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Tales of Cherry Blossom Dreams

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*Tales of Cherry
Blossom Dreams*

Kelly Dykstra

In his old age the emperor was blessed with a son by one of his highest-ranking consorts. In the days of her youth she had been a favorite of the emperor, but it had been many years since she had last born him a child, and her beauty had begun to fade with age. In vain she made efforts to improve the quality of her salon, gathering many talented ladies in waiting around herself to draw the emperor's attention. However, the emperor was seduced with the fresh beauty and childish charm of some of his younger consorts, and this lady was left to resign herself to remembrances of what had once been.

There was a younger man at court who had desired this lady for years. He was generally agreed to be a highly desirable and most handsome gentleman, though this lady had stayed faithful to the emperor for years despite this man's advances. One cannot be certain how he convinced her in the end. Perhaps her position at court had grown too precarious, or maybe she had just grown sorry for him, but one night the emperor's consort allowed this man to visit her, and the effects of this union were what you might expect.

At hearing of her condition, the emperor was delighted, for with good reason he thought the child to be his own. Despite her sin, the emperor's consort must have had some bond from a former life, for never had any in attendance seen a boy of such health and beauty. The emperor treasured his infant son, for he was by far finer both in form and disposition than any children that had been born to him before. He sought to keep the boy with him always and spent perhaps more time than he ought in this consort's salon in order to see him, to her delight and to the dismay of her rivals. The child's beauty, instead of putting everything around him to shame by comparison, made everything in the consort's salon somehow more enchanting than it had been before him. His demeanor was such that all who saw him could not help but feel as though they basked in the warm glow of the sun. Many of his attendants worried that the boy was too beautiful and thought that one so unequally favored could not be able to live for long, especially those that knew the consort's secret. Even so, the young prince grew into a studious and clever young man and when he came of age was named Takeyoshi. Despite his favor towards the young prince, the emperor did not place him in line to take the throne after his eldest son by the empress, who was already to inherit. I'm uncertain as to why, but perhaps he wished to spare him from the jealousy of his older brothers or spare his mother from the wrath of the empress.

The old emperor retired when Takeyoshi reached the age of ten, and Takeyoshi and his mother joined him when he removed from the palace to an estate in the city. For fear that his true parentage would be discovered, Takeyoshi's mother was anxious to secure his position in society by arranging for him an advantageous marriage as soon as possible. Therefore, when Takeyoshi was thirteen years old, his mother encouraged the emperor to consider a match between Takeyoshi and the daughter of the minister of right, a girl named Senshi, and thus the two were married before the year was out. Though everyone agreed the match to be highly desirable, Senshi, a girl of seventeen, was disappointed in such a young husband.

Senshi was indeed a very beautiful woman, but Takeyoshi found himself able to admire her only as one is able to admire a piece of art. One was quite able to recognize that it contained superior qualities and craftsmanship, but it one could hardly expect this sentiment to be returned. For a time, he thought it must be the difference in their ages that caused to her to be so cold and aloof, but even as he grew to an age to truly be her companion, she took little interest in anything he tried to talk to her about. She may have been educated, but she despised most subjects except the creation and perfuming of her court costumes, which were indeed very tasteful and elegant, but were a subject in which Takeyoshi found no interest. When he reached his twenties, his fascination with her and attempts to please her waned, for he longed to have someone with whom in the evening he could speak to of the days musings, of his studies, or perhaps a new poem he had thought of in the course of the day. On occasions when he tried to speak to her of such things, she would just frown at him until he trailed off into silence. Then she would speak at length and with great severity of how at some banquet she had attended such and such person had matched such and such colors in their costume, and she hoped that *he* would never shame her by conducting himself as such. She would then criticize him for being at court too often. Indeed, such conversations led him to spend even more time at court than in his father-in-law's household than was, perhaps, appropriate. Despite this slight to his daughter, Senshi's father was delighted in his son in law, for he was an intelligent and honest man, and was well on his way to making a name for himself at court.

In the times he spent in his father's house, Takeyoshi became uneasy at times when he noticed the great differences between himself and his mother's other sons. There was also the matter of that other gentleman at court who paid him far more attention than was due and bore an uncanny resemblance to himself. He was haunted by the thought that perhaps he had been committing a great sin all his life by paying failing to pay proper respect to his true father. He was in torment, what would become of him if the old emperor too noticed these strange inconsistencies if he had not already? Even so, he cared dearly for the old emperor and still wished to spend time with him as his health ailed.

The emperor, soon noticing the increase in time Takeyoshi spent by his side, grew concerned and encouraged his son to spend more time with his wife, for his father in law would not remain so enchanted with him for long. At seeing Takeyoshi's pained expression at these words, he took pity on his son.

"What is the matter child? The woman to whom you are married is said to be a great beauty, surely it cannot be so painful to spend some time in her presence."

"In form and feature it is true that she is beautiful, but I fear she lacks both the sensibility and gentleness of manner that one desires in a woman. To her, every action I take is some great sin. I find it impossible to love such a woman."

"If you are so unsatisfied with *this* woman then seek your love elsewhere. One can hardly expect to find love in all of one's amorous interactions, and marriage is no different. It is foolishness to merely dwell on this in dark reverie. There are many women of a superior quality at court, and one such as yourself can hardly be wanting for a willing partner."

But Takeyoshi hated the shallowness of the love affairs at court and despised the flippancy with which his friends discussed their fleeting conquests. Only the greatest and purest love would persuade him to love or marry again and so he resolved to suffer in silence. Despite this encouragement aimed to drive his son out into the world, the emperor could not say he was disappointed that his son chose to remain at his side.

2

Having lived to a grand old age, the old emperor's health soon failed and those he left behind grieved greatly for him. With him went Takeyoshi's great escape from his wife's home, and it became ever harder for him to find reasons to leave it. On one occasion when he could not find a good excuse to remain at court any longer, in order to avoid spending time in his wife's household, Takeyoshi left on a pilgrimage to the Ise Shrine. Takeyoshi and his party paused just outside the capital to view a wonderful stand of cherry trees that had just reached full bloom. In the spur of the moment Takeyoshi composed a poem of the great beauty before him.

In the morning breeze
Cherry blossoms dance and sway
For love of the sun
Why then does not such a tree
Blossom in my own garden?

All in attendance agreed it was quite a good poem, and some, realizing the last two lines referred to the prince's unhappy marriage, even wept at the poor prince's misfortune.

Overcome with his feelings about his marital situation, Takeyoshi decided to walk alone along a pretty path through the trees. After some time, he came across a run-down estate. It had in so many ways become part of the wildlife that it looked as if it too had grown there. Though it had the look of once having been very fine, the walls and roof were overrun with moss and vines and the trees around the house blended with the walls. He quite forgot his despair in the curiosity he felt at this strange discovery.

"Ah," Takeyoshi chuckled to himself, "Could it be that someone lives in such a place? Perhaps this is the home of one of those beautiful women rumored to have been hidden out here in the wild." As he walked around the main building, he was surprised to hear the voices of several women talking in the Pavilion. "Who can that be? Has a den of foxes taken up residence here?" Not wishing the women to stop talking for learning he was near, he hid himself outside of a window, for he desired to know of what they spoke. The women within appeared to be holding a poetry contest. Each in turn would recite the poem she had written about the cherry blossoms. Most of these poems are not worth recounting, having been either childish or lacking in sophistication. But one struck Takeyoshi as being quite a clever poem indeed. The young woman

who had written it appeared to be, by manner and how the others around referred to her, the lady of the house.

The young deer pauses
Beneath the blooming cherry
To remember how
When the winter winds would blow
Such beauty hid in shadow

Such a woman could not possibly be a fox. In fact, now that he stopped to think about it, Takeyoshi thought he had heard tell of a man of third or fourth rank having died and left behind a beautiful daughter living alone somewhere in these hills. Surely this must be she! Wishing to catch a glimpse of her, he peaked in the window, for the blinds were slightly raised, but was only able to see her long hair and the trail of her sleeve. Her hair was long and thick. It must have been at least a foot longer than she was, and yet was carefully arranged and was so lustrous it reflected the afternoon sun. He was also quite struck with the subtlety with which she had prepared her costume, not as flashy as those arranged by Senshi, the colors of her robe were light pinks over white. He found her to be wonderful and determined he must know more of her. After returning to his party, he dispatched one of his attendants to her with a note requesting he be allowed to visit her that evening and a reply to her poem on pink paper, to match her costume:

That young deer need not
Live in winters dark shadow
The ice has melted
The spring sun will come to shine
Like ice, darkness melts away

The woman in question, a girl named Hiromi, was embarrassed when she received the note, realizing that she had been overheard and perhaps seen without her knowledge. She was however, curious to know more of this strange man. Something about his calligraphy and the way he chose his words told her he must be gentle and kind. She quickly sent her reply:

That bright spring sunshine
Which melts away the darkness
Shines on all the world
Though the deer also enjoys
The light and warmth that it brings

With this she meant to convey that though she would receive him that evening, she presumed herself to be of little importance to him. After all, how could a man who by all counts

appeared to be so sophisticated be interested in someone such as she for long? Her ladies wondered who such a man could be that had found them here in this wilderness. What kind of man had taken such an interest in their dear lady? Surely, he must contain at least some ounce of wisdom and good qualities to see how wonderful their lady was.

Takeyoshi was delighted with how beautiful her calligraphy was and how clever a poem she had written, though he hoped to quickly dispel the sentiment she conveyed against him. That night he made his way back to the estate among the cherry trees, or the Sakura estate, as he decided to call it. As he approached he saw but one window that shone like the moon in the dark sky of the forest. Surely this must belong to her. He crept silently to the window so that he would not be discovered by the other women in the house and called out to her. Hiromi received him in her chamber but remained behind her curtain of state. He would have to resign himself that for this visit at least, he would only see that beautiful hair and trail of her sleeve that had so entranced him earlier.

“A deer with such beautiful fur must have an equally beautiful name.”

“But the deer never tell, merely silently move from place to place,” she replied, “Just as the sun may give its light but never truly speaks to those on whom it shines.”

He admired her quick wit, even though she continuously refused to tell him her name. Even so, he found her to be quite an encouraging conversation partner. He spoke to her of many things, his musings, life at court, his studies of Buddhism and Chinese poetry. She listened with a quiet curiosity and had such marvelous insights that seemed quite sophisticated for a woman living in such a countrified environment. He hardly even noticed dawn had broken until she started urging him to go before her women awoke.

He made his way through the still world despairing that he had to leave her so soon and would not be able to see her again for quite some time. Once he again rejoined his party, he dispatched another letter to her with the poem:

The dew gathers here
Upon the still sleeping world
It cannot compare
To the dew on my sleeves or
The mourning mist to my eyes

“I regret that I cannot come to see you again until I return from the journey of which I told you.”

Her reply:

Though the sweet blossoms
That still rest upon the trees
Will soon fall away

This dew gathers the thickest
On my sleeves til you return.

3

There was another man of third or fourth rank by the name of Noritomo who longed after a particular woman living in the sixth ward. She had, however, rebuffed his advances for years, and had been recently married and was thus more beyond his reach than ever. Even so, he sent her letter after letter, begging that she let him see her, and cursing her for being so cruel to him.

On one evening, while in the company of some gentlemen he knew, he overheard a conversation between a man he knew to be an attendant of Prince Takeyoshi and someone he did not know well.

“The prince is quite enthralled with this woman, she is just like one of those hidden beauties you hear about. He declares her to be more beautiful than the grove of cherry blossoms in which she resides, and so calls her his “Sakura Lady.” And from a glimpse I once caught of her I would say she looks quite a lot like *that* woman, that great lady in the sixth ward.

Recognizing his lady’s name in the conversation, Noritomo listened closer.

The attendant’s conversation partner replied, “How can a woman living in such a countrified environment be anything compared to *that* woman?”

“It is indeed surprising, but her education seems to have been quite complete. She moves with the elegance and grace of a princess and writes such clever poems to my Lord in such a beautiful hand. Despite her sad environment, it appears she is exactly the sort of woman that could be considered ideal by even a man of the highest rank.”

The two began to further discuss exactly what made one woman superior to another and comparing their various conquests.

Growing tired of this line of conversation Noritomo interrupted, “And who is this woman? Who captures the heart of the scholar prince?”

“Not even the prince himself knows. It is quite something out of a romance novel. All he knows is that she lives in an estate hidden away among the cherry trees just outside the city.”

“This is very strange indeed! And you say she looks just like *that* woman?”

“Indeed, if I did not know better I would say she were the very same.”

Noritomo was instantly struck with a desire to see this woman for himself, and the following evening went out to the grove of trees in question to search for the beauty hidden among them.

In the months since their first encounter, Takeyoshi had visited Hiromi on many various occasions. Indeed, he spent more nights at the Sakura estate than he did in his own home. He never grew tired of her beauty and intelligent conversation and found her perhaps more beautiful and her conversation more stimulating each time he visited. Even so, she still would not tell him her name, and though he did not say who he was either, Hiromi soon guessed, based on his stories of court and his thoughts and musings on his studies, that this must be the scholar prince

Takeyoshi. She was certain that such a great man could not be interested in her for long. She also knew that the prince Takeyoshi was married to a great lady of the highest rank, and so when the prince declared that he should like to marry *her*, and install her in the north wing of his estate, she would give him a reply such as: “Certainly not today, I must wash my hair today, and tomorrow is quite inauspicious, we would surely be met with ill fortune,” or “I was thinking perhaps today or tomorrow I may take the tonsure and become a nun. I am feeling so very disconnected with the material world and am sure to soon reach enlightenment,” or “I’ve had a very bad dream in which a fox carried off my finest fan. I’m certain it means I cannot get married until at least next week.”

Although he laughed at her teasing, Takeyoshi was frustrated with her continued refusal, but was satisfied, for the moment, with keeping their love for each other a secret. Yet Hiromi’s women whispered to themselves about it, “Why does my lady continue to refuse him? Perhaps she is possessed by some spirit.”

On an evening when Takeyoshi was unable to make his way out to see Hiromi, Noritomo wandered through the grove of cherries in search of this Sakura lady. And just as the attendant had said, he found the run-down estate among the trees. He made his way to Hiromi’s window and called out to her. “Oh, where is the great Sakura Lady?”

Hiromi approached the window and asked, “Is that you my Lord?” She peaked through the blinds to catch a glimpse of her visitor, and seeing it was not Takeyoshi, quickly retreated. Though a handsome man, Noritomo could not compare to the beauty of Takeyoshi, and there was something hard in his eyes that very much contrasted with the soft intelligence Takeyoshi’s held.

At catching a glimpse of her, Noritomo was delighted to find that she indeed did look quite a lot like the lady whom he loved and was instantly infatuated with her. He entreated her to let him in, but she refused him, and when he continued, she determined she would not speak to him anymore, and retreated from the window.

Noritomo was enraged at her cruelty towards him and determined that she would be his no matter what he had to do. He returned on many other nights but was either refused or found that Takeyoshi was already there. He sent her many notes in addition to the notes he sent to the lady in the sixth ward, and only ever received cold replies, indeed she must have felt at least a bit sorry for him to reply to him at all.

“Indeed, she is very much like *that* woman! The pair of them are equally cold and cruel to refuse me so continually. I am certain that they must be related.”

In fact, the woman whom he loved from the sixth ward was the sister of Hiromi’s mother.

4

On a particular evening when Takeyoshi had made yet another proposal of marriage to Hiromi, and was again refused with “Oh but you are currently facing east, which is an

inauspicious direction today, how could we be married in such circumstances?” his frustration reached its peak and he demanded,

“Why do you continue to refuse me? Do you not know that I love you more than the sun loves the moon? Do you not love me as I love you? Surely we were lovers in a past life and are destined to be together!”

Realizing he had grown tired of her teasing, she replied, “In truth sir, I love you. But though we have sought to hide our identities, I know you to be Prince Takeyoshi, and I know you to be married to the great lady Senshi. With such a woman as your wife, how can you say you will marry one such as me and install me in such a position of honor? I have no backing and surely if our love were to become public, she would be jealous of your favor for me and would make my life very uncomfortable.”

Indeed, reports of the Prince’s nightly trips to the estate outside of town soon reached Senshi’s ears, and she became enraged that her husband, apart from not paying proper deference to *her*, would be paying such attention to this woman who was of no consequence. Her women attempted to comfort her by speaking of how cruel it was for Takeyoshi to ignore someone of such importance as she.

“It is a great injustice truly.”

“He will surely tire of this upstart lady soon enough.”

“A presumptuous creature she must be to go after and so ensnare a prince!”

“Men are so very fickle while they are young. It is quite common for such men to have the occasional dalliance. In fact, it was quite surprising that his lordship does not already have one or two other lesser wives at this point.”

“But it was still a great injustice that he should so ignore *you* my lady. You are after all his principal wife, and with such powerful backing.” And so on and so forth.

But Senshi would not be comforted by their words. How dare her husband treat her with such little deference! It had been so long since he had last come to visit her in his father in law’s house, that she had practically forgotten what he looked like! It was not to be born. She would have to act to prevent such injustice from continuing. She would not suffer her jealousy in silence as women in her position were wont to do. She sent her attendants to attempt to waylay Takeyoshi in the streets when he attempted to visit the Sakura estate and to spread unsavory rumors about the Sakura lady herself. She sent them too, to the grove of trees where Hiromi’s estate was nestled and chopped down trees to barricade the path, and to destroy the plants in Hiromi’s garden.

“She is acting as a woman possessed! Perhaps her jealousy has made room for some kind of evil spirit,” Senshi’s attendants whispered.

Even so, Takeyoshi found his way to her side, and Hiromi, not wishing to upset Takeyoshi by the misfortune his visits were causing her, instructed her attendants to dig up the mangled plants, and informed Takeyoshi that she had merely grown tired of them and therefore had them removed to be replaced with some other flowers. Takeyoshi was too familiar with his wife’s personality to miss the truth and loved Hiromi all the more for her attempts to spare him.

In his frequent trips to the Sakura Estate, Noritomo noticed all that had taken place to prevent Takeyoshi and the Sakura Lady from being together, and at first thought that some sort of bond from a previous life must have resulted in some spirit perpetrating this blessing. For no strange messengers or unsavory characters accosted *him* in the streets, and what did he care if people were whispering that the prince spent his nights with some old hag in the woods, or the rumors about the lady herself, that she was attempting to raise her place in society by sharing a bed with any nobleman she could find. His position in society was not so great for any such tale to do *him* any harm. The barricade in the forest did give him some trouble, but he was not unequal to a bit of exertion to get what he wanted. Surely a soft pampered prince would not be so able. However, when Takeyoshi still continued his relationship with the Sakura lady despite it all, he thought to himself, “No spirit surely would have made such hasty and bungled attempts. What poor soul then is it that shares this goal of mine? Will they be friend and ally or another bitter rival?” So, he searched out information on this person and soon discovered that it was Senshi, Takeyoshi’s wife. He sent her a note reading:

“I have learned of your efforts in separating your husband from the lady at the Sakura Estate. As I wish to make the very same lady my own, I think we can be of use to each other.”

Senshi invited Noritomo to visit her at her curtain of state once the rest of the household had gone to sleep. In the dead of night, he visited her, and together they plotted of what was to be done about their shared problem.

“As I’m sure you are aware, your husband is with this woman constantly, and when I make it out to see her, he is often already there. When he is not in her presence, she recognizes my approach, for she knows when your husband does not mean to come and will not leave the presence of her women to let me in,” Noritomo informed her.

“Indeed, my husband’s attentions to this woman are highly irregular and inappropriate. This lady must be removed so that she is out of my husband’s reach. Once this happens, surely he will come to his senses and attend to his proper duties.”

“I quite agree, I have a house in the provinces to which we could retreat, but how am I to get her away with your husband blocking me at every turn?”

“We must pick a night to enact this plan. On that night, I will make sure my husband is unable to visit her, then you shall go to her under pretense that you are he and carry her off to wherever you see fit.”

They discussed further which day would be most auspicious for their plan and thus it was set.

On the day in question, when Takeyoshi had intended to visit Hiromi, Senshi sent a messenger to him to tell him “Your wife has taken ill, you must come at once.” Takeyoshi, though disappointed, realized that he must attend his duty to his wife, and dispatched a messenger to Hiromi to inform her that he would be absent. This messenger had, however, been commissioned by Senshi not to deliver this report.

When he arrived at his wife's home, Senshi had taken to her bed and had painted her face to make herself look pale and ill. Takeyoshi was quite concerned for her and sent for the exorcists and mediums to remove the spirit that caused this illness.

While Takeyoshi's attentions were focused on his wife, Noritomo made his way to the Sakura Estate, wearing one of Takeyoshi's robes that Senshi had given him. There he waited until all but the Sakura lady had fallen asleep. Then, he crept up to her window and called out to her, "It is I, Prince Takeyoshi come to see the beautiful Sakura Lady."

Expecting Takeyoshi to come and recognizing the bit of his sleeve that she could see beyond the window, she went to allow him to enter. Yet as she pulled aside the curtain Yoritomo grabbed her and carried her off into the night. Hiromi was terrified and was quite unsure what was happening. That is, until they boarded a small boat and the moon broke out from behind the clouds and revealed that the identity of her assailant was not indeed Takeyoshi but Noritomo! Though she struggled and attempted to escape, she was subdued until the boat had sailed far away into the night.

5

Takeyoshi was satisfied enough with his wife's condition that the following night he made his way back out the Sakura estate. He was surprised that his wife allowed him to go without protest, for she usually complained profusely in the best of conditions when he left her after so short a time, and no one attempted to stop him along the journey, which in recent days had become an unusual occurrence. Senshi, for her part, though angry that her husband would thus abandon her while he still thought her to be ill, knew that he must go this last time to discover his lady was no longer his.

Takeyoshi longed to see his sweet Sakura lady. Even the one night of separation had almost been too much for him, and spending time with Senshi always emphasized Sakura's superiority. Where Senshi was cold and aloof, Sakura was kind and gentle, where Senshi's movements were like a mountainside avalanche, Sakura was as graceful as a softly flowing stream. And where he quickly grew tired of Senshi's shallow conversation, he could talk with Sakura for hours, either eagerly listening to her thoughts of the world, or being eagerly listened to in return. In all the world he had never met a woman of such a high caliber as the Sakura lady.

The only flaw it could be said that she possessed was the inferiority of her birth, something he cared little about but seemed to haunt her thoughts frequently. Just what must he do to convince her that she should be married to him! He must admit her fears for Senshi were founded, she had often proven herself vindictive enough—no matter how separate he kept them—to attempt to make Sakura's life difficult, and he wished nothing more than to shield her from such behavior. And though he wished to honor her publicly, he would surely receive backlash from Senshi's family. Must they truly continue as they were forever?

When he approached the Sakura estate, he found it in complete disarray. Some of the women were crying, others wandered around looking panicked. When they saw him, some approached and begged, "Is she with you?"

"Surely she must be."

"Where else could she be?"

"What is this you speak of?" Takeyoshi asked the frantic women.

"The Lady Hiromi! She was expecting to see you last night and was waiting as we went to bed, but when we arose, the candle had burned all the way down and my lady was nowhere to be found!"

"Some unpleasant business kept me away, I was unable to come last night, did not my note reach you?"

"Nay my Lord it did not. But where else could she be? Who but my lord would have taken her away?"

Takeyoshi was quite dismayed by this grave news. Though he finally knew his Lady's name, what good was a name if its sweet owner was not to be found? He thought to himself that this must be Senshi's doing, but by what means could she have perpetrated such a crime?

"Please sir," one of Hiromi's attendants, an old crone, caught his attention. "There was another man who would come to visit Lady Hiromi and send her all sorts of letters. Though she constantly turned him away in favor of you my lord, he was quite persistent. This man's name is Noritomo. Could he be responsible? There is nothing *we* can do towards such a man, but someone as great as you must be able to get her back! Please bring our lady back to us."

Takeyoshi's heart was warmed by the great esteem and loyalty with which Hiromi's women viewed her and vowed that he would do everything he could to bring her back to them. But before Takeyoshi could attempt to do anything about it, a messenger arrived from his father in law, saying his wife had taken a turn for the worse and he must return at once. Cursing this ill fortune, Takeyoshi returned to his father in law's estate, but dispatched some of his attendants to seek out this Noritomo.

As it turned out, Senshi's jealousy had indeed left her open to evil spirits, and in her fit of pretend illness, they had taken hold of her and made her illness very much real. Indeed, by the time Takeyoshi had returned to Senshi's side, she had a terribly high fever and seemed quite delirious. Though he longed to search for Hiromi, Takeyoshi did his duty to his wife and stayed by her side.

6

The boat which Hiromi and her captor had boarded came to shore sometime before the sun rose. There they met with Noritomo's attendants and were loaded into carriages. Hiromi was

kept under constant watch as they traveled, though she remained alert at all times hoping for some way to escape.

At last, her opportunity came. The maids who shared her carriage had all dozed off. Hiromi peeked outside of the curtains to view over what terrain she would be making her way. Alas it was rocky and would be hard to cross, harder while being pursued. But up ahead she saw a bridge flowing over a rushing river and she knew what she must do.

She sighed. She must have been guilty of a great sin for such karma to befall her. Perhaps this was her punishment for so adamantly refusing to marry Takeyoshi. Truly they must have been bound together in a past life, why had she so denied him? Why had she not just married him? For surely none of her fears could have been quite so great as the tragedy that befell her now. She must make her choice, either stay where she was and be married to Noritomo, or throw herself from the bridge, where she would either escape and be beyond her captors' ability to follow, or die in the attempt. Surely an opportunity like this one would not be coming again. Well, if she were to die, then she prayed that at least she and Takeyoshi would be together in their next lives, if she lived, perhaps they could still be joined in this one. As she waited for them to reach the bridge, she scribbled down a quick poem to convince her captors that she intended to commit suicide.

Dark falls on the world
It is nothing to my heart
Where dark does not sleep.
To escape the dark, I flee
To that bright eternity

When her carriage reached the middle of the bridge, she flung open the curtain and raced towards the wall of the bridge, throwing herself into the icy water below. At the whip of the curtain, Noritomo turned in his saddle from where he rode just in front of Hiromi's carriage and saw in horror as that dark thick hair whipped in the wind as she sprinted for the wall. There was no time to admire her beauty in this wild state. Though her desperation lent her the most fascinating expression. Alas he reached her just too late, and only felt her hair slide through his hands like a waterfall flowing ever down into the screaming depths of the current below.

7

Senshi's condition did not improve for several weeks, everyone thought each second, she must be on the brink of death, and thus Takeyoshi was unable to leave her side. One such day as

he attended her bedside, one of the attendants he had sent out in search of Noritomo returned. Takeyoshi retreated outside of his wife's curtain to hear his report.

"I have found the man Noritomo."

"And the Lady Hiromi? Tell me, did you find the Sakura Lady?" Takeyoshi demanded.

"He admitted to having taken her, but claims that she has died, that she drowned herself in a river as they travelled."

"Surely he must have been lying! He must be hiding her away and hopes that we will be put aside by such a disgusting falsehood."

"I thought so myself, but he produced this poem, I do believe it is written in her hand."

The attendant handed Takeyoshi the poem, it was, in fact, the one Hiromi had written to keep her pursuers from attempting to follow her. Takeyoshi recognized it immediately as Hiromi's calligraphy, and noted in horror that it did seem to mean she intended to kill herself. He cursed himself for not going after them himself.

Senshi, who heard all of this from where she lay behind her curtain, began to laugh. Her great rival was no more! Things had turned out even better than she had planned. She had won. Yet this disgusting culmination of her jealousy gave the spirits the opportunity they needed, and her condition worsened. By sunset, she was no more.

Takeyoshi and his household observed the rites of mourning, though for Takeyoshi he mourned for the death of Hiromi and not Senshi. He had been so disgusted by her response to Hiromi's death, and even more convinced that she must have had something to do with the whole affair.

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In a town some ways downriver from the bridge from which Hiromi had jumped, an old nun who happened to be passing by came across a mysterious woman washed up on the shore, apparently alive, but breathing shallow harsh breaths as she lay there.

"What is this strange sight before me?" The nun said to herself. "How could such a beautiful girl have ended up in such a place? Surely, she must be a fox! I have heard tales of foxes taking the form of humans and causing all sorts of misfortune."

Wishing for a second opinion, the nun went to fetch the bishop, who found that this was in fact an ordinary girl. But how could such a woman who was clearly a highborn lady have ended up in this sorry state? There was nothing upriver for miles but unforgiving and uninhabitable countryside.

The two took the girl back to the convent, where she was nursed back to health by the nuns who lived there. However, even when she had quite recovered, she could not say who she was or how she had gotten there. It seemed that the incident had caused her to completely forget what life it was she had led before she had arrived there. The lady was quite listless. She felt she was meant to be doing something but could not remember what, and often took to wandering

around the convent as though in search of it. After a few months of this, she determined that perhaps this loss of memory was a gift to allow her to be able to withdraw from the world without regret, and made it known that her desire was to take the tonsure and become a nun.

“You could not possibly do that!” the old nun cried when the lady told her this plan. “One so young and beautiful as you, you could marry and live many happy years before you should do such a thing. Why would you wish to live this sad and barren life when such happy times are still ahead of you? Surely it would be more of a sin for you to leave the world as you are now!” And thus, the lady was not able to realize her plan, but continued to push for it at every opportunity.

Some time after, she began to have very strange dreams in which a man was crying and calling her name. When she was asleep, she was sure she knew who this man was, and recognized her own name, but when she woke she could remember neither. When she told the old nun about these dreams, for fear they were an inauspicious omen, the old nun said, “This must be the wandering spirit of someone from your old life searching for you. He must have been very important to you. This is why I would not allow you to become a nun.”

In her dreams this strange man continued to appear to her, though she still could not remember his name.

Back in the capital life had begun to return to normal. Takeyoshi’s brother had retired as emperor to be succeeded by his eldest son. Despite being out of mourning, Takeyoshi still grieved for the loss of Hiromi, and severely felt the shame of being unable to keep his promise to her women. Takeyoshi too began to have dreams. In these dreams he saw Hiromi in a strange bleak environment, confused and alone. He tried to go to her, but she was always just beyond his reach. However, in one such dream a strange being appeared before him, Takeyoshi thought he recognized him to be some sort of river spirit.

It spoke to him, “Why do you languish here in mourning? I saved the one you love so that you could be together. Her spirit called out to me as she was drowning in my river, and because of her great virtue and the eternal love you share with her, I pulled her to shore. Would you reject my gift? Go to her.”

When he awoke, Takeyoshi went to a soothsayer, who determined this dream must have indeed been a vision of true events that had come to pass. Takeyoshi left at once to go in search of Hiromi, though he was unsure of the way. When he did not know which direction to go, he thought he could see her spirit beckoning to him along one road or another.

At long last he arrived in a small town beside a river. He was sure this must be the place, for when he arrived he began to hear gossip of a mysterious lady more beautiful than the dawn who had washed ashore here some months ago and had taken up residence at the convent. He made his way to the convent in question and noticed in the yard a single cherry tree in bloom. As he drew closer, he heard voices through the fence. Those hidden within appeared to be begging one among them to write a poem inspired by this beautiful day. The voice that replied to them was sweeter than any sound that had reached his ears before it, for it belonged to his dear lost Hiromi.

“Cherry blossoms laugh
In the breeze by the river
I wish I recalled
Times when I could laugh as they
But memories fade to black.”

Everyone declared that it was a beautiful poem and some of them wept for her. Overjoyed at confirming once and for all that his love truly lived—though grieved for the great suffering she must have had to endure—he devised to write her a poem as he had on the day they met. On the same pink paper, he wrote:

Though lasting so short,
That bright spring cherry blossom
Carries with it all
The memories of lives past
And cheer of new beginnings

He sent it off to her and waited by the fence to hear her response. He peered through the cracks to look where she sat beneath the tree. If it was possible, she had grown even more beautiful since he had last seen her.

The lady was quite surprised when a note arrived for her. Though she had grown used to men from the surrounding country seeking to get to know the strange beauty hidden in the convent, the paper on which this one was written was of the finest quality. There was something so very familiar about it, as though something similar had been important to her in a past life. As she held it, the perfume with which it was scented reached her nose. That smell! Surely it belonged to someone she knew? Then as she read the note she felt tears fill her eyes for she knew that hand, she knew it belonged to her love, Takeyoshi. The man from her dreams, she finally remembered his name. Takeyoshi, Prince Takeyoshi. But how could he be here? How had he found her when she could not even find herself?

She looked up and saw the old nun watching her with a sad smile on her face.

“Child, I have come to love you greatly in the days you have spent here. But I knew I could not hold on to you forever. Go to the one who holds your heart. I wish you every happiness.”

Evening fell upon the world as Hiromi gathered her few belongings and prepared to leave. At her window she heard a familiar voice.

“Where is the Sakura Lady, alas where is my Lady Hiromi. I heard her sweet voice a few hours ago, I would do anything to hear it again.”

Their reunion was filled with as much bliss as you can imagine. They conversed all night of what had happened in their time apart and reminisced of the times before. The following

morning, they set out to return to the capital, and this time when Takeyoshi asked her to be his wife, she happily consented.

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Upon arriving back in the capital, Takeyoshi bought the land on which the Sakura estate rested and began the process of restoring it to again be a fine estate. When it was finished, he installed Hiromi in the north wing, and those of her women that could be found were brought back to serve her once more. There were many tears on the day of their reunion with their sweet lady.

In the years that followed Takeyoshi spent as much time as he could spare away from court with Hiromi and after a year Hiromi gave birth to a son whom they named Toshimori. He was a beautiful boy, and everyone agreed that he would grow to be wise and scholarly like his father.

It was not until Hiromi reached the age of 37 that she found herself again with child. There was much celebration and Takeyoshi spared no expense in making his wife comfortable. Despite all of these attentions, the pregnancy was hard for Hiromi, and only grew worse as the days went on. One day, Hiromi was unable to leave her bed and started having fits of violent shaking. Takeyoshi found that she had a high fever and commissioned all manner of religious services to expel whatever demon caused this discomfort. The exorcist found that indeed some dark spirit had wound its way around her and was attempting to snuff out her life and the baby's. Though try as they might they could not seem to move the spirit into a medium. This continued for quite some time, and Hiromi slowly weakened. At the time when Hiromi was supposed to give birth, Takeyoshi was informed that he should prepare for the worst, Hiromi was unlikely to have the strength necessary to survive it.

Since her illness, Takeyoshi had taken to spending any time he was away from Hiromi's bedside wandering around the garden or lounging under the cherry trees and reading the poems they had written to each other in their youth. What would he do without his Sakura lady?

When the time came for Hiromi to give birth, the evil spirit earnestly fought to snuff out the lives of both mother and child. Through tears and screams it shook her about until she was unable to resist it any longer and was like a trailing sleeve caught in the wind. Despite her tears, Takeyoshi still found her to be the most beautiful woman he had ever beheld. One would think that after spending months in bed, her hair would be in disarray, but it was still as smooth and glossy as ever. In fact, he thought perhaps she had grown more beautiful in her illness and admired her ever more. At long last she was delivered of the child. A beautiful girl with hair so long and thick you could almost part it. The mother, however, moved no more.

Takeyoshi had heard tell of evil spirits that made their victims appear dead and urged the exorcists to continue trying to expel it. Hiromi continued to lay still, breathtakingly beautiful if so terribly cold. They continued all through the night, but at dawn it was announced she was

dead, and visitors started to arrive to give their condolences. Takeyoshi refused to give up and remained with her until at one moment she gave a violent jerk, and from her lips emitted a cold low laugh. Takeyoshi recognized that laugh, but how could it be she?

“Who are you? Identify yourself!” Takeyoshi commanded of the spirit.

“Even as your wife lays dying do you still not know me?” with this Takeyoshi knew he had been correct, for he knew that Senshi was truly referring to the lack of attention he had shown her, even as she had been gravely ill.

“This woman has done nothing to you, any offense against you was from myself and myself alone. Release her at once.” But Senshi only continued to laugh.

“I have won, no woman shall ever take my place, I have won.”

But as the spirit had now identified itself the exorcists were able to call it more strongly and were finally able to draw it into a medium where she continued laughing until the medium was removed from the room. For a while Hiromi continued to lay still, but finally her eyes fluttered open. There was rejoicing throughout the household, for Hiromi’s survival and the beautiful baby girl, whom they named Himiko. Although many in attendance thought perhaps the girl was too beautiful and would be destined for a short life.

Though soon able to rise again from her bed, Hiromi no longer had her prior strength, and tired easily. She spent her days resting under the cherry trees in the garden and writing poems and stories to entertain her women and daughter. Takeyoshi spent as much time as he could with her and found her ever more amazing and beautiful than ever. Her wit and intellect appeared to only have grown with her ailment, and she wrote the cleverest poems he had ever heard.

When the princess had reached the age of ten, Hiromi’s health again began to decline. One day as she lay in bed with Takeyoshi at her side she told him, “I am not going to be in this world for much longer. Even in this moment I can feel the next one calling to me.”

“No, I am sure you will live many more years. You shall see our daughter grow into a beautiful woman and we shall love each other as though we were youths even in our old age.”

“You must make sure that Himiko continues to have a good education.”

“We shall ensure it together.”

“My spirit will watch over you until we meet again in the next life.”

The calm demeanor she had in the face of her own evanescence must have been truly inspiring to all. And despite his protests, a few days later Hiromi breathed her last.

The whole household wailed at the loss of their great lady. Through mourning, Takeyoshi barely spoke to anyone. Himiko, who was just old enough to understand was equally distressed but bore her grief with the grace and dignity of someone much older. Takeyoshi longed to withdraw from society but stayed to keep his promise and attend to Himiko’s education. Though years past and Himiko grew into a beautiful, intelligent woman very much like her mother, Takeyoshi was unable to leave behind the grief he felt for Hiromi. He and his daughter lived a peaceful life at the Sakura Estate, and avoided the noise and bustle of court life.

But as she grew older, Himiko longed for the excitement of a life at court. She was quite taken with the tales she read of the banquets and secret love affairs. Oh, what she would not do to find love as they did in those stories! One day the crown prince heard of the beauty his great uncle had hidden away in the forest and sought to know more of her and devised to send her a poem. Himiko was delighted by the attentions of one so great and eagerly sent him a reply. Though her response was still a bit childish, he found it charming and clever, and the two began a correspondence.

After a time, the prince arranged to visit Himiko secretly in the night. He found her to be beautiful and enchanting, full of a grace and a wit that entertained him greatly. Himiko found the prince to be awfully handsome and sophisticated. After their third night together, and eating the third morning rice cakes, the two were married. Everyone agreed it was a wonderful match. Later that year, Takeyoshi's nephew stepped down as emperor and the crown prince succeeded him. Himiko left her father's house and was installed at the palace as empress. With his daughter happily married, Takeyoshi was finally able to do as he had wished and withdraw fully from the world. As soon as everything was fully settled, he took the tonsure and became a monk, and was never seen in court again.

Thematic Elements of Heian Literature and their Influence on Tales of Cherry Blossom Dreams

In an age where women everywhere were considered lower class citizens and denied many of the world's blessings, some women in the small country of Japan began an unprecedented flowering of literature that gave birth to the modern novel. Indeed, the world's first novel, the *Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu was written during this period. Not long before, such progress in literature would have been impossible. The primary written language in Japan was Chinese characters, and very few women were allowed to learn them and were therefore unable to express themselves through writing. However, with the introduction of the vernacular writing system of Hiragana, women were suddenly able to write and exchange stories. The Heian era shows high and unprecedented levels of female education and writing, largely caused by the fact that women had a large amount of free time and did not share the popular view held by men that fiction was a waste of time (McCullough, 3). Although much of this writing was lost, we do retain some of the major works and tales of the time, including Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*, *the Tale of Genji*, *Sagoromo*, and *Riverside Middle Counselor's Tales*. My work, *Tales of Cherry Blossom Dreams*, or *Sakura no Yumei Monogatari*, utilized many of the different themes and stylistic aspects used by these female writers and their contemporaries in Japanese history.

The first notable stylistic choice of these women was to begin the story abruptly and without preamble. The setting and characters are sometimes fleshed out in time, but for the most part, readers are left to use their personal knowledge of the world. This is most evident in the *Pillow Book*, but to a lesser extent in other works of the time. In this pattern, *Cherry Blossom Dreams* begins with the consort's plight, followed quickly by the birth of the protagonist, Takeyoshi. Starting this way, with the protagonist's birth, was a common practice as well and is used often in works like the *Tale of Genji*. These stories were told in a narratorial fashion, with few vivid scenes or action sequences. This allowed the stories to progress quickly from one event to another.

The overall tone the narrator used tended to be that of an honest recount. While the stories Heian women told were often invented, they were stated in a matter of fact manner to assert that this story was not useless fiction but a worthwhile account of true events (McCullough). Even so, they often added just a dash of fantasy with talk of spirits and prophetic dreams, superstition of which was very common in this era (Keene, 23) To give the stories credence, and to justify their enjoyment of them, people would claim these were cautionary stories meant to convey some kind of moral (Keene, 23).

They were aided in their attempts for credibility by their focus on using realistic human as the centers of the stories. Most scenes were intended to display a particular emotion and contained very little action (McCullough, 5). While *Cherry Blossom Dreams* does contain a small amount of action in the kidnapping and subsequent escape of the character Hiromi, I use

very little description of the actual events. There is a greater level of focus on the terror she felt at being carried off, and her desperation in her plan of escape.

Each character generally fit into a mold, displaying a few characteristics and emotions as the sum of their being. Often, the protagonist is a male who is described as being beautiful beyond compare, but generally holds some level of disgraced position in society. He generally has so many good characteristics that people overlook this deficiency and view him as a paragon of masculine charm (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 5). The character of Genji, for example, was called the “shining prince,” but because of his mother’s lack of high status, was demoted to the level of commoner of the Genji clan. Readers of the work when it was written would know that this clan held a position of disgrace in society for losing a recent war. The protagonist Takeyoshi fits this mold as he is unbelievably good looking and intelligent but is a bastard.

Poetry

Poetry had a great deal of significance in Heian culture. The type of poems primarily used in this period are called waka. These are unrhymed poems with five lines with syllables of 5,7,5,7, and 7 in each line respectively (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 5). The ability to write a good poem was essential for a person in the Heian court to be taken seriously (Shirane, 2). In fact, one’s ability to rise in the ranks of court was also greatly determined by how well one could write (McCullough, 3). Poems also created a means of communication between sexes, and was often used for love letters, as is seen in *Cherry Blossom Dreams* (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 5). These poems tended to be about nature and to focus primarily on emotions (Shirane, 2).

Love and Marriage

Historical Context

A primary thematic element in most Heian era stories is that of love relationships. Romantic interactions were not only a significant element among all characters in these stories but were also usually the primary plot. Thus, *Cherry Blossom Dreams* is primarily about the romance between Takeyoshi and Hiromi, and involves other relationships as well, such as the emperor and his consort, the consort and the gentleman, Takeyoshi and Senshi, Noritomo and the lady in the sixth ward, Noritomo and Hiromi, and Himiko and the crown prince. In Heian literature, there was often a very stark distinction between love and marriage. The two were not considered to necessarily go hand in hand.

The marriages in *Cherry Blossom Dreams* greatly reflect the historical context of the Heian era and the practices involving how one’s marital and romantic relationships were formed.

In this time period it was very common, and actively encouraged, for a man to have multiple wives (Morris, 225). In fact, if a man did not have multiple wives, people would look down on him and think him antisocial (Morris, 248). Thus, the emperor encourages Takeyoshi to go out into the world and find a lover or to marry a second wife. Takeyoshi represents a smaller subset of male protagonists in Heian literature, as he does not generally want to have multiple wives or lovers. While this is uncommon among Heian heroes, it is not unheard of, and is present in characters such as Kaoru, who was devoted to a woman named Oigimi in the *Tale of Genji*, and Yugiri and the Lady Kumoi in the *Tale of Genji*, who were devoted to each other for most of their lives. The choice of this character subset was largely made to make the character more sympathetic to western readers while still maintaining the Heian style. While this work is written in Heian style, as the actual audience to whom it is presented is western, certain choices reflect a more western worldview. This choice also creates a foil to distinguish Takeyoshi's feelings for Hiromi, showing that they are very real and intense in comparison to his feelings for other women and his wife.

In the upper classes, most men's first, and often principle wives, were chosen for them by their parents when they were between the ages of 10 and 13 (Morris, 225). This relationship was usually political in nature, meant to boost and secure both party's status in society (Morris, 229). The girl he married was very frequently in her late teens, and this is perhaps the reason that the marriages between the two tended to be unhappy (Morris, 230). Needless to say, in the first several years of their marriage, wives were more like caretakers to their husbands than marital partners. While the boy would visit his wife, they would not be intimate until he was older (Morris, 230). An arrangement to this effect occurs in the *Tale of Genji* between the main character Genji and the daughter of the minister of the left, Aoi. In *Cherry Blossom Dreams*, a mirror relationship exists between Takeyoshi and Senshi.

In most cases, the process by which a couple got married was distinct. A man would find out about a woman, whether through family connections, a match maker, or, as Takeyoshi finds Hiromi, a chance encounter (Morris, 225). After gaining an interest in the woman, the man would send her a letter and a poem. The woman would reply with a poem of her own, and if the man liked it, he would arrange to meet her secretly (Morris, 226). These visits were rarely actually secret, as the parents and attendants of these girls often encouraged or discouraged the relationship upon the arrival of the first poem, and frequently helped the girl write a good reply. The household would therefore pretend not to know what was happening, even though they knew very well that the man was coming. With the open layout and thin walls of Heian era estates, even if the household had not known, it would have been difficult to sneak in unnoticed (Morris, 225). During his first visit, the man would make love to the woman, and leave at dawn. If he had liked the woman, he would write her a "morning after letter" with a poem usually involving dew about how sad he was to leave her. If he did not like her, he would say nothing. While mildly offending the family, this was not too unusual and rarely affected the woman's prospects for future suitors (Morris, 227). To continue the courtship, he would return in a similar fashion for two more nights (Morris, 227). After the third night, he would not leave at dawn, but

instead the couple would be served ceremonial rice cakes and would then be considered married. At this point, the man could come and go as he pleased from his father-in-law's house where his wife would continue to live for a while, often until the couple had children. For obvious reasons, this was not the process followed when the groom was a mere child of 13 (Morris, 227). In *Cherry Blossom Dreams* different elements of this process occur between several of the characters, however it is carried out in the most deliberate fashion between the characters of the Himiko and the crown prince, as they are a stereotypical situation and match that would be approved by everybody. While Takeyoshi begins this process, indicating that his intentions towards Hiromi are along this vein, her act of remaining behind her curtain at their first meeting, and overall aversion to marital intimacy prevents it from occurring.

Men with multiple wives would have one who would be the principle wife, who was the highest ranking lady (Morris, 229). However, on occasion a man would choose a lower ranking woman to be his principle wife, often causing backlash from those rivals who outranked her, as is seen in the conflict between Hiromi and Senshi (Shirane, 294). A man's duty was to give his principal wife more public honor and deference and give her a majority of his time. She ran his household and he would usually make her first son his heir (Morris, 231). Directions held a great deal of relevance in Shinto practices, and it was believed that the northern direction was the chief of them all. Therefore, a principal wife's rooms would be in the north wing of the estate to show her superiority (Morris, 229). Takeyoshi's desire to place Hiromi in this position communicates his desire to make her his principal wife over Senshi, which is the primary cause for her dismay at Senshi's likely reaction. If a man violated his duties, and the wronged wife had strong backing, her family would often bother him until he did his duty. The emperor points this out to Takeyoshi concerning his lack of attention to Senshi (Morris, 236). While Takeyoshi was certainly lacking in the proper attention aspect, he does quite a lot more for her out of duty than would be expected from a western perspective, given how much he dislikes her, and how cold she is to him.

In both literature and reality, love relationships and marriage relationships were not always intertwined. Marriage was often political in nature, but the overall culture greatly encouraged people to find their love elsewhere. It was not uncommon to have had many sexual partners before marriage, and one's history had very little impact on marital prospects afterwards (Morris, 238). People would often see multiple people simultaneously, which was widely acceptable for men and unmarried women (Morris, 238). In fact, having frequent sexual interactions was thought to be good for a person's health, and if you remained a virgin for too long people thought you were possessed (Morris, 225). This particular fact appears in the *Tale of Genji* when the character of Oigimi continuously rejects Kaoru's advances, and sheds light on the relationship between Takeyoshi and Hiromi in *Cherry Blossom Dreams*. The comment made wondering if Hiromi was possessed implies that the relationship has not taken a sexual turn and explains in part Takeyoshi's frustration at the continuous refusal.

Literary Themes

A sadly common theme among Heian era stories is the impermanence of love (Shirane, 5). Even relationships that do succeed do not do so forever and the story never ends before everything falls apart. While occasionally left with some hope for the following generation, the story generally focuses on the continual frustration of the primary characters in their search for happy relationships (Shirane, 5). This is evidenced in the relationships between Takeyoshi and Senshi, Noritomo and his various attempts at love, and even between Takeyoshi and Hiromi. When the barriers keeping them apart were seemingly gone, the jealous spirit of Senshi brought an end to their happy utopia, causing hardship for Hiromi for years following the incident and resulting in her early death. In Heian literature, this theme is most prominent in Genji's various relationships throughout the 54-chapter book.

There is also an overall theme of higher-class men finding love with lower class women, who, despite being down on their luck, are somehow perfection incarnate (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 130). A common idea was the "hidden treasure," or the overall romanticizing of women who have been hidden away from society in distant unknown lands. Being brought up outside of society is supposed to have made these women more docile and sweet than their courtly compatriots (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 130). Such women often had multiple suitors vying for their attention, frequently causing most of the plot problems (Morris, 220).

Another common theme that occurs both in the *Tale of Genji* and *Sagoromo*, is the theme of a lifelong infatuation (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 131). Both of these characters were greatly in love with a woman who was beyond their reach for their entire lives. Genji's great love being his father's consort Fujistubo and Sagoromo's being his own adopted sister Genji no Miya. The unattainability of these characters leads to another common theme, that of replacement and surrogacy. Due to the unattainability of the actual object of their affections, these men found women who look just like them, but are more available (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 129). While such relationships, of varying success, are meant to replace the original relationship and are often painted as a great true love of their own, the man does not forget the real object of his affections and still attempts to seduce her whenever possible (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 131). This theme occurs in the character of Noritomo and the lady in the sixth ward, and then his replacement of her with Hiromi. He does, however continue to go after the original lady, despite equal efforts now for her replacement. Often with replacement comes the trope that the replacement is somehow related to the original, as Genji's "lifelong love" Murasaki is the niece of his great love Fujistubo, and Hiromi is the niece of the lady in the sixth ward.

The theme of jealousy is incredibly prominent in both stories and the reality of the Heian era. The promiscuous culture involved little faithfulness to any one partner, so it is easy to imagine jealousy running rampant. Many writings record the jealous feelings that people, abandoned wives especially, felt at their situation (Morris, 253). Showing this jealousy publicly however, was socially unacceptable. Those suffering were expected to do so in silence and

continue to be gracious and obedient to their husband (Morris, 231). From this perspective, the character of Senshi would have been very sympathetic to a Heian audience at first, but would be demonized through her lack of deference to her husband and how she later shows her jealousy. Strong feelings like jealousy were thought to tie spirits to this world as Senshi's haunts Hiromi (Shirane, 7).

Women's position in society

While it is true that women in the Heian era had more rights and freedoms than women in many eras before and after them, they still suffered their share of unfairness. For one thing, as mentioned above, married women were not allowed the freedom of multiple partners, despite the promiscuous culture in which men and women engaged in prior to marriage, and as men continued to do after marriage. Women were supposed to remain faithful to their husband no matter how little attention she was paid and was to suffer the injustice of his many affairs in silence (Morris, 254). In Heian stories, like the *Tale of Genji*, violating this standard could end poorly for the guilty wife if it was learned by her husband. When Genji discovered that his new wife, the third princess, had an affair with Kashiwagi, he treated her with disdain for the rest of their marriage, and this was considered a kind response. Such affairs did probably happen in Heian history, and such as with the case of Takeyoshi, may have ended up with illegitimate children treated as legitimate heirs. In stories, most dalliances of this nature seem to end in a child, leading to a lifelong effort by their parents to keep their secret from getting out, as occurs multiple times in the *Tale of Genji*.

What made a woman physically desirable is a surprisingly vague subject. The writings tend to be very descriptive of nature but then entirely gloss over what a person actually looks like. One trait that is described in detail is a woman's hair. Beautiful hair was straight, thick, and glossy, and longer than the woman was tall (Morris, 215). Another feature often described is the quality with which the woman puts together an outfit. Heian era clothing consisted of multiple robes layered over top of each other, ranging in number from six to twelve. Each layer progressively inward would have longer sleeves, so that the combination of colors chosen would be most apparent there (Morris, 216). As they were generally out of sight of men, women would tend to hang their sleeves outside of their curtains or carriages to be admired (Morris, 216). Otherwise, women who are "beautiful" are merely stated as such or are described as beautiful by their actions. Such actions included grace, quality of calligraphy, gentility of manner and other traits of that sort (Morris, 214). By this standard, woman like Senshi, though described as fair of feature, would have still been found lacking by her overall stiffness, and cold and domineering nature, which to a Heian audience would have further demonized her.

Perhaps the reason for the vague standard of beauty was the fact that a woman was not supposed to be seen by any man other than her father, husband, or brothers, and was expected to

remain inside and out of sight, or behind a curtain at social gatherings. The only thing that could be seen was a woman's hair and sleeves which she would drape outside of her curtain to be admired (Morris, 224). Women at court had a bit more freedom, but other high-ranking women had to resign themselves to a somewhat boring existence at home. One happy result of this affliction was the bloom of female literature, as to pass the time women would read and write fairytales and poems, as we see with Hiromi and her women at the beginning, and end of the story (McCullough, 3). A woman would often live for visits from a gentleman visitor as this was the greatest bit of variety she could hope for in her day (Morris, 224).

While a woman's overall ranking in society was more versatile than a man's through marriage, her position was also more delicate (Lurie, Shirane, & Suzuki, 130). A woman's level of influence in her married household in comparison to other wives was determined by how strong her backing was. That is, the relative power of her father and brothers. This backing ensured that her husband would not mistreat her, for her family would come after him if he did (Morris, 236). If her father died, she would be largely unprotected in her household, so the ideal man in this society would be one who provided well for his wives (Morris, 236). A woman who was favored beyond her station could potentially see a great deal of backlash from those who outranked her but were favored less (Morris, 233). This struggle for wifely power was especially strong at court among the consorts of the emperor. These women would seek out talented and pretty attendants to attempt to draw the emperor's attention to their salon as the consort at the beginning of the story does (McCullough, 5).

Religion and its Influence on Literature

Japanese religion is a unique amalgamation of three different religions incorporated into a single set of practices. One of these religions is Buddhism. Following this religion involved a great deal of flashy ceremonies and festivals which were popular with the Heian court, and thus it made a smooth introduction to Heian society (Morris, 113). Along with it came the positions of monks and nuns. In actual Heian history, it was not uncommon for people who fell out politically to become a monk or nun and this theme runs to any character who has experienced great heart break in Heian stories. Being a monk or nun was generally a sad and barren existence but was considered a high ideal by the Heian court for its help in achieving enlightenment (Keene, 22). The idea of reincarnation also greatly influenced the culture. People believed that many good or bad things that happened to them occurred because of a "bond from a past life" as is said frequently in the *Tale of Genji* and occurs many times in *Cherry Blossom Dreams*.

The idea of religions being mutually exclusive is an idea that was unheard of to the Heian Japanese, so when Buddhism was introduced, it was mixed and mingled with the already prominent, but not particularly difficult to follow religion of Shintoism. Shintoism's overall belief system essentially involved living peacefully alongside nature, and thus did not require a

high level of devotion. This made it much easier to continue to practice Shintoism while adopting Buddhism, as the two did not conflict per se (Morris, 106). Many concepts behind Shintoism were merged with Buddhism. For example, Shintoism is an incredibly superstitious religion and believed that many diseases were caused by evil spirits. The response to becoming ill was to call in exorcists and mediums to expel the spirits, and these people were often members of the Buddhist clergy (Morris, 152). While we know that evil spirits do not actually cause disease, this trope was incredibly common in Heian literature, as the angry or jealous spirits from someone's past would come and make them or their loved ones sick. This is the case with the Rokujo lady in the *Tale of Genji*, who's jealous spirit causes both Aoi and Murasaki, two of Genji's wives, to become ill. This theme appears in *Cherry Blossom Dreams* between Senshi and Hiromi.

Two other parts of Shinto beliefs that pervaded society was the importance of dreams, and taboos. If a person had a bad or strange dream, they would go to a soothsayer who would interpret the dream for them (Morris, 141). Sometimes, as in the case of Takeyoshi, these dreams determine actions that must be taken by the dreamer. However, some dreams were considered inauspicious omens, and a person would be considered taboo and would remain away from others until the effects of it had supposedly passed (Morris, 142). Hiromi makes jokes to this effect when she speaks of a dream she supposedly had about a fox. Directional taboos were a strange concept that nonetheless pervaded Heian literature. This idea holds that on a given day, certain directions are more auspicious or inauspicious than others (Morris, 131). People would often stay in certain places extra days to avoid travelling in an inauspicious direction. Several comments are made in *Cherry Blossom Dreams* about directions, such as Hiromi's joke that they cannot get married because Takeyoshi was facing east at the time of his proposal. Related to inauspicious directions is the idea of inauspicious days, which stated that it would be particularly lucky or unlucky to perform certain activities on certain days of the year. These were often related to various festivals and superstitions (Morris, 140). Some whole years in a person's life were considered inauspicious, though one such superstition may have come into existence because of its references in the *Tale of Genji*. While a person was 37, they were thought to be in danger of illness and attack by evil spirits. Two characters in the *Tale of Genji* either died or were beset by spirits at that age, Genji's mother Kiritsubo, and his wife Murasaki. For this reason, Hiromi suffers from the possession by Senshi when she is 37.

With the great deal of Chinese culture that was borrowed in this era, some Confucian aspects entered the culture as well. This is primarily seen in the concept of filial piety and strong family ties (Morris, 108). They intertwined these precepts with their superstitions as well and believed that violating them would cause nature to lash out (Morris, 238). This is in part the reason for Takeyoshi's concern when he wonders if the emperor is his real father. For if he has been inadvertently breaking this rule, and showing piety to the wrong man, it could go badly for him.

Related to a variety of these religions, people would go on religious pilgrimages, often to places like the Ise shrine as Takeyoshi does. For some, this was out of a sense of piety, but for

most it simply created a welcome diversion from the monotony of life. For women, visiting shrines gave a break from staying at home all day (Morris, 223). Often enough, couples would meet at these shrines for trysts, or people would go with the intent of finding a lover (Morris, 119). Takeyoshi goes on his pilgrimage as an excuse to avoid his wife's household.

Common Phrases and Motifs

There are a view different phrases and ideas that I noticed in my studies of the *Tale of Genji*, *Sagoromo*, and *Riverside Middle Counselor's Tales*. While each is not enough to prompt discussion on its own, I will briefly mention each of them.

For one, small interjections of opinions by the narrator was an incredibly common practice, often stating their opinion or lack of understanding of a character's motives and actions. Frequently enough, these contradict the statements made in the scene.

Another is the idea that people very conveniently recognize who other people are, as Takeyoshi remembers Hiromi's father, and Hiromi figures out Takeyoshi's identity.

Love at first sight is also incredibly common, though it might be better to say love at first glance of her hair and sleeves, as that was frequently enough to send a man on a quest of love.

The distinction in women's character between being sophisticated or countrified comes up frequently in Heian discussions of women. Sophistication meant she showed courtly grace and ideals, and is probably an adept writer, while if she were countrified—often meaning from the provinces or anywhere outside the capital—she was considered low and uncouth and wrote “childish” poems which disgusted all who read them.

Many scenes occur in which men carried women they desired off into the night. At each of these events, the woman responded by being terrified, but for all intents and purposes going along with it.

A woman was often thought to have “grown sorry” for a man she has rejected for a long time and suddenly accepts, whether in the larger sense of becoming his lover as with the consort and the court gentleman, or as Hiromi does in even answering Noritomo's letters.

People cried about many things. They cried when they had to leave their lover in the morning, and even cried when they heard a sad poem. Phrases to the effect of “everyone started crying” were incredibly common in Heian literature.

There are also many mentions at the birth of a child if that child is extremely beautiful that that child must be destined for a short life.

People are often peaceful and impressively composed in the face of their own evanescence, that is, the fleeting nature of their lives. The word evanescence comes up specifically frequently.

Fox lore is referenced frequently, especially when women are found in a place where it is strange for them to be. The belief was that such women were foxes who had turned themselves into humans to sow misfortune.

The final theme is that when two people in these stories were in love, the other person grew only ever more beautiful and he loved her ever more throughout their relationship. This is especially common when a primary and beautiful character falls ill. Somehow, this makes the character more beautiful. It is not in spite of the ill effects of the sickness, but the effects somehow added to her looks. For instance, when a woman grows thin and weak, the thinness has somehow improved her figure.

While some stylistic choices were made to appeal to my western audience, this story was crafted to emphasize and honor the writings of the pioneers of the modern novel, who often go unheard of to modern audiences. Reading what they wrote allows a person to see a little bit of what life was like for these women and how they and their novels became so influential to literature in the modern era, and I hope that my work brings to light some of these characteristics to bring them the honor they deserve.

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