

Things in Pockets

By Richard Paul

It started on his way to the bus, having just left work, walking as quickly as he could down a packed street on a Thursday evening in December. When he jammed his cold hands into his coat pockets he noticed the slip of paper in the left-hand one. Thinking it was a wayward receipt, he pulled it out, gave it a brief glance and saw:

S.O.M.E.T.h.i.ng for l.aT.E.R snipyechopyekillyeatye.

Evidently, some idiot had slipped it into his pocket as he passed by, doubtless under the misguided assumption that they were being witty. He carried the paper to the nearest bin, let it drop and watched with disinterest as a breeze caught it and blew it into the distance.

The bus was usually a welcome relief from the winter chill, however on this occasion some idiot five seats ahead inexplicably decided to open a nearby window, sending a constant blast of icy wind into the faces of nearly everyone sat behind. No one was protesting, as was often the case with irritants on busses, and he couldn't do anything about it himself as he was stuck sat next to a woman who was fast asleep. (At least that made for a half-decent excuse.)

When his stop finally drew near, he extracted one hand from his pocket to push the call button and found another slip of paper inside. Perplexed, he opened it slowly and read:

Waitngforrye/soonlysoon

He looked around quickly, saw no one looking back, no one who should have been able to slip anything into his pocket, no one who, best as he could tell, was following him. Had he simply missed this one when he found the other? Maybe. Probably. His coat had fairly deep pockets, it wasn't impossible.

He missed his stop in all his pondering, and finally left the bus with an extra thirty feet to walk back to his house. With much muttering and curses through gritted teeth as he started back towards home, he let the stupid note fly away and jammed his hands back into his pockets, both hands struck something wet, wet and sticky. Shocked, he drew his hands back and found they were red and dripping on his shoes.

He didn't think after that, he didn't try and figure out what was going on, he ran, he sprinted through the darkness and wind over the pavement back towards his house, wrenching off his coat as if it were a giant spider and letting it fall behind him.

Frantic red fingers dove into his trouser pocket and grabbed for his door keys, and instead found a severed ear, along the back of which was scratched, as if with a claw or fang:

ThiswasThElAstpiEcE,donotFeathtonearsnottAsty.

Thiswillbe/allthat/'sLeft/ofYou/

The man never actually read this last message, however the one who found his discarded coat with a severed ear resting atop it the following morning did.

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