

The Day A Zombie Came Into The Playground

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'Mrs MacKay, there's a zombie in the playground!'

The teacher sitting at the front of the classroom didn't even look up, let alone turn so she could see out of the windows behind her desk; she just kept scribbling away with her red pen.

Donald tried again, 'Mrs MacKay ...'

She cleared her throat. 'I heard you the first time, Donald.' She spoke with a dismissive and condescending tone. 'You're already being kept in for telling tall tales; don't make it any worse for yourself!'

Beyond the teacher, Donald could see into the sunny school yard where a rotting figure was shambling around, chasing the children who, only moments earlier, had been enjoying the lunch break he'd lost as a punishment. He didn't know where the zombie had come from, but he knew this was no figment of his imagination, it was definitely there now. 'But Mrs MacKay, there really is a zombie in the playground. It's chasing people; it's trying to catch them and eat their brains.'

Still the teacher didn't look up from her marking. 'On Monday, you said you saw a werewolf, and that wasn't true, was it?' Her hair was tied up in a tight bun which wobbled ever so slightly as she spoke.

Remembering his mistake, Donald felt his cheeks turn a deep crimson. 'But Miss, I wasn't lying; when I shouted out, I really did think it was a werewolf.'

The teacher drew a large red cross at the bottom of the page she'd been reading and turned it over. 'And what did it turn out to be?'

Donald shifted uncomfortably in his seat and mumbled, 'It was just Mr Smith, the sports teacher.'

She turned another page. 'And why did you think he was a werewolf?'

Donald let out a resigned sigh, 'he'd grown a beard over the summer holidays.' As he spoke, he watched what was happening in the playground. He knew he wasn't wrong this time: this really was a zombie. As it continued to stagger around, Donald could see it was too slow to catch any of the kids. In fact, it was moving so slowly that the only way it was going to catch anyone was if they didn't see it coming until it was too late.

The teacher closed the jotter she'd been marking and leant backwards. 'And on Tuesday, you saw a pterodactyl swooping down into the playground, trying to snatch one of the kindergarteners from the sand pit.'

Donald kept his eyes fixed on the zombie. 'I was sure it was a pterodactyl, I thought they were in danger; I had to say something.'

'And what was it really?'

Donald started to answer, but the teacher interrupted him, 'Look at me when you're talking to me.'

Donald shifted his gaze towards the teacher's narrow, pointy face which always looked like she'd just sucked on a lemon. 'A black plastic bag the wind had blown into the air.' As soon as he'd answered, his eyes shot back towards zombie as it stumbled around the now empty school yard, all the children having fled to safety.

'And remind me what you thought you saw on Wednesday?' There was a scraping noise as the teacher pushed her chair away from the desk and stood up. She paced back and forth, never taking her eyes off Donald as she waited for him to answer. The sudden movement caught the zombie's attention and he started to lumber towards the windows, his arms reaching out in front of him.

Donald could barely tear his eyes away from the approaching monster. 'I saw a mummy.'

'No, you saw Miss Walker, the maths teacher; she'd had a car accident and had a bandage round her head. I'm telling you, Donald, you've got to stop letting your imagination run away with itself. It'll only get you into trouble.'

Mrs Mackay rested her bony bottom on the window sill, keeping her back to the yard. Behind her, the zombie moved ever nearer. Donald could now make out its dull lifeless eyes, its sallow, sunken cheeks, the way its skin was peeling away from its left forearms. 'But Mrs MacKay, I'm not making it up and I'm not mistaken this time; there really is a zombie in the playground!'

She folded her arms, a stern look on her face. 'Just like you were sure there were aliens trying to land on the playing fields yesterday?'

The zombie was getting closer and closer with each faltering step, and Donald was becoming more and more agitated at his teacher's refusal to believe him. 'That's different, I just got confused. I really thought it was aliens.'

'Yes, I'm sure you did, yet it was only a helicopter flying over the school to take some pictures for the local newspaper. And what about the vampire you saw this morning? The one you were shouting about and disrupting everyone else in the class in the middle of a very important test; remember? The reason you're in this room right now rather than getting to play outside with your friends. What did *that* turn out to be?'

'The headmaster.' Donald knew he'd been wrong, but he tried to defend his actions. 'But the way his gown was blowing in the wind, he looked like a vampire.'

The zombie was now only a few feet from Mrs Mackay, its rotting fingers almost touching the thin pane of glass that was all that separated the classroom from the school yard. Its head loomed over the teacher's shoulder, its jaws open, revealing blackened and blood-stained teeth.

'And now, you're saying there's a zombie in the playground?' The teacher leaned back against the window, shaking her head and tutting loudly. 'Tell me, why should I believe you, this time?'

'Because you have to, Miss, it'll get you if you don't. I know I was wrong about the werewolf, and the pterodactyl, and the mummy, and about the aliens landing on the playing fields, and the vampire, but I'm right about the zombie. Just turn round and you'll see for yourself!'

Mrs MacKay narrowed her beady little eyes and stared at Donald over the top of her half-moon glasses. 'Have you ever heard of the story about the boy who cried wolf?'

'Yes, Miss, but that's different. I wasn't doing it for fun, I really did think the monsters were there.' Donald sprang to his feet, unable to see why his teacher couldn't understand the difference. 'I really did think we were in danger. All I was trying to do was to warn everyone, to keep them safe.'

'You know, I almost believe you, but when are you going to grow up and realise that monsters don't exist? The dinosaurs died out millions of years ago, didn't they? So there can't be pterodactyls flying around now, can there?' She'd uncrossed her arms and was now leaning forward, wagging a finger tipped with a claw-like nail at Donald. 'You need not get it into your head, there's no such thing as werewolves, or vampires, or aliens.' Misses MacKay drew her skinny frame up to its full five foot eleven inches, trying to appear as intimidating as possible. 'And there's certainly no such thing as zombies!'

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than the zombie smashed through the glass and dragged her, kicking and screaming, from the classroom. Donald had done all he could to warn her, and he couldn't help thinking that it wasn't his fault that she was now zombie food. All she needed to do was give him the benefit of the doubt this time rather than assuming he must be lying because he'd got things wrong before. Teachers were always doing that, judging children from their past mistakes, not realising that they could change. After this morning, Donald had sworn to himself that he wouldn't shout out again, not unless he was sure he was right. It just so happened that a real monster had turned up a few hours later and she had assumed that, yet again, he was seeing things that weren't really there. Well, she was the one who'd ended up dead because of it and Donald felt she only had herself to blame.

At that moment, the classroom door flew open. There stood the headmaster, his black gown billowing out behind him, again bearing a striking resemblance to the vampire in the film Donald had watched the night before when he should have been tucked up in bed.

'What's all this racket?' The headmaster spotted the broken glass littering the floor and turned towards where Donald was still standing in the middle of the room. 'Did you break that window, boy?'

'It wasn't me, Sir, I didn't do it.' Donald saw the headmaster roll his eyes in response as he strode over to shattered window. Glass crunched under his size twelve shoes as he turned to face Donald, and his voice boomed out accusingly. 'But there's no one else here, boy, it must have been you!'

Behind the headmaster, Donald saw the zombie rise up, his teacher's blood dripping from its face. He smiled at the headmaster, knowing what was going to happen next if the headmaster didn't believe what he was about to say and thinking that it would serve him right.

'No, Sir, it was the zombie in the playground ...'