

CHAPTER SEVEN

(Part 2)

“All I Need is Coffee and Red Lipstick . . .”



Gangnam, S. Korea – Bus Stop, outside Kim Hyun Joong’s Apartment

9:30 P.M.

WAS it really safe to leave them? Saffire and JaeJoong? After all, he ‘had’ put the bug in his ear to use the room, making sure the key was easily accessible in JJ’s sprawling Gangnam home.

Now, as uncle Ryu sat perched on the cold metal bench at the bus stop, he wondered why Saffron was taking so long. Surely, Hyun Joong had rejected her overt attempts at affection already, and she would be heading home in no time. Time was of no concern, but boredom got the best of him, and closing his eyes he found himself back in the tiny room above the Hotness Café.

She was stunning. Bathed in moonlight, her hair glistening in the candlelight. She loved to be fed, and her eyes darted mischievously from the steaming plate of food before her, to Young-Jae’s fork, poised at her lips in anticipation of her next bite.

Opening wide, she slipped her tongue forward, just enough to tantalize him, giggling as his expression creased the already prominent dimples on his face. Every muscle in his body twitched and ached with love for her.

Here, in this room . . . their sanctuary . . . where they were able to lock out the cares of the world, was where he would have been content to live and die with 'her'.

Snoring was not a ghostly option! Uncle Ryu's head jerked up, wondering why the dog at his feet was staring at him with such confusion written all over his droopy, eye-lidded face.

"Shoo. Go home. Nothing here for you." Young-Jae begged, trying to wave him off, but instead the snow-covered, Golden Retriever merely cocked his head to one side quizzically, barking a series of loud, conspicuous "WOOF'S" to the seemingly empty bench . . .

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Inside the 'Cup of Hotness Café' – JaeJoong and Saffire

9:30 P.M.

STANDING nervously, eyes squeezed shut, Saffire was almost afraid to open them, unable to believe JJ would purposefully disobey the Noona's who had ordered him to stay away from not only a date in the café, but her as well. *He had a key. Had he gotten 'that' key from Uncle Ryu as well?*

"OPEN!" JJ announced at her side, sounding well pleased with himself.

Blinking as she focused around the small private room, a slight gasp emanated from her lips at his cute and whimsical creation, looking much like a little girls 'birthday party'. As her heart melted into a pool of understanding she remembered he was the Idol with sisters, small nieces, and a large loving family. Now she felt bad for decking him. Of course! This small display of his own childish yearnings couldn't have represented him more.

The round table she cleaned often, was parked in the very middle, laden down with fancy crystal bowls, dishes of candy and cakes, with two wooden chairs flanking it on either side. He had thought of everything from cupcakes to chocolates, gummies, and hard candies, even including two massive cones of ‘cotton candy’ perched in the middle like a bouquet of pink spun sugar. Baby pink and white balloons dotted the ceiling, with heart-shaped votives on the floor, encircling the entire display, sending sparkles of candlelight (twinkling like hundreds of diamonds) around the otherwise dark walls.

Speechless, Saffire touched her lips mindlessly, wandering away from him and into her own ‘Cotton Candy Wonderland’.

“Oh my, JJ . . .” She cooed, one finger sliding along the white satin table cloth, and down to the cushioned chairs on either side. “How did you know pink was my favorite color?”

Following behind her cautiously, JJ found himself smiling, his eyes giving away his inner excitement, (realizing that it didn’t matter if she thought it was over-the-top for a first date). It was exactly how he had ordered it. This represented the stripped down version of Idol Kim JaeJoong. Tonight, despite their rough and tumble beginning, she would find him fun, vulnerable and exposed.

“Oh, just a lucky guess.” He knew the real reason, but there would be time for that. “The view from here at night is spectacular. Ummm, I figure you’ve probably been in here since coming, de?”

He hesitated, hands behind his back watching her meander about, taking in every detail of the decorated space, even getting on her toes in the candlelight to peer out the very top of the large window. The snow was still falling lightly outside, little flakes hitting the glass, and melting on contact against the reflection of her wide-eyed expression pressed firmly to its cold surface.

“It’s chilly. Hope your feet don’t get cold. I turned on the heat right after I got here. And, the candles help.” He apologized, forgetting that this was the room closest to the heavens. Hot in the summer and frigid in the winter.

“Yeah, it’s cold, but that’s okay. And actually, I HAVE been in here. Maud makes me clean it. Don’t know why. It doesn’t really get dirty. But, I’ve never been here at night. Wowww, JJ. You’re right. It IS spectacular.” Turning around to face him, she sucked in one dry coffee-flavored lip, wishing she could capture the moment and imprint it in her memory banks.

Struggling anew with the ups and downs of their quirky, love/hate relationship, now hating that she had almost turned him away. *If she had, how would she have seen this side of him?*

Moving past him to the bench, she sat down pensively, leaning back against the soft pillows, her eyes still dancing with excitement around the candlelit room. “Why is it you make me feel all pissy, and then do something amazing like this JJ?” She questioned curiously. “This isn’t at all what I expected.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Sucking in the last bit of his now cooling coffee, he sighed heavily, plunking down, and staring out into the night sky along with her.

The warmth of the alcohol was surging through his veins, easing the shy tension he always felt when overwhelmed in the presence of someone he truly cared about. Bantering with her and being witty helped him in the short term, but when push came to shove, he had to work at letting her see his true heart. Like her, he had been burned . . . and more than once.

“This is me Saffire. This is what I’m all about when I’m not ‘ON’. You know. Having to be an Idol. Think you really know me?” Barely hesitating, he sighed. “Maybe I should ask that a different way. Do you WANT to get to know me? Really know me? After all, you DID ask for this date.”

Saffire cringed beside him at the question. *It was true, she ‘didn’t’ know much. Junsu had been her obvious target of affection in coming, when JJ came flying unexpectedly out of the woodwork. She knew him as JYJ’s ‘King JaeJoong’, and Junsu’s friend. Other than that. He was still a mystery.*

“I DO want to know. And NO, you’re right. I really don’t know anything.” Admitting she needed to start somewhere, she scooted down into his shoulder, wondering what was next.

“Okay. Then the date officially begins now.” He announced, leaning over toward the table, and tugging out both large bouquets of pink sugary cotton candy from inside their respective vases.

“One for you . . . one for me. Unknown JJ fact #1. I love sweets. Especially cotton candy. And since you have been named the ‘unofficial’ ‘Cotton Candy Princess’ . . . ‘Bitch’ . . . ‘Princess Bitch’. Whatever!” He joked, (bowing low as if he were in the presence of royalty).

“Welcome to your ‘Cotton Candy Kingdom’. I am Prince JJ, and this my lady . . . is your bouquet. You are now ‘Official’.”

“JJ. Oh my God? Are you serious?” She giggled, letting him rip the cellophane from around the bottom, moving her mouth in for the first bite . . . savoring the taste, its sweet sensuous, flavor melting against her warm, wet tongue. *So he was attempting to seduce her with candy, his official proclamation being his first assignment as ‘Prince’ JJ. It was so crazy, it just might work.*

“Of course I’m serious.” The peaceful quiet around them, was overwhelming as they sat side-by-side, their bodies touching lazily. Suddenly out of nowhere he announced, “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised you don’t know anything about me. Even though most girls can list my entire Bio, likes . . . dislikes . . . habits . . . aishhh, I could go on and on.”

Picking pieces from the side of her candy bouquet, he licked his lips unconsciously. *She was busy with her own life in California. A life that included her music . . . and Junsu. She had made it clear he had been her goal. Not ‘King’ or ‘Prince’ JJ. His ego needed to take a rest.*

In spite of that, he was working up the nerve to tell on himself. He had ‘Googled’ her as soon as she had asked for an official ‘date’. *He was up against his hyung. He wanted to fight for her, but Junsu had nearly two years on him, (making it hard to catch up).*

Stretching out both legs, he crossed his feet, allowing his neck to fall back against the top of the pillowed bench. It had been a hectic day already, ending with an ache between his legs, (both physically ‘and’ sexually). Concentrating on a few songs he had been working up, he hummed unconsciously, allowing them to float about, not even aware that Saffire had stopped picking pieces of cotton candy off the cone and was staring at him sidewise intently.

“What’s it like JJ? Being you? It must be . . . I don’t know . . . grueling, sometimes.” Watching him bobbing his head up and down agreeably, she finally answered her own question, “I can’t even imagine. Having to be . . . like you said . . . ‘ON’ 24-7.”

“Not ‘ON’ right now.” He muttered, peering at her from under a thatch of blonde hair. “This is how I relax, really. I find a private out-of-the-way corner, drink a little, (well, maybe more than a little, depending on the situation), have a cigarette or two.” *Maybe now was the time to tell her about himself.* “I walk the Han listening to music when I’m stressed, and I like to run, gets the kinks out and clears the cobwebs out of my head.”

Stopping as Saffire shivered against him, he continued, his eyes shutting lazily. “But, hands down . . . laughing and hanging out with my hyungs is my favorite way to unwind. It’s getting harder though, we’re all sort of scattered now. The movie is helping though.” Curling one long arm around her shoulder he snuggled his nose into the fresh scent of her trailing locks of hair. “You, Saffire Ryu are an exception to my rule ‘and’ my schedule right now.”

Unable to effectively process the sharp-tongued, witty Idol she had met a few weeks ago, with what he had just said, Saffire remembered the long talks she and Junsu were used to having about just those same issues. The rigors of an Idol. Secrecy was key in all their lives, to maintain any modicum of normalcy.

Case in point . . . the ‘Cup of Hotness Café’. Uncle Ryu’s sanctuary, where the Idols could come and go without fear of repercussion, photographers or crazy screaming fans. *In all honesty, he had left her and Saffron a goldmine.*

Kim Hyun Joong’s Apartment – Hyun Joong and Saffron

9:30 P.M.

HOLY shit . . . the room temperature shot up a hundred degrees as sweat beaded up across Hyun Joong’s upper lip. *Had he heard her right . . . ‘no panties’? DAMN, was she that uninhibited? Miss ‘Corporate’.* Fingering the zipper of the long skirt she wore, the image of what laid underneath had his mouth watering.

“What the fuck Saffron, what would possess you to ‘forget’ panties?” He scolded her, unable to keep his finger from tugging on the fastener, quickly closing it when it opened without effort.

Chewing on her lip, sensing the change in him she opted to tell him the truth, (okay, maybe a watered down version of the truth).

“Ummm . . . it’s something I’ve always wondered about but never had the guts to try.” Shrugging her shoulders she hoped he would let it drop, pick her up in his arms, and carry her to the bedroom, no questions asked.

Instead, he flipped her off his lap as if she had just confessed to really being a guy. Hitting pause on the remote he observed 'Seung Jo' taunting 'Ha Ni' with her childish underwear. Remembering how embarrassed they had both become while doing the scene, (with one or the other laughing) whenever their eyes met, he couldn't help but shoot a look to Saffron's uncertain ones.



“Bullshit Saffron . . . in the dead of winter, to a man's apartment.” Pausing, he took a deep cleansing breath before asking, “What do you want from me? ‘Cause if you're looking for a one-night stand you're barking up the wrong tree.” He bellowed, rubbing his palms down his pant legs trying to hide the hard-on that was starting to get painful.

Saffron cringed. *Well now she had done it.* Needing to think fast before he threw her out in the snow on her bare ass, her mind spun with excuses . . . no, explanations.

“No, Joong nothing like that . . . I'm . . . I'm not sure what I was thinking.” She stammered bringing her legs up under her and lowering her head. Then taking a huge gulp, she straightened up like a rod had been inserted along her spine, remembering the motto, ‘Never let them see you sweat’.

“You been drinking? I would expect that kind of behavior from drunken Saffron . . . but not sober.” He asked curiously, tilting his head to one side, wondering if his first impression of her had been totally off. *Fuck . . . maybe he should swear off women for a while considering his present predicament.*

“Why not?” She asked, her brows snapping together, hearing the swish of the curtains as the blowing heat fluttered them out into the room.

Sliding to the edge of the sofa hands on knees, he squinted at her, a line creasing his forehead in thought. Then, announcing matter-of-factly, “You're too uptight . . . I don't see you as a woman with an agenda.”

She grinned glancing at the T.V. screen then back to him, “Oh Joong I thought you knew women . . . we all have an agenda. I came here tonight to seduce you.” Tilting her head she pierced him with her round blue eyes. “Back in Chicago after I lost everything, I saw this Drama.” Pointing to the T.V. “Your Drama. I won't lie I fell for his . . . your good looks.

“The arrogant genius that I hated first, because he treated Ha Ni with contempt, but the more I watched, I could see the attraction was her persistence in the pursuit of him. I know this doesn’t make sense to you, but I felt he needed her from the start, and decided to help her find her own hidden potential making her worthy of his love. I watched it eight times in a row . . . finally decided to search for a man like that . . . my own Baek Seung Jo, and I didn’t think I would find him anywhere except Korea. I had already planned to move here before Uncle Ryu died . . . with the excuse to find you.” She faltered, blushing slightly. “But now I’m pretty sure it was really to discovery me.”

Joong balked. *If he were smart he would toss her out the door, and not get involved.* Wondering why he always picked the damaged ones . . . yet still not moving, he sensed she wasn’t done, so he waited while she collected herself, winding her hands in her lap as she swallowed then kept going.

“Then, I lost Uncle Ryu, the one man in my life I could depend on and found a sister that I have little in common with. So that night when you came to my rescue, knight in shining armor Baek Seung Jo, so different from Mr. Big. You became my Prince because you were there for me like Uncle would have been.”

Fidgeting next to her on the sofa Hyun Joong figured this Mr. Big must have done a number on her. In order for her to get away from him, she had to move to the other side of the world. Glancing at the T.V. screen he was nothing like Seung Jo and it was obvious in her delusions that she didn’t see him, Kim Hyun Joong . . . why couldn’t it be him?

Shit, once again he was freaking jealous of himself. Aish, she was a problem he didn’t want to take on the other night, still it hadn’t taken much to get him involved, one game of Ki Bi Bo. WHY?

Giving her a disconcerting look, he stated, “It’s true what you said before, I haven’t got a clue what goes on inside a woman’s head . . . especially yours. I don’t think I can be who you really need, at least not right now.” Rubbing his hands together, he looked away, “It wouldn’t be smart for me to start a new relationship at this point, because of my busy schedule and upcoming military service.”

Shit, all I can do is the here and now, and no woman wants that.

“Well, I’m not asking for a relationship. After living with a man for four years without the benefit of marriage or even girlfriend status, believe me a commitment is the last thing I anticipate.” Raking the long hair behind her ears, she continued.

“Maybe I want someone to care enough, like ‘Seung Jo’ does, by manipulating ‘Ha Ni’ into becoming a better person. I really do identify with her. That was me . . . living for Mr. Big with no sense of my own worth, and he liked it that way. Baek Seung Jo didn’t, he wanted Ha Ni to become an independent woman.”

“And you think I can do that for you?” Seizing her hand placing it on his heart, “Feel that? I’m flesh and blood not a fantasy, a man that will probably take advantage of you, then throw you away like yesterday’s news. Is that what you want?”

Cocking an eyebrow Saffron gave a coy smile, “Really, I don’t believe that,” shifting closer to him keeping her palm on his warm chest. “Take advantage of me . . . God, I hope so. Throw me away? You’re too good of a person.”

“And you realized that from one piggy back ride.” Hyun Joong brushed her palm off his chest as the thumping of his heart increased.

“Uncle would have said it’s Fate, you and I . . . I would have laughed at him, disagreeing and we would have had a very serious discussion about it.” Blinking, she met Hyun Joong’s eyes with an adoring gaze. “Now, I’m not so sure.”

“Aishhh, who knows, your Uncle did have a way of making things happen . . . I’ve gone to him many times for advice, although I think it was probably only a coincidence.” Nervously he chuckled crossing his legs, damn she had called his bluff. She was beginning to alarm him.

“You’re starting to sound like JJ with all this supernatural stuff.”

Catching his eye, “Am I? Sorry . . . just that I feel Uncle’s presents sometimes.”

“Saffron.”

Switching gears like a well-oiled machine Saffron rose risking the humiliation that he would tell her to go. Still, seduction was the name of the game and by the desire in his eyes, she was winning.

“I like to hear my name on your lips, it thrills me. I’ll leave if that’s what you REALLY want . . . But, I don’t think you do, for some unknown reason, something is throwing us together . . . tell me you don’t feel it.”

He couldn’t, everything she said was how he was feeling, and he knew no matter how much he tried to stay away from her he couldn’t, (just like asking her to leave had filtered in . . . then out of his mind).

“Hanniiiiii . . .” He groaned, somehow he had to guard his heart from her the unconventional way.

“Yes, ‘Seung Joook’? She cooed, knowing she had won . . . she was going to get what she wanted . . . he didn’t have a chance as she straddled his hips pooling the skirt around them and sinking her bare sex over his jean covered bulging erection. “Oh God,” She said, closing her eyes as her head tilted back.

“Aahhh fuck . . .” He whispered.

Her fingers tangled in his hair as they locked eyes. “I’m being a very forward American woman Mr. Kim Hyun Joong, and I hope you will forgive me my aggressiveness.” She spoke in a low seductive voice as she crossed her arms grabbing the hem of her sweater raking it over her head. “And excuse me for being very vulgar, but what I desire most in this world right now, is for you to fuck me senseless.”

Somewhere in Gangnam, S. Korea –

‘BABY MAMA’ leaving for Hyun Joong’s Apartment

10:15 P.M.

CHUNG-A sitting in front of the open window blew cigarette smoke out into the cold winter air, as she gazed in longing at the distant lights of Gangnam. That’s where she should be, not stuck in a roof house with a pregnant girlfriend and the ‘baby daddy’.

Coming from Busan at the tender age of twenty she had expected to become an Idol, that’s what the man had promised her. Wrapping the coat tighter around her slim body shuddering at the thought of what she had done to survive over the last ten years, she drew in deeply on the smooth tasting cigarette.

Now at thirty, her days were numbered as a backup dancer. Exhaling, she wondered what it might have been like, to have had children. Chuckling to herself at the thought of her being a mother . . . (no fucking way would she want that kind of chain around her neck, certainly not). She had her eye on the bigger prize, not some unknown choreographer, or dancer like herself with little salary and small chance of advancement. Her dreams were bigger . . . so much bigger . . .

Glaring at the tall buildings and twinkling lights she could pick out which one was his, having kept him on a tight leash for so long . . . waiting for those magical words that would change her life forever. Unfortunately, Kim Hyun Joong was a hard nut to crack, hating that all she could get out of him was a proposal to live together.

Shrewdly tuning him down, knowing she was worth more . . . with the idea of bringing him around to a 'real' proposal soon, she became angry . . . going ahead and breaking it off with him. It had been risky. For two weeks she had wondered about making such a rash decision, ecstatic when it had paid off with lots of flowers, texts professing his love and even diamond studded earrings. Smiling as she twisted one unconsciously she noticed it had started snowing.

Flicking the ashes out the window, squinting as she took the last drag off the butt before tossing it into the street below, wondering what the hell had gone wrong . . . With a whole fucking year to entangle him in her life, she was so sure that after the tour had wrapped up he would pop the question. *Why would he suddenly break up with her . . . saying they had grown apart, he wasn't in love with her any longer and wanted his freedom?*

"Has to be another woman," she muttered, "'Cause Joong doesn't like being alone, eating alone, or sleeping alone." Pissed off, she slammed the window shut with enough force that it rattled.

He had always denied involvement with other women, but she could never be sure, they hung around him like bees to honey. Being who he was, he smiled politely, gave hugs, let them take pictures . . . loving the attention, being sure fans always had access to him.

Seizing her glass of wine she emptied it in one swallow, deciding she had already started fighting for the life she deserved. The stage had been set with her confession at that silly coffee house they all hung out at, now she was sure she recognized the look that told her he was fucking the redheaded slut that worked there. Could it be any more obvious? He used to look at

her like that. Well, if he thought she would just slink away with her tail between her legs, and let him take up with that piece of trash, he was sadly mistaken . . . no fucking way.

Rinsing out her glass she glanced at the clock. There was still time to cement her plan. Heading to the little bedroom about the size of Hyun Joong's kitchen to change clothes . . . she fortified herself. Glancing at the self-assured woman in the mirror her reflection gave her the courage to do what needed to get done . . . after all it was for 'love'.

“And everyone knows, ‘All's fair in love and war’ . . . and this is definitely war.” She stated, checking her purse for bus fare, her phone, and taking the pink tube of lipstick out, (coating her lips as if it was her armor).

Hyun Joong's Apartment – Kim Hyun Joong and Saffron

10:15 P.M.

INSTINCTIVELY Saffron caressed Hyun Joong's sweaty back, lost in the afterglow of her climax cherishing the 'melodic Korean' he was whispering between kisses to her neck and ear. It didn't matter if she couldn't understand his mumbling, it was the tone of his voice rippling over her body melting her like hot chocolate over ice cream. The gravity of what just happened jogged through her mind, unable to keep the smile from spanning her face. *This had been what she wanted, 'right?' Oh hell yes . . . she would be doing the happy dance if moving hadn't been impossible.*

His weight should have been stifling, instead it was comforting, the hot puffs of breath against her damp flesh, music to her ears.

Hyun Joong slowly became aware of other elements in the room besides her scent, feeling a loss when her legs slipped off him with a small, 'whoosh' and 'thump' as her heels hit the floor. The voices on the T.V. sounded loud, invading the sensual spell that had been cast around them. He thought about leaving her, only he liked her breasts crushed against his chest, their hearts beating together. His manhood nestled in the V of her legs, skin that tasted like salty nectar as her hair spun around them, he was the fly caught in the spider's web.

“Saffron . . .” He spoke in low throaty voice as the long strands of red hair tickled his face. Blue twinkling eyes met his concerned ones. *Did she regret what had just happened between them?* When he had told her earlier he didn't do one-night stands, this had been why. Too much

uncertainty followed this kind of rash behavior . . . along with awkwardness. Except, that's not what he saw. Her emotions were written all over her face.

“You okay?” He asked reluctantly, trying to roll off to one side, hearing her yelp as her head followed him, jerking into a weird angle.

“Damn my hair is caught . . .” She growled, digging her nails into his shoulders so he would stay put.

“Ah . . . the red-haired witch has me tangled in a web,” He laughed, going to his original position, kissing her swollen red lips, to cut off her reply. Hearing little humming noises coming from her relaxing in his arms, had him thinking, they could just stay like this for the rest of the night.

Unwillingly he left her inviting mouth. “Hold still, let me.” He offered, his brow furrowed in concentration as he detangled the silky locks from between them, along with pieces of popcorn that had stuck to their sweaty bodies.

“I swear one day I'm going to cut it all off.” She stated, watching him settle next to her.

“No, that would be a crime.” He insisted, his fingers threading through her enticing tresses arranging them carefully over her full breasts. “You should wear it like this all the time, be my ‘Lady Godiva’.” Smiling he pecked her frowning lips, re-arranging the red strands so each nipple could be seen peeking through.

Saffron giggled, happy that they had a natural camaraderie between them, no awkwardness even though they didn't know each other that well. “This means you'll be my trusty steed.”

“Of course my lady remember, I'm ‘Sprit of the forest’ you can ride me anytime, day or night.” He laughed, the corner of his eyes crinkling with mischief as his fingers lazily explored her silky skin.

“Oh that is so cheesy, using ‘Seung Jo's’ character for your own selfish ends . . .” She raised her chin noticing that they had landed next to the table, wondering where the bottle of water had gone off too. Suddenly trembling as his wet tongue circled her nipple. “Aahhh.”

Smirking, he stated, “Look who's talking ‘Ha Ni’,” then grabbing her long skirt he covered her legs asking, “Cold?” (Knowing she wasn't as he caressed her lower belly.)

“No, thirsty . . . where is that bottle of water.” She scanned the room seeing that in their hunger for each other they had made a mess of the place.

“It’s over there on your right, wait and I’ll get it.”

“I see it.” She said.

Before he could rise, she had stretched up, turning away giving him a nice view of her ass. He lifted a brow at seeing the tattoo on her upper hip. Gripping her he inspected the three inch red bird, its feathers tucked in, as if it was bracing for a storm.

“Saffron why do you have a bird on your ass?” He asked, brushing the image with one finger as if he was smoothing the ruffled feathers of the little fowl.

Opening the bottle she paused, groaning at having to explain a rash decision she had made while drinking. Swallowing most of the water before laying back down she handed it to him. “It’s a Firefinch . . . I had gone to the gallery opening of a client, who was a wildlife photographer. He had taken a series of pictures of this little bird’s tenacity to survive.” She watched Hyun Joongs adams-apple as it rode up and down his throat while he drank, longing to kiss the area.

Shaking her head she had to remember this was about the bird. “I was a little drunk, and very moved at how hard the bird fought overwhelming odds in order to live. I concluded in my inebriated state, that I was like the little bird, fighting against forces trying to crush my dreams . . . so I bought the pictures, then on the walk home I passed a tattoo parlor and found myself inside, coming out with this.”

Hearing her eloquent rendition of the decision to get a silly random tattoo, he chuckled to himself. Anyone else would have just said, “I decided since I was wasted to get the tattoo ‘cause it reminded me of myself.” Now, another side appearing in her proper use of language and articulate, flowery descriptions.

“Woman you are a contradiction . . . one minute buttoned up tight showing no emotion, the next running around free and wild with no panties on, spilling out sentences even I have a hard time understanding.” His hand spanned her flat stomach sliding to the other cheek squeezing, “Got a tattoo on this one?”



“No.”

“Anything else I should know.” He asked, tossing the now empty bottle in the vicinity of the table.

Rolling over, she propped up on one hand gazing at his handsome face, noticing she had marked him ‘hers’ with her signature red lipstick.

Responding boldly, she grinned. “Well, I have a thing for Asian men, a love affair with my shoes, a talent for cooking (as well as eating) and I’m discovering a new appreciation for being naked.”

Closing the distance between them he nibbled on her lower lip, locking eyes letting the lust show as his pupils dilated, “You’re perfect, stay with me tonight . . .” He murmured seeing the mixed emotions in her blue eyes.

Should she . . . what would Saffire do? Forget what her sister would do, more importantly what would the new Saffron do? Stay, have a hot steamy night of passion with her dream man, not worry about the consequences of her actions. The other choice would be to go home to a cold mat on the floor with Saffire.

“Joong, if I stay, it’s with the understanding that we’re not officially an ‘item’. We just talked about this. I’m sorry, if I’m ruining the mood.” Lowering her head she was sure once again things were getting messed up by her overthinking and indecisiveness.

“Don’t be sorry for telling me how you feel, I understand, I’m not in a position to make any promises either.” He said, lifting her chin beaming into her beautiful face, thinking if Uncle Ryu ‘had’ brought them together, he should be thanking him for it. “Arasseo, let’s just take it one day at a time then . . . starting with tonight, yah?”

Nodding her head not trusting herself to speak, Saffron took the initiative once again by slinging her body over his, discovering another new adventure . . . rolling around on the floor . . . naked.

Outside Kim Hyun Joong’s Apartment

10:30

WAS it possible to be 'this' cold? Young-Jae just didn't understand this Spirit thing completely. One minute freezing, one warm. Was he in Purgatory? Or Heaven? Or stuck somewhere in between? Did he need to finish this self-imposed 'assignment' before he could finally lay down and rest? No one seemed to be helping him. At the rate they were going, this was going to take up his entire 'eternity' and he wouldn't have time left for any fun when it was finally over. One girl just wanted to 'collect' men, and the other couldn't make up her mind 'between' men. He would never have a moment's peace at this rate.

Shivering in the snowy night air, he also couldn't understand why Saffron 'still' wasn't coming out of Hyun Joong's apartment. Was he going to have to go in there?

"Aishhhh!" he hated all this hanging around and eaves-dropping, but . . . by the same token, how else would he make sure 'nothing' was going on. And if there was . . . well . . . he would need to take immediate action. (What? He didn't know.)

Leaning up against the apartment building wall he coughed, watching a large ball of frosty haze emit out into the cold air directly at eye-level, startling a young man stepping up to the front door. Chuckling in spite of himself, he reached out, attempting to grab the man's arm just for fun to see what he would do, but all he managed to accomplish was to swipe a swath of wind about him, moving the flustered individual's long bangs to one side indiscriminately.

"DAMMIT". He really needed to work on that!

Glancing around to see if there was anyone else in the vicinity to practice on, he spotted a woman stepping off the bus down the street.

"Ahhh, a new victim". Grinning from ear-to-ear, he started toward her, but the closer she got the more recognizable she became.

Head bent against the snow, the slim figured, dark-haired young woman was hatless, clutching her coat close to her chest as she barreled toward him. As he prepared to reach for her, they were face-to-face when she suddenly looked up, her eyes steely and determined, the creases deep where she frowned. He couldn't stop himself or swing off to one side as she plummeted directly through his misty, indistinguishable form, feeling like he had ran head first into a brick wall.

"SHIT!" He squealed, forcing another blast of frosty air out into the night, as swinging around he realized who he had just encountered. It was Hyun Joong's girlfriend. Cowering down against the unusual onslaught she stopped momentarily, shivering slightly, her head tossing to and fro as if looking for some viable reason for a sensation she couldn't comprehend.

Regrouping immediately, Young-Jae whirled around after her. She was headed to the apartment. How would he stop her? Where was that damned cat when you needed her? Swiping and grabbing at the back of her coattail he watched his hands slip directly through the solid material as he tried unsuccessfully to tug her away from the entrance.

In a matter of seconds she had punched the code, the glass door swung open and she barged inside huffing and puffing, like a woman on a 'mission'. (The mission obviously being, Kim Hyun Joong.) He and Saffron were both doomed. But, wasn't that what he was after? An interruption? Something to bring his Saffron back out into the December night?

He paused thinking, then again . . . despite the inevitable outcome . . . maybe it was for the best. She might very well turn out to be his 'ace in the hole'.

Kim Hyun Joong's Apartment – Chung-A, Kim Hyun Joong and Saffron

10:30 P.M.

WITH one hand on the keypad, an already (chilled to the bone), Chung-A pushed buttons hastily, knowing that he would be home, the sweet smell of popcorn wafting out under the door, along with the sounds of either his music or the television set. She knew it was late, but she didn't care. Her level of aggravation already on the rise, she held her breath, hoping he hadn't changed the code after their argument a few days ago.

Like it or not, she was going to have to make the first move and fix things, because if it was one thing she was certain of, it was the fact that he could not dismiss her this easily, like an inconsequential afterthought. With her plan already set in motion, thankfully she heard the door lock click, as she bulldozed through and into his front hallway, attempting to focus in the dim lamplight.

* * * * *

SAFFRON'S heart skipped a beat as she drew her head up startled to hear the sound of the door lock click open across the room.

“OH MY GOD JOONG. Either someone's here or you're being robbed.” She hissed, hurtling off Hyun Joong's body in a very bad rendition of a 'tuck and roll' attempting to hide under the coffee table. With the long wool skirt wound tightly around her shuttering naked form, she looked more like a badly rolled cigar than anything else.

Bolting upright, naked as a new born babe, Hyun Joong tried to ignore his own state of undress, unable to keep himself from breaking out into laughter at Saffron's descent under his table.

“What the hell are you doing?” He asked, skidding down and pressing his cheek to the carpet to see her better, his white naked butt propped precariously in the air, just as Chung-A put one foot past the hallway entrance wall, and flipped on the light switch.

“Hyun Joong its freaking dark in here, what's going on?” Her loud shrill voice penetrated the quiet room. “Why aren't you answering your phone?”

About the same time the overhead light began to illuminate the dark room around her, Hyun Joong sprung up, his dark eyes wide with anger, shocked at seeing the one person he hoped he would never have to come in contact with 'undressed' ever again.

And Chung-A . . . spotting them in a corner, saw Saffron, huddling underneath the table, her stocking'd feet sticking out, pushed into Hyun Joong's crotch, arms crossed over her head in embarrassment.

As the trio stared each other down, humiliation . . . disgust . . . fury . . . mortification and 'the need to vaporize into thin air' was the collection of their combined feelings, (none of them daring to break the awkward chasm of silence by moving or speaking first).

Saffron, just wanted the floor to swallow her up . . . Hyun Joong was searching the floor frantically for his missing jeans . . . and Chung-A was feeling like she was about to throw up.

Crouching low, Hyun Joong dragged his pants from under the couch, slipping one leg in first and then the other, never taking his eyes off of the uninvited Chung-A. Then still without saying anything, he tapped Saffron's foot, motioning for her to come out from under the table. As she scooted backward precariously, still attempting to stay covered, she peered over at Chung-A's booted feet, and then on up her stiff body to steely hazel eyes, and thin lips.

"Why are you here anyway Chung-A? Dammit." Hyun Joong cursed quietly. "I knew I should've changed the code. Doesn't matter what you want. You need to leave." Standing tall, he helped Saffron sit up, noticing her hand was clammy and freezing, in his.

"OH, SO SORRY! Didn't mean to interrupt you and your NEW lady friend." Chung-A shouted sarcastically in frustration, tears pricking her eyes as she began clicking her thumbnail and middle finger annoyingly, like she always did when she was without a cigarette, and about to lose control.

Hyun Joong had seen it more times than he was willing to admit, and knew if she continued, the results would be bad. He had to get one of them out and quickly. It would probably have to be Saffron. All he needed right now was for a babbling Chung-A to go off on a crying spree and spill her guts about everything going on between them, when he hadn't had the opportunity to tell Saffron all the details yet.

"What was so important that you just had to come see me this late at night anyway and, why 'should' I answer your calls? We're not together anymore." He stated indifferently, (not wanting to show his current state of emotion to either women).

Saffron, digging deep for the gumption to stand up in front of this interfering ‘person’ (she knew was going to eventually cause trouble for her), managed to scramble to her feet, touching Hyun Joon’s arm gently.

“I’ll just go change in the other room.” She offered quietly, throwing Chung-A a slight smirk as if to say, *“I won. He’s mine,”* before grabbing her clothes from the floor and trotting satisfied off down the hallway toward his bedroom.

“Are you for real right now?” Chung-A asked Hyun Joong, catching her breath, allowing another crocodile tear to roll slowly down one cheek. *It would take more than a few tears to get his attention this time.* “It doesn’t matter if we’re broke up. In my condition you should be available anytime.”

Flipping around, she scanned the romantic scene set before her in the living room. The T.V. was still running, (on Episode 10 of ‘Playful Kiss’) and with an empty bowl of popcorn on the floor, its contents strewn about in all directions, it was clear . . . the encounter had been planned. *DAMN HIM! AND . . . HER! Now ‘she’ had to put on an even better performance.*

Hyun Joong bent over picking up the bowl, while beginning to scoop up the greasy kernels. *He needed to keep busy, not look at Chung-A.* The clicking of her nails (getting louder by the second in his ear) he wondered, how was he going to coerce her to leave? *And what would Saffron say as soon as ‘she’ finished dressing?* His eyes darting back down the hall, he prayed the scattered Saffron would have enough sense to stay put, for at least a few more minutes. Standing up he stared at her tear-stained face blankly. “What in the hell do you want me to do?”

Chung-A rolled her eyes clutching her lower belly pathetically, acting suddenly as if she desperately needed to sit down. Weaving her way toward the sofa, she released herself into the leather cushion gingerly, her lids drooping closed, sadly.

“I’m having pains Joong. Real pains. I think it’s the baby. Ever since we argued the other day and you broke up with me. I don’t know if I can do this. It’s too much.” She whined, one hand to her head, the other motioning for him to join her on the couch. “Can you stop that for a minute? You can do at least that much. I REALLY NEED YOU RIGHT NOW!”

There . . . that should get to him . . . she figured, smiling inwardly. He hated a needy woman and even more so . . . tears.

WATCHING out the half-opened bedroom doorway, Saffron thrust her fist to her mouth in anger. *THE LITTLE BITCH! AND A BABY? SHE WAS FUCKING PREGNANT? It couldn't be. He would have told her. He couldn't be that cruel. Not her 'Baek Seung Jo'? NEVER!*

As she stood quivering, attempting to process what she had just witnessed, she saw his blue-jeaned, bare-chested form cross the small span of hallway, disappearing toward, (what she could only assume was . . .) the sofa and a disturbing display of lying, feminine wiles.

What should she do? What 'would' she do if she had been witness to such a blatant outright lie in an office setting? There would be no room for tolerance there. She would have to put on her 'big girl panties' and go face the demons.

Stepping straight out into the open where she could be seen 'and' heard, with her voice loud and clear, she buttoned up one of Hyun Joong's white dress shirts about her bare breasts, (stopping the top button just shy of her cleavage line). Hiking up the wretched wool skirt, she made her presence known, announcing . . . "OH MY GOD!" Her arms in the air as if headed to give Hyun Joong's 'Ex' a massive hug of sympathy. "Did you say you're having pains? You're pregnant? Dear Lord . . . Joong, she needs to see a Dr., that's nothing to fool around with. Why didn't you tell me?" She hissed in his ear, never letting her guard down or losing her smile as she glared at Chung-A.

"Because you didn't give me a chance." He muttered back, rising up off the sofa to face her, temporarily ignoring the ill-fated Chung-A, still clutching her abdomen.

"Well, the hospital is where she needs to be." Saffron insisted, crossing her arms defiantly across the starchy white shirt. "You finish getting dressed Joong, and go start the car. She obviously needs help or she wouldn't have come over here."

Chung-A heard Saffron say 'hospital', balking noticeably, knowing there was no way she could go see a doctor at a hospital in her present condition.

"NO!" She shouted, grabbing Hyun Joong's bare wrist frantically. "I'll be okay. Really. I just need to lay down and rest a little while."

Hearing Chung-A's loud "NO", sent warning bells clanging deafeningly through Saffron's head. She knew immediately that attempting to make the conniving little 'witch' out to be lying wouldn't help her. Her only defense in front of Hyun Joong was to kill her with kindness.

"I've already been to the clinic Joong," Chung-A whimpered, "it won't do any good to go again. They said I just need to relax . . . the stress could cause me to miscarry. But, that's hard to do after what happened between us."

Scowling at Saffron's happy, smiling face she rose weakly, holding on to Hyun Joong's shoulder. "I just needed to see you one more time. I thought if I came over it would help. That's really all I need right now, not being poked around by doctors." Pausing, she put her head on his shoulder pensively, "You're such a good and gentle man. You're gonna make a great appa someday. I just know it."

Turning to Saffron, Hyun Joong wrung his hands nervously. "I think maybe you should go." He requested, hating that Chung-A had bested them all. *Be a good daddy, really Chung-A?*

Her back stiffening indignantly, Saffron wanted to jam one finger down her throat and puke all over the both of them. *I just needed to see you one more time . . . Joong are you really that f'ng stupid?*

"So, you want ME to leave?" She asked. *The sugary sweet voice emanating from her own mouth couldn't possibly be hers. She was standing in front of a female Hyena. She wanted to hiss, snarl, bite, and scratch her eyes out.* But, instead she nodded her head in mock understanding, dropping over and showing cleavage nearly to her belly button, as she picked her purse off the floor prepared to do as he asked.

Trying 'not' to notice her boobs about to fall out of his favorite shirt, Hyun Joong took her by the elbow mumbling, "I'll walk you out." While grabbing her coat on his way toward the front door.

But, Saffron wasn't having any of that! Snatching the wool jacket away from his arms she swung around prickling like a mother bear protecting its cub. "No. I don't need you to 'walk' me. I know the way."

"Hurry, Joong." Chung-A moaned behind them, dropping to her back on the cool leather couch. "I need some hot tea, and a rag for my head. Ooohhhh, it hurts."

In her haste Saffron, searching impatiently for her shoes, (forgetting they were in the other room) spied Hyun Joongs muck boots sitting by the door. “Thanks for EVERYTHING Joong” she hissed under her breath as she slipped both stocking’d feet into them, and flung the door wide.

As she glanced over at Chung-A their eyes met, the ‘other woman’ grinning back at her as if to say . . . *“I win. He’s ‘still’ mine”*.

Inside the 'Cup of Hotness Café' – JaeJoong and Saffire

10:30 P.M.

NEARLY an hour had passed, the 'Gummies' and cupcakes were gone, and JJ was working on the last of the cotton candy. It had stopped snowing, and the sky was clearing, filled with an array of stars, twinkling as beautifully as the candles lighting up the tiny room.

"Can I have some more of that?" Saffire asked, her hand out toward her companion's grinning face as she pleaded convincingly for his last few bites of cotton candy.

Sitting quietly together, she realized it was getting harder and harder to see him as anything other than just a regular guy. (Exactly what she had told Saffron about Hyun Joong.) Idols or not, guys were guys all over the world. Now she couldn't figure out what in the hell he saw in her. Antonio had said it was her eyes. Junsu, her musical ability and sense of humor. Poor JJ hadn't gotten 'any' of that. From day one she had been snarky, difficult and (true to her new name) 'bitchy'.

"How come you brought me in here JJ?" She finally asked, taking the sticky candy gingerly and popping it quickly in her mouth. "We could have done lots of other things."

"I know. Gimme." He ordered, reaching for her fingers and drawing them instinctively into his mouth, sucking the sweet sugar off each finger seductively, making sure to get every little bit off without embarrassing himself. "Mmmm, yummy. We'll revisit THAT later." Chuckling, he set them back in her lap gingerly. "There's history in this room. Didn't you know? I thought surely Maud or SeRae would have told you by now."

"Nooo." Shivering against him in the chilly space, about ready to climb into his lap if she didn't warm up soon, Saffire rubbed her palms down each blue-jeaned leg, wishing it wasn't so cold. Kissing and licking fingers should have started a fire-storm for both of them, but it was freezing, and only served to aggravate an already uncomfortable situation.

"Hmmm. Well, the story goes like this." He started. "Your Uncle Ryu had a mysterious love in his life back when he was a young and aspiring Trot singer. And like we all do, he had to

keep her from the public eye. He couldn't take her to dine at his house, or stay over with him, so he built the apartment above the café along with this special dining room so she could come have late meals with him, and . . . well . . . you can figure out the rest. Your Uncle Ryu was one romantic guy. I thought bringing you here would be special. Since he left the café to you and Saffron, maybe this room would mean more if you were to experience it first-hand."

So Uncle Ryu had had a 'once in a lifetime' love. The times she had visited him, she never remembered ever seeing him with a woman of any kind. No random photos anywhere, and he had never talked about being in love. For all practical purposes she knew him only as single and satisfied to stay that way. Maybe his love had been married, or with someone else. Then of course, this 'secretive' room would make sense.

A strange, sad sensation coursed through her veins, her eyes pooling with unshed tears, hearing the touching story of the room (that up until this very moment), had only been a headache, needing upkeep and cleaning once a week.

Why had no one had bothered to tell her. There were other family members. Aunts . . . cousins . . . Even her parents. But, why did that not surprise her . . . they couldn't even tell her about her own sister, Saffron. In fact there were so many things about her secretive Uncle Ryu and apparently her parents as well, that she and Saffron were both just finding out.

"I wonder why they split." She asked quietly, attempting to imagine a younger version of her Uncle, courting an attractive woman, seated just like she and JJ were doing on the bench, looking out into the twinkling lights of Gangnam, or watching the rain fall on a bleak, stormy afternoon. Maybe they fed each other while eating around the small table, holding hands, laughing and making jokes, then kissing in the doorway sadly, hating to say goodbye.

It was the stuff that novels and movies were made of, and her previous notions of who and what Kim JaeJoong was all about began flying out the window before her, replaced with a newly found respect for the sincerity of his heart.

"I don't know. He never told us what happened. I loved him, Saffire. He was so special." JJ sighed. "He gave me the key to this room when I had my first relationship with a noona. Told me never to be afraid to use it. It was a safe haven. A place that would protect her as much as me. I miss him. It feels empty and lonely in the café without him here."

As his own sad feelings lurched to the forefront, JJ stood quickly, ripping himself from the warmth of Saffire's body. With one hand on the wall, the other shoved deep into his pocket, he stared out into the star-studded December sky.

"Humph, funny thing is . . . I never even used it. The key or the room," He whispered, "not until right now. With you."

What else could he say? Or even tell her. He wanted to confess, that he had no earthly idea why, but he was falling for her.

Flipping back around he shivered, rubbing his arms through the thick sweatshirt, hoping he could lighten the mood. "Anywayyy . . . I 'Googled' you." He blurted out. "Don't be mad. I know it sounds creepy, but . . . when you asked me to have this date, you know, see about our 'connection', I felt compelled to get some information."

Now embarrassed that he had spilled the beans so harsh and indiscriminately he tried to water it down by explaining. "Hyun Joong, his girlfriend . . . she's turned out to be a bit of a cuckoo-bird. And . . . seeing what he's going through. Well, I . . . I was trying to be careful. And I didn't know you were Junsu's 'secret' American friend. I wouldn't have bothered if I had. I trust his judgement on everything."

Saffire sat up on the bench, tucking her freezing feet underneath her, Indian-style. *If she was confused about him before . . . now she was petrified. Junsu for all his sweet, kind and loving words to her over the time she had known him, had 'never' touched her like JJ had in only a few short weeks.* Tonight . . . she had to admit, she was worried. The aura of the tiny room, (now with the knowledge that he had never brought anyone into it but her), was chipping away at what small insignificant wall she had tried putting up around herself.

Gulping out loud unconsciously, the mood changing, she clasped her hands in her lap, prepared to hear him out. "And?"

Flying back to her side, his eyes suddenly bright with renewed interest, JJ pulled the straight back chair up close, resting his arms on the back as he studied her. "Really wanna know?" He asked.

"Sure. Go for it. I guess it's not creepy." She urged him, hoping he hadn't dug up something weird, disgusting or pornographic. Her mind flying back, she struggled to remember if she had

posted any nude pictures or been photographed with her middle finger in the air . . . didn't matter now, he was about to spill it if she had.

“Arasseo. Some of what I found out you already told me, but the rest was really fun, and interesting.” He announced, gauging her reaction to his efforts, as he began counting down in his head all the facts he had memorized over the last two weeks, since her arrival. However, looking into her stunningly innocent face, all but the most important seemed to melt away inconsequentially.

“Well, let's see . . .” He began coughing lightly, to ease his sudden discomfort. “You were born January 23rd, 1989. We're both Aquarians. In case you don't know, that's a good match, (especially in the sack).” Leaning over he winked, whispering . . . “When I recover that is. Ummm, you're smart ‘and’ talented. De, that's a lethal combination too.” Pausing to take a short breath, he brushed aside a stray piece of her hair, noticing how she cocked her head to one side temptingly.

“I even found your Facebook page, and Instagram account, not to mention, ‘Saffire Ryu Renault's Korean/American KPOP Blog’. Where it looks as if I might have made it into a rant about ‘JYJ’ where while praising my counterpart Junsu, you verbally assaulted me over being a ‘stage hog’ when in concert.” Shaking his head in mock despair he chuckled. “Aishhh, no wonder you were yelling at me to “get out of the way” when we first met. And mianhae, Junsu was right. You actually did go by ‘Renault’ didn't you?”

Nodding in agreement, Saffire watched him sigh massively as he tucked his chin down over the wooden chair back, grinning at her without waiting for a response, as he continued talking.

“Most importantly, Ms. Ryu, your favorite color is PINK, favorite foods are mac n'cheese, ice cream, chocolate and Korean pancakes. I was disappointed to find no mention of kissing like spun cotton candy.” Now sitting back slightly, he crossed his arms satisfied. “Not too creepy?”

Saffire could only gulp loudly, embarrassed that she had underestimated him from the very get-go. If she hadn't already heard the touching love story about Uncle Ryu, she would have thought he was pretty smooth, definitely knowing all the right things to say and do.

“No, actually I'm impressed.” Her childlike smile lit up the already dim room, sending JJ's heart speeding to his throat. “So it looks like now you know all my secrets. Especially the one about chocolate. You paid attention. I like that.” Dipping into the small bowl of M&M's beside

her, she raised a red one in the air before popping it in her mouth, savoring its sweet chocolaty taste slowly.

“Well, I thought it was important at the time.” Slipping one hand over the chair, he scooped a handful of candy into his mouth as well, crunching down on it heartily. “Truthfully, it wasn’t necessary to dig all that up you know.” He admitted, deciding it would do no good to defend his position. She had him at ‘groveling for a tampon’.

Standing, he lifted her tentatively from the chair and into his arms. “I had all the information I needed the moment I kissed you for the first time.”

“And what was that?” Saffire asked timidly.

Molded snugly against him, his breath was a sweet mix of cotton candy, chocolate and Vodka, only serving to fuel the flames beginning to surge through her unsuspecting body, his piercing black eyes like polished onyx, as he stared openly into her face.

Junsu had felt comfortable. This man felt like raw, unadulterated sexuality. Like a drug addict’s ‘carnal poison’ . . . forbidden and dirty. She had ‘never’ felt this way encased in the arms of ‘any’ man, and the shiver careening wildly up and down her spine as he bent to her exposed neck, was all consuming.

“Well, Saffire Ryu, ‘Cotton Candy Princess’.” He hesitated, a mounting excitement rising in his groin, “I knew your eyes were as blue as the sky . . . cheeks, smooth as a baby’s bottom.” His wayward fingers traced a circle about the bottom of one exposed earlobe as he attempted to describe his ‘indescribable’ attraction. “You were honestly candid in your sadness, outspoken and uncut.” His tone hushed, he openly admitted. “No woman’s ever talked to me like that before, I have to say, I think you hated me.” *She was killing him right now.*

Standing remarkably motionless in his arms, she emitted an aroma of various candies and sweet liquored coffee from between her perfectly formed pink lips. He wanted to take her right then and there, without any more conversation. But, this was important. So reeling in his wild racing urgings and emotions he continued, his breathing labored.

“Even telling me you were wearing a thong that left you bare and exposed when you piggybacked told me part of you was sensual and exciting.” Now boldly tipping her chin toward

him with two fingers, he quirked his kissable mouth into a sexy smile. “And, to top it off, you smelled deliciously of Vodka and bubble gum. Sort of like you do right now . . .”

Biting her lower lip, Saffire was drowning in the poetry of his confession. It was no wonder his original song compositions spoke to the soul and not just the heart. The culmination of his quiet resolve and sudden believability left her aching for more. So much more . .

Tangling his fingers through her mass of blonde hair, JaeJoong’s eyes were drawn to her pouty mouth, like a parched man to water, as he tilted her head back, drowning in the effect she was having on him. Forming his lips to the ‘perfect’ kiss, his breath still hot on her neck, he searched downward seeking out the sweet spot of her throat.

“And best of all . . .” he gurgled (as she moaned against his assault to her searing skin), “you’re approachable, refreshing AND sexy. I don’t quite know what to do with you . . . except I’m finding, that kissing you is no longer an option.”

Passing out was not an option either. Forcing herself to stay standing, Saffire gave in to the kiss that relentlessly invaded her from the base of her collar bone on up to the dimple of her bottom lip, sliding into the throes of her eager awaiting mouth, all the while, her brain screaming piercingly, “*Cotton Candy Kiss*”, “*Cotton Candy Kiss*”. *How would she ever recover from this?*

On the bus – Uncle Ryu and Saffron

11:00 P.M.

SLIPPING into the seat next to Saffron on the bus, Uncle Ryu laid his arm sadly around her drooped shoulders. He wanted to be angry with her, but he could feel her heart. She was discouraged and broken.

“Why sweetheart? You didn’t have to go that far . . .” He whispered in her ear, watching her wipe angry tears from her wind flushed cheeks with the back of one gloved hand. “I can’t stop you. I can only intervene.”

Leaning his head against her he knew this had already gotten out of hand, and now even though he had welcomed the 'outcome', he was powerless to help her with it. He wished he was a real breathing man again, who could take the 'little girl' inside of her, kiss away the tears and hug her tight. But, his spiritual hands were tied.

Punching at the frosty windowpane, Saffron glared out into the passing vehicles, her flushed face now rigid and void of emotion, as she struggled to compose herself.

"He's not right for you." Young-Jae whispered in her ear again, watching her rub the side of her head as if hearing him, but refusing to pay attention.

"Stupid asshole." She blurted out suddenly.

"Well, I wouldn't go that far." Young-Jae responded chuckling lightly. "It's not his fault you know. It's the girlfriend. I think we can blame this one on her. It will all play out in your favor, trust me. Don't I always have your best interest at heart?" He did . . . but Hyun Joong had been the best of the best, and now . . .

"Pregnant. F'ng pregnant." Was her aggravated response.

"Pregnant? Who's pregnant?" Young-Jae sat up straight, his ghostly body quivering with abhorrence. The girlfriend from hell was pregnant? No wonder Saffron was suffering. Sudden guilt washing over him, he couldn't help but feel responsible for assisting in dropping her into this position without thinking it through first. Dammit. Weren't dead people supposed to know 'everything'?

"Ohhh, sweet Saffron." He cooed beside her. (Now, he was angry too.)

Riding along in silence, each consumed with their own thoughts about her situation, Young-Jae decided it was time to leave Saffron to regroup, when he started to think he should tag along all the way to the café. He had seen this side of her before. Right now, she was

experiencing the calm before the storm. But in a few moments, she would barge into the café, like a raging hurricane, surely interrupting Saffire and JaeJoong and there would be hell to pay in the aftermath of her wake.

“Sorry Saffire.” He muttered apologetically. “I can only do so much.”

Even now (without really wanting to), he was seeing Junsu headed out his front door, not sure what ‘he’ would find (when and if he showed up). But, in his defense ‘he’ couldn’t be everywhere at once and right now ‘this’ young woman was his main concern.

His transparent face scrunched in contemplation he decided that, after all . . . looking on the bright side, if there was one . . . considering the complications, he really hadn’t worked very hard tonight, to get the anticipated results!

‘Cup of Hotness Café’ – JaeJoong and Saffire

11:00 P.M.

JUST when Saffire was caught up in the delicious moment of a ‘Cotton Candy’ kiss, JaeJoong released her abruptly, sending her senses careening off into thin air, a cold rush filling the void his warm body had made, only seconds earlier while touching her.

Readjusting his tight jeans, he dropped both hands, taking her by the arm, and urging her out toward the only open corner of the cramped room, fumbling for his cell phone. Punching in a random song, he tossed it in the center of the candy-crowded table announcing engagingly . . .

“Dance with me!”

Hating to interrupt the moment, he knew himself well enough to realize, it was the only way to stop the upward spiral of his libido before he went too far.

“Your ‘Bio’ didn’t tell me if you could dance or not, but it doesn’t matter. Fake it.” He encouraged her, over the barely audible rock and roll of a group she didn’t even recognize.

“I . . . I really DON’T!” She groaned back, embarrassed as he backed away, twisting, and thrusting in small circles around her.

“Sure you do. Everyone can dance somehow. If I can do it with throbbing jewels, you can at least try. Come on, show me what you got Princess.” Finally stopping, he clasped her hands, swinging both arms to-and-fro, swaying clumsily, (as if they were at a high school prom and she was the inexperienced partner).

Finally giving in, hair flopping up and down about her grinning face she released him, bouncing around erratically, giggling at her own awkwardness, wondering all the while, had Uncle Ryu and his girlfriend danced the night away like this in the small romantic hideaway at the top of the café?

Making up their own version of ‘random dance’, they made their way around the cramped room, attempting to avoid the heart of candles, skipping and grabbing candy, (almost upsetting the carefully set table on every turn), as they passed.

Before long the laughter caught up with them, and unaware of the forces behind their seemingly instant attraction, they lounged sprawled out on the cold tile floor, sweaty, giggling, exhausted and spiraling downward off their massive sugar high. Saffire couldn’t remember the last time she had had so much unencumbered, giddy, gut-busting fun.

Curling over one knee, JJ stared up at her, scratching his head pensively, wanting to do and say more, but finding the right words weren’t coming as easily as he expected.

“What do I have to do to get you to love me?” He finally whispered, his eyebrows

raised, a sigh easing out of his body. *Love came easily to him, but was not always reciprocated. He never understood why.*

Scooching across the floor in front of him, her long hair covering one eye, she looked up



impishly, pondering his question before answering.

“Well, let’s see . . . You offered up your balls in sacrifice.” She snickered, “It snowed again while you were here . . . you made just the right combination of coffee and Vodka, tempted me with sinfully good chocolate, AND . . . best of all . . . brought me up here. I think you’ve done everything right so far.”

That was all he needed to hear. Unable to contain his excitement, forgetting his immediate pain, JJ jumped up, snatching the balloon ribbons and jerking them down one-by-one, the popping going off around the room like the ‘Han River’ fireworks show. Saffire crouched down in a mass of giggles, hands covering her ears, hoping her answer hadn’t given him too much false hope.

Moments later, surrounded by bits and pieces of pink balloon rubber, burned out candles, and candy wrappers, an impatient JJ couldn’t hold back any longer . . .

“Come here you.” Crooking his finger at her enticingly, she could tell the mood was about to change for yet a second time. “Play time is over. Now, you’re just tempting me. It’s time to find out just how strong this connection really is.” He growled, hypnotized by her shining smile and crystal blue eyes.

“Gotta catch me first!” Saffire squealed, suddenly throwing the door open, banking on the fact that he was out of breath, and still hurting from her earlier assault.

Shooting down the stairs, headed for the safety of the darkened kitchen she scrambled through the dining room toward the back entrance, eyes peeled for the cat. *Where ‘was’ that damned cat?* Afraid she would trip over it in her haste, she slowed down just long enough for JJ to catch up, pinning her unsuspecting form against the kitchen wall with both hands, as he swiveled her to face him, re-energized . . . his heart racing at break-neck speed.

Raking his hair back with one free hand, he managed to keep her prisoner beneath him with the other, until easing his weight into hers, their bodies melded to one, her back pressed to the cold hard surface, watching his fingers leave the strands of his own sweat-dampened hair.

Beginning an ascent that trailed up and inside the hem of her cotton T-shirt, he stopped only to toy with the diamond stud in her belly button, his lips (in conjunction with his hands), on a hungry search to match her desire with his.

“Please tell me you want this as much as I do?” He pleaded, feeling her lips instinctively dancing circles around his hairline.

Pausing momentarily, the heat of his skin against her mouth rushing to her very core, Saffire swallowed hard, breathing wild and erratically. *Of course she wanted him. Truth be told, she had wanted him from the moment he touched her tampon on the floor in the drinking tent. Literally. Dear God what was she doing?*

“I doooo . . .” She moaned, then hating herself for her next remark followed it with, “But, did we drink too much . . . again? Aghhh, JJ . . . I don’t want to be like every other girl in the world who wants you. That just makes me easy.”

“You’re NOT easy. And this isn’t about EVERY other girl Saffire. I did this for you. Only you. All of it.” Muttering quietly in her ear, his resolve weakening, she suddenly confused him by her reaction. “You’re incredible. I’ve never met anyone like you.” (*If she would just give him half a chance!*) “Let me show you.” His coercion was intense and sincere. “It’s true, I fall easy, but I fall hard . . . if you catch me, we can fall together.” He whispered, his voice feathery and romantic.

More song lyrics, meant to touch her soul. She knew it. She would hate herself in the morning. She knew that too . . . Feeling his knee pushing upward between her legs, his fingers adept and purposeful, he found the zipper of her jeans, the sound of its descent echoing loudly about the open kitchen.

“Meowww . . .” The elusive coal black stray jumped up on the end of the coffee bar, rolling over as it purred satisfactorily.

Outside the ‘Cup of Hotness Café’ – Saffron, Saffire, JaeJoong, Uncle Ryu

11:00 P.M.

H *ERE it came . . . As uncle Ryu floated off the bus behind Saffron observing her stomp with dogged determination toward the front steps of the café, head down (not even attempting to look up) as she kicked soft snow around in front of her, he*

waited for her to hit the café like an angry raging tornado.

With hands fisted at her sides she pummeled her thick wool coat over and over again in her fury. Seeing the feisty little red-headed girl that used to huff and puff about his spacious house when she was angry, he knew if there was something in her way right now . . . it was about to be the recipient of 'the wrath of Saffron'.

* * * * *

FIRST came the cat bowl . . . sitting directly outside the front door, the cat food scattered in a million pieces around her, as she cursed loudly, “F’ng cat. Who’s feeding the damned thing anyway?” Jamming her hand into her pocket scrounging for the key in another burst of disgust, she turned it in the lock, realizing that the front door was already open.

“What the hell!” She barked, shoving it with one booted foot, noticing that the lights were on, the warm cozy atmosphere emanating out into the blustery December night. “Stupid Saffire. I told her to always lock the front door. Can’t believe she left it open. Obviously she WANTS us to get robbed.” She mumbled disgustedly, unbuttoning her coat as she went, dropping it on the nearest bar stool and flouncing past the open hallway.

* * * * *

JAEJOONG’S hands flew away from the waistband of Saffire’s jeans, cocking his head to one side as he heard the front door creak open noisily.

“Someone’s here.” He barked, attempting to stay out of sight, as he guided her around the piece of wall, away from the kitchen doorway, one hand to her mouth, to hush her.

With the sound of heavy boots clumping through the silence, a woman’s voice could be heard cussing and muttering quietly, as it came closer and closer to their hiding spot. *Was it Saffron? It didn’t sound like Maud or SaRae . . .*

“F’ng night from hell. Why is this happening to me? It was going so perfectly, then ‘she’ showed up. Don’t need this kind of drama. Came to Korea to get away from all this shit.” Sneezing loudly, Saffron sniffed into her wrist as she wiped the snot from her red-tipped

freezing nose. “That’s all I need . . . to get a damn cold. If I didn’t think the sex would’ve been so good I would’ve stayed home.”

JJ chuckled, against Saffire, realizing that it was Saffron, rambling on unaware that the two of them were close by and could obviously hear her.

“At least ‘someone’ got good sex tonight.” He whispered into Saffire’s ear, the fingers at her waistline tickling her mercilessly until she whimpered in laughter, and Saffron’s muttering stopped, directly in the doorway . . .

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