

It's raining cats and dogs. The sky is almost completely covered by gloomy dark grey clouds; every couple of steps there are already not small puddles on the road: all the passers-by who are unlucky enough to be outside in such weather are covering themselves with umbrellas; and the cold raindrops continue to pour down everything, making a deafening sound as they hit the windows, and they don't care that because of them somebody's plans are being destroyed. Usually, such relentless downpours don't last too long in the spring, but thirty minutes has already passed, and the rain not only doesn't stop but also shows no sign of slowing down.

Looking at the rain drumming on the window of the school hallway, Nene sighs with sadness. In fact, she always loved this kind of rainy weather: with heavy rains, thunderstorms, and howling winds outside the window. The rhythmic tapping of rain on the window was pleasant, calmed her really well and helped her fall asleep or do her homework. But that's when she's at home, not locked in her school without an umbrella which means she can't go outside and return home.

"Stupid... How could I forget to check the weather forecast?... How could I forget to bring an umbrella?..."

Even Tsukasa had an umbrella today! Although this situation would be less of a problem for him than it's for her. Nene could easily imagine this fool running home headlong in the pouring rain, shouting at the top of his lungs all over the street. The picture from her imagination has improved her mood a little but it hasn't changed her current situation.

Actually, if he and Rui hadn't gone home earlier today, Nene would have asked them for help. Yes, she would have had to endure Tsukasa's vociferous teasing, but at least she wouldn't have wasted half an hour at school and would have been home long ago. Unfortunately, by the time Nene's last lesson was over, they had already left.

In fact, Nene was sure that if she called Rui right now, he'd come to help her. But he's been helping her too much lately, doing too much for her. She needs to learn to rely on him less.

— Kusanagi? What are you doing here?

A vaguely familiar voice calls out to her from behind, and Nene, filled with sudden hope, immediately turns around.

A sigh of relief gets stuck in her throat. In front of her stands Shinonome Akito, a boy who has recently become her classmate. He puts his hand to his chin in surprise, clearly not expecting to see her here. The dawning hope quickly evaporates, and Nene wants to believe that it isn't very noticeable how uncomfortable she is now.

Shinonome-kun always made her feel slightly uneasy. The difference between his polite but false side and the glimpses of his real, much rougher personality that came out too often was a source of great tension for her. It's possible to say that Nene was a little afraid of him, although she had never caught him doing anything too bad. Nene would have preferred to meet him less and certainly not to encounter him at a time when she was so vulnerable as she's now.

— Kusanagi, you... You forgot your umbrella, right? In such weather?

Nene twitches at his correct guess, nods nervously, but remains silent. It's better to say nothing than to mumble something incomprehensible.

— Look, then, maybe, we can go home together? I have an umbrella.

Nene freezes and looks at Shinonome-kun in shock, as if expecting to find some kind of trick on his face. She doesn't see anything like that, his expression looks naturally calm, and the offer even seems to her... sincere?

Realizing that one of the other possible alternatives is to spend the night at the school, Nene decides to accept this peculiar gift from fate. Squeezing the sleeves of her jacket tightly to give herself courage and confidence, Nene finds the strength to force herself out:

— I-If you'll be s-so kind...

Glancing at her with a slight confusion but not asking anything, Shinonome-kun nods and walks over to his locker with his belongings. He quickly changes his shoes and takes out a big black umbrella. Nene also quickly puts on her outdoor shoes, and they walk to the exit of the school together.

Shinonome-kun is the first to step outside, where the weather still hasn't thought about calming down, and he extends his hand with an umbrella which he opens. Then he lifts it, shielding himself from the downpour, and gestures for Nene to come under the umbrella. She runs, still nervously and quietly, under this shield from merciless arrow-drops.

"I hope I don't regret this a hundred times in the future..."

After a few steps, Nene is surprised by how comfortable and dry she feels under this umbrella. She doesn't stand too close to Shinonome-kun (the only thought about it makes her flinch with fear) but she still doesn't feel a single drop fall on her. Apparently, the umbrella is really big.

It's only when they cross the school gates and Nene looks up from her feet and the puddles beneath them that she notices that instead of holding the umbrella in the middle, equally covering both of them, Shinonome-kun is leaning it heavily towards her, leaving his entire left arm exposed to the heavy rain.

Nene murmurs her thanks quietly, but the downpour and the sudden thunder drown her out. She wants to hope that Shinonome-kun has heard her but she doesn't really think he's done it.

After a brief "well, lead the way" from Shinonome-kun, Nene relaxes a bit and walks much more boldly, pointing the way and avoiding puddles to keep her shoes from getting completely ruined. They don't talk much for most of the way, with only Nene's occasional phrases about where to turn next breaking the silence.

— Shinonome-kun, and where do you live yourself?

Unable to contain her curiosity and bear the awkward silence any longer, Nene decides to, at least, talk for a while.

— Ah?... Well, it's almost next to the railway station, about a ten-minute walk, probably.

Her question catches Shinonome-kun off guard and seems to pull him out of the thoughts he's been deeply immersed in for all the way from their school.

— But that's a completely different direction from the school! Shouldn't you have turned right instead of left as soon as you left the school?

In her surprise, Nene raises her voice very loudly, which immediately embarrasses her.

— Yeah, and what should I've done with you? Send you on a solo journey across the water, covered with a school jacket?

It's very clear from Shinonome-kun's voice and expression that he doesn't like this idea at all.

— You'd be soaked through by the time you got halfway! Then you'd be bedridden for a week, if not more. You forget that, unlike me, you don't have an umbrella, don't you?

Nene can physically feel her ears and cheeks turning scarlet with shame. True, it was a really stupid question. But now she wants to remain silent even less than before, so she asks him a question again:

— W-what were you doing at school for so long? The lessons are long over, you're not in any club, and you didn't have to wait for the rain to slow down...

— Hmm... I helped the guys from the basketball club. You're right, I'm not a member of any of the clubs, but sometimes other guys from different sports clubs ask for help, and I don't want to turn them down. Can you imagine, those basketball players are probably still practicing there.

After some thought, Shinonome-kun asks the question himself:

— And are you in any club yourself, Kusanagi?

— Yes... I'm in a film club...

— Wow, this sounds really interesting, actually.

— T-then why don't you try joining our club yourself?

— Eh, nah... I spend too much time on lives and preparations for them. I'll be a very bad club member, seriously.

Nene is about to launch into a speech about what they do in their club, how exciting their meetings are, and how it's not necessary to attend every meeting, or even most of them, in certain circumstances they can turn a blind eye to this.

But before she can do that, she notices her house, their final destination. Suppressing a slight feeling of disappointment in her chest, Nene awkwardly bows to Shinonome-kun:

— And here's my house... I can go on by myself...

Shinonome-kun nods very seriously, says goodbye to her and turns around, intending to walk towards the opposite direction, now back to his home. He tries to shake off the dripping water from his completely soaked left hand insensibly, almost casually. Nene feels a sense of something very wrong, and, once again, she squeezes the sleeves of her jacket. Standing in the continuing rain and taking a deep breath, she screams with all her might:

— Thank you, Shinonome-kun! Thank you very much!

Shinonome-kun turns back to her abruptly, for some reason not very content, with a slightly red face:

— Why do you have to shout so much, a?! I heard you perfectly that first time!

Nene smiles at him quietly, still timidly, and waves him goodbye before running into the house. Although her heart is racing fastly-fastly from the experienced excitement, her soul is calm and relaxed. It's very helpful to see other people from different perspectives. Even the smallest details can drastically change someone's opinion about them.