**Bedroom**

Morning comes after a night of muscle rehabilitation, and I find myself trapped in my bed. Soreness is actually quite nice when combined with a fluffy surface you can lounge around on, and for a moment I consider joining the tennis team just so I can experience it more.

A very brief moment.

Eventually I escape, though, and my legs become a source of suffering yet again. Glancing at my uniform pants with a grimace forming on my face, I shuffle over to grab them, mentally preparing myself for the struggle that I’m about to undergo.

**Kitchen**

After finally managing to get changed, I stumble down the stairs and into the kitchen, finding a note beside a plastic-wrapped plate on the table.

Mom: *Will be working late tonight. Please take care of dinner for yourself.*

Decorating the note is a carefully drawn smiley face, a small reminder to try to enjoy my day. I smile in spite of myself, a warm feeling starting to spread inside.

I’ll do my best, Mom.

**Front of House**

It didn’t rain yesterday so, sensing a possible downpour today, I make sure to grab an umbrella before I head out.

Mara (waving smiling): Morning.

Pro: Hey, Mara.

Mara (neutral curious): How’d you sleep?

Pro: Really well. How about you?

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Like a log.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: I feel like I’ve said this before, but logs don’t sleep. They’re dead.

Mara (neutral skeptical): You did say that before, and that’s a rather bleak way at looking at things…

Mara (neutral neutral): But whatever, I guess.

Mara (neutral thinking): Anyways, doesn’t today feel like a good studying day? Weather’s perfect for it, and all.

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: What exactly constitutes good studying weather…?

Mara: Um…

Mara (neutral nervous): Weather that’d make it more convenient to stay inside, and…

Pro: Wouldn’t that be good manga weather as well?

Mara (surprise geh): Geh.

Mara (neutral smiling\_nervous): Well, it wasn’t on my mind, but now that you mention it…

I sigh, knowing that it definitely was on her mind.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: We can hang out after school today if you want. To study, or whatever you wanna do.

Mara (neutral smiling): Yay.

Mara (neutral happy):

In an even better mood, Mara cheerfully skips down the steps before turning back to face me, a large grin plastered on her face.

Mara (neutral smiling): Well, let’s go then.

Before we can to the sidewalk, though, Mara suddenly stops and peers into my eyes, her face inches away from mine.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): Did something happen?

Pro: Hm? I don’t think so…

But as I think about it, I notice a tiny twinge of worry in my chest. I’ve tried to push it to the back of my mind, but Prim’s interaction with her sister bothers me nonetheless…

Mara (neutral neutral): Oh, okay.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Let’s get going.

**Neighbourhood Road 1**

Raindrops suddenly start to fall halfway through our walk, causing Mara to shift a little closer to my side, probably expecting me to share my umbrella. However, they stop as abruptly as they started shortly afterwards.

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: Do you not have an umbrella today?

Mara: I don’t.

Pro: That’s unusual. You’re usually pretty prepared.

Mara (neutral thinking): Well, I thought that if we were gonna hang out today…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): …it’d be nice to be picked up instead of having to go wait for you at your school.

Pro: Right…

Pro: But your school ends earlier than mine.

Mara (arms\_crossed smiling\_eyes\_closed): It’d be nice to be picked up instead of having to go wait for you at your school. For once.

Mara (arms\_crossed smiling\_annoyed): And especially because I don’t have an umbrella.

Pro: Alright, alright. If it rains I’ll pick you up. But only if it rains.

Mara (neutral smiling): Yay.

Mara (neutral thinking): Maybe I’ll do a rain dance later today.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: A rain dance?

Mara: Yeah, like…

Mara (neutral thinking): …

Mara (neutral curious): I actually dunno, but I’m sure I’ll be able to figure it out somehow…

Pro: Right…

Mara (neutral skeptical): Anyways, shouldn’t you pick me up regardless of whether or not it rains? You seriously need to put more skill points into your charm.

Pro: Maybe…

Mara (neutral fufu): If you’d like I could help you practice.

Mara’s expression sends danger signals throughout my entire nervous system, causing me to shiver instinctively.

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: It’s alright, you don’t have to go that far…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): No, no, it’d be my pleasure.

Mara (neutral fufu):

Without warning, she leans in and gently blows in my ear, causing me to blush profusely.

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing):

Pro: M-M-Mara…!

Mara (neutral bashful\_blushing): …

Mara (neutral smiling\_blushing\_eyes): H-Hehe.

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): Well, I-I’ll be going this way, so I’ll see you later.

Mara (neutral bashful\_blushing): At my school.

Mara (exit):

Mara dashes off down a side road, leaving me stunned and alone. My heart rate has increased drastically, and a sense of overwhelming embarrassment flows through my entire being.

What’s gotten into her…?