Name: _____ Date: _____

# Goodbye, Waffles

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 1121 words

Waffles got his name when he was eight weeks old. He climbed onto a kitchen chair and ate a whole stack of waffles, syrup and all, while nobody was looking. Noor was not even born yet, but she knew the story by heart, because Dad told it whenever anyone asked and sometimes when they did not.

Now Waffles was fourteen. His beagle face had gone gray as a pencil, and he slept most of the day in the square of sun on the kitchen floor. When Noor came downstairs, his tail thumped twice against the tiles. Two thumps was all that was left of the old wagging. Noor said good morning to him anyway, every single time.

On Thursday, Dr. Amani told them what they already knew. She said it plainly, with her hand resting on his back, and Noor was glad of that later. Waffles could not climb the porch step anymore. He ate a little less every week. There was no medicine that could make a body young again. "He is not hurting right now," she said, "and I would like to keep it that way."

Mom and Dad looked at each other for a long time. "Tomorrow," said Dad. His voice came out smaller than Dad's voice usually was. Noor looked at the floor, where Waffles had put his chin on her shoe. Nobody said anything else. The clock in the waiting room went tick, and tick, and tick, and Mom held the car keys so tightly that they left a mark.

After a long quiet while, Idris, who was five, asked, "Does Waffles know?" "I think he knows he is loved," said Mom. Idris thought about that, the way he thought about everything. "And a biscuit?" "And a biscuit," said Mom. Idris frowned. "But does he know the other thing?" Mom took a long breath. "Not the way we do," she said. "Waffles only knows today." Noor looked down at the dog asleep across her lap, his paws going a little, chasing something.

By the time they got home, Noor had a plan, written on the back of an envelope. WALK. WAFFLES. SUN. It was the only list she had ever made that she did not want to finish. They went the old way, past the mailbox and the blue gate and the crooked maple, down to the bridge at the creek. Waffles rode in Idris's red wagon, because his legs were tired, with Dad pulling.

He stopped at every post and every tire and every patch of dandelions. He read the news on each one, nose down, the way he always had, and nobody hurried him once. Noor said a beagle's nose had more books in it than the whole library, and Dad did not even argue. He just waited, with the wagon handle in his hand, until Waffles was ready.

At the bench by the creek, Mom unwrapped the foil. Inside were waffles, still a little warm from the toaster, and a jar of syrup, and a knife for the butter. A whole waffle was for Waffles. He

was never allowed one, not ever, because of the Chair Incident, and now he ate it slowly, with his eyes half closed, until the syrup stuck to his whiskers.

Idris laughed, loud, and then looked quickly at Noor to see if laughing was allowed. Noor laughed too. It was allowed. It felt strange, like finding a coin in a coat pocket on the worst day of the year. Dad wiped the syrup off Waffles' chin with his thumb, and he did not seem to notice that he was crying a little.

In the afternoon they carried him home and set him in the square of sun. They all lay down on the kitchen floor around him, even Dad, who said his back would be sorry later. Noor read him a chapter of her book out loud. Waffles did not understand a word, but one ear turned toward her voice the whole time, like a flower following the light. Every so often Mom slid the blanket along to keep him in the sun.

The room at the vet's was small, and there was a rug on the floor. Dr. Amani did not rush anyone. Noor had saved up something to say, and she said it right into his soft ear, where only he could hear. Only Noor ever knew what it was. Nobody asked her. That was a kindness too.

After that there was a part she does not tell, because it was quiet and gentle and belongs to her. When it was over, Waffles looked just as he did in the sun, only without the sun. Dad cried the loud way. Mom cried the quiet way. Idris held tight to the blanket and did not let go until they were back in the car.

At home, the leash still hung on its hook by the door. Nobody wanted to touch it, and nobody wanted to move it either. The square of sun lay on the kitchen floor with nobody in it. Noor poured a bowl of cereal and was fine. She was fine through the first spoonful and the second. Then she saw his water bowl by the fridge, with the dent in the rim where he always pushed it.

A wave came up through her. It started at her feet and went all the way to her eyes, and she put down the spoon. Mom sat beside her and did not say anything, and after a while the wave went out. It came back at odd times. It came at school, when a boy showed a picture of his dog. It came on the porch step, where she kept listening for the click of nails.

At first the waves were tall and knocked her flat. Later some of them were smaller, no bigger than the ripples at the edge of the creek when a duck swims past. Some days there was no wave at all, and then Noor felt strange about that, as if she had forgotten to be sad. Noor asked if she could be sad and have toast at the same time. Mom said yes, and she made two slices.

On Saturday, at walking time, Idris stood at the door. "Can we go the old way?" They went without wagon or leash. At the bridge a beagle trotted by on a long red line, and Noor watched until it was out of sight. The wave came up, and she let it come. Then it went out again, and the creek kept going the way creeks do. She sat on the bench, and Idris sat beside her. The

wood was still warm from the sun.

## Questions

**1. How did Waffles get his name?**

A. He ate a whole stack of waffles as a puppy
B. He was born on a Sunday morning
C. Idris named him at breakfast

**2. Why did Mom say that Waffles only knows today?**

A. He was too old to remember anything
B. A dog lives in the day it is in and does not worry about tomorrow
C. She did not want to answer Idris

**3. How did Waffles get to the creek on the last day?**

A. He walked the whole way
B. Dad carried him
C. He rode in a wagon

**4. Why did Idris look quickly at Noor after he laughed?**

A. He wanted to know whether laughing was allowed on a sad day
B. He had spilled the syrup
C. He wanted the last waffle

**5. In this story, a wave of feeling is something that**

A. stays the same all week
B. comes and then goes out again
C. only happens near water

**6. What does Noor do when the wave comes up on the bridge at the end?**

A. She runs after the beagle
B. She lets it come, and it goes out again
C. She turns back toward home

## Words to know

plainly: clearly
wagon: pull cart
ripple: tiny wave
whiskers: stiff face hairs
crooked: bent, not straight

# Answer key: Goodbye, Waffles

1. A. He ate a whole stack of waffles as a puppy
2. B. A dog lives in the day it is in and does not worry about tomorrow
3. C. He rode in a wagon
4. A. He wanted to know whether laughing was allowed on a sad day
5. B. comes and then goes out again
6. B. She lets it come, and it goes out again