

on the getaway mile

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by [Odaigahara](#)

Summary

“You want me to do what?” the civilian asked disbelievingly, and Scar’s body language shifted to that of an impatient trainer, one whose fuse was running short. It was a precursor to bad things, like being tased or forced onto a treadmill for hours; Mumbo flinched even knowing it was an act, and the civilian cut off with a squeak, so Mumbo knew he felt the same way.

Or possibly that was the gun. Scar having a gun seemed more likely as an explanation, now that Mumbo thought of it.

Stealing the car would be better, but they had no idea where they were going, and neither of them was familiar with road laws. What if they hit a person while driving? What if there was some sort of kill switch in the car that the owner could flip to blow it up with them inside? Anti-villain tech had to be wild, from what the Foundation had on hand— and they were villains now for sure. Not just for defying the Foundation, but for this. Heroes didn’t take the actions he and Scar were taking.

Notes

TW's at end notes, and thank you to antimony_medusa for beta reading!

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

“You want me to do what?” the civilian asked disbelievingly, and Scar’s body language shifted to that of an impatient trainer, one whose fuse was running short. It was a precursor to *bad things*, like being tased or forced onto a treadmill for hours; Mumbo flinched even knowing it was an act, and the civilian cut off with a squeak, so Mumbo knew he felt the same way.

Or possibly that was the gun. Scar having a gun seemed more likely as an explanation, now that Mumbo thought of it. He fumbled for a seatbelt, laptop case held securely between his knees in the backseat, and tried not to throw up at the man’s obvious fear. Scar had said the gun wasn’t loaded, but Scar lied like a nanite constructed copies of itself, so that meant very little. One bump in the road could leave them in the car with a corpse.

Stealing it would be better, but they had no idea where they were going, and neither of them was familiar with road laws. What if they hit a person while driving? What if there was some sort of kill switch in the car that the owner could flip to blow it up with them inside? Anti-villain tech had to be wild, from what the Foundation had on hand— and they were villains now for sure. Not just for defying the Foundation, but for this. Heroes didn’t take the actions he and Scar were taking.

“It’s okay,” his best friend told the civilian sweetly. Mumbo’s implants lit up, alerting him to the use of a genetic enhancement, the charmspeech Scar used that sank into your brain like grease clogging a drain. “We’re just taking you hostage so you can drive us somewhere. There’s no need to call any authorities! All you have to do is drive us and drop us off, and we can go our separate ways from there.”

”You’re— you have a gun,” the civilian said, sounding dazed, out of it. His heart rate accelerated to dangerous levels, sweat breaking out on his skin. “That’s a gun. You’re going to shoot me?”

“No, no, no,” Scar crooned, and the civilian’s pulse slowed against his will. He put the car in reverse and backed away from the small rural gas station, pulled out onto the highway without using his turn signal. Mumbo cataloged each action, implants recording them for later analysis, and put the rest of his mind to use estimating how long it would be before pursuit caught up to them. “Perish the thought. Exile it from your mind. We’re friends here, aren’t we?”

The speedometer ticked up: forty-five miles per hour, fifty-five, sixty. They had an hour before their handlers realized the cameras were on a loop, if no one checked on their cells in person. It would have been better to lay down a false trail, hack the cameras to make it seem like Scar and Mumbo had escaped some other way, but there hadn’t been time. Mumbo hadn’t known they were running away until Scar had broken the locks on his cell.

Change of plans, he’d said brightly, stumbling and bloodied, nanites working overtime to knit his shoulder together. Mumbo had been packing his few possessions, attempting to gird himself for a life without Scar in easy reach; for a second he’d thought he was hallucinating, because by all rights Scar should’ve been in a foreign country by then. *Mumbo Killsalot Jumbo, I would like to propose a road trip.*

“I don’t know your names,” the civilian said. The car chimed insistently now that they were on the road, driving Mumbo a tiny bit out of his mind. “And *you* haven’t put your seatbelt on, which all my friends know very well how to do. Listen to that beeping, you’re making my car sad.”

“Oh, I’m, um,” Scar blurted, and clicked his seat belt on. The chiming cut off. Mumbo exhaled in relief. “I have a code name, which I cannot tell you, and a real name, which my unnamed friend will now remind me about. Do our former employers know that one?”

Mumbo searched his memory, drawing up instances where they’d used their chosen names and cross-referencing them with times he *knew* their privacy had been compromised. “They don’t,” he said finally, relieved. He hadn’t thought about that, whether the Foundation knew their names. Names had been quite the indulgence of theirs, so secret they hadn’t seemed real. “Ninety-nine point six percent certainty. That’s rather encouraging, as probabilities go.”

“In that case,” Scar declared, “my name is Scar, and the man you see in your rear view mirror is Mumbo.”

So weird to hear those out loud. “Scar and Mumbo,” the civilian repeated. “Well, I’m Grian. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Scar said, more convincingly than Mumbo could have. “We’re going to a big city, by the way. Whichever one has the most superheroes who aren’t associated with the Rescue Foundation.”

“*That’s* specific.”

“We have, um, ideological differences with regulated heroics,” Mumbo offered. “Internet arguments.”

“Lots of comment section hate,” Scar agreed. He’d lowered the gun to his lap, was picking at the tear in his Hawkeye uniform where the bullets had ripped through it. As soon as they reached a city, they’d have to change clothes.

“I guess we’re going to Hermitopolis, then,” Grian concluded, switching lanes. “That’s a few hours, but I should have gas? I had no gas. I was getting gas, and then—”

“Let’s see what’s on the radio,” Scar interrupted cheerfully. He grabbed the audio dial, broke it off in a clatter of sparks, and stared at it blankly. Then he rolled down the window and lobbed it into the woods blurring by. “Never mind! Never you mind, Grian. The radio has betrayed us.”

“I just bought this car,” Grian said distractedly. Mumbo winced. “I saved a long time to afford it.”

“And your sacrifice is dearly appreciated,” Scar said, smile going strained.

The highway widened, forest falling by the wayside to be replaced with corn fields, wildflowers, grazing cows. Barns with advertisements for fireworks painted on the sides,

restaurant billboards showing foods Mumbo had never so much as *heard* of, dinosaur mini golf, cave tours and museums all demanded their attention. Mumbo wished they could've stopped for the science museum.

Cars passed them by, mostly personal vehicles driven by other civilians. Some eighteen wheelers and work trucks, a couple of red sedans nearly identical to Grian's. Mumbo shut his eyes and endeavored to sleep, setting his implants to monitor stimuli while he did, and the outside world rumbled past, nearly soothing.

The sun crept across the sky, late afternoon light boring directly through the windshield. Scar had spent the trip fully awake— he had to be, to keep the hypnosis active— but he'd been quiet, thoughtful and tense, and their hostage hadn't said a word the whole trip.

When Grian finally spoke, it startled Scar so much that Mumbo jumped awake in the backseat, convinced they'd been found out.

“Right, time for a bathroom break,” he said, and flicked on his turn signal.

“What? No, hold on, we can't *stop*,” Scar blurted, shoving himself upright. His breathing stuttered, since the motion had shifted the bullet working its way through his healing flesh— Mumbo adjusted Scar's nanites automatically, directing most of them to give up on pushing the bullet out and work on dismantling it instead— and Grian frowned at him. Mumbo received no feedback from Grian, because he was a harmless civilian they had kidnapped for their own ends. Oh, god, he was a harmless civilian and they'd *kidnapped* him, what if he had a family, what if that family had *missed him* in the hours he'd spent under their control—

“Don't be ridiculous, I'm not peeing in a bottle or whatever you think road trippers should do,” Grian scoffed. “I have standards, thank you very much. We're stopping at a rest stop. You can go get candy from the vending machines— I want Skittles, personally, and since I'm driving, you have to pay for them.”

“I'm not entirely sure what those are,” Mumbo said faintly. Grian blinked and peered back at him, like he'd forgotten he was there. “I suppose I wouldn't mind a bathroom break either, so long as we avoid cameras.”

“Sure,” Scar agreed. “That's fine, if you think it's fine. We're going to be a-okay. Spiffy. Is that a word?”

“I also don't have that knowledge,” Mumbo said, and some perverse impulse made him add, “Grian? What do you think?”

“I'm above this conversation, I've just decided,” Grian told them. He parked. “All right, we'll take turns. Who wants to guard the car from black bears and things?”

“Is that a standard road trip hazard?” Mumbo asked, horrified.

Scar volunteered, “I could fight a bear,” then faltered, likely recalling that Grian was actively under hypnosis. “How about you and me go first and Mumbo can go after. He could also fight a bear, you know, that's his secret power. His mustache hides many secrets.”

“It’s a magnificent mustache,” Grian agreed grudgingly, stepping out of the vehicle. Mumbo caught a flash of the unnatural blue in his eyes, Scar’s power working its magic, and swallowed down bile. It was fine. They wouldn’t be keeping him long.

He picked up a map inside the rest stop that told them Hermitopolis was five hours to the west, and stopped at a vending machine to contemplate the existence of foods with artificial colors, ones that came in polymer material bags and plastic wrappers. Were Skittles fair compensation for being kidnapped by runaway superweapons? He had no idea. None of his training had prepared him for this moment.

Tricking the vending machine into releasing Skittles into his custody was incredibly simple, though, which he supposed gave him his answer. He stole two bags just in case, and a chocolate bar for Scar.

“We’ll also need to get gas in a bit,” Grian informed him when he came back, brightening at the Skittles. Scar unwrapped the chocolate bar and examined it, pulled a face when it smeared on contact with his hands. “What do you need to get to Hermitopolis for, anyway? It’s a weird city, there’s weird heroes there. Sure, there’s no Rescue Foundation, but there’s Goatfather, and in my opinion he is unnecessarily touchy about where people park in proximity to his megabase. Very easily offended.”

His vital signs remained unnaturally calm, Scar’s hypnosis dampening inconvenient emotions. He’d used to practice on Mumbo and the occasional prisoner the handlers brought in, and in those cases the bewitched party would default to a placid, amenable attitude, treating Scar as a mundane but trusted acquaintance.

“Have you met this hero?” Mumbo ventured nervously. Suddenly the idea of *other* heroes seemed more threatening, especially if it was someone who knew their hostage personally. Villains didn’t *deserve* mercy, that had been stamped into their brains along with interrogation tactics, so— “It’s just, having become villainous today, we’re uncertain about coming into contact with heroes. We don’t even have a— a villainous plan yet. I’m the singular henchman Scar has.”

“Hey, you’re not a henchman,” Scar interjected. “You’re a support specialist in heroics, I mean crime. In crime. We’ve rebranded.”

“Right, but being a support specialist in crime, you understand how we might have an issue with strange heroes,” Mumbo said.

“Goatfather might threaten you, but I wouldn’t be too worried,” Grian said dubiously. He directed Scar to open the Skittles and shake some out into his hand. “When he arrested *me*, he spent a while ranting about parking fines and how I keep doing this and why I couldn’t use the guest parking at the heroics community center like everyone else, but that was about it.”

“Do you spend a lot of time at the heroics community center?”

“A friend of mine is a rookie hero,” Grian said archly. “I was meeting her for lunch, thank you very much. It’s hardly *my* fault Doc can’t take a few pranks.”

Mumbo's implants automatically scanned Grian again, attempting to map out potential injuries, places his reactions might indicate lingering damage. "But you weren't in trouble, really," Mumbo said hopefully. "Because of your friend, is that it? You don't seem to have many signs of injury."

"Well, but Grian's not a *villain*," Scar pointed out. "Unlike us, now. Do you think we should change our manner of speech to sound more evil? I can do a great evil laugh."

"You didn't answer my question," Grian said. "We're driving to Hermitopolis for some reason, which in retrospect is strange considering how I was going— I was going to *Evo*. Why am I driving you, are you paying me?"

"A great deal of money," Scar promised instantly. "Riches beyond your comprehension." In the rearview mirror, Mumbo saw Grian narrow his eyes. "We're... going to Hermitopolis for top secret reasons?"

"Try again."

"We're quitting our jobs," Scar settled on. "The, ah, the benefits weren't great, and the punishments, well, those were all right? We heal fast, we're trained, that was acceptable. But we were being reassigned to separate places, and that was just not on. It's very difficult to recover from training without a friend there to help you. Sort of depressing! You know how it is, you have a hero friend."

"I'm not sure I do," Grian said, frowning. The next exit claimed it had a gas station, so he switched lanes. "Do you mean being tired? Pearl usually sees a medic if she pulls a muscle or something, that's not something I'm equipped to help with."

"Oh, no, I mean intentional injuries," Scar assured him. "For when you don't do so well, the ones you aren't allowed to heal until you've learned your lesson. Not *any* injury, we'd never be in tip-top fighting shape if they did *that*."

"I— *what?*" Grian asked, and his phone vibrated, a call coming through. He shifted to answer it, and Scar snatched his phone off the center console, canceled the call before he could press the button. "Hey!"

"This is a no phone zone, I'm limiting screen time," Scar blurted. "You may direct your objections to Mumbo, who will side with me because he's a wonderful friend and comrade—"

"If you throw that out the window too, we're having *words*," Grian threatened, exit coming up on their right, and Mumbo's implants spat out an alert before any of them could say another word.

"Scar," he choked out, implants scanning the vehicles behind them — three cars, two identically black and one disguised as a Toyota Camry— "Scar, we have a problem."

"How many?" Scar asked, because of course he knew what Mumbo meant, he always did. "Grian, don't stop here, keep driving."

“Three,” Mumbo reported. The cars activated their sirens, drawing civilian cars out of their way like animals fleeing a predator: a minivan slowed and let them pass, two trucks doing the same. “I deactivated our trackers, so I don’t think they’re finding us that way, but they must have had extra— oh, god, it must have been the rest stop. We should have hidden our faces better.”

“It could be okay,” Scar said hopefully, and Mumbo’s implants buzzed at the same time that Scar winced, a message landing on their subcutaneous comms. Mumbo hadn’t been able to disable them completely.

“Assets Hawkeye and Redstoner, please return to your handlers immediately. You are in violation of your contracts.”

“No can do,” Scar responded warmly. Mumbo concentrated his efforts on not hyperventilating. “We quit. I’m citing terrible labor practices, lack of overtime pay, lack of, oh, *any pay*—”

“If you don’t surrender, we will be forced to take decisive action.”

“We have a civilian hostage,” Scar said, and Grian scarcely reacted, scarcely blinked at the cars flanking him and their wailing sirens. Most of the other cars had pulled back. There wasn’t much room to maneuver. “Right, Grian?”

Grian hummed and asked diffidently, “Are those cars chasing *us*?”

“Yes,” Mumbo squeaked, “yes, they *are* .”

“If you try anything, he’s going to be the first to feel it,” Scar continued, heart skipping unpleasantly, and Mumbo bit back a protest, squeezed the laptop case. It contained all of the information the Foundation had on them, especially things they’d never been permitted to know in detail, like how the nanites worked and who had commissioned their creation in the first place. Mumbo had stolen the data on a whim, hadn’t had time to download it into his brain. “So you shouldn’t try anything, I wouldn’t think. We are at an impasse, and the solution to this dilemma is to let us go.”

The black cars sped up until they were ahead of Grian’s sedan, blocking him from changing lanes. The third car drifted to their right, firmly into the blind spot of the side mirrors.

“*Scar*,” Mumbo warned, his partner’s adrenaline spiking as he recognized the signs, and the third car jerked toward them, colliding with the right back wheel in a shriek of metal. The sedan spun sideways, wheels squealing, two tires in the air—

Mumbo and Scar both threw themselves at the doors on their side, and the sedan landed upright with a crash. For a breathless moment they sat there in the center of the road, sideways across the lanes, tires smoking, the stench of friction-burnt rubber in the air, and then the agent in their comms said again, *“Assets Hawkeye and Redstoner, this is your final warning. Surrender now and the civilian will not be harmed.”*

Mumbo mustered his voice and objected, “He’s– he’s our hostage. You can’t threaten *us* with his well-being, we don’t care about him at all!”

No response. A response wasn’t necessary. Anyone who’d read Scar or Mumbo’s file would have known they couldn’t ignore a threat to a civilian. They’d been selfish to try to escape by threatening one themselves, no matter that they’d softened it with hypnosis and the promise that it wouldn’t last long or cause permanent harm. They’d been stupid and shortsighted, assuming they could flee from an assignment because they didn’t *like* it–

Cars rumbled by on the opposite half of the highway, across the grassy median with its low fence and sunflowers. The black cars had stopped just ahead, blocking off their escape route; the third car was behind them, agents undoubtedly aiming weapons from all three vehicles.

This was what they got for choosing villainy. This was their own fault for not planning better, for making an impulse decision, training after this was going to hurt so *much*–

“Well, we had a good run,” Scar said cheerfully, grin not reaching his eyes. “I mean, we could have done it if you’d– *you* could have planned it better. We could’ve escaped sooner, that would have been nice. We might have been at Disneyland by now.”

“It was pleasant while it lasted, minus the hostage situation,” Mumbo agreed weakly. The next step after this was reconditioning. He wouldn’t have the solace of training with Scar afterward, this time, since Scar had been reassigned to a facility overseas. The last chance Mumbo would have to talk to him would be when they were observing each others’ punishments, because that was what happened when one of them stepped too far out of line, and trainers would be there for that. They wouldn’t be able to speak in private.

So this *had* been pleasant, genuinely. Just being able to hang out and doze in each other’s presence, in sunlight with candy in their stomachs, had been amazing. Mumbo would treasure this memory, however poisoned it might be by what the Foundation did to them to retaliate for it.

“Okay,” Scar said, and settled his shoulders like he was in no pain whatsoever. “Grian, you’re in luck. These nice police officers are here to rescue you, the bad guys lost. We’re just gonna step out and be arrested, and then they’re gonna let you go.”

The hypnosis would take a couple of minutes to wear off. Mumbo’s implants alerted him as Scar withdrew what influence he could, leaving echoes to signal through Grian’s brain. The bluish sheen to the civilian’s eyes faded, replaced by a brown so dark it was nearly black.

“Let me go,” Grian said slowly. “We’re– surrendering? To these people?”

“*We’re* surrendering,” Scar corrected. “You’re a hostage, so you’re safe.”

“They just attempted a *pit maneuver*,” Grian said, all the hallmarks of strong emotion heightening in his body: increased blood flow, quickening heartbeat, flaring nostrils. Mumbo braced himself for the anger, the fear and betrayal. Oh, he *hated* when hypnosis wore off, when the prisoner realized where they were and what had happened to them, it was always

horrible. “On a *civilian hostage* . You had to counteract it! They didn’t even attempt to negotiate for my safety!”

“Well, in their defense, most of the conversation was done in a manner you couldn’t hear,” Mumbo said, bewildered by the sudden vehemence, and Grian hissed between his teeth, clenched the wheel so tightly his knuckles went white. His vital signs shifted, heart rate increasing again, uncanny calm bursting like a bubble.

“These are the people who gave you that bad job assignment,” Grian said, like he was sounding it out. “Who left you with injuries you weren’t allowed to heal.”

“Usually deserved, in my case,” Scar offered. Mumbo quashed the urge to draw his knees up to his chest, because it wouldn’t help anything.

“You aren’t even holding the gun to my head anymore,” Grian continued, “but *they* just tried to kill me. Threatened me, even, I heard what you said about *my* wellbeing. And you’re running from them to *Hermitopolis* .”

“*Assets Hawkeye and Redstoner, if you do not leave that vehicle in the next ten seconds, we will drag you out kicking and screaming,*” the agent snarled. Mumbo and Scar flinched at the same time, Scar’s hand twitching up to the place in his neck the comm was embedded.

Grian nodded to himself decisively. “Right, hold on,” he said, and locked the car doors.

“Grian?” Scar said, high-pitched. “I’m very sorry we hypnotized and kidnapped you, but we have about five seconds before they start shooting, so now is not the time for revenge—”

“*Three seconds,*” the agent hissed, and Grian spun the wheel as far left as it would go, hit the gas and careened over the median in a squeal of rubber. Bullets pelted the left side of the car, shattering the windows, but Grian kept going, dodged between two cars and picked up speed.

The Foundation cars peeled out behind them. “What are you *doing?* *Grian!*”

“You said they hurt you!” Grian snapped. “They think I’m some helpless *hostage*, that they can wreck my car and, and drive me off the road and stop me from getting revenge on my kidnappers *myself*, which, by the way, is still happening, you are going to *owe* me after this— a *pit maneuver!* On a *civilian!*”

“Is that bad?” Mumbo stammered. “We wouldn’t have let you die in the crash, Scar’s very practiced at rescuing people— or, well, crash test dummies, but they were really quite realistic— I’m sorry, we didn’t mean to get you into this!”

“They’re about to be more sorry,” Grian promised, and slammed his foot down on the gas. There was a cluster of eighteen-wheelers ahead of them, barely any space between them, but Grian threaded the needle deftly, bounced onto the shoulder and back, heedless of the truckers’ horns. “They think I’m the least dangerous person in this car, do they? Well, they’re about to learn *very differently*. Scar, do you have ammo for that gun?”

“Yes? But this makes you an accomplice, so I don’t know if–”

“Driver makes the rules,” Grian hissed, and Scar blurted, “Seventeen bullets in the magazine!”

Mumbo had officially lost the plot. “They’re going to shoot as soon as they catch up to us,” he volunteered, because if Grian was going to act like their handler suddenly, he should probably have the pertinent information, “and Scar has very good aim, but I don’t know if we *want* them in that range, that would be risky. Twenty percent chance of success.”

“Okay,” Grian said resolutely. “Mumbo, you call Pearl– she’s the last person who called me– and Scar, you get ready to fire out the window. I’m going to see if I can stay ahead of them until the next exit.”

“Um,” Mumbo managed, “not that we’re complaining, except for how you’re a civilian and in danger, so I suppose we *are* complaining, hypocritically– but *why?*”

“You kidnapped me,” Grian said after a moment of hesitation, “so now I’m turning the tables and kidnapping you. You owe me a new radio, and I intend to collect.”

One of their handlers’ voices buzzed into their comms, threatening all sorts of consequences for their misbehavior. Mumbo hacked past Grian’s passcode, dread sitting like a noose around his neck, and Scar said, “Welp, that makes as much sense as anything. Do I have to replace your *entire* radio?”

“You have to replace my entire car,” Grian sniffed, not nearly as furious as Mumbo had expected, and the speedometer crept past one hundred and twenty, Foundation vehicles gaining ground behind them. Mumbo decided he might as well follow orders and called Pearl, so bewildered by the situation that it nearly outweighed the fear.

End Notes

TW: referenced abuse/torture in the context of being supersoldiers/assets, hostage situations, mind control, gun violence, fear

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