

A sudden shout broke from among the stragglers on the platform. I thought at first it was Feely's cruel treatment of me that had caused the outcry, but I saw now that people were running towards the edge of the platform.

The guard's whistle was blowing frantically, someone was screaming, and the train banged to an abrupt halt with clouds of steam billowing out from beneath its driving wheels. I struggled free of Feely's grasp and elbowed my way back along the carriages, squeezing past the possible Air Vice Marshal, who seemed rooted to the spot.

The villagers stood transfixed, many hands clapped to many mouths.

'Someone pushed him,' said a woman's voice from somewhere behind me in the crowd.

At my feet, as if reaching for my shoes, a human hand stuck stiffly out, with awful stillness, from beneath the wheels of the last carriage. I knelt down for a closer look. The newly filthy fingers were wide open, reaching for help that would never come. On the wrist, which was almost indecently naked, tiny golden hairs stirred gently in the moving air beneath the train.

My nostrils filled with the smell of hot, oily steam, and with something else: a sharp coppery odour which, once experienced, is never forgotten. I recognized it at once.

It was the smell of blood.