

Tate saw what he'd only ever had nightmares about; saw the horror that he'd only ever read about in books – in the enigmatic labyrinth of his own dying mind . . .

For written on the toilet mirror in a runny, crimson liquid were the same words:

Terribilis est locus iste

The nauseating yellow light of the small cubicle fluttered around his eyes. He felt sick, that was for sure. The words splattered upon the mirror stuck out at him like . . . like a sore thumb. Like a *severed* thumb. His unrelenting childhood paranoia returned momentarily, and he almost *did* feel like a child again. Scared and alone, afraid of what was going on around him. His mouth motioned it was dry again, as his lips fought to separate themselves from each other. It made Tate think of intimacy, and that right now, he himself desperately wanted someone – anyone – to hold onto.

The cubicle, empty and odorous, appeared to him now like a prison, or some sort of chamber for the demented. The walls were a murky yellow colour, as if they'd been exposed to decades of cigarette smoke; the toilet pan sat undisturbed like an old ghost. The black lid was down, and Tate feared that something lay waiting underneath.

He stood for a few minutes, oblivious to the train moving, and gazing into the eerie empty cubicle felt like an eternity. Images from horror movies flashed by in his mind like negatives from a spool: he mentally saw bodies being torn, faces full of dread and fear . . . It all seemed too real to Tate. Too *life-like* . . .

Regaining what little he had left of reason, Tate wiped his mouth and tried to think hard. His coat felt heavy, like concrete, and it weighed him down. *A rational explanation will surely ensue this madness*, he thought. He wasn't a detective, but this kind of thing *had* to have some kind of sane motive.

It was then he felt something hard press into his ribs. It started off as a soft poking, but as Tate scrambled through his weary mind the poking grew to a prodding, and he felt himself beginning to search through his jacket rapidly. He then remembered the thumb in his pocket.

Tate's eyes widened with immense horror as he produced the severed digit from his jacket pocket, for it wriggled in the small plastic bag like a fat, blue worm. Shouting out, he staggered back and clumsily fell onto the seat behind him. The bag thudded on top of a table and lay beside an opened newspaper.

Tate lay there, sprawled on the seat like a drunk, tired and confused, terrified and bewildered. He felt sick again, and the disgusting taste of vomit wormed its way up his throat and entered his mouth. He wanted to

spew, to rid his body of the sick, but he swallowed hard, and the hot, tangy mess retreated back down into his system.

The thumb, fat and blue and hacked, moved itself. It erupted into a series of spasms, then rolled over a number of times before settling itself. The nail, black and bloodied, tapped against the table through the bag, and all Tate could hear was the crumpling of the bag as the nail continued to beat off the tabletop.

It then began to move towards him.

Tate's life lacked emotional sentiment and love. He knew this because like the train, the images and feelings he'd briefly encountered in his life were speeding through his mind at that precise, unrealistic moment, battering into his memory violently and making him realise the atrocities he had committed. He remembered the woman with the laptop smiling seductively at him (an apparition of a past lover?); the near-bald man with the CD player sitting patiently (a psychic proposal of Tate's own solitary future?); the kid in his twenties with the adult magazine (Tate's youth?). But all were players in a never-ending game called Life.

The base of the thumb lifted itself (it looked humorously like a snooker player's before that all-important shot) upright, before thumping back down onto the table. Tate looked on in disbelief, lost for words and sanity. The thumb was edging its way towards him.

Suddenly, the lights in the carriage went out, the blackness around him falling like a bride's veil, smooth and secretive and seductive. He could still see the thumb upon the tabletop.

The sound of the train instantly became deafening. The roaring thunder of its wheels filled Tate's ears and he threw his hands to them and gritted his teeth. He remembered the laptop and the phone with its continuous ringing. *Would it still be ringing now?* he thought.

The thumb had now exited from the bag and pushed – pulled – itself closer to Tate. The base, shredded beyond repair, oozed a little blood and left a slight trail as it journeyed. And although the digit was a horrible bluish-grey, Tate could still make out the tattoo of the eye at the bottom.

As it neared him, Tate swore the eye was looking *at* him.

Throughout these nonsensical moments, Tate had forgotten about his job, his bosses, and his money. Was all this madness worth it? Had Tate simply fallen asleep on his train journey and was dreaming this absurdity? After all, he did feel mildly comfortable lying upon the seat and that was a sign of relaxation, of peace. But was this inanity he was witnessing perhaps the next stage concerning the amoral nature of his profession? Surely his mind wouldn't slip up now, since it had been a very important killing he'd made tonight.

If his superiors were to hear of his disillusion tonight, surely they'd issue a contract out on him . . .

And even when Tate's eyes focused on the dark of the tunnel stretching beyond and before him through the closed windows of the train, the thumb continued to crawl to him. His heart jumped as the digit neared, its cycloptic eye watching him, rapt and unforgiving.

Tate slowly got up and the thumb halted. The eye *was* watching him! He looked at it like a cowboy anxiously awaiting a sun-risen duel. His warm hand gripped the seat whilst the other swayed in mid-air, as if in some mock karate defence.

The thumb rested upon the table, its trail reminiscent of a snail's. They glared at one another, and Tate instantly thought, *An eye for an eye*. Was he suggesting he had a telepathic connection with the thumb? That it would 'hear' what he had 'said'?

It had.

*You did this, it 'said'. And you will pay.*

Tate shivered profusely as the threat invaded his mind. The carriage grew shakier as the train sped toward . . . towards where exactly? Tate's initial

destination was lost in his brain, and right now, the only place he thought he'd be destined for was Hell.

*And as the train sank deeper into the station it was doomed to arrive, Tate knew Hell had come for him. And that it had got him.*

*And would keep him there.*

Forever.