

How I Met my Zombie Boyfriend

By Kaitlyn Miller

It wasn't exactly love at first sight. In fact, it was more like fear, horror, and revulsion at first sight. It had been almost a year since the Zombie Wars ended, but I still wasn't used to the presence of zombies in everyday life. After all, my home in New Jersey was on the other side of the country from the front lines (the zombies having first appeared out of the water on the California coast—though a lot of people were surprised that it hadn't been New Jersey). So, needless to say, I was surprised and more than a little dismayed to see a zombie working at my local Laundromat.

I did my laundry as quickly as I could, glancing at him nervously every few seconds. Every time I looked at him, he seemed to be looking at me, and I looked away quickly. His expression was unreadable—or maybe I just didn't know how to read zombies yet.

It was almost a week before I saw him again, but see him again I did. One evening I saw him sitting at a booth in my section of the fifties diner where I worked. After a hasty whispered conference with my coworker, Debbie, I admitted defeat and skated over to the booth, a plastic smile stuck to my face. “Hi, my name is Susan, and I'll be your server today.” I handed him a menu. “Can I get you something to drink to start out?”

He looked up at me. The skin around his eyes was loose and practically hanging off his face, and the flesh was rotting off his jaw, but I could have sworn he looked sad. “Oh, no thanks,” he said in a slow, creaking voice. “I'm still waiting for my friends.”

Concealing my surprise—he had friends? would there be more zombies here soon?—I nodded and skated off, leaving several menus on the table. I retreated to the kitchen, glancing out the glass double doors every few seconds to see if his friends were there yet. Tuesday nights were always slow. Pacing doesn't work so well when you're a roller-skating waitress, so I resorted to skating in fast, nervous circles around the counter in the middle, causing Rebecca, the cook, to sigh heavily at me.

“What, are you sweet on him, or something?” she snapped irritably. I shot back an angry “no,” and stopped to look out the window again.

Finally, I saw three figures approach the booth and sit down. The zombie from the Laundromat stood up to allow another zombie to slide in, and on the other side, two humans, obviously a couple, sat down. The three picked up menus and they began chatting as they perused their options. After giving them a minute to take a look at the drink menus, I skated over again. “Hi there! My name's Susan, and I'll be your server today. Can I get you something to drink to start out?”

They ordered fountain sodas, and I skated off again to get them their drinks. I wondered what, if anything, the zombies would order to eat. Everyone knew that they ate brains. Did we have any food that would be similar in consistency? I couldn't think of any, but then again, I'd never tried to eat brain. I knew that in places with larger zombie populations, restaurants used the brains of the animals they cooked, and hospitals and morgues removed the brains of the deceased to sell, but we had nothing like that here. In fact, I wondered what would draw zombies here at all, other than our prime location in New Jersey.

As it turned out, the Laundromat zombie ordered a grilled cheese and fries, and his zombie friend wanted fried chicken. The man ordered a chicken Caesar salad and the woman wanted a Philly-style cheesesteak.

After I had served them and brought drinks to another group that had just come in, I started to feel ashamed. There they were, two humans and two zombies, just sitting together and having a good time. They were even sharing food, regardless of whether the flesh of the person who'd ordered it was healthy or rotting. How had they gotten used to the presence of zombies? Or were they somehow able to ignore the differences?

By the time they'd left and I was collecting my tip, I had decided to give up my search for a new Laundromat. Even if I didn't like the fact that zombies were moving in to Millersville, I could manage to tolerate their presence. As long as no one dropped rotting flesh on my clean laundry.

The next time I went to the Laundromat, the zombie greeted me by name and with a smile. I returned his greeting with a brief nod, as friendly as I could muster, and went about my business quickly. He was polite to all the customers, though, helping a young woman with two small children and fixing one machine that was making a loud buzzing noise—really a perfect Laundromat employee as far as I could tell.

That Friday, I went to the roller-skating rink as I do every Friday at six, all glammed up and toting my skates. As I handed the cashier my card to scan (I was a member of the rink's exclusive club), I saw him in the skate rental area, lacing up a pair of those hideous brown skates. I had a brief moment of panic when I thought he might be following me, but when we nearly bumped into each other at the snack bar, his expression registered only surprise, and I chided myself for being so paranoid.

“Hello, Susan,” he said in his slow way, a smile spreading across his face. “You skate for fun?”

Surprised that he was using my name, I focused my gaze behind the counter, watching for the waitress who would be arriving at any moment with my Mountain Dew. I nodded. After all, it was the least I could do to endure small talk. “Every Friday. You?”

He shook his head. “This is my first time. I hear it's fun.”

“Oh, it is,” I agreed fervently, passing some money over the counter in exchange for my large soda. “Well, see you!” I spun away, fully intending to avoid any further contact with him that night, if I could help it.

As soon as I set skate on the rink and started whirling and grooving to the music, all thought of boys, zombie or otherwise, completely left my mind. I was in skating mode—not work skating mode, in which skating was simply my transportation, but fun skating mode, in which I was a whirlwind of excitement. I joined a group of girls, and we all joined hands in a circle, spinning as we made our way around the rink.

After a few songs, I was out of breath and thirsty, so I rolled myself over to the table where I had deposited my things and slurped at my Mountain Dew. There was a woman and a little girl on the other side of the table. I smiled at them. The little girl waved. She had the most adorable skates, with little heart cutouts on the sides. I wished they made skates like that in my size.

When I returned to the rink, a song was just ending. I started skating around, building momentum, but the next song to start was a couples skate. It wasn't a romantic song, but they dimmed the lights and someone came on the loudspeaker to announce the theme. I braked and started to make my way off the rink since I didn't have a partner, but before I made it to the break in the rink wall, the zombie rolled up to me. I hadn't noticed him on the rink before, and his sudden appearance took me by surprise, though I tried not to show it. He smiled at me. “Hi again, Susan. Want to be my partner?”

I was about to make up some excuse and skate off quickly, but he just looked so earnest and his eyes looked so sad that I shrugged, smiled, and said “okay”. After all, I thought, if he dropped a piece of flesh on me, I would have an excuse to not have anything to do with him in the future. He put out his hand, I took it, and off we went.

He was a natural. As we whirled and danced in circles around the rink, I nearly forgot that I was skating with a zombie. His hand didn't feel any different than a normal boy's hand. In fact, the only indication that he was a zombie that I could see was his rotting face. His shirt and jeans seemed to hang peculiarly on his frame, though, and I found myself wondering about what was underneath them.

When the song ended, we were both out of breath and sweating. We allowed our momentum to carry us off the rink and onto one of the benches on the side, where we collapsed, breathing hard. “That was great!” I said between breaths. “I thought you just started. How did you learn to skate so well?”

He shrugged. “I did just start. It's fun, is all. It's not hard.”

I shook my head, but didn't pursue the subject. “You know, I keep seeing you around, and you know my name, but I don't know yours. What is it?”

He blushed, and I had to admit it was rather cute. I hadn't known that zombies could blush. "I'm sorry, I never introduced myself! My name is Sam."

And, well, the rest is history. Oh, and I discovered something: they may technically be dead, but there is nothing stopping a zombie boy from acting just like a live human being in any way that matters.