

predation

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by [crimsonseekers](#)

Summary

He knew he should listen to his handlers, that he needed to work to be a hero, but there was an overpowering voice in the back of his mind saying that he would not get the return he needed to survive.

So the HPSC, ever adaptive for their own ends, conditioned him to associate capture with food. The trainers acting as “villains” would have a chunk of raw meat. When his handler told him to capture the villain, he *hunted*. The Commission made use of all sorts of methods and punishments to keep him in line, but they had only ever kept a meal from him once, when he was ten.

Hawks still felt horrible about the state he’d left that guard in before he was sedated.

Notes

my environmental science professor made a passing comment about how birds wouldn't move unless they absolutely needed to in order to conserve energy because they only got energy back by hunting, and my brain went brrrr

Huge shout out to [toast](#) for beta-reading this!

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

The Hero Public Safety Commission had trained Hawks to view villains as prey.

Now, he knew that sounded bad, and to be fair, it was, but it was the only way they could get him to go through the rigorous training of becoming a hero.

Hawks was a human, but he was also a bird of prey.

He remembered one of his tutors explaining the food chain to him. Birds of prey didn't *forage*; his natural instincts weren't drawn to berries or fruit. Birds of prey *hunted*.

Each hunt expended energy. Each time he flew, he needed to get that energy back by catching prey. Each time his trainers tried to get him to fly an obstacle course, he resisted. It was a waste of energy.

At first, they had gotten around it by tempting him with food at the end of the course, but when they had begun training him for chase and capture, he shut down again. He knew he should listen to his handlers, that he needed to work to be a hero, but there was an overpowering voice in the back of his mind saying that he would not get the return he needed to survive.

So the HPSC, ever adaptive for their own ends, conditioned him to associate capture with food. The trainers acting as "villains" would have a chunk of raw meat. When his handler told him to capture the villain, he *hunted*.

At a certain point, the immediate return of the trainers having the meat on them was no longer needed; as long as Hawks was still fed after each capture, he cooperated. Since villains came from all sorts of different backgrounds with all sorts of genetics and quirks, the HPSC hadn't so much conditioned him to view villains as prey as they had conditioned him to view *humans* as prey.

The Commission made use of all sorts of methods and punishments to keep him in line, but they had only ever kept a meal from him once, when he was ten.

Hawks still felt horrible about the state he'd left that guard in before he was sedated.

He'd gained better control of himself since then, but no one wanted to test if he would try murdering a Commission worker for food again. As long as Hawks was fed, he was fine. He had regular breaks on patrol to eat, half as a reward to keep his conditioning in place and keep him motivated throughout the day instead of trying to sustain on willpower alone (usually didn't go well), half to make sure he didn't embarrass himself by mauling a villain.

His schedule was fine tuned and strict to make sure nothing happened.

Unfortunately, villains didn't care about his schedule.

The thing about Dabi being a dickhead and the entire League being basically nocturnal was they called Hawks over at the *worst* times.

Like today.

He hadn't even had time to stop at a yakitori cart after patrol before Dabi was calling and threatening to light a fire under his ass if he didn't get a move on to make it to the meeting in time. So, Hawks was already a little peckish when he left.

The other thing that villains didn't care about was *distance*.

Hawks flew at breakneck speed for several hours to travel the one thousand kilometer distance between Fukuoka and Tokyo. Flying in general burned a *lot* of calories. Flying halfway across the country at top speed left him feeling like his wings were made of clay and that his stomach was caving in. So, by the time he stumbled into the League base at 1 AM, he was, understandably, *starving*.

He was a grown man, however, not a ten year-old, and he had far better self control than to just *attack* people on a whim even if Toga smelt like fresh blood and Dabi like cooked meat. Spinner was just a problem he was better off not even looking at.

"You're late," Dabi said, looking almost smug as Hawks dropped into a seat, ignoring the greetings of the other League members.

"Fuck off," was his reply, not feeling particularly generous as he buried his head in his arms on the table. "Not in the mood for this today."

"Oh, you better be in the mood, considering you missed the entire meeting."

Hawks grit his teeth. Great. He'd flown all the way to Tokyo for *nothing*. Unless he could find somewhere open at this ungodly hour, he was flying back on an empty stomach. Fantastic.

Hunt, something whispered in the back of his mind, a thought which he crushed ruthlessly before he could consider it.

"Birdie." Dabi poked at his head when he didn't respond, and the scent of cooked meat met Hawks' nose before the arsonist pulled his arm back again.

Prey, it continued. Hawks knew that joke about how everything tasted like chicken, but he was fairly sure if he sunk his teeth into Dabi outside of the sexy way, he would throw up.

"Hawks, don't fucking ignore me." Dabi shoved at his head harder, the scent passed his nose again, and it took every ounce of self control Hawks had to not react.

Eat. No.

"Hawks-"

Eat. No.

"Hawks-"

Eat. N-

“Hawks!”

Hawks’ head shot up in alarm, and he saw Dabi moving in the corner of his vision.

Prey.

His arm shot out and grabbed Dabi’s arm in a vice grip. He was *hungry*.

“Hawks, what the fuck are you doing?” Dabi snapped, scowling furiously as he tried to tug his arm out of Hawks’ grip.

Hawks’ fingers only tightened as his mind narrowed. The prey was struggling. He should have snapped its neck for a quick kill, but the adrenaline suddenly dumped into his system by the need to hunt cramped his fingers, and he couldn’t let go.

He extended and arched his wings, trying to assert himself over the increasingly panicked prey. It would be over quick if it stopped struggling. He didn’t want to have a drawn out kill. The limb in his grip began heating dangerously, to the point where the skin beneath his gloves began to sting. A low, hissing warning escaped the back of his throat as he leant into the prey, feathers sharpening and wings curling around so he could take a clean kill when the opportunity presented itself. Too much blood would attract competitors.

Something creaked under his fingers as the prey let out a loud and pained *“FUCK!”*

It was vulnerable. It was weak. Hawks reared back, tightening his hold to keep his prey still as he prepared to kill it.

His hunger was so single-minded that he didn’t notice the fist coming toward his face until it was too late.

Hawks’ head snapped to the side, and a sharp, stinging pain blossomed across his cheek. He came back to himself, taking note of his racing heart and heavy breathing. The next thing he noticed was the *entire* League staring at him, looking ready to attack him at any given moment — Toga had her knife drawn and was watching him critically, Shigaraki was staring at him over the top of his Switch which was threat enough, and so forth.

Hawks swallowed heavily and folded his wings slowly, settling them tight against his back before he looked at Dabi.

Dabi, who was staring at him with equally wide eyes, one arm pulled back, ready to hit him again if need be, while the other was still securely in Hawks’ grip. Hawks, through a sheer amount of willpower he didn’t know himself capable of, peeled his fingers off Dabi’s arm and shoved his hands in his pockets, letting them cramp up into little fists. Dabi scooted his chair away, cradling his arm close to his chest as he watched Hawks cautiously.

The entire bar was silent.

Hawks' chest felt tight. He was no better than when he was ten. "I—" he cut himself off with a choked noise as his stomach audibly growled. He didn't need a reminder that he was hungry, *thank you very much*.

He forced himself to steady his breaths as he stared at the floor, not willing to meet any of their eyes.

"I'm just gonna go," he said quietly, striding out of the bar and onto the street before anyone could say anything, forcing himself to spread his wings and start the long flight back to Fukuoka.

Hawks didn't hear from Dabi or the League for a fair amount of time after that.

He tried to not dwell on it.

He didn't tell the Commission what took place, only that no information of importance had been discussed and that he hadn't been contacted since.

He stewed in guilt while waiting to hear anything from the League. He had an extra pair of pockets sewn onto his cargo pants which he promptly stuffed with protein bars to eat on the go because that had been too close. Even if Dabi was a villain, Hawks didn't want to kill him. Hawks didn't want to kill *anybody*.

The weeks passed. He kept on patrol, he stayed on top of paperwork, he ate at every available moment even if he was already full because who knew what kind of event could break up his schedule, what if he grabbed a *civilian* next time?

When Dabi finally texted him the time and location for a meetup (no longer invited to the League base; Hawks was perfectly capable of reading in between the lines), Hawks couldn't tell if it was relief or panic that gripped his heart.

When he touched down outside the designated sketchy alleyway and saw Dabi within its depths, he made sure to not get too close. He scuffed the soles of his boots on the ground while he waited for Dabi to break the silence, not meeting the other man's eyes.

"So," Dabi started in a cold tone. Hawks hunched in on himself. "I'm sure you know *exactly* what the problem here is." It was a statement, not even a rhetorical question, but Hawks still nodded sheepishly. "Try anything like that tonight, and I have backup on speed dial. Clear?"

"Yes." It felt like he was getting scolded by his handlers.

"What I want to know is very simple. What the fuck happened?"

Hawks paused, eyes flicking anywhere but Dabi's irritated face as he dithered, debating his answer.

"Tick tock, bird brain, we don't have all night."

"I'm just — trying to figure out how to say this without it coming out *really* wrong."

“Spit it out or stop wasting my time.”

“I was hungry.” That was the simplest explanation Hawks could offer off the top of his head, even if — and this was confirmed by the confusion that twisted Dabi’s scars — it made absolutely no sense without context.

“You broke my arm because you were fucking *hangry* or something?” Dabi sounded incredulous, and Hawks couldn’t exactly blame him. It did sound a little stupid when he put it like that.

“Kind of? Not really. Give me a minute.” He needed time to formulate a correct response and angle that didn’t sound really fucking bad.

“You have a second.” Alright, this was going great. The unfiltered truth it was.

“I was trained to view humans as prey.” That gave Dabi pause. The man stopped. Stared. Stared a little more. When no scathing comment came his way, Hawks hurried to continue. “It’s — it’s like instincts, you know? Hunter instincts, I should only expend energy if I can get it back by eating, so I was really resistant to any sort of training that required me to fly because calories get used up fast. So they used food to trick my ‘bird brain’ into hunting mode so that I’d do the work, and I started to associate capturing people with eating so... y’know...” The words that had tumbled out of his mouth panickedly began to taper off, and he shrugged weakly. Dabi was staring at him with an indecipherable look. “Flying from Fukuoka to Tokyo takes up an insane amount of calories, so by the time I got there, I was sort of on a losing battle with those instincts.”

“You-” Dabi broke off with a confused noise and pinched the bridge of his nose. “You’re saying you were trying to *eat me*?”

Hawks opened his mouth to deny it but paused, and Dabi didn’t look impressed with his hesitation. Hawks gave a little so-so motion with his hand. “Yes, but also I really didn’t want to. This may come as a shock after all those cannibal jokes you like to make, but I really don’t want to eat a person.”

“You were trying to eat me,” Dabi repeated flatly. Hawks did his best to smile reassuringly, though it felt fake even to himself. “Oh my fucking god.”

“But I didn’t eat you,” Hawks added on, giving the man finger guns. “Silver lining!”

Dabi opened and closed his mouth several times, looking at a rare loss for words before he finally settled on “You realize I’d prefer you didn’t try in the first place, right?”

Hawks stuffed his hands into his pockets and lowered his gaze as Dabi sighed yet again.

“Just — fuckin’ tell me the next time your dumbass bird brain decides to make you into a little bitch.”

Hawks, even with the slight guilt he felt, couldn’t stop the answering remark before it left his mouth. “What did you want me to say, ‘Mind if I step out for a second to grab some food,

unless anyone is volunteering’?”

Dabi rolled his eyes. “That’s why I said *next time*, birdie. Now that I know you’re a fucking cannibal-”

“Did you not hear the part where I said I *don’t* want to eat you?”

“-I’m a little more inclined to listen.” Dabi wasn’t very inclined to listen to begin with, but Hawks supposed it was better than nothing.

“Gotcha. No more eating you, even if you look like a snack.” Hawks only realized how that sounded after Dabi started to smirk.

“Flattering. Now get lost.”

“Aye, aye, cap’n.” Hawks was eager to leave so he could agonize over his newest embarrassing situation in peace.

The next time Hawks went over to the League base, he almost reeled back in shock when Dabi slammed a plate of yakitori and raw chicken breast on the table in front of him.

“Eat.”

“What?” Hawks said, like the smart man he was. Dabi clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Fucking eat *this* before you eat *me*. Is that clearer?”

Hawks opened his mouth to respond but only managed to exhale a pathetic little wheezing noise as he felt his face go bright red. Dabi narrowed his eyes.

“What. What is it now. What could it *possibly* be now?”

Hawks buried his burning face in the collar of his coat, sinking down in his chair in a futile attempt to escape Dabi’s blistering glare. “Bird thing,” he managed to choke out.

Dabi made a disgusted noise in the back of his throat. “You better not try and eat me again.”

“I’ll eat your dick.”

“What?”

“What?”

“No, what the fuck did you just say to me?”

Hawks whined and sunk deeper into his chair, practically laying on the seat by this point. Dabi reached down and grabbed his coat collar, yanking him back up, leaning close as he presumably prepared to ask even more questions that Hawks would continue to answer in the most embarrassing fashion possible if his track record was anything to go by.

Luckily, he was saved by Shigaraki of all people snapping at them to “Get a fucking room!”

Dabi glared at the man before ‘tch’ing and storming off, saving Hawks from the humiliation of explaining how the gift of food made Hawks feel like Dabi was trying to court him. That conversation could only go well.

End Notes

hawks having bird instincts is my bread and butter love that shit

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