

Kiko: The Waterfall of Forever

The next morning, the golden sunlight spilled through the paper windows as Kiko hurried to get dressed.

Sakura was already awake.

The little calico kitten darted around the room, chasing her own tail before suddenly stopping to pounce on a loose shoelace.

"Good morning to you too," Kiko laughed.

Downstairs, the smell of warm rice and miso soup filled the house. Baba was already sitting at the table, sipping green tea.

"I hope you've both had a good sleep," she smiled.

"We have!" Kiko replied. "You said we were going somewhere special today."

Baba nodded.

"There is a place beyond our village called **The Waterfall of Forever**. For hundreds of years, families from Hoshinomura have taken their pets there."

"Why?" asked Kiko.

"They say that if a loved and trusted animal chooses to walk through the waterfall, it will be blessed with lifelong health."

Kiko looked at Sakura.

"You mean... she has to choose?"

"Exactly," Baba said. "No one may carry or force a pet through. It must be their own decision."

After breakfast, Baba handed Kiko a small cloth bag.

"Inside are rice cakes for our journey."

"And for Sakura?"

Baba smiled.

"I thought she might enjoy a little dried fish."

Sakura let out a cheerful meow, as though she had understood every word.

The path to the waterfall wound through towering cedar trees. Sunlight danced between the branches, and tiny streams trickled across smooth stones.

Sakura explored everything.

She sniffed flowers.

She chased butterflies.

She even became fascinated by her own reflection in a puddle, gently tapping the water with one paw before jumping backwards in surprise when the reflection disappeared.

Kiko giggled.

"I don't think she's ever seen another cat before."

"Perhaps," Baba chuckled, "she's simply discovering herself."

After nearly an hour, they reached a clearing.

Before them stood the most beautiful waterfall Kiko had ever seen.

Crystal-clear water tumbled gracefully over a high cliff into a sparkling pool below. Rainbows shimmered in the mist, while bright green moss covered the surrounding rocks.

"It's beautiful," whispered Kiko.

"It has been here much longer than any of us," Baba replied quietly.

At the edge of the pool stood a small wooden sign.

Trust cannot be hurried.

Kiko read the words aloud.

"What does that mean?"

Baba smiled.

"You'll soon find out."

Kiko placed Sakura gently on the ground.

The kitten stared at the waterfall.

Her ears twitched.

She took one careful step forwards...

...then another...

Suddenly, she stopped.

Instead of walking towards the waterfall, Sakura sat down and began washing her paw.

Kiko sighed.

"I don't think she wants to."

Baba rested a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Then we wait."

Several minutes passed.

Kiko became impatient.

"Maybe I could just carry her through."

Baba shook her head.

"If you do that, she won't be choosing."

Kiko folded her arms.

"But what if she never goes?"

"Then today's lesson isn't about the waterfall."

Kiko frowned thoughtfully.

Just then, a colourful butterfly floated across the clearing.

Sakura's eyes grew wide.

Without thinking, the kitten bounded after it.

The butterfly drifted through the cool mist...

...straight beneath the waterfall.

Splash!

Sakura dashed through the falling water in pursuit.

The butterfly escaped into the trees.

Sakura stood on the other side of the waterfall, looking rather surprised.

For a moment, nobody spoke.

Then Baba laughed.

"I think tradition has been honoured."

Kiko clapped her hands.

"You did it, Sakura!"

The soaking-wet kitten trotted proudly back towards them before shaking herself vigorously.

Tiny drops of water sprayed everywhere.

Kiko squealed as she was splashed from head to toe.

"So that's your thank you?" she laughed.

Even Baba couldn't stop smiling.

As they sat together eating rice cakes beside the pool, Kiko watched Sakura curl up in the warm sunshine.

"I nearly spoiled it," she admitted quietly.

"I wanted everything to happen quickly."

Baba nodded.

"Many people do."

"But if I'd carried her..."

"...then she wouldn't have trusted her own curiosity," Baba finished.

Kiko looked thoughtfully at the waterfall.

She suddenly remembered Master Hiro's teacup.

Great things take time.

Perhaps warriors and kittens had something in common after all.

As the afternoon sun began to sink behind the mountains, the three of them started the journey home.

Before leaving, Baba turned for one last look at the waterfall.

"Tomorrow," she said softly, "I'd like to spend the day at home with you."

"Just us?" Kiko asked.

"And Sakura," Baba smiled. "I have some stories I've been saving."

Kiko grinned.

"I'd like that very much."

Comprehension Questions

1. According to Baba, why must Sakura choose to walk through the waterfall herself?
 - A. So she can learn to swim.
 - B. Because the tradition only works if the pet goes willingly.
 - C. To prove she is brave.
 - D. Because the water is too shallow to carry her.

2. What does the word *fascinated* most nearly mean in the sentence, "She became fascinated by her own reflection"?
 - A. Confused
 - B. Frightened
 - C. Extremely interested
 - D. Disappointed

3. What does the sign, "*Trust cannot be hurried,*" suggest?
 - A. People should never visit the waterfall alone.
 - B. The path to the waterfall is dangerous.
 - C. Animals should always be trained quickly.
 - D. Trust develops naturally and cannot be forced.

4. Why does Baba refuse to let Kiko carry Sakura through the waterfall?
 - A. It would prevent Sakura from making her own choice.
 - B. The water is too deep.
 - C. Kiko might slip on the rocks.
 - D. It would frighten the butterfly away.

5. Which word best describes Baba throughout the story?
 - A. Strict
 - B. Patient
 - C. Curious
 - D. Forgetful

6. What lesson does Kiko learn by the end of the story?

- A. Butterflies are difficult to catch.
- B. Some things happen best when we allow them to happen naturally.
- C. Waterfalls are dangerous places.
- D. Travelling is more enjoyable than staying at home.

7. Which sentence best hints at the events of the next book?

- A. Sakura shook herself vigorously.
- B. Rainbows shimmered in the mist.
- C. "I'd like to spend the day at home with you... I have some stories I've been saving."
- D. Kiko clapped her hands happily.

8. Which theme is explored most strongly in this story?

- A. Winning competitions is important.
- B. Adventure is more exciting than family.
- C. Curiosity always causes trouble.
- D. Patience and trust often bring the best rewards.

Answers

1. B
2. C
3. D
4. A
5. B
6. B
7. C
8. D