

## **Rashomon at Green Park Tube Station**

A short story by Neil S. Plakcy  
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### ***Nigel—Hammersmith, London***

I was riding down a long escalator, when I heard, echoing against the tiled walls and barreled ceiling, "This guy's a fucking faggot!" As I continued down I saw two young black guys arguing with a white guy on the upward-bound escalator. The black guys were in their early twenties, while the white guy, who was shorter, seemed a little older. He was arguing with the most vocal of the two guys, who said, "You're a fucking faggot, man." Then they passed me, and I never knew how it ended. But on the train, someone had ripped up a poster for *Gay Times* magazine.

### ***Richie—Red Bank, NJ***

My boyfriend and I were on vacation in London, doing the tourist thing. We'd marveled at the vaulted ceiling in Westminster Abbey, stood in line at the tower of London, had a ritual lunch at the original Hard Rock Cafe. At the end of a long day we were making our way back to our hotel on the Tube, changing trains at Green Park station, where a long escalator descended through a tiled vault. The escalator was crowded so I could lean back, almost imperceptibly, into him, feel the connection between my back and his chest, the slight tremor of electricity that runs between us whenever our bodies connect.

I felt him stiffen when I heard the boy's voice echo through the vault. "This guy's a fucking faggot!" I leaned forward, remembering we were in public after all,

and strained for the source of the voice. It came from a young black guy in his early twenties, and he was addressing an older, somewhat shorter white guy with close-cropped dark hair.

“You’re a fucking faggot, man!” the black guy said

The white guy seemed to argue with him a little. There was a conversation and then the black guy renewed his accusation, and then we were past. I turned to look back up at them and saw my boyfriend’s face, rigid staring forward, not paying attention to what had passed us. I remembered he’d told me he’d been bashed once, in the Village, years before I’d met him. He and another guy had been leaving a gay bar, and a group of suburban teens in a beat-up Ford had hurled epithets at them, threatened them with tire irons and baseball bats. He and his friend had barely escaped.

We didn’t talk about what we’d seen, not while we waited for the next train, not while we rode the last stretch back to our hotel. As we got off, I noticed a poster for *Gay Times* magazine above the door. Someone had ripped most of it away, leaving only the slogan, “Ready to come out?” in neon pink.

### ***Ed—Miami Beach, FL***

I met my boyfriend at the gym, when I joined and he was assigned as my personal trainer. Our relationship grew intimate very quickly, and I rejoiced as much in discovering the intricate musculature of his body as in developing my own. He would always be a few steps ahead of me, by dint of genetics, previous experience, and sheer hard work, but by the time we’d been together a year, when we went on vacation to England, we both had bodies to admire.

On our second day in London, after most of the jet lag had worn off, we went to a gay bar in Soho for happy hour. It was quite a different crowd from Miami—no one young and pretty, hardly a muscle in sight. We felt a little like freaks.

The Brits were pasty faced and unattractive, as if the muscle cult pervading the American gay community simply hadn't reached across the pond yet, and maybe never would. My boyfriend is more outgoing than I am, and he tried to make friends as we stood in the bar, but no one seemed particularly interested. I told him they must have found us scary. "Imagine if they could see your tattoos," I whispered into his ear.

"Or your nipple ring," he whispered back. "That'd really freak them out."

So we drank our beers, feeling comfortable at least to be in a place where our legs could rest against each other, where he could hold my hand above the table. When we finished our beers we walked down the street to the Tube station to head back to our hotel and rest up before dinner. We were still a little high from the comfort of being able to be out at the bar, so we were surprised when we were riding down a long escalator at Green Park, changing trains, and we heard, "You're a fucking faggot, man!" echoing against the tiled ceiling.

Both of us looked down and saw two young black men yelling at a white guy as they all rode up the escalator. The escalators are really long there, so the white guy was kind of stuck, with lots of people all around. He was arguing with one of the black guys, and we heard one of them call out again, "You're a fucking faggot, man!"

My boyfriend looked at me then, and I looked at him, and without saying anything he stepped to the left and started moving fast down the escalator, me right behind him. When we got to the bottom we immediately turned around and got on the up escalator.

By the time we reached the top, the two black guys had cornered the white guy. They were berating him, poking fingers and yelling. He tried to stand up to

them as best he could but they were taller and younger and fitter. The stream of passengers eddied around them, no one paying them much attention.

"We don't like fucking faggots," the one guy said.

"You got a problem with faggots?" my boyfriend asked. The accusers turned to face us. "Why don't you take it up with a couple of faggots more your own size?"

Of course they weren't our size at all; we were both taller and broader than both of them.

"Seems like maybe you need to learn faggots come in all shapes and sizes," I said.

The two guys looked at each other. "Shit," one said to the other. They both took off down the long corridor, their sneakers echoing against the tiled walls.

"Thanks," the dark-haired guy said. "I don't know what got into those guys. I bumped into one of them on the platform and he started yelling. He held up his left hand, which bore a wedding ring. "I'm not even gay."

I knew from my own experience that a wedding ring had nothing to do with whether or not you liked to have sex with men. "That's okay," I said, looking at my boyfriend. "It wasn't about you anyway."

### ***Derek-Golder's Green, London***

I admit it. I was looking at his ass. He caught me looking and knew exactly what was going on. I bet he's been a rent boy once or twice in his life. Why else would he get so crazy? Not that I was going to do anything about it; Vanessa hasn't got any idea what I'm really like and I have no intention of letting her find out. What I do after hours or on business trips out of town is my business, after all. I'm not one of those chaps who figure marriage to be some kind of tell-all fest, like those

American talk shows. I'm sure Vanessa has some secrets of her own, and I don't want to know what they are.

This rent boy started making a fuss, calling me a fucking faggot. You could hear it all through the Tube station, I'm sure. If it'd happened closer to Borne I'd have been nervous, but I was just changing trains at Green Park. Of course, closer to home I'd never even have looked; I've learned to shut down the closer the train gets to Golder's Green. By the time I get home, I'm Vanessa's tired salary man, ready for a spot of bangers and mash and few hours of telly, then bed and do it all again the next day.

I started to get a little nervous when they wouldn't let it go, the rent boy and his mate. I mean, a joke's a joke, and let it pass. When we got off the escalator they cornered me and wouldn't let up. It was getting tiresome and I was even beginning to feel a little afraid. What if one of them hit me? Would anyone intervene? What if the police came? How would I explain it to Vanessa?

Fortunately these two Yanks appeared, just like in some old black-and-white cowboy movie, the kind of thing that was always playing on the telly in the afternoon when I was a lad. They had big thick muscles, and both of them were tall, one nearly two metres. The taller one said, "You got a problem with faggots, boys?" or something like that. It was like the good guys riding up on their white horses; they were even swaggering a bit, as if they were really cowboys.

The look on those boys' faces was worth it all. I tell you, they turned tail and ran, like scared rabbits. The two cowboys asked after me, if I was all right. I wondered which one bugged the other, if they took turns. I'd never have taken them for faggots, with those bristling muscles and tight asses. Oh, those asses! I admit it, I've always been an ass man myself. It's the only way Vanessa and I make love anymore. I take her from behind and pretend she's one of those rent boys, and sometimes, when I've had enough to drink, it works.

## ***Troy – Brixton, London***

I knew what he wanted, the bastard, I saw him looking at me arse. I knew that kind of look. Seen it enough 'round me neighborhood. Fucking faggot. World's full of 'em these days—can't turn the telly on without seeing 'em. I don't know I'd have said anything if me mate hadn't a been there. I elbowed him and he saw the look the fucking faggot was giving us.

"What you looking at?" I asked him. It was then he looked away. "He's a fucking faggot," I said to me mate.

That's when he started messing with me. They know better than to mess with me, down to my neighborhood. That Troy, he's a bad 'un, they say. This bloke, he says, "Rent boy," under his breath, thinking I ain't hearing him.

"I ain't no rent boy," I said. "You fucking faggot."

We argued like that all the way up the escalator. I got like in a frenzy, like I get sometimes, down in the neighborhood, when something doesn't go my way. It just reminded me of this bloke me mum used to see, back when I was a lad. Ben, his name was, Jamaican bastard she met down the pub and brought back to her bed. Only it wasn't just her bed he wanted. Bastard used to catch me going into the bathroom after me mum had left for work, get me with me trousers down, grab hold of me little john, and pull. Then he'd kiss me, his big sloppy lips on me, and rub me arse with his hand. He tried to bugger me, but I fought too much, and he tried to make me put his john in my mouth, but I bit him. You should have heard him howl! Wasn't long after that he left, me mum never the wiser. I wasn't going to tell her, that's for certain.

So then, I see this fucking faggot looking at me arse in the Tube and it reminds me of that Ben. All the rage I had in me for him, me just nine or ten years

old and him this big sloppy old faggot lusting after little boys. I wanted to hurt him, I did. The fucking faggot in the Tube, Ben, all those fucking faggots in the world.

I would have, too, if it hadn't been for the two Americans, big fuckers they were. Scared the livin' piss out of me, I can tell you. I imagined what could happen, and it was like Ben all over again. I took one look at me mate, and he looked the same at me, and we took off. Nobody going to use me like that again. Not now that I can fight against it, or run away.

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