

Chapter 11: Vengeance

She ran on a deserted plain, the wind of her passage rustling the dried up and shriveled grasses as she passed. Where was she running to? Or from? She didn't know, and frankly didn't care at the moment. Just to run...as if doing so would leave her troubles behind her. It didn't. They seemed able to keep up just fine. And this scenery wasn't helping either. Why so desolate? Like her heart...this landscape seemed to have lost all hope. In the distance, she thought she saw a great black cloud hovering ominously over a cityscape...the newly renamed Robotropolis.

"Why am I headed toward THAT?" She wondered aloud. "There's nothing there but sorrow and slavery..."

"I think you know the answer to that, Ren."

Serenity ground to a sudden halt, looking around in alarm. She knew that voice...had known it all her life, but...after what had happened...she hadn't expected to hear it again.

"Yes, it's me, Ren."

"Daddy?!" Serenity squeaked. Unwanted tears sprang back to her eyes. "Where are you? I can't see you!" The alarm was evident in her voice.

"Shhhh...I'm always with you...in your heart...even if you can't see me."

There was a calming sensation around her...however Sonic's last statement negated it somewhat as she gave a start. "You don't mean...!"

"Shhhhhh...Relax, I'm still alive...still will be when you get back. This is the only way I can talk to you now though."

Serenity calmed down a bit at that. "Daddy...why am I here?" She waved a hand to indicate the barren landscape she was standing on.

Her father's disembodied voice was quiet for a while, the desolate wind on the dead plain the only sound until he continued, "You know the answer to that, too, Plumcake."

"Wait...you don't mean..."

"You have to carry on in my stead. It's what you were born to do."

"But I..."

"Look, ask Prophecy when you get back. She'll explain it to you. I'm no good with this omen stuff...But remember this...you are the Promised One...the Freedom Fighters NEED you now...since I can't do it anymore..." There was more than a touch of regret in his voice.

With that, the voice faded away, as did the comforting paternal presence. Serenity was left alone on the dead No-Man's-Land between the forest and Robotnik's city of metallic misery.

She began running again...her mind troubled. There it was again...this business about being the 'Promised One.' The tears came again. She didn't want to be a 'Promised One' if it meant that she had to live with her father as nothing more than a vegetable...

The dead plain faded from existence as the voice came back on the winds once more, "Carry on my legacy..."

The purple hedgehog's eyes flew open as she sat up abruptly in bed, the pillow stuck on her quills again. Impatiently, she tore it off. Dream. It was just a dream. However, she now knew what she had to do...what she was BORN to do. She WAS the daughter of two Freedom Fighters, after all. Robotnik would PAY for what he had done...

“Serenity, you can't be serious. I won't let my baby-”

“MOOO-THER!” Serenity protested and rolled her eyes. “Don't call me that. And don't tell me I can't go, because I'm going. And you can't stop me.”

“But you-”

“Let her go, your Majesty.”

“But Prophecy...She's never...I mean, she doesn't know what it's actually like to be a Freedom Fighter!” Sally stammered, unsuccessfully trying to come up with a reason to keep her determined daughter safe in Knothole.

“Well, I guess I'll just find out then, won't I?” The purple hedgehog princess smirked briefly. “Don't worry Mother, I'll be fine. Promise.” She gave the flustered ground squirrel a thumbs-up. Her casual attitude hid a fire behind her sapphire eyes.

“But...I should go with you to make sure you stay safe!”

“Not with my future sister in your belly you don't!” Serenity countered pointedly.

Sally sighed. “You got me there. Just...promise me you'll be careful! You don't know what he's like...” the royal ground squirrel glanced to the side pensively, nervously grasping her arm with her other hand. “Robotnik can be...vicious.”

“So I noticed when he tried to MURDER Daddy with a flippin' LANDSLIDE!” Serenity countered sardonically, a dangerous look in her eyes. “Don't worry, Mom. I can handle it. Remember, I'm the daughter of the two best Freedom Fighters that ever lived!”

Sally smiled slightly at the oblique compliment. However, she was still reluctant to let her daughter endanger herself. “I just don't want to see you hurt...or WORSE...”

The Mystic Serval cut in, “It is her DESTINY, your highness. She is the Promised One,

after all.”

Sally sighed again and capitulated. “Okay...but...honey...Take someone with you.”

Serenity was slightly taken aback by this. “I can do it myself, honest!”

Sally set her stance. “Freedom Fighters always work as a team. You never know when you might need somebody to bail you out, you know.”

“Someone bail ME out? Are you serious?!”

“You have too much of your father in you.”

“I know...wait...HEY!”

Sally merely shrugged at her daughter’s glare.

“Fine. I’ll take the twins with me. I’m sure they’d like some adventure.”

“The twins?! But...but...they...”

“Mother. They. Are. THIRTEEN. Plenty old enough to go on Freedom Fighter missions. Their dad was going on missions at TEN.”

“FINE! But I think you should ask permission of HIM first before you lead them off into certain doom.”

“Can do. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

Contrary to her initial thoughts, it actually took some more persuasion and the twins themselves pleading to be able to go to convince Tails to let them go with Reni on a potentially dangerous trip into the newly hostile city. He was particularly hesitant to send Peace...since she reminded him so much of his lost lifemate; he didn’t want to lose his *daughter* too. However, he *did* trust the princess...despite the fact that she’d never done anything like this before... “Just bring them back safely...”

“I will, Uncle Tails, I will.”

Surge rolled, narrowly avoiding getting crushed by a blazing rafter, the child in his arms crying in terror. “Shhh...it’s alright. I won’t let them hurt you.” He cradled the youngster

as he fled the fireball that was once the orphanage he called home. The maroon hedgehog ducked into the shadow of an alley, where a small group of other orphans was huddled, the youngest trembling in fear. He looked up, his eyes meeting those of his roommate, the overlander Jason. "Is this it, Jase? No more?"

The dark-skinned overlander shook his head sadly. "They got tha' rest...Even tha' couns'lors. There weren't not'in I coul' do."

Sergei swore under his breath, then immediately clamped a hand over his mouth when he looked over at his younger 'brothers and sisters.' Looking down, he muttered. "Sorry. It just slipped out."

"S'ok, bro. I dun' think they 'erd you...they's too scared anehways. So...Whata' we do now, eh?"

The electric hedgehog was silent a while, watching the alleyway opening warily. "Well...one thing's for sure...we can't stay here. I...don't know what happened...but we GOTTA get AWAY before they realize they missed us."

"But...tha' others..."

"There's nothing we can do about the others now...I..." He trailed off as they heard sirens approaching. "There's ONE thing I can do. We...need to get somewhere safer...I can teleport us using lightning, but...I'll have to shield you and the little ones first..."

"Well...by all means...do it befoa 'dem bots gets back!"

The maroon hedgehog closed his eyes, concentrating. A blue-white sphere of static expanded outwards from him, enveloping the little band of survivors. He then raised his hands and muttered something...

Jason glanced at the alley opening nervously. "C'mon Surge, pal...they's found us...they're a commin'!"

Indeed, the robots had detected the heat signature of the little band and were closing in. Jase winced...waiting for the blaster-fire to start...

Suddenly, there was a flash of blue-white light and a thunderclap. The scenery was abruptly different...they were now surrounded by greenery, though to Jase, it hadn't felt like they had moved at all. The human looked over at his 'brother.' The maroon hedgehog was looking decidedly shaky. "Surge?" Suddenly the electric hedgehog's eyes drooped shut and he fell first to his knees, and then collapsed, unconscious, on the ground. His normally constantly-sparking quills were strangely devoid of static. Jason scrambled over to him. "Surge! Surge! Wake up, bro! Oh...don' do this to meh, Buddy...don' die on meh!"

Snowdrift knew she was taking a chance, especially with her white fur. She scanned the forest in front of her before darting behind another tree. She couldn't be too careful with all the marauding SWATs. There were none in this part of the forest, but...

She hesitated before continuing to the shadow of another tree. *I really shouldn't be out here...but...I need those herbs...What's that?* The albino skunk peered out from behind the tree and gasped. Wasting no time, she hurried over to the group. "What are you doing out here... don't you know it's dangerous now that--" She gasped when she saw a familiar form, passed out on the ground. Instantly going into healer-mode, she knelt beside the unconscious maroon hedgehog.

"Oh good, a medic." Jason tried not to look TOO relieved, but he couldn't completely hide the concern he felt for his 'brother.' "Is he gonna be a'right?"

The skunk was waving a dampened cloth under Surge's nose. The electric 'hog stirred... and then sneezed. He sat up, holding his head. Jason tried to hide his relieved sigh. "Oww... warn me to think twice before I pull a stunt like that again... Oh my head... I've never transported so many before..." He blinked at Snowdrift for a moment before recognition set in. "... Snow?... Where's Reni? I got some bad news... The city..."

"She knows, Surge... She left a half hour ago, saying something about avenging her father." Before he could ask what that meant, Snowdrift was helping him to his feet. "Can you walk? We have to get home, anywhere outside of Knothole is dangerous."

"...I...think so..." Surge took a few shaky steps before having to admit to needing assistance. Jason moved to support his left side, while the albino skunk supported his right. They made their way back to the hidden village, the rest of the surviving orphans following. "...I should be ok in a couple of hours or so," Surge explained, "I just overdid it a bit there... completely drained myself... Reni left? What happened?!"

"...It's her father... Robotnik is back, and with a grudge, too, it seems. He... ambushed them..."

"Reni?! Is she hurt?! I swear, if--"

Snowdrift shushed him. "Don't get excited... you're body can't deal with it right now. Reni's fine... Sonic on the other hand..." Snowdrift informed Surge of the sad events as they entered the village.

A rank and putrid stench assaulted her nose as Reni darted behind a building. The purple hedgehog glanced around. There was already a sizable pile of metallic trash here in the outskirts of town. *Sheesh. Robotnik doesn't mess around when he gets down to business ruining neighborhoods...* It had only been, what, a couple days since the ambush and takeover? *He must have had this planned for a good long time while we were blissfully unaware.* She exchanged a

glance with the twins, who were sticking close. She glanced around the side of the building, ears switching, alert for any trouble. The street was long, dark and dingy, with SWATbots lined up on either side at attention. The sky was a sickly brownish yellow at the edges, with heavy, dark brown clouds above adding to the oppressive feeling. Any plants that had been in Mobotropolis before the re-takeover were shriveled and brown, unable to survive the massive amounts of pollution that had been released since the new coup. She sneezed softly and glared down the street. The palace had once again been converted into a massive egg-shaped hunk of metal. *Why are we being forced to repeat history? What didn't we learn?* She thought, gazing at the melancholy scene, trying to keep the hopelessness in her heart at bay. *And to think I WANTED to live this when I was a kid...What was I THINKING?!*

Serenity coughed. She already felt dirty just standing here. She ran a finger along part of her arm and looked at the grime that came off on her finger. The sludge in the air had already precipitated out onto her fur, covering it in a thick layer of grit. The purple hedgehog princess narrowed her eyes as she glared toward the tyrant's headquarters. *You will regret hurting Daddy, Lardo...* Reni vowed silently to herself before beckoning her friends to follow as she darted behind another building further into the city.

Suddenly, she found herself falling, as the ground beneath her feet was suddenly rendered nonexistent. She hit a slick incline and slid for what seemed an eternity before tumbling out into a gloomy steel-plated room and hitting her head on the far wall. She caught a quick glance of glowing energy bars before blackness enveloped her.

Dark eyes surveyed a destroyed and ravaged cityscape with sinister glee. From within his hoverpod, Robotnik took pleasure in the sight of every begrimed and sullied panorama. THIS was what he lived for. Destruction and dominion. Robotropolis was HIS again. This time PERMINENTLY. No longer would that pincushion foil his plans...he had beaten him. What was even better...he had beaten him in the sneakiest, most underhanded way possible. The Rodent had never seen it coming! He cackled sinisterly.

There was something in the rear-view mirror for a split-second. Robotnik turned the hoverpod to look...but it was gone. He must have been imagining things. Too many years having to deal with that THORN of a hedgehog had made him paranoid. He needed to stop fretting about it. Sonic was dead...by his own hand...or was he? The despot turned his red-centered eyes on his nephew who was cowering in the seat beside him. "Snively..."

The small man flinched. "Y-yessir...?"

"Key in the coordinates of that rock pile I made. I changed my mind. I want that spineball's HIDE on my wall!"

Snively scrambled to do his master's bidding. "Yessir!" His lackey made some adjustments to the hoverpod's plotted course, and it was soon headed for the scene of the ambush several days previous.

"Go to stealth-mode." Robotnik commanded as they neared the site of the landslide. After doing so, they pulled the hoverpod in close for an inspection. "WHAT?!" Robotnik pounded a fist on the dashboard in frustration. The body he'd expected to find was nowhere to be

seen. He pulled the pod in for a landing, and then, after making sure none of the Rodent's *friends* were around, decloaked and emerged from the hoverpod, Snively trotting hastily behind. Stalking around the vicinity, the tyrant scrutinized the pile of rubble. "Ha! I DID get 'im! Look! Bloodstains! His *friends* must have found the body before I could come back and retrieve it. Drat. I really wanted that hide. Oh well. At least this proves he's dead." The large man strode back to the pod, his lackey following. He was disappointed that he could not have his nemesis's hide as a trophy, but it wasn't a huge loss. The Rodent was dead. He had THAT much satisfaction at least.

"Uh...sir?"

"WHAT?!"

"Transmission from headquarters, s-sir!"

"Well don't just stand there shaking, Snively, patch it through. And get us out of this... *forest!*" Robotnik shuddered as he said the word.

"Y-yessir! Sending it th-through, sir!" He pressed a few buttons on the control-panel and the ship rose off the ground, headed back to the conquered city. "... You overgrown pumpkin..." Snively added in a mutter.

"WHAT was that, Snively?!"

"Err, uh...I said, I'm punching it in, sir!"

Robotnik growled slightly and took his seat as the transmission came through.

"THE TRAP TRIGGERED IN SECTOR 5-ZETA. ORDERS, YOUR EMINANCE?"

"The trap? What is that rust-bucket talking about? I already sprung my trap and it worked perfectly!"

Snively pulled nervously at the collar of his uniform. "Uh, I th-think it means THE trap, s-sir!"

"What?! Impossible. That trap is only triggered by someone traveling at supersonic speeds, and I already saw the proof that I did away with HIM!"

"B-but s-sir!" Snively stammered, "Readings are in-d-deed showing a lifeforce in the cell at the end of the t-trap..."

Robotnik hammered his fist on the dashboard. Did that spineball actually have the GALL to survive the ambush?! It COULDN'T be!...Could it? But he'd seen the bloodstained ground! Nothing could have survived his rockslide...not even the Rodent! "Well! We'll just have to see what we caught in our little trap then shan't we? Snively! Take us in!"

"Y-yessir!"