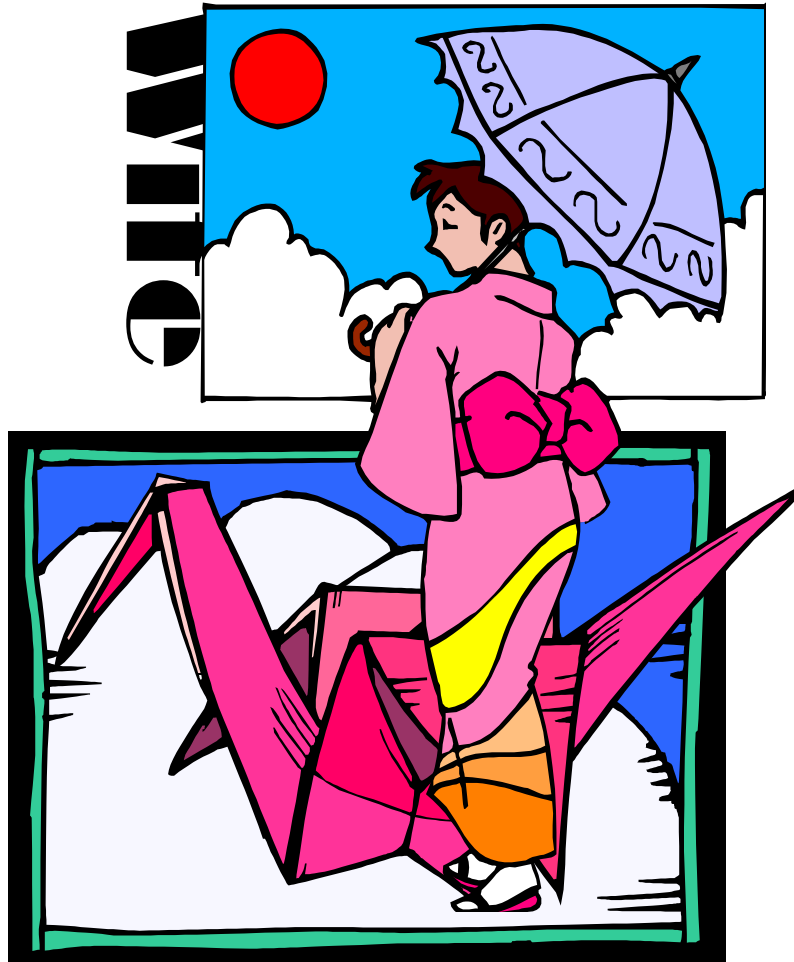


Crane



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PROLOGUE: THE PROCESSION

NARRATORS: Mukashi, mukashi. Once upon a time. Aru tokoro ni. There was a place. In the shadow of the mountains the snow can fall for nine months. It covers the thatched kayabuki and fills the village streets.

CHORUS: Dig, good neighbor. Dig.
Come to my house. We will drink some tea.
They will only tell each other tall tales.
The snow has covered the treetops.

NARRATORS: When the snow comes, the young women, musume, go into the weaving room to weave the beautiful Echigo cloth. Alone behind the screen, sitting at the loom, the women weave long strips of soft, white cloth.

CHORUS: Weave well, my dear.
Breathe deeply, in and out.
Keep it even, young one.
The hunters will pay a high price.

NARRATORS: When the snow is still deep and white upon the ground, the cloth is laid out and bleached in the sun.

Mukashi, mukashi, aru tokoro ni. A long time ago, the crane lived each summer with the farmers below the mountain.

CHORUS: We fished together in the waters of the river.
And the cranes kept the mice from the rice.

NARRATORS: But when the sun hides behind the mountains, and snow falls, the white, long-necked cranes rise from the stream and fly to their nests in the meadows by the sea.

CHORUS: Fly, tsuru, fly.
Go to the ocean meadows.
Come back to us. Summer will come again.
The snow will pass.
ALL: Fly beautiful cranes.

NARRATORS: The great snow crane leads her flock up out of the valley.
One by one, and two by two they fly, casting shadows over the earth.

MARCH OF THE HUNTERS

NARRATORS: When the cranes fly, out of their houses come the hunters.

CHORUS: Food must be gathered.
The winter is long.
ALL: Bows. Arrows. Aim.

NARRATORS: The arrow flies. Swift and sharp, it crosses the sky. Arrow and crane. Crane and arrow.

SCENE ONE

NARRATORS: Mukashi, mukashi. Aru tokoro ni. A poor young peasant named Kokuro lived alone in his little hut at the foot of the mountain. One day, Kokuro went to the woods to gather twigs for his tiny fire. He walked and walked. It was cold and nearly dark, as the snow began to fall.

[The sound of rustling wings is heard offstage. KOKURO turns around to look. A voice from offstage cries in pain, then a CRANE enters, wounded, and falls to the stage.]

KOKURO: Oh! It's a crane. You're hurt. This arrow has pierced your wing. How you must suffer. If this snow continues to fall, you will surely freeze to death. Quiet, quiet. Shhhh! There it is, the arrow is gone. It's OK. Please rest. Everything will be all right.

NARRATORS: He cradled the crane's body in his arms until he felt the heart beat strongly again. He helped the crane stand on its long legs and stretch its wings.

[The crane circles once and flies off. Kokuro watches, then picks up his pack and begins to walk back home.]

SONG: Snow is falling. Night is dark.
The path is long and cold.
Wind is blowing. Stars are dim.
A fire will warm my heart.

SCENE TWO

[KOKURO enters his hut. The CRANE DANCERS enter, shrouding the CRANE WIFE. They deposit her in front of the hut and then depart.]

CHORUS: [knock, knock, knock]

KOKURO: What's this? Who can be knocking at this time of night?

CHORUS: [knock, knock, knock]

KOKURO: Who can be coming for me? What have I done?

CRANE: Kokuro, please. Please let me in.

CHORUS: [knock, knock, knock]

CRANE: Kokuro, I beg you. Please let me in.

CHORUS: [knock, knock, knock]

CRANE: Kokuro. Kind gentle man. Please, let me in. It is cold and dark, and the snow will soon cover my head.

[KOKURO goes to the door and sees the young woman.]

Kokuro, please. Let me come in. I want to stay with you. Please, I would like to become your wife.

[KOKURO turns away in disbelief.]

I am sorry to disturb you. Please. If you wish, I will go away. I shall only ask you once again. Will you let me become your wife?

[Pause. The CRANE wife lowers her head and turns to leave. At the last moment, KOKURO stops her.]

KOKURO: Please. Come in to my sad little hut. It is empty, but if you truly wish it, I would be honored to have you as my bride.

[KOKURO leads her into the hut.]

I have only this tiny fire and a thin blanket...you are so beautiful...

CRANE: You are all I need to be happy.

[They embrace.]

SCENE THREE

NARRATOR: Very soon the village was full of gossip.

CHORUS: Have you seen that boy Kokuro?
Young Kokuro has a wife!
The ujigami have smiled on him.
That young man has a fine wife.
Have you ever seen such a beautiful bride?
Where did Kokuro find such a wife?
Kokuro has a better wife than he deserves!

NARRATOR: Indeed, Kokuro had a fine wife. She swept the mud from the tatami mats. She cleaned the crocks and scoured the kettle. She mended the paper shoji with beeswax. She cleaned and cleaned until Kokuro's hut was a home.

KOKURO: Ujigami, protectors of my little house. You have given me a great gift. I do not deserve it. I offer this little rice cake. It 's all I have. Please, spirits, accept my gratitude.

CRANE: You are simple and kind dear husband. I am honored to be at your side.

NARRATORS: But it was not an easy time. Kokuro was the poorest of the poor among the peasants.

CHORUS: Winter is here, foolish Kokuro.
What will you feed your pretty bride?
Two mouths to feed instead of one?
How will you manage that?

NARRATOR: Kokuro grew poorer and poorer as each day passed. Each day his wife saw his face grow darker and darker.

CRANE: Anata, I see that you are troubled.

KOKURO: I am ashamed, because I cannot care for you. All of our food is gone and the hunters have taken all of the animals from the woods.

CRANE: Anata, you must share your worries with me. You must not be too proud to accept my help.

KOKURO: Dear wife, I confess. I am grateful for your offer, but what can you do?

CRANE: I see the village women weaving cloth to sell in the market. Please, dear husband, I know I am not from this village, but if you will allow me, I can weave one time for you.

KOKURO: Dear wife, if you like you may use the loom my mother used when she was a girl.

CRANE: Thank you, dear husband, but you must put the loom behind this screen at the back of the hut. There I will weave, and you must promise never to look at me behind the screen while I work.

KOKURO: I will do as you say, my wife, but why must you hide behind the screen?

CRANE: Please, trust me. You must NEVER look upon me while I am weaving.

NARRATOR: And so Kokuro's wife disappeared behind the screen and went to work weaving her cloth.

[THE FIRST DANCE OF THE WEAVING. Crane dancers will pantomime weaving in silhouette on the screen. WEAVING SONG]

NARRATOR: And so Kokuro waited. Kokuro waited for four lonely days. At last, his wife appeared.

KOKURO: Omae! This hut was so lonely without you.

CRANE: Dear husband...

KOKURO: But you asked me to wait, and I have waited. What did you do that I could not see?

CRANE: I have made you a cloth.

KOKURO: You are ill. You've worked too long behind the screen. Your skin...so pale! I swear, I shall never ask you to weave again.

CRANE: The cloth is yours. Please take it to the market, and our troubles may be ended.

SCENE FOUR

NARRATOR: On the next day, he took the cloth and set out for the market in the town. Kokuro could not resist showing his neighbors the cloth his wife had made.

CHORUS: Hiso. Hiso [repeated throughout the chorus lines]
How rare!
So white!
Soft as snow!
How could this be?
Where did she learn to make such cloth?
He's a lucky man.
I wouldn't want that kind of luck.
She's had help from the bakemono.
Luck like that come with a price.
After good fortune comes only bad.
He doesn't deserve a cloth like that.

NARRATOR: Soon the hunters came to the market. Each one wanted the cloth for himself.

CHORUS: Ten ryo!
I'll give you twenty!
Thirty-five for the whole piece!
Make that fifty, and not a sen more.
Fifty ryo? Too rich for my blood!
And mine!
Fifty ryo. Sold!

NARRATOR: And so the cloth was sold. Kokuro returned to the hut filled with joy.

KOKURO: [chanting and doing the happy dance]
Money, silver! Money, gold!
What a rich man is Ko-ku-ro!
Ko-ku-ro! Ko-ku-ro!
What a fine man is Ko-ku-ro!

Wife! Wife! Look at this! We shall have the finest food and the warmest fire for days and days! Blessings on the ujigami for this good fortune!

CRANE: I am glad to see you smiling again.

KOKURO: I can't help it with a wife like you! Fifty ryo! I've never seen such a fortune!

CRANE: If we are wise, it will last us through the winter.

KOKURO: Of course...it will last!

SCENE FIVE [THE LONG WINTER]

NARRATOR: Nigatsu. Sangatsu. And still the snow fell.

CHORUS: The winter is cold. The winter is long.
Fifty ryo will not last forever.
Two mouths to feed instead of one.
What will you do when your coins are gone?

NARRATOR: One by one the fifty ryo slipped away. But Kokuro said nothing. He did not wish to trouble his gentle wife.

CRANE: Dear husband, what's wrong? Do I not share your sorrows as well as your joys?

KOKURO: The winter is long, and Spring is nowhere in sight. There's no more rice, we're out of fish, even the tofu is gone! I can't even buy a tiny bowl of miso to make the soup. What will we do?

CRANE: Husband, please. It is possible for me to weave one more time.

KOKURO: Dear wife, I am grateful. This will be the last time. I will not ask you again.

CRANE: [as she prepares to go behind the screen] And now, I beg you, please never look at me while I am weaving.

KOKURO: Yes, my wife. I know. I do not understand, but I will do as you say.

[SECOND WEAVING DANCE]

NARRATOR: And so Kokuro waited.

CHORUS: Ichi-nichi. One day. Simple man. What's he thinking?
 Futsuka. Two days. She hides herself. What's she doing?
 Mikka. Three days. Who is this woman? Evil spirit.
 Yokka. Four days. She weaves alone in secret.
 ALL: Himitsu. Himitsu. Himitsu.

NARRATOR: On the fifth day, Kokuro's wife came out from behind the screen. In her hands was the most beautiful piece of cloth he had ever imagined.

KOKURO: It is magnificent my wife. There is nothing like it in the world.

CRANE: I am glad you are pleased.

KOKURO: Dear wife, you are tired! But the cloth! The cloth shimmers and glows! Rest yourself, and I shall go to market. [as he is leaving] I shall sell the cloth! Thank you my wife. Now rest. Thank you! Thank you!

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR: Kokuro set off for town, and once again, he could not resist showing the cloth to his neighbors.

CHORUS: Hiso. Hiso. [repeated throughout]
 Lighter than silk!
 Made of the wind!
 Like air!
 How could this be?
 He's a lucky man, a wife like that.
 I wouldn't want that kind of luck.
 She's an obake. Beware such luck.
 Luck like that comes with a price.
 After good fortune comes only bad.
 ALL: Beware, Kokuro! Beware!

NARRATOR: Soon the hunters came to the market. Each one wanted the cloth for himself.

CHORUS: Thirty ryo!
 I'll give you forty!
 The last piece sold for fifty, and it was not so fine as this!
 One hundred ryo! No! Make that one-fifty!
 One hundred and fifty ryo? Oh my!
 One hundred and fifty ryo. Sold!

NARRATOR: And so the cloth was sold. Kokuro soon had a heavy bag of coins for the long walk home. But it was a burden he was happy to carry.

KOKURO: [chanting and doing the happy dance]
 Money, silver! Money, gold!
 What a rich man is Ko-ku-ro!
 Ko-ku-ro! Ko-ku-ro!

What a fine man is Ko-ku-ro!

Wife! Wife! We are rich, and spring will soon be coming! I can buy an ox, and three chickens, and seed for the corn, perhaps a tiny piece of land!

CRANE: Yes, my good husband.

SCENE SEVEN

NARRATOR: But it was not to be so easy. News of the beautiful cloth spread quickly. And so it went from hunter to hunter, from town to town, each gossip forging a tale more fantastic than the last. It traveled on the wind until news of the cloth reached Kokuro's greedy neighbor from across the mountains. The neighbor, hearing of Kokuro's good fortune, knew that he wanted a piece of it.

NEIGHBOR: Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend! I see you've bought an ox and some chickens. And now you have your land. Tell me, how has a kid like you been able to do all of that with just a little weaving of cloth?

KOKURO: It was my wife. She wove the cloth, and the hunters paid a fine price for it. One hundred fifty ryo! Can you believe it?

NEIGHBOR: That IS quite a story! My wife's cloth never brought such a price. How does she do it?

KOKURO: I don't know. She won't let me watch her while she's weaving.

NEIGHBOR: You can't watch her?

KOKURO: That is her wish. I don't know why.

NEIGHBOR: Oh, Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend! If your wife can make such remarkable cloth, then it should not be wasted on the hunters. The hunters, indeed! What do they know of fine things? Why you should take it to the capitol – to the palace! It is cloth for a shogun or a nobleman, at least! You must tell your wife to weave a new supply.

KOKURO: Oh no! I can't do that! My wife has said that she cannot weave again. I dare not ask.

NEIGHBOR: Oh, Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend! Are you not master in your own house? Order her to make more cloth, and WE shall take it to market.

KOKURO: Oh, I could NEVER do that!

NEIGHBOR: Just think of it, my friend! Money for the rest of your life! No more work. You will tell your wife to weave. The profit will be so great, we will each take half, and be rich as noblemen. We will sit back and watch while others chop the wood!

Money, gold! Okane! Kin!
A fine house. Servants. Money. Gin!
Sit and sit the whole day long!
Money, gold! Okane! Kin!

KOKURO: Money, silver! Money, gold!
What a rich man is Ko-ku-ro!
Ko-ku-ro! Ko-ku-ro!
What a fine man is Ko-ku-ro!

NARRATOR: What an idea! Kokuro could not say no, and off went the neighbor to find his wealthy buyer.

But what should he tell his wife? The poor peasant was frightened. What if she could not weave again? How was he to explain to the neighbor? He rolled out the futon and fell into a sleep of troubling dreams.

CHORUS: Kokuro-don.
Neighbor.
Friend.
What have you done?
How will you tell your wife?
What if she refuses to weave?
But you will be rich!
Or poor the rest of your life.

SCENE EIGHT

NEIGHBOR: Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend. Come out! See who I have brought you!

[Enter THE SAMURAI.]

SAMURAI: Where is the man who will sell me the magic cloth?

NEIGHBOR: Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend. Where are you?

SAMURAI: Kokuro, young peasant, come out! I will not harm you. I have brought 2000 ryo to buy your magical cloth.

NEIGHBOR: Kokuro-don, my neighbor, my friend. Here he is, my lord. Look, Kokuro! There are the silver ryo! Two-thousand of them. Tell your wife to bring this fine warrior his cloth.

KOKURO: I fear I cannot, my lord. She says she cannot weave again.

SAMURAI: What is this? You have brought me here and there is no cloth? I will take your skin before I will be dishonored so!

NEIGHBOR: No, no, no, no my lord! Kokuro! Will you see me cut in two? What about the fortune? Look. Two-thousand ryo! Tell your wife to weave some more. Are you not master in your own house? He will deliver the cloth, my lord. I swear by my right arm.

KOKURO: The weaving is slow, my lord. It is such a fine cloth.

NEIGHBOR: That's it, my lord! The weaving is slow! Return to the city and leave the money here. She will make the cloth and I will bring it to you! Kokuro is an honest kid. He will make his wife obey.

SAMURAI: NO! Kokuro will bring me the cloth himself. YOU I will take for ransom. If Kokuro doesn't bring the cloth in ten days, we will see what a good farmer you will make with only one arm.

Do not disappoint me, Kokuro. I have a fierce temper!

[SAMURAI exits, carrying the NEIGHBOR.]

NEIGHBOR: Tell your wife to weave the cloth! Ten days, Kokuro! This getting rich was YOUR idea, remember? Make her do it! Once in a lifetime! We can both be rich!

[KOKURO goes to the bag of money and looks in it. As he does so, the CHORUS chants until he shuts the bag again.]

CHORUS: [whispered] Money, silver. Money, gold.

KOKURO: Surely she will not refuse me? But what to tell her? [he opens the bag again.]

CHORUS: [whispered] Money, silver. Money, gold.

[KOKURO hears the CRANE WIFE approaching and quickly hides the money.]

KOKURO: Oh, my wife! I have just seen a fine Samurai lord. Oh, to be so rich and powerful.

CRANE: Are we not happy dear husband? Have we not food to eat and fire to keep us warm? Have we not home to keep us from the wind? Do we not care for one another?

KOKURO: Yes, yes, yes, we do, my wife!

CRANE: Then why would we EVER need so much money as that?

KOKURO: With that money a man could have his own rice fields. He could give the orders for others to work.

CRANE: Is it not enough to do our own work together and to make each other happy?

SCENE NINE

NARRATOR: Kokuro saw he could not make his wife understand. One day went by. Then two. Kokuro knew that ten days would soon be gone. He brooded in a corner. He did not speak. Tossing

and turning, he spent restless nights, the jangle of the silver coins echoing in his ears. Finally, his wife could not stand his unhappiness any longer.

CRANE: Dear husband, I cannot bear your distress. I will weave for you, one more time, but this must truly be the last. I shall never weave again.

KOKURO: Thank you, my wife, my beautiful wife. I know, I know, I am not to look. I do not understand, but I will not look.

CRANE: No matter how long I may weave, you must not look at me. Do you understand?

KOKURO: I will do as you say.

[THIRD DANCE OF THE WEAVING]

NARRATOR: **And so Kokuro waited.**

CHORUS: Ichi-nichi. One day. Simple man. What's he thinking?

KOKURO: What's taking so long? What is so secret behind that screen?

CHORUS: Futsuka. Two days. She hides herself. What's she doing?

KOKURO: What does she do with the secret loom? Over and under the cloth is made.

CHORUS: Three days. Four days. Who is this woman? Evil spirit. Five days....

KOKURO: Only two more days left, and I must take the cloth to town. What is she doing?

CHORUS: [repeat, growing louder and louder]
Over and under.
What is she doing?

[KOKURO begins chanting with the chorus. He goes mad and throws down the screens with a fierce scream. The CHORUS screams with him. Behind the screens we see the CRANE WIFE covered in red ribbons like strips of blood. The CRANES stand around her, holding above her head, a long, white strip of cloth, with a red ribbon running through it.]

CHORUS: Look what you have done.
This is the price you pay.
Curiosity got the best of you.
Greed is your enemy, peasant boy.
See what has become of your good fortune?
You see the demon weaving in your hut.
You don't deserve the silver coins!

NARRATOR: What Kokuro saw was not the oni or the yamauba, the mountain demon. What he saw was not the nushi from the swamp. No. What he saw was a crane. But, no...once a beautiful crane, now the bird's long neck and sleek body were naked and smeared with blood. Three times, behind the screen. Three times, with its own beak, it had plucked out each of its beautiful feathers to weave upon the loom.

The sight was too much for simple Kokuro. He fell to the floor in a deep faint. There while his mind lost touch with his body, he heard a sad and terrible voice.

THE CRANE CEREMONY

CRANE WIFE: My dear husband. For your sake, I did as you asked. I hoped you would be able to honor my request. I begged you not to come behind the screen, but now you have looked upon me in my naked suffering. You have seen my sorrow. I have sacrificed my honor, and my dignity is lost. And now I can no longer remain in the human world, the sad human world of envy and distrust. I am the crane you saved from the snow in the winter. I fell in love with your simple kindness and your gentle heart. I trusted your tenderness, and I left my home to come live by your side. But now I must go back to my flock. You know my sad disgrace. Our future together is lost. Farewell. I pray that your life will be long and happy.

[THE FINAL DANCE OF THE CLOTH]

CHORUS: Lighter than air.
Whiter than snow.
It glows.
Made of breath.
It floats.
But look.
But look.
But look.
See the crimson thread.
Deeper than blood.
And whiter than snow.
Wait! Wait!

KOKURO: Wait...

CHORUS: [as they leave the stage]
No use, foolish boy!
She's gone!
She's gone, Kokuro!
She is gone.

[KOKURO sits silently on the front of the stage. From offstage, the CHORUS chants while a single CRANE dances behind.]

CHORUS: The cranes are flying.
See them go, Kokuro.
Look at the cloth.
The beautiful cloth.
Kokuro is a rich man.
Money, silver.
Money, gold.
Where is Kokuro's wife?
Kokuro is a rich man.
Money, gold.
Look at the crimson cloth.
The white and crimson cloth.
Kokuro had a wife.
Where is she now?

[The CRANE wraps KOKURO in the cloth, and slowly walks offstage.]

NARRATOR: It is done.
Itte shimaimashita.
She's gone.