

Love

(Inuyasha FanFic)

A white shadow moved out from under the forest and approached the pair like a ghost. “Lord Sesshomaru!” the little girl squealed and ran up to the elegant demon. “Rin found these and thought you might like them – you always watch the stars in the sky, and these flowers look like them.”

With a regal turn of his head, Sesshomaru looked the at the child he had rescued from death. She clutched a small bouquet of blue star-shaped flowers that matched the ones woven into her hair. His face was as impassive as the statue of a god, but his golden eyes seemed to soften. *Such a curious thing*, he thought to himself.

“Thank you, Rin,” he told her as he took the offering. A huge smile split the little girl’s face as she turned and raced back out into the field of nightflowers. Her peal of laughter caused Jaken to start in surprise from his doze.

“Oh! Lord Sesshomaru!” The imp jumped up and nervously searched for his fallen staff, afraid that his master had caught him sleeping.

“Jaken!”

The servant quivered, waiting for the kick he was sure to receive.

“Be sure that you watch over Rin.”

“Do not worry, my lord! I will not fail you!”

Sesshomaru moved off silently back into the trees.

Jaken sat back down grumbling to himself and rubbing his sore toes. “Ay, my blisters have blisters on them! Why does the master insist on traveling from dawn to dusk? I should have listened to my mother and never become involved with him.” He grimaced at Rin’s dancing form.

“Silly human,” he harrumphed. “I don’t see what Lord Sesshomaru sees in her.”

With a gusty sigh, Jaken rubbed his lamp-like eyes trying to stave off weariness.

A high pitched scream banished all thoughts of sleep and made him jump to his feet.

A wolf howled in the distance, long and forlorn.

It sounds so sad, Kagome thought. She paused in digging instant ramen bowls out of her pack. The sound rose and fell, making her shiver in the cool night air.

Wait--

“Inuyasha!”

“What now? Is my ramen ready?”

“I sense jewel shards!” Kagome concentrated on trying to get a fix on the tingling sensation. “That way—toward those cliffs!”

“Then let’s get on it!” The hanyou’s demeanor lightened with excitement. He bounced down from his customary tree branch and tapped Miroku’s sleeping form.

The monk mumbled something in his sleep and rolled over to grab Sango’s rump. Instantly he was awakened by the stinging slap from the demon hunter.

“Get up, we’ve got work to do!” Inuyasha growled

“Rin! Rin!” Jaken ran as fast as his little toad legs could carry him. His eyes darted left and right for the distinctive checkerboard of her kimono. He bounced up using his magical staff to balance above the swaying flowers. Cold fingers of wind plucked at Jaken’s coat and whispered of dreadful things his lord would do to him because of his failure. The empty field of dancing flowers mocked him.

He ran forward to the crest of the hill screaming Rin’s name. A frightened squeak ripped out of him as he nearly toppled over the sudden edge of a cliff. The ground had eroded away beneath the flowered meadow creating a steeply sloped rockslide down to a river several hundred feet below. Jaken got down on his hands and knees and peered carefully over the verge.

Rin’s body was no where in sight, but the telltale signs of loose earth and stones were clear even in the moonlight. The grade of the cliff side would not be impossible to climb, but if you were to fall it would be a dangerous trip down to the glittering river below.

“Rin! Rin are you down there?” Jaken yelled, hoping to see movement.

His only answer was to send down another shower of loose stones and gravel.

“Oh, Lord Sesshomaru will kill me for sure if anything happens to her!”

With a last gulp of air, Jaken climbed over the edge of the cliff and started his way carefully down.

Miroku rubbed his face and groaned, “It’s not even light yet!”

“You’ll have time to sleep when you’re dead, which will happen if Naraku gets a hold of all the shards first,” Inuyasha said simply.

The monk looked reproachfully at the hanyou’s running back. With the WindTunnel slowly eating away at his hand, Miroku knew full well the consequences of failing to kill Naraku.

“I can’t tell how many yet, but there are at least two shards straight ahead.” Kagome held onto Inuyasha as tightly as she could. Through practice, she had become adept at firing arrows from his back, almost like an ancient horse archer only with doggie ears.

The wooded forest broke open suddenly and the group found themselves on the banks of a moonlit river. A cliff rose up steeply from the opposite shore, riddled with large boulders and jagged rocks. Dark openings appeared here and there in the rock face, speaking of natural fissures and vents.

“The shards are in one of the caves,” Kagome concentrated. “Up there! One of the larger caves, the one with the ledge.”

A faint smudge in the night sky made the girl squint. “There looks like a trail of smoke from the same area, like there is a fire.”

“Hmm,” Sango wondered aloud. “It is too obvious, it must be a trap.”

Kirara roared and the group clambered up onto the cat demon’s back. When all was secure, she surged up into the air, leaping across the river’s lazy swirls. Her landing on the opposite bank was hard and loose stones slipped out from under her paws. Kirara tried to keep her balance but fell to the ground as the surface betrayed her.

Sango jumped off and checked her friend with deep concern. The cat demon steadied her legs and licked the woman’s face in reassurance.

“We’ll have to be careful, the ground is likely to slide out from under us.”

Inuyasha’s hackles rose as he sniffed the air.

“What is it?” Kagome looked at him closely.

“I smell blood.” His brow furrowed. “And wolves too.”

“This is Kouga’s territory isn’t it? Maybe it’s some of his pack members?” Kagome didn’t sound convinced, even to herself.

“No, this smells different.” Inuyasha grasped the hilt of his sword Tetsuaiga reflexively.

Jaken gasped for breath as he held onto a boulder. His shoulders ached and his feet hurt anew from the treacherous climb down. He wiped the sweat from his eyes and looked around, hoping to see Rin.

A bloody wolf track in the dirt caught his attention.

He started to tremble.

“RIN!!!”

The cave mouth was set back on a long natural stone ledge. Normally foreboding during the day, the darkness of night made the entrance look like a pool of black ink.

Kagome swallowed nervously, but knew that the shards were inside.

Come on, girl, she thought. We’ve faced down Naraku and hordes of other demons, this is just a...a...a dark cave.

Something fluttered in the fitful breeze catching her attention. Large feathers littered the ground, blood staining their banded markings. Kagome picked one up and Inuyasha confirmed her suspicion.

“Birds of Paradise. Looks like one of them got a bit more than they bargained for.” The hanyou’s face pulled into a wicked smile. “If they are enemies of those feathered bastards then the critter in the cave can’t be that bad.”

Miroku looked at his friend. “We should not make such assumptions, it is possible that the Bird of Paradise was killed in a battle with others of its kind. Perhaps a territorial dispute turned fatal. We must still proceed with caution.”

As the group moved along the natural path, signs of battle became evident in deep clawed gouges in the rock. Gore spattered the stones, leaving bloody stains that were black in the starlight. The broken form of a large Bird of Paradise lay deep in shadow near the entrance, its wings twisted cruelly. Kagome looked at the monster’s body and frowned.

“Inuyasha...it looks...like...”

“Yeah,” he said with a grimace. “Something’s been eating it.”

The girl slapped a hand over her mouth to keep from retching. “*Eating it?*”

“In some cultures it is believed that by eating one’s enemies, you gain their strength.”

Kagome knew she was going to vomit now.

Inuyasha scratched his nose. “The smell of blood is so thick, I almost can’t pick up anything else. I smell wolf though, and it’s really close.”

Kagome looked at the cave entrance with increased trepidation.

“Only one way to find out!” Inuyasha strode purposefully and disappeared into the cave.

The stars glittered like ice, lining everything with a blue silver light. The moon was still hanging high in the crisp night, but it would soon fall toward the horizon to be buried by the sun.

He liked this time of night better than any other.

The wind tugged playfully at his long white hair, like Rin begging attention. A thoughtful expression crossed his smooth features.

Sesshomaru looked down at the delicate blue blossoms in his hand. *So strange.*

Suddenly he stiffened. A familiar scent was lingering on the breeze and he turned back toward the direction he had come.

The meadow was empty, but he followed his sensitive nose to the edge of the cliff and quickly surmised what had happened.

He leaped over the edge without a second thought and floated down the rocky slope.

The tunnel made Inuyasha's ears twitch, every movement made by the group of adventurers was echoed painfully in all directions. He hoped that whatever beast or wolf owned this cave was fast asleep and would not hear their approach.

A faint draft pulled at his hair, seeming to draw him in like an inhaled breath. He grimaced, their scent would be carried down to into the den long before they arrived, whatever lived in the cave would know they were coming. Something that could rip a Bird of Paradise apart would be formidable indeed and the close confines of the den would limit the group's combat tactics. The hanyou gripped the hilt of his sword and crept forward.

To his surprise, an amber light seemed to be growing the deeper they went into the den. The golden radiance flickered and danced, foretelling of torches or a fire. The tunnel curved to the right and opened up into a larger chamber and Inuyasha peeked cautiously around the rock wall.

Jaken's chest heaved from his panicked descent. He had stopped to rest on a particularly large cliff shelf when he noticed blood staining the rocks. He scrambled forward and saw the forbidding mouth of a natural cave. Blood trails lead into the darkness and Jaken shudder with terrible fear.

If I return to Lord Sesshomaru without Rin, he will surely kill me slowly. However, if I go into that cave, I will most likely be eaten by whatever creature spilled this much blood!

Unless.....the blood is from the creature itself and it is already dead!

Jaken's eyes popped open with renewed hope and he hopped forward.

The promised fire was banked up against the back wall of the cave under a natural chimney. The smoke was drawn out the vent and fresh air was pulled in from the tunnel entrance causing the draft the group had felt earlier. Woven mats and blankets were thrown on the floor to

provide insulation from the cold stone. A cooking pot and other crude household utensils were tossed in a corner near the fire. Broken pottery littered the floor where someone had thrown them against the cave walls.

Backlit by the golden blaze, an enormous wolf lay curled around a colorful bundle.

Inuyasha frowned and edged closer to get a better look.

The wolf's head lifted and turned in his direction. A blood chilling snarl lifted the wolf's lips and dagger-like teeth gleamed in the firelight.

The hanyou stopped where he was, tense.

Kagome looked around Inuyasha's back and gasped. "It's a child!"

The wolf glared at them with eyes that glowed demon red, but did not move or attack.

"I see the jewel shards! There are two, one is in the wolf's forehead and the other is down low, I think in its chest."

"Lot of good that does me, I can't get close enough to get them." Inuyasha growled under his breath. "I can't even get close enough to grab the kid without the wolf killing her first,"

The wolf watched the group clustered at the far side of its den. After a moment, its long red tongue rolled out and began to lick the child's face slowly.

Inuyasha grasped the hilt of his sword and stepped forward, fearing the worst.

The wolf snarled again in warning, but made no move to hurt the child.

Something's not right, Kagome thought. *A normal demon would have killed the little girl already ...* She looked around the cave again and spied two small forms covered by straw blankets. A tiny hand was visible from under the edge of one mat.

"Inuyasha – wait!"

"What??"

"She's protecting the child – look!"

"Wha? You're crazy, that demon wolf is going to eat the kid if I don't do something fast!"

The wolf mother had gotten up to meet his advance and the unconscious child became more visible. Cuts and bruises covered the little girl's exposed skin, as if she had taken a dangerous beating. The wolf mother had licked clean the more serious wounds and stopped the bleeding.

Kagome thought the child looked familiar, but the little girl had her face turned mostly away. A rising growl jerked her attention back to the advancing wolf.

The jewel had done its work on the beast's body. The size of a pony from the tip of her nose to the ends of her twin tails, the wolf mother was black as the darkest nightmare. Now standing at its full height, the wolf seemed to fill the cave like an angry storm. The Shikon jewel shard glittered in the wolf's forehead like a baleful purple star as she placed herself between the hanyou and the child's still form.

"Inuyasha! The wolf helped the little girl! Don't attack!"

"Yeah? Well that isn't gonna stop me from taking her jewel shards."

"SIT!"

The charmed necklace slammed Inuyasha to the ground before he had moved forward two steps.

His growl was clear even through the dirt he was forced to kiss.

The hanyou glowered at Kagome as he rubbed the earth off his face, "Protecting? Feh!"

“My shards you want?” the wolf roared to everyone’s surprise. “The hell birds wanted them too, they killed my children before I could finish them all off. You shall not have neither shards nor child from me!”

The group of adventurers were taken aback by her ferocity and looked at each other for guidance.

Taking a chance that her suspicions were correct, Kagome knelt down trying to appear harmless. “Please, we don’t mean you or the little girl any harm. We are collecting the shards so that we can repair the Shikon jewel and destroy it forever.”

“A terrible demon called Naraku seeks the jewel for his own purposes. The more shards he has, the more powerful he becomes. He is a great danger to us all.” Miroku added. “Your children will not be the only ones to die if his evil is allowed to go unchecked.”

“My entire village was destroyed by Naraku, I seek his life to avenge my family and friends,” Sango spoke with determination.

“He killed my parents! If Kagome and Inuyasha hadn’t taken me in, I would be all alone,” Shippou added.

“And what of you, hanyou?” the wolf growled.

Inuyasha’s ears flicked, images of Naraku’s schemes and horrors fluttered through his mind., Kikyo’s face burned in the back of his eyes, but slowly it bled into a vision of Kagome’s. “Naraku has to die.”

The wolf’s eyes narrowed.

After a moment’s thought she sat down and allowed the group to move closer. “I can smell the truth of your words.”

Inuyasha still looked sulky, but Kagome smiled. “I have medicines, and know some herbal remedies--could I look at the little girl?”

The wolf’s massive head swung toward the young woman, fixing her with burning eyes.

A strange blurring of the air around the wolf made everyone take a step back. When the shimmering cleared, a woman with wild black hair stood in place of the beast. The jewel shard remained in her forehead, but the eyes below them were no longer dreadful crimson. Short claws and slightly pointed teeth still betrayed her heritage, but the woman could have passed for human at a distance.

“I...I have never seen a wolf demon do that,” Sango stammered.

A lopsided smile pulled at the strange woman’s face.

“Put under terrible stress, we revert back to our natural forms,” she explained. The wolf mother’s eyes shined with tears which she gamely tried to keep from falling. Her gaze kept being pulled to the small still forms of her children.

Kagome felt pity swell up in her heart. “So awful.” Unconsciously, she leaned against Inuyasha’s shoulder for comfort.

“I will pray for them if you wish, so that they might find peace,” Miroku offered.

The wolf mother looked up at him and smiled sadly. “You are kind, but the wolf tribes do not follow the gods of men. The winds will carry their souls to the endless hunting grounds, where they can chase deer and play in snowmelt streams...” Tears finally rolled down her cheeks, but she didn’t seem to notice.

Kagome stepped forward and wrapped her arms around the demon. Inuyasha stared at her in surprise, but said nothing. Broken sobs wracked the wolf mother’s body, but Kagome held on until she quieted.

“Thank you,” the wolf mother whispered quietly. “My name is Kala, I am of the Black Mountain Wolf tribe.”

Kagome gave introductions all around and the wolf mother looked helplessly at the wrecked den. “I would offer you tea, but I seem to have destroyed my cups.”

Smiling sympathetically, Kagome turned to look at the hurt child.

“I found her on the slope, she must have fallen from higher up the cliff. The Bird of Paradise tried to take her, but I fought them off. I was too late to save my little sons...” The pain in the wolf-woman’s voice tore at Kagome’s heart. Even Inuyasha clenched his sword tighter remembering the shredded carcass outside the cave.

Carefully unwrapping the torn kimono from the child, Kagome gasped.

“What is it?” Inuyasha asked, leaning forward.

This is the child that travels with Sesshomaru! Kagome thought.

As she watched, Rin’s brow wrinkled in pain and her eyes started to open.

Jaken trembled as he tiptoed down the entrance tunnel of the wolf’s den. A constant grumble ran through his mind about how he was cursed and should have listened to his mother. The tunnel started to curve and firelight brightened enough so that he could see more than feel his way through.

Creeping up to the edge on his shaking little toad legs, he gathered his courage to look inside and see the source of the voices echoing off the walls.

At that instant, a rush of air and movement caught him from behind and tumbled him into the open.

Jaken’s squeak made the companions turn toward the entrance tunnel.

Standing over his faint retainer, Sesshomaru glanced around the den to assess the situation.

He immediately saw Rin’s crumpled form.

Inuyasha and the others sprang to their feet in preparation for battle.

“Sesshomaru! I don’t know why you’re here, but if you wanna fight, I’m all for it!” the hanyou declared ripping Tetsaiga from it’s sheath. The enchanted blade instantly doubled in size and moved as an extension of Inuyasha’s will.

“Stand aside,” Sesshomaru commanded.

“I don’t think so!”

Rin’s eyes opened fully and she looked around. She didn’t know where she was, nor could she remember anything after that first terrifying moment of falling. Her body hurt, but not nearly as much as it should have. She turned her head and saw the blurry backs of people standing near her. As her eyes cleared more, she could see who the people were facing across the cave.

“Lord...Sessh...oma...ru,” she croaked in barely a whisper.

The wolf mother looked down at the hurt child.

Red tinged the demon lord's eyes and he grasped the hilt of Tokijin, his fiend-forged sword. "Stand aside, little brother," Sesshomaru said again.

Inuyasha growled and gripped tighter on his magical sword, preparing for the demon's rush.

"What are you doing?" cried Shippo.

The others turned to see the wolf mother cradling the little girl in her arms. Miroku grabbed her shoulder as she walked past the group and toward the white demon.

"He is very dangerous, stay back!"

The wolf mother just looked at him and smiled sadly. "He is her father."

The companions froze and looked at the wolf demon in horror.

Inuyasha sneered, "There's no way – Sesshomaru hates humans!"

The lord said nothing but stood loose and ready, listening.

The wolf mother looked at Rin's desperate face.

"He is her father in her heart, and that is all that matters." With that, she strode through the stunned companions and carried the child up to Sesshomaru.

Feebly, Rin tried to lift her arms out to her lord, tears starting in the corners of her eyes.

Glancing at his impertinent brother to make sure that he was staying back, Sesshomaru accepted Rin's tiny body from the other demon. Once cradled in his arm, Rin clutched at his haori like it was the only thing solid in the world. She cried into his chest, letting all the fear and pain she felt wash out of her with her tears.

Strange emotions flickered beneath Sesshomaru's usually impassive mask. They were feelings that he could not explain or understand, but they were real. The human child had kindled something in his cold heart that could not be ignored.

Rin's sobs had given way to her exhaustion and she fell asleep. Inuyasha and his friends stared in shock as his brother let the dirty child snuggle more comfortably in the crook of his arm without complaint or apparent concern.

Stroking a lock of hair from the child's face, the wolf mother smiled sadly before stepping away.

Getting over her initial shock of seeing the demon lord exhibit anything but cold disdain for humans, Kagome blinked. "There is a jewel shard in the girl's side..."

The wolf mother looked back and put a hand to her own torn shoulder. "The child was badly hurt, so I gave her one of my shards. It will give her the strength she needs to heal as well as make her harder to hurt in the future."

A softness came into her eyes, "I could not save my children, but I will save this one!"

"The shard is purified...you gave it up out of love..." Kagome said with wonder.

Miroku and Sango looked at each other.

"Fool!" Inuyasha snarled. "Demons will hunt her down for that shard – the kid won't be safe at all!"

Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed threateningly.

The wolf mother looked up at the demon lord and then turned to the hanyou. "I do not think that will be a problem."