

Kiko: At home with Baba

The morning after their visit to the Waterfall of Forever was quiet and peaceful.

For the first time all week, Kiko had nowhere she needed to be.

Sunlight streamed through the windows as Sakura stretched lazily on a cushion, letting out a tiny yawn before curling into a fluffy ball once again.

"She certainly enjoys relaxing," Kiko laughed.

"So should we," Baba replied with a smile. "Come with me. I have something I'd like to show you."

Baba led Kiko into the spare room at the back of the house. In the corner stood a wooden chest, polished smooth with age.

Slowly, Baba lifted the heavy lid.

Inside were dozens of old photographs tied together with faded ribbons.

"These belonged to our family," Baba said gently.

Kiko carefully picked up the first photograph.

It showed a little girl with two untidy pigtails standing beside a cherry blossom tree.

"Who's that?" she asked.

Baba laughed.

"That mischievous little girl... is me."

Kiko stared in amazement.

"You?"

"I know. It's difficult to believe I was ever that young."

The two of them sat together on the tatami floor while Sakura squeezed herself between them, determined to be part of the afternoon.

As they looked through each photograph, Baba told another story.

She spoke about climbing trees when she was little, helping her parents in the garden, learning to cook rice without burning it and even getting lost in the forest after chasing a butterfly.

"Were you frightened?" Kiko asked.

"A little," Baba admitted. "But I found my way home... and I learned to pay much better attention."

Kiko smiled.

"I suppose everyone makes mistakes."

"Everyone," Baba agreed.

Even Sakura seemed fascinated, occasionally batting at the corners of the photographs before settling back down with a contented purr.

After a while, Mum brought in a tray of warm green tea and colourful Japanese sweets.

"There you are," she smiled. "I thought you might both be hungry."

"They're beautiful," Kiko said, looking at the tiny sweets shaped like flowers.

Baba picked one up carefully.

"When I was your age," she said, "my grandmother used to make these for me."

"So this is a family tradition?"

"It is."

The room fell comfortably quiet as they enjoyed their treats.

Outside, a gentle breeze carried blossom petals past the open window.

Baba looked towards the garden for a long moment.

"Kiko," she said softly, "may I tell you something important?"

"Of course."

Baba reached across and held Kiko's hand.

"I've had a very happy life."

Kiko smiled.

"I know."

"I've watched our village grow. I've seen your mum become an adult. Then I watched you arrive."

Kiko listened carefully.

"One day," Baba continued, "my journey will come to an end."

Kiko frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"When people become very old, their bodies grow tired. Eventually, it's time for them to rest."

Kiko looked down at her hands.

"I don't want that day to come."

Baba squeezed her hand gently.

"Neither do I."

For a few moments, neither of them spoke.

Then Baba smiled.

"But when that day does come, I don't want you to be sad for too long."

Kiko looked up.

"I want you to remember the stories."

"The photographs?"

"All of them."

She pointed to Kiko's heart.

"Because the people we love never truly leave us while we continue to carry them here."

Kiko felt a lump in her throat.

"I'll remember."

"I know you will."

Sakura suddenly climbed onto Baba's lap and began purring loudly.

Baba laughed.

"I think Sakura agrees."

Everyone smiled.

As the afternoon sunlight faded, Baba stood carefully and walked towards the front door.

"I'll be heading home tomorrow."

"So soon?" Kiko asked.

"I'm only a short journey away."

She smiled warmly.

"And besides..."

She looked proudly at Kiko.

"...I think you're becoming exactly the sort of young person this village needs."

Kiko felt taller somehow.

Not because she had learned to balance perfectly.

Not because she could hold a wooden sword.

But because she understood something much more important.

Being a warrior wasn't simply about strength.

It was about kindness.

It was about patience.

It was about family.

As evening settled over Hoshinomura, Kiko watched the stars appear one by one above the mountains.

Sakura curled up beside her.

Inside the house, Baba's gentle laughter floated through the open window.

Kiko smiled.

She knew there would be many more adventures ahead.

But she also knew that wherever life took her, she would always carry Baba's stories—and her love—with her.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Baba show Kiko the old photographs?

- A. To teach her about photography.
- B. To share family memories and life lessons.
- C. To help her prepare for warrior school.
- D. To find a missing picture.

2. What does the word *contented* most nearly mean in the sentence, "Sakura settled back down with a contented purr"?

- A. Curious
- B. Sleepy
- C. Happy and satisfied
- D. Noisy

3. Which sentence best shows that Baba wants Kiko to value memories more than possessions?

- A. "These belonged to our family."
- B. "They're beautiful."
- C. "I'm only a short journey away."
- D. "The people we love never truly leave us while we continue to carry them here."

4. Why does Kiko feel emotional during her conversation with Baba?

- A. She realises that Baba is talking about growing old and eventually dying.
- B. She has lost one of the photographs.
- C. She thinks Baba is leaving forever that day.
- D. She misses warrior school.

5. Which word best describes Baba?

- A. Impatient
- B. Careless
- C. Wise
- D. Shy

6. What does Kiko realise at the end of the story?

- A. Warrior school is no longer important.
- B. True strength comes from kindness, patience and family as well as skill.
- C. She wants to leave Hoshinomura.
- D. Sakura should stay with Baba.

7. What can the reader infer about Baba's attitude towards the future?

- A. She is frightened of growing old.
- B. She regrets the life she has lived.
- C. She believes life should never change.
- D. She accepts that every life has its own journey and wants Kiko to look forward with hope.

8. Which theme is explored most throughout the story?

- A. Adventure is more exciting than home.
- B. Memories should be forgotten as people grow older.
- C. Success depends only on natural ability.
- D. Love, family and cherished memories remain with us throughout our lives.

Answers

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