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BREAKING NEWS



MARCH 13th, 2017 – 10:00 P.M. – UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, L.A. – SAFFIRE’S ROOM

“**WHAT** are they saying? I need to turn it up, it’s about US. Are we seriously **THIS** newsworthy? I, I have a niece?” *The sister in the bed beside her had a daughter?* Reaching over, Saffron snatched the T.V. remote off the bed, hitting the + button several times until the voices shot out the undeniably true information, even louder.

“Saffire, world renown violinist and co-founder of the L.A. Children’s Music Conservatory is continuing to improve, but still listed in critical condition at Seoul University Medical Center. Her daughter has since been released.”

His expression grave, Hyun Joong balked, throwing a glance toward JJ. *Dear God! Saffron didn’t even know about Sienna or the accident yet. Now, here they were on national television spouting off facts that could very well disrupt her ability to effectively recover.* Visibly tightening his grip on her waist, she leaned forward straining against his grasp, (as if perched on the edge of cliff, waiting for the ‘all clear’ to jump).

“Even before the horrific accident took place, the Los Angeles Asian community had gathered round the sisters supporting the newly opened Hotness Café attempting to shed light on the importance of local establishments that lend itself to the area’s Korean culture.

Saffron Ryu, a businesswoman from Chicago, took over the helm of the original Cup of Hotness Café in S. Korea with her sister in November of 2014. She has since been able to establish a successful franchise in Osaka Japan, and currently her newest endeavor here in Korea Town, L.A. The sister’s story, along with Saffron’s personal fight for success in a male dominated culture has been a beacon of light for up and coming young Asian women.”

Smashing her finger into the PAUSE button, Saffron’s blood-pressure began to rise uncontrollably as she rallied her options in watching further.

“And, WHEN was someone going to tell me my sister has a daughter?” *Just like seeing the video of Ian’s proposal, couldn’t they at least be up front with the basics? She had to hear THIS on the damned news as well?*

Re-rolling the outburst of her father’s blame in the hallway, things finally began to make sense. The tired-eyed toddler she’d been curious about was not his, but . . . Saffire’s. Regret at now knowing the child had suffered in the accident as well, a hurricane of pushed down memories swirled through her in confusion, her unexpected question quiet, “I was driving, wasn’t I?”

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WHAT was happening? Saffire, her senses bombarded with a confusing commentary attempted to piece together names, dates and information to no avail. *Sounding like she was stuck inside a barrel under water, the urge to be released was strong. Only moments earlier JJ’s soft voice had whispered, ‘Saranghae’ (I LOVE YOU) in her ear, and wasn’t she hearing Saffron?*

Saffron . . . hands groping a steering wheel, the crunch of metal on metal, so intense her head burned at the mere memory. A crying child, sirens, voices (like now) that she didn't recognize. Followed by the soft calming touch of a hand.

She WASN'T dreaming. There HAD been an accident. She could hear the machines beside her, feel the heaviness of the blanket against her legs. Where was Sienna? Was she safe? And . . . Saffron? What had happened to her? Why couldn't she open her eyes, move even a finger, speak to JJ and tell him how much she loved him. Thank him for coming to save her.

Struggling to form words, she screamed obscenities in her head, imagining a life-sized punching bag, her fists hitting their mark against it time and time again. Did no one in the room see her? Sense her pain? Feel her anger?

As the voice's droned on, Saffire swore when she finally left her prison of silence, she would get to the bottom of how and why she and Sienna had ended up in the news!

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“Well?”

Wanting to understand, Saffron ignored the deafening silence in the room, wondering which man would speak first. Did they not think this entire incident would be exploited on social media or in the press? If these men were she and her sister's husbands then the little Asian girl mentioned as Saffire's daughter, HAD to belong to the tall, good-looking man standing quietly, wringing his hands his face ashen at her questioning. Even though she didn't exactly remember the accident, Mother had filled her in on most of the details.

With neither idol immediately answering the question Hyun Joong cleared his throat reaching out for the remote. At the very least, he could turn the T.V. off, buying himself a few minutes to think through an appropriate method of attack, but it didn't seem as if that was what she wanted either.

“NO. LEAVE IT. I WANT to hear the rest since everyone seems hell bent on keeping me in the dark,” Saffron barked back at him, (much like he remembered his Commanding Officer doing

in the Army). “Obviously, I was. No wonder my own father hates me.” Her hand shaking, she fumbled with her grip on the remote, her heart racing, chest tight, adding hauntingly her eyes on JJ and Saffire, “They probably do too . . . I could’ve killed us all.”

“NO one blames you, especially not them. Do we have to do this now? Let’s turn off the news and I’ll take you back to your room. This isn’t something we have to go into today.” Jumping to her defense, Joong tugged her lightly away from the bed, more concerned about her state-of-mind. “Please Hani.”

But, Saffron wasn’t budging. She wanted answers, and she wanted them now. Maybe hearing the gory details would trigger more memories, something . . . anything . . . to help her get through a suddenly overwhelming feeling of regret.

“I said no. And, don’t call me Hani,” she snapped, wriggling from Joong’s grasp, her ears flaming with indignation, hoping the sister at her back would finally wake up to help her understand what DID happen over the last few years of her life, including the accident. “So far it seems like Ian is the only one who thinks I can handle the truth. If you don’t want to hear the rest of the news, leave.”

“Saffron . . .” Attempting to keep her calm, (per the doctor’s orders) Hyun Joong’s soft voice echoed in the silence of the room, wishing all of a sudden that JJ would step in and give him some well needed help. But, looking at him, it was clear he had his own set of upcoming problems with the information coming out over the air-waves.

“DON’T patronize me Kim Hyun Joong,” Hissing under her breath, Saffron’s tone was raw. “Just because I’ve been comatose for two days, and you’re insisting you’re my husband, doesn’t mean I have to do what you tell me. About anything!”

Torn between the need to know, and the safety of NOT knowing, she backed away from the bed, hitting PAUSE again to restart the program.

“And, then there’s a personal side to these two amazingly talented sisters. Following their progress on the road to recovery, unnamed sources report they are

involved in serious, long-term relationships with Korean Pop Idol friends, Kim JaeJoong (of the group ‘JYJ’) and solo artist, Kim Hyun Joong, ‘SS501’ member.

Currently, a reported timeline of curiosity prior to December 2014 is evolving around both couple’s relational status. Proof of the relationships include photos, video and a verified personal account placing them, along with family members, and café co-owner, Chicago business icon, Ian Carver III, on location at another JYJ member, Kim (Xia) Junsu’s, Toscana Hotel, JeJu Island, in S. Korea.

In the case of Saffire Ryu, it’s questionable whether or not she was successful in hiding her ongoing friendship with Xia Junsu, by using the last name ‘Renault’ between the years 2011 and 2014. (Complete story forthcoming).”



JJ’s jaw dropped, hearing the young T.V. reporter seemingly unfazed, telling the listeners he, Junsu’s and Saffire’s most heart-wrenching and intimate details regarding their triangle relationship. Still reeling from seeing Junsu in the hospital gift shop, his gut told him the party was just getting started.

“Sources within Seoul University Hospital confirm the two women have been visited on the VIP floor frequently over the past few days by all parties mentioned above.”

And, all this . . . on the heels of an already, highly controversial ‘marriage proposal’ video gone viral, to Saffron Ryu, by none-other-than the afore-mentioned, Ian Carver III at the Hotness Café opening ceremonies, right before the accident.”

Watching Saffron cringe in disbelief at not only the mention of ‘verified’ information, but hearing Ian’s name and the video as well, Joong bent forward mumbling, “What the hell, who gave them a personal account, from the Toscana? What are we, criminals?”

“Surfacing today is a photo of Kim Hyun Joong meeting with Idol friend, Kim JaeJoong in the University Hospital parking elevator, boasting a clearly visible wedding band on his left ring finger.

Add that to pictures obtained from February of 2015 showing the cozy foursome posing as couples in the Cup of Hotness Café, Gangnam, S. Korea.”

Now, like JJ, Hyun Joong was anticipating the worst, reaching for his cell phone preparing to contact his Manager. Squinting down at the wedding band on his finger, his jaw clamped shut in anger.

Holy shit. Didn't matter they were on the V.I.P. floor, the security of the hospital had obviously been breached. Where could he even begin with Saffron now, after this? The local news channel was giving a detailed account of their somewhat secret relationship, citing corroborating sources. Somebody's head was gonna roll. Not to mention, it was nobody's business whether he met JJ in the f'ng parking lot or not. He should've guessed his privacy could be invaded no matter where he was.

“Saffron, please shut the damned thing off,” he growled, sounding more like a demand instead of a request.

“NO.” Still refusing to give in, she held firm, clinging to the remote possessively, her blue eyes steely with determination. “I need to hear them out.”

Scant memories told her social media had been her friend in the past. If there were conflicting stories out there, she wanted to know what they were. She was smart enough to do her own research.

Afraid to push further, Hyun Joong was stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand he DID want her to remember him, Saffire, and Sienna along with knowing the whole truth, despite the emotional fallout. On the other . . . he didn't want to lose her to memories of Ian, he knew relatively nothing about. The veins in his neck pulsating with indecision he fingered the cell in his hand nervously focused on the remainder of the commentary.

“Sources also report that only hours after the March 11th accident, Kim JaeJoong was personally observed signing parental consent and release documents regarding Saffire Ryu’s 18-month old daughter. (Name withheld).

Secret marriages . . . covered for the sake of S. Korea’s KPOP Idol obsession?
You decide . . . More to come.”

“Holy shit. More to come. I can only imagine. Cat’s out of the bag now,” JJ muttered to Hyun Joong. Dropping his head to his hands, he found himself numb to what should have been indignation and anger. “I guess it was only a matter of time. We’ll just have to handle it.” Reaching up, he caressed Saffire’s limp fingers lovingly, “You need to take Saffron and go. My first priority is right here. I’ll make some calls after I spend some time alone with her.”

“Joong wait.” Finding her way to Saffire’s side, for a split second Saffron’s heart lurched in sadness. *It didn’t matter who the woman was . . . she was suffering. Trapped inside herself, unable to react, respond, or hug her daughter.*

“I’m so sorry Saffire. So . . . so . . . sorry.”

Fighting back the tears, the realization of everything Hyun Joong had been trying to tell her began pushing its way to the top of her psyche. If the report was true, there was a good chance he WAS the man she’d fallen in love with. But, even confronted with the cold hard facts, nothing inside changed.

“Come one Saffron.” Urging her to go before things got any worse, Joong smiled at JaeJoong. *One step at a time.* “I’ll try to help you make some sense out of all this. Mianhae.”

There he was, apologizing again. When would HE ever be able to stop feeling sorry as well? For her, for Saffire, for them all? On top of everything they’d been through, now they would suffer the consequences of this!

9:45 P.M. – CUP OF HOTNESS CAFÉ, L.A.

A cool night breeze followed Ian in through the familiar back door of the café. Sauntering down the short hall to the front, having not been back since the day of the opening, his stomach churned remembering the sight of Kim Hyun Joong standing boldly amongst the crowd, eyes fixated on Saffron . . . HIS Saffron. Now, days later it felt like he was being gut-punched over and over again, with no regard to either his feelings or his status.

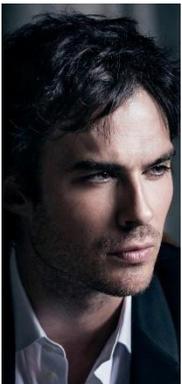
“HEY! Where is everybody?”

Tossing his jacket over the nearest metal stool, his palm slapped the coffee bar loudly. *It wasn't even 10:00 yet, why were they already closed?*

Hearing footsteps from behind the kitchen door, Ian made it a point to follow the sounds through the opening. “Jimmy? What the hell’s going on?”

The café should've been open, raking in tons of money right now, especially with all the online presence he'd been following, and scores of customers wishing Saffron and Saffire would get well and come back. So, what was happening? Were these people he'd left in charge, children? And, what about Serae? Wasn't she supposed to be overseeing things in Saffron's place?

The rising anger, pushed away his jolting stomach just about the time he spotted the new ‘Hotness Wall’ out of the corner of his eye. Redirected to the slew of current photo’s that hadn’t been present the day of the opening, he slithered toward it hesitantly.



“What the fuckkkk . . .”

Finding himself rubbing his eyes to make sure he was seeing clearly, his hands trembled uncontrollably, for smack dab in the center of the space were large framed pictures of none other than Kim Hyun Joong and Saffron perched directly beside an equally as disturbing photo of Kim JaeJoong and Saffire. Arms linked together, Hyun Joong and the woman he’d sworn to keep at his side forever (no matter what it took), gazed into the photo lens, with warm glowing smiles *FUCK, FUCK, FUCK . . .*

He'd come to check things out. Maybe even look for the missing engagement ring. No one else but Serae would've framed photos of the girls and Idols OR put them on the wall. Especially now. Pissed off didn't come close to describing him at that moment in time.

“JIMMY. DAMMIT . . . WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?”

Wanting to fire him on the spot, Ian's face was purple with indignation as he swung around to face the night Manager. But, appearing at the end of the bar, it was Wallace who greeted him instead.

“OH, Mr. Carver . . . sir. I apologize, I didn't hear you come in.” Wiping his hands on his apron he noticed the co-owner did 'not' look pleased.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHERE'S JIMMY? WHY ARE WE CLOSED? AND, WHO THE FUCK HUNG THESE PICTURES?”

Taking a deep cleansing breath to steady himself against the onslaught of questioning, Wallace pursed his lips remembering Serae's final words to him before leaving earlier in the day. *“Ian's not going to like this, but we can't afford to stay open past 9:00 until we staff up. You can't keep working 16-hour days with a skeleton staff. I have limited time to hire new people right now, so find yourself a new night manager first and we can go from there.”*

His only worry had been just this . . . that Ian would get to the café before Ms. Serae had time to inform him of the changes. Clearing his throat, he stood his ground like the professional he was. Ian Carver didn't scare him. He was talented and experienced enough to find another job if he was let go out of ignorance.

“Jimmy quit yesterday sir. Ms. Serae suggested we close early until I can hire a new manager for evenings.” Waiting for the 'shit' to hit the fan, he blinked rapidly as Ian's agitated face began to subside.

“Humph. Whatever. Sorry, I lost my cool. It's been a rough couple of days.” Shoulders slumped Ian dropped into a chair beside the nearest table. “I guess you're doing double shifts

alone then, huh?” Looking up into Wallace’s tired face it was clear the man was burning the candle at both ends.

“Yes, sir.” Not budging, Wallace gulped, saying a silent prayer that Ian had folded as quickly as he had.

“Well, thanks. I can’t be here right now either. I get it.” Hiking his head toward the picture wall Ian felt his jaw tighten at the reference yet again. “Who hung all the new pics?”

“Ms. Serae sir. She was busy most of the afternoon. She’s real proud of it. Says it makes the place feel more like home.” Happy to give the man good news Wallace finally sat down across the table from Ian’s large frame.

“Is that right?” *What good would it do to berate poor Wallace for the handiwork of Hyun Joong and JJ’s number one fan? He would take it up with her when the time was right.*

“Yes, sir. What can I do for you? Need a coffee? I haven’t cleaned the cappuccino machine yet.”

“No thanks. I’m gonna check on some things in the office, then I’ll be going.” Rising slowly, avoiding the prominence of the wall beside him, the tall man started to walk away.

“Ah, sir!” Following him Wallace remembered Serae changing the code on the office door pad before she’d left that afternoon, muttering something about the ‘wrong’ people having access to Saffron’s personal space. *Surely, that didn’t mean Mr. Carver?* “The door code isn’t the same.”

“Huh? Why not? Someone try to steal something?” Jerking around Ian frowned. *Why in God’s name would the code change? And, at who’s authority? Not Saffron’s, she didn’t even remember owning the café.* “Because Jimmy quit?” *That made sense, he and Wallace both knew the code.*

“Yeah, maybe that’s it, but I dunno. I could swear this place is haunted sometimes. Think maybe it’s built on Indian burial grounds or something?” Smiling, Wallace’s shoulders rose. “Eh, it’s whatever. I think I’m just sensitive to that shit is all. New code’s 32016.” Not waiting for a

response or desiring to engage with the volatile co-owner any further, he sauntered away, dismissing his own skepticism at feeling ‘watched’.

“Haunted? What the hell?” Mumbling, Ian reached over punching in the new code, satisfied he was on the first step toward finding what he was after.

DECEASED YOUNG JAE RYU

GIDDY with delight, Young Jae, stroked the fur of his feline friend, ‘She-Devil’ whistling an old Trot tune. He’d finally been given the green light to observe and comment only, on the nature of his daughter’s futures. With permission came power. Understanding his own personal ability to manipulate without recourse he whispered lovingly into ‘She-Devil’s’ attentive ear.



“Sooo, what’s it worth to my sweet kitty to help out your old Uncle Ryu?” The quiet purring against his cheek was all the answer he needed.

“See down there?” Pointing through the clouds he had a bird’s-eye view of the darkened confines of Saffron’s café office. Noticing the cat’s back bristle with interest he continued, “I need your help. Ian Carver’s on his way in to snoop around for Saffron’s engagement ring.”

Pausing momentarily, he snickered. “Not sure why. Isn’t going to help him now that she’s back with Hyun Joong. “Anyway . . . do whatever it is you do and get your namesake down there to discover a bright, shiny, new toy. If I’m not mistaken, Serae left the desk drawer open by accident earlier when she was here.”

Young Jae, a jokester at heart, knew if he played his cards right, Saffire’s new kitty, café mascot ‘She-Devil’ would find the sparkly diamond the perfect distraction for those lonely nights locked away in the darkened office.

“Hurry now. He’s doing the code as we speak.”

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PUSHING through the large oak door, Ian flipped the light switch scanning the area quickly. If it was one thing Saffron wasn't . . . it was neat. Looking much like they'd left it several days ago, the only addition was that of the mail, strewn across the desk top. If there had been ghosts, they would've gotten lost in the debris. Stepping forward his eyes caught the tip of kitty's tail, as she sped through the bathroom door, headed for the litter box.

Stupid animal. He hated cats. Maybe that's what Wallace had been talking about. Hoping Saffron wouldn't want to take the thing to live with them after they married, (if indeed they did) he longed to shut the door on it, to keep it from wandering.

"Sooo, now that we're alone . . . if I were you Saffron, where would I hide my very large, expensive, engagement ring?" he mused, thoughtfully rubbing the bottom of his scruffy chin. "It wasn't at the hospital." Seeing the side drawer opened slightly he peered inside, "Certainly, not the desk. Too obvious, and easy to steal," ruffling scissors and notepads around anyway, to no avail.

"Hmmm, the safe?" Two steps sideways in the small office brought him directly in front of the square metal container. "Nope. If sister and little one were with you, you probably didn't take time for that." Without even trying the combination lock, he flopped into the desk chair, swiveling in circles to scan the entire space. "Or, maybe you wouldn't have left it here at all huh? If you were taking it back to your place, why wasn't it in your purse with the rest of your stuff? The car maybe?" *If she'd thrown it in the center console, or even the glove compartment, it was history. That was just inconceivable.*

Feeling like he was on the brink of insanity, he ran both hands through his head of thick hair, and down his face.

What was he doing anyway? Was the lack of sleep, regular meals and exercise finally getting to him? He needed a plan. Not a ring. He was freaking out for no reason. It would show up eventually. Regardless, he was going to have to win back Saffron's love all over again. And, this time he couldn't use the café to his advantage.

“Shit.” Cussing out loud, he didn’t want to think of the outcome if he couldn’t convince her he loved her, enough to toss whatever she ‘thought’ she had going on with Kim Hyun Joong. She wasn’t herself right now. Well, she was . . . but not the woman he’d managed to reclaim over the last few years. Unfortunately, she only remembered the bad times with him.

Closing his eyes, he smiled, seeing her face light up the night he’d surprised her with the permits to start construction on the café. It had been a good night. No, a great night! Kissing her again . . . feeling her respond like only she could. Where was THAT Saffron? She was the one he needed to pull up from the depths of her memory. NOT, Idol girlfriend . . . S. Korean Baker ‘Oh Hani’. *What a fucking ridiculous name!*

“ALRIGHT CARVER.” Spinning in the chair one last time, he jumped from the seat, re-energized, a plan beginning to form in the back of his mind. “Have you ever given up when you wanted something bad enough?” Spotting his reflection in the mirror above the console table he grinned. “HELL NO. And, you’re not gonna start now.”

11:00 P.M. – UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, L.A. CA

THE quiet hospital halls echoed under JJ’s footsteps. Phone to his ear, he listened intently to his Manager’s voice re-iterating the importance of returning to S. Korea immediately if not sooner. Neitzen’s had already gotten a hold of social media accounts and T.V. reporting, causing a fire-storm of questions, blowing up all of JJ’s personal Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages.

But, how could he and Hyun Joong not have both been aware that the inevitable was about to happen? The worst part being . . . now, he had a daughter to think of. An unsuspecting little girl, stuck in the middle of what could potentially turn out to be the biggest media scandal of his life.

The thing he’d feared the most (in coming back to America), was chasing him like a rabid dog, causing the woman and child he loved, more pain and suffering because of ‘his’ bad choices.

“Wha? De. De. I get it. But, I can’t leave yet. She isn’t awake. And, they won’t let me transport her like she is.” Slipping against the wall outside the elevator he pounded the DOWN button mindlessly. “Ani. I tried to be careful. We were supposed to be covered here at the hospital but,

obviously it leaked out anyway. You need to get my attorney on that. And, start working on an official statement.” Expecting within hours he would begin receiving messages and/or calls from his family members, his back prickled uneasily. “Right now, I can’t promise anything, but I’ll be home as soon as Saffire comes to and I can tie up the loose ends. Yagsog (PROMISE).”

Stepping into the vacant elevator his heart pounded with guilt. No matter what came crashing down on him, whether it be pressure from his company, Neitzen’s, or even family, he wasn’t going to bail this time. *If he had to break from the drama of his open-ended lifestyle to keep them safe, then so be it. It would be worth every second!*

Before ever reaching the parking garage the buzzing of his cell alerted him to yet another call. Hesitant, he put the phone to his ear, but it was only Hyun Joong.

“Hyung, have you left the hospital yet? Do they want you to go back, at least make an appearance?”

“De, of course. Idol first, human second. Isn’t that the way it goes?” Frustrated at what could only be described as the story of his career, JJ rolled his eyes, focusing on the random scratches along the steel elevator doors. “Jal, (WELL) I don’t give a shit what they say, I’m done being some puppet. Not leaving until Saffire and Sienna can come with me. I don’t care how long it takes.”

“Fighting hyung. That’s my advice. You won’t lose your fan base over it. They’re just threats. If you can take on ‘SM’, you can take on some stupid rag reporter from L.A. out to make a buck.” Hoping he was seeing the fighter in his friend coming through once again, Joong smiled into the phone.

“I finally got Saffron calmed down. Promised her we’d talk again in the morning after some of this shit blows over. I’m headed out day after tomorrow for the fan meet I couldn’t re-schedule. Maybe Saffire will be awake by then and they can get officially introduced. Good to know you’ll still be here.”

“De. Let’s hope so. Don’t be burdened hyung, and don’t worry about Carver. I’ll keep an eye on Hani for you.”

As the doors opened slowly, JJ sauntered out, feeling better about his decision to man-up and take responsibility. *He'd call his family immediately, take to social media . . . and, run his own interference if need be. After all, he was the 'Cotton Candy Prince'.*

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