

The Battle at Kilburn High Road Station - Paul Blake

Beth Hudson walked down the steps to the platform. Her head down, being careful of her footing on the concrete stairs, much to the annoyance of the businessman behind her. She could hear his sighing with every step, along with tinny EDM beats coming from the earphones. Her four-inch heels clicked and scraped with each downward step, the platformed outsole slid, ever-so-slightly, on the wet footprints from earlier commuters. Her aquamarine ASOS pencil skirt restricted her stride. She had one hand on the stair railing, the other held her oversized Louis Vuitton knock-off purse and her large Costa cappuccino. The purse was from her girly holiday last year to Sunny Beach. Beth was looking forward to next month when the girls would be heading off to Paphos, even though her best friend Jen wouldn't be coming. She had hooked up with a fella at her office Christmas party and was currently four months pregnant. Beth frowned at the thought and then at herself for the frown. Both women were twenty-seven, and Jen had always wanted kids. Beth just wanted a man first.

She reached the bottom of the steps, and the businessman pushed past her and headed to his favoured spot on the platform. Beth looked up at him and tutted. She took the time to check him over though. *Not bad*, she thought. His arse looked good in his tailored suit. Tall and slim, dark wavy hair, and a battered but chic cracked leather satchel briefcase in one hand, his own travel coffee mug in the other. She headed in the man's direction and stood four foot away from him, standing slightly forward so she'd be in his eye line. They were about halfway down the platform. *He's much better looking than my Tinder date last night. Attitude about the same though.* She thought about the date. How Chris turned up at the bar wearing obviously the same clothes he'd been wearing all day at work. A wrinkled suit and a

shirt with a barely cleaned ketchup stain down the front. One drink and he was getting restless. Talking about going back to his 'pad'. *The Lothario*. Well, when he was not on his phone that was. She could see him swiping left and right. *More right than left. Creep*. Beth excused herself to go to the toilet, walked past the toilets and out the door.

Beth looked across the tracks to the other platform. The same faces she saw every day. Yawning. Coffee drinking. On their phones. On their own. It's not a time for families. In her peripheral vision, she watched the tutting man drink out of his travel mug. The way his head lifted exposed his tanned underjaw and muscular neck. *Hmmmm*. Beth purred to herself. Over the platform's tannoy system the female voice with its odd phrasing gaps announced the arrival of the next train.

"The train now approaching Platform... 1 is the... 07:20... London Overground service to... Euston."

Passengers started shuffling forward in anticipation of the train's arrival. Beth held back waiting for the guy to choose his carriage. *It's not stalking. It's just nice to have something to look at instead of all the travel insurance and vitamin posters on the train. Guy candy*. He moved to the yellow line at the edge of the platform, Beth stood slightly behind him to the left. He looked in the direction the train would arrive from, she followed his gaze. A minute's wait and the train came into view. The bright yellow and blue driver's cabin lead the way. The train slowed as it travelled along the tracks, the occasional brake squeak disturbing the air. As the front of the train came level with Beth and the businessman she heard a commotion occurring further down the platform and Beth stood on tiptoes to see what was going on. Waiting passengers were moving down the platform towards Beth but looking at the roof of the carriage. Beth followed their stares and saw two men on top of the roof, getting closer as the train slowed to a stop.

Both men were facing each other about four foot apart, legs wide for balance and arms in a wrestler's' grapple stance. The train came to a halt, and the men swayed at the sudden loss of momentum. The man closest to Beth had his back to her. She could see he was a beast of a man. Muscles bulged through his tight, grey knitted jumper. Shoulders, far wider than his waist. He towered above the other man by a foot or more. The other man wore a black dinner suit, with a burgundy cummerbund, and a perfectly tied black bowtie. He was devilishly handsome. He had a chiselled jawline and a kind, but strong face. Looking at him Beth felt her heart flutter, and any thoughts of the businessman in front of her disappeared as though they had never been there.

The beast stepped forward, having regained his balance quicker. He reached with his tree trunk arms for his quarry. As he did his foot slipped on the metal surface, and his leg went out from underneath him, he fell to one knee. His weight carried him forward and to the side. Beth gasped. He grabbed the jacket of the other man and pulled him with him as he slid off the roof. They landed in a heap on the platform four foot away from Beth. She heard the thud of impact in tandem with the hydraulic hiss of the train doors opening. The smartly dressed man struggled to his feet, elbowed the bigger man to the side of the head as he rose. The beast grunted. Beth saw a trickle of blood from his left eyebrow drip down his face. His face was a grotesque mask of scars, crisscrossing his cheekbones and forehead. He pushed the smart man away from him, to give himself a chance to get to his feet, and shook his badly shaven head. His head was a mammoth square. Cords stood out in his massive throat. He got to one knee and then the other and stood. *He must be seven foot tall.* His dark and emotionless heavy-set eyes were focused on the other man. He pushed the tutting businessman, whom Beth had been admiring earlier, out of the way. His face struck a pillar, and he crumpled to the ground. Beth gasped. The colossus roared and charged the dinner-suited man.

The suited man heard the challenge and dodged the charge at the last second hitting the beast in the small of his back as he passed. The brute stumbled a few feet into the crowd that had gathered. He regained his balance and then turned to face his urbane opponent, whose positioning had put him next to Beth.

‘Kick the ugly fucker’s face in!’ a voice from the crowd shouted.

‘Watch out Bigfoot, you’re in for a pounding!’ another jeered.

The brute spat to the floor, ‘Come on Alessandro, give yourself up,’ he said. His voice was like nails on a blackboard, high-pitched and squealy. Someone in the crowd laughed. Then another. A domino effect of laughter rang around the platform.

Beth heard the announcer over the laughter ‘The train about to depart from... Platform 1... is the... 07:20.. London Overground service to... Euston calling at... South Hampstead... and... Euston.’

Alessandro said to the beast, ‘Davor, you’re going to have to try and take me.’ His voice soothed Beth like poured chocolate and warmed her insides like a shot of whiskey. She could see the smile on his lips. He smelt of sandalwood: masculine and powerful. *Is that Bleu de Chanel?* Beth felt her body reacting to the smell and the closeness of the man.

Davor walked forward, slow and glacial. The ground didn’t shake in response, but Beth thought it wanted to. Alessandro looked at Beth and, with a smile that lifted her heart, asked ‘If I may?’ He took the coffee from her hand. She gave it up powerless to resist. Davor got within striking distance. In one fluid motion, Alessandro removed the plastic lid from the cup and threw the scalding liquid in Davor’s face. The smell of freshly pressed beans hit Beth’s nose as Davor screamed. Alessandro moved forward and launched a series of rapid kicks at Davor’s shins, knees and thighs. Davor’s legs gave way as Alessandro pushed him through the open train door and on to the train. The crowd cheered as the doors automatically

closed and the train moved off. Some wit started singing ‘Nah Nah Nah Nah Hey Hey Goodbye.’ But faded in isolation and embarrassment before the second “hey”.

Alessandro turned to Beth and said, ‘Thank you, my dear. I think I owe you a coffee.’ He offered his hand to her with a beaming smile. With hesitation, Beth took his hand, and he led her to the steps, and they ascended. They exited the station and Alessandro hailed a black cab. As she entered the taxi, she didn’t see Alessandro reach into his pocket and retrieve a small mobile phone. She also didn’t see him send a prewritten text message and replace the phone. He entered the taxi and told the driver to head to Soho.

‘There’s a great little café on Wardour Street, which serves the most exquisite coffee.’ He told Beth as he reached for her hand. As they passed Edgware Road station, with her heart pounding in her head, Beth didn’t hear the explosion a mile or so to the east, Alessandro did though, and his smile grew wider.

END

My debut novel *A Young Man’s Game* is available in paperback and ebook at <http://getbook.at/YoungMansGame>. Please see [A Young Man’s Game – Out Now](#) for more details and special features.