

—A NAVRITTO STORY—



The Red *Umbrella.*

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The Red Umbrella

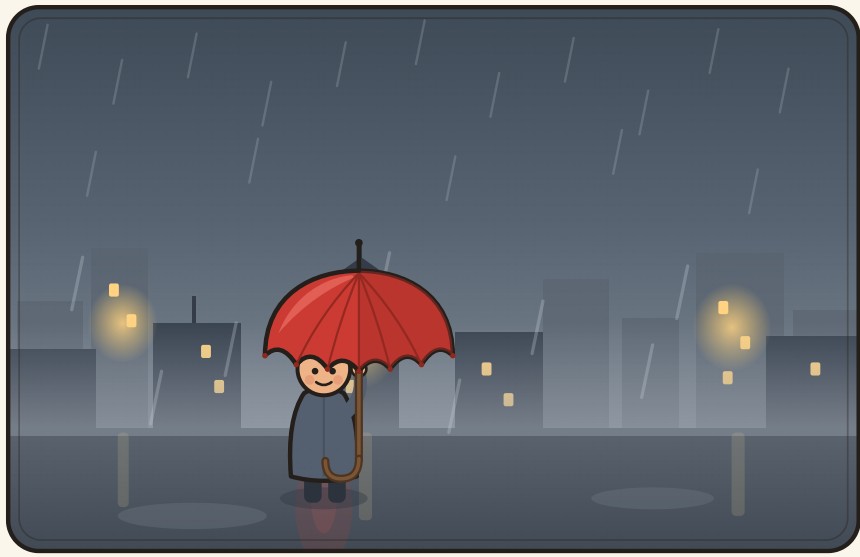
Written & illustrated by Navritto.

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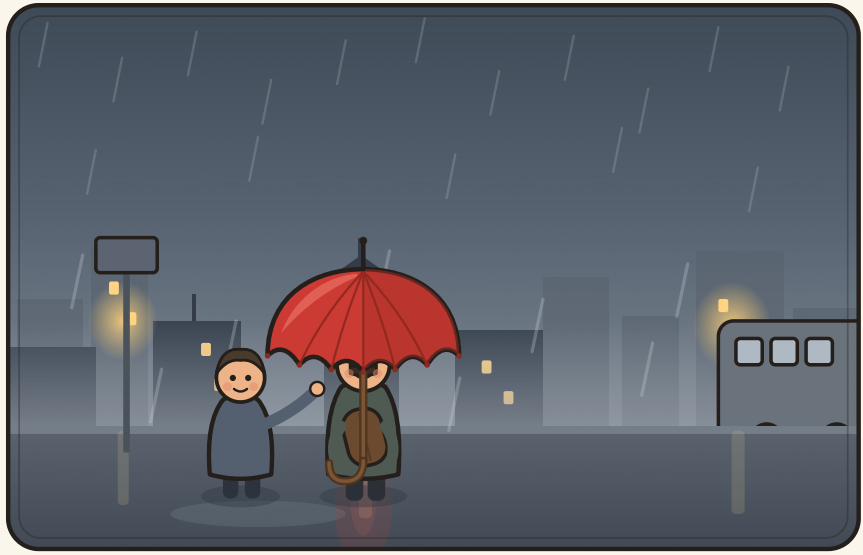
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It was the greyest, wettest morning of the whole year. The sky was grey. The streets were grey. The rain came straight down and did not stop.

In all that grey, one thing shone bright and red: Milo's umbrella. It was his favourite thing in the world. Under it he stayed warm and dry, and the rain drummed a little song on the top.

So Milo set off for the bus, red umbrella held high — the one spot of colour in the whole city.



At the bus stop a young woman stood shivering. Her coat was soaked dark. She held a violin case tight against her chest, trying to keep it dry, but the rain had already found it.

“I have a concert this morning,” she said, almost crying, “and I am so wet and so cold.”

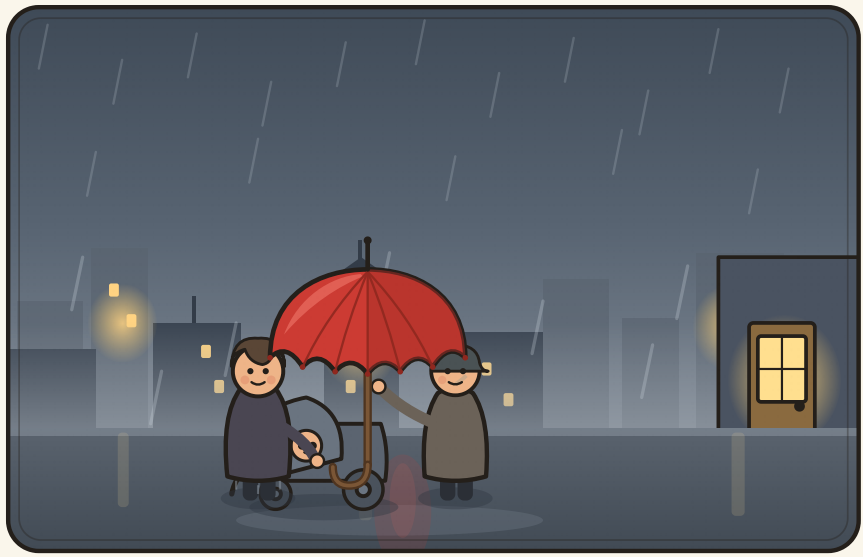
Milo looked at his warm, dry umbrella. Then he lifted it over her head. When his bus came splashing up, he pressed the handle into her hand. “Keep it,” he said — and ran off into the rain, grinning, before she could say no.



For the first time all morning, the woman was dry. Under the red umbrella she felt calm, and warm, and no longer in a hurry.

So she noticed the old man across the street. His paper bag had split, and his apples were rolling into the rushing gutter.

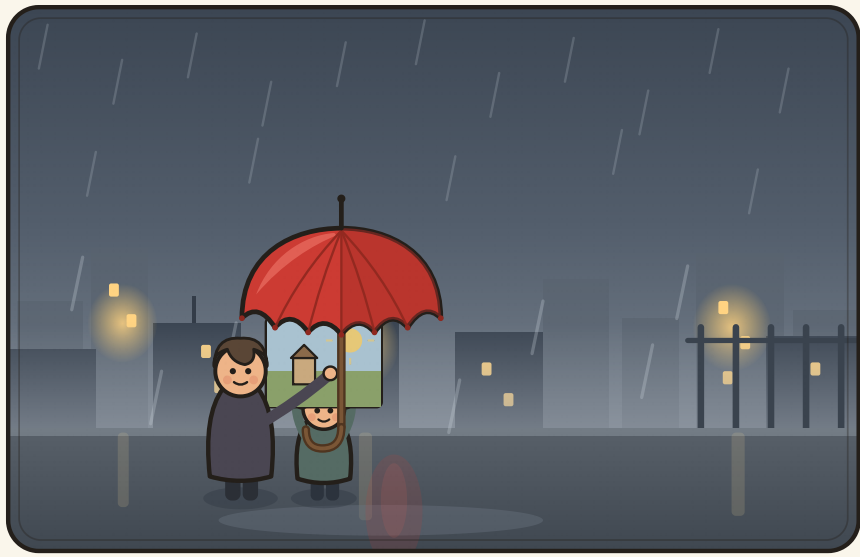
She crossed the road and held the umbrella over him while they gathered every one. When her tram hummed near, she could not carry the violin and run and hold the umbrella too. So she tipped it gently into his hands. “Now you keep it,” she smiled, and hurried off, her violin safe and dry at last.



The old man walked on, warm and dry beneath the red umbrella. At the corner he found a young mother bent over a pram. Her coat was soaked through, because she had draped it over her baby to keep the rain off its small face.

The old man said nothing. He simply held the red umbrella over the pram, and walked beside her all the way to her door.

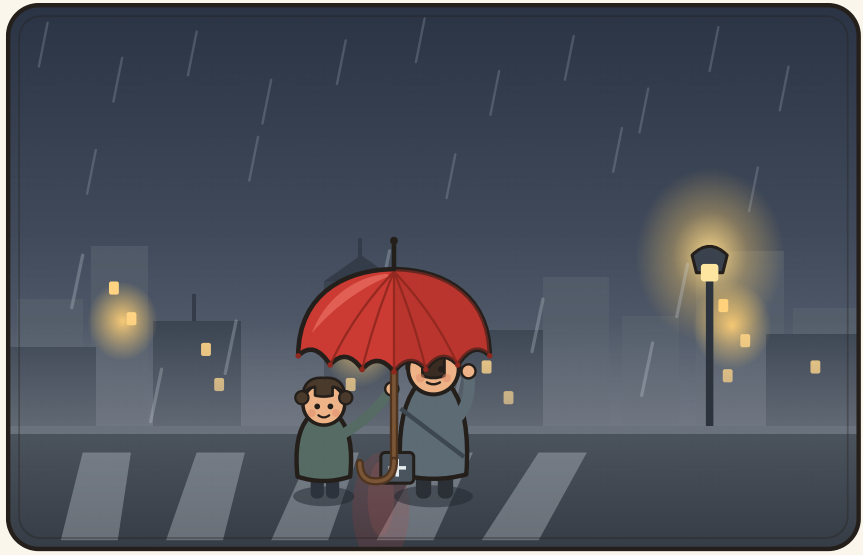
“For the little one,” he said, and gave her the umbrella. Then he stepped inside, out of the rain, warm from more than the fire.



Her baby now dry and asleep, the mother stepped back outside. On the corner a schoolgirl stood crying. She had painted a great picture for her school show, and the rain was turning it to grey mush in her arms.

The mother ran over and lifted the red umbrella above the painting like a roof. Together they walked to the school gate, the picture safe and dry between them.

“Take it inside where it’s dry,” said the mother, and gave the girl the umbrella. The painting was saved. Not one colour had run.



All day the red umbrella crossed the grey city, from hand to hand to hand. Now the light was fading and the street lamps were flickering on.

At a crossing the schoolgirl met a tired nurse, just finished a long, long shift, soaked and shivering as she waited for the light to change.

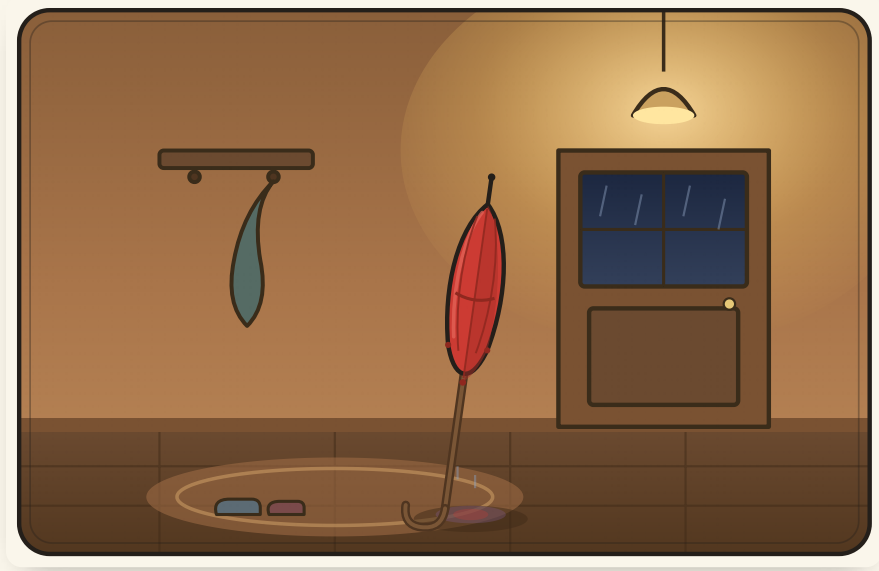
“You look how I felt this morning,” said the girl. She reached up and gave the nurse the red umbrella, then skipped home to show her painting. The nurse stood under it in the falling dark, warm and surprised, and walked on.



By now it was night, and the rain came down harder than ever. At a bus shelter two people stood shivering with no umbrella at all — a woman and her small daughter.

They had come out to meet someone off his bus, and the storm had caught them. The woman was Milo's mother. The little girl was his sister.

Out of the dark stepped the nurse with the red umbrella. She held it over them without a word and walked them the whole wet way home. At their gate she gave them the umbrella, smiled, and vanished back into the rain — never knowing that a boy named Milo had started it all that morning.



Milo opened the door and his mother and sister tumbled in, laughing, dry as toast. “A stranger gave us an umbrella!” his sister cried. “It saved us in the storm!”

And there in the hall, dripping quietly by the door, stood a bright red umbrella — home again after its long journey through the grey city.

Milo looked at it, and smiled, and said nothing at all. He knew it well. He shook it dry and hung it by the door, ready for tomorrow. For he had learned the secret of a kindness: it never stays where you put it. It travels, hand to hand, all through the rain — and sometimes, if you are lucky, it finds its way home.

✦ THE END

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