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Beck's Game

Series 1 : Part 1

Oxford Circus

INSIDE THE CARRIAGE

Midday and the carriage of the train was full, but not packed. A few people stood holding on to the poles and the hand grips to keep steady whilst the train juddered its way through the darkness of the underground system.

Susan sat opposite a man with a blood stain on his collar, he must have cut himself shaving although it was so obvious she wondered why he hadn't changed his shirt. She quickly turned her attention elsewhere as she noticed him opening his eyes from his doze. Katie sat on the next seat also staring at the man but as she was only six she had no inhibitions to make her look away.

Feeling embarrassed for both of them Susan tried to distract her daughter. 'We're almost there, what do you want for lunch?'

It worked and just as Katie was about to reply she was interrupted by the speakers inside the carriage.

'The next station is Lancaster Gate, that's Lancaster Gate. This is a Central Line train to Epping.'

'That's our stop sweetie. Nanny will be waiting for us. We need to get ready to get off now.'

Susan went to stand but the narrow aisle between the rows of facing seats was blocked by the man with blood on his shirt also standing and making his way to the doors in the middle of the carriage.

Taking Katie's hand Susan copied him and for a few moments all three looked out of the windows at the dark walls of the tunnel they were travelling through.

LANCASTER GATE PLATFORM

Despite the fact that if she missed this coming train there would be another one only a few minutes behind, Nora still felt the relief of making it to the platform on time.

There were a few clusters of other people waiting around her as, slightly out of breath from hurrying, she made her way to the yellow line and tried to guess where the doors of the carriage would end up when the train stopped.

LANCASTER GATE CONTROL ROOM

Not for the first time this week Sophie looked at the banks of monitors, lights and switches in front of her and felt overwhelmed. Why had she taken this job? It was too complicated. Lawrence seemed perfectly at home pushing buttons and talking at a rate too fast for her to take it all in and he didn't normally work at this station. But he was

nice and she was a little pleased it was with him that she had her first week's training. Bernice, who worked at this station and should have been training her had been on holiday, Japan she seemed to remember. Still, although she should already be back in the country by now it would still be a few days before she returned to work, Sophie guessed that was to deal with the jet lag.

Lawrence finished typing an email and turned his attention back to her.

'Ok, I think it's your go. There's a train just coming in at the Eastward platform-' The sudden ending of that sentence made Sophie tense up. 'It's not slowing,' he added and she could sense his concern. Suddenly ultra serious he grabbed the microphone. 'Driver, this is Lancaster Gate Control, slow down you are approaching the platform.'

The was no response.

'Warning Driver, slow down you are approaching the platform.'

Just a crackle was returned, but no voice.

It took a moment for them to notice as both Sophie and Lawrence were looking at the image on the screen of the coming train whilst he was trying to contact the driver; but when they both looked at the monitor of the cabin they realised the full extent of the problem.

LANCASTER GATE PLATFORM

Nora heard the familiar whoosh of the coming train and felt the air move ahead of it. The lights could now be seen in the darkness of the tunnel as it approached, however Nora, who had used the Underground most days of her life, could tell something was wrong this time.

'It's not slowing,' she found herself saying, realising she wasn't the only one to make this observation.

LANCASTER GATE CONTROL ROOM

'Get on to HQ General Control and warn them,' ordered Lawrence. 'I'll speak to Marble Arch.'

Sophie did as she was told.

LANCASTER GATE PLATFORM

It only took a few seconds for everyone to realise this train was not stopping. Everyone standing took several steps away from the edge as the it rushed passed them and into the circular black hole at the other end of the platform.

'What's up with that?' asked a man a few feet away from Nora.

'I don't know but I've got a meeting to get to,' she complained more to herself than as an answer.

INSIDE THE CARRIAGE

Everyone in the carriage watched as the station rushed passed the window then disappeared to be replaced by the darkness of the tunnels once more.

'Hey that was my stop!' someone called out.

'Mine too,' the older man muttered to Susan as if looking for some mutual confirmation.

'I wonder what the reason was?' Susan replied feeling she had to say something.

'Dunno but this deep under the ground, anything can go wrong.' This response came from a middle aged man with red hair who was clinging tightly to one of the poles. Both Susan and the older man turned to look at him. 'Just saying,' he added.

'Right,' the older man muttered.

Just as he did so the speakers in the carriage came to life with the automated message once more. 'The next station is Marble Arch, that's Marble Arch. This is a Central Line train to Epping.'

Everyone inside was now looking out the windows.

'Are we speeding up?' the red haired man asked.

LANCASTER GATE CONTROL ROOM

'Yes we've dealt with Marble Arch and Bond Street, and Sophie here has just sent the Emergency Messages to Queensway and Notting Hill Gate, they are doing what they can. Thanks.' Lawrence hung up the phone and sat looking at the monitors in silence.

'So what happens now?' Sophie asked. It was hard enough when it was running properly, how was she supposed to deal with this in her first week?

Lawrence turned to look at her, regardless of the fact he was deadly serious she couldn't detect any kind of alarm, how did he manage that? On the inside she could barely control the panic.

'We're just responsible for Lancaster Gate. We've told everyone we need to. For the moment there is nothing more we can do.'

He didn't shrug his shoulders but it felt like he just had.

'What do you mean?'

'The train behind it is safe, it'll stop at our platform and await further instructions. If we need to evacuate the carriages, the platform, or even the station we can do so. We'll await instructions.'

This made sense but somehow it didn't feel like enough.

'But further up the track... and what happened to the driver, where did he go?'

'There will be an investigation later, at the moment the people we are responsible for are safe. We need to make sure they continue to be...'

'Those other people could die. How are you so calm?' Sophie guessed it was experience and the fact he knew he had to keep her calm but it didn't seem right in the circumstances.

Lawrence let out a sigh. 'HQ are evacuating all stations in Zone One on the Central Line east of us. All trains further on the track are being diverted where possible... I know this is overwhelming and you're only training-'

'I've worked at this station for years. I understand emergency procedures. It's the people on the trains I'm worried about. If that one doesn't stop... what about the one in front of it?' The fact was although she had worked there for years it was in the Customer Service team, this was never a possibility she had had to think about before. As much as she was trying to remain professional she also felt the reality of the situation sinking in.

'HQ and the other stations will do what they can.' It was as if Lawrence suddenly noticed her fear and his tone changed. 'Trust me that train will not crash.'

'How can I? You don't know that'

Lawrence flicked his attention back to the monitors where they could see the next train slowing to stop at the platform.

'We've got to deal with this one now.' He stopped as a voice broke from the radio units.

'Evacuate the station, repeat evacuate the station.'

He waited until it stopped. 'Are you going to be ok?'

Sophie nodded.

'Good. Trust me, none of those passengers are going to die. I know this.'

LANCASTER GATE PLATFORM

The voice of the message repeated several times but was soon lost to the sudden confused babble of the many people trying to get off the platform, despite the official requests it be done in a "calm manner".

Nora, who was further away from the exits and nearer the edge found herself torn between needing to get out and the frustration she was going to miss her meeting.

A rush of warm air blew from the tunnel once more and the sounds of the next train could be heard.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE TRAIN AHEAD

Mandy's checked her pockets once more for her name badge and pass. Having lost it once she was now in a state of OCD every time she made her way to work. The manager on the afternoon shifts at the department store, where she was worked, wasn't the easiest person to get on with. Just one mistake and she would make you feel like you'd committed murder. Still she had plenty of time and her stop was next.

INSIDE THE DRIVER'S CABIN OF THE TRAIN AHEAD

Jasmine listened attentively to the message from her superiors as she carefully kept control of the train. It was a lot to take in.

A runaway train behind her was scary enough but the risk of what they were instructing her to do? Oxford Circus was coming up next and it had been decided to stop the train there and evacuate it as quickly as possible, she had been told the platform had already been cleared; they didn't want to keep the passengers on the

train and judged there was enough time to empty it.

Jasmine didn't agree, she wanted to move to a further station along the track, but then if the other train sped up and they crashed in the tunnels, or if there were stationary trains evacuating at further stops already it wouldn't be possible. Just do as your told. She pressed the button and made the announcement she still wasn't sure she agreed with.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE TRAIN AHEAD

Mandy stood up safe in the knowledge she could feel her badge and pass and made her way to the doors, along with several other passengers.

Overhead the speakers came to life and the voice of the driver filled the calm carriage.

'The next station is Oxford Circus. Due to a problem please all alight here as quickly as you can and evacuate the station in an orderly manner. Repeat when the doors open please, showing consideration to others, all depart the train as quickly as you can. Do not waste time to collect belongings. There will be no one else on the platform, evacuate the station quickly in an orderly manner.'

Mandy's blood went cold. The calmness of the carriage disappeared to be replaced with, at first mutterings and then alarm. People stood up and pushed their way to the exits, ignoring the request and grabbing their bags and belongings. Mandy was grateful she was standing next to the doors even though she felt the pressure of everyone else pushing up against her.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

Susan now knew something was seriously wrong when once more she couldn't feel the train slowing as the lights of Marble Arch Station appeared.

'It's not stopping here either,' she said.

The older man took in an audible breath as like before the platform passed by the windows.

'It was empty,' the red haired man called out. 'Did you see that? They've evacuated the platform.'

'We're in trouble,' the older man replied.

Susan held Katie closer, her daughter silent as if aware of the danger but not understanding it.

'The next station is Bond Street, that's Bond Street. This is a Central Line train to Epping.' The announcement filled the carriage which had now gone practically silent, each person deep in their own thoughts, with one exception.

'We are so very deep underground,' the red haired man stated.

LANCASTER GATE CONTROL ROOM

Lawrence was once more on the phone. Sophie felt useless, she tried to listen in on

what was being said but lost track as she found herself imagining all sorts of scenarios, from what caused this to what would happen.

'Right thank you. Keep us informed if you can.' Lawrence hung up the phone and pushed his chair back a little from the desk. 'Not that they will have time.'

'So what now?' Sophie asked for what felt like the hundredth time.

'All the trains outside of Zone One East are waiting at their stations, the one following our now empty train,' he indicated the deserted platform and the still carriages that could be seen on the monitor, 'has just stopped at Notting Hill, everyone is safe. West they have all stopped and everyone is evacuating at a station which themselves are emptying. It's just the train ahead of our runaway, it needs to get Oxford Circus so everyone can get off as soon as possible.'

'And the people on board the runaway?'

Lawrence took a deep breath and once more looked at the monitors. 'They will cut the power and hopefully it'll slow and stop before reaching Oxford Circus and the other train, but as I said it should be empty if it does... meet.'

'Hopefully and if?'

He turned his attention back to her and once more took on the calm persona he had held, probably for her benefit. 'It will be fine. No passenger will die because of this.'

Sophie knew he was trying to be helpful yet the fear she had been trying to suppress gave way. 'Stop saying that. Do you really think I'm naive enough just to accept your promise that no one will die from this? You can't know that.'

Lawrence's response was not what she expected. 'I'm not promising anything, no passenger will die from this. We've done what we can, we too should leave now.'

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

'The next station is Oxford Circus, that's Oxford Circus. This is a Central Line train to Epping.'

As the announcement played out, everyone in the carriage remained silent, just looking to the blackness of the tunnel walls outside.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE TRAIN AHEAD

The train had slowed and the platform of Oxford Circus appeared outside the windows. It was vacant.

The voice of the driver once more filled the carriage. 'When the doors open, please all evacuate as quickly and as orderly as you can, please leave the station. The power will be cut soon this is planned but please be aware.'

And the train stopped.

'Get out of my way,' someone shouted from further inside. 'I need to get off.'

'We all do. Stop pushing,' came the response from someone else.

The doors, which had been supporting Mandy against the force of everyone opened and she almost fell over as the pressure behind her increased. She just managed to steady herself to get off the train, pushed further forward by the stampede of everyone

else. She couldn't afford to fall, she'd be crushed.

She didn't have time to look around her, but the platform that had been empty was now filled with the occupants from the rest of the train, also fighting to get out.

'Hey let me out. We're from the last carriage we have further to go...' someone somehow managed to shout above the growing chaos.

Despite the force at which everyone was pushing Mandy found she had slowed as a bottleneck had formed at the narrow exit points to the corridors beyond. Then the lights went out.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

Everyone yells as the darkness now engulfs them inside the train, but still the train rushes forward. The red haired man has nothing to say.

INSIDE THE DRIVER'S CABIN OF THE TRAIN AHEAD

Jasmine is silent. At the head of the train her cabin is in the tunnel and her only way out is through the door behind that leads to the first carriage. Jasmine stands watching as the last of the passengers exits and now she is able to alight herself, the captain, the last to leave. She pulls the handle on the door and enters the empty space, but then the power goes and the doors slide shut. There is no power to open them.

OXFORD CIRCUS PLATFORM

The sudden lose of power silences everyone and despite the fact they are now more anxious to get away Mandy feels the pressure around her stop.

'What's that noise?' someone cries and everyone pauses to listen in the darkness. There is a blast of warm air and the sound of another train approaching from behind.

'Everyone get off the platform!' The shout is unneeded as the force around Mandy increases stronger than before.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

Susan can feel the slowing of the train around her. Not certain exactly what was happening she allows herself to think this might mean there is some hope.

The red emergency lighting flickers on. The older man takes another deep breath. 'Hold on to something. I think they've cut the power to stop the train. This is a good thing...'

Katie has been holding her mother tight. Susan, as much as is possible lowers herself to speak to her. 'Katie, love, keep hold of me ok?'

OXFORD CIRCUS PLATFORM

Despite the pushing the crowd is still at a bottleneck. Movement is slow, there are stairs ahead and Mandy guesses the escalators are no longer working meaning everyone has to climb.

In all the shoving she finds herself on the edge of the platform pressed up against the stationary train. So many fears form in her mind. The sudden red lighting is a reassurance, but the increase in noise of the approaching train destroys that.

'The train's coming! Move! Move!' She surprises herself when she realises it's her that just shouted this.

'They're gonna to crash!' Someone replies.

And there is screaming all around her.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

In the emergency lit space it's hard to tell when the platform is coming up. Susan just hopes the slowing of the train will be enough to avoid a fatal impact.

OXFORD CIRCUS PLATFORM

The dark shape of the oncoming train can now be seen in the eerie redness. Mandy can't move forward but she can turn to see behind her, just like everyone else.

The shape is slowing. It feels like an eternity but also as if there is not enough time for it to reduce to a safe enough speed.

Mandy holds her breath and shuts her eyes.

There is a pause.

'It's stopped!' someone further along cries and in that moment the atmosphere changes. It's like a weight has been lifted and Mandy wants to cry.

INSIDE A CARRIAGE OF THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

Susan didn't realise how long she'd had her eyes shut, but the gentle halt of the carriage causes her to open them.

No one is moving, they are all processing this new information. Are they safe?

It takes a second and then the chaos erupts as everyone tries to get to the doors.

OXFORD STREET

It was raining and Rhys didn't have an umbrella. Fortunately it wasn't that heavy, unfortunately the queue to get into the station had spilled up the entrance stairs to the outside and then down the road. He'd only been waiting ten minutes but he hadn't moved an inch since he'd joined. He turned to look behind him and, alongside the busy

traffic of bright red double decker buses and taxis, shoppers and businessmen, the queue was continuing to grow.

Shaking his head he turned back to face the front and watched enviously at the few who had umbrellas to shelter under.

LANCASTER GATE CONTROL ROOM

Lawrence was once more watching the monitors when Sophie entered and took her seat.

'How was it?' he asked.

'Fine,' she waved the question away. 'They said they might need to speak to me again in a bit.'

'Ok. So how are you feeling now?'

The images on the screens were still, the platforms remained empty with the abandoned trains still alongside them.

'That could have gone so badly wrong. Sorry I kind of panicked there.'

'It was your first week and you thought people were going to die. It's a human response. But you did well.'

'Only you were calm. It's like you knew what would happen...'

'I was just trying to be reassuring.' His reply seemed a little too quick. 'You should go home,' he added as if to draw attention away from the previous comment.

'I just said they want to see me again...'

Lawrence grinned, 'See I'm mess up too. Is Bernice ok?'

Sophie tried not to frown. 'Yes. It's good of her to come in. I guess it's all hands to the deck. She only landed last night it seems.'

'Staffwise she knows this control room better than anyone, she'll be able to advise and get it all back up and running as soon as possible.'

'Still it was her holiday,'

Lawrence raised the corner of his mouth in a half smile. 'Main control seem to be on top of things. I guess I'll be sent back to my station sooner than we expected, now she's coming back.'

Sophie paused, she'd always been a little scared of Bernice, not that she wasn't nice, but Lawrence seemed to be going out of his way to look after her as a newcomer to this role, Bernice was just very straightforward in her manner.

'Well thanks,' was all she could think of to say. 'I'm glad you were here today though.'

'Bernice's been doing this for a long time. You'll be as good as her with experience.'

'Not sure I believe that.'

'Learning to cope when things go wrong isn't a bad lesson. But Bernice will guide you through everything I was going to. It was only supposed to be for the week anyway.'

'It still amazes me how calm you were.'

Lawrence smiled fully now, 'As I said, experience.'

'I think it was more than that. You were so confident it would be ok. It's like you've dealt with that before... You weren't guessing; you knew...'

'What more can I tell you?' He stood up abruptly. 'Look I'm going to have a word with the powers that be. Find out what I can; tell them to send you home, they can interview

you tomorrow. You need to rest and process it all.'

'I could do with that. You know what I can't get my head round? What happened to the driver?'

OXFORD STREET

The rain had stopped but the wait went on. Rhys had no idea how long he'd been standing there. He was going to be late, but he was glad he had good reason.

Ironically at this point his phone rang. He knew who it was without looking and let out a sigh. Momentarily he considered not answering, but at this point he had something he could actually hide behind.

'Hello?'

'Hello Rhys. I'm waiting outside.'

'Mick I'm sorry. I'm still at Oxford Street. The queue to the Underground is up at ground level. I've never seen this before. We're just not moving. I've no idea but if it's like this all the way to the platform... I'm not going to get to Tottenham Hale anytime soon.'

There was a pause before Mick responded.

'This can't go on. You're already two months behind. You promised me you would be here.'

'I would have been, but there's nothing I can do...'

'Tell me where it is, I've got the key I can go in and get it.'

Rhys felt himself go cold. 'I'd rather you didn't,' he stammered trying to sound calm.

'You do have my rent?'

'Yes it's just I'd planned to pass a hole in the wall on the way home, so it's still in the bank. If it wasn't for this hold up...' he was pleased with his quick thinking.

There was another pause before the voice from down the phone continued. 'Look I'm going to have to think about this. You can't go on missing your rent. You've been in three months and only paid one month and the deposit.'

'I know. But this really isn't my fault, I'd have been there. Honestly the queue is up the stairs and along the street. It's not moved since I got here half an hour ago.' His timing was a guess but it seemed about right.

'When I've thought about it I'll let you know my decision.' The line went dead. Rhys let out a sigh and looked at the unmoving queue ahead of him.

'You haven't heard then?' The voice pulled him out of his daze and Rhys blinked away the confusion. A man, about ten years older than him, was standing opposite on the pavement. Rhys couldn't tell if he was part of the queue or had just been passing by. He'd not seen him before but that didn't really mean anything, in all the time he'd been standing there he'd not paid any attention to who the other people were.

'Sorry what?' he asked.

'Sorry to eavesdrop on you, but there's little else happening.'

'Ok.'

The man pointed to Rhys' pocket where he had put his phone. 'Your call. You didn't seem to know why there is a queue.'

'Extra busy rush hour I guess.'

The man shook his head. 'Check the news.'

'I can't. I don't have data on my phone.'

Realisation dawned on the man and he nodded. 'Which is why you don't know.'

'So tell me.'

The man moved a little closer to him. 'There was a problem with one of the trains earlier today. They're not saying much but they had to close the Central Line and evacuate all Zone One stations.'

'Terrorist attack?'

'Maybe. Apparently no one was hurt.'

'Well that's a relief. We can queue if it means everyone is safe, well you know what I mean.'

'It's not as bad as it could be so don't complain?'

Rhys nodded, 'Something like that. So is it running again?'

The man had somehow worked his way to be standing in front of him in the queue though he wasn't sure if he'd always had that spot.

'They've opened the station,' he continued and waved at the people who were on the steps that led down to the entrance hall, 'so they must be confident... but who really knows with these things? I'd say most of these are tourists and don't know either, or they'd have got a bus or taxi.'

Rhys looked around him, now it was pointed out most of the people did seem like visitors and not the usual workers and locals. He turned his attention to the road and the buses. 'Well I can see from here the buses are packed. To be honest, and I know this sounds bad what with what could have happened, but I don't mind having a reason not to be at home at the moment.'

The man grinned. 'The other issue I picked up from your call?'

'You really were listening weren't you?'

'Alex,' the man held his hand out.

Rhys found himself shaking it. 'Rhys.'

'I know I heard your landlord as well.' Somehow this wasn't as creepy as Rhys thought it should be. 'Got no money and the he's after you?'

'Yeah...'

Alex nodded further down the line. 'Look this queue isn't moving, and I'm starving. Don't take this the wrong way but I'm going to give up, get out of the drizzle, and get some dinner. Join me if you want?'

'Nice idea, but can't afford to...'

Alex laughed at this point. 'Hey I'm, rich, I'll get it. As I said, just being friendly and helpful. You coming?'

This was weird, but now it was mentioned Rhys could feel how hungry he was. 'I've been in London three months and that's the friendliest anyone has been to me. I'm not even going to argue out of politeness. Thanks, I'm starving and can't face tinned soup again.'

Alex stepped out of the queue and pointed ahead. 'Good. There's a great place just around the corner.'

VOICEMAIL

'This is a message from the Metropolitan Chief to the whole tribe. I'm sure you know what happened on Central just today. Be aware this isn't going to go down well. Keep it in mind. I'm sure I'll be hearing from The King soon. I'll keep you updated. Go easy for the next while, especially with the GeeYous.'

A PUB

Rhys sat looking at the plate of food in front of him and suddenly realised in his hunger what he'd done. 'I feel bad,' he said.

Alex looked up from his dinner. 'The food's ok?'

'Yeah. I mean I've just met you and you're buying me an expensive dinner... is that weird?'

Alex shrugged 'Only if you think so. No one else cares. As I said. I'm rich and that's not really an "expensive dinner". I was wet and hungry, we weren't ever going to get on that train... I suppose it's just as money is no object I can buy a stranger supper and not think it's a thing.'

This stranger seemed to be genuine so Rhys relaxed a little. 'Oh. Well thank you. I've not had lamb shank for ages.'

'It's just pub grub.' Alex picked up his pint and took a sip. 'So tell me, you said you just moved here but seem to have no money. What's the story?'

Rhys didn't really want to get into this but felt like, in the circumstances, he should say something. 'Needed to get away from home, thought I'd do a Dick Whittington, come to London and make my fortune... No, I lost my job back home and had no reason to stay, bad memories y'know? And I thought I'd have more chance of getting work here.'

'Only it's not as paved with gold as you thought? If it sounds too good to be true, it isn't.'

'Like a free dinner from a stranger?'

'It's only a dinner. What did you do for work?'

'General office Admin. I mean everyone does that so more people than jobs I'm guessing. Three months not a sniff of work. Tiny bedsit in Tottenham and a landlord who's deciding to evict me maybe. It's not exactly a legal set up so I guess he can do what he wants.'

Alex just nodded, as if he'd heard the story before and it wasn't a problem. 'Yeah London can do that. I like Tottenham though.'

That was an odd comment. 'Really?'

'What do your family think?'

'No family. Folks died a while back and... well I had no reason to stay so I took a gamble. Not sure I should have done now. Sorry, you don't need to hear my life story.'

Alex finished his meal and pushed the plate away. 'No it's fine. My marriage ended some years back so I know what it's like to feel down when your life doesn't work out. Wife just walked out, I never really found out why. I thought we were both happy. I was. Always thought I'd be a dad by now, but... doesn't matter how much money you have it's not going to fix some things. Were you close to your parents?'

'Yeah, but it's all still a bit sore I don't want to talk about. It was a pretty... dark time. Sorry I've kind of ruined the conversation and brought you down too.'

Alex shook his head. 'Nah. It sounds like something happened and you've not had a chance to deal with it? And now you have more worries. Let me guess when your landlord called you didn't actually have the money in the bank.'

Rhys shrugged, there was no point in lying. 'No. Look I was enjoying the lamb. Can we change the subject?'

Alex nodded. 'Sounds like a plan. If you don't think it's too weird. I'm not working tomorrow, you're not. Do you want get some pints? Well more pints... On me. You've been in London three months and been counting the pennies right? But you've missed out on some of the good things from the city. You need cheering up, let's do it tonight.'

It was only because Rhys needed to get his head out of his problems that he found himself considering this. He hadn't had a chance to properly enjoy the city since he came.

'Erm...' he still found he didn't know how to answer.

'What else did you have planned? Honestly you'd be doing me a favour as well. I've not been out for a drink for too long. Been missing some non work company.'

'You know what? Thank you. Yes.'

SOPHIE'S HOME, COCKFOSTERS

As she closed the door behind her Sophie felt the weight of the day hit. At the sound of her entrance her mum rushed down the stairs.

'Did you get my message?' she called out as her mum just hugged her. It was a needed hug.

'Thank goodness you're home. I've been so worried. Are you feeling better?'

She let go and Sophie took her coat off. 'I don't know how I am. It's all been a bit stressful. And the bus on the way home was packed because people were worried about the trains. I'm running on automatic.'

Her mum nodded. 'Let me make you some tea. Go and sit down. Your dinner's in the microwave.'

'I'm both hungry and not up to food. Tea would be great though. Thank you.'

'When you're ready. Go and sit down.'

Sophie looked in the direction of the living room. 'Thanks, but I'll come and sit in the kitchen. It's good to see you, I feel safe.'

Her mum smiled and headed into the kitchen, Sophie followed. 'I heard some of it on the news. And that was your station?'

'Yes. Mum I really thought all those people were going to die.'

'I dread to think what that must have been like. But unlike oh five everyone was safe in the end. You played a part in that. I'm proud of you.'

She pulled out a stool to sit on and watched as her mum filled the kettle and put it to boil.

'I don't know if I did. As it is the person who was supposed to train me was off so for the first week they'd got in this person from another station, Mornington Crescent I think, it's not even the same line. He's nice enough, but he did everything really. I mean

I just told the main control room. They took over.'

'Are they giving you a few days off to get over it?'

Sophie shook her head. 'They offered but I think if I'd have taken them I'd have been too scared to go back. They were really good. I had this interview and I was terrified but they made me feel ok.' She let out a sigh. 'I knew I shouldn't have accepted it.'

Mum was busy finding cups and putting tea bags in them. 'Nonsense, that's just shock.'

'I was happy, I had it all worked out. I don't know why they kept insisting that I applied.'

'Because they believe in you and didn't want to lose you; just like when they first invited you to apply for customer service. It's nice to think they are watching and looking after you. They see your potential even if you don't.'

'The potential for this?'

The kettle boiled.

'That was an exception and it was ok in the end. That should give you confidence. The worst almost happened and you got through it. Still, I won't go to work this evening, just so you're not alone; I know how you worry. Here's your tea.'

Sophie took the mug that was offered to her. 'Thanks. You know I think I need to try and stop thinking about it right now. Just sit down and just chill for this evening. Have you heard how Granddad is?'

Sophie's mum nodded. 'I was just on to the hospital. They think he can go home in a couple of days, but I'm just worried he's going to fall again.'

PHONE CONVERSATION

The King: Tell your tribe there will be an investigation into today's events. When I find out who was behind it there will be consequences.

Piccadill Chieftain: Why are you telling me? We're Piccadills, we have no dealings with Central; Holborn is a nothing.

The King: I'm telling all Tribe Chieftains, including you.

Piccadill Chieftain: I'm just saying if I was going to point a finger there are some others I'd consider first rather than waste everyone's time.

The King: Certainly and if you ever become Queen you can do it your way, until then we do it mine. Tell your tribe I will hold whoever is responsible to account. And just so you don't feel picked on I've already told the Victorians, the Centrals and The Northerners. There will be an inquiry. I expect you all to attend. I'll send you the date for yours. Inform your tribe.

SKY GARDEN

Rhys had never been up here before, although he'd heard a lot about it. Having seen the

prices he realised this would probably be the only time. Looking out of the window at London below him he had to admit that, putting all his problems aside, it was a cool city. Alex approached and handed him a glass.

'Here.'

Rhys nodded. 'Thanks but seriously they're expensive drinks. You can't keep just buying more.'

Alex waved this away. 'It's fine. Although our chairs have been taken.'

'Sorry I went to the loo and then came for a look.'

'See the city? From up here it's easy to leave your problems below and just look at the splendour of it.'

Rhys frowned. 'Splendour?'

'Yeah I think I do need to lay off the cocktails for a bit. They are stronger than I remembered.'

They stopped and looked out at the orange lights on the horizon.

'When were you last up here?' Rhys eventually asked.

'Don't know. I've been kind of busy. It's been nice to step back for a bit and not think about life. It can be...' He stopped at the sound of a text message. 'Spoke too soon,' he added as he glanced at it.

'Work?'

'Just a meeting I've got to go to about something that happened... Tell me, are things really that tough?'

Why did he have to ask that? Rhys thought. He'd just about managed not to be thinking about all his problems. 'I thought we said we'd not talk about it.'

Alex waited a moment. 'Well maybe I know of a position...'

Is that what this was about? A rather odd job interview? It was a strange situation, but if there was a chance of a job he didn't want to lose it; this was London they did things differently here. 'Really?' Rhys hoped he sounded calm.

'Yeah. It's not as... conventional as it might sound. Don't worry nothing like that. But... well I've said it now, that's the cocktails, so I guess I can't take it back.'

This was getting weirder, Rhys was sure about that, but at the moment he was safe... and it was the prospect of work. 'Yeah, not much I can say to that, but I do need a job.'

'Are you healthy? Can you run?'

'Now that is weird. Not just my opinion. You've become cloak and dagger. Is it legal?'

'It's hard to explain. But don't worry, it's legal. Totally legal. Very legal. More than...'

There was an awkward pause.

'Why were you queuing today?' Rhys found himself asking.

The question took Alex by surprise. 'What?'

'I've been wondering. You were queuing at Oxford Circus. We, the rest of us, tourists and people with no data, didn't know what had happened. We needed the train. You keep telling me you're rich so taxis are not a problem, and yet you queued knowing you were not going to get to the station.'

There was another pause as Alex let this sink in. 'Well you've just proven suggesting the available position to you wasn't a bad idea. Take it and you'll never have to worry about money again.'

'This is sounding sinister now, I should go.' Rhys turned to head for the lift. But what was this? Apart from never finding out what was going on, was he turning down a good

job that would end his problems? End them for good?

'A wariness is important.' Alex said just stopping him from walking off. 'You keep convincing me.'

'You keep unsettling me.'

'That's necessary. Honestly I'm trying to help. You come to London, it's not working for you. It's sometimes about who you know. Our meeting in the queue was random, a chance, don't throw away a one in a million coincidence that it was you.'

Rhys turned back to face Alex. 'What chance? What role? It's all too cryptic.'

'Look out there. The city. The lights, the Thames, the traffic. How much money is out there? And you have none of it. If that fair? The rich get richer, you can't get a basic job. Out there are millions of people coming and going and living their lives. Each one different. I could be standing here with someone else, one of the people down there who has also hit hard times, there's enough of them. But I'm here with you.'

'Were you looking for someone?'

Alex ignored the question. 'Out there is not just one place. There are stories and truths and lies all merged together to make the city. Different worlds. Some are on view, some are hidden, worlds going on around you that you only catch out of the corner of your eye, but you don't know what it means so you ignore it, forget it. But some of them are worth discovering. Do you want a way out of your problems?'

'Yes, of course. But all this...'

'I'm speaking in code because there are too many people here. We'll take a taxi to Highbury And Islington. We can talk there and then you can get home. It's a good coincidence you live on the Victorian line.'

'According to my landlord not for much longer.' The city lights shone and Rhys' own words made him realise if this was a chance he should not give it up, at least until he found out more. 'Ok. Tell me what this has all been about.'

SOPHIE'S HOME, COCKFOSTERS

After dinner Sophie sat watching the telly. The news was pretty much all about the "incident" on the Underground, although it was strange her knowing more that went on than was reported, and where the reports were wrong. It was a suspected terrorist attack but most of the details were not revealed. Watching it was both helpful as it made it all real somehow and not just a thing that happened to her, and also she didn't want to be reminded any longer. She reached for the remote and turned the television off.

'Mum?' she called.

'Yes love?' her mother called out from the kitchen.

'I've just thought. I don't know what the trains will be like in the morning. Do you think you could give me a lift some of the way in when you go to work tomorrow, please?'

Her mum joined her in the living room. 'Of course. If you feel up to it... it'll mean getting up early. I'm doing a morning shift...'

'That's fine. I can have a look round some of the old junk shops.'

'Don't you be wasting your money on more rubbish.'

Sophie laughed. 'It's not rubbish. One day I'll find something that's worth a fortune.'
Her mum raised her eyebrows. 'You watch too much daytime TV when you're on late shifts... You just waste your money. But ok be ready when I leave. I'm going to bed.'
'Thanks. Night Mum, and thank you. You made me feel better.'
'Take care of yourself.'
Just as she was about to go Sophie stopped her. 'I am really grateful it was you that ended up as my mum.'
Her mum smiled. 'Bless you. I'm grateful it was you who ended up as my daughter.'

HIGHBURY & ISLINGTON STATION

They didn't speak in the taxi, but travelled through London in silence. However as soon as they pulled up in front of Highbury And Islington Alex seemed in a hurry to get out. Handing the driver a note he called out 'Thanks,' then turned and rushed off to the entrance of the station.

Rhys just about got out of the vehicle before it drove off. He rushed to join Alex at the entrance. 'So you live round here?'

Alex just marched onwards calling behind him, 'This way.'

Still rushing to keep up they got into the ticket hall. It was empty but open.

'They must have fixed the problem.' Rhys commented.

'Different line. Although Oxford Circus is a nexus... a junction with Central, they would have been able to get it going sooner.'

They looked around them.

'Not packed like Oxford Circus at any rate,' Rhys said simply to break the silence.

Once more Alex walked off. 'This way,' he said as he let himself through the turnstile.

'Let me just get my Oyster.' Rhys pulled his blue plastic wallet out of his pocket and let himself through. 'So what's this about?'

Alex was already at the escalators although he waited for Rhys to catch up. As they descended Rhys found himself breaking the silence once more.

'I've always wondered why do we stand on the right? I mean when we drive the slower cars go on the left and we overtake on the right. it's always seemed the wrong way round to me. We even walk on the left in the passageways of the Underground.'

That weirdness was still in the air.

'The first escalators had a system to make people walk on the left.' Alex replied. 'As people who climb the steps on them are faster they were given priority so could exit first to the left. Slower people who just stood on the escalator had to be on the right to keep the movement at the top flowing. When they updated the technology the idea was so ingrained that it's stuck.'

'I wasn't expecting an answer to that.'

As they got to the bottom of their descent a busker with a guitar could be heard further down the tunnel. Alex marched off in that direction. It was back to awkward silence and Rhys had no choice but to follow once more.

The music got louder as they approached even though there were no other travellers.

Rhys turned a corner and found Alex drawing level with the busker, a man about Rhys' age but bigger built.

'Evening Sven.'

The busker stopped playing. 'Hi.'

'Rhys this is Sven.'

A little confused Rhys extended his hand and Sven shook it.

'He's down here a lot entertaining the passengers,' Alex continued.

Rhys looked about him. 'What passengers? There's only us.'

'I am committed to my art,' Sven replied. It was an attempt at a joke but there was an edge to it. Alex nodded and marched off further down the passageway as the music started up again as if Rhys was not there.

Alex was waiting for him outside an unmarked door.

'The Victoria line's that way.' Rhys started when he caught up. 'I don't know if I'm allowed in this bit. Do you work for Transport For London?'

'In a manner of speaking they work for us... me. This is part of the station that the GeeYous... the public don't get to see. Through here.' As he said this Alex produced a key and unlocked then opened the door.

This suddenly seemed alarming as for the second time that day Rhys realised exactly what he was doing. 'In a hidden and gloomy room deep underground? I'm getting a little bit concerned.'

'Trust me,' Alex waved him inside.

'That's what all murderers say.'

'And the people who can be trusted. I can solve all your problems. But your choice.'

Alex stood waiting for Rhys to enter. Rhys paused. Out in public he felt safe enough but in a hidden room deep in the station underground...? Instead he turned to look inside the room, but remained in the corridor although even here the only person about was the busker and he seemed to be in on it as much as Alex was, whatever it was.

'If I get murdered I'm going to be so angry.' Rhys said it as a joke but hoped Alex got the meaning.

Alex looked about him. 'Ok we can stay here, I get it. Technically we should never leave a siphon room door open, ours or anyone else's but we're here and this is a one off. What do you see?'

'An empty room, well with just a pole with a box on top in the corner. Why are you showing me this?'

The room was small, about the size of his studio, just big enough for a bed and the essentials.

'Thirty million people used this station last year. About two hundred million for the whole of the Victorian Line. If I got just a few pence per passenger.'

'You run the station?' Although by now Rhys knew he wasn't going to get a straightforward answer.

'I hold the station. Beck's Game is a game that is played across London. It's a world the public or the GeeYous, the great unwashed, don't know about. When they use the Underground they give us their money. No Player needs to do anything else, you make plenty of money, get rich quick. Some do have other jobs, I don't see the point.'

'You're losing me.'

'Every time a passenger uses a station ten per cent of what they pay gets siphoned off and held in that, it's called a siphon... sorry. Each Player holds a station, the Players who hold stations on the same line are all in the same tribe, each tribe battles the

others. So I'm a Victorian. Four days a year all the money that is banked by the siphons on a line gets shared equally between the tribe, it's a fair way as some have more lucrative stations than others. A day's worth needs to get banked at midnight each night and it is then stored for payday. That's why I'm here now.'

This sounded crazy. Either it was some scam or this man was mad. 'Is this legal?'

Alex nodded. 'Oh yes, dark corners of the government know about it and allow it, some play themselves. Everyone gets their Quid Pro Quo.'

'I'm not sure I believe this... So you just come and take the money?'

Alex pulled a small metal object out of his pocket and showed it to Rhys. 'Each Player has one of these.'

'A fob watch?'

'It looks like one, but no. It's called a token.' Alex stepped into the room and up to the siphon. 'You connect it to here. It's called Beck's Game after Harry Beck who designed the map of the Underground in 1931, although it actually has nothing to do with him. Each station has a siphon but any Player can raid your station and steal the day's takings up until that point. They do that by transferring it on to their token. At midnight anything left is banked and is safe for the tribe but I can also add my daily takings from other stations to it as I'm doing now. It's best to do it just before midnight because if I get raided after but before banking I lose that as well. When it's banked no one can take it.'

Rhys paused to let this sink in. Despite the fact that it sounded nonsense, the siphon was there and Alex was doing what he said.

'If you don't bank in time?' he asked.

'You lose whatever you raided that day, it goes back to the stations it came from.'

'So let me get this right, any other Player can just connect their token thing to your station's siphon and they get all the money and you all go about taking the money from each other? Isn't it best to just stay on guard?'

The siphon made a beep and Alex disconnected his token.

'Some do, paranoia sets in. They never leave, ever. End up hermits of the Underground. But you also want to go out, live your life where it's possible, I mean spend the money you make... plus the raids are part of the the Game. Your tribe expects it of you too as you are working for them; and if your tribe chieftain wants to they can impose sanctions if you haven't raided enough or defended your siphon reasonably and lost too much, but each tribe works different and some are freer than others. The Victorians are the best.'

'How do you guard yours if you are out taking from others? I take it the lock is not enough.'

'That's more to stop the GeeYous wondering in. The rules state the siphon must be reasonably accessible to Players... but you have to find your own way. I employ Sven and others as Guardians to keep an eye on things for me although they don't really know the full details so don't tell him and if I offered one of them the position the others will get upset. However don't get into a fight with him either. Most others use Guardians of some sort, they are hidden down in each station, sometimes buskers, actually they could be anywhere, not even on the Underground if there is a reason for it. Anyone you pass on the Underground could be a Guardian or a Player who's watching you to see if you are a threat. The GeeYous won't ever notice, Players do.'

Suddenly it all became clear. 'And that's what you want. You want me to guard your siphon thing?'

Alex laughed. 'No. We lost a tribe member a while ago...' he stopped short. 'So we have an opening, a free station on the line that needs defending as they are just being raided all the time, with no one to guard it's an easy target, and the tribe is losing profit.'

Was this real? Other than just one man sprouting what could be rubbish what proof of this was there? But if it was real... that was a lot of money. Rhys stopped to think. It didn't do any harm to investigate.

'And I can sign up for this? How?'

Alex stepped out of the room and closed and locked the door behind him. 'It's not as easy as that. First you need a token. The only way you can play is to find a token of an ex-Player. Once you have that you get their station. Well you have to register with the King, he runs the Game.'

Alex said this as if it were something he was used to. It was quite a revelation to Rhys.

'The King runs this?'

Alex started walking off back the way they had come. 'Yes. But show him you have a working token, agree to the rules and the station linked to the token is yours, and you get your share of the profits of the tribe.'

'Sorry I'm just trying to get my head around all this... Where do I get a Victorian token?'

Sven was still playing when they passed him but both he and Alex ignored each other. Alex waited until they were on the escalators to carry on; there was no one else about.

'The idea is they are hidden throughout London, someone finds one and if they are curious enough will follow clues and will discover the Game. If not it will just float until it falls into the hands of the right person. Or if a Player knows where one is and can find someone new they can get them in. When we lost someone I knew where the token for Seven Sisters went.'

'So you just give it to me and I hold a station? That's mad.'

'No. It's not as easy as that. It's a game after all so there are rules. For example, if you have a token already you are forbidden from carrying a second one for any reason, well there are two exceptions. So although I know where it is you have to get it and take it to the King, before someone else does.'

'I go to see the King?'

'Yes you go to his palace.'

Rhys closed his eyes to think as they got near the top of their ascent. 'This is madness... It sounds too good to be true, so can't be. You said that.'

'Nothing free ever is. I've told you the good points but it's a game. There are winners and losers. Some take it a bit too far and with the money they generate, they can do anything to make problems for other Players.'

They stepped off the escalator but paused in the corridor.

'What like?' Rhys asked.

'Something went down at Oxford Circus today. The Centrals are mad, savages. They pool their resources and make some pretty big moves. You want to stir clear of them.'

'What? That today was part of the Game...? I mean I still don't really know what happened but... that's mad, that's dangerous.'

'It wasn't that bad.'

Rhys had almost been convinced to at least trial this, but he was back to thinking either this man was making it all up, or if it was real was it such a good idea to get involved?

'Does this happen a lot? Do people... Players or the public get hurt?'

'The King is there to make sure it's fair, he sees to it. Not everything bad that happens is part of the Game but a lot of the the unexplained is. When you've made all this money, some have played for years, and it's tax free, you look for other ways to heighten the experience. It's not the money, it's the Game. Plus there are other things I can't say until you're committed.'

'Ok now you're putting me off.'

'Is life completely safe? Can you make this amount of money without breaking eggs? Go home, if you still have one, and think about it. If you want to play here's my number. Be quick. I know where the token is, so might others. And I can't wait.'

Alex handed Rhys a card with a phone number scribbled on it.

'What stops me from telling everyone about this?'

'Players are rich and powerful... would you be safe?'

'Either join up or shut up?'

'You got it. Next payday is in one week. Sign up soon and next week you will be loaded.'

Rhys paused for a moment looking at the card.

'I'm off.' Alex pointed to the ticket hall. You'll want the train to Tottenham Hale, back downstairs. You pass through Seven Sisters, think about it as you do.'

With that Alex marched off leaving Rhys looking at the card with the phone number on.

PHONE CONVERSATION

The King: Yes put me through immediately.

Hold music for a few seconds

Male Voice: Yes?

The King: Just to let you know I am dealing with the issue today at Oxford Circus, there's no need for the government to get involved.

Male Voice: And it will be done quickly? We can't lose revenue if the public are scared. I'm disappointed, this shouldn't of happened and it needs to be fixed. As you say, you don't want the government involved.

The King: Whose revenue are you talking about? (Laughs) You make it sound like you are actually important. Well maybe in some things. The problem with politics is that people stab you in the back so easily... fellows, business men, Kings... I prefer my own dictatorship. Do not threaten me.

The line goes dead

RHYS' FLAT, TOTTENHAM HALE

When he got to the bottom of the stairs that led to the basement where his studio was, Rhys noticed an envelope pinned to his door. He snatched it off, with a tear, leaving the pin where it was.

Unlocking the door and getting inside he opened the letter. An eviction notice.

Closing the door Rhys sat on his bed and sighed. 'I need to get some money fast,' he said to himself.

This is a series one story for Beck's Game. The next part is Seven Sisters...