

A/N: There is ONE swear word in this chapter. I usually don't put expletives in my work, but I HAD to...to show how vehement Reni was...it simply would not have the same impact with a different word. So, sorry to those of you who don't like expletives. It most likely will be the only instance of swearing in this story.

Chapter 10: Broken Dreams

It was the twins who found them, an hour later. They had agreed to look for Serenity and her father when it became clear that something was keeping them from returning to the party. Sally was concerned, but for the sake of her unborn child and Alcor, she had to stay in the village, since there was an element of danger about the search efforts.

Serenity didn't even hear her two best friends' approach; she was too lost in her anguish to pay attention to the world around her. She jumped and instinctively curled when Peace put a hand on her shoulder. "Reni, it's just us. What...happened?"

Distraught, Serenity turned and buried her face in her friend's arms. "He...saved me...pushed me out of the way...but...it was so sudden...Oh, Peace, what am I gonna do?" She started sobbing again. One minute, everything had been fine, but the next, her whole world was shattered and falling down around her. Her father meant the world to her, but now...

Peace didn't know what to say. She'd never seen her friend this upset before. Of course, nothing like this had ever happened before. "I...I'm sorry..."

Abruptly, Serenity's mood changed. She straightened up, shook the rain and tears out of her fur and looked at her two best friends. "We have to get him home. I...thought I heard a heartbeat when I was..."she trailed off. *It was awfully faint, though...*she glanced in the direction of the prone hero, then wrenched her gaze away, squeezing her eyes shut momentarily before continuing, "Teej, go back to the village an' get help; Dr. Quack an' Snowdrift an' anyone else who can help. Peace, stay with me and see if you can help me get this dang rock off Daddy's foot..." She brushed impatiently at a tear that threatened.

Tails, Jr. nodded somberly and flew off. As soon as he was out of sight, Serenity sank down again beside her father, sobbing. "Hang in there, Daddy, I know you can make it...Help is on the way..." she whispered between tears.

"So...what exactly happened...?" Peace asked.

"We were ambushed!"

"Huh?! By what?"

"You'd never believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"I...don't really want to talk about it now, okay?" Serenity looked away, sobbing again.

The grey kitsune dropped the subject. She knew Reni would explain eventually. But she needed time. Peace contented herself to just sit with the purple hedgehog, providing moral support. The two of them kept vigil until the medics arrived.

“YESSSS!” Robotnik could hardly believe it. His trap had actually *worked*! He was so used to failure by this point that he didn’t quite know how to express himself in victory. When his plans failed, he tended to destroy things. Now that one actually succeeded...well, he could still destroy something, since that tended to bring satisfaction, regardless of the cause. He cast about for something to break. He didn’t want to pound on the control panel of the hovercraft, since he still needed that in order to return them to base. Luckily, Snively was nearby. Roughing his nephew up was always rewarding. The large overlander grabbed the smaller one by the shoulders and shook him jubilantly, dropping him roughly on the cold steel floor when he was finished. “I got ‘im! I finally GOT ‘im!”

“Y-yessir...!” Snively said, trembling. *But you still see fit to abuse me in the process, you bag of lard...* He didn’t dare voice this however. He valued his life too much.

The dark-eyed man turned to his flunky. “You know what this means, Snively?”

“Y-you t-tell me s-sir...”

“It means – you stupid wretch – that the world is now MINE!”

“But sir...you still have to finish taking over the city, you know...”

“All in good time, my narrow-minded lackey, all in good time...”

“Uh, sir...don’t you think we should check our – I mean, *your* – handiwork? After all you *have* underestimated your enemy before...”

Robotnik decided to be lenient for once and disregard that remark. “Nah...not even the Rodent could have survived that rockslide I triggered...I say, let ‘im ROT where he fell!” he sneered contemptuously.

“Ooookayyy....” *I still think we should double-check...*

There was silence in the hovercraft for a while. Presently, Robotnik addressed his nephew again. “Oh and Snively...”

The small man cringed. “Y-yes...?”

“You can add ‘regicide’ to my list of crimes.” The man grinned unpleasantly.

Snively sighed and rolled his eyes. “Yessir.”

*B*EEP...BEEP...BEEP...

The sound of the life-support system was an unremitting companion as the purple hedgehog kept a constant bedside vigil by her comatose father in the medical hut in Knothole.

She was just starting to doze off in her chair for the hundredth time, when her mother, Dr. Quack, and Snowdrift – who had taken to apprenticing with the medical waterfowl, as he was no longer in the prime of life and had decided he needed to train an eventual replacement – approached the dejected princess.

“Serenity...honey...it’s time to go now...” Sally tried to control the catch in her own throat as she regarded her unmoving lifemate.

“But...” Reni said, standing as her mother led her reluctantly from the room.

“The...doctors need to see what they can do for him...There’s nothing more you or I can do...”

“I’m so worried, Momma...” Serenity buried her face in her mother’s fur.

“Shh...I know. We all are...” Sally looked down at her daughter, suddenly so small and vulnerable-looking, and placed her arms around her and rocked with her comfortingly. *She hasn’t used that name for me since she was a toddler...*

“Serenity...dear...we need to know what *exactly* you saw...” Sally tried to cajole her glowering daughter into talking. The ground squirrel gulped visibly before continuing, trying to control her emotions, for both of their sakes. “You...you were the only witness...”

Serenity didn’t speak or even move for several minutes, burning tears streaming down her sodden cheeks as she glared into empty space. When she finally did speak, her voice had taken on an ominously dangerous tone, “That...that...*BASTARD!*”

Sally was taken aback. She’d never heard her daughter utter a single swear word in her entire life. “SERENITY ALICIA!”

“I’m sorry, Mother.” The purple hedgehog did not alter her forward-staring gaze, though her voice had turned contrite. “I really am sorry, but...” Her eyes narrowed to slits...“HE KILLED HIM!”

“Now Reni...your father IS still...*gulp*...alive...”

“Yeah? But for how long?!” Serenity abruptly stood up and started pacing...“And if he comes out of it...he’ll wish he was dead! You saw his leg!” She stalked to the window of the Knothole hospital, resting her head in her hands as she propped her elbows on the windowsill. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying futilely to stop the tears. “That...that...”

“Reni...what was it?” Her mother came over to stand beside her, placing a comforting

hand on her shoulder. “What did you see?”

The purple hedgehog princess flinched at the touch, and sank down to the floor, curling up instinctively as she started sobbing afresh. Sally sat down beside her, and Serenity turned and buried her face in her mother’s fur again, trying to wipe away the tears. But the tears just kept coming. In a small voice she said, “It was *him*...”

“Who?”

“You know...that bag of lard...”

Sally gasped as understanding hit her. “No...”

“Yes...”

“But...he’s dead...”

“No, Mother...no he’s not...I saw him with my own eyes...”

“Robotnik....” Mother and daughter said in unison, their eyes meeting with a sudden sense of foreboding.

Serenity stubbornly refused to leave the hospital, even with dawn approaching. She sat outside the intensive care unit room her father was being kept in, waiting for any sign of good news. The doctors and surgeons had worked through the night to try to save Sonic, and Serenity was not going to be anywhere else, should something happen, good or bad.

She stubbornly refused to acknowledge her mother when the ground squirrel came requiring her presence in an urgent matter of state.

“Serenity Alicia, I need you with me right now. There is urgent news from the city...”

“Can’t it wait? Don’t you see I’m busy?!”

“Serenity, I’m as worried about him as you are, but...”

“Then have them report it in here! I won’t leave Daddy.” Serenity set her stance obstinately.

Sally put her hands on her hips. “It wasn’t a request. And the Guard can’t report it in here.” The ground squirrel added in a whisper, “We don’t want to panic bystanders.”

Serenity sighed and reluctantly acquiesced. “Fine...but make it quick...” She cast one final glance in the direction of the hospital door before following her mother out and to the old building that used to serve as the briefing area during the days of the freedom fights. The building had gone unused since the celebration of the collapse of Doomsday...until now. The old Freedom Fighter gang was hastily dusting off all the instruments of guerilla warfare as they arrived. The Royal Guard was there as well – some of them anyway; the rest were either in the

city, or guarding the ICU room that Sonic was in – awaiting the royal mother and daughter. The Guard bowed stiffly as they approached, causing Reni to roll her eyes in annoyance.

“Good evening, Your Highnesses...We regret to pull you away from His Majesty in his current state, but...”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah...Can’t you just spit it out already?!”

“RENI!”

Serenity cast her eyes on the ground. “Sorry, Mother...I’m just...”

“...Worried, I know...I am too...” Sally trailed off for a minute before regaining her take-charge attitude. “But we need to know what’s happening.” She turned to the guard, gulping imperceptibly, “Go ahead, please.”

“Well...” The guard began, “Early Yesterday evening, technological equipment all over Mobotropolis began malfunctioning. The Guard and the MP’s in Mobotropolis suspected it was a hacker and began working to try to pinpoint the miscreant’s location; however, none of their equipment was working either. The city fell into disarray as all inhabitants struggled to make their technology work, to no avail.

“This went on throughout the time Her Highness’s party was going on, and we in Knothole did not get word until late that evening, after our King’s unfortunate accident, that the city was declaring a state of emergency.”

“However, at that time, saving the King took precedence over all else...”

“As well it should...” Reni muttered, darkly, before her mother shushed her.

The guard went on, unfazed by the princess’s remark, “As we were trying to deal with the tragedy here, the city...um...well, the city...fell.”

“Fell?” Mother and daughter both raised eyebrows at this, though each thought they knew what the guard meant. They each waited with foreboding feelings deep in their hearts.

“Um, yes...It seems...It seems that Doomsday did not kill Robotnik as we had hoped. He’s back. The city’s gone...under his control again...Half the population is missing...and more refugees are pouring into Knothole as I speak....” The guard trailed off. “We also lost half the Guard and MP’s...again....”

Sally’s heart sank. It was the news she had been dreading. After all those years...after getting the planet and Mobotropolis back to prosperity...it was gone again...in an instant. “No...”

It was Reni’s turn to comfort her mother, as the queen dropped her head into her hands. Adding to the uncertain fate of her lifemate, this recent news was too much for her to take, and she abandoned her strong façade and wept.

Serenity paced outside her father's hospital room, anxious for any news, good or bad. Couldn't the doctors hurry up with their healing already? The world was once again in need of its hero. The purple hedgehog sighed impatiently and plopped down in one of the chairs in the waiting room...

She awoke to someone gently shaking her. "Reni...the doctors need to speak with you..." It was her mother. The ground squirrel looked strained...as if she was having trouble withholding her emotions. Serenity gulped and followed her over to where her friend Snowdrift waited with Dr. Quack and several others.

"So....I take it it's not good news..."

The healers shook their heads. "Your Highness..."

"Please, just call me Reni...and spill..." She tried to put the impatience out of her voice, but failed. "I can take it." she said, gulping visibly.

"Well, your Highness...Your father IS alive...but....He shows no signs of coming out of his coma..."

The purple hedgehog gulped again and stared at the floor tiles. "Go on..." she said in a small voice.

"Well...his leg was fairly severely shattered, so...we...had to amputate."

"Say **WHAT?!**" The purple hedgehog princess's gaze shot up sharply, boring accusingly into each of the doctors.

"We had to amputate his leg...there was no way to save it. I'm sorry, Reni..." Snowdrift mumbled and looked at the floor, unable to meet her friend's accusing stare.

"**AMPUTATE!?**" Serenity squeaked, shocked and appalled.

"Yes...." continued Quack. "It would have gotten gangrenous and threatened his life if we'd tried to save it...it was already too far gone to even try...I'm sorry, Princess..."

"But, but...*amputate?!?*" Serenity seemed unable to fathom the reality of the word.

"Reni..." Sally started.

"NO! It can't be! I won't believe it!" The hedgehog princess muscled her way into the ICU, and over to her father's side. Apprehensively, she moved the blanket covering Sonic's prone form away from his leg, and beheld with horror the reality of the heavily bandaged stump that ended roughly at his knee. "No...." She squeaked again, pivoted on her heel, and fled, knocking over chairs and people in her haste to find a secluded place to release her grief.

She ran around the perimeter of the village at least four times, wailing like a violet banshee, as the snowstorm that had spawned itself from the thunderstorm the night before swirled around her. At a time like this, she would normally have found herself at the ring pool, a natural place that her father and her both found solace in. However, the current worsening of the weather

- that mysteriously coincided with the recent tragedies of the ambush of her father and the fall of Mobotropolis – prevented that. Instead, she rocketed into her house and straight into her room, slamming the door behind her so hard that it shook the walls. She collapsed into a curled position on her canopied bed and cried the bitter tears that she couldn't let the world see.