Two Foolish Cats
A Japanese folk tale
retold by Alice Leonhardt

Long ago two cats named Sam and Keigo lived in Japan. Sam was a small cat with bristly, striped fur. Keigo was a big cat with smooth, glossy fur. They lived and hunted together in the pine forest.

One day, Sam and Keigo hiked until nightfall without catching dinner. Sam’s stomach growled noisily. Keigo’s mouth watered hungrily.

“If we don’t find food, we will starve,” Sam said to his friend.

“Let us visit the farmer’s house,” Keigo suggested. “Perhaps his wife will feed us.” They hurried through the rice fields to the farmer’s house. On the porch were two rice cakes. Sam was so hungry, he pounced on the bigger cake.

“Hey, I am the bigger cat,” Keigo said. “I deserve the bigger cake.” Sam shook his head. “I am the scavenger cat, so I should get the bigger one.”

They argued so loudly, their screeching woke the farmer’s wife. Waving her broom, she yelled, “Go ask the Wise Monkey to settle your argument.”

Snatching up the rice cakes, the two cats raced back into the forest. They found the Wise Monkey napping in the branches of his tree.

Keigo looked up at the monkey. “Who should get the bigger cake?” he asked.

The monkey wrinkled his forehead in thought. Then he said, “You should both get the same. I will make the cakes, and I will use my scales to make them equal.”

The cats dropped their cakes into the monkey’s paw. He put a cake on each tray of the scales, which did not balance. “This will be easy to fix,” he said, taking a bite out of Sam’s big cake.

“You should be equal,” the monkey said. “The scales were not equal. The bite was too big.” He decided, eating some of Keigo’s cake. Again he weighed them and the scales did not balance.

While the cats watched, the monkey weighed and matched until he’d eaten both cakes. “The scales are now balanced!” Wise Monkey said with a satisfied grin. “The rice cakes are equally good. Now you may stop arguing.”

“Meow-ow, we are foolish cats,” Sam and Keigo cried when they realized what had happened.

Wise Monkey patted his full stomach. “Next time, you will remember to share.”

The two foolish cats slunk back to their home. Working together, they caught their dinner. And from that day on, they never quarreled again.

Alice Leonhardt is the author of over sixty children’s books. Her novel Shadow Horse, written under the pen name Alison Hart, was nominated for an Edgar Allan Poe Award for best children’s mystery. When she’s not writing books, she lives in ...