

Title for the post: "The Scent of Home" [Byte and Shadow Puppet]

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(I wrote this with u/EmiAgain. She assisted with Shadow's part, including editing and rendering. So credits to her for doing most of the work!!)

[This is Part 2. Here is [Part 1](#)]

### **Location: RVM HQ**

*It had been about a week since Byte and Shadow's duel. Byte lay on the canteen floor, face resting on his paws, tail slowly wagging.*

*Byte: "I haven't seen or spoken to Shadow since the accident. I feel awful... I didn't mean to go that far. She wanted a spar, and I nearly killed her. I hope she's doing alright. I wouldn't blame her for not forgiving me. I should probably try to find her and apologize."*

*Byte pushed himself up from the ground.*

*Byte: "I mean, it's the least I can do. She helped me with that soul; it was a solid favor. I need to find her." He focused, using his sense of smell to locate her.*

*At first, he couldn't distinguish Shadow's scent among the jumble of other members' odors in the building, each trail leading elsewhere in the headquarters.*

*After a few seconds, however, he detected a faint whiff of pine mixed with wet soil and herbs, reminiscent of the woods. It was her scent, subtle to others, but unmistakable to him.*

*It guided him to the upper floors. Shadow had recently gone up, likely just entering her room.*

*Byte followed the scent slowly, ascending the stairs.*

*Byte: "Yeah... that's definitely her smell. I remember it, right after the accident."*

*Minutes later, Byte reached her floor and approached her room. He knocked gently.*

*Byte: "Hey, Shadow? It's Byte. I came to apologize... for the accident."*

*Earlier, Shadow had spent some time in her city to collect "special fertilizer" for the gardens and finish some work. Returning to her room, dimmed by heavy curtains, she*

*removed her gloves and wiped off the blood from her claw-like fingers. Just as she settled on the bed, she heard the knock. Her soul-detection instantly identified Byte's energy; it was high and familiar, causing a tense spike in her awareness. Yet his calm tone eased her slightly, a stark contrast to the fury he displayed when he smelled her blood, or when he had gotten enraged at the damage he took during their duel.*

*The door had been left ajar. With Byte's knock, it opened slowly, revealing his tall silhouette and softly glowing visor, reminding her of the first moment they faced each other in the empty duel room.*

*Still seated, Shadow kept her glowing yellow gaze fixed on him, frowning slightly, wary, and stopping her hands mid-motion.*

*Byte didn't expect the open door or the dim light, but his advanced night vision allowed him to see her clearly: upright on the bed, eyes sharp and tense, posture coiled like a spring. The faint glow of her gaze recalled the duel's weight pressing on him. He stopped just past the doorway, half in shadow, half in the hall's light.*

*Byte: "Hello, Shadow... mind if I come in? I wanted to apologize for the accident."*

*His voice was subdued, lacking its usual edge, deliberate and careful, exposing an emotion he rarely showed. His visor dimmed slightly as if reflecting his unease. His posture, hands loose at his sides, angled slightly forward, clearly showed he wasn't here to fight. Despite his processing power, sincerity was difficult for him to convey in human-like gestures.*

*Shadow studied him silently, claws resting on her knees. The faint smell of blood lingered in the air. She noticed the subtle twitch in Byte's stance as he registered it. Her wariness remained, but his tone and hesitance, even a trace of vulnerability, stood out. She tilted her head slightly, weighing whether to grant him space or push him away.*

*The silence stretched, broken only by the soft hum of Byte's systems and the rustle of her claws against the sheets. His visor flickered, shoulders sloping slightly, revealing more than words could. He waited for her permission to enter.*

*Shadow continued observing Byte, noting every movement, change in tone, and posture. Despite his struggle to demonstrate sincerity, she registered it all.*

*Even after the violent duel, Byte had calmed. Shadow had thought it might take longer, or perhaps he'd never return to normal. Yet the low tone, careful words, and visible effort to show honesty suggested otherwise.*

*Shadow: "...Come in."*

*Byte stepped inside, hesitating briefly before leaving the door open, an unspoken acknowledgment of his limits.*

*Byte: "Thank you for letting me in, Shadow."*

*His voice was low, visor dim, until it brightened slightly. He sensed the faint blood on her hands but said nothing directly, acknowledgment carried in his subtle tone.*

*Byte: "I don't think we can ignore this... or maybe I can't. I want to talk about the accident... and apologize for how I acted."*

*His words faltered as he searched for the right phrasing. His tail brushed the ground, a reflection of his guilt.*

*Byte: "...and I should never have tried to kill you during a spar. That was wrong."*

*The words hung heavy in the silence, his visor faintly glowing as he waited for her response, posture tense yet subdued.*

*Shadow listened intently, analyzing Byte's words for any hidden motives. There seemed to be none. The only "danger" was his subtle reaction to the blood on her hands, which she remained alert to. Still, she realized his tone and careful words were genuine. He was not acting out of pride or aggression; he was hesitant, vulnerable, and sincere. She softened slightly inwardly, though her guard remained up, posture unchanged.*

*Shadow: "...I must admit, you're right. What happened cannot be ignored. And I must also admit... I share some of the blame. I shouldn't have taken it so personally, so seriously, that my only thought was to stop you and even kill you at all costs."*

*Byte looked puzzled at her apology, uncertain why she felt the need to apologize.*

*Byte: "Why are you apologizing? You did the right thing. I pushed you to that point—I was going to kill you. You had to defend yourself."*

*Byte: "I'm not angry that you tried to kill me—you're not the first, nor the last. I know that feeling all too well; I'm almost numb to it. If you've felt that way before, I'm sorry... but I don't blame you for defending yourself."*

*Byte fell silent, recalling the moment he had crossed the line. His visor dimmed, his shoulders tightening, tail brushing the floor like a pendulum of guilt.*

*Byte: "I don't expect forgiveness... but you should know I regret it. I regret hurting you as much as I did."*



*Shadow observed the self-blame in his voice, her gaze softening slightly.*

*Shadow: "...I should have continued controlling myself, like during the first part of the fight—calm, measured, trying not to hurt you. I knew your aggression when smelling blood was part of you. I tried to slow you down, maybe calm you... but after my fire axe broke, I lost control."*

*Her eyes widened as memories flashed: betrayals from allies, learned distrust, the hard code of survival she had forged. Trust was rare and dangerous. And now, faced with Byte... perhaps she had misjudged him, just as her past taught her to expect betrayal.*

*Shadow: "...I thought you were betraying me, Byte. Hatred in your visor, the determination to kill... it triggered memories of past betrayals. I lost rational thought instantly."*

*Byte's visor dimmed further. Her words struck him hard. He had never considered that his actions might feel like betrayal to her. Yet he didn't blame her. Not after everything.*

*Byte: "...I understand. I've felt the same. Betrayal isn't something I forgive easily... but those who betrayed me aren't alive anymore."*

*He hesitated, shoulders heavy, voice raw.*

Byte: *"I have three kids... two boys, and a young daughter. I can't imagine anyone harming her. That thought breaks me. During our fight, I realized I was going too far, instincts pushing me to kill you. I saw your fear... and I don't blame you."*

*The visor dimmed further as silence stretched. He drew a shallow breath before adding softly:*

Byte: *"You were right to defend yourself. I was a threat... and you're still young. You've already endured more than most should."*

*Shadow nodded, lost in thought.*

Shadow: *"Yeah... those who betrayed me are no longer alive either. And just like I did to them... I tried to kill you at all costs."*

*Hearing about his family, her gaze softened. Byte, despite everything, had loved ones. His fear for his daughter mirrored memories of her own adoptive father, overprotective, aggressive after loss, desperate not to lose another family member again. She felt a strange familiarity.*

Shadow: *"I know what happens to your systems when you smell blood. It's part of you, part of your brain. You can't change or resist it."*

*She paused, glancing to the side.*

Shadow: *"That's why I held back. I fought aggressively, yes, but I controlled myself, trying not to hurt you. Like your system, my reactions stemmed from survival instincts. I may have overreacted..."*

*Byte let out a long-held breath, a faint, hopeful smile easing his features. Relief softened him in a way Shadow hadn't seen before.*

Byte: *"Then let's forget it. Let's fix this, make our friendship better. I forgive you, and I want to try."*

*He leaned forward slightly, closing the space between them. His words carried the weight of truth: systems may curse him, but he would not let them define how he treated others.*

Byte: *"When you bled, I went feral. You fought to survive. It fed on itself until I lost control. All I care about now is that you're alive. I have a daughter—I won't let anything happen to her. I won't let anything happen to you."*

*Shadow's eyes widened. Byte... actually cared. He wanted her safe, as he did with his daughter. The words still felt familiar, as if they were echoing memories from her past.*

*Shadow: "...Despite everything, you still care about me like that...?"*

*She paused, fidgeting with her claws, then regained composure.*

*Shadow: "We were both affected by our own flaws... almost killing each other despite trying to calm each other down. Now we know why, what triggers it... we can protect each other."*

*The longer Byte stayed, the stronger the air around him became, thick with familiarity. His visor flickered as his systems struggled. Thoughts raced.*

*Byte: ("Could it be...? No. She couldn't have survived that...")*

*He shook the thought but it lingered. Forcing himself to speak, he faltered over a word.*

*Byte: "...I'll protect you the same way I would have protected one of my daug— ...my daughter."*

*Chest tightening, tail stilled, visor dimmed, head lowered, he struggled to compose himself. A fragment of buried memory surfaced.*

*Byte: ("Why did I say daughters? I only have one. Only ever had one...")*

*Fists clenched, memories of the accident and lab flashed. He murmured like a mantra:*

*Byte: ("Impossible... I lost her. That terrible accident... My own experiment killed my daughter.")*

*The scent grew stronger, flooding his senses: warmth, home, protection. Not Shadow alone, but a memory of someone he swore to protect—his daughter, his world.*

*Standing there, memories forced themselves to the surface. Shadow felt the same creeping familiarity, invading her mind. It wasn't the present, but the past, memories she couldn't explain, linked to her adoptive father. Byte's accidental word, "daughters," intensified the feeling.*

*One thought rose above the others: a "what if" so impossible she tried to banish it. Could it be...? No. So much time had passed, they'd been separated... She barely remembered her adoptive father's face.*

*For the first time, Shadow stayed silent, lost in impossible thoughts, drawn by a logic she couldn't fully grasp.*

*Byte remained still, visor dim, scent filling the room. Memories surged, fragments of sound, images, and sensations returning in a flood. He didn't move, processing the weight of his past and present at once.*

*Memories of laughter, characteristic cold hands, fear, trust... and then fire, metal screaming, the experiment gone wrong. He almost erased her existence from his system, but couldn't. Now the memories forced themselves back, undeniable.*

*Byte: "...Do you... happen to be Shadow Puppet?"*

*The name hung like a fragile wire. His voice softened, breaking almost humanly. He pressed on, careful.*

*Byte: "And... did you have an adoptive father who took care of you... until an experiment failed, and you were separated?"*

*Shadow blinked at that question, unsure if she had heard him correctly. Was he serious? If he was, then... Why would he ask such a question? Everyone knew her name within the Red Void Mafia, and Byte was no exception. But behind that seemingly obvious question seemed to lie something else, something that gave it a completely different meaning.*

*Shadow: "Uhh... yes, Byte. I'm Shadow Puppet. You already know it perfectly... why?"*

*And after that, her mind was once again flooded with questions as Byte continued speaking. Her eyes widened, and a slight shiver ran down her spine. Unconsciously, she tensed up again.*

*How did Byte know that?!*

*She didn't remember telling anyone in the mafia. And if she did, she wouldn't have told it in detail. Her mind immediately sought to connect more and more of those fragments of her memories, managing to piece several of them together.*

*But one was missing. The most important piece of all.*

*A spaceship... a laboratory... an experiment... a very powerful explosion... were all keywords she remembered from that moment. Words she associated... with Byte. Who had a spaceship and conducted experiments in a laboratory that could end badly. And who, coincidentally, wanted to protect her now just like he did with her daughter.*

Shadow: "...yes..."

*Her simple confirmation hit him harder than expected. Visor brightened slightly, emotion surging through circuits. Words formed, fragile, impossible...*

Byte: "...I am your adoptive father."

*Silence followed. No breath, no heartbeat, only the mechanical stillness of a machine trying to sound alive.*

Byte: "...It makes sense. Timeline... name... the lawless city you often talk about... everything matches. This sense, this smell... It's burned into my memory. I couldn't forget it. It's you. I am the father who took you in, the one who promised to protect you."

*Doubt lingered. How was she alive? Why didn't she remember? He replayed the accident, chaos, explosion, and unbearable silence. He had thought he had lost her that day. Certain.*

*Another memory surfaced: sitting alone, cursor hovering over the option to erase her existence. Almost did it, but stopped. Too precious to forget, but too painful to carry. Instead, he buried those files deep within his system, locked them away where even he could barely reach them.*

*Yet those memories were back now. He had tried to lose her once. But standing here, he realized he never truly could. Not when she was right in front of him again.*

*Shadow's heart raced, questions flooding her mind. Everything matched, the missing fragment of memory returned, perfectly fitting her past. She remembered everything since she was reincarnated into her own shadow, being found injured and then rescued by him. He had put aside all else for her.*

Shadow: "Wh-what...?"

*Denial faltered. Memories didn't lie. Byte, her adoptive father, was standing in front of her. And she had never noticed. She had him right in front of her several times like in that moment—hell, she even fought him—and she hadn't even noticed. That failed experiment, that explosion had robbed her of all her memories of him... and only now was she managing to recover what originally seemed irretrievable, unattainable.*

*After thinking each was lost, they were reunited. She couldn't believe it; her stoic demeanor melted into shock.*

Shadow: "D-dad...?"



