

Taboo

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/25550) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/25550>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Fullmetal Alchemist
Characters:	Roy Mustang , Scar - Character
Additional Tags:	General , Self-Destruction
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2004-05-06 Words: 3,979 Chapters: 1/1

Taboo

by [rabbitprint](#)

Summary

Rated for gore. There are many things taboo for a State Alchemist, and not the least a confrontation with a certain Ishbal refugee. Spoilers up to episode 15.

Notes

Written for the Scimitar Smile 'Hagaren Love 30' list.

If you'd asked Colonel Mustang in advance -- writing his memoirs, perhaps, you an inquisitive journalist and he a decorated veteran of a war gone grey -- he would have laughed at the suggestion that it would have ended with anything other than a bang. Nothing less, for the Flame Alchemist.

But if he'd thought about it? *No*, the man would have said resolutely, shaking his head. *Bad for morale*. It made troops wonder if they heard fatalism in their commanding officer's voice. Spend a second too long in musing aloud, sound a fraction too amused when debating if you'd take the bullet in your skull or your neck, and you could watch their confidence in you crumble.

Showing fear would be even worse.

Some things were taboo, in the army.

Interview Mustang's most loyal soldiers, and you would have them nodding in agreement over the man. The Colonel subscribed to the camp of arrogance when it came to his mortality. Death could come to Roy on *his* time. Appointment first. Lunch, maybe. Death could carry the tip along with the leftovers.

Everyone knew it. Roy was the type of man who would bend physical laws over the knee of his pride, demanding that nature itself submit to his fancy. They all witnessed example, hadn't they, when he'd gone charging into the rain against that Alchemist-killer. Like a war-beast, Roy'd been, or a god. Ignoring the weather as he had broken into a dash for the enemy, fingers poised to call a spark that would have never flared.

Only Hawkeye had snapped out of the spell to stop him. All the other officers had been so caught up in Mustang's confidence that they'd expected him to have a plan in motion, instead of just a suicide run.

Some things weren't allowed, in the military.

That was Colonel Mustang for you. A man who would scoff and claim that if you had enough time to debate your own manner of extinction, you had enough time to figure out how to stay alive. If you had enough time to figure out *life* then you'd do a damned sight well to follow up on said method, which meant no excuses for doing anything less than your best.

Else your own troops would pay the price when they tried to save you.

Bravado helped. A little.

If you'd asked him -- in advance, in a private room of his house where the afternoon's wan light streaked in wearily through stormclouds -- Colonel Mustang would have admitted that death in combat was preferable than some wasting sickness in bed, a humiliation of thinning hairs and age. He'd have passed the teapot. Given you a refill, then changed topics.

And if you pursued that direction regardless, voiced a query of violent termination, then Roy would have had to conclude that he wouldn't want to be shot down by an anonymous face.

He'd want to see the one who took him out. A stubborn pride, maybe, and one that had been sorely tempted during the war when snipers and random gunfire exacted the greatest toll.

But then if Mustang was able to see his adversary then it would have been even more of a loss of face to die anyway, seeing the threat and unable to stop it.

Logical conclusions extended. First Roy's powers would have to be removed, nullified in a such a way that question of his own talents never fell into debate. And yet if his abilities were to be stripped from him, it would mean his last moments were spent in helplessness.

Who wanted to bear that kind of mewling on their knees before an enemy?

A threat that was able to appear in surprise, then, but *not* in surprise lest the lack of foresight be an insult to Mustang. A danger with a face. Some manner of force powerful enough to kill any and all Alchemists without any chance of being dodged, but nothing so inglorious as a flu. And with *significance* to the demise, that was the greatest qualifier--having a point to one's death might redeem the waste of their life.

And Mustang had much to make up for.

The situation was no-win. No way out that Roy could see, which meant he kept returning to that dilemma, rounding it in his mind. The problem tasted like wine. When he dwelled upon it too long, the air he inhaled came tinged with medical supplies and dust and Rockbell ghosts.

No solution, then.

Save one.

It was still raining along the streets, coating the gutters with slender rivers in grey and blue. The water reflected the colors of military uniforms bustling up and down the cobbles. None of the clouds had lessened any in their gloom; one of Mustang's escort had offered an umbrella, which the Colonel had accepted with a stern mien.

Events that day had left them all shaken. Soldiers forced their shoulders rigid-straight, attention sharp from the threat of the Ishbal assassin. Officers whispered in the corners.

Roy went home.

They had left him there, bidding a good night. Roy hadn't told them he would be going for an evening walk once the sky was properly dim, streetlights humming impervious brilliance inside their glass-walled cages. The umbrella was returned with proper thanks.

He hadn't wanted to trouble them further.

The night air had brushed against his face when he'd stepped out of his front door, locking it dutifully behind him and then straightening the black raincoat. Plain pants. White shirt, nothing of the military in him tonight. He'd been exacting in how he'd dressed, every fold in place and every button holed.

Mustang hadn't turned more than two streets away before a hand had darted out of the nearest alley and grabbed him by the collar, yanking him hard enough to the side that Roy had thought at first, incredibly, that he was being mugged.

Then he'd taken a fist to the jaw, a second to his ribs. Turned gasping for breath to catch a glimpse of his assailant, and realized the face-scarred man had been trailing him all this while.

How convenient.

When he was younger and the thought of being killed filled his mouth with the taste of soured dust, Mustang hadn't yet learned to forestall his own terror through projected debate. Fear could be kept at an arm's length by studying it long enough to declare mortality impossible; taking the route of complex excuses made it easier to think about the loaded gun, the ritual circle of human transmutation. Detached. War had been outside the tent flaps and inside his bunk. Central City had placed the fight at a safe distance. Down the block and take a left.

Now the Colonel -- the Flame Alchemist of Ishbal -- had one arm twisted behind his back and a smirk directed at the blank wall only several hundred feet from his own home. An old poster had been tacked up there, proclaiming some theater event; it had gone wasted and faded, the words run unintelligible from weatherharm. It was dripping with rain.

Yes. In all Roy's exacting calculations, this was how the equation was supposed to balance.

Roy knew it, too.

"We could at least have dinner first," he coughed, any charm wasted on the stonework of the alley. "My treat?"

It was a barter with the inevitable, a scoff and a smile in ever-waning hope, much like a man counting the fractions of a trigger's depression. Roy had faced the graveyard's threat on numerous occasions. That didn't make it any less frightening.

Or desirable.

If it was going to end, it would have to be like this. No chance of having a last-minute rescue this time. The only souls around were one Roy Mustang and a single survivor of the nation he'd helped destroy, which made for the most appropriate equivalent trade the Alchemist could imagine.

Though he could have done without his knee wedged against a rusting dumpster, the reek of rotting garbage in his nose.

The weight of the other man had him pinned, like the paw of a giant cat keeping the mouse tame no matter how the animal thrashed. Mustang tried to shove back, feeling the way his body turned into the saddle of the other's hips, but his attacker was a muscle-bound brute; the attempt gave no leeway, no loosening of pressure.

Scar's shoulders were hanging heavy on Roy's spine. Scar was leaning onto Roy hard enough to crush him, and the Alchemist disliked the acute reminder of their respective height differences.

As if in spiteful reminder of impotence, the clouds shuddered overhead. They spit a fresh delivery of storm; Roy got one fat drop slithering down his bangs and into his eye. Liquid snuck into the high collar of his coat. Maybe he should have brought the hat.

"The woman said you can't use alchemy in the rain."

Scar's voice against his ear was a gravel-spit growl. The Ishbal's breath flooded hot with exertion; Mustang could see the puff of mist in the chilled air, match it with his own as he panted for oxygen to fill his battered lungs.

Useless, that was the phrase. Mustang recalled Hawkeye's voice vividly, the shock of her blonde hair like a splash of sun in the dim streetway. *You're useless in the rain*, she'd said.

Scar was wrong, of course; it was fire that Mustang couldn't use during damp conditions, his most familiar weapon. The signature skill that had given him his name gone fallow. *Useless*.

But poor weather didn't make an Alchemist completely powerless. Roy's specialty was harped upon because it was a natural inclination, not a restriction. Mustang knew how to shape matter to his will for all that he didn't often display it.

Thank goodness Scar was from Ishbal. They obviously didn't have Beginning Transmutation 101 as standard curriculum.

Lucky break, that.

Mustang's answer was to try and push back away from the garbage bin, fighting to untwist his arm where it had been cramped behind his back. Scar only wrenched the Alchemist's wrist further then, bending Mustang's hand until he swore he could feel himself touching his own spine in the fetters of his fingers.

"Maybe she was wrong," Roy gritted out, splitting his own inner lip between his teeth in accident of enunciation. "Did you ever think about that?"

His reward was a strong cuff to his temple that sent his head snapping down, plunging into the miasma of compost-decay. The mixed layers of garbage swayed far beneath him, bridged by the stained metal walls of the dumpster, compounded by the damp weather. Rot-stench wormed into his nose, thick and ripe with prolonged decomposition.

Despite Roy's best efforts, he felt the pain begin to eat out his heart with raw dread. Animal's terror. The feeling turned his thoughts hollow, giving him the nigh-overpowering urge to kick.

He resisted.

A dark-skinned hand gripped Mustang at the back of his neck and slid upwards, yanking unkind fingers through Roy's scalp and wrenching the Alchemist's head aloft by the roots of

his hair. It hurt. Mustang promptly ignored the sensation and tried to measure where Scar's thumb was, if it was the man's left hand or right currently jeopardizing his skull.

Right? Or left? He couldn't tell, shifted his arm again and found that the fingers had begun to go numb.

Scar forced his waist against the small of Roy's back at that sign of resistance, and the Alchemist tried to keep his breathing steady while his arm was forced to a degree acute.

"So why are you out here?" Strange, to hear a wolf speak like a man. Or maybe that was pain's influence, clouding the stability of sound. "Alone?"

If only Roy could reach the chalk in his pockets.

His free hand was already working, shifting in minuscule struggles unseen where it was pinned by his own hip. Roy had rare occasion to draw a transmutation circle in the dark; he'd tested himself a few times with a blindfold, only to have the rate of accidents escalate until he'd blown the library door off its hinges.

Rotes using fire would have been easy. Those, he knew by memory clean enough to draw it in his sleep, measuring the circles by angles of his palm and fingers. Save for the weather, which broke apart his diagrams; no escape that way.

The organic weight rotting in the dumpster couldn't be so easily used, though a chimera would certainly give Scar pause; the metal of the container itself was more lethal, could be coaxed to shoot out spikes if it weren't for the fact that the attack would have to go through Mustang's body to get to Scar.

Normally such a restriction might have given the Flame Alchemist pause.

Today, he decided, he could be creative.

There was one effect that could be generated despite the weather, one that he knew better than shapeshifting or recombination. Its figure branded itself on his eyes when he blinked against the backdrop of discarded wrappers and paper-supplies. Mustang had seen the pattern more times than he would want to remember, but he knew why it was considered more versatile than his own, understood the change in limitations.

His fingers inched down, wrist pinned against the dumpster and black-ironed pants, and Mustang could feel the small bones of his hand grind as he tried to twist his palm surreptitiously. One popped; Roy clenched his teeth and tried not to grunt with pain.

Scar took the silence as the delay that it was in truth. "I can always take my answers from another of your kind, Alchemist." A knee came up fast, pressing the back of Roy's leg like a dull lance. "Speak fast, unless you want me to finish you now."

Damn. "Isn't just *touching* me like this," Mustang said, spitting out the words with a grim satisfaction for all implications involved, "forbidden in your culture?"

"Isn't suicide against yours?"

So maybe the weight-lifter wasn't totally ignorant.

Mustang hesitated then, before his automatic protest kicked into play; he wasn't religious, couldn't be anymore not after he'd rebuilt matter itself. The Ishbal religion prohibited alchemy, calling it an interference in what their god gave them. *Affecting the natural world at whim was wrong*, they said. *You could lose all sense of value for what you already had.*

Maybe they were right.

Roy's only answer was to give a cough where a laugh could have been.

"Very well." Fingers loosened on the Alchemist's scalp, giving a scant-span of relief to the pained hairs before Scar settled his palm more firmly on Roy's skull. "May Ishbala have mercy on the remnants of your soul."

The scarred man was playing smart this time, realizing perhaps that going headlong in his crusade was just going to get him killed before his task was complete. In the teeth of Mustang's resistance, it seemed as if Roy's unhelpfulness had reached the end of its tether.

Mustang tried to shake his head, his reward another hard shove pinning him against the bin. "Ishbala," he whispered, the sound harsh with the bile of his own suppressed gagging, "doesn't have enough forgiveness for my guilt."

Was it his imagination, or did the other man's hand loosen?

Closing his eyes, Roy thought of Kimberly and drew the final arc of the detonation circle he'd learned from Crimson's twinned palms.

The ensuing explosion started at his stomach and spread outwards, unfolding around his body like a child's toy. Memory's heat collided with present time. Kimberly was laughing endlessly in his mind, and then Mustang's body finally struck the cobbles from being flung through the air.

He hit the ground hard enough to bounce. It was his shoulder that took the worst impact in place of his skull; the milky fire of pain turned the socket molten, and Roy realized dimly through agony's incandescence that the landing had dislocated his arm.

The back of his head was pulsing. His ears were ringing; not just from the explosion, but also from what felt suspiciously like a crack to the skull. Review of the jumbled seconds when fire had opened wide as a flower answered his addled self-query.

He'd been thrown back into Scar, had clipped the man's jaw. Good. That might provide the time to follow up on the risky nature of the explosive circle.

Mustang had been told once by his father that embers were angels ascending, but he couldn't see the connection until he watched bodies of his victims ignite in cordwood piles. Now the Alchemist tried to shove himself upright enough to squint at the garbage bin, hoping to see evidence that the papers on top had been dry enough to harbor even the briefest flame. Divine grace as the cherubim escaped.

What he found was failure. The rain and damp was already extinguishing the few sparks. Too late for Roy.

He'd hoped to keep them alight just long enough.

A hand still-shivering from the detonation reached out towards the dumpster regardless, the circle on the back of his glove smeared with alley-filth. He willed the fire to breed in the rain, feeding off the transmutation he cajoled from the air.

But it wasn't as strong as he needed. A heavy shape broke through the feeble sparks without pause, interrupting Mustang's line of sight. It ignored the Alchemist's upraised hand, brushing it aside so that Roy was left with the touch of a pair of black pants in his palm, the round bulge of a stranger's knee.

The figure smelled like ashes in the desert.

Scar set the toes of his boot as carefully on Mustang's neck as a dancer, and then the Ishbal man shoved his weight down.

Roy gagged. All too easily the deftness of his mind threw up images of a larynx crushed; the Alchemist tensed his muscles as best he could, but now Scar had shifted his shoe and was grinding his heel up against the underside of Mustang's jaw. Pressing hard.

Spots danced in country-step before his eyes, on a stage of deepening blackness. If he'd only the opportunity to use a ritual circle, Roy knew, he wouldn't have had to worry about blacking out quite as fast as he was now.

It would be such an irony if the Flame Alchemist died from a lack of oxygen.

"Why did you come out here?"

Roy made a weak movement in response, a scrabbling of his fingers in jerk-reflex. Scar eased off on the pressure.

Instantly, Mustang crooked his knuckles to bend them against the ground to begin the initial arc of a transmutation circle.

No tolerance was given of the Flame Alchemist this time. Scar pounced at the first sign of Roy's hands, his fingers lashing down to grip Mustang's wrists. When Roy saw the light begin to congeal around the Ishbal's arm, he wondered if he'd even have the time to miss his hands when they were gone.

Tendons snapped like harp strings in an explosion too simple to be real.

When Roy screamed, he did so into the flesh of Scar's left palm thrust against his mouth to muffle him.

The Flame Alchemist came back to himself slowly, by degrees marked by the throbbing of his pulse gone jagged. Erratic. Returned to the surreality of Scar's voice roughing out the words, "I didn't want to have to do that."

That made two of them.

"Give me the answer." Scar had all the patience of a man knowing he had his prey finally worn out to submittal through exhaustion. His voice had turned eerily gentle; understandable, Mustang decided, the Ishbal had the luxury of pity now. "Where are the other State Alchemists?"

Mustang started to inhale, but a wave of nausea forestalled that. He thought to move his fingers, examine the degree of what might or might not be missing, yet the bloody mess he glimpsed from the corner of his vision rapidly killed any desire he might have had to investigate further.

Shock from the damage to his hands was setting in fast. They'd lectured the Alchemists about it on the battlefield, all the warning signs of a body's failure as neatly clinical as a beaker of chemicals going defunct. Blood loss. Confusion. Pale, clammy skin. Roy didn't think he could stop to check what he looked like right now, but found himself rapidly losing any care to.

The air smelled heavy with rain, and the war.

"I asked you a question, Alchemist."

A dull tug, and Roy felt himself be lifted off the ground. Scar's fingers were wenching themselves into his shirt. Scar's knuckles were colored deep crimson, almost black, and Roy found himself a little resentful that the Ishbal man looked so casual covered in his blood.

"Ask all you want." The voice that trickled through the patter of the rain was so faint, Roy didn't recognize it as his own. "I won't let you know the next opportunity to attack them."

"Your chances weren't good to succeed against me. Why did you come out here?" Scar's repetition was impassive as a mountain, and just as unwilling to bend. "Were you bait?"

Suspicion. Roy might have found that dangerous in the man before, knowing how paranoia could twist a hunter to extremes, but now the ice-spots of drizzle were washing away even the Alchemist's own worry. "Your quarrel is with me. Not them. These people weren't even at the war. But I was. End it with me. End it *now*," Mustang repeated, mustering what small intensity was left to him in the rain. He could feel it sliding out of his will to summon, like a circle gone wrong, power left to dissolve like a summer-haze. "Finish it here. Leave them out of it."

Scar's red eyes flickered, side to side on Mustang's face.

"Aren't you afraid of dying?"

Water-chill was sinking into Mustang's skin. Each droplet hit his damaged arms like a hammer, but the agony was the only sensation left. Even that was fading.

Roy managed the ghost of a smile.

"Proper trade."

This answer at last seemed to satisfy Scar, easing whatever conflict brewed in the man's head since he'd first challenged Mustang on the Flame's willing visit. "I promise *nothing*, Alchemist," he growled, sliding Roy back down to the ground, untangling spattered fingers from that once-pristine shirt. "But it seems to be God's will for you to perish for your sins."

And yet, the Ishbal man *hesitated*.

"Are you ready?" Palm down upon the Flame Alchemist's chest, those shade-shadowed eyes studying the man beneath him. Scar's question was cautious in a way that Roy had not expected. The Ishbal sounded like a soldier touching on a mystery he'd experienced a thousand times, but had kept himself apart from encompassing. Arm's length distance. Rationalization to quell the fear. A subject Scar didn't want to delve into but had to negotiate every day.

In Mustang's heart, he heard himself answering the question forbidden. *Yes*.

The crackle of energies roiled.

Red light of deconstruction rippled across Scar's flesh, twining around the man's arm before embedding itself into Mustang's flesh. There was no gun to drop, shivering, upon the table. No desperate toying with forbidden equations full-knowing that death would come calling.

No rain that could be ordered to stop.

That was how it was supposed to end, right up until Mustang woke with a gasp.

When he showed up haggard to morning report the next day, Roy excused the lack of sleep on nighttime fantasies. He accepted the papers detailing the street damage in one hand, his coffee in the other. Laughed when asked which girl it had been in his bed.

To Havoc's lolling question about measurements, height and weight and proportions, all the Colonel admitted was that the person had been in athletic shape.

Some thoughts were, after all, taboo.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!