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48 HOURS



MARCH 11th, 2017 – 9:00 P.M. – HOSPITAL, L.A.

THE sun had already set over the L.A. mountains, a large crescent moon shining in the night sky. Outside the air had cooled considerably, while inside the stuffy hospital waiting room JJ, Hyun Joong, Maud and Serae hovered, (heads together) in the midst of a serious collaboration.

“I hope this works.” Her voice cracking with emotion, Serae lifted the small gift bag in the air swinging it by its black ribbon handles.

“Well its too late for regrets now, isn’t it?” Maud clipped, having already passed the point of gut-wrenching emotionalism. These two young men needed their help and if this was the only way to make it happen, then so be it!

“Aigooo . . .” Clasping one hand to her heart, Serae glanced upward, catching the brightly lit moon outside the window. “On our dead Young Jae’s soul, forgive us for this indiscretion Father.”

Shaking her weary head, Maud shoved her almost jokingly. “Since when have you asked forgiveness for anything sister? Especially on poor Young Jae’s soul?” Lowering her voice to a whisper she hissed, “We’re not going to burn in hell for one little ‘white lie’. Get on with it, these poor boys have been through enough.”

“Arasseo, arasseo . . .” Digging into the small bag, Serae pulled out two small, white boxes, handing one to each Idol adding, “at least say something meaningful before you open them.”

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***FOR** the love of God where was everyone?* High heels clipping noisily across the stark, white tile hospital floor, Nyoko tugged at the collection of brightly colored balloons, a concerned frown crossing her sharp features.

After sitting alone for hours at the hotel bar, swatting away sleazy, aggressive, assholes she’d finally gotten up the nerve to text JJ, and ask why she’d been relegated to the bottom of his importance list. Finding out the owners of the newly christened café had been involved in a serious accident, why was she the last to know? The text had been abruptly cold, telling her she needed to be ready to leave with the manager by hotel check-out time tomorrow morning and, NOT to miss him.

The hell with that! Who did he think she was? Some childish schoolgirl he could manipulate at will? No. She was a grown woman, with a mind and a bank account. She would stay to support him. Immediately, taking matters into her own hands, she’d booked another room at different location proceeding to make enough calls to discover what hospital the women had been taken to.

Thinking about how awful hospital food was portrayed in the movies, she passed the candy machine, wondering should she stop and invest in some goodies to help him make it through the night. No, probably not, he’d would be pissy she’d hadn’t stayed put.

Skidding up to an empty desk before the entry button to ICU, she stopped to examine her makeup and hair in the reflective door glass. Not perfect, but it would have to do. Finger to the cold, steel button an uninterested voice responded, echoing through the speaker out into the hallway.

“Name?”

“Nyoko . . .”

“No, patient name.”

“OH?” Hiking up the large bear she’d purchased down in the gift shop for the child, she felt into her jacket pocket for the sticky note Saffron’s name was written on. “Saffron Ryu,” she belted out proudly, waving it in the air above the disembodied voice.

“Okayyyy. Waiting area on the left. Only one visitor at a time.”

And, the double door’s swung open. *YES!* Pleased the voice didn’t question her further about who she really was, the tall Japanese woman bolted inside, tugging the bouquet of balloons behind her.

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“**MISS.** Ummm, you can’t go in there!” The loud reprimand from behind startled Nyoko, who one hand on the waiting room door was about to make her grand entrance.

“Why not?” Swerving impatiently, the balloons catching the side of her long, dark hair she pouted at the elderly nurse, unable to comprehend why they’d opened the doors, but were now refusing her entrance.

“Are you Sandra Kroes?”

“Nooo.”

“There aren’t any other family members listed.” Peering over the glasses perched on the tip of her nose, the woman sniffed haughtily. “Humpf, who let you in?”

“I DON’T know. A voice. I gave my name.”

“Well, it wasn’t me. You’ll have to leave the gifts here at the desk and check on the patient’s condition tomorrow. Only family allowed until they’re out of ICU.”

They? Both sisters were serious enough to be in ICU? Staring the woman down, the wheels in her head turning a mile a minute, Nyoko clicked her nails against the slick countertop. *Be nice, act natural, or this witchy old woman wouldn't give her another second.*

“Oh my. I am SO SORRY.” Sighing dramatically, she lifted the bear to the counter, placing the bright yellow, ‘Get Well’ card in its lap. Tying the balloons to one stout arm, she snickered at the thought of it drifting up to the ceiling (where the nurse, would need a ladder to reach it). But, no such luck.

Purposefully staring into the nurse’s name tag she broke into a broad, engaging smile, starting coyly, “Nurse Brantley, it’s late . . . and I came all the way from Malibu to see Saffron, my best friend in the whole world. I’m the last one to know about this awful accident. Now, you’re telling me I have to drive all the way back home without even getting the chance to tell her how much I love her, and want her to get better soon.” Feigning hurt and disappointment, she forced a slight tear out of one eye, hoping to appeal to the woman’s softer side. *If she could just get to JJ she’d be home free!*

Arms crossed, the grey-haired nurse’s foot tapped the tile floor underneath the counter in frustration. She wasn’t one to break the rules, but it was coming into final visiting hours. The shift change wasn’t due until midnight, and the rest of the family hadn’t moved from the waiting area for over thirty minutes. What harm would it do to (at least) give her permission to hang out with the family for support and information?

“Oh alright. But, leave the goodies here. The rest of them are already in there.” Figuring she was safe, she waved the attractive friend back toward the closed door, trying not to act like she’d given in.

“OH THANKS . . . THANKS SO MUCH.” Bowing excitedly, Nyoko bolted from the nurses’ station, a glimmer of haughtiness returning to her features. *It was no secret, coercion was her middle name. You didn't land a catch like JJ without working at it.*

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HUDDLED in a circle, looking like a satanic cult about to conduct a ritual of some sort, the four; serious looking adults didn't notice Nyoko as she slithered inside the waiting room door. *What were they all doing?* About to approach JaeJoong's broad back she overheard their hushed conversation, followed by a most unusual exchange of major proportions.

"So, this seals the deal," Hyun Joong muttered, slipping the silver wedding band on his left finger, unable to take his eyes off the way it glimmered in the bright overhead lighting. "Jae? You game?"

His eyes following around the circle he watched JJ lift his own band from the confines of the small box, smashing it over his knuckle hurriedly. "Always was. You were the hold out."

"Okay then, Serae account, "we're legal now. No more questions asked, husbands and wives finally together."

Hands clasped as if in prayer, she closed her eyes thanking whatever source had led them to this unanticipated end. Initially, all they were after was a well-needed reunion to talk and hash out their feelings. What had come with it was so much more.

Nyoko blinked at the foursome (heart beating out of her chest) forced her emotions to catch up with her hearing. *Husbands? Wives? Finally, together? JJ was f'ng MARRIED. NO . . . HELL NO. TO WHO? Hadn't he come just to support Saffron in the opening of her new café? She was the tall, dark and handsome Ian's fiancé. And the child?*

Feeling the knot in her stomach rise, not knowing where to turn, or how to announce herself, all she could do was crouch against the door waiting for one of them to notice her. It didn't take long. Hyun Joong looked up past Maud's shoulder and there she was, pale as a ghost, her dark hair stark against her skin.

"Jae." His voice quiet, he nodded in her direction, waiting for JJ to turn around. *How had she gotten here? She certainly wasn't family.*

SIENNA'S ROOM

CHIN propped on the metal bars of the hospital baby bed, JaeJoong stared down into the peacefully sleeping face of his daughter, Sienna. Her dark eyelashes fluttered unknowingly as she slept, dreaming of what he hoped were happy things like puppies, ice cream, and sunny days on the beach.



Afraid to disturb her, fresh from surgery he tipped his cheek onto one elbow feeling the tenseness in his shoulders fall away. She was his flesh and blood. A feeling he'd always hoped for, but never imagined would encompass his heart with such raw abandon. Already, he knew someday she would conquer the world.

“Ahhh, my little Sienna.” Whispering, his voice dispirited, so many questions flew in and out of his mind. Most of them unanswered. “I love your eomma (MOMMY) I really do. But, I don't know if that's enough anymore. Aishhh, I hate that you're too little to understand.”

Remembering the phone call from the SUV and Saffire's squeal of oncoming disaster, he shivered unconsciously. She 'had' reached out. Even without knowing he and Joong were at the opening . . . she had still made the call.

“Did she tell you about me?” Leaning over slightly, he caressed the folds of her hospital gown, half expecting her to open her eyes and respond. “You're beautiful. Just like she is.”

Feeling himself dozing, his eyes closed allowing the relaxation of the moment to fully overtake him. Visions of them running hand-in-hand, her tiny legs weaving through the tall grass at the shores of the Han River, drifted into the exposed spaces of his heart. But, the reality was . . . unable to be by Saffire side as a complete family, could he honestly put aside his career to give her what she needed? His biological father couldn't do it for him, he was just as guilty.



The worst of the day was over, but Princess wasn't out of the woods yet, and this amazingly brave, little girl, who (snatched from the jaws of death) deserved 'both' her parents to live a full and happy life.

“Mianhae Sienna. Mianhae,” he muttered sadly.

Hearing again, the hurt in Nyoko’s voice pleading to stay with him only brought to the surface the realization he shouldn’t have dragged her into a situation, period. She had feelings too. He’d used her, just like Hyun Joong had accused him of before ever boarding the plane. Now, here he was trying to justify himself to a sleeping toddler.

Seemed like all he’d done since arriving, was split his time between rooms, thinking. He’d re-contemplated his life after nearly drowning in the Han years earlier, but for the most part moved on . . . turning his emotions inward to his song lyrics and compositions. Alone, drowning his true feelings in alcohol only momentary fix. In his Idol world he spoke, moved and loved without much thought, until the last twelve hours, when lives literally hang in the balance.

The military was supposed to have turned him into a man. Thinking back however, he was certain manhood was more than a fit body, and the ability to sacrifice your life for a comrade. Why did ‘he’ suddenly feel like the sacrificial lamb? Young Jae would be disgusted with him right now. Afraid to even conjure up a thought about the man who’d died, leaving him a clear path to his daughter, JJ coiled in shame.

Talent didn’t make him any less of a scoundrel, who smoked, drank, cussed and flirted with fans of both sexes. Still struggling with adulthood, now he would be expected to settle down with a child on his knee and a ‘wife’ at his side . . . For as much as he wanted it . . . he feared it even more.

Wishing with every bone in his body he could be more like the responsibly strong Hyun Joong, his release of tears came without warning, soaking the white blanket tucked carefully around the still form beneath him. Would Sienna or Saffire even know if he returned to Korea? He needed to walk back out of their lives before any more damage was done.

Obviously, they had been doing just fine all this time without him. They still had family, Maud, Serae . . . they didn’t need the headaches that life with an Idol would bring them. How could he have been so stupid to think that he could come back into this woman’s life without a

word of encouragement from her? He was a cold, heartless bastard. He didn't deserve them. Loving them from afar would be a smarter and better alternative for everyone.

Rising wearily, he swiped away the tears with his wrinkled shirt sleeve. Before Saffire came to, and the situation spiraled any more out of control, it was time to say his goodbye's and return home immediately. He had chosen the life of an Idol and it would kill him if he dragged her and Sienna along with him, only to suffocate her in the end and alienate his own flesh and blood. She had created a life for them here, and he didn't blame her. With luck, in her unconscious state, she wouldn't remember his promise to never leave her again.

Resigned by his decision, he stroked one finger down Sienna's exposed arm gently, uttering . . . "Annyeong (GOODBYE) my Angel. Take good care of your eomma (MOMMY). She's gonna need you when she wakes up," slipping off the silver wedding band, he laid it atop the bedside table. Turning away he closed the door along with his heart, to the stabbing pain he knew would haunt him forever.

SAFFRON'S ROOM

VISITING hours were over. Leaning on the wall across from Saffron's bed, Hyun Joong watched the nurse checking her vitals. Scribbling little notations on the chart she carried, the IV pump droned loudly in the quiet room. Nothing had changed since they rolled her into Emergency. Someone . . . probably Maud, had braided her long red hair, leaving it resting over one shoulder and down her chest. Looking angelic, her pale skin and black eyes were the only indication of the trauma she'd endured.



The freckles he loved, appeared darker and more prominent than he remembered. Babo (STUPID) California sun. Hell, for redheads. Picturing her patting the annoying spots with makeup and cursing her Great Aunt Saffron for inheriting her looks, the soft touch to his shoulder jolted him back to the present.

"Mr. Kim, you okay?"

Wanting to scream, ‘NO, the love of my life is comatose!’ he met the kind brown eyes nodding his head ‘yes’, instead. “Mianhae, no sleep. How is she?”

“The same but, the first twelve hours is considered early. The doctor said it could take up to forty-eight for her to fully wake up.” Wrapping the chart to her chest, she tugged the little blood pressure cart behind her. “I brought you some bedding. It’s over there on the fold out couch so try to get a little sleep. You won’t any be good to her when she comes to if you’re exhausted. And, don’t worry, we’ll be watching her all night. If there’s any change, I’ll be sure to wake you. Can I bring you anything right now?”

Raking his hair back, the ring felt heavy on Joong’s left hand. “Ani, gamsahabnida. (NO, THANK-YOU) I’ll be fine.” Smiling politely at the young nurse, he bowed his head slightly trekking toward his wife’s bedside.

Sitting down he twisted the silver band staring at it glittering in the overhead light. “Funny Oh Hani, we talked about not going down this road. But, for all intents and purposes, here we are . . . married. Don’t be angry with me. It was the only way.” Rubbing the scruff on his chin he watched her chest rise and fall with each breath.

“Sienna is doing good. Amazingly, the car seat along with JJ, saved her life. She needed some stitches. He’s with her now. And, just like you, Saffire is . . . well . . .” Searching for the right words, he coughed uneasily. “Asleep.” Recovering quickly, he snickered, thinking about the two sisters floating in limbo plotting their next attack.

“Knowing you two, you’re probably together trying to decide how long JJ and I need to suffer for leaving your cute, little asses. If you’d hurry and wake up right now, I’d welcome one of those Cat-5, redheaded tantrums you’re famous for.”

Scanning the outline of her still body, he recalled thinking (for a split second at the cafe opening), the pretty toddler Sienna, belonged to his Hani. Now pausing, what if two years ago, it had been her alone and pregnant? Would she have chosen the same path her sister did?

Scooting the chair closer to the bed, he took a deep breath, gently seizing her braid, reminded of the silky texture wrapped around his body when they made love. In Jeju she’d as much as confessed to being in love with him, even going so far to say she would welcome them having a

child together. A fresh chuckle racked his body. “No . . . you wouldn’t have put me through that kind of hell. Unlike Saffire you would’ve dragged me to the hospital to confirm your condition and with your Oh Hani logic, refused to marry me.”

On the table between his Styrofoam tea cup and box of tissues, Saffron’s cell began flashing brightly. How the phone had survived the accident was an unexpected miracle.

Picking it up, Joong swiped it open, seeing a text from Ian. *Shit. Should he read it, or not? After all, declaring himself her husband gave him the right to protect her from men like him.*

Turning the diamond engagement ring over to Maud, he’d asked her to send it back to the man because Saffron wouldn’t need it. While waiting outside of Emergency for news, a distraught Maud filled in the blanks, telling him everything he’d missed over the last two years. The fire; Saffire leaving Saffron alone to rebuild and run the café; Sienna’s birth; finally . . . Ian coming back into her life.

“If I read it TO you Hani, it’s not like I’m invading your privacy.” Opening the text, it made him feel better to rationalize it.

LANDED BABE. SMOOTH FLIGHT. MISSING YOU. WILL CALL WHEN I GET THROUGH CUSTOMS. HUGS.

Clearly, Ian not knowing about the accident yet, gave Joong time before ‘so-called-fiancé’, busted in calling ‘foul’. A buzzing from his own cell, pierced his thoughts.

“Damn, suddenly we’re popular Hani,” he announced quietly, digging it from his back pocket, seeing JJ had texted him.

Hoping it was good news about Saffire, he anxiously opened it. Reading down through the ‘bullshit’ message, his eyebrows drew together in real concern. Cussing, “FUCK YOU JAE,” under his breath, he punched out a response, hitting SEND and tossing the cell to the nightstand, his entire body shaking with fury. “You’re a f’ng idiot. Why am I surprised?”

This time his hyung wouldn’t be slipping into the Han River by accident, he would push his ass in personally for his cowardliness, and sheer stupidity.

Both hands falling to his thighs in despair, the irritated, exhausted Idol bowed his head. Not only was he in a strange place with no support but, now . . . homeless as well. It wouldn’t be long

before Saffron’s parents and an angry fiancé would descend upon him, asking questions he didn’t have any answers to.

Maybe in the long run, JJ was right. They should have left well enough alone. However, thinking back . . . unlike him, he had a letter from Saffron filled with frustration, love, and ultimatums.

“Mianhae Saffron, if only I’d . . .” Choking on his words, he was paralyzed with agony over what had happened in the last twelve hours. ‘What-if’s’ flooding his brain, he rose stumbling out of camera range, not wanting anyone to witness his breakdown. Aware this wasn’t good for either of them, the only problem was, he couldn’t seem to turn his emotions off. Sleep was what he required, trusting the nurse would wake him if anything happened.

Gabbing the pillow, he clutched it like a lifeline, sinking back into the uncomfortable stiff couch. And, there in the dead of night (if only for a moment) gave in to his fears. Because, with JJ’s departure the game had drastically changed, as well as the promise he’d made to Uncle Ryu.

While slipping on the thin silver band swearing he’d take responsibility for Saffron’s happiness, whether he was a part of her future or not, it now included Saffire and Sienna.

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