**Shopping District**

We ended up reading manga until the sun fell far below the horizon, and, in a panic, we rushed outside to grab something to eat.

Mara: We really lost track of time, huh…?

Pro: Yeah…

Pro: But then at the same time it’s almost winter, so the days are getting shorter.

Mara: I guess.

Mara: It’s almost 8:00, though.

Pro: Yeah, um…

Pro: Let’s not talk about that.

Pro: I thought you were hungry, though.

Mara: I mean, yeah, but…

Pro: But?

Mara: But my hunger for knowledge far outweighed my hunger for food.

Pro: Huh? Was that series really good enough for you to forget about dinner?

Mara: Well, it was alright, but each volume ended on a cliffhanger, so…

Well, I guess that’d do it.

Pro: Ah well. I guess I got caught up too, so I can’t really complain.

Mara: It’s not all bad, though.

Mara: There’s something charming about going out when it’s dark, you know? It makes me feel all grown-up.

Pro: That sounds like something a child would say.

Mara: Bleh.

Despite my comment, however, I can’t help but agree. All the restaurants we pass by are filled with office workers in their fancy suits, and apart from us there really aren’t any other students around. It almost feels like we’re somewhere we’re not supposed to be, especially because of our school uniforms.

Pro: So, what do you wanna eat? Did you choose yet?

Mara: Um…

Mara: I haven’t.

Pro: Huh…?

Pro: I thought we were going out to eat because you had something specific in mind. You said you wanted something spicy, no?

Mara: But there are a lotta spicy foods like, um…

Mara: …

Mara: Like takoyaki!!!

Pro: Huh? Takoyaki’s not spicy…

However, I realize that I was wrong after noticing what caught Mara’s attention. A small takoyaki shop advertising roulette takoyaki.

Super spicy roulette takoyaki.

Pro: Are you sure you want that…?

Pro: I don’t think I’d be able to handle it…

Mara: Aw, c’mon. Only one of six would be spicy, so it evens out.

Pro: That’s not how it works…

Mara: But don’t you think it’d be fun? We could get two orders of regular takoyaki to fill up, and then two orders of roulette for afterwards.

Mara: And we could take turns picking from the roulette ones, which would make everything even more exciting.

A brief inner debate ensues, but a glance at Mara while deep in thought causes me to relent. I can’t really deny her something when she’s that enthusiastic, can I…

Pro: Alright, alright. Let’s do it.

Mara: That’s the spirit.

Mara: Besides, there’s a chance that you don’t get any spicy ones, so if you get a bit lucky you’ll be fine.

Pro: On the flipside, I could also get a little unlucky and get both spicy ones…

Mara: Oh, that’s true.

Mara: Well, I guess we’ll see what happens then.

She stuffs a crumpled bill into my hand, her eyes shining with anticipation.

Mara: Go ahead and buy, please.

**Shopping District**

Mara: …

Her eyebrows furrowed with concentration, Mara stares at the remaining two roulette takoyaki with an intensity that I’ve never seen from her before. I had the misfortune of choosing a spicy one earlier, which was so painful I finished the entire drink we decided to share, tears streaming down my cheeks.

However, that was the only one we found…

…and thus there’s one left.

Mara: Left or right…

Pro: Choose whichever you want.

Mara: Ah, don’t rush me!!

Mara: I’m concentrating…

Pro: Isn’t it a 50/50 chance, though? So does it really matter which one you choose?

Mara: That’s what you think, but statistically almost nothing’s ever a perfect 50/50 split.

Mara: So technically one of them is more likely to be the bomb…

I sigh, her reasoning way above my head. Whether or not I get the spicy one is out of my hands anyways, which could be a good or bad thing depending on how you look at it.

Mara: …

Mara: This one!!

In a single sweeping moment she stabs her selection and brings it to her mouth, triumph clearly written on her face…

…until the spiciness starts to kick in.

Mara: Drink, drink, drink, drink, drink…

Pro: Sorry, I finished it…

Staring at me with betrayal written all over her face, she abruptly stands up and runs off, presumably to find a vending machine somewhere.

Once she’s gone, I let out a small sigh of relief and reach for the last piece of takoyaki. However, before I can I notice someone across the street staring at me, pulling my focus towards her and away from my food.

Lilith: …

After taking a second to realize what’s happening, I tentatively wave, unsure if she’ll come over. She does, though, weaving through a passing mob of suited salarymen to do so.

Pro: Hey, Lilith.

Lilith: You again, huh…

She glances around at the empty takoyaki boxes scattered around me, causing me to feel a tiny bit self-conscious even though I know that I didn’t eat them all.

Pro: What’s up? Little odd to see a student around here at this time.

Lilith: I could say the same to you.

Pro: Ah, I guess that’s true…

Lilith: I was looking for something to eat, though.

Lilith: Was that good?

Pro: Um, I guess. If you’re looking for something more substantial, it might not be very cost-efficient though…

Lilith: I see.

Lilith: I’m not too hungry, so I’ll grab one, I guess.

Lilith: Wait here for me?

Pro: Huh?!? Uh…

I look around for Mara, eventually spotting her smirking behind a light post. I suspect that she’d probably want me to stay with Lilith, and my phone buzzing in my pocket confirms that.

But…

“Sure.” **OR** “Sorry, I should probably get going.”

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Pro: Sure.

Lilith: Alright. Which one did you get?

Pro: Um, I got two original and two roulette.

Lilith: Roulette?

Pro: It’s like Russian roulette, where one of the takoyaki is spicy but the others are regular.

Lilith: That sounds pretty interesting. Maybe I’ll get it.

Pro: But if you’re getting it for yourself, I don’t think there’s really a point since you’ll end up eating the spicy one eventually.

Lilith: …

Lilith: How spicy is it?

Pro: I thought it was pretty spicy…

Lilith: I see…

Lilith: I think I’ll try it out anyways.

Lilith: Be back in a few minutes.

She lightly trots off towards the takoyaki shop, leaving me alone again.

I should probably clean up all of these boxes, or she might ask about them later…

Wait, speaking of which, where’s Mara?

Mara: Are you gonna eat that one?

Oh.

Pro: You can go ahead.

Mara: Yay.

She leans down and finishes off the takoyaki we bought, washing it down with a newly-bought bottle of water.

Pro: Are you okay? The spicy one’s pretty spicy, huh?

Mara: Yeah…

Mara: Anyways, enough about that. That was Lilith, no?

Pro: Yeah.

Mara: Is she coming back?

Pro: Huh? I guess so.

Mara: Fufu.

Mara: Don’t even think about running away.

Pro: I wasn’t thinking of it, but whatever…

Pro: What are you gonna do in the meantime, though?

Mara: Me? I’m gonna listen in, of course.

Pro: Why don’t you just stay with me and meet her…?

Mara: I could, but that’s not as interesting. I wanna see you struggle.

Pro: …

Mara: Just kidding. Kinda.

Mara: I don’t wanna get in between you and your friends at school. So I’ll sit back and enjoy myself instead.

Mara: Oh, she’s coming back.

Before I can respond, Mara fades into the shadows, conveniently taking the empty takoyaki boxes with her.

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Pro: Sorry, I should probably get going.

Lilith: Oh, I see. No problem.

I hastily pop the last takoyaki ball into my mouth, chewing it while I gather all of our trash. However, a piece gets lodged in my throat, causing me to cough profusely.

Lilith: Are you alright…?

Pro: Yeah, I’m fine…

Lilith: That’s good…

Lilith: Um, I’m gonna go get a box, so I’ll see you tomorrow then.

Right. For tutoring.

Pro: Oh, alright. See you.

I clear my throat as Lilith trots towards the takoyaki shop, my cheeks a bright red because of both my embarrassment and lack of oxygen intake. A drink would be nice…

Actually, speaking of which, where’s Mara?

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