

CHAPTER ONE

“I love days when my only problem is . . . tea or coffee.”

Bidya Sury



Saturday, December 6th, 2014

5:00 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – Funeral House

THE service was winding down. Saffire and Saffron Ryu sat across from one another in the small office, fidgeting nervously. Uncle Ryu was gone. Korea was a continent away from the United States, and the curious eyes around them held nothing but disdain. The two aunts on Father’s side and a few cousins sat ogling them furiously. *What had they done to deserve this? Showed up? Drank a little too much on the plane? Found out they were sisters? Like that wasn’t shock enough?*

Saffire tugged anxiously at her Father’s sleeve, begging him to let her leave the tiny claustrophobic confines of the room for a breath of fresh air. The worst was over, she was about to pee her pants, and the three Korean pancakes she had eaten at the service were threatening to make their way up and out! She was trapped.

Patting her leg in agreement, he nodded ‘go ahead’, watching her snatch her copy of the Will from the wooden table and hurtle herself toward the closed doorway. It was over. There was no reason

to make her stay. Blinking around the room, he coughed uneasily hoping his sisters would leave the girls alone and not make waves. However, by the looks on their faces it didn't seem like that was going to happen.

“Saffron, maybe you should go too,” he whispered throwing a glance to his other daughter to follow Saffire. “the two of you aren't needed here any longer.”

A quiet, reserved Saffron swung her legs from under the table, flipping her long strawberry blonde hair over one shoulder, (grateful for the exit pass, regardless the reason). She was suffocating as well. The reading of the Will was making her stomach churn with unintended curiosity. Of course, she remembered Uncle Ryu! Even though she hadn't spent a lot of time with him recently, her memories were still keen. His death had come as a sad surprise, his last wishes even more of a shock.

Unbeknownst to them all his secret, (yet famous) ‘Cup of Hotness Café’ was now officially hers and Saffire's . . . It was no wonder the family was pissed.

Skirting around the glares and pursed lips of the aunts and cousins she had never met, clutching the Will she bolted out the door headed for the ladies' restroom. In front of her, Saffire was already lunging toward the exit. Clearly, she was done as well. Maybe that was what they both needed. To leave while they could. The loud commotion and comments coming from the room behind her were proof positive she and her twin sister were about to be tarred and feathered if they continued to linger.

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5:05 P.M.

KIM JaeJoong and Kim Hyun Joong, flung open the heavy glass door to the back entrance of the non-descript building. Glancing from side-to-side hoping to avoid the press or any straggling fans they ducked quickly inside.

“Yahhhh . . .” Whistling low, Hyun Joong's dark eyes scanned the crowded service area, dotted with the familiar faces of company heads, producers and other Idols from the entertainment community, gathering to pay their respects to ex-trot member and café' owner, Kyong Ryu. “Can't believe just the other day he was telling us to ‘be happy and eat well’. Damn. Now he's gone.”

Feeling the whoosh of air and sting of flying hair against his arm, JaeJoong reeled around as the fleeting figure of a young woman sailed past him and out the front doorway, her long brightly colored skirt flying behind her.

“Huh? Wha?” Unable to take his eyes off her retreating form he nodded to Hyun Joong agreeably, not even sure what the ensuing comment had been.

“Uncle Ryu . . . Gone . . . Funeral . . . That’s why we’re here.” Hyun Joong reiterated, shoving him forward gently. “Geez, even at a funeral all you focus on is women. You’re pathetic sometimes,” he chided jokingly.

Then, his eyes spotted a second female careen out the back hallway opening directly on the heels of the first. Her perfectly rounded backside clad in hip-hugging black slacks, bounced enticingly, forcing him to unconsciously gulp as she passed. “De, anyway . . .” he barked quietly, “Ummm, Uncle Ryu, can’t believe he’s gone. Loved that man.”

“Mmmm-huh . . .” JaeJoong clamped one hand on his hyung’s shoulder whispering in his ear knowingly. “You’re one to talk. Come on, JYP in the house, directly left.”

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PLUNGING out into the cold December afternoon, Saffire sucked in a long deep breath of the icy air, clutching her heaving chest as it collided with the warmth of liquor permeating her limbs. Feeling the sidewalk beginning to spin, she leaned into the rough brick at her side, attempting to focus. She was finally in Korea, and now not only was her precious Uncle Ryu gone . . . but, every known Korean relative she had in the world obviously hated her, and (of all things) she was being forced to accept a damn sister. A sister . . . really!

Cussing her parents under her breath for burdening her with yet another dramatic episode on top of everything else, she kicked the wall angrily with one booted foot, even hating the fact that she was now co-owner of Uncle Ryu’s secretive ‘Cup of Hotness Café’. *Damn him! Damn them all.* Her choice to come to Korea should have been the result of Junsu’s welcoming text, agreeing to help her find work, and lovingly telling her he would put her up for as long as she needed.

Digging her phone from her pocket she stared into the dark screen hesitantly. *Should she call him again? She was here now. The funeral and meeting were over. Maybe knowing she was actually here would make a difference.*

“You okay?” Saffron’s quiet accepting voice penetrated the air around her as she jerked up surprised to find she wasn’t alone.

Had sister seen her little tirade against the wall? “Yeah. Just need a minute to process.” Attempting to stand tall and compose herself, her answer was honest. Clearly, she and solid 24-hour drinking were becoming good friends. However, paired with the events of the late afternoon reading, she was tired and waning.

“I get it.” Sighing loudly, Saffron shoved both hands into her jacket pockets lazily. “You don’t have to like me,” she added, sniffing in the cold afternoon air. “You know, just ‘cause we’re related and all.”

Wincing at the words, Saffire realized she had sort of acted like she didn’t especially care for this newly discovered sister. It wasn’t that. It was too much. On top of losing Antonio . . . and everything else falling apart around her, sister Saffron seemed like another burden she would have to deal with. *Her entire life had just fallen apart and no one cared. Certainly not Mother ‘or’ Father. Why had she thought they would?*

“Oh shut up. It’s not even like that,” she growled. “I’ve been through hell and back in the last few months. YOU . . .” she frowned, pointing an accusing finger at the reddish-haired beauty beside her, “You, are just too . . . too . . . HAPPY right now!”

Rearing back Saffron laughed loudly, her entire body shaking in the process. “Happy? Are you freaking serious? You think THIS is happy?” she asked, rolling her index finger around her astonished face. “Yeah, you and me, we have A LOT to talk about. This my sister, is NOT HAPPY! This is called relief. Glad to be out of that stuffy little room, crammed up in-between the aunts from hell, clueless attorney’s, and smelly fish snacks. Thought I was going to puke. You just beat me to the punch.”

“Welll . . .” Digging her toe into the wall at her back Saffire suddenly felt like she should apologize. “Sorry then. But geez, all I wanted to do was come here and have fun. Start life over. You know. Not all THIS.” Her breath shot out into the cold, resting in a frosty circle around her face. “Andddd, you’re right, we do need to talk. REALLY TALK.”

“So. I’m game. Where do we go from here?” Saffron asked, just wanting to put the events of the afternoon behind her too. “I could use a stiff one. What about that little drinking tent right up the road? It’s a short walk.”

Shaking off the urge to barf, Saffire stepped away from the building grabbing her sister by the arm. “Saffron. Can’t believe your name is really Saffron. You know that’s a damned spice, right?” she muttered shaking her head.

“Yeahhh.” Allowing Saffire to pull her away from the entryway to the large brick building, Saffron, wondered if maybe drinking was going to be the way to connect with this unusual twin she had just met.



The difference between them was glaringly evident, especially their clothes and mannerisms. She, put together and sophisticated had meticulously dressed for the occasion, taking great care to find just the right combination of colors and accessories. But, Saffire looked a hot mess. In a long patterned hippy skirt, with low-heeled black boots, and a baggy sweater, she sported a knit hat over her straight blonde hair, and large gaudy baubles of jewelry around her neck and wrists. Her massive purse was fake alligator, and despite her attempts at looking ‘casual’, all she did was look awkward.

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Gangnam, S. Korea – Drinking Tent

6:45 P.M.

“**H**E was married . . .” Saffire muttered, lowering her head in her hands, feeling the welcome rush of alcohol from the bitter shot that flowed through her veins. “Walked smack dab into the damn bar I was in on the arm of his pregnant wife . . .” Her sad confession withered away into the folds of her fingers, eyes closed to the still relatively unfamiliar female face before her.

Saffron watched her, equally as despondent over her own situation with ‘Mr. Big’. *Clearly her newly ‘discovered’ sister was not a happy drunk.* Maybe after the events of the day and a few shots, things would improve. *She could have shared her own desperate feelings of being dumped and rejected. But, what purpose would that serve? One story was enough!*

“HEY. Look at me,” she urged, poking the top of the young woman’s disheveled blonde head (now void of the nasty knit hat) forcing her eyes upward at her insistence. “First . . . you’re a crazy, sloppy, drunk, and this is a small freaking tent in the middle of Gangnam!” Tipping in hastily, her voice lowered to a whisper. “Second . . . stop feeling sorry for yourself and lighten up. You act like I don’t know what you’re going through. Look, there’s only like six tables here, and EVERYONE is staring at us. They were all probably at the service. Not to mention, a few of the guys are complete hotties. Geez, obviously I AM the happy one right now.”

Satisfied she had gotten her sisters attention, she raised her bottle of Soju in the direction of a young looking blonde-headed man sitting with a friend at a table across the room, and grinned. *Mr. Big could suck it! She would find herself a ‘Baek Seung Jo’ here in Korea. And, be his ‘Oh Ha Ni’! Her newly acquired sister needed to do the same. They were about to start an adventure, what the hell was she crying in her beer about?*

“Maybe I don’t WANT to be happy right now.” Saffire scoffed, swiveling her head toward the table her sister had zeroed in on. A fake smile crossing her lips she nodded briefly at the young duo hoping to GOD they weren’t going to see it as an invitation to come join them. She just wanted to drink herself into oblivion, and maybe she would pass out and wake up in Junsu’s living room. *Why hadn’t he answered her last text before she’d boarded the plane anyway? It had been nearly twenty-four hours. It wasn’t like him to ignore her like this. Maybe something was wrong.*

Warring with herself over whether to text him again or not, she couldn’t help noticing Saffron didn’t seem to carry a cell phone, as she sat demurely sipping her bottle of Soju. Why was she so prim and proper? Even after alcohol? Remembering the walls, she herself had put up over the years, Saffire knew drinking never failed to relax her, breaking down all conversation barriers, allowing her to be fun and easy to talk to.

So, what was going on now? Stressed and tense, she bit into her thumbnail girlishly, (unconsciously returning to the habit she’d developed early on in life to soothe herself). Was it just the situation? Was she tired? Today she didn’t want to socialize with random Korean guys. Uncle Ryu had died, her relationship was over, her job gone, and her friend and Idol obsession, AWOL. What else could possibly go wrong? Forget being flirty and fun, more likely than not, in her current drunken state she would inevitably trip over something or someone, puke in front of everyone in the tent, or loudly make an ass out of herself when she finally began talking.

“They’re really cute, huh?” Cooing, Saffron twisted the end of her hair seductively. *Maybe one (or both) of them would come sit down if she put herself out there a little bit. How was she going to find her ‘Prince’ if she didn’t start looking? What better time than the present?* Recalling the perfectly chiseled features of actor Kim Hyun Joong in ‘Playful Kiss’, she shivered inwardly. If all Korean’s looked like him, she was most definitely in trouble.

Directly across from her, Saffire glared, lips pursed like she had just bitten down into a spicy pepper. *Humph! Didn’t matter what the new sister thought or didn’t think right now. Korea was her playground, and she was about to start the party.* Rising from her chair, determined to salvage something from the horrendous day she had just experienced, the red-headed Saffron stepped forward away from the table, when the heel of her shoe caught the bottom of Saffire’s massive bag, toppling all the contents across the floor at their feet.

“DAMN!” Cussing loudly at the innocent Saffire, she raked her hair back in frustration. “Of course you would have the biggest purse in the universe, and carry an entire room full of shit with you.” Bending over, they reluctantly started scraping items from around and under the table, snatching up lipstick, papers, pens, hair clips, jewelry, tampons and other miscellaneous items in a rush to keep them from the scrutiny of the other patrons around them.

“Ulineun doum-i doel su issseubnida? Help? Can we help?” Came the quiet snicker from behind Saffron’s bent back. *Such a familiar voice. Where had she heard it before?* As her blue eyes scanned over, they followed a black pair of dress shoes, up the tailored pants legs to a perfectly proportioned crotch area, and into the throes of a white crisp dress shirt, covering a muscular chest and crumpling arm muscles. Tossing his coat over a chair, he bent to help her reach for a small notepad.



His eyes twinkling into hers, she was suddenly thrown back to a small T.V. screen she had hugged lovingly, lip-to-lip with the enigma . . . ‘Baek Seung Jo’? *She was dreaming. Oh God. The alcohol had finally bested her. Her limit had always been only two or three, and she was working on her fourth (after drinks on the plane and very little food most of the day).*



Blinking several times quickly, she tried to ignore the delicious smell of aftershave, and pearly white-toothed smile as their fingers touched over the notebook.

“Arasseo (OKAY), I got it.” His whisper was faint but, determined. And, as he rose, curling his hand into hers for assistance, everything else floated away. Gawking at him awkwardly, she could see the sweat on his upper lip glistening in the dimly lit area of the small, already crowded tent around them.

“HEY!” Saffire’s loud raucous drunken voice permeated her dreamlike bubble like a stick pin to an unsuspecting balloon. Shouting, “YOU!” she sat back on her heels, finger pointed at someone standing to the side of Saffron’s ‘Prince’. “You’re in my way. I can’t see what I’m doing, and come to think of it, you’re ALWAYS in the way of my Junsu!”

And, there it was . . . the thing Saffire was certain she would do to embarrass herself. Familiar Idol, Kim JaeJoong had suddenly appeared in the flesh before her like a bad dream. Head dipped down, staring at her backside as she crawled about the dirty ground grabbing tampons that had rolled into the aisle between the tables and chairs. His one booted toe smashed against the last culprit, he watched as she dropped down on her butt, releasing herself to the frustration of the moment.

In a split second, the entire tent went silent. JaeJoong (having grown up with many sisters) shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly, and reaching down snagged the tampon from before him, dropping it back into the confines of the large bag beside her.

“Bangbeob-eulo heo? (IN THE WAY HUH?) Need help?” In his soft confident tone switching casually between Korean and English, he grazed her elbow attempting to help her up off the cold ground. “Joong?” he asked, who now rose with the strawberry-haired woman he recognized from the funeral service earlier. “Do you see Junsu here anywhere? Huh. I could swear he went to JeJu a few days ago.”

Now grinning at Saffire, he waited to hear his hyung’s response feeling her jerk away from him like he was a poisonous snake about to strike.

“De. Gone.” Hyun Joong forced his eyes away from the beauty before him, long enough to see Saffire, (blue eyes blazing) back away from JaeJoong almost disgustedly. In all their years as friends, he’d never witnessed any female diss JJ. Especially not a fangirl. This was one for the record books.

“Mmmm-huh. Thought so.” JJ followed his reply with a playful smirk, seeing that this angry looking quivering blonde (stumbling sidewise while attempting to squeeze into her chair without making more of a scene) was comical at best. It most assuredly was the ‘ghostly’ wisp of a body he’d seen in flight at the funeral house. The long flowered skirt had graciously given her away, not to mention the straight blonde hair and black-heeled boots.

She was drunk. Of that he was certain. And, the way she called him out over Junsu, made it clear she was a Kim Junsu fangirl. What exactly she was talking about he had no idea, but curiosity was getting the better of him, so slipping into the empty chair beside her, he leaned both elbows on the table, staring into the empty shot glass, and her choice of the night . . . a nearly empty bottle of Vodka, surrounded by lemons, limes, and crumpled napkins. *She was a Vodka drinker. A girl after his own heart.*

“May I?” Lifting the bottle and glass toward her, he tipped it slowly, the clear liquid draining out into the glass, filling it to the brim.

“Eh, whatever.” Shrugging her shoulders Saffire was certain if she didn’t comply, sister Saffron would throw her ass out of the tent, and probably pay for her ticket back to America.

Motioning for Hyun Joong to sit as well, JJ smiled at the redhead curling into the chair beside him. She was pretty. Put together and classy looking. She seemed like Hyun Joong’s type, (not at all like the witch he was currently entangled with). Joong needed to get his other situation taken care of and soon. It was time for him to clear the slate before his military service. With luck, maybe he could be talked into a slight dalliance with the charming looking redhead.

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CLINGING to ‘Baek Seung Jo’s’ every word, sitting down Saffron felt one knee press against him slightly. She didn’t know anything about Korean idols or actors except this ‘one’, and Kim JaeJoong was as foreign to her as the entire situation was. Sister Saffire seemed to know exactly who he was though. The two of them had not really had the opportunity to talk, and with her alcohol kicking into high gear as well, it was sure they wouldn’t get to it tonight. ‘Baek Seung Jo’ was sitting next to her, and she needed to become ‘Oh Ha Ni’, in order to grab his attention.

Motioning a young waiter to the table for another bottle of Vodka, JaeJoong poured the remains of the first into Saffron's empty, unused shot glass, thinking maybe if he could down a few and meet this interesting girl halfway, they might be able to connect.



“To our Uncle Ryu.” Temporarily ignoring both girls, he raised his glass, clinking with his hyung, the two of them downing the bitter drink simultaneously, slamming the glasses hard to the table, shaking it beneath them.

“Hold it,” Saffire snapped, stopping JJ’s arm before he reached to open the second bottle of Vodka. “You know Uncle Ryu?”



“De,” smiling, JJ knew she hadn’t seen he or Hyun Joong at the service, even though they had seen her. *Did he want to divulge any more than that or not? She was snippy this one.*

Her features were stunning up close, her face glowing, flushed and void of make-up after what he was certain had been a grueling day. The longer she scowled at him the more attractive she became. *What was it? She didn’t seem his type. But, did he really have a type? No. All women were his type. If they walked, talked and said hello . . . they were fair game.*

“So . . .” Waiting for his answer she crossed her arms on the cluttered table top, struggling to focus on his face through the alcohol.

“So . . . what?”

Grinning at them from across the table, Hyun Joong, and Saffron realized JJ was playing with her.

“How? How did you know him? Were you friends? Were you close? What?” Agitated that he was poking fun she finally gave up when he answered her again, in a single syllable.

“De.”

“That’s NOT FUNNY.” Shouting she jumped out of the flimsy plastic chair shoving it away from her in disgust. “YOU’RE not funny either.” Flipping her eyes at the other couple in question, she added, “Doesn’t matter WHO else thinks so. I DON’T.”

What had she just said? Clamping one hand over her mouth, Saffire immediately realized just who she was talking to. This was Junsu's best friend. And, if she pissed him off, he would tell on her. Cringing, she scolded herself inwardly, "*Fun Saffire . . . you need to laugh, be engaging . . . sexy . . . Find it and find it quick. Uncle knew him. Be someone else right now, or you're doomed.*"

Saffron watched the stranger in front of her rise. Unsure she could stop what was coming, as much as she wanted to admit that she thought JJ's interaction was humorous, she didn't dare.

"Guys, um we've been through a lot today. Sorry," she apologized hurriedly in Saffire's place, "and . . . it's getting late. I think my sister has had enough."

Skirting behind Hyun Joong's strong muscled back Saffron hated that she was about to drag this drunken sister out with her to . . . where? The café? A hotel? Without a cell phone, she wasn't even sure where Father had taken their luggage.

"Ani. Mianhae. (SORRY) My fault." JaeJoong stood bowing to a confused, withering Saffire. He had pushed one too many buttons. Around him in the tent, heads were turning again as the idols who had just sauntered in to drink, looked as if they were about to leave. "Let us take you home," he offered, one hand out to her apologetically.

Saffire gulped, grabbing at the edge of the table as she reeled in front of him attempting to maintain her balance. "Ummm, no . . . no. We can get a taxi, huh Sis? It's not far."

Raising one eyebrow, Saffron heard herself being called, 'Sis'. *Oh, NOW she wanted to get all cozy and familiar?* "How far is 'not' far? Do you even know where we're going? 'Cause no one bothered to tell me. Not freaking surprised." Grumbling, Saffron was already tipsy enough to come off sounding agitated. "Why, because you just called me sister, do I have to follow you and leave 'Baek Seung Jo'? I don't want to leave. I want another drink." Sniffing haughtily at Saffire, she reached for the bottle, breaking into a grin at Hyun Joong's startled expression.

Encouraging the fact that Saffron wanted to stay and continue the party, both Idols nodded agreeably, JJ piping up quietly, one hand on Saffire's wrist. "Sit . . . we're just getting started."

Shouting "Ahjumma", Hyun Joong's loud voice boomed across the small tent, "Bring us our usual."

Now, Saffire was not only frustrated, but confused. *She didn't want to party with them anymore. It was windy and snowing out. Her head was throbbing. She wanted to go find a bedroll.* Looking

around the tent, there was obviously no place to curl up in here. *And, what on earth had gotten into Saffron? She was being bossy and arrogant. Not to mention Kim JaeJoong . . . He did NOT just grab her by the wrist like a pompous Chaebol? This wasn't 'Boy's Over Flowers'. And, he certainly wasn't Lee MinHo.*

Snatching her arm away from JJ, she dug through her large bag tossing the copy of the Will, glasses, and finally her cell phone out across the table. Laying it down in front of her she punched in her code, attempting not to notice JJ peering over her shoulder at it as she typed. The address popping up in her notes was that of Uncle Ryu's 'Cup of Hotness Café'. Only a short walk up the road. Amused, now the Idol's curiosity was beginning to peak. *How were these two related to Young Jae?*

Everything else around her spinning, Saffire stared Saffron down. *Seriously you're not going with me? This is how a sister acts?* With no response forthcoming, she finally threw her large purse over one shoulder (nearly knocking JJ upside the head) announcing, "Drunk or not. I'm a big girl. I can make it. Alone . . . don't need help." Wobbling precariously around the crowded tables, she made a slow laborious trail toward the front, looking back several times to see if anyone was following.

Close to giggling, Saffron rolled her eyes at Hyun Joong. "Oh my God, I have to go. We all know I can't let her go out in the snow alone."

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