

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(Part 1)

“May your coffee kick in before reality does . . .”



Friday, December 19th, 2014

10:30 P.M.

JeJu Island – ‘Toscana’ VIP Lounge Club

LIFE is all about choices. Good or bad, they mold the direction in which we take our lives. Along the way . . . consequences. There would be a myriad of choices made this Christmas holiday night of 2014 in the ‘Toscana’ hotel. The events and consequences following . . . would send all involved on an unpredictable and even more unexpected journey.

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TAEMIN curled his arms about Saffron’s small waist, his hips grinding into hers seductively. It was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain his composure, with the alcohol pumping through to his loins, and the sweet way she dragged both hands around the curve of his upper buttocks as they danced.

Where had this ‘Angel’ come from? She was a delicious vision he was certain he didn’t want to vanish into the night, without taking advantage of kissing, at least once.

It didn’t matter that they were amongst scores of other couples, on the eve of a concert or that he had probably had at least three too many drinks. He wanted her. Plain and simple. For well over an hour, in the arms of Donghae, JunK, (and even his own leader) Onew he had watched her toss her red hair enticingly, smoky blue eyes molten with desire. Flirtation was her gift. And she was giving it away without reservation.

How she had settled into his own arms could only be described as a miracle. Now all it would take was a hint of diplomacy, suggestion of something sinful, and hopefully she would comply. After all . . . wasn’t he . . . ‘special’?

Smiling at his own deviousness, he whispered in her ear, “You’d look so much more comfortable without that dress on,” allowing his tongue to travel lazily down toward the base of her neck. And the dance to his room began . . .

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TWO young men, blinded by the confusions of love, hovered side-by-side in the double lounge doors, scanning the writhing, dancing couples spread across the large dance floor. Surrounded by their peers, it was a common club scene but, at that particular moment their only goal was seeking out two wild, drunken American girls in the midst of the overpowering chaos. Loud music, smoke and chatter permeated the senses, almost making it difficult to imagine how one could stay engrossed in the madness for more than a short while.

This was a place Junsu was familiar with. He had walked every inch of his hotel a thousand times over since the infancy planning stages, and he knew the lay of the VIP Lounge like the back of his hand. With a massive bar, and spacious dance floor, it more than accommodated the growing crowd, not allowing the ability to see through the moving sea of bodies without physically taking a stroll into the insanity. It had to be worth the risk.

Despite his concern, he leaned into Hyun Joong’s ear, attempting a smile. “I don’t see them. Go straight ahead. I’m betting they’re somewhere on the dance floor.”

Hyun Joong nodded in agreement, trying to avoid the inevitable by standing on tip-toe and craning his neck over the wave of bodies. Finding Saffron would be akin to searching out a

needle in a haystack. But, did she even ‘want’ to be found? That would be the question of the night.

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BATHED in a misty, electrifying aura, Yoochun sat off to one side alone after Jonghyun’s flight some time ago. Spotting the two recognizable Idols before they were barely five feet inside the door, (even though glad to see them), he knew once Junsu was on the premises, there would be no stopping the party crowd that would congregate at his anticipated appearance. Poor Hyun Joong would end up like chum for the sharks, being thoughtlessly devoured along with him.

True to his concerns, it wasn’t but a few seconds and his hyung’s were bombarded with requests from friends to sit and drink, along with the smiling, giggling faces of numerous female Idols, tugging at their sleeves, arms encircling their waists, anxious to be the first in line for a hug or personal acknowledgement. Watching them wade through the crowd, it seemed as difficult, (if not more so), than maneuvering a cluster of crazy fangirls.

Heaving himself off the chair he jogged forward, with only one mission in mind. To intervene, and warn them before they reached their destination. A single question to anyone in the room about the women of the night would’ve given them the results they were after. Everyone present knew exactly ‘where’ they were and ‘who’ they were with. It had been so the entire evening.

“Yah! Over here.” The loud tone of his voice averting an incoming connection with Krystal from ‘Girls Generation’, he motioned them toward his table. Wavering tipsily from one too many beers, the liquor was doing its own work in his bloodstream. Swallowing hard, he poked one long finger in Kim Hyun Joong’s chest accusingly, “Joong . . . how in the hell did you lose Saffron between my room and here? Let me guess, she got mad and walk away . . . Aishhh, you’re so predictable.”

“AM NOT. Doesn’t matter.” Never taking his eyes off the bobbing heads on the floor Joong’s response was terse. He didn’t need judgement . . . he wanted to get her out of here and explain.

Junsu, jaws clenched, slipped up against the table top squinting into the flashing lights. “We figured they’d be here. Suddenly seems they don’t go anywhere without each other, huh?”



“Guess not.” Yoochun reached for his beer, his attention fixated on his friend. “Yahhh . . . hyung, they’re both pretty wasted. Hell, we all are. But, I’ve been trying to keep an eye out anyway. Joong, you definitely need to get out there,” Urging the man gently, he shoved him forward before tilting himself toward Junsu, his voice lowered to a whisper, in warning, “Saffire’s out there with Heechul. Been with him for over an hour. Figured if you didn’t show pretty soon I’d have to text you. Bartender’s been sort of an ass too, complaining they’ve had enough. Wanted to cut them off but our Cinderella and Donghae pulled their typical stunt and talked him out of it.”

Junsu’s ears perked up at the mention of Heechul and Donghae. Dear Lord! The two bad boys of ‘Super Junior’. (Shades of escapades in the café just days ago.) That was all he and Hyun Joong both needed to hear. As they stepped away, about to head straight for the crowd, Yoochun grabbed Junsu’s arm, stopping him dead in his tracks.

“Ani hyung. Let Joong go alone.” Choosing his words carefully, he laid out the plan he’d been mulling over since assuming long ago that Junsu would eventually come looking for Saffire. “Think for a minute, you can’t let everyone see you hauling her out like she is. You know who’s here. Publicity remember? I think you should go buy a round for the house. Take the focus off of her, and I’ll make sure she leaves with me. We’ll meet you outside by the employee elevator. Less trouble.

Poor Yoochun. Like he hadn’t ran enough interference tonight, first with Saffron and Ian, and now with Saffire. What was it about these women that elicited such devotion from men anyway? All the men in the room for that matter. They’d been holding everyone captive the entire night, as he watched from the shadows.

Even the girls seemed to gravitate to them, laughing at their silliness, booty-shaking alongside them when the music got down and dirty, hugging and swinging them around, clinking shot glasses and beer bottles in the air in mindless comradery. It was clearly a mystery. Was he under the spell too? Surely not. Yet sauntering toward the couples on the floor, he was beginning to wonder.

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A **H**HHH, his kisses were like molten lava. His large hands cupping her face with care as they swayed in perfect rhythm to the slow rocking beat of a love song. Saffire felt as if she were falling, off and away into an abyss of spinning darkness. Why was she letting this happen? Because it felt so damned good? Every fiber of her inebriated being was squealing “STOP”, but her lips and tongue defied her and kept moving, hypnotized by the music and feeling of his arms around her.

Even when he quit, she wanted more. Her body shivering with desire, her bare toes curled over the tips of his tennis shoes as they danced. She couldn't remember exactly how she'd gotten on the dance floor, just that she had. And now . . . the eyes of the man in her face were stripping her boldly as he gradually pulled away.

“Come on Saffire,” Heechul, eyebrows raised in mock anticipation, begged the stunning blonde in his arms quietly. “The clock's ticking and Cinderella wants to play.”

Gulping uncontrollably, she found herself nodding, “Yes”. Was she really going to do this? Go to Heechul's room? Didn't she tell him “No” earlier? At least she thought she did. Was that her? Oh hell, why not? He was hot . . . and she was horny.

“Mmmm . . . sweet, sweet Saffire . . . yummy, sooo yummy.” Finding himself lost in her presence, Heechul's crooning gave way to his fingers running rampant up and down the length of her satiny spine. “Wait for me while I hit the men's room. And DON'T go anywhere. I'll be right back.” And as his warm lips touched hers again, she kissed him wide-eyed and innocent, feeling much like she had the night she'd lost her virginity.

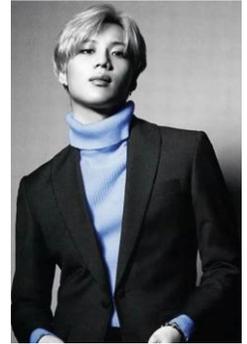
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“WORD has it there's a sexy redhead kickin' up her heels in the VIP Lounge 'Oh Ha Ni'.” Hyun Joong's voice behind Saffron, was like liquid gold in her ears.

Releasing a dumbfounded Taemin in one fell swoop, she spun around in her haste to get to him, nearly tripping into his arms in the process.

Backing up instinctively, the young Idols' hands shot in the air at seeing Hyun Joong's steely determined eyes as he caught her. This had 'not' been part of the plan. "Dammit to hell, Hyun Joong, what are you doing?" Shoving them back into his pockets in disgust, the cuss words flowed from his mouth on a river of alcohol.

All he knew was, the night was still young, the music blared on, and warm sweaty bodies (pressed tightly together), moved around them like waves on water. His muddled thoughts, clashing with the heat in his groin baffled his senses, knowing only she'd made herself available as his bird of choice and now she was flying the 'proverbial' coop. And . . . with none other than (his old rival), Kim Hyun Joong. Shit, why was he surprised? Leaning forward, one hand gently touching her sweat glistened arm, he pleaded urgently, hoping to thwart her departure, "Where are you going Saffron? What about later?"



Oh nooo, sweet Tae. She hated to leave him, but Saffron was aware she would have to forgo their certain rendezvous to get back into 'Baek Seung Jo's good graces. Instantly calculating her options, it was obvious by the look on Hyun Joong's face, she couldn't have her cake and eat it too. Hugging the Maknae drunkenly she got up close, her breath a whispered tickle in his ear. "It'll be okay. We'll meet again at the café. You promised me, remember?"

Okay for who? Taemin twitched angrily, his thoughts still focused on the feel of her hands across his backside. Why in the fuck did he always lose out to Hyun Joong?

Determined to have the last word, he pressed against her, grazing her neck with his full lips, in retaliation. "Oh baby. I won't forget. You can count on that." And releasing the anger on his face bowed to Hyun Joong slightly, mumbling . . . "Joong," as he backed away, swallowed up into the crowd.

"Later Taemin."

Casually dismissing the 'SHINee' member, Joong returned his attentions to a woozy Saffron swaying precariously in front of him.

"Seung Joouoo," As the alcohol disallowed control of her tongue but, not her limbs she grappled for his face, slapping little red marks over both cheeks lovingly, until he couldn't stand anymore (forced to stop the stinging, by grabbing her wrists).

“Thank God, you’re heeerrre. You always show up jusst in time. Who told you where I was?” Giggling, she raised her voice loudly above the hammering bass of the dance music . . . “Doesn’t matter! I’m having soooo much fun!”

Watching her flip tipsily in his arms, Hyun Joong hung on, wincing as she squealed piercingly in his ears, “Hey everyone! Look!” Then pointing at him gleefully, she scrambled around on tiptoe daringly, waving one hand toward the ceiling in a futile (out of control) attempt to capture the crowd’s attention, announcing, “My boyfriend’s here.”

With heads and eyes turning all around him, an embarrassed Joong snatched her into a tight embrace, clamping one hand over her mouth in an effort to silence her. “Shhhh. Ha Ni you’re drunk. You need to come with me, we’ve got unfinished business.”

Despite her childish outburst, how in the hell could he be angry with her? She had dealt with Chung A, and in her own mind, won. He needed to get her out of the limelight before she said or did something they would both regret.

But, it didn’t matter what he wanted . . . she wanted to keep dancing. Attempting to wriggle free from his grasp, her limber body still rippled about him seductively. Nonetheless, Hyun Joong, was done and before she realized what was happening or could even protest, he had her by the wrist, whisking her toward the large double doors, (the crowd splitting to let them by). Spotting her shoes and purse atop the still crowded table she had partied at, he snatched them up on his way out, hoping to God that Junsu had been able to get to Saffire as well.

“It’s okayyyy,” Saffron continued declaring loudly to the onlookers as they exited, “My boyfriend . . . he’s my boyfriend. You know . . . Baek Seunnggg Jooo. Alllmosst Parrradiiisse . . .”

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Saffire stood awkwardly, watching Heechul’s back disappear away from her and into the crowd toward the side doors. Now what?

“My boyfriend . . . he’s my boyfriend.” The loud familiar voice permeating the chatter and noise around her sounded a lot like Saffron. And then the singing started. It had to be Hyung Joong come to her sister’s rescue.

Blinking drunkenly, she staggered closer to the direction it was coming from. Princess ‘Oh Ha Ni’ had lots of boyfriends around her tonight, but still ‘Baek Seung Jo’ had managed to track her down. So where was HER real savior? Obviously, the ‘knight in shining armor’ Heechul had eluded to earlier in the evening was nowhere to be found.

Unable to press in close enough to see ‘Oh Ha Ni’ in action, she bumped against person after person, staggering and bowing over and over again until she reached the door handle, exasperated, sweaty and feeling sick to her stomach.

Now, not giving a second thought to her decision, leaving her purse and shoes behind, with one hand to her mouth, she darted out into the lobby headed for a vanishing Heechul and the men’s restroom.

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JUNSU lifted one foot on the bar rail, flashing his hand flamboyantly toward one of the bartenders motioning him over. If keeping the entire bar in alcohol for the next few minutes was what it would take to redirect the focus off of Saffire then by God, that’s what he needed to do.

Thanking Yoochun under his breath for having his back, he announced loud enough for everyone around him to hear, “Next round’s on me,” patting the man’s shoulder accommodatingly, pausing only momentarily to see if Yoochun was on his way out with Saffire yet.

But, unbeknownst to them both, in the split second it had taken him to walk over, look away and order drinks, Saffire had slipped out the door unseen, disappearing off into the hallway.

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SAFFRON leaned on the elevator wall, arms crossed sulking like a five year old being reprimanded for not standing still. Why did he just stand there glaring at her disapprovingly as if he had been the one ditched? Dammit, she was having fun, there was no reason for him to drag her out of the bar.

Recalling the warm fingers around her slim wrist as he pulled her off the dance floor, raising it in front of her face, and scrunching both eyes closed, she giggled mouthing ‘OMG’, ‘Baek Seung had done the same thing to ‘Oh Ha Ni’ in ‘Playful Kiss’. It was the graduation scene,

he'd dragged her out of the building, pressed her up against the wall and . . . bamm! Their first kiss. More squealing only served to earn her a confused stare from Hyun Joong.

Shaking his head, clearly she was off in 'Baek Seung Jo' fantasy land once again. The goofy grin and ear-piercing screech a sure sign. God knew what she had 'Seung Jo' doing to poor 'Ha Ni' in her mind this time. Trouble was, he couldn't deny she was sexy cute, in the dress that ignited his imagination and had him itching to get back under the layers of crinoline.

'Big Bang's', 'Fantastic Baby' came through the elevator speaker. Saffron had heard it in the bar earlier, remembering by the first chorus everyone was singing and dancing to the infectious beat. Attempting to recreate the dance, she jumped out, arms swinging, wailing at the top of her lungs.

"Come on, 'Seung Jo' join me, Joong's sooo grumpy." Singing, she posed, frozen in place, both fingers pointed in his calculating, sober face yelling, "FANTASTIC BABY!"

Hyun Joong lowered his head attempting to disguise his grin at the totally wasted Saffron oblivious to the Christmas music softly playing in the background. Then without warning, her mood flipped, as she dropped her arms to her sides, dejected that he was being a party-pooper. Seconds later, recovering quickly, she flashed him a lopsided grin.

"Joong did you see me dancing with Lee Taemin of freaking 'SHINee' . . . you know the hottest dancer in K-Pop, Taemin of SHHIINNEEE," Her squawking voice grated on his nerves, as she propped herself onto his crossed arms. "Oh, and he said he couldn't wait to come and work the café. I promised I'd put him on the 'Hotness Wall'." Bouncing up and down she gushed enthusiastically before crumbling to the floor of the elevator when it stopped.

"SAFFRON!" Hooking a hand under her arm and lifting, he recognized the green sheen beginning to flood over her face. Oh shit, she was going to be sick. Having been down that road before he knew time was of the essence.

Moaning, her head rolled back over his upper arm. "I thinnk . . . I'm gonna be . . . siiicckkk."

Scooping her up, he wrapped one arm over his shoulder cradling her close as the ding of the doors could be heard opening. Oblivious to the sweat pouring off his forehead he rushed down the hall, chuckling at her attempt to keep up with him, her jelly legs collapsing underneath her.

All he could think about was making it to his room before she soiled her dress, the hallway and himself.

“Jooonnggg . . . please . . . bathrooommm.”

“Hang on baby almost there.”

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SPITTING into the toilet Saffron cracked one eye open, staring at the remains of the greasy cheeseburger she had scarfed down earlier, floating in the pristine bowl. “Ugghhh . . .” Sinking her flushed face onto the cold floor, she groaned.

Oh hell, can I just die now. I can't believe I'm puking in an Idol's hotel room. Die . . . I just want to die. I'm never drinking again.

Walking in, Joong tried not to laugh at the girl curled up in the fetal position on the tile. Having been there a time or two he knew making fun of her was not going to benefit her condition . . . still, he couldn't help himself.

“Baby, feeling better? You look pretty sexy down there, even though . . .” Flushing the toilet, keeping it together was getting even harder, seeing the scathing expression meant for him cross her reddened face.

“So this is funny to you? I'm dying and you're joking. Curse you Joong. I want Taemin, he wouldn't treat me this way,” Flipping him off, she curled back up into a tight ball.

“Oh, I chased after you and now you're dissing me. I'll get your phone and you can go ahead and call your precious Taemin to come get your

drunken ass,”

Turning to leave, it suddenly pissed him off that the Maknae was once again meddling in his life. Seeing her dancing in his arms had sent his stomach plummeting, his gut reaction being to go ahead and punch his lights out. Maybe, if he had done that a couple years ago things might have turned out differently.



“Joooong,” Whining, Saffire reached for him sensing his frustrated withdrawal, “Don’t leave me, I’m sorry.”

He paused, his mouth set in a hard line at her plaintive cry, “Well, guess we can’t have Taemin posting pictures on Facebook of the upstanding ‘Cup of Hotness Café’ owner in a compromising position. Come on wild woman . . . up. Damn, you’re heavier than I thought.” Groaning over the nearly dead weight, he hauled her into his arms for what felt like the hundredth time that night, now having to decide between the shower and the sink. Seeking a little revenge for the fact that, (out of all the idols) she would target Taemin.

Angling her toward the shower stall two fingers clutching her chin, he met her hooded blue eyes, “The quickest way to sober you up is a cold shower . . .” It worked for guys, it could work for her.

Her reaction took him by surprise, as smacking his hand away she seemed to sober up at just the suggestion of cold water running over her hot frame. And then the fussing began. “Joong, are you freaking crazy? Do you know how much this dress cost? Don’t you dare put me in the shower, or . . . or . . . I’ll kick you in the balls,” And as quickly as it had begun, the threat was over as she dropped her head wearily onto his broad shoulder.

Changing directions he leaned her against the vanity instead. “Babe your breath.” Waving one hand in front of his nose, now on top of the stench of hard liquor, beer and smoke, she had ‘puke’ breath. How could she still be appealing? He would never understand the innate tugging at his heart. So, adhering to her demands he would have to be content with slapping cool water on her cheeks, still believing a kick in the balls might be worth shoving her under a cold shower for what she had put him through so far.

“Okay, Okay, I get it,” Feeling overheated, sweat popping out all over her body she gripped the edge of the basin, mumbling, coughing, and spitting.

“You’re not going to be sick again, are you?” It seemed as if was going to be a long night.

“No, don’t think so. I’m fine. Just unzip my dress will you?” Not waiting for him to comply, she splashed water onto her feverish skin, glancing up into the mirror horrified at the raccoon staring back at her, “Holy shit, I need my makeup remover and facial soap, I look. . .” But, Joong finished the sentence for her.

“Like a debutante after a frat party.” Now the laughter came. Unable to hold it in any longer, he eased up closer, his chin against her one bare shoulder laughing beside her in the spacious mirror.

“Again . . . thanks, you think you’re so funny.” She couldn’t resist, throwing a handful of water in the direction of his grinning face.

Jumping away from the wayward drops, he reached up caressing the back of her neck as he lowered the zipper on her dress. “Everything you need is on the left side of the sink. Junsu had all your stuff moved in here earlier this evening.”

“What?” The giddiness of the moment turned, as annoyed . . . her eyes met his reflection, “Rather presumptuous of you, I don’t remember giving anyone permission to move my things,” With a haunted gaze, she glanced left, discovering her makeup remover along with everything she had packed that morning.

“Ahhh . . . there’s my highly educated, uptight socialite. Thought I’d lost the classy redhead when I found you puking in the toilet, wanting to die.”

His own aggravation and sarcasm showing in his voice, after an already long day with Chung A, not to mention finding his ‘Oh Ha Ni’ making time with the youngest SHINee member, still Hyun Joong played lady's maid, sliding the dress off her shoulders, stopping at the elbows as he waited patiently for her to slip out of the armholes.

Hearing the crinoline crinkling down her legs, she bristled at his agitation. After all, he was the one who had left to meet baby mama. If anyone should be pissed, it was her, and why hadn’t he informed her about this weekend and the ex being here, anyway? The curt response was reason enough to alert him to her sudden change of heart.

“Don’t give me attitude. You have no reason to be angry, I wasn’t the one who left to meet the old girlfriend,” Digging out her toothbrush, she hoped to God the toothpaste wouldn’t upset her stomach any more than it already was. Sobering up was crucial right now.

But, the equally as salty Hyun Joong wasn’t playing games any longer. He wanted answers. “Oh baby, you want attitude? I’ll give you attitude. First, why don’t you tell me what the fuck you were doing out there on the dance floor with the Maknae?” Glaring at her in the white bra,

toothpaste dripping down her chin, he was aware she wouldn't have an answer he would be satisfied with. Not now . . . not ever, so he raged on.

“What Babe, got nothing to say? So tell me, after he got done feeling you up, were you going back his room? Tugging the dress out from under her feet as she skipped out of the way, he marched out in frustration, rolling it up in a crinkly, puckered ball.

Watching him through the mirror, ranting and raving, the dressed crushed in his strong arms, Saffron regarded the reflection of her pale image, snorting at his superiority.

“Pffft, he's not acting very 'Baek Seung Jo' like . . . big baby.” Rinsing and spitting she swiped the back of her hand across her lips. Brushing over her hated freckles in the process, she wrinkled her nose, questioning why he would ask her something like that . . . after all she was just having fun with Taemin. And dammit, she'd also adored the attention that Donghae, Chansung, and the other Idols had shown her. She liked being the life of the party, what was the harm in that? But, had she been planning what he accused her of?

“Fuck.” Tossing the brush toward the left side of the sink in disgust, she knew the answer. Damn straight she was, and without even thinking about how it would hurt him.

Honestly, everything had been her. She'd targeted him before even coming to Korea, then seduced him like one of her many acquisitions. Now, things were getting complicated. Was she bailing, and finding a new target? Taemin?

He was right, of course, she had overdone it tonight, acting childish once again but, after Ian . . . wasn't she entitled to be little selfish. Smoothing the hair off her face, she could hear Uncle Ryu in the back of her mind, telling her it was unfair to play with someone's feelings. Is that what she was doing to him?

“Holy shit, I'm turning into mother. . .” Disregarding her state of undress, she tripped out of the bathroom, catching the wall with one hand and sliding toward him as the room began to tilt.

“DAMMIT, MR. KIM YOU'RE FUCKING RIGHT. I was going to leave with Taemin . . . Yep. Make out with him . . . definitely! Sleep with him . . . I can't say one way or the other, and I want to be truthful. The odds were fifty-fifty.”

Joong stood there calmly stirring a cup of coffee, trying with great difficulty to understand her. Why would she tell him something like that? Could she be that calculating, that easy, or just

that brutally honest? Observing the small sassy woman, so similar to the one who had turned his world upside down not that long ago (the one carrying the nickname ‘Sweetie’), he knew if it had been ‘her’, he surly would have lost the bet.

“Fifty-fifty huh? Not great odds. Is it that you want to play the field? Or tired of me?” Scrutinizing the blue eyes that expressed so much, he wanted to shut the world out and pick her brain to find out what really made her tick.

Where had her balls gone? Why were her emotions slinging her up one mountainside and down the other? Happy and content one second . . . jealous, angry and difficult the next. He was about to bolt. She could see it all over his face. Sense it in his body language. *Down Saffron . . . step down or it’s over.*

“God no Joong, I’m sorry. I am. There’s no excuse for playing with your feelings. Please don’t be angry with me.” Swaying as she placed her hands together in front of her begging his forgiveness, she gave him an out . . . landing on, “I’ll do anything.”

Raising an eyebrow he tapped the spoon on the edge of the cup, the loud ping ringing in his ears as he consciously counted down the seconds before speaking. “Anything?”

“Yes.”

His demand was going to be severe, and she wouldn’t like it, but it had to be met. “SHINee is never to work ‘The Hotness Café’ as long as we’re together,” Dropping the spoon to catch her shoulders before she toppled over he realized tonight had been a close call . . . too close for his peace of mind. Discovering her with Taemin made him anxious, digging up long forgotten memories of Sweetie and how he had lost her.

“But . . . I don’t understand.” Shrugging him off Saffron held up one palm meekly, “I swear I won’t have anything to do with him, Saffire can deal with it if he comes in. Joong please.” Pleadingly, she watched his eyebrows draw together forming a frown across his handsome face. Now, he was playing with her lively-hood. Saffire might not care, but certainly Maud and SeRae would, and business would suffer because of it. He wasn’t being fair.

“Why are you making demands on me about SHINee? Before I agree to anything I deserve a reason.” Stomping her foot in frustration she hated to admit, (like on the dance floor), that if

she wanted Taemin to work the café, giving up ‘Baek Seung Jo’ would probably be the price she’d have to pay, and right now at least, she wasn’t ready to do that.

“Saffron, it’s a strong request not a demand. One day I’ll tell you the whole sorted story, but for now you’ll have to trust me,” A lone muscle twitching in his jawline, he desperately hoped she would understand and drop it.

Standing in her underwear trying to read his freaking poker face and getting nowhere, she wanted to continue stomping across the room, throw a tantrum, be the tornado who had barged in on Saffire and JJ a few nights ago. Maybe even be that girl she’d told Yoochun she wasn’t . . . But, no. Instead she was cool and level-headed Saffron, taking everything in stride. Why was she getting the feeling Ian was whispering in Hyun Joong’s ear?

Sighing as she swallowed down her emotions she answered quietly. “You win, no SHINee,” seeing his body relax as if he’d been holding his breath waiting for her to respond. It had something to do with a woman . . . that much she was sure of, (and it wasn’t Chung A). Whoever she was, this woman was special, so much so that he couldn’t or wouldn’t talk about her.

Now, there would be more unanswered questions swirling around in her head. Did Taemin steal her away from him? His reaction hadn’t been in line with his demand. Why was he being so tight-lipped? Did it have more to do with her, and not Taemin? Uncertain, she turned away, deciding all she could do was let it go, for now.

Picking up the cup a satisfied Hyun Joong held it out for her to take, “It’s for the best, now drink your coffee. God knows, the last thing I want to do is fight.”

Sniffing the dark brew before pushing the nauseating drink away from her she turned her head away asking, “Babe, do you have any tea? I don’t think my stomach can handle coffee right now.”

“I’m sure I can find you some,” Exhaling he sat it down, reaching up to palm her freshly scrubbed face. Tracing her perfectly bowed eyebrows with both thumbs, it occurred to him that the faint freckles dotting her nose was (hands down) one of the features he loved about her the most. Giving them a quick kiss, he felt her quiver under his touch. “Are you cold?”

“A little,” Smiling at the renewed concern in his voice, she snuggled into his embrace. “You know whenever I visited Uncle Ryu and didn’t feel well, he would make me a cup of strong black tea. He made it really sweet, saying it would calm the rumbling in my tummy,” Sighing at her own nostalgic memories of Young Jae, she hated that he wasn’t here for her now. “I had forgotten all about that.”

“Sounds like Uncle,” Joong had to agree, “why don’t you go dress for bed, your things are in the top drawer. I’ll try to make your tea like he would.” As she twisted away from him, he drew her back haltingly asking with all sincerity, “Saffron, would Uncle approve of us dating?”

Searching his brown eyes, she could tell her Uncle’s approval meant a lot to him, and with everything that was going wrong there was no way she would add any more anxiety to his life. Didn’t he understand that it was her consent that was needed, and he had that the first night after he and JaeJoong chased away the two guys that had been following them. This time she cupped his face, “Ah, my handsome prince. I do . . . so he certainly will.” Smiling, she kissed him gently. Mmmm, his kiss was like candy . . . peppermint, certainly not cotton candy. Breaking from his lips, she blurted out, “Oh, shit Joong. I left Saffire in the bar with all the Idols.”

* * * * *

‘Toscana’ Kim Junsu’s Suite

10:45 P.M.

THE waiting was agonizing, the pounding in her temples relentless . . . but Saffire was finally in her element. He had come for her. Her ‘Knight’. Her very own ‘Baek Seung Jo’. Giggling playfully, she toyed with the tiny hairs on the back of his neck while Junsu slipped the room card into the slot, reaching back and swatting her fingers at the tickling.

“Stop that!” It felt like he’d warned her at least a hundred times since hauling her off and away from inside the restroom, and a startled Heechul. Sad thing was . . . he was loving the attention, anxious to get her inside alone and away from the possibility of being spotted by roving photographers and curious fans.

“Nooo . . .” Wrapping both arms about his crisply shirted waistline, she objected loudly, savoring the manly smell of his cologne. Did he always smell this delicious? Like an irresistible cocktail of masculinity. “Junsu . . . Junsu . . . Junsuuuu . . . my friennnddd . . . my best’est

friennndddd . . . My saviooorrrr . . . I knight you, ‘Saviooorrrr Kimmm Junsuuu!’” Throwing one arm in the air pretending to wield an imaginary sword she fell against him happily as he stepped through the open door.

What in God’s name was he going to do with her now? What had happened (other than alcohol) to turn his sweet violin-playing goddess into this alter ego ‘party girl’ about to lose her cookies in the men’s john? He wasn’t sure how he liked this version of her. Was it the parents? Or something else? Obviously he had dipped out before whatever it was went down.

Getting her into the back employee elevator without being seen had been challenging enough, with Yoochun laughing hysterically beside him, while she groped and fondled every visible part of his being. Turning on the unsuspecting friend at one point, showering his face with sloppy wet kisses professing her undying love to him, JJ and a long list of other Idols she’d come in contact with over the evening.

Yoochun, bordering between uncomfortable and embarrassed had exited on his own floor, hopping out and away from her, finally leaving them to fend for themselves. More than grateful to have come out unscathed (and, still dressed) in front of Junsu.

Now, with her drunk as a skunk, all Junsu could think of for starters, was a pot of strong coffee, praying she would agree to drink at least one massive cup and begin sobering up. What he really wanted was romance . . . Dammit. All the things that would be the precursor to his confession . . . and ultimate, proposal. But, from the looks of her condition, there would be none of that. Not any time soon.

Swatting her behind, he pointed in the direction of the door leading to the bathroom bellowing in a playfully stern voice, “March. Now, you little she-devil. Pretty sure you’ve done enough damage tonight already. I keep new toothbrushes under the sink, and don’t come out until you’ve brushed everything important . . . especially your teeth.” Mumbling under his breath as he followed behind her, “Heechul germs . . . ewwww fuck.”

Despite his feigned displeasure, it was hard not to be amused watching her stumble barefooted in that direction, swinging around at the last minute blowing air kisses to him, before slamming the door shut with a thud.

He knew she didn’t really need a toothbrush, because her things were already tucked away in the bedroom closet. Jumping to the conclusion he could convince her to spend the night, he had

made arrangements to have them delivered earlier before settling down to deal with his headache. Now however, not being able to gauge her response, and considering her condition . . . it just didn't seem like the right time to tell her.

* * * * *

THE wind was picking up outside the open sliding glass doors leading to the pool, making Junsu wonder if a storm wasn't brewing. What was taking her so freaking long? It was beginning to feel like a Mexican stand-off, with her still in the bathroom . . . while he waited impatiently, feeling somewhat like an afterthought.



Punching the balloon cluster he stepped out on the patio briskly striding around the glassy waters of the pool, both hands shoved deep into his pants pockets. It flustered him that the evening he'd attempted to plan around her had already spiraled downhill.

He knew her . . . or so he thought. She had given him numerous opportunities to gauge her level of commitment toward him. But, the awkward somewhat insincere kiss at the café', coupled with her hesitation to move in, spoke volumes as well. Now that he was more than ready to initiate something physical between them she was a sloppy, drunken mess . . .

Not to mention, by morning JJ would have talked with Hyun Joong and seen Saffron, alerting him to the fact she was here. The 'triangle' games would commence. He needed to end it before it began.

Caught up in his own thoughts it dawned on him that he hadn't made much of an effort to keep track of her status. If she wasn't okay, they were both in serious trouble . . . Why did his head always go to the tabloids? Heading back inside for an update, this time he snagged the bouquet of balloons flapping haphazardly at the patio entrance, tugging them in behind him.

The bathroom doorway loomed ahead. Leaning in, touching it gingerly with his forehead, he rattled the knob seeing if she'd locked herself in, his voice gentle and whispery.

“Saffire? You okay in there? Anything I can do to help?”

“Noooo. I'll be right outttt . . .” Still slurring her words, she responded amidst water going off and on, the toilet flushing and then out of nowhere, the raucous drunken singing (at the top

of her lungs) of the 'Boys Over Flowers' OST 'Almost Paradise'. Ending in a loud bang and an even louder . . . "OUCH!"

Startled, he flung around hoping he could get to a kitchen knife to pick the door lock in time to save her from what he didn't know, when it creaked open and her disheveled blonde head poked out cautiously.

Junsu tried not to laugh, but right at that moment, she was a sight for sore eyes to be sure. "What happened? Bump your head? Are you sick?"

"Nope . . . and nope!" Emerging slowly, she clung to the door jamb to steady herself, knowing that if nothing else, at least she 'felt' cleaner and with the smell of strong coffee wafting through the room, quite unexpectedly she was longing for donuts.

Studying the distance between the doorway and the bedroom, hoping she could make it without losing her balance, she kicked the wrinkled white dress out before her, smirking as it swooshed to the floor looking sad and forlorn, like a well-worn rag doll.

"Guess I won't be needing thatttt, any more tonight."

Used to being half-dressed in a bikini, it didn't faze her in the least to stagger out into the brightly lit room in only a revealing thong, and one of Junsu's wife-beaters she'd found hanging on the back of the door.

"Whoah, whoah, whoah, holy shit Saffire . . ." As both eyebrows rose significantly, he groaned, his heart racing at the sight of her tight round butt, and perky nipples. He hadn't quite been prepared for this! Trying in desperation to keep calm, and refocus his attention away from her large breasts he gulped loudly. "Ready for some coffee now?"

But, the carefree beachcomber Saffire . . . comfortable in her skin, paid no attention to his dilemma, immediately giving up her quest for the bedroom, weaving instead toward the large cluster of pink and white balloons.

"Oooo, Junsuuu, loookkkee . . ." Purring like a satisfied kitten she followed them childishly as they hurtled back through the double doors in the wind, headed for the stormy night sky over the swimming pool. "OH! OH! I can't catch themmm . . . dammmnnn . . . alllll gonnne." Palms in the air, she stuck out her lower lip, dropping despondently at the edge of the pool instead.

Lunging toward her Junsu hoped to God she wasn't going to seize this particular moment to enjoy a drunken dip in the heated pool, steaming invitingly. With the wind blowing it felt much colder than the 65 degrees the outside thermometer was reading. If she plunged into the water, too drunk to swim, he would end up doing mouth-to-mouth. He didn't need an ambulance here anymore than he'd worried about one inside, moments earlier.

“AISHHH, SAFFIRE! Yeobeso (honey)! DON'T . . . Its cold out here and you're . . . ahhh, well . . . practically . . . naked. Come on back inside. I'll get you a blanket . . . It's warmer and I made coffee.”

As the balloons drifted away shrinking in size the closer they got to the bending treetops, Saffire studied her surroundings curiously, her laughter tinkling in conjunction with the wind chimes. Ignoring his command to go inside she laid all the way back on the cold concrete arms hanging limply at both sides. The cool gusty wind felt amazingly good to her alcohol-ridden body, burning from the inside out after a night of horror in the skin-tight dress from hell.

Staring blankly into the sky, it didn't take but a few seconds for the sound of the water pump to jog her woozy memory, reminding her that someone told her JJ had requested naked pictures at the side of Junsu's pool.

“Jaeee? He came here, huhhh? Took nakeddd pictures for herrr . . . whyyyy, Jaeeee . . . whyyy? He doesn't love meee . . . no more Cottonnn Candeee Princesss . . .” she deduced, blubbering sadly, rolling off to one side in an attempt to draw her rubbery limbs back up to a sitting position. “He lovvvzzz herrr.”

Pointing one long manicured fingernail in Junsu's concerned, puzzled face she continued her own drawn out, drunken rendition of the two men after her heart. “Aghhh . . . but, youuu . . . youuu, lovvvee meee, don't you my friennnddd? You came for meeee . . . mmmm, least someone cares . . .”

Junsu knew this was his chance, but the words seemed to stick like glue to his lips. Whatever she was babbling about now, involving 'naked' pictures that had never happened . . . meant somewhere in the course of the last several hours (unbeknownst to him), she and Jae had crossed paths. “Saffire, babe please. Listen to Oppa. You'll catch your death out here.”

Oppa. He was calling himself boyfriend. Feeling his soft hands surround her bare shoulders, she shivered uncontrollably beneath him, right before her toes touched the warm water. She wanted

to stay . . . give in and slip into the pool, drifting away into peaceful oblivion. Undisturbed, like her evenings in the rolling ocean. But, before she could stretch off the side, Junsu had her up and in his arms, hoisting her close to his rapidly beating heart, the muscles of his arms strained against her weight.

“Oh no you don’t . . . not drowning in my pool tonight,” His warning firm, he strode rapidly back through the living room toward the massive bed, shutting the glass door behind him with one foot. Adding, as they fell together across the cool sheets, “And, the balloons you let fly, were for you.”

“Awww, sorreee . . . thankzzz . . .” Meowing apologetically for not only her over-drinking but, her over-flirting as well, after hearing his declaration, did that mean JJ was off the hook? Curling up across his muscled legs she lounged against him wistfully, her eyes wavering shut again. Securing his undivided attention both full breasts flattened enticingly against his bare chest through his unbuttoned shirt causing Junsu to quiver beneath her, beads of sexual tension popping up across his forehead and around the base of his neck. Was it possible that even like this she could be any more tempting?

“Guess I’m ready for coffee.” Leaning up, smacking her lips over his chin in a wet kiss, she added breathlessly . . . “Got anyyy doonuts?”

Chuckling, despite her quizzical babbling about JJ and harrowing challenge to plunge into the swimming pool, his fingers stroked across her messed up hair, lifting a strand only to watch it fall gracefully back down around her flushed cheeks.

“No silly, but I can get you some. You forget I’m the owner? Would it help?”

“I, ahhhh . . . donnn know. Naw . . . probably not. Jus . . . coffee, annn Tylenooolll.” Giving in she rolled off his nervously perspiring body watching him rise up and away from her, padding barefoot back into the other room.

* * * * *

THE cool night air from the open window surrounded the woozy young woman’s bare limbs, as she eased into the warm comfortable bedding, the mattress conforming to her aching muscles, the pillow (resting like a marshmallow cloud) beneath her throbbing head.

Out in the kitchen, Junsu, poured the coffee slowly. No added goodies this time. Hot and black. That's what she needed. It was the only way to bring her back to life. Otherwise, how was he ever going to salvage the night? Was Hyun Joong going through the same dilemma? He hoped so. It made him feel better knowing both sisters were equally as incapacitated, and unpredictable.

“Knightttt Junsuuuu . . . Saffire'sss loneleee . . .”

Hearing her sweet, labored voice calling from the bedroom reminded him of her empty stomach. She had asked for donuts and on top of that, she was sprawled out across his bed nearly naked. That just posed a different set of problems. Looking down at his crotch, clearly it was about to be his 'biggest' problem if he couldn't rein himself in and stop thinking about how she looked.

“Is she now?” he chimed in, responding loudly. Dropping one spoonful of 'pity' sugar into the hot liquid, he stirred quickly, reaching into the cabinet for the Tylenol bottle.

“Are you comminnngg?”

“Holy shit . . .” Smiling away a grimace he groaned, “If you only knew.” Taking the full cup and bottle, he headed back toward the sound of her giggling adding, “De, I'm coming . . . right now.”

Precisely on the word “now”, he sat the large white mug and Tylenol down beside her on the nightstand and making a gazelle-like leap across her sprawled out body, slipped under the sheets quickly (hoping to hide his manhood from her already half-lidded eyes). Maybe it would take care of itself in due time.

“Gamzaaa oppaaa, (Thanks, boyfriend),” Smiling, she acknowledged him, not sure why he'd darted over her like a skittish mare or if she could even tackle the steaming coffee he'd positioned so lovingly for her on the table.

“Here, Oppa says take your Tylenol. You can use my water.”

Closing his fingers around the water bottle perched at the side of the bed, Junsu knew marriage meant nights like this together, where she needed him, and he needed her. Smiling, he took a moment to revisit the imagines he'd been harboring lately of life with her on a daily basis. Seeing her disheveled hair, smudged makeup, and pouty lips sitting across the breakfast table as

they shared their plans for the day . . . Kissing her goodbye when he walked out the door . . . Days of longing without her, and nights full of passion.

It was the ordinary, routine of life. No glamour, no cameras, no pretenses. That's what he wanted. He was sure of it. Even though he didn't really 'like' drunken Saffire, it wasn't the drinking, it was the attitude in the bar that came with it. When he made her his wife that would change. In fact, by making her his wife, his entire world would change.

"K, thanks." Struggling with the lid on the bottle, she toppled down over her bare legs letting him take it from her, listening to the jingle of the pills as he dumped two in his palm, resting them under her nose.

"Here. You want me to force feed them to you?" Now laughing, he was glad he wasn't a drinker any more, recalling many times just like this when drugs, black coffee and Bloody Mary's were the only things keeping him going. She was already working on the pills and coffee, the Bloody Marys' might have to be next.

"Nooo . . ." Gulping them down, her still inebriated response was lost in the attempt to zero in on his face blurring in and out, as she fought through the need to sleep.



Finally relaxing, Junsu scooted down beside her resting on one hand studying the way each hair seemed to caress her face, curious as to why she hadn't returned any of his text messages earlier, getting drunk instead and clinging to a 'player' like Heechul, to flitter the night away with. It had to have been seeing JJ. Whatever he did or didn't say to her had obviously pissed her off. But, why didn't she come to him instead? His insides churned thinking about the consequences if he hadn't found her when he did.

Without moving or taking his eyes off her perfectly rounded breasts and, flat tummy, the question finally came forth, his voice quiet and velvety. "Feel better without that dress, on?"

"Yeahhh. Tighttt . . . wayyy tooo tight."

In quiet contemplation he wrestled with what to do as he strategized his next move. He really didn't want to play the friendly 'fatherly' protector . . . tucking her in to let her sleep it off. (With a hard-on pressuring its way out the zipper of his pants that was going to be difficult at

best anyway). His choice was to push the strong coffee and begin the dance, allowing the desire to be her lover, ultimately to take over.

* * * * *

THE rustling of the trees outside the open window and tinkling of wind chimes lulled Saffire into a comfortable state of lethargy, imagining the two of them swaying back and forth in her hammock by the ocean, the waves lapping the shoreline lazily at their feet. It was a vision she'd had often over the years, now blissfully aware of the fact she was finally in bed with him. The beautiful, self-proclaimed flowerboy, 'XIA' . . . every fangirl's fantasy.

Gulping noticeably it was difficult at best to ignore the fact that when his lips 'did' become clearer they were pink and kissable, as if floating on a creamy white cloud of vanilla ice cream, forming an appealing curve, making the urge to kiss him seem justifiable and somehow appropriate. She'd kissed him before. But this time, not really understanding the anxious fluttering of her own heart. Unquestionably her heat-ridden body was responding of its own free will to the sight of his bare chest peeking through the folds of the unbuttoned shirt.

So why would her stomach not stop churning? And, the coffee cool even just a little, so she could gulp it down and get on with the night? He was amazing, and sexy. Maybe she 'did' want to try kissing him again. Blinking her focus away and gathering all her courage, she reached shakily for the tall steaming mug.

"Let me." He was quick to offer, his smooth fingers stretching over to assist her immediately.

"Ummm . . . noooo . . . I'm ok. I think." Trying to show him (like with the pills), she was sure of herself . . . nevertheless, dizziness and quaking hands overtook her and it rattled back down on the table before barely getting one tiny sip of the harsh dark liquid. "Ooops, bitter . . . sorrrrryyy," Apologizing, she watched it splash over onto the napkin, managing only to think in the moment as she tumbled back over . . . 'clumsy like Saffron'.

"It's okay. You need it strong or it won't work. What else can I do babe?"

Stroking his fingers down the length of her spine, he cursed himself inwardly, knowing if she passed out, this might be his last chance tonight to let her know his true feelings. If he let it go,

by the light of day, possibly regretting her behavior, she could be searching out JJ. He couldn't keep them from seeing each other forever.

“Just hold me, pleazzze, I'll be okayyy,” The request was a simple one, as wriggling into the crook of his arm, she allowed herself to give in to heavy eyelids and the promise of sleep. He felt so good, his arms enveloping her, a sweet repose. Maybe that was all she needed right now. The kissing could wait.

Moments later, her breathing labored and steady beside him, Junsu listed over her peaceful face, whispering, “Saffire,” hoping she hadn't already drifted off, “are you sleeping?”

“Hmmm? Nooo . . .” With both eyes shut, she wasn't sure if he was actually talking, or she was already dreaming.

Pausing only slightly, he planted a tender kiss on the cool surface of one smooth cheek. “I need to tell you something. It's important.”

“Hmmm . . . Whattt?” One eye popping open groggily, she waited out his hesitation. He needed to hurry or she would miss the question.

“Saranghae, I love you . . . You have to know I do. Stay with me the rest of the weekend. Please.” *And don't go to sleep on me now. Tonight was supposed to be special for us. The limo, a night under the stars. Balloons, champagne and romance. Aghhh, wake up!*

“Awww . . . I knowww . . . Stayyy? Surrre . . . I love youuu tooo . . . you're my Oppaaa . . . my frienddd . . .”

Oppa . . . and friend . . . all in the same sentence. His heart crept further and further up into his throat as he tried to make sense of her response. Dammit, there was still too much alcohol fogging her brain. That was it. She didn't understand. Whatever . . . it didn't matter. She wasn't going anywhere tonight and he didn't have any regrets. He knew his feelings for her were real. But, did she?

Lethargic and tired, Saffire's limbs melted into the bed around her as she gave way to her dreams. He loved her. They all loved her. All the flowerboys. Each of them confessing their undying love, showering her with kisses. Where one left off, the other picked up and continued. When she looked past them, the line was long. Extending out the door and into the hallway, one Idol after another in line to confess.

And as the vision emerged, faded and emerged again, she imagined she was kissing them. So when Junsu's eager lips folded over hers, it seemed out of nowhere her tired body responded shamelessly to his touch, both arms snaking around and under the nape of his neck. The race was on.

With all reasoning gone, fueled by passion and greed, Junsu tried unsuccessfully to stop the warnings in his head. *Dear God! What am I doing? I shouldn't. You're nearly asleep. This is wrong on every level. But, you kissed me back. And you're the girl I love. So, why not dammit . . . I'm going to marry you.*

Obsessed with everything about her, the moist probing of her minty tasting tongue coupled with the one sip of coffee was intoxicating at best. Stripped down, she was naked in his arms in a matter of seconds, even though to Saffire . . . in her mixed up, alcoholic induced imagination, her fantasies ran rampant.

With an insatiable hunger for sex beginning to awaken inside her, instead of being Junsu, he began to represent every man she had ever desired and could never have. He was her favorite professor in school, the pizza delivery boy, the lifeguard on Malibu beach. He was the sexy club bartender, Heechul, Taemin, and even . . . 'Baek Sung Jo'.

Conjoined tightly together, poor Junsu, having opened the door to her untamed vulnerability, languished underneath her hot skin, allowing her to take him into the raw, salacious world he had only fantasized about going with her.

Devouring every inch of him with her lips, hands and body he couldn't help but wonder, who in God's name had taught her how to pleasure a man to such heights? Stupid Antonio no doubt. Didn't matter . . . she was in control, despite her giddy inebriated state, (making the transition from little girl to seductress that much more enticing).

As she undulated above him, eyes clamped shut, long hair falling into damp strings about her pinched face he arched his back in compliance, feeling himself breaking away into sweet oblivion. He was a willing prisoner and she alone held the key.

It was over before it had barely begun. Dropping away from each other ragged and spent, Saffire curled into the fetal position against him finally giving in to the heaviness of sleep.

With lightning flashes and the onset of faint thunder outside the cracked window, now (after the fact) Junsu wrapped one arm about her bare waist. Should he be ashamed of himself for ‘taking’ this free-spirited, modern day flower child gripping his heart? Rationalizing it out instead, telling himself he couldn’t get enough of her, the lost romance of the evening seemed trivial, paling in comparison to their lovemaking.

This would be a conscious choice there would be no turning back from. The unusual night serving only to solidify his resolve to marry her . . . and soon!

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