

A Man Becomes a Woodpecker

Translated by Tod Swanson from the Quichua text in Orr and Huddleson 1971:58.

One time there was a man whose name was Carpenter. He said to his wife, "I am going out to drain that first branch of the creek." And telling this to his wife, he left her. So now he started to go out and his wife stayed in the house. But before he got to the branch of the river he turned into a bird, and carpenter was the name of that bird. Then he started to climb up a tree. He started to climb up a bamboo tree and began to make holes in it. Later his wife arrived. She looked around but he was not there. She only heard a woodpecker pecking away in a tree. So that woman went back to the house. When that woman



arrived home her husband arrived just after her. [Instead of a leaf packet of fish] that man brought a leaf packet of worms, the kind of worms that birds eat. His wife took the packet and looked at it. When she opened the bundle she saw that there were lots of worms. Seeing that the woman became frightened. Afterwards, because she saw that, she turned into a bird and climbed up a tree. (Afterwards, because the woman saw that [the man] turned into a bird and climbed up a tree.) My mother said that it was from there that the pian bird which they call "carpintero" (woodpecker) [came].

Questions on **A Man Becomes a Woodpecker**

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1. Compare this story to “A man becomes a wooly monkey.” What do the two stories have in common?
2. Who are the main actors in the story?
3. What did the woman expect her husband to bring home when he went out to work on that fateful morning? What did he bring back instead? What was her emotional reaction?
4. What were the implications of this event for her marriage? For the couple’s relation to their extended families?
5. What creates tension between the two actors and how is this tension resolved?
6. What happened in the story that caused the woman to turn into a woodpecker?
7. What consequences would the woman’s transformation into a woodpecker have for her marriage? For her relations to parents and siblings?
8. Compare the habitat of a woodpecker to the habitat of human beings. Is it more restricted or less restricted?
9. If this is how woodpeckers came into being what does it tell you about the nature of woodpeckers?
10. If it were possible would you like to be a friend of these people?

