

Samurai Kiteh

by Juhi Kalra

I

She was the prize of the litter, healthy and bouncy within days of her birth, her white coat bright and full, dappled in black and brown spots; the only one of her mother's womb who looked this way amongst equally beautiful single color coated siblings. But despite it, or perhaps because of it, she became the targeted one of the humans who her mother belonged to. Perhaps for no reason that exists in Cat World, but where humans have turned to depravity to hide their own pain. She knew none of this, being just a cuddly kitty. They took to torturing her early, shoving her with their shoe clad feet. Shoving gave way to kicking, and then slamming her against the walls. She saw the wall often coming at her, the stark white of chalky lime, covered with bumps that scratched her skin where they had shaved off her fur. There was the day she learned to be afraid of fire, and the day water became the enemy. The repeated clippings of her ear that left her with only one. The slamming down of the hammer on her front paw that finally grew gangrenous and was removed with the kitchen knife. They kept her from her mother's teats repeatedly, until her mother no longer offered it to her, nosing her aside in quite acceptance. They would lay out a saucer of milk to entice her, then grab her by her neck when she tiptoed to it driven by hunger. The mother never cried out at missing her baby, accustomed as she may have been to being tortured herself, and made no protest when they took the rest of the litter away.

At first she had been too small to look up at the humans, or to learn to recognize them. She came to know the hands when they came for her as she back crawled away from them, knowing what pain may follow their appearance. In the beginning, hoping it was play, she would strike out with her little padded paws, clawless from being clipped. But soon she learned to look up in resigned anticipation of

whatever painful new game the multitudes of hands wanted to play. They may have tired of their games one day, or perhaps of her, or found some other means of entertainment. She was just a little kitty who knew nothing of what humans thought. As she lay half asleep that night, with one eye open and her remaining ear alert, she smelled the hands lay a delicious morsel next to her sleeping head. She moved her head only, eating it tentatively. Then another, and another, each a bit further away from her hiding spot, as she followed them to fill her empty belly. A saucer of milk was set down by familiar hands, and moved in stealth for the kill. She felt herself being lifted none too gently, and landing in some white softness in the dark. She moved, jabbing at the surrounding darkness with her remaining front paw, and was swatted for her struggle. She felt movement as she had not known before, then an upending that had her falling infinitely into a much greater darkness. The cold and wet hit her together, and she went underwater with no time for a breath or a cry. All night it took her, clinging to the slimy rounded sides of the dark well with clawless paws, to climb out. She belly crawled for the shelter behind the lattice covered space under the front porch and passed out in exhaustion just as the Sun was coming up.

She did not know the passage of time, for she was just a bedraggled little kitty, but she stayed behind the lattice for many rising and settings of the Sun. Whatever magic may have been in the last morsels she ate or the black water she climbed out of, she stayed a shaved naked little kitty through them, not changing or growing at all.

II

A hand reaches in through a small break in the lattice, she back crawls into the dirt. The hand reaches in further, the finger just grazing her face. She moonwalks even further, but she has run out of space. A finger jabs at her nose: once, twice. With a roar our kitty rises up. Up and up and up she grows, her white coat grown out

completely like armor, her brown and black dapples the daisho at her sides. In the moment of awakening, her human hands go flying in every direction, spinning her katana in one swift movement, laying the jabbing fingered arm in a bed of bloody dirt. There is noise and screaming all around as she rises, going through the rickety porch, the walls of the rooms above breaking all around her from the massive being she is becoming. She slashes left: unknown hands are separated from unknown arms. She slashes right: unrecognized arms are severed from unsuspecting shoulders. And still she does not stop, swinging in every direction, a lethal top on a unremitting spin. She opens her mouth, and the ensuing roar drowns out the mewling screams of the limbless humans scattering away from the broken home. The Sun glints off the studded white armor of Samurai Tiger.

III

This scene played itself out innumerable times, through the destruction of many innocents that followed, until the curious and loving hands that reached out to kitty finally stopped coming. Blood curdled at the sight of the blood. Eventually, new humans came, rebuilt the house, patching around the latticed porch. Not a word was exchanged between them and kitty, but she knew they were just above her. The house began to smell different, daily filling with the warm scent of cooking. It felt different, the footfalls softer, the voices from above quieter. Underneath it all, Samurai Tiger lived ever vigilant inside bedraggled kitty. Morsels of deliciousness began to appear regularly, but hungry as kitty may have been, Samurai Tiger kept her safe by ignoring them, destroying them, or marking them with the yellow stroke of her powerful yari. A saucer of milk appeared one sunlit dappled day, and Samurai Tiger kicked it away, knowing saucers of milk were followed by dark falls into wet wells. Every sunrise brought a fresh saucer of milk, with no threatening hands, and eventually Samurai Tiger became complacent. Finally, bedraggled kitty stepped out gingerly to take a sip. Hands, hands

were all around her, holding her, lifting her. Her terror brought Samurai Tiger directly to the scene, rising through the void, katana in hand cutting the air to ribbons. But a white softness was all around, and the rapier cuts brought forth only soft white clouds of unknown warmth.

"Honey, be careful. She's scared. Gently, gently. Keep her close to your body, Hiro, so she doesn't fall."

"She's got her claws in my chest, Azumi, I don't think she's going anywhere. Here, you take her, I'll hold the saucer. Wow, look at her go! You been hungry for a while, hanh, katoid?"

"Aw, poor kitty, you just drink up. How long have you been down there, kitty baby?"

"Well, that quilt will never see another day of battle, might as well be hers now, yeah? We can take her to the shelter in it."

"She's not going to the shelter, Hiro. You know we're keeping her. She's really beautiful under all this dirt. White, looks like. With brown and black dapples. Though I think some of them will come out in the wash."

"Fine, but once she's well, no babying her. I mean it, Zumzum. Agreed?"

"Sure. Whatever you say. You want to pick out a name for her?"

"Not that she's going to answer to anything; she's a cat, Zum, they rule the world."

"Let's call her Koji Torao".

"Sounds about right. Little Tiger. But she won't be little for long".

