**Front of School**

Once school ends I head straight outside to meet a waiting Mara, a little apprehensive because of this morning’s incident. Which is odd because physical contact is pretty normal for us to some extent, but I guess this time I was caught off guard.

Mara (waving happy):

She waves cheerfully as I approach.

Mara (neutral smiling): Hey.

Pro: Hey there. How was school?

Mara (neutral expressionless): Kinda bleh.

Mara (neutral smiling): But no more about that. Are you prepared?

Pro: Prepared…?

Pro: I don’t even know where we’re going.

Mara (neutral neutral): ...

Mara (neutral disappointed): You could’ve just said yes...

Pro: …

Mara (neutral neutral):

Pro: Yes. I am prepared. Body and soul.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Yay.

She happily grabs my hand and gives it a little tug, and after a tiny bit of initial resistance I reluctantly oblige and let her pull me along.

**Outside Board Game Cafe**

The trip takes longer than I expect, and about half an hour of walking later I’m on the verge of asking for a break. However, after one last turned corner we finally arrive at our destination.

Mara (neutral smiling):

Pro: Huh…

Pro: A board game cafe?

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Yup! Surprised?

Pro: A little.

Mara (excited excited): I’ve always wanted to try going to one of these.

Pro: Same here, actually.

We stand outside the cafe and stare at it in awe before remembering that we came here to go inside.

**Board Game Cafe**

Mara grabs a stack of board games after we take our seats, and after browsing through them she takes interest in a very peculiar one.

Mara (neutral confused): Monopsony…?

Pro: Hm?

She holds it up for me to read.

Pro: Oh, the game’s called Monopsony. What’s it about?

Mara (neutral thinking): Um…

She opens the box and takes out the instruction manual.

Mara: According to this…

Mara: It’s a game where several different companies try to win the affections of a single consumer by investing in different spaces of the board.

Mara (neutral confused):

Pro: …

Pro: What…?

Reminds me of a certain family-destroying game…

Mara (neutral neutral): Well, it looks fun. Let’s play this.

Pro: Wait, are you sure you wanna learn a new game?

Mara (neutral curious): Yeah, why not?

Pro: Well-

Mara (neutral fufu): This way you can’t complain if you lose. Or rather, when you lose.

Pro: …

Suddenly, a fire is lit in my soul.

Pro: Is that so?

Pro: Don’t cry when I crush you.

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe. Bring it on.

**Board Game Cafe**

Mara (neutral thinking): And the final record is…

Mara (neutral happy): 7 wins for me, and none for you.

Pro: Geh…

Mara (neutral fufu): Hmm, I wonder where all that confidence went…

Predictably, Mara completely destroyed me in every game we played. After crushing me in Monopsony a few times she decided that playing more familiar games would give me a bit more of a chance, but of course it didn’t end up mattering.

What is this empty feeling...

Mara (neutral sigh): I should’ve offered to make a bet before we started playing. Coulda gotten a lotta free food.

Mara (excited earnest): Gotta save when I can.

Pro: Save for what?

Mara (neutral thinking): Mmm…

Mara (neutral smiling): More food.

Pro: Of course.

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe.

Mara (neutral neutral): Speaking of food, I’m kinda hungry. We should get something substantial to celebrate my total victory.

Still moping over my seven consecutive losses, I put my head down on the table and sigh.

Pro: How does Burger Emperor sound?

Mara (neutral curious): Burger Emperor?

Pro: You know, the new one. Since we’re trying new things today.

Pro: I thought you of all people would’ve known about it.

Mara (neutral bashful): Well, you know…

Mara (neutral embarrassed): If I eat too many burgers I might get fat.

Pro: How could you even be a little bit worried about that? You eat so much and never gain any weight…

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe.

Mara (neutral smiling): Well, I guess having them once in a while isn’t so bad. You ready to go?

Pro: Um…

I hesitate, having discovered that sticking one’s face onto a cool, smooth surface is surprisingly pleasant.

Pro: Five more minutes.