

The Girl and the Koi



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Mika loved the pond at the bottom of Grandma Yuki's garden. It was round and quiet, ringed with smooth grey stones and soft green moss. Inside the pond lived seven koi, gliding like slow orange ribbons. The biggest one had a black spot on its head, and Mika called it Spot. Every morning, Mika ran down the path in her yellow rain boots to say hello.



Mika was eight years old, with a black bob and bangs that tickled her eyebrows. Her green watering-can hair clip bounced as she walked. Grandma Yuki said the clip was perfect, because Mika was a little gardener of fish. Grandma Yuki wore her straw sun hat and thin round glasses, and she knew everything about ponds. "Come," she said one morning. "Let me show you how we care for them."



"Koi are strong," Grandma Yuki said, kneeling by the water, "but they need our help." She handed Mika a long glass tube with tiny marks on the side. "This tests the water," she explained. "Fish breathe the water, just like we breathe the air." Mika looked at Spot, who poked his round whiskered mouth above the surface. "So clean water keeps them happy?" she asked. "Clean water keeps them healthy," Grandma Yuki said.



The next morning, Mika came early with a small bucket of koi food. She sprinkled it gently across the surface, a little at a time. Spot rose first, his glossy orange-and-white scales shining, and the others followed like bright sparks. Their flowing fins waved softly as they ate. "Not too much," Mika whispered to herself, remembering Grandma Yuki's words. "A little every day is better than a lot once."



After feeding, Mika checked the water with the glass tube. She watched the tiny marks and wrote the number in a little notebook. Sometimes the water was clear and fine. Sometimes it looked cloudy, and she told Grandma Yuki right away. "Good girl," Grandma Yuki said, adjusting her lavender cardigan. "You noticed. That is the most important part of care — paying attention." Mika nodded and wrote the number down carefully.



Some days the work felt slow. Mika had to scoop out fallen leaves with a long net before they sank and turned the water murky. She had to rinse the filter and check the little pump that made gentle bubbles. Her arms grew tired, and her boots got muddy. "Do I have to do this every single day?" she asked one afternoon. "The fish depend on you," Grandma Yuki said softly.



Mika thought about Spot and the other six koi. They could not scoop leaves or check the water themselves. They could only swim and wait and trust. So Mika kept going. She came every morning, even on days when she wanted to play. She fed them, counted them, and wrote her numbers in the notebook. Slowly, the pond stayed clear, and the koi swam brightly.



One morning, Mika saw something worrying. The water looked a little green and cloudy, and the koi stayed low near the bottom. Spot barely came up for his food. Mika's small round face grew serious, and the freckles across her nose seemed to stand still. "Grandma Yuki!" she called. "Something is wrong with the water." Grandma Yuki came quickly, her straw hat tilted.



Together they tested the water. The number was not good. "Too much sun and too many leaves," Grandma Yuki said calmly. "We can fix this." Mika and Grandma Yuki worked side by side. They scooped the leaves, added fresh water, and shaded part of the pond with a small screen. It took the whole afternoon. Mika's arms ached, but she did not stop. "Almost there," she whispered to Spot.



For three days, Mika checked the water twice a day. She wrote every number in her notebook and fed the koi only a little. Grandma Yuki said, "This is the slow part. This is where care truly lives." Mika watched the koi rest quietly below. She worried, but she kept working. On the fourth morning, the water sparkled clear again. Spot rose to the surface and wiggled his whiskers at her.



The koi came up one by one, their orange, white, and black patches glowing in the sun. They swam in bright circles, fins flowing like silk. "They are saying thank you," Grandma Yuki laughed, her hazel eyes crinkling behind her glasses. Mika laughed too, and her watering-can clip bounced. "They look so happy!" she said. "They are healthy," Grandma Yuki said. "And that is because you never gave up."



Mika opened her little notebook and looked at all her numbers, page after page. Every day was there — the sunny days, the muddy days, the slow days. "It was a lot of days," she said. "Yes," said Grandma Yuki, putting a warm hand on Mika's shoulder. "Animal care is not one big day. It is many small days, one after another. That is consistency, and that is love."



From then on, Mika kept her morning routine. Feed the koi, scoop the leaves, test the water, write the number. Some days were quick and easy. Some days were slow and muddy. But Mika never skipped a morning, because seven bright friends were waiting for her. Spot always came first, his black head spot shining, and the others followed like a little parade of living jewels.



Grandma Yuki gave Mika a small sign to paint for the pond. Mika wrote: CLEAN WATER, HAPPY FISH. She painted it green and hung it on a wooden post. Then she sat on the mossy stones and watched the koi glide. "You take good care of them," Grandma Yuki said. "I try," Mika said. "Every single day." And she was proud — proud of the clear pond and her seven swimming friends.



The sun set over the garden, turning the pond gold and pink. Mika rinsed her yellow boots and put away her glass tube and notebook. Spot swam a slow circle near the edge, as if to say goodnight. Mika waved. "See you tomorrow," she whispered. In her heart, she knew that steady care was a quiet kind of friendship, and it made the whole garden brighter.



And every morning after that, Mika came down the path with her bucket and her notebook. The water stayed clear, the koi stayed healthy, and the pond sparkled like a small round mirror. Mika learned that helping the ones who depend on you is a joy, even when the work is slow. Animal care takes patience and consistency — and Mika gave both, every single day.