# Don't touch the dead animals

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## \*Chapter 1\*: beginning

all alonewaiting for you…

cough.  
open my eyes.  
A flash of light through the window.  
Lightning strikes. Thunder catches up in one, two, three, four, five, six, seve-  
The loud noise causes me to jump slightly, even though I knew it was coming. They say that the time it takes for the thunder to sound after the lightning strikes can be used as a tool, to measure how far away it is. They say a second represents a mile, give or take. That would make the lightning roughly seven miles away.

The constant pelting of droplets against the tin shack. The hollow sound of rain pattering against the roof to this metal box that I find myself prisoner to.  
Draped over my limp, unmoving form is a ratty sheet, riddled with holes. It's more like a rag than a sheet.

Fetal position.  
Hugging knees to my chest.  
No pillow. My head rests on the metal bar that holds this cot together. My nose practically wedged between my knees. My breath is hot and stale. Stagnant. Breathing in and out, the same recycled air over and over again. Starting to feel light headed.  
Starting to feel dizzy.  
Deep breath.  
Hold.  
My head's encased in a dark fog, so to speak.  
Everything's… fuzzy.  
It's hard to think properly under these conditions.  
Hard to focus.  
I'm starting to get claustrophobic. The metal walls are closing in.  
I feel trapped. I feel useless.  
I am.  
What good it a hero with no one left to save?  
They've long since gone. Nothing could be done to prevent it.  
Shells remain. Only shells. Shells that clutter the air and make it hard to breathe. Starting to feel worse, just thinking about it. Had to leave. Had to get out.

It started, oh goodness, when did it start, it started a while ago, back before I was so hungry, it started when we were happy, it started when we were confident, it started when we thought we fucking had him. We were so fucking sure of it. We had him for sure. I guess this all really started on an expedition to the big city. We were going to cripple him permanently, by taking out all four of his factories.

We were going to do a lot of things.

Crickets chirping.  
Owls hooting.  
Feet pounding against the forest floor.  
Twigs snapping.  
The sound of my breath.

A symphony that might as well be silence.  
My head hurts.  
Grinding my teeth.  
Tired.  
His limp, unconscious form draped across my arms. His lead lolling back and forth with every step I take.  
Running. Trying to. Out of breath. Tired. Worn out. Weighed down by deadweight.

Starting to feel sick to my stomach. My mouth watering, like I'm about to throw up.

Sweating.  
Head swimming.

Staggering through the shadows of the trees. Off course, stepping diagonally. It's hard to keep straight.

There it is. Just ahead of me.  
Just need to push my self.  
Legs pumping, pounding onto the ground. Muscles burning as they work to push me forward.  
So close.  
Legs giving out.  
He's too heavy.

Falling to my knees, he limply rolls out of my arms and onto the dirt below.  
My throat is harsh. When I call out, it causes me to cough.

I'm sorry, Antoine.

"Now, what in tarnation happened to him?"

"We split up."

"Duh. What's going on? Where's Sally?"

"That's my way of telling you that I don't know. We split up. I wasn't there. Found him like that."

"And Sally?"

"I don't fucking know, okay?"

She sighs and crosses her normal arm over her metal one. Leaning her butt against the hospital bed. Tail just peaking over the edge. Twitching impatiently. Her gaze is cast downwards before her eyes close.

"Why don't you start by telling me what you do know."

"Alright, fine. As planned, we split up four ways. As planned, I snuck into the city, and made my way into the factory. Retreating into alleyways as soon as I heard the whirring of a search 'bot. As planned, I wasn't seen. As planned, I placed the bomb."

"I get it, alright? Get to the damn point."

"No, you don't. Do you want to hear what happened?"

"Yes, already."

"As planned, the bomb went off. But so did the alarms. After my placing the bomb, I made my way to the forest line, to watch the explosion. Three explosions. The alarm sounded, and I started to run. The fourth explosion was delayed, but it didn't register then. I was too busy running. Made my way to the ring pool to wait. Waited for forty-five fucking minutes, and you know how much I hate waiting. Made my way back through the woods when I hear

a rustling in the distance.

"Hello?"

My ears perk up, neck straightened to full extent. Scanning the darkness for the source of the sound.

SNAP  
That was far too loud for an animal.

"Hello?"  
Silence.  
A few seconds go by. The rustling continues as the advancing figure stumbles out into a small clearing, appearing as but a silhouette under the starlight. Filtered by trees.

"Hey!"

The mobian shadow folds its arms over its chest, and clutches its sides, bending slightly forward. The moon beams down on his blonde hair.  
A sparkle catches my eye. His revolver clutched tightly in his left hand, the barrel poking out from underneath his right elbow. His walk is very stiff. Loosely clutching his gun, he makes his way over to me. Coughing and babbling.

"There was nothing I could do.."

"Antoine?"

The coughing gets louder. He falls to his knees, coughing and retching.

"What happened?"

He falls to his side.  
Rush over to him.  
He rolls over to his back. Face hidden by the shadows of the cluttered leaves, only cracks of light shining on his right, watering eye. The moonlight illuminates the dark blue jacket from the right shoulder, and on passed the elbow. The gun still sparkling, his arms still crossed.

"Stay back" he says weakly.

"What? Why?"

His thumb fumbles with the hammer over the handle of the pistol. I can feel my eyes widening.  
It clicks into place. His arms move, as the gun is shakily raised. The trembling barrel pointed right at my face.

"Hold on there, Ant. Easy, now"

"Go" he says. "Go home, Sonic. Leave me here. Go home and don't come back for me, you understand?"

"What?!"

"Get the fuck out of here, Sonic. Go warn the others, before it's too late."

"Come on, Antoine. I need you to put down that gun, okay? I need you to put it down, so I can help you, okay?"

"I didn't want to have to do this in front of you…"

"Give me the gun, Antoine."

His wrist falls to his chest, the sparkling barrel lowered, and resting against his blue jacket.  
His other hand weakly reaches for my own. I take grasp, and help him as he's trying to get up. Using my weight to help him stand, his face is revealed by what little light glows in the sky up there.  
He looks… dead.  
Falling back to his knees, his head drops as he vomits into his lap. Retching followed by a splatter. He tries to scramble to his feet once again, but falls back on his ass., his grip breaking free of mine.  
He looks up at me, face partially hidden in the darkness.  
Half of it.  
He's sitting up, his wide blue eyes shimmering at me. His face tilted up at me. Moonlight reflecting on his irises.  
His hair; kinky.  
His breathing; rapid and hoarse.  
His eyes watering. Hopeless and dead.  
The outline of the gun can be seen as he lifts it up. Bringing it to his chin.  
"NO!"  
Click.  
Click.  
Click.  
Click.  
Click.  
Click.

...

Thud.  
The pistol falls to the ground beneath, lost in the somewhat tall grass. Antoine doesn't try to retrieve it, he just buries his hands in his face, and for the first time ever before me, Antoine started to cry.

Standing here, speechless, no idea what to say, no idea what needs to be done.

I pick him up, against his will, and begin to carry him. He fights me for a second, but he's too weak. He gives in. He goes on to start begging me to not only leave him there, but to put him out of his misery. To kill him.  
The sweet release of death.  
Babbling nonsense.  
Crying.  
Begging.

Just ignore it.  
Ignore all of it.

Nothing else I

could do."

Her head turns sideways to look at me. I'm standing at the foot of the bed, Antoine passed out in it. Bunnie leaning against its side. She stares at me questionably.

"What?"

Bunnie is acting strange. It's almost like she blames me.

She and Antoine had something going on, I think. They never flaunted it, so I couldn't be sure. If they did, they kept it pretty much under wraps. But you can tell by the way she's acting that even if they had nothing going on between them, she wanted there to be. She was worried, to say the least.

The door opens and Rotor steps in.

"What the fuck happened?"

"Where the fuck have you been?"

"I was wandering circles in that fucking forest, man. Was chased off in the wrong direction by SWATbots. Ran out of ammo. After spending about an hour and a half in hiding, I wandered around the forest for god knows how long. Where's Sally?"

"I don't know. I was hoping you did."

"What the fuck happened to Antoine?"

"We don't know. Found him in a bad way. Did you see Sally any after we split up?"

"No. Not at all."

"Shit. We have to go back and get her."

"Tonight?"

"Of course! Do you mean to tell me you would sleep while that psychotic human does god knows what to our le-"

"Excuse me," Bunnie interrupts "but Antoine is trying to sleep. Think you could take it outside?"

"What's the plan?"

Holster my sidearm, and pick the assault rifle off the table in front of me. Rotor's loading his shotgun. He cocks it to fit another shell, and he hit's the safety button. He looks at me, waiting for an answer.

Look down at the assault rifle cradled in my arms. The stock resting my bicep. Cock it, and sling the strap over my shoulder.

"This is my plan"

Grab another clip with my left hand and fish out a handful of bullets from the box on the table in front of me. My fingers start forcing them into the clip one by one.

"Not much of a plan"

The clip's full, and I stuff it in my vest pocket.

"What's your plan?"

"What?"

"Exactly."

"I don't know, man. I just think this could get us killed and all. Just rushing in there with guns and a limited ammunition supply?"

"Here's how the plan goes, Rotor. We get over to that city as fast as possible and find Sally. After that, we get back to Knothole. You understand, now?"

"What if we don't find Sally?"

"Not an option. You ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

Reach into my vest pocket and pull out a thin metal box, and open it.  
Two cigarettes roll back and forth with my steps, bouncing off one another. Grab the one on the left, and bring it to my mouth. Close the box and light it.

"You think I could have one of those?"

Remove the one from my lips and hand it over. Reopen the box and snatch the remaining one up.

Like Rotor needs one. We would have been there in half the time if it weren't for his extremely slow speed.

I decide I'll save it for later, and put it back in the box.

Place the box back into my pocket.

"Who rolled this?"

"Did it myself."

"You suck at rolling, Sonic. You're fucking terrible at it."

"Fuck you, Rotor"

"What is that?"

"Fog. It's fog."

The city lights illuminate the cloud that it's engulfed in. The once bright lights are now a dim white glow. The top of the cloud drifting away in a stream, and being replaced somehow.

"What do you make of it?"

"I make that it's fog."

Pause.  
Remove the assault rifle from my shoulder and ready it in my arms.

"Something doesn't feel right."

"Think about all of our previous missions. Does it ever feel right?"

"You have a point."

"Let's move"

We step passed the tree line, and make our way across the field, and into the fog.  
It smells funny.  
We continue advancing.  
Finger the safety button, until I hear it click. My grip around the handle tightens, finger around the guard, rather than nestled on the trigger.  
Don't want to get jumpy and shoot this thing at the wrong time.

Drifting in the fog.

We stay pretty much shoulder to shoulder, in order to keep track of one another. Just a foot or so of distance between us would make it impossible for us to see one another.  
We blindly float until-

"You hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Shhh……"

Silence. Nothing.  
Ears straining to listen.

Suddenly a thud. A click. Some whirring.

"SONIC!"

It's Sally's voice!

"SALLY!"

"Sonic I don't think-"

Start to run off, but he grabs me by the vest, his shotgun barrel dragging against the cement behind him as he tries to keep up with me.

"SONIC! HELP!"

It's coming from ahead, in what seems like the center of the city.  
Shoes beating against the cement. Rotor's shotgun barrel carelessly dragging. The force pulling me back.

"SONIC!"

"SONIC!"

Two voices screaming at me from two different directions, and they both want the same thing. They both need the same thing.  
They both need me.  
Pushing forward, being pulled back, I stumble forward, landing hard on my right knee. Call out to her, but she doesn't respond.  
She's lost in this fog, just as I. Floating out there somewhere.  
I have to find her.  
Force myself back up and step forward once again.

"SONIC!"

"You can't leave me out here, man!"

"SONIC!"

"WAIT!"

I break free of Rotor's grip, and race forward through the mist.

"SONIC!"

"SONIC!"

"SONIC"

My brain feels like it's splitting in half, but there's a glow off in the distance, a bright glow and if I can make it over there maybe I can find my way, maybe I'll be able to see and my head hurts, oh god it hurts I don't want to carry on but I have to, I have to I'm so fucking nervous and scared but I push forward towards the light until the fog finally starts clearing up, and I can see her figure.

"SONIC"

But she isn't moving. And neither is her mouth.

"SONIC!"

Her voice calling out to me, but her mouth doesn't move a muscle.  
Her face doesn't move a muscle.  
Her face isn't her face anymore. It doesn't move a muscle, because it doesn't have muscle. Just bloody, scraped bone.  
Her eyes pushed in by blunt force.  
Her voice calls out to me from a tape that was placed beneath her, a couple of feet away.  
Her body was tied and nailed to a stake. Her organs lay in a pile next to the tape player.  
Lump caught in my throat. Heart pounding. Head splitting.  
This isn't real. This can't be.

Start backing away.  
Around her neck is a sign. Written in blood across the white surface. He's laughing at me.  
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHH

I can hear him, that sick fuck. His voice echoing over some loud speaker. Laughing.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH! AHA! AHA! AHA!"

Gun's raised, at the ready. Backing up, and scanning the smoke for Robotnik when suddenly I back into something. Immediately turn around to see-

Rotor.

"Soni-"

Spotlights suddenly shine down upon us.  
Dodge roll to my right, landing on my face, and scraping it against the pavement. I can feel the torn skin without even having to touch it.  
Roll over, and take aim at the spotlights.

Pull the trigger and hold it down. Sparks emit from the lights as they are blown out, the loud shattering of glass barely sounding over the gunfire.  
Shield my face while backpedaling against the cement until I come in contact with a wall. Using it to help me get up, I search my surroundings.  
It takes a moment for my eyes to adjust. My back to a building,

Gunfire.  
The shotgun.

He fires and pumps. I can hear it from my left.  
Make my way around the corner of the building behind me. The shotgun goes off again in just enough time for me to catch the spray of mechanical parts and sparks flying in my general direction.

Rotor's gun pointed at me, flashlight shining on me. The flashlight is poorly taped to the end of the gun.

"You okay, man? You don't look too hot."

"I'm fine. We have to get out of here."

"Did you find Sal-"

Rotor's cut off by a gurgling noise, his silhouette clutching his neck.  
He falls to his knees.  
He's hit by another bullet, and his head caves in.  
Skull matter and brain splattering on the cold concrete below.  
The alarm sounds, and more lights shine down upon me. The laughter ringing once again over the PA system, Robotnik's reinforcements marching towards me form the distance.  
Before I know what's hit me, I've thrown the assault rifle over my shoulder, and started to run. Snatching the shotgun out of Rotor's arms, it snags and slows me down. A bullet tears through my vest and grazes my side.

Dash into the mouth of a nearby alleyway. Turn off the flashlight. Press my side against the brick wall, and drop to my knees.  
Footsteps approaching.  
Pump the shotgun.

The first one's silhouette steps into view, carefully scanning the perimeter. But not low enough.  
Fire.  
His right kneecap is blown through the back of his leg as the shin and thigh disconnect.  
Cock.  
He falls.  
Aim.  
He lands.  
Fire.  
His head caves in on itself, and I throw the shotgun to my feet, and remove the rifle from my shoulder. Aim at the lip of the alleyway. Getting off my knees to a crouching position, I dash to the other side of the alley, leaning my back against the adjacent wall.  
The group of four is slowly approaching the corner, watching that side for me.  
Scoot closer.  
Take aim.  
The automatic weapon empties in their general direction as the bodies fall. Drop the clip and reload.

Race over to the shotgun. Remove the taped on light forcefully, and flip a bitch. Make my way down the alley, and take a right.  
The alarm still sounding across the city,. Turn the flashlight on. There's one around here somewhere…

Aha! A manhole.

Set the gun down. I can hear shouts in the distance. Fingers worm through the holes in the metal cover, and pry it open.  
Pick the gun up, and throw the strap over my shoulder once again. Flashlight in hand, I descend into the darkness.

After replacing the manhole cover, there is an absence of light.  
Blindly and slowly make my way down the ladder. Before I know it, I'm ankle deep in what I'm guessing is the waste of Robotnik and his goons.  
Scouring the metal flashlight for the switch with my fingers.

There it is.

Flip the switch. It clicks into place, and the light barely makes a difference. Batteries are dying, and it shows. The light, instead of shining a bright white, it glows a dim yellow. Its radius has shrunk significantly.  
Sigh and shine it in front of me. Insects scurry up the grungy walls, and away from the light as if it were an enemy.  
Spiders and roaches the size of your fist.  
A chill runs down my spine.  
Back into the ladder. My ass catches on a rung.

I have to sit down for a minute.  
Breathing hard. Can't help it. So tired.

Close my eyes.  
Her face comes to mind.  
Eyes pop open.

Heart racing.

Sally…

It can't be real. Couldn't have.  
It's hard to believe any of this is real.

But it all hurts too much to be a dream.

Had to get moving. Been wandering forever through these dark sewers.  
Looking for a way out.

Find myself in a branched off underground tunnel before I even remember the existence of Lower Mobius.

A sanctuary right here in the belly of the beast, and I've accidentally come across one of the many tunnels that lead in.

Keep the light pointed at the ground in front of me, as not to trip. Random scraps of metal clutter the walkway. Discarded machines and their rusting parts. Shoes squishing with each step I take.

Rats the size of digs scurrying across the light and off into the darkness.

Fallow the curved tunnel around to the right to see a straight away with a flickering light at the very end of the tunnel. Off in the distance.  
My gaze alternates back and forth from the ground before me, and the almost rapidly flickering light.

As I get closer, the mouth of the tunnel gets bigger. The light gets brighter. Always off longer than on. Occasionally flickering on and letting me catch a brief glimpse, but I can't make anything out.

Suddenly the smell of decay hits me in the face. Something is rotting down here, and the odor gets stronger as I approach. I remove a handkerchief from my vest pocket, and put it over my nose and mouth in attempt to filter the air.

Sweating.  
Light headed.  
My throat itches and my mouth is dry.

Before I know it, the light cuts back on and I'm at the mouth of the cave staring at Lower Mobius for half a second before it goes pitch black again. The flashlight finally dies and I toss it to the side.

"Hello?"

Silence. Blindly step forward, and the light flickers on again for another fraction of a second. I catch a glimpse of a figure leaning against a wall in the distance. Stepping slowly in that general direction passed the seemingly abandoned underground homes.

"Hey!"

The light flickers back on and I see why he didn't answer me.

He's covered in blood.

The light flashes again to expose the bloody, blister covered corpse that was once Griff.

The sight of it makes me gag and cough into the handkerchief. Stumble around in the darkness, using the brief instances of light to search for the ladder that leads to Robotnik's fortress.

I'd rather face my own death than suffocate on that of others.

## \*Chapter 2\*: middle

I don't even know how you got in! I really have to hand it to you, hedgehog.

Suddenly, I look up from my coffee, and there you are! Zipping passed the screens that surround me one at a time. You seem slower than usual. Wonder how long it will take them to notice you. They're useless, anyway. I don't expect them to catch you or kill you.

I expect you to come to me.

Running down a hall, you are spotted. You halt in your tracks, and raise your weapon. He stupidly commands you to place your firearm on the floor and surrender and you open fire, shooting him three times through the chest.

Others are alarmed. You make your way further down the hallway. You round the corner to four of them, side arms at the ready. As you open fire, getting two headshots on one, and multiple body shots on the other. Another burst of fire that hits nothing, and duck back around the corner, into another monitor. They finally manage to draw their weapons as you start sliding against the wall, backing down the hallway and towards the camera.

They follow you blindly around the corner and all three of you open fire. You manage to come out unscathed while taking out their legs, wasting most of your ammo, and shooting them in the back. You drop your assault rifle, draw your sidearm and crouch.

Leaning against the wall, you make your way back to the corner, and peek around. Clear. You advance down the hallway.

Peek around the corner again.

And here comes Snively. He quickly ducks around the corner again, and produces a knife from his vest.

Hmm. This is getting interesting.

Sonic presses against the wall. Snively, oblivious to Sonic's presence, walks right passed the corner, not noticing his presence at all. Sonic rushes up behind him and puts the knife to his throat.

Now, he makes his way in my direction.

"I've been expecting you, hedgehog"

His back turned to me.  
Sitting in his metal throne.  
I see myself a hundred times on the monitors around me.

"What took you so long, Sonic?"

Pressing the knife against his throat, we walk forward.

Clicking noises.  
Suddenly all the monitors surrounding us light up a dark blue. The word play flashes at the upper left corner and static consumes the screen. And once the static clears away, it reveals Sally.  
Being tied to the stake.  
Her arms and legs being held against the sides before being nailed in.  
Screaming.  
Screaming my name.

The recording…

He starts laughing, both on camera and off. His mechanic chair turns around slowly as Snively and I come to a stop a few feet away. His face contorted into a twisted smile. His teeth jagged and yellow. His eyes sparkle with madness.

"What happened to your face, hedgehog? Looks like it hurts."

More nails go through her skin and pin her to the wood.  
He gets to work on her face, cutting the corners.  
Slowly peeling them until the incisions meet.  
Abruptly tearing it away.

I can't watch. Aim the pistol right at his head.

"Stand up, fat man."

"Giving orders now, are we?"

"Cut the shit, Robotnik. I have the upper hand."

"You do?"

"I mean it"

"Don't let him kill me, Robotnik!"

"Shut the fuck up, Snively. Stand up, Robotnik."

He stares at me for a moment. Raise the pistol, pointing it at his head. He begins to stand.

"I suppose you do"

"That's right."

He immediately starts laughing. This throws me off, but only for a second.

Wasting no time, he upholsters his pistol, and aims it right at me.  
Press the knife against Snively's neck harder threateningly. My head ducks behind his while I keep the .45 aimed blindly at him.

"I just want to know, Sonic. What are your plans?"

This is my plan.

"Please don't let him kill me."

"Shut up, Sniv-"

I'm cut off by the sound of two gunshots. The impact of the bullet sends shockwaves through Snively's chest. One tears through and buries itself into my side. More gunshots as one lands in my right thigh. My finger pulls the trigger as fast as it can, the pistol recoiling wildly as I blindly empty my clip and fall back. Letting go of Snively as the right half of his forehead explodes right next to me.  
Wet matter sprinkling on the left side of my face.  
Land on my ass.

Release the clip from the gun. Stupidly fumble around the pockets of my vest before realizing that coming to the conclusion that I'm out. Or maybe I just didn't want to believe it.  
Look up to see Robotnik on his knees, holding his spent handgun out before him with one hand, and his other hand over a bloody hole in his chest.

"Well… met"

The gun falls to the floor, and he along with it.

Then I collapse.

## \*Chapter 3\*: end

My chest hurts.  
I take that back.  
Everything hurts.

Slowly crawling, making my way towards the hover pad just ahead.  
Clutching my chest with one hand. Supporting my weight with the other.

Right knee.  
Left knee.  
Readjust.

Repeat.

The air coldly stings my lungs with each inhalation.

I close my eyes and Sally's there.  
She's there, and she's suddenly torn away.

Scream as I open my eyes. I'm on the hover pad, shaking and trembling in the fetal position.  
My head is fuzzy. Hard to think. I hear knocking on the door.

Hyperventilating.  
Reach for the buttons and turn it on. Lights flash and things beep. A voice calls out to me from behind. Tells me to freeze, or something. Push another button and hope to god something happens, and it does. The pad shoots forward and crashes into the window.

My hands clutch the sides for support as glass rains down on me. Gunshots fired.  
Bullets bounce off the metal surface, sending me off track.  
Close my eyes.  
I see myself. As if I'm outside of my own body.

I see myself dead. Completely destroyed, and thrown to the side, like trash. Rotting. Maggots eating away at my decaying carcass. I'm laying next to a skeleton, completely decomposed. This one's been dead for much longer than I.  
On my side. facing the ancient pile of bones before me.

The insects have eaten a void into my chest.

You can take that however you want. I'm done thinking.

My face pressed against the metal surface.

I don't know what the fuck I'm doing.

Open my eyes to sky. Early morning gray sky.

Lifting my head slightly, I can see trees coming at my at a rapid pace.

Turbulence.

The pad starts jerking and rocking sporadically.

My weight begins to shift.

Close my eyes and pray for the best.

Impact.  
The hover pad is torn from underneath me.

Second impact.

I can't see anything.

But I can hear everything…

Robotnik's laughter echoes through my skull and Sally calls out to me. She cries for my help, but I'm lost in a sea of darkness. I can't see a thing, but I hear it all. Hyperventilating. My breath loud and fast. She's crying, and he's laughing harder. My head is splitting. Gunfire. Spinning. Lose balance and fall backwards. Land on my back, my head bouncing off a hard surface. Expel toxins from my nose and mouth. My eyes burn. Lids coarse and dry. Blinking is like rubbing sandpaper against the naked eye.

Manage to pull myself to my feet. The color of this place has gone from none to all. Surrounded by white, so bright it forces my eyes close agonizingly. Try to open them, but I can only squint. I see a figure in the distance, and I start stiffly walking towards it. Attempt to hail, but my voice fails me. My eyes slowly open to reveal myself walking towards me.

Only difference is, I don't look like me. I look to dead to look like me. My face is destroyed. I'm bleeding all over the place. I look to be in an extraordinarily bad condition.

Can't stand to see me like this.

I throw my hands around my neck, and attempt to put me out of my misery. I fight back, punching me in the face, and pressing my thumb against my eye, pushing down with as much force as I can muster while being strangled and wrestled to the ground. My knee meets my stomach, and I feel like throwing up. My eye caves in and so does my windpipe and I start bashing my bloody, already disfigured face into the ground again and again and again and again and TAKE THAT MOTHER FUCKER and I don't even know why I'm doing this to myself, but I know one thing and one thing for sure right now and that is that I fucking hate me, and I hate me with every fiber in my being. I've stopped moving, but no, no that isn't enough I don't want to fucking look at me anymore, so I grab a rock the size of my fist and SMASH it against my face and it CRACKS as it caves in, my own blood spattering against my face as my face flattens against the hard white surface into a red, gray and pink stained blue pile of self destruction and all I can think, the only thing that runs through my mind is HAHAHAHAHAHADIEMOTHERFUCKER!!

Light.  
My eye is wide open.  
How long have I been awake?

Not long.  
The light reflecting off the walls around me is still too bright.  
Squint.  
It's hard to keep them open, but I manage.  
There's a steady beeping sound coming from behind me that I'm just now noticing.

Pain slowly creeps in from the back of my head, increasing with each obnoxious beep. An overhead vent kicks on, sending a cool breeze right at my face.  
Eye wide open. Drying out. Itchy, irritated ball rolling around in dry sockets. Examine my surroundings.

I'm in my hut.

The right half of my face is covered. Some sort of bandage.

Every muscle, every bone aches. Trying to sit up is agony.

Fall back.  
Hyperventilating.  
Close my eye.  
Hold my breath.  
Try again.  
This time, it's successful.

Breathing loudly and somewhat obnoxiously, I look for the source of the sound.  
The alarm clock. It's eight in the morning. Turn it off and cradle my head.

For the first time in many years, I don't know what the fuck to do.

Staring at myself in the mirror.  
Not sure how I could explain the feelings here.

I feel like a toy that's been broken, and poorly patched up and fixed. Now I'm fragile. Feels like I could break at any minute. I don't know.  
I don't know what's wrong with me.

Haven't removed the bandages yet, to see the damage. Especially the facial one. Haven't even touched it. I'm not near brave enough for that.

I need to sit down.

A knock on the door.  
Without response, it opens.

"SONIC!"

As soon as Tails sees me sitting on the edge of my bed, he rushes over and gives me the most painful hug I've ever experienced in my entire life.

"Hey" I respond weakly.

"I'm so glad you're okay!" He sniffles and squeezes me a bit tighter. He has no idea the kind of suffering he's putting me through.

His voice sounds like he's on the verge of crying.

"How long have I been out?"

He lets go.

"Two days" he says, wiping his eyes.

Two days? No shit?

"Where is everyone?"

His smile fades. His tone dies down a bit.

"Bunnie is with Antoine. He's real sick."

"And everyone else?"

"Sally and Rotor were never found. Everyone else abandoned Knothole yesterday. In search of a new colony."

"Oh… I see."

"Are you okay?"

"No. No, I don't think so."

Tails shoots me a worried glance and hugs me again. Cringe, and try my best to hug him back.

Knock on the door, and there's no answer.

"Hello?"

Press my ear against the door to hear a faint sobbing through the barrier. The crying gets louder. Knock again. The crying turns into hysteric screaming.

"Bunnie?"

I found her with his dead body in her arms.  
His dead body covered in blisters.  
Covered in blood.

I found her kissing his lifeless body.  
Her mouth dripping with blood.  
His blood.

We buried him in the morning.  
We held a ceremony in honor of everyone who died.

I'd just as soon not talk about it.

I can feel myself slipping already.

A knock on my door.  
The door opens revealing Bunnie, and here I was expecting Tails.

"We have to talk."

"What is it?"

"It's Tails. You'd better come see him."

"Sonic?"

"Yeah?"

He coughs loudly into his blanket. Wipes his mouth with his fur.

"Am I going to die?"

His eyes, welling with tears. What do you say to that?

"No. Not anytime soon, little guy."

"You're lying."

His lip starts quivering. He's too smart for his own good.

"If you're so sure, why would you even ask?"

"I guess I wanted to hear you lie to me."

Make eye contact through blurred vision.

"Get some sleep, kiddo. Everything's going to be okay."

"You want to what?!"

"Keep your voice down."

"What in god's name are you saying?"

"Look at it, Bunnie. Do you want him suffering through what Antoine had to suffer through? He's a child for god's sake!"

"But we can't just kill him! Who are we to play god?"

"God's already played his part in this, Bunnie. I just want to end his pain."

And she stares at my for the longest time, not saying a word.

The light switch clicks and the room is lit.  
He reacts immediately, rubbing his eyes and sitting up.  
My hands hide behind my back.

"Hey Sonic. Hey aunt Bunnie. What are you doing in here?"

"Hey darlin'"

"We came here because" pause "we have a cure."

"A cure?"

"Yeah. But it's a needle and I didn't want to alarm you. If I give you this shot, you're going to be okay. Do you trust me?"

He stares at me blankly. I don't know what to make of it. My heart is pounding and I'm trying my hardest not to cry. I can't cry.

"Yes" he says with no emotion after moments of silence. "Of course I do."

"H-hold out your arm."

My trembling hand lifts the syringe up to my face as I uncap and test the needle by squirting out some of the clear fluid. He holds out his arm and Bunnie turns away.

"I love you, Tails"

"I love you too, Aunt Bunnie"

Pinch the skin on his arm, and stick the needle in.  
Push down on the plunger.  
Release.

"It burns"

"It'll all be over in a sec, champ. Just hold in there. Everything's going to be fine."

He lazily looks up at me before his eyes roll into the back of his head and his lids slowly shut. He doesn't say a word.  
He just sighs. It's as if the life inside of him was taken away with his breath.

Drop the needle and clutch my chest. We stand in silence for a few moments.

"Let's get out of here"

"I've lost everyone"

She sighs.

"You still have me"

Wrapping my arms around her quivering form, pulling her into a tight embrace. Her soaked face rests on my shoulder, stifling her crying. Her arms slowly snake their way around my back and she squeezes me gently. I don't know what to say. Don't know how to react. I just hold her.

"I'm so sorry" she says. "For everything"

"Don't be."

"I loved him, you know?" Her words broken by sobs and hiccoughs. "I still do"

"I know"

"He didn't care that I couldn't have sex with him. He didn't care about that."

I don't know what to say. At a loss for words. She lifts her head up and sniffles. My shoulder damp with tears, spit and snot.

"He cared about me. No one's ever really cared about me that way, you know? I couldn't even fucking understand him half the time and for some reason he still cared. And Tails. He was so young. Oh, my stars."

Reach out. Use my glove to wipe her face clean. She sniffles again and casts her gaze downward. The index and middle finger on my clean hand hooks her chin, and directs her gaze back at me. We make eye contact. Her eyes sparkling blue with tears. Shimmering in the faint candlelight.  
Lean forward and plant my lips onto hers. She pulls back, surprised. She eyes me hesitantly. I feel like a fool.

"I'm sorry. I'd better go."

Get up to leave. Her hand catches my own.

"Stay"

Trying to sleep next to someone who's comprised of seventy percent metal is absolutely impossible and more uncomfortable than you could possibly imagine. Especially when she wants to cuddle. You have no idea what this is like, and I don't have the means to explain it. I'm running on almost no sleep whatsoever. Every time you find yourself drifting off, she fidgets and spasms. A metallic elbow to the chest is all it takes to force you to snap back into grim, uncomfortable reality.

I would go as far as to call it a crucible. A test of my faith.

My throat is coarse. I begin hacking and coughing intensely. Cover my mouth with my gloved hands. After a few minutes, it subsides.

Remove my hands to suck in unfiltered air that stings my throat and lungs.

The white palms of my gloves are covered in… blood.

Oh god. Oh god, no.

Oh fuck

"Oh god" she whines through her real hand. Her eyes tearing up. Her metal fist clenched. She's trembling all over. "Not you, too."

I don't say a word. Only stare.

Only wonder why she hasn't gotten it yet.

"I can't handle this. I have to leave."

She turns to leave, and time stops. A mental image of her kissing Antoine's bloody mouth over and over again, while hysterically crying through red smeared lips. And those same lips, cleaned and coated in lipstick, she kisses Tails at the funeral. Those same lipstick coated lips meeting mine as we embrace.

My fists tighten.

"You"

She stops and turns around.

"What?"

"Come here."

"I can't. I'm sorry."

The door opens and shuts behind her and I am left alone here, sitting in this desolate, empty place. The sounds of her metallic footsteps thudding away. With little effort, I snatch the pocket knife off the nightstand and leap to my feet. Make my way towards the door while wedging my thumb underneath the peg, slightly lifting the blade up and out of the handle. Flick my wrist and the blade flies out and clicks into place. Fully extended. My hand reaches for the doorknob and opens it hard, the knob slamming against the wall, creating a perfectly round hole in the wall behind the open door. Walk through the doorway, and leave the door open. I see her off in the distance, slowly skulking away. No. Not this time. Gripping the handle so hard that the belt clip is cutting into my hand, I march towards her. Getting closer and closer and closer and she doesn't even notice me until it's too late, just enough to get out my name before I pounce on her fleshy torso, baring the knife against her face. She starts shrieking madly as the blade slices its way down her cheek and into her neck one, two, three, four, five, six, seven times. A gory spray splashes me in the face as I saw the small pocket knife against her rough, snapping and cracking cartilage. She's stopped crying, and my voice replaces her. I'm screaming and screaming and screaming as my voice box tears and I start coughing and hacking up blood all over my hands and her face and it's getting hard to think I can't think my head really hurts it feels like it's splitting. Before I know it, her head is no longer connected to her body. I pick it up and cradle it, being unable to prevent myself from weeping. I cry and cry and cry and cry and cry and cry like a little fucking girl because I have nothing left there's nothing left for me I might as well have never been born I'm completely fucking useless and I'm dying I'm dying and I FUCKING DESERVE IT I deserve every moment of suffering I endure from here on out because I'm a worthless piece of shit and I hate hate hate hate hate hate myself I don't want to exist anymore.

"I want you to know that I'm really sorry about that."

Sorry about what?

"Oh, you know. Beheading you and all."

Oh, please, sugar. I didn't need that old body anyway. Ya'll did what ya'll had to. Ya'll give me a kiss now, okay?

Grab her by the ears and bring her up to eye level. Lick my lips.

"I knew you would understand."

Cradled in my arm, I pat her with my right hand and tell her it will be okay. I just have to set you down in the grass, okay? I'll be back in a minute. Ya'll hurry back, okay? I'll miss you. I promise her I will and I set her down on the blanket I set out for her by the ring pool. I grab the bag and open it, searching for the materials I set aside. Find the book of matches and the bottle of kerosene. Leave the rest of the supplies and seal the bag. Make my way back towards Knothole. Once inside the limits, I make my way through to the other side and start with Sally's hut. I'll work my way back towards Bunnie and exit stage left. Then we can go off and start our life together and forget all this nonsense and everything will be perfect, you'll see. Everything will be perfect.

Perfect.

The blazing fire glows brightly, lighting up the evening. Heat bouncing off my back as I make my way back over to my precious love and kneel. Pick her up and hold her in my arms, pressing her face against my chest. What are you doing? We have to move on, I tell her. We have to start over. Why did you set Knothole on fire? I had to, baby. Some things are better forgotten, you know? But I don't want to forget them. I know. Me neither. But it's best to forget what happened to them. What happened to them? I… can't remember. The place seems to be burning down though, so we had better get out of here. The fire is pretty. Isn't it? I pick up the bag and throw it over my shoulder. A violent cough and liquid runs down my chin. The back of my glove wipes away blood. Wipe it on my shirt. Are ya'll okay? I'm fine. Let's go.

Set up the metal cot on the forest floor and set Bunnie on the end of it. This looks like a good place to set up camp. Place the bag underneath the cot and sit down at the edge of it. Fish the air freshener out of the bag, and spray down Bunnie. She's starting to stink. Set the spray down and pull out the shabby sheet I brought along. I should have grabbed a pillow, but it didn't come to mind. Can we start a fire? I don't have the materials, I tell her. Because you wasted them on Knothole. I don't want to talk about it. You can't just shut me out, Sonic. I don't want to, but you're leaving me no choice. This is your fault, Sonic. Why are you turning on me? All your fault. You did it. Shut up. You! It was you! SHUT UP! You killed Sally! You couldn't even save the one you loved! STOP! Then you come running to me because you have no one left, you come to me for comfort because you're fucking pathetic and you can't hack it on your own! SHUT THE FUCK UP! You're fucking pathetic! You're a coward! A traitor! SHUT UP! SHUT UPSHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP!!I pick Bunnie up and I slam her head into the bar over and over again while screaming at her, telling her to stop and her voice rises above my own, Robotnik laughing at me in the distance. Sally screaming. I throw the broken head as far as I can and I'm crying again as I dig into her brain and stuff handfuls of it into my mouth, chewing down on raw brain matter, crunching particles of skull and stringy strands of hair and I'm coughing again, coughing my own blood out and I'm crying, I'm crying so hard and I just want to sleep somebody kill me

night; cold.  
day; cool.  
me; tired.

packed up kinda  
put whats left of bunnie in my bag  
picked up the cot.  
moving on

found a shack  
metal

use for shelter  
use for sleep

tired.  
so tired.

lightning strikes, flashing through my window and sally is here and ive been waiting for her this whole time and im so glad shes finally here im so excited and i cant seem to find the words and she just gestures for me to follow her so i get up, and its hard but i manage to get up so i can follow her and she phases through the door and i have to stumble over and open it. the lightning strikes and there she is, off in the distance in a white dress, and its dark again and i cant see her anymore. thunder sounds almost immediately. run out into the rain, straight forward in her general direction and the lightning strikes and there she is without a face and my heart is racing and the rain is pelting down upon me, causing my fur to mat together and fall out and my skin starts to melt off with it. my insides fall to the dirt. try to catch them, and they all slip through my bone fingers and splatter in the dirt. stained immediately. fall to my knees before me. face-plant into the pile and