

Another Me

By A. C. Zito

They knew I didn't want to go see grandma in her *stupid* nursing home! She could rot in there for all I cared. I just wanted to be home in my room playing *Fortnite* with my friends and giving them crap for not ever getting as many kills as me.

"Bring me back home! I want to go back home *now!* We can just see the old hag when Christmas time rolls around again." I said to my parents hoping they would just ignore me. But, of course, *my dad*, had to open his stupid, ugly mouth!

"HEY! SHUT YOUR MOUTH, YOUNG MAN! I DON'T *EVER* WANT TO HEAR YOU TALK THAT WAY ABOUT YOUR GRANDMOTHER EVER AGAIN! SHE'S YOUR *GRANDMOTHER*, FOR GOD'S SAKE, BILLY! WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE SUCH AN UNGRATEFUL LITTLE PRICK! NO MORE *FORTNITE* FOR A MONTH! DO YOU HEAR ME?" But I stopped listening halfway in. The only thing I really caught was how he said something about *Fortnite* which had me go off on a tangent in my head about the most epic *Battle Royale Victory* of all time! I was definitely about to go home after this and watch *at least* ten YouTube videos of *Ninja* to practice my new strategies I've been working out for the last week!

We made it to *Oakview Falls* and the place already smelled of rotting apple sauce and old people that haven't had their diapers changed.

"*GOD, I HATE IT HERE!*" My dad quickly swung his head back to where he was nose-to-nose with me and looked like he wanted to swing his fist right into my jaw. "Go ahead," I said, "I dare you." But no, instead, he jumped right out of the car, swung my car door open and pulled me out by the tip of my ear.

"*YOU LITTLE SHIT!*"

"*OWW, OWW, OWWWWW!*" I screamed out in pain. He pulled me down with him onto the grass and I felt each hit as he spanked me in front of all the old people. They all stopped and stared at the sight. I felt so embarrassed! Why did I get put with the worst dad to ever live! He hates me so much, and I hate *him* so much! I already couldn't wait for tonight! I was going to run away! I was going to move to another country, become a legendary *Fortnite* player and make millions having a huge following on YouTube and my dad would hate me forever for how many subscribers I will have! He doesn't even know! I'm going to have so *many!* Just you wait, Dad!

He slapped me on the butt one last time and yelled to me to get in the car as I struggled to barely stand up. But it was too hard. I wanted to fall to the pavement and burst out in tears. This was the worst life God could have ever given me! The Dude hates me so much! He's probably going to send me to Hell and make me bunk with Hitler or Donald Trump.

"I HATE YOU!" I screamed out. I then burst into tears and ran into the car and plopped my face into the cushion seat while I sobbed uncontrollably.

The old people began going about their business again quietly talking to each other while I heard my parents outside talking to each other. My mom said to my dad:

"I'm going to go in and tell my mom that Billy's not feeling too good and we're going to try coming back in a couple of days. My dad didn't answer. I looked up to see my mom walking inside as my dad sat down on the curb and put his hands over his face.

Two days later:

"Billy! Come down stairs, honey!" I didn't want to though. I wanted to stay up in my room and stare at my desk and my wall where my TV and my computer used to be. I also wanted to stay up in my room and feel at the empty space in my pocket where my phone used to be. They took *everything!* And they told me they doubted if I would ever get any of it back. But I didn't care. My plan to run away was almost complete. I had already started sneaking a couple of cans of beans and putting them in my closet, and I had already memorized the way to get to the town's visitor center so I could get a map and start the trek to Canada or Mexico. Whichever one was closer... I didn't exactly know because I lived in Colorado, and they both kind of seem super far away.

My dad opened my door.

"Hey, buddy," he smiled at me a tinge of remorse showing on his face. "You know I love you, don't you? And I want what's best for you! So that's why your mom and I got you a present. To show that we love you and care for you." He sat right next to me on the side of the bed and tried to put his hand on my shoulder, but I flinched away giving him a scowl.

"I know what it is... it's another book. A book that I'm guessing you used to read when you were a kid... Dad, this is 2018, no one reads books anymore everyone just plays video games and watches Netflix and YouTube." My dad smiled at this, saying:

"Which is something you won't be allowed to do for a long time. At least, until you learn to be respectful and have at least one little sliver of discipline in your whole entire body. I don't want you to end up like your friends who continually complain to their parents, cuss at them and worship some false idol that goes by the name of *Logan Paul!*"

"Dad! He's not that bad! I told you this from time and time again! He just messed up like *once!*"

"BILLY!" He snapped back, "I don't want to hear it! I'm tired of hearing that name, and I'm tired of you having friends that are going nowhere in life and are just plain rotten! They were raised by parents that don't know the meaning of discipline which is something that you will one day come to learn and love about how much better-raised you are then from... *them!*"

There was a long pause before my dad finally got up and held out his hand. I know what he wanted... a hug. He wanted me to get up, hug him, and tell him that I love him and that I care for him and that I'm glad to have him as my father and that I'm glad that he's part of my life. But I just sat there and stared at his hand.

"Just give me the stupid book... and don't try the whole repackaging of the Angie Sage book that you love so much. I already told you that I don't care about *Septimus Heap* or the third book in the series... It's not even *Harry Potter*, and I don't care that you think *Harry Potter* is overrated... I don't even care about *Harry Potter* anyway... I just care about *Fortnite* so just give me my computer and TV back, and I'll be respectful when we go see Grandma tomorrow." I really thought that saying that would settle everything and that would be that. He *has* to know by now that books are a dying entity, and they won't even exist in the future. Everything will just be movies and video games.

"This is your last chance." He muttered like he was telling me some grave warning or something. But I wasn't buying it. I crossed my arms and yelled out in my best *Pewdiepie* impersonation:

"*Fortnite* is the *best!*" He stared at me like he had just lost something... I don't know what though he was just a stupid dad just like all the other stupid dads. All that dads will ever care about is golf and football, I don't know *why* this *dad* would care about his son so much! It's so *stupid!*" He nodded his head, and it almost looked like a dark entity had passed through the inner layers of his eyes while he did this:

"Bring him up, Shannon." My mom brought up someone with a towel placed over their head, covering their head and upper body so I couldn't see who it was.

"One of my friends that you actually like, I'm guessing?" I asked, kind of confused what they were playing at. And I didn't know *why* Craig or Andy would actually play along with how weird my parents were...

"Surprise!" My mom said sheepishly as she pulled the towel off of...

"WHAT THE F-"

"HEY. Not that word! You know I don't like that word!" My dad quickly interrupted me.

"I'M DREAMING! I'M DREAMING! THIS IS A NIGHTMARE! I screamed out, hiding behind the other side of my bed.

"Hey, Billy, I know this seems weird in all, but I don't think you've heard of us yet. I'm obviously just a robot that looks and talks exactly like you! But-"

"BUT THAT'S WEIRD!" I screamed back at the *thing!*

"It's just so you won't have to see your grandmother and go to church with us and stuff like that! You can just play *Fortnite* and watch YouTube all day long, honey while the robot goes around and acts like you!" As soon as my mom said this I stood up. That actually sounded like a dream come true!

"You're playing with me..." he whispered. His parents shook their heads.

"I mean..." my dad started to say, "I'm not totally on board but what I'm hoping it will do is help you learn to have more respect and discipline by seeing the actions of the robot."

"That's stupid," I said under my breath. But luckily neither of parents heard me.

"Alright!" My mom said, "We'll leave you two to get acquainted." They left the room leaving me with the bolts and screws. Is that what I should call the stupid thing?

"Should I just call you bolts and screws? Because that's all you are! A hunk of metal! You may look like me and sound like me... you may walk and talk like me, but you will never *be* me!" I told the thing, nudging it with my finger... it was weird... it actually felt like I was touching a real human.

"Hi," it said, "You know why they really got me, right?" The thing went and sat down on my bed.

"No, why?" I asked, feeling its smile rest on the picture of my girlfriend on the desk next to where my computer used to be.

It didn't answer. Instead, it went over to the picture, picked it up and said:

"Prom's coming up in a couple of weeks." I looked at it, concerned.

"How did you know that?" I asked. It dropped the picture frame down on the desk having a loud noise erupt from the sound of it hitting the wood.

"Julie and I talked about it." it said. I looked at the robot and then looked down at the picture.

"How did you know my girlfriend's name was Julie?" it smiled as it moved me over to where it was standing.

"My parents brought me over to see her after I got back from the hospital." Back from the hospital? What was it talking about?

"You mean back from the store?" I corrected the robot. It shrugged at this. There too. They let me pick out a new video game. I've kind of gotten tired of *Fortnite* and Greg and Mark were telling me I should get *Fallout* so they don't have to keep bringing theirs over whenever we want to play it.

"Wait..." I said, "How do you know my friend's names?" It looked at me and laughed. "Silly robot," it said, "robots aren't friends with humans! That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard in my life!" It called me a robot... why did it call me a robot?

"MOM?" I called out. It sat down on my bed again and smiled as my mom came in looking at the robot.

"Is it glitching, Billy?" She asked the robot.

"MOM! That's the robot!" I said pointing to the *thing* sitting on my bed with its arms crossed.

“Can I have my TV, phone, and computer back now?” It asked. I looked at it shocked. She smiled at the robot and nodded.

“Just promise you’ll be good when we go and visit grandma again tomorrow, okay?” It nodded and picked up my comic book, beginning to read it right on the same page where I left off.

“How did you know I left off on that page?” It looked at me with a scowl.

“These robots are weird!” It snapped as my mom tried to lead me out of my room. But I wasn’t budging. I couldn’t believe this was happening.

“NO!” I screamed out, “I HAD NO IDEA THIS WOULD HAPPEN! I WANT TO BE GOOD! I WANT TO SEE GRANDMA! I WANT TO STAY HERE WITH MY PARENTS! THIS CAN’T BE HAPPENING!” Two men came in and picked me up, taking me from my room and down the stairs as I kept kicking and screaming. My dad was waiting down at the bottom of the stairs with a mug of coffee.

“My golf buddies told me this happened to their robots they got for their kids too.” My dad told the men.

“BUT DAD IT’S ME! WE JUST TALKED ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE BOOK! *SEPTIMUS HEAP*, DAD! THE THIRD ONE!” He shuddered as he said:

“That’s weird,” he took another sip of his coffee as he remarked; “I hate robots and how they can just say stuff like that.” They pushed me through the door and towards a big van that they quickly shoved me inside, closing the door.

“Roger? Elroy? Peter?” All my friends looked at me confused as they remarked to each other about how funny the human’s emotions were. Then Elroy shoved me down onto the bench inside the van saying to me as it got its face all up in mine:

“You better be good! *Don’t worry*, you’ll be with your human friends soon enough, human boy! Just sit back and enjoy the ride.” And the van started up and took off.