



# ORIGINS OF SAKURA

## *The romantic legend behind how Japanese Cherry Blossom tree came to be*

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When people talk about Japan, one of the first things they associate the beautiful country with is Sakura Trees. These cherry blossoms bloom across the country during the month of April, attracting thousands of tourists each year who visit to catch a glimpse of the landscape imbued with the alluring, light pink shades. In Japanese, this beautiful cherry blossom represents transience and the fragility of life. Each person on this earth has only a limited time to make the most of their life. It goes away, much like how a Sakura petal falls, beautifully and quickly.

But what are the origins of this dream-like tree? Many of those who visit Japan to see these spectacular trees have no idea about the legends of true love behind the cherry blossoms, a love so strong that it remained for all eternity. This tale is set back in ancient Japan, during the feudal era when war had clouded the entire country. Battle after battle took place and the fields turned into a grotesque battleground. Dead bodies and blood were scattered everywhere and people looked hollow and dejected. Amidst the gore, there sat a beautiful forest that was untouched by the surrounding war. Men of the army didn't dare disrupt the tranquillity of the forest and therefore it lay as a safe haven for those that wished to escape the horrors of war, even if it was just for a little while. In the middle of the forest, however, there was an exception. A tree that stood tall and strong but without a single leaf or flower to adorn its branches. It looked much like a tree that had withered away during the winter season, which cast a strange gloom amidst the beauty of the forest. Animals wouldn't dare approach the tree, fearing that they too would fall into its spell of eternal gloom.

According to the famous legend, a fairy living in the forest was so deeply upset and felt sorry for this abandoned tree that she decided to do it a favour and so, one day, the fairy approached the tree and asked whether it would like a chance to cherish the warmth of life and to blossom and come alive as the other trees around it. However, there was a catch. The fairy explained that this spell would only last for 20 years during which the tree would have the chance of taking the form of a



human and also, to change back into a tree whenever it wished. After 20 years if the tree was still not able to find the emotions that would help it blossom, it would perish into the night and would never appear on Earth again. The gloomy tree accepted the spell and began living as a young man, in the nearby village. However, as the months flew by, the only thing the man saw was the war and sadness around him. He continued to roam from village to village, in the hope of finding the source of his happiness but in vain. The sadness and distress surrounding the young man made him feel even more depressed and emotionless than ever before. One day,



while the man was resting at the foot of a tree, he saw a beautiful young woman carrying a water pot in the distance. The man was so mesmerised by her beauty that he decided to approach her and ask her name. The woman was very kind to him and he learnt that her name was Sakura. Wanting to spend more time with her, the young man insisted on carrying her water pot back to the village and on the way, they talked about many things. After they reached Sakura's home, she asked the young man what his name was to which the man, not having a name before, came up with the name Yohiro which meant 'hope'. The years flew by while Sakura and Yohiro met daily. The duo loved spending time talking, singing and reading books. Gradually, a love blossomed in Yohiro's heart and one beautiful evening, as the two were sitting side by side, Yohiro confessed his love to Sakura. With his confession of love, Yohiro admitted the truth behind his life and the fact that he only had a few days to live. Sakura was impressed to learn that he was a tree with a spell to live for just 20 years. However, Sakura remained silent as she wasn't sure of what to say. After she left, the young man, with a heart filled with sorrow, turned back into a tree to live out his last days. On the afternoon of his final day, Sakura appeared in front of the tree, breathless from running as she had finally realised that she too harboured feelings for the young man. At that moment, sensing the love between the two, the fairy of the forest appeared in front of Sakura and asked her whether she was willing to choose between living the rest of her life as a human or having a chance to reunite with the love of her life by merging into his tree form. Sakura looked around her, her mind opening to the war and sadness around her. Not wanting to live a life filled with distress and away from her true love, Sakura walked towards Yohiro's tree form with open arms and a smile on her lips. In that instant, a bright light washed through the entire forest as beautiful pink cherry blossoms bloomed on every branch of the tree.

Yohiro had finally found the warmth that he had yearned for all these years and since then, the love from this tree has spread throughout the lands of Japan, reminding everyone to always fill the heart with love and happiness.