



THE BOY WHO DREW CATS

A Tale from Japan Retold by Dianne de Las Casas

Excerpted from Dianne de Las Casas' *Handmade Tales: Stories to Make and Take* (Libraries Unlimited; 2008)

A long time ago in Japan, there lived a poor farmer and his wife. They had a large family and could barely afford to feed them all. Their youngest son was weak and small and although he was clever, he was not fit for work.

But he had an unusual gift for drawing cats. He spent all of his time drawing cats!

Big cats, small cats, short cats, tall cats.
Here cats, there cats. Everywhere, cats!
Cats, cats, cats. He drew cats, cats, cats.

His father said, "Son, since you cannot help out on our farm, your mother and I must send you away. You will go to the village temple and study to become a priest."

So the boy was taken to the temple to study the priesthood. An old priest became his teacher and the boy learned quickly. But at night, when he needed to spend his time studying, he did not. He spent all of his time drawing cats. On the walls and in the halls, on paper and mats, the boy drew cats!

Big cats, small cats, short cats, tall cats.
Here cats, there cats. Everywhere, cats!
Cats, cats, cats. He drew cats, cats, cats.

Although the priest loved the boy dearly, he could not stop him from drawing cats. The old priest called the boy over and said, "Son, since you are unable to study the priesthood, I must send you away. But here is some advice. If you see large places, avoid them all. You must take heed and stick to small."

The boy packed his bundle of clothes and left the temple. He was sad but he knew the priest was right. He had the heart of an artist, not a priest. He walked for some time and day became night.

The boy began to shiver from the cold and he knew he needed to find shelter. In the distance, he saw a temple. When he knocked on the door, he found it was empty.

He went inside and looked around, “Look at these beautiful floors and those lovely walls!” His heart jumped with joy as he sat down and pulled out his paint and brushes.

He spent all night drawing cats.
Big cats, small cats, short cats, tall cats.
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Cats, cats, cats. He drew cats, cats, cats.

When he was finished, he looked around and was pleased with his work. He was tired and needed to sleep. As he searched the big room for a place to sleep, he remembered the old priest’s words. “If you see large places, avoid them all. You must take heed and stick to small.”

So the boy found a small cabinet with a sliding door and climbed inside. He started to doze off when he heard strange noises. Hissing and howling. Grunting and growling. The boy was frightened and he stayed in the small cabinet.

When morning’s light came, the sounds stopped. Carefully sliding the door open, the boy stepped out of the cabinet. He looked around. He saw his cats on the floors and on the walls but they were all in different places and in different positions!

It was then that he saw something lying in the middle of the floor. It was a huge goblin rat. The boy knew immediately that his cats had come to life during the night and saved his life. The boy bowed and said, “Thank you, honorable cats!”

From that time forward, the boy with the heart of an artist, drew to his heart’s content. And, of course, he spent all of his time drawing cats!

Big cats, small cats, short cats, tall cats.
Here cats, there cats. Everywhere, cats!
Cats, cats, cats. He drew cats, cats, cats.

He became a famous artist known all over Japan for his beautiful drawings of... cats!