

Hanging on to the edge of the wash basin was a human hand. It was large, a man's hand. And it was minus the thumb. At first, Tate thought the movement of the hand was because of the swaying of the train, but then he realised it was trying to get a hold on the porcelain, for it finally climbed over the rim and flopped into the bowl.

Tate tried to shut the toilet door against this fearsome sight, but the hand suddenly leaped out of the basin and clung to the edge of the door. Then, quite without warning, it jumped from the door onto his jacket, clinging there and pulsating like a living thing.

Tate cried out in abject terror. The hand was working its way, inexorably, up the coat. He was able to knock it off and it fell to the floor with a soft plop. Tate fled into the adjoining carriage, slamming the communicating door behind him. In doing so he caught his thumb in the door. The pain was excruciating. He looked at his thumb and saw it had a tattoo on it, rather like an eye. Tate knew he had no tattoos. He leaned against the door, panting, his heart beating many times above normal. Somehow he had to get off this dreadful train. He pulled the communication cord, but nothing happened. He pulled it again and again, until it finally snapped. The train sped on through the night. Suddenly, the meaning of the Latin on the computer screens, and in the diary, came to him. This was indeed a terrible, a frightening place.

Running through the carriage, he now found the far door closed. He could not open it. No matter how hard he pulled and pushed it. The door would not budge. Then terror gripped him. Looking back he saw the hand crawling along the floor of the carriage towards him. He ripped his fingernails to pieces in a vain attempt to open the door, the blood making his hands slip on the smooth structure. Turning now, with his back to the door he tried, in desperation, to ward off the hand. He kicked at it with all his strength. It caught his trouser leg and began to climb up his clothing. There was nothing he could do to stop it.

Tate screamed as the hand fastened itself about his throat. He struggled to detach it, but it seemed possessed of super human strength. The hand closed relentlessly about his windpipe and Tate fell to the floor, gasping and choking. He thought he saw a woman bending over him. She was smiling. She was the girl with the laptop computer, and she was dressed in some sort of uniform. Behind her, and largely out of focus, Tate could see a bald headed man who was saying something and shaking his head. He wasn't playing any music now. Then the young man with the mobile phone was there – what was he doing – pointing to something out of Tate's field of vision.

The light began to fade from Tate's eyes as the hand squeezed ever tighter. The noise of the train was roaring in his ears now and he felt he was sinking downwards into the dark tunnel.

Two members of the station staff had seen the man try to board the train. He had got the door to the first class compartment open, but the train was moving and the man began to lose his grip. The door had slammed to and cut the man's thumb off. He had then fallen onto the platform. Gasping and choking.

A porter called an ambulance. When it came, the paramedics found the man unconscious. They decided the casualty was having a heart attack and began resuscitation, which continued in the ambulance on the way to the Accident and Emergency Unit of the hospital. On arrival the patient was taken immediately to the cardiac emergency room where a doctor and nurse were waiting. The man was connected to a life support machine.

The doctor noticed that the patient had lost a thumb and, seeing that it was a fresh wound, asked the nurse to find out what had happened. She went away to talk to the ambulance crew who were unable to throw any light on the matter. Then one of the receptionists, who had been going through the man's clothing in order to try to identify him, found a thumb wrapped in plastic and placed in a bag in the man's jacket pocket. It was concluded that the station staff must have retrieved the digit from the scene of the accident and sent it to the hospital with the casualty. When the doctor was told this he was satisfied, but told the nurse he didn't think the patient would

be needing the thumb now. He was not responding to treatment and seemed to be sinking.

The nurse went to look at the man and thought she saw a flicker of his eyelids. She smiled down at him, but the doctor, behind her, shook his balding head and said he didn't think that there was any life left. A young junior doctor pointed to the heart screen, which had now stopped recording a pulse.

Arrangements were being made to remove the body, still unidentified, to the mortuary. The hospital porters were about to wheel the trolley away when the doctor called to them urgently. He told them to wait. To the nurse he said he had discovered two rather weird things about this case.

Firstly, and the doctor could not understand why he had not noticed it before, there were four deep, red marks on the man's throat, almost like finger marks? Then, secondly, the man had lost a thumb – right? The thumb was found in a plastic bag in the man's pocket – right? Well, the fellow had lost the thumb from his right hand, the left one being intact. But the thumb in the bag was a left hand one, and it bore a tattoo, rather like an eye.