**Neighbourhood Road 1**

Potential present ideas whizz through my mind the entire walk home, but none of them are any good. Stationary, music books, stuffed animals... all not bad options, but for some reason nothing feels just right.

Why does it have to be so difficult? A gift for Mara would be easy – she’d be more than happy with manga, dinner, or a day at the arcade. But would Prim want to receive such trivial things? I’m not sure.

Mara would probably be able to pick a gift for her in a heartbeat, though. Usually things that I find difficult she does with ease, so maybe I should’ve depended on her advice from the beginning, but it’s too late now...

Mara: Hey.

Startled, I let out a strange yelping noise and jump back, much to Mara’s amusement.

Mara: What...

Mara: What was that? I was standing right in front of you, too.

Pro: I don’t wanna talk about it.

Mara: Hehe.

Mara: So? What’s on your mind?

Well, you were, but it’s not like I’m gonna tell you that.

Pro: A birthday present. For Prim.

Mara: For Prim, huh?

My heart rises, seeing that the gears in Mara’s head are already turning.

Mara: Hmm...

Mara: Well good luck with that!!

Pro: ...

Pro: Wait, help me out here. What should I get her?

Mara: Huh...?

Mara: Don’t you think that’s cheating? You’re supposed to think about what gift to get yourself, or else it doesn’t count.

My gut twists ever so slightly, knowing that she’s right but not wanting to accept it.

Pro: Maybe a hint...?

Mara: No can do. And I’ve never met her, so I can’t really help you anyways.

My entire body slumps, a feeling of disappointment diffusing through my limbs. I should’ve figured as much, but I was hoping that she’d at least help me out a little...

Mara: Well, let’s get going.

Pro: Huh? Where?

Mara: Shopping.

Pro: Shopping? Now?

Mara: Don’t you need to buy a gift?

She stares at me as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, which it probably is, of course.

Mara: I won’t pick one out for you, but I’d be happy to accompany you while you struggle towards a decision.

She grabs my wrist, smiling sweetly.

Mara: We don’t have much daylight left, so let’s get going.

**Shopping District**

The muted hustle and bustle of the shopping district preparing for an influx of salarymen surprisingly has a calming effect on me, and spending a few minutes walking around with Mara I actually start to enjoy myself.

The weather’s really nice today, with a temperature in the perfect sweet spot between too high and too cold. The smell of autumn sweets fills the air, and after a while my stomach starts to rumble...

Thankfully the person standing next to me seems just as hungry.

Mara: Hey, Pro.

Mara: Let’s get a chestnut taiyaki.

Pro: A what?

Mara: A chestnut taiyaki. It’s taiyaki, except instead of red bean inside they use a paste made with chestnuts.

That would make sense.

Mara: And let’s also get walnut mochi, baked sweet potatoes, and those pumpkin things that are crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside...

Mara continues to list off all the things we should eat, and I can’t help but agree, for once happy that she’s thinking with her stomach.

However, around ten items in she stops abruptly, apparently having remembered something.

Mara: Ahem...

Mara: That being said, we should focus on the task at hand. You really need to buy a gift.

Pro: Huh...? I wouldn’t mind getting a sna-

Mara: Nope.

She cuts me off, surprisingly gung-ho. It’s impressive, considering how much she probably wants to run off and buy from all the vendors she can, and after a moment’s hesitation she doubles down.

Mara: We are not going to eat *anything* until you find a suitable present for Prim. Understood?

Pro: ...

Pro: Yes ma’am.

Mara: Good. I like your attitude.

Mara: ...

Mara: Could you hurry up though? I’m starving.

Pro: Huh...?

Pro: *You’re* the one who imposed restrictions, so why are *you* the one who’s complaining?

Mara: It was a necessary evil. Shouldn’t you be thankful that I’m willing to suffer to much for your sake?

Pro: Uh...

I hesitate, trying to discern whether what she’s saying has any merit.

Pro: Thanks, I guess...?

Mara: That’s right. You’re welcome.

Mara: Hehe.

She reaches out and ruffles my hair fondly, obviously enjoying herself.

Mara: Well, let’s get going before it gets too busy. We can eat our fill when we’re done.