

CHAPTER TWO

“I didn’t choose the mug life, the mug life chose me.”



December 6th, 2014

7:00 P.M.

Gangnam, S. Korea – On the Street

THE brisk wind was picking up, tiny snowflakes dotting the sidewalk, as sisters Saffron and Saffire trudged away from the security and warmth of the drinking tent, heads bent into the oncoming weather.

“Damn!” Saffron cursed under her breath. “Why are we walking? Who cares if it’s only a few blocks? I’m freezing.” *Didn’t matter that coming from Chicago her body was used to subzero temperatures, a nice cozy ride in the backseat of JJ’s car would have sufficed, along with it . . . the warmth of Kim Hyun Joong beside her. Who was this crazy girl calling her sister? And, why was she so hell bent on making everyone around her crazy as well?*

Hyun Joong and JJ stood watching the girls leave the tent, headed up the hill away from the Café in the wrong direction.

“I thought they were going to the café?” JaeJoong asked, dropping money on the table beside him to help cover the cost of the Vodka. “Should we follow? They’ll end up in the Han river at this rate.” His dark eyes crinkling mischievously, he flung one fisted hand out in front of his

friend. “Kai, Bi, Bo. (ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS). I win . . . We let those guys over there follow instead of us. I have a schedule early tomorrow. You win . . . we follow.”

Ignoring him, Hyun Joong sighed loudly, muttering as he reached for his coat, “I can’t catch a break, can I? All I wanted was a quiet night to drink and reminisce.” *The two young men under ‘suspicion’ already looked like they were getting ready to bolt.* “Yahhh, arasseo . . .”

Shoving one hand behind his back he shot the other out toward JJ’s quickly. *Of course! JJ never won against him.* “Shit, looks like we’re on rescue duty again. That one, the blonde drunk, can’t remember her name. She hates you, I can tell. Don’t think she’s gonna follow you anywhere. But, aishhh, whatever . . . we can try.”

“Her name is Saffire . . . Ryu, not blonde drunk. Saw it on the paper from her purse. Eh, she’ll come around. Besides, Junsu doesn’t even know she exists,” JJ announced matter-of-factly.

“You DO love a challenge, huh?”

“You’re one to talk about challenges. The bottle clasped firmly in his grip JaeJoong buttoned his coat turning on one heel, following Hyun Joong toward the door flap.

In the time, it had taken the two idols to play the game and choose an option, the occupied table at the front was vacant where the two blonde-headed strangers had been drinking.

Staring at the empty table, Joong slipped into his coat as well, his tone sarcastic, “So, if she’s a damned SAFFIRE, what do you think her sister is? Probably a frickin’ RUBY ‘cause of that fiery red hair.”

Hating to admit his friend had made a joke (that was actually humorous), JJ snickered. “Arasseo. Maybe we should hurry up then before they disappear like diamonds in the snowfall.” Hesitating he peered out and up the street into the darkness. “Get it? Diamonds? . . . Saffire, ruby? Ah shit, never mind.”

“Babo, (STUPID) hyung. You’re so babo!”

The snowflakes dancing off the streetlight, created a romantic cloak of white as the girl’s backs could be seen ahead, hunched over, braving the cold wind. And, directly behind them, the figures of two young men quickly gaining momentum.

“**S**AFFIRE! Wait up for God’s sake!” Saffron shouted. “Heels and alcohol. Jesus.”

Her feet screamed in pain. When she dressed that morning, there had been no talk about walking any further than the short distance to and from a waiting car. Even a short thirty-six hours ago all she had bothered to worry about was when to break down and wash her hair; what Drama to watch next; how she could effectively avoid everyone and everything around her; including Mother, and finally . . . how to get a plane ticket to ‘Wonderland’ to meet her ‘Prince Charming’.

There was no funeral, no father, and especially no knowledge of a twin sister, oddly named Saffire to match her own ridiculous name of Saffron. *What the hell were her parents thinking when they had picked out names anyway?* Saffire was right. Saffron was a freaking spice. Didn’t matter that it was a rare, sought after spice . . . it was still a spice. She had lived with the backlash of it for years.

Why hadn’t her parents told either of them about each other? Yes, they were different. But, so what? Family was family. Even having to sit together, in the same room today was much like climbing into the lion’s den, waiting for someone to be eaten alive. The sparks igniting around the table at the reading of the Will were enough to set the entire city of Gangnam on fire. It was no wonder Saffire had drank herself into oblivion before ever entering the room.

Looking back . . . she was sort of sorry she hadn’t done the same. Now . . . on the heels of seeing Uncle Ryu’s smiling picture hanging amidst flowers and candles, finding out about his Cup of Hotness Café AND sister Saffire, she hated her father even more. His absence, his re-appearance, and more importantly . . . his silence. He was a black-hearted, son-of-a-bitch who had just taken her already topsy-turvy world and flung it around one more time!

She wanted to like Saffire. She really did. But . . . wow. She hadn’t given her any good reasons ‘to’ like her. Gawking at each other like aliens in the middle of the funeral service didn’t give her much to go on, and fighting over the last Korean pancake, just told her they liked the same foods.

Was she educated? Musical? Artistic? Did she smoke? What did she like to do other than drink? (Of which she did extremely well, pounding shots like a pro.) Was she normally so difficult to

talk to? And, so loud? Clearly, her heart had been broken by a married man, she was extremely verbal about that fact but, after all, she too had come to the funeral with a less than stellar relationship record.

The girl certainly didn't know how to dress or behave in public. That probably came with years of living on the beach in California, with father and not mother to help her find some sense of style and manners.

Feeling her stomach begin to roll uncomfortably from the shots she had sucked down to act cool, mixed with the previous four bottles of soju, she knew it would only be a matter of time before she would be face first in the middle of the sidewalk, puking her guts out. Between them, she was sure they were a sight, stumbling down the middle of a dark Gangnam street, two Americans clueless and wasted.

Where was Baek Seung Jo? Korean men were supposed to be so gallant. Or were they? Her already inebriated clouded mind wandered to the several K-Dramas she had watched after 'Playful Kiss'. Hmm, (in most of them) they did do a lot of bullying, wrist grabbing, head-thunking, and stomping away from. But, it was always followed by back-hugging, piggy-backing, and close enough to kiss . . . staring. Confusing as hell but, so enticing.

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T*HE ghostly apparition of a man stood silently in the brisk, falling snow, observing the two women as they forged ahead into the darkness.*

Smiling slightly, he couldn't help being pleased that so far things had gone just as planned. They were here in Korea . . . they were together . . . and best of all . . . If they could manage to get themselves headed in the right direction, they would spend their first night in his very own Cup of Hotness Café. His excitement level rose, then fell, seeing two young gentlemen scurrying with anticipation out of the shadows to follow them.



Wrong two gentlemen. Where in the hell had JaeJoong and Hyun Joong gone off to? He had seen them stand, preparing to go. Something had to be done, and quickly. A slight smirk crossing his thin lips he inched closer to the oncoming females, debating which to toy with. These girls had always been suckers for a practical joke. Would they be as accepting tonight? There was only one way to find out.

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AS Saffron strode silently behind Saffire, lost in her K-Drama dream world, the sidewalk buckled in front of her with uncertainty and looking down a second too late, her shoe caught the bulge sideways, snapping the heel straight off the bottom, sending her careening forward into Saffire's unsuspecting backside.

"Ahhh . . ." his work here was done.

Flying to the ground, her vision of 'Prince Hyun Joong' shattered in the snowflakes around her. *Why did it seem like she had just run head first into a brick wall, not tripped over a slight bump in the concrete?* Rubbing her sore bottom, she looked at the five-hundred dollar, designer shoe Mr. Big had gotten her, swearing she would never wear heels in the snow again. Especially, not her most expensive pair. She thought Korea had been ready for her, apparently she hadn't been ready for Korea!

Finally hitting her breaking point, the shoe had been the final straw. For all her momentary happiness at finding her 'Prince' in an out-of-the-way drinking tent, like the broken shoe, he too was gone in the blink of an eye because of some idiotic sister she didn't even know.

"These were my favorite, freaking shoes!" She screamed, kicking her bare foot into Saffire's back angrily. "Now they're ruined. AGHHH. This is all YOUR FAULT."

"REALLY? Are you kidding me right now?" Spinning around on the ground, Saffire's blonde hair whipped against her reddened face. *How was this HER fault? She was here for all the same reasons. Now they were stuck with each other.*

As the other shoe left Saffron's foot in disgust she hurled them both out into the street, hearing the clatter against the hard surface. *Barefoot in the middle of a Korean snowstorm. Baek Seung Jo's, 'Oh Ha Ni' had despondently exited the bus, in the freezing rain . . . and he'd come to her rescue. Maybe she would get lucky, he would still come for her, and she could leave the sister behind!*

Squinting and wiping away the tears beginning to form little ice particles on her cheeks she felt strong arms lifting her from behind. Startled, the curl of a smile crossed her lips, knowing it was her 'Prince' come to save her. *He had witnessed her calamity, she was sure of it.*

But, the arms around her weren't clothed in a dark, black coat, they sported a patterned sweater, the breath at her neck reeking of liquor. *Who had a hold of her? He needed to put her down and immediately. Should she kick? Scream?*

"YAH. I got her." Hyun Joong's voice was strong, as the sweated arms slipped away, replaced with the smooth familiar hands she had touched under the table in the tent.



The men's voices bantered back and forth, until finally, two sets of footsteps could be heard clipping away hurriedly, and once again she was being lifted from the cold, hard ground.

"Get on my back." Hyun Joong urged her quietly. "You're going in the wrong direction. Café's that way. Babo sister. Can't believe she's so drunk she doesn't know her right from her left."

Baek Seung Jo, her Savior . . .

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“**A**RE you okay?” JaeJoong squatted down beside Saffire, his dark eyes boring a hole into her flushed face.

“I don't know.” Inhaling weakly, she still wondered why his eyes were so deep, and vampire-like in the darkness of the unlit street. Because she only cared about Junsu,

she had never really looked at him before. He was more than attractive. He was close to perfect. “You aren’t going to bite me? Are you?” She squeaked, giggling nervously.

Standing tall, he reached out his hand (like he had in the tent) gallantly helping her to her feet.

“Aishhh, blood . . . de, that’s what I’m after. How did you know?” His boyish laughter rang out in the stillness, as leaning in toward her exposed neck his arms encircled her waistline, letting her steady herself against him.



“I was kidding, just kidding.” Moaning, her palms flattened against the rough wool of his dark coat. He smelled deliciously of the crisp outside cold, his hair flung sidewise in the blowing wind. Close enough to kiss, he turned suddenly nodding at Hyun Joong and Saffron.

“Looks like they have the right idea. It isn’t far, and you’re headed in the wrong direction, come on . . . up! I’ll carry you.” Offering obligingly, he bent over announcing casually, “We’ll suck necks later.”

“No! I don’t NEED to piggyback.” Protesting, she wriggled uncomfortably as he started to hoist her to his back. “I’m not that drunk. I . . . I . . . can walk, I can.” Attempting to back away from him, it wasn’t at all that she ‘wanted’ to walk, it was much more.

Noticing the sudden panic in her voice JJ wondered if there wasn’t some other reason she didn’t want to be carried. He hadn’t met a girl yet that refused to be piggybacked anywhere. Unable to help himself, he needed to know the real reason. Didn’t matter that Hyun Joong and his redhead were already walking away, her loud excited voice babbling about being rescued by ‘Baek Seung Jo’. This girl here was his main focus right now. And, his curiosity was at an all-time high.

“Really? Wae (WHY)?” He finally blurted out, folding his arms patiently even as the snow began to gather in the creases of his crossed elbows.

“I . . . I . . . ummm . . .” Stuttering hesitantly, Saffire knew the reason was purely personal, and had nothing to do with the fact that he was irresistible, and obviously gallant. “I only have on a thong,” she finally whispered, tucking her head down, a bright blush rising up her already colored neck. “Not sure if I should. Might cause problems.”

Once again, (just like the incident in the tent with the tampon) JJ couldn't help snickering at her awkwardness. *Indeed, she was drunk. But, even so . . . her innocent declaration and expression was endearing and sexy. Sisters, thank GOD for sisters!*

“Wellll . . .” he mused, one finger to his chin thoughtfully. “I won't tell Junsu, if you won't.” And, turning his back offered himself up for the second time, feeling her bare legs curl into his open hands as she lifted against him.

He had won! Whatever her drunken fangirling mind thought she was to Junsu, he was about to dispel it in one delicious piggyback ride two blocks in the snow-ridden cold. What was the American saying? “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Ahhhh, de. She was, quite literally, in his hand.

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T IRED of waiting for JJ to make up his mind about what he was doing, Hyun Joong took off in the blustering wind, Saffron clutching him with joy, her bare feet tucked around and into the warmth of his crotch as he walked. The broken shoe already a faint memory, all she could focus on was the man beneath her.

“Could life get any better?” she cooed in his ear, bouncing up and down against him as they walked. “I LOVE KOREA. I LOVE GANGNAM. I LOVE YOOOUUUU . . . WHOOPS!” Giggling loudly she bit her bottom lip at the drunken declaration of love. Feeling his entire body shiver as he sighed beneath her, she realized she might have said too much. But, oddly she didn't care.

After a moment of silence, she heard footsteps behind them, and Saffire's loud exasperated voice. “JaeJoong! Not so fast . . . Ouch, your coat button . . . that hurts. Damn . . . wait.”

“Stop complaining Saffire,” she hollered back. “All you do is complain. Idol under you. Remember? I got my Baek Seung Jo . . .” and squeezing Hyung Joong's neck she began singing “Almost Paradise”, directly in his ear. “Sing with me K-Drama-mama. You know it,” she urged her indignant sister, flinging one arm back behind her.

“Dear God,” Hyun Joong chuckled, “Wrong song ‘Oh Ha Ni’. I didn't get the girl in that one.”

“Ooops. Sorry.” Apologizing, Saffron clamped her mouth shut into the recesses of his warm neck.

She was making a fool of herself but, she didn't care. Feeling exhilarated and finally free, she clutched him even tighter, snuggling her nose against the back of his ear. Tingling all over at hearing him call her 'Oh Ha Ni', her heart began to swell. *Was this what love was supposed to feel like? She didn't know. It had never been an integral part of her life.*

The combination of cold air, and liquid warmth dribbling through her system forced her to give in to the gentle rhythm of Joong's body as they walked, finding herself dozing off, her warm face smashed into his broad back. In the darkness surrounding them, amidst falling snow, reality faded into fantasy as she imagined crawling into bed with the handsome 'Baek Seung Jo', wrapping herself around his large muscular frame.

"Are we almost there?" Mumbling to himself quietly, Joong lifted his head upward trudging with determination toward the top of the hill.

The café' had never seemed so far from the tent before. But, he would persevere. His days doing 'gan-dong' on "Barefoot Friends" had proven he could sweat it out and do the impossible. A boisterous, clingy female was nothing compared to the massive bundles of fruit he had been forced to carry over and over again until he thought he would drop from exhaustion.

He could hear her steady breathing. She was finally falling asleep. At least she wasn't so drunk she couldn't hang on. And, hang on she did. Even drifting in and out of consciousness, her bare heels digging into his crotch, he was beginning to feel turned on and uncomfortable. Adding to that, the incessant blowing of warm breath to his neck and ears reminded him of how sensitive his head area was to sexual advances. It had been too long. *Was JJ experiencing the same thing?*

"Hyung?" His question at JJ's side floated around them as they walked. "I need to get 'Oh Ha Ni' here off me and soon! If you know what I mean." His expression telling his dilemma he waited for JJ's response.

"Ahhh, hyunnie . . ." Smiling, JJ headed steadily for the building directly in front of them, releasing one hand from Saffire's leg to cover his heart mockingly, "It warms my heart to hear you say that, especially since, 'you know who'."

"Fuck you! You lose YOUR balls or something, between here and the tent?"

"Ani." Hiking her back up before she careened off to one side, JJ snapped back. "She's practically naked against me."

“Arasseo, lucky you, you’ve got naked, I’ve got drooling. Stop talking.” Shifting Saffron one last time, Joong hoped to get her feet away from his crotch. “It was just a funeral. Now it’s a damned nightmare. A sexual nightmare at that . . . Just wanna go home.” His aggravation threatening to force his hand, all he wanted was to drop and run. “For God’s sake, she thinks I’m ‘Baek Seung Jo’,” he hissed.

“Well, I’m up against Xia. Bet she asks me to get her an autograph when she sobers up.” Snickering, JJ stopped in front of the doors to the Hotness Café’. “Gotta wake her up. Need a key.”

“Oh shit. The silence is daebak (AMAZING). Do we have to?” Hyun Joong asked despondently, feeling his arms about to give out but, still in his gentle, caring way, not wanting to drop her.

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STANDING directly outside the doorway to the café the satisfied apparition waited patiently for the two couples to make the long trek up the hill. His heart warmed watching them come closer to his beloved home. He would find a way to keep them together. And, as Hyun Joong’s foot hit the stoop he faded away into the heightening snowfall.



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