**Neighbourhood Road 1**

The rest of the day passes by in a blur, and before I know it I’m on my way home. This is the first day this week that I’ve been able to partake in my usual after school activity, and I find myself looking a little forward to spending some time at home by myself.

**Kitchen**

When I get home, I kick off my shoes and, suddenly getting a call from nature, head to the washroom. Strangely, the door is closed, so I open it to get inside…

*Thud!!*

?Mara: *Ow!*

There’s a yelp of pain behind the door. It turns out that the washroom was in use by a very familiar person...

Mara (neutral ouch): Ow, ow, ow...

Pro: …

Pro: Mara?

Mara (neutral frowning): That really hurt...

Mara (arms\_crossed put\_out): Were you trying to give me a concussion or something?

Mara (arms\_crossed hmph): I didn’t know you greeted your guests with aggravated assault.

Pro: ...

Mara (surprise surprise):

Pro: Those who haven’t been invited aren’t considered guests.

Mara: …

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): Am I not welcome?

Her expression turns serious. To any other person, it would look like she’s actually upset, but I’ve known Mara long enough to notice the way her face is slightly twitching — a hint of her attempt at suppressing her smile.

Mara (neutral sigh): I never thought you were this type of person, Pro.

Mara (neutral worried): I don’t know what to say. This feeling of betrayal…

Mara (laughing laughing):

I try to respond, but my attempt at a serious retort is ruined by the laughter that escapes through my mouth.

Mara (laughing recovering):

Pro: All right, all right.

Mara (neutral smiling):

Pro: So, to what do I owe this honour, your highness?

Mara (neutral neutral): Nothing in particular.

Mara (neutral fufu): Just wanted to find out about what happened earlier today.

Mara: Specifically how the conversation between my close friend and his new acquaintance went.

Pro: Ah. Lilith, right?

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh, so that’s her name? It sounds pretty.

Mara (excited excited): So, what’s she like? Soft and squishy?

She blinks at me hopefully.

Pro: Well, honestly... I don’t know.

Mara (neutral disappointed):

Mara visibly deflates.

Mara: Huh? You sure?

I give her a helpless shrug.

Pro: I asked how she was doing, and then she kinda...

Pro: ...walked away from me.

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh.

Mara (neutral nervous): Well, that’s what happens when you stare at a girl.

Mara (neutral neutral): If I were minding my own business, and some random dude walked up to me and started gawking at me, I don’t think I’d wanna talk to him either.

Pro: That’s fair…

Mara (neutral sigh):

Mara sighs in exasperation.

Mara (neutral neutral): Well, that’s that.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): I guess you can try again next time.

Pro: Try again…?

Mara (neutral earnest): Of course!

Mara (neutral smiling): She’s probably just cold on the outside, and really sweet on the inside. You know, like that common trope you see in anime. Tsundere.

Pro: I have a feeling she might be cold inside and out...

Mara (neutral neutral): Well…

Mara: She’s not.

Pro: Huh? How can you be so sure?

Mara (neutral thinking): Mmm…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Just a feeling.

Mara (neutral smiling): I trust my instincts, and if I trust them then you should too.

I sigh.

Pro: All right. If you say so...

Pro: I guess I’ll give it another go.

Mara (neutral satisfaction): That’s the spirit.

Mara (neutral neutral): Well, at the very least you have that other girl, right?

Pro: I did? Who?

Mara (excited excited): The really cute one.

Pro: Oh, Prim?

Mara nods.

Mara (neutral disappointed): You never told me how that went, either.

Pro: It was fine, I think.

Pro: She seemed a bit shy, but I don’t think she necessarily disliked talking to me.

Mara (neutral satisfaction): Nice, nice.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Maybe one day you’ll get close enough to her and make walking to school together a regular thing.

Mara (neutral fufu): I bet you’re always lonely when I leave you to go to school.

Pro: Maybe…

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: Actually, that sounds pretty good. I’ve been walking with you all this time, so changing things up seems kinda appealing…

Mara (neutral nervous): Huh…?

Pro: Maybe we can set up a schedule or something…

Mara: Hey, hold on…

Mara (neutral ouch):

I stop and flick Mara on the forehead.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly):

Pro: Just kidding.

Pro: Walking with you is enough for me.

Pro: I don’t really want to change the routine the two of us have.

Mara: …

Mara (ahem ahem):

She quickly regains her composure.

Mara (arms\_crossed indifferent): Can’t resist my excellent company, I see.

Mara: Understandable.

I jokingly shake my head.

Pro: Well, if you have a problem with it, then you’ll have to make your company less bearable.

Mara (neutral hehe):

Mara lets out a small laugh.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Impossible.

Mara (neutral neutral): Although...

Pro: Hm?

Mara: You’ll have to manage without me tomorrow. I can’t walk with you.

Pro: Oh, really?

Mara (neutral nervous): Yeah, sorry...

I’m about to ask her for more details, but then I hear the sound of my front door opening.

Mara (neutral neutral): Oops, looks like your mom is home. That’s my cue to leave.

Mara (waving smiling\_eyes\_closed): See you!

Mara (neutral wink):

As she heads towards the back door, she turns around and gives me a teasing wink.

Mara: Don’t miss me too much.

Pro: I’ll do my best.

Mara (exit):

And with a laugh, she’s gone, leaving me standing alone in the doorway of the washroom.

Mom: I’m back.

Mom (neutral confused): What are you doing?

Pro: Hm?

Pro: Oh, uh, using the washroom.

Mom (exit):

I walk in and close the door behind me, thinking of Mara’s parting words. I know she was joking, but in actuality there’s a pretty good chance that I’ll end up missing her at least a little bit tomorrow.