

“Good morning, Tony!”

The line Tony McDonald heard so much he thought it must be rehearsed. Every morning when he wakes up, his roommate Damien greets him with the same, upbeat tone.

This morning’s greeting was replaced with a pained grunting from their shared bathroom.

Oh, joy. What could it be this time? Bad seafood last night?

A groaning... a gasping... followed by screaming. Something slams against the bathroom’s tiled walls, and by the sound of it, it’s probably Damien.

“You alright dude? I kinda need to get in there.”

No response. When *Damien* goes quiet, something must be wrong.

With his phone at the ready, emergency services ready to be called, Tony unbolts the door, meeting with a sound akin more to a displeased cat than his roommate.

His eyes settle on the ground first. The black sludge mess at the feet of what is—*was?* his roommate. Inkiness spills onto the white tile of their dorm’s bathroom floor, seeping into grout and dyeing it, as if to replace it.

Sitting inside the spillage, a gleam of white catches Tony’s eye. Not an untouched piece of tile, no. That would lay flat on the ground.

A tooth, erupting from the black.

Meaty pieces of gum still cling onto it, wrenched out in a panic and discarded on the ground. The more his eyes focus, the more Tony feels like he may make a mess on the floor of his own.

Not far from the tooth lies Damien’s fingernail.

Two. No, Three. Four... Viscous red blood mixes around with the black sludge, oozing off the forgotten nails.

Fearing his squeamish stomach cannot handle any more, he forces his eyes to follow the mess, from the floor to the counter, upon the form of his “roommate.”

He stands too tall, too thin. That isn’t Damien, it can’t be. He looks stretched and broken. He seems unsteady on his feet, about to topple over.

He looks over his shoulder, movements monstrous as if controlled by some spectral force, not his own will. Tony now sees the source of the mess on the tiles.

It spills from every orifice of former-Damien’s face, stains the front of his shirt. His eyes are dark, covered in a wet film of the same ichor that drips down his face.

Two shiny canines are settled in its gums, where he would have ripped out his old teeth. Talons replace what used to be fingernails.

His body turns, following his head to settle on Tony, the creature's keen eyes resting upon his own.

Without a second to waste, the trembling Tony slams the door, tumbling to his knees to catch his breath. There's a barrier between him and the monster, but he knows he's not protected.

A voice behind the door. Drowned, garbled. It came from Damien, yes, but didn't belong to him.

"Good morning, Tony!"

By Lexi Johnson, age 16, Coquitlam