

## YOU ARE ALL MINE



**MARCH 11<sup>th</sup> – 12:05 P.M. - CUP OF HOTNESS CAFE, - L.A., CA**

**“WHAT THE FUCK . . .”**

Smashed against the coffee bar, Hyun Joong was unsure of what he’d just seen and heard. Not only was the entire café clapping with enthusiasm at the bastard’s lame proposal, Saffron herself looked mildly impressed!

Both hands fisted at his sides, he bit down on his lower lip, a renewed slew of expletives raging through his befuddled brain. *How DARE this punk pull such a stunt in front of so many people? It was his duty to stop it from going any further. ‘Oh Hani’ was his. That’s why he was here.*



Blinded by anger, not caring about anything or anyone around him, he bolted from the bar stool. But, seconds later, Nyoko’s, high-pitched, shriek pierced the air above his head.

“OMO . . . where are you going?” Excitedly grabbing the back of his sleeve, she barreled around him like a freight train, hell bent on destruction. “What an amazing proposal. So off-the-

cuff and romantic. Aren't they cute together? Are you taking notes Jae?" Nudging JaeJoong with one elbow, she acted more like a star-struck tween, than a grown woman well into her twenties.

"Get the FUCK out of my way . . ." Snarling through clenched teeth, it didn't take Joong long to realize he needed to rein in his exploding temper. Despite the fact he was tucked away in America, the publicity of a near scandal with crazy ex, Chung A, back in Korea, reminded him he still had a reputation to uphold. Seizing the moment, he darted right (toward the safety of the back door) instead of straight ahead, into the lions' den.

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**IN** the flurry of activity, cell phone cameras could be heard going off, mingled with the sounds of congratulatory fans crowding around Saffron, Ian and little Sienna. Not surprisingly, the emotions of the moment were careening out of control. In relative disbelief, Saffron watched Maud snatch the microphone from between Ian's fingers, hissing in his ear loud enough for her to hear, "Don't you have a plane to catch?"

Despite her obvious aggravation, he nodded, grinning broadly, responding with an eerie calmness, "I do."

Winking definitively, he hauled Saffron to his chest, kissing her soundly on both unsuspecting lips (more for the benefit of the press, and certainly the unseen Idol somewhere in the crowd of onlookers). Releasing her gently, he leaned in whispering, "We'll have to finish this later love. I need to catch a plane. Australia, remember? Be good while I'm gone."

*BE GOOD? What the hell did that mean?* Hands quivering at her sides, dark emboldened eyes belied Ian's belief that he was bidding her farewell with the best of intentions. Pinching Sienna's chubby cheek, he waved to the dwindling crowd and was gone, striding off at a perky clip toward the front door, his cell phone already ringing in his jacket pocket.

"I'm gonna KILL him . . ." Saffron hissed, still smiling through clenched teeth at those milling around her.

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**THE** shuffle of feet, and sound of Maud's voice in the microphone alerted Hyun Joong that something behind him was shifting. Pausing in the doorway, he swung around, seeing Ian purposefully headed out the front. *Look up Saffron! Dammit, I'm standing right here.* Wanting to jump up and down, waving like a lunatic, he sucked down his newfound resolve, knowing it would be inappropriate to cause a confrontation with camera's rolling.

He would have to go back and join JJ. Wait them out and catch her when she returned to get to the bottom of all this ridiculousness. *Marry Ian? Not over my dead body . . .*

Why then, amid all the impending commotion, did Fate insist on dealing him yet another devastating blow? *Was he being punished?*

One step closer to his goal, a glass of chilling champagne seeped down around his belt-line, icy cold to the warm skin beneath. The head of brown female hair (chest-high), rocked backward in horror, brightly painted fingernails finding their way toward his soaked clothes, in a whirlwind of persistence.

Hurled back to a wintery night in Uncle's, Gangnam café, with Saffron's earnest hands dabbing relentlessly at his crotch over a toppled cup of steaming coffee, his brain squealed insistently . . . *SHIT NO . . . NOT AGAIN.*

"OH MY GOD. I'M SO SORRY, I didn't see you turn around . . . That's gotta be cold." Her apology sincere, the short, young Asian girl's eyes teared up in immediate embarrassment, unsure where to look or how to make the awkward situation right.

"Please . . . just stop . . ." Glancing down, Joong cringed, pushing her back easily with both palms. "It's okay. Really. I got it."

But, (too much like Saffron had done years ago), she persisted. "You're soaked, and sticky . . . At least let me get a wet rag."

One finger still hovering dangerously close to the tiny opening at the base of his shirt he blinked, realizing this was not Saffron, and there was nothing left to do, but kindly deal with the uncomfortable situation. *He couldn't even blame Uncle's damned cat.*

Following on the heels of the mishap, just when he thought things couldn't get any worse, along came a small crowd of leftover fangirls. God help him, he was officially, 'found out'. Forget the press. With cell phones in hand, the nightmare he called, 'Instagram', 'Facebook' and 'YouTube' finally came rolling in to haunt him.

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**NOT** in the least bit sorry (the bastard) Ian had left the premises, Maud stepped forward, hoping now maybe Hyun Joong and JJ would show themselves. Quickly dispersing the crowd of well-wishers without skipping a beat, she urged Serae to round up both sisters and get the toddler. *There was certainly much more going on than anyone realized!*

"Take Sienna for Saffire, and rendezvous at the office." Rolling her eyes toward the unseen Idols, Maud whispered in her sister's ear while passing, "I'll handle the rest. I think the girls need a few minutes alone to vent **WITHOUT** cameras."

"I agree." Always observant, Serae smile understandingly, interrupting a baffled Saffire from reaching for her daughter, "I got her. Come on sweetie, auntie Serae has a surprise."

Surveying the situation, Maud knew this was her chance to 'X' out everything Ian had just done. Thankfully, tied up at the back door, Joong seemed preoccupied with a small collection of young fangirls. On the other hand, a horrified JJ, stood frozen at the counter, one hand cemented to the bar top . . . beside him, a tall, black-haired, Asian woman sipping champagne, grinned as if enjoying the show, a little too much.

All that was needed was to steer the two men (the Ryu sisters cared about most), over toward the office and back into their arms. But, just as she stepped away, the annoying reporter who had persistently captured every disgusting moment of the proposal, turned tail heading after Saffron, motioning for the camera crew to follow him. *What the . . .*

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**WATCHING** the scenario playing out like his worst nightmare, JJ kept his eyes peeled to Saffire's retreating figure, scurrying across the floor in front of Serae and the toddler, missing

him yet again. Clenching and unclenching his fist in frustration, the hum of conversations, and scuffling feet around him were heard, coupled with Nyoko's increasingly annoying voice requesting . . . coffee?

*Had she already had too much champagne? What a lightweight. Sadly, when he needed her most, his vodka guzzling, 'Cotton Candy Princess' was fleeing like a ghost, in relative anonymity. Damn, how could one lone reporter cause this much trouble? It was futile to follow. If only he were still dreaming, lounging comfortably on the plane.*

Disappointment setting in, he sighed, one hand drifting into his coat pocket, the folded envelope smooth between his grasp. Feeling her put a warm cup between his other fingers, she whispered empathetically, "Here, you look tired. Probably jet-lag."

Nodding to appease her, he didn't want to be grateful, but she was right. As weariness flooded his body, coupled with the emotional stress of the moment, the pungent, familiar smell of cinnamon coffee, (like an arrow to his heart) only served to spiral him deeper and deeper into despair.

Still attentively fixated on the closed office door, the familiarity of the handle nestled in his palm didn't faze him. Finally sucking in the first sip of sweet liquid he realized the cup was an exact replica of the personalized one he'd kept at the café in Gangnam.



Puzzled, he flipped toward Nyoko barking, "Where did you get this?" holding the cup out questioningly.

Unsure why he would ask she stared at it curiously, "The coffee, or the cup?"

"Never mind. Doesn't matter." His heart beginning to flutter, JJ ignored the reasons why it was here. Clearly, Saffire had something to do with it. She was the only one who knew its significance to the two of them.

Forget the letter. Seeing this, he HAD to confront her face-to-face before any more unnecessary time drifted away. Skulking away like a thief in the night, was the coward's way out. He'd done it in his previous relationship with SooMin, he wasn't about to do it again. The assistant

at his side, would have to give him some space and understand. It wasn't about her (hell, it never had been).

## SAFFRON'S OFFICE

**WHEN** life gives you lemons, hopefully you know how to make lemonade . . . But, how in God's name was Saffron going to make lemonade out of this sour-assed situation?

Slamming the office door, her palms flattened against it disgracefully. Not only had her, 'ex-boyfriend-current-whatever' just thrown her under the bus, he'd ground his foot over her face while she was sprawled out and bleeding. *HOW DARE HE?* No decent man in their right mind would propose at the drop of a pin, then with barely a ten second explanation, flit off to another country, leaving her relegated to the job of cleaning up after his sorry lack of judgement.

One look at Saffire told the rest of the tale. Clinging to Sienna's small body, her face ashen with disbelief, she was savvy enough to know he had used the toddler to his own end, but still grasping for understanding, amidst of a multitude of questions.

Reaching for them both, Saffron pulled her sister close, hugging her tightly as well. "Wowww, I'm so sorry sis. I feel like such an idiot." *Was an apology even good enough at this point?* "I had no clue, really . . ."

"I figured by the way you responded, but this is NOT cool, not at all." Her arms quivering, Saffire nestled her chin between Saffron and Sienna wishing she could disappear and take everyone in the room with her.

"NO, it's NOT!" Standing erect, chest heaving with sudden indignation, the tall redhead took the toddler, hiking her on one satiny-dressed hip. "Pffft, proposing in front of everyone like that. I think we all just got played. He's f'ng delusional if he thinks for one minute I'm gonna sit by and let him get away with this. I shouldn't have to accept a ring just because a stupid photographer is all over me."

If there was one thing they DID know moving forward . . . Ian toyed with life on his own terms. Despite his 'changed' attitude, loving kindness toward Sienna, and potentially good

qualities, underneath he was still the overbearing, asshole he'd always been. Business partner or not, it was time to kick him to the curb for good.

“Is it too early to say I told you so?” Head cocked, Saffire could only agree, with the stress of the opening, and Ian’s ability to coerce you out of your skin if necessary, her sister had unwittingly fallen prey to his wicked, scheming agenda ‘yet’ again.

“Probably not, I deserve it. But, NO MORE. PROMISE. The buck stops here. Right Bean?” Stomping her foot against the tile floor she poked Sienna’s tummy playfully.

“Yeah, sounds good, but is that supposed to make me feel any better?”

“No . . . I guess not.” Hating like hell to admit it, Saffron knew her laid-back sister (who usually let everything roll off her shoulders), had every right to be pissed.

Taking in the small, organized office the tell-tale signs of Ian’s influence were hard to miss. Now, would come the drama. He might have walked out the door and into the spotlight with his empty proposal and ‘fake’ family, but they were left holding the bag. No doubt, the photographic residuals of his actions were already popping up on social media.

“Obviously, we can’t let him get the upper hand anymore, so here’s what I think we should do.” Handing Sienna back to her mommy, Saffron smiled slyly, a new resolve evident on her face. “The only way to fix it, is to beat him at his own game. Hit him in the pocketbook, where it hurts the most.” Tugging at the diamond ring on her finger she cursed under her breath quietly. “Damned thing won’t come off.” *Of course, her finger had already swollen significantly. Bad omen?* “I should go pawn it. Welllll, don’t have time to deal with it now. Let’s go back to my place, Bean needs a nap anyway. We can come up with a good plan there. How high do you think I can rack up his credit cards in a week?”

*NOW SISTER WAS TALKING!* Re-energized, Saffron? fisted the air above her head, laughing out loud. “You have access to his credit cards? SAFFRON.”

“Shhh . . .” Turning her back she whispered, “Don’t let Serae overhear, she’d tell Maud. He leaves me everything but his business account when he travels. Says it’s easier, they don’t risk getting stolen and if I need anything I can just sign his name.”

“Well shit then. Rack ‘em up until they get declined. Bean and I could use a shopping trip.”

Motioning Serae over, Saffron bowed eagerly, her eyes ablaze with twinkles. *There was light at the end of the tunnel after all. If that’s what it took to bring Mr. Big to ‘both’ his knees, then so be it.*

“We hate to bail auntie, but Sienna needs a nap, and since the rental’s closer we’re going to head over there for a few hours. Things are winding down here so would you and Maud mind sticking around to supervise cleanup and lock up? You can always call if you need anything.”

“Yesss . . . no problem, I’ll text her.” Nodding agreeably, Serae pulled out her phone. “Just stay long enough to make sure the cameras are gone first.”

Trying to hide the massive grin spreading across her face, she swung around to leave. *If they only knew this would afford her the perfect opportunity to give Maud the green light. She could send Joong and JJ on to the house ahead of them. Truthfully, Saffron didn’t need to kick Ian to the curb . . . Hyun Joong would happily do it for her!*

**12:15 P.M.**

**LARGER** than life, each Idol, (stuck in their own time warp continuum) was having a difficult time putting one foot in front of the other to propel them past the obstacles holding them hostage.

The trio of fangirls still had Hyun Joong trapped in a never-ending barrage of selfies, chatter and autographs . . . while JJ suffered in silence at the hands of his clingy, obsessive, Japanese stylist.

Outwardly cordial, inwardly their hearts were already with the two sisters, making plans to leave, in the office across the room.

Having previously attempted to be discreet, Maud could sense the situation didn’t warrant her secrecy any longer. Ian had fled, the press was packing up, NCT was already boarding the vans outside, and clean up was underway. Not to mention, whoever the icy looking chick was holding JJ hostage at the bar, didn’t matter . . . she was expendable. The only goal now was to the subjects at hand, OUT. (Before the girls left the building).

Careening past the bustling workers, she pulled up directly beside Hyun Joong, scattering the giggling teenagers with the wave of a hand. Without a word, her fingers curled about the strong muscles of his wrist, railroading him back in the direction of JJ and the coffee bar. Relieved and easily persuaded, he allowed her to drag him along knowing that right now, she was his lifeline to Saffron.

Dropping his wrist, Maud sized them both up with her usual air of superiority. She and Serae had started this little ‘love’ project, over a year ago by involving JJ in the funding of the café. Now, with so many broken hearts at stake, it was time to bring it full circle.

“Who’s this, Jae?” Nyoko’s dark eyes raked over the heavy-set ahjumma, already anticipating an impending drama by the serious look on her face.

“Annyeonghaseyo.” Ignoring his companion’s question, JJ bowed to the woman he’d already known for a decade, bristling with the realization that at her appearance, he and Hyun Joong’s fate was about to drastically change.

Hoping to God she finally had their undivided attention, Maud bent slightly in acknowledgement responding, “Alright you two. Listen up, ‘cause I don’t have time to mince words.” Moving in front of Nyoko, she leaned in hissing under her breath, “Call a cab honey, the party’s over.”

### **SAFFRON’S OFFICE**

**FISTING** her weary eyes, Sienna leaned into Saffire’s shoulder, (tired from being passed around from one person to the next like a rag doll) crooning, “Nigh-nigh . . . nigh-nigh, Mommy.”

“I know little Bean. We’re leaving in a few minutes.” Scanning the office for her purse Saffire’s face crinkled. “Seen my bag sis? I could swear I dropped it somewhere in here.”

“Hmmm, nope. Mine’s over here by the file cabinet. I saw you come in earlier, did you leave it then? Bathroom maybe?” One step closer to putting the last few moments behind her, Saffron grabbed her own purse, car keys and Sienna’s diaper bag.



Sticking her head inside the bathroom door, Saffire spotted ‘She-Devil’ looking up at her from the kitty bed. “Hmmm, not in here. What should we do about kitty? We can’t leave her here all night. She’ll tear up the place.”

“Told you to keep her at your house.” Crossing her arms, Saffron tapped one foot impatiently. “Just close the bathroom door. She’s too little to do much damage in there. If she has food and water, she’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?” Peering into the kitten’s tiny face, Saffire frowned in concern. “She looks lonely.”

“Saffire! She’s the café mascot. You wanted her. Besides, we both know she can’t come to my place. You really HAVE turned into a mom . . . come on.” Tugging at her shoulder, Saffron slipped out of her heels and into a pair of sandals. “Can we just come back later and look for the purse please? I need to get out of here.”

“Okayyy, I guess. But crap, my phone’s in it, and it’s on silent. You know me, head in the clouds. With everything going on, I probably threw it down somewhere without thinking.” Reluctantly giving up she closed the door behind her. “Who’s gonna call me today anyway? Everybody knew I was tied up for the opening. You can text Maud or Serae later and ask them to keep an eye out during clean up.”

“Okay. I’m sure it’s around somewhere.” Concerned, but not panicked over the missing purse, Saffron hoped maybe now they’d spent enough time in the office for the coast to clear.

“Think it’s safe to come out of hiding together? Or, should we go separately?” Listening, one ear to the door, she picked up on distant laughter, and the clinking of glasses, coming from the kitchen area.

“I don’t know, peek.” Leaning in closer, Saffire nudged her gently, feeling oddly adventurous.

It had been years since the adrenaline had pumped through her veins with such velocity. Like the night of Young Jae’s service, when they’d ventured out into the snow together, drunk and

looking for a café they knew nothing about. If only (like then) there were two ‘Princes’ waiting in the wings to rescue them . . .

Peering through the crack in the door, Saffron’s eyes rolled from one side of the establishment to the other. A small inattentive crowd at the coffee bar . . . that was good. Maud’s broad back hovering around a trio of lagging customers . . . no sign of reporters, photographers or anyone else suspicious. It seemed as if they were safe.

“We’re good,” she whispered, “let’s go.”

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“**DADDA** . . . Appa!” Her little head cocked behind her, Sienna seemed to be the only one aware that the swiftly moving remnant of a tall man in a dark pair of pants and suitcoat, cast a familiar presence on his way out the front door of L.A.’s Hotness Café.

How they missed each other was anyone’s guess . . .

“What? Baby, Appa isn’t here.” Not bothering to look around, Saffire followed Saffron through the back door, stepping into the nearly empty parking lot. “Probably thinks she saw Ian. It’s funny how her innocent mind thinks every man in a suit looks like him. JJ would cut off his balls if he heard her calling him Appa.” *After all this, it pissed her off even more to think Sienna was calling the S.O.B. of the hour, a name reserved for Prince Jae.* Reaching for the car door she lifted the sleepy little girl into the back seat, buckling her down securely.

Silence overtaking her at the harsh statement, Saffron had to agree, sister was probably right. Maybe now WAS the time to talk more in depth about JJ, and even Hyun Joong! Hashing over what had just happened with Ian, would be a precious waste of breath.

### **12:20 - OUTSIDE THE CAFÉ BY THE CURB**

**THE** minutes ticking by agonizingly slow, JaeJoong leaned against the street sign, watching the string of cabs and Uber drivers pulling up in front of the café. Word had gone out quickly about the conclusion of the event, and as others joined him curbside, he ushered (a now semi-complacent) Nyoko inside the one closest in line. Slamming the door on her retreating figure, he

hoped he'd gotten her outside, before her disruptive complaints were heard by anyone still lingering about the café.

Nodding slightly as it drove away, he followed quickly in Hyun Joong's stead, watching him wave down the next car to pull up, the weight of her presence lifting from his shoulders immediately, replaced by a calming sense of peace.

With only seconds to spare, (stripped from the confines of his jacket), he scooted in across the seat, awaiting Joong's slew of unsaid reprimands, in the wake of the assistant's departure. But, none came.

Grinning from ear-to-ear, his friend dipped his head inside, handing the driver a small piece of paper scribbled in Maud's handwriting reading, 210 Rosetta Drive, high-fiving as he settled in for (what they were told, was) only a short twenty-minute ride.

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