



when they came into my room to give me crisps and milkshakes!

That evening was even better. When I finally came downstairs after a whole day spent playing computer games, the kitchen was filled with the most delicious food you've ever seen. Pizza! Chicken! Meatballs! Chips!

I'd never eaten so well in my life, and the house had never been cleaner. For once, I didn't have to do a thing. I had no idea what had come over my parents, but I loved it!

The next day was exactly the same. I woke up to a delicious breakfast, and Tabitha's sports club was cancelled again. This meant we had another whole day to play on our GAMER-X CUBEs. But after a few hours, I began to get bored of playing computer games. I decided to have a quick walk in the garden instead. But the moment I touched the back door handle ...

"What are you doing, Ash?"

Mum and Dad were standing behind me. They were both still smiling those big smiles.

"I'm just popping outside," I said.

"You do not need to go outside," said Dad.

"Go and play on your GAMER-X CUBE."

"No, thanks," I said, opening the door.

"I need some fresh air."

"But Ash," said Mum, closing it again, "what if Barry Sandwich sees you? You should stay in here, where it is safe."

I stopped. I'd been having so much fun, I'd forgotten all about Barry Sandwich.

"I ... I guess you're right," I said.



"Of course we are right, Ed," said Dad.

"We are your parents."

I blinked. "Ed? Dad, my name's *Ash*."

Dad smiled. So did Mum. But there was something odd about the way they were looking at me now – something I couldn't put my finger on. I suddenly realised what it was. *They weren't blinking.*

"That is what I said, Ash," said Dad. "Now go and play some more computer games."

Mum and Dad watched me with their unblinking eyes as I walked upstairs, my mind racing. Their smiles didn't look so friendly any more – in fact, they looked sinister.

It wasn't my imagination – something about Mum and Dad had changed. They still *looked* like my parents, but it was as if they had been replaced by strangers.

But that wasn't possible ... was it?

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EPIC ESCAPE

The next day was exactly the same. Once again, Tabby's sports club was cancelled. Once again, whenever I tried to stop playing computer games, even for a second, Mum and Dad would send me back upstairs and make me stay in my room. It was like being kept prisoner in my own house.

Something seriously strange was happening. I needed to talk to someone. Someone clever. Someone like Aunt Emmy.

I waited until the house was silent, then sneaked downstairs. Mum and Dad were nowhere to be seen. I finally found my phone underneath Emmy's soup zapper, and quickly typed her a text.

EMMY, IT'S ASH. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.

NOT NOW. IN THE MIDDLE OF AN EXPERIMENT.

...

IT EXPLODED. HOW CAN I HELP?

I THINK SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH MUM AND DAD. THEY'VE BEEN ACTING REALLY WEIRD SINCE THAT FANCY DINNER.

WEIRD HOW?

I THINK THEY'VE STOPPED BLINKING.

...

...

STAY THERE. DON'T MOVE.

"What are you doing, Ash?"

