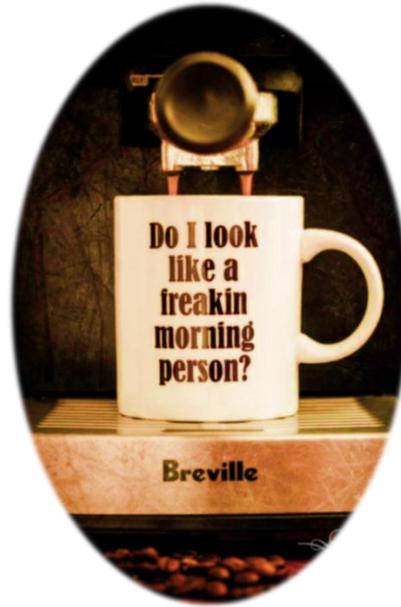


CHAPTER FOUR

“Do I look like a freakin’ morning person?”



December 7th, 2014

9:00 A.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea –Café Apartment

IT was a gorgeous, warm Spring day. The flowers were beginning to bloom along the back side of the Café . . . the birds chirping as they tended to their nests and chicks, scrounging for twigs and worms in the soft rain dampened grass.

A grinning Young-Jae Ryu held his head high majestically as he smoothed down his tuxedo jacket one last time, arms out to engulf the two beautiful blushing brides on either side of him. The day couldn't have been more perfect for a 'double' wedding. Stepping away from the porch of the Café' to the sound of violins playing the 'Wedding March' the three squinted into the blaring late morning sunlight, barely able to make out the covered arbor of flowers and stoic bodies of their husbands to be waiting impatiently before them.

How had it come upon them so quickly? This day they had been dreaming about and anticipating for what seemed like a lifetime! As they nodded to the attendees, seated in wooden

garden chairs alongside the white runner, dotted with rose petals and aligned with billowing coral ribbons their stomachs lurching in eager expectancy.

Nearing the last set of chairs, Uncle Ryu stepped back, bowing low to the groomsmen and Officiant, feeling the fingers of each bride slip away from him for the final time. His heart swollen with pride he turned to make his way to his empty seat when curiously people began to rise out of nowhere, their faces tense and angry, accusing fingers pointed to the still smiling girls dressed all in white.

“I forbid it!” Squealed a short Asian woman, clutching a copy of ‘The Will’ in one hand, her eyebrows creased in loathing.

“ME TOO!” Came an even louder voice, as another woman joined her, fist in the air in livid denial.

“I OBJECT!”

As the red-headed beauty donned in a slender white designer gown, dropped the floral bouquet at her feet, spinning to see why the voice sounded so familiar, a tall crisply dressed American man jumped up quickly, nearly knocking the chair out from behind him announcing loudly, “He doesn’t love her like I do! He can’t make her happy!”

Just as swiftly another man rose on the other side, glaring at the tall blonde, swathed in a romantic, Juliet-styled dress, sporting a large white hat. Along with him rose a pregnant woman and small wide-eyed child grasping the bottom of his brown jacket.

“I told you I would divorce her!” He called out, letting go of the other woman’s hand and attempting to squeeze past the child toward the aisle to get to her. “You need to wait. I OBJECT AS WELL!”

In a split second as if an invasion of evil had descended from the sunny heavens, the chaos began . . . out of nowhere the soft quartet of violins faded away into a raucous brassy rendition of a ‘Trot’ song that had been Uncle Ryu’s favorite. The two dark-haired faceless grooms stepped away from the Officiant disappearing into a wall of thorny bushes, leaving a barrage of confused and startled groomsmen, wondering what to do next.

The red-headed bride staggered, stunned toward Young-Jae in an attempt to stop him from leaving and in the process, tripped over her large floral bouquet (to the sound of hideous

laughter), landing face first in the dew drenched grass at his feet . . . and as the blonde's eyes darted from the dark-haired man and his family to the sprawled out bride before her it was painfully clear that in her 'current' physical condition it was impossible for her to bend over and help.

Her swollen pregnant belly shot out under her nose, threatening to overtake all her balance and ability to move effectively to thwart her own precarious situation. Panicked, she gripped the stem of flowers between the fingers of one hand, the blood rushing to her head as she raised the other mechanically. The shot rang out hurling her backward from the force, and the laughter stopped. *What had she done?*

And then . . . the sky went dark and the snow began to fall . . . large wet flakes dotting the ground and heads of the scattering guests, as the sun dipped behind the clouds.

The 'perfect' wedding had just dissolved into the wedding from 'hell'.



* * * * *

uncle Ryu's ghostly form sat back against the wall of his bedroom, now occupied by his favorite girls, knees up examining them as they slept. Their faces tranquil and serene, their dream of a perfect wedding would have to be enough to help get them through the upcoming 'first' hectic day, as owners of his 'Cup of Hotness Café'. Still satisfied that he had done all he could do, he tipped his head against the window frame wishing they were as excited to be here as he was to have them. He would have to work on that.



The loud harsh 'Trot' song blared from the small nightstand alongside the floor mats of the upstairs apartment bedroom. Saffron, warm and sweaty, arms flailing about her flushed forehead, rolled face-first off the narrow mat, muttering something in her sleep about 'tripping and ruining her designer dress.' Seconds later, drooling into the cold wooden floor, she smacked her lips groggily, realizing that she had face-planted off the pad in her sleep. Slinging one arm over to the 'culprit', she tugged the leg of the tiny table until the alarm clock crashed down around her, still 'singing' Trot.

Something was going wrong. It wasn't supposed to be 'Trot', it was violins . . . the 'Wedding March'. What had happened? Now everything was about to go haywire. His perfect plan was falling apart yet again.

Standing quickly, he watched in dismay as Saffire squeezed her eyes open and shut, open and shut, moaning, her face crinkled in obvious despair. What was happening? Why was she so distraught? It was the perfect wedding. He would have to come up with something else. Drifting out of sight, he left the sisters to their dilemma . . . wishing he had remembered to change the alarm.

Startled out of a dead sleep by the sound of a gun-shot as the errant alarm clock smacked the floor, Saffire's tears pooling in the corners of her blue eyes, began to awaken and focus on the tiny boxy room around her. *Was there a window open?* She wondered, feeling the dampness of her cheeks with one hand, hearing Saffron's mumblings beside her, mixed with the loud musical clanging of the singing alarm.

As her surroundings came into view, she glanced down at herself, attempting to make out the large pillow-like bulge across her belly. *SHIT! The dream! Was it true?* Gripped in immediate fear, the impossible ran rampant across her mind. *Had she gone to bed 'normal' and woken up 'pregnant'? He had only kissed her? What was happening? Had she killed him?*

Then her foggy hungover mind began to follow her eyes into reality, and she felt the pillow slide from her stomach, off to one side. The warmth of the wedding day and sound of chirping birds and violins returned to her memory before crashing around her as she recalled seeing Saffron pummelt to the ground at her feet, the shot ringing out about her head.

“You ruined my dream!” She barked loudly, jolting up to a sitting position, aware that Saffron was pressed so closely against her on the floor they literally could have shared the same mat. “Aghhh! I was about to marry him! You tripped, you’re so freaking clumsy.”

Pounding one fist alongside her, she lowered her head dismally. Even in her dreams she couldn’t make it to the altar. *He was there . . . right there. And then . . . it all went to hell. But ‘who’ was there? Junsu? JaeJoong? Antonio? Who had she offed?* Pondering the question momentarily it was suddenly clear. *Why, Antonio, of course! Without him gone, there could be ‘no’ wedding.*

“You’re full of shit.” Saffron muttered, scratching the top of her head, trying desperately to figure out why Saffire might have been dreaming about a wedding, when clearly she was having the same dream. “I was about to marry him. Your ‘already married’ boyfriend screwed it up. It’s YOUR fault.” She argued, now remembering clearly the tall Hispanic man standing indignantly next to his pregnant wife and child, finger pointed at Saffire’s smiling face. “Humph. Divorce. Like that would ever happen in the real world!” She added, allowing her head to drift back down into the soft pillow, covering her eyes with one hand.

“Why were you in my dream anyway?” Saffire asked, rolling over on one elbow, peering into the disheveled head of her newly acquired relative. “Besides, I killed him. Didn’t you hear the shot?” Pointing two fingers into Saffron’s exposed neck she giggled, “Bang, bang you’re dead.”

“You’ve got a screw loose. Don’t touch me.” Saffron scoffed, brushing the make-shift finger pistol away from her bare skin. “And how the hell should I know why we were having the same dream? We are ‘twins’ right? Don’t they have some sort of weird, sacred, soul connection or some such thing?” She quipped, not bothering to open her eyes and look at her. “Trust me, I didn’t WANT to share my wedding day with you, or your stupid ex-boyfriend and his stupid family. Murderer.”

“Me either. Mmmm, murderer . . . that’s a title I never thought I’d have. Guess I must’ve hated him more than I thought.” Leaning over, Saffire tugged her cell phone out from under the pillow. “What time is it anyway? Holy shit. It’s already 10:00. I’m not used to this time change.”

Suddenly flying up off the floor in excitement she shook the phone in the air, bouncing around in circles, portraying the random, sad version of a 'happy dance'. Her head pounding from the residuals of alcohol, she didn't let that thwart her opportunity to show her newly acquired family member she 'could' be fun and exciting, (not a 'bitch' or an angry, pathetic, murderer).

"It's him! It's Junsu. He finally texted me back." She squealed, stuffing the screen in Saffron's face as if to say 'I told you so.'

But then reality hit her. The reality of JJ's late night comment that Junsu had a girlfriend, and she wasn't it. And then had come the tears, the disappointment and finally 'the kiss'. No, this text should not be a joyous occasion.



"You read it." She announced handing it over toward Saffron's bent head. "I don't know if I can."

"Are you serious right now? You weren't kidding about him?" Saffron snatched the phone from her sister's fingers staring at the short message. "And this isn't 6th grade you know. You just shot a man for God's sake and you can't read a simple text message." *She had been certain, like JJ that Junsu was just a fangirl's yearnings. Now, the proof it clearly was 'not' was staring her in the face.* "It says, "Mianhae for the late reply, business in JeJu. Thrilled u r here. Call me. Oppa J." Raising one eyebrow, she handed it back clucking her tongue in warning. "Tsk, tsk. Best be careful. Two best friends, that's playing with 'fire', Ms. Saf . . . FIRE!"

"I don't need any advice. All I asked for was a read . . . I DIDN'T kill a man, and I'm NOT a 6th grader. NOT a Virgin either, I'll play with freaking fire if I want, and HE KISSED ME!" Saffire snipped back, flouncing away from the bedroll, headed toward the bathroom doorway.

"Could've fooled me . . . He kissed you?" Saffron whispered, rolling back down to the floor and covering her head with the heavy woolen blanket.

"I heard that."

Saffire sat on the toilet wondering what to do next. *Should she call him as requested? Just exactly how 'did' she feel about JJ's kiss last night? Would she ever even see him again? Surely he and Hyun Joong and maybe even Junsu came to the Café often. Even the drinking tent down*

the road. One problem at a time. First, pee . . . second, figure out the lay of the apartment . . . third, talk to Saffron about their newly acquired duties as café owners, and lastly . . . well lastly . . . deal with Junsu and JJ, and play with fire.

* * * * *

“**I**S THAT all you brought to wear?”

Saffire peeled off the shorts she had dropped onto the mat in last night, watching Saffron step from the bathroom doorway in dress slacks and a boring navy sweater. “You look like a damned CEO or something. What did you say you used to do back home? Secretary or something?”

Saffron shrugged her shoulders, knowing that if she had had her way, her entire wardrobe would have been shipped to Korea, not just her few pairs of slacks, jackets, and heels. Leaving her designer clothes, jewelry and shoes behind had been nearly as painful as her break up with Mr. Big. Now, here she was with minimal outfits to choose from, only one pair of boots, no tennis shoes, missing her best jogging outfit, and sleeping in underwear and T’s instead of the satin pajamas she was accustomed to. *Was this what it was like to be poor?* She guessed so.



“What’s wrong with it?” She asked, her tone tart.

“Well, I don’t know. Just doesn’t look very comfortable is all.” Saffire tugged a large sweatshirt and pair of crumpled leggings out of her duffle bag, tossing them toward the open bathroom door. “You gonna serve up coffee in that? Sort of dressy don’t you think? What if you spill something? You know here in Korea they wash their clothes outside on a rock. Haven’t seen a washer/dryer combo in this tiny place yet have you?”

Saffron threw her hands on her hips her eyes darting from one side of the room to the other. In the light of day it was easier to see that Uncle Ryu had been a bit of a hoarder of gadgets, magazines and books. She was still hungover, why was Saffire insisting on irritating her first thing? And WITHOUT coffee?

“I don’t much care about washing clothes right now. This is all I have, and this is what I will wear. If it comes down to rock pounding, then I guess we’ll fight it out for the closest rock.

And YES, I was . . . a Personal Assistant. NOT a Secretary. Big difference.” Sticking one finger in the air she wagged it at Saffire’s face wildly. “In an office, this is how you have to dress.”

“Ohhhh, I get it, vs. a lazy musician, whiling away the hours, sun tanning on the beach in her flip flops and bikini . . .” Saffire mused, nodding her head. *It was painfully clear. They would never see eye-to-eye.*

“I didn’t say that.” Saffron argued, slamming the bathroom door and reaching for her small purse, perched beside the wardrobe closet.

“Didn’t have to.” Saffire added. “And tell me WHY? You don’t carry a phone? Or an iPad? Or a Blackberry? Or a Bluetooth? Ms. Personal Assistant? I thought those were the tools of the trade on Wall Street?”

Now Saffire was venturing into sensitive territory. Saffron wasn’t ready to talk about how she and Mr. Big ended things. (Her true reasons for walking away from all electronic devices, and social media.) Just because this unhappy drunken sister spilled ‘her’ guts over alcohol, didn’t mean she needed to do the same.

“Just a personal choice.” She muttered, tucking through the doorway in an attempt to put some space between the inquisitive woman (she wasn’t sure she wanted to talk relationships with at the moment).

“Hey! Where you going?” Saffire asked, padding behind her in bare feet, scratching the underside of her ribcage beneath the now ‘itchy’ wool sweater. “We were talking. Conversing. Isn’t that what sisters do? How are we gonna run this place if you won’t talk to me.” Dogging her like a puppy begging for a treat, she continued harassing her until Saffron stopped in the middle of the living area abruptly, and the chatty sister bumped into her by surprise.

“We were not conversing! YOU were asking stupid questions. And is that what sisters do? I have no idea. Never had one. Didn’t want one. Not sure I want one even now. How are we gonna run this place? Don’t know that either. Don’t really want to. Betting you don’t either.”

Tossing her freshly washed hair behind her back, without turning around, she took a huge step forward staring into the wall of photos before her. There stood a handsome Uncle Ryu and a young woman who looked surprisingly like her mother. Alongside them, a tiny little rosy-cheeked girl with bright blue eyes and curly strawberry hair.

Ignoring the shiver that ran down her spine at sight of the photo, she exited right and ignoring sister Saffire still standing timidly behind her, dashed down the steep stairs, her stocking'd feet slipping and sliding as she went. *Whatever it was . . . she didn't want to know. Not now . . . maybe not ever!*

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CAFÉ employees Maud and SeRae stood side-by-side listening to the loud chatter coming from the upstairs apartment. They had gotten the text last night after closing, informing them that Uncle Ryu had left the café to his two nieces Saffire and Saffron from the States, and they would be moving in and immediately, needing training so one day they could take over.

“They hate each other. Kinda like we used to.” Maud chuckled, turning on the large coffee maker before SeRae had a chance to beat her to it. “Gonna be a hell of an interesting day.”

SeRae stared blankly at the large chalkboard over the back bar, her head cocked to one side quizzically. “Umm-huh.” She muttered almost incoherently. “Yah. I could swear our bias’s were on the schedule to work next week Monday. I wrote them in myself.” Turning from the blackboard she drew out her phone checking the schedule she kept on there as backup. “Whoah, okay . . . that’s unusual.”

“Wha?” Maud tucked the crisp white apron around her waist preparing the dough for another round of homemade pastries. “We agreed right? Minho and Onew . . . Second Monday of the month twice a year. Been waiting for six months for God’s sake. I’m getting my hair cut and tinted next weekend!” Tugging the bottom of her short cropped dark hair Maud grinned, showing perfectly straight white teeth, and slightly dimpled cheeks.

“Well . . . that’s not what the blackboard says.” SeRae announced, one pudgy finger pointed at the familiar writing they had left yesterday afternoon before closing down the Café and attending the Memorial Service for their beloved employer Uncle Ryu. “It says JaeJoong and Hyun Joong.”

“Dear Jesus NO!” Maud shouted, throwing herself across the floor to the board in disbelief. “I . . . I . . . it HAS to be a mistake. Someone else was here last night. They had to have changed it.” She stuttered hoping her excuse was the truth. “See that full vodka bottle there on the end of the counter? And this empty coffee mug. I didn’t leave that. Did you?”

“Well of course not. But, remember . . . the GIRLS. Obviously they DID stay here last night. I let their father in to drop off suitcases before I left. This stuff has to be theirs. Looks like they might have had company, huh?”

SeRae lifted the nearly full bottle of liquor with two fingers, setting it gingerly behind the counter where it couldn't be seen by incoming customers.

“Maybe. But they wouldn't have changed the board. They don't even know what it's for. They just got here.” Maud interrupted. “I mean . . . JJ and Hyun Joong . . . HOT, SEXY, TO DIE FOR . . . kissed me smack on the lips (both of them) last time they were here . . .” One finger to her plump lips, she sighed remembering the idols trapping her between the two of them, taking turns kissing her playfully while stealing fresh bakery off the tray she had been forced to give up in the process. “But . . .” She continued, “just days before Uncle, ‘you know . . . left us’ he told me they would be AWOL for a while with the new movie coming out and all. They wouldn't possibly have time for working the café. No . . . something else is going on.”

“Well whatever it is. I DON'T LIKE IT!” SeRae barked, her frown evidence of her displeasure. “Onew never has time to come sit anymore like he used to. They're all so busy. We finally got the two of them here at the same time and now . . . the Devil himself is messing with our schedule. Damn!”

“Schedule?” Saffron's voice piped up over the two women's, as peeking her head around the doorway she realized that the noises she had heard earlier while dressing were coming from the downstairs café and kitchen. “Oh hi. I'm Saffron, sorry to interrupt.”

Sticking one hand out, she introduced herself, remembering that these were the two employees that would see to it the café opened and ran smoothly until she and Saffire could be schooled in the process. She needed to make sure she befriended them . . . and they her. Saffire could handle them her own way, but she was the ‘ultimate’ networker. She knew how to manipulate people, and normally had others eating out of her hand in no time. For some reason Saffire wasn't that easy.



“Mornin' child.” Maud smiled, nodding to the stairs where Saffire was scooting into the small room as well, still sporting the white sweater she had slept in, hair drawn up in a crazy disheveled topknot, brushing her teeth as she tried to smile, toothpaste oozing from the corners of her lips.

“Mornin’.” Saffire mumbled hastily, waving with one hand, mostly curious to see who Saffron was talking to, and why she hadn’t waited for her to come downstairs.

“Go upstairs and finish that.” Saffron scolded her, thinking for an accomplished, intelligent woman who had just spent her last few years playing classical violin for a professional orchestra, she was a bit of a child in so many ways. “Geez, I’m not your mother.”

“It’s okay. Come around to the sink here honey. We got cups and water.” SeRae motioned her behind the coffee bar, trying not to notice the way she squinted at Saffron, almost as if she were taunting her. *They would be a challenge these two!*

“I’m Maud, and that there’s MY sister SeRae.” Maud smiled again, hoping to let these girls know that no matter what, the four of them would need to be friends and get acquainted. Didn’t matter what the two of them had left behind, they were in Hotness Café territory now, and attitudes had to give way to customer service.



The Idols were always number one. Always right. Their privacy was always protected, and most importantly . . . never hit on. Remembering the vodka bottle and names on the black board she wondered if by some odd chance, they hadn’t entertained JJ and Hyun Joong last night. *No, that was virtually impossible.*

“Anneyeong . . .” SeRae bowed slightly, wishing she had been able to meet them before today. This was just awkward. They seemed okay, but being mostly American, she was certain that not only would she and Maud have to baby them into the customs, most assuredly they would be the epitome of middle-school fangirls for each and every idol duo that worked, and everyone else who came to relax, put their feet up, engage in some socializing and stay anonymous at the same time.

“Have you looked around yet?” Maud offered, finishing off tying her apron around her thin waistline and pointing toward the opposite side of the café, past the hallway to where the table spread out, and a larger room appeared.

“No. Last night was a bit of a blur.” Saffire snickered, tapping her toothbrush on the counter and gulping in a large sip of water before spitting into the sink.

“Yeah, you could say that.” Saffron agreed. *It was a wonder Saffire could remember much of ‘anything’ that had happened she was so wasted.*

“Well, come take a look over here.” Motioning for the girls to follow, Maud stepped up toward a large wall filled with photos from top to bottom, the three largest in the middle being that of Uncle Ryu, Saffron’s mother, and Saffire’s father. “This is the ‘Couples Wall’.” She announced proudly, her eyes misting with unshed tears at the deceased Uncle Ryu’s younger, smiling face, void of the heartache and sadness she knew he had experienced in the latter part of his life.

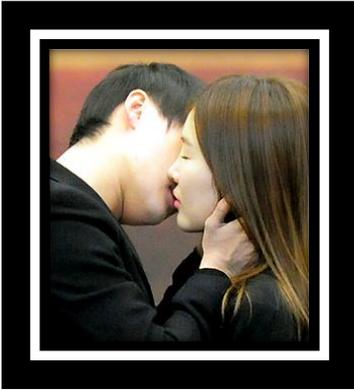
“Wow.” Saffire let her breath out slowly, wondering how all these years Uncle Ryu had known she had a twin sister, but never gave away the secret. From the look of the wall . . . her father and brother had both known sister Saffron’s mother. It seemed so complicated all of a sudden.

Saffron studied the photos much like she had the one upstairs in the living area. Again, her mother and Uncle Ryu side-by-side, even though not exactly together. Her father, his eyes tense, mouth set in a firm unsmiling line. There had never been a word about the connection. Not until the phone call had come, two short days ago . . . announcing the death of the man she had only remembered as Uncle Ryu the Trot singer.

Again, the shiver ran down her spine, and again she dismissed it as a chill in the cold (as yet) unheated café, hoping one day the mystery would be revealed.

Scanning the rest of the photos up and down the wall, at the very end she found him. Her Baek Seung Jo, Kim Hyun Joong staring at a dark-haired Korean girl . . . are they ‘a couple’? With his longish hair a dark brown she hoped to God it was an old picture. A photo taken somewhere years ago, the girl either a friend, or maybe someone from his distant past. Her Baek Seung Jo couldn’t have a girlfriend. She didn’t want to experience what sister Saffire was going through already. She had just discovered her ‘Prince’. He had barely slipped up into the saddle of his white horse, and he was still holding the glass slipper.





“OH HELL NO!” Came Saffire’s loud voice from the opposite end of the long wall. “No. I don’t believe it. Everyone’s lying.” Arms crossed angrily, her eyes saddened as she stood face-to-face with Junsu, lip locked with an attractive Asian girl. “Please . . . Maud is it?” She threw a pitiful look at the older Noona, begging for a different answer, or at the very least some idea of when the photo had hit the ‘Couples Wall’.

“Yes, Maud. That’s my name child. And Mr. Kim Junsu, and the pretty Noona. I can’t say honey. He comes in a lot. He and Mr. JJ. I wasn’t here when your Uncle put that picture up. Don’t know when, don’t know why. Mianhae.” She apologized. *All she could do was speculate.*

It had been months since Junsu had even ‘talked’ about another girl (other than someone he was attached to in the States). Someone he had befriended years ago, and was anxious to coerce into moving. The excitement in his voice was evident every time he mentioned hearing from her, but never a name, or picture. For the most part he was the quiet one, who kept his personal life to himself. The fact that he had even confided the uncommon friendship to her was just a fluke, and then he had made her promise to never talk about it to anyone. And she hadn’t. His secret was still safe.

“Well, I think we both need to forget about last night AND this morning’s ‘message’ (if you know what I mean) and move on.” Saffron urged, curling one arm about Saffire’s shoulder almost lovingly.

“But, JJ kissed me.” Saffire muttered in her ear quietly. “And I’m confused, I don’t want to forget. Not about either. Besides, you’re one to talk, ‘Ms. Oh Ha Ni’.” She reminded Saffron looking away from the photo, certain she couldn’t look at it another second.

“Yeah, well ‘Miss Oh Ha Ni’, was ‘as usual’ a clumsy idiot last night, and DON’T repeat this . . .” Chucking her sisters shoulder she rolled her eyes. “But, I probably ran him off for good after what happened.”

“Okay. What happened?” Saffire was all ears. Apparently while she and JJ were kissing in the café, Saffron and Hyun Joong were doing ‘something else’ upstairs in the apartment.

Maud and SeRae moved quietly away, now thoroughly convinced that they were in the presence of two serious fangirls that were going to need a whole lot of attention in the upcoming weeks

and months. Mouthing “C . . . R . . . A . . . Z . . . Y . . .” to each other, fingers whirling about their heads in the process they disappeared back into the opposite side of the café.

“Hot coffee, all down his pants. I panicked so hardcore, I basically groped him for like five solid minutes.” Saffron admitted, blushing slightly.

“Whoah . . .” Saffire began to giggle, then laugh harder, imagining the look on Hyun Joong’s face as he was being ‘touched’ and ‘fondled’ in Saffron’s attempt to remedy the embarrassing situation.

“I know, pretty pathetic huh?” Saffron pulled out one of the café chairs sitting backwards in it, leaning her chin in her arms on the rounded back. “All I ever wanted was to meet and marry Prince Charming. Mom hated the idea . . .” She explained, her eyes sad as she stared up into the photograph on the wall of her Mother. “She introduced me to Mr. Big because he had money. I fell for the enigma. Should’ve followed my heart. Now . . .” Eyes winding their way toward Hyun Joong’s picture, she remembered only her toes curling and heart flip-flopped about in her chest randomly the first time he looked at her under the table in the drinking tent. “It’s probably already too late.”

Saffire whirled around, her topknot nearly falling down in the process. “Aghhhh.” She growled grabbing the corner of her long white sweater, twisting it in a knot nervously. “I thought coming here would change things. “Prince Charming, huh? You know he doesn’t exist. Except in fairytales. You don’t seem the fairytale type.”

“That’s not a very nice thing to say. You don’t know me.” Now this hungover, frumpy looking sister was making assumptions about her character and choices. Where did she come off saying something like that? Look at her . . . Kissing JaeJoong just ‘cause she was drunk, when in reality she was drooling all over one stupid text message from Junsu. Back home in Chicago they would call that ‘slutty’. But, attempting to be non-judgmental she tossed her hair back, hoping they weren’t about to have another knock-down, drag out right here on their first day as co-owners of the Hotness Café.

Saffire stiffened at Saffron’s harsh words. It was true, she didn’t know her, but she seemed to have lived the life of luxury, not unlike herself . . . feeding off the paycheck of a Corporate Entrepreneur who basically ‘kept’ her for himself, then dumped her when he got tired and wanted to move on to someone more interesting. If ‘Mother’ had forced her into the lap of Mr. Big, then it was certain that Saffron and mom didn’t have a relationship based on mutual respect.

Now this same ‘sister’, wanted to weasel her way into her life, mooning over Baek Seun Jo, like Juliet to Romeo, and in the process, tell her what to do with her ‘non-existent’ love life! The rift between them seemed as wide as the Grand Canyon all of a sudden.

‘Mother’ had never even bothered to give her much advice about men, just wondering why she wanted to settle down with her art and music and have a down-to-earth husband and family. How did she manage to juggle the two of them in secret and screw up both their lives anyway? And Uncle Ryu? From the looks of the pictures both upstairs and down, Saffron might well have been the favorite. So far there hadn’t been even one photo of her and her beloved Uncle, who had introduced her to her first violin, held her hand at every concert she remembered with vivid fondness, and introduced her to music heads and moguls even at the tender age of thirteen.

“You’re right. I DON’T KNOW YOU. And you obviously DON’T know me either.” Saffire suddenly buckled in anger, fisting the table in front of Saffron’s wide blue eyes. “So why don’t we just leave it at that? I need to go change. There’s work to do.”

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