

# **The Man With The Hippo-Head Brooch**

**by**

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**Klaine || AU || PG-13**

*A passing encounter on the London Underground leaves Blaine trying to track down a beautiful stranger.*

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"Shit," Blaine swore as he checked the time on his phone for the twentieth time in ten minutes. Having conveniently forgotten that he was supposed to be meeting Lucy at Stables Market, he had stopped at his professor's office for some clarification on an assignment, and as a result was already a half hour late. He'd sprinted through the half-closed doors at Embankment, and had one hand wrapped around the overhead rail just inside the doors, his messenger bag constantly slipping off his other shoulder, and a man with some definite and unfortunate body odor issues pressing into his back.

*This market better be worth it*, he thought.

Blaine was debating the relative merits of fashioning a text message out of that particular sentiment when suddenly, somewhere between Euston and Mornington Crescent, the train lurched to a shuddering halt. The lights overhead flickered and died, and all that could be heard over the wind that whipped through the tunnel was the indignant grumbling of the other passengers.

"Always bloody happens when there's somewhere you need to be, eh?" grunted Body Odor Man, and Blaine smiled back at him half-heartedly, releasing his grip on the rail and rolling his shoulder back and forth. The passengers around him shifted, spreading out a little more now that they seemed to be in for a wait of indeterminate length.

The inside of the carriage was fleetingly illuminated as the train traveling in the opposite direction came trundling past, before grinding to its own stop. The lights in the other carriage sputtered, yet somehow didn't die, instead occasionally flickering in and out of a weak and pallid fluorescence. The passengers inside looked as chagrined as Blaine felt.

*"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We'd like to apologize for this slight delay in your journey; it seems that there's an electrical fault due to ongoing improvement works, and we're estimating about a twenty-minute delay. Once again, we apologize for the inconvenience caused."*

"At least now I have an excuse for being late," Blaine belatedly replied to Body Odor Man, who smiled wanly and went back to scratching at the back of his neck.

Drawing out his phone once more, he typed out a text to Lucy letting her know that he was on his way, and hit Send for when he had a signal again. He glanced around at the other passengers, the faint light from the other carriage casting the hollows of their faces into deep shadow; macabre, like something straight out of

a Dia de los Muertos festival but lacking the bright colors and good spirits. With a barely-suppressed shudder, he turned back to face out of the inner doors, and bit back a smile.

Across the track, a tall, slim man with chestnut brown hair was checking his reflection, his gaze resting just to the left of Blaine's own. He was long-limbed and lithe, and Blaine couldn't help but stare at the man as he preened, smoothed down the lapels of his jacket, and turned to look over his shoulder, scanning himself from head to toe. Blaine's eyes followed the man's, and he swallowed thickly.

So often, walking the streets of London, he would let his gaze drift lazily across the faces of passers-by, but he never seemed to get caught up in someone's eyes anymore, never felt like jumping onto a couch or table and melodizing his feelings. He mostly attributed it to the ever-growing stack of music theory and production textbooks by his narrow bed, and the sheaf of assignments in his in-tray that never seemed to decrease, no matter how long he spent hunched over his laptop with headphones plugged in and fingers aching. But this man... There was something about the way he held himself; proud, like he made no apologies. There was confidence, and the seemingly natural tension in the set of his jaw and high arch of his brow spoke of such confidence being hard-won.

It was just as Blaine was taking time to fully appreciate the curve of the man's ass, clothed in charcoal denim so tight that it could have been sprayed on, that the lights in both carriages blazed back into life. The man's piercing and imperious eyes were suddenly locked on him. Squaring his shoulders, Blaine managed a sheepish and flushed smile, and raised his right hand in the universal 'OK' gesture with what he hoped was an appreciative look.

It was the other man's turn to blush, then, a dusky pink tingeing his cheeks and disappearing beneath his jawline. Visibly taking a steadying breath, he waved his hand between the carriages and rolled his eyes. Blaine nodded in agreement, before inclining his head towards Body Odor Man and discreetly rubbing beneath his nose with a significant look. The man bit his lip around a grin, and sympathetically narrowed his eyes.

Before he could think too much about what he was doing, Blaine rummaged through his bag and produced a notepad and pen. Feeling the man's eyes watching him curiously, Blaine began scribbling down a message as neatly as he could and, re-capping his pen, he pressed the notepad to the perspex of the door.

*My name's Blaine, it read. Nice to 'meet' you!*

As the man scanned the hastily-written words, his lips curved into a smile, and he met Blaine's eyes again with an expression of deliberation. A moment later, he was retrieving his own notepad and pen, leaning it against the door and writing back. His eyes flicked between the page and Blaine almost disbelievingly, and he flipped the notepad over with one last shake of his head.

*Kurt. Nice to 'meet' you, too. Do you... do this often?*

"Kurt," Blaine murmured to himself as he wrote out his reply.

*Not really. Not across tracks, anyway. Where are you headed?*

*Oxford Street. Christmas shopping time! Just finished work for the day. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. What about you?*

Blaine grinned, unable to help it in the face of Kurt's half-embarrassed expression.

*Stables Market in Camden—I'm late to meet a friend. Have you ever been?*

*Yes, of course! You haven't? Let me guess—tourist?*

*Exchange student. I go to Tisch, but I'm here at King's College for my final year. You must be a native, then!*

Kurt's eyes grew wide, and he furrowed his brow for a moment, before hesitantly responding, pen pausing every few moments as he regarded Blaine. He bit his lip when he was finished, before pressing the notepad against the door.

*Exchange student, too—I graduated from NYU this summer, but I'm doing a year's placement course here to supplement my degree. What a coincidence that we're both from NY! What are you studying?*

*Music, Blaine replied. Theory and production. I'm here mainly for research on my final project. And I'm actually from Ohio originally. I'm going to go right ahead and guess that you are (were?) a fashion major. Either that or... Lit. Maybe History?*

Kurt raised an eyebrow at him questioningly, and Blaine waved his hand up and down to gesture to Kurt's outfit. Skinny jeans, white Doc Martens, fitted red pea coat, and the collar of a crisp white shirt peeking out from beneath a thick black scarf that Blaine could have sworn was McQueen. It was all finished off with a

hippo-head brooch fastened just above the chest pocket of his pea coat. He was, in a word, breathtaking. Perfectly put-together—even in the bitter December cold that had descended over London at the same time as the switching-on of the Oxford Street Christmas lights—whereas Blaine was bundled up in jeans, hiking boots, two shirts and a thick, navy coat—he'd decided to forgo a bow tie that morning in favor of his threadbare gray and red-striped scarf. Compared to Kurt, he felt pale and forgettable.

Caught up in checking him out, it took the motion of Kurt snapping his fingers to recapture Blaine's attention, and there was another message already waiting to be read.

*Got it in one—fashion major. History, Blaine? Really? And you're seriously from Ohio? Another coincidence—me too!*

*Westerville, born and raised*, Blaine wrote back, with a half-grimace at fond memories, forever tainted with barbed words spat on top of bruises that ran much deeper than the surface of his skin—the external blemishes had been only fleeting, yet still the roots remained, woven throughout his nervous system. Changing the subject, he continued, *So what brought you to London in the first place? If you're studying fashion, why not Paris or Milan?*

Upon reading the words, Kurt seemed to consider his answer carefully. *Something just seemed to call me here*, he wrote. *People in the industry tend to overlook London Fashion Week. I can relate. Maybe it's my own way of getting some catharsis, I don't know.*

Blaine had no sooner finished reading the message, this man intriguing him more than he would ever expect for a chance encounter on the tube, than Kurt was turning the notepad back over and quickly writing out another message. *I'm sorry for the rambling. I'm usually much more eloquent and much less 'woe is me', but ever since coming here, I feel like I've come alive and opened up a little bit more. Do you know what I mean?*

Nodding emphatically, Blaine scratched at the side of his neck, considering his next words. He and Kurt were attracting some curious looks from passengers in their respective carriages, but he couldn't find the will to care. It might have been unorthodox, but Blaine had never experienced such an immediate connection with someone, especially not one based simply on body language, facial expression and the written word (however rushed and entirely unworthy of literary recognition). It was new, and different, and actually sort of wonderful. Pure, somehow, and unforced.

*I do, actually. In fact, I feel exactly the same. Maybe it's an Ohio thing?* Blaine paused momentarily, feeling the pull of something he'd buried long ago in order to focus on his academics, and it had been a while since he'd actually even felt the spark of something. Something that might have the potential to be, well, *something*. Pen poised above the paper, he decided to throw caution to the wind and just go for it. *I don't mean to presume anything, but would you like to have coffee with me sometime and we can talk about it some more?*

Blaine watched as Kurt's eyes scanned the page once, twice, three times, before meeting his own with a small quirk of the lips.

*Do you do this often, Blaine?*

Self-deprecatingly, Blaine shook his head. *You mean, ask out insanely good-looking fashion majors by essentially passing notes? No. Not through notes, at least.* Unable to resist the urge, he added a wink at the end.

Kurt laughed, and oh, what Blaine wouldn't have given to be able to hear him, to hear the effect that he'd had. His response was short, two words above eleven digits written large enough for Blaine to read: *Call me.*

Just then, the train rumbled beneath Blaine's feet and his ears were filled with the grinding and crunching of the engine coming back to life. Frantically, Blaine did his best to scribble down the number, head bobbing up and down as he made sure to not miss it, but the train was already beginning to pull away and he couldn't make out the final three digits. He tried to gesture to Kurt, but in the end he could make only a guess. The last he saw of Kurt was his palm pressed against the perspex, and then all he could see were the dark walls of the tunnel.

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Taking the escalator two steps at a time, Blaine stared at his phone with frigid air whipping around him, and willed the bars of his signal indicator to reappear. As soon as one blinked into blue presence, he made his way through the ticket gate and dialed the number he had so quickly written down, praying that he'd guessed those last three digits correctly. Even if Kurt hadn't arrived at his stop yet, his voicemail would probably confirm it either way. One-handed, he pulled his coat tighter by the lapels, and raised the phone to his ear in time to hear it ring.

"Please be the right number, please be the right number, please let me have this," he muttered under his breath as the ringing continued.

*"Hi, it's Laura. Leave a message and I'll—"*

"Dammit!" he exclaimed with far more volume than was strictly necessary, pocketing his phone and studiously avoiding the startled looks from those in the vicinity.

It was impossible. How many combinations could there be of those last three digits? Thousands, at least. Why couldn't he have had the presence of mind to grab his phone and take a picture?

It wasn't like he was in Camden regularly—his shopping and socializing tended to take place almost exclusively in and around Covent Garden's Jubilee Market or along the south bank of the Thames. Kurt had said he'd just finished work, yes, but 'work' could be anywhere, and he hadn't been wearing a uniform of any kind. *Now there's a thought—no, Blaine.*

There was nothing more he could do in the face of his missed chance, so he braced himself against the cold, adopted the old British 'stiff upper lip' adage, and left the station.

"And what time do you call this, Mister I'm-never-late-for-anything?" Lucy greeted him in her strong Suffolk accent (or so she had told Blaine upon his polite inquiry as to where she was from originally), pushing off the wall she'd been leaning against and stubbing out her dropped cigarette with the toe of her boot. Blaine wrinkled his nose at the sight of it, but the wind had already carried the smell away and he hugged her all the same.

"I'm so sorry, Lu," he said sincerely as they began walking to the market. "My train got stopped somewhere in the middle of a tunnel after Euston. Fault on the line, or something."

"Hey, no worries. I know better than anyone how that goes," Lucy replied, rolling her eyes and shoving her gloved hands into the pockets of her cropped white jacket. "Did you see any fit men?"

"Excuse me?"

"I read this article today in the Metro on my way to uni," Lucy explained. "It said that the Northern line has the sexiest passengers. You were on the Northern line from Embankment, right?"

"Yeah," Blaine answered, accepting a flyer for the Electric Ballroom from a passing teenager with more facial piercings than he'd ever seen on a person since coming to London.

"'Yeah', you were on the Northern line, or 'yeah', you saw someone fit?" Lucy prompted after a few moments of silence.

"Both," Blaine said. Despite his usual reticence to talk about his love life (or lack thereof, since The Big Break-Up with Nate a year prior to moving to London), all Lucy had had to say was, "Don't give me that shit, Blaine. You're going to talk and I'm going to listen, and then you're going to buy me donuts," and that particular barrier between them had vanished, mere days after they were paired up for an assignment in one of Blaine's classes. Out of the small circle of friends he'd made at King's, she was the closest thing he had to a best friend.

"And?!"

"Ugh."

"Oh no. What happened?" Lucy asked sympathetically, and linked her arm through Blaine's.

"He was perfect, Lu," Blaine lamented.

"Tall, dark, and handsome?"

"Tall, medium-dark, and beautiful," he corrected, and launched into the story of his encounter with the man wearing the hippo-head brooch. He spared not a single detail, raising his voice as they passed by a bell ringer standing on the bridge over Camden Lock to describe the crystalline blue of his eyes, the flawless upward sweep of his hair, and the soft bite of wit with which he responded to Blaine's notes. As they approached the market, he'd barely been paying attention to their surroundings, and was just about to tell Lucy of the disastrous attempt at getting Kurt's number when he glanced up at the archway through which they were about to walk. "Wow."

"I know. This place used to be a horse hospital, for horses that got injured pulling the river barges," Lucy told him, gesturing up to the bronze horse busts that seemed to leap out of the dark bricks. Her fingers tightening in the crease of his elbow, she steered him inside, where his senses were assailed by the mingling smells of all different kinds of food. "God, I'm starving. Food, then shopping? You can finish telling me about your star-crossed tragedy when I've got my Bang Bang chicken fix."



Ten minutes later, when they were huddled together at a bench in the outdoor food court, through a mouthful of steamed rice Lucy asked, "So what happened after you asked him out?"

Toying with his plastic fork, Blaine sighed.

"What, he wasn't gay?"

"No, he was," Blaine said, and speared a piece of chicken but made no move to eat it. As good as it smelt, and as delicious as the sample piece he'd gotten from the kind-eyed Chinese vendor had tasted, he had little appetite. "At least, I think he was. I told him I didn't mean to presume anything and asked if he wanted to get coffee sometime, and he wrote down his number and said to call him."

"I'm not exactly seeing the problem here, B," Lucy said slowly, taking another mouthful of food.

"The problem is that I was in the middle of writing down his number and the fucking train pulled away," Blaine said, finally dropping his fork and slumping against the back of the bench.

Lucy regarded him with wide eyes at his colorful language—there had been numerous occasions where she'd observed aloud his tendency to shy away from profanity—and chewed once before swallowing. "Have you ever read the Metro?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"Don't you give me that, Blaine Anderson," she said, warning clear in her tone and the way she pointed her fork at him. "Just because you're in a mood, don't think you get to take it out on me. Especially when I might—*might*—have a solution."

Blaine sat up straighter at that, mind already beginning to race with questions that he couldn't keep from tumbling out of his mouth in a desperate stream. "What are you saying? Do you know him? Do you know where he works?"

"Calm down, dear," Lucy said, rolling her eyes. "No, I don't know anyone called Kurt. Now, do you read the Metro?"

"That's the newspaper, right? The free one at the tube stations?" Blaine asked, trying to conceal his disappointment.

Lucy nodded. "There's a section called *Rush Hour Crush* where people write messages to other people they've seen on the tube and want to get in contact with," she said, before her voice took on a dreamy quality. "'You sat opposite me in a leopard print dress and red shoes, between Temple and Monument at three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Would love to get to know you, please get in touch.' Things like that. Some of them are downright creepy, but there are some that are so adorable. You know, that's one thing I wish they would do—get people to write in with success stories after using the column."

Blaine considered Lucy's words for a long moment, twirling the end of his fork between his fingertips. Did Kurt even read the Metro? What if his hypothetical message in fact turned out to be downright creepy? What if Kurt got the impression that Blaine just never bothered to call and saw the message but chose to ignore it?

"I don't know," he said, and voiced his concerns.

"You'll never know unless you try," Lucy said. "I can look at it before you send it in, if you want. Make sure you don't come across as some weirdo stalker type. Although if the cap—"

"The cap does not fit, Lucy. The cap is for a head entirely not mine," Blaine interrupted wearily. "Never again am I letting you talk me into dressing up as a private investigator for Halloween and then meeting you in the park across from the house."

"It was supposed to be ironic. And how was I to know you'd take it so far?"

"It's no fun if it's not authentic. The binoculars completed the outfit."

"To be fair, you carried off the trench coat surprisingly well."

"'Surprisingly' well?"

"You know. Because you're short."

A beat passed between them, and Lucy rested her chin on her hand and bared her teeth at Blaine in what he thought was probably meant to be an angelic smile.

"So, d'you want my help or not?"

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Blaine sent emails every day for a week before his message was one of those published. Having managed to get a seat for once, he was eating a bacon and cheese croissant he'd picked up at Delice de France (the one extravagance he allowed himself each week) and thumbing through a copy of the Metro someone had left on the seat next to him. Under the section header *Metro Talk*, there was the little teal box titled *Rush Hour Crush*, containing four messages. The first three were charming—Smiley Asian Guy wanted to take Quiet Blonde Girl out for a coffee, Anon wanted the redhead on the Victoria line to know she made a day better just by being there, and Shy French Girl wanted the boy with the orange rucksack to know he had the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen—and then, the fourth of four, was Blaine's.

As his eyes landed upon it, he almost dropped his croissant in shock—the number of submissions the newspaper must have received for that section every day was probably gargantuan, and he'd begun to lose hope that his would ever be picked. He and Lucy had constructed it together: short enough that it wouldn't automatically be rejected, but with enough detail that, hopefully, no one else would confuse it with their own encounter. And there it was, in black and white and teal, for all of London and beyond to see.

*To the tall, designer-clad man traveling on the Northern line last week: our trains broke down and we wrote notes to one another, but I missed your number. Get in touch? Exchange student from NY.*

Looking around the carriage at his fellow passengers, a large percentage of whom also had their noses buried in the paper, he pictured Kurt's eyes lingering on that section, as his own had done ever since Lucy talked to him about it. Not that he would be so narcissistic as to assume, but Blaine couldn't help wondering if anyone had ever left a message for him. After all, there had been that week-long, eye-contact-only flirtation with a blond guy who had looked like he could have been a Calvin Klein model back when Blaine had first arrived in London (the guy had seemed particularly amused when he caught Blaine turning his underground map upside down but had never offered his assistance, and in the end, that was what had ended the flirty glances from Blaine's end of the carriage).

All he could do was hope, and as the train pulled into Embankment, he folded his copy of the Metro and slipped it into his bag.

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Late December saw Blaine flying home for the holidays, and he spent a happy—albeit quiet, owing to Cooper's absence—two weeks with his parents and various family friends. It was during those all too frequent quiet times—when his father had gone up to his study and his mother was fussing around the house—that he found his thoughts drifting toward Kurt. He would stand before the French doors and look out at a pristine blanket of snow, his fingers curled around a mug of coffee that was still too hot, picturing Kurt in Ohio for the holidays. Had he come back, too? Was he suffering through a huge family Christmas with dry turkey and endless helpings of Brussels sprouts because his mother was also of the opinion that he was 'still a growing boy'? Would he spend a lonely evening in the back yard building a bow-tied snowman with only fireflies for company? Did he have someone in his hometown to kiss at midnight on New Year's?

It was insane. Clearly, Blaine had some sort of fixation problem.

It didn't stop him when he got back to London, however, and his second message appeared in the newspaper on January 3rd.

*To the blue-eyed man wearing a red coat and white Doc Martens: it's been a month and I still think of you on the rare occasion that I step onto the Northern line. Get in touch? Exchange student from NY.*

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The first Wednesday of February, Blaine caught the Northern line from Embankment to Leicester Square, and changed onto the Piccadilly line to get to Covent Garden. It was Lucy's birthday, and Blaine and their group of friends were taking Lucy to Rockaoke at the Roadhouse, an American-style diner that had happy hour every night of the week. The wind whipped through the station as he walked briskly from the elevator that had brought him up to street level, and held his Oyster card as he got into the line for the ticket gate.

When Blaine reached the other side, jostling his way through the crush of confused tourists and impatient Londoners, someone pushed past him and knocked his card from his hand. He crouched to pick it up, just in time to see a white flash of passing Doc Martens in his periphery, accompanied by the scent of earthy, citrusy cologne. Almost leaving his jaw behind, Blaine straightened and whipped around, standing firm against the disgruntled passengers pushing past him. By the time his eyes landed upon that same sweep of hair he remembered so well, disappearing beneath a denim blue scarf pulled high and tight, Kurt was already stepping through the closing doors of the elevator, and then was gone.

When Blaine's turn came at Rockaoke, he sang of missed opportunities and chances left untaken. With a renewed vigor, he began sending messages to the Metro again, and it took only three days for the latest to appear, nestled in the second spot of three.

*To my Northern Line note-writing friend from December: I saw you at Covent Garden station the other day. If you'd still like to have coffee with me, get in touch? Exchange student from NY.*

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"What are you looking at me like that for? It couldn't hurt, right?"

"Lucy..." Blaine trailed off, exhaling slowly and pinching the bridge of his nose. A week's worth of copies of April's Metro were spread out before him on the floor, all open to the Metro Talk page. "Please don't think I'm not grateful and appreciative of what you've tried to do for me, but I told you at the beginning of last month that I'd decided to move on. I wasn't getting anywhere, and I turned down three offers of dates because I was holding out for someone that's... Just a dream."

"Kurt."

"Yes, that's his name."

"Blaine, look at me," Lucy said firmly. "Kurt."

"What are you—"

"Your eyes lit up. Just now, when I said his name, your eyes lit up."

"Stop," Blaine groaned, drawing his knees up to his chest and burying his face.

"Blaine," Lucy said gently, and he raised his eyes just far enough to meet hers. She held out his phone to him, the screen displaying a draft email already addressed to the appropriate department. "One last try?"

*To the man with the hippo-head brooch: a part of me misses you even though we've never properly met. Is it just me? Please get in touch. Exchange student from NY.*

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Four days later, Blaine was heading home after seeing a play at Hampstead Theatre with some friends from college. He was approaching the escalator at Camden Town station when his phone buzzed in his pocket and, upon pulling it out, the screen showed eight new emails that had come through all at once. Making a mental note to finally download the Very Important Update he'd been avoiding for over a week, he disinterestedly scrolled through his inbox—mostly newsletters and mailing lists to which he hadn't yet gotten around to unsubscribing—until his eyes lit upon the oldest one. Stepping onto the escalator, his thumb momentarily hovered above the subject line before he opened it.

**FROM:** Crush at UK Metro

**TO:** Blaine Anderson

**DATE:** Tuesday 14 April 2015, 11:27AM (GMT)

**SUBJECT:** Re: Message from NY exchange student

Blaine,

My name is Elliott and I'm the administrator of the *Rush Hour Crush* column. I've been hoping that your rush hour crush would get in contact—your messages are so sweet! They always brighten up my day.

Guess who I received an email from this morning? I'm hoping that it's legitimate—he's included a few details which I hope verify his identity—and that you two finally get to meet up properly. You'll have to tell me the story some time if it all works out!

Best of luck,

Elliott

**Attached email message from Kurt Hummel:** *To the devastatingly handsome man in the navy coat, with curly hair and hazel eyes, who wrote notes to me while we were stranded on the Northern Line: I wondered for so long why you never called, though I did suspect that you didn't get a chance to take my number down in time. My roommate showed me your message, the one that mentioned my hippo-head brooch, and I am hoping against hope that "exchange student from NY" is you. I'd still like to get that coffee—send me an email if you haven't given up on me yet.*

For a moment, all Blaine could do was stare. He had promised himself that that last message was exactly that: the last message. He couldn't keep fruitlessly pining for something that had happened five months

prior; what if the love of his life came calling and he let a whirlwind romance pass him by because he was hung up on some beautiful stranger he'd once passed time with on a train?

But finally, Blaine had a response. Intangible though it was, he had it. After only a moment's fleeting trepidation, he flipped his phone sideways and began tapping out a new email. He was three words in, however, when he caught the faintest hint of earth and citrus on the air that breezed past.

His head snapped up and to the right, just in time to see a man striding quickly up the left side of the opposite escalator, head bowed as he thumbed through something on his phone.

*Kurt.*

"Kurt!" Blaine called out, but Kurt kept on moving. Turning himself fully, he called out again, but to no avail.

Leaving no room for even the merest shadow of a logical thought process, Blaine shoved his phone back into his pocket, stepped to the left, and ran back up the downward-traveling escalator. The journey back up the two thirds of the way he'd already gone was arduous, and as he reached the top his thighs burned with the sudden burst of exertion, but finally, after five months of hoping and waiting and wishing and more waiting, Blaine had the possible man of his dreams in his sight, less than twenty feet from him. Quite honestly, he didn't care if his damn thighs ached.

"Kurt, wait!"

The closer Blaine got, it became clear why Kurt wasn't turning—it wasn't his phone through which he'd been scrolling, but his iPod, and the wires from a pair of earphones disappearing beneath the high collar of his tailored black jacket were only just visible. As Kurt approached the ticket gate, Blaine ran faster, and just as Kurt waved his Oyster card over the sensor, Blaine's hand landed on his shoulder.

Kurt turned with a start, eyes widening even further when they came to focus on Blaine.

"Oh my god, it's you!" he exclaimed, whipping the buds from his ears. "I can't believe this, I sent that email just today, and... I'm sorry it's taken me so long, my roommate only *just* showed me that message you sent. Have you sent many? I want you to know that it's not just you, and—oh my god, I'm rambling. To you. Again. Sorry."

Breathing heavily, Blaine rested his palms on his thighs as he fought to catch his breath. Kurt's voice was clear and higher than he might have expected, with a wry lilt and a hint of music.

"Are you okay?" Kurt asked, concern plain in his eyes, which Blaine could now see were a brighter blue than he even remembered, outlined in a shade of green that he couldn't name, and flecked with tiny specks of a hazel yellow. *Gorgeous*. As Blaine simply took him in, Kurt wrung his hands. "Please say something."

Dropping his head for a moment with a smile he couldn't have held back even if he'd wanted to, Blaine took a deep breath, and looked back up at Kurt. "There you are. I've been looking for you *forever*."

- *fin*