**Batting Cage**

We arrive at the batting cage, and after buying tokens we pick our bats. Mara chooses a lighter one so she can swing it more easily, and I opt for a heavier one to hit the ball farther.

Mara (neutral determined):

We decide that Mara will go first, so she climbs into the cage as I head over to put a token into the machine so it’ll start. She practices her swing as she waits for me to figure it out.

Mara (neutral fufu): Well, what do you think? Could I play on the girls baseball team too?

Pro: Mmm…

Mara (neutral expressionless):

Pro: I’m not too sure.

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: How fast do you want it? Is forty miles per hour okay?

Mara: Um…

Mara (neutral smiling\_nervous): Isn’t that pretty fast…?

Pro: I dunno. That’s the lowest setting for this machine though.

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh, I see.

Mara: I guess it’ll be alright.

Mara (neutral determined):

I put in a token and the machine turns on, and a startled Mara forgets to swing at the first ball. However, she eventually gets the hang of it and manages to hit about a quarter of the pitches that are shot out.

Mara (neutral sigh):

Pro: Wow, not bad. I’ll probably do better, though.

Mara leans her bat against the wall as she gets out of the cage.

Mara (neutral fufu): Oh, is that so? I guess we shall see.

Pro: We shall see indeed.

Mara (neutral thinking):

We switch spots, and Mara goes to start the machine as I warm up.

Mara: Let’s see…

Mara (neutral curious): Oh, it goes up to sixty.

Pro: Wait, Mara, keep it at forty…

Mara: What was that?

Pro: Keep it at forty…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Okay, it’s starting now!

Despite my protests, Mara feeds a token into the machine and it roars to life, and I, not feeling nearly as confident as I did a minute ago, prepare to hit the first pitch.

However, my bat turns out to be too heavy for me to swing properly, and I hit a grand total of two out of twenty balls.

Mara (neutral fufu): What’s this? You were so confident you’d do better than me, but you ended up hitting less than half the balls I hit.

Pro: My bat was too heavy. And besides, you set it to sixty, while I set it to forty for you.

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe.

Mara: It was actually at forty.

Pro: Don’t believe you.

I check the machine settings, and sure enough, it’s set to forty. It turns out that Mara won fair and square…

Mara (neutral fufu): See?

Pro: …

Pro: Rematch.

Mara: Are you sure? What if you get crushed again?

Pro: I’ll beat you next time.

Mara: I’d like to see you try.

Mara (laughing laughing):

After pausing for a moment, we both break out in laughter. Mara then picks her bat back up, and we continue our competition.

**Batting Cage**

After an hour or so we finish up and trudge back to the front to return our bats and helmet. Our contest was a lot closer than the first round was, especially after I traded in my bat for a lighter one.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed):

However, even though it was close Mara still won in the end, and despite her tiredness, she sports a triumphant grin as we leave.

**Front of Batting Cage**

Mara (stretching satisfaction): Ah, that was fun! It was exhausting, though.

Pro: Yeah, it is. What are we gonna do now?

Mara (neutral thinking): Hmm…

Mara (neutral neutral): I’m kinda hungry. Wanna go for dinner?

Pro: Sure I guess. Around here?

Mara (neutral thinking): Mmm…

Mara (neutral neutral): Let’s go to that diner again. The one near home?

Pro: Okay, that works.

Pro: Wait, actually…

Pro: If we’re gonna walk all the way back lemme use the washroom first.

Mara (neutral disappointed): Oh, okay…

Mara: Hurry up, though.

**Batting Cage**

I jog back inside and use the washroom, and after I wash my hands I quickly head back towards the door. However, I encounter a familiar face on the way.

Lilith (holding\_bat neutral): Oh, it’s you.

Lilith (holding\_bat curious): What are you doing here?

Pro: Oh, hey Lilith.

Pro: I came here with a friend. How about you?

Lilith (holding\_bat neutral): We came here to get a bit of extra practice in.

We?

As if on cue, a curious face pops out from behind Lilith.

Petra? (neutral smile): Hey, who’s this?

Lilith: This is Pro. He goes to our school.

Petra? (neutral surprised): Oh, really? I don’t think I’ve ever seen him around, though.

Petra? (neutral grin): Nice to meet you!

Lilith: This is Petra. She’s also on the baseball team.

Petra (neutral smiling): That’s right!

Lilith (holding\_bat annoyed):

Petra (neutral raised eyebrow): By the way, Pro, what’s your relationship with our Lilith?

Pro: Um... what?

Petra (neutral grinning): Do you two have anything that you’re hiding from us? Don’t be afraid to share!

Lilith: Petra…

Petra bursts out laughing. Her voice is fast and almost hyperactive, as if she drank a couple of energy drinks on their way here.

Lilith (holding\_bat annoyed\_really): We met for the first time yesterday after *someone* almost hit him with a baseball.

Petra (neutral surprise): Oh really? Who?

Lilith (holding\_bat sigh): …

Lilith (holding\_bat annoyed):

Petra (neutral neutral): …

Petra (neutral nervous): Was it me?

Lilith (holding\_bat sigh):

Lilith sighs again.

Lilith (holding\_bat annoyed):

Petra (neutral smiling): Heh, sorry about that…

Pro: Oh, don’t worry about it.

Petra (neutral smiling): Although it’s partially your fault for not paying attention–

Lilith: Ahem.

Petra (neutral pout): Geh.

Petra (neutral smiling): Well, anyways…

Lilith (holding\_bat neutral):

Petra (neutral smiling): Lilith, the others are waiting for you, so we should probably head over.

Lilith: Oh, I see. Well then, we should probably get going.

Lilith: I’ll see you later, then.

Pro: Oh, alright. See you later.

Lilith (exit):

Lilith heads towards the cages, and once she’s out of earshot Petra turns to me.

Petra (neutral smiling): If anything happens between you two, be sure to let me know, okay? I’ll help you out!

Petra (neutral grinning): Bye, Pro!

Petra (exit):

And with a wave, she scampers after her teammate. What a hyper girl.

I sigh and watch them go, but then I realize that I’ve made Mara wait all this time. I dash towards the exit, hoping that she didn’t leave me behind.