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Opening extract from

Memoirs of a Neurotic Zombie The One with the Zealous Zombees

Written by

Jeff Norton

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Foreword

It has been an honour to be asked by Adam Meltzer to write his memoirs. I wrote this book from his notes and his recollections. I'm sure he would have written the book himself if he weren't so busy with school, comic books, and saving the world.

But the story is all his and I am merely the messenger.

Happy reading,

JEFF NORTON

P.S. You can get in touch with Adam at:
www.AdamMeltzer.com
or if you're old enough, through facebook at:
www.facebook.com/AdamMeltzerZombie

Prologue

In Which I Introduce Myself

My name is Adam Meltzer. The last thing I remember was being stung by a bee while swinging at a robot-shaped piñata on my twelfth birthday. I was dead before the candy hit the ground.

That's right, I'm dead. But I'm alive . . . *ish*. The 'ish' is important. I'm the walking dead. *Talking* too. It's awkward and gross, and there's nothing anyone can do about it. You see, I died and then I came back . . . as a zombie.

Yep, there it is.

Zombie.

The big 'Z'.

It's a loaded word and makes most people think: brainless, cannibalistic monster. And if you think that too, then I hope these memoirs change your mind.

I still have a brain; I mean, how else would I be telling you all this? As for cannibalism, I have no

interest in eating people. Even rare steak gives me indigestion and really bad gas. And my table manners are too good to accept the label of 'monster'.

I died, and now I'm back – zombified. Apparently there was a funeral, which I don't remember, and then a really dark grave, which I definitely do. It's hard to forget climbing up through two metres of dirt.

And I should tell you; I don't like dirt.

Or mess.

Or filth.

Of any kind.

The school guidance councillor called it 'early onset' Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, but I say that when it comes to germs, it's better to catch them too early than too late. She also said I worry too much.

But I say: there's *a lot* to worry about.

I worry about running out of shampoo. I worry about the factories that make nut-free candy and yet cannot guarantee that they're made in a nut-free environment. I worry that there are no air bags in school buses. I worry about robots rising up against humanity. I used to worry a lot about dying, but I suppose I can cross that off the list now. But thanks

to my unhelpful guidance councillor, I now have to worry about worrying too much; so the list doesn't get any shorter.

This is my strange story, and I swear on a stack of vintage comic books that it's all true. So read on, if you dare.

But please wash your hands first. With anti-bac soap and hot water.

Ideally twice.

1

In Which I Get My Zombie On

I like to collect things. I started with stickers and stamps, and then graduated to comic books and travel-size soaps, shampoos and hand sanitizers. But my favourite collection is my range of drug pens.

My mom's a doctor and every week a parade of pharmaceutical* sales people come to her clinic to ask her to prescribe their brand-name (expensive) medicines instead of the generic (cheap) pills. They always give her little mementos like pens with the names of the drugs on them. And since Dr Mom only needs so many pens, she gives them to me.

I've collected two hundred and thirty-three drug pens, ranging from Aspirin to Zoloft. I have pens for depression, acne, high blood pressure, arthritis, and

* Pharmaceutical (pronounced: farm-a-suit-ick-al): it's kind of a big, fancy word for medicine.

six for erectile dysfunction (that's an adult way of saying: winkles that don't work). My favourite pen is for a drug called Gastellex, which treats 'aggressive flatulence' (an adult way of saying: really bad farts) and it even makes a fart sound when you click it. You get all the funny fart sound without the actual smell or unseen poo particles spreading around the room. It's funny *and* hygienic! Win-win. I have pens for all sorts of ailments and diseases, but I don't have a pen for *death*.

In fact, there is no drug pen for death because (and yes, I have checked Wikipedia) there is currently no-known treatment, therapy, ointment or cure for death. Hence, no pen.

People die and they don't come back. Death is the series finale of life, and there's no reunion show. It sucks, but it's true. And unless it happens to guys like Darth Vader's boss or Osama Bin Laden, it's pretty sad.

Death is a one-way street with no U-turns and no exceptions

But now there is an exception.

Me.

The *zombie*.

It's the best description for my condition. And not to be a stickler for detail – but once you're dead, there isn't a whole lot left to be a stickler for – I've decided to come to terms with the label. Sure, there are other words I could use: reanimated, walking dead, living dead, resurrected. But none of them feel quite *me*.

Reanimated sounds like I've been escaped from the Disney vault.

Walking Dead is that scary TV show, and I'm pretty sure it's a registered trademark.

Living Dead, well, that's literally a contradiction in terms.

Resurrected, maybe, but let's face it, that one's got a lot of Jesus connotations.

No, it's *zombie* all the way for me. I've been given a lot of labels in my twelve years of living – neurotic, sensitive, precocious, shower-hogger; and while I may still be all of those things, my new defining characteristic is probably that I'm technically dead.

I have no pulse, am legally deceased, and was even buried in a coffin that was very hard to climb out of. At this point, I should give Mom and Dad a major shout-out for not going all cinders and ashes on me. They cremated Gran when she died and then put

her mortal remains in a ceramic urn. Thanks, guys, for not buying me a one-way ticket to Urnville!

So, instead of adorning the mantelpiece with Gran, I dug my way out of what I'd later learn was a very expensive coffin using my NinjaMan throwing-star belt buckle*. Of course, no one had thought to bury me with a set of house keys. When I finally made my way home, with the driest throat ever, I ding-donged the doorbell like I was trick-or-treating at my own house . . . and waited.

And waited.

It was a balmy Sunday morning. The gentiles were in church, Mom was in the back yard replanting her flowerbeds, and Dad was probably on the fourteenth hole.

Ding dong, I rang again.

Finally, the front door swung open and Mom just froze. She didn't scream. She didn't faint. She just stood there. I mean, she was probably expecting to be sold a box of girl guide cookies or sign a petition to put air bags in school buses, not to see her only son back from the dead – 100 per cent zombified.

* And thereby reducing its resale value on eBay.

Or, as I now like to say, *zomtastic*!

'Adam, is . . . it . . . you?' she stuttered, wiping the garden dirt on her jeans before reaching for a hug.

I put my arms up to hold her back. 'Oooh, Mom, maybe you should wash your hands properly,' I said. But because my mouth was so dry, what came out was: 'Aaargh Uuurgh Ooooh.'

'Is it for me?' called my sister from upstairs. She bounded down the steps and screamed.

Mom ignored her for once and stared at me. 'You're,' she said, searching for the word, 'alive?'

'OhMyGod!' gasped Amanda, a piece of cherry liquorice hanging from her quivering lips. 'What is *that*?'

But Mom kneeled down and enveloped me in a big bone-crusher of a hug. Seriously, she actually did crack a rib. It still smarts when I laugh or sneeze.

She reached for my hand, and let me inside. This time I froze. Mom's hands were filthy. But then I remembered I had grave dirt under my fingernails and decided not to judge.

'You're not letting it *in*, are you?' cried Amanda.

I limped to the kitchen, desperate for a glass of water, washed my hands (twice!) and helped myself

to a bottle of water. I don't really do tap water because our urine and faeces go into the public water supply*. *Just saying.*

My rehydrated tongue finally allowed me to speak, so I asked the big question that was on my mind. 'When did we get new carpet in the hall?'

Okay, maybe that wasn't the *big* question, but it didn't escape my attention that I'd upset Mom by dumping dirt on the new plush. No wonder she was in tears. I was traipsing grave dirt everywhere and that carpet was not going to give up a stubborn stain easily. She looked really upset so I decided to change the subject from ruined floor coverings.

'Um, Mom, did I die?'

Mom blinked away her tears and slowly nodded her head, twirling her black curly hair like she always did when she was anxious. Amanda cowered in the corner brandishing a rolling pin.

'Is it really my little boy?' Mom sobbed.

* It's true, look it up. They chemically alter our pee before you drink it, and the poo gets scooped up and turned into giant poo cakes that are burned to make electricity. So, next time you charge your iPod, it could be powered by your own poo.

'I'm twelve,' I reminded her. 'I'm not a little boy!' It really irked me that they still treated me like the baby.

I'm only fifteen months younger than Amanda, and if you include death and unnatural resurrection, I've had waaaay more life and death experience than her. And yet she has a mobile phone and I don't. She has her own computer and I still have to share Mom's.

Amanda screwed up her freckled face. She was sporting red hair now, which was odd because yesterday I'd thought she was a blonde. 'Are you even human?' she asked from behind the rolling pin.

'Jeez, Amanda, what are you going to do, roll me into a pastry? And since when have you been a redhead?'

'It's Autumn Auburn,' she said.

'But it's *March*,' I reminded her.

'Oh, Adam,' cried my mother. 'It's . . . June.'

June!?

Suddenly, nothing made sense. Where did the last three months go? And why would Amanda choose an autumnal hair dye for the start of the summer?

The world had gone mad.

I looked to Mom for answers even though she was clearly still upset about the carpet. But I needed to know. 'What happened to me?'

Of course, I had pretty much worked out the clawing-out-of-the-grave part for myself, but my memory was a *little* hazy about how I got there in the first place.

My mom took a big breath. 'Adam, you were stung by a bee and had a . . . terrible allergic reaction.'

But I wasn't allergic to bees.

I was allergic to shellfish, milk and milk by-products, the red dye used in hot dogs, and the rubber they make pencil erasers from. But not bees. I'd been tested for one hundred and twenty-seven potential irritants, including bee stingers both foreign and domestic and was given a clean bill of bee-health.

Nothing made sense.

Amanda puffed out her cheeks in mock swelling. 'I thought your head was going to explode,' she said.

'Amanda!' snapped my mom.

'By terrible,' I clarified, 'you mean *fatal*, right?'

'At your birthday party.' Mom started to sob again and gave me another hug. I braced myself for another

cracked rib, but instead she just slumped on me. 'You collapsed and died from the reaction.'

With Mom blubbering, it didn't strike me as the right time to argue with her about her erroneous* diagnosis. I thought back to my birthday, which I suppose was also my *death*day, and it all came back to me:

The piñata, a Mexican party ritual popularised by Buy-Mart, was Mom's idea; probably to make little Ernesto, the shrimpy eleven year old who lives behind our house, feel a little less homesick. Nesto is actually third-generation American and the closest he's ever been to Mexico is the Taco Tavern on Main Street. But Mom's head is so filled with medical facts that she sometimes short cuts to stereotypes.

It was unseasonably warm for March, and despite my protests that the early spring would bring disease-carrying mosquitos**, Mom insisted on holding the

* Erroneous means just plain wrong. I like it because it sounds like a dirty word, but really isn't.

** I was naturally concerned about West Nile virus. We lived about 5,000 miles from the West bank of the River Nile, but those who think that distance will protect them from infection are in denial.

party outside. There were eight of us: me, puny Ernesto, the twins Tuck and Taylor Thompson (say that ten times fast!) from school, Jake O'Reilly who I buy comics with every Wednesday, Allen Doogle who always has the latest gaming console going (a good guy to know), and Kevin Krasowski who used to go to my school but moved to Dayton last year. Oh, and of course Amanda, who only attended because she had a crush on Kev's older brother and was hoping that he'd drive him down from Dayton. *He didn't.*

We formed a semi-circle around the helpless papier-mâché robot hanging from the oak. The idea was to take turns whacking him with a stick until one of us cracked his shell and candy spilled out of his intestinal tract.

And you wonder why I worry about a robotic uprising!

As the birthday boy, it was my honour/duty to attack first. But as I held the stick for my first swing, something strange caught my eye. To be accurate, it wasn't a something, it was a some*one*. Two houses down, I spotted Corina Parker watching me from the window.

She stood perfectly still, half-shrouded in thick

curtain. She was pale and gaunt and dressed all in black (always in black), but didn't move. She just stared.

Our eyes met so I had to do something. I waved and she immediately ripped the curtain closed.

Nesto caught me gawking at her house and teased, 'Adam loves Corina!'

Everyone laughed at my idiot's grin and unreturned wave. Everyone but me, that is.

Now, for the record, I did not *love* Corina Parker. I hardly knew her. She moved to Croxton a year ago, and was in my class, but never once said 'Hi' to me (or to anyone as far as I could tell) and acts like she's so cool in her woe-is-me black garb. Her one-armed dad opened a successful dental practice in the mall where I've been for check-ups twice (with no cavities). Her mom, who I think is really homesick from somewhere in Europe, stays in the house with the curtains drawn. In fact, that day was the first time I'd ever seen them open.

'Adam loves Corina,' Nesto mocked. 'She's gonna hatch his babies!'

A word about Ernesto: he can be a right pest sometimes. I mean, he's not a bad kid; he's just

immature. He's only eleven; what do you expect? At least he's still gullible enough to be talked into doing my yard work, so he does have his uses. But be forewarned:

Ernesto Ortega smells.

Ever since he moved in behind us four summers ago, he's always had this musty odour. The stink lives in his uncombed black hair and seeps out of his pores. And if you get too close to Ernesto, you might smell too. It's kind of contagious. And if you haven't guessed by now; I don't like contagion.

'She's way too cool for you, Adam,' laughed Allen.

'She just doesn't know what she's missing,' cheered my mom.

Jake undercut Mom's supportive, if embarrassing, endorsement. 'Oh, she totally does Mrs Meltzer. Corina's in our maths class, but she ignores him.'

'Then show her your big swing!' urged my dad, his camera phone covering his face.

I was mortified.

Everyone chanted, 'Big swing! Big swing!'

'Go on, smash that piñata,' Dad said. 'For the camera.'

I decided to take out my embarrassment on the

robot. I pulled back my arm, stick in hand and ready to strike. I was going to get that candy, and I didn't care if I had to disembowel a papier-mâché automaton to get it. I heard the buzz of the bee before I saw it. As I made contact with the robot's groin, the biggest bumblebee I'd ever seen took aim at my cheek.

Killer bees: not just an internet rumour.