

## CHAPTER SIX

“Forget Love, Fall in Coffee . . .”



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

12:15 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Café

**D**EAR God . . . he had seen her. *Her poor Junsu.* They both had. Saffire bit down on the skin of her upper lip, feeling the acrid taste of blood as she broke through, releasing the bitterness inside her mouth.

*And JJ? What the hell? Why was he here?* He had been ratting her out to Junsu, she just knew it. Telling him about the kiss no doubt. Making sure, even if there ‘was’ someone else, their relationship would never be the same.

She wanted to run past Saffron and throw her arms around Junsu, tell him she was sorry for not contacting him and acting like a spoiled brat since she had arrived, but now she wasn’t sure what was frightening her the most . . . thinking Saffron almost killed herself over a stupid request to go look at some girl he was sitting with, or this very moment . . . staring into the shocked look of he and JJ’s eyes when they realized she might have played them both. She

moved back instinctively, wanting only to bolt . . . in reality, the drama-like triangle was growing larger by the minute, and that hadn't been her intent.

After everything she and Junsu had shared over the years, how was she going to handle it if JJ had been right and he did indeed have a girlfriend? Just because the dark-haired girl at Hyun Joong's side didn't resemble the one in the picture kissing him, didn't mean she didn't still exist. He was the closest thing she had to a best friend. (*She 'had' to be mistaken.*) Despite Uncle Ryu's demise, in the end . . . Junsu was the reason she was here.

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*Stepping back into the shadows of the café bar, the concerned apparition's long fingers caressed the soft fur of the purring black cat sprawled out on the countertop licking its paws satisfactorily. Smiling the sly smile he was known for, (even alive) he couldn't help but see that the use of the cat had helped him on more than one occasion. She was a good stray, and he was grateful for her presence. Turning toward her piercing grey eyes he whispered . . . "The pictures? Too much? I was trying to prove a point."*



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**O**UT in the middle of the floor, on his knees, still examining Saffron for injuries, Hyun Joong couldn't believe what had just happened. Even without the assistance of the pesky cat, she was extremely accident prone. Seeing her go down, all he could envision, was an ambulance, bandages, and blood. Sweating profusely, but not daring to touch her, he didn't care that Donghae, JJ, Junsu, Heechul and a score of other concerned onlookers were all clustered about her like a brood of mothering hens. *He was the only one she needed right now. He was Baek Seung Jo, and for all practical purposes, she was his 'Oh Ha Ni'.*

"Are you hurt Oh Ha Ni?" He whispered as quietly in her ear as he could, hoping to God no one heard the endearment that seemed to stay glued to the forefront of his lips every time he thought to talk to her.

Hearing Hyun Joong call her the name she loved the most outside of her own, Saffron cringed, but shook her head negatively, allowing



Saffire and Heechul to help her to her feet. Wishing to float in his arms, or longing for a piggyback wouldn't help her today however, because like a minion from the depths of Hell, the face of the meek looking 'girl' she recognized from the photo on the 'Couples Wall' was clutching the arm of his shirt, her eyes reigning fireballs down on her and everyone around her.

Trying to ignore the girl Saffire 'thought' might have been with Junsu, she smiled, patting Saffron's shoulder lovingly. She could go now, the sister somehow cursed to hit the floor to draw attention to herself, was safe . . . surrounded by all available 'Idol Princes', hovering and cooing over her. (#1 Savior 'Baek Seung Jo'), at the helm. (Clearly, she had her work cut out for her . . . certainly they both did.)

Giving Saffire a 'thumbs up', with the words sticking to the back of her throat, Saffron managed to eke out a wisp of an answer, letting at least Hyun Joong know, it was safe to leave her with the entourage of idols. "Go . . . its ok."

"I'll be back. Promise." He squinted concerned, not only for her safety, but for the fact that she had recognized his ex-girlfriend behind him, and not knowing the details was caught in the middle of the gross misunderstanding that he didn't have time to divulge. Touching her arm politely, his eyes saying as much as he was able, he turned allowing the dark-haired girl to tug him away toward the front door.

Sighing, she acquiesced to Donghae, who was already attempting to maneuver her out of the line of fire, with Maud and SeRae on a mission to the middle of the dining room, waving arms and brooms, consecutively, while barking orders to the wait-staff.

"Let's make sure you're not cut." Donghae offered, grabbing her thin waistline as she limped off beside him.

"I'm not. I don't see anything." Looking back over her shoulder, she caught Hyun Joong's eyes just as he rounded the corner to the front hallway, hesitating momentarily as his face creased in a slight smile. *He would be back for her. That was all she needed to know.*

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**“W**HERE are you going Saffire?” Junsu shouted at her as she slipped off, disappearing into the small crowd of people (allowing Heechul to tug her

behind him like the wayward Heroine in a K-Drama).

With the din of the noisy uproar subsiding into the quiet of the back kitchen, Heechul, concerned and serious wheeled her around to face him.

“Are you O.K.?” He asked, emphasizing the ‘O’ and ‘K’, making the sign with his fingers, as he worked his English to the best of his ability. “Wha? What happened out there?”

“Yes, yes of course. The cat . . . she just came out of nowhere.” Reassuring him, her head bobbing up and down, her hair tossing wildly about her still quivering shoulders, she didn’t understand it herself.

Now that the fog was lifting, Maud and SeRae had taken over the helm, shooed everyone back to their respective tables, gotten the wait-staff to clean up, and things were calming down. Saffire could see through the doorway that Junsu and JJ had headed back to the table, and Hyun Joong and his ‘girlfriend’ had made a bee-line for outside.

Donghae had rescued Saffron to the back restroom hopefully to attend to any wounds, and the café was mostly back to normal.

*But was she?* Fingering the cell phone in her pocket she half expected to be getting a text from Junsu at any moment requesting a one-on-one outside to talk. *What would she say? She still wasn’t sure he was without a girlfriend. There had been no real proof.*

Peeking around Heechul’s broad shoulders she attempted to see the tops of JJ and Junsu’s heads as they talked. It was apparent they were in a ‘heated’ conversation. Neither of them smiling, hands waving about wildly, and at one point Junsu shoved his plate away from himself, and shot back against the spindles of the wooden chair, crossing his arms disgustedly.

“What can I do?” Heechul asked kindly, stepping out of her way to allow her access to the dining room.

“Nothing. Really.” He had already done enough, and if he didn’t get out there and continue his ‘idol’ duties, Maud and SeRae would be angry at she and Saffron, for creating a scene that spoiled the afternoon with the ultra-popular Idol duo.

“Sure?” He asked one more time, touching the bottom of a strand of her blonde hair gently, like he had in the hallway earlier. “So beautiful. Cinderella jealous.” He grinned.

“Gamza.” She smiled back shyly. “But it’s a pain in the ass sometimes. Mianhae Heechul, I really have to go. You’ve been daebak. Saved my sister for sure. Gamsahabnida. Really.” Bowing to him politely, she rose, cupping his one cheek considerately before returning to the coffee counter and the ‘cursed’ machine. If there was drama on the horizon, it was sure to find her now!

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“**T**HERE she goes with Heechul. Dammit!” Junsu cursed out loud, slapping the sides of his thighs with both fists as he stood on tiptoe trying to see over the tops of the tall man and his family in front of him. “I’m going after her.” Careening to the left, JaeJoong grabbed his arm mid-step causing him to lose his balance and fall backward into his friend’s side. “YAH! Let me go. That’s her. And how do you know her anyway? She’s only been here like a week!” Junsu’s voice rising above the now quiet muttering around them, he was beginning to draw attention to them.

“Shhh,” JJ put his finger to his lips requesting Junsu to keep it down. “You want everyone to hear you? Come back over here and sit for a second.” He urged him, pulling out the chair and plopping his friend back into it carelessly. *How was he going to explain something he didn’t quite understand himself?*

“Maybe I don’t WANT to sit!” Junsu argued, his anger riled that JJ was stopping him from going back and talking to the girl he had been waiting to hear from for over a week now.

“We need to talk first.” JJ scooted his chair forward closer to Junsu.



*Of all places, this was NOT the place to make a scene over Saffire.*

*Uncle Ryu’s picture had already bit the dust, and JJ was getting the willies just thinking about the fact that Uncle Ryu was probably cursing them all after seeing Saffron hit the floor with a massive tray of water glasses.*

“SO! How do you KNOW HER hyung?” Junsu asked again, this time in a low growl, his heart-shaped lips pursed in aggravation at this friend that had a bad habit of flirting with girls he was interested in right under his very nose, sometimes just because he knew he could.

“I told you. Didn’t you listen to the story? Joong and I met her and Saffron the night after the funeral.”

Now JJ was more concerned about the fact that ‘she’ might be the secret ‘girlfriend’ that he and Hyun Joong had assumed Junsu was keeping in hiding somewhere in Japan. “More importantly . . . how do YOU know her? She’s Uncle Ryu’s niece? We asked you about the text, why didn’t you just tell us her name was Saffire Ryu? I’m confused.” JJ sat back now, his feet crossed, brows creased as he waited for Junsu’s answer.

“You never asked for a name. And her last name isn’t Ryu. It’s Renault.” Now Junsu was confused. He ‘did’ know Uncle Ryu’s niece was coming from America. To him it was merely a coincidence. But, by the same token, he didn’t know her name was Saffire. ‘His’ Saffire had never talked about having an Uncle in Korea. He only knew she was mixed, and had visited several times with her father, an executive with ‘SM’.

“Renault? No it’s not.” JJ persisted, picking at the now cold piece of meat on the plate in front of him. “I saw the Will for the Café’. Says right on it. Saffire Ryu. Are you sure she’s the same girl? Cause you’ve been known to make mistakes before.” He chuckled.

Junsu stared off into the emptying lunch room. “Are you babo? Of course she is. Why wouldn’t she be? I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

JJ hated to be the bearer of bad news, but it was a fact. As far as he knew, Saffire hadn’t talked to or texted Junsu for days now. They had all worried that maybe the secretive ‘girlfriend’ (from wherever), might be giving him the cold shoulder. It was now clear why she was laying low. Saffire didn’t know how to deal with Junsu, after kissing ‘him’ her first night at the coffee bar.

Not giving JJ equal time to respond, Junsu rambled on nervously, “Whatever you ‘think’ you have going on with her, better forget it. She’s here because I ‘asked’ her come. Like a year ago. Uncle Ryu passing was just a free ticket. Just because she went by another last name in the States doesn’t mean it isn’t her. You’re acting like I’ve never seen her before. We’re actually VERY close. VERY CLOSE, if you know what I mean.”

Lying never came easy to Junsu, but this was JJ he was dealing with now, and the only way to keep him away from her and out of the picture was to pretend they had been together, physically

or otherwise. Leaning back in his chair satisfied he crossed his arms waiting to see what JJ would say to that juicy bit of information.

“How does she kiss?” JJ asked nonchalantly, now putting the cold beef to his lips and smacking into it as he remembered the little round ‘O’ she had made with her mouth when he had puckered, and the tentative way she had barely touched his upper lip with the tip of her tongue before opening her mouth to allow him access. *Yes, he doubted very much that Junsu had kissed her, but he was willing to play the game.*

“Why . . . uhhh . . . she’s daebak. Of course.” Junsu, rolled his eyes hoping that the more he protested the less JJ would pump him for information.

“Mmmm, get any tongue?” He asked again, his eyes twinkling mischievously.



“That’s none of your freaking business.” Junsu barked suddenly, rearing up in the chair, nearly knocking it to the ground. “You stay the hell away from her you hear me. I . . . I . . . I asked her here so we could ‘really’ start something. She’s practically my girlfriend.” He finally stammered defiantly.

“Is that right?”

JJ’s cool, collected demeanor was getting under Junsu’s skin, and he knew it. This wasn’t the first time they had come to words and almost blows over a girl. The last one JJ had acquiesced over because his schedule was just too crazy to handle a relationship. She had lasted about three months and then had cheated on Junsu with another well-known idol, and they had split. He hadn’t been with anyone since, and neither had Junsu.

“You haven’t kissed her have you?” Reaching over he smacked Junsu lightly on the side of the cheek. “Because if you had . . . you wouldn’t be looking like you’ve been sucking lemons right now. Kissing her is like falling into a vat of cotton candy. Not only would you never forget it, you’d never want to kiss anyone else ever again. So don’t lie hyung.”

Now Junsu was fuming. His ears blushing a scarlet red against his white sweater, his chest heaving in massive deep breaths, he grabbed up his cell phone punching in her number hurriedly. “I’m texting her, RIGHT NOW! Let’s just SEE who she wants to talk to, OR KISS, or whatever!”

JJ picked at the back of his teeth, seeing Hyun Joong standing in the open doorway alone, wondering what had gone down between he and his Ex. This was usually a quiet tranquil place to hide out and unwind. *Why so much drama in the small café today?*

“I can text her too.” JJ mumbled, reaching for his own phone. “Oh wait.” Stopping himself he pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Well, don’t have her number. But, I CAN go right back over there to the coffee counter and plead my case. You’re really gonna fight me for a girl that I’m finally falling for.”

“Falling for? OH HELL JJ! You fall for anything that wears a skirt and says ‘Annyeong’. Get over yourself. And I’d be willing to bet that kiss was a ‘drunken’ kiss besides. Every girl kisses when they’re wasted. You’re pathetic sometimes. Falling for her? Yeah right.”

Head bent, Junsu concentrated on what to say that would help her understand that he was desperate to talk to her and explain why he hadn’t bothered to come around sooner, since her arrival.

“Listen! Whether it was or wasn’t, I saw her here in Korea first. Besides, she likes me. We made a connection. And I’m going to ask her out too. Like it or not. I think we should let her decide.” JJ pounded one hand on the table as if making his final argument. “Yep, that’s the way we should handle it. Let her choose.”

“Wae? Afraid you can’t compete with me?” Junsu snorted, half-laughing.

“Oh I think you know better than that.” JJ replied smugly, steepling his fingers in front of him, as Hyun Joong slipped silently back between the arguing duo. *Now what was happening? What had he missed? Who were they competing over? He hated being out of the loop.*

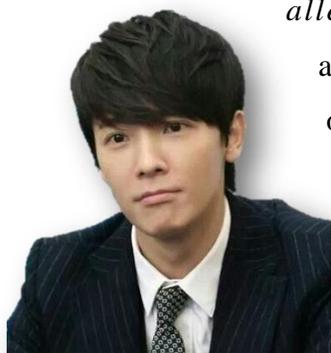
“Then give it your best shot. But leave that thing you call a penis in your pants. ‘Cause I’m NOT competing with that.” Rising up out the chair, Junsu set his eyes on the coffee counter, and Saffire wanting to flip JJ off so bad it hurt, but using restraint and striding away like the gentleman he was.

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“**D**ONGHAE . . . I, ahhh . . . I think I’ll be fine. Just a few bruises. Accidents happen.” Saffron smirked, unlocking the bathroom door, and holding it open for the two of them to vacate the small room. “But, thanks for coming back with me.”

She could tell his intentions had not been entirely honorable, the glint in his eye saying for all practical purposes that if she had given even an inch he would have taken a mile and never looked back. He was hard to resist this one. But Hyun Joong was coming. He had said he would. Craning her neck to see back into the café, she noticed that he was back at the table, talking and smiling to JJ, (minus Junsu), and before she could open her mouth or put a foot out the door, they stood, grabbed their jackets and laying the tip on the table proceeded to the front never bothering to look anywhere but at the way out.

*What the hell? Was this what she was waiting for? Was he going to come back around to the alley, and ask for her there? No, why would he do that? It was already past 1:00 and surely they were due back to wherever they had come from. He had not only lied to her, he had dissed her along with it. Not knowing how she felt about that, except that her insides were working their way up to the base of her throat and threatening to hurl themselves all over the tiny bathroom floor, she gulped loudly, steadying herself in the door jamb, blinking rapidly to allow herself time to think.*



Donghae. Of course. Donghae had wanted to date her. Maybe it didn’t matter what the rule book said about not dating idols. Just like Saffire had said earlier. She was an owner. She could make up her own idol handbook, and change the rules. Rule #1 . . . date every freaking idol that sets foot inside the Cup of Hotness Café. Yep! That’s just what she would do.

“Well.” Flipping her attention to him just before he skimmed past her out the door, he stopped dead in his tracks his eyes wide.

“Well?” He asked back curiously.

“How about that date?” Wanting to drop in a heap at his feet and scream ‘NO IT’S A MISTAKE!’ She smiled instead, rubbing her bruised backside unconsciously, attempting to look flirtatious like she had seen Saffire doing with Heechul.

“Date? Ohhhh, you WANT to go on a date?” He couldn’t have been happier if he had won the lottery. *She was asking him!*

“Ahhh. Yes. Yes I do. You pick the time and place, you have my number. Let me know and I’ll be there.” She snapped almost too readily.

“How about YOU pick the time and place, let me know and I’LL pick you up.” He reiterated quietly. “My pleasure.”

“Ok.” Now, how could she make an awkward exit less awkward? “Great . . . Swell . . . Later . . . I’ll tell you later before you leave. Okay . . . Bye.”

Waving weakly, her heart in her feet she limped away hearing Maud requesting help back in the kitchen. Even hurt, she would have rather been at the mercy of Maud, then in the presence of the sexy, about to be ‘dateable’ Donghae.

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**M**OVING stealthily away from the bar, Uncle Ryu shooed the cat to the floor, and out the front door before him. Hyun Joong was hopefully getting ready to leave. At least something had gone his way. And Donghae, was going on a date with Saffron. One hand was washing the other. It tickled him when everything turned out as planned.

Looking across the emptying coffee house he couldn’t help but feel sorry for Maud and SeRae. Maud . . . her back bent as she clucked over her good set of broken glasses, SeRae holding his photo from the wall against her chest, her shoulders heaving as she wept. He hadn’t meant to cause them this much pain. His goal was an honest one. Make sure they could retire and rest easy at the hands of Saffire and Saffron, who would come around eventually, and love the café as much as he did. But, as with all good things, it would take time . . . of which he had plenty of.

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“**H**E finally did it, didn’t he? Antonio, broke your heart, and drove you to me. I’ll have to thank him.” Junsu’s soft velvety voice rose up behind Saffire, along with the feel of his arms about her unsuspecting waist. “JJ told me why you’re here. The café. Agi (Baby), why didn’t you just tell me? You’re in my arms. That’s all that matters.”

Saffire felt her fingers slip from the coffee mug she was drying, the towel drifting to the floor at her feet. If she hadn’t dreamed about the moment for months, she would have sworn she had died on the floor her first night in the small dingy café apartment. He smelled deliciously of spicy aftershave, the soft cotton of his white jacket tickling the tender skin behind her ear as he spoke.

“I don’t know. It all happened so fast.” Barely moving her head, she wanted desperately to turn around, take the conversation out of the limelight, but it seemed everyone else was busy, and most of the lunch crowd had dissipated after the accident.

“Don’t . . . don’t turn around. Stay right like this. I just want to hold you for a minute.” He begged, knowing that even at their last meeting in America (aware that she was still attached to Antonio) he hadn’t had the guts to either kiss or hug her before saying good-bye. Such behavior had just left her wide open for the likes of JJ, (the king of flirtation and skinship). He didn’t want her thinking about her ‘kiss’ with JJ right now, she needed to be focusing on him.

Saffire prickled nervously under him trying to rationalize his behavior. *Why was he holding her so lovingly if he had a girlfriend? She shouldn’t let him. It wasn’t right. He was just another Antonio if he was doing that to her.* “This is awkward Junsu, you have a girlfriend.” She mumbled, even though she wanted to melt into him, her eyes closing at his breath on her neck.

“Did JJ tell you that? NO, I don’t!” He uttered convincingly.

“But. The picture . . . The Couples Wall. And he said you don’t date girls from America . . . He thought I was one of your fangirls.” Straight as a board against her, she felt him stiffen. *So JJ had been twisting the truth because she had kissed him. Dammit!*

“Come outside with me, and let’s really talk.” Junsu urged her, untying the apron she had slipped on after hiding out in the kitchen away from Heechul, and everyone else who was still mulling around. Lifting it over her head, now, in the moment he wished it was a long satiny dress, that would have left her bare and vulnerable against him. Catching his breath at the

thought, he reached for her hand as she guided him toward the rear entrance. *It was time he took her out of the 'friend zone'!*

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**M**AUD peeked out the back kitchen window spotting Saffire and Junsu settling up against the large brick fireplace Uncle Ryu had used years ago to warm water for washing clothes. *Where had HE come from? One minute it was Heechul, the next Junsu. She and Saffron both were having their share of issues when it came to adhering to the rules of 'no dating' the idols that frequented the café.*

Shooting her eyes at Saffron, clinging to the counter looking as if she were about to pass out, it was apparent she had fallen harder than she wanted to let on. Little beads of sweat popping out around her hairline, she drove her hands into each round of bread dough, silent and introspective. Hurting was more like it. Not sure if it was physical or mental, Maud knew she wouldn't be worth her weight in salt if she didn't give in and let her go up and lay down.

“Saffron. Go upstairs. You've done enough today. SeRae and I and the staff can close out. You took a nasty spill. You look like you could use the rest.”

Saffron's head turned slowly, her eyes focusing past Maud and out the window to where Saffire and Junsu were standing, pressed together, looking like they were about to kiss. Her heart dropped once again, wishing it could have been she and Hyun Joong out there, lip to lip, whispering sweet nothings in each other's ear. Now she had Donghae on a string, and was about to dangle him about like a puppeteer, with no rhyme or reason for her madness save the fact that it felt better to be in control of the situation and not floundering at the whims of someone else.

“Yeahhh . . . gamza Maud.”

Unable to argue the point, she washed her hands, and trudged up the long narrow staircase to the apartment bedroom, flopping onto her still curled up bedroll, feeling the cold wooden floor against her bottom as she laid staring up into the ceiling. The buzzing of her cell phone came out of nowhere, startling her as she began to doze off unexpectedly.

“OH HA NI. R U WELL? NOT IN HOSPITAL? I WANTED 2 COME 4 U. 2 MUCH DRAMA. EXPLAIN LATER. TEXT ME.  BSJ

Staring into the screen, the heart he sent began playing games with her senses. *Why if he had someone else would he 'heart' her? Why would he even say he wanted to come for her? She didn't know what to do. Respond? Not? Her 'Baek Seung Jo' had bolted out behind his 'girlfriend', like a dog in heat. Leaving her with only a pitiful stare, and an unfulfilled promise. What would Saffire do? She was already making waves outside with Junsu. Leaning over, she pressed her nose to the frosty glass trying desperately to see if they were kissing yet or not. Damn! Would she date them both? JJ and Junsu?*

Envisioning her bohemian, violin playing, sister parked between the two idols one hand on each knee, eating strawberries from one side and chocolate from the other, she giggled in spite of herself.

*Would that be her, Donghae and Hyun Joong? Dear GOD! It didn't seem near as funny picturing herself and not Saffire. She didn't envision herself as the 'Player' type. Or did she? Had she not just 'asked' a freaking idol for a date? An idol that a million girls world-wide would give their last penny to see, date, strip, marry, and have babies with. And . . . she didn't much care.*

*Was this the beginning of her stepping into a new 'identity'? One more like her long lost sister . . . Maybe it wasn't so bad being more 'unencumbered' with life. Sure, Saffire had showed her 'stuff' when they first met, but hell . . . they had both been taken for a ride and ceremoniously dumped. Surprised she hadn't buckled under the pressure as well, all she could do was thank God Kim Hyun Joong had been the one to touch her hand that night in the drinking tent, and not someone else. Or even JJ.*

Without bothering to change her clothes, or unroll her sleeping mat, she felt herself dozing off, imagines of Hyun Joong darting in and out of her subconscious, laughing, then frowning, arms out to take her, then back turned . . . walking away . . . There seemed to be no end to the despair he was feeling, and finally lurching to a sitting position, her last memory of his face was tearful and sad.

Giving in to her lonely heart she debated once again whether to call him. The cell phone was NOT her friend. She hated it, and hated using it. Face to face was where she would rather be. So opting out of returning his text, she put the phone on silent, and drifted back off.

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1:00 P.M.

Outside the Café

**B**LOWING on her freezing hands, the icy whiteness shooting from between her lips. Saffire still wasn't used to this ridiculously cold winter weather, longing for the warmth of the California sun, and the sand between her bare toes. "I don't have much time." She warned Junsu.

"First of all, mianhae, for not being here when you texted me the first time." He apologized, taking both her hands and shoving them deep into his pockets to keep them warm.

"I thought you didn't care that I was coming." Her head dropped sadly, knowing that her drunken night at the tent had resulted in her kiss with JJ, and 'that' was causing so many butterflies in her stomach right now.

"Wae SR? Have I ever made you think you were anything to me but special and daebak? And wae would I have a girlfriend, after everything I've told you?"

"I don't know. Yeah we're friends. Good friends." Trying not to turn away she mumbled, "Probably my only 'real' friend. But that doesn't mean you don't date, or have a girlfriend. I had Antonio all those years."

"Listen, he didn't matter to me. I just didn't want to see you get hurt. And I told you . . . there IS no girlfriend" He reiterated firmly.

"Then what about the picture of you kissing that girl on the 'Couples Wall'. Your hair's the same, it looks recent." She had to know.

"Her? Saffire, come on. That's my Stylist. Yeah, we dated but, that was a couple years ago. Even before I came to America and we met. Is that what this is all about? You saw us on the Wall?"

His questions came out perfectly and his eyes sincere, but the closer his lips came to hers, the more they began to look like JJ's. *He was going to kiss her. She had dreamed of it. She had fangirled over it. His lips were plump and luscious. Now knowing he didn't have anyone else, she would faint she knew it! No, she would kiss him back, take him by force . . . show him how much he really meant to her.*

But when they finally touched . . . her heart went cold, and all she could feel was the way he was curling his fingers into hers between the folds of his jacket pocket. She heard the clanking of pots and pans in the kitchen, Maud shouting something at Saffron, car horns honking on the street.

There were no bells ringing, no music playing, no toe curling, he didn't even cup her cold face so gently like JJ had. *Had they shared too many secrets, and been friends too long for there not to be a spark? Any kind of a spark? It was lacking . . . What was she going to do? She couldn't let him know . . . it was like sleeping with someone and then faking an orgasm. Both were equally as bad.*

She hated JJ right now. She hated him for his amazing smooth lips and moist probing tongue . . . the way he had curled around her mouth lazily, knowing full well he was taking her to heaven and back without even trying. He had spoiled this moment for her. *DAMN HIM!*

“Mmmm.” Junsu moaned, backing away wondering why kissing her hadn't felt like falling into a vat of cotton candy like JJ had described her. *That was just silly. Nobody kissed like cotton candy. JJ and his poetic explanations for everything. She kissed as well as anyone else he had kissed. And kissing her meant he cared. He really did care. He was showing her. That's what she wanted. Wasn't it?*

So, desperate to prove herself wrong, she hauled both hands from inside his pockets, and throwing her arms about his unsuspecting neck, smashed her lips to his unrelentingly, floating her tongue around the inside of his mouth, frantic to feel the smooth lazy cinnamon heat she had tasted with JJ. Eyes closed, hating herself for even having to 'try' so hard, she felt him tighten his grip as he hung to her responding guardedly.

“Junsu . . .”

There could be no apologizing for her forward unladylike behavior. Korean men, hated their women to take the lead. But, she had to know. Attempting to convince herself JJ was just a 'fluke' in her life, and not even 'boyfriend' material, she smiled hoping Junsu would see her advances as the open door he was looking for.

Tucking his forehead against hers in the frigid wind, he sighed. “That says it all babe. You're here now. We can pick up where we left off before Antonio whisked you away and turned your life upside down. I've missed our long talks, the way you always came to me. You have to know

that. Tell me you'll leave this silly café and come stay with me. I've been asking you for months now. Here . . . Japan . . . Doesn't matter. I have two houses. And I frequent them both. I can have your things picked up by the end of the day. Surely you don't have more than a suitcase or two? Right?"

Babbling on, for some reason he was just assuming she was going to move out of the café and set up housekeeping with him. And as amazing as that sounded . . . her mouth nearly ready to say 'yes', at the same time, her heart was screaming 'no'. Suddenly, the Café actually meant something to her. It didn't matter that she cursed it, Uncle Ryu and Saffron daily . . . it was still hers. Something she could call her own. Something to put her blood sweat and tears in. Something to be proud of.

"Oh my God!" She finally barked out, her teeth chattering in her head. "You don't know how good that sounds. But, I . . . I can't leave the café Junsu. More importantly, I won't. Uncle Ryu loved this place, and he left it to Saffron and I for a reason. Even though I came here for you, everything has suddenly changed."

*It would continue changing, and so would she. How did she feel about a true 'relationship' with Xia Junsu? In the flesh . . . lip to lip . . . sharing spaces and lives. She was finally asking herself all the 'right' questions. She should be more level-headed like Saffron. Weighing all the pros and cons and not leading with her heart or her crotch!*

His eyes scanned her wind-kissed face curiously. "When you texted me, wanting to come, asking for help to find work, I assumed . . ." As his voice trailed off, hoping she wasn't turning him down, because that was how it felt.

Then for some reason he remembered sitting in the café with JJ and Hyun Joong, her frantic text coming in for all three of them to see. JJ had asked about the mysterious 'girl' who called him Oppa. And why she was such a secret. Of course! He had just assumed that she was a girlfriend he was keeping under wraps . . . Possibly even in Japan. Without any prior knowledge, the assumption had gone unchecked. Now, it was all beginning to make sense. Coupled with the photo on the wall, Saffire had unconsciously been jealous of 'herself'. It was hard not to see the humor in the situation. But, now JJ was making a play for her . . . and that was 'not' okay! Turning his thoughts back to her downcast face he was seeing her like he had the very first time they had met. He in the front row of a concert, she . . . violin in hand . . . taking his breath away!

“Oh geez. I WAS SERIOUS JR. That hasn’t changed. You have to know I was a wreck . . . and hurting . . . but, when you didn’t reply right away, and Uncle Ryu passed on, sitting on the plane I began to realize that maybe my priorities weren’t in order. That’s why I haven’t contacted you since you told me you were in JeJu.” *Why was he looking at her like that? With that mixture of confusion, longing and sadness all rolled into one? JJ had said something to him at lunch. Why would he do that? Was nothing sacred?* “I was trying to avoid this . . .”

“This? Or JJ?”

The statement burst from his lips before he realized what he had said. Even though he was hearing her, her words weren’t matching up with the beating of his heart. There was a distance in her eyes. A hollowness that told him something was missing. Even the feigned excitement in her voice was detached.

Stepping back away from him, Saffire’s hands dropped from his neck. Wringing them thoughtlessly she finally hugged her cold frame, scuffing one booted toe into the frozen ground beneath them.

Filling in the gap of silence he spoke, his voice oozing a modicum of pain. “Sooo. You can’t come live with me? You won’t? Or both? You act like we’ve never had this conversation before. We’ve been talking about this for almost two years Saffire.” Now he was getting frustrated.

“It’s freezing. I have to go in.” She announced, flouncing away from him without another word, hoping to dissuade him from the inevitable hurtful end of the conversation. But, not to be dissuaded he followed close at her heels pinning her against the wall in front of the ladies restroom not ‘ready’ or ‘wanting’ to end things between them quite yet. *He was already invested. And his heart was picking up speed. She had to know that.*



“Did you ever intend to let me know you were staying here, or anything about the café? And for God’s sake, in all these years you never even told me your last name was really Ryu. That came as sort of a shock. Especially having to hear it from JJ.”

One hand at her head, the other against her shoulder, his dark eyes felt suddenly burdened. JJ of all people, had only spent a few short hours in her presence, and already knew more about her than he did, after two long years and hours upon hours of conversation.

He was tired, his head throbbing. Along with his cumbersome schedule, and troubles with his hotel, she was supposed to have been his light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe there were forces going on beyond his control, to have stopped her from running straight to his arms after seeing her again for the first time in months.

“Can we at least spend some time together now that you’re here? Go out a few times? I have a lot of meetings and schedules coming up, but for you, I’ll make time. Yagsog (I promise).” Nose-to-nose, he nipped her upper lip tenderly. “Please. I’ve thought about you every day.” He whispered smiling.

Despite her hesitancy, she leaned in tolerating his purposeful kiss to the tip of her nose, quirking one eyebrow, trying not to frown. “Of course Oppa. I could use a day off soon anyway.”

“Ahhh, jo-eun (good). I’ll call you. We’ll take in a show, or a concert. A walk after, and maybe some Christmas shopping.” Rattling off all the things he knew she loved, he figured he could get to her that way, if no other.

“Okay.” Agreeing, though somewhat reluctantly, she hated herself for immediately wishing he had been JJ. *She was headed to hell. What had Saffron called her this morning? A slut . . . and JJ had called her a bitch. She was both . . . and in the process, the flame for idol Kim Junsu seemed to flicker, threatening to go out before ever getting the chance to burn.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*“GOOD job Saffire.” uncle Ryu encouraged her, fisting the air above her blonde head as a whistling Junsu, headed happily for the door, despite being nearly turned down entirely. “Don’t know what I did to deserve this one, but I’ll take it!”*

*He knew it was wrong to pit the two friends against each other over her, but he knew them both well. Junsu, as amazing as he was, was also skittish about commitment. His string of one-night stands proved it, despite his accusations to hyung JaeJoong about falling in love at the drop of a pin. JJ came from strong family roots, aspiring to being a loving husband and father someday, (with a brood of children at his knee).*

*Saffire herself adored children and only wanted to settle down with a loving caring man and have a family. Having been 'used' long enough, Junsu would never be able to give her that. With a rift as wide as the Grand Canyon between her mother and father, he knew it came down to him. He would never rest easy until he saw that dream fulfilled in her life.*

\* \* \* \* \*

**S**TILL bumped against the wall, Saffire closed her eyes, squeezing them to shut out the vision of his face directly in hers. *Now what? He would already be planning their date. Why wasn't she over the moon? He was amazing! Incredible! But still, she didn't know how she felt about that. And sadly, his kisses had done nothing for her. It was more like kissing her cousin Bobby, or God forbid a brother (if she had one). No tingles . . . Nothing between her legs . . . Just skin on skin, and a little bit of spit.* Running the back of her hand across her lips as if wiping it away, she heard the bell at the door ring as it closed behind him.

Now it was safe to go back out in the open café. *And what about JJ? She did hate him for spoiling every kiss she would ever have again in the future. And he hadn't even bothered to stay and attempt to 'fight Junsu' for her. Not that they had much to fight over . . . but still. He didn't have her number so clearly a phone call or text would NOT be forthcoming. So, where did that leave her?*

*Pacing back and forth from one side of the café dining room to the other, Uncle Ryu's ghostly figure floated behind her, hands clasped behind his back. "Call him." He whispered in her ear quietly. "Call him. He's waiting for you. Junsu will be fine. I'll see to it."*

Saffire whacked the side of her head, swearing a mosquito was buzzing somewhere in the vicinity, but not seeing any. "Maybe I should call him." She uttered to herself. "No not possible, no number."

Satisfied that it wouldn't happen, when she turned back around for the umpteenth time and headed to the kitchen, she passed the large chalkboard. Scribbled in the very lower right hand corner, under the newest coffee recipe for the day someone had put 'JJ . . . 82-2-6583-9876.'

"You're shitting me right now! Where did that come from? I could swear that wasn't here this morning."

Jumping around the counter, eyes wide, she scooted up to the board peering into the corner excitedly. Reciting it to herself over and over again until she knew it was memorized, she darted up the stairs to the apartment, tugging out her phone and punching in the number before it slipped her mind and she forgot it. *She shouldn't be so eager! She had just left Junsu . . . She should wait . . .* But by the time she had attempted to talk herself out of it and hang up, JJ's energetic voice popped up on the other end, shocking her at how quickly he answered.

\* \* \* \* \*

“**S**AFFFIIRREEE . . .” He deliberated, tugging the front of his blonde bangs, wondering how long it would take her to get to him after Junsu left. “Why was I expecting you? How's my favorite loveable little bitch today? Quite a scare with Saffron earlier huh? She's okay gwonli (right)?”

He waited . . . hearing her ragged breathing on the other end of the line. *She would speak eventually, he knew it.*

“She's fine . . . And I told you I'm NOT a bitch. Not even a loveable one.” She announced loudly, kicking off her shoes and padding toward the back bedroom. “You could've warned me before bringing Junsu to the café.”

“Ahhh, what fun would that have been?” He snickered, remembering the look on his friends face when he rose and saw her. “Let me guess . . . he apologized . . . whispered sweet nothings in your ear . . . (he's good at that.) And then he kissed you didn't he?”

Saffire stopped, staring down at Saffron's snoring figure sprawled out at her feet, and then out the window as tiny little snowflakes began to fall against the window pane, glistening in the bright afternoon sunlight. *What was it about JJ and snowflakes? And for crying out loud . . . how did he know all that?*

Her silence spoke volumes. Unable to answer the question effectively she tiptoed back out of the room, closing the door behind her gently. As her head hit the musty pillow at the end of the couch, she sighed into the phone, kicking her toes out of her shoes. “It's snowing.”

“I know. But that's not what I asked you is it?” JJ pressured her, still waiting to see if she would answer the question.

“No, it isn’t what you asked me.” Closing her eyes, she wanted to cry, scream, float away into space and never come down again. Meet Uncle Ryu in the heavens and forget about men entirely. Her Father, Antonio, the ugly boy in middle school who had bullied her mercilessly, Junsu for wanting her . . . JJ for forcing her to want ‘him’ . . . It was a never-ending cycle of confusion that started and stopped at the door to the ‘Cup of Hotness Café’.

“Mmmm. Wasn’t a cotton candy experience was it?” JJ mumbled into his Bluetooth, realizing that she wouldn’t know what he was talking about, but it didn’t matter.

“Is that how it’s supposed to be?” She asked, her eyes still squeezed shut, now comparing the lips of the two idols in her head. One’s soft, smooth and suck-able, the other’s cool, pliable and moist.

“Of course it is.” JJ grinned to himself, wishing to God she was lying in his lap, close enough for him to ‘practice’ on.

“Then, even though it’s none of your damned business . . . no. It wasn’t exactly a walk in the park, or a trip inside the nearest cotton candy machine. Satisfied? I thought the two of you were friends? Good friends?”

“We are. But, unless I meet him lip-to-lip, it’s sort of hard to tell him he sucks at kissing, (don’t you think?)”

“I don’t wanna talk about it. That’s not why I called.” Rolling over on one side, she toyed with the scattered pieces of mail at the base of the small sofa.

“Then why DID you call? And how did you get my number? Oh wait! Did someone leave it on the blackboard by accident?”

Laughing out loud, he thought back to the night he had kissed her behind the coffee bar. After making sure she and Saffron were safely tucked away upstairs, he had snuck back into the kitchen and scribbled his number in the corner of the blackboard, hoping . . . (just like today) she would eventually find it.

“Yes, SOMEONE did, and I . . . ummm . . .” Waffling for a fake reason to have called him, everything that came to mind involved ‘wanting’ him at some level. Wanting to hear his lazy, funny voice . . . wanting to kiss him again and again until she couldn’t breathe . . . wanting to tell him he was freaking amazing and made her blood boil just thinking about him.

But none of that could be said. It seemed, she was already ‘Junsu’s’ girl. How had that happened? And so quickly? How could she stop it?

“I need your help.” She finally blurted out callously, ripping little pieces of paper from the sides of a long white envelope she waited for his response.

“Withhh?”

JJ hesitated, sensing the tension in her voice on the other end. Watching the snow falling outside the car window as he drove back home from the studio he turned on the wipers, examining each flake as it melded into the one next to it, becoming a watery slope down the side of the windshield.

*Oh how he wanted to take her out and run in the snow with her . . . catching snowflakes on the tip of their tongues . . . skidding and sliding into each other, laughing, falling down, making out in the cold. Friend or not. Junsu had had two freakin’ years to take her out of the ‘friend zone’ and hadn’t done it. He had to go. There was no other way.*



“I need to see you again. Just to be sure.” The statement came out so quietly, he wasn’t sure he had heard her right.

The phone plastered to her ear, Saffire cringed. *How stupid did that sound? Desperate was more like it. Be sure of what? If Saffron heard her, there would be no end to the ribbing and harassing she would be subject to. Begging for JJ to spend more time with her? Pathetic!*

“Sweetheart if you aren’t sure, then I don’t know if we need to spend more time together.”

As soon as the words flew from his lips, JJ smacked the steering wheel in frustration. “Aishhh.” He muttered to himself. *His mouth always gave him away before his brain kicked in. 4-D wasn’t always what it was cracked up to be.*

“BUT . . .” He added quickly. “I’m willing to see where it goes if you are.”

Saffire heaved the biggest sigh on the planet, feeling her body go limp at the thought of a real date with him.

“Can we keep it just between us?” She questioned, wondering if here was where he would hang up. Friends just didn’t ‘do’ friends that way. *What was wrong with her? Antonio really HAD done a number on her over the last few years. She was about to pit two friends against each other just because one kissed like cotton candy and the other didn’t.* “JJ.” The pleading in her voice was overwhelming. “I can’t just walk away from him, especially not knowing. You have to understand. You know him better than anyone.”

“It was a drunken kiss Saffire. What makes you think I’m worth breaking his heart over?”

Stopped at a red light, JJ leaned his chin on the steering wheel. He wanted this as much as she did, but she was making perfect sense. Even though he was willing to kick Junsu to the curb if Saffire was the real deal, was breaking his best friend’s heart worth something that ‘might’ be? He fell in and out of love daily. Why, this, crazy, blonde-headed Korean/American beach girl was getting a grip on his heart he had no idea. For the most part he knew nothing about her. Save the fact that she was family to Uncle Ryu, shot him senseless in one look, and left him in a pool at her feet after one simple ‘cotton-candy’ kiss.

“Okay. One date. If it’s there. We tell him. No dragging anything out. Straight truth. He deserves that much.” He clipped off responses like making out a grocery list. “I’ll keep quiet and set it up. Text you when I have a date. I gotta go. Almost home. Annyeong.”

Satisfied that he had dodged a bullet, he skidded away from the stop light, eyes peeled on his street up ahead. *Why was he feeling so good, yet so horribly bad?*

“Alright. Bye.”

The phone went click in Saffire’s ear. Hearing the silence but not wanting to admit to herself she had just told him she wanted to ‘try him out’ basically, she banged the phone against the floor angrily . . . once, twice, and finally the third time the bedroom door flung open and a groggy, Saffron stepped out, rubbing the back of her hair, clothes wrinkled, eyes, squinted and sleepy.

“What the hell are you doing? Don’t break that! Those cost money,” Her tone harsh, she pointed at Saffire’s phone, halfway across the room, tucked under the side of a large ottoman.

“Aghhh, you won’t believe what I just did.” Saffire kicked both legs out in front of her, messing with the pile of envelopes and bills, watching them fly in every direction in her anger.

“What, with who? Junsu? Oh God, you didn’t hook up in the downstairs bathroom did you?” Saffron plunked down next to her on the couch, laying her reddish head of hair on her sister’s shoulder.

“Nooo. Damn, give me a little credit. JJ, I just asked JJ out. Right after Junsu left.”

“JJ?” Her eyes casting an ominous gaze upward, Saffron wondered what had prompted such a move. “Why? I thought you really liked Junsu. You two have history, remember? Little Ms. Fangirl. He’s all you’ve been talking about since you got here. Junsu this, and Junsu that. Freaking driving me crazy. Geez.” Pausing to consider the situation, she realized what had happened. “It was JJ’s kiss huh?” Fishing for answers, she knew Saffire would spill her guts because if it was something involving men, or her personal life . . . she was all in!

“OH I DON’T KNOW. I do and I don’t. Now I think I’ve ruined everything. Junsu wants to take me on a date. This is horrible, but I don’t really even want to, and I panicked . . . and asked JJ to get with me to see if there’s anything there. Now I’m afraid, I’ll end up on the wrong side of a naked orgy.”

Saffron shoved Saffire jokingly, “Naked orgy? Come on. And what if you did? You know what they call him . . . Sex God. Looks like Sex. The King. I’m shocked you’re scared. Here, I was waiting for you to ask you how to handle Hyun Joong. He texted me. I was lying in bed dreaming about him, and by the time you WOKE me up with your loud obnoxious banging, I figured no matter what he’s got going on in his life, I want him. And I intend to have him. But, I don’t quite know where to start.” Wincing down into the couch cushion, Saffron wrapped her arms about her knees, balling into the fetal position beside Saffire.

“On top of that revelation, I guess I should tell you, you’ll find out anyway . . .” Saffron rubbed over a small scrape on the upper part of her ankle bone, her voice timid.

“What? You’re pregnant by osmosis?” Saffire threw her arms over her head gleefully. Sister Saffron could get so ‘serious’ in a split second.

“NOOO!” Swatting the cackling blonde above her, Saffron figured if she was going to get help, she had better start with the ‘whole’ situation. “I asked Dongue out on a date.” Holding her breath, she waited for the downpour of expletives and jokes. But, shockingly none came. “You aren’t going to say anything?” She asked lifting her head to meet Saffire’s twinkling eyes.

“What do you want me to say? Good for you? You’re catching on quick? He’s hot to trot? Have fun? Or should I say, what about Baek Seung Jo?” Her lips pursed she knew she was taking Saffron for a sarcastic ride, but it was beginning to tickle her, and she was having fun.

Saffron waited the statement out patiently, then sat up straight, crossing her arms almost defiantly. “Listen . . . I’m ATTEMPTING to be more laid back like YOU! And after Mr. Big, I’m just not sure how to maneuver this dating game anymore. I want Hyung Joong, but I think I should play the field a little at the same time.”

“Mmmm, I would have to agree.” Saffire nodded her head, dipping it back against the worn sofa.

“So, how about it? Can you help? You seem to know how to handle things better than I do. Look you just proved it.” She stated. *Was it possible that they were actually coming together enough to ask advice of one another? The heavens should have opened up with the Halleluia Chorus!*

“Wow. Just when I thought it was safe to come out of the water.” Saffire snickered. “What makes you think I know anything you don’t? Shit Saffron, we’re the same age, and definitely NOT virgins anymore. I could understand if we were a couple of ‘tweens’, raiding mom and dad’s liquor cabinet and reading ‘Playgirl’ magazine together for the first time discussing penis sizes. But, come on. For the most part, guys are guys. All over the world.”

“Well, aren’t you the jaded one all of a sudden.” Saffron scooted further back into the cushy sofa, hearing the clinking of glasses, and dishes in the late afternoon, as Maud and SeRae cleaned up for the dinner crowd. “You maneuvered JJ pretty damn well that first night. And from the looks of it, you’re still ‘working’ him.”

“Ahhh, yeah. I was drunk. I can maneuver a wooden plank when I’m drunk. Please.”

“Just give me an idea how I should go about ‘wooing’ Hyun Joong away from his girlfriend. And handle Donghae in the process.” Now Saffron was serious. She knew nothing about Donghae, but only a little bit about Hyun Joong, and not near enough to make an overt ‘play’ for him. On top of that, she was virtually clueless about his taste in women. She had to start somewhere. Surely, Saffire could help.

“Oh alright.” Saffire agreed, picking at one fingernail mindlessly. “Since you’re sort of a ‘corporate hound’, you could start with the Internet.” She suggested. “I know you don’t like ‘social media’ since you’re big split, but it is what it is . . . and Google knows all!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014

8:00 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Café

**S**AFFIRE couldn’t understand why Maud was sending her out for supplies so late at night. It wasn’t like her to make her go alone. Not that the neighborhood was questionable or unsafe. She just felt uncomfortable. Hiking up the large bag of paper goods, she stepped to the front door, expecting to find SaRae and Maud finishing up the evening and making their usual delicious smelling late night cups of Vanilla Bean coffee. Wednesday nights they closed early, and the noona’s took their coffees and went home to their own personal lives.

Teetering the large bag, on one knee, she rummaged through her massive purse for the small door key. They could have at least waited for her. Tipping her head upward, she felt the first smattering of snowflakes against her forehead, dotting her nose and lips. More snow. *Did it ever stop snowing in this God forsaken place?* Shaking her head, with thoughts of JJ drifting in and out of her consciousness, she leaned one elbow into the door, shoving it hard.

Before she could drop the awkward bag, a warm set of hands lifted it from her arms, slamming the hard wooden door behind her.

“Here let me get that.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014

8:30 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Kim Hyun Joong’s Apartment

**D**EAR God it was snowing again! Saffron stood shuffling her feet nervously, one gloved hand curled around a cup of Kim Hyun Joong’s favorite cappuccino, the other grasping a container of freshly baked homemade sweet buns. Staring up into the large

glass entryway, she buzzed number #101 for the second time. *That ‘was’ the number he had texted her wasn’t it?*

*Was she doing the right thing? After all, he HAD asked her to come talk. And in the last two days, she had taken ALL of Saffire’s advice, starting with hours glued to the Internet, attempting to find out every possible thing about him she could. One thing being, he liked his women’s legs covered. Snickering, she felt Saffire’s long wool skirt blowing gently about her bare legs in the brisk winter wind. It didn’t say what she should wear underneath!*

More snow, colder wind . . . winter. Christmas was almost upon them, and even though it seemed like she had been in Gangnam forever, it had only been a short eleven days. Trying not to shiver she fumbled for her phone. Once again, the phone. Even wanting to be rid of it, she couldn’t. It seemed to be a necessity, like it or not. Maybe she needed to text him that she was here.

Tugging off her gloves, she set the coffee and rolls down beside her in the accumulating snowflakes. Certainly, he was waiting . . . the bus ride had been long and arduous. Not something she was used to. She was more the taxicab and personal driver type, but if ‘Oh Ha Ni’ could brave the rain and the bus, then so could she.



I’M HERE. U SAID 8:30. She typed in slowly, her cold fingers barely able to maneuver the tiny keypad. Then deciding maybe she would ‘surprise’ him, she lifted the phone above her head, picked off her wool cap, shaking her long red hair out around her shoulders, and making the ‘V’ for victory alongside a snowy smiling face, snapped a ‘Selca’ (Selfie) of herself to send with the message. *Who could resist that?* Without getting a response, the door clicked open, allowing her access.

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