

MONARCH

by
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Based On:
The Crane Wife

retold by
Odds Bodkin

FADE IN:

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA - DAY

Myriad monarch butterflies flutter in migration. Through the shadows under the treetops, they move as a school of orange and black.

A gust of wind. A single monarch is lifted from the multitude. Flitting through the leaves and branches, it makes it into open sky.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A silken kite of patterned white and blue glides and soars in the open sky. The kite, of a traditional Japanese model, is hexagonal with a long singular tail.

Its line, unwound and taut, leads to TAKUMI, a Japanese man of 27, pudgy, and laden with boyish features. His smile consumes his face.

As the wind begins to die, Takumi fervently reels the line. Beginning to run, his kite in tow, it twists and twitters without lift. Floating just above the earth, Takumi's kite finally meets its terrestrial demise.

Takumi reels in his line as he walks. Collecting his kite from atop the green, the wind gusts. Bundling his scarf more tightly now about his neck, he heads for home, a storm amassing over his shoulder.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Thunder rattles the wooden shanty. Lit only by a single candle, Takumi sits hard at work repairing the battered silk. Lightning. The walls are illuminated, covered in beautiful kites of all colors and patterns and shapes and sizes. Darkness. Thunder rumbles the artisan flyers on their hooks. Lightning. Each kite sways softly, each with a price tag wavering out of sync, each unsold. Thunder.

Takumi tenderly sews with a thin thread of blue silk, the candle's flicker following his needles skill.

Lightning. The pitter-patter of wings trapped against wood. Takumi perks. Then thunder, obscuring all other sound. Silence.

Takumi focuses his ear. Again, the pitter-patter of tender wings. Leaving his needle, Takumi feels his way through the inky black.

INT. TAKUMI'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Unlocking the deadbolt, he cracks the heavy wooden door open. Electricity surges back to life, white and blinding. Takumi jumps backward, throwing the door wide. There, writhing about the wood planking, is a monarch butterfly, dripping and battered. Kneeling down, Takumi tenderly reaches a hand toward the fragile flyer. The monarch, with two legs bent and broken, limps into Takumi's palm. Lightning. A circuit breaker explodes in the distance. Darkness leaks back into the cabin.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Set in front of the candle, the small monarch rests soaking up needed warmth. Takumi returns, setting two cotton balls near his guest. He begins to dab the drips of rain collected on the butterfly's wings. In whispers:

TAKUMI

It's okay fragile thing. I'm used to handling such tender breaks, you know.

Takumi lightly fingers the monarch's broken legs. The butterfly twitches. Takumi smoothly takes up his needle and blue silk thread, then coaxes the entranced monarch into his left palm.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Do not be frightened little monarch. I'll just wind my silk around those breaks and again you're legs will be as straight as bamboo. Silk will let you fly higher and longer!

Takumi begins to slowly wrap the thread around the butterfly's broken limbs. Small casts begin to form of brilliant blue silk around the black legs of the monarch.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

It is not so often that such a beauty knocks upon my door so late, you know.

(beat)

(MORE)

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Being a kite maker provides little to make the women swoon, I guess.

(beat)

I am Takumi, should you want to know... If you are able to know, I guess.

With the gentle flourishes of his needle, Takumi finishes his casts, tying a tiny fastened knot at the ankle of each of the monarchs broken legs.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

And with that, you are great as new! Lucky those wings of yours didn't rip. Not sure if I could have helped you out there.

Standing atop its mended legs, the monarch softly brushes the fingers of its savior with its wings. As Takumi sets the monarch back nearer the candle, he leaves, walking over to a window. As he speaks, the butterfly's antennae wiggle.

TAKUMI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You are welcome to spend the night, of course, but should you want to escape, I'll understand. This window will be cracked and prepared for just that time.

Returning to the table, Takumi sets a cap full of sugar water in front of the butterfly. He stares with a satisfied smile. Hobbling toward it, the monarch stretches out its proboscis and sips the sustenance.

Takumi returns to work, mending the broken kite.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

It will be nice to have some company...

Lightning. Thunder.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - MORNING

Takumi jumps awake. Blue and white thread stick to his face. The morning sun burns his eyes. Squinting, he sees the cracked window, and looking down notices the bottle cap sucked dry. The monarch is gone.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Takumi strolls along the sidewalk with seven kites in hand.

INT. AL'S KITE SHACK - DAY

Takumi bursts through the door, back first, the jingle of the bell alerting an empty store.

TAKUMI

Hello? Anyone back there?

Walking through the small, stuffy shop, kites of solid color and traditional shape hang on the wall, all priced below twenty dollars.

Reaching the counter, Takumi pounds the bell.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Albert? You asleep again?

ALBERT, weary-eyed and greyed, walks from around the corner of the threshold to the storeroom and out behind the counter, opposite Takumi.

ALBERT

Nope. Nope. I wasn't sleepin'. Just enjoying the peace an' quite. But wait! Why should I be enjoyin' the quiet when I'm supposed to be runnin' a business here! Can't very well run a business without business now can I, Takumi?

TAKUMI

Well, no. But. Well. I've brought some new designs to sell.

Takumi holds up the seven kites. They are beautiful, but very much out of place amongst the modern, sleek, cookie-cutter designs on the walls.

ALBERT

Takumi. I ain't sold the last ten you've brought in. No. I did sell one. But that was three months ago and only because the brat buyin' pitched such a fit to his mama!

Takumi is crushed, but still holds his creations forward for Albert to inspect.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

There just too damn expensive, son.
And if they ain't trick kites, or
battle kites, or sleek, or durable,
people just ain't gonna bite.

(beat)

It is a shame though. They are
beauties. Can't you make 'em from
nylon or somethin'.

TAKUMI

Albert, I've told you. Silk makes
them fly higher and--

ALBERT

--with less wind for longer. I
know. Makes them rip a hell of a
lot easier, too.

(beat)

Well, give 'em here.

Albert motions for the seven kites. Takumi gladly hands them
over.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

They are beautiful. I guess I'll
just replace your others with this
new batch.

(beat)

Here you go. A hundred is all I can
give ya for the lot of 'em.

TAKUMI

Thank you.

Takumi takes the five twenties, but his smile has vanished.

ALBERT

I'll be thankin' you if these
things ever start sellin'. Let's
hope, for the both of us, that's
soon.

TAKUMI

I will see you in two weeks, then?

ALBERT

I'll be here. Think about that
nylon.

TAKUMI

I'll think about it. Good bye.

ALBERT
See ya later.

Takumi exits the store. The bell jingles.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Wish I heard that more.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Takumi sits hunched over his dining room table. His hands blaze, needle and thread between his index finger and thumb. The blue and white kite sits beside him, half mended. Takumi now sews a new creation of black and orange, with celled wings and white accents. It is nearly half finished.

Takumi's cheeks are dirty with patches of stubble, his eyes sunken. His face is intense. A can of half eaten tuna sits beside him.

Behind him, half the original variety of kites still hang, but half have been replaced by variations of the monarch butterfly kite he slaves over now.

The phone rings. After the third ring, Takumi jabs his needle into the center of the half finished kite and storms away toward the telephone.

INT. TAKUMI'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

On the fifth ring, Takumi picks up.

TAKUMI
Hello.

ALBERT (O.C.)
Takumi. It's Al.

TAKUMI
Hi.

ALBERT (O.C.)
How are you, son?

TAKUMI
I've been better. Can I do something for you?

ALBERT (O.C.)

Well, I ain't seen you in here in a while, and was just wonderin' if you were gonna come by and show me anything new soon?

TAKUMI

I told you when I would see you next. Two weeks.

ALBERT (O.C.)

Tak, it's been a month since I seen you last.

Takumi is speechless, frustrated, and angry. Grabbing the calendar beside him, he finds the date he last went to see Albert. He looks at the date on the phone receiver. It has indeed been one month.

ALBERT (O.C.) (CONT'D)

What have you been doing, Takumi? You got anything to sell?

TAKUMI

Does it matter? Even if I sell them to you, they will not sell to anyone else. I can not live on this pauper's salary. Where has my time gone? I have wasted it in this dead profession. I am nothing. I am finished.

ALBERT (O.C.)

Now, Tak--

Takumi slams the phone atop its base. Storming to the dining room, he is blind with frustration.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TAKUMI

One month? One month?! Gone. For what? For you?

Takumi takes the half finished monarch kite and flings it against the kite lined wall. A few fall amidst it. Takumi attacks.

Individually, Takumi grabs one kite, then another, then a third, tossing them to the ground. As he reaches for a fourth-

The doorbell rings, reviving Takumi from his hulkish state.

INT. TAKUMI'S FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Breathing heavily, Takumi reaches the heavy wooden door and slams it open.

There, opposite Takumi, stands CHO. A beautiful Japanese woman. She stands shyly, her long black hair obscuring the left side of her face, wearing a silken blue skirt, and a burnt orange blouse.

Takumi's breath is short and stifled.

CHO

Hi there.

Takumi is speechless, and is just becoming aware of his sordid appearance. He blushes.

CHO (CONT'D)

I know it's late. But-

TAKUMI

No. No. Come in. Come in. You'll have to excuse the mess though, I was just... redecorating...

CHO

Don't you even need to know why I'm here?

TAKUMI

Nope. Not really.

Cho chuckles, humbled. After an awkward standoff, she enters.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Takumi feverishly attempts to straighten the mess he's made.

Cho, quiet and still, stands amidst Takumi's rapid distress.

CHO

Umm.

Takumi, obviously having forgotten his guest, drops the battered half kite in his hand.

TAKUMI

I'm sorry. Would you like a drink?
Snack?

Motioning to the wall behind him, jokingly.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Kite?

CHO

Yes! Yes. That is why I am here.

TAKUMI

For a kite?

CHO

One of your kites.

Takumi is flabbergasted.

TAKUMI

I. Did Albert send you here?

Confused, but appeasing--

CHO

Umm. Yes. He said you were the one to see.

TAKUMI

He just called. I guess that's why--
(beat)
So. A kite?

CHO

Yes. He, Albert, mentioned you make your kites of silk. They are quite beautiful.

TAKUMI

Thanks. I. I am Takumi, should you want to know.

CHO

I am Cho, Takumi. It is wonderful to see you.

TAKUMI

This doesn't really happen. Beautiful women don't come here in the night wanting my kites. No one, for that matter, wants my kites.

CHO

I can't see why not.

TAKUMI
They are brittle. The silk is
brittle.

CHO
But with silk they fly higher and
longer.

Takumi is stunned. Cho picks up the half mended, discarded
blue and white kite. She traces its rip.

TAKUMI
That is what I always say.
(beat)
Choose one. It's yours.

CHO
I couldn't.

TAKUMI
You must. I am through anyhow. My
kites just won't fly for anyone but
me now. And you, I suppose.

CHO
Through?

TAKUMI
Through. You are the first to know,
Cho. No longer a kite maker!

CHO
I too am a flying maker of sorts,
you know.

TAKUMI
Of kites?

CHO
And others. I could help, if you
wished?

TAKUMI
You, beautiful as you are, come
here late at night, looking to buy
a kite of mine (nothing short of a
miracle) and now, now you want to
help me make kites, knowing I've
sold but one in four months?

CHO
Well, I didn't know that--

Takumi begins to pace, grabbing the half finished monarch butterfly kite from the floor.

TAKUMI

And did you know, for one month, I have been able to sew nothing but this! I have been here, losing all concept of time, creating the same unusable kite.

CHO

It is so beautiful.

TAKUMI

Beautiful will not buy my food.
Beautiful will not buy my success.
Beautiful will not help me survive.

CHO

If I told you I could make your beauty do all of those things--

TAKUMI

I would bunk up on the couch right now, and my room would now be your room.

CHO

I accept.

Takumi laughs heartily. Cho does not.

TAKUMI

You're serious?

CHO

I am.

TAKUMI

You are welcome to stay the night. Perhaps by tomorrow you'll have come to your senses. I am exhausted, myself.

CHO

Thank you, Takumi. I will see you tomorrow.

TAKUMI

Don't you have anything with you?

CHO

No. You see it all.

TAKUMI
You are a miracle.

Takumi leads Cho into his room, then emerges with a pillow and blanket. The door closes.

INT. TAKUMI'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Takumi lies awake in darkness. He perks his ears. The pitter-patter of wings? His eyes close. He drifts to sleep.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - MORNING

The dining room is clean and tidy. The kites are hung on their hooks, but lie behind Cho who sits at the polished table. The table is empty save for five kites, each more beautiful than the last. Each of nontraditional design, threaded in orange. She sits, sipping a steaming cup of tea.

INT. TAKUMI'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Takumi's eyes pop open. Throwing off his blanket, he stands, stretches, fully dressed. He notices his bedroom door open. He strolls into the kitchen, not noticing Cho.

INT. TAKUMI'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A groggy Takumi grabs the hot kettle, pouring himself a tall cup of tea. Taking a sip, he cringes, spitting a little back into the cup at his lips. He then notices Cho, watching him from the dining room.

TAKUMI
Sorry. It's a little sweet.

Takumi then notices the kites in front of her.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)
What are those?

Takumi, zombified, walks into the dining room.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TAKUMI
Did you? How?

CHO
I... I was inspired.

TAKUMI
They're incredible. Miracles.

Takumi wells with emotion. He can merely finger the kites before him.

Cho is silent, an innocence flushes her face.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)
I must go to Albert. This is it.
You are it!

Takumi runs around the table, kissing Cho hard on the lips, then grabs the kites, and bolts for the door.

CHO
Takumi. No. I must tell you something.

TAKUMI
Can't it wait?

CHO
You must promise me. I can not make anymore. These were to get you off the ground. It is up to you now to stay aloft. Promise me.

TAKUMI
Okay. Okay. I promise.

Before turning, Takumi again runs to kiss Cho, this time on the forehead. Cho blushes, smitten.

Takumi is off, the door slamming behind him.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cho sits, still at the dining room table.

The door bursts open. Cho smiles as Takumi races to her side.

TAKUMI
He bought them. He bought them all!
300 dollars. 60 dollars a kite! He loved them.

CHO
I'm glad.

Takumi, his hands having been behind his back, presents Cho with a large bouquet of flowers. In his other hand are three stuffed plastic grocery bags. Cho begins to stand.

TAKUMI

Oh no. Tonight is yours. Sit. Sit.

Again, Cho is humbled, sinking into her chair, her hands fold around the bouquet.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - LATER

Candles afire, and place-settings for two, Cho waits.

TAKUMI

Dinner, my miracle, is served.

Takumi, in apron holding two steaming plates, confidently presents Cho with her meal, then, he sits across from her. They dine, sheepishly smiling at one another. She is radiant amidst the candlelight. Both eat, longingly.

The phone rings flagrantly. Takumi does not move, then on its second ring leaps to answer it. Cho listens as he speaks.

TAKUMI (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Hello. What? All. All of them?

Cho smirks.

TAKUMI (O.C.) (CONT'D)

More? I can't. No. I can't. Just because. All of them? I'll try. Good night. Okay. Good bye.

Cho's smirk has saddened. She brightens as Takumi enters.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

He sold them. All five! In one day.

Takumi, walking to Cho's side, kneels beside her. Taking her hands inside his, his gaze pierces her own.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Tell me you'll stay. I can't explain it. But tell me you'll stay.

CHO

I will stay--

Takumi mutes her with a kiss. Scooping her into his arms, they leave the table as one.

The candles burn until their wicks disappear.

INT. TAKUMI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Beneath stiff sheets, Takumi and Cho lay embraced. Their speech is whispered.

TAKUMI
Would you make but ten more?

CHO
Takumi, you promised.

TAKUMI
And I will promise now to never
break another promise should you
create ten more miracles.

CHO
I can not.

Takumi nibbles her nose.

TAKUMI
Please. Never again.

CHO
Ten more. Just for you. But you
must not watch.

TAKUMI
Why?

Cho, more intense.

CHO
You mustn't. Please.

TAKUMI
But you will make them?

CHO
For you. Once more.

TAKUMI
Fine. Now sleep and rest those
fingers. Good night.

CHO
Good night.

Takumi closes his eyes, sighing into silence. Cho stares, sad.

INT. TAKUMI'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Takumi paces in front of his couch.

TAKUMI
Cho? It has been three days. Don't
you need anything? I didn't ask you
to kill yourself in there--

INT. TAKUMI'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door to Takumi's bedroom creaks open. There, about his bed lay ten beautiful kites. Same as before, each more beautiful than the last, threaded in orange, flecked in black. Cho lays amidst them, groggy with heavy eyes.

TAKUMI
Cho. They are
(beat)
Unimaginable. I must take them at
once. They can't not sell.

Cho is weary, but forces a smile toward Takumi.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)
You sleep, my miracle. You
certainly deserve it. Thank you.
Thank you.

Kissing her cheek, her forehead, her nose, Takumi leaves with the ten kites. Almost inaudible, Cho forces speech behind him.

CHO
Promise.

Walking out the door, Takumi:

TAKUMI
I promi--

The door closes.

INT. TAKUMI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cho stretches awake. Beside her, Takumi lays, his head propped atop his hand. He waves twenty, one hundred dollar bills in front of his maniacal smile. He kisses her hard.

TAKUMI

They're gone. Each one sold before my eyes. There was a line, Cho. A line. People were offering hundreds, a thousand dollars for your work. One more batch and we would have enough to take a long break. To keep them waiting. You could rest. We could rest.

CHO

Takumi. It is too much work. I just want to rest with you now. Why can't we just rest now. You are a kite maker, you've created a name for yourself. Sell your kites. They are just as beautiful--

TAKUMI

They don't want my kites. They want your kites. Everyone does. I most of all. You can take your time. Just one more lot. Only twenty. Please. Then we can be together and rest. I promise.

CHO

You must leave me. Do not watch, please. Twenty. Then. Then we can rest?

TAKUMI

Yes. Yes! Together we will do nothing but rest.

Kissing Cho, Takumi leaves his bedroom, and watching her as the door slit lessens, Cho forces a smile to meet Takumi's.

INT. TAKUMI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Takumi sits wedged in the corner of his cabinets on the kitchen floor. His head in his hand, the telephone receiver at his ear.

TAKUMI

I know it has been a week. It might be another. I don't know, Albert. She's been in the room for it all. No. I haven't seen her once. I can't. No. I can't. She made me promise. Fine. Bye.

Takumi, hanging up, slinks prone to the tile.

Pitter-patter.

Takumi crawls toward his bedroom door.

Pitter-patter. Fluttering.

INT. TAKUMI'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reaching his door, he presses his ear against the wood.

Flitting. Pitter-patter. Fluttering.

Reaching up, Takumi grasps the doorknob. Turning, he finds it locked. Still silent, Takumi stands. Reaching above the door frame he reveals a small key. Sliding it into the key hole, the lock pops open.

Swiftly, Takumi bursts into the room.

INT. TAKUMI'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

There, atop the bed are twelve finished kites. Threaded in orange, flecked with black. The thirteenth lays half finished in the center. Around it flutters a small, monarch butterfly. Between its legs is a needle looped with thread of orange. Two of its legs float straightened with blue silk. The monarch is dulled and mangled. The orange thread flows from the needle to the left wing of the butterfly. It appears to flop rather than fly.

With the gust of wind caused by the opening door, the butterfly drops the needle, causing it to reel downward, slamming against the sheets.

TAKUMI

Oh my. Oh.

Takumi drops to his knees. Terrified and guilty, he stares.

The monarch, disconnecting the needle, limps to the edge of the bed. She too stares.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Cho? I am so sorry. I will leave.
I. The thread. They are you. You
are the. I. I am so sorry.

Hanging his head low, Takumi reaches for the fragile creature. A fingertip away, and Cho, the monarch butterfly, flits past his outstretched hand.

Takumi tries in futility to grasp onto his savior.

Cho flops and flutters past the door.

INT. TAKUMI'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cho continues to float past the hung kites, landing on the windowsill of the window left open for so long.

Takumi, rushing from his knees, races to catch his miracle.

Cho, her antennae wiggling, bows her head and flutters through the cracked window.

Into the night sky, Takumi can only watch, his face wet and reddened, as his love floats from his reach, above the trees, free, into open air.

Collapsing beneath the window, Takumi sits numbed. Beside him, a silken kite of blue and white lays half mended, a needle threaded in blue at its side.

Taking up that needle, Takumi, lost, alone, wanton, begins to mend.

FADE OUT.