**Kitchen**

The first thing I notice when I get home is the smell. It’s a familiar smell, one that reminds me of things my mom used to cook when I was younger, which is strange because there’s no way she’d be here...

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh, you’re home.

Mara: Do you want dinner? A bath?

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): Or perhaps…

Right. That explains it.

Pro: So, why are you here?

Mara (neutral skeptical): Huh…?

Mara (neutral expressionless): That’s pretty cold…

Mara (neutral smiling\_gentle):

All of a sudden her expression softens.

Mara: Do you know when your mom will be coming back?

Pro: No idea.

Mara: I see.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly):

She stops to study my expression for a few seconds before turning back to the stove.

Mara (neutral neutral): Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. Have a seat and relax.

I follow her instructions and take a seat, realizing how exhausted I am.

Pro: What are you making?

Mara (neutral curious): Curry noodles. You couldn’t tell from the smell?

Pro: Well…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed):

She prepares two bowls and brings them over, a warm smile on her face.

Mara: Here you go. Eat up!

Mara (neutral smiling):

She begins to dig into her own portion, and after watching her for a bit I start to eat my own as well, finding that it tastes almost exactly the same as my mom’s.

Mara (neutral bashful): I, uh…

Mara: I went and found that cookbook again. And I thought something like this would be nice…

Mara (neutral embarrassed): Do you like it?

Pro: It’s really good.

Mara (neutral sigh): That’s a relief. I was a little afraid I’d mess it up…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Thank goodness I didn’t, though.

Mara (neutral smiling\_gentle):

After finishing up the rest of the curry in her bowl, she watches tranquilly as I slowly ingest the rest of my meal. With each bite comes a wave of nostalgia, and after a while I have to force myself to continue eating, not wanting to disappoint Mara.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly):

Once I finish eating as well, Mara takes all of our dishes to the sink to let them soak before sitting back down across from me, looking me in the eye.

Mara: So…

Mara: How are you really doing?

Pro: I’m alright.

Mara (neutral worried):

She eyes me a little skeptically.

Mara: I’m sure I told you this before, but you’ve always been terrible at hiding things. Whenever you’re hiding something, I can tell just by looking at your face.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): What’s on your mind? You’ll feel better if you let it all out.

I open my mouth, but no sound comes out. How can I tell her how useless I am as a son, how uncertain I am about her not wanting me to do anything, and how guilty I feel about making her work so hard…

Mara (neutral sigh):

My thoughts are interrupted by a not-so-gentle forehead flick from Mara, pulling me back to the present.

Mara (neutral wishful): You know...

Mara: Your mom’s a really good cook. If I ate stuff like this every day I’d be as happy as could be.

Mara (neutral neutral): You on the other hand…

Mara (neutral smiling\_nervous): Well, let’s just say that you’d actually start being a burden if she let you into the kitchen.

Mara (neutral smiling\_gentle): You suck at cooking. And you’re definitely not ready to take care of yourself.

Mara: But I think that’s okay. I think it’s alright for you to be her child, and for you to let her take care of you. And I think she wants you to do that, too.

Mara (neutral thinking):

She hesitates for a moment, considering her words.

Mara (neutral neutral): Your mom’s already very kind, and she cares about you a lot. To her, I’m pretty sure doing things like working long hours or waking up earlier to make breakfast aren’t as bad as you think because she’s doing it to make sure you’re happy.

Pro: How would you know?

Mara (neutral bashful): Because, well…

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): I’d do the same, I guess. For someone with so many weird little quirks, you’re actually pretty lovable.

Mara: When you care about someone, things like time or money start to become less important…

Mara: …

Mara (neutral bashful\_blushing): Not that I care about you that much.

I pause for a moment, a little tickled by Mara’s sudden tsundere behaviour, before breaking out laughing.

Pro: I think you deviated from your trope for a second there…

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): Ah, bite me.

Mara (exit):

Put out, she abruptly stands up and heads to the sink to finish cleaning up, but before she turns her back to me I notice a small smile.

Mara (neutral smiling): When I’m done with this let’s watch a movie.

Pro: Sure, what do you wanna watch?

Mara (neutral thinking): Um…

She stops for a moment, thinking.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Pick something that we used to watch when we were younger.

**Kitchen**

We end up watching the accompanying movie to one of the shows we loved as kids, but halfway through Mara dozes off, contently clutching the jacket I left on the couch.

Pro: What’s the point of watching a movie if you’re just gonna fall asleep…?

Trying not to wake her, I pat her head gently, silently thanking her for coming over today.

It really is a blessing to have someone who won’t let you feel lonely.

Mara (neutral tired):

However, my attempt to not wake her ends up being a failure, and I quickly retract my hand as she drowsily sits up, apparently having noticed something on her head.

Mara: Big...bird….

She stares at me confusedly for a second, regaining her bearings.

Mara: Oh, it’s just you.

Pro: Morning. What were you dreaming of?

Mara (neutral expressionless): Um…

Mara (neutral tired): Chickens. A lot of chickens.

Pro: Not enough meat today?

Mara (stretching yawn): Maybe.

She glances at the screen, trying to figure out what’s happening.

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh, we’ve gotten pretty far, huh? You should’ve woken me up.

Pro: Ah, sorry.

She shakes her head.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): It’s alright. Thanks for letting me get in a little nap.

Mara (exit):

We watch the rest of the movie, and once it ends Mara starts getting ready to go home, saying that she should probably get home and sleep properly. She refuses to allow me to walk her home, stating that I should get some rest as well.

And, as always, she’s right. Once she’s left my eyelids start to droop, and I barely manage to make it to my bed before crashing.