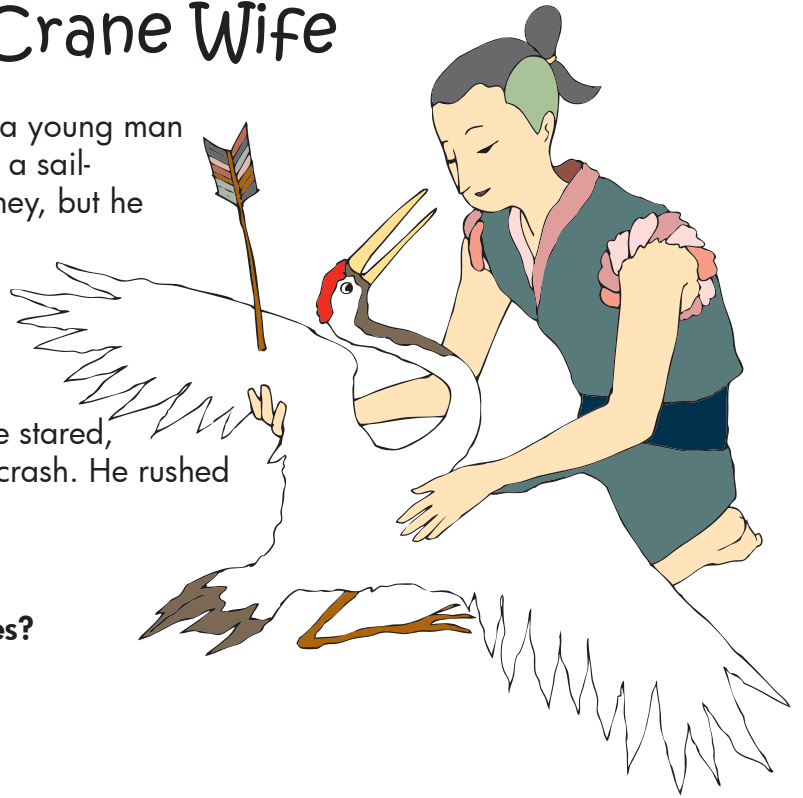


The Crane Wife

A LONG TIME AGO, there lived a young man in a small home in the mountains. He was a sail-maker, which did not make him much money, but he had enough to get by, and that was all he needed. One day, while walking home, a beautiful white crane appeared overhead. It swerved wildly through the sky, to and fro, and the man knew something was wrong. It picked up speed as he stared, and suddenly hit the ground with a great crash. He rushed toward it to make sure it was OK.



STOP

1. Where do you think the young man lives?

- a. In a small village
- b. In a big city.
- c. With his parents

When he approached it, he saw that it had an arrow lodged in one of its wings—a hunting accident. Feeling sorry for the poor thing, he scooped it up in his arms and took it back to his home, where he cleaned the wound and nursed the beautiful bird back to health. A few days later, he sent the crane back out. As it flew away, he warned it to stay away from hunters. The next evening, he came home to his small house, the way he always did. When he opened the door, he was shocked to find a lovely young woman sitting at his kitchen table. “Welcome home, husband,” she said.

“Husband? I cannot be your husband!” the sailmaker said, astonished. “I don’t know you at all, and even if I were your husband, I cannot support you. I barely make enough money to get by on my own.”

“Oh, do not worry about me,” she said, motioning to a small sack on the floor. “I can take care of myself. I brought rice with me to eat, and a loom to work on.” She got up and began to boil a pot of water for the rice. Unsure of what else to do, the young man sat down as his new wife prepared dinner.

STOP

2. Why didn’t the sailmaker want the woman to be his wife? (2 answers!)

- a. He didn’t know her.
- b. He had gotten to know her and didn’t get along with her.
- c. He couldn’t support her.

Over time, they began to warm up to each other. She was kind and caring, and he was a good, honest man. They treated each other with respect, which slowly turned into love. One day, the wife asked her husband if she could have the room in the back of the house to weave in. "I would like to begin weaving so that I can make us some more money," she said, and her husband agreed. "I have only one condition," she warned. "You must never look inside."

She closed the door, and he heard the loom start up. For seven days and nights, the loom clicked and clacked. Finally, she emerged with a beautiful cloth; the most beautiful he had ever seen. "Take this into town and sell it. It will no doubt command a high price," she said. He did as she asked and, as she predicted, he sold it for a tidy sum. Content, he returned home.

STOP

3. Based on what you have read so far, whom do you think this woman might be?

4. Why do you think she will not let him look in her room?

His wife continued to weave. After several weeks of weaving and selling, the sailmaker's curiosity began to eat away at him. As far as he knew, all she had was a loom—no thread. Finally, he couldn't stand it anymore. He slowly pushed the door open and peeked inside. To his surprise, she was gone.

Instead, he found a crane sitting next to a pile of finished cloth, the elegant bird plucking its own feathers for thread. He gasped, and she heard him. She hung her head in sadness and walked over. "Remember me? I am the crane that you brought back to health. I wanted to repay you for your kindness, but now that you have seen my real self, I must go." She nudged the finished cloth toward him with her beak. "Take this to town and sell it. It should make you enough money to keep you comfortable for the rest of your life."

She turned to face the front door. She was sad, for she had loved him, too, but off she went into the dark sky, never to be seen again.

