***“Bakumonogatari”***

Written by Mackhenzie Rhod Yuson

**ACT I**

Every night… for months now… I experience the same dream. Or rather, I get the same dream right after a nightmare. Though I have no recollection of the nightmares when I wake up, I remember the dream right after so vividly. A beautiful girl, about my age or maybe older. Long black hair, eyes as vibrant as stars in the night sky, and a smile that radiates a gentle warmth. That's right… I remember… that smile. Every time I meet her in the dream, she had a mesmerizing smile on her face.

***June 15th, 2019***

I had the same dream again. But this time, I got to talk to her. She seemed like a very pleasant young lady. But I find it strange that she greeted me as if it wasn’t the first time we talked.   
  
“Glad to see you’re doing well, (player name). It has been a while.”

She says as her face is lit up with a beaming smile.

“Uhmm… Y-You know me?”

I asked her with a puzzled look on my face.

“Ah, I see. Well then, let me introduce myself. The name is Yume. You must be wondering what all of this is about?”

“Nice to meet you, you already know my name so I guess it won’t be necessary to tell you. And yes, I have been wondering what this is all about.”

I wanted answers, but I wasn’t so sure how to act around her. Its not like I ever had problems talking to people. Its just that, none of this is real. I am dreaming after all. I am aware of that.

“Hmm. I wish I can tell you right now. But it looks like you aren’t ready yet. But don’t worry, it may take some time but you will definitely get the answer you are looking for.”  
  
She says as she tilts her head adorably.

“...And besides, Its almost time for you to wake up. Don’t worry, you will see me again. I’ll be here as always waiting for you.”

As the dream fades out and the sound of my morning alarm fades in, I come to my senses. I wonder where this is gonna take me.

**ACT II**

***June 22nd, 2019***

This time, we got to talk a little bit more. Yume asked how my day went and intently listened as I talked about my mundane daily routine and what went on during the day at work. The thought of all this being weird is still in the back of my mind. But oddly enough, I am at peace. I feel like a little bit of weight was taken off my shoulders. On top of that, she is a sight for sore eyes. Now that I think about it, I kinda wish she was real.

“Sounds like you had an eventful day.” she says with an innocent smile on her face.

“Really? To me it’s just like any other day really. For me, seeing you here is the best part of my day.” I responded.

Her vibrant smile turned into a more faint one with a hint of concern when I said that. Did I happen to say something to offend her?

I hesitantly broke the awkward silence by asking random questions about her. Which she responded to vaguely. Well, some of them at least.

“Hmmm… I don’t know if its the right time to answer these questions now. But I can tell you this, I am here because of you. It may be hard to take my word right now but know that my intentions are not to cause you any harm.” she says as she caresses my cheek gently.

“Intentions might not even be the right way to put it. Ah, that's it. Purpose. I have a purpose that I need to fulfill. All you need to know for now is that whatever this purpose is, it is for you.” she adds with the usual smile on her face this time.   
  
“It is frustrating to not know. But for now I will choose to trust you, Yume.”

“Thank you. Like I said, when it is time I will tell you everything about me and my purpose. It’s almost time for you to wake up soon. As always, I will be here waiting.”

I once again, wake up to my alarm. Same old routine as always but this time, I have something to look forward to at the end of the day…

**ACT III**

***May 19, 2018 (a year ago)***

I feel empty… I am supposed to be sad. Devastated even. Maybe I’m still in shock. I had never imagined that this day would come. As the minutes go by, it slowly sinks in… I am alone now. The only person that matters to me, the only one I wanted to spend the rest of my life with, no longer wants to be a part of the future I envisioned for us. It was the meaning of my life… now it's gone. As the pain settled in, the tears followed. I know this is real. But a part of me still hopes this was all a dream.

***July 2nd, 2019 (present day)***

It was the same as usual when I fell asleep. But this time for some reason, I remember the nightmare. It's a bit foggy, but I think I know what it was about. Because the feeling I got from it was a very familiar feeling. The pain and the crippling weight of your entire world falling apart on you. It was just like that day… No matter, I will be seeing Yume soon. That's weird, she’s usually already here by this time.

“Hey… Sorry I kept you waiting.” Yume appears behind me, visibly exhausted.

“Are you alright? You don’t look alright to me that's for sure.”

“I’m… fine. Just a little winded, that's all. Don’t worry about it.”   
  
She was obviously lying. But the fact that I can remember the nightmare I just had and my suspicion that Yume has something to do with all of this, I think it would be safe to assume that something is going terribly wrong.

“I know I just got here, but it's about time for you to wake up.” says Yume with a forced smile on her face.  
  
“I know you’re smart so you’ll probably have your answer by the next time we meet. I promise to tell you everything by then. But for now please, you need to leave. It's not safe for you to be here right now.”

As I woke up, I sat up to gather my thoughts. Thinking about what Yume said before I woke up, I got reminded of an old folktale. About a mythical creature who devours nightmares. The “Baku”.

**ACT IV**

***July 3rd, 2019***

I spent the entire day reading up on a mythical creature called the “Baku”. The legends suggest that this creature devours people's nightmares helping them to sleep peacefully. In the legends however, it is said that the Baku can also devour someone’s hopes and dreams when they are not satisfied. Yume does not seem to be like that. She only takes my nightmares and even lets me remember our interactions in the dream. But… why? I thought about it for a while and as the hours went by, I realized it's almost time for me to go to sleep.

Yume was already there when I arrived. She still looks weak and exhausted. This is it. The moment of truth.  
  
“Yume… you look just as exhausted as yesterday.”

“Don’t worry about me. What’s more important is that you already have the answer, am I right?”

“Yes.” I said hesitantly.

“I am a Baku. But you probably know that already. We devour nightmares but some of us also devour hopes and dreams. As for me, I only want to help you. I want to ease the pain in your heart.” she explains as she looks at me with a soft expression.   
  
“As you can see, I have become weaker as my powers are almost spent. We “devour” nightmares, but it's better to describe it as “subduing” the nightmare and sealing it within ourselves.”

“So that means, everytime I have a nightmare…”

Yume looks at me with a faint smile. She was doing all of this for my sake. Just because I can’t let go. Because I choose to ignore and pretend it never happened instead of embracing the pain and moving on. She is fighting with her life, just to save me from myself.

“Hey now. Don’t make that face. None of this is your fault. This is my purpose. The reason I exist. I am not bound to fulfill this purpose. But I choose to do it, because it's you.“

Hearing this, I can’t help but shed a tear. Because it’s me? What does she mean by that? But somehow, I am glad.

“You are doing this, because it's me?” I asked.  
  
“I don’t know what it is and how it started. But as the time went by I felt a sense of warmth in my heart whenever I got to see you. It brought me joy and pushed me to do more for you. I feel upset whenever I see your nightmares because I know how much sadness it brought you.”

I wanted to say something, but I couldn't find the words. Without fully realizing it, I have already embraced her. I have never felt this valued for a very long time. I want to be with Yume. But I know we don’t have much time left.

“Yume… I want to apologize. But that would mean I don’t appreciate everything you have done for me. So rather than that, I want to thank you… for everything. You were there when no one else was. You protected me from being consumed by the pain in my heart. I understand that you are unable to exist in reality but a part of me wishes you were real. So I can be with you in reality.”

I expected Yume to show me her usual gentle smile as a response. But I never expected tears in her eyes as she looked at me.   
  
“I wish… I was real too. So I can ease your pain in a way that truly matters.” she says with a slight tremble in her voice.  
  
“Now, please live on happily. Live your life and seek happiness for yourself. That is all I wish for. My power has severely weakened, I will no longer be able to meet you like this. I will spend whatever remains of it to seal this nightmare away for good. And then, I will cease to exist.”

“Thank you, Yume. I know I have already caused you so much trouble, but I was hoping you can grant me one last wish.”   
  
She looks at me with a confused smile.  
  
“You know I will do anything for you.” she sighs and smiles at me.  
  
“Please let me keep this memory of you. After you cease to exist, I want to remember you. I want to remember the one who saved my life. I want to remember the reason why I am able to find my happiness. Please… Yume.”

She caresses my face just like she did when I first met her.

“If that’s what you wish for, then yes I will grant it to you. The thought of being remembered makes me happy.” she says with her usual gleeful smile.  
  
“It’s almost time for me to go. I’m so glad to have spent all this time with you.”   
  
“I’m also very glad to have met you, my dear Yume.”

I had tears in my eyes when I woke up. That is the last time I will ever see her. I want to burn her face into my memory. I don’t ever want to forget that smile. From now on, I will find happiness. I will live my life and pursue my dreams. Because that is what Yume would have wanted.