

Chapter 5: Little Whirlwind

Years passed. The young princess grew into a happy, energetic child. *Extremely* energetic.

All was quiet in Knothole as the sun crept above the sheltering crown of trees bordering the little village. Most of the populace was still asleep this early in the morning, and those who were awake spent the early hours quietly, reluctant to disturb the serenity of the new spring day. *Most* of them.

Within the stump home of the royal family of Mobius, a pair of sparkling sapphire eyes peered cautiously into the still dark master bedroom, filled with mischievous intent. She giggled softly at her father's snoring as she backed up, her tiny tail a blur of violet motion. Stifling another giggle, she launched herself...

"Hee!"

Sonic was jarred out of a pleasant dream by the sudden impact of a plum-colored bullet to his chest. His eyes shot open as he wheezed, trying to recover his breath. The blue hedgehog found himself staring into a pair of intent, azure eyes, framed by a spiky purple face. The young princess was dressed in her usual yellow midriff-tank-top, cut-off jeans shorts, and some slightly tattered tennis shoes...already ready for a full day of fun.

"Daddy!"

He stifled a sneeze as the plum forelock hanging down from between the face's perky ears tickled his nose. Coughing, Sonic sat up, brushing his daughter's forelock back affectionately as he plucked her off of his chest and set her down nearby. "Reni, Sweetie, why do ya always haveta do that to yer poor Daddy?" He coughed again, "Ya coulda given me a heart attack!" he said, grinning.

"Daddy, c'mon! Let's go! Daddydaddydaddydaddy..." Serenity tugged on her father's ears impatiently.

"Hey, oww! Come on, Sweetie, let go of Daddy's ears! ...Please?" Sonic reluctantly let himself be coerced out of bed.

"Daddy, come on!"

"Shh... Ren, you don't wanna wake up your mom, doya?" he countered.

Sally was already awake, but she feigned slumber, smiling to herself.

Sonic leaned down, continuing in a conspiratorial whisper as he put his shoes on, "She could make you do chores...Heck, she could make ME do chores!"

Serenity giggled as her father dodged a flying pillow.

"Uh oh," the blue hedgehog whispered. "She's awake. C'mon...Ally-oo!" He lifted the young princess onto his shoulders. "I think we'd better run for it." With that, he raced out of

the stump, Serenity giggling on his shoulders as she tugged at his ears. They stopped in the nearby meadow. Sonic set his daughter on the ground. "So...whatcha wanna do today, Plumcake?"

"RACE!!! Racera-race!"

Sonic laughed at the enthusiasm in the six-year-old Serenity's voice. "Okay, but I'm gonna win!"

"No yer not, I'M gonna win!"

"We'll see...Okay, you wanna race, eh? How about...to that tree and back?" He pointed to a pine tree halfway across the meadow.

Serenity shook her head. "Not far 'nough."

"Not far enough, eh?" Sonic thought for a minute. "Well...how 'bout that rock near the tree line?"

"Nuh-uh. Farther."

"Farther? Well what'd ya have in mind, Ren?" The hero-king threw up his arms in mock annoyance.

The child's grin was smug. "Ring pool." she announced proudly.

"The ring pool? Are ya sure yer ready for that, Plumcake?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well...Okay. Ring pool it is then. Mark...set - I'm still gonna win, y'know -"

"Notta chance, Daddy!"

"GO!"

Leaves, pebbles, and dust flew up behind them as father and daughter rocketed forward, matched stride for stride. As the small lake that was their finish line came into view, the six-year-old princess began to tire, falling back. Sonic saw and consciously but imperceptibly slowed down. Serenity stopped at the edge of the pool, panting slightly as her father stopped merely a toe behind her.

"Well, what d'ya know, you DID win!" He tried to act surprised.

Serenity rounded on him, cobalt eyes flashing angrily. "You LET me!"

"Well, I-"

"You let me win! I wanna win by myself!" Reni sat on a log, lip trembling. "I wanna do it myself!" A single tear dropped into the water at her feet. The young violet-colored hedgehog brushed impatiently at her eyes. "I wanna be fast like you, Daddy."

Sonic's grin fell off his face as he sat beside her. "You are, Princess, you are."

Serenity sniffed. "No I'm not. Not AS fast."

"You just have to give it time, Sweetie. You'll grow into your speed, I know you will. You'd have won, but you just got tired."

"Why? Why'd I get tired? You NEVER get tired! An' you said you were runnin fast at five. Why can't I? I'm six!"

"Come here." Sonic took his daughter onto his lap. "You are fast. You just need to practice a bit. I had more reason and chances to practice when I was growin up. I also had more to lose if I messed up. We were fightin for our lives back then. I hadta learn how to protect everybody, mess up Ro-butt-nik's plans, *and* not get myself caught. You don't know how relieved your mom and I are that you don't haveta live in hiding like we did. Take it easy. Practice, but don't beat yerself up about it when you think you coulda done better. Yer young...and free...try to enjoy it. Understand?"

Serenity looked up at him, not quite able to comprehend all of his words. "Not really."

Sonic hugged his daughter tenderly. "You will. Maybe not now, but someday."

"Daddy?"

"Yeah?"

"Wanna race again?"

"I'll win, y'know."

"Yeah, right. *I'm* gonna win, and this time without you lettin me!"

"Ha! Fat chance!"

"I will!"

"Wanna bet?"

"No...just race."

Sonic laughed, taking off, his daughter right behind him.

The day proved to be a pleasantly warm one. Sonic lounged indolently against a huge oak tree. He watched as his daughter darted here and there and everywhere, sticking her little black nose into every hole and hollow she came across, chasing butterflies across the meadow and bouncing off tree trunks. Sonic sighed as he closed his eyes. There was probably some onerous royal task he should be attending to, but it just felt too good sitting in the shade and being

lazy for a change. His ear flicked idly. He removed the crown and scratched at his head. Man, that thing could really be annoying. He set the crown on the ground beside him and was about to close his eyes again, when suddenly...

"Daddy! Watch me!" Serenity backed up and raced right toward the tree her father was lying under.

Sonic sat up, startled. "Whoa! Ren, what areya-" The hyperactive princess shot straight up the trunk. Her father sat there blinking for a moment. "Reni? What..." The branches above his head rustled, and a pair of bright blue eyes peered down at him.

"Pretty neat, huh?"

"Wha...Where'd you learn that?!"

"From you." came the smug reply.

"Heh. 'Coarse ya did...Sweetie, please come down..."

"Okay." Serenity dropped straight out of the tree, landing on her father's belly.

"Oooof. I didn't mean *that* way!" Sonic coughed, trying to get his breath back...which was difficult to do with a small child sitting directly on his diaphragm. "I really wish you'd stop dropping in on me like that — cough, cough..."

"Sorry, Daddy...But didya see me? Didya see what I did?"

"How could I *not* see?"

"I ran up the tree! That means I'm gonna be like you, right?"

"You already are, you little rascal!" The cobalt hedgehog ruffled his daughter's headspines affectionately.

There was a sudden rustle, and an agitated orange fox flew out of some nearby bushes, looking extremely worried. "Sonic, am I ever glad I found you!" Tails breathed in relief, flitting about nervously.

"Huh? What is it?"

"It's Laura...she's...well...there's no time to explain...C'mon!"

"Okay, I think I get it. Hold up a sec..." Sonic stooped to pick up his daughter, placing her on his shoulders and scooping up his crown as an afterthought.

"Hiya, Uncle Tails!"

The flying fox managed to send off a quick, anxious smile to the bright-eyed young princess before resuming his nervous airborne pacing as they made their way to the hospital hut. Upon entering, a hectic scene met the trio's eyes. Prophecy was busy going in and out of the operating room, carrying towels and other items. From time to time, loud grunts and painful

shouts were heard from behind the double doors.

“I thought as much.” the blue speedster commented after observing the scene. “So...just needed a friend, eh?”

Tails nodded, wringing his hands.

“I’ve been there. Relax, Lil’ Buddy. I’m sure it’ll turn out fine.” Sonic plopped himself down in a chair in the waiting room, lounging, unconcerned.

“But...she...Sally didn’t scream that much, did she?”

“Well...no...”

“Daddy...What’s goin on?”

“You know how Aunt Laura’s had a big tummy lately?”

“Uh huh...”

“Umm...” *How do I explain this to her? Should I just be blunt?* “Well, she’s going to have a baby.”

Serenity seemed to consider this for a couple minutes. “So...that means I’m gonna have a playmate?”

“Well, yes...in a couple years, maybe...You can’t play with babies when they’re first born...They’re too...uhh...new.”

“Oh...okay...Hey Uncle Tails?”

“Uhh...yeah?”

“Is it gonna be a boy or a girl?”

“We...don’t know yet...” Suddenly, there was a monumental scream from the operating room, and Tails was hovering by the small window, trying to see inside. The receptionist calmly asked him to sit down. He did so, nervously twirling his two tails together. Prophecy rushed by with an IV, and the concerned kitsune jumped back up again. “Prophecy, what’s wrong? Is she okay? Please say Laura’s okay...”

The serval simply looked at him with a sad expression on her face, before rushing into the operating room.

“Something’s wrong! I just know it! Oh, what do I do?”

“Sit down and don’t panic.” The receptionist replied calmly, not looking up from her desk.

“I’m sure she’s fine, bud. Just relax.”

Serenity saw the worry that appeared to be consuming her beloved Uncle Tails, and clambered into his lap, hugging the kitsune. “Ever’thing’s gonna be okay, Uncle Tails, I know it. Don’t worry.” She said, curling up in his lap.

Despite his anxiety, Tails was forced to smile, and patted Reni on her plum head, whispering, “Thank you...”

Sonic just tried to hide his grin.

About fifteen minutes later, Doctor Quack emerged from the operating room to find a purple hedgehog curled up in the lap of the formerly agitated kitsune. Both were now asleep. The duck raised an eyebrow in the direction of the lounging king.

He shrugged. “She tends to have that effect on him.”

“Cute. However...I need to talk to him...” the duck gently touched Tails on the shoulder, rousing him. “Tails...I need to speak with you...”

Serenity yawned and clambered into her father’s lap, where she promptly fell asleep again as Tails followed Doctor Quack down the hallway.

“Tails...I have some good news, and some bad. The bad news first...I’m sorry...Laura didn’t survive the birth...”

“What?! Noooo...” The kitsune seemed to lose all use of his legs, as he collapsed to the floor, hands shielding his tear-wet face from the world. How cruel of the Mother to deprive him of his one true love!

“I’m sorry. We think it was the heavy metals in her blood...Her heart wasn’t strong enough to bring two kits into the world.”

“T-two?”

“That’s right, Tails, you’re a father of twins.”

“Two...”

Shortly thereafter, the yellow duck led the three waiting mobians in to look at Tails and Laura’s newborn twins in their incubators, their eyes sealed shut from the newness of life. Both kits had their father’s double tails.

“A boy and a girl. Laura wanted him named after you.” Quack pointed to the orange fox kit. He did indeed look like his father, the only differences being the darker orange arms and legs, black-tipped ears, a shock of gray fur on the infant’s head, and black rings around his two tails between the orange and the creamy patches...

“O-okay...” Tails was still somewhat stunned by the recent path his life had suddenly taken.

“Tails Jr. it is then. Now, what about her?” the avian medic pointed through the glass viewing window at the other baby kitsune, her gray fur a painful reminder for Tails of his loss. The infant’s small forelock was a bright auburn color, and the rest of her gray fur had hints of orange throughout.

“I...don’t know...”

Serenity was leaping about excitedly, jumping up to see beyond the glass. Her father gently lifted her so she could see. “Cool. Now I’ll have two new friends!”

Tails looked at the youngster thoughtfully. “Yes...yes I DO know what I’ll call her...” He looked up at his best friend. “Since your daughter’s named Serenity, I think I’ll call mine Peace.”

“A good choice...” Quack steered them toward the exit. “You can come back again tomorrow...”

Sonic put a comforting hand on his grieving friend’s shoulder. “Laura would have been proud...”

“But...How will I raise them...without...her...?”

“You’ll do fine...”

“I...guess...”