

FUCK PERFECT



MARCH 23rd, 2017 – 11:00 A.M. – HYUN JOONG’S CABIN IN THE WOODS

IT was nothing short of a miracle. Thanks to her own steadfast determination, Hyun Joong’s unending patience and the presence of familiar surroundings, Saffron had gotten her memory back!

Finally, freed of the annoyance of reporters; Neitzen’s; diehard fangirls, and the pressure of the outside world to hinder them, the reunited couples stepped into Joong’s cabin hideaway and back into a world of their own making.

The winter of 2014, they’d huddled around the 12 ft. Christmas tree, drinking and playing games . . . hopeful, but unsure of their future. Today, (what seemed like a lifetime ago) was staring them in the face once again.

Even now in Spring, the uninhabited cabin and still untouched Christmas tree, loomed in the corner as a pinnacle of their pre-ordained happiness. Like snapshots from the photobook of their past, each relived the time spent together daring to hope they would never be apart again.

3:00 P.M.

TOWEL hung low on his hips, JJ peeked out the bathroom door, checking to see if Saffire was anywhere in the vicinity. If he was going to move his plans along, it would require Joong and Saffron's coordination, without her knowledge.

Darting across the hall he snatched his phone from atop the dresser, texting madly before she popped up out of the blue, like she was prone to do.

HYUNG. DID U DO WHAT I ASKED? IF SO, LET ME KNOW & WHERE'S SAFFIRE?

Glancing over his shoulder, furtively waiting out an answer he cursed quietly, "Fuck Joong hurry up before she shows." But . . . it was too late.

"JAAAEeee . . . Are you out of the shower yettt?" Saffire's sing-song-y voice drifted up the stairs getting louder and louder as she approached. "I brought you a snack."

Hearing her feet hit the top step he tossed the cell across the unmade bed assuming the 'ding' that followed was indeed his hyung's response. Instead, it was someone else . . . someone he thought he'd already successfully relegated to his 'out' basket. Someone named, Nyoko.

Suddenly, not only were the plans over his surprise about to be compromised, but his integrity put on trial as well.

SNS-NYOKO:

I KNOW WHAT YOU TOLD ME, BUT I'M HAVING A BIT OF A CRISIS HERE. NEED U 2 CALL ASAP. IF I DON'T HEAR FROM U, I'LL TRY JOONG.

And, directly on its heels . . .

RESPONSE TO JJ'S SNS-JOONG:

STOP STRESSING. TAKEN CARE OF. SAFFIRE'S HEADED UPSTAIRS. ACT NORMAL. COME GET A BEER. KE-KE-KE...

Anxious to read Joong's message (but realizing if he did he ran the risk of being caught red-handed) JaeJoong ignored the second 'ding' spinning around, nearly losing the grip on the towel covering his bare essentials. Grinning, he licked his dry lips, trying not to look suspicious.

"Aigooo, Princess. A snack. How'd you know I was hungry? Gamza (THANKS)."

"Look at youuuu . . . Maybe the snack should wait . . ." Returning his eagerness, Saffire scanned the shadowy folds of towel across his loins. "After all we ARE here to relax, rightttt . . ."

Easing the small tray filled with fruit, crackers and a drink, over onto the dresser she couldn't help noticing the way his eyes skirted anxiously about the spacious room, his fist clutching the terrycloth as if she was a stranger about to accost him without permission.

"Is something wrong? You look nervous."

"Nervous?" Dismissing her without answering the question he drew her against him instead, hoping to take her mind off any concerns she might have that he was doing something sneaky or underhanded. "Ani, why would I be nervous?"

"Oh, I don't know." Running her fingers through the strands of his damp hair, her lips found his forehead, naturally moving down the bridge of his nose until she'd captured his mouth against hers, murmuring against him, "Hani and Seung Jo are busy in the kitchen."

One hand on the tattoo adorning his chest, before coming up for air, her breathless whisper reminded him, "I feel like I have a royal duty to uphold, because you my Prince, are buck naked underneath this towel." *If there was one thing they'd never struggled with, it was their physical attraction to one another.*

Allowing her to forcefully shove him back against the rumpled covers, JJ gave in to her warm hands grazing over the shiny, damp, hollows of his belly button, careening down underneath the confines of the towel.

Was it worth giving up his snack, and potential beer to appease her . . . versus her finding out about his upcoming secret? By all means!

About to dip her head to his groin, she spotted the phone at his hip, the unanswered text messages blinking glaringly into the air. Hesitating, she readjusted her position. Lifting it, she simultaneously scanned the phrases from both Nyoko AND Hyun Joong . . . even the warning that SHE was headed upstairs.

I KNOW WHAT U TOLD ME . . . CRISIS . . . CALL ME . . . STOP STRESSING . . . and TAKEN CARE OF.

A message from the dark-headed bitch, even involving Joong. Oh, this was NOT good. What the hell was going on?

“What’s this all about Jae? And, why the hell is Joong telling you ‘it’s all taken care of?’” Pouting, her libido was permanently squashed.

Holy shit! Not having any knowledge of what was said, JJ swung his legs over the side of the bed, snatching the phone from between her fingers.

“YAH.” Grappling for an excuse, he turned away from her suspicious glare, re-covering his nakedness with the towel. *What had Joong said to piss her off and make her mistrust him?* “It’s ahhh, it’s nothing. Just schedules.”

“OH, is that RIGHT? And, I suppose you were trying NOT to worry me about schedules, so you didn’t respond to the CRISIS ASAP, and left Hyun Joong to take care of your dirty work? Who is she anyway?”

Ignoring the stunned look crossing his face, Saffire had thought she could bury her jealousy toward the woman who’d fawned all over him in the airport. Obviously, she could not. They were here to get away from Managers, Assistants, and random intrusive messages. If she didn’t get the conversation over with now . . . it would haunt her the remainder of their relationship.

Gulping at the strange insinuation that there was a ‘she’ hidden somewhere in his innocent text about proposal plans, JaeJoong was puzzled.

“She? She who? Saffire . . . calm down and tell me what you’re talking about.”

“That WOMAN. The tall, disgustingly, good-looking, Asian who snatched you away right in front of me outside Customs at the airport. I was right behind you, I saw everything.” Sucking in a deep breath, Saffire’s hands drifted to her lap. “She nearly ran me down inside the café the morning of the Opening too. You brought her there, didn’t you?”

Where in the world had she picked this line of questioning out of Joong’s response? It was true, all of it. He remembered watching Nyoko nearly run over her outside of the Ladies rest room before the accident. Now, after recognizing her at Incheon, she obviously remembered her as well. But . . . why was she bringing it up now? He’d already fired Coco. Immediately upon arriving in fact. Did Hyun Joong tell her about the time she’d snuck into the hospital to see him? Or maybe about their ‘friends-with-benefits’ type of relationship BEFORE discovering Saffire was still in love with him? Oh, this was bad . . . very bad.

“Before I answer that . . . who told you about her?” His voice scarily quiet, JJ wiped a bead of sweat trickling down the side of his face, beginning to worry that quite possibly even Nyoko herself had managed to get her hands on Saffire at some point. She was ruthless and cunning, for sure.



“REALLY? You’re really going to ask me that?” Horrified that this man she’d already pledged to live the rest of her life with was wriggling out of a suggestive text message (involving a sleazy, attention-grabbing whore) Saffire winced markedly.



“I KNOW you read your DAMN messages JAEJOONG. Clearly, you didn’t want me to know she was texting you about her ‘something urgent’ . . . so, you turned her over to Hyun Joong to deal with instead. WOW. I’m not the brightest crayon in the box, but I know a cover-up when I see one!”

“Whaaatttt . . . the fuck. Something urgent?” Glancing sheepishly down at his cell screen, Nyoko’s text met him like a blaring trumpet sounding a pre-dawn alarm.

Fuck, fuck, fuck! Saffire was TOTALLY misunderstanding BOTH messages. (Well, maybe not Nyoko's.) God only knew what the hell she even wanted. Everything was a crisis to that woman. But, Hyun Joong's response just happened to fall right in line with her frantic request. He was doomed.

Wanting to laugh out loud at the ridiculousness of it all, he didn't dare. He'd been on the opposite side of her wrath in the past, and with a proposal on the horizon, now was not the time to fan the flames of 'this' fire . . .

DOWNSTAIRS

THE day was speeding much faster than Hyun Joong anticipated. Not too many hours ago, he was cuddling with Saffron while the soft amber of dawn peeked through the budding trees. Staring at his cell, from the bottom of the staircase, his brows furrowed. *Come on JJ.*

Why Jae thought he could pull off a surprise proposal while occupying the same house as his intended was beyond Hyun Joong's reasoning. Cause now he was knee deep in intrigue, secrets, and lists.

Saffron was the queen of lists. She'd been writing the list of lists, ever since JJ dragged them to a corner explaining why he needed their help. Trying to discourage him, he'd asked if a kick in the balls was worth surprising the fickle 'Princess'.

Sighing, he scrubbed his face. *Fuck, he should have gone fishing this morning instead of catering to his libido. Then he would've been out of both Saffron AND JJ's reach.* Brightening, a set of small hands (sporting a huge diamond ring) wrapped lovingly around his waist.

"Joong, I need you to help me move furniture around in the breakfast room."

Pocketing his phone, he caught her elbows pulling her tight against his back. "Wae, we have like two days." Turning in her arms, he dropped a peck on the top of her head clutching her waist in hopes of distracting her. "If we move it now, what are you going to tell Saffire when we can't eat in there?"

Thoughtfully touching her cheek, she announced, “I know. We’ll say the room’s going to be painted,” adding, a palm to his chest, “Orrr . . .”

Meeting her eyes, he laughed at her invisible wheels turning.

“Stop, Miss Corporate. We have plenty of time to freaking move tables and chairs. Aigoo, between you and JJ I’m going crazy. I’ll be glad when Mother Ryu arrives. At least there’ll be one sane person among us.”

“That won’t help. She’s part of the problem. She’ll show up and . . .” Clapping her hands together Saffron’s voice rose, “BAM . . . she’ll want to take over. I need to have most of it done. She doesn’t know Saffire’s taste. Never has.” Spinning away in a tizzy she grabbed her iPad. “So . . .”

“Shhh-shush . . .” Finger to his lips he glanced up the open staircase, “did you hear that?”

Following his sight line, she hesitated whispering, “No, what?”

And, then she heard Saffire yell Joong’s name. Puzzled she turned off the iPad cradling it to her chest. “Why is Saffire mad at you?”

“Hell, if I know.” Shrugging his shoulders, he could only assume it was something to do with the text he’d gotten. There’d been no answer from JJ.

The longer they stood listening, the louder the muffled voices became. *Shit. The last thing he wanted to do was referee a fight between the Prince and Princess of Cotton Candy Land.*

Propelling Saffron toward the front door he barked, “Babe lets go for a walk.” Taking the iPad from her, he deposited it on the kitchen counter and seized their coats.

“But Joong, shouldn’t we . . .” she trailed off as bending to one knee he gently slid off her slipper. Gripping the door jam, her heart skipped a beat staring down on his dark head, her eyes glazed over as he purposefully tied her shoe.

Catching her blue-eyed stare, his lips curved into her favorite, ‘Baek Seung Jo’ smile.

“You’re so transparent Hani. If I didn’t know already, I’d say you’re in love with me.”

* * * * *

QUIETLY they strolled down the gravel lane, Hyun Joong tucking their clasped hands into his pocket, stopping at the end of the drive. Quickly studying her profile, the pond came into sight.

“Looks a little different since the last time you were here,” he announced, the pond sparkling like a sheet of glass. Gazing out over it into the trees, he pointed, bending toward her ear whispering, “Babe look, a deer.”

Shading her eyes with one hand she crooned, “Aw, pretty.”

The loud chattering of birds high in the trees broke through her thoughts as she watched the doe’s head snap to attention, eyes boring right through them. Skittishly, she flicked her tail turned and leaped off into the safety of the trees.

“Oh damn. Did we scare her?” Saffron asked, disappointed.

“Possibly, we’re up wind. She probably caught our scent. Come on.” The stone drive broke away into a large patch of grass as he guided them to a gazebo looking out over the water. Gently helping her onto the platform, he seemed proud of the location. “What do you think of the view?”

In awe Saffron examined the wild ducks swimming at the water’s edge rummaging for food. The sound of bull frogs singing, and bees gathering nectar from the early spring flowers had her feeling calmer, flashing him a radiant smile.



“It’s beautiful. This is where we went ice fishing, huh?” At his nod, she bumped his shoulder gently. “I remember you were so pissed when I caught more fish than you did. Big baby!”

“Aishh . . . It was beginners luck and I WASN’T PISSED. Just frustrated cause you freaking scared all the fish away with your loud singing.” Giving her a peculiar look, he questioned hesitantly, “Even with that, it was a good memory, right?” Their last visit to the cabin had been a mixed bag of emotions for them. “Did the good ones out-weigh the bad?”

“Pfff Joongie . . . Of course. Our time here kept me company on those nights when I couldn’t sleep, worrying about what you.”

“Yeah, me too.” Circling the cedar floor, he inspecting the workmanship surrounding them. “I had this build with you in mind.” Finally, able to feel at ease, he leaned on the log support, hands to his pockets.



“Really?” Surveying the area once again, Saffron wondered how she would occupy herself while her man perused his manly hobbies and sports? *Maybe read a novel? No, she never had enough time to finish one. Feed the ducks? She was a city girl, this was more of a ‘Saffire place’.*

A finger to her chin she could picture her artsy sister playing her violin in the sunshine while Sienna chased bugs, waiting patiently for JJ to come back from a tour. Then twisting the diamond on her finger, an idea struck her.

Clapping her hands, she announced gleefully, “Joong, this would be a perfect place for JJ to propose. We could wrap the post in tulle, string lights around and up through the ceiling. And, all those zillions of balloons would fit perfectly between the beams.”

Oh my God, she’d kicked into party planning mode. Shaking his head, Hyun Joong pushed off the post trying to block her path as she rambled. *What the fuck was he going to do now? JJ would shit bricks. The man was already a nervous wreck. Throwing this at him would drive him straight into the nearest bottle.*

“Saffron!” he warned her gruffly.

Pivoting at the tone of his voice, she blinked questionably. “What? Not a good idea?”

Tucking a curtain of red hair behind her cute ears, his tone softened. “It’s important to JJ that we follow his plan. Please don’t throw a monkey-wrench into it.”

“But . . .” Protesting, she paused knowing he was right. “Sorry, I just thought . . .” Turning away her thumbnail tapped against her teeth mindlessly.

Hyun Joong sighed as she hopped down off the platform heading toward the pond. Why all of a sudden was she drifting off into ‘Oh-Hani-Land?’ Stepping down he followed her enticing backside in the tight jeans, sliding up beside her.

“Saffron, what’s wrong? You’ve been buzzing around the cabin like a damned humming bird fluttering from one thing to another one minute and staring off into space the next.”

Suddenly chilly, she ignored him, wrapping the coat around her tighter, crossing both arms still tapping her teeth with one nail.

What was her problem? When she didn’t answer he encircled her waist from behind, kissing her cheek gently. “Has JJ’s event made you sorry I didn’t wait and propose properly in the courtyard?”

Not knowing what to expect, it surprised him when she barked out a definitive, “No. What girl doesn’t want to be proposed to, wearing her man’s tee shirt and nothing else.” Sighing she patted his hands trembling at his closeness.

“I just wonder about the future. You know what a worrier I can be. We’re happy right now, right here . . . But, what happens when we leave Joongie? I always scoffed at Saffire for worrying about what impact she and Sienna would make on JJ’s career by being married. But, since you and I decided against marriage, and with us just being lovers I didn’t have any reason to be concerned . . . until now.”

Whirling her to face him, he brushed the red hair from her shoulders, lifting her chin. “Everything’s gonna be fine Hani, I PROMISE. We’ll get married, you’ll go back to baking at the café, and I’ll make music. Simple as that.”

Grateful for his optimism, she stared at him, still skeptical. “Just like that. I don’t know. Remember what happened to my Father.” Zeroing into the air over his shoulder Saffron’s eyes caught the shadows of clouds moving swiftly on the wind, covering the sun in their path. “Nothing’s guaranteed, is it?”

“Babe, tomorrow will take care of itself. And, of course I remember what happened to Young Jae. He especially would want us to be happy and raise lots of cute, fat babies. We can name our first boy after him. How’s that?”

Almost satisfied, she raised an eyebrow at his amused smile, giving him a quick kiss, “Exactly how many babies is a ‘lot’ Kim Hyun Joong?”

“Mmmm . . . I don’t know. Let’s go with an even number, three red-headed daughters and three black-headed sons.” Chuckling at her shocked expression, he turned away, “Come on Mrs. Kim. We have to hurry . . . we have work to do.”

Was he crazy? Hands to her hips, she stood staring as he trotted away up the path without her. *SIX! OH, HELL NO. He wasn’t going to get his way this time. After all, she was Saffron Ryu, the best negotiator in Chicago. She’d dealt with some of the biggest CEOs in the world. Surely, she could handle one handsome Idol.*



Shouting in his wake, she chased him up the crooked path, “JOONG, WAIT UP. Can we talk about this first? You know the odds of having redheads is . . .”

BACK UPSTAIRS

“**CALM** down Princess. Let me explain.” Reaching out, JJ drew her down beside him on the bed. “It’s not what you think.”

“If not, then it better be good.” Still glaring at him, arms folded in staunch adversity to any forthcoming explanations that didn’t line up with her rendition of the issue, Saffire’s heart was pounding rapidly.

“That woman you are referring to WAS . . . past tense . . . WAS my Assistant and Stylist. I hired her on after I came back from the Army. Honestly, she was only around for a few weeks.”

“I KNEW IT.” Teeth clenched, eyes to the wooden planks on the floor, Saffire wondered why he hadn’t been more forthcoming with that tidbit of information. Especially after encouraging all of them to return with him to S. Korea. Surely, he knew she would find out eventually.

“Comon now. I’ve been patient with your little ‘indiscretions’ in the past. Hear me out.” *Whoah, where had THAT come from?* Wanting to slap himself in the face for even putting one little toe in that sea of confusion she called ‘friendship’ with Junsu he paused, hoping she’d skim right over it. But, nooo . . . His Princess was on a roll and not prepared to let anything by in passing.

“INDISCRETIONS? MY LITTLE INDISCRETIONS? HEAR YOU OUT? Ohhh, so now my relationship with Junsu was an indiscretion? And, I should be just as accommodating to understand YOUR indiscretion with your freaking STYLIST?”

Careening from the bed, tears pricked her lids as she gripped her temples, the familiar burning ache of a migraine forming behind her eyes.

“DO YOU SEE HIM TEXTING ME? Is HE having a crisis?”

Shouting wasn’t helping the situation she knew, but by the same token, JJ didn’t seem nearly as repentant as she imagined he should’ve been. Without allowing him even a second to speak, she rattled on like an out of control train speeding down the track.

“You were sleeping with her, huh? You brought her to my sister’s opening, KNOWING I would be there.” *God help her, she wanted to slap him into next week, but her quivering hands wouldn’t accommodate her furious desire.* “What kind of man does that? What if the accident hadn’t happened? What if we’d actually confronted each other BEFORE I left with Saffron? WHAT JJ? Were you going to let her drool all over you right in FRONT of me?”

His silence at every turn scared her more than anything. She knew she hadn’t been forthcoming with him about Junsu either, yet for some odd reason he wasn’t taking the lead in that line of questioning toward her, either. Maybe the magic of the last few days had finally turned to dust. Her bubble of happiness popping right before her very eyes.

Ultimately, was all this HER fault? Her fault for giving up on him? Running scared, hiding she and Sienna away when she should've been begging him to forgive her for Junsu's role in her life? FUCK!

“Are you finished? Can I say something?” A calmness settled over JJ, watching her struggle with what he could only ascertain were an overabundance of unresolved emotions, directed at not only him, but Junsu and herself as well. All this over a disengaged text message to help keep his surprise a secret. It didn't seem worth the agony he was watching her endure.

Nodding, as tears slid in wild abandon down her flushed cheeks, he re-attached the towel at his waist, rising to gather her in his arms.

“I was wrong Princess. Stupid and wrong. Joong warned me before we ever left Korea. And, no . . . I don't think Junsu was an indiscretion. He's my brother. OUR friend.” Dogged again over the photos of him holding Sienna, JJ gulped down his pride to ease her pain. “I should be grateful he was here when I couldn't be.”

There. He'd said it. Maybe now they could finally move on. What he didn't expect was her shaky, embarrassed confession . . . confirming Kyong's final words to him before stomping out of the beach house only days ago.

Sucking down her tears, the hot skin of JJ's bare shoulder was wet beneath Saffire's cheeks. “No . . . it was me. I have no right to be angry. This was all my fault,” she admitted squeezing her eyes shut, hoping that might erase her humiliation and pain. “I should've told you this years ago . . .”

Her words whispered against his neck were barely audible, “Junsu and I slept together the weekend we spent in JeJu. It was a drunken mistake, but when I found out I was pregnant . . . I panicked and left. I didn't want to hurt you if the baby wasn't yours.”

The silence between them deafening, JJ clung to her desperately, reeling from the truth, but realizing he'd known in his heart all along. Remembering how many times he'd said it didn't

matter, now he knew inevitably it would. His parents would insist on a paternity test if they thought anything was out of line, and that could very well be their end.

“Mianhae.” Crushed by his silence once again, Saffire felt faint. *What had she been thinking to keep this secret for so long? But, there was more. She had to finish telling him, before she lost her nerve.*

“She’s yours Jae. Sienna DOES belong to you. Junsu agreed to have the test before he went into the military.”

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