Sleepwalking

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Summary

'There is a strong arm curled around his torso, the appendage keeping him close to its owner, whose warm breath is ghosting over the back of his neck. Sonic is sure he went to bed alone the previous night, but he isn't worried about the intruder. After all, this isn't the first time this has happened...'

Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own any of the characters from the Sonic the Hedgehog franchise.
With a yawn, Sonic opens his eyes, sleep slowly releasing his mind from its strong hold.

Though sleep definitely isn't the only thing that's holding him.

There is a strong arm curled around his torso, the appendage keeping him close to its owner, whose warm breath is ghosting over the back of his neck. Sonic is sure he went to bed alone the previous night, but he isn't worried about the intruder. After all, this isn't the first time this has happened...

He closes his eyes again, sighing contently, for now just letting himself bask in the pleasant body warmth of his bed companion. He doesn't bother to look over his shoulder to take a look at the person; he's perfectly aware it's Shadow.

The hero lets out a quite chuckle, recalling the memory of his first time waking up like this; the first morning, he was startled by waking up to someone holding him tightly and thus his quills bristled instinctively—which, in turned, caused a rather unpleasant awakening to his rival.

Though it was pretty funny now when he looks back at it—neither he nor Shadow knew how the agent had gotten into his bed in the first place, so they argued for about an hour whose fault it was until they concluded that their argument was getting nowhere and Shadow left.

However, the next day the event repeated and Sonic found himself awakened in Shadow's hold once more. Luckily, this time he didn't panic so Shadow didn't need to deal with quills stuck in his face. And even though he had expected it, this time they didn't argue at all; Shadow just left without a word to him, almost breaking the front door from sheer force on his way out.

And because Sonic had a feeling that wouldn't be the last time this strange event would occur, he made sure to stay awake for as long as he could that night—to finally see how was Shadow even getting into his bed in the first place.

The answer surprised them both.

Shadow suffers from sleepwalking. Or, well, sleep-teleporting as Shadow had actually chaos controlled into his bedroom, but those are just details...

After figuring that out, Sonic didn't try to wake Shadow—he heard that you weren't supposed to wake up sleep-walkers and he'd rather be safe than accidentally cause some damage; so he just guided Shadow into bed, planning to tell him about his finding in the morning. Then he tried to leave the room to sleep on the couch in the living room and leave his bed to Shadow, but the sleep-walking hedgehog wouldn't let him go anywhere—and thus Sonic had to spent yet another night in the same bed as Shadow.

Back in the present—the fourth morning, Sonic lets out a deep sigh; he knows that Shadow will be pissed off once he finds out that they are in the same bed again. Though there isn't much that Sonic
can do about that as even in sleep Shadow has an *insanely* firm grip on his body—he can't *even* get out of Shadow's embrace without awakening the ebony hedgehog.

But despite the whole oddity of the situation, Sonic is actually finding himself kind of *enjoying* the situation. Routine isn't something he'd normally enjoy but having someone sleep in the same bed as him is definitely something he could get used to; there is just something really *comforting* about knowing there is someone beside him, someone that he can snuggle to, someone that will hold him...

Sonic's train of thought comes to an abrupt stop as suddenly the dark arm around his waist tightens for a moment and then goes limp again, his companion stirring slightly. It seems Shadow is waking up.

The hero's suspicion is confirmed when he hears Shadow give a tired grumble—an obvious sign that the agent's waking up.

"Ugh..."

"Good morning, Shads!" Sonic chirps, turning his head slightly to look at the other over his shoulder, his tone cheerful despite knowing his nice morning is most likely about to get ruined—but, hey, one can hope, right?

Shadow's eyes snap open, the crimson orbs immediately locking with his own and Sonic knows that, yes, his morning is about to be ruined.

"You again?" Shadow growls in a low voice, clearly displeased to find himself once again in the hero's bed. The agent sighs and then looks away from him. "This is getting ridiculous..." he huffs and rolls away, clearly not wishing to spent more time around him than necessary, his hand immediately coming up to rummage through his dark head quills to find the Chaos Emerald that has to be there—he couldn't have gotten into the hero's bedroom without it.

For some reason, Sonic suddenly feels cold; even though his blanket, which is still securely wrapped around his body, should definitely be enough to keep him warm. The hero frowns, instinctively wrapping himself up more in the blanket to get rid of the strange cold feeling.

"Hey! Don't talk like if this is *my* fault!" he retorts, his tone coming off slightly angry even if he's not actually intended it. "*You* are the sleepwalker here!" he adds in softer tone.

"Whatever." Shadow shakes his head dismissively, finally taking the gem out of his quills. "But I can promise you that it won't happen again."

Sonic snorts in a mild amusement at the prospect. "Yeah? And how exactly do you—?" Sonic doesn't even have the time to finish before the familiar words 'Chaos Control' echo through the room and Shadow disappears in a flash of light, leaving him alone in his bedroom once again.

For a moment, Sonic just stares at the empty spot, wondering what kind of plan Shadow could have come up with to stop his sleepwalking. However, then Sonic just shakes his head, not able to help himself but chuckle at the prospect again; there is no way that Shadow can control his own sleep-walking as he is, after all, doing it unconsciously...

But, hey, it wouldn't be Shadow if he admitted so...

With a grin, Sonic gets up from his bed and goes to prepare himself for the day, expecting to find himself in his rival's arms the next morning just like for the last four.
But Shadow is obviously too headstrong to break his promise.

Sonic has assumed so from the fact that he woke up alone in his bed the following morning, no signs that the dark hedgehog might have been in the same bed as him during the night.

To be honest, Sonic was kind of disappointed about that.

However, he guesses it is better like this. After all, like this the things between them will get back to how they used to be before all this started and not trod on this odd unknown ground...

...right?

~O~

Sonic rolls over to to his other side for what seems to be a thousand time today, unable to find a comfortable position—just like the night before.

It has been an entire week since Shadow's last sleepwalking 'visit' and even though one would expect he'd get used to sleeping alone again in this time frame, instead the opposite seems to be happening—the more nights he spends alone, the more he finds himself missing sleeping next to Shadow.

It's really starting to annoy him.

Come on! He's been gone for more nights than we had spent together! Just let me sleep, brain... The cobalt hero closes his eyes, giving a loud sigh that coincidentally hides the barely audible creak of an opening door that sounds at the same moment.

Sonic winds the blanket around himself more tightly, hoping that sleep will finally come to claim his tired mind. However, his eyes snap open when the mattress unexpectedly dips slightly and just a moment later there's an arm placed around his waist, pulling him against a strong body.

Sonic turns his head slightly to look at the person behind him to ensure that somebody is actually there and that he isn't imagining things, but the room is too dark for him to make out any details except the vague silhouette of his bed companion.

"Shadow...?" he calls out softly.

Red eyes reveal themselves, barely visible in the dark. However, Sonic would recognize them anywhere. Even though this time they aren't sharp and furious like usually but instead glazed and unfocused—Shadow is obviously in his sleep-walking mode again.

Well, whatever he was doing before obviously isn't working anymore ...Sonic realizes as his semi-conscious counterpart just continues to watch him silently.

Sonic would be lying if he said he's sorry about this turn of events, the smile which graces his lips confirming this. The blue hero lets his head fall onto the pillow again, automatically placing his hand on the striped one that is already resting on his stomach.

"Good night, Shadow."

Shadow's only response is just the agent pulling him even closer.

Letting out a content sigh at finally being in a comfortable position, Sonic closes his eyes, his consciousness slipping away from the reality in a matter of seconds.
"Damn it!"

Those are the exact words that wake Sonic up the next morning.

Even though his body protests against it, he still forces his eyes to open and gaze at Shadow. "Geez, Shadow, do you even have a 'good morning' in your vocabulary?"

"There is nothing good about this morning," Shadow responds as he gets up, automatically reaching into his head-quills to take out his Chaos Emerald.

Surprisingly, Shadow's hand comes out of his quills still empty. Irritation flashes over Shadow's face before it is suddenly replaced by a brief surprise and a short "Damn," leaves the agent.

Sonic raises his brow. "You lost the Emerald?"

"I didn't have it on me when I came here—I had given it to Rouge," Shadow replies, bending down and picking up his hover-skates that Sonic honestly didn't even see him put here—if he should judge by the surprised look Shadow is giving them, Sonic would say neither Shadow had any idea he had put them there. "It seems I ran here..."

Sonic laughs. "It seems you really wanted to see me."

Shadow shoots him a glare, before flopping down to sit on the edge of the bed to put on his skates.

"Don't take it as that I'm unhappy to see you, but..." The mattress shifts slightly as Sonic crawls to Shadow's side and then seats himself right next to the agent "What happened to your 'sleepwalking-fix'?—whatever it was," Sonic questions, his curiosity once again awake when Shadow is too. "I've thought you got it under a control when I haven't seen you for a whole week..."

There is a moment of silence but then... "...I never had it under a control," Shadow admits quietly, Sonic having to strain his ears to even hear it.

Sonic frowns. "But then how did you—?" The rest of Sonic's question remains unheard as he notices something unusual about the other's appearance.

There are noticeable dark circles under Shadow's eyes.

A realization dawns on Sonic. "You haven't been sleeping all this time..." he breathes, shocked.

Shadow shoots him another glare for pointing this out but doesn't deny the statement. Sonic frowns. "Shadow, you don't need to strain yourself like that! I don't really mind this—"

"But I do," Shadow answers firmly, standing up. "I have to stop this from happening—"

"What about finding the reason why it's happening in the first place?" Sonic suggests as he gets up, once again at the same eye-level with his rival. "Or did you have trouble with sleep-walking before?"

"I know why it' happening," the ebony agent responds, turning to leave, "and it's nothing that needs to concern you."

"I think it does," Sonic answers, placing himself between his dark counterpart and the door to prevent the other from leaving. "After all, you keep coming to me."

Shadow growls. "Move out of my way."
"Come on, Shadow! Just tell me and I'll help you solve it! If you were able to deal with this on your own, we wouldn't be having this conversation now, would we?" Sonic gives the ebony agent a smirk, believing his logic to be flawless.

However, Shadow only hisses warningly. "Step aside, hedgehog."

"—Whatever it is, I promise I won't laugh at or mock you because of it!" Sonic promises, believing that the agent's sleep-walking has to be connected to something embarrassing—like, for example, that Shadow might have used to have a teddy-bear that the agent has problem to sleep without and that he's now supposed to be its substitute.

(To be honest, Sonic wouldn't really mind in continuing to act the part of teddy-bear if this was the case—Shadow is surprisingly warm and comfy if given the chance.)

Shadow scowls; he would definitely much prefer if it was a laughing matter—though it probably is for anybody but him. "Hedgehog, I'll warn you one more time—"

"I'm not moving until you tell me," Sonic replies to the other's unfinished threat, crossing his arms over his chest in a gesture of determination.

Shadow's scowl slowly transforms to an emotionless expression, a glint of something dangerous in his eyes. The atmosphere also suddenly feels much heavier than moment ago, Sonic isn't really sure what to think of this sudden change of mood.

"Fine then." The ebony hedgehog makes a step closer, Sonic slightly tensing up as he doesn't know what he should expect from Shadow. A punch to the gut maybe? A punch to face? Or—

But Sonic's line of thought is cut short when Shadow makes his move unexpectedly. The cobalt hero suddenly finds himself being thrown across the room onto his bed, landing onto the soft cushion with a 'thud' just as the familiar 'click' sound of shutting door reaches his ears—an obvious sign that Shadow has just left the room.

As quickly as only a super-fast hedgehog can manage, Sonic jumps to his feet and runs over to the door, swiftly opening it only to see that Shadow is already nowhere in sight.

Shoulders slumping, Sonic sighs. *Alright, you win this round, Shads.*

"Err, Sonic!" Tails' voice sounds from downstairs, making Sonic wonder how did Shadow manage to run past Tails without the fox noticing him. "Did Knuckles drop by when I was still in bed? The door is broken again!"

Which, of course, isn't the only mystery. Why is their door broken in the first—? But before the question could be finished, Sonic's brain has already made the connection on how Shadow managed to get into the house without a Chaos Emerald.

—and you owe me a door, Sonic adds to his previous comment, sighing before walking down the stairs to see how much damage has been done to the door and if it can still be salvaged.

~O~

*I should probably try to make this stop happening...* Sonic muses the following morning, once again held by the sleeping Shadow. *But I don't really want to...*

There are no pros that this action would bring him. There are only cons—he would lose the warmth of the other's body and the feeling of safety that Shadow's presence always induced in him.
Sonic chuckles at the thought. *Shadow making me feel safe? That has to be the most ridiculous statement of the year!* But despite its bizarreness it is true—Shadow makes him feel safe just by being here with him. However, *how* exactly he manages to do that is beyond Sonic.

After weighing the pros and cons it should be pretty clear that stopping Shadow's midnight visits wouldn't be favorable for Sonic, however, the cobalt hero still cannot fight of the feeling that it isn't the right thing to do.

Even if Shadow doesn't want to share with him the reason of his sleep-walking, he still should do something to help the ebony hedgehog get rid of this habit, right? Maybe, if he shows Shadow's sleep-walking self that he's no longer welcome in his bed, it will deter the ebony hedgehog from going back to him...

*It's my duty to help him,* Sonic reminds himself, his fingers absent-mindedly playing with Shadow's white chest-fur. *It's the right thing to do.*

But then why does he still feel reluctant about doing so?

~O~

But some things are easier said than done.

And apparently convincing a sleeping-walking person to stop doing something is one of them.

The semi-conscious hedgehog frowns in confusion. "...No?"

"No," Sonic repeats his previous statement, making sure to keep the ebony hedgehog at an arm length away from him; otherwise, Shadow would surely try to grab him and there is no escaping the ebony agent once that happens—a sleep-walking Shadow is *extremely* clingy Shadow.

"...Why?" Shadow asks, his expression utterly perplexed, his partly-sleeping brain apparently unable to come up with a reason why Sonic would suddenly change his mind about the two of them sharing a bed.

"Er...because..." Sonic starts, his brain racing thousands miles per hour to find a reason that would be enough for the parasomniac hedgehog. "Because...you don't really want this."

"What...?" the ebony hedgehog grimaces, making the blue hero wonder if Shadow even understands what he is telling him or if the sleeping-walking hedgehog is just saying random words that somehow fit into the conversation.

"You dislike me—remember?" Sonic tries, gesturing with his hands to emphasize his point. "You always try to avoid me at all cost! Well, at least when you are awake..."

Shadow just continues to stare at him, dark eye-ridges furrowed in confusion. "I don't dislike you..."

"I beg to differ," Sonic responds, crossing his arms over his chest a bit defensively.

"I don't dislike you," Shadow insists, his tone getting a vexed edge that makes Sonic wonder if the ebony agent has just woken up. But judging by the far-away look in Shadow's eyes that isn't the case.

It's really unsettling how much awake the ebony hedgehog seems...
Sonic sighs and shakes his head. He's never thought he would be explaining to Shadow that he's supposed to hate him. But here he is. "You don't like me! Why else would you insult me all the—"

Sonic barely dodges the dark hand that reaches for him. "—Hey! Stop that! I'm trying to talk some sense into you!"

The ebony agent frowns at Sonic avoiding his touch and makes another attempt to grab the cobalt hero; Sonic just dodges his hand once again.

The hero hisses. "Hey! Are you even listening to me?!"

There is no reply. Shadow just scowls and then unexpectedly lunges forward, tackling his blue counterpart to the bed, Sonic yelping in surprise at the unexpected swift move from the usually sluggish parasomniac.

"Hey! Let me go!" Sonic immediately starts to thrash in the other's hold, the cobalt hero not willing to give up without a proper fight. However, Shadow just tightens his hold, seemingly not bothered by fact that there are two peach hands trying to force him away. The semi-conscious hedgehog just closes his eyes, giving a clear sign he doesn't care about Sonic wanting to make him see reason, sleep being the only thing on the ebony hedgehog's mind.

Nonetheless, Sonic continues his struggle, because he simply refuses to go down without a fight. "Dammit, Shads! Why won't you ever let me help you?!"

Shadow mumbles something in response, the event catching the blue hero's attention and making him cease in his movements in order to focus on what the ebony hedgehog is saying.

"—hold you then."

Sonic blinks in confusion at these words, realizing he probably hasn't heard some important information that preceded in this sentence. "Err, Shads, could you repeat that? I haven't quite caught it the first time."

Quiet snoring is Sonic's only answer.

*Oh, come on! Right now?!* Sonic groans internally at Shadow's choice of time of (truly) falling asleep. The ebony agent's expression is for once peaceful, his usual scowl nowhere to be found. The blue hero can't help but sigh at the sight. *You know, Shads, you are making it really difficult for me to help you...*

*Or maybe he doesn't want to be helped...* a voice at the back of Sonic's mind comments, Sonic having to admit it is likely right—after all, Shadow refuses to share with him the reason for his sleep-walking. However, even if it was true Sonic would still refuse to give up on Shadow. He would never give up on anyone.

The cobalt hero stares at the other's relaxed face for a moment longer before he closes his own eyes and lets himself succumb to his own sleepiness.

He can always try again tomorrow, after all.

Chapter End Notes
Sonic is slightly surprised to find his bed devoid of Shadow's presence the following morning—usually he is the one to first wake up—but he doesn't think much of it; he's probably just slept a bit longer because of the whole 'spending the entire night trying to make the sleepwalking Shadow see reason' thing.

Which didn't really go as planned, unfortunately.

The cobalt hero jumps out of his bed and then stretches his body to get rid of the stiffness, hearing a couple of 'pop's as his joints crack. Letting out a content sigh, he lets his arms fall back to his sides.

Then he proceeds with carrying out his morning routine.

Just ten minutes later Sonic is already showered, clothed and walking down the stairs. Planning to get some breakfast, he enters the kitchen, his eyes immediately zeroing themselves on the other occupant of the room—Tails who seems to already preparing something on the stove, his back turned to the door.

Sonic grins as he steps further into the kitchen. "Morning, Tails! What's for breakfast?"

There is no reply.

"Tails?" Sonic calls out louder, but the younger Mobian doesn't seem to register his presence even this time—and so Sonic walks closer and waves his hand right before Tails' face. "Hey! Mobius to Tails!"

Suddenly, Tails lurches backwards with an alarmed shout, flailing his arms in panic, Sonic barely avoiding getting hit by the frying pan (and hot flying food) that is still in the young inventor's grasp. Though Tails stops the moment he notices it's just Sonic.

"GEEZ, SONIC, DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT!" Tails shouts just a little too loud.

Sonic immediately covers his ears in attempt to save his hearing. "Hey, no need to shout, buddy! I'm not deaf yet!"

"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? I CAN'T—Oh!" Tails quickly sets the now empty pan back on the stove, the pan's formerly contents currently decorating the kitchen ceiling—Hmm, pancakes, one of his favorites—and then reaches into his own ears and takes out something that appears to be a pair of very technological looking ear-plugs. "Oh, I'm sorry for yelling! I forgot I had these in!"

"Ugh, let's hope not much damage has been done," Sonic mutters as he taps his left ear, slightly annoyed by the ringing in it—hopefully, it will go away soon. "Why did you have ear-plugs stuffed in your ears anyway?"

"I'm testing if they are absolutely sound-proof," Tails replies as he sets the topic of their conversation aside on the kitchen counter and reaches for the bowl with the pancake mixture to pour some of it on the now empty pan. "So far they seem to be promising."

"Do you need them for a project or something?" Sonic questions, picking up one to examine it more
closely; they really seem like something taken straight out of a sci-fi movie.

"..."

"Hmmm?" Sonic turns to the suddenly quiet fox, raising an eye-ridge in question. Why does Tails seem so uncomfortable out of nowhere?

"...I need them so I won't hear things that I'm not supposed to," Tails replies and snatches the device out of Sonic's hands and then the other one off the counter, "I'm going to put them back to my workshop for now. Be right back!"

"Wait a minute!" Sonic immediately side-steps, stretching out one of his arms to block Tails' way. "What do you mean by 'things you are not supposed to hear'?"

"I think that's quite obvious," the younger of the two replies, earning himself only a confused look from the other.

"It actually isn't," Sonic replies, shaking his head.

"Eh..." Tails is clearly reluctant about voicing the reason why he needs those ear-plugs. "Well, I know nothing has really happened yesterday. But I want to be prepared in case you decide something should happen sometime in the future."

Sonic blinks owlishly, feeling even more confused than a moment ago. "I honestly have no idea what you are trying to say, Tails."

"Ugh..." Tails seems very uncomfortable now. "I mean you don't have to worry about me hearing anything when I have these ear-plugs! Though it really would be nice if you warned me in advance to use them—"

"You could make it much easier for both of us if you stopped talking in riddles, Tails," Sonic advises, crossing his arms over his chest.

"...Okay." The young genius takes a deep breath, looking as someone that's about to say something very serious. "You see, last night, I saw...I saw you with Shadow."

"Oh..." is the only thing that leaves Sonic's mouth, the hero not really sure what else to say. Is that what this is about? About Shadow's midnight visit? But how is that relevant to Tails needing ear-plug—

Oh!

"Sweet heavens— NO! You totally got the wrong idea, Tails!" Sonic almost half-shouts as he realizes what Tails must have assumed about the situation. "We're not involved like that!" he continues, making wild gestures with his hands and hoping it'd get his message across.

"It's alright, Sonic! You don't have to deny anything! If being with Shadow makes you happy then I'm happy as well—" Tails replies, wanting to assure Sonic that he is alright with his partner choice—even if it is a male and not female...and even though said male has murderous tendencies from time to time.

You know, any other time Sonic would probably have been grateful for Tails' gesture of acceptance, but at the moment he's too preoccupied with trying to clear out the misunderstanding to truly appreciate it. "We are not a couple!"
"Even if you are friends with benefits—"

"We aren't that either!" Sonic interjects, for a fleeting moment wondering how does Tails even know this term. "Just friends! Honestly!"

There is a questioning look on Tails' face. "...Then why was Shadow here yesterday? In your bed? With you?"

"Well..." the blue hero trails off, unsure how to explain their extraordinary situation without it sounding absolutely ridiculous. "Okay, the reason is...Shadow is suffering from sleepwalking—and for some unknown reason anytime he sleepwalks he comes here and sneaks into my bed—but nothing else happens!"

...Well, that has definitely come out worse than it's sounded in Sonic's head.

And Tails clearly thinks the same. "So, Shadow comes all the way from Club Rouge...just to sleep in the same bed like you?" he questions, the young inventor's skepticism obvious in his tone.

"Pretty much." Nodding, Sonic rubs his the back of his neck and gives a nervous laugh. Chaos, why it is always him who gets into such weird situations? "Though that actually happened only once, he usually teleports into my room..." he adds after a small pause, knowing it to be a bad move the moment Tails' brows furrow ever so slightly.

There is a tense moment of silence before Tails speaks up again, sounding even more doubtful than the first time.

"...Do you really expect me to believe that?" he asks, the question even accompanied by a raise of an eye-ridge in the 'are you pulling my leg?' manner.

"I know it sounds ridiculous—Heck! I wouldn't believe myself either!" Sonic says, fully understanding his friend's skepticism—after all, the whole predicament is absolutely bizarre. But then again... "But it's true!"

Tails just stares at him with an impassive expression for a moment and then sighs. "There's no need to come up with crazy stories, Sonic—You're not prepared to admit it publicly. I fully understand that." With these words and a small nod the young genius turns around, most likely headed for his workshop.

Sonic only stares and gapes at his friend in shock. "I-I'm serious!"

"Of course, you are!" Tails calls back, his tone clearly saying that he doesn't believe a word he's saying. Sonic only continues to watch the retreating back of his best-friend, having no idea what else to say to convince Tails that he's not lying.

To be honest, he would have never imagined that he would be spending the morning convincing Tails (and failing on it) that he and Shadow aren't secretly dating.

'FLOP.'

—or cleaning the floor of remains of the breakfast.

He sighs, wondering if other people out there are having such a difficult morning just like him.

~O~
Unfortunately for a certain dark hedgehog, the answer is a 'yes'.

"Where the hell are you?! You should have been here fifteen minutes ago!" Shadow hisses over his communicator, his bad mood possible to be sensed even on the other side of the line.

"Oh, my. It sounds like somebody woke up on the wrong side of the bed today," Rouge comments, obviously in no way affected by her colleague's harsh tone—they had known each other for too long for it to have any effect on her anymore.

More like on the wrong bed altogether, Shadow comments internally before focusing back on whatever Rouge's saying.

"—Don't worry, sunshine. I'll be there in a few minutes!"

"You better," he says and closes the line. Red eyes sweep over his surroundings to ensure no robots have appeared yet. And truly the forest is still be devoid of the metallic creatures; it seems that Dr. Eggman's security system hasn't detected his presence yet—which is good as the mad scientist cannot know about him if their mission is to be successful.

Not wanting to draw attention Shadow remains in his kneeling position behind the bush, his ears regularly turning around to hear any approaching enemy while he waits for his colleague to arrive.

However, there's nothing to be heard beside the chirping of birds and the wind rushing through tree crowns for a couple of minutes. But then there's the sound of fast steps, the sound getting significantly louder with each beat of a foot against the ground. Shadow quickly identifies the most likely source and almost immediately feels a headache slowly forming.

Dear Chaos, just don't spot me—

The steps are really loud now but when they suddenly come to halt, Shadow knows his mission (and life) have just gotten significantly more complicated.

"Hey, Sha—!"

"Down you, fool!" Shadow hisses as he pulls the newcomer down behind the bush as well, the blue hero yelping in surprise at the unexpected action.

"What the—!"

Shadow interrupts Sonic once more—this time by clasping his hand over the cobalt speedster's mouth and then giving the blue hero a hard glare while hissing, "Keep your mouth shut and your head low! We don't want the doctor to notice us!"

"Oh, a secret mission! Cool!" Sonic whispers quietly once Shadow removes his hand, the blue hero immediately using the chance to peek through the bush. "I didn't even know Eggman had a base here!"

There is a light smack to his head, Sonic immediately stopping his attempt on sneaking a look at the base in order to turn around and send a glare to the other hedgehog. "Hey! What was that for?!!"

"For you being stupid. Stop drawing attention," Shadow answers back in a quiet voice, his ears swiveling around to check there still is no one around—or approaching.

"You're no fun," Sonic replies with a pout. Shadow just rolls his eyes at the childish action, deciding to ignore the other for the time being to give Sonic the sign he's not in a mood to talk.
But Sonic has never been one to stay quiet for long.

"Hey, Shads?"

Shadow sighs in exasperation. "What is it now?"

"Yesterday night Tails has kinda seen us together and thinks we are a thing now—just so you know," Sonic says, speaking in a tone one would use to describe the weather and not to share such an important information like this.

"What?!" Shadow barks out, sharply turning to the other hedgehog. "Why the hell do you let him think that?!"

"Hey, don't give me that look! I tried explaining our special situation to him but he thinks I'm pulling his leg!" the blue hero immediately defends himself, but his argument doesn't affect anyhow the glare the dark hedgehog is currently giving him. "I swear!"

Shadow sighs once again as he turns his eyes away from Sonic. "Great. Just great." Then the two fall into silence again, neither of them sure what to say.

But a certain bat knows. "Oh, come on! Talk a little bit more about your special situation. I'm very curious about that."

Both hedgehogs sharply turn to the new voice and see Rouge casually sitting on a tree branch, giving them a too-innocent grin. "Oh, please, don't mind me. You can continue your conversation," Rouge states, making a small 'return to what you were doing before' gesture with her hand.

Shadow sighs in annoyance once again. "For how long have you been sitting there?"

The white bat just shrugs her shoulders. "Apparently not long enough. I missed the juiciest part of your conversation as it seems," Rouge replies, giving them a wink before turning her teal eyes away from them to stare at the metal structure hidden among the trees. "Based on my information Doctor Eggman is in the Westopolis at the moment, so we should have enough time to retrieve the project."

"What project?" Sonic immediately asks.

However, it just earns himself the same response from both agents. "That's classified."

Sonic lets out a small huff of annoyance. "Geez, you agents and your secretiveness," he comments, before peeking over the edge of the bush, at the same time watching Shadow out of the corner of his eye to ensure he won't be smacked again. "Is this a stealth mission or can I destroy a few robot heads?"

"Once we get the project you can do whatever you want. But until then, you'll behave," Shadow replies, the blue hero rolling his eyes at the other hedgehog's remark.

"Sure thing, mother! Let's roll!" With these words Sonic leaves their hiding place and heads straight for the lair, obviously not caring that there might be hidden cameras around.

Shadow sighs. Again. "This hedgehog will be the death of me one day," he comments, giving an unhappy frown.

Rouge's only reply is a laugh.
It has been only five minutes since they started searching for the secret project and Sonic is slowly but steadily growing more bored with each passed hasn't-found-the-project-yet minute. Plus the lair is weirdly cold even though it's a summer already and it's really irking him. Have they accidentally stepped into a freezer or something?

Sonic rubs his hands together to create some heat. The action brings him only temporary relief from the cold before he is once again attacked by the freezing air that makes him shudder. It really feels just like in winter. A hot cocoa would definitely feel nice now.

Green eyes turn to stare at the other person in the room—which happens to be Shadow, who is at the moment is searching for the secret project at the other side of the laboratory. Apart from him, the dark hedgehog doesn't seem to be bothered by the low temperature at all. Sonic kinda envies him that.

"Have you found anything yet?"

"Do you think I would still be here if I did?" Shadow replies with a question of his own, not averting his gaze from his search even for a moment.

Sonic frowns at the answer; he's hoped that he could strike a conversation with Shadow. He hates just standing around doing nothing. "...You know, if you told me what it looks like, I could help you with searching for it."

"I already told you that's classified."

"Oh, come on! I'm freezing! Just tell me what it looks like and we can finally get out of here!"

"If you are cold just go, the door is over there." Shadow looks up from his search for a moment to point at the aforementioned door behind him.

Sonic smirks. "You're not getting rid of me so easily, Shads!"

~O~

Why am I not surprised? Shadow mutters internally, but only gives an eye-roll in the real world. Of course, Sonic wouldn't—

Suddenly, there is a body pressed to his side and two fawn arms wrapped around his torso.

Crimson eyes sharply turn to meet emerald ones.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Shadow asks, his tone low and dangerous.

"Using you as my personal heater," Sonic replies matter-of-factly, seemingly not bothered by the dangerous glint in the other hedgehog's eyes. "I think it's time you return the favor, don't ya think?"

Sonic gives him a toothed grin, while Shadow himself frowns at the other's subtle implication of his midnight visits.

"If you wish to keep all your limbs attached to your body, hedgehog, I advice you to let me go. Now."

"Not happening!" Sonic replies with a defiant grin, the blue hero obviously enjoying riling him up—he always does.

Shadow's glare intensifies, his voice dropping even lower in warning. "You are playing with fire, hedgehog."
However, the warning only makes Sonic's grin stretch even more. "I don't mind getting burnt a bit."

The two continue to stare each other down, the burning crimson rubies and the calm emerald eye not breaking the eye-contact for a moment. Not even when their owners start to lean closer, not even when their faces are mere inches apart—

But then Shadow forces himself to turn away, breaking the strange trance. "The project is a small metal ball about this size," the dark agent shows the approximate size of the project with his hands. "Now make yourself useful and go search for it."

Sonic blinks a few times, not really sure what has just happened but deciding it doesn't matter at the moment and so he brushes it off.

"Roger, captain!" The blue hero gives a short salute before running off to the other side of the room to search for the project.

What the hell is wrong with me?! Shadow growls internally in frustration the moment the other's gone, turning back to the working table and then shoving away a portion of projects covering the table with bit more force than necessary, sending a few items to the ground with the action.

A loud crashing sound of something breaking on the hard floor echoes through the spacious laboratory soon after. He feels Sonic's questioning gaze at the back of his head just a moment later but he doesn't bother to explain himself. Sonic can go to hell for all he cares!

...At least in that case, his brain would finally stop bringing up the beautiful-sounding lie that he could have a happy life if he choose to give in his feelings for Sonic.

—Which would be an absolutely stupid course of action to take in his opinion.

Shadow is logical person; he makes decisions based on facts, not on feelings—no matter how loud they might scream at him. Sonic would be a great match, there's no doubt in that—he's kind, smart, strong, supportive—anybody in the right state of mind would be delighted to have the blue hero as their partner.

Except him.

Because Sonic has a flaw that he just cannot overlook, a flaw which no ordinary person would ever see.

This flaw is mortality.

To ordinary person Sonic being mortal wouldn't matter, as many would say 'Everybody has a limited amount of time in this world,'—everybody will die of old age one day—everybody except him—the Ultimate Life form, the ageless Life form.

He can never die of natural death, a violent one possibly, but not natural.

Which means that he would have to watch Sonic slowly wither for decades and then one day, without any warning, the blue hero would die, leaving him all alone in the world.

...just like Maria did.

He doesn't want to feel that kind of pain ever again.

And for this reason he cannot allow a such situation like the one that took place just moments ago.
Next time he might not be able to catch himself in time and then—

Shadow shakes his head to get rid of the thought. No there's no chance of that happening. He won't let it happen. Even if his heart will continue making him feel things he doesn't want to feel, even if his treacherous mind will carry on with telling him those mellifluous lies, even if his traitorous body will keep on bringing him to Sonic—he will resist, he won't succumb to this beautiful—but at the same time undoubtedly disastrous—idea.

He won't let his life be controlled by his heart or by the whims of his subconsciousness. He is the one in charge of his life.

He will mercilessly crush his feelings before they have a chance to grow stronger.

With all means necessary.

And with this final thought Shadow returns to his search, determined to fully focus on the task at hand and not to get distracted by the ridiculously attractive hedgehog on the other side of the room.

Unfortunately for Shadow, he hasn't realized that exactly this decision will seal his downfall.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
"You are the most stubborn idiot I have ever met, hedgehog," Shadow mutters, not really caring that the intended receiver of his remark is currently out like a light and thus not really listening him.

No, instead of responding with some witty remark, Sonic continues to stay unconscious, the cobalt form still shivering badly even though he's wrapped in a thick layer of blankets now.

"You're unnecessarily careless, you know that right?" the ebony agent continues as scolding the blue hero helps him to ignore the bothersome worry that has taken permanent residence in the pit of the stomach since the moment he saw Sonic collapsed on the floor only about twenty minutes ago. "Seriously, risking death by hypothermia just to fulfill a mission that's not even your responsibility is utterly stupid..."

Unsurprisingly, he doesn't receive a reply even this time.

Shadow sighs tiredly as he sits down on the bed next to the unresponsive hero, watching his sleeping face intently. *Just what were you trying to prove, hedgehog?*

*That you are the fastest at everything? Even at finding goddamned projects that are none of your concern?*

The ebony agent's mouth forms a thin line. *Or was it something else?*

Crimson eyes travel to the bedside table where the wanted project lies. It was in Sonic's hold when he found him collapsed. Shadow guesses that Sonic found it just a moment before his body gave up on him.

But why did Sonic even go through so much difficulty just to get that project?

...*Were you trying to impress me?*

Shadow shakes his head to get rid of that thought. No, Sonic had probably just been way too careless during his showing off like usually.

"Sha...dow..."

Ruby eyes sharply turn to stare at the hypothermia-affected hedgehog. "Sonic?"

The ebony agent waits for a reaction from the blue hero, but receives none—Sonic's eyes are still closed and no other words leave the peach mouth.

Was it just his imagination...?

Shadow softly touches the other's forehead to see if Sonic is warming up, but notes with a scowl that it is almost as cold when he has brought him here. He hoped the stack of blankets would be enough to warm the hero up as he doesn't really have many other possibilities how to help him. A hot drink is definitely out of question—Sonic is unconscious and pouring it down his throat would most likely end up with the hero suffocating instead. Shadow is also reluctant to risk a warm bath as such drastic change in temperature could make Sonic go into shock.
Shadow frowns as another violent shiver racks the blue and peach body. He would add blankets but he's pretty sure those are all the blankets that Sonic owns—he hasn't been able to find any more no matter how many times he searched the hero's house. (And, unfortunately, the fox kid isn't around to be asked if there even are any other blankets.)

Why did he even take a hero back to his house instead of hospital? He has no idea. In the moment it just seemed as the most reasonable choice—Sonic's house is closer to Doctor's base than the hospital, which meant he could get Sonic warmed up sooner and prevent any possible permanent damage to his tissues from occurring. He wasn't even worried of messing something up—thanks to the extensive training he received from Professor Gerald on the topic of 'Taking care of somebody in a critical condition' aboard the ARK he knows everything necessary to smoothly handle the situation.

Though he still questions why he did take this burden upon himself—given his speed it would take five more minutes at most to get Sonic a medical care from a doctor. Furthermore, taking care of the hero means spending more time in Sonic's presence which definitely won't be favorable in the long run—it will only make him care more for hero. And that's not what he wants.

Just why hasn't he chosen the longer route with getting the hero to a hospital where trained professionals would take care of him?

Because even five minutes can be way too long, his brain explains, probably to justify his actions in his own eyes if he himself doesn't want to acknowledge them as reasonable.

And Shadow has to admit that his brain has a point. Taking those extra five minutes could have doomed Sonic—he couldn't know if Sonic would last that long. Choosing the fastest route undoubtedly gave Sonic the highest chance of survival...

Shadow shakes his head again to clear his mind—this is not the correct time for analyzing his own decisions. Sonic still needs to be taken care of.

And at this moment there is only one more thing that can help Sonic get out his life-threatening state and given the fact there's nobody except them in the house, it seems he'll have to do it himself.

Shadow sighs as he kicks his metal skates off and then takes off his gloves to get rid of all the layers that would block his body heat from being shared. He places the white and black gloves on the bedside table right next to the project that he'll deliver to the GUN later.

The ebony hedgehog raises the thick layer of blankets, the action making Sonic's shiver violently again as the bit of heat that he has been able to gather escapes its cotton prison. But just a moment later Shadow is already slipping under the covers as well, the warmth of his body compensating the loss immediately.

The blue hero turns still for a moment, his sleeping brain obviously unsure how to react to such a sudden change. But as Shadow takes the shivering hedgehog into his arms Sonic's muscles loosen again, the blue hero relaxing once more. And just a moment later Shadow feels Sonic weakly trying to snuggle closer to him in his sleep, the hero's cold-stricken muscles not able to do much in their current state.

Shadow sighs as he places his chin atop the other's spiky head, forcing his legs to tangle with its ice-cold counterparts of his blue rival in order to warm as much area of Sonic's body as possible. Soon after the blue hero starts to hum quietly as the pleasant heat starts to make its way into his tissues, warming them up slowly.

The ebony agent sighs for what seems to be a thousand time today as he tries to unsuccessfully push
down the different kind of warmth that the one which is currently being shared between the two of
them. No, this warmth, this emotion, is currently spreading through his insides like a wildfire, the
instance of holding the blue hero feeling just too good to be ignored.

He shouldn't be feeling this way.

That's not according to the plan.

~O~

Warmth.

That is the first thing Sonic notices when he regains consciousness, the sensation so much different
from the biting cold that surged through his body before.

It hadn't really occurred to him that he couldn't stay in such a cold place without moving for so long.
He is used to dealing with being uncomfortable, even being in pain—he hadn't realized his body
wasn't just in discomfort, but actually in crisis, until it was too late as he has actually never collapsed
because of cold before—an impressive feat given his life being one giant adventure filled with
stopping Dr. Eggman from carrying out his plans, which more than often means staying for days in
extreme climates, like deserts or tundras.

But at least I got the project, Sonic says to himself, smiling slightly, his mind already sliding over the
edge of consciousness to unconsciousness again.

However, just then he realizes that the project is not in his hands, a pang of panic shooting through
his system. His eyes snap open on their own accord and finally allow him to take the first look of his
new surroundings—

—which is at pretty much just an already very familiar black and white chest of Shadow.

Well, that explains why I'm warm, Sonic comments internally, relishing in the sensation of feeling
toasty and nice for a moment before continuing on with his task of finding out where he is.

After a long time of struggling (because, hell, Shadow seriously has an insanely strong grip in his
sleep) the blue hero somehow manages to sit up to comfortably look around the area they are in.

Which is his own room by the looks of it.

—but it could easily also be just some crazy stalker's copy of his own.

But, hey, given all these unique handmade given-as-a-gift blankets that are stacked over the two of
them he guesses the former is the case here.

Shadow must have brought me here... Sonic realizes, turning his gaze to look at the aforementioned
hedgehog.

And almost has a heart-attack when he sees two crimson eyes staring back at him intently, because,
hell, he is 99.99 % sure Shadow was asleep just few seconds ago.

"Oh, h-hey! Had a nice nap?" Sonic asks, stuttering slightly. But, hey, you would be too if
somebody looked at you with such a scorching glare like Shadow.

Said hedgehog looks like he wants to respond with some harsh remark, but, surprisingly, only a
simple 'No' leaves his lips. And right after that the dark agent proceeds with getting up and putting
back on his clothing items, the action causing Sonic to chuckle lightly. *Gosh, we are already staring to fall into routine...*

"Oh...Well, I guess that makes sense—sleeping with an icicle in the bed definitely cannot be comfortable," Sonic jokes to lighten up the atmosphere.

However, it doesn't cause the desired effect as instead Shadow scowls and shoots him another glare. "That's not something you should joke about, hedgehog."

Sonic taps his chin and looks at the ceiling thoughtfully, completely ignoring the other's remark. "Or maybe a popsicle would be more accurate?"

Shadow’s scowl drops only to be replaced by a puzzled look, crimson eyes turning to stare at him in confusion. "...What?"

"You know, 'cause icicles should be pure ice while popsicles are flavored..." Sonic explains, earning himself only a blank look of the 'Are you serious?' kind from the other hedgehog.

"I mean it would make more sense like that, wouldn't it?" Sonic asks, when Shadow continues to just silently stare at him.

The ebony agent shakes his head in disbelief. "...I refuse to deal with this nonsense." And then Shadow grabs the project that is still sitting on the bedside table and heads for the door. Sonic immediately raises his hands in a gesture of surrender when seeing this. "Okay, I get it! You're not in a mood for a philosophical talk about popsicles! I'll stop! No need to leave just yet!"

"Actually, there is, hedgehog. I've wasted enough time with you already and I still have to deliver this," Shadow replies as he turns around, gesturing to the project in his hand. "Rouge is surely already getting scolded for not delivering it and I definitely don't want to hear about how much I owe her for leaving her alone to deal with the Commander's fury."

Sonic frowns slightly as he lets his hands drop back down. "I'm sure she can deal with that for a little bit longer..."

The ebony agent exhales deeply, shaking his head. "Give up, Sonic. We are not friends and don't have to behave like we are. We're just two acquaintances that help each other from time to time." Shadow looks at him, locking their gazes probably to ensure he'll have his full attention and his next words won't fall on deaf ears. "Nothing more, nothing less."

"But I consider you a friend," Sonic protests, earning himself a snort of amusement from Shadow with that remark.

"You consider everybody you meet a friend, hedgehog."

"That's different."

"And how exactly?" Shadow asks, raising an eye-ridge in question. "How am I different from any of those random people you meet?"

"You are a *close* friend," Sonic states, the remark rendering Shadow speechless for some reason. But the dark agent recovers almost immediately, sucking up the air through gritted teeth almost as if he is trying to resist saying something very harsh.

"Don't throw that term around so *carelessly*, hedgehog."
"I'm not throwing anything around! You are a close friend to me!" Sonic repeats himself as he gets off the bed, not liking how weak he feels but still determined to confront Shadow. "And though I might not be a close friend to you. You cannot deny that we are friends—because acquaintances definitely don't risk their lives for each other."

"Allies then," Shadow replies as he crosses his arms over his chest and shrugs his shoulders. "Not much of difference there."

"What was the last time that you choose taking care of your ally for hours when you could have easily dropped the work at some doctors in a hospital?" Sonic asks as he raises an eye-ridge. "I mean—You still have the Emerald, don't you? Getting me there would require a mere thought from you—and yet you chose to take care of me yourself."

"...I left it at home," is the ebony hedgehog's strangely delayed reply, those crimson eyes widening slightly almost as if he just realized something. But just a moment later both Shadow's expression and tone turn neutral once again. "Given your condition it was necessary to get you warm as fast as possible—and it required less time to get to your house than to a hospital just on foot."

Sonic is surprised by this new information. "Well...You still could have called somebody to take care of me..."

Shadow snorts in amusement. "Who? Rose?" A noticeable shiver wrecks Sonic's body and both of them know it's not caused by the cold this time. "Even I am not that cruel. Furthermore, I think she would try to bash my head with her hammer if she learned I let you get hypothermia—and I prefer not having to deal with that."

"I guess I prefer not having to deal with her either..." Sonic mutters quietly, but still loud enough for the ebony hedgehog's enhanced hearing to pick it up.

"So you finally see my point. Now if you excuse me—I still have a project I need to deliver," Shadow finishes and turns to leave, but is a promptly stopped by a warm hand wrapping around his wrist.

"Wait a moment, Shads!"

"What is it now?" Said hedgehog sighs and rolls his eyes in a clear sign of annoyance.

But Sonic ignores it, stretching his mouth into a wide grin. "What would you say about becoming more than allies?"

Yes, he's aware how strange the request sounds, but given Shadow's clear intense dislike of the word 'friend' he doesn't really want to say it in an outright way. And there isn't even any need for that—Shadow is smart enough to figure out on his own what he meant by that.

But strangely, his request causes a panoply of emotions to run across the dark agent's face. But it stops when the ebony hedgehog yanks his wrist free from his hold, Shadow's trademark scowl returning just a moment later. "I think you are misinterpreting the situation, hedgehog. I don't want our relationship to change anyhow."

"But I do," Sonic replies with a confident smirk, fully believing in his persuasion skills. "And you should know by now that if I set my mind to something I'm not stopping until I accomplish it!"

"It seems I'll be your first defeat then, hedgehog."

And with these words Shadow finally leaves the room, neither of them aware they have crossed the
line of 'more than allies' a long time ago.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sonic knows that he should be a) horrified with what the ebony hedgehog managed to do to the kitchen in those two minutes before he went to check up on him or b) worry about what will Tails say once he sees what happened to his beloved kitchen. However, he really cannot bring himself to feel either of those two emotions and so he just settles for laughing.

The cause of his amusement sends him a glare, the other hedgehog crossing his arms in discontent, obviously unhappy that his attempt on trying to help Sonic has only earned him a laugh from the cobalt hero.

Sonic's laugh slowly dies down, but his eyes stay filled with mirth. The blue and peach speedster slowly makes his way over to the ebony sleepwalker, making sure to avoid the puddles of what he assumes is a chicken soup on the floor.

Sonic lets his mouth stretch into a grin once he reaches the dark agent, who still tries to maintain the aura of seriousness despite the fact there are currently soup noodles hanging from his quills—in Sonic's opinion that makes the sight just funnier.

"You know, I don't think Tails will be happy that you pretty much wrecked our kitchen just to make me a soup—which, unfortunately, I won't be able to even taste as it seems," Sonic comments as he looks down at the soup-covered floor and then back up again. "Though I definitely appreciate the gesture."

The semi-conscious hedgehog quietly grumbles something in response, the remark vaguely sounding like, "That goddamn can didn't want to cooperate," but his ears might also be just hearing wrong. The cobalt hero gives his ebony rival a reassuring smile.

"Just go get a shower. I'll take care of this in the meantime, 'kay?"

Shadow grumbles something else, but this time Sonic's ears are unable to decipher the words. However, the parasomniac does as he's been told and heads for the bathroom.

Once the ebony agent is out of the room, Sonic lets out a sigh, looking over the cooking disaster once again. He didn't expect that throwing a casual remark about being hungry would make Shadow think he should go prepare him something—conscious Shadow definitely wouldn't jump so eagerly on an opportunity to help him like this.

The cobalt hero sighs as he unwraps a blanket from around his shoulders and then throws it over the closest chair, his body immediately reacting to the heat loss by shivering—it still hasn't fully recovered from the afternoon.

Sonic walks over to the kitchen counter and takes the roll of paper towels that lies there. He tears a few of them from the roll and squats down to clean the mess, ignoring how his muscles protest against the movement.

"Why are up in the middle of the night?"

Sonic's head snaps up in alarm and his gaze falls onto the speaker—aka a drowsy looking Tails. "Er...I wanted a soup?" Sonic tries, wondering why Tails isn't questioning him about the state of the
kitchen yet. However, this train of thought is completely forgotten when he realizes he's not the only one that should be explaining why he still awake so late into the night. The blue hero stands up, giving Tails a disapproving look. "More importantly why are you still up?"

"I wanted to finish one project. It took longer than I expected," the young genius explains as he brings up his hand to cover his yawning mouth.

"You know that staying up so late is not good for your health, right?" Sonic asks, discarding the used towels and taking new ones.

"And what about you? You're doing the same," Tails replies, rubbing his left eye tiredly.

"I have to make sure Shads doesn't accidentally set the house on fire or something during his sleepwalking," the blue hero explains as he kneels down to continue the cleaning.

Tails blinks surprisedly then frowns. "You're still insisting on that story? Sonic, I already told you that I'm fine with you dating Shadow—You don't have to keep this show up."

Sonic sighs tiredly, looking up from his work. "Tails, I am not keeping up any show! He really is sleepwalking!"

The young fox looks slightly irritated now. But Sonic doesn't think much of it, Tails always gets cranky when he's sleep-deprived. "And where is he then? Shouldn't you be keeping an eye on him right now?"

"He had a little disagreement with a can of soup—as you can see," Sonic gestures to the overall room as the soup's pretty much everywhere. "So he's getting himself cleaned up."

"That's one more reason to keep an eye on him, isn't it? He could get hurt easily in the bathroom—with all the water causing everything to be slippery and such," Tails says with a frown, obviously trying to poke holes in Sonic's story.

The blue hero shrugs his shoulders. "Not really. Even in this state he's managed to get here from Club Rouge without getting himself hurt anyhow, so I think he can handle a simple shower."

The young genius throws his arms into the air in defeat. "Fine! Keep feeding me that story! At least it lets me know you don't think I'll keep your secrets! So much for trusting your friends!" And with these words the young inventor turns around and starts walking away.

Sonic immediately shots up from his position, alarmed because of the indirect accusation but not realizing Tails might have just said it on spur of the moment because of his bad mood.

The blue hero catches his younger friend by his arm and then turns the fox to face him, the young genius looking at him with disinterest in his blue eyes. Sonic immediately decides he doesn't like that expression. "I am really not pulling your leg, buddy! Just wait until Shadow comes back! You'll see I am saying the truth! What about that?"

Tails takes a deep breath and then lets out a sigh of weariness. "Fine."

Sonic copies the action, but in his case it is a sigh of relief. "Thanks, buddy."

The cobalt speedster lets go of the other's arm and instead uses the now free hand to grasp the roll of paper towels and then to offer it to his younger friend. "But let's get this place cleaned up before Shadow returns, 'kay?"
"...He really is sleepwalking," Tails says aloud in a tone of utter disbelief as he waves his hand before Shadow's face, the parasomniac hedgehog clearly not giving a damn about this if his silence is anything to go by. Conscious Shadow definitely would have voiced his displeasure about somebody breaching his personal bubble like this.

(And maybe he would even threaten to cut Tails' hand off if he was in a especially bad mood).

"Told ya~" Sonic singsongs, clearly not concerned with the fact that the ebony hedgehog is currently clinging to him from behind—the scene oddly resembling a child holding onto their dear teddy bear.

Tails actually feels pretty uneasy about the sight—after witnessing dozens of arguments, which really has been nothing but a tirade of hurtful words and occasional punches, of the two hedgehogs seeing the two interact in almost an affectionate way seems just so...wrong.

"For how long has this been happening?" Tails asks, trying to focus on Sonic and not on the fact that the usually cold-heartened agent that has stared nuzzling his brother's neck, Sonic himself seemingly not even noticing the action.

"Something over two weeks now," the cobalt hero replies, subtly nudging Shadow in the ribs with his elbow to give the ebony parasomniac the signal to cut off his caress while at the same time fighting to keep his expression emotionless. He honestly has no idea how to handle Shadow's sudden interest in his neck—the ebony parasomniac hasn't done anything like this before.

Though it definitely doesn't feel bad. Just strange...

...nice kind of strange...

"Do you know the cause of this habit?" Tails asks, drawing Sonic back to the present moment again.

"Well, no. But I asked Shadow about it and he admitted that he knows the reason, but he refuses to tell me."

Tails furrows his eye-ridges in thoughtful manner, clearly pondering over what he has been just told.

"Do you have any idea what it could be?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Sonic shrugs his shoulders, the action (much to Tails' delight) making the ebony sleepwalker finally leave the hero's neck alone. "Though I could try to get the information out of him now—while sleepwalking Shadow isn't as secretive."

"Then what are you waiting for? Try it!" Tails orders, hoping it will solve this situation and he won't have to witness this absolutely weird scene of the two rivals being so close to each other again. The sight is really unsettling.

"Geez, you're even more impatient than me—and that's saying something!" Sonic comments as he gently removes Shadow's arms from around his waist and turns around to be face to face with the parasomniac.

His hands grip the still damp one's of his counterpart, giving them a slight squeeze to ensure Shadow's full attention will be on his persona alone. "Shadow—" The ebony sleepwalker looks at him with those strange glazed eyes of his which today seem to be filled with an emotion that Sonic cannot quite identify. However, the blue hero doesn't think much about it—after all, he's here to ask some questions, not to analyze Shadow's eyes. "—what is the reason for your sleepwalking?"
Both heroes await anxiously the dark agent's response, Shadow now looking like he's pondering over his answer.

"...reason?"

"Yes, what is the reason?" Sonic repeats himself, hoping this time he'll get an answer. Shadow's eye-ridges furrow thoughtfully as he clearly racks his brain for the reason.

"...fear."

"Fear?" The two heroes exchange a surprised look, before Sonic turns his gaze back to Shadow. "Fear of what?"

The parasomniac takes another moment to think of an answer.

"...Of losing you."

"Losing me?" the blue hero repeats, furrowing his eye-ridges in confusion. "Why would you—" But before he can finish the thought, Tails interjects, looking like if he just realized something.

"Sonic, you said Shadow's sleepwalking started about two weeks ago, right?"

"Well, yeah. Why are you asking?" Sonic inquires as he turns to look at the younger Mobian, letting go of the ebony agent's hands in the process.

"Around that date there was this particularly bad battle with Dr. Eggman where you almost got decapitated, right?"

Sonic blinks in confusion, wondering how come Tails remembers it so correctly as him almost getting killed during battles with Dr. Egghead isn't anything extraordinary. "Well, yeah, but I still don't know why you're bringing that up now."

"Could that have triggered Shadow's sleepwalking?"

"Huh?" The blue hero raises his eye-ridge questioningly so Tails immediately dives into explaining.

"I mean he was the one that saved you from that chainsaw, wasn't he? Even though you actually didn't get hurt, the event might have been a traumatic experience for Shadow—It imprinted into his subconsciousness and that's why it keeps making him come here!"

"You mean he's checking up on me?" Sonic asks to confirm if he has understood correctly, the young inventor immediately nodding in response.

The blue hero turns his head to ask for confirmation of this theory from the ebony parasomniac, who has returned to using him as some kind of a giant teddy-bear about two question ago. However, this intention is immediately forgotten when he sees that the dark agent has his head laid on his peach shoulder with eyes half-closed—a clear sign Shadow is just a step from falling into a deep sleep.

Sonic takes it as a cue to end their conversation as the idea of dragging the who-knows-how-many-pounds heavy hedgehog upstairs on his own isn't exactly one he would like to execute. "It seems we'll have to leave this to another time—given the look on Shadow's face I am definitely not getting any more information out of him tonight. But a great theory, Tails! I'll surely question Shadow about it once he's capable of answering! Though I better get him into the bed before he falls asleep completely—getting him upstairs would be much more difficult then. So—sleep tight, buddy!"
"Yeah, you too, Sonic."

And with these good-nights the two brothers part, both wanting to finally get into their beds and sleep.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
From the bed Sonic's green eyes lazily watch as Shadow continues to put on his clothes, an idea on how to subtly inquire about the truthfulness of Tails' theory popping up in the hero's mind.

"Hey, Shads, did you know that sleeping positions have meaning?"

"How can a way of sleeping have any sort of a meaning?" the ebony agent asks as he slips one of his gloves on. "People choose to sleep in a position that they find most comfortable, there's no other reason behind it."

"You find sleeping with face full of my quills as the most comfortable one?" Sonic asks with a slight confusion, referencing to the parasomniac Shadow's spooning habit.

The ebony agent snorts. "Don't mistake my choices for the ones of my sleepwalking self, hedgehog. I'm practically incapable of making sensible decision in that state."

Sonic would like to retort that he surely cannot be that injudicious even while sleepwalking, but then he recalls the yesterday incident during which the sleepwalking Shadow tried to open a can of soup with a chaos spear because he hadn't found a can opener. "I...cannot really argue with that one."

"Of course, you can't," Shadow replies with a self-assurance as he puts on his second glove. "But entertain me—What kind of nonsense does my sleeping position say about me?"

Green eyes lock onto the dark hedgehog once again, watching the agent closely. "...Big spoon preference suggests a big protectiveness of your bedmate," Sonic replies, his eyes catching how Shadow's body uncharacteristically stiffens for a moment. "Strange how can a nonsense be so oddly accurate sometimes, isn't it?"

This time Shadow doesn't let his body language betray his inner state and instead the dark agent turns towards him with an emotionless expression on his face, those crimson eyes hard and unblinking. "What are you insinuating, hedgehog?"

"That you worry about me," he responds directly.

Sonic can say by the flash in the other's eyes that he just hit the nail on the head. However, he knows that Shadow won't admit it so easily when the ebony agent snorts and then, with a definitely fake contempt lacing his voice, replies, "Tsk, me worrying about you? Hedgehog, I care about you as much as about the dirt on my shoes."

And so he gets up and makes his way over to the dark agent, crossing his peach arms over his chest and raising an eye-ridge in a clear sign of doubtfulness. "Oh? That little? How come I'm not currently acting the part of a decorative sculpture in Eggman's freezer then?"

Shadow snorts again. "Because in that case I would get swarmed by your friends demanding an explanation of why I hadn't helped you and also possibly take on your responsibilities of fighting Doctor. And I'd rather deal with taking care of you for a few hours than with any of those pathetic existences."

A spark of anger rush through Sonic's veins upon hearing those words. "What did you just call my
friends...?

"Pathetic, hedgehog, pathetic. Do you need me to spell that out for you?" Shadow taunts him, the remark making the hero's blood boil. Nobody has right to call his friends pathetic! The hero snarls as he open his mouth to retort, his next remark starting what has to be the biggest fight in the time they have known each other.

~O~

Scream at me.

"How dare you call my friends pathetic?!

"How else should I call a bunch of people that never does anything but wait for their beloved hero to save them?"

...

Be mad at me.

"What the heck is your problem, Shadow?!

"You are my problem, hedgehog."

...

Hate me.

"Arrogant asshole!"

"Annoying imbecile!"

~O~

"Mind sharing what was that about?" Rouge asks as she lands down on the rocky road to join her colleague in his walk.

"Yes," is Shadow's only answer, the dark agent clearly not planning on telling her anything about the heated argument she just helped to end.

The bat flutters her wings in annoyance, not liking the fact that her co-worker is refusing to explain to her the cause of the shouting match that made Tails so distressed he called her for help at six in the goddamn morning. How is she supposed to get any beauty sleep that way? "Please, remember that I've been dragged out of the bed because of Big Blue and you. I think I deserve some kind of explanation."

Shadow sighs, knowing the bat won't stop him nagging about causing her to lose her precious beauty sleep until she gets an explanation she'll be happy with. "I expressed my unfavorable opinion of Sonic's friends and he lost his temper because of it. That is the full story."

"And why exactly are you insulting Sonic's friends at six in the morning in his own house?" the bat continues to inquire, raising her eye-ridge.
The ebony hedgehog frowns, crossing his arms over his chest. "I believe that's none of your concern, Rouge."

The female mimics his actions and also makes a step in front of the other, thus blocking the other agent's path. "And I believe it is, because if it's going to make me lose sleep again, I want to know what's at fault."

"Rouge..." Shadow growls low in annoyance, giving her a signal he doesn't want to talk about this now, but Rouge ignores the signal and continues to prod.

"So what is it?"

"As I said—none of your concern," Shadow repeats and side-steps the female, who immediately outstretches her arm to stop him.

"Oh, no way, sunshine, you are not—" But before her fingers can even brush against the other's arm, her wrist is already being held in a strong grip, with hard angry rubies burning holes into her with their intense gaze.

"It is none of your concern," Shadow hisses one more time, the female immediately sensing the unvoiced warning in his tone. And so when the dark agent finally lets go of her arm, she doesn't outstretch it again and doesn't try to stop Shadow when he turns around to continue his departure away from the heroes' house.

The female agent frowns and starts to tap her chin thoughtfully as she tries to figure the enigma that is her colleague. Shadow doesn't deliberately start fights 'just because' and the dark agent is perfectly aware that Sonic cannot stand when somebody insults his friend—which means that the instance of angering Sonic definitely wasn't accidental.

Now when I think about it, that fight was really strange altogether...

Teal eyes fill with suspicion as their owner locks them onto the retreating form of her co-worker. Usually it takes only five minutes of arguing to make the hedgehog duo start physically attacking each other, but when she arrived—which was about twenty minutes into their argument as Tails informed her—she only found the two screaming their lungs out at each other in an never-ending tirade of mean names and derogatory terms.

Furthermore, Shadow doesn't seem angry even though he just had a vicious fight with Sonic. Normally, it takes a total destruction of a couple of trees to make him calm down, but today—today he just walked out of the house, no trace of the anger that he displayed when he was shouting at Sonic visible in his body language.

Rouge's frown deepens as she takes off from the ground and with a few strong flaps of her wings reduces the distance between her and her colleague. She beats her wings a few more times to gain some distance on the dark hedgehog. She turns her gaze towards the ebony agent, her teal eyes studying him closely. There has to be something she missed...

And just then they catch the ghost of a victorious yet sad smirk that is on the ebony agent's face.

The bat hums thoughtfully, pondering why is Shadow wearing such a strange expression but finding it impossible to find a reasonable conclusion.

A small smirk of her own makes its way on Rouge's face as she comes to a decision. Shadow will definitely unleash hell on her once he finds out what she plans to do, but her curiosity won't be sated until she has solved this mystery.
It's time to do some spying.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
"Go away."

Two simple words. They should be so easy to understand. But according to the hand that has just landed on his shoulder, it's not so easy.

"I said go away!" Sonic slaps the striped hand on his shoulder, causing the ebony parasomniac to withdraw it. The cobalt hero immediately pulls the blanket fully over himself, giving a clear sign to the other that he doesn't want him here. However, based on the steps that are definitely not retreating ones and the way the mattress shifts slightly just a moment later he assumes the dark agent hasn't gotten the message.

"I don't want you here," Sonic says as he pulls the blanket lower to openly glare at the dark sleepwalker that is sitting on the other side of the bed. "Leave."

"...I am sorry," Shadow says as he reaches for him again. Sonic just rolls over on his other side to escape the touch, turning his back to the ebony hedgehog in a clear gesture of rejection. "You're not."

"...I am," the ebony sleepwalker insists, his hand once again touching the peach shoulder lightly. However, Sonic jerks his shoulder, shaking the hand off with the action. "Whatever. Maybe you're sorry. But the awake you definitely isn't. And I don't want to have to deal with that jerk anytime soon. So leave!"

Strangely, no protests follow, making the cobalt hero believe the parasomniac finally decided to fulfill his request. This belief is even strengthened when he hears the bed give a soft creak and the mattress shifts again. However, there are no steps to be perceived, no familiar flash of light to be seen or murmur of the familiar activation words of chaos control to be heard, so the blue hero rolls over again to see what on Mobius is Shadow doing if not leaving.

Knowing that destroying his blanket because of Shadow is not worth it, the cobalt hero surpasses the urge to bristle his quills in annoyance when his gaze falls onto the other hedgehog, who has apparently decided to lie down instead of leaving as has been asked of him. "I think I told you to leave."

"...I won't."

Sonic has always been against the idea of attacking people that are defenseless—which Shadow definitely mostly is in his current state—but the ebony hedgehog is really testing his patience now.

"...Then I will," the cobalt hero says after a small pause and gets up, grabbing his trademark shoes from beside his bed. He approaches the door and when he sees the other hedgehog start getting up as well, he says, "And if you don't want your face to become a close acquaintance of my shoe, you won't follow me."

And with these words Sonic leaves his room, expecting that with the sleepwalking Shadow's usual complete disregard of his wishes he'll definitely have to carry out his threat.

But Shadow doesn't follow him.
For some reason that makes Sonic more angry than if he did.

~O~

"I'm sorry," echoes through the room just like the night before, Sonic once again turning his back in rejection to the originator of this phrase.

"I don't care."

"I am sorry," the ebony parasomniac repeats and places his hand on the Sonic's shoulder. But instead of having the desired effect, it just annoys the cobalt speedster enough to throw the blanket off himself and get up, pushing him out of the way rather roughly in the process. However, when the hero reaches for his shoes this time, a striped hand grips his own to prevent him from doing that.

Burning green eyes turn to stare at the glazed ruby ones of his counterpart, the hero silently demanding to know what the heck does he think he's doing.

"I am sorry," Shadow stresses out, clearly wanting the other hedgehog to understand that he truly feels regret over what he has done. However, the cobalt hero doesn't acknowledge this attempt and just yanks his hand free to grab his shoes and then heads for the door, planning to go on another midnight run.

"Speaking like a broken record won't help you. It is not your apology I want," Sonic says as he walks out of the bedroom, leaving the ebony hedgehog alone once again.

And just as the door click shut behind him, the hero can feel guilt start to nibble at his insides, his inner sense of justice insisting he's treating Shadow unfairly.

But with anger fueling his steps, even the guilt is not enough to make him turn back.

~O~

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you doing this?!" the cobalt hero asks as he sits up sharply to glare at his unwelcome guest, blue quills bristled in anger. "Why do you keep coming back?! To drive me mad with your endless apologies? The apologies you apparently don't mean because otherwise you in your right state of mind would have already came and apologized! Or do you simply enjoy driving me up the wall so much that you cannot pass up the opportunity to rile me up even while you sleepwalk?!" The blue hero throws his arms open to emphasized his words. "Just what the hell do you want from me?!"

"...I don't want anything from you..." Shadow replies and just then a slightly trembling striped hand grips Sonic's own, the simple gesture irritating Sonic greatly. But not because of the fact that he minds Shadow touching him, but because it has made the ire he feels for the ebony agent diminish considerably.

When did Shadow start to have such an influence over him?

"...I just want to be with you..." the ebony parasomniac confesses quietly, his eyes sincere and looking much more alive than any time before. "...forever...

Sonic stares at the other in puzzlement, the anger leaving his features for the time being as he unsuccessfully tries to make sense of what has been just told to him, not able to connect the dots between the awake Shadow's behavior and this confession of his sleepwalking self—the cobalt
speedster, with his mortal thinking, not even considering the possibility that 'forever' may not be just a simple figure of speech in this case but the key-word for decoding this seemingly simple but in reality very complex message, which would answer all of his questions.

And exactly this inability to decipher the message makes Sonic fall for the seemingly correct belief that the ebony sleepwalker is just trying to coax him with cheesy phrases that are meant to show how important he is to him but are actually nothing more than a sugar-coated lie.

Sonic shakes his head, yanking his hand away as he gets up from the bed and lets anger fill his system once again. With uncharacteristic aloofness, the hero says, "Well, a good thing we sorted that out. See ya when you sort that out with yourself," and then exits the room without another word.

And just as his foot touches the corridor floor, he can feel his gut twisting, his instinct screaming at him that he shouldn't be doing this.

He ignores it.

~O~

Sonic stares at the steaming pot of soup, occasionally stirring the liquid with the wooden spoon in his right hand. He looks up at the clock hanging from the wall to see for how long has been cooking the soup, in his head calculating for how much longer he will have to cook it, and also to check the time.

Huh, it's two in the morning. Who would have guessed?

"You are really messing up my sleeping schedule, Shadow. You know that?" Sonic asks aloud even though the person to whom this declaration is directed isn't even present—which is kinda strange when you know that Shadow is incredibly punctual person—even when he's sleepwalking—Shadow has never arrived later than five minutes after midnight.

But it is 2 AM already and the ebony agent is still nowhere in sight.

The cobalt hero sighs as he puts down the spoon and changes the intensity of the flame to a milder one, letting the soup cook at slower rate as he takes the cookbook to check he hasn't forgot to add any of the ingredients.

As his gaze flies across the lines and the hero mentally ticks off all the items from the list, he cannot help but wonder why is he even making soup at two in the morning instead of sleeping.

Well, the intention behind this behavior is clear—to ensure that he'll be awake when Shadow finally makes an appearance so he'll be able to chase him away and thus won't have to deal with his much meaner self in the morning.

However, he doesn't really understand where his willingness to wait for Shadow for this long is coming from. He's still angry at him—though significantly less than yesterday—and he doesn't really plan to forgive him anytime soon.

(Though if fully-awake Shadow decides to finally show up and apologize, he may reconsider this decision.)

Is it because of what Shadow said yesterday? the blue speedster wonders as he sets the cookbook down and takes the wooden spoon again. That it sounded just so strange and unbelievable that it made me curious why would he even lie like this...?

And then suddenly there are two arms wrapping around him from behind, the hero immediately
forgetting his train of thought as he focuses all his mental capacity to stop himself in time from impaling the person with his quills in reflex.

"...I am really sorry..."

And just that is enough for Sonic to identify the person.

The cobalt hero sighs and starts to stir the soup again, not bothering to take look at the other hedgehog nor to remove the red-striped arms from around his waist. "Shadow, stop this. I already told you I want your awake self's apology, not yours."

But Shadow just continues with, "...Please, forgive me," as if he hasn't heard him.

Sonic sighs again, not sparing a look to the ebony parasomniac even now, just continuing with stirring the soup. "Go home, Shadow."

"... Please." The hero feels how the sleepwalker's hold on his body tightens but fails to notice the strange tremor that racks the ebony hedgehog's own body, even though, unlike yesterday, the agent's shaking is clearly visible.

"Shadow..." Sonic breaths out in weariness as the aforementioned hedgehog buries his face in the crook of his blue neck and nuzzles it gently, silently asking to be pardoned. "...Go back to Club Rouge."

Ignoring his command, the hold of the dark arms around his body tightening even more. The cobalt hero sighs once again. No running away today as it seems.

"Go home, Shadow," Sonic repeats and tries to pry open the embrace in which he's being held, the dark agent immediately responding to his attempt by strengthening his grip. The blue hero lets out an irritated sigh. "Come on, we both know how this will end! Don't make me use force on you!"

However, instead of letting him go or simply ignoring his warning, the ebony sleepwalker does something that makes the hero freeze in surprise and makes bewilderment flood his system.

Shadow presses a kiss to his neck.

And then another.

And another.

Sonic gasps as the alien sensation makes a shiver run up his spine, the cobalt hero suddenly becoming hyper-aware of how strongly is his heart beating inside his chest, how there suddenly seem to be thousands of butterflies in his stomach, how he's suddenly overcome with unexplainable urge to turn around and find out how the lips pressed to his neck would feel against his own...

And as if Shadow could read his mind, Sonic suddenly finds himself turned around, with his back pressed against the kitchen counter and with tan lips upon his own, the soft peach flesh of his lips getting abused in the most pleasant of ways as it moves against his rival's own in a sensual dance that makes him forget the world for one fleeting moment—

—until he realizes what they are doing and shoves the dark hedgehog away.

Shadow stumbles back but doesn't fall, managing to catch himself in time despite the unexpectedness of the action. His burning crimson eyes turn to stare into the hero's own confusion filled ones, the cobalt speedster still bewildered by what just happened.
So when the ebony parasomniac hesitantly reaches for him, the blue hero only backs away until his back hits the kitchen counter again, unsure of what to expect of the sleepwalker or from himself if he let the other get closer.

But the dark agent doesn't come nearer—he only retracts his hand, something flashing in his crimson eyes as a conflicted expression makes its way to his face.

And in the following moment the ebony parasomniac is gone in a flash of light, leaving the blue hero alone with no traces that he has ever been there in the first place.

The cobalt hero releases the breath he wasn't aware he has been holding and softly touches his slightly swollen lips, still trying to understand the emotions that the short kiss has evoked in him.

...And also why does he suddenly have this ominous sense of foreboding in his gut.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
"...right...?"

"...nic...are...right...?"

"Huh?" Sonic blinks in confusion as he finally realizes there's somebody standing before him and talking to him. The cobalt hero shakes his head, to get his mind back into the present moment. "Sorry, buddy. I haven't caught that. What were you saying?"

"I asked if you're alright," Tails repeats himself, his eye-ridges furrowed as if he's deeply pondering something. "You look like if you just saw a ghost," the inventor adds as an explanation for his question.

"I'm alright—I guess," Sonic responds, brushing his fingers over his lips again. The feeling of Shadow's own lips pressing there still present even though it's been already some time since it happened. "Just really confused."

"Why?" Tails asks as he sits down across the other, knowing that it is very unusual for his brother to be up at four in the morning. But judging by the dark circles under the older one's eyes, he guesses Sonic hasn't gone to bed at all. "Did something happen?"

"...Sort of," the cobalt hero says, for a fleeting moment pondering if it is good idea to share what happened with Tails. And then deciding that yes, Tails surely will be able to offer advice. "It's about Shadow. He..." Sonic makes a small pause, still in disbelief that something like that has actually happened between him and Shadow. "...He kissed me."

"Shadow kissed you?" Tails repeats, looking surprised but Sonic is sure it's not as surprised as he looked when Shadow kissed him.

"Yeah..." The cobalt hero nods, once again replaying the strangely pleasant moment with the parasomniac in his mind's eye. He would have never guessed that sleepwalkers could kiss that good. "Well, it was a sleepwalking Shadow to be precise, but you get the gist."

"Oh..." The fox genius furrows his eye-ridges in thought, clearly contemplating what it could signify. "...Has he ever done something like this before?"

"No, he hasn't," Sonic replies, frowning, "And I don't even understand why did he do it!" The cobalt hero throws his arms wide open to convey his frustration with being unable to understand what is going on in Shadow's head.

...and in his own heart as well.

"What were you doing before he kissed you?" Tails asks, hoping that this little fact might help him figure out what did the kiss meant. Could Shadow possibly be secretly romantically interested in Sonic? Or maybe did Sonic just gave some kind of sign that the parasomniac misinterpreted...?

"I was telling him to leave. He didn't listen to me."

"Why?" There is confusion written all over the young inventor's face now. "I thought you didn't
mind sleepwalking Shadow coming here."

"I don't..." Sonic confesses quietly, rubbing his upper arm nervously. "It's just...I was just angry at Shadow because of what he said at Monday and I didn't want him to be around."

"'Was'? So you're not angry anymore?"

Am I? Sonic asks internally, trying to recall the intense anger he has felt anytime he thought about Shadow in the past few days. But now it just feels as if the flame of his anger has been extinguished and only a few warm embers remain now...

"Well, no..." the cobalt hero says finally and then he looks down on the table, trying to find the correct words to describe how he feels at the moment. "I'm just irritated, I guess. I don't know what to think about Shadow's behavior anymore...

Or mine... he adds internally when he recalls how eagerly he responded to the kiss. He had no reason to react like that. He doesn't like Shadow in that way. It's just...

Just...

He just likes being around Shadow—teasing or riling him up with witty and taunting remarks, seeing the anger and contempt that the ebony agent always shows to the world give away under the weight of his never-ending jokes and then change into a mild amusement, enjoying the rare times when he manages to make Shadow smile or laugh in an honest, non-sarcastic way, relishing the nights where his dark rival wraps his arms around him and makes him feel all warm and nice...

That isn't love...is it?

"Then tell me what exactly he's been doing since the moment he started to act strange. Maybe I'll be able to shed some light onto his behavior."

And so Sonic starts, eager to draw his attention from thinking about how exactly he feels about Shadow.

Though somewhere deep inside he already knows the answer to that question.

~O~

"So what do you think about it?" Sonic asks as he finishes the story, curious at what kind of explanation would Tails come up with. Said inventor crosses his arms over his chest, his expression alone saying that whatever the young genius is about to say won't be exactly pleasant.

"Shadow undoubtedly has romantic feelings for you."

Sonic ignores the flutter his heart gives at this as there is one big problem with Tails' explanation.

"He treats me like a trash."

"I have two theories about that." The young inventor raises his index finger and middle finger in a 'V' sign. "The first one is that Shadow doesn't want to acknowledge his feelings for you and that's why he treats you the way he does." He puts one finger down. "The second one is that he acknowledges them and has some reason for actively trying to ruin any chances he might have with you." He puts even the second finger down.

"But what about the way he behaves while he sleepwalks?" Sonic asks, not seeing how would the
'affectionate' parasomniac fit in either of those two.

"When Shadow sleepwalks his subconsciousness is in control—that means neither his morality nor rationality affects his decisions at the time. His behavior is purely impulsive based on his momentary feelings and he doesn't care about whatever reasons he normally has for keeping you at a distance."

"But if the feelings are momentary then that means that he could have kissed me just on the spur of the moment and actually might not have any romantic feelings for me," Sonic argued, finding his explanation reasonable as well. Because what is the probability of Shadow having mutual feelings for him?

But then Tails shakes his head and Sonic knows that there is something he missed. "You are not looking at the big picture, Sonic—you have to look at how he behaves otherwise. He does everything to be in your favor—be it helping you demolish the kitchen—" Tails gives him the 'you better not do that again' look. "—or apologizing for his awake self being a jerk hundreds of times. He wants to be close to you all the time. He even hugs you. When was the last time non-sleepwalking Shadow gave you a hug?"

"Never," Sonic replies, frowning slightly. The last time he tried to hug Shadow—which was after a difficult battle with Dr. Eggman when he was overcome with the joy of winning—he ended up getting shoved to the ground. Apparently, Shadow's distaste about people invading his personal space doesn't fade even during post-victory moments.

"Exactly! Do you see my point now?"

Sonic nods after a moment, only a quiet "Yeah..." escaping him as his mind is preoccupied with trying to answer a different question:

What is he supposed to do now?

~O~

"But we've been through so much, Ruby! How can you-"

Sonic yawns tiredly as he wraps the warm blanket more securely around his body, the voices of the actors on the TV screen not really registering in his mind anymore and instead changing into some kind of humming in his ears—which is bad as the initial plan has been that the movie would keep him awake until Shadow arrived so he could have another heart-to-heart talk with the sleepwalker.

Which sounds kind of ridiculous when put this way, but Sonic's pretty sure that's the most accurate term to label his conversations with sleepwalking Shadow.

Though...he's not entirely sure if he should even want to see the sleepwalker. Because he has absolutely no idea how he should act now. Should he try to deter Shadow's sleepwalking self from coming back to him when that's apparently what Shadow wants to happen?

Because what other reason would Shadow have for starting that argument with him than to secretly manipulate him into being hostile with his sleepwalking self for long enough to discourage the parasomniac from coming back?

Or should he try to put up a fight and make Shadow finally spill the beans? And then maybe convince Shadow to give him a chance?

Because, to be honest, he doesn't want to lose this caring side of Shadow. He doesn't want them to go back to just being rivals—or allies as Shadow put it—he still wants to get to know Shadow better.
It wouldn't even have to be a romantic relationship—just companionship. Just being friends would be enough for him...

But Shadow has already voiced his disagreement about that too...

The cobalt hero shakes his head, once again considering the decision about giving up waiting and heading to the bed. He already feels exhausted thanks to waiting for Shadow late into the morning the previous night and his short afternoon nap hasn't really helped with his weary state, so denying sleep definitely won't help him with the heavy feeling of tiredness that has settled in his bones.

And neither with the uneasy feeling in his gut as it seems...

Rubbing his eyes tiredly, the cobalt hero yawns again, thinking that, yeah, he should probably do that. Tails surely wouldn't appreciate if he fell asleep on the couch and ended up accidentally destroying it with his quills.

The blue hero sighs as he uses the TV remote to switch the TV off, causing the living-room to fall into darkness once again. Draping the blanket around himself, he stands up and makes the first step towards his bedroom. However, he doesn't even have the chance to outstretch his leg to make the second one as a loud ringing sounds through the house, his ears immediately perking up in alarm.

The cobalt hero frowns when he realizes what the ringing is. The cobalt hero makes his way over to the device hanging on the wall, unsuccessfully trying to recall when was the last time somebody called on their land-line.

Though he's fairly sure it wasn't in the middle of a night.

Sonic brings up the telephone receiver to his ear, saying, "Hello?" to give the caller a signal he's listening.

He is truly surprised when the next thing he hears is Rouge's voice. "You've got ten minutes to get to Club Rouge."

"Why? Is something happening?" Sonic asks with slightly alarmed tone, worrying that Rouge might be in danger. What other reason she could have for calling him at one in the morning?

"Calm down, Blue. No attack is happening," the female agent reassures him as she has noticed his tone. "I just need to find out if my hypothesis is correct and based on the result I will either call Shadow an idiot in the morning or not. So are you coming?"

Sonic blinks in slight confusion, unsure what to think of such strange remark. But then he just dismisses it as unimportant, nods and adds a short, "I'm on my way," before placing the telephone receiver back into its holder and setting off on his journey.

~O~

"Hey, Rouge! Are you here?" Sonic calls as he steps into the empty and dark club, his eyes unable to spot the bat in the surrounding darkness.

"Over here, hon!"

Sonic turns in direction of the voice, seeing Rouge step out of the shadows, waving, and then gesture for him to follow her. "This way."

The cobalt hero zips over to her, for a fleeting moment wondering why she doesn't switch on the
lights. But just a next moment his eyes are assaulted by sharp light as they step out of the club area into the accommodation area she and Shadow live in. Sonic blinks a few times to adjust his eye-sight and then breaks into a swift jog to catch up with Rouge that is suddenly a good few feet before him.

"So what exactly do you need?" he asks, his blue triangular ears turning around to catch some kind of noise but finding the building to be completely silent—well except their footsteps, of course.

However, he doesn't receive an answer to his question. Rouge just asks, "Did you know that Shadow used to suffer from chronic nightmares?" as if she hasn't heard him.

The cobalt hero stills for a moment, greatly surprised by this information and also unsure why Rouge is even telling him this. After a moment he just says, "...No. He never told me," and resumes his walk beside the bat.

"No wonder, he hasn't. He's not proud of it. After all, who would be proud about waking up each night flailing and screaming as if they were being murdered?" Rouge asks in a nonchalant way that in Sonic's opinion doesn't suit such a serious topic like this in the slightest. "He actually never even told me he had them. But he knew he didn't need to. He knew I could hear him. These walls are not thick enough for me not to hear him with my super hearing." Rouge taps on one of the walls as if to emphasize her point, the sound of her knuckles against the solid wall echoing through the mostly empty corridor that they're walking through.

"But then without any warning three weeks ago it just stopped. As if you just snapped your fingers and it was gone," the bat continues, stopping before a brown wooden door, looking at it with strange gleam in her eyes. Somehow Sonic knows that the door leads to Shadow's room even though he has never been here before. "About two weeks ago I decided to check up on him in the middle of the night to ensure he was actually sleeping and not forcing himself to stay awake to escape the nightmares. However, when I came into his room he wasn't there."

The female agent puts her hand on the handle of the door but doesn't open it yet. "A week ago I got a call from Tails in the morning to come and help him end that fight of yours. Shadow refused to explain why he was arguing with you at your house at six in the morning, so I started playing with the idea: 'What if the reason why I haven't heard him for those past weeks was because he simply was sleeping elsewhere?' So I started to investigate, choosing your house as the first place to be monitored as it seemed as the most probable choice with the limited info I had. I saw Shadow teleporting into your house night after night. I heard everything you two said at these nights and saw how you behaved around each other. It made me confused."

Sonic knows he should scold Rouge for spying on him without his knowledge but he's too curious about the rest of Rouge's story so he keeps his mouth shut.

"So I decided to ask Tails about you two as I was sure neither of you would want to talk to me about it. And Tails told me everything. I was surprised to find out about Shadow's sleepwalking as I didn't know he had another sleep disorder beside the nightmare one. But there is one particular fact that surprised me even more than the fact that he sleepwalks."

Rouge slowly turns to him, her teal eyes shining with some mysterious emotion. "This fact was that Shadow didn't have a single nightmare during all those nights that he spent at your house. So I asked: 'What is difference between here and your house? Why isn't he plagued by the nightmares when he's at your house?'—and then I realized it." She brings up her other hand to softly poke Sonic in the chest. "You are the difference."

A small frown finds it's way to Sonic's face at being prodded, the cobalt hero slightly leaning backwards to escape it. "That's great and all, Rouge. But you still haven't explained what I'm doing
"You are here prove my hypothesis that you are truly what holds Shadow's nightmares at bay," Rouge explains as she draws her arm back to her side and then crosses it with the other one over her chest. "Which I already have some evidence about as without you by his side he already had two nightmares during this night."

Sonic furrows his eye-ridges, for a moment wondering how it come that Shadow has dreamed but not sleepwalked once. Since this whole sleepwalking started, there hasn't been a night where Shadow went to sleep and didn't end up sleepwalking to his house. "He'll throw me out."

"That's the fun part, hon. Shadow is stuck in a some kind of strange loop of sleepwalking and having nightmares, so we don't have to worry about that part." Rouge explain with a grin, but the remark just brings more questions to Sonic's mind than answers. Rouge grasps the door handle again and pushes it down, opening the door just enough for him to catch a glimpse of the room. "So, can you?"

Sonic looks at the darkened room, his brain coming up with thousands of reasons why this is a bad idea. But he knows that most of them are just excuses for avoiding meeting the sleepwalker. And so he slowly walks over to the door, Rouge immediately stepping out of the way to let him pass. He pushes the door open, his eyes immediately sweeping over the room to get at least a vague idea of how is it organized. He can hear the soft click of door getting closed just a moment later and the room gets shrouded by darkness once again. However, the faint moon-light coming through the window is still enough for him to make his way around the room without bumping into anything.

(Though the fact that Shadow's room is minimalistically furnished is definitely a big help as well.)

Sonic slowly turns to look in the direction of the bed, the cobalt hero blinking in confusion when he sees it empty. Maybe Shadow has changed his mind and is now waiting for him at his and Tails' house? Green eyes immediately sweep over the room, trying to find the dark hedgehog that not might even be there.

The cobalt hero turns around, his still-adjusting eyes searching the room carefully for any signs of the ebony hedgehog's presence. "Shadow, are you here?"

"Sonic?" The sound of his name is soft and barely audible, but the cobalt hero still can say that the speaker is truly Shadow. Though his name definitely sounds strange when uttered by Shadow like this—the ebony agent rarely uses it and when he does it's always in much more irritated manner. The cobalt hero swiftly turns around in the direction of Shadow's voice, finally spotting the faint silhouette of his ebony rival sitting in the darkest corner.

"Hey, Shads," Sonic greets him as he makes his way over to the agent, deciding not to question the parasomniac about why he's sitting in a corner. He just sits down cross-legged across the other, preferring this over to looking down at the other—not that he can see much with darkness hanging over the room anyway. "I came to see you," he adds after a moment, his mind running thousand miles per hour to figure out why hasn't the sleepwalker came like usually and then coming to only one explanation. "...To let you know I'm not mad at you anymore."

"...You're not?" Shadow asks, his tone slightly unbelieving. That alone is enough for Sonic to say he has guessed right the parasomniac's reason—so the hero shakes his head, a small smile on his face. "Not at all. I realized I've been way too harsh with you and I want to apologize."

There is significantly larger pause than before until Shadow replies this time, the ebony agent probably surprised he's being apologized to. "...You don't need to."
"But I want to. I'm really sorry for being such a jerk—and I know you're too," Sonic adds, sensing that Shadow was just about to apologize again. "So what do you say? Everything forgiven?"

Peach gloved hand reaches forward, offering peace. Its owner can see crimson eyes stare at with slight disbelief and after a moment, a striped hand, currently glove-less, reaches for it from the darkness and then shakes it slightly thus sealing the proposal of peace.

Sonic lets his smile stretch wider as he holds the other's hand for a moment, trying to ignore the strange tickling sensation that has came to life when Shadow's hand came in contact with his own.

"Awesome! So—" The cobalt hero tries to pull his hand back—only to be suddenly tugged forward and then sprawl awkwardly half across the floor and half across Shadow's torso with a startled yelp. But before he can even try change his undignified position Shadow's arms wrap around his form and pull him up and closer to the ebony body, forcing him into a weird half-sit up as with the dark arms encircling him he cannot but lean against the black and red body.

The blue hero frowns slightly, this entrapping gesture strongly reminding him of yesterday. Though this time he could probably wriggle out if he really wanted. "...You know, I don't plan to go anywhere. There's no need to make surprise attacks on me."

However, he receives no answer this time, Shadow obviously not finding this remark as something he should respond to. Sonic sighs and then twists slightly in the embrace to get into a more comfortable position, now leaning against Shadow more with his side rather than his front or back, with one arm wrapped around the dark form of the agent and with his legs pulled closer to the rest of his body.

And somehow, despite the slight awkwardness of the position, he feels completely comfortable with Shadow holding him like this in a warm embrace...

Is this what it is like to be in love with somebody? That no matter how awkward something might be it feels perfect with them by your side? Sonic muses, frowning as he notices the strange trembling of the ebony body at the same time. "Are you cold? You're shivering," he says, his frown deepening when he doesn't receive response immediately. "We can move to the bed if you want to..."

"I'm fine," the parasomniac replies, tightening his hold more. "Now I'm fine."

A blue eye-ridge slightly rises at this remark, but Sonic doesn't question it as he can feel Shadow doesn't want to talk about it. Maybe is that shivering some kind of delayed reaction to whatever nightmare Shadow had?

The blue hero sighs as he rests his head on the strong solid chest of the other, feeling the soft thudding of Shadow's heart against his cheek, the rhythmic beating calming and nice...

And suddenly he's asleep and he doesn't even know how.

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]
Little by little, Shadow feels his mind obtaining clarity, the strong grip that the sleep has on his mind gradually weakening until it lets go of him completely and the dark agent becomes aware of the painful stiffness of his back and the warm weight pressing down on his chest and stomach.

Dark eyelids slowly open, revealing crimson eyes that immediately sweep over the room. Blinking a few times to ensure he's seeing right, the ebony hedgehog studies the room again, surprised to find himself awakening in his own bedroom—It has been three weeks since it last happened.

But the surprise soon changes into confusion when he realizes that instead of lying on his comfortable bed, he's sitting on the ground with back slumped against the wall.

He tries to shift, groaning lowly when it makes pain shoot through his stiff back. Gritting his teeth, he brings his hands onto the ground, barely noticing how they seem to brush over something soft and pointy at the start of the motion, and then he pushes himself up on them to get into more upright position.

It is at the same time as when his 'blanket' gives a small grunt at being moved, crimson gaze immediately snapping down in alarm.

And for a moment Shadow just stares.

What the hell is Sonic doing here?

Crimson eyes filled with incredulity continue to gaze at the sleeping hedgehog. Sonic's head is laid on Shadow's dark stomach and one fawn arm is wrapped around his waist while the rest of the blue and peach body is concealed from his sight by a warm dark gray blanket that Shadow is sure should be on his bed.

What the hell is Sonic doing here? Shadow asks internally again, his eyes never leaving the peacefully slumbering hedgehog draped over his lower body. Could I have brought him here during my sleepwalking? But why would I do that? And why would he let himself get caught this time? Shadow wonders, frowning. Last four nights he has always woken up in the hero's bed but without Sonic by his side. He assumed that was because of Sonic not wanting to be around him—like he hoped would happen if he angered the hero enough.

Which apparently worked at first so what is Sonic doing here now?

It cannot be that Sonic has already forgiven him, right? He said loads of horrible things so exactly that wouldn’t happen. So, there's no way Sonic has forgiven him yet.

Especially when he still hasn't apologized...

"Yup, this is going to be my new wallpaper."

Shadow sharply turns in alarm at the sound of familiar voice speaking only to close his eyes again when the flash of Rouge's cell-phone camera blinds him for a moment.

"What the hell are you doing?" Shadow demands, opening his eyes and blinking a few times to get
rid of the colorful spots in his vision.

"Taking a picture of a cute couple," Rouge replies with a smirk, flipping her cell-phone to show him the picture and then back again. "Though I think the one where both of you are sleeping is much better."

"We're not a couple," Shadow growls and attempts to wriggle from underneath Sonic without waking the other hedgehog—he really isn't in the mood to deal with both him and Rouge—but stops when it makes the hero stir. The ebony agent growls and then settles for glaring at his colleague from his sitting position. "Delete it immediately."

"Not until it served its purpose," the female agent replies. She flips the cell-phone again and, surprisingly, offers it to him. "So take a look at it and tell me what you see."

Shadow frowns as he takes the black cell-phone from Rouge's hand, unsure of what the bat thinks showing him the picture will achieve. His crimson eyes turn from studying the bat to studying the photo that is shining brightly on the cell-phone's screen. However, it's the other one than the one she just took. "Me and Sonic sleeping."

"In more detail," she orders him.

Shadow's frown deepens, the hedgehog still having no idea what Rouge wants from him, but he still complies with her demand. "Me and Sonic sleeping on a floor and covered with a blanket. Now, tell me why the hell you're showing this to me in the first place."

"Not until you take a proper look at the photo," she replies in a tone one would use on a child when saying 'Now go into a corner and think about what you have done.' "And see the little things."

Looking back at the photo, Shadow finally realizes what this is Rouge trying to do. He presses his lips into a thin line as he looks at these 'little things' as Rouge has called them. He actually saw them the first time he laid his eyes on the photo. How couldn't he when they are so painfully obvious?

How at peace he looks with Sonic in his arms...
The way he holds onto Sonic as something dear he doesn't want to lose...
The small smiles on both of their faces...

"There's nothing special," he says in the end, outstretching his arm to give the cell-phone back to its owner. For a moment Rouge just stares at him in a mix of disbelief and—is it disappointment?—and then she finally takes her cell-phone back, switches it off and shoves it down her secret pocket.

And just then two simple words fall from her lips.

"Say it."

~O~

The response is immediate. "There's nothing to say."

"Liar," Rouge replies and continues to look at the ebony hedgehog before her with unfltering gaze, determined to stand her ground and find out what is Shadow's problem.

After the many years they have know each other she learned that neither of them is comfortable with sharing their problems with other people. They always simply ask if there is something they can do
to help the other. They never ask what is the problem, they just asks if they can give a helping hand.

But she feels that this particular problem cannot be solved without her knowing what exactly it is and so she demands one more time:

"Say it. Tell me what is wrong.

Shadow stares at her with an emotionless expression. But she can see the war going on behind those blood-red eyes—the ebony hedgehog clearly torn between keeping silent and finally getting her out of his fur.

And then finally she sees something flash in those crimson eyes, Shadow opening his mouth to speak just a moment later. "I'll tell you—under one condition."

"And this condition would be...?" Rouge asks, both glad that they are finally getting somewhere and curious at what kind of terms Shadow wants to set.

"You won't interfere in any way."

A frown makes its way to her face upon hearing this particular restriction. She doesn't really want to agree as it would mean giving up the chance of helping Shadow with whatever his problem is. However, at the same time agreeing would give her a chance to at least learn something. And even if she won't be allowed to interfere, she can always argue with Shadow about it...

"Sounds fair. I agree to your terms." The bat nods, crossing her arms over her chest. "Now spill the beans."

"First help me get him off—So we can move somewhere else," Shadow says as he turns his gaze to the still sleeping hedgehog. "I don't want him to overhear anything."

A white eye-ridge rises in a silent question but when it receives no answer, Rouge just sighs, realizing she most likely won't get any answers until they are out of the room.

And so she just walks over to the hedgehog duo, helps Shadow get from underneath the blue hero and then to move Sonic onto the bed.

All the while wondering if Sonic is just pretending to be asleep or if hedgehog ears simply twitch this much in their sleep.

~O~

There are many things Rouge has never thought she would see Shadow do.

She has never expected him to admit aloud that he has nightmares. Neither to confess that all of them are about how he lost his friend Maria. Nor to hear that the reason for his sleepwalking is the fear of the same happening to Sonic.

However, what she has definitely never anticipated is those two revelations to be followed by Shadow actually confessing aloud that he has romantic feelings for Sonic.

But now she's sitting here, at a kitchen table, with a cup of coffee in her hands, overwhelmed by the mass of this new information. But there is one particular fact that is more prominent in her mind than any of the other facts that are currently wildly running around in her head.

This last fact is an explanation why Shadow behaves in the absolutely opposite way than one would
expect of someone in love.

She sighs.

"You know, hon, I always believed you're smart and fearless." She pauses to take a sip of her coffee. "...But now I cannot decide if you're an idiot or a coward." She takes another sip, this time sparing a glance to her ebony colleague. "Or maybe both."

"Rouge..." Shadow hisses warningly, his tone clearly telling her she better keep her lecture to herself. However, she never paid any mind to his warnings. So why start now, right?

"Don't 'Rouge' me, Shadow. How else am I supposed to call a person that is deliberately ruining their chance with a person that apparently likes them back and could make them happy?" she replies, a small frown finding its way to her face.

"Sensible. Because them giving in and loving such person might bring them a happiness for some time but it would also bring them anguish for millennia once the person dies," Shadow replies with a strong conviction in his tone, clearly believing he's the one right here.

But Rouge doesn't share the same opinion, immediately letting this known by replying with one sole word, "Excuses."

"So, you mean you would act differently if you were me?" Shadow snaps back angrily, clearly irritated that his closest friend is refusing to acknowledge his point of view.

"Of course!" Rouge responds and puts her cup down with more force than necessary, a droplets of the brown liquid inside it splashing onto her glove and the table. "I would preffer much more to love somebody and be loved by them even if it meant getting hurt in the end!" she continues, her voice slowly rising in volume. "Because life is meant to be lived! Enjoyed! Experienced fully and thoroughly with everything good and bad! But if you still insist on your sorry excuse of one, then maybe you should end it right now!" She abruptly stands up, slamming her hands down on the kitchen table. "It's not like it would make much difference in the long run!" she finishes, staring down at her staggered colleague, the ebony agent clearly surprised by her outburst.

But that is no surprise in itself—she has never showed such anger towards him before, so him looking like this is to be expected, appreciated even. She wanted to get some kind of reaction from him with this speech. This just proves she was successful.

Rouge lets out a sigh as she slowly sits back down, slicing back a strand of hair that has came loose during her short outburst. Gloved hands wrap around the cup of coffee once again and she takes another small sip, feeling as the anger in her system starts to gradually dissipate.

For a moment, silence overtakes the room, making Rouge wonder if she has hit home as her colleague doesn't argue about her point anyhow.

But just then Shadow breaks the silence with a small comment to her declaration. "...Nobody ever said this love is two-sided," he says clearly, wanting to point out a flaw in her short but passionate speech.

Rouge looks at her colleague, her gaze briefly darting at something behind the ebony agent before it moves back to Shadow's face—just as she lets out a snort of amusement. "Nobody needed too. It has always been clear as day. Now even more than ever before."

Shadow just raises an eye-ridge in a silent question.
"Maybe you should turn around, hon," Rouge suggest with a grin, chuckling when she sees the brief shock in those crimson eyes before Shadow abruptly turns around and is met with the sight of hopeful looking Sonic standing in the kitchen entrance.

The ebony agent sighs as he turns in his seat to face her again, speaking in a voice just loud enough even for Sonic to hear him despite standing behind his back. "How much have you heard?"

"Well...most of it," the cobalt hero admits quietly, clearly feeling uneasy about admitting overhearing a conversation that he apparently wasn't supposed to hear. "But, to my defense, you two weren't exactly quiet about it."

"Well, I should probably thank you for that," Rouge says as she stands up, earning a confused expression from both males. She grins. "You saved me months of persuasion that it would definitely take to convince Shadow to tell you," she says as she heads for the door to leave the room, only stopping to pat Sonic on his shoulder. "So, thanks for that."

But she stops at the door just a moment later, turning around to face the two still surprised looking hedgehogs. "Oh, and both of you do us all favor. Act as adults for once and face your problems instead of running away."

And then she exits the room, leaving the two hedgehogs alone to decide what they wish to do now.

~O~

And surprisingly the first to speak up is Shadow.

"Before you might get any ideas, hedgehog. I am not—" the ebony agent starts but is thrown in for a loop by the other before he can even finish his sentence.

"Stand up."

The ebony agent blinks in confusion, which immediately changes into mild ire when he realizes he's being ordered around. "Excuse me?"

"I said stand up," Sonic repeats himself as he walks over to the center of the kitchen, outstretching his arm and repeatedly curling his fingers in the gesture of 'come here', with a small smile on his face.

Shadow frowns, not sure of what to expect of the sometimes unpredictable hedgehog. But he still stands up and walks over to the other hedgehog, mildly curious at why Sonic isn't already questioning him about what he heard him tell Rouge. Shadow expected the hero to be curious or unbelievable, he expected Sonic would ask him if what he told Rouge is true.

But instead of that Sonic just starts to speak, "A week ago when we were at Eggman's base—"

"Where you almost got yourself killed by the cold," the ebony agent points out, but Sonic just continues talking as if he hasn't said anything, the small twitch of the hero's peach lips being the only acknowledgement of his words.

"—we had this strange moment."

Shadow frowns, perfectly aware what exact moment is Sonic speaking about. "And you are bringing that up now because...?"

"I want to give you a choice," Sonic says and makes a step into what could already be considered as Shadow's personal space. Crimson eyes immediately narrow at this.
"What kind of choice?" Shadow asks as he makes a small step back to get some space between them, which Sonic surprisingly doesn't try to invade again. Shadow cannot decide whether that is meant to make him feel relieved or not.

"To change your mind," Sonic says and then the hero leans closer, thus invading his personal space again and causing their noses to almost touch just like back in Dr. Eggman's lair. And this little gesture is the last push that Shadow needs to figure out what is Sonic proposing.

"Are you up to it?" Sonic asks with a questioning look on his face, his tone suggesting nothing beside the hero being curious about his decision. However, the hero's body language is a different story, the unusually tense shoulders of the other betraying his inner nervosity.

Apparently, Sonic is worried about how he will decide.

And given the fact Sonic is the one who proposed this, it is clear what kind of reaction he is afraid of receiving.

Shadow opens his mouth to speak, all the pros and cons as well as Rouge's speech running wildly around in his mind, offering reasons why to either accept or reject Sonic's proposal.

Crimson eyes meet their emerald counterparts and Shadow realizes this decision will be one of the most important ones of his life.

Because this will be either the biggest mistake he'll ever do or the best decision he'll ever make.

...or possibly both at once.

And it all depends on if he will lean in or if he'll draw away.

That simple.

But such a hard choice to make.

...Or maybe not so hard. Because, after all, both of the outcomes will be bittersweet in the end...

Shadow sighs, uttering quietly, "Damn you, Rouge," before he makes a step forward, curls his arm around Sonic's waist and then pulls the surprised hedgehog into a kiss.

So, why not choose the sweeter one?

**The End.**

Chapter End Notes

[Last edited: 2018-07-01]

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