

FOR THE LOVE OF A CAT

C Byrde

Art by Suddhasatwa Basu



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This book belongs to

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About Katha

Katha, a nonprofit organization founded in 1988, works in the literacy to literature continuum. We work with slum communities and municipal corporation schools to ensure that every child learns to read for fun and at grade level. We also work with women and teachers so that all children achieve their potential.

Our books, workshops and learning centres strive to forge cross-cultural connections through story and Story Pedagogy®. As one of India's finest publishers, our initiative has been recognized as "a unique and special moment in Indian publishing history" by *The Economic Times*.

Katha's books have received global recognition, including the nomination by an international jury for the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Award, the world's biggest prize for children's literature.

We love to work with new and established writers, translators and illustrators.

Do you like writing, illustrating, translating for children? Write to us at editors@katha.org to become a cherished member of the Katha family!

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— Charles Landry, *The Art of City Making*

"Katha has a real soft corner for kids. Which is why it ... create[s] such gorgeous picture books for children."

— Time Out

"Katha's work is driven by the idea that children can bring change to their communities that is sustainable and real, just as the children do in [their books]."

— Papertigers

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Long, long ago in Japan there lived a young painter. He was a good painter and was happiest when he was deep in his work, drawing or painting. His only friend was a little cat Tora, who shared his hut and his food and who sat quietly by him whilst he worked. It wasn't easy for the painter to make a living. So most of the time he was poor.

Winter came. No one gave him work, and no one in his small town could buy the paintings he made. He tried everything. At last all his paper and paints were finished and he had money just enough for one meal.

Out he went into the market and brought back a small fish. This may be the last meal of my life, he said to himself, so I shall cook it carefully, and enjoy it.

Then, I'll lie down and wait for death to come.



But when he had cooked the fish, he found there would not be enough for both him and the cat. He smiled at his cat, stroking it gently, saying, "You eat the fish. I won't be able to give you anything, anymore."

He had hardly closed his eyes when there was a sharp knock at the door of his hut. Through it came a crowd of dim figures - a group of priests from the temple of the Buddha.

"Oh, I hope you're not ill, sir?" asked one of them, "We need you at once."

"Yes!" said another. "We want a beautiful painting of the Holy One with all the creatures of nature around him."

The priests helped the painter to move into the temple to begin the great work. But before he started, the priests had one condition: No cats, they told the painter. Not a single cat. Because we have heard the all-knowing Buddha did not like cats.

It was a small condition and the painter accepted it. In no time, an advance was paid to the young man.



He and his cat ate well and the painter managed to purchase all the materials he needed.

He worked with great joy for many weeks, speaking to no one but Tora, his small cat companion. One by one, he drew all the creatures of the world around the figure of the Buddha, all those the painter knew or had dreamt of.

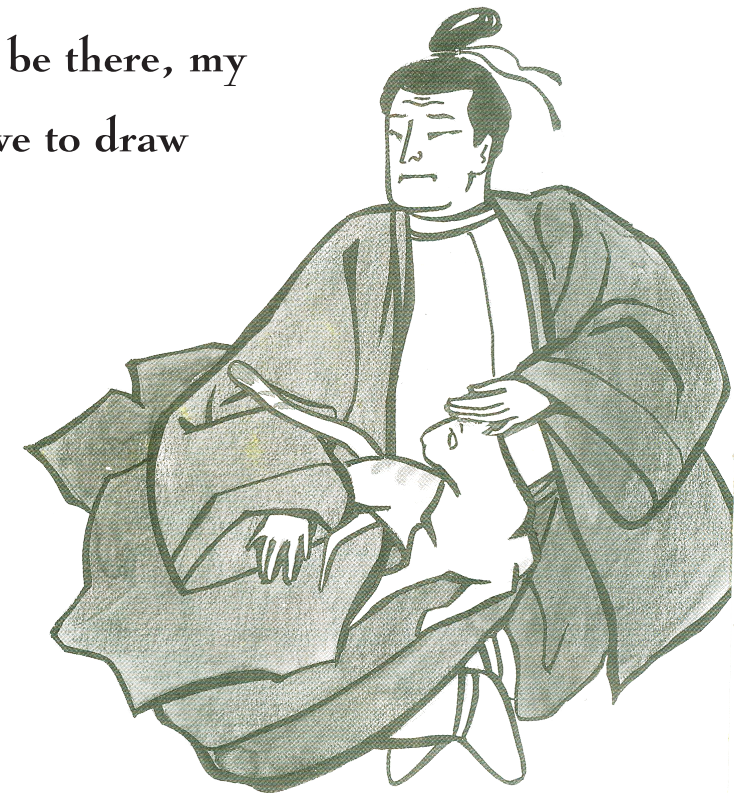
Tora sat, looking at her master's painting. The painting was almost complete. One day the painter's cat fell sick. A week passed. The painter realized that the cat was dying. "Come, Tora," the painter coaxed. "Now we have plenty to eat. Don't go hungry, little one!"

"Oh my dear little one," he said, stroking her lovingly, thinking deeply about his cat.

At last he looked up. "Ah," he said, "I know what you want. I wish I could put you in the painting." But how could he? He knelt by the cat and explained in great detail why she was not in his painting of the Buddha. But Tora continued to sit quietly.

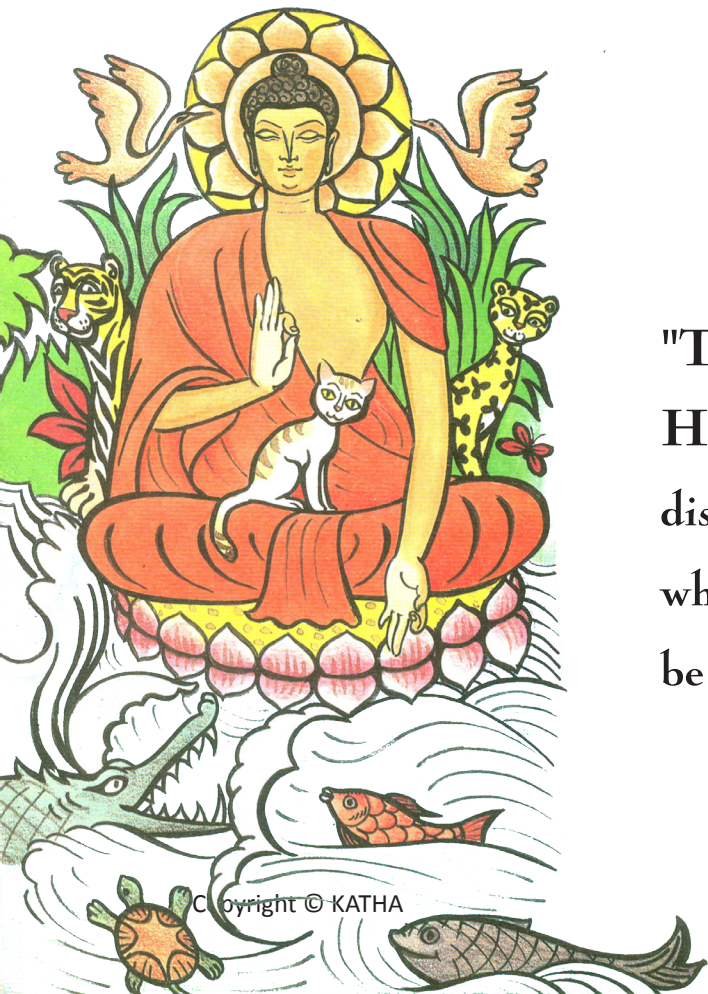
Finally the painter said, "How can I leave you out of the world of the Holy One? You shall be there, my little friend, but I'll have to draw you very small."

He painted the cat at the feet of Buddha, but so small that no one would find it.



The cat looked at him gratefully and died peacefully in his arms.

The painting was done. The next day, the priests marvelled at his wonderful painting till one priest discovered the cat. "How dare you disobey us?" he thundered.

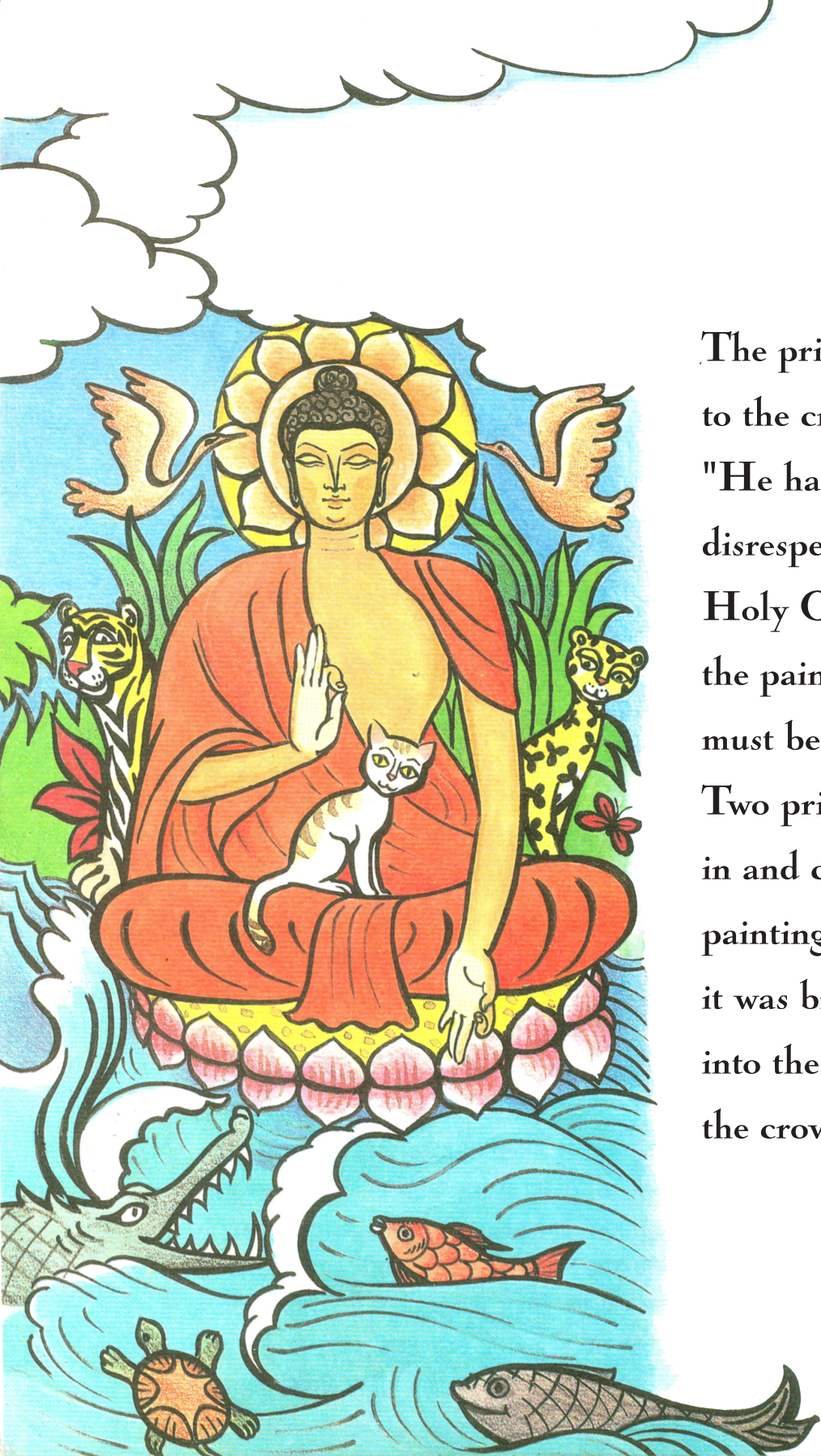


"Tomorrow," said the Head Priest, "you will be disgraced in front of the whole town and you'll never be allowed to paint again!"

At dawn the next day, the people gathered to see the painter's shame. He was dragged before them, pale but quiet.

He knew what he had done. In a way, the priests were right.

But in his heart he knew they were wrong. Still, it was too late. If he could not paint, he didn't care if he died.



The priests spoke to the crowd. "He has shown disrespect to the Holy One. Bring the painting. It must be burnt." Two priests went in and carried the painting out. As it was brought into the daylight, the crowd gasped.

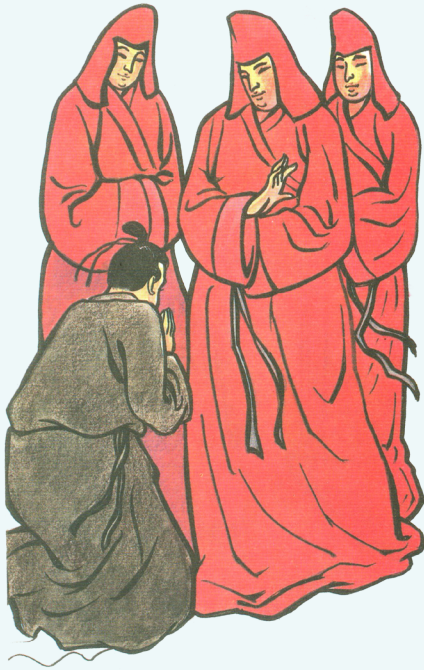
The seated Buddha was smiling, and on his lap, the Holy One's hand resting gently on it, was the painter's little cat.

A "It's a miracle!" went the cry. And so it was. The priests were humble enough to understand their fault. The painter was given all honour, both for his painting and for his great love for one of God's creatures.



C Byrde was the pen name of Rosalind Wilson. An English woman, Rosalind had heard a lot about India when she was studying in Oxford, England, and saved money to travel to India. She came to India in 1966 and never went back. She loved writing for children and ran a fun magazine for children called *Target*.

Suddhasatwa Basu is a renowned illustrator, painter and maker of animation films for television. He has illustrated a number of books for children, including *The Song of the Scarecrow* which won the Katha Chitrakala Award in 2002 and received an honourable mention at the Biennial of Illustrations, Bratislava, in 2003. He was given the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) for his contribution to children's book illustration in 2010.



In a small town in Japan lived an impoverished painter with Tora, his faithful cat. A day comes when the painter offers the last meal money could buy to Tora, his companion and best friend. Miraculously then, a group of priests arrive and demand that he make a beautiful painting for Lord Buddha—but on the condition that he doesn't include a cat in the painting. Caught in a dilemma between love for Tora and respecting the priests' wishes, the painter takes a decision after much thought. What happens to the painter when his painting is unfurled?

A story filled with love and gentle wisdom, *For the Love of a Cat* is bound to strike an emotional chord with young readers.