



## **JIU ROKU SAKURA, THE CHERRY TREE OF THE 16<sup>TH</sup> DAY**

**Wenceslau de Moraes**

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Here follows another story.

Wakigori is a district in the province of Iyo, in the island of Shikoku. In Wakigori there stands an extremely old and rather famous cherry tree, called *Jiu-roku-sakura*—the cherry tree of the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the year. It came to be known as such through its curious trait of blossoming during just one day every year, this day being the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month, in the old calendar. Now, this time of the year comes with great frosts, several snowfalls; and the cherry trees in Japan, as is known, blossom in the midst of the mild and gentle springtime. But the *Jiu-roku-sakura* blossoms with life which doesn't, or rather, didn't always belong to it, because within that tree resides the spirit of a man.

The man was a samurai of the Iyo province, and it is in his house's garden the tree which I mention used to grow, the tree whose flowers *used* to bloom at the normal time (that is to say, from March to April). It was a cherry tree which had been around for centuries, verdant, with a wide and knotted trunk; in its shadow the samurai used to play as

a child; as had his fathers and grandfathers played before him, just like, most probably, even older ancestors had done before them. He himself, the samurai, had reached a ripe old age; and now his children, and his grandchildren, in the shade of the same cherry tree, had passed many hours of their childhood; and all of them—he, his parents, his grandparents, his great-grandparents, his children and his grandchildren—had taken delight, during a long series of springs, in viewing the beautiful blossom of their fellow cherry tree. The old Samurai loved nothing more in this world than the family cherry tree!...

Now then, during one summer, the leaves withered, and fell, and the cherry tree died. A catastrophe! The Samurai's pain was excruciating and everyone felt his anguish just to look at him. So, kind-hearted neighbours brought him another cherry tree for his garden, one which was vibrant and flourishing, in the hopes to console him. The old man said his thanks, promising them that he would forget his pain; but truth be told the pain that he suffered was incurable. One day, specifically the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the year, a way occurred to him to save his beloved tree from death. He knew that a person was able to give his own life to help another, be it an animal, or even a plant, if the Gods were willing to allow such an exchange. Having made up his mind, he went alone to his garden, bowed reverently before the emaciated trunk and enounced these words: "be given the chance to flower once more, for I shall die for you...." Dressing himself all in white, as one was supposed to do, and making sure he performed everything correctly, he plunged his own sword into his stomach, tumbling to the floor; bathed in a sea of blood... The spirit of the samurai thus entered the cherry tree, which, in that exact moment became adorned with flowers. And it continued to flourish every year, on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month, during the time of the snow.

The original text "Jiu Roku Sakura" (1905-1906) can be found in

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