

UBAZAKURA

Three hundred years ago, in the village called Asamimura, in the district called Onsenori, in the province of Iyo, there lived a good man named Tokubei. This Tokubei was the richest person in the district, and the muraosa, or headman, of the village. In most matters he was fortunate; but he reached the age of forty without knowing the happiness of becoming a father. Therefore he and his wife, in the affliction of their childlessness, addressed many prayers to the divinity Fudo Myo O, who had a famous temple, called Saihoji, in Asamimura.

At last their prayers were heard: the wife of Tokubei gave birth to a daughter. The child was very pretty; and she received the name of Tsuyu. As the mother's milk was deficient, a milk-nurse, called O-Sode, was hired for the little one.

O-Tsuyu grew up to be a very beautiful girl; but at the age of fifteen she fell sick, and the doctors thought that she was going to die. In that time the nurse O-Sode, who loved O-Tsuyu with a real mother's love, went to the temple Saihoji, and fervently prayed to Fudo-Sama on behalf of the girl. Every day, for twenty-one days, she went to the temple and prayed; and at the end of that time, O-Tsuyu suddenly and completely recovered.

Then there was great rejoicing in the house of Tokubei; and he gave a feast to all his friends in celebration of the happy event. But on the night of the feast the nurse O-Sode was suddenly taken ill; and on the following morning, the doctor, who had been summoned to attend her, announced that she was dying.

Then the family, in great sorrow, gathered about her bed, to bid her farewell. But she said to them:--

"It is time that I should tell you something which you do not know. My prayer has been heard. I besought Fudo-Sama that I might be permitted to die in the place of O-Tsuyu; and this great favor has been granted me. Therefore you must not grieve about my death... But I have one request to make. I promised Fudo-Sama that I would have a cherry-tree planted in the garden of Saihoji, for a thank-offering and a commemoration. Now I shall not be able myself to plant the tree there: so I must beg that you will fulfill that vow for me... Good-bye, dear friends; and remember that I was happy to die for O-Tsuyu's sake."

After the funeral of O-Sode, a young cherry-tree,-- the finest that could be found,-- was planted in the garden of Saihoji by the parents of O-Tsuyu. The tree grew and flourished; and on the sixteenth day of the second month of the following year,-- the anniversary of O-Sode's death,-- it blossomed in a wonderful way. So it continued to blossom for two hundred and fifty-four years,-- always upon the sixteenth day of the second month; -- and

its flowers, pink and white, were like the nipples of a woman's breasts, bedewed with milk. And the people called it Ubazakura, the Cherry-tree of the Milk-Nurse.