

The Grateful Crane

A Japanese Folktale



A poor man lived in a little house all alone in the woods. One day, he found a wounded crane with a hunter's arrow stuck in its wing. Feeling sorry for the bird, he pulled out the arrow, saving its life. Then the man watched as the crane flew away.

That night someone knocked on his door. Outside stood a pretty young woman who said she was lost. She begged him to let her stay the night.

Very soon after, they fell in love and got married. They were very happy, but very poor.

To help make ends meet, the wife decided to weave some cloth to sell at the market. She set up her loom in a small room and told the husband never to look inside.

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The wife worked alone in her room for three days and nights. The cloth she wove was very fine and beautiful. The husband sold it in town for a lot of money.

But soon they needed money again, so the wife decided to weave more cloth. Again, she made the husband promise not to peek inside. This time the wife worked alone in the room for four days and nights. And this time her new cloth was even finer and more beautiful than the first. The husband sold it for a great sum of money.

Now they were no longer poor, but the husband still wanted more money. Even though she didn't understand why, the wife agreed to weave one last cloth.

Again, the wife told the husband not to peek into the room while she worked. But after four long days, he forgot his promise and opened the door just a crack.

Inside, a white crane stood at the loom tearing out her feathers to weave the cloth. When she saw him, the crane changed back into a woman—his wife!

The wife explained that she was the crane he'd saved from the hunter's arrow. She was grateful for his help, so she turned into a human and came to help him. But now that he saw her true form, she must leave.

And with that, the wife turned back into a crane and flew away.

