



The Old Man Who Made Flowers Bloom

ONCE upon a time, a kind old man and a greedy old man lived as neighbors right next door to each other.

One day as the kind old man was tilling his fields, he heard the greedy old man shouting angrily. “Go away! Stay out of my fields!” Soon after, the kind old man saw a little puppy running away from the greedy old man and coming toward him.

“There, there, let him be,” the kind old man said to the greedy old man, and decided to keep the little puppy. He doted on the dog, which soon grew to be big and strong.

One day, the dog led the kind old man to a certain spot in the hills behind the house and said: “Woof, woof! Dig here!” When his master did so, he pulled a wealth of gold coins out of the hole. Seeing this, the greedy old neighbor secretly took the dog and forced it to go into the hills with him. The dog grew tired

and fell to the ground. When the greedy old man dug there, however, only snakes and monsters came out of the hole. In a rage, he killed the dog.

Heartbroken, the kind old man erected a grave for his dog, and planted a small tree by its side. The tree quickly grew into a towering giant, and the kind old man heard a voice from somewhere telling him to cut the tree down and make a rice mortar. He did so, but when he used the mortar to make rice cakes, the rice cakes turned into gold. Seeing this, the greedy old man stole the mortar. When he tried to make rice cakes with it, however, the rice turned to ash instead. The mortar then snapped itself in two, staining the greedy old man’s face black with ash. Enraged, the greedy old man pounded what was left of the mortar to bits and burned it in his stove.

Saddened, the kind old man gathered up the



MORE ABOUT CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN JAPAN

The cherry blossoms the kind old man caused to bloom are a traditional sign of spring in Japan. In Okinawa, which enjoys a warm climate throughout the year, cherry blossoms appear from mid-January to early March. In late March, the cherry trees begin to bloom gradually from south to north across Japan. In Hokkaido, which lies at the northernmost tip of Japan, the cherry trees begin blooming in May. Forecasts of when the cherry trees are expected to blossom are constantly aired on TV and printed in newspapers, and the people of Japan follow them with great interest, eager to learn when the trees in their own town will bloom.

When the cherry trees do bloom, people in Japan bring food and drink and gather with their friends and coworkers beneath the trees for parties known as *hanami*, or “flower viewing.” This custom is said to go back to the Nara Period (710-794).

The profusion of beautiful pink and white cherry blossoms creates quite a magical scene in the springtime in Japan. Why not visit the country and see it for yourself?

ashes of the mortar and began spreading them over his fields, but the wind picked up the ashes and blew them away. The ashes settled on some withered trees nearby, which glowed with light and then sprouted beautiful cherry blossoms. Overjoyed, the kind old man gathered up the remaining ashes and sprinkled them on other withered trees, which also grew lush with cherry blossoms.

Hearing this tale, the local lord came to visit. When he saw the kind old man make withered old trees bloom with cherry flowers, he was delighted, and gave him many great rewards.

Seeing this, the greedy old man mimicked the kind old man and sprinkled ashes on withered trees as well, but the ashes blew into the lord’s face instead. Enraged, the lord threw the greedy old man into prison. **1**



Cherry blossoms at Chidorigafuchi