

CHAPTER SEVEN

(Part 1)

“All I Need is Coffee and Red Lipstick . . .”



Wednesday, December 17th, 2014

8:30 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea

Unkle Ryu stood behind a shivering Saffron, outside of Kim Hyun Joong's Gangnam upscale apartment building.

“Saffron . . .” He scolded her quietly. “If you weren't so forgetful you wouldn't have had to take the bus. I can do a lot of things darling, but getting your wallet to you in time to allow you to snag a taxi, just isn't one of them.”

It was 'exhausting' being the only one in charge of everyone's circumstances surrounding, she and Saffire's ultimate ascent to true happiness. How in the world could he be exhausted? He was a spirit for God's sake! Thankful for his ability to whisk himself in and out of anywhere he chose, he knew if he had still been a living, breathing man . . . well . . . it would have been a cold marathon, dashing about the city in the December wind and snow.

A smirk crossing his usually somber face, he was certain he didn't need to worry about Saffron (even though her intentions were 'obviously' inconceivable where Mr. 'Baek Seung Jo' were concerned).

Not sure why she was taking 'dating' advice from scattered sister Saffire, no doubt, she would probably embarrass herself yet again, and in the process the already 'burned' and 'still smoldering' Hyun Joong would give her no leeway. ('That' he could take to the bank!)

The night was barely in its 'birthing' stage, and already he had successfully 'visited' the major players, weaving his web of suggestive whisperings and practicing ill-fated attempts at moving and manipulating solid objects.

Staying true to his promise to Saffire that he would make sure Junsu would be fine in the wake of a date with JaeJoong, he left the 'somewhat jilted' Idol pouring over fan messages on his Facebook page, having responded personally (at 'his' quiet urging) to a young woman from JeJu, begging him for a special date in the new dining room of his recently opened hotel.

Steepling his fingers impatiently, he wanted to just 'visit' Hyun Joong in his apartment 'personally' to get this ball rolling and over with, but something told him first, he needed to return to the café.

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8:30 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Inside the Cup of Hotness Café

SAFFIRE'S heart raced uncontrollably, feeling the heaviness of the grocery bag give way in the blackness, when out of nowhere, the damnable black stray cat dashed out from behind the darkened bar, toppling over a wire coffee display in the process, it's loud descent randomly scattering small boxes of coffee and tea across the tile floor at her feet. *What the hell! No one was supposed to be in the café after hours!*

Her first thought was to go straight for the groin. Without pepperspray, or a weapon of any kind, (except herself and the toe of her wet black boot), her senses keen and focused on the task at hand, she leaned over and reared one knee up, coming in direct contact with human flesh.

Satisfied with her spur of the moment decision, the squeal from above her head, matched the loud shriek of the cat as the boot came down, her heel meeting the tip of the stray's coal black tail. *A one-two punch! Maud had taught her well.*

But, the loud yet melodic voice was achingly familiar.

“SHIT . . . SHIT . . . SHIT . . . WHAT THE FUCK!” JJ screamed garishly, gasping for breath, hoping to God that she hadn't crippled his nuts for life, at the feel of her bony knee crunching loudly against his groin.

As the grocery bag hit the floor along with the already destroyed display of boxes, he cursed again, just for good measure before crumpling to a squat before her, one hand on an attending bar stool, to maintain his balance.

With her eyes darting furtively about in the dim surroundings, Saffire thought if there was one thing she was famous for, it was reacting first and asking questions later. This time . . . she might well have made a serious mistake.

“OH MY GOD! JJ! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?” She barked, hoping he would understand that between the darkness, the cat and ‘a body’, all she had seen was ‘red’. “You scared the living hell out of me. You’re lucky I didn’t have my purse, I carry a knife you know.”

Dropping to one knee, amidst the clutter, she surveyed the situation, peering into JJ’s pinched and peaked face. “Are you okay?” She croaked out, almost incoherently, her eyebrows raised at his dilemma. “The balls, I know. I really AM sorry. That’s gotta hurt.”

But, in her defense, he had ‘ambushed’ her. What did he think she was going to do, stepping into a dark café and finding him standing there alone (with her vulnerable and unprotected)? She was new to Gangnam. She didn’t know. He could have been anyone, a thief, rapist . . . murderer? She wasn’t ready to pack it in yet, at the tender age of twenty-four, and especially NOT at the hands of some whacko!

Nodding first “Yes”, to make it seem like he was a ‘real’ man and could handle the pain, JJ began to struggle to his feet, until halfway up the barstool he squeaked out a truthful “NO”, giving in to the pain and slipping back down around her ankles. “Ice. Please. Hurry.”

“OH right! Ice. Of course.”

Hopping up, Saffire kicked the coffee boxes out of her way, rushing madly toward the kitchen and the freezer, all the while muttering under her breath. “Why are these freaking things happening all of a sudden? First the crazy night at the

drinking tent, Saffron's coffee all down Hyun Joong's pants, the mishap with the tray full of glasses in the dining room . . . I just don't get it." Then she realized . . . *The 'FUCKING CAT'! That was it! The cat was 'always' around when something horrific went down.*

Scouring the kitchen for not only a small plastic bag but the wayward animal as well, she was convinced that if she found it, she would skin it alive from the top of its furry little head to the tip of its annoying flickering tail.

Scurrying back to the front hallway, the scene that met her when the lights came on looked worse than expected in the dark. The display had been a large one, and there was JJ parked in the middle of the mess, leaning on one arm, his dark glasses tipped down, his expression still solemn and wracked with pain.



"I was trying to surprise you." He muttered weakly, reaching for the bag of ice. "Give me that. What the hell did you THINK I was doing here?"

"I don't know. And for crying out loud, I SAID I WAS SORRY!" Saffire tossed him the bag of ice, wanting to be more sympathetic but, considering the circumstances, finding it hard.

"We were supposed to have a date, remember?" He reminded her, stretching both feet out against the cool floor. Plunking the ice bag over his blue-jeaned crotch tenderly, he closed his eyes as the cold sensation began to numb his throbbing package. "I really didn't mean to scare you, OR the cat."

"Well you did." She snapped, wanting to stay aggravated, but watching him suffer at her own hand was clearly making it difficult. "Last I heard, you were supposed to text and let me know when . . . not just randomly show up!"

Still mumbling and cussing under his breath from the pain, JJ attempted to get up again for the second time. *This was what he got for taking the initiative to come over and plan a special night for this girl he was trying so hard to impress. Wow, he had impressed her alright.*

For some reason, the ‘special’ in special night flew straight out the window, when his gonads came in contact with her knee. Now he was reduced to attempting to stand in the middle of a chaotic coffee display, clutching himself awkwardly in the one place he had been hoping to make good use of later on.

Bathed in the overhead lights, Saffire stood next to him silently surveying the situation before slipping out of her short boots and coat.

“How did you get in anyway?” She asked curiously, moving on and padding anxiously around the floor, righting the display stand, while picking up boxes in an attempt to act disinterested. “I didn’t leave the door open, and you certainly don’t seem like the ‘breaking and entering’ type. Did Maud or SaRae let you in before they left?”

Pausing at her task, she hopped up on a bar stool facing him directly, studying this flushed and exasperated Idol, (whose image had produced many sleepless nights for her over the last few weeks).

Even when quaking at her feet, he excited, then petrified her, the memory of his ‘self-proclaimed Cotton Candy’ kiss melting her resolve faster than she could keep up. He might as well have been the ‘vampire’ she had compared him to when they first met, because the draw of his eyes and lips were mesmerizing, yet unsettling. Now that the worst was over, what would become of his surprise date?

“You ask a lot of questions without waiting for answers.” JJ stated matter-of-factly, unable to stop himself from smiling through the pain at her pink, wind-dyed cheeks and messy hair, (still dotted with melting droplets of snow).

Her response edgy, Saffire swung herself in a lazy circle, kicking both stocking'd feet out in front of her with each turn. "Well, you never answer quickly enough."

How could he? She was a 'talker' this one. Hard to get a word in edgewise. Still, in general without being in 'Ninja' mode, she was engaging and witty. A quality JJ found rare in the scores of other women he had dated in his past.

So, true . . . his strategy 'had' been to meet her at the door, whisk her into a kiss and let nature take its course after that, but . . . still reeling from the aftermath of her bony knee, he readjusted the ice pack, now realizing he would have to take things slower . . . much, much slower because obviously, they were already wayyy past her entrance and his fall from grace. Time would tell how the remainder of the night would end up playing out. He wanted to get to know her and vice versa. Hopefully, it could still end up being perfect.

"Arasseo then, let's see. Question #1. 'How did I get in?' I was afforded a special key. A long time ago by a wonderful middle-aged gentleman who I believe you know as 'Uncle Ryu'. Question #2. 'Did the noona's let me in?' Answered by question #1 . . . ani." *She was a challenge this one.* "Anything else you need to know? Hmmm, how about, am I broken? Do I need an ambulance? Will I ever have sex again after tonight? Can I still walk? It's disturbing that you don't care."

Disregarding each of his questions, Saffire's circling stopped, hearing him mocking her in lieu of his present physical state.

"Actually, yeah," She answered abruptly, "there is one more. How come you thought you could creep around in the dark and not get caught? Seems like you own the place sometimes. You're just a little too familiar with things when you're here."

"Wowww. That's cold my little 'Cotton Candy Princess' but, don't worry about me . . . I'll survive. Think I can still walk. Don't need an ambulance. Probably crooked my manhood permanently, but I guess we could check it out later . . . see

if it still works.” Winking at her mischievously he chuckled adding, “I’m familiar with a lot of things around here because of your Uncle Ryu. I wanna be a little more familiar with you too. Another reason why I’m here.”

Not knowing how to respond to his sudden ‘sexually charged’ conversation, Saffire gulped loudly as they squared-off, staring each other down, waiting for the other to say something first. In her entire life she had never met a man like Kim JaeJoong. Sassy, sexy and sure of himself.

Truth be told, a month ago, she would have cowered away into nothingness at his bold insinuating comments to her, but if nothing else . . . Antonio had left her with more spunk and fire as well . . . making this idol, the perfect target for her pent up aggressions. In an odd way, it had felt liberating bringing him to his knees before ever finding out how they would mesh together as a couple . . . if indeed they ever did! He was turning out to be a worthy opponent.

“Wha? No feisty answer? I’m shocked.” JaeJoong muttered, leaning upright against the bar, thumping the ice bag down in front of him, working through the residual pain to reach up over the counter for two large coffee mugs, (one, sporting a set of women’s red painted lips on it, the other, his own ‘personal’ JJ cup).



Saffire had seen the mug saying, ‘STAY HUNGRY, STAY FOOLISH’, but never placed the initial ‘J’ slashed through it, as representing ‘JJ’

“I think we’re ‘familiar’ enough for the time being.” She mumbled, returning to the task of re-stacking coffee and tea boxes, humming purposefully to keep her mind off the fact that a now somewhat ‘recovered’ JaeJoong was unscrupulously undressing her with his eyes, (even in the passive motion of setting two coffee cups down before him).

After all this, could she not just rewind her entrance? Possibly even her exit from the café, earlier in the evening. If she had only known he was coming. She would

have showered, brushed her teeth, (been more prepared), made sure she was dressed in something 'other' than her tattered blue jeans and plain colored T-shirt. She felt neither acceptable nor 'date' worthy.

The old antique wall clock overhead ticked down the minutes, matching the nervous beating of her heart. Never one to back down from a decision no matter how impulsive, (i.e. kneeing him first and asking questions later), this time she felt like hesitating.

How was it possible he was 'imagining' she was sexy, when even in his discomfort, he was so blatantly perfect? Holy SHIT, she was beginning to sound like Saffron, mooning over Hyun Joong being 'Baek Seung Jo. "Stop Fangirling Saffire . . ."

Her fingers adjusted and re-adjusted the display anxiously, as she swiveled away from him the second time, attempting to hide her uneasiness. *Would her reactions have been the same if he had been Junsu, standing in front of her about to make coffee? A few short days ago, she would have thought "Yes" . . . tonight . . . she wasn't so sure.*

Maybe 'that' was what Junsu had been missing. That look of raw hunger, when he finally faced her for the first time in months. (Even a 'married' Antonio had given her lust and sensuality, always leaving her thirsty for more.)

Frankly, for all practical purposes, she shouldn't be worrying about 'any' man in her life right now. She was a business owner after all. The way she had flown in the face of danger to protect it, and her had just proved it. The café should be her number one priority.

But, Saffire Ryu (the woman) had always been a romantic at heart. Searching for love in all the wrong places. The feel of a man's tender arms around her was . . . well . . . it was something she craved and couldn't live without. She was about to jump out of the frying pan. *Dammit! Why was she choosing JJ to be the fire and not Junsu?*

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“**Y**OU finished with that? Come on over. Let’s have some coffee.” JJ announced, startling her out of her thoughts. “Where’s that bottle of Vodka I left here last time? It’ll help me with the pain.” Scouring behind the counter amongst jars and cans of coffee ingredients, he fished out the full bottle of Vodka parking it happily atop the bar beside his cup. “Join me?”

Saffire made her way back over toward him, easing herself yet again onto the stool directly in front of his lanky, yet muscular form. Now, not only were her legs quivering, but her stomach churned uncomfortably too, with an excitement she tried desperately ‘not’ to register across her face.

“Of course.”

Her answer was weak as she fingered the label on the liquor bottle, wondering why she continued to dwell on the drunken kiss, they had experienced the last time they were together in front of the whirring cappuccino machine.

“I’m impressed.” She finally blurted out unable to think of anything else noteworthy to say. “You have your own coffee mug here. I’ve seen it, might have even used it a time or two. I didn’t know it was yours.” Shrugging her shoulders apologetically, she watched the ice cubes melting into a pool of water inside the zip lock bag he had plunked atop the wooden bar. “I’m starting to wonder if the upstairs apartment wasn’t really yours too . . .”

Not really ignoring her statement, but not answering either, JJ’s dark eyes rose slowly to meet hers. *So those tasty pink lips had kissed the rim of his coffee mug already? It made the drinking so much sweeter.*

Two hefty ‘shots’ in each mug later, a dash of cinnamon, cream and two large teaspoons of sugar, with steady hands, JJ placed the steaming cup in her

outstretched fingers. Then downing one straight gulp of Vodka first, he lifted his own cup to his lips with a sigh.

“Aishhh, nothin’ like a good stiff shot of Vodka when a feisty Princess decides to rearrange your balls.” He snickered teasingly. “And the apartment upstairs? Ani. Never mine. Could have used it though. Just never did.”

He recalled having been given permission ‘more’ than once to make use of it over the years, but had respectfully declined. It was a fact, he had inarguably been one of Young-Jae’s favorites.

“You DO know I own a coffee house right?” He added, “It’s sort of common knowledge. Uncle Ryu convinced me to give it a go.”

“I do.” Saffire was beginning to remember his comment to her about being more ‘hands on’ here in her Uncle’s café. “And even though I’m sort of torn over it, what you told me about taking my role here more seriously, is actually starting to hit home.”

Fidgeting on the stool, she stared past JJ’s head to the ‘now’ familiar café surroundings, admitting, “I’m not really a businesswoman. That’s Saffron’s forte’. Me, I’m the artsy one. It’s been hard giving up the lifestyle I’m used to. Truth is, all this sort of gives me a headache, but I’m trying.” She sighed, her confession heartfelt and sincere.

Tucking her lips over the red painted image on the cup, seeing if she could match the print with her own she added offhandedly, “Ewww, I hate red lipstick. Gloss, natural, or pink. That’s me. Red is more Saffron. Grey business suits, high heels and ruby red lips. According to her, that’s the ‘Corporate’ way.”

Scrunching her nose in disgust, she shuddered at the thought of dressing up like that every day, preferring her Bohemian skirts and bare feet. As her mind wandered back to her carefree days on the beach she witnessed him smirk (ears perked

attentively to her rambling conversation). *He had been correct earlier, in pointing out one of her worst habits . . . talking without waiting for responses or answered questions.*

Allowing herself to continue anyway, she referenced his piggybacking of her to the café from the drinking tent the first night they had met.

“Us being back here like this, sort of reminds me of the other night. I was seriously tipsy, huh? Hard to believe after just meeting we stood right here and you called me a ‘bitch’. Now look at you. Suddenly, I’m a freaking ‘Cotton Candy Princess!’” She snickered, leaning over to smell the delicious aroma wafting up from out of her steaming cup. “Can’t make up your mind? Maybe I’m really the ‘Cotton Candy Bitch’.

“Yahhh, I was gonna say that, but I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.” JJ quipped, “Already been knee’d once . . . wasn’t looking forward to a second time.” Grinning, he reached for the Vodka bottle tempting her with another shot to her coffee cup. “One more? Help you relax. You look like you’re about to have a coronary perched up there all nervous and stiff.”

“Not nervous.” Saffire lied, clutching her cup tighter at his insinuation that she was edgy or tense.

“Like hell. One more or not? ‘Cause before we do ‘anything’ else, I need to make sure all my lower extremities are working properly.”

“Okay.” She acquiesced, as the foam around the rim of her cup dissipated with the interference of the thick Vodka. *Obviously she had hurt his ‘pride’ more than his ‘jewels’*

Unable to help herself she began to compare this fly-by-night infatuation she was having with him . . . (his lips, his eyes, and his wit), to the steady long-lasting

friendship she had developed over the last few years with Junsu. Unable to figure out, why Junsu didn't make her weak in the knees like JaeJoong was doing?

Looking up at him, she began to figure, 'what the hell'. The night was already a disaster, she had pulled a Saffron and embarrassed herself mercilessly . . . hurt him in the process, and was now indecisive about whether she should keep him at bay, or get it over with and jump his bones. Drinking always helped her relax. But, would he see her for who she really was? And would she know when to stop?

Flashbacks of the piggyback ride, her bare legs scrunched against his hips, nearly bare crotch to his backside, was fueling her desire to bolt across the counter, and take him up on his offer to 'get familiar'. Without more alcohol, it would never happen. She was bold, but she wasn't stupid. Whatever he had 'specially' planned for them tonight, had included 'more' than just talking. She was sure of it.

She had taken 'unfiltered' and 'untapped' Kim JaeJoong for an irrational romp through a field of unknowns, and was expecting him to weed his way through unscathed. That was so unlike her. She didn't manipulate men. She adored them. Fawned over them, she and Saffron were more alike than they knew. At some level, they were all 'Princes' to her too, she just never allowed herself the opportunity to imagine the fantasy would ever materialize for her.

"A few drinks is exactly what I need." She grinned, not only slurping a massive gulp from her cup, but lifting the bottle in the air for a pure shot along with it. "Considering you put your manhood on the line for me and this date, I guess I could indulge a little bit."

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H *E knew he had returned for a reason. Sitting at the end of the long coffee counter, Uncle Ryu spotted the black stray cat, hissing at him from around the kitchen doorway as he listened intently to Saffire*

and JJ's conversation. It hadn't been his intention to interrupt this 'date', but AGAIN . . . things were just not going as planned.

"The knee Saffire! Why? Oooo, that hurts so much for a man. He was ready . . . willing. I'm surprised he hasn't already left." Even without the physical parts of his body that made him flesh, Uncle Ryu cringed against the countertop, the memory of many blows to the groin rolling randomly through his mind.

These two were becoming so complicated. When he had left them last, Saffire seemed so pliable and open to JaeJoong and now! Well, now they were BOTH feisty and drinking . . . Aishhh, nothing good came of a drunken encounter. He knew that well. Not to mention the cat. Kitty wasn't helping these two, no matter how happy he was with its previous interference. How was he going to fix it?

"JaeJoong my son . . ." He crooned floating his quiet voice around JJ's head, "Stop drinking . . . Just be yourself. We've talked about this before. She doesn't go for 'fake' or 'vain' attempts at romance and you always get so 'sexual' under the influence. Remember what you're up against. Her past, and . . ." As the advice faded away into silence, the black cat curled away, tail tucked between its legs, scurrying past him toward the upstairs apartment.

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AS the hurt and wayward cat careened out through the doorway behind him, JJ was certain he heard Uncle Ryu's familiar voice, mingling with his father's, reverberating through his subconscious, reminding him, "*Just be yourself and stop drinking.*" It was good, solid advice, given many times over, in

his conversations with both wise men over the years . . . that he shouldn't be fake or turn his encounters over to the effects of alcohol.

With the burning in his crotch waning, he poured a shot for each of them from the bottle, then tucked it carefully back under the counter. "Probably shouldn't drink 'too' much." He apologized out of nowhere. "Still gotta drive home."

"Maybe not." Saffire tipped her head, as the smooth bitter liquid careened down the back of her parched throat. "There's a couch upstairs. No reason why you can't crash there if it gets too late." She offered tantalizingly. *Stop Saffire . . . you want him to meet the 'real' you, not another drunken version of yourself like last time. Take it back, hurry.*

"I mean . . ." She stammered back-peddling. "Ahhh, yeah . . . I get it. You should really make sure you can get home. You have schedules . . . and stuff . . ."

Oh MY GOD! Taking her half-empty coffee cup, now she just wanted to slap herself. One minute she was physically assaulting him, the next minute she was offering him a bed and whatever else he might want. *Get a grip.*

Embarrassed that the perfect evening had plummeted downhill so fast, JJ tried in vain to make sense out of this blonde-headed beauty parked in front of him, sassing him like an errant child one minute, and then stroking his ego like a love-sick pup the next.

Why were both of them running so 'hot' and 'cold' all of a sudden? And how was he going to make her understand he was serious? His heart was telling him, she might be 'the one'. How could he turn his back on that? No matter what she said? He was here to share a fun, relaxing night with her hating that she might think he was being transparent. She didn't know it, but he had neither the time nor the inclination to play games with 'any' woman's heart right now. He was headed to the military soon. He wanted to settle down, have a relationship. He wanted someone special to come home to.

“Wowww, thanks for the offer. Ummm, yeah. We’ll see arraseo?” Letting his breath out slowly, his ringed fingers twisted the coffee mug gently before him. If he was going to salvage anything out of his original intentions, he needed one question answered first . . . before the residuals of the alcohol hit them both, and the night slipped away into something else.

“Do you think what I’m doing here is all just a game to get you away from Junsu? ‘Cause if it is, you’re wrong.” He stated suddenly, stuffing both hands in his pockets apprehensively. “He’s my best friend Saffire, my hyung (brother). We’ve crossed each other over women before. Most friends do. But, this is different.” He muttered, feeling the cotton lining of his pockets scratching against his fingernails.

Even their bantering at the lunch table over her had been uncommon for the two who were normally joined at the hip. They were as close as any two men could be, having grown up together, lived together, suffered together. When one bled, the other felt the pain.

“Shit.” JJ cursed under his breath, “I can’t explain WHAT it is about you that’s making me go behind his back to even ‘have’ this date with you. It’s not right in so many ways, but I can’t seem to stop myself.”

As his face changed, Saffire bent her head apologetically, embarrassed that for the life of her she couldn’t explain her attraction to him either. “No, JJ I don’t think it’s a game. That’s the problem. I’m afraid if he even finds about ‘this’ it might break his heart.” The alcohol already working its magic, she felt suddenly responsible. “Sorry. I’ll understand if you want to leave it here. You know, not pursue ‘us’ anymore. It was me. I should never have asked you.” *While pushing him away, was she actually trying to pull him closer?*

Seeing her about to slide from the stool in humiliation, JJ reached over the bar grabbing her tightly by the arm, to stop her descent. *What was she doing? He didn’t mean it ‘that’ way. He would help protect Junsu’s heart. He always did. And*

a little competition between them was healthy. Once it was all said and done, she wasn't a storm that their friendship couldn't weather,.

“I never said that. So, quit jumping to conclusions and stay put. You're not getting away from me THAT easily. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. We still have a date to finish,” he added, “and how will we know if there is an US if we don't pursue it?”

“I don't know.” She mumbled, twisting one long curl at the bottom of her hair nervously.

“Then stop worrying about everything, and let's enjoy the rest of the date. I only asked you that so you would know I was serious.”

Saffire hesitated, her mind reeling with new found possibilities for the rest of the evening. *Thankfully, she hadn't scared him off with talk of Junsu yet. He was right. That was a bridge they could cross when they encountered it.*

“I DO have one condition first though.” JJ smiled at her quizzical face, his dark eyes dancing in the overhead bar lights. They needed to start over.

“What's that?”

“You and I both promise to leave our attitudes here at the bar. Along with any sudden urges to try out any 'Tae Kwon Do' moves on each other. Let's have a clean slate once we walk out of here. De? I really wanted tonight to be special. And no telling Maud and SaRae about this either okay?” He warned. “I caught hell earlier for wanting to use one of the small dining rooms. Maud said, “Under no circumstances, no dates IN the café.” Then she texted me back saying, “If I was going to do 'anything' I needed to take it upstairs,” were her exact words.”

Chuckling to himself at the Noona's reference to whatever she 'thought' was going to happen later, JJ cupped Saffire's bent elbow, easing her willing body from the stool.

“Hmmm. Take it upstairs? Guess we both know what she meant by that huh!” Saffire pursed her lips, giving in to the rush of warmth careening down her limbs and resting in her loins. *The noona’s weren’t stupid either. Not knowing her well, they obviously had JJ’s number already.*

“Okay . . . I guess we need to stay downstairs then. No sleepovers.” She nodded agreeably, her memories of Maud and SeRae’s #1 Rule of ‘no dating the idols’ in the café, fresh in her mind, as she quickly diverted her attention instead, to following the determined JJ closely as he headed away from the coffee bar.

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SAFFIRE and JJ’s blatant dismissal of his one and only ‘rule’ when the café had first been opened ‘NO DATING THE IDOLS’ caused a pensive uncle Ryu to laugh out loud, glad that the sound of his laughter only resonated into the atmosphere as the relatively inaudible tinkling of distant wind chimes outside in the night. Here he was, years later . . . sneaking around and re-arranging lives, breaking his very own rule.

Now satisfied at the couples’ conversation and glad he had returned and done his best . . . the ghostly Young-Jae knew it was impossible to dictate what JaeJoong had pre-arranged for the ‘perfect’ night with his precious Saffire. He would have to take a step back and leave them alone to finish what he had started. He had other ‘fish’ to fry.

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“FOLLOW me. I’m moving a little slower than normal.” JaeJoong requested, “Did you feel like we’re being watched or something? Damn. I get creeped out in here lately.” Shivering uncontrollably, JJ clutched Saffire’s arm tighter his eyes skirting

the dark dining room nervously. “Must be the cat. Don’t know why. I actually love cats. That one spooks me though. Never know when or where the damn thing’s gonna show up in ‘attack’ mode.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I like cats too. I think that one’s possessed or something.” Saffire agreed, her head twisted to look back into the bar area where she had watched it sneak angrily around the kitchen doorway. “Keep your eyes peeled, pretty sure I pissed it off.” She warned JJ giggling.

“You too.” He chuckled. “So, to change the subject. I actually have a surprise planned. You DO like surprises don’t you?”

“It depends.” *Saffire’s last surprise had been spotting her lying, ‘married’ boyfriend walking into a bar, on the arm of his pregnant wife.*

“Well, I . . . happen to LOVE surprises. So trust me. I think you’ll like this one.”

Winking at her boyishly, he guided her carefully past the main dining room, and along the ‘Couples Wall’, stopping at the base of an entryway, leading up a narrow flight of stairs tucked away in the very back of the café.

She recognized it immediately. At the top was an empty room, more like a large storage closet than anything else. She and Saffron had asked about it when they first arrived, and were told it had been Uncle Ryu’s private dining room. They were ordered to dust it weekly, but it was otherwise locked. Void of any of the usual room decorations, with only a table, two chairs, and a plump cozy bench, (strewn with pillows) facing a large window, overlooking the rooftops of Gangnam, it remained a mystery. *What was JJ doing? They were going to be in sooo much trouble! Maud and SeRae were the only ones with access to the key. Had he stolen it?*

“Still with me?” He whispered, clutching her hand as they ascended the stairs together, stopping on the narrow landing. “Now, hang on tight to your cup and close your eyes. Already had one mishap tonight, don’t need hot coffee down your boobs like Hyun Joong’s crotch the other night.” Snickering in her ear, he watched her eyelids go down, fumbling in his pocket for the key. Turning it in the lock he pushed open the door, steering her carefully inside.

* * * * *

8:30 P.M.

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

SHIVERING, Saffron stepped inside the door pausing as a blast of heat puffed the long hair off her shoulders. Warmth seeped into her cold limbs on her way to the empty security desk, where she set down the peace offerings to remove her gloves blowing and shaking her hands as they tingled back to life.



Scanning the lobby she found the view similar to many apartment buildings around the U.S., with the mailboxes on one side and elevators farther behind the desk. She noticed the sign on the wall indicating apartment numbers with arrows going left and right. Seeing she had to go left, she nodded her head agreeably. *Huh, first floor . . .* for some reason she pictured him in a penthouse at the top.



Oh hell . . . observing the image of bright blue eyes contrasting against red blotchy skin in the mirror above the desk, she cringed. *Great.* Digging into her purse for her makeup bag she dumped it carelessly on the counter top . . . *Powder somewhere she had powder!* She needed to tone down her wind burned cheeks. Shuffling through various items . . . mascara, tweezers, and tampons she finally rolled her fingers

around the hidden culprit, seizing the compact to repair the damage.

Tilting her head satisfied with the results she smiled, stretching her lips open wide inspecting her teeth for any foreign objects, groaning at seeing the tint of red swathed across the front. *Damn*. It would be nice to get though at least one day without some kind of disaster befalling her she thought, as she rubbed them solidly with both fingers, remembering her sixteenth birthday when mother set a real cup of coffee in front of her along with a tube of bright cherry red lipstick.

The corner of mother's eyes crinkled as she stated; "Saffron Ryu . . . remember, all a woman needs is a strong cup of coffee, a tube of red lipstick and she can tackle the world." Saffron had nodded her head, not sure what she had meant by that . . . until right this very minute.

Running her fingers through a long strand of golden-reddish hair and seeing the determination in the wide eyes staring back at her, Saffron knew she was going to get what she desired most at this point in time . . . Kim Hyun Joong. Didn't matter he had a girlfriend, didn't matter that he left the café without speaking to her. Didn't even matter that he had been indifferent toward her . . . like 'Oh Ha Ni', (in the end) she would win his heart and everything else that came with it. After all . . . *she was prettier, sexier, 'and' smarter than that girl dragging 'her prince' out of the café the other day.*

Turning on her heel, collecting the bag and cup, she wondered if maybe she should have made a bento box (lunch box) instead of sweet rolls, feeling guilty for going on a date with Lee Donghae.

Not really knowing 'why' she had asked him, she only recalled that she was infuriated and jealous of the girl hanging on Hyun Joong, when a gnat in her ear directed her to the smiling, handsome and sexy, Lee Donghae.

Checking him out, (certain that he had all the qualities she was expecting in a prince), she couldn't help but notice that 'of course' he was only two inches taller

her, so wearing flats with him would be a must. Not to mention, he wasn't solemn, or mysterious, like Hyun Joong. On the other hand, she was actually drawn to his boyish good looks and sparkling brown eyes.

The date had been satisfactory, but nothing to write home about. She couldn't blame Donghae, he 'had' been charming, funny and engaging, anticipating her every need, then fulfilling it. Picking her up late last night he had taken her on a walking tour of the city. They were uncommonly comfortable with each other right from the beginning, everything from talking informally to their tastes in fashion, styles, and even music.

But, clearly she felt something was missing . . . where was the fluttering of her heart when their eyes met? The tingle of awareness deep in the pit of her stomach? The cool indifference? What was missing was glaringly obvious, he wasn't Kim Hyun Joong.

And even though she tried not to show her disappointment when they returned to the back door of the café, she could see in his eyes that he wanted to kiss her. Where was the excitement, passion, and anticipation, the emotions she should have been experiencing? She felt none of those emotions. Already, she had merely fallen in 'like' with him . . . She liked hanging out with him, and liked talking to him, but had no desire to exchange saliva or any other bodily fluids at the end of the night, or any other time.

She thanked him quickly, promised to answer when he called and ran into the café with a picture in her head of a pissed off 'Baek Seung Jo' ruffling his hair in frustration yelling, "OH HAN NI!"



Now, the need to apologize to Hyun Joong was strong, (thus the coffee and pastries). Scooping them up she continued on, deciding her course of action would be the celebrated Korean, 'ambush' kiss. When he opened the door 'BAM', she would surprise him with a scrumptious, long overdue lip

lock . . . from there, hopefully other more stimulating pursuits. Giggling in anticipation, she covered her mouth with the bag in her fist, quickening her pace down the hall, congratulating herself on her cleverness.

* * * * *

COMING out, Hyun Joong stood in the hallway wondering what was taking her so long to get from the front door to his apartment. Then remembering who he was dealing with . . . if anyone embodied the spirit of ‘Oh Ha Ni’, it was the lovely Saffron, with her cute clumsiness, and unwavering attitude. The only characteristics they didn’t have in common was body type, where ‘Oh Ha Ni’ was childlike, there was no mistaking Saffron for anything but, a woman.

“Ooouuu . . . Damn, there he is”. Saffron whispered almost faltering. *“What about the plan? He’s supposed to be on the other side of the door. What to do . . . what to do? Stay on course nothing’s changed . . .”*

Zoning in on his lips, the ultimate target . . . Saffron charged forward, squinting her eyes focusing on the most perfect set of bow shaped, thick bottom, (a woman would die for) kissable lips. She was almost there . . . lifting her arms . . . closing her eyes . . . tilting her head just a degree, as she collided with his warm, willing body . . . *“Yes!”* Target has been achieved.

Then he saw her . . . *Oh hell!* She was barreling straight for him like a thief in the night, hair flying with a single-minded expression, not noticing he was blocking her way. He caught her upper arms unexpectedly wondering if they were both going to land on the floor with hot coffee flying.

“Yah! . . . Saffron . . . SAFFRON . . .” He barked, shaking her, blowing out his cheeks with relief at avoiding any harm to his bodily person.

“HUH? . . . WHA? . . .” She slowly opened her eyes. *What the hell had happened?* Staring at an annoyed face, his nose less than an inch away from hers, he was ‘talking’ to her. Blinking rapidly as the roar left her ears she tried concentrating on what he was saying.

“HA-NI . . . you’re standing on my toes.” He muttered, the corner of his mouth hitched up in a smirk, nudging her back slightly off him. *Obviously, she had been in ‘Seung Jo land’, God only knew what had been going thru her mind.*

“Oh shit sorry . . . so sorry.” Embarrassed she hadn’t kiss him, (it was all in her mind). She felt like an idiot. Biting her lip, holding up the bag and cup trying to save an awkward situation, she grinned, “I brought coffee and baked these especially for you.”

Glancing over her down the hall then to the gifts she had pushed at him, he couldn’t help but ask, “Why were you barreling down the hall like that?”

“Um . . . truth is I wanted to try something I saw in a Drama.” She admitted, lowering her arms, as she tapped the toe of her boot on the carpet, avoiding his inquisitive face.

Rolling his eyes heavenward Hyun Joong couldn’t help but wonder how this smart, stylish, sensible woman could have her head in the clouds whenever they met. *It must be him that brought out the clumsy, whimsical little girl in her.*

“And what would that be? This thing you saw in a Drama?” Smiling, he took the cup from her before she dumped it all over his slippers.

Saffron’s eyes snapped up to his amused ones, he was ‘laughing’ at her right now! Straightening her spine determined to regain her composure and get her fighting spirit back, she licked her luscious red lips, “Ambush kiss.” She said smugly, tilting her head while letting her long reddish bangs fall over one eye mysteriously.

Fuck, where had this seductress come from? The ‘boy downstairs’ woke up with all kinds of scenarios going thru the little head.

“Damn, sorry I ruined it.” He leaned in brushing the hair out of her face and behind one ear. *No reason why he couldn’t finish what she started.* Then he heard a dog bark and a door opening down the hall. *Shit, what was he doing, didn’t he have enough problems without the neighbors talking.* Jerking back, he schooled himself into the bored, poker face.

“I don’t like coffee.” He announced, jamming his free hand into his front pocket, entering the apartment, assuming she would follow.

Right on his heels she couldn’t believe what he was saying, “What? How can that be, the site I looked up last night said it was your favorite drink . . .” Setting down the bag on the low table in the living room, she flipped her hair out of her face, worried as he deposited the cup next to it, peeking into the bag and immediately scrunching up his nose. Cocking his head, he gave her a grin.

“I don’t like sweets either.” Regardless he pulled one out, taking a bite. Chewing, he raised a hand under his chin, licking his lips in hopes of catching the flaky crumbs littering his black shirt. “Mmmm, good, next time no glaze.”

“Oh! Okay.” She dropped to the couch staring at him with hunger, dying to clean the bits of crust stuck to his cheeks. *Shit, stupid neighbor, he was going to kiss her . . .*

Still resolved to carry out her plan, she scanned the apartment finding it a lot like him, neat, clean, simple and functional. Sliding out of her coat, she dropped it along with her purse and hat sitting back chewing on her lip while crossing both arms under her breasts, scowling as the wool stretched over her backside.

“Aigoo . . . ‘Seung Jo’ drinks coffee, are you sure you looked up the right person?” Hyun Joong grumbled. *Shit, he was jealous of himself!* Studying her,

there was something special about her . . . not unlike the rolls she made, a quirky flavor he couldn't identify . . . Would her lips taste like that? Amused at the seemingly always 'put together' Saffron now looking out of sorts, nervous, and in her own fantasy world, he was curious as to what was going on under all that red hair.

She gave him a sidelong glance as he shoved the rest of the roll into his mouth rubbing his hands together, "Good to know, I think the hot looking Hyun Joong is jealous." She smirked, reaching for the coffee. "No sense this going to waste." She did a 'cheers' gesture when he picked up the bottle of water from the table.

"You think I'm hot . . ." He lowered his head, leering at her smug face.

Not answering she wondered, 'where did she go from here?' Hiking up the skirt and crossing her legs . . . "Did I interrupt your movie time?" She finally asked, nodding her head to the TV screen with a serious 'Baek Seung Jo' and 'Oh Ha Ni' staring at them.

"No, thought maybe we could watch it together." He said sitting down on the low table in front of her as she tugged at the skirt. "Comfortable?"

Why had she let Saffire talk her into wearing this 'outfit' . . . and no she wasn't 'comfortable', the wool scratched, it was too long, (and way more material than she was used to). She missed her pencil skirts, now thinking she was going about all this the wrong way. She was trying to be Saffire, the free-spirited, laid back California girl . . . she had to face facts. She was Corporate. Anything she had ever achieved was from using the experience she had attained from working in the business industry . . . fuck, even her ex-boyfriend.

"Yeah sure. Sort of . . . a little cold." She shivered, but it wasn't from the weather, it was him and the way he looked at her.

They were both unsure of the other, trying to figure out where to start. They had experienced the drunken encounter and didn't have much else to go on. With a hitch in her breath, he caught her swinging foot to remove the boots, dropping them beside him meeting her gaze with a concerned expression.

“No wonder, your socks are wet.” He said, hands sliding up under the garment pulling them off, and gently kneading warmth back into her feet. “Hang on.” Rising, he disappeared down the hall.

Saffron tucked her feet under the wool, here she was alone with Kim Hyun Joong . . . She had to think of this as a business deal, that shouldn't be a problem. For years, she had worked with multi-millionaires, CEO, and leaders of counties, so one handsome multi-talented K-Pop Idol should be a breeze.

Coming back with heavy socks, Hyun Joong liked the way she looked all curled up on his couch. When he had texted her to come over it was with the intention to talk, nothing more, but now with her enticing red lips, smelling sweet like the confections she created, and the skirt molding to her legs, his mind wandered imagining thoughts of a more erotic nature.

“These should warm you up.” Sitting on the table, he peeked under the hem of the skirt snagging her calf.

Leaning in to the feel of his hands on her she wished he would explore her fully. “Joong, I'm sure I already did, but if not . . . I apologize for my drunken rant the night we met.” Sipping the coffee, she knew her first impression had been horrible.

“Forgotten, beside you were cute . . . singing was a little off key.” He laughed, caressing her legs, “I should also apologize for the other day in the café. I'm pleased you agreed to come over.”

God, she needed her 'power suit' . . . his smile alone was disarming. “You can't be melting at his feet Saffron, stop being so wishy-washy.” “Yeah, what about the girl

at the café, girlfriend?” She asked, gathering a fist full of wool, hoping she didn’t regret the answer.

Charmed by her straightforwardness he raised one brow, his eyes boring into her disarmingly. “No, not anymore, but . . .”

“Yay!” She whooped, interrupting him. Slapping her hands over her mouth immediately. *Sorry, would it be to forward of me to jump him now?* Okay, that’s what she wanted to do, but instead she turned somber-faced asking, “Did she break your heart?” Towing up the skirt as his fingers stilled.

Giving her a half-smile he answered, “Heart’s intact. Long story . . . boring.” Now that the conversation was working its way around to the very subject he needed to bring up, he was reluctant to do so. Loathing to continue in this direction he set her legs down and swung over to the couch. “Um, how about watching the Drama? It’s set to go . . . and I made popcorn.”

“Sure,” her eyes sparkled knowingly, “don’t want to talk about it huh? I get it. Yeah, good idea. Let’s watch the Drama.” Feeling the coffee had gone cold, she sat it on the table letting him be in control for now, but if she had her way . . . things were going to heat up with her prince.

He hit ‘Play’, not meeting her eyes embarrassed because he was digging himself deeper by not speaking up and telling her, surprised that she had let him drop the subject. Laying his arm on the back of the couch, he watched her, ignoring the TV.

“Joong not this episode.” She protested, noticing he was sitting in the corner of the sofa way to far from her. *Pffff . . . nothing going to happen if they’re two feet apart.*

“Wha? Hell, I thought every girl gushed over the rain kiss.” He clutched his chest closing his eyes giving a huge dramatic sigh.

Giggling she looked at him comically, “Well, I’m not like every girl.”

“That’s for damn sure . . . not every girl can claim getting a piggyback from Hyun Joong while declaring their love for ‘Seung Jo’.” He laughed, sinking farther into the sofa, as she grabbed a pillow attacking his head and shoulders.

“Hey, not fair . . . I was drunk, I can’t be held accountable.”

Smiling she didn’t fight too hard when he grabbed her wrists trapping them onto his chest. Bringing her face inches from his, gazing into his coffee brown eyes, ablaze with passion . . . it was finally going to happen. Tilting her head, she closed her eyes and puckered her lips.

He longed to kiss her . . . needed to, but if he did he knew it wouldn’t end with kissing, shoving her gently off him and onto her knees, “What episode are we watching.”

Again he had backed off . . . Why? She had seen it, he ‘wanted’ to kiss her, now the poker face was back. “Nine . . . episode nine.” She wasn’t going to let him off that easily. Gathering up the yard of material, she scooted deeply into the crook of his shoulder.

Settling, she sighed as he tucked her in, his fingers lightly circling her upper arm, his heart beating in her ear. She made herself known with a hand on his thigh. With droopy eyes she watched ‘Seung Jo’ and ‘Ha Ni’ on a date floating on the lake. Envisioning her in ‘Ha Ni’s’ place, she heard the rumble of his voice.

“We had to do this scene over three times, SoMin really can’t swim, and she almost drowned.” He uttered, shifting into a better position (his hand now on her



hip). Torturing himself as she gripped his thigh to align her body more onto his, he wondered why was he fighting this . . . her. Swearing there were forces working against him, remembering JaeJoong saying he had a weird feeling that first night after meeting the two

sisters. Even if he didn't totally believe in that stuff, he wouldn't dismiss it either.

“Wow, must be hard at times.” Saffron sighed.

“At times, but can't think of anything else I would rather be doing.” He admitted.

Lifting her head (reading the honesty in his simple statement), she envied that he was doing what he loved . . . her life on the other hand was drifting with no set course. Her heart swelled and without thinking, or having a calculated agenda she stretch up pressing her lips to his.

His lips were soft, pliable, warm and moist . . . the scent of butter from the popcorn wafting around them. Whimpering in her throat as he hauled her up on his lap deepening the kiss while ‘Seung Jo’ decided that ‘Ha Ni’ was a problem he needed to figure out.

Acting like teenagers at a make-out party they barely came up for air, greedy . . . exploring each other's mouths . . . savoring the hot supple skin they found over and under clothes, Saffron twisted her fingers thru his silky dark hair begging with her lips for him to possess her body.

Hyun Joong, was mindless as to why he had called her here in the first place. *Wasn't it for this? A need for her to fulfill something that had been lost in his current relationship, (or maybe was never there in the first place).* The urge to scoop her up and carry her into the bedroom was overwhelming, his common sense so far removed that his hand slid under her skirt, skimming up the bare leg to her knees.

“Oh shit . . . damn . . . my hip, wait, cramp.” Saffron whined, stretching out her leg, ruining the heavy make-out session and bringing Hyun Joong back to his senses.

As if coming out of a trance he reacted to the situation as if he was on the soccer field with a teammate, both hands kneading her hip and thigh to ease the pain. “Is it here? Try to relax, take deep breaths.”

Their eyes met and seeing the humor in the change of atmosphere started to giggle, then broke out into full fledge laughter with Saffron wincing until the cramp eased up. Scooting onto his lap arms around his shoulders, (mildly flushed) she glanced at the TV.

“Oh, my favorite part is on.” She announced.

“This is the bathroom scene . . .” He said, lifting a brow, chuckling as she concentrated on the television. With a crooked grin (not unlike ‘Seung Jo’) he whispered into her ear, “When this is over how about we reenact the scene with a different ending . . . you game, ‘Oh Ha Ni’?”

Saffron’s angled her head, a wicked gleam in her eyes. *It was time to fess up.* “Mmmm, sure . . . only one problem.”

“De, what’s that?” He asked, seeing the mischief cross her face, tightening his hold on her waist.

“I seem to have forgotten to wear panties.”

* * * * *