

**≡Home≡
for Meow**

Two Fur One

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1



The World's Longest Cat

"Welcome to The Purrfect Cup, the best and only cat café in town! Can I interest you in a cap-purr-ccino?"

The customer standing in front of me looks confused and nervous. Probably because our family's cat, Pepper, is sitting on the counter

staring at him. Her tail is perfectly still and her eyes don't blink. Pepper lifts her paw and licks her claws slowly, never taking her eyes off the customer.

"Um, can I just get a cup of water?" he asks.

"Sure, I guess," I say. "But if you change your mind, we also have hot chocolate with marsh-meow-lows. Or I could make you some *purr*-itos and *avo-cat-o* toast."

"Kira Parker," Mama says sternly. "What are you going on about?"

Mama finishes wiping down one of the tables in the café and joins me behind the register. She pours a cup of water for the customer. "Sorry about that. We're actually all out of our

homemade marshmallows. And we've never served burritos or avocado toast," she says. Then she turns to me.

"Kira, why don't you go help your father in the kitchen?"

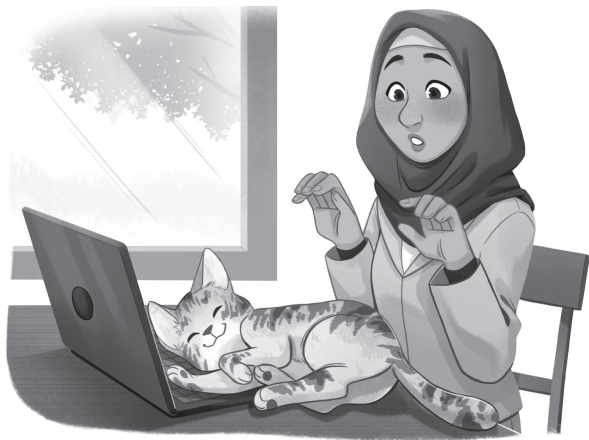
"I was helping him, but he sent me back out here because I put too many chocolate chips in the cookie dough." He also said I put too many chocolate chips in my mouth, but Mama doesn't need to know that.

"Well, go ask him if you can help again. And take it slow this time."

I don't know if I can take it slow. I feel as restless as a kitten who hasn't learned the difference between day and night, and stays up all night

pouncing on your toes. We haven't had school in *three* days! Our principal closed the school so our teachers could listen to some people talk about how to teach. I thought they already knew! I'm not sure what more there is to learn. Teaching kids is probably way easier than taking care of cats, which is what I've been doing all week.

I love hanging out with the cats that live in our family's cat café, The Purrfect Cup. It's the most wonderful and cozy place in the world. The cats stay here with us until we can find them the perfect fur-ever homes. They climb on the shelves lining the walls and play with all the toys we leave around the café. Usually the cats love watching the customers and walking up to them to ask



for belly rubs. But today, even the cats seem bored!

They're lying on top of tables and chairs with their legs all the way stretched out, like they're trying to take up as much space as they can. I see a cat lie down on top of a customer's laptop and refuse to move. Another one dips its paw in a customer's glass of iced tea. I think it must be about to rain or something. My best human friend, Alex Patel, told me that cats can tell when

it's about to rain, and they also get restless. It's too bad Alex isn't around to tell me more cool facts. She and her mom went on vacation while school's closed.

I turn to my best nonhuman friend, Pepper. She stops licking her paw when she sees me looking at her.

"Want to go back to the kitchen?" I ask. In response, she rolls over onto her back and sticks her legs straight up in the air. I think she's tired of going back and forth between the kitchen and the café too.

My brain is usually full of *great ideas* for things to do when I don't have school. Sometimes I even have *great ideas* when I'm at school, which

gets me into trouble, like that time I decided the school library needed more books about cats, so I wrote my own. I probably shouldn't have thrown the other books away, but I needed space for mine! Right now, I can't think of any *great ideas*! My brain is as empty as the library shelves after my teacher took my cat books down.

Pepper follows me into the kitchen behind the café, where Dad is making coffee cake for the afternoon crowd of customers. His coffee cake is perfectly buttery and cinnamony, and it has a layer of brown sugar streusel that's as thick as the cake. Just how I like it.

"Hey, Dad," I say. "Mama sent me back here to

help you. Is there anything I can do? I'll be more careful this time."

"Can you hand me that bag of powdered sugar? You can help me sprinkle it on the coffee cake if you go real slow."

"Sure!" I say. I run over to grab the bag of powdered sugar and—*whoops*. I didn't know it was already open. I pick it up by the bottom, and all the powdered sugar dumps out onto me, Pepper, and the floor.

Dad sighs.

"Yeah," I say. "I'll go check on the cats."

I walk back out to the café. Mama's talking to a woman near the front of the café. The woman doesn't seem to be a customer because she's not

ordering anything. She is wearing a huge belt that's holding all kinds of tools. Hammers, a measuring tape, and screwdrivers. I wonder what she and Mama are talking about.

My little brother, Ryan, is sitting at a table near the café door, right by Mama. I plop down into a chair next to him so I can listen to Mama's conversation.

Ryan is watching a show on Mama's iPad. He offers me an earbud. "I don't know why you don't want to sit and watch TV," he says. "I'm having the best day ever!"

"You know I'm bad at sitting," I say. "My blood's as hot as a donut coming out of the fryer!"

"Remember that time you burned your finger

on the fryer and made that funny noise?" Ryan laughs. "Maybe *that* was the best day ever."

I scowl at him. "Shh! I'm trying to hear what Mama's saying to that lady. Do you know who she is?"

Ryan shrugs. "She looks important. Maybe she's going to use that hammer to finally hang a giant picture of me on the wall. That would really brighten this place up!"

"The Purrfect Cup doesn't need any brightening up. It's already perfect! Plus, your face would scare all the customers away—oh no, look, your face scared the lady away already!"

Mama and the woman move away from us. They walk around The Purrfect Cup. The woman

holds her measuring tape up to the walls and the cats and the cats on the walls, then takes notes on a little pad of paper.

"What is she doing?" I whisper. "Why does she want to know how long our cats are?"

"Maybe Mama is entering us into the World's Longest Cat contest," Ryan says. "That'd be awesome!"

I get up to ask the woman what she's doing, but she turns to Mama and shakes her hand. A bunch of cards fall out of one of the pockets on her belt and land on the floor. I pick them up.

"I'll send this quote right over," the woman says. "And unless any urgent jobs come up, I

should be able to stop by tomorrow. Looking forward to it."

"Thanks so much, Mrs. Talbot," Mama says.
"We'll see you soon!"

I hold up the fallen cards, but the woman is very tall—so tall, she doesn't notice me when she walks out the door. I look down at the cards. They have her name and phone number on them.

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"Why are we going to see that lady soon?" I ask Mama. "Is she from the World's Longest Cat contest?"