself to speak in a hoarse voice.

"Hello... hello... it's Phil. I'm - I'm afraid I'm not feeling well..." he paused to cough again. "... I've got a fever - and... well, I hate to - to say it, but I didn't get my flu shot..."

He coughed again for emphasis.

"... I'm going to go to the - the clinic today... get an evaluation. I'm really scared it's the flu... I-I might need... some time off."

"That's a shame. I'm going to make sure I get my flu shot. You go ahead and rest, Phil."

He smiled weakly.

"Thanks, Gwen. You're... a good assistant manager. I-I'm going... to take a nap now."

"Alright. Sleep well, sir. Bye."

"Bye."

... The Mellow Morpho didn't have a sick day policy yet, but he'd certainly have to think of one. Maybe seven free days off, and then penalties? Or was that too generous? He could think about it later, after he'd gotten some extra sleep.

He mentally apologized to his parents as he rinsed out his bowl of the cheesy residue that couldn't be scraped off by spoon.

... But he just couldn't leave Mike to die. He'd finish his shifts and then let Mike take over on Monday, like he was intended to, when the animatronics were still fairly inactive. After all those phone calls over those years... and those visits to see Jeremy in the final months of his life... just trying to keep her boyfriend alive and keep Rachel from suffering was just about the only thing he could offer to repay her for all those years.

Slowly losing Jeremy had taken its toll on Phil... and he was going to try to do everything he could to make sure Rachel never had to deal with the pain of losing her own boyfriend.

But just giving him an easier shift wasn't enough... surely he could do more. There had to be another way he could help... but how?

He remembered his first nights as a security guard... how he had wondered what it was like for Jeremy during his first nights... when, for so long, he thought he was just calling up 'some random guard', like all the ones who had "gone missing" before him. Phil looked back over at the phone.

That was how.

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November 4, 1992

It was roughly 4:45 am, and Phil had about 25% of his power left... even though he had both doors sealed to keep out Bonnie and Chica. This was as good a time as any.

Phil had tried to figure out the best way to speak to Mike about the whole scenario - yes, he could just outright say 'this job will kill you, go get a new one', but what if Gilbert was curious and listened to the messages? If he didn't give the company some ass-kissing, all his advice might end up getting
He picked up the phone and dialed the pizzeria's number, waiting for the answering machine to pick up. Phil backed away from the answering machine so that it wouldn't record his voice twice. The easier he was to understand, the better - he didn't want Mike making any mistakes. He heard the tone on the phone - as well as the hum of the answering machine across the room - and he began to speak.

"Hello? Hello, hello?" he could hear the answering machine on the other side of the room, but it didn't seem to be having an "echo" effect on the recording, so he continued speaking. "Uh, I wanted to record some messages for you. Help get you settled in during your first week and all. Uh, I actually worked in that office before you... I'm finishing up my last week now, actually. So, while things may seem overwhelming... I'm here to tell you there's nothing to worry about. You'll do fine. For now, let's just focus on getting you through your first week. Okay?"

Considering how Gilbert had forgotten until the last minute to read him the company policy, he figured he might as well try to recite it back to Mike. See how he liked those 'terms and conditions' in the fine print.

"Okay, so... I should probably start with the introductory greeting from the company that I'm supposed to read... kind of a legal thing and all. 'Welcome to Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, a magical place for kids and adults alike. Fazbear Entertainment is not responsible for damage to property or person. Upon discovering that death or damage has occurred, a missing person report will be filed within... 90 days, or as soon as property has been thoroughly cleaned'... and blah, blah, blah."

Might as well throw in some reverse psychology.

"Now, that might sound bad, I know, but there's really nothing to worry about. Yeah, the animatronic characters get a little... quirky at night, but do I blame them? No. If I had to sing the same stupid songs for twenty years and I never got a bath? I'd probably be irritable too."

He moved the receiver to his shoulder and continued talking.

"So, just be aware, the characters do move around at night. They're left in a free-roaming mode at night because their servos lock up if they're turned off for too long, something like that. They used to walk around during the day, actually, but..."

Phil clenched his fist.

"But then there was... The Bite of '87... yeah," he frowned, trying to at least sound sarcastic despite the fact that talking about the incident still hurt. "I-It's amazing that the human body can live without the frontal lobe... you know?"

Jeremy deserved to be remembered as a person... not as an incident. Phil forced himself to smile, as though it would help him speak in a lighter tone again.

"Now, as for your safety... the only real risk to you as a night watchman are the characters. Uh, if they see you after hours, they probably won't recognize you as a person. I-It's kind of a glitch in their systems. They'll most likely see you as an endoskeleton without its costume, and since that's not allowed, they'll... probably forcefully stuff you into a costume. That wouldn't be so bad if the suits themselves weren't stuffed with crossbeams, wires, and other kinds of animatronic devices. Especially around the facial area. So you could imagine how having your head forcefully pressed inside one of those could cause some discomfort... and death... uh, probably the only parts of you that would remain intact would be your eyeballs and teeth... once they pop out the front of the mask."
Phil chuckled a little, trying to keep the mood light, like the sort of guy who underestimates the danger he faces.

"Y-yeah, they don't tell you these things when you sign up. But hey! First day should be a breeze. I'll have another message for you tomorrow. Check those cameras, and close the doors only if it's absolutely necessary. You'll want to conserve power. Alright, good night."

Phil hung up the phone and checked the lights, relieved to find that Chica and Bonnie had both left. He quickly checked the cameras - Freddy was still lingering in the bathrooms, and Foxy was starting to creep out of Pirate's Cove, practically glaring right into Phil's eyes, as he stared intently back at the camera. Phil turned off the monitor and let the doors open so he could conserve a little more power. But with a little over an hour - and 22% of his power left - he was pretty much guaranteed to survive the night.

Phil smiled and checked his lights quickly once again.

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Now that Phil was getting a full night - or rather, afternoon - of sleep, he had started to dream again. Of course, he had dreamt during his job on the nightshift, but they had often been nightmares - of an animatronic catching him, of dying, of... The Bite of '87.

But this was a good dream - possibly the first good dream he'd had in a while.

He was out at Lakeview Park with his friends - Fritz, Sophia, and Heather played a game of catch while Pat swam in the lake. George had opted to fish, even waving Phil over to join him, though he declined. Meanwhile, Ronaldo was putting together lunch for everyone.

With Jeremy.

He sat down at the picnic table and wound up chatting with Jeremy. What they had talked about, he couldn't remember, but he was with Jeremy again, out at that beautiful lake, like all those years ago.

And then he woke up around 8 that evening, and suddenly it was all gone. Dreams of Jeremy used to make him cry during that first year he was in his coma. And he still missed him. And his other friends, now that they all lived in different parts of the state... he hadn't seen Heather since Jeremy's funeral. Thanksgiving was a few weeks away... maybe they could meet during the holiday weekend?

But as he regained his senses, he smiled at the picture of Jeremy by his bedside, mumbling a 'good evening' as he pulled himself out of bed. There may have been sad memories, but the happy memories now made him happy again.

After eating a small meal, watching TV, and getting dressed with a little help from Dan, he was ready to start another night.

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November 5, 1992

Six am was only a few minutes away. And yet Phil was trapped with Chica on his right once again, and with a shut door on the left, waiting for Foxy to finish knocking and leave him alone. It terrified him to realize that somehow, Foxy was strong enough to rattle the door so much that it actually drained power. Was he strong enough to stuff a human into a suit...?
No. Better not think about stuff like that. He was down to the last of his power... if he was going to keep his doors shut, he might as well leave a message for Mike. He picked up the phone, pausing in case Foxy tried to knock again, before he called the pizzeria and left a memo on the answering machine.

"Uh, hello? Hello? Well, if you're hearing this, you've obviously made it to Day 2, so... congrats! I-I won't talk quite as long this time... Freddy and his friends get a lot more active as the week progresses. Speaking of which, maybe you should check those cameras and make sure everyone's in the right spot."

Phil did a quick check on Pirate Cove before he continued speaking.

"Freddy doesn't leave the stage that often... but he's a lot more active in the dark, that's for sure," Phil recalled, remembering how Freddy tended to hang out in the shadowy areas of the camera views... he was pretty cunning for an animatronic bear. "Guess that's just another reason why you don't want to run out of power. Speaking of darkness, uh, make sure you're using those lights by the door. The cameras in the hall corner have blind spots... and those blind spots are right outside your doors. So, you might only have a few seconds to react if they're there."

Phil decided he should turn on a little more of that reverse psychology.

"Of course, it's not like you'd be in danger if they were there. I-I'm not implying that."

He checked the monitor for Pirate Cove when one of the most obvious tips crossed his mind. If he had an extra hand, he would've probably slapped his forehead.

"Oh! Also, make sure you're checking on Pirate's Cove, on 1-C. The character in there is... uh, unique. He's always been kind of twitchy, but he becomes more active if the camera on him remains off for a long period of time. I guess he doesn't like being watched? I dunno. Anyway, I'm sure you have everything under control."

Unlike his power, Phil realized, as he was down to the last 2%.

"Uh, talk to you soon!" he blurted out, quickly hanging up, trying to conserve the tiniest bits of power.

He had always been super careful - and super lucky - with not having the power go out during his shift. He checked Pirate's Cove one last time, content to see Foxy cast a frustrated glare at the camera, before checking the lights. Chica was gone, and there was no one outside the door on the left. Phil decided to take a chance and leave them both open. He tried to breathe as softly as possible, as the animatronics would likely be drawn to noise.

One percent... he checked the clock. It was 5:54 am. Oh God, he probably was about to find out what happened when the power went out. He sat there, silently waiting, until the light flickered out overhead and a slow hum filled the air as everything went dark. He should've moved to hide under the desk while he had the chance...

As his eyes slowly adjusted to his dark surroundings, he could faintly make out a flickering light source coming down the west hallway. As well as the faint sound of music, like some kind of wind-up music box, growing slightly louder as... whatever it was moved down the hallway, until he recognized the melody at last.

The Toréador Song.

Oh, that song brought back memories. Of his father and Mr. Derbassier going to Carmen, the first
time Bonnie sang a pre-recorded track of the song, going to see the opera with his friends...

But as the light drew nearer and the music grew louder, he began to realize that rather than dark eyes watching over him, they were actually very bright. Through the window, he could vaguely determine that the facial structure of the animatronic was actually that of Freddy's, not Bonnie's.

Well, Freddy was the original. Of course he would have a recording of that song in his programming.

Freddy stopped, and Phil shut his eyes, instinctively letting his body go limp as if he were dead. The music stopped playing, and Phil swallowed hard. Please, leave him alone. Please, let the clock roll over to 6 am, please -

He could hear a click and a whirring hum, as well as retreating footsteps. Phil opened his eyes, almost letting out a cry of delight, to see that the room was lit up once again. The power always switched from the reserve supply to the regular one at 6 am. Phil clocked out ecstatically, taking in some deep breaths as he sat in front of that little metal fan on the desk. Never had he been so content to feel a small breeze.

He felt even better after a few games of skeeball. So much better, in fact, that he had almost forgotten that he could walk down the recently installed metal ramp that allowed for wheelchair accessibility. He had walked right up it without a second thought yesterday night, after all.

And then - just to put some extra stress on him - a third thought crossed his mind. Even if Mike resigned his first night on the job, it would still take two weeks for him to leave. Sure, he could do something out of line and get fired... but if he was trying to support himself and Rachel, what would that mean for applying for other jobs? What if they needed a little extra money?

Well... with so many thoughts coming to him, Phil would think of something. But for now, it might be best just to drive home and get some sleep on it.

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November 6, 1992

There was a note left for Phil in his chair when he arrived at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza for another night's work.

Phil -

I take it you saw the new ramp I had installed for our handicapped patrons? We won't need to worry about using plywood anymore. I recognized it as an old set piece that we kept backstage. You know that area is off-limits to everyone except for management and mechanics, right? There are endoskeletons, suits, and other parts kept back there, and they should only be handled by professionals. The animatronics seem to be functioning properly, so I'm going to give you the benefit of a doubt. But like I warned Mike - any more rummaging backstage, and you will be fired and-or have charges pressed against you.

Have a great night!

Gilbert

"Great night" indeed. One plan he had considered was calling Heather to see if she knew how he could hypothetically "break an animatronic to the point that it needs two weeks for proper repairs without causing permanent damage". And of course, nothing said great like anxiously pressing light
switches, turning cameras on and off, and occasionally slamming doors.

It was about 3:53 am when he found himself with both doors closed, Bonnie and Chica vigilantly keeping an eye on him, and another opportunity to make a phone call.

"Hello, hello? Hey, you're doing great!" Phil praised, before going right back into 'no implications' mode. "Most people don't last this long. I mean, you know, they stop coming in altogether. I-I'm not implying that they died. Th-that's not what I meant."

Phil checked the clock, just in time to watch the numbers change to 3:54, as another one percent of his power drained away.

"So, um, I probably shouldn't talk too long. Things start getting real near the middle of the week."

Things were already pretty "real" for Phil, considering that Fridays were second only to Saturday in terms of how active the animatronics were.

"Anyway, something came to me the other night. If the animatronics do get into your office, uh, try letting your body go limp! You know, play dead. It might make them think you're a suit, instead of a rigid endoskeleton," Phil suggested, then frowned. "Although... if they think you're an empty suit, they might try to stuff an endoskeleton inside of you. I wonder how that would work."

Phil shook his head.

"Yeah... uh, maybe it's better not to think about that sort of thing. It's best just not to get caught. Okay, I'll leave you to it! See you on the flip side."

See you on the flip side? He must've been watching more television than he realized, he thought to himself with a wry smile, as he checked on Pirate Cove. He checked the lights, realizing Bonnie and Chica had left, giving him a chance to open the doors to ease up on the power usage.

Despite a small scare from one of Foxy's sprints, Phil otherwise made it through the night just fine - with about 3% of his power left by the time the clock struck six. After clocking out, he gently patted his pocket with a smile, glad that he hadn't needed to put his desperation plan into effect. He even played a few extra rounds of skeeball after calming down, just to beat his high score. It was amazing how much his aim had improved over the course of six weeks.

Of course, once he got home, Phil would be sure to eat well and get some sleep. Tomorrow was going to be his last Saturday, and he was going to make sure he came out of it alive.

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Phil woke up a second time, this time to the real sound of his radio alarm going off. He could've crawled out of bed to start eating breakfast at about 7:30 pm... but he opted instead to hit the snooze button, smiling at Jeremy's picture before closing his eyes again. Just in that little hope that he could fall back asleep and enjoy his dream a little longer.

He had dreamt of only Jeremy this time, ordering takeout and chatting before spending the night in each others' arms. It was kind of unusual to dream about sleeping and waking up, but that was how it had ended - just waking up with sunlight streaming through the blinds and with Jeremy's arm wrapped comfortably around his waist... before he had actually awakened.

Phil hugged his arm closer against himself, as if he were tucking someone's arm tighter around his body. He could practically feel the gentle rumble of Jeremy's chest when he chuckled or that light kiss to the back of his neck, Phil thought to himself, his smile perking up a little more.
Ten minutes later, the alarm went off again, and this time Phil got out of bed, immediately heading for the shower. As the hot water streamed down his body, a thought occurred to him. Leaving all these little pointers for Mike had been a good idea, but... if Sunday was his last day - the day when the animatronics would be minimally active - perhaps he should make the most of all that free time and make a proper training tape. Teach him about all the animatronics' patterns, tips on how he should prioritize his power usage, stuff like that. He could rewind the old tape in the answering machine and completely record over everything, giving a good five to ten minutes' worth of instructions.

He dried off and dressed himself, remembering to bring the key items for his "desperation plan". He never really liked to think about being in a desperate situation, but... he had to be ready for the worst, just in case. With that thought, he gave Dan even more thanks than usual for fixing up his tie, complimenting him on how helpful he had always been.

After eating a microwave dinner (a pretty good Santa Fe rice and beans bowl), Phil turned on the TV to help him relax before the night shift. As he watched a Picnix commercial already promoting Thanksgiving, he recalled the other day how he hadn't spoken with Heather in a while. He muted the television and called her number.

Despite not having seen each other for over a year and a half, she was still as happy as ever to hear from him. They chatted about what was going on in their lives (though Phil didn't mention the stuff about Freddy Fazbear's Pizza for obvious reasons), and they were both pleased to find that they had openings in their schedule to meet the Saturday after Thanksgiving - a perfect chance to catch up at The Mellow Morpho.

The hours passed as he watched television until it finally came time for Phil to drive back to Freddy Fazbear's Pizza for one final Saturday. He listened to the radio as he made his way down the dark and quiet streets - a rather upbeat number by The Cure was playing, and he couldn't help but smile. This late at night, it was probably the perfect song to end a Friday night on.

The melody created by the electric guitars still ringing pleasantly in his mind, Phil parked and hurried into the pizzeria to clock in for one final challenge.

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November 7, 1992

As Phil checked on Pirate's Cove and then the lights, he was surprised by the silence around him. Usually early on Saturday nights, he could hear Freddy's programmed laughter as he began to traverse from room-to-room.

Phil checked the camera that monitored the stage, just out of curiosity. Bonnie, Freddy, and Chica all stood in their usual spots. Well, that was pretty pleasant. The longer they stayed motionless, the better.

As if to cancel out any positivity Phil was holding onto, the three of them rotated their heads sharply to face the camera in synchronization. Phil jumped back slightly in his seat as the trio locked eyes with him. Chica slowly turned to face the front again, whereas Bonnie turned to step off the stage. But Freddy... Freddy kept staring right back at him until the screen suddenly went staticky. Phil turned that monitor off, deciding to check Pirate's Cove again. Foxy had just drawn the curtains back.

Phil turned off that monitor and checked his lights. He went between Pirate's Cove and the lights several times, noticing the sound of footsteps in the western hallway. Sure enough, the next time he
checked, he spotted Bonnie starting to peek around the corner of the doorway. Phil immediately shut the door.

Twenty minutes later, Bonnie finally left, but Chica had decided to show up to his right. Phil closed that door, hoping that the sound of the door wouldn't draw any animatronics to him. But no, sure enough, when he went to check Pirate's Cove, he only saw curtains swaying slightly. Phil immediately shut the door on the left, greeted by the sound of metal banging against the door a few seconds later.

He closed his eyes and let out a relieved sigh, the mental image of of Bonnie staring back at him with empty eye sockets filling his mind. Phil opened his eyes, taking in the surroundings of the office, a much more pleasant sight. He checked the light on the right, only to find Chica had returned. That wasn't so pleasant.

Lights, cameras, doors, he had done it all before. The hours finally started to whittle away, as did his power... Phil didn't really know how to feel, just gently pinching the little pin on his tie every so often for comfort, as if he was trying to squeeze every last drop of luck out of it for this one night.

Should he be elated that he was down to his final hour? That he was literally 60 minutes away from going home safely? ... Or should he be worried that he was down to the final 12% of his power?

Recalling Foxy's previous attack from hours earlier, he sank back into fearing for the worst. One more attack from Foxy... and he wouldn't stand a chance for the rest of the night. After checking to see if his surroundings were safe, he peeked back at Pirate Cove's camera. Foxy was already poking halfway out of the curtains, like a sprinter on his mark.

His once-beloved animatronic was probably itching to kill him, and it broke the heart of his inner child.

... Inner child, huh?

Thanks to Foxy, as a child, Phil had often loved playing pirates. And pirates certainly didn't play by the rules. Nobody did when it came down to life-or-death situations.

Phil was supposed to stay and monitor the animatronics... but there was never any rule that said he was strictly confined to the office. And quite frankly, this 'pirate' was starting to like the idea of jumping ship.

It was risky, but running and hiding could very well be his one chance to survive the final hour.

First, Phil checked his door lights - both were clear. Next, he checked the camera for the east hall - it would have to serve as his escape route, since he couldn't risk confronting Foxy in the western hallway. The dining area was also clear, that was very good. It would ultimately be the crossroads where he would have to decide on a hiding spot. Now the only question was, where would he find the main trio?

Phil checked the show stage first, immediately answering his question. Freddy was still there, like he had been all night. How bizarre that he would let Bonnie, Foxy, and Chica have all the fun in harassing him.

Bonnie couldn't be found backstage, so that meant he had to be hiding in that supply closet along the western hallway. It was certainly a bizarre place for an animatronic to visit... was it a bug in Bonnie's programming?

Phil went back to check on Pirate's Cove. Foxy was crouched down, like a sprinter set to run.
He couldn't hear any rustling pots or pans, so that meant Chica wasn't in the kitchen. Was she near the restrooms, then? Phil checked that camera, pleased to find that she was standing pretty darn close to the camera.

That meant the kitchen would have to serve as his hideout.

Phil checked the camera on Pirate Cove just in time to spot Foxy's tail in the corner of the camera view, whipping up as he began to run for the office. Phil immediately got out of his chair and sprinted out the east door, running like he had never run before. Exiting out into the dining area, he immediately sidled up against the wall, slinking along quickly towards the entrance to the kitchen.

Just as he reached the swinging doors, he could hear a faint mechanical buzzing... like the sound of animatronic parts moving. He looked up and spotted the faint gleam of Freddy's eye from across the dark room.

Phil heard him let out a low laugh. Now, Freddy wanted to move. Phil hurried into the kitchen, looking around at all the metallic tables and equipment. There appeared to be another room in the kitchen, probably functioning as a walk-in cooler.

And there was a phone on the wall nearby.

Phil ran up to it, picking up the receiver and quickly dialing the number for the restaurant, before ducking into the cold room and closing the door as much as he could behind him.

It was pitch black inside, and obviously cold, with only the sound of the ringing on the other line to comfort him.

It was shortly accompanied by the sound of footsteps in the room.

Phil swallowed down his fear, tightly gripping the phone in his sweaty hand, as he finally heard the tone indicating that his message was being recorded.

"Hello, hello! Hey, wow... day four. I-I knew you could do it," Phil praised with a weak smile.

He could hear the footsteps getting closer.

"Uh... h-hey, listen... I-I may not be around to send you a message tomorrow."

He squeezed his eyes shut as he heard one of the animatronics banging on the door, forcing himself to continue speaking.

"It's... it's been a bad night here for me. Um, I-I'm kind of glad that I recorded my messages for you... uh, w-when I did."

Phil had to clear his throat in the middle of his sentence, forcing down that lump in his throat. It was so tempting to cry... considering that he could be killed any minute now. But Phil would put up his best fight until then. He wasn't going to be a coward in his final moments. He had to stay positive. For Mike... for Rachel...

"Uh, hey... maybe you could do me a favor? M-Maybe sometime... you could check inside those suits backstage?"

... And for Jeremy. He'd do it for him, too.

"I-I'm going to try to hold out... until someone checks. M-Maybe it won't be so bad..."
It was time to set his desperation plan into action, Phil decided, holding the receiver between his ear and shoulder to remove the most crucial item to his plan from his pocket.

"I-I-I always wondered what was in all those... empty heads... back there... y-you know..."

The banging on the door had ceased as it was finally pulled open, leaving Phil face-to-face with Freddy and Chica. As if he was taunting him, Freddy even started playing the Toréador Song.

Chica... oh God... what was wrong with her? Some kind of noise, like a strangled breath, came from her.

"Oh no..."

Despite the phone still clenched against his shoulder and ear, Phil turned to run further back into the cooling room, to keep as much distance from the animatronics as possible. But the moment he had pivoted, garbled speech filled his ears. Phil closed his eyes and shook his head, trying to ignore the noise. When he opened them, he saw some kind of apparition in front of him... that original Fredbear suit, like a golden version of Freddy - and it roared. (2)

This wasn't his mind playing tricks on him, no, he could even hear it through the receiver of the phone. Somehow, this thing had just warped into the room, and wasn't - it wasn't right - he flinched as it continued to roar, trying to back away from that... that ghost or something.

Phil backed away from Golden Freddy, only to let out a yelp when he backed right into Freddy, who wrapped his arms around him, effectively immobilizing him. Phil wriggled around madly, trying to find some weak point in the mechanical grip.

"T-tell my parents I love them...!" Phil added, only to realize - much to his despair - the receiver had already gone dead.

His final message would never go through.

Still, he continued wriggling, struggling, trying to throw his body weight one way or the other, trying to kick Freddy in the legs, anything to slow him down.

But Freddy's mechanical grip remained as firm as a vice, his melody continuing to play as he triumphantly carried Phil through the dining area to the backstage area.

Phil let out a cry of fury as he forcefully writhed with all his might, managing to pull his arm free. He sighed in relief, gently clenching the item in his hand for reassurance.

It was his class ring, given to him by his uncle all those years ago, and as many bills he could roll up to fit tightly inside the ring so that they wouldn't move around. He'd tried to use the highest increments he could when selecting what bills he put into the ring, ultimately managing to fit about $1940 worth of cash into it. The ring itself would probably sell for several hundred dollars in addition to that. It could help Mike and Rachel for a short period of time, probably long enough for Michael to apply for a better job.

Finally, he'd found a good use for his uncle's ring. Phil took in a deep breath as he was marched toward the backstage doorway, already wide open.

He'd only get one shot to do this.

Focusing on the first empty animatronic head he'd caught sight of - one of Bonnie's spare ones - Phil swung his arm in an underhanded arc, like he had in all those skeeball games over the past month or so.
The ring sailed through the air and right into the eyesocket of the head he was aiming for. Phil had never made a perfect score while playing the skeeball machines, but that was okay - he didn't need numbers to know that was the best shot he had ever taken.

He still remembered his uncle's shitty commentary about moving on and getting married. True, over the past several years, Phil had met plenty of nice people, and many of them were attractive as well. But he couldn't give them his heart.

You cannot give away that which belongs to someone else, after all. Phil knew it in his heart that Jeremy was his true love, and nothing - neither life nor death - was going to change that.

He was quickly reminded of the dire situation he was in, however, as Bonnie moved to Freddy's side to help him hold Phil... an empty Freddy costume awaiting him on the table. Phil tried to struggle out of their grasps in mid-transition, but he lost his balance, giving Freddy an ample chance to properly grab him on his own once again.

"Don't do this!" Phil commanded, only for Freddy to shove him into the suit.

Or at least, Freddy attempted to push him in. Phil managed to catch himself on his arm, despite the fact that his sleeve was now shredded and his arm was now covered with several small nicks and scratches thanks to all those animatronic parts. One piece of jagged metal had even managed to reopen a small part of the major gash Foxy had given him.

Freddy shoved him again, and Phil let out a grunt of discomfort, starting to feel the pieces of metal gently prodding against him through his uniform.

"DON'T KILL ME!" Phil pleaded, a few tears escaping him, as Freddy gripped the hair on the back of his head.

Phil took in one deep breath, expecting the worst... sure enough, Freddy slammed his head forward into the facial area of the suit, one of the connector beams lodging between his eye and his eye socket, painfully and awkwardly starting to pry it out. Phil let out a horrifying scream, but it was cut short when Freddy pushed him again, this time trying to cram his torso into the suit.

Phil felt some other metal part stab him straight in the stomach, and he felt his strength and blood drain away as the realization finally hit him.

He was going to die.

Phil could already feel himself starting to lose his sense of awareness, save for the sensation of blood practically pouring out of his body. Time seemed to slow down around him, as Freddy continued to play his song, and he thought back to the days of his parents taking him to Fredbear's Family Diner, of high school, of college, of The Mellow Morpho. He could see the faces of his parents and his friends in his mind. He would miss them so much... he hoped their grief would be short and as painless as possible.

Wanting his last thoughts to be happy, he pictured Jeremy's smiling face one last time.

Jeremy...

Phil squeezed his intact eye shut, bracing for another push from Freddy, only to collide with something soft.

No wires. No beams. No more pain or bleeding. In fact, he wasn't feeling all that weak all of a sudden. He started to pull himself up, but two arms wrapped around his waist, gently pulling him in
Phil opened his eyes - both of them, making him fully aware of what had happened - and let his gaze trail up. Up to those lips, slightly curled into a small worried frown... those elliptical glasses, those chocolate brown eyes, and a full head of brown hair - untouched, unharmed, and un\textit{bitten}, like it was meant to be.

"Jeremy..." Phil whispered, gently letting his hand rest against the side of Jeremy's face, confirming he was real.

"Thank you so much, Phil. For talking to me and never giving up on me. For what you did for Rachel and Mike..." Jeremy smiled briefly, but let out a small sigh. "... I'm just sorry you're \textit{here}.

Phil shook his head with a smile, tears falling down his cheeks.

"Don't be sorry. I-I mean... I'm sorry that I died... I-I'm going to miss my family and our friends, an- and I know they'll miss me too... but how could I ever be sorry about being with you?"

"Oh! No, I meant I'm happy to see you too, I just wish it hadn't been so soon... you know?" Jeremy shook his head with a laugh, tears starting to form in the corners of his eyes. "Even in the afterlife, I still have problems expressing my love for you."

"Oh, Jeremy!"

They both laughed, wiping away their tears, before Jeremy gently pulled Phil in for a kiss.

"Jeremy..." Phil whispered happily, resting his head against Jeremy's shoulder. "It's you. It's really you, after all."

Jeremy chuckled, tenderly embracing Phil a little tighter.

"Yes, Phil. It's me."

\textbf{0-0-0- I love him! I love him, and in the face of death itself, I'd repeat that I love him! -0-0-0}

Chapter End Notes

(1) Thank you to pinkiemedicpie for giving me a name for a random employee.

(2) Because of all the inconsistencies of how Phone Guy died, there are multiple theories on how it happened. One interesting theory I saw was that Phone Guy was actually killed in the kitchen. Supporting this are the facts that the banging sound is different from the one Foxy makes, the fact that Freddy plays his melody in the kitchen, the fact that Chica can make those raspy breathing sounds and also appears in the kitchen, and the fact that some people used to theorize that Golden Freddy was kept in or near the kitchen area (before FNAF3 introduced us to the "Safe Rooms"). This was the theory that I chose to use.

The quote in the opening (and translated in the closing) is from the opera Carmen, specifically the finale, "C'est toi! C'est moi!".

I'd like to close with a quote from the 1985 movie "Clue" -
"That's how it could have happened. But how about this?"

In other words, I WILL be making a Phonemy 'three-shot' following this, exclusive to AO3, with three alternate endings (and all of them are happier ones). I'll probably take a brief break from writing before I work on it, considering that it's summer vacation and all, but I do plan on writing "Punnett Square" soon.

Special Thanks and Shout-Outs to...

Dave (aka Matt) and 5nightsinhell - other fellow Phonemy fans who even drew fanart for this fic!

Hasana - Our AU's may be different, but I'm so happy we share a love for this ship. Seeing a new pic from you in the Phonemy tag always brightens my day.

Pibmo (formerly guronenko) - I seriously love that Phone Guy design. Thank you again for letting me write about him. Everytime I see that design (or Hasana's design) show up in the Phone Guy tag, I'm always super excited!

(remember, as artists, they do not necessarily take requests (Hasana has stated she doesn't do requests and draws as she pleases, although she might be willing to discuss commissions), so please don't harass them for more art.

George deValier - a writer on fanfiction-dot-net, whose famous Hetalia fanfic, "Auf Wiedereheen, Sweetheart", greatly inspired this one.

Georges Bizet - Seriously, I really did enjoy "Carmen". I know you're dead and can't read this (I think). But because of it, I'm going to try branching out and watching other operas.

You, the readers! - Gotta save best for last! Whether you left kudos, fav'd, bookmarked, commented, reblogged the link on tumblr, etc. or simply just read it, I'd like to thank you all for joining me on this incredible journey. Like I said, I can't reply to every comment (especially since there are some that are simply "More", "Update soon", etc.), so if you left one that didn't get a reply, consider this your official thank you.

It's been a pleasure writing for you all.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!