

# CHAPTER FIVE

“Things I don’t like . . .”

“Small talk . . . probably you . . . Mondays . . . cold coffee.

Making small talk with you on a Monday while my coffee’s getting cold.



Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014

8:00 A.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Café

**A**N entire week had passed, and things had gone progressively from bad to worse. Like a fish out of water Saffire was lost without her violin, paints and beach front. Saffron, struggled with her identify, vacillating between her corporate self that should have been put to rest weeks ago, and her desire to lead a more normal life, void of rigid schedules, suits, heels, and slicked back hairdo’s. The common ground that the Hotness Café should have afforded these newly acquainted sisters, had yet to be discovered.

Monday was a cold blustery morning, and the heat hadn’t officially kicked on





in the café yet, as Saffire trudged into the freezing kitchen, her slippers scuffing the floor lazily. She knew she was late. Glancing over at the clock, as she meandered around the counter already dotted with freshly rolled sweet cakes and donuts, her nose twitched uncontrollably at the delicious smell of the freshly baked goods ready for the first round of customers at 9:00 A.M.

*Did it really matter that after a bizarre and hectic seven days of non-stop training, memorizing coffee recipes, broken cups, and continual arguments with Saffron, what the hell time she came in today? As she recalled . . . last night after the doors were locked, ‘sister’ had banned her from the kitchen, telling her to either get her act together, and at least ‘pretend’ to care what was going on, do some freaking work, or get her lazy, skinny ass on a plane back to L.A. Yes . . . she was pretty angry!*

Maud looked up from her stance at the coffee machine, her eyes narrowed in fear for what Saffron and SeRae were going to say to the laid-back California beach girl, who for all her lazy, nonchalant ways was still funny, engaging and a joy to have around the café. She hated that there would be fireworks again this morning.

“You’re late little one.” She muttered, her voice low and barely recognizable. “Hurry and get your hands washed. I’m grinding the beans. You can help me.” Attempting a weak smile, she noticed out of the corner of her eye, the other two at the end of the long counter kneading dough, heads down (not really paying attention).

“Why?” Saffire hissed, plopping both hands next to the massive coffee machine defiantly. “SHE doesn’t want me here. Said so last night. You didn’t hear her. I don’t WANT to make another f’ng cup of coffee except to drink it and go back to bed.” Slipping her chin down to the tie of her sweatshirt she studied the dark beans in the large coffee tin in front of Maud. *Sorry Uncle Ryu.*

“Honey . . .” Maud swung around in front of her placing both hands on either side of the young girl’s cheeks lovingly. “No one said this was going to be easy. It’s a business. It can’t run itself. Your Uncle Ryu trusted you and Saffron to come in and do what SeRae and I do. We don’t want to stay here forever. You two need each other. Just like we did when we started.”

“NO! I DON’T NEED HER!” Saffire barked, leaning around the small Asian woman, her blue eyes spitting fire in the brightly lit kitchen.

Even knowing what had been said the night before, Saffron hearing the childish rantings, clearly attempted to ignore Saffire's insistence to cause drama so early on a busy Monday morning. Humming loudly as she placed each roll onto the pan in front of her, she was determined to keep her mind focused on Prince Charming, Kim Hyun Joong this morning.

Even after finding her cell phone packed tightly in the bottom of her suitcase (her mother feeling sorry for her and sending it), she didn't have a number for him, and neither he 'or' JJ had showed up in the café at all last week. She hadn't slept a wink last night, going over and over the picture of him plastered to the café wall, as if to remind her she was becoming 'obsessed'.

*What was he doing this morning? Was he waking up in bed with the girl who 'drooled' over him in the photo? What did he see in her that 'she' didn't have? Prettier? Not possible. More talented? He wouldn't know. They had barely talked. Was she good in the sack? Ewwww, didn't want to imagine that. Surely, he would show up eventually and they could at least talk. Maybe then she wouldn't be so on edge.*

Saffire on the other hand, had done nothing to help the situation either. Opting out of the most important and busiest times of the day, excusing herself to 'roam' the block around the café in the cold afternoons hoping to catch a glimpse of JaeJoong coming or going in the area. And Junsu? WELL! Her text to him had been brief and cold at best. It was odd how she manipulated her feelings and seemed to make excuses for everything. How she had ever gotten as far as she did in the music world could only have been attributed to the fact that she had blatant raw talent, that couldn't go untapped or ignored.

They were unarguably, night and day, oil and water and north against south. It was probably a good thing that their parents had kept them apart all these years. One of them would surely have come up dead.

Before too long, Saffire could be seen bent over the coffee beans with Maud, at least 'looking' like she was doing something. Sighing through her song, before she realized it, Saffron's mutterings went from quiet humming to loud, uncaring singing.

"Almost paradise . . . La, la, la, la, laaaa . . . la, la . . ." She squealed at the top of her lungs, arms in the air as if conducting a pretend orchestra over the oven.

“OH MY GOD! WILL YOU SHUT THE HELL UP!” Saffire squawked disgustedly slapping both hands on the metal countertop. “How many times do I have to tell you? Wrong song . . . wrong drama! ‘Boys Over Flowers’, and he DOESN’T get the girl. You’re driving me freaking nuts. I didn’t get any sleep last night ‘cause you were singing the stupid thing in your sleep half the night. What do you want from me anyway? BLOOD!”

Saffron, swiveled to face her sister politely, wiping both hands across the front of her white apron. “In my world . . . he DOES get the girl. And I happen to LIKE the song. Don’t care what drama it came from.” Satisfied she had said enough, she turned back to her work, winking at SeRae. “Doesn’t take much for her, does it?” She whispered.

SeRae stood stoically between the two bickering twins, wondering how long it would be before they would iron out their differences, quit fighting and get down to business. Not only did they argue over the café, they disagreed about everything. What to eat for lunch, what time to break, what to wear, who was doing what at what time. Even the pictures on the ‘Couples Wall’ had been the source of several arguments, from the family photos down to . . . of course . . . Junsu and Hyun Joong.

As the loud voices beside her rose, suddenly the seemingly calm Saffron began to flush, from her neck up to the tips of her ears and without warning, scooped up a handful of flour and stepping back away from SeRae, flung it at Saffire, watching it fly across her the room, dotting both her sweatshirt, and her shocked face.

“I’ve had just about enough of you. You’re a lazy, little . . .” Searching for a word she finally screamed out, “SLUT! PLEASE do us all a favor and go home.”

“Ah! How DARE you call me a slut! FROSTY BITCH! Because I can get two guys and you can’t even get one? That makes me a slut? WOW!”

Brushing flour from around her face and out of her hair, Saffire squared off in front of Saffron, scoping out the immediate area rapidly for something to throw back at her. Instead of intervening, Maud stepped out of the way, knowing that getting in the middle would only mean disaster for them all. She and SeRae had had their share of flour throwing, name calling and arguing when they started . . . in the long run, it only meant one thing . . . ‘time-out’, was inevitable and on its way.

Finally spotting something unbreakable to throw, Saffire grabbed up the large can of coffee beans and hurled it out into the chilly kitchen air. As they careened off the counter and floor, dropping at everyone's feet, Saffron chuckled a low, somewhat evil laugh.

“Really? That's the best you can do. And maybe I don't WANT to have but one guy in my life, UNLIKE YOU! You obviously got Father's genes. He's a player and so are you. I don't know what JJ OR Junsu see's in you. You're . . . you're . . . you're easy! You let him kiss you after ONE hour! God only knows how far you would've gone if I hadn't been around.”

Now Saffron knew she was getting ugly. She couldn't believe she had just compared Saffire to their womanizing father, and brought JJ's kiss into the argument. If it was one thing they both DID have in common it was how much they despised them for the most part. But, she had asked for it. Was she 'that' jealous, that new sister had gotten to first base and all she had done was rolled over and played dead.

“Well if I'm the slut then you're the bitch. Little Miss 'Oh Ha Ni'! You're so messed up you don't even know 'who' in the hell you are. Hyun Joong's already HAD Oh Ha Ni, he doesn't need another one. Humph! You take after Mother! 'Cause she wouldn't know a good man if he slapped her in the face! All she wants that stupid husband of hers for is his money. Seems like you followed right along in her footsteps didn't you? You and your HOITY TOITY, RICH, CEO BOYFRIEND. Where did it get you Saffron? HUH? He left you high and dry, without a penny. Not even a freaking job! I hate you. At least I WANT to settle down and have a family. Antonio being married WASN'T MY FAULT. He promised me the world. All I did was believe him.”

Now Saffire was tearing up, her anger mixed with sadness, as once again she reiterated both of their pitiful past relationships. *Why did it always boil down to that?*

“BITE ME!”

Saffron, stuck her middle finger in the air, knowing full well that even though she acted as if Saffire had come straight from hell to annoy her and screw up her life, she envied her ability to let her emotions out, and move on. The talented blonde sister was fun-loving and engaging when she drank, casual and laid-back and never took life too seriously. Even going so far as to laugh about the fact she had dreamt she killed the ex-boyfriend and how did it feel to be a murderer.

It was true. Maybe she was turning into a bitch. Mr. Big had done a number on her for sure, and now enthralled with Kim Hyun Joong, Saffire had hit the nail on the head. She 'was' confused as to how she felt going into this new life, desperately longing for the perfect relationship.

Maud and SeRae stood silently by, heads swinging back and forth between both girls as if they were spectators at a tennis match. But suddenly at Saffron's loud declaration and blatant one-finger display of misdirected affection, clearly Saffire wasn't about to take the situation lying down. As one long arm shot out, she lunged toward Saffron, both hands swinging like an errant child fighting over a precious toy. Saffron reciprocated, taking a stance, eyes steely, teeth bared, long nails ready to do damage to Saffire's neck and face.

"Touch my face and you'll never walk again." Saffire growled, slapping Saffron about the chest frantically, her hair flying violently in unison to each blow that met its mark.

"Ouch! Stop it that hurts!" Saffron shouted, fighting back to the best of her ability. She wasn't much of a fighter, and was surprised that Saffire could rain so many blows to her before she connected and hit back.

It had gone on long enough. Envisioning more broken china and mugs, and an even bigger mess to clean up in the process, the Noona's stepped in and halted the 'match'.

"GAME OVER!" The small but strong and stout SeRae hollered, gripping Saffire tightly, while smaller sister, Maud wrapped both arms about a reluctant Saffron, pulling her further back and into the small doorway to the back hall.

"TIME OUT!" She ordered the younger woman, her voice strained with warning.

Wriggling in their arms, anger still at its boiling point, the girls glared at each other, not even remotely concerned that in the midst of a work day, they were creating havoc, and causing more work for their older counterparts.

"STOP IT and follow me." SeRae barked at the two of them, taking one girl's wrist in each of her chubby hands and literally dragging them out into the hallway and past the restroom to the ice locker. "IN! Doors locked. Timers on. Can't come out until you've made up. Hot coffee on the flip side. Mianhae." And lips pursed, but eyes twinkling she nodded to her sister, watching the girls step back, flinging their heads about the small boxy freezer, frightened and already shivering.

“I hated to do that.” SeRae set the timer for fifteen minutes, locking the door securely behind her. “But you know it works.”

Maud tipped her head agreeably, noting that her ‘concerned’ sister hadn’t even given them the ‘full’ twenty minutes which was what they had received after their first knock down drag out fight in the café kitchen.

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8:30 A.M.

Hotness Café – Ice Locker

**U**nkle Ryu’s ghostly figure, sat picking his nails as he studied the full freezer around him. The Noonas had done a great job of keeping it stocked and organized. He had made the right choice when hiring the two hot-headed Asian girls, one straight out of culinary school, the other an accomplished Barrister. They had given up fifteen of the best years of their young lives, and served him respectfully and well.

Chuckling to himself, as he waited for Saffron and Saffire to join him in the cramped space, he remembered seeing the faces of SeRae, and Maud the first time he had shoved them into the tiny freezer to ‘duke’ it out or freeze to death in the process. With the timer set on twenty minutes, they had banged wildly on the door after ten, but still hadn’t shown any improvement when he released them into the hallway, and back they had gone, cussing him out under their breath. Ten more minutes, and he flung the door wide to see them huddled together, hugging, and giggling . . . the storm in their relationship over.



Now, it was Saffire and Saffron’s turn to experience the wrath of the ‘freezer’. For their own sanity and the sake of the café’s future . . . it had to be done. The large door whooshed open, and in they stepped. Could they have been any more of a sight? His chuckle turned into a

*low laugh, as he scooted over to one side, allowing them to sit between he and the wall. But, they weren't interested in sitting.*

Still at a stand-off of sorts, Saffire leaned against a metal shelf, arms crossed angrily, mouth set in a thin line, eyes closed. Saffron, chose her territory on the opposite side against the racks of meat, and frozen dough. Rubbing her arms to shield herself from the biting cold she closed her eyes as well.

*Not wanting to miss a second of the excitement, Uncle Ryu sat on pins and needles, awaiting the first sign of a truce. Five minutes ticked by . . . then ten . . . and at fifteen, still without a word said between them, both shivering and stomping their feet to keep warm, the door clicked open and Maud's dark head could be seen in the light.*

*"Not ready." Uncle Ryu stated silently to himself. And the door closed with a click.*

*"Ten more." Is what he heard SeRae's voice announce as the crack came together, and the girls rolled their eyes disgustedly.*

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**B**UT suddenly, out of nowhere, Saffron's reddish head rose, and she took a step toward Saffire slowly. "I'm sorry I called you a slut, and said you were like Father." She whispered. Then smiling a weak smile, she put one finger to her lips almost as if telling a secret. "There isn't anyone on the planet who is like him. He gives great presents though. Don't you think?"

Unable to keep from giggling, Saffire, her teeth chattering in her head, pulled Saffron toward her, wrapping her sweat-shirted arms about her sisters' bare ones. "Ehhh, it's cool. Yeah, I got a pony for my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. Never even learned how to ride it."

"That's nothing . . ." Saffron hugged into her sister's warm body tightly, longing for that hot cup of coffee that had been promised them on the outside. "He threw me a Sweet Sixteen party and invited the Back Street Boys."

“Ohhhh, I’m, jealous, they were my favorites. Did they come?” Saffire’s eyes were wide with envy as she laid her cold cheek against Saffron’s warm hair.

“No. Mother said it was too extravagant and I’d never go back to school or sleep again for an entire year.”

“You smell good . . .” Saffire crooned, feeling an odd sense of warmth and sudden companionship in the arms of the sister she wanted to hate. “I’m sorry too. I guess this whole thing is just pretty overwhelming huh?” Smiling inwardly at the chance to finally make things right with Saffron, she rambled on despite the cold. “And you know you had Hyun Joong right where you wanted him. I don’t know why you didn’t just ‘go for it’. Well . . . it’s obvious I would have.”

Saffron stepped back her eyes focused on Saffire’s sincere face. “You’re right. I did. I could really use help in that area. Miss Oh Ha Ni needs to step it up a notch.” Chuckling she shivered, her teeth chattering unwillingly.

“It’s fucking freezing in here huh? Whose bright idea was this anyway?” Saffire barked out, looking toward the locked door, wondering when in the hell they were going to be allowed out.

Saffron threw her arms away from Saffire spreading them wide to engulf the tiny space around them. “THEM! Those two crazy noona mama’s out there!” Her voice cracked as she began dancing circles around Saffire’s form huddled against the shelf. “Isn’t this some sort of sister abuse?”

“Probably!” Seeing the breath floating from in front of her lips, Saffire began tapping her foot to an imaginary song in her head as well, figuring if they were going to freeze to death at least they would go happy. And about that time the door popped open . . . with no one in sight on the opposite side, but the long, warm empty hallway.

*They were free. And happy. They would be fine. He was sure of it. Uncle Ryu dropped his hand into his pocket, nodding his head in satisfaction. His little experiment had worked the first time, and now . . . years later, yet again. If only he had more control over their love lives. Instead it seemed as if everything had gone awry, and no matter how hard he tried to*

*help . . . it wasn't working. "Go on girls, Uncle Ryu loves you." He whispered, watching them dart into the hallway, hand in hand giggling and laughing.*

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8:33 A.M.

Café - Kitchen

**M**AUD looked up from behind the coffee bar just as Saffire and Saffron ran arm in arm into the kitchen, singing 'Almost Paradise' at the top of their lungs. *Why were they out of the freezer already? The timer hadn't even gone off. How had they gotten the door unlocked?*

"MAUD! It worked, you and SeRae are geniuses. We get it. No more fighting. Promise!" Saffron announced, 'both' girls throwing their arms about the startled noona. "Gamza, gamza . . . thanks!" Squeezing her until she could barely breathe, she smiled at their 'temporary' enthusiasm.

"Yahhh, you're welcome. Someone very special did it for us, a long time ago." She mused. "We knew it would help. Nothing like a little PUSH to get you both on the same page. NOW! We've wasted a good part of prep time, Saffire get upstairs and change. I know you're a sexy little number in those cotton boxers, but not appropriate for customers."

Swatting her backside, she ushered her toward the stairs, turning her attention to Saffron. "And YOU missy! You have a kitchen to clean up. You and your 'flour tossing'. Come on! We have idols coming to help today, and only twenty minutes to get this place ready for customers."

"Mianhae Noona." Saffron's head dropped apologetically.

No matter how bad she felt for what she had done, it had still felt DAMN good to give in to her emotions for once in her life and lose control. Uncle Ryu would have been proud of her. Even as a child, he always said she was wound too tight. He had taken her along with him into the kitchen of his 'then' sprawling Gangnam home, showing her how to pound her frustrations out into the bread dough, and recipes that required concentration and precision.

And, her cooking skills had not gone unnoticed at the Hotness Café either. Both Maud and SeRae picked up immediately on her innate ability to gently roll and knead dough for bread and rolls, and how carefully she concentrated on every aspect of recipe's that were foreign to her, listening intently to directions and asking questions. Between her business skills and familiarity in the kitchen, the noonas were convinced Uncle Ryu had tossed them a diamond in the rough.

Sadly, though her people skills were lacking. She spent the majority of the day, head bent over the counter, determined to get everything right, following the noonas everywhere they went, taking in each and every word and command. Unlike her sister, only during 'allotted' breaks did she wander into the small restaurant side, staring quietly at the Couples Wall, hands behind her back as if memorizing each and every face, and contemplating the situations behind the photos.

Saffire on the other hand was another story entirely. Wanting only to wander through the café, staring at the picture wall as well, drink her weight in coffee, and scope out the neighborhood, her fingers constantly moved on a non-existent piano or violin at her sides or in front of her as she walked. She was going to be a tough nut to rein in and crack. But, turn her on to the public, and she was the epitome of her name, 'Fire'. With a languid sexy walk, and smooth enticing voice, she woo'd each customer that walked through the door, when she 'was' around. The tinkle of her laugh could be heard echoing throughout the bakery side of the café when she knew she wasn't allowed to wait tables, and her penchant for flirtatious one-liners was unmatched.

Now looking into Saffron's repentant face she had to smile. Maybe these two firecrackers could start rubbing off on each other like she and SeRae had when forced to work the café together. If they could only see how they complimented each other!

"No harm done." Maud whispered. "I'll help. And then it's doors open and on into the day! Yep, I got a feeling it's going to be a very special day today." With a twinkle in her eye she glanced at the large chalkboard behind Saffron's bent head. "Heechul and Donghae . . . Oh, so FUN!"

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11:30 A.M.

Cup of Hotness Café

“**Y**AHHHH, sexyyy Noona . . .” Heechul growled slipping up behind an unsuspecting SeRae, back-hugging her plump form, as she dropped the dish towel at her feet, allowing him to snuggle his nose into her warm neck. “You! Always smell like cinnamon and pastries. So yummy!” He giggled. “Cinderella like. What did you bake for me special today?”

His casual banter was common, and his favorite, vegetable Korean Pancakes. She knew it well, and always had some warm and ready when she knew he was coming. Today however, she had left the recipe with Saffron, hoping that it might afford her the opportunity to step out of her comfort zone.

“Special? Mmmm, you’re special enough for me Cinderella.” She cooed, feeling him plant tiny wet kisses up and down the side of her neck. “But . . . I do have your pancakes ready. Warming in the oven. We knew you were coming. Just weren’t sure when.”

Sighing, reluctant to slip from his young slender arms, and lips against her, she pointed to the oven at her back. “Go on, get a hot pad and have you one. You know that’s really why you came in here.” She scolded him, her face creased in smiles. He was one of her favorites. He always accosted her first, before ever even speaking to poor Maud. It was exhilarating, and she so wished she were younger. Even though she had her bias, she would have taken this young Heechul for a steady ride ten short years ago.

“YAH! How shallow am I?” He barked jokingly, turning as she had suggested and grabbing a plate and hot pad.

“Shallow enough. You have habits that are hard to break. Where’s your counterpart? Already signing autographs and scoping out the ladies I assume?” She questioned him about his partner in crime today . . . Donghae.

“Aishhh, he’s already got his eye on some hot little number with strawberry blonde hair, hanging out in the hallway back there. I’m about to go get in the middle of them and take a Selca for the Couples Wall. I love a good opportunity to photo bomb.

SeRae heard him say strawberry blonde, and hallway. That could only mean one thing, Donghae had walked through the door and immediately spotted Saffron headed out the back with the trash. His eyes were like radar. He could spot a gorgeous female a hundred miles away, and zero

in on them in 1.1 milli-seconds. *How was she going to stop him? More importantly, 'could' she stop him?*

“Well.” She started, tugging the apron off her head and patting Heechul on the back, she stepped away. “He’s discovered my newest protégé Saffron.”

“Saffron?” Heechul turned, the large pancake already headed toward his mouth. “What silly name is that?”

“HER silly name. Need to run interference, or we’ll never get any work done today.” Scooting him out of the way she darted around the counter. Where was Maud? And more importantly . . . Saffire? She had sent the two of them to gather up the trash and make sure it was emptied before the lunch crowd filtered in, and now it seemed all three of them had gone AWOL. Except for Saffron and now . . . Donghae.

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11:30 A.M.

Outside the Hotness Café

The dark SUV pulled up onto the already crowded street in front of the café. JJ’s manager unlocked the doors and the small troupe of idols spilled out at the door, pushing and shoving playfully, motioning him on with a promise to text or call when they needed picked up.

The day had gone well so far. Junsu had managed to join the cast to go over the OST for the movie, and Hyun Joong had nailed not only his lines but his first major on-screen fight scene. JJ himself had spent the major part of the morning, looking forward to lunch and ‘Saffire’.

The door swung open, revealing the never-ending staircase he remembered from only a short week ago. As his eyes adjusted to the dimness of the small hallway, he winked at Hyun Joong, aware that ‘his’ memories of a tipsy Saffron crawling doggedly upward, were probably forefront in his mind as well.

“Wonder where they are?” He whispered, leaning in toward Joong’s shoulder, trying desperately not to let Junsu hear their conversation.

“Don’t know.” Hyun Joong responded lightly. “I’m just hungry, can we get a table before it fills up. I’m sure they’ll appear eventually. Like bee’s to honey no doubt.” He snickered.

“YAH!” Junsu’s loud voice crackled behind JJ’s bent head. “Where’s who? Are we supposed to meet someone for lunch?” Flipping up in front of JJ he bounced around anxiously, his eyes darting from side-to-side looking for an empty table.

“Ani.” JJ smirked, stepping away from the entrance spotting a table off toward the windows at the front. Shoving Hyun Joong in front of him they headed in to sit.

He hadn’t said anything to Junsu about Saffire on purpose, taking the last few days to let the way he felt about their ‘encounter’ settle in, and find a soft spot in his heart. He was prone to leap too fast and suffer the consequences later, and that usually meant trouble in the long run. Besides, Junsu hyung seemed to be having ‘girlfriend’ related problems of his own. More than once he had noticed him checking his phone, obviously for a message that never came. It wasn’t like him to be sullen or distant, in any part of his life, public or private. Even now, with the issues pending at the Hotel in JeJu, he had started out last week, upbeat and excited to meet up with ‘her’. Somewhere between then and now . . . it hadn’t happened.

Hyung Joong dropped wearily into the small café chair studying the menu he already had memorized, just to take his mind off of Saffron. He knew she was here somewhere. And how was he going to react when she showed up in his line of vision? His heart was doing the ‘happy dance’ inside his chest, but his expression was solemn. He couldn’t let JJ or Junsu know how he ‘really’ felt. Or her either for that matter. Even though after last night, he could officially say he was an EX-Boyfriend, and single again . . . that didn’t make it seem right to jump from the frying pan back into the fire no matter what his gut was telling him.



“The beef is always good. Guess I’ll have that.” He stated calmly crossing his hands in front of him patiently waiting for something . . . anything . . . to happen.

Junsu, was a pretty good judge of character, and knew these two hyungs better than they knew themselves. With an odd sense of foreboding, he measured their dispositions carefully. JJ was grinning from the top of his head down to the tips of his toes. It was his “I have a secret, and it involves a girl” look, that he wore just about the time he was about to break the news he had a new girlfriend. And Joong . . . well, he was sucking on his tongue inside his cheek, like he did when he was about to explode and



didn't want anyone to know it. What were the two of them up to? And what did it have to do with coming for lunch at THIS particular place . . . so ridiculously far from the movie location.

“Beef for me too.” JJ gathered he and Joong's menu's rising to remove his jacket as he scanned the crowded room. A disappointed look crossing his face, he dropped back down, chin in his arms. *She had to be here. She just 'had to'!*

“Alright you two, what's going on?” Junsu slapped his menu down in the middle of the table, looking from one friend to the other impatiently. “Uncle Ryu's is wayyy to far from the studio to be going for lunch. Wae? Girls? You're both as about as transparent as glass. Especially you JJ hyung.” Kicking JJ lightly under the table with one booted foot, he couldn't help but laugh. “Looking all starry-eyed like you get when you THINK you're in love and this one is (yet again) THE ONE!”

JJ curled his eyes up over toward Junsu sheepishly. *He couldn't get anything past this guy. He read him like an open book!*

“Okayyy, Joong? You want to tell it or you want me to?” He offered the opportunity to let Hyun Joong tell the story about meeting Uncle Ryu's nieces a week earlier, but Joong shook his head adamantly, declining the opportunity swiftly.

“Ani. You're mess. You tell.”

“SO! To make a long story short . . .” JJ cocked his head up, now more interested in conversation, given the chance to talk about Saffire. “Joong and I here, met Uncle Ryu's nieces at the drinking tent down the road after the funeral last week. You were still in JeJu. They were sort of ‘under the weather’, if you know what I mean. And we brought them back here afterward ‘cause they said this was where they were staying. Dear God they're so freaking gorgeous!” With eyes drifting shut, Junsu could tell he was about to go off on a rabbit trail if he didn't reign him in and back to the original story.

“Arraseo, get on with it. Your ‘discoveries’ are always ‘so freaking gorgeous’.” He quipped, nudging him in the arm to continue.

“Anyway, ummm . . . I guess you could say we ‘connected’. At least I did. How about you Joong?” JJ elbowed Hyun Joong who was staring out into the crowded room, his heart leaping about wildly at each turn of a woman's head as customers came and went.

“Huh? Oh de.”

“Like that was so hard to tell.” Junsu lifted his cell phone out of his pocket, laying it upside down in front of him on the table. “So, where are these two beauties? Do they live here? What? Names?”

“Hold it.” JJ put one palm up, halting his friend from any further line of questioning. “Why should I give out details when you can’t seem to divulge any information about your ‘mystery’ girlfriend? Right Hyun Joong? I don’t recall getting a name, bio, place of birth, age, physical description, or anything else to go on since you’ve been pining away over her for the last few weeks.”

Junsu swallowed hard. It was true. He had never mentioned Saffire because quite frankly, he never thought she would ever show up on his front doorstep. As many times as he had invited her to visit, begged her to leave her ridiculous Hispanic boyfriend, and start something with him, she had declined. What purpose would it have served for him to sing her praises, and then nothing develop? He was in the throes of legal issues with his Hotel, on the heels of his enlistment in the military, and busy with a final single, preparing to go off on tour one last time. As much as he longed to have her in his life right now, the timing was all wrong.

A week and a half ago sitting in almost this exact spot when he had gotten the text announcing she wanted to come to Korea would he help her find work, and these same two hyungs had seen it, it was just easier to let them assume they were already in a relationship. Now, how was he going to explain and tell them otherwise?

“You’re hiding her away in Japan? Aren’t you?” JJ asked. “Sly devil. You’re good at that. Keeps them out of the limelight huh? I get it. So does she have a name? You give yours I’ll give mine.”

“I call her Sr.” Junsu, quirked his mouth remembering the first time he had seen her rise up from her chair in the front row of the college orchestra, violin in hand, long blonde hair pinned to a tidy bun at the nape of her neck. Her tall frame seemed to swallow up the shorter man beside her, and when she bowed, her eyes drooping forward, he had lost his stomach and his resolve.

“Sr.” Hyung Joong laughed out loud, finally zeroing in on Junsu and JJ’s conversation. “That’s just weird.”

“De. I know. But there’s a reason for it. She’s tall. And I’m sort of short. I started calling her Sr. and she calls me Jr. Sort of a pet name.” Not only that, but her initials had been S.R. for Saffire R. Renault. It just seemed appropriate at the time. “Your turn. Names . . . Guys?”

But, Junsu’s question hung in the balance, for just at that moment, a familiar face hovered over the table, leaning in toward Hyung Joong, arms out as if waiting for a hug, face smiling. It was her . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

11:45 A.M.

Cup of Hotness Café

**S**AFFRON inclined into the back doorway, her face crinkling in laughter, Donghae’s hand resting lightly above her on the wall. In only a short five minutes, he had managed to get her name, what she liked to eat, where she was from, how she came to work at the café AND a phone number scribbled on the back of his hand, before heading into the most important question. Would she go out with him? As she blushed openly, little beads of sweat forming around her eyebrows, he knew he was hitting pay dirt. He rarely if ever got the opportunity to hook up with American girls, and his tri-monthly obligation to work Uncle Ryu’s Hotness Café was turning out to be a relative ‘gold mine’ for him today.

Glancing up past her twinkling blue eyes and glistening reddish hair, he struggled to think about where he could take her that would make her first week in Gangnam special. Before coming up with an answer, he realized a slew of people were beginning to gather around the two of them, including his favorite two noonas from the café, another tall stunning blonde, and even Heechul, chewing his vegetable pancake lazily as he wandered into the hall.

*Dear GOD! He wasn’t about to rape her or anything! They were just talking. What were they all doing?*

“Saffron.” SeRae’s voice was low and firm, her face taut. Without saying another word, Saffron knew she was in a shit load of trouble. She was breaking rule #1 of the Cup of Hotness Café handbook. No fraternizing with the idols. Did that mean she would end up back in the freezer?

Sucking in her breath, she dipped from under Donghae's arm hurriedly, snatching up the large trash bag on her way out the door. "Mianhae." She muttered as she darted away from the two of them, wondering if he would indeed make use of the number she had given him, and call her later. There was no chance Hyun Joong would get back with her, and for all practical purposes, Donghae seemed just as charming and amazing as he had been.

Maybe her Prince Charming came wrapped up in a 'different' idol package. One with dancing eyes, and a sexy smile, whose voice was liquid silver when he talked. *Why hadn't she ever fangirled on 'Super Junior' before? Saffire said they were all awesome and sexy, and she had a hard time picking her favorite.* Again, even though she was half Korean, she lived with both feet in America, and this side of her heritage was a closed book to her with the exception of the scattered visits she had taken to see Uncle Ryu.

"Donghae . . ." SeRae's eyebrows crooked down at the boyish grinning face in front of her. "Tsk, tsk, tsk." Wagging one finger at him threateningly, she couldn't help but meet his grin. "My 'girls' are busy. What are the rules?"

"I know, I know. But noona, she's daebak." He argued convincingly. "You can't keep her holed up here forever. When you turn her loose, I'll be waiting. Can't stop me outside the front door."

His lips smacking SeRae's smooth smiling cheek he bounded out toward the crowded lunch area, motioning for Heechul to follow. But Heechul had other things on his mind.

Finally, having come across the small crowd in the back entryway, he spotted Saffire. Raking her long manicured fingers through a mane of disheveled blonde hair, she looked up the moment he spied her. Watching her was like slow motion in a movie. Glued to her figure and the way she waltzed unhurried into the gathering, he felt himself quiver in anticipation of hearing her speak. Give him something.

Stepping closer, he noticed Donghae drift off toward the dining room, not caring that it was nearly twelve and time for the two of them to visit fans, and sign autographs. He wanted to meet this blonde vision first and foremost. And he wasn't going anywhere until he did!

But, typically Donghae had other things in mind. Nose to nose with the angel in front of him, Heechul reached out and touched the bottom of one curl around her shoulder, his eyes fixated on her mouth, when Donghae swung back around and trudging purposefully toward him, bowed

politely to Saffire, grabbed Heechul by the arm and hauled him away from, muttering under his breath that if he wasn't allowed to fraternize with the employees then neither was Heechul.

Waving meekly as he moved away, Heechul blew her a kiss, winking and motioning that he would talk to her later. Not to leave him high and dry . . .

With Saffron taking out the trash, Heechul and SeRae gone, that left only Maud and Saffire staring at each other comically.

“Well that was interesting!” Saffire scoffed. “Is he always like that?”

Maud watched Heechul disappear into the crowd toward the Couples Wall nodding her head introspectively. “Oh yeah honey. He's a keeper. Just watch yourself around him though. He'll have those panties off in a hot second, and you eating out of his hand. Not sure we need any little Cinderella's running around the café right now. Got our hands full as it is.” And with that, she threw her head back in laughter and strode away, leaving a confused Saffire to contemplate her unusual answer about the dynamic and sexy Kim Heechul.

Saffron appeared back in the small space, wiping her hands on the bottom of her apron, a soft glow to her already flushed face. “Did you see that?” She asked Saffire. “Donghae. Oh my God. Is he amazing or what? I think he was going to ask me out, when SeRae interrupted. He just swept me off my feet. I think I would've married him right then and there if he had proposed. DAMN. Forgot the rules about no hanging with the idols completely.” Chattering to Saffire her voice low, she followed Donghae's bouncing, energetic body around the café as he took selcas with customers, and signed autographs. “You were right. Oh Ha Ni needs to broaden her horizons.” She admitted in her sister's ear.

“Yeah, well I'm sick and tired of being back here behind the scenes. Look how much fun they're having up there. Let's go mingle for a few minutes.”

“Oh my GOD! We can't do that.” Saffron balked, stepping back away from Saffire now hesitant and frightened to buck the rules that the noonas had set in stone so many years ago.

“SAFFRON. WHO THE HELL OWNS THIS PLACE ANYWAY?” A disgruntled Saffire hissed at her angrily. “We could fire them today, and do whatever the fuck we want. Uncle Ryu made us owners, not them.”

Saffron, not one to go against the system, debated whether to let Saffire talk her into breaking the rules or not. Wasn't this JUST what she had been thinking about? Afraid to step out and be more adventurous? Go with the flow? Have a little fun?

“Oh SHIT okay. Why not?” Tugging her long hair out of its ponytail, she shook it around her shoulders, feeling it soft against her face. The apron coming off over her head, her eyes fixated on Donghae, she stopped momentarily, wondering if they shouldn't have drinks or trays or something to make it look less obvious that they were idol spying.

But, Saffire had already bolted out toward the middle of the room, and then suddenly stopped dead in her tracks, spinning around and scurrying back toward her at break-neck speed.

“OH SHIT – OH SHIT” She gasped, one hand to her throat, the other wagging out toward the café dining room. “He's out there. They're ALL OUT THERE! And it looks like he has his girlfriend with him. OH MY GOD, I can't breathe. What are we gonna do?”

“What? Who has his girlfriend?” Saffron leaned around her, standing on tiptoes to see if she could make out where her exasperated sister was pointing at, hoping she wasn't talking about Hyun Joong and 'his' girlfriend.

“THEM, Oh Ha Ni!” She squealed, shaking Saffron's shoulders frantically, “Hyung Joong, JJ AND JUNSU! All three of them, together . . . sitting at the same table. I, I can't let them see me. Oh dear God, just when I thought I had this all under control.” Whining as she lifted a fingernail biting into it unconsciously she added, “I knew I should've said something more to Junsu.”

“Wowww . . .” Saffron looked over her shoulder and sure enough, cradled in the far front of the café, were Junsu, a dark-headed girl between he and JJ, and Hyun Joong across from them.

“You go.” Saffire begged, in fact . . . ummm . . . go take this tray of water glasses with you, less conspicuous. “See what she looks like for me.” Reaching behind her for the tray, she lifted it with quivering hands, resting it in Saffron's grasp.

“And what about me? You know they're going to say something to me.” Saffron moaned, not wanting her perfectly good encounter with Donghae to be ruined in the midst of Baek Seun Jo and Saffire drama.

“I trust you. Cover for me and come right back. And whatever you do, DON’T LET JJ OR JUNSU know I’m here.”

As Saffire sent Saffron out to the front lines, she inched closer and closer to the Couples Wall, running her hand along the bottom of the textured surface attempting to fade into the background.

Heechul was just standing up after taking a Selca (Selfie) with an overly excitable Noona, lunching with her equally as excited daughter. Donghae’s conquest was coming straight for him, a tray of water glasses, filled to the brim teetering precariously in one upraised hand, her expression petrified, looking as if she were about to puke.



Taking a gallant step forward, in an attempt to assist her, he reached out for the tray, when out of nowhere, a coal black cat, jumped between them, claws out, right in her face. Before he could react, the ‘conquest’ in question, howled at the top of her lungs, cussing out the nasty evil animal in perfect English and throwing the tray into the air in front of her. Despite his errant attempt to grab her, as the cold water hit the bottom of his jeans, he reared



back, seeing her plummet to the floor in front of him, glasses flying in all directions.

At her position by the wall, Saffire watched horrified as Saffron slipped backwards to avoid the wrath of the cat, and her tray lurched forward, glasses and water flying all over Heechul and the tables surrounding him. Then to her dismay, simultaneously the picture of Junsu hanging directly at eyelevel, clattered to the floor, along with Uncle Ryu’s, destroying them in the process.

Heechul, his eyes fixed on Saffron as she started to go down, couldn’t understand where the cat had come from or why? As customers scattered around them, the cat meandered off, it’s tail in the air as if satisfied that it had come, done what it intended and was now finished.

At the front table, Hyun Joong heard the cussing, and loud crash, rising up out of his chair only to see none other than ‘Oh Ha Ni’, sprawled out on the floor at Heechul’s feet, covered in water and glass, muttering something about “Shit, not again . . .”

Despite the fact that Chung Ae had gotten up to scope out the situation along with everyone else at the table, he scooted his chair back, and rushing around the side pushed his way through curious customers attempting to get to her first.

In the split second it took her to feel the tray leave her fingertips, Saffron saw every embarrassing moment she had experienced since coming to Korea flash before her eyes, from tripping in the drinking tent, to the smell of hot coffee hitting the crotch of her Prince Hyun Joong, all the way to the mis-represented dream where she had stumbled on her own wedding dress, landing face first in cold muddy grass. Only this time, not only did her ‘Prince’ come to her aid, but ‘all’ the Princes in the room were now hovered about, picking up shards of glass, touching her everywhere for cuts or injuries, clucking lovingly over her misfortune, and otherwise, tending to her every need. Unbeknownst to Saffire, the idea had gotten her the attention she desperately craved.

Having already forgotten the two idols behind the ‘plan’ gone bad, Saffire concerned that Saffron had been hurt or cut, jumped into the aisle alongside Hyun Joong, eyes peeled on the sister who had ultimately just ‘taken a bullet’ for her. Her head swirled as she swore silently to herself for making Saffron do her dirty work. Now look what had happened.



As she cupped her sisters embarrassed reddened cheeks in both hands, mouthing, “Sorry”, as she hugged her tightly, before standing to help her rise. Turning her carefully, making sure she didn’t step into anything she looked up, directly into the concerned faces of JaeJoong and Junsu.

“SAFFIRE!” They both exclaimed at the same time.

