

Da Coryza:

1:14 "I'm not sure... my feet kinda hurt >.> had to walk to Ethro and back today. Bus had problems"

1:15 "Say... I know I'm doing a lot by popping the question, but"

1:15 "Do you wanna hang out at my place instead?"

You:

1:18 "Like, meet up? :o"

1:19 "For real?"

Da Coryza:

1:21 "Yeah! :3"

1:21 "It would be super fun! Besides, you've been to a couple of my shows so it's not like we've never met"

1:22 "Even if we are practically ornm oKA X3"

1:22 "Gah! Pen pals* X3"

1:22 "My fingers are too fat =.=

You:

1:24 "Pffff"

1:24 "English?"

Da Coryza:

1:25 "Shut uuuuup"

You:

1:25 "*pokes* :3"

1:26 "I'm kidding! Um gosh I'm awfully shy thou"

1:26 "Friggin send button. I mean... I could tryyy"

Lucibelle finally let go of the 'y' key after a few solid seconds, sliding her rock-hard thumb to the 'lock screen' button at the side of her phone. Her eyes flickered curiously at the pink sparks of energy guiding themselves along cracks in its surface, running along in factory emulation of natural ley lines. The Bergamasca bleated to life with a wide yawn, flat tongue lolling before her alabaster jaws clacked right back shut. The sheep arched her back over her chair and stretched her legs to the chair opposite her at the table, diving into a lengthy stretch. Rather than sit around and wait for a reply, she rose to a stand.

Lucibelle swept a glance across her dingy apartment. She'd cleaned it to the best of her ability, but... well, it was hard to phrase that in a way that didn't sound like an excuse. She had her dinner table, a square alcove just across from the front door, and a hallway which split off into a cramped bedroom and ever crampier latrine.

...Cozy. That's how she would describe it. With a soft, bleating sigh, Lucibelle set forth to the relative freedom of her kitchen. Her small cloven hooves click-clacked against the cold, carpetless floor as though she wore boots of ice.

"I could try," she puffed in thought. Her hand fell aloft the waist-level countertop; lithe was her figure, but padded with wool and stock, particularly around her waist. "I could try."

Her thoughts merged into a dust devil of deliberation. As a new migrant to town, she had met Tali before, but only at her magic shows. For all intents and purposes, pen pals described them best—and now Tali, her idol, was inviting her over to hang out? Her superior in the ways of magic who had long graduated Ethro, the mage's college, in which she had only *just* enrolled? It simply couldn't be!

And yet, perhaps *that* was of no consequence. No, she thought, driving a rocky hoof into the alabaster flooring: No, that wasn't the prospect that frightened her at all. She would give *anything* to meet Tali in person! Why, just the very thought... it was all she could do not to bring her hands to her mouth and squeal like a little lamb! In fact... well, sure, it *was* a bit of a scary prospect; scary in a good way—scary in a meeting a friend for realsies kind of way! Exciting, nerve-twisting...

"Bah, what the—!" she remarked aloud. She looked down to see her countertop was—ugh, level with her chin? "Already?" she finished her thought. And there it was—the number one reason *not* to fling herself into something that might make her nervous like meeting the proprietress of the stage herself. She bounced on the tips of her hooves, trying desperately to match the missing foot or so in height, but was no use.

Her lips curled into a pout as she uselessly kicked the cupboard that used to be below her thighs, its wooden surface rattling as if to warn her "No, whatever you're thinking is not a good idea." And for a moment, hand thoughtfully burying itself in a wreath of her neckwool, she almost listened. She never knew why beyond the curious bell she always had fastened to her tail, the semi-literal seat of her magical prowess, but so it was that fear—and its lesser offspring, stress and nervousness—summoned magical recoil to shrink her as though to hide her away and make her disappear from the source of the adversity. It was ever a cause of annoyance more than anything... nothing serious.

What was it, if not serious? Something that would make her reconsider? Surely not. And what was their meetup if not an escape from her building-block apartment? Several things, really, but that was certainly one of them.

Instead, it only took a few moments of non-thought before she rolled her shoulders, then found herself giddily prancing back to her kitchen table, wooly stump-tail wriggling excitedly as she dove stomach-length across it just to reach her phone again, the annoyance of her

newfound height now long discarded. Ignoring the gap of about seven minutes between her last message, her fingers blazed a trail across the plastic bumps.

You:

1:35 "You know what, meet me at the Loom!"

1:36 "Wanna make it a sleepover?"

I can't believe this is happening! This is happening, this is happening!

Slow footsteps sounded out like marshmallows against carpet. The dulled scents of lavender incense did little to assuage their owner much beyond the occasional pause before the muffled clip-clop of her hooves resumed, each a little faster than before. It was out of no sense of urgency; rather, the worry that she would keep her host waiting too long kept her going. The pale, snowy ovine waltzed into the room again with hobbling hooves, but only barely, content to simply hang a hand on the edge of the doorway.

She managed to stifle her excitement just long enough to speak properly. "Okay," came the slow bleat of a sleepy Lucibelle. Her wooly hips left no room to sashay them between the walls. "So *you're* the one that wanted to get right down to practice. Whatcha got?"

The figure opposite Lucibelle sat with thighs queenly crossed at the edge of her bed-throne. "Mmm?" Tali purred. She shifted the position of her chin on the pad of her palm, twisting like a royal. "Oh, that. What I 'got' is work ethic—y'know, something that usually helps you survive at Ethro. School in general, really!"

"Ugh, come on, Tali. If I wanted a lecture I'd still be in class right about now," Lucibelle puffed, hugging the laces of her teal nightgown. It was with a harrumph that her sheep snout twisted to the side. The leopardess was smart—too damn smart, really. "I mean come on; they only give us one week to create a spell that makes fireworks out of the vapor in the air. All I can do is freeze it! Doesn't *that* count?"

Tali managed to stifle a girlish giggle and rustled her shoulders, golden locks falling aloft them. "I'm not lecturing! Just calling you out on your corner-cutting, that's all. Because you are my friend and I don't let friends cheat on cantrip homework," Tali sang, voice lilting. She shifted. "So instead of that, we can practice! Y'now," the leopardess said, turquoise eyes rolling to their rims before settling right on Lucibelle, "If you still want to."

"Y-yeah right," Lucibelle admitted. She finally detached from the doorway and made her home on the seat of a beanbag cushion. With a flump she settled atop its surface, which quickly caved in to her modest weight and suspended her hooves above the carpet. Courage was

difficult in the presence of her idol, but through force of will it came. “I think—you know what I think?—I think it’s well past your bedtime to be telling me what to do, showstopper.”

Tali gently bapped her companion’s horns as she unfurled, eliciting a derisive bahh. “I wouldn’t dream of having you over if I had work tomorrow. I know I can’t resist staying up ‘til... what time is it?” The leopardess stole a glance sideways, at the violet luminance forming numbers atop her end table. Welp. She probably shouldn’t have done that.

“Late?”

Tali nodded. “Honestly, the only thing you really need to do is follow your instructor’s advice.” The leopardess flumped to the back of her queen-sized bed with a motion that Lucibelle assumed was practiced. Likely the result of a strict sleep schedule. “When I was enrolled, they’d give you a long standing lecture on the step-by-step of exactly what you have to do to get by the bare minimum result out of the spell they want you to cast. It’s just to prove you can.”

The sheep of snowy wool leaned back and opened her palm, fiddling with a cold blaze that chilled into existence upon it. It made a good distraction, but did little to curb her stutters. “S-should I do just that?” She gazed into the thermal voice coalescing before her, then with a clutch of her hand stifled it. “If I do, I don’t really feel like I’ve learned anything. I wanted to go a little past that... o-or at least put my own spin on it.”

“Awww, Lucy!” Tali’s head peeked over the edge of her bed, turquoise eyes aglow and everything else concealed by velvet blankets. “You’re just a little bit of a bookworm. Just like me!”

“A lot of a bookworm in your case,” Lucibelle jabbed. She couldn’t help a giggle, an awkward and endearing sound that could be described as a repetitious, lilting bahh.

“You say it like it’s a bad thing,” Tali harrumphed, disappearing back over the top of the bed. The springs of the only bed in the room groaned with pressure. “It’s been really awesome meeting you, Lucibelle.” She snickered beneath her breath and continued, “It feels so weird saying your name out loud like that. Probably because I’m used to just typing it out. L-U-C-Y.”

Lucibelle laughed—a soft, nervous tittering that accompanied her thoughts. “It is a little surreal, now that you mention it. Meeting you in person has been, like... b-bahhsically the coolest thing ever.” Her hands flew to her muzzle upon hearing the bleating tic escape. However, Tali didn’t seem to notice. “A-anyway. I’m, um, r-really glad we got this time to see each other a-and... y’know, just talk about stuff. You have a really nice place. Er, I mean, I know I’ve said that a couple times now...”

Oddly enough, the ensuing silence placated her more than it made her worry. The sheep quickly lost herself in the crashing waves in her thoughts; she crossed her legs and leaned

back, wooly hips buried deep, deep into the beanbag. With her neck supported by the snowy fleece that poured down her shoulders like a powdery avalanche, the sheep couldn't resist shutting her eyes. It took willpower simply to open them again.

And when she did, uncountable minutes having passed, she turned her head toward the general direction of Tali. She still hadn't answered. "Tali? You awake?" She raised her neck; the prone, sprawled figure forming landmasses beneath the silky blankets answered her question, as did the leopard's snort shortly afterward. "Ah. 'Kay. Guess we're practicing tomorrow."

Too sleepy... she was too sleepy. The task of forcing herself up and trotting down the hall to the guest bedroom that Tali had no doubt painstakingly set up proved too daunting a task, however guilty she may have felt about her efforts going to waste. Her eyelids fell heavy over her vision, and there they stayed.

The trial of sleep was both fitful and slow. As Lucibelle finally withdrew from the world of the dreaming, she recollected terrible fragments of her stay, droning to life without ever once opening her eyes. Fitful; that was the word she would use. She knew it would be.

The guilt of falling asleep right in her room never could be the issue—it was discarded so very easily—but the anxiety from the very prospect of being in the presence of her idol was quite possibly the most nerve-wracking experience she had ever had. "That alone was enough to turn me into a nervous wreck," the sheep puffed, noting the groggy crags of her voice. Still, she did not open her eyes. She could tell that she'd rolled plenty in her sleep though; she was flat on her stomach and certainly didn't need her vision to tell her that.

Instead she stirred bemused. *Hah*, she thought. Incredible. Even the *idea* of meeting Tali the stage mage in the flesh had shrunk her back in her apartment. It was *that* scary of a thought—and just as impossible. Lord, would that her curse could separate fear from nervousness... she would bear a much more approachable character, of that she was sure!

Hmph. Suppose it was time she woke up in earnest. Hopefully she would wake up first—ooh, but if not then maybe Tali had already made breakfast? Oh lordie the thought. Slowly, her lids fluttered open and she pushed her thin, wooly arms against the floor, eventually rising into a stand. Her lips widened into a yawn through which she managed an amiable, "Good morning, Tali."

No answer came. And when her eyes began to stir awake in earnest, de-blurring to take in her alien surroundings, it quickly became clear that whether or not Tali was awake had nothing to do with her unresponsiveness. A single great spire of wood, littered with artistic engravings of the tree it once was a part of, stretched high to support a continental monolith smothered in shadow. The floor wasn't a cozy beanbag—it wasn't even the carpet floor that she

remembered so distinctly, with its greying knots of fiber and comfortable pressure against her hooves, no. Now, all was a cottony badlands that stretched without end. Foreign flora coiled into strange geometries bearing strangely intricate detail as though she trod on a canopy of silvery forests. None of it made sense—not until she looked up.

“No... no way this happened. There is just no way.” The ovine rubbed her eyes and her heart rose to an inconsistent pace. Where there would have been sheets haphazardly sprawled off the side of Tali’s bed, instead there lie infinite parapets, sheets stretching up and up as a silken wall that went on forever to the shrunken sheep. In the opposite direction lay an amorphous brown mass—no, goddamn it that could not be the beanbag! It simply couldn’t!

A loud rumbling tore open the skies and forced Lucibelle to clap her hands to her ears. It was guttural, like the great roaring of a slumbering beast—and then, as if she needed more proof, it hit her. “T-Tali...?” Shoot, shoot, shoot! The plants were simple knots in the carpet, the carved wood a leg of the bed... and she dared not think about the rest.

Chewing her lip, the ovine thought and thought until she recalled the contents of her pockets. All objects on her person would shrink with her—her clothes, her tail-mounted bell, and most importantly... oh, thank goodness, her phone was perfectly intact. She retrieved the silver egg-shaped object and flipped it open, rushing to her most recent conversation.

Lucibelle nodded firmly as her short tail sashayed. The jingle of her bell kept her sane and then some. For once, her message came slowly and with immense care. She couldn’t afford to rush this one. If Tali was asleep and a single buzz woke her up, she would be doomed.

You:

9:52 Tali don’t leave the room please please please I’m small and right next to your bed please be careful!

Okay, maybe not as slowly as she’d like to imagine.

How absolutely absurd it sounded was of no concern to her. Her thumb slammed the green button. *Sending... sending... come the hell on already!*

The sky exploded into vibrating shockwaves. The very air molecules seemed to erupt many miles above her head—Lucibelle stepped back in recoil, but not start, focusing her mind on the calming ringing of her replica carillon that accompanied her movements. The sheep managed a glance to her screen again: “*Sent.*”

“Oh thank god.” The ovine clutched her chest and loosened her shoulders, phone still tight in her palm. She was worried the signal may not reach her at all. A few moments passed before a low stirring sounded out from above once again, during which time Lucibelle found her

gaze tracing ever upward along the draped curtain of wayward blankets, hoping beyond hope she'd be able to catch a glimpse of her friend before too long.

Her attention didn't last. Elsewhere did her eyes sway, finding of note only discarded clothing strewn hither and thither—the room was well-kept in a way she wouldn't have been able to appreciate at any other size. Now, however, the immaculate detail only terrified her. Was she any more noteworthy now than the specks of lint and debris that the leopardess made sure and well never made past the door? She certainly hoped so...

After a couple minutes, she needed not wonder for long—blankets far, far above stirred in accordance with Tali's almost perfect circadian rhythm. A little early, no doubt thanks to the errant resonance of her phone, but still remarkably punctual. Lucibelle watched lumps kick free from their blanket prison, revealing themselves as four-toed digits that bled into spotted fur. First a heel, then an ankle, and finally a calf followed Tali as she swiveled upon the edge of the bed. Lucibelle could finally see the first glimpses of her celestial visage—if only the golden rivulets of hair and hints of a fuzzy chin from just over her all-encompassing lap. Eager to venture back into the waking world, the feline's toes stretched and splayed against the lower infrastructure of the bed's side, pressing their bus-sized magenta pads firmly into the wood.

Tali seemed to pause, looking at something. Lucibelle felt her hooves dig into the carpet as she watched—a squint, a press, another press, and then the same one as before. Her finger movements were mere blurs of gold from her vantage, but she could detect the blasé manner in which they moved—sleepy, curious, and succinct in their desire for an answer. She was typing.

The sheep felt a buzz in her pocket not long after. She tore away to check.

Da Coryza

9:56 “???”

A sense of dread filled the pockets of her chest.

“There aren't many ways to misunderstand that!” she bleated beneath her breath. The instinct to step back was ferocious, and eventually succeeded in reconciling with her conscious decisions if only for the comforting resonance of her bell that accompanied every step.

However, she soon wasn't the only one stepping. One meteoric impact slammed into the hushing carpeted earth after the other with a force that nearly sent the sheep feet into the air.

Lucibelle took in the source of the thundering cacophony—and indeed, how could she not? Four fuzzy, bus-sized toes slammed into the carpeted earth, scrunching and pulling up fibers like weeds as the sole behind them slapped down to join them. Gasping, the meek ovine took careful steps backward, pale hooves papping soundlessly. Where footsteps would be, her

short wooly tail jingled with every rock of her waist. She nearly stumbled from the sheer scope of her pen pal's physical form, who loomed like an overhead Armageddon all could behold.

"Ah, no!" She felt a pull against her ankle. Tugging her tiny hoof free from a low knot of carpet fiber, she began backpedaling with hollow, utterly muffled steps. "No, no, how can I... screw it—*Tali!*" After cupping them to her muzzle, her hands fell to her knees as she caught her breath. Yelling certainly didn't work. Turning to her side, she tore her gaze away to scan how much room she had to avoid the monolithic footfalls—articles of clothing and discarded footwear dotted the expansive forest of carpet like forgotten altars to her deific presence, while congealed teal dust graced the canopies in long-faded runic signs embedded into the floor for practice.

However, the simplest peripheral twitch yanked her gaze right back; thick, but dulled feline clawed jutted forth from each fuzzy digit, like curved knives that pressed divots into the carpet so faintly, so invisibly that Lucibelle knew she would never be able to see it in action at her normal height. A-and there was the most fleeting glimpses of pink, plush, almost... dare she say it, inviting pad that she could catch when the waking giant scrunched and stretched her gargantuan toes, still just acclimating to the temperature and texture of the earth they so put to shame. A blush most terrible and telling spilled across her cheeks.

"O-oh no, please... not now!" Perhaps in consequence, the sheep felt faint—a familiar, warming sensation strode along her spine like a terrified animal fleeing from something unknowable. She visibly cringed, teeth gritted, as magical energy forced her form to compact and shrink even further...

Knots in the carpet became gargantuan roots, little by little. Down she went before the set of deific digits that began to comprise her entire worldview, inch by inch, foot by foot. It expended great will not to attempt measuring herself by way of comparison, for she feared she would hit her limit before long. A flurry of curses sailed through the ovine's tired mind and her oval ears splayed anxiously like reeds in a breeze. *I'm only thankful that nobody's here to see this...* were her last thoughts before she tore her eyes away from those gargantuan—soft... plush, even—*No no no stop it, stop it!* She papped her tiny hands against her furious red cheeks as if to hide them.

However, interrupting her voyeurism was a biblical rush of wind that swept down on the infinitesimal ovine's world. The monolithic goddess that Lucibelle wanted desperately to call her friend fell to one knee, tendons thrumming in Tali's statuesque ankles and toes as every motion down to the most discrete twitch sent tremors echoing across the endless carpet expanse from its trembling epicenter. Lucibelle looked on in shivering awe, fist clutched to her mouth, as a sky of pink ending in four cloudlike digits careened with an utter slam of finality that forced her to shut her eyes.

There's just no point in moving, she thought. Whatever Tali did would encompass the surrounding several miles. Never once before had she felt so powerless as now—ironically, a circumstance that she could very easily have avoided.

However, her heart skipped several beats when she opened her eyes again.

Up until now, “within hundreds of feet away” had seemed like a humbling gap between two objects—far, far out of sight. But even though she had shrunk before, she had never been small enough for such a measurement to seem utterly inconsequential. A gargantuan mountain of keratin swallowed up the view before her, smothering even the tops of Tali's plush toes whose fur ran across like matted forestry for miles upon miles. One claw formed her very sky. Every grainy, chipped, but otherwise kempt detail was remarkably plain to see. The meteoric footfall had blackened the concaving earth with accumulated dirt and debris gathered on her soft, supple pads that surpassed cities in size and scale, pressing craters into the sunken ground before her. Her fragile heart practically failed to pulse until she remembered to breathe in: She was barely a twitch away from being stepped on.

And yet, Lucibelle quaked as she looked up further still, neck running sore before she fell to her woolly bottom altogether. Far above, Tali's head tilted with great care... eventually settling on the space just before her toes. Turquoise moonbeams finally cast themselves upon Lucibelle's form, preceded in height by Tali's hands cupped to her mouth.

The sheep brought her hands to her muzzle and covered her wordless mouth right back. Was it... was it not *Tali*, her idol and inspiration, who stared her down with those scrutinizing eyes? She was a monolith of spotted gold, like a perfect statuesque deity draped in violet silk—for a moment, she had almost believed her to be coated with objects of tribute rather than her own plain clothes that were simply magnified to levels of detail she had not thought comprehensible for mortal eyes. Every individual crease was a canyon that belonged, not an imperfection; every thread, a bridge one could cross.

All of a sudden, Tali's features seemed to flare up with recognition. The motion of a single palm sweeping to the ground and landing at the side of the impossibly small speck of wool... it simply shook her to her core. However, courage came, and Lucibelle took the cue. She clambered on as best she could, fingers digging harmlessly into the pad of her palm before throwing herself on top. She scrambled to nestle in a wrinkle, reminiscent of a dried river with its sheer depth and length.

Careful as a mother with her baby swaddled in cloth did Tali cradle her palms, bringing them close to her face. Her features became muddled masses of bright, curious colors, her gentle features warping into immense landscapes. Lucibelle quivered, but looked right into whatever portion of Tali's eyes that was physically possible. How Tali remained wordless throughout the whole ordeal was a wonder to her.

“Tali... I-I d-didn't—” she paused at the sound of her own knocking knees, a time she found it prudent to force down the lump in her throat. “I-I know it was selfish not to tell you... I did want to see you in person! And meet you and get to know you—really, I did, but then I also thought that of all people, you could figure... this!” The pint-sized poof motioned her arms around her as if to exacerbate her size. “Out! So... so I... I tried to wait until a better time to tell you.”

Ugh... *figure it out?* What was she thinking? That wouldn't make sense to anyone, least of all Tali, who stood there waiting for a well-worded, well-formed, and well-thought answer. Woe were her lips that could do little more than bleat and huff apologetically. Tali's celestial locks decorated her shoulders far below as she tilted her head, seeming to be caught up in discerning minute details to an unknown rhythm of thought and deliberation.

The titanic leopardess' eyes cast their feline glow over her pathetic body like turquoise moons, shifting, pouring lunar rays over her form with daggerlike pupils sharp enough to shear her wool right off even when dilated. Seeing them shift around with pinpoint precision within the ocean of their sclera, it was no longer a wonder that Tali's precise feline eyes could detect her, even with her impossible smallness. Lucibelle found herself looking down and away, anxiously watching her hooves shift of their own volition against the pink, padded earth. She was powerless against her instincts screaming at her rattled mind to flee, and powerless too to carry out their will. She dared crane up again. Tali's fingers hadn't moved; her lips which bore more resemblance to soft, velvety canyons were shut tight.

Tali, motionless, allowed her lips a tremble that locked Lucibelle's gaze upon it, unsure of whether it was going to speak or grant clarity into its terrifying depths. “Lucy...” Her voice sundered the very air with soft, unbelieving dulcets. “What... I... what happened to you?”

Lucibelle breathed in—it was difficult. She probably should have been more frightened, closer to her wit's end, perhaps even fainted, but all she could do was puff a sigh of relief. “T-this... wears off in a f-few hours.”