Breathe

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train schedules, lost belongings, bad weather, horrible weather—in the fall we go to Nikko just as the Japanese mainland is getting slammed by a typhoon, and we spend the weekend with dripping hair and flooded socks (but taking the best pictures of our lives).

In the early spring, we even book a trip out to Okinawa for a few days, figuring that going during the tourist off-season would be more enjoyable. We use the cheapest airline we can find and wait for our flight in the shittiest terminal I've ever seen. Cierra buys some rice balls from a kiosk, which are just awful. The rice crunches in our teeth and the tuna sticks in the back of my throat like dry cereal, and she laughs and promises we'll get some actual good food when we land, but three hours later she's puking in a Naha Airport public toilet. So instead of browsing shopping streets and sampling traditional Ryukyuan cuisine our first night in Naha, a city so beautiful it's unfair, we sprawl on the pull-out couch at our Airbnb watching Netflix, drinking ginger tea, and eating saltine crackers and beef bowls bought for cheap at the convenience store nearby. The real you-get-what-you-pay-for experience.

Still, we have fun.

That's the thing about being with her.

The Skyliner, of course, arrives right at 1:27.

Cierra helps me haul all three suitcases onto the train and up into the luggage rack. Adam/Avery/Aaron fucks off to another car, thankfully. The arm I twisted is still sore, but the interior of the train is blissfully cool, and my legs don't meld with the cloth seats like they did the chairs in the waiting room, so it's heaven for all I care.

It's only about thirty or forty minutes from Nippori Station to the Naha International Terminal. Now that I'm out of the heat resting a bit, the only thing I can focus on is the counting down of minutes, which soon is going to turn into the counting down of months, to days, to hours.

I tighten my fingers, threaded through Cierra's.

As though reading my mind, she whispers, “It's only until December. I only have to go home for Christmas, and I'll spend the entire rest of the break with you. Hang in there.”

“I know.”

I think about home, briefly. Cierra's not there, but my parents are. It's hardly a fair trade.

“I'm aware that it's a huge loss,” she says. “I don't know what you're going to do without me. I am irreplaceable.”

“Effervescent,” I reply.

“A real gift to humanity.”

“I'm not sharing you with the rest of humanity.”

I see her smile out of the corner of my eye.