

# Inuyasha Basket

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*Tohru goes to visit her cousin (Kagome) with Yuki and Kyou. Haru and Momiji join up with them and instead of seeing Kagome... Well, read it!*

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<b>Chapter 1 - The well</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - strange transformations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - meetings</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - worrying</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - the plot thickens</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - Snake meets Dog</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 7 - to the fuedal era</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter 8 - hand of fate</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 9 - Final Transformations</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Chapter 10 - Ecstasy</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 11 - time's running out</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter 12 - Merge</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 13 - couples forming</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter 14 - operation has begun</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Chapter 15 - Disaster Strikes</b>	<b>49</b>

# 1 - The well

The pairings are as follows:

Yaoi Pairings:

Ayame and Sesshomaru (\*glee\*)

Shigure and Miroku

Kyou and Inuyasha

Akito and Naraku

Non-yaoi pairings:

Momiji and Rin

Yuki and Sango

Haru and Kagome

Hatori and Kikyou

I'm going to be busy...

Chapter One

The Well

Tohru sat nervously at the table, fiddling with her chopsticks. She had to tell them that she needed to do something today. She never really liked doing this. She knew that Shigure and Yuki had been somewhat okay before she had moved in, and Kyou had lived on his own in the mountains, but she still didn't like leaving them like this.

But her cousin had been sick for so long that she was beginning to get worried. Her cousin seemed to be doing so poorly in school and in her own health that Tohru was worried about her, so wanted to go visit her and wish her well. Every time she had called asking about her, she had always been too sick to answer the phone.

"Um... Shigure..." she said.

He looked up from his bowl. "Yes, Tohru-kun?"

She fidgeted nervously. "I need some time to myself today, if that would be all right."

"Of course, Honda-chan," Yuki said. "May I ask where you're going today?"

She flushed. "Oh, it's just that my cousin has been sick an awful lot—that's what her grandfather said—and I just wanted to pay her a visit; that's all."

"If you don't mind me asking, who's your cousin?"

"Oh, she doesn't go to our school. She lives on the other side of town..."

"Are you going there all by yourself?" he asked.

"Oh, it's not that far. I was planning on taking the bus, so..."

Yuki cocked his head slightly. "Honda-san, may I escort you?"

Kyou's face heated. "No way! Don't let that damn rat take you there. I'll escort you, Tohru-chan!"

Tohru blushed. "Oh, I don't need an escort..."

"The stupid cat would only get you lost, Honda-san," Yuki said in his quiet, calm way. Kyou's rage escalated

"Why don't you both go?" Shigure suggested. "Or, I suppose I could take Tohru-kun..."

That settled it, and after Tohru had cleaned up the kitchen and did a load of laundry, she, Yuki, and Kyou were walking to the bus stop together. Tohru couldn't stop herself from repeatedly telling them that they really didn't need to come with her. It really wasn't necessary, after all. It was really sweet, though, that they would be concerned about her well-being.

She had left the address and a phone number with Shigure, just in case, and had made sure there was at least lunch in the refrigerator. She shouldn't be too long. She knew that her cousin was sick, and needed rest, so she was only planning on being there for an hour, at most. She wondered if there was anything she was forgetting, but she really couldn't think of anything.

When they were waiting for their bus, Tohru spotted two familiar faces. "Momiji! Haru!" she called, waving. Momiji waved back and sprinted madly up to Tohru. Haru followed at a more reasonable pace.

"Tohru-kun, where are you going?" Momiji asked. "We were just coming to see you!"

She bit her lower lip. Oh, dear. She was going to visit her sick cousin, and they had come to visit her...

"Get lost," Kyou said, in his typically harsh manner. "We're goin' to visit Tohru's sick cousin, and we don't need you there."

"Then we can wait for you at Shigure-san's house," Haru offered.

Tohru hated to not be there while they waited. It was so rude... "No, no. That's not necessary. My cousin is sick, so I didn't want to bother her too much anyway. So long as you're quiet, and maybe stay outside for a few minutes while I see her, you could... come along with us?"

"Yeah!" Momiji cried. He began chattering about something unimportant to Tohru. Haru looked at Yuki, then looked away. He wondered if Yuki would ever accept, or at least acknowledge, his love for him.

Kyou was the first one to spot the bus. "Hey, it's here." The bus pulled up to a stop, opening its doors. Passengers spilled out, and the kids piled in, paying the fare. Tohru had to pay attention now. She was the only one who knew where the stop was.

Kyou and Yuki were engaged in a verbal battle. Yuki always won those too. Momiji and Tohru talked together, Momiji sucking on one of the seemingly infinite candies he carried around with him. Haru simply gazed out the window, appearing as though he were lost in thought. But White Haru was always like that.

After a long but enjoyable bus ride, Tohru recognized the stop and pulled on the cable, signaling the bus driver to stop for them. The kids filed out and Tohru led the way to the Higarashi shrine.

"What's your cousin's name?" Haru asked her.

"Higarashi Kagame-chan," Tohru answered. "Her family are the keepers of the sacred shrine here." As if she needed to point that out.

"Oh, cool!" Momiji cried, beginning to dart out ahead. Kyou pulled him back. "Aw..."

"Don't go dartin' off like that," Kyou snapped.

"Waaa! Kyou's being mean to me!"

"Shuddup!"

"Waaa!"

"Please stop fighting," Tohru said. Kyou and Momiji immediately stopped. Kyou moved away from the

younger boy, sulking. Tohru smiled. They were coming to the steps now. Yuki stayed by her side, in case she tripped. Tohru was kind of klutzy, after all. Momiji seemed to be having a grand time just on the steps, though. He was talking excitedly to no one in particular, popping another sucker in his mouth. When they came to the top of the steps, Momiji grinned and immediately took off to explore. Haru followed him to keep him out of trouble. "Could you just stay out here for a while? And try not to fight each other?" Tohru asked Yuki and Kyou. They promised to do their best, then shot each other glares when Tohru's back was turned. Tohru knocked apprehensively on the door. Sota answered. It had been a while since they had seen each other, but Sota recognized Tohru immediately. "Tohru-chan!" he said, smiling as he stepped aside for her. "How have you been?" "I'm great," Tohru said, returning the warm smile. It faded when she thought of why she was here, though. "How's everyone else?" "Tohru-kun? Is that you?" Grandpa called. "Come in here!" Tohru quickly took off her shoes and followed Sota into the living room. "It's been a long time, Tohru. How are things?" They were referring to how things had been since her mother had died. "Oh, it's really great..." "I hear you were living with a family called Sohma. Am I correct?" She blinked. Gossip really spread in her family. "Uh, yes. Sohma-kun and Kyou-chan, and two of their cousins, are waiting for me. They escorted me here, and I said I wouldn't be too long. How's Kagome-kun?" "Why don't you bring them in, Tohru?" he asked, ignoring her question. But, Tohru, being Tohru, didn't notice his clever evasion. She nodded. "Of course." She opened the door, about to call for them, but didn't see them anywhere. What had happened?

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Meanwhile...

It seemed that Tohru had not even shut the door before Kyou and Yuki were arguing again. Kyou couldn't seem to help picking fights with Yuki, and Yuki was too easily pulled into them. Yuki suddenly broke off mid-sentence, looking around. "What now, you damn rat?" Kyou taunted. The rat held up a finger for silence. "Listen." "To what? I don't hear anything." He gave the cat a serious look. "Exactly." Momiji's chatter, giggles, and general horse play (or, rabbit play) had ceased altogether. And Haru was no where to be seen either. They immediately took off in search of their younger cousins.

Meanwhile again...

Momiji seemed intent on exploring every inch of the shrine. He looked into the store room, but immediately got bored upon seeing it and moved on to the sacred tree. He stared at it for a moment. The branches were too high up to climb, though, so he moved on. He opened the door to what he assumed to be another store room. It was dark inside. He plunged into the darkness, Haru yelling at him to stop. When Haru came inside, Momiji was peering over the well. He had a pebble in his hand. He dropped it over the edge, leaning forward. "Momiji!" Haru called, seeing that the foolish rabbit was about to fall. Momiji looked up and plunged over the edge. Haru dove, reaching downwards. He barely caught

Momiji's left ankle. He tottered for a moment, then he, too, fell down the well.

Tohru put on her shoes and ran outside. "Sohma-kun! Kyou!" she called. "Haru! Momiji!"

Yuki heard her and called, "Honda-san!"

She came running to where she heard his voice. "Is something wrong? Where are Momiji and Hatsaharu?"

"We don't know. We're looking for them."

Kyou ran up to them. "Have you seen them?" he asked.

Yuki shook his head. "No."

Tohru began to grow more and more concerned. "Oh, no! I hope they're all right!" She looked around, and spotted an open door. They had to be in there! She hurried over to it, the boys right at her heels. She pushed the door open wide for more light, and they looked around. There was only an old well in here, and no Momiji or Haru.

Tohru's eyes fell on something. She rushed down the stairs. It wasn't... was it? One of Momiji's candies, lying right beside the well. She peered over the edge, leaning down over it. "Momiji! Haru!" She leaned over a bit farther, squinting in the dim light. "Are you there? Are you all right?"

"Tohru! Don't do that!" Kyou yelled. Yuki and Kyou ran over to her, intent on pulled her away. Then she slipped and fell down with a cry, right as they had both gotten a hold on either arm. Tohru didn't weigh very much, but they were already off-balance from their sprint down and the three were pulled over the edge.

## 2 - strange transformations

Momiji looked up at the top of the well, but it wasn't dark. Strangely enough, he swore that it was sunlight filtering down through the well. Haru sighed and stood up, looking for a way out of the well. He noticed that it was strangely light inside the well. What the hell?

Momiji grabbed onto the vines and began hauling himself out. Haru ignored him and looked around the well. Maybe there was a tunnel, and this well was outside somewhere...? He looked around the small space, but didn't see anything like a tunnel. It was just a dried up old well. Except, there hadn't been vines before. Or sunlight.

Might as well take a look around. Momiji had already disappeared over the edge. "Wow!" he yelled. "Haru, come look! There's a forest up here!"

What? Haru tested one of the vines and began the climb upwards. He poked his head over the edge of the well. Sure enough, there was a forest. He blinked. How the hell had that happened? He pulled himself out of the well, landing nimbly on the grass. Momiji was running around the clearing. Had Momiji ever ran that fast before? As Haru observed him, it seemed like he was halfway... hopping as he ran. Momiji suddenly came to a stand-still, one foot raised in the air, much like a rabbit staring into the headlights of an oncoming car.

"Tohru?" he wondered, sprinting back to the well. Haru peered over the edge. Down in the well, sure enough, was Yuki, Kyou, and Tohru.

"Where are we?" Kyou demanded.

"I don't know," Haru answered.

"What the hell do you mean you `don't know'?" Kyou yelled. He began the climb upwards. Yuki helped Tohru to her feet.

"Are you all right, Honda-san?" he asked her.

She nodded. "Yes, I think so. But... where are we?"

Kyou jumped over the edge of the well. "What in hell?" he practically screeched.

Yuki resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Momiji, seeing that Tohru was all right, resumed running around in circles and eating candy in typical Momiji fashion. Haru helped Yuki and Tohru over the side of the well. They looked about at the scenery.

"Where... How... Why..." Tohru couldn't seem to decide on what question to ask first. There were so many, after all.

"Momiji, you shouldn't run around like that," Yuki said.

The bunny froze. "Why not?"

"We don't know this place, and we need to figure out how to get back."

Momiji pouted. "But I wanted to explore some more!" he whined.

Tohru walked over to Momiji. "Momiji, it may not be safe here, and I'm afraid that my aunt might worry about where we've gone. So, could you help us find out how to go back..."

"I think the important thing right now is finding out where we are," Yuki said. It was probably true, and it was also a question everyone else wanted answered as well. It seemed that Kyou was most interested in the answer, though, as he had already darted off into the forest when no one was looking, trying to get some clue as to where they were.

"Where is Kyou-kun?" Tohru wondered, looking around the clearing. The others looked as well, but no one saw him anyway.

Yuki glanced to the spot he had last seen Kyou, then into the forest. Sure enough, there was a perfectly

clear imprint of his shoe in the dirt. “Tohru, it looks like Kyou wandered off by himself. I’ll go get him—” Tohru was already off—running after Kyou. Yuki ran after her. Haru leaned against the well, considering. The obvious thing to do was to just jump back down the well. It was probably best to wait until the others returned, though. A piercing scream cut through the otherwise silent forest. Haru and Momiji were immediately up and running. Tohru had been the one that had screamed.

Tohru was ahead of Yuki, and had charged randomly through the forest in her blind search for Kyou. That stupid cat! Kyou hadn’t left a single trace of his whereabouts, and Tohru had just came after him, calling for him. No doubt, Kyou had answered, but— Yuki caught sight of Tohru just in time to see her scream. A creature like an centipede, only as big as a tree and just as thick hovered over her. “Honda-san!” Yuki cried. He leaped forward, pushing her out of the way. There was a puff of smoke and Yuki expected to be standing in a pile of his clothes, looking up at Tohru. However, nothing had seemed to change. He had successfully pushed Tohru away and after the smoke cleared, he grabbed her and kept running. The centipede was after them, though. Tohru’s ankle caught on a tree root and she fell. Yuki bent to help her, but the centipede thing was drawing near. Kyou leaped out of the underbrush. He looked frightened, but angry, too. Something was threatening Tohru—the one person who could see him as a person instead of just the outcast. She was also his only real friend. And nothing was going to harm Tohru. He made a decision, and took off his prayer beads, shoving them into his pocket. The transformation was quick, and he tore at the centipede. Yuki grabbed Tohru and they ran off, leaving Kyou to fend off the centipede. He probably stood a better chance of not getting hurt in that form than Yuki did.

They met up with Haru and Momiji. They stared at Yuki strangely. “Yuki, what happened?” Haru wondered.

Yuki frowned. “What do you mean?”

“It looks like you almost transformed, but got stuck halfway,” Momiji said, pointing.

Yuki’s frown deepened. “What?”

Tohru looked at him and her eyes widened with surprise. “Yuki…”

“What?”

“You… have a tail.”

“Wha…” He looked. Sure enough, there was a furry mousy tail—attached to him. Wonderful. In fact, he had tiny claws, small fangs, and his eye color had changed to coal black. He noticed the claws and stared at them. “How did…”

Haru frowned, an idea forming. He had to know. This was strange. He suddenly hugged Tohru. She yelped in surprise. There was a puff of black and white smoke, and when it cleared… Nothing about Haru had changed. At first glance, anyway. His hair was the same, he didn’t have a cow (er, ox) tail, no hooves, no change of eye color. In fact, the only real difference were the little horns growing out of his head.

“Ooo! I wanna hug Tohru!” Momiji lunged at her, wrapping his arms around her. She gave a cry of surprise. Another puff of smoke. Momiji looked as cute as ever. His human ears were gone, and he now had floppy yellow rabbit ears and blunt rabbit claws. He looked utterly adorable.

“Oh, Momiji, you’re so cute!” Tohru said. Apparently, everything about the centipede had been forgotten in exchange for the cuteness. While that is a pleasant exchange, it is not always the best one. Except that the threat was gone. Kyou stumbled to them. He looked severely beaten up, but he was otherwise all right. He fell. Tohru rushed to him automatically. There was the puff of smoke and there was Kyou, looking adorable. He had cat-like claws that retracted, an orange kitty tail, kitty ears, slitted pupils, and fangs.

“What the hell?” he demanded, staring at his claws, touching his ears and glaring at his tail. He looked

at Yuki, Haru, and Momiji, and was semi-consolated. It wasn't just him.

"Kyou, what happened to that monster?"

Kyou considered demanding if she meant the centipede or his true form, then decided against it. "I think its dead," he muttered. "Let's get out of here."

"We could be home by now if you hadn't run off, stupid cat," Yuki said flatly.

Tohru shrieked, falling backwards, for behind Kyou was some kind of strange creature she didn't understand. Kyou looked behind him and jumped back, pushing Tohru away. The thing—whatever it was—lunged forward, breezing past Kyou, grabbed Tohru and leaped into the air. She was gone—just like that—screaming and struggling.

Now would be a good time to explain what had happened. Naraku had ordered one of demons to kidnap Kagome. Why was something he did not explain. The reason he had chosen this one was that it had impenetrable armor-like scales with only one blind spot. Thus, it should be fairly easy to bypass Inuyasha and kidnap Kagome. Thus, the demon's presence. Except Naraku had merely described Kagome as being dressed strangely and like a tramp, and being female. Thus, the mistake.



### 3 - meetings

Kagome had a Geometry test, so was screaming about needing to get home to take it. Inuyasha consented, but decided to complain the entire way to the well. Kagome was seriously considering “sitting” him all the way to America. The only thing stopping her was that he had agreed to let her stay for a couple days to rest, study, and take the test. Hopefully, she would pass. If not, Inuyasha was to blame.

Miroku, Sango, Shippo, and Kirara were back at Kaede's village. It had been a while since they had rested, and everyone needed it. Kagome was looking forward to a real bed, a hot bath, and home cooked food. She wasn't sure what sounded better—probably a bath, then a nap, then her mom's home cooking.

Oh, it sounded so amazingly good. She had somehow managed to tune out Inuyasha's whining with thoughts of a long bath. Her happy mood was shattered when a human girl's scream ripped through the air.

“That was a human girl,” Inuyasha said, frowning. Who would be out here?

Inuyasha sniffed the air. “There's half-demons around here.”

“What?” Kagome wondered, as they doubled their pace and headed toward the direction of the scream. It had sounded more surprised than frightened, and if it were a half-demon, there shouldn't be too much trouble. All the same, maybe they should hurry. Kagome jumped on Inuyasha's back. “What were you saying about the half-demons?”

He took off. “Half-demons. Four of them, and one human girl.”

Kagome blinked. “What...?”

Inuyasha froze for a moment, as if he had temporarily lost the scent, then found it again and took off. He followed the smell of blood. There was a torn up centipede demon, and the blood of something he didn't recognize. He looked around, listening. He heard voices, and followed them, this time more cautious. This must have been what the girl screamed about, and the half-demons must have taken care of it or something. Except that the only other blood around this place was something strange.

What was a human girl doing with a group of male half-demons anyway? He didn't smell any fear in the air, so she obviously knew them, or something. The girl screamed again, followed by the others shouting. Inuyasha leaped above the trees. There was some kind of demon reptilian bird, carrying a human girl. Should they pursue the girl, or find out about the half-demons. Probably the latter. Besides, when Inuyasha landed, he landed right in front of Kyou. Kyou instinctively laid his ears down, almost hissing at the dog, before realizing he was doing it. Instead, he pushed past Inuyasha and went chasing after Tohru.

“Hold on!” Inuyasha grabbed the cat and hauled him backwards. The two glared at each other, sizing each other up. It seemed as though they were going to stare at each other until kingdom come.

Kagome observed the half-demons and her jaw dropped. By their clothes, she could tell that they were from her time! She climbed off of Inuyasha's back. “Where... are you from?”

Yuki blinked. Momiji was the first to recover from the shock. “Where is this?” he asked her.

Kagome knew that they had to be from her time! “What year is it?”

Haru frowned. “Isn't it 1998?” \*Author's Note: Kagome's time is 1998.\*

“Not... here,” Kagome said. How had this happened? “Oh, boy...”

“What about Tohru!” Kyou screamed.

Kagome's eyes opened wide. “Honda Tohru?” she asked, looking at Kyou.

“Yes, a creature abducted her. We can't leave Honda-san with it,” Yuki insisted, but in a more charming way than Kyou.

Kagome nodded. “We need to get Sango and the others first. Follow me.” Inuyasha was already off, racing through the forest to get to the village. Kagome took the lead, leading the four modern half-demons through the forest as quickly as was safe. “How do you know Tohru-chan?”

Yuki gave Kagome the briefest overview he could of how Tohru had come to live with them and an even briefer introduction. “How do you know Honda-san?”

Kagome blinked. “I'm her cousin,” she said. “Kagome.”

“What?” Kyou exploded. “What the hell? Tohru came to visit you, and you're running around in some forest! And how the hell do we get back?”

Kagome wasn't sure how the best way to explain this was, so she just decided to blurt it out. “You see... That well that you fell through...” She assumed that they had somehow all fallen through. It was the only explanation, really. “It's a link to this world. To feudal Japan. Five hundred years ago.”

Haru frowned again. “How could that be?”

Kagome looked at the cow. She wondered how it could be that they were all half-demons in her world. “I don't really know, exactly. Except that the well is made out of wood from...” She realized that she would have to tell them the entire story now. Oh, great. “It's too long for right now. How can you be half-demons, though?”

“What...?” Haru wondered.

“Higarashi-san, could you explain this to us?” Yuki said.

Kagome groaned inwardly. And she had to explain about demons and half-demons too! Damn! This was going to be a long day. She wondered what they should do, though. Kirara was the only one who could catch up to Tohru now, and she could only take so many passengers. Of course, Inuyasha would probably pursue them, but these half-demons should stay at the village. She sighed. She should stay too. They would be needing questions answered, and she was the only one who could answer all of them. She could stay behind, just this once. She knew that Inuyasha could handle it. But why had that thing kidnapped Tohru? It was possible that it was just going to feed her to its young or something, and was avoiding the village because of Kaede. But something was nagging at her. She couldn't decide what.

“Kagome, are you all right?” Haru asked her.

“You were totally spacing out just now!” Momiji informed her.

“Tohru-kun does that too...” Kyou murmured. Tohru... For some reason, he couldn't help but blame himself.

Yuki looked anxiously off in the direction he had last seen Tohru. “Hagarashi-san, would you please tell us what is going on?”

Kagome nodded. “Sure-“

“Watch where you're going, you stupid cow!” Kyou snapped at Haru, when the ox had glanced behind, then ended up running into Kyou.

“Kyou—“ Yuki warned.

“Damn it, you're so clumsy! You could at least watch where you're going!”

Black Haru curled his fingers into a fist and swung at Kyou. Kyou dodged and threw a punch of his own. That one missed too, and the pair were now engaged in a fight. A fight—at a time like this. And it was all Kyou's fault. Yuki was getting angry, too. Tohru was much more important than this, but they had to calm Haru down to White Haru! Kagome was confused. Hadn't they been friends? What had happened? But Haru seemed... different. It was like he was an entirely different person. The Haru she had met had been quiet, calm, collected, and kind. This one was shouting obscenities, trying to kill Kyou, and was anything but calm. Momiji was undeterred. He had long ago figured out that Inuyasha was going to get back

Tohru somehow, and everything would probably be all right. This girl knew how to get back, too. He sucked on a sucker, wondering what would happen to make Haru revert back to White Haru.

“What's... going on?” Kagome finally had to ask.

“Hatsaharu has a split personality,” Momiji volunteered. Kagome didn't like that idea. She had had experience with split personality personas, and it had not been pleasant. At least Haru wasn't trying to kill everyone, and it seemed like he was only intent on beating up Kyou.

“In our family, we call this one `Black Haru,’” Yuki said. “Haru is usually easygoing, but once someone turns him black...” They had to stop this! And soon, but Haru showed no signs of going white again by himself. Usually, that happened when someone knocked him down, or there was some kind of situation... But he already knew about Tohru. That was it. As much as Yuki didn't like it, there was only one thing to do. He moved quietly, almost gliding. He hit Haru in the back with a spinning kick, knocking the ox down. Kyou froze for a moment, then started yelling at Yuki, who called him stupid and helped White Haru to his feet. “I'm sorry I did that, but...”

“I understand,” Haru said.

Kagome stood still, utterly confused. Yuki had explained it to her, but that really didn't clarify much. He would have to explain everything to her, but he seemed reluctant to talk about his family. She noticed that when he mentioned them, he passed over crucial details—like about how an ox, cat, rat, and rabbit could all be cousins. It was just too coincidental. In fact, if she disregarded the cat... “Are there any more half-demons in your family?” she asked.

Haru realized that she meant the ones cursed with the zodiac. She did ask them about that earlier. Maybe she had mistaken the curse for that? Then again, the curse was strange in this world. “Yes,” he said carefully.

“What kind of half-demons?”

Haru regarded her suspiciously. Yuki's face was stereotypically blank, but kind. He started to walk again, hinting for the others to do so as well. They did, Kagome taking the lead again. Haru walked beside her. “I suppose... You could say... A dog, a dragon, a rooster, a boar—” Kyou shuddered. “—a horse, a tiger, a ram, and a snake.”

That was... very strange. “You know, if not for Kyou, you would all make up the zodiac,” Kagome commented unwittingly.

Kyou's ears stood straight up, his fur on his tail bristled, claws extended, and his hair stood on end. “You shouldn't have said that,” Yuki said. “Kyou is very sensitive about that.”

“It's all the damn rat's fault!” Kyou screeched, pointing accusingly at Yuki. Kagome frowned, her confusion deepening. Haru sighed. Momiji bit his sucker in half and began to chew it, completely ignoring the other's talk. He had heard it all before—countless times, in fact.

Yuki seemed annoyed. “Stupid cat,” he muttered under his breath.

Kyou attacked him immediately, shouting obscenities at Yuki. Yuki dodged every blow he delivered, toying with for a bit, then kicked Kyou and sent him sprawling.

Kagome had had enough. “Stop!” she screamed, right before Kyou got up to attack Yuki again. “You are going to explain everything to me about your family, and you're going to do it now!”

The boys looked at each other. Kyou huffed indignantly, crossing his arms and turning away from the others. Yuki looked away. Momiji pulled out another sucker. Haru sighed. It seemed like he would have to explain the Sohma curse. But where to begin? He supposed, with the story of the zodiac. “Do you know the story of the cat of the zodiac?” he asked her, glancing at Kyou. They began to walk again, Kyou sulking in the back of the group. Kagome shook her head. Haru had expected as much. He told her about how the rat had tricked the cat into not going to the feast, and thus not becoming a part of the zodiac. Kagome was beginning to get an idea of where this was headed now. “Our family has a curse on it. When a member outside of our family and of the opposite sex embraces us, we turn into the

animal we are cursed by.”

“Is everyone in your family like that?” Kagome wondered. If there was, there was either some serious bestiality, a lot of gay people, or a lot of incest. The last two were true, but Kagome was not to know that, even if she wanted to.

“Only fourteen of us,” Haru answered.

Kagome felt herself growing confused again. “Fourteen? Twelve animals, plus the cat...”

“The god of the zodiac,” the ox said quietly. Yuki hid a shudder.

Momiji stopped sucking on his lollipop long enough to make a comment. “So that makes fourteen of us.”

“So... ordinarily, you turn into the actual animals, not half-demons?” the reincarnated priestess wondered, beginning to feel dizzy with the concept. And she had thought demons were weird. Cursed humans were much stranger, particularly this family, and she didn't just mean that they turned into animals.

“Yep,” Momiji confirmed. “But this is awesome. Don't I look cute?”

He did look adorable, Kagome had to admit. “Of course you do.” So, something weird was going on with their curse. She wondered why. It could just be the old well doing something, or it could be something... more. But what? The others were wondering the same thing.

“Now you have to tell us about this world,” Haru insisted.

Kagome nodded. “It's a long story.” She told them about how she had fallen down the well, about the Shikon no Tama, and all about demons and half-demons, finishing with Naraku. By the time she had finished, they had been in the village for over an hour, and Kaede was making them soup.

Some more pieces of the puzzle had fallen into place, though. Maybe, they could discover something about why the curse was placed on them, or where it came from? Or even just who had cast it. Or perhaps not. The Sohma name was, after all, Chinese, not Japanese.

It had never really bothered them before not knowing about the curse's origins, and it didn't really bother them now either. Besides, the present was more important. Even if this present was in the past. Yuki looked up at the sky, wondering about poor Tohru. Kyou was wondering the same thing. Haru, however, was unconcerned, and he and Kagome were chatting like old friends. Yuki was happy for him; he really was. Haru needed to open up to more people, but he just wished he could be less relaxed and a bit more concerned about the present!

Meanwhile...

The battle was almost pointless. The Wind Scar held no effect, Hiraikotsu just bounced off, and the Wind Tunnel was useless because of Naraku's damned bees. What the hell was he—a beekeeper? And where had all of these things come from to begin with? Miroku was considering risking the poison, but the girl was still in its grasp.

The demon just kept flying, completely unbothered by their efforts. It was like they had no choice but to just follow it. Needless to say, Inuyasha was getting more and more frustrated, so he just kept hammering it with the Wind Scar.

Finally, the demon grew annoyed and flew at Inuyasha, wrapping up a throat-soar Tohru with one of its eight arms protectively. Inuyasha dodged, using the trees for cover. It snaked through them lazily, hissing. Its breath wilted the leaves and made Tohru cough.

Inuyasha flew at it again, swinging his sword erratically. It bounced off of the demon's armored hide with such force that the fang actually bounced off of it, as if it were made of rubber. It was damned useless! He charged again, to the arm holding Tohru. Her eyes widened in fear. The thing pulled away. It was strong, but it couldn't move very fast. Maybe... it's eyes? He charged again, expecting the sword to cut

through the yellow, faceted eye. It only bounced off again, and he nearly decapitated himself. He blinked and brushed off the almost accidental suicide chill and tried the Wind Scar. Nothing. It moved its head and lunged at him. This creature had every advantage, it had seemed; it could fly, its scales were impenetrable, and nothing affected it. But it was as slow as a toad missing both hind legs, and it apparently held no demonic power. Well, that was advantageous. At least it couldn't kill Inuyasha, but he couldn't kill it either. He refused to call it a stalemate, though.

He swung the sword again, connecting with one of its arms. It only bounced again. Was there no weak point? The bees buzzed angrily around it, then it heaved a sigh, destroying some foliage, and slowly, with a rattle of scales, ascended into the air again, only to be hit in the face with Hiraikotsu.

How annoying. This nonsense was beginning to make the demon want to eat the girl and be done with it, but then Naraku would be after him, and Naraku knew about the blind spot somehow, which was most troubling to the demon.

Ah, well. Pretty soon, he would have no more need to stay around, and he could go back to being dormant. He had heard rumors that Naraku absorbs other demons, and knew that this may be his fate, but the half-demon wouldn't have much to gain from it.

The demon looked behind him again. Those humans and the half-demon were still pursuing him. How tiresome. He felt the demon bone bounce off of him again, and a bit of a breeze as the Wind Scar hit him. When were they going to give up? They couldn't...

He felt a gnawing hunger in his stomach. He needed to eat—and soon. After all, he hadn't so much as moved in four hundred years. He needed a snack at least. He sniffed the air. Ah, a human nearby. There was a small child in a field of flowers. Why she was there, he didn't know. There wasn't a village anywhere nearby. No matter. She was lunch.

## 4 - worrying

Shigure was beginning to get worried about Tohru. Not so much Yuki and Kyou, but he did worry about his little housewife. He knew that Yuki and Kyou could take care of themselves. Tohru, however, was good at taking care of others, but when it came to herself, she was hopeless.

He didn't know why he was worrying like this either. Call it a dog's intuition, maybe. He knew that dogs had a sixth sense when it came to people they liked. Maybe this feeling wasn't just because he was hungry and wanted Tohru's great cooking. Maybe...

No, Tohru had to be all right. He had to keep his mind off of this somehow. He decided to call Ayame. That was always a good pastime. He called the shop first, then he realized it was a Sunday and it would be closed, which would explain the utter lack of the phone being answered. He called Ayame's house phone. The snake picked up on the fourth ring.

"Hello?"

"Aya!"

"Shigure!" Aya immediately started babbling about his own life, and how wonderful everything was. That was Ayame for you, though. It was good to hear Aya, with his happy-go-lucky personality, and it lightened his own mood as well, if only on the surface. Suddenly, Ayame stopped right in the middle of a story about one particular customer. "Gure-chan, is something wrong?"

Count on Ayame to figure it out. Nobody knew Shigure better than Aya, not even Akito. Speaking of which, he should really go visit Akito sometime soon; he hadn't seen the god in quite some time. But the present was more pressing than the future, and Tohru was what was important. "Well, I just have this... feeling." His eyes fell to the sheet of paper by the phone. It had the phone number and address of Tohru's cousin on it. Why didn't he just call there? "Can I call you back in a minute? There's something I need to do."

He hesitated, considering trying to convince Shigure to tell him what was going on now, or demanding the dog tell him when he called back. "Well, of course, but you have to tell me what's going on!" Aya whined.

Shigure laughed and agreed readily. He hung up and dialed the number immediately. An old man picked up on the third ring. "This is the Higarashi Shrine--"

Shigure interrupted, "Hello. Is this Tohru-chan's sick cousin's house?"

A brief pause. "Yes." For some reason, the old man seemed hesitant. Shigure brushed it off.

"Is Tohru there?"

"Actually, it's strange. Tohru-chan left shortly after arriving."

A chill ran up Shigure's spine. "Yes, thank you. Good-bye." He hung up without a further word. He had to find Tohru. He looked at the address. The bus ride would have been long, but if they had only been there a moment, they would have either called him to tell him what they were doing, or came straight home. Either way, they would be here by now, or they would have called.

Maybe he was jumping to conclusions. Maybe he should run it by Hatori. He was the most rational person he knew. Surely, the dragon would know what to do. He dialed Hatori's number. Hatori picked up. "What is it?" he demanded in his usual, harsh way.

Hatori's cold-heartedness just rolled off of Shigure like water. He plunged right into his reason for calling. "It's about Tohru..." he said slowly. "She went to visit her cousin, but I just called over there, and she isn't there. Apparently, she left quite some time ago, and she should be back by now."

Hatori considered, but it did not take him long to do so. "Wait another hour," Hatori advised. The dog

had been expecting that. "If she isn't home by then, call me again, and we'll go pick her up."  
"Right." Hatori hung up on him. Shigure set the phone down. Should he really wait another hour? He really was worried about Tohru, but maybe they had just gone to the store? Hatori was right, anyway. They should wait at least another hour. He called Ayame.

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"That's Rin," Sango said, pointing toward said child. Did that mean that Sesshomaru and that green thing were around too? If that was the case, though, maybe Sesshomaru could kill this thing and they wouldn't have to. Of course, Inuyasha would throw a fit, but Sango would secretly have no problems with that.

"And the youkai is heading right for her!" Miroku said, stating the obvious like all anime characters tend to do, for whatever reason.

Should they rescue the girl? The answer was obvious, and it didn't look like Inuyasha's brother was around anyway, or he would have acted by now. Rin looked up, frozen in place as the demon dove down for her, ready to swallow her. Inuyasha darted out from the forest, grabbing the girl around the waist with his free arm and jumping backwards into the forest again, using the trees to his advantage. The youkai hissed in anger, and turned toward him, preparing to go on the offensive again.

"Sango!" Inuyasha yelled. Kirara swooped down low. "Take the kid and go back to the village."  
Rin regained her ability to move again. She stuttered for a moment before words formed. "But... But... Sesshomaru-sama..." she said, looking around anxiously.

"That bastard isn't around," Inuyasha muttered. Figures--the one time when his brother being nearby would be useful ("useful" as in Inuyasha wouldn't feel inclined to play babysitter so the girl didn't get eaten), he wasn't around. He passed Rin to Sango. Miroku tried to protest at being left behind while Inuyasha risked his life, but one look from Sango shut him up. The priority right now was to protect—both Tohru, and their new and temporary charge. If they just left Rin, the thing would eat her, and they couldn't fight it off; their attacks didn't work.

The beast seemed to consider pursuing its snack, then lost interest and continued on, either because it decided it couldn't catch Kirara or because some of Naraku's poisonous insects were buzzing around its head. The youkai snapped at them, but continued on.

Inuyasha leaped after him. It had to have a weak point. Everyone and everything alive had a weak point. He just had to find it, wherever it was. He was sure that that was all there was to it—finding it, then hitting it. He could do it. He always had before.

Once he found it, he could defeat that thing and get the girl back for Kagome. Also, this demon would lead him straight to Naraku!

He attacked it randomly as he pursued it, hunting for some kind of chink, or break or something... He leaped up again, this time aiming for an arm. He didn't notice when it slipped through a glowing barrier. Then he slammed into the barrier, face first. He twitched, then tumbled to the ground, landing with an ominous thud. The only solace he had in this great indignity was that no one had been around to see it. "Ugh..." he moaned. He lifted his head and glared at the barrier. It seemed to be mocking him. Its obnoxious glow was like a quiet chuckle, laughing at him for running into it. He swung the Red Tessaiga at the barrier. It seemed to shudder, and made a semi-whirlpool effect, but other than that... Nothing at all. He wanted to slam his head into a tree. No way he'd come all this way for nothing! But, he needed Kagome here to help him bring down this barrier. Together, they could break it. But he needed her arrows. He cursed himself for leaving her at the village. He sheathed Tessaiga and ran back through the forest. He was getting tired, though.

He had run a long ways, but at least now he knew where Naraku was. He just had to get the others and

go back. He was sure they could break through it together.  
He just hoped it wasn't too late for that girl.

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The nameless youkai half-dropped Tohru in front of Kagura. She looked at her. "This isn't her," she growled.

"She fits the description," the demon growled back.

"Go back and get the real one."

"What about this one, then?" he said, eyeing poor, cowering Tohru hungrily. Her eyes widened. She thought she might faint. It was going... to eat her?

"I don't care. Eat her."

The demon was just about to do so when Naraku chose to make his dramatic appearance. "Don't do that," he said. The demon stopped, hovering over a very pale Tohru, who looked like she was about to burst in to tears and start screaming again—a sound that the demon was beginning to loathe. "We can use her as bait. Inuyasha was still trying to get her back, and they'll bring the miko with them when they return."

Kagura turned and walked away, suddenly bored, like always. The demon growled at Tohru, but turned and walked away, getting ready to take off again. He half-expected Naraku to tell him to stay and eat Inuyasha, but he didn't, so the demon merely flew away.

Time for lunch...

And, no, it had no intentions of eating Rin anymore



## 5 - the plot thickens

Rin and Momiji were getting along splendidly. So were Hatsaharu and Kagome. It was weird. It was almost as if... They were flirting with each other. But didn't Kagome love Inuyasha? It was strange. Speaking of Inuyasha, where was he? Sango hoped he had managed to rescue Kagome's cousin, Tohru.

She noticed the boy with the gray hair was sitting off by himself. He was so strange. Always so quiet, but kind and polite. He wasn't at all like the redhead, Kyou. Kyou actually reminded her of Inuyasha—with his explosive personality. The cat had wandered off some time ago, but no one was really very worried about him. Yuki seemed relieved he was gone, in fact.

Sango sat beside him. She was curious about these other people from Kagome's world, and Yuki seemed like the only one worth talking to. "Could you tell me about Tohru?" Sango asked. "I mean, we went to rescue her, but she's not a part of your family. What's your relationship to her?"

"Honda-san is a dear friend of mine... I'm very worried about her, Sango-san," he said in his lovely soft voice.

Sango felt her cheeks heat. He was so polite, unlike a certain monk she knew. "I'm sorry that we couldn't rescue her. Inuyasha probably did, though, and maybe they're coming back now." She wasn't so sure though, and Yuki, being the intuitive person he is, knew that.

He looked at her. Her heart began to pound, but she couldn't figure out why. There was just something about this boy that made a girl's heart melt. "It's all right, Sango-san. You don't have to feel guilty about what happened. You did all you could do."

She really felt guilty now. It wasn't her friend out there, in Naraku's clutches. And he was comforting her. "I'm sorry, Yuki. But we'll get her back from Naraku."

Yuki tried to remember how to smile, but failed. It was something about the strength and determination in her eyes. "Thank you."

Sango turned away, her face coloring again. "Y-You're welcome."

Rin and Momiji were running around the village, playing tag with a few other children. Rin was happy to be able to socialize with other children for a while, but was constantly looking for Sesshomaru. Though she did like Momiji. He was always so happy and fun... The game had switched to hide-and-seek. Rin ran to hide. Momiji took her hand, smiling. "Come hide with me, Rin-kun!" he said. Rin smiled back and ran with him, giggling.

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Inuyasha had slowed to a quick walk, breathing hard from the heavy use of Tessuiga, all the running around, and then running into the barrier. Damn! He would have to at least take a nap before they left. Besides, his ankle was killing him. He had landed on it when he had fallen, and was pushing himself pretty hard. He was probably only making it worse, so he had been forced to slow down. He hoped it wasn't too serious. Maybe a poultice or some of Kagome's medicine, and the swelling would go down anyway. He knew it wasn't broken.

He sniffed the air. It was that cat hanyou, just a few yards away. He stopped, lifting the wounded ankle so as not to put any unnecessary pressure on it. He couldn't stand to put pressure on it. At least it wasn't broken, though. He had that to be grateful for. If he had a broken bone, that would slow them all down, and Tohru might not have the time for that.

“Hey, did you come back with Tohru?” Kyou said, stepping toward him. He didn't see Tohru and almost started screaming at Inuyasha, before he noticed the swollen ankle, and the overall exhausted hanyou's expression. He sighed. “Well, you'll get her back, right?”

“Yeah,” Inuyasha said.

“Well, that's good. But you still let that bastard get away.”

Inuyasha ground his teeth and almost started screaming, but then didn't see the point. He realized something, then. Kyou was a lot like himself. He wasn't angry with Inuyasha, he was just concerned for Tohru and didn't know how to express it. Sort of like when he was worried about Kagome. “I'll get her back, jackass.”

“Well, ya better.” Kyou thought, This is a lot like having a conversation with myself. He looked back at Inuyasha. The dog was leaning against a tree, and looked to be in a lot of pain. Kyou sighed. “Let me help you walk.”

“I don't need help,” Inuyasha snapped.

The cat was undeterred. “You can't walk alone.” He put one of Inuyasha's arms around his shoulders.

“Just use me as a crutch, okay? And don't argue about it. This'll be a lot faster than you limpin' along by yourself.”

Inuyasha almost argued, but the cat was right, and the sooner he had help, the better. He had to get to the village soon, after all. So he let Kyou help him. He had never known there were demons in Kagome's world, though. “Hey, why are there demons in Ka--your world? All the times I've been there, I've never seen `em.”

Kyou sighed. He had listened to Kagome and Haru talking about this, so he knew what to say. “Well, I'm not a demon. In my world, my family has a curse. I'm cursed with the spirit of the cat. But when I came here, the curse changed and turned me into a hanyou, but I dunno why.”

Inuyasha considered this. “Could the spirit be a cat demon?”

Kyou blinked. He had never once considered that, and it hadn't occurred to anyone else either. But now that he thought of it... “That could be.”

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Shigure was practically watching the clock. When an hour had passed and they still had not returned, he called Hatori. “Hatori-san, they're still not here!” he whined through the phone, not even giving the doctor time to say “hello.”

Hatori sighed. “I'll be right over.” He hung up. Shigure paced the floor. Something just wasn't right.

Something was horribly, terribly wrong. He just couldn't think of what exactly. He heard a knock on the door. He rushed to it, but instead of seeing Hatori's scowling face, he saw Ayame's grinning one. After their greeting Ayame hauled him out of the house.

“Aya, what are you doing here? I'm waiting for Hatori-san!” Shigure cried, even as Aya drug him out the door, locked and shut it, then continued.

“I came along with Tori-chan. Akito came too,” Aya added as an after thought. Akito? Why? Ah, because if Tohru got his Yuki or Kyou into trouble... Well, that made sense anyway. Akito was just looking for a reason to have Tohru's memory erased. Shigure sighed. Well, if Akito was going to be there, it was a good thing he was there. He was the only one Akito ever bothered to listen to.

Akito and Hatori were waiting in the car. Shigure gave the address and directions to Hatori. Ayame and Shigure chattered, a bit nervously, with the Sohma god there anyway. Akito was silent as the grave, but he had a malicious glint in his eyes. They arrived at the shrine. Akito was the first one out, and, despite Hatori telling him to stay put or come with them, Akito wandered off. Hatori, Ayame, and Shigure went to the house.

Akito paused at the tree. There was something strange about it, but he couldn't name what. He quickly lost interest, though, and moved on. There was a door that was open. He wandered over to it and stepped inside. Hatori would have a fit. That delighted him, and he walked down the wooden steps. It was just an old, dried up well. Why the hell they would do something as stupid as build a shrine over it, he didn't know. Also, why was the door ajar?

He noticed something lying in the dirt. Candy. That was also strange. Considering the reverence this family seemed to have for an old well, they were leaving trash lying around in it. That made no sense at all. He peered over the edge of the well. He felt like... Like something was down there. He leaned in a bit farther, keeping his hands on the side of the well. Something was down there... He could definitely feel... something. He couldn't really explain it, but there was definitely something there. He swung a leg over the side. There were places like handholds along the edge of the well. He began the descent slowly and carefully, chuckling at the thought of how angry Hatori and Shigure would be. The smile was swept away as he cried out. His foot had slipped. He lost his grip on the wall of the well and plunged downward.

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After interrogating the girl (which had been extremely easy), Naraku decided to investigate this well for himself. He flew over to it and peered over the edge. Little did he know that it was his presence that had called out to Akito, their wicked hearts beckoning to each other through the rift in time.

He blinked. Where no one had been a second before, he now found himself looking at a human man. He sniffed the air. And at the same time... Not human at all. Something... more. Akito looked up at him and frowned. What the hell?

"What... did you do?" Naraku demanded.

Akito scowled. Had someone just demanded something of him? "Where did you come from?" Akito countered.

Had this human just sneered at him? A pathetic human? What insolence. He would kill him. He shot a tentacle down the well. It shattered. (Not the well, but the tentacle.) Akito was unharmed. Akito blinked.

"What... are you?" Naraku growled.

Akito sneered again. "Are you going to help me out of this well, or try to talk to me from there?" (They're so perfect for each other.) "Insolent human baka."

Akito's anger flared. His power, acting on impulse, threw Naraku backwards and floated out of the well, landing primly on the ground. He narrowed his eyes. He didn't know what had happened, or where he was, or what was going on, but he certainly did like this new power, and he was definitely not going to question it. "Hm."

Naraku frowned. No, this was no mere human indeed. This man... was a god. "Who are you?"

Akito tilted his head a bit, sizing up Naraku. His appearance was certainly odd, and that he was in a forest was even stranger. Still, though... This was interesting. Much more interesting than being confined inside all day like Hatori liked to keep him. And, besides... Akito felt healthy in this world. He had never felt healthy a day in his life. He was never going to give that up. He didn't feel like he was dying any more. He felt alive. For the first time... And he didn't want to return to a world where he was sickly and dying. "Sohma Akito," he said. "What is this place?" He looked around again.

Naraku was a bit confused. What did he mean? "Explain yourself."

Akito's eyes narrowed, but whatever this creature was, he seemed to not know what he meant. "Is this Japan?"

"Yes..."

Akito looked around again. His kimono was beginning to slip off of his shoulders. The air was pure. He looked upwards. No smog. Nothing at all, in fact. It was as if Japan had never seen modernization.

Interesting. This was Japan, though. Logic told him that it was impossible, but logic also claimed that the Sohma curse didn't exist either. So, using this "logic," Akito deduced that the well was a portal to the past, and that he was some time in Japan's past. It was an interesting concept, and one he would like to explore. But he could do that later, not now. "... I see," he said. He pushed his kimono back onto his shoulders. "Who are you?"

Naraku regained himself. "Naraku." Akito intrigued him. What was he? He sensed Inuyasha nearby. That damned idiot would probably attack him, and he didn't want to be interrupted at the moment.

"Come with me."

Akito cocked his head. Why not? Learning about this would be interesting, and he had no desire to go back. Might as well go with someone who seemed to be powerful and know their way around. "Of course... Naraku."

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Inuyasha swung his head suddenly. "Naraku," he snarled. He tried to run off, but Kyou hauled him backwards. Inuyasha kept trying to go after Naraku, but Kyou knew that the dog couldn't even run. Inuyasha, however, didn't seem to realize this. "Lemme go! I can't let him get away!" "Idiot!" Kyou held on tightly and hauled Inuyasha back again with such force that Kyou fell onto his back. Inuyasha managed to turn halfway as he fell, landing on top of Kyou. The two of them looked at each other, wide-eyed and speechless for about twenty seconds, before they recovered. Kyou and Inuyasha started yelling at each other almost immediately after they recovered from their shock. Inuyasha struggled off of him. They both sat, backs to each other, blushes coloring their cheeks. Kyou swallowed hard. Why was he so embarrassed? It was almost as though... No. That... couldn't be... He turned to look at Inuyasha, then swung his head forward abruptly, eyes wide. Oh, this was weird... Inuyasha was in much the same predicament. He and Kyou had a lot of common ground, really, when he thought about it. From what Kyou had told him, Kyou seemed like an outcast, just as he was an outcast. Kyou just needed to find a way to kick @\$\$\$. They had been talking a lot while they were walking back. Kyou said that if he defeated Yuki, the rat, then he would be unofficially accepted in his family. Inuyasha was sure that he could teach him something that would help. But he couldn't figure out why he wanted to. He sighed inwardly. Maybe he should apologize for freaking out. Kyou had just been trying to help him.

Kyou looked down at the dirt. Perhaps he should apologize to Inuyasha. He had been sort of rough. He had probably just made everything worse. And then he had yelled at him. He started to turn, just as Inuyasha turned. Somehow, they both moved with the same speed, moving in different directions. Their lips touched. They froze again, eyes widening again, but neither moved. It was as if time had stopped for this freakishly weird moment. They both spun back around, faces red once more.

"Er, well..." Inuyasha stammered.

"It was just an accident," Kyou said.

"Right! `Cuz there's no way I'd kiss you."

"Who would kiss you?" Kyou snapped back.

Inuyasha suddenly fell silent, listening. "Hey, listen." Kyou's ear twitched and swiveled toward the voices. He could hear two voices. One was one that he did not recognize, but it still made his skin crawl. The other made his skin crawl, too, but for a different reason. That was Akito. Kyou gasped. How was Akito here? "You know that other guy?" he asked, looking at Kyou's reaction to it.

Kyou nodded, eyes narrowing. "Akito," he said.

"Who is he?"

The cat rose to his feet and helped the injured dog up. "Akito is... the god of the zodiac. He's the one

who bears the full brunt of the curse.”

Inuyasha froze. God? These cursed humans turned into half-demons in this world... If Akito assumed the role of “god of the zodiac” in that world... He actually would be a god in this world. And he was with Naraku! What if they teamed up? Inuyasha lunged forward, stumbling and limping as he ran for the clearing. He just couldn't let that happen. It would spell disaster for all of them. But by the time he burst into the clearing with the well, he could only see them flying away. He cursed and was about to pursue them, but his ankle protested and buckled. He caught himself as he fell and cursed again.

Kyou knelt beside him, looking at his ankle. “You really are an idiot, aren't you?” he demanded. He needed treatment for that ankle. It looked terrible. But the village wasn't too far off. “Can you get up?” “Yeah,” Inuyasha said, his pride shining through in his voice. He stood up and immediately fell over. Kyou grabbed a hold of him. He sighed and rolled his eyes. “Sure ya can. C'mon. I've got ya.” They took a few steps, Inuyasha reluctantly leaning on Kyou, but Inuyasha just kept stumbling. Kyou ground his teeth and grabbed Inuyasha. He picked him up and threw him over his shoulder. The dog protested, but was really in no condition to do much about it right now. And there was no way that Kyou was going to leave the idiot here (he'd probably try to take off after Naraku and Akito) and carrying him in a more proper manner was sort of suggestive and bothered him, so Inuyasha would just have to deal with this for right now. “Hey, you can't walk for shoot, so I've gotta carry you.”

Inuyasha ground his teeth. “Okay, but once we get to the edge of the village, ya gotta put me down, all right?” he said, his tone threatening.

Kyou wasn't bothered by it. “Yeah, sure. Whatever. And I won't tell anyone either. So you better not.”

He was referring to the kiss. Inuyasha knew it. He nodded. “Yeah, I won't. But you better not say a damn word!”

“You can count on it.” They were quiet as Kyou hauled Inuyasha through the forest, as if the dog hanyou were a sack of potatoes instead of a sack of entrails, bone, and blood. Kyou dropped Inuyasha before the forest thinned. Inuyasha landed on all fours. He glared at Kyou.

“What the hell didja do that for!?” he yelled.

“There was somebody nearby.”

Inuyasha sniffed the air. He heard giggling. Kyou recognized the voices as being Momiji, and that girl Rin. Momiji suddenly ran by. Kyou reached out and grabbed him. Momiji kept laughing, trying to escape Kyou's grasp. “Kyou! You gotta let me go or she'll get me!” he cried.

Shippo ran past, and almost made it safely behind Kyou and Inuyasha, but Rin burst through the underbrush and tagged him. Who ever would have thought—a yaouki, a hanyou, and a ningen all playing together happily. And, despite the pressing urgency, and everything that had gone wrong, the world felt right. Like this was meant to be, and everything that wrong—like Tohru's capture—would soon be brought to right.

## 6 - Snake meets Dog

“Akito!” Hatori yelled as he came up the stone steps to the shrine. The god had just... taken off. He looked around worriedly, but he didn't see him anywhere. He looked to the house. Perhaps Akito was already inside. He doubted it, but he had better check, and ask the inhabitants for help in finding him. He hated to involve them with Akito, but they knew their way around. On second thought, he had better send Shigure to do that. He would check the surrounding area. “Shigure, ask the Higarashi family about Tohru, and ask them to help us look for Akito. Ayame, help me look for him outside.”

Shigure nodded and went to the house. “All right, Tori-san. Where should I look?”

He considered sending him off into the surrounding area, but was certain that Ayame would only get lost if he went. “You look around the shrine, but don't touch anything.”

“Hm?” Aya blinked. “Why would I touch anything?” He turned around and trotted off. “Akito?” he called as he went.

He wandered about the shrine. He climbed over the railing that surrounded the tree and touched the scar on it briefly, then his hand fell away. He walked around it, then wandered away. There was something weird about this tree, but he couldn't exactly decide what, and wondering about it bored him. He poked around the house, but didn't see any trace of Akito, so wandered away from it. Looking for Akito was boring. Maybe he should have stayed back at the main house? He had been working on making repairs to the dancer's outfit for the New Year. Next year, it was Kisa's turn, and it needed adjustments so it could fit her. It wasn't like it was pressing, but he needed to do it while he had the time. What he really wanted to do was alter it, stray a little from the traditional. But, of course, everyone else would be mad at him if he did, and he would never get away with it.

He opened a door, but it was only a small storage shed, and Akito was not inside. He heaved a sigh.

“C'mon, Akito. This really isn't fair,” Ayame muttered. Maybe Hatori had already found him. But he should look around anyway, and yelling for him didn't help. If Akito didn't want to be found, he wouldn't assist him by responding.

He wandered in to another building, pushing the door wide open. He stepped lightly down the steps. Why had Hatori let Akito come anyway? Akito was probably too sick to be out. After all, Akito probably only had a few more years to live. He really shouldn't be shortening his life by doing so much.

Ayame sighed and sat down on the edge of well. Well, Hatori must have found Akito, because the man wasn't around the shrine. He should go inside and see what Shigure was up to. He considered Yuki. He hoped he wasn't in trouble. Shigure said that he had been gone for quite a while. It worried Ayame, but not too much. After all, how many times had he run off during high school? He was sure that Yuki was all right.

He leaned back, looking upwards at the ceiling. Of course, Yuki wasn't nearly as worldly as Ayame, and Kyou was useless with those sorts of things too. Tohru was also rather oblivious. So... Maybe he should be worried. Shigure seemed to be worried. Hatori was calm, though, but he was always calm.

Was that why Akito had come? If anything happened to Yuki because of Tohru, Akito probably wanted to know firsthand. Nobody would just tell him; they'd be too afraid to, for their own sake as well as Tohru's. Akito was just looking for a reason to send Tohru packing. And he wanted Yuki back. Ayame didn't like that. He didn't know exactly what had happened, but it had destroyed Yuki. So, he had to protect Tohru as well as Yuki—because it was Tohru that was changing Yuki for the best.

Ayame smiled. That was something he had to do. A chill breeze blew in from the open door. Ayame's eyes widened. He knew what was coming. A puff of smoke and he fell, with his clothing, down the well in

his snake form.

He had been expecting a nasty fall, and probably to be unconscious. However, He was merely sitting at the bottom of the well, naked, with his clothing lying over his lap. He looked up. There was no building overhead, though. He frowned. What...?

Maybe he really had hit his head. He felt for a tell-tale bump. Nothing. Well, he could have had the shortest transformation he had ever had and become human right before he had hit the ground, which would explain a few things. But it didn't explain the sky instead of a building.

He was certain that the well had been in a building. He slipped into his clothes. His shoes had fallen over as well, by some stroke of luck. He put those on as well. It seemed like the only way up was to climb up the vines. Ayame wasn't sure he could make it up though.

"Hatori?" he called. "Shigure?" He was greeted with silence. "Anyone...?" It looked as though it was just him. He blinked. Climbing up there was a daunting task. Maybe he should just wait for help. But he shouldn't just sit here either.

In that case, what should he do?

He grabbed a hold of one of the sturdier-looking vines, swallowed, and pulled himself up onto the wall. It really brought him back to his high school days in gym class... a class he often made a point of skipping whenever possible. He wanted help... He heaved himself up again, absolutely terrified that he was going to just fall down again. But, as he climbed, he began to feel better. He hadn't slipped; he was halfway there and—He slipped and came crashing down with a scream, landing roughly on his rear end. Ayame looked up at the sky forlornly.

"This isn't fair," he muttered. He thought of everyone else, though, and his confidence was revitalized.

"Right! I can do this!" He grabbed a hold of the vines again and climbed upwards. Just focus on the goal. Keep going. C'mon... Anyone who can design a dress, draft the pattern, and sew it all in one very busy (and exhausting) day should be able to climb up a few yards, right?

One hand was over the lip of the well. Yes! Victory was at hand! Ayame pulled again, trying to lift himself out of the well. However, all the strain was too much on the poor snake and he lost his hold.

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Sesshomaru came to the place he had left Rin and Jaken. Jaken was nearby, but Rin was nowhere to be found. She must have disappeared or was captured, because when he arrived, the imp was running around babbling to himself about his impending and inevitable demise for letting Rin be abducted again. Sesshomaru waited to be noticed, but Jaken was in such a panic that he looked right at him and it didn't seem to register. In fact, he seemed to think that Sesshomaru was an illusion his mind had provided for him to remember why it was so important that he find Rin immediately.

"Jaken," Sesshomaru said.

"Oh, it's like I can hear his voice!" he screeched. "Sesshomaru-sama is going to kill me! Oh, no!"

"Jaken."

"I don't need to be reminded of how important—"

"Jaken."

Said toad soon found himself nursing a rather large bump on his head. The toad looked up at the demon lord and his eyes seemed to widen further. He threw himself down in the dirt. "Please forgive me, my lord! Rin went to pick flowers, and when I went to check on her, she was gone!"

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know!" he wailed.

Sesshomaru considered kicking him, then thought better of it. Best not to accidentally knock the toad unconscious right now. "To pick flowers."

“Oh.” Jaken shot to his feet and raced off as fast as his stubby toad legs would carry him. “This way, my lord!” Sesshomaru wandered after him, sniffing the air for any tell-tale signs of Naraku. The field had Rin’s scent all over it. He moved to the center. There was one scent that bothered him, though. He walked to the edge. Yes, it was definitely Inuyasha. His eyes narrowed. What had Inuyasha done with Rin? Sesshomaru started to follow Inuyasha’s scent, but right after Inuyasha had taken her into the forest, her scent disappeared, but Inuyasha’s went on one way, then retraced back again. He considered the others in his group. That two-tailed cat could fly. He sniffed the air again. Yes, there were faint whiffs of cat here. All he had to do was follow Inuyasha’s returning scent. What bothered him was why they had taken Rin. They had no business doing that, and they had never been horribly interested in her before. It could be to lure him there. It could very well be a trap, but that was unlikely as well. Inuyasha was content to ignore Sesshomaru’s existence whenever he could, and that group rarely invited trouble, so much as they went hunting for it. No, that couldn’t be their reasoning. Then what was it?

He quickened his pace. Soon, along the path, a new scent intermingled with Inuyasha’s. It was some kind of cat hanyou, but still no sign of Rin. This puzzle was perplexing.

There were other hanyou scents nearby—a mouse, a rabbit, an ox... a snake. He paused at the last one. A moment ago, that smell had not been there. Which meant that this snake hanyou had suddenly appeared nearby. There wasn’t even an approach. It had merely appeared. He followed the odor to a small clearing with an old well. The snake was definitely in the well, and struggling to get up it, by the sounds of it. He frowned. The snake... had just appeared there. How?

He saw a hand grab the edge of the wall. He noted that the skin of this hanyou was impeccably clean, smooth-looking, and the nails were perfectly manicured. He moved toward the well. How had this hanyou just appeared there? The snake slipped, however and began to plunge downward. Before he knew what he was doing, he had reached out and grabbed the hanyou’s wrist. He looked over the edge... and almost dropped the snake. He felt like he was looking at himself.

Slowly, he pulled the half-demon out of the well. Ayame gracefully slid his legs over the edge of the well and rose to his feet, brushing off his garment a bit. He turned to look at Sesshomaru, flicking back his pale grey hair as he turned. Ayame was stunned speechless—for the first time in his life. He looked around at the surroundings, but his green eyes fell back on the beautiful being in front of him.

“Who are you?” Sesshomaru asked, finally breaking the silence. It was growing uncomfortable.

“A... Ayame...” With that, Aya regained his composure. “Thank you so much for saving me—”

“You would have lived had you fallen.”

Ayame blinked. This guy may look like him, but he reminded him a little of Hatori. “Well, then, thank you for saving me from a nasty fall.” Ayame smiled, and the smile seemed to brighten his lovely eyes. “I must ask you this though... Was that silk-screened?”

Sesshomaru blinked. Well... That had been unexpected. “Yes...” He glanced at the well. “Where did you come from?”

Ayame peered down the well. “Well...” He looked back at Sesshomaru, frowning. “I thought I had fallen down the well... Excuse me, but I don’t know your name.”

Sesshomaru looked at him from the corner of his eye. “Sesshomaru.”

“Ses...shomaru.” Ayame blinked slowly, then smiled again. “I like it,” he decided. “Oh, and what’s that furry thing on your shoulder? I love it. Can I touch it?” Without bothering to wait for an answer, he gently touched the fur. Finding it to be very soft, he sunk his hand in to it. “Oh... This is really nice.” He immediately began thinking of a fur-lined coat, maybe with an extra fluffy collar... He froze as Sesshomaru turned to look at him.

This hanyou... He was very bold. But, for some reason, Sesshomaru wasn’t offended at all. This hanyou was graceful, charming, and beautiful—beautiful? Hm. Sesshomaru had always been interested in both women and men, so it came as no surprise to him that he thought that. It was just that this being was a



hanyou. For some reason, that just made him more enticing. The hanyou had to know he was out of line, but it didn't seem insolent. It seemed...

"What are those..." Aya's voice trailed off. The more the man looked at him, the more he seemed to lose his voice. He just wanted to stare at him in reverence. And Ayame had never felt that way about anyone but himself. Possibly, it was the resemblance. And... this guy was... very good-looking. It was no big secret that Ayame was bisexual, with a preference for men. He had admitted it with pride in high school, and it was evident in the way he acted. With his free hand, he hesitantly touched the crescent moon marking, his fingers trailing down to his cheeks. There was no difference in the skin texture. It was like a birth mark, except the wrong color and too perfected. Sesshomaru felt himself leaning into the hanyou's touch, still not offended by it. Why? He opened his eyes, not having realized he had closed them. Possibly, it was because this hanyou was beautifully sculpted, with a face that matched his idea of perfect. Did he have the body of his dreams, too? He stopped those thoughts in their tracks. He was not going to go there. Maybe later, but not right now. Right now, he had to find Rin and make sure she was safe. Then he could play with this snake called Ayame.

He heard her giggling a ways off. At least she was all right. He heard the running of children, voices. He caught Inuyasha and the cat's scent as well, as long as that of the rabbit, the kitsune child that Inuyasha drug along, and Rin's scent. Time to collect his charge.

He pulled away. Aya snatched his hands back, worried that he had offended him somehow. Ayame fell into step beside him. "Did I do something...?" Ayame was confused. Sesshomaru hadn't seemed to feel insulted. Ayame considered, but only for a moment. The spell was wearing off, and his usual happy self was kicking in.

"No," the youkai answered.

"Good." Ayame smiled—that sly, seductive smile of his. "Because I had hoped that something more than mutual awe would overcome us."

Sesshomaru glanced at him, to be sure he was serious. He certainly looked serious. He would take him up on that offer, just not now. "Later," he promised him.

That pleased Ayame, and he let the seductive act drop. "Fantastic! Sesshomaru, that was it, wasn't it? I must say, you're possibly the most beautiful being I've ever seen—next to myself, of course—Oh, Kyou-kun. Momiji-kun."

Kyou's ears stood on end. He slowly turned around. Inuyasha sprang to his feet, hand on his sword, ignoring his injuries.

"Ayame."

"Sesshomaru!"

"Sesshomaru-sama!" Rin cried, darting past Inuyasha. She came to a halt in front of her lord.

"I didn't know you were a lord," Ayame said, looking at him with renewed interest.

"How the hell did you get here!" Kyou screeched, pointing an accusing finger at the snake.

Ayame blinked. "I suppose... Through the well, of course."

Kyou wanted to hit him. Inuyasha wanted to hit his brother. However, the latter two had no interest in these things. Yuki couldn't have picked a worse time to come. He and Sango were fetching the children for lunch. Yuki froze upon seeing Ayame, who grinned upon seeing Yuki. The very air around Yuki seemed to turn black. His eyes took on that creepy, iridescent violet glow. "Go away," he hissed at Ayame.

Ayame planted his hands on his hips. "That is no way to treat your big brother," he reprimanded.

Yuki's rage only seemed to grow. "Get. Out."

The snake raised his chin, looking down at his little brother. "Yuki, I am your older brother, and you should obey me!"

Sesshomaru wanted to laugh. He promised himself that some time later, when no one else was around,

he would. He was beginning to like this snake, and it was more than just a sexual interest. Yuki cocked his head to the side. His fingers curled in to fists. He prepared to punch the totally oblivious Ayame. He swung his fist, and it would have connected, except for a slight interference. Sesshomaru pushed Yuki's fist away. "I agree with your brother," he said, but was looking at Inuyasha.

"Hey, don't be gettin' any damn ideas!" he yelled. He started to draw his sword.

Kyou noticed and decked him before he did. Inuyasha fell flat on the ground. Violence solves everything, it seems. Momiji looked at him. "Whoa, Kyou! You really hit him hard!" he exclaimed.

Shippo grinned. "Yeah! Kyou, do it again!"

"You're in no condition to go picking a fight, especially if that's not what he came for," Kyou growled, ignoring the two kids. Well, Momiji wasn't really a kid, but he looked and acted like one, so he got labeled as one.

"Rin. We are leaving." He turned to leave, then stopped, looking over his shoulder at Ayame. "You can come, if you wish."

Ayame looked from Yuki, who was still seething with rage, to Sesshomaru, who was unbelievably beautiful. If he stayed, a possible punch in the face awaited him. If he went, a possible frack awaited him. It wasn't really a difficult decision to make. He ran up to Sesshomaru and Rin, who immediately began chattering with him. They were a good match in that, as they both loved to chatter. Ayame just loved to hear his own voice, especially if he were talking about himself.

"By, Rin-chan!" Momiji said, waving. "We'll meet again, won't we?"

Rin stopped and turned back to him. She looked up to Sesshomaru, then back at Momiji. She really liked Momiji. She hesitated, then smiled and nodded. "Yeah! Bye, Momiji-kun!" Rin started up the chatter with Ayame again, asking him about himself. He was only too pleased to indulge her.

## 7 - to the fuedal era

Yuki stomped off. “Yuki, wait!” Sango cried, chasing after him. “You and your brother get along just about as well as Inuyasha and his brother. Why is that?”

He took a deep breath and looked at her seriously, all the anger dissipated with that calming breath.

“When I was younger...” He wasn't sure how to word this. It felt so wrong telling this to a complete stranger. But he liked Sango—she was strong, brave, courteous, and he knew that it was safe with her. He looked away again. “I was given to the god of the zodiac... as a play thing.”

Sango didn't know what to say, so she said nothing.

“Akito—the god—liked to beat me up, I guess you could say. I was hurt, and... broken. I reached out to my brother once. It was the first time I had, and it was the last time. You see, we have a large age difference, and because I was kept apart from the others, it was almost as if we did not exist for each other. So... you see...”

Sango understood Yuki's reasoning, but she didn't agree with it. She had seen his brother, and it looked like Ayame was trying to reach out to Yuki, if he was doing it in the wrong way. Yuki just needed to accept that his brother was a weirdo and try to meet him halfway. “Yuki...” She put her hand tentatively on his shoulder. She had never guessed how much pain and suffering he kept hidden. In the brief time she had known Yuki, she had known that he was a bit odd, but she had assumed that he was merely quiet by nature—not that it had been beaten into him at an early age. He looked at her.

The next thing that happened seemed inevitable, and just as avoidable as placing two opposite magnets near each other.

Their lips met.

It surprised both of them. When they pulled away, Sango was blushing. Yuki immediately averted eye contact. “I am sorry, Sango-san. That was—“

“I kissed you too,” she said quietly, still feeling the heat in her cheeks, but it was pleasant. He looked back at her. It was the first time she had seen him smile, and her heart missed a beat. If he looked beautiful with a frown, he looked divine with a smile.

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Hatori hadn't found any trace of Akito. There was always the possibility that Akito was with Ayame and Shigure by now, though. He sighed and turned. He had really hoped that he would have been the one to find him. Aktio needed a stern lecture. This was too much.

He just wasn't healthy enough for this. In fact, if Hatori had had it his way, Akito would be in bed right now. But Akito was stubborn and that was not how it had gone. If Hatori recommended something, Akito liked to do the opposite.

The average lifespan of the god of the zodiac was about 30-35, at the very most--if they stayed healthy, took their medicine, and got enough rest. Akito seemed to be trying to die earlier. Hatori had secretly often considered tying Akito down to a chair, to keep him from leaving the house. In his delicate condition, outside was the last place he needed to be.

He came back to the shrine, looking for any sign of Akito or Ayame.

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Let's go back in time a bit...

Shigure knocked at the door politely and waited for someone to answer it. It was a little boy. “Oh, hi,”

the kid said. "Are you here about the shrine?"

The dog shook his head. "No. Did Tohru-chan ever come back here?"

"No."

He had feared as much. "Of course. Well, she hasn't come home either. We were hoping that she would have been outside somewhere. Or maybe find out where she had gone."

The boy once more shook his head. "I haven't seen here. I'll get Mom and Grandpa, and we'll help you look, though. You can come in."

He stepped inside and slipped off his shoes. Tohru's aunt was cute, considering her age, and Shigure soon found himself flirting with her, as he flirted with everyone, but she directed him back to the more urgent topic at hand. She asked him questions he had asked himself, and they tried to fill each other in as much as they could, as they tried to think of her whereabouts. They sat at the table, brainstorming. If they had an idea, they went to the phonebook and made a call, but it was all for naught.

Another knock at the door. The boy, Sota, went to get it again. There was a brief exchange. "Shigure," Hatori said. His tone was even more serious than usual. Shigure lifted his head and looked at him.

"Ayame and Akito have gone missing as well."

Sota, "Mom," "Grandpa," and Shigure exchanged glances. Sota looked frightened. "People are... disappearing?"

Tohru's aunt stood up. "Come on, we have to find them. Could they have gone to your car?" She began rattling off other ideas even as the others put their shoes on and the search began. Hatori went outside. Sota immediately went to the well. Hatori frowned and followed him. He hadn't noticed before, but the door to the building had been open before the others had gone outside. Perhaps, they were in there. Ayame could be a klutz sometimes; he may have tripped and hit his head. Or, Akito may have passed out in there.

Hatori went inside after the boy. "What is this place?" he asked.

Sota looked up at him, then back at the well. "Just an old well. I don't know the stories very well. You should ask Grandpa."

The boy wasn't exactly telling the truth. But Ayame wasn't here, and neither was Akito. Something caught Hatori's eye. Was that... He walked down the steps to the well. One of Momiji's candies. They had been here. When? What had happened? Sota leaned over the well, ideas he refused to share beginning to grow in his mind. He stood on tip toe, trying to get a better view.

As fate would have it, he fell. Hatori reached to grab him. In his haste, he imbalanced himself and plunged over the side of the well. He disappeared, but Sota hit the bottom. "Ow..." he muttered. He looked around. "Where'd he go? Somebody help me!"

"Mom" heard Sota yelling. She and Shigure followed his voice to the well.

"Do you need help getting out of there?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yeah. I can't reach the handhold."

Shigure, determined to impress "Mom," volunteered to help him. "Don't worry about it. I'll climb down and help him up."

Sota's eyes widened. For some reason, he knew that was a bad idea. "No, it's okay..."

"Nonsense." Shigure began the descent. When he was about there, he hopped off. Sota moaned when Shigure, too, disappeared. Well, at least now they knew what had happened to them.

## 8 - hand of fate

Hatori looked about. It was too bright in here, and above him was, quite clearly, the sky instead of what should have been there. And what had happened to Sota?

Well, he couldn't do much if he stayed down here. He climbed up the vines. Once he was halfway out of the well, he looked around. Strange. Why was he in a forest? Maybe he had hit his head—and hard. Of course, dreaming all of this was the most logical answer, therefore it had to be the least likely. He distinctly recalled falling straight downward, without hitting the sides of the well, and he had landed on all fours. Naturally, that could also be part of the dream. It was entirely possible that his body was elsewhere, leaving his consciousness to wander around in a dreamland. Could he be in a coma? And if he was in a coma, then why did the dream begin with the well? Furthermore, dreams usually try to convince the unconscious that they are reality, thus in the dream world, one does not believe that the dream is not real. Thus, he really shouldn't be thinking it was a dream if it really were a dream. Though that point could be argued using the same logic.

So, using this skewed logic, he could choose between believing it was a dream, or believing that he had somehow been magically teleported to a forest. It was a difficult decision, as neither made sense, though the first was easiest to believe.

He wandered away from the well, into the forest. One tree seemed to stand alone here. He approached it curiously. It had the same scar that the one at the shrine did, and the leaves looked alike.

He frowned. Of course, this was only further evidence that he was dreaming and his subconscious was putting things in his mind that he had seen recently.

In that case, where was Shigure, Ayame, and Akito? He had been wondering about them when he fell, therefore they should be here. Strange that they were not.

“Who are you?” a soft but cold feminine voice asked him.

Hatori turned his head toward the person who had approached him. It was a woman, dressed in traditional clothing, holding a bow. Where had she come from, if this was a dream? “Sohma Hatori. And who are you?”

She looked at him, a bit suspiciously. She regarded him completely with suspicion, in fact. “I am the priestess, Kikyō.” Priestess? That was interesting. And where had his mind plucked that information out of? And he had never known anyone who looked like this woman, or had the name Kikyō, though Tohru's late mother had a similar name. It could be derived from that. Then where had the priestess part come from? It was a mystery. She scrutinized him further. “You are not of this world.”

Typical. It was a dream, then. “Perhaps not.” He could also take that as the priestess somehow noticing the curse, and speaking metaphorically.

The priestess looked around, then turned and started to leave. She stopped and looked at him. “I must leave this place. You can come with me... If you want to.”

Why not? It was just a dream, after all. He might as well see how this played out.

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Miroku had the misfortune to have seen Sango kissing Yuki. Well, then... shoot. His life really was hell, wasn't it? She wouldn't let him get near other women, he was cursed with the Kazaana, there was no one left in his family, and now the woman of his dreams apparently did not share mutual feelings with him.

Life sucked.

Seriously, this just couldn't get any worse, could it?

As he walked through the forest, he began to grow a bit calmer—less angry with Sango, and more angry with himself. Maybe, if he hadn't been such a “pervert” then she wouldn't be so interested in that hanyou, Yuki. What did she see in him, anyway? He considered the boy. Well, he was Miroku's opposite. Perhaps... Was that the attraction?

He just couldn't figure this puzzle out... He froze. He heard someone stumbling around. A demon? No. There was no demonic aura. Perhaps it was a lost villager? He headed toward the sound.

“Hello? Is there anyone around here?” he heard a voice inquire to no specific individual.

“Yes. Are you lost?” He still hadn't seen this person yet.

“I guess so.” The person came in to view. The clothes weren't abnormal, but there was something weird about the way they were sewn together. The other took him in for a moment and frowned. “What... happened to me?”

Miroku frowned, then an idea formed. “Did you, by chance, come through the well?”

He nodded. “Yes. How did you...?”

“I think you might want to come with me.” He sighed. Was this one going to take Kagome? No, she seemed interested in Haru. Weird. Didn't she love Inuyasha? “My name is Miroku.”

The other cocked his head and moved beside him. He smiled, almost oblivious to Miroku's ill mood. “I'm Sohma Shigure.”

“‘Shigure,’ hm?” He looked at him again. “How did you come through the well?”

Shigure sighed. He started at the beginning, but when he stopped to describe Tohru, he got a little sidetracked. “... She's a really cute high school girl. You see, I need her—I need my little housewife—“ “You're a pervert!” Kyou yelled. Miroku knew what was coming next as Kyou came sailing through the trees, fist raised. He knew that the word “pervert” usually meant pain either before or after the word was said. He hauled Shigure backwards and Kyou punched a tree instead of Shigure's face. He ground his teeth and prepared to start yelling at Shigure, but froze in place. Miroku had pulled back Shigure as Shigure was turning. Naturally, the cursed Sohma had been spun around as he pulled him backwards, causing an unexpected change in weight and momentum. The result was that they fell over, Shigure landing sprawled on top of him. By some insane twist of fate, their lips had always landed dangerously close to each other, and now they were just frozen in place, staring at each other as if Kyou wasn't even there.

Kyou's ears stood on end, tail fur bristled. “What the hell is wrong with you! You're a pervert and you're gay!” he screeched. Shigure continued to not move. Miroku's eyes darted about, but his body didn't seem to want to respond. Well, most of his body anyway... The real reason neither of them wanted to move was because of the embarrassment. Neither of them even thought about moving until Kyou had taken off. The second he did, Shigure practically leaped off of the monk. They looked away from each other.

“Well... That was unexpected!” Shigure said with a laugh.

Miroku found himself smiling, even as he kept his voice somber. “Indeed.” Perhaps, that the Sohma family keep coming here was the hand of fate interfering with their lives.

## 9 - Final Transformations

Shigure and Miroku walked back to the village together, talking about their lives, woes, and various other existence-related attributes.

Shigure looked at the monk. He was cute and easily turned on. Sort of reminded him of himself, actually, which he liked. He wondered if he might be attracted to him. He studied him for a moment, feigning that he was only looking at him as he paid attention to him speaking. Hm. Interesting. He was attracted to him. Interesting concept, though not on likely to be explored. That was kind of a shame. He hadn't been with another man in quite a while.

Miroku thought that it may be awkward between them now, but it had not seemed to bother Shigure all that much, so it was fairly easy for him to act as though it were not so big of a deal. It was amazing how easy it was, actually. It was almost as if it had never happened. Strange, but it hadn't seemed to really faze Shigure.

In fact, the more he talked with Shigure, the more similar they seemed to be. Shigure often got pummeled for being "perverted," just as Miroku often got slapped for fondling Sango, or flirting with another girl.

Women really were confusing. Sango had sent him so many mixed signals. She got furious when he went after other girls, and she was furious when he groped her. It made no sense at all. Miroku somehow ended up explaining his situation to Shigure, who nodded with empathy.

"Women are like that. They're also very high strung and can be kind of... insane." He thought of his editor and the boar of the zodiac, Kagura. "Yuki and Kyou are always the ones who hit me, but I know what you mean."

"Shigure, you're here too?" Haru asked.

Shigure's eyes fell to Kagome. More precisely, his eyes fell to the length of her legs and the length of her skirt. He ignored Haru and approached Kagome. "Why, hello. What is a beautiful young lady like yourself doing in such..." He glanced at Haru. "—poor company?"

Haru looked at him flatly. "Shigure..."

Kagome blinked. This man reminded her of a certain lecherous monk she knew. Typical that they should be together. "I take it you're one of the Sohmas," she said flatly.

He smiled charmingly. "Of course. How did you ever guess?"

An idea suddenly occurred to her. She moved forward and hugged him. There was a puff of smoke and she backed away. Exactly as she had suspected, he was a member of the zodiac. He had little dog ears like Inuyasha, fangs, and claws. He looked at himself incredulously, then noticed the horns on Haru's head.

"Why didn't I transform all the way?" he wondered, staring at his claws on one hand and touching the little black puppy ears with the other, while poking at the fangs with his tongue in confusion. Why wasn't he a dog?

Haru didn't know how Shigure had ended up here, but if he was here, then he must have fallen through the well. Which probably meant that Hatori might be here, and maybe even Ayame. Poor Yuki. "In this world, we only transform partway," Hatsaharu answered flatly.

Wrong. Dead wrong, actually.

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Hatori glanced behind him. Kikyou had wandered off for a bit, and was just returning from wherever she had gone. She gave no mention of what she had been doing, and he really didn't particularly care. Her

absence had given him time to think about things—like why he was here, and if this were really a coma-induced dream. However, he could think of no reason why it would not be, so he was content to go on believing that it was.

“I cannot lift the curse on you,” she confessed.

How had she known about the curse? That was... strange. Then again, it was just a strange dream, was it not? “I had not expected you to be able to.” Nobody could. When the curse was first placed upon the family, he had read in the records that they had tried desperately to find someone who could. Obviously, they had failed and learned to live with it. Now, this was the best they could do.

It seemed to trouble her, though. She was so absorbed in thought that she tripped. Hatori automatically went to catch her, then cursed himself. His clothing fell to the ground as his body transformed in a puff of colored smoke. When the smoke cleared, Kikyou found herself looking at a grayish-black dragon. She frowned. How had that happened?

Hatori was wondering the same thing. Usually, he turned into a seahorse. Why had he turned into a full-fledged dragon? It could just be another aspect of the dream. Besides, it would be infinitely more interesting to be an actual dragon than a helpless seahorse.

“Hatori?” she wondered.

He looked back at her. “It's me,” he said.

She scrutinized him. “I think I can return you to that other form. But would you mind explaining this curse to me?”

He considered this. Well, the woman had known there was a curse, she had seen him transform—as strange as this transformation had been—and, even though this was just a dream induced by a coma, he felt safe in telling her. “Agreed.”

He watched her put her hands together and close her eyes. He felt the curse give way and there was another puff of smoke, and he was standing there naked in front of her. She opened her eyes and abruptly turned around. He began to get dressed. She turned her head a little, looking back at him, then mentally chastised herself for doing so, and looked forward again



## 10 - Ecstasy

Sesshomaru left Rin with Jaken, then started off again. He paused, looking back at Ayame. Ayame looked back at him. He had been talking to Rin, and he broke off mid-sentence when he realized what the other was getting at. He smiled and trotted off in his very flamboyant manner after Sesshomaru. Sesshomaru did his best to ignore the snake's eccentricity, in favor of the snake's beauty, and continued into the forest. He wanted to be well out of earshot.

He glanced back at Rin, Jaken and Aun. Aun was grazing, totally ignoring everyone else, and Rin was nearby them, picking flowers and twisting them into circlets. Jaken was trying not to look at Sesshomaru and Ayame, and was failing. He had such a surprised, somewhat horrified expression on his face that it was rather comical.

“Do you prefer seme or uke? Personally, I've done both and—“

“Seme.”

“I thought so,” Ayame said slyly. He was growing kind of giddy. And by “giddy” that would be more giddy than was usual for even Aya, and in a different way. “So, how far do we have to be before we frack?” he asked, clapping his hands together.

Sesshomaru wondered if he would be so vocal during sex. He hoped so. “Out of earshot.”

“How far is that?” Ayame wondered, looking back. He couldn't see or hear them. He automatically flicked his tongue out without really thinking about it. He frowned, wondering why he had done that, then “saw” their bodies. They were a ways away, but their heat patterns were visible—Rin's anyway. Jaken's and Aun's were barely visible to him. That was strange. Very strange. He knew what it was; he had seen it enough times in his snake form, but why was he seeing it now?

“We must continue on for a while longer. Just be patient.” Sesshomaru was trying very hard not to rip off the lovely hanyou's clothing here and now. Every time the snake moved, it was like an open invitation. It probably was.

Ayame pouted. He didn't want to be patient. He wanted Sesshomaru to forget his principles and frack him now. “How much longer?”

Sesshomaru looked at him. The pout on Ayame's face was adorable. “It's not too far now.”

Ayame smiled. “You're really cute,” he commented. Sesshomaru began to feel exasperated. He had half a mind to not be courteous to Jaken and Aun and strip Aya now. But then he would have to deal with the awkward stares that came from that. And the more the damned snake, who looked entirely too much like himself, looked at him, it reinforced the former idea and said to hell with the latter. “Especially with that look on your face.”

What look? He realized that his features had contorted into exasperation and longing. He immediately shifted his face back to its normal blank. “Indeed.” He turned and continued walking.

Ayame walked beside him. He really did like looking at Sesshomaru. It was a literal feast for the eyes. Besides that, though, he seemed like an admirable person. His quiet demeanor, his coldness, and his few words reminded him of Hatori. And he thought that this man could be one of the few people that he admired in terms of personality, intelligence, and etc. He already admired him for the way he looked. Ayame swiftly moved in front of him and leaned in to kiss him—very briefly, then spun to his other side, his hand briefly brushed up against Sesshomaru's.

Sesshomaru blinked and looked at him, then continued walking. Clearly, this hanyou was too bold, but he happened to like it. Everyone treated him with either reverence, fear, or hatred. This hanyou genuinely liked him, and while being enthralled with him, it didn't border on worship. At least there was

one person in existence who treated him like a living creature instead of an enigma. It might as well be this adorable hanyou.

He stopped and listened. He could hear Rin singing to herself from here, but she couldn't hear them from this distance, no matter how much he could get Ayame to scream. Jaken might be able to hear, if he was listening, but he had the idea that Jaken would be doing his best not to.

He looked at the area. Maybe just a little bit farther, until he came to somewhere more... romantic? Why would he be thinking that? He glanced at the hopeful-looking snake again. That was why.

It was not often that one found a creature as lovely as this hanyou, and he wanted the experience to be perfect. So perfect that the hanyou would continue to stay with him so this could continue.

Ayame's hopeful expression was utterly adorable, even in Sesshomaru's opinion. He was staring Sesshomaru, eyes huge. "Yes," Sesshomaru answered to the unasked question.

Ayame's lips parted in a grin. "Finally! I've been waiting for so long... What are you doing?" he wondered. Sesshomaru was pulling off his armor, but it probably looked weirder than it was, considering the make of his armor. He didn't answer and dropped it on the ground, raising an eyebrow at the snake. "Oh." Then Ayame realized that he could touch him now with no fear of getting impaled. Before he could move to do so, though, Sesshomaru came to him and started unbuttoning his long coat.

Ayame thought that this had to be some amazingly perfect dream. And, he might wake up soon. He always seemed to wake up right before the really interesting part happened. Sesshomaru dropped the coat down and pulled the other off of him. He felt an emotion he rarely felt—delight. The hanyou really did have the body of his dreams, to go along with the face. Thin, toned, but not muscular. His body was perfectly sculpted, in fact. Oh, he just couldn't wait to thoroughly explore that body. He started pulling off his own clothing.

Ayame scowled. "Not fair!" he accused. Sesshomaru paused, looking at him quizzically. Ayame smiled, and put his hands to Sesshomaru's obi. "You undressed me. Now it's my turn." Sesshomaru let his hand fall to his side. He was usually the one doing that, and it was strange to have someone else do it—even in a moment like this. They were usually content to sit and watch him, practically drooling as he did. But not this hanyou. He was half-expecting the snake to get confused when it came to the more complicated parts of his outfit, but he never faltered for a moment. It was like he had studied clothing. Little did he know that he had.

"I just love your clothes," Ayame commented, running his hands over the smooth silk. Sesshomaru wanted him to stop playing with his clothes and start playing with him. He reinforced this thought by kissing Ayame. The kiss seemed to awaken something in the hanyou, and he pulled off the rest of Sesshomaru's garments.

The next thing Ayame knew, he was lying on his back, with Sesshomaru on top of him, continuing to kiss him. He felt Sesshomaru's hand gliding down his torso, caressing his hip for a moment, and then his fingers curled around Ayame's erection.

Ayame gasped with the movement, running his hands over the taut muscles on Sesshomaru's back. His perfectly manicured nails suddenly dug into Sesshomaru's back, and the other realized that it was time to stop. He pulled away from Ayame's mouth and inserted three of his fingers. Ayame's skilled tongue caressed them. He imagined how amazingly good that tongue would feel on his cock. He pulled out his fingers, one by one, and moved his hand back to the place he desired.

Ayame tried to relax, but he was so excited that it was a bit difficult. Sesshomaru looked at him. "Relax, or this will hurt," he warned him, pushing one slender finger against the snake.

Ayame tried, but couldn't manage to. "Oh, I can't! I'm too excited."

Sesshomaru kissed him softly. Ayame felt like he was melting—like boiling chocolate in a pot. A good kind of melting. It had the desired effect, for the snake relaxed, then the giddiness came back as he felt a finger penetrate.

He moaned against Sesshomaru's lips, then gasped as another finger entered. He squirmed a little, uncomfortably, so Sesshomaru waited for his body to adjust before he began to work at preparing him for the inevitable.

Emerald eyes stared into golden ones. Ayame closed his eyes, crying out as his fingers hit his prostate. Another finger entered. Ayame began to shake, but not from fear or pain. Almost there...

His back arched as he moaned. Sesshomaru sat up. Ayame repositioned his legs so that his ankles were on the other's shoulders. He felt a short pang of emptiness when Sesshomaru removed his fingers, but it was gone when he felt Sesshomaru's hard cock pressed against his entrance, slowly easing inside. Ayame moaned, his fingers gripping Sesshomaru's thighs, the nails digging in again.

Nothing else seemed to exist. They were a world apart from everything else.

Ayame had already lost himself the oblivion of ecstasy, and Sesshomaru was... Forgive the pun, right behind him (though that's not their current position, things are subject to change).

Because of how totally boring sex is unless you're right there experiencing it or it's something really weird or bondage-y, I won't bother explaining how amazingly wonderful their awesome boyxboy sex was, or about how Ayame was ridiculously loud, or about how Ayame, being a snake, was extremely flexible, which Sesshomaru found to be quite delightful, or about how many times they changed positions, or about how they both seemed to have excellent stamina. Oops. It seems I've already done that.

Sesshomaru, being a dog, wanted to finish with Ayame on his knees. He grasped the snake's hair, hauling his head back, forcing him to arch his back more, and pulling him upright. Ayame looked back at Sesshomaru—who was hot, sweaty, and sticky, with his hair stuck to his face, chest and back (a sexy thought). Ayame wasn't much better off (author drools).

Ayame turned Sesshomaru's face towards him and leaned back, kissing him for one brief moment before he pulled away. Ayame screamed his release, falling back on his hands and knees, panting heavily. Sesshomaru was almost there as well. He pushed in, all the way to the hilt and his back arched, head thrown back as he let out a loud moan, emptying into Ayame's bowels.

He panted for a moment, then pulled away. Before Ayame turned to look at him, Sesshomaru shut his mouth, as he had automatically, in the throes of ecstasy, had reverted to instincts only, and his tongue had been sticking out of his mouth in very canine fashion. While that may have been acceptable in his dog form, it was most certainly not acceptable in this one. He settled to breathing heavily through his nose, then slowly and gracefully collapsed onto the soft grass. Ayame was in a kneeling position, still panting heavily. Sesshomaru reached up, grabbed Ayame's braid, and pulled him gently down beside him.

Ayame almost thought to protest about the way he had been treated, but when he looked at Sesshomaru, he couldn't. He snuggled up to the dog and closed his eyes, drifting off into a peaceful slumber.

Being that there is something weird about boys that makes them want to sleep after their release, Sesshomaru did likewise

## 11 - time's running out

Kagome and Kaede looked after Inuyasha's ankle back in the village. Hatsaharu helped where he could, though he mostly just handed them whatever they needed. They had poked at the swollen ankle, asked him about it, sprayed it with something painful, rubbed a cold ointment on it, and were bandaging it now.

"Kagome, does this happen often?" Haru asked her, referring to Inuyasha's damaged ankle.

She smiled and shrugged a shoulder. "Usually, he gets hurt in the chest. But half demons heal quickly. So he should be all right soon."

Inuyasha really didn't like the way Haru and Kagome looked at each other. Was that jealousy he was feeling? He had felt that way when Kouga flirted with Kagome, but Kagome seemed to enjoy Haru being there, which sort of gave cause for worry.

"I meant... Do you have to do this a lot? And do you ever get hurt like this?"

At the same time, though, he supposed it was okay. Haru, hanyou though he may be, was from her world. If she went back with him, it would really be better for everyone, he supposed. Better for him, easier on her.

She tied the bandage firmly and looked at the ox. "Well, sometimes." She smiled. "But, as you can see, I'm all right."

It hurt her so much when he went after Kikyuu. It would only continue to hurt her. It felt like she was being selfish to Inuyasha. It really made no sense why she acted that way.

"Kagome-chan, please be careful," he said. "Don't hurt yourself trying to get back Tohru for us."

At least if she went back with Haru, then she would be safe there. She wouldn't keep getting captured, she wouldn't die here—away from her family and the world she knew. She really didn't belong here anyway.

She hid a blush as she turned her back on Inuyasha and Haru, fiddling with her first aid kit. "You don't need to worry about me."

Besides, Kikyuu was alive again—more or less. He could freely pursue her if she went back to her world and stayed there—with that damned ox hanyou.

"But I will worry about you," he said.

His eyes trailed to the door. He waited, then saw what he thought he smelled—Kyou. He was pacing back and forth outside the door, as if he were expecting something. He was probably apprehensive about Tohru, and was wondering when they could rescue her.

What Kyou was really thinking about, though, was that accidental kiss. There had been something... there. Besides surprise, confusion, and horror anyway. What it was, he didn't know.

But he knew that if he were to kiss Inuyasha again, he would know. That he would admit that, even to himself. And if that were the only way he would ever know what it was, then he would never know. He could content himself to that.

He stopped and looked off in the direction Tohru had been taken. Without Tohru... the world just seemed devoid of joy. Tohru's smile lit up the world. He hoped that she was all right. He hoped that she was still alive.

He really didn't know what he would do if anything were to happen to her. She was his first real friend—the first person who had truly accepted him (Kagura didn't count; she was nuts). If it weren't for Tohru...

They had to rescue Tohru—and soon.

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Tohru had been placed in a dark room. It wasn't that it was cold, or damp. It was that it had no windows, and that the door was locked that frightened her.

She had no idea how long she had been locked up in here, and she was so terrified. So many frightening things had happened. She was so worried—about herself, about Yuki, Kyou, and the others. She had no idea why she was here, and she was so confused.

Apparently, they had confused her for someone else. But who could that be? And, more importantly, where was she? What was going on?

The door opened. The light hurt her eyes, and she flinched away from it. When her eyes didn't hurt any longer to look at the light, she looked up to see Naraku. Akito pushed past him and froze upon seeing Tohru.

Akito's face immediately shifted into a hateful glare. "Tohru."

"A-Akito-san..." Tohru whispered. How could this be?

"Is Yuki here?" he hissed.

Naraku looked from Tohru to Akito, a bit confused. But apparently they knew each other—obviously not on good terms. "Here? In this room?" she wondered in her "blonde" sort of way.

Akito's eyes narrowed. "No. Here. In this world."

She blinked. "World?"

"He fell through the well with you, didn't he?" Akito growled, grabbing a hold of Tohru's hair and hauling her head back.

Tohru gave a small cry, looking up at Akito, clearly terrified. This was just like déjà vu. Except now, there was no one to come between her and the Sohma god. "Y-yes."

His rage deepened and he lifted her up until she was half-standing. Her eyes watered. "What did you do to my Yuki?"

"N-nothing. I was just... I fell down the well, and he tried to save me, and fell down..."

"He's still here? On this side of the well?"

Tohru didn't know what he was talking about. "I don't know what you mean," she cried.

Akito let go of her suddenly. If she didn't know what he was talking about, what good was she? He turned away from her.

"You know this girl, then?" Naraku asked him.

Akito looked at Naraku coldly. "If you have no use for her, then kill her, or I will."

Tohru's heart began to pound and her breath caught in her lungs—all at the same time. Her eyes widened as she looked fearfully from Akito to Naraku, not sure of which she should be more frightened of.

"I am using the girl as bait."

Akito regarded him for a moment, then brushed past him. "Once she is useless, you will kill her, will you not?"

"Yes," Naraku confirmed. He shut the door.

Tohru trembled. "Sohma-kun... Yuki-kun..." she sobbed into the darkness.

On the other side of the door, Kohaku had been standing guard. His gaze shifted to the door. He really didn't like this. They were going to kill her? How could he just... stand by and let this happen? He had to kill Naraku—soon, before this girl's time ran out

## 12 - Merge

Somehow, the others managed to convince Inuyasha not to go running after Naraku, as his ankle was still damaged, and decided to leave at first light.

"We should leave the other half-demons," Miroku said to Sango, Kagome, and Inuyasha. "It will be too dangerous for them."

Inuyasha considered. Kyou would be furious. The others may be more willing to stay behind, but not Kyou. But it was safer if Kyou stayed put. "Right. We'll just have to leave them in the morning."

"Damn rat!"

"Stupid cat."

"Are they fighting again?" Kagome wondered. She poked her head out the door. Sure enough, Yuki and Kyou were engaged in another fight. She just hoped their demon powers never surfaced during this; they'd kill each other.

Speak of the devil and he will appear, however. Kyou's body seemed to burst into flames as he lunged Yuki. Yuki's eyes widened a little, but he skillfully evaded him.

"What's going on?" Sango wondered, peering out the door. "Yuki!"

Momiji seemed to appear from nowhere. He looked up at Kagome. "What happened to Kyou?"

Miroku came outside. "It seems as though Kyou came in touch with his demonic powers."

"Should we interfere?" Sango wondered.

Momiji's eyes widened. No one ever got involved in Yuki and Kyou's fights. It was like inviting more hatred and violence. "You probably shouldn't. Besides, Yuki will beat Kyou soon anyway!"

"Are you sure about that?" Kagome wondered, judging by how fast the cat seemed to be moving, and the demonic energy he was building.

Momiji smiled. "Yup. Yuki is way stronger than Kyou."

It seemed to be true. No matter how fast Kyou was, or how furious, he couldn't seem to lay a decent hit on Yuki. Yuki's speed was unnatural, too, and his movements were faster than was usual for even himself.

Inuyasha finally came outside. He regarded them with disinterest. "What do you think, Inuyasha?"

Kagome asked. "Should we break it up?"

He considered for a moment. How would he feel if someone broke up a fight between him and Koga or Sesshomaru? He would be furious. Yuki might be grateful, but Kyou would just be angry at whoever got involved.

Shigure and Haru came walking around the corner. Shigure looked at them and laughed. "At least they're not wrecking my house this time!" he chimed.

The others just wondered how he could be so carefree all the time. Their attention went back to the two combatants. Yuki finally landed a punch on Kyou's jaw. The fire went out and Kyou fell on his back.

Inuyasha made a mental note to teach him about his demon powers a bit more. Yuki turned from Kyou and walked up to the others.

"Have you decided on a course of action?" he asked. But he seemed to be looking primarily at Sango. She nodded. "Yes..."

"We're leaving all of you here," Inuyasha said flatly.

Yuki looked away. "I see."

"What!?" Kyou practically screeched, stomping up to them. "But we... It's our fault that this happened to Tohru! You have no right to leave us behind!"

He had a point, but this was for his own good. "If you come with us, you'll just get hurt."

"What can you do?" Kyou demanded. "You don't even know Tohru. You shouldn't be doing this—we should!"

"It's all right. We need to do this."

Inuyasha looked at Kyou. They hadn't said anything about Akito to the others yet. "Kyou. What about that man you knew?"

Kyou frowned, not quite comprehending for a moment, then he realized what he meant. "Oh..." He glanced at Yuki and Shigure, then looked back at Inuyasha and the others. "It may be more dangerous than you think. At the very least... You should bring Shigure."

The others frowned. "What do you mean?" Shigure wondered.

He looked at the dog. "Akito is here."

A fearful silence hung over the Sohmas like a fog. They looked at each other. Even Momiji was fearful.

"What does that have to do with us going after Naraku?" Kagome wondered, fearful that she knew the answer.

"Akito is with Naraku," Inuyasha told them.

"Akito...?" Miroku wondered.

"The god," Yuki said quietly.

As the reality of just how dangerous the situation had become fully dawned on them, they looked fearfully out at the sky. Naraku and Akito working together could spell disaster for every living creature.

"Could you tell us about Akito?" Kagome asked. "Is he as evil as Naraku?"

Yuki looked down. Shigure looked away. Kyou was reluctant to say anything, and Momiji didn't really know Akito either. Haru looked from Shigure to Yuki. Only those two could really say for sure just how evil Akito could be. To his surprise, it was Yuki who finally spoke. "Akito is a malevolent, selfish, arrogant bastard. His sole pleasure lies in the misery of others, and he cannot be happy unless someone else is miserable," he said quietly.

"If Akito is there, we'll need Hatori," Shigure said. Akito may listen to Shigure, but that didn't mean he would listen. However, if Yuki, Shigure, and Hatori were there, they stood a decent chance of convincing Akito to come back with them.

"Who's that?" Shippo asked from his perch on Kagome's shoulder.

"Did he come through the well?" Momiji wondered.

Shigure really didn't know. Had he? He thought back to when he had fallen. Hatori had gone in there with Sota. Had he fallen down through the well? "He is," he realized.

They looked at each other. "How do we find him, then?"

All eyes fell to Inuyasha. "I don't know what he smells like!"

The Sohmas thought for a moment. Shigure sighed and removed the pack of cigarettes he had swiped from Hatori's car from his pocket. "Smell this."

Inuyasha sniffed at it and wrinkled his nose. "What the hell is that?"

"A mixture of herbs and paper. Can you detect the human scent?"

Inuyasha nodded. "Let's find him, then." He took a step forward and stumbled. Kyou caught him. They looked at each other, faces flushed. They both immediately pulled away.

Only Shigure seemed to understand what had just occurred. He kind of smiled. "Well, it seems as though Inuyasha will have to stay here." He considered. He had been in his dog form enough times to know about tracking. He sniffed the cigarette box. The smell of tobacco was almost overpowering, but he definitely could smell Hatori on it. "I'll find him. Kagome, Sango..." He took their hands. "The forest is so dark right now and I might get lost trying to find my way back, so could you accompany me?"

Yuki punched him.

It ended up that Shigure, Yuki, Sango, Kagome, and Haru went out looking for Hatori, leaving the others. Momiji and Shippo went to bed.

Kyou, however, was up on the roof, staring up at the stars. He heard a sound like someone climbing onto the roof. His ear flicked toward the sound. He turned to see Inuyasha climbing up. "Oh... You're up here," he said.

Kyou turned away, looking back up at the alien night sky. You never saw the stars like this in his time. It was so beautiful. He wished that Tohru could be seeing this. He glanced back at Inuyasha, who still hadn't moved, as if trying to decide to come up anyway or to go elsewhere.

"You can come up here, y'know," Kyou said flatly. Inuyasha hesitated, then pulled himself all the way up. He made a point of sitting on the opposite side of the roof. "How's your ankle?"

"Fine. We could even leave now, but they all left to go find your damn friend."

"Hatori isn't my friend," Kyou hissed. "He's my cousin." His only real friend was in the hands of Naraku and Akito. Damn! Akito hated Tohru. What if she was hurt? Or worse? Kyou could only blame himself, really. If anything happened to her... An image of Hatori's damaged eye came to mind. Akito had been capable of that, even though it had been something as simple as asking permission for marriage. And he didn't even hate Hatori. "Akito may kill Tohru."

Inuyasha blinked. "..."

"If he does anything to her..." His fingers curled into a fist. But what could he do? Akito... Akito controlled everything. He hoped the others came back with Hatori soon. He couldn't bear the thought of Tohru in trouble. "Akito..."

"Will you kill him?"

Kyou glanced at Inuyasha. He wasn't so sure he could do that. And not just because he wasn't physically capable. But because, like it or not, he was blood related to Akito, and Akito... He wasn't so sure he could do that. It wouldn't be right to kill him. But the idea of that bastard hurting Tohru released something violent in him. "I don't know."

"Well, we'll get back Tohru. And I'll kill Naraku," he added.

Kyou looked at him. There was a resolve in his eyes—a burning passion. Inuyasha could get back Tohru. The determination was burning in his eyes. He could do this. It made Kyou feel more at ease to know that he was going after Naraku and Akito to take back Tohru. Kyou smiled. "Hey..." His eyes shifted away. "Thanks."

"Yeah. Well... She is Kagome's cousin and all..."

Kyou smiled again. He turned and looked at Inuyasha again, who was turned and looking at him. "Well, thanks anyway."

"I could teach you how to beat Yuki."

Kyou's interest was suddenly piqued. "You think you could?"

"frack yeah."

They suddenly both fell silent, looking at each other. That their first kiss happened was inevitable, and it wasn't as awkward as they thought it might have been. Inuyasha pulled Kyou over to him. Kyou looked at him. "Isn't this wrong though? We're both guys."

"Yeah," he agreed. "Probably."

Ah, well. So long as they were okay with it, it was okay. Kyou sat down beside Inuyasha. "But we're not going to say anything about this to anyone else."

"No," he agreed.

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It was strange, but Hatori found himself looking at Kikyuu differently than he did with other women.



Perhaps it was time to get over... He refused to think about her name. But his blind eye was a constant reminder of her face. He had to move on. She had, even if it was only because her memory were erased. But, perhaps it was time for that. And Kikyō, despite her attempts to hide it, seemed to be interested in him as well.

In reality, she was thinking the same things he was. Inuyasha seemed smitten with her reincarnation. And, while he still loved her, she was dead. And he didn't seem to understand that. Hatori, however, did. She had let him see her soul collectors and explained what they were, and what she was. It hadn't frightened or surprised him. Perhaps, it was time that she, too, moved on from Inuyasha. She sensed the presence of three half-demons. She turned toward them. There were humans with them.

Miroku looked around. "Kikyō is here," he commented upon seeing a soul collector.

"With Hatori?" Sango wondered, considering the direction Shigure was taking them. He wasn't as uncouth as Inuyasha to get down on all fours, but he still seemed good at tracking. They had begun at the well and had been hunting him down since then. Shigure said that there was another scent there, but he didn't know who it was.

Kikyō moved toward them. Hatori followed her. "What are you doing here?" She glanced at Shigure.

"Are you tracking me?"

"Actually, we're tracking him—" Shigure said, pointing to Hatori. He looked at Hatori and grinned. The dragon cringed inwardly. Shigure may have tried flirting with the girl, but there was something about her that gave him the creeps. And Hatori might hurt him. "Hatori-san, we need you, y'know."

Hatori blinked. Remember, he was still convinced that this was a coma-induced dream. "Why?"

Shigure approached him. "Akito is here. He has teamed up with..." He looked at Kagome. This was going to take a while.

Kagome looked at Kikyō. "Akito is a god in this world—literally. He and Naraku are together."

"If Akito realizes his powers, we'll all die," Miroku said quietly.

Kikyō considered this. "Very well." She valued her life while she had it. Naraku could kill her for certain if this Akito person were there. "I will assist you."

They began the trek back to the village together. The others wondered how Inuyasha would act with Kikyō and Kagome both around for the short while they would be together. Kikyō didn't really like Kagome either, so it really could get nasty. But Kikyō seemed different as she walked beside Hatori. Calm and peaceful. Kagome walked beside Haru and explained what she could to Hatori, then Shigure told Kikyō as much as he could about Akito, and about how Tohrū had been abducted. That seemed to strengthen Hatori's resolve as his ideas of being in a coma were slowly being diminished.

Two groups had merged. Shigure thought of Ayame. He had been told that Ayame had went off with Inuyasha's brother. They had to find Ayame eventually when they went back to their own time, but in the meantime, it was probably best if he stayed out of the way

## 13 - couples forming

Rin looked back in the direction they had come. It really wasn't all that far from that village. She frowned, considering. She really had liked that boy, Momiji. And it had been fun playing with other children. She had happily gone off with Sesshomaru-sama, but then he had wandered off, so...

She glanced at Ah-Un. Should she go see Momiji? It wouldn't take too long. "Master Jaken?" Rin asked. He had a weird facial expression (even weird by his standards) and appeared to be trying to scoot as far away from the direction Ayame and Sesshomaru had gone as possible. "How long will Sesshomaru-sama be gone this time?"

Jaken glanced at her, then attempted to bury his head in the dirt. That's what it looked like, anyway. Rin frowned. She walked over to him and kneeled down, peering at him. "Master Jaken, what are you doing?"

"Don't think about it!" he yelled, but she couldn't figure out why. He moaned and flopped over tragically. "Couldn't they have gone just a bit farther? Oh..."

Rin was confused. "What are you talking about?"

His eyes somehow managed to become wider, if that was possible. "N-nothing! Nothing a human child needs to be concerned with!"

She was still curious as to know why Jaken was being so peculiar, but she was more interested in seeing Momiji again. She looked up at the sky. It was already dark out, though. Maybe she should just go to sleep. She walked over to Ah-Un and snuggled up to the two-headed dragon. Jaken envied her relatively dull human hearing for the first time in his life.

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The night was strange. Hatori felt tired, so it was getting difficult to keep denying reality. It was strange to feel sleepy in a dream, after all. However, he also couldn't help but deny this world and all of its weirdness.

After all, it seemed to him as though Kyou was attracted to Inuyasha, that Yuki was interested in Sango, Haru liked Kagome more than Yuki, and that Shigure had a sexual attraction to Miroku.

While the last one could be believable, the others were so weird that he just couldn't believe it. After all, Yuki showed interest in no one. He had the harsh realization that he was cursed drilled into him. He knew that he couldn't be accepted by normal people, yet he was trying now, and it seemed to be working. That alone was strange. Furthermore, Haru already had a girlfriend (Rin; not the little girl "Rin" from Inuyasha either). And he was in love with Yuki. So, that made no sense at all. Why would he be cheating on his girlfriend, while simultaneously betraying his love to Yuki. It was strange.

And it only got stranger. Most of the Sohmas seemed to have gender problems; it was true. Ayame had no concept of gender, Yuki looked like a girl, and so on. Furthermore, most of the Sohma family also had no problems with incest (for obvious reasons) or homosexuality (for even more obvious reasons). Kyou was probably the one exception to this general rule.

And yet, Kyou seemed to be genuinely interested in Inuyasha. At least the feelings were mutual. They may have thought that they hid it, but to someone who knew Kyou or Inuyasha, it seemed rather obvious. It would have been less obvious if they did not deliberately ignore each other, only to be seen sitting up on a rooftop later.

Kikyou, at first, was saddened by this. She had always thought that one day, she would return to the world of the dead... and Inuyasha would follow her. She had hoped for that, anyway.

But now, he was no longer torn between her reincarnation and herself. Kagome seemed smitten with the

hanyou, Haru. And Inuyasha, despite how he attempted to hide it, seemed to like the hanyou, Kyou. It was a star-crossed match, after all; a cat and a dog, both with fiery personalities, and being more or less outcasts.

However, her jealousy seemed to fade when she looked at Hatori. He seemed to be the only person who didn't question her motives, or anything. In fact, he seemed like the perfect man—the strong, silent type. So different from Inuyasha, but in a very pleasant way—like coming up for air after half-drowning. He was a relief.

The others decided to get some sleep before the morning. Kyou was already asleep on the roof, in proper cat fashion. Inuyasha was awake, sitting near him, but not too close. The boys and girls made sure they were apart (largely due to Miroku and Shigure's lechery).

The hanyou and the monk sat near each other, sulking and discussing in hushed tones the manner in which they were treated by the others. Naturally, they didn't see themselves as being perverts, but the others knew much better.

The others in their hut were already asleep. Shigure glanced at Miroku again. “About that time in the forest...”

Miroku's eyes widened a little, then he relaxed again. He looked sidelong at Shigure. “Yes? What about it?”

“Well, did you feel as though...”

Miroku blinked slowly, getting the idea of where this was going at. “Perhaps...”

Shigure couldn't think of a way to just say it, so he acted on his emotions instead. He leaned forward and kissed Miroku. At first, the monk was so shocked that he didn't move. He just sat there, eyes wide, not moving, and barely breathing. Then he slowly sunk into the kiss. Shigure pulled away and yawned. “I'm going to bed.” He crawled over to the futon, glanced back at Miroku, and went to sleep.

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Morning came. After the fastest breakfast any of them had consumed, Inuyasha, Kagome, Sango, Miroku, Kikyuu, Hatori, Shigure, and Kirara left in pursuit of Naraku and Akito. Shippo protested at being left behind, but was somewhat consoled, as Momiji was there.

Kyou sulked as the others went off to rescue Tohru. He didn't like that he was so useless as to be left behind, but what could he do? They just didn't want to put him in danger, and Hatori and Shigure were the only people who could reason with Akito, so they had to go. Still, it really didn't seem fair.

Haru, however, didn't sulk. In fact, he was in a rather good mood. Before Kagome had left, she had promised to bring Tohru back, and then... Well, Haru was kind of clumsy, so had tripped a little. As luck would have it, he had caught himself and the distance between them had closed. The moment had been awkward at first. But then... They had both hesitantly kissed each other. It was a fast, quick kiss—but it was still a kiss. Kagome had turned away from him, looking a bit confused, but was blushing. Haru had only smiled.

Yuki wasn't in a bad mood either. He was worried about Tohru, but Sango had also promised to bring her back—and he believed in Sango. He knew that she would help get Tohru back. And soon his friend would be back with him, where she belonged. And then... Would they all just go home?

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Momiji and Shippo sat coloring, discussing the older kids' and adults' doings as they did so. Momiji suddenly put the crayon down and looked off at the forest. Perhaps, he had a crush on Rin. She was cute.

He thought of Ayame. He had gone off with her too. They would need to bring him back with them, of course. Maybe he should go find him (and Rin)?

He reasoned that it would be easier on everyone if Ayame was already with them when they got back with Tohru—and possibly Akito. That way, they wouldn't have to go looking for the snake.

He looked at Shippo. “How long do you think they'll be gone?”

Shippo looked up. “Sometimes, we walk around for days without finding Naraku. But this time, Inuyasha knows right where Naraku is hiding, so they just have to break down the barrier,” he said. “And with Kikyō and Kagome there, it won't be a problem.”

“So, you think I'll get to go home today?”

Shippo considered. Him going home today meant that they would rescue Tohru. But a member of their family—apparently an important member—had sided with Naraku. It would depend if they wanted to bring him back as well. “Are you bringing Akito back with you?”

“Akito-san is the Sohma god. We have to bring him back.” Momiji thought for a moment. Could a new god even be born if Akito was still alive? And if they were back in their time, and Akito was here, would Akito still bear the full brunt of the curse? And if a new god couldn't be born, and Akito wasn't there to shoulder the curse... What did that mean for the Juunishi?

Momiji got up. “I'm going to find Aya.”

“Who?”

“That man who went off with Rin and the other man.”

Shippo frowned as he tried to think of who the boy meant. Then he realized who he was talking about.

“Is that a good idea? Sesshomaru is really scary.”

“Who?”

“That man that Aya went with.”

Momiji touched his lower lip as he thought. “Aya won't let anything bad happen to me. And he can't be that bad if he has Rin with him.”

Shippo smiled slyly. “You have a crush on the girl.”

Momiji blushed. “Y-you think so?”

The child youkai nodded. “Yep. You like her.”

The rabbit grinned. “Yeah! I do!” He spun around in a circle, giggling. “I do like Rin!” With that, he bounded off into the direction Rin had gone

## 14 - operation has begun

Things were not looking well for Kisa, Hiro, Rin, Ritsu, or Kureno. The other Sohmas who knew about the curse didn't know what to do without Hatori being there.

Ritsu had been the first to become affected (one hour after Akito's disappearance), and had immediately gone home to the hot springs the day before—which seemed like the obvious thing to do. However, since yesterday, he had only been getting sicker, and slept throughout most of the day. His mother tried calling Hatori, but the doctor didn't seem to be there. Naturally, she jumped to crazy conclusions at first, then decided that he might be out. She tried calling Shigure, but there was no answer there either. Possibly Ayame? No answer.

Maybe he was visiting another of the Juunishi?

Kureno fell victim second—only hours after Akito had gone through the well. However, because of his confined state, it would be a while longer before anyone took notice of the bird. He had a pounding headache. It felt like someone had taken a hammer to the inside of his skull... As if his body were slowly being pounded to pieces.

Rin was the next target. She had been out shopping with one of her non-cursed cousins, and had suddenly collapsed outside. Her cousin panicked. Luckily, she knew enough about the curse to not let any man help them. What if Rin transformed—right here in public? Somehow, however, she managed to get the unconscious Rin into a taxi and the girl didn't transform all the way home. In fact, she wasn't even conscious until the taxi stopped. The cousin (who I am not naming) paid the fee and helped Rin out of the car. Rin stumbled, leaning heavily against her.

“What happened?” she asked her.

Rin moaned in pain. “I just feel so sick...” She covered her mouth and stumbled away from her, to the curb, where she threw up. Couldn't even make it inside. This was bad. Rin had been fine a while ago... It wasn't until later in the evening that Hiro was affected. His family was just sitting down to dinner when he suddenly ran from the table to the bathroom—to throw up. He was spitting up blood as well as vomit. The pain was making him dizzy. The world seemed twisted at an odd angle, and nothing made sense.

“Hiro, are you okay?” he heard his mom ask.

“No,” he snapped angrily, pushing his hands against his temples, trying to massage his throbbing head.

“Call Hatori-san.”

“Right away, honey.” But Hatori couldn't be reached.

Kisa was the last, and she remained unaffected until late at night. She woke up in a cold sweat. She was freezing and too hot at the same time, and feeling miserable. She tried to get up, but was too dizzy. She waited a moment, then slowly climbed to her feet. She struggled down the hallway to her parents' room and knocked on the door. She opened it. “Mommy?” she called.

“Kisa?”

“Mommy, I feel really sick...”

Her mom got up. She took her temperature. Kisa had a high fever. Her mom got her some water, over the counter medicine, and an ice pack, and Kisa tried to go back to sleep. She did, but it was a fevered sleep.

Things were not looking well for the Sohma family right now.

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Akito, however, was currently having the time of his life. He was playing with his newfound power, testing his limits, and discovering that there were few. He wanted to use it to kill something—or someone. To inflict pain and suffering on others.

He looked back at Naraku, who was watching him with curiosity. Akito raised his hand. A tiny bird perched on his finger and began to preen itself. “I want to kill someone,” he said.

Naraku smiled. He found himself liking this man more and more by the minute, as if fate had bestowed upon him his ideal partner. “You will. Just be patient.”

Akito frowned. Patient? He glanced back out the open window. His gaze settled on one unfortunate tree. With his power, he uprooted it and let it fall to the ground with such force that it made the farce building shudder with the impact. The bird spooked and flew off. He smiled wickedly. “Let me kill Tohru.”

“No.”

He glanced at a teacup. He cradled it with his power, making it rise. He took it out of the air and sipped slowly. “Then I will kill your enemies for you.”

“Leave the priestess.”

Akito glanced into Kanna's mirror, watching the scene. “Which one?”

Naraku had the mirror direct to one particular priestess. “That one.” Kikyuu was riding on a dragon, her soul collectors nearby her. “It won't be long now.”

“Fine.” He let go of the teacup, letting it glide back to rest on the table. He rose to his feet, delighting in that movement was no longer painful at all. His kimono slipped off one of his shoulders. “How much longer?”

“Give them one more hour.”

“Just let them in the barrier.”

“Then they will suspect something.”

“They already suspect something.” He glanced back in the mirror. “And I'm sure they know that I'm here.” He looked at Shigure, a bit annoyed to see him. He didn't want to hurt Shigure. The dragon must be Hatori. Maybe he would blind his other eye this time, but he couldn't bring himself to kill Hatori either. Not that he wanted to explain it to Akito (who still wouldn't see his point of view) leaving the barrier in place just forced Kikyuu and Kagome to waste arrows. Maybe he should send Kagura to attack them. Akito would be angry for wasting time.

Naraku rose. “Akito.” The other turned to look at him. As soon as he turned his head, Naraku kissed him. Akito blinked slowly, trying to process what was going on. Then his eyes closed as he found himself melting into the kiss. “Should I slow them down a bit?” he asked, trailing his fingers down Akito's bare shoulder. Akito shuddered softly.

“All the time you can,” he said with a small smile.

Naraku called for Kagura, not bothering to be courteous enough to step away from Akito when she came in. She abruptly turned around upon seeing Naraku half-naked and Akito getting there.

“Well I never knew you liked men,” she muttered under her breath. But it sure explained a lot.

He ignored her statement. “Go slow down Inuyasha.”

“Fine.” So long as he wasn't intent on making her a party to this. Battling Inuyasha would be much more preferable. Besides, she really didn't want to be here while Naraku fracked Akito. Not a pleasant thought. And here she had been, thinking that Naraku didn't even have a sex drive, considering that he didn't really have a gender to begin with anyway. Well, surprise, surprise. She heard the first moan before she had even left the castle. She kind of flinched and took off.

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Inuyasha froze in mid-air upon a rather disturbing scent and sound assaulting his senses, making for a

rough landing.

Kagome's grip tightened. "Inuyasha! What are you doing!" she yelled. He glanced in the direction said noise and smell were coming from. He was positive it was Sesshomaru, too. Was it with... that guy that looked really feminine? Huh. Well, he had always assumed that Sesshomaru had to like men. Why else would he be so... weird? He thought of Kyou. Of course, Inuyasha really couldn't talk. "Inuyasha!" He glanced at Kagome. "What is it?"

The others, noticing that he had stopped, landed—except for Hatori, who was too big for that. Shigure jumped down off of Hatori's back, landing gracefully on the ground—beside Miroku. He immediately wrinkled his nose. "That's..." He looked around. He laughed. "Ayame."

This only dawned on Sango, Kagome, and Miroku slowly. Miroku, being a pervert, was the first of the three to get it. "Oh... Let's leave them alone," he said.

Kagome frowned. "Don't we need to get Ayame anyway?"

Shigure laughed. "It might be best not to bother them."

"Wha...?"

A scream of pleasure from Ayame clarified exactly what was going on. Shigure howled with laughter. Miroku looked in the opposite direction. Sango got back on Kirara, followed by Miroku. Kagome's face was indescribable and quite humorous to others, though it was a look of horror. "I never knew... that Sesshomaru was gay," she said, flinching when Ayame screamed again.

"Let's leave," Inuyasha suggested when he heard Sesshomaru moan. They really weren't very far off from here, which bothered him quite a lot. He couldn't take it any more and started to leap off.

Shigure grabbed a hold of his haori. "I'm going to get Aya."

"What!"

"They're done." He pointed and signaled for silence. Indeed, it seemed as though they were.

"You're going to just... walk in on them?" Kagome said, horrified.

Shigure blinked. "I've walked in on Aya-kun having sex before."

"With a man!"

Shigure considered pointing out that there had once been a time when he was that man, but decided it was best not to. "So?" He went off in the direction he smelled them. "Just give me a while."

"I'm not sure that Sesshomaru would appreciate you walking in on them, even if your friend won't care," Miroku said.

Shigure blinked. "Who says I'm going to look? I'm just going to tell Ayame to come with me. I'll say Hatori said so," he added as an afterthought. Come to think of it, if Hatori went... He looked up at the dragon. "Hatori-chan—"

"No," he replied.

"Fine." He started off, careful to only go so far. "Aya-kun!" he called.

"Gure-chan?" Ayame called, sitting up. Sesshomaru had half a mind to haul him back down, but he didn't.

"We're going to try to get back Tohru from Akito and this Naraku person. It would be easier if you were back at the village when we got back, so could you go back?"

Sesshomaru sat up. "Exemplify."

"What's happened to Tohru-kun and Akito-san?" Ayame asked. Shigure realized that no one had told either of them what was going on. He sighed. Ayame suddenly appeared, completely naked, sweaty, and dirty, beside him. It didn't suit him at all. "Gure-chan, did something bad happen to Tohru?"

He nodded. He would have to go back to the beginning, with the younger boys' story. Once he got to the part with Naraku, Ayame's "lover" appeared, halfway dressed, listening intently. He stopped and explained the curse of the Juunishi, then continued with his story.

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During all this time, the others discussed how to subdue Akito. The obvious thing to do was to split up a bit—Inuyasha and gang, as well as Kikyō, would go after Naraku, Hatori would go after Akito, and Shigure would try to find Tohru, who would most likely be inside the castle. They warned Hatori about Naraku's various incarnations, and told him to, if at all possible, avoid Naraku. They had to explain Naraku's power to absorb other demons. It would be bad if he absorbed Hatori, for many reasons. Not that Kikyō would let him.

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In the meantime, Momiji had found Rin (how, nobody really knows), but he did. Rin was thrilled. Jaken was not. The hanyō and ningen children were playing in the field. It appeared as though Rin had her first crush. Fantastic. To anyone else, it would look cute. But to Jaken, it was horrifying and sickening. One, because he didn't like Rin. Two, because Rin was playing with a hanyō disgrace. What would Sesshomaru do? Then again, Sesshomaru had been with a disgraceful hanyō recently. Had he forsaken all of his morals? Had the world suddenly gone utterly berserk? The answer was apparently “yes,” for at that moment, Sesshomaru walked into the field, accompanied by the snake hanyō. (Shigure had gone back to the others, informing them that Sesshomaru and Ayame were coming with them. Inuyasha was displeased. They had come to the conclusion to bring Ayame when Naraku's incarnations came up. You see, Kanna has no demonic aura, or scent, thus only one person could detect where she was—Ayame.) They looked somewhat washed, but it was more of a very quick dunk in a river, and their clothes were damp (ooh, white clothing on a damp Sesshomaru and Ayame—yummy!). Momiji and Rin mostly ignored them, aside from greetings. Sesshomaru led Ayame over to Ah-Un. He picked up the snake and set him down on the dragon's back. Ayame frowned. He had seen Ah-Un before, and the creature looked tame enough, and he trusted Sesshomaru, but... “Um, what are you—” Sesshomaru kissed him, interrupting him. Jaken hit the ground. Momiji didn't care. Rin frowned, looking from one to the other. Weren't they both men? Sesshomaru pulled away and climbed on in front of him. Ayame wrapped his arms around Sesshomaru's waist instinctively when the dragon took off. Operation Everyone-Teams-Up-to-Take-Down-Naraku-and-Akito-and-Take-Back-Tohru had begun (that was horrible).



## 15 - Disaster Strikes

Kagura froze upon seeing the approaching party. “He has got to be kidding,” she muttered flatly. There was no way she could take on all of them by herself! And, she really didn't want to attack Sesshomaru if it could be avoided.

Well, there was really no point in her hanging around; Sesshomaru could destroy her in a matter of seconds. The dragon also worried her. Where had they of all people found a dragon ready to side with them? Had Naraku known that they were all together? That bastard! He had sent her to die—again! She turned back around. She had better at least warn him, then get the hell out. As much as she liked the idea of Inuyasha killing him while he fracked that “god,” if Naraku's enemies didn't kill him, then she would be in trouble for not warning him.

Kagura hadn't thought anyone had seen her, but Hatori had noticed her. “Kikyou, there was a woman on what appeared to be a floating feather,” he said.

She looked around, but didn't see anything. “Where?”

“Ahead. She turned and went back the way she had come.”

“It must be Kagura,” she said. She wrapped her fingers around his horns. “Hatori, let's go on ahead.”

She glanced back at Shigure. “Shigure, hold on. We're going ahead of the others.”

He obeyed, like a good little puppy. “Hey, everyone, we're going ahead of you!”

“Hey!” Inuyasha began to complain, but Hatori was already off. Inuyasha sped up to try to keep pace, but it was like a human trying to outrun a horse. Ah-Un, however, had only little trouble keeping up.

Kirara was just behind them. Inuyasha cursed. Just because he couldn't fly...

The barrier came in to sight. They stopped. Inuyasha noticed this upon reaching the peak of his jump and smirked. They needed him, and apparently Kagura had managed to get through the barrier before they approached. Hatori turned around. What was he doing? Inuyasha discovered after his third jump after seeing him, for Hatori snatched him and Kagome out of the air, carrying a protesting Inuyasha to the barrier, dropping him in front of it. However, he didn't let Kagome fall. He kept his paw flat. She stood up on it, looking up at Kikyou. Kikyou seemed to be waiting for her, an arrow notched, aimed at the barrier. “Aim at the barrier. When Inuyasha attacks it with the Red Tessen, then we will shoot together.”

Right. That would make this barrier come down—for sure! There was no chance that this barrier would last. Did that mean... This would all come to an end today? So long as they were all together, Kagome was sure that they couldn't lose. She liked that idea. All Naraku could do now was run!

She aimed at the barrier, looking down at Inuyasha, who only seemed to be waiting for her. He swung his sword. The archers released their arrows. Kagome had guessed right—there was no chance for the barrier and it came down after the triple hit.

They raced through. Sesshomaru leaped off of Ah-Un, leaving Ayame at a safer distance behind them. Ayame flicked his tongue, “looking” to see the people inside.

“Ayame, how many are inside?” Hatori asked him.

“Six,” he answered with surety.

Kikyou nodded. “One of them must be Tohru. Ayame, Shigure.” Sesshomaru would hate her for doing this, but what choice did she really have? “Go look for Tohru inside.” She looked at Sango and Miroku.

“Will you two go with them?”

Sango nodded. "Right." The four of them landed and dashed inside. Sesshomaru had left the door open, and Inuyasha had dashed after him. Kikyou and Hatori landed. They were alone now. She looked at Hatori, considering changing him back to his normal shape. A soul collector dropped a soul into her body. "Once they get outside with Tohru... Hatori, could you take them back to the village?" He regarded her for a moment. "How can I be sure you will come back with the others?" Kikyou smiled softly. "I will. I promise." She looked up to see Kagura running away. Let her go. "Kikyou." She turned back to the dragon. "Be safe." She smiled again. "You as well."

Ayame suddenly froze. He was the one guiding them to Tohru.

"What is it, Aya-kun?" Shigure wondered.

They tried to ignore the sounds of battle on the other side of the castle. They had to get out of here before it was destroyed. They didn't have time for him. He looked around. "One of them is coming toward us."

"From where?" Miroku asked, getting into a defensive stance. He realized he had put himself between Shigure and the corridor.

Ayame pointed down the hall. "It looks like a kid," he commented.

Sango stepped forward. "Kohaku..."

"Hm?"

"My kid brother." She raised her hiraikotsu, spreading her legs outward, staring intently forward. Kohaku stepped into the light. They prepared for a fight, but the boy only looked at them, then raced down another passage. Sango ran after him, as could only be expected. "Kohaku!"

"Should we go after her?" Shigure wondered.

"But Tohru is just ahead," Ayame said, pointing.

Miroku looked from Ayame to Shigure, then down both hallways. "Sango can take care of herself. Our priority right now is Tohru."

Ayame led the way. He froze again. Shigure ran into him. "Gure-chan, you should be more careful."

"Why did you stop?" Miroku interrupted before Shigure could defend himself.

Ayame looked down another passage. "Another child is here."

The most disturbing thing about when they had ran in, following the scent of Naraku's miasma, was that Akito and Naraku had only been half-dressed. Akito pulled on his kimono the rest of the way unhurriedly. He flicked his wrist. The table hurled itself toward Inuyasha. He swung his sword, but Naraku's barrier came up. The blow totally annihilated the room. Kikyou aimed and shot. It pierced the barrier and dissolved it. Naraku took Akito and flew upwards. He really didn't want to face all of them at the same time. Sesshomaru leaped at him. Akito put his hand out. His power wrapped around the dog's throat, like white-hot fingers. Sesshomaru froze, lest the fingers burn him. Tokijin's blade turned blue and he released its destructive power. Inuyasha, Kagome, and Kikyou rushed to get out of the way. When the light dissipated, Akito had his hands raised, as if he had warded it off somehow from himself and Naraku.

Inuyasha used the Wind Scar again. Kagome aimed and shot him. He erected a barrier right before the Wind Scar hit him. Kagome's arrow almost pierced his barrier. While he was distracted, Kikyou aimed and fired. Her arrow hit him in the shoulder. Sesshomaru attacked again. Akito rushed to Naraku's aid and threw Sesshomaru backwards. The dog landed on his feet and prepared to rush at them again.

Naraku glanced to the other side of the castle. "Sesshomaru. You are wasting time here. Your pet snake is in danger."

Sesshomaru hesitated, then turned and ran for Ayame. Naraku was feeling a bit more confident now. He plucked out Kikyō's arrow and destroyed it. He could take on these three with no problem—especially with Akito here.

"You're gonna fracking die!" Inuyasha screamed, jumping up in the air for another attack.

"You are pathetic."

Kagome aimed at Naraku again. "Together again," Kikyō whispered. Inuyasha's Wind Scar hit the duo above.

The reincarnated one nodded. "Right." Before the attack had finished and the light dissipated, the archers shot once more. Naraku wasn't even looking at them. His tentacles were going straight for Inuyasha, combined with Akito's power. Akito had seen them aim though, and he was already using his power against Inuyasha. There was no time to shift it away. He dove in front of Naraku. The two arrows hit him in the back. He fell against his lover. Naraku froze, his barrier falling in to place again.

"Akito..."

"I'm all right. I'm a god... This won't kill me. Pull it out."

Kagome looked at her quiver nervously. Running out of arrows here...

Naraku's fingers wrapped around one of the arrows, looking into Akito's pained eyes. But Akito was used to pain. He flinched when Naraku pulled out the first arrow, and gritted his teeth again with the second. The two seemed oblivious to the three getting ready to attack them again.

"Akito..." Naraku pulled him to him and kissed him. Inuyasha lowered his sword a little.

"Eh..."

They still hadn't pulled away. In fact, Akito had wrapped his arms around Naraku's neck.

"What the hell is wrong with everyone!" he screamed. The two broke the kiss and looked at him.

"Oh. You," Akito said, sounding annoyed. "This is the second time you've interrupted us." He smirked wickedly. "You need to die now."

The debris from the castle, illusion or not, floated upwards. Akito planned to hurl it all at Inuyasha from various angles. There was no way he could avoid all of it. And if he used the Wind Scar to get rid of it, he would probably accidentally hit the girls.

"Kanna!" Miroku said, hauling Shigure and Ayame back. He knew he couldn't fight Kanna, so what would be the best course of action?

"Give... me... your soul," Kanna's soft voice whispered from the darkness. The white child stepped into the light.

Ayame's gaze immediately fell to the mirror, being the vain person that he is. He suddenly started feeling weak...