

Kiko: The Hunt for the Shattered Gems

(Part 2)

The forest closed around Kiko like a living cage.

Branches clawed at her sleeves as she ran, roots twisting beneath her feet like traps. Her breath burned in her chest, but she did not slow. The warning bells still echoed in her ears, chasing her through the darkness, reminding her that she had left her village behind — and perhaps lost it forever.

The gem pressed heavily against her palm, wrapped in her grandfather's cloth. It no longer glowed, yet she could feel it, like a heartbeat that did not belong to her. Each time she stumbled, the stone seemed to pull her onward, guiding her deeper into the ancient paths that only hunters and spirits were said to know.

By dawn, her legs shook with exhaustion.

She collapsed beside a stream, the icy water numbing her hands as she drank. The forest was quiet now — too quiet. No birds. No insects. Even the wind had fallen silent.

That was when she saw them.

Footprints.

Large. Deep. Unmistakable.

Kiko's stomach tightened. Someone else was hunting — and they were not alone.

She moved carefully now, her senses sharp, every lesson her grandfather had drilled into her rising to the surface. *Observe first. Act second.* She followed the trail until the trees thinned and the land dropped away into a ruined valley.

Below her stood stone pillars, broken and cracked, forming a circle around a blackened altar. And there, standing in the centre, were three figures wrapped in dark armour, their faces hidden by masks carved like snarling beasts.

Between them lay something that made Kiko's breath catch.

A gem.

But it was broken.

Its pieces floated in the air, spinning slowly, leaking a sickly red light that poisoned the ground beneath it. The earth around the altar was cracked and lifeless, as if the land itself had been wounded.

"So it's true," one of the figures said, his voice distorted, wrong. "The child carries the Heart Gem."

Kiko froze.

"How do you know?" another asked.

The first turned — and looked directly at her.

Kiko ran.

An arrow sliced through the air, missing her by inches. She threw herself into the undergrowth, rolling, scrambling, her training screaming at her to move, move, move. She did not stop until her lungs burned and her vision blurred.

When she finally collapsed, the forest had changed.

The trees were thinner. The light harsher. And standing before her was a stone doorway carved with symbols she recognised from her grandfather's stories.

A sanctuary.

Inside, the air was warm and golden. At the centre of the chamber lay a pool of light, and floating above it were **two intact gems**, glowing softly.

Kiko stepped forward — and the doorway slammed shut behind her.

The gems flared.

The walls began to move.

And somewhere beyond the stone, a voice whispered her name.

Comprehension Questions

1. What does the forest's silence suggest at the beginning of the story?

- A) Something is wrong
- B) The forest is dead
- C) Kiko is safe
- D) The storm has passed

2. Why does the gem feel heavy to Kiko?

- A) It is large
- B) It is broken
- C) It is made of stone
- D) It carries responsibility

3. What do the footprints show?

- A) Animals are nearby
- B) The village has followed her
- C) Others are searching for the gems
- D) Kiko is lost

4. Why is the broken gem important?

- A) It is worthless
- B) It proves the gems can be destroyed
- C) It lights the altar
- D) It belongs to Kiko

5. What does the red light symbolise?

- A) Hope
- B) Balance
- C) Danger and corruption
- D) Strength

6. Why does Kiko run when she is seen?

- A) She is afraid
- B) She is injured
- C) She is unprepared to fight
- D) She has been told to run always

7. What does the sanctuary represent?

- A) A trap
- B) A hiding place
- C) A test
- D) A village

8. Why is Kiko drawn to the intact gems?

- A) They are beautiful
- B) They are calling to her
- C) She wants to sell them
- D) She is curious

9. What does the closing doorway suggest?

- A) Kiko is trapped
- B) Kiko is safe
- C) The danger is over
- D) The forest has moved

10. Why is this ending an effective cliffhanger?

- A) It answers the mystery
- B) It introduces a new character
- C) It places Kiko in immediate danger
- D) It resolves the conflict

Answers

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