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MEMORIES



MARCH 10TH, 2017 - 11:00 A.M. – SAFFIRE RYU’S HOUSE - L.A., CA

IT was nearly spring. One eye on her laptop the other on 18-mo old Sienna, playing beside her on the floor, Saffire’s continual plunge into nostalgia wasn’t all that uncommon. So much had happened since she’d boarded a plane for California, dead set on leaving a tangled web of emotional baggage behind. Sadly, the baggage made it, kicking and screaming through the airport and on into her life, despite all attempts to ignore it.



Could her little ray of sunshine Sienna solidify her strong resolve to finally make peace with herself and her past? So far, nothing else, (including her charity) had managed to do it. Maybe tomorrow’s cafe opening would be the catalyst she needed to take the first step. God knew she wasn’t feeling it today!



Convinced the little girl was pre-occupied enough to take her focus off, Saffire turned back to the computer screen scrolling rapidly through the Internet until Kim JaeJoong's familiar face popped up engagingly before her. Waving and making finger hearts into an Instagram video, she could only wish they were directed at her. Keeping up with his recent post-military life had been the easy part. Keeping up with her heart over the years . . . not so much.

Finding herself talking to his image her smile waned. "Hi Prince Jae. We're about to have the café opening tomorrow. Wish you could come. I miss you and so does Sienna, she's almost talking." Glancing over at the toddler, engrossed in a tiny piece of fuzz off the shaggy rug she sighed longingly. Oh, how she wanted to scoop the little bundle into her arms and tell her, her daddy was on the computer screen. But, after so many years, her innate fear of rejection, continued to remind her that was impossible.

Kim JaeJoong was a superstar. He didn't need the shackles of a woman and child in his life holding him back. Not only that, it would confuse Sienna, and if he turned a blind eye . . . cause a firestorm of 'I told you so's' from her family, (more than the 'likes' on his Instagram page). No, despite what she wanted out of life going forward . . . this secret was better kept intact. Unable to do it last year, nothing had changed. She still couldn't do it today.

"HEY! Aren't you supposed to be fixing the mistakes on the webpage? It's almost lunchtime."

Saffron's formidable figure stood in the open doorway like an English guard outside the royal palace, stern-faced and unbending, arms plastered to her sides. All she needed to drive her point home was a rifle, a hat and moustache.

"Ummm, yeah . . . I was just getting to that." Exiting out of FB, (FaceBook) Saffire cringed guiltily. *Dammit, caught red-handed again, for the third time that week.* Saffron was like a corporate bulldog when it came to sensing she was doing something other than work.

"When are you gonna give it up anyway? I'm getting tired of watching over you like a kindergarten teacher." Her voice curt but kind, Saffron (of all people) knew her sister's struggle.

At least to a point. However, struggle or not . . . there was work to be done; Sienna was relatively unattended; and the ‘Cotton-Candy-Princess’ was off yet again, reminiscing about JJ, romping merrily through, ‘Cotton-Candy-Prince-La-La-Land’.

“Your daughter is about to break the heel of your most expensive designer shoe, along with her ankle.” Lifting the dark-haired toddler from her teetering stance behind the bed she snatched the shoe away tossing it over the tall iron headboard, announcing matter-of-factly, “I swear she’s gonna kill herself one of these days, and then you’ll HAVE to contact JJ.”

“Cut me some slack will ya? I was just skimming FB for a second. Your damned mistakes will get fixed. And, Sienna will NOT kill herself on my watch. Why do you always assume I’m such a horrible parent?” The hairs at the back of her neck bristling with irritation, Saffire couldn’t understand why she and Saffron seemed to be at odds every day over the dumbest and simplest issues.

“Stop jumping to conclusions. Did I SAY you were a bad parent? NO! I did not. You just need to keep a better eye on her sometimes. I have enough on my plate today without you wasting precious time.” Parking Sienna in her lap she dropped to the bed, her eyes taking in the colorful room, cluttered with baby toys. “Why isn’t she napping anyway? It’s 11:00.”

“Maybe because she isn’t tired. You act like she keeps a schedule just for your benefit. And, not that you care, but I didn’t get much sleep last night either, and I can’t rest today because YOU have me running all kinds of reconnaissance for tomorrow.” Gearing up for their usual argument, Saffire swung around in the desk chair, lips pursed angrily. *If she was going to criticize she could take her sassy corporate ass out the door and do her own dirty work.*

Like the calm before the storm, in the impending pause, they glared across at one another. Then out of the blue Sienna ducked her head, rolling her large brown eyes up into her head at Saffron, as if to say, “Whatever . . .”

It was hard to miss. And, even harder to ignore. Bursting out in loud laughter, the sisters (bested by the innocence of a child’s take on attitude) gave up the fight.

“That’s my little diva.” Joining them on the bed, Saffire hugged Sienna fiercely. “Gets that from her daddy. Huh baby?”

“Yeahhh. I think it’s mutual.” Watching the two interact, Saffron tried desperately to relegate her jealousy to the back seat. Even though she disagreed with her sister in parenting issues (among other things), she was an amazing mom. Warm, open and loving. She couldn’t imagine how different their family dynamic would’ve been if the Prince himself had only known. But, was it still too late? Maybe not. Swallowing her initial aggravation at Saffire’s web-surfing habits she poked Sienna’s ribs playfully.

“If only that daddy could see his little DIVA. When are you going to tell him Saffire? If you wait any longer she’s going to resent you for keeping it from her.”

The room went quiet for the second time. Blushing, Saffire rose, tossing a strand of long blonde hair from her face, prepared to ignore the real issue by merely changing the subject. “Did you know Hyun Joong’s having a fan meet in Japan next week?”

“Wowww, way to jump the river. Good job. And, no. How would I know that? I don’t sit around on social media hoping to glean some information I could use in the future like you seem to be doing, huh?” Standing as well, Saffron shivered unconsciously hearing Kim Hyun Joong’s name.

Why did this twin of hers seem to thrive on making her miserable sometimes? Didn’t she have enough on her plate, especially with the opening tomorrow? Was it possible she was suddenly having last minute regrets? Especially now, because of Ian? And, because Hyun Joong was finally out of the military? Or was it because she had dropped the ball? Or had they both?

Clearing her throat, she headed back toward the bedroom door, hearing little Sienna squealing in the background. “Me go, me go,” her tiny arms raised to be included in Saffron’s wish for flight.

“I’ll tell you what ‘Miss-Smartie-Pants’,” she barked over her shoulder, “You call JJ and tell him what’s going on, and . . . we’ll go to the damned fan meet. Get the baby a passport.” One foot in the hallway Saffire’s voice rang out loud and clear behind her.

“I thought about asking him to the opening. But, I didn’t want to take the focus off of you. Tomorrow’s your day.”

Not only was it unexpected, it was unprecedented. *Had she heard right?* Feeling Sienna grab her pantleg Saffron folded down around her gratefully. “Jesus Saffire. That’s the fn’g stupidest reason ever. Why would I NOT want him here. For your sake if nothing else. Besides, he’s an Idol, it’s good for publicity.” Pointing to her sister’s cell phone resting on the desk top she ordered her bluntly. “Quit making excuses. It’s only like 10:00 there, he’s probably headed out to drink. Call the damned man and get him here before it’s too late. I’d do it for you, but, after that whole fiasco with Junsu, I won’t go quite that far.”

Two years of regret thick in her voice, Saffire’s response was guarded. “I’m scared. Especially about the publicity. The Neitzens. His regular fans. He doesn’t need us in his life making it more complicated. Being a single, sexy Idol is his career, not an unavailable, cushy, family man. You know that.”

“Pffft, that’s bullshit. How many times have we talked about this?” Arms still tight about the toddler playing with one dangly earring, Saffron’s voice softened. “Look, you can’t play the victim forever. Don’t be like mother and Kyong. Take a gamble for once. Doesn’t Sienna deserve at least that much? If for no other reason, do it for her. If he comes, he comes. If he doesn’t, he doesn’t. You’ll never know until you try.”

Her own advice sounded so perfect when directed toward Saffire, but what about herself? Was she taking it to heart as well? With no closure, fueled by her own guilt and fear (almost as if he had dropped off the face of the earth), she too had walked away from the man she admitted loving. And, now on the heels of a renewed relationship with Ian . . . was she opening a can of worms (that would eat her alive from the inside out) by urging Saffire to bring JJ to California? Because surely . . . along with him would come . . . yes, her very own ‘Baek Seung Jo’, Kim Hyun Joong.

DECEASED YOUNG JAE RYU AND AUNT SAFFRON

IT was never a good day to talk about ‘what-if’s’, but regardless, (standing side-by-side) Young Jae Ryu and old Aunt Saffron found themselves dwelling on the past lives of the always

unpredictable twin sisters. Tomorrow there would be a celebration. Young Jae didn't understand why Saffron would use his unique 'Cup of Hotness Café' as an excuse to avoid reality.

Stroking the tip of 'She-Devil' the cat's twitching ear, the spirit cocked his head downward in the direction of the quibbling sisters, distraught as well over Saffire's continued hesitation to give in and follow her heart.

"It's been two long years. I don't get it. I set things up perfectly for them. Why did she run? She should've confronted JJ and told him the truth. He's a good decent man. He wouldn't deny her or Sienna. She's making it harder each day. Dammit, where did I go wrong?"

Taking a cue from his melancholy tone the elderly ghost beside him sniffed haughtily, sticking out her buxom chest. "YOU didn't raise her, fool. She's the product of that spineless Kyong I've learned to despise so desperately. After everything you've done for my girls . . . Now, you're my favorite, and that's why I put up with you. If you'd only followed my advice from the beginning they wouldn't be separated. I warned you. But, noooo . . ."

Prepared for the backlash, Young Jae winced, going quiet. *She was right. She was always right. His own sins were coming back to haunt his daughters. Was there still light at the end of the tunnel? Despite his prior interference, now he was powerless to take any action.*

Re-focused on the purring black feline in his arms, he sighed. "The fire was supposed to have taken care of all this. Bring them together, not scatter them all to the four corners of the world. And, why was Junsu even there? I swore I'd taken care of that, before . . ." Hesitant to mention his descent into the heavens disallowing him credence with the physical realm, clearly he felt at a loss . . . whining, "On top of everything else, without Hyun Joong in her life, Saffron brought that rogue Ian into the mix again . . . oh my, I feel faint. All my hard work for nothing."

"Young Jae Ryu!" Aunt Saffron's voice was stern. "If you'll shut up long enough to listen you might catch something important. There's a shift in the atmosphere. Fate controls their destiny now, not you. And, you can't change how they feel. I know only too well. Your girls are outrageous and free-spirited, just as I was. Humph. Some would call it pig-headed." Referring to the Kyong she loathed, even as a child he'd been insolent and unbearable.

Hearing Saffron announce loudly, “You’ll never know until you try,” Young Jae’s ears perked up gleefully. In all the commotion of the conversation, he’d missed the most important part. Maybe he was off the hook, and they were ready for a reconciliation after all!

**MARCH 10TH - 1:00 P.M. – KYONG RYU & SANDRA KROES
VACATIONING IN HONOLULU, HAWAII**

STANDING in the window of the high-rise hotel, Sandra wrung her hands fretfully. She hated storms. Ever since her suicidal descent into the raging ocean on the shores of JeJu Island in S. Korea, years earlier. This was proving to be more than just a passing rain shower.

Hearing Kyong cussing behind her as he flipped from one news report to another, she tried desperately to see him through different eyes. He had been a changed man these past few months. Doting on her hand and foot, showering her with gifts, words of endearment, basically . . . re-staking his original claim as her husband.

Amid piles of volunteer work, and messy divorce details, the trip to Hawaii had been a welcomed surprise. Looking out over the howling winds and pounding rain she remembered how beautiful the beach and ocean had been when they’d honeymooned at the exact same location, thirty some odd years ago. The tall, handsome man she’d never truly let into her heart had taken her for a romantic thrill-ride into the depths of his soul.

But, it hadn’t taken her long to realize it had been nothing more than a futile attempt at fulfilling a bad lie. Now, yearning to have his arms around her in the throes of impending disaster all she could think about was her daughter’s upcoming café opening and the fact that their flight, scheduled to leave later that evening had already been cancelled.

With cell service sketchy, and electricity flickering on and off, there would be no communication with the mainland. They were stranded. Saddened by every facet of the adventure she felt a tear trickle down her smooth cheek. *Was this God’s way of telling her she needed to nip this attempt at a new life with Kyong in the bud? Her girls should’ve been more important. The trip . . . well . . . it could’ve waited.*

“For Christ’s sake Sandy, don’t just stand there, you might as well come help me get the rest of our things. From the looks of it, we’ll be on a bus out of here by nightfall. They evacuate these islands when it gets this bad.” Kyong’s voice at her back was edgy and void of anything remotely akin to compassion. *Why wasn’t she surprised?*

“That’s just great.” Agitated, she curled her bare toes into the tile floor, swiping at her reddened cheeks. “There’s still wet bathing suits in the bathroom, champagne bottles open in the fridge . . .”

“Leave them. Doesn’t matter. I’m getting ready to call downstairs, see what the status is. I keep hearing people out in the hallway. Sounds to me like they might already be ushering everyone out.”

“And, what about the girls?” Planted firmly at the window ledge, Sandra’s fingers curled about the sill, seeking some sort of regret from him.

“The girls? What about the damned girls? We’re in the middle of a fucking hurricane and you’re worried about the girls?” Eyes bulging, her lover of a short twenty-four hours ago looked increasingly like a water-logged bull-frog.

“You’re such a bastard. You knew before you even made this reservation that the café opening was tomorrow. Saffire’s right down the beach, practically under your roof. And, I know she tells you everything. Dear God, whatever possessed me to think you would ever change. Always thinking of yourself first. Saffron’s going to be devastated that we aren’t there. I promised her we would be back in time.” Flinging herself toward the flowery couch, Sandra’s tears flowed with uncontrollable certainty at the outcome she couldn’t control.

Unflinching, Kyong watched her, his mind reeling. After everything he’d said and done over the past few months; professing his undying devotion to her AND the girls; giving up his womanizing; re-arranging his busy schedule to bring her to Hawaii on the anniversary of their first honeymoon . . . WTF.

“Sandraaaa . . . Jesus, calm down. They will understand. We’re having a hurricane here. No control . . . got it?” Starting back across the room, arms outstretched he tried sounding more sincere. “Are you blaming me right now?”

Shoving him aside as he approached, Sandra blinked wide-eyed the tears still falling. “Why not? It’s because of you everything goes wrong in my life. I never should’ve come.”

Wishing she could make sense of what she was saying, or how he was reacting all she could do was exit to the bedroom, slamming the door behind her. She’d been right to divorce him the first time. Why she thought he’d ever truly change, she had no earthly idea. If anyone was having regrets . . . it would be her.

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