

Every Rose Has Its Thorns

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Come journey inside the mind of Kurama to learn the secret behind his weapon of choice, the Rose Whip. Told in a rather...unique perspective for an interview.

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Disclaimer: I do not own YuYu Hakusho or any of its characters. These all belong to the show's creator, Yoshihiro Togashi.

The Moonless Night: This story/interview was inspired by a 97-episode marathon of YuYu Hakusho coupled with some intensive study for my biology class. The combination of watching everyone's favorite redheaded kitsune and ponder some difficult questions concerning plant growth gave rise to this loosely fact-based fiction. I hope that you will find it entertaining, if not informative. As always, **Read and Review!**

Every Rose Has its Thorns

Today was beautiful! The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and there was even a light breeze to delight one with its gentle caresses. Spring was upon the land in all her splendor the grass growing green and buds making their appearance on the tender shoots of the cherry trees. It was the perfect day to be lying on a grassy knoll or hiking the forest paths. So, what was I doing in this dreary place?

Do not get me wrong. This quaint little restaurant with its brightly colored décor and delicious foods was a far cry from being a dungeon, but it may as well be the darkest pit of the Makai as far as I was concerned. My doom had been laid before me in paper form. It was a cruel twist of fate that my identity and, subsequently, my very life as Suuichi Minamino should rest upon something as mundane as a note left in my school locker. I slipped the parchment from my jacket pocket and read it once more:

You don't know me but I know you, Youko Kurama. Meet me at the ramen shop on fourth and main this Friday at five or your identity becomes public.

The Moonless Night

The note was simple and to the point, scribbled on a piece of notebook paper in a nearly incomprehensible scrawl as though the author had been in a great hurry. A voice in the corner of my mind snarled at this thought, angered at the prospect of being considered low enough to not take the time to concoct a more tasteful text or, at the very least, to write it in a more eloquent script. Youko did

not take kindly to those who underestimated him in life, be it on the field of battle or on the social scales.

I quickly pulled his anger back, secluding it to the most secret places of my psyche. This “Moonless Night” could not know the danger the note invited from my darker self, and doubtless, did not deserve the horror the threatened to break forth.

Outside, the town clock struck five and I found myself watching the shop door with a sense of deepening dread, as though I awaited the coming of a powerful demon. Such thoughts were absurd since the author of the note had to be human. If a demon had sought my attention, few would have the tact to request it. Fewer still would be willing to write such a beckons in the human tongue, especially on paper made in the Ningenkai.

The author had to be human...it was the only logical solution.

The minutes dragged on, feeling like an eternity in passing. Five, ten, and soon twenty minutes had passed without a single person walking through the door. It was a decidedly slow afternoon for the ramen shop. After some time, I began to toy with the idea of Yusuke or Kuwabara walking through the door and proclaiming this some childish prank, offering an ice cream or pastry as a well-earned apology. Unfortunately, this was no joke.

She arrived half an hour late, red faced and out of breath.

The girl that walked through the swinging glass door was not striking, save for the fact that she wore a long coat that looked better suited to winter snows than the pleasant days of spring. Her hair was dark, falling a little past shoulder length, and her complexion was light. Her eyes were the strangest feature on her face being caught somewhere between brown and green. One might call them hazel but that just was not the right shade. She was a foreigner in Japan, no doubts about that.

Walking straight to my table the girl took the chair across from me and sat down, smiling all the while. It was disturbing in some small way, having this stranger smile at me like that, but I swallowed my discomforts and tried my best not to blush. “The Moonless Night, I presume?” I asked in the most chipper voice I could manage. The girl nodded, still smiling like a Cheshire cat. I coughed nervously and cleared my throat to try to hide it. “Well, you are a bit late. Were you held up in traffic?” (Traffic being the mad crush of people that walk Tokyo after schools and work let out.)

The smile disappeared and Moonless Night shook her head vigorously. “No, sir,” she sighed. “It was my fault I was late. I am a college student you see, with classes at night and in the early morning. My teachers have been a bit demanding lately and, well, there I times I think they are all out to get me. I had three tests yesterday, all in different classes, and one more this morning. As one might guess, I have not slept much in the last few days, so, when I got home from work today I kind of fell asleep.” She paused to sigh again and lowered her gaze to the table. “I overslept and had to run the whole way here. Gomen nasai, Minamino-kun! I did not mean to inconvenience you at all.”

She bowed in formal apology and my jaw nearly hit the floor. I stared at the girl dumbfounded. She left a note in my locker threatening to reveal my identity to the world if I did not meet her here and she did not want to inconvenience me! What did she think this whole thing was? A walk in the park perhaps? Guessing the directions of my thoughts Moonless Night spoke, her head still bowed.

"I only wanted to know more about you, Minamino-kun. I meant no harm...really."

"B-but...the note!" My voice shook and I quickly snapped my mouth shut, nearly biting my tongue in the process. I would not stutter at the girl like some fool. That was something even Suuichi did not tolerate.

"Hai, the note. . . . I am sorry about that too." She finally lifted her eyes from the table to pin me with more uncomfortable staring. "It was the only way I could think of getting you to talk to me. I do know the truth though, Kurama." The last sentence was pitched low, meant only for my sensitive hearing and no others. She truly did know my identity to know I could hear things in that range of decibels.

My hand shook as a tremor of fear swept through me and I clenched it into a tight fist to try to hide it. Moonless Night glanced once at the fist and paled ever so slightly. It was nearly imperceptible, even to my trained eyes. I had not meant to frighten her but the occurrence did fascinate me. How could she know of Youko and yet show so little fear towards me? It was slightly unnerving. This girl was a mystery that I had to solve if I wished to keep my identity secret and my sanity whole.

"What do you want with me?" I finally asked.

Moonless Night sighed in what I took to be relief, speaking in a cheery tone that confused my perception of her even more. "I already told you. I want to know more about you, Minamino-kun. I want to know how someone like you ended up here and. . . ." she leaned in close to whisper softly to me, "I want to know how that whip of yours works. I must admit that it fascinates me to no end."

I gawked at her in disbelief, shocked and unable to formulate an answer. Meanwhile, Moonless Night kept a quiet vigil, awaiting my answer. The minutes dragged on and she finally sighed and leaned back in her chair. "You don't believe me but I am telling you the truth. Those facts are all I want from you. You have my word that I will never tell a soul your secret, even if you choose not to tell me yours. I am not that kind of person."

Leaning back in my chair, I eyed her uncertainly, weighing her character in the way that only a kitsune can. Sifting through the countless clues left in her words, her posture, and even in her scent. What I found shocked me more than her requests. . . . She was telling me the truth.

Slowly, I nodded my assent. The effect was instantaneous as the smile returned. She leaned forward, eagerly awaiting the tale that was soon to follow. With a sigh, I followed suit, pitching my voice low to avoid any eavesdroppers from overhearing our conversation and my deepest secret. While the shop Moonless Night had chosen for our meeting was small, it was far from empty and, as they say, even the walls have ears.

Carefully, I unfolded my story to the girl, avoiding points that were too dark to speak of and telling her only what was necessary (which was still more than I was comfortable with telling anyone). With skill and finesse, I laid the tale of my life as Youko before her, beginning with my escape from the bounty hunter and ending with the reawakening of Kurama a few short years ago. Throughout, I was careful to omit my adventures with a certain Spirit Detective and my friends. She had not mentioned any of them yet, not even in passing, and I did not want to put any ideas into her head. As my narrative drew to its close, I was pleased to find our roles reversed. I was the one smiling and she was the one gaping like a . . . well

. . . like a schoolgirl.

Moments dragged on in silence and I could almost hear the gears in her mind turning. She would not speak, not until she had sifted through every grain of information given her. After several long, tense moments, she spoke.

“Your story was absolutely incredible Kurama, but you have forgotten something.” I cringed at the casual use of my demon name but motioned for her to continue, sure that I had left no key points out. “You have yet to tell me how your rose whip works.”

I cringed again. It wasn't a secret I wanted to share, but she was insistent. Taking another stock of her conviction to keep my secrets, I found myself sighing again. “I was hoping you had forgotten about that little detail.”

She laughed and actually clapped her hands, thoroughly enjoying this state of matters. “I don't forget so easily, Suuichi-sama. Please, tell me how it works.”

So, she doesn't forget things easily. . . . I would have to see about that, there were several ways to skin a fox as the old saying went, and the same thing applied to humans. Some herbs had very . . . interesting effects on the human mind, and it just so happened that I was carrying a few of said herbs with me now. A contingency plan, one might say.

“Well, Suuichi?” At least she was using my proper name again, howbeit in far too friendly a manner. That too would soon be remedied.

With an exaggerated sigh, I slumped in my chair. “You win Miss Night, but before we begin, do you mind if I order some drinks? My throat has grown dry with this constant speech and you yourself could probably use some refreshments after your run. It wouldn't do to have you collapse from dehydration.”

The girl nodded her assent and I chuckled silently to myself. The trap was laid and now, I needed only patience and some minor slight of hand to close it. I smiled, but not for the reason the girl thought, and beckoned to a nearby waiter. As the man approached our table, I inquired as to her beverage of choice. “Is tea all right for you?” To my surprise, she shook her head.

“No. It is, quite literally, against my religion,” the girl replied.

Drat. It would be harder to hide my deed without the overpowering taste of tealeaves and fruit juice would likely create a bad reaction chemically speaking . . . perhaps a glass of milk? Yes, that just may work. The waiter arrived at the table and bowed low, asking humbly if he could be of any assistance.

I nodded. “The young lady and I are thirsty. Could you bring us two drinks? A glass of milk and a cup of oolong tea should do quite nicely.” The waiter nodded and turned quickly on his heel, heading to the kitchens to fetch the order. Watching him from the corner of my eye, I waited until he was out of earshot before leaning forward to begin my explanation. The girl followed suit.

“Miss Night, you must understand that what I am about to tell you is to be kept in utmost secrecy. A fighter revealing his techniques is akin to a magician revealing the illusions of his magic; others frown

upon it and see it as a shameful and even traitorous act. If any of my fellow kitsune learned that I betrayed their trust . . . let us just say that my fate would not be pleasant. You must swear to never reveal what you are about to learn to anyone. Do you understand?"

"I do and I promise," came the answer.

"Good." I paused to glance once more around the room. What I had said was no lie. I risked more than she realized in telling her this, even with what I had planned for her in the near future. Satisfied that no one was listening, I turned my gaze back to the girl and began.

"As you may know, I am rather fond of biology and botany but what you probably do not realize is the extent of my knowledge in both areas. You see, these fields are particular favorites of my people and we are referred to as the nature sprites of the Makai by fellow demons because of it. Every kitsune is born with an innate ability to manipulate plants at a molecular level, to change them to suit our needs. It is this ability, born of my demonic past, which is the key to creating the rose whip.

"I make a few small changes to the rose at its most fundamental levels, making it into something that is similar to ivy or a creeper vine more than anything else. After these changes are made, a small amount of reikai is introduced (human reikai being far more volatile than demon yuki), causing the plant to grow at an accelerated rate. Since this growth is artificially induced, it is easily controlled and, thus, can reach nearly any length desired.

"The hard part is reversing the changes made and reverting the whip back to its original form. This step requires infinite skill, advanced knowledge of a rose's molecular structure, as well as fine control of one's reikai. It is a dangerous process, this reversion, since misplacing a single neutron in this complex web creates something far more deadly than the whip . . . radiation. A radioactive rose." I fell silent then, partly to gage Moonless Night's reaction and partly because I had spied the waiter returning with our drinks. I was not disappointed on either count. The drinks were delivered, the waiter bowing and making his retreat, and Moonless Night simply stared into space. Her face was blank but her eyes told the truth of the matter. She was once again mulling over the information she had just been received like a dog gnawing a bone.

Taking advantage of the moment's reprieve, I picked up her glass of milk, palming my herbal concoction into the liquid as my fingers brushed the rim. I hoped that she would not notice the bitter after-taste they would leave until it was too late. Otherwise, I may have trouble on my hands in a few minutes. . . .

"It suits you, Kurama." Her voice came suddenly, startling me so badly that I very nearly yipped like the kitsune I was. Thankfully, I was able to hide my start behind the sound of someone's glass breaking on the other side of the room. A waiter had dropped a stack of plates and was now apologizing to the furious manager. Silently, I thanked the lad for the cover he provided and vowed to leave a generous tip for him. It was the least I could do for my unwitting rescuer.

"What?" I finally stammered to Miss Night.

"Your weapon, Kurama. It suits you well." Moonless Night smiled. "The rose is a beautiful flower but its beauty is deceiving. Hidden behind the soft petals and pleasing smell are thorns waiting for some unwary traveler to try picking the rose. It is just like you.

“On the surface you are the quiet pretty-boy of everyone's dreams, polite and calm no matter the situation, but below that . . . below that a demon lies sleeping. Youko is hidden just like the thorns of the rose, waiting for some poor fool to come and stir up trouble for you Suuichi. Only after they threaten you does he make his appearance. Am I right?”

Blinking, I gapped at the girl finding myself at an utter loss of words. Just where had THAT come from? I had never looked at it that way before, but she was right. The rose allegory did fit my situation perfectly. Smiling, the girl turned philosopher spoke again. “Why did you choose the rose as your weapon, Suuichi? Inquiring minds want to know.”

Taking a long swig of my tea, I recovered my composure slightly and tried my best to formulate an answer for her. “I do not rightly know, but I think it was because I wanted people to know that even beauty could be deadly. Have you ever heard the old saying, ‘The only difference between medicine and poison is the dose’? Well, that is very true. The rose may be beautiful but, as you said, it has its thorns.”

Moonless Night nodded at this and actually laughed. “I should have suspected as much.” She opened her mouth to say more, but her voice faded into a deep sigh. The clock outside had just struck eight, its tones still ringing through the tiny shop. “It is getting late. I should have let you go a long time ago.” She stood, pulling her jacket closer about her and smiling that strange smile of hers. “Don't you worry about any of this Minamino-kun. You kept your word and I will keep mine. Not a word of this will pass to anyone.”

“B-but I . . .!” I stuttered. She could not leave yet! Her drink had not been touched. All of my well-laid plans were beginning to crumble around me. She simply must drink the concoction! She must not be allowed to remember the night's events or my life, Suuichi's life, would be in grave danger. Once again, providence saved me. She coughed; her throat no doubt parched by the combination her earlier run and the long stint of talking. Her own body would be the tool of her undoing.

Quickly I stood, proffering her the milk with one hand and patting her back with the other. “Here, drink this. It will help.”

She nodded and quickly drained the cup, seeking to stifle the itch in her throat. Draining the last of the dregs, she grimaced, tasting too late the bitter tang of my herbs. Her eyes widened as she realized what I had done and she pinned me with a gaze fit to kill the strongest demon. “What did you put in the . . .” Her voice faltered and she swayed on her feet, dangerously close to passing out. I grabbed her arm, swinging it over my shoulder into a one-person carry and whispered in her ear.

“No rose is without its thorns, but sometimes one cannot tell they have been pricked until it is too late. Beware the rose.”

Her half-lidded eyes found mine one last time before she succumbed to the effects of my potion, slipping into a blissful unconsciousness. When she awoke, she would have no memory of this night's event and, most likely, no memory of the last few weeks. They would write it off as stress from her college classes. After all, she herself had said that the teachers were handing out homework left and right. If she did remember anything about me, it would be dream-like recollections that she herself would blame on some stress related delusion. I myself would help to propagate the falsehood.

The whole commotion had already attracted several onlookers; all it would take would be a few well-placed words to convince them I was a stranger, a boy set up on a blind date by friends, and that she had collapsed after complaining of a headache (a common symptom to those suffering from extreme stress). I do not know her well and do not know what the problem could be. A nameless face that she could forget as easily as any other, no need to tell her I was even here. . . .

Not even the herbs would pose a problem. They were of the Makai and, as such, unknown in this realm. I doubt that human doctors could even detect their presence. It was the perfect plan.

Lowering the girl to the ground, I plastered a panicked look on my face and raised my voice so that the entire restaurant could hear me. "She won't wake up! I think something is wrong. Someone call an ambulance and hurry!"

Some people rushed to grab their cell phones and others came to my aid, leading the "panicked boy" away from the unconscious girl with consoling pats and soothing words. The place was a bustle of confusion after that, allowing for an easy escape.

Dropping a large tip on a nearby table (true to my word), I slipped out the door and into the night.

Every rose has its thorns. Beware the rose.

The Moonless Night: Just to clear up a few questions before they are asked:

The "Moonless Night" of the story IS me, from her appearance to her school troubles. It is a self-insertion into the fic, but hopefully done with some taste. I really wanted to do this interview with Kurama in a different manner than those traditionally used (AKA: the screenplay format. Ex: **Moonless Night:** blah, **Kurama:** baa, **Moonless Night:** blah blah) because I really don't like reading those. The first person narrative where I was the outsider was my solution to the problem.

This is a one-shot. I do not plan to continue the story, even in spin-off form. Sorry, but Moonless Night has a boyfriend who might get jealous if he reads about his girl flirting with certain anime characters.

Regarding my story, "On the Other Hand": I seem to have written myself into a corner on this one. Any suggestions people could make on directions they would like to see the story take or possible scene ideas would be much appreciated.

That concludes this Q&A section. Please remember to review before leaving. Thanks and ja ne!