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SISTERS



MARCH 18th, 2017 – 1:00 P.M. – SAFFIRE’S BEACH HOUSE, CA

IF it’s true opposites attract, then the Ryu twins were born at complete ends of the spectrum, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and perceptually. But, none-the-less . . . twins are also born with a rare, intuitive ability to sense each other’s innermost thoughts and feelings.

That knowledge didn’t particularly make Saffron feel any better, standing at the door to her sister Saffire’s cottage, one hand on the doorbell. Armed with what she could only hope would aid her exploration into yet another realm of foggy memories, she licked her dry lips preparing to plunge headfirst into the unknown, (not quite sure what to expect).

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GRATEFUL to be out of her hospital gown Saffire, donned in a casual ‘T’ and gaudy flowered lounging pants sat cross-legged on the couch, propped against a mountain of pillows, surrounded by an influx of ‘Get Well’ cards, letters and children’s color pages. The soft classical violin solo (meant to soothe her anxiety over still being somewhat confined) wasn’t exactly doing its intended job. Eyes closed, she attempted in vain to concentrate on each note, her fingers moving in her lap to the lilting melody as if she had violin in hand.

Saffron was on her way. So many conversations had weaved their way through her mind since getting the text her sister would be joining her for a long talk. It would be the first time since she'd opened her eyes to an audience of family members days ago. She and JJ's decision to hold off on extended visits had been the right one temporarily, but now after finally being released, it was time to return to the land of the living. They stood on the verge of some major decisions . . . dealing with Saffron's amnesia being one of them.

It had been a week since the accident. She and Saffron had much to talk about. But, would it be a one-sided conversation? Pinching her temples unconsciously, JJ's words of wisdom, coupled with her own sincerity kept creeping to the forefront. 'You're her lifeline Princess. Not Ian, or any of the others. Just remember . . . she has nothing to lose and everything to gain.'

Since when had her own life quietly turned 'itself' so upside down? After three days with this man, she was beginning to wonder how she'd been able to breathe (let alone survive) without him by her side?

"Saffron, Saffron, Saffron. How am I going to make you understand, when you don't even remember? I'm not the strong one. You always were. You're going to buck me every step of the way I just know it." Talking out loud to the faces of the children in the photo nestled in her lap she sighed.

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THE loud chime of the doorbell, announcing Saffron's appearance, echoed about the small room, forcing a startled Saffire to jolt upright, kicking the paperwork from her lap. Rising she smoothed the wrinkles from her shirt, a sincere smile on her face as she flung the door open eagerly.

"OH MY GOD Saffron. You're finally here." Meeting her tall, red-haired sister head-on the laid-back, intriguing blonde was giddy with excitement. Encircling her sister warmly, tears found their way easily down her face. "Come in, come in. Look at you. Can you believe it? We're BOTH alive. Sienna too. Even though it's only been a week, I missed you so much. Being in a coma just SUCKS huh?"

Hearing the door slam behind her, Saffron blinked back tears of her own, unaware of what her reception would be. Feeling an immediate connection with the pretty outspoken girl wrapped like a glove around her awkward frame she eased away from the hug, trying in vain to hold her emotions in check.

“Yeah, coma’s do SUCK. We would know, huh?” Nodding agreeably, she was prepared, already knowing a one-on-one with Saffire meant the gaps in her memory would be challenged. “The house . . . it looks a lot like your hospital room did.”

Scouring the small colorful living area her eyes rested back on this newly acquired sister of hers noticing that for all her exuberance, she still looked pale. Trying not to focus on the faint bruising still visible down one bare arm, her blonde hair was skewered up in a scraggly bun, the white ‘T’ draining all the hue from her lightly tanned skin.

“You know me. I’m a sucker for pattern and shit like that . . . Oops, sorry, stupid me. You’re here to get reacquainted.” Embarrassed she’d already slipped up making Saffron feel even more uncomfortable, grabbing one hand, she eased her toward the couch. “Sit. Let me look at you.” Whisking the paperwork to the floor to make room for them both her eyebrows rose quizzically. “Is it weird? Not remembering any of us?” Her previously scattered nerves beginning to calm themselves she whispered reassuringly, “Don’t cry. I’m the ball baby in the family, not you.”

Allowing this friendly ‘stranger’ to fawn over her, Saffron’s uneasiness began to fade rapidly, replaced with a feeling of being connected and cared for.

“It’s more than weird. It’s . . . it’s almost worse than being in the coma . . . Waking up to only remembering bits and pieces of two whole years of your life.” Saffron’s tone sad, her fingers clutched Saffire’s desperately. “You have no idea what it’s like having to research yourself online just to find out what the hell you did with your life. What happened? What changed? Who came and went? It’s awful. I hate it! And, more than that, I hate that I’m going to have to sit here grilling you like a lawyer examining a witness in court. You’re my sister for God’s sake! I WANT to remember you, but right now I just don’t. Mother, Kyong, Maud and Serae, everyone is telling me we were this together, and that together. And I’ll understand once we spend more time with each other. Shit, I hope so.”

Seeing her swipe at frustrated tears, Saffire immediately sensed the memory loss had obviously already taken its toll.

“Saffron, we’ve always been connected. Don’t worry so much about that. Twins are twins, right? There’s no getting rid of each other. So, let’s stop trying so hard, and just talk. How about something to drink? A snack? I don’t have any of your fancy pastries on hand, but Mother went shopping yesterday and got some cookies . . .”

“Nooo. I’m good. How about a Kleenex?” Aware that Saffire was trying extra hard to relieve her discomfort, Saffron smiled. “My pastries are that good huh?”

“Dahhh, yeahhh . . . the best in S. Korea, and now the best here on the coast.” Rising to retrieve the tissue box, Saffire’s eyes twinkled in remembrance. “I hope just because you can’t remember you aren’t going to give it up. Baking I mean. Here . . .”

Blowing her nose politely, the ‘baker’ in Saffron rose up defiantly. “Of course not. I don’t understand how I got to this point, but I promise not to quit. Already had that conversation with the Aunties at the café. I thought the entire staff was going to tar and feather me when I mentioned letting someone else take over. Don’t really know where to put my energies now. Getting healed is my first priority.” Sticking out her feet, donned in tennis shoes she chuckled loudly. “I’m so damn sore I can’t even wear heels. You must know me well enough to know **THAT IS KILLING ME.**”

Shaking her head Saffire had to agree. “We’re both pretty beat up huh? Every bone in my body feels like it’s coming unglued. Hurts to do much of anything. By, the way . . . sorry if I hugged too hard a minute ago.”

“Nahhh, it’s okay. Check this out.” Easing back, Saffron lifted her long red hair away from the slope of her collarbone. The dark blue and purplish hued bruise popping out at Saffire, momentarily took her breath away.

“Holy shitttt . . . That must hurt like a mother-trucker.”

“Yeahhh . . . It was the seatbelt. I’m sort of glad I don’t remember. Hyun Joong said it was pretty horrendous.” Now relaxed, Saffron’s face brightened, able to mention her newly acquired ‘husbands’ name without repercussions. *There were so many other more important issues to discuss but opening the door to conversation had to come first.* Pleased that Saffire wasn’t holding back as expected, she added, “Have you always been this out-spoken?”

“Always, even as a little girl. I say what’s on my mind. And, so do you. We don’t give a shit anymore. That’s what happens when you’ve been through as much as we have together.” Leaning closer, Saffire ignored the drone of music, focused instead on how to get Saffron to recall even one detail of their time together. “Do you remember ANYTHING? Uncle’s funeral, running the café? Meeting the guys? Any of that?”

“Not really.” Honest to a fault, all Saffron had to go on were the bits and pieces of information she’d gleaned from family members, Hyun Joong, the café and social media. Tossing her tissue in the wastebasket, she sighed. “I took the time to do some research though.”

“Ohhh, you did, did you? Why does THAT not surprise me?” Snickering, Saffire knew it wasn’t unusual for that side of Saffron to be showing up. “And, what did you find out Ms. Investigator? Spill it. ‘Cause whatever it is, I can clarify or dismiss.”

“That’s what I figured. Of course, I knew we needed to talk, but I’m also here because literally EVERYONE else is tip-toeing around me like I have a life-threatening disease or something. It’s pretty frustrating.”

“Mmmm. They mean well I guess. But, before we get started let’s get something straight.”

“What’s that?” Hands clasped between her legs, Saffron suddenly felt like a child begging for a favor. *Here it came . . . this ‘sister’ was going to want something in return.*

“You have to trust me explicitly, or I’m not answering any questions. Swear?” Resorting back to the age-old act of the ‘pinkie-swear’, Saffire’s intent was to force Saffron into accepting everything she was about to divulge.

Hesitating, the red-head stared at her outstretched finger cautiously before realizing she had nothing to lose, her own pinkie curling around Saffire's, hugging it with a renewed sense of purpose.

“Swear.”

“Okay, let's walk. It's cool and breezy out. No sun to aggravate this headache I'm struggling with today. Besides, the sea air is good for both of us, don't you think?” Observing Saffron's jeans and long-sleeve shirt, Saffire pursed her lips, already hoping that taking her sister outside the confines of the house might help her relax and kick-start some well-needed memories. “You've got comfier clothes in my room. Come on. You can just wear them home when you leave.”

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IN all honesty, the day couldn't have been better for a slow walk down the beach. A storm kicking up out over the ocean ushered in a rolling surf accompanied by large, white, billowy clouds (one of the many reasons Saffire had chosen to return here to raise her daughter).

What would Saffron think of her impending decision to leave and return to Korea with JJ? Depending on how their conversation went today, this might well be the perfect time to encourage her to do the same. There would be no other way to get her away from Ian, and back to the true love of her life . . . ‘Baek Seung Jo’.

Shoulders touching as they walked, the twins were a stark contrast to the sandy beach and tumbling white-water. A few steps from the trailing waves, Saffron pivoted, digging her toes into the hardened wet sand beneath her feet, wishing she could (at the very least) get outside herself and enjoy this tranquil setting the way Saffire did.

“How about we start at the accident. What exactly do YOU remember?” she asked matter-of-factly, flipping into her corporate self, (the only person she could honestly identify with), now anxious to get the questioning underway.

Not sure the accident was the best place to begin, Saffire sniffed in a long deep breath of sea air, unable to believe Hyun Joong and JJ hadn't already filled her in on most of it over the last few days. *What did she really want to know? There had to be a clearer way to find out.*

“Let's skip the accident for now and get to the nitty-gritty sis. Talk to me about Joong.” Confronting her on every level Saffire realized there was no time like the present to get to the bottom of her twin's line of questioning.

Staring blankly into the blonde's almost mocking face, Saffron's wheels churned wildly in every direction, about to spin totally out of control as she choked out unexpectedly, “Joong? My Joong?”

“Of course, YOUR Joong, who else would I be asking about? The other night when you visited, after I woke up . . .” Winking, Saffire knocked shoulders with Saffron, “you two were verrryyyy chummy. Just like before. Have you . . . you know?” Snickering she made a sexual gesture with her hands.

Her face flushed, Saffron shoved her away, the red rash prickling down her neck. “Agh-hem . . .” Clearing her throat, she barked hastily, “SAFFIRE THAT'S RUDE . . . NO, WE . . . HE'S . . .”

Wide-eyed, Saffire, giggled like a school girl gossiping about her first crush, “What? You freaking did it first . . . are you going to tell me NOTHING happened between you? I mean you ARE married.”

“It's really none of your business anyway. And, so are you . . . married. Have you two?” Cocking one eyebrow in annoyance, Saffron couldn't believe it. She'd come looking for answers about her lost memory, not to swap stories about their sex lives, or (in her case) lack thereof. *Admittedly if Joong had pushed a little more the other night, she would've given in easily. But, being a gentleman, he'd kissed her forehead instead, retreating to the guest room alone.*

Bending Saffire plucked a pebble from the beach, rubbing the smooth surface with her thumb her response quiet against the roar of the waves. *Come to think of it, maybe getting into this topic*

'wasn't' something she wanted to pursue either. Dwelling on it only made her nights that much longer.

“Nooo, not yet. Like you, we’ve been apart a long time . . . and with Sienna . . . and the coma.” Trailing off almost timidly, she studied the water finding its way around the outline of her toes.

Saffron stopped beside her, shifting her sights to the ocean, watching as a lone surfer carved his way through a massive wave. “It’s kind of weird but, even though I don’t remember Hyun Joong I feel so safe with him. It’s like something or some ONE is pushing us together. Sort of like how I feel with you.”

Following her line of vision, Saffire smiled. “I taught you how to surf. You’re pretty bad-ass on a board.”

Gathering her long hair in the stiff wind, Saffron dragged it over one shoulder rotating toward her twin. “Sister, you’re changing the subject.”

Suddenly getting the feeling Saffire wasn’t taking her seriously, (especially since her agenda didn’t allow for time to walk the beach talking about unnecessary things) still . . . the longer she and the free-spirited blonde hung out together, the more she liked her.

Finally skipping the stone Saffire watched it glide over the surface of a wave, and slap into a wall of water, before sinking.

“Remember at the house, you said you’d trust me?” she asked, continuing to focus only on the darkening horizon. “When I flatlined . . . I saw Young Jae.”

The back hug was a surprise. With her sister’s breath loud in her ear, Saffire felt warm arms crossing over her chest. As the tears threatened to spill again, her voice cracked emotionally, “He called me by my nickname, ‘Fire’ and told me I couldn’t stay . . .”

Locked in an embrace, the two women paused, basking in the sentiment of the moment, the salty sea water lapping against their bare toes. Saffron beginning to appreciate the special bond they shared, even without cause.

Saffire sighed, her shoulders shaking to hold back the tears. “It was amazing Saffron. The light, the peace . . . His exact words were, ‘Not your time . . . Saffron and Sienna need you.’”

“Wow, I can imagine.” Understanding they shared at least part of the experience of being comatose, for that reason, Saffron knew what she was going to say next.

Saffire, shocked at hearing the words, ‘PLEASE YOU NEED TO WAKE UP,’ echoed in unison along with her, clasped her sister’s cool forearms, swiveling to meet her watery gaze.

Whispering in her ear, “Oh my God Saffron. Don’t you see? Young Jae was and still is, the path to our happiness, nothing can stop him . . . not distance; a car accident; or amnesia.”

For the first time since hearing about the death of her Uncle, Saffron cried openly . . . with the person who shared the same type and depth of love she did for him, and who understood their special relationship.

Like they failed to do at his funeral, they were finally able to comfort each other over the loss of the man they both loved and respected. No matter that to one he was ‘Father’ and the other, still ‘Uncle’. Whispering nonsense, (as if communicating in their own twin language) they wiped the tears from each other’s faces.

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ARMS entwined, they made their way back up the beach toward the cottage ignoring the other beachgoers around them. Tightening her hold, Saffire brushed strands of stray hair away from her face. In the absence of more questioning, resolving NOT to let Ian get the upper hand in her sister’s temporary state of amnesia she threw her next statement out nonchalantly.

“SO, now that we’ve cleansed our souls and had a good cry . . . tell me what you remember about our arrogant, son-of-a-bitch, Ian.”

“Son-of-a-bitch?”

“You heard me.” Her stride unsteady in the softer sand, Saffire continued leaning into Saffron hoping they could get him out of the way before reaching the house. “I’m listening. What is the

last thing you remember about him before the accident?” she asked, muttering under her breath, “probably thinks you’ll still marry him no doubt. Asshole.”

Questioning the harsh words, Saffron tugged her sister to a bench, parked in front of a low stone wall, her head cocked quizzically.

“Welll . . . he . . . ahhh . . . he was sort of giving me the cold shoulder. That’s what I remember anyway. When I did my online research, I found out a few years ago he’d accepted a marriage contract with some socialite his parents approved of. And, you know what?” Skidding to a stop short of the tree-line Saffron frowned. “I couldn’t find any social media sites on myself, except the ones connected to the café. I remember being addicted to my devices. I didn’t go anywhere without them. What happened?”

“Your lover was a dirt bag. That’s what happened. He didn’t have the BALLS to break up with you civilly, so he did it to you online instead. You were a mess when we first met. What does that tell you?” Convinced she could (if nothing else) coerce Saffron into understanding why she dumped Ian in the first place and fell for Hyun Joong, the rest of the story would be a downhill slide.

Her worst fears being acknowledged Saffron kept her eyes down, shaking the sand covering her red toenails. “So, you’re basically saying, he didn’t love me?”

“BINGO! What makes you think he loves you now?” It was a harsh reality she knew, but Saffire didn’t want her sister falling for Ian’s crap all over again, (not even another minute).

“I don’t know. He keeps saying he’s changed.”

“NO. Not happening. Don’t believe it. Why do you think Hyun Joong was even here?” Now the conversation was getting interesting.

“I suspect you’re going to tell me, huh?” Cringing Saffron glanced sidewise at Saffire. *She hadn’t been kidding when she said she wasn’t pulling any punches. Believe her, all or nothing.*

“I am. You asked me earlier what I remember about the accident . . . I know you were trying to get me to call JJ right before it happened. We didn’t know he and Hyun Joong were behind us headed to your place. He did tell you they were at the opening, right?”

“Yes. I heard about all that.” Scooting closer to hear over the sounds of a volleyball game starting not too far from where they sat, Saffron toyed with the bottom of her red hair. “But, did I ASK him to come?”

“That’s a good question. You didn’t talk to me much about him anymore. I suppose you had your reasons. Ian probably being one. Jerk. All Jae told me was the Aunties invited him and he brought Hyun Joong.” Feeling the grains of sand peppering up against her arms in the escalating wind Saffire swept one hand across her skin. “So, sis. What do you think that says? Obviously, he wanted to see you.”

“I guess. Then YOU need to tell me the whole truth too.” Comparing her silver wedding band with Saffires’, Saffron hoped finding out was something she could handle no matter what it ended up being. “Are we REALLY married? Cause, if we were, even secretly, I have to think I would’ve told you. Mother said we were extremely close.”

“Mmmm, yeahhh . . . we were . . . are, I mean.” Thinking back to their conversations together over the last two years, Saffire desperately wanted to continue the marriage fallacy for this sister she loved more than life. But, she just knew her conscience wouldn’t allow it. Gulping loudly, she began slowly, hoping beyond hope that Saffron would understand.

“Listen sis. I consider JJ and I married. At least in our hearts. To me anyway that means you and Hyun Joong are too. Neither of us had any official ceremony. But, right now, I’m going to accept it for what it is, and I know the rest will fall into place. You’ll see. And, it’s because we still love each other . . . always have.”

“So, you’re saying, I fell in love with him two years ago over Ian’s decision concerning a damned arranged marriage? Joong joined the military and now he’s back here, telling me we’re married . . . even though Ian thinks I’m going to marry him? Shit Saffire. As hard as I try I can’t wrap my head around all that. It makes no sense whatsoever.” Lost in thought, she slid the sliver

ring off and on over her knuckle. “Would Ian’s decision have been enough to make me scrap my whole life and leave the country? I’m so freaking confused right now.”

Grabbing her by both shoulders, Saffire shook her lightly. “Saffron, listen to me. PLEASE! You can’t question your decision just because you don’t remember. You didn’t accept Ian’s damned proposal. His idea of love is twisted. You told me point blank in the office right afterward that there was NO way in HELL you were going to marry him.”

“I DID?”

“Yes. You did. You wanted to know everything. Here it is . . . Hyun Joong would take a bullet for you. Ian . . . well pretty sure he’d duck and run if the opportunity presented itself. Surprised, he isn’t secretly making plans to do just that, even as we speak.” *Would her firm, no-nonsense approach, finally convince this confused sister of hers?*

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THEIR heads lifting, a shadow blocked the beginnings of an afternoon sun. “Hey ladies . . . by golly, it is you. I was walking the beach and saw that familiar bright combination of hair color. Nobody on the beach compares to the two of you. How are you doing?”

Rising politely Saffire beamed. “Fred, so nice to see you. Saffron?” Winking, she hoped her sister caught the hint, “Surely you remember my neighbor?”

Keeping eye contact with the elderly gentleman, Saffron nodded, accommodatingly, “Good, we were just out getting some fresh air.”

Taking Saffire by the hand the man smiled warmly. “I was sorry to hear about the accident hon. It’s a miracle you’re both okay considering how bad that SUV looked. Tell me, how’s my little beach buddy?”

“Yes. She’s already back to her old self . . . being a toddler, driving me crazy,” Saffire chuckled, “Thanks for asking.”

“Oh great! Such an adorable, pretty girl. This is such a coincidence bumping into the two of you, especially since you were just on the news AGAIN this morning. Can’t believe you’re suddenly so popular. I feel like I’m living next to a couple of movie stars!”

A bored Saffron stood quietly by until Fred said, ‘NEWS’. “Really, what are they saying about us now?” Grabbing Saffire by the hand she squeezed it nervously, not thinking he was prying but, truly concerned about them, a shiver racing down her spine at his curiosity. “I thought the hype would’ve died down after a few days.”

“Well, look here, see for yourself.” Digging his phone from his pants pocket he quickly pulled up the news app, holding it out for Saffire to take.

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“**THIS** is bad . . . this is REALLY bad.” Biting down on one fingernail, Saffire wasn’t sure how she was going to relate to Saffron the harm the interview could very well have done to her current relationship with JJ.

“How so?” Quirking her head sidewise, Saffron pulled her sister’s finger from her mouth motherly. “Don’t bite. Bad habit.”

“It’s complicated.” Seeing the cottage coming into view, Saffire was grateful for the sudden opportunity to finally be alone again.

“Again, I say . . . how so? Speak. Tell me. All I saw was a final confirmation that what you told me is true. I DO have a real relationship with Hyun Joong. Is it bad because now the whole world knows I was trying to beat the living hell out of some girl I don’t even freaking remember? Probably isn’t good for the café publicity huh?” A strange excitement bubbling up inside her stomach Saffron grinned. “I should be worried ‘cause that’s not like me at all. She must’ve pissed me off hard-core. Explain it, PLEASE.”

Stopping at the steps Saffire swiveled in frustration at her odd change of attitude, barking back, “She was Hyun Joong’s ex, and can’t we just skip over this one?” Sister was hyping up over the fall-out years later over a stupid cat-fight . . . but for her, all the interview had done was

solidify her reasoning for keeping JJ and Sienna out of the media since leaving S. Korea. Now, for that same reason, she wanted desperately to return with JJ. But, just the same, she surely didn't want to risk being buried in the country somewhere, trapped and unable to do anything for fear of exposing their lives to everyone.

Her tone softening, she sighed. "Take my word for it Saffron. It was the weekend from hell. We can talk about it later. There isn't enough time right now to even begin."

She didn't WANT to have to dredge up their little drama at the Toscana. It was horrible. She'd cheated, Saffron had been accosted by Ian, beat up on by Chung-A, and her parents went on a relational roller-coaster ride . . . It had all ruined the entire event.

"Whoahhh . . . sorry." Throwing her hands up in defeat, Saffron faced off as well. "Was it really THAT bad? I knew his ex?"

"YES. It was worse than bad. Ask him about her. You deserve to hear it from him, not me." Poking a finger into her sister's arm Saffire scolded her lovingly, "And, DON'T let him skirt the issue by saying you're not strong enough for the truth. You ARE."

"Okay. I can do that. What about Ian then? He was definitely with us at the table in one of those photos."

"Dear God."

One hand to her rapidly beating heart, Saffire rolled her eyes skyward realizing that no matter what she said about Ian, or how she painted him, her sister would have to come to her own conclusions.

"Yes, he was there. Was he an asshole? IS he still an asshole? Yes, yes, and YES. Story closed. HE isn't going to tell you what happened that night, but again . . . Joong is your answer. Have you not figured it out yet Saffron?" Turning rapidly, cupping the red-head's warm cheeks, she hoped her final statement would carry the most weight. "Oh Hani . . . Baek Seung Jo . . . Kim Hyun Joong is your answer to EVERYTHING. You LOVE him dammit, and he loves you. Doesn't matter what you remember or not. Listen to your heart. Your heart never forgets."

“Wowww . . . that was deep. Are you SURE you’re a true blonde?” Snickering Saffron touched Saffire’s hands mockingly.

“Nope. Amnesia or not, you should know better than that.”

Standing tall, Saffron found herself grinning, wishing she remembered more. “So, where do we go from here, sis?”

“How about back to S. Korea?”

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KICKING sand from the bottom of her feet, Saffire waved one last time, watching Saffron take the stone path around the side of the small cottage, and back to the car. Grateful for their time together, now she had bigger fish to fry. *What (if anything) had happened between JJ and Junsu over the last week? Afraid to bring it up, she’d played innocent hoping he would stay silent as well. Now, it seemed . . . they would have no choice, but to talk about it.*

One hand on the door latch the screen slammed behind her definitively. Traces of his presence everywhere around her she touched the JJ coffee mug timidly, skimming the rim where his lips had been just that morning.

Her blatant response to the question of them sleeping together had been a fair one. Nestled in his arms at the break of dawn her desire ran rampant, but clearly her body wasn’t cooperating. Riddled with bruises, sore muscles and bones and sporting a massive post-coma headache she’d begged for (at the very least) a massage, knowing he would understand. That didn’t make it any easier. On any level.

Shivering unexpectedly at the mere thought of having him back in her life both physically and emotionally still didn’t change the fact that Uncle Xia wasn’t going away just because she wished it so. *What f’d up timing.* Setting the mug in the sink she pattered to her room determined to relax and allow herself time to sort out the dilemma that had sent her to L.A. in the first place.

Slipping out of the lightweight pants she eased her aching body into her desk chair. Surrounded by the trinkets, photos and memories she'd accumulated over the years without JJ she found herself tearing up.

Had he sat in this very spot? Combed through Sienna's memory box? Read the letters she'd left strewn across her bed the morning of the café opening? They were gone when she returned, replaced with a dozen pink rose petals in the shape of a heart. In the middle . . . two plastic children's crowns, representing the Princesses in his life. Without a word to her about what he might have seen, read or heard, his arms and heart were open. And, continued to be.

Fingering the face of her phone she sighed, surprised he hadn't already texted her wondering how her conversation with Saffron had gone. It was pushing late afternoon. Sienna would be, or already was more than likely awake from her nap at mother's and he would be back.

Did she dare bring up the interview? What if he hadn't even seen it yet? And, how in the hell would she ever convince him he had still been the one in her heart, even after handing a newborn Sienna over to Junsu?

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