

## Anywhere You Are

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31026629) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31026629>.

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Rating:          | <a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>  |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>  |
| Category:        | <a href="#">Gen</a>  |
| Fandoms:         | <a href="#">Sonic the Hedgehog - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Sonic the Hedgehog (Video Games)</a>  |
| Relationships:   | <a href="#">Rouge the Bat &amp; Shadow the Hedgehog</a> , <a href="#">Shadow the Hedgehog/Sonic the Hedgehog</a> , <a href="#">E-123 Omega &amp; Rouge the Bat &amp; Shadow the Hedgehog</a> , <a href="#">E-123 Omega &amp; Rouge the Bat</a>   |
| Characters:      | <a href="#">Shadow the Hedgehog</a> , <a href="#">Rouge the Bat</a> , <a href="#">E-123 Omega</a>  |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Moving In Together</a> , <a href="#">and they were roommates but like platonically</a> , <a href="#">Sibling Bonding</a> , <a href="#">Found Family</a> , <a href="#">also they're both neurodivergent no i don't take criticism</a> , <a href="#">Chronic Pain</a> , <a href="#">Disabled Character</a> , <a href="#">Background sonadow</a> , <a href="#">rouge's vague but traumatic past</a> , <a href="#">shadow's blatantly traumatic past</a> , <a href="#">ShtH was pretty messed up if you think about it</a> , <a href="#">Mental Health Issues</a> , <a href="#">medical neglect</a> , <a href="#">Team as Family</a> |
| Language:        | English  |
| Stats:           | Published: 2021-05-27 Completed: 2021-08-27 Words: 14,011 Chapters: 6/6  |

# Anywhere You Are

by [cozyqueerchaos](#)

## Summary

Rouge and Shadow move in together. Rouge is new to this whole "friendship" thing, and Shadow is still hiding something from her. But she'll make it work. She always does.

## Notes

howdy, I'm once again making niche content that only appeals to me! please take this silly roommate shenanigan fic, there's Epic Sibling Moments probably

takes place immediately after ShtH but you don't need to have played the game to understand what's going on

title is from "up in the stars" by Swimming With Dolphins

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

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rouge offers to let Shadow stay with her, after... well, after. Shadow accepts, which is a shock all on its own, and follows her home looking lost and confused.

Rouge can't really blame him. Her father wasn't the greatest of people (try 'unrepentant dirtbag'), but at least he never tried to forcibly brainwash her into murdering everyone she knows.

Shadow chaos controls them to the city, managing to land them in the general vicinity of her apartment complex by sheer chance.

He's in a daze, barely responding to anything she says or asks, and when they finally reach her apartment she just pushes him into her bedroom and insists he sleep. Shadow protests at that, weird little chivalric child that he is, but she waves him off.

Shadow falls into unconsciousness mid-argument, still wearing his skates and covered in blood. Rouge resolves to do the laundry tomorrow.

She stumbles back out into the living room and crashes on the couch, adding 'set up guest room' to that mental list of tasks in the few seconds before she blacks out.

----

"Rouge. Rouge, wake up." There's someone shaking her shoulder.

Rouge jerks, her brain shifting from deep sleep into high alert at the flick of a switch. She shoots a kick in the general direction of whoever's touching her, arms coming up in automatic defense.

The sleep clears from her vision and she realizes that it's Shadow who's crumpled before her, rubbing at his knee. "Ow," he says, no trace of anger in it.

"Shit, are you okay?" Rouge says, and he nods, standing straight again. Not standing, actually, floating- he's still wearing his skates. Did he forget to take them off when he woke up?

Rouge guiltily taps her fingers along the armrest of the couch. "Sorry 'bout that, hon. In the future, maybe don't touch me while I'm sleeping."

"You were having a nightmare," Shadow says. It's not exactly an argument, but she doesn't miss that he didn't *agree*, either.

"I-" Rouge forces herself to shut up before she says something really stupid, like, "*I always have nightmares*." She pinches the bridge of her nose. "Fine, whatever. You're the one who's gonna get bruised. You want some breakfast?"

Shadow nods, and she feels her shoulders slump in relief. That's something she can do.

...relatively. It'll hopefully only be a little burnt.

They glide over to the kitchen, her on her wings, him on his skates, and she remembers to tell him, "you can take those off, you know. Just leave 'em by the door, or something."

Shadow says a quiet word, "okay," or something close to it, but makes no motion to remove them.

Rouge shrugs. He can be uncomfortable if he wants to. She clicks on the coffeemaker, then the radio, a relic she's grown too fond of to toss.

She passes one mug to Shadow (someone as angst-ridden as him has to like coffee, right?) then pours herself another, turning to raid the fridge for whatever food hasn't gone bad while she was out fighting aliens. There's eggs and creamer and a frozen loaf of bread, so she settles on French toast.

It's not something Rouge's tried to make in a long time, and she ends up having to dig out a recipe book.

...come to think of it, she doesn't remember the last time she legitimately prepared herself a meal that didn't come pre-made in a box.

The song playing is one of Omega's favorites. He used to blast it at them when they were traveling together. Rouge quietly follows the lyrics, "it's like you've never tasted fear, or loss of control," the chorus kicks in and she spins around, abandoning her current slice of French toast to the mercies of the stove to point at Shadow, voice ramping up to match her exaggerated movements. "We all danced in fire, trapped in this machine!"

Shadow smiles uncertainly at her. He tilts his head, ears perked up as he listens intently to the next verse. When the chorus begins again, he hums along, light and sweet. It's hard to pick out beneath the sound of her own voice, but Rouge has the feeling Shadow wants it that way.

They continue like that, her singing dramatically and Shadow humming softly. He (quite obviously, she berates herself) doesn't know any songs, even the more popular ones. It always takes him until the second verse to join in, often butchering the melody when he does. But he's still got that funny little smile and Rouge can't bring herself to mind.

At one point, Rouge hands him a pan of whipped eggs and a spatula, just so he won't be hovering awkwardly in the middle of the kitchen.

Shadow looks startled, but moves forward to join her at the stove. She turns the burner on for him, and says, "just keep moving it, and try not to let it burn."

To her eternal surprise, neither of them end up burning their respective dishes. She finds syrup and plates and forks, and they sit down to eat.

It only takes one bite for Rouge to realize she forgot to *season* the scrambled eggs before handing it off to Shadow. They're possibly the blandest thing she's ever tasted. Shadow doesn't seem to care, looking just as happy as he did moments before.

Rouge internally snorts, and decides that, at least, she'll easily be able to top this tomorrow.

After they finish eating, she herds him into the shower, because, again, *covered in blood*. It's dried into his fur now, like red and green rust, but it's still incredibly gross.

Rouge throws the bedding (also covered in flakes of dried blood) into the wash while he's away, then finds a second set for the guest bed. The spare room itself isn't as bad as she'd feared, just a tad dusty and home to a few storage boxes. She opens a window and starts cleaning.

Time passes, and eventually Shadow pokes his head inside the room. Rouge blinks at him in surprise. It hadn't felt that long, but maybe she'd zoned out a bit, because the room does look markedly better than when she'd began. "Hey," she says.

"Hey," he echoes, sliding into the room. "What's this?"

"It's, uh," she glances around again. "It's your room."

It's not much, she knows. The room is a deep ocean blue with white trim and a window that overlooks the street. The bedframe and mattress came with the apartment, same for the dresser. There's a few plain lamps and a bedside table, all hers, and aside from that, the room is barren.

Shadow doesn't respond, so she adds, "how long do you want to stay here, by the way? I know it's kinda drab in here, so if you wanted to decorate, we can do that..."

"How... how long do *I* want to stay?" Shadow repeats, staring at her.

Rouge stares back, confused. "Uh, yeah? I know I'm a lot to deal with, and I'm sure you have places to be-"

"You're not," Shadow interrupts, possibly for the first time ever in his life. "You're not a lot." He says it firmly, so confident that Rouge almost believes him. A lifetime of abandonment and angry exes would beg to differ, but it's a nice sentiment. "And I don't have anywhere else to be."

"Oh." Rouge says. She has no idea where to go from here. Uncharted territory, S.O.S., how the fuck does one handle sincerity? "In that case, what do you say we spruce this place up a little?"

----

They buy a lot of stupid stuff.

Rouge has been earning a G.U.N agent's salary for over a year now, though, so she's not too concerned.

They get new lampshades and curtains, each designed to dampen light, because Shadow admits that his heightened senses give him headaches sometimes (she orders him noise-canceling headphones, too, but they won't arrive for a while and she decides to leave them a surprise). They get back to his room and decide it's a little *too* dark now, and find glow in the dark stars to plaster across the walls and ceiling.

Shadow takes the pink ones and starts replicating actual constellations, and Rouge takes the green and blue ones and starts sticking them in random spots just to mess with him.

Rouge grabs him a few picture frames ("in case you want pictures, stupid,"), a bookshelf, and a beanbag chair, which Shadow rolls his eyes at but then spends fifteen minutes picking out the perfect spot for. Shadow finds fluffy pillows and blankets, and then, when she shows no signs of judgement, a few stuffed animals.

(Rouge decides that, should she ever get the chance, she's going to beat the shit out of whoever made this kid feel like he couldn't be a kid.)

"You still need clothes to fill out this closet," Rouge comments, poking her head inside it. It's pleasantly devoid of spiders.

Shadow nods, and flops over onto the bed. "And books. But can it wait until tomorrow? It's getting late."

Rouge draws the curtain back to find that the sun has already set, streetlights glinting in the darkness. "Definitely. Although, those might be things you collect over time, rather than- hey, don't wear your shoes on your bed, we just washed those blankets."

Shadow huffs, but this time he actually listens to her, pulling his skates off and carefully placing them on the floor.

Rouge falls into the beanbag chair, closing her eyes and letting her body rest for a moment.

"You have a star in your fur," Shadow says.

"Huh?" Rouge yawns, reaching up to feel for it without opening her eyes.

A bit of plastic hits her directly in the forehead. She opens her eyes to see Shadow smirking at her, holding a bag of unused stars and poised to throw another.

"You're on, you little punk," Rouge growls, snatching up the other bag.

Shadow's first shot turns out to be the best of the night, most of the stars ending up on the floor as they toss them haphazardly at each other with varying degrees of success. It might have something to do with the fact that neither of them have stood up yet.

"Do you want to watch a movie before we hit the hay?" Rouge asks, once they've run out of ammo.

"Hit the-"

"Go to bed," Rouge clarifies, like she has several times today.

Shadow nods, committing the colloquialism to memory. Maybe she should find him a notebook to write them all down in. "Sure."

Then Shadow does something really odd.

He reaches down, off the edge of the bed, and painstakingly picks up one skate without moving his lower body. He shakes a few plastic stars out of it, puts it on, and swings that leg onto the ground, leaving his other leg on the mattress while he reaches for his second skate.

Rouge blinks. "Doll, we're just heading to the other room, you don't need to put those back on."

Shadow freezes, panic flitting over his features. Then his expression goes blank and he looks at her with none of his previous mirth.

Actually, Shadow seems to be looking *through* her, and Rouge fights the urge to turn around and inspect what she knows is a blank wall.

"I- is it bad if I do?" Shadow asks, frowning down at the blanket he's squishing between his fingers.

Rouge hesitates. What the actual fuck. "I... wouldn't call it bad, but it's definitely not necessary."

"Okay," Shadow says, almost to himself. "Okay." He kicks off the skate he'd put on, and stands up.

Shadow wavers, off-balanced, hands splayed out to keep himself upright. He brings them back, holding his left hip before noticing the way Rouge is watching him and letting his hands drop entirely. "Are we going?" He says, in his usual flat tone, like nothing out of the ordinary just happened.

"What was that?" Rouge asks, stunned. She gets up and starts walking over to him; Shadow takes a small, unsteady step backwards, away from her. Like he's afraid of her. Rouge stops moving, heart in her throat, and Shadow relaxes.

"Nothing." Shadow says, slightly strained.

Rouge raises her eyebrows. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yes," Shadow huffs, crossing his arms. "I'm just tired."

"So," Rouge drawls, copying his stance and leaning back on her heels, "you're telling me that if we just stood here like this for ten minutes, you'd be fine with that?"

Shadow's eyes widen a fraction, but his voice is even when he replies, "No, because that'd be boring."

He sidesteps her and exits the room, not allowing for further discussion.

Rouge lets the subject drop.

They watch two movies instead of one, staying up far too late. Rouge goes to make popcorn before they start the second, and Shadow follows her to the kitchen to grab drinks. It's only when they're walking back, arguing about which flavor lemonade is superior (Shadow insists nothing could improve on pink, but he hasn't even *tried* raspberry) that she notices his limp.

It's nearly imperceptible, maybe completely imperceptible to anyone who wasn't a jewel thief and then a stealth operative. But it's there, becoming more prominent with each passing step. A little pop in his left leg when he lifts it, a bit more weight resting on his right...

Rouge frowns, logging it away beside the earlier incident, and goes back to ranting about raspberries.

## Chapter End Notes

me: watch how many headcanons I can fit in one fic

thanks for reading! lemme know what you thought or something? or don't no pressure



## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

not gonna lie this is just becoming a series of vaguely-connected one-shots and I am loving it so hopefully it's at least semi-enjoyable to read

content warnings: quick reference to trauma regarding Rouge's wings, food issues (it's more unintentional disordered eating than an actual ED but i want to be careful). Skip the grocery store scene at the end if you're worried about either of those

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

Shadow shakes her awake the next morning, this time anticipating her knee-jerk attempt to attack him and dodging it with ease.

Rouge groans, rubbing her temples. Her head is on fire. "I thought I told you not to wake me."

"You were crying," Shadow says, watching her. She can't tell exactly what's going through his mind, but it looks eerily close to concern. "And you talk in your sleep. It didn't sound..." he hesitates, then tactfully finishes, "good."

Rouge presses her fingertips against her cheek. The fur is damp. "No, I wasn't," she denies immediately. "I was laughing. From how hilarious my dreams were."

Shadow raises a brow at her. "And the things you were saying?"

"Uh." Rouge searches her memory for what she might've said. She can't imagine it was anything less than scarring. "I was lead actor in a tragedy?" She tries uncertainly.

Shadow stares at her, eyes narrowed in exasperation, then shakes his head. "Sure. I'll be right back."

He stalks off, and Rouge doesn't try to stop him.

Rouge ends up staring at the wall for what feels like hours, not fully awake yet but burdened by the undeniable certainty that she's fucked up big-time.

Well, Shadow was going to realize she was nuts at some point, better to get it over with. Everyone hits their limit with her eventually, and then they leave. That's just how it goes. Honestly, she's surprised nothing tipped him off sooner.

And it's not like Rouge *wanted* him here. It's not like having him around made the whole place feel a little brighter, and like maybe she was doing something *right* for once.

Fuck.

Her door opens and Shadow steps back in, tentatively carrying a mug like it might bite him. Rouge blinks. "Hi."

Usually people wait for her to emerge from her room before they tell her they're leaving.

"Hi," Shadow echoes, crossing the room to hand the mug to her. "I don't know how you take your coffee."

"Oh." Rouge says dumbly. "Thank you." She takes a sip. It's far too bitter. She finds herself smiling anyway, wiping it off her face the second she notices.

"So, you.. have those every night?" Shadow asks, fiddling with one of his inhibitors.

"Close to it. Ready to run yet?" Rouge says, as jokingly as she can manage.

"No," Shadow answers, honestly, and Rouge nearly drops her mug. "Does it help when I wake you up?"

"It-" she's about to say it doesn't matter, then stops, considering the question. Not to be woken up, no, but to see a person she trusts immediately upon waking... "Yeah, kinda."

Shadow nods. "Then I'll keep doing that," he says, like that's all there is to it. "What do you want to do today?"

Rouge takes another sip of bitter coffee, trying not to let the emotional whiplash of this entire morning throw her. What they *need* to do is grocery shopping, but she hates grocery shopping down to the depths of her core, and losing her entire gem collection sounds preferable to leaving the house *at all*, so... it can wait another day.

"Wanna play some video games?"

----

It turns out Shadow is... very bad at video games, as a disastrous half-an-hour of Mario teaches them. They're twenty deaths into the fiasco when Shadow asks, "What's this character's name again," and Rouge finally remembers that video games didn't exist back when Shadow lived on the ARK.

Shadow suggests that he just watch her play a game, an idea that Rouge seizes on immediately. There's only so many times you can watch someone chuck themselves off a cliff before it gets sad.

"Ugh, I'll get them this time, I swear." Rouge says, pressing respawn.

"Just stop going to high-level areas," Shadow says. They're both buried underneath her largest quilt: it's patchwork, and worn down to maximum softness. Shadow's feet are squished into her thigh, which is fine except Rouge keeps accidentally knocking her elbow into his knees.

"I have to get my stuff back," Rouge whines, walking her character directly back to the scene of the slaughter.

Shadow snorts. "Don't blame me when you die again."

Rouge taps her chin, pretending to consider it. "Hmm, I think I'll blame you anyway."

Shadow attempts to throw a pillow at her. Rouge knocks it out of the air with her wing, unintentionally scraping his snout in the process. Shadow, thankfully, doesn't try to shove her wing away. He only rolls his eyes and launches the *other* pillow at her. She knocks that one away too, leaving them pillowless.

"Now look what you've done," Rouge looks sadly at the pillows on the floor, making no move to retrieve them.

"Cut down in the prime of their lives," Shadow agrees, equally motionless.

Rouge nods sagely and continues to play her game.

When it's become apparent that neither of them are going to do anything about their cushion-based dilemma, Shadow yawns, and says, "I'm going to get a drink." He begins the arduous process of extricating himself from the quilt, tossing his section onto Rouge as he stands.

"Bring me a raspberry lemonade." She tells him distractedly, batting the blanket away from her face.

"Absolutely not." Shadow replies, then pads off to the kitchen.

Rouge gets her loot back, accidentally starts the fight a fourth time, and dies again, this time dropping her inventory the tiniest bit farther out of the enemy's line of sight. Progress.

"Where do you keep your inferior drinks?" Shadow calls from the doorway.

Rouge twists, draping herself over the back of the couch to look at him. "Aww, I knew you wouldn't leave me hanging. They're in the cupboard beside the fridge."

"I can't believe I'm enabling you," Shadow sighs, turning away. He reappears with a glass of water in one hand and a lemonade can in the other. "What's in these, anyway?" he asks, looking down at the nutrition label. "It just says, 'flavorings.'"

"That's how you know it's good," Rouge says with a grin, and is met by a look of despair.

Shadow starts making his way back over to her and her smile falls.

"Hey," she says haltingly, "why do you walk like that?"

Shadow pauses mid-limp. He glances down at his uneven footing, then around the room like he's looking for an escape. "I always walk like this when I'm not wearing my skates," he says, sounding mildly uncomfortable.

"Yes, I know, but why?" Rouge presses, and feels guilty the second she does. Shadow's ears flatten and he adjusts his stance so that he's standing more evenly, equal weight on each leg. He obviously hadn't wanted her to notice- still doesn't.

Shadow shrugs, not meeting her gaze. "I'm not sure. I've been like this as long as I can remember. A defect in my design, I suppose." Shadow's expression clouds with the same far-away look he always gets when he remembers the ARK. He recovers quickly, giving his head a tiny shake. "I can put my skates back on if it bothers you."

"Why on earth would that bother me?" Rouge asks, exasperated, and Shadow flinches. She tones her voice down a bit when she continues, "I was asking for your sake- it looks painful."

"Thank you for your concern," Shadow says. It might be the first time Rouge has heard someone say that phrase without a heaping spoonful of sarcasm. "But I'm used to it. It's fine most of the time. Can we get back to the game?"

Rouge frowns. Most of the time is not all of the time, and while Shadow isn't the type to outright lie (unlike her), he certainly *is* the type to downplay his own issues.

"Yeah," she says eventually. "I died again."

"I told you so," Shadow says, sitting back down at her side. His voice is smug, but his shoulders slump in relief.

----

"Why do you do that?" Shadow asks.

They're walking into a store, because as much as she'd love to, they can't avoid grocery shopping forever. They had, however, suffered through four entire days of eating takeout and random garbage for every single meal before Rouge admitted defeat.

Rouge is pulling a sweater over her head like she has for every shopping trip since childhood. Actually, she's walking, Shadow is gliding, because Rouge still hasn't quite figured out how or when to bring up the whole 'limping' thing.

"Huh?" Rouge hums, wiggling her wings to get the fabric to stretch comfortably across them.

"You cover your wings every time we go somewhere," Shadow states. He never was one to pull punches.

"This is the first time we've left the house together," Rouge points out, dodging the question. She's not going to dredge up old memories if she can feasibly avoid it.

"No, we-" Shadow stops, staring down at the asphalt. "Didn't we..." he tries, then trails off again.

"We stopped at a few places during the Neo Metal Sonic ordeal," she offers. Shadow looks up at her curiously. "Is that what you're remembering?"

Shadow nods slowly, eyes narrowed in annoyance while he struggles to remember. Rouge feels anger brewing in the pit of her stomach. Black Doom really did a number on this kid's mind. If the bastard wasn't already dead, she'd kill him herself.

"Omega was there too, wasn't he?"

Rouge grins. "Yup. That chassis of his is great for shoplifting."

Shadow groans, but starts moving again, looking considerably less traumatized by his own existence. "You're incorrigible," he mutters.

Shadow takes a shopping cart on their way in, once again showing a partial knowledge of modern inventions that he, by all accounts, shouldn't have.

Rouge smiles to herself. Maybe someday he'll remember everything. Maybe even the whole mess with the giant lizard. Until then, she's free to reuse all of her bad jokes on him.

It's nearing midnight, meaning there's only a few other people in the store, and Rouge's stress levels drop a smidgen. Having Shadow at her side certainly doesn't hurt.

All the same, even Shadow notices the tenseness that enters her shoulders the moment they step inside. "You okay?" He asks, then averts his gaze.

Rouge forces a chuckle, and ruffles the quills on his head fondly. Shadow tolerates it for about two seconds before he knocks her hand away. "Never better, hon. Let's get some groceries."

They wander around the aisles in silence for a few minutes, until Shadow asks, "what are we here for?"

Rouge stops cold. "I have no idea."

It's been so long since she's done this, constantly flitting from one apocalypse to the next without time to plan, let alone cook, a real meal. Not that Rouge was great at that whole shebang *before* everything went to shit. Food was just whatever she could get her hands on, and if she couldn't find anything, then sleep was an acceptable substitute.

"You didn't make a list?" Shadow says, a tad too judgemental for someone who *just this year* went shopping for the first time.

"I don't know," Rouge snaps, throwing her hands up. "I didn't think about it!" Grocery shopping is the worst; there's strangers all around her, and the music is too loud to hear oncoming attackers, and there's nowhere to escape to, and yeah, fine, maybe she's *not* doing okay.

Shadow tilts his head, quietly taking in Rouge's ongoing breakdown. He seems calm, oddly not upset that she lied to him.

"We need breakfast food," he says, cutting through her panic. "Let's start there."

Right. Right, that makes sense. Rouge squeezes her eyes shut tight and takes a deep breath, trying to ground herself. "Okay. Cereal, or something."

"Bread," Shadow adds, steering their cart into the next aisle, which happens to contain cereal. "Vegetables. Fruit."

"Are you just naming things?" Rouge asks shakily. She tosses a few brands of cereal into the cart, one that she remembers buying and some random ones hopefully neither of them will hate.

Shadow lets her do her thing, following her without commenting on her choices. "Yes. Breakfast is meaningless to me. I had ration bars in place of most meals."

Rouge places another box in the cart, then turns to stare at him. "That sucks."

Shadow shrugs.

"We're gonna fix that," Rouge decides, wrapping her arm around Shadow so she can pull him and the cart along with her. Shadow doesn't shove her off this time.

She gets two kinds of milk, one regular and one soy, because she can't recall if she can have dairy or not. It's mildly horrifying. At least Shadow doesn't know whether he can, either.

They get bread, and more coffee, and a random assortment of vegetables, and then they get to the fruit section. Rouge looks at all the options, concludes that this is overwhelming, and asks, "what kind of fruit do you like?"

"I've never had fresh fruit." Shadow says. "What kind of fruit do you like?"

"I liked pears when I was little," Rouge replies carefully. She hasn't had fresh fruit in years.

"Pears, then," Shadow says. Doesn't move.

Rouge sighs. "You don't know what pears look like, do you."

"No clue."

Rouge picks up an apple from a nearby stand and hands it to him. "Here. A pear."

Shadow looks down at the fruit he's holding, then scans her face. "Liar."

Rouge snickers, and grabs a carton of strawberries. "And these? These are oranges."

Shadow rolls his eyes, dropping the apple back onto the shelf. "Screw you."

They finish the trip without Rouge ever having to run off and have a breakdown in the bathroom. She even low-key flirts with the cashier. Then, upon noticing how embarrassed Shadow looks, she high-key flirts with the cashier.

Shadow attempts to strangle her; the employee just laughs.

It's a good day.

## Chapter End Notes

I'm in such a weird headspace right now. I might go ahead and post chapter three  
as always, thanks for reading <3

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

okay this one is weird but i had a ton of fun writing it?

oh and this is also where the shadsoni tag becomes relevant btw. it's not a plot focus but it's there

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

Shadow has (mostly on accident, she's pretty sure) developed more of a social life than Rouge has.

It might have something to do with Rouge's abysmal work-life balance. Shadow only gets called in when G.U.N needs an uptick in firepower, but Rouge has an actual day job there, doing paperwork and all that jazz.

It's boring as hell.

Shadow seems to be having fun, though. Rouge will get random texts from him; sometimes Shadow tells her he's out on a mission and won't be back for a few days, but more often, he's telling her he's out with one of the many people they've saved the world with on multiple occasions.

Today's entry is:

*3:52- Hi. I and several others are at the beach right now, but will be at Sonic and Tails' house later if you wanted to stop by after work.*

*3:52- Knuckles is here. You could bother him*

*3:54- lol thanks. ya sure, i'll be there <3*

*3:55- someone has to keep you from brooding all night*

*3:57- Bite me*

*3:58- Hey hey rouge you should bring marshmallows shad doesn't knaofihahfjak*

*3:58- Sorry. Sonic stole my phone*

*3:58- did you tell him you're in love with him yet*

*(read 3:58)*



Rouge shows up around six with a jumbo-sized bag of gas-station marshmallows in one hand, because she has no idea why Sonic wanted them but it's bound to be hilarious.

There's still-smoldering wrecks of robots scattered around the house, Eggman-brand, by the looks of it. A fight must've gone down recently. Rouge pettily gives one of them a kick on her way to the front door.

Sonic and Tails' house is in the middle of the woods and the door is therefore always unlocked, so Rouge slides inside without knocking.

Inside are... more people than she expected. Not enough to be a party, by any means, but a lot. She recognizes most of them, noting the injuries accompanying their waterlogged fur, and finds herself wondering- not for the first time- where the hell half of these kids' parents are.

On her way through the house (she's not looking for Shadow because she *misses* him, he's just the one who invited her and it'd be impolite not to find him) Rouge spots Amy beating Blaze and the Chaotix at poker in the corner, Tails at the kitchen counter showing an astonished Silver how a blender works, and Cream challenging Knuckles to an arm wrestling contest.

She stops to watch them, and ends up seeing the rabbit flip Knuckles over the table. Either the echidna's a better actor than she thought, or there's an unstoppable powerhouse in that pint-sized container.

Shadow and Sonic are both in the kitchen leaning against the fridge, Shadow holding a glass of water and giggling uncontrollably while Sonic looks endeared but ultimately just worried.

Sonic spots her first, waving her over with obvious relief. "Hey, Rouge, good to see you!"

"Rouge!" Shadow calls, too loudly for the small room, and copies Sonic's wave with *way* too much enthusiasm. Everyone turns to look at her, calling out various greetings.

Rouge shifts at the sudden attention, donning her trademark self-assured smirk. "Figured you wouldn't mind if I crashed the party."

"Yeah, I was actually gonna call you, but none of us have your number and Shadow won't let anyone use his phone," Sonic says, grabbing Shadow's arm and dragging him over to her.

Shadow wobbles with each step, lacking his usual grace. He collides with Sonic more than once. It should spark a tirade of taunts, but Sonic patiently nudges Shadow back upright each time, mockery nowhere to be found.

Rouge's good mood burns up in an instant. She throws the marshmallows on the counter and meets them halfway, grasping Shadow's face gently in both hands the second she gets close. He doesn't fight her like she expected him to.

Shadow's pupils are huge, dilated so badly that she can't find even a hint of his crimson irises. "What's with him?" Rouge asks, trying not to explode from worry.

"I went to the beach," Shadow replies. His voice is slightly muffled from the way she's squishing his face.

"I can see that," Rouge mutters, absently brushing grains of sand out of his quills before letting him go. "I meant, why are you high."

"Eggman was trying out a new weapon," Tails says, when Shadow just resumes his laughing fit instead of responding. "It was just supposed to knock us out, but if you *don't* sleep after getting hit, you get really loopy. Charmy and Silver got hit, too, but Charmy's the only one who actually let himself fall asleep."

"Plus, this idiot," Sonic elbows Shadow. Shadow stops laughing abruptly and elbows him back without any semblance of restraint. Sonic is knocked three feet to the side, then pops back over like a jack-in-the-box, completely unaffected. "Got himself shot like three times 'cause he kept taking hits for other people."

"I didn't think it would amplify the effects," Shadow mutters. "Figured you couldn't be hit more than once."

Sonic pats him on the back in faux-sympathy. "And you were very, very wrong. Like, embarrassingly wrong."

Shadow raises a hand in preparation to flip him off, glances at Tails, and seems to think better of it. He yawns, stumbles back a couple steps.

Sonic reaches out to steady him. He leaves his arm around Shadow's shoulders for extra support.

From his current angle, Sonic probably can't see the green glow that's steadily consuming Shadow's face. Rouge, however, can see it just fine. Fuel to torture him with at a later date.

She snickers. Shadow glares at her like he can tell what she's thinking.

Tails rolls his eyes at his oblivious brother and tears into the bag of marshmallows, biting one with the done-with-this-shit expression of someone who's been babysitting two severely sleep-deprived teens for the past several hours. "It should wear off on its own eventually, but sleep would certainly speed it up." Tails aims a pointed look at Silver when he says this. Silver sticks his tongue out at him.

"Sleep is for the weak!" Silver declares happily, and continues to press buttons on the blender in mesmerization. Shadow nods solemnly in agreement.

"Yeah, no, you should both sleep," Sonic says. He gives Shadow a tiny shake for emphasis.

Shadow huffs, turning his glare towards the floor. "I don't need sleep."

Sonic opens his mouth to argue, but then Shadow moves forward, shrugging Sonic's arm off his shoulders.

Shadow sets his cup down on the counter, and places his palms flat on either side of Rouge's face, reversing their position from minutes ago. "Rouge." Shadow says, like it's the most important message he's ever given anyone. "Hey- hey, Rouge."

"Yes?" She asks, amused.

"Rouge," Shadow says again. Then he frowns. "I forgot."

"Ooookay," Rouge drawls, removing his hands from her face. "We're going home, and *you* are going to sleep. C'mon, kiddo." She grabs his wrist and tugs, like Sonic did, and Shadow stumbles a second time.

Rouge blinks, looks down. "You're not wearing your skates," she observes. Shadow follows her line of sight, lifting one bare foot experimentally and wincing at the sudden weight shift.

"I wanted to go in the water," Shadow says, yawning. He slaps his palm down on the table and leans most of his body onto it. A casual motion to any onlookers except Rouge herself, who notices the way his shoulders droop in relief.

"He really didn't," Sonic interjects. Shadow shoots him a look of betrayal. "Cream guilted him into it."

"She looked at me with those big eyes of hers," Shadow whines.

Without warning, Shadow pushes himself away from the table, spins on his heel, and drops his face into the crook of Rouge's shoulder.

"My legs hurt," Shadow whispers, only for her to hear. "A lot. I'm not sure I can walk home."

Rouge cautiously brings her arms up to wrap around Shadow's back. This open display of affection from him is more than a little overwhelming, and to her horror, she feels a lump rise in her throat. It's stupid. He's only doing it so he can speak to her privately. That's all. It doesn't mean a thing.

*'Maybe he trusts you,'* whispers a traitorous voice in her head.

Rouge brushes it out of her thoughts. Only an idiot would trust her, and Shadow is *not* an idiot, for as much as he acts like one sometimes.

"Okay," she says, and decides to take a guess. "Where did you leave your skates? Those help you, right?"

Shadow nods. "Yes. Um. I don't..."

"I think he left them on the beach when the house got attacked, I can go grab them!" Before Rouge can respond, Sonic dashes away, leaving a blue streak suspended in the air behind him.

Rouge frowns. How much of that did he hear?

"He's so nice," Shadow says blissfully, returning to a normal speaking volume now that he's no longer at risk of- what? Seeming weak? Rouge isn't sure why *she* would be the exception to that rule. "Should I propose?"

Amy, who chose the wrong moment to walk in, chokes on her hot chocolate.

"Yes, do that," Rouge agrees, and if she wasn't so damn worried she'd pull out her phone and start recording this train wreck.

Blaze strides up from out of nowhere and starts patting Amy on the back. Knuckles, Cream, and the Chaotix trail in behind her; Charmy looks exhausted but considerably more lucid than Silver or Shadow.

Sonic is back within the minute, by which time Shadow is already leaning the majority of his weight on Rouge.

"Here ya go!" Sonic says, presenting the pair of rocket boots like a bouquet of flowers. Shadow disentangles himself from Rouge to grab Sonic by the shoulders. His legs shake from even that small movement without support.

Rouge bites her lip. How long has Shadow been on his feet? And, as long as she's asking questions that Shadow won't or can't answer- why is he in pain?

"Sonic. Listen," Shadow says, very seriously, and Rouge distractedly wonders if she's obligated by the bro code to stop Shadow if he really does try to ask Sonic to marry him.

"I'm listening," Sonic assures him, fighting laughter.

Shadow looks him right in the eyes and says, forlornly, "I might have to kill you."

"You might have to kill me?" Sonic repeats, gently pushing Shadow down into a chair so he can actually put his damn shoes on. Shadow doesn't seem to make that connection, though, so Rouge snatches one of the skates from Sonic and presses it into Shadow's hands to jumpstart him.

"You're too cute." Shadow explains, pulling on the skate and taking the other from a now stunned Sonic. "It shouldn't be allowed. You must perish."

Shadow reaches out and pokes Sonic's face with as much care as one can possibly put into a poke. "But then I would be so sad," Shadow whispers, sounding like he's about to cry.

Sonic is spared from having to respond by a loud, metallic, *ka-thunk*, followed by the blender exploding.

Silver yelps, falling off the counter, both him and it now covered in a white, tar-like substance that might've once been marshmallows.

"Well, would you look at the time," Rouge says blandly, although at this point she's not sure anyone's really listening to her. "We really have to get going."

"Sonic, I'll text you so you have my number in case something like this happens again."  
Rouge adds, herding Shadow out of the kitchen.

"Wait, hold on," Sonic starts to say, but a loud beeping interrupts him. Rouge looks over her shoulder to see a plume of smoke rising from the shattered remains of the blender.

Then the automatic sprinklers pop out from the ceiling, drenching the entire house and all its occupants.

It's only once she gets home, sopping wet and carrying a sleeping hedgehog, that Rouge realizes she just designated herself as Shadow's emergency contact to the one group of people who will actually need that information on a regular basis.

## Chapter End Notes

i've done some really weird shit when i'm tired? generally just TERRIBLE jokes that i'm too embarrassed to share here, but i also act incredibly loopy and burst out laughing at literally nothing, to the point that i've had people ask me if i'm running a fever

...i wasn't going anywhere with that, it's just what inspired this chapter

anywho thanks for reading, y'all :)

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

um I honestly was not expecting such a warm response to this? thanks so much yall are so nice I'm- \*cries\*

oh also I decided to just make this scene its own chapter, so now there'll be five chapters total. probably. i hope.

content warnings: mentions of past child abuse/neglect, reference to rouge being targeted because of her wings, over-the-counter painkillers, Shadow has an unhealthy mindset about his disability but we're working on it I swear

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

She doesn't approach the issue until a week later.

Rouge doesn't even bring it up by choice- she's still trying to give Shadow time to adjust to living with her (and if she's being perfectly honest, she's not totally used to having him around, either).

And... he'd seemed genuinely *afraid* of her the last time she'd pressed him on it, something which she'd be quite happy to never see him be again, so if Shadow needs her to tiptoe around whatever the issue is for a while, then she will.

But one morning, Shadow doesn't show up for the breakfast routine they've accidentally fallen into.

Rouge knocks on his door with no small amount of trepidation. It's not fully closed, because Shadow has a *thing* about closed doors that she's too wary to delve into yet. Rouge keeps her knock light to avoid pushing the door open further. "Hey, kid, you alright?"

There's a short silence.

"I'm fine," Shadow says unconvincingly, too late to be normal. His voice shakes, just slightly, like keeping it steady is taking all the energy he can manage. "I'm sorry. I'm supposed to help you with breakfast."

"I haven't made it yet," Rouge says, because she can't even begin to address all of the little worrying messages threaded into that statement.

"...can I come in?" She asks, and the following silence is longer than the first. "You can say no," Rouge adds, because she's found that Shadow seems to need that reassurance. Not with

everyone, and not always, but often enough that it's become convenient to just assume it'll help.

"Yes." Shadow says.

Rouge wastes no time in throwing the door open. *Maybe* she's a tad worried. Sue her.

It's not as dark as she was expecting. The blinds are open, displaying the rain outside. It illuminates the bed, which is currently a nest of blankets containing one very ruffled hedgehog.

Rouge is at Shadow's shoulder in an instant. When she gets closer, she sees that his entire body is shaking. The kind of shake that comes when you've been crying but you've run out of tears and your body can't handle the stress without them. No wonder his voice was shot.

"Shit, doll," she breathes, perching next to him. "What's wrong, how can I help?"

Shadow's breath catches and he curls up tighter on himself, "-hurts." He whispers, but it's fractured and Rouge can't tell if there were supposed to be words leading into it. "I'm sorry. I should have gotten up anyway."

"I- I don't expect you to do things for me, hon, especially not if you're in pain." Rouge says softly.

She reaches up and pats his quills in a hopefully comforting manner. They're not sharp like she was expecting. Shadow's ears twitch when Rouge first touches him, but he doesn't snap at her, and she takes it as a sign to continue.

Shadow mumbles something, sullen, but when she asks him to repeat it, he just shakes his head, ears flattening.

The rain patters against the windows, grounding and rhythmic against the backdrop of engines revving and cars honking. The city is doing a better job of being comforting than she is, right now.

Rouge decides to switch tactics. Address the problem first, and the cause later. "Okay, hold on. I'll be right back, I promise."

She darts off, passing in and out of rooms with a speed to rival any super-powered hedgehogs. Trying not to think about how she is *painfully* out of her depth.

Rouge is back at Shadow's side in less than two minutes, dropping a collection of items onto the floor. Shadow is... sort of sitting up when she returns, squished into the space between the wall and the headboard to watch her movements.

He looks exhausted, and kinda cold; Rouge digs through the pile to grab a hoodie. It's one of hers, since he doesn't own any yet. She hands it to him. Shadow stares at it blankly for two seconds, turning it over in his hands, then resumes staring at her.

For the first time, Rouge notices that Shadow isn't wearing his gloves. The red stripes on his arms extend down over two of his fingers.

"So," she says, worry starting to overwhelm her as she feels more and more helpless. But whatever. Not about her right now. "I grabbed you a heating pad," Rouge begins, plugging said item into the wall and then tossing it to him. "I also brought painkillers, chocolate, water, and my laptop, in case you wanted to watch something."

Shadow takes a moment to respond, pausing to drape the heating pad over his ankles and pull the hoodie over his head. It swamps him, lavender sleeves covering his hands. "Why are you doing all this for me?"

Rouge clicks the heating pad on, then adjusts his placement of it, setting it underneath the blanket so there isn't a barrier between him and the heat. Shadow gives her an irritated look, like she's fussing too much. Rouge ignores him. It's her apartment and she'll worry about him if she wants to. "I'm trying to help you feel better."

She is. Chaos help her, but she is.

She doesn't know how to help anyone. She doesn't know how to have friends, or a roommate, or whatever the hell Shadow is to her now. It's becoming painfully clear how easily she could fuck everything up.

But Shadow needs her, so goddammit, she's going to try. Rouge has never let a complete lack of proficiency hold her back before.

"But I'm not hurt."

"You're not *injured*. You look pretty hurt to me."

Shadow bunches the sleeves up around his wrists, avoiding her gaze. She rips open the bag of chocolates and sets it on his bedside table, followed by the other items. Chocolate is not, in fact, an acceptable substitute for breakfast, but she's done it enough times to know it won't kill either of them.

Frustratedly, he asks, "Isn't it normal?"

Rouge blinks, glancing over at him. "What, being hurt?"

"Being in pain," Shadow corrects.

She wasn't sure before, but now she can tell- he's not mad at her, he's mad at *himself*.

The only thing she can't pinpoint is *why*, but the self-loathing in his tone is unmistakable.

Rouge works her jaw soundlessly for a second. "No," she manages. "Yeah, no. Most people aren't in pain constantly."

Shadow stares at her. Then he looks down, pulling at the weave of his blanket. He's picking the fabric apart, slowly but surely. At this rate, she'll have to get him a new one each month.



"Oh."

"Yeah," Rouge agrees, not sure how to feel. Anger is sounding pretty good.

"I thought... they used to say I was just complaining." Shadow says, and it sounds discolored, a bruise that's been poked one too many times.

Rouge is about to launch into a rant against the bastards on the ARK who raised him and where *exactly* they can shove their emotional mind games, but Shadow continues, "I guess I should've realized sooner that wasn't the case."

Swallowing her rage, Rouge sits down beside him and runs her hand along his back. Shadow wouldn't appreciate it if she pointed out his obvious trauma, whether Rouge was on his side or not. Past experience indicates that he's *slightly* in complete and total denial about the whole 'living test subject' thing.

"Please don't ever think this is your fault, sweetheart. You didn't ask for this."

Shadow hums, obviously not believing her. But he doesn't tell her to leave, or to stop touching him.

Rouge hates this. She hates that someone's made Shadow believe he deserves pain, that he earned it, somehow, by merit of existing. It reminds her of- of wings, and stares, and hands. Of her father telling her not to cry, because this is *normal*, no point complaining. Like she wasn't allowed to be upset, because she should be accustomed to it.

She picks up the chocolates, dropping the bag within easy reach of them both.

Shadow tentatively takes one, leveling one of his Judgement Stares her way. "Shouldn't we eat real food?"

"On bad days, we eat chocolate," Rouge declares. She needs a list of house rules at this point.

Shadow laughs, and it's tired, but not bitter. It's something close to relief. Rouge squeezes him with the arm she left around his waist, half of a hug. He lets his head fall against her shoulder.

"You're too nice to me," Shadow mutters.

"Me, nice? Perish the thought." Rouge jokes, giving him a shake and wishing she could jostle the self-deprecation right out of his head. More seriously, she adds, "I'm only nice to the people I like, hon. Get used to it."

'Like' may not be a strong enough word. 'Like' is the only word she's strong enough to say.

When Shadow doesn't respond, she one-handedly grabs his phone, then her laptop, tossing the former to him and propping the latter up on her knees.

"Text your boyfriend or something, I still need to call in sick to work," Rouge orders, pulling out her own phone from the pocket of her pajama pants. She dials in the number in a

practiced motion (it would feel like admitting defeat to simply add it to her contacts).

Shadow opens his mouth to object- to what part, she's not sure- and she shoves a finger in front of his lips, making an obnoxious *shush* noise. This apparently annoys him enough to tackle her, even with his pain.

Rouge shrieks, wings snapping out to keep them both from falling off the bed. "Shut up, shut up, it's ringing!"

She shoves Shadow off of her and calms down just in time for the secretary to pick up. Rouge does her best impression of being sick, but then starts playing up her 'illness' for the sole purpose of making Shadow smile. After one particularly overdramatic cough, hacking up a lung in a manner reminiscent of a dying man in a soap opera, the secretary just sighs, and says, "I'll tell your boss you have a dentist appointment."

"I used that one last week," Rouge protests, but the line's already gone dead.

"How are you not fired yet," Shadow asks.

Rouge shrugs. "Must be my natural charisma."

Frankly, she's been wondering that same thing, and is starting to suspect her boss is keeping her on out of spite. It's no secret that she hates working there. Or maybe they're just aware she'd do a lot more damage outside the agency than she does inside.

"Now, I'm happy to stay and watch dumb videos with you, but if you'd prefer that I go..."

"I'd like it if you stayed." Shadow tells her. He doesn't look at her when he says it, tearing open another chocolate instead, but she can hear the sincerity in his voice. "But I might fall asleep."

Rouge smiles, although she doesn't love the implication that he's been in too much pain to sleep until now. She squeezes his shoulders in a one-armed hug. "Go for it, kid."

She queues up a few random videos with long durations and comedic topics, in the hopes that they can both zone out a little bit. Entertaining enough to be distracting, but not enough to keep Shadow awake.

Currently though, it wouldn't matter- Shadow's busy typing something on his phone, and for a second Rouge wonders if he genuinely took her advice. It buzzes the second he sets it down, the screen lighting up to display the message: *'that's ok!! i hope u feel better soon'* followed by several heart emojis.

Rouge gives Shadow her best smirky-face. Shadow blushes an alien shade of luminescent green, flipping his phone over so she can't keep looking at it. "He's not my boyfriend," he says instantly.

"Uh-huh."

"He's not. I was just canceling some plans."

"Uh-huh."

"Ugh." Shadow picks up his phone to ignore her, but ends up opening his messaging app and texting Sonic back, which really just proves Rouge's point.

True to his word, Shadow's asleep halfway through the second video, some analysis of a game she's never played. His face is buried in her neck so that each breath tickles her fur, but Rouge wouldn't dream of moving him.

She pulls out her phone, and starts to do research.

## Chapter End Notes

okay I might need to write a Rouge backstory fic? I've got so many half-formed headcanons about her past that just marinate in my mind and seep into my writing and I'm sure it's confusing as fuck to read

the mindset of "this is my fault" concerning chronic pain is... so hard to avoid. It's hard not to feel like you've done something wrong, or that you should be able to handle/ignore it better. I think Shadow would have a distinctly difficult time with that, since he was kinda raised with the idea that he needs to be perfect and never falter and save everyone around him.

btw shameless self promo, if anyone's interested! i wrote another fic that i personally consider to be a prequel to this one, it's... humorous horror, let's say? it is kinda fucked up though, so no pressure to read it, you won't miss anything i promise:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/32419843>

thanks for reading, please take care of yourself i love you <3

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

hey uh. you know how last time i raised the chapter count? um. so. \*raises chapter count again\*

i'm posting five and six at the same time though so it doesnt count. it doesnt!!!

I hope yall are ready for some Omega :D

(btw i just realized i never explained this but i have no plans to do so in-fic, so: shadow's skates are a mobility aid! they reduce gravity on the wearer, which is what allows him to float, and that inadvertently reduces the amount of pain he's in because he technically doesn't have to stand, or walk)

content warnings: painkillers again, a line that could be read as suicidal ideation (nothing worse than what the games themselves say though), past depressive episode

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

Omega shows up the next day.

Actually, he showed up sometime last night, but Rouge only becomes aware of his presence in the morning, still blinking away nightmares and sipping at black coffee. She tries to open the fridge for milk and finds that it is not a fridge, and is in actuality a two-ton killing machine.

Rouge screams, startled.

She recovers, screams again out of pure joy, and jumps into the air so she can throw her arms around his metal neck. "I missed you!"

"Your absence was noted," Omega rumbles, metal claws patting her back lightly. It's more comforting than it should be.

"Where have you been?" Rouge exclaims. She hasn't seen him since before Shadow's shithead of a dad played the metaphorical fiddle whilst the city went up in flames. She cranes her head to catch a glimpse of a remarkably undamaged front door. "And how did you get in here?"

Omega whirrs, the robot equivalent of shamefully breaking eye contact. "Your bedroom window is now broken."

Rouge snorts. She'd fallen asleep in Shadow's room, so that explains why she hadn't heard it. "As long as you're paying for it, sweetheart."

Vacuuming up that much broken glass is going to be a pain, but at least she lives several stories up. Nobody but Omega is going to be crazy enough to scale the building.

Maybe she should find a new place. One with bigger doors that a two-ton robot can fit through. Not many apartments like that... maybe a house?

Wait, no. She's not buying a house. That's something adults do, specifically adults with their lives put together.

Omega recounts his tale, a mission gone haywire that started in Paris and ended on the high seas. Turns out pirates suck at fighting robots, which more than made up for the fact that Omega can't swim.

He's nearing the end of the story when Shadow appears.

"The buoyancy cushions were exceeding expectations, but unfortunately did not possess the structural integrity to withstand bullets. We won the battle, but the shipment sank, as did I. My comm-link was waterproof, and my crew shared the lilting tones of Billy Joel for six consecutive hours while we waited for the retrieval team to arrive."

Rouge doesn't quite know how to respond to that, other than, *"What the actual shit,"* but thankfully she doesn't have to.

Omega stops speaking, and Shadow skates forward. "Hello," Shadow says.

"Greetings, small ally," Omega replies.

Rouge snickers.

Shadow flips her off without looking. He hesitates a moment, then wraps Omega in a hug, pressing his face into the robot's chest.

Omega pats Shadow's head, body language even stiffer than usual. He looks about as shocked as a robot without facial expressions can.

Only a few seconds pass before Shadow retreats, crossing his arms and glaring at the floor like the entire event never happened. "Missed you," he mutters at the tiles, and skitters away to join Rouge at the counter.

He jumps onto one of the spinny counter chairs, kicking his legs since they don't reach the floor; Rouge drops her phone like it's caught fire and tries to look like she hadn't been taking pictures. It's a shoddy acting job, as far as her cons go. Shadow doesn't seem to notice.

Rouge exhales slowly and picks up her phone again, forwarding the pictures to Omega.

"Now what, fam-" Rouge clamps her mouth shut. Nope. Not opening that can of worms. "-uh, folks?"

"We could go out," Shadow suggests. "Show Omega how the city's changed in the past month."

He shoots Rouge a shy little smirk, and she suddenly knows what he's referring to: the twelve-story building that collapsed during a fight with Eggman and has since been transformed by the city's residents to a parkour-style jungle gym that spans several blocks.

It's a cute idea, and Shadow looks happily mischievous about it, and Rouge wonders when exactly Shadow started feeling comfortable enough around them to come out of his shell.

Omega nods. "This is amenable. Suggestion seconded."

"Uh, yeah, sure," Rouge says distantly. "Sounds good, guys."

Families are stressful. Families are messy. Families are expectations and obligations and being forced to hold her tongue lest she upset the dynamic with her strangeness.

They aren't her family. Definitely not.

----

They go to the death park. Omega inadvertently scares several humans with his claws and tendency towards shooting fire, and once he notices this effect, he begins to do it on purpose.

Rouge and Shadow pass around responsibility like a game of hot potato, taking turns minimizing damage while the other laughs like an asshole.

Thankfully, amongst all the broken robots and horrifying spikes, no one thinks twice about them, counting it as another facet of the park. *"Lethal parkour not enough excitement for you? What if a killing machine chased you through random sections?"*

Eventually, Rouge drags them all home, when Shadow starts letting Omega pick him up a little too readily and Omega starts getting genuinely upset by the reactions he's receiving, eyes flashing red in sync with the startled screams of the humans.

Rouge flops onto the couch, Shadow following suit. Omega carefully perches on his other side.

The couch is ruined. The couch has seen better days. The couch will continue to be marred by claws and spines and blood and giant spiky robots.

She is not getting a new couch.

It's dark. None of them bothered to turn the lights on, and only the fading glow of the sunset provides anything to see by.

Rouge doesn't mind; she's never been a fan of light. Omega might be the one who's most amenable to it, and that's only because he barely registers it as a concept.

Shadow kicks his skates off, and curls into the smallest ball possible, bar spindashing. One shoe *thunks* to the floor, but the other wedges itself into the gap between the ottoman and the couch, sinking down into the depths of the furniture like the icy sludge of hell. Never getting that back.

Rouge drapes her arm around Shadow's shoulders, pulling him to her side. "You good, hon? Need anything?"

"I'm fine," Shadow mutters, a hedgehog in headlights. He doesn't relax into her like he normally might, instead maintaining his initial stiffness. "I'm not helpless."

"...I wasn't saying you were."

"I don't need your pity," Shadow seethes, abruptly brushing her arm away. He's bristling in every sense of the word.

Rouge doesn't try to touch him again. Much like yesterday, she gets the sense this outlandish reaction isn't actually about her. She should strike up a soothing tone, and remind herself that she's talking to the emotional equivalent of a chao who's determinedly brandishing a knife.

However, she fails the second she opens her mouth, defensiveness overriding everything else. "I'm not-"

"Preliminary scans of your skeletal structure indicate inflammation," Omega interrupts, just in time to prevent her from making an enormous mistake. "In short, bone machine broke. Do you require medical attention?"

"No."

They all sit, uncomfortably quiet. Shadow buries his face in his knees. Rouge glances over his head at Omega. The robot's eyes flicker from green to yellow, shoulders tilting in a full-body question.

Rouge shrugs uncertainly. She'll have to fill Omega in on some stuff, later. It's not her place, but she doubts Shadow will feel up to doing so himself anytime soon.

She's honestly impressed this hasn't provoked him into running, yet.

Shadow used to run from her all the time. From everyone, really. When the three of them were traveling together, they'd find hotels, an equal ratio of crappy joints with flickering lights to glimmering monuments mounted to the splendors of commercialization.

She'd lounge on top of the covers, eating ice cream (or the next best option) with little regard for the high stain risk, and she'd ask Omega what he wanted to watch. All the while marveling at how at-ease she felt, hanging about with not one, but *two* other people. Both of whom would be completely able to murder her without a second thought.

(Feeling strangely certain that they never would.)

(She still wonders if they found her just as calming as she found them.)

Omega would reply, "something with copious amounts of violence," and Rouge would laugh and search for a high-budget, low-quality action film where the lead says stuff like, "I didn't start this war," or, "I hope I don't have to write a report on this," and then puts on sunglasses and jumps out of an exploding building.

Shadow would lurk on the sidelines. Sometimes he'd go as far as to lightly perch on the edge of her bed, but every time Rouge tried to engage with him, he'd just... shut down. A soft reply, or a curt one if she pushed too hard, and Shadow would stand back up and dart outside, not to be seen until morning.

Like the very idea of talking to someone about nothing at all was equivalent to being locked in a box and shoved to the back of a shelf to collect dust.

And that was *better* than what most other people got from him, those days. If Shadow wasn't fighting with the other teams, he simply wasn't there, vanishing like grass in a fire. Or, if Rouge wants to be really cliché about it, a shadow in the sunlight.

It's a stark contrast to the hedgehog sitting beside her now, who so obviously wants to run, to hide, but is choosing to stay. Because on some level, knowingly or not, Shadow recognizes that they are *safe*.

Rouge shuffles her wings, glancing over at him in the dark. "Shadow, I wasn't asking because I think you can't survive on your own. I know you can."

Oh, yes, she knows. Rouge knows Shadow can rob banks and fight robots and eat uncooked ramen alone in an empty apartment. Like she did.

Shadow turns his head a fraction, one crimson eye locking onto her.

Rouge draws her knees up to her chin, copying his position. "But if I can help, in any way at all, then I want to."

Omega's head buzzes with unnecessary volume as he swivels to look at her. "*We* want to," she amends. "You don't have to do everything alone anymore. Okay?"

"...okay," Shadow whispers, after way too long. He hides his face again, and says, "I'm alright. I'm in pain. I don't need anything."

"Alright," Rouge says. He's being stupid, but that's fine.

She grabs her purse from the floor and snags out a bottle of painkillers, dropping both items on the ottoman. Then she picks up the remote and presses play on the first show she finds that none of them hate.

A television screen isn't anything like a campfire, but the flickering lights provide that same timeless bubble.

Halfway through the first episode, Omega buzzes lowly and sets his hand against Shadow's legs, palm facing outwards. There's no fire, but the metal of his hand glows amber, flamethrower partially activated.



At the start of the second episode, Shadow drops his head onto Rouge's shoulder. She links their fingers together and doesn't comment on the way his body trembles.

By the end of the third episode, Rouge passes Shadow the bottle of pills and he takes them from her without protest, dry-swallowing two. It's not nearly enough for someone with his enhanced metabolism, but Rouge isn't about to scold Shadow when she's *finally* gotten him to accept help.

She chances a glance down at him. Shadow's wearing that look again. His, '*I shouldn't be doing this, I don't deserve this, I can't need this,*' look. Rouge has gotten uncomfortably familiar with it in the past few months.

But then Shadow meets her gaze, and the look fades, his entire body relaxing.

Rouge smiles. Shadow doesn't smile back, too tired for his face to change much at all, but he squeezes her hand in return. His hands are cold but his grip is strong, the rough skin of his paw pads a grounding pressure against her own.

It only takes ten minutes before he's wavering in and out of sleep.

"Will he return to optimal function?" Omega inquires, vocal volume as low as he can set it.

Rouge pauses, but nods. She's not sure what Shadow's 'optimal function' *is*, at this point. Will she be able to tell when he's miserable in the future? Will he trust her enough to say so?

"Do you require emotional support?"

She's worried, sure, because something is obviously very wrong and she has *no idea* what-but Shadow hasn't seemed to be concerned, so it's fine, right?

...on the other hand, Shadow's never been one to prioritize his own wellbeing.

Fuck, maybe she does have something to worry about.

Shadow mumbles a few nonsense words, and turns to nuzzle into Rouge's neck. If he's not completely asleep she'll eat her wings; there's no universe in which a conscious Shadow would have done that.

"I don't know," she whispers hoarsely. "I'm gonna mess this up, aren't I?"

Omega stares at her for a moment, then purposefully lets his eye-lights flicker. "Error. Interpersonal relationships do not possess true solutions."

Rouge chuckles bitterly. "True, but there's definitely ways to fuck things up for good."

If she pushes too hard, Shadow will pull away. If she doesn't push at all, he might voluntarily become damaged beyond repair.

"...your tendency to carry your allies on your shoulders, though admirable, is often detrimental to your own health. I advise you to trust us, and allow yourself to rest. Even if we

have not earned it." Omega inclines his head at Shadow. "Even if we have actively spurned it."

Rouge frowns.

"Shadow has let himself fall before, but he is capable of caring for himself. It is your presence, not your aid, that keeps him from repeating the past."

"What if I'm not enough," Rouge replies, in a voice so tiny it doesn't sound like hers anymore. It sounds like a stupid little girl she left behind years ago. "No one's ever- I don't know-" she takes a sharp breath, air stinging her lungs, and a question that's been bugging her for ages bubbles to the surface. "Why didn't *you* stay?"

*Why did you leave me?*

"Rouge." Omega's voice remains as metallic as ever, but he pivots his head to look directly at her. "My departure was unrelated to our living arrangement. I wished to pursue more adventures. You needed to recuperate. As such, I felt that I... was counterproductive to have nearby."

"Oh. I never thought..."

The few weeks after Metal Overlord are nothing but a strangely-hued blur, but Rouge doesn't think Omega made it worse. Without him, she might've stopped eating altogether. Or given up sleeping, when her nightmares got so bad she detested closing her eyes.

Omega leaving may have been a wake-up call to piece herself back together, but that doesn't mean it hurt any less.

"I may have been mistaken. My apologies."

"It's fine," Rouge mumbles. She shouldn't have made such a big deal over it, anyway.

Omega came *back*. That's what counts.

"So you think he'll be okay?" She asks, just to be sure. She's not taking any chances. Not this time. "Even if I'm not perfect?"

Omega looks down at Shadow, then refocuses his optical processes on Rouge. Omega's internal core whirrs, harmonizing with Shadow's quiet purr. "Yes. I am positive everything will work out."

## Chapter End Notes

okay quick psa (I blame adventure of sonic the hedgehog): Shadow's disability is not the issue. his trust issues resulting from past abuse and medical neglect are the issue. im

trying really hard not to write inspiration porn here but I wrote this chapter while having a "get home and crash" kinda day myself and so I'm worried it might come across that way? so yeah if that's what you're here for fuck off <3

everyone else, thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed and I'll see you in chapter six :)

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

you thought I was only projecting onto shadow??? ha! think again!

I had so much fun designing my own mobian holiday, im not even kidding

content warnings: past shitty parenting, panic attacks, swearing

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

"I have returned to experience the celebration of what many have deemed, 'a festival.'"

Rouge blinks, pausing in her mission to devour all the rice before Shadow and Omega start throwing it at each other. "Oh. The festival."

"What's a festival," Shadow asks irritably, like he can somehow predict he's not going to get an answer. He's already finished eating, and is eyeing the spoons with an expression that means he's thinking of using them as tiny swords.

"Yes. The festival."

Rouge glares at Omega. Omega stares back, slowly propping his elbows on the table to rest his head against one giant knife-hand.

"Seriously, what is it," Shadow repeats.

Neither of them respond, engaged in their terribly one-sided staring contest because robots don't fucking *blink*.

Shadow groans dramatically, picking up his phone. He taps a few times, then raises the device to his ear. A tiny ringing emits from the speaker.

"Relent," Rouge hisses at the robot, not breaking eye contact.

"Negative." Omega responds instantly, giving up his image of relaxation in favor of slamming both hands onto the table.

The ringing ceases and Shadow says, "Hello. Are you busy? ...good, because I have a question..." Shadow turns away, and Rouge begins to tune him out. She's in the home stretch, now.

"I wish to partake in mobian celebrations, Rouge," Omega says, somehow turning the innocent statement into something threatening.

"Yeah, and I *don't*," Rouge growls.

She hasn't celebrated the holiday since she was sixteen, back before she packed a suitcase and skipped town without leaving so much as a note. To this day, she has no idea if anyone noticed. Or cared.

"...please?" Omega ventures, eyes softening to a pink glow.

Rouge lasts about three seconds. "Fine," she snaps, crossing her arms petulantly. "You win, turn those puppy dog eyes off. But we'll have to leave soon, I think it starts at sunset."

It absolutely starts at sunset. She's well-versed in this holiday, not that anyone else needs to know that.

Omega pumps his fist in the air, slamming a hole into the ceiling. "Victory," he beeps, drywall showering down around his head.

Rouge snorts. Just like old times.

She glances over at Shadow, who's speaking quietly into the receiver with a hint of a smile in his voice. Shadow notices her gaze on him, and ends the call with, "I have to go, Rouge finally lost. See you there."

She resists the temptation to run over and flick him in the forehead. "You coming?"

Shadow rolls his eyes, but hops up to grab his purse. "Since you both so graciously explained what we're doing, sure."

"My information on the subject is minimal," Omega replies.

"Doesn't matter," Rouge says shortly, when they both look at her for her excuse. "It's like a big dumb party in the street. Let's go."

----

The city is awash with lights, from the moment they step out into the freezing night air. Paper lanterns are strung from every available rooftop and light post, illuminating the path to the inner city.

A flow of people bustles around them, all heading in the same direction, cars forgone to make room for the crowd that fills the streets and sidewalks alike. Mostly mobians, but plenty of humans, too- a lot more than she remembers. This holiday must've grown in popularity in recent years.

Shadow fluffs up immediately, ears flattening like an angry kitten. She probably should've grabbed them all coats, she realizes, wrapping her arms around herself.

"They sell winter clothes there, don't worry," she says, taking the lead in an attempt to ward off the chill.

Omega jogs up next to her and initiates his flamethrower hand, a small flame dancing above his palm. Rouge leans closer, but far less than she normally would. She's still mad at him, although she knows deep down that she's being unfair.

He and Shadow deserve the chance to enjoy this. It's not their fault she can't.

"Who does?" Shadow asks, forcing his way between both of them to hog the warmth.

Rouge mercilessly elbows him in the gut and reclaims her position. "Everyone. You'll see."

Shadow doubles over, wheezing. He kicks out at her leg as she walks past, because everyone in this group fights dirtier than an abandoned subway station. Rouge stumbles, grabbing onto Omega's arm for balance.

"Oh, so that's how it's gonna be," she says casually. Then she snaps her wings out and *throws* herself at Shadow, heedless of any injury this might incur on either of them. This subway has left the station, to hell with the broken track.

Shadow yelps, spinning just in time to avoid the attack. He clambers up Omega's back for safety, balancing precariously atop the robot's shoulder.

Rouge pops her head out of the snowbank she chucked herself into. Her ears sting with the cold, but there's a laugh bubbling up in her chest. Shadow grins back at her, before catching himself and smothering it down into a small (but no less smug) smirk.

"You are both behaving erratically," Omega says approvingly. He increases the flame so they all can share, now barely small enough not to be considered a health risk.

Somehow, they make it to the main square.

Mismatched tents and stalls line the sides of the streets, the paper lanterns more plentiful than ever. The fountain, at the center of everything, is covered in candles of all shapes and sizes. As they watch, people walk up to it, adding their own contributions, leaving them on the cobblestones now that there's no room left on the fountain itself.

Above it all dances one large flame, sustained by magic.

"Welcome to the Firelight Festival," Rouge says, spreading her arms tiredly.

If Shadow and Omega pick up on her mood, it doesn't dampen theirs, both of them staring up at the sparkling sky with wide eyes.

A stall catches her attention, blankets piled high on every table. "There," she nods at it and takes off, not waiting to see if the other two follow her.

She buys three blankets. Omega doesn't need one, but he'll appreciate the gesture. All three are woven in the traditional Firelight style: red and orange fabric, with silver embroidery

portraying flames around the edges and a chao in the center.

Rouge uncomfortably wraps one around her shoulders. She remembers her father doing the same thing for her, back when she was so little it hindered all movement. He'd picked her up, carried her on his shoulders all throughout the night, blanket flying around the two of them like a cloak...

"You okay?" Says a voice, and Rouge jumps, nearly dropping the other two coverings.

"Doin' great, doll," she lies, tossing the bundle of cloth at Shadow. "Here, now we won't freeze."

She hops onto Omega's other arm, letting the robot choose their destination while Shadow drapes one blanket around himself, and hooks the other into Omega's armor, securing it tightly so the bustling crowd won't knock it loose.

"What are they- *we* celebrating?" Shadow asks her, squishing the fabric between his fingers.

Rouge shrugs. "It's misnamed, actually. The whole point of the festival is to melt the ice of nearby water sources, like rivers and fountains. Something about keeping Chaos and the rest of the chao happy. But somewhere along the line, people decided the 'fire' part was more fun than the 'freezing water' part."

"Still," she adds, "at the end of the night, most people head to the beach and throw the lanterns in. Huge waste problem, really. The coast guard hates it."

A group of children runs by them, waving sparklers without care for who they may light on fire.

Rouge sighs, reaching out to whack a lantern as they pass under it. It bobs dangerously, but stays attached to its strand. "It's all so much bigger than I remember," she whispers.

The road was never quite *this* busy, before. They'd had room to walk, to dance.

"Likely due to the recent reappearance of Chaos," Omega says. "A desire to appease the gods."

Rouge forces a smile. "Yeah, maybe."

"Lots of vendors are selling sweets," Shadow says, diverting the conversation.

Omega nods. "Adjusting route. New mission: obtain sugary foods for Shadow."

----

They get separated later in the night.

Omega drops them off at a candle shop, and when asked where he's going, says, "It will be a surprise. I will reconvene with you later."

Then she and Shadow bump into the entire Sonic crew: Tails, Sonic, Amy, and Knuckles, and weirdly enough, Cream and Vanilla.

Amy extends an invitation to wander through the city with them, everyone else seconding it and looking as happy and bright as this time of year implies.

Neither of them reply. Rouge feels like she's drowning in the wake of this much hospitality. Shadow is having similar issues; he glances at her for direction, silently tilting his head.

"You go," she blurts out, uncharacteristically uncomfortable with everyone's eyes on her. She shoves Shadow's shoulder, pushing him into the group. He belongs with them. She doesn't. "I'll catch up later."

Shadow keeps looking at her, a bit concerned.

Rouge waves her hand impatiently, launching into a tirade before he can question her emotional state. "Go, shoo, get. I have stuff to do."

Although Shadow still seems like he wants to protest, his attention is quickly diverted when Amy tucks an orange flower into his quills and Sonic grabs his arm to lead him away, the three of them swiftly becoming lost in the crowd.

The younger kids chase after them, taking to the skies to locate their targets.

Leaving Rouge alone with Knuckles and Vanilla, each looking at her with expressions that are oddly sympathetic.

"What," she snaps, crossing her arms. Her mood soured the instant Shadow left; she's not feeling up to feigning polite conversation.

Knuckles frowns. "You can come with us too, you know. I don't... actually hate you,"

Before Rouge can respond (what would she even say? thank you?), Vanilla nods. "Yes, this is a day for togetherness. Shadow's such a sweet child, I'd love to know his sister."

Rouge chokes on absolutely nothing. "I'm not- uh-" wait, is she- "We're not related."

She would've thought that was obvious, what with the whole 'hedgehog vs bat' thing. Though, come to think of it, Shadow doesn't exactly look like a normal hedgehog, from his fangs and pointy ears to his tail and patterned fur.

"Oh. I could've sworn-"

Knuckles speaks over the rabbit's musings and Rouge's never felt more blessed in her life. "Seriously, bat girl. You don't have to be a loner."

Rouge hesitates. Really, honestly hesitates.



She doesn't belong, but maybe she could. If she tried.

A child bursts into tears a few feet away. Their parent starts to fret, wrapping a brightly colored scarf around a scraped knee and pressing a kiss to the child's forehead.

"I have to go," Rouge says. Her voice sounds far away, disjointed from herself. She's speaking in spite of her silver tongue, instead of using it, suddenly unable to bend it to her will. "Sorry, I- I can't, thank you for the invitation, but I have to- I can't-"

Oh, sweet chaos, she can't steady her voice, or her hands, body shaking in a way that has nothing to do with the cold. Knuckles, clearly alarmed, says something that she can't process. There's another emotion, too, but she doesn't recognize it. Only alarm, like she just stole his emerald.

Rouge can't breathe. She broke her facade. They know she's a phony now, that she's crazy, and she *can't*-

There are people all around her, strangers she doesn't know the first thing about, but that pales in comparison to her need to escape. She turns, and runs, boots thudding against the cobblestones, because it's less weird to flee than it is to have a breakdown.

Her wings extend, a mind of their own, leathery skin skimming the heads of unlucky passerby in the few seconds before she's *flying*. Excited murmurs follow her into the air, children reaching up to brush their fingers against her wings before she's gone, seeking shelter on the rooftops.

Rouge falls, rather than lands, atop the nearest building. Her ankles wobble- she's still shaking, it might even be worse than before- and she sinks to the ground, bracing her head between her knees.

She gasps in air, failing to remember any breathing techniques from the one(1) therapy session she managed to attend over two years ago. Go figure.

What the *fuck* was that?

She's always so controlled, refusing to show anything but the persona she's carefully constructed. The one time she actually needs it for more than just a cheap laugh and she just- just breaks down like a house of cards.

The freezing air stings her lungs. Stupid holiday. Stupid cold. Stupid memories.

Rouge tugs the blanket closer to herself. It's a wonder she managed to hold onto it. She sniffs, rubbing at the droplets of frost that have solidified in her fur. What a pain.

She scoots over to the edge of the roof, hooking her arms over the side. People still swarm, her flashy exit already forgotten. She can't make out anyone specific in the crowd, except for Omega, who's way down at a fireworks stand. That... might be an issue. Or really fun.

She lets her gaze drift, across the passerby below and up to the stars above. She watches until her tears freeze over and the streets clear, until her fingers are the same temperature as the air

and her breaths are too cold to warm them.

People watching is addicting, apparently.

This is something her father had never done. He was always focused on the destination, and as she realized later, on himself.

Ugh. Maybe she's been out here too long.

"Hey."

Rouge nearly topples off the roof. She whips her head around to see Shadow skating up beside her.

Shadow quietly sits down next to her. Rouge shivers involuntarily. Shadow throws his own blanket around both of their shoulders, pressing close and adding his warmth to hers.

He still has the flower (a lily, she thinks), but it's been joined by several brightly colored ribbons, braided through his quills. Fire colors, mostly, just orange and yellow since he already has red, but within them lies one streak of blue, striking and impossible to miss.

Sonic is *very* lucky Shadow doesn't know a thing about this holiday's traditions.

"Did you have a good night?" Rouge asks.

Shadow nods. "It was fun. Did you?"

Rouge shrugs, internally wondering if Vanilla and Knuckles kept quiet about her freak-out. "I only tagged along for you two. Don't worry about me."

Shadow frowns.

"How'd you find me?" She asks, changing the subject.

"I looked up." Shadow twirls one of his rings. He's watching the crowd, not her, but that's fine because she doesn't feel like making eye contact right now anyway. "I know why you didn't want to do this."

Rouge brings her wing up to wrap around his back. It's freezing, like the rest of her. Shadow doesn't comment. "You do?"

"Sonic told me this is something people traditionally do with family. I know that's a sore subject for you."

...well, damn. She needs to start giving this kid more credit. Or get better at hiding things.

"Anyway," Shadow shrugs, shoulder knocking against hers. "Just so you know... you're my family, Rouge." He ducks his head, ears flattening, and refuses to look up and face her shocked expression. "And I'm willing to be yours, too. If you want."

"I, um-" Rouge swallows. Gosh, her throat hurts all of a sudden. "Yeah."

Shadow smiles, glancing at her without moving his head. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," she repeats, not sure what the shit she's supposed to be saying. "I'd like that."

"...are you crying?"

"No," Rouge says, crying. "Fuck off."

Shadow rolls his eyes, and tilts his head into hers. He doesn't call her a liar, even as she sniffles pathetically and wipes tears out of her fur.

They watch the stars and the people below until Omega messages them, asking to meet at the beach, to, quote, *"light a substantial amount of shit on fire."*

Shadow stands, offering Rouge his hand.

She takes it, then returns the favor by scooping him up and hopping off the building.

"Rouge!" Shadow screams, clutching onto her shoulders as they plummet. Windows and brick walls blur together. The people gathered below look up and yelp, Rouge's wingspan blotting out the lanterns. "Don't fucking-"

"Hold this!" She yells, flapping her wings a few seconds before they would've splattered onto the street. Shadow's light enough that she can carry him one-handedly, using the other to snag a lantern off a string and shove it into his chest.

Surprisingly, Shadow manages not to drop it, even as he shrieks obscenities at her.

Rouge laughs, and flies faster.

## Chapter End Notes

well, here we are. I finally managed to complete a multichapter fic. thanks for sticking with me :)

if yall have like. questions? or anything? please feel free? also feel free to tell me if there's anything you want me to write more of!

seriously thank you again to everyone who read through to the end. it means so much to me that people like my rambles, I never would've finished this otherwise. I love yall <3

## End Notes

yell at me on tumblr, im @cozyqueerchaos

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