

Sidera somnum suadent

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Nicole explaining her story...

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1 - In the beginning...

I had a pretty good youth. My parents, they loved me, and my little brother Cody. My parents named me Nicole... I grew up on the other side of the planet, a country called Buthainah, also known as "downundah" as most people refer to it, in the small city Kennice. Buthainah wasn't a bad country to live. On the contrary, it was a beautiful place. Surely, it wasn't the richest and biggest country on the planet, but everything was great. Growing up there was like a dream... Everywhere you looked, you saw the exotic jungles, huge waterfalls, pearl-white sand, clear ocean water, exotic wildlife, the hundreds of tiny islands, and all sorts of things that were a feast to your eyes. Every time you opened your eyes, it was like seeing everything again for the very first time...

As for me... Life couldn't get any better. Although it was the same routine every day. Get up, go to college for 8 hours, then go back home, have a nice family dinner, then go to bed, and the whole process is repeating itself the next day... But in my spare time, like the weekends or holidays, I loved going out with my friends. Visiting a club, going to the beach, the movies, or everything else that involved friends. Also, I loved listening to music. My favourite is Drum and Bass, although my parents hated it.

Everything they ever proposed me to do was always rejected by me. You can say I was a spoiled, rich brat that always did the opposite of what my parents said, and they weren't too happy with it. Most of the time, it got me in trouble and when I was 14, I got busted for stealing sunglasses... Whether all these actions were a cry for attention, I don't know. But hey, you know what they say. You don't live until you live life on the edge. And that's exactly what I did. Always pushing myself to the edge to see what'll happen. What will happen if I steal something? Or what will happen if I had tattoos? Or what if I take fighting lessons without my parents knowing it? Because I always had my parents to get me out of situations I couldn't get out of myself... Every time something like that happened, my dad held a preach about taking responsibility and stuff. At some point, I didn't even bother to listen because I know he was coming to get for me when I was in trouble... Don't get me wrong though, I loved my parents, especially my mother... We did all sorts of stuff together, and the simple things were something that mattered to me most... Talking about boyfriends and all that crap...

We weren't poor... My father owned a construction company before I was even born. It started small and over the years, it became bigger and bigger. He got richer and richer as demands from the other continent became more. There was a bloody war going on for the past decade, and ever since it ended, demands got higher. The whole planet needed to help those countries, seeing as the countries on the other continent were devastated. My dad always told us how lucky we were that we didn't live there. But besides that, everything went great... Demands were high, money kept rolling in, and my dad got the idea of stock market investment. As the economics grew, even more money started to roll

in... That was about 4 years ago, when I was 14...

But, with every rich man or woman, there's always someone out there to take over business... At the height of my father's success, an old co-founder of the company showed him papers that the company should be handed over to him. It was all about legal paperwork and all sorts of stuff. My father didn't agree on that, seeing as he quit the job himself when the company was suffering from a lack of jobs. Everything resulted in a legal affaire, which eventually resulted that my father was forced to hand over the company to him. My father was devastated by that, seeing as he worked his whole life to build it up from the ground... And to make matters worse... Seeing as the stocks investment was a part of the company, he lost it all... We were forced to move out of our big house, sell almost everything we got to pay our debts, and leave everything behind... But that wasn't the worst part for me...

My father changed a lot during that period... We now had a small house with only the necessary stuff... All the luxury we were used to was gone, and trying to make it on your own isn't really easy for someone who is used that everyone else is doing for it you. It had its rough time, but we managed it. I still went to school, and Cody went to school as well... But, I still wasn't used to the idea of living this sort of life... We only managed to last it out for a couple of months... Not because of all the things we lost, but by the effects and frustration...

Then one day, I came home late... As I opened the door of my house, I heard that my mom and dad were arguing loudly... As I walked through the hall, I noticed that picture frames were broken and the living room was a mess... Then Cody ran up to me in his pyjamas and told me they were arguing... And at that point, I saw my dad coming in the hall pissed off, went out the door and slammed it... I saw my mother crying on the couch, and I sat next to her... And tried to comfort her and to find out what it was all about... I never found out what actually happened that night... But dwelling in the past doesn't make things right. Because you're waiting for an explanation that will never come...

For the next couple of months, the situation didn't change much... I can understand my dad was frustrated about everything that happened to him, but that doesn't give him a reason to act it out on us. I started to feel depressed every time something like that happened and I tried to get in touch with my old friends... But they're not there for me anymore... They all abandoned me when I needed them the most...

As time went by, the confrontations ended up violently... At some point, my mother had enough and they divorced, which had a great impact on me and my little brother... But what's worse was that she didn't take us along with her. She fracked off and never came back... We didn't know where she was or how we could get in contact with her... She just left us... And for that, I'll never forgive her... I wasn't her

daughter anymore...

Now that my mother wasn't around anymore, my dad took his frustrations out on us... I was able to defend myself, but Cody couldn't... Almost every day we had big arguments and I had no one to go to except my little brother... My dad always told us how sorry he was after it was over, which made him cry... He never showed it to us, but I could hear him at night... I knew he had regrets, but that doesn't mean it never happened...

One day, I arrived in an empty house... Or so I thought... I heard something from upstairs and once I got there, I could hear Cody sobbing... I opened the door to his room, and there he was, on the floor, crying... As I got to him and asked what happened, he didn't respond. I tried picking him up and he yelled all of a sudden not to pick him. It took a lot of time and patience to persuade him to talk about what happened to him. And at some point, he lifts up his head and looked at me, and I could see he had a black eye... At that point, I decided we had to go... Because, we couldn't live on like that anymore...

After I took care of Cody, I went to the living room. I searched the place for money and grabbed everything I could. It was actually a lot of money and I placed it inside my pockets... I left a note for my dad, and after that, I took Cody's hand and went outside the door... I locked it, and we both walked away without ever looking back... I remember Cody's face when he looked at me. He got a weak smile on his face and I smiled back... I never really had a good relationship with my little brother, only because he was 4 years younger than me. He can get pretty annoying, but I think he thought about me the same way. But that all didn't matter now though. He knew I cared for him by walking away together...

So the first thing we did was going to the train station... We bought two tickets to Reventon, which was located near the sea. They looked at us rather baffled when we said we wanted two second class tickets to Reventon, seeing as it's a journey of about two days. I managed to talk ourselves out of it and once we boarded the train and found our seats, Cody and I couldn't sigh in relief... At that point, I realized my brother was a person too... That he had needs, and dreams and all sort of stuff. Before this all happened, I didn't even know his age... We talked a lot during the journey to Reventon, and he opened himself up to me... To me, it felt like living on the edge again, with no care in the world. Only my little brother and I and whatever what might be ahead of us...

But I never realized that there might be trouble ahead of us, which, inevitably happened. Once we reached Reventon, we had no idea what to do. We stayed in a humble hotel for a few days and again, talked myself out of it when they asked how we were gonna pay for it... With the money we had left, we bought cloths, and all sort of stuff. Within 2 days, all the money was gone which presented another problem... At some point, our stay in the hotel ended and we had to get out...

That night, we stayed out on the streets... At that same moment, I learned a valuable lesson. Never trust anyone... A group of hedgehogs, about the same age as us approached us. Five of them, two girls and three guys... They offered us food and shelter and I accepted it with my stupid naïve face. At first, they seem very friendly, but Cody didn't trust it. I always said he shouldn't worry about it, but he did anyway for a good reason.... We stayed there for a couple of days and they gained our trust... And soon it was time to return a favour to them...

One night, the oldest of the bunch approached me. I never got their names by the way, but that doesn't matter. He asked me if I was "interested" in making some money, and when he said that, I was shocked. He saw the look on my face and told me he didn't mean it that way. At one point, I was very relieved, but also very curious with what he meant... And he said he wanted me to steal things... Just about anything, as long as it's worth money... And the worst part is, he wanted Cody to steal things as well... I said I didn't want that, and as soon as I said that, he pushed me against the wall, holding a knife to my throat. He said we both took advantage of there "hospitality" and that we both needed to return a favour to them... As soon as the others came, one of them got hold of my arms and pinned me down while the other pulled down my pants... Then they locked the door...

Something happened to me ever since that. Every time someone got close to me, I reacted violently. It didn't take long before we got kicked back on the streets again, and I tried not showing it to Cody. He acted like he didn't know anything but I knew all too well that he realized something happened. He noticed I changed, and that that we needed to come up with something to get out this forsaken place...

Now Cody... See, he doesn't look very bright, but he's actually very clever... At some point, he pointed to my necklace and he smiled... I didn't get him at first, but after he explained it all, I knew this had to succeed... A little bit of extra cash always comes in handy...

So the next day, Cody explained it all again while we were out on the streets. I sold my necklace at a pawnshop and didn't get much for it. But that doesn't matter. We had bigger plans... Before we went back to those guys, Cody revealed the plan one more time and then we went back...

Now, the oldest of the bunch wasn't too happy with the money that we brought in... He saves it somewhere... But all we needed to know is where he keeps the rest of it...

The next day, as evening fell and everyone was outside doing their "stuff", Cody and I got "home" early. Cody stood guard as I quickly grabbed a lot of money and placed it in my pockets. Cody tapped on the door, which was the signal that we had to leave. So we both slipped through the backdoor to the street and walked normal. We were pretty nervous and as we turned a corner, I was suddenly pulled in an ally, and was pushed against a wall. It was the same guy again, but this time, I punched him hard in the face and he fell back. That was actually the first time I punched someone... Then all of a sudden, I became so pissed off that I kept beating his face. At some point, Cody held me back and we both ran as fast and far as we could...

We searched around and eventually reached the ferry. It takes you to the peninsula about 50 kilometres away from this island. The peninsula still formed the gateway to Buthainah, with the airport and all major transport routes. I actually paid attention during social studies while I was in college... We were just in time to catch the last ferry...

Once we got to the peninsula, we had, again, nowhere to go. That night, we slept at the docks and by dawn, we saw a container ship getting ready. I looked at Cody and he smiled, then we decided to hitch a ride with the ship as stowaways... We looked around and made sure no one saw us, and then we climbed the thick rope that was anchored at the bay... Looking back now, it was a dangerous thing to do. Because if you fell, you would be dead for sure... You'd get crushed between the bow of the ship and the concrete walls. But, we both made it and waited in a lifeboat with a plastic sheet covering us... Few hours later, the ship set off, to wherever the hell it was going...

That same night, one of the sailors, walked around on deck. I heard he was lighting up a cigarette and that he walked around. But for some reason, the lifeboat we were in caught his attention. He took a peek in the boat and discovered us. At that same moment, he looked up and was about to warn the others, but I grabbed his hand and placed paper money in his hand. He then looked at us again and I told him that if he could arrange food and water for us, he gets more...

It went good for a few days. It was long and boring, and every time the sailor came along at night, we talked for a little while. He even managed to bring us some blankets and a few books... But one night, he didn't come...

That night was a stormy, rainy night... Cody and I got soaked from all the waves that were hitting the ship and we heard a lot of people yell... At some point, I looked outside and all I could see was the dark, rainy night sky... And at that point, I realized the ship was capsizing... The lifeboat started to take water, and the lifeboat had to let go, otherwise, we were being pulled under water. We pushed and

pulled the ropes on the pulleys, but the boat didn't give in. So we both jumped in the water and clenched on a piece of wood that floated around... As the hours passed by, the storm finally calmed down and I could see the sun coming up... And with it, I saw a few dead bodies floating around, among them, the sailor who took care of us... Then Cody looked at me and I realized we were thinking the same thing... What the hell are we doing out here...? The ship started to sink slowly, and we could see in the distance the other lifeboats of the crew, but we floated away in the other direction...

After hours of floating around on sea, we could see in the distance land. I didn't know where the hell we were and we were both really tired... The sun went down and it turned night... The night was freezing cold as we still drifted slowly towards land... I looked at Cody and I didn't know how he did that. Falling asleep just like that... By the time the sun came up again, I couldn't feel my legs. Then I tried moving up a little to get my legs out of the water.

One whole day passed by... Two days passed by... Each day, we saw land getting closer and closer, which gave us strength not to give up. It took about 4 days to reach it...

On the night of day 4, I woke up on a beach... I didn't see Cody anywhere... I tried looking for him by crawling forward... Every move hurts but I managed to get up. I took my shoes off first and every bone in my body was shivering. I tried getting up and stumbled towards a forest not far from the beach... And at some point, I couldn't go on... I collapsed in the middle of a forest, not knowing where I am...

Then I felt like I was moving in a swaying motion... I felt something warm on my back... I opened my eyes slowly and saw I was moving in a swaying motion... I felt the warm sun on my back and I looked down. I saw two dark blue legs with cyan stripes below me walking and that warm thing I felt on my back was an arm. It took me a while to realize I was being carried. I turned my head and saw this dark blue hedgehog, with cyan quills in a pattern on his spines. At that point, he turned his head and faced me... I saw a huge scar across his right eye, and the way he looked at me made me freak out...

I jumped out of his grip and stood before him... I kept staring at him while I prepared myself for a fight... Then I noticed he carried weapons and a vest that said RRTS... A little name tag to the right of it said "Reaper"...

???: Good morning to you too...

RRTS was something that I heard of before... Especially a lot on the news during the war...

???: You know, the war might be over, but it's still not safe going through the forest all by your self. You're soaking wet. There's a village a couple of miles east.

Nicole: Where's my brother...?

???: We took him in last night. We found him wondering around the forest all alone while we patrolled the forest. He told me that you were around here somewhere. Come on, let's go.

I couldn't say if I could trust this guy. With every word he said, he sounded so cold... Last time I trusted a stranger, it didn't go too well... But, seeing as his vest said RRTS and he carried the weapons, I thought I was best to obey him. But he didn't look that old though...

I tried walking but I was too tired to carry on. He picked me up and threw me over his shoulder while his hand was holding me to my back... As the swaying motion came back again from the way he walked, I fell asleep...

As I woke up, I noticed it was evening and found myself in a warm bed... I looked around the room and lots of stuff was on a shelf. Like, a big bullet, some photographs, and all sorts of stuff. I took a closer look on the bullet and it had something carved in it. It felt rather heavy once I held it in my hand...

Nicole: "FUBAR"...

???: Yeah, it sure was... It's a .50 calibre anti-material round. Could blast through anything...

I turned around and saw him standing in the doorway with a plate of food... The same hedgehog that carried me... He handed the plate to me and I sat down and started eating.

Blain: Eat up.

Nicole: Thanks...

???: Don't mention it...

Nicole: ... You told me the forest still isn't safe to wonder around didn't you...?

???: Yeah... The war is over for just a few weeks...

Nicole: Few weeks...?

???: Yup.

Nicole: But the media-

???: Don't believe everything the media tells you. It's over for a few weeks, but there are still some groups left pillaging and kill to get there hands on whatever they want. That's why there sending reinforcements to hunt those groups down until every last one of 'em is dead or captured. So don't go out on your own.

Nicole: Ok... Got it...

Then it stayed silent for a while... I still gotta let it all sink in. All the stuff that happened in two months and now hearing the war is just over for a few weeks... And then I realized something...

Nicole: Wait, hold on... Did you say war...?

???: Yeah... Why?

Then I realized I'm on the other continent... At that point, I dropped my plate and stared in blank space with wide eyes... And something else fell too. I looked down and saw the bullet on the ground...

???: Hey, you ok?

Nicole: How the hell did I end up here...?

???: Only you can tell me. Right now, you got shelter and food. So stay here for a couple of weeks and then we'll find out how to get you home.

Somehow, he gave me the chills every time he opened his mouth and said something... He sounds so cold, like there is no emotion in his voice...

Nicole: Thanks...

Blain: I'm Blain...

Nicole: I-I'm Nicole...

He kept staring at me with a rather puzzled look.

Nicole: ... Something wrong?

Blain: No, it's just that...

Nicole: What...?

Blain: Well... What are you?

Nicole: Excuse me?

Blain: I mean what species... I never saw anyone with a huge tail like that...

Nicole: ... You never saw a kangaroo...?

Blain: ... No not really no. Their not common over here...

Nicole: Well I never saw anyone with so many stripes...

He reached out his hand to help me get up, so I got up. I picked up the bullet that I dropped...

Nicole: Why are you keeping this?

Blain: It reminds me of how I got here in the first place, a tribute to my fallen team mates, and why I never should go back to Robotropolis.

Nicole: So... What does it mean?

Blain: fracked up beyond all recognition. That about sums up my past.

Then I remember he wore a vest that said RRTS... For some reason, I got a very strange feeling... I heard a lot about them... They say that they caused bloodbaths, killing innocent people and did tons of things that violated civil rights...

Nicole: RRTS...?

Blain: Yeah, I'm an ex-RRTS member...

I knew it... He was part of it... I let him talk about it and the more I listened, the more I disliked him. He talked about it like it was nothing. He killed innocent people during the war... Like it was nothing! How the hell could he live with himself?! It sends chills down my spine as he stared at me... And at some point, I thanked him for the food and walked out of his house...

2 - Making my way...

Cody and I got reunited not long after that. Some blue hedgehog saw me wondering around and started talking to me. He introduced himself as Sonic. And at some point, I saw Cody's head popping out of a window and then he ran outside. He literally jumped in my arms as we both hugged each other. A rather touching moment back then...

From the day we ran away from home 'till the day we arrived in the village,, was a journey that took us about two months... A lot of stuff happened within those two months, and I rather want to forget about it. It's not easy, but I told myself that it never happened. That's why I swore not to tell anyone what happened. And if they did asked where I came from, I just told the shipwreck part. Cody knew all too well that he need to keep his mouth shut about what happened, and he realized that.

Cody and I got our own home. It wasn't much, just 2 rooms and a bathroom, but it was way better then living on the streets. The night I left Blain, we could stay over at Sonic's place, who shared it with Tails. Sonic and I talked for hours about anything, and he was a really nice guy. Unlike Blain, he didn't make me feel uncomfortable. Tails was an adorable little fox with two tails that went out with Cody a lot. The next day, Sonic introduced us to the others, and Shadow and Rouge became my best friends. But what surprised me the most was that Blain was friends with them as well... So having an argument with Blain was inevitable whenever we hang out together... But besides that, most of the time I'm just ignoring him. Cody and I were very happy and tried to forget everything that happened to us. It was like we started a whole new life...

Only time will tell if Blain would ever be a part of it. And the way it goes right now, it doesn't look it's gonna happen soon. But, something happened that changed everything...

Surely, there were jobs to be done. Like gathering wood, bringing in supplies that were delivered and all sorts of stuff. It was a small community looking after itself and everyone had his or her own speciality. Tails for example, supplied every home with electricity and water by building generators. Cody often helped him a lot with the simple things, but he loved it.

Some of the combat veterans patrolled the forest and guard the village at night. Like Blain said, it was dangerous to go out on your own. Every time we needed to go outside the village, one or two armed veterans came along with us. I didn't liked the idea of someone with a weapon walking next to me, but soon, it proved that it had is advantages, followed with every gruesome consequences that you can possibly think of...

It's been 2 weeks since I arrived in the village... And one day, we were out in the woods to collect firewood for that evening... Blain was amongst the armed men guarding us, as well as another one. A wolf, about my age. The two of them had radio headsets and all sorts of high tech crap and weapons, which was a bit redundant if you asked me. Sonic was the only one I knew that went along gathering... At some point, I lost sight of the others, and as soon as I called out their names, I got pulled along in a bush and saw a small group of guys aiming their weapons at me. As soon as they pulled me up, shots rang through the air and 3 of them fell dead on the ground. I was petrified after witnessing that... I didn't move an inch and I had a feeling my heart could burst out of my chest any second... At that same point, I saw Blain getting up from behind a bush, aiming his weapon at the 2 remaining guys. The one that held me placed a knife against my throat. For some reason, they both knew they weren't getting out alive...

Blain: Silas, get over here, we got a situation.

Radio: On my way.

Guy: Let us go and I'll give her back...

Blain: We're not some political group... We don't negotiate...

At that same point, that wolf came in too, aiming his weapon on the other guy...

Silas: Oooh, a hostage situation... I hate that...

Blain: Yup... Five bucks that it's all bluff...

Silas: You're on.

... Are they starting to bet?! Hello!! My life is at stake here! I'm being threatened with a bloody knife!! They moved in closer, but the two of them backed off. The guy who held me was getting nervous...

Blain: Well this isn't getting us anywhere...

Silas: You got three seconds to release her, or we'll open fire.

They can't be serious... What did I do to deserve this...?

Guy: Get out of the way!!

Blain: You got nowhere to go, give it up.

Guy: I'm warning you!!

And at that point, the guy next to me dropped down and tried to get his hands on a weapon. Blain and the wolf immediately shot him...

Silas: Give us the girl, you're free to go

The guy walked past Blain and that wolf, and pushed me towards them. Then he ran away. Blain took his aim and shot him in the leg. He fell down and yelled... And after that, the 3 of us walked back to him. The wolf bends over him...

Silas: You didn't think you got rid of us that easy did you?

Blain: You owe me five bucks...

And the wolf aimed his weapon on his head as Blain kicked him in the stomach while he was on the ground. Then they pulled him up, and dragged him towards the village... As we arrived there, I was still shaking a bit... I never saw anyone being shot, let alone 5 people... Then Blain took me apart...

Blain: What did I say about wondering around?

Nicole: I wasn't-

Blain: If something like that happens again, you're on your own. Got that?

Nicole: Right...

Then I looked at him and he turned away...

Nicole: What's gonna happen to him now?

Blain: Find out who they were, hand him over and he might not get executed.

Then he just walked away... How the hell can he do something like that...? He doesn't care if anyone could be shot... He just pulled the trigger without thinking! Then I noticed Sonic standing next to me...

Sonic: It takes a while before you get used to him.

Nicole: How can he do something like that?

Sonic: Well... Blain grew up in a total different environment then us. It's either kill or be killed.

Nicole: Yeah but, that's all over right...?

Sonic: Not really... If you see what those groups are capable of... They got nothing to loose, nor are they

afraid to die. We heard stories of complete villages being murdered out for their supplies, and that's why they're all on high alert, because they don't want to happen that again.

Nicole: But... Why killing them...?

Sonic: Because if they don't get killed, they're gonna find something else to put their mitts on. And well, no one can't really use that now that everything is gonna be rebuilt. It's something that I don't agree on either, but we have to if we want to make it. And seeing as we're almost there, I'm not intending to lose it all again by some figures who can't get used to a normal life...

Nicole: Well you're right about that...

Sonic: It's not easy for Blain too, but at least he's trying...

Nicole: But that doesn't mean it rectifies everything he ever did...

And that's basically why I loathed Blain... At first, I was a little afraid of him... But over the weeks, it disappeared and I wasn't afraid of him anymore. Instead, I stood up to him every time we had an argument.. What seem relatively harmless became teasing and nagging and it got worse over the weeks. But, as time went by, we forgot why we were nagging each other in the first place... And the loathing kept on growing...

Blain wasn't the only one though... There were more people in the village and as far as I know, some of them were combat veterans. But they were not like Blain at all. Instead, I heard stories that they helped saving people and all sorts of heroic acts during the war.

I was rather baffled the first time I saw a human. I saw them on television and all, but humans didn't live where I came from... I never imagined they were so tall... We only had few humans though, and they were really friendly...

A few weeks passed by without much trouble. My house was on a hill a few hundred meters away from the lake. At night, when the stars lighted up the night sky, you could see the reflection of the night sky and the forest in the clear, bright water. Sometimes at night, I could see Blain sitting outside in the grass. Then I saw him getting out a pencil and paper, and another piece of paper that was all folded up and wrinkled... It even looked like it had blood on it... And it looked like Blain was writing it down on that new piece of paper. And every time he stared at the night sky... At times like that I often wondered what was on his mind. It was actually kinda sad to see him all alone like that...

Sometimes I sat down there near the lake as well when I was alone, in the grass, staring at the heavens and thought about everything, especially our stay in Reventon.... I was wondering how my dad was doing, or where my mom was... But as soon as I realized they both abandoned us, I quickly recovered and forgot about them. But for some reason, it didn't let me go. Because, after all, they still your parents... I guess I needed some distraction of all the things that happened. The first few weeks, I didn't

eat, sleep, drink or talked much... It took me a long time to be accepted where as Cody didn't had trouble at all to be accepted. Why that ever was, I will never know. And quite frankly, I don't even wanna know...

It's been half a year now since I got here. Most of the things here are rather beautiful but sometimes I couldn't help but to think that I want to go home. Back to where I came from. And every time I thought that, I realized that there was nothing there... It's a forgotten memory that will be cherished and hated for the rest of my life...

One day, we were out by the lake with the usual group. Sonic, Shadow, Rouge, Knuckles, Tails, Amy, Cody, me and Blain... This was something that changed all of our lives...

Sonic: Did you heard?

Shadow: Heard what?

Sonic: There's a school opening in Deberan.

Nicole: Deberan?

Sonic: Yeah, it's a small town located near by.

Blain: Some dickhead is trying to force us going to school...?

Sonic: Yup...

Blain: Me too...?

Sonic: Everyone by the age of 18 or below...

Rouge: Can they do that...?

Sonic: Yup... Its part of the Civil Rights, that everyone has the right to go to school. I wouldn't mind really...

Shadow: Well I would...

Sonic: Why?!

Shadow: Ever seen a fifty year old hedgehog sharing classes with 15 year olds?

Nicole: Fifty?!

Shadow: Yup...

Nicole: But, you look so young...

Shadow: I take a lot of beauty sleeps...

Then everyone else chuckled... I didn't get it really, how could Shadow be 50 years old and still look so young?

Nicole: No I'm serious!

All: ...

Nicole: How's that possible!?

Then Shadow looked at me and smiled. There was no way he was gonna tell me, so I just dropped it...

Shadow: It's all part of where I grew up...

Sonic: Well... I grew up on the Green Hill Zone... But you don't hear me complaining...

Knuckles: Angel Island...

Amy: Station Square...

Shadow: Space Colony Ark...

Tails: South Island...

Rouge: ... Isla Muira...

And as soon as Rouge said that, everyone looked a bit baffled...

Shadow: You came all the way from there...?

Rouge: Yup...

Shadow: ... I never knew that...

Sonic: Neither did us...

Then they all looked at Blain...

Blain: What?

Cody: Where are you from?

Blain: Robotropolis...

Sonic: How about you?

Cody and I looked at each other and we both said it together...

Nicole/Cody: Buthainah...

All: ...

Knuckles: Isn't that on the other side of the planet...?

Nicole: Well... Yeah...

Rouge: So, how did you end up here?

Nicole: Long story I rather want to forget... The point is, I'm here now and that's all that matters.

Sonic: I thought you had a rather funny accent...

Nicole: Funny accent? Why's that?

Sonic: Well, you just got a funny accent...

Then it stayed silent... I heard chewing sounds getting louder and all of a sudden, heard a soft "pop" sound. Then we all looked at Blain who was eating bubblegum... He kept looking at us while he kept on chewing. After he noticed no one stopped staring, he passed some bubblegum around.

Blain: Now stop staring at me. It freaks me out.

Sonic: Wilco, sergeant-major Blockhead.

Blain: Damn right.

Nicole: So... What's with the whole school stuff again...?

Sonic: It's in Deberan... You're not forced to go, but it would be better then just sit around every day and do nothing...

Shadow: Whadda ya mean? We got lots of stuff to do around here...

Sonic: Don't you ever get tired of that? I mean, I don't mind working, but to collect firewood for the rest of my life... That's not really something I want to do...

Shadow: True...

Rouge: But how's that gonna work out? I mean, how are they planning to get everyone in classes?

Sonic: I don't know, probably by age or something. We can always check it out, and if we don't like it, we're going... The school opens tomorrow, and is opened for the rest of the day to give information and everything.

Nicole: So who's going...?

Everyone except for Shadow and Blain agreed to go...

Sonic: ... Well, have fun gathering wood and cleaning roof tiles tomorrow then.

Shadow: Since you put it that way...

Blain: Yup...

So we agreed on a time and place where we would meet up. And after a while, we went home.

After Cody and I got home, we ate something. Then Cody sat down on my bed and stared at me. I smiled and sat next to him...

Nicole: What's up?

Cody: Oh nothing, it's just that... That...

Nicole: What is it?

Cody: I... I think I'm in love...

He whispered it out that I could barely hear it...

Nicole: In love...? With whom?

Cody: Mina...

Nicole: Ooooooh... Wait, who's Mina?

Cody: That mongoose...

Nicole: What mongoose, I never saw a mongoose here...

Cody: Come on, you've have seen her around... Purple hair, 4 piercings, wears a black tank top, purple hair...

Nicole: I think I saw her once...

Cody: Yeah... But, I think she has a boyfriend...

Nicole: So...? That doesn't mean you can't be friends with her...

Cody: Well maybe...

Then it stayed silent for a while...

Cody: I also talked to Blain today.

Now that was something that surprised me...

Nicole: Oh...?

Cody: Yeah...

Nicole: About what?

Cody: I couldn't resist asking him about the scars he has.

Nicole: And what did he say?

Cody: Well, he said he got shot. He lost his left arm and was replaced by a bionic one.

Nicole: He lost his arm...

Cody: Yeah! I didn't believe it at first too, but he stretched out his arm and I felt it. It's cool though. I mean the whole bionic arm thing.

Nicole: Right...

Cody: You don't like him very much do you?

Nicole: Why should I?

Cody: Well I like him...

Nicole: I'm not stopping you if you wanna hang out with him, but...

Cody: But what? What could he do to me?

Nicole: Just... Be careful with him.

Cody: Ok, ok... Geez...

I gave him a hug and he went to bed. I took a hot shower first. After I was done and dried myself with a towel, the hot steamy damp began to cover up the mirror. As I wiped away the damp, I saw myself standing there. The patch of dark skin coloured fur on my chest was a mess... And after I got dressed, I went to bed...

3 - Hidden talents...

The next day, I felt the nice warm sun shining right on my face. I opened my eyes slowly and yanked down the curtain. Then I slept some more.

Not long after that, I felt that someone was yanking and pulling me. I turned around and then I felt I hit something... Someone yelled which was followed by a thud. I opened my eyes and saw Cody on the ground.

Nicole: What are you doing on the ground...?

Cody: You pushed me off the bed!!

Nicole: What are you doing here in the first place?!

Cody: Trying to wake you up!! We're gonna be late!!

Then I noticed the clock. It said ten o'clock. Well it didn't actually say the time, but you know what I mean. I stared at it for a moment to realize that we would meet at Sonic's place. Then I realized we're also too late. So I kicked Cody out of the room and quickly got dressed. Then we both went to Sonic's place...

As soon as Tails opened up, we were baffled. We stood there a long time staring at him while his face became annoyed... Cody and I could barely hold our laughter...

Tails: What?!

Nicole: You look eh...

Cody: Original...

Nicole: Yeah that's it...

Tails: I can't help I'm having a bad fur day...

His fur was messed up. His frills hang sideways as his head was a complete mess... Like he got an electric shock, or... His barber died or something... Tails pouted and gestured to move inside.

Sonic: Finally...

Nicole: Yeah, sorry about that...

Sonic: Well, everyone's here, so let's go.

Tails: I'm not going out looking like this!

Shadow: Then you stay home.

Tails: ... But...

Sonic: It's not that bad, now let's go.

Tails: But-

Sonic: Let's go!

Tails let out a groan and was the last one to leave the house. Since we didn't have any transport, we had to walk... So we entered the forests and I had no idea where we were going...

Nicole: So how long is it...?

Rouge: What?

Nicole: How long does it take for us to reach it...?

Rouge: Not long, about 20 minutes or something...

Blain: Well if you can't take it, go back.

Nicole: Stuff it Blain.

Blain: Right-o.

Nicole: Is he always acting like an @\$\$?

Rouge: Well, he doesn't act like that towards me.

Sonic: Or me...

Shadow: Even me...

Tails: Nope...

Knuckles: Naah...

Cody: Me neither...

Blain: Then I guess I'm only acting like an @\$\$ towards you...

Nicole: Draw a line on your chin and you would actually have a butthole on your face...

Shadow: *chuckles*

Blain: Sure, and while I'm at it, why don't you go climb that telephone pole and take a big steamy piss on the power cables...

Shadow: *burst out laughing*

Shadow just couldn't stop laughing... Everyone looked at him baffled as he rolled on the ground...

Blain: It wasn't that funny.

Nicole: Or insulting.

Blain: Shut the hell up.

Nicole: Oh well, I got better things to do once we get there.

Blain: Like what, comparing bra-sizes with Rouge?

Then Rouge slapped Blain on the back of his head... Shadow kept on laughing.

Rouge: Leave me out of this.

And so we reached Deberan... A small town with narrow streets, lots of shops and bars, and eventually, we found the school. It was just a rectangle building... It didn't really seem out of place... So we all went inside and looked around and the whole place is filled with stands where they give demonstrations and information about every class available. Tails immediately went off to a stand with some science stuff along with Cody. Rouge and I walked around and asked questions about everything, followed by Blain and Shadow... We entered a hall and there were lots of kids screaming and all that...

Blain: Oh no...

Shadow: Backing up...

Nicole: I think you'd fit right in here Blain.

Blain: Ever got dog slapped?

Nicole: As a matter of fact, no, but I would love to dog smack you one day.

Blain: ... I dare ya...

Then Tails ran back to us along with Cody...

Tails: We signed in!

Shadow: What?

Nicole: So soon?

Cody: Yeah! I mean, doing experiments and all! How cool is that?!

Nicole: You do realize that it's not the only thing you'll be doing?

Cody: ... Oh crud...

Blain: ... Forget it, I'm out of here.

Cody: Did you also know that you'll get a card with 4000 bucks on it?

All: ...

Cody: Yeah! They say it was eh... An investment in the future...

Shadow: What do they mean by that?

Rouge: What they're meaning to say is, they give every student signing up 4000 bucks.

Shadow: But why?

Rouge: Because we are the future. Now that everything is being rebuilt, it's our job to carry that on. And besides, you don't hear me complaining.

Shadow: But what am I supposed to do? I got nothing to do here...

Blain: And me...

Sonic: Blain could be... a... Psychological educator...

Blain: ... I'm not gonna listen to everyone's problem...

Sonic: No no, psychical. Like, keeping everyone fit and all that.

Blain: ...

Sonic: Look, I don't know what I'm supposed to do either!

Blain: ... But you're still going?

Sonic: Yup... There's always plenty of time to think of what you wanna do... And besides, 4000 bucks doesn't sound that bad...

Blain: ... Alright...

Shadow: ...

Everyone looked at each other while we all knew what everyone was thinking. Then we all looked around for the things that appeal to us most and signed up...

Few hours later, we went back home... Not before we explored the city a bit. Lots of shops and pubs, but we didn't have any money... All sorts of stuff were available, like radio's and TV's, but also cloths, flowers, groceries, and everything. Meh, too bad we couldn't afford it...

On the way back home, we all walked together. It was around 3 o'clock, and nice, warm weather. It'd better be, considering it was summer. Normally, Blain walks faster then us, but this time, he didn't. I looked back and saw he was walking alone, with a rather grim expression on his face. No more then the usual... Rouge went towards him and they walked together...

Rouge: What's wrong?

Blain: *sighs*

Rouge: Come on, just tell me.

Blain: It's driving me frackin' nuts...

Rouge: What is?

Blain: This whole deal man... Seriously...

Rouge: Well, it's new for me too.

Blain: Yeah but that's not the only thing. It's so all of a sudden. I mean, last year, we were still fighting rebels and Robotnik's droids for the sake of freedom, and look at us now.

Rouge: Yeah...

Blain: It's driving me nuts not knowing what to do...

Rouge: Then you gotta make a plan for the future.

Blain: How?

Rouge: By discovering your skills and talents and everything that you like to do.

Blain: Well, that's the point. I don't know that.

Rouge: It's actually very easy to find out. If someone asked you "what do you like to do?" How would you answer?

Blain: Well, I like chewing bubblegum...

Rouge: ... Well, it's a start. What else?

Blain: Kicking back in the grass and watch the sky go by...

Rouge: ... And?

Blain: And uh... I eh... like cooking...

Rouge: You do?!

Blain: ... Yeah.

Rouge: ... I never knew that...

Blain: No one did.

Rouge: Maybe you can cook for me some time...

Blain: How about I cook for you tonight?

Rouge: Uh... Sure...

Blain: Just... Don't let the others know...

Rouge: That you're cooking tonight?

Blain: Yeah...

That evening, I was on my way to get home. As I passed Blain's house, I noticed a delicious smell... But I kept on walking...

As Blain handed Rouge a plate...

Rouge: Oooh... What is it...?

Blain: It's a rabbit. I caught one today, killed it, skinned it, and... baked it...

Rouge: Ooh... Ok...

Blain: Eat up chubby.

Rouge: I'm not chubby...

Blain: Watch out for any bullets though. You might crack your teeth on it.

And as the two of them ate...

Rouge: This is really good. Where'd you come up with that?

Blain: Well, during the war, it wasn't like we were going to a fracking restaurant every day or something. Jasco taught us how to cook with the things you got. And I liked it... You'd be surprised what can be made out of a potato, a rabbit and a tomato.

Rouge: But where'd you get the tomatos?

Blain: Stole 'em from old Greddy.

Rouge: That old bastard?

Blain: Yeah.

Rouge: He'd be pissed if he found out...

Blain: But he didn't find out.

Rouge: You cheeky bastard...

Blain: You know Rouge, I was wondering...

Rouge: What?

Blain: What did you actually choose for that whole school thing?

Rouge: Well, just the basics... You?

Blain: Same...

Rouge: You're not that comfortable with it are you?

Blain: No...

Rouge: Why not...?

Blain: Because... I don't know how they will react once they find out what I did.

Rouge: It's all over now Blain, give it a rest.

Blain: I don't know if you noticed, but most of the former rebels and creatures living here know exactly who I am. Holy shoot... If looks could kill, I'd be pushing up daisies 10 feet below ground...

Rouge: But that doesn't mean they actually... hate you...

Blain: You're not fooling me Rouge.

Rouge: Look, if they don't like you because of what you did during the war, then they are free to leave the village. They don't see you like I do, or Sonic and everyone else. We know you fought along on our side, that you didn't betray anyone. Hell, you even scarified your own life for it.

Blain: At what costs...?

Rouge: Exactly... At what costs? If these people don't see all the sacrifices you've made in order for us to be free, then their not worth it to know you. Because you did a lot for us and I wouldn't trade you for anyone...

Blain: What about Nicole?

Rouge: Not even for her... I know you longer then her...

Blain: Thanks Rouge...

Rouge: Anytime...

Blain: But, what I don't get...

Rouge: What?

Blain: Why is Nicole always acting so dogy against me? I mean, she gets fine along with everyone else, especially you, but...

Rouge: Well you're not exactly the easiest person to hang out with... I mean, remember when you first got to us?

Blain: Yeah... *smiles*

Rouge: No one could really get along with you, not even Shadow. It's because you grew up in an entirely different situation then us. And it's the same with Nicole. She doesn't understand yet. You can talk about your past all you want, but she will never understand it, because she was never there.

Blain: So what do you think I should do?

Rouge: Just ignore her whenever she acts dogy... And when she's acting normal, just go along.

Blain: You know Rouge?

Rouge: What?

Blain: You'd be one hell of a psychiatrist.

Rouge: Thanks...

Then Blain let out a big burp...

Rouge: Charming...

Blain: I'm stuffed.

Rouge: Same here... *shoves plate away*

I looked in the mirror as soon as I got home, and saw this zit on my face...

Nicole: Gaah...

Then I saw Cody sneaking up in the mirror reflection. As soon as I turned around, he stopped dead in his tracks and looked at me with wide eyes... Then he just pointed at laughed at me...

Nicole: What?!

Cody: You got a...

Nicole: I know, stupid...

Cody: No, there's another one!

Then I turned around and noticed another one on my nose...

Nicole: ... frack...

Cody: I'll go get the tweezers!! *runs off*

Nicole: The hell you are!!

Then I ran after him...

Another few weeks passed by without much trouble. We always hang out by the lake, or walk around town. And every time everyone was together, Blain and I had an argument as always. Sometimes I managed to shut him up, and sometimes I couldn't. He just dissed me with that smart @\$\$ attitude... And every time I wanted to slap him, he dodged. I swear, there's gonna be a day that I'll slap him into a coma...

One day, this truck arrived and dumped a bag of letters. It wasn't that much, as some guys grabbed letters and yelled everyone's name. Most of it was for us... And the letter said about the whole school thing...

Sonic: "Dear student. We would like to thank you for attending at the Saint Romulus Gemini College. "

Rouge: "We would like to announce that an introduction day is planned on next Monday the 5th of September."

Tails: "The introduction day consists out of receiving schedules, along with providing answers for questions that you might have. It begins at 8:30 and ends at around 10:00. We are looking forward to see you then."

Nicole: "Sincerely,-"

Blain: "The fracking asswipe who came up with the whole idea."

All: ...

Blain: What?

Then we all realized that the 5th of September is next week...

Nicole: It's next week...

Sonic: That's fast...

Knuckles: Yeah...

Going to school next week...? Well, it better be good... Like Sonic said, I'm not intending to spend the rest of my life gathering firewood and all that...

4 - Blain's worst fear...

Well the week quickly passed by... I know I say that a lot, but, to be honest, there isn't really anything interesting to mention. Every day, we did what we had to do, which ended up with us hanging out by the lake. The last evening before we went to school, we all hang out by the lake as usual. We talked about the future and all that, and Shadow didn't really seem thrilled about the whole idea. We talked for hours until it got dark outside... And then we went to bed, knowing that when we wake up tomorrow, a whole new life was about to start.

...Which came quicker then expected really. As soon as I woke up, I saw Cody bouncing around the room. I couldn't really say I was thrilled to go to school again, but it was all new... So basically, I was kind of excited...

Anyway, as soon as we got dressed and packed our stuff, we went to Sonic's place, where everyone else already waited. They all looked very sleepy and Knuckles kept on yawning. And as soon as everyone was ready, we started to walk slowly on the familiar path...

Shadow: "Following the trails of the damned, a light shines in the far distance. Yet the light is unreachable, to those who have dimmed their inner light..."

Sonic: What the hell are you talking about... *yawns*

Shadow: ... School...

Knuckles: Speaking of which... Blain?

Blain: Sup...?

Knuckles: Did you ever have school?

Blain: ... No...

Knuckles: You know how to write?

Blain: ... Yeah... Which is kinda hard to do when you lose an arm.

Knuckles: You're left handed?

Blain: ... Yeah.

Knuckles: You know how to read?

Blain: Yes, I'm not a complete retard...

Nicole: Oh? Well you sure look like it.

Blain: Piss off...

Nicole: Do you even know the alphabet? *chuckles*

Blain: ...

Shadow: Well do you? It's not a shame that you don't know it. I mean, hell, even I know the fracking alphabet.

Blain: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu...

All: ...

Blain: Want me to count to 10 as well?

Nicole: Not exactly what I had in mind, but it'll do I guess...

Blain: We're passing that telephone pole again Nicole.

Nicole: Oh ha, ha...

Rouge: Nicole?

Nicole: Yeah?

Rouge: Did you ever spoke a different language...?

Nicole: No... Why is that?

Rouge: Well, because you said yesterday you're from Buthainah and I realized that Buthainah had some ancient language or something.

Nicole: Well I know a few words...

Knuckles: Let's hear!

Nicole: What?

Sonic: Yeah!

... What?

Nicole: Ok, eehm... "Reite studest bëbet orân Tset der"

All: ... What?

Nicole: It means "Life is just a chance to grow a soul". It's a saying...

All: ...

Rouge: How's that language called?

Nicole: Pălicirean.

Blain: Nicole spoke Pălicirean... Holy frack... It sounded like a duck having an orgasm, but still, she spoke Pălicirean!

Nicole: Then you try.

Blain: I don't have exactly what you call a flair for languages. Then again, I might lack the linguistic talent.

Nicole: It's all the same you asshole...

Blain: Then I rest my case.

Nicole: *sighs*

Once we arrived at the school, we were send straight to the auditorium. Once we arrived there, it looked crowded. From very young kids around the age of 11 to people of around 21 or something. So we found some places to sit as the auditorium got more crowded as more people started to come in. At some

point, we saw Tails, Cody and Amy waving at us and they sit somewhere in the front.

Then at around 9:00 o'clock, the door of the auditorium closed and some guy stepped up on the podium. He gave a long boring speech... And at some point, names were being called up and they had to go to the podium. When the group was complete, they had to follow what I thought was a teacher. At some point, Sonic, Shadow and Knuckles had to go, and eventually, Rouge, Blain and me. When Blain found out he was in the same class as me, he didn't really liked it. His face said a lot. Rouge and I looked at each other and we just snicker after we saw the look on his face.

So we followed the teacher to a classroom, and as everyone took their seats, he wrote his name on the blackboard. The guy was a human. For a human, he was very small and he looked old. Every time he walked, he walked with a limp. Very friendly guy though.

???: Goodmorning everyone, my name is mister Morgan. For the next semester, I'll be your mentor and psychics teacher. Now, before I continue, is there anyone who never been to school? I know how the situation was, and it wouldn't actually surprise me if someone never went to school.

Then we looked around the class and no one raised there hands. Not even Blain.

Rouge: He means you, stupid...

Blain: Yeah but-

Then Rouge held Blain's arm in the air. Blain quickly pulled it down again, but it was too late. Mr Morgan already saw he raised his hand.

Morgan: Yes, you. Anyone else?

Blain: dog...

Rouge: Hehehehe...

Morgan: Anyone?

Then four more raised their hands with a bit of an uneasy face...

Rouge: See, you're not the only one...

Morgan: Ok, good. Now, basically, you might wonder what a mentor is.

Guy: A teacher?

Morgan: In some way. Being a mentor of a class means I got my responsibilities. My job is to look after this class as a whole, and make sure you are getting good grades. With every question you have about the school, you'll ask me. The same with all problems whether it's about the school, in the school, or personal problems. Don't hesitate to visit me. I got my pledge of secrecy, so no one else but me will know about it. Any questions so far?

Then everyone shook no...

Morgan: Ok, wonderful. Let's make a round around the class and introduce you to the others. Tell us what your name is, where you come from, your hobbies or anything that you would like to share. Let's start with you.

Then they all introduced themselves... Some of them said they lost a family member during the war, others held a complete autobiography of them while others only say their names. As it got closer to us, I noticed Blain started to get more and more nervous. He looked around a lot, blinked, and even started to sweat a bit... I could see it on his forehead.

Rouge: Will you relax...? You're making me nervous...

Blain: I can't help it man...

Rouge: Yeah but at least try to-

Morgan: Please, listen to the others. It's rather disturbing.

Rouge: Sorry.

Eventually, it was Rouge's turn...

Rouge: Ok, well, my name is Rouge. I'm 18 years old... I'd like to kick back with a fruitpunch and... Read a good book. And I'm obsessed with jewellery. Or at least I was. Or still am, I don't know.

Morgan: Thank you Rouge.

Nicole: My name is Nicole, I'm also 18 years old. I know Tae Kwon do, which is an ancient form of martial arts. I... I was shipwrecked, and... It's been half a year now since I got here...

Morgan: Ok... Thank you. How about you?

The look on Blain's face was rather priceless. He looked like he was shooting needles, but for some reason, I actually felt a bit sorry for him. He got even more nervous when he found out everyone was staring at him... There was a long silence before he said anything...

Rouge: Come on, say something...

Blain: Well... Eh... M-my name is Blain... I'm 17 ye-years old... Former sergeant of the RRTS... Eh... Fought countless of battles including the invasion of Angel Island... And eh... Yeah... And...

Then there was that long silence again... Basically, Morgan helped him out by ending it...

Morgan: Thank you Blain. Welcome.

Blain nodded quickly and let his head down on his desk, probably because he was too ashamed of himself... Then Mr. Morgan passed out the schedules and all sorts of information. He explained some other stuff including the whole classroom and how to find them. Not really interesting, seeing as I already knew how it worked. After he explained it all, and answered some questions, we were dismissed. Tomorrow, school starts for real...

After we walked outside, we met up with Sonic and everyone else...

Sonic: So, how'd it go?

Shadow/Blain: Don't ask...

All: ...

Shadow: You too?

Blain: Yeah...

???: Sonic...?

And at that point, I saw Sonic looking up with wide eyes. As he turned around, he looked baffled at some rabbit... Hell, everyone looked baffled at her. She had bionic legs and a bionic left arm, so it wasn't a surprise everyone looked at her baffled...

Sonic: Bunnie...?

Bunnie: Sugah-hog!!

Sonic: Bunnie!!!

Then the two of them ran towards each other and gave each other a big hug... Tails ran too along with Amy and they all hugged her... Everyone else was a bit baffled...

Sonic: Look at you babe!! You look good!

Bunnie: Thanks! You're not so bad either!

Sonic: How you been?! Where's the rest?!

Then her happy face changed into a depressed one...

Bunnie: Rotor didn't make it...

Tails: What...?

Bunnie: No...

Sonic: Antoine...?

Bunnie: We got a lot to talk about....

Sonic: Let's go...

Amy: Do we see you again real soon?

Bunnie: Yeah... Right now, Sonic and I need to talk...

Amy: Alright, catch ya later then...

Then she nodded and walked away in the other direction with Sonic... Then the rest of us went home...

Nicole: What was that all about...?

Amy: She was part of us during the war as a freedom fighter. And... That's how she lost her legs and arm. At some point, our group got split up. Antoine, Bunnie, Sally, Rotor... Fiona...

Nicole: I see...

Blain: I never knew there were more...

Amy: ... You only know the half of it...

Many, many hours later, as sunset started to kick in, we stayed at the lake. At some point, we saw Sonic walking towards us with a rather sad expression on his face...

Shadow: So how's with loverboy here?!

Rouge: Shadow...

Amy: What happened...?

Sonic: Bunnie is the only one left...

Amy: What...?

Tails: What about Antoine...?

Then Sonic shook his head...

Blain: Wait... Who is who?

Sonic: *sighs*

Blain: Well...?

Shadow: I'm just as confused as you are...

Sonic: Well... You gotta hear the whole story to understand...

Tails: Sonic...?

Sonic: It's ok Tails...

Then Sonic sat down and prepared himself to tell whatever happened here to Blain, Shadow, Rouge and me...

Sonic: This place used to be a kingdom... My uncle and my dad had ties with the royal family and that's how I know Sally...

Blain: A princess...?

Sonic: Yeah... As soon as Robotnik and the humans invaded the kingdom, the king declared war... It only lasted for a few weeks before they got annihilated by Robotnik... Robotnik placed the royal family under arrest... King Maximillian, Queen Alicia, and Prince Elias along with General Armand D'Coquette. Sally, Amy, Tails and I managed to escape with the help of Rosie... Not long after that, Antoine D'coquette, son of the general, hid amongst us, along with Bunnie and Rotor...

Then there was a long silence...

Rouge: ... Go on...

Sonic: *sighs* Sally and I had a relationship going on in the last couple of years... We loved each other very much... And Antoine, being a member of the Royal Guard, it was his duty to protect Sally... But ultimately, he failed... Robotnik knew there was someone missing... So Robotnik executed the royal family, including Sally once he found out where she was... He wiped out the royal blood line...

Again, a long silence...

Tails: ... What about Antoine...?

Sonic: Bunnie had a relationship with Antoine... He managed to escape once the princess got captured, but he had a strong sense of duty and honor, instilled in him by his late father... Antoine said to Bunnie that he failed the king, his father, and the whole kingdom once the princess got captured... He was overrun with shame and guilt, which at some point took his toll on him... He got caught as well while on a mission and was executed right away... Bunnie saw how Antoine got executed, which left a scar on her for good... And one by one, they all fell...

He took a deep breath and tried to hold his tears back...

Sonic: And the rest, as they say, is history...

Nicole: That's awful...

Sonic: Yeah...

Shadow: You ok...?

Sonic nodded and got up from the ground. Then he turned around and walked away... We all stared at him as he walked back to his house...

5 - Back 2 school...

The story that Sonic told us last evening made a deep impact on me. Everyone acts so happy that made me forgot that there once was a war. Seeing him telling about how most of his friends died during the war was very touching... And now I realized Blain had that too... Except that he was part of it... And to be honest, he's still an asshole...

Gaah... 7:00 am... The very first day of school... I smashed my alarmclock and I heard something crack. I took a glare at it and noticed there was a crack in it...

But for some reason, I was excited about going to school. I was wondering how Blain is gonna hold up against it. Maybe it's cruel, but I don't care. After all the stuff he said and did towards me, it's payback time...

Cody and I waited for the others to arrive. Then Rouge and Blain arrived...

Rouge: You sure you got everything?

Blain: Look, I told you a million times that I got everything!!

Rouge: Aw... Wittle Bwain is all gwoing up! It's his fiwst day of school! *pinches cheeks*

Blain: ... Do that again and I'll shove a cap up your @\$\$....

Rouge: Geez, don't act so dogy...

On the way to school, no one said anything... I guess everyone was a bit nervous but Blain and Shadow were stressed. Once we got there, at around 8:20, we still had 10 minutes left before class would start. Eventually, Sonic saw that bunny from yesterday again and they hang out somewhere else.

Blain: Look at all these people Rouge...

Rouge: Yeah, scary aren't they?

Blain: Yeah- I mean-

Rouge: Dude, chill out.

Blain: But-

At that same point, the bell rang for first class... Which was maths... Which I hated... And of course, there's always an asshole or a dog teaching it... As soon as I saw the look on teachers face, I knew I

wasn't gonna like him... Then he wrote this strange symbol on the blackboard. π , or PI...

Teacher: How many of you know this symbol?

Apparently, no one did...

Teacher: I see... Pi is one of the most important mathematical constants, approximately equal to 3.14159. It represents the ratio of any circle's circumference to its diameter in Euclidean geometry, which is the same as the ratio of a circle's area to the square of its radius. Many other formulas from mathematics, science, and engineering include PI... It is an irrational number, which means that its decimal expansion never ends or repeats. Indeed: beyond being irrational, it is a transcendental number, which means that no finite sequence of algebraic operations on integers, like powers, roots, sums, etcetera, could ever produce it. Throughout the history of mathematics, much effort has been made to determine PI more accurately and understand its nature; fascination with the number has even carried over into culture at large.

Then he drew a perfect circle with a template on the blackboard, and wrote " $\pi=C/D$ "...

Teacher: Note that the ratio c/d does not depend on the size of the circle. For example, if a circle has twice the diameter D of another circle it will also have twice the circumference C , preserving the ratio c/d . This fact is a consequence of the similarity of all circles. Area of the circle = $\pi \times$ area of the shaded square. Alternatively PI can be also defined as the ratio of a circle's area to the area A of a square whose side is equal to the radius.

No one really understood a word of what he's saying... Like no one cared or something... Perfect, I couldn't care either.

Teacher: Another example.

Then he wrote down a lot of stuff...

Teacher: The formula is remarkable because it allows extracting any individual hexadecimal or binary digit of PI without calculating all the preceding ones. Most formulae used for calculating the value of π have desirable mathematical-

This guy just doesn't shut up... I looked at the time and only 15 minutes passed away... I almost fell down of my chair because I was amazed of how slow the time went... I told myself that this couldn't

possibly be happening, but it was... Slowly... Very slowly... Until the bell rang at ten and it was recess... Then we walked outside...

Rouge: See, that wasn't so bad...

Blain: No, it was worse. Honestly, did you understand a word of what he was saying?

Rouge: Of course I didn't. Did you?

Blain: Nope... Guess I'm not the only one.

Nicole: Same here...

Blain: Whatever happened to the days where you shot someone that you didn't liked?

Rouge: Their over now.

Then he smiled...

Blain: So, what's next?

Rouge: Social studies...

Blain: What's it about?

Rouge: Honestly, I have no idea...

Nicole: It's about economics, geography, government, cultures and all that.

Blain: ... Ooh...

So next up, social studies... Blain, Rouge and I went to the classroom as soon as the bell rang... This time, the teacher was an old woman who was very friendly... As with the math teacher, she too wrote something on the blackboard first before she said anything... "Democracy"... She wrote...

Teacher: Democracy... A word we haven't heard in quite some years... Who can tell me what the definition is of democracy?

Nicole: ... Freedom of speech?

Teacher: Yes, good. That is a very important aspect of democracy.

Guy: The eh... Right to protest?

Teacher: Yes... Good. Bascially, the definition of democracy is "by the people, for the people". Take a look at the map. For this example, we'll use Angel Island. It has come to be recognized as the oldest democracy on Mobius. Yes?

Girl: If it's a democracy, how come the map says Republic of Angel Island?

Teacher: That's a very good question. Does anyone have the answer to that? You, in the front.

Then I looked at my left and noticed Blain raised his hand... Which was... Awkward...

Blain: Because eh... The echidnas didn't believe in a monarchy unlike most of the cultures on Mobius?

Teacher: Almost, but not quite. Yes, you in the back.

Girl: Because the citizens elect representatives to make laws and decisions?

Teacher: Very good! What is your name again?

Girl: Riki-Le ma'am.

Then Blain looked at us and smiled. It was actually a fun class to follow, seeing her being so nice and explaining everything. But, with everything, it came to an end. And then we had lunch break. Rouge and I took a coffee.

Blain: Where's everyone else?

Rouge: I don't know... Maybe their still in class or something.

Nicole: Probably.

Rouge: I'll go take a look outside where the others are.

And before I could tag along with her, she left. Before she disappeared in the crowd, she looked at me and winked, then walked off outside... Why the hell did she winked? Now here I am, all alone with... Blain...

Nicole: So...

Blain: I keep seeing people walking by with food. Where the hell did they get that?

Nicole: Cafeteria... But you need to pay for it.

Blain: ... Aint that a dog...

Then this guy bumped into Blain from behind, spilling his drink all over Blain... Blain turned around immediately and pushed the guy... He was an echidna, a bit taller then Blain and looked buffed...

Blain: Watch it!!

Echidna: So sorry about that. Hey, I know you... You're from the RRTS are you?

Blain: What's your problem?

Then that echidna steps up to him...

Echidna: You know, most of us agree that you don't belong here. So why don't you just go away and run along with your friends? Oh wait their all dead. Sorry, my bad...

Oooh, this could get ugly... I drank the rest of my coffee and stared at Blain and that echidna... Everyone could see Blain was boiling on the inside, and now that everyone knows he's from the RRTS, everyone that looked at us backed up a little... Except for that echidna... So I decided to step in between and act like a... Peace keeper or something...

Nicole: Come on, leave him alone Blain. He's not worth it.

Then that bastard acted out on me!

Echidna: Listen to your dog before it gets nasty...

Nicole: What?!! First of, I'm no one's dog!!

Echidna: You could be my dog!! *laughs*

Nicole: Hey frack you!!

Blain all of a sudden pushed that echidna again, and 3 other guys stood up to help that echidna. As soon as Blain turned his head to face one of the others, he received a fist in his face. And Blain punched back... And he received a punch from one of the other guys. He was only slightly taken back as he felt the bruise on his cheek and then cracked his knuckles...

Blain: How about a truce to get this over with...?

Nicole: Works for me...

And as soon one was about to punch me, I kicked him in the face. Then Blain and I went all out on these guys. I kicked one of them against the vending machine by leaning back on my tail and gave a kangaroo kick at the chest as Blain received another punch. So he punched him back. The fight kept on going and I received some punches as well. Who the hell would hit a girl like that? The fight kept on going until we got broken up by other people, and we were send straight away to the principal...

Now, at the principal's office, they didn't make a big deal out of it. We got away with a warning and they held an entire speech, as Blain had an icepack on his face and my stomach and legs hurt. We explained everything and all, and Blain gave a brief description about his past. Surely, there are others who had a rough past as well, but it seem like these guys were after him for some reason. After we got dismissed, we went back to the cafeteria again, while the other four are still at the principal... As we walked passed them, they all glared at us, and we glared back...

Then we head back to the cafeteria. We both sat down and sighed... It stayed quiet for a while...

Nicole: I still got 50 cents... Which... Is enough for a coffee...

Blain: You're offering me a coffee?

Nicole: You want it or not?

Blain: No, I'm good, thanks.

Nicole: Alright...

So I took another coffee... Poured cream and sugar in it and stirred...

Nicole: You did pretty well back there...

Blain: Like what, knowing how to start a fight?

Nicole: Well you didn't start it.

Blain: I know.

Nicole: You even came up for me.

Blain: I didn't.

Nicole: You pushed him as soon as he called me a dog!

Blain: So? Just because I hate your guts doesn't mean I can't come up for you.

Nicole: Well it's still a sweet thing to do...

Then he looked at me with a frown. He stared at me for a moment, shrugged and looked outside the window.

Nicole: Although, you gotta remember to put your arms up.

Blain: ... What?

Nicole: That's the reason why you got punched.

Blain: Whaddaya mean?

Nicole: You're arms. You gotta keep your fists close to your head. It's better for your defence, plus you can punch harder once you turn your body along with the punch.

Blain: Oooh... Ok... Nicole: Keep that in mind and you'll be ok.

Blain: How about those kicks you gave?

Nicole: What about it?

Blain: I never saw anyone kicking that high...

Nicole: You can't kick?

Blain: Well, I can kick someone in the groin, but, that's basically it. I know how to punch someone, but I'm not some martial arts guy... More of a... Street fighter...

Nicole: You gotta find your balance. Shift your weight on you right leg and throw your left leg up while

keeping balance. The energy your building up on your right leg bursts out when you throw your left leg up.

Blain: Ooh... Ok...

And that was the first normal conversation we had in months without calling each other names... This was pretty weird, because I could swear I can hear him say "dog" to me any second... But it didn't happen. Blain didn't say anything to me after that conversation, but, it's a start isn't it?

Well, some first day of school huh? We already got into a fight... Couldn't say it was a bad thing though, we beat them with ease. At around 4 o'clock noon, we could finally go home. I haven't eaten anything the whole day, and I was really starving, so I wanted to go home as quick as I could. And on the hallway, I saw Sonic standing in the doorway of a classroom.

Sonic: Yo Nicole! We're gonna hang out! Wanna come?

Nicole: Naah, I'll go home... I'll see you later...

Sonic: Alright... Shadow!! Stop drawing stupid faces on the blackboard!! Let's go!!

And after I walked out of the building, I noticed Blain walking on his own... I caught up to him...

Nicole: Hey!

Blain: 'Lo...

Nicole: Aren't you gonna hang out with the others?

Blain: Naah... I'm going home.

Nicole: You're not really someone who hangs out a lot are you?

Blain: Nope... And I don't see a reason why I should.

Nicole: Having fun is one of the reasons why you should.

Blain: ...

Nicole: Also, you get to know each other a whole lot better.

Blain: ...

Then he didn't say anything... He kept staring in front of him... Maybe that conversation was a one time only...

Nicole: Well... I think I'll run ahead... I'm really starving...

Blain: You...? Running?

Nicole: ... Yeah... What's wrong with that?

Blain: Well I can't really imagine you would run...

Nicole: So what you're saying is, I can't run?

Blain: Well, no, but I can't really imagine you run with a huge tail like that...

Nicole: Alright... Then let's have a little race then...

Blain: A race?

Nicole: Wha? You aint backing down now are you?

Blain: Hell, I ran on the beaches of Angel Island while bullets were whizzing by and didn't get shot once back there. Let's race...

Nicole: Race ya to the village?

Blain: Aight...

Then he ran away... He took off fast, but... What he seem to forget is, that I'm a kangaroo... So I took my shoes off, took a run up, sprinted and then just hopped... With every hop, I go faster and faster and eventually, I hopped past Blain... I saluted him with a grin and he just looked baffled at me as I hopped past him.

It's been a long time since I hopped so fast and freely... I enjoyed every second of it... Seeing the trees go by so fast, followed by the beautiful crystal clear lakes with the hills while the mountains stood guard behind it was a beautiful sight, and it made me forgot to look where I was going. Then at some point, I tripped over something, and I rolled in the village. My knee had a small cut on it, and my wrist hurt but I didn't really care. I was free again... Free of all the worries I ever had, and even though it only was for about 10 minutes, it seemed like an eternity for me. Then I just let myself fall down in the grass, spread my arms and stared at the beautiful summer sky...

Blain: What are you so happy about?

Then I looked up and saw that Blain finally arrived. He looks exhausted and sat down next to me. I put my head down on the grass and just smiled...

Nicole: Thank you...

Blain: ... For what?

I just looked at him and smiled. I didn't explain him why I thanked him... He wouldn't understand... But I thanked him for making me realize I was alive...

6 - Say it right

Blain and I sat there in the grass for a while until I heard my stomach rumbling. Blain looked at me with a baffled look and I stared back...

Blain: ...Did you just fart?

Nicole: What?!! Ew!! No!! It's my stomach, I'm hungry.

Blain: Suuuure it was...

So I got up to go home and eat something, and I was still carrying my shoes after I took them off for a little race against Blain. He got up as well, and we both went home, seeing as he lived near my place, he walked along. Then all of a sudden, I felt I stepped into something sharp...

Nicole: Ow!!

Blain: What?

Nicole: I stepped into something sharp!

Blain: Who the hell walks barefooted in a forest...?

Nicole: Because I couldn't beat you if I had shoes on...

Blain: ...

Nicole: But it really hurts!!

Blain: *sighs* Fine, get inside...

So we both entered my house and I sat down on my bed. He kneeled before it and I placed my foot on his knee. There was something stuck in my foot and he took off his gloves and tried to pick it out. But it only got deeper and it started to bleed a little...

Nicole: Ow!! Easy!!

Blain: You want me to get it out or what?

Nicole: Yeah, but, take it easy...

Meanwhile, outside, Rouge walked by and heard them talking...

Blain: It's stuck...

Nicole: You're only pushing it deeper...

Blain: Hold still! How the hell am I supposed to get it out if you're moving?!

Nicole: Oh, it's bleeding a bit...

Blain: I almost got it.

Nicole: Ow, ow, ow...

Blain: Got it...

Nicole: Whoa... That's huge...

Then he showed me the piece of wood I stepped in. My sole is bleeding a bit, but, I'll get over it...

Nicole: Thanks...

Blain: Don't mention it...

Then it stayed silent for a while. For some reason, we were both staring at each other for a while ... I don't know why... Maybe I had a booger or something...

Blain: Well... Goodnight...

So he got out the door and went home... And he forgot his bag, I tried to call him, but he already left.

Nicole: Goodnight...

At some point, I noticed Rouge peeking at the doorway. She came in with a big grin...

Rouge: So... How was he like...?

Nicole: What?!!

Not long after that, Cody and Tails entered the house as well. They say that they had to do some homework and they rushed to Cody's room. And seeing Rouge was already here, I made something to eat... Soup... Out of a can...

Rouge: So what's the deal between you and Blain?

Nicole: Nothing. We teamed up and fought some guys at school. No biggie.

Rouge: Aah...

Then it stayed silent for a while...

Nicole: What, you don't believe me?

Rouge: Well I never said that...

Nicole: ... You've been acting strange lately... Don't tell me you're pregnant...

Rouge: Says you who just played "hanky panky" with sergeant major Blockhead.

Nicole: I didn't!! Hell no!! He removed a splinter out of my foot...

Then I showed her the piece of wood that was still around for some reason...

Rouge: Riiiiight...

Nicole: Look, Blain is still an asshole. The fact that we're acting normal to each other doesn't mean everything is fine and dandy!!

Then Rouge looked to the door for a while, and then I turned around. And Blain stood near the door... Uh-oh...

Nicole: ... What'd you hear...?

Blain: The asshole part...

Then he grabbed his bag that was lying near the door, glared at me and walked off...

Nicole: *sighs* ... Damn...

Rouge: Smart move...

As soon as I checked on the soup, it looked rather disgusting. I went over to Cody and Tails to ask if they want something... So I knocked on the door.

Cody: I can't figure out the atomic mass of this deuteron!

Tails: That's simple. What's a deuteron made of?

Cody: ...A proton and a neutron...?

Tails: Then what the hell is this electron doing over here?!!

Cody: I don't know!!

Tails: Then get rid of it!!

Nicole: 'Scuse me to interrupt the nerd convention, but you guys want anything?

Cody: No thanks, we're cool.

Tails: Yeah!

Cody: And it's mister nerd for you!!

Nicole: No it isn't.

Then I left them alone again to whatever they were doing. I check on the soup, poured some in a bowl, and passed it to Rouge. Rouge looks disgusted at it... And... To be honest, I did too...

Rouge: Did something died in the soup or something?

Nicole: I got it out of a can.

Rouge: What kinda soup is this?

Nicole: Chicken... I think... Must be a diseased chicken then...

Rouge: ... You first...

Nicole: ... How about together...?

Rouge: Ok... At three...

Nicole: One...

Rouge: Two...

Nicole: Three...

Then we both took a sip from the soup... And immediately got spit out in the bowl again...

Nicole: Aw man!! That's nasty!!

Rouge: You sure it's not over date...?

Then I looked at the can and it was still good...

Nicole: No, it's not...

Rouge: Where'd you get it?!

Nicole: They passed it around a while ago...

Rouge: Ah, that explains all...

Nicole: So... Wanna have a sandwich then?

Rouge: As long as it doesn't contain a diseased chicken...

Nicole: Hopefully not...

So after I made some sandwiches, which tasted way better by the way, Rouge looked all serious...

Nicole: You ok? You look like you gotta shoot needles or something...

Rouge: Please, I'm eating...

Nicole: Then why the serious face all of a sudden?

Rouge: *sighs*

Nicole: What...?

Rouge: Ok... Well, before I tell you, you gotta promise you won't tell anyone.

Nicole: Ok...

Rouge: No seriously...

Nicole: I won't tell anyone... It's not something bad is it...?

Rouge: No...

Nicole: Then what is it...?

Rouge: Shadow told me that... Well... That he likes me...

Nicole: "Likes you"...? Well, isn't that obvious? I mean, I always see him staring at you, if not, drooling all over you...

Rouge: Yeah...

Nicole: So... You like him too?

Rouge: Maybe...

Then she got a grin on her face...

Nicole: You didn't...

Rouge: I kissed him...

Nicole: How'd it go?!

Rouge: ... Clumsy...

Nicole: Aww...

Rouge: Yeah...

Nicole: So now what?

Rouge: Well... I guess we should just wait and see... But, don't tell anyone about this ok...?

Nicole: Alright... Hehe...

Then it stayed silent for a while...

Rouge: You gotta make up with Blain...

Nicole: ... Why?

Rouge: Because if you were a guy, and you called him an asshole, he would bash the shoot out of you every day for the next 4 years...

Nicole: No he won't...

Rouge: No, but still. No one really shows gratitude for all the things he did for us. And as far as I know, I'm the only one that ever thanked him...

Nicole: He doesn't ask for it...

Rouge: No, because he doesn't want anything in return. He saved your life twice, and calling him an asshole is a bit ungrateful if you ask me...

Nicole: Yeah... You're right...

Rouge: He really tries his best to be part of it, but the poor guy isn't given any chance...

Nicole: So what did he do for you...?

Rouge: During the war you mean?

Nicole: Yeah?

Rouge: He saved Shadow and me once from being incinerated on a battleship... Took us out of the village when rebel forces came our way... And...-

Nicole: You boarded an enemy battleship...?

Rouge: Yeah, with the intention of blowing it up along with everyone else...

Nicole: Whoa... Was he alone back then...?

Rouge: No... Blain and two others deserted Robotnik, knowing that he was about to fall and fought on our side...

Nicole: The RRTS fought on your side...?

Rouge: Yeah...

Nicole: I never knew that...

Rouge: They don't tell you the full story...

Nicole: Then what happened?

Rouge: Well... This one time, I sat near a lake. And Blain sat next to me. He told me he was responsible for the death of the fourth member... He told me they got ambushed and got captured, tortured, interrogated, and eventually claimed the life of one...

Nicole: Ooh... So... How did you get in contact with them...?

Rouge: We had a skilled sniper on the look out, covered up in the hills. Then she noticed the RRTS got captured and told us everything. She saw one of them get away and that he made contact. So she placed a knife around his neck.

Nicole: ... Killed as well?

Rouge: No... As soon as we arrived, we watched him as the sniper went back. She shot every rebel she saw, and once Blain and the others got out, we made our first contact. Sonic and Shadow went towards them as the sniper provided cover if they tried something as the other guy told us everything. And now that they know the whole story, they deflected and stayed with us ever since...

Nicole: But... I thought the RRTS were some trigger happy guys working for Robotnik...

Rouge: They were...

Nicole: So you've seen the other two...?

Rouge: Yup... They were actually really nice guys... Except in combat situations, they were not so really nice. It's a shame their dead...

Nicole: I see...

Rouge: Blain misses them a lot though... He can't let go of the past, which explains why he has trouble getting used to this sort of life. For some reason, he doesn't want to let go. I can understand though... He considered them as brothers and the oldest of the bunch was like a father to them... And now their all dead, except for Blain.

Nicole: Yeah...

Rouge: ... He was actually dead for three months...

Nicole: Who, Blain?

Rouge: You know those scars he has?

Nicole: Yeah?

Rouge: The poor bastard got perforated... And even got his arm blown off...

Nicole: And he died?

Rouge: Yup...

Nicole: So how did he get back to life?

Rouge: No one really knows... That's still a mystery that has yet to be solved... But the fact that he got a bionic arm might have to do something with Robotnik...

Nicole: So he's a robot?

Rouge: Well no, not really...

Nicole: Ooh...

Rouge: So... Give the guy a break... And... Apologize to him... I never heard anyone apologizing to him... But I know it would mean a lot for him...

Nicole: Yeah...

Then I looked outside and saw it was getting dark...

Rouge: I really should be going now.

Nicole: Alright, see you tomorrow?

Rouge: Sure, same time as today?

Nicole: Yup.

Rouge: Is cool. See ya tomorrow then.

Nicole: Later.

So she went out the door and smiled at me before she left. Not long after that Tails left as well. At around half past ten, we went to bed...

But then, I woke up from something... It was in the middle of the night at around 1:00 am. I heard sounds in the bushes and thought it was just an animal or something, so I went to bed again. It stayed quiet... I couldn't resist peeking out the window and saw Blain sitting near the lake again with the usual pen and paper... And well, after what Rouge said, I decided to go to him... So I got dressed, and went to the lake... I stood behind him for a moment but he looked carried away in thoughts... So I sat next to him... Then he looked up, and faced me...

Blain: The frack you want...?
Nicole: Shouldn't you be in bed...?
Blain: Why the hell would you care...?
Nicole: *sighs*
Blain: Go away.

Then he went back to writing that letter...

Nicole: What are you writing...?
Blain: You still here?
Nicole: You're not making this very easy for me...
Blain: Then say what you wanna say and frack off.

Then it stayed quiet for a while...

Nicole: I... I wanna say I'm sorry... I truly am... I didn't mean it...

He looked up surprised as I got up to walk away...

Blain: You know... You ever had nights that you feel complete desolation and that no one in the world gives a shoot about you...?

Then I looked up surprised and faced him...

Nicole: Yeah...?
Blain: This is one of those nights... And on those nights, I sit here, staring at the clear night sky and gaze at the stars... And for some reason, I think about everyone who passed away over the years, and why I'm still alive... It's something I can't really let go, but I have to, because their not coming back...

So I sat back next to him...

Nicole: You're not the only having that...
Blain: Whaddaya mean...?
Nicole: Well... Just like I said...
Blain: You wanna talk about it...?
Nicole: ... No... I'm not here to talk about myself, but to apologize to you...
Blain: You did. Now go away.

Nicole: Look... I know we said things to each other that really hurt... I know I once said that you're friends deserved to die and I'm sorry about that... You said things that really hurt me, and... I want this to end. After the fight we had today with those guys proved we could get along just fine... And... I don't know about you, but... I'm tired of all those fights Blain... We don't have to be best buddies, but we could at least stop with all the insults.

Blain: Most of the time it's just a joke...

Nicole: Yeah but there's a difference between a joke and hurting someone... You gotta be careful with what you say in order not to hurt someone, because you don't know what happened before...

Blain: Like you said that my squad deserved to die after all the things they did for Sonic and the others...?

He got me there...

Nicole: *sighs*

Blain: ... Well...?

Nicole: I told you, I'm truly sorry about that...

Blain: ... Rouge told you, didn't she?

Then I nodded...

Blain: She's gotta stop doing that...

Nicole: Why...? If she didn't tell me, then I would have never come here and apologize...

Blain: Because no one thinks further then that. They never think what might be the story behind it.

Nicole: Not everyone is like that...

Blain: But I know you are...

Nicole: Damn it Blain!! When will you realize that when you're not telling anyone, that no one will ever know the story behind it?!! People can speculate what might be your background story, but that doesn't bring them anywhere!! It's not like anyone can smell what you've all been through!!

Then someone yelled out the window for us to shut up. Well it was late after all... I couldn't really stand it that Blain thinks everyone knows your background story just by looking at them...

Blain: *sighs*

Nicole: It's not easy, I know, but if you want people to respect you for everything you did, you gotta tell them the whole story... After Rouge told me everything, I have a totally different perspective of you now...

Blain: I'm trying... I really am...

Nicole: But it's not getting you anywhere at this rate...

Blain: Then what the hell do you want me to do to?!!

Nicole: You're not trying... You either do it, or you're not doing it at all... There is no middle road... And I suggest you do it...

Blain: How?

Nicole: ... I'm gonna help you with that, along with everyone else...

Blain: Can I ask why...?

Nicole: Everyone might have a reason...

Blain: Right...

Nicole: Rouge thinks its time someone did you a favour after all the things you did for them... But how can they do you a favour if you don't tell them what's wrong...? Everyone sees that something is bothering you. But how can they know what's wrong if you never say anything...?

Then it stayed silent for a while...

Blain: What about the ones that passed away...?

Nicole: What about it...?

Blain: Remembering friends that fell... They were the only family I ever had, and seeing you around with Cody and all... Well...

Then I know what's really bothering him now... Rouge told me he misses them a lot and now I know she wasn't kidding... I can understand though, but at the same time, I couldn't...

Nicole: You don't need a picture or a letter to remember them... Cherish the memories you got, and they'll be with you forever... You keep them in your heart as long as you don't forget about them... Their truly dead when you forget about them...

Then he looked at the blood stained letter he was holding... He folds it up and held on it. Then he looked at me...

Blain: Thanks Nicole...

Nicole: Anytime... So... We're cool...?

Blain: Yeah... We're cool...

We sat there for a short time not saying anything until we realized it got really late... And we had school tomorrow... At some point, Blain got up and reached his arm out to help me get up. So I grabbed it and stood up... And we both walked home...

7 - Dealing with the past

On the way back home I noticed Blain kept staring at the night sky... Before Blain went to his house, he held me back and he pointed upwards...

Blain: Look...

Nicole: Hmm?

Blain: The stars...

Nicole: What about it...?

Blain: Ssh...

Then he kept staring at it for a while... I thought he went insane or having a mental breakdown or something... I didn't really get it and I frowned at him at first... But then he explained...

Blain: Stars are not just some dots in the sky Nicole...

Nicole: No of course not... Their big rocks filled with gas billions of miles away from here...

Blain: No...

Nicole: Whadda ya mean no...?

Blain: They tell stories Nicole...

Nicole: ... You feeling alright?

Blain: Never been better... Do you know the constellations?

Nicole: Yes...?

Blain: Then you should know that they represent something... They represent a story... They represent a vision, an ideal... They represent you and everyone else... How it's interpreted is what makes them fascinating... If you look at them, what do you see?

Nicole: I don't really know...

Blain: Then look deeper...

I don't really know what to say... For some reason, it fascinates me and I kept staring at it...

Nicole: I see myself...

Blain: They say that they shine down on you, protect and guide you when you need it. Provide you comfort when you need it the most... As soon as you open your eyes and face the night sky, all your problems and worries are gone... Just like that... In a blink of an eye... And that's what kept me going during the war...

Nicole: I see...

Blain: And you were right...

Nicole: About what...?

Blain: That it's time to let the past be the past...

And after that, he looked at me and smiled... Which was something I saw for the very first time... He turned around and went to his house... And after he got inside and closed the door, I went inside my house as well...

It took me a long time to fall asleep... Thinking about what Blain said about the stars made me wander... How could something like that have a whole meaning behind it? And what's even more surprising, how did Blain come up with that...? Was it something he interprets on his own, or did he just heard from someone? The way he interprets the simple things made me think. How could something like that have a whole meaning behind it? Those questions and a lot more would never be answered, because I don't see the things like he does...

Damn it... The alarm clock goes off at 7 am... I only had four hours of sleep... I had a lot of trouble opening my eyes and practically forced them open. I took a hot shower and then turned it cold to wake up. And after that, I was wide awake. Then I made some coffee. I looked around for something to eat but then I realized I wasn't really hungry and as soon the coffee was done, I made a cup. I took some sips and slowly dozed off...

Cody: Good morning!!!

I scared the shoot out of myself and fell down of my chair. The cup of coffee I held was spilled on my arm, which burned. Well yeah, of course it hurts. Do you still need to ask? So I held my arm under cold water for about 10 minutes and after that, I slapped Cody on the back of his head. Surely, it wasn't his fault, but I'm always moody in the morning when I haven't got any coffee. And especially when I only slept for a few hours.

Then all of a sudden, there was a knock on the door... Cody opened the door, and to my surprise, Blain was there...

Cody: Hey Blain!

Blain: 'Sup...?

Nicole: Blain...? What are you doing here...?

Blain: Well... About last night...

Nicole: Hold that thought. Cody, could you leave us alone for a sec?

Cody: ... Damn...

So after he went to his room...

Blain: What happened to your arm?

Nicole: I spilled some hot coffee on it...

Blain: Oh...

Nicole: Well anyway, go on...

Blain: I just... I wanted to say I'm sorry too...

Nicole: It's ok... Let's not talk about it anymore. What's done is done...

Then he sits down and sighed...

Blain: So... Now what?

Nicole: Whaddaya mean?

Blain: Well you'd said you would help me.

Nicole: *sighs* Blain... You gotta do what every guy of your age does...

Blain: Like what?

Nicole: Just... You know... Go out, see people, find a love, brag about your shoe-size...

Blain: ... My shoe-size?

Nicole: ... Never mind... Look, just tag along every time we go somewhere. We're going to do a lot of things. Just go along and you'll find out it'll be worth every change you ever made. Come on, it's gonna be great. Don't worry.

Then he looked at me and smiled...

Nicole: Let's go, we're gonna be late for school.

So after we packed our stuff, we went to school... Blain and I talked on the way...

Blain: What did you do before you got here?

Nicole: Eh... Hanging out with friends... Going to clubs and pubs... Going to the movies... The only time when I was home was when I was either sick or asleep.

Blain: You never told me how you got here. You were shipwrecked... But, that's all I know...

Nicole: I ran away from home...

Blain: What made you run away from home...?

Nicole: Let's not talk about that...

So I quickly changed the subject...

Nicole: We need to get you some cloths when we got money. Running around naked is out of fashion.

Blain: But-

Nicole: And some new sneakers.

Blain: What's wrong with my boots?!

Nicole: ... Their old...

Blain: Yet comfortable.

Nicole: And smelly after all these years...

Blain: You smell your upper lip...

Then he just smiled as he looked in front of him. I pushed him when he wasn't expecting it. He fell in a ditch while I smiled at him...

Nicole: Ha, ha, and might I add, ha.

Blain: Don't expect me to save your @\$@ again when you need it...

I reached out a hand to help him get up. As soon as he grabbed my hand, he grinned and pulled me in the ditch as well. I looked at him and he laughed, then I flicked his nose and smiled. As soon as he got out of the ditch, he pulled me up.

Then we headed for school...

Second day of school... Boring as hell and time sure went slow... I didn't see Rouge... During the 15 minute recess at 10, I took a coffee and seeing as we didn't saw anyone familiar, Blain and I stick together. At some point, Blain pulled out a cigarette and lighted it up...

Nicole: ... Since when do you smoke?

Blain: Eeh... Since 14 years. Want one?

Nicole: Eh... No...

Then it stayed quiet for a while...

Blain: Do you have anyone waiting for you back home...?

Nicole: Yeah...

Blain: Oh...

Nicole: Why do you ask?

Blain: Well, it's just that...

Nicole: No...

Ouch... Well that was really subtle wasn't it...? He looked a little surprised to say the least but...

Nicole: Look, I don't know you that well, and you don't know me too well... I mean, we're way too different... I mean... I'm a kangaroo, and you're a hedgehog... People would gossip you know...

Blain: ... I never asked if you had a boyfriend... Don't get all cocky like that...

... Ouch...

Nicole: Well you know now... It would never work out between you and me Blain... I'm only doing this because I owe you...

Blain: Just because you owe me...?

He got a bit pissed... Hell, I would be too... It sounds like I only wanted to help Blain just to clear my conscious... And well, this time he got every right to be pissed...

Nicole: *sighs* You don't understand...

Blain: No... You don't understand... I saved your @\$@ twice... I never asked anything for in return... And this is what I get in the end? To make me look like a fracking fool? Just because you "owe" me...? Open your eyes for fracks sake and realize I'm not stepping in the bullshoot... If you really think you could, then you better frack off back to the shoothole you crawled out from, because I don't take this shoot from anyone...

After that, he flicked his cigarette away and I watched as he walked off while not looking back...

Truth be told, I had a boyfriend... It's just that we were at off's and had a couple of fights before I got here... I still loved him... But... As soon as we got moved out, I never heard from him again... I often wondered if he still loved me... And if he still thought about me... But I know I miss him... The only question was, did he miss me...?

I know I shouldn't have said that to Blain... I didn't mean it like that... And well, in some way I do owe him...

For the next few days, we didn't talk... And I had a feeling we were back at square one... I was afraid that the fights would come back, but even that didn't come back... I was feeling guilty and that proves that something innocent to say can turn out disastrous for the other... And well, soon everyone would know what happened... Sure I wanted to help him out, but I tried keeping him at a distance. I don't know why. Rouge told his story... I thought I understood... Maybe it would help if he said it himself...

The days crawled by... Blain and I still didn't say anything to each other... But with each day, I felt more guilt. On a Friday I decided to apologize to him... I went to his house but no one was home. Then after asking around and looking for him, I finally found him on the beach... All alone... I don't know if he already forgot about the whole incident but I went towards him...

Nicole: Hey...

Blain: 'Sup...

Well first contact was established... Seeing as I fracked up again and needed to make up...

Blain: ... You're blocking my view. Move.

Nicole: ...Alright...

So I sat next to him... He still didn't say anything... I was trying to feel a bit uneasy...

Nicole: What are you looking at anyway?

Blain: The sun... It's going down...

And indeed, the sun was going down... The water reflected the gold orange skyline as the clouds turned dark red, reflected by the water... The sky was light blue where the sun still shines, but looking back, I could see the dark blue sky while the stars came out of their slumber above the hills... Beautiful...

Nicole: Why are you always staring at stuff like that...?

Blain: It's beautiful isn't it...? Proof me wrong...

Nicole: It is...

You could hear the sea waving over the beaches... As we sat there for a while, it became so relaxing...

I don't really know how long we sat there... We didn't talk... I looked to my left and saw Blain lied down in the sand, staring at the night sky like he always does...

Blain: You know what's funny?

Nicole: What?

Blain: I actually hate beaches, and yet here I am...

Then more silence...

Nicole: You know... You would have loved the sun going down in Buthainah...

Blain: Really...?

Nicole: Yeah... I remember back when I was young... My dad used to take me outside in the middle of the night and we stared at the hundreds of islands being surrounded by clear ocean water as the sun went down... There isn't really a way to describe what you see, but it's something that'll never be forgotten...

Blain: Yeah... It does have some kind of symbolic meaning to me...

Nicole: What does?

Blain: The sun... The stars, the moon...

Nicole: Like what?

Blain: The sun rises and falls... And with it, goes another day... As soon as you saw the sun rising again, you know you're still alive and made it through the night...

Nicole: Ooh...

Blain: I often wondered how many times I would see the sunset...

Nicole: Whaddaya mean...?

Blain: Well... During the war, every day was to question if you would make it to the next... One night, it rained... Then all of a sudden it stopped... Like someone turned it off or something... The clouds moved away and I stared at the stars... And that's what always got me through... Because I wanted to see the next sunset no matter what...

Then it stayed quiet for a while... And after what Rouge told me about Blain, I think it's time for him to tell me personally what truly happened...

Nicole: What happened during the war Blain...?

At first, he looked a bit baffled... But I was serious... Rouge told me he died, got shot, tortured, interrogated, that he was responsible for the death of one of his team mates and all... He sighed and looked down... I think all Blain needs is someone to listen to him... And then he started talking...

He talked for hours... And I just listened... It was the way he talked about it that got me hooked... All sorts of emotions were heard in his voice... Anger, sorrow, hate, regret, scared... He also talked about the good things that happened... Like someone brought a bag of marshmallows and that the four of them ate them all up... I wouldn't jump 10 feet in the air if someone brought a bag of marshmallows, but those things were the only good things that he had... Then he sounded happy... He had his moments where he could barely talk because he almost choked down in his tears... He got moments where he became pissed... He was sad... He had regrets... All sorts of stuff...

And from that moment on, I knew he was telling the truth... It was all true, no doubt about it... It stayed silent for a while after he was done with his story... For some reason, he sighed in relief and smiled... Then it stayed quiet for a moment...

Nicole: Look... Eh... Tomorrow it's Cody's birthday... And it would certainly mean a lot to him if you showed up... You don't have to be there for me, but at least do it for Cody... He's fond of you...

Blain: I'd like that...

Nicole: Cool... So... See you tomorrow?

Blain: Is cool... You're going home...?

Nicole: Yeah... You coming along?

Blain: Naah... I'll stay here for a while...

Nicole: You sure...?

Blain: Yeah...

Nicole: Goodnight...

Blain: Goodnight...

So I turned around to walk away...

Blain: Oh, and... Nicole...?

Nicole: Yeah...?

Blain: Thanks...

I smiled at him and walked home.

8 - B-day boy

Aah... Saturday... Finally being able to sleep in... And the best is that you get to sleep in tomorrow as well. And to make it more special, it's Cody's birthday. I didn't forget about it, it's just that I forgot his age... I didn't know if he's 14, 13, turned 15 or 13 or 14... It's so confusing... And a bit embarrassing not to know your little brother's age... I still need to get something for him, but I don't really know what. I know he likes those miniature models, but they cost a lot. Back home, he had all sorts of models. Military gunships, tanks, cars and all that. The weird thing is that I never saw him playing with those models. He always stared at it like some zombie. But at least I know what to get for him.

We talked about Cody's birthday before and we all agreed on having a little party. I know we said we're not gonna give expansive gifts, but I don't really know what to give. I could at least look around in town.

It was around 10:00 that I woke up. I checked on Cody and he was still asleep. So I sneaked out the door and went to Blain's place. I wondered if he wanted to come along to town. Just to hang out and looking for a present for Cody.

But as I arrived at Blain's place, he wasn't home. I knocked on the door but there was no answer. Then I peeked through the windows, but still nothing. I didn't see him. At that point, I saw Sonic walking. I guess he was on his way to my house, seeing as we were going to town. So I caught up to him, and we headed towards town. On the way, we saw Blain and I asked if he would tag along as well. And to my surprise, he came along. And after that, we were finally on our way.

Sonic: So how old is Cody supposed to be?

Nicole: To be honest... I have no idea...

Blain: He turned fifteen today.

Nicole: How'd you know?

Blain: Because he told me...

Nicole: Ooh...

Sonic: Any idea what you wanna get for him?

Nicole: No... I don't know what he likes...

Then we both looked at Blain, thinking he might know the answer again. He shrugged and stared ahead. And after a while, we reached town. We looked around for shops, but there wasn't really interesting things to mention... At some point, we entered some hobby shop and looked around. Everyone had their own opinions about everything, and at this rate, we would never come up

with a gift...

Sonic: *sighs* How about colour pencils and a sketchbook or something?

Nicole: Naah...

Sonic: I give up...

Blain: What do you know that he likes for sure?

Nicole: Miniature models...

So we looked around and eventually found some models.

Sonic: Right. We found them. Now what?

Blain stared at all those miniature models... He wandered off while Sonic and I kept looking around... And after a while, Blain came back.

Blain: How about this one?

He showed a miniature model of a... Battlewalker...

Sonic/Nicole: ...

Blain: What, I like it... The "M3A1 Centurion" Battlewalker... A classic...

Nicole: Well he had models like that in the past...

Sonic: ... Ok...

Nicole: How much is it?

Blain: ...

Nicole: ... Well?

Blain: Ehm... 149 dinar...

Nicole: Whoa!! Holy shoot!!

Blain: And 99 cents...

Nicole: I don't even remember how 149 dinar looks like...

Sonic: Well how much you got then?

So I took out my wallet and see how much I got left. As I opened it, I could clearly imagine a moth flying out of my wallet screaming "I'm free!!" Luckily, that wasn't the case here. Not all the money we stole in Reventon was gone... But it wasn't much either... I only had 16 dinar left... And some small change...

Nicole: Eh... 16 dinar...

Sonic: ...

Nicole: You know what?

Sonic/Blain: What?

Nicole: We owe Cody something... Once we get our money, we'll buy something for him.

Sonic: Okay...

And Blain just nods. I noticed the time at the town square, and it said 13:23. We've been looking all over town to get something for him, but nothing. So as soon as we saw a café, we stepped in... I was rather hungry, seeing as I didn't eat all day... I ordered a coffee and a sandwich. As soon as a waitress brought me my order, Sonic and Blain stared at me...

Nicole: You want anything?

Sonic/Blain: No I'm good.

Then I started eating... But they kept staring...

Nicole: Look, if you guys want anything, just say it.

Sonic: Ehm... How about a chilidog...

Blain: Same as Sonic...

Nicole: ...

Sonic/Blain: Please...

So as soon as those chilidogs were delivered...

Nicole: You know, I was wondering.

Sonic: What?

Nicole: They call you the fastest thing alive, but I've never seen you anywhere fast.

Blain: Well he shoves chilidogs down his throat without chewing. So that's probably the reason why they call him the fastest thing alive.

Then Sonic frowned at us...

Sonic: Well... Shoving down chilidogs down my throat with the speed of light isn't the only reason why I'm called the fastest thing alive.

Nicole: Then why do they call you the fastest thing alive?

Sonic: Because I used to run at the speed of sound.

Blain: ... You could run at 770 miles an hour...?

Sonic: Well yeah...

Then Blain and I looked at each other and burst out laughing. He kept staring at us while Blain and I laughed our asses off... But after a moment, he kept having a serious face...

Nicole: You're serious?

Sonic: Yeah...

Blain: Then how come you don't run that fast...?

Sonic: It's not only me who was affected by it...

Blain: Affected by what?

Sonic: The Chaos Emeralds.

Nicole: Who else then?

Sonic: Knuckles, and Shadow... Knuckles used to punch his way through solid concrete walls and Shadow could annihilate everything within a radius of 300 meters with a finger snap.

Blain: Well I've seen Shadow doing it... But Knuckles and you?

Sonic: The reason Shadow could use his powers is because of his Chaos Emerald. We got four others, but two are missing... Once we get those, we can restore our power...

Blain: But that doesn't explain how you got those powers...

Sonic: Well Shadow is easy to explain. He was created, along with the power of Chaos. How I got mine, and why I can run that fast, I don't know. I don't complain though, I love it.

Blain: Hold on...

Sonic: What?

Blain: You said that once we find the 2 other Chaos Emeralds, you can restore your power right?

Sonic: Yeah?

Blain: ... Does it work for me as well...?

Nicole: You? Powers!?

Blain: ... Didn't you know?

Nicole: What?

Blain: I was created as well. Shadow was created by Gerald Robotnik, and I was created by his grandson... The idea was to have 4 ultimate lifeforms. One of them perished in early stages, and the 3 of us made it. Except that the whole project backfired. We did however, had an improved nerve system. Like stamina, hearing, eye sight and all that...

Blain? Created? Well that was an interesting twist. Then again, that would explain a lot.

Sonic: Well I don't know about you're powers.

Blain: We can always try...

Sonic: That my friend, is true.

At some point, we had to go home. I asked for the bill and when the waitress brought the bill, I almost fell down my chair of the price...

Nicole: Oh no...

Sonic: What?

Nicole: Check it out...

So I showed the bill to the others...

Blain: "21 dinar and 31 cents"...?

Sonic: All that for 2 chilidogs, a coffee and a sandwich?

Nicole: Yeah...

Sonic: The nerve...

Then I realized I didn't have enough money...

Sonic: You what?!!

Nicole: Sssh!! I don't wanna do dishes...

Sonic: So now what?

Blain: Don't worry... I've done this many times...

Sonic: What? Sneaking out a café and not paying?

Blain: No, getting away without being seen.

Nicole: Blain you cheeky bastard.

Blain: Hey, it's either that or doing dishes, your choice.

Then we looked around the café to see if we could get away unnoticed... It wasn't really busy and besides, if I left the 17 dinar I had left, that means only 4 dinar short right? I mean, it's not that much... Then I decided that I could actually save up what I had left... I mean, its not like I stole before... And it's not really stealing... The café wasn't really crowded...

Blain: I'm going to the bathroom.

Nicole: Yeah sure, why wouldn't you?

So he walked off to the back of the café, near the terrace that had opened doors so that visitors could also sit outside. He peeks around the corner and gestured to come along. He walked out on the terrace and jumped over a small hedge that separated the sidewalk from the terrace. Not long after that, we followed. We made sure we went one at a time... And as soon as we managed to jump over the hedge, Blain was kneeled behind it as well.

So we sneaked away...

On the way back home, we came across an electronic store. I stared in the windows and looked at all the TV's, radios, cd players, computers, and game consoles they had... I wish I could afford a TV, and a cd player, because I really needed it... Earlier, I saw cd's with drum and bass tracks. Very good for breakdancing and all that, but I suck at it. I once made an @\$\$ of myself thinking I actually could. And well, everyone was- Wait, why the hell am I telling you embarrassing stories of myself? That's totally irrelevant and not worth to mention. As a matter of fact, I never said anything.

...

Ahem, moving on.

Sonic: Nicole!!

Then I got back to reality...

Sonic: You coming or what?

Nicole: Yeah sure.

Damn it... Did he have to break my day dream?

As soon as we got home, I went to my house with Blain and Sonic... Someone had been messing around with the lock, and the door was slightly open... Blain went in first, followed by Sonic and me... As soon as we got in the small living room...

Shadow: Surprise!!!!

We almost got a heart attack seeing Shadow jumping up from behind a door. Then I noticed he decorated the house a bit... A bit of a messy decoration, but still, a nice gesture...

Nicole: Eh... We're gonna celebrate Cody's birthday at Sonic's place...

Shadow: What?

Nicole: He has a bigger house, so, yeah...

Shadow: Then all of this was for nothing?

Nicole: Yeah... I'm sorry...

Shadow: frack... Well, I thought it was weird that no one was around...

Blain: Speaking of which, I gotta go see Tails.

Sonic: Why?

Blain: I made a gift for Cody and I need a drill to finish it.

Nicole: Oh? What is it?

Blain: You'll see...

He smiled and went off... So Shadow, Sonic and I packed some stuff and went towards Sonic's place, where everyone else was busy cleaning the place. To my surprise, Cody helped along. He seems very happy and I cuddled and hugged him and kissed him on the cheeks.

As evening starts to fall, we all settled down. Not everyone had a present, including me, but I still owe him one. Amy bought him colour pencils and a sketchbook... He seems thrilled by it and gave Amy a hug...

Sonic: See, I told you...

Nicole: Yeah, yeah...

Then Blain gave him a small box... As he opened it, it was a necklace... With a bullet hanging on it...

Blain: Here you go...

Cody: Whoa! Is that a real one...?

Blain: Yup... It's a .50 calibre anti-material round.

Cody: Thanks!!

Then he placed it around his neck... Seriously, the bullet is bigger than his index finger... Then he gave Blain a hug as well. Blain seemed surprised at first that he got hugged, but he got a little smile on his face... It was actually cute to see that...

And well, to be honest, we didn't have much. No tv, no radio, no music whatsoever. So it got a little boring to say the least... But Cody was very happy and he talked with everyone that evening. We passed drinks around, along with something to snack. All in all, everything seems to have succeeded...

At around 1:00 am, everyone started to leave. Blain, Rouge, Shadow and me stayed to help Sonic clean up the place. And after that was done, we all went home... I saw Blain walking home in the darkness while I walked with Cody towards my home. I wanted to talk to Blain for a moment alone, so I told Cody to go ahead. Then I caught up with Blain...

Nicole: Blain?

Blain: Hey, wassup?

Nicole: Well I just wanted to tell you that...

Blain: Hm?

Nicole: Well...

Damn it... I wanted to talk to him, but I don't even know what to say...

Nicole: You see... Cody trusts you... And...

Blain: You think I'm gonna take advantage of that?

Nicole: No, no, it's just that... Cody has a mental... Disadvantage...

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Nicole: Well... He's fifteen now, but he has the mind of a nine year old...

Blain: So... ?

Nicole: Whaddaya mean so?

Blain: Just like I said.

Nicole: Look, I just want Cody to be protected from anything that can harm him...

Blain: And that's the exact problem...

Nicole: What?

Blain: Yeah... If you want to protect him all the time and you do all the things for him, how can he learn to be on his own?

Well he's right about that... I haven't really thought about that... It made perfect sense back then, but now...

Blain: My thoughts exactly...

Nicole: You know, what you did back there was really sweet...

Blain: What?

Nicole: He loved it... He kept on telling how much he loved all the presents he got and although it wasn't much, he kept on mentioning yours. I saw he hugged you, which is a rare thing for him...

Blain: He hugged Amy as well...

Nicole: Yeah... But that just shows that he had a good time... So... Thanks... He really needed it after all the

things that happened to him.

Blain: Don't mention it...

Nicole: What brought you to that idea in the first place?

Blain: I used to have one... But... It got lost a long time ago.

Nicole: Ooh...

Blain: And it's because out of sentimental reasons...

Nicole: Why is that...?

Blain: Because I got you now right?

I didn't really know what to say to that... Then all of a sudden, I gave him a hug... I don't really know what got into me, but I did anyway. I mean, it was rare for him to say something sweet, let alone something towards me... He looked a little surprised after I let him go, but he got a smile on his face none the less...

Blain: Awkwaaard...

Nicole: Hehehe...

Oh man... I had a feeling my head could explode any second... I was so embarrassed by that... Then he looked at me and then I realized I was blushing... Damn it, make it worse why don't you... At that point, I didn't really know what to do...

Blain: Well, it's getting late. I should be going...

Nicole: Ok... Goodnight then.

Blain: G'night...

Then he walked off, into the darkness to his home... Then I got back to my home and noticed Cody sitting on the couch... He looks a little depressed...

Nicole: Cody...? What's wrong...?

Cody: I don't know... Well...

Nicole: Hmm...?

Cody: I was wondering if mom and dad would realize it's my birthday today... And if they even thought about it...

I didn't really know what to say. I guess he's a little home sick, and to be honest, I got that too... So I sat next to him, and held him close... At some point, he fell asleep... After a while, I fell asleep as well while lots of thoughts ran through my head... And I was wondering about the same thing...

9 - Jolly Roger and a Margarita

Two weeks passed by without much happening. We went to school, had some fights, had some laughs... Lots of homework... But the best thing of all is that we got our cards. Basically, it doesn't have any value. It looks like a creditcard, except no one else but you get to pay with it. It's a whole new payment system, and everything goes electronic instead of the old fashioned paper money and coins. All you gotta do is swipe your card, then press some finger print analyzer and press "yes" if you wanna pay. That's it. Every retard can get along with it.

We haven't spent much, but that will change anytime soon. In fact, we even had plans to go this weekend to town. And well, Blain wanted that I'd help him. So we're going shopping. First of, he needs some cloths. Seriously, when's the last time you saw someone running around naked? ...Exactly. Hell, everyone else needs cloths too. Seeing as autumn is coming soon, and it gets cold, and windy, and rainy and all that. So yeah. Clothes.

I have to mention though, that Blain keep having fights with those four guys. And seeing I was fighting along with him last time, they act it out on me as well. Nothing bad or anything though, it stayed with bugging and calling each other names. We almost had a fight again, until some teacher passed along. I wouldn't mind to fight while a teacher is watching, but these guys were pussies... Hehehehe...

...

Where was I again...? Well, I can't remember. Anyway, this weekend is gonna be great. Well, today is Friday and we decided to go to a pub tonight. Anyone is allowed to enter a pub but you gotta be 18 years old to get alcohol. And Blain wanted to know how to have fun... Well, you'll do the math. But back then, it seemed like a good idea... I never thought I would regret it...

At around 10 o'clock in the evening, we went out to town. It wasn't really alive and kicking in the town, but there were others people around our age visiting pubs. And as soon as we entered one, we took our seats...

Sonic: ... That's it?

Nicole: What?

Sonic: You dragged us out here just to sit...?

Nicole: Well no but-

Sonic: I mean, I can sit at home as well...

Nicole: The place itself might be boring as hell. Its how you get along with each other is what makes it fun.

... Awkward silence... No one really seems to enjoy... Shadow kept playing around with a toothpick... After about 15 minutes with a minimal conversation level, I had enough... Geez... Apparently, no one ever visited a bar...

Nicole: Who's up for a drink?

All: ...

Rouge: Piña Colada for me.

Nicole: Finally, someone that knows what's good. Anyone else?

Long silence again...

Shadow: Well I'll think I'll go all out tonight...

Nicole: Yeah!!

Shadow: ... One glass of milk.

All: ...

Shadow: With two shots of tequila!!

Nicole: ... You sure that's a good idea?

Shadow: ... Get me water then.

Nicole: Oh for fu... Come on...

Sonic: ...

Nicole: You guys are boring...

So I ordered a Piña Colada and a dropshot at the bar... Now... I guess they weren't really the type of guys that hang out in a pub. About half an hour later, everyone except for Shadow, Rouge, Blain and me left the pub and went somewhere else. Seeing as the four of us are the only "adults", and I say adults sarcastically because we all know deep inside we aren't, we stayed. Rouge stayed because she liked the Piña Colada and ordered 4 more after she finished the first one, Shadow stayed because he liked Rouge... Blain wanted to find out what normal people do, and I stayed for the hell of it... At some point, I had enough and I dragged Blain towards the bar...

Blain: Is this your idea of having fun?

Nicole: It will be. A pint and a Jolly Roger please.

Bartender: Coming right up.

Blain: What the frack is a Jolly Roger?

Nicole: A mix.

So after the bartender passed the drinks to me, I shoved the beer over to Blain. He looked at it with a distrustful face, and even smelled it... Like he haven't seen a beer in his whole life...

Nicole: You're supposed to drink it, not sniff it.

Blain: You sure it's safe?

Nicole: Definitely. Cheers mate.

Then we both swig the drinks until it's all empty. He slams the glass down and coughed while pulling a funny face...

Blain: How the hell can anyone drink this shoot...

Nicole: You never had a beer before?

Blain: ... No.

Nicole: Oh...

Then there was this awful silence as Blain chewed on a toothpick. I noticed he kept staring at a female bartender...

Nicole: You like her or something?

Blain: Who?

Nicole: That bartender.

Blain: Well she doesn't look that bad...

So I came up with a plan... As soon as she got close enough...

Nicole: Blain, could you get me another Jolly Roger? I gotta go to the bathroom.

Blain: Well eh-

Then I walked away, and watched them from a distance. Then the girl turned to Blain seeing as I got her attention.

Bargirl: What can I get you?

Blain: Well eh... A Jolly Roger and eh...

Bargirl: Yes?

Blain: Well... What else you got?

I saw Blain was talking to that bargirl. I didn't really know what species she was, but I think she was a coyote. I checked on Rouge and Shadow and Shadow seem bored...

Rouge: Where's Blain?

Nicole: Over there at the bar.

And as we all looked over to the bar, Blain was still talking to that girl. He smiled every now and then. So I decided to leave them alone for a while.

Nicole: So how's it going?

Shadow: This isn't really my thing.

Nicole: Whadda ya mean?

Shadow: Just like I said.

Nicole: Well look at Blain. It's not his thing either but he still seems to enjoy. Rouge: Yeah, looks like he made a new friend.

Again, we looked back. I noticed four empty glasses on the bar... What the hell was he doing?

Rouge: Well anyway, we're gonna leave soon...

Nicole: What?! Why?!

Then she frowned and had a smile on her face...

Nicole: Ooh!! Oh... Well have fun then...

Rouge: I'm sure we will, wont we Shadow?

Shadow: Huh? Whuzzat?

Nicole: Well I'm gonna check on Blain to see what he's up to. Later.

So I went back to the bar... I saw she went back to work and Blain was all happy...

Nicole: Ok smartass, what'd you do?

Blain: Well eh... I didn't really know what to pick.

Nicole: So?

Blain: Sooooooooooooo... She asked me what I'd like. Then she gave me some mix with lime. Really

tasty!!

Then I remembered what he means with lime mix. He had a Margarita mixed with lime... Holy shoot, that's some strong stuff... It's all pure...

Nicole: You're not drunk are you?

Blain: Naaah...

Nicole: Good, because I'm not carrying you.

Blain: I feel all warm inside man...

Nicole: That's usually the case when you pour 4 glasses of Margarita down your throat...

Blain: Four glasses?! Are you shooting me?! I didn't have four glasses!

Nicole: You didn't?

Blain: No!!

Nicole: Oh good...

Blain: I had six!

Nicole: You what?!!

I looked at the time and noticed it was only 1:00... I wasn't really sleepy and all, so I tried to have a normal conversation with Blain... Seeing as I was all alone with him... Maybe this was a good opportunity to hear him out... Maybe I could use a good laugh... Hell, he wouldn't remember it the next day... And again, he asked for another Margarita... His seventh one...

Nicole: So Blain?

Blain: Yarp?

Nicole: ... You ever been with a girl before?

Blain: I am right now!

Nicole: No I mean, did you ever have a relationship?

Blain: Oh!! Well... I had... During the war...

Nicole: You did...?

Blain: Yeah... She saved me a lot...

Nicole: ... Oh?

Blain: She was the most beautiful thing on the planet... I loved her very much...

Nicole: Whadda ya mean was...?

Blain: I left her... I had no choice...

Was he shooting me or was he telling the truth...?

Nicole: What happened?

Blain: After the war, I didn't need her anymore... It still pains me...

Nicole: What was her name?

Blain: SCAR... SCAR-11... SOF Combat Assault Rifle...

Nicole: ...

Then he just giggled. He just made me look like a fool. Good thing he won't remember it tomorrow... Hehehehehe... I noticed that the bargirl looked at Blain and I guess she overheard us.

Nicole: Eeeh... I'm gonna go to the bathroom...

Blain: Again?!

Nicole: ... Yeah.

Blain: Be careful not to drown... *chuckles*

So I went to the bathroom... This time for real.

But as soon as I got back from the bathroom, I noticed Blain was talking to her again... And noticed two more glasses in front of him...

Blain: And I fracking shoot you not... This guy!! He kept on yelling that he's going to be a father. Todd was his name I believe. Or... Janice, I can't remember, but he was a human. Then all of a sudden...

Bargirl: ...

Blain: BAM!!!!!

Bargirl: O_o

Blain: His fracking head splattered all over the fracking ground!! He was hit with a .50 calibre anti-material round!! And I told him!! I swear I told him!! You know what I told him?!

Bargirl: No?

Blain: I told him... I said I told him that... That... Always!!! Always remember to keep your rifle out of the dirt!! You know what he said?!!

Bargirl: ... What did he say?

Blain: He said... Nothing!!! All I could hear him say is that blood was gushing out of his head... ONE BIG FRACKING HOLE IN HIS HEAD MAN!!!! I SWEAR!!!! All of his brains... and eyes... And... And... Oh Todd why did you had to die?!! You fracking wanker!!!

Then he let his head down on the bar and cried...

Bargirl: Eh... I think you're buddy had enough for tonight.

Nicole: I think so too... Come on Blain, it's time to go.

sighs

...

Well that really didn't turn out too great... Normally, it would take about twenty minutes to get back to our village. You know how long we took to get home? Two and a half hours!! All because Blain kept ordering those stupid Margarita's... After I paid, we were heading home. He fell down a lot and whenever he was walking, he had a lot of trouble standing on his feet, which ended up in him falling on the ground... After an hour or so, we finally managed to get out of town and entered the woods... Then he fell down again...

Nicole: Come on Blain!! Work with me here!!

Blain: No, I need a rest..... I... Must sit...

So he sat down and I sat next to him...

Nicole: We can't stay long here...

Blain: Chill... It's safe..... I'm here...

Nicole: Oh yeah, that's perfectly soothing in your present state...

Blain: You know Nicole...

Nicole: What?

Blain: I really, really... ..Really like your eyes...

Nicole: Eeh... Thanks...

Blain: Their all... Purple-ish and... Shiney...

Nicole: Eh... Ok... Thanks...?

Blain: Also... You're tail...

Nicole: What about it?

Blain: It's all fluffy... And shoot...

Nicole: ...

Blain: And I like your boobs...

Nicole: What?!

Blain: Izza... Like..... If you poke them, they go like... "Whoo!!!! Wiggle wiggle!!! "

Nicole:

Blain: Whoowee!!!

All of a sudden, he poked my boob...

Blain: Whee! It wiggled!

Then I punched him as hard as I could in his face, which knocked him out... Great...

Nicole: No more alcoholic drinks for you... shoothead...

Not long after that, I heard him snoring... And seeing I became a little tired, I shook him awake... And well, I couldn't really leave him behind... Well I could, but...

Blain: Huh...? Whuzzat...?

Nicole: Let's go!! I wanna go home!!

Blain: I don't feel so good...

Nicole: *sighs*

Blain: I'm dizzy.....

Nicole: At least try to get up...

Blain: I... I can't...

Nicole: Don't be such a pussy... Get up...

So he sat up right... And he still didn't got up... At some point, my patience was wearing thin so I stepped on his tail and he immediately jumped up...

Blain: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!!!!

Nicole: See, that wasn't so hard...

Blain: Why the hell was that for?!!

Nicole: Because I wanna go home and you're holding me up.

Then all of a sudden, he wanted to punch me. I dodged him, grabbed his arm while I made him trip, which was fairly easy and placed my knee between his shoulder blades. Then he yelled it out... I wasn't pressing that hard...

Blain: Get off me!! Get off me!!!!

Nicole: Don't be such a pussy Blain... Seriously... What the hell...

Blain: GET OFF ME!!!! YOU'RE STANDING ON MY EXIT WOUND SCAR THING!!! IT FRACKING HURTS!!!!

Nicole: Oh. Sorry.

So I helped him getting up. Basically, it's his own fault that he is in this present state. Well, I know he hasn't been like this before, but for every thing there's a first time right? I just hope he learned his lesson. Don't ever poke my boobs. Or drink too much alcoholic beverages...

Anyway, we were on our way again. It took us a long time to reach it, but we finally made it. And as we stood in front of his house...

Blain: Nicooooooooole...?

Nicole: What?

Blain: Thanks..... It was fun...

Nicole: Oh... Well, no problem. Want me to walk you in?

Blain: Noooooooooo, I can handle it...

Then he had a lot of trouble of getting the door opened. So I opened the door for him. And as he walked inside, he tripped over the doorstep and fell face first down... I had trouble holding my laughter and I heard him giggle while his face was buried in the wooden floor. Funny sight...

Nicole: You sure you don't need a hand?

Blain: *muffled* Naaah...

Then there was this long awkward silence as I still tried to hold my laughter...

Nicole: Ok, well, goodnight then...

Blain: *muffled* Goodnight...

Then he rose up his arm and made a waving motion while the rest of his body didn't move an inch. Really funny to see, and I just laughed it out loud. Not long after that, I walked over to my house. And before I went inside, I took another look at him, and noticed he was still lying in the doorway... It actually surprises me that his vocabulary wasn't affected by the 9 glasses of Margarita's he had...

Nicole: What an assmunch...

I shook my head and smiled, then went inside to get myself to bed...

10 - A new friend

The next day...

Tails: Blain!!

Tails knocked on the door... But there was no response...

Tails: Blain...?

He peeked through the bedroom window and noticed Blain in bed. As soon as he taps on the window, Blain looked up with a pissed off look and yanked down the curtains. Tails kept on tapping and eventually, Blain opened the door...

Blain: What?!!

Tails: Geez, what's your problem?

Blain: Went out last night...

Tails: Oh! Did you have a good time?!

Blain: Define it...

Tails: Oh... What happened?

Blain: Never mind... What are you doing here anyways?

Tails: I came by to do some maintenance on your arm.

Blain: Ooh... Yeah come on in...

Blain looked in the mirror and he saw his right cheek was glowing red. Every time he poked it, it stings a little. So he got out an ice pack and held it against his cheek...

Tails: What happened to you?

Blain: ... Nicole...

Tails: And she punched you?

Blain: ... Yup...

Tails: Do I even wanna know...?

Blain: ... No...

Tails: Then I won't ask...

Blain: Thanks...

Tails: But... I'm still wondering...

Blain: What?

Tails: What did you do this time?

Blain:

Tails: I didn't say anything.

Blain: I can't remember anything... Why the hell did she punched me anyway...

Tails: Maybe you need to interact more with the feminine side, understanding it, so that you can have a good, meaningful conversation.

Blain: Says someone who doesn't have much life experience.

Tails: Ah, but that's where you go wrong my friend. I had a girl, unlike you.

Blain: Yeah, for about two days...

Tails: Three... And that's more then you can say! Taking a shower once in a while would help too you know...

Blain: ...

Tails: *laughs*

"coffee..."

...

"I need a coffee..."

That was my first thought when I woke up. I glared at the clock like it was taunting me. The clock however, said it was 13:24 am... So I got up from bed, made a pot of coffee and took a shower in the mean time.

After 4 cups of coffee I was wide awake again. Come to think of it, I was a little bored and it's Saturday... What do most people do on a Saturday while it's a nice warm day? Well, seeing as autumn was coming soon, I had to get myself some cloths for the winter and stuff. And come to think of it, everyone else needed that as well... So I got out and went searching for the others.

Everyone wanted to come along. Not because I came with the idea, but because of common sense. It's not very clever to freeze your tits off in the winter. There was just one person that I haven't asked...

Nicole: Blain...?

I knocked on the door but there was no response... I check the doorknob, but the door wasn't locked... So I slowly opened the door but I didn't hear anything...

Nicole: Blain...?! Where are you?!

Then I heard sounds from the living room. It sounded like something was falling on the ground and I could hear some mumblings... Was that Tails...?

As I peeked around the corner, I scared the shoot out of myself. Blain's left arm was cut open and Tails was doing something with it... There was even a little bit of blood...

Nicole: Whoa!!! What the hell!!! Holy shoot, what the-

Then Tails and Blain looked up...

Tails: Hey Nicole!

Blain: Ow!!!

Tails: Oh, sorry.

Blain: Look where you're going with that screwdriver!!

Nicole: Blain, you alright?

Blain: ... Yeah...

Nicole: Why's your arm cut open!?

Blain: Monthly maintenance.

Nicole: Doesn't that hurt?!

Blain: Sometimes... *glares at Tails*

Tails: Don't worry, the skin is synthetically engineered. It won't leave scars after it's burned by a laser.

Nicole: ...

Blain: You done?

Tails: Almost.

Blain: Pssh... fracking hell...

Nicole: So how's your head...?

Blain: Painful... What the hell have we been doing last night...?

Nicole: We? Speak for yourself rodent, you're the one who ordered 9 glasses of strong liquor.

He rolled his eyes and supported his head with his right arm and pouts. Then Tails took off his glove, got out a pencil and poked his fingers with the sharp tip...

Blain: Ow!!

Tails: You're all set. Move your fingers.

Then Blain tried to move his fingers... His thumb acted funny though. It went berserk like a squirrel on steroids. After Tails made some adjustments, it acted normal when Blain moved his thumb... Where's the fun in having a normally functioning thumb...?

Tails: Done.

Blain: Great... Thanks Tails...

Tails: No problem.

Blain: ... What are you doing here anyway?

Nicole: Well eh... Everyone is going to town, so... You wanna tag along?

Blain: Do I need to?

Nicole: Well if you need clothes for the winter...

Blain: ... I still got a headache...

Nicole: Take a very hot shower. That should cure your hangover.

Blain: ... Right...

As Blain took a shower...

Nicole: Tails, do you where Cody is?

Tails: He's with Rouge and Shadow.

Nicole: Oh? What's he doing there?

Tails: I don't know. He said they took him to town.

Nicole: They left already?

Tails: Yeah... You going too?

Nicole: Yup. I need some clothes.

Tails: Aah...

And after a while, Blain came out of the shower. His head was one big fluff ball... At that same point, I drank something. That really didn't go too well... It got spit out again and I choked while I died laughing... He quickly flattened his quills by stroking it and pulling it down. His spikes came back, but it still had that fluffiness...

Nicole: You feeling better now?

Blain: ... Kinda.

Nicole: Right! Let's go! You coming along Tails?

Tails: Yup!

Blain: But-

I didn't ask for Blain's opinion. I just dragged him along. He had to, because he had to get cloths too. Running around naked is out of fashion.

Once we got in town, we met up with the others. Shadow and Rouge went their own way, as well as Amy, Sonic, Tails and Knuckles. So we decided to look around to see some clothes shops... All sorts of brands were on display... At some point, we entered some shop. It wasn't really busy and we looked around in the shop. Blain looked around as well but he wasn't that impressed by all the brands on display...

Nicole: See something you like?

Blain: ... Not really.

Nicole: Here, try this on.

I threw some jeans at him which was way to long for him. As soon as he unfolds it, he stared at me, wondering if I was sane.

Blain: It's way too long!

Nicole: That's supposed to be. It's called baggy.

So he puts it on... ...Did he ever wore pants...? Seriously, he pulls it up to his waste...

Nicole: You gotta lower your back pockets to your @\$\$.

Blain: Like this?

Nicole: Yeah, now fold the bottom.

Blain: Alright...

Nicole: Ok, looks good. Keep that one.

I found a few other jeans about the same size. I got a dark grey one and a dark blue one with a white "worn off" texture on it. After looking around, Blain noticed something. He shows me pants with urban camo textures. After he puts it on, its all tight around the waste and his @\$\$... So I got out a bigger one for him. He puts it on and it's baggy...

Nicole: Looking good. It suits you.

Blain: Ya think?

Nicole: Yup. Here, take this.

I got him a black tank top, a hoodie, 2 t-shirts as well as 2 casual t-shirts, and 3 sweaters in different colors and prints. Looks good on him. I also got him some new gloves. Fingerless gloves, with a small open rectangle on the outside. A pair of nylon sunglasses for in the summer, a pair of dark grey strap-on sneakers, a pair of grey/blue high-tops, and a pair of black and blue low-tops. Now it was my turn to shop around...

Six hours later, we returned home. We didn't see anyone else on the way back home... In total, together, we've spent about 600 dinar... Blain carried all the stuff we bought and I only held one bag because he couldn't carry more.

Then, as evening fell and Cody arrived to say he's gonna stay over with Tails, Blain and I chilled out on the porch at my place after his stuff was taken to his house. It actually scared me how clean and tidy his closets were... Maybe a little too clean...

Anyway, we were kicking back on the porch at my place. Leaning back on a chair our feet up against the railing with a nice hot cup of coffee. Well, I did anyway. As it turned dark, I lit up a candle that was on a small table next to me. It was one of those aroma candles that give a nice smell after it was lighted...

Blain: You often think about the future Nicole?

Nicole: Nope... I'll just live every day like it's my last and not worry about the next, because the next day has its own worries.

Blain: Yeah but, don't you think about how you'll end up in ten years, or even twenty years, or maybe even in thirty years?

Nicole: Of course I do.

Blain: Really?

Nicole: Yeah. I know I'll be old. I might have a kid. Maybe even two... I might even be married even though I can't really imagine that...

Blain: But what if those things are never to be realized?

Nicole: How would you know?

Blain: Well...

Nicole: How do you know that it's not gonna be realized?

Blain: ...

Nicole: Exactly... Maybe it doesn't go the way I planned. Maybe there are lots of things that are not gonna be realized in 30 years. Hell, maybe I'm dead in thirty years. But I know that at least one thing will be realized.

Blain: Which is...?

Nicole: I don't know. That's the point. Maybe I'm way different in thirty years. I bet you never thought you would end up like this with me on a porch talking about the future. I guess that indicates how much you changed over the years.

Then he looked at me and smiled. I guess he knew I was right...

Blain: Yeah... I never imagined that...

Nicole: Hehe...

Blain: Where'd you come with that?

Nicole: With what?

Blain: With what you just said.

Nicole: Life experience... You know... I've been through a lot...

Blain: You wanna talk about it...?

frack... That wasn't supposed to happen...

Nicole: No...

Blain: I don't get it Nicole... I mean, you always tell me to talk about everything and shoot, while you don't say a word of where you from. I don't know shoot about you.

Nicole: I also tell you to put things in the past.

Blain: But that doesn't mean you can't talk about it anymore.

Nicole: ... Just drop it Blain.

Blain: You know...

Nicole: What?

Blain: You don't have to tell me anything... Just... Bear in mind that you'll be the one with the problem... Not somebody else... It's just that...

Nicole: Hmm?

Blain: Well... You did a lot for me and I just wanna return the favor... I can't stand it that people do things for me without doing something back...

Nicole: Truth be told Blain...

Blain: What?

Nicole: Everything I did for you was also for me.

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Nicole: Well... I just wanted someone close you know... I don't like being alone... I'm not used to that... And... I guess you were the perfect "victim".

Blain: Victim?

Nicole: Yeah... I guess wanted to keep the lifestyle I was used back in Buthainah... But over the months, I realized that it's not gonna work out. So... I guess I changed as well...

Blain: What does it have to with me?

Nicole: You never did any of that... Shopping, going to bars and all that... And... I guess I just wanted to show you that... I mean, look at you... You changed a lot during those months...

Blain: So did you...

Nicole: Yeah... Sometimes I wonder if I ever get back to Buthainah my friends would still recognize me. Then again... I guess they never would...

Then I closed my eyes and sighed, and took a sip from my coffee. I realized it was already cold, so I threw it out in the bushes and got myself a new one... As soon as I got back, I took some sips of it. I stirred and stirred and the whirlpool that was caused by the stirring caught my attention... I kept staring at it for a while until it stopped. Then I took another sip and sighed again...

Blain: You ever think of going back to Buthainah...?

Nicole: Sometimes...

Blain: Oh...

Nicole: Why?

Blain: Well, since we're being honest here...

Nicole: Go on.

Blain: Well... I like you... I can't really imagine what I should do without you...

Nicole: What about the others?

Blain: I don't know... It's not the same.

Not long after that, we could hear tiny rain drops hitting the rooftops and not long after that, it pours, like the clouds bursts open or something...

Blain: ... Are you really thinking of going back?

Nicole: I have no idea Blain... There's nothing for me back there...

Then it stayed quiet for a while... The rain got louder and you could the rain hitting the rooftops and the trees, which had some hypnotic effect on me. Blain didn't say anything after that. I guess he was also hypnotized by the sounds...

Then at some point, I heard a soft "mrow" that got me out of my hypnotic state... I looked at Blain and he looked back...

Nicole: Was that you...?

Blain: What?

Nicole: It sounded like a meow or something...

Blain: No, that wasn't me...

Then we heard it again.

Blain: I heard it too.

Nicole: Where'd it come from?

We looked around while we stayed in our seats but couldn't find anything. Then at some point, we heard a "mrow" from under the porch. Blain kneeled down to see what was under it.

Blain: It's a kitten!

Nicole: Oh?

Then Blain pulled it out and showed it to me once he got back on the porch. It was a soaked grey ball of fur with a few black stripes... I went inside and got out a towel to dry the poor thing. Blain dried it off and held it on the palm of his hand... I took a closer look to see if it belonged to anyone.

Nicole: I don't see a collar or something...

Blain: No...

Nicole: Is it male, female?

Blain: How can you tell?

Nicole: ...

Blain: What?

Nicole: Give him to me.

So I carefully picked him up and it meows again. It stared at me with those big blue eyes...

Nicole: Sorry pal, I gotta do this.

So I looked underneath it. It was a male.

Nicole: It's a male.

Blain: ...

Nicole: *ahem* Anyway, I don't think someone is gonna get after him. You want him?

Blain: No, I hate cats...

Nicole: ... Hate cats? How the hell can you hate a fluffy furball like this...?

True... His little head kept turning around to look and he meows every once in a while.

Nicole: I think I'll keep him then.

Blain: You do?

Nicole: Well I can't just dump him with the trash...

Blain: You got a name for him?

Nicole: ... Mace.

Blain: Naah... How about... Giovanni?

Nicole: No... Peaches?

Blain: ... He's not a fag...

Nicole: I hope so... Hehehe...

Blain: How about Diesel?

Nicole: ...

Diesel it is then... Blain takes him back and the kitten was so small, it fits in Blain's hand palm. He caresses him with his other hand and scratch behind his ear... The little critter closed his eyes...

Blain: You should get him inside. I think its way to cold for him right now.

Nicole: Yeah...

So we went inside the house and sat on the couch. I got out a towel from a closet and wrapped Diesel up while his little head sticks out. I caress him on his tiny head and at some point, you could hear him purr quietly...

Blain: He likes you...

Nicole: Yeah... I guess I like him as well... I got a weakness for fluffy things.

Blain: Hehe...

Nicole: How can anyone dump a kitten just like that...?

Blain: I don't know...

Nicole: I mean... Look at him...

Blain: Hmm-mm... What do cats eat by the way?

Nicole: ... Catfood.

Blain: ... Figures...

Then I took the little critter on my lap and cuddled it... Blain looked at me and had a weak smile on his face... I looked at him as well but I could see there was something bothering him. But he kept on smiling none the less.

Blain: I wish I would be cuddled like that...

And before I could say anything, he smiled again and went out of the house...

I took Diesel with me when I went to bed. I placed him on my mattress as I lied down, and scratch him under his chin. He keeps nudging his head against my hand, and I held him in my hand close to my face. He fell asleep in no time, as I carefully placed him on my pillow next to me. I looked outside and saw the rain pouring down the windows... For some reason, it made me think about what Blain said. Did he liked me, or did he "liked me" like me? And if he did liked me the way I thought he would, what would I do?

I took another look at Diesel and he was asleep... At least I know I'm not alone anymore...

11 - Snow war

Autumn passed by... The winter was about to start... Three months passed by without much happening... It's December now... We had two weeks off from school, which I was very happy about. Two weeks of sleeping in, getting to bed early, and do everything I want. Oh yeah, and did I mention I bought a radio?

Then just one day I woke up and realized it had been snowing last night. I did see snow in my life, but never actually experienced it. I packed myself all warm, but still froze my tail off. And whenever I looked at the others, I already felt chills down my spine. They weren't as packed up as I was, so I didn't really understand how they didn't feel cold.

Anyway, the first time I actually went out in the snow was a bit weird. Like I said, I never walked on snow or actually saw it for real. And it was really cold... I was actually enjoying it just outside my door until I received a snowball in my face... Then I felt it was dripping down my neck...

Nicole: GAAAH!!!!

Blain: Boom!! Headshot!!

So I glared at Blain after I wiped the snow off and slammed the door of my house.

Blain: She can't take it.

Cody: Well I can.

Blain: I know, but obviously, she can't.

Cody: Yeah...

Blain: Call her out so I can throw one again...

Then I heard Cody calling me. I knew they were up to something... So I opened up the window to ask what was wrong, but as soon as I opened the window, I received another one in the face... Cody and Blain died laughing... This means war... I closed the window and put up the finger to Blain.

Blain: Aw come on Nicole, we're just messing around...

I got to another window on the back of the house, opened it and scoop up snow from the windowsill. I closed the window a bit and I saw them walking away, following the path that was next to my house. I

ducked as they passed and as I got up, they're backs were facing me. I quickly formed a ball, leaned out the window and threw it with all my strength. It hits Blain right on the head and I quickly ducked...

Blain: Hey, hey, hey!! We're on the same team here!!

...Team?

Cody: I didn't throw it!!

Blain: Then where did it come from...?

Cody: I don't know!

Blain: Keep your eyes open Cody... I smell an ambush...

What the hell were they doing...?

I got myself a nice hot cup of coffee but I couldn't shake the idea of what they were up to... Every now and then, I saw Sonic running past the window with Shadow, and even Rouge ran along with Knuckles. Then there was some screaming, laughing and then they ran past again. And at some point, a few snowballs hit my window... Then I went outside as I put my gloves on and put on my woolly hat...

Nicole: What the hell are you guys doing?!

Knuckles: GAAAAAAAAAH!!!! IT'S DRIPPING DOWN MY NECK!!!

Sonic: Hey Nicole! We're doing snowball wars. Or something. I don't know what it's called.

Blain: Wanna join...? *grins*

Cody: Come on!! It's fun!!

Then before I could say anything, Sonic yelled...

Sonic: Cease fire!! New teams!!

Knuckles: Aw man, again!?

Sonic: She joined, so she gets to pick a team mate.

Then they all looked at me... I thought "meh, what the hell" so I decided to join.

Nicole: Cody.

Shadow: I'm with Rouge.
Sonic: Knuckles.
Blain: We got one guy short!
Amy: I'm in...

Then we all turned around to see a pissed off Amy with her head covered in snow... She wipes it off and she turned to Sonic...

Amy: You're going down...

Sonic was looking a bit worried... Amy seemed really pissed...

Amy: ... Who's left?

Blain: ... I am...

Amy: ...Fine, I'm going with you.

Blain: But-

Amy: NO IF'S, AND'S OR BUT'S ABOUT IT!!! YOU GOT THAT?!!

Blain: Ehm... Yeah?

Sonic: Alright!! Let's begin!!!

Then everyone else started scooping up snow, formed snowballs and threw it at each other. Sonic immediately hit Amy again with a snowball and ran away laughing... Then everyone run away in different directions to get snowballs...

Amy: ... He's so dead...

Blain: This requires a Silent Assassin tactic...

Amy: ... I'm listening...

Blain: Good... Here's what we do...

Cody and I took cover behind a house and scooped up a lot of snow. It looked far from a snowman or anything, but that's the basic idea...

Cody: Now if someone walks by, kick the pile of snow...

Not long after that, Shadow sneaked in front of the houses with Rouge... We could see them through the windows and Cody gestured to get ready. I leaned back on my tail and balanced myself with my legs against the pile of snow... Then, as they came closer...

Cody: KICK IT!!!!

So I kicked it with all my strength and they got covered by a thick layer of snow. They wiped it all off and the look on their faces were priceless. Cody and I ran away laughing while we could hear snowballs falling behind us. Then one snowball hit me on the back and again, snow was dripping in my neck... I shrieked but kept on running as Cody couldn't stop laughing.

Then at some point, I could see Blain and Amy kneeled on a rooftop of a small house... What the hell were they doing...? As I looked up, I noticed Knuckles and Sonic getting closer to that house...

Blain: There they are Amy... Stand by...

Sonic: She can't be that far...

Knuckles: I saw her just a minute ago...

Sonic: Then where is she-

Blain: NOW!!!

Then they jumped up from the slope and slide down the rooftop, armed with two snowballs in each hand. Sonic and Knuckles got covered in snow from the rooftop, and Amy and Blain landed on their feet, throwing two snowballs each... They hit the targets dead on...

Sonic: ACK!!!! COLD!!!

Then Amy quickly scooped up another snowball and threw it at Sonic... Blain seems enthusiastic... Maybe a little too enthusiastic...

Amy: Told ya I'd get even...

Blain: Booya!! That's how we do it!! Ha!! High five Amy!! High five!!

Then Amy frowned at Blain...

Blain: Aww, you're gonna leave my hand hanging here?!

Then I hit Blain from a distance in the face with a snowball... Sonic, Knuckles and Amy laughed at him, as well as Cody and I... We got closer threw some more snowballs at them.

Amy: Now would be a good time to go!!

Blain: I couldn't agree more with you my dear. Let's roll!!

The two of them ran away, in the direction of the frozen lake while scooping up more snow. We ran after them, trying to hit them but Cody and I didn't succeed. Then they slide over the frozen lake, turning around and facing us as we ran after them on the lake... Now I know ice is slippery, but not that slippery... I kept falling down as Cody had trouble to hold his balance on the ice... We were sitting ducks... Fish in a barrel... They just looked at us but didn't do anything... Then Knuckles and Sonic ran through, and slide on the ice...

Blain and Amy slide over the ice, dropped and slide on their backs over the frozen lake which caused them to dodge the oncoming snowballs Knuckles and Sonic were throwing. They slide passed them and threw a snowball that hit Sonic and Knuckles' head... Meanwhile, Cody and I have fallen over numerous times and had a lot of trouble getting up on the ice...

Sonic: ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT!!!! WE SURRENDER!!!

Knuckles: Look at those two!

Then Blain got to us...

Blain: Need a hand?

He got out his arm and helped Cody and me getting up... As soon as we were on our feet...

Blain: You never walked on ice before?

Nicole: No! How the hell can you walk on ice?!

At that point, Knuckles slides backwards and as he faced us...

Knuckles: We be jammin' mon!

Blain: Pssh, wise-@\$\$\$. Come on.

Nicole: I can't even stand on it!

Blain: Cody seems to get the hang of it...

Then Cody carefully shuffles along the ice. He looked at Blain and me, and gave a big grin as he realized he was moving forward.

Blain: I'll show you!

Nicole: What?

Blain: You showed me a shoot load of things. Now I'll show you something.

Nicole: I don't think it's-

He got behind me and pushed me! I screamed my lungs out as I slide over the ice with a ridiculously low speed. Still, I had the feeling I could fall over any second. Once I got to a complete stop, I had such an awkward pose, trying to keep my balance... Then Cody went by fast and made me almost fall down.

Nicole: Hey!! Watch it!!

Blain: ... It's actually not that hard to walk on ice...

And as I looked around I noticed Rouge and Shadow joined on the lake as well. Everyone was sliding past me and Knuckles went so awfully fast... I tried to take a step, but as expected, I slipped and fell down with my head on the hard surface of ice... I was dizzy for a short moment...

Blain: You ok?!

Nicole: Ow...

He reached out his hand to help me get up. I slipped again, but this time, he held on to me so that I wouldn't fall again. Then I decided to sit this one out and watched them from the sideline. And seeing everyone slide and having fun puts a smile on my face. Sonic and Shadow were arsing around like usual, while Blain swings Cody around by his tail as he lay on his back. At some point, Blain lets go of his tail, which makes Cody slide on his back on the ice, knocking down everyone who got in his way. Nothing severely though, as you could clearly hear them all laughing as some of them were still knocked down.

As evening fell and the starry night sky came out of its slumber, we returned home. It was getting really cold, and it started to snow again. As everyone went their own homes, Blain and I went to my house. I made some coffee, and still had my scarf wrapped around my neck. I offered Blain some hot coco while I sat down in a nice comfy chair. Then Diesel jumps on my lap.

Nicole: Hello little guy...

Diesel: Mrow!

Then I scratched him behind his ear and he purrs quietly. I noticed Blain was missing something in his hot coco so I threw some marshmallows in...

Blain: Well today was fun...

Nicole: Yeah.

Blain: I mean, it's not every day you see a shoot load of snow.

Nicole: Hmm-mm.

Blain: How's your head?

Nicole: It's alright... A little headache.

Blain: Aah...

I paid more attention to Diesel than to Blain. I was thinking about how he grew so big in the last couple of months. Then he jumps off my lap and wandered around... I looked at Blain again and he had that serious expression like he always did.

Nicole: Christmas is coming soon you know...

Blain: Yeah...

Nicole: You ever celebrated Christmas?

Blain: As long as I can remember...

Nicole: Good memories...?

Blain: Some of 'em... *smiles*

Nicole: There it goes again...

Blain: What?

Nicole: A smile, you cracked a smile.

Blain: Whoop-di-doo, alert the fracking media.

Nicole: It looks good on you...

Blain: What?

Nicole: A smile.

Blain: ... Not you too...

Nicole: Huh?

Blain: Sonic always says that...

Nicole: What?

Blain: *puts up retarded voice* "Remember! You gotta smile!" "All you need is a smile! And everything is gonna be ok!" "Smile for fracks sake!"

I couldn't resist laughing, seeing the way he said it. It's true, Sonic does say that a lot. Much to the annoyance of the others...

Blain: *sighs*

Nicole: Why can't you be more like that?

Blain: Like what?

Nicole: You know... Acting... goofy and all...

Blain: That's not exactly me.

Nicole: Is that what you believe or did someone told you to believe?

Blain: Neither.

Nicole: Then stop acting like you got a sheep shoved up you're @\$\$ and crack a smile once in a while...

Then I grabbed the corner of his mouth and stretched it to make him smile.

Nicole: You gotta smiiiiiiiiiiiiile!

Blain: Yo won sshtep owoy flom gitting yo ash kigked...

Nicole: What? I can't hear you.

Blain: ...

Then I let go... I should have taken a picture of that... Nevertheless, he keeps on smiling...

12 - Christmas...

And Christmas arrived... It knocked on the door and barged just right in without saying hello, except I saw it coming from a distance...

...

What the hell am I talking about?

Christmas. Yes. Fun, fun, fun for the whole family. Geez...

I don't really know what to say. Christmas is some holiday that's been around for centuries and no one really knows why it's a celebration. I believe I heard someone saying once that it's a holiday, dedicated to some important guy who was born on that day thousands of years ago. .

Pssh, yeah right. I was born and you don't see the 17th of august being turned into a world wide holiday... All I cared for was the shoot load of presents that were under the tree... Who the hell came up with that idea anyway? To put a tree in your house, decorate the shoot out of it and place presents under the tree?! Seriously, the one who invented that was one weird guy... Or girl, I don't know. Still, I didn't complain. It was all fun... Until one incident changed everything...

...

Got ya there didn't I? Ha! You thought something horrible was about to happen, like a giant... ..thing... ruining Christmas and the kangaroo that saved Christmas. I actually like the sound of that. "Nicole, the sexy @\$\$ kicking Kangaroo who saved Christmas".

Hehehe...

ahem

Christmas morning... It was only 11 am and I felt that something was tickling my paw. I wasn't really wide awake to actually be bothered by it, but I felt it was slowly crawling upwards. At some point, I looked up and noticed Diesel sticking his little head from under the blankets. I scratched him behind his ear...

Nicole: Merry Christmas lil' guy...

Then I noticed a Christmas hat on the table. I got it from people who were passing those things around a few days ago in town. I actually got 4 or something... They didn't believe me when I said I already had a few. They gave it anyway. I placed one over his little head, and he reaches out for the bell that was dangling on it...

Nicole: Getting in the Christmas spirit yet?

Then I placed one on me myself...

Nicole: How about now?

Diesel: Mrow!

Nicole: Yeah my thoughts exactly.

Then after I took a shower, I went over to Sonic's place to help with everything... Everyone looked so happy for some reason. Christmas is just another day like any except there's always a cheerful mood everywhere you go.

As soon as I arrived, I got cuddled by everyone, followed with kisses on the cheeks, and I did the same. We all wished each other a merry Christmas, but we didn't know why. Guess it was tradition or something.

After all the preparations were made, I went home to get dressed properly. Normally, I'm not really

someone who wears dresses, and I'm not gonna change that now. So I got out some decent clothes and cleaned the place up a bit. Then I went towards the others...

It was late in the afternoon when I arrived. Sonic's house was being decorated with lights and all sorts of things, and they were still decorating the tree... Well, trying to get it up first...

Blain: To your left!!

Knuckles: What?!

Blain: You're left!!!

Sonic: Whoa look out!!

Blain: Knuckles!!!

Knuckles: Help me here!!

Sonic: Aah!!

Blain: What?!!

Sonic: The branch hit my eye!!

Blain: Oh for fu-

Knuckles: Watch out!!!

Then the tree fell down on the guys...

Knuckles: Get off me!! Get off me!!!

Sonic: Well if I could get a hand here I would, stupid!!

Rouge: *sighs*

Nicole: ... Am I missing something?

Rouge: No you're just in time...

Nicole: Hehehe...

Rouge: Seriously, who needs TV when you get to see those guys?

Nicole: Meh... So how's the score?

Rouge: The guys: zero. The tree: Four.

Nicole: Interesting score.

Rouge: Yes indeed...

Nicole: Shouldn't we help them?

Rouge: Naah, not just yet...

Many, many... Many... ..Many moments later, they finally managed to put the tree up... Decorating didn't go smooth as well, seeing as lots of baubles got shattered on the ground. Sonic even managed to cut open his finger on the broken baubles... But finally, it was standing... A lil' tilted...

Nicole: It's a bit tilted.

Sonic: Yeah you're right...

Blain: Will you shut up before anyone is gonna mess with that tree agai-

Nicole: No, no, really, it is...

Sonic: I got it.

Ok, lemme rephrase that... Way tilted... That thing could fall down any second if someone bumped into it... And I swear, the moment I thought that...

Cody: I got some more baubles!

Sonic: Watch where you're going!!

Cody: What?

Nicole: Oooooooh dear...

Then Cody bumped into the tree, and of course, it fell down... Again.

This time, we helped putting up the tree again. And with "we" I meant Rouge, Amy and myself. All the tree needs is a feminine touch. And a lumberjack to chop it down... Then we helped decorating the tree and cleaned up the mess the guys caused.

As evening fell, we opened up the presents... Tails was the first one who got a present first. It's a big, rectangle thing, and as he unwraps it, we could see it's a big... Rectangle wooden box... With nothing on it...

Tails: Eeh...

Sonic: ... I think I see screws on top.

Tails: Get me a screwdriver...

It takes fifteen minutes to unscrew the lid... And after he opened it, his face turned sour... He got out a note, while there was nothing else in the box...

Tails: "Better luck next year."

Sonic: That's it?

Shadow: Maybe this will help.

Then Shadow got out a present from his back and gave it to Tails...

Tails: You made this?!

Shadow: Yeah, aint it great?

Tails: Hehehe, thanks Shadow.

Shadow: Open it!

Then Tails unwrapped the present and saw... A pair of socks... His face turned sour again with a weak smile... Tails picked a present from under the tree and it was for Cody. A big one. Now I know this one. We all agreed a while ago that we still owe Cody for his birthday. So, encase if you wonder what we got for him... It's a gameconsole... You know... Videogames and all that... He literally jumped 10 feet in the air as he saw that... But we don't owe a TV... He also realized that... We're getting back on that...

At some point, I noticed Blain going outside... And after a while, he still didn't get back... So I looked for him and he was on the porch smoking a cigarette...

Nicole: Smoking is bad for you, you know.

And as he turned around, I saw his hands were shaking...

Nicole: You ok...?

Blain: Uh... Yeah, I'm fine...

Nicole: You sure...?

Blain: Don't mind me... Sometimes I got moments like this...

Nicole: ... I know that...

Then he turned around... He was still shaking a bit...

Blain: You know... Four years ago, I celebrated Christmas with a dead body...

Nicole: What...?

Blain: Yeah... We got send out on a mission to round up a rebel leader and got ambushed, which caused me to get separated from the others. I managed to hide in a small village, until I saw someone walking towards me. I waited until he got close enough, pulled him over in an alley and I stabbed him. In the chest. He fell dead next to me and I began searching his body for weapons. It took me a long time to realize he didn't had any, because he wasn't a soldier... Instead, I found something else...

Nicole: Well... What did you find...?

Blain: A Christmas card...

Nicole: A Christmas card...?

Blain: Yes... And as I turned his body around, I noticed it was an old guy... A human...

Nicole: An old man...?

Blain: Yeah... To me, Christmas didn't mean much, but it does for millions of other people... Even in times of war. As soon as I got radioed by the others where I was, I went to the rendezvous point... And... On the way, I walked by the small houses and saw everyone inside. They didn't have much, but they seemed so happy with the little things they had...

Nicole: You got a grudge against Christmas...?

Blain: No, not at all... In fact, those are the happiest memories I can remember... When I was young, Jasco gave us things on Christmas... Not any presents, but small things. Like a bag of marshmallows, or chocolate bars he stole. And every time we were out on the field, he kept us warm by lighting a fire, and he always told how good his Christmases were when he was young. And ever since that day I found that card, I felt something was missing. A place to call home and someone to call family. It sounds so cliché you know... And now that I got both, I got the feeling I'm being left out...

Nicole: What makes you think that...?

Blain: Because everyone I ever celebrated Christmas with is DEAD!!!

I was a bit surprised by that... I didn't really expect that... I kept looking at him as he stared back...

Blain: Dead!! Everyone...!

Nicole: You got us right...? I mean... Sonic and, everyone else...

Blain: Yeah... But Sonic celebrated Christmas with everyone else each year... And all of a sudden, I was alone...

Nicole: Well... Truth be told... I'm alone too...

Blain: Whadda ya mean...?

Nicole: Luckily, I got Cody... But, I miss my parents too you know... How it used to be... But I'm not going back, not after what they did...

Blain: Who did what?

Nicole: They... They've abandoned us when Cody and I needed them the most... I was a spoiled, rich brat that sometimes needed a slap, but... Not this...

Blain: You were rich...?

Nicole: I was...

Blain: And you've abandoned that while you were on the other side of the planet...?

Nicole: ... I walked away...

Blain: You had it all and you just walked away...? How the hell can you do that...?

Nicole: Because...

I didn't want to let him know what really happened. I just didn't want to talk about it...

Nicole: Because... It became unbearable...

Blain: Like what, a safe home, loads of cash and not being shot at every fracking day became unbearable?! What the hell...?

Nicole: You didn't know what I've been through...

Blain: I would trade it any fracking day!! Especially after all the things I've been through!!

Nicole: You don't understand...

Blain: Do I need a reason to understand...? What's there to understand...?

Nicole: ... Nothing...

At that point, I decided to shut up... How can anyone understand something if you don't want to explain the whole story...?

Blain: I don't get it... Why would you leave everything behind and even come here...? It just doesn't make any sense... I would trade my past just to get my arm back... I would trade with you... I would have stayed home if I was you...

Then he closed his eyes and let his head down...

Blain: But... Then again, you're not me... We're way too different...

He turned around to walk away, but I grabbed his left arm. He looked up surprised and then back to me... I took his glove off and placed my right hand in his left hand, then looked back at him... He looks down at my hand being placed in mine...

Nicole: You and I are not that different... You look at where I came from... I look at you as a person... And... You and I are not that different as a person...

There was a long silence before he responded... He never actually responded to what I said, but I knew it meant something to him... He's devastated... No one ever saw him like this... Especially not me... He didn't move an inch... I got closer to him and placed an arm around his shoulder. Then he looked at me with soggy red eyes... I gave him a hug and he hugged me tightly... I placed my hand on the back of his head and caress it...

Nicole: Sssh... Its ok, Blain... Let it all out...

Blain: It's just not fair man...

And at that point, he held me even tighter... I felt how his big hands clenched on my back and I could hear him sobbing... His tears hitting my shoulder... And at some point, I couldn't hold myself either and I felt a teardrop leaving my cheek as well...

What I don't understand is... How can Blain talk so easily about everything that happened to him...? Everything seems to revolve around Blain... What about me...? I can do about it all I want but if I don't tell, they will never know... It's as simple as that...

A lot of bad things are happening in the new year and it gets worse... For me... At some point, they will know... But not this night... I didn't know it that night... That night, everything was fine...

As soon as we got back, I noticed the mistletoe hanging on the wall and we stood underneath it...

Nicole: Blain...?

Blain: Yeah?

Then I looked up to the mistletoe. At some point, he looked as well and I smiled...

Blain: Forget it...

Then he smiled as well and went to the kitchen to splash water in his face... Then Sonic came to me...

Sonic: What happened to Blain?

Nicole: Nothing... We just needed to talk about something...

Sonic: Ooooh... I see... Go for it...

Then he went back to the others...

Nicole: ... What?

After I got back from splashing water in my face, I got a present... A small present... I unwrapped it and saw a little black box... As soon as I opened it, I noticed it was a necklace... I got it out and it had a black

Onyx stone, shining in different colours as you turn it in the light... Cobalt blue, Nero black, Crimson Red and all sorts of colours... It's beautiful... I also noticed my name was carved in the stone... As soon as I asked who gave me this, no one knew... And as I looked at the back of the stone, it said "Thank you for opening my eyes..."

Then I knew who gave me the necklace...

13 - New Years Eve...

Sometimes I wonder if the things I bottle up would change me, especially ever since Christmas... Changing the way I act, changing the way I think, changing the way I act towards others... Each day, I can feel it growing slightly, and I'm afraid that one day it'll just "explode" followed with every consequence... That was bound to happen along with every other shooty thing that I would encounter... All the things that will happen would have a great impact on me... But with all experiences, you'll learn from it for better or worse... Looking back now made me realize all these things had to happen for me to become the person I am today. I couldn't understand it at the time, why it was all happening. I didn't know those life-changing things were gonna happen to me. I didn't know. I'm glad I didn't. And encase you're wondering... I'm not talking about the past... I'm talking about the future, of all the things to come... But I didn't know it at the time... Everything was fine back then... I know I must sound like an emo or something, but really, it's not like that...

Every day I wore the necklace I got for Christmas. It's been a few days since and no one knows who gave me the necklace. I asked around, but no one knows... I still got a hunch though...

I entered my own house and wiped the snow off of my boots and got out of my winter coat. I just came home from doing some groceries in town. You know, the standard stuff. Bread and all that. I heard laughing in the living room and as soon as I entered, I noticed Cody and Blain laughing all the way... Cody had tears rolling down his cheeks of laughing and Blain almost fell down out of the couch...

Nicole: Hey guys!

No response... They kept on laughing... At some point, they turned around, looked at me, looked back at each other and laughed even louder...

Nicole: What?! What's so funny?!

Again, no response... There was no reason with the guys so I went to the kitchen to unpack the groceries as they kept on laughing... But then...

Blain: Bloody hell, look at those cheeks!!

Cody: A lump of lard with a diaper!!

Then they laughed even louder... Oh dear... I think I know what they were up to... I stood behind them...

Cody: Hey Nicole! I eh...

Blain: *chokes in drink*

Cody: I was just showing Blain a baby picture of you!!

Nicole: You what?!! How'd you get that?!!

Cody: I still had it. I don't know how I got it...

Nicole: Gimme that!!

Cody: No... *laughs*

Then I jumped on him and wrestled for a bit. After a while, I got the picture and smacked Cody with a pillow on his head as he kept on laughing... I stared at the picture for a while...

Nicole: It's been ages since I've seen this one...

Blain: Really?

Nicole: Yeah... I think I was... Around two years old on this picture...

Cody: And lost weight ever since!

Then I smacked him with a pillow again...

Cody: What?! It's a compliment!!

They both started laughing again, and I smacked them with pillows. And a pillow fight was starting... After we were done smacking each other senseless with pillows, I looked outside. It was snowing heavily with really strong winds... No weather to be outside and have a snowball fight like last time...

Cody: Come on, let's hook it up!

Blain: Yeah is cool.

Nicole: Hook what up?

Cody: ... Videogame console I got for Christmas.

Nicole: We don't even own a TV...

Blain: You do now...

Then he got a box from under the table and unpacked it... A small, grey TV... With remote of course...

Nicole: You bought us a TV?

Blain: No, Cody did.

Cody: Blain just went along to pick it up.

Nicole: When did you get this?

Cody: Yesterday.

Nicole: Ah...

And after they unpacked everything...

Blain: *scrapes throat* -Ahem- "Congratulations on you're new purchase of the Ascari Reza 254-bit Game Console. Please be aware that"-

Cody: Yeah yeah yeah, got it. What's next?

Nicole: I think you need to plug the TV in first.

Then Cody grabs the power cord and plugged it in an outlet. He pressed the "on" button and all we got was white snow.

Cody: What's next?

Blain: Seriously, if I wanna see snow, I could just look outside.

Nicole: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

Cody: Dude, what's next?!

Blain: Oh. Eh... "Plug the scart cable on an available scart Line-in. Make sure the game console is set "off" before continuing. After the previous steps have been completed, plug the power cord in an outlet."

Cody: ... Scart...?

Blain: I think it's this thing.

Nicole: Can I get you anything while you're busy?

Cody: A drink would be nice.

Nicole: ...

Cody: Please.

Nicole: You want something Blain?

Blain: A drink please.

Nicole: See, Blain says it the proper way.

So... After I returned with the drinks, they were still busy.

Cody: Scart, scart, scart, scart...

Blain: I can't see it...

Cody: Maybe we should call Tails.

Blain: Yeah maybe we should...

Nicole: Turn the TV around. *takes sip from drink*

Blain: *Turns TV around*

Nicole: No, the other way.

Blain: Eh?

Nicole: *sighs* Lemme do it.

So I turned the TV around and saw the scart line-in. I plugged it in the TV and that's it. Seriously, it's not that hard...

Blain: Right, moving on. What's next?

Cody: Setting up the infra-red wireless controllers.

Blain: What?

Cody: It says right here. "Position the infra-red wireless receiver for the controllers in front of the TV. When the red led on the controller flashes, a connection can not be established with the receiver. The maximum distance is 5 meters for the controller to be recognized with the receiver. The controller will automatically go in stand-by mode if it's not used."

Then I grabbed one of the controllers and noticed a green light. Cody checked on the other one and noticed it was green as well.

Cody: We're done.

Blain: That's it?

Cody: Yup...

Blain: Ah... I just got one question.

Cody: Hm?

Blain: What the hell is a game console?

Cody: I'll show you in a sec.

Nicole: You got games for it...?

Cody: Yup, two games actually...

Nicole: Which one?

Cody: "Recon Zulu 2: Behind enemy lines" and... "BlackOut Brawl: Back on the streets"

Nicole: BlackOut Brawl? I know that one!

Cody: ... You do?

Then he looked baffled at me... Like I never played a videogame before...

Cody: Since when?!

Blain: Wait, wait, wait, what?

Nicole: It's a fighting game.

Cody: Wanna go a round?!

Nicole: Lay it on me...

So after Cody placed the disc of the game in the console, Blain looked at the back of the box and was a bit puzzled...

Blain: "BlackOut Brawl is back! BlackOut Brawl lets you emerge in the underground fighting, taking on tough opponents who are just as eager to win like you! Do you have what it takes to survive the streets and be the most wanted?"

Nicole/Cody: ...

Blain: ... It doesn't make much sense to me.

Nicole: Alright, take a look at this.

We watched the openings cutscenes. Just some random guys bashing each other senseless, switching from character to character... Two player mode... Character selection... Humans, as well as fictional creatures. Cody chose some bulky human as I chose one of the characters I still remember when I used to play the first game. A lioness that goes by the name of Selina. She kicks @\$\$ Like me. Heehee... As I looked back at Blain he just stared at the screen... After Cody quickly pressed start to select a stage, the game was beginning... I didn't know that. I was facing Blain...

Nicole: Basically, you select a character. Each button on the controller represents a move the character does on the screen and the goal is to kick the shoot out of the other character.

Lots of beatings were heard and as I turned around, Cody bashed my character K.O...

Tv: K.O!!

Nicole: Hey!! I was talking to Blain!!

Cody: Ooh... Sorry... *chuckles*

Then round 2 starts... I remember some special moves from the first game with this character, and as soon as I pressed the button combination, she does the same moves. Hehehe, He's going dooooooown...

Tv: K.O!!

Cody: ...

Nicole: ... Ha...

Round three... Same strategy as I did with the second round... And won... Hehehehe...

Nicole: And you're... How do you say... Owned... By me...

Cody: Pssh...

Nicole: Aw come on... It doesn't matter if you suck at the game... As long as you have fun sucking...

*That came out so wrong... Spontaneously, that fancied my tickle box and I burst out laughing. Just because of the stupid comment I made... Cody and Blain looked at me, wondering if I shouldn't be put in the nuthouse... *Ahem*... Guess they didn't understand that...*

Then at some point it was inevitable for New Years Eve to arrive... Aaaaaaaand... With New Years Eve, there ought to be fireworks... We tried getting fireworks earlier, but demands were so high everything got sold out within a day. At some point, we gave up and decided to look around on the 31st to see if there were any leftovers. It's also a lot cheaper then...

When we arrived in town, and with "we" I mean Sonic, Knuckles, Cody and me, we saw a big sign that said "Fireworks". State the obvious, to buy fireworks, you must follow the signs. Duh... We came to a store, where shootloads of people were waiting in line to get fireworks... Everywhere you looked, there were signs of "No smoking" and "No sales under the age of 16". Sonic grabbed a folder that was on a shelve to get an impression of everything they got...

Sonic: This could be a potential bomb...

Knuckles: With nice effects! I'd set it off any day!

Sonic: Yeah well don't get overconfident, remember last year?

Knuckles: Huh?

Sonic: You ended up with one of your dreadlocks on fire!

Knuckles: Well I told you not to get close with the lighter!

Sonic: Only because you said you were ready!

And as the line was moving, I pulled Sonic along with Knuckles. Only a few people were standing in front of us until some guy behind the counter stepped forward...

Guy: Sorry! We're out!!

And everyone was starting to get pissed and angry. Hell, I was too. We've been standing for more then 45 minutes in line... More of those sales guys backed the other one up...

Nicole: You're all out?!

Guy: I'm sorry, everything I have left are orders.

Nicole: Damn it!!

Cody: So, no fireworks...?

Nicole: No... I guess not...

Cody: Damn it...

We went home disappointed. On the way home we saw kids lighting up firecrackers and all sorts...

Once we arrived back home, we thought of ways to celebrate this day... A little more help would be appreciated... I haven't seen Shadow and Blain all day, and it was getting late... It was 16:32 when we got home and we still didn't come with a solution... Then all of a sudden, there was a loud bang... It was so loud, the windows vibrated heavily...

Cody: WHAA!!

Nicole: Whoa!!! What the he-

Blain: Whooooooooohooohoo!! Yeah!!!

Sonic: There's Blain!

Knuckles: And Shadow!

We went outside to see them, and they carried a lot of bags and even a large cardboard box... It had a fireworks symbol on it...

Cody: You managed to get fireworks?!

Shadow: Yup!

Blain: I knew the right guy. He held back some stuff for us.

He grabs in one of the bags and got out a lot of stuff. He tossed it to Cody and passed everything around to everyone else. Then he grabs something that looked like a firecracker... But not an ordinary firecracker. Its long, slim and didn't had a fuse...

Cody: What's that?

Blain: It's a Striker. Check this out.

He got out the box of those things, and strikes it like a match. He throws it away quickly out in the woods...

Blain: Cover your ears.

And right after that, it exploded with a huge bang. I felt the shockwave in my chest and I couldn't hear for a short while...

Blain: Hehehehee...

We all got together again to spend the evening with each other at Sonic's place. Every once in a while some of us including me went outside to set off fireworks. Some were beautiful, others were just plain bangs... The closer we got to midnight, the more excited we were. At around 23:55 pm, Rouge got out the champagne bottle along with glasses. She poured the liquor in glasses and she handed it out to everyone. She was just in time for the final countdown...

All: TEN!!! NINE!!!! EIGHT!!! SEVEN!!!! SIX!!!! FIVE!!! FOUR!!! THREE!!! TWO!!! ONE!!! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

Everyone was so happy once we all shouted happy New Year. We were all hugging each other as the girls also received kisses on the cheeks. Hehehe... I saw Cody looking at me and smiling, and although he was only a head smaller than me, I gave him a firm hug and lots of kisses. I lifted him up for short moment as he kept looking at me.

Nicole: Happy New Year bro...

Cody: Happy New Year...

Nicole: I love you...

Cody: Luff ya too Nic...

He hugged me again as I looked around. Blain was firmly hugging Sonic and he whispered something in his ear. I didn't know what he said though...

Blain: Thank you Sonic... Thanks for everything...

Sonic: That's what friends are for right...?

Then Sonic got hugged by Amy and before he turned around, he winked at Blain.

We could see fireworks in the pitch black night sky whenever we looked outside... Then everyone got outside as quickly as we could as the others got out the fireworks. Blain and Shadow got out the

cardboard box, opened it and rolled out a huge mat filled with those firecrackers Blain had... Once they were done, Blain gestured to stand at a distance...

Blain: Fire in the hole...

He lights off the fuse and ran back to us quickly... Not long after that, loud bangs filled the air as I could feel shockwaves going through my body. I covered up my ears but that didn't really work against the ear deafening noise it made. We yelled our lungs out to "talk", but that wasn't really helping as well... It took about 10 minutes before it died out... I couldn't hear for a short moment...

Then they got out a plastic tube and stuck it deep in the ground. They placed a big @\$@ firework rocket down the tube and set it off, as it shrieks through the air. It got high enough and exploded, and all the colors of the rainbow appeared in the sky, being reflected by the lake as the sparks slowly died out in the pitch black sky... Another one was fired... And another... And another one... Every one of them were reflected in the lake, and it was a beautiful sight to see it above the forests. As Sonic took over from Blain, Shadow and Sonic continued setting off firework rockets as the others set off fountains, firecrackers and all sorts of things... Blain was standing next to me, placed an arm around my shoulder and held his head close next to me...

Blain: Happy New Year Nicole...

Nicole: Yeah... Happy New Year...

We both smiled at each other and I gave him a kiss on his cheek as we both saw the fireworks being reflected in the lake...

At some point, we were running low on fireworks. It's gotten late and the guys were still setting off the last remaining fireworks... Cody was grabbling in a bag and got out something...

Cody: E.M.P... Hmm... "Twist cap and release handle".

He looks a bit puzzled at it first, but then twisted the top and released something. He throws it away and not long after that, it exploded and it sounded like something that short-circuited. You could see black and dark blue lightening bolts flashing out of it and it impacts on the houses. One by one, we saw the lights going off in the houses and everyone had their hair raised up...

Cody: Whoo!! Did you see that?!
Blain: ... What the hell was that?
Cody: E.M.P!!
Sonic: That was tingling...
Blain: Aw damn it...
Nicole: What's wrong?

Blain couldn't move his left arm... He swings his upper body and you saw his arm dangling...

Blain: It's dead.
Nicole: You look funny.
Blain: ... You too.

Then I poked his butt. There was a sparkle and he yelled...

Blain: OW!!!
Nicole: Ooh! Static electricity!
Blain: Don't you-

Then I poked his butt again... At some point, everyone was poking each other. Very funny to see everyone poking each other and yelling... Hehehe...

Sonic: Everything is fun and all, but we don't have electricity!
Tails: ... I'll fix tomorrow...
Cody: I'm sorry...

Once we were all discharged of the static electricity that thing caused that Cody threw, we returned home. Seeing as we don't have electricity, it was very hard to see where you were going once you got back home. I felt the wall and guided myself inside my room after lots of bumping my knee's and toes to all sorts of things.

Cody: You think their mad at me...?
Nicole: Naah... You couldn't know...
Cody: Well I just reminded that EMP means Electro Magnetic Pulse...
Nicole: As long as you had fun, it doesn't matter. Come on, get to bed. It's very late.

Cody: Ok... Goodnight...
Nicole: Sweet dreams...

I gave him a hug and watched him leave my room carefully in the pitch black. I heard a few stumbles and cursing, but at some point I heard a door closing. That means he made it.

I took off my shoes and lay down on my bed as I stared outside. I pulled the blanket over me and made myself comfortable. All snug and warm and I felt myself floating away...

14 - Another day...

Back to school again... As soon as we arrived in class, I noticed we got 4 new guys... Well actually, 3 guys and a girl. A big bulky muscled bad @\$\$ attitude black mustang... A nerdy raccoon... A shy rottweiler that actually looked very sweet... And a lynx... She was the girl... A bit of a doggy... dog. Even dogier than me... Can you imagine that...? No I guess not... Anyway, over the weeks Blain and I became friends with her and that mustang guy. She was called Shamara and the guy was called Rico. At first, everything was fine but over the weeks, she became dogier towards me and acted all mushy around Blain. It always happened when he wasn't around, and we even had arguments while Rico just remained a normal guy and acted just normal towards Blain and me. I talked about it with Blain, and he said I shouldn't worry too much about it. But as time went by, we went our own ways. I still wanted to hang out with him, and we still did, but Shamara always managed to kill the mood whenever she came along too. At some point, he hangs out more with her than with me, and it actually pissed me off. I did so many things for him and he just pushed me aside. He knew it all too well but some reason, he didn't come back...

At some point, I didn't talk to Blain anymore. I hang out with Rico more often. He looks like a bad @\$\$ son of a dog, but in reality, he's a really shy guy. I was just friends with him while Blain and Shamara grew into something more as time went by. Few days later, Blain came back. He was sorry the things he did, and slowly but steady, we hang out again. Everything seemed to get better, until something happened that definitely changed me forever.

One day, Blain and I were walking home together from school. Earlier today, we had a fight again with those guys, which escalated. Even blood was flowing from all the punches and kicks we dealt and received, and as we're walking home, I hold up my nose in the air to stop the bleeding. I don't mind getting punched, but does it have to be by a guy? I mean, who the hell would punch a girl like that... Luckily, Rico stepped in as well. The fight lasted for about half an hour and we were send home after the other guys got send home first. What we didn't know was that they were waiting and followed us...

Then all of a sudden, I saw Blain got punched... Someone jumped up on him from behind and as soon Blain punched him off, we saw those guys again... Blain and I didn't hesitate and fought them... As Blain pinned one of them on the ground, I noticed the guy pulled out something shiny and stabs it in Blain's leg... Blain yelled it out and fell down. Then I saw it was a knife... And as I turned around, I felt a sharp pain in my stomach... I looked at the guy that stood in front of me and he had wide eyes... Something warm dripped down my stomach and then I realized that guy wasn't the only one with a knife... I tried to get away but fell down...

Then they all ran off as I crawled over to Blain... He tried standing up with a lot of pain and effort. I looked back and noticed a small blood trail from where I crawled. And that's where I became really afraid... I started to feel cold as the puddle of blood underneath me became larger... Blain carefully picked me up, and that hurt so much that I yelled it out. He tried walking, but as soon as he made the first step, he fell down and dropped me by accident. We yelled it out as I heard something snapping, and I saw he fell on his leg, which broke the knife and got deeper in his leg. It took a moment for us to recover...

Then he felt my wrist and I saw the look on his face. He had wide eyes all of a sudden and at that point, I knew it was serious... I never felt so scared and desperate like that... And judging by the face of Blain, he became desperate as well while you could see he had a lot of pain... He pressed his hands against the wound to stop the bleeding... Which was painful... I tried to yell it out, but there was no sound coming from out of my mouth... Then the last thing I could remember was that he desperately screamed for help as everything slowly faded into darkness...

It felt like there was this big black space I was staring at. Everywhere I looked, it was all pitch black. That was the scariest part for me. I didn't feel anything... I didn't hear anything... I didn't see anything... All sorts of thoughts ran through my head... I still had to do some homework... Do the dishes once I got home... Make up my bed... Then I wondered if I ever get home... If I actually saw Cody and all the others again... A really scary thought...

Then, slowly, I heard something... It seemed like an eternity before I heard anything, and it slowly faded in... At some point, I recognized Blain's voice talking to someone. I tried opening my eyes, but I couldn't. I tried moving, but I couldn't... I regained conscious but couldn't do a thing... And I could hear everything... He said I lost a lot of blood and that I might not make it through the night.

Did he mean I was gonna die...? I didn't want to go like this... I wanted to cry, but I couldn't... And if it was inevitable that I was going to die, give me at least a chance to say goodbye to everyone... I'm only 18 years old for fracks sake... So much to do and so many things that I still wanted to do... Then at that point, I felt something warm... It was my hand, and felt some other strange hand touching me... Was Blain holding my hand...?

After what seemed like an eternity I felt he let go of my hand... I wanted to yell for him to come back, but I couldn't... And then that same desolate feeling came back as I heard him limping away...

I couldn't stand it that I couldn't do anything... If only I could open my eyes... That would make a whole lot of difference... But I couldn't... I thought I was getting mad... That I actually died already... But then again, if I already died, someone would have noticed right...? So... There was still hope... And every now and again, I fell asleep... And every time I regained conscious there wasn't much changed... Except sleeping made the time goes faster...

The others visited as well... I could hear Cody sobbing quietly and kissed me on my fore head, and everyone else said things that meant a lot to me...

An eternity crawled by before I felt Blain's hand again... And again... And again... And every time he visited me, he began with "I don't know if you could hear me, but"... I could hear everything... If only they knew...

I was on the edge of insanity... I couldn't stand it anymore, and I wanted to cry my eyes out, but I couldn't... I forced myself to move and kept thinking that I should move. And after an eternity crawled by trying to move something, I felt that my thumb moved...

I began to see things in the pitch black... Whether it was all a hallucination, a dream, or just my fantasy I didn't know. The scary thought was that I could clearly see and hear it all... All the things I witnessed

before, like, seeing 5 people getting shot... Me being stabbed... The blood trail from me... The thing that happened in Reventon... At that point, I felt my blood rushing through my veins like a bad adrenaline rush and it became worse by the second. I wanted to break free, I wanted to get away... I imagined myself running away from the pitch black sky and it slowly faded into the familiar forest... And as I walked and looked around, I noticed everyone looking. Then I saw Blain smiling at me as he walked towards me. I wanted to hug him and as I turned around, I saw that guy who stabbed me was aiming a gun at my head. He grinned, and pulled the trigger... And... It was something that felt so lifelike, you could actually feel it... I heard my own scream echoing as the pitch black void came back...

I was falling a long way down. Without warning, it was like I hit the ground on my back, and some kind of shock was going through my body. All of a sudden, I opened my eyes... I looked around and saw I was in a bed... A TV hanging on the wall... Some strange smell was in the air... It smelled like a hospital. Anyone who's ever been in a hospital should know how it smells like... And my bed was near a large window... I could look outside and saw it was raining... Dark clouds moved slowly across the night sky...

Blain: About time you woke up...

Then I looked over to my right and saw Blain in a bed next to me... He looked all sleepy and had a weak smile on his face. He reached out his hand, and we touched each other's hand...

Blain: Now you finally know what it's like to be me...

He closed his eyes and fell asleep just like that... I took a look at my stomach and noticed I had stitches.

The next day, I felt the warm sun shining on my face. As soon as I opened my eyes, I noticed Rico sitting on my bed... Because of his size and weight, you could hear the bed squeaking every time he moved...

Rico: Heey...

Nicole: Hey Rico...

Rico: How you doing?

Nicole: I've had better... Hehe...

Rico: You know, I brought you something.

Then he got a box of chocolates from his bag.

Nicole: Aw... How sweet... Thanks...

Rico: No problem... Just make sure the doctors won't see it... Because yesterday, they went apeshoot when I wanted to leave this for you...

Nicole: Hehehe... Thanks Rico... You know where Blain is?

Then I saw an arm sticking above Rico's head. Rico turned around and as I looked to my right, I saw Blain lying there in a bed next to me...

Blain: Present.

Nicole: How you doing Blain?

Blain: I'm doing alright, thanks... You?

Nicole: Well Rico gave me chocolates, so I'm feeling better.

Rico: Hehehe...

Then I saw Shamara coming in, with flowers, balloons, cards and all sorts of crap... She hugged Blain and gave him "wittle kisses" and all... It was so mushy it was disgusting... Seriously... Rico looked at me with a frown as I stared back.

Shamara: I missed you soooooooooooooo much!!

Blain: You just saw me yesterday.

Shamara: So?! That doesn't mean I can't miss you can I?!

Blain: Maaaaaaaaybe...

Shamara: How's your leg doing?!

Blain: Ask him, I don't know if he'll respond.

Right from that moment, I knew Blain was changed. It never really caught my attention until now. He wasn't that serious anymore, and he smiled a lot. It might look a little stupid to notice that, but I couldn't help but to notice. Sure I've seen him laughing once in a while, but it looked like he was laughing more today than he did in his entire life... I should have known back then, but I wasn't really paying attention to that back then...

Nicole: Rico brought some chocolates. Anyone?

Blain: Fire away!

So I tossed a chocolate over to Blain and he catches it with his mouth. Rico grabbed a few and I tossed one over to Shamara, deliberately aiming a bit too high so it would hit her forehead, and not her mouth... Funny... My stomach hurts when I laugh...

Rico: Heads up, doctors coming this way.

So I quickly hid the box of chocolates under the blankets...

The doctor said I was making progress and that I could leave the hospital in a few days. In the mean time, Cody and all the others visited me as well, and once I was recovered, I was discharged from the hospital. Rico was there to pick me up, and slowly but steady, we walked home. Seeing as it was on a Tuesday, everyone had to go to school. Rico told me he called in sick this morning to pick me up.

Now the doctor told me to rest a lot. I didn't really feel to do much, and after Rico left, I was thinking... Thinking about everything that happened in the past few weeks... Then I remembered it clearly... A really scary thought... I was so scared of that, that I isolated myself from the others... I didn't go to school anymore... I barely ate, drink, or sleep... I didn't want to talk to anyone, not even Cody... All I did every day was just crying. That seemed the only logical thing to do at the time.

No one really knew why I acted like that the last couple of days. Even I didn't know why I... Every time someone gets too close for comfort to me, I got a feeling I need to break out of a box. Like when everyone surrounds you, you need to punch your way through. And that's why I isolated myself...

Then just one day, I heard a knock on the door... I looked up and saw Rouge standing in front of the window. She didn't go away and she already noticed me. So I opened the door...

Rouge: Can I come inside...?

Nicole: Yeah...

And after she closed the door, I sat on the couch again, staring into blank space...

Rouge: Everyone is worried sick about you Nicole... What's wrong...?

Nicole: ... Nothing...

Then she sat down next to me...

Rouge: ... You know... Cody told me everything...

Nicole: ... What...?

Rouge: Yeah...

Nicole: Everything...?

Rouge: Yes... Everything...

As soon as she said that, I looked up to her with wide eyes... I wanted to say something, but I couldn't. It was like something was stuck in my throat... After a long silence, I could finally utter some words out of my mouth...

Nicole: Th-They took away the only thing that was truly mine... My dignity... The-They took away my dignity...

Rouge: You don't have to act big for me here, Nicole...

Nicole: Cody said-

Rouge: Don't blame it on Cody that I know... At some point, he would have gone crazy for not telling it...

And I knew Rouge was right...

Nicole: Do-does everyone know...?

Rouge: No... Cody told me in private...

I nodded and just stared in front of me into blank space again... At some point, I couldn't hold myself anymore and felt a tear rolling down my cheek...

After she gave a firm hug, Rouge left after I asked her to. I sat on my bed for hours, staring in blank space... And after I realized the time, I took a hot shower and went to bed... Not closing an eye... There was no one on this entire planet... Just me and my pillow... And just cried 'till dawn broke...

15 - And it's all because of you...

Blain didn't even visited once... He was so caught up with Shamara that he didn't even have time to visit me. After all the things I did for him, he just pushed me aside and I guess I had all the right to be pissed off at him... Rico didn't... Rico helped me the most... So did everyone else... Except Blain, who lived on like nothing ever happened...

A few weeks went by... I still stayed home, and Rico still visited regularly. One day, we were hanging out by the lake and I talked to him. I told him a lot that no one else knew of me. It's actually kinda strange, because I know Rico for just 2 months, and I know everyone else for more then a year now. I guess talking to a "stranger" about you're problems could help more then to someone you know for years. I don't know why, but it just helped. I don't even know how many hours I stayed with Rico, telling all sorts of things while I just cried my eyes out. And I'm thankful for that Rico was there for me. I just couldn't stand it that Blain pushed me aside like that. Why? Why did he do that? He always talked about "no one gets left behind" and all that other bullshoot he was yapping about, and yet he abandoned me. Every time I saw him, I acted different against him. He realized it all too well that he was doing the wrong thing, and yet he kept on doing it. If he's gonna hang out with Shamara, that's his call but you're never turning you're back against your other friends. I saw Blain lesser and lesser and at some point, I didn't see him at all anymore. It's not my fault... I'm not intending to apologize, not this time...

Rico and I were starting to get close. I told him so many things that has happened to me just to get rid of that unpleasant feeling that was inside of me all this time. And at some point, he also shared stories. His mom died when he was 9 years old, and his dad always beat him. He showed me scars on his back and he told me he ran away from home, in which I can relate. Every day when we saw each other, we shared stories and the more we share, the better we felt. I liked Rico a lot, and he has a good sense of humour.

He lived in downtown Deberan and got himself a nice cosy apartment with a beautiful view on Brawshore Falagate Square. It was even more beautiful at night, when you saw all the neon signs and people walking around on the pavement below like ants. Sometimes during the weekends after we came at his place, we sat in the bay window, staring at the view. We always fell asleep after staring outside it for countless of hours, and that every time I woke up the next day, he was making something for breakfast. Well, lunch was more like it, seeing as we always got home late and everything.

Then one Saturday night, we home after we visited a club. We had a lot of fun, and had "temporary" friends as long as it lasted. We started talking with another couple, who also had a few friends along. So basically, after that night, we exchanged phone-numbers, so if they visited that club again, they'd give us a call and vice versa.

And that, after we got to Rico's place, we sat at the bay window again, staring outside again... I wasn't tired... I faced Rico and cuddled him...

Nicole: Thanks for everything Rico...

Rico: Always...

I leaned over to his chest and felt he puts a strong arm around me. I felt safe... Cosy... Warm... I placed an arm around his shoulder and held him close. I have no idea how long we sat like that, but I wished it was forever... We stared at each other as I felt my face was getting closer to his and I kissed him... And he kissed me back... For a moment there, it felt really awkward... But that feeling got away soon as I kissed him again... And again... And again...

I slept with Rico that night... I didn't know why I did it... Maybe I did it for attention... Maybe it was to close down a chapter of my life... Whatever the reason was, I would be lying if I said I didn't like it... Everything felt so intense, it felt like I was floating... The feeling only lasted for about an hour, and as we were busy, the feeling slowly faded away and left me feel empty on the inside...

We cuddled afterwards... Except... It didn't feel like it used to... I didn't feel safe, cosy and warm anymore... I just felt plain miserable... If there was an explanation of why I did it, I could at least give it a rest and accept it... But I couldn't for some reason... I didn't know why I did it and why I felt miserable... I thought it would actually help me, but it didn't... And the more I thought about it, the more miserable I felt...

Rico: Is something bothering you...?

Nicole: No... I'm fine, really...

He looked at me and smiled, and not long after that, he fell asleep... I couldn't sleep... I stared at Rico like he was a stranger all of a sudden... I couldn't face Rico anymore... In some way, I took advantage of him, fooling me into thinking it made me feel better... But it did the opposite... And I was feeling even more miserable... And that's why I had to go...

I got dressed, got my things, and looked at Rico, who was still asleep... I sighed, and got out of the door, wiping a tear with my arm... I couldn't face him anymore, not after what I did...

And as I was walking through the streets, I saw a lot of people... Most of it were couples trying to have fun in clubs, or they go to a cafeteria to eat something after a night spending in a club... I don't... All I wanted was to go home...

Around half an hour later, I got home... I flopped down on my bed while wiping my eyes. I was tired... But I just couldn't fall asleep while still feeling miserable as ever... Then I thought if a nice shower would help... So I took a shower... A very hot one... For some reason, I was shivering... Even though the hot water and steam filled up the cabin... I looked down at my... Well, you know... And... I just didn't know what to think of... I mean... I wasn't myself anymore for some reason... I let myself down and sat at the bottom of the cabin and trying to think of a reason...

That reason never came... As I got out of the shower and looked in the mirror, I didn't see myself... The reflection I was staring at wasn't me... Yet it was a familiar face I've seen a long time ago... I stroked the patch of fur on my chest and kept circling it around for some reason. I closed my eyes and sighed, and dried myself off. I put on my nightie and went to bed...

I couldn't fall asleep... It was 4:21 AM... I've been turning around in my bed for more then 2 hours now... Then all of a sudden, my phone went... I was a bit reluctant to answer it, but it kept on ringing... So I

answered it...

Nicole: ... Yeah...?

Phone: Nicole, it's Blain...

Nicole: Oh... Hey...

Phone: I didn't wake you did I...?

Nicole: No, I was just dozing off...

Phone: I eh...

Nicole: Hm...?

Phone: I know it's very late but...

Nicole: But what?

Phone: You think I could... You think I could see you?

Nicole: What, you mean now?

Phone: Yeah... Too talk...

Nicole: I'm not in the mood to talk...

Phone: Well... It's just that... *sighs*

Nicole: What?

Phone: I'm worried about you, you know...

Nicole: That's all?

Phone: No... Shamara and I had a fight... A few hours ago, she walked away...

Nicole: And now you need someone to talk to right?

Phone: Yeah...

Nicole: Well we talked. Goodnight Blain.

Phone: *sighs* Wait...

Nicole: What is it?

Phone: I'm sorry... I... *sighs* I know I've been acting like an @\$@ the last couple of weeks... I... I just miss having you around you know...?

Truth be told, I kinda miss him too... Seeing as I couldn't sleep and needed some distraction, I thought it was best if he came over...

Phone: ... You still there...?

Nicole: Yeah... Sure, come on over...

Phone: Thanks Nicole... See ya in a bit...

And I hang up. I got dressed in a regular outfit and waited for Blain...

Hours passed by without seeing him... He never came that night... At some point, I gave up and fell down on the couch while staring outside the window. Dark clouds covered up the starry night sky as the first raindrops fell until it got louder and louder... A really depressing sight... And I noticed Shamara walking towards his house... And at that very same moment, I realized something...

For some reason, Blain was running around in my thoughts. I couldn't really put it all aside. All the things we've been through and now look at him... Seven months ago, he was so different... I remember the good times we had, like going to school, going to a bar, Christmas, New Years Eve and a lot of other things before she came in his life. I couldn't really let the thought go that he has someone else now. I felt like I was being pushed aside after all the things we did together. And seeing him together with her

was painful... It made me wonder if I'll ever be able to experience that I would be with someone again. The feeling of a strong arm holding you when waking up... The gaze in the eyes of the person you love... And I think that's the reason I clenched so much on Rico, because I don't wanna be alone... And after what I did tonight, I couldn't face him anymore...

Simple cuddles are the only things that I really miss, and if Blain would hug me again, I know it wouldn't be the same... Maybe I really liked him... What started out hateful turned friendly, except it never broke the boundaries of something that could have been more than just friends... I never told him how much I cared for him after all the things we've been through. Like I once said, how can anyone know if you never tell anything...? I told Blain that a long time ago and now I'm doing the same... How stupid can you be...? He never knew because I never told him that I cared... And what scared me most is that I never could tell if he really liked me back... He's got someone else now and is moving on, while I stay behind and watch him leave... I know Blain isn't really an open book when it comes to expressing his emotions... He can be gentle, sweet and caring... But all it takes is to find the right page...

For some reason, I was really pissed, but also very sad... It's really hard to describe that feeling, especially if you've never felt it before. And thinking of "the good old days" only makes it worse. You've experienced it, but it's not coming back. Whatever may happen in the future, things will never be the same again... Because... I really didn't want to lose Blain. And realizing that also made me realize I needed Blain... Not the other way around... I hang out with Blain to make myself feel better, so that I would not be alone. Sure I got everyone else, but that's not the same. Blain and I did a lot together... We laughed together, cried together, and we both had the same desperate and desolate feeling after that "incident"... After that happened, I felt like I was the only one that truly understood what he all went through and brought us even closer...

I had regrets... Of course I had regrets... Would it be selfish of me not to let him go...? To make him live his own life...? Maybe... I don't know... .. That and thousands more questions kept circling around, while I didn't know the answer... I was caught up in a distant dream wandering why my mind played tricks and fooled me into thinking he was here... The only thing I ever wished for that night was that he was here... Just to talk... That's all... Nothing more... Nothing less...

And with that in mind, I cried myself to sleep...

16 - Thought you had all the answers...

Up 'till this day, I still don't know why I did it that night. Maybe there wasn't even a reason. It just happened. Maybe Rico thought the same way. I liked him, but not in that way. So why did it happen? If only I knew...

Waking up the next day didn't change much. In fact, I felt even more miserable. So much happened the last few days and I could barely keep track of it. I needed to find a way to clear my mind and get everything straight. And as I looked outside, I noticed it was a sunny day. It wasn't very warm, but I guess I needed to be outside. So I did. I went outside and sat by the lake staring at the water. And every time I saw my own reflection it made me think. Wondering what happened to me. Because it just wasn't me I was facing. It's as simple as that.

Mina: Hey!

I was so carried away in thoughts that I didn't noticed Mina standing behind me. You know, the mongoose girl. I didn't really know her that well and deep inside of me, I wished she would just leave. But some reason, she didn't. I turned around to face her.

Nicole: Hey...

Mina: Long time no see. How you've been?

Nicole: Alright...

Mina: I heard what happened a few days ago... Are you ok?

Nicole: Yeah...

Mina: Does it hurt...?

Nicole: A lot...

Mina: Heh... I haven't seen your friend in a while as well.

Nicole: ... So you're point being?

Mina: I don't know... I mean, you always used to hang out with him a lot. And now... Well...

Nicole: Blain and I are at offs right now.

Mina: Oh...? What happened?

Nicole: A lot and I don't wanna talk about it right now.

Mina: Oh...

Then I stared in front of me again, hoping that would make Mina go away. But for some reason, she didn't go away... She sighs and sat next to me.

Mina: Why don't you just tell him...?

Nicole: Tell him what?

Mina: The truth.

Nicole: What truth?

Mina: That you actually like him.

Nicole: What?

Mina: Come on... I've seen you two... Everyone knows...

Nicole: ... Is it that obvious...?

Mina: Hmm-mm...

I sighed and supported my head on my knees... Maybe she's right. Maybe she's not... Who knows...? I wouldn't know... There was this long silence...

Mina: See... There once was this guy I truly loved. He saved me once... And ever since then, I never left his side. I fell in love with him. We had great times until he found someone else. I was so devastated by that, that I couldn't stand it anymore. And one day, I was determined to tell him everything. Absolutely everything... I found out he had a relationship with her, but I talked to him anyway... You know what he said...?

Nicole: What did he say...?

Mina: "Mina... I always liked you the best... But I was afraid... Afraid of your silence..."

Then I just looked at her and she sighed.

Mina: So... Don't be afraid to open up your feelings to him. Because... I didn't, and I had lots of regrets... I still do... And that's the worst kind of feeling you can have...

Nicole: Yeah...

As she looked up, I noticed someone standing on the hill smiling at Mina. A guy, another mongoose. Probably her lover or something. She got up and smiled at me, and walked over to the guy. They walked away holding each others hand and they stare each other in the eyes. I barely know Mina and yet she pretends we're being best friends or something... Its kinda remarkable, because it actually helped me. After I couldn't see them anymore, I took another look in at my reflection in the water. And all of a sudden, it was like I was hit with a mallet. Well, not really, but you know what I mean. I suddenly knew the answer and it was in front of me the whole time...

I sat by the lake for more then half an hour. After all, it was a nice Sunday for the time of the year, and it wasn't really that cold.

Not long after that, I heard limping behind me. And well, there was only one person I knew that would have a limp... I turned around, and as expected, Blain stands there... For some reason, he looked different... I don't know why, but that was the first thing I noticed. He was changed. His appearance didn't change, but there was something about him. But I looked in front again and ignored him...

Blain: Hey...

Nicole: Hello stranger...

Blain: You're still mad huh...?

Nicole: To say the least, yeah. Actually, I'm pissed off at you.

Blain: *sighs*

Nicole: What are you doing here anyway? Shouldn't you be with miss "imtoogoodforeveryoneelse"?

Blain: Why are you so pissed off at me anyway...? Is it because I hang out with Shamara?

Nicole: No...

Blain: Then what is?!

Nicole: You really wanna know?!

Blain: What?!! Why is it?!!

Nicole: It's because you were not there for me when I needed you the most!! That's why!!

He sighed and looked down as it stayed quiet for a while...

Nicole: Where was I when you sat there on the beach and doged about everything that happened to you...? Where was I when you needed me the most...?

Silence...

Nicole: Where were you when I needed you the most...? The stories you told and that "No one gets left behind" thing...? Bullshoot... Because you dropped me like a brick...

He turned around to walk away... At that point, that really pissed me off...

Nicole: You wanna walk away...? Sure... Go ahead. Bury you're head in the sand. But I'll tell you one thing. If you leave right now, I never wanna see you again. Because what you did is unforgivable. We either talk about it right here, right now, or don't bother to come back...

Again, he sighed and he came back... Which I was hoping for. He sat down next to me.

Blain: I don't... I don't really know how to explain this... It's... It's all new to me.

Nicole: Then try it.

Blain: I eh...

Nicole: Hm?

Blain: ... I really don't know... I wish I knew, but... I don't...

He looked at me and sighed... Truth be told, I was getting a little desperate by now...

Nicole: Look... I know you and Shamara got something together... Truth be told, I don't like her at all. But you do, so I'm not stopping you. I'm not the one who can decide for you...

Blain: I know... I like Shamara as well but... I don't know... I mean... I changed a lot over the year but I've changed more ever since I've been with her... I don't know what the hell is happening and more important, why... *sighs* I'm happy around her, and around you but it's not the same... I do things I never realized I would, and... It's so fracked up, I don't know what to do. And you were right. I've become a pussy...

Nicole: You're not being a pussy... You're just in love. That's all...

Blain: Me? Oh come on...

Nicole: No really... Did you ever watched yourself...? Like, comparing you with how you used to be...?

Blain: Yeah... And it scares me a bit...

Nicole: Changes can be a good thing Blain... Now would be a good time to leave the past be the past... You see where I wanna go...?

Blain: Yeah... But... I want things back like they used to be you know...? I miss that...

Nicole: I know...

Then it stayed silent for a moment...

Blain: You still mad at me Nicole...?

Nicole: Kinda...

Blain: Oh...

Nicole: It'll pass I guess...

Blain: Heh... It's been a while since we've talked like this huh...?

Nicole: Yeah...

It stayed silent for a while again... I was thinking about what Mina said and I guess it's time to finally come clean...

Nicole: Blain...?

Blain: Yeah?

Nicole: There are a couple of things I wanna get rid of my chest... And... I made mistakes... And I got lots of regrets... In fact, that's one of the reasons I feel so shooty...

Blain: ... Talk to me...

Nicole: Well... For the past few weeks... Rico and I hang out a lot together... I talked about everything... But... For some reason, it didn't really help... I mean, it helped, but at the same time, it didn't... I- Gaah... I don't know how to put it... I feel so ashamed of telling you this...

Blain: It's ok, go on...

Nicole: I-

Shamara: There you are!!

For the love of... I recognized that shrieking annoying voice... Actually, I was boiling on the inside... I finally got the chance to talk to him and she comes along... I tried not to show my irritation...

Shamara: I've been looking for you!

Nicole: Do you mind? Blain and I are talking here.

Shamara: Come on Blain! We gotta go!

... Did she ignore me just then? Oh hell no...

Nicole: Excuse me, I'm talking to him.

Blain: Could you leave us for a sec?

Shamara: But the others are waiting! Come on!

Blain: Come on, this is important...

Shamara: ... Fine...

She glared at me and walked off... Somewhere, deep inside I was actually thankful that Blain could say no just this once. But for some reason, I lost the will to talk to him since she came. I was so frustrated by that and deep inside of me, I just wanted to punch her to shut her up. But I didn't. For my own and Blain's sake I didn't...

Blain: ... What is it that you wanted to tell me...?

Nicole: Go on... Just... Just go with her, ok...?

Blain: You sure...?

Nicole: Yeah... But... Do me a favour will you...?

Blain: Anything...

Nicole: Remember this conversation we had... Ask yourself if it's all worth it in the end and if this really is what you want... And... If I really mean that much to you as a friend...

He looked at me for a while and nodded slowly...

Nicole: Do it for me... Please... For a friend... That's all I ask...

Blain: I will...

No hug... No kisses on the cheek... Not even a smile... All he did was looking up and down, sighing and closing his eyes... He turned and walked away to Shamara, who was waiting impatiently for him... At that point, I thought he wouldn't do it. That he wouldn't keep the promise nor that he understood what I said to him... He walked away with Shamara and I watched them leave...

I was wrong... Over the next few weeks, something changed inside Blain... I guess he kept his word and thought about everything. Every time I saw them together, they had little arguments. And at some point, they even had fights... I didn't meddle with them nor did I talk to Blain ever since that day. He needs to find out on his own if that was really what he wanted. He wanted to hang out with Sonic and everyone else again, but Shamara didn't want him to. She started to cling on Blain even more while Blain wanted the opposite. And slowly but steady, they grew apart. And one day, it was inevitable for them to break up... I was actually feeling sorry for Blain, because I knew how much she meant for him. But on the other hand, I was relieved that he broke up with her. I'm not saying that I didn't have any part in it, but I just wanted him to realize if that really was what he wanted. He wanted to hang out with his own friends... But she kept him from doing that...

As for more me... Not much changed over the weeks... The stitches I had in my stomach got removed and it healed nicely. The scar I had was covered up by fur so you wouldn't see it. But that didn't really matter. It was like I was stuck in an endless cycle of loops and didn't know how to get out of it. I talked to Rouge a lot... And I'm forever grateful that she was there for me. Blain wasn't there for me. But... This time, I can understand... Blain started to isolate himself from the others as I got out. He was so heartbroken by breaking up with Shamara that nothing could really cheer him up. And everyone noticed he was changed dramatically by that...

As the days slowly passed by, I was starting to feel better. Not everything got solved, but it's a start... The problem with me is that I always want to be there for the people who mean the most to me. But like

Rouge said, "how can you take care of someone else if you don't even take care of yourself?" I guess I was so caught up by everyone else's problems and misery that I overlooked my own. And like I said, it just exploded one day with every consequence to think of. Being confused, doing things you normally wouldn't do and just not be yourself. I was often scared by the things I did which I thought that would solve it but it only dragged me down even more. It seemed like a good idea at the time, often not thinking about it... The only reason to think of why I did it is that there was no reason I could think of... It's so very difficult to put those things in the past but I have to if I wanna go on with my life. I wanted to be helped...

Then one evening, I was sitting at home kicking back with a cup of coffee... I noticed a drawing Cody made a few days ago. I picked it up and stared at it and he made a bird. Not just some scribbles on paper. In fact, it looked really good. And for some reason, I picked a pencil and a sheet of paper and began to draw the bird on another sheet of paper. It took me about 3 hours to get it right, and it closely resembles the one Cody made. I noticed it made me feel better... Then I knew the answer to my problem...

In just a week time I made 23 drawings... Getting better with every pencil flick and I drew all sorts of things... The lake, for example. Animals, scenery... I studied birds' movement and tried to copy that on paper. And each time a drawing was done, I felt slightly better... Maybe it was because I put my thoughts and experiences on paper... But whatever it was, I was glad I finally found the answer after all those weeks... While Blain was the one who got left behind this time...

17 - What are we supposed to do?

And another few weeks passed by without much happening... Blain rarely talked to anyone else and sometimes when I walked passed his house, I saw him either sitting on the couch tossing a ball against the ceiling or something like that. He went out on his own to do his own stuff, while I started to hang out with everyone else again. And this one time, everyone was at the lake, including me as we watched him leave towards the beach...

Amy: He really is heart broken isn't he?

Nicole: Yeah...

Rouge: Poor guy.

Sonic: I don't really understand what the big deal is with him. I mean, they've only been together for a few weeks.

Shadow: How the hell could you say something like that?

Then we all looked at Shadow... We never expected him to say something like that...

Sonic: Whadda ya mean?!

Shadow: A few weeks makes all the difference there is... Just look at me...

Sonic: Yeah but still. He changed dramatically over the weeks ever since he's been with her... Sometimes I ever wonder if that really is the same guy.

Shadow: ... "For my eyes have been mistaken, for this to be true, an angel so low, an angel so bright, has stolen two stars from the night sky... And hid them within her eyes, so one day you shall see, the beauty within the Angel I see, but above all, she has became, the angel of my dream..."

Then it stayed silent for a while... We all looked baffled at Shadow...

Shadow: That's what makes the difference and someone made me realize that a long time ago.

Rouge: Aww...

Nicole: That was like... Deep...

Shadow: Even the most evil, black hearted mean son of a dog can change if they encounter someone that makes it worth to change for... So I guess Blain can too...

Rouge: *hugs Shadow*

Shadow: *Grins*

Then it stayed silent for a while... At some point, they all looked at me while I didn't know what was going on...

Shadow: ... You still here Nicole...?

Nicole: Wait, what?

Shadow: I thought you would get it by now.

Nicole: What are you talking about?!

Rouge: Go to him, stupid!

Nicole: Wait, wait, wait, are you guys hooking me up with him?

All: Maybe...

Sonic: I swear, Nicole. I had nothing to do with it.

Nicole: Right... Why the hell would you guys want me to hook up with Blain anyway?

Sonic: Because no one else has the guts to be with him!! *laughs*

Nicole: Oh come on, he's really not that bad...

Sonic: Naah...

Amy: That's why you gotta go after him...

Their not serious are they...?

Nicole: You don't think-

Amy: Come on! Isn't it obvious?!

Rouge: Yeah! All the stuff you did together...

Amy: Those mushy nights at the beach...

Rouge: Not to mention when he stayed over at your place all the time...

Amy: I think someone needs a hug!

Sonic: *spreads arms*

Amy: And I'm not talking about you.

Sonic: Not even a little one...?

Amy: ... No.

Sonic: ...

Shadow: Haha, you got dissed!

Sonic: *punches Shadow*

Shadow: Hey, hey, hey!! Watch it furball!!!

Sonic: Come on!! Bring it!!

Rouge: *slaps Shadow on the back of his head*

Shadow: ... What the hell was that for?!

Rouge: Because you're acting like a kid. You're supposed to be the oldest one. Act like it.

Shadow: Well, he started it...

Sonic: *grins*

Shadow: *glares at Sonic*

Nicole: Guys, guys, everything is fine and all, but, what the hell do you want from me?!

Rouge: We don't want anything from you! *grins*

Amy: Blain might want something...

Nicole: I swear, if you're setting me up and make me look like an @\$\$, I'll get back to you.

Rouge: There is no set-up...

Nicole: Then what is? Because I don't trust this, not one bit. Everyone acts different today and I don't like it.

Amy: You'll see...

Nicole: What'd you guys do to him?

Rouge: ... Let's just say you're not the only that talked to him...

Amy: Yeah. We persuade him.

Nicole: ...

Rouge: And now he's waiting for you.

Nicole: ...

Amy: Go!

Nicole: Yeah but-

Rouge: ... Go.

Nicole: ... Damn it.

**sighs* Why me... There wasn't really a way to talk myself out of this one, so I guess I had no choice. Actually, I'm growing pretty tired to hear someone else's problems. I don't have a problem with it, but lately it seems kinda... I don't know... All I wanted was just peace.*

And as I made my way to the beach, walking through the forests had a calming effect on me. It usually only takes about 10 minutes to walk to the beach, but it seemed much longer. You saw the sun shining through the trees and branches, and there was a typical scent in the air, which smelled of blossoms, tree bark, and the scent you get after the heavens bursts open and drowns the forests with water. There was always a certain scent in air the after it rained... The whole atmosphere just felt clean, and smelled as if the world was reborn. And I was actually walking through the forest with a smile on my face for some reason. Then I woke up from my daydream as I tripped over a tree root. I got up quickly again to look if anyone saw me. Then I walked away, feeling a bit embarrassed... I could have sworn I heard a chipmunk laugh or something...

And not long after that, I arrived at the dunes. Trying to get on top of them was a bit hard, seeing as the wind was rather... Windy. My hair kept blowing in my eyes and mouth, and I tried to "spit" my hair out. I looked out if I could see Blain, but no sign of him. Instead, I saw someone else, walking in the breakers while she held on to her shoes. I squint my eyes to see who that was, and as soon as I noticed it

was Shamara I turned around and walked away...

And as I made my way back home, I saw Blain sitting on a log in the middle of a forest with a piece of paper, a pen and... Smoking a cigarette...

Nicole: If your mother saw you smoking, she'd be very upset.

He looked up, and gave a smile...

Blain: Hello...

Nicole: 'Lo.

Blain: How you been?

Nicole: I'm... Doing alright actually... How about you?

Blain: Not too bad...

Nicole: That's good... I saw Shamara on the beach.

Blain: I know. I just came from the beach.

Nicole: Oh?

Blain: Yup...

Nicole: Nothing bad happened or something I hope?

Blain: Naah... Shamara and I talked about it, worked out things... So... It's officially over now.

Nicole: I'm sorry...

Blain: Don't be. It was difficult at first, but... At least we talked about it and broke up without a fight. So... That's a good thing I guess.

Nicole: Yeah...

He smiled and went back to writing again. His handwriting was a bit sloppy and it reminded me of how my handwriting used to be when I was a kid. I looked at him and flicked his cigarette out of his mouth. He looked all baffled and frowned at me as he got another one from out of his pockets. And I grabbed it, crushed and threw it away. ...And he grabbed another one. He puts it in his mouth, and I flicked it again, and this time, it broke in half while it dangles in his mouth. He kept looking at me and I tried to smile as innocent as possible. Hehehe...

Blain: ... What the hell are you doing?

Nicole: You shouldn't smoke.

Then it stayed silent for a while as I looked at the scenery...

Blain: You ok?

I sat there for a little while staring at the scenery, which looked more beautiful by the second... For the first time in my life, I had the feeling everything was complete. That I had everything I ever wanted... And the more I thought about it, the happier I felt. My stomach felt all tingly and fuzzy inside as I stared at the scenery. Maybe it was because I finally closed down a chapter of my life... And then I looked at Blain... I took off his glove and held onto his hand...

Nicole: I'm just glad to have you back...

Blain: So am I...

Nicole: Let's go home...

And on the way home, we didn't say much. We just looked around and at each other once in a while, and I almost tripped again over the tree root I fell over earlier. I could barely hold my balance as Blain laughed, and I pushed him over the tree root. He grabbed my arm and I got pulled down as he fell. I flicked his nose as we lay on the ground, and were just arsing and romping around like little kids. I didn't notice it at the time, but as I was on top of him, for a very short moment, I felt something tingly and fuzzy in my stomach again... Then he just tickled me. I'm ticklish... I pushed him off of me and jumped on him, continuing romping around like little kids...

At some point, we lied down exhausted in the grass, staring at the oak trees above us, watching all sorts of animals do their things. Then something fell on my head. And as I looked down, I saw an acorn next to me. And as I looked at Blain, he received a few more acorns on his head. We both looked up, and we saw 3 squirrels walking up and down the branches, collecting stuff... Blain scratched behind his head and had a rather puzzling look on his face.

Blain: You know what I still don't get?

Nicole: What?

Blain: I've seen a lot of creatures in my life. But, what I don't get is... How come there are still animals?

Nicole: We evolved out of them.

Blain: Yeah but, aren't they supposed to be extinct?

Nicole: ... Nooo... Not exactly. It's all part of evolution. Humans evolved out of monkeys and yet monkeys still exists. The same happened to us.

Blain: Like, you're evolved out of a kangaroo and I evolved from a hedgehog more or less?

Nicole: Yeah. Millions, and millions of years ago, kangaroos were actually carnivores.

Blain: Meaning...

Nicole: Kangaroos ate meat and if you look at "primitive" kangaroos today, their all vegetarians. It's all about evolution.

Blain: So if it wasn't for primitive mammals we wouldn't be here in the first place?

Nicole: Exactly. That's why we respect nature and all the animals and all that.

Blain: Humans evolved out of mammals too, but I don't see them hugging a tree or something...

Nicole: That's true... But not every creature is hugging a tree either.

Blain: Meh... That's not something I would do either... I prefer hugging something more... Fuzzy.

Nicole: Hehehehe...

And that's how we got through the day... All we did that day was just talking... Hehe, we had a lot of catching up to do... And being with him and talking about all sorts of things made me forget everything else. I truly had the feeling now that its back, and I couldn't have been more happier that day. We didn't even noticed the time and sunset was starting to kick in. We went to his place and continued talking 'till the morning hours... And it started to rain... And eventually, we were starting to get tired. Blain could barely hold his eyes open, and neither could I. So he offered me to stay over. He was sleeping on the couch though... So he got out some blankets and pillows for himself to sleep on the couch...

Blain: You need anything else?

Nicole: No, I'll be alright. Thanks...

Blain: Alright then... Goodnight...

Then I went to bed myself... I couldn't help but to notice that his house was very clean and tidy... There was not a speck of dust to be seen and his bed sheet was all fresh and everything... I keep hearing Blain turning over on the couch over and over again but he never lay still for a moment... I tried to sleep until I heard the bedroom door open and he lay down next to me in bed and cuddled me...

Nicole: What's wrong....?

Blain: I can't sleep...

Nicole: You know...

Blain: What...?

Nicole: What you just did could be found offensive to anyone else...

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Nicole: ...

Blain: ... Hm...?

Nicole: You don't lie down next to someone just like that, especially if it's a girl...

Blain: ... Why...?

Nicole: You can't be serious...

Blain: What's the big deal...?

Nicole: It's because I could get the wrong idea... ..You know?

Blain: No...

Nicole: ...

Blain: Look, if you want me to leave, just say it... It's just that I can't sleep alone...

Nicole: Then what if you're alone at home...?

Blain: Then I keep on thinking about lots of things for hours and eventually fall asleep...

Then I remembered that when I was a little girl, I couldn't sleep alone either... I always had my teddy, or slept in between mom and dad... I guess Blain never had that...

Nicole: You know what my mom always did when I couldn't sleep...?

Blain: What...?

Nicole: She always stroked my forehead and scratched behind my ear... Then I fell asleep just like that...

Blain: Does it work...?

Nicoles: Worked for me...

So I stroked his forehead and scratched behind his ear... He closed his eyes and smiled, and not long after that, I could hear an "rrrr"... Was he purring...?

Nicole: ... Are you purring...?

Then he quickly opened his eyes and looked at me...

Blain: What? No...

Nicole: Yes you were...

Blain: I'm a hedgehog, not a cat...

Nicole: Riiiiight...

Blain: What?

Nicole: I think it's cute...

Blain: Hmpf.

Nicole: It is... I never heard you purring...

Blain: ... I never did...

Nicole: Yes, you did... I could clearly hear it...

Blain: ...

Nicole: Don't worry, I wont tell...

He smiled and we cuddled as I still stroked his forehead and scratched behind his ear... He closed his eyes again...

Nicole: My mom used to tell me bed time stories... But that was a long time ago...

Blain: Stories...?

Nicole: Yeah...

Blain: What kind of stories...?

Nicole: You know... Pixie fairies and all sorts... I can't believe I was actually listening to that way back. But... Heh... She always said that there was a little guy on the moon.

Blain: Doing what?

Nicole: Nothing. He just walked around and looked down on earth.

Blain: Hehehe...

Nicole: No seriously... She fooled me though. Every time I saw the moon, I tried to look for a sign of him. And every time I said he wasn't there, my mom said that he was going for a walk.

Blain: Maybe he just didn't want to be seen...

Nicole: Maybe not...

It stayed quiet for a while... Then he did the same I was doing to him... Stroking my forehead and scratching behind my ear...

Blain: You're so fluffy and furry...

Nicole: Well yeah...

Then he nudges his head...

Blain: Can I...?

Nicole: Uh...

He placed his head on my chest on the patch of fur and keeps nudging his head on the patch on it. I felt how he touched the fur on my chest and keeps stroking it...

Blain: You'd be a good rug or blanket...

Nicole: Yeah well you would be a good road kill...

Blain: Hehehe...

Then again, it stayed silent for a bit... All I could hear was the rain pouring down and hitting the windows and the roof...

Blain: You know...

Nicole: Hm...?

Blain: I know so little about you... I don't even know you're age...

Nicole: ... I'm 18...

Blain: When's your birthday?

Nicole: August 17th... Anything else you would like to know?

Blain: ... Favourite food?

Nicole: Uh... I don't really know... I'm a vegetarian whenever I got the opportunity to be one...

Blain: ... Favourite things to do...?

Nicole: I used to go out to clubs and all that... But... That's all over now... Now I just love to kick back in the grass and watch the sky go by... Or sit at the lake... Or the beach...

Blain: Like me...

Nicole: Yeah... Like you... But I thought you hated the beach...

Blain: Hehehe... Depends if I'm not being shot at...

Nicole: Yeah... This reminds me of sleepovers I used to have when I was little...

Blain: Sleepovers?

Nicole: Yeah...

Blain: What's that?

Nicole: Well... You're a sleepover... Like the name says, someone sleeps over at your place...

Blain: Ah... So what'd you do?

Nicole: During a sleepover?

Blain: Yeah?

Nicole: Basically, stuffing ourselves with junkfood, staying up late and talk about all sorts of stuff...

Blain: Like what...?

Nicole: You know, girl things. Sometimes Cody had one as well and he trashed our sleepover with his friends...

Blain: Hehehe...

We stared at each other for a long time... I never told Blain that I like him... And... I didn't know if he liked me back... Like I said a while ago, we never broke the boundaries of something that could have been more than just friends... And... It couldn't be more of a perfect moment to break it... I placed my forehead on his and stared him in his dark blue eyes... His look became serious and stared right back at me. ... We didn't say anything... At some point, I moved in closer with my head and gently kissed him... He looks a bit confused and I guess he didn't really know what to do. So I kissed him again... And again... And again...

We cuddled for a long time... He placed his head back on my chest and strokes the patch of fur... He clenched on my back as we cuddled and I scratched him behind his ear again...

For some reason, I remembered what I said when he first lay down next to me... And he just said he didn't know why it could be offensive... Was he really that naïve...? Or did he just pretend not to know...? Maybe he didn't really know... I guess the army isn't teaching you that... On the outside, he looks all tough and confident, but deep down inside, he's as insecure as he could be...

I rubbed my paws against his as he stared at me with wide eyes. And again, I kissed him and placed his hand on my boob... He looked at me and quickly pulled his hand away. I guess he didn't want to get punched again like the time we went that pub... Hehehe...

And I felt how his fingers were stroking the patch of fur on my chest... The way he did it made me smile... He acted like I was very fragile and could break into thousands of pieces any second... Then he placed his head back on my chest... The way he acted ever since he lays next to me reminded me of how a young kid would act with his mother...

At some point, I noticed his head stopped nudging and that he fell asleep... I continued scratching behind his ear and not long after that, I fell asleep as well with a smile on my face...

18 - Enjoy the silence

That night was the start of something that would last for an eternity... It was relatively harmless considering it was just a kiss, but I guess a kiss says more than a thousand words... I know it sounds all mushy and everything, but it's not. I'm not like that. I always kept denying that I liked him, right from the very beginning. I guess things aren't always what they seem to be... But I'm intending to do everything very slow... I could use some peace after everything that happened...

That night, I woke up from sounds... As I rubbed my eyes and looked outside the windows, I could see the sun was coming up, but it was still fairly dark as I saw shadows moving along the trees and heard voices...

???: You think this is the place...?

???: frack dawg, how the hell am I supposed to know... You're the one with the map...

???: For once, it would be actually nice to find them instead of finding out we're at the wrong place again...!!

???: Would you keep it down...?!

And just about when I wanted to jump up and freak out, Blain muffled my mouth and whispered...

Blain: Sssh... I've been keeping tabs on those guys lately.....

Nicole: Who are they.....?

Blain: No idea..... For the past few nights, they've been sneaking around... So stay put..... I'm gonna find out.....

Nicole: Well I'm not going anywhere if that's what you think.....

Blain: Good.....

Then he pulled a gun from under his pillow and another gun from his drawer. He slowly pulls out the clips to check for ammo and gently loaded it...

Nicole: Are you insane.....?!

Blain: Ssh.....

Nicole: You're NOT going out there by yourself.....! You don't know if these guys are armed.....!

Blain: *grins*

And before I could stop him, he got up and ran towards the door with a minimum sound level, peeking through the windows every time he moved closer to the door... He looked all serious, and he reminded me of some secret agent guy I saw in a movie a long time ago. But this was dead serious... He slowly opened up the door, then ran away...

???: You heard that...?

???: What...?

???: I think someone is out there...

???: Oh great, then we can finally ask directions...

Then I heard someone falling, and yelling...

???: Get offa me!! Get offa me!!!

Blain: Get down on your knees!!!

???: Oh shoot!!! Oh shoot!!! He's got a gun!!

???: A gun?!! He frackin' got two of them!!!

Blain: GET YOU'RE HANDS UP AND GET DOWN!!!!

???: I didn't come all the way here to get shot by some psycho hedgehog!!!

???: JUST DO WHAT HE SAYS DAMN IT!!!

Then I heard a shot...

???: OW!!! frackIN' HELL!!! HE SHOT ME!!! HE frackING SHOT ME!!!

???: WHERE?!!

???: IN MY CHEST!!! IM DIEING!!! HOLY frack IT HURTS!!!!

???: I don't see anything.

???: ... You sure?

???: I'm positive.

???: Not even a little scratch?

???: ... No.

???: How about blood? There is blood right?

???: Nope. It a bit red though.

Blain: Get down now!!!

???: Alright!! Alright!!

I was kind of interesting to see who they were... So I quickly got dressed and went outside... I saw an armadillo being rolled up as a ball, and... A huge crocodile on his knees... And as I got next to Blain, the crocodile jumps up and grabbed my shoulders. Blain took his aim again...

Crocodile: I swear, this dude is fracked up!! Run while ya can!!!

Nicole: Blain, lower the guns... What the hell...

He sighed reluctant and lowered it...

Nicole: What's this all about?

Then that armadillo pops his head up from his curled up position...

Armadillo: Finally! Someone who asks questions first!

Crocodile: Rather than shooting around like some triggerhappy blat-blat cholo motherfracker aight?!

Then the armadillo pops his head back...

Nicole: It's ok, come on out...

So the little ball jumped out and unfolded itself to a black armadillo and landed on his feet.

Armadillo: Oi! Would you get rid of those things!

Nicole: Who are you guys?

Armadillo: Well I'm Mighty, and that's... Vector over there...

Nicole: Ooh... I'm- I'm Nicole, and that's-

Vector: Psychohog...

Nicole: ... Psychohog has a name.

Vector: And what may that be? –glares at Blain-

Blain: ... Blain.

Then the crocodile and Blain were starting to argue again... About... All sorts things... That armadillo and I started talking...

Nicole: So, why are you here?

Mighty: We were looking for someone actually... 'Cept handbag here, kept sending us in the wrong directions... We've been travelling for more then 4 months now, following directions that people gave us... And now we're hopelessly lost... *sighs*

Nicole: Well, maybe we can help.

Mighty: You can?

Nicole: Well yeah, that's the least thing we could do after mr psychohog went berserk.

Blain: Hey! Hey! Hey! Who's side are you on anyways?!

Vector: Damn straight she's right!! Holla back!!

Mighty: Vector, cut it out...

Nicole: Blain...

Blain: Psh...

Vector: You lucky mah homeboy spoke fo' you!!

Blain: ... Really?

Vector: Yeah!! Yeah!! That's right B-boy double G mah jiggy dawg blat-blat!!

Blain: ... Would you stop with fracking blat-blat thing already?!! Seriously, I don't understand a frack of what you're saying!!

Nicole: Will you two shut the hell up already!?

Vector/Blain: ... Aight...

Nicole: Thanks... So who exactly are you looking for anyway?

Mighty: Well, the guy I'm looking for is-

I turned around and noticed the others are standing behind us... They all look sleepy and yawning and questioning why we were yelling. And as I faced Mighty again, his eyes were widened... Sonic, Knuckles, Tails and Amy as well...

Mighty: ... Is right here...

Then the four of them ran towards Mighty and they just hugged and laughed, telling that it was long time, and how much he changed over the years. I didn't really get it. Neither does Blain...

Nicole: You know these guys?

Rouge: No, not really... I only know them by face...

Nicole: Am I missing something here...?

Rouge: Without a doubt...

As soon as Vector saw them, he got up from his kneeled position and went towards them as well. Seeing him on his knees didn't really make it look like he was big, but he was gigantic when he was on

his feet... He was five to six heads bigger than me, and heads towards the others as they also hugged him... It took about 15 minutes to say hi...

Blain: You know these guys?

Sonic: Yeah! Their with us!

Vector: Which reminds me. Do you always greet others while pumping them up with lead?!

Mighty: Can't you just drop it already!?

Blain: I'm sorry. It's just that I don't like having someone to sneak around my house at night. *glares at Vector*

Sonic: We actually got saved by him a couple of this when he acted like that...

Knuckles: Don't blame him for acting paranoid.

Blain: ... *slaps Knuckles on the back of his head*

Knuckles: *laughs*

Nicole: Excuse me but... You said you were looking for someone...

Mighty: Yeah... We were looking for Knuckles actually...

Knuckles: Me...? Why is that?

Vector: We got word from Angel Island... And...

Knuckles: Why, what's wrong...?

Mighty: Well... They need you back on Angel Island...

Knuckles: I know, but...

Vector: We gotta get there as soon as possible...

Knuckles: And Julie-Su...?

Mighty: She's still there...

Vector: With her big mouth attitude...

Knuckles: How's she doing?

Mighty: Very good actually...

Knuckles sighed in relief after hearing this "Julie-Su" was doing very good. I had no idea who she was though, and Knuckles just smiled nervously around...

Nicole: Who's Julie-Su?

Amy: His giiiiiiiiirlfriend... *makes mushy kissing noises*

Knuckles: Hey, shut the hell up. At least I got one and didn't messed everything up.

Sonic: ... You're right on that...

Knuckles: Of course I am.

Amy: *Glares at Knuckles*

Mighty: Guys... Not to be rude or anything but... Is there a place where we can crash for the night...?

Vector: Yeah, I'm shattered...

Sonic: Well, no wonder, the sun is coming up...

Knuckles: There isn't much space at my place...

Shadow: Yeah, the only one who lives alone is Blain.

Then everyone stared at Blain who was yawning and still holding on to his pistols... As soon as he realized everyone was looking at him, he looked around with shifty eyes...

Blain: What? Oh no... Oh hell no... Their not staying with me!!

Knuckles: Come on man, don't be such an asswipe.

Blain: What!?

Knuckles: That's what you always say!

Nicole: Yeah! And besides, you can stay over at my place...

Amy: Ooooooooooh!! Look! He's blushing!!

Nicole/Rouge: Aaaaaaaaaww...

Blain: Ok, ok, ok!! Shut the hell up!! Fine... But I swear, if you mess up my place, I'll make you clean my toilette with you're tongue until you can't taste the difference between shoot and fried chicken... You got that...?

Mighty: Uh... Sure.

Vector: Party at Psychohog's!!

Blain: Hey...

Vector: Aight, is cool, I'm just playing, daayumn! What the hell is your problem...

Knuckles: Alright, get some sleep then. We'll see you tomorrow.

Mighty: Goodnight everyone.

Vector: Later...

Blain and I turned around to walk away to my house, but then...

Vector: *Ahem*

Blain: What?

Vector: How'd we enter your house if we don't a have key?

Blain: *sighs*

Vector: Come on man, chop-chop!

Blain: *Glares at Vector*

So we entered Blain's house... I got my things and in the mean time, Blain showed them a quick tour. And with quick, I mean really quick...

Blain: Bed. Couch. Bathroom. Questions?

Vector: Yeah, ever thought of decoration?

Blain: ... Goodnight.

Vector: Later Esé!

Blain: Oh, one more thing.

Mighty: What is it?

Blain: Don't sniff around in my closets. You'll regret that.

Mighty/Vector: ...

Blain: Goodnight.

Nicole: Goodnight guys.

Mighty: Goodnight Nicole.

Vector: Man, this place is whack!!

Mighty: ... I'm taking the bed.

Vector: Oh hell no!!

And as Blain and I walked over to my place, we heard Vector and Mighty arguing, and running around the house...

As soon as we got inside my house, I sat on my bed while Blain just sighed as he sat next to me.

Blain: I know what you're thinking.

Nicole: You do?

Blain: Yeah. Why I'm being so paranoid around strangers and-

Nicole: Well actually, I was wondering when you would get rid of the guns and went to bed. But now that you mention it, yeah. Why you're being so paranoid?

Blain: I just don't like it when people sneak around me or something. I mean, what do they have to hide?

Nicole: True, but that doesn't mean you can stick a gun to their face.

Blain: ... Chest.

Nicole: Same. Don't do that.

Blain: Yes mommy.

Nicole: ...

Blain: *grins* Goodnight!

And with that, he placed his guns on the table with the safety on, or, at least I hope so. He gets in bed and falls asleep right away. I just frowned at him. I mean, who the hell said he could sleep in my bed?

...

I guess there's plenty of room after I kick him out of my bed...

19 - The start of something beautiful...

The reason why Knuckles had to go back to his birthplace wasn't known by anyone. No one knew why... Vector and Mighty had been talking to him the day after in private, and many hours later, they came back... Knuckles looked devastated, and not long after that, they said goodbye to everyone else after Knuckles packed a few things and were on their way back home to Angel Island... As to the question if he ever came back, he wasn't very clear. But he did, except it still took 8 years before he came back...

But... Sonic and the others said they had to go as well... To look for something, I don't know. I can't really remember but I think they mentioned something about some emeralds. And so they set off as well... They'll be back but, not for a few months... So Blain, Cody, and I were the only ones left in the village...

And as for me... I kept living on like I always did... The months passed by quickly and summer was about to kick in... I still went to school, and if you're wondering what happened to Shamara and Rico... Well... We still saw them... We both had a bit of a problem going to school and actually see them, but I guess they had the same with us. I never had the guts to face Rico ever since that night, and many months passed by without seeing him... It was actually a shame that it all led to this, because we had a really tight friendship... Except... I fracked up with Rico and never had the guts to take responsibility for it ... And before the holidays started, Blain and I saw Shamara and Rico walking away together... That was the last time we saw them...

But everything seems to fade away slowly as the summer holidays came... Two months of relaxation, sleeping in, parties, beaches, and all that... I have to admit, this was by far the best summer I ever had... When Blain stayed over that night, he never left... So at some point, we decided to live together with the three of us... Blain, Cody and me...

One day... Well, on a Tuesday to be exact, was a very hot day. We've only had summer holidays for a few weeks now, but the temperatures were rising quickly, even before the holidays. You saw people walking around half naked through the streets in town eating icecream and some even splashed in the large fountain on Brawshore Falagate Square. People used everything to keep cool but for some reason, I wasn't really affected by it. Maybe it was because I was used to temperatures like that and... Well... Others weren't.

But it did affect me at night though... It was so hot and muggy and taking cold showers didn't really help. The blankets were thrown waaaaaaaaay back in my closets and only had a pillow at night. But there was this one thing that helped a bit, and it's kinda embarrassing to tell about it. Hehe, I'll get back on that later...

I'm getting sidetracked again.... Anyway, as I said, Blain and I decided to live together, and on that hot Tuesday, we moved his stuff to my house. Well, it wasn't really much. Blain didn't own much. Except his clothes, and some big metal case... And a few other cases which had some logo on it...

Nicole: What's with all the cases?

Blain: Trust me, you don't wanna know.

Nicole: Can I...?

Blain: No... Don't.

Nicole: Why not?!

Then he just looked at me and smiled, and walked off with his things to my house. As soon as I noticed I was alone, I couldn't resist peaking in the cases to see what he was hiding... So I opened the big one first... At first, there wasn't anything that really seemed out of place. A pair of leather gloves, some maps, a few pistol clips... Body armour with that RRTS thing... A flashlight... Some documents about his past... And- Wait... I picked up the dossier that was filled with papers and all sorts of stuff. As soon as I opened it, I noticed all sorts of data about the four of them... As I flipped the pages, I came on his file record thing. That his real name was "Epsilon 223" and not Blain. Well, Blain was mentioned as a codename or something further down the dossier. It also said about all of the imperfections he suffers from after he was created and every other little thing. It said he suffered from claustrophobia... I didn't know that... I mean, I know he was created but... Not anything like this... All of his campaigns were tracked and recorded, from the Assault on Westopolis to the re-capture of Station Square... It also said he was missing in action ever since Robotropolis fell...

Blain: You know... I was saving that...

I jumped up and let the dossier fall out of my hands and looked at him. He picks up the papers and placed it back in the case...

Nicole: Well, I-

Blain: I was saving those documents but... They gotta be destroyed.

Nicole: ... Why? I mean, everything you ever did, are in those documents! It contains you're history!

Blain: Exactly, that's why they gotta be destroyed...

Nicole: Yeah but... Why...?

Blain: Well if they ever look for me in the future, they can't prove anything... After these documents are destroyed, I would have never existed... I'll just be another average creature... And then I can truly leave the past...

Nicole: I see...

Blain: Come on, let's go.

He grabs the cases and he held his arm so that I would take and smiled. I hooked my arm underneath his and we walked out of his for the last time...

We would go to the beach but it actually got me thinking. I liked swimming, except... Me in a bikini... My tail looks so ridiculously huge whenever I wear a bikini. I stood a long time in front of the mirror to look if it wasn't... Too stupid...

Blain: Come on! Hurry up! What's taking you so long?!

Nicole: Hold on, almost done!

I peeked around the door of my room to see what he was doing. He wore his black tanktop with the urban camo pants along with his lowtops. He always wears that...

Blain: Come on, come on, come on!

Nicole: Ok, ok, ok! Chill!

Blain: What are you doing in there anyway?!

Nicole: Ok... Ok... I'm coming out... Promise not to laugh...

Blain: ... Uh, sure...

Nicole: Promise!

Blain: ... I promise.

Then I sloooooooooooooooooowly opened the door and peeked around the corner. He just stands there looking with a baffled frown as to question what the hell my problem was. Then I slowly got out of my room. And the rest of me... In a bikini... A red one... I just stood there uneasy. The fact that he just stared at me and didn't say anything didn't really help either...

Blain: Whoa... Uh...

Nicole: ... So...?

Blain: Eh... I uh...

Nicole: ...

Blain: It's just that I've never seen you like that.

Nicole: ... Are you staring at my @\$\$?

Blain: What?! No!

Nicole: Yes you were!

Blain: No! What makes you think that?!

Nicole: Well the fact that you're blushing gave me a hunch...

Then he turned even redder. I couldn't help but to smile at him as I went back in my room. That didn't solve the tail issue though. Having a huge tail can have an advantage but... Sometimes it's just a drag and a pain in the @\$\$... Literally...

Anyway, I dressed in something comfortable and wore flipflops. I got out my sunshades and... Waterbottles... Towels... And that's it I think. As soon as I got out of my room, I noticed Blain had dogtags around his neck and his sunglasses as well.

Blain: Ready?

Nicole: Yup!

Blain: Then let's go.

So we went over to the beach. I searched for Cody to see if he wanted to come along, but he said he was gonna meet up with friends and was gonna spend the night at one of them. So, that just leaves me and Blain going to the beach...

It wasn't that late when we arrived at the beach. Around 13:00 hours and yet it wasn't really crowded. You saw all sorts of creatures and a couple of humans having fun in the water and on the beach. We looked for a nice quiet place and placed the towels on the ground. A couple of kids were playing in front of us... So I took off my clothes and just kicked back while putting my shades on... And not long after that, I felt a ball hitting my stomach...

Kid: Can I have my ball back!?

Nicole: Uh, sure. Here you go.

Kid: Thank you!

And not long after that, it hits me again...

Kid: Oh! Can I have my ball back?!

Nicole: Sure but watch where you're going with that!

Kid: Thank you!

Then the kid fracks off again with the ball as Blain was just snickering...

Nicole: What?!

Blain: Their not gonna listen to you... *chuckles*

Nicole: Why not?!

Blain: You'll see...

At that point, the ball hit me again... This time, I threw the ball at Blain... He didn't realize the ball belonged to that kid and popped it with his left hand... Then the kid looked baffled at Blain and ran away crying...

Nicole: Aww, now look what you did!

Blain: ...

Not long after that, some ice-cream guy came along with a cart, yelling, "ICECREAM!! GET YER ICECREAM HERE!!!" He looked funny though. Anyway, I went over to him and bought two ice creams. Vanilla flavoured ones with those crispy cones, you know? Well those. After I gave Blain his ice-cream, we started eating and at some point, he stared at me with a grin. He nudged my arm and my icecream went right up my nose... Then I just looked baffled at him...

Blain: You got a little icecream on your nose.

Nicole: Oh really?

Blain: Yup... Hehehe...

Then at some point, I asked if he could rub my back with sun block... I lay down on my stomach and took off the straps of my bikini top as he sat on me... Normally its not a weird sight if you see someone else doing it, but... The way it happened was... Awkward... He squirts some of that stuff on my back and rubs it really gently...

Nicole: Dude, you gotta rub harder.

Blain: Like this?

Nicole: No, harder.

Blain: ... This?

Nicole: No harder!

Blain: ...

Nicole: Harder!

Then I just looked around and noticed people were staring at us after realizing what I said... Oh the embarrassment...

sighs

...

That sort of stuff always happens to me. Not long after that, I guess people forgot about it. Anyway, after a while, the heat became unbearable. And seeing other people in the water and all that looked refreshing. I bet it was. So Blain and I went for a swim... Luckily, I remembered to put on the straps of my bikini top otherwise it would have been really embarrassing...

I jumped on his neck and sat on his shoulders as he held me on to my paws and were arsing around until he tickled my paw and I fell off his shoulders... We continued arsing around, splashing water and tickling and laughing...

At some point, I held on to his shoulders and stared in his dark blue eyes... There was always something about those eyes... Every time I stare at it, I felt myself drifting away... Maybe it was because I was in the water but... Still... It always had a rather weird effect on me and made my belly go all tingly and fuzzy... He never really showed it, but that day, his eyes told a lot... And we just floated around for a while as we stared in each other eyes...

We slowly sank under water while we still stared in each others eyes... I felt how he held on to my waist as I supported my forehead against his and closed my eyes... And as soon as I opened them, I stared in those eyes again... From that point, I knew it was more... That it was more then just friendship and that he felt the same... A quick stare in his eyes told me more then 1000 words... Everything I ever thought about him,, I knew he thought the same about me... He strokes his hand through my hair as oxygen bubbles slowly floated upwards towards the surface and had a little smile on his face... He smiled a lot more often then he used to, but this was a special smile... A smile I've never seen... With every move he made and touched my hair, belly, waist or anything at all felt intense... Those gentle touches are something I've never felt before and I thought way back what love truly meant... Heh... Turned out I knew nothing...

As soon as we reached the surface, we held on to each other... I stroked his cheek as he still held on to my waist... And not long after that, he kissed me... Which... Was actually surprising... I didn't complain though... Hehe...

People started to go home... We didn't... We stayed until the sun went down... For some reason, this sunset was more beautiful then any sunset I've seen so far. Maybe it was all in my head, or maybe it was because I watched it together with Blain... Whatever it was, I was happy...

As soon as we got home,, he had a determined look on his face for a short time.... No smile, whatsoever...

Nicole: Something wrong...?

Blain: No... Why you ask...?

Nicole: Because... You look all serious...

Blain: Yeah... I'm intending to close down a chapter of my life tonight...

Nicole: Oh...?

He grabbed the metal cases of him and looked at me as he stood up...

Blain: Come on...

Nicole: What are you gonna do...?

Blain: Closing down a chapter...

We went towards the lake with those cases... At first, I didn't get it but as he stood at the bank of the lake, he looked at me, smiled and nodded to join him... So I went over to him and grabbed the handlebar of the case...

Blain: You ready...?

Nicole: Hmm-mm...

Blain: Ok...

Nicole: One... Two... Thr-

Blain: Whoa!! Whoa!! Whoa!! Wait!!

Nicole: What?!!

He dropped the case and got out the pistol, the ammo and the gloves... After that, he closes it and

picked it up while I held on to the handlebar on the side as I just stared at him...

Blain: ... What, I like those gloves...

Nicole: Hehehe...

Blain: We're doing this together ok...?

Nicole: Sure...

Blain: Ok... One... Two... Three...

At that point, we both tossed the case in the lake, and it slowly sinks... Blain threw the rest of the cases in the water as well... He looked at and sighed as we saw the cases sinking slowly... For a second there, I thought I saw a tear running down his cheek, so I put an arm around him...

Nicole: You alright...?

Blain: ... I am now...

And we sat down in the grass... It stayed silent for a moment until he grabbed my hand...

Blain: Nicole...

Nicole: Yeah...?

Blain: I gotta tell you something...

Nicole: What is it...?

Blain: Well... You made me realize that there are more things in life... And... I've put my past in the past, and I'm living like there is no tomorrow... We've both closed down a chapter of our lives and... We're beginning a new one... And I just hope we can start the new chapter together... You've been a good friend to me, Nicole... No one and nothing can take that away from me...

Nicole: That's why I'm here for right...?

Blain: Heh... I know I've been acting like an @\$ in the past, but-

Nicole: Hey...

I caress his cheek as my other hand strokes his quills...

Nicole: Like you just said... In the past... This is now... It's a whole new chapter... I also did things I regret but... It doesn't matter anymore...

Blain: You're right...

Nicole: Let's go home, ok...?

So we went home... Blain took a shower to wash of the seawater as I cleaned up a few things... Well... It got me thinking... The bathroom door wasn't locked... So I just stepped inside...

He turned around and watched as I took off my cloths... I felt that he looked at my body and then I just stepped in the shower... I stared in those blue eyes again and placed my hands in his as I kissed him... I guided his hands down and every moment seems so intense that at one point, the water drops seem to freeze in mid-air... And that there was nothing else on the entire planet except for Blain and me...

And after we were done taking a shower, I lay down on bed as he sat at the end of it, touching my paws. I didn't really know why though, but it felt funny. But at some point, I got up and pulled him down on the bed and encase you're wondering... We were naked so... I guess you can see where we're heading... Heehee... Anyway... I kissed him again and guided his hands down... And he just looked at me with big eyes so... I kissed him again to assure him everything was fine...

Nicole: Wrong place...

Blain: Here...?

Nicole: Nope... A little down...

Blain: ...

Nicole: That's my bellybutton silly...

Well, he looked a bit embarrassed to say the least but... Hehe... I couldn't help but to smile as he finally found the right place. I guess it must have felt like for him that he was on a treasure hunt or something... "X marks the spot"... But for me, it felt waaaaaaaaay different... It felt like... I don't know... I only did "it" two times and yet I never felt anything like this before... The way he did it was so gentle, like I could break into thousands of pieces any second... And after a while, I sat on his face. He tried to say something but... Hehehe...

We did a lot more that night and even went further then that... Except I'm not bothering to actually tell you that... You ought to guess it... But yeah... That was a real intense night... Blain and I were no longer friends... We were more then that... And that was the start of something that would last for a very long time... Like I said... Best summer ever...

20 - Dream...

.Everyone who was following this story ever since it began should have known this was bound to happen. Two complete different individuals, growing up in a completely different environment... Being the complete opposite of each other... Maybe that's why we liked each other... It's like we compensate one another... And right now when I think about it... I don't even know why I fell in love with him... I thought it was just a phase or something but it wasn't. I guess it shows how unpredictable things can be and that there are no clear answers to that sort of thing. Does it matter? No, no I don't suppose it does. Looking for answers that no one else knows but you. All it takes is a little bit of perspective and someone who open your eyes...

Blain and I never made it official. We didn't even ask each other to have a relationship. Come to think of it, it wasn't even necessary... Everyone knew and could see that there was something, and saying something like "I love you" is redundant as well. All it took was a quick look in the eyes of each other and we knew exactly what the other one was thinking... I never had to explain myself ever again whenever I was feeling a little down. He knew. He just knew. And he had the same with me. Whatever it was, we always got through. And that's something no one could break apart...

One and a half month later, Sonic returned with everyone else. They said they had succeeded and a few days later, they were about to restore their powers... I have no idea how they were gonna pull it off, but I was curious enough to see it... Everyone was gathering around at the lake...

Shadow: Would you just hurry up already?!

Sonic: Alright, alright alright!! Chill out dude!

Shadow: Seriously, how long does it take to get out some emeralds...

Sonic: Check this out... You're gonna love this...

Sonic tossed up six emeralds towards Shadow as he got out another one... Then they both balled there fist as those emeralds started to float up. Along with it, grass, twigs and all sorts floated up as well as all of a sudden a bright flash appeared and we all looked at Sonic and Shadow who floated up in the air...

Then the emeralds just dropped on the ground as they slowly went down again...

Sonic: Whoo!! Hell yeah!! That was tingly!!

Shadow: ...

Nicole: ... That's it? Some light show and everything is fine?

Shadow: Yeah, basically...

Cody: Does it work?!!

Then Shadow just snapped his fingers and made a fist as a dark red aurora flame surrounded his hand... I just couldn't believe it and thought it was just a magic trick or something...

Nicole: Is that real...?

Then he threw the flame against a tree with a lot of strength... I heard wood cracking, and saw a tree coming down in the distance... He spreads his fingers and relaxed his hand, shaking it up and down like it was burned or something...

Shadow: Yup, looks real to me.

Nicole: ... Whoa...

Sonic: My turn, my turn!!

Sonic started to run in place, as his feet moved faster and faster until it was nothing more than just a blur in an eight figure. He got lower to the ground as his right hand touched the ground. Dust, grass and twigs flew up in the air, then he just took off in a blink of an eye, leaving a dust cloud and a blue streak behind. Not long after that, he returned the other way... How the hell was that possible?! Blain and I just stood there looking baffled, but everyone else looked like it was just normal...

Blain: Holy ffffffffrrack.....!!

Nicole: Wait, how did you...

Sonic just grinned and ran off again... It looked like a dream or something... How the hell was he capable of running that fast...? I didn't know... Not long after that, he stands behind me...

Sonic: I don't know how I got it. I could run this fast as long as I can remember.

Shadow: Yeah, yeah, yeah, stop showing off already.

Sonic: There's this one thing we haven't tested yet...

Shadow: ... Do we have to?

Sonic: Yeah, unless you wanna chicken out as usual...

Shadow: ...

Sonic: *makes chicken noises*

Shadow: Ok!! Bring it on, scrotumsack!!!

Then suddenly, those emeralds started to float around them. They went fast and faster until the light got so bright, we had to look away. And as soon as we could look at them, Shadow was white and... Sonic was yellow...? What the hell is going...? I didn't exactly look. Gawping at them was more like it. I never saw anything like that before and apparently; Blain didn't see that before either... He was baffled as well... Then Shadow cracked his neck and closed his eyes for a short time... Some aurora surrounded them and you could actually feel the pressure of it. Like you got forced down or something... Everyone else acted normal, but Blain and I were speechless really... Then all of a sudden, they disappeared and before I noticed, I almost got blown away by the wind. And as I looked up I saw they were fighting above the lake. Shadow punched Sonic down and he fell on the ground.

Sonic: Cheap shot!!

Rouge: ... *sighs* Here they go again...

Nicole: Are they for real?!

Amy: Naah... Their just being childish...

Blain: Their beating the shoot out of each other!!

And Sonic speeded towards Shadow and they kicked and punched each other until Shadow fell down in the lake...

Nicole: Is he dead...?

Rouge: Naah...

Then all of a sudden, the water in the lake looked like it was about to swell up and all the water drained out of the middle as Shadow slowly rises up with dark red lighting bolts surrounding him and he just laughed with some sinister tone... The water started to spout up in the air like a fountain... I was actually worried for a moment when all of a sudden...

Old guy: Oi!! Will you two stop with the monkey tricks?!

Sonic/Shadow: ... Sorry...

Sonic and Shadow relaxed and got back to the ground, as they received their normal colours back... I still didn't get it. It was like... Some... Illusion or a magic trick... But... It wasn't. I pinched myself to see if I

wasn't dreaming and could wake up any second. But I wasn't asleep...

Nicole: Can someone tell me how it's all possible?

Tails: No one really knows! It got something to do with those emeralds but...

Sonic: Well, these are the Chaos Emeralds, containing unlimited amount of mystical power...

Rouge: Long thought to be a myth, until someone found one...

Shadow: And that's how Blain and I got created... Well, with help of course...

Nicole: So... How'd you get in contact with the emeralds...?

Sonic: A long time ago. Shadow had one in his possession.

Shadow: To be able to use my powers.

Sonic: Did you know he used to be a bad guy?

Shadow: ... *sighs*

Sonic: Anyway, once he deflected to us, he told us all about them.

Shadow: And once all of them were found-

Sonic: I noticed I could exploit their powers as well...

Cody: Yeah but how come I'm not able to shoot lasers out of my butt and stuff?!

Then everyone just laughed...

Cody: No! I'm serious! What makes you guys so special that you have powers?!

Good question...

Shadow: I got created with the power of Chaos... So... That's easy to explain...

Sonic: But for me... I don't really know...

Tails: Well there is one theory that might explain it...

Blain: Well, tell us.

Tails: Humans used to experiment on animals waaaaaaaaaaaaay back... As time went on and animals evolved, some of it enhanced their natural abilities. Some even mutated into something paranormal as genes were passed on generation by generation. But over the centuries, some kept their abilities, some even managed to enhance it. Others don't have anything at all, and with others, their powers are dormant waiting to be sparked by something...

Blain: Sounds interesting...

Tails: Well yeah!

Nicole: ... You mean, I could actually have powers...?

Sonic: Well it might be. Who knows, maybe you can run just as fast as me!

Shadow: Don't mind him, he always runs like hell when he has to take a shoot real bad.

Sonic: ... Shut up.

Nicole: Hehehe...

Then Shadow looked all serious at Blain...

Shadow: ... Blain...?

Blain: 'Sup?

Shadow: Remember you asked me a long time ago about powers...?

Blain: Yeah...?

Shadow: Time to find out kid...

He tossed an emerald towards Blain... Blain just looks a bit worried at it...

Shadow: You feel it...?

Blain: Kinda...

Shadow: Let it flow...

I could have imagined Blain floating up in the air and turning pink or something. That would have been hilarious. If he did, his creator had a very good sense of humour. Except, nothing happened... After he stood there for a while with the emerald in his hand, we saw a few sparks, and a dark blue aurora flame surrounding his hand... Then after it burned for only a short time, it slowly died out... He looks a little disappointed, and tried on for another fifteen minutes but it never came back after that...

Blain: ... Damn it...

Cody: ... You think I can turn super as well...?

Sonic: Well try it. Here. *tosses emerald to Cody*

Cody: I don't need no emerald!!

Sonic: Huh?

Cody: I can turn super by eating...

Cody was grabbing in his pocket until he got out something...

Cody: *high pitched voice* A cream cracker! *gobbles it*

Then everyone just stared at him as everyone was laughing...

Cody: Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

*gasps*aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!! – I'm not done yet!! –
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!-

Nicole: *slaps Cody on the back of his head*

Cody: Ow!

Nicole: Enough is enough Cody...

Cody: Psh...

The guys got together ever since then on Friday and Saturday, playing a card game like Poker. Most of the times, I just watched, but it seems a lot of fun. Just looking at them was a lot of fun, especially when the tensions were rising as to question who would win the round, acting all retarded and silly. Blain joined as well, and he even act retarded whenever he was playing... I didn't know much of those terms, like, Big Blind, Flop, Pot Odds and all that, but I understood the basics of the game... Sonic and the others said they learned it a long time ago, and used to play this game whenever they got bored. And they taught Blain the basics of the game when they first started playing. And ever since that, he was hooked on it. But yeah, most of the time I didn't play, I just watched TV with Amy and occasionally watched the poker game. This time, I watched the game, seeing as Blain was running low on chips...

Sonic: Whaddaya mean I'm the dealer?!

Shadow: You got the highest card, stupid! Shuffle those cards befo-

Sonic: Just post the small blind...

Tails: Big blind!

Rouge: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

Blain: Ok deal!

Sonic: Ya'll ready?

Blain: Deal it!!

Aaaaaaaaand everyone got two cards. I peeked with Blain and he had a 10 and a queen.

Tails: I'll bet 2.

Blain: ... Call

Sonic: Call!!

Shadow: ... Call...

Rouge: ... Raise with 5.

Then Blain just looked at Rouge... Then he looked down on his stack of chips... He only had 5 left... Then Rouge just grinned...

Blain: Oh for fu- All in...

Tails: ... Fold...

Sonic: Pass.

Rouge: Come on Shadow, show some guts...

Shadow: I fold, thank you very much. Five is a bit too high for me...

Rouge: Chicken...

Sonic: Everyone gone?

Shadow: Yeah except for Rouge and Blain.

Blain: I'm all in.

Sonic: Open up the cards!

So they both showed their cards... Rouge had a King and 10...

Sonic: Blain is still leading.

Rouge: Yeah, yeah, flop it. My guts says I'm gonna win this one.

Sonic: Here comes the flop.

Sonic placed three cards down, and three cards open... Which were a 10, 5 and Queen.

Rouge: Hehehe...

Blain: Whoohooohoo!! Say goodbye to those chips Rouge!!

Sonic: The turn...

And he placed a card down and one open...

Rouge: A nine?!!

Blain: Yeah whatever!! I'm still leading!!

Rouge: So?!

Blain: Come on, come on, gimme that stack, I'm still in the game!!

Sonic: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaand... The river...

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaand another card got placed down... And he opened another one... Which was a king... So basically, they both had two pair. Except Rouge had a higher one. She had Kings and 10's and blain had Queen's and ten's...

Rouge: ... Buhbye. Thanks for the donation!

Blain: Ffffffffffffffffffiddlesticks... Well there goes my two dinar...

Rouge: Yeah, they will be missed dearly. Now shove over!

Blain: ...

Nicole: Hehehehe... Let's watch a movie.

Blain: ... 'kay... I got nothing else to do now...

So we made our way back to the TV, where Amy was sitting on the edge of her seat.

Nicole: Anything interesting tonight?

Amy: Ssh...

Nicole: What?

Amy: Sarafina is about to confess to Fabrizio that she cheated with Cassijero but she only just found out she's been pregnant of Giorgio!

Nicole: Sounds like she was busy...

Amy: Well yeah!

Then it just ended...

Amy: Ack!! Cliffhanger!

Nicole: Change the channel will ya?

Amy: ... Sure...

Then she zapped for a few channels until...

TV: Former dictator doctor Julian Ivo Robotnik was assassinated this morning at the Taiba Crest. The-

Blain: Whoa!! Whoa!! Whoa!! Change it back!!

TV: -was of great importance. Forensic analyses indicate that it was a professional hit, and that the shooter was an excellent marksman, seeing as the projectile travelled for more than 2 kilometres. Doctor Julian Ivo Robotnik was the number one resource supplier of the humans ever since the war has ended, and the humans are on a brink of an economic disaster. The ICA and GUN has set up a thorough investigation to apprehend the assassin.

As I looked around, I noticed everyone was all serious and silent as they stared at the tv... They showed a picture of Robotnik back when he was ruling this continent as everyone just stared at it...

Sonic: ... He's only been dead for 11 hours...?

Shadow: ... He wasn't dead yet...?

Rouge: ... He is now...

Amy: How's that possible...?

Nicole: What?

Blain: How the hell could he have survived...?

Nicole: Well... He's truly dead now... So...

Blain: Yeah but... still...

I cuddled him on the couch as Amy kept looking for a movie... She made popcorn as she picked a DVD. I didn't know what it was called, but it was some action slash comedy movie I once saw. Not long after that, the guys were done playing poker and joined us watching the movie. Everyone seemed to forget the news bulletin as soon as the movie was starting and popcorn got shoved down their throats... Blain still looked all serious and puzzled...

That night, Sonic just all of a sudden got out of the house and went outside. And after a while, he still didn't come back. So I went looking for him. As I walked outside, I saw his figure moving in the distance and disappeared. As soon as I caught up where he stood, he wasn't there.

Nicole: Sonic?

Sonic: Yeah?

Nicole: Where are you?

Sonic: Up here.

I looked up and saw he was kicking back in a tree, leaning against the tree trunk while his arms supported his head. Normally, Sonic isn't always that serious, but tonight, he really had a depressed look on his face... So I climbed up the tree with a lot of effort and sat on another branch...

Nicole: What are you doing up here?

Sonic: I could ask the same thing about you...

Nicole: I asked first...

Sonic: Meh... Sometimes I got moments like these ya know.

Nicole: What's wrong?

Sonic: Look how everyone is doing now... Look what we build up...

Nicole: Yeah...

Sonic: I mean, even Blain changed a lot... That's gotta mean something...

Nicole: He's got good friends...

Sonic: He also got you...

Nicole: Yeah...

Sonic: No I mean it... He talks a lot about you. It's always Nicole this, and Nicole that... He can't really find a way to express how he feels towards you, yet everything he ever talks about nowadays is you. You mean a lot to him.

Nicole: Heh...

Sonic: It's just that...

Nicole: What...?

Sonic: Seeing you together with him and all the things you do together... *sighs* I just miss Sally a lot, you know... I wish there was a way just to see her one more time. Five more minutes with her, that's all... I recognize a lot with you and Blain of how Sally and I used to be...

Nicole: I... I'm sorry but... I don't really know what to say...

Sonic: You don't have to say anything... Just saying it out loud helps a lot you know...

Nicole: Well... If it makes you feel any better... I lost people I loved too... Except... The unbearable thing is that their still alive...

Sonic: Whaddaya mean...?

Nicole: My parents for example... I had a really good bond with my parents until one day, everything was over... I didn't know what I did, or... What caused it, but... Apparently, my mother didn't want to know me anymore... And that hurts a lot... Sometimes I really get homesick and just wanna go home... To find out why... But... I feel like its chasing down wind....

Sonic: Yeah... At least their still alive... My parents died during the war... And my uncle took care of me until he got rounded up... Before that, we had a fight... I can't remember what it was about ... I just kept being stubborn and left, and when I got home a few days later, he wasn't there anymore... People from the underground said he got rounded up and executed... I was so devastated by that, that we formed a resistance group... We weren't the only ones though, but our group consisted of more then 150 people... Most of them died... And sometimes I'm actually wondering why I'm still alive... Because looking back now, I took a lot of risks and even got caught a few times. Yet I always managed to look death in the eyes and grin at it, while I kicked mister grim reaper in the nuts... Like someone was protecting me from above. I don't know...

It stayed quiet for a long time... I thought about what Sonic said and I actually felt really sorry for him... We continued to sit in the tree for a long time and every now and then, I moved a little over so that my butt wouldn't turn numb from the branch. Then at some point, I heard some soft wood cracking. And before I realized, the branch snapped and I fell out. Except my tail got stuck between a few other branches on the way down. It didn't really hurt, except my ego was deeply offended. I was dangling on my tail in a tree, and it took a long time before I could free myself... Sonic just laughed...

...

Why the hell is that always happening to me?

I had a dream that night. While I was in bed, I felt myself floating away gently. Then all of a sudden, I felt a shock. Like you feel when you got high voltage running through you. In a blink of an eye, it felt like I was going through a tunnel. It all happened for a few seconds I believe, but it seemed much longer then

that. As soon as I opened my eyes, I saw I was standing on a beach. And as I looked around, everything looked so familiar... Tiny islands in the distance, being surrounded by crystal clear bright blue water... Pearl white sand... As I looked around I noticed Sonic was standing next to me. Which... Was a bit odd. He didn't say anything, but just smiled... And before I knew it, we were standing on top of a mountain... This one also looked very familiar... It was mount Soraya, that was near Kennice... Then all of a sudden I knew it... I was back in Buthainah... I had no idea how I got here, but every now and then, it switched view... Like all of my memories were speeding by and just continued to loop. And every time, Sonic was standing next to me... That was such a weird dream, because everything just felt so real... The water felt real, the wind felt real... Everything... Then suddenly, It felt like I hit the ground... And as I slowly opened my eyes, I saw Blain lying next to me, sleeping... As I looked up, I noticed Sonic standing in front of my bed... He smiled, tossed up an emerald and just disappeared. It was just a very weird dream. Not long after that, I fell asleep again, not remembering any of it...

21 - Daddy...

As time passed by, everyone forgot about that news bulletin about Robotnik being assassinated, and many years have passed by since. And of course, it was inevitable that a civil war was breaking out, due to all sorts of politic bullcrap. We didn't know what was happening there, and task forces were dispatched to the north of the continent, providing protection, restore order and all that. The humans had a corrupt government ever since Robotnik got assassinated. Eight years later though, they still didn't know who was behind the hit. And in the mean time, all sorts of little "wars" broke out among humans as all the other countries send task forces to contain the situations. Most of them had success, as they tried with a lot of effort to form a new democratic government and all that. The humans had it pretty rough over the past 8 years but luckily, we didn't get affected by it. We lived thousands of miles away from it...

Eight years passed by since the assassination on Robotnik. Eight years with nothing but happiness. Each day was like I was living on the edge again, like I used to. Some times during the summers I just ran through the forests, or hopping was more like it. I've seen the forests many times but each time I ran through them again was like seeing them for the very first time. I really wish there was a way to describe everything I was seeing, but there isn't a way to describe it that even gets near of what I'm trying to tell. You just gotta see it with your own eyes. During the autumns, winters and spring, Blain and I made walks through the forests and the beach. We always did the same thing together yet it never got boring. And of course there were others things we did, like going to town, watching movies together and with the guys and all that... Sometimes even had fun at night... Hehehe...

We missed Knuckles a lot though, but being here for so many years made everyone growing even closer then we already were. Blain turned 25... I turned 26... Tails turned 23... Rouge turned 29... Shadow even turned 60... Sonic and Amy turned 25 as well... And Cody...? Well... He was 22 years old, the youngest of the bunch... But that didn't mean we treated him like we used to. Like a little kid. You saw everyone changing psychically and that... Well... Was just normal to see. Sometimes we had nights that we just looked at pictures of when we were younger and just laughed at our appearances and shared all sorts of stories. But I guess time is not standing still, and you'll grow older and wiser, whether you liked it or not... All of the guys used to run around naked, and Blain was the first one to actually wear clothes after I insisted for a long time. I guess everyone picked up that idea, and the first time the guys wore clothes, it was something I really had to get used to. But that didn't mean they changed on the inside. Everyone remained the same personality they had...

But Blain did change a lot... Even more when I first kissed him... Ever since the day he threw those cases in the lake, he changed even more. He's much more laid back and relaxing, and even swears way less then he used to. This one time, I came home and noticed a box of chocolates on my bed with a note... It

said: "I'm looking for a word... But not just any word... I'm looking for a word that no one knows... I'm looking for a single word that can express my feelings towards you... Sadly, no such word exists so I'm gonna think of one... You'll have to do it with the chocolates in the mean time... Blain..."

...

I love chocolate...

Then without warning, Knuckles came back one day along with Vector and Mighty. But there were two new ones as well. Some pink female echidna with some metal dreadlock or something, and a little echidna girl with glasses. She was red like Knuckles and was very shy. The first time we saw her, she hid behind Knuckles clamping on his leg... We haven't seen him in a very long time, so everyone greeted them with a lot of enthusiastic, maybe a lil' overreacted, cheers and hellos. As soon as Sonic asked who the little twerp was, Knuckles replied it was his daughter.

Tails: You're what?!!

Knuckles: ... My daughter. This is Lara-Su.

Sonic: ... You?! Being a dad?!

Knuckles: Yeah... Aint it great?

Amy: Who's the mother...?

Julie-Su: ... Hello guys...

Sonic: Julie-Su?!

Julie-Su: Hey Sonic...

Sonic: Oh man, this is rich! How you been?!

Julie-Su: Well you know... Can't complain really...

Knuckles: What? What's the big deal?

Sonic: I never imagined you with kids...

Rouge: We never thought you'd be the first one with a kid...

And as Lara-Su hid behind Knuckles, looking around at everyone and even turned her head away every time someone was looking at her, I decided to kneel down next to her.

Nicole: Hello! I'm Nicole!

She just stared at me through those glasses, wondering if I was sane. She was adorable though, but for some reason, I had a feeling I could read her mind. Like she was wondering why in the hell I act so retarded...

Nicole: How old are you?!

Lara-Su: I'- I'm four years old...

Sonic: Whoa, she really does look a lot like you guys...

Then Lara-Su just smiled, and let go of her dad's leg. For some reason, she seemed less nervous and started to look around with a smile...

Sonic: So... You're gonna stay now or...?

Julie-Su: Well, we want to if that's not too much of a hassle.

Amy: No of course not!

Sonic: Yeah.

As Sonic and Knuckles continued talking, I noticed Vector, Blain, Tails and Mighty arguing... Blain and Mighty stayed out of it though, except Tails and Vector really turned up the heat as their arguments got louder and louder...

Tails: How can you think something stupid like that?!! You don't even know what the hell you're talking about!!

Vector: Yeah says you!! You think Polypeptide is a motherfrackin' toothpaste!!

Tails: What the hell does that have to do with the planet Pluto?!!

Vector: Man how the hell can you call Pluto a planet? No motherfracking planet has an elliptical orbit!! This shoot don't make no sense!!

Blain: This isn't even an argument anymore...

Vector: Hey stay outta this you freakish furball.

Blain: What, you're starting on me now?!

Vector: Yeah!! That's right!! I still remember you shot me back then!!

Blain: I didn't even frackin' hit you!!

Vector: It still hurts!! I oughtta whoop your prickly blue @\$!!

Blain: What?!! Step over here, I'll rebuild you're face!!

And well, Blain has that uncontrollable explosion of anger. He really should follow some anger management course or something... Vector just provoked it even more by taking a step closer to him. Then Blain just exploded and jumped up punching him in the face. Vector didn't really seem to be impressed when Blain punched him with his right hand, but he was when Blain punched him with his left hand... Then Vector just picked him up by his neckscruff. Blain was dangling two meters above ground, and with his size, that was really high. He gave up punching Vector knowing it wouldn't make any difference. Instead, he just looked at Vector really pissed as Vector was still holding him by his

neckscruff. Blain knew all too well he can't take on everyone. And come to think of it, it was actually kind of funny seeing him dangling above the ground as he couldn't do anything... In the mean time, Tails and Mighty just stared at each other and at them. I wasn't actually surprised. I'm familiar with his anger thing. Except he never acted like this when I was around. And as soon as he noticed I was watching, he quickly changed mood... Vector didn't though... As I turned around to see if anyone else saw, no one was there... I guess they moved on or something.

Mighty: Come on guys!! Can't we just settle this over a pint?!

Nicole: NOOO!!!!

Then they all stared at me with big eyes...

Nicole: I mean, no... Heh.

Then Vector looked at Blain.

Vector: You still got those pieces?

Blain: ... Pieces?

Vector: Yeah?

Blain: Pieces of what?

Vector: No no no, blat blat.

Blain: ...

Vector: A nine!

Blain: What the hell are you talking about?!

Vector: Guns dude!! I'm talking about guns!

Blain: Oh... Yeah I got 'em.

Vector: You're a fed?

Blain: ... No.

Vector: ... Some guard?

Blain: ... No.

Vector: Well you oughtta be something! It's hard to be getting yo hand's on weapons these days! I should know. My arms dealer got whacked a long time ago man!!

Mighty: Dude, you're talking about Reno?

Vector: Yeah?

Mighty: He's not dead...

Vector: What?!

Mighty: Yeah! Reno moved away a long time ago!!

Vector: Motherfracker!! He snitched me!!

Mighty: ... He didn't SELL any weapons Vector. He just happened to be an ordinary guy!! Of course he moves away after you gave him all of your savings for something he doesn't do! I told you, but you

wouldn't believe me...

Vector: Yeah whatever. So what be you?

Blain: Ex-RRTS.

At that point, Vector eyes widens and dropped Blain all of a sudden. And he just stared at him with disbelief. As soon Vector looked at me, I nodded, and so does Tails... Then he stayed all silent and looked around with an uneasy look.

Vector: I'm sorry man, I'm sorry. I really am man.

Blain: ... My ego...

Vector: We're cool right? I mean, we're homies!

Blain: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

Vector: Aight! An RRTS member is my homie! Not many people can say that!

Blain: Because their all dead. Now shut the hell up about that RRTS thing.

Vector: Aight is cool. I'm sorry.

Blain: Just drop it...

Vector: We're still homies right?

Blain: ...

Vector: Aight, I get it. I got yo back. Whoever messes with you, messes with me.

Blain: Vector?

Vector: Yeah holmes?

Blain: Is it possible for you to shut the hell up for 10 seconds?

Vector: Fo sho dawg...

Everything seemed so harmless, except I noticed a huge difference. I mean, as soon as Vector heard Blain was ex-RRTS, he immediately changed the way he acted against him. Maybe it's just me, but I find it a little hypocrite. And judging by the way Blain looked; I noticed he thought the same. Once anyone know something about you, why would they change the way they act towards you and pretend like their being best buddies? I don't get it. Vector wasn't afraid of Blain at first, and now he is. Well, maybe a little. I don't know, I think it's just weird... But then again, I acted like that too when I first met Blain...

That afternoon, Blain and I took a walk through the forest like we always do. And every time we took a walk again, we noticed something new we haven't seen before. After hours of walking through the forest, I felt like I had to run... So I did. Blain followed me, but not long after, he loses it from me. As I got back to the village, I sat down, as Blain arrived 10 minutes later panting his lungs out... After a while, he recovered again and wiped the sweat off his forehead...

Blain: How come you can run so fast?

Nicole: ... Well, I'm a kangaroo... That should explain a lot...

Blain: ... Not to me...

Now, you see, everyone acted like retards every once in a while, and it was always fun to see someone getting pranked. Like, Shadow placing a spider on Amy's head, or Tails pushing Sonic in the lake. I couldn't help but to notice that Blain never got pranked. Sure, he laughed about all the stuff everyone else got into, but he never really joined the madness. So that afternoon, I decided to pull a little prank on him...

Nicole: You wanna know the secret?

Blain: Yup...

Nicole: Ok... See what I did this afternoon?

Blain: You hopped?

Nicole: Yup, that's the secret.

Blain: ...Hopping is the secret?

Nicole: Uh-huh. You take a run up, then sprint your legs out of your butt and then jump, and hop from there on. Give it a try.

Blain: You sure?

Nicole: Yeah! Come on!

So he took a run up, sprinted, jumped and hopped... It didn't really go that fast. I had trouble not to laugh while I saw him hopping... He kept on hopping for a while...

Blain: It's not working!

Nicole: Don't give up! I had to learn it too you know! It wasn't like I could run that fast as a kid!

Well actually, I could, but that's something he doesn't need to know... So Blain kept on hopping, I tried to keep my laughter in... After a while, the others watched Blain hopping as well...

Rouge: Why the hell is Blain hopping around like some moron...?

Nicole: I told him the secret on how to run just as fast as me.

Rouge: But... You're a kangaroo...

Nicole: I know. But he seems to forget.

Blain: It's still not working!!

Nicole: Ok, watch this... You gotta say something along it Blain!! It helps to keep the rhythm in!!

Blain: Like what?!

Nicole: Something like, "hop, hop, hop"!!

Everyone started to snicker as soon as I said that. We all stared at him hopping around and saying "hop, hop, hop!!" and at some point, everyone saw it. Sonic, Shadow, Rouge, Knuckles, Amy, Tails, Cody, Mighty, Vector, Julie-Su and Lara-Su... everyone. At some point, we couldn't hold our laughter anymore and everyone fell down on the ground laughing at him...

Blain: What?!

Sonic: She's a kangaroo, stupid! You can't run like her! *keeps on laughing*

And as soon as everyone saw the look on Blain's face, they laughed even harder. Blain realized he just made an @\$@ of himself...

Blain: I hate you, I fracking hate all of you...

Then we laughed even louder as he walked away... I followed him... I got the feeling he was really pissed...

Nicole: Aw come on, it's just a harmless joke, Blain.

Blain: I know. I'm just too embarrassed to stick around...

Nicole: You made an @\$@ of yourself before!

Blain: Yeah but not of this magnitude...

Nicole: Hehehe...

Blain: You got me though... Still...

Nicole: Hm?

Blain: I wish I could run as fast you...

Nicole: Daww...

I just gave him a big hug and a little kiss as he still looked embarrassed...

Sometimes when you think you left something and closed down a chapter of your life, the past comes knocking at the door... And I wasn't really prepared for it...

That evening, I heard talking outside... I thought I heard a very familiar voice... I heard Blain, but also someone else I haven't seen in a very long time... As soon as I looked outside the window, I saw a guy with a large black trench coat and as soon as he looked up and faced me,, I saw it was my dad... He looked awful... His face was all pale, had wrinkles around his eyes and all... But I saw it was him. He gave a weak smile as he set his eyes upon me, but as I stared back, I couldn't see a spark of life... I couldn't actually believe it was him, yet it was him... Then like a reflex or something, my legs took me to the door and I opened it, as I couldn't realize it really was him...

Nicole: Dad...?

???: Nicole...

Blain looked up and down with his eyes, like he was checking him out to see if he could be trusted or something... My dad was taller than Blain...

Nicole: Dad this is... Uh... Blain... Blain, this is my dad...

???: I'm Jayce.

Blain: Blain.

They shook each others hand, but Blain kept staring at him with a distrusting look...

Jayce: We have a lot to talk about.

Nicole: Blain, could you leave us for a sec...?

Blain: Sure thing.

And as Blain left, he kept staring at my dad... Then we went into my house...

Jayce: Strange 'lil fella aint he...?

Nicole: Sometimes...

Jayce: You... You got a nice home...

Nicole: What are you doing here?

Jayce: ... I wanted to see you... Before...

Nicole: Before what...?

He sighed and got out a tissue to wipe his forehead...

Jayce: Could you get me a glass of water please...?

So I got him a glass of water... As I came back, I noticed he leaned on the table, still wiping his forehead...

Jayce: Thank you...

He takes a tiny box from under his coat and opened it. It contained all sorts of pills. He puts one in his mouth and poured the glass of water after it...

Nicole: What is that?

Jayce: Painkillers...

Nicole: For what?

Jayce: I... I got a disease... The doctors don't know what it is... They gave up on me... It's immanent... I'm a dieing man Nicole... It could be over in just a few weeks... Every day, I feel myself getting weaker and weaker... It's a struggle to do the simplest things... These... Pills I got only extend it by a few days... I... I wanted to see you before I go...

Nicole: Why...? Why now?

Jayce: It wasn't been easy for me...

Nicole: Did you ever give a thought about us...?

Jayce: All the time...

Nicole: Then how come you look for us now...? All these years...

Jayce: *sighs* Is there a place we can talk...? Alone...?

Nicole: Come on...

So we went outside again... The others were looking at us as we walked passed them, but no questions were asked. I guess everyone wondered who he was, and even I asked myself the same thing... But... As soon as we reached the lake with no one else in sight, I sat down in the grass... And he sat next to me... And as I looked him in the eyes, I could see a small spark of life... But that little something reminded me of how he used to be, and it took me back to my childhood... All the things we did together... He took me for walks on the beaches, through the forests... Taught me all sorts of things... The comforting feeling he gave me when I was scared... All sorts of things a father and daughter would do... And then one day, it all stopped... And I just didn't know why... And maybe that's why I wanted to give him a second chance...

Nicole: Does Cody know that you're here...?

Jayce: Yeah... He didn't want to see me... Which... Pains me... That's why I'm glad you're willing to talk and listen to what I have to say...

Nicole: ... Go on...

Jayce: I know I've not been a good father to you or Cody... And... Not everything what I'm about to say is exactly pleasant... But... Losing everything I ever had wasn't the only thing I lost... I was losing my mind as well... Except... That turned to be a fatal move... I did four years prison... I was desperate... Each and every day I thought of you and Cody and how it all could turn out like this... And... Not long after that, I was diagnosed with a terminal illness...

He looked down and it stayed quiet for a while... I just plucked nervously some gr@\$@ haulms and wiggled my toes in the cool grass... For some reason, I just couldn't keep still... It's all just very weird right now... And what he just told me just didn't get through to me... Dark clouds were stacking up and in the distance, you could hear thunder...

Nicole: How's mom...?

Jayce: She...

Nicole: Hm...?

Jayce: *sighs* I don't know... I haven't heard from her... I tried looking for her as well but... I couldn't find her...

Nicole: Maybe... Maybe she's trying to find us as well...

Jayce: I wouldn't know...

Nicole: You know dad...

Jayce: What...?

Nicole: I don't really know what to say... It's...

Jayce: You don't have to say anything Nicole... I'm here to apologize and... Although it might not mean anything to you, it does for me... I can't go without seeing you're face again...

Nicole: Heh...

Jayce: I'm so proud of you Nicole... You've grown...

Nicole: Yeah...

Then it stayed silent again... For some reason, I didn't really wanna talk with him... As I looked at my dad, I could see he had regrets and that he was sad... And that made me realize he was truly sorry for everything... Yet I didn't wanna believe he was...

Nicole: How did it all turn out to be like this...?

Jayce: ... Other things played a part...

Nicole: Oh...?

Jayce: Yeah... And... I think it's best for you not to know...

That was a bit of a weird answer...

Nicole: Ten years... For ten years I wanna know what really happened... I still didn't get any answers and I wanna know why... Why...?

Jayce: You know Nicole... Some times it's best to leave things in the dark... Ignorance is bliss, as they say...

Nicole: You come here all the way for what...? You think you'd come here and everything was fine and dandy...? To catch up like old times?!

Jayce: No...

Nicole: Then what is it?!! Why don't you just tell me?!!

Jayce: ... I... I don't know...

Nicole: If you don't even know yourself, why'd you come here in the first place...?

Jayce: I...

Nicole: Why did you come here in the first place if you don't even know the answer yourself?!!

And at that point, he slapped me in the face... I fell on the ground...

Jayce: I wasn't the one that fracked off to some unknown place, away from his children!!! So stop blaming me!!

He didn't really slap me that hard, but... Still... As I got up, he stared at me and reached for his heart and gasped. He's in pain...

Jayce: There are lots of things you can blame me for... But not this... I don't see your mother here to visit you...

I rubbed my cheek as I coldly stared in his eyes... And now that I see them again, there wasn't a spark of life no more... Just cold eyes... I could feel the first raindrops falling down as the thunder grew closer...

Jayce: I'm... I'm sorry... It's...

Nicole: You think you're the only who had it rough...?

Jayce: You... You wanna talk about it...?

Nicole: No.

Jayce: ... I see...

Nicole: You and mom abandoned us when we needed you the most. Before we got here, we went through all sorts of shooty things and even after we got here, we went through shooty things. I almost died 8 years ago. THOSE things that happened changed me. NOT because of the things you put us through. But you know what? I conquered everything. On my own. I did it all by myself. I managed to break through and stand above it. Unlike you... I'm not weak as you are...

He closed his eyes and nodded slowly...

Jayce: Is that really what you think...?

Nicole: ... I know it...

Jayce: Then... I guess I have no purpose here then...

Nicole: I think so too...

Then he got up with a lot of effort and looked at me...

Jayce: Nicole... Keep in mind I tried... I failed, but I tried... I thought I could do it... To tell you everything so that you won't have to wander in the dark no more...

Nicole: I know...

Jayce: ... Goodbye... Daughter...

Nicole: Goodbye... Jayce...

After that, he walked away as the rain got heavier... I noticed he got out something from under his coat and rips it in pieces as he walked away in the pouring rain... The wind blew the pieces of paper towards me, and as I grabbed and looked at one of them, I noticed it was a picture of Cody and me... Then all of a sudden, the rain didn't pour on me anymore, yet I still heard it... Then I noticed Blain with an umbrella standing next to me...

Blain: Thought you could use one...

Nicole: Heh...

Blain: You ok...?

Nicole: Yeah... I'm- I'm fine...

Blain: Come on, let's go...

I took a last peek at the man in the trench coat before he disappeared in the darkness... And that was the last time I saw my dad...

I know a whole lot more from where I am now... It makes much more sense now than it was then... I finally found out what really happened... And I understand why my dad didn't want me to know back then... I'm actually grateful he didn't tell me... I wish I've made a different decision back then... I wish he stayed with us... I wish I said different things to him... But the past cant be undone... My father died five weeks after that... Only five weeks... While I kept on living like nothing ever happened... I had regrets and so did he... He tried... He really tried...

22 - Epilogue

Many, many years have gone by since I encountered my dad again... Everyone grew older, including Blain and me. And with every year that passed, you saw everyone changing, especially Lara-Su. We grew really tight together and with Julie-Su... She's been here for more than 3 years now, and I saw her growing up as if she was my own daughter. The bond that Blain, Cody and I had with Sonic and everyone else wasn't just friends anymore. We became family. A tight, warm loving family that always looked after each other...

Like I said a long time ago... Those bad things that happened to me happened for a reason. I would never understand the true reason of why it happened, but I'm not complaining. Those things only brought me and everyone else closer to each other. There are people complaining about how shooty their lives are and I just don't understand why they do it, or why they isolate themselves from others. Because no matter how deep you've sunk, there is always a chance to reach the surface. But you need to do something for it. You gotta struggle for it. And once you got up the surface, you look under water and question yourself if it really was you who made it. People can complain as much as they like about their lives, but it's not getting them anywhere. You can always try to help them, but in the end, they have to live with it. Now I can finally say I made it...

Heh... Seeing Knuckles and Julie-Su with their daughter made me think. Lara-Su visited us regularly if she didn't went to school, and although we weren't related in any way you could think of, she always called me "auntie" and Blain was called "unc". And every time she left, I had a feeling something was missing...

Blain and I talked about having kids but he wasn't so sure if he was ready for it. He saw how Knuckles got involved and all the responsibilities that came along. After months of consideration we finally tied the knot, but that didn't mean he remained uncertain. Of course I was nervous too, but I had all faith in it that everything would work out. So we tried having a baby together...

Blain and I tried for months, but I never got pregnant... I didn't complain though, if you know what I mean... Hehe... But, on the other hand, that was also rather frustrating... But then one day, I found out I got pregnant... As soon as I found out, Blain and I hugged each other overwhelmed with happiness, knowing that our efforts wasn't in vain. Well, like I said, I didn't complain but... You know... Hehe...

As the months passed by, I felt something growing inside of me. I can't describe the feeling, but I can tell it was wonderful... I often stood in front of the mirror, looking at my belly to see if I could notice anything. Kangaroos are born very small, and unlike any other species, you didn't see a belly. But I often held my hand on it, and I could sometimes feel it moving inside of me... I could see that Blain was enjoying it every time he held his head close to my stomach and placed his hand on it... I was moody once in a while, and very hungry whenever I felt my stomach rumbling but at least I had an excuse. I was eating for two now. Literally. Hehe... Over the months, we found out that I was expecting a girl... Blain and I thought up with all sorts of names, but we never agreed with each other choices... Then one name was interesting for us... Kaelyn...

But... During the 5th month of my pregnancy, something went wrong as I gave birth to her... She was 4 weeks too early, as opposed to the normal 6 to 8 months of pregnancy with kangaroos... I only held her for a few minutes that seemed like an eternity... And yet I wished it was longer than that... She was the most beautiful being I ever set my eyes upon, and I could still feel her tiny little hands clamping around my fingers... Kaelyn was dark violet, blended with dark cyan and huge dark purple eyes. Her tiny little tail being curled up every time she yawned... Blain was there besides me the whole time... He had a huge grin on his muzzle and held her close... She was his daughter... She was my daughter... My daughter...

They tried to save her, but to no avail... I had a miscarriage... Kaelyn died the next day due to complications of her premature birth... Blain and I were devastated by that... All the feelings I ever had were nothing compared to what I felt when she died... We had nights that we just cuddled each other and just cried together without saying a word... We had rough times ahead of us...

We buried Kaelyn under the great oak tree across the hill next to the lake, right besides our house... I carved something in that tree for her, but what I carved, I won't tell. I want to keep that to myself... We visited every day, and usually stayed at the lake until dusk came over us... Sometimes we even stayed at night... But as months passed by, we slowly got over it, with our daughter in our memories...

I was 27 years old when I gave birth to Kaelyn. At the end of this story, I'm 31 years old... Knowing what would lie ahead for us in the future makes me regret I didn't enjoy life more than I already did... The assassination on Robotnik proved to be a fatal move by whoever did it... Not only for, us but for the entire planet... I guess they didn't think about the consequences of what they were doing... But... That's a whole different story... It would still take 11 years... In the mean time, I'll keep on living like I always did... Living without a care in the world... For now, I'll say goodbye, but I'm sure I'll see you again one day... Thank you...

...

Goodbye...

Nicole...

The end...

23 - Background story, fFAQ, outtakes and lost chapter

Basically, I got a few things to say about this story.

Most of the situations in the story are based on real life events. I've been through a lot in my life, and all sorts of shooty things happened that shaped me into the person I am today. I really noticed I changed due to all the things that happened. Please read on if you're interested about the background of this story.

Nicole and Blain aren't just some random OC's that I happen to create. They reflect "the good" and "the bad" sides of me. Writing has become a therapy for me to process all the things that happened to me. Some things were processed in chapters of Deus Ex Machina, but this story was heavily influenced by real life events. No matter how much I talked about my problems with friends, family, or just about anyone I know, it never made it seem to go away completely. And that's basically why Nicole was brought to "life". I think the way a girl expresses her thoughts are way more sympathetic than when a guy does. And it's also because I couldn't really imagine Blain saying all these things. Hehehe. Anyway, it's also more of a symbolic meaning. Like, you noticed how Blain and Nicole were loathing each other in the beginning, and that basically explains the separate characteristics I had back then. The more I wrote, the better I felt, and eventually, ended up with Blain and Nicole being together and have a relationship. Like the separate characteristics were joined together and became whole again. Some events are also symbolical...

It wasn't always the bad things that were based on real life events. Of course not. Also the good ones. For example, the part where they had a huge snowball fight also happened for real. Except we didn't do that with 8 people, but with around +/- 30 guys and girls. I only knew 4 guys, but we joined anyway. No one knew each other and yet we all acted like we knew each other for years. And I guess that's something that will stay with me forever.

And that's what I wanted to tell basically.

FAQ THINGY

#1: What does “Sidera somnum suadent” mean?

Again, its Latin and it basically have two meanings: “The stars advise us to sleep” ”I am what you will be”

I think this title fitted perfectly with the overall theme here. It wasn’t very easy to change Blain a lot, but I think I pulled it off quite well.

Lemme know if you got more questions.

OUTAKES!!!!

Cody: Hey Blain! Wanna play?!

Blain: Well, I got some thi-

Cody: Hide and seek!

Blain: I-

Cody: I will be the seeker!

Blain: It’s just-

Cody: I shall seek!

Blain: Well no, but-

Cody: I shall seek you!!

Blain: Eh-

Cody: Where could he be?!

Blain: I don’t think-

Cody: There he is... There he is right there... *points to Blain*

Blain: ...

Cody: *grins*

Blain: Sure, what the hell. Start counting.

Blain: I don't get it Shadow... What's up with me?

Shadow: You're in love kid.

Blain: ... Me? In love? Get real...

Shadow: No really. Its like, when a boy likes a girl, sometimes the boy shoves his dic-

Rouge: Shadow!!!!

Shamara: I just wanna do something good for him, unlike you did!!

Nicole: You wanna do something good?!! Then get yourself sterilized and never have babies!!

LOST CHAPTER!!!!11

One day, on a nice warm sunny spring afternoon, Blain and I took a walk through the forest. I never really noticed of how high the trees were, and seeing all those woodland creatures doing their own thing was fun to watch. Birds singing in the flourishing trees while chipmunks ran up and down them and collected nuts and everything...

At some point, something caught my attention. I went over to it while Blain kept on walking...

Nicole: Blain, check this out...

Blain: What?

I walked over to something that looked like a concrete wall... Which was rather odd seeing as this was placed in the middle of a forest... And as I looked closer, I noticed more of small concrete walls in the distance... Also, the landscape was much higher in the distance... Then I noticed Blain walked towards me.

Blain: What is it?

Nicole: Don't you think it's rather odd...?

Blain: What?

Nicole: A concrete wall in the middle of nowhere...?

Blain: ... Must be debris or something dating back from the war.

Nicole: Then how come it's all solid and clean?

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Nicole: Well if it's debris, how come there isn't any chunks missing?

Blain: No idea... Let's just go...

As soon as I took the first step, I felt the ground underneath me sinking. Blain reached out a hand to pull me up and stepped back to get a grip. Then he realized the ground he was standing on also started to sink in...

Blain: ...Whoa...

Nicole: Walk away... slowly...

So we both tried to walk away... But then the ground started to collapse and Blain grabbed my hand in a nick of time. As he slowly got up, the ground underneath him collapsed as well and we both fell down. We hit the hard rocks on the way down and I landed face first down as Blain landed not too far from me. My face and elbows hurt a lot, and I heard Blain groaning. And as I looked up, it was a bit dark...

Blain: Nicole?!

Nicole: Blain?! You ok?!

Blain: I'm ok!! You?!

Nicole: Everything hurts!!

Blain: Then you're not ok!!

As soon as my eyes were used to the darkness, I could see Blain getting up. And as I looked around I noticed this was a very large area... I could hear my own voice echoing and I could see this wasn't made by nature... The ground felt like solid concrete... All strange objects could be seen in the large distance but I had no idea what it really was...

Blain: Nicole?! Where are you?!

Nicole: Over here!!

As soon as Blain found me, we grabbed on to each other so that we wouldn't lose each other.

Blain: Where the hell are we?

Nicole: I have no idea... It's definitely not something made by nature...

Blain: Yeah, I figured that bit.

Nicole: Some light would be helpful...

Then I looked around and noticed I could see lots of desks and all sorts of papers on the ground with lots of computer like things. Then I really had no idea what this place was... All sorts of cable and boxes mounted on the wall with symbols on it...

Nicole: I see some old computers and... Stuff... You see it?

Blain: Yeah.

Nicole: Maybe there's a way to turn the power on.

Blain: You don't think it'll work after all these years do you?

Nicole: Worth a shot.

Blain: True.

Nicole: ...

I'm not some techno nerd or something, and I really don't know anything about it, At some point, I noticed a box with a symbol on it that resemble electricity.

Nicole: I think I see one.

Blain: Where?

Nicole: Over there.

Blain: What symbol does it have?

Nicole: Eeeh... A yellow triangular... Wiiiiiiiiiiiiith... A lightning bolt on it.

Blain: That's the one.

So we both walked over to the box in the pitch black. All of a sudden, I heard something crunching and looked down. It was a... Uniform...?

Nicole: Blain...?

Blain: Yeah?

Nicole: Could this be an abandoned old military base or something?

Blain: Could be, why?

Nicole: Because I think I see a soldier's uniform here...

Then Blain kneeled down next to it...

Blain: This doesn't look like the uniforms soldiers are wearing these days...

Nicole: Why's that?

Blain: We have a Net-Bat system integrated in the helmets with all high-tech features... This is just a normal helmet... Also... Camouflage doesn't add up.

Nicole: Whadda ya mean?

Blain: It's a desert camouflage... Who the hell would wear desert camouflage in the middle of a forest?

Nicole: Ooh...

Blain: And it has a flag on the right sleeve... Blue, white and red with stars on it and stripes... I've never see this before...

I kneeled next to him and squinted my eyes. I could vaguely see what he meant and I haven't seen it in my entire life as well. Then he removed the helmet slowly... I scared the shoot out of myself that there was a skull underneath it... I jumped back to get away from it...

Nicole: WAAAH!!!!

Blain: WHAT?!!! WHAT'S WRONG?!!

Nicole: IT'S A SKULL!!!

Blain: Well that's usually the case... The poor bastard got 4 bullet holes in his skull...

Nicole: GET RID OF IT!!!

So he placed the helmet back on his head...

Nicole: THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT GO AWAY!!!

While I was still freaked out a bit, we continued to that box I saw earlier and

I couldn't really read what it said, so I wiped the box and squint my eyes. It was very hard to read...

Blain: What's it saying?

Nicole: I don't know... It's some... Language...

Blain: Can you read it?

Nicole: It says... "Achtung"...?

Blain: Achtung?

Nicole: Yeah...

Blain: What the hell is achtung?

Nicole: ... No idea...

Blain: What else does it say?

Then I wiped the rest of the box to get a good view on it... I had no clue what it said though...

Nicole: Achtung... Bei... aus... ausgeschaltetem... Hauptschalter unter... Spannung...?

Blain: ... You know what it means?

Nicole: No... Do you?

Blain: If I did, I wouldn't ask you what it meant...

Then I just opened it... It looked like an electronic switchboard... A very, very old one...

Blain: It looks like a switchboard... There should be a lever somewhere to override the power manually. Push it up five times...

And he was right. I saw a lever indeed. The lever went up and down rather rigid. I pushed it upwards with all my strength and after about three times, I was exhausted... Then Blain took it over... After he pushed it up 2 times, we could hear something... It sounded like jet engines taking off...

And not long after that, lights turned on one by one. Most of them exploded by the sudden burst of electricity, but at least we had some light... Then Blain and I saw where we ended up and why it was such a large area... Blain and I were baffled by the sight...

Nicole: Whoa...

Blain: shoot... Look at this place...

As a few lights got turned on in the very large area, we saw lots of vehicles... Military, by the looks of it, but also normal ones... Most of the light vehicles were flipped over and damaged. Although it wasn't anything like we've seen before... Vehicles that looked like tanks, gunships with strange blades on it... More skeletons... Ew...

Nicole: What the hell is this place...?

Blain: Military base...

Then Blain went over to a cabinet file and yanked a drawer open. Everything was so dusty and filthy... He searched around the drawer and opens a lot more until he found a map. He wiped all the junk of a desk and unfolded the map...

Nicole: Coalitions...?

Blain: No... Countries... Look at the date...

Twenty-first of September, 2032...

As we both looked at the map, it was totally different from the map of Mobius today... All sorts of names that I couldn't make any sense of... Names like... France... Spain, US... And all that... Two big continents were separated from the middle continent... If you take a look at the planet today, the other two continents were joined with the middle one. Or if I named it, America and Africa are stick together on Europe... Except for two islands, Australia and New Zealand. The both of them are now joined together and countries like Japan, Indonesia, Micronesia, French-Polynesia, and other countries that end with "Esia" were joined at Australia and New Zealand. A bit confusing, but basically, there are now only 2 continents left. ... Lot's of "Esia's" by the way...

Blain: Holy shoot... This place is more then thousand years old...

Nicole: No...

Blain: Whadda ya mean no?

Nicole: They used "The reclamation"...

Blain: The what?

Nicole: *puts up deep voice* The reclamation...

Blain: ... Eh?

Nicole: A huge war broke out somewhere in the year 2012 which ended in 2065 and almost wiped out human kind... After the humans almost annihilated themselves, they started all over again with the year counts. It also explains our origins...

Blain: What?

Nicole: Mammals started to evolve without the interference of humans... Slowly but steady, we learned how to live side by side with them. It took us hundreds of years to evolve like this and if it wasn't for the humans, we would never be like this... Creatures adapted speech, and human behaviour...

Blain: How'd you know all that?

Nicole: I actually paid attention during class...

Blain: I'm a little confused...

Nicole: It's quite easy... We live in the year 3132... So 3132 years ago, the humans started the reclamation, which means they are counting the years all over again. But before the reclamation, there were still 2065 years passed...

Blain: Meaning...

Nicole: The world where humans recorded history exists for 5197 years...

Blain: shoot...

Nicole: You didn't know?

Blain: No...

As he stared back at the map again, I looked back at all those vehicles... They were really intimidating and lots of them were damaged and covered in dust and filth as thousands of years passed by...

Nicole: We gotta tell everyone...

Blain: What?

Nicole: ... I think it should be put in a museum or something...

Blain: No...

Nicole: Whadda ya mean no?!

Blain: No. It's best to leave it like this.

Nicole: What?! Why?!

Blain: Because, after you died, do you want anyone raiding your house and put your thongs and bra's on display in a museum so that everyone can stare at your crap stained underwear?

Nicole: ...

He had a point though... And my underwear isn't crap stained for fracks sake... Ew...

At some point, I noticed some TV... I turned it on for the hell of it and noticed it wasn't an ordinary TV... It did have images and sound but it was all black and white with red moving objects as the picture faded away once in a while.

Blain: It's infra red.

Nicole: What?

Blain: Infra red is used to track down targets during the night. It's mostly used on gunships.

Nicole: Ooh...

Then we both stared at it...

TV: Adjust elevation scan. Target reset.

TV: V1, rotate. V2, positive rate climb.

TV: There's hostile armour moving in from the south, near the S bend by the water tower.

TV: Eh, navigation, confirm you see the water tower.

TV: Roger. Target locked and waiting for your all go.

TV: Confirmed. Take him out.

TV: Copy. Mark-19 loaded.

TV: Gun ready!

TV: Fire when ready.

Then this little dot on the tv got annihilated...

TV: Kaaaaaaaaaboom...

TV: All units, be advised, a possible nuclear device has been found. NEST teams are on location to disarm it. All troops are to fall back to the east ASAP.

TV: Chalk 5, roger, falling back.

TV: Chalk 2 copy that.

TV: We're hit! We're hit! Chalk 3 is going down, Chalk 3 is going down!

TV: TOC, this is Chalk 4, Chalk 3 is down, repeat, Chalk 3 is down.

TV: Chalk 5, request to initiate a search and rescue.

TV: Roger Chalk 5, be advised that you are not guaranteed to survive in the event the device goes off.

TV: Copy that TOC, we're-

Then all of a sudden, we saw a big flash and everything started spinning... Then it went static...

Blain: Ouch...

Nicole: Whoa...

I turned the TV off and we looked around the base... We turned a corner and noticed that a huge part of the base was collapsed... We entered one of the doors but it broke down as soon as we tried to push it. It looked like some bed chambers with bunk beds stacked on top each other. It was a mess as lockers were down on the ground... One of them was open and contained a picture of a naked human lady... As we turned a corner, we got into what looked like showers. And there was a skeleton on the ground... With no clothes on him...

Blain: Poor bastard got shot while taking a shower.

Nicole: What a way to go.

Blain: Yeah... He died with a clean conscious and not that smelly.

Nicole: ...

Blain: ... Let's move on.

So we went back to the

Yeah I never got to finish it... And seemed to be a bit redundant to me.

Anyway, like with all stories, I'm kinda sad that it ended, but I can also say it helped me with a lot of things. And if something happened to you, how stupid it might seem, put it down in you're story. Well, if you're making a story. Because I can tell you, it will give you a fantastic story, written straight out of your heart. I feel kinda stupid to say that this is a fantastic story, but basically, all I did was writing down what was bothering me. You'll be judging if this was a "fantastic" story or not. To be honest, I can't tell. All I know is that it helped me a lot...

Thank you for reading this, and I hope you liked the story as much as I loved writing it...

MrGimp.

Dedicated to a good friend of mine...

Erik

** 19-05-1986 † 13-03-2008*