**Bedroom**

I forgot to fully close my curtain before going to bed, and around eight hours later I pay for it dearly. Sunlight is not very good for sleeping, and as I pry open my eyes I find that today there seems to be an exceptional amount of it.

After briefly considering going back to sleep, I grab my phone to check the time.

7:30 on the dot. Not too bad. I guess the days do get shorter as winter approaches.

With a little sigh, I crawl out of bed and get ready for school. If I went to bed again, there’s a good chance I wouldn’t wake up for a while.

**Kitchen**

I notice the smell of food as I head downstairs, and, ready to eat breakfast for the first time this week, I pop my head into the kitchen to see what my mom’s making. However, she’s not there, and upon a quick inspection of the area I spot her at the door.

Mom (neutral smile): Oh.

Mom (wave smile): Good morning. You’re up early.

Pro: Morning…

Pro: Wait, you're going to work already?

Mom (neutral smile): Yeah. This week things have been pretty busy, so I’ve been going in early this week.

I blink a few times, processing what she just said. This week?

Pro: Every day?

Mom (neutral worried\_smile): Yeah.

So she’s been going to work at this time every day, and I didn’t even know…

Mom (neutral worried\_smile): You usually sleep in a bit more, and I didn’t want to wake you.

Mom (neutral worried\_smile): Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. Work’s starting to slow down again anyways, so things will start being normal again soon.

Pro: Are you sure…?

Mom (neutral smile): Yeah.

Mom (neutral smile): Nothing makes me happier than seeing you enjoy yourself, you know. So this isn’t that bad.

Pro: Alright…

I see her off before going back to eat, trying my best to not let my worry show on my face.

Is it normal for a parent to do so much for their child? I know that to some degree most kids need their parents to survive, but at times like these I’m reminded of just how much I depend on her…

While I’ve been going out and having fun, she’s been working long hours to make ends meet. And even though she says it’s fine, I can’t really bring myself to believe that.

Feeling a little anxious and guilty, I start eating the breakfast my mom left out for me.

It’s good.

**Front of House**

After eating and brushing my teeth I head outside, half-wondering if Mara will be here this early. I already know the answer though, and as I open the door I’m greeted by her cheerful smile.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Good morning.

Pro: Morning.

Mara (neutral neutral): You’re not late today, huh.

Pro: Yup, yup. I’m so proud of myself.

Mara (neutral smiling): Me too. Now, keep it up for the rest of the month.

Pro: …

Mara (surprise geh):

Pro: I think I’ll be late tomorrow, then. Can’t disappoint you if you don’t have any expectations for me.

Mara (neutral skeptical):

Mara reaches up and not-so-gently flicks me on the forehead.

Mara: I’ll wake you up personally every day if you’re gonna be like that.

Mara (arms\_crossed hmph): And I wake up before 7 every day.

Pro: Okay, okay I repent…

Mara (arms\_crossed smiling): Good.

Mara (arms\_crossed neutral):

She pauses, studying my face.

Pro: Hm? Something up?

Mara: Nothing.

Mara (neutral smiling): It’s a beautiful day today, huh?

Pro: Yeah it is.

Mara: It’s a good thing you came out early. We’ll be able to take our time and enjoy the walk for once.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Let’s go!

**Neighbourhood Road 1**

In an even better mood than normal, Mara cheerfully hums as we head to school, pointing out every flower bed that’s survived the cold weather thus far.

Mara (neutral smiling):

Pro: You seem happy today.

Mara: I am.

Pro: I see.

Mara (neutral pout): Not gonna ask why?

Pro: Why?

Mara (ahem ahem):

She clears her throat.

Mara: Because…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): You weren’t late. And yesterday’s manga chapter was really good.

Mara (neutral smiling):

Pro: Really…?

Mara: Really.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): You seem a little down today, though.

Pro: Do I?

Busted.

Mara: What’s up?

Pro: Well…

Pro: My mom’s been working overtime this entire week. And I just found out today.

Mara (neutral neutral): I see.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): And you feel guilty?

Pro: Yeah.

Mara (neutral thinking): Hmm…

She pauses for a moment, seriously considering the issue.

Mara (neutral neutral): Well, I don’t think it’d be worth it for you to get a job. You’d probably get paid close to nothing, and it would take away from your ability to do other things.

Mara (neutral thinking): You could do well in school, get into a good college, get a good job and make lots of money…

Mara (neutral neutral): That way, she wouldn’t have to work at all, right?

Pro: I mean, yeah, but it’s not like I’m doing that great in school…

Mara (neutral expressionless): Same…

We pause for a moment, the reality of the situation sinking in.

Mara (neutral neutral): Wait a second.

Mara (neutral curious): One of us has to do well in life so we can get rich, and I don’t want that responsibility.

Pro: Huh…

Pro: Even if I did somehow make it big, what makes you think I’d share my fortune with you?

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe. You wouldn’t be able to resist.

Pro: Huh…?

Mara (neutral thinking): Or…

Mara (neutral fufu):

She smiles mischievously, and, remembering everything that happened yesterday, I instinctively shudder again.

Mara: Prim’s gonna be a professional pianist, right? So if she turns out to be really good…

Pro: Really…?

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe.

Mara: Do your best. See you!

Mara (exit):

She pokes me in the cheek before running away, leaving me confused for a second before I realize why she left.

Prim (shy down): Um...

Prim (waving shy): Hi.

Prim (shy shy):

Pro: Oh, hey Prim.

Prim: You’re early today.

Pro: Yeah…

Prim (fidget down):

We stand there awkwardly, both of us fidgeting with our bags.

Prim (fidget shy):

Pro: Let’s get going?

Prim (shy shy):

She nods quietly, and we start heading to school in silence. She seems even more subdued than normal, and after a quick glance I notice that her eyebrows are a little scrunched, making it look like she’s worried about something.

Prim (shy surprise):

Pro: Is something up?

Prim (shy down): Oh, um…

Prim (fidget smiling\_nervous): I’m just a little worried about my test.

Oh right.

Prim (fidget shy):

Pro: Ah, yeah…

Pro: I totally remember that feeling.

Prim (shy curious): Remember?

Pro: Yeah. I don’t really get nervous before tests anymore.

Prim stares at me, impressed, and I realize that she’s gotten the wrong impression.

Pro: Whenever we have one, I accept the fact that I’ll probably do badly no matter how much I worry, so it makes things a little better.

Prim (shy smiling\_eyes\_closed): That makes sense.

I let out a sigh, remembering my conversation with Mara.

Pro: I dunno. I don’t think I did this badly when I first started high school...

Prim (shy curious): Maybe you’re in a slump?

Pro: A slump?

Prim (shy thinking): It’s like…

Prim (shy shy): When you can’t do something you normally could do for a while.

Prim: Like sometimes I find I can’t play some piano pieces I should have no trouble with.

Pro: Oh, I see. Maybe, actually.

Prim (shy curious):

Pro: I don’t think it’s exactly like that, though. I’ve always had trouble understanding things, but recently it’s like I can’t work up the motivation to force myself to. Especially after the summer break.

Prim (shy worried\_slightly): I know that feeling…

Prim (shy smiling\_eyes\_closed):

Prim’s nervous expression softens into a small smile.

Prim: Well, let’s both do our best!

Pro: Will do.

Prim (exit):

I trip on a crack in the sidewalk and almost fall over, apparently in an exceptionally comical fashion. Prim and I share a good laugh for the rest of our walk to school, and by the time we part we both have a little more bounce in our steps.