

The moment the bus comes to a stop is the moment my heart starts to break. Up until then I'm able to pretend that everything is fine, and that nothing is happening. But when the bus itself sags down in defeat and the driver begins to mutter and swear under his breath, I have to admit that things might not be okay. A few minutes later, when he tells us to "sit tight and get comfortable," he may as well be asking me to die. This whole thing was a bad idea. It was stupid of me to leave Wellington. Not when I knew how risky it could be. Now, I might be paying the ultimate price.

Desperately, I try to call Juliet and Miho, even borrowing a phone from a stranger in hopes they'd have better reception. They don't. I don't even bother the driver - the way he stomps around, yelling into his comms device, tells me everything I need to know. With the lights of the city in the distance, it feels worse than if we were stranded in the middle of nowhere. Close enough to see, but too far to walk to.

Along with some of the other passengers, I pace around uselessly outside, hoping for a miracle or an opportunity to hitchhike. Neither arrive, and soon we return to our seats. Hunched over in my seat, I find my notebook and a pencil. Flipping back to that day, I skim through the lines I wrote until the ones that started them all.

*August 17th - Don't know if I should laugh or cry. The most curious person came into the Bellhouse today. She had fluffy ears and a tail, and eyes that I'm sure I won't forget. Partially because she's beautiful. Partially because I managed to spill her drink on the counter in front of her. I hope she comes back again. I'd like to know more about this "Miho."*

It's rather the same from there. Accounts of the time she and I spent together, with varying degrees of attention and affection sprinkled in. Reading through these words, my mind fills in all the blanks, and the parts I can't capture in prose. There's so much more to my friendship with Miho than can fit in these pages, and there's already an awful lot of it in there.

Turning to the next blank page, I forget about the clock as I start to write everything that I can remember. Every tiny detail. My hand cramps but I don't stop - I can't stop! My only hope, against the tears and the pain and the aching feeling of inevitable loss, is to hope my feelings are enough. That in the face of Miho's magic, maybe there's something different here, now, about me and about us.

Everyone around me cheers or expresses relief as the driver announces a replacement is on the way, but I'm numb to it. There's not enough time for it to get here and back to Welly. He may as well be speaking to me from death row.

As the final minute comes closer, I try to hold an image of Miho clearly in my head. My hand struggles to keep up with my thoughts as I jot it all down; everything I have to try to preserve my memory of who she is. I write, filling page after page as fast as I can.

*Her name is Miho and she's unlike anyone you've met. She's a fox from Korea and she's still new to being a person, but she teaches you a lot about it too. She hasn't learned to be bitter and cynical yet, or to hate the world, or to*

Another passenger bumps against me as they pass by, knocking the pencil out of my hand. They apologize as they hand it back to me and go on their way, and I go back to my notebook that I have open.

[small pause]

I frown as I look down at the half-finished sentence waiting for me. I lost my train of thought entirely, and don't remember quite what it was that I was about to write down. Ugh, I hate it when that happens.