

THE HEART



OF

TOMTOM ZOMBIE

By
adrian ramos

Tom Tom is a zombie. At least part of him is. It's a sticky undead infection beating in his heart and covering his hands with green skin and purple warts. Other than that, with the exception of the undead look in his eyes, Tom Tom Zombie is like any other boy.

Like other real boys, he likes to hit a ball with a stick, chase lizards, not for their brains but to pull their tails, something he also likes to do with little girls and their pigtails, because it makes them shed tears, the second favorite thing for zombies after brains. Tom Tom is almost hungry for brains. If he was a real zombie, he would spend all day trying to suck skull juice, but he is not one yet. Since he can't eat brains, he is satisfied with eating apple pie dirtily and messily. This hunger for mischief makes him laugh with his undead laughter, and that's when it happens.

"BLURP!" a loud belch comes out of Tom Tom's mouth, but it sounds like it came out of his entire body. It is not a hiccup, not even the memory of sugary lemonade, it is the infection spreading a little. Every time the infection spreads a little, Tom Tom scratches himself. Evil always itches a little.

One dark night, only the clattering teeth of Dr. Petostein were as loud as the thunders outside the castle. The Dr. was nervous and frightened like never before, his little son was very sick and almost gone. The Dr. tried the blue stuff, the green stuff, the yellow pills and the machine with smoke in the mouth but nothing worked. The tongue of the little boy was almost completely purple now. Suddenly, just like the time the German mosquito stung him between the eyes, Dr. Petostein felt something burning in his head. This time it was an idea. Not only an idea, it was a cure! But it was madness, complete madness!

He held the grey stuff close to his face. It bubbled and popped inside the tiny glass container, maybe because it could feel it was coming out of its jar, or maybe because it felt it was close to brains, and let's not forget that Dr. Petostein had great brains. The Dr. let out a sigh.

“This is the only way,” he said, “he’ll die a little, but he will live forever”

And after plugging his son to the machine with the iron belts and golden buttons, the grey stuff oozed its way inside the boy’s body. The infection is so hungry it would have eaten the whole boy, but Dr. Petostein is so smart he kept the infection only in the boy’s heart and hands.

Ever since that day, Tom Tom is undead at heart.

Everytime someone cries because of Tom Tom, every window he breaks with the ball and the stick, every lizard’s tail lost and every pint of little girl’s tears caused by him, he becomes a little more zombie. Then he scratches.

But Tom Tom is also a boy. Not in his heart or in his hands, which will feed only on brains someday, but everywhere else. No one should underestimate the feet of the boy, his shoulders and knees; his slightly undead but still human eyes; the grumbles in his stomach; the hunger for apples and hams and for stew and milk and other things that have nothing to do with brains, even if they are also slightly squishy. He is also definitely not undead in his head, where he thinks thoughts that tell him he should be different. Tom Tom’s head tells him he should be good.

The next day Tom Tom Zombie helps patch up the broken window, pets the lizard until it grows a new and better tail, mops up the apple stuffing and the cinnamon powder off the floor and leaves a chocolate cupcake outside the little girl’s door (because who wants to apologize to little girls in person?) Wanting to be good has its limits, after all.

“BURP!” another loud belch comes out of Tom Tom Zombie’s mouth, this one a little less creepy, as far as belches go.

Everytime Tom Tom causes a smile, everytime something is fixed, a mess is cleaned and one or two feelings are mended, the infection retreats a little. That’s because being good makes Tom

Tom a little less zombie. Every time the infection retreats a little,
Tom Tom scratches himself.

Goodness always itches.

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