



The Gratitude of the Crane

ONCE upon a time there lived an old man and woman who were poor but very kind. One cold night on his way home from selling firewood, the old man came across a crane caught in a trap. “Poor thing. Let me help you,” the old man said. He freed the crane, which flew off for parts unknown.

When he returned home, the old man told the old woman what had happened. Just then there was a knock at the door. The old woman opened it to find a beautiful girl standing in a snowstorm. “Oh my,” said the old woman, “you must be cold out there! Come in, come in,” and ushered the girl into her home.

“I came to visit someone but lost my way. I don’t want to be a bother, but would you please let me stay for just one night?” the girl politely requested. “How horrible for you!” the couple exclaimed. “Yes,

please stay with us.” So saying, the couple warmly welcomed the girl.

But the snow kept on falling the next day and the day after that, so no one could leave. In the meantime, the girl did whatever she could to help the couple—sweeping, laundering clothes and cooking. “How happy we are that such a kind young lady came to our home!” said the couple, who had no children and had come to think of the girl as their daughter. Upon hearing this, the girl said: “I have no family. Would you let me stay with you?” The couple was overjoyed, and the three of them lived quite happily together.

One day the girl asked the old man to purchase some thread for her so that she could weave some cloth. After the old man did so, the girl told him: “While I am weaving, you must promise never to peek inside.” The girl then went into a room and



shut the door. She continued weaving for three days and nights. On the third night she emerged carrying some gorgeous woven fabric. “Please sell this cloth and buy more thread,” the girl asked.

The old man went to town the next day to sell the beautiful cloth, and was able to fetch a very high price for it. When he arrived home with the thread he had bought, the girl once again closed herself off in the room. Again she said to the couple: “Please, promise that you will never, ever peek.”

But the old woman exclaimed: “How I would like to see how she weaves such beautiful fabric!” The old man refused at first, but then thought: “One peek won’t hurt, will it?” So the couple peered into the room where the girl was working.

When they did so, they were astounded—there was a crane, pulling out its feathers with its beak and weaving them into the cloth. The crane had hardly any feathers left. The girl emerged from the room, holding the cloth. “I am the crane you freed from the trap,” she said. “I wanted to thank you. Since you have seen my true form, however, I must leave. Thank you for allowing me to stay with you for so long.” The girl then spread her arms, turned into a crane, and flew off into the sky toward the mountains. ”

THE HOME OF THE GRATITUDE OF THE CRANE

In the western part of the city of Nanyo in Yamagata Prefecture, beside Orihata (“Weaving Loom”) River that flows through the Urushiyama District, sits Kakufuzan Chinzoji Temple, the source of the legend of “The Gratitude of the Crane.” (“Kakufuzan” means “mountain of the crane cloth.”) Many names of places in this district are closely associated with the legend, and in the Meiji Era, Nanyo was renowned for its spinning. At the Yuzuru no Sato museum (“home of the twilight crane”), visitors can enjoy exhibits on spinning, listen to presentations of folk tales, and try weaving on a loom.

