**A Night at Teddy’s**

Stepping through the shattered glass windows, Officer John Cansby felt a soft shiver run down his back. Situated on the floor in front of him was a torn-up Teddy TurtleBack costume, its green body lying shell-up four metres away from its mascot head, reeking of armpit hair and sweaty gym socks.

Officer John tightly held his nose, carefully tiptoeing around the beheaded adult costume before slowly making his way towards Teddy’s head. Flashing his LED flashlight towards the head, Officer John gasped. The battered head had no eyes, its eyeholes instead being filled with a family of sleeping rats who hissed at John upon awakening.

Officer Cansby backed off, slowly cutting through the decades-old police tape behind him, which prevented entry to the fragmented ticket booth, making his way into the abandoned children’s pizzeria.

Earlier on that chilly November Saturday, several reports emerged from the surrounding neighbourhood about loud, child-like shrieks and laughter emitting from the abandoned pizzeria. Thus initiating a call to the police station where Officer Cansby was ordered by Police Chief Cansby, to investigate the crisis.

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“Me?” John asked, his nose furiously flaring. “Why me?”

“Because,” Chief Casnby replied, “nobody else wants too.”

John snorted. “Dad, I-”

“Don’t call me *dad*,” Alexander Cansby corrected sternly, adjusting his uniform.

“I can call you whatever I want, *pops*!” John screamed with building fury. “Now answer my question*. Why me?”*

 “Officer,” Alexander replied, his patience beginning to run out. “I’m your chief, and I order you to investigate the abandoned pizzeria.”

“Look pops, I don’t care whether you’re my father and police chief or my grandson and a beggar! I’m not going to go looking around in some children’s dump because a couple of seniors can’t sleep at night! So I’m not going. And that’s final!” John replied, stomping towards the closed office door.

Police Chief Alexander glared at his son, before chuckling loudly. “Oh. I see why you don’t want to go, son.”

John paused, raising his eyebrows in response.

 “That’s right,” he prodded. “You don’t want to go because you’re scared. Remember that day John, when you didn’t want to go to the zoo because you were scared of the bat cave? Of the dark? You held onto your mommy’s leg the whole day and wouldn’t go near the cages! You’re face, near the jaguars. Priceless.” He laughed wiping a tear from the corner of his eye.

“I wasn’t scared of the jaguar!” John declared, turning to go. “And I’m definitely not scared of some dumb turtle-bot and his pizza-smelling metal friends!”

“Then prove it,” Alexander challenged with sly smile.

 John’s muscles flexed furiously under his navy uniform. Without saying a word, he headed out to his car, responding to the 507, possible 10-70. But now, as John slipped past the shredded police tape, little did he know his investigation would prove to be quite animated.

John crept inside the dark unsettling room, his sweaty palm firmly grasping the high-powered police flashlight which forged a large circle of light into the night’s blackness. His feet trembled with each step as he reminded himself that, *It’s only an old pizzeria.*

*Come on you wimp!* He thought, firmly. *It’s just a dumb old kid’s restaurant.* Carefully searching between the various pizza-shaped tables, John couldn’t help but feel a small sense of eeriness within the vast dining room. It was if he was not alone in these abandoned ruins of childish dreams, it was as though something was watching him, as if his every step was being stalked by a pair of threatening eyes*. Someone must be here*, he thought. John rapidly flashed his light towards the hallway, its bright gleam bouncing off the peeling paint of the towering walls. He searched for the intruder. He heard something, moving just beyond the beam of his standard issue flashlight.

*What* was *that?* John’s mind racing at a hare’s pace. He ran through his officer’s training, cursing the recent staffing cutbacks. Officers, unless possible treat to personnel was involved, were to respond alone. Finishing his survey of the pizzeria dining room, John made his way through the fading hallway, its menacing walls seemingly closing in on the young officer.

“*Hurry up John,”* He thought, moving carefully through the hallway and passed the creaking door leading into the main party room. “*The sooner this ends, the sooner I can watch the Leafs game.”*

John, marvelling by the vastness of the room, braced his flashlight atop his pistol, methodically scanning the room. Against one corner lay three arcade games, unplugged and untouched for years. Against another, a large animatronic of the pizzeria’s main mascot, Teddy TurtleBack, and two other slightly smaller animatronics of Rocky RhinoHorn and Helena HippoSnout, the pizzeria’s minor mascots. John studied the animatronics and noticed that for some reason, all of their eyelids had been smeared with a ghastly black, while their lifeless bodies, he observed, were covered in tiny scratches. Scanning the animatronics, he noted that they each were inexplicably cracked around their joints, heads, and abdomens, with wires of various colours and thicknesses sprouting like deadly thorns. Things had certainly changed here since his 6th birthday.

 Suddenly, John heard a noise coming from the opposite side of the room. Startled, he spun around; shining his light past the plastic chairs, strewn carelessly around the wooden stage backed against once silky red curtains. He could see no trespasser.

*Was that a voice?* John thought, trying to register the noise. “This is the Police. Show yourself,” John demanded, firmly, making his way past the seated rows and to the front of the stage. Nothing. “I know you’re here,” he continued, his annoyance audible. “Stop playing games and show yourself.”

Suddenly, something crashed behind John. Thoroughly alarmed, he spun around, a drop of sweat trickling down his temple. He shined his flashlight, methodically across the room, but everything appeared the same. Nothing had changed, from the arrangements of the plastic seats to the three dust-covered arcade machines and right down to the two animatronic of Rocky and Helena in the far corner. *Nothing,* he reassured himself, *nothing but the dumb wind and settling of junk.*

Another crash behind him, this time even louder. John quickly spun towards the stage, his sight catching a dark, hunched figure swiftly slip between the curtains.

*What in the world? Who? How? But I was just there!*

“Who’s there?” John demanded loudly, trying to hide his nervousness as he flashed his flashlight at the blood-red stage curtains. “Show yourself. This is *the* *police*!”

Suddenly, his flashlight powered out, the bright circle of illumination was eaten alive by the eerie darkness of the abandoned pizzeria.

*What the -?* John nervously questioned, his soaked palms still firmly grasping the burned-out flashlight. *I just charged this darn thing this morning! Piece of junk, penny pinching department.* John swallowed, his salty sweat pouring down his clean-shaven face and underneath his navy-blue uniform as his frightened eyes looked into the black barrier of darkness.

 John cursed under his breath. “How in Newton’s name am I supposed to get out now?” He tried to feel, his way out with his feet, but stumbled over a chair. Holstering his weapon and cursing loudly, he began crouching, to better feel his way around the room. After many minutes, John felt his way past the plastic maze of seats and up to the lone animatronic of Rocky in the room’s darkest corner.

 John groped the animatronics’ foot, its metal compartment shaking with an unknown eeriness. Squinting to get a better view, John continued feeling around the animatronics’ feet and legs before focusing in on the dull brown exterior

 “Ah! I know who you are!” John proudly exclaimed, rising up to face the shadow-covered robot. “You’re that pathetic mascot Rocky RhinoHorn!” John kicked the metal animatronic, his steel-toed boots banging against the faded metal abdomen as Rocky’s jagged wires cut through the think knit of the police officer’s issue pants.

 “Come on rhino-boy!” John exclaimed mockingly, jumping up and shrieking like a toddler high on chocolate. “Give me your best shot you metal piece of junk!”

 Suddenly, Rocky’s eyes glowed a shadowy red. With its hydraulics kicking in and a menacing roar, it shot forth its metal knee and struck John right between the legs, hard and low. Gasping, John collapsed in horror and pain as the humongous rhino-robot lifted his gigantic foot, and stomped on John’s frightened face, forcing it through the rotten floor, which gave way at the last second.

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 John slowly opened his eyes as blood dripped off the tips of his eyelashes and onto his battered cheeks. Confused, John clenched his jaw as his head pounded away in agony. Grunting, he tried lifting his head up but immediately let it drop back onto the hard, table surface. An faint electric light came from beyond his bloody vision.

 Oh *God*, he thought as blood and snot drizzled from his broken nose. *Where am I?*

 Turning his head, slowly and painfully, in a 180 degrees axis over the table, John scanned the room yet again. On his left, there was nothing but a couple of posters of Teddy and his mascot friends, a beat-up Coca-Cola machine, and a metal door. On his right though, there was another stage, smaller than the wooden one from the main party room, but still decently grand.

 Unlike the wooden stage though, this stage had three mysterious figures standing patiently on its solid floor, their eyes glowing an eerie dark red as their wires zapped and flared. *Ha*, thought John. *So that’s where the light is coming from*. With mechanical sounding gear shifts, they hopped off the edge of the tall stage and staggered towards John. In response, he let out a frantic call for help.

 John’s bellowing pleas echoed off the pizzeria’s silent walls. “Oh God please, somebody help me!” he shouted into his radio. His reply was static; no reception, no backup. John scurried to the door, frantically trying to open it as the animatronic trio slowly staggered towards John. Realizing the door was locked, John pulled out his semi-automatic .40 calibre handgun and fired at the advancing robots. But the bullets harmlessly bounced off the animatronics’ solid exteriors.

 “Please!” He pleaded as he dropped the useless firearm to the ground. “Please, I can’t die yet!” Somehow, he already knew his fate.

 Surrounding him against the wall, the animatronics stared into the soul of John, their glowing red eyes emotionlessly scanning the very depths of John’s mind. Suddenly, Teddy Turtleback opened his mouth, revealing two sets of jagged metal teeth and a tiny speaker. “We didn’t deserve to die either,” Teddy replied in a mechanical child’s voice. “We deserved to live. Just like you.”

 John shook, his sweat now cold, completely staining his soiled uniform. “W-what’d you mean you didn’t d-deserve to die?”

 “We were just like you, John,” Helena replied, her soft metallic voice cracking with each consonant. “We had families and friends and lives just like you.”

 Blood continued dripping from John’s head wounds, covering his vision. “H-humans? But you’re, jus-just animatronics-” He replied, choking on his words.

 Rocky struck John across the face, his blood-stained robotic fist further damaging John’s broken nose. “We may look like animatronics *now*,” he stated, his shrill, voice shaking the remaining foundations of the abandoned pizzeria. “But our spirits used to inhabit human bodies, like yours.”

 “But how?” John pleaded, wiping the blood from his nose, his mind desperately clutching consciousness.

 “Murder,” Teddy replied, his red eyes flaring with the torturous scenes of Hellfire. “Late one winter evening, on January 17th, 1997, I was celebrating my sixth birthday with my two best friends in this very room.” He concluded glancing at Rocky and Helena.

 “Everything was going swell!” Helena stated, her robotic eyelids fluttering over her sinister-red eyes, exaggerated eyelashes painted on around giving a coquettish effect. “We had already finished eating cake and were just about to be treated to Teddy’s finest cheese pizza, when suddenly, evil struck.”

 “It happened instantaneously!” Rocky proclaimed, his lively robotic eyes staring deep into John’s quivering orbs. “A number of bullets. Some shouts and screams. Three blood-soaked chest wounds. We were murdered.”

 Helena began to weep, her chemical tears sparking and hissing with her zinging wires. “It just wasn’t fair! We were only six, yet we were caught up in violence. We thought our lives were done, that our lives had tragically ended!”

 “Until that is,” Rocky began, a sinister smile stretching across his battered head, “we made a pact, a pact with *Him*.”

 Eyes widened, John looked around incredulously, saw no other being. After much consideration, he gasped. “The Devil?” John shrieked, shaking at the mention of his name. “T-that’s impossible! There’s no such thing as the Devil. Never!”

 “Oh yes, but we did!” Helena replied, her static voice suddenly changing tone. “And it was a special pact. A clever one too, just like the Devil himself.”

 “What was it?” John asked, fearing for the worst.

 “Well as you can see, John,” Teddy responded, his eyes locking in on John’s spirit. “The Devil gave us some new *bodies* to live in. Sure they do get a bit rusty every once in awhile but that’s what exercise is for right?”

“As we said though, we had signed a pact with the Devil, meaning we had to do something for him in return. Do you know what that something is, John?” Teddy asked, the trio leaning in closer to the seated officer.

“N-no. I don’t know.” John began his final prayers, usually reserved for the Leafs in playoffs, praising every god he had come to mock in his lifetime. “B-but I think you’re g-going to tell me?

“Well, John,” Teddy declared raising a massive turtle limb. “While we live in these ‘pathetic’ bodies of ours, our job to the Devil is to collect worthless souls! Worthless souls, like yours!

“N-no please.” John pleaded one final time, his falling tears mixing with his bleeding cuts, stinging. “Please have m-mercy on me.”

“Mercy is for the weak!” Teddy proclaimed, coming down on his skull, as Rocky and Helena tore apart the officer’s muscular limbs. “Our master wants your soul!”

And now as the dim winter sun bleeds into the morning horizon, a fourth animatronic joins the trio on stage, its eyes flickering. The hydraulics kick in and gears shift audibly, its menacing red eyes flick to life as its crooked jaw opens wide.

“I’m Johnny JaguarPaw!” The animatronic declares in a booming, robotic voice, as the unsuspecting Police Chief enters the abandoned pizzeria.

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