**Shopping District**

After we get our ice cream, we decide to stay in the shopping district and look around. It’s surprisingly quiet, despite it being a beautiful Saturday afternoon.

Mara (eating curious): Lemon again? Don’t you get tired of eating the same flavour over and over again?

Pro: I like what I like.

Mara (eating expressionless): That’s a boring answer.

Pro: Too bad.

Mara (eating pout): Boo.

Mara (eating hehe):

Mara giggles and gestures for me to give her a bite, which I reluctantly oblige.

Mara (eating smiling): Well, I guess it’s fine as long as you enjoy it.

Mara (eating smiling\_eyes\_closed): Here. Say “ah.”

Pro: Huh? I don’t need to try yours.

Mara: Say “ah.”

Pro: …

Pro: Ah…

Mara (eating hehe):

Laughing delightedly, she feeds me a bite of her own ice cream as well, obviously enjoying my embarrassment.

Mara (eating smiling): It’s good, isn’t it?

Pro: Yeah, I guess.

Mara (eating hehe): Hehe.

Mara (eating curious): Which one do you like better? Mine or yours?

Pro: Um…

To be honest, I liked Mara’s a little bit better, but if I told her that I’d never hear the end of it…

Pro: They’re both pretty good. I like them equally.

Mara: …

Mara (eating fufu): Spoken like a wannabe harem manga protagonist. Does “Pro” stand for “protagonist,” or something?

Pro: Huh…?

Mara (eating curious): Actually, what *does* your name mean?

Pro: Dunno.

Mara: Your mom never told you?

Pro: Nope. Don’t think so.

Mara: I see.

Mara (eating smiling\_eyes\_closed): Well, for the record, I like your name. It’s simple, cute, and a little endearing.

Pro: Thanks, I guess…

Mara (surprise surprise):

My cheeks feeling a little warm, I scarf down the rest of my ice cream cone to cool down, but I end up choking on it instead.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): Are you alright?!?

Pro: Yeah, I’m fine…

Mara (neutral worried):

I cough out the rest of the crumbs left in my windpipe, my throat starting to hurt again. Mara notices wincing in pain and catches on, concernedly fretting over me while I recover.

Mara: Seriously, you can be such a klutz sometimes…

Mara (neutral smiling\_worried): I can’t leave you alone, can I?

Pro: Probably not…

Mara (neutral hehe): Hehe.

Mara (neutral curious): Maybe we should get something warm to drink next, huh.

Mara (neutral smiling): For your throat, of course.

Pro: Right. For my throat.

**Café 2**

We head to a local café and order a pair of coffees, a regular one for me and a rather fancy specialty one for Mara. She doesn’t offer any of her drink to me this time, though – maybe she’s worried that the strange ingredients it has might aggravate my throat further.

Mara (neutral worried\_slightly): How is it?

Pro: It’s better now. Just a tiny bit sore.

Mara (neutral neutral): I see.

Mara (neutral smiling): You wanna order more ice cream? The parfaits here aren’t bad at all.

Pro: I think I’ve had enough ice cream for today…

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): Heresy. One can never have enough ice cream.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: You say that, but eat enough of it and eventually your stomach would burst.

Mara: …

Mara (neutral expressionless): That’s really gross…

Mara (ahem ahem):

Mara shudders, trying to hide her revulsion by clearing her throat dignifiedly.

Mara (neutral disappointed): Aw, my latte doesn’t seem very appealing anymore…

Mara: Ah well.

Mara (neutral curious): Oh yeah, I forgot to ask. How was Prim’s performance?

Mara (neutral sigh):

Pro: It was good.

Mara (neutral skeptical): Well, of course it was good.

Mara (neutral smiling): Did anything interesting happen?

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: Oh, I met Prim’s sister. That was pretty interesting.

Mara: What’s she like?

Pro: Mmm…

I stop to think about it, realizing that I have a pretty good grasp on her personality. Probably.

Pro: She seems pretty calm and collected, but also serious at the same time. She also has a rather sarcastic sense of humour…

Mara: I see, I see.

Pro: She kinda reminds me of Lilith, actually.

Mara (neutral confused): The blonde girl? Where did that come from?

Pro: Oh, sorry, just a passing thought. I ran into Lilith earlier today as well. At school.

Mara (neutral curious): Was she there for remedial lessons?

Pro: Nope. Apparently she’s pretty smart.

Mara: Oh, wow.

Mara (neutral wishful): Imagine being both pretty and smart.

Yeah, imagine…

Mara (neutral hehe): You should get her to tutor you or something. Just kidding.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: Um, actually…

I trail off, unsure exactly how Mara would react if I told her the truth.

Mara: Hm?

Unfortunately, she eventually figures it out.

Mara: Did you…?

Mara: …

Mara (neutral skeptical): I can’t believe you. You really are a wannabe manga protagonist.

Mara (neutral disappointed): Did you approach her and ask?

Pro: I dunno. We ran into each other, and then it kinda just happened.

Mara (neutral neutral): I see.

She stares at me oddly, her usually vibrant expression aloof and unreadable.

Mara (neutral smiling): You should drink your coffee before it gets cold. We came here to get you a warm drink, after all.

Pro: Oh, right.

Her smile returns, and she naturally changes the topic to an anime that recently aired, sucking me into a heated debate about our favourite characters. It’s a little scary how quickly she switched gears, but I guess if she wants to talk to me about something, then she will.

No need to force it.

**Intersection 2**

After downing our drinks, we pay the bill and start to head home.

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: Are you sure you don’t wanna go anywhere else?

Mara (neutral fufu): Hm? What’s this? I thought you didn’t wanna do anything today.

Pro: Well, while we’re already out…

Mara (neutral curious):

Pro: And I don’t think I said that.

Mara (neutral smiling): You didn’t explicitly say it, but you tried to escape earlier, remember?

Pro: Right…

Pro: Sorry.

Mara (neutral smiling\_eyes\_closed): It’s okay. You are forgiven.

Mara (neutral curious): You still haven’t told me why you ran away, though.

Pro: Do you really wanna know?

Mara: I do.

Pro: Well…

Pro: I wanted to take a nap.

Mara stares at me, probably trying to determine whether or not I’m joking.

Mara (neutral thinking): You know…

Mara (neutral neutral): If you wanted to sleep, you could’ve just said so.

Pro: I thought you’d object.

Mara: I wouldn’t have.

Mara (neutral hehe): I would’ve let you sleep on my lap.

Pro: And what makes you think I would’ve accepted?

Mara (neutral fufu): Hm? You seemed happy enough yesterday.

Mara (neutral satisfied): No need to hold back. Aren’t my legs comfortable?

Mara (surprise surprise\_blushing):

Pro: They are, but that’s not really the pro-

Realizing what I just said, I stop myself but it’s too late.

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): …

Mara (neutral bashful\_blushing): I-I see.

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): Well, if it’s only every so often then…

HUH?!?!?

Mara (surprise surprise\_blushing): Never mind!! Forget what I just said.

Mara (neutral nervous\_blushing): I, um, have to go home to…

Mara (neutral embarrassed\_blushing): To do stuff. That’s right. To do stuff.

Mara: See you later!

Mara (exit):

Not giving me a chance to even return her farewell, she dashes off as quickly as she can. I stare as she becomes smaller and smaller before eventually disappearing, a stunned look undoubtedly on my face.

What was that about? We’re childhood friends. There’s no need to get embarrassed over a bit of physical contact.

But then again…

…I guess I can’t really say anything, given how warm my cheeks feel.