

Dream for the Damned

By Shinigami-no-Kaze

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When at night he goes to sleep, what does Kenshin dream about? Is it a reality--a waking dream, or is it simply a concoction of his own imagination.

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1. Dream for the Damned

Author's Notes: Yeah for Rurouni Kenshin! I've finally gotten around to actually writing a semi-decent story about the show. Sadly the story turned out slightly demented. Remind me to write one on a... happier note... Please, enjoy this story. It's rather bizarre, I realize this, so I don't know how well it will be received. Flames will be read, laughed at, and used to heat the cardboard box I am currently inhabiting.

Dreams are interesting things. One never knows what to expect from a dream at night, and they are often so cryptic that one cannot easily decipher the meaning. A friend with an enemy's face could mean many things--from the enemy being a true friend or a friend being a true enemy. The death of someone in a dream could mean the death of a part of a person. Dreams are something that are often not understood, but often should be.

If only humanity had the skill of Joseph, who told Pharaoh of the famine that would come to his land for seven years. If only humanity had the wisdom of wise Solomon. If only humanity had the pure heart of David. Alas, humans do not. We have not the purity, the wisdom, nor the skill to understand something so complexly simple as a dream.

But if we could... If we could understand our dreams, if we could know exactly what they meant...

...would we really want to?

The darkness was soft, penetrated by simple shafts of moonlight through the thin walls of his room that provided simple, elegant light. He lay down, pulling his blanket over his body, closing his violet eyes. His eyelashes brushed his cheeks tenderly, just short of truly tickling them.

He squinted his closed eyes, rubbing his cheeks drowsily with the back of his hand, muttering to himself at the same time. It was sleep time, not time for tickling. Silly Miss Kaoru... Trying to tickle him so late at night... so late... so tired... that was for... morning time...

There was a silence, at first. Nothing but a strange, almost tangible silence. And darkness. All around. The thick, misty, lingering sort of darkness that covers and sticks to everything. The kind one sees before falling into night's first dream.

He tried to push through the darkness, like one straining uphill and falling farther back with each labored step. However, he felt something solid under his feet as he walked wordlessly through the nothingness. His feet carried him through the darkness toward a light, shining irritatingly bright for one whose eyes had grown accustomed to blackness. As he drew closer he found

himself staring into the glare of a hanging street lamp, lighted by a flickering candle, on a street filled with flickering shadows. Underneath his feet, he could see a simple dirt road, not unlike the ones he walked on every day. Sound echoed through the darkened silence, the sound of his own cautious footsteps moving through night's endless shadows and away from the only light on the street.

Violet eyes glanced, narrowed, from one side of the street to the other, and then moved their gaze across the street. Nothing. Nothing but flickering shadows and a moonless, starless, endless expanse of night. He could hear his own breathing, quivering and broken with suspicion at every shadow and the slight nervousness of one unknowing what to expect around the next corner. His mind was blank, void of all thought except to keep his legs moving, however slow the speed. The buildings lining the street seemed vaguely familiar, but in the flickering of lights he couldn't fully place them in his mind. Nothing seemed to make sense here. There was no one on the street, no one but himself, his feet carrying him farther and farther from the safety of the light and deeper into the night. Why should he be afraid? He was prowling the streets in the shadows as he had done so many times before. But it felt... different this time. Almost... wrong.

A sharp, frozen wind threw itself at him, tossing his bangs out of his face and revealing his chilled, nervous, shining violet eyes. Those who stared into the eyes of death rarely looked at anything again, but this wind defied his very existence. It tried to blow him backwards, back towards the flickering lantern light. Where he had come from. And where he suddenly longed to return. The breeze chilled his skin to the bone, making him shiver and pause for a moment in his nearly automatic steps. He closed his eyes, turning his head sideways to avoid the wind and tried to press on.

Yes, he was afraid. For once, numbness to all but the shadows escaped him, and he felt the ice-cold fingers of fear creeping along his skin, its chilled breath crawling upon his neck.

For the first time, he was nervous. For the first time, he was afraid. And for the first time, he was alone.

Alone.

On an empty street.

Another breeze came. This one, though just as cold, was lighter. As it passed, he swore he heard something equivalent to a whisper find its way into his ears. He snapped his head around and moved his eyes all around. No one. The streets were still dark and still empty, just as they had been since he'd arrived at this God-forsaken place. The buildings loomed over him now, and suddenly he did not feel so alone. He felt... watched.

Another, sharper whisper flew by him. He whirled around again. Another, clearer this time, came from the other direction. He snapped around again. Nothing. No one. Emptiness. He shivered again, though this time it was not from the cold, nor from the wind. The whispers increased, surrounding him completely, though they remained unclear and undecipherable. Then, as quickly as they had come, they ceased. The wind followed suit, dying from the air. The darkness fell heavier than before, pressing against him; heavy like a woolen blanket.

He stopped completely now, standing completely motionless on the sidewalk. Slowly, ever so slowly, he began to turn his head to the left, very aware of his quickened breathing. His bangs had fallen free from the wind when it disappeared, and now they shadowed his face.

Utter silence.

Then, a piercing, echoing scream sounded from far behind him. It began distant, and then slowly increased its volume until his ears could hardly bare it. Suddenly, just as he was about to cover his ears, a pale, lifeless arm shot out from the alleyway to his right and grabbed for his arm. Its bony, creaking fingers wrapped around his thin, yet strong, arm, ripping completely through the fabric of his clothing. He cried out and yanked his arm away, watching the arm fall from him to the ground. There was no blood.

Before he could react, more hands of the same type shot from the alleyway, reaching for him with angry desperation. The screaming never died, but increased, with more voices joining it. He tried to scamper away, running farther down the street, but the arms now sprouted from every darkened alleyway, reaching mercilessly for his body. Each hand barely had enough skin to cover the bones, and the stench of death filled the night air. He cried out once more and ran to the other side of the street, only to find more hands sprouting out from the shadows to claim him. He backed away from their reach, turning to glance back at the other side of the street, and then back where he'd come from towards the light that was no longer visible. He turned one last time, only to find himself staring into the cold, harsh, almost lifeless blue eyes of a young woman who looked frighteningly familiar. Her black hair looked pale and dead, like her eyes, and it hung limp as noodles about her face. He yelped in shock and backed up a few steps.

Cannot stare into the faces of death, can you? A coward of a murderer you are...

Her lips did not move. The voice seemed to come from inside his head, yet at the same time from her. Her frighteningly dead eyes bore into his in a stare unbroken by blinking. Her face was as white as the hidden moon and her lips as thin and pale as the rest of her body, or at least what was visible. The rest was covered by a simple white kimono. She had a kimono like that... had he killed her?

When he could no longer stand to look at her face, so like hers, he turned his head in the opposite direction. However, he came face-to-face with a tall, older man with graying hair that nearly matching his skin color. This man, too, stared with eyes devoid of the life that had once possessed them. In his arms he held a child barely five years old, her long hair blowing in the returning wind. A small, silent tear slid down her little cheek as she, too, watched him with dark eyes.

He moved away from the man and child, but bumped into a young couple as he did so. He whirled around, his heart racing wildly in his chest.

Look upon us! Look upon the victims of your merciless wrath! Look into the eyes of those whose lives were cut short by your anger and obsession!

He wanted to plead with them to go, to leave him alone, but his voice was weak and lost. His throat was dry and sore as he gasped air in through frightened breathing. He shielded his eyes

as more people filled the once silent, empty street. All stared wordlessly at him, throwing their anguish and pain upon him with only the depths of their empty eyes. He tried once more to voice his terror, to beg them to leave him in the darkness, but his voice cracked and left him as he opened his mouth to speak. Tears welled up in his amethyst eyes, threatening to spill should he look again upon the faces of the dead. The faces of those killed because of him. Dead because he had cut them down for the sake of a few. All of them. They lined the streets, moving toward him in crowds, never at all uttering a word. Their whispers filled the air around him as men, women, and children walked toward him. He scampered away from them, breaking into a fearful run. The wind blew the tears from his eyes as it was thrown by him.

Why do you run now? You were not afraid then. You were death's right hand, yet now you run? You choose life over death? You now abandon everything you once claimed to stand for? Hypocrite!

The tears streamed down his cheeks, blurring his vision as he ran. Sweat poured down from his forehead. He no longer cared where he was or where he was going. He'd go anywhere that would take him away from the crowds following him in a painfully calm walk. He ran farther and faster than he realized he was capable, and soon he came to the end of the street. He stopped, wiping the tears from his cheeks, and turned to look back. Once more, the street was empty, dark, and silent. He was breathing heavily, adrenaline coursing through his veins as he slowly, carefully resumed his journey in the form of a walk. There was something at the very end of the street. He could see it now, but not enough to see what it was. Gingerly he pressed on, leftover tears still defiantly spilling from his tired eyes. He moved with exhaustion toward the object, hoping to God it was not another one of them. Hoping to God it was not the one with her face.

A cool yet gentler breeze blew through the air as at last he reached what appeared to be an open casket. He sniffed and once again wiped away his tears. He had nowhere to go now but forward, despite his fear of what lay in the casket waiting for him. As he peered inside, fresh tears welled up in his eyes, and a scream stuck firmly in his throat. He was staring down at his own lifeless body, his eyes eternally shut and his body eternally still. He dropped to his knees, pleading silently for this to end. He closed his eyes and cried out wordlessly once more, covering his face with his hands.

Whispers appeared again, trickling into his ears like drops of poison. He shouted for them to shut up, to leave him, but they only grew louder. Slow footsteps surrounded him in multitudes, and suddenly he felt hands on his back, his head, his legs, his arms, his hands, and his face, all around him. They were pulling, pushing, ripping at his clothes and skin.

Face us. Face us. Look into our eyes and face us!

"Stop. Please, stop. Stop this! Leave me alone! Forgive me! Please!" he sobbed as they grabbed at him.

More hands were on his back now, and with one great force they pushed him forward. As if in slow motion he began to fall forward, slowly, slowly, falling toward the ground...

...towards the casket...

...and there the girl was, with her face... and a young boy with his and an older man with his...

No... He hadn't killed them... He hadn't killed them, had he...?

His back fell against hard wood as he stared up at the faces he knew so well, even as they were frozen in death.

With your obsession, you killed us. Now, with your obsession, we will kill you.

His head throbbed mercilessly and his violet eyes shot open. His blankets were wet and smelled of sweat. They were twisted tightly about him so that it was all he could do to draw a breath of air. Through the walls, he could hear the soft murmur of birds and voices, hers among them. And both of those boys's; as well.

He pushed the blanket away from him, sitting with a hand to his chest. Horrible, horrible, horrible. What had prompted such a dream? It wasn't as if he wanted to dream something like that, nor had he been thinking about his life before this when he had fallen asleep.

Slowly, he stretched himself out as he stood from his bed and his long night's sleep. He moved towards where he kept his clothes and began to pull the top out when he stopped. The shoulder had a rip in it. He swallowed hard and put that top away and went to take out another, one that wasn't damaged.

Finished dressing, he left his room and walked into the common one. She looked up at him and smiled. "Sleep well after your walk?" her voice asked.

After his... walk...? He stared blankly at the floor for a moment before sitting and taking a cup of tea. His walk. He had taken a walk. A walk on a deserted street. A deserted street where his past had come back to haunt him, to kill him, to seek its revenge upon him. But it was just a dream, the more reasonable part of his mind screamed. If it was a dream, then what did it mean? One didn't have a dream like that for no reason, and he certainly hadn't taken the walk that she had mentioned. Or had he. So was it a dream? Or was it not?

...or did he even really want to know...?

Because even if he could... If he could understand his dream, if he could know exactly what it meant...

...would he really want to?

~Owari~