

Your darkness....

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What do you mean Inuyasha asked a now nervous Mrs. Higurashi. She saw the look in the hanyou's eyes, and the feral gleam promised things that she didn't even want to conceive. It left her shuddering in fear.

Contains Violence, Language, Rape

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1 - The dark

Chapter 1 - The Dark!

~~Current Time - Modern Day Tokyo - Somewhere~~

The day had been long, and overcast. The threat of rain hung in the air like a sickening pawl, but never fell. It was like it was waiting for something. Something that seemed to linger waiting for the dark. The dark where the shadows could offer their companionable silence and cover a wealth of sins until the light of day.

She paused to catch her breath. It was late. Too late. She had been visiting one of her friends, who lived not far from her family's shrine. It was a pleasant evening, despite the fact that they were doing school work together. She had finally gotten caught up on all of her missed assignments, and even had managed to do some extra credit work and in a couple of her worst subjects, no less. She had even done a couple of extra chapters to get a little bit ahead.

It was hard to keep her school work even remotely up-to-date. There just was not enough time for it all. Studying, trying to make up for lost assignments, doing makeup tests, and having time to spend with her mother, brother, and Ojii-san.

But that was not even the tip of the iceberg. No! There was so much more. There was the ever present search for the Shikon no Kakera, the shards of the Jewel of Four Souls. Sometimes for days, even weeks, she would spend time in Sengoku Jidai traveling with her 'family', in an effort to fix what she had broken, and to bring justice to the world by defeating their hated enemy Naraku.

It had gotten a bit easier in the past month, only because they had finally beaten the evil hanyou and obtained the shards in his possession. But there were still a few of the shards needed to complete the Jewel and she had vowed to continue her quest and be true to her vow to protect and keep pure the Sacred Jewel.

She was supposed to meet up with Inuyasha at the old Bone Eater's Well at sun down, but the chance to get caught up on her school work for the first time in months was just too good to ignore. Unfortunately, she had stayed way too long, and now it was dark and she was still a couple of blocks from home.

The shrine was in sight, for which she was grateful, but the last couple of blocks were the hardest part of the trip. Only half of the street lights on both blocks were actually working and even those did nothing to push back the threat of the darkness. Despite the fact that there was a full moon tonight, the cloud cover from the day still lingered and the heaviness of the air for the threat of rain, was oppressive almost to the point of suffocation.

Cursing herself for not having asked Ayumi's father for a ride home, or asking Hojo to walk her to the steps, she vowed that she would let Inuyasha yell at her and call her every name in his vocabulary if she could just get home without incident.

Taking a deep breath, she gripped her books tighter and started to run. She didn't want to linger for a moment over the last hundred yards or so, she just wanted to get home safe. With the bottom most steps in clear view, and being now in the last half block, she sighed in relief knowing that she was almost there. It was the darkest of the entire distance, the last area where there were no lights at all. Even the nearest houses were boarded up, run down, abandoned boxes that no one had lived in for years.

Still, she pressed on. She was strong, brave, and could do this. She just needed to run that last short distance to the steps at the front of the shrine, and she was home. But the Fates had other ideas on this dark and scary night.

2 - She is in Danger!

Chapter 2 - She is in Danger!

~~The Past - Sengoku Jidai - Inuyasha's Forest~~

"She's late." huffed the angered hanyou. The dog promised to be back hours ago, and she still had not come through the well. What was wrong with her, why could she not just forget that damn school thing and just stay here?

Truth was, Inuyasha was not angry with her for wanting to go, or even that she had gone. It was just that he hated for her to be so far away and not able to catch her scent or see her face, or just be near so that he could know she was safe. It left an emptiness in his heart, every time she left him. It was so painful that he found times when just breathing was almost beyond reason.

But she didn't see this. All she saw was his anger and all she heard was his cruel and hurtful words. He didn't mean to hurt her, he was just afraid. He had given his trust before, and had come out with not only the heartbreak and anguish of betrayal, but the loss of 50 years of life. Time spent sealed to a tree and unable to do anything but dream it away. That is until that one memorable day, when SHE came. When she came and removed that hated arrow and set him free.

He wanted to tell her how much he loved her, how much she meant to him. But he was afraid that she didn't feel the same way and could not bring himself to say those most precious words for fear of being rejected.

"Inuyasha!" called Shippo as he ran up to the old well to see if Kagome had returned yet. As the hanyou turned, he could see that Sango, Miroku and Kirara was not far behind the little kitsune. "Has Kagome come back yet?"

"Hmmp! lie! The dog is late again," he grumbled. "The stupid baka was supposed to be back before sunset."

Miroku and Sango exchanged knowing smiles, before turning back to the upset hanyou. "Perhaps you should go after her," said the houshi.

"lie! She can stay there for all I care. She is nothing but trouble," he further complained, although they all knew that he didn't mean what he said.

"Well then, perhaps we should all just go back to the village. Obviously, if she wishes to return she will," stated Sango, looking once again at the houshi with a slight smirk. With a knowing glimmer in his eyes, he turned to Inuyasha.

"Hai! Perhaps she just doesn't feel that she is needed enough to want to return," he stated. "Come Sango, let us go. Obviously, it is a waste to wait here for someone who is weak and useless. She is after

all, nothing but a bother, and really doesn't provide any useful purpose to our quest or group. Other than as a mere shard detector that is."

Shippo was confused. This didn't make sense to him. Why were they not trying to get Inuyasha to go get his Okaa-san and bring her back? He was about to say so, when Sango caught him up, covered his mouth and shook her head to show she needed him to be quiet at the moment.

Not being sure why, but figuring that they must have their reasons, Shippo decided to stay quiet and just let Sango and Miroku continue as they were.

The group, minus one hanyou, turned and proceeded back to Kaede's hut in the small local village. They had barely gotten out of sight, when they turned into the nearby woods and quietly snuck back to a couple of convenient bushes and sat to watch the by now irate hanyou.

"Hmmp! How dare they say such things about Kagome. She is not weak or useless. She is the best of our group. She contributes a lot to our group and they should know that by now," he huffed. He was pacing back and forth in front of the old well, getting more and more angry by the moment. Why was she not back yet? Had something happened?

He stopped suddenly, as an icy chill raced up his spine, leaving him feeling like someone had just dropped snow down his back. He broke out into a sweat and without realizing it, he was growling in the most vicious of manners. The secluded watchers caught the sudden change and were about to leap from their hiding place, when they heard his next words and felt their own fear grip their hearts.

"Kagome! She's in danger!," cried Inuyasha, as he turned and leaped like it was his life into the old dry well.

3 - The horror!

Chapter 3 - The Horror!

~~Current Time - Modern Day Tokyo~~

Higurashi-nisou was trying to make herself busy in the kitchen. She was worried for her daughter. Kagome should have been home hours ago. She had called Ayumi's mom to see if Kagome was on the way home or if something had happened, but found that Kagome had left about 20 minutes ago. Given the distance that she would have to walk, it would realistically take Kagome about 30 minutes to make it home.

"Kami, please let my daughter make it home safely," she sighed. She had spoken to her father, and son, and both had set out to see if they could meet up with Kagome and at least provide some safety for part of her trip. But they had only just turned exit the house, when a red blur came crashing through the door.

"Where is Kagome? What happened to her?" an anxious hanyou yelled angrily.

"She is fine, Inuyasha. She should be home any time now. She was at a friend's....."

"IIIIIIINNNNNNUUUUUUYYYYYYAAAAASSSSSHHHHHHAAAAA!!!!!!!!!"

The air was suddenly rent with a gut wrenching scream that tore through the night, leaving any who heard it gasping in fear and shock. Without a seconds thought, the same red blur that had torn the front door open was gone and Higurashi-nisou was left almost standing still by comparison. She made her own way to the door, fear gripping her heart as she prayed that that scream didn't belong to the one person whom she was sure in her soul, it was.

Higurashi-daitoku and Souta both knew who it was, but just as with Kagome's mother, they were both trying to deny it, even as they too rushed towards the sound in the hopes of getting to Kagome and helping in whatever way they could. They were almost knocked off their feet as a dark red form stormed past them, down the steps and off into the darkness of the concrete jungle called Tokyo.

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Her blood filled the air, and the stink was almost enough to make him vomit. While his bestial side often craved the satisfaction of blood to quench its thirst, the smell of her blood had just the opposite effect. To his youkai, this was his chosen mate, and her blood was not supposed to be spilled. Not by anyone, or anything, for any reason, unless by him, her mate, and even then only under very specific circumstances. He had spent too many years protecting her, providing and caring for her to let anyone else take her from him, and he was not about to let her go for any excuse.

Oh why had he been so stupid? Why had he not just gone to get her like he should have? Why had he been so stubborn and angry? Why did he have to let the fear in his heart control his mouth and his

actions? Why could he not just tell her the truth?

Fighting back the fear that threatened to overwhelm him, he raced towards where the smell was the strongest. It led him down a nearby street, ironically within sight of the shrine steps. About halfway down the dark block of obviously abandoned buildings, there was a dark alley off to the right.

Here the smell was thickest and mixed with the smell of others. Inuyasha's heightened senses could pick out the scents of at least six others, along with Kagome's fear, her blood and the one scent that left him growling like a rabid dog in anger, almost foaming at the mouth.

Lust!

Fighting back his youkai blood, he focused on finding Kagome. It was just a moment longer before he spotted the shadows of six figures bent low over a crumpled body laying on the ground.

Two were busy holding her down, and roughly grabbing at her breasts as they laughed maliciously, while a third was busy ramming himself as deeply into her as he could, groaning in his pleasure at her pain. She was sobbing hysterically, as a fourth was slapping her in the face for making noise and having screamed, a fifth and sixth one standing one either side of her, pulling her legs almost impossibly far apart and up to give their companion easier access to drive full force into her, as they passed their time carving random patterns in the backs of her legs, awaiting their at taking their pleasure with her.

At the sound of a wild and rabid dog coming rapidly towards them, the five males froze for just a heartbeat and then all scrambled and raced in different directions. The sounds of the growling was enough to leave at least two of them losing control of their bodily functions in their own pants, as they rushed to leave the area and make their escape.

Inuyasha wanted to chase them down, but at the moans of pain coming from Kagome, he forced his youkai down, Tetsusaiga helping him to retain his sanity, as he quickly removed his haori, and gently wrapped it around the shivering form of his most precious treasure. As she whimpered in pain from the movement, her breathing seemed pained and ragged. He realized that a couple of her ribs were probably cracked and one arm was broken by the looks of the odd angle that it lay in, she was bleeding from numerous cuts and scratches, as well as the violation of her body, and had several deep cuts that were bleeding profusely where she had been stabbed with a knife. Her face was already very swollen and turning black and blue, where she had been repeatedly slapped and punched. Thankfully, there were no cuts or marks that would not heal with time and nothing to permanently mar the beauty of her face.

"Inu....yasha?" The word came out broken and barely above a whisper, through the swollen and bleeding lips. "Take me away from here! Take me 'home'," she was barely able to say.

Somewhere in the depths of his mind, he realized that to her, 'home' was a large and Sacred Tree, and a small unassuming village in a far distant time. A place where demons were the norm, and modern day luxuries were unheard of. A time that was far away from the nightmares of this night in this era. He looked into her pain filled eyes, and nodded that he understood. She closed her eyes and as best she could, she tried to curl into a ball to block out the reality of this night.

Inuyasha looked briefly, but carefully around the sight, taking in the scents of the vile things that had

done this to his tenchi. To any average ningen, this place would show almost nothing of importance, other than the signs of a struggle, and the blood and other bodily secretions from the activities that this night had seen.

But to the senses of an enraged inu hanyou, the very darkness that shrouded this place held secrets that only one with his abilities could find and read. Here a bit of cloth from on of the vile fiends that had dare to touch what was his. There a couple of stray coins that had fallen from the pockets of the one who had dropped his pants. Here a shoe that one of them had lost as he ran. There a few strands of hair that Kagome, in her efforts to fight off her attackers had pulled from at least two of her assailants.

A bit of wood that one of them had brushed against, leaving behind a few drops of sweat. Sweat that gave off a stronger scent for want of the fear that had gripped the owner at the sound of a wild animal rushing after him. Over there, a bit of building material that had for the briefest of times, been near one of the two who had messed himself, and now was permeated with the scent that had hung in the air long enough to cling to its surface.

Even on Kagome, herself, there were many clues that told their own story about the owners of those scents. Scents that could be used to track them down, one by one, and make them pay for the crime that they had committed this dark and horrid night. A great deal of the lingering clues, Inuyasha found on the torn clothing that Kagome had once worn. In their haste to violate the onna, she had fought tooth and nail, biting and scratching back. Grabbing what clues he could, without regard to what was there, Inuyasha lifted Kagome up as gently as he could, and rushed her back to the shrine.

4 - A problem Known!

Chapter 4 - A Problem Known!

~~Current Time - Modern Day Tokyou - The Higurashi Shrine~~

Knowing that Inuyasha could get to Kagome faster than anyone, Higurashi-nisou returned to the house, hauled out extra blankets, and got the first aid kit. Moments later, Souta, and Higurashi-daitoku came running into the house, opening the door wide as Inuyasha carried in a red wrapped bundle and gingerly laid it down on the living room floor.

"Ojii-san, take Souta out of here. This is something that he should not have to see," said Higurashi-nisou. The old man nodded his understanding and hugging the boy closely to him, led him upstairs to his room.

Kagome's mother was fighting hard, to not lose her own self control. She had to be strong for Kagome. There would be time later for her to break down and give into her own fear and horror at the sight that lay before her now.

"I will go call the police and get an ambulance," said Kagome's mother. Inuyasha startled her when his clawed hand whipped out and grabbed her wrist, effectively stopping her.

Inuyasha turned to Mrs. Higurashi when they were finished, "You need to know that Kagome asked me to take her back with me. I believe that she wanted to be as far from here for a while, as she could get and to get away from the nightmare of this evening."

"But we need to call the police and have her looked over by doctors here. If we do not, then we do not stand a chance of stopping these criminals," she argued.

"How would you explain to them that 'I' am the one who brought her home? She is obviously not in any condition to have gotten here herself, and Ojii-san and nii-san could not have gotten her here either," he stated firmly, but quietly as he let go of her wrist. "She will be safer with me, and her friends. We can watch over her, and give her the help she needs."

Slowly and reluctantly Higurashi-nisou nodded her understanding. "Though it pains me to say so, I have to agree with you. Even calling the police and reporting this would take time and it is very unlikely that the criminals would be brought to justice for their actions," she stated sadly. "Not to mention the emotional torture that the authorities would per her through just trying to get information."

Making a mental note of this statement, Inuyasha turned his attention to the more immediate concern. Getting some kind of treatment going on Kagome's injuries. Her arm was the most immediate problem along with her cracked ribs. She, also, needed to be cleaned up so that her other injuries could be

attended to, as well.

"Her arm is broken and several of her ribs are cracked. I need something to brace her arm with once it is straightened and something to bind her ribs with," he stated firmly. Mrs. Higurashi nodded and left the room for a few moments. Inuyasha took this time to talk to Kagome, offering his comfort and support as best he could and to prepare her for what he had to do next.

"Kagome," Inuyasha leaned down and softly whispered to the injured onna. She was still sobbing, almost uncontrollably, but the hysterics had subsided.

"Kagome? I need to set your arm, this will hurt, gomen ne," he said. She looked at him, and the pain, trust and something he could not quite grasp, in her eyes, warmed him as she nodded her understanding.

Kagome's mother quickly returned with some strong but soft cloth to bind Kagome's ribs, and she had several bits of wood that could be used as splints for her arm. She took a roll of cloth and brought it to Kagome's mouth.

"Here, bite down on this as we straighten the arm. It will muffle the scream, and you can scream as loudly as you need to," she told Kagome. The onna nodded and opened her mouth as her mother set the cloth into place. Higurashi-nisou then settled herself near Kagome's head and held her daughter's shoulders to hold her steady while Inuyasha set her broken arm.

"Kagome, look at me and no matter what, do not take your eyes from mine," said Inuyasha. She complied with the request and focused her glazed vision on the face of the hanyou who held her heart, and nodded that she was ready for what she knew he had to do. For a moment, she just felt one of his hands bushed over her shoulder and the other gently but firmly wrapped around her wrist. Seconds later, the pain of her broken arm tore through her like someone had set every nerve she had ablaze with the fires of hell.

At the sudden wrench of the offended appendage, Kagome screamed for all she was worth, but it only lasted a moment as she passed out from the pain and shock of the evening's incident. The bliss of darkness engulfed her and gave her some small removal from the pain that she was suffering from the horrors of this cloudy, ominous night.

"Where did you find her and how?" Mrs. Higurashi asked Inuyasha. She knew that she needed to know, else she would have more nightmares than she thought she could handle. On the other hand, she was scared to learn the truth of what had taken place. But one thing about Kagome's mother, she was never one to turn away just because the situation was unpleasant.

Someone had hurt her daughter, and there had to be a way to bring justice to this matter. The real problem was, how to find the culprits and how to bring the evidence needed against them and make it stick.

"She was only a short distance from here, but the area was dark and most of the buildings appear to be old and abandoned," he stated heatedly.

Mrs. Higurashi nodded. "I know the place you speak of. There have been many who had tried to get something done about that area, but so far we have not had much luck in getting the authorities to demolish the old buildings and clean up the area."

Mrs. Higurashi knew of the gang that was involved. Their name the 'Nightwalkers', had appeared in the newspapers and on the news too many times to count. The biggest problem with the group, was that no one was willing to step forward and bear witness to the crimes committed and there were no apparent pictures of the individuals of the group, as the police had never been able to link any known criminals with the crimes to provide who they were or what they looked like.

The only thing that pointed the crimes committed to the criminals that committed them, was their horrid habit of leaving their name, 'Nightwalkers' carved in their victims chests or stomach's and traced near the bodies in the victims own blood. The gang seemed to revel in the torture of their victims.

At least half of them were onna who the gang had taken and kept locked in kami knows where, while they repeatedly and painfully tortured them, until they either lost interest, or the victim died of their injuries. The public was in an uproar, but so far little or nothing had been done, or seemed to be able to be done to catch this horrible gang of hells own devils.

Inuyasha was unable to restrain a growl at this news. It was offensive, no it was more than offensive, it was an injustice of the worst possible kind. It was horrible that such places existed as havens for the vile and dirty things such as had hurt Kagome, this night. He vowed that he would make each of the six pay for what they did, and the basics of a plan had already begun to set in him mind.

"I had been waiting for her to come back to Sengoku Jidai. Kagome was late, and I had thought to come at get her. Something told me that she was in danger, and...I tried to...get here as quickly...as I could," Inuyasha paused, shuddering with guilt as he recalled how he had originally refused to come, because he was angry at her for being late. "But...I...I...failed to get here in time. I...I...I...was not....fast enough. I was not here...to protect her like I was supposed to."

He could not bring himself to look Mrs. Higurashi in the eye. He hung his head, the shame more than apparent to the mother of two. While he didn't say it, Kagome's mother knew that part of his shame was most likely because he had hesitated to come earlier to get her daughter. She knew of the friction between the two, but also understood that much of it was simply that the two could not bring themselves to face each other and open their hearts, because each was afraid that the other would say the one thing neither wanted to hear.

Mrs. Higurashi put a comforting hand upon the shoulder of the shaken hanyou, "Inuyasha, even if you had been here, you most likely would not have been able to stop this crime. Kagome was late coming back from her friend's house, and it is unfortunate that the way she took is the only path home from where she was."

She paused to collect herself. She wanted to cry, but now was just not the time. When she felt that she could speak again, without her anger and fear showing, she continued.

"Her friends are as much to blame as anyone here, they should have seen her safely home, or at least made her come home before it got dark. The gang that did this to her are not unknown, but our

authorities have not been able to capture them and bring them to justice. Unfortunately, Kagome is just one of many of their victims and she is not likely to be the last," she stated with more anger than Inuyasha thought the woman possessed.

Mrs. Higurashi had gotten a couple of sturdy bits of wood that as it turned out, were pieces of the old Goshinbuko, and with these, Inuyasha was able to rapidly and efficiently splint up Kagome's arm. Between the two of them, they were able to tightly bandage her ribs and was relieved as the sound of her breathing being less erratic and more normal. Inuyasha continued to dress the various wounds, and with Mrs. Higurashi's help, they took Kagome into the bathroom, where they cleaned up the mess from the sexual violation that she had suffered.

Inuyasha had, had more experience in dressing injuries over the past five years, what with the hunt for the shards, and their numerous encounters with Naraku, and Mrs. Higurashi had a background as a registered nurse. So between the two, they were able to clean up and treat all of the injuries that Kagome had suffered. At least the physical ones, anyway.

Once they were done, they returned to the household living room. Kagome, injuries dressed, wearing a pair of loose fitting sweat pants and baggy t-shirt, and bundled into a warm blanket, was currently lying on the couch. Inuyasha and Higurashi-nisou were packing the things that they thought most needed and wanted for Kagome, into her backpack. While they packed the necessities, including some painkillers that Mrs. Higurashi had on hand for her father's arthritis, they discussed the situation at hand, and what could be done about the criminals.

"You said yourself nothing your 'authorities' have been able to do, has stopped these monsters. You, also, said that there seemed no hope of anything being done to capture them or even to find them," Inuyasha said with more heat than he had meant to. "If your authorities cannot protect her here, then the very least that I can do is take her where I KNOW she will be safe, and take what steps are within my power to see to the justice your 'authorities' seem unable or unwilling to do themselves."

"What do you mean Inuyasha?" asked a now nervous Mrs. Higurashi. She saw the look in the hanyou's eyes, and that feral gleam promised things that she didn't even want to conceive. It left her shuddering in fear. "You can't mean to track them down and kill them. We have laws against that in these times."

"lie! I will not 'kill' them. That would be the easy way out," he said with such a sadistic voice that Mrs. Higurashi thought she might faint from the chill that ran down her back.

"I may not have much love for him, but thanks to Kagome, I have more respect for my older brother that I have every thought possible. One thing he taught me in some of our recent encounters, is that sometimes it is better to 'make them live'," he said with a growl. Now Mrs. Higurashi knew that something was up, but she could not argue in all logic with the perspective. Death for those that found pleasure in this kind of vile act, was the coward's way out and too good for such. But she didn't even want to imagine what Inuyasha had in mind. The malicious way he spoke and the feral, sadistic gleam in his eye was enough to make her cringe at the thought.

"I am going to take Kagome to Kaede-baa-chan. The old miko will take care of her as well as any of your 'hos-pit-alls'. She has cared for her before when the need was there and she can and will do so again," he stated firmly brooking no arguments. Kagome's mother just nodded her understanding.

"I will be returning tomorrow well before sunset, however, and I intend to bring some... 'friends'... with me. In the mean time, I need somethings gathered together if you do not mind?" he asked.

"Sure, Inuyasha! If it is within my or my family's power to do, I will help as much as I am able," came the hesitant reply. She was not sure what she was being asked, but she was not sure she really wanted to know. All she knew for sure, was that whatever happened, she didn't want to know the details.

"Good," said Inuyasha. Removing the scraps of cloth from the sleeves of his haori, he gave them to Kagome's mother. "I need these kept safe, separated, and preferably sealed so that they can't be contaminated by any other scents than the ones currently on them. I need a map of that dark area where I found Kagome, and if you can get me some of those picture things of that area, too, it would be a big help.

I will require clothing for a woman about your size, a male a head taller than myself, two males about my size, two males just a bit smaller, and one male less than half Souta's size. I am the only one who need worry about my ears, the other can use their hair. I will explain myself further when I return," he stated firmly.

Inuyasha continued. "You need to be prepared to receive a pure blood inu youkai, three pure blood ookami youkai, a pure blood kitsune kit, a pure blood neko mononoke, a Taijiya, and a houshi. There will, also be five ookami. Because they are wild, we will not be able to leave them outside unattended, so they will have to come into the house or the shrine for at least a short time. Do not be afraid of them. They are lead by an ookami youkai Prince and are under the strictest control."

"I will have everything ready by the time you arrive Inuyasha," said Mrs. Higurashi. "I understand about the wolves, and will speak to Souta and Grandpa as well. We will be ready for you."

At that Inuyasha stood up, and picked up the now fully clothed but still unconscious little Miko. Mrs. Higurashi wrapped the blanket more securely around her daughter and gently kissed her bruised face, then turned to the loving but seething hanyou.

"She trusts and loves you more than you could possibly imagine Inuyasha," she said. "She would give her life for you. She is just afraid to tell you because she doesn't believe you feel the same for her. You have always been there for her, and done your best to protect my daughter from evils that I cannot possibly imagine."

"You are always welcome in our home, Inuyasha. You are more than just a friend to us here. You are the one that my daughter has given her heart to, and I trust you not to break it and to treasure what you now hold in your arms like it was your life," she concluded.

Inuyasha was shocked at these words. He would never have expected them. To be accepted by such a family, especially when most of them hardly knew him, was almost overwhelming in and of itself. They never treated him with prejudice or anger, and had always welcomed him into their home. He owed them more than he could ever repay, and was quietly thankful for their generosity and graciousness.

But to learn that Kagome loved him that deeply, was something that he had only dreamed of. Why had

she never said how deeply she felt? Oh, Kagome had told him many times that she loved him, but for some reason, he could not quite fathom, he thought it was friendship and nothing more. He had always wanted more, and he had admitted sometime ago to himself that he deeply loved her himself. But after his own fashion, he was afraid to speak of his feelings for her, because of the betrayal he had suffered in the past with Kikyou, and fear that Kagome didn't feel the same.

Mrs. Higurashi's words warmed his heart in ways that he had never dreamed possible. With more gratitude than he had ever felt for anyone, he looked her right in the eye, "Arigato, Higurashi-nisou-sama. Your words have just given me back my life and my heart. We are leaving now, but remember, I will be back tomorrow and I will be bringing friends." With that he was out the door and before one could draw breath he was down the old well and passing back through time.

5 - Bringing her home!

Chapter 5 - Bringing Her Home!

~~The Past - Sengoku Jidai - Inuyasha's Forest~~

The night was filled with stars and the full moon shone brightly on the frame of an old well in a small clearing not far from the great matriarch of this forest, the Goshinbuko. To all intents and purposes it seemed like any other normal night. The air was warm, the normal nightlife was a foot, the old well looked like it had always appeared. But the reality of this night belayed the appearance of what was true.

Four entities stood by the old Bone Eater's Well, as they had for the past couple of hours. They waited seemingly patiently, but they were all scared and worried half sick for a very dear and beloved friend.

One was a male dressed in the dark robes of a houshi, sitting with his back against the old well, with his staff in arms. Another was a female, Youkai Taijiya by trade. Normally she would have been wearing a simple but not unappealing kimono, however, as there had been mention of trouble earlier in the evening and not being one to be unprepared for any possibility, she was currently wearing her battle gear and her Hiraikotsu was poised on her back ready for immediate use if need.

The third figure was a very small, but not insignificant kitsune. He paced back and forth on the lip of the old well, fretting and whining in fear for his surrogate mother's safety. Sitting poised on a corner of the old well, was a currently small cream coloured fire neko youkai. Her tails were twitching smartly back and forth, and were the only signs of her anguish at the thought of a dear and trusted friend being in danger and unable to lend a paw to help.

"I hope that Kagome is alright. Do you think she is hurt really bad, Miroku?" asked a shivering Shippou.

"I truly do not know, Shippou. We can only hope that Inuyasha got to her in time," stated the houshi.

"I swear by all the Kami that my tribe ever worshipped that if anything has happened to my little sister, I will see the vile monsters that hurt her covered in their own blood before they meet their own demise," swore a seething Taijiya as she reached back for the thousandth time to finger the bands on Hiraikotsu.

"Calm yourself Sango-chan. Inuyasha, I am sure, is doing his best. He will see that she returns to us safely," stated the houshi with a soothing voice that didn't fool anyone for an instant. They all knew that he was just as anxious for Kagome's safety as any of them, but Miroku was one who spent most of his life not letting his feelings control his actions. His was the power of diplomacy, reason, and planning.

Moments later a flash of blue light announced the arrival of a traveller through the Bone Eater's Well. Everyone stepped back to give room to whoever was coming through and ready for any possibility just in case. At the sight of the hanyou in question, and the bandaged and bundled figure in his arms, all

gasped and started to surge forward with their many questions until halted by the glare of barely contained rage on the face of the inu-hanyou.

"Not now. We need to get to Kaede's first and then we need to talk. Now!" he stated and then dashed off to the old miko's hut.

The others, figuring that time was important, took advantage of the now full sized neko youkai and flew off to meet Inuyasha in the village a short distance away.

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It was only about 30 minutes from the time that Inuyasha had arrived with the badly injured and still unconscious little Miko in his arms at the well, to the time that she was safely sequestered on a comfortable futon in a warm corner of the old miko's hut. Kaede had made a mixture of healing herbs, something for pain and honey, and with Inuyasha's help they had managed to get Kagome to drink the resulting tea.

She was still unconscious and it was easier to get her to swallow the herbal tea, than to try to force her to swallow a pill. The painkillers her mother had provided were set aside for when she awoke.

Now the rest of the group sat in a semi-circle around Inuyasha, who had Kagome resting with her head in his lap, as they talked of what had transpired. Inuyasha explained all that he knew and told them of his plan. A couple of minor bugs needed to be worked out, but with the advantage of a few of the jewel shards in their possession and Kaede-baa-chan's aid in putting them into several binding necklaces, the problem of getting someone other than Inuyasha and Kagome through the old well, was resolved.

As a precaution that was not truly believed to be needed, each of the necklaces were spelled so that when Inuyasha and/or Kagome asked for their return, the holder of the necklace had no choice but to comply. With that completed, Inuyasha proceeded with the next step in his plans.

"Miroku! I need for you and Shippou to visit Kouga. Explain to him what happened to Kagome and ask him to meet up with us in the clearing by the old well by sunrise. If he asks why, just offer him the chance to payback those who hurt Kagome." stated Inuyasha.

"Where will you be, Inuyasha?" asked Sango.

"I am going to visit my brother," he stated firmly.

"You are WHAT?" they others all asked at the same time.

"Are you crazy Inuyasha? Are you sure that your brain is not broken?" asked Shippou.

With a growl of warning, Inuyasha replied, "lie. I know what I am doing and for this to work out properly, I....need...Sesshomaru's help. Besides, he owes a life debt twice over to Kagome at the very least. Not only because she returned his arm, but also for when she saved his life and helped to rescue Rin."

"Just be careful Inuyasha," stated Miroku. "We all know that you and your brother do not exactly care for

each other."

"Hmmp! I will. Don't worry. Once he finds out that someone did this to Kagome, he will have no problem helping out. We all need to meet back by the old well by tomorrow at sunrise. So I am leaving now," stated the determined hanyou.

"As shall I," stated Miroku. "I will take Kirara to speed things along. Come on Shippou."

The three left the hut, and Sango turned to Inuyasha.

"Stay here with Kagome, Sango. But do not worry. I have need of you in these plans as well, so you will get your chance at these bastards as well. They have hurt their last victim and hurting Kagome is the last time they hurt anyone. I will make sure they 'live' with complete awareness of their retribution for the rest of their lives."

He stayed just long enough to see the Youkai Taijiya nod her head in understanding and then dashed out the door and speeding as fast as he could go towards the west.

6 - SHE needs YOU!

~~The Past - Sengoku Jidai - Kouga's Den!~~

Ginta was bored, which was not unusual. He was serving guard duty near the entrance to the pack's den. It was his shift, but he had gotten so used to constantly following Kouga, as they chased down whatever leads they could find in their search for Naraku that sitting doing guard duty had only one benefit. He was not constantly getting a stitch in his side from trying to keep up with a shard enhanced pack leader.

Still, despite the boredom, Ginta and Hakkaku both agreed that they would much rather this, than still have to look forward to facing the vile hanyou that had finally met his fate but five short weeks ago. The whole pack was the better for the relief that the news brought and even Ginta and Hakkaku found themselves looking forward to the up and coming mating season.

Other packs had learned of the devastation that Kouga's pack had suffered. Normally, this would not have done anything, but brought the pack ridicule and shame. Many learned the cause behind the demise of almost the entire pack, and the fact that Kouga, brave, daring, and strong, had spent not only several years, tracking the jerk but had joined the now well known Inuyasha Pack to destroy Naraku in the end, was enough to not only save Kouga's honour, but to build it even beyond what it had once been.

The only downside, for what it was worth, was that Kagome-neesan had not accepted the advances of the Prince of the Youkai Ookami Tribe. Of course, neither Ginta nor Hakkaku was surprised about this, as it was obvious even to them that onee-san cared for their leader as a friend and valued the friendship of the entire pack, but her heart was with the inu hanyou, Inuyasha and nothing could sway that, not even death it seemed.

But as a true leader, Kouga didn't let the sorrow of losing Kagome keep him down for long. As Hakkaku had pointed out to the proud and virile leader, Kagome-onee-san would not want him to wallow around in self pity and besides, with the up and coming mating season there were several fine and strong possible mates who would all love to challenge the accomplished pack leader and become his mate willingly.

So with that in mind, Kouga set aside the ache in his heart, which to his surprise was not as difficult as he had thought it would be, and moved forward. The past five weeks was a time of healing and rebuilding to bring the tribe back up to full strength again before the next winter season. It was now that Kouga realized what Kagome had been trying to tell him, he was not truly in love with her, just infatuated. But they would always be something more than just friends, she more like a sister with a large extended family of ookami and ookami youkai, both brothers and sisters, who she would always cherish and care for.

As Ginta looked out over the territory in the moonlit sky around him, he caught sight of a flickering glow

headed towards the den. This was peculiar, as the entrance of the den was a well guarded secret and if someone who was not part of the pack knew of the location, then there was a serious problem to be corrected.

Not wanting to leave his post, but being aware that word had to be gotten to Kouga immediately, Ginta barked out a command to one of the nearby wolves, who responded back with a yip and took off into the den to fetch the packs' leader. As Ginta continued to watch the approaching flicker, he was frustrated at trying to identify it as it was coming from down wind of the den and the scent was carrying the wrong way.

It only took a few moments for Kouga to appear, but in that time the flicker in the sky had grown noticeably larger. With Kouga's better vision, one of the many merits that made him a fine pack leader, he was able to make out that it was a neko youkai in battle run, and headed directly towards the den. It was obvious that this youkai knew exactly where the den was, and that this was its destination.

It only took a couple of moments for Kouga to figure out who it might be, as there were not many neko youkai's that he knew of, or the people who associated with them. His suspicions were confirmed moments later, when the youkai landed and a houshi with a small and very familiar kitsune landed and approached the Ookami Prince bowing their greetings as they did so.

"Kouga-sama, greetings. I only wish that the circumstances were better, but I have been sent by Inuyasha to request your presence at an important gathering," stated Miroku.

"Houshi-sama!" Kouga nodded in acknowledgement and greetings himself. "What do you mean? What is wrong? Something has happened to Kagome, hasn't it?"

"It is with saddened heart that I must say yes to that question, Kouga-sama. Although, I can say for sure that she is alive and safe for now, however, Inuyasha thought that you might desire to assist in a little...uhn...plan...to bring retribution to those who have caused harm to the little Miko," stated Miroku.

Kouga's first reaction was an aching pain that threatened to overwhelm him at the thought that Kagome had been killed, but that quickly was replaced by relief and then intense rage when he realized that someone had hurt his onee-san. There were some people out there somewhere who were going to bleed, and they were going to bleed a whole lot for this offense.

"It sounds like you have much to say and little time to say it. Please come, and sit with us, and tell us what you know," stated Kouga calmly, although his own wolves had moved back, and even the sentries were hard pressed to stay close to him. They knew that when he spoke that calmly, he was a youkai with barely restrained rage, and no one wanted to risk being the one to set off the exploding beast that lay just under the surface.

Miroku bowed, and Shippou on his shoulder, headed into the den following the Prince of the Ookami Youkai. Kirara, just curled up outside by the entrance to the den and awaited the houshi and kitsune's return. She knew it would not be long before she had to make the return trip, and quite frankly she was anxious to make it as soon as possible.

A cup of tea each, and about 45 minutes later, five pack wolves, Kouga, Ginta, and Hakkaku, stood

outside the front of the den with the messenger of bad news in the form of a calm appearing houshi, and a small kitsune. The neko youkai was now standing awaiting her passengers patiently for the trip back to Inuyasha's Forest. Hands were shook and goodbye's for now, being said.

"Despite the circumstances young Prince, it will be a pleasure to work with you and your pack members. I believe that this agreement will prove to be a great adventure and most satisfactory if Inuyasha is planning what I believe he is," stated Miroku to Kouga. "I cannot stress enough, however, the importance that the information I shared with you tonight be kept only among ourselves. It has been a carefully guarded secret for the past five years, and I am sure that you can understand why."

Kouga was still getting over some of the shock of what the houshi had divulged to him, Ginta and Hakkaku. He knew that they probably were as dumbfounded as he felt. To learn so much about Kagome, the woman that he had thought he knew, and find that there was so much more about her that he never even dreamed of, was overwhelming to put it mildly. But now was not the time for such things to be considered. There was justice to be meted out, and time was of the essence.

There was no way that those who hurt Kagome in such a cowardly and vile manner would get away with it and not suffer for their fiendish games. Kouga and his comrades silently vowed the same thing, although they were unaware that each was thinking the same thing.

"Hai, houshi-sama. You can rest assured that no one here will breath a word of any of this to anyone. The secret is safe with us. We would do nothing to bring harm to our onee-san and would give our lives to defend her. We will be at the old well by sunrise. Tell dog breath that for the duration of this agreement, there are no differences between us. We fight as pack brothers for a just cause and we will agree to his leadership in this matter without question," was Kouga's surprising response.

Miroku nodded his gratitude and Shippou and he climbed onto Kirara. "Arigato Kouga-sama. I look forward to seeing you at dawn." With that Kirara launched herself into the air and headed back the away she had come earlier in the night.

Almost immediately Kouga, Ginta, Hikkaku, and the five pack wolves could be seen racing as fast as they were able in the same direction. The night was clear and the air not too warm. Their speed and efficiency in travel was such that Kouga knew they would be able to make the designated clearing in just a few hours.

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Far to the west standing upon a great cliff, looking out over the vast stretch of what was known as the Western Lands, a great, powerful and most regal figure stood. The silver tresses of his almost knee length hair wavered gently in the light breeze that carried the night's fragrances and scents his way. An fukurou (owl) hooted in the distance, a shishi (lion) roared its intent to a prey it had just caught sight of, the soft flap of a group of bats passing in the night, and the gentle rustle of leaves upon the many trees around, were only a few of the many nights sounds that drifted in the night.

But none of these bothered or seemed to attract the attention of the noble Lord of the Western Lands as he stood stoically surveying what was his. Sesshomaru-sama, Great Taiyoukai of Japan and Lord of the Western Lands, proudly stood unmoving in the night. It was his favorite time of the day. It was a time

when he could stop, think, consider the day's various experiences, organize his thoughts if need be, or just enjoy a bit of solace and quiet time.

He had just completed his most recent patrol of his lands, and estates, as was his want to do on a regular basis. Sure he had warriors and guards that were trained to do the work for him, however, one of the things that made Sesshomaru the Great Lord that he was, was his habit of taking personal responsibility for what was his. He didn't mind having his lackies doing the patrols for him, but it was much more sensible to supplement by periodically doing his own rounds, just to make sure that things were running the way HE wanted them and not to someone else's desires.

Besides, it meant that he was always informed about what was transpiring in his realm and kept him always alert and on his toes. No one caught the Western Lord off guard, at least not and live.

The breeze picked up briefly, bringing with it a scent that was unpleasant, but no longer instilled the hatred that he had once felt at the least thought. Instead it evoked memories of a recent heavy battle with a vile and hated hanyou that had the unmitigated gall to try to take from him what was his. No one touched what belonged to Lord Sesshomaru. NO ONE! Nor did they touch what he considered to be important to him, not an live, or at least not and live pleasantly....HEH! HEH! HEH!

Most who had heard of the Great and Terrible Taiyoukai of the Western Lands, shivered in fear at his name. Many believed that even getting within sight of the Youkai Lord was a death wish and that those who did would meet their end at the ends of his razor sharp claws. But what no one knew, was that in the eyes of the Great Lord Sesshomaru, that was the easy way out.

Death was an end, a doorway to the afterlife and one of the Seven Levels of Hell, where the soul could pass from level to level until it finally was granted the right to return to the world of the living. But Life...now there was another story...to make one of your enemies 'live', was much more interesting. After all, there were those who deserved to 'live', and Sesshomaru had many means for doing just that. The pleasurable thing was that none of those methods required a dungeon, nor did it take much time. But the effects could last a lifetime and leave their victims memories that could be carried by their soul to the afterlife.

Knowing that his hanyou half brother was rapidly approaching and knowing that he would not be seeking him out unless there was a reason, Sesshomaru chose to just wait for him. Whether the reason was a good one or not remained to be seen, but for now he just didn't feel like disturbing the night with useless chasing and banter.

He had to give Inuyasha a grudging respect. There were so many changes to the hanyou in the years that he and his rag tag pack had spent searching out the Shikon no Kakra and chasing after the evil Naraku. Even the thought of that loathsome hanyou's name was enough to make the Great Lord growl in anger and hatred.

Inuyasha had successfully learned how to wield the Tetsusaiga, much to Sesshomaru's chagrin, but what truly had amazed the Youkai Lord, were the other transformations that Inuyasha's adventures had allowed him to instill into the great fang. Transformations that his father had not originally put there, and which remained to be seen if they were intended.

But his true respect, and greatest honour was not for his half brother, nor even for the Youkai Taijiya or houshi that travelled with him. Even the insignificant kitsune, and the neko youkai had earned some respect from the Demon Lord, but the heart of the group was the one who had truly earned not only his respect, but the right to be considered almost his equal in many ways.

That was the little Miko. The odd onna who had set his half brother free from his 50 year long imprisonment, and despite all odds stuck by him through thick and thin, through all their adventures. The young woman, who had stood up to Naraku and was key to ending the vile hanyou's existence in this world and saving countless lives because of her risks and willingness to sacrifice herself for what she believed, and those she loved.

Not long after catching his brother's scent on the wind, a rustling was heard and almost immediately Inuyasha dropped from a nearby tree and stood to face his older brother. What surprised the Demon Lord about his appearance, was not the daring that it took to appear before him, but the determination and barely suppressed rage that could clearly be seen in the shivering form of the hanyou that stood before him.

He could see in the hanyou's eyes, the flicker between the natural and normal golden colour and the flash of red that was a warning of the youkai blood raging just behind those eyes. Sesshomaru had not missed the tightly clenched hand, wrapped around Tetsusaiga, trying almost in vain to retain his sanity. What had set him off so? Why was he standing so boldly before the Taiyoukai, with such strength of will? What had happened this night?

"Good evening little brother," stated the ever stoic Sesshomaru.

"I wish it were Sesshomaru," was Inuyasha growled reply.

Something seriously had to be amiss. The hanyou was audibly growling and just barely controlling his youkai blood, even with Tetsusaiga at his hip and tightly clenched in his clawed hand. How was he able to control such rage, especially when he didn't have the benefits or strength of being a full youkai in blood?

Giving his half brother his full and undivided attention, Sesshomaru spoke once more.

"Something is bothering you tonight, little brother. What does this have to do with me and why have you come to visit?" he asked.

"I have come to beg a favor," Inuyasha barely ground out. It was not that he was upset with Sesshomaru, nor that he was asking his brother for a favor. None of that mattered at the moment. What really was the problem was the images of his badly battered, raped, and abused Kagome lying unconscious on a futon in the old miko's hut and the images of her attackers and knowing that even now they might be looking for another victim.

"And why would I be interested enough to give you such a request?" came the coldly emotionless response.

"For a several reasons. One, you owe Kagome and this favor is for her. Two, this little favor promises to

provide even your curiosity with more information than it could possibly hold for at least a good hundred years, if not longer. Three, I need help to bring a fitting 'life' to six....grrrrr....six worthless monsters that have....grrrrr....hurt....grrrrr....violated what is MINE!" he growled out in his rage.

"Kagome was attacked? She has been hurt?" Sesshomaru let a frown momentarily grace his stoic face. "How badly and when?"

"Very badly. She was violated in the worst possible way that a woman can be, along with having been beaten, several broken bones, numerous cuts, and more. I have a plan for taking to task those who inflicted this damage to her, but to carry it out, I need some help," Inuyasha stated. Talking about it to someone who he knew would find such an act both cowardly and the worst possible crime and who would understand the rage that he barely held at bay, made it a bit easier to push down on his youkai blood.

"I have arranged for others to join me, and plan on meeting everyone at the old Bone Eater's Well in my forest. I have come to ask that you join us in this matter of justice for one of our own," he almost pleaded.

Sesshomaru was surprised on many levels, but he was also enraged himself. To think that anyone would do this to the little Miko was something that almost sent the ever emotionally anchored Great Taiyoukai into his own blood rage. That in itself frightened him, though no outward sign of this showed.

"This Sesshomaru owes much to the little Miko, so I will accompany you on this venture. It will be necessary to make a small side stop along the way, as I need to inform Jaken and see to Rin before we go," was his surprising reply. It was shocking enough that it helped Inuyasha to further get control of his blood rage, as he and his brother turned and started upon their journey to take the next step in Inuyasha's plan.

After they met up with Jaken, Rin, and Ah-Un, it was felt that it would make better time, if they all flew. With that in mind, Inuyasha, Rin, and Jaken, rode on Ah-Un, and Sesshomaru used his own youki, to make their journey to the old well easier for everyone.

7 - A plan of action!

Chapter 7 - A Plan of Action!

Inuyasha was the first one to return from the night's excursions. Sesshomaru had explained to Rin that Kagome had been injured badly and that she was healing. It was felt that informing her in advance would make the trauma of seeing someone who the onna thought of as a distant mother so badly injured, a little easier to bear. This way, the child at least would know to expect the unpleasantness associated with Kagome's condition.

Rin had a good heart, and she had seen many bad situations in her travels with Lord Sesshomaru, so it didn't occur to anyone to try to prevent her from seeing the awful truth. But they were considerate enough to at least help her to accept the matter, and do what was necessary to help make Kagome's recovery easier than it might otherwise have been. This did a lot to help Rin on many levels, especially in a time when horror was more the norm than not.

It said a lot for the group, to even see the normally complaining and ever grumbling Jaken struck speechless by the sight of the battered onna. Even the already green youkai imp turned more green at the image she presented and almost fainted from the smell. He might not have a liking for ningens, but this was one of those that he himself made an exception for.

Even though he and his Lord had more than once attempted to end the lives of the stalwart group, this one little ningen onna still stood up to them in battle bravely facing even the Great Sesshomaru, and willingly risked her life to protect those she cared about. But it went even farther than that, as Jaken had never known anyone who would stand by her enemy as she had, and call them friends when no one else would, and to help them when they needed it.

To even further raise this little onna to a higher status in the eyes of the old toad, was the fact that she did all this completely unconditionally and without expectation of any kind of payment in return. She just gave selflessly, and seemed happiest when she could help others.

Who could be so horrid as to do such a thing to a creature as pure and innocent as her?

"My Lord, a question if I may?" the little imp turned to Lord Sesshomaru, bowing to the floor to make his request. Even the Youkai Lord could hear the anguish in the old toad's voice.

"Speak Jaken," he stated.

Clearing his throat, and staying bowed low, "I request that you permit me to return to your palace and to fetch the Chief Healer. There are some treatments that she knows that the old miko, no insult intended, maybe unaware of and could help the young Miko in her recovery."

Sesshomaru considered this for but a moment, then nodded to Jaken, "Hai, you have my permission Jaken. Take Ah-Un, and bring back Atsuko. Explain the Miko's condition to her."

Jaken turned to start out the door, only to stop in his tracks as the Youkai Lord spoke once more, "Jaken, know that if you are not back with the Healer in one hour, I will have to find another choice of career for you." Jaken audibly gulped at that. He could think of a few possibly things that his Lordship might set him to, including being the 'nanny' to a village full of children all about the same age or less than Rin. This was NOT a prospect that Jaken found enticing, so he raced as fast out the door as he could and did his best to impress upon the two headed dragon the urgency of getting the Healer as quickly as possible.

Sesshomaru took a few moments to visit with Kagome. She was still unconscious, but even in that state the onna still moaned in pain and not just the physical either. As he spent a short time watching the little Miko, there was a sound at the door, and moments later Miroku and Shippou entered the room. Miroku brought the news that Kouga and his pack brothers would be arriving by dawn.

Kaede made tea and offered it for those who wished to partake. As these simple ministrations were taking place and in themselves offering some sense of calm, Sesshomaru asked for a complete rundown on what had happened and of Kagome's injuries. Though it hurt to bring back the images, Inuyasha, who was sitting with Kagome, carefully holding her in his lap and doing his best to lend her what comfort he could in her current state, explained to the others in the room exactly what he knew.

An hour later, an angered and enraged Demon Lord excused himself for a short time, promising to be by the old well by dawn, and headed into the nearby forest. All that could be heard by the rest of the group was a roar that sounded like raging thunder as the earth shook and the screams of a number of lesser youkai that were unfortunate enough to believe that they had the right to take up residence in Inuyasha's Forest.

They all knew that a certain inuyoukai in full demon form was relieving some much pent up rage, as a way to calm himself for what was to come. No one mentioned this or even considered bringing it up to anyone. It was a private moment and would remain such.

It was a short time after that, that Kouga and his pack brothers along with the five pack wolves arrived. Just as with Sesshomaru, the Youkai Ookami Prince took the time with Ginta and Hakkaku to visit with Kagome. They were badly shaken by what they saw, and also found a need to release the anger that this brought to their hearts and blood. So they, too, took to the nearby forest to let off their anger and all then met up by the old well to have the meeting that Inuyasha called.

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The sun shone brightly down upon a clearing. A clearing that held an old well, whose origins were so old that the reason for its very being were lost. No one could ever remember the old well holding water, or whether it had ever been meant for such. All anyone really new for sure, was that it seemed to be a dumping ground for the nearby village to deposit the bones of dead and dying demons. All of which tended to disappear in a few days, but no one knew why, how or where those bones ever went.

But this well held more secrets and importance than just a few bones. It also, held a strange connection to time. It is possible that the reason for this was due to the fact that the material of this almost timeless well had come from two very important trees. One was a very ancient and now gone, Tree of Ages that

was now nothing more than dust and the last resting place of Hyouga. The second was the matriarch of Inuyasha's Forest, the Goshinbuko, a sister tree to the long gone Tree of Ages.

Although only known by a few people, the apparent result of this combination of very special and powerful woods, was a well that allowed for a simple appearing, onna from 500 years in the future to travel to Sengoku Jidai and a wayward and proud inu hanyou to travel 500 years into the future. No one understood how it worked as it did, and quite frankly no one really cared. More important to them all was that it did work and by doing so gave them all something more precious than even the Shikon no Tama.

That something now lay hurt badly in the old miko's hut in the nearby village. This fact of reality was the reason that there now sat by the old well an odd group of individuals conversing and planning an upcoming venture that would leave a quiet mark on the pages of history 500 years yet to come.

Introductions were not really needed, so Inuyasha just got right to the point. To bring everyone up to the same page of reality he started with how he had first met Kagome several years ago. The Taijiya, kitsune, houshi, and neko mo no noke all knew this story and contributed what they could to reassure the rest of the group of the truth of the tale. Little Shippou had even brought some of the small treasures that over the years, Kagome had brought for him, to show as further evidence and proof of Kagome's origins.

After completing this part of the meeting, Sesshomaru, Kouga, Ginta, and Hakkaku sat in thought just trying to process the almost overwhelming knowledge. No wonder it was so important to keep such information secret. Kouga and his pack members had heard the tale in brief, from the houshi, but had not really taken the story very seriously. But hearing it again, and in complete detail left them almost breathless in awe. If Naraku had even suspected such to be the case, they would never have succeeded in destroying him as they had. They all shuddered just considering it.

After a short pause to let the information sink in, Inuyasha continued and outlined his plan and the reasons for his decision to help 'fix' the problem that had cause Kagome so much pain. Of course, everyone had their questions and doubts, but he had taken the time while travelling to find Sesshomaru to work out some of the more important details and had answers ready for their concerns.

Kouga was the first to voice one of their questions.

"If only you and Kagome-sama are the ones to get through the old well, how are you going to get us through?" he asked.

Inuyasha pulled out several necklaces of prayer beads. They were most unusual in that the beads themselves were a deep blood red, and the claws that randomly separated them were black as pitch. But on each one, attached to one of the beads was a small shard of the Shikon no Tama. There were enough necklaces to provide for everyone at the gathering, including Kirara and the five pack ookami.

"Each necklace has been specially made and spelled so that if either I or Kagome ask, the wearer must return the shard contained within. Once they are placed around your neck, much as with my own, only Kagome can remove them. Unlike my own necklace there is no other binding spell so there is no other control to be worried about. The beads are ones that Kagome made sometime ago and left here with Kaede should they ever been needed," Inuyasha informed everyone.

"With the help of these each of us will be able to pass through the well to the otherside and then safely return when our mission is completed," he stated.

"Why are these 'poll-eece' you spoke of, from Kagome's era not taking care of this matter?" came the quiet voice of Sesshomaru.

"Kagome's mother has informed me that they have been trying to catch these 'things' for sometime and not been successful. Much like the sentries and guards that are common in this time, there are certain restrictions to what the police in Kagome's time can do. Plus these particular criminals have been pretty clever by ningen standards in that they have cased out a fair size chunk of territory that they consider their own and have set up the den in what otherwise appears to be a deserted area," came the ready reply.

"They control the surrounding area through fear and have no qualms about maiming anyone that they believe threaten their control. So far none of their victims has been either willing or alive to come forward and identify who they are and what they look like, so those in power in Kagome's time have not been able to bring these monsters to justice or even to provide any idea of what they look like."

Ginta spoke up next, "How are we to identify them if their own 'poll-eece' are unable to do so?"

"We have several things that even with the 'tek-noll-o-gee' of Kagome's time, ningens still do not have. We have far superior senses. They have to rely on whatever visible physical evidence they can find, but even then they still are unable to find the most important information that would help them to bring such as these to task for their crimes," Inuyasha said with assurance.

"In other words, they are unable to scent their prey or seek out their aura's," stated Miroku. "From what Kagome has told us over the years, magic is almost unheard of in her time. We have spoken of this on several occasions and come to the conclusion that it may very well still exist, but is just concealed as this 'tek-noll-o-gee', that Kagome describes has replaced much of what magic is used for in our time."

"Ningens of the future, however, have still not found a way to duplicate such things as hunting by scent, reading auras, or sensing magic. Apparently, while they do have means to hunt in the dark, they do not use this skill to full advantage either," he concluded.

The youkai in the group considered this information and nodded their understanding.

Inuyasha paused in thought for a moment and then spoke up, "I have asked Kagome's mother to have a number of things ready for us by the time we arrive. These things will make it easier for us to move around in Kagome's era, and to have the freedom that 'we' need to complete our plan of action."

"From what Inuyasha has learned from Kagome's mother, these fiends have been plaguing the area where they attacked Kagome for quite sometime now," Sango began. She shuddered to think that such creatures could hold such ominous power over anyone and was anxious to take part in this little venture and do her part to help Kagome.

"One of their weaknesses in our favor will be their over-confidence," she stated firmly.

Hakkaku spoke up, "I agree, not to mention that they will not be expecting anyone with our abilities to track them down either." a couple of the pack wolves sat near the young ookami youkai and he quietly scratched them behind their ears.

"Hai," stated Miroku. "From the stories that I have heard Kagome tell, the ningen from her time are not familiar with youkai or hanyou. They may still exist, however, they too are concealed if they are still around. The ningen in her era are not as well versed in the hunt, and their normal lifestyle is not as filled with the same hardships as exist now, so they tend to be much less guarded and aware as ningen of this time."

"Considering the concerns that Kagome's family have," spoke up Inuyasha, "my intent is not to 'kill' these things! I prefer to take a lesson from my brother, and make them...'live'. The last word said with growled emphasis, a sadistic grin that left his brother proud - although it didn't show, and a feral gleam in the hanyou's eyes.

"I have an idea for that one, little brother," spoke up Sesshomaru. "Something that I think will suit quite well."

"I am willing to listen, brother," said Inuyasha, "although whatever it is, it must not be anything that can be traced back to Kagome's family or the shrine. We must be careful not to leave any trail of evidence that could lead back to her family. If these villians have more people than the six I have seen, they might try to harm Kagome's mother, brother and Ojii-San."

"Not to worry, little brother," said Sesshomaru. "It is a simple potion. One with an unusual binding spell. Most of the ingredients are readily available and in fact, the old miko probably has those aplenty. There is but one more ingredient required, but for that I must have your permission to obtain it."

"What would that be?" asked Inuyasha cautiously.

"The essence of her memories of the attack," Sesshomaru stated like it was as everyday a thing as breathing.

8 - The essence of a nightmare!

~~The Past - Sengoku Jidai, Kaede's Hut~~

A "smitciv rorroh", was what Sesshomaru had called the 'simple' potion that he mentioned. For in truth, it was pretty simple. The herbs required were fairly common place and indeed, Kaede had them in abundance. It was but a matter of about an hour to have enough of the potion's base ingredients combined and ready for use.

It was the last ingredient that was the hard part, and at first it was something that Inuyasha was dead set against. He just couldn't find it in himself to put Kagome through that nightmare again.

Essentially, what it involved was linking to Kagome's mind, and encouraging her to relive the images of what she had gone through. As Sesshomaru had explained it, the closer to the incident in question for the victim, the stronger and more potent the potion would be. As Kagome had only been attacked but a few hours ago, the potency of the potion was never in question.

The hard part was that Inuyasha didn't want to have Kagome relive those memories. Initially, he was so against it that he would not even hear of doing such a thing, and even Kouga originally agreed with him. It was finally Sango that helped turn the tables.

"Inuyasha! You would not be making Kagome relive anything that she is not already having nightmares about now." Sango stated simply. She had watched over her little sister ever since Inuyasha had brought Kagome back from her own time. She had spent hours watching as the onna tossed, whimpered, and cried in fear at the horrors that her mind, as equally abused as her poor battered body, replayed over and over again throughout the night.

"She will probably have nightmare images of last night's events for years to come, if she is ever able to get over them at all." stated Sango with pain filled assurance. "I wish it were not so, but what happened to her, is the worst nightmare that every onna and woman lives with almost daily. Luckily, most never experience such horror. But for those who are not so fortunate, their lives are never the same. Some never recover at all."

"She is right Inuyasha," said a calm spoken Miroku. "I once met an old woman, who had suffered a similar incident when she was but a teenager. Much like Kagome, from what I found out. She was but 25 years old when I first met her, and yet she looked older than Kaede-baa-chan does. She could not stand to be around males of any kind, not even her father or brothers. I learned about a year after I had met her that she had finally not been able to take the nightmares and horror anymore and had thrown herself off a cliff not far from where she had lived."

"The priestess of her village had told me that part of the difficulty is that the victim of such crimes are hard pressed to face the fear that such an attack brings to them. Instead they spend much of their time believing that it is they that are to blame for what happened to them. That they are dirty for having been

violated, and that those around them see them as nothing more than loose women who asked for what happened to them to begin with." Miroku informed the group.

"But that is ridiculous," said Kouga. The idea that any woman wanting to have such a thing occur was totally ludicrous and that others would think such of a woman who had suffered so, was almost beyond contempt. "Anyone who could take one look at the pain and hell that Kagome has suffered would be a fool to think that she asked for that to happen to her."

"You are right, Kouga," said Sango. "Be that as it may, it is a fact nonetheless. It is part of the mind's effort to cope with the horror. Only those of strong will and determination are able to relive their nightmare and then finally put it aside and continue with their lives. Those are the ones who learn to accept what happened as something beyond their ability to control, and stand up to the fear it causes. Once they do, they are able to move forward with their lives, and if not be what they once were, at least they are able to live something of a normal life."

"For Kagome, it could be even harder," said Miroku. "As a Miko, at least during our times, such an action is believed by many to have tainted her soul and made her less than pure. The truth, however, is that the only thing that is impure is the abuse to her physical body. The spiritual impurity is only a concern, if the victim can let go of the nightmare before it darkens their heart."

"While this Sesshomaru is not experienced in the matters of which you speak," spoke the up to now silent Youkai Lord, "I do understand what you are saying. There is another factor in this idea that you are missing. I have heard that most such victims of violent attacks, find it easier to face their nightmares when they can 'share' them with someone else."

"As I understand it, many prefer to share their fears with someone that they love and trust, while others prefer to seek the support of strangers. I do not understand this completely, but it is what I have heard," he said.

"Hai, ye are right Sesshomaru-sama," said Kaede. "I learned of this when I was young, long before onee-sama died. For some, the love and support of a close relation lends them the strength to face their horrors and on a mental level, beat back the beast that lies within."

"Others are afraid of being judged by their loved ones, and seek solace in the aid of strangers who are unbiased. They are neither there to judge the victim, nor accuse. Just to listen and be there for them as they need," Kaede concluded.

"Ah! That makes sense then," said Sesshomaru. "This link that I wish to do, would have much to benefit the Miko then. The fact is that during the linking she would not be reliving the injustice she suffered alone. She would be supported by the person or persons linking with her, as she shows them what happened."

"Those who are linked would see what she saw, from her perspective, including feeling her pain. No physical harm would come to anyone, but it would feel as though they were right there as the attack occurred. In other words, whoever is linked with her as she relives these memories, will feel just like they are her, feeling exactly what she felt as she felt it."

"For her, she would be like an onlooker viewing the act on the sidelines. While I link with her on this, I would feel just like she did, including all of her pain, but at the same time, I would be able to stand with her from the sidelines and show her that she is not alone," stated the Taiyoukai quite matter-of-factly.

"In that case, this is probably a good thing to seriously consider Inuyasha," said Kaede. "It would go along with helping Kagome-chan recover much more readily from her experience. Especially if it can be done now, while everything is still fresh."

Sesshomaru's personal healer, Atsuko, who had arrived earlier, with Jaken, had had the opportunity to examine Kagome and offer her own remedies to aid the little Miko in her recovery. She knew of the potion that her Lord was seeking to create and what was involved in its creation. In fact, her great-great-grandmother had been the one to originally come up with the ancient recipe that was used for this most effective and useful potion.

She took the time to speak up in the conversation, "If I might interject here. There are many benefits to this potion, not to mention its ultimate purpose against the criminals that originally caused the current crisis."

"The sooner that Kagome-sama can face the fear of her nightmare, and understand that it is alright for her to be afraid, to be angry about what happened, to even hate those who attacked her, the sooner and the easier in the long run for her to recover and come to grips with what occurred," stated the healer with complete confidence.

"But the other side of this potion, is the one that you do not yet understand," Atsuko continued. "When my great-great grandmother originally created this potion, it was intended as a means to pay back those that spent their lives bringing pain and suffering to the innocent."

"The essence of Kagome-sama's nightmare would be bound to the potion. All it takes is a few drops of the completed potion on the lips of the criminal that caused the victim's suffering. Just a few small drops and the criminal is left to spend the rest of their lives reliving every single second of pain filled torture and horror that they gave to their victim. They would never show the marks, and nothing can be found physically or mentally wrong with them. But every time they close their eyes, every time they try to sleep is spent making them feel exactly as their victim did."

It was this last tidbit of information that helped to turn the Inu-hanyou's decision around. His only condition was that he would, also, link with Kagome along side his brother. This way, Kagome had the support of two to be there for her, and help her to not feel alone.

9 - To defeat the enemy!

~~The Past - Mid Morning - Sengoku Jidai - Kagome's Nightmare Relived~~

She was trapped. Trapped till the end of time forever to repeat that same horrible, vile, pain racked nightmare. Try as she might, she could not get away from it. She crawled, walked, ran, fell only to get up and run again, until she could not draw a breath that was not filled with overwhelming pain.

It left her with only her pain and the horrible images to cling to, and she wanted neither one. Depression readily took over. How was she to hold her head up? She was dirty, tainted, and used. No one would want her now, not even Inuyasha. She could almost hear the laughter of her friends as they pointed their fingers at her...

"There is the whore. Look at her. She wanted what happened to her, else she would have gone home sooner. Look at the dirty slut," they all seemed to say. Loathing and disgust filled their eyes, and she could feel those looks like daggers piercing her skin.

"Why did you not listen to me Kagome?" her mother said. "Why could you not be more like the other young onna, who listen to their parents advice? You will regret your life if this little incident has left you pregnant. Now get your sorry @\$ up and get ready for school, you lazy good for nothing slut."

Even her mother was ashamed of her, hated her, wanted nothing to do with her. No one wanted to be near someone who had been raped. Everyone knew that victims of rape always were to blame for what happened to them. Everyone knew that it was because those same victims wanted to be taken that way.

When she fell again, she didn't have the strength to rise. She could not fight the pain any more. She had no one. Ojii-san would never love her again, Souta had mama, Sango had Miroku, Shippou would never be able to look at her again, Inuyasha had Kikyuu, her school friends - well, they all had boyfriends and didn't need to be around the low life called Kagome, even Hojo would no longer be interested in her, and the same could be said for Kouga. She was dirty, and tainted. No longer welcome anywhere. There was nothing left to care for, and she just wanted for all of the pain and heartache to stop.

She felt a sudden presence and a moment later a hand came to rest on her shoulder. At first, it drove her fear beyond the ability to reason. Rational thought did not exist, only fear. Wave after wave, of mind numbing, blood freezing fear. Even Naraku was easier to face than this.

A calm, unemotional, yet soothing voice, came out of the darkness, "Miko! We are here to help!"

Almost immediately, she felt the soothing comfort of a pair of loving arms, as they snaked around her waist and pulled her back into a warm chest and loving embrace. A hot whisper of a breath, caressed her ear and neck, "We are here for you, Kagome. I am here for you. You are not alone!"

She looked over at the clawed hand that still rested upon her shoulder. The razor sharp and deadly appendages, rather than feed her fear, surprisingly brought what she needed the most. Comfort, and the

feeling of safety. She knew that hand, even without seeing the twin maroon stripes that graced the wrist.

****Ses...sho...maru?*** was her hesitantly whispered plea.

****Hai! We are here to share your pain, and the help you face your fear,*** came the stoic voice from the darkness beyond.

****Inu...yasha?*** she said with a bit more confidence, as the fear continued to ebb away.

****Hai, koi! I am here,*** came the second voice, just behind her. The gentle tightening of the arms holding her making it clear that she was not alone and not unloved.

****We are here to help you. We need to see what you saw, feel what you felt, witness what they did to you,*** Inuyasha's voice said gently.

****lie! I don't want to go through that again,*** she cried. ****Can't we just make it go away?***

Sesshomaru's voice came out of the darkness once again, as the clawed hand on her shoulder squeezed in gentle reassurance, ****The only way to make it go away, Miko, is to face it. Do not be afraid of fear. You are strong.*****

****Hai, Kagome. There is no shame in being afraid, only in letting it control you,***** said Inuyasha. ****Show us. We NEED to see. Onegai, koi. We will be right here with you.*****

****Hai Miko. Let us take your pain. You will not be alone. Show us your fear,***** the stoic voice commanded more than requested.

****O..o..okay,***** came the hesitant and fearfilled reply. Both the arms holding her, and the clawed hand resting on her shoulder squeeze again gently and given her as much reassurance as they could. It was enough. Enough for her to take heart, and a deep steadying breath as she let the vile and nightmarish images wash over her once more.

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She had almost made it home. Just a little farther and she would be at the steps leading up to the Shrine Gates proper. The steps to safety and freedom. But the Fate's were not to be so kind that night.

No only had they seen fit to not provide at least the light of the full moon, but the very lights that should have lighted her path all the way home were left broken and unrepaired for kami knew how long. Had the moon be aware of the destiny that awaited her? Known what was to come, and hidden its face in shame behind the clouds that hung like a smothering blanket that night?

Whatever the case was, the facts where that she had only managed to make it about midway down that last block home, when those filthy, rough, caloused, strong hands had reached out, grabbing her from the sight of her haven. Grabbed her and dragged her down a nearby alley into the darkness.

~~She wanted so badly to turn away. She didn't want to face this again. It hurt so bad. She hurt so

badly.

****Face it, koi. We are here with you. We understand. You are not alone in this,**** came that beloved voice out of the darkness of her nightmare.

That clawed hand, tightened just a bit, and those arms held on more securely, and it gave her the strength to continue.~~

She screamed as best she could, although one hand was over her mouth. She bit, clawed, scratched, kicked and thrashed, all to no avail. The hands were just too strong, and her fear just too great.

Not just one set of hands either, but several. It was like there were hundreds of hands grabbing her, touching her, ripping her clothes, digging into her flesh, grabbing her breasts painfully, shoving themselves into places that had no right to be touched in such a violent and invasive way. They slapped her, punched her, felt her up in the most violent way. They pushed her, shoving until she fell, only for their owners to kick her in an effort to make her stand once more.

But she didn't give up. She kept fighting. She shoved back, pushed as best she could, she tried to stand up and run, but was grabbed. She tried to roll away, so she could gain her feet once more, only to be punched in the face and knocked back again. The impact with a nearby street pole stunned her momentarily, but not enough to miss the sickening sound of breaking bones in her arm.

~~The pain of that injury was so fresh in her mind that she had been feeling it at every repetition of the images before her. She closed her eyes, expecting the, by now familiar, pain to hammer at her senses again.

****You have a right to feel fear, Miko. Accept it, just do not let it control you. You were...are strong. Few could have lasted this long and lived,**** a stoic voice soothingly said.

The hand on her shoulder shook with unseen rage, but continued to offer comfort as the thumb started to make calming circular motions on the back of the shivering shoulder.

Those calming words, and equally calming actions pulled her back to herself, and she realized with the awareness that she didn't feel the pain as before. It surprised her, and she welcomed it. Once more she opened her eyes, and let the images continue to flow.~~

When she fell once more, crying out in pain, she was kicked. Kick in the side, kicked in the stomach, no mercy shown and none given. She felt her ribs crack, and prayed that they were not broken. Despite the injuries and her blurred vision due to a swollen and blackening eye, she still fought and still tried her best to get away.

It had taken almost all she had to keep her wits about her as long as she could. She had finally been able to determine that there were six of them. They all were dressed in black, and except for their hands, faces, and eventually their exposed body parts, all that could be seen was darkness.

They had called out to each other, but no names were spoken. The only reference that she could discern was 'Nightwalkers'. That reference alone, sent chills of fear down her spine that she could never

have felt had she been facing off with even the most fearsome of youkai. Not even Naraku himself.

~~At the feeling of shame and anger that washed over her, Kagome once again shuddered and closed her eyes. It was so overwhelming and so intense, she could feel the bile in her stomach rising to her throat. Her breath came short and her very body shook with suppressed rage, something that she had not felt even towards Naraku. It sickened her and she fought it, fought with all she was.

These are beasts more vile than any hanyou or youkai, Kagome. You were brave to have fought them as you did. You have every right to feel anger towards their heinous acts. Do not be afraid to feel whatever is your need. Inuyasha's voice offered. A loving kiss, and warm tongue caressed her neck, where she knew he nuzzled by her ear. It brought some measure of control to the raging onna, although she was not sure why.

The best way to fight an unwanted feeling, Miko, is to give into it. Let it come. Accept the right to the feeling and let it wash over you. Only then can you control it and let it go. that ever stoic voice said.

The rage diminished greatly at that. She could not say exactly why that was so. All she knew was that it no longer seemed to encompass her entire being, and the soothing calm of the two presences next to her seemed to lend her their strength as she faced her nightmares. It helped make her ordeal both more real, and less painful as the images continued.~~

They had dragged her down the alley, uncaring of whether she walked or not. Whatever was in the way, she was dragged over or through, even if there was path around. When her legs gave out, they just grabbed whatever their hands were closest to, and used that as a means to continue to drag her further into the dark.

One of them had grabbed her now broken arm, and as she tried to fight back, he had slammed her into the nearest wall as hard as he could. The impact had left her momentarily unconscious and when awareness came back to her, she found herself lying on the filthy pavement as the six of them began the true torture.

By now, her clothes were gone, and they were reveling in the pain they gave her as they continued to drag her down the dark and smelly alley. When she was in the deepest, darkest, depths of the alley, where no one dared to venture into, they dropped her, started jeering and laughing as they detailed what they intended.

One of them had taken a knife and found pleasure in running the blade randomly over her flesh. Her sides, her breasts, her shoulder, her neck, her stomach, her thighs, any place that took his whim, as he delighted in watching her blood flow and running his fingers through the red liquid as it ran from the cuts.

Surprisingly, he left her face alone. His reasoning was that he wanted the scars to be easy to hide. It would be fun to watch as those who were attracted to a pretty face, shunned her in disgust when they saw the 'artwork' left on her body. Well, at least they were not looking to kill her, was her only thought at that moment.

~~It was bad enough to know that they were intending to violate her. It was enough that they caused her more pain and anguish than any youkai, hanyou, or evil lord she had ever faced. But to leave her such

scars, for no other reason than to give her a lifetime of loneliness, and anguish was more than she wanted to live with. It was just so unfair. What had she ever done to deserve such treatment?

Cry koi. Let it go. We will find a way to deal with these scars together. To me, you will always be beautiful and nothing will ever change how I feel about you in my heart. Do not be afraid. I will never leave you alone. Inuyasha's voice once again offered solace. The warm breath on her ear more soothing than she thought possible.

Those words held more healing in them, than even the hanyou truly realized. It was more than she could have hoped for, and all she had ever prayed to have.

As much as she didn't want to continue, she knew that she had to. It was the only way to survive, and she owed it to those she cared most for. She had to brave this out and see it through, see it through so she could move on, and let it all go.~~

Another, had decided that he would take pleasure in abusing her breasts. He had already run his own fingers through the trails of blood running from the cuts, but that was not enough for this one. No, he had to continue the pain and torture by digging his fingers into the tender flesh and biting them until he left his own mark upon them. Another seeing the 'fun' in this, decided to join his associate and between the two, they tortured and abused both of her breasts, even slapping and punching them just to watch the flesh bounce and the skin discolour.

When the one with the knife lost interest in his game, he had chosen to kneel by her head with the intent of plundering her mouth with more than just his own. He was only just getting ready to take his pleasure, when a fourth member of the group, began rammed his aroused flesh, hard and deep into her. Reveling in the pain that he inflicted, he was unrelenting in his efforts to drive himself, seemingly up into her ribcage.

Seeing his efforts to do so, the final two members of the pack present, grabbed her legs and pulled them up and apart until Kagome thought that they were going to pull them from the hip joints. As they held her legs out of the way, the two picked up where the one with the knife previously had left off, carving random patterns into the backs of her thighs. One was using his own dirty blade, while the other seemed to delight in using his filthy nails.

She had read the articles in the newspapers, seen the reports in the news. The 'Nightwalkers' were the stuff of nightmares that everyone, even her friends had spoken of at school, but never above a whisper. The horrible images of the bodies that had been found by innocent passersby, or the police, flashed across her mind. She knew what they were capable of and knew what they intended for her, and all she could think of as they began taken their pleasure of her, was one simple and yet so meaningful word.

Despite all of this, and her rapidly waning strength, Kagome still fought as best she could. Unconsciously, she was even growling at her attackers in a most animalistic way. At first this had confused them, and for just a moment the confusion and the strange sounds brought a little fear to their hearts. It was enough to give her strength, to let her reach deep into a well of energy that she had forgotten she even had. It was the pain of feeling like she was being ripped in two, when her innocence was taken that finally gave her breath to scream the only thing that she knew was her salvation.

"IIIIIIINNNNNNUUUUUUYYYYYYAAAAASSSSSHHHHHHAAAAA!!!!!!!"

~~Even in this nightmarish world, the power and strength behind that cry was inhuman. It was a physical presence that left nothing in its way. Nothing, no one, not space and not time.

It is ok, koi. I felt your need. I heard you. Even beyond the well, I knew you needed me. Inuyasha explained soothingly. Although she was dreaming, and knew that the images before her were just memories, the nearness of him was more real than life itself. It brought a warmth and comfort that she so badly needed then, and she was grateful for every second that he was near.

Miko! Let yourself feel as you do. It is not in the denying that you will find freedom from all of this. It is in the acceptance of what it made and makes you feel. Anger, hatred, remorse, shame, sadness, terror, a thirst for vengeance, a desire for blood, and even the fear. You have the right to feel these things. Accept them, they are a part of what makes you who you are. The only true shame would be if you let them control you. You have no need to feel shame.

Sesshomaru's words struck a chord within her soul. One that she had not realized she had or even needed. She was Miko, and for years and been facing fears that to most would have been impossible, and more terrifying than these images before her. She had faced youkai singly and in vast armies, alone and with her companions. She had faced death himself, and still stood tall and survived.

More than anything, however, was the fact that she had faced herself. It was her greatest strength. Through all of the dark times, and the light, she never denied who she was, or that her humanity was less than she knew it to be. All beings, whether hanyou, youkai or ningen, were entitled to feel. Love, sadness, shame, pleasure, compassion, anger, hatred, peace, and all of the other feelings great and small.

That understanding had saved her life and her sanity on more than one occasion. The attempted violation of her mind by Tsubaki, the attempted tainting by Naraku's child, Kikyou's constant abuse and attempted killings, even her own worst fears of never being able to have Inuyasha for her own. All had been things she had accepted as a part of who she was and all she was meant to be.

This crisis was truly no different in that sense. Only the circumstances and the faces of the enemy had changed. She could do this, and this time, she was not alone as she faced down her enemy.~~

The vile animal that had been by her head, immediately punched her in the face once more, and when she continued to cry out and whimper in her pain, he proceeded to slap her repeatedly for making too much noise. Each movement, every touch, all their actions, only brought more and more pain. She could no longer hold back the sounds that escaped her, and despite their efforts to make her stop, she continued unrelentingly.

In the almost mind numbing fear of the moment, Kagome did the one thing that she could do, she fought again. More like a blind, and mindless animal, she did her best to kick, scream, claw, bite and yell. It was this that had torn more of their clothing and left some of their blood and skin clinging to her hands and nails. In the end, all it did was get her punched, kicked, and slapped more, but still she persisted, some part of her not willing to give up the fight.

She thought she heard a familiar growl. But she dared not give herself hope that she had. She knew that Inuyasha had been waiting for her back on the otherside of the well. There was no way that he could have heard her scream, and her only hope was the some good samaritan had heard her and called the police. If only they could get to her in time, but there was not much hope of that. Not with the dreaded 'Nightwalkers'.

Again she heard that familiar growl, louder, closer, echoing out of the darkness, and she dared to hope that the sound was not just her ears ringing from the pain and loss of blood. It was louder this time, and filled with such rage that she felt each of her attackers as they shivered in fear at the sound.

"What the frack was that?" asked one. They all paused in their actions to listen. When the sound came again, louder, closer, and more enraged than ever, they all clearly shivered in abject terror, and Kagome could smell that at least one of them had relieve himself in his pants.

To her relief, they all jumped as one, and fled into the night. The growl materialized in front of her blurred vision and revealed a familiar figure dressed in red and sporting long silver tresses and golden eyes filled with rage strong enough to tint them red.

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As the last image faded away, she felt a wave of exhaustion wash over her. The darkness that followed was not the heavy presence that it had once been, but the comforting feeling of peace. It was a soothing darkness that promised that there would be no more nightmares, and that the toughest part of the journey ahead was over.

Rest Miko. You are entitled to a little peace. You will no longer be plagued by these images, came Sesshomaru's sage advise.

Hai, rest koi. We have felt your pain, and we will take away your nightmares. Leave them with us now. You will remember them, but there will no longer be pain with the remembering. Now it is time to heal. Inuyasha said as he hugged her more tightly to his chest.

Promise? she asked half in fear and half in relief.

You have our word, Miko. No one could have gone through what you did and not been unscathed. You were both brave and strong. You should be proud of that. You are a credit to your race, and in fact, are even a credit to hanyou and youkai as well. Stand proud of who and what you are, regardless of whatever that might be. said Sesshomaru with more feeling that anyone thought the stoic and icy hearted youkai to possess.

Arigato, Sesshomaru-sama, was all she could manage to say to him. Words seemed insignificant to otherwise reply to those sage words.

Know, Kagome, that those vile....things....will never again hurt anyone. They will never again, be able to hurt even the most lowly of creatures. They will pay for their vile and cowardly actions. This Sesshomaru swears to this. The barely contained rage behind that promise was almost frightening in its strength. There was more force behind them, than anything she had ever known.

I swear the same, Kagome. My oath that they will pay for their crimes. We will put an end to the pain and anguish these 'things' cause to others. Rest now. Heal. You more than deserve it. There will be no more nightmares, just peace. Inuyasha said, as he nuzzled her neck once more, just beneath her ear. His soothing and gentle kisses giving her most emotional release and comfort that he could ever imagine.

Arigato, Inuyasha, she said as consciousness finally failed her, and she drifted into a warm, peaceful, and healing sleep.

10 - The unexpected healer!

~~The Past - Just Past Mid Day - Sengoku Jidai - Kaede's Hut~~

It had been one of the most incredible displays of spiritual power that Miroku or Kaede had ever heard of. It was a masterful piece of work. So masterful as to almost be a work of art, spiritually speaking. Who could have believed the power possessed by the inu youkai brothers? Just to have witnessed such a display was like being handed a long cherished and desired gift and both houshi and old miko found their breath taken away, just in wonder and amazement.

Even the others were in awe. They little understood what they had just witnessed, except in the most general of terms. All they really knew for sure is that the end result would give them a way of making those who had dared to hurt Kagome, pay for their actions. That was what they all wanted the most and were committed to seeing through to the end.

It had started innocently and quietly enough. At first, Kaede had suggested that Atsuko might want to be alone with the two inu youkai brothers, and Kagome for this part of making the potion of "Smitciv Rorroh". She was surprised, however, when the kobura (cobra) youkai healer had stated that such measures were not necessary.

In fact, she had stated, it would be better for all who cared for the little Miko to stay, as their loving aura's would only help her to face her fears in this matter, by their very supporting presence. With that settled, everyone, including the five ookami, crowded into the little hut and the healer, having arranged everything she needed set about linking the two youkai and one Miko together.

Inuyasha leaned back against the wall, Kagome carefully arranged to sit in his lap so that he could rest his head against hers and nuzzle into the nape of her neck. They were careful of her injuries, and did everything to ensure her comfort as much as possible, despite the nightmares that were still causing her to toss about in her unconscious state.

Sesshomaru, sat next to Inuyasha, facing towards the little Miko currently seated in his little brother's embrace. He had set aside his armor for the duration, as it was not sure what kind of effect this spell would have on any of the trio and if by chance there was any adverse effects, it was less likely that the spiked armor would add to any possible injuries or concerns. On one level, he didn't want to subject himself to the rush of raw ningen emotions that he knew he had to face for this, however, he had been the one to choose to do this, and he was not about to back down now, or admit to being intimidated by the situation, and yes, even a little afraid.

His self imposed barriers were formidable. He had spent centuries strengthening them to his standards of perfection. No one alive could claim the strength and power of the mental shields that the Great Taiyoukai possessed. No one even came close.

But for this potion to work, he needed to access her memories of the events from the previous night. That meant that he had to at least make a hole in his barriers and allow the raw emotions that the little

Miko was obviously going through to pass beyond his tight control and actually experience them as his own.

Even Inuyasha would have a difficult time handling such raw and uncontrolled emotion. But it would not be as hard for him, as Inuyasha was not one to keep his feelings suppressed. He was a much more explosive and openly expressive than his much more stoic older brother, and he would be better prepared for the onslaught that they were about to face.

Atsuko, who had been his personally healer for centuries, understood her Lord's unspoken concerns. Without hesitation and expertly avoiding anything that might embarrass her Master, she let him know that she would do her level best to support him as needed in this rare spiritual sharing.

"Master, no insult intended, but it must be spoken. Are you quite sure that you are ready to face what must be?" she asked. Part of the ritual of the ceremony needed to link the nightmares of the little Miko to the potion, required that those participating be asked and given the option to back out freely and without shame.

"Hai!" was the only response.

"Sesshomaru-sama, Inuyasha-sama, before I begin you must understand what you are about to face. This has rarely been done between a youkai and a ningen. Even more rarely between a hanyou and a ningen. It has never been done before between a youkai, hanyou and an untrained Miko," stated Atsuko for all to hear.

Miroku curious about why this would make a difference, voiced the question that ran through all of their minds.

"Why does the combination make such a difference, Atsuko-san?" he asked.

"When done between two or more beings of the same race, it is easier for all participants to share what must come. Their emotional mind set is similar enough that there is little danger to anyone of those in the link to mentally harm another. Such things cannot be done by accident or design. It is the nature of this particular spell," she carefully explained.

"Between hanyou and youkai, the sharing of youkai blood, also, aids in the linking for the same reason, just as does the sharing of ningen blood, if the participants are hanyou and ningen. Between youkai and ningen, it is harder. There is considerable difference in the way a youkai mind works, how it chooses to express itself, how it is capable of handling some kinds of emotions, especially extreme ones that a ningen is not capable of handling, however, most youkai have strong emotional control barriers that help to protect either side."

"Even linking youkai to miko would not normally be a matter of concern, as the miko training goes a long way towards protecting the ningen. However, Kagome-sama is untrained, and as I understand it, the more strong her emotional state, the more powerful her Miko powers manifest themselves, sometimes without her awareness of what is happening," the kobura youkai healer continued.

"In order for this spell to work and for the visions to be bound to the potion, Sesshomaru-sama and

Inuyasha-sama are going to have to make Kagome-sama relive her attack in all of its gory details. That is a very emotionally torturous time for her, and reliving it could trigger her powers to react. If they do, it would most likely be violently and could result in Sesshomaru-sama and Inuyasha-sama being purified at worst, and best, they could almost be babbling idiots for a long time."

"This is a lesser concern for Inuyasha-sama, because he is hanyou, but also because he has an emotion bond to her and already shares much of her feelings and unconsciously channels a lot of her power naturally. His familiarity will aid him in his task, and help to reassure her in hers," explained Atsuko.

"Sesshomaru-sama has to allow her to reach past his own powerful control barriers. In other words, he has to let her inside his head, just as he has to enter hers. I believe that he is more than strong enough to withstand the feelings that even now threaten her very sanity, but it will still be a hard battle and a most challenging experience for him."

"Is there anything that either Miroku-sama or I can do to help protect Kagome-chan, Inuyasha-sama, and Sesshomaru-sama, while they are linked?" asked a concerned Kaede.

"Lie, Kaede-sama," was the reply. "The nature of this spell is such that nothing must be allowed to interfere. It is purely by the strength of their own wills that they do this, and come out of it whole."

"In that case, Sesshomaru-sama," spoke up Miroku, "you should be aware of the strength of Kagome-sama will and feelings. Even at the best of times, her emotions tend to run high. It matters not whether she is happy, sad, depressed, or angry. Inuyasha-sama can bear witness to this, as she has subdued him on many an occasion, although never without good reason."

"She can change her moods extremely quickly as well, brother," said Inuyasha with a slight flush of embarrassment on his face at Miroku's words. "I have seen her change from happy, to sad, to frustrated, then angry, then determined, and back to happy, in less time than it takes to turn around in the heat of battle. She is an...extremely...'dynamic' individual."

"This Sesshomaru will keep this in mind. Your warnings are...appreciated..." said a very stoic Youkai Lord.

"Then, if there is nothing more, let's us begin," said Atsuko. All participants, excepting Kagome, nodded. As Inuyasha was already making physical contact with Kagome, it was only necessary for Sesshomaru to touch her in some way. He chose to place his hand on her shoulder. With that Atsuko touched them both in the center of their foreheads. A gentle red glow emitted from the tips of her fingers.

She began a chant, and after a moment removed her hands from the two inu youkai brothers, and placed her hands on either side of Kagome's face. The glow intensified, as Atsuko continued her chant. It flared suddenly, causing everyone except the trio and Atsuko, whose eyes were already closed, to shield their vision from the glare that engulfed the room.

When the glare died down, everything appeared as it had before. The trio seemed unchanged other than that Inuyasha, and Sesshomaru were no longer aware of anything in the room around them.

For quite a while, it appeared that nothing was happening. Other than that Kagome had finally stopped tossing so restlessly in her fitful slumber. A couple of times, it could be seen that Inuyasha's hold on Kagome tightened a bit, and that Sesshomaru's hand seemed to do the same.

Shortly after this, the whole group looked on in shocked surprise to see tears streaming down the faces of both inu youkai. Both seemed to have trouble breathing, and were almost sobbing in abject terror. A wave of unrelenting fear, and absolute terror rushed through the room, seeming to fill the air and making it feel almost too heavy to breathe.

Both grunted in pain, and their left arms jerked as though someone had attacked them. They gasped, and grabbed their sides, and then stomachs with their left hands, the pain of said appendage from a moment ago, completely forgotten in favor of this new assault.

"They are seeing and feeling how she was first attacked," said Atsuko. "This must be when they broke her arm, and damaged her ribs.

The two brothers began growling at this point and their free hands, came up as though about to strike something, their claws extended with an obvious desire to rend flesh and bath in blood. Moments later, their bodies started to twitch uncontrollably. Inuyasha remained up right by dint of being sandwiched between the wall and Kagome, but the Great Lord was not having the same luck. No one knew how he maintained his hold on the little Miko's shoulder, but even as he fell over and writhed in obvious pain and torture, he never once relinquished his hold.

Then to everyone's astonishment, blood began seeping through the fabric of Sesshomaru's haori and his hakama as well. There seemed to be a random pattern of seeping blood that began at his chest, ran down his sides and along his legs, and then back up to his collar and even his neck. His head jerked to the side violently as though someone had just punched him.

His breathing was erratic at best, and he was panting for air like it was almost impossible to breathe. He was once again grabbing his chest, and the action of his claws tore enough of his haori to expose the flesh underneath. Even as they watched, bite marks appeared, as well as, the obvious signs of fingers being roughly dug into the flesh tearing it open and then tracing symbols through the blood that poured from the injuries.

To everyone's shock and horror, the word 'Nightwalkers' was left written in the blood pouring from the wounds. All left to wonder what it meant or who it was, and almost too stunned to move or speak.

"Someone, please! Get me a bucket of cold water quickly," demanded the kobura youkai healer, as she rushed over to the Demon Lord. "Sango-san, I will need your help, if you please. I am going to have to try to hold him down, until this is over. No matter what, we can't let his connection to Kagome-sama break or it will kill him."

"Hai, Atsuko-san," said Sango as she quickly moved to assist the youkai healer.

"What of Inuyasha-sama?" asked Miroku.

"He doesn't seem to be being affected as strongly as Sesshomaru-sama," said the healer. "But, if you

could keep an eye on his just the same, it would be a good idea."

"I will help with Inuyasha," came a surprising response from Kouga and he went to aid, Miroku. So far, all that appeared to be happening there was his twitching in response to the attacks that the trio were seeing inside their minds. Ginta had by now returned with the bucket of water that was asked for, and handed cloths to Miroku and Atsuko, which Kaede had passed to him when he returned with the water.

Kaede spoke up, "Ginta, Hakkaku! Ye and Jaken-san would be a great help if ye took Shippou and Rin outside. They should not have to sit and see such as this."

"Hai miko-sama," was the joint reply, as the three youkai took the children outside. They chose to take them to the clearing by the old well, so as to not have to bare witness to even the sounds that could now be heard coming from the Youkai Lord.

"I have never heard of this kind of a reaction to this spell before," said Atsuko in a mix of awe and horror. The Youkai Lord was still thrashing about, his legs now sitting in a most obvious and horribly uncomfortable way, that left everyone wondering just how anyone could have their legs put into such a position and still walk afterwards. He was still clawing at his chest, which by now was covered in blood, and turning a deep black even as they watched.

Kouga suddenly took a deep breath, trying to catch something odd in the smells that filled the room. "This doesn't make sense!"

"What is that, Kouga-kun," asked a busy Sango, both hands full of trying to keep the now convulsing Taiyoukai from furthering his own injuries.

"The scent of the blood in the room. It is not Sesshomaru's," he stated firmly.

The kobura youkai tasted the air. Her heightened sense of taste had centuries of experience as a healer, and her skill at deciphering smells was second only to the Inu Lord beside her. "He is right. The blood scent coming from Sesshomaru-sama is the Miko's, not his own. I have never heard of this, unless...."

At her hesitation to continue, Kaede spoke up and drew her back to the moment at hand. "Unless what, Atsuko-san?"

"Unless his Lordship has somehow become empathically bonded to the Miko." was the awed reply.

"Is that anything like a mating bond?" asked Kouga, not sure whether this was a good thing or a bad one. Either way it bothered him.

"Yes, and no!" was the confused reply.

"It is not even as remotely intimate as the bonding of mates, however, emotionally they are inseparable. The only way that something like this could happen is if they both have suffered some similar horror in their lives, or if they both suffered some extremely traumatic incident in their lives that both found to be almost too much to handle, and have never finished facing and dealing with." said Atsuko, still doing her best to hold down her Lord and Master, who was still violently thrashing and from the sounds of the

growls that were coming from his chest, he was in danger of losing to his youkai blood.

"If something is not done soon, or they do not get through this nightmare soon, he is going to go into a blood rage and we are all done for then," stated Sango.

"Then let's just separate them and get Sesshomaru out of here." stated a determined, but fearful Kouga. His concern was not for himself, but for Kagome. He could not sit by and not at least try to do something to help keep his nee-san safe.

"lie! Don't even consider that. If you do, you will kill all three of them, at best. At worst, you will cause both Sesshomaru-sama and Inuyasha-sama to lose themselves to their blood beasts, and Kagome-sama would die regardless. We can't separate them," stated Atsuko firmly.

"But we have to do something, and soon," Sango said. It was getting more and more difficult to hold down the Youkai Lord, and already the features of his face had begun to elongate as the youkai in his blood began to take control. His claws were lengthening, the left hand clenching and unclenching as the claws extended, and the claws of the right had begun to pierce Kagome's shoulder, although remarkably, it could be seen that the Lord was fighting to not hurt her.

Inuyasha was shuddering and to some degree he, too, was convulsing, however, he was not showing any of the effects that were appearing on Sesshomaru. Even his growls, although viscous in the extreme, were not showing any signs of a loss of control to his inner beast.

By now, Sesshomaru's face was bathed in sweat, his left eye and the entire left side of his face swollen and turning black and blue. It was obviously when Kagome had been punched and beaten in the face. In between the growls that were being pulled from his chest, there were whimpers and cries for the pain that was racking his body as it continued to convulse with what was obviously each blow and thrust of the invasion of the onna's body as she had been attacked.

"My kami! How on this earth did she ever survive all of that?" asked an awed and terrified Kouga. "Who...what kind of monsters are those people that would do such things to anyone, let alone someone as sweet, kind, and innocent as Kagome?"

The waves of fear, terror, blind rage, hatred, despair, shame, guilt, and loneliness seem to make the very air around them throb like a physical presence. There was not a dry eye in the place and not one of the people there, youkai and ningen, male or female alike, who felt shame for those tears that fell.

Gasping for air, at the intensity of it all, as the waves of emotional turmoil poured surprisingly not off of Kagome, but off of Sesshomaru, Kaede spoke up.

"There must be a way to help relieve the stress that is so strongly affecting Sesshomaru-sama," she stated.

"I wish that I could make a suggestion, Kaede-sama," said a flustered Atsuko. "Unfortunately, this is something that I have never heard of and to my knowledge nothing like this was ever even mentioned in my ancestor's journals, or even the ones that followed later generations."

They were all at wits end, and had no idea what to do to help the Great Lord. Each moment saw him in more and more pain, more and more blood, more and more injuries, and slowly, inexorably transforming into his true form, blood lust becoming rapidly more evident in the sound of his growls and the one eye that was not swollen and bruised was so red that it glowed in its lust filled hatred.

Just when all seemed beyond anyone's control, the scream of Inuyasha's name was torn from both Kagome's and Sesshomaru's lips. The sound so filled with pain as to leave all who heard it gasping in shock and anger that anyone would put their friend through so much pain and hell. Moments later, Inuyasha began to growl even more viciously than he had been thus far.

For a moment, everyone feared that they were going to have two blood enraged youkai tearing the place apart. But much to the surprise of everyone, the hand of Kagome's unbroken arm, and Sesshomaru's left hand reach out to each other, and when they met, they gripped each other tightly as though the Seven Levels of Hell itself could not tear them apart. Inuyasha's left hand reach over to lie on top of the two tightly clasped hands, and where the three met and blinding flash of red light exploded outward until the hut fairly radiated with the intensity of the glow.

Long moments passed before the brightness faded away, and the afterglow cleared from the temporarily blinded eyes of the occupants of the room. When it did, the sight before them was almost as amazing as the events that had transpired all during the past hour, that seemed like a full day.

Atsuko noticed that the vile of potion, which had been sitting on the floor near the linked trio, was glowing with the same red light that had filled the room just moments ago. It pulsed with a power all its own, and sent shivers up the spine of the kobura youkai, for the almost living quality that the potion seemed to emanate.

Sesshomaru was once again sitting up, just as he had before the spell was cast. The bruising on his face and body gone, like it had never happened. The cuts, and scratches that had once covered his body in random patterns, were no longer there, the only evidence of any of the injuries was the blood that his once pristine clothing now lay soaked in, and the tracks of the blood on his body that still looked like someone had been finger painting with it, and the vile word, 'Nightwalkers' still visible on his stomach.

Every joint and muscle he owned seemed to be in pain. He felt like he had joined a cross country run, but had been run over by everything including a mountain. He put a hand to his pounding head, as a cup of soothing tea was brought to his lips. Without even considering that someone was holding the cup for him, he drank and was grateful for the ease it brought to his pain racked body.

So intense was the pain, and so clouded his mind, that he didn't notice the condition of his clothes or the blood that coated his body, nor the patterns that were painted there. A cool, wet cloth was brought to his almost fevered brow and began to wipe away some of the sweat. Even as gentle as it tried to be, the side of his face was pained by the touch, as though someone had pound that area of his face to a pulp.

He growled at the pain that claimed his cheek, until he heard his brother.

"Sesshomaru, what happened to you?" moaned a tired and aching Inuyasha. Kagome still in his lap and his arms still securely wrapped around her.

That was when Sesshomaru looked down at his clothing and body. More slowly and weakly than he would willingly admit, the Lord stood up with Atsuko's and Sango's aid. As he did, what was left of his clothing fell away and the trails of painted blood could be seen by all. The source of that blood, the bruising, the scratches, gouges and cuts were no longer evident at all. There was no sign of what had caused, or where the blood had come from.

So caught up was everyone looking at Sesshomaru that it was not until Inuyasha reluctantly made to put Kagome down and made to stand up, that he looked at Kagome's face. His gasp of astonishment drew everyone's attention and when they looked to see what he was looking at, their own astonishment filled the room.

The bruising that had covered more than half of her face was gone, no evidence that it had ever existed. Carefully, Inuyasha pulled up the hem of her shirt, to show her stomach, the area where the most cuts from the knife had been made. Not one single cut could be seen. It was like they never had occurred.

Kaede checked the splinted arm, and found that it too was no longer broken, and her skilled fingers, as well as those of Atsuko were able to determine that the cracked ribs were healed as well. Miko and the healer asked for a bit of privacy to check Kagome out more thoroughly and no one objected or complained. A short time later, when they all were back sitting in the hut once more, the two healers were able to confirm what they all already suspected. All the marks, all the cuts, all the bruising, everything, including the bodily violation that the poor onna had suffered was gone. Gone like it had never happened.

For the first time since the attack, the little Miko was resting peacefully. With her physical injuries healed and gone, it was just a matter of healing mentally that peaceful slumber would do a lot to aid. It was also felt, though not spoken out loud that the unusual bond between the Miko and the Youkai Lord, would speed the mental healing along, as well.

Somehow, in the empathic bonding of the Miko and the Youkai Lord, perhaps because of his own natural healing abilities, or perhaps the powers within the onna, herself, or perhaps a combination of the two, all her injuries had been healed leaving nothing to show for them, except the memories. Memories that were now bound to a potion. A potion that had a special destination date with six sadistic bastards who would learn of the horror that they seemed to enjoy bringing to the innocent.

Miroku left the hut and sought out the village weaver. It was luck that the woman and her family were quite skilled in their craft and had gained a well-deserved reputation for the quality of her goods. With a bit of haggling and negotiating, Miroku was able to get a fine set of silk hakama's and haori that while not exactly like Sesshomaru's originals, at least matched the quality. It would serve for now.

Jaken was immediately dispatched to his Lordship's fortress home to get a fresh set of the Lord's more customary clothes and instructions that if he didn't return within the hour, he would become the local village's next 'experienced childcare provider', with Rin as the evidence of his long and expert experience. Of course, Jaken fairly fell over his own feet to rush out the door and could be heard calling to Ah-Un, and berating the poor beast to fly faster as they left, and was soon just a small speck in the western skies.

In the mean time, Atsuko, Sango, and Kaede, brought the two inu youkai up-to-date as to what had happened during the hour that they were held in the spell, linked to the little Miko. If it were not for the blood tracks and the pain that he still felt, Sesshomaru and Inuyasha would have had a hard time believing what they were told. Both were able to confirm that what they saw on Sesshomaru's body was exactly what had been done to Kagome, including the finger painted blood.

No one could understand why the blood was Kagome's and not Sesshomaru's, neither could anyone understand why the waves of emotional stress that had filled the room a short time ago, poured off of the Youkai Lord and not Kagome herself. Atsuko explained her theory as to why things had gone the way that they did, but no one offered further comment on the matter.

Sesshomaru seemed more withdrawn than usual, not that he was talkative to begin with by nature. It could almost be felt how he seemed to retreat further than normal behind his emotional barriers, especially after Atsuko explained that only unresolved great trauma experienced in the lives of both him and Kagome could be the explanation for the events of the past hour.

In any case, it was now fact that Sesshomaru and Kagome were mentally linked on an purely emotional level. They could not confirm with 100% accuracy until she regained consciousness, but it was believe that both the Miko and the Youkai Lord would permanently be able to feel the emotions of the other. The stronger the feeling, the more affected each would be.

Once Miroku returned with clean suitable clothing, Sango and Atsuko assisted Sesshomaru in visiting the local hot springs just on the outskirts of the village. Miroku, having been aware that such a visit would be necessary, and knowing that the Youkai Lord would need and want some privacy, had taken the time on his returned with the clothing to make sure that no one was using the springs.

By the time that Jaken returned, remarkably in less than an hour, Sesshomaru was cleaned up, and once again sitting in the hut with another cup of soothing tea. Inuyasha, although not having suffered near as much as his brother, still felt a need to clean up, but decided that he would hold off until they got to Kagome's era and was in her mother's home. It did not go un-noticed that the Taiyoukai sat next to the still unconscious but now peacefully resting Kagome, nor that one hand was resting upon his knee.

No one brought it up, as more than anything it seemed to bring even the stoic Youkai Lord a bit of healing comfort at the close contact with the onna. Considering the things that they had all witnessed either directly or not, no one even thought to make a anything of the matter. If either of the two could and obviously did find healing and comfort in so simple and innocent a thing as touch, who were the others to consider standing in their way.

11 - Preparations to be made.... Hi Mom!

~~The Past - Mid Afternoon - Sengoku Jidai - Kaede's Hut~~

It was not long after the completion of the spell that Sesshomaru was recovered and almost back to normal. All pain gone, and no sign of any of the injuries that he had experienced remained. Neither Inuyasha nor Sesshomaru were willing to speak of what they had witnessed. Both insisted that if the information were to be told, it was Kagome's right and choice to do so, not theirs. No one could get anymore out of them.

In honesty, no one really wanted to push the matter. After seeing the marks, and abuse that were inflicted upon the Taiyoukai's body, they all had a pretty good idea of the horror that Kagome had been put through. It was enough to give even the strongest of the group, nightmares of their own for years to come, and they were astonished that anyone would willingly inflict such pain, or that once inflicted that such a victim could live through it all.

It was a testament to the courage and stamina of the little Miko that she had endured so much, and lived through the horror. Both inu youkai assured the group of concerned 'brothers, sister, grandmother, and children' that Kagome was well on the way to healing mentally as well.

After pricking their fingers, and adding a few drops of their blood to be added to the herbal mixture, the potion was completed and ready for use upon the unsuspecting beasts. It was divided up into six small bottles and Sango tucked them safely with her poison mask for safe keeping and ease of carrying.

With that done, Rin and Jaken were left in the care of the old Miko, along with Atsuko to keep watch over Kagome. The others, including the five ookami all met at the old well a short time later.

"Before we jump into the well, there are some things that you all need to be prepared for. Things in the future are nothing like they are now. Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the current location of the shrine, the well, and the Goshinbuko," stated a determined and confident hanyou.

"These will be the only landmarks that you will find in Kagome's era near where she lives. Except for a small grove, all of the forest is gone, and in its stead are nothing but a forest of buildings like none you have ever seen. The air is much less clean, and the odors are much stronger and more intense, especially the scent of ningen," Inuyasha continued.

"So I advise you to cover your nose until you can adjust to the powerful odors you will be faced with. Even a hanyou like me, had a hard time getting use to them, so for the youkai here, it will be a problem. Being in Kagome's home will make it easier. Her scent completely permeates the entire house, and it offers both healing and comfort from the smells and sounds of her time."

"There are no horses, no wagons, and people do not get around on foot as much. The dirt paths are covered in some strange ningen-made stone and their means of travel are like nothing you could imagine," stated Inuyasha.

"When you get to the otherside, you will find it dark at first. That is because in Kagome's time, this well is housed as part of the Shrine Complex, which generations of Kagome's family have been in charge of tending to. As soon as you get to the otherside, immediately make your way out of the well, but do not open the doors until we are all together," he strongly advised.

"Remember this excursion is to help right a wrong in Kagome's world, and as the shrine is a place that gets many visitors it would not help either Kagome or her family to have a pack of ookami and strangely dressed youkai barging out of the old well house unexpectedly. Kagome's mother is expecting us, and as soon as we are all together in the old well house, I will take you all to her home, where we will finalize our plans and scout out the area we are going to be 'hunting' in," Inuyasha said with the same vengeance and primal snarl that had sent a chill down Mrs. Higurashi's spine. It sent an equal chill down the spines of his friends, the only one to not feel it was Sesshomaru, but the look on his face was enough to rival his little brother's and just as chilling to see.

It was decided that Sango, Kouga, and two of the ookami would be the first through the old well. This permitted the Ookami Youkai Prince to be on the otherside and in control of the ookami at all times. It would not do to have the wolves wandering around aimlessly in a world where ningens abound. After all, the idea of this venture was to clean up a problem, not create more.

Once they were through, showing that the necklaces worked perfectly, Ginta, Hakkaku, and two more of the ookami soon followed. Shippou and Miroku with the last ookami were next, and finally Inuyasha and Sesshomaru brought up the rear, bringing Kirara with them.

All the remained of the determined group of time travellers was a now silent and uninteresting old well, deep in a forest glade.

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~~The Present - Mid Afternoon - Modern Day Tokyou - Higurashi Shrine Complex~~

Once everyone was on the other side of the old well, Inuyasha told them to stay put for a few moments. He quickly ducked out the door, checked for tourists and raced to the house to let Kagome's mother know of his and his friends arrival. He was back in short order and everyone quickly and quietly left the well house and followed Inuyasha to Kagome's home.

All were in awe of the sights, sounds and odors that greeted them, and Inuyasha was hard pressed at first to get them to the house safely. As he had warned them, the odors were the worst they had ever had to cope with. The sounds were bad, but after a short time, they were able to tune out the unimportant things.

The sense of smell was more difficult, mostly because that was the one sense that they all relied the most on. It was their main line of recognition and communication with all who they met or had to deal with. Though it never showed on his face, even Sesshomaru had a tough time getting his sense of smell under control. The assault of alien and ningen odors was almost overwhelming. Just as Inuyasha had said, however, Kagome's scent permeated her home of birth and it made it ever so much easier to make the much needed adjustment.

"Nisou-sama, these are the friends that I told you about. They are like family to Kagome back in our time, and all are here to help 'fix' the problem we spoke of," said Inuyasha. Kagome's mother bowed politely, and motioned for everyone to move to the livingroom. They were joined by Ojii-san, who for once was not chasing everyone with his ofuda's, and Souta, who was barely restraining his eagerness to meet the new youkai in his home. Instead he settled for sitting on the floor and becoming acquainted with the ookami.

Once they were all settled and tea offered, she joined them and introductions were made. Miroku being natural a diplomat did the honours of the introductions.

"Nisou-sama, we have heard much of you from Kagome. We are honoured that you would permit us in your home. Most of us have known and been friends and near family to Kagome for years now, and you should be proud of her achievements, strength of will, and her undying compassion for those she cares about," he said.

"The silent and stoic youkai, is the esteemed Sesshomaru-sama, Taiyoukai of the Western Lands in our era, and older half brother to Inuyasha," Miroku said. Sesshomaru bowed his head in polite courtesy, and was surprised when Kagome's family bowed as appropriate for both their status and his own.

"The one in headband and furs is Prince Kouga of the Ookami Youkai tribe. These are five of his ookami pack, and two of his pack brothers, Ginta and Hakkaku. Kagome is a pack sister to them, and they are very eager to aid Inuyasha in bringing justice to bare for your daughter's suffering," Miroku continued. Kouga, Ginta and Hakkaku bowed in greeting, and the ookami all took the time to sniff at the three strange ningen, imprinting their scents to memory so as to know that they were part of the pack and not to be harmed.

Kouga gave them the time to become familiar, but when it looked like their were getting just a bit too eager for comfort, he growled out an order, and the five ookami immediately stepped back and laid down. They all whined in apology, which Ginta took the time to translate for Kagome's family, leaving the three contemporary ningens most impressed.

"The young, beautiful, and strong Lady with us, is Kagome-sama 'sister', Sango-san," Miroku continued the introductions. "She is a Taijiya by trade and the best of her kind."

Sango bowed low, letting her hair cover the blush that rose to her cheeks at Miroku's words. As was her habit, she was dressed in her usual kimono, and Hiraikotsu resting on her back.

"Sugio," said Souta, as he looked over the great bone boomerang. "Can you really throw that thing?"

"Hai," she answered, "with ease." She smiled at Souta, finally getting to meet the little brother that her 'sister' had spoke of so often. He reminded her so much of Kohaku, and seeing him brought a smile to her face.

"Cool! Could I watch you throw it sometime?" he asked in awed wonder.

"We will see," she said in return.

Miroku spoke up to finish the introductions of their oddly mismatched group, "The small kitsune is a kit rescued by Kagome-sama and Inuyasha-sama. His name is Shippou-chan. He is more of an adopted son to Kagome-sama, since his father was killed by the Thunder Brothers some three and a half years ago. He has faced many adventures with us over the past three plus years, and Kagome is most proud of his bravery."

Shippou's chest could not have been thrown out any more and still stayed attached to the little kitsune. It was obvious just how proud Miroku's words made him, and he was doing his best to let his small stature show as much of it as possible for all of the adults to see.

There was a tiny mewl, squeaked out from the over crowded room, and a moment later, a small cream coloured form could be seen perched on Miroku's shoulder.

"Oh, yeah! I am sorry Kirara, didn't mean to forget you," said Miroku with the most sincere apology to the little fire neko. "This is Sango-san's companion, Kirara. She is a fire neko mononoke. Don't let her current appearance fool you. In battle form she is a most formidable warrior in her own right.

And I am Miroku, a houshi by trade..." Miroku tried to continue.

"And a hentai by nature," said Inuyasha, giving a warning look at Miroku, which he knew immediately meant that he was to keep his hands away from Kagome's mother. He had the good graces to blush, when the others in the room laughed, including Sango, who had a mischievous look in her eye. Miroku took that as a warning about his hands, and appropriately gulped in response.

Kirara mewl a happy chirp, and bounded over to sit in Sango's lap. At that, Mrs. Higurashi turned to the odd group of people and animals in her livingroom, and took the time to make her own introductions.

"Welcome to our home. I apologize that our humble living is not more appropriate to the status of some of you here today, but in our era those such as we are here at the shrine seldom see those of royal status, let alone expect to have to entertain such company," Kagome's mother said.

"Your home and accommodations are more than adequate for of my pack and myself, Nisou-sama," spoke Kouga. "We are used to a much more rugged lifestyle ourselves. No offense is taken. Besides, anything would be acceptable and endurable if it helps us to help our nee-san."

"Your nee-san?" Higurashi-daikotu (priest) asked.

"Hai, Kagome! She risked her life for my people in a dangerous battle. For a long time, I had hoped that she would accept my hand and be my mate. She has refused the offer, however, for other reasons, but still remains as a sister to me and my tribe." was Kouga carefully worded response.

He had seen Inuyasha stiffen at the old priest's question, and although he would not have minded a battle with inu-kuro, now was not the time or place. Besides, he had given his word to set past differences aside for the duration of the current matter. He was a Prince and a youkai of his word, no less than Lord Sesshomaru. He would honor his word. Inuyasha relaxed at his answer and gave a slight nod of approval. The exchange didn't go unnoticed by the ever observant Mrs. Higurashi, but she tabled

her questions for another time.

"The young man, before you all and enjoying the presence of your very well mannered ookami, is Kagome's little brother Souta. He still attends school and as life is quite different in our times, his adventures with his sister are not quite the same as those you all must have, but he is a very brave young man. Especially where his sister is concerned, although don't tell her that we said that," Mrs. Higurashi said with a gleam of humour in her eye.

Souta blushed, "Ahhh...Mom...", but sat a bit more proudly nevertheless. Everyone else, of course with the exception of Sesshomaru, laughed and smiled at the boy.

"Don't let my father's ofuda confuse you, I am sure that sooner or later he will forget himself and start trying to throw them around. He has been trying to banish Inuyasha for the past four years, but as his ofuda are less than effective, you can all see how successful he had been. Still, we all love him regardless. He is Kagome's Ojii-san, and the current keeper of this shrine," said the old man's daughter. Her humour sparkling in her eyes as the old man looked on with a blush of colour to his own cheeks. It was easy to see where Kagome got her cheerfulness, sense of humour, and her most delightful and alluring blush from.

"I will have you know that I come from a very old and very long line of Priests, who have held these Shrine Grounds for hundreds of generations. My spells and ofuda are the best and..." began Mr. Higurashi.

"Yeah, yeah! Some of us have heard it before gramps." said Inuyasha. The old man promptly shut up, looked at the hanyou, pouted, sniffled and just huffed. Nevertheless, he smiled and bowed to the group of visitors that his granddaughter called friend and family.

"Of course, I am obviously Kagome's mother, Mrs. Higurashi," she smiled. "Again, you are all most welcome in our home, and I hope that I can at least make your stay a comfortable one."

Surprisingly, Ginta and Hakkaku spoke up, almost in unison, "It is we who are honoured that you would permit us to be here. You are the one who brought the Miko into this world, and who grants her the rights to visit us. Without you, our lives would not have been blessed to have known her, nor would we have had the means to defeat our greatest of enemies."

Everyone in the room agreed with their sentiment, and even Sesshomaru nodded at their words.

"I am sure that you are all anxious to get started on the plan that Inuyasha has in mind. If you will excuse me for few moments, I will get more tea, some snacks and the things that Inuyasha requested," said Mrs. Higurashi. "Souta, there are some boxes upstairs in Kagome's room. Why don't you and Ojii-san fetch them downstairs!"

"Hai, mama!" said Souta and led Ojii-san upstairs to get the boxes.

"Nisou-sama, would you care for help?" asked Sango.

"Arigato Sango-san. Hai," was the reply. Both Sango and Miroku with Shippou in tow followed Kagome's

mother to the kitchen to help get more tea and the snacks.

"Sugoi," said Ginta and Hakkaku a moment later. Everyone was gazing in awe and wonder about the room that they were setting in. All of the strange furniture, the carpet on the floor, the decorations, the odd box like things in the corner and along one wall. It was all a room of marvels for the visiting youkai.

"I have had the opportunity to become familiar with many of the 'conveniences' that Kagome has grown up with here in her time," said Inuyasha. He took a moment to grab what he recognized as the remote for the TV.

"This is one of the ones that took me the longest to get used to," he said, "only because I had a hard time understanding that the images it shows are not only real, but that the being it shows are not trapped inside the box. It is not dangerous, but I have found it to be most useful at times in getting information, about this time."

He pushed the power button on the remote and the TV came to life. By chance it happened upon a local news channel, and Inuyasha chose to leave it there. Everyone gasped in surprise, Sesshomaru being the only one to not give audible signs of his own surprise, however, even his eyes widened in surprise at the sight and sounds coming from the strange box.

It was now that Ojii-san and Souta came back downstairs carrying boxes that appeared to be filled with clothing. There was a smaller box on top of the one that Souta was carrying holding a number of other items. Inuyasha took the box from Ojii-san, who thanked the hanyou for his help. Souta and Inuyasha set the boxes down on one of the side tables near the end of the couch.

Higurashi-nisou, Sango, and Miroku came into the room a moment later carrying trays of tea, sandwiches, and other snacks. These were placed down on the coffee table in the center of the room, so that all could take their fill at their convenience. Shippou brought in a tray that held additional cups and dishes to make it easier for everyone to partake as they saw fit. Once everyone was settled, they all turned to Inuyasha and preparations for the night's adventure began.

"The boxes that Souta and Gramps carried down, are clothes appropriate to this time. They are nothing like you are all used to, however, for the short time that they will be needed and for the purposes they are intended, the discomfort and inconvenience is a small price," said Inuyasha.

With Souta's help, Mrs. Higurashi began passing the clothing around the room.

"These are nothing special, however, they reflect the most common kind of clothing popular among the youth of this time," she explained. "I am sure that many of you have seen the 'odd' clothing that Kagome commonly wears. For the most part, the main outfit she has worn to Sengoku Jidai has been her school uniform."

"Gomen, Nisou-sama," broke in Hakkaku. "But what is this school?"

"Gomen ne, Hakkaku-san," she replied. "In our time, everyone has to go to school, a place of learning. It is required by law for everyone from the age of five until they are at least sixteen. Our code of honour places high standards on passing the lessons learned with good grades and striving to improve oneself

and gain respectable employment when they graduate, usually in their early twenties."

"All the time that Kagome has spent hunting for the Shikon no Kakra, and fighting against the evil in your era, she has also, been working very hard here to keep up her schooling so that she can at least graduate high school with good grades. Her adventures have kept her quite busy, and her grades have suffered for it, so it is unlikely that she will continue to college, or attend university. So we are not sure what her plans for her future are. She had not yet spoken of this to us."

"Why is that, Nisou-sama?" asked Kouga.

"I believe that she is still trying to work out where she feels that she most belongs. It would be extremely difficult for her here. You see, much as she has had to keep her origins secret in your era, she has had to do the same here, but for quite different reasons," said Kagome's mother.

"She has some friends here, however, if they were to learn of her adventures through the hidden well, it would only serve to have her mental health questioned and the authorities here, would have her committed to an insane asylum at best," she spoke with certainty.

For some reason this line of reasoning bothered Sesshomaru, and he chose for the first time to speak up, "Explain. Asylum, insane, committed...!"

"Gomen ne, your Lordship," was the prompt reply. "I did not mean to offend. In our time, much of what you take for granted, magic, youkai, killing your enemy yourselves, miko powers, and such, are all nothing more than myths and legends to most of the people in this era. Ojii-san and I have spoken of this often, and believe that there are still such in existence today, however, we believe that much of it is kept hidden from the public at large. We can only guess at the reasons."

Ojii-san spoke up here, "I am sure, especially from the old records and family history that we keep here at the shrine that youkai, hanyou, and all that you are used to dealing with daily in Sengoku Jidai, are still here. But for reasons we have not been able to determine they are now hidden, and kept secret. The problem with this, however, is that for someone like Kagome, who has very strong spiritual powers, if the general public found out, she would never have a normal life."

"Some would seek her out for their own gains, others would laugh at her and ridicule her for being different or believing things that others do not believe are reality. Still others would be inclined to lock her away, and experiment on her to try to find out how and why she has the powers that she does."

"For us, in many ways, it is both a fear and a relief when she passes through the old well. We know that while she faces many dangers there, at least they are open and known dangers that her powers can help her with. Here she cannot live such an open lifestyle. She would have to live in fear of her abilities being found out, or remain in hiding much of her life," he stated.

"It would seem that her choice would be obvious," came the stoic reply to the old man's explanation. Few noticed the flush that was even now colouring the hanyou's face.

"In face of the bald facts, you are quite correct, your Lordship. But while Kagome was brought up in the comforts in this era, she has become quite accustomed to the simplicity of Sengoku Jidai. For her it is not

that she doesn't wish to choose what is in her heart," spoke her mother, "it is just that she is not sure where her heart is welcome."

Surprisingly, no one commented on that statement. In fact, it was pretty much left alone. There were many surreptitious looks sent in the direction of a hanyou who could not keep the blush from his cheeks. Silence reigned supreme for a few moments, before Miroku broke the tension by pointing out that they had other reasons for being gathered in the Higurashi's livingroom.

Mrs. Higurashi grabbed the boxes, and began passing out the clothing. Jeans were the common run for everyone, including Inuyasha. Most were either dark blue or black, and were quickly followed by t-shirts that also were of a dark colour. The one exception was the clothing for Sango. While not as dark, as what was handed out to the males, it was considerably more feminine in nature and accented her muscular and yet graceful build quite nicely.

"The clothing that I have gotten for you all, is a lot more snug fitting than you are used to, however, it should not restrict your movements much more than what you normally wear," spoke Kagome's mother. "It is one of the reasons why this kind of clothing is most common nowadays. It is not the latest in fashion, however, it is functional and tasteful by today's standards, especially among the young."

Souta spoke up, "We can use my room for the guys to change their clothes in. At least two or three at a time can fit comfortably in there while changing. I will go with you to show you how these clothes fasten. It is simple, but being new to it, it might frustrate some." At that, Ginta, Hakkaku, and Miroku followed Souta upstairs.

"Sango, Ojii-san can show you where Kagome's room is. You can change in there," stated Mrs. Higurashi. "Do you need any help?"

"Ie, Nisou-sama. Kagome and I often bath together in the hot springs and pools in our adventures, and I have had the opportunity to see how her clothes fit." she replied.

"Well, if you need help, just ask," said Higurashi-nisou as Sango followed Ojii-san upstairs to change her clothes.

"Were you able to get any information regarding this gang that attacked Kagome?" asked Inuyasha.

"Hai! I am happy to say that my pack-rat of a dad keeps every newspaper he can get his hands on, and he was able to obtain a quite a few articles and reports about this group," she replied. "Sadly, it is not as informative as would be preferred. But it does give some information and might help you."

"Good," said Inuyasha taking the information that Ojii-san had put together. He spread it out on the table, and those still in the room began going over each article and image that was found.

The pictures, despite being in black and white, were the worst of the gathered information. The obvious tortured bodies, and even the few injured survivors were almost too horrible to consider. Poor Shippou found it too much to handle, and not wanting to appear weak before his peers tried his best not to look sick at the images before him. Mrs. Higurashi seen the determined attempt on the kitsune's part to try to look strong and brave. Her heart went out to the young kit, and she tried to come up with some way to

make it easier for him, without him losing face in front of the others.

"Shippou-chan! I think we need to refresh the snack trays. I could use some help," she spoke up.

"I could help you, Nisou-sama," Shippou said almost too eagerly. He was happy to have some way to get away from the images before him. He knew what had happened to Kagome, having been at the old well when Inuyasha first brought his mother figure home. It sickened the little kit's heart to think that his Okaa-san had been treated in so vile a manner, and it brought back too many of the memories of his own mother and father's death.

"That would be great, Shippou-chan," she said. The two made their way with empty trays to the kitchen.

As they were putting together the tea, more sandwiches and snacks, Shippou was a bit surprised when Kagome's mother asked, "Those pictures bothered you, didn't they Shippou-chan?"

He cringed, the look of shame crossing his face before he could stop it. Of course Higurashi-nisou saw and a knowing smile graced her peaceful features.

"It is alright, Shippou-chan. No one else has to know. I thought you might like to get away from the frightening pictures for a bit," she said.

"It...it..." **sigh** "It hurts to think that someone did that to Okaa-san. It...it..." **sniffle, sob** "It reminds me too...too...too much of my real parents. My father was skinned alive by the Thunder Brothers for his hide. It is sick that people would do that..." Shippou despite his best efforts lost his battle to the tears that he could no longer hold back. Kagome was not there to hug him, and Sango was busy, besides her hugs just were not quite the same. To his surprise a pair of warm, inviting, understanding arms wrapped around the little kit and hugged him, welcoming him to cry his sorrow out as he needed to so badly to do.

He gave himself to his tears, and was grateful for the shoulder offered. But he was even more surprised when another sound caught his attention.

"Oi, runt. You ok?" spoke Inuyasha from the doorway.

Shippou turned his tear filled eyes to the hanyou, who he looked up to like a hero and to some degree a father. Inuyasha had helped him to get vengeance for his father's death, and had saved his life many times. But he knew that the hanyou didn't like weakness, and he was ashamed to see that he was found crying.

Inuyasha walked up to Kagome's mother, and took the kit from her arms. He held Shippou, not unlike he had seen Kagome do many times when the kit had nightmares or was upset, and looked him in the face, "Shippou! It is alright. We are all sickened and upset about what happened to Kagome. We all show our anger and upset in different ways. Even my brother. When you get older, you will find your own way to show your grief and cope with how you feel. For now, you are entitled to cry and should not be ashamed of doing what is quite natural for you to do."

With those words, Shippou just buried his face in the hanyou's haori and cried like he had never let himself do since before his father had died. Kagome's mother looked on with a nod of approval, and

understanding to the hanyou. Inuyasha felt pleased that his actions seemed to be the right thing to do, and just held onto the kit and let him cry.

12 - scooping out the matter at hand!

Chapter 12 - Scoping Out the Matter at Hand!

Moment's later, Miroku entered the kitchen looking for Inuyasha. He saw him holding Shippou, and while his actions surprised the hentai houshi, he chose not to say anything to embarrass either the young kit or the hanyou. Normally, this time of teasing was something that the loose handed houshi found great pleasure in, but the current situation was anything but normal and for once, he was keeping his wandering hands under a remarkable amount of control.

"Inuyasha, Nisou-sama...that strange box with the people in it, seems to be saying something about these things that attacked Kagome-sama," he said.

Everyone immediately dropped whatever they were doing and headed back into the livingroom. In the short time that Inuyasha and Shippou had been in the kitchen, Ginta, Hakkaku, Miroku and Sango had finished changing their normal apparel for the clothing that had been provided by Mrs. Higurashi.

With their more exotic hairstyles, Mrs. Higurashi thought that both Ginta and Hakkaku looked more like the 'punks' or 'goths' so popular in this era among the youth of the day. Miroku made for a very nice and most striking looking young man that could readily pass anywhere in Modern Day Tokyou without question, many joshi easily drooling over his fine looks.

But to Mrs. Higurashi, it was clear that this itchy handed houshi had eyes for only one onna, and the young lady in question presented a most lovely sight. The jeans she sported hugged her hips most alluringly, the tight fitting, dark, long sleeve top accented her rugged, handsome features just as well. She left her hair down in the normal low ponytail that she was most accustomed to, and the overall look was one that complimented the dark look already being worn by the boys. Miroku was practically drooling at the sight she presented, and Mrs. Higurashi just calmly walked by the houshi, and gently closed his mouth with a giggle. Everyone else broke up with laughter, of course minus one very stoic and slightly disapproving Youkai Lord, and Miroku had the good graces to blush at being caught.

She had chosen to maintain her wristlets. At her questioning look, Sango showed Mrs. Higurashi the hidden blades that she always kept with her under them as a means of protection. Knowing that her background as a Taijiya was the life of a warrioress, Mrs. Higurashi chose not to try to change her mind. It was probably better that the young woman did wear them with what they were planning away.

Turning back to the news that was on the TV, Mrs. Higurashi saw the images being shown, gasped and turned the volume up just a bit for everyone to hear. It was obvious that there was another victim of the 'Nightwalkers' found.

"...young onna of about 13, was found two nights ago in the area of the city known to be the regular haunt of the infamous 'Nightwalkers'. Please note that the images we have are very gory, and may not be suitable for all ages."

"The victim, identified as Toshifumi, Akiha, was reported missing about a week ago. Unfortunately, the police didn't have enough clues to track her whereabouts, and it was only by the graces of a local good Samaritan that she was found lying in an alley less than half a block from the well known and honourable Higurashi Shrine. The seventh grade student was apparently walking home just after sunset in the area near the Higurashi Shrine, known to most as the 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard', so called because more than half of their victims are usually found horribly torture, mutilated, and their bodies among the old and abandoned ruins of that part of the city."

"While the young teen is alive, she is currently in the hospital in critical condition suffering from broken ribs, a broken arm, both legs broken, as well as, numerous cuts carved all over her body. Medical personnel have also, indicated that she was violated numerous times from at least six separate individuals, possibly more. It is considered by many to be a miracle that the young girl was found alive, although it is unknown as to what her mental state maybe at this time, as the girl has yet to regain consciousness since her ordeal."

"For the past couple of years, parents throughout the city have been petitioning the city authorities to do something about this area of the city. Most of the buildings have been long abandoned and run down. As these photos show, very few of the lights that should be working along this three by five block area, are broken or just not working. City authorities were unavailable to comment on the lack of effort to clean up this area."

"Many in the community have sighted a failure on the part of our public officials to address their concerns, and that the area is not only a disgrace, but also affects the tourism that the ancient and venerable Higurashi Shrine relies on to maintain its complex and keep its doors open to the general public."

"The police are investigating this matter, as they are also doing to all of the other victims of this infamous and terrifying gang. Unfortunately, a lack of sufficient evidence to help the police track, capture, and convict these miscreants is the one major barrier to the police being able to get this vile and horrible gang off of our city streets. If anyone has any evidence, or witnessed anything that might be related to this terrible crimes, you are urged to contact your local police department. Due to the nature of these crimes and the villains that seem to find their pleasure in such disgraceful acts, the police ensure that all information given to them will remain completely anonymous."

"On to other news....."

13 - Loosing control!

About halfway through the news broadcast, the viscious growling of one hanyou, and four youkai filled the house. Surprisingly, the Higurashi family didn't find the sound terrifying, but rather in some small way, comforting. What was the most surprising was that the Youkai Lord himself, seemed the most strongly affected, very closely followed by Inuyasha.

Without warning, the Great Lord was suddenly standing in the corner of the room, where he had been quietly sitting just a moment before. His growl had reached a level where it seemed to vibrate the very walls of the room. His hands were raised, and his claws were lengthening. His head held low, so that his face could not be clearly seen.

The ookami whined and began to slink out of the room. The other youkai knowing what was happening, followed them as quietly and slowly as possible. Inuyasha urged Souta and Ojii-san from the room, as Miroku urged Mrs. Higurashi to leave as well. She, however, would not be pushed around her home so easily, nor would she be easily frightened.

"Nisou-sama, you do not understand," quietly spoke Miroku. He knew that the Youkai Lord was fighting very hard to keep his beast at bay, but was slowly losing the battle.

Miroku could only assume that the empathic link that had tied him to the little Miko, having witnessed what she had experienced, and now seeing this horrifying report on this TV, was almost more than the Great Lord could tolerate. Back in Sengoku Jidia, Sesshomaru would have gone out and hunted to relieve the anger that was currently overriding his ability to think rationally. But here in Kagome's time, such a hunt was not possible, and it was at least a couple of hours until they could leave the Shrine for the hunt that they were planning.

Quickly and calmly, Miroku explained as best he could, this information to Mrs. Higurashi, but just as her daughter, she still refused to be pushed from her livingroom, or to be terrified of the Youkai Lord.

By now, Sesshomaru's claws were dripping with his well known poison. The acid like liquid burning holes into the floor where he stood. He had lifted his face, just enough that it could be seen, and for the first time, Mrs. Higurashi got to see a glimpse of the world her daughter had come to know so well.

His eyes were like blood red glowing rubies, filled with such anger as she could not imagine. His fangs had lengthened and in their doing so, had cut his bottom lip just enough to cause it to bleed, the blood dripping down his chin and onto his usually pristine white clothing. His claws where easily three inches in length, and still dripping the corrosive acid that seemed to glow around his hands.

But somewhere deep down in those eyes, she saw pain. Pain and anguish that no creature should have to bare alone. It touched her heart, just as it would have the heart of another if she had been there, and she knew that this pain was not just his own, but the pain that her daughter had gone through.

Mrs. Higurashi was not a miko, nor did she have any miko powers. She had never exhibited any in her

life and she was as surprised as her father, to find out that Kagome not only had such powers, but that she carried them in such powerful levels as to be legendary even in Sengoku Jidai. But the one thing that the mother of the little Miko did have, was empathy.

Her empathy was well known to her family, and among their closest friends. It had become quite a benefit over the years to the shrine. Many were the sorrowful souls, seeking someone to lean on that found solace in the ear of a single mother, who had a heart big enough to fill all of Tokyou and beyond. It was that heart that now reached out to the enraged Beast standing in her livingroom, struggling to maintain his sanity.

Having never had to deal with such beings before, the one thing that Mrs. Higurashi never knew, was that she did have some small miko powers. They were not noticeable, because in her time, they were not needed as much as they might have been had she been in the Warring States Era. She had a powerful and soothing scent. One that worked with her empathy. Even on ningens it had a calming effect. But it worked on a purely unconscious and instinctive level.

Had anyone known, and tried to analyze her abilities, they would have called them pheromones. To ningens, they are almost unnoticeable because the ningen sense of smell is so weak and little used. But to the youkai, hanyou, and ookami in the room it was more than apparent.

She calmly pushed Miroku aside and with quiet confidence literally radiating from her every pore, she walked back into her livingroom and right up to the Taiyoukai. She stopped just in front of him, and slowly reached out to touch his face. As her hand got close, his first reaction was to jerk his head back away from the encroachment, but as he did, he took a deep breath and the scent of lavender and roses suddenly washed through his senses.

The effect was almost immediate. He could feel his grip on reality strengthen, and as her hand gently stroked his fevered brow, his world suddenly stopped being a bloody shade of red. The sounds around him returned to normal, and he could think clearly once again. The glow of poisonous vapors that had surrounded his elongated claws, evaporated and his claws returned to their normal state. His fangs returned to normal, leaving the only thing left to show his loss of control, the trail of blood that had run down his chin and dripped on his haori, and the damage to the floor near his feet.

As everyone else looked on in complete shock, Kagome's mother took the Taiyoukai by the hand, and led him unresistingly from the room, upstairs and disappeared. Everyone was too stunned for words.

In Souta's room, with the door closed for some privacy, Kagome's mother turned to Sesshomaru.

"Sesshomaru-sama, are you alright now?" she asked quietly and with all the respect she could put behind those words.

Her scent continued to offer its calming effects, and he closed his eyes and welcomed the relief. When he could trust himself to speak normally, he opened his eyes and looked at the little Miko's mother.

"Hai!" he said. As though that was enough for her, Higurashi-nisou smiled, and turned to leave the room. Before she could complete the maneuver, a clawed hand reached out and grabbed her shoulder. She stopped and looked at the hand, then quietly turned back to the Taiyoukai.

"Know that this Sesshomaru is grateful for your aid. Gomen nasai, for my lack of restraint," he stated as calmly as ever.

Mrs. Higurashi looked deeply into the Youkai Lord's eyes. Something that she found there seemed to register and she came to a decision.

"My Lord! You are a Youkai of great strength of body and character. You are, also, a being of considerable power," she said with complete assurance. "But as your link to my daughter should prove, you are also a person of incredible passion. Not just the negative passion either. Else that sword you bare on your hip would not be sitting where it is. Do not deny your right to the passions that Nature meant for us all to have. If you do, one day they will control you, and not the other way around."

"You do yourself a great disservice if you continue to do so, and that is beneath the man you can yet be. It is unworthy of who you are, and the heritage of your father," she stated. "Take what time, and privacy you need, my Lord. You are always welcome here, and your privacy will be respected while you are under my humble roof."

Once again, she turned to leave, and once again he stopped her as before.

"You need to know that you have a most remarkable daughter. Now I know where she gets her strength, courage, and compassion from. She is more than simply ningen, and she will always have the protection of the Inu no Taisho. I swear it." was his reply.

"Arigato, Sesshomaru-sama. Your words ease this mother's heart very much. You are a credit to your heritage and your race. May the kami bless your future a thousand times over for your generosity and compassion," was her response. With that she left the room, closing the door quietly to give the Lord his privacy and some peace.

Sango had fled from the room, shortly after they had shown the images, having run upstairs. Mrs. Higurashi found her sitting on Kagome's bed. Surprising to Mrs. Higurashi, the young woman was not crying. Instead she found Sango sitting red faced and it appeared that the onna was holding back on barely suppressed rage and anger.

"It would seem, from the flaring tempers around here that my daughter has chosen her friends and extended family well," she smiled at the Taijiya.

Sango turned to her and hung her head in shame. "Gomen nasai, Higurashi-nisou. I didn't mean t...."

"Nonsense dear onna. No apology needed. It is apparent that my daughter has left a remarkable influence on all of you. It is a credit to her personality and her good taste in friends. She has chosen wisely, I think," she told Sango.

"What happened to Kagome is truly a most horrible thing. As her friend, and sister, you have every right to the anger you feel. Never be ashamed of that. Very few women in this day and age are able to even defend themselves against the even the simplest of unwelcome advances. Of those who can, none could possibly compare to the strength, courage, and skill of one such as you. I am proud to know you

are sister to my daughter, and know that you are there if she needs," said Mrs. Higurashi.

Sango took a deep breath and was able to calm herself. Once she felt in control, she nodded her thanks to the woman who had given birth to her remarkable 'sister', and without thinking she reached out and hugged her. Mrs. Higurashi's best and most important skill was hugging. Something that she had lots of practice doing. She returned the hug and patted the Taijiya on the back, letting her know that everything would be alright.

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Sesshomaru sat for awhile in Souta's room. He had not yet changed his clothes, but knew he had to fairly soon. He sat contemplating the little Miko's Okaa-san and her words. She seemed to be almost as intriguing a person, as her daughter was. Thanks to her bravery, or foolishness - depending upon your point of view - she had managed to bring him back from the brink of temporary insanity.

He felt shame. Shame and confusion. Why had he lost control of himself? Sure the report had been bad, by ningen standards for this era, even horrible. But it was nothing to Sesshomaru. He didn't know the victim, didn't want to know her, probably would never even remember her name. So why had such a thing seemed to bother him so much?

There was no doubt that the crimes of these....things....were vile. Hell, considering what they were in the habit of doing, and who their victims most commonly were, the actions of this gang were nothing short of sadistic and cowardly. To delight in such pain, inflicted on innocent young joshi's, some not more than children who were not really able to fight back, much less defend themselves, was an act of cowardess that sickened the Youkai Lord.

It occurred to him that somehow, his inner beast had begun to see these acts as though they were all being committed against the little Miko. But it went beyond that, especially since he had been linked with her. Somehow, in his Beast's mind, his sometimes convoluted and odd way of viewing things, these acts might as well have been being committed against his Rin.

Each dark haired, young, smiling faced onna, was either the little Miko's or Rin's. It didn't matter that they weren't. It didn't matter that these things could never reach his Rin, or get to the little Miko again. All that mattered, to the possessive and protective Blood Beast, was that there were those out there that were perfectly capable of committing such acts and taking delight in the pain they caused. And if by some freak of nature, they either lived in his time, or he in theirs, those he cared most for could be threatened by their very existence.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he felt a soothing warmth that seemed to reach out to the almost fevered mind of the stressed Taiyoukai, and the inner seething of his Youkai self. At first he didn't know where this strange feeling came from, he only knew it was welcome. It soothed his inner turmoil and eased the deep seated anguish that he barely even knew he felt. Then it clicked. It was her. Even 500 years distant, she had managed to feel his anguish and though it had taken some time, she had managed to feel his pain, and reached out from a small village hut, in a far distant time, and offered what comfort she could.

He sighed, and welcomed the healing she gave, and renewed his vow that these vile and horrid animals

would pay for the pain they caused. With renewed determination, he turned to change his clothes and to return to the gathering downstairs.

14 - Yet another Victim!

Chapter 14 - Yet Another Victim!

While Sesshomaru had taken sorely needed time to regain control of himself, Kouga, Shippo, and Inuyasha had decided to use Ojii-san's room to change into their clothing. It had presented something of a problem at first for Kouga and Shippo, as even with loose fitting shirts, there seemed no way to hide their errant and uncontrollable tails.

For Shippo, it was not so bad, especially as he could disguise himself with his kitsune magic. But Kouga didn't have the same advantage. He had needed to open a few stitches in the back seam of the jeans to allow for the presence of his tail. But while this meant that he was not in pain from having to stuff the easily excited length of fur into the snug fitting jeans, it also left it open for everyone to see.

For him, the problem was conveniently solved, when Higurashi-daitoku suddenly appeared with a long, black robe that he referred to as a 'trench' coat. While it fit snugly from the shoulders to just above the waist, from there down it flared out and easily provided enough camouflage for the wayward appendage, and since their exposure in the daylight was going to be kept to a minimum, they were not concerned about its minor chances of being seen.

This, however, did nothing for the more than attractive and quite voluminous tail of the Youkai Lord. He, too, had 'modified' his dark, snug fitting jeans to accommodate the needs of its considerable presence. A 'trench coat' was not a choice in this particular instance, especially as there was just TOO much of the darn thing to hide that easily, no matter how it was arranged.

It was finally decided to just leave it alone. What they were planning was not going to keep them in this era for long, and was only going to leave them exposed at night. At that, they were going to be in some of the darkest places the city had to offer, and with the speed at which the Youkai Lord was capable of, in the long run, his exotic appearance might actually make parts of their plan all the easier. With that being the case, a Great Taiyoukai of the Feudal Age, graced the living room of the Higurashi household in deep, dark, tight fitting denim, and a long sleeved, snug fitting black t-shirt that added considerable eye appeal to his well force musculature and accented his almost glowing pale skin.

Finally, with everyone calmed down, and all gathered back together in the Higurashi living room, the odd mix of characters once again returned to finalizing their plans. Part of that effort required someone to go out and scout out the area that they were looking to 'invade' that night. It took some debate, and a bit of persuasion, but it was finally decided that Kouga would take Souta, and tackle the task at hand.

Kouga was capable of considerable speed, and with his usual headband adjusted just a bit, or his hair taken down from its ever present high pony tail, his ears were not a problem. Souta could take a camera with him, and take pictures of the area they needed to know the layout. It would, also, give Kouga a chance to pick up any scent markers in the 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard' making it easier for everyone to more readily find their targets.

Sango, who had felt that they were missing something, suddenly realized what it was, "Inuyasha, if this information that we are working with is accurate, then these 'Nightwalkers' have been taking victims at least every few days. Some they keep with them for several days or longer. They have to be keeping their victims somewhere, or have someplace that they commonly take them once their are captured."

"She's right," said Kouga. "That leaves us with a problem."

"What problem?" asked Ginta.

The answer came from the stoic and icy voiced Youkai Lord. "They obviously have at least one, if not more victims currently in their possession. The matter is how many, where are they keeping them, and what condition are they in? And...if we find them, what do we do with them?"

Before anyone could answer, the phone rang, and Mrs. Higurashi excused herself to answer it, while everyone offered ideas or suggestions on what to do about the newly realized problem. There had to be something that they could do, but they had to be careful at the same time. They could not risk being seen and identified. And it was all important that nothing be left behind that might lead anyone to the Higurashi Shrine.

When Kagome's mother returned, Sango immediately rushed over to grab the woman, who looked about ready to faint, Miroku offered the chair he was sitting on. Souta ran to the kitchen and came back with a glass of water, and Inuyasha went to her and urged her to tell them what happened on the phone.

"Apparently, last night after Kagome left Ayumi's house, Ayumi got upset that her father didn't offer to bring Kagome home in the car. She was worried about Kagome and before her mother or father could stop her, she ran out the door to go find her and make sure that Kagome was safe," was the softly whispered response. Everyone knew without question what the next words were going to be, but silently wait for the anguished mother to continue.

"Ayumi never came home. Her father has been out all night and all day looking for her, and has found no clues or sign of her. They have called the police, but in the past when the police have tried to scout out the area and by chance of gotten near to any of their victims before they are finished with them, they were always found dead. Usually their bodies are found stuffed in garbage cans, and left for the police to easily discover."

At this, Mrs. Higurashi broke down and sobbed. This whole thing was just too much, and now someone else that was close to her family was hurt. Sure Ayumi was not family, but she was a close friend to Kagome, and to even think that Ayumi was suffering right this moment at the same brutal hands that had hurt her daughter was almost overwhelming. Inuyasha and Sango both held her and let her have the moment she needed. She had been holding up so well, even considering the heartache she must be suffering over Kagome. No one should have to go through this kind of thing.

"Call her mother and father, and tell them to bring something of their daughter's over here," came the voice of the Youkai Lord. A voice that was so cold, quiet, and commanding that it left chills running down the spines of everyone in the room. Seeing as how, Mrs. Higurashi was not in any condition to make the phone call, Ojii-san made the call. He gave no specifics and refused to give a reason, but insisted to

Ayumi's father that this request brooked no argument and the explanations would be made when they arrived.

It took almost no time for the two to arrive. Mrs. Takenouchi was obviously distraught, and Mr. Takenouchi was barely even in control of himself. Once they were in the house, the first thing that caught their attention were the ookami. Finding five wild ookami roaming loose in a friend's home, unrestrained can do wonders for one's heart.

"Mayuki-san, Hidenori-san! Thank you for coming over so quickly," said Mrs. Higurashi, who had regained control of herself by the time the worried couple arrived. She had gotten so used to the good behavior of the ookami that she had forgotten that they were wild. Kouga stepped forward and spoke unexpectedly, which made the two new arrivals jump at first.

"Stand perfectly still and calm yourselves," he said in a tone that brooked no argument. "If you show no fear they will not harm you. Just stand still, and let them catch your scent."

The Takenouchi's were in no position to refuse the order. In fact, they were so scared that they could not have moved if they tried. Kagome's mother saw this and knowing that there even more shocks in store for the pair immediately took things in hand.

"Mayuki-san, Hidenori-san. Onegai! What you are seeing here, and what we are going to show you much never leave this house. You must never say a word to anyone about anything you are about to see," she spoke.

About this time, Sesshomaru walked through the crowd, who parted and let him pass. He stood directly in front of the two fearful and distraught parents, and stared them right in the eye.

"Do you wish to find your daughter?" he asked emotionlessly.

"H-h-hai! Onegai!" was all the Mayuki could say, and her husband could only nod.

"You will say nothing about what you see in this house. I will find your daughter, and we will take care of those who seek to harm her and others like her....," he said, "but you must pay a price for what we do."

Hidenori finally was able to find his voice, "Onegai, sir! We would pay any price to have our daughter returned to us. If you can help, I will do anything you ask!"

The man was obviously distraught, but no one pointed this out to him. The Taiyoukai just stared into the eyes of both parents, and after a moment he nodded and motioned them to follow him. He turned and went back into the living room, returning to the spot he had occupied earlier. The ookami followed quietly.

One of whom, a near white dog, followed Ayumi's mother. When the woman and her husband sat down of the space cleared for them on the couch, the dog rested her head on Mayuki's knee and with big soulful eyes, whimpered and nuzzled the woman's hand.

Mayuki started for a moment, and tried to pull away. She was unsure of what this wild animal wanted of

her, and in her uncertainty, she was scared. Patiently, the dog whined and leaned forward to again nuzzle Mayuki's hand.

Kouga barked at the rather forward dog, who turned to the Ookami Prince and whimpered and yipped at him. Kouga barked back, then turned to Ayumi's mother.

"Onegai! Forgive the dog's boldness. She feels your pain, and in her own way is trying to offer comfort to you. She means no harm," he said. "We are gathered for very much the same reason as you are here. Chiyuki knows this and finds the stress difficult to handle without taking action."

It took a moment for what Kouga said to register on Mayuki. But then things clicked and hesitantly she reached out and quietly petting the ookami on the head and scratched her ears. The ookami closed her eyes and softly whimpered again, and somehow in the sharing of a similar pain, the two females found a bit of comfort.

Hidenori had also picked up on what the Ookami Prince had said, but on a different part. "You say that you are gathered for the same reason that we are here!" As the words left his mouth, it dawned on him what was meant. The colour left his face and he turned to Mrs. Higurashi, "you don't mean...NO! NO! Please tell me I am wrong. She wasn't, she isn't....Ok Kami...." and the man ran from the room.

"I will get him," said Ojii-san, and he hurried after Ayumi's father.

"What? What did he mean?" said a worried Mayuki.

Mrs. Higurashi didn't know of an easy way to tell the woman. She knew that Ayumi's folks felt bad enough about their own daughter, but to find out in this way that Ayumi's worst fears were realized was only going to add to the already over stressed woman. Nevertheless, she needed to know. Before she could speak, someone else said the words that Mrs. Higurashi knew was upper most on the minds of everyone here.

"These 'Nighwalkers' attacked Kagome shortly after she left your house last night," said Inuyasha. He was angry with these people, and felt justified in that anger. After all, they knew this time, and the places in it. They knew of these criminals and the dangers that they posed. Obviously, their daughter did as well, but she at least had tried to do something. They should have been more responsible. They should have given Kagome a ride home.

But seeing the guilt on Mayuki's face, and the horror of the realization on Hidenori's prevented him from speaking his mind. He knew that they already had figured it out for themselves, and knew that they would torture themselves more than anything he could say. So for one of the few times in his life, he said nothing.

"Oh kami! She didn't! You don't mean that....Oh kami...how badly was she hurt?" cried Ayumi's mother. "Is she alive? I didn't see anything on the news! Is she at the hospital?" The questions just kept pouring out. It was obvious that she was becoming hysterical. But no one was sure what to say or do.

"YOU WILL STOP! NOW!" was the half roar that suddenly filled the room. The hysterical mother promptly shut up and froze in terror. The ookami catching the fear in her scent stood, hackles standing,

and fangs bared, low growls rumbling from their throats.

"You will calm yourself now! You do yourself, your daughter, and Kagome no good by your hysterics," were the cold, now quiet words of the Youkai Lord. "If you wish to help us find your daughter, you will get a hold of yourself and you will do it NOW!"

15 - Nothing to forgive!

It seemed harsh, but nevertheless it had the desired effect. The hysterics stopped and Mayuki seemed to regain control over herself. She looked at Sesshomaru, she stared at her with cold determination. Despite the chill that ran down her spine, she knew that what lay behind those eyes was reserved for those who had taken her daughter and apparently hurt Kagome.

Still there was a sense of guilt and she knew in her heart that she would never find away to forgive herself, and her husband, even if the Higurashi's did. Ayumi had insisted that she take Kagome home last night. She could still hear her daughter screaming at their insensitivity and carelessness. Now, because they had chosen to ignore their daughter's warning, both joshi had suffered. How badly remained to be seen.

"Mayuki-san...there are things that you need to know...about who these people are, what has happened since last night, and what will be happening tonight. But as Sesshomaru-sama told you and Hidenori, NONE of this information must leave these walls or this shrine," said Mrs. Higurashi to the now calmed mother.

Mayuki was still looking at the Youkai Lord. Only now did she really see what was before her. A creature of such ethereal beauty as to be almost angelic. A being with golden eyes, and long silver tresses that put most women to shame. A being with odd, yet attractive markings on his face, a regal stance that spoke of royalty, a strange fur something that seemed to be a natural part of him, wrapped over one shoulder, fingers that seemed to end in long, deadly looking, sharp claws, pointed almost elvish ears, and were those the glint of fangs when he had spoken?

She nodded to him, to let him know she understood his words and his intent. Seeming to be satisfied with what he saw, he stepped back to his original place, once again.

"Did you bring something of your daughter's as was requested?" he asked.

"Hai," was her reply. She took the bag she still had under her arm, and reached inside and brought out her daughter's hairbrush. It had been sitting right on her dresser and was the first thing immediate to hand when she dashed into Ayumi's room to get something just before they ran out of the house to come to the shrine. "This is my daughter's brush. She uses it all the time. If it is not suitable, I can go get something else."

"It is adequate," said the stoic Taiyoukai, who turned to look at Kouga. Kouga immediately took the brush and right away started showing it to the ookami. As it was being passed around and everyone taking the moment to sniff it, Mrs. Higurashi took the time to explain to Mayuki.

"Mayuki-san, I do not have time to go into specifics and details of Kagome's past four years. To be honest, there is just too much and most of it is really not my place to speak of. But you do need to know that these people, are not from this time. With the exception of Miroku-sama, and Sango-san," both of whom bowed to the anguished and confused mother, "and Inuyasha-san, who looked impatient, all here

are youkai. Inuyasha-san is hanyou, and of course there are the ookami. They are all from 500 years ago, in Sengoku Jidai," said Kagome's mother.

"Youkai? 500 years...but how...wh...?" but Mayuki was cut off by Inuyasha.

"Much of that is not important right now. Much of that is on a need to know basis. However, know that yes, Kagome was attacked last night, apparently not long after she left your home. I was able to rescue her," he said, although the pain in his voice left no doubt how he felt about the matter, and Mayuki could swear that she was hearing a growl coming from somewhere in the room. "Unfortunately, I was not soon enough to keep her from being seriously injured. Details of that Higurashi-nisou can provide later."

"As for the rest of us here," he continued with more determination. "The one commanding the ookami, is Kouga-sama. He is the reigning Prince of the Ookami Tribe. The two with him are brothers from his pack, Ginta and Hakkaku." The youkai in question all bowed to the astonished onna.

"The little runt here, is Shippo-chan, Kagome's pup," Inuyasha continued, leaving Mayuki further astonished, "and the one over there in the corner is my youkai half brother, Sesshomaru, Lord of the Western Lands."

"Both Sesshomaru and myself, are Inu. Kouga-sama and his pack brothers are ookami, of course. Shippo-chan is kitsune, and the neko that sits with Sango-san, is bi-neko mononoke. We all have far more superior senses than you ningens, and the brush of your daughter's is to give us her scent."

"We plan on paying a 'visit' to these 'Nightwalkers', and 'speaking' to them about their rather nasty habits, and their choice of victims. With your daughter's scent, we will be able to track her, and find her." he stated.

"We will find her, and no matter what, we will return her to you," spoke Sesshomaru again. Mayuki knew that it was a sworn oath, and not just a few worthless words. Somehow, she found her fear of these beings rapidly fading. Her daughter's life hung in the balance, and that balance was lined with youkai. Youkai and ookami who may or may not have been of this world, but right now promised to bring her only child back to her. No matter what it took, or the payment they asked of her, she knew that she would give whatever the cost. Even if it meant her life.

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While Mrs. Higurashi and Sango got more refreshments and tea for everyone, Miroku and Shippo tried to help Mayuki get over some of the shock of the situation. Ginta and Hakkaku were a great help in reassuring her that her daughter would be found, and the quiet confidence of the Youkai Lord further alleviated her fears.

Souta had jury-rigged a map of the area that was known as the 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard', and it was laid out on the living room floor, where Sesshomaru and Inuyasha were studying the layout of the area. Kouga and Souta left on their errand to gather pictures of the alleys, passages, back streets, abandoned buildings, and haunted doorways of the despised and feared area. Souta had traveled before with Inuyasha, and knew what to expect with the Ookami Prince, although he was most astonished at how much faster Kouga was than his beloved hero.

It was in the Shrine proper that Ojii-san found a retched and almost broken man. What had once been a proud man, who might have otherwise been kneeling before the go-shintai of the Shrine. Now, there was a huddled mass of a broken hearted man, who might just as well have crawled in from the nearest halfway house.

Although, almost no sounds could be heard coming from the breathing mass on the floor before the go-shintai, Ojii-san would see the shaking that showed that Hidenori was crying. Crying like he had probably not done since a child himself. Adults do not cry, it is weakness, and dishonourable.

But that was a line of thinking that Higurashi-daikotu didn't agree with by half. Everyone had feelings, feelings were important. Feelings mattered more than people gave them credit for. The kami gave everyone the ability to feel, and if the kami gave that gift to their children, then there had to be a reason, and a value in them. The value depended on how those feelings were put to use.

For awhile, the Daikotu just kneeled by Hidenori. He didn't say a word. Didn't demand anything, didn't asked anything, didn't expect anything. It was enough to just be there. Be there as was proper for a good Daikotu and to let the man know that someone was there for him when he was ready.

"Gomen nasai! Gomen nasai! Gomen nasai!" seemed all the poor soul could muster after Ojii-san had sat there for awhile. He put a hand on the man's shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze. At this Hidenori looked up into Ojii-san's face, and a look of confusion crossed his face.

"How...how can you bare to even look at me, let alone touch me?" he asked, loathing dripping from his voice. Daikotu knew that the emotion was not directed at him, and so took no offense at the insult.

"I am an old man, Hidenori-san. I have been a daitoku almost my entire life. As far back as I can remember, it was all I ever wanted to be," said the tired old grandfather. "My family is as much my life as being Daikotu to this shrine. Like you, I hurt for my granddaughter and what Fate handed her. For her, I can do more than just look at you. I can help you if you wish. I can do my job as a Daikotu, and be here for you and your family."

"But...because of me, your granddaughter is hurt, or worse. Because, in my pride, I didn't listen to my own daughter, I let your Kagome get hurt. I have no excuse. There would never be one even remotely suitable for my actions, or rather lack of action. I cannot even find it in myself to ask that you forgive me." cried the anguished father.

"If she were here, Kagome would tell you herself. There is nothing to forgive," said the Daikotu. "Fate hands us our destiny. Oh, we are given choices, and how our destiny ends up, is a result of those choices. But ultimately, we must still face the path that Fate chooses for us to follow."

Higurashi-daitoku continued, "For the past four years, my granddaughter has had a most unusual life."

"Hai! Ayumi has told me of her many and varied ailments. It must be difficult for you and your daughter," spoke Hidenori. Much to his surprise, the old man laughed.

"Iie. Gomen for laughing, but the reality of it is that Kagome has never had any of those illnesses that

your daughter has heard about," admitted Daikotu. "You see, Fate has a most surprising and unique destiny for my granddaughter. In fact, her path was chosen for her hundreds years ago. When those at school believed that Kagome was away suffering some odd illness, what she was really doing was following a path like nothing you could possibly have ever imagined."

"A path that is filled with the fabled youkai, hanyou, and mononoke. A path that has made her the chosen Guardian of the legendary Shikon no Tama and quite possibly the most powerful and gifted Miko since Midoriko herself."

Of course, Hidenori looked at Ojii-san like senility had set in, but again, the old man laughed and this time, he simply held out his hand.

"Come, let me show you that which will make you believe in wonders like you never knew possible. Let me introduce you to those who WILL find your daughter, and who the kami have gifted with the ability to bring justice to those that even our own authorities are unable to find," spoke Daikotu as he stood.

"In my granddaughter's world, miracles happen everyday. Some she is personally responsible for. Many others are because of those who are now more family to her, than her mother, brother, or even I am now. Let me introduce you to a room full of wonders and miracles and let them show you how to forgive yourself for the events of last night," Ojii-san turned at that and led Hidenori back into the house, and to the living room.

16 - A mystery Revealed!

It was almost dark now, and Souta, who had already returned with Kouga, had taken the time to print out the images from his camera with the aid of Kagome's computer. These he carefully oriented to the map he had made earlier, and the extra photos he passed around the room for the youkai, hanyou, houshi, and Taijiya to see.

This is what met Hidenori's eyes when he entered the room. At first, now that he could take the time to notice, the sight of fangs, claws, pointed ears, feral eyes, and barely control rage behind those eyes, made the usually stalwart man, very nervous. But seeing his wife sitting among them, and adding what little information and aid she could to the plans around the room, he stood in awe and marveled at the lives sitting in the room.

Mayuki saw him enter, noticed that he was more composed and that he was just as in awe of the people in the room as she was. She had noticed the map and pictures that were being used to plan the evenings 'hunt', as everyone called it, and when she recognized some of the places indicated by the pictures, she began offering any information that she knew of the area.

Her and her husband had both grown up in the area. The home that Hidenori had been raised in, had at one time been in the heart of the now infamous, 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard'. They had gone to school together, from a very early age, and had gotten along since they had first met. This childhood friendship had easily become the ground work for love and marriage by the time they were adults. Hidenori had gotten a prestigious job with one of the better law firms in the country, and Mayuki had become a teacher at the university.

While both were not wealth, they were well off, and over the years they had rubbed elbows with some of the best in some of the highest places. Life was good and quite comfortable for the Takenouchi family. That is until the current crisis and their now missing daughter.

Not having had any real hardship in their lives, the Takenouchi's were finding it hard to cope with having such an experience now. It was difficult to know what to do, when to do it, who to speak to, what not to do, and more. If it were not for the quiet determination and supreme confidence of the Taiyoukai, as she had learned he was, Mayuki didn't know if she would even be coherent right now.

As it was, she at least felt like she was being helpful in trying to find her daughter. After she had heard how badly hurt Kagome was, she felt that anything she could do, anything at all, would be better than nothing and in some way help to make up in some small way for the selfish mistake that they had made last night.

She motioned her husband over, explained what she knew of the plan and what she was doing in her own way to help. Hidenori had more first hand experience of the area from his childhood, and remembered many of the haunts that he and his friends, at the time, used to hang around in. He recalled the old youths' center that had once been a hub of activities for the kids in his day, and even the place late at night that seniors had used to gather for some socializing of their own.

There had been at least one small family store in the area, but the family that had owned it had been old when Hidenori had started school. The owners had no children to take over the small establishment when they had died about the time he had entered high school. No one else had taken up the business in their stead and the building had become one of the first abandoned buildings in the area.

At one time, Mayuki recalled, someone had tried to open up a nightclub not far from where the youths' center had been. But as the area tended to be more family oriented, especially with the ancient and venerable Higurashi Shrine nearby, it had never gotten off to a good start and more folks there didn't want it. Shortly after the owners had renovated one of the old storehouses that had been bought out from the previous owners, the establishment had been closed and boarded up, never to be used again. Just as with the small store, it had become abandoned and remained so today.

There had been one very large and prominent family at one time. Their home had been located about three blocks from the old storehouse turned nightclub. The Masakazu family had been very well known when Mayuki had just started school. Their wealth had been established by the great grandfather of the family a number of years before, and they had finally reached a pinnacle to realize their life long dreams of moving out of the local area. It was rumoured that they had moved to America, but Hidenori seemed to recall having heard that they had actually moved to France. Either way, no one had lived in the huge almost mansion like home, for at least 20 years. It too, have become abandoned and like all the others had not been maintained for ages.

As they looked on with the youkai, hanyou and other ningens in the room, Hidenori and his wife were proving quite helpful and resourceful in remembering the old buildings and places in the 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard'. Much of what they spoke of, had even trigger memories of the area for the old Daikotu. Having been with the shrine since birth, Ojii-san remembered some of his less than glorious moments as a youth.

There was a particular photo that Souta had captured that Hidenori kept coming back to. For some reason it kept triggering a distant memory. One that he had trouble recalling. It bugged him to the point that he picked it up, showed it to his wife and finally to Daitoku. "I remember this house. It is so familiar, but I can't place why!," he said.

Mayuki looked at the photo as well, "I remember it, too. Your right. It is very familiar, but something doesn't look right. It looks so broken down, like it is almost ready to collapse. I don't remember any of those old houses being in that bad a shape. This would have to have been abandoned for almost 50 years or more to be this bad."

"You are right. That is why it seems so strange. Those homes were all very well built in their day, and except for the foundation of the old youths' center, not one of them was over 100 years old, and none of them were abandoned when we were kids growing up around there," said Hidenori.

"Hmmm! You know, you are both right," said Ojii-san. "The first abandoned building was that old store. I remember it was owned by the Nishizawa's. They had started the business when they were in their early 20's and run the place until Nishizawa-san died about 25 years ago.

Let see...hmmm!" continued Daitoku. He might have been old, and to some very odd, but one thing

about Higurashi-daitoku, he loved history. Loved it and knew it well. No one could match him for recalling the history of everything in the area, and if it was related to the Shrine Complex, you might as well sit down with a tape recorder, for once he got started there was no off switch. His skill in this area proved it worth on this one seemingly old building.

"The confusing part is all this rubble and the things that seem to make it look like it is near collapse. I know that is not right...hmmm!" he said.

Ginta looked at the image himself. The building, which he had come to understand was the equivalent in these times to a well built hut, in Sengoku Jidai, must have been very well maintained, at one time. The paint on the two story building was not new, but neither did it show the wear and tear that having been abandoned for many years would have shown. It appeared the windows were all intact, too. When he looked at the other run down homes in the other images, it struck him as odd that their windows were all broken or completely missing. The only real reason that this particular building looked so bad, seemed to be the amount and kind of debris that was surrounding it.

There were several large beams of wood that appeared haphazardly tossed against the building. A large pile of old, worn, broken wood could be seen, heaped randomly against on wall, like it had fallen there or been tossed against the building carelessly. What must have been a porch was broken, the roof on one side appeared to sag dangerously, but if you looked closely, you could see that there was a fairly solid column just behind the lowest point of the 'falling' roof that kept it from falling as it should have done long ago.

Seeing this, Ginta pulled Hakkaku over and showed him what he had seen. Together they both looked over the house, and between them found more and more oddities. The actual roof of the house appeared to be in even worse shape than the porch. In fact, if truth be told, it was impossible for it to still be standing in the apparent shape it was. At first glance what looked to be a door barely hanging by one hinge, could be seen to hide another door, a little further in that was more than secure enough to keep the elements at bay.

"Is there anyway to get a closer look at this particular building?" Hakkaku asked.

"Why...it looks like a real dump," said Inuyasha.

Ginta spoke up, "All the more reason to look more closely. That porch roof is not as badly damaged as it appears, and most of the debris is deliberate."

"Hai, see. If you look closely at this corner of the porch, there is a supporting column just behind the lowest area. It obviously is supporting this spot, but if it was truly as run down as it first appears, then it would have collapsed long ago," said Hakkaku.

"Hai, and with other things that I noticed, it would seem that the roof of the house is also supported in some way. Look...there is no way that roof should still be standing if that house was really in that bad a shape. Besides even the paint is little worn, and all the windows are still intact. None of the other buildings in these other images have more than the occasional good window. All the others are broken or gone," said Ginta.

Ojii-san was still perusing the house in the photo, as the two ookami youkai spoke and pointed out their findings. As he looked on and each flaw pointed out, something clicked in the back of his mind. "Sugoi! Why didn't I see this earlier. That is the old Ishihara house." With that Higurashi-daitoku rushed out of the room.

"Ojii-san seems to have lost it again," said Kagome's mother.

"lie," said Hidenori. "Now that he mentions it, I remember that house. He is right. A family from a long time ago, lived there. They were known as the Ishihara's. They were very well-to-do, although from what I remember, no one knew where their money came from. Neither the husband or the wife appeared to work, yet their children always wore the finest of clothes."

Mayuki spoke up, "Hai, I vaguely recall one of the daughters, when I went to middle school. She was very pretty and many of the boys could be found at any time vying for her favor. Which was odd, because she was very anti-social. She hung out with no one, and those who offered her friendship, she often shunned. No one really knew why. Many said that it was because of her father."

Hidenori spoke up again, "Hai, I remember her. She was the talk of all the boys. Hardly any of them in school had not tried to approach her and get her to go out with them. She turned everyone of them done. But there was something about her. It was odd. Many of the boys used to talk about how she seemed so beautiful and that they felt almost drawn to her."

"I remember one of my friends saying how he had tried his hand at getting a date with her. Imari, was her name. He said that the closer he got to her, the stronger the attraction seemed to be. She was very rude, and anyone that I heard talk about their failure to get a date with her, spoke of how they felt a chill of fear run down their spine when she spoke to them or looked them in the eye. Yet, despite this, they were still drawn to her. I can't remember what happened to her."

About this time, Ojii-san walked back into the living room, an huge photo album in his hands. He lay it out on the table and opened to a marked page. The picture showed a house that looked like it was just built. A young man and woman stood in front of it, with a baby in their arms, and two boys approximately, 6 and 9, standing beside them. The home was reasonably simple, but from the looks of the landscaping in the front yard, and the draperies in the window, the family was very well off.

Comparing the house in the old photo, to the image taken today, clearly showed how much of the 'damage' of the house as it was now, was more a front, than true damage. Someone had gone to a LOT of trouble to make a home in good shape, look like it was a wreck. But why? That was the real question.

Daitoku had caught the last of Hidenori's conversation about the onna he remembered in school.

"As I recall, she was attacked. In fact, now that I think about it, I believe that she was attacked not unlike Kagome. Unfortunately, her injuries were too severe, despite every effort made to save her. It was believed that even had she lived, she would not have been whole of mind," said Ojii-san. "The last that I heard of, her parents brought her back home after the physical wounds had healed, but after that nothing more was ever heard about her."

Ojii-san pulled out an old, yellowed article from a newspaper long gone. It showed a picture of a

beautiful young onna around 15 or 16 years of age. It was clear that she would have become a regal beauty when she grew into adulthood, but as Fate would have it, she never made that day.

Daitoku spoke again, "I remember about that strange attraction that you spoke of, Hidenori-san. We had many people bring this to our attention at the Shrine. In fact, my father was still alive at the time, and when the onna's mother came to pay her respects here, she spoke to him about the girl."

"He believed, but never got the chance to verify it that she had some kind of spiritual power. We were never sure if it was miko, fujo, kurimiko, or exactly what it was, as we never got the chance to test her abilities. All we could be sure of, is that she was untrained. Her father refused to accept what she might be, and would not permit her to be tested. He was very....more like extremely protective of the girl, especially as she was their only daughter."

"Father believed that he was afraid that her beauty would attract the wrong type of man to her. He never considered teaching her how to make her own wise choices and discouraged her socializing other than what was absolutely necessary at school. We often felt that she resented this and that this was the reason for her cold and rude behavior." said the old man.

"It was not long after that incident that her family moved out of the house. It has been abandoned since that day. I was never able to find out what happened to them after that. About a year later, there were a few rumours that the house was haunted. That was shortly before my father passed away," said Ojii-san. "I remember it because my father was asked to give the house a blessing to put the spirit of the onna to rest and stop the hauntings. It seemed to work, as no more sightings were ever seen."

17 - Tasks assigned with one change!

"Well, from the looks of things, someone is still hanging out in that building. I would put my bet on it being one, if not all of this 'Nightwalkers' group," said Kouga. "The loose attempt to camouflage the building might fool a typical ningen, but with our youkai senses, we should be able to find these guys easily."

"True, and I have a feeling that Ayumi is being held in that particular house," said Miroku. "Something about that particular image that Souta brought back today, just doesn't feel right. I wonder if they might have others with them that they have kidnapped."

"I know a couple of officers in the police department, one of them is my brother, and another is a close friend. They know of Ayumi, and are even now out there trying to figure out where these guys are and have taken her," spoke Hidenori.

"One of the current problems that we face right now, is that there are police hovering out there everywhere. It means that we have to be more careful about our activities. Remember, our goals are to find Kagome's friend, and capture these 'Nightwalkers'," said Inuyasha. "Once we have caught them, they are each to be given a few drops of the potion that Atsuko-san made from Kaede's herbs, and Kagome's memories."

"What I can do is call my brother, and between him and my friend they can divert the police out of there a bit for you. In the mean time," said Hidenori, "they can get an ambulance in the area on standby so that if...when you find Ayumi and any other victims, they will be ready to help them."

"That would be a good thing. Okay, as I feel that this particular house is probably the most likely place to find their leader," said Inuyasha, only to be interrupted by Sesshomaru....

"I make one change in those plans, little brother," spoke up Sesshomaru in a tone that left no room for argument. "The leader is MINE! No one touches him, but ME!"

"Hai, brother," responded Inuyasha. "Then you take this house. Kouga, you and one of your ookami, take the old youths' center. Ginta, you have the old market building. Take one of the ookami as well. Hakkaku, same for you, but take the old night club place."

"Souta, is this some kind of small park or something here?" said Inuyasha pointing to one of the images, and a place on the map that seemed devoid of buildings.

"Iie, Inuyasha-nii-san. There used to be a couple of buildings there until a couple of years ago," said Souta. "But from what Ojii-san taught me, they collapsed sometime ago. They look more like piles of rubble now. Low enough to almost be vacant lots. But difficult to walk through because of the mess from the buildings."

"Arigato runt," came the reply. "Let's use this area as a central meeting place. We can flush these guys

out, and herd them into this area. Once there, we give them the potion and can let them go. In the meantime, Miroku...you, Sango, and Shippo can go into these places and see if you can find any of their victims.

Regardless of whether they are living or...kami forbid, dead, bring them out. Bring them to this area, as well. Once there, we can fade into the night, and let these police do pretty much the rest."

"Inuyasha-sama, I will call my brother, and arrange for him to have an ambulance by that clearing, and let him know that only him, and my friend are to come," said Hidenori. "He can be trusted to keep quiet on anything, as long as there is no unnecessary blood shed."

"Good," said the hanyou. "That will be acceptable."

"The leader of these 'Nightwalkers', comes with us," was the bone chilling response from Sesshomaru. "He is mine, and I have....plans....plans to make him 'live'."

At the cold, and spine chilling sound of that voice, everyone was silent and just looked at the icy determination that pour from the eyes of the Taiyoukai. As one, they all nodded their understanding and all prepared to set out on their 'hunt'.

18 - Now we hunt-Kouga

Kouga and the ookami, Chiyuki, arrived moments later at the building known as a 'Youths' Center'. It had taken Souta a few minutes to explain the reason for such a place, and a few more moments for Hidenori to recall what might be expected inside.

He knew that there were several rooms, luckily only one floor. One of the rooms was a huge place called a 'gym', where the children and teens were able to participate in a number of sport activities. There was another room that had held tables for playing games of various kinds, two bathrooms, a main office, a nurse's office, broom closet, and a manager's office. They all were rooms that led off the main reception area inside the front entrance. There was one door in the rear of the building that accessed a storeroom. Hidenori was not sure, but believed that there might have been a small basement room, somewhere near the storage room.

Kouga figured that if anyone was in this building, the basement room was probably the most likely place. Thanks to the scraps of bloodied cloth and other clues that Inuyasha had picked up, Kouga and Chiyuki, along with the others had picked up and imprinted the scents of the ones that they were looking for. With that in mind, Kouga and Chiyuki quickly circled the building checking for any signs of its inhabitants.

It happened that it was another heavily overcast night. For the youkai and hanyou this was perfect. They had figured that either the 'Nightwalkers' would be out looking for another victim, in which case they could nail them all at once, or they would be hiding. They figured the latter was the more likely event.

They had caught Kagome the night before, however, their 'entertainment' was thwarted. As a result, they had acted in haste and taken another unfortunate victim. It was more likely that they would hold up for the night, especially as the police were busy searching the area.

The added darkness was more than welcome. Kouga was easily able to move about unseen and unheard. He readily melted into the night, becoming one with the dark, and even with the near white dog tracking with him, anyone looking in his direction would have been hard pressed to see him.

They had reached the rear of the building, when Chiyuki gave a soft whine and raised her nose to the air. Kouga had caught it also, and knew that their prey was at hand. Not being sure of the terrain inside the building, Kouga figured that it would be better to lure his intended prey outside to him, instead of going to his victim.

With that in mind, he sent Chiyuki over to the door and after a few quick commands, the ookami scratched at the door. In the almost silent depths of the night, the scratching was almost like a shout. Their efforts and persistence paid off, when they heard the noise of movements inside.

Getting a quick idea, Kouga removed his headband and let out his pony tail, letting his hair fall about his shoulders in unkempt waves. He deliberately turned his back to the door, and sat down on the edge of the nearby street. He was close enough to give anyone looking the appearance of someone sitting there, someone that might easily be mistaken for an onna, all alone.

Soon the door could be heard creaking open slowly, as it whoever was checking out the scratching at the door was trying to be cautious. The idea of this left Kouga hard pressed not to laugh. If only this ningen knew what awaited him. HEH! HEH! HEH!

Kouga didn't say anything, and the only movement he made was to slump down a little more and sniffle like what he hoped would sound like a female who was in some kind of distress. He must have gotten something right, especially after he let out with a small whimper, to essentially tell Chiyuki to stay back for now. He soon heard the quiet approach of footsteps.

As the scent grew stronger and Kouga was able to get a clear whiff of it, from all the other and varied odors in this primarily ningen world, he was able to confirm that this male was indeed one of those who had attacked Kagome. Kouga didn't make any sudden moves. He didn't want to spook his prey too soon. So he waited until he could hear the male just behind him.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you the dangers of being in the 'Nightwalkers' Graveyard', little girl?" asked the male with calm deliberation.

Kouga smirked, but didn't let it reach his voice, which he kept low and soft, trying to keep the illusion of being a simple, helpless onna for just a bit longer. "I...I...got lost...," he whined. "I...a-am..new around here... Can y-you help me?"

At the sound of what appeared to be a helpless female, the male fell for Kouga's trap. He stepped forward and reached out to grab the 'female' by the shoulder, only to suddenly have a tall, muscular, snarling, ookami youkai holding him by the throat. Fangs gleaming, even in the dark, and eyes glowing with barely restrained rage and an obvious thirst for blood.

The male turned out to be a piece of cake from there, as he was too scared out of his mind to do more than shiver in fear. Kouga called to Chiyuki, while he knocked his prey cold. For a moment, he left him lying on the pavement near the door of the old building, with the ookami, and went inside to see if there were any others there.

Inside the building looked very much as Hidenori had described it. Many of the things that had once furnished the place well were still there, but in obvious need of repair. Dust and cobwebs hung thick in the air, and Kouga was hard pressed not to sneeze. He did catch the scent of another ningen, and as they had surmised, it came from the small basement area that Hidenori had suspected was there.

When he went down to the small, ill kempt, and ill lit room, the sight was enough to have him not far from where the Youkai Lord had been earlier that evening. In such a rage that he wanted to give in to his own youkai beast. He fought back the bile in his throat and his raging youki, and approached the bound, gagged, and half-dead female that lay in the filthy corner of the room.

The walls down here were damp and mold and mildew were prominent. A small table sat in one corner, with the remnants of a meal laying on it. There was a half broken lamp that served as the only light in the room, and a small box that seemed to have voices coming from it. This confused the Ookami Prince, until he recalled the one that Souta had shown him, and called a radio.

But the true focus of the room, was the filthy excuse for a futon, lying in the opposite corner from the table. If there was a whole blanket on it, the figure lying there would have been lucky. As it was, even the futon itself was not suitable for a rat, let alone anyone else. Her long dark hair was almost the only thing covering her, what was once her clothes being nothing more than dirty rags.

She was unconscious, and for this Kouga gave a prayer to the kami, for he was sure that had the onna been awake, she would have not been able to keep the screams from her lips. It looked like both legs had been brutally broken, her body was covered in random cuts made from the apparent rusty blade of a nearby knife. What was left of her breasts were more bloody pulp than whole, her face cut, eyes swollen shut, and black and blue. The scent in the room confirmed what Kouga had already suspected, she had been repeatedly and almost continuously violated during her captivity, but he knew from the same scent that this was not, luckily the Ayumi onna, whose parents were back at Kagome's home.

What kind of filth were these vermin that they would do such to anyone, let alone a young female. Kouga removed the cruel wires that he found was used to tie the onna. They had cut deeply into her wrists and ankles, but the bleeding seemed to have stopped. He carefully turned her over onto her back and did his best to make her at least a bit more comfortable.

As he did, he noticed that even her jaw had been broken in what must have been someone's idea that the onna's face was a punching bag. He didn't know if the girl would live, and he could tell that she needed help. She had obviously been here for several days and it was doubtful that she had been fed or even given water.

He needed to take care of the male first. In her condition, the onna was not going anywhere, so he would take his prey and meet up with the others in the designated clearing and send Miroku and Sango to get the onna once he was there. He did take a moment and grabbed the cup of liquid that was sitting on table and forced a few meager sips through the poor onna lips. Even unconscious she had the instinct and ability to swallow and for that Kouga was grateful. It was all he could do for the moment.

Leaving the door open, he left the building, grabbed his prey and with Chiyuki following him, he headed for the clearing. He fought the urge the entire way, to not rip out the throat of the male he was carrying. Instead, once he got to the meeting place, he settled for binding him with the very wires that had been used on the onna, and took sadistic satisfaction in making them tight enough to cut into the male's skin.

Miroku provided an effective ofuda that would keep their prisoner from moving. He, also, pulled a strip of cloth from a small bag that he had gotten at the shrine, and used it to gag the male.

"Sango-san, there is an onna where I found this thing," said Kouga. "She is in a very bad way. I didn't have time to do much more than try to make her comfortable, if that were possible to even do. She needs help as soon as possible."

"I'm on it, Kouga-sama," she said. She took Kirara, and staying below the rooftops the fire neko mononoke soon took off, following Chiyuki, who Kouga had given instructions to show Sango where to find the building and the onna.

19 - Now we hunt-hakkaku

Hakkaku had to fight the urge to stare and gawk at the strange sights around him. He would never in a million years, have guessed the ningens could build, created and make so many strange and wondrous things. But right now was not the time for the luxury of sight seeing. No...the packs' nee-san was badly hurt and beaten. Those who hurt a female of their pack were a threat to the pack and had to be dealt with.

It didn't take long for Hakkaku to reach the place Kagome's family had called, 'Nightclub', whatever that was. It was not an overly impressive building, large because it had once been a storehouse, but other than a couple of broken signs on the front of the building, and a number of broken windows, it was just not impressive at all.

Hakkaku and the ookami Genya found the entrance that they were advised to look for. It was near the back of the building on the north wall. Considering the state of the rest of the building, this door was surprisingly intact. But with a little creative use of his claws, Hakkaku soon had the hinges removed from the door and carefully and quietly set it aside.

As silent as the shadows the two ookami brethren moved into the depths of the dark and almost foreboding building. He had caught the scent of his prey, and from the scent markers that Inuyasha had provided, Hakkaku knew without question that he had found one of those responsible for his nee-san's current unhealthy condition. Suppressing the urge to growl, he followed the trail, which lead him to a door in the back south wall of the building.

Here he was presented with the problem of getting inside, preferably without his prey having even the slightest risk of getting away or getting the upper hand. Deciding that having his prey come to him, rather than the other way around, he quickly came up with a plan.

He motioned Genya to fall back into the shadows and remain quiet. Reaching to the door, he softly knocked and then followed Genya, to also stand in the shadows.

The response was almost immediate. Footsteps could be heard making their slow approach to the door. The knob turned, and ever so slowly the door creaked open. It opened just enough for the male that Hakkaku had scented, to stick his head out and look around to see what had made the noise.

That was all that Hakkaku needed. Before the male could even blink the door was slammed against him. As it rebounded back, he fell to the floor. Hakkaku quickly pulled him to the side, and gave Genya instructions to guard him. While the ookami watched their prey, Hakkaku enter the room just recently vacated by the male.

To his horror there were three females in the room. All bound, gaged, blindfolded, violated and beaten. One was so bad that if Hakkaku had not heard her heartbeat with his youkai hearing, he would have suspected she was dead. The other two were conscious, and he could hear their whimpers of pain. The smell in the air was more than enough to tell him of their ordeal. He fought hard to keep down the bile in

his throat.

He softly approached the joshi, "Can you walk?"

At the sound of his voice, both joshi jumped and almost screamed. But they were too afraid, and from their appearance, they had been beaten for screaming. So they tried to keep themselves under control. Hakkaku tried again.

"Onegai! I am not here to hurt you. I am here to help you. But I need to know if either of you can walk?" he continued speaking softly.

One of the onna gathered what courage she could to speak, "Hai, I...I...I t-hink I can. If someone could help me stand, an-n-d it means getting away from here, I would crawl." Tears of pain and horror etched the poor girl's face, and Hakkaku's heart went out to the obviously brave onna.

The second onna's face mirrored the first. She was still too afraid to speak, but managed to nod her head to show that she too, would do whatever was necessary to get out of there.

"Alright! Onegai, before I remove your blindfolds, you need to understand that what I am, is not something you are used to. I mean you no harm. I am a friend, and I have already obtained my...prey.... I can get you all to someone who will take care of your injuries and get you back to your families, however, I cannot carry the three of you, and the male who was hurting you," he told them.

"W-w-hat do-o-o you mean, 'not something we are used to'," asked the first onna.

"Nothing you need fear. My brethren and I are here to help. My brethren is an ookami," he said. "But he will not harm you in anyway. He will help you, just as I will. I do not wish to leave the three of you here alone, as I do not know where the other males are," Hakkaku said. "So I need the two of you to help your sister to walk out of here. Do you think you can manage that?"

By now the second girl had found her courage, and with the first onna both said, "Yes".

"Ok! I will remove your bindings, and blindfolds. All I ask of you, is to please not scream or be afraid when you see me," Hakkaku instructed the onna.

Both nodded their heads and lay still, as Hakkaku approached them. The first onna gasped when he first touched her. He quickly drew back...

"I have to touch you to removed your bindings," he told her softly.

"Gomen nasai! I just didn't hear you approach," she said. "It was unexpected."

"I understand," he replied. "Onegai, understand. The way I move is because it is in my nature to do so. It is part of what I am. I am proud of that, but I am not something from your....country..."

"Okay! You sound kind," said the second onna. "Your voice makes me feel safe. I am not afraid anymore. I will let you touch me."

"Good," said Hakkaku. "I will remove your bindings, but when I remove your blindfolds, please keep your eyes closed for just a moment longer."

"Hai," both onna said.

He quickly and efficiently cut their bindings with his claws. Just as with the victim Kouga had run into, their bindings were wire. As he had asked them, they kept their eyes closed when he removed their blindfolds. It gave him the time to step back to the door so that they would not be too afraid of being in the presence of a youkai.

"Okay!" he said. "You can open your eyes now."

Both joshi slowly opened their eyes. They were not sure what to expect or what their rescuer meant by his words. All they really knew, was that he was helping them, and his voice had a kindness that made them want to trust him. When their eyes had adjusted to the light, they both took a moment to look around the room.

The room was not much to look at. Bare walls, and unshielded lighting was the norm, and a small table against one wall. There were three filthy and bloody futon's along two walls, and it was here that the third onna lay. Both gasped in shock at the sight of the girl.

"Is she alive?" the second onna asked softly.

"Hai! I can hear her heartbeat," came the voice of their rescuer.

In unison, they both turned to the door to see the owner of the voice. Hakkaku slowly stepped out of the shadows of the neighboring room, and let himself be seen.

For a moment, Hakkaku waited, expecting the two joshi's to scream. After all, youkai were not known in 'nee-san's era', though she believed that they still existed. At least according to her Okaa-san, Ojii-san, and Otouto. This they apparently believed very strongly about, because of an encounter with a 'Soul Piper'. Hakkaku had to agree with their assessment, it was very likely that youkai still existed, but were more likely in hiding for their own privacy and security.

The two joshi saw the odd looking boy. It took them a moment to realize that the somewhat 'punk' looking boy, was not a boy at all. Well, not a ningen boy, anyways. They finally noticed his ears, and then his claws. When he shyly smiled, they got a glimpse of his fangs, and both onna gasped.

Hakkaku cringed, expecting the two joshi's to scream at their first sight of a youkai. He hung his head, and started to step back into the shadows, however, he was stopped when both girls limped painfully forward and each took one of his clawed hands. He looked up, only to be greeted by two painful, but warm smiles. It warmed his heart and he stood just a little taller and prouder than before.

"Okay! We need to get moving. I do not know how long he will be out, and I do not know if any of those who are part of his pack will show up. I need to carry him, but your 'sister' over there, needs help," he said pointed to the unconscious onna, who looked almost dead.

"I am going to bind the one that hurt you," he continued. "While I am doing that Genya, my pack brother, will watch over you. He will not harm you, he is here for added protection."

"What are you called?" asked the first onna.

"I am ookami...an ookami youkai," he said hesitantly.

"Gomen. lie, I meant your name," she said shyly.

Blushing at her forwardness, "Hakkaku!" came the reply.

"My name is Masayo," said the first onna.

"I am Ichiho," said the second. "I am not sure, but I believe that I heard her," she pointed to the unconscious onna, "say her name was Nayuko. She was here already, when I was brought here. I am not sure, because I can't tell how many days I have been held here, but I think she was here at least a week before me."

"I can get you all help," spoke Hakkaku, inwardly pleased that the onna were both so calm in his presence. 'Now to introduce them to Genya.' he thought. "But we need to get outside first. Then I can send Genya ahead."

"Genya?" inquired Masayo.

For answer, Hakkaku took some of the wire that he had removed from the joshi and pulled the still unconscious form of the male back into the room. He didn't really need the light to see by for tying up the male, but felt that it would further help the joshi if they saw what he did. It also permitted him to introduce them to Genya.

"Onegai. Kneel and hold out your hands. Genya needs to imprint your scents," he told them. Not sure why he asked such an unusual request, both joshi nevertheless complied. "Onegai, do not move, and do not fear. My pack brother will not harm you."

He gave a low growl, which surprised both joshi. At once a huge black wolf stepped panting into the room. Hakkaku barked at the wolf, who promptly went over to the onna on the futon, and softly sniffed her hand, and gave a small lick to her palm. He seemed to consider what he found for a moment, and then approached Masayo and Ichiho.

The first instinct of the two joshi, was to draw back in fear. But the gentle voice and calm presence of their rescuer gave them the confidence to stay as he had requested. The black ookami, easily as big even on all fours, as any one of the joshi, walked right up to them much like a happy inu. His ears perked up, tail high and wagging for all it was worth, tongue lazily lolling out as he panted like any common inu.

He laid his nose in the palms of their out stretched hands, and just as with the unconscious onna on the futon, he grazed their palms with his tongue. As they watched him more closely, it appeared as though

he was trying to commit their smell and taste to memory. He almost appeared thoughtful as he performed this simple act.

Once done, he immediately stepped back to where Hakkaku was standing, and sat down like this was an everyday thing. At that Hakkaku stepped forward and carefully, but easily lifted the unconscious onna, and held her long enough for the other two to slip one of her arms around their respective shoulders and brace to support her weight.

It was difficult, especially with their injuries, but with a look of agreement between the two of them, they forced their aching limbs to bare the weight and with determination held the onna up. Hakkaku smiled in approval of their spirit and bravery, before returning to the side of the male and easily throwing his unconscious weight over his shoulder. With that the group proceeded out of the building, for the joshi, it was the first time in days that they had breathed free air.

Once out side, Hakkaku immediately barked and growled a command to Genya. He in return whined back at his pack brother, and with unexpected skill to the two joshi, faded in to the shadows as though he was the dark itself, soon lost to sight.

"Hakkaku," said Ichiho almost timidly. She was impressed with the being before her. "Do you truly talk to the ookami?"

"Hai," was his simple response. "All ookami are brethren to ookami youkai. We share the same spirits of nature. Thus we are easily able to understand each other and share all that life offers to us."

If the joshi had any other questions, they had not the chance to voice them, as seemingly out of nowhere a huge neko, feet and tail ablaze of fire landed right in front of them. It startled them so that they almost dropped their unconscious burden. Luckily, they caught themselves and her before that occurred.

"Hakkaku, Genya told us you had your hands full," said a remarkable young woman from the back of the enormous fire neko. "Seems he was right, and your hunting was good."

"Hai, Sango-san," he replied. "As you can see, your help is much appreciated."

"Sure," said Sango. "Who do you want me to take with me? Or if you prefer, we can put two of the joshi on Kirara, and we can walk with you. I could help the third."

"That sounds like a good deal, nee-san," said the young ookami youkai. "Arigato!"

After a few moments decision, it was decided that Kirara would carry Nayuko, and Ichiho, who would hold onto Nayuko so she would not risk falling off. The two were the worst injured of the three. Sango offered to let Masayo lean on her, however, the young teen seemed more comfortable with Hakkaku.

At this, Sango decided to finish that last bit of the trip by carrying the unconscious male, and Hakkaku, blushing the whole way, although standing quite proudly, let Masayo ride on his back. It was only about another 15 minutes and they were at the clearing meeting up with Kouga, who had also just arrived with his own prey in hand.

20 - Now we hunt-Ginta

Ginta quickly found the storefront that was his target for this hunt. Baku had picked up on the scent trail from back at the shrine, which really concerned the young ookami youkai. It suggested that the 'Nightwalkers' were not only familiar with his pack sister, but that they had apparently been stalking her for sometime. Having lost their prey the night before, so unexpectedly, the trail suggested that they were looking to get back what they had lost.

This only angered Ginta all the more. It was bad enough that they had brutally, viciously, and with no manner of sanity by any standards he knew of, violated, beaten, and harmed one of his nee-sans. Not just any nee-san either. But the little Miko who had been an accepted pack sister for the past four years. One that no one was entitled to touch without her express consent or the consent of her immediate family.

As far as the young ookami warrior was concerned that family was Kouga's pack, the Inu brothers, and those who traveled with her. Anyone else who dared to touch her, or even consider harming her, was fair game for a pack hunt and right now, he was on the prowl and his prey was near.

The trail led him and Baku, his pack brethren, to a lower rear window on the eastside of the building. The place was not in the best of shape, but it looked like someone had found some refuse in a small part of the back of the building. The scent of blood was strong, suggesting that the male he sought had perhaps found himself another victim within the past couple of days.

Just the memory of the way his pack sister had looked, back in Kaede's hut, made the idea that this loathsome and vile excuse for existence of a ningen might be even now repeating the same cowardly acts against another victim sickening to Ginta. He forced the bile rising in his throat down, and letting his anger help him, both him and Baku entered the building through the broken window.

This lair had a bit of difference to it. It was one of the oldest homes in this area, but it was also one of the longest left abandoned. It was in very bad shape, and in many places looked to be a miracle and a prayer that kept some of the walls in place. Whoever had chosen this spot for a hideout, had been a bit creative. Where the floor against the back wall of the old store had caved through long ago, someone had taken the time to dig out a small passage of stairs and a room.

It consisted of nothing more than packed earth, but the benefits were immediately noticeable. The earth acted as insulation, against the cold, heat, wet, and even dry air. But it, also insulated sounds. This of course worked both ways, as sound inside didn't carry out, and sound outside didn't carry in.

Bare wires had been run from whatever the nearest source was along the short flight of four or five stairs, and into the room at the bottom. Several exposed light bulbs were the soul source of illumination.

With their superior senses, Ginta and Baku could tell that there was at least one onna in the room, and that the male that they were trailing was there as well. The smell of blood was almost overwhelming, and Ginta wondered how the ningen could stand it, for surely even he had to be able to smell the awful odor.

It was not like the fresh smell of blood from a new kill during a hunt, nor even the warm smell of blood from a freshly killed enemy.

This was blood that had been spilt a while ago, and left to sit pooled on the soil and ignored. Strong, but stale and old. It was like bad meat, just plain awful.

So quiet did the two move that they were able to hear the male's breathing like he was right in front of them. The smell in the air as they got closer made it clear what the vile thing was doing. When they reached the foot of the stairs the scene before them, almost made Ginta heave where he stood. For it was obvious that the poor girl lying on the blood and dirty caked futon, being violation by the animal a straddle her, had been alive until but a few moments ago.

A wave of guilt that had no discernible reason, washed over Ginta like a man standing in the ocean at the beach. He felt like he was drowning, and could not find his way back to reality. He vaguely noticed that the man had frozen in the middle of his act of wanton lust. A noise seemed to almost flow from the very walls of the room, and it took Ginta a moment to realize that it was coming from him.

Upon seeing the horror before him, coupled with the memories of how the little Miko had looked when he last saw her, Ginta had slipped his controls. With eyes the color of blood and glinting in the light like rubies, his fangs bared, and his claws poised, he leapt upon the vile male ready to slash his throat and spill the ningen's blood. The male seeing what appeared at first glance an insane blood crazed maniac, panicked and tried to leap away from what he saw as impending death racing towards him.

Baku seeing his pack brother losing himself, gave a whine and bark. Whatever he said had the desired effect, because just as Ginta's claws began to sink into the soft flesh of the male's throat, his eyes cleared and the noise in the room stopped. The smell in the room, however, intensified. Now mixed with feces from the scared and snivelling fool at his feet, Ginta could no longer stand the odors that permeated the air in the room.

Despite the fact that the poor onna, body still warm, no longer able to feel any pain or discomfort, the young ookami youkai gently removed her bindings, her gag, and the blindfold that had covered her eyes. He didn't think that he would ever forget the once beautiful green eyes that lay beneath. The pain of her last ordeal still fresh upon them. He didn't even feel the tears of sorrow that rain down his face for the onna he never even knew or would ever learn of.

He gave a quick prayer to the kami he knew, hoping that it would be enough to give her spirit rest, and swore the he would personally see to the punishment of her slayer. He turned then, and once more approach the vile fiend still cringing in his own filth in the corner. He grabbed him, not caring that his claws pierced his flesh, and bound his hands together. He removed the belt that lay on the floor where the male had dropped his clothing, and with a few deft flicks of his claws he had a collar sufficient to fit snugly around his prey's neck. Some rope lying discarded in the corner served as a leash and there was enough to bind his ankles, leaving just barely enough movement to walk.

Ginta surveyed his handiwork with a critical but satisfied eye, then pull the male to his feet. He grabbed him by the makeshift collar and pulled him forward until they faced off nose to nose.

"Know this ningen filth," he said heatedly and with all of the anger, hatred, pain and guilt that he felt at

that moment, "you will feel her pain. I swear it by all the kami there are."

Ginta then yanked on the leash he had made and began leading the male from the building, Baku bringing up the rear. As he went, he neither cared whether the ningen was walking, crawling, or being dragged. He pulled and the male followed. If there were obstacles in the chosen path, so be it.

There was fresh blood left on the broken window that was the sole source of egress to that building that night. And one lonely and sad youkai was secretly glad of every bruise, claw mark, cut, and scrape that the ningen 'developed' on that last walk. When he got to the clearing where they were all to meet, he told Sango and Miroku of the little onna's body. He put his prisoner with the others there, and then sat near a tree.

If spoken to, he would answer as briefly as possible, but he neither spoke of his own accord, nor seemed aware of the others there. They worried for him, and even their ookami brothers and sisters were concerned for him.

When Miroku scouted out the area and found the body, he understood what ailed the young youkai. He explained as best he could to Sango, and between the two of them, they dressed the onna's body as best as they could in some blankets that they had found, and brought her body to the clearing so that Hidenori's friends in the police force could return her to her parents.

They all took a moment upon their return with their burden to gather around Ginta. None said a word, not did they pressure him with their presence. But they did bow their heads in silent prayer for the spirit of the tortured soul. Each did their best to let that soul know that justice would prevail that night to her tormentor, and that he would spend the remainder of his days paying for his vile crimes.

Something must have worked in that silent vigil, because Ginta suddenly felt the pressure of what might have been a hand on his shoulder, and a gentle touch of what might have been a palm on his face. He found himself closing his eyes, and for just a moment the soft pressure on his face was a hand. A soft, gentle, almost loving hand. It was followed by a gentle caress across his lips...what is a kiss? Was it her? Did she understand that he was avenging her death and trying to give her peace?

A soft scent of roses warmed by the midday sun, reached his nose. For a moment a sense of peace seemed to warm his heart, and touch his soul. He felt a bubble of laughter in the back of his mind, and soft, sweet feminine voice with a gentle bell like tone. It warmed his heart and eased the guilt he felt for not having arrived sooner to aid the onna. It gently reminded him that even if he had arrived sooner, it would have made no difference for her injuries were too severe. Its soft tinkle of laughter let him know that he had succeeded in what was needed most, he gave her soul peace and opened the door for her to seek the afterlife as she was meant to do.

With a sigh he smiled then, stood and went over to where the prisoners were currently lying or sitting depending upon whether conscious or not. He sat near the male he had caught. Sat, and with a gleam that sent chills of horror down the spine of the nameless coward, he stared at the male who was his prey. A stare that held a promise. A promise that whispered..."you will feel her pain."

21 - Now we hunt-sango,miroku,shippo and kirara

Although it had taken them longer to get from the shrine than the others, to the edge of the 'Nighwalker's Graveyard', once within the dark and sinister area, it had not taken Sango, Miroku, Shippo and Kirara, long to reach the designated area that they had all decided would be used as a central meeting place. Despite their limitations as ningen, Sango and Miroku were resourceful. What they could not accomplish without youkai abilities, they found ways around.

They could not fly as much as they might have done with Kirara in the past, especially in the more lighted areas. Once they had reached the areas cloaked in darkness, however, Kirara did transform and they all rode her great and stalking form to their designated place.

They had decided that while Kirara could fly for short distances, it was best to walk for the most part. When the mononoke flew, she would keep as low as possible to avoid attracting unwanted attention to herself and the group.

Once there, the small group carefully looked around the small area, and the neighboring buildings. While they knew that the two buildings that had once stood in the small space, were nothing but rubble now, it was obvious that many of the nearby structures were not too far behind in their own unkempt and damaged state.

With this in mind, they decided to move with more caution than they might otherwise have used. While they were not overly worried about the danger of the dilapidated buildings themselves, their mission would not permit them the time to have to worry about rescuing themselves. They were there to help others, and didn't need to bring any more attention to themselves than they could help.

"Before we go into any of these buildings," stated Sango with authority, "I think it is best if we circle around the perimeter. It will give Kirara and Shippo a chance to pick up any scents, and save us a lot of work, if we do not have to go into each and every building."

"I quite agree, Sango-san," spoke Miroku, the determination on his face more than equaled her own, as did the looks on Shippo's and Kirara's faces.

"Sango," asked a slightly scared Shippo, "do you think we will find more joshi that look like those pictures, and Kagome?"

It was obvious that the kit wanted to help, but was still quite upset about the horror of the things that he had seen so far. On the one hand, he wanted to do something that would help to stop the pain that these filthy fiends were doing to the innocent. On the other hand, he was horrified of what they might find.

"Hai, Shippo-chan," was her honest reply.

Seeing the look on the little kit's face, Miroku spoke up, "Shippo-chan, it is alright to be afraid. It might help you to know that both Sango-san and I are afraid, too."

"You are?" he asked confusion and curiosity warring on his face at the idea that two of the few people that he looked up to, were scared by any of the things that they had seen in all of their adventures, other than perhaps Naraku. "Really?"

"Hai," was the surprising answer from Sango. "Shippo-chan, what happened to Kagome and the other joshi, is the most horrifying thing that anyone can do to an onna. It is a horror that goes far beyond the physical pain that her injuries caused to her body."

"I don't understand," was the small reply.

"How do you feel, Shippo-chan," spoke up Miroku, "when you think of how your father died?"

"Like someone was ripping my heart out as I watched," was the young kit's heartfelt, and pained reply. "Like I will never be the same, ever again. Those are images that I do not think I will ever forget."

"When an onna is attacked the way that these joshi have been," spoke of Sango, the anger and rage once again, apparent, "it is not unlike what you feel when you remember your parents Shippo-chan. For us, however, it goes deeper. For joshi, it is like a part of us dies inside, a part that we know we can never get back. The way it is lost haunts our every waking and sleeping moment, some for the rest of their lives, others finally learn how to live despite it, and a very few are lucky enough to find someone to help them learn how to let it go, and move on. But this kind of violation, is something that never quite goes away."

"It is a hard thing for an onna, Shippo," continued Miroku, "Almost nothing that a man can experience comes close, although even some of us have had such experiences. In most cases, it is not the act itself that is the hardest to cope with, but the shame, guilt, and horror afterwards. Especially from those around you, who you rely on for support and comfort, who in most cases are anything but helpful."

"Oh, you mean like if someone had made me feel," spoke up Shippo, trying to honestly understand, "like it was my fault for my father being killed. The only difference being that instead of it being my father, it would be me instead, having lived after being attacked."

"While that is not the most accurate description, Shippo-chan," Sango spoke up, for the first time all night a small smile haunted her face, "it is close enough so that you have some idea what Kagome-san will face, when she awakens. But she will be one of those lucky ones, in that she has all of us to help her get through this."

Shippo stood just a bit prouder, and his little chest could not be puffed out more. With a braver face than he had, had all day, he replied to Sango's implications, "I will be there for Kagome. She was there for me, when I needed her. Now it is our turn to help her."

With that, the group moved out, and began to scout out the surrounding area for any scents that Kirara and Shippo could ferret out. They moved off to the north, first, and staying within sight of the designated meeting place, circled around with the meeting place being the center, like a bullseye in a target.

Their first round brought nothing of interest or out of the ordinary. Well, at least not out of the ordinary for

where they were. As nothing unusual was noted, they moved one row of houses further out, and again circled.

Their intent was not to try to enter any of the buildings for now, but to find the most likely spots that would yield either one of their prey, or some of their prey's victims. Knowing where your target was located, was the first step. Scouting it out for advantages, and disadvantages was second. Planning your attack, and moving in was the third and final step to bringing down that which you wanted most to defeat.

With the second round, there were a couple of buildings that seemed to reek of recent use. According to Shippo, both he and Kirara could smell a lot of blood, as well as, other even less tolerable odors. Some of the smells were several days old, but there were hints that some of it was only a few hours old.

Still, they continued to circle around. They noted the two spots that seemed to have the scent markers, and then moved to their third and final round of scouting, one more row out from the clearing. Again, they started from the northern side, and circled around letting Kirara, and Shippo take their time to sniff around for any tell tale signs of what they sought. When they were finished, they returned to the clearing and went over their findings.

"Well, going by the smells that Kirara and I picked up," spoke up Shippo, "there are three places that seem to have had recent activities. Of those, one seems so strong and fresh, as to suggest that perhaps the male we are looking for is still there. There are at least three joshi with him, but there might be one more. It is hard to tell, because her smell is not like the others."

"Not like the others how, Shippo?" asked Sango. She thought that she knew, but while afraid to ask, it was necessary so that they could be fully prepared for what they had yet to do.

"She smells of death," sighed the little kitsune sadly.

Miroku put a comforting hand on the little kitsune's shoulder. This whole experience was and would be hard on the child, unfortunately, there was no help for it. All that they could do was help each other, as they all found their own way to cope with this horrible experience. Even without the sights that the kit had yet to face, there was still the images of Kagome to haunt him, quite probably for the rest of his long and unnatural life.

In the long run, however, helping to aid in the rescue of others suffering the same assault as Kagome, would help to bring a measure of peace to the little kit's heart. He might not have been able to protect Kagome from her own attack, but in some small indirect way, doing this was helping both her and himself. Both Sango and Miroku knew this, and understood the turmoil that gripped the kitsune.

Again, Shippo sighed, and swallowed the lump in his throat. He was torn. On the one hand, he wanted more than anything to just be back in Sengoku Jidai with Kagome, and helping her there. On the other hand, he knew that this would help not only joshi still being held captive, but also the onna who had become almost a mother for him. The idea of bringing those who had harmed her, and others joshi as well, to justice was something that he wanted to do just as much as he wanted to go home.

It was hard to face what he knew they would see. The idea of seeing other joshi, injured like Kagome

had been, was sickening and frightening. If they were hurt like she had been, then it was the same nightmare for them, as for Kagome. If the things that had hurt her was still hurting these other joshi, then they needed help, too. If Kagome were here, she would want to help them. With this thought in his mind, Shippo found it easier to face what he knew that he must.

Squaring his shoulders, and holding his head a bit higher, he continued, "The other two houses, where Kirara and I caught similar scents, suggest that there is definitely joshi in them. At least three in one, and possibly five in the other. All are alive, at least their scents suggest that they are, but they are very badly hurt."

"Arigato, Shippo-chan," spoke up Miroku. "Kagome-sama would be most proud of you if she were here."

That brought a smile to the young kit's face, and gave him the strength to face what the night had to bring. Kirara mewed at him, and nudged him with her nose, to help reassure the kit that they were doing the right thing.

"One more thing," Shippo spoke up, before they could head for the first house. "The last house that we spotted...the scents coming from there suggest that there are two males inside. One of them smells like the scents of the six we are looking for, but the other one is a different male."

"Does it smell like this other male was hurt?" asked Sango, not believing this for a moment.

"lie," spoke up Shippo, "he smells like....like Inuyasha sometimes smells around Kagome....."

It was obvious that the kit could not find the right words for what he wanted to describe, but the reference was enough for the two ningen to grasp his meaning. They both just nodded their understanding, leaving the matter stand. Nothing more was needed to explain what the house contained.

They had brought the map with them from the shrine and looking it over, comparing it to their surroundings. They decided to take care of the two houses where they felt that there were victims first. It was felt that if they got them first, by then some of the others might be finished with their own hunts, and could stand watch while they took care of the third house, or they could even assist with taking them down if need be. With that in mind, they checked the map for the best approaches to their respective targets, and proceeded to the first house.

While it was hard for the two ningen in the dark, they were used to having situations that were fought a night or even deep underground. After all the experiences of the past four years, it was not unusual for them to have encounters with their enemies at night. It taught them valuable lessons that were almost second nature to their youkai and hanyou friends. But for them, and their much inferior senses, they had found other means to adapt to the environment.

To their advantage, both had senses that most ningen didn't have. Their ability to sense auras, and powers, both spiritual and magical, had proven to be invaluable in their nighttime encounters. Miroku, also, had a few suitable spells that were useful in such conditions. This situation proved to be no exception.

Evil has an aura of its own, one that some can sense. This was one of the senses that both the houshi and the Taijiya had long ago learned to trust and use. It had saved them, and their friends more than once.

They got no sense of evil, other than the lingering evidence of its having once been present, from the first two houses that they came to. What they found, however, both sickened them all, and yet strengthened their determination and resolve to see this nightmare through to the end.

In the first house, they found an easy entrance through the rear of the building. Although it was obvious that whoever commonly used the place had tried to keep the entrance somewhat hidden from possible prying eyes, it was a poor effort, and pointed to the building being just a temporary haunt.

Kirara currently in her smaller form, led the way into the building, following the scents that her and Shippo had picked up earlier. They all cautiously passed through the door, and down a flight of steps. At the bottom, Kirara sat, and waited while Sango and Miroku pulled out the small flashlights that Kagome's mother had provided them with.

They had waited until they were inside, so that the spark of light from the small devices, would be less likely to be seen from anyone outside. With the small glow of the two magic candles, they continued to follow the small neko.

Kirara led them to a lone door in a dank, dark, musty basement. She walked over to the door, and for a moment, sniffed around it, and seemed to listen for any sounds that might be inside. Shippo did the same, although he sat on Sango's shoulders rather than on the floor.

After a moment, the small neko turned and mewed up at the little kit. Shippo listened and then turned to Miroku and Sango.

"Kirara and I can only smell joshi inside. All are injured, at least two are unconscious," he informed them. "It smells like there are at least five of them in there, one of them is in a very bad way."

Sango took a moment to examine the door. In her time, barging through a closed door could present a lot of hardship. Traps, and such were common in her experience, and she was not sure that such was not the case in Kagome's time. Satisfied that there was nothing to hinder their entering the room beyond, she stepped back, and spinning on one foot, she put her other foot through the door, taking it off of its hinges and turning the old door into nothing more than kindling.

Several muffled screams of terror greeted their loud and unexpected entrance. At their sounds, Sango stepped through the door first, while Miroku chanted a quick spell that allowed the top of his shakoju to glow with a light of its own. With more than enough light to see the contents of the room, both the ningen put away their small flashlights and entered the room. Shippo and Kirara entered right behind them.

As Shippo had said, there were five joshi in the room. The odor of blood, sex, and filth was strong enough to even make the weaker senses of the ningen cringe. The sight was horrible, and sickening as they took stock of the room and its contents before them.

A small table sat against the back wall of the room with a number of unusual items resting on it. They

might have been unusual, but it was obvious what they were meant for, and the little group cringed at the visions that threatened to overwhelm them.

The muffled snuffles and whimpers of three of the five joshi in the room, drew their attention. Along the right hand wall, were three futons so filthy and vile as to be not much more than rotted pallets on the floor. Each one held an onna in various conditions of injury, fear, and bondage. All were bound with wire, gagged, and blindfolded, as were the two on the left hand side of the room.

One on each side, accounted for the two that Shippo had said were unconscious. A third looked as though she was barely holding onto consciousness, and indeed from the looks of her one broken leg, her broken right arm, and the obvious broken ribs, which hampered her breathing, it was a miracle that she was awake at all. Her pale skin, through the innumerable cuts and gouges, clearly showing that she had suffered considerable blood loss, further making it a wonder that she was not unconscious.

The other two conscious ones, didn't seem to have any broken bones, but the evidence of numerous cuts, and repeated violations showed the major cause of their injuries. The two who were unconscious, were of course in the worst shape. One girl was lucky to be alive, as it appeared that the last time they had violated her, a cord had been wrapped around her neck. It was still there and just barely loose enough for the woman to take in air.

Miroku quickly went to her, and removed the cord from her neck. He checked her heartbeat, and breathing, relieved that she was still alive. He made quick work of removing her bondings, and then moved to the next girl.

"Onegai," Sango spoke. With unspoken agreement, Sango took charge of talking to the injured joshi, at least until the captives were more comfortable with the houshi's presence. Especially, as they were still blindfolded, it helped to hear another onna's voice, rather than the voice of another male. "We are here to help you. The houshi, and I have come to rescue you, and can take you to safety. We are going to undo your bindings, and remove your blindfolds. We need you to help us, so that we can help you."

"You need to understand that what you are going to see, is not something that you are used to seeing. Onegai, do not be afraid. Nothing you see will harm you," she offered as warning.

Projecting as much calm and confidence into his aura as he could, Miroku soon made short work of all of the women's bindings. With Shippo's help, he did his best to make the two unconscious joshi a bit more comfortable, not that they were in any condition to notice, but anything was better than the way they found them, and if in some way it eased their discomfort, then their efforts were not useless.

"We can take you to safety, but we are going to need you to help us," spoke up Miroku as soothingly as he could. He tried his best to keep an even tone to his voice, and made sure that his hands were visible at all times, this was not the time or place of hentai behavior. We do not need to take you far, but to get out of this....place....we will need to carry your friends. Shippo, can you help the young onna over there?" the houshi asked, pointing to the barely conscious girl with the broken arm and leg.

Shippo looked at the onna for a few minutes, seemingly lost in thought. Finally, he pulled a leaf from his vest, and placed it on his head.

"Fox magic," he said, and there before the surprised young joshi, was another young onna not much different than themselves. Shippo, who had used her image a number of times before, transformed himself into Kagome. By doing so, he could help the badly injured onna out of the building, and once there, he could then change as needed to continue to help her.

When they all gasped in surprise at the actions of the small 'child', Sango spoke up, "This is part of what I meant, when I said that there were things that you would see, but that they would not harm you. Shippo is a master the magic of illusion. He can hold this form long enough to help you make it outside, and once there, Kirara, here," she said pointing to the small kitten form on the floor, will be of even more help."

"Sango, and I will carry your friends, and Shippo will help you," Miroku said, looking at the girl with the broken limbs, "If the two of you can manage to just make it outside, then we can be of more help. Can you do that?"

"My name is Chisaki," spoke up the girl with the bad arm and leg. Her voice was low, and raspy, not just from her apparent weakened condition, but also from throat tissues that had suffered from screaming in her torture. It was surprising that the onna could talk at all, let alone with such determination. "If you are as you say, here to help us escape our captors, despite my injuries, I will crawl out of here if I have to."

Shippo walked over to her, "Don't worry. I will carry you out of here. Can you climb onto my back?" She nodded and he turned around to allow the onna to get on his back. It was hard for her, even with Miroku's help, but with a strip of the tattered and filthy excuse for bedding covering the pallet that the girl had been occupying, they managed to get her secured to Shippo's back and ready to leave.

Sango and Miroku, each lifted one of the unconscious girls, and the remaining two, leaned on each other, helping themselves to stand long enough to make their own way out of the building and away from their nightmare. Once they had them outside, Kirara wasted no time in transforming, allowing Sango and Miroku to place the two unconscious joshi on her back.

They immediately went to help the remaining two joshi. Shippo changed form once more becoming a cute, but animated version of a small toy pony. In this form, the onna on his back was better able to just lie upon his back as he continued to carry the girl as they made their way back to the clearing. By the time that they reached the meeting place, Kouga's ookami companion was waiting for them, and with Shippo's help, they got Kouga's request for help.

Shippo and Miroku took care of their five burdens, while Sango and Kirara went to assist Kouga. A short time a later, Sango and Kouga returned with both his prey, securely bound, and the victim that he had rescued.

Just about the same time, Genya showed up with a message from Hakkaku and Sango set off immediately to lend him a hand. Miroku went with Kouga to the second house, and Shippo stayed with the already rescued victims.

Among some of the few supplies that they allowed themselves on this night, were a number flasks of herbed water. It was not much, but it was felt that most of the victims would be in sore need of liquids, and while they could not provide them with medicine for whatever ailed them, they could provide them

with some simple herbs that would ease their pain, even if only a little. This Shippo took the time to give to those who were awake. For the unconscious ones, he carefully let the moisture drip slowly into their mouths with practiced ease, just as he had done many times in the past with his friends.

It was a short time later that Kouga and Miroku returned. Miroku was helping one onna, who though badly injured and in great pain, was still able to just barely walk. Kouga had one on his back, using every last bit of strength she could muster to hang on, while he carried a third who was just barely conscious.

Just as with all of those found so far, all had various injuries, ranging from broken bones, numerous bruises and abrasions, and the ever present random pattern of cuts all over their bodies. One apparently had been stabbed, although it was clear that the culprit had been careful to do so in a place that would not hit a vital organ. She was the one that Kouga was carrying, her blood loss being too great for her to hang on to more than just a thread of consciousness.

The one on his back had a badly broken jaw. As the onna that Miroku was helping explained, she had been screaming from her injuries as they were inflicted, and her assailant had punched her in the jaw.

As they were helping to lay their last round of rescued victims down, Ginta arrived with his prey, and Sango arrived with Hakkaku and the group he had rescued. Right from the moment he had shown up, everyone could tell that things had not gone well for the ookami youkai.

He was leading his prey, very much like an inu on a leash. Actually that would not have been an accurate description, because Ginta would have given even a dog more consideration, if not respect. He dragged his prey, uncaring of whether the male was walking or not. If he crawled so much the better. Even then, he cared not for whether the male had to go through or around obstacles. If the male got injured, so be it.

His prey some what battered and bruised, Ginta dragged his prey the last few yards to where the others were being kept. He grabbed him by his make shift collar, and practically threw him to the ground.

The feral gleam in Ginta's eyes, with the outline of red, spoke volumes of the turmoil that was in the ookami youkai's heart. It must have been bad for him, for him to be reacting this way. When his friends and companions tried to get him to speak of what happened, and if there were any victims, the youkai merely walked over to a nearby tree and sat down like no one was there.

By nature, ookami are social creatures. It is rare to find a loner, and even they prefer, at least for a short time, the companionship of their own kind. Ookami youkai are no different. The habit among many others, when one of their kind is in obvious emotional pain, is to leave them be and give them solitude. Not so with the ookami. While Ginta obviously didn't wish to speak of his experience to others, he did need to know that those who were a part of his pack were there for him.

Knowing where he had been assigned to go, Miroku took Kirara and went to check out the site. When everyone saw the victim, and caught the fresh scent of death upon her body, they all knew what had occurred. Miroku and Sango did their best to lay the poor onna in as comfortable a way as possible. Not that the dead would notice, but it did give just a small amount of comfort to those present.

With this in mind, those present took a moment from their own tasks to sit with their depressed brethren,

each offering their own sympathy and prayer to the soul of the lost one. With their hearts, they reached out, doing their best to let the lost soul know of their quest, and that her tormentor and his companions would be brought to justice.

~~You can rest in peace now. We share your burden through one of our own, and we will see that justice is done.~~

It was the unspoken message that they all poured out with their very souls. Something of their message must have reached the soul of the poor onna, as for the briefest of moments, Ginta's face seemed to almost glow. It didn't last long, and it was gone no one could be sure that it had happened at all, but it was enough. Their pack brother smiled after that and the air of depression left his face.

Although there was still a hint of the blood rage in his eyes, it was no longer tainted with the sorrow and guilt of earlier. He stood and walked over to their already acquired prey, and knelt beside the one that he had captured himself. Ginta then, did what was completely natural for an ookami youkai. He just sat and stared at his prey, watching him as he squirm under the intensity of the promise of paying for his crimes in ways that he had yet to understand.

Inuyasha and Sesshomaru had still to be heard from. But no one was bothered by their absence. It was not known how many victims they might have encountered or what obstacles and challenges they might have to overcome to achieve their goals. No one even considered that they might fail. There was just no way that such would be the case.

The final target on Sango and Miroku's list, was the next target for the gathered group. As Shippo and Kirara were sure that there were at least two males in the house, with three possibly four joshi, Kouga and Hakkaku chose to join in on this last assault. Ginta for reasons that everyone understood, chose to stay with the captured prey. Shippo asked to stay with the rescued joshi, to continue to help them in whatever small way he could.

So, moments later, a group of three youkai and two ningen stood before the entrance to the third house that Shippo and Kirara had earmarked as a hideout. It was decided that Kouga and Hakkaku would take care of the males, and Sango and Miroku would free the prisoners. Kirara would act as back up if needed, and to aid in carrying any of the joshi that could not be helped by the others.

Without a word, Sango stood where she could easily be seen by anyone exiting the house. As the only onna in the group, she made for both the best target and the best lure. Kirara walked up to the entrance that they had found earlier, and scratched at the door to get the attention of the males inside.

At the unexpected sound, by a door that only a hand full was supposed to know of, both males made for the door. In their panic at the possibility of the authorities finding them with their victims, they had charged through the door without wait to see what was afoot.

Upon seeing an onna, alone and defenseless (a/n: HEH! HEH! HEH! They don't know her very well, do they? HEH! HEH! HEH!), their initial panic quickly subsided, replaced by overconfidence, and a feeling of superiority. Both started to approach Sango, neither paying much attention to Hiraikotsu or her stance. While she didn't have a hand on her weapon, her right hand hung loosely at her side, fingers flexing and prepared for action as needed.

"Heh, heh, heh! Look what we have here! Pretty little thing," said the first of the two males. "What brings such a tempting morsel out here all alone? Have you not heard that it is dangerous around these parts?"

"I-I-I am I-I-lost," Sango stuttered doing her best to look weak, and scared. "I-I-I-I am new in t-t-t-ow-n. Can y-y-y-you h-h-h-hel-p-p me?"

"Suuure we can sweet one," spoke up the second male. "We would be happy to 'show' you around."

'I am sure you would,' thought Sango.

By now, the two males were standing on each side of her. Both looked to each other, and out of the corner of her eyes, Sango saw them nod in unison as they tensed to grab and subdue her. It never happened, however, as they were both surprised when an almost wicked grin spread acrossed Sango's face.

"Arigato for your cooperation boys," she said to both of them seductively, as both suddenly found themselves lying on the ground, with what sounded like growling animals on their backs, holding them down.

They began to struggle, hoping to break free, only to still at the sound of what could not possibly be ookami. The heated breath that hovered over their necks, the feel of sharp claws digging into their unprotected flesh, and the slight graze of a fang on their throats stilled them in a way that no voiced command could have done.

As their fear increased with the strangeness of their attackers, the growls coming from them grew as well. Nothing entices a prowling hunter more than the smell of fear coming from their prey. Sango took a moment to look in disgust at each of them.

"I suggest that you calm yourselves," she spoke, letting her confidence and disgust drip from her words. "You see, my friends have not hunted in awhile, and they are hungry. Being the cowards that you are, you must not know how delicious fear smells."

At this news, the two males froze as if paralyzed. They neither one wanted to see or know what held them down. Her friends? Who or better yet, what was she and they?

Sango and Miroku rushed into the building, quickly finding the four joshi that they sought. As Shippo had sensed, three of them were still alive, though badly injured, but one was more than obviously dead and had been for at least a day. Despite this, Miroku quickly removed the poor onna's bonds, as Sango took care of the others.

With the joshi freed, and Sango soothing them, Miroku quickly took the bindings that had been used on the joshi, and between Kouga, Hakkaku, and himself, they soon had the two males bound much as they had done the joshi inside, except that their legs were hobbled. The belts off their own pants made suitable collars, and a bit of conveniently found rope made perfect leashes.

Kouga, Hakkaku, and Miroku, each lifted one of the joshi to carry back to the clearing. Sango riding on

Kirara, lead the two frightened males, as they followed the others. Soon they were all back at the designated meeting place, their prey in hand, and the rescued joshi being cared for.