

# The Burden of the Past

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*Life isn't always easy, and with the past hanging over you, it can be that much more difficult.*

*By the way, I accidentally deleted the whole thing! Please leave comments again if you left them before, guys!! Thanks! ^\_^*

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# 1 - New Beginnings

"Kagome," her mother said over the phone. "We have a present for you!"

A present? "What?" she said dumbly, the unexpected gesture breaking her out of her reverie.

"Yes," her mother continued doggedly, sounding nervous, but attempting excitement. "We've all decided discussed this; Souta, your grandfather, and I. We would like to send you abroad for the year. In America. To a college there. We all agreed that we think it would be a wonderful experience, and hardly too expensive."

America. So apparently they thought separating her from Japan was a good idea. "What?" She said again dumbly, probably sounding harsher than she intended.

"Don't worry about it, Kagome. Everything is worked out. The college is extremely good, and they have a good exchange program; your credits will transfer, and you can take your archeology and mythology classes. This is very far away, but perhaps you'd like to go to graduate school there. Your grades..." her mother babbled on.

"But... Mom... What about..." Kagome trailed off. What about what? Her friends? She didn't really have any. Her friends from high school moved on, and any friends she might have made were always pushed away by Kagome's constant melancholy, and something else, if asked, they couldn't identify. "What about you guys," she concluded lamely.

Her mother's laugh sounded very far away over the phone line, despite the fact that the college was close to home. "Kagome, we've been dealing just fine for the past two years while you've been away at school." The fact that she had been gone during a lot of high school through the well was left unspoken. "Don't worry about it. Really, honey, this will be an excellent opportunity and experience."

So push me away from everything else that is familiar. Kagome sighed, her reasons all weak. "Alright, mom. Thanks!" And it was thus, with forced cheerfulness that Kagome was to spend her next term abroad in America.

Frowning at her computer screen, she jumped at the knock on the door. She unfolded herself from her chair and walked over to answer the door. "Hai? Ah... Hello?"

"Hi! I'm Katy! I'm your neighbor. I just thought I'd say 'hello.'" A blonde with red streaks and green eyes held out her hand.

Kagome shook the offered hand. "Hello. It is nice to meet you."

"So where are you from?" she peered around Kagome to look at her name tag on the door. "Oh, from Japan? Wow, you're a far way from home. I'm from about an hour north of here, somewhere you've

probably never heard of."

Kagome frowned slightly, not sure if she should be insulted, struggling to keep up with the girl's fast speech.

"So what are you studying?" Katy asked before Kagome could say something.

"I am studying Asian archeology and mythology," Kagome replied politely.

"Hey, your English is really good. I'm impressed. That's totally what I'm studying by the way. Or well, my minor. What classes are you taking?"

"Um... I was just looking at classes..."

"You should totally take AAM 239 with me! The professor is Japanese; he's really smart and absolutely gorgeous." She sighed happily, clasping her hands. "I've taken another class with him, Professor Inukami. He's brilliant and tells the best stories too! He's got amazing English."

"What is the class about?" Kagome asked, amused and repelled by the girl's flakiness, but also wanting to have a friend in America.

"Oh, right. Sorry." Katy laughed. "It's Ancient Asian Mythology. 239 is about lesser-known myths and the feudal times, or something like that. You should take it with me!"

And it was thus, at the hands of a wily cheerful neighbor that Kagome was enrolled in entirely different classes than what she had originally planned.

"I'm so excited," Katy said, having invited herself into Kagome's room. "You're going to be in my classes! It'll be fun!"

Kagome nodded, finishing the email to Souta who would relay the news to the rest of her family. Katy had practically forced her to take the other two classes Professor Inukami was teaching. They were small classes, Katy had explained, so the discusses was better and more in-depth.

"Who's the email to?"

Kagome glanced at her, annoyed. This was her room, and her email. It was none of Katy's business. "It's to my family," she said shortly, letting her miko powers flare up in a way that, as previous experience had shown, could make people uncomfortable.

"Man... Cool breeze..." Katy commented, bouncing up and closing Kagome's window.

Kagome just barely managed to repress a growl of displeasure. It was going to be a long year.

Kagome and Katy found seats at the front of the class on the first day. "Oh man," Katy babbled. "I'm so excited! He's so amazing. Wait till you see him, Kagome!"

Saying nothing, Kagome sighed, tensing suddenly at the flair of yokai energy. Odd. It vanished quickly, however, so Kagome dismissed it. None of that mattered anymore.

Katy was chattering on about the professor and how gorgeous he was. Kagome mentally rolled her eyes. He sounded like some professor. What kind of name was 'Inukami' anyway. 'Dog god?' Really? Was he really even Japanese? He sounded suspicious. He sounded like--

"Good morning. I am Professor Inukami, and welcome to Ancient Asian Mythology 239, Lesser Known Myths and the Feudal Period," a familiar voice said softly and briskly.

Kagome paled, Katy's words (oh my gosh, isn't he gorgeous!) passing right over her. Grabbing her book bag, Kagome stumbled to her feet and hurried out of the room, ducking her head, grateful for the lack of school uniform, and her short-bob-like hair cut. Panting, she made it to a bathroom, sinking to the floor in a corner. "shoot shoot shoot!" She gasped for breath. Him! Of all people! Him... Surely the universe hated her. Why him? Why now? Why here, of all places!? shoot! And she had two other classes with him too! Damn Sesshoumaru! A professor!? Of all the professions...!

"Kagome...?" Katy's worried voice called as the door opened..

"Hai...?" Kagome replied weakly. "I'm here."

"Are you okay? Omigod, what happened?"

"I--" She paused. I what? I knew him more than 500 years ago, when he was a cold killer demon, who wanted me and my love-interest (and friends) dead? "I... just felt nauseous. I am fine now. Sorry." shoot, she had to face him. She struggled to calm her breathing. Developing panic attacks at this stage would be no good. "Anou... Would you please tell Professor Inukami--" She almost choked on the name "--that I felt ill and had to go home, if he asks?"

Katy looked concerned, and Kagome felt a tiny twinge of guilt for lying to her, but was very relieved when the girl replied, "Sure. Feel better. Do you need me to walk you home?" Katy helped her to her feet, but Kagome shook her head.

"No, thank you. Go on; I'll be fine." Gathering her book back, Kagome left the bathroom and hurried home to her dorm room, thankful her room-mate was still at class.

Finally giving into her panic, she sobbed wildly into her sheets, sobbing for her past, her new level of self-pity which disgusted even her. Two other classes with the elder brother of her old flame, dredging up memories of everything she had been sent to America to forget. Damn him! Her dry sobs hurt her chest as she hated every detail of her former enemy: his same stone-cold face, markings covered up by make-up or enchantment, hair seemingly platinum blonde, though very close to his original silver and pulled back into a short pony-tail, she could only assume the same amber-golden eyes, and his deceptively human ears. Again, they were probably changed by some illusion. She doubted surgery. He would never change them permanently; he was too vain. His image was burned into her mind.

Sitting suddenly, Kagome gasped. That was her answer! If he could disguise himself, so could she. It was so simple. Sunglasses would be a must. She would suddenly realise that she was 'very sensitive to light,' even indoors. Kagome had never been one for perfume, but now it was essential. It would effectively mask her scent. Thankful for her short hair once again, Kagome debated dye. Blonde? Definitely not. Probably red. And hats would definitely become a fashion statement. That would be perfect. She hurried to the bathroom and washed her face, gathering her books again, sliding a pair of sunglasses on and borrowing a spritz of her room-mate's perfume, hurried to her next class, with plans to buy red hair dye at the earliest convenience.

Three weeks passed, and Kagome had acquired a variety of hats, quite a collection of perfumes, and enough sun glasses for a different pair every day of two weeks. The days she didn't wear hats, her newly dyed red hair made her look different enough that she was sure old friends wouldn't recognise her. And, there was no reason for him to notice her since she sat in the back of the room and never spoke up. She quietly answered 'here' when he called her name for roll. He probably didn't even remember her anyway. However, she wasn't taking any chances.

Katy continued to plague her with her constant presence, so Kagome accepted her with a martyred sigh. The girl even grew to be almost a comfort, talking away her loneliness. Kagome sometimes even had a conversation with her, instead of being talked at.

It was almost a disappointment though, Kagome thought, wandering into the second of the three classes she had with 'Professor Inukami.' If he noticed, he didn't say anything. If he didn't notice, that was almost boring. Had he really grown so dull? What a disappointment. So she turned it into a game. Today, for example, she sat in the second row, with sunglasses and perfume. A week ago, she had been in the very back row, wearing sunglasses, hat, perfume, and clothing that didn't remotely resemble a school uniform.

As class started, he paid her no more or no less attention than any other day. She had been gradually moving forward, and even tempted fate every once in a while by not wearing sunglasses. He noticed nothing.

"Kagome Higurashi," his smooth voice called, glasses riding on the bridge of his nose. Ridiculous things. He probably didn't really need them anyway.

"Here," she replied almost boldly. Look at me, she dared him mentally, disappointed (and surprised to find herself so) to find nothing happened.

He was so... ordinary... she mused as he began lecture. He had a gift for it, she admitted, but he was so painfully ordinary that she began to wonder if 'Lord Sesshoumaru: Taishou of the Western Lands' existed in that sorry husk of a fake human. Kagome almost laughed at herself. even now, there was still nothing 'ordinary' about him. He was incredibly gorgeous and had an incredible presence. His classes were 95% hormonal females and 5% men of questionable preference. Compared to her Sesshoumaru, however, he was quite ordinary.

'Her,' she mused. Interesting... 'Her' Sesshoumaru was from the feudal era, and she often spent time in other classes than his making up his pas and how he had come here. Perhaps he too came to America to escape Japan.

The bell rang.

"Kagome," Professor Inukami's voice called blandly as she packed her things.

"Yes?" Her heart leapt and fluttered. He was right next to her. Had he noticed?

"I'd like you to come to my office hours to discuss your paper."

"Oh." She couldn't help but feel disappointed again. How ordinary. Some small hope remained. Perhaps he did notice though, and this was just an excuse to see her alone. "Sure. When?" she asked, feeling bold.

"Does later today at say, 4:30 work?" He had moved away and was packing his books and notes into his brief-case.

"Yes. That's fine." Kagome nodded.

"Good. I will see you then." And he left. It was only until he was out of the door that she had realised he had spoken to her in Japanese.

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Sesshoumaru walked briskly to his first class of the new semester, new year. Ancient Asian Mythology 239 was his favourite course. Since he had free reign over the lessons, he taught the stories he knew best: the old tales of the feudal era, witches and demons, miko and humans. The books he taught from had all been written by himself at some point or another, under a variety of pseudonyms of course. None of them traced back to himself.

Pulling open the door of the chemistry building where the administration had seen fit to place the class, he hurried on to his classroom. He'd slept late, which was slightly unusual, though more forgivable in recent years. In fact there were a lot of thing tha--

He cursed under his breath as a student flew around the corner, nearly crashing into him.

"Oh, sorry," she murmured, never stopping.

His temper flared in irritation, but he stomped it down, lest his youkai energy flare and bring attention to himself. Sighing, Sesshoumaru hurried to his classroom, his thoughts on other things. "Good morning. I am Professor Inukami; welcome to Ancient Asian Mythology 239: Lesser Known Myths, and the Feudal Period," he began.

A cursory whiff of his students told him they were mostly females with a few hopeful males. Something faintly familiar caught his attention, but the girl was already half-way out the door before he could focus on the scent. He frowned, looking after her. Wrong class?

"Excuse me, Professor Inukami," a blond stood. Katy. He'd had her in class the previous semester. "I'm

sorry, that's my friend. I'll be right back. I'm going to see if she's okay."

Sesshoumaru nodded. "Go ahead, Katy."

She blushed and he could tell she was pleased he remembered her name. He sighed inwardly. "Alright. This class is about the old fables and mythic history of the feudal era." The class stared at him raptly as he continued his synopsis of the class.

Katy returned shortly. "Hey," she whispered as she re-entered the classroom. "My friend doesn't feel good right now, so she went home."

"It's the first day," Sesshoumaru dismissed. "Now, here's the syllabus, and yes, you do need all of the books listed. They are not 'suggested,' they are mandatory. You will want to read through the first chapter of Ancient Myths and Folklore by a week and a half from now."

Class went by and even finished early. The students left, trickling out the door, throwing glances over their shoulder. Sesshoumaru sighed. Every semester. Sometimes he wondered if it were more trouble than it was worth. No matter where he went, the students always reacted the same way. He had taught for quite some years by now, also under aliases and falsified records. He could not afford to let people become suspicious, thus he moved around frequently and kept to himself. It had probably been four years he'd been teaching at this university. After next semester, perhaps, it would be time to move on. He'd been in America, however, for about sixty or so years.

Reaching his office, he set his briefcase down in a familiar pattern, loosened his tie and then headed to the bathroom. As he gazed in the mirror, washing his hands, he sighed. Honey-brown eyes mocked his reflection. They were soft eyes, human eyes. They were flat and dull. Sesshoumaru turned away from himself in disgust, returning to his desk to review the notes for his next classes, noting with interest as he looked over the class rosters, that the girl who had run out of his first class, presumably, was also in two of his other classes. She was Japanese. Kagome. Higurashi Kagome. He flipped the paper over. He had left Japan behind.

Sesshoumaru sighed and stood, grabbing his wallet to head out for a cup of coffee.

The days crawled by, blurring one into the other, and before long, it was three weeks into the semester. As he sat grading the papers on his couch in front of the tv, Sesshoumaru lifted his fork and took another bite of the take-out Chinese food. He'd actually come to like the americanised version of the food. Of course, he only ever ate it in the privacy of his own home. What a sad state for the tai youkai... Former, he corrected himself, former tai youkai of the Western Lands. That was another world ago anyway. He sighed.

Changing the channel on his TV, he picked up the next paper. Kagome. He frowned. It was hard to get a feel on that girl. She was very strange. She was apparently a student from abroad, though she spoke English pretty fluently. It was hard to tell what she was actually getting from any of his classes, seeing as she hardly ever spoke in class, except to answer roll. He had been interested to see how she fared in paper-writing. As he shifted her paper, the strong scent of one of her many perfumes wafted to his nose causing him to sneeze. He wondered idly why she wore so much. They smelled nice, but, to his sensitive nose, they were rather over-powering. And all of those hats and sunglasses... He shook his

head. Were they truly necessary? Was she trying to be incognito?

Shaking his head again, he picked up her paper and began reading. The prompt he had assigned concerned the reliability and the folklorish properties of such myths and their importance in culture. It was rather abstract and difficult to answer, yet Kagome, in her paper he discovered as he read, had answered the question brilliantly. She had chosen to focus her paper around the myth of the Miko and the Half-Demon, his brother's story. She wrote well, Sesshoumaru observed. Apparently she just didn't speak in class. She--

Sesshoumaru abruptly stopped ceased reading, looking back over the paragraph he'd just read. The Boneater's Well...? That hadn't been mentioned in the myth. Shaking his head, he went back and reread the paragraph, paying closer attention. Where had she gotten this material? It was all correct, but he hadn't mentioned it in their assigned reading. He knew what he'd written, and some of the information she mentioned concerning the people involved just hadn't been mentioned. Plagiarism? The thought floated uneasily to the surface of his mind as he frowned, pursing his lips. It was an ugly idea. He'd have to speak with her about. He didn't think her the type to do that sort of thing... But the quality of her paper and the information in it... led him to believe otherwise. He shrugged. One could never be too sure. He finished her paper anyway, liking it overall, but holding off on the grade until he spoke with the girl.

He entered the classroom, the girl's perfume assaulting his nose; he took a deep breath through his mouth. Setting his briefcase down, he organised his materials in preparation for class to begin. She was wearing sunglasses today, he noticed as he sat. And the strong perfume. No hat. She was very strange, yet her habits intrigued him. Perhaps he would be able to speak to her about it when she came to his office. It was unusual that she never seemed to be able to pick a seat and stay there. Humans were creatures of habit. She, apparently, was different.

The bell rang, so he left his musings alone and got the attendance sheet out, calling roll. "Kagome Higurashi." She replied loudly, and he could feel her intense stare. Shivers fluttered down his spine at the sensation. He didn't look up. His own cowardice astonished and disgusted him.

He cleared his throat, adjusted the glasses (just for show), and began class, ceasing to speak only when the bell rang.

"Kagome," he called quietly, impulsively speaking Japanese. It had been a long time since he'd spoken the language. He almost chuckled as her heart beat faster. In that respect, she was no different from any of his other students.

"Yes?" She looked up at him, her face a mask of calm, despite the worry and other emotions roiling beneath the surface.

"I'd like you to come to my office hours to discuss your paper." The disappointment, however, shown clearly on her face. What did that mean?

"Oh. Sure. When?" Clearly, she was disinterested.

"Does later today, at say, 4:30 work?" He moved away to begin packing his things, confused by her reactions. She seemed relatively unconcerned.

"Yes, that's fine."

"Good. I will see you then." He watched her leave and then left himself, heading to his next class, the only one of which she was not a student. He sighed in relief. It would give him a good chance to organise his thoughts.

## 2 - Plagiarism

"Crap," Kagome muttered as the rain began to fall in earnest. "Just what I needed. Damn Sesshoumaru..." She jogged towards the building, hunching over her belongings in an attempt to keep them dry.

As she entered the building, she set her books and purse down, wringing the water from her hat, muttering ill wishes at the weather and Sesshoumaru. Checking the room number of 'Professor Inukami's' office one more time, Kagome turned down the hall, knocking as she reached the correct door. "Hello? Professor Inukami?" The name stuck in her throat.

"He's over in the corner by the window," another professor said, looking up and gesturing towards the space.

Kagome followed his finger, easily spotting Sesshoumaru. She quickly pulled her hat down further to hide the shivers going down her spine. He was staring at her. Making her way passed the other professors who shared the office space, she stopped in front of his desk. "Good afternoon, Professor," she said quietly.

He was silent, staring at her still before his head jerked almost imperceptibly and he looked down abruptly. "Good afternoon. Please sit," he said tersely.

What is wrong with him? Kagome eased herself slowly into the chair, setting her things on the floor. Her heart began to speed up as he stared at her again. Does he know?

"Do you know why I asked you here?" He said all of a sudden.

"N-no..." Kagome replied hesitantly. "You said about my paper..." shoot. He knows.

"Yes."

"What about it?" Kagome asked. Is he playing games with me?

He was shuffling some papers around. "Here." He pulled her paper to the top. "Kagome, some of the information in your paper is not from any of the sources provided. I'd like to know where you got your information."

Kagome blanched. He thought I was cheating? Silence was her only response. He was staring at her again, the silence stretching between them while Kagome's mind raced for an excuse.

"Do I know you?" he said two minutes later, seeming surprised at his own words. "Pardon, have you been in my classes before?"

"No," Kagome said quickly. "I've never been in class with you before. I would remember. You're hard to

forget."

He blinked.

Kagome flushed slightly. "I mean--well... you are.." Open mouth insert foot, she thought grimly. Crap... He is so on to me.

Sesshoumaru shook his head. "Nevermind. That's unimportant. Do you have an answer for me? This is very serious."

"I know, " Kagome replied heatedly. "I didn't cheat."

He nodded. "Okay. I'll believe you. Where did you get this information? It is correct, but you quote no sources, nor is it from any of the sources I asked you to use."

"It isn't plagiarism." She looked up, into his face as if to convince him of her sincerity. "The information is from... family. My family lives near a shrine, and my grandfather tells me stories that were passed on to him," she lied.

He stared back at her, his glasses at the end of his nose, honey-brown eyes intense.

He's not buying it, Kagome thought grimly. "It isn't taken from any books. It's all from first-hand information. Honestly."

He finally dropped his eyes with a sigh. "Very well. I believe you." Steepling his fingers as he leaned his elbows on his desk, he looked up at her again, his eyes mild. "Where did you live?"

"I lived in Tokyo," Kagome replied almost warily.

"I lived there for a while," Sesshoumaru said quietly, his gaze wandering to the window.

No kidding, Kagome thought acerbically. You lived there a long while, as well as a long while ago.

"Your grandfather must be a very interesting person." He turned his attention back to her.

"Ah... Yes. He is..." She avoided his eyes, looking down into her lap. Can I go now...? She worried her lip between her teeth, waiting out the silence, her nerves making her tremble.

Sesshoumaru sighed. "Very well. Here is your paper. You recieved an "A." Wonderful paper. Thank you for the new insight. You may go."

Kagome grabbed the paper and picked up her things. "Thank you, Se--Sensei." She stood, gave him a quick bow. "I will see you in class." shoot! I almost said his name!! Stupid Kagome! You idiot!

"Are you sure I don't know you?" He asked quickly, glancing up at her.

"Hai, sensei," Kagome said with a smile. "Like I said, I'm sure I would remember you. You're

unforgettable." She gave him another bow and quickly threaded through the desks and made her way out the door, hurrying down the hall and out of the building. Kagome hurried towards her dormitory, rounding the corner. Stopping to catch her breath and calm her racing heart, she burst out laughing. The few people walking by looked at her strangely, but Kagome didn't care. That was the most thrilling thing that had happened in years! She hurried home, her step lighter, grinning.

"Hey, Kagome!" Katy called as Kagome walked passed her open door.

"Hello, Katy!"

"Ooh, wow! You seem chipper?"

"Do I?" Kagome asked a little breathlessly, calming herself again.

"Yeah! Something good happen?" Katy set her laptop down and walked over.

"Oh. Well, not really. I just went to see Professor Inukami about my paper. Apparently, he thought I cheated. So--"

"You?! Cheat?" Kagome almost laughed at her shocked expression. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know." Kagome waved a hand. "So I just explained to him, and he believed me. He really liked my paper!"

"No way! That's awesome!" Katy squealed, giving Kagome a big hug. "Congratulations!" Pulling back, she gripped Kagome's hands. "Now. What was he like in person? Like... talking to him one on one? Tell. All." She grinned.

Kagome laughed again. "There isn't much to tell. Here, come with me to my room. I have to put my stuff down." Kagome walked the short distance to her room next door, unlocking it and setting her things down. "He was very much like the dispassionate doll he is in class."

"Kagome!" Katy replied, scandalised. "He is *not* dispassionate. He's *suave*."

Chuckling, Kagome shook her head. "Okay. Whatever. He wasn't any different. Hey, do you want to head to dinner early?"

"Hm. Sure! I could do food now. Let me get my keys."

The girl was entertaining. And, to be honest, Kagome was glad to have a friend. Katy's persistence was endearing, and she was a cheerful presence.

"Alright! Let's go to dinner!" Katy returned, waving her keys.

Smiling, Kagome nodded. "Right!"

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Sesshoumaru frowned. He couldn't concentrate on his paperwork, anyway, but he could at least make pretenses. His eyes strayed to the window again, the sound of the rain soothing and relaxing. He checked the clock again. She would be there shortly. Ah. There was the faint sound of feet. The door opened and he heard her ask after him. She--

There it was again! That familiar smell. He looked up at her, staring, trying to figure out where he knew that scent from. He must have known her at some point. She smelled too familiar. From Japan? But how? He hadn't been there in over fifty years, and she was just a college student. Was she the daughter of someone he knew...? That didn't seem right. The smell was too familiar, and it would be different on offspring. Damn it was so frustrating! He suppressed the urge to growl.

She pulled her hat down and hurried over. She was damp, so the rain must have washed away most of that perfume that she normally wore. How infuriating. She made her way over to him, weaving between the desks of the other professors. "Good afternoon, Professor."

He stared at her, still trying to figure out where he knew her from. "Good afternoon. Please sit," he said finally, vaguely noticing her heart speeding up, guilt and worry rolling off her. Was she really guilty of cheating? Damn! She smelled so familiar! "Do you know why I asked you here?" He asked, getting down to business.

"N-no..." she replied, unsure. "You said about my paper..."

Again the scent of guilt. Odd. "Yes."

"What about it?" She asked warily.

Sesshoumaru moved some papers around, bringing Kagome's to the top. "Here. Kagome, some of the information in your paper is not from any of the sources provided. I'd like to know where you got your information." To his surprise, the girl looked genuinely shocked. She stared at him blankly, her blue eyes—strange for a Japanese girl—wide beneath her bands and the brim of her hat. They also looked familiar. Those eyes... He'd seen eyes like that before... "Do I know you?" He blurted, cursing his bluntness, quickly trying to cover. "Pardon, have you been in my classes before?"

"No," she said quickly, seeming relieved. "I've never been in class with you before. I would remember. You're hard to forget."

Sesshoumaru blinked, surprised this time by her bluntness, even more surprised by the fact that he was pleased by her words.

She was embarrassed. "I mean—well... you are..." She was mortified. Interesting.

Shaking his head, Sesshoumaru returned his thoughts to the business at hand. This was a ridiculous time to be even thinking about thinking those types of thoughts about one of his students. This was a serious matter. "Nevermind. That's unimportant. Do you have an answer for me? This is very serious."

"I know!" she replied heatedly. "I didn't cheat!"

Oddly enough, he believed her. She didn't cheat. She was telling the truth. "Okay." He said for appearances. "I'll believe you. Where did you get this information? It is correct, but you quote no sources, nor is it from any of the sources I asked you to use."

"It isn't plagiarism." She looked up, her earnestness clear in her eyes. "The information is from...family." That part was a lie. "My family lives near a shrine, and my grandfather tells me stories that were passed on to him. It isn't taken from any books. It's all first-hand information. Honestly." That was true. She wasn't lying about that part, but something didn't ring true about her entire story.

Sighing, Sesshoumaru looked down at her paper. This certainly was a confusing situation. There was no way out, from a teacher's standpoint. "Very well. I believe you." With another mental sigh, he leaned forward on his elbows, steepling his fingers. "Where did you live?" He asked idly, looking up at her.

"I lived in Tokyo." She replied, her guard back up.

"I lived there for a while," he said, turning his gaze to the window. So much for leaving Japan behind... Even in America, it comes to him. He almost chuckled at her wary silence. She was perched on the edge of the chair, her shoulders straight and set. She was an interesting girl; she was very vague about the information she let go. "Your grandfather must be a very interesting person," he commented, looking back at her, noticing her perk to attention.

"Ah... yes. He is..." She looked down, worry returning. He watched her worry her lip between her teeth, his curiosity piqued. He sighed.

"Very well. Here is your paper. You received an 'A.' Wonderful paper. Thank you for the new insight. You may go." He handed her the paper which she grabbed from his hand, standing quickly, relief flowing off her. She grabbed her things.

"Thank you, Se-sensei." She gave him a quick bow, rushing the words. "I will see you in class."

Now he felt almost affronted, but there was that scent again! "Are you sure I don't know you?" He asked, surprised by his own desperation. He looked up into her blue eyes, all armor on.

"Hai, sensei. Like I said, I'm sure I would remember you. You're unforgettable." She bowed again, giving him a blinding smile, and then was gone as quickly as possible.

Sesshoumaru grumbled under his breath, finding himself wishing for the old days of Japan where he could demand something and have his answer. Ridiculous. This was a foolish charade. He curled his lip as he fingered the charm on the necklace, lying warm against his skin beneath his collar. He was soft. This...career had softened him. Pathetic. That girl, Kagome. Perhaps he should speak with her grandfather to get those stories. It would mean going back to Japan, but... The girl knew them so well. That spoke well about her grandfather. They were so detailed. It was almost as if she had been there...herself... Sesshoumaru froze, repeating the words, mouthing them silently. 'Almost as if she had been there herself.' "shoot!" He surged to his feet, his chair skittering on the linoleum floor. He stared down at his hands flat on the desk. shoot!

"Professor Inukami?" The woman one desk over asked hesitantly. "Is something wrong?"

Sesshoumaru mentally shook himself and gave her a warm smile. "Of course. I just remembered. I forgot to get groceries. Sorry for disturbing you."

She laughed, flushing lightly. "Oh no. Not at all. It's fine."

"Pardon me. I need to get going." He threw his things together and left as quickly as he was able, while still appearing human.

His half brother! Damn it! She was the girl who was—had been—with his half-brother's party. She was the archer. He was sure of it now. There had been Inu Yasha, the houshi, the demon hunter, the fox kit, and the fire cat. And her. Her in her short skirt, scandalous at the time, and the scent like summer and fresh rain. He slid into the driver's seat of his car and locked the doors, gripping the steering wheel, knuckles white.

"shoot! shoot shoot shoot!" He let his hair down, running his fingers through it, grimacing as he noticed the imprints of his hands on the steering wheel.

She was the same girl though, despite the hair-cut and the dye job, hats and sunglasses, and perfume. Oh shoot! Panic ran through him anew, something he didn't like. He didn't like it at all. Did she know who he was? Is that why she did it? All of the perfume and what-not? To disguise herself? All so he wouldn't know? Was that—

Sesshoumaru took a deep breath. This was ridiculous. Starting the key in the ignition, Sesshoumaru rolled down the windows, heading home, making plans to go on a long run to help himself work things out.

### 3 - Preparations

Kagome yawned. She shouldn't have stayed up so late talking to Souta and her mother.

"I'm sorry, Miss Higurashi, is my class boring you?"

Kagome looked up sharply. shoot. "No, I'm sorry, professor."

Sesshoumaru raised an eyebrow at her. Damn that eyebrow... Sitting first row today was a bad idea. "I was up late..." Her face flamed. Damn him for calling her out...

"This is an important section we're going over, and it will be on the midterm," he continued, informing them all of this important information.

Shrinking into her seat, Kagome thought dark thoughts in his direction, pushing her sunglasses up on her nose. Checking her watch, she breathed a sigh of relief that class was nearly over.

She twiddled her pencil until the bell rang, and then threw all of her belongings into her bag. Go home, take a nap, eat dinner with Katy and friends, then get to homework, Kagome listed in her head. That was the plan of action—

"Kagome," Sesshoumaru's voice came as she stepped towards the door.

Crap. She turned. "Yes?"

"I'd like to speak with you, if you don't mind. Are you free this afternoon?" He was shoving his things into his briefcase efficiently.

Ugh, there goes my nap... "Um. Sure," Kagome replied, trying to keep her voice light, eyeing the girls walking out jealously, while they looked back, eyeing her standing with Sesshoumaru jealously. The grass is always greener... "What time? What about?"

"If today is a bad day for you..." He looked at her over the rims of his glasses, seeming almost miffed.

Kagome nearly laughed. "No, today is fine. Where and when would you like to meet, Professor?" She couldn't even bring herself to say his 'name.' That awful pretentious alias. Poor taste, Sesshoumaru, poor taste.

"If you would like to meet somewhere quiet, we could meet around 4:00 at Café Paradise, the coffee shop on the corner of John and Second? I would like to discuss your sources, if you don't mind. I am working on writing a book, and they would be helpful."

Oh? What now? A café? Shrugging, she nodded, quelling the sudden panic inside. "Sure, I'll meet you there."

He nodded. "Excellent."

Kagome ducked out, trudging home, gloomy thoughts accompanying her. Fantastic. She was going to have to make up something to compensate for how her grandfather was supposed to have told her the stories in which she herself participated.

"Hey, Kagome!" Katy chirped enthusiastically. "ooh... Why so glum?" She asked as Kagome walked by her open door.

"Do you ever go to class?" Kagome muttered, digging her key out of her bag. Unlike Katy, her room-mate was never home.

"Course I do, silly. This one just isn't important," Katy said, joining Kagome at her door. "I repeat: why so glum?"

"I have a date with Professor Inukami," she grouched.

"What?!" Katy shrieked, grabbing her arm. "WHAT?! TELL me you're joking!"

"Do I look like I'm joking?" Kagome turned to face her friend, her expression dead-pan, pulling her arm away.

"No...!" Katy gasped, her jaw dropping as she followed Kagome into her room. "Kagome, you have a date with the most gorgeous man alive and you're depressed? I swear... You're the only girl I know who would be upset over this! Oh... you don't...like girls...do you?"

Kagome laughed at the aghast expression on her friend's face and her straight-forwardness. "Katy! No! It's just that... Oh—Listen. It's not really a date. He just asked me to meet him, so he could ask me some questions, I'm sure. It's nothing to get excited about." She laughed again as her friend threw herself against the wall. "Now really..."

"Kagoooooooooooooomeee....!! You don't know what kind of opportunity this is! He's single! You're single! Right? Yeah. You're single. He's single!!" She paused adding more quietly, "At least... The underground fanbase seems to think so..."

"Ugh... I'm disgusted that something like that exists..." Kagome replied. "Listen, I've got less than an hour, I want to try and nap for a short—"

"You need to freshen up," Katy said firmly. "Look gorgeous." She grabbed Kagome and sat her down on her desk chair. "Now—"

"Katy, you are not playing dress-up with me, and if you think I'm going... to let...you..." Kagome trailed off with a sigh. Katy was already going through her closet. Standing, she walked over to the other girl.

"Here." Katy thrust a garment at her. "Wear this."

"Katy...! I can't really change clothing! He'll notice, and I don't want to look desperate. Not to mention this is completely the wrong message that I want to be sending!"

"Hm... Well, you're right about changing clothes." Katy frowned, thinking quickly. "Well. Forget clothes. Here. Stay there. Let me fix you up."

Kagome glared at her friend. "Katy, you're being ridiculous. You can get into a lot of trouble with this sort of thing anyway! I don't—"

"Where's your make-up?" Katy turned to face her.

"It's in that drawer—wait! No! I don't want to tell you that!"

Katy pulled it out, digging through her make-up, dumping it out on Kagome's bed. She ignored Kagome's protests, pulling out some eye-shadow, mascara, and several other elements. "You'd better sit still, unless you want me to poke you in the eye with this mascara..."

Kagome grumbled, folding her arms, but sat still, letting her friend do up her face. She glanced at the clock a couple minutes later. "Katy, you need to—"

"Stop moving! Don't move! Just one more minute, then you can move."

"I need to get to go meet him really soon."

Katy stepped back. "Okay, there. Done. You're ready. You'll knock him dead, girl!"

Kagome blushed. "Well... I don't necessarily want that..." She stood and walked over to her mirror, incredibly pleased by Katy's mini make-over. "Wow... You did a really great job. I'm impressed."

"Oh yay! Thanks!" Katy bounced over, giving the other girl a hug. "Go get 'im!"

Kagome laughed softly. "Right. Well, I'm off then." She grabbed her purse and headed to the door.

"See you later!"

Kagome hurried down the stairs and across the campus to the little café that her former-enemy-turned-college-professor had chosen.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sniffing the wind, Sesshoumaru pulled his head back in the car and parked in the large empty parking lot in front of the Jewel-Osco. No one was around. Of course, at 2:38, no one should be around. He stepped out of his car, locking it. As soon as he was absolutely certain that there was no one around, he bounded across the street, down a ways, to the giant forest preserve. It was his favourite place to run late at night. It helped him to unwind, relax from all the stresses of pretending to be human. He inhaled deeply the scent of pines and flora, immediately feeling the stress melt away. He hadn't done this in too long. Stretching his arms over his head, Sesshoumaru looked up at the moon, taking off down a gravel

pathway through the preserve.

Two hours later, Sesshoumaru made his way back to his parked vehicle. Pulling his keys out of his pocket, he clicked the remote, lights flashing as the car unlocked. He smiled to himself as he exhaled deeply, the night breeze blowing across his warm skin as the sweat dried. Driving himself home, Sesshoumaru took a quick shower, falling onto his bed afterwards, a towel over his wet hair.

Kagome.

He would have to handle this situation delicately. If he asked her straight out, she would deny it most likely. They hadn't been on the best of terms back then. Of course, the situation was quite different; however, there was still the chance that she would hold a grudge against him. He had, however, mentioned wanting to know more about 'her' stories. He sat. Perfect. That would make the perfect premise. His office would not be the right place. Leaning back against the cool sheets again, Sesshoumaru mused quietly over a solution to the problem. Asking her to his apartment would be utterly out of the question. He couldn't make the situation seem too formal, i.e. asking her out to a meal. However, asking her to meet somewhere without some other preoccupation would be awkward. Perhaps coffee or something. A café. That would work nicely. He would ask her to meet him at a café for coffee or tea. He frowned, rolling over to turn the light out. He wouldn't offer to pay. That would be over-stepping his bounds. Sesshoumaru lay back again with a sigh, rolling over to finally sleep.

Morning came too early, but he rose anyway, preparing himself a quick breakfast before he went over his notes again for class. He would see her three times today. He would ask her after the last class, giving her little time to think about it, and think about an excuse to get out of meeting with him. He would not let her run away from him this time. He was genuinely interested to see how the meeting would pan out. There had to be some way that he could get her to admit it, that she had been there. If she knew who he was which, by her manner of dress, she most likely did, then she might be more willing to admit that she had lived through the events with Naraku and the Feudal Era. Sesshoumaru sighed and began packing his notes away into his brief-case. Ridiculous. He was spending too much time thinking about this girl. If his secret were in jeopardy, and she threatened to expose him, it was likely no one would believe her anyway, without some form of proof. And he had no intention of giving anyone any sort of proof. He had carefully covered his tracks for a long, long time, and there was no way that he was going to slip up now.

With that thought in mind, Sesshoumaru drove to campus with confidence that he would be able to work the situation through in his favour.

Kagome stumbled into the first class (with Katy), looking more tired than he felt after his night, finally falling asleep around 5:30. He almost pitied her, especially by the time she got to the third class she took with him. However, by the sixth time she yawned, his irritation rose. "I'm sorry, Miss Higurashi, is my class boring you?"

Her face flushed with embarrassment as she focused on him suddenly with those blue eyes. "No, I'm sorry, Professor." She was clearly tired, but she was so distracting, yawning every two minutes. He raised an eyebrow at her, irritated that she had decided to sit front row if she was so obviously tired.

"I was up late..." She began, obviously trying to rationalise.

Up late? Really? Surely it was nothing compared to his own late hours... "This is an important section we're going over, and it will be on the midterm," he stated, his eyes settling briefly on her, the message in his eyes reading, pay attention. Pleased as she shrunk down in her chair, Sesshoumaru continued on with his lesson.

The bell rang just as he was finishing. Priding himself on his good timing, Sesshoumaru nodded to the departing students, hurrying to intercept Kagome on her way out. Likely she was upset with him for calling her out in class, however, he had business with her. "Kagome," he said to catch her attention.

She turned like a thief caught stealing. "Yes?"

I'd like to speak with you, if you don't mind. Are you free this afternoon?" He asked as he retreated to the desk, slipping his belongings into his briefcase.

"Um... sure." He could smell her reluctance through the perfume and couldn't help being miffed. "What time? What about?"

"If today is a bad day for you..." He looked up from his papers, over the rims of his glasses, hardly helping but to wonder why he was so bothered by her rejection, but also secretly pleased.

"No, today is fine. Where and when would you like to meet, Professor?"

"If you would like to meet somewhere quiet, we could meet around 4:00 at Café Paradise, the coffee shop on the corner of John and Second? I would like to discuss your sources, if you don't mind. I am working on writing a book, and they would be helpful," he said, the well-rehearsed lie flowing off his tongue.

The girl nodded, but he could tell she was not feeling the apparent calm that her appearance portrayed. "Sure, I'll meet you there."

He nodded. "Excellent." And excellent it was. Now he would just have to ensure that this meeting went well. She couldn't purify him while they were in a public place—that was assuming that she still had her miko powers, Sesshoumaru realized, the thought occurring to him suddenly. Surely she still retained them, however, the possibility was there that she did not... All the same, the public, open café provided protection from any sort of public outburst that could possibly occur.

Nodding, satisfied with his plans, Sesshoumaru hurried to his office to take care of business before meeting with the girl an hour hence.

## 4 - Meeting

Kagome paused outside of the door, gathering her wits and catching her breath. Holding the one she sucked in, she pushed the door open, sighing as she was met with the cool air conditioning. Looking around, Kagome quickly spotted Sesshoumaru. He stuck out as he always had. Ducking her head, she walked towards the back of the café, shifting her purse on her shoulder. "Professor," she said quietly as she approached the table, her head ducked.

"Kagome," he said quietly, looking up at her from his papers. "Thank you for meeting me; please sit."

Kagome did so, eyeing him sharply from beneath her bangs. "Thanks." They were silent a moment as Sesshoumaru took a sip of his drink.

"Go ahead and get anything if you'd like it," he offered, his voice mellow.

"No thanks," Kagome replied more sharply than she would have liked.

"Right. Well. I asked you here so we could discuss your sources." He set his coffee cup down. It was strange to see him holding the paper cup in the first place, his button-down shirt open at the collar.

Kagome mentally shook her head. This was really ridiculous. How was she even supposed to answer this? There was no way that she could honestly answer him. He would know if she lied. She bit her lip, thinking rapidly for an answer, her irritation growing.

"Kagome?" He looked at her inquisitively.

She looked up, pretending to be surprised. "Oh! I'm sorry, I was thinking." She gave him a small smile, becoming even more panicked and more irritated. "Um..."

"Take your time." He gave her a small smile. "I'm going to get another coffee." He stood and quickly walked passed her.

Kagome gave him a tight nod and then half slumped over the table, burying her hands in her hair. Damn, this was stupid! She hadn't had much time to think about anything to tell him, and then Katy had distracted her from thinking up anything. Growling under her breath, she flexed her fingers against her scalp. *Damn it!*

"Are you sure you don't want to get anything to drink?" Sesshoumaru asked politely as he came up behind her.

Straightening immediately, Kagome automatically flashed a bright smile. "Ah, no! No, thank you; I don't need anything right now." She looked back down at the table while Sesshoumaru sat again, cursing herself inwardly.

"So, if you could begin, I would love to hear more than what you had explained in your paper about the legend of the half-demon and his friends specifically."

She looked up at him sharply, immediately masking her expression. He was doing this on purpose. He looked calm and composed, but he was mocking her, Kagome was sure of it. She smiled. When at a loss, develop a previous lie... "Um, yes. Sure. Well, as I had said, the stories that I heard were mostly from my grandfather. They had been passed down to him by his father I believe. The story about the half-demon was the one you wanted to know more about, right?"

Sesshoumaru nodded, smiling pleasantly. "Yes, please. Go on."

Feeling sick inside, Kagome smiled again. "Of course... Um.... He spoke of the Bone Crusher's Well, and how um... there was, of course, the half-demon of the dog clan, and then a monk, a fox demon, a demon-hunter, and then there was also a miko. And there was another miko that was related to the first miko. And, ah, that miko had been the guardian of this stone. It was called the Shikon no Tama, I believe. So,... there was this other demon called Naraku. He was also a half-demon," Kagome babbled nervously. "So, he was evil and wanted the Shikon no Tama himself, and so this group of friends of the half-dog-demon were all fighting this demon, because he had some of the shards of the Shikon no Tama. The first miko was trying to put the shards back together so they could purify—or well, so *she* could purify the gem and—"

"This is rather fascinating, if rather rambling. I'm sorry; I'm a bit confused," Sesshoumaru said with an amused smile. He raised an eyebrow. "If you could order things a bit more chronologically?"

Kagome fumed. He was making fun of her! He was doing this on purpose. He knew who she was, and he was just trying to make her life miserable. "I'm sorry," she bit out. "I'm just a bit nervous about—"

"Nervous? What are you nervous for?" He smiled easily, leaning on his hand. "Please don't be nervous. This isn't meant to be an interrogation, it's merely a meeting for—"

"Stop messing with me, Sesshoumaru!" Kagome hissed, surging to her feet as she planted her hands on the table, leaning over him in anger. "I know what you're trying to do."

He arched an eyebrow at her. "I beg your pardon, Miss Higurashi?"

"Stop that!" She shook a finger at him, hissing to keep her public humiliation to a minimum. "Stop mocking me! I know you know who I am! You're just trying to get me to admit it! You want me to—" She broke off, paling as she sank back into her seat, burying her face in her arms. "You just wanted me to do what I just did..." she finished miserably. "shoot." Now I'm screwed... She looked up at Sesshoumaru after a minute of silence. His hands were folded in front of him on the table, looking at her, his amber eyes serious.

"Well, honestly, I wasn't expecting that to go quite as well as it did."

"Excellent. I'm glad my lack of control over myself works to your advantage," she said caustically.

Sesshoumaru chuckled. "Well, yes. In fact. I'm glad it did. I wasn't really meaning to trick you at all. I

actually *did* want to hear about your side of the story. I'm truly baffled that you're here. I had no idea why you were suddenly here. I smelled something familiar in your scent, but I couldn't identify it. Then the other day—"

Kagome shook her head. "Wait a minute. Slow down. You're talking too much."

Sesshoumaru looked confused.

"You're talking too much. I wasn't expecting you to be this talkative," she explained lamely.

"It *has* been five hundred years. A person can't be the same for that length of time."

"You could manage it," Kagome muttered under her breath.

"I *can* hear you, you know. Just because I look human, doesn't mean I hear like humans," he said, amusement lacing his voice.

Kagome's face flamed. "S-sorry... I just..."

Sesshoumaru waved his hand. "Nevermind. It doesn't really matter, I suppose."

Kagome blinked. Was he *insane*. She straightened. "It doesn't matter? I'm sorry, this all seems very strange. We were *enemies*, in case you had forgotten. You wanted to *kill* your brother—half-brother—and you were never very kind to any in our group—"

"I fail to see how that's relevant right now," Sesshoumaru said casually with a shrug.

Looking at him with disbelief, Kagome gave her head a shake. "Really? You really think that this is just 'okay'? You think—I don't even know *what* you think. What *are* you thinking, Sesshoumaru? I never could tell," Kagome said, her voice growing louder, gesturing irritably with her hands. "Your facial expression never seems to change, does it."

Sesshoumaru tilted his head slowly as if he were digesting this, contemplating thoughtfully, so different from his normal expression. "Perhaps. However, I am willing to make this a new start, if you're willing to also."

"New start? What is that supposed to mean? Are we supposed to be friends now or something? Is that what you're looking for?"

"I was hoping that since we have a common bond through a past, yes, that we might meet again and discuss some of this, perhaps you could tell me stories about the events from your point of view? That was my original goal anyway. We share a common history. I would like to hear your whole story as well; why you're here, and how you came to be there?"

Kagome shook her head in utter shock. "No," she said quietly. "No," she said again more loudly. "No! That's... that would *never* work. This... this is ridiculous. I'm sorry, Sesshoumaru, but this... this would never work. I'm sorry; I can't accept that sort of arrangement. That is just..." She shook her head again

and stood. "I have to go. It was... No. I have to go." She slung her purse over her shoulder and hurried from the café leaving him standing by the table.

Ridiculous. This was just ridiculous. Her heart ached. Inu Yasha... Her eyes burned as tears threatened existence, but she blinked rapidly to clear them away. There was no way that they could ever be friends. Friends? What was he thinking? She tossed her head, pulling out a pair of sunglasses, slipping them on as she hurried home.

She would run. Perhaps running would help her clear her mind. That would be good. A nice long run and then a nice warm shower...

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Sesshoumaru arrived early. Nervous, he picked a table in the back corner. He set his briefcase down and put his light jacket over it before joining the other patrons in line. He got himself a iced chai and returned to his table, pulling out some papers to work on before Kagome arrived. He smelled her before he saw her. He heard the door open and her refreshing scent flooded into the café with a breeze. Her steps were small and quiet as she approached him. "Professor."

"Kagome." He shifted his glasses, looking up at her as if he hadn't been aware of her. "Thank you for meeting me; please sit."

"Thanks," she offered simply.

"Go ahead and get anything if you'd like it." Sesshoumaru folded his hands in front of him on the table, hoping to make her more comfortable in his presence.

"No thanks," she returned shortly.

Clearing his throat after a sip of his chai, he began, "Right. Well. I asked you here so we could discuss your sources." He set the cup back on the table as he waited. Waves of confusion and inner turmoil rolled off of Kagome. She bit her lip, looking down at the table. If his guess was right, which he was sure it was, then she was the same girl who had traveled with his half-brother. So of course, that meant that she would lie to him. She would have to lie, because she had experienced the events first hand. She had no sources. Sniffing again casually, Sesshoumaru noted her irritation. "Kagome?" He said her name softly, looking at her in askance.

"Oh! I'm sorry, I was thinking." Her surprise was obviously fake, Sesshoumaru noted with amusement. "Um..."

He stood. "Take your time. I'm going to get another coffee." With a small smile, he grabbed his cup and walked away, breathing in the scents of the other patrons of the café. Her scent was heady and he needed some fresh air. Besides, him getting another coffee would allow her some time to think up something to tell him. Of course, she might just waver enough in her conviction that she might let on that she had actually been in the past. That, of course, was the ideal way things could go. Sighing almost wistfully, Sesshoumaru dug out his wallet to pay the cashier. Of course, he could always wheedle it out of her eventually. It would be nice to have someone else to talk to concerning the past. At any rate... He

picked up his new chai and headed back to the table noiselessly, pausing behind Kagome. She was even more conflicted and irritated now, though if that would work in his favour... That still remained to be seen. "Are you sure you don't want to get anything to drink?"

She turned, startled, flashing him a bright smile—shockingly reminiscent of her smile from when he knew her five hundred years ago. "Ah, no! No, thank you. I don't need anything right now." When she looked down, Sesshoumaru sat, shaking his head slightly to clear the confusion.

"So, if you could begin, I would love to hear more than what you had explained in your paper about the legend of the half-demon and his friends specifically," he said quickly to focus himself on the matter at hand.

"Um, yes. Sure. Well, as I had said, the stories that I heard were mostly from my grandfather. They had been passed down to him by his father I believe. The story about the half-demon was the one you wanted to know more about, right?"

With a -hopefully- encouraging smile, he nodded. "Yes, please. Go on."

She smiled at him again though he could tell she was nervous, and continued, "Of course.... Um... He spoke of the Bone Crusher's Well, and how um... there was, of course, the half-demon of the dog clan, and then a monk, a fox demon, a demon hunter, and then there was also a miko. And there was another miko that was related to the first miko. And, ah, that miko had been the guardian of this stone. It was called the Shikon no Tama, I believe. So,... there was this other demon called Naraku. He was also a half-demon. So, he was evil and wanted the Shikon no Tama himself, and so this group of friends of the half-dog-demon were all fighting this demon, because he had some of the shards of the Shikon no Tama. The first miko was trying to put the shards back together so they could purify—or well, so she could purify the gem and—"

Was she really so nervous that she really couldn't enunciate *anything*? "This is rather fascinating, if rather rambling. I'm sorry; I'm a bit confused. If you could order things a bit more chronologically?"

"I'm sorry. I'm just a bit nervous about—"

"Nervous? What are you nervous for?" She was irritated, he knew, and the nervousness must be from trying to cover for her lie. He could almost feel for her. He strongly believed that she knew that he knew, so since he knew that she knew, they were both playing a game of words where she was at a disadvantage. But he needed to know... "Please don't be nervous. This isn't meant to be an interrogation; it's merely a meeting for—"

"Stop messing with me, Sesshoumaru!" She was suddenly on her feet, leaning over him, her voice angry and hissing. "I know what you're trying to do."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Higurashi?" So she was the same girl. He didn't go by that name at all these days. If she were to think that she was mistaken, then perhaps there wouldn't be a problem.

"Stop that!" Her finger was wagging in his face, her anger blazing and musky on her scent. "Stop mocking me! I know you know who I am! You're just trying to get me to admit it! You want me to—" Shock

set in as her face was suddenly pale and she sank back to her seat. The regret wormed through, smelling bitter and salty. "You just wanted me to do what I just did..." Her voice was small and miserable, making him feel for her again. "shoot."

He waited for her to gather herself. She did, and then she looked up at him. She almost seemed to be accusing him of something, though he couldn't figure out what it might be. "Well, honestly, I wasn't expecting that to go quite as well as it did," he admitted.

"Excellent. I'm glad my lack of control over myself works to your advantage."

Chuckling, Sesshoumaru felt a strange sense of relief sweeping through him. "Well, yes. In fact, I'm glad it did. I wasn't really meaning to trick you at all. I actually *did* want to hear about your side of the story. I'm truly baffled that you're here. I had no idea why you were suddenly here. I smelled something familiar in your scent, but I couldn't identify it. Then the other day—"

"Wait a minute. Slow down. You're talking too much," she interrupted.

That wasn't the response that he had been expecting.

"You're talking too much. I wasn't expecting you to be this talkative," she said, almost panicked.

"It *has* been five hundred years. A person can't be the same for that length of time," he explained. Did she expect him to be the same person he was back then? He hadn't been... He had worked through some of his problems since then.

"You could manage it," he heard her say.

He almost laughed. So she did still have her spunk. "I *can* hear you, you know. Just because I look human, doesn't mean I hear like humans."

"S-sorry.... I just..." Embarrassment filled her scent.

He waved away her apology. "Nevermind. It doesn't really matter, I suppose."

"It doesn't matter? I'm sorry, this all seems very strange. We were *enemies*, in case you had forgotten. You wanted to *kill* your brother—half-brother—and you were never very kind to any in our group—"

And the past was the past. "I fail to see how that's relevant right now." He couldn't tell why she was so outraged; there was no problem here. In fact, this was going beautifully. Now if she would just calm down...

"Really? You really think that this is just 'okay'? You think—I don't even know *what* you think. What *are* you thinking, Sesshoumaru? I never could tell. Your facial expression never seems to change, does it."

That wasn't true. Perhaps in the past it had been true. He had been overly stoic, he admitted to himself, but these were different time, and he was a different man. She was confusing him with his past self. This was getting very confusing very quickly. "Perhaps. However, I am willing to make this a new start, if

you're will to also," he said, offering the olive branch.

"New start? What is that supposed to mean? Are we supposed to be friends now or something? Is that what you're looking for?"

"I was hoping that since we have a common bond through a past, yes, that we might meet again and discuss some of this, perhaps you could tell me stories about the events from your point of view? That was my original goal anyway. We share a common history. I would like to hear your whole story as well; why you're here, and how you came to be there?" Why was this still an issue. She couldn't let bygones be bygones? He shifted in his chair, refolding his fingers, frustrated.

She shook her head, hair swishing across her face. "No. *No*. No! That's... that would *never* work. This... this is ridiculous. I'm sorry, Sesshoumaru, but this... this would never work. I'm sorry; I can't accept that sort of arrangement. That is just..." She stood, shaking her head again, her scent washing across him. She really needed to stop doing that. "I have to go. It was... No. I have to go." Grabbing her purse, she hurried from the café, leaving him standing by the table, too stunned to move.

"That didn't go at all *like* I had wanted," he muttered to himself, still a bit dazed. Sinking back into his chair, he slumped, his chin falling into his hand as he stared through the people in the café blankly. It suddenly felt like he had been dumped. That makes no sense, he scoffed to himself. Another part of his mind questioned that, wondering if, on a deeper level, he had been searching for female company. She would be acceptable; she knew his past, and it wouldn't matter what he looked like.

Sesshoumaru sighed, rolling his head to work out the kinks in his neck. If she planned on unveiling him... There wasn't really any way that she was capable of doing so as she didn't know where the enchantments were to hide his true appearance. People would just think she was crazy in this day and age.

Growling to himself, Sesshoumaru shoved his papers into his briefcase and headed home. Time to begin round two and woo Kagome into regarding him in a more friendly manner.

## 5 - The Aftermath

Kagome didn't go to class the next day.

Well, to be more specific, she didn't go to *his* class. She avoided Sesshoumaru's classes, to be cliché, like she would catch the plague. She slept in for a change and leisurely got dressed, finding something to eat in her refrigerator. Turning on her computer, she settled herself back into her bed comfortably.

"Don't you have class, Kagome?" her room-mate asked before she left.

Kagome looked up with a smile and nodded. "Yeah. I don't feel all that great today, so I'm going to skip. Don't worry about me though, Michelle."

"Oh... I'm sorry. I hope you feel better," the other girl replied before slinging her purse over her shoulder, grabbing her books and leaving the room.

Smiling with the thought of being rebellious for a change, Kagome brought up her email after her computer ran through all of its routines. The smile dropped immediately as she read through the first email from 'Professor Inukami.' Anger sparked in her again. "Are you serious...?"

*'Kagome,*

*I think we might have had a bit of a misunderstanding. I understand that you're angry with me. Though I am somewhat confused as to the reason why, I hope that we can ignore our past. Perhaps what I mean is not ignore, but rather discuss. I know that we were enemies in the past, and I hope that currently, as I believe I stated, that we could be friends. I would be happy to answer your question if, in turn, you might answer mine. Perhaps we might try this again. I would very much like to meet with you again, same time, same place this afternoon. I hope to see you then.*

*Sesshou-'*

"-Maru," Kagome finished, disgusted. There was no way that she was going to meet with him. She tossed her hair out of her face, reading through her other emails. She started as her computer dinged, an instant message coming up. "Souta!" She smiled. 'How are you doing?' the message read. She quickly replied, "Pretty good. You're up late."

"Yeah. Shh. Don't tell mom." She could almost picture her brother's grin.

Chuckling aloud, she replied, "Don't worry. I won't."

"So how have you been? What about classes?" He asked.

Typing quickly, Kagome switched her webcam on when finished. "Turn your webcam on. You're in your room right? That way we can talk more easily." She stared at her computer screen a couple of minutes

before a window popped up, her brother's face filling it. "Souta!" She grinned.

"Hey Kagome." He grinned back.

"Hey little brother." She leaned on her elbows, looking into the camera.

"How are you liking America? You seem a lot happier," Souta observed.

Tilting her head in thought, Kagome clucked her tongue idly. "You think so?"

"Yeah," her younger brother replied warmly. "I'm glad you're happier there. I've missed you."

Giving a low sheepish chuckle, she shook her head. "Geeze. You make it sound like I've been gone..."

Souta shrugged. "Maybe. So. Anything new going on?"

Kagome hesitated. "Well... Kind of..." She changed the screen back to the email Sesshoumaru had sent her.

"What is it?" Her brother inquired eagerly.

"Well.... You remember that professor I told you about?"

"Yeah, the Japanese one with the weird name?"

She gave a low forced laugh. "Yeah. That one."

"What about him? Stop stalling, Kagome, and just tell me!"

Looking up at the camera, Kagome nibbled at her lip. "Well,... He's kind of Sesshoumaru."

"What?!" Souta quickly covered his own mouth, looking over his shoulder at the door before whipping his head back to face the computer. "What!" he hissed quietly. "Inu Yasha's older half-brother! How do you know!"

Kagome gave him a half-grin. "He told me. He doesn't look like himself, 'cause he has some sort of enchantment or something. But it's definitely him. And he confirmed. Well, I guessed. I guess we kind of told each other. I didn't want him to know it was me, so I'd been wearing hats and perfume and stuff-"

"Oh, so that's why you changed your hair colour."

She nodded. "Mm. But he got suspicious. Or well, I got suspicious." Kagome shook her head. "I don't know. We met up in a public place and talked. He wants... He wants to be friends. Or something. I don't really know what he wants."

Her brother whistled softly. "Wow. I didn't know he'd even still be around. That's... How crazy. And to think that the two of you would meet up. What are the chances?"

"I *know!*" Kagome exclaimed in frustration. "Why, of all places, does he have to be the same place that I am!"

Souta shrugged. "Maybe it's not such a bad thing."

Kagome glared at him. "I blew him off and then I got an email saying-" She switched screens again. "-blah, blah, he understands that I'm angry with him, but doesn't understand, and he wants to meet up and be friends. It's weird."

"Wow, that is pretty weird," Souta agreed. "But maybe... Maybe he's looking for someone to talk to, you know? He's probably lonely. He doesn't have anybody here, I'm assuming. He's probably all alone, and just wants to, you know, reminisce, about the past. Or something like that."

Kagome smiled warmly at her brother. "You're pretty smart after all, aren't you?"

Souta blushed. "Whatever!" He cleared his throat. "So what are you going to do about it? He knows who you are now too, right?"

"Yeah..." Kagome sighed. "I don't know what to do about it. I just don't feel comfortable being 'friends' with Sesshoumaru, taiyoukai, ice-man." She made a face.

Grinning, Souta wagged a finger at her. "Come on, nee-san. Don't be so close-minded. You're not like that. Plus, knowing you, you're probably terribly curious about him. I doubt he's going to try and hurt you."

"Well, yeah," Kagome admitted sheepishly. "I am. A bit. But not enough to meet up with him. Plus," she protested, "he's a professor and I'm a student! That wouldn't be appropriate."

Souta shrugged. "From what you've told me, it's pretty relaxed over there. I don't think that people would really care."

Giving an unintelligible grunt, Kagome sent him a martyred look. "Really? You think so? When he's the most sought-after bachelor on campus, it tends to take a different turn. He's got every single female bewitched by merely his pheromones. One look and they're blushing like they've never seen a man before..."

Souta laughed out loud, quickly stifling the noise. "Sounds like you're jealous."

"Really?" She fixed an eye on him blandly, arching an eyebrow. "Not in the slightest. He's my enemy, Souta."

Souta shook his head mildly. "Whatever you say. I still say that you should meet up with him. My bet is that it won't be so bad. You'll probably have more to talk about than you'd think." He threw a glance over his shoulder. "Well. Anyway. I should probably go to bed. I'll talk to you soon. Let me know how it goes." He gave her one last grin and then signed off.

Grimacing, Kagome sighed and turned her webcam off as well. "Geeze... One would never think that this would be so difficult." She leaned back against the pile of pillows, thinking. After a moment, she sighed turned her computer off, getting ready for her next class. She would make Sesshoumaru wait a couple of days, avoiding his class, before giving him an answer.

With all the free time Kagome had, ditching three classes, she wandered the town the college was set in. There were a variety of small cafés and quaint restaurants. She found several good Asian restaurants, a particularly good burger joint, and a smoothie place that was tasty and cheap. It had been four days since she'd decided that she would meet up with Sesshoumaru, so her seemingly aimless wandering served more than the single purpose. She was scouting out discreet places that they could possibly meet while familiarizing herself with the campus town. It was a really nice place.

As she returned from her latest adventure, she gave the obligatory niceties to Katy and nodded to her room-mate who, she felt, didn't really like her very much. But that didn't matter. She sat down and turned her computer on, waiting impatiently for it to boot up. After she signed in and waited some more, all the while drumming her fingers on her desk, she brought up her email.

Kagome brought up Sesshoumaru's email to her and clicked the 'reply' button.

*"Sesshoumaru,*

*I will meet with you. How about next Saturday morning, 10:00, at Jacob's Burgers? Let me know. Thank you.*

*Kagome"*

Her nerves hummed as her mouse hovered over the 'send' button. Taking a deep breath, she pressed send and then quickly closed her email to take away the temptation of sitting and staring at it with baited breath for it to announce a new message.

"You okay over there?" Her room-mate half-turned in her chair.

Kagome looked over at her, suddenly grinning. "Yeah. Actually, thank you. I'm just great!"

Michelle gave her a small almost reluctant grin and turned around. "Great..."

---

She wasn't in class today, Sesshoumaru noted, slightly disappointed. It had always seemed (from his perspective) that Kagome had been one to face problems, not run away from them. Yet here she was, avoiding him. He hesitated as he reached her name on the attendance sheet, his pen hovering over the box. He sniffed to himself and marked her there anyway. It was partly his fault that she wasn't attending anyway. Hopefully she was alright and was just ignoring him. He should get this sorted out, though. He'd send her an email, Sesshoumaru decided, going about the motions of teaching class.

Glancing at the clock, he nearly growled in frustration. This was ridiculous. He was getting way too worked up over the girl. He did want to rectify things though. "Alright, you guys are dismissed. Go

ahead," he said, shutting his book and sitting back on the desk. He turned, beginning to pack his own things, the students whispers about getting out early (an event that never happened) not going unnoticed. Hurrying, Sesshoumaru packed his things and left, making his way to his office to type up the email to Kagome.

After he settled himself, Sesshoumaru frowned at the blank email. A salutation would seem the best place to start.

*'Dear Kagome, I wanted to-'*

No. That didn't work.

*'Kagome,'*

Better.

*'I think we might have had a bit of a misunderstanding. I understand that you're angry with me. That really wasn't my intent.'*

That sounds stupid.

*'Kagome, I think we might have had a bit of a misunderstanding. I understand that you're angry with me. Though I am somewhat confused as to the reason why, I hope that we can ignore our past. Perhaps what I mean is not ignore,-'*

He didn't want to ignore their past together. As much as he might not want to admit it to anyone, including himself, Sesshoumaru was an alienated being in this world. The youkai were very few and far between. He rarely ever ran into one to which he could relate. Kagome was a tie to his past. He was a being to whom he could relate. He didn't quite understand her being here, but it must mean something.

*'-but rather discuss. I know that we were enemies in the past, and I hope that currently, as I believe I stated, that we could be friends.'*

He wanted someone who knew what he had been through. He wanted to talk to someone with whom he could be himself. No pretenses. The burden weighed heavily sometimes, and it would be a relief to not have that pressure of pretense.

*'I would be happy to answer your question if, in turn, you might answer mine. Perhaps we might try this again. I would very much like to meet with you again, same time, same place this afternoon. I hope to see you then. Sesshoumaru'*

He reread his email and quickly pressed the 'send' button before he changed his mind. Closing his computer, Sesshoumaru sighed, willing himself to relax and prepare for his next class.

As he willed the clock to go faster, he ended his classes early, hurrying to the café where they had met the last time, ordering a coffee and sitting down in a conspicuous place to wait. At first, he sat and twiddled his thumbs uncharacteristically as he drank the brew and waited for Kagome to show up. After

a half hour, he sat back and took out some papers to grade, waiting for the girl. He missed dinner. Unless you counted a brownie he got for free by smiling at the cashier. It was a quarter after seven by the time he finally left. Disappointment set in as he walked to his car and drove home. True, he'd gotten the papers graded, but Kagome never showed.

Irritated, Sesshoumaru decided that it was a nice night for another run.

He kept marking her as present.

The email didn't come until four days later. He'd just about given up hope when he saw her email in his inbox. He straightened in expectation as he opened the email.

*"Sesshoumaru,*

*I will meet with you. How about next Saturday morning, 10:00, at Jacob's Burgers? Let me know. Thank you.*

*Kagome"*

Jacob's Burgers? Where was that? He looked up, leaning towards the woman whose desk was near his. "Kathy, do you know where Jacob's Burgers is?"

The woman looked up as if surprised that he was talking to her. "Jacob's? Yes... It's on Mulrose Street, next to Sasha's and the Starbucks."

"Ah, thank you." He went back to his computer and quickly hit reply and sent back the message: *'Kagome, I would love to meet with you on Saturday. That sounds just fine. I look forward to it. Sesshoumaru'*

## 6 - Trading Stories Pt. 1

Frowning at the door, Kagome adjusted her sunglasses, hoping the restaurant was obscure enough that none of her classmates would see her and recognize her. Hopefully, she also looked like an older woman. Her frown deepened. He was just so damn conspicuous... She'd spent hours agonizing over what she was going to wear, asking Katy's advice, though it was hard to keep it a secret what she was dressing up for. Ridiculous. The words of his email ran through her head again: *Kagome, I would love to meet with you on Saturday. That sounds just fine. I look forward to it. Sesshoumaru*

She sighed, waiting for him to arrive, having gotten there early to pick the table, hoping to put herself on the upper hand. Her nerves grew jitterier as she checked her phone for the time. 9:58. He would arrive, she was sure, exactly at 10:00, because that's the type of person Sesshoumaru was.

Leaning down, she rustled through her purse for her lipstick. Kagome gave her reflection a last once-over before resettling herself in her seat. She looked at her phone again. 10:04. He was la—

"Kagome. Good morning." Sesshoumaru's shadow fell across her as he slid fluidly into a seat. He gave her a pleasant smile.

"I never thought you would be the type to be late," Kagome commented almost sourly. He probably did it on purpose, to throw her off.

"Late?" He looked a bit surprised as he checked his watch. "Ah, yes. I suppose I am. I apologise. You haven't ordered yet, have you?"

"No. I haven't." She took a sip of water. "Go ahead and order."

"Are you getting anything?"

"I was thinking about it."

"Oh? What were you going to get?"

"I don't know! They supposedly have good mushroom burgers..."

Sesshoumaru nodded and flagged the waitress who came over, bright smiles, hips swaying. Kagome rolled her eyes.

"I'll have two mushroom burgers. Bill to me, if you please. And a cola. Diet."

Kagome gaped. "N-no!" She waved her hands, protesting. "N-no! Split it please!"

Sesshoumaru winked at the woman and shook his head. "One tab is fine, thank you."

The waitress blushed and walked away.

“Sesshoumaru!” Kagome hissed. “You are *not* paying for me!” What was he doing?! Kagome went into panic mode. If he was thinking to put her in his debt, he had another thing coming—

“Don’t worry about it. I have a salary. You’re a student with an allowance. Allow me to treat you, so you don’t have to worry about money.”

Narrowing her eyes suspiciously, she pushed her sunglasses back up onto her head. “Why.”

“Why? Why what?”

“Why are you paying for me? You don’t have to.”

“Of course, but I was hoping to appease your anger some, and give a demonstration of good will. Is that so surprising?”

“Yes! Yes it is!! It’s because it’s *you!*” Kagome growled a sigh and laced her fingers through her hair in an attempt to get a hold of herself. Calm down. Just calm down. She took a deep breath and sat back, folding her hands on the table, straightening her spine. “Listen, Sesshoumaru. Why are you here?” she asked.

His eyebrow arched. “Why? I’m teaching here.”

“You know what I mean.”

He gave her a bittersweet smile, his voice a bit sour. “Starting with an easy question, are you?”

“If you answer mine, I’ll answer yours,” Kagome stated. True, she was curious, but more importantly, why was he coincidentally at the same school she was, and why was he so obsessed with gaining her good favour?

“It’s a long story, you know. There’s no simple answer,” he replied, leaning back in his chair. His bangs brushed his cheekbones as he shook his head.

“Of course there isn’t,” Kagome agreed. There was nearly five hundred years of history here. “I still expect the answer. Tell your story, Sesshoumaru. I’ll listen.”

“I left Japan years ago,” he said softly, his deep voice entering story-telling mode as his honey-amber eyes softened. “Though perhaps I should go back further... Time changes rapidly. I...”

Kagome’s face tightened as he paused. “I’m not looking for some pre-rehearsed, edited novel, Sesshoumaru,” she explained, the words softer than she had wanted.

“Of course. You’re the only person I’ll have told this to, you understand.”

Kagome nodded, understanding, from the Sesshoumaru *she* had known, he was a private person, the

necessity of privacy even more pressing in his current situation. “Yes, but that doesn’t mean that it can’t be pre-rehearsed.”

His hollow chuckle went through her. “Too true. Anyway. Rin married a human boy. He was killed, she was pregnant. She... nearly miscarried once, but survived. She had the baby, but died in childbirth.”

Why he’d started with Rin, Kagome didn’t understand, but knowing how the little girl had traveled with him, she knew he must have had great compassion, if not affection, for her.

“Rin was buried next to her husband. I... I raised her daughter.” Kagome nearly smiled at the thought of Sesshoumaru as a grandfather. “Rin’s girl, Hikari was her name, Hikari died from disease. She was...twenty four.”

Her heart tightening, Kagome pictured him. He probably hadn’t changed at all while everything changed around him.

“Anyway,” he continued, Kagome noticing his discomfort in telling her this. “I left Japan. I went to Africa. I became bored there, so I went and spent time in England and the British Isles. That too, soon bored me. India, Russia, Greenland, and then I migrated to Canada. That was... boring. I came to the United States after my brief stint in Canada. That was about 60 years ago. 1940s. I...”

When he looked up at her, she nodded almost imperceptibly, waiting for him to continue. He, of course, was skipping over a huge amount of details, but she got the gist of what he was saying. He shrugged and gave her an apologetic smile, a strange expression from the dog demon.

“What does that mean?”

“There’s nothing more.”

“What do you mean ‘there’s nothing more?’ You’ve been here for 60-70 years and there’s nothing more?” Raising her own eyebrow, Kagome leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms.

“I... I haven’t really done a whole lot here. I wrote books for a lack of anything else to do. There were only so many I could write. I got into teaching more by accident than anything else. So that’s what I’ve done.”

Narrowing her eyes, Kagome gave him a look. “You traveled, wrote books, and teach. Sesshoumaru, there’s more than that, I’m sure.”

He shrugged and leaned forward, lacing his fingers and leaning his chin on them. “True. But what about you? How about your story?”

Kagome stiffened, nearly blushing at his eyes staring at her. She shook her head. “We’ll do my story la—”

“Hello! Here’s your food!” The waitress interrupted her, setting their plates down on the table. “I hope you guys enjoy. Feel free to ask me if you need anything else.”

“Thank you,” Sesshoumaru said as Kagome nodded. When the waitress left, the dog demon looked at Kagome. “How about your story after we eat.”

Kagome gave him a reluctant nod, looking away, hoping he would forget about it by the time they were finished eating.

“Don’t worry,” he continued. “I won’t forget.” Sesshoumaru smiled and took a bite out of his burger.

---

Damn! There was no place to park! That was the one thing about college campuses; there was never any place to park—and if you wanted free parking? Forget it. Sesshoumaru drove around the block for the fourth time, having not calculated this into his schedule. Damn it! “Ah!” He stomped on the gas, spying a parking space, maneuvering his car into the small spot. Finally. Jumping out and adjusting his clothing, Sesshoumaru made his way casually towards the restaurant. He was late.

“Kagome,” he said as he walked up to the girl who was checking her phone. She was probably peeved. “Good morning.” He smiled, hoping to alleviate her tension.

It didn’t work. “I never thought you would be the type to be late.”

“Late?” He replied, pretending he hadn’t noticed the time as he checked his watch. “Ah, yes. I suppose I am. I apologise.” He was going to have to work really hard to gain her trust. “You haven’t ordered yet, have you?”

“No. I haven’t. Go ahead and order.”

“Are you getting anything?” Really hard. He sat and took a sip of the water glass that was presumably for him.

“I was thinking about it.”

“Oh? What are you going to get?” She certainly wasn’t forthcoming with her answers.

“I don’t know! They supposed have good mushroom burgers...”

He nodded and flagged the waitress who was quick to respond, swaying her hips to catch his attention. He ignored her flagrant attempts to catch his favour. “I’ll have two mushroom burgers. Bill to me, if you please. And a cola. Diet.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the girl’s jaw drop. “N-no!” Her hands waved in protest. “N-no! Split it please!”

Using the woman’s appreciation of his appearance to his advantage, Sesshoumaru winked and shook his head. “On tab is fine, thank you.” She blushed and ducked her head before walking away.

“Sesshoumaru!” Kagome hissed, blue eyes spitting fire behind her sunglasses. “You are *not* paying for me!”

That had backfired, he sighed mentally. “Don’t worry about it. I have a salary. You’re a student with an allowance. Allow me to treat you, so you don’t have to worry about money.”

Kagome pushed her sunglasses off of her face, giving him a clearer view of her emotions. “Why.”

“Why? Why what?”

“Why are you paying for me? You don’t have to.”

“Of course, but I was hoping to appease your anger some, and give a demonstration of good will. Is that so surprising?” Obviously, her view of him was greatly out-dated. He’d lived among humans long enough to understand the way they lived and how they thought.

“Yes! Yes it is!! It’s because it’s *you!*” The girl gripped her hair in frustration, growling softly. He almost chuckled. After she had regained control of her mental functions, she sat back and met his eyes.

“Listen, Sesshoumaru. Why are you here?”

Choosing to misread her question, he replied, “Why? I’m teaching here.”

“You know what I mean.”

Of course he did, he just preferred not to jump to that... “Starting with an easy question, are you?”

“If you answer mine, I’ll answer yours,” she said, her voice firm, broking no argument.

“It’s a long story, you know. There’s no simple answer,” he warned her as he leaned back.

“Of course there isn’t,” she agreed readily. “I still expect the answer. Tell your story, Sesshoumaru. I’ll listen.”

He smiled to himself. This was what he wanted. Here was the bridge. Here was where they could connect. “I left Japan years ago. Though perhaps I should go back further... Time changes rapidly. I...” Where to start? Pain threatened the corners of his heart as he thought how best to tell it.

“I’m not looking for some pre-rehearsed edited novel, Sesshoumaru,” she said, saying the words that he needed, almost as if she understood. Sesshoumaru expected she did.

“Of course. You’re the only person I’ll have told this to, you understand,” he warned her again.

The girl nodded, and Sesshoumaru trusted that she *did* understand. “Yes, but that doesn’t mean that it can’t be pre-rehearsed.”

“Too true. Anyway.” Giving a mirthless laugh, Sesshoumaru nodded and began. “Rin married a human boy. He was killed, she was pregnant. She... nearly miscarried once, but survived. She had the baby, but

died in childbirth.” This was where his affection for Japan had died. Rin had been the light in his life, the joy. Her happiness gave him pleasure. “Rin was buried next to her husband. I... I raised her daughter. Rin’s girl, Hikari was her name, Hikari, died from disease. She was... twenty four.” She was so young, so like her mother. So much happiness lost and wasted away, the same with her body. After Hikari had died, there was nothing left in that land. There was no more use for the daiyoukai, the House of the West, his lineage. Youkai were dying out, and so his place in the world was coveted. There was no use in fighting for something he did not want. So he chose to blend. “Anyway, I left Japan... I went to Africa. I became bored there, so I went and spent time in England and the British Isles. That too, soon bored me. India, Russia, Greenland, and then I migrated to Canada. That was... boring. I came to the United States after my brief stint in Canada. That was about 60 years ago. 1940s. I...” He paused, looking up at Kagome, a bit surprised to see her serious blue eyes trained on him. The in between bits weren’t so interesting, but he had learned many things, both about humans and about himself. He caught Kagome’s nod, and gave her a small shrug and sorry smile.

“What does that mean?” Kagome looked confused.

“There’s nothing more.”

“What do you mean ‘there’s nothing more?’ You’ve been here for 60-70 years and there’s nothing more?” Kagome leaned back, folding her arms across her chest, giving him a challenging look.

Feeling at a lack for detail, Sesshoumaru continued, “I... I haven’t really done a whole lot here. I wrote books for a lack of anything else to do. There were only so many I could write. I got into teaching more by accident than anything else. So that’s what I’ve done.”

She still looked suspicious. “You traveled, wrote books, and teach. Sesshoumaru, there’s more than that, I’m sure.”

Shrugging, the demon leaned forward and laced his fingers, setting his chin atop them. “True.” There was more. There had been incidents. He had been required to move, change his appearance, create a new identity... He had had run-ins with humans who had inklings of what he was and there had been deaths. They got too close. There were women... Only a very few, and none could be kept too close, so they always left in the end. “But what about you? How about your story?”

She stiffened at the sudden turn of conversation, flushing slightly. Shaking her head, she deflected, “We’ll do my story la—”

“Hello! Here’s your food!” The waitress cut Kagome off, much to Sesshoumaru’s irritation, but set their plates down on the table. It did smell good, he had to admit. “I hope you guys enjoy! Feel free to ask me if you need anything else.”

“Thank you,” Sesshoumaru dismissed. He waited until she left before saying, “How about your story after we eat.”

Kagome nodded reluctantly, clearly not pleased about being cornered into spilling her secrets.

“Don’t worry,” he assured “I won’t forget.” He gave her a smile and then picked up his burger and

took a bite.

## 7 - Trading Stories Pt. 2

Author notes: I just want to say, thanks for all of your reviews. ^\_\_^ They keep my going! I really appreciate you guys leaving them. There was something else I wanted to say, but of course... I've forgotten... haha.

Right, I remembered: There are potential ending spoilers in Kagome's story... Just so you know. But I am taking some liberties.

Anyway. Please enjoy!

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She wiped her mouth and sat back, satisfied. They hadn't talked much while eating, much to Kagome's relief. He'd left much out of his story when he told her, so that meant it was fair for her to do the same. She frowned, thinking of her own past and how best to avoid breaking down and sobbing hysterically as she so often did when she dwelled for too long on the subject. Glancing at the man across from her from beneath her bangs, Kagome opened her mouth to speak.

"Hey! You guys finished? Here's the check, Sir. I hope you guys enjoyed your food!" the waitress interrupted.

Snapping her mouth shut again, Kagome didn't meet the waitress's eyes, pushing her plate towards her. "Thanks. Yeah, it was good."

They sat in silence after the waitress left, returning Sesshoumaru's card. Sesshoumaru leaned forward, his face familiarly unreadable. "So. Now that we're finished..." Kagome's heart sank. "I would like to hear your story."

Steeling her heart, Kagome sighed deeply seeing no way out of telling him. "I'm sure you know how it feels to lose everything that you love and know. You understand that, Sesshoumaru. But losing everything you love all at the same time..." She shook her head, saying quietly, "It's rough, to put it lightly. I don't even know what happened to them. Inu Yasha, Sango, Miroku... Shippo..." She watched his face for a reaction. His honey eyes may as well have been a mirror. Nothing to see but her own reflection. "I loved him, Sesshoumaru. I still do. Apparently the universe thought it fit to only give me as much time with him as I'd spent in the past. Three years. I had three years of happiness with him, Sesshoumaru. Then..." She took a deep breath, willing her heart to beat more slowly, tamping down on her rising emotions. "And then I was dragged back to the present. Though perhaps I should back up." She dragged another breath through her unwilling lungs, pushing her hair back out of her face. "As you know, I traveled with your brother, as the Shikon miko. That's how you knew me." She looked up at him.

Sesshoumaru nodded. "Right. I remember."

“This is really my time. I belong here, but through some... I don’t know. Somehow I traveled back in time, through the well. The Bone Eater’s Well that I wrote about in my paper. It’s all true. I don’t know how it worked exactly, but I was able to hop back and forth between the Feudal Era and this present whenever I went through the well.”

“Can you still?” Sesshoumaru interrupted, leaning forward.

Kagome gave him a withering look, her eyes beginning to burn. “Do you think if I could, I would be here? I was in love with him Sesshoumaru. I’m certain he’s long dead by now... He would have found me...” She cleared her throat and continued. “Let me finish and then tell me about what you know.”

Sesshoumaru nodded and Kagome thought she saw an almost imperceptible tightening around his eyes.

“Anyway, after Naraku was defeated and the jewel purified, then I returned to the present. I spent three years here without him, without them, and then the well happened to open up again, and I was able to return to the past. I...” her voice broke. “I was only there for three years and then I was—I don’t even know how to describe it to you. I was just... yanked back to the future—my present. This time. The well didn’t work again. Believe me. I tried. I guess my mother got sick of me moping around so sent me here. I broke my ankle one time, jumping into the well.” She smiled bitterly, eyes watering. “Ugh! It’s ridiculous!” She scrubbed at her eyes, wiping away the tears, feeling pathetic. “This... Ugh. Nevermind. I’ll just... I’ll be right back. I’m going to the washro—” Kagome made to stand up but stopped as her wrist was grabbed. Sesshoumaru’s long fingers circled her wrist, but she didn’t dare meet his eyes for fear of bursting into tears.

“Kagome...” he said so quietly and gently that it almost broke her. “Don’t worry about it. I understand. You were right. I *do* understand.”

She sank back into her seat off of her shaking legs. “Don’t, Sesshoumaru. Stop, please. If you be nice to me I’ll cry. I don’t want to,” Kagome threatened, not wanting her former enemy to see her so weak, neglecting to remember the times he’d probably seen fighting futilely back in the Feudal Era.

She felt more than saw him shake his head. “Don’t worry about it, really,” he continued kindly. “I won’t mind, because I understand, more than anyone else. Would you... like to go somewhere more private?”

Kagome shook her head. “No, no, just... just let me calm down,” she whispered, knowing he’d hear her, the tears sliding down her cheeks as she blinked, taking deep breaths. Well this was embarrassing. Definitely what she had been afraid of and definitely not what she had wanted to happen. She looked up through her bangs again, Sesshoumaru’s hand lingering on top of hers. Kagome flushed, sniffing, still not willing to meet Sesshoumaru’s eyes. He did understand. “Um...” She pulled at her hand gently.

“Ah. Yes. Um. Sorry. Of course,” Sesshoumaru said quickly, sounding almost flustered, as he pulled his hands away slowly.

Bending down to her bag, Kagome pulled out the pack of tissues, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose. “I’m sorry. I just—”

“You don’t have to apologise for something that makes you unhappy, Kagome. You don’t need to apologise for emotions either,” interrupted the demon. “You should trust me on that one.”

Laughing suddenly, Kagome sniffled, finally meeting his amber eyes and giving him a small smile. “I suppose you’re right on that one...”

“Of course.” He gave her a smile that made her feel fluttery and then stood. “Well, now that I’ve caused you enough trauma, shall we go? Would you like dessert at... Dairy Queen?”

Her eyes almost spun at the thought of Sesshoumaru even saying the words ‘Dairy Queen,’ let alone eating there. “Um...”

“If you don’t want to, that’s fine, but I just thought I should offer, to make up for making you cry,” the tall man said, offering her his hand.

Kagome kept her face down lest she regard the man like an alien. This was so not Sesshoumaru.

“Kagome?”

“What’s wrong with you?” She began to giggle, the absurdity of the situation finally getting to her.

“I beg your pardon?”

Eyes watering again, Kagome continued to giggle, her shoulders quivering with the effort to keep them quiet. “Nevermind... Let’s just go get ice cream...” Picking up her bag and slinging it over her shoulder, she walked passed Sesshoumaru, shaking her head at herself.

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Sesshoumaru waited while Kagome stalled, eating, wiping her mouth, avoiding his eyes, drinking. He let her. When she had finished, he pretended he didn’t notice her eyes on him. He could fairly see the words written across her face. She was looking for some way out of telling her story. But if he had told his, then she would have to tell hers. He could smell that she was uncomfortable and nervous. Admittedly, he felt badly about that, but curiosity over-ruled his pity.

When she opened her mouth to say something, the waitress zeroed in on their table. “Hey! You guys finished? Here’s the check, Sir. I hope you guys enjoyed your food!” Kagome’s mouth snapped shut with an audible (to him) snap.

Sesshoumaru soothed his irritation as he accepted the slip of paper and pulled his wallet from his back pocket, and handing her his card.

“Thanks,” Kagome muttered. “Yeah, it was good.”

Sesshoumaru leaned forward on his elbows, gazing at the girl. He was highly curious about why she was here, and what her story was. There was no reasonable explanation that he had been able to fathom, and her being a demon was not plausible. She was a miko. He knew that much. The waitress

returned with his card and then left. “So,” he began, how they were alone. “Now that we’re finished... I would like to hear your story.” Her unease came off her in waves.

He watched her as she mentally prepared herself. “I’m sure you know how it feels to lose everything that you love and know. You understand that, Sesshoumaru. But losing everything at the same time...”

There was truth in that statement. Losing everything at the same time would be devastating, but watching those that you loved grow old and die was just as heart-breaking. Now was not the time, however, for comparing heartache.

“It’s rough, to put it lightly,” she said, his own emotions echoing the pain he saw on her face. “I don’t even know what happened to them. Inu Yasha, Sango, Miroku... Shippo...” Here she looked up at him as if she expected some sort of reaction.

He gave her none. The mention of his brother’s name had long ceased to ruffle him. There was simply no point any more. What she said next, however, did give him cause to rethink his ambivalence, though he was unsure why.

“I loved him, Sesshoumaru. I still do. Apparently the universe thought it fit to only give me as much time with him as I’d spent in the past. Three years. I had three years of happiness with him, Sesshoumaru. Then...” Another deep breath as her heart sped up. “And then I was dragged back to the present. Though perhaps I should back up.”

That would help him considerably. What she was saying didn’t make sense. Time travel? That was impossible.

“As you know, I traveled with your brother, as the Shikon miko. That’s how you knew me.” She looked up, her blue eyes filled with hurt.

True enough. Perhaps time travel wasn’t as absurd as scientists might believe it. He was a demon, for goodness sake. Humans had long forgotten their belief in such creatures, so perhaps... “Right. I remember.”

“This is really my time. I belong here, but through some...I don’t know. Somehow I traveled back in time, through the well. The Bone Eater’s Well that I wrote about in my paper. It’s all true. I don’t know how it worked exactly, but I was able to hop back and forth between the Feudal Era and this present whenever I went through the well.”

“Can you still?” Sesshoumaru inquired, wondering for himself if he could go back, just... Just for fun? He could... If he went back, he could see Rin, he could—he met her eyes and almost shrank back from her stark stare of ridicule and anguish.

“Do you think if I could, I would be here? I was in love with him Sesshoumaru. I’m certain he’s long dead by now... He would have found me...” She stopped and cleared her throat, emotion burning brightly in her scent. “Let me finish and then tell me about what you know.”

He should. However, if the past still pained her this much, then perhaps that would wait for later. He did

know of his brother's demise, as well as her friends. He had kept quiet tabs on his brother and the humans, never realizing that the information might ever be useful in the future, might assuage her questions. He nodded, realizing that that same information was still painful for him as well.

"Anyway, after Naraku was defeated and the jewel purified, then I returned to the present. I spent three years here without him, without them, and then the well happened to open up again, and I was able to return to the past. I..." Her voice broke and her eyes seemed to focus on something else that wasn't in the restaurant with them. "I was only there for three years and then I was—I don't even know how to describe it to you. I was just... yanked back to the future—my present. This time. The well didn't work again. Believe me. I tried. I guess my mother got sick of me moping around so sent me here. I broke my ankle one time, jumping into the well." She gave him a bittersweet, aching smile, the scent of tears drifting across the table.

"Ugh! It's ridiculous!" She exclaimed suddenly, scrubbing her eyes to wipe away the tears. "This... Ugh. Nevermind. I'll just... I'll be right back. I'm going to the washro—"

Sesshoumaru grabbed her wrist, stopping her from rising completely. If she left, he would lose her, any hope of a connection that they might make. He didn't want her to cry alone which was, undoubtedly, what she would do. Females often did.

"Kagome..." He said as gently as he manage, waiting for her to meet his eyes. "Don't worry about it. I understand. You were right. I *do* understand." She was very close to crying, upset and distressed. He waited, not realizing that he was holding his breath, for her to sit again. He didn't want her to raise those barriers again.

Finally sinking back into her seat, Kagome still didn't meet his eyes. "Don't, Sesshoumaru. Stop, please. If you be nice to me I'll cry. I don't want to."

He almost smiled. He'd seen her cry before. He knew his brother had pushed her to the task before. It didn't matter. They were both pitiful beings, there was no reason for her obvious shame. He shook his head. "Don't worry about it, really. I won't mind, because I understand. Would you... like to go somewhere more private?"

The girl shook her head and whispered, "No, no, just... just let me calm down." He could smell the tears, but let her cry, pretending not to notice. He waited patiently, watching her, his hand resting on top of her small one. She finally peeked at him through her bangs and then pulled lightly on her hand under his. "Um..."

Oops. "Ah. Yes. Um. Sorry. Of course," he said too quickly for his pride, pulling his hand back, wanting it to linger there.

Kagome leaned over and returned upright with a tissue, taking care of the evidence of her distress. "I'm sorry. I just—"

"You don't have to apologise for something that makes you unhappy, Kagome," Sesshoumaru quickly interrupted. "You don't need to apologise for emotions either. You should trust me on that one." He joked, hoping she might cheer up more quickly.

To his instant pleasure, she laughed, sniffing. Finally looking up at him, she gave him a small smile that meant broken barriers and a bright potential. "I suppose you're right on that one."

"Of course," he replied, hardly helping the smile that curled his lips, pleased also by her increasing heartbeat. Standing, he continued, "Well, now that I've caused you enough trauma, shall we go? Would you like dessert at... Dairy Queen?" He liked Dairy Queen. He liked their Oreo blizzards. And treating the girl might further ingratiate himself. He held a hand out to her, perplexed by the sudden surprise lacing her scent. She didn't look at him. "Kagome?"

"What is wrong with you?" His surprise barely had time to register before she giggled.

"I beg your pardon?"

The girl continued her giggling, standing. Thinking rapidly for the reason behind his mirth, he came up with no reason. "Nevermind..." she said. "Let's just go get ice cream." He almost missed it as she leaned over and grabbed her bag, walking by him, her scent full in his nose. As she shook her head, he dumped some cash on the table and then hurried after her, still wondering what she had thought was so funny.

## 8 - Reflections

The rest of Saturday passed quickly. Sunday, however, dragged. Tossing herself back on her bed, Kagome sighed. Michelle had gone home for the weekend as usual, leaving Kagome in the room alone. It was private time Kagome usually relished, but this weekend it was maddening. With no distractions from her room-mate, all Kagome had to think about was Sesshoumaru and their little 'date,' though the word made her shiver with something that she couldn't really put a finger on. Setting her computer aside, she tip-toed down to Katy's room and knocked on the door. "Katy?"

When there was no answer, Kagome knocked harder. "Katy?"

"Mmf... C'min!" came the muffled reply.

Pushing the door open, Kagome stuck her head in. "Katy? Are you awake?"

"Y'm 'wake..." Katy raised her tousled head from her pillow and blinked bleary-eyed at Kagome. "Sup...?"

With an affectionate smile, Kagome walked in and shut the door behind her, perching herself on Katy's desk chair. "I'm sorry for waking you. I was...well, I just wanted someone to talk to me and keep me company."

"Mm, no. No problem," Katy replied, sliding off of her lofted bed and heading towards her closet. "What's the story?"

"Well..." Kagome was suddenly shy as she dropped her eyes and shifted on her feet.

"Woah," Katy exaggerated, seeing her in the mirror. "I know that look. You met a *boy*! Who was it! What happened? What's the—you have to tell me the *whole* story!"

"Woah, woah, woah—Katy! Don't just... don't jump to conclusions!" Kagome protested. "This isn't—"

"Don't you lie to me." Katy cocked her hip and gave her a look. "You need to tell me the *whole* story. Don't tell me that isn't why you came in here. You're just bustin' to get it off your chest."

Almost shocked by the amount of perception the girl was capable of, Kagome gaped at her. "Wow."

"I know, I'm awesome, right?" was Katy's sly reply. "So. Spill."

Giving an exaggerated sigh as if Katy were pulling the information from her, Kagome rolled her shoulders and her eyes. "Fine, fine..."

"Pop a squat and spill, sister!"

Kagome couldn't help but laugh as she followed the other girl's advice. "Well, you're going to...not be too happy with me, but—"

Katy gaped. "No. Way. You didn't. You... Did you do what I think you did?"

"Yeah, probably. I saw Professor Inukami." The false name suddenly didn't seem so putrid in her mouth.

"Alone!"

"Yup. Alone. We met yesterday. At Jacob's. We had mushroom burgers. It was very strange to me."

"Strange? Why? He's not that old."

Kagome nearly choked. Old didn't even cut it. Sesshoumaru was ancient.

"You okay?" Katy queried.

"Um... fine. Yeah. Fine."

"So what did you talk about?" Katy grabbed a brush and dragged it through her hair. "I said I wanted to hear all."

Shrugging, Kagome continued, "Well, we talked about... the past, I guess; by which I mean our stories, you know, how our life went and stuff like that."

"Wow, deep stuff on a first date!"

"Don't call it that. It wasn't really a date. It was more of a meeting. It turns out that, since he's from Japan, we actually had mutual acquaintances. Small world, huh?" She wrapped her arms around herself, chills creeping down her spine. Small world indeed. Fate was cruel. "And then we went to Dairy Queen for dessert. He dropped me off after that."

"Ooh, now he knows where you live! How scandalous!" Katy exclaimed, grinning.

"Yeah..."

"Man," the girl said, leaning back over her bed "I'm so jealous! Lucky you! You've got the attention of the most gorgeous guy like... ever! I'm surprised he isn't an actor! I'd go see his movies even if they were horrible!"

Kagome laughed. "No you wouldn't."

Katy replied blandly, "If I got to see *that* face on the silver screen? Heck yes! I'd probably see it more than once. Guh, he's gorgeous!"

The last part was true. Undeniable, in fact, but it didn't change that he was Sesshoumaru. Which was

just weird. “Yeah, but he’s our *professor*.”

“Psh. Girls have had affairs with professors before! And he’s not married. I haven’t ever seen a wedding band. And trust me, I’ve been keeping close watch. If you track [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com), there’s no mention of it ever.” Katy giggled. “And the issue has been of hot debate.”

Of course that made sense. He’d never be able to keep a wife and his secret. “Ew. That’s just gross. We’re definitely *not* having an affair. Ugh. Never.” She never would, either. The idea of sleeping with Sesshoumaru gave her chills. Part of her mind wondered curiously at the idea of sex, sex with *him*, but most of her fiercely rejected it as unnatural. Kagome was in love with Inu Yasha, and it hurt to be close to Sesshoumaru when she knew that he knew him after she did. “Oh!”

“What’s up?”

shoot. Sesshoumaru hadn’t told her about Inu Yasha, speaking of him... “N-nothing. I just forgot an assignment that I need to remember to do. Sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.” She gave Katy a weak smile.

“No problem. So.” Her grin gave Kagome cause to worry. “Are you going to see him again? Can I come along?”

“Yes to the first question, and definitely no to the second.”

“Kagomeeeeeee,” Katy whined. “Can I sneak and spy on you guys like you’re a celebrity couple?”

“What!?! *Definitely* not!” Kagome stood. “I think I have to get back to my work. Thanks for listening, Katy. If you sneak on us, I’m going to have to...” Kagome couldn’t think of a good enough threat. “I’ll do something.”

“Okay. Thanks for telling me. I want all the juicy details, don’t forget.” Katy waved to her as she left the room.

Bringing up her email as soon as she was back in her room, Kagome typed quickly, *Sesshoumaru, You never told me about Inu Yasha. You promised. When can you tell me? Kagome*. She pressed the send button and then sat back, returning to her reading. That didn’t stop her, however, from obsessively checking her inbox every ten minutes for the rest of her weekend.

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Sesshoumaru returned home. He dropped his bag next to the door. He had, oddly enough, enjoyed keeping company with the girl. She was... entertaining. And he could, for the first time, be himself. That, Sesshoumaru knew, was the all-important clincher. It was a relief, for the first time in many many years, for him to finally be able to be himself and let some of his barriers down. Sitting down in his chair in front

of his TV, Sesshoumaru grabbed the remote and flipped it on, the background noise pleasant. He loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar.

His apartment was sparse, Sesshoumaru noted somewhat with regret. It was all out of necessity, really. He moved around too often to really acquire furnishings and knick-knacks. Shuffling over to the refrigerator, he pulled out a beer, pausing to gaze at the box of things that he kept with him, sitting on top of the fridge. A bitter smile curved his lips as he popped the lid off his beer and took a swig, returning to his chair, the light glow of the TV reflecting off his already pale skin. Sesshoumaru propped his feet up on the low table in front of him. He sliced through the tape with his nail. Sesshoumaru paused. shoot. He'd forgotten to tell Kagome about his brother, he realized as he leaned back and pulled out the fuzzy black and white photo that he had. He could easily have it touched up, but he liked the original. He pulled out another black and white frayed photo that had Inu Yasha next to Kouga, both in some absurd western-type clothing that hid most of their demon features. Kagome would like to see them, he imagined. He would show her the next time they met.

He took another swig of the beer, melancholy insistent when he picked up one of Rin's hair clips. There were also belongings from Hikari in the small box as well as other small tokens that meant so much of him. There was a scrap from his trademark kimono. The rest had all but fallen apart.

Tossing back the rest of the beer, he stood, feeling uncharacteristically impulsive. He kicked off his shoes and pulled the navy socks off, curling his toes against the concrete-like carpet before pushing the resistant door open to the small balcony of his apartment. The night air was refreshingly cool against his skin, but not too cold. Sesshoumaru flicked the tie back into the room and shed his shirt. A manic grin crossed his lips briefly moments before he leapt from the balcony and soared through the sky like he hadn't done in ages.

Tonight he didn't care that he might be seen. People always thought they saw things that they would later write off as having one too many drinks, or taking drugs, dreaming, or just plain having imagined. Tonight he needed the natural light of the moon to replace the TV's glare. Tonight he wanted to have the wind on his face and not streamlining over his car, creeping in the window. Tonight he wanted it raw like he had all those years ago in Japan.

Touching down on the top of the tallest apartment complex, he perched on the edge of the building, gazing across the night filled with artificial light. He hadn't missed the past this badly in a long time. And as much as he wanted to blame the girl, Sesshoumaru knew that she had only exacerbated his problem. This had been a long time building. True, she had returned those memories to the surface, and she brought up people and places that he hadn't thought of despite teaching the class all week long. It was really just an excuse to blame Kagome.

The cold wind of the upper sky blew through his ponytail, whipping it into his face. He pulled the hair band out and let his platinum blond hair blow about his shoulders. It didn't feel the same. Gazing down at his manicured nails, he curled a scornful lip, once again the surge for the old days flaring strongly. Maybe he would blame the girl. But only a little. He hadn't felt this alive in a very long time.

Throwing caution to the wind, Sesshoumaru lifted the charm that kept his true features hidden and lifted it over his head. Immediately he could feel the once-familiar weight of his hair, his ears, teeth, and youkai power enveloping him. Grinning into the moon, he leapt again. Joining the heavy clouds in the

sky, Sesshoumaru bathed in the heavens and laughed through the lightning.

Only when he was thoroughly soaked did Sesshoumaru return to his balcony with a light heart. Wringing his hair out, he stepped inside leaving wet footprints on the way to his bathroom where he took a warm shower. It was therapeutic. Boxers only, he returned to where he'd left the TV on and plopped into his chair, once again returning his feet to their place on the table. Feeling around for his briefcase, Sesshoumaru gave a mild groan of annoyance when he realized he'd left it at the door. He plodded over towards the door and grabbed it only to return to his chair and take his computer out. Setting it on his lap, he flipped the lid open and waited until it powered up before logging into his email.

He grinned to himself when he saw Kagome's email address. Of course she had sent him an email. He opened it.

*"Sesshoumaru, You never told me about Inu Yasha. You promised. When can you tell me? Kagome,"* he read aloud in his silent apartment.

Sesshoumaru leaned back in his chair. It would be a while. He was busy with papers for another class, his new manuscript to prep for publishing—he'd gotten the letter while he'd been out with the girl. Not to mention there was a conference coming up. He hit 'reply.'

*'Kagome, I regretfully apologise for neglecting to tell that story. I will not, however be able to see you for a bit of a while seeing as I have many responsibilities in the coming two weeks. I will promise you that I will tell you the story about my brother. You do, after all, deserve to know. We should meet again. I will have to let you know my availability sometime in the middle of the week after next. I did enjoy our time together Saturday. Thank you for the pleasant lunch date. Sesshoumaru'*

Leaning back after he pressed the 'send' button, Sesshoumaru checked through the rest of his emails and closed his eyes.

It wasn't until his doorbell rang for the third time that he got up. The sun was shining through his window and balcony door. He groaned. Slept in the chair again. That was a bad habit into which to get, Sesshoumaru realized as he sat up and put his computer down on the table.

"Mister Inukami! Hello?" The woman outside his door pounded again.

What did she want? Shuffling towards the door, Sesshoumaru cursed as he saw his wild reflection of a taiyoukai in the mirror. He rushed back to his bedroom and grabbed the charm, yanking it over his ears. The nearest shirt was good enough, he decided, hurrying to answer the door. "Hello?" He pulled the wooden object open.

"Miste—Oh." The woman stared.

"Can I help you?"

She flushed. "I'm your... um. Well. Pardon me. I'm your landlord? You'd put in a request for

maintenance. I was here to follow up...”

He stared at her dumbly, running a hand through his unruly hair. “Mainte—oh yes. My balcony door does not lock properly. And it’s hard to open.” He stepped back and let her in to do the inspection. By the time she left, it was well after noon. Having nothing better to do, Sesshoumaru settled into his work schedule and waited for the new week to start.