



# ROTGUT GIN

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Hop Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia 2015

# Rotgut Gin by Rhys Ford

*Four damned sinners went into the rain  
Strings bleeding red, soaking up their  
pain.*

*Sky fell apart, piercing their souls,  
Night closed down, shadows filling the  
holes.*

*One woke up, And then there were two  
Sun came back out, the sky black and blue  
Too bright to be warm, too sharp to be  
kind,*

*Missing twin shadows, by the two left  
behind.*

*— Four Sinners Gone Walking*

*“Get the fuck in, Damie!”* Johnny screamed out of the driver’s window, tapping the brakes of their van to slow the vehicle down enough for Damien to jump in through the open back doors.

Miki lost his grip on an amp, catching it before it skidded out of the back. Damie was a foot behind the van, his jeans down low on his hips, a peek of hair caught on the scrunched elastic of his underwear. He nearly lost his jeans, letting one hand go to grab at Miki’s fingers. His undone fly flapped back and Damie stumbled.

The alley was tight, jogging left suddenly, and Damien nearly hit the wall with the turn. Screaming at Johnny, Damie looked over his shoulder, ducking to avoid a dumpster lid.

“Don’t stop! I’ll catch up!”

“Brake!” Miki shouted back at Johnny.

“Fucking stop the damned van for a fucking minute.”

Johnny chanced a look over his shoulder.

“Don’t got a fucking minute, Sinjun!”

Dave pounded at the back of the front passenger seat, urging Damie on. Something boomed from the alley behind them and one of the back doors lost a window, scattering glass in Damie’s path.

“Shit!” Johnny’s New York accent broke, going guttural and hot. “Hold on!”

Johnny hit the brakes, smoking up the van’s tires. Caught off guard, Damie slammed into

the back deck, cutting him across his stomach. Grabbing Damie's shirt, Miki hauled him in, reaching down to snag at Damie's falling jeans and giving a good yank.

“Go! Go!” Miki screamed towards the front of the van. Johnny hit the gas and the van doors slammed shut, narrowly missing Damie's bare feet. Panting in the cramped space behind their equipment, Damie heaved a sigh of relief and shot Miki a cocky grin.

“Fuck, *that's* what being a rock star is.” He crowed between gasps. Miki guessed he would have said more if the next shotgun blast hadn't taken out the other rear window, deafening them all for a moment.

They were all panting, frightened down to their core. Damie'd disappeared for what felt like only a minute after they'd finished packing the van up, then the shouting began—the oh-so-familiar-yelling of Damien being caught with his pants down and screwing with someone else's lover.

And as they usually did, Johnny started the van up and gunned the engine, ready to leave another town in their dust.

“Do we have to go back?” Dave shoved at his long hair, trying to get his silken mane under control. His sloe-dark eyes were narrowed, concern beetling his eyebrows in.

“Why the fuck would we want to go back to that?” Johnny gave their drummer a filthy

look. “Are you trying to get us killed?”

“We got Damie. But if he was with a guy... then he’s going to be in trouble. We just can’t leave him there.” Dave turned around, leaning between the two front chairs. “Was it about you being with a guy? Did we leave someone back there to deal with this by himself? Do we have to go back, Damie?”

Damien’s cocky grin faded, swept away by a bit of remorse and guilt. “Shit. Yeah. Yeah, we do.”

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They found the young man—barely out of boyhood—lying in a puddle of his own blood. His face’d been worked over, his ribs

pounded on but thankfully, he wasn't riddled with holes. He'd run his shoes off, or perhaps one of his attackers took them. Either way, his feet were bare and muddy.

Johnny'd circled the van around, back to where Damie'd been with the slender blond, cutting the headlights when they spotted a group of large guys, laughing and slapping one another on the back. The van grew very quiet, and Miki's stomach churned from fear. He spotted the young man first, curled up into a ball against a dumpster. Damie was out of the van before Johnny could throw it into park, and Miki followed hot on his heels, unsure about what to do.

It was a shitty eighteenth birthday for Miki, but he'd woken that morning knowing he was

free. He didn't have to look over his shoulder for Vega anymore, and it'd been months since he'd last run from the law. The state of California no longer owned his ass, could no longer pimp it out to some asshole with a kink for little boys and the money to satiate it.

Miki St. John was finally fucking free.

It'd been a day spent hauling around equipment and singing his throat raw for three sets. Their celebration backstage had been shots of Jack and a Hostess cupcake with a candle in it. There'd been other cupcakes, but that one with the candle had a layer of frosting on it and rainbow sprinkles. He'd sucked out the crème inside and left the cake and frosting for Damien, chasing the

sweet down with a burn of whiskey.

The young man lying on the alley's cement ground didn't look much older than Miki.

“Shit, I've taken worse,” Miki muttered under his breath.

The other three didn't understand—no, Damie understood—but Johnny and Dave were brought up in a land of white picket fences, backyard BBQs and Sunday dinners. They'd swam in pools in the summer and went begging for candy in the fall when they were still young, cute and fit into store-bought superhero costumes.

“Let's get him in the van,” Dave said, unbuckling his seat belt. “We need to get him

some help.”

“He’s not dead.” Miki pointed out. The other two merely looked at him, twin blank stares he didn’t want to counter with his brand of common sense. “Good thing, right? Let me get some towels. Rug back here’s fucked up enough without getting blood on it.”

There was an argument, mostly from the young man about going to the hospital. He didn’t want to. Damie, Johnny and Dave insisted. He shoved at them, shouting for them to mind their own business. Told them to fuck off and die, to leave him alone, but the three packed him up carefully and laid him into the van’s rear seats.

If there was one thing Sinner’s Gin was good

at, it was packing stuff up and carting it off.

Even if the *it* was a young man who fought them all the way in.

The hospital stank of dead skin and alcohol, a taint of fake lemon added in for extra zest. An ER nurse gave them the hairy eyeball when they came in, asking if the blond guy slung over Johnny and Damie's shoulders was impaired in any way.

His missing front teeth and a burbling moan of pain pushed her into action, and the blond was gone before Miki could blink. He'd slunk outside to wait, thinking the others would stay. They didn't. Instead, they shadowed Miki's steps, lurking outside of the ER, a murder of crows waiting to see if

their victim of circumstance survived.

“How much money do we have?” Damien asked Dave, lighting a clove he’d stolen from Miki. They all hunkered around the van, pulled up as close to the smoking area as possible and stared at the emergency room doors. “I don’t know shit about him. Suppose he needs help?”

“For his bill?” Dave made a face. “I don’t know if we have that much.”

“You’re asking us to fork over hotel room money for a kid you fucked and left?” Johnny stepped away from the canister of sand he’d just stubbed a Chesterfield into. The three of them sat silent, staring at their bassist. Johnny sighed, flinging his hands up in the air

to surrender. “Seriously, you’re bi. Can’t you fuck women when we’re in places like this? Bad enough we’ve got to worry about jealous boyfriends. You fuck a guy? And we’re sitting there running from assholes who want to kill you because you like to suck dick.”

“Do we got the money or not?” Damien ignored Johnny, pressing in on Dave.

“I don’t *know*.” Their drummer was the smartest with cash. Miki knew he couldn’t do it, manage their finances. He was barely useful grabbing snacks when they gassed up. “Maybe. Depends on how much.”

“And don’t get on my case, Johnny. Those fucking assholes back there came at us

screaming about faggots and homos. Don't have to be a rocket scientist to know they wanted to bash some heads in. I went one way, he went the other. I told him to follow me." Damie turned and Miki caught the glitter in his blue eyes. His brother was either going to cry or lose his temper. It was fifty-fifty. Tears won and he blinked furiously, thinning his lips out as he met Miki's gaze. "It'll be okay, Sinjun. He wasn't that bad. Not like..."

"Yeah, I've seen worse." Miki'd *been* worse. Lost teeth were nothing. The guy's chest wasn't whistling every time he breathed, and he hadn't choked on his own tongue or blood. As beatings went, it was one he'd walk away from. "Fucking crappy,

though. Shouldn't have to bleed just because you're—”

“It's a shitty part of town. You're going to get the shit kicked out of you just for being there,” Damien spat. “They could have fucked with anyone. They just happened to choose us.”

They *were* in a shitty part of town. But then, they were always in shitty parts of every town they found gigs. They'd come a long way from playing at street gigs and sidestages. They were headlining at small clubs, building up their name, and selling CDs out of a cardboard box. Motel rooms were a luxury at times, sometimes eating a meal sitting down was a celebration.

Gas was their first priority, followed by strings and the occasional roll of duct tape. What none of them was saying out loud was they couldn't afford to pay for the blond's medical bills. Not if they were going to make it to their next gig.

Sitting in the van's side door well, Miki shook out a kretek from his dwindling pack. Damien'd practically chain smoked the black cigarettes since they'd parked the van, waiting for something—someone—to show up for the young man they'd brought in.

He didn't like hospitals. There were too many questions and too little sympathy. It would have been better if one of them were actually inside, but Miki knew if he brought it up, it was as good as volunteering to go in.

“What the fuck are we doing here, D?”

Johnny reached past Miki to get to the cooler they stashed behind the rear seats. “We should be gone already. We got him here.”

Everything else in the van'd been pulled out to make room for their equipment, and the Econoline was barely big enough to hold everything, but they'd made room for a small rolling ice chest, packing it with cheap soda and water bottles. An ice slurry dripped off of a bottle Johnny pulled out, a cold wet dribble finding the back of Miki's neck.

“Hey, fucking watch it. Shit, that's cold.” He shoved at Johnny, a light reproach. The lean bassist retaliated, shoving the bottle against Miki's throat before dancing away. “Fucker.”

“Close the lid,” Dave drawled. “But yeah, Damie, what do you want us to do here? It’s nearly morning and—”

A sleek, champagne gold sedan pulled into the parking lot, finding a space near the entrance. Its brake lights were still on, but the car’s passenger, a middle-aged blonde woman, hurriedly got out, leaving the door open. She rushed across the crosswalk and was through the ER’s sliding doors before the driver, a tall man with silvering brown hair, got out. He checked out the band, dismissing them with a turn of his shoulder before closing the passenger side door. Following the woman slowly, he didn’t glance back as he set the car’s alarm.

“Betcha that’s for the guy. He’s the only one

in ER, right?” Johnny cracked open his water, playing with the lid.

“You should go check, D,” Miki said softly. Damien shot him a look and Miki glared right back. “It could have been you in there. Or worse. And then we’d be scrambling for the money for sure. Go the fuck in and take care of it.”

“In a little bit,” Damien muttered, pacing across the van. “Fuck. This is... so screwed up.”

“Here’s my question. The two of you are gay. You love him. Shit, you two always share the same bed in the hotel room, leaving me with this Cajun asshole.” Johnny jerked at Dave.

“I’m not Cajun. That’s like my saying you’re from Jersey,” Dave interjected.

“Yeah, whatever. Somewhere down there with sweet tea and bugs the size of our fucking van. The thing is, you’ve got Miki. Why the hell don’t the two of you just become fuck buddies, and we don’t have to worry about this kind of shit anymore?”

A part of Miki’s brain threw up, spreading its sour bile through his body. Gagging at the thought of putting his mouth anywhere near Damien’s cock, Miki scraped at his tongue with his teeth. Reaching into the still open cooler, Miki scooped out a handful of ice and flung it at Johnny, pelting his face and chest.

“Hey!” He couldn’t dodge the second handful, catching most of it down the front of his neck. “Cut it out!”

“You do know we’re brothers, right?”

Damien leaned against a light post, taking another drag from his clove. “It’d be like me fucking you just ‘cause you’ve got a dick and asshole. Not going to happen.”

“I’m not gay.” Johnny muttered, warding Miki off with a spread of his hands in front of him. “And you’re damned fucking right that’s not going to happen. You’d stick your dick into a dead possum if you thought you’d get off.”

“I’m not attracted to you either. You don’t make my dick hard, Johnny. Sinjun doesn’t

either. And that's not how we are." Damie took one last draw on his cigarette, then tossed it into the butt canister. "I'm going to go in and see if they came for... shit, I don't even know his name. I'll be right back."

Dave tsked at Johnny as Damie jogged across the parking lot and into the ER. "I love you, man, but sometimes you're really fucking stupid."

"It was a fucking good question." Johnny shook out his t-shirt, partially melted ice cubes dropping out of its depths. "Shit, Sinjun. I'm soaked here."

"Should be glad I didn't pitch a fucking can at your head." Miki leaned back on his hands, his bony shoulder blades pressed into

the back seat's side. "People aren't just holes, J. Not like you screw every chick you see just because she's there."

"Not that they'd have him," Dave pointed out, his honey smooth baritone hot with sarcasm.

"It just would be... Jesus, fucking guys after the show doesn't always end too good. How many fucking times are we going to be shoving gig money in our pockets and hauling ass out of town because Damie's got his dick sucked behind the club? One day someone bigger and faster's going to get a hold of him, and we're going to be missing our lead fucking guitarist."

"Won't always be like that." The Southerner

pulled an elastic tie off of his bony wrist. Scraping his hair back into a ponytail, he secured it tight against his scalp. “Maybe one day we’ll even see Sinjun here hooked up with someone.”

“Not bloody fucking likely,” Miki snorted. “That kind of shit? Not going to happen for me. Can you imagine the loser who’d have to put up with my shit? Damie barely does and he fucking loves me like a brother. That’s *brother*, J. Siblings. Whatever other fucking seven-dollar word you can come up with, that’ll be it.”

“It just... I get scared sometimes, you know?” Johnny’s voice dropped, a raspy whisper painted with skyscrapers and big apples. “You guys are like... pieces of me.

It'd fucking kill me if we lost one. You know?"

"Yeah, I know," Miki murmured. He was the youngest of their band, the baby in a pack of kick-ass musicians. There was never going to be a time when he didn't wake up astonished he was a part of them—that he *fit* into their pieces and parts as if they'd been made for him. Even in the middle of their arguing, it was a comfort. He *knew* he could say anything, do anything and they'd be right there with him.

No matter what.

"Someday, no one's going to give a shit about Damie or anyone else sticking their dick into whomever they want to. Or..."

whatever there is to stick or suck.” Dave ruffled Miki’s hair, then snagged himself a Coke, closing the lid afterwards. “Someday people are going to start minding their own shit, caring for the person next to them instead of trying to tear them down. And yeah, Sinjun, one day you’re going to find someone who’ll want to wake up next to you—hopefully without Damien in the same bed—and that guy’s going to love you. Just you. You’ll see.”

“Right,” Miki sneered.

“I’ll bet you a shot of rotgut moonshine on it,” Dave said, saluting Miki. “Hell, I’d bet both of you on it. One day, when you wake up and find yourself in the middle of a family situation, you come by my place with some

bathtub gin, and we'll get drunk off the 'shine. All of us."

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It was cold and wet in Cypress Park. Miki shivered despite the thick wool of his black peacoat, stepping out of the GTO as Damien angled the car's tires against the grade.

Retrieving a small package from the back, Miki met his brother's gaze across the seats.

"You ready?" Damien's question held too much weight, too many barbs sharp enough to hook down into Miki's soul. "Took you this long to do this. We can come back when it's warmer if you want."

"No, I owe him, you know?" The paper bag

crinkled loudly as he adjusted it over the glass jar inside. “Let’s do this.”

The walk was a long one for Miki and his knee, especially in the cold. They climbed up a rise to where a pair of angels stretched their wings and arms up to Heaven, their breath misting around their heads. The statues were elegant, sweet-faced and barefooted, marble twins seeking serenity under San Francisco’s stormy grey skies. Flowers, teddy bears and other tokens were strewn about the memorial’s large circular base and the bronze plaque set into the front was worn around the edges from rubbings.

Miki didn’t need to read the names written there. The memorial had been his idea, and he’d been thankful for the families’ gift of

two handfuls of ashes so a piece of the man he'd loved could be where they'd all become one. He needed something to anchor them to him, needed a place to go to when he wanted to talk out his misery. From the scatter of things around the base of the statue, a lot of other people felt the exact same way.

“Notice there's not one for me.” Damien teased. “Only two angels. But then, of the three of us? I'm the furthest thing from an angel we've got.”

“I wasn't ready for you to be dead,” Miki replied softly. “And apparently, you weren't fucking ready for it either. So shut the fuck up and help me do this.”

The mason jar lid was hard to get off but

Miki got it loose. The liquid inside was mostly clear, but a bit of vanilla bean they'd tossed in there for good measure floated at the bottom, sienna specks clinging to the edges. Despite the fragrant addition, the gin stank of regret and sin.

“You got them?” Miki held the bottle carefully.

“Yeah, but pretty sure you could just dump out a bit. Careful, though. That shit's going to eat right through the fucking marble.” Damien dug four shot glasses out of his jacket pockets. Holding them upright, he hissed when Miki sloshed a bit of the liquid on his fingers. “I'm...meeeelting. Seriously, this shit smells like jet fuel.”

“Fucker. Stop that.” Miki took two of the shot glasses and set them at the angels’ feet, patting at the base before pulling back. Grasping the one Damien passed him, he lifted it up towards the plaque. “This took too damned long, Dave, but I had to learn how to fucking make moonshine. And then it had to be good enough to at least choke down.

“You were right. About a guy. About Kane. You were *always* fucking right, and I hope right now you’re out there laughing your fucking ass off because of it.” Miki blinked away his tears. “But maybe, one day... soon... we won’t have to worry about two boys kissing or two girls holding hands. Maybe soon. Kiss Johnny for us. Because

that'll piss him off.”

“Amen.” Raising his glass, Damien muttered. “To the two who left us behind.”

“Fuckers.” Miki grinned, then downed his shot, choking as he swallowed. “Fucking hell, bastard knew this was going to burn going down. That’s why he did it, I’m sure.”

“Eating crow hurts, Sinjun. Hurts like hell.” Damien pulled his brother into a tight hug, and Miki clung just as tightly back, cut open from the bet he’d made. “Just like this fucking gin you’ve made.”