Tale Of A Youkai and His Tiny, Little Human

by Niglia

Summary

In which Kagome Higurashi falls into the well as a child, a young Sesshoumaru finds her and decides to keep her for himself.
A story told in little pieces.

Notes

A/N. Hello everyone! I’m so, so excited to be here, posting my first ever SessKag fanfiction, I can hardly stop myself from babbling non-stop, LOL. Okay so just so you know, English is not my mother tongue; so if there are any mistakes or wrong saying or something like that, I would really appreciate if you’d let me know. After all, you learn from your mistakes! :D Nuff said: please enjoy the reading! Yours, Niglia.
It had been a strange noise to distract him from the hunt and scare away his prey, a kind of hissing and sucking together, followed by a slight tremor of the ground and the sudden silence of the whole forest. Then, in the quiet, came a faint sound.

Sesshoumaru straightened, leaving the crouch and standing up in all his small stature: he was conflicted. His father had given him until sunset, and then he would have to return to the camp with a prize worthy of the first-born of the Great Inu No Taisho. And if at first he had intended to ignore the hum, and classify it as an unwanted distraction that would simply made him waste time and daylight, in the end he could not help but give in to his curiosity.

He had then turned around and had followed that choked echo with the same scrupulous concentration he had taken when hunting, sharpening his senses and noticing that the noise acquired volume and clarity as he forwarded in the forest. He did not know the territory – it was only the second time he set foot in the East – but the young demon was not afraid of getting lost, he was sure he would have found his father also blindfolded and with his hands tied.

This did not prevent him, however, from feeling some apprehension when the tips of his boots stood on the edge of a small clearing, which would have gone unnoticed had not been for the old well standing exactly in the middle of it. The leaves of the ivy that covered the wooden frame had acquired a golden hue at the approach of sunset, and their presence was probably a sign that the well had to be disused, or simply abandoned.

Now that he was so close, Sesshoumaru recognized that noise for what it really was: a small and desperate hiccups alternating rapid and nervous breathing, coming exactly from inside the well.

The young youkai froze, fearing a trap. He lifted his nose and took deep breaths examining the smells carried by the wind, but he did not feel anything more than the scent of the forest, the small stream that flowed downstream and the delicious fragrance of flowers, sunshine and summer hovering around the well.

It seemed that there was no danger.

Sesshoumaru stepped forward then, and the sound of the grass crunching under his feet abruptly put an end to the crying; but he stopped again when a voice, weak and frail as the chirping of a baby bird, climbed up the walls of the well until it reaches his perfect hearing.

“Is there anyone out there? … Mama… Jii-san?”
Sesshoumaru sprinted toward the structure, frowning and with the claws of a hand ready to attack if the creature revealed suspicious intentions. He cleared his throat, modulating it to resemble his father’s, and thundered.

“Are you a demon?”

“I’m a girl”, the voice answered, slightly trembling.

Sesshoumaru didn’t understand that answer, so he changed his question.

“Are you a human?”

This time the voice snorted annoyed through its tears. “I’m a little girl”, it repeated, stressing the word as if it was in itself rather exhaustive.

“Hn”, Sesshoumaru said.

Words count: 537 words.
When he jumped over the edge of the well and landed gracefully on the bottom, the little girl screamed.

"Shush", Sesshoumaru said.

He crouched in front of her in order to be on the same level, and cocked his head to one side in a gesture that betrayed interest. He watched her eyes red and moist by dint of crying, her tousled hair, her flushed cheeks, her teeth nibbling her lips and her little nose that curled from time to time when she sniffed.

Leaning toward her, and ignoring the slight tremors that continued to shake her, Sesshoumaru began to snuffle curiously through her hair, behind her ears and along her neck, realizing that the delightful scent of flowers and sun and summer that he had smelt in the clearing came entirely from her.

She was clearly a human, but she did not smell like any ningen he had met during the various explorations with his father.

He straightened up and began to stare at her, ten times more curious than he was before.

"Why are you in the well?" He asked.

The girl sniffled uncertainly, and she curled up her legs against her chest. "I... I fell", she murmured with a slight hint of embarrassment. "I was chasing Buyo, and he jumped on the edge of the well, and I was climbing, and... I fell."

"Who is this Buyo?"

"He's my cat…"

Sesshoumaru hadn't smell any feline nearby, or he would have undoubtedly hunted it.

"And where is he, now?"

That last question snatched her another sob. "I don't know."

"Hh." Sesshoumaru stared at her in silence, noting for the first time the oddity of her blue eyes – he had never seen humans with eyes that color – and then he dared to stretch a finger at her, gently touching her cheeks covered with freckles. His father had repeatedly stated that humans were fragile, and Sesshoumaru did so careful not to hurt her carelessly with the tip of his claw.
He gently touched the skin under her left eye, watching her trembling lashes and the pupil dilating imperceptibly at the contact with his hand. The young demon inhaled discreetly, and he studied the nuances of the little human female's perfume, noting that, despite the obvious stress and sadness emanating from her in waves, he could detect not even a hint of fear.

"You're not afraid of me?" He asked then, still caressing her and letting her feel the delicate scraping of his own claws on her neck, causing a little wrinkling on her skin.

She shook her head in silence.

"Why?" He insisted, eager to understand.

The child still did not answer, merely shrugged.

The young youkai frowned. His father had always told him that humans fear what they do not know and do not understand, and that the terror they feel toward the superior race that are the youkai was caused by a deep instinct of survival and preservation centuries old – so why this small wren of a human infant did not fear him?

Sesshoumaru did not know whether to feel uncomfortable, or in awe.

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**Word Count:** 516 words.
Sesshoumaru looked up at the rim of the well, noting that the sun had already come and gone, and the sky was already beginning slowly to dye black. He had only himself to blame for that deviation that had prevented him from carrying out the task assigned to him by his father, and yet...

Perhaps his hunt was not a complete disaster. Who knows what his father would have said once he would return with a human instead of the trivial game that certainly it was expected of him?

_He will certainly be proud_, he said to himself, taking a decision.

Sesshoumaru turned and crouched in front of her. “Come”, he said. “I’ll take you out of here.”

He waited for an interminable few seconds that the child rustled up sufficient courage to climb on his back as his father had done with him several times; finally, he heard the rustle of her clothes, a faint sigh, and a pair of tiny hands resting on his shoulders for balance.

Instinctively he reached out behind him to grab the human under her legs and to better accommodate her back against him so she would not slip, then he straightened again to check that her grip was stable. It was: her soft and thin arms tightened immediately around his neck with a firm grasp, and had he been a human, she could have almost strangled him.

“Hold on”, he told her. When he felt her nod against his shoulder, he jumped.

Although he had not yet mastered the trick of manipulating his youki and make it solid beneath his feet, a method favored by his father to move quickly, Sesshoumaru boasted a considerable strength in every muscle of his body, which made him the envy for youkai far older than he. Whereby, going out of the well with that little push proved to be a very poor challenge.

Still, hearing the strangled groan full of terror and wonder of the human, and feeling her fingers cling like little claws into the fabric of his haori, he could not help but feel a twinge of pride.

Once they were in the clearing, Sesshoumaru narrowed his eyes and expanded his aura in search of potential threats to his prey. When his youki snaked from the center of his being in coils and slipped outside, like threads of water that gradually took possession of the land, the little girl trembled against his back as if she was experiencing his power as tingling on her skin.

“Mh… cold”, she whispered, burying her face in his neck.

_Intrigued_, the young youkai again harnessed his aura, which disappeared shortly like water absorbed by dry soil. Immediately the human ceased to tremble, letting out a sigh of relief.

_Hn_, Sesshoumaru thought.

The human took him right away from his contemplations. “Thank you, ah... you didn’t tell me your
name”, she realized in a low voice, without changing position.

“Sesshoumaru,” he said absently. Why he had not yet removed her from his person?

“Mh,” she murmured. “You have a nice smell, Sesshoumaru-chan.”

Before he could respond with some harsh protest, reproaching her that sudden display of familiarity, the little human slipped cozily into a deep sleep.

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Words count: 536 words.
The Inu No Taisho’s camp was teeming with life – bonfires lit up the night, the soldiers exchanged stories and laughs around them while they shined their weapons, the horses grazed lazily on the edge of the clearing.

When Sesshoumaru emerged from the woods carrying on his back a small and sleeping human, however, every noise ceased. Ignoring the curious and puzzled stares of the soldiers, and emitting a low menacing growl that intimated any of those present not to come close to his prey, the young prince of the Western Lands crossed the entire field with his heads held high and a determined pace. He then reached his lord and father tent without deigning to look at any of the other youkai present.

Even after he was gone in there, the soldiers stayed silent – no one dared to utter a word. Only the most daring would exchange glances and whispers, and ventured hypothesis about what was happening – it was the first time that their little lord returned from a hunt without any kind of game – and the most curious strained their ears to hear what was occurring inside the General’s tent.

The great Inu No Taisho was engaged in reviewing the peace treaty drawn up recently with the Lord of the Eastern Lands, which was why they had planned the trip in the first place. He had decided to distract himself immersing in politics not to think about the twinge of disappointment that was caused by the delay of his heir – he should have returned to the camp a few seconds after the sun setting, and now it was already night. He was not overly worried about him: he knew that Sesshoumaru boasted a considerable amount of power for a puppy of just one hundred and seven years, and that if he had ignored the imposed term for his hunt, he must have had his reasons. The General hoped that he could provide a good explanation, because otherwise, he would have had to punish him, and he was not in the right mood to do it.

He was just thinking about what kind of reception he should reserve his heir when he finally arrived in the camp – his rebel youki was pounding threateningly, and Inu No Taisho frowned curiously.

What had happened to make his usually impassive Sesshoumaru react that way?

The answer came to him as soon as the young youkai walked through the threshold of his tent, carrying on his back a small human bundle.

Once in front of his father, Sesshoumaru bowed. “My lord,” he said. “I present you my prey.”

It was almost impossible for the Lord of the West to remain speechless, yet his son succeeded in
the difficult task. Trying to maintain a neutral countenance, his father stretched his voice. “So... Are you going to eat it?”

His pup’s face twisted in a so deeply disturbed expression that the General had to stifle a laugh for the sake of his son’s pride.

“So... Are you going to eat it?”

“Of course not, Father,” the son replied rather rigidly.

“What are you going to do with this delightful prey, then?”

“She is mine,” Sesshoumaru whispered, slightly turning to look down at the girl who was still sleeping undisturbed on his back. “I wish to keep her. May I, Father?”

It wasn’t exactly the explanation he would have liked to hear, but the Lord was too amused to notice.

Inu No Taisho carefully examined his heir, weighing him as if he wanted to ensure the integrity of his desire and wondering if this could have been detrimental to his training. Finally, he must have reached the conclusion that keeping that human would benefit the training of his pup, and bowed his head in approval.

“Very good. But, that will not interfere with your studies.”

As if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders, the young Sesshoumaru solemnly nodded.

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Words count: 646 words.
The strange dream crumbled in pieces of gold, silver and darkness, fading with the first signs of awakening.

When Kagome opened her eyes, she immediately understood that she was not in her room: first, Buyo was not sleeping next to her; and second thing, there was a significant shortage of pink.

Sitting up and looking around with a rather disoriented look, the girl slowly took consciousness of her surroundings. She supposed she was in a tent – she knew it because her father had taken her camping sometimes. She realized then to be sitting on what, apparently, was a futon made up almost exclusively of thick and warm fur, and further, neatly placed on the ground side by side, there were three swords.

The question was, how had she arrived there? She vaguely remembered having chased Buyo up to the temple behind her house, having climbed over the well, and having fallen inside it when the boards that covered it had succumbed, completely rotten, under her weight..., which made her realize that her mother would not at all be happy..., but, anyway, now where was she?

She would have to wait to receive adequate answers, because some muffled sounds – whispers and rustlings and strange thuds – began coming from the outside, followed immediately by a hand that crept into the folds of the tent by lifting a hem.

Then a young man appeared in the threshold, looking quite familiar and yet very outlandish. He was wearing his long silver hair in a braid that hung carelessly over one shoulder, and he was dressed in a white haori with lilac flowers embroidered on the edge of the sleeves and collar, and a pair of hakama of a deep dark blue.

However, what really caught her attention, beyond that clearly valuable and sought after clothing, were the strange marks that he carried on his face. In all the six years of her long life Kagome had never seen anyone going around with crimson stripes on their cheekbones and a half moon in the middle of their forehead – and that stern and pierced demeanor, too!

On the other hand, she had never even seen clawed hands and golden eyes, catlike, on someone’s face. Maybe it was some sort of disguise.

Then something bounced off at the edge of her consciousness and the little girl sharply held her breath, pointing a finger at him with wide eyes.

“But, you were a dream!” She exclaimed, clearly confused. Surely, she had dreamed of that boy who had taken her out of the well with a single jump, right? Moreover, if he now stood before her, did that mean that she was still dreaming?
Brightening with hope at the possibility and without waiting for an answer from him, the girl began pinching violently the back of her hand, convinced that once awake she would have been in her pink bedroom. Nevertheless, at the first hiss of pain the boy snapped at her side, taking her hand in his with a muffled growl and looking at her as if she was crazy.

“Stop it, you’re hurting yourself”, he sternly chided her.

But Kagome was distracted by the very solid touch of their hands intertwined, and she realized then that something serious had really happened.

“You ... you are real”, she stammered. And she burst into tears.

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**Words count:** 555 words.
6. A Reassurance

A Reassurance

Sesshoumaru looked uncomfortable whilst his prey burst into desperate tears, finding that being powerless in the face of a female in tears was not a particularly pleasant feeling.

He looked around frantically, hoping perhaps that a solution to that problem would appear before him as if by magic; unfortunately for him, only the two of them were in the tent – and by his own request, on top of that – so he doubted that someone would come to take him from that embarrassing predicament.

After all, his father had been clear on this: if he really wanted to keep the human, then he would have to take care of her.

The young youkai cursed his pride.

"Girl", he called, realizing that he did not know her name. "Girl!"

The big blue eyes flooded with tears of the human snapped open when he raised his voice, and then they trembling rest on his person.

Unsure whether to congratulate himself for drawing her attention or not, since she kept on sobbing, he continued. "Do stop this useless crying; I'm not going to hurt you."

As he should probably have anticipated, he succeeded only in make her cry more.

Annoyed and at the limit of exasperation, Sesshoumaru resorted to the latest tactic – he growled.

Actually, his snarl was not threatening in and of itself: it was but the puff of a pup, as threatening as a newborn kitten, which usually caused condescending giggles in the adults and warm smiles in the mothers. His father assured him repeatedly that his growls would purchase volume and ferocity, with the passage of time.

However, on an already terrified human the effect was quite different.

Kagome shrieked, tearing her hands from his grasp and crawling backwards on the bed to put as much distance as possible between them. Sesshoumaru discovered that after all, he did not like the smell of terror coming right now from the human – it was sour and unpleasant, and combined with the salty smell of her tears it made him uneasy. He much preferred the fragrant scent she emanated the night before.
"Don't cry", he tried again more cautiously, trying not to raise his voice.

She sobbed, unable to obey. She missed her family – something told her that she would not reunited with them for quite a while time – she had no idea where she was and that boy had just snarled at her! How could she calm down?

Kagome closed her eyes and did what her mother always told her to do when she woke up suddenly after a nightmare: she tried singing her lullaby.

Sesshoumaru frowned – what was she doing now? He glanced at the entrance of the tent, assuming that perhaps it would not be so bad to ask for help to someone who could know more than he did about whining females... But no, he could not admit defeat so easily. He would not look weak in front of his father after stooping to ask if he could keep the human. She was his prey – he would deal with her.

He sighed. Then, silent as a shadow, in the blink of an eye he was beside her. He took her hands in his and pulled her gently toward himself, ripping her yet another sob.

However, the girl did not resist when the young demon laid her hands on his own cheeks, letting her cupping them and emitting a strange and soothing rumble that put an end to her tears.

Kagome stared at him wide-eyed, and Sesshoumaru tried to smile reassuringly.

It was almost as easy as training little dragons.

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**Word count:** 599 words.
At first Kagome had thought he wanted to hurt her, but how bad could be a purring child?

She felt the slight vibration of his soft growls – growls that no human would be able to emit – transmitted to the palms of her hands, making them pleasantly tickling. Then she let escape a half-smile, and sniffed for the last time.

He reminded her of Buyo, when he purred and rubbed himself against her ankle to ask for forgiveness after having scratched her accidentally.

As he continued with his soothing rumble, watching her through half-closed eyelids, Kagome turned her attention on his sharp taloned fingers that barely touched her. Just because he seemed dangerous, it did not mean that he was, the girl thought wisely. Driven by a strange desire, she moved her right hand so to slightly caress his cheek soft as silk, in the direction of the curious magenta drawings that crossed it like scratches.

When she looked at her fingers to see if the strange make-up had stained her skin, she was surprised at seeing it completely clean. She pursed her lips, determined, and rubbed her fingers with greater insistence on his stripes, making him wince. The color, however, still did not come off.

"What are you?" She asked curiously, following with another finger the pointed profile of an ear and observing his golden irises and his catlike thin pupils. He resembled those creatures from storybooks – elves, if she did not remember wrong. And the elves were not bad, weren't they?

Was it possible that she had never seen a demon? "I am an inuyoukai", he answered quietly, studying her expression. "Heir of the Western Lands."

Kagome suddenly caught her breath – there went the elves' theory. "But Jii-san... He says that youkai are just legends."

Sesshoumaru frowned – that was happening more often in her presence. "Your village must be well secluded if your Jii-san says things like that, and believes them to be true."

The girl snorted, irritated that someone dared to speak ill of her grandfather. "My Jii-san knows a lot of things," she said, with the blind faith of childhood.

It was the young demon's turn to show irritation. "Well, of course he does not, if he is wrong about the youkai," he said, lowering his hands and folding his arms across his chest. "How can you still believe his words if you're here, surrounded by demons?"
Inevitably, Kagome paled. "Sur-surrounded?" She murmured.

Sesshoumaru merely did a dry nod of assent with his head. "You're in my camp," he said solemnly. "Hn, my father's," he then corrected himself, in case the old General was listening.

"Why am I here?" She wanted to know, looking around as if she expected to be attacked any moment now. "Why haven't you brought me home?"

*Hn, humans ask a lot of questions.* "Since I found you, you are under my care; so I brought you in the only safe place," he said, wrinkling his nose slightly as the smell of her nervousness refilled the tent. "Besides, I do not know where your house is," he admitted reluctantly.

"I live at the shrine! The Higurashi Shrine," she replied immediately, reciting by heart the brief indications her mother had made her learn in case she was lost. "Now you can take me there!"

Stiffening in front of the girl's blatant desire to get away from him, Sesshoumaru clenched his fists and jumped up. "I do not know where this shrine of yours is," he repeated, more coldly than he intended. "And I told you that you are under my protection. You can not leave!"

Kagome stared, uncomprehending. Then, infuriated by the attitude of the arrogant young demon, she stood up in turn and planted her hands on her hips. "I want to talk to your father!" She exclaimed. Adults knew even more than children, right?

Taken aback, Sesshoumaru turned furiously and started to leave.

"Stay here," he growled, before disappearing.

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**Word count:** 655 words.
Inu No Taisho would have never admitted it aloud, but he was worried.

He had heard his son's growl coming from inside the tent, then silence – and now he was beginning to reconsider his decision to let him keep this human, and to question the ease with which he had agreed to his pup desire without putting up too much resistance. Beyond the fact that he could or could not be able to take care of her, there were other factors to consider.

First, Sesshoumaru had briefly explained to have found her at the bottom of a well – which did not make sense per se, and it was even less clear if combined with the fact that there were no human settlements nearby. Only an old well in the middle of the forest and a little girl inside of it.

Now, no one simply appeared from nowhere without any explanation – let alone a child. It could have been a trap? A gimmick contrived by the enemies of the West to establish a spy inside the fortress? Possible, but unlikely: after all she was but a helpless creature, her smell was patently human and she had no particular special features apart from that of drawing his son's attention. How she did it, he was yet to figure it out.

Moreover, who was she? Where was she from? The General had only been able to see her in passing when his heir had brought her into the tent, and had almost ordered to leave him alone with her. What would have happened if she had belonged to a noble or influential family, and what if they were to learn that their little girl was in the clutches of youkai? The kingdom of the West boasted that it had never gone to war against ningen, and Inu no Taisho had no intention of being the first to dishonor his family name by stooping so low as to trigger an unnecessary conflict only because his son's curiosity got the better of his foresight.

In any case, they would be able to manage a small human – no matter how mysterious she could be. His word was law, and none of his subjects would have dared to question his choice of allowing the presence of a human in the court.

Sesshoumaru, for his part, had been quite adamant about the idea of keeping her. He had spent the entire night standing guard beside the human, watching her with enviable perseverance and never closing his eyes despite his father's protests. He considered her already his, and stubborn as he was nobody could change his mind – and he did not even particularly appreciate his sire request to bring the child to him once she woke up.

Usually the pup obeyed as befits one of his rank, but this time Inu No Taisho had seen a glint of defiance in his eyes.

On one hand, he could admire his son's fighting and fascinated spirit, who often acted as if nothing
was enough worthy of his attention, but on the other he could not help but condemn it; the General was the Alpha, and it was expected of Sesshoumaru to behave accordingly. He could also allow this distraction because he had to admit he found it funny, but the boy was not supposed to forget that the last word still belonged to his father.

However, he decided not to interrupt the two pups that were now whispering quietly, and wait for them to come to him. He took the opportunity to gather his soldiers and directing the organization of their departure, making dismantle pallets and round up the horses and dragons – a gift of the Lord of the East, along with numerous other furnishings including precious jewels, fabrics and treats – and making them clean up carefully the glade so that it would have looked like no one was ever passed.

He gave a last thoughtful look in the direction of the tent, and then to his surprise he saw his son rushing out – his usually aloof face distorted in an angry and irritated expression.

Holding back a sigh, Inu No Taisho straightened. *And here the problems began.*

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**Word count:** 697 words.
9. A Dejection

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Dejection

The great General did not know what to expect after his son’s sudden outburst – or rather, his almost insolent demand for him to go talk to the human who had requested, quite courageously, an audience with the demon lord.

Certainly, what came before him once over the threshold was completely unexpected.

The little girl stood at the center of the tent as if she possessed it, arms crossed and chin up, trembling like a leaf in front of the imposing presence of Inu No Taisho, but with a resolute look that the great demon could only admire.

Trying not to smile to avoid upsetting the two pups, the Lord of the West stopped a few steps from the human, slipping his hands inside the wide sleeves of his haori and bowing his head slightly in a gesture of greeting. Standing at his side, Sesshoumaru ran his eyes from his father to his prey with a small crease between his eyebrows, unsure on how he was supposed to act in this situation. Finally determining that his sire would be well able to handle the situation without requiring his intervention, he decided to remain silent until it would be required of him to take action – and in the meantime, he would keep an eye on the girl.

“So then, little human,” Inu No Taisho’s deep voice finally broke the silence. “I have been told that you wished to talk to me?”

Kagome gulped, blinked, and suddenly she couldn’t find her voice – so she simply nodded awkwardly. That demon was impressive, nothing to do with Sesshoumaru! Why had she believed that it would be easy to talk to him?

And those dark amber eyes, so different and yet similar compared with his son’s, they stared at her as if they wanted to weigh on her physically, putting her uncomfortable, pinning. She wanted to ask him so many questions, demand for several explanations, but her throat was closed, and it was with eyes wide and frightened and filled with tears that she returned his musing glances.

Then Inu No Taisho did something much unexpected. Clicking his tongue and shaking his head slightly, he crouched in front of the human, stretching his arms towards her and drawing her in his lap to rock her as if she were a pup. Unconsciously imitating what his son had done only a little earlier, the Lord began rumbling low murmurs meaningless to the human ear, but that in the language of inuyoukai would roughly sound as a kind of comforting lullaby.

With a quick glance towards his son, he made him understand not to interfere, and briefly nodded his head when the pup reluctantly obeyed him.
“You have nothing to fear from me, little human,” the demon whispered while gently running his fingers through her hair, wondering inwardly why he had felt the need to comfort that creature in the first place. “You belong to my son: I accepted his claim. So now tell me, who are you afraid of? Sesshoumaru or me?”

Not knowing what to do and since it was impossible to slip away from the powerful demon, Kagome rested her forehead against the smelling leather of his armor and sighed, snuggling in a grasp that all things considered was strangely comforting and reassuring.

“He... Sesshoumaru-chan... He says I can’t go away,” she almost sobbed, clutching a tiny hand on the fabric of his precious haori. “That I can’t go home.”

Inu No Taisho barely managed to keep himself from sighing, before directing a reprimanding look to his son – which in turn looked clearly unhappy with the position his prey was now in.

“And where is your home, child?” He asked gently, without ceasing his caresses.

She sniffed. How many times would she have to say it, again? “I live at the Higurashi shrine,” she murmured. “In Tokyo... but I don’t remember the way.”

The Lord of the West furrowed his brow, puzzled. There was no lie in her words – he doubted that she could have any reason to lie – yet he, the one who had explored the entire Wa far and wide, had never heard of this village.

The worst of all this, however, was finding out that she was linked to a shrine.

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Word count: 709 words.

Chapter End Notes

Notes: WA (倭) "Japan, japanese", from chinese Wō (倭) is the oldest recorded name of Japan. It was changed to “Nippon” around the VIII century, but considering that Inu no Taisho was born in an earlier era, I suppose there’s nothing strange in him referring to those lands with a name no longer used.
Sesshoumaru watched unsatisfied as the General gently cradled and comforted the human child, and not because she was enjoying his father’s attentions, but rather because the demon lord was taking too many liberties with a prey that was not his. Painstakingly swallowing a growl that threatened to announce his jealousy, the pup folded his arms across his chest and narrowed his eyes, waiting impatiently for the scene to end.

He saw his father bowing his head toward the girl's hair and inhale quietly, as if to commit her scent to memory. Sesshoumaru gasped in surprise: he himself had done that with her – her sweet scent of flowers and summer was already deeply imprinted in his senses – but if the Alpha did it, then the gesture took a very different meaning. It meant that he recognized and accepted her presence in his pack, whereby the young lord was now completely reassured about the intentions of the older demon.

Inu No Taisho kindly nuzzled the girl’s brow, tearing her a muffled sound that was half sob and half chuckle, and he grunted his approval.

Then he placed a finger under her chin, and Kagome was forced to lift her face to look into the golden eyes of the Great Demon Dog. “Do not cry, child,” he soothed her softly. “My son thought only of your well-being, he did not mean to hurt you. So are you not afraid of us?”

Kagome shook her head slowly, but still did not dare to speak.

The General sighed, and then curled his index finger towards his son beckoning him over. Sesshoumaru was at his side immediately, placing itself so that he could see the child's face and not her back, and looked at his father with an air of expectation.

“Why don’t you tell us your name, mh? Certainly, a bonny lass like you will have a name just as beautiful”, the daiyoukai teased her patiently.

Her eyes run from him to his son and vice versa, undecided, but then she sniffed and tried to be strong. “My name is Kagome,” she murmured, looking down at her hands still clutching the fabric of the Lord of the West’s haori.

She wondered what her mother would think if she knew that Kagome was giving all of that information about herself to strangers – she would surely be very disappointed! However, what could she do? The boy – Sesshoumaru-chan – had saved her from the well and had been kind to her, until he had revealed that she was now his. While his father, the imposing demon who fondled her and had a raspy but gentle voice, and that reminded her of her Otou-san, well, Kagome had not yet figured out if he would bring her home or not.
That was the first time she mentioned the Higurashi shrine to someone who obviously had never heard of it, and it frightened her. If they didn’t know where she lived, how would she return to her family?

Her aura and the abrupt change in her scent had certainly denounced her mood currently desperate and distressed, because now Kagome felt the arms of General squeezing consolatory around her shoulders and the small hand of Sesshoumaru taking hers in a comforting grasp.

“Do not fret, child,” the Lord coaxed her, tucking her head under his chin. “You will be ours until we will find your family.”

The young prince slammed bewildered his eyes, not expecting to hear such a claim nor such a promise, and now they shone with anger. “But, father–”

“Hush, son,” the General silenced him. He looked at him sideways, trying to convey his thoughts without actually saying a word. “Later,” he added in a whisper.

Sesshoumaru bit his tongue and nodded stiffly, bringing his attention to the child – no, he amended, to Kagome. His prey, his pet, his little bird in a cage.

He would not allow his sire to take her away.

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Word count: 655 words.
The words of the Lord of the West resounded threatening inside the young lord’s head, which, as solution to prevent someone from approaching his human, had decided to stay close to her at all times, keeping her under control to the point of not releasing her hand for any reason.

His father had tried to reassure him that no one would dare to take her away, but the truth was that Sesshoumaru trusted very little the General, since it was the latter that promise Kagome that, that she would be returned to her family.

While the child was having breakfast, perched on a log next to the remnants of a warm bonfire, father and son sat next to each other in front of her, looking with one eye at the movements of the soldiers that hung intrigued around her, and with the other at their current ward.

“You should not have promised her that, father,” Sesshoumaru was hissing, his hands balled into fists resting on his knees. “She is mine. Mine to protect, under my responsibility. You said I could keep her!”

Inu No Taisho took a deep breath, cursing the stubbornness of youth.

“You see well for yourself that the girl is unhappy,” he pointed out quietly. “There would be no problems if she had been an orphan, but she has a family, she already belongs to someone. And what would happen if the members of the shrine she belongs to found out that she is under the protection of a demon?”

“She was alone when I found her,” said the inflexible puppy. “This does not mean, according to our laws, that she has been repudiated by her people and that now would belong to whoever claim her?”

Touga frowned: sometimes his son was too shrewd and crafty for his own good.

“You say well, son, these are our laws. But she is human,” he reminded him patiently.

Sesshoumaru merely huffed. “Thus a human is above the law of demons?”

“I do not like your tone, pup,” the General warned with a slight snarl. “It is not like you to behave this way: I expect a greater awareness from my heir. Now, since you are being an undisciplined pup, you will be treated as such: stop treating the child as if she were nothing more than a prize
that you rightfully deserve, and act accordingly. Ask her if she wants to stay with you until we find a way to bring her back to her people, and if she refuses you will behave as it is expected of you. Am I clear, Sesshoumaru?”

The young prince swallowed his growl and replied without meeting the Lord stern eyes. “Yes, Father.”

Inu No Taisho nodded briefly, before rising to his full height. “Good. And remember this lesson, son, for one day it will be useful: know that the value of a leader is not determined by observing how he interacts with his equals, but how he treats the weakest – this maxim should be the foundation you will need to establish your kingdom.” His pup suddenly solemn eyes and his quick nod made him understand that despite his temper, the message had been received, and only then, the General allowed himself a small sigh of relief.

He put a hand on his heir’s shoulder, squeezing gently, and gave him one of their secret smiles.

“Comfort the girl and be kind: she is a human, it is true, but she is not a toy you can use to your liking. I gave you permission to keep her so that you can treasure this experience in the future and remind you that in the end they are not so different from us.”

Eventually realizing the desire of the young youkai, the lord of the West pushed him gently towards her. “And now, no more moodiness: the girl is worried about you.”

Only then Sesshoumaru lifted his eyes on the child, noticing that she was looking at him with an expression so deeply nervous and afraid that the demon could not help but feel guilty and ashamed for his behavior.

Nodding absently to his father and taking his leave with a little bow, Sesshoumaru hastened to go sit down next to Kagome and took as usual her hand in his.

This time, his touch was gentle and not overbearing, and the girl let him willingly.

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Word count: 730 words.

Chapter End Notes

Notes: I couldn’t resist – sorry! Inu No Taisho appropriates and rephrases one of the best quotes in my opinion by Sirius Black: “If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals.” [Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, J. K. Rowling].
Also, thank you so, so much for your reviews and the kudos - you're all so nice!
The Inu No Taisho's entourage set off early in the morning: the General in the lead, the soldiers after him, and the animals closing the procession.

The young prince and his prey – or rather, his protégé – rode disorderly in and out of the lines, depending on what caught their attention along the way. Flowers captured the excited eyes of the human child; hares and other little animals hiding in the undergrowth those of the demon.

However, after the third captured rabbit, Kagome had burst into tears and begged him to stop, and despite the offense of not having his hunting skills recognized, Sesshoumaru had consented; and, more than inclined to indulge his little human, he took to bring her dead plants instead of animals – although he couldn’t understand the point of it.

Inu No Taisho followed the two pups’ exchange with quiet interest, nodding pensively to himself.

Kagome, of course, had no intention to insult her new friend, and found other ways to make up for it. She listened to his stories with unrestrained awe – Can you really fly, Sesshou-chan? – wove fragile crowns of flowers for his hair, and generally let him take care of her without making too much of a fuss.

When Sesshoumaru finally brought her a little brown hatchet, still alive, to let her pet it, the girl’s smile was so wide – the prince even noticed the absence of a tooth – that it made him forget the early tears and offense. Perhaps it was not necessary to kill any game to impress her, he thought; humans were so strange.

Much later, when the afternoon sun took away her desire to keep playing, Kagome fell asleep curled up on the back of one of the dragons, wrapped up in thick fur, resting peacefully and with a thumb touching her parted lips.

Sesshoumaru sighed for the umpteenth time, walking nearby to keep the animal under control in case she might slip – one of his hands curled gently around her thin wrist.

“You sleep too much,” he murmured, watching her, his lips curled into something that dangerously resembled a pout.

A dozen steps ahead, the corners of Inu No Taisho's mouth twitched into a sly smile. It really looked like an interesting summer was unfolding ahead of them.
Oh look - I'm still alive!
Since I found myself with some free time in my hands, I decided that I would give this story another chance, and try to keep it going a little more. I have another ten chapter in various states of completion, so it's only a matter of will and inspiration. Fingers crossed!
In the meantime, here a very short interlude that will take our story one step further - next, the Inu No Taisho's fortress!
Thanks to all of you that kept leaving kudos and comments to this story even though my unforgivable disappearance. You honestly gave me the push I needed to write!
*hugs*
With love and gratitude,
-Niglia.
The palace of the Lord and Master of the Western Lands was the emblem of power and magnificence.

Perched on a small hill, it was surrounded by tall and dense trees that ran along the boundary of solid stone walls of which there was no beginning nor end. It was a real fortress, rising in the middle of a citadel teeming with life. Demons of every kind and rank went back and forth, eternally busy, yet at the passing of the escort of the Lord of the West everyone stopped, honoring the Lord with smiles, greetings and deep bows.

Sesshoumaru did not pay the crowd any heed, as he was busy to observe and watch over his ward – memorizing every little expression that alternated on her rosy face, from awe to apprehension, fear to excitement, in a swing of emotions so swift it confused him.

He patiently and smugly let her grip his hand as if he were a rock in the middle of the storm, and instinctively took advantage of that touch to draw her closer – hence making clear to anyone who dared doubt it that she was under his protection. Her trust made him proud.

“Do not be afraid”, he whispered, stooping down a bit towards her. “We’re home.”

Kagome would have wanted to argue that home was where her Jii-san, her mother and her newborn little brother were, but the voice and the presence of the peculiar boy – youkai, she amended with a certain difficulty – at her side had a strangely soothing effect on her nerves. Therefore she nodded, trying to keep up with his steady pace and appear braver than she actually felt.

It couldn’t be any harder than the first day of school, after all.

Every person in the crowd tried to steal a glance of the odd little ningen dressed in youkai finery – clothes belonging to the General’s son – but no one dared to mutter a single contrary word about how the young lord Sesshoumaru allowed her to hold onto him.

Perhaps the fact that the two pups were surrounded – and protected – by armed guards, and under
the watchful eye of the General himself, helped to appease the throng.

“Stay close?” Kagome whispered, her eyes widening as they took everything in – the stifling crowd and the imposing shiro and its tall gates that opened to welcome the proud procession.

Sesshoumaru gently squeezed her hand back, meeting her glance. “Always”, he swore.

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**Word count:** 412 words.
As soon as they were able, the Inu No Taisho and the two pups left the entourage behind them, infiltrating inside the private eastern wing of the castle through a passage half hidden by ivy and fragrant flowers.

Sesshoumaru saw his father bidding him to remain silent, his golden eyes twinkling mischievously, and he could not help but smile and vibrate with excitement at the thought of an ambush so early on their return home. Kagome was staring at him with a kind of amused curiosity, but the little lord only shook his head and dragged her further into the game, spurring her on to follow the General’s steps through the garden.

They crossed wooden bridges, footpaths made of smooth stones, trails concealed by tall grass – they skirted around ponds and fountains, everywhere a bursting of green, dark reds and warm oranges. As they went on, walking deeper into the garden, Kagome saw the General walking with the stealth and the resolve of a predator, until he stopped, suddenly, behind a tall golden hinoki.

Kagome watched with rapt eyes as he crouched, then beckoned Sesshoumaru forward, silent still, and she almost stopped breathing as her young demon friend gently tugged her along with him.

Clearly sensing her confusion, Inu No Taisho turned to her and took her free hand with his far bigger one.

*Fear not, child,* his smile said. *Come and watch.*

Both of her hands held as willing hostages by the two youkai, Kagome could only obey. She drew near, following Sesshoumaru’s example and crouching besides his father, and let her eyes search curiously through the branches of the cypress.

Her breath caught in her throat when she finally saw what they wanted her to see.

On the other side of the hedgerow, nestled between a maple tree and a crystalline pond where koi fish wallowed merrily, an elegant pavilion stood placidly as if it were a careful placed element of a painting. Under its shadow, a beautiful demoness that so much resembled Sesshoumaru was taking her tea, listening to the amicable chatter of her companions.

Kagome would have admired her for hours if only she could. A long cascade of silky, silvery hair draped over her shoulders, falling neatly down her back; a thick pelt, similar in fashion to the one worn by the General himself, wrapped her from elbow to elbow like a shawl. Her formal, heavy juunihitoe didn’t impair her movements, instead it seemed to emphasize the gracefulness of them.
Kagome watched the elegant twirl of her wrist as she brought a cup of tea to her painted lips, drank a tiny sip, then delicately placed it back on the table. Her hands folded themselves over her lap, almost fully hidden by layers upon layers of robes – then she gently cleared her throat.

“Ladies, it seems we are being watched.”

Sesshoumaru smothered his grin against his sleeve, his eyes dropping sideways to Kagome. “Found us!” He loud-whispered, enjoying the tiny giggle that escaped her tightly pressed lips.

Inu No Taisho straightened to his full height, smothering invisible wrinkles in his clothes and dropping a hand on his swords. “We’re no match for her, I fear”, he sighed long-suffering, faking a frown.

The little lord helped Kagome to stand, and they both followed his sire out and around the tree. In the pavilion, only the white-haired demoness was still sitting straight – the others were all bowing demurely, foreheads laying primly on pale, clawed hands.

Her eyes twinkled when her mate stepped forward; her smile widened as she saw her pup. And her head bent slightly to the side in calm curiosity as she took sight of the human child he brought with him.

Her voice was like soft silk upon skin. “Touga. Did you bring home a man-cub?”

“Not me, my Lady. Your son”, was the easy answer of the Lord of the West, whose eyes sparkled with obvious interest, eager to see how this confrontation would enfold.

Instinctively, the pup tightened his old on the little girl; and Kagome swallowed nervously, half awe and half dread, her eyes still wide and focused on the delicate visage of the youkai – on the crescent moon upon her forehead, identical to the one on Sesshoumaru’s.

Removing with difficulty her attention from the graceful demoness, Kagome gestured for Sesshoumaru to come near, then raised a hand to cover his ear and her mouth in the universal childlike gesture of secrecy.

“Your mother is so beautiful, Sesshoumaru-chan”, she whispered with tangible admiration. He shuddered at the sensation of her breath against the delicate skin of his lobe.

Obviously, her whispering echoed loud and clear in the youkai garden, and the attending court ladies heard the comment and welcomed it with pretty smiles and amused looks.

Even Inu No Kimi yielded to the innocent flattery, and her eyes softened.

“Touga. The man-cub may stay”, she ordered with finality.

Thereupon even the Inu No Taisho smiled, and the young Sesshoumaru released the breath he didn’t notice he had held until now. His father might have allowed him to keep Kagome, but whatever his mother said in the end would be much more influential inside the castle’s walls.

Hiding an indulgent smile, the Lady of the West held out her arms to her pup in clear invitation. “And now come and say hello to your mother, my son.”

Sesshoumaru hesitated, torn for a moment whether to leave Kagome’s hand or drag her with him in front of his Lady mother. A quick glance to the General, however, reminded him that in front of the court he was not allowed to appear unreasonable: so, he reluctantly abandoned his grip on his human and headed for Inu No Kimi, bowing before the demoness drew him in a maternal hug.
The young lord grunted slightly, resigned to letting his mother nuzzle him with total disdain of the etiquette – covering him with her own scent and thus making him lose Kagome’s. Unacceptable.

Her barely stifled giggles made him blush despite himself.

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**Word count:** 1003 words.

**Notes:** We find ourselves in the Heian Period (here, 1107 ca.). A fun fact from that era: it was improper for men to look at a woman’s face, so men and women were separated from view by bamboo curtains hung from the ceiling, or by large painted fans made of wood – the only part of the woman that men could see was the edges of their sleeves. Now, doing so would be difficult for so many reasons, plot-wise, but since I’m still a sucker for historical accuracy (at least, as much as it’s possible), we’ll play it like this: the youkai society, thanks to its members’ longevity, follows only some of the human’s customs, ignoring those they find useless or simply don’t understand. They’re a superior species, they don’t need to explain themselves to ningen. This will be my standard explanation for all the historical inaccuracies you’ll no doubt find in my story, lol.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so, so much for reading this story, leaving comments and kudos and generally being an awesome lot of readers! The resurrection of this story is only thanks to you, you lovely people. ♥
After exchanging a few more pleasantries, Sesshoumaru’s mother ushered them all inside the shiro – fondly scolding her mate for deserting his duties towards his soldiers and his court while she was at it.

“You were only gone for two weeks, sweet Kami”, she muttered half-heartedly, letting the General nuzzle her one last time before she sent him back to take care of his people.

“Now”, she began, turning towards her son and his ward, “I think we should clean ourselves a bit before the banquet. A young lady shouldn’t wear male clothes during celebrations, after all.”

That sounded like something her own mom used to say, Kagome thought with a pang in her heart. She always made her dress nice and pretty when they went to parties, or when they prepared the temple for the holidays – she supposed that Sesshoumaru’s mother was very much the same as hers.

She made to follow, eager to show the elegant demoness that she was a very well behaved little lady despite her current appearances; but something suddenly hold her back. As Kagome turned to see what was going on, she met her friend’s frown with a perplexed expression of her own.

“Mother, she is mine”, Sesshoumaru said, his shoulders stiff as if he were trying to channel his sire.

Unperturbed, Inu No Kimi raised an eyebrow. “I know, dear; you made that quite clear when you entered the shiro holding her as close as decency allowed”, she gently reprimanded. “What might be the problem, now?”

The young prince crossed his arms. “I promised I would take care of her.”

“Were you mayhap planning to help her bathe as well, then?” She asked rhetorically, proceeding to drag him almost forcefully out of the bathroom and ignoring his low, threatening growl. “It is not appropriate for you to assist while she is washed and dressed.”

Sesshoumaru blushed violently. “But she is mine”, he rumbled again, trying uselessly to resist his mother’s push.

“No one is taking her from you”, she hissed, pushing him beyond the threshold. “I already recognized your claim in front of witnesses, there is no need to be capricious. Go away.”

Sesshoumaru barely caught a glimpse of an intimidated Kagome surrounded by servants looking in his direction, before the fusuma was closed with a snap right in front of his snout. Irritated, he
crouched in front of it and waited – his ears ready to pick up the slightest noise indicating that his protégé needed him.

*He had promised her that he wouldn’t leave her alone, he seethed silently. If he couldn’t follow her inside, he would at the very least keep guard outside.*

Regardless of the sulky puppy crouched just outside the door, the servants of the Lady of the West were preparing to make the little human presentable for the banquet that would soon be held at the palace.

Kagome felt hands touching and grabbing her from all sides – the clothes that Sesshoumaru had given her were slipped off, the knots in her hair untied, her arms and legs were prodded and lifted as if to make sure they were completely intact. A servant even began to count her fingers and toes: she had the impression of being a doll at the mercy of excited little girls!

It was the stern voice of Sesshoumaru’s mother that finally ended that chaos. “Come now, ladies, don’t you see how scared she is? Behave yourselves!”

The servants moved away bowing and murmuring apologies, and the Lady then turned to her. “None of us will hurt you, man-cub. My son would not allow it”, she smiled, her tone a balm of kindness. “Now, in the tub – Aiko will take care of you.”

Until that moment, bathing was something that Kagome had only done with her mother, and if she had to be completely honest with herself, she did not want to try this new experience – especially if those who would have to help her had claws instead of the blunt nails of her Okaa-san. Yet, despite trembling with apprehension, she knew she could not disobey the Lady of the West, and that being naughty was not like her.

So she remained as still and stiff as a statue while Aiko washed her hair, gently rubbed her back and arms, and then helped her standing to scrub her stomach, legs, and feet – all under the benevolent but attentive gaze of Sesshoumaru’s mother.

When the servant took a step back to indicate that she had finished, another came forward with towels that wrapped around Kagome, taking in the task of drying her.

“Thank you”, the child muttered with a tentative smile, once that servant too was done.

“Now”, said Inu No Kimi with a sharp clap of her hands, her eyes assessing as they swept over Kagome. “I think something red would be appropriate for you, don’t you agree? And a golden obi as well.”

Two maids were bringing in a heavy trunk from an adjoining room, and as they opened it Kagome could see a colored heap of fabrics bursting off it. They pulled out something red and gold and white – fulfilling silently and promptly the Lady’s suggestions – bringing everything over once the Inu No Kimi hummed her assent.

The Lady of the West could still hear her son impatiently pacing outside, and smothered a smile as she watched the little human being dressed in his most favorite colors.

*He will surely be pleased,* she mused.
Sesshoumaru was, indeed, very pleased when he saw Kagome wrapped up in his colors – his family’s colors, to be more correct. She appeared behind the fusuma with her black hair braided like a princess’, a red kimono with a pattern of white flowers on the hems and sleeves and a golden obi tightly tied around her waist, a tint that recalled the hue of his own eyes.

His mother had clearly wanted to let everyone in the court know who she was for him: she turned to him with a knowing look and a tiny smirk before leaving them to take care of her guests.

Unfortunately, the young prince didn’t have enough time to coo over his protégée and admire her as much as he would have liked before he, too, got whisked away for his own preparations.

Luckily for him, his mother allowed him to let his human inside the room after his bath – so that he could explain to her what was going to happen at the banquet whilst he was being dressed.

And he did just so – after he nuzzled Kagome, reacquainting himself with her scent and rubbing his own on her new clothes and her soft skin. She giggled at that, and he smiled widely seeing her blushing and happy.

“The General concluded a very important deal with the Lord of the Eastern Lands”, he then proceeded to explain, as a maid tied his sash and fixed the hem of his long sleeves. With the Lady’s permission, he could wear clothes that were in colors the exact reverse of those worn by Kagome – namely, a white ensemble with bright red flowers on the collar and sleeves’ hem, with a yellow stash with purple adornments. “That’s why we were near the well where I found you. Now, our clan is glad to celebrate this new treaty between the two kingdoms, and my father will share with them the many gifts the Eastern Lord had offered us.”

Little Kagome didn’t fully understand what Sesshoumaru was talking about, but she enjoyed hearing him talk – his eyes took an excited glint and his tiny fangs appeared in his smile – so she tried to follow his explanation with a rapt look, nodding sagely at the right moments.

The allusion to the well made her eyes become dark, the nostalgia too heavy yet to be simply discarded; Sesshoumaru noticed, taking her hands in his own tipped ones, and looked at her with sorrow. He knew she missed her home, her family – but she was his now, or for the time being anyway, and he had already vowed that he would take care of her, would always be at her side.

“Look”, he exclaimed eventually, spreading his arms and twirling once on himself. “We match! Now everyone in the clan will know you’re under my protection”, he said quite proudly.

“Everyone will know we’re best friends!” Kagome managed to smile sweetly. She did not care
particularly about protection or youkai instincts, but she understood that he was trying to cheer her up and distract her from her sadness.

That was why she suddenly came forward, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him fiercely. “Thank you, Sesshou-chan”, she whispered, dropping a quick kiss upon the magenta stripe on his cheek.

When the maids came to collect them from his room to escort them to the banquet, they found a very flustered prince Sesshoumaru holding hands with his human.

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**Word count:** 576 words.
Kagome felt like a princess from those animated movies her mother let her watch before bed. She had new, elegant clothes; creatures with animal features who smiled at her and loved to sing helped her getting ready; a big, fancy party with music and food and torches lighting up the gardens’ paths was waiting for her: everything looked like a dream.

Keeping herself as close as possible to Sesshoumaru, and gripping his hand under the long sleeve of his kimono, the little human shyly entered the wide, festively decorated courtyard of the shiro. Colourful paper lamps hung from long cords disposed in a fan-like pattern, under which dancers and tumblers entertained the guests – generals, lesser lords from neighbouring territories and visitors from various other clans – sitting all around in tables arranged in a horseshoe formation.

It wasn’t worse than when they entered the gates, that morning, but there were nevertheless too many people – much more than those who came to visit her family’s shrine during the holidays – and Kagome was starting to feel a bit overwhelmed.

_We’re not in Tokyo anymore, Buyo_, she thought warily, paraphrasing a movie she and her mother used to watch every weekend, before the beloved tape became too ruined for them to understand smoothly the audio. Sesshoumaru and his parents were the only familiar and comfortable faces she could see among the demons – Kagome could easily recognize them from their pointy ears, fangs and those weird marks upon their faces: they seemed to stop for a few seconds what they were doing when she entered the yard, watching her as if she was some sort of inexplicable oddity, or worse – something they would have liked to eat.

As if feeling the sudden spike of trepidation in her aura, the young lord bent slightly towards her. “Just stay close, Kagome-chan: no one will bother you.”

She then smiled at him, encouraged: thankfully, he hadn’t let go of her hand for a single moment.

Gently, Sesshoumaru guided her towards the dais where his Lord Father and his Lady Mother, sitting behind a generously laid table, were chatting with their higher status guests – mainly representatives who had travelled with them from the Eastern Lands, and ambassadors from the continent – softly instructing her to follow his example and bow once in front of them.

The chatting died down a little when the two kids stopped to stand in front of the General, their seriousness causing indulging smiles in the adults.

The Inu No Taisho proudly announced: “My lords, you remember my heir, Sesshoumaru?”

“The heir of the Western Lands greets you, Lord Father, and your esteemed guests”, replied the
young lord, quietly but loud enough to be heard by the whole table; next to him, Kagome bowed a bit awkwardly as instructed.

The General accepted his son’s greeting with a serious nod; then, with a softening smile, he turned towards the little human. “And, of course, his darling ward – Kagome, from the Higurashi shrine?

Upon hearing her name spoken out loud by the Inu No Taisho, Kagome blushed and ducked her head, letting Sesshoumaru try to hide her with his own body from the curious looks of his father’s guests.

“A ningen? From a temple?” Mused the inuyoukai sitting to his right, his long claws scratching lightly an auburn stubble. “My, how mutinous of you, Touga.”

“Ah, you know me, Naoki – me and my rebellious streak”, chuckled the General. “Sesshoumaru declared her part of his pack, therefore she will be treated as such. Many of us will learn from their friendship, I am sure.”

His voice grew dangerously soft towards the end, and all those who sat at his table understood the implicit threat for what it was: a warning to whoever disapproved of his son’s ward to act civilly, and a promise of harm if the peace of the pack were to be in any way compromised.

With an understanding nod of his head, the demon called Naoki gave his blessings.

“I wouldn’t dare to criticize my nephew’s nor my brother-in-law’s choices. Peace, pups”, he added, as the children warily followed the adult’s subtle conversation. “I was only curious. It is a pleasure to meet such a lovely lady: please, feel free to call me Uncle as Sesshoumaru does.”

An irked rumble escaped Sesshoumaru’s throat, causing his uncle’s grin to widen.

“Enough boring the pups with your usual bickering, you old dogs”, the Lady of the Western decided to intervene, raising delicately an arm to pour some sake into her mate’s cup.

The General smiled at her gentle reprimand, and nodded to let her know she was right.

“You may go enjoy yourselves”, he magnanimously allowed.

Before Sesshoumaru could drag Kagome away, his mother dispensed a last, solicitous advice.

“Make sure she eats well: she’s too tiny.”

Word count: 800 words.
Sesshoumaru took his mother’s suggestion to heart. Feeling quite important in such a serious task, he proceeded to fill Kagome’s plate with the most succulent morsels of food for the rest of the evening, relenting only when the little girl started to tire of eating.

“Could we go play, Sesshou-chan?” She begged him with an adorable pout, squirming in her seat. “I’m not even hungry anymore, please?”

The young lord would later wonder how could a human’s eyes grow to be so large and sparkly under the light of the lanterns – and surely magic was involved somehow, because he felt he could deny her nothing when she turned those blue pupils towards him. So, he relented. He stood, searching his sire’s gaze over the other guests’ heads, and turned his head this way and that in a silent inquiry; the General simply smiled widely at him, nodded and freed them with a tiny gesture of his chin.

“Come, then”, he urged her softly, circling her wrists with his clawed fingers. “I shall show you something.”

Kagome’s smile seemed to have on him the same charming effect of her eyes, for the prince found himself stumbling a bit as he dragged her away from the tables, flushed cheeks smartly hidden with his long locks.

They left the courtyard behind them, but the music and the boisterous voices followed them for a long while as they strolled down corridors, sneaked under archways and avoided the busy members of the household.

Finally, the two children reached their destination: a rather secluded nook of the gardens, far enough from the main courtyard to avoid any encounter with the General’s guests yet enough nearby so that they could still enjoy the music and the overall joyful atmosphere of celebration.
The little human though was not yet impressed, so Sesshoumaru went silently to kindle the torches and –

Kagome gasped, suitably awed. “Oh, Sesshou-chan – it’s beautiful!”

It was indeed rather charming. Sesshoumaru had led her to his favourite spot in the whole fortress: here was where he went to read, practice his forms, or simply steal a nap or two away from his tutors in the laziest summer afternoons. A little lake crossed by a wooden footbridge covered almost the whole surface of the private alcove, with big koi fish swimming leisurely right under the surface, their scales glinting as they glimpsed outside with every other turn; the dark water reflected the flames of the torches dancing merrily under the breeze, giving it a dreamily ambience.

Glad to notice she truly enjoyed his preferred place, Sesshoumaru urged her to do like him and shed shoes and socks, giggling and smiling at each other as they ran around in a mock version of hide and seek, cold grass under their naked feet; they then went to sit on the border of the catwalk, breathless – Sesshoumaru helped her as she fixed her kimono, dragging the fabric over her knees to avoid getting it wet. Once they were comfortably set, they let their feet dangle over the water, brushing it a little with every swing.

“I know you may miss your family, but… I am glad to have you here, Kagome”, the prince murmured after a while, with quiet solemnity.

The little girl turned a sad smile towards him, reaching to grab one of his hands in between her own. “Thank you, Sesshou-chan”, she replied serenely. “I’m happy we’re friends.”

Truth be told, she couldn’t say with full honesty that she was completely happy – happiness was something that made her think of her family, her mother and her grandpa and her little brother, and the little house behind their family temple, and the dorayaki her mother used to make for her birthday, and when she came to tuck her in and kiss her goodnight – but she felt that it would be unfair to whine and complain to Sesshoumaru when he and his parents had been nothing but nice and helpful to her. Plus, he had promised to help her go back to her family, so – she wasn’t overly worried.

_Oka-san, Jii-san… I’m not too scared now_, she swore silently, cuddling closer to him.

Temporarily satisfied, Sesshoumaru slipped a cloth from his sleeve, unveiling it and presenting her with a smug expression a small collection of sweets he pillaged during dinner. Thus, they ended the night – eating candies and whispering secrets under the stars, with only the koi fish to keep them company.

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_**Word count:** 742 words._
It had been decided that little Kagome would thenceforth attend Sesshoumaru’s lessons with his personal teacher – the good-humoured Naoki-sama, the General’s own brother-in-law.

In the days following the return of the Inu No Taisho to the shiro, it became clear that to separate the two would only end up in having a young, scared human girl holed up in Sesshoumaru’s room and an angry, temperamental pup who refused to leave her alone and act according to his standing. Thus, the General allowed the indulgence, seeing no real harm in that, but with the renewed promise from his heir that the little girl’s presence would not distract him from his studies.

Besides, Naoki-sama seemed quite curious and intrigued by the human his nephew insisted on declaring as his own, as he had never actually had anything to do with a ningen before, if one didn’t consider the warriors or the monks he had met from time to time in battle or along his patrols.

The morning was too beautiful to be spent inside the shiro, which was why Naoki-sama decided to move the lesson outside; followed by a tiny procession of quiet court ladies and a couple of trusted soldiers, they settled into one of the numerous pavilions scattered all over the gardens, where the heat wasn’t too harsh, and the shadow provided by silky curtains allowed them to read easily.

“I do hope you didn’t forget all the progress we made in our studies over the last few weeks, Sesshoumaru, as you were gallivanting in the Eastern lands”, began his uncle with a teasing smirk, as the pup occupied the table with scrolls, ink bottles and pens. Besides him, the little girl placed her elbows on the table, her chin on the palm of her hands and watched them – and sometimes, the gardens – with rapt attention.

“I read the books you made me bring with me, Uncle”, he replied seriously, sitting with a straight back and his hands curled over his knees.

Naoki nodded satisfied. “As I knew you would. And do you have any questions?”
“A few”, Sesshoumaru admitted. “Concerning the distributions of Wa’s lands in between the highest youkai lords…”

They fell into an easy and deep conversation, exchanging quips and information about the subject at hand, forgetting in the meantime of the human sitting nearby. To her credit, Kagome tried to keep up with the demons’ discussion as long as possible, but they quickly became too technical and detailed for her to follow; so she took a paper sheet, a brush and one of the ink bottle laying in front of her, and started to scribble what she could remember of her school lessons.

She was so focused in her writing that eventually Naoki-sama noticed that the child wasn’t simply scribbling or drawing nonsense on paper, as he was imagining her to do: her brushes had method and order, even though he could not, for the life of him, understand what was being written.

He halted Sesshoumaru with a gesture of his hand and an apologetic glance, and bent over Kagome’s homework.

“This… is not Chinese”, noted the inuyoukai with a perplexed frown, trying in vain to decipher her writing.

She blinked, innocently. “No, it’s not. It’s Japanese!”

Naoki’s frown got deeper. “Mmh. Is it.” The characters were similar to the ones he was used to, but they somehow lacked a certain elegance, a subtle grace, that made the Chinese ideograms much more pleasant to the eye, if more complicated and harder to replicate. “Where did you learn to write in such a way?”

“Mama and Jii-san taught me to write before I started school”, Kagome answered proudly. There weren’t a lot of children in her class that knew as many characters as she did already, which made her feel very mature and important – despite her parents telling her that boasting her abilities when her other friends knew less than her was not something a kind young lady should do. In this case, though, it was an adult who inquired about her knowledge, thus Kagome felt she could be as honest and pleased as she wanted while she showed him, and Sesshoumaru, the meaning behind each kanji and hiragana.

Naoki listened to her, awed, and watched raptly as she continued writing in her unknown language, brushstroke after brushstroke. It was an oddity itself the fact that she new how to write in the first place, being such a young woman and a human one at that; but if she came from a temple, and if there was no monk available, then her family had probably felt the need to teach her the holy ways to make her a miko. That did not explain, however, how she seemed to know nothing of the Chinese alphabet, for Naoki was convinced that religious people made use of it to write prayers, amulets and talismans of various nature.

Now, the question was simple. Did she simply come from a village that had made up their own written language – nothing unusual, really, considering the difficulty in learning Chinese kanjis and the pressing need of the more common people to write despite of it – or was there something more, something else, in the little human’s life?

As he observed Sesshoumaru starting to copy her odd language, following her instructions dutifully and with a much serious expression, the old inuyoukai wondered if he should bring his concerns to the Inu No Taisho himself, or if he should keep it quiet a bit longer, for his nephew’s sake.

Certainly, little Kagome was not a human like the others.
Word count: 933 words.
Life at the citadel was rarely boring, something that little Kagome was discovering rather quickly the longer she spent there – her days were so busy that she barely had time for sadness, although she never stopped missing and thinking of her family for even a minute. Sesshoumaru simply became better at taking her mind off her homesickness, and she couldn’t help but grow fonder and fonder of him as the time passed.

Inu No Kimi had given them permission to sleep together in her son’s bedroom, which had become their own. Sesshoumaru-chan called it ‘nest’, something that never failed to make her giggle, and had done his best to turn it into a space she could comfortably live in and call her own; he let her choose the colors of their bedding, and he had made her write their names next to each other over that in her own, strange language – so that he could pin the scrolls with her awkward experiments in calligraphy against the wall, over their bed.

They could also have their meals in the privacy of the pavilion they used for their lessons with Naoki-sama. Her friend had explained that his mother felt somehow the need to protect her from the other youkai that wandered around the shiro, since being the only human amidst demons could be pretty overwhelming for one so young; luckily, she didn’t have to worry, as Sesshoumaru’s family had taken her under their wings, and so she spent most of her time with him, his parents and his teacher Naoki.

Of course, it wasn’t realistic for the two children to spend every hour of every day joined at the hip. Sesshoumaru’s daily schedule was terribly busy from the moment he rose at dawn to when he finally went to sleep in the evening – such was the life of the heir of the great Inu No Taisho – and truthfully, he had very little free time. His parents had allowed him a brief reprieve to help his human ward settle in the routine of the fortress, but now, after a week, the usual commitments needed to start again.

Therefore, it happened that Sesshoumaru was more often than he currently enjoyed occupied with various other teachers besides Naoki-sama – a master of the swords, another one for martial arts, even a foreign teacher from the Continent to whom he had to speak in languages Kagome couldn’t understand – and in such times, the human girl was left to her own devices.

(Oji-sama – as the mischievous youkai had insisted to be called, and eventually managed to get away with it – had to explain to both his nephew and Kagome that the little girl would surely get
bored if she had to watch him exercise at the dojo during his long trainings, for swordsmanship wasn’t amongst the subjects the Inu No Taisho had allowed to be taught to her, as the lessons were far too dangerous for a human. Not to mention that his trainer wouldn’t want a female in the middle of their daily practices, anyway.)

That was how Kagome found herself free to occupy her mornings as she liked. There was always a maid or a guard walking a few steps behind her, an assurance her youkai friend had practically pretended of his father for those times when he couldn’t be the one personally committed to her safety. They let her meander to her heart’s content: but even for the most imaginative of children, running around a garden could hold appeal for only this long; and soon Kagome grew bored, and loneliness started to ruin her fun, and made her annoyed with the two silent shadows following her everywhere.

Thus, at one point she stopped in the middle of a wooden bridge, turned around with a swirl and, with her hands against her hips and a serious frown on her upturned face, she confronted the two perplexed demons.

“If you need to follow me, then I should at least know your names!” She demanded, letting her eyes glide from one to the other. But then she swallowed, immediately embarrassed by her own outburst, and tried again, more quietly. “Oh, I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean it”, she sniffed, twisting her hands together. “It just feels silly walking together without being able to talk to you. I promise – I’m not annoying, I’m good!”

The maid’s silver eyes were the first to soften at the human’s appeal. “We know that, lady Kagome. You do seem very kind and well-mannered”, she admitted with a little bow.

Kagome looked suddenly hopeful, her hands joined in a supplicant gesture in front of her. “Then, will you walk and talk with me? Show me around?”

The two demons exchanged a glance, probably mentally debating the merits of their orders against the biggest blue eyes they had ever seen on a child’s face. “Won’t you be bored with such old people as company, little human?” Asked the soldier gruffly.

“Of course not!” Kagome hurried to reassure them, taking one step forward. “Jii-san says that adults tell the best stories, and to always listen to what they say because their experience is a lesson for me”, she added, repeating almost words for words one of her grandpa’s favourite advice.

The demoness hid a smile behind the sleeve of her kimono, while the soldier nodded ceremoniously. “Your grandfather must be very wise”, he said, watching her beam proudly. “Very well: you may call me Kusano, little human. And this lady here is Sachiko-san.”

“I’m really glad to meet you, Kusano-san and Sachiko-san!” Kagome dutifully bowed to each of them, before surprising them further by grabbing their hands and dragging them down the bridge.

“And where are you taking us, lady Kagome?” Sachiko smiled, noticing fondly that the child did not bat an eye when she took their hands in between her own, despite their inhuman paleness and the dangerous claws.

“Oh!” Kagome stopped again, raising her blushing cheeks to look at her guardians. “I forgot I don’t know this place very well. Where do you want to go?”

“I have an idea, little human”, Kusano offered, tugging her gently down a stone path. Kagome followed them eagerly, almost vibrating from happiness: Sesshoumaru and his parents did their best to take care of her and lessen her homesickness, but only now, walking in the middle of the
two youkais, holding their hands and listening to them as they explained all the passages and the flowers and the nooks of the gardens, she did feel less melancholy – she could imagine she was still at home, enjoying a school-less morning with her mother and her grandfather. Kagome couldn’t wait to go back, she wanted to tell her family everything about her adventure, about Sesshoumaru-chan – hopefully they wouldn’t forget about her while she was away.

Kusano-san was leading them beyond the gardens, towards the stables: she had never been in that area of the fortress yet, but Kagome could hear the noises of the animals before they were near.

“Have you ever seen a dragon’s hatchling, little human?” Kusano-san asked her in a conspiring whisper, smiling as the child gasped in obvious delight, her eyes wide with awe.

“No, never!”

“Well, then”, he nodded, guiding her through the sheds. “My son Kenta comes here often to take care of them. He’s around your age: I am sure he will explain everything to you better than even I could.”

*If only Sesshou-chan were here!* She thought excitedly. Finally, she would have something thrilling to tell him about her day – her friend constantly worried that she would feel bored and lonely when he was forced to attend to his various engagements and couldn’t spend time with her.

She couldn’t wait to tell him!

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Sesshoumaru was less than pleased when he discovered how Kagome had spent her day away from him. On one hand, he was glad she had found a way not to spend her mornings in solitude – the simple thought of knowing her alone while he was otherwise occupied made him irritable and distracted, and more than once his instructors had reprimanded him – but on the other…

Kagome hadn’t stopped talking about *Kenta* and his friend *Taro* since the moment they had met again at dinner.

He was far from thrilled, and if Oji-sama’s teasing smirk was anything to go by, Sesshoumaru hadn’t been able to mask his reaction. *Hn – unacceptable.*

But during a lull in the conversation – *so she did need to breathe*, the little prince thought sullenly, aimlessly moving the food around in his bowl – Kagome, who hadn’t missed the scowl her friend was trying to hide by avoiding her eyes, drew near and gently bumped her shoulder against him.

“I did miss you though, Sesshou-chan”, she admitted easily. “I wish you were there, too.”

The young youkai froze, his chopsticks faltering and almost falling off his hand. A soft blush bloomed on his cheeks, darkening his stripes, and suddenly Sesshoumaru wasn’t feeling so irritated anymore.

He straightened his back, and quietly put some chosen morsels of meat on her plate.

“Tell me more about the dragons”, he offered, feeling slightly chastised but also much more relaxed. Beaming, Kagome went back to her tale; and Sesshoumaru could finally enjoy his dinner,
glad that he hadn’t yet lost his precious human ward’s loyalties to some other arrogant pups.

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**Word count:** 1559 words.

Chapter End Notes

A/N. Hi everyone! Yes, your eyes aren't deceiving you - I'm back with a new chapter, and right in time for Christmas! Life has been busy and this time of the year is horrible, so this is probably the last you'll hear of me until next year - but I can promise you, I have already some good stuff ready to see the light of day, so keep your fingers crossed! :) I can't even begin to tell you how much I love your continuous support, I'm so glad you guys are enjoying this little fairytale ♥ Thank you so, so much! [next time we'll be back with some more jealous!sess, promise!] Merry Christmas and happy holidays to everyone, and happy end of the year! See you in the next decade, people :D xoxoxo

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