**Bedroom**

I lug the groceries into the kitchen and head straight upstairs, half-expecting to find someone there…

…and finding that, for once, my intuition is right.

Mara: …

Mara: Welcome home!!

Pro: I’m back…

I self-consciously walk past her and lie down, painfully aware that she’s watching my every movement.

Mara: Do you do that every time you get home?

Pro: Mmm…

Pro: Most of the time.

Mara: Really…?

Mara: I can’t say that I’m particularly surprised, though.

Pro: So? Why are you here?

Mara: Huh…?

Mara: Do I need a reason to be in your room?

Pro: Yes.

Mara: Boo.

Mara: I wanted a quiet place to read manga, so I came here after school.

Pro: Couldn’t you just go to the library…?

Mara: It’s so far, though.

Mara: And besides, it’s not nearly as comfy as it is here.

Mara luxuriously lounges her arms towards the bed, her fingers brushing my shirt ever so slightly.

However, after a moment of stillness she pokes the side of my torso rather violently, causing me to start and roll away.

Mara: You’re pretty jittery today. Nervous about something?

Pro: Not really.

Mara: Huh.

Mara: You gonna take a nap?

Pro: Maybe. Probably, actually.

Mara: What about studying?

Pro: I’ll study afterwards.

Mara starts to frown, obviously disappointed with my lack of interactivity. I know that I should probably humour her, but for some reason I feel unusually sluggish and moving from the position I’m in now is the last thing I wanna do.

Mara: …

Mara: …

Mara: …

Mara: Let’s do something.

Figured.

Pro: Like what?

Mara: Like…

Mara: Like, um…

Mara: I dunno. We could play a game, or we could do homework, or read manga, or…

Pro: Couldn’t you do all of those by yourself?

Mara: I mean, I *could* but it’d be *nice* if someone else were also there…

Pro: …

Pro: Alright, alright.

*Direction: Thud noise*

I reluctantly roll back over and off the bed, landing squarely on the floor at Mara’s feet.

Mara: Um, are you alright?

Pro: Yeah, I’m fine.

Pro: Decide what you wanna do yet?

Mara: Nope. Gimme another few minutes to decide.

Pro: Alright. I’ll be here, then.

**Kitchen**

Mara ends up spotting a deck of cards tucked away behind a stack of books, and we end up playing a variety of card games over the next hour and a half. All of which I lose.

Mara: And that’s 20 wins for me, and 1 pity win for you.

Mara: Fufu.

Pro: I don’t get it at all…

Pro: Are you extraordinarily smart, or am I extraordinarily dumb…?

Mara: Both.

She smiles happily and stretches her arms above her head, letting out a satisfied noise.

Mara: So? Where’s my reward?

Pro: Your reward? I didn’t agree to a punishment game.

Mara: Reward, not punishment.

Pro: Huh…?

Bewildered, I stare at her as she sits on the floor, almost obliviously cheerful.

Pro: What do you want as a reward?

Mara: Hmm, let me think…

Mara: How about…

Mara: …

Mara: …a kiss?

It takes a few seconds for her words to sink in, but when they do I let out a panicked sound of confusion and sprawl backwards instinctively. However, Mara isn’t about to let me get away and follows after me slowly, like a cat cornering its prey…

Mara: Hehe.

Pro: Wait, Mara-

Mara: I’m just joking.

She quickly retreats and sits back, looking like she rather enjoyed herself.

Pro: Seriously, what’s gotten into you recently…

Mara: Hm? What do you mean?

Pro: You’ve been kinda, um, odd recently.

Pro: Like you show up in my room more often, and, um…

Pro: Huh? Did I say something wrong?

Mara: You don’t get it at all, huh.

Pro: Don’t get what?

Mara: It’s nothing.

I don’t get it at all…

Mara: Anyways, are you sure spending all this time playing cards was a good idea? Don’t you need to study?

Pro: Ah, um…

Pro: I think it’s fine. I’m studying with Lilith tomorrow anyways, so I think I’ll get a lot in then.

Mara: Shouldn’t you study now, and use Lilith to supplement your learning?

Pro: Um…

She’s totally right, but a mix of pride and embarrassment prevent me from admitting it.

Pro: Maybe. I dunno.

Mara: Hmm…

Mara: Ah well. I guess there’s nothing you can do about it now. And it’s mostly my fault that you wasted your afternoon…

Mara: Sorry.

A tinge of guilt pangs my heart, and I instinctively reach out and gently place my hand on her head.

Pro: It’s alright, don’t worry. I had fun.

Mara: …

Mara: That’s good to hear.

Pro: This enough for your reward?

She nods after a small delay, her expression unnecessarily coy…

Mara: I think I’m gonna go home now, so, um…

Mara: See you.

Mara: Oh yeah, and, um…

Mara: Tomorrow you’ll have to go to school by yourself. I have some stuff I need to do.

Pro: Oh, okay. I guess I’ll see you when I see you then.

Mara: Yeah.

Mara: Bye, now.

Mara slowly removes my hand from her head and stands up, stretching a bit before moving towards the door. Before she slips out, she gives me a little wave and then disappears without another word.

I stare at the door long after she leaves, still a little stunned. I’m not sure what prompted me to pat her head like that, but for some reason it just came naturally.

Huh…

…

I know I should move, but I don’t really want to. Another five minutes.