**Classroom**

Asher is already there when I get back to the classroom, and as we eat we discuss a new game that came out last week.

Eventually, lunch ends and is replaced with class, and after struggling to keep my eyes open for around half an hour I give in to my desires and start to doze off.

Teacher (arms\_crossed stern): Pro?

I jolt upwards, almost jumping out of my seat. Beside me, I hear Asher suppressing a laugh.

Pro: Oh, uh, yeah?

Teacher (arms\_crossed menacing): I was just making sure you weren’t sleeping in class again. After all, since we *just* talked about that yesterday, you wouldn’t *dream* of it, right?

Pro: Yes, that’s right.

Teacher (arms\_crossed sigh):

She sighs.

Teacher (neutral disappointed): Alright. Let’s continue then.

Teacher (exit):

That was close. If she called my name five seconds later, I would’ve been asleep already and probably wouldn’t have heard her. What would’ve happened afterwards is something I don’t want to think about.

Unsurprisingly, I manage to stay awake for the rest of the school day, and when Ms. Tran dismisses us I get up to stretch.

Asher (neutral smirk): That was close, wasn’t it?

Pro: Too close…

Asher (neutral smiling): At least you weren’t asleep yet.

Pro: Yeah…

Asher starts to pack up his things.

Asher (neutral curious): You going straight home?

Pro: Probably. How about you?

Asher (neutral thoughtful): Some of us are gonna go grab something to eat. I’d invite you, but I don’t think you’d accept.

I appreciate that Asher is trying to look out for me, but the idea of going out with a bunch of popular kids doesn’t sit well with me.

Pro: Yeah, I wouldn’t.

Asher (neutral disappointed): I see.

Asher (waving smiling): Well I better get going. I’ll see you later, okay?

Asher (exit):

Asher leaves the classroom, and shortly after I pack my bags and leave as well. What will I do when I get home today?

Probably nothing.

**Front of School**

However, as I leave school, an interruption to my plans appears in the form of Mara.

Mara (waving smiling): Hey.

Pro: Oh, hi.

Pro: Wait, why are you here?

Mara (neutral expressionless): Well…

Mara (neutral smiling): Yesterday was boring since we didn’t do anything, so today we’ll have twice the fun to make up for it.

Mara (neutral skeptical): Unless you’re too busy going home?

Pro: Alright, alright, let’s do something then.

Mara (yay yay): Yay!

Mara (excited excited):

Pro: What do you wanna do?

Mara (neutral thinking): Mmm…

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

Pro: Huh?

Mara (excited excited): Batting cage! Let’s go, go, go!

Mara (exit):

And without any further explanation Mara dashes off, leaving me to chase after her.

**Riverside**

Eventually, Mara slows down and we head towards the nearest batting cage, which is about a 20-minute walk away.

It’s strange how different the scenery is here compared to the rest of the region. Most of it is clean, bright, and friendly, but along the river the streets are dirty, the buildings are old, and a grey gloominess seems to always hang in the air.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed):

None of this seems to bother Mara, however, who happily hums to herself as we walk. I wonder if she even notices how derelict this area is.

Mara (neutral neutral): Kinda gloomy, huh?

Apparently she did.

Pro: Yeah, I was just thinking about that.

Mara: Oh, really?

Mara (neutral smiling): Well, put up with it for a little while longer. We’re almost there.

**Bridge**

We keep walking, and after a few minutes, we reach the bridge that marks the halfway point.

As I glance at the rows of steel wires that stretch across the bridge, the distant roar of crashing waves grows louder…

It’s too loud.

The air thickens, and I clutch at my chest, unable to breathe...

Mara (neutral worried): Pro?

Mara grabs my shoulder, and all of a sudden the feeling passes and I’m able to breathe normally again.

What was that?

Mara: Are you okay?

Pro: Yeah, I’m fine.

Mara looks into my eyes, her gaze filled with concern, and I feel a bit of guilt for making her worry about me.

Pro: Don’t worry about it, I’m fine. Really.

Mara: ...

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): Alright then.

Mara (exit):

Eventually, Mara forgets about my sudden spasm and starts to hum cheerfully again, and as we continue on our way I manage to push it to the back of my mind as well.