

Chapter 12: Roadblock to Revenge

Peace and T.J. Prower knelt on the ground in the region Reni had JUST been, staring at a locked trapdoor in the metal floor. They'd seen what happened, but they still could not quite believe it. One minute, they had been following as Serenity darted from one hiding spot to another; the next, she was GONE. Through the floor, apparently. T.J. tugged at the edges of the pit-cover, determined to follow where his friend had vanished, but the metal plate would not move. Peace stood nearby squinting at the spot, rubbing her chin.

"Peace! Help me! I can't move it! Reni's down there somewhere!" Panic edged the kitsune's voice.

"Teej, I'm just as concerned about her as you are, but..." The young grey fox squeezed her eyes shut momentarily before continuing, "...I think we need to return to Knothole and get help."

"WHAT?! You're just gonna leave her in that madman's clutches? We gotta get her OUT!"

Peace sighed. "Look...It's obvious we're not gonna get through that. It's locked tight! If we're gonna be ANY help to her, *we* need help. Please...It...It hurts me to leave her too, but... We have a better chance to free her if we go home and tell the others what happened. They've been doing this longer than we have."

There was a long silence. T.J. finally stood up, shoulders slumping in defeat. "I...guess you're right...but..."

"I know. C'mon. We'll hurry. The sooner we get home, the sooner the others will be able to help us."

With a final regretful glance back at the closed trap-door, the twin two-tailed foxes set off for the secret village, both thinking the same thing: *I'm sorry, Reni...but we'll be back, I PROMISE...*

Several hours later, a small group had converged around the sealed trapdoor. There was a muted metallic clang as Bunnie's cybernetic limbs connected with the ground, as she was the first to disembark from the back of the group's transportation, the dragon known as Dulcy. She glanced over to where the twin kitsunes were anxiously hovering, before making her way over. Shortly afterwards, another form leapt off of their friend's back and followed, sparking anxiously. Despite not having much experience fighting tyrants - and being recently recovered from his teleport-stunt - Surge had refused to be left behind while his girlfriend was in possible mortal danger. They both looked expectantly at the dragoness's pouch.

"Sugah-Twan, you comin' deah?"

After several minutes the coyote's head emerged hesitantly from where he had been hiding throughout the flight and subsequent rough landing. Dulcy still hadn't quite gotten the hang of landings, though they had gotten a LITTLE better over time. Antoine stammered, "... Oui...Oui, I am to be comeeng...zough I am not seeing 'ow I am to be helpeeng... Why iz zis 'appeneeng again, eh?" He followed Dulcy over to where the group was gathered, every now and then casting hunted glances around at the darkened city.

"That is a good question." The new voice came from a figure that resolved itself from the shadows into the form of a Robian hedgehog.

"Aaah!" Antoine jumped, before recognizing who it was. "'Ow dids you avoiding zee controleeng-virus, Uncle Chunk?"

"During the original fight for freedom, I anticipated possible virus-attacks, and so I installed a firewall into myself, as well as creating one for Nicole...I assume you brought her along?"

Bunnie handed him the micro-computer, "Sally-girl insisted Ah bring 'er...though Ah don' reallah know how ta work with 'er."

The Robo-hog turned to the wall, plugging the semi-sentient micro-computer into a convenient input-jack, typing in a series of commands. "Let's see if I can find out where she's being held...Ah here we are." Nicole projected a hologram of the suspected holding facilities. "Hmm...this could be tricky. There's a lot of security measures around this cell..." He pointed to an area on the hologram. "That's the most likely spot for a trap of this nature to empty out...if my suspicions are correct."

"How ah weah gonna get to 'er then, Sugah-Chuck?"

"Hmm...Good question. I think if we..." As he dropped his voice, the freedom fighters leaned in close to hear his plan. Shortly thereafter, they had split into two groups, determined to save their princess.

She woke up with a splitting headache...and not one from hitting her head either. THAT was just a dull ache in the back of her head. This headache was...more of a...She didn't know, but it seemed there was a slight chemical aftertaste-smell to the air in the room...CELL. Serenity jumped to her feet, looking over at the glowing bars at the front of the cell in alarm. It was a cell, not a room. She was in a cell. What the HECK was she doing in a CELL?! And what was that smell...She sneezed and blinked back some residual drowsiness, mentally connecting the dots, the chains that had somehow appeared on her neck, arms, and legs clattering. Sleeping gas. It had to be. She snorted. Overkill. This trap must have been made especially for her...or someone like her...her dad! It had to be.

There was activity somewhere on the other side of the bars, beyond eyeshot, probably at the end of a corridor. The sound was a rhythmic clanking, as of many robot feet marching in unison. The metallic parade soon marched into her range of vision, and the purple hedgehog

caught a glimpse of a red-suited overlander in the very center of it. Great. This was JUST what she needed right now. NOT. Her head ached, she was a prisoner, and she did NOT want to exchange words with her father's would-be murderer right now. Reni curled up and wedged herself into the darkest corner of the cell, trying to blend with the background, pointedly ignoring the tyrant as he approached...

“I thought you said there was something in here.” Robotnik growled at his nephew. “I see nothing.” *Why didn't I put many lights in here? I'd be able to tell if there actually was something in here...* He didn't say it out loud, however. It was FAR more gratifying to watch Snively squirm under the assumption it was his fault.

The smaller man trembled under the accusing glare of his superior. “Th-there is S-sir. The heat-scanners d-don't l-lie.” Trembling, he handed the device over. “S-see? Bunched up in that c-corner...”

“Hmm...” The despot examined the warm spot on the scanner for a while, twisting his mustache in thought. “Snively!” He barked, smiling unpleasantly as his lackey jumped. “Get me a flashlight! NOW!” The smaller man scrambled off to do his bidding, returning a short time later, handing over the required device with shaking hands. The corpulent villain pointed the handheld lamp in the direction of the heat signature.

The beam of light hit her like an accusing finger, and she flinched instinctively. However, she did not move from her curled position, her quills facing outward, presenting her captors with nothing but a ball of violet spikes for their troubles.

“What...is THIS? So I DID snare me a hedgehog, hmm?” Serenity could hear the sneer in his voice. “However, you aren't the one I was expecting. Of coarse you're not. I killed him, didn't I? Well. Why don't you turn around? Give me a glimpse of my robotisizer's newest victim, eh?” His voice was sickly-sweet. “And how'd you even get in there, hmm? This trap was meant for ONE rodent...and you aren't him, obviously. Because I killed him.” He grinned unpleasantly at the spiky, quivering ball of potential energy.

Suddenly there was an explosion of activity in the cell. In one swift motion, Serenity had leapt to her feet, pivoted around, and dashed right toward the glowing bars with an almost feral growl. Abruptly she fell flat on her tail as she came to the end of the chains that attached her to the wall. Jumping back up, she stood fuming impotently at the end of the chains, her sapphire eyes narrowed to slits, teeth bared, ears flat against her head, and quills flared out. “YOU!” She screamed oh-so-elocquently. “MURDERER! Daddy almost DIED because of you! And here you are boasting about it! When I get outa here...”

“HA! You CAN'T get out. I made sure this cell was a secure vault. And from that

display you just gave, I'm glad I took all the precautions. Not that a LITTLE GIRL like you could ever match up to ANY cell of mine anyway, but..." The Robot Overlord sneered at her obnoxiously.

Serenity let a snarl escape her lips as she fought with the chains, attempting to pull them out of the wall, and only succeeding in running in place. "I'll make you EAT those words, LARDO!"

Robotnik seethed inwardly at the insult, but chose not to show it. It would ruin his imposing image. "Uh huh. Sure you will. From that little stunt you just pulled, it looks like I touched a nerve. I take it your father was my now-dead nemesis, Sonic, am I right, Rodent?"

"Well DUH. And I'm NOT a rodent! And he's NOT dead! NO thanks to YOU! Stop gloating from tha other side of these bars and face me on THIS side of 'em!" Reni smacked a fist into her palm for emphasis.

Robotnik scoffed. "I'm not stupid, Rodent. I'm not going in there with you using that cage as a treadmill. I can say this though. You. Are. Doomed."

Serenity snorted derisively. "Psssh. Yeah right. I can get outa here with my eyes closed in a Sonic Second! Yer gonna PAY for what you did to Daddy...for what you did to our city...our planet..."

The tyrant snorted. "Empty threats from a doomed hedgehog. I WAS just going to robotize you...but now...I think I'll have a little fun with you. I think I'll ease you into it sloooooooooowly. See if I can get you to go INSANE before the process is complete. But...for now...I will leave you to ponder your fate...And stop leaving skid marks on my cell floor, Hedgehog's Spawn." He added as an afterthought. With that, he motioned to his chrome entourage and sauntered back the way he'd come.

The purple hedgehog gave an exasperated sigh and sank back into her corner, hiding her head in her hands, as she tried to fight the tears that returned unbidden, triggered by her frustration and the hopeless situation she now found herself in.

* * * *