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FEAR



MARCH 13th, 2017 – 3:50 P.M. – UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, L.A. – VIP FLOOR

IN one horrific moment, Sandra’s future was forever changed. Now, she had no choice **BUT** to deal with Kyong in the only way she knew how. She would have to clip him at the knees and move on . . . alone . . . again.

Having only heard ‘my Saffire’, Saffron visibly shaken, grabbed her mother’s wrists, a flurry of illogical images bombarding her groggy senses. The always accusing face of a father who’d never loved her, a tiny, dark-haired Asian girl kicking her legs leisurely against the stroller, and lastly . . . Sandra (shock and revulsion searing through her like a lightning bolt).

Kyong had never been one for diplomacy, no matter what the situation, but what WAS he accusing her of, and why? And, who was the toddler? Grasping at straws, Saffron tried quickly to piece together some framework of memories that might bring this bizarre situation into focus.

“Mother?” Hoping to get back to that place of peace she’d experienced right before waking up into this nightmare of reality, she looked to Sandra for some sort of an answer.

“It’s nothing sweetheart. Your FATHER’S obviously been DRINKING AGAIN.” Her voice clipped and dripping with sarcasm, the tall woman wrapped one arm about her daughter protectively, dismissing Kyong with a venomous gleam in her eyes. “Don’t know why he insists on going out in public like that. ESPECIALLY with the baby.”

Kyong, taken aback by his own words and response from the woman he claimed to love, bit his lip, his grip tightening around the stroller handle. “I’m . . . I’m sorry. Sandra? Saffron, oh my God. I . . . ummm . . .” Stuttering to keep himself from throwing up he knew he needed to set the record straight, and quickly . . . but, Sandra’s face said it all.

It was the look he’d seen more than once over the last twenty years. The look that said, ‘I’m done.’ *DAMMIT*. Whatever he’d hoped to recapture, he’d just unceremoniously thrown right out the window.

Daring Kyong to move from the spot in the hallway, Sandra swiveled whispering, “Saffron, sweetheart. Let me help you back to bed. I need to talk to your father. ALONE,” coaxing her back in the direction of the door.

Somewhere between hearing ‘I’m sorry’, and ‘I need to talk to your father.’, Saffron felt her entire body go numb. Tiny prickles of light bouncing around her eyelids, reminded her of the very first time she’d passed out, giving a speech to a room full of executives for Ian’s company. Not realizing she was slowly losing momentum, before she could utter a plea for help, a pair of strong arms swooped her up, carrying her back into the safety of the hospital room.

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“**WHAT** the hell happened?” Brushing a stray hair from Saffron’s forehead, Ian slid off her slippers, tucking her feet under the blanket. “Good damn thing I was coming in here, or she’d have hit the floor like a ton of bricks. Like she needs another head injury.”

Hesitating momentarily, he glared at both Sandra and Kyong realizing neither of them had moved from the open doorway. “I asked you what happened? Did she have a memory? Did you

SAY something?” Fishing for the answers, he knew rested with the couple guiltily wringing their hands in the aftermath, his anger flared.

Not wanting Saffron to hear them argue, Sandra was quick to move forward, pushing Kyong out of the way toward her other daughter’s room.

“I think she’s still a little weak is all, Ian. Why don’t you call the nurse in to check on her. Kyong and I will go on and take Sienna to see Saffire before her appointment. Come on Kyong.” Motioning for the ‘asshole- of-the-hour’ to follow, they disappeared quickly out of Ian’s sight with little fanfare.

Once out of hearing range, Sandra leaned down, tenderly kissing Sienna on top of her head before hissing under her breath to her ex-husband, “WE’RE FINISHED. For GOOD this time! I’ll be over to pack up what’s left of my things later tonight. And, if I EVER hear you talk to Saffron that way again . . . it won’t be Ian you’ll have to worry about . . . it’ll be ME.”

4:00 P.M. – HOSPITAL - PARKING GARAGE

THE sound of heavy footsteps echoing through the upper-level parking garage alerted Hyun Joong that JJ was nearing the elevator vestibule. The walk through the hospital, filled with patients, students, staff and visitors reminded him the cocoon of Saffron’s room was a safe haven he already yearned for.

JJ’s text had been short and to the point.

HYUNG, ARRIVED 30 MIN AGO, TELL ME WHERE YOU’LL BE, I’LL MEET U.

No questions asked, no mention of the ‘call to arms’, he’d had to deliver the day before to set a fire under this man who was unusually out of touch with his feelings.

Standing quietly, arms folded he waited out the elevator door, holding it open until JJ’s tall, form stepped inside. Clearing his throat, he wanted his words to bite . . . but, not so harshly that it cracked JJ’s already fragile heart, wide open.

“Annyeong. ‘Bout damn time. You done being an asshole? Your family needs you.” *Why did it feel like he was taking on the role of Young Jae Ryu right now? Working overtime to see to it that Saffire and Sienna didn’t tumble over the proverbial cliff at the hands of his ‘devil-may-care’ hyung?*

Stepping in, JJ acknowledged Hyun Joong’s greeting, flipping a swatch of long hair from his eyes, his shoulders heaving noticeably. “Are YOU done? I’m here, aren’t I? And, I wasn’t being an asshole. I just thought she’d be better off without me. Especially, considering . . .”

“Jal, (WELL) that wasn’t the right decision was it?” Even after a nap and a shower, Hyun Joong, (still on the brink of aggravation after his go-round with Ian) was hoping to finally put their differences aside for the sake of the women they loved. “De. I’m cool. At least you KNOW when you’re being an asshole.” Grumbling, “F’ng Carver lives in asshole mode without a damned clue,” he knew it would take a lengthy conversation to catch JJ up on all the drama that Ian had perpetrated the moment he’d returned from Australia.

“Ian? What does he have to do with all this? He’s already back?”

Throwing his arm about JJ’s shoulder Hyun Joong punched the 4th floor button. “I’ll fill you in on all the shit that’s gone down on the way to Saffire’s room.”

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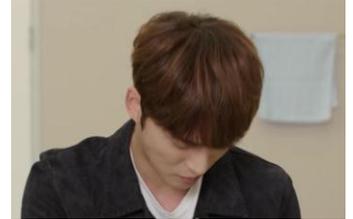
TAKING one last drag on his cigarette, the 4th floor orderly flicked the butt over the concrete wall to the street below, shoving both hands in his pockets on the way toward the closed elevator doors. He knew who Kim Hyun Joong and Kim JaeJoong were. The mission from his friend in Records had been to ‘keep his eyes and ears open’. And, he had done just that. From listening in on conversations between employees, all the way up to right now . . .

Everyone was looking for proof that the sisters on the VIP floor were indeed married to two of the biggest Idols in S. Korea. Maybe . . . just maybe . . . the unobtrusive photo’s he’d managed to capture on his cell a moment ago would be another stepping stone to that end. *What did he stand to gain? Cash. Cold hard cash.*

Grinning, he hit DOWN. Time for supper, and a date with destiny.

4:15 P.M. SAFFIRE'S ROOM

WHERE to begin? *How did he say hello, when he'd never really said good-bye?* Ashamed of his own behavior, JaeJoong found it impossible to raise his head and confront the woman he'd sworn only days ago to never leave. He couldn't blame her if she opened her eyes, demanding his immediate removal (from not only her room but, her life). Struggling with his emotions, he finally lifted his eyes.



In the same position he'd left her in (days ago) she hadn't moved a muscle from the last time he'd see her. Still bruised, the swath of bandage encircling her head, her usually pretty, blonde hair, hung limp and greasy against the pillow. For the 'Cotton Candy Prince' Jae, this shell of his hippie 'Princess' threw shots into his heart that were hard to ignore.

Since walking away her room had literally exploded with gifts of love and support. But, if she had woken up even moments ago, nothing amongst them would've proved either his presence, or his love in her life. In such a hurry to see her, he'd managed to come empty-handed yet again. Maybe he was the asshole Joong had accused him of after all.

Nearly drowning in the Han river himself, several years ago, he knew the staggering sensation of weightless peace that came with a near-death experience. Shivering at the memory finally exploding to the forefront of his thoughts he couldn't help wondering if she'd suffered any in the moment. To slip away from your physical 'shell', only to return shocked and unaware was either the cruelest thing God could perpetrate on humans, or the most sovereign. In the wake of the accident, her body had failed her . . . in his case, he had selfishly tempted death, for the possession of a ring.

In the silence of the moment, it hit him . . . *Speaking of rings? What had happened to the wedding band he'd removed in Sienna's room?* Anxiously tugging at his empty ring finger, suddenly the weight of his commitment bore down on him. Frustrated, he wished he'd taken time

to secure another one before re-entering the hospital. They still weren't legal, potentially causing a multitude of issues if not taken care of immediately.

“Mianhae Princess . . . Mianhae.” Stroking her hand, he whispered an apology he had no right to request, almost afraid she would sense his pain merely by touch. Sorry wouldn't have brought her back from the brink of death. Nor would it have covered him for deserting her if she'd died. Processing where the future would take them had been uppermost on his mind since receiving Joong's call. Seeing her again only served to solidify his resolve to turn his back on everything he'd worked for if need be, to raise his daughter and not give up on either of them.

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“**JJ** is that you? Locked in a tunnel of unconsciousness, Saffire's ears perked up at the familiar lilt to his voice. Feeling warm skin against her fingers, she fought to lift them, confusion setting in.

“What are you sorry for? Did something happen? Uncle told me it wasn't my time. But, I didn't get it. Not my time for what? I distinctly remember holding 'She-Devil', even though she died in the fire.”



“Don't ever think it's going to be that easy to get rid of me again.” Chiding her JaeJoong choked back a sob, knowing he needed to stay positive.

Zeroing in on his words, Saffire imagined the perfectly, handsome face of the man she would forever love, focused on a surprising pain in his eyes. Her unspoken response, coincided with her (pre-accident) decision to cut him loose after Sienna's birth. *“It WASN'T easy . . . it was hell! But, I thought you were better off without me. I was wrong. Sooo, wrong.”*

“Saffire, yeobo. (HONEY) You need to wake up and get out of here. Sienna and I need you.” Struggling to keep his composure, JJ wondered how much she truly heard or understood.

“Wake up? Damn, I knew it. I drank too much after the opening, and passed out, huh? Of course, I did. It was my idea, the drinking. No wonder I saw Uncle and kitty, I always have crazy

dreams when I drink.” Remembering a conversation with Saffron about going out for drinks she couldn’t figure out what had happened afterward, to put her in this weird state of limbo.

“Sienna’s here Princess. Just down the hall. I can bring her in, just say the word.” Leaning down JJ studied Saffire’s face, almost as if daring her to open her eyes at the mention of their daughter.

“Nooo, not if I’m hungover silly. She’ll want to play, and I already have a splitting headache.” Giggling at his somber expression, it sounded like he was joking. He always had such a goofy sense of humor.

With no reaction forthcoming, JaeJoong scooted the chair closer to her head, digging in his pocket for earbuds. Placing one side gently in her ear, the other in his own, he plugged them into the cellphone, the soothing sounds of his own voice singing, ‘I’ll Protect You’ drifting out between them. “Hmmm. Since I can’t bribe you with Sienna, how about this? You know how you love this song.”

The words of the OST (ORIGINAL SOUND TRACK) to his drama ‘Triangle’ washing over her like a wave, released Saffire into a delicious cocoon of peace. *He did love her.* Feeling one tear slip from between her closed eyes, she sighed, the faintest acknowledgement of his presence, finding its way past her dry lips. “Jae . . .”

“SAFFIRE?” *Had he heard right? And, the tear . . . she was crying!* His heart plummeting to his feet, JJ jiggled her wrist. “You’re not dreaming . . . it’s me, I’m right here Princess. Wake up. Oh my God, you HAVE to wake up.” His voice unsteady, he gripped her fingers tightly, silently begging her to squeeze back just to prove him right. But, nothing came. The earbud ripped from his own ear, hers still sat snugly against her skin, the song murmuring on, despite his excitement.

With no other visible response forthcoming he flipped the bedside switch to alert a nurse, Orderly, SOMEONE.

“Coming!” Her Korean sketchy, Nurse Baker’s voice through the speaker, broke JJ’s bubble of expectancy, hauling him kicking and screaming back into reality. Hoping it wasn’t an

emergency she dropped the chart she was working on, already headed down the hall toward Saffire's room, grabbing the bi-lingual Orderly on the way.

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HER eyelids twitching uncontrollably, Saffire heard the sensation of beats and tones in one ear abruptly stop, while JJ's voice beckoned her to wake up in the other. Rambling on in the dark vastness of her own mind, she also heard the voice of someone unfamiliar, followed by . . . of all things, a Korean translation of the conversation.

"SO. It seems as if our Mrs. Kim is having some positive signs of coming back to us. These tears, whispers and such you're telling me about . . . they're normal. Nothing to get overly excited about." Waiting out the Orderly's translation to JaeJoong, Nurse Baker grinned.

"You mean she isn't going to sit up in bed, and start talking like Saffron did?" Disappointment evident in his voice JJ returned Nurse Baker's smile, accepting the reasoning to the best of his ability.

"Lee Bom, tell him we don't know but, possibly. We still haven't been able to come any conclusions about her significant drop in blood pressure yesterday. Like the doctor said, we thought she might have had some brain swelling, but this mornings' tests showed everything was normal. Guessing she just isn't ready yet. She was probably waiting for you." Patting his shoulder comfortingly her heart swelled. "It's nice to see you back here. Look what good it's done for her already. She knows."

The heart of the woman who'd managed to oversee both girls' health, and subsequently dramatic love lives over the last few days had softened considerably to both 'husbands'. Hoping after today, this sister responded much the same as the redhead Saffron had, she turned away motioning the Orderly Lee Bom, to follow, anxious to give her co-workers the good news.

"Gamza." Nodding in thanks, JJ watched her leave, desperately wishing she could've given him more to go on. This only meant more waiting. Releasing the earbuds, he'd been clutching

tightly, JaeJoong meandered toward the other side of the bed, examining each and every detail of Saffire's body shape, molded under the blanket.

“KIM JAEJOONG . . . talk to me. Where the hell are you going?” Groping for a sleeve that wasn't there, a still confused Saffire attempted to hang on to JJ's arm as he moved away. *“What was that all about? I heard that person say I had a test. I hate tests. I'm in the hospital huh? Am I SICK? So, I'm not hungover or dreaming. Just tell me, please! And, why did she call me Mrs. Kim? When did we get married? I don't remember. I hate being left in the dark like this. Can't you just slap me or something, so I know you're real?”*

Eyes to the ceiling, JJ wished hard for Young Jae's down-to-earth advice about this complicated daughter of his, always believing it was at the spirit's heavenly manipulations they'd ever met in the first place.

“Aishhh Uncle. When she comes to, I hope she'll understand why I told everyone she was my wife. It was the only way. And, you know how much I love her. I won't screw things up again. Promise.”

Now, when he needed to hear from him the most, he was silent, leaving the Idol to his own defenses . . . right or wrong.

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