



THE CRANE GIRL

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Long, long ago, in a snowy village in Japan, there lived a kind young man named Yosaku. He was poor, but he had a big heart. One cold afternoon, Yosaku was walking home when he heard a noise. He found a beautiful white crane that had been shot with an arrow! The poor bird was trapped and hurt. Yosaku felt very sorry for the crane. Carefully, he pulled the arrow out, cleaned the wound, and made sure the bird was safe until it could fly again.



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The crane circled the sky three times, let out a cry that sounded like "thank you," and flew away. Yosaku was happy to help, and went back to his simple life.



That night, there was a terrible snowstorm. Knock, knock! A beautiful, mysterious young woman appeared at Yosaku's door, shivering.

"Please, may I stay here until the storm stops?" she asked. Yosaku, being kind, welcomed her in. The storm lasted for days, and the woman stayed, helping with chores and becoming a part of his home.



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They were very happy together, and soon, they got married!



One day, Yosaku's wife had an idea. She knew they needed money for food and firewood. She said, "I can weave some cloth for you to sell, but you must promise me one thing: You must never, ever peek into the weaving room while I am working." Yosaku promised. He built her a small room, and she went inside. Clack-clack, clack-clack, swoosh. Yosaku heard the sound of the loom all day and night. After seven days, his wife came out. She looked very, very tired and thin, but she held a roll of the most beautiful, shimmering cloth anyone had ever seen!



Yosaku took it to the market, and everyone wanted it. He sold it for a very high price, and suddenly, he and his wife were rich! A little while later, the wife went back into the room to weave another beautiful cloth. Clack-clack, clack-clack, swoosh. Again she told Yosaku, "Do not look!"



But Yosaku started to get curious. "How can she make something so amazing?" he wondered. "And why is she getting so skinny?"

His curiosity got the better of him. He forgot his promise. He cracked open the door just a little bit and peeked inside.

Yosaku gasped! It wasn't his wife in the room. It was the same white crane he had saved! It was plucking its very own beautiful feathers from its wings and weaving them into the cloth!

The crane saw Yosaku. It stopped weaving and looked at him sadly.

"Oh, my dear Yosaku," the crane said. "I am the bird you saved. I wanted to repay your kindness and be your wife forever. But now you know my secret, I cannot stay."



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Yosaku felt terrible for breaking his promise. The next morning, the crane transformed back into a bird, flapped its wings, and flew away into the sky. Yosaku wanted to go with the crane.



He
ran after the crane until he, too, had wings. Together they flew
over the hills and along the river to the marshes at the edge of
sea.

There , the other cranes welcomed them by placing their beaks
together and dancing.

Yosaku and the crane stayed together for the rest of their long
lives and raised many crane children, one by one.