**Bedroom**

The first thing I notice when I wake up is that my pillow has turned into a stone, but after groggily coming to my senses I realize that I’ve fallen asleep at my desk, papers scattered everywhere. A blanket is wrapped around my shoulders, indicating that my mom probably came in once I dozed off.

Sore all over, I slowly reach for my phone to see if I’d be able to take a quick nap in bed before heading to school. Instead of the time, though, the first thing I find is a message from Mara saying that she won’t be able to walk to school with me, which is a bit disappointing.

And what’s also disappointing is that if I don’t get up now, I’ll be late.

With a groan I move my aching body, throwing my blanket back onto my bed and standing up. My back is so stiff that I almost fall over, but, knowing that I still need to pack up all my notes and get changed, I push through and get ready for school.

**Neighbourhood Road 1**

It seems like my mother woke up early to cook but then went back to bed, so after eating the breakfast she set out for me I quickly brush my teeth and head out. It’s a rather chilly day, and the fact that I have to make the walk alone again doesn’t really help…

Asher (waving smiling): Yo.

I look at Asher, a little befuddled, Where did he appear from?

Asher (waving neutral):

Pro: Why are you here?

Asher (neutral expressionless): Huh…?

Asher (downcast downcast): That was kinda cold…

Asher (downcast neutral):

Pro: Don’t you live on the other side of school?

Asher (neutral neutral): My parents asked me to drop something off at a family friend’s house before going to school today.

Pro: Oh. That makes sense.

I stop for a second to study him. He’s no Mara, but…

Pro: I guess you’ll do for today.

Asher (neutral confused): Huh? What does that mean?

Pro: Nothing.

I suddenly resume walking to school, and a confused Asher follows shortly afterwards.

Asher (neutral worried\_slightly): You’re being awfully cold today…

Asher (neutral curious):

Pro: It’s freezing…

Asher: …

Asher (laughing laughing):

We stare at each other for a moment before breaking out in laughter.

Asher (laughing recovering):

Pro: Sorry, sorry…

Asher (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Don’t worry about it.

Asher (neutral smiling): Did something happen yesterday?

Pro: Not really. Spent most of the evening studying.

Asher: For the test on Friday? Same.

Asher (exit):

Strangely, we spend the rest of the trip to school talking about math concepts, discussing parts of the problem sets that we found tricky or confusing. Well, to be honest we really only talked about the things that I found tricky or confusing. Asher’s a pretty smart guy.

But I don’t think he’s as smart as Mara, and at times like these I can only wonder what it’d be like if she enrolled in our school as well. Would we be more hardworking, more successful? Would we be more motivated, forging onward towards bright and hopeful futures?

I guess there’s no point wondering about it now, though. What’s done is done, after all.

And besides, I’ve recently found out that Mara’s not the only one who can get me to try.