

“So you just stand here. And wait?” Miki resisted the urge to poke at the rice in the skillet. “How do you know when it’s done?”

“Ye’ve worked in Chinese restaurants, son. Didn’t ye pay attention when they were making fried rice?” Donal worked his knife through a slice of carrot, turning it into slivers.

“Dad, the only view I got from the kitchen was from the sink and the table they put in the back where you sat and made wonton.” Miki gestured at the pan with his wooden spatula. “This shit is actually cooking. Do you honestly think they would let me near anybody’s food? I like burnt grilled cheese sandwiches.”

“Honestly, who doesn’t?” Donal tsked at him, gesturing with the knife for Miki to step away from the stove. “Leave off of that and come help me. Do me a favor and chop up that chicken and all of the leftover bacon. About the size of a dime for the chicken and a little bit smaller than that for the bacon.”

It was one of the things he loved about Donal — one of the many things. His adopted father knew Miki needed reference points, especially when faced with things he’d never done before. As stupid as it sounded, the kitchen was a waystation of sorts for him and to enter it with the intention of creating an actual meal was as scary as the thirty-foot drop ride they’d gone on in Japan.

“If I cut my fingers off, you’re going to have to explain to the band why I can’t play guitar anymore,” Miki warned, picking up the knife. “And maybe to Edie too. And the record label guys.”

“Well don’t ye be cutting your fingers because while I could take them on, I’m more afraid of what my bride would do to me,” Donal replied, chuckling. There was a warmth to his laugh, a gravitas mingling humor with comfort. Miki liked that Kane laughed as his father did, a low roll of thunder spiced with a bit of joy and sometimes teasing.

The teasing was the hardest thing to get used to.

Damien seemed to get the knack of it but for all of his years on the road with the Sinners boys, Miki never quite got the hang of poking fun at others and himself. It felt mean even though other people seem to enjoy it and there’d been a few times when Miki sat in the middle of the Morgans’ living room and the mood shifted around him, going back to normal when Donal cleared his throat and everyone found something else to do.

Donal’s teasing was out in the open and never meant to make Miki feel small. Maybe that’s what he really didn’t like about being poked at. There’d been too many years where he’d been shoved into a tiny space and told to be invisible, or worse, told he didn’t matter at all.

“Does it have to be like squares? Or does it matter?” Miki poked at a piece of chicken, wondering if he should take the skin off as well. “And do I just cut it up? Like do you want the skin?”

“Yer making it too hard on yourself there, son.” Donal leaned over to take a peek at the rice. “Skin on or off is fine. However you want to make it.”

“I just don’t want it to be *wrong*.” Miki scowled at the mound of cooked chicken in front of him. “Food’s a big thing. They’re always giving me shit about how I eat. I just don’t want to fuck this up.”

“That’s not going to happen. That’s the best part about fried rice,” Donal remarked, cracking an egg into a glass bowl. “It doesn’t have to be perfect because it’s made out of everything ye have the refrigerator. It’s kind of like an omelette.”

“Yeah, I don’t know how to make those either.” He shook his head. “Kane makes them sometimes. Like he takes a couple of eggs and pulls crap out of the fridge then all of a sudden we’ve got this five course meal with hot biscuits and these perfect half-moon egg things on everybody’s plates.”

“Well now, that’s just him showing off then.” A few more eggs joined the first one of the bowl then Donal added a dollop of water from a nearby cup. “Hand me that fork there, will ye? It’s time to add the eggs.”

“Shit, I’m not of done chopping up the meat.” After handing Donal a fork, Miki began to diligently separate the chicken from the bones.

“Take yer time. See? The eggs just go on top of the cooking rice and then let that sit for a while.” Donal made sure Miki’s attention was on the pan as he poured the beaten eggs slowly around the skillet. “Just finish up what ye’ve got and we’ll toss it in after the vegetables. Then we’ll broil the short ribs. Those will go fast and the rice will keep in the oven under the warmer.”

He finished the chicken and then the bacon, tossing them all into a bowl before handing it over to Donal. There was a space on the counter he’d been told he could sit on, a controversial decision protested by the Morgan siblings since they hadn’t been allowed to do so growing up. Being overruled first by Donal and Brigid, there was a tiny storm of grumbles but Miki was assured the rest of the family would simply have to adjust.

Although he did notice Ryan had been promptly told to get off the counter when she’d tried to sit up there.

Miki nearly breathed a sigh of relief when Donal turned the rice over with the spatula. He watched attentively when Donal showed him the crackle then leaned back on his hands. “Can I ask you something?”

“Ye can ask me anything. Ye know that, Mick.” Donal continued to work the pan then tapped the spatula against its edge. “What’s on your mind?”

“Did you know what kind of person you wanted Kane to be with?” He shifted on the counter, careful not to bang his heels against the kitchen cabinet. “I mean, I hear people talk about what they want for their kids sometimes. And it’s kind of weird because they’ve got these huge ideas about what this kid is going to be when it grows up and sometimes even the type of person they want it to be with. Did you and Brigid ever do that? Like try to plan out their lives?”

“Truth be told, I think every parent does that.” Donal turned the fire down with a flick of the knob then leaned against the counter, crossing his arms over his burly chest. “Funny thing is about raising kids is that a parent shouldn’t go into it thinking they can mold or make what they want out of this person. Not to say that we didn’t make our mistakes. For the longest time, I’d wanted Connor to be a lawyer but that wasn’t in the cards.”

Miki snorted. “I can’t imagine Connor being a lawyer. Maybe Kiki. Or even Kane.”

“Well, I had it all planned out. I knew what schools I wanted him to attend and figured one of us was going to have to learn how to play golf so we could teach him when Brigid’s da told me something while we were getting pissed over a new bottle of whiskey he’d brought in.” Donal grinned. “And ye’ve been around me long enough to know pissed means drunk, right?”

“I think I know how to say drunken hangover in about fifteen dialects and twelve languages,” Miki made a face. “It’s right up there with where’s the bathroom and no I don’t have any money and I am not looking for a hooker.”

“Very good life skills that,” Donal agreed. “So we were passing a fine Sunday afternoon when he looked at me and said; ye’re a fool if ye think ye’re going to have a say about the boy will be. Here ye are laying down a path for him to walk on when what ye should be thinking about... what ye need to be doing... is to be concerned about what kind of man he’ll become. *Raise the man, Donal*, he scolded me. If ye raise the man right, the path he chooses will be the one he’s meant to follow.

“Since they stuck with me even after I sobered up, I figured those words were a truth I couldn’t deny.” The vegetables joined the rice but Donal held off mixing them in. “I never wanted any of my children to pick up the gun and the badge. For me it was a way to help people find justice, for me to help people who may be needing a voice but couldn’t speak up. I never imagined any of them would wear my uniform. And any plans that I might’ve had for them were set aside because their passion for justice is even stronger than mine.

“Now to get to yer question about did I ever imagine the person I saw Kane with? The answer to that is no because I know love hits without warning or reason.” Donal’s smile grew wistful and he laid a warm hand on Miki’s thigh. “I never imagined I would fall in love with Brigid Finnegan but when I finally saw she’d made a place for herself in my heart, I knew I couldn’t ever love anyone else. It was that way with ye and Kane. I knew the moment I heard him speak about ye that he’d lost himself in loving ye.”

“Wouldn’t you want your kid to have somebody less fucked up?” Miki bit at his lower lip, looking away. He was poking at a brittle shell of insecurity he’d been avoiding for months but the doubts about him fitting into Kane’s life and the family always resurfaced. “I mean, I’m not —”

“Ye exactly who he needed to fall in love with, Mick,” Donal said, cupping the back of Miki’s head until their foreheads touched. “Ye challenge him. Ye challenge his world and make him think. Ye tell him no when the world bows to his pushiness and forced him to rethink the way he approaches people. If there is one great disservice I’ve given my children, is that they sometimes believe they are always right.”

“Yeah, I don’t know where they got that from,” Miki coughed, “*Brigid.*”

“I’m not going to say that ye’re wrong but I had a hand in it.” He laughed, kissing Miki on the temple before letting him go. “Ye make Kane stretch outside of himself. With ye he learns to compromise because while he is an irresistible force, ye are an immovable object at times and this makes him stop and change course. So while I have made him the best man than I could raise, ye are making him a better man because ye love him but won’t take any of his shit. So that, Mick, is why I could never imagine anyone but ye by Kane’s side and it was one of the happiest days in our lives when he brought ye home so I knew right then and there, ye’d be a son of our hearts and a blessing on this family.”