

Alone in My Shadow

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Alone in My Shadow

by [NeuroticTemptress](#)

Summary

Insomnia often leads to the aimless wandering of the mind.

Notes

Just a short, little fic that popped into my head one night when I couldn't fall asleep. Sleep deprivation does weird things to your brain. Anyway, this takes place long before Rogue joined the X-Men.

Bedside

It musta been th' thirtieth time Ah tossed over ta mah other side. Ah hated nights like this, when sleep was th' farthest thing in th' world from me. Think Ah woulda had better luck attemptin' ta climb Mount Everest than fallin' asleep. It was like tryin' ta find that pot o' gold people say is at th' end o' ev'ry rainbow. Th' one guarded by a grumpy ol' leprechaun that'd jus' as soon push you off th' nearest cliff than have you touch his precious money. Truth be told, a round o' bickerin' with a stingy Irish elf sounded ultimately better than tossin' an' turnin' a hole right through th' mattress.

Ah fin'lly gave up an' opened mah eyes. It was clear Ah wasn't gettin' anywhere in th' REM department. Th' window was open an' th' drapes were blowin' softly in th' breeze. Could jus' make out th' moon peepin' over a few treetops in th' yard, stars pepperin' th' heavens around it. There's jus' somethin' so soothin' 'bout th' night sky. How it's so peaceful an' still, like all th' creatures o' th' Earth are afraid ta disturb its quiet existence. Ah spent a lot o' time doin' that, Ah realized; starin' out mah bedroom window in th' dead o' night 'cause Ah couldn't seem ta catch those elusive Z's. Ah'd pay fo' it in th' mornin', no doubt; walkin' 'round like a zombie from th' grave. Be a miracle if Ah could stay awake durin' th' chemistry lesson Reenie would be givin' me after lunch. Now under normal circumstances, that task would already be diff'cult enough ta accomplish. But add a touch o' sleep deprivation ta th' mix, an' you've got yoahself one li'l Mississippi girl fast asleep.

Rollin' onta mah back, Ah dragged mah gaze ta th' ceilin'. Def'nitely not as pretty as th' view outside. Saw a couple o' cracks that were gettin' a bit more visible. Ah made a mental note ta tell Momma 'bout them before they got any worse. Ah have ta admit though, th' thoughts poppin' inta mah head at that moment wouldn't've shown themselves if Ah'd been admirin' th' scene beyond th' window. Th' thoughts currently runnin' through mah brain were th' kind that needed th' sterile blankness o' th' area above me.

Ah started thinkin' 'bout how Ah stopped goin' ta a regular school almost three years ago. Couldn't risk bein' exposed ta th' rest o' th' 'normal' kids. Couldn't risk bumpin' inta any o' them in th' hallways. Couldn't risk stealin' their thoughts, their dreams... their very souls. That was me in a nutshell, ladies an' gentlemen. Good ol' southern belle with a vampire's kiss. One touch an' yoah out cold. Not much o' a life fo' a fifteen-year-old, red-blooded American girl. Not that Ah thought Ah deserved ta have one. Not after what happened ta Cody. If Ah thought mah life was an ugly mess o' Fate's twisted idea o' a joke, then he got a worst deal than Ah did. Last we heard, he was still in a coma. A coma that Ah put him in. Th' result o' some innocent curiosity. He was mah first... prob'ly be mah last.

Dammit! Ah didn' want ta think 'bout stuff like that. No good ever came from it.

Ah sat up in bed an' felt th' sheets bunch up 'round mah legs. Ah turned ta stare out th' window again, lettin' nature's magic refresh mah soul. It was a while before Ah actu'lly let

mahself focus on anythin' 'sides what mah eyes could see. Self-analysis was a scary process – an' definitely one that wouldn't lead ta a successful trip into dreamland.

Ah decided ta try a Peter Pan impression an' think only happy thoughts fo' th' time bein'. That always helped when Ah was younger, more than countin' sheep ever did. Ah let mahself wander down ta mah own li'l version o' Never-Never Land, as Ah noticed th' wind pick up outside.

Ain't it funny how yoah eyes could be lookin' at somethin' but not really lookin' at it. Y'know? Ah mean, Ah was watchin' th' trees move back an' forth, but at th' same time Ah was watchin' th' li'l self-made movie up in mah head. Ah was splittin' mah attention between th' two an' yet understandin' perfectly what was happenin' in both.

Th' 'real movie' – th' one jus' beyond mah window – was quiet. More than likely wouldn't have made any box office records if they had played it in th' cinemas. Th' one in mah excessively used imagination was more likely ta hold its own against th' competition, sure ta impress fans an' critics alike. Yoah typical damsel in distress, caught in th' arms o' an evil, black-hearted villain who jus' happened ta be her lover's archenemy. All right, so maybe it was a bit flaky an' had been done into th' dirt so many times that it had reached China already, but what could Ah say? Ah was a hopeless romantic, an' that was somethin' that wasn't likely ta change.

Not that it was common knowledge ta anyone else. Couldn't have a momma like Mystique an' be a quiverin', helpless li'l waif. 'Round here Ah was tough as nails, hard as steel, capable o' extractin' internal organs in twenty diff'rent ways – add 'bout a hundred more if Ah used somethin' other than mah hands.

But sometimes, in th' privacy o' mah own room, Ah'd let th' romantic side o' mah soul breathe. No harm in bein' girly once in a while, Ah thought. Not like Ah was gonna turn into a fluff-lovin', bubble-gum-poppin' pansy who more often than not looked like a pastel-colored flowerbed threw up on them. Ah was more o' th' subtle kind o' romantic, but a romantic nonetheless.

Th' movie inside mah head was reachin' its climatic finale. But unlike th' typical guy-rescues-girl scenes, mah heroine helped ta kick ass. One thing was fo' sure, she wasn't th' average damsel in distress. After her prince charmin' freed her from th' chains bindin' her wrists, they worked t'gether ta defeat th' treacherous villain. She even pulled 'Romeo' outta some tight spots a few times. It was a happily-ever-after – as all romance stories should have been, in mah opinion.

You'd have thought Ah'd be a li'l bit more cynical 'bout all th' romance nonsense, 'specially considerin' mah powers – not ta mention mah parents' line o' work. But fo' some reason, Ah wasn't. Would have ta prob'ly blame mah momma fo' that – mah real momma, that is. Ah could remember watchin' afternoon soap operas with her when Ah was little. Guess you could say all o' it rubbed off on me.

At least Ah was sensible enough ta know that th' fairy tale romances traipsin' 'round mah noggin could never survive in th' real world. A woman couldn't wrap th' man o' her dreams 'round her li'l finger more times than she could count. A man didn' have th' stamina o' a bull,

or th' infinite patience o' a saint. An' despite what we've been led ta believe, good didn' always triumph over evil. Ah was never one ta try an' fool mahself into thinkin' that mah perfect guy was out there somewhere. Or that by some miracle o' miracles, mah mutant power would somehow find a way ta be controllable, an' Mr. Right an' Ah could ride off ta our castle in th' sky.

Even though Ah knew it was likely never ta happen, Ah let mahself dwell in th' land o' 'What If.' What if Mr. Almost-Right-Fo'-Me really existed an' was out there in th' world, goin' about livin' his life jus' like Ah was – th' two o' us completely oblivious o' th' other's existence? Where was he right now? Was he livin' in th' same country as Ah was? Th' same city? Th' same neighborhood? Or was he clear across th' globe? British? Scottish? Chinese? French? Was he someone Ah already met? One o' th' boys Ah knew before mah powers manifested? Maybe he was someone Ah'd passed on th' streets down here in Caldecott. Or over in New Orleans when Raven an' Reenie had taken me there fo' Mardi Gras.

Was he a lot older than me? Old enough ta be outta school an' workin'? What kind o' job did he have? Or was he still in school like me? Maybe he was homeschooled like Ah was, not able ta go ta regular classes 'cause o' one lousy extra gene. Was he a mutant like me? Did his mutation keep people at a distance 'cause o' some difference in his body, like mah untouchable skin? Did people make fun o' him fo' it? Did it hurt him as much as it hurt me?

Did he like th' same kind o' things Ah did? How would he feel 'bout sittin' quietly in th' night, watchin' th' stars 'til th' mornin' stole them away? 'Course th' best place fo' stargazin' was on top o' th' roof. Was he th' type ta climb up there with me, or would he be afraid o' heights? What was he doin' right now? Starin' out th' window an' thinkin' 'bout his future? Maybe thinkin' o' me an' wonderin' where Ah was?

A sudden thought hit me an' Ah lowered mah eyes ta th' floor. Was he sharin' his bed with someone else? Holdin' her in his arms an' whisperin' words o' love into her ear? Did he think that she was th' one he would spend th' rest o' his life with? Was he thinkin' o' marryin' her? Or were they already married? Better question still, would he be able ta love me after lovin' her?

Mah li'l 'What If' game was startin' ta get depressin', totally destroyin' mah original plan o' happy thoughts. It was time ta try an' go back ta sleep. Momma would kill me in th' mornin' if Ah wasn't on time fo' trainin'.

Ah settled back down onto one o' mah pillows, pullin' th' other one close ta mah body ta hug. Ah couldn't help but wonder fo' a split second what it would be like ta feel his body next ta mine, an' ta fall asleep listenin' ta th' rhythm o' his heartbeat under mah ear.

They were childish, silly dreams, but dreams nonetheless. An' dreams sometimes had th' power ta come true. There was a small part o' me that wished it could pan out, a part that hoped he'd find his way ta me, an' then steal mah heart away. Wasn't very confident that was gonna happen, but Ah let mahself believe... at least fo' now.

Not long after, Ah fell asleep. Th' last thing Ah remember thinkin' was, would mah soul recognize him if Ah saw him?

Rooftop

Chapter Notes

This fic started out as a one-shot, but Remy refused to leave me alone until he got his own chapter. But hey, there are worse things in life than to be hounded by Remy LeBeau, right?

Felt de smoke drift down my throat like a soothin' river flowin' t'rough my system. Bad habit, I'd been told. Didn' much care. Cigarettes helped me t' t'ink. Took de edge off my nerves. Seemed like I needed dem more an' more lately.

Guessed it was about two in de mornin'. An' instead o' gettin' some shuteye down in de house, I was up on de roof starin' at de stars. Habit o' mine whenever I wanted t' clear my head. Went hand in hand wit' de cigarettes. All I needed was some alcohol, a beautiful woman, an' de answers t' all my questions. Den I'd be pretty much set f'r de rest o' my life.

Ironically enough, it was de rest o' my life dat got me up dere in de first place. In less dan twenty-four hours, I would pledge myself t' one woman, Bella Donna Boudreaux. In some ways, it felt like de most natural t'ing t' do. She was my friend, my lover, my fiancée – o' course de next logical step was marriage. But in other ways... Well, can't really say what it was. Somet'in' jus' felt... off.

Not dat I'd ever be able t' figure out what dat was, 'specially considerin' dat I loved Belle. She an' I, we went way back, since we were pups. Dere wasn't a scrape I'd gotten myself inta dat she hadn't experienced right along wit' me. Pickpocketin', shopliftin', prank-pullin'. One time when we were ten, we decided t' hotwire a car an' cruise around de Quarter. We ended up hood-first in a swamp 'bout twenty minutes later. Our poppas would've tanned our hides. 'Specially since we used de mayor's car. Secretive an' stealthy wasn't part o' our vocabulary dat day.

Like most Guild children, we were homeschooled by private tutors. 'Normal' kids had examples like "If Betty had six pencils an' Tim had two, how many did dey have alt'gether?" We, on de other hand, were asked "If Emil stole a wallet containin' eighty-nine dollars an' Etienne lifted a watch worth one hundred an' fifty-six dollars, how much was deir total take dat day?" If you asked me, our way was much more practical. Like dere'd ever be a time in deir lives when Betty an' Tim would be sittin' 'round a table wonderin' how many pencils dey had.

Poppa also made sure I knew de ups an' downs o' bein' a t'ief. I had lessons on lockpickin', electronic security override, hand-t'-hand combat, an' all dose cool stuff dat pups my age only dreamed 'bout learnin'. Did pretty well in all o' dem too, if I do say so myself. Actu'lly, not jus' 'pretty well.' I raised de Guild standards up a couple notches. By de time I was fourteen, I'd broken inta over a hundred high-security buildings, an' was well on my way t' becomin' a master t'ief.

I was not'in' if not self-assured 'bout my t'ievin' skills – as if de LeBeau confidence wasn't obvious. But when it came t' relationships, dat was another t'ing alt'gether. Don' get me wrong; I was de ultimate ladies' man. I'd been charmin' women since before I could walk. But when it came t' commitment, t' settlin' down wit' one woman f'r de rest o' my life, dat was somet'in' diff'rent. Dat was somet'in' dat justified sittin' up on de roof at two in de mornin', workin' on my sixth cigarette.

I was scared. Dere I said it. Dat was de God-honest truth. Way down deep, past all de rationalizations an' self-made shadows, in de only corner o' my brain dat held any honest emotion, I was scared. What if dis marriage would be de biggest mistake o' my life? What if forty years inta de future I would look back an' regret bein' talked inta dis situation? Basically, f'r all our similarities in upbringin' an' ev'ryday way o' life, Belle an' I were very diff'rent people.

O' course she was an Assassin an' I was a T'ief, which in itself was a very obvious distinction. But dere were other t'ings aside from dat. She was a compulsive buyer, pickin' up expensive t'ings like dey were candy. I was a li'l thriftier, havin' been raised in a guild where de value o' money was an important t'ing. She hated de fact dat I flirted wit' other women – excessively, she said. Honestly, I didn' mind dat she flirted wit' other men, as long as dey kept deir hands t' demselves.

But de biggest diff'rence between us were my 'devil' eyes. Belle didn' know what it was like t' be a mutant. She didn' know what it was like t' constantly hide behind a pair o' sunglasses 'cause people tended t' panic if you didn't.

Couldn't really help but t'ink dat all o' dis self-analysis was Tante Mattie's fault. I wouldn't have been up here if she hadn't pulled me aside earlier an' given me a 'talk.' Felt more like a lecture but I knew better dan t' argue wit' her. She went on an' on 'bout how marriage was a wondrous an' beautiful t'ing t' be shared between two people who honored an' loved each other. I surprised us both by askin' her what love felt like. She wasn't even shocked by de question. Guessed she figured wit' my hedonistic tendencies, I wouldn't be sure if it was real or not. S'pposed when you got right down t' it, I wanted t' know if what I had wit' Belle was de genuine jewel or de knockoff imitation.

Tante Mattie had leaned in real close an' whispered, "When y' find de one dat makes ya heart smile, dat's love." She didn' say anyt'in' else. Jus' hugged me, kissed me on de forehead an' den left.

*Six hours later, I was on de roof. Her answer was s'pposed t' help me, not confuse me even more. De one dat made my heart smile? Merde, what did dat mean? A lot o' t'ings made me smile – a good batch o' Mercy's gumbo, t'ievin' wit' de boys, de craziness durin' Mardi Gras, de sound o' Belle's laughter – but someone who made my **heart** smile?*

I frowned at de t'ought. Tried t' figure out if Belle had dat kind o' power over me. Shook me up but good t' realize dat I didn' know. I loved her, we had fun t'gether, but I didn' know if she was de one makin' me happy, or if it was de t'ought o' unitin' our fam'lies into one guild.

I never told anyone dis before but a couple o' months ago, I was watchin' Belle sleep. Not'in' out o' de ordinary 'cause dat was my usual cure f'r insomnia. A few minutes o' watchin' her dreamin' in peace normally had me out like a light, but f'r some reason dat night was diff'rent. She was curled up facin' me, an' I was followin' de steady rise an' fall o' her breathin'. I lifted my eyes t' her face, an' I swear t' all de saints in Heaven, f'r a split second she wasn't Belle. She was someone else... someone I never seen before.

Dat spooked de hell outta me. Didn' sleep f'r de rest o' de night an' nearly got my ass kicked while sparin' wit' Lapin de next mornin'. If you'd ever seen my cousin fight, you'd understand what a shockin' t'ing dat was.

If dat woman was not'in' else, she was... beautiful. I mean, Belle was beautiful, but dis femme... Dere was somet'in' about her... Don' even remember her face all dat well. All I remember were de waves an' waves o' cinnamon curls overflowin' on de pillow. But dere was somet'in' unique about dem... somet'in' you didn' see ev'ry day. F'r de life o' me, I couldn't remember what dat was.

What did dat say 'bout me den? I was lyin' in bed next t' my fiancée, but picturin' another woman in her place. Was dat gon' continue on even after we were married? Ev'ry once in a while, I'd be seein' a diff'rent woman sleepin' next t' me? De first one was a brunette. Would de next be a redhead? Raven hair? Or maybe a blonde like Belle?

Felt de wind pick up, brushin' across my face like Mother Nature was tryin' t' clean my troubles away. It was comin' from de north, prob'ly somewhere in Mississippi. Had done one or two jobs in a few o' dose small-time towns over dere. You wouldn't believe how many rich folk set up residence along de river. Easy pickin', if you'd ask me. Jus' beggin' t' be robbed.

Actu'lly used de money from one o' dose jobs t' buy Belle's engagement ring. Dat was another story I wouldn't ever share wit' anybody – 'cept Mercy 'cause she was wit' me in de store. Belle loved diamonds, which is why she wanted a classic diamond engagement ring. Now I've never been one t' follow tradition t' de letter, so I was havin' other ideas 'bout dat ring. While Mercy was busy 'oohing' an' 'awwing' at de customary selection, my eyes kept wanderin' over t' dis exquisite pear-shaped emerald. De cut was almost as breathtakin' as de color. It was de deepest, purest shade o' green I ever saw. I was ten seconds away from buyin' dat t'ing. If Mercy hadn't reminded me dat Belle wanted a diamond, I would've been one emerald ring richer.

An' jus' a couple o' weeks ago, Belle an' I went back t' dat same store. Dis time t' pick out weddin' bands. De emerald was still dere, twinklin' like crazy at me. If I weren't a sane t'ief, I'd've sworn it was callin' my name. Needless t' say, I walked out o' dere once again emerald-less.

After snuffin' out my last cigarette, I dusted my hands an' stood. Had t' slip back into de house an' try t' sleep. If Mercy or Tante Mattie caught me out here at dis time o' night, I

would never hear de end o' it. God forbid if dey both found out. Den Belle would be marryin' a corpse.

Felt a li'l better 'bout my troubles. De more I t'ought about it, de more it sounded like pre-weddin' jitters. Ev'ry man felt like dat de day before losin' his bachelorhood, n'est-ce pas?

As I was droppin' down t' my balcony, de north wind started blowin' again, slightly stronger dan before. A noise caught my attention an' I whipped around quickly.

Not'in'. Jus' de wind. Could've sworn I heard... Shook my head an' walked back inta my bedroom.

Could've sworn I heard someone callin' out t' my soul.

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