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DON'T GIVE UP!



MARCH 11th, 2017 – 12:40 P.M.

DECEASED YOUNG JAE AND AUNT SAFFRON

IT took every ounce of celestial power for Young Jae to stay obediently glued to his heavenly post. After Aunt Saffron’s scolding only a short time ago, his mission had been redirected. Oversee the collection of new souls, and report **ONLY** to the man in charge. Handed down to thwart his attempts at interfering with his earthly family, he’d hoped to at least have a direct line to their thoughts, but no such luck.

Boredom already setting in, he sighed standing to stretch. New souls came through the gates, were ushered to the throne room, and then on to him for processing. He knew the drill. It was a lengthy and tedious job, and he was only one of many clerks. Remembering his own crossing over well, he’d already spent numerous ‘spiritual’ hours asking newcomers the proper questions. Wasn’t it time to be relieved?

Suddenly out of nowhere the sound of trumpets rang through the heavens. This was it! Whenever a soul was being challenged, a changing of the guards existed, so-to-speak. Thrilled at

the opportunity to finally relax, he scanned the area around him, certain this would give him time to check in on his daughters.

Impatience settling over him, he heard the trumpets again. Where were they? This was highly disconcerting. Whistling to pass the time he felt a sudden shift in his spirit. Not unlike he'd felt the night his café in Gangnam had burned to the ground. What was wrong? Something was happening to the girls, he just knew it. Possibly worse than Ian's proposal. He HAD to find out. Disregarding the paperwork strewn out around him, he flew from the area, on a quest for answers.

The heart that Aunt Saffron said didn't exist in him any longer was far from empty. Thumping through his body at breakneck speed, he sailed off across the sky, leaving a trail of clouds in his wake. The trumpets usually meant, all hands-on deck. There was a fight in the spiritual realm for a newcomer's soul. So how did it affect him, and why did he care?

Scores of random scenarios dominating his thoughts, he careened over the tree tops headed straight toward the void that (literally) seemed to be luring him in.

What he found . . . was horrifying.

Whirling in large circles over the carnage of the accident, he watched in desperation. Despite knowing about sovereignty, and eternity, every inch of his spiritual body quivered with questions.

“What's happening? Why would you DO THIS? I don't understand. In only seconds they were all going to meet . . .” Calling on God for immediate answers, the heavens were silent.

“Don't, please don't. I love my girls! And, what about Sienna?” Shouting into the smoky air around him he panicked, realizing that the souls in jeopardy were those in the SUV below. “She's an innocent . . . don't take her. Please tell me it isn't time? I don't want them with me right now. Aunt Saffron, tell him . . .”

Unsure how to react, he reared away turning his head from the sadness. Four lives, hung in the balance, including the young man, bleeding in the front seat of the pick-up truck. The wise Aunt Saffron was right. All he could do was observe. In these situations, the Angels were in charge. Powerless to interfere, he heard the sirens coming down the street, the commotion of

panicked observers and Hyun Joong's familiar voice, barking orders to JJ about getting Sienna's car seat out before worrying about Saffire.

The stout presence of his elderly Aunt beside him, roused him from his withering thoughts. "What happened?" Her voice seemed curt as she leaned over his shoulder, viewing the accident. "Goodness, it's our girls."

Taking stock of the situation, she folded both arms, uncertain herself of the upper echelon's reasoning behind such a serious disruption of life. *Who had approved this? And, why?*

"Calm down Young Jae," she cautioned him, "you know there's always a reason. Let it play out."

"PLAY OUT?" Spinning around angrily, Young Jae tried to suppress the frustration rising from his gut. "My FAMILY is down there. I should've been warned. I'm not prepared."

"Stop jumping to conclusions. You don't know the outcome. Why must I continually remind you . . . God works in mysterious ways." For some reason, despite his incessant whining she hated to think her advice was consistently being ignored. "Only a short time ago it was the proposal. Now this . . . there's a larger plan. There has to be. I don't think their names are on the list."

"But, but . . ." Stammering as she tugged him away from the sight of EMT's and police, he hated admitting her propensity to always be correct. "The trumpets, I distinctly heard the trumpets."

"So?"

"You know what they mean."

"I do. But, a soul is a soul. And, you should know the trumpets could've meant ANY soul across the world. Why are you so single-minded Young Jae? You still have so much to learn about the spiritual life." Now dragging him along and back into the sky she unceremoniously dropped him at his original post. "Stay put, and let God and Fate handle it. You act like they don't know what they're doing."

1:20 P.M. - SEOUL NAT'L UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY, L.A. CA

EYES focused, head splitting, JaeJoong ignored the chatter of hospital personnel in his sights, racing down the Emergency Room hallway. The ride in the ambulance had all but drained him of energy, and emotion. Replacing them instead with a firm resolve to make sure he did everything in his power to see that his daughter would come to, without complications.



Pulling up short at the large double doors the tall Asian surgeon calmly held him back with one hand, his voice calm and reassuring, asking the obvious, “Do you speak English?”

“Very little.” Unable to stop himself from trembling in anticipation of the outcome, JJ was desperate to get the preliminaries over with.

“Arasseo.” Continuing in Korean, the man’s face was kind. “She’s in good hands. Until we get her into surgery and remove the glass from her leg she’ll be considered critical. She’s lost a lot of blood. But, you did the right thing not removing the glass before EMT’s arrived. Don’t worry. We have the finest staff in the area. Your name? Are you related? Father by chance? We’ll have to have consent for surgery, and if she needs a transfusion, we prefer to use a relative.”

Consent? Tranfusion? Looking down JJ stared at the toe of one shoe. This was where the rubber met the road. If he said ‘yes’, how was he going to prove it? If he said ‘no’, there was no else available to sign consent forms, and she would run the risk of infection.

“Sir?” Realizing the shock was beginning to take its toll, the surgeon blinked at the handsome young man before him, his patience waning.

Lifting his head JJ coughed slightly, his chest heaving with the weight of the outcome. “JaeJoong, Kim JaeJoong, and YE, Sienna’s my daughter.” *He would deal with the consequences later.*

“Ahhh, good. Then head over to Patient Services, and fill out the appropriate forms. She has to be stabilized and prepped for surgery while we wait.” Stepping toward the set of swinging doors, he glanced over his shoulder, a look of sincere regret and understanding following him. “When you’re finished, it would be helpful if you could go on to the Lab and give blood. Better to be one step ahead of the game.”

And, he was gone. Finally, alone . . . the stark sterile hall reeked of bad memories from JaeJoong’s own (not so distant) past.

Lying unconscious after nearly drowning in the freezing depths of the Han River in Seoul . . . sitting bedside, hopelessly watching his niece struggle to catch a breath after an unforeseen allergic reaction . . .

Now came the hardest part. *Who but Saffire knew he was Sienna’s father?* Leaving Saffire behind in the mangled remains of the SUV had been one of the hardest things he’d ever done, but accompanying his daughter to the emergency room had taken precedence.

Still vividly seeing Hyun Joong perched at the car door, cradling a bleeding Saffron in the front seat, brought tears to his tired, bloodshot eyes again. There had been no way to open the passenger side without the ‘Jaws of Life’, in order to rescue his Princess. And, so . . . he’d held Saffire’s limp hand from over the back seat, listening to the EMT’s working on the unconscious toddler from her car seat.

His heart heavy, he could feel his cell vibrate, going off in his pocket. Reaching in to grab it, he hoped the text was from Maud or Serae. Having already been contacted, they only minutes from the hospital themselves. Curious as to why there was no immediate response, he had to assume they’d gotten the message anyway. But, instead it was Hyun Joong.

WHERE R U? PULLING UP IN FRONT OF EMERGENCY NOW. CAN U MEET ME?

Already? Thankful both girls had been brought in quickly, that didn’t change the fact that his original choice still needed to be upheld. As desperate as he was to meet up with Hyun Joong, Sienna’s current condition was more urgent. Beginning to pick up speed as he strode toward the elevator, his fingers flew through his response.

HAVE TO SIGN CONSENT FOR SIENNA TO HAVE SURGERY & GIVE BLOOD. HOW R THEY?

Holding his breath, he waited . . .

SAFFRON IN & OUT, SAFFIRE STILL UNCONSCIOUS. JUST COME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

1:30 P.M. – PATIENT SERVICES, INFORMATION DESK

SITTING down at the information window, JJ wrung his hands under the counter top nervously. *Were they going to ask him to prove his claims? What would he say? They were from Korea, and the paperwork was kept there . . . Would they believe him?*

At this point he didn't even know if Sienna held his last name. All he was going on was his gut feeling after seeing the child for the very first time, from across a crowded room.

What if he was wrong? Didn't matter. He would deal with the consequences later. Again, the question of English . . . Maybe he could feign innocence by not understanding the language. No such luck. They were in an international hospital, an arm of Seoul University, and the clerk before him was decidedly Asian.

“Ah ye, guardian for 18-month old female patient Sienna? Identification please?” Her Korean perfect, the clerk's eyes twinkled slightly at his name.

Did she recognize him? Would that get him anywhere? Digging for his wallet, he slipped out the ID card pushing it through the small space under the glass.

“Aishhh . . . Anneyeoghaesyo, Kim JaeJoong SSI.” As she nodded giddily, he couldn't believe in the moment of confusion, he'd managed to link up to a fangirl.

“De, anneyeoghaesyo.” Returning the graciousness of her greeting he watched her slide a form toward him, waiting patiently for the obvious question.

“The patient is your daughter I see. Oh my.” Stopping momentarily the lighthearted tone of her voice sobered. “Please accept my heartfelt prayers for her swift recovery. I am going to need your signature for consent to surgery here . . .” Flipping the paper over she tapped on the top of

the second page, adding, “And, then I need to know what hospital she was born in, so we can verify her birth certificate.”

There it was. Stabbed in the heart with only moments to spare, he forced a half-smile, flipping immediately into Idol mode. “Ahhh . . . de . . .” His mind reeling with potential hospitals in S. Korea he could use to stall her with, the unexpected voice at his back was undeniably abrupt and familiar.

“Never mind all that . . . I have her birth certificate right here.” Shoving the folded paper over JJ’s shoulder and through the hole in the glass, Maud whispered in his ear, “sorry it took me so long.” Hugging him briefly, she returned the secretary’s patient smile knowingly.

What more could he ask for? The proof of his love for Saffire had finally been revealed.

2:15 P.M. – EMERGENCY ROOM

HEAD in his hands, Kim Hyun Joong teetered on the edge of the uncomfortable emergency room chair, reliving the last couple hour’s over and over until he thought he was going to be sick. Waiting for the ambulance, with nothing but raw guts and determination to spur him on, he’d weighed all the possibilities while cradling Saffron’s bruised and battered body in his arms.

What if she died? What if they all three died? He and JJ would never be the same. Having seen her open her eyes and finally clutch his shaking fingers, he knew at least where Saffron was concerned he could move on from that horrendous end. Sadly, Saffire and Sienna were still in the woods.

Standing abruptly, he raked both hands through his hair, hoping whatever JJ was having to deal with didn’t put him on the wrong side of the law. Leaning against the woven patterned wallpaper, Joong paced back and forth forcing himself to re-focus on the positives and not the negatives. It was a top-notch hospital, and all of them were getting the immediate care they needed. Most importantly . . . he, JJ and the cabbie had been the first to arrive on the scene.

“JOONG! Oh my God. Sorry for the delay, I got here as soon as I could.” Flying into his arms, Maud clung to the feel of his weary body against her. Leaning back, she studied him, both hands

on his cheeks like mother to son. “How are you doing? I just left Jae, and I know about Sienna, but what of the girls?”

The longest sigh emanating from his dry, tear-drenched throat he forced a weak smile. “Aishhh auntie. One question at a time.”

Steering her back to the row of chairs they sat down, clutching hands for support. “I’m trying to hold it together. But, it happened so fast. It was like watching my own life flash before my eyes in slow motion.” Trying not to choke up again, he coughed, unashamed of his reaction. “It was weird. One minute I was thinking about how I was gonna apologize, and what she would say, hoping I wasn’t too late . . . and the next . . .” Trailing off his face downward, his eyes misted over as the snapshot (he knew he would never forget) flashed before him again and again.

“Aigooo, poor boy.” Tucking her arm about his drooped shoulder Maud didn’t remember having ever seen him this broken, (not even after Young Jae’s passing). “Any updates?” Looking in the direction of the closed curtains clearly, they weren’t allowing him back there during the preliminary exam.

“Not really. She was banged up pretty badly from the airbags, and must’ve hit her head on the steering wheel cause both eyes are black and blue, and she keeps going in and out of consciousness. And, Saffire . . . she hasn’t come to yet.”

Hearing more troubling news, Maud clung to him, trying to be positive. “Well . . . give them time. I know it’s hard.”

“You said you just left JJ hyung? Have they taken Sienna into surgery yet?” Trying to change the subject Joong rose, wiping the sweat from his palms. His designer suit pants were bloody and wrinkled, his black jacket probably still laying in the back seat of the cab where he’d left it when he’d taken off across the street. But, none of that mattered now. Only what was ahead. For all of them.

“They have. The little dear’s probably being prepped even we speak. JJ IS her father you know. I brought him the birth certificate. Saffire keeps it in the top drawer of the office desk. Not

sure why. Maybe to remind her she needed to tell him.” So glad to give good news for a change, Maud stood to hug the young man’s broad shoulders again. “I hate that this had to happen. It was a hell of a way for him to find out, but she’s been struggling with it for so long.”

Putting his animosity aside, Hyun Joong relaxed against her stout frame, thinking about Saffire. “I figured it out earlier at the opening. She looks exactly like him. Anyway, it’s cool. I’m happy for him. He loves children, and he needs that right now,” adding, “it’s been hard for him without his ‘Princess’.”

“So, they haven’t said why she hasn’t regained consciousness yet?” Maud had to get all the information necessary. Even though it was still early, there were others to contact. Serae, back at the café, employees, Kyong and Sandra, and even Ian.

“No. I hope it isn’t serious. Between that and Sienna’s surgery, JJ’s gonna need lots of support.”

Biting down on her lower lip, the middle-aged woman forced a smile for his sake. “De. But, she’s a fighter. They ALL are. They won’t give up and I didn’t spend an entire year planning this little reunion for the four of you to have some asshole in a pick-up truck ruin it.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Now Hyun Joong was chuckling. If there was one thing he loved and missed about Maud, it was her innate ability to tell it like it was.

“Mr. Kim? They’re getting your wife ready to take up to ICU, as soon as she’s settled we’ll come get you. I brought you her things.” The older nurse stood in the doorway holding a small plastic bag, a blank, half-hearted smile on her face.

Hearing ‘wife’, Maud nudged his ribs perceptively. Just like JaeJoong he had already attempted to seal their fate, stepping across all boundaries and into the unknown.

“Text Jae see if he’s available yet.” Rising, Joong winked at her, grinning through his pain for the first time since he’d leaned into the cab prepared for a trip to meet his destiny.

Hands out he took the bag peering inside curiously, finding Saffron's small clutch, cell phone, the diamond ring, set of earrings, and curled up at the very bottom, the silver snowflake necklace she'd been wearing. It had touched him, seeing it on her for the first time in the café, again when he held her curbside, and now . . . for the third time it managed to catch his heart in a completely new and significant way.

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“YAH, I heard my name.” His expression grave, JJ careened up beside his friend, waiting to be acknowledged.

As brothers should, they clung to one another momentarily unaware of the impact it had on those around them. The journey hadn't been about this. It had been about answers, new beginnings and rekindling a love they thought had been lost. Now . . . it was about strength, support and encouragement. They'd come through tragedies before. Together, they would come through this one too.

“I tried to get here as quick as I could. What's the status on Saffire? I need to see her.” Eyes wide, he shifted his focus, waiting to hear the update. Praying it was positive he glanced from the nurse, to Joong and back again. “Is it serious? Is she going to be alright?”

“And, you are?” Stopping him from moving any further toward the gurney carrying Saffire's limp body toward the hallway the nurse suddenly turned somewhat firm.

Before he could speak for himself, Maud puffed out her chest in front of the woman boldly, her dialect strong.

“He doesn't speak English. He's her husband, and father to the little girl that was taken up to surgery. So, if you'll get her things please. Gamsahabnida.” Bowing politely, she tapped one foot impatiently, waiting for the nurse to move and respond.

Grateful for the interruption, JJ nodded profusely, accepting his new status as husband, darting over to the side of the gurney, leaving the other's behind.

“Can . . . she . . . hear me?” Eking out a timid whisper, he nudged the short, stocky intern wheeling her in the direction of the elevator, forgetting his English was raw.

Pausing, the man nodded, responding in Korean, “Ye, she’s unconscious, but talking is encouraged. Only a minute though, we need to get her upstairs.” Allowing JJ some privacy he stepped back politely.

Choking down his emotion, JJ leaned over her pale, bruised face. A quick visual examination told him most of what he needed to know. Seemingly no broken bones, but a myriad of various cuts, scrapes and bruises dotted her bare shoulders and down both arms.

Still feeling helpless and vulnerable, now the guilt set in. He had left her. When the decision had to be made between she or Sienna, he’d chosen the toddler he’d never laid eyes on until hours ago. His paternal instincts ran deep.

Ignoring the random sounds around him, he brushed his lips across her already bandaged forehead, gingerly stroking one finger down her still hand.

“Princess, it’s me Prince Jae.” Pushing on, (knowing his time was short), he tried to stay positive. “You wake up and get well, arasseo (OKAY)? I promise I won’t leave you ever again. Saranghae (I LOVE YOU).”

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