

Chapter 14: Metamorphosis

ZZZAP!

“Ow! Owowow!” TJ pulled back his hand, shaking it. “Sorry, guys...I...I can’t get it. It...It’s shielded.” The kitsune had tears in his eyes, as he massaged the life back into his hand. “I can’t get through it...and now I’m afraid Reni’s domed...” His voice trailed off as he looked at the floor of the vent.

The purple hedgehog balked at the door to the robotisizing chamber, every instinct telling her to run. She couldn’t, of course. The chains made sure of that. She gazed in horror at the hated machine. Her thoughts trailed back to that day in the museum, when she had willingly climbed inside it. *What was I THINKING?!* She had no way of knowing, of course, that this was the exact same robotisizer. Somehow, it looked FAR more menacing now...with the electronic indicator lights, and the light in the center of the tube. The glass door hung open, wide and ravening, hungering for its next victim, which just happened to be her. She gulped, but refused to show the fear that was growing inside her as she took each tiny, hobbled step closer to the device’s waiting maw.

“Well now...I trust you had a good night’s sleep, little princess?” Robotnik said mockingly, sauntering over.

“No.” Serenity said flatly, her voice deadpan.

“Pity. As it’s the last real sleep you’ll ever have.” Robotnik was enjoying this. Not only had he successfully destroyed his arch-nemesis, now the rodent’s own daughter was about to become his permanent robotic slave. “I have set the controls for the slowest, most painful, and most thorough robotization sequence. I entertained the idea of turning you into a mega-weapon and unleashing you on your friends, but...somehow that always seems to backfire on me. No...you will be a mere servant, nothing more.” He smiled unpleasantly.

Resigned to her fate, Reni said, “Yeah, yeah...can we just get this over with?”

“Ah-haha! You’ve already lost that fighting spirit I saw in the cell, have you? This will be easier than I thought. Hmm....Somewhat of a letdown, though...considering how much trouble your father always gave me...though in the end, he lost too, didn’t he? Pathetic.”

“Don’t you DARE talk about Daddy that way, Lardo!” Serenity growled and spat in the despot’s face, tears again threatening.

Robotnik sputtered somewhat, wiping off his face. “Ah-HA! So you ARE still spunky, huh? Well, Spawn of Sonic, we shall put a stop to that right NOW!” And he shoved her into the robotisizer’s waiting glass jaws. Confident that she would not be able to get out, Robotnik pressed a button. The shackles and chains released her, sinking into a compartment in the base of

the machine.

She landed hard on her tail and scrambled to her feet just in time to see the glass door swing shut, seeming to disappear completely, leaving her in a seamless, inescapable tube of glass. “NO!” She pounded her fists on the glass, her panic resurfacing. No escape...there was...no... escape...Serenity gulped several times, until her nerves were calmed enough to remark about the release of her chains. “You realize...you just freed...me and I can...run again, right?” She said between bouts of hyperventilating.

“Ha! That door is hermetically sealed to the rest of the tube. That is no ordinary glass either. I had it replaced with fused diamond-glass. Completely unbreakable.” He pounded on the outside of the glass with his metal fist for emphasis. “Spin all you want, it will do you no good.” Robotnik smirked as the purple hedgehog spun around the tube in abject terror.

Serenity knew she was doomed. She collapsed into the center of the robotisizer and curled herself tightly.

Robotnik sauntered over, leaning casually on the glass, continuing to gloat. “Perhaps you’d like to know WHY I released you from your chains, hmm, Hedgehog’s Spawn? The answer is simple. I cannot have your new metal body fusing to your chains, now can I? What good to me is a worker-bot who merely shuffles around and has its hands chained permanently behind it? I’ll tell you...none. I need you to have full range of motion. But you cannot get out of that tube, so I don’t need to worry about you running away.” Reni just continued to tremble in her balled-up form as Robotnik went on, parading self-importantly in front of the tube, his hands clasped behind his back. “Let me explain how this works...As I have mentioned, I have set the controls to their slowest and most thorough. At this setting, the process acts similarly to frostbite, attacking your extremities first, and moving inward—“

“Just...please...Get it over with already...”

“You do not wish to hear my explanation?” He replied in mock innocent surprise.

“No.” Deadpan voice again.

“Very well. However...I will need you to uncurl first.” He pressed a button and a jolt of electricity shocked the hedgehog out of her defensive posture. He smirked as she picked herself up, shaking from the shock. “Say ‘Adieu’ to your free will, Spawn of Sonic...” Relishing the moment, Robotnik pressed the robotisizer’s ignition switch with a flourish of evil glee.

Serenity hung her head in defeat. *Daddy...I’m sorry... Mother Mobius forgive me...your Promised One has failed...* “AAAAUUUUUUUGHHHHH!” Agony and searing, liquid fire shot through every fiber of her being, concentrating itself at the tips of her fingers, ears, tail, nose and quills, where it collected and began to eat away her flesh, replacing it with metal. The pain was excruciating. *Just...kill...me...NOW...*

“No!”

CRASH! BANG! The vent cover fell to the floor noisily, and there was a blinding flash of light, followed by the room filling with smoke. The despot coughed, fumbling around in the smoke and hurling curses.

The mist finally began to dissipate, revealing three angry Mobians. In the center of the group stood a livid Surge, his quills, unruly at the best of times, flared into one living mass of sparks and spikes, his ears flat against his head, teeth bared. Twin bolts of lightning speared from his extended hands, one to the control panel, and one going straight to the diamond-glass tube... shattering it.

“What the...?!” Robotnik sputtered. “ANOTHER hedgehog?” He didn’t have time to ponder this long, however, as something LARGE crashed through the skylight, causing him to reflexively shield his black eyes from yet MORE flying glass...In the next minute, he was a – rather bulbous – icicle as he found himself in the path of a too-familiar, localized, icy blast...that dragoness again.

Dulcy grinned humorlessly. “Hello...Again.” She turned from him to give the fat man’s lackey - who was trying to make an undignified scrambling retreat – the polar treatment as well.

Surge stood for several minutes, eyes blazing more hate than he had ever felt before... even toward his step-father. He readied a third bolt, aiming for the frosty tyrant.

“Surge, no! We need to help Reni!” came TJ’s somewhat frantic call.

“Junior here is right, Sugah-Surge...Dulcy’ll keep Ol’ Robotnik on ice, so ta speak.”

Dulcy snorted meaningfully in the tyrant’s direction, keeping an eye on him in case he started to thaw.

The electric hedgehog hesitated, and then, dissipating the bolt, turned back to the beleaguered princess, supporting one side, as Bunnie supported the other, as she tried to stand. Serenity was having considerable difficulty not crumpling into a pile of quivering spines. “You okay, Princess?”

“Uuuuuuhhhnnn...”

“C’m on, Reni-Girl...let’s getcha home.” A lump caught in Bunnie’s throat. She knew exactly what kind of pain and fatigue the purple hedgehog must be going through.

Serenity was staring bemusedly at the metal glinting on her fingers. “My...my...my...” She stammered blurrily.

Bunny placed her organic hand comfortingly on her shoulder. “Ah know how ya fe-ahl, beleahve me, Ah do, but...”

“But...m-my venge—” the dazed purple hedgehog started to protest.

“...Can wait for anothah day, hunnie. We gotta getcha home. Yoah mothah’s prob’ly frahntic.”

“But...Daddy’s...And my hands are...”

Bunnie knew what she was going through...but...they HAD to get OUT of there...before Robotnik or Snively thawed out enough to call for backup. The rabbit helped the shaking princess climb into Dulcy’s pouch, while she and Surge climbed onto the saddle-harness on the dragoness’s back. Tails, Jr took to the air and left through the smashed skylight to scout for the other group, who should have reached the rendezvous point in the junkyard by then. As Dulcy flapped her wings to gain altitude, Surge, sitting on her back, glared once more at Robotnik. “If you...ever...EVER...again harm even ONE quill...” He trailed off, letting the threat sink in before they too vanished out the shattered skylight, leaving the villain to quiver in rage and cold.

Inside the dragon’s pouch, Serenity let instinct take over and curl her into a tight, protective ball. Her body STILL felt like it was on fire. She still didn’t quite have her wits about her, as she continually mumbled to herself, shivering, “Daddy.....Daddy.....”

Serenity regarded herself mournfully in the mirror. It had been a week since her failed quest for vengeance and subsequent brush with the robotisizer. The events of that evening when the rescue party had returned successful – at least mostly – were still hazy, but she recalled being helped out of Dulcy’s pouch and collapsing into her mother’s arms. The immensely relieved ground squirrel had fussed over her, much to Serenity’s chagrin.

“My baby! You’re safe! My baby girl’s safe!”

“Mooooom!” Serenity had protested weakly, squirming out of her mother’s arms. But she had been so very tired...not to mention the fire that was only just beginning to ebb from her body and that was still burning in the metal-tipped parts of her body. “How much of me got...”

“Shh...Not now...You need rest.” She had been helped into the house and up to her bedroom, where she had collapsed onto her bed. She had slept for a day at least.

The purple hedgehog’s thoughts returned to the present as she forced herself to look at her altered reflection. Her quills were still a little ragged. She had cut off the metallicized tips, and they had not fully grown back yet. But that was nothing. Quills were just a form of hair...it would return to normal in time. The rest of the metal points however...she was stuck with those. Her tail tip, her fingers up to the first joint, and the tips of her ears were now irrevocably marred by the metal from that horrid machine. Luckily, her shoes had protected her feet from the process. She had no illusions however...she knew that if she had been there much longer, her feet would have been damaged as well...and her shoes would have been fused to them. The purple hedgehog squinted at her reflection. Was there also a metallic sheen on her nose? What was worse...her metal points ITCHED. Like CRAZY. And, because of the metal, she couldn’t get to the itch. That madman would PAY. Not only had he maimed her father...but now...now it was PERSONAL. She grimaced at her reflection, trying to look fierce. This time...THIS time her revenge would not fail. Luckless-ness or not.

But first...She had to ask Bunnie some things about being a part-Robian. Like...were robotisized parts supposed to itch this much...? She raced off in search of the rabbit.

“Nah...if ahnehthang...Ah compleahly lost ahll feahling in ‘em. ‘Till Ah got me some upgrahdes.” Bunnie looked curiously at her best friend’s daughter after Serenity had explained her problem. “Mebbeh we oughtah consahlt Doc Quahk aboutht this.”

“Oh come on! It can’t be THAT big a deal...” Serenity’s voice went small and squeaky briefly, “...right?”

Bunnie placed her organic hand on the young hedgehog’s shoulder. “C’mon, Reni-Girl.”

Serenity gulped imperceptibly and followed her to the medical facility. She didn’t want to admit she was worried.

“Well?” Serenity asked; her impatience was tinged with worry as the medical duck examined her metal points. Her mother, who had joined them, placed a hand on her shoulder comfortingly, at the same time shushing her with a glance.

“Hmmm...” was Doctor Quack’s only reply as he studied her ear.

The ear flicked of its own accord before she could stop it. “Sorry...” she mumbled, concentrating on holding it still. “...Well? What’s the scoop? Is it spreading? Please don’t say it’s spreading...”

“It’s not spreading.”

“You’re just saying that.”

Her mother sighed. “Serenity...he’s a doctor. He’d lose his license if he were to deceive you.”

“Ok so then...what’s happening?”

The duck’s only reply was another “Hmm...” as he continued to examine her ear... specifically the point at which metal met skin.

“I’m waiiiiiiiiting!”

Sally slapped a palm to her forehead, sighing. “Reni...manners.”

“...Sorry.” The purple hedgehog mumbled contritely. “But...don’t you have any idea what’s happening, Doc?”

“Serenity...does it itch just at the join point, or all over?”

“All over.”

“Hmmm...”

“‘Hmmm...’ what? What’s happening?!” Serenity was getting exasperated.

There was a long pause. “...I don’t know.” Doctor Quack finally admitted.

“You don’t know? What do you mean you don’t know?!”

“Serenity. Calm down.” Her mother urged.

“Calm down?! How can I calm down?! My robotisization is spreading, and you want me to calm down?!”

“Your Highness, I told you...it’s not spreading.”

“Then WHAT’S happening?!”

The doctor sighed. “Sometimes in cases of partial robotisization, the victim will get itching at the join points. This is sometimes a sign of the body rejecting the new metal limbs—” he held a hand up to forestall any panicked outburst from the purple hedgehog. “...But not always. Most of the time, it’s just a side affect of the process having been aborted prematurely—Most of the time, the itch goes away within a couple months...replaced with complete total numbness and sometimes Phantom Limb Syndrome...”

“What?”

“Ah had that. It’s when ya think ya feahl tha limb that ain’t there no moah. Sometahms still get it.” Bunnie added.

“That doesn’t matter though...because that’s not what this is.” The duck continued.

“Then WHAT is it, already?!”

“Princess, I already told you...I don’t know.”

“Aaaarrrraaaaaggggghhh!”

“Calm down, Your Highness. We’ll just have to observe it over the next couple of days and see what happens. Be sure to contact me if anything else unusual happens.”

Serenity grumbled, and jumped off of the medical seat. “Fine...But this is NOT going to stop me getting my revenge on Lardo...” With that, she took off, leaving the three older Mobians to exchange glances. Sally put her palm to her forehead again, and followed, hoping her daughter wasn’t going to jump right back into trouble.

V ZZZZZZZzzzz...SHUNK!

Sand and scraps of cloth flew everywhere, as Serenity uncurled from her spin-attack,

shaking sand out of her quills. She turned to survey the damage. *I go through more Robotnik-shaped punching dummies that way...* But...how else was she going to learn how not to be inept at freedom fighting? After her first attempt met with complete failure and nearly ended up making her a metallic servant for Robotnik, her mother had insisted she go through lengthy training before attempting her quest for revenge again. That was reasonable, but...when she thought about her father...reduced to a vegetable in the hospital hut...responsible actions and level-headedness were the farthest things from her mind.

Several weeks had passed since Serenity's brush with the robotisizer, and she was getting frustrated. *I need justice, and I need it NOW!* Training was boring. She would bring down that tyrant if it killed her! "GAH. This is taking too long! I want REVENGE!" She kicked at the ground in frustration, and a plume of sand wafted up briefly.

"Serenity. I understand your feeling. It tears me up inside too, But use your head. You WILL end up killed, or WORSE, if you go in unprepared! You saw what he did...You, of all Mobians should know what he's capable of...He's obviously not afraid of using lethal tactics anymore. It seems his loss the first time has made him even MORE ruthless."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know, Mom, I know...but—"

TINK.

"...Whatwasthat? And why does my tail feel funny?..." She glanced behind herself...and squeaked in fear.

"What?! What is it?!"

The violet hedgehog bent down and picked something off of the ground. Something small and made of a purple-ish metal. Her eyes went wide with shocked horror and she shot off in the direction of the hospital hut. "DR. QUAAAAAAAAACK!!!..."

Sally picked herself off of the ground and followed.

"**Y**ou are a very lucky young hedgehog, Princess." Dr. Quack said as he examined the piece of metal.

Serenity snorted. "Lucky?! Me? Yeah right. My tail just FELL OFF. How can that POSSIBLY be lucky?!"

"Take another look, Your Highness." The physician indicated a nearby mirror.

Serenity glanced at it with trepidation, expecting...she didn't know what. She gave a gasp of surprise. Her small tail was still there...all of it...in flesh and blood. Granted, the part that had formerly been metal was fur-less, but it was still there. "What...?"

"Now we know the reason it was itching."

Serenity caught herself scratching absently at her partially-metal nose – or trying to...her metal fingers made it difficult – and stopped. “What do you mean?”

The avian explained, “It seems only the first layer of skin was touched by the robotisizer. It’s like when an overlander gets a bad sunburn, and now the new skin is taking its place and causing it to peel...or in this case...the metal loosens and falls off. You should consider yourself very fortunate.”

The purple hedgehog looked at the mirror again, “Then the rest of this will...”

“Hopefully, yes.”

“Well, uh...that’s great...but what about my fur? Is my tail gonna be bald now?”

“Your fur should start growing back soon. It may be patchy at first, but it will grow back. You should make a full recovery.”

As if to prove the duck was telling the truth, the metal on Serenity’s nose came loose as she attempted to scratch at it and fell away in her hand. “...Sweet. Now I can get back to my revenge sooner!”

Sally spoke up, “No. You still need the training. This doesn’t change anything about your inexperience. If you go back and get caught again, I doubt Robotnik would bother with torturing you by prolonging the robotisizing procedure a second time. Remember, he doesn’t want you to become anything like your father. He might just have you executed.”

Serenity gulped. “But what’ll you do until I can? You can’t just let Robotnik do what he wants while I’m in training!”

Sally gave her daughter a strained smile. “We’ll manage.”