

Midnight Snack

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Midnight Snack

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Summary

Hawks has kept a shameful little secret for most of his life, only indulged in the late hours of the night. But perhaps acceptance can come from an unlikely corner...and some villains are more understanding than heroes. Everyone has their imperfections, right?

Notes

Please note that while this is largely a genfic and there aren't any real triggers, there are graphic depictions of eating raw meat. So if that grosses you out a lot, don't read this. I had this laying around in my drafts and decided to dust it off and post it in honor of Hawks' name reveal! I look forward to using his name a lot in upcoming fics....

It's after midnight when Hawks tiptoes into the kitchen, standing in the darkened doorway for a second, hesitant to cross the threshold. Even here, even now, in the dead of night, this is hard for him to do. He's so used to being in the spotlight, but having to carefully shore up his image. What would the public think if they knew he has a taste for raw meat? A third eyelid? Sharp little teeth? What if he didn't file his talons away or pluck out the extra down that grows on various places on his body? They'd think he's a hideous monster, or so his handlers at the Hero Commission have told him since he was just a boy. But...tonight he's just so hungry. His stomach feels like it's trying to twist into a knot, and there's only one thing that fixes it when he gets like this. Shame burns inside him at even the thought of what he has to do, the echoes in his ears of every voice telling him that his little secret is strange, disgusting, frightening. He opens the fridge with a quiet click and rummages in the back for the hamburger meat he bought the day before, and stands over the sink slowly pushing it into his mouth a tiny piece at a time. He tries not to savor the way the cold blood rushes along the back of his tongue with each bite, the way it calls to some primal, instinctive part of himself. It's so good he closes his eyes, lost in the flavor of the meat, the soft but still fleshy texture. Cold, because he doesn't deserve it heated. It's still enough though, enough to stop the awful twisting in his gut that he'd successfully ignored all day long. He needs this, the doctors told him once. His body requires the vitamins and minerals in the raw meat to function optimally, to be as healthy as possible, and his stomach acid is stronger than a normal human's. If he doesn't eat enough, he can even suffer some intense acid reflux. He has no other option, but that doesn't stop his shoulders from curving in, wings fluttering around himself as though even in the shadows, he's trying to hide his secret away.

Then a voice from behind him, sudden in the warm dark. "Hey birdie, whatcha doin'?" His heart stops. He whirls, and there's Dabi standing in the doorway, leaning against the frame with one scarred arm and smiling knowingly at him. A pit forms in his gut, and he backs away, unsure whether to swallow the lump of raw meat already sitting on his tongue. Because there's no denying what he was just doing, and surely even Dabi will be disgusted, will hate him—

"Damn, hungry much? You didn't even heat it up." Dabi strolls over to the counter, looking at the mess Hawks' fingers made digging into the meat, red streaks on the yellow styrofoam backing that keeps it from pooling on the countertop. It looks nearly black in the low light, and Hawks feels a hollow heat inside of him, shame welling up from the pit of his unsatisfied stomach. Then Dabi hums, takes out a dish and a fork, scraping the remainder of the bloody pile onto the plate as Hawks' eyes go wide and he finally manages to swallow the literal lump in his throat.

"Wh—what are you doing?" He's still frozen, wings brought tight up around his shoulders, as though ready to flee or defend himself as soon as Dabi realizes that he was just eating raw meat like a freak in the kitchen at...two a.m.? Something like that. Not that it would be any more normal if he was doing it at noon, but perhaps the light of day would make it seem less guilty somehow, though he should know better than anyone that the time of day doesn't change who you are and what you do. That thought brings another curdle to his gut, and his bloody fingers close in on themselves, smearing his palms dark as his blunted nails dig into them slightly.

“I was just gonna stick this in the microwave for you. It’ll taste better warm, won’t it? Closer to body temperature?” Hawks just stands there, stunned, as Dabi mashes the meat more or less flat—increasing the surface area will reduce the time to heat it, so the outside doesn’t cook as much, and the inside will get warm too—and then slides it into the microwave like it’s the most normal thing in the world. Long, skeletal fingers key in the time, and the sudden electric glow of the number pad glints red off one of the staples buried in the back of Dabi’s hand, a brief flash of a reminder that he’s barely held together.

Hawks scrambles desperately to get enough of his brain cells together to form at least one of the questions floating around in his head right now. “I—that’s raw meat. I was eating raw meat. Is that not—super fucking disgusting?” The words rush out of him, higher than the normal pitch of his voice with nervousness. It’s not even that he believes Dabi has a lot of room to judge him, but the thought of anyone finding him doing this sends a hot prickle of shame running along his scalp. The humiliation is so deeply ingrained that even a villain catching him out makes him want to run and hide. It’s pathetic, but then, so is everything else about this.

Dabi raises an eyebrow at him, leaning back against the countertop while the microwave hums dully in the background. “I mean, you’re not about to catch me doing it. But you and I have a different set of tastebuds, right?” Hawks is still too perplexed and uncomfortable to answer, and Dabi rests his hands on the counter behind him, bony shoulders pressing nearly to his ears. Everything about him is too long, too thin, as though he was stretched out at some point in his life and scraped to a limit he could never return from. “Okay, let me guess: someone somewhere along the line told you it was gross you feel the urge to eat raw meat. That it was horrible and disgusting and you were a bad, bad boy for it. That if you absolutely had to, it should be shameful and secret in the dead of night, where no ‘normal’ person could ever see your perversion.”

Hawks opens his mouth for a second, but then closes it, because yeah. Dead on. Dabi continues, his voice low and sweet, when Hawks knows how terrifyingly sharp and manic it can be. A not-so-secret persuasive side, one that Hawks should be wary of, and yet still quietly listens to. “That’s kinda the whole running theme of the League, if you haven’t noticed yet. Toga drinks blood from living people. With a straw. Her parents told her the exact same thing when she was just a little kid; that she was a freak and a monster and if she ever wanted to be normal, she’d have to hide away one of the things that make her fundamentally who she is. Do you think that’s fair? Telling a little kid that they’re a monster for doing something that feels natural to them? That they might even need to survive?” Dabi’s eyes glitter in the buttery light of the microwave’s glow, but for once, that incredible focus doesn’t feel dangerous. It isn’t the knife-point stare that Hawks has grown oddly accustomed to; he seems more coaxing now, clearly trying to lead Hawks towards what he believes is the right answer.

“I mean, yeah. Toga is pretty batshit. But can you blame her? All her life, people have been reacting to her with pure disgust, and she’s decided to just own it. If this is her reality, why shouldn’t she live it?” The microwave dings, the abrupt sound making Hawks jump just slightly and Dabi pops open the door. “I, for one, agree with her. Spinner eats bugs sometimes and sheds his skin, which again, kinda nasty but that’s how he lives. Twice

doesn't know who he is all the time. Shigaraki scratches his neck raw because it's the only way he can handle the stress of his Quirk. I staple my face on in the mornings."

He takes out the plate, not seeming to mind that it's probably hot. Not for the first time, Hawks wonders how damaged the nerves in his hands are. The skin on his fingers is more normal, but...can he even feel heat there? Maybe his skin is stronger on his palms to cope with his Quirk, though the rest of him doesn't seem able to hold up as well. It's a mystery; Dabi sets the plate on the counter and pushes it over, and the scent of warm, raw flesh fills Hawks' nose and he can't help the way his mouth waters.

Dabi is back to leaning against the counter again, thin fingers drumming against it absently in a nonsensical rhythm that underscores his casual air. "You're a bird of prey. Makes sense that you have some deep craving to eat raw meat. That's just part of who you are, y'know? It doesn't make you a bad person." He takes a deep, sighing breath, and gives a quick, almost sheepish smile. "Like...fuck, never repeat this to anyone, but it doesn't invalidate the fact that you're a hero. And yeah, I fucking hate heroes and the whole hero society, but even I'm not twisted enough to think that there's something wrong with saving people. Not my thing to be merciful, but. You going to town on a little raw hamburger now and then doesn't change that you've saved lives before. That you're a good guy—even if society wants to tell you some bullshit otherwise."

Hawks blinks, tongue lazy and heavy in his mouth before he can form any words at all, though even then, he isn't sure how to articulate his emotions. "I....I dunno what to say to all that." Because it feels like a slap in the face to everything he's ever been taught about himself and the world. To years of training, grooming, fixing and editing him until he was the perfect hero in the eyes of the Commission. All the bits of him they've cut off to make him the way he is swirl at the forefront of his mind as he stares down at the plate, watching the way blood drips out of the meat and pools across the flawless white china. A deep, ruby red that everyone is pretending they're too civilized to care about, yet is still at the root of everything they do. Heroes. Villains. Mostly, it comes down to blood and urges.

It's a shock that Dabi won't judge him. Is even encouraging him, casually embracing one of the parts of himself that he's hated the most. And....there's a tiny sliver of vindication inside him. That single thread that always resented being told he was a monster all these years, that he had to look and act a certain way to be worthy of any kind of attention, much less praise. To be a good person, he had to look good. Appear good. But Dabi is telling him that those two things have nothing to do with each other, and Hawks feels a mean kind of pleasure inside him at the suggestion. Again, he knows as well as anyone else that appearances and reality rarely line up, and the prettier the lie, the uglier the truth it most likely hides.

"Just eat your damn food already," Dabi says with a shrug, and Hawks pulls the plate over. Carefully, still glancing at Dabi, he picks up a little of the meat and pops it into his mouth. Flavor, rich and coppery and perfect, pours over his tongue and pulls a soft hum of delight out of his throat, before he greedily swallows and reaches for more. He wants to say more, to make some point in return to all that Dabi has just shared with him, and yet he can't fight the instincts overwhelming his senses now. They've been denied so long, pushed to the back of his mind since he was only a child, hidden in box after box and pushed behind closed doors, silenced and bound until he felt unable to move, even with all his limbs at his disposal. It

seemed that no matter how fast he flew, no matter how high he soared, a part of his core was always tethered and hooded, and he could no more escape those jesses than he could sever off his own wings. A perfect, gilded cage for the perfect hunting hawk. Yet now, as he swallows the meat, feels the wet tear as it passes his sharp incisors and crushes beneath his molars, a pure and undeniable satisfaction wells up within him. It tastes vital, almost alive; or rather, what is in it is the essence of life. Blood, so much thick and lovely blood, an infinite dark lake of it stretching within himself back across his entire life as he struggled to stem the tide, and for what? Hadn't they always prized his violence? Hadn't his only worth ever been measured in the speed of his wings, the precision of his dives, the brutal perfection of his ability to stop criminals? Each hypocrisy puts another crack in the dam, and now, here in the darkened kitchen in the company of a wanted man, he feels the first trickle start to seep through. He allows it.

His fingers are stained red now, crescents of the dark color underneath each nail as he greedily stuffs another mouthful across his tongue. Maybe he could let them grow out, he thinks hazily. All at once the fantasy hits him, the secret he'd not dared to wish for even at night in bed; his plumage, full and unplucked, his talons as long and deadly as they'd always promised to be. His teeth, as sharp as razors instead of the blunt, filed, human smile they gave him as a teen. No makeup to cover his freckles, no careful management of the scaled skin that appeared in patches along the sides of his ankles. No more editing, no more perfecting and photo editing until he hardly recognized himself. Only this, only reality, only the taste of fresh meat and the pleasurable song of instinct rising high within him. He feels a gaze on him as tangible as a touch, and looks up to see burning blue eyes watching him through the dark.

There was no fear or disgust in that gaze, and the fact of that alone blindsided Hawks. Fascination, yes, but not the horrified sort; Dabi watched him as one might watch a stranger in a cafe, or a child with a slice of birthday cake. He made no secret of his curiosity, and yet was not hostile at all, and his mouth was turned just so at the corner in what might have, on a lesser man, been a smile. It was a manipulation, for certain. Dabi had found a weakness, a tiny flaw in Hawks' otherwise perfect armor, and he was snaking inside expertly to open Hawks up to his worldview. One manipulator recognizes another. But even still, as he flicks his tongue out to clean the blood off one fingertip, he has to admit the draw of everything Dabi is saying to him. That perhaps, after so many years of being told he was only worthwhile when he behaved in a certain way, became a certain man, it was...rare to find someone who listened to him like this. Who saw what he was, his deepest instincts and darkest sides, and never flinched from it for a second. Dabi's eyes trace down to his hands, a twisted version of near childlike wonder, and then back up. Everything here in the kitchen is strange, shadows cast long in the moonlight and stretching, bizarre in their angles until Hawks almost wonders if this is a dream, a product of the strange machinations of his unconscious.

Dabi has always been too painfully real to be a dream.

"See, little bird?" Dabi launches himself off the counter with a shove, long legs tilting him back towards the darkened door of the hall. In the low light he moves like a shadow, here stiff and awkward, there fluid and graceful. Certain motions must hurt him to make, but he's gotten so accustomed to it, the halting changes in pace seem a part of him, the unnatural

made second nature. He turns back, oddly flawless rows of teeth gleaming in the moonlight as he pauses by the door, the darkness swirling softly behind him. “Ain’t it grand to be free?”

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