

Rainy Day

An original short story
by Nagaru Tanigawa
Illustrations: Noizi Itou



Translation: Ultimatemegax Editing: Kaisos Erranon

This is a story that took place when I was in middle school.

It was near the beginning of September in my final year. I'm not exactly sure if it was the first or second week of the month, but it was around then.

Summer vacation had just ended, but we were still able to swim in the pool during our physical activity classes. Unfortunately it was our final day to swim, but we were given free time to do as we wish. I wouldn't say it was from the kind hearts of our teachers, but it's a tradition that we get to do on the last day we can swim. While we get to splash around in this pool that stinks of chlorine that some of the other students somehow love to do, our teachers get some free time. It kills two birds with one stone.

As usual, the summer heat had lingered around and, to make matters worse, there wasn't a single cloud in the sky today. This gave the sun a golden opportunity to spray its hot rays of light all around us. While I would've liked to stay in the lukewarm water and enjoy the nice breeze, all of the students from two different classes were jammed into a 25 meter pool. I swam for a while and then quickly came out to dry at the poolside fence closest to the street.

I got a pounding throb in my head every time someone splashed into the water, but there's another reason I got out of the pool. Water instantly evaporates from my wet skin, thus I could cool off faster in the shade.

We would hear various sounds in the woods behind us for the last time. Despite this heat wave persisting on into autumn, we can't go against society's wishes to end our summer. While I wish it could stay in the half of the year that summer occupies, it's beyond the power of a normal middle school student to place a needle on the calendar and have it stop.

But there's another good reason for the anxiety I'm feeling. My incredibly comfortable middle school days are coming to an end now that we're in the latter half of the calendar year. It's something that I think every middle school student at the end of his three years feels; I don't know which high school I'll be going to and, even worse, how I'm going to do on the entrance exams for the ones I apply to.

Well, it's not that I'm very pessimistic towards those things. My mother, the kind woman who brought me up, anticipated my laziness towards my studies since spring began and had enrolled me into a cram school with the goal of continuing my education in a small prefectural school in the city. So now reluctantly, lucky me gets to travel to my house with exam information more or less spilling out of my head. Well, all of the teachers will say their "You'll be alright!" special prayers and give me a certificate of passage, so it'll be alright for me to slack off somewhat.

"Ah..." Surely I'll think about it half a year from now when exams are about to happen. The situation is out of our hands, though we prepare as if most of us will be scattered to Timbuktu. I get depressed when I start to think about my self-introduction in my first high school class. What kind of people will my classmates be? I hope there aren't any weirdos in my class.

And so in that kind of state, I stared at the boys and girls who were frolicking around. One person rose from the pool. I could hear the splattering of water as she walked over to me.

"Hey, Kyon."

Sasaki, who was smiling and covered with water, quickly sat down next to me. "You don't seem to be too energetic. Did you get enough sleep last night?" Sasaki sat holding her knees close to her chest while she looked at me.

"Ah, you could say that." Honestly, I had been feeling tired since this morning. It started as soon as I woke up and still hadn't gone away now. I was hoping to sleep during first and second period, but the eyes of my Science and English teachers were like hawks. That plan was an utter failure.

A short "kukukuku" from the inside of Sasaki's throat was released like doves from a magicians hat. "You were listening to the radio at some late hour and thus you couldn't get to sleep, weren't you?"

Mystery solved.

"I suppose you're just the type of person who wouldn't use that time to study."

That's me exactly. Certainly the last thing on my mind last night.

"Today we have a quiz at our cram school. Instead of studying for it you decided to listen to the radio. And then afterwards you abandoned your studies for the comforts of your bed. Procrastinating like that is something I think you'd do."

How did you know that? Did you plant some type of listening device in my room?

"I've not been to your room before have I? Usually I only go as far as the entryway."

Of course I'm joking. Sasaki's always been able to see what people are thinking. Myself being a normal human, I seem to lack that ability. I'm sure she's seen through me like a flimsy piece of paper.

"Yare yare Kyon. Please understand that we are about to sit for some very important exams soon. Haven't you had enough of your middle school life?" That's purely Sasaki.

Everything changes in life, but I didn't tire of playing like an idiot with other idiots until the middle of my second year because those times were great fun. But as it stands right now I wouldn't be around idiotic classmates laughing at stupid things. That's just a bunch of memories to me now.

A drop of water from the pool hung from Sasaki's bangs she spoke. "That's a relief, Kyon. Even if you go to a high school¹, it's just the beginning. It's like a three year moratorium in life where things won't start again. And then you'll still have to apply to universities after that to continue that time. Only

¹ Japanese students are required to attend schooling until they graduate from middle school (the equivalent of 9th grade/year). High schools are optional, but 98% of students go on to attend one.

students have the right to postpone their life. Middle school is just the opening act for the rest of our lives."

Sasaki cynically smiled. Just how far do her real intentions go? I can't tell. Are those plans something she thinks everyone should do or is it just for me alone?

While I appreciate her friendship, Sasaki should be included in the "popular" category rather than be associated around me. I only met Sasaki once I moved to being a third year student. Even then I could tell that Sasaki's mental age is far beyond myself, much less what I would become when I'm older. When compared with her, she'd easily be called the mature one.

"University-type ideas are only dreams for me now. Is that alright?"

When I informed her of my true intentions, Sasaki gave a comforting smile. "I'll help you improve your will to study so they won't just be in your dreams. I think, combined, we can surely extend this moratorium for you. As long as you put in some study time, I think I'd allow you to have some fun now and again. When the time comes for you to return your middle school ID, you should be just fine. That's how I perceive it'll be. I would guess that your mother has the same opinion."

Yes, when Sasaki makes an appearance around my mother, that woman is quite happy. She's given off the impression many times that she desires for me to attend the same university as Sasaki, regardless of how impossible it is for that to happen. My mother is just like that.

The prerequisites for both Sasaki and I to attend the same university are quite high. First, Sasaki is amazingly gifted at doing well on examinations while you'll be able to see how poorly I do on this afternoon's cram quiz. If I worry about university plans right now, then my spirit won't be able to keep up. The Olympics come around every four years, so wouldn't taking exams every three years be a fault in our system?

While I plan for many years in the future in my head, the present me should just relax and enjoy himself.

"Yare yare." Sasaki shrugged her shoulders. "But I'd say you've struck a good point, Kyon. Your way is correct as well. Worrying about this or that in the future means nothing if what we're worrying about doesn't happen. I just ask that you don't take the choice of temporarily stopping all of your thoughts because your worries are far away. That's not a proper way to approach the future. Even at the best of times, we have troubles coming at us like we're just small pitiful little children."

As always, I can't tell what are these troubles Sasaki's currently talking about. Before I can ask about it, a nuisance appears before us.

"Good morning Sasaki-san." It's Kunikida, from the neighboring class. Since we've shared many classes, I've gotten used to seeing his face. We met this person, a weirdly styled young male, in our third year of middle school.

Kunikida stops several steps before us. "Mind if I sit next to you?"

"Do as you wish." Sasaki answers with a smile.

Kunikida sits across from Sasaki. "You two seem closer now that we've started the second semester. Did something happen over the summer vacation to bring you two together?"

You ask an unthinkable question. "Nothing in particular comes to mind" I give Kunikida a sharp look. "We were in the same classroom during the same cram school summer session. Surely you would become close...right? Besides, if this person wasn't in middle school I'd have fewer chances to speak with someone..." For some reason I couldn't properly answer.

"Oh well," said Kunikida. "But when you think about it, you're both in the same middle school and in the same class... I'd say you'd have the same chances of talking with others. You'd still come into contact with your classmates and Sasaki."

That probably wouldn't happen. While it would be inconsequential, I probably wouldn't become close with anyone. Even in kindergarten I would leave for the day before playing heartedly with my classmates.

Kunikida further investigated. "But you only met this spring in the third years' cram school class right? Then being in the same class could act as a catalyst for your relationship. Besides, the distance between you two doesn't seem that big."

"Is that so...." Entering the conversation between we two guys was Sasaki.

Guessing my full name was incredible, but she could've just looked at the full roster of names and found mine. Regardless, it served as the starting point for our conversations. I can't say that it was that insignificant if it started that many.

"Thanks, but since the questions involve my personal life, would you mind stopping your interrogation?" Somehow it was Sasaki stopping him with her words. I had started to wrinkle my brow when I noticed the "kukuku" coming from Sasaki's throat as she started to laugh.

"Ah, but that question is just like you Kunikida-kun. You know I have to prepare beforehand because you don't ask any fair questions. Was it not your intent to come over here and find out if Kyon and I have any secrets together? Thus we have to prepare as if we don't answer properly, it may appear badly for us. If a person asks a question that is mistaken from the very beginning, then I feel that the only proper reply is to remain silent."

Seems like it was me who was at a loss from this sudden rescue from my friend because Kunikida had a pleasant smile on his face for some reason.

"But that indeed is a proper reply to my questions Sasaki-san. I didn't come over here to begin some sort of rivalry with a friend of Kyon's. Something like that isn't what a friend should do. So if you would like me to say so, I am sorry Kyon."

Thanks. I'd think he was making light of me, but that doesn't seem likely. And wait, it feels as though my inadequacy is coming from both Sasaki and Kunikida.

"So," began Sasaki. "Kunikida-kun, that's all in the past now. Did you come over just to say those meaningless words? Or has this prologue come to an end yet?"

"I believe it has, Sasaki-san. Oh, I brought that CD you lent me. I'll return it by the end of the day."

CD? Of music?

"Yeah," Kunikida meekly nodded. "I'm in the broadcasting club. Though our intention was to play music throughout the school during the lunch hour, I can't let my own taste in music take priority over others. It's already begun clashing with other members' personal tastes; thus we decided the best path would be to play a heavy rotation like some shops have done. People have strongly desired to hear music during lunch, so I can't let my own tastes get in the way of our broadcast."

What kind of songs did he like?

"Western music. I'm a little crazed about it."

I see. While I've heard some of that in the past, I don't understand either the lyrics or the popularity of foreign celebrities. But those are just my opinions.

"I also like that style." And Sasaki spoke up. "People who like both Japanese and Western music are a minority in this school. I think Kunikida-kun also feels very similarly to myself. That's why I said I'd share my CD with him. These small feelings of solidarity will also sprout from our classmates who like Western music as well. Even though we are a minority, we own these feelings and we should embrace them as a sign of unity between us. Think how lonely we'd be if we didn't become friends."

Sasaki placed her arm on her knee and turned her chin to face me. "If you'd like, I wouldn't mind lending it to you either."

That's alright. If it's not in Japanese, I wouldn't be able to grasp the meaning of the lyrics.

"Oh well Kyon," Sasaki continued. "Foreign music, though nice, is not perfect. While I like Western music, I recognize that the singer is simply one instrument in the band. There's the melody of the drums, bass, and the guitar. Then the singer's vocals combine with the others to make a tune. Only then can you experience the true work. It doesn't matter the language; I even take a Japanese singer's vocals as only a part. It's inconsequential as to whether the lyrics have meaning or not because they're just lumped in as part of the tune. And so regardless if it's vocals, guitar, or piano, they all have the same importance to me when I listen to music."

Please don't be discouraged if you're a songwriter.

"Music has no national borders. Because it's like that, it's alright if the message isn't communicated. Hearing a good tune is something that can be understood all around the world. Novels and films have an artificial story that is in different syntax from others, yet as long as the meaning is conveyed, it's alright. I'd say that the quality of sound echoing all around the world would be about the same, right?"

If there is a theory by Sasaki and Kunikida, it's highly unlikely that I'll be able to understand it. Besides, it seems like Kunikida will be playing Western music during lunch. Unlike Japanese music, it'll flow through ear from ear without being much of a hindrance. We should be grateful for that.

Back in the pool, there were plenty of male and female students swimming to their hearts' content in their final lesson. How innocent.

Naturally, as a healthy young adult in the middle of my teens, my eyes were focused on the girls' young bodies like some kind of animal instinct. My eyes were on those in the same class as me. They were particularly on Okamoto, whose figure was much different than the rest of the girls in my class. All of the boys were noticing her. The image of the school's number one girl in her school swimsuit would be burned into our memories. It's quite the rare sight to see in real-time.

Thanks to the sun's glaring rays, our school regulated competition swimsuits would quickly dry. Changing clothes would be such an easy task now.

Sasaki, Kunikida, and myself gazed at the students playing around in the water until the bell chimed.

Then we move to lunch on that same day.

We were still wearing the summer uniform at that time. Short sleeve cut shirts and slacks for the boys and short sleeve blouses with suspenders and a skirt for the girls. While the men didn't mind, you could hear complaints coming from the opposite gender. "Primitive," "they remind me of being a child," and "Though there are some good points, they are way out of season" were things said about the female uniform.

"There's no use in complaining." That uninterested statement was from Sasaki. "While they have a point, we're still children after all. We're not ready to interact with the rest of society yet."

Continuing in that uninterested tone, "It's just like eating lunch from the cafeteria. Wouldn't you say that's the sign of being a child?"

I would agree. It's just like the age when you're standing on your tiptoes to seem bigger.

"As well as raising your voice when you're in the water at the swimming pool. Don't you agree?"

Ah, well if you go that far then all the students are brats.

"I agree." While nibbling on some bread she continued, "We're still boys and girls or, as some call us, kids. If we're not contributing to society, then we're not part of it. As of right now, we possess many freedoms that we don't think about. Right now we hold this privilege, but after this year we have to give it up when we graduate. I don't want to embrace an inferiority complex to being children but I don't want to forever stay a child like in 'Peter Pan'."

Sasaki gulped down her bread and then said "However, I think our moratorium on having those rights is ending shortly, and that we should think about them more in-depth."

Then I, who didn't understand, emitted a comment. Finish your lunch soon. Afternoon classes begin after lunch.

In the same class, a neighboring student was listening to Sasaki and my conversation for no reason. "Hey you two!" A third voice came from behind me. I turned back.

"Ah..." Unintentionally my voice spoke when I turned around. There at point-blank range was the face of a girl. More specifically, the girl who raised the libido of all the male students with a single glance was there.

It was Okamoto.

Incidentally, I had no choice but to look at her. Our class leader Okamoto was standing before us with two blank sheets of paper.

"This is a career wish form. Write your wish and return it to the teacher."

Such a serious face, but this girl had a weakness: her personal space was quite small. Occasionally she'd bump into people as she walked by them. Her curly hair was touching my cheek and I was succumbing to myopia even though I don't wear glasses. When she spoke, her face came close to the tipping point of my nose. I could see why she was different than all other middle school girls as she was directly opposite as my face and edging closer. I felt just like I was beginning to do the backstroke in a pool.

And then at my weakest moment, this unwitting desire of men-in other words an absolutely beautiful woman- captured me. I was quickly trounced by the natural strikes of the unwitting Okamoto. Her scent and looks that would be good enough to ensnare any man were going all throughout my body, but it wasn't all good for me. Behind that popular girl look lies something nasty inside. Yes, she's a natural man-hunter.

"Of everyone in this group, it's only you guys left to finish this." Okamoto was clouding my senses. I'd say she was only 10 centimeters away from my face. "Don't be late turning it in. If you are, then both the teacher and myself will be angry with you. Please turn it in this time."

Even though the topic is very serious, she says it in such a coquettish tone. Suddenly she quickly leaves us behind.

That was quite the shock. Really, if you were to come over here you should also talk to Sasaki about that. Well, I guess I do have a habit of procrastinating on important documents.

"I suppose" began Sasaki who also hadn't say anything, "that your path will be quite difficult."

"Yeah, Yeah." I was slowly starting to catch my breath,

"Please think about it more. If you go somewhere close, it may not be the best choice for you."

"If it's a public school, then it'd be in the city. Do private institutions have their own grounds?"

"I don't think that's the case. You're still young though. From your records, I'd think you'd likely get into a good prep school, right?" Sasaki slightly bends her head as in doubt. "That's still somewhat within your capabilities. If I recall, Kunikida-kun decided on his first choice of schools a long time ago."

Good. With the size of that guy's memory, I'm sure he'd head to a prestigious high school.

"I don't remember the name but he thought it'd suit his goals. Certainly I'd say the people attending that school do as well."

I think Kunikida's goals are a step above the rest of us. Or at least what appears to be my route. My mother wishes for me to go to a local private institution as she's told me, but I can't attend if the tuition fee is too high; mostly due to the living expenses at my house. While Sasaki is at scholar level, my only problem would be using private/public schooling to prevent me from sliding down the hill of life. That's the difference between us.

Sasaki once again sees victory in sight. "An inner city public school would be easy for you to get into, Kyon. Your improvement on the next test results will show the hard work we've put in going to cram school."

Already my boredom had set in after summer vacation finished. Already half the year has gone past and now worries have come in to cloud up my mood. Why couldn't we just stay at the side of the pool gazing up into the blue sky?

"I'd like to do that too, Kyon." Sasaki said with a graceful smile towards me. "Unfortunately, time doesn't stop. We can't reverse the flow. We have to constantly change ourselves in order to keep up with it. Forever staying a middle school student isn't good for you. You have to keep moving after your dream just like a pawn in chess can only move forward."

A dream, huh. I wonder what dreams Sasaki has for the future.

"Kyon, fulfilling dreams are only one part of what I want to do. I don't think you can just talk to people about them. Maybe if I get to the bitter end and haven't come across my dreams or hopes I might consider talking about them with someone."

I remember Sasaki suddenly smiled after that.

I remember seeing that smiling face. In the same third year classroom, it was like mixing a full color anime still cel with a sepia image. That's the impact it made on me. It was only for an instant, but why do I still remember that time?

And yet, I somehow forgot about it until that meeting before spring vacation in my second year of high school.

After classes, Sasaki accompanied me as we left the school. Since spring, it had become our habit that I would take Sasaki along to cram school on the back of my bike. First we had to stop by my house and pick up the bicycle first.

It just happened that my house was en route from the middle school.

As I was taking out my ladies bicycle from the porch I could hear the pitter-patter of steps coming from inside. There at the entrance appeared my little sister.

"Welcome home Kyon-kun!" At that time my sister was in her fourth year of elementary school. My nine-year old sister had a soy sauce bag in one hand and a half eaten rice cookie in the other. Her eyes grew like a cat's when she saw who was behind me.

"Ah! Sasaki-oneechan! Have you come to play?"

"Unfortunately not," said Sasaki with a cheerful smile. "We're off to study after school. Maybe someday I can come back and join you."

"Shucks." My sister's innocent eyes were pointed straight at Sasaki until she turned towards me. "Kyon-kun, would you like a rice cracker?"

Not now. It's in-between meals, but maybe I'll get one when I come back. My sister immediately stopped negotiations. "How about one, Sasaki-oneechan?"

Take out that rice cracker before you speak. Hey! There better not be any teethmarks on the rest of those in the house.

"Sure, I'll take one." The smiling Sasaki took one and quickly put it in her mouth. My sister delightfully laughed as Sasaki's crunching made a tune. I shrugged my shoulders at these two's style of communication. When I went closer to the doorframe, I found another set of colorful childrens' shoes.

"Do we have a guest?"

"Miyokichi," said my sister. "She came over to play with me in Kyon-kun's room."

Play in the living room, not my room!

"Can I borrow a game then? I've done that before and you didn't mind."

That's reasonable. While sometimes my skills as a tactician, or so I think, may drop down to level 0, there's times like this where I feel touched.

That's as much as I remember about the game. After that I dragged out my usual bicycle and tossed Sasaki's and my bags in the front basket. I quickly straddled the bike and sat down. Following that, Sasaki got onto the back of the bike. Isn't this a violation of the Road Traffic Act? Oh well, I'll just stick to back roads as best I can to be safe.

"Bye-Bye!" yelled my sister. "I won't go into your room except to get the game! Miyokichi won't either!"

"Good."

My sister was thoughtlessly waving her hand to send us off. "See you soon Sasaki-oneechan!" Sasaki gave a silent nod from behind me. Without waving back I stepped on the pedals and we left. I could still hear the crunching of the rice cracker from my passenger.

And so we were off. The weather had turned very odd. Grey clouds were steadily approaching us from one side. While we still had sunlight on us, the ominous color was awaiting us.

And just as I thought a few minutes later it started to rain. Not only did it start to rain, but it was pouring down as if it were a tropical squall. The asphalt was soon becoming soaked and began to give off that rain soaked scent we all know.

Thinking it would be over shortly, I kept pedaling. That optimistic forecast was surely too good to be true. As soon as we left my house we were soaked. Even Sasaki, who was behind me, was as bad as I was.

"This isn't good, Kyon." This more or less amused voice from behind me spoke. "If we keep going all of our clothes will be soaked. Find somewhere to stop."

You make it sound so easy. While the rain kept hitting my face, I started to hunt for some awnings that were placed outside a building or a convenience store, as my bicycle kept moving forward. Finally we found a place that would protect us from nature's threat.

It was some type of overhang for a store. I can't remember if it was for a grocery or a cleaning store though. Regardless, I stopped my bike immediately and, with Sasaki, took cover underneath the covered overhang.

Though one could call it an awning, it wasn't that big. While it was enough to cover Sasaki and myself, the overhang wasn't big enough to block out all of the rain and the associated odor. We took a direct hit from the squall. It was bad enough that even our underwear was soaked.

"That's it for me." That was Sasaki, who mumbled across from me. "You didn't purposely bring this rain down, did you? I don't remember it raining during the last time we went to cram school. It doesn't rain often, so I'm not quite sure your spirit didn't wish for it to rain this time."

Wouldn't your theory be mistaken if two people had the identical chances of being soaked like this in the rain?

"Regrettably, my supernatural powers appear to be in a drought. We could go to the area convenience store to stock up though."

"No thank you. I remember those cruel folktales about people dying when meeting kappa after they wished for rain." Sasaki was one head shorter than myself. Not to mention she was sloped downwards so naturally I had to look diagonally down to see her.



As if she was concerned about her bust, Sasaki kept pulling her blouse away from her. When it got wet it had the tendency to cling to her body. Also from what I could see, almost all of her top was becoming transparent.

"While I do prefer things like rainy weather, I can't say that I like sudden downpours washing over me like this. I was already feeling soaked from our swimming lesson earlier today. Today's been one unlucky day. I wonder if it's the Sanrinbou² or the Day of Heavenly Death."

Usually black, her hair had taken on a somewhat greenish tint and became awfully glossy when it got wet. Her bangs were listlessly hanging over her brow.

"Oh yeah, Kyon."

I somewhat raised my eyes to glance at hers.

"If you'd please look away for a while, I'd appreciate it."

Why?

".....yare yare."

Sasaki shook her head as if admitting defeat. "Kyon, even though you forget at times, I'm 100% a girl. When I'm like this.... you should understand that I'd prefer not to have my underwear showing. I'm not self-absorbed enough to have my body shown to the shameless eyes of the public."

"Ah, sorry." I turned around, panicked.

Yeah, I'd have to agree with her. It's my fault that sometimes I forget and treat her as if she's somehow transcended gender lines. I guess it's how she always talks like a boy. I wonder why I've never asked her what caused her to begin speaking like that.

But it's alright. That's just purely Sasaki's way of being a girl. From what I was able to see, she definitely doesn't look like a boy. There's nothing weird about her acting differently from other girls. Well, if pressed about her, I'd have to say "Sasaki is Sasaki," at that time. Perhaps stranger, there's no other way to describe her. The past me didn't have any doubts about her at all. It's not strange now that I think about it.

She was only my friend who accompanied me in the same class and cram school. How is that bad? While the present me would be very serious, it was difficult for that me to become so as Sasaki was able to see through me like one can easily see the skies during winter.

Sasaki, who was still worried about her bust, spoke, "You didn't get a chance to look closely at my pitiful chest did you? Do you prefer Okamoto-san's? Honestly, yare yare Kyon. Not just from the rain, but from me too."

I didn't understand the significance of the second half of those words at that time. Now I know that our conversation was quickly smoothed over. I meaninglessly looked up at the blank sky.

² A very unlucky day in Japanese folklore.

Despite the fact that I could feel her body heat, I turned away. In this situation, it seems the only thing that I could do was to stare out as the rain hit the streets and highways.

Perhaps unconsciously I muttered, "Summer has ended."

Sasaki curiously looked up and then added to my statement, "My clothes will quickly dry."

Looking back, I think those words were trivial. Was there not enough wit to come up with something better? Thankfully Sasaki didn't give a rebuttal to what I said. Perhaps she felt it wasn't worth it to try. We stood in silence watching the downpour cover the streets for a little while.

Then Sasaki spoke, downtroddenly, "It looks like it's not going to stop soon."

"Yeah."

"We're going to be really late."

"Yeah."

During my halfhearted replies, I glanced over and saw Sasaki looking up and for some reason admiring as the clouds darkened. There was a single drop of rain extending from her bangs as if she had just come from the pool when it suddenly overlapped with Sasaki's figure.

"What?"

Sasaki looked over with a sideways glance. *Crap.* This is bad. Not being able to think of a suitable reply to her question, I too turned my gaze back to the sky to see that nothing had changed. The squall hadn't weakened a bit right now. Even though I could sense the body heat next to me, I couldn't turn my head to look at her. Ordinarily, I wouldn't look at the street and the sky like I'm doing, but it couldn't be helped in this case.

Then, perhaps unconsciously I muttered, "Yare yare."

Oh how I wish I could use a time machine to go back and instruct that me to improve his vocabulary and perhaps choose a better set of words. Even now they haven't improved much since then. But that's just how it goes.

As for the rest of that day, we finally made it to cram school, though I don't remember how late we were. They could plainly see that the rain was the cause of our lateness, or perhaps our truancy if I'm not remembering correctly. I've buried that memory deep in the back of my head. I think Sasaki would probably know though.

And just now I realized it.

Since I've entered North High and rendezvoused with Haruhi, I seem to mutter those words constantly thanks to you. It's a certain phrase that I've borrowed from Sasaki to this day and time. An innocent phrasing from Sasaki that's four syllables long and is one portion of my vocabulary now.

I should easily remember my middle school days but those memories have become a bit unreliable, like a toddler jumbling the insides of a toy box into pieces. But that was the starting point of when I started to say "Yare yare."

That much I know for sure.