

Momentarily, then he gasped.

In the foreground, things were as they should be. There was a stainless steel toilet with some paper floating in it, some more tissue paper strewn across the floor.

Golden sunlight streamed in through the open back of the cubicle, where normally you might expect to see a partition. He was looking at an open vista of green fields, motionless fields. The train was stopped, and he could smell the grass, feel the sunlight on his face. He could step down, if he wished, and walk on the grass.

He looked back over his shoulder. The compartment was unchanged, and under his feet he felt the unmistakable rhythm of forward motion. Through the windows he could see the same impenetrable darkness. Tate was riding an emotional rollercoaster, and now his annoyance was replaced with incomprehension. But that wasn't a condition likely to last long in the mind of a man like Tate, a natural predator; he was already evaluating this situation, instinctively calculating the odds, choosing between the incongruity of the train and the safety of the familiar sunlight and rolling pastures outside.

He rubbed his eyes and looked back outside, through what he was coming to regard as the portal. Solid, stationary, safe. An environment where he remained in control. Not careering along an impossibly long tunnel toward

God knows where.

Or what.

Tate became aware of two things almost simultaneously. Firstly, that he was humming a tune from his childhood, words almost forgotten. All he could remember was:

This-little-ship-was-bound-for-hell

A mental rhythm that fitted exactly with the faint background noise of train on track. Hardly anything audible, just a whispering underfoot susurrations.

He was reciting this over and over like a mantra. Secondly, he realized that he was alternating it with:

Terri-bilis-est -locus- is-te

Bound for hell, interesting notion. One that might be literal, given the circumstances. But what of this Terribilis est Locus iste?

And why, when he first saw it, did he associate it with organ music?

Or, indeed, Hell,

Tate took a final glance at the view from the back of the cubicle. He noted the short drop down, the greenness of the grass. A stirring of the air brought a smell of cut grass and wallflowers which mellowed the chemical and urine odour of the cubicle.

Tate backed out, into the area between the carriages, the door hitting him in the back in his haste, and then back into his carriage. He quickly scanned the area, hoping that, by some miracle, everyone would have returned. Nobody had. He cursed as he heard the mobile phone still ringing, and then became desperate that it would stop as he ran toward it.

Clutching, nearly dropping it, held to his ear.

A voice he didn't recognize, a woman's voice, pleasant, informative.

"Terribilis est locus iste".

She sounded as though she should be announcing the arrival of the next train.

And then, before the curse rising from his throat erupted she began to speak again.

"Hic domus Dei est, et porta caeli; et vocabitur aula Dei".

At least, that's what it sounded like.

Tate ran to the laptop. The words had changed to a scrolling screensaver;

"Et vocabiter auli Dei",

scrolled past, vivid orange on black. He stumbled past the table to the window. Two hands and his face pressed to the glass. Absolute black. The window may as well have been backed with black velvet. A wave of claustrophobia swept over Tate. He felt as if the train was burrowing further and further into a subterranean tunnel of infinite depth. And then the mobile interrupted his thoughts again. Tate dived for it, thrust it to his ear and listened:

"It's awesome, silly."

No, this can't be, thought Tate. THIS CANNOT BE.

It was the voice of his wife, his poor, dead, Sally. They had shared three happy years in between his time in the SAS and his becoming a paid assassin. She was the only person ever to eke out any love and compassion from Frank Tate, after her death there was none left for anyone. Again, her voice:

"It's awesome, silly."

He gasped out her name, but she was gone. Tate knew that he'd heard this before. It was like a recording of something that had occurred between them. It was what finally decided him, though. He wasn't staying on the train a moment longer. He was running again. He caught the laptop a blow and it crashed to the floor. Tate ran hard, through the automatic doors, feet pounding in the otherwise almost silent train. Past the now lukewarm drinks and finally, shining like a beacon: TOILET ENGAGED. Thank God for it's dull, sickly light. He ran toward the door and slammed his hand hard against it and Tate was suffused in the golden light that flooded from the outside world just on the other side.

Tate almost slipped on the wet toilet tissue as he sprang across the floor and jumped out of the train toward the firm, green grass below.

Tate fell. It was very black, and he fell. There was no grass, no sunshine. It was all a lie. He heard the rhythmic sound of the train on the track, like a heart beat and then that stopped and there was silence, and darkness, and falling.

A snapshot appeared in his minds eye. It was a grainy photo him in uniform with two friends. Then suddenly, a whole collage of pictures, some moving, some still, of people and places, events that he'd long since forgotten came back in a vast wave. He saw himself with Sally, on honeymoon, standing

outside a chapel and peering up to read the inscription on the ancient archway at the entrance:

*Terribulus est locus iste*

Sally, reading from the guide book, translated: "This is a terrible place". He said that he thought it was a strange thing to write about a church, Sally told him they didn't mean it that way, they meant we should be in awe. He cracked a joke: "This is an awful place". And Sally laughed and told him,

"It's awesome, silly".

Tate read the second part of the inscription

"*Hic domus Dei est, et porta cauli*", and Sally read from the guide: "Here is the House of God, and the gate of heaven".

But then Sally was shifting, and fading and from high above he saw the tiny figure lying on the station platform; Tate's own body. Lying where it had fallen after the crushing chest pains, where it had lain since the train pulled off without him, embarking on its journey while Tate set off on his own, longer journey. He saw that his head was cradled in the uniformed railway workers hands and, as he came closer he saw his own ashen face, mumbling the words:

"Et vocabitur auli Dei",

The last echo's of Sally's voice continued to translate, and the railway worker strained forward to hear what would be Tate's last words as he repeated what Sally told him:

"And it shall be called the court of God"

And as Tate fell into the blackness, he knew there would be no appeal.