

Choice Literature.

O CHERRY BLOSSOM SAN

(Concluded)

Miss Southworth was, perhaps, ten years older than this young man. When he had been her pupil she had liked him. His absolute truthfulness, his way of looking straight in her eyes with entire belief in what she told him, even his exaggerated diffidence, all had been pleasing to her. She thought now that he did not seem so very much younger than she. Looking at him as he sat upright and stiff in his chair, with the moonlight full on his face, she was surprised at the beauty of that face.

"Really Greek," she thought. "But his shyness is so great as to be almost a disease. How odd that Joshua Meserve should turn out to be such a handsome man! Poor fellow! Can't he speak?"

Some one else spoke, softly, hesitatingly. Cherry Blossom was making an attempt to converse, as if she were an American lady.

"Mr. Meserve, on your honourable legs did you come? or by the honourable horse?"

Joshua started, and gazed eagerly at the small figure at the doctor's feet. How pale and mildly brilliant the oblique-eyed face was in that light!

"What say?" he asked.

Cherry Blossom, with the utmost care, repeated her interrogation. She now began to question as to whether she was doing right. She would ask her doctor as soon as they were alone. Her doctor knew everything.

"I—I walked," answered Joshua.

"Handsome the night is, very," said Cherry Blossom, after a slight pause.

If there was one thing upon which this Japanese girl prided herself, it was upon her ability to speak English. Had not Dr. Southworth taught her? Had not she, Cherry Blossom, applied herself with all her powers to the learning of the honourable language of her honourable friend? And the doctor had encouraged and praised, as indeed the girl had deserved. And there was something in the extreme diffidence in the man before her that made Cherry Blossom wish to make him more comfortable.

Miss Southworth leaned back in her chair and smiled rather broadly. She felt herself a very experienced woman. In this kind of light, and dressed as she was, she did not look more than twenty-five.

Joshua Meserve, looking at her, felt that it could not be that Mabel Southworth was old enough to have taught him. The effect of the moon and the night, and the warm perfume from the flowers in the old-fashioned garden was upon the young man. He wished he could say something beautiful. But it was of no use trying to do that. He moved his feet uneasily.

"It's a beautiful night," he said, in response to Cherry Blossom's last remark. "And the flowers seem to smell sweeter, somehow, don't you think?"

He looked from one to the other. Cherry Blossom bent her head in assent. Here was a person who was more shy even than she had ever been. She would tell her doctor that she felt a—she thought it was a tenderness, for this being, who was a man, and yet who was shyer than she.

"These August nights," responded Miss Southworth, "bring out perfumes very strongly."

"Yes, ma'am; that must be it."

After this access of conversation there fell a long silence upon the group. Joshua crossed his legs and then uncrossed them. This he did several times. He wondered if he ought to go home. He had never called upon ladies before. He knew that fellows who were courting their girls would stay until eleven or twelve; but that was very different. He was not courting; at least he supposed he was not.

A whippoorwill in the field opposite the house gave forth his song.

Joshua said it was rather late in the season for whippoorwills to sing. This voluntary remark encouraged him greatly.

Miss Southworth responded by saying that she had heard those birds as late as September. She thought the sound mournful.

When a bat flew over them Joshua had the power to say almost with animation, that he did not like bats.

Then the doctor smiled and said: "No; a bat was neither bird nor beast. It was no wonder he didn't like them."

After this he uttered several sentences. He had a feeling as if he were doing uncommonly well. He was exhilarated. Then he began to be tormented with the thought that he ought to go home. As for him, he could sit there all night and look at those two.

It was really very warm. Dr. Southworth had a fan. Sometimes she held it before her face. The young man did not know that she was beginning to yawn quite recklessly.

But Cherry Blossom did not yawn. She sat there on her little footstool by her doctor, and her gentle face showed all the time a gentle interest, or seemed to show it.

But at last Joshua picked up his hat from the ground beside him, and rose from his chair. He said, in a melancholy manner, that "he guessed he'd better be going."

The two women also rose. Dr. Southworth said she was glad he had called. She hoped she should see him again while she was at home. As it had been noised abroad that she would be at home a year, this was not an extremely encouraging remark. But Joshua did not think of that. He stood with his hat held in front of him by both hands.

"How very handsome he is!" was what the doctor was again thinking. Then she put up her fan and yawned behind it.

"If you'll be at home Saturday evening," said Joshua, "I should like to call."

He spoke in a quietly desperate manner, and he turned a burning red all over his perfectly featured face.

"Perhaps we shall get as far as algebra then," pleasantly responded Miss Southworth.

Then, as he still stood, she made a decided movement toward the house.

He said "Good-night," forlornly, and walked away.

Dr. Southworth laughed silently as she went into the house. But she made no remark. When the two were upstairs in their room Cherry Blossom sat down on the edge of her little cot and gazed earnestly at her companion.

As the doctor went about the chamber she had an amused expression on her face. She did not appear to notice the girl for some time. At last she felt the gaze upon her. She went and sat down by Cherry Blossom and put her arm about her. The caress brought an almost poignantly happy look to the girl's countenance.

"What did you think of him?" asked Miss Southworth.

Cherry Blossom paused before replying deliberately:—

"He is truly lovely. It was pleasant to me to look at him."

There was so much simple fervour in the voice as it gave this answer that the elder woman turned abruptly and fixed her eyes questioningly upon the ingenuous face close to her.

"Do not say this to anyone else," she remarked, after a moment.

The young face instantly clouded over.

"It was not the right, the correct sentence."

"In you it was right. I understand, but others might not," was the response.

Cherry Blossom knew that her doctor was telling the truth. She put her two hands softly together. Alas! She did not yet know, she thought, all about the English language.

Meanwhile Joshua was walking rapidly along the high way. He held his head up for the first time in his life, and this attitude gave him such a different appearance that his mother, standing on the stoop watching for him, hardly knew him at first.

Joshua must be courting. She trembled with fear and anxiety and hate, she did not know what to do. Joshua! It was incredible. He turned in at the gate. The moonlight showed how fine his face was. Why did he appear so changed? His mother slipped back through the sitting-room into her bedroom; she could not meet him. He went on up the stairs; then all was still in the little old house. Joshua was sitting at his open window, looking out into the radiant flower garden.

For the next three months young Meserve went two evenings in a week to Simon Southworth's. Everybody in the neighbourhood soon knew of these visits. A great many spoke of them to Mrs. Meserve; but all the response she ever made to these remarks was:—

"I guess I know where my son goes."

Having spoken these words the woman nipped in her lips in a way that was very expressive.

People began to say that Mabel Southworth was a great deal too old for Josh. Some wished that they had the courage to ask Mrs. Meserve if she thought Mabel would carry Josh back to Japan with her. Of course she could take him when he offered himself. She could talk fast enough if he couldn't, they said; but she was too old.

Joshua did not walk home from meeting with his mother now; he always went "acrossit."

In those long, hot autumn days and nights when Joshua went about so absorbed and so unlike himself, the widow Meserve came to think that she did not care what happened if only her son would not go to Japan. When she saw the strange, glorified look on Joshua's face she was conscious of an almost murderous impulse. Not toward him, oh, no; but toward the cause of this change. He was no longer her boy. He did not care for her. He did not obey her. He had never been the same since he went "acrossit" that day and she walked round the road. In her solitude she would sometimes say aloud:—

"I wonder if he could talk to me if I'd be'n different."

Too late now to be different.

The young man could not now sit under the syringa bush with the ladies. The cold of the fall had driven them into the house. He sat in the little, close parlour and looked at them. Try all he could, he did not find much to say.

Dr. Mabel grew restive often under these visits; but Cherry Blossom never seemed to be so. She always sat near her friend, and she gazed at Joshua with a shy mildness.

Miss Southworth now rarely exerted herself to make any remarks, and the silences were sometimes so prolonged that they were ludicrous.

"What is he thinking about?" she would ask herself.

"And why is he so handsome?"

She used to laugh when she heard jokes made about Joshua's courting, and once she retorted that Josh was no more courting than she was.

"What is he doing, then?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He said first he came to talk about algebra."

And she laughed again. Suddenly there was a rumour that Dr. Southworth would go back to Japan much sooner than she had intended, that she was going in a few weeks.

On the night when he heard that rumour, Joshua appeared, pale and excited, at the Southworth house. It was not his night, for he had been there the preceding evening. An air of desperation completely overpowered his shyness. It was the doctor herself who opened the door to him. He stepped inside the bit of an entry. He held on to the hand she extended to him.

"Is it true?" he asked, not responding to her words of greeting.

"Is what true?"

"That you are going. Don't go in there—stay here. I must speak to you."

He kept her in the hall. His voice vibrated; his eyes burned; his head was flung up.

Miss Southworth was silent. But her heart began to beat faster. She waited, while he still clung to her hand. She was extremely interested. In all the weeks during which he had been coming she had never been able to decide for whose sake he came; whether for hers or for Cherry Blossom's. She had never been so puzzled in her life. As soon as she could speak calmly she answered:—

"Yes, we are going on the 30th."

"That is in two weeks."

"Yes."

"Then you must let me see her. You must let me see her alone! I tell you I can't bear it! I can't!"

Now Miss Southworth knew.

"Poor fellow!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Let me see her now!" repeated Joshua, not noticing her exclamation.

She turned away.

"I will tell her," she said. She put him into the parlour.

She went up into her own room, where Cherry Blossom was sewing with a steady patience for "her doctor."

"Mr. Meserve is here," remarked Miss Southworth, with her eyes on her companion in much the same way that she would have held her finger on her pulse under other circumstances.

Cherry Blossom began to fold up her work.

"We shall go down, shall we?" she asked.

"He doesn't want me," said the doctor.

"Not want you?" repeated the other, as if it were impossible not to want Mabel T. Southworth.

"No. Only you. He is waiting."

Cherry Blossom stood confounded a moment. She put her hands softly together in that way she had. At last she said:—

"Go I cannot without my doctor. No, no."

The elder woman hesitated a little. She was asking herself if she should command this girl. She decided not. She turned away.

"I will go down and tell him," she left the room.

Being left alone, Cherry Blossom crouched down on her heels on the floor, and remained perfectly motionless. America was a strange place. She thought the foreign women who had come to her own country had shown her how very strange women could be. But she had not known until she came here. She could not understand things.

Presently the doctor came back.

"He will not go away until he has seen you," she said.

Cherry Blossom did not stir.

"I think you had better see him," said Miss Southworth, and she added, "He seems to be suffering very much."

"Suffering?"

"Yes. You see in this country men are different."

"Oh, yes. Extremely much different."

A faint red spot was coming upon the girl's cheeks.

"Does my doctor say that I must go?"

"I advise it, strongly."

Cherry Blossom rose to her feet.

"If my doctor will go with me," she said, with something like despairing earnestness; "but without her I cannot—cannot!"

She came to Miss Southworth's side. She took one hand of her friend and pressed it closely upon her heart. Although the action was quiet, there was in it a pathetic passion that suddenly made the woman's eyes dim. She bent over and kissed the little quivering mouth. Cherry Blossom trembled beneath the caress. Her doctor was the only person in the world who had ever kissed her. For even a mother in Japan does not kiss her child.

The two went down the stairs. The young man was standing in the middle of the room.

"I am sorry for you, Joshua," said the doctor; "but she would not come without me. You know things are very different in her country."

But Joshua did not pay any attention to this remark. He did not notice the speaker at all. His eyes were upon Cherry Blossom, who stood with lowered eyelids just within the door. He walked up near her.

"I was afraid you would go without my telling you," he began, hurriedly. "But I guess you must know already. You can't help knowing, when I feel it so that I'm a different person. I ain't the same man. I don't care for any thing I used to. I don't care for anything but you. I want you to marry me. I love you."

Dr. Southworth, as she saw and heard Joshua now, thought that it must be a peculiar girl who could easily say no to him.

Cherry Blossom, instead of flushing, grew paler than usual. She felt as if she were choking. She had her hands crossed over her breast.

Joshua repeated:—

"I love you," and put out one hand as if to touch her. She shrank just beyond his reach. He went on hurriedly. "No woman was ever like you. The others are rough and—horrid. If you can only love me—oh, you don't know how I will take care of you."

He stopped as if his voice had failed him.

Cherry Blossom now seemed to make a great effort. She raised her eyes and looked softly at the man before her.

"Great sorrow I feel," she said, hesitatingly. "But no—but no."

She turned, and moved quickly to Miss Southworth's side.

"It is my doctor that owns me. It is my doctor that I love—love. I will not leave her. No."

The doctor's keen face softened in a wonderful way.

"Joshua," she said, almost tenderly, "I don't think you have the least chance in the world. She is as firm as she is gentle. You won't believe me; but you will get over it. Now leave us."

Joshua obeyed. He fumbled blindly at the latch, then he walked down the road toward his home. —*Maria Louise Pelt, in the Independent.*

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