

Sinjun liked to take walks.

It was an odd pastime for somebody with a bum knee, but his brother clearly defined odd. Damien was never sure if Sinjun's need to ramble stemmed from a burning desire to reassure himself he was free of anyone's chains or if it was a way he gathered his thoughts. The why of it didn't matter so much as the when because sometimes when he needed Sinjun the most, his brother was nowhere to be found.

This time, however, Damien caught Sinjun at the door.

Despite all the years of knowing Miki St. John, Damien was still amused by his feral brother's reaction to being told to wait up. His emotions played out over his face, subtle signs of stubborn annoyance then resignation flickering through his eyes and the set of his mouth but only if you knew him well enough to read him. His hazel eyes were always wary, catching every movement around him, and he held himself a bit too tight to be called relaxed.

Damien hated that most of all. He hated how Sinjun lived his life holding his breath, waiting for the next shoe — or fist — to fall. Donal insisted the day would come when Sinjun didn't scan a crowd for trouble or flinch at a loud noise but Damien wasn't going to hedge his bets. Maybe Sinjun's rambles were his subtle way of telling the world to fuck off, of going out and testing his resolve, facing the fears lurking inside of him.

Or maybe his baby brother was simply that fierce, willing to take on any battle thrown at him simply to show the world he wasn't afraid.

"Let me grab my jacket and I'll go with you," Damien offered. "Since it looks like the dog tapped out."

Dude was as independent as his — Damien wouldn't say owner but rather companion — Sinjun. Most of the time the dog was more than willing to sit patiently while Sinjun clipped on his leash, something Kane religiously insisted he do. Neither dog nor man cared for the leash but were willing to compromise if only to make Kane happy. Or at least that's what everyone believed. For all Damie knew, Sinjun took the dog off the leash as soon as he crossed the street. He wouldn't put it past his brother but he also knew from Sinjun, a promise was a promise, so Dude probably remained leashed for as long as they walked. At the moment, the sound of his leash being jingled didn't move the dog from his place on the couch nor did he so much as twitch an ear from his upside down position, communicating quite literally had no intention of joining Sinjun that afternoon.

"Unless you don't want company?" Damien stopped midway of putting on his shoe, glancing up at his brother while he balanced on one foot.

Again, Sinjun was easy to read or at least for Damien. It was a split-second shuffle between desire and expectations. A rapid-fire assessment was going on behind those thoughtful eyes, a brief flick of his lashes then Sinjun murmured, "No, you can come. Just going for a walk to clear my head."

"Oh those of the best kinds of walks," he replied, checking to make sure he had his wallet in his back pocket. "How about if we swing by Chang's and grab a few char siu bao? I've been jonesing for those the past couple of days and haven't grabbed any."

If there was one way to Miki St. John's heart, it was through his stomach. The steamed bread dumplings filled with a bright red, savory-sweet pork filling was Sinjun's favorite food in the world. If he had one thing he could eat twenty-four / seven, it was dim sum and char siu bao seemed to bring out a level of happiness Sinjun only matched by one of Kane's kisses.

Sinjun's mouth quirked to one side. "I could totally get down for that. It's kind of late though. He might not have any."

"I have faith," Damien chuckled. "I also gave him a call as soon as I heard you grab your keys and call the dog for a walk. Chang's got six set aside for us. Just let me get my other shoe on, and I'll be ready to go."

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They ended up eating their bao at Woh Hei Yuen Park on John street, a few yards away from where Sinjun had been found by the cops wandering aimlessly over two decades before.

It was a small divot of green grass and a children's play area dotted with swooping park benches and a pagoda gazebo sitting on a hill opposite the arched entranceway. The wisteria was blooming a little bit out of season, and the park was fairly empty with only a pair of little boys and their mothers playing on the miniature Asian sailing vessel built near the jungle gyms.

The walk up the hill had been brutal and more than once Damien almost stopped Sinjun to ask if he was okay, but his brother kept up a steady pace, powering through the incline after they'd grabbed their food from Chang's. A food truck sat outside the park selling braised pork belly tacos, and they'd grabbed a couple of those along with several bottles of unsweetened iced tea. The picnic benches beneath the wisteria were empty so they sat on a table top with their feet hanging over the edge and unwrapped their food.

"You remember any of this?" Damien asked softly, peeling off the paper from the bottom of the bao. "We've never really talked about that."

"A lot of this wasn't here. I mean, the buildings were but everything's different." Sinjun twisted around, looking about. "Fuck, the street's name isn't even St. John. The social worker read the report and it said ST. John for where I was found. So that's how they got my name. This park wasn't here. That's a lot cleaner now. I came down here a couple of times when I could get away from Vega.

"I don't know why I came here. I don't know what I was expecting to find." Sinjun went silent, tearing his bao part then biting into one half. Chewing slowly, he glanced over Damien. "But that day? I don't remember jack shit."

"Do you think about it?" Damie cracked open one of the teas and set it down next to Sinjun before opening his own. "I think about shit with my parents all the time. Especially when we're around Donal and Brigid. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to have parents like that, you know?"

"I figure life is what it's supposed to be." Sinjun shrugged, picking out the meat filling with his fingers then tucking it into his mouth. "We'd be different people. Maybe not even people we would like to know. Maybe we would not like each other. I don't know. I guess I don't worry about shit I can't change because even with the fuckery Vega and Shing put me through, I wouldn't have met you without them.

"And you wouldn't have pushed yourself to be free of your parents if things are different." He gestured with the dug-out bread half, catching the attention of a fat pigeon. Sinjun broke off a piece and threw it towards the bird who pounced on it then flew off. "Whatever would've happened to me after I got away from Vega probably wouldn't have been much better than if I'd stayed with him."

"That's not true —"

"That's all the truth," Sinjun cut him off. "I didn't have schooling and I was spending my time working to feed myself. There wasn't anything ahead of me but the next day. You finding me after a shitty gig when you were pissed off and looking for someone or something different than what you had meant you took me with you when you started climbing for the stars.

"I wouldn't have met Johnny and Dave. And as much as I love music, I wouldn't have been able to learn the guitar or how to write songs without meeting you." Sinjun ate the rest of his bread, then said. "You asked me one time why I didn't get you a headstone like I did them and I keep telling you it's because I knew you were still alive but mostly it's because I couldn't imagine you dead. It's like if you were gone, I would have to go back to that fire escape and wait for you to return. Because my life couldn't begin again without you. Because it didn't begin the first time without you."

"I'm glad Kane showed up to help you pick up the pieces," Damien replied, giving his brother a quick one armed hug. "And Dude. I think he went a long way in keeping you grounded until your cop showed up."

"He did," Sinjun agreed with a laugh. "I love Kane with all my heart. I never for one fucking moment thought I'd fall in love with him, especially since he chewed my ass out about the dog but he snuck in. Climbed over the wall and set up shop. And then he brought all of the Morgans with him."

"And then one of them brought me." Damien teased. "I'm going to remember that moment in the kitchen for the rest of my life. I never thought my heart could stop and race at the same time until the moment I saw you. And fucking Sionn, God I love him but if only he'd gone to meet his fucking cousin's boyfriend, I would've found you sooner."

"It is what it's supposed to be, D." Sinjun nudged Damien's shoulder with his own, laughing at the disgruntled expression on Damien's face. "Are there things that I would change? Yeah but I also know how they would alter what's real for me now. I don't look back that way. I *can't*. I only can look forward and hope you, Kane, and the rest of the entire fucking insanity he and Sionn have dragged us into will be there for the ride. And I'm good with that. I don't want to live my life any other way. Especially since I found a really good happy with all of you in it."