

**-22-**

## **HOME**



**MARCH 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 – 8:00 P.M. – SAFFRON’S HOUSE - S. KOREA**

**IN** less than twenty-four hours Hyun Joong had created the fairytale atmosphere in Saffron’s small courtyard, testing the light in the cherry blossom tree hoping he’d met the expectations she requested in a proposal. *So why wasn’t he more excited? Isn’t this what he wanted?*



With apprehension he sat clutching the guitar, brushing the wafting of petals off his coat. Resting the instrument on his thigh, he reached over, adjusting the tall glass flute making the red glitter heart, perfect.

Saffron sounded so animated and sure of what she wanted over the phone. But, all this had him cringing. Just like he hated the couple’s sweaters he’d been forced to wear, he would suffer again to make her happy.

No matter his misgivings, tonight needed to be a precious memory, because she had no remembrance of him. Not even during his last visit here, on a cold February night, had there been anything this fancy. Just the two of them, curled in a heavy blanket, sharing an Adirondack chair.

Whispering between kisses they promised to write and hoped she could visit sometime during his service. But, it didn't happen. Forces he never would have conceived of, worked against them.

A shiver raced down his spine. *What if he misunderstood her? Worse . . . what if she said, no?* Rubbing a sweaty hand down his leg he cursed inwardly.

*Damn, why was he so nervous? She'd loved him . . . for now. But, what about when her memory did return? And, certainly it would. All it took was a trigger. Could be something small, like a picture, entering her house, or even hearing the truth about Young Jae.*

Strumming the guitar, doubts of 'happily-ever-after' troubled his mind. Surveying the court yard, he cringed. *What the hell, he couldn't propose like this. It wasn't natural for them. They had always been honest in their relationship. This wasn't him being truthful. The fake marriage was at no time meant to replace a real one. If fact, marriage was never their goal.*

Chuckling to himself, it was hard to believe that at one time, his Debutant's only goal was running the café and flirting with all the Idols. Hearing a text message, he fished the cell from his jeans. It was Sandra. The driver had just dropped Saffron off at the front door.

Pocketing the phone, the beep of the key pad alerted him to her arrival. Dropping his head back he stared at the twinkling lights in the tree, inwardly calling himself a 'fool'.

"Damn." Setting down the guitar, he rose, swiping the little black box off the table and slipping it into his coat. Swiftly turning off the lights to the fairytale dream, he shut the door on the event, waiting . . . for his Hani.

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**AS** the SUV drove away Saffron repeated the code aloud, scanning the gate of her house, (a gift from Uncle Ryu). On the flight, Saffire had held a sleeping Sienna on her lap, delighted to relay the story of finding the deeds away in a safe deposit box.

Clicking a thumbnail on her teeth, she located the keypad just right of the massive wooden doors. "Here we go," she muttered, entering the code. Hearing the click of the lock she hugged herself anxiously, grabbing the suitcase handle, as the heavy gate moved silently on its hinges.

Peering in she stepped onto the stone path, hoping by finally being back here her past would reveal itself. *Well Saffron, nothing's changed except the time of year. Shit, no onslaught of memories.*

Disappointed, she followed the path. Strings of tiny lights, hung over a bench against the stone wall surrounding the property. A cluster of clay pots held long dead flowers and birds serenaded her climb up the two steps to a small front porch.

Trading shoes for slippers she took a deep breath swinging open the door. Poised at the entrance she flipped the switch and waited. *Damn, still nothing. Not the silence meeting her ears, smell of cinnamon, or the hard wood floors under her feet triggered anything but, a feeling of welcome.* Stomping a slipper'd, foot, discontentment filled her body and fatigue replaced excitement.



“Welcome home, Debutant.”

“Huh? Joong?” Snapping her head up, Saffron lost her breath, her eyes eating him up in the process. *Why was he just standing there waving shyly?* Unsure of his greeting she blurted out the first thing that came to her mind, “Changed your hair . . .”

Skimming his bangs, he uttered, “De, new tour . . . new hair.”

*Ten minutes ago, he'd planned on being her prince, dropping on one knee to make their marriage real.* Now, tongue-tied he didn't have the right words to even welcome the love of his life.

“Of course.”

The air between them awkward, Saffron wasn't sure what her reaction should be . . . or if her opinion even mattered. Usurping Joong's pragmatic stare, she cocked her head noticing the room around her instead.

“Well hell, did I gut the whole house? Not sure if Uncle would approve.”



The outside looked as she remembered, (traditionally Korean), however the inside appeared modern and minimalistic, sporting a large chef's kitchen that took up most of the living area.

“He wouldn't approve of what? The house or me in the house?” Shuffling his toe against the tile floor, Joong goaded himself mercilessly. *Good job stupid . . . sarcasm is what we need to break the tension.*

Tentatively taking one step, prepared to apologize for his ridiculousness, he cracked a smile in response to her look of wonder, when she flung herself into his embrace instead, wrapping her legs about his slender hips.

Burrowing into her neck, inhaling deeply he growled, “Stop using that fucking perfume Ian bought you. Smelling like Saffron and butter makes me hard.”

Trembling at his command, her hands rose, tangling mercilessly through his thick hair. “No problem . . . you smell yummy too.”

“It's all for you, Hani.”

The love shining through his eyes was her undoing. The last time they were this close she shied away but, not this time. She'd made peace with the black hole left in her mind that was reserved for him and starting right now she would make new memories.

“You're precious to me, you know that?” she cooed, kissing his forehead, branding him with her bright red lipstick.

He was a man starving. With the touch of her lips brought a vision of her warm, naked body weathering under him, screaming his name. Whatever noble intention he had evaporated as he hiked her up his torso.

“Come Hani, it's time to give your Seung Jo a proper hello.”

### **9:45 P.M. – CUP OF HOTNESS CAFÉ – GANGNAM**

**JJ** was late. The Hotness Café still smelled deliciously of cinnamon rolls and spiced coffee, bringing Saffire's senses in line with a cold, snowy night, in December 2014, hovered around the

‘cappuccino machine from hell’, waiting for him to mix her the perfect blend of coffee and Vodka. *Right about now, a stiff drink would’ve placated her perfectly.*

Leaving Mother to put Sienna to bed (at the house Maud occupied in her absence), why didn’t it surprise her that Saffron and Hyun Joong had opted out of the scheduled meeting earlier in the evening. Chuckling to herself, it was no secret they were both anxious to be alone. Forcing them to honor their commitment to come, would’ve only been a lesson in frustration for them all.

Along with the time, Saffire checked her unanswered messages and voicemail every few minutes, rattling aimlessly about the empty, renovated, establishment with night-shift, chef, Lin Song. Thankfully, between stocking and taking inventory, his light-hearted humor (even amid questioning after her sudden disappearance years ago), had served to keep her temporarily entertained.

Now, here she was . . . perched at the dimly lit coffee bar, alone with her thoughts. Only back on S. Korean soil several hours, she was already feeling like an abandoned puppy. Pushing 10:00, all she could conjure up in the recesses of a jealous mind, was the fact that the pencil thin, dressed to kill, Asian woman at the airport had somehow confiscated her Prince in-route to his penthouse.

*Where had she seen her before? Here in Korea, when she and JJ first met? Noooo . . . unless he’d kept her under a rock, she would’ve remembered anyone in his life back then.*

Squeezing both eyes shut, she attempted to rerun the unusual airport encounter again, when quite unexpectedly a different vision of the woman popped to the forefront.

*OH, that was it! The Opening in L.A. The bitch had nearly decked her rushing out of the rest room doorway. Scowling unapologetically the stark woman had clipped off into the crowd, her stiletto heels tapping loudly against the tile floor.*

Then, reality sank in. ‘That’ woman and ‘sappy-Asian-lady’ (practically groveling at JJ’s feet in the airport), were one in the same. Since JJ had been in attendance for the opening, the only explanation that made sense, was he’d brought her with him. But, in what capacity? Earlier at

Incheon, she'd come across sounding like a Handler, Stylist, Assistant, or some sort of employee. However, her actions reeked of girlfriend, or even lover.

Prince Jae, who'd been her 'Knight' . . . Coming to her rescue when she needed him most . . . had arrived in L.A., dragging his post-military baggage along with him. A sleazy, dark-haired leach, who had not only attached herself to him at the opening, but seemingly, 'continued' to claim him here at home as well. *Was that the scenario she was dealing with?* Suddenly, his absence began to take on a whole new meaning.

Lured again to her darkened cell screen with an anxious heart, now Saffire was a girl in limbo, uncertain what to do with this sudden influx of disturbing revelations, or even how to casually bring it up without starting something she couldn't effectively prove.

The chilly room, sending shivers up and down her arms forced her to slip back into her light-weight coat. *March in Korea wasn't near as accommodating as L.A.* Hoping to calm her rattled nerves, she twisted a napkin into varying degrees of disarray, finally tearing it into tiny shreds, allowing the pieces to litter the slick, bar top.

"What's happening to my perfect night Father? Where IS he? Do you think he's with her? Surely, you wouldn't let that happen after all this . . . would you?" Her questions directed to the heavens was meant for the man who always seemed to dictate where the men in her life found themselves.

She didn't want to end this magical day in some petty argument . . . especially not one about another woman. That sort of thing hit way too close to home with Saffron's issues. NO, she and JJ were happy. Ecstatic in fact.

They were finally a family. He had brought her here for good. So why did her heart suddenly feel so exposed? Ultimately, she'd been the one to step back. If his intentions in coming to L.A. weren't to seek out the truth and reasoning behind her decision, why else would he have come? To end it? Was the accident just an unanticipated fluke, forcing them back together?

Now worried, she scooped the pieces of napkin into her quaking palm, balling it into a tight fist. Pacing up and down in front of the metal bar stools, by the look on her face one would've thought she'd just experienced a tragedy in her life, not a long-awaited reunion.

Her Father's spirit seemed far removed, not allowing her any opportunity to settle into the peace she'd experienced meeting him at the gates of Heaven. He'd sent her back. But there had been no mention of JJ needing her. Only Saffron and Sienna. Was it a bad omen?

Flattened up against the wall at the end of the hall, palms sweaty, a dull ache began forming at the base of her skull. *Not another headache, not now.*

"Saffire, get a hold of yourself," she whispered frantically. "Of course, he loves you. You're imagining things. That's what you're good at. You're here, aren't you?" But, even her own words weren't enough to convince her.

This was the wall he'd pinned her to the night of their 'Cotton Candy' date. His lips warm on her willing flesh, hands eagerly groping for acceptance to bare skin. Even from the first moment she'd seen him, she knew there would never be a way to exorcise him from her heart, or her soul. Oh, she'd tried . . . over and over until, waking from her coma to find him at her bedside, something or someone told her it was time to stop running.

So here she was. Back at the place where he'd trapped her from running the very first time. Only, now . . . she stood here alone. *Was she making a huge mistake?*

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**THE** large wooden door to her left finally swung open, JJ's tall, muscular form shadowing the dark entryway. Pushing herself off the wall, was it desperate of her to nearly knock the stool over in her eagerness to get to him, even before the latch clicked at his back? *She should be angry, wanting answers. MAKE him explain.*

But, for some reason, suddenly it didn't matter that she was emotional, still running on coffee and adrenaline to stay awake. Nor that every bone in her body ached for him, and her head was pounding with anxiety and remorse for the part she'd played in their separation.

No, in that split second . . . all she knew, was the man she'd given up everything for, was FINALLY in her arms. And, come hell or high water . . . she would NEVER let him go again!

“Aishhh, Princess. Slow down. I can't breathe.” Giving in to her frantic embrace JJ dropped a package to the floor, nuzzling the blonde tresses around her warm neck willingly. “Mianhae, didn't mean to be late. I got held up on the phone with the Manager going over schedules. I told him I had to go. My Princess needed me.”

*It was a blatant lie, but could he tell her the 'real' reason without giving away one of his best kept secrets going into their alone time at Hyun Joong's cabin?*

A smile forming at the sincerity of his apology, stilled all the fears Saffire had allowed to rattle around her head in his absence. Remembering the warmth of his hand holding hers while dozing beside him in the plane, and moist feel of his lips on her forehead before leaving, was enough to temporarily satisfy her.

Whatever the reason the dark-haired bimbo was throwing herself at him in Incheon didn't matter anymore. He was here. They were together, and as far as they were both concerned, she was . . . Mrs. Kim.

“Mmmm, kiss me Mr. Kim. I've missed you like crazy these last few hours.” Murmuring her request, she drew his mouth to hers, engaging him fervently before releasing his reddened lips to finally speak.

“Is this how it's always going to be now Princess? You aren't going to leave me again, are you?” he asked, rocking against her passionately.

“Of course not. You're stuck with me.”



Grinning, JJ cupped her face, reveling in the deep, blue pools of her eyes. Without her his life (as he knew it) would be empty. She and Sienna were proving to be his calm in the storm. And, on top of that . . . here they were . . . back in Young Jae's Hotness Café.

He'd given in to her mysterious wiles, kissing her for the first time, right here beside the coffee machine, telling her 'even a bitch deserved to be loved'. There was no turning back. They'd made a baby together and were starting a new life.

"What's that?" Her smile broadening by the minute, Saffire bounced around in his shadow, grabbing for the package on the floor. "Is it for me? You got me a present, didn't you? Is THAT why you were late? Jaaeee . . ."

Her analogy tickled him. One thing about her hadn't changed. She loved being pampered and fawned over. Rather than risk more questioning about his tardiness he nodded grinning.

"I did. But, probably not what you might think."

One hand easing her back, he lifted the box out of the paper bag. Grappling for it excitedly she winced at the weight, both eyebrows arched in curiosity.

"Feels like a brick."

"Don't shake it."

Waiting her out patiently, he scanned the coffee bar of the now renovated cafe he hadn't been inside since leaving for the military. His two best girls had done an amazing job of keeping it true to Uncle's original footprint. (All the way down to the large blackboard, JJ cups on the open shelving, and monstrous cappuccino machine.) Interestingly enough . . . he felt just as much at home here now, as he always had.

Inwardly thanking Young Jae for bringing them back, his mouth quirked at the memory of Saffire unashamedly kneeling him in the groin right in that very spot, thinking he was an intruder or worse. And, still . . . the remainder of the night had managed to be magical.

“Jae . . . you brought me a bottle of Vodka! How did you know? I was just craving some.” Her voice shrill, Saffire pranced toward the counter setting it down with the realization that they were finally on the same page. “You know I probably shouldn’t drink any of this because of my medications, but . . .” Crooking one finger in his direction she perched over the bar enticingly, “you do owe me ONE tiny favor.”

“Not THAT?” Desire plastered across his perfect face, JaeJoong snickered, his eyes scanning the long expanse of counter top.

“OH MY GOD. Get your mind out of the gutter, if Saffron found out, amnesia or not, she’d STILL be mortified. Not to mention we aren’t here alone . . .” Slapping at him playfully, she motioned him around the other side. “I meant this.” Pointing to the machine she’d always hated, her grin broadened. “Make me a cinnamon coffee. And, because we’re celebrating, toss in a shot of Vodka while you’re at it. You know how even a little bit of Vodka, drives me crazy . . .”

### **BACK AT SAFFRON’S HOUSE**

**SITTING** up, Joong adjusted the pillows behind his back, careful not to wake his debutante. Unconsciously rubbing his face, he felt like an ass for only thinking about himself. Looking down he caressed the red, silky hair stuck to his chest. Between the bed play she’d conveyed what had happened with Ian. Despite being caught up in the succulence of her body, he listened . . . inwardly applauding how she’d trounced on the asshole, without losing her composure.

Welcoming the pounding of his heart, he brushed wisps of hair from around her face. This woman had barreled into his life, tuning it upside down and finally she was his. But, were they moving too fast? Was it fair to subject her to his world without realizing what it entailed? How could he be sure this is really what she wanted? His life was chaos at best. Could she handle being alone for days or weeks on end? Without recalling their relationship before the accident, he wasn’t so sure. *If she didn’t have doubts, why had she repressed the time spent with him?*

Swinging his feet to the floor, she rolled toward the wall stealing the sheet covering his hips. Soberly, he regarded her seductive back, wanting nothing more than to curl himself around her, shutting out the world. *Aishhh, that wouldn’t solve anything.*

Opening the nightstand drawer, he pulled out the snowflake necklace, along with her letter. No, instead his plan was to force her into remembering how dangling the chain from his fingers, she'd gotten all girly cute at the gift, a reminder of the piggyback in the snow. Sadly, now all he held was a shiny piece of jewelry with no specific meaning beyond monetary.

It would be different had the doctor not noted, she'd repressed the memories herself. *What was the reason? It was too painful for her to remember their time together . . . or what she'd lost?* Gazing at the letter, he couldn't help being hopeful. *Were these items the key to unlocking her mind?* Until it happened, he couldn't (in good, conscience) propose.

Distracted by his cell, he laid the necklace next to the open letter. The ID showing his manager, he stood, headed to the bathroom, "Yeoboseyo. (HELLO)"

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**STRETCHING**, Saffron heard the shower, snapping her eyes open staring over at the series of finch photos she'd bought years ago from a photographer friend. *Fuck! It wasn't a dream. God, how in the hell could she have forgotten a lover like Joongie?*

Rolling to his side of the bed, she hugged the pillow tight feeling her heart tremble at his scent. Her dreamy gaze ping-ponged between his clothes on the floor and the bathroom door, envisioning him stepping out, flashing her a wicked grin, in nothing but a towel (asking her to dry his back)

'GRUGHGH', her stomach rumbling she sighed, thumping her belly. "Damn couldn't you wait till I got his towel off?"

Throwing the pillow aside she reached for his white tee. Slipping it over her head she licked her lips, hoping Joong had stocked her cupboards because suddenly she was craving pancakes. But, not just 'any' kind of pancakes . . .

"Mmm . . . blueberry . . ."

Imagining the sweet fruity taste exploding in her mouth she rose, her eye catching something glittery on the nightstand. It looked familiar.

Mystified her brows drew together, feeling the headache coming on, as she palmed the piece of jewelry, eyes closed. Fingering the snowflake, she tried to relax, watching the flash of pictures gently flow through her mind.

Easing up her breath caught in the recesses of her throat, a faint sob escaping her lips . . . a huge Christmas tree with tons of presents under it . . . someone holding a small box, tied with a red bow.

Squinting at the tattered letter addressed to Baek Seung Jo, dated January 2017, she whispered, “I’m sure, this is . . . special.”

Hearing the shower still running in the background she picked it up, already knowing it was from . . . ‘Hani’. Scanning the first line, she gasped. *Dear God, it made no sense. She must have been drunk.*

Skipping the drunken rambling, her vision narrowed to a pinprick as the words repeated, ‘hate you, love you’, playing a game of ‘he loves me, loves me not,’ with the petals of her heart.

Moaning, she dropped the necklace along with the letter curling into a ball on the floor. Without warning, the pain rolled through her brain with the force of a tsunami, generating a wave of memories that continued to wash over her throbbing mind

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“**BABE**, you awake, I’m hungry . . .” In bare feet, Hyun Joong exited the bathroom rubbing his wet hair with a towel, sweat pants riding low on his hips. Flickering a glance at the empty bed, he freaked out at seeing her huddled in the fetal position on the floor, the objects of her despair strewn at her feet. “Saffron . . .”

Rushing across the room he gathered her shaking body to his chest afraid she’d relapsed back into the frightening void of a coma. Flipping the hair from her face, he gripped her chin attempting to regain her attention.

“Babe, answer me. Are you okay?”

Opening her eyes slowly, they smoldered with a strange indignation.

“Kim Hyun Joong. You fucking bastard! Why didn’t you answer my letters? Not a damned word from you. Do you know how many times I dreamt of you waking up next to me? About as many time as I shot you dead for breaking my heart. That’s how much I love AND hate you.”

Shocked, their eyes locked as he sat back, registering her strange outburst.

“Oh God. Hani . . . you, you remember me . . . your memories . . .” Relief seizing him, he pulled her lips to his in a fiery, passionate kiss.

*Damn him. Did he have a death wish? First, he ignored her for two years. Second, he dragged her into bed as soon as she hit Korea. Now, he thought kissing would solve the problem.*

Palms flat on his chiseled chest she prepared to push him away when his tongue delved relentlessly into her mouth. Disarmed, she blinked a couple times then lowered her gaze snaking her hands over his shoulders, and with a whimper gave in, melting into his kiss. *Oh, who the hell gave a fuck . . . he was hers.*

Breaking contact before they ended up in another round of sex, he dropped his head on the side of the bed, sucking air to calm his excitement.

“We need to talk,” he announced, staring at the ceiling, trying to gather his thoughts.

Dazed, lips pursed she poked him in the side. “Seems we should have TALKED before you carried me into the bedroom. And, why didn’t anyone tell me Young Jae was my father?”

Flinching, he seized her hand, seeing she was dead serious. Exhaling he started to explain, but she broke in ranting in frustration. “I CAN’T believe Saffire wouldn’t say something. And, what about Mother? All these years of punishing me through him, and the biggest damned news of my adult life just gets swept under the rug like it was nothing!”

“Saffron, calm down. Mianhae . . . we all agreed to follow the doctor’s orders.” *But, thinking back, Ian had been unyielding in attempting to coerce them to divulge ALL the information about Young Jae. She had a right to be pissed.*

“You know, I’m not one of your paper cranes. I don’t wilt, crumple and fall apart at the first sign of a storm. You forget . . . I AM the storm . . .”

Her mouth set in a determined scowl, he could see she was conflicted hearing they were all attempting to act on her behalf.

“Saffron. Come on, be reasonable. You were in an extremely fragile state. How could we live with ourselves if something worse had happened by telling you?”

Pausing to consider the medical consequences he implied, she had to admit he had a point. “I suppose. But, Saffire said she would be up front with me about EVERYTHING. I just feel cheated somehow, that’s all.”

“Mianhae, don’t blame her, JJ and I discussed it, and decided because of her condition too, we would take responsibility for it. We told her not to say anything. And, I understand how you feel, but I don’t understand why you would suppress our memories as well.”

Deflated, she dropped her head to his chest, “I don’t know. I guess, I’m my own worst enemy sometimes. After you left, I was so unhappy all the time, I just buried myself in work. Then one night in my office Ian kissed me and asked if we could date again.”

Raising her guilty eyes to his, her voice trembled, “It was so lonely without you. I went home that night and got wasted. Back when Saffire and I were talking about JJ, she told me writing a letter would help me get over you and move on. God knows at the time, I was trying to purge you out of my life. But, it was never meant to be sent.”

Caressing her head lovingly, Joong sighed, “Well, I’m glad it DID get sent. At first, when I didn’t hear from you I was mad, thinking everyone had been right . . . that I was just a fling. Then, when I got back home, your letter was waiting. Reading it, I could tell you were hurting, but you still loved me. It was in the same stack of mail that the invitation to the opening came. So, I decided to go with JJ to get some answers.” Hesitating, his voice caught in his throat. “What I couldn’t understand was you saying I hadn’t written, when really it was you who didn’t write me.”

Confused, she heard the helplessness in his tone. “Fucking ‘A’ . . .” Putting distance between their bodies, she wasn’t sure she’d heard right. “You didn’t think I was committed? Joong, I wrote almost every day.”

Recognizing the fire in her eyes, he waved his hand in distress.

“Whoah . . . that’s not what I said. I wrote for almost six months without a word from you. I even came to the café but, they said you were off to America with Ian.”

A quick calculation and she knew he was telling the truth. She was the one who’d closed her heart and tried to move on with her life. Watching as he rose, padding to an overnight bag on her dresser he pulled out a clean tee shirt.

“Joongie, if you wrote and I wrote . . . then who has the letters?” she asked.

Snapping the shirt, he gathered the hem and slipped it on. “Good question babe. When I got back after your accident, I had a long talk with my manager. After what happened with Chung A, he felt I should channel my energies into my Military life and Idol career, not a fiery red-headed foreigner.” Combing the drying hair with his fingers he gave her a smoldering look, the anger rising in his voice. “Seems, he was the one who blocked my mail and destroyed all our letters.”

“No fucking way? Why?” Shocked, she jumped up, pacing the floor realizing the need to pee. “Never mind, I get it. God, what an act. You know how many times he came in the café looking all sad, saying you couldn’t write and couldn’t have visitors? Son-of-a-bitch. I finally told him to stop coming.”

“Huh. That’s interesting. He told ME you were too busy opening your café in Japan and seeing the tall American. I assumed it was Ian.” Stopping her mid pace, they faced off. “Saffron, if I hadn’t shown up at the opening . . . would you have married Ian?”

Scrutinizing him, the smile she’d been hiding found its way back across her face. “Well, after what happened in the last few hours. What do you think?”

Grinning he glanced at the rumpled bed. “Oh-Hani would have stalked me. But, you don’t have to worry, I only see you.”

“Damn straight.” Going on tiptoes she gave him a peck on the lips. “And I’ll stay by your side, no matter how many random Idols flirt with me.”

Threading fingers thru her red hair, he blinked clinging to her gaze, “Saffron . . . marry me.”  
*This was the perfect setting. This was real.*

“Hyun Joong, I, I don’t know what to say.” Stuttering, she gripped his wrists, wondering where were the flowers, glitz and glitter she’d asked for? He didn’t even have a ring.

“Arasseo, I’ll give you two choices. Yes, or maybe. Pick one. I know this isn’t the setting you were expecting but, saranghae, I love you. Shouldn’t that be enough?”

A thumb to her teeth she balked sheepishly, “What about, ‘No’?”

“Not an option.” Lifting a brow, he took her hand twisting the wedding band off her finger. “We’ve already made a commitment.”

Fishing out the snowflake ring from the pocket of his sweats, he held it up between his thumb and forefinger. “Look, I intend to make it official.”

“OH, it matches my necklace . . .” Cupping her mouth she met his sparkling brown eyes hopping in place like a fangirl. “Yes, yes, yes, Baek Seung Jo.”

Laughing, he placed the ring on her finger, “Aishhh . . . never thought you’d be so outrageous about this. Where’s that Debutante now?”

“It’s not that. I really just gotta pee.”

Wiggling out of his arms she rushed to the bathroom. Before shutting the door, she poked her head out demanding, “Pancakes, I want blueberry pancakes to celebrate.”

Watching the door shut he hollered, “Aigooo . . . Arasseo, WIFE!” Spinning on his heel, he looked heavenward hearing ‘Almost Paradise’ surprisingly STILL off-key.

## **HOTNESS CAFE**

**LIN SONG** heard Saffire’s shrill squeals echoing from the back staircase to the upstairs rooms. Unable to hold in his amusement he laughed out loud boisterously, grateful for the time he’d shared with the personable owner when he was first hired. It was good to have her back on the premises. He’d followed the reports out of the U.S. about the unfortunate accident, her

subsequent coma, and even gossip revolving around (boyfriend/husband) Idol, Kim JaeJoong. To be here now . . . witnessing their love story playing out directly above him was a befitting end to the fairy-tale.

Not used to the rigors of being pursued up the stairs, a panting Saffire, doubled over against the wooden door frame to Young Jae’s private dining room. Feeling JJ’s arms scoop her up from behind, he sashayed inside, in his usual ‘Princely’ manner. Left vulnerable, by the warmth of the Vodka-laced coffee pumping renewed life through her veins, the late hour and anxious jealousy of earlier, were conveniently swept away in his embrace.

“Don’t you wish we would’ve made a baby right here on the floor, the night of our first date? Believe it or not, I was ready Princess . . . still am.” JJ’s salacious remarks seared directly into her heart, leaving Saffire wanting only to rip every shred of clothing from his muscular form, letting him ravage her without consequence.

Her mouth against his, gave him the answer he sought. *How could he have ever thought she didn’t love him?* Here, in the full light of a spring moon, under Young Jae’s heavenly watch, he would seal their destiny.

Breathless they clung together, each reliving a time in their relationship that could never be recovered or re-enacted. The push and pull of two souls, meant to share eternity together, dancing their way around the inevitable.

Without Young Jae Ryu’s death, and subsequent spiritual intervention, this couple might never have found their way home. Satisfied they had given peace to his spirit, JJ eased Saffire down to the ‘original’ bench they had bonded over years ago, his eyes dark and sinfully suggestive.

“I will if you will . . .” he muttered wickedly.

“Lock the door . . .” she replied, just as boldly.

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