

CHAPTER NINE

(Part 1)

“Love is in the air, I can smell my coffee brewing . . .”



Thursday, December 18th, 2014

8:25 A.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Cup of Hotness Café

YOONA Song leaned over the tiny porcelain sink checking her eye makeup for what seemed like the hundredth time that morning. Smiling at her reflection, she flicked her newly cut bangs, watching them fall gracefully into place, sliding her tongue across freshly brushed teeth. Coming to work at 8:15 for a 9:00 A.M. shift wasn't exactly her idea of a good time, but today was special. It had taken two phone calls, and fifteen minutes of begging to get her friend and co-worker Lisa to switch shifts with her so she could be available today when 'he' came in.

Fingering several small folded pieces of note paper in her apron pocket with one hand, she reached for the restroom door handle with the other and stepped out into the narrow hallway, eyes focused on the café kitchen. With the notes had come pieces of his heart. One every

Thursday for the last eight weeks. At first they had been simple . . . saying she was pretty, her hair looked nice pulled back, he could get lost in her eyes. Then, he began sharing song lyrics, asking her opinion about things, wondering what her favorites were. And an odd friendship began to emerge. They never exchanged phone numbers, never talked about dating, and never touched. He slipped the notes under her tip at the table each time, grinning at her and waving goodbye as he disappeared out the door and back into life, the cocoon of their relationship harbored unobtrusively behind the doors of the 'Hotness Café'.

What would she say to him this time? They never got much time alone. Only a few short fleeting moments to exchange pleasantries and allow her the space she needed to be engaging, yet continue working under the noona's watchful eye. *That damned rule they enforced of no dating the idols.*

The only one privy to their unusual relationship . . . her recently deceased boss, Young Jae Ryu, whose eyes never missed an encounter between hearts.

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UNCLE Ryu stared across the narrow hallway, wondering why he hadn't bothered to paint the café while he had still been alive. The dim tan color was worn and scratched, slices of old paint cracked and peeling at the ceiling line. A finely spun spider web caught his eye, as he followed the busy creature going up and down the thin strands, searching for insects to lure into its unsuspecting lair.

Boredom was beginning to set in. Unable to bear the thought of listening in on the noona's conversation about Saffron and Saffire this morning, he had relegated himself to the back hall having seen his favorite young waitress Yoona come traipsing in early, makeup bag and coffee cup in hand . . . only to skirt immediately into the ladies restroom.

He wasn't surprised. After all, it was Thursday. Smiling, he knew what she was up to. He also knew the outcome. Today would be an epiphany for them all.

Hearing the door open beside him, he leaned over, catching a whiff of the clean outdoorsy scent she always wore for her special someone as she floated out, humming happily, hands stuffed into her apron pockets.

Careening up alongside of her, he grinned wishing she could see him. He missed their talks. The way she cocked her head, listening intently as he gave out his advice about life and love. Recently . . . her heart had been broken. But, she was a fighter. She pulled herself together and bounced back . . . in the process, capturing the attention of someone extremely 'special' in the entertainment industry. How could he NOT encourage her to follow her heart, or her dreams for that matter?

His voice, a whisper as quiet as the whoosh of a summer breeze in her ear, he reminded her yet again . . . "Don't worry about the rule sweetie. I'll take care of it."

Then satisfied she had heard him . . . disappeared to the corner of the dining room, taking up residence at the table he was used to occupying when the customers began coming in at opening.

Yoona, flounced down the hall merrily with her thoughts spinning wildly out of control, remembering Young-Jae fondly hugging her shoulders gently, and whispering in her ear . . . "Don't worry about the rule sweetie. I'll take care of it." He felt so close, and the faint reminder seemed so real . . . even down to the fatherly lilt in his deep voice . . . But, sadly . . . he was no longer at the helm.

Passing the small staircase leading to the private upstairs dining room, she hesitated, hearing a barrage of cuss words floating down around her, alerting the entire staff to the fact that one of the nieces was not only 'in trouble' but 'sorely late' . . .

Snickering she figured one or both of them would probably be getting reamed out this morning, due to the fact that it was nearly 8:30 and neither of them had been seen on the premises doing anything constructive. Normally by this time they were wandering back and forth between the dining room and kitchen, coffee cups in hand . . . sharing freshly baked donuts, chatting, gossiping and preparing for the morning regulars.

So far, several of the other girls had questioned their whereabouts as well, and as much as Yoona had grown to like the two young American women, she and her co-workers could never quite figure out why they got such preferential treatment? If that had been her or anyone else . . . well the ax would have fallen a longggg time ago! That she was sure of.

What was it about them anyway? They were extremely peculiar sometimes and for being twins . . . so brutally different. The story they told was as unusual as they were. But, despite their idiosyncrasies, (Saffire . . . fingers constantly moving like she was playing an imaginary instrument, and Saffron . . . coming dressed to bake and wait tables in business attire), for the most part they were both charming and fun to be around.

Guessing it could all be chalked up to the fact that they were for the most part Americanized, Yoona sighed, wishing she had the luxury and run of the café at will to do whatever she wanted without getting fired. As excited as she was for the day to begin, she was nearly as apprehensive about its outcome.

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8:30 A.M.

Cup of Hotness Café – Upstairs Dining Room

DROWNING . . . drowning in a sea of candy, pillows of sugary confection surrounded Saffire as she floated down . . . down . . . down . . . grasping for the familiarity of the snowy night sky. It was cold, icy cold . . . and she couldn't breathe. Choking on slivers of cotton candy she blinked unconsciously hoping this 'sea' of sweetness wasn't going to swallow her up in her craving for gratification.



Where was he? Where were they? Surely she wasn't alone? Left to dangle, sinfully imprisoned in her own carnal greed. Someone needed to rescue her. But . . . why would they? She was the 'bitch'. Albeit, the 'Cotton Candy Bitch', none-the-less she had played them. Now, she was doomed. In her death they would suffer. Suffer for making her choose. Then suddenly, a hand . . . reaching down, fingers outstretched. Was she being saved? By who?

“Mmmm . . . JJ . . .” Mumbling quietly in her sleep, Saffire kicked both feet out from under the heavy woolen blanket she had curled up in the night before. “Swweeeeet Jae . . . my cotton candy prinnnce. Save meeee.” She begged, her slumber-induced urgings muffled in the creases of one arm, thrown over her face to block out the glaring morning sun, streaming in the large plate glass window of the upstairs dining room.

“SAFFIRE!”

“HUH? WHAT? JJ?”

Bolting upright on the narrow wooden bench, she jerked to attention, her stocking feet hitting the floor with a resounding thud. *Who the hell was screaming at her? And what time was it anyway?*

“You’re LATE . . . Don’t give me a reason to come in there and WHIP your ass!”

Oh SHIT. It was painfully clear that SaRae had found her out. Sighing heavily, she waited for the heavy set noona to step away from the door before standing. Then wrapping herself in the blanket she made her way gingerly across the small expanse of candy cluttered floor.

“I’m coming noona.” She called out hoarsely.

“Yes, indeed you are. Indeed you are.” SaRae backed off muttering mercilessly, her rantings turning quickly to a barrage of cuss words as she could be heard descending the stairs.

Now what? She recalled before slipping back into uncle’s private sanctuary last night to sleep, (amidst the confusion of JJ’s ‘Cotton Candy’ surprise), she had fought with sister Saffron, tried to convince herself to stay in Korea, and fell asleep determined to come to a decision between her two Idol ‘suitors’, (at least by Christmas). In the light of day, it all seemed like yet ‘another’ bad dream.

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8:30 A.M.

‘Cup of Hotness Café’ – Upstairs Apartment

“**A**PPA . . . Appa I love you.” A three-year-old Saffron squealed as he tossed her up in the air above his head. Sunlight sparkling off her curly golden red ponytail, she giggled as he sat her down into the field of wildflowers.

Suddenly he vanished leaving a twenty four year old Saffron standing in a man’s white dress shirt holding a photo. Glancing around she wondered why . . . why did he leave? Crumpling the photo in her fist hitting her chest over her broken heart she knew it had to be her fault.

“Daddy didn’t I love you enough . . . wasn’t I pretty enough . . . or smart enough for you to stay?” She sobbed, wishing she could go back and promise to be better, be the daughter he wanted.

“HaNi, I want you, I’ll love you forever . . .” He said, holding out his arms waiting for her.

Her eyes softened seeing her prince ‘Baek Seung Jo’s smiling face begging her with a welcoming embrace. Rushing through the field, ignoring the flowers that wrapped up her legs trying to slow her progress to the man of her dreams. The perfect man. She deserved him . . . the one who would always say the right thing, never criticize, and love her unconditionally.

The flowers were clenching tighter around her legs, when from her other side a baby cried. Halting she turned hearing Kim Hyun Joong’s pleading voice calling her.

“Saffron I need you, why can’t you love me?” He asked, bouncing a tiny bundle in his arms.

“Joong, you really want me . . .” She mumbled sweeping the tears from her eyes wanting to believe the loving expression on his handsome face. Disregarding the storm clouds gathering around him taking the shape of a woman. Glancing back and forth from one to the other, tugging her foot from the flower’s stems as they bit into her legs, “I want you too Joong.”

“No, stay with me.” Seug Jo begged her, a death grip on her hand as he hauled her back to his side. Spinning around as his sweet voice washed over her, noticing him standing bathed in blue sky and sunshine.

“Yes, I want you Seug Jo.”

“I won’t let him have you.” Hyun Joong yelled, taking the other hand, jerking her toward him.

Saffron heard the roaring of thunder, seeing a laughing Chung-A standing behind Hyun Joong, her arms snaked around his waist. “Stupid woman, he was only yours for a few hours . . . he will always be mine.”

“No, he wants me.” Saffron said, squeezing her eyes shut unable to endure Chung-A staring her down with an arrogant disgust.

“Babe,” Mr. Big clucked in her face as if he was scolding a five year old. “Come with me, I’ve always been your safe place. I’m the one who will take care of you. They can’t, neither one knows the real you like I do . . . I love you Saffron.” He admitted, a grim look on his handsome face, as he ripped the wildflowers from her legs.

Shocked, loathing his deep seductive voice, she lurched away from all of them shouting, “NO” wanting to shut out the sounds of them begging, pleading, and laughing, wondering if all the pain was worth the love of a man. Jerking free, she twisted around falling into the beautiful wildflowers weathering in pain as the vines bit into the soft flesh of her body.

Waking with a start, she found herself sprawled on the floor tangled in the blanket. Her long hair twisted around her neck, she could hear Maud’s loud bellowing voice through the closed door, saying she was late, and to get her ass downstairs.

She tried to free herself quickly from the blanket, when a photo flew out from the folds tear-stained and crushed. Sighing heavily she stared at the face of her lover. *But who was he? ‘Baek Seung Jo’ or Kim Hyun Joong?*

“Damn sister for being right, my love triangle is with one man.” She whispered, and then hearing Maud pounding harder, hollered back, “Okayyy, I’m up.”

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10:30 A.M.

‘Cup of Hotness Café’ – Kitchen

THE cappuccino machine sputtered loudly spewing water everywhere all over the counter, and Saffire as well. *Had Saffron really read her like an open book? Would she be better off in California? Was she that inadequate that she couldn't even handle the freaking cappuccino machine? Too much water? Too little coffee? How hard could it be anyway? She could master an entire orchestrated version of Beethoven's Sonata's, on the violin 'and' piano. So what the hell was up with this dumb contraption?*

Determined not to let it 'beat' her again, she attempted to give it another shot, smiling through her frustration, as she watched co-worker Yoona, pick her way expertly through the crowded dining area, chattering happily, while balancing an entire tray of coffee mugs, without skipping a beat.

Oh to be 'that' girl. Instead, here she was . . . sequestered to the coffee bar, sentenced to die at the hands of a damned appliance that was out to kill her she was sure of it. *Why did working this café seem so easy for everyone else?*

Wiping up coffee and water as she watched, Saffron was seen darting suddenly out from behind the hallway opening, racing up to Yoona, whispering something in her ear then racing back toward the restroom. *And what was that all about? What was sister up to now?*

Even after last night's argument, and her reluctance to mention anything while they cleaned up the dining room together this morning, she had hoped Saffron would at least be civil. But . . . it looked as if she was going to be as cold and unyielding as ever. She knew her sister was nursing a hangover, no matter how 'chipper' she came off to the staff, and nobody, (including herself) had 'wanted' to be on the receiving end of the noona's wrath first thing before work. But, after all she wasn't entirely to blame.

“OUCH! SHIT!”

Snatching one pinched fingertip away from the large silver handle on the 'devilish' contraption in front of her she stuck it between her lips sucking hard to stop the pain as it permeated her entire hand, forcing her eyes downward and away from the customers in front of her.

Embarrassed, she mumbled apologetically, scanning the immediate bar area for someone (anyone) to take over for her so she could seek out at least a band aid. *Where was everyone when you needed them?*

“Can I help?” Yoona’s soft voice was like that of an angel’s behind her as Saffire swung around relief flooding her pain-filled face.

“Oh my God, yes. Thanks. I pinched my finger hard on this thing. Looks like it broke the skin. I could use a band aid. Can you cover for a sec so I can go get one? It’s really busy, hard for me to leave.” Leaning over she whispered in the young girl’s ear regretfully, “Not to mention, I SUCK at this. SaRae is forcing me to stay on this side of the counter until I learn it . . . “in my sleep” she said.”

“Sure, I have a few minutes. Go on.”

Yoona smiled at Saffire engagingly, flipping the machine back on, and instantly striking up a conversation with an elderly halmeoni (grandmother) to her left, fussing over whether to try a new coffee flavor or stick with her usual.

“Gamza. I owe you.” Saffire patted her arm on the way out of the kitchen, headed toward the tiny break room, and the first-aid box.

Spotting Saffron on the way she started to say something, (even just acknowledging that their eyes had met), but the already irritated sister dropped her head, and kept walking, purposeful in ignoring her. *It was going to be a lonnnnggg day.*

“Hey, Miss Saffire!” YoonJong, the short, plumpish cook Maud had recently hired to help out part-time called out to her from the confines of the dim back hallway, pointing to the corner of the closet-sized break room. “Those came for you a few minutes ago. You must have SOME CLASSY boyfriend.”

“What?” Still sucking on the bleeding finger, Saffire pulled up short in the open doorway. Flipping on the overhead light, she was shocked and thrilled to find a massive bouquet of pink roses atop the small round break table, along with a huge stuffed teddy bear, donned in a cute ‘French’ hat. Instinctively, because she had been so used to keeping her relationship with Antonio so hush-hush, she knew she probably didn’t dare tell anyone new who worked at the café about her two ‘suitors’, but her excitement level was at an all-time high so she stepped out into forbidden territory anyway.

“Ahhh, boyfriend? Classy? Yes of course, two of them actually.” She beamed at the new cook her fingers already curled about the satiny bow tied at the teddy bear’s massive thick neck.

With the dating rule hanging over all of them (like a dark cloud threatening a downpour) she knew after this morning's 'talking to', that the noona's were going to be as adamant as ever about enforcing it, but frankly . . . she just didn't give a damn.

"Whoahhh, Miss Saffire. Lucky you."

About ready to comment further and ask her how she managed to juggle a job, 'and' two boyfriends without coming unglued at the seams, YoonJong was interrupted by his cell phone, and had to turn away to take the call, disappointed that he wasn't able to take the time to engage her in some juicy gossip that could be used to his advantage later.

Disregarding the curious chef as he sauntered away, Saffire slammed the door behind her, throwing both hands to her flushed cheeks muttering out loud excitedly, "OH MY GOD JJ! You are so freaking perfect. How did you know I loved pink roses?" *Who else could have sent them?*

Lost in her own thoughts, and engrossed in smelling the thick sweet aroma of the bouquet, she didn't hear the door re-open quietly behind her.



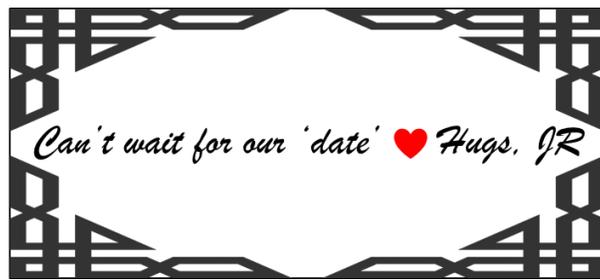
"Nice." Came Saffron's agitated voice, "Must feel good to be doted on. Wonder what Junsu will think about all this."

Saffire spun around, just reaching for the card cradling it between two fingers. *Why was she being so shitty? Still?*

But again, before she could even come up with something to say, Saffron had rotated on her heels and was stomping down the hallway and back to the bar, the quiet mutterings of, "Cotton Candy Bitch." echoing after her.

"Saffron! Wait . . ." Saffire made an attempt to call her back into the room to talk, but it was too late. She was already disappearing around the corner of the coffee bar and to shout would have drawn too much attention to herself. "Dammit!"

Despite her sister's snarky remarks, she tore into the fancy white card unable to contain her delight. *Pink roses were her favorite. Of course he would know. Everything last night had been pink . . .*



She read the message out loud to herself quietly. *JR, never sent or given her before . . .* But, having seen her receive several large and events in California, he she did indeed prefer pink Since last night with JJ she date they had agreed upon . . . Christmas concert. Still, the ‘was’ so thoughtful and sweet

And the bear? Did that mean of disappointment crossing

massive teddy quickly until she finally spotted a rolled up piece of paper stuffed underneath the ribbon around his neck, reading . . .



had all but forgotten the to shop, take in dinner and a flowers were gorgeous it of him to think of her.

he had sent that too? A stab her heart, she searched the

Unable to stop herself from smiling, she backed up against the wall, staring at the two gifts knowing the two hearts behind them were racing up a hill, only to find a cliff with no warnings on the other side. And she was powerless to stop them from shooting over the side and out after her into oblivion.

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“**W**HO’S a cotton candy bitch?” Yoona asked, (hearing Saffron’s grumblings behind her) as she swirled a large heart into the dollop of cream topping the steaming cup of coffee she was preparing to hand to a young gentleman perched at the bar.

“My stupid-ass sister.” Saffron hissed under her breath, not wanting the customers to hear her cursing.

Wiping her hands down the front of her apron, Yoona lifted the mug to the customer, smiling before acknowledging that she had heard what Saffron had underhandedly remarked.

“Saffronnnn. No she’s not. What’s going on anyway? I know the two of you don’t always get along, but I like Saffire. Why are you so mad at her this morning? What did she do?”

This was where Saffron knew her ‘adult’ self, should shut up, and not resort to nitpicking about her sister, but for some reason the ‘child’ in her (who had never had the opportunity to do so growing up) won out, and ultimately took over.

“Come here Yoona.” Tugging the young woman aside and toward the back of the bar area, she crossed her long arms about her chest with icy blue eyes blazing. “She’s got this ‘thing’ for Kim JaeJoong.” With the information now out in the open, it required an explanation. “And in the process, she’s about to ruin a perfectly good relationship, already ‘in the works’ with Kim Junsu. Those two are BEST friends for God sake! She’s beyond stupid.”

Realizing Yoona probably had no clue what she was talking about, she stared out over the half empty bar crowd, wondering why she was so intensely bothered by the whole situation. She should be happy for Saffire. Instead, all she could feel was jealousy. Green disgusting envy . . . that ‘her Prince’, didn’t care enough to even remotely follow through with anything but text messages, the morning after.

Yoona, reached back untying the back of her apron, and slipping it over her head hurriedly. “Break. It’s break time. Come talk to me in the back room.” She whispered, not wanting anyone else to overhear their conversation. Especially not the noona’s or Saffire, who was already meandering slowly back toward the coffee bar, humming to herself, fingers floating about in front of her as if she were conducting an imaginary orchestra.

If Saffire was attempting to ‘date’ two of the most well-known idols that frequented the café, what in the world did that mean for her and her impending situation? These two women hadn’t been at the café long enough to really know what was going on in her life.

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THE strong pungent odor of flowers permeated the small room, as Saffire snatched a fruit drink from the fridge plunking down at the tiny table. Shoving JJ’s enormous bear over to one side in annoyance, (crushing it in a corner in the process), she glared

across the sea of baby pink roses into Yoona's inquisitive eyes.

"Is it possible to hate her even though we're related?" She snapped, her previously energetic face now showing the true state of her condition after last night's binge before bed.

"You don't 'hate' her. She's un-hate-able, and you know it." Yoona caressed the tip of one satiny rose, leaning down to sniff in its sweet aroma. "Do you know which one these are from?" She asked, her curiosity getting the better of her wondering inwardly what in the world she would have ever done if her ex-boyfriend had bothered to give her roses or a life-size version of Teddy. *Probably wet herself right on the spot!*

"I overheard her 'gushing' when I came down the hall. She thought JJ, but I'm betting Junsu. He seems more the 'roses' type. The bear is probably JaeJoong. Who cares anyway? Damn, I can't seem to get anything but a pregnant ex-girlfriend for a gift where Hyun Joong's concerned. Muttering under her breath Saffron's eyes smoldered with pent up frustration.

Despite her unusually haughty tone, Yoona was suddenly interested in the gossip that was going to determine whether or not 'she' would be allowed to date an Idol as well.

"So, she's got JJ AND Junsu after her huh? And you're dating Hyun Joong? THE Kim Hyun Joong?" Her voice drifted up loudly in the quiet room, echoing her disbelief.

"Shhhh . . . shhhh . . . DAMN, keep it down. You want the customers to hear us? The noona's will skin and quarter us both."

Saffron, unable to take the long stemmed bunch of roses in her face any longer, grabbed them by the ribbon tossing them on the short counter beside the microwave.

"Ewww, I loathe roses honestly, even Joong's freaking ex-girlfriend is a step up from the rooms full of pink roses my ex used to have his secretary send me . . . never picked out anything worthwhile either. Couldn't get a gift on his own to save his damn soul." adding . . . "Anyway, Joong and I, we're not really 'dating', just sort of 'seeing' each other, I guess you could say." *Yeah, seeing each other. That was a big fat lie. But, saying 'sleeping together' wasn't going to get her any closer to the 'girlfriend of the year' award either.*

“Sort of like friends with benefits?” Yoona scooted up in the chair, bridging the gap between the two of them. “Mmmm, that’s progressive. Wow, and he has a pregnant ex-girlfriend? You’re okay with that?” *This American redhead seemed pretty shameless when it came to talking about the men in her life. She would NEVER divulge this much personal information to a relative stranger.*

“NO, not friends with benefits.” Saffron sucked the pomegranate juice through the straw slowly, now wishing she had taken Joong’s recent text messages. “It’s complicated, and . . . shit, of course I’m not okay with the ex, would you be?” Offering up the question, she kept talking anyway, not giving Yoona any leeway to respond. *No girl should be alright with such a despairing and complicated situation. How had she managed to leave him with things still so up in the air?* “You know what, it doesn’t matter, because I’m pretty certain she’s lying . . . about the pregnancy part.”



“Lying? Whoah, that’s heavy. She must be desperate to get him back huh?” Now, the gossip was getting too good for Yoona to overlook. *These sisters, both in relationship with Idols, getting gifts, having drama, where had SHE been the last few weeks?*

“I guess so.” *And who wouldn’t be? He was amazing . . . perfect . . . in every way.*

Close to tearing up, she found her eyes drifting back over toward Saffire’s gifts. *She had taken her sisters advice to be bold and look where it had landed her. Smack dab in the middle of a hornet’s nest of complications. While Saffire rode the train to Wonderland, with JJ at the helm and Junsu bringing up the rear. It just wasn’t fair!*

“Do the noona’s know about any of this?” Yoona finally asked, peering at Saffron’s despondent face, from under her newly acquired bangs. “’Cause I thought the rule was ‘no dating the Idols.’”



Swinging back around, Saffron thought about the answer to Yoona’s cut and dry question, finally responding curtly. “It is. But, damn. Who wants to follow it? It’s as stupid as my sister sometimes is. The name of this café is ‘Cup of Hotness’ for God’s sake.” Cocking her head to one side, she squinted at the young waitress in front of her, noticing a wide-eyed look of satisfaction beginning to

spread out across her previously somber face.

“Ahhh . . . I know the name of the café”, Yoona reiterated, one hand to her flushed cheeks, reminding Saffron reluctantly, “but even if it is STUPID and we don’t like it, aren’t we ALL supposed to follow it? Rules are rules.”

“No we don’t have to like it, OR follow it.”

Saffron wasn’t sure how to get across to her that this particular rule was something that could be dispensed with in the blink of an eye if (as owners) she and Saffire chose to do so.

And she couldn’t help but wonder why she was even asking all of a sudden? *Was there an idol she was interested in?* When she and Saffire had arrived a few weeks ago, all she could surmise was that Yoona was extremely friendly, talked to virtually ‘everyone’ equally, did her allotted time on the clock, and left immediately.

Oddly though, she ‘had’ noticed the girl seemed pre-occupied lately, especially today . . . with more makeup on than usual, and a new hair-do. She hadn’t noticed anyone special hanging around her. Donghae and Heechul had talked to all the staff the other day, giving them equal time and attention, and other than them, there hadn’t been any idols in the café, except for Junsu, JJ and Hyun Joong.

Was it possible she had her eye on one of them? Oh shit! That would NOT be good. Now, almost afraid to ask, Saffron dipped her head closer to her ‘employee’ hoping her question would go unanswered.

“Yoona, is there a particular idol you’ve got the hots for?”

Yoona reared back, not expecting to be asked outright if she might be interested in anyone. *Did she dare tell her?* Saffron acted like a friend, but by the same token she had just spilled her guts about her and her own sisters’ involvement with the idols. Would she end up doing the same to her if she divulged her news? The noona’s didn’t play around when it came to enforcing ‘any’ of their rules. And along with that . . . more than likely, came losing the job she had worked so hard to keep over the past year. Hesitating, she dropped her eyes picking at the ends of her white bow tie.

“It isn’t Hyun Joong or JaeJoong is it?” Saffron finally questioned, leaning over, and grabbing the reluctant girl by the wrist pulling her closer across the already small table.

Now Yoona understood why Saffron was acting so unusual. She thought her ‘mystery’ idol was one of the men she or Saffire was interested in.

“OH MY GOD NO!” Shaking her so head vigorously the hair began wisping out around her sleek pulled back ponytail, she giggled. “They never really even talk to me when they come in. They are good tippers though!”

Saffron heaved a sigh of relief, her fingers still gripping the girls’ wrist. “Whew, that’s good. You had me going for a minute there. But, seriously Yoona, if there is . . . you know . . . SOMEONE . . . don’t worry about the damn rule. I can take care of it.”

Yoona, hearing the exact words that Young Jae had spoken to her when confronted with the particulars of the ‘rule’, wriggled her arm free, wondering just ‘how’ Saffron thought she was going to be able to take care of it. She didn’t have any pull in the café. Only the noona’s could change the rule, and that wasn’t likely to happen any time soon.

“Maybe . . . but, I don’t think he even sees me like that.” She added, standing up and smoothing down her skirt. “We should go. Our ten minutes is up. And you my friend, might want to go splash some water on your face. You really do look like hell.”

Bouncing off the plastic chair, she patted Saffron on the shoulder on the way out, still languishing over her dilemma while darting out the door and back toward the dining area, tossing her apron over her head as she ran.

Now what was she going to do? As if it wasn’t bad enough that he would be here soon, her original decision to tell him about the boyfriend being out of the picture was waning . . . Saffron was onto the fact she might have her ‘eye’ on someone and that could only mean one thing . . . if Saffron picked up on it . . . Saffire would as well. And right behind them . . . would come Maud and SaRae! Was she ready for that?

11:20 A.M.

Cup of Hotness Café - Inside

“**Y**OONA! There you are . . .” Saffire chased the young waitress back toward the dining room, out of breath as she finally caught her stepping up toward the last

table in the back, “Thanks again for standing in for me.”

Young-Jae tipped back in his chair, making room for Saffire to breeze past him, sensing the energy in her step. His time at the café was short today, there were other issues brewing that needed attending to. But, he didn't mind the interruption. Once the clock turned over to 1:00 p.m. he knew it would be safe for him to leave. At least temporarily.

Yoona studied the flushed and animated face of the laid-back, (often times, out-of-touch with reality), Saffire. She looked like a girl in love. Almost as if she had just gotten caught with her hand in the cookie jar. And for good reason. *Was that the way 'she' looked today? All pink, and flustered . . . nervously checking the clock over and over again . . .*

“Sure Saffire. Anytime. You look so happy all of a sudden. You were about to kill someone when I left you at the bar earlier.”

Knowing full well, what it was that was causing Saffire's happiness, she didn't want to let on that Saffron had already spilled the beans about JaeJoong, Junsu and their extravagant gifts, currently lying unattended in the break room.

“Awww, it was just a pinched finger. As soon as I managed to get away from that damned machine, I started to feel lots better.” Saffire admitted, wondering if the excitement of getting the roses and bear was that evident on her face. *What she really wanted was to shout her exhilaration to the rooftops, not caring who heard her.*

“That all?”



“Uhhh, welllll.” Twitching with pent up exuberance, Saffire weighed the pros and cons of sharing her “Cotton Candy” experience with Yoona, and the results this morning.

“Hmmm.” Yoona reached over picking up an empty glass, studying it closely for water spots, never taking her eyes off Saffire’s twinkling eyes. “Couldn’t be because you got something in the break room could it?” She finally asked, setting it down and picking up a second one, clucking her tongue at Saffire casually. “Tsk, ts, ts. I swear I don’t think I’ve EVER seen a bouquet of roses OR a bear quite THAT big before . . . wow. You must’ve impressed somebody important.”

Now Saffire was blushing like a school girl in the throes of her first real crush. And in her haste to get back to work after pinching her finger, she realized the gifts had been left on the break room table, totally forgetting that it placed them under scrutiny to every employee that worked the café, (including the noona’s). *But truthfully, did she care? Not really.*

“AGHHH. YOONAAAA . . .” She whined grabbing the waitress’s arm as she bounced about the small table. “I guessss I did, maybeeee . . .”

Since it was just the two of them, she was dying to let someone in on the secret, that she had a ‘thing’ for the blonde-headed ‘KING’ of KPOP Kim JaeJoong and quite possibly his best friend as well.

“Soooo? Spill it, who?” Yoona asked. “Anyone I know?”

As they wiped down the glasses together, Saffire sighed rolling her eyes toward the ‘Couples Wall’, reminded of Uncle Ryu and his secret upstairs dining room. “Okay, okay, you’ve probably seen him in here.” She cooed, her voice sounding satiny smooth to Yoona’s ears. “But, you have to promise NOT to tell anyone if I say.” She warned, now coming back to reality, and realizing that one word to the wrong person could make them all miserable if Maud and SaRae got wind of their gossiping.

“Promise.” Yoona crossed her heart, smirking at Saffire’s sudden girlish attitude.

“Okay. Well, I had a surprise date with Kim JaeJoong last night.” Saffire paused, her fingers gripping Yoona cautiously, attempting to gage her reaction before saying more.

Finding her surprised but not shocked, she continued animated. “He set up this amazing candy surprise, and we talked and danced . . . He likes me Yoona. REALLY likes me, if you know

what I mean. He sent me the bear this morning. And my friend Junsu sent the flowers. Just because, I guess. We haven't had much time to spend together since I got here, that's probably why."

Arms hugging her waist, as if reliving JJ's arms encompassing her against the café kitchen wall, she sighed. "Junsu's awesome and all, but JaeJoong's freaking amazing."

Then remembering she and Saffron's conversation about men and relationships several days ago in the apartment she unexpectedly wished the inquisitive Yoona had been her sister instead . . . interested in what had actually happened during her date . . . and happy that she had received gifts from not only JJ but Junsu as well. Antonio had given gifts but only secretly when they were alone in the apartment, and even then they were meager. Now, after the fact . . . she understood why.

"Wow! That's daebak. I saw them both here last week with Hyun Joong. JaeJoong's like one of the biggest idols around. And Junsu too, come on Saffire . . . how in the hell did you manage that? I mean you just moved here. And what about the rule?" Yoona whispered, one hand to Saffire's ear almost scared to hear her interpretation of 'the rule'.

"Huh? The dating rule? Pshhhh. That's a bunch of crap. And I guess you could say it was sort of a fluke how we got together. I suppose it was Uncle Ryu passing. Geez Yoona, I've told you some of the rest. Junsu and I have been friends for a long time."

Somewhat frowning at the mention of the rule, Saffire threw her other arm around Yoona's shoulder drawing her close. "I'm not gonna follow that dumb rule. I'm from America, I'll go out with whoever I want to."

Young-Jae snickered at their backs, feeling a little bit sorry for his two unsuspecting noonas who were about to be thrown into a 'mutiny' over the previous, unyielding 'dating rule'.

Why was Yoona questioning the rule? She never had before, and for some strange reason, now Saffire was beginning to sense by her pointed questions that she might already know more than she was letting on. Saffron, of course. She had seen the gifts and obviously gotten to Yoona first to discuss her 'jealous displeasure' after last night's argument. What a lot of nerve.

"Did my sister tell you about me and JJ?"

The hesitation before answering was just long enough for Saffire to know her suspicions were true. “Wow. She did, didn’t she?” Barking out at the waitress in frustration, now Saffire’s previously enthusiastic mood was turning sour.

Yoona nodded agreeably, dropping her head as she fingered the small square note pieces in the pocket of her apron again. *It was time to get out while she could. These two crazy sisters were going to get them all in trouble before the day was through. It was obvious that neither of them were ‘rule’ followers.*

“It wasn’t much. She was just . . . ummm, happy for you is all. Don’t be mad at her. I can’t talk anymore. I really have to get back to work . . .” Begging off any further conversation she tried to step away, but Saffire latched onto her tightly, not giving her any room to escape.

“Happy for me? She was? Really?”

“Ahhhh . . .”

One thing about Yoona, was she never lied. She had tried often, but always got caught, and little goosebumps were prone to appear all up and down her arms whenever she did. This time though, she sensed Saffire was needing to feel acceptance from the sister who had just thrown her under the bus. “De. Of course she was.”

Wanting to shout out loud happily at Saffron who was presently back in the kitchen baking, Saffire scooted closer to Yoona’s ear. “Did she tell you I was the one who encouraged her to go after Hyun Joong?” Now the flame had been fueled, and Yoona . . . who really didn’t want to hear or know any more ‘dating’ secrets between the two, was anxiously wriggling free of Saffire’s strong grasp.

“No. No, of course not.” She stuttered. “Just mentioned him. That was all. And, anyway . . . that’s none of my business.”

“I guess not. But, you know what Yoona.” Saffire smiled engagingly, finally releasing her shoulder so she could step away. “I wouldn’t worry about the rule. If you wanna date an idol, or you like someone . . . I can take care of it. You won’t get in trouble.”

11:30 A.M.

‘Cup of Hotness Café’ - Outside

THE young idol hiked the massive teddy bear in his arms, as he slammed the car door shut against the flurry of snowflakes threatening to kick up a late morning storm, even with the sun out. It was too late to back out now. With his heart pounding clear through his T-shirted chest, he marched forward toward the large wooden café door, smiling at some passers-by who chuckled at his unusual ‘companion’.

Lifting one large bear paw in the air, he waved at them comically, hoping to ease the tension for himself in the process. Waving back, they spun around clicking a few quick pics of him before heading on down the sidewalk, leaving him to his own defenses.

For weeks now he had engaged her bashfully with friendly smiles, furtive playful eye-gazes when no one else was looking, and left her afterward with a personal written message to help him weave his way into her heart. The ‘notes’ had served their purpose up until this very minute, but it was time to move on to bigger things.

She was stunning. With twinkling eyes and a bright smile he could think of nothing and no one else. He had pushed her up on a pedestal so high that he was afraid if she didn’t at least ‘consider’ his request today . . . he would be devastated.

So, donning the ‘magical’ bear that would be his words when he faltered, he pushed through the door quietly, and into the semi-crowded café.

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