

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

(Part 2)

“Caution! Things are about to get serious . . .”



Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

9:30 P.M.

JeJu Island, S. Korea, 'Toscana Hotel' – Hyun Joong's Room

“**JOONG** let's break up.”

The whirling fan overhead fill the awkward silence between the two lovers. Apprehensive, Saffron witnessed the poker face appear as his hands fell from her lapels, wrapping her waist and crushing her to him. Squirming in an attempt to push out of his arms the moment his lips stole hers, she struggled until his tongue swept in entwining with hers.

Quieting down, his magnetism overpowering her resolve to end their relationship, she dug her fingernails into his strong shoulders, the kiss a sweet torture. A hint of the Insam-cha (ginseng tea) he favored and the odor of sweat filled her senses, curling her toes. Was he saying goodbye?  
*Be careful Saffron his power is great.*

As the pricks of pain brought him to his senses, there was no way he would let her run from him. Breaking the kiss, moaning, “Aish . . . woman you’re killing me,” he kept a hold on her none-the-less.

Jerking free she tried to keep her equilibrium, tripping away from him with a scolding gaze. “Joong, did you just ‘ambush’ kiss me?”

Chuckling he crossed both arms over his chest, “De, It was daebak and the only way I could think to shut you up. I want more Saffron so forget about breaking up. How about we slow it down?”

Rolling her eyes up and down his staunch form, she slapped his shoulder in determination. “Dammit, don’t dismiss me like a brainless twit. This is serious. You know I’ll have a mess to deal with when I get back, between social media, the café, and my sister’s problems. I can’t even consider having anything serious with you right now.”

“Babe you’re a lot of things, smart, spontaneous, strong, and damn sexy, but brainless twit isn’t one of them.” Placing her hand over his heart he loved the fierce glint in her eyes. “Do you feel that? The heat from my body . . . beating of my heart? I’m real Saffron, not a fantasy, not a toy to romp around in bed with for a few hours. The one thing I learned this weekend is you’re running from Ian, your former life in Chicago and especially me.”

“NO, I’m not.” Skirting his glare she pulled her hand from his grasp rubbing it down her shirt, uncomfortable at his declaration. “We both knew this was temporary, you have other more important obligations than me. So let’s stop now before it’s too late.”

“Yah, Babe . . . it’s already too late.”

Throwing up her hands she knew it was useless talking to him. *Freaking stubborn man wants his own way.* She attempted to shift around him and out the bathroom, only to have him grip her upper arms, stopping her from leaving.

“I’m not done,” Rubbing her arms gently he murmured, “I tried to stay away and forget the sexy redhead I carried to the café a few weeks ago. Then you go and show up on my doorstep in that silly skirt, hell-bent on seducing me.”

“Pfft, you didn’t fight too hard.” Flipping her long hair over one shoulder leaning into the soft caress of his fingertips against her skin she added, “You should have tossed me out the door like you threatened.”

“I’m not sure why I didn’t. No, that’s not true, you were refreshing, different . . . maybe I was jealous that you wanted ‘Seung Jo’ and not me.” Now aware he’d fallen for her the first night, trudging through the snow as she sung of her love for ‘Baek Seung Jo’ he heaved a sigh, setting her aside, grabbing his shaving kit and leaving the bathroom with her shadowing him the entire way.

“Yah . . . aren’t you running too?” Her question introspective she scooped up the brocade dress she had fallen in love with at first sight. Folding it with care she placed it in the suitcase feeling the cool breeze from the balcony flutter the curtains, raising goose bumps on her arms.

“The difference is I’m running toward something, not away.” Seeing her shiver Joong marched to the sliding glass door, closing and locking it firmly, his forehead puckered. “I told you, I don’t do one-night stands. I want it all,” adding without hesitation, “so, let’s officially date, starting right now.”

Getting his bag, coat, and phone he stopped in front of her shocked expression slipping a hand around the back of her neck, placing his perfect lips in the middle of her forehead. His goal was Saffron Ryu and when he settled on a goal all his energy went into reaching it.

With tenderness shining in his brown eyes he stated softly, “I’m going to Junsu’s suite to clean up; someone will come for you when it’s time to leave for the airport.”

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Whispering, “WTF just happened?” Saffron’s fingers grazed over her forehead as the door shut, leaving her with the sounds of the festival winding down in the background. The echo of the word ‘date’ banging around in her head was disconcerting at best.

*NOOOO, can’t be true.* Reeling, her mind in a daze she packed, mumbling to herself. “Why would he say that? Dammit, we agreed one day at a time . . . how could he do this? Kiss on the forehead . . . what the hell did that mean? Shit, has to be a Korean thing, like the silly ‘ambush’ kiss.” Scooping clothes out of the drawer cursing when an array of under garments floated to

the floor, she stomped one foot in frustration, picking them up and piling it all on top of the brocade gown.

She hadn't come here to date. No, in truth all she wanted was to find 'Baek Seung Jo' and . . . what? Sleep with him? Well, mission accomplished. Retracing her steps to the dresser she reprimanded the red-headed vision of herself in the mirror.

"Stupid, now what? Go back to the café? Chicago? Pretend none of this happened? Oh hell no. Don't think Joong will cooperate with that idea."

Wrapping the charger cord around her hand she stuffed it into the side pocket of her bag unable to understand how she could have left Chicago on a whim considering how pragmatic she was. Groaning, she felt an ache begin at the base of her skull, hoping to cut off the migraine she remembered at the last minute shoving the medicine into her purse.

Spying the bag on the counter of the kitchenette, Saffron face soften at the sudden memory of Joong reprimand about leaving her things laying around, it was no wonder she was always losing stuff. Interrupting the daydream, she heard the cell rang out.

Dumping the bag onto the counter annoyed it wasn't there, "where did I leave it?" Scanning the room she remembered picking it up before dinner aware there were messages from Yoochun, JJ, and mother, having planned on calling (at least) 'her' back before leaving for the airport.

She zeroed in on the bed where Saffire's snow princess dress lay wrinkled and glowing. Strolling over shoving the white confection aside, she groaned at mother smiling face staring out from the screen, stating she wouldn't be ignored.

"Hello Mother." Half-listening she lifted the limp dirty dress, sure it wouldn't fit in the suitcase. *What the hell am I going to do with this stupid thing?* "No, I haven't left the island yet, ummm . . . had some unfinished business." Scrunching the soft material in her fist she continued wondering, why was she responsible for getting it back home?

"What? Why would you stay in Korea? You know what. Doesn't matter. It'll have to wait. Not trying to be rude, but I can't talk now Mother. I have to catch a plane in less than two hours, and I haven't even showered yet. Let's talk when I get back, okay?" Rolling her eyes in boredom, she sighed at mother's response. "Are you sure? I get in awfully late. All right, thanks. I'll text you my flight information. See you then."

Hanging up, (on top of everything else), now she had mother to worry about. Damn, what if she had caught wind about the fight with Chung A? That would only serve to strengthen her position on wanting her to return to America tomorrow.

Stuffing Saffire's dress in the already crowded case, remembering she would have to find room for what she was wearing. Grinning, she whipped off Hyun Joong's hoodie and button-up shirt, this made two now she had gained, seeing in her mind, the white dress shirt she'd worn home from his apartment hanging in the tiny bedroom wardrobe.



Cursing in aggravation as the snow dress caught the suitcase zipper, ripping when she tugged it closed, she shrugged her naked shoulders on the way to the shower, guessing things could be worse. She could have slept with the wrong man. Thinking, as her evil laugh echoed off the shower walls . . . Of course in this case, there was only one man, playing two parts.

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10:30 P.M.

JeJu Airport – In the Airbus

**UNWINDING** the scarf from her neck Saffron sat in the last row of First Class. Distracted, she tried to get comfortable as passengers filed by the empty seat next to her. Waiting for Hyun Joong to board she hoped they would have the opportunity to talk on the hour flight back. Overhearing talk about the video of her and Chung A, she yanked down the slouch beanie she'd picked up at the boutique on her way out of the hotel, deciding incognito was the fashion for today.

Suddenly out of nowhere, a young man about fifteen slid into the seat next to her. *What the hell?*

“Excuse me.” Tapping him on the shoulder she waited until he shoved his backpack under the seat in front of him.

Flipping the long dark bangs out of his eyes he pulled out one earbud, smiling, “Hello,” greeting her respectfully before turning back to the keypad of his phone.

“I’m sorry this seat is occupied.”

“Yah, by me,”

“Are you sure?”

“Look it here on my ticket, 4B, maybe you’re in the wrong seat.” Flashing his ticket in front of her face he pointed at the seat assignment.

*Surely Hyun Joong is sitting with me.* Frowning, Saffire dug into the side of her purse pulling out her ticket as well, unfolding it to confirm she was 4A.

“Saffron? That’s a weird name, you don’t smell like saffron. More like an exotic flower.” The young man inhaled deeply, leaning over to read the boarding pass clutched between her fingers.

“What the hell? You’re gonna diss me, then give me a compliment? You think I’ll fall at your feet or something? And by the way . . . there’s nothing wrong with my name. What are you? John? David? Something boring like that?”

“No, Slater.”

*Slater? What the fuck kind of name is that?* Her mouth set in a hard line she had had enough of male cockiness for one day. Tilting forward, (ready to lay into the sassy teenage kid, out of nowhere the atmosphere became charged with electricity. Hearing murmurs rumble through the plane like the wave at a sports event, she peered at the entrance, her stomach dropping as if she was in an elevator, racing to the top floor. There stood her handsome, Kim Hyun Joong,



Feeling sick as his eyes swept the interior, they finally locked onto her. His intense stare had her sitting up straighter, one hand gripping her belly, trying to keep a hold on her emotions. “Shit,” she mouthed, seeing his pupils dilate and the ‘Baek Seung Jo’ smirk (he had made his own) stretch across his luscious bowed lips. Saffron appreciated his sense of style, looking both stylish and comfortable in the black coat.

Ignorant of the bottleneck he’d created behind him he stood staring at her squirming uncomfortably in the seat. The longing in her eyes made him believe he was doing the right thing. The saying . . . ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’ was true. He was counting on that. Still wishing to God, he could have traded places with the young Japanese boy, the hardest

thing for him to do in that moment, was to break eye contact and slide into the seat three rows in front of her.

Nudging Saffron, an awestruck Slater couldn't help but ask, "Cool. Look there . . . Isn't that Kim Hyun Joong? My uncle took me to a charity soccer game in Japan last year. He's an awesome player."

Pushing out a long breath, unaware she had been holding it Saffron answered nonchalantly, "Yeah, that's him."

Tucking his body closer to her when a woman with a baby on her hip passed, Slater gave Saffron a look of admiration, "Dayummm . . . you know him?" Glancing back and forth from Hyun Joong's bent head to hers forgetting the bad boy persona he'd been perfecting for his trip to Korea, hoping he could swindle an autograph.

Snapping her eyes to the boy, Saffron couldn't help but notice the acne sprinkled across his high cheek bones. With a harsh bite to her voice she responded, "NO." Immediately sorry when his wide grin immediately turned to a frown. Shit, she'd never outright lied, now she was breaking the teenager's heart. Couldn't she at least have put a spin on knowing Hyun Joong? Her corporate background didn't seem to be helping one bit all of a sudden, thanking her lucky stars when the stewardess's voice came over the speakers to start the safety speech.

With Slater's attention averted Saffron glared at the baseball cap covering her lover's head. Why were they separated? Was it his idea or management? Sliding the window shade up she gazed into the black night as the droning of the flight attendant's voice faded out. Yawning, she needed sleep, the weekend had drained her mind and body. Things would be better in the morning. Trying to stop the wheels from turning she visualized herself sleeping above the café next to her sister, jolting as her hand vibrated.

The cell flashed with a text, it was Hyun Joong. Twisting, she observed Slater had leaned into his seat with the earphones once again in place. Shifting her gaze three rows ahead it disappointed her that he hadn't moved. The text read:

MIANHAE, MGR DOESN'T WANT US 2 B SEEN 2-GETHER. HAVE A HEAVY  
SCHEDULE NEXT FEW DAYS. WILL HAVE 2 POSTPONE OUR FIRST DATE. CALL  
WHEN I CAN.

Sulky she considered how to answer. If he thought she was going too meekly to sit by the phone waiting for him, he must be delusional.

DON'T BOTHER . . . WON'T ANSWER

Sticking her tongue out at the cell she retracted it hurriedly at meeting his amused expression over the seats, not surprised when it buzzed again.

SURE U WILL

“Excuse me Miss we’re getting ready for take-off. Please, shut off your phone, thank you.”

Saffron raised her eyes to the friendly sounding stewardess, assessing the irritation in her face at being ignored. “Sorry,” giving the correct corresponding reply. Staring once again at the words of his text and typing ‘whatever’ hitting send. Powering her phone down she heard the engines roar as the plane taxied to the runway. Blinking as the tears bit her eyes, she rested her head against the seat damming Kim Hyun Joong for complicating her life.

Seeing her answer Hyun Joong conclude she was no longer in shock at his actions. No she was pissed ‘cause he’d backed her into a corner. Cranking his neck around, he saw her staring out the plane window. What did he expect? That she would fall into his arms blindly professing her love? And, she did love him, otherwise she wouldn’t have admitted to wanting a future with him at dinner tonight. Scared, that was it. Just like he’d told her in the room. She was running scare.

“Is everything alright, Mr. Kim? Do you need anything?” Eager to please, the pretty flight attendant leaned into his manager her breath grazing Hyun Joong’s cheek.

“Ani, I’m fine, thank you.” Catching the disapproving glare from his manger as he straightens in his seat, he flashed her a dazing smile wishing for the first time in a long time, he lead a more normal life. Reaching the air nob above, he twisted it wide open, leaning into the head rest, his eyes closing allowing his thoughts to drift away to the last time he’d visited JeJu Island with a woman.

Trying to recall her face, the cobalt blue eyes were the only thing he could conjure up. Should have realized then he and HyeSu were never meant to be? Surprisingly the ache in his heart for her was almost nonexistent after two long years. Now images of Saffron’s smile, the sparkle in her blue eyes when she didn’t get his jokes, and how sexy she looked in his shirts were what filled his mind of late, keeping him going when he was exhausted. The signature smirk playing

about his mouth, his sweet debutante better be prepared for war, because that's what love was and this time he would win.

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**SMELLING** the bread was making Saffron's mouth water. "Uncle, how long before we can cut it?" Her sparkling eyes followed him placing it on the cooling rack while she fingered the dial of the egg timer in her small fourteen-year-old hands.

"Patience Princess, you're always in a rush." Tossing the potholders onto the counter Uncle Ryu patted the top of his niece's red head. The changes from last year to this were dramatic . . . thinner, much to his dismay she was gaining a woman's body.

Oh that he could stop time and keep her the plump, smiling little girl he'd taken to the Majang market (meat market) for their traditional beef dinner. This year she was so reserved, rigid and quiet, picking the smallest cut, stating that Mother disapproved of eating beef at all. What had happened to the imp that choose the biggest, thickest steak she could find, asking what he would buy her if she finished the whole piece of meat. Laughing at her serious face, Young Jae would pay, instructing the vender to send their selections to the restaurant next door for dinner.

"Twenty minutes should be enough, right Uncle?"

"Um, yes perfect." Smiling at her, he plunked the bowls they had used into the soapy water.

Anticipating the taste of the light sweet bread she set the timer, unable to keep from licking her rosy lips. Feeling like her old self after a week with her favorite Uncle, she was painfully aware that this year it was harder for her to find the real Saffron.

Echoes of Mother's disapproving voice rang in her head every time she did something she loved. As usual, when she returned home (just like every other time), Mother would take one look at her ragged nails and declared cooking was below her. That's what they had servants for. But, Saffron had never thought of food preparation as a chore and Uncle encouraged her to stretch her abilities every time she visited. If they weren't in the kitchen they were shopping, her other favorite activity while in Korea. Never shopping for clothes, the two of them haunted culinary shops, open markets for recipes, and new cooking techniques.

Wiping her hands on the dirty apron she skipped to the sink seizing a towel to dry the dishes while he washed. “Uncle I want to live with you. You need someone to take care of you. I don’t like that you’re all alone in this place.”

Startled the large spoon he’d held slipped out of his fingers into the hot water. “Princess you would hate living with an old man. Did something happen at home?” Tweaking her nose, he laughed at the soapy bubbles he’d left behind. He had to ask . . . “Are you fighting with your mother again?”

Shrugging her shoulders she rubbed the soap from her nose. “I can’t go back to school, I hate it there.” Her lower lip quivered and the doe eyes met his slanted ones while the birds cheerful song outside mocked her agony.

Frowning at the sudden change in mood, Young Jae cursed under his breath, remembering her mother at that age and how moody she had been. Why did his little Princess have to grow up?. Crossing his arms staring out the window at the cherry blossoms blowing in the breeze, soon the heat of summer would be upon them and Saffron would be leaving for home.

“Although I would love for you to live with me, you know how much that would hurt your mother. Plus, all your friends are in Chicago.” Tweaking her nose he added, “And, we both know you’ve already got your future planed down to smallest detail.” Considering what problem was devastating enough to make her want to leave the country over, it dawned on him the only reason would be the opposite sex. Smiling at her forlorn face the questioned popped out unashamedly. “Tell me, this sudden decision to room with old Uncle Ryu, involve a boy?”

Twisting the towel she tossed it aside, jumping limberly up onto the counter, “Well . . . kind of.” Seeing his questioning gaze she heaved a sigh, continuing. “He’s in my art class, really popular, talented, so cute, and two grades ahead of me. He drew a picture and gave it to me during our free time.”

Staying quiet Young Jae listened to the sadness in her voice. What had this young man done to break her heart? “Really, that was nice, so he likes you then?”

Blushing, she dropped her head in embarrassment. “That’s what I thought; I asked him why he would draw a picture of me? He said my face was interesting.”

“The boy is right, your features are beautiful . . . unique.” Seeing the shimmer of tears in her eyes Young Jae left the wet dishes, drying his hands, hating the thought of someone hurting her in any way, physically or mentally.

Her voice cracking the blush was gone replaced with the flush of indignation. “He laughed at me Uncle and told me that I was weird looking with the big freckles, white skin, and fire colored hair.” Meeting his stare, the coldness in her voice elevated, “I’m ugly, fat, and I HATE my face.” Desperation coming over her, she pleaded selflessly, “Uncle I don’t fit in there. Let me stay here and live with you. PLEASE.”

Wow! He hadn’t expected this, his Princess was developing a skewed image of herself. He gave advice all the time at the café for those that asked, sometimes even if they didn’t, but none of his customers were fourteen and smack dab in the middle of puberty. Parking his palms on either side of her thighs, Young Jae disregarded the thumping of her heel hitting the cupboard as if she were playing a bass drum.

“Saffron, the boy is an ass . . . babo. Don’t listen to him. You know what I see?”

Shaking her head she wanted to believe that someone in her life accepted her exactly as she was, no matter what she thought of herself.

“I see the beautiful woman you will become someday. Don’t worry. Right now you’re in limbo. Inbetween sort of . . . Those freckles will shrink and fade soon enough, and your stunning red hair and pale skin will be the envy of almost every woman you meet.” Hugging her tightly his heart swelled with love for her. Tilting her chin to meet his eyes he grinned warmly. “And, know what? The right man will come along and LOVE you and your uniqueness, exactly the way you are. Just like I DO!”

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“SAFFRON . . . hey, earth to Saffron.” Bumping her arm with his, Slater woke her from the dream of Uncle Ryu, even though she ignored him, continuing to stare out through the little window. Mindful they had landed and were taxiing into the gate, she finally swung her attention to the teen rising from his seat beside her, hiking the backpack over one shoulder.

Slater lost his cheesy smile, the beauty of her gaze hitting him with the force of a hurricane gale. Shaking himself as the hormones coursed thru his blood at the emotional storm swirling in her

dark blue eyes, surprisingly he could see that her unique name fit her loveliness. With an unexpected shyness and a slight wave, he announced, “We’ve landed, it was nice meeting you, and I decided your name is cool. I’m sure we’ll meet again, annyeong Saffron.”

“Annyeong.” Rubbing her tired eyes she watched as he cut into the middle of a couple teenage girls, grinning from one to the other. Pfff . . . that boy was a player in the making. Snapping her eyes three rows up, Hyun Joong’s seat was vacant, and a cold emptiness filled her chest.

Her heart aching for Uncle Ryu, she took her time gathering her things, sad she was unable to ask for his advice. But then, she probably didn’t want to hear what he had to say anyway. Because, he would be correct. Rising exhausted she recalled his words that day long ago, ‘The right man will come along and LOVE you and your uniqueness, exactly the way you are.’ It was true. The damn man was always right.

From nowhere the scene of ‘Baek Seung Jo’ leaning on the rail swinging ‘Oh Ha Ni’ love letter in his slender fingers, telling her how he hated stupid girls. Watching the exchange on the T.V. Saffron thought Seung Jo was an ass, why out of all the girls in the school would he choose her. Answering her own question, ‘Oh Ha Ni’ was quirky, unique, and optimistic; Seung Jo graded her letter for his own selfish reasons.



Confused even more, Saffron should have known from the start Hyun Joong would desire more than romp in the sack. She hadn’t question beyond the moment, recalling he’d told her straight out that he didn’t do one night stands. She swung out into the aisle, envious of the woman carrying the sleeping child in front of her. The thin sprit of Uncle Ryu right behind her, whispered into her ear, “Beautiful babies, Princess and Hyun Joong will have beautiful babies . . .”

Pausing she spun around, “What . . . who said that?” swearing it was Uncle’s thick voice encouraging her.

“Miss? Everything okay? Did you leave something behind?” The flight attendant strode toward her, concern written across her pretty face.

“No, thank you.” Saffron scanned the emptying cabin, a shiver racing down her spine, concluding she needed sleep. Noticing the expression of sympathy on the stewardess’s face she

turned, scurrying out the door of the plane. Uncle Ryu watched his little Princess, glad she was finally home.

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