

# How to Fool a Cat

Japanese folktales for children



Hiroko Fujita &  
Fran Stallings

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Dedicated to the children in Japan and the United States  
who have loved hearing

*Hiroko Fujita*

tell these stories,  
and to the storytellers who will continue to pass them on.

— F.S.



Hiroko Fujita



Fran Stallings

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*Hiroko Fujita*

*Fran Stallings*

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## THE LITTLE GIRL AND THE FARMER

*Introduction by Fran Stallings*

Once there was a little girl who had to leave her childhood home in the capital city because a big war was coming. Like the English children in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, she escaped far into the countryside where she didn't know anyone. And like Susan, Peter, Edward and Lucy, she discovered MAGIC there.

But she didn't go through a coat closet and find her magic with a Faun. The magic was waiting for her in a vegetable field with a Farmer.

This little Japanese girl, Hiroko, heard hundreds of stories from the old farmer KuniTakeda, whom she called "my Uncle in the Field." She heard stories of funny people and supernatural beings, animal shape-changers and creepy tales. Mr. Takeda had learned these stories in his own childhood, at least fifty years before, and he told them to the little city girl who loved stories.

When she grew up and married Mr. Fujita, she remembered the stories and shared them with her children and other children in Japan. Now, with some help from me and other friends, she can share these stories with you.



I met Hiroko Fujita in 1993, during a visit to Japan to see my brother who was teaching at a university there. Since I am a storyteller myself, I wanted to see Japanese storytelling although I spoke



only a little Japanese and expected I wouldn't understand much. By this time, Mrs. Fujita was an old lady. She had taught preschool and kindergarten for almost forty years. But she was still filled with the magic of the stories that she had learned as a girl. Her folk storytelling style was so vivid, with lively gestures and voice changes, that I was amazed; I could understand! Also, it helped that she used many props and puppets that she had made to help her youngest Japanese listeners understand her stories of country folk long ago in the little farm town of Miharu, Fukushima Prefecture.

I wanted American story-lovers to see that they could enjoy the stories too, even if they didn't know Japanese. So in 1995 I started bringing her to America for spring tours of libraries, schools, community centers, and storytelling festivals. In twelve tours, she told her stories to thousands of people in twenty-two states.

How could Americans follow the stories? I introduced each one briefly in English, not giving away the ending. Then she told it in Japanese. Listeners, from preschoolers to senior citizens, exclaimed, "I didn't understand a word, but I understood the story!" In return, she and her friends began bringing me to Japan. She introduced my stories in Japanese, and I told in English. We even performed together in Singapore!

During our tours, she told me many stories. Some were short and straight-forward, perfect for telling to Americans after just a short English introduction. Others were longer, or needed more explanation than we felt we could do in performance. But they were wonderful stories, and I wanted Americans to see them—especially since many of them had never been translated into English before.

Here they are: some of her American listeners' favorites, plus others we share for the first time with an American audience here.





## ABOUT THE STORIES

Sometimes, before a story begins, we give a little background information that we think will be helpful. Sometimes Mrs. Fujita adds an interesting COMMENT, or I add a NOTE with more information. We also sometimes have a TIP for storytellers. Japanese words will be introduced into each story in italics. Further information about Japanese words may be found in the GLOSSARY & PRONUNCIATION GUIDE at the end of the book. We hope these additions will be useful.



From *Cats suggested as the fifty-three stations of the Tokaido*  
by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798 - 1861)

## PEOPLE ASK

*Preface by Hiroko Fujita*

Sometimes, people ask me why I tell stories. I would like to share the gift I received when I was a child. What I received was not mere stories. Storytelling requires tellers and listeners being together, face to face. Through it, I received the teller's kindness and warmth, and it was a wonderful, happy moment for me. Now I want to share this happiness with my listeners.

From each story, I learned wisdom, courage, firmness, kindness, sorrow, happiness, craftiness, and such. Folktales are fiction. Monkeys can't talk, and *Tanuki* can't change into anything. But in stories, the drowning monkey thinks of his wife, and the mother Tanuki who wants to show her gratitude, changes into a drum although she knows she will be beaten.

Storytellers convey these feelings to listeners, and these feelings are true. We learn these true feelings through fiction. *Oni* and *yamanba* don't exist. But both storytellers and listeners find them inside themselves and sympathize with them. Stories are a fabrication, but this sympathy is real.

We learn how to deal with evil and sorrow in ourselves. I learned this sometimes with a laugh, sometimes with a sigh. I'm hoping that children will learn true wisdom and courage through my untrue stories.

Also, I developed my imagination by story-listening. Folktales



tell facts, but seldom explain characters' feelings. "The wife started smiling as she heard the peach peddler's call." Though this sentence is very simple, I can imagine how much the woman loved her husband and how much she longed for him. From simple words, I picture the scene in my head.

Also, in real life, I can live only my life. But by story-listening, I can be a king, a poor farmer, a rare beauty, or a mean mother-in-law. I can be a hungry snake who eats its own tail. I can be a turtle who wants to fly in the sky.

Experiencing many different kinds of "me" in stories enabled me to look at myself objectively and to put myself in another's shoes. I would like to convey these things also.

So, I suppose these are the reasons why I tell. But basically, I tell stories because I enjoy it. I think it shares the wonderful childhood I had. It was a time with no books, no TV, no games. (Not enough food or clothes, I can add.) But there were many, many stories, rich in teaching, rich in feelings, rich in beautiful dialects. When I think of it, I am very grateful.

I'm also grateful for the ways in which I acquired languages: first, my mother's tongue, then a dialect, then standard Japanese and then foreign language. I am also grateful that I learned languages richly through my ears first, then through printed letters.

I'm also grateful that I learned that words don't come out of a machine: they come out of human lips conveying kindness, warmth, or sometimes sorrow or sting. Many, many people have taught me that. I feel very blessed.

I hope you tell these stories in my books using your own words and your own heart.

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## STORIES FOR FUN

These silly stories are fun to share in a group, where everyone can join in with the actions and repeated lines. The traditional Japanese sound effect words add to the fun! To help you say them, we used ALL CAPS for stressed syllables. There's also a GLOSSARY & PRONUNCIATION GUIDE at the end of the book.

### *A Box of Cakes*

**INSIGHT:** *Botamochi* snacks have a center of pressed rice, with various sweet toppings. They are about the size and shape of an egg.

Long time ago, there was a boy whose mother said to him, “Today I made a lot of tasty botamochi. I want you to take some to your aunt who lives in the next village.

“In this box I have packed many kinds of botamochi. In this corner of the box are botamochi covered with bean jam; in that corner, walnut paste; in this corner, toasted soy flour; in this other corner, sesame seeds. So you must not shake, drop, or tip this box. Carry it straight and carefully.”

The boy said, “All right,” and set out from home.



As he walked, he said to himself, “I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box. I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.”

As he walked on the path past the rice field, a frog jumped out of the field.

He was surprised, and shouted, “*OT-TOT-TOT-TO!* (Oops!)”

He leaped back, but “Good, good, I didn’t shake it. I didn’t even tip it. Good, good.”

And he continued on his way, saying,

“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.

“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.”

Next he reached the creek. There was no bridge, so he had to jump, *PYON*.

“Good, good, I didn’t shake it. I didn’t tip it, either. Good, good.”

And he continued on his way, saying,

“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.

“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.”

Next he had to climb the mountain to go to the next village. The mountain path was bumpy with tree roots. As he walked, he stumbled over a root, *TON*.

“Ouch! But I’m all right. Good, good, I didn’t shake this important box. I didn’t even tip it. Good, good.”

And he continued on his way, saying,

“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.



“I must not shake this important box. I must not tip this important box.”

At last he arrived at the next village.

Suddenly a dog barked because she saw a child she did not recognize: *WAN, WAN, WAN!* (woof!)

He held the box high over his head and ran from the dog, saying,

“I must not shake this important box! I must not tip this important box!

“I must not shake this important box! I must not tip this important box!”

At last he arrived at his aunt’s house. He called, “Auntie, Auntie!”

His aunt came out, opening the door, *gaRA!* (sound of creaky door) “Oh! Welcome, welcome. Come in, come in.”

As he handed the box to his aunt, he said, “My mother told me to bring this to you.”

His aunt was very glad and said, “Oh! Oh! You took such trouble to deliver this to me. What is inside this box? What can it be?”

She put her ear to the box and listened to it.

It made no noise, so—

She shook it all up!!

*Oshimai* (It is closed), a traditional story ending in Mrs. Fujita’s Fukushima dialect.



COMMENT FROM FUJITA-SAN: I often tell this in first person as if it was from my own experience. After all, my Uncle in the Field told me stories of Fox and *Tanuki* just as if he had seen them with his own eyes.

TIP FROM FRAN: If listeners would be puzzled by exotic botamochi, say it’s a box of frosted cupcakes. What a sticky mess they would make, shaken up in a box!