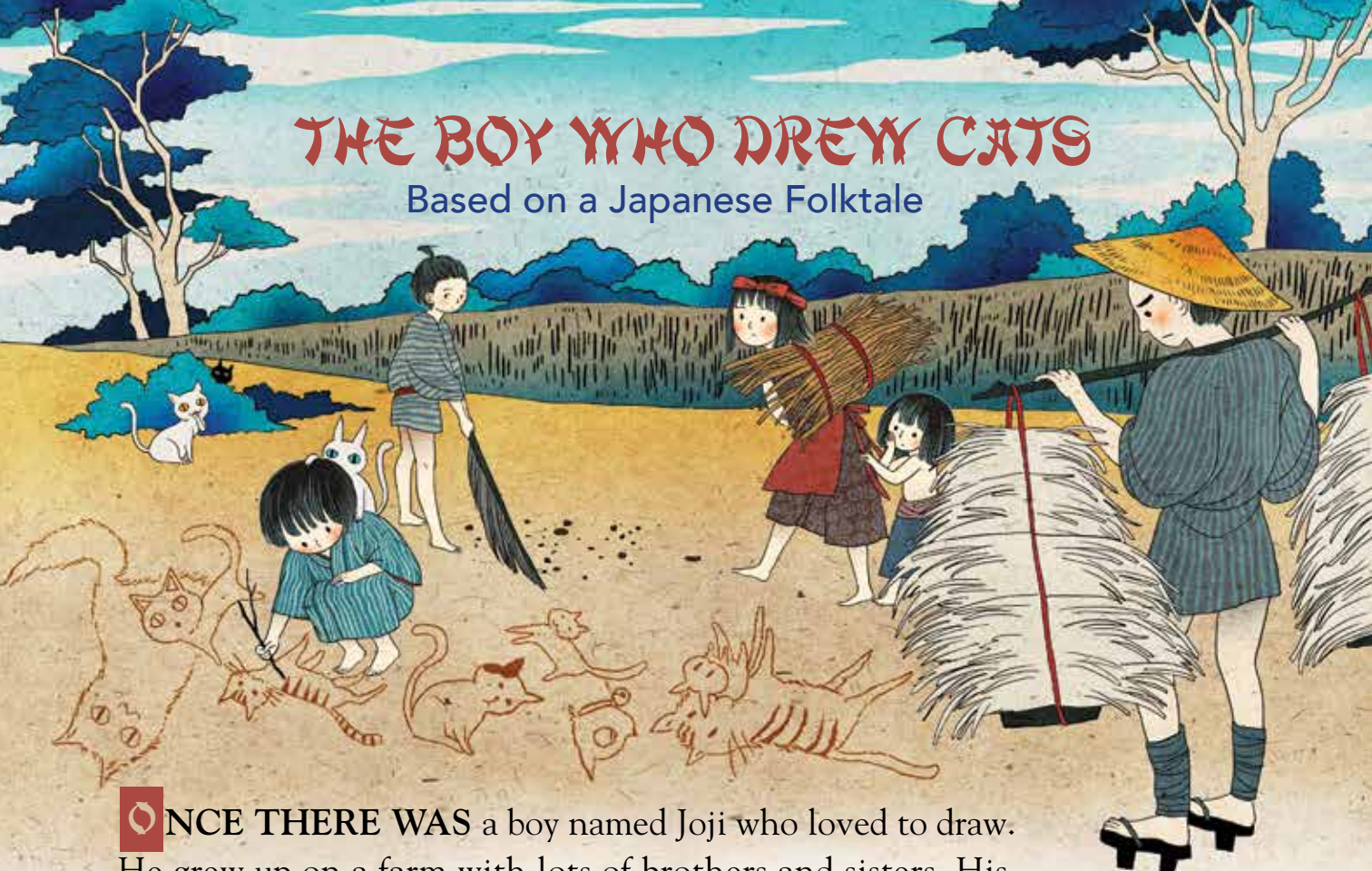


THE BOY WHO DREW CATS

Based on a Japanese Folktale



ONCE THERE WAS a boy named Joji who loved to draw. He grew up on a farm with lots of brothers and sisters. His siblings were a big help to their father and mother. But not Joji!

He did nothing for hours but draw in the dirt with a stick. And Joji drew just one thing.

Cats.

Cats, cats, and more cats. Small cats, big cats, thin cats, fat cats. Cats, cats, cats, cats, cats.

“Joji,” his father told him, “you must stop drawing all these cats! How will you ever be a farmer?”

“I’m sorry, Father. I’ll try to stop.”

And he did try. But whenever Joji saw one of the farm cats go by, he forgot about his chores and drew another cat.

“Joji will never become a farmer,” his father said sadly.

Joji is pronounced “joe-jee.”



It’s getting late. We better start searching.



H’m, now where does one look for a woolly bear?



Under there!

by Aaron Shepard
Art by Khoa Le

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“Maybe he could be a priest,” Joji’s mother replied. “Why don’t we take him to the temple?”

So they brought Joji to the village temple. The priest said, “I will gladly teach him.”

From then on, Joji lived at the temple. The priest gave him lessons in reading and writing. The other students worked hard at their writing. But not Joji! With his brush, ink, and rice paper, he did nothing for hours but draw. And Joji drew just one thing.

Cats.

Cats, cats, and more cats. Small cats, big cats, thin cats, fat cats. Cats, cats, cats, cats, cats.

“Joji,” the priest said, “you must stop drawing all these cats! How will you ever be a priest?”

“I’m sorry, honorable sir. I will try to stop.”

And he did try. But whenever Joji saw one of the temple cats go by, he forgot about his writing and drew another cat.

Under where?



Ha! I made you say underwear!



Excuse me! Can we all please try to be a bit more honorable—worthy of respect and trust.



Thistle is really upset, Bill.

That was bad enough, but then Joji started drawing on the walls of the temple. Soon there were cats on all the rice paper screens. They were everywhere!

“Joji, you’ll never become a priest,” the priest told him sadly. “You’ll just have to go home.”

Joji went to his room and packed his things. But he was afraid to go home because he knew his father would be angry. Then he remembered another temple in a village nearby. Maybe I can stay with the priest there, he thought.

Joji started walking. It was already night when he got to the other village. He climbed the steps to the temple and knocked. No one answered. He opened the heavy door, but it was dark and empty inside.

“That’s strange,” said Joji. “Why isn’t anyone here?”

He lit a lamp by the door. Then he saw something that made him smile. Blank rice paper screens!

Joji got out his brush and ink and started to draw. And Joji drew just one thing.

Cats.

Cats, cats, and more cats. Small cats, big cats, thin cats, fat cats. Cats, cats, cats, cats, cats.



Cheer up, Thistle. We'll find Woolly.



Ever since I brought him home, he's been trying to wander away. Zoot alors! But what could 'ee be after?

Poor little guy. All alone in the woods.



In the middle of the room lay a monster rat—a rat as big as a cow! It lay dead, as if something had smashed it to the floor.

Joji looked around the room. No one and nothing else was there, just

the screens with the cats. Then Joji looked again at the one gigantic cat.

“Didn’t I draw the head to the left and the tail to the right?”

Yes, he was sure of it. But now the cat faced the other way as if it had walked out of the screen and then walked back in again.

“The cat!” said Joji. His eyes grew wide. Then he pressed his palms together and bowed to the screen. “Thank you, honorable cat. You have saved me. For as long as I live, I will let no one stop me from drawing cats.”



When the villagers learned that the monster rat was dead, Joji became a hero. The village priest let him live in the temple as long as he liked.

But Joji did not become a priest. And he did not become a farmer. He became an artist. A great artist. An artist honored through all the country. An artist who drew just one thing. Cats! 🐱



Don't worry. For one night Woolly can take care of himself.

But he's not fierce—threatening, mean, and angry. He's woolly!

Sounds like 'ee tastes très nasty to me.

I'm so sorry Thistle, but we must go home. We'll start looking again first thing tomorrow.

