

A Man called  
Tomato



(iBook with complete illustrations By Jutta Timm available in apple Books)

There once lived a stranger in a little town who had a big, red nose. He had frozen it in an icy winter, when he lived in a land much colder than ours. And every year after that, when winter came, it turned bright red in the frosty air.

When people met the man on the street, they would look at him and say "Look at that nose! It's red as a tomato! Surely it comes from drinking!" And because nobody could pronounce his strange-sounding name, they simply called him "Tomato".

One February day, it was bitterly cold. Tomato put on his coat, wrapped a thick woolen scarf around his neck and reached for his hat. As he stepped outside, his breath blew little white clouds in the bright winter air.

At the edge of the Park, some children were playing in the snow. Tomato stopped to watch them a while.

When the children noticed him, they put their heads together and whispered, "See that man? How he's staring at us? And look at his big nose, like a tomato! Now he's putting his scarf across his face so no one can recognize him. He must be a robber!"

Shrieking loudly, the children ran to the lake where other children were skating on the ice and told them about the suspicious-looking stranger.

The man with the tomato nose shook his head. "Why did the children run away like that?" he thought. He walked slowly on...

That afternoon, the phone at the police station didn't stop ringing. Inspector Core shook his head. A hold-up at the bank, a robbery at the jewelry shop, a traffic accident. And a child was missing. The inspector hardly knew where to start.

“What if she’s been kidnapped?” the parents of the missing child asked.

“Our children told us they saw a suspicious-looking man at the park,” said a young father, who was at the police station because of the traffic accident. “He had a large red nose and wore a funny old hat.”

Inspector Core sent two officers out in a police car to search for the suspicious-looking man. He himself conducted the investigation in the center of the town, going through the streets and shops to ask if anyone had seen a man with a large red nose and an old-fashioned hat.

“Yes, Inspector,” reported the baker, whose shop was next to the bank. “I saw a man with a funny-looking hat run by.”

“The man who robbed us had a red scarf over his face,” the jeweler said. “He dropped the jewelry he stole into his umbrella!”

“The thief wore a red scarf, hat, and coat and had an umbrella,” muttered Core, writing in his notebook.

“We saw him, too! It must be the man with the nose like a tomato,” said the children who had been playing in the park. “He came through the bushes and frightened us.”

“So,” noted the inspector, “a nose, and red like a tomato.”

He circulated a “wanted” poster with an artist’s sketch of the suspect and named him “Tomato-Nose”.

The rumour about the dangerous man with the tomato-nose spread around the town like wildfire. And whenever people heard about an unsolved crime, they said: “It must have been Tomato-Nose.”

Several days later, the man, who had no idea that people suspected him, went into a bakery to buy some bread. As soon as he entered the shop, the

baker ran into the street crying “Help! Help! Tomato-Nose is in my shop! I recognized him by his nose.”

When the man realized that people thought he was a thief, he ran off as fast as he could.

As he entered the street, a police car happened to drive past. “They’re following me,” he thought, shocked. He ran faster, as if the devil himself were behind him.

He ran and ran until he reached the edge of town. He stopped to catch his breath. “I’ll never go back to that town!” he said to himself. They all think I’m a thief!” But where could he go?

After wandering a long while, he discovered an old, abandoned house. The door stood open. He went inside. In a corner lay an old mattress. He was so tired that he wrapped himself in his coat and fell asleep almost immediately.

When he woke up, he was freezing. He gathered wood and old paper and torn rags and made a fire. But he dared not keep it burning for long, in case someone saw the smoke and came to find him.

Days passed and Tomato grew hungrier and hungrier. But he had no money for food. And so he waited until nightfall before leaving his hiding place. Then he ran over the fields, climbed over fences and hedges, and took potatoes and turnips from barns and sheds.

((5, right side))

Once he found a cellar window open and climbed inside. He took a warm blanket, an old sweater and a jar of homemade cherry jam. The people never noticed, for they had provisions enough.

"So I really am a thief now!" he thought. And as he returned to the old house, he looked anxiously about to see if he was being followed.

Finally, spring came. One morning, the March sun shone through the window and drew Tomato out of the house. He sat on the old stone steps and blinked in the light. It had been a long time since he had felt as warm as this. It wasn't long before he fell into a deep sleep. So he didn't hear the two men approach the house.

One was Inspector Core and the other was the mayor of the town.

"This is it," said the inspector, pointing at the house with the broken windows. "It's in a terrible state though. A real rat hole."

"Doesn't matter," said the mayor. "We'll soon get it fixed and then it will make a perfect orphanage. The fresh air on the edge of the forest is exactly what our children need."

The two began to walk around the house.

When their shadows fell across Tomato's face, he dreamed that a monster had come to seize him. He woke with a start, jumped up and ran, knocking the mayor over in his haste.

"That's -- that's Tomato-Nose!" Inspector Core cried, helping the mayor to his feet.

"Tomato-Nose?" asked the mayor astonished. "I thought that was just a rumour! The bank hold-up and jewelry theft have long since been solved. And the missing little girl had simply lost her way."

“But -- you see for yourself how he’s running! Anyone who runs away has a bad conscience. I’m a policeman, and it’s my duty to follow him,” the inspector said and ran after him.

Then something strange happened. Tomato, who had almost reached the forest, stopped, and turned. He came back, first slowly, then faster. Halfway back, he met Inspector Core.

Tomato stuck out his hands and said, “Arrest me. I don’t want to run any more. I don’t want to creep into houses and steal food.”

“That’s a confession!” Inspector Core said. “Mr., uh, Mr. Tomato, or whatever you’re called, you’re under arrest!”

The next morning, the newspaper boy at the market place called as loud as he could: “Tomato-Nose arrested!”

“Finally,” said a taxi driver, reading the paper in his car. By noon, people had flocked to the kiosk to get the latest news.

“Anyone who steals like that is a bad, bad man!” a woman said, shaking her head.

“When you’re cold and hungry maybe you got to steal to stay alive,” said a young man buying a pretzel.

“What do you know about it?” the baker said. “I’ve seen him. I just about died of shock when he came into my shop. It’s a good thing a monster like that is under lock and key.”

But several other people said, “It wasn’t his fault. No one cared about him.”

Most people didn’t think much about it one way or the other. They just thought it was up to the police to know if he were a thief or not. What did it have to do with them?

Somewhat later, Inspector Core met the mayor at the town hall.

“What happened with this, ah, this Tomato fellow, Inspector?” asked the mayor.

“Tomato? We didn’t have any proof. We had to let him go,” the inspector answered.

“Letting him go is no solution,” the mayor said. “We have to try to help him. Otherwise it will start all over again.”

“But what can we do? How can we help him?” Core wanted to know.

“Above all, we have to get him a job,” said the mayor. “I’ll take care of that.”

He telephoned everyone he knew, trying to find work for Tomato. Finally, he found something...

It was an hour here, a couple of hours there. It was work no-one else wanted to do. But it was a beginning.

On Mondays, Tomato emptied the trash cans in the City Park.

On Tuesdays, he helped collect the garbage.

On Wednesdays, he found work at the market.

On Thursdays, he washed windshields at the bus station.

On Fridays, he swept the sidewalks with a giant broom

On Saturdays and Sundays, he was alone.

Tomato was glad to have work, but he wasn’t happy.

One fall day, as Tomato was raking leaves in the park, he met the mayor.

“Good afternoon, Mr., uh, what is your name, actually?” the mayor asked, a little embarrassed.

“Just call me Tomato. That’s what everyone else calls me, and I’ve gotten used to it,” Tomato said, emptying a shovelful of leaves into the cart. He was pleased to have met the mayor, because it wasn’t often someone talked with him.

“Well, so, Mr. Tomato,” said the mayor with a nervous cough, “our new Children’s Home is almost completed. But we’re still looking for a housefather. Someone who likes to be with children. Would that be of interest to you?”

“To me?” Tomato said with astonishment.

“Yes, that is, naturally, if you’d like,” Mr. Green added quickly.

“I like children very much,” answered Tomato. “I can’t imagine anything I’d like better.”

When the Children’s Home was ready, Tomato moved in along with the children. The children soon grew fond of him. They trusted him and took him into their hearts. And his big red nose? They no longer noticed it. If you are friends, the color of the eyes or skin no longer matters. He was just their friend. Someone who always had time for them. They would run to him and he would help. He remembered old games from his own childhood, and invented new ones as well.

With the left-over wood, Tomato and the children built an adventure playground behind the house.

One evening, they were sitting in the meadow, roasting potatoes and apples over a camp fire. Tomato watched the smoke and remembered that not long ago he had sat in this very place fearing that the smoke of his fire would betray him.



A boy came to him and said, "Would you like an apple, Mr. Tomato?"

Tomato nodded and smiled. He knew then, that he was happy at last.