Possibly the only redemption story Anti-Tails has ever had.
Chapter 1

Shaking from fear and a low temperature, Miles was overwhelmed with the feeling of isolation and loss, thinking that it wasn't fair, blaming himself, and later on, thinking that he should've expected to have lost his friends when he was lucky a mutant like him even had people willing to give him a chance, that it was only a matter of time before he was forced to be alone once more.

Vividly having flashbacks multiple times in a row to all the times he was a three-to-four-year-old boy miserably longing for friends, he eventually became fed up, and refused to let the rest of his life be that way.

After some brief consideration, he determined that the best way to fill the void the Suppression Squad left in him, would be to replace them with the closest approximation to them he had, the Freedom Fighters. They were their counterparts, after all, and as their good, more caring twins, they should logically be even more likely to warm up to him and care about him.

But it couldn't be that simple. While they did claim to be heroes who helped people, he was still just a criminal to them. How long would he have to deal with being treated with disapproval, being an outcast in his own home? It would be like being back at the orphanage all over again, surrounded by people he wanted to like him who didn't.

Anti-Tails was faced with the fact that he'd have to become a hero for the rest of his life if he were to successfully earn the Freedom Fighters' friendship and keep it, and as a result of him already being miserable to begin with, this led him into a long, depressing, self-loathing train of thought full of introspection about whether or not he was satisfied with his life as a criminal.

No longer having friends around to peer pressure him, it finally dawned on Miles that for the first time in his life, he had the freedom to actually choose the path he would take in it. Before that point, he had always felt forced into doing the things he did from circumstance. He was forced to steal to stay alive on an island where no one valued his life, and was being forced to do evil deeds to keep the favor of his only allies. He always had a delusion or excuse to justify his actions, one that worked even when he felt that revenge against humanity wasn't enough of a good reason. He was a criminal to either stay alive or keep his friends and a life worth living as a result of them.

He hated Moebius for being full of people who were cruel and prejudiced to him, and the brief time he spent on Mobius never had him experience any prejudice, but he could never have chosen to come live there permanently and reap the benefits of a world with more accepting people because his allies were all Moebians, who would've just wanted him to commit crimes that would make the Mobians hate him regardless. He could never gain what he truly desired, and had to deal with the cons of his place in life in order to keep the benefits it gave him. He repressed the guilt and ignored how disturbing it was carrying out his orders, and pretended he was enjoying himself even more than everyone else was, but deep down, he was conflicted every single day, frustrated with how he wasn't nearly as satisfied with his lashing out as he wanted to be. But rather than being honest about that and opening himself up to scolding, persuasion and even rejection, he kept silent to keep the respect of his peers.

But now he was alone, with no one there to pressure him. He was independent and free. He could very well stay in Moebius, take advantage of the fact that he was made the heir to Alicia's throne, and live a lonely miserable existence as a petty and vengeful king. But that choice would make everything he would do afterwards entirely his fault. He would only end up being embarrassed and frustrated with himself for wasting his time lashing out at the world when he didn't actually want to. He knew he was already breaking down from his loss; the full burden of guilt crashing down on
him with no mercy would destroy him.

Thinking back to the landslide he almost got killed from forced him to think about the fact that he could've died that day. His life would've ended there, and no one would've missed him. His life had flashed before his eyes as he flew away from those falling boulders, and it forced him to focus on the fact that he wasn't happy with how he had lived his life. He wasn't happy with how his life had turned out and the legacy he had made for himself. Life was too short for wasting on what he had done.

Miles thought sadly, "For the first time in my life… I have the freedom to choose what to do with it… and now that I have that choice… I want to make the right decision… I want to do the right thing." His eyes widened in realization when he finished that thought, unable to believe it when he finally admitted it to himself and realized the implications. Was he truly happy with the legacy he made for himself? While it sounded like an excellent idea terrorizing his dimension because he viewed it as giving bullies who discriminated against him for his second tail what they deserved, ultimately he was only lashing out at people because of a lack of a proper outlet for his anger, and the nagging feeling of guilt that came from trampling on people weaker than himself with the help of the Suppression Squad offset the small satisfaction that came from it.

Revenge didn't get people to stop discriminating against him, it only made it worse and made him even more unhappy with himself. There was always a little nagging voice in his head criticizing his every mistake and flaw and saying that he himself was a bully, often taking on the voice of one of the many bullies he had suffered from in life who always said everything he suffered from was his fault. That was every day of his life, and it was as if the people of his island would always continue to haunt him, even long after Scourge had them all destroyed for what they did to his little brother figure in the past. He wondered if that nagging feeling, his insecurity and self-loathing drilled into him from birth, would at least be lessened if he made more of an effort to do the right thing, for more than just the few who weren't his enemies. If he was a productive person, instead of a detrimental one. "I've been worse than useless…" he thought sadly, wiping his tears away full of bitter hatred for himself.

He wondered if he would be more content in the long-term using his abilities to be productive to the world he lived in, and the idea of being productive on Mobius, a world that might actually deserve his help, sounded strangely appealing, particularly when he thought about how he never held back using his powers to destroy robots. Kintobor's robots never truly did anything wrong, so destroying them felt pathetic, and frustrating, and "surreal," in a way that he finally accepted meant that it felt wrong. It was thoroughly unsatisfying. He verbally expressed it as them not being a challenge to his criminal friends, who he always had to talk up his evilness to for the sake of getting them to respect him more, but he knew there was something missing that had nothing to do with that.

Destroying harmless street-cleaning robots felt like a petty waste of his time. Destroying the dangerous robots of Eggman would be the most satisfying use of his abilities that he would ever have, making himself look more powerful than ever before on Mobius while being completely in the right. It would be perfect, the ideal way to deal with his stress and to make use of his abilities and live his life.

Destroying Eggman's robots with the Freedom Fighters would be the most satisfying way to get out his anger and relieve his stress, all while feeling completely in the right. He could easily imagine Sonic supporting him on that, aside from perhaps complaining about him not leaving any robots for him to fight and stealing his thunder. He might still have to hold back against robots if that were the case even for Scourge's noble twin.
In fact, the more Miles thought about the idea of becoming allied with Sonic permanently, the more fond of the idea he became. " We seem to work surprisingly well together, " he remembered himself saying to Sonic on his previous encounter with him on Mobius, trying to look casual and relaxed at saying something so gutsy and forward to him. " You could say that, " Sonic had replied to him, so casually that he didn't even turn to look at him or stop smirking from landing his previous attack. He hadn't exactly shown any objection to it. That was before he threw Sonic with Scourge into a portal on Boomer's order and betrayed him. " Bon voyage, hedgehogs! " he remembered saying later, letting himself think that Sonic was just as bad as Scourge to enjoy himself in the moment that he ended up looking back at with regret.

Still trying to wipe away his tears as they kept coming out without stopping, he thought, " Sonic… Will he ever forgive me? " That stunned him into a clear mind for a couple seconds when it dawned on him the double meaning of that sentence. " Sonic… " Which one was he trying to refer to?

Much to his embarrassment, thinking of Sonic always led to him thinking of Scourge, and in desperate times, when he was full of anxiety and uncertainty, Miles always found himself thinking back to Scourge when he was his only friend and instinctively turning to that old version of him for advice, remembering how friendly he was to him back then with a nostalgic fondness and attachment. Conflicted more than ever before from anxiety over trying to carry out what he was planning, with no one left to turn to, it was only inevitable that he would start doing that at that desperate moment. " Damn it. What would Sonic say? " Miles thought, calling Scourge by the name he always knew him as in childhood out of habit.

He remembered what Scourge said to him as advice on how to live his life, vividly remembering a blue hedgehog with shades and a leather jacket smiling at him when he was a very young child. Wearing a leather jacket himself as well as dark sunglasses, his younger self asked Scourge twiddling his thumbs and looking down, " Bro, um, you know how you're the one raising me right? And, um, usually people who do that give valuable life advice on how to live life. W-What would you give me, for, uh, life advice? " still being timid and awkward around his friend. Scourge grinned in amusement commenting, " Never been asked that before, " and then after a brief moment of consideration, he smirked confidently while saying eagerly, " Live life to the fullest! "

Miles remembered that he had asked Scourge in his youthful ignorance, " Uh, fullest? " not understanding what he meant. He was often embarrassed when remembering when he was that young, and one of the reasons was his lack of education showing through; with his limited knowledge of common phrases, words and social customs, it was clear that he had never gone to school, and Scourge usually looked like the wiser one in comparison. Scourge lightheartedly teased him, " You know! " finding his ignorance cute. He chuckled and ruffled his hair before elaborating, " Enjoy life! It's as simple as that. Do what you want, and don't let anybody get in your way! If it makes ya happy, then do it! "

Miles reflected on that, uncertain for what was hardly the only time in response to it, as he often wondered how he was to follow that advice and do what made him happy when he wasn't sure what could make him truly happy to begin with. He usually just did what he was told; happiness was not the priority, loyalty was, because loyalty was necessary to avoid losing his happiness. If he didn’t stay loyal, he’d lose his friends and everything enjoyable about life. So in order to keep that from happening, he promised himself that if he ever got friends, he’d do whatever they said, therefore following a strict moral code of his own devising that was more important to him than anything. The hedonism Scourge encouraged was a childish mistake.

That was what separated him from Scourge. He valued his friends more than anything else, to the point of doing things he didn't always feel right about just for them. Unlike Scourge, he lived his
life according to rules, because he feared the consequences of breaking them, which would be losing everything he loved. Scourge broke the rule of mistreating his friends and ended up losing their respect and appreciation, and in the end, he even suffered through imprisonment for it. During his train of thought about the likelihood of him becoming a hero, Miles was unable to ignore the implication that him being rule-abiding to that extent, might prove that being honorable and noble was in his very nature when he followed a moral code of his own even in spite of the influence of his criminal friends. The fact that he had never ended anyone's life even when he believed they deserved it only proved it even more.

Scourge on the other hand, only cared about making himself happy, whether it was at the expense of others or not, and Miles didn't want to be like that, but he still wanted a happy life, even if he believed it required doing things he didn't want to in order to obtain and maintain it. In the middle of his grief-stricken breakdown, he had to ask himself a pertinent question. Was being evil lashing out at society giving him a happy life? He only remembered himself being frustrated during those deeds, never actually feeling better. While he respected Scourge and his life advice at first, he was confused at it from the fact that he wasn't sure what he could to do to make himself happy, other than making his friends happy enough to like him. He soon learned in life that he needed to be more in touch with what made him truly happy to understand how to properly follow his brother's advice.

Miles always defined the most reliable means of obtaining happiness as spending quality time with the people who cared about him and reminding himself that they did, so seeking out a new friendship would be the best possible choice of action following that advice. He still had his issues with Scourge for neglecting him later in life, but he had to admit he admired how he could enjoy life, unburdened by such issues as scary and upsetting memories and dissatisfaction with how life was not how he wanted it.

The only way he could think of to follow that advice to pursue happiness, was to apologize to the Freedom Fighters in order to seek out a friendship with them. It would be extremely difficult making himself go through with it, but in the long-term, it could be the first decision he ever made that would give him a genuinely happy life. It was just like Scourge always said, "You deserve to live like a king! Do whatever ya can to get yourself the good life!" He couldn't help but see the irony in how following the advice of Sonic's evil twin could lead to him becoming a hero instead. He could end up becoming one of the closest friends of Scourge's most hated enemy, and all from earnestly following his advice.

Having made his decision and unable to bear remaining in his own dimension any longer, Miles threw off his sheets, jumped out of bed, fled to Boomer's lab as fast as he could and got a hold of the fully functional teleporter Boomer had made for their planned attack on Mobius.

Picking it up and warping there with a flash of green light, he escaped to Mobius with tears still running down his face, and the minute he arrived in a damp cave there in a flash of light, he threw the teleporter to the rocky ground and made throwing motions with his arms flinging lightning bolts at it, grunting and shouting in a fit of a rage against the loss he experienced and the misery his old dimension had caused him. All of those overwhelming emotions came out of him at once and he expressed it in the safest way he knew how. "I'm never coming back! Ever! Again!" Miles exclaimed furiously incinerating the device, as the once clear sky above him became obscured by black rainclouds that proceeded to send torrential rains out of them with rapid thunder and lightning.

After standing over the completely incinerated ashes of where his teleporter used to be panting in exhaustion, Miles caught his breath at last, was frustrated with himself for accidentally summoning a freezing storm for himself from his emotional turmoil, tried and failed to get rid of it because he
wasn't in the right emotional state for stopping storms, and stormed out of the cave not even being sure which direction he needed to head in.

He immediately had to force himself to deal with being soaking wet from freezing rain and wind that motivated him to move as fast as he could to the limestone cave that Freedom Fighters HQ was built into. However, his preferred method of flying wasn't ideal in the pouring rain where moving that fast would only make the freezing rain and wind fly in his face much faster, making him unable to see and even colder than before. So with great reluctance, he set about flying in the way he usually had to in the worst of storms.

He jumped in the air hovering over the ground with his spinning tails above him and quickly moved his arms around in a circle to summon a tornado below him to catch and hold him above it, but only temporarily that time, considering the method of flight he'd have to contend with. By shaking his bent-upwards fingers as they were raised slightly above his head, he turned down the temperature of the air around him to freeze its water vapor solid, creating a sphere of ice around him that had a hole in the bottom for him to look through from above as he reluctantly flew with his tails despite the pain, blasting wind behind the ice sphere surrounding him to thrust him forwards four times as fast as before.

He wanted to get out of the rain and get the apologizing over with as fast as possible. His nerves were already shot from having just witnessed the death of all of his friends, and the more time he spent flying to Freedom Fighters HQ in a dark and stormy night, the more nervous he became about approaching the people he had wronged so much in the past, and in an effort to subtly become a permanent ally. He knew he wouldn't receive a warm welcome, and wasn't sure that he would be able to handle it. All he was going to do was give a quick apology and ask to stay with them "for a little while," assisting them, but even that was nerve-wracking.

A nervous wreck by that point, he was overwhelmed with stress as he couldn't help coming up with the worst case scenarios for how they would react to his presence in the worst possible ways, imagining them shouting at him and attacking him and even tying him up and imprisoning him and calling the international police, all without ever listening to him, or calling him a liar. He was petrified, terrified that even though making himself ask them to let him stay with them and expressing regret for how he treated them in the past would be very difficult for him, it was possible the Freedom Fighters would not appreciate how hard it would be for him and only call him a manipulating liar. The best he could hope for was that he would break down crying in front of them and get their sympathy from that rather than being called manipulating even more, but he was dreading humiliating himself like that, and it only made him feel worse.

By the time he got to their front door, he was trembling, both from the freezing cold rain and wind he had to deal with before he had started flying, and from being completely frightened and hysterical. Shaking his hands to melt the ice sphere surrounding him and free himself, he landed on his feet in front of the locked door, thankful that no one else was watching him. To make sure they wouldn't think he was an enemy the instant they saw him, he moved the flip-switch on each of his spiked bracelets to make the spikes fold harmlessly into them, didn't try to fake an annoyed or dignified expression to look normal when that would only make him look hateful, and took a deep if shaky breath to attempt to steady his nerves before timidly knocking on the door very lightly three times in a row.

The wait that came afterwards was nerve-wracking, as he dreaded the salt in the wound that would be Sally's familiar judgmental glare the minute she'd see him again. He forced tears back by blinking irregularly and trying to clear his mind, not wanting to be humiliated the minute they saw him again. But after an entire minute had passed with him fidgeting and looking around nervously before he finally realized how much time had passed, it dawned on him that it was too late at night
for him to get any kind of response from them. It was past midnight when he finally went to Mobius. "I've wasted most of the night crying like a weak-minded fool…" he thought with downcast eyes, his head hung low. He was so ashamed.

He considered ringing the doorbell, but immediately decided against it pulling his hand back like he was about to touch a hot stove, horrified at the prospect that waking everyone up with that would only put them in a very unforgiving mood with him and refuse to listen to what he said. "Of course," he bitterly muttered to himself, silently facepalming and shaking his head at himself. At first, he instinctively thought about breaking into the house from opening or damaging the window and sleeping in the basement, as he had done as a homeless three-year-old hundreds of times before, but he soon came to his senses upon remembering exactly where he was. Breaking into a house to get a warm place to sleep wasn't an option for him, because that would only land him in hot water with the Freedom Fighters and the police if he was discovered. "No, no…I can't…" he said quietly with his eyes closed, with a sinking feeling losing all hope, holding his head with both hands as it started to ache.

If he was to make a good impression on the heroes the minute they found him in their world, he couldn't do anything to implicate himself. He couldn't commit any crime and then expect them to trust him. It was horrifying for him. He was stuck in the worst possible situation. He was homeless, but unlike on his old island, he didn't have the option of breaking into a house for a warm place to sleep. For at least one night, he was in a worse situation than he had been as "the island mutant," and that terrified him. He was lucky it wasn't the winter.

Frustrated with himself for not being rational enough to realize he would've wasted his time, and getting irrationally worried that he might never find the Freedom Fighters before they found him and jumped to conclusions, tears welled up in his eyes again obscuring his vision. He jumped into the air spinning his tails behind him like a propeller and flew away as fast as he possibly could forcing himself to look enraged to try and hide it. The cold wind and rain stung as it was sent towards his face and body much faster than normal as he was propelled forwards in the stormy sky by wind blasting out of his palms behind him, but he was so overwhelmed by his thoughts and anxieties that he didn't care. "Who cares if I freeze now?!" he thought in frustration and sadness, hating his situation and himself.

Landing on his feet in front of the cave several minutes later, he ran inside the cave taking shelter from the storm and sat down in exhaustion, shivering uncontrollably with his bottom lip quivering blinded by the tears. Accepting his situation, Miles slowly laid down on the cold hard rocky floor, breaking down sobbing on his side with his eyes squeezed shut and his tails wrapping around himself for warmth, longing for a comforting embrace that would never come. With his arms around his chest shivering on the ground to try to emulate such an embrace, exhaling in short sharp breaths and then gasping every so often to breathe in the thick moist air of the cave that only made him feel worse, everything about his experience was directly reminding him of when he was a very young child, forced to sleep in cold caves with no proper home for himself on an island full of people who demonized him from birth. "It's not fair…" he thought, not bothering to speak out loud when his voice would only come out as a pathetic whimper and make him feel even worse.

Miles spent the rest of the night tossing and turning on the cave floor, lost in memories of the past and fearing the future. He wasn't sure how much longer he'd be able to take it. With the fear that it was all hopeless buzzing around in his head, he wondered if keeping himself alive at that point was even worth it. He felt overwhelmed, trapped, and helpless.

When morning finally arrived, he realized to his dismay that he hadn't slept at all, and with his eyelids feeling heavy and his eyes still watering, he reminded himself of what he couldn't put off doing. He had to force himself to push himself up off the rocky floor, stand up feeling unsteady and
disoriented, and slowly walk to the Freedom Fighters' base in the freezing rain, too exhausted to fly there and get there faster.

The bottoms of his boots were soaked through the soles at that point, and his gloves were dripping wet above his bracelets, sticking to his hands more tightly in the process. As he passed by puddles on the ground during his walk, seeing his muddy reflection in them only made him feel even worse, as all he could see in them was a freak, a two-tailed abomination of nature, and if that wasn't bad enough, one who used to be a criminal at that, a villain. If one aspect of himself wouldn't get him discriminated against, he was certain that the other one would. Would his situation improve at all? He eventually started trying to ignore the puddles entirely, hoping he wouldn't break down crying out in the open during the day, even if there was no chance of anyone seeing him in the wilderness.

When he finally reached the door to the base again, there was no one there to answer the door, and when he made it all the way to Sally's castle, tears running down his face by that point, he couldn't bring himself to ring the doorbell, knowing there might be a panic caused if the wrong person answered the door. This was enough to break his resolve, and he ran back to his cave with tears in his eyes losing all hope and courage.

He was terrified that if he did get allowed to stay with them, he would be ostracized by the Freedom Fighters for the rest of his life at best, or rejected by them outright at worst. He didn't know what to do. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life miserable and alone, doing nothing but crying in a cave in between somehow finding meals for himself. After waiting for one of the Freedom Fighters to come to him through a miracle, he eventually started to give up.
After putting the last of the dishes in the dishwasher in his Cocoa Island cabin on vacation for the week, Tails glanced through his window at the cliff across from his house on the way out of the kitchen, only to stop in his tracks and gasp at what he just saw. "Anti-Tails?!" he exclaimed. His evil twin was falling off a cliff, potentially to his death, and there didn't seem to be anything he could do about it.

Panicked at seeing his injured evil counterpart plummeting unconscious towards the ocean, Tails gasped, ran outside to the beach beneath where he would land as fast as he could, and dived into the ocean after him in an impulse.

Spinning his tails behind him to generate a force that would push him towards Miles faster, Tails grabbed his hands as he sank away from him, and started spinning his tails above him like a propeller, flying out of the water carrying both his and Miles' weight and bringing his bleeding counterpart out of it just in time, and started gasping for air as soon as he broke the surface.

After flying until he was just above the sandy beach, he let go of Miles' hands and saw him limply drop to the ground unconscious. Tails gasped, and kneeled on the sand in front of him and examined him in a panic. Lying on his back with an unhappy expression and his eyes closed in unconsciousness, Miles had three very noticeable wounds; a long cut along his left tail, a small but deep cut on the side of his left hand leaving his glove torn, and a third cut across the top of his right hand with the same effect. All three of the cuts were steadily bleeding at a thankfully slow rate, which had caused the water Miles sank into to be stained red with his blood. He was covered in dirt and grass stains, and was dripping wet from head to toe, with the usually neat black tuft of hair on his head drooping downwards from the seawater and nearly covering his left eye.

Scared and trying to remain calm, Tails stammered, "M-Miles?" Despite his mouth being ever so slightly open, Miles didn't seem to be breathing. He was lying on his back on the beach completely motionless and silent. Worried, Tails placed his hand on the middle of Miles' chest, trying not to press too hard against it and impede his breathing, and while he was relieved to feel a heartbeat from him, discovering for certain that he wasn't breathing caused panic to overwhelm him.

"No! No!" he exclaimed, and desperately pushed against the middle of his chest with his hand facing sideways, and started pounding on it with his fist using his other hand. After five seconds with no results, Tails became desperate enough to force him to reflexively cough by lightly hitting the front of his soaking wet neck, trying to go easy on him to avoid hurting him, and to his relief, it worked, forcing Miles to cough up some water as the blood returned to his head from the chest compression. With his mouth finally clear of water, he started breathing again at last, his chest rising and falling slightly beneath Tails' hands, although he was still showing no signs of waking up. "Oh, thank goodness! It worked!" Tails thought, glad that his desperate method hadn't backfired on him.

But then his attention returned to his cuts. If he didn't get treatment for them soon, they would continue bleeding until he would go into fatal shock, rendering all of his efforts to save him pointless. This was especially problematic because Miles was showing no signs of returning to consciousness any time soon, and Tails couldn't risk him losing too much blood by waiting for him to wake up so he could convince him to come home with him of his own will. Tails sighed reluctantly, and thought, "I can't believe I'm doing this for my evil twin, but... I can't let him die! If he ended up dying because of me, I'd... I'd never forgive myself... You owe me big time, Miles. I hope you'll appreciate this."
With that, he got into the process of lifting his cold limp counterpart into his arms, by slightly turning his legs over before placing his left hand underneath his knees and pushing them back with the other hand, lifting them up from beneath now that they were being held in his arm. With his other arm at around the same time, he pushed the side of Miles' chest to turn him slightly on his side, placed it beneath him and started lifting him up by his back. Holding him up by the back of the knees and his back, he made sure he supported his neck by having Miles' head resting against his shoulder, and with that, he started spinning his tails behind him vertically and ran to his house with his injured counterpart in his arms, moving at over 530 miles per hour hovering above the ground. He was worried about the possibility of his fast movement agitating Miles' injuries, but he wanted to get him home and stop his bleeding as fast as possible.

Rushing into his house on top of the hill in the Mystic Ruins, Tails lowered Miles to the couch carefully and pulled his arms away from beneath him, regretful that he would make the couch wet and stained from Miles' soaking wet and bleeding body, but believing that putting him on the floor would be too callous.

Overwhelmed from having so many different things he needed to do for Miles at once, Tails tried not to panic as he lifted Miles' legs up to push a pillow beneath them, elevating them along with his tails, which were resting on top of his legs limply. He knew that elevating his legs would increase the amount of blood in his heart and make sure there was more blood getting to his vital organs, helping with shock if he had any, and would decrease the amount of bleeding from his tail as a result of the decreased amount of blood going to it.

Trying to properly prioritize his actions while in a hurry, Tails was deep in thought with an upset expression as he ran in a yellow blur to his washroom cabinet from the living room hallway, opened it up to take out the First Aid Kit, pulled a towel off the rack and rushed to Miles' side with them in his hands, dropped the towel in front of the couch for later use and opened the First Aid Kit placing it on the floor right in front of the couch.

Deciding to stop the bleeding first and foremost, Tails grabbed a bottle of anti-bleeding powder, held it upside-down facing cotton balls and started shaking it so that powder fell out of the holes in its lid onto them, and immediately grabbed each of the two cotton balls with each of his hands and started holding them against the cuts in Miles' hands for four seconds until he felt the bleeding stop beneath them.

Tossing the used cotton balls over his shoulder cringing at how they were stained red, Tails grabbed the powdered cotton balls that he hadn't yet used with both hands and quickly held them against the wound on Miles' left tail, which was slashed to have a long cut in it that required multiple cotton balls to treat. After holding them against his tail for four seconds and tossing them over his shoulder, Tails thought with concern, "How could someone do this?... Thank goodness I got to him! I don't wanna think about what would have happened if I hadn't been there..."

Having finished getting his bleeding to stop, Tails proceeded to twist the lid off a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, pour it onto some more cotton balls, pick up two of them and start holding them against the cuts on Miles' hands, looking at his expression to see if the stinging pain of his cuts being disinfected would wake him up. It didn't, although he could subconsciously feel it, his face looking stressed and on edge, and Tails wondered if it was affecting his dreams, if he had indeed started dreaming in his passed out state. He seemed to have bags under his eyes, with his eyes looking sunken from beneath, indicating that he hadn't gotten enough sleep, and Tails wondered if him being tired was what contributed to him being injured and thrown off the cliff so easily, and if his lack of sleep was part of why he stayed unconscious for so long despite the blood being sent to his head.
After tossing the used cotton balls onto the table to be discarded properly later, Tails brought the rest of the disinfectant-covered cotton balls to the long cut across Miles’ tail, and disinfected it with a worried look before tossing the rest of the cotton balls onto the table. He picked up the roll of bandages from the First Aid Kit, pulled it and the bandage in opposite directions to get a long roll of bandages ready, used scissors on the bandage to cut it free and lifted up Miles’ tail from beneath to wrap the bandage around its cut until it was covered.

With Miles’ tail properly treated, resting on top of his legs above the other tail with the entire middle part of it wrapped in bandages, Tails looked over at the cuts on his hands, and had to hold back a groan of unhappiness, knowing it would be difficult to pull off Miles’ dripping wet gloves and shirt so that he could dry off properly. Pulling off his shirt especially would be a difficult task, considering he wouldn't be making it easier for him and he was worried about waking him up by doing so, and the fact that the shirt was a turtleneck made it worse, as the neck part of it would have to be pulled at from both ends from the inside to get it over his head.

Being careful around the spikes of Miles' black bracelets, Tails slowly and gently pulled off his left glove one finger at a time starting from the one nearest to him, and when he finally pulled the glove off holding the tips of the fingers with his hand, he gasped at seeing what was beneath it. He had never seen a hand so scarred in his entire life. It was covered in the old remains of years-old cuts scattered in every different direction, to the point where Tails was reluctant to see the rest of it, and he could've sworn he saw the remains of years-old burn marks as well.

After five seconds of staring at the hand in stunned silence, Tails reluctantly lifted it up from beneath and held it by the fingers as he wrapped a bandage around it, dressing the wound on the side of it with a devastated expression. He couldn't believe he had suffered so many injuries to his hand in his young life. Even if he was working in a criminal gang, he still had a hand that was far too rough and cracked for his age, to the point where it was clear that the injuries had been systematically done on purpose by someone with vicious intent. "I hope it wasn't Scourge…" he thought.

After he finished bandaging his left hand, he dreaded seeing the other one, and reluctantly pulled off his glove by the fingers and revealed that it was even more scarred than the first, although it was hard to tell, as a fresh wound was right across the top of it potentially blocking his view of even more scars and attracting all of his attention right away. Lifting up his limp hand from beneath the fingers, he wrapped the last of the bandages he needed around it, using scissors to cut the bandage short after finishing up with it and pulling it away from his hand.

Tails then proceeded to place the roll of bandages back in the First Aid Kit, take advantage of his speed to quickly discard all of the used cotton balls in the nearby trash bin using napkins, and hesitated for a moment before getting to removing his wet cold clothes.

Upon closer examination, he discovered that he could flip a tiny switch in Miles' spiked bracelets to make the spikes fold into the bracelet and become harmless to him, and found that rather convenient. After that, he pulled each bracelet from opposite ends to stretch them out and pull them over his hands to remove them. Hoping that Miles wouldn't be too annoyed with him upon waking up without them, Tails placed them on the table and got to work pulling Miles' distinctive red shirt off. He lifted up his shirt from the front of his chest and lifted him up from beneath his upper back slightly to fully pull it away from his torso, lifted his right arm almost all the way up to help with getting it out of the sleeve and gently placing the arm on the couch afterwards, and repeating the same with his left arm, incredibly thankful for his shirt being loose on him rather than tight because it made removing it easier.
Finally, he carefully pulled the neck part of his shirt from both ends to stretch it out and pulled his shirt over his head as fast as he possibly could getting it off him in a hurry, and finally removed the shirt at last, sighing in relief at the ordeal being over without Miles even stirring, too exhausted and weakened from blood loss to wake up. He was lying on the couch without his shirt soaking wet, with the dyed black tuft of hair on his head drooping from all the water and having the seawater running down his face as a result.

After quickly leaving the room with the wet shirt and gloves, putting them in the dryer and then returning to Miles' side, Tails pulled off his boots one at a time and brought them to the side of the couch, picked up the soft towel from the floor at last, and towed him down from head to toe starting with his head, trying to at least dry off the front and sides of his body. He was very careful and gentle about drying his face with the towel, not wanting to risk waking him up as he dried off his forehead, cheeks and chin. By the time he started drying off his legs, he had to use the other side of the towel to dry him off because it had become too wet on the side he was using.

With Miles still looking wet, but not nearly as much as before, Tails examined him again, wondering if there was anything else he needed to do for him. Looking at his exposed fingers moving apart the thin fur covering them showed that his skin was pale, and he laid on the couch completely silent and motionless, causing Tails to lightly place his hand on his chest to check his breathing rate and discover how weak, infrequent, and slow it was, with Miles taking several seconds for a single weak breath. Getting worried that his oxygen intake wasn't enough, his eyes darted around nervously for a few seconds until he noticed a lotion called Vix Vapo Rub in the First Aid Kit, in a container shaped like a half-circle with a flat base. Reading its label revealed that it would help facilitate respiration in someone struggling with it.

After untwisting and pulling off its lid, Tails pulled off his right glove removing the black cufflink on it to do so, and after a second of uncomfortable hesitation, he reluctantly covered the palm of his hand with the lotion before gently rubbing it over Miles' chest underneath the fur, thinking awkwardly, "I can't believe I'm doing this for him," and hoping he wouldn't wake up at that exact moment. Tails wondered whether or not he should try to find out from him where Miles' scars came from. Knowing him, he might refuse to tell him for being his enemy; in fact, Tails had a hard time imagining Miles being anything but difficult to work with as soon as he woke up to his arch nemesis trying to nurse him back to health. As a result, Tails was caught between a mixture of gratitude at him being asleep and anxiety and impatience at it, knowing that he wouldn't be able to give him food and water in the state he was in and that his prolonged unconsciousness by itself was cause for concern.

After successfully covering Miles' chest with Vapo Rub and using a towel to remove the residue lotion from the fur above it, he ran in a yellow blur to the washroom with the towel, removed his left glove, and started washing his hand of the clearly scented lotion with soap and water, being in a hurry because he didn't want Miles to wake up without him around; he still didn't trust him alone in his house, and he wanted to be there right away to tell him that he helped him.

After seven nerve-wracking seconds, Tails dried off his hands with a towel, picked up the red bathrobe hanging on the door, got dry gloves for himself from his bedroom cabinet, and rushed to Miles' side once again.

Still frantically worried, Tails examined him again with his hand on his chest, and was relieved that he was breathing better while still being worried. As he put the slightly warm bathrobe on Miles, he lifted him up at various points to put his arms in the sleeves and make sure that all of his back was covered by it, and once he had finished putting a warm dry bathrobe on Miles, he covered him over with the soft blankets on the other end of the couch to warm him up, and waited for him to regain consciousness while holding back tears taking deep breaths to calm himself down, hoping
He was dreading him waking up, but at the same time, he couldn't stand him remaining unconscious and incapacitated and worrying him even further. The wait was nearly unbearable, but he had to allow him to wake up on his own, as a rude awakening would give a negative first impression that might overshadow everything he did to help him.

Minutes later, Miles finally began to stir in his sleep, the scent of the Vix Vapo Rub on his chest working as well as smelling salts to bring him back to his senses. He moaned miserably, and squeezed his eyes more tightly shut to better endure the pain of his injuries, awakening to stinging cuts while Tails fidgeted in anxiety waiting for one of his worst enemies to wake up and negatively respond to his act of compassion.

As he slowly regained consciousness, his senses returned to him, flooding him with new information. The stinging cuts on his tail and hands were bandaged and had stopped their bleeding, which he noticed as soon as he tried to move them. He was lying on his back on a comfortable couch covered in soft warm blankets with his legs having a firm pillow underneath them, making sure they were elevated to a higher position than his head. His entire body felt soaking wet, as if he had recently showered, but at the same time, he wasn't as dripping wet as he could be, as if the front of his body had been toweled off. His shirt, bracelets, boots and gloves had been removed with his shirt replaced with a warm and soft bathrobe that reached all the way down to covering his knees. It felt like there was familiar lotion on his chest that had a strong scent to it, a lotion that he quickly recognized and mildly appreciated.

Focused on the pain he was in the most of all, Miles vividly remembered the cause of his injuries. He had goaded a group of criminals into attacking him and then rushed to the nearest cliff as fast as possible in a desperate impulsive attempt to end his own life, collapsing from exhaustion into the ocean, and it was clear to him that someone had saved him from his earlier fatal predicament. There was no other explanation.

But the most shocking revelation of all to him was the identity of his rescuer. Having a strong mental connection with electricity, Miles recognized it immediately, feeling the presence of an electromagnetic field formed by electric charges that was in the shape of someone quite familiar to him; Tails. The one who saved his life and was nursing him back to health, was Tails. Someone he always thought hated him with a passion, actually valued his life, after all of the times he treated him with disdain.

Miles was stunned at Tails being forgiving enough to help him as much as he did after all of the times he had hurt and insulted him, without him even having a reason to believe it would turn out well for him. Even though he had always heard that Tails was a good person, he didn't think he would ever do anything kind for him. Tails saved his life, and he had done nothing to earn such compassion.

He was overwhelmed by the depressing feeling that he didn't deserve his help, that Tails should've let him drown in retribution for the way he had mistreated him, but from some strange fluke of the universe, he spared him. He showed him mercy. Miles wanted to believe that the amount of suffering he had been through in life did more than enough to earn him compassionate gestures, but Tails felt sorry for him enough to help him even without knowing what he had been through.

"Perhaps I was wrong about that 'little boy...' " Miles thought sadly to himself. Even if he was still bitterly jealous of his happiness and didn't respect his idealistic outlook, he would always appreciate his kindness.

Of course, appreciating his kindness was one thing, but being open and honest about it and looking
humble and vulnerable in the process was another thing entirely, and he knew he'd have a harder time swallowing his pride and doing that, than treating him the way he usually did and maintaining what was left of his dignity. But he didn't want to repay the rare kindness from him by treating him with his usual bitterness and making him regret going to all that trouble for him, making it look like he wasn't worth it, and he already looked weak in front of him just from being injured, so trying to act tough was pointless when he could barely stand.

Before he could even consider the idea of pretending to be asleep until he left and then leaving when he was gone, he heard Tails say to him in a worried tone, " M-Miles?... Are you, um, can you hear me? Are you alright? "

Still stunned at being shown compassion and sympathy, Miles remained silent in shame, having a hard time bringing himself to speak to him in a manner that he never had before, and worried him as a result. " C-Can you sit up? I, do you want something to eat? I-I've got some chicken noodle soup, but, you'd have to sit up to eat it, at the table, and, you might be too dizzy or, get a head rush or something, I don't know… But it'd still be best for you to eat it. I don't want you catching a cold from falling in the cold ocean and being wet for so long. D-Do you, do you want some? " Tails stammered nervously, feeling awkward about the situation and preparing for the worst.

The prospect of being given chicken noodle soup when he was hungry was too tempting for Miles to resist, and his survival instincts proved stronger than his pride as he finally gave a response, nodding with a sad look on his face. He decided he may as well be honest with him; Tails must have known he was able to hear him because he was speaking to him in the first place, so there was no point in pretending otherwise.

Miles forced himself to sit up, which was even more difficult with his legs being elevated, and forced his eyes open centimeter by centimeter when his eyelids felt too heavy and urged him to get some more sleep. Trying to keep his bandaged tail still as he sat up and turned around to face Tails a little, he let a moan slip out in the process as his blurry vision mostly cleared, and he hoped that his leaning against the inner wall of the couch in exhaustion wouldn't make himself look even more weak in front of Tails, even if he wasn't functionally his enemy at the moment. In fact, for all intents and purposes, Tails was his friend, and he wasn't sure how to feel about that. Did he prefer being enemies with Tails? Did he like it? Did he really enjoy being enemies with anyone at all, considering that they would hurt him and insult him and act against him as a result? It seemed better to be friends with him than enemies, but acting as such would look very undignified of him, and require him to apologize to him first to gain his trust, which he dreaded doing.

Resting his back against the couch to the left of him feeling light-headed from a head rush, he sighed quietly with his hand on his head as it ached and his hands and left tail continued to sting fiercely, and Tails looked at him in sympathy for a few moments. Aware of how he was being stared at with pity, Miles was full of conflicting emotions at his compassion and kindness, torn between humiliated frustration at looking weak in front of him, stunned confusion at someone being nice to him for once, blissful appreciation of being treated with such compassion, and an insecure belief that he didn't truly deserve it.

Knowing he would feel guilty about leaving Miles alone even for a few seconds, Tails picked up the remote control for the TV and said sweetly with a nervous smile, " Wanna watch some TV for a while? I've got the Discovery channel on this, so, it's educational! I'll keep the volume down low and with subtitles on so it doesn't make your headache even worse. " Looking away from Tails ashamed, Miles mumbled awkwardly, " Y-Yes, um, thank you, " very self-conscious of being polite to him for once as Tails turned on the TV, turned down the volume and turned on the subtitles for him.
After that, Tails said, "I'll be right back," and ran into the kitchen in a yellow blur, disappearing from view in seconds and leaving him alone, overwhelming him with an undeniable emptiness in his heart at being left alone in the state he was in. After having to resist the urge to call out for him to come back, he realized what that implied about him and felt ashamed. "I'm pathetic..." Miles muttered under his breath with a bitter look and downcast eyes, embarrassed of how desperately he craved being treated with love and kindness. He then hoped that Tails didn't hear what he said, being ashamed of how he still kept his old habit of talking to himself quietly to distract himself from the fact that there was no one for him to actually talk to.

With his back and the back of his head resting against the soft couch behind him, shivering slightly from falling into the cold ocean recently, struggling to keep his eyes open with the effect of so many sleepless nights still making him weary, he found himself listening more to the noise in the kitchen than the sound coming from the commercials on the TV, hearing a can opener being used for a while, a bowl and silverware being brought out of a cupboard and drawer, and a bowl being placed in the microwave and heated up after the contents of the can were poured into it. He then had to ignore his irrational paranoid worry that his old enemy was poisoning his soup, knowing that it was ridiculous after all the effort Tails had put into saving his life, but still remembering the last time he had taken food from a known enemy.

After what felt like forever, but was only a few minutes, Tails carefully walked into the room and placed the bowl of soup on the table saying gently, "There you go." Miles reluctantly forced himself off the couch and sat in front of the table with his head hung low to start on his soup with the blankets still wrapped around warming him up, taking his time with it from knowing that it was hot.

Tails said nervously, "Y-Your shirt and gloves are in the dryer for now. You'd take longer to dry off and warm up if I left them on you. Hope you don't mind wearing my bathrobe for now. It's a perfect fit!... Do you like it?" trying awkwardly to make him feel more at home. "Yes..." Miles said reluctantly, and added, "It's warm, and soft..." with a look of discomfort and annoyance. Tails' attempt at making conversation with his evil counterpart had failed, but he at least didn't seem to hate him at the moment.

Tails sat on the couch behind him at the other side of it, staring at him sadly, and the silence between them started to become increasingly uncomfortable as time passed, since both of them were painfully aware of how badly Tails wanted to get answers out of him and how reluctant Miles was to tell him anything.

Looking depressed and melancholic at seeing his own gloveless hands, Miles was especially not looking forward to Tails questioning him about the scars that he had no way of not noticing when he removed his gloves. He wasn't sure if he could talk about them without getting worked up, and he looked weak enough in front of him already without getting upset in front of him from revealing how he was treated in the past. At the same time, he did find it appealing the idea of having a sympathetic ear to vent about his past experiences to, as he barely did that with anyone. Most of the time, he would hold it all inside, not trying to talk about what was bothering him with anyone, because he was convinced that people didn't care and would never understand, and would only look down on him for being so troubled.

So deep down, he craved being able to tell Tails what had happened to him in the past and get his compassion and sympathy, finally having someone who wasn't on his side understand him. But it didn't change the fact that looking weak in front of someone, and thus looking like an easy target, was something he instinctively wanted to avoid. He doubted that Tails would think he had a persecution complex like everyone else did, but he still didn't look forward to even so much as implying what had happened to him.
At last, Tails finally broke the silence between them, saying unhappily, "Miles?" Knowing what was coming, Miles sighed, and replied reluctantly, "What?"

"Do they still hurt?" Tails asked sadly, with his voice almost a whisper from sympathy. Miles stopped what he was doing and looked at him stunned, with an unhappy expression on his face, having a hard time adjusting to the idea that someone actually felt sorry for him. He was especially stunned at how that was Tails' very first question, showing that he cared about his well-being more than anything else; he was expecting him to inquire into the nature of the injuries and who did it before bothering to think about how they affected him. "Tails..." he said quietly as his gaze went down to the scars on his hands. He wasn't entirely comfortable with calling him Tails, considering it to be inherently hurtful, but he wasn't sure what else he could call him; he couldn't get around it by calling him by an insult after everything he had done for him that day.

After a four second silence, Miles finally answered, "Occasionally..." reluctant to look weak in front of him, but wanting to be honest in spite of it. After hearing his response, Tails felt even more sorry for him, and started to get a scared look in his eyes as he thought about what kind of person would cause his scars in the first place. After another four second silence, Miles reluctantly admitted, "Mainly when I wash them... When something like soap gets into my scars, they tend to sting..." and Tails wondered if the salty seawater would've made them sting even more.

"Who would do such a thing?" Tails said quietly, looking devastated and trying to hold back tears of sympathy. Miles continued to unhappily avoid eye contact with him and finish up his soup until Tails asked, "Was it Scourge?"

"He would never do that!" Miles exclaimed defensively as he turned to face Tails in an instant, looking both offended and horrified that he would even say such a thing. Tails flinched and jumped from his sudden outburst of anger, and the fact that he was standing up for Scourge confused him more than anything else. As Tails looked nervous and intimidated from upsetting one of his worst enemies that much, Miles continued indignantly, "In fact, he was the only one who ever stood up for me back when I was... alone..."

He realized as he was ending his sentence that he had startled Tails with his response, and felt terrible about it, wishing he had just bottled up his anger instead of immediately expressing it in a knee-jerk reaction, one that he had ever since he had first become friends with Scourge, when he was so grateful for his friendship and positive attention that he was blindly loyal to him. By the final word of his sentence, he looked sad, with just mentioning his past in the passing filling him with an intense sadness that was impossible to hide, and his embarrassment and shame over instinctively defending Scourge as if nothing had changed between them made him feel even worse.

He was stuck in the past, and he hated when he made that clear, reacting like he would if he was in an earlier point in time even when that was completely irrational. Miles resented Scourge, but he still couldn't help but stand up for him, because the idea of him being compared to his old bullies was infuriating after everything Scourge had done for him, after everything he had said and done to make it clear that he hated the people who abused him that way.

Feeling terrible about the fact that he intimidated the very person who went to such lengths to help him, Miles looked him in the eyes and apologized sadly, "I'm sorry I yelled at you... I didn't, I... forgot who I was talking to..." with a depressed tone in a voice that was almost a whisper. He looked away from him again, trying to hold back tears as he drank up the last of his chicken noodle soup, and Tails needed a couple seconds for it to sink in that his evil counterpart had actually apologized to him. He couldn't believe it. He must have really appreciated his help. Tails was stunned that Miles was grateful for it at all instead of feeling entitled to it and not obligated to repay his kindness in turn.
"It's okay, Miles. At least you said you were sorry. But I owe you an apology too. I didn't know that, I mean, I just assumed it was him, because, no one else came to mind. I, I didn't mean to..." Tails said sadly, with a nervous smile at the first two sentences. After hesitating briefly, he asked him gently, "Who was it, Miles?... You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I just... I just wanna help..."

There was a silence, as Miles deeply considered just telling him the truth. Doing so would require a lot of explanation, and he could barely talk about his past without getting worked up. He wanted to talk about it with someone sympathetic and be comforted for it, but at the same time, he didn't want to look weak in front of him and cause him to completely stop taking him seriously as an enemy... even if he had a hard time thinking of Tails as his enemy anymore after everything he had done for him.

Miles sighed, and said in a depressed tone with a bitter expression, "People are cruel... Cruel and heartless... It's no one you know, so if I gave you names, they'd mean nothing. With downcast eyes and his head hung low, he added under his breath, "I barely even knew them myself..."

Looking even more worried than before, Tails hesitated for a moment before getting off the couch, sitting right next to him, and asking sadly, "Was it your parents?" placing his hand on his shoulder. He felt a startled jolt from Miles at the physical contact, and while this implied that he was surprisingly easily startled, what confused him even more was how quickly Miles went from being startled to appreciating his kind gesture, with his shoulders relaxing from the affection almost as quickly as they had tensed up. Was he used to that from someone else?

"I never knew my parents..." Miles admitted after regaining his composure, with an irritated look on his face trying to cover for his melancholic tone. "Are they... are they dead?" Tails asked sadly, hoping he wasn't asking too many personal questions. To his relief, Miles continued to give him answers, going into a rant as if the floodgates had been opened.

"No, but they're dead to me... They abandoned me at an orphanage when I was a day old saying I was a disgrace to the family and they never wanted to see me again. For something I can't even help! I didn't even do anything wrong!... Although I suppose I should be grateful. They could've easily left me in the woods to die or kept me chained up in their basement all my life, being neglected and abused and barely given enough to survive. A lot of parents have done that to an unwanted child. At least they had the decency to leave me at an orphanage when they didn't want me, so that there was at least the possibility that I'd be adopted by parents who wanted me, as nonexistent as that possibility was because everyone I meet takes one look at me and recoils in disgust..." Miles ranted bitterly as Tails listened in sympathy with a look of anxiety on his face, horrified at his parents abandoning him for not meeting their high standards, and starting to get a dreadful feeling that he understood why Miles was treated the way he was.

With a sad expression on his face, Miles started looking progressively more heartbroken and miserable as he explained, "I assume from the fact that they abandoned me that they were horrible people who were completely irredeemable, but I don't know anything else about them. They don't sound any different from everyone else I've met, and there have been plenty of otherwise nice people who still treated me like the scum of the earth... just like everybody else... M-My point is, I don't know what my parents were like. I don't remember having parents at all!... I barely even remember my experience with the orphanage, to be quite frank, because it burned down from being struck by lightning when I was three years old, so I don't have many vivid memories of it aside from being treated terribly. I-I don't even know when my own birthday is because the only people who could've told me worked there, and, none of them are exactly alive to remind me. " Tails had to hold back a gasp at hearing that.
"Then I had to live alone, hiding in the woods, doing whatever it took to survive. No one on that island tried to help me, not unless it was to lure me into a false sense of security, before beating me. Everyone was out to get me! Everyone wanted me dead! I had no choice but to start stealing what I needed because the soup kitchens refused to let me in and I had no other way of surviving the winter, and the hospital wouldn't help me no matter how injured I was, so I had to hide in people's homes or in caves while I recovered, because if I stayed outside, then eventually people would find me!... I... " The more Miles revealed to Tails about his past, the more upset he became, until by the end he was having a hard time keeping his voice from cracking as tears welled up in his eyes, overwhelmed by the feeling that it just wasn't fair. Four seconds passed with a dead silence, until he took a deep breath and finally spoke once more. "I was hunted..." Miles whispered fearfully, and Tails looked horrified at the implications of what he said.

He took a shaky breath before ranting quickly with a cracking voice and a forced expression of bitter hatred on his face, "Every day there would be people trying to hunt me down, attacking me with whatever they could get their hands on; frying pans, knives, guns, syringes, rakes, crowbars and baseball bats, anything! I couldn't stay in one place for too long because the entire island was searched... The so-called heroes of the island were my worst nightmares. The police wanted to shoot me dead, the firemen tried to drown me with their hose, even the paramedics would kick me when I was down! Whenever I tried to call for help it just made things worse! Everyone wanted me dead! And the few people who didn't, kidnapped me when I was too injured to evade them and tortured me... using me as a personal stress ball, a punching bag!... At least three different times I was held captive for that purpose, a different person every time, barely being kept alive. And the only reason I was able to escape was because my prospective murderers set me free... It wasn't fair... I was only four years old. "A tear rolled down his cheek, and Tails, feeling awful about not doing it earlier and unable to hold back from it any longer, put his arm around him to hold him close in a sideways hug in sympathy, and was relieved that he wasn't objecting to it at all. He didn't even seem to notice, being too absorbed in his past to focus on the present.

"A-A-And that was the best I could ever hope for, because if those people hadn't kidnapped me instead of just killing me outright, I wouldn't have had a place to recover from my injuries... a place that was safe from the people hunting me down and had everything I needed to survive. At least they gave me food and water that wasn't poisoned, even if it was only to keep me alive to keep abusing me and the food tasted awful, but at least it was because it was healthy and nutritious, like gruel, or, Brussel sprouts. At least it was good for me... And..." Miles sniffled, and said with a forced smirk that wavered constantly, "The joke's on them, now, because I've grown to prefer healthy food..."

After sniffling quietly and subtly drying his eyes with his head lowered and turned away to help hide it, he went from anxious and bitter to merely depressed as he told Tails, "I-I can't remember ever not liking healthy food because food in general was always so, scarce for me. I suppose I just adapted an affinity for it as a survival mechanism. I'd break into homes that were unoccupied and the first thing I'd do after closing the curtains and locking all the windows and doors, is make myself a salad... And tea... I always loved tea..." By the end, he forced a nervous smile, trying to remind himself that there were still good points in his life even when it was at its worst, only to remember that they weren't nearly enough to make it worth it.

There was a silence, as Miles looked incredibly sad with downcast eyes and his head hung low, and Tails tried to keep himself together, devastated and heartbroken from hearing just how much he had suffered. He was starting to think that Miles had turned against humanity for a reason. He always assumed that Miles was just his evil twin, a snobbishly condescending evil genius who was evil because he was born that way, because he was his evil counterpart. But the reality was far more depressing. Tails wondered in horror if he could've ended up just like Miles if circumstances were different.
Miles wasn't just his evil twin, his exact opposite in every way with nothing in common with him. Things weren't as simple as that. He could've ended up just like him. Tails wondered if, at one point in his life, Miles was just like him, sweet and innocent and naïve, only to have the childhood beaten out of him until something in him snapped, and turned him bitter, and fixated entirely on survival. Tails had always been irritated by his condescending behavior, but after learning about how awful people made him feel about himself, treating him like his life had no value, he was starting to wonder if that unlikable attitude was all a mask, something he put on to protect himself, and if there was more to him than that.

"D-Do you have any of that, by the way?... Any, tea I mean?... I, I hope I'm not asking for too much... after everything you did for me..." Miles asked with a nervous smile, looking depressed with his head hung low and downcast eyes by the end of it. After a brief silence, Tails exclaimed in sympathy, "Of course, of course! Of course I'll make you some tea! You've earned it, Miles! You've earned it. You, had a rough day."

Right after he said that, Tails embraced Miles in a comforting hug, knowing he'd feel awful if he didn't express his compassion of him more openly after hearing everything he had to say, and wanting to put off leaving him all alone again. At first, Miles jumped in panic and stiffened from being held still by his enemy, but after a second had passed, it began to sink in what Tails was doing for him, and he relaxed his shoulders and returned the hug with a smile, savoring the affection for as long as he could.

Four seconds later, Tails ended the hug, with Miles reluctantly letting go a split-second later with a nervous smile, and said, "Wait right here and I'll make some for you. O-Or you can come into the kitchen if you want! It'd probably be better if I had you there with me to tell me if I was doing it wrong, " and giggled nervously. "Good idea," Miles said immediately, grateful that he had been given an easy excuse to not be left alone. Tails noticed a small smile on Miles' face and started to smile for real, happy that Miles was finally smiling in front of him.

He had never seen a genuine smile from Miles before; it was always a satisfied smirk if anything. Miles smiling sincerely was a stunning sight, as he looked so much like Tails, with a smile that was cute and endearing to the same extent as his that would light up the room with his happiness. Tails usually pictured Miles with a distinctive condescending or antagonistic look on his face that made him seem completely unlikable, so on the rare occasions where he actually smiled, he looked like a completely different person. Tails thought deeply about that as he made tea with Miles' help, putting milk and sugar into it to put the finishing touches on it and carefully bringing it into the living room and placing it on the table with Miles following behind him.

Miles took a sip of the tea, and smiled peacefully in relaxed bliss, appreciating his favorite drink immediately. He sighed happily, and said, "Perfect..." with his eyes closed with a smile. Tails smiled at seeing him finally cheer up, proud of himself, but unfortunately, it didn't take long for Miles to start looking worried again, ashamed of himself for looking so weak in front of him. "I never wanted you to see me like this..." he said sadly, and as Tails let that sink in, he looked depressed as he started getting lost in thought.

Disappointed that he was back to looking worried so soon, Tails asked gently, "Is anyone gonna be looking for you?... You know, wondering where you are?..." Miles looked over at him, and Tails continued, "I don't wanna worry anyone by keeping you here. You can stay as long as you like, don't get me wrong. I'm just hoping it's not any trouble, that's all..."

After a silence, Miles told him, "It's not a big deal, don't worry about it. My frien- um, I mean, my associates in the Suppression Squad, they aren't going to be looking for me. I know that for a fact. I'm... separated from them for the time being... I can stay if I want to. " Tails smiled a little at
hearing Miles reveal that he considered the members of the Anti-Freedom Fighters to be his friends. He really cared about them, probably because they were the only people who didn't try to kill him. With standards as low as that, it was a small wonder that Miles didn't have a problem with having criminals for friends, and after all the abuse he had suffered, it was only natural that he'd eventually want revenge, even if a part of him knew it was pointless and felt empty from getting it.

"Good to know I won't have anyone barging into the house. No offense. So that means you can stay here for as long as you like while you recover from your injuries, for as long as it takes! Just make yourself at home," Tails said to him with a smile, only to look worried and hesitant, starting to remember who exactly he was talking to and how he really didn't get along with Miles most of the time. Would his gratitude eventually wear off? Would he go back to being just as rude to him as usual? Could he be trusted to behave?

Tails wondered if he was making a huge mistake, but at the same time, he knew it was the right thing to do, even if it would cause him problems later on. It didn't seem like anyone else could be there for him, and it wasn't right to make him take care of himself with the blood loss weakening him and in the kind of pain he was in. Sending him out into the streets in his condition would make him a prime target for criminals at worst, and he wouldn't survive the second time.

"Won't Sonic have a problem with me being here? And..." Miles asked nervously. "He won't when he sees the condition you're in. He'll understand," Tails reassured him, thankful that Sonic and him didn't have that many disagreements. "And don't worry, Miles. I won't tell him what you told me if you don't want me to," Tails added understandingly.

"Thank you," Miles said quietly with a nervous expression. "Me and Sonic will stay here with you for as much as we can while you recover. We're not the only Freedom Fighters, after all, so I'm sure Sally will understand. T-The only problem I can think of is that one of my friends might come over here to see how things are doing and I'll have some explaining to do, but that's why me and Sonic will spend most of our time right here with you, just in case. We'll back you up if you need us to. Just relax, watch some TV, and you'll be back on your feet in no time!" Tails said with a smile, staying optimistic.

Miles nodded, looking worried from what Tails was saying to him. He still appreciated the tea he was drinking, but it was hard for it to keep him distracted from his worries for long, as he was painfully aware of the fact that Sonic and his friends were usually his enemies and would not be very welcoming of him no matter how polite he would try to be.

He couldn't stand the idea of being shunned again, always feeling like he was on the outside looking in, not being accepted and loved by the people around him and knowing full well that he was being judged, shunned, hated and insulted, no matter what he did. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get people to like him. Just the thought of it nearly drove him to tears. It was no wonder he ended up becoming a villain, because no matter what he did or said, everyone treated him like one, for as long as he could remember.

He didn't want to feel like an outcast again. At least when he was with the Suppression Squad, he felt like he belonged. They weren't always happy with him, especially considering all the emotional baggage he came with, but they still understood him and were surprisingly considerate and accommodating of him, especially Alicia, and even Patch could be a reliable friend to him, showing a protective side as he was always willing to punch someone in the face for calling his friend the wrong insult. Boomer was usually all wrapped up in his engineering, so he didn't have much of an attachment to him, but even he showed that he cared about Miles from time to time. All of them did, continuing to celebrate his birthday even after Scourge stopped being around to pressure them into doing so. The only one he didn't like was the Anti-Bunnie, Buns, as she seemed
to be the most self-absorbed and the most likely to complain about him and how much his friends
defended him, accusing them of "babying him" and "spoilimg him rotten," and sometimes he
wondered if she was right.

As flawed as his friends were, being cynical to the point of paranoid and insisting that the world
deserved whatever they did to it, and being stubbornly reluctant to look like softies by giving him
all the affection he wanted, they were still the only people who cared about him, who trusted him,
who appreciated his presence and valued his life. They were the only people aside from Scourge
who weren't disgusted with him for having two tails… until he met Sonic and his friends, who
couldn't have possibly had a problem with it, and yet they resented him anyways for completely
different reasons, hating him for his personality and behavior rather than for being a mutant.

The rest of his enemies only used who he was and what he did as an excuse to justify their
prejudiced hatred of him, knowing that they could no longer get away with being honest about it,
and would've hated him anyways even if he wasn't a bitter criminal. But Sonic and his friends
weren't like that. They hated him for who he was, making him wonder if he as a person had truly
become that unlikable that even if someone didn't have a problem with his second tail, they'd still
hate him anyways. Was he really that awful?

He couldn't stand that feeling. He couldn't stand feeling like he'd be hated no matter what, and it
often made him lash out at people because he'd be hated either way, wanting them to feel the pain
he endured by showing them what it was like to be treated like a monster. Scourge had convinced
him that it was better to be standing up for himself than passively putting up with mistreatment,
even if it was pointless in the end.

But after all the sympathy Tails had shown him that day, Miles had started to feel some hope. Even
before he told him about his past, his arch-enemy still cared about him enough to save his life and
take care of him when he needed it. Maybe he wasn't forced to explain what he had been through
for non-prejudiced people to stop hating him. It would go a long way, but if he could avoid it, he
would.

At least on the surface, Miles didn't care about doing the right thing and being a good person
anymore, instinctively seeing people in general as cruel bigoted bullies who didn't deserve his help
and viewing everyone as a threat. While there were people he loved and cared about, and he
certainly had some compassion in him, Miles had become so antagonistic and fixated on revenge
that from a certain perspective, he was the definition of evil. In fact, he was even more evil than
Scourge, hating humanity with a fiery passion that rivaled anyone else's; while Scourge was
somewhat cynical, his villainy mostly came from his selfishness, not really having anything against
humanity as a whole – they just happened to get in the way of his fun, preventing him from doing
whatever he wanted in his hedonistic lifestyle.

Scourge was merely selfish, while Miles had an outright vendetta against the people of the world.
He understood why people would think that someone like that didn't belong on Sonic's side,
because he wasn't a good person anymore. He had it out for the world, while the Freedom Fighters
wanted to defend it. He had his own morality to him, with his lashing out at the world with his evil
deeds being his own twisted version of doing the right thing because he was standing up to
potential bullies, real or imagined, because everyone had the potential to be a bully, and everyone
with the potential to be a bully was one because of that alone.

Miles wasn't entirely happy with the idea of becoming a hero after all the abuse he had suffered,
when his villainy in the first place was his idea of standing up for himself, and heroism would
mean helping the very kind of people who would judge him in the first place. He wasn't
comfortable with the idea of being a hero and treated like one. If Miles joined the Freedom
Fighters, that would be exactly what he'd be heavily pressured to deal with, and objecting to it would only earn him scorn and hatred, forcing him to return to being alone. He'd be forced into being a hero when he didn't know if he wanted to be one.

But if there was a possibility that he could have some genuine caring friends among Sonic's side, he supposed he could tolerate being a hero just to fit in with them. He could always take out his hatred for humanity on Eggman's robots. In fact, it'd be the best way for him to use his powers to their full potential, as he'd completely stop feeling the shameful urge to hold back against his targets if his targets were robots and machines. He could fight to his full viciousness, letting out the full brunt of his anger and rage, and almost no one would complain because the victims of his evil behavior would be universally understood to deserve it.

As long as Miles had caring friends as a result of that, he could see himself staying with Tails permanently, and potentially having a happier life, perhaps even getting to finally see the day when most of the people he encountered would smile at seeing him rather than recoil in disgust. There might come a day when the world he lived in would not only accept him, but like him, and all he ever wanted was to be loved.

There were times when Miles was so enraged and devastated from the prejudice he had endured that he furiously wished the world would end and dreamed of bringing on its destruction, seeing people in general as heartless threats with no redeeming qualities, but even he knew deep down that it wasn't what he wanted. He wanted the discrimination to end.

He still wanted people to like him, he still had faith, he still wanted to be able to trust people easily and not have it backfire on him. And maybe, just maybe, if he spent enough time with Sonic, he might be able to learn to trust again. He might finally get to have a happy life. Even the traumatic flashbacks to his past might become less frequent as he'd begin to focus on the good in his life.

But all of that was a pipe dream. He didn't know why he was even considering such an ideal scenario. He would be lucky if Sonic's friends didn't try to attack him, insult him and kick him out of the house the instant they saw him there. With his luck, he'd be miserable from being shunned by them no matter how nice Tails and Sonic were, and he'd be desperate to be back with the Suppression Squad in hours. He might even end up missing Scourge.

At least he never treated him that way. Scourge may have shown annoyance with him for his negativity, his so-called nagging of him, and his condescending sophisticated act. He called him pixel-brain or wise guy or a nag when he contradicted him. He was smug and focused on his own desires and doing his own thing. While he tried to be a good friend to him in his own way, being incredibly comforting when he made it clear that he needed it and friendly to him most of the time, he was still cluelessly insensitive and irritating, especially as he got older and started responding to his criticism by dismissing him as being a brat, and spent all his time without his little brother around for the sake of his intimidating image. Growing up meant growing apart, as far as Miles could tell, as their once incredibly close friendship ended up deteriorating into a petty rivalry as the years went by.

But as difficult as their friendship ended up being, Miles knew that Scourge still cared about him. Whenever someone called him a freak or hurt him, Scourge would completely lose his temper on the one responsible. When Scourge took over Anti-Mobius, the very first thing he did publicly as its new king, was arrange for the island where Miles was tormented on to be destroyed, taking revenge on its inhabitants for abusing his childhood friend. After all those years of knowing Miles, he never forgot his hatred of Miles' bullies.

Not that it mattered, because his bullies would always continue to haunt him in his mind, long after
they had all been destroyed. Everyone in his dimension hated him from the instant they saw him. What made the people of his island any different? What could make the people of Tails' dimension any different? They never seemed to have a problem with his second tail, only comparing him to Tails, but he was certain that if he had been to more parts of Mobius, he would've met people who were exactly as cruel as the ones back home.

As he kept thinking about what was bothering him, becoming consumed in his inner turmoil and not paying attention to anything else, it rained outside in an unusually heavy downpour, and eventually the wind began to pick up, the weather itself synchronizing with his miserable emotional state and venting out his stress for him in the process.

Soon after Miles had finished his soup, there was a flash of light in the room coming from the window as loud thunder boomed in the distance and seemed to shake the house from its proximity. Tails jumped looking startled and started shaking in fear, his pupils shrunken and his expression being that of anxiety and dread. Miles recognized that expression in himself, knowing very well how it felt to feel like he was in danger, and seeing the person who was kind enough to save his life scared out of his wits didn't feel right.

Tails was distracted by his fear and only focused on the thunder booming outside his window at the expense of everything else, only to be briefly snapped out of it upon Miles sitting next to him on the couch and embracing him in a comforting hug, having his arms around him and his head over his shoulder as he gently held him close to his chest. "Huh? Really? I…" Tails said in astonished confusion, carefully returning the hug when he finally realized what he was doing. After a few seconds, he smiled and said happily, "Aw, that's so nice of you! Thanks!... But why?"

There was a silence, until Miles could finally motivate himself to respond, continuing to hold him close while he struggled to speak in a dignified way to him. "Because you were nice to me… You went through the trouble of saving my life, and, now I'm in your debt. So I wish to repay you for, the act of compassion. I-I believe you've earned it… I still can't believe someone who hates me would help me like that, let alone help me at all! I… I'm, sorry about the way I treated you… I'm sorry I treated you like you were useless. I knew it wasn't true and I didn't really mean it!... I just did it to spite you… The truth is… I envied you…"

There was a stunned silence as Tails tried to let that sink in. Miles was jealous of him? "You had such a happier life than I ever did, and I was jealous of how you didn't suffer like I have. I'll admit I'm still a little jealous of you, but you, you proved today that you have such kindness in you, even for someone like me, that you don't deserve to be treated that way even once!... I've been treated like I was inferior and worthless hundreds of times for as long as I can remember! That's why I act like I think I'm superior to everyone else, because I want to let people know how it feels… but I'm doing the same thing they did to me, and now it's to someone who doesn't even deserve it. So, I shouldn't have been lashing out at you like that… I was being petty, and… childish… " Miles apologized reluctantly, with downcast eyes as he tried as hard as he could to force himself not to well up with tears and keep his voice from cracking as he spoke to him. The last word of his apology was especially hard on him, as it almost caused him to break down crying right then and there.

He was extremely self-conscious of just how rare it was for him to be openly humble and give someone a lengthy apology for his condescending behavior, and had to force himself to continue and to not take back anything he said or lie that he didn't really mean it, as just saying all of that was causing him to hate himself from being reminded of just how unlikable he was, and he knew that the situation he was in was not an appropriate time to lash out at whoever happened to be around him.
After he had finished apologizing, Miles closed his eyes and tried to control his breathing to avoid crying in front of Tails, being thankful that he was close to him and being comforted by that when he needed it. "Oh, Miles, it's... it's okay... I... I didn't know... As long as you at least, tone down on it, I, I think I can forgive you... I understand," Tails said with pity, stunned at his evil twin of all people showing remorse, and feeling sorry for him enough to tell him he forgave him in spite of the fact that he was still annoyed with him for his behavior.

He had never realized there was a deeper explanation for Miles' resentment of him, and from what he was learning about him, it all made sense. He would never stop being upset at remembering how that evil genius acted as his enemy, but now that he understood the reason behind it, he was able to look past it and see him with something other than hatred.

Suddenly, the rain started getting even louder as thunder boomed at a volume so startlingly loud and with a flash of light so blatant that it caused Tails to jump and yelp, and start trembling in Miles' arms. Panicked, Tails exclaimed hysterically, "Oh, that sounds like it's right next to the house! What if it gets struck by lightning?! What if- " "Nothing like that will happen, I promise. I can assure you of that. The storm will be over in four hours and 42 minutes and we'll be safe for the entire duration of it. It's... you're going to be alright..." Miles told him, realizing that he could've sounded condescending by the last sentence and trying to make up for it by reluctantly making his sympathy for him clear.

"How can you not be scared?" Tails whispered, holding him tightly on the couch with his eyes closed to try to deal with the fear. "Well, I used to be afraid of it, but by the time I was four years old, I stopped seeing it as a threat. I have lived through hundreds of thunderstorms. There hasn't been a single week in my life where a storm hasn't occurred. And it was never that much of an inconvenience. There were dozens of instances where convenient lightning strikes would scare off my pursuers, and that's far from the only way it helped me, so, after a while, I started to see lightning as more helpful than anything else. It was as if every time lightning struck near me, it was to my benefit!... There's also the fact that I'm extremely familiar with how the weather in my general vicinity is going to be like and how exactly it works, so I'm never surprised when it starts thundering out because I know exactly when it's going to happen. But I'm not trying to insult you... I understand why you don't feel safe around it. I'm not judging you for having a logical fear. Not everyone is like me... It's just that I'm used to it by now, and it's not a threat to me like it is to everyone else," Miles told him quietly in a matter-of-fact tone, sounding depressed while talking about his pursuers.

"How could you ever get used to this?" Tails said with a shaky voice as Miles held him in his arms and thunder boomed just next to the house. "I just stopped seeing it as a threat... after repeated exposure. I was desensitized to it after a few years." Miles said awkwardly, stopping himself just short of telling him how lightning strikes gave him energy and made him more powerful, as it might cause Tails to suspect that he was the cause of the storm and be upset with him for it. He honestly didn't know if he caused the storm or not, and felt terrible about the possibility that he did, that Tails was frightened because of him. And it wasn't even the first time that it had happened.

There was a silence, as neither one of them spoke for seven seconds, Miles not being sure what else to say and Tails being too focused on the storm to speak to him. "Hey, um... I'm still tired... Incredibly tired. A-Are you, tired as well?" Miles awkwardly asked him, hoping he would get the hint.

"What? Uh... sort of. Why do you-" Tails answered in confusion, only to be startled by thunder booming especially loud, and he started holding onto him like his life depended on it, trembling in his arms. "Why don't we lie down for a while and try to have some rest?" Miles said nervously.
while speaking quickly to get it out faster. To his relief, Tails nodded, and didn't object at all as he laid down on the couch with him, still holding him in his arms.

He briefly used one of his arms to pull the blankets over the two of them, and laid down with his head on the pillow of the couch, sharing it with Tails. The pillow was turned diagonally so that Tails' side of it was lower than his, and he held him close to him with his arm underneath it as Tails ended up placing his head in his chest nearly burying his face in it, being as close to him as possible to try to distract himself and comfort himself. Miles wrapped his uninjured tail around Tails to help hold him close to him and make him feel better with the soft feeling of it, and Tails smiled a little, and brought him closer to him by wrapping his tails around him in turn. With that, the two of them were lying on the couch in each other's arms, with Miles trying as hard as he could to get Tails to relax and get some sleep in the most terrifying storm he had ever experienced.

They both knew it wasn't something that normally happened and to not get used to it, but at the same time, they appreciated it anyways, Tails because he was scared out of his wits and Miles because he just wanted to hold someone close and be held back. As Tails trembled in his arms and sobbed from the lightning storm and how close it was to the house, Miles held him close with his eyes closed in a sad expression, gently caressing his head and back at various points to reassure him, with them both completely covered by the blankets. To his slight embarrassment, it came completely naturally to him, rather than being something he had to force himself to do. As he comforted his trembling counterpart getting him to sleep, he was reminded of how Tails reminded him of himself at a younger age, back when he was naïve and sweet and innocent, and yet almost completely consumed by fear.

After a full hour had passed, Tails was asleep in his arms, having been soothed to sleep at last. Miles wasn't that far from it, feeling so calm and peaceful from the relaxing feeling of holding someone warm and soft close and being held, and knowing that the plentiful lightning strikes were good for him as he subconsciously gathered energy from them. It wasn't long before he fell asleep holding him, staying silent as he spent the night with his former enemy in his arms. It ended up being the first night in months where he didn't have post-traumatic flashbacks of people trying to kill him or worse for having a second tail.

Instead, his dreams were of Scourge, of how happy he was being friends with him when they first met, when it was just the two of them and all Scourge cared about was enjoying himself with him. While Scourge was tactless and clueless at times when it came to trying to be a good friend, his insensitivity from lack of personal experience was made up for with generosity and kindness, as he was an incredibly understanding and caring friend, the best big brother he could've ever imagined. Even his infamous temper was very held back around him, as he learned to be patient and be careful about what he said to avoid offending his only friend. Miles missed those days. He missed them more than anything else, and thinking about them brought tears to his eyes because he didn't think it was fair that they had to end. Could he ever truly replace him?
When morning came at last, Sonic opened the door of the cabin and entered the living room with a smile, only to stop in his tracks and look shocked and apprehensive at seeing Anti-Tails on the living room couch, who gasped in fear at seeing him and flinched. "No, please! I-I can explain!" he said fearfully while trembling uncontrollably, almost whimpering as Sonic looked at him alarmed. But all of Sonic's reservations about him disappeared when he noticed how injured he was and gasped.

One of his tails was heavily bandaged with a long narrow stain in it representing that he had been slashed at with something sharp, and there were bandages wrapped around his hands covering up some noticeable wounds. He was completely covered in bruises from head to toe. "What happened to you?" Sonic said with sympathy, his voice almost a whisper. "I…" Miles said quietly with a sad expression, stunned at how quickly he felt sorry for him and not entirely wanting to tell him what happened. His instincts were telling him to trust Sonic and give into the temptation to seek comfort from him, but there was still some anxiety and fear holding him back. After all, he wasn't the Sonic he knew.

"Sonic?" Tails said in surprise as he walked into the room, carrying a plate of French toast and scrambled eggs with a fork on it. "What's going on? What happened to him?" Sonic asked him unhappily. "I think a gang of criminals attacked him…" Tails answered sadly, and after placing the plate on the living room table as Miles got off the couch and sat in front of it still covered by blankets, he whispered, "He was thrown off a cliff into the ocean. He could've drowned! I don't wanna think about what would've happened if I hadn't been there. He could've bled to death! He almost…" There was a silence, as Tails didn't want to get too upset by finishing that sentence.

Understanding, Sonic said in a reassuring tone, "Don't worry, Miles, you can stay here for as long as you need to. It's not safe for you to be walking out and about with injuries like that. " Miles couldn't help but smile in relief at hearing that. Tails was right after all. But he still couldn't help but be worried that if he didn't behave in quite the right way around him, Sonic would get irritated with having him around and impatient for him to leave, which would lock him out of staying there indefinitely. There was also the possibility that getting too close to Sonic would cause Tails to worry that Sonic was replacing him as his brother figure, or that Miles was trying to make that happen on purpose.

"Thank you… I, I'll stay quiet and… stay here. I won't be an inconvenience. You've earned it, both of you; you for allowing me to stay, and Tails for saving my life. I must repay you for this!... As soon as I am able…" Miles replied quietly in a depressed tone, self-conscious of looking so humble.

Knowing that Miles didn't feel welcome in his home and not knowing what he could do to reassure him, Sonic said to Tails quietly, "Good luck," with his hand on his shoulder comfortingly. He wanted to give Miles that affectionate gesture, but he wasn't sure if he would be comfortable with it.

With that, Sonic sat down on the couch and waited for Tails to bring his own breakfast to the living room, not wanting to leave Miles unsupervised in spite of feeling sorry for him, and when Tails returned and sat beside Miles to have his breakfast, Sonic sped into the kitchen in a blue blur to make breakfast for himself, deciding to have it in the living room to keep Tails company before catching up on his sleep in his room. Tails was watching a physics documentary on TV, and Miles reluctantly watched as well, having no interest in the subject when it didn't pertain to his weather
powers, but appreciating how it gave him something to focus on other than his pain and worrying, and not wanting to annoy Tails by complaining when he was lucky he was being allowed to stay in his home.

Hours passed in which Miles slept on the couch with the television as background noise. When he finally woke up, he realized that he was alone. Tails was working on his engineering, so Sonic had been left to supervise him. Miles was confused at how he was trusted to be left unsupervised so early, only to realize that Sonic must have overestimated the amount of time he would be sleeping. He made a mental note to himself to pretend to still be asleep when Sonic would return to his side. That way, he wouldn't have to deal with any false accusations on his first day of staying with him.

Miles slowly sat up, keeping the warm blankets covering him, and quietly yawned while readjusting to being awake again. But before he could start focusing on the television across from him, he was snapped out of his state of drowsiness when he heard the sound of a small dog barking and gasped with a startled jolt, tensing up immediately at the familiar sound. Panicking, his pupils shrunk and he trembled uncontrollably saying, " No! NO! That horrible sound! Don't hurt me! Please! " In an instant, he was taken back to his past, when he was a four-year-old child running away from a vicious black dog with a red collar and sharp teeth that was chasing him down in a fenced in backyard.

Clutching the blankets tightly, he vividly remembered all of the times he had been chased by vicious dogs that had been sent after him in the past, and all of the memories flashed before his eyes one after the other. Seconds after he tripped on a tree trunk, a black dog started biting into his left arm as he struggled to get up from the ground forcing himself not to scream to avoid attracting bullies to his location. Reliving it so vividly that it might as well have been happening for real to him, Miles trembled and grimaced with his eyes squeezed shut while grabbing his arm protectively, desperate to prevent the same thing from happening again. " No, no, no, no… " he whispered under his breath, in denial. He had gone from being mildly content to terrified in an instant from a single familiar sound.

Hiding his arms underneath the blankets wrapped around him, his panic became hysterical when he felt the weight of something the size of a small dog pounce on his chest with its head close to his face, and only the fear of getting in trouble with Sonic and Tails restrained him from instinctively trying to attack it in self-defence. Desperately hoping he wouldn't get hurt, he froze up as a feeling of familiar dread overwhelmed him. There was nothing he could do. He was powerless.

" Huh? " Miles said quietly upon feeling a small metal object move across his face. Motivating himself to open at least one eye to see what was happening, he saw a small robot shaped like a fox quickly licking his face with a metallic cold " tongue, " with what seemed to be a happy expression on its face, something that took a long time for Miles to register from the fear and uncertainty overwhelming him. He instinctively examined T-Pup to gauge how threatening it was to him, and to his relief, he found no sharp teeth or claws that it could hurt him with. " No teeth, no claws… That's good… You're not a threat… " Miles whispered quickly with a shaky voice and a nervous smile by the last two sentences, trying to reassure himself that he wasn't in danger. If anything, the " dog " seemed to have taken a liking to him, perhaps for bearing such a strong resemblance to its master. The idea that an animal could actually like him, and without him having to do anything for it, left him stunned and confused to the point of being speechless.

He didn't trust animals. How could he, when he couldn't predict what they were going to do to him? He didn't trust people, either, but at least they were easy to understand. Animals always tried to hurt him, just like people did, but at least people gave an understandable excuse. Animals would attack him on sight, even when they had no reason to have a grudge against him. This robot with the mind of a common dog seemed to be performing an action on him that was completely non-
threatening in spite of it. Why? " W-What do you want from me? " he stammered suspiciously, wanting it to leave him alone.

Still shaken and confused, it took several seconds for it to dawn on Miles that the robot pet was trying to get his affection. He had never given an animal affection before, mainly because he was terrified of them because they all wanted to hurt him, but now that he finally had at least one animal-like being actually appreciating his presence, and one that he would no doubt be pressured to not be cold to later on, there seemed to be no better time to try something he had never done before. There was a first time for everything, after all. Feeling like he was taking a huge risk, his trembling hand inched closer and closer to the robot's head until finally, it landed on it, and immediately started moving back and forth along it in a petting motion, unconsciously imitating how Scourge had ruffled his hair every now and then.

At first, Miles was terrified, forcing a smile in spite of the instinctive fear that he would get bitten by sharp teeth for petting it, but after a few seconds had passed with T-Pup showing nothing but appreciation in return, he smiled in relief as he started to relax, petting the robot dog in content and feeling it soothe his frazzled nerves until, for once, he was at peace. There was nothing for him to worry about.

His shoulders relaxed from their raised tense state and he loosened up at last, after several seconds of having his muscles tightened painfully from panic and stress. " Oh, you're not so bad. You're not like the other dogs I've dealt with! " Miles said in a quiet voice that was relaxed and loving. " Of course, it's probably because you're a robot. If you were a real dog, you would've… would've… " he added quietly, in a tone that was bitter and depressed. Remembering his past experiences with dogs once again, he continued his thought in his head with an unhappy expression, before shuddering at the painful memory, whispering, " Never mind, Miles, don't go there… " and forcing his attention away from it rather than reliving it over and over again.

Smiling from petting the smooth surface of T-Pup's head once more, Miles allowed it to rest on his lap as he watched the educational show on the television across from him, trying his best to distract himself from his worries and focus on the good. Sonic went into the room a while later and was alarmed at first, only to relax and smile at the sight in front of him, while Miles was slightly embarrassed and tried to distract him.

Things remained rather uneventful as Miles slowly recovered from his injuries, spending most of every day on the couch watching educational television with Tails or Sonic by his side, depressed that he wasn't doing anything productive to repay Tails for his kindness. Tails occasionally worked on his engineering in his workshop, but being away from Miles when he was injured and depressed made him feel so guilty that he was only able to do so for a few hours in the day before returning to keep him company.

Soon, in the hopes of getting Miles to stay, Tails started renovating the house by adding what later turned out to be a guest bedroom to it, feeling guilty about Miles having to sleep on the couch. The guest bedroom was small, with only a bed in it, which Tails built himself and bought a mattress, pillows and blankets for, and Miles was stunned that he went through so much trouble for him when he didn't even have to. Having a bedroom of his own would certainly make staying with them permanently a lot more tolerable, even if he was still dreading going to the Freedom Fighters HQ to apologize for the first time.

Tails wasn't aware of how long Miles was planning on staying, but figured that even if he wasn't there for long, a guest room could still be something the house could use one of. Sonic pitied Miles for the injuries he had and his emotional state, but was more concerned with what the reaction of his friends would be if they found out Miles was staying with him, and he wasn't looking forward
to their reaction to the idea of him working for them.
"Well, it looks like you're fully healed," Tails said to Miles after a week, examining where the gash in his tail used to be. He threw away the last of the bandages on him as Miles tried and failed to hide how depressed he felt from knowing that he was expected to leave. Noticing how he was feeling, Tails smiled nervously as Sonic looked at him with concern, and said awkwardly, "I don't blame you if you don't wanna tell me where you're gonna go now, since we were enemies for most of our lives. I don't know how I could even get the information out of you anyways. I-I just want you to know that, I'm here for you. I-I understand you a lot better now, I've gotten to know you better – both of us have – so, um, if you're ever hurt again, you can come to me."

Miles felt his eyes start welling up with tears and smiled at hearing that. It felt so good knowing that he had only been with him for a week and already he had his forgiveness. "Thank you," he almost whispered, with a voice full of appreciation. He had to force himself to not give the game away right away and ask if he could stay with them forever, because he didn't want to push his luck, and he wanted his apology to all of the Freedom Fighters to be a pleasant surprise. He let a sad sigh escape him as he walked out the door, leaving Sonic and Tails' house as freezing rain started falling from the sky once again.

As soon as he left, he spun his tails behind him like a propeller bursting forwards from a gale force wind, jumped into the air as he hovered forwards and kept that momentum going as he moved his arm in a circle, creating an uplift of air below him raising him up into the sky. With that, he flew high up into the sky, still moving just as fast as he was when he was running on the ground, and focused his sights on the ground below in an effort to find his next destination. Annoyed at how far away from him the ground was, Miles squinted in an attempt to make sense of the blurry mass of shapes below him, cursing his increasingly nearsighted vision. He had always had that difficulty, at least ever since he was four years old when he got pepper-sprayed in the eyes by a woman whose home he had broken into for food.

It must have taken over an hour for him to finally reach the place where the Freedom Fighters spent most of their time, but he wasn't keeping track of the time, miserable and shivering with his entire body and the clothes on his back dripping wet sticking to him. Eventually, when he knew he was only a straight line away from his destination, he landed on the ground and started walking to save energy, with his head hung low the whole time looking down away from the rain above him. He barely stopped himself in his tracks in time to not walk right into the door of the base, and internally put himself down for that absent-minded mistake, thinking bitterly, "Miles, you idiot…" to himself as he shook his head with his hand on it.

This only distracted him briefly from his emotional turmoil, and after looking back up at the door nervously, his pupils shrunk as he looked horrified, and he took a deep breath preparing himself trying to be brave. He had to force himself to once again timidly knock on the door in front of him, hoping that knocking as lightly as he could with his shaking hand would somehow make the Freedom Fighters less suspicious of him upon seeing it was him. He was hoping against hope with all of his heart that things wouldn't turn out badly for him, and felt a horrible amount of pressure to do everything right, because he couldn't afford a single mistake. He was on thin ice, and the wrong move would cause it to crack open beneath him.

When the door opened in front of him at last, he had to force himself not to yelp startled and instinctively run away, with his jumping at the door opening being his only reaction. It was Sally who opened the door, and she gasped shocked at seeing him immediately, her eyes widening and stepping back a little instinctively. Her facial expression quickly became one that distrusted him
and took him seriously as a threat, just like he had worried, but her eyes were shrunken in surprise and worry. Terrified that she'd attack him, Miles knew he would have the best first impression as a potential ally if he made sure that an apology was the first words out of his mouth, and without even the slightest delay.

" I'm SORRY about earlier! I-I'm not here to fight you! Can we, can we talk?! " Miles forced the words out as quick as he could to try to get her to relax, stuttering while shivering from the freezing cold rain he had to deal with on the way there. Apologizing to her even in that short minimalistic way made him feel very self-conscious and uncomfortable, and he was hoping she wouldn't just dismiss his apology as a lie just because he was trying to placate her and the Freedom Fighters with it. He wondered if he would end up breaking down crying if after all the effort he put into making himself apologize, they treated him like that.

" He looks awful… " Sally thought upon examining the evil fox, in spite of her distrust of him. The spikes on Anti-Tails' bracelets weren't jutting out as before, and she realized that he had retracted them into narrow folds in them, presumably to appear harmless. His expression was sad and frightened, he was shaking, and he was soaking wet from head to toe, to the point of his normally neat dark gray streak of hair being messy and drooping in front of his face. There were stress lines under his eyes, and his eyes were a bit bloodshot and red with streams of water directly below them that were stained into his white muzzle, which almost looked like tear stains compared to the water droplets on the rest of him. In that vulnerable humble position where he looked as if he was about to cry, he reminded her of Tails. His trademark condescending or bitter expression was gone, and he looked like a completely different person.

In the second and a half of anxiety-inducing silence where Sally reacted to his presence with surprise, Miles couldn’t stand the feeling of being judged, and worried irrationally that him being wet would discourage her from letting him inside because he would track water into the base, frustrated with himself for not thinking of that and having no way to dry off first. He was starting to feel like the situation was hopeless, and felt a panic attack coming on that he actively resisted expressing openly.

" Miles! " Sally exclaimed with a scared expression that made him dread a lack of trust coming his way. " How long were you out in the rain?! " she said, revealing that she was worried about his well-being. Stunned at her concern, Miles stammered, and took a few seconds before saying uncertainly, " Hours? I, I don't know. I, wasn't keeping track of the, passage of time… " adding in his thoughts that he never really could. He thought, " Why'd she ask that? Is she worried about me? Already?! I… I shouldn't be surprised, she's Alicia's ' good twin, ' but, this must be too good to be true… "

While he was lost in thought, he failed to notice Sally turning to Sonic on the living room couch behind her and ordering him, " Get him a towel and blankets! He's freezing! " and Sonic running out of the room in a blue blur and immediately going back to it holding some blankets and a red towel in front of him. Sally then turned back to Miles and told him, " Okay, come inside first, we can talk on the couch, " snapping him out of his train of thought.

He jumped a little from her intimidating him unintentionally with her commanding tone and distrusting facial expression, and was embarrassed with himself for looking like such a coward. It was clear that Sally was speaking to a child that she viewed as a troublemaker, a juvenile delinquent who couldn't be trusted, and it felt both condescending and anxiety-inducing at the same time. He was still in trouble for the way he always acted in the past, but at the very least, he was being shown compassion instead of immediately being rejected. His head hung low, he reluctantly forced himself to follow her, being so irrational at the moment that it didn't occur to him that her irritated disposition, much like with Alicia, was being used as a cover for her concern
for him.

Sonic dried him off and then wrapped the towel around him the minute he walked into the base, and then covered him over with the blankets after he sat down on the comfortable couch, and the familiar experience of a blue hedgehog drying him off and giving him blankets while looking concerned for his well-being warmed his heart from nostalgia for a friendship long gone. He was ashamed, and frustrated with himself for how he still missed Scourge, and how close his friendship with him was when they only had each other, and how he was so stuck in the past that seeing Sonic always directly reminded him of Scourge. All he needed was shades and a leather jacket, and he'd be perfect, if not even better, because he wouldn't waste all his time committing crimes and chasing girls. He'd be the brother he always wanted.

"Thank you," Miles finally responded in a hushed quiet voice, after being silent for a few seconds stunned at the sudden compassion. He quickly looked around the living room taking in the sights at last, finally realizing that aside from Antoine and Amy, all of the Freedom Fighters had happened to be in the room upon his arrival, including Tails, the one he had treated the worst. And yet, no one seemed to be glaring at him. He could certainly recognize fear in them, but the way they were looking at him, they seemed to be more concerned for his well-being and curious about what he intended to say. This was too convenient. It had to be.

Sally sat beside him looking nervous, with Sonic on the other side unintentionally comforting him with his mere presence, and said, "You're welcome, Miles. It was nice of you to apologize," appearing annoyed and reluctant to speak with him, before questioning him, "So why aren't you with the others? Where's the Suppression Squad?" Hearing that question only brought back old emotions in him and made tears well up in his eyes, reminding him directly of the void they had all left in him. "They..." he whispered, looking devastated with his head down as his voice became choked up.

"Anti-Tails?!" Amy exclaimed all of a sudden upon entering the room, startling Miles off the couch and getting everyone's attention in an instant. Believing that he was misleading everyone, she impulsively screamed and smacked him in the side with her hammer before anyone could stop her, sending him flying and landing on the floor painfully. "Amy, what is wrong with you?!" Sally yelled at her right away, which failed to reassure Miles, as he was too focused on what just happened to care. His worst fear had been realized; one of the Freedom Fighters had attacked him just for showing up, without even letting him talk first. How long would it be before the rest of them turned on him?

I knew it! I knew it! Why did I trust you?! Wh-Wh-Why did I think you'd all give me a chance?" he exclaimed with a choked up voice, humiliated by the tears escaping his eyes at last. As Sonic and Tails rushed to his side and lifted him up to a standing position reassuring him, "It's okay," and helping him back to the couch, he couldn't help but think about how he'd feel if the rest of them attacked him like that, vividly imagining them beating him up for revenge.

"Calm down!" Rotor said to him worried, followed by Bunnie telling him, "That was just Amy!" and Nicole reassuring him in a kind tone, "None of us are going to hurt you!" Tails then told him unhappily, "Exactly! As long as you don't hurt us," smiling nervously at the end as his show of compassion finally snapped Miles out of it.

Meanwhile, Sally was scolding Amy for her impulsive act of violence with her hands on her hips. "He was on the couch with blankets over him, for Pete's sake, have some compassion! You're too violent for negotiations." Amy exclaimed sadly, "I'm sorry! I just saw Tails' evil twin and thought he was misleading you or something!... I didn't think it would make him like that!" looking really remorseful and uncomfortable by the end of it.
Hearing that even Rosy the Rascal's counterpart was showing compassion for him stunned Miles into silence once again, and he frantically wiped away his tears humiliated on the couch, sniffling with Sonic and Nicole on either side of him reassuring him with comforting gestures. A towel was wrapped around him once again with the blankets being over top of it, both of which were doing a splendid job of warming him up.

"It's okay, relax!" Sonic said in concern, rubbing his shoulder beneath the blankets, with Nicole shushing him and stroking his head to calm him down. Unfortunately, Sally had to ask him again, "S-So where's the Suppression Squad?" Feeling very pressured to answer to avoid getting in trouble, he forced himself to reveal the answer, with the words directly reminding him of what happened and taunting him in the process. "They don't want me around anymore!" Miles exclaimed with a choked up voice, with his shaking from the sheer terror being combined with his shivering from the cold.

Everyone around him looked stunned and horrified from the revelation, and Miles, terrified that they might accuse him of doing them in, forced himself to try to elaborate the best that he could. "A couple months ago, I started being a double agent to Kintobor because I couldn't TAKE it anymore and I just wanted to start making it up to him, but eventually they found the phone I was warning him of their plans with, and they yelled at me so much, and, I don't think I can trust them not to hurt me anymore! At least Alicia was being patient with me, at least she still liked me, but at this point, with everyone else in the gang turned against me, how can I LIVE THERE anymore?" Miles said in a panic, with his pupils shrunken and appearing to be staring at something far off in the distance that no one could see.

Ashamed, he covered his face with his hands to try to give himself a little dignity as he hid the tears from everyone too late for it to work, upset at how his gloves were so wet from the rain that they completely failed to dry his face successfully. He couldn't take them off to dry his eyes when that would only reveal his scars. His tails beneath the towel and blankets were wrapping around his knees and back as he sat with his knees drawn up in front of him, desperately trying to comfort himself and hide his expression. He wished more than anything that someone would just hug him already, and a part of him hated them for not doing exactly that. It didn't feel fair, even though he knew he used to be their enemy and had no right to feel entitled to such a thing. He felt both victimized and disgusted with himself for feeling that way.

"It's okay! You're safe here..." Sally reassured him after several seconds of being silent in shock, not sure how to respond. Bunnie said sadly, "That's awful..." which was what Sally had considered saying and decided against because she thought that kind of response would only upset Miles even more. Nicole put her hand on his shoulder to comfort him.

No one failed to realize how strange and risky it was to be giving those comforting gestures to Tails' evil twin, when for all they knew he might attack them for it, but they were too overwhelmed by the situation for that to keep them from showing him compassion. Miles nodded, his eyes closed and his knees drawn up with his head hung low hidden behind them. Humiliated didn't even begin to describe how he was feeling at the moment, and the only thing comforting him was the idea that their pity might be the only thing making them sympathize with him and listen.

"I still miss them so much. How could they..." Miles said sadly. "You really cared about them..." Sally said in realization, saying what everyone else was thinking. They were shocked that Tails' evil twin actually cared about someone other than himself, to the point of having a minor breakdown at losing them, and wondered if he had always been that way or had changed. When he nodded reluctantly in response to Sally, Nicole stated, "He hasn't lied once since his arrival! Even when he apologized! He's telling the truth about everything," taking advantage of her new convenient Chaos power to be a living lie detector to help his case. Miles was caught between
dreading dealing with that power and knowing he should appreciate how she'd prove his
truthfulness when it counted.

" He's heartbroken. He's not faking any of this… " Nicole added sadly. " No kidding. I've never
seen him cry before! Poor kid. You can't fake a reaction like that, " Amy replied unhappily, getting
another brief scolding look from Sally as a result. " What? " she asked in confusion, not realizing
that she might have come off as rude.

" Could I stay with you for a while? " Miles forced out at last, saying what he had planned to say
from the very beginning while terrified of being told no. After a brief awkward second-long-
silence where the Freedom Fighters reacted to it stunned and Miles tried to get his courage to speak
back, he blurted out, " I have nowhere else to go! I'm stranded on Mobius and no one wants me
home! I can't go back to being alone! "

He looked terrified at possibly giving his plan away and stammered nervously with a fake smile, "
I-I-I mean, not right away, I mean. It's no big deal, I just, need to stay here for a little while u-until
I get over it. " His facial expression became more earnest and serious as he said passionately, " I'll
do anything you want to pull my weight while I'm here! I'll follow any order you give to me. I'll do
whatever you want! I'll be happy to fight that ' Eggman ' with you!... Please?... "

Another brief silence followed, and Miles kept his eyes squeezed shut drying his tears to avoid
seeing everyone's reactions, worried frantically at how Nicole was clearly able to tell when he was
lying. He considered trying to tell them about the weather powers he had discovered since their last
encounter as a way to persuade them into believing he'd be useful, but decided against it because
they might not believe him, or only fear him for it at worst. Showing them would only startle them
into attacking him at seeing him summon electricity from his hands and instinctively think he was
threatening them, or at least it'd get that response from Amy anyways. Once again, he felt trapped,
completely at the mercy of the cruel whims of fate.

" Miles, the weather's awful out and you have no one else to turn to, of course you can stay! As
long as you agree to be under constant supervision, and obviously not break the law. " Sally said
outstretching her hand at the end, being compassionate at first and serious and wary by the end.

" Deal! I swear on my life, " Miles said to her shaking her hand, taking it very seriously while still
being on edge. He was ashamed of how much he was appreciating simply holding someone's hand,
and forced himself to let go. Sally noticed that, just like the last time she shook his hand, his grip
was gentle rather than firm, as if he was using it as an excuse to hold someone's hand. He didn't
squeeze the hand at all, and she was doing the majority of the shaking. She supposed she should've
taken that kind of " wimpy " handshake as a sign that he wasn't that bad, that at the very least he
wasn't the type to assert dominance and control over someone at the slightest of opportunities and
cared more about feeling loved.

" I'll be sure to keep Nicole around you at all times to make sure you'll always be telling the truth.
Not that I don't trust you not to try anything right now. I just want to be sure, " Sally stated
seriously, being a bit nervous at the end. She still didn't entirely trust him not to give in to his old
evil ways, and Nicole could tell how shaky things were for him and decided not to risk anything
for him by revealing that he was lying about his stay being temporary. She wasn't entirely sure
how well things would work out, Tails' evil twin trying to be a hero out of loneliness, but her hope
was that with positive role models around making him use his abilities for good, and with enough
empathy being shown to him, Miles might end up realizing the error of his ways because of them
and changing for the better. None of that would happen if he was rejected as a Freedom Fighter on
day one because of her. So she kept quiet, hoping she wasn't being a bad friend to Sally by doing
so.
"M-Miles?" a male voice suddenly said to him in shock, with the familiarity of it and French accent immediately reassuring him that he wasn't an enemy. "Antoine!" Tails said getting everyone's attention, noticing him walk into the room looking worried and concerned. After briefly being completely still, he went up to Miles in a hurry, and responded to his emotional turmoil with a concerned, "What's wrong?! Don't tell me something, happened to them..." It was clear to everyone from that reaction that he knew Miles better than any of them did.

Looking awkward at first, Bunnie finally said, "Look, I know you don't like talking about your time disguised as Patch, but, I think now it'd be the best idea to, well... talk about what you've learned." Sally, feeling she could word it better, ordered him, "What she means to say is, Miles is going to be helping us out for a while, and as someone who has spent an entire year with him, you are a valuable source of information. Tell us everything you know about him."

Antoine looked over at Miles in pity, and then replied awkwardly scratching the back of his neck, "You mean, right in front of him?" knowing that he would only embarrass him even further. Miles forced out despite his voice cracking, "I've been humiliated enough! F-Fine, tell them what you know about me, but at least do it behind my back so that I don't have to hear it. I already know how pitiful I am..." He said the word pitiful with scathing self-loathing and bitterness for himself, and his first sentence had him terrified afterwards that his raising his voice had landed him in hot water.

Tails had to hold back a gasp from hearing his supposedly arrogant evil twin express self-hatred like that, and said impulsively, "No you're not! Anyone would be upset from going through that! It'll be okay..." in spite of his history with him. Miles wasn't sure if he'd get used to having to be polite to Tails, someone he was still very envious of and didn't entirely respect, but he at least was already growing to appreciate his kindness.

"Thank you," he replied reluctantly, and was unable to hold back smiling a little with his eyes closed from Tails briefly giving him a reassuring backrub. He knew he would grow very fond of that kindness from him, but he couldn't help but wonder how he earned it. He vividly remembered the last thing he had said to him as an enemy, and his smile faded. "Please don't talk, little boy, we're trying to have an intelligent conversation." A tear ran down his face, and he quickly wiped it away, self-conscious as more of them started to come out.

Unable to hide from it any longer, he held back a deep sigh of regret at being reminded of how condescending and hateful he could make himself sound, looking depressed with his head hung low and subconsciously leaning closer to Tails on the couch, savoring the compassion. "No wonder people can only sympathize with me out of pity..." he thought bitterly to himself. Being treated with such compassion by the "little boy" after all of that felt horribly wrong, and he was determined to make sure that treatment would become earned and deserved, which he could only do by painstakingly making it up to him.

Thinking ahead to the idea of himself being awkwardly polite to Tails, he concluded that it would be very difficult. But he had to do it, because if he started repaying his kindness with hatred, it would only make him feel worse, and he'd soon lose it and never be able to get it back. At the same time, he knew he couldn't overdo it, because the Freedom Fighters would only get suspicious at worst and weirded out at best, defeating the purpose of making it up to them because they wouldn't appreciate it at all. So all he could manage to do at the moment was mumble quietly, "I'm sorry..." to Tails as he put his arm around his evil twin.

"Okay, Antoine. We'll wait," Sally said understandingly to Antoine, who hoped he'd be able to get away with keeping some of Miles' more humbling secrets for as long as he could. Wanting to at least help a little as he sat next to Bunnie on the armchair, he said, "Just be patient with him. He's
not that bad. I'd be lying if I said he didn't hate humanity, but he, has a heart… " Everyone nodded in understanding, still stunned at everything that had happened recently.

Sally ordered Miles, " Take off your boots and shirt, they're soaking wet and need to be dried, " and he nodded and followed the order, despite a bit of difficulty removing the turtleneck. He then handed them to Bunnie who had her arms outstretched for them and left the room carrying them. As everyone else in the room continued to look at him sympathetically, Antoine reassured Miles in a quiet voice, " I know you're nervous, but the hard part is over now. You've already apologized. Now you just have to behave and everything will be fine. "

Miles sighed sadly, still wiping away tears, and said sadly with a slightly cracking voice as Bunnie returned to the living room, " I don't feel like my apology was really enough. It was just three words, it probably came off as just an afterthought. You don't know how much I've thought about it… and how hard it was for me to say it! I-I just want you to know that I'm not proud of what I did with my old gang, and what I did to you. Even back then, I didn't like looking back on it. I'm not gonna try and lie and say that I never hated humanity, even now I don't like or trust people as a whole, but that doesn't make me proud of how I wasted so much of my time lashing out at the world and following their orders just so I could have friends. I-I'm not making excuses, I just want you to better understand that I didn't really have much of a choice back then, a-and I didn't have anyone else willing to be there for me. I wouldn't still be alive if I hadn't settled for them, and that's why I can't bring myself to hate them as much as everyone else does. But just because all that isn't my fault doesn't keep me from being, regretful. "

Everyone listened to his awkward apology with worried and sometimes wary expressions. Antoine wasn't suspicious at all, and neither was Nicole, or Sonic and Tails, but the other Freedom Fighters were torn between being sympathetic to and proud of him, and being very confused and skeptical. By the end of it, Miles had broken down crying once again, and Sonic gave into temptation and hugged him on the couch, surprising everyone in the room except for Miles himself, who relaxed his shoulders at being hugged by a blue hedgehog again.

Miles was torn between staying completely silent until necessary just to be safe, and trying to say everything he wanted to say so he wouldn't be depressed at holding it inside. With a reassuring look from Tails in response to him trying to dry his tears, Miles said awkwardly with a slightly choked up voice, " S-So am I, um, going to be stuck without a shirt until it dries? Well, obviously, yes, I just mean, I don't have a change of clothes. Or anything, really. All of my belongings are back on Moebius. I-It's not a big deal to me or anything, just, never mind… " He was scared at the end of being seen as materialistic and demanding.

" What'd he own anyways, 'Twan? " Sonic asked Antoine casually, trying to lighten up the mood by acting more cheerful. Fortunately, everyone else got the hint and followed suit, trying their best to smile and act natural as Antoine explained, " Well, he had lots of CDs, mostly of the rock genre of music, and obviously a CD-Player to hear them with. He also had a violin and a violin bow. Um, let me think… Technically the castle piano was Alicia's, or more like her family's in general, but it was basically his because only he ever used it. What else was there? Nothing really. Spare clothes resembling the ones he already had, um, and he still had his old leather jacket and shades stuffed in his closet. They obviously wouldn't fit him anymore. "

Miles looked embarrassed at the end, since Antoine made it clear, or at least Miles thought he did, that the clothes Scourge gave him held sentimental value to him. He also couldn't help but be saddened by being reminded that he officially lost them, and his spiked bracelets were all he had left of his brother.

" How'd you know all that, exactly? Why'd he let you in his room? " Amy asked, Sally being a bit
annoyed at her again because she was making him feel self-conscious being talked about as if he wasn't even there. Antoine answered unhappily, "I found out the first time he had a fever when I was there. I volunteered to take care of him until he got better, and so I spent a lot of time in his room watching TV as a result. Oh, right, he also had a TV, an HD one, not that it mattered because he never really watched it."

"You don't mind that he looked in your room and stuff, do you?" Amy asked Miles, being the blunt one once again. This time, it was for the best, as Miles shook his head and answered unhappily, "He couldn't help being curious. He just wanted to get to know me better, and since he had to disguise himself as Patch, he couldn't outright ask about things he was expected to already know, so he was probably just trying to get himself better informed in any way he could. There's nothing inherently wrong with that."

By that point, his tears had stopped at last, and he was already starting to feel better, getting used to being around the Freedom Fighters as it finally began to sink in that he wasn't unwanted there. If he really had a reason to be worried, they would've already mistreated him. He looked around the living room glancing at everyone's facial expressions just to be sure, and sure enough, none of them seemed annoyed with him or suspicious. All he had to do was keep being well-behaved, and things might turn out fine in the end.
With the Freedom Fighters in Rotor’s lab while Miles was passed out on the sofa, Sally ordered, “Okay, Antoine, it’s time. Tell us everything you know about him.” Bunnie said more reassuringly, “What she MEANS to say is, what was it like being disguised as Patch? How did Miles treat you? It might be easier to start there, “seeing Sally as being bossy. Antoine sighed, and said, “Well, okay, I’ll start. But you have to promise you won’t think any less of me, or not believe me.” His friends all promised him they wouldn’t, with Bunnie and Sonic putting their hands to their chests, and Antoine took a deep breath, before he started to explain.

“So, when I was first sent to that world, Scourge told me that if I didn’t keep on the disguise, I’d lose all hope of ever coming home again. “Because he’d kill you?” Bunnie asked him nervously. Antoine said, “No, actually. That’s the thing! I THOUGHT he meant that. But as time went by, it seemed like, he wasn’t that bad. Now bear with me here, I have good reasons for thinking this. First off, if he was really as evil as I thought he was, he wouldn’t have faked Patch’s scar on me with a marker, he would’ve given me it for REAL. I thought for SURE that he’d do that, and I was terrified, but he didn’t. He NEVER hurt me. Not even a minor smack. I expected Sonic’s evil twin to be this unstoppable psychopath because he’s so fast that no one can outrun him and he’d, get rid of them in a single blow, but while he is sadistic against his enemies, he’s never killed anybody! Barely even a prank, it’s like he thought taking me to Moebius was prank enough. “His friends all look wide-eyed and shocked as he explained nervously, hoping that they wouldn’t accuse him of just having Stockholm syndrome,

“Occasionally, he’d tease me, about being worried, but not when I was just unhappy in general with my situation. If anything, he, felt uncomfortable about it. One time, he caught me at my worst, the third day I was there… “

The Freedom Fighters all looked at him in shock, with Sonic smiling eventually, as Antoine began to explain the most surprising time Scourge and him had together. When he was hiding in a closet in Alicia’s castle, wiping away tears and gasping behind Scourge’s jackets, he jumped at hearing a knock on the door, and Scourge opened it up, making him wonder why he bothered knocking at all. To his surprise, though, he saw through the blurry white fog of his tears that the blue hedgehog looked worried, and uncomfortable. Despite that, he was dreading on instinct what his reaction would be; this was the evil twin of Sonic the Hedgehog he was looking at, someone he was absolutely mortified to be stuck on a planet with a few days ago, and was trying to be on his best behavior to avoid setting him off. He hadn’t even spoken to him since he first showed up there. Since he saw how merciless he was with beating up thugs on the streets, he had a reason to fear his temper.

“C’mon, it’s not that bad, “ Scourge said with a sad tone, sat down in front of him, and Antoine tensed up startled when he felt his arms embrace him in a warm hug, before he could do anything about it. “What are you doing?!” he asked without thinking as Scourge gently stroked the back of his head to calm him down. Thinking that it was a stupid question, Scourge reluctantly admitted, “T-Trying to get you to stop crying, what does it look like? “

Noticing that he wasn’t squeezing him tightly in the hug, but was instead being rather gentle, Antoine asked in confusion, “Why? Don’t you like my suffering? “his voice cracking, and he continued gasping, sobbing from homesickness and a desperation to get back.

Scourge answered awkwardly, still holding him close, “It… you’re remindin’ me of Miles, okay? It’s a force of habit. You’re actin’ like you’re traumatized by all this! And I’ve seen firsthand how
that can mess a kid up. And I don’t wanna have THAT on my head. Being bullied on an island and hunted like a rat is one thing, having to live somewhere else is another. So compared to that? Not a problem! ‘Sides, uh, who WOULDN’T like getting a hug? Nobody’s watchin’. If I see a perfect opportunity, I take it… “ Antoine remembered that Miles told him how unloving Scourge’s parents were, and felt sad. So when Scourge added, “ You’ll feel better if you do it back, ‘Twan, “ he ended up hugging back.

After a six second hug, Scourge reluctantly let him go just to sit beside him, put one arm around him to hold him to his side, and Antoine couldn’t help but feel reassured by the warmth of his shoulder as his head leaned against it, frantically wiping away tears ashamed of being caught like that. Shaking and gasping, he kept dreading Scourge insulting him, voicing the insults in his own head, but it never came. Scourge turned his head to him, looked him in the eyes and said seriously, “ If I only cared about making ya suffer, don’t you think I’d just do that? Torture ya after lying that you betrayed the team? Think about it! Listen, it’s NOT that bad here. Everyone treats ya decently, only mildly annoyed that you’re worried all the time. You’ve never been hurt, or gotten in trouble, and you’re even complimented on how well you beat up thugs, and not to mention swipe and pickpocket stuff, you’re a NATURAL! I mean, stealing those keys without the guy noticin’? Genius! So we clearly care about ‘cha. We’re just not lookin’ to look like total softies by admitting it constantly. You’ve never even been pranked. “

Antoine said in a breaking voice, “ I thought being stranded here WAS a prank, “ hiding his face with his hands. Scourge complained looking away in annoyance, “ Yeah, and it got old FAST. It was amusing enough at first, but pretty soon I got sick and tired of your moping around. At first it was interesting seeing how you reacted to Patch’s lifestyle. Now it’s just depressing. It’s not funny anymore. As much as I want it to be. “ Then he said under his breath looking uncomfortable, “ T-To be honest, I feel like any minute you’re gonna snap and, do something really stupid. And get yourself hurt, or worse, “ worried that he was going to have a breakdown, and he did not want that happening in front of Miles.

Antoine was stunned at hearing him talk like that. Sometimes his brain mistook him for the Prime Sonic on instinct and got very confused, and hoped that it really was him. “ I, t-then, w-why not just send me home? “ he asked, thinking it wasn’t fair. Scourge put his hand on his shoulder, which startled him but soon comforted him with its warmth, and he told him, “ I CAN’T, ‘Twan. I HAD to do this. I didn’t do this just to annoy you. I mean you think you’re my mortal enemy or somethin’, that you’re always on my mind? No, why would I go out of my way to focus on you just for the sake of it? Why’d I mess with you and not Sonic? It’s not just to prank you of all people, it’s ‘cause I needed a replacement for Patch. You were just the first to come to mind. “

Scourge seemed scared and frantic being relatable to Antoine as he explained, “ Patch’s been trying to kill me. He even tried to ice me five times in one week! I didn’t have a choice! He HAD to go! And I know what you’re thinking, but if I just killed him outright, they’d FIND OUT. I’m not stupid, I can still think ahead. If I got rid of him without a replacement, whether that’s from icing him or putting him in a special place to torture him, the gang would figure out he went missing and blame ME for it since I’m the most likely one, and kick me out. And who KNOWS how Miles would react to all of that?! I never killed anyone before as far as I know, n-not that I’m too soft to ever even consider it. But it couldn’t be as simple as just doing that to him. “

Antoine felt uneasy about someone with Sonic’s voice casually talking about the idea of killing someone like it was a choice between choosing which cereal to have for breakfast. It felt like it was Sonic who was talking like that, and that was part of the whole problem he had with Scourge, that
any time he acted more harshly and cruelly, he couldn’t help but imagine if Sonic was like that when he was reminded of his times with him. But hearing that Scourge had actually never killed anyone before, at least on purpose, stunned Antoine, and he hoped it wasn’t too good to be true.

He thought in French, “Yes it COULD’VE been. And then I wouldn’t have my reputation ruined by that monster! Who knows what he’s done, who knows how many people he’s hurt, all because of you, you reckless, irresponsible hedgehog! You SHOULD’VE… What’s wrong with me? Am I becoming like these punks already? He’s not THAT bad, he IS comforting me after all. I need to calm down. “

Scourge continued, “Well, actually, I guess it could’ve. I could’ve killed him and THEN sent him to another zone with a replacement. I don’t know why I didn’t. Hell, it would’ve given Sonic a scare, gotten him to take me seriously finally. And now who knows what he’s up to there… Well, I assume he’s beating up punks like he always did, maybe he’s in jail by now because that’s illegal for some weird reason. “ He took his hand briefly just because he could as he reassured, “So you can relax, alright? Chances are, he’s in prison and not hurting anyone. “

He added, “Well, anyone worth anything I mean. That’s what I assume, but I… “ He looked awkward letting go because Antoine didn’t appreciate it, and explained awkwardly, “Look, s-sorry you’re upset, OK? I didn’t really think about what I did. I didn’t think about what he’ll do when I sent him there. It was all a split-second impulse when he threatened me with that teleporter. And you know me, I’m impulsive. The opportunity was so obvious, it was too good to pass up. Get rid of the guy threatening me, that I wasn’t allowed to do something about normally, and with only one catch. You. “

As Scourge pulled him close so that his head was resting against his side and chest, Antoine tried to focus on the warmth to avoid feeling too uncomfortable, trying to pretend it was Sonic and failing as he wished that a part of him didn’t enjoy the compassion and affection. Scourge smiled as he complimented enthusiastically, “And you’re not even that much of a catch to this! You’re way better at this than I thought! You play the role like a champ, talking like a typical bad guy playing it up, when I thought all I would get from you is a refusal to do what you’re told on the first mission and you’d run away like a coward! That would’ve solved my problem just fine, explaining why Patch would go missing from their lives. “

Scourge stopped smiling as he continued calmly and Antoine finished crying, “But who knows what’d happen to you after that, where you’d live and what the evil Sally and Rotor would do. Don’t think that would be the safer option, because it’s not. Where’re you gonna go? You got nothing else and nobody else, and Sally wouldn’t accept you just up and ditching her. At least I don’t think she would. They’d want revenge. This way, well… you’re safer here. “

After a confused silence, Antoine said, “Fighting thugs twice my size?“ hoping that his constant contradicting Scourge wouldn’t make him lose his temper from losing patience with him. It never failed to be a relief to him that such a thing never happened. Scourge encouraged him, “Hey, you’re not half bad at it! You knock ’em with your chain somethin’ fierce, and you deck ’em pretty hard, too. Guess you have a lot of stress to work out. You take a few bruises here and there, but nothing landing you in the hospital. I kinda take back the wuss and dweeb insults! The only way you’d be one is if you kept letting this get to you. “ Antoine found the second to last sentence heartwarming and wished that Sonic had ever said that to him, but was annoyed by the final sentence implying that he was being irrational.

Scourge continued, “I mean, I can understand you not wanting to bother Kintobor, but the punks in the city? Come on, the minute Sonic takes Robotnik down, you and the other heroes would have to fight guys like that all day anyways. It’s no different than beating up Swatbots. Just try to see the
positives of your situation, alright? I’m tired of ya mopin’ around. “

With an excited smile, Scourge said to him, “If you think about it, I did you a favor! You get to loosen up, get all your repressed anger out, do whatever you always wanted to do that your old friends like Sally would never let ya, ‘cause with me and my gang, you’re ABOVE the law! You can take anything you like and any time you feel like you wanna punch someone, aside from one of us, you can just do it to your heart’s content. You’re basically invincible. Any time you ever wished you could cause some mischief, daydreamed about even the slightest prank, you can! You have the freedom to do anything you want that doesn’t cross us. Think of this as a vacation! A vacation from a world constantly pestered by that egghead’s rule!“

“…But you didn’t do it for me…“ Antoine pointed out, despite his fear, and he forced himself to continue despite the fear of being lashed out at, “Y-Y-You’re just making excuses, a-AFTER the fact. To j-justify what you’re doing. You don’t r-really care about me, do you? It’s Miles who gets all worried when I take a hit. If you really cared about me, y-you’d let me go home, you’d let me take off during a mission and let me warp home with your teleporter. “

Scourge sighed. Accepting that his affection wasn’t appreciated, he reluctantly let him go, and said, “Again, Antoine, I have to keep you here. Or I’ll get in a lot of hot water. Miles wouldn’t react well to losing one of his best friends and the rest of the gang would all blame me, and if you acted too out of character and took off from having a conscience, for all I know they’d figure out you’re not really Patch and I’ll get in trouble. If you betrayed them, you might get in hot water long before you’d get a chance to warp back home. They might not believe me if I tried to have them believe you betrayed them just to try to explain away ‘Patch’ leaving, and in fact, I DID TRY to have that happen to Patch and it didn’t work!… As much as I’m being, well, soft on you, that’s ONLY because you’re not causing me all sorts of headaches like Patch did. I wouldn’t put up with you inconveniencing me, especially not like that. “

Worried, Antoine asked, “Would you try to kill me? Torture me in a dungeon for the rest of my life?“ and Scourge actually looked uncertain, and quickly covered it up by saying, “Er, MILES, remember? I can’t. That’s the ONLY reason, obviously. He was… he would know how it… Although, ugh, okay, look, I do appreciate you on some level, because you’re the person I kind of wish Patch WAS. “ Antoine looked at him wide-eyed and shocked. None of his old friends ever said they appreciated him. “Not the fact that you’re miserable and complaining about being here with us. In fact, I wish you liked it here and enjoyed the fun. If only I could brainwash you into being happy here,“ Scourge continued awkwardly. Antoine was surprised by the idea, and saw a contrast to Robotnik who would never make someone happy with brainwashing, just brainwash them to benefit him.

“I mean that while you’re not exactly grade A friend material since you obviously resent me for what I did, you’re still leaps and bounds and YARDS ahead of Patch. And I respect that, bud. “ Scourge admitted reluctantly, smiled at the end putting his arm around him and said, “I really do,“ putting his hands on his shoulders briefly with a sincere smile.

He continued as Antoine looked confused, “So I’m not about to reward your good behavior by treating you like him. That’d be stupid, you’d end up trying to ice me too, and I guarantee ya if you dared to tried to kill me, you’d be outta here! But as long as you keep it up, things are gonna be just fine. “He briefly stroked his hair like he was Miles saying, ‘You’ll see!‘ with a reassuring smile, and stopped while looking hurt because Antoine only backed away nervous and bewildered. Scourge sighed, and said, “I guess I’m only confusing you by being nice to ya. Just like Miles when I first met him. So fine. I know when I’m not, wanted. But hey, I got you to stop crying, so I say it was worth it! Mission accomplished!“
Antoine felt so confused, and thought in French, “He’s the master of mixed messages. First he threatens to kill me and then he says he likes me? Who IS he? I think I might have preferred it if it was simpler and he really was pure evil. Oh who am I kidding, of course I wouldn’t, I’d probably be dead by now, “ and Scourge continued after standing up from the floor,

“ And again, you’re way safer here. Our Robotnik’s not evil, trying to turn everyone into robots or anything. If it weren’t for me, who knows what would’ve happened to you? You’re lucky you got as far as you did, with your lack of special powers! You could’ve been killed! Or injured, or turned into a robot, or tortured, or put in a coma! You should be, well, “ he looked irritated predicting his reaction to what he’d say and continued in frustration, “ well, okay fine, you’re homesick, you miss your normal friends, so maybe THANKING me wouldn’t make much sense. I GET it! But at least TRY to focus on the silver lining here and have fun with what you’ve got. You’re making things a lot harder for yourself than it could be. Try makin’ a list of the positives, doing everything you can think of that you’d enjoy, a lot of which you wouldn’t get to do back home. Maybe faking enjoying it would be a good start; smiling can fool your brain into actually being happy if you do it long enough… I mean, not that I would know! Miles just told me!... And I think that could apply to you. “

He put his hand on his shoulder one last time, and told him seriously as Antoine looked guilty, “ Remember, you’re playing a role. Not the real thing. Don’t let yourself feel too guilty for the role you got forced into by circumstance. It’ll eat you up inside. “ Antoine cringed a little at the image from that, and again found the courage to speak to him, feeling more encouraged to every time he didn’t snap at him as he began to fear him less and less as time went on. “ Then doing bad things when I don’t have to will only make me feel worse. “ “ Define bad things, “ Scourge said, rolling his eyes thinking he didn’t get it, and opened the closet door, saying,

“ That’s subjective. You need to think more open-mindedly, because real heroes are open-minded, not quick to judge. At least that’s what Miles used to say, and I’M his hero. Don’t bottle it up, Antoine, you’ll be a ticking time bomb if you do. And I don’t want you doing anything stupid because you lose control of yourself. “

Antoine didn’t want to admit that he felt like Scourge had a good point. He was stressed out, and there were plenty of times when he felt like decking Sonic when he pranked him, but didn’t because he was scared of the consequences. Maybe with his reputation on Moebius, he had nothing to be scared of, especially with the other members of the gang around. He didn’t want to act just as bad as Patch, but something about the idea that he was in power and in control when trapped in a helpless situation was enticing. He never had that position before. It used to be Robotnik in power, but here, Scourge’s gang was if anything.

After Scourge walked out of the closet, he snapped him out of his conflicted train of thought by telling him, “ I’m SERIOUS, ‘Twan, don’t get yourself killed. We don’t need that, MILES definitely doesn’t need that, and neither do your friends back home. And I’m not talking about attacking too recklessly. I think you’ll be fine with that. You got US around. Just, don’t… get too emotional. Just be patient, okay? ‘Cause eventually, I might wanna fight Sonic again, not like I’m trying to work up the nerve, just the motivation, of course. And who knows. Maybe I’ll have to bring you along. “ With an oddly sweet smile, he took off after the final two sentences, leaving Antoine stunned and remembering the hug he gave him earlier.

Antoine said to his confused friends in the present day, “ He didn’t HAVE to comfort me that one time, but he did anyway. I thought he would tease me, insult me, hit me, but not only did he not do any of that, but he gave me a hug and told me everything he could to make me feel better. He tried to have me think of it as a blessing, a vacation from my earlier troubles, and he calmly explained to me WHY he had trapped me on his planet, which he didn’t bother to do earlier. Of course, it was to
save his own skin, because he’d get in trouble if word got out that he got rid of Patch, and Patch was constantly trying to kill him, but the sheer fact that he didn’t kill Patch outright, and reassured me when he didn’t have to at all… I don’t know. I think he’s not as bad as he makes himself out to be. “

Sonic, Sally, Bunnie, Amy, Rotor and Tails were in various states of shock, confusion, and curiosity at what Antoine had to say, with Amy and Sonic even smiling at points, and Antoine, the whole time, was scared that they wouldn’t even believe him, and would dismiss him as delusional.

“ And remember, you promised me you’d believe me. I don’t have a reason to lie and he’s not the type to embarrass himself by looking like a softie on purpose, so I don’t think he’d try to manipulate someone THAT much with no reason to. He was, a complicated person. Vicious one moment, but friendly the next. It was creepy because he was, almost there, but he just wasn’t Sonic, and every time he did something like punched a criminal in the gut or kicked them below the belt, or threw everyone out of the arcade, I wished he was you, Sonic, and he almost was, which is why I survived. One minute he was holding me to his side complimenting me and the next he was saying Kintobor was just a lying hypocrite. I didn’t know what to think and I settled on hating him for what he did. But honestly… “

He took a deep breath since he was afraid of being judged for what he would say, and admitted, “ It wasn’t that bad. Of course, I hated bothering Kintobor, it’s not like I was evil over there! But I think the fact that I came back home acting braver instead of traumatized and quitting the action from sheer stress, means a lot about my situation over there. Because Scourge was part of the reason I BECAME braver. Every single time I felt like I was pushing my luck with him, he didn’t lose his temper. I just kept on contradicting him, while still staying relatively polite, and it simply annoyed him. Same goes for Miles. “

Sonic and Bunnie said, “ Finally, “ relieved at Antoine getting to the original point at last, and Sally, after hoping they wouldn’t be seen as rude, asked, “ What about him? And don’t worry, we’re not judging you for doing what you had to do. You’re probably right. “ “ …Well, with Miles, the reason he made me braver was not only that I never got him to hurt me, but it’s also because he gave me advice. He knows how it feels to be, you know, well coward’s not really fair to HIM, I mean timid and worried is more like it. When he’s scared, he acts angry and serious to cover it up and fights against the threat to lash out. He knew how I was feeling and wanted me to feel better. “

“ How exactly? Did he KNOW who you were? “ Sally asked in curiosity. Antoine explained nervously, “ I don’t think so. I let him believe I was just Patch with amnesia. He said he’d tell me everything I needed to be reminded of and keep my secret to help protect me from being taken advantage of. When it was the end of my first day, he walked into my room and asked me why I was so quiet and nervous earlier, and he was really concerned about me. So I took a huge risk, which I think I only did because he was young and reminded me of Tails. I asked him if he liked bothering Kintobor all the time, being an evil twin. And he said he didn’t! “

He continued with an excited smile, “ He smiled, figuring out that I didn’t like doing that, and he started complaining about how pointless he felt it was and that he was only doing it to appease his friends, and he wished he could have a bigger villain to fight like Robotnik! I thought he’d just think I was being stupid, but he loved having someone he could finally relate to. The most relatable person to him before me was Scourge, and that was only because their parents hated them and they wanted to lash out… They were both lonely people, honestly, and it showed. It’s why Scourge was so willing to hold me close to him on a whim, and it’s why MILES was. In fact, he took every opportunity to hug me and reassure me that he could! I feel like he was my only real friend there! The only one I could open up to and be myself around. Even when I was sick, he volunteered to spend all day with me in my bed until I got better, and even covered for me when I faked it for as long as I could get away with. “
Everyone looked surprised, and Bunnie exclaimed, “I figured he had a soft side, but I didn’t think it was that much! Are you sure?” Antoine said, “He’d have nothing to gain from pretending. Remember, he’s not comfortable looking like a softie, either. He’s, well, scared. He’s worried about people reacting badly to it, not trusting him or mistreating him, thinking he’s an easy target. Like they always used to... He had to be with Scourge for a reason! People, really didn’t like him, and for the flimsiest of a reason, long before he had done anything to deserve it. All because he had two tails... I don’t want to go into that too much. Not only would it take all day, but I think it’d be unfair to him, he’s already ashamed enough of how his past has affected him, and you’ll figure it all out as you spend time with him anyways and see what, gets him on edge. Is that okay with you? I’d feel awful if I just told you everything about the bullying he used to go through, especially since YOU’D feel awful.”

Sally sighed and reluctantly admitted, “Okay, fine. I suppose it’s none of our business. But if he’s scared of something we’ll be seeing a lot, you should let me know in advance,” as everyone looked worried and sympathetic to Miles. Antoine smiled in relief, and said, “Me and Miles would go on ‘let’s not and say we did’ missions when we were alone together where we’d just go cooking or go to the arcade when we were supposed to do something evil instead. That’s right, cooking. He was a GREAT cook! He actually taught me quite a lot about it. He could be a professional chef! If only... if only he wasn’t so shy. He won’t even play music in front of anyone. I hope we could help him get over that. Maybe he’d be happier here, helping us out. He certainly thought he might be when I first got to know him.” “They all smiled, and held out the same hope.
In order to test his usefulness to their group, the Freedom Fighters brought Miles to a hill overlooking an army of Egg Pawns that were slowly walking towards the entrance road to Emerald Town, the suburbs near Station Square. At last, with a good view of the robots down the hill below them, everyone stopped and stood near where the hill sloped. Nicole, Bunnie, Antoine, and Sally were to the left of Miles, while Amy as well Sonic and Tails were to the right of him. They were all a little more warmly dressed than usual in response to the chilly autumn wind, with Rotor wearing a light gray scarf and jacket, Nicole wearing a light purple sweater and scarf, Bunnie wearing a brown Texas-style sweater with black buttons, Amy wearing a pink sweater and long red pants, and Sally wearing a light blue scarf with a blue sweater.

Finally revealing to Miles why they were going there after several minutes of walking there, Sally questioned, "The reason we all brought you here is this. What are you going to contribute to our cause? After all, while yes, we all know you're intelligent, we can't exactly let you make the plans. So your intelligence won't exactly help us. So what can you do that Tails can't? " A bit nervous about their potential reaction, Miles looked away saying quietly, "Well, actually…" and hesitated before explaining awkwardly,

"I barely even use the abilities I share with Tails anymore because they've since become obsolete. I've learned a lot about myself since the last time we met, and as a result, I've discovered a vast quantity of abilities that I never knew I had, mainly relating to my innate control over two forces of nature; electricity and the weather, both of which I was born with an instinctive mental connection with. " Smiling in excitement that he couldn't help but be bursting with, Miles exclaimed proudly, "Allow me to show you my greatest asset! " and turned to face the robot army on the ground behind and below him.

With that, Miles pushed towards the ground to create an uplift of air to launch himself high into the sky, moved his arm in a circle to create a dark thundercloud below him. Looking like he was high up in the sky riding on top of a thundercloud, he immediately got to work throwing lightning at the Egg Pawns in quick swiping arm motions, raining electricity down at the now panicking robot army. Moving quickly with a thrilled smile from being able to fight with his powers after weeks of inactivity, he fought the robot army at full strength, not holding anything back.

Responding to his dedication to the fight and letting his anger out, the wind picked up and started roaring around the army of robots surrounding it in a whirlwind so fast that it was visible from afar, all from a single thought from him. By moving his hands upwards with his palms facing the sky on either side of him, he created a barrier of golden electricity that surrounded the robot army from all sides and trapped them in his area of sight, and smirked cruelly at the hopelessness of their situation, before going right back to a thrilled childish smile of excitement at him thoroughly enjoying throwing bolt after bolt of lightning at them.

Feeling like he had to mix things up more in front of the Freedom Fighters, he rubbed two of his fingers against his thumb and mentally increased the amount of water vapor in the sky just above the robot army, causing clouds to appear above them and expand to cover the horizon just beyond him, clouds that grew dark to the point of casting a clear shadow on the army of Egg Pawns that were now being caught in a raging thunderstorm, the wind howling around them and the rain short-circuiting them in a furious downpour.

Knowing he had to hurry to show off the last power he wanted to, Miles shook his hand with its fingers bent upwards and facing the sky, starting with vibrating it from upwards to downwards and
immediately reversing it, which reversed the temperature of the hill below him, freezing the air into large icicles that he summoned to trap the robots in, or what was left of them. He then shook his hands violently waving them in an abrupt upwards motion, making the large icicles shatter into pieces and melt.

Finished showing off his power at last, Miles sighed happily, and turned around with a relaxed smile of satisfaction, relieved that being able to vent out weeks of pent-up stress with a vicious onslaught of attacks on deserving targets, all while using the powers that he loved using so innately. But his happiness was transformed into anxiety and sadness at seeing how instead of being happy with him, the Freedom Fighters looked worried.

Sonic at least was impressed and happy for him, with a great big smile on him that reminded him of how proud Scourge was of him when he first learned to throw lightning in a fit of rage. He vividly remembered Scourge's voice in his head complimenting, "Come on, man, you can shoot lightning out of your hands! How is that not awesome?!"

But Sonic's impressed smile was replaced with a nervous but sympathetic expression upon realizing that he was the only one who reacted that way. Tails looked terrified, trembling with his pupils shrunken from his fear of lightning. Sally, Rotor and Bunnie all looked worried about the possibility of him using those powers against them or innocent people. Antoine was intimidated as well, and Amy had the same reaction. Even Nicole had a worried expression, although it was at least overshadowed by her intrigue and curiosity, like she was interested in his powers and how he could have them and not Tails, rather than only thinking of them as a threat. He supposed he'd rather have her fascinated with him than scared. But even she feared him for them a little.

It was clear that the Freedom Fighters mainly viewed his display of power as proof that he had become too powerful. He sighed sadly, looking depressed from how disappointed and unwanted he felt. At least the Suppression Squad never feared his powers. They respected them and were happy for him for discovering how strong he really was.

Sonic, trying to stand up for him with a forced smile from the tension, said, "Come on, guys, aren't you happy?! Just look at how he thrashed Eggman's robots for us! Isn't that cool?! He could give Shadow a run for his money!" Most of the Freedom Fighters, remembering how sympathetic Miles looked mourning his previous allies, smiled nervously to try to reassure him and tried to calm themselves down with the knowledge that he had a heart. But Sally was still worried.

Sally, her eyes darting around nervously, responded cautiously, "I know, but… You said temporary ally, remember. One of these days, he's going to use those powers against us, or against innocent people. While he's certainly powerful, he won't always use this for good. A-Although d-don't get me wrong, Miles! I fully appreciate every time that you will, " sounding scared of him by the end with a forced polite smile and laugh. Miles turned away, uncomfortable with making someone who reminded him so much of Alicia, afraid of him. This wasn't what he wanted from a friend.

"I'm not going to be your enemy again. I'm sick of that," he mumbled quietly with a depressed tone in his voice. This caused everyone to look at him in surprise and shock for a couple seconds, making him feel self-conscious at the attention. Fortunately for him, Nicole was there to help him, saying, "He's telling the truth!" with a relieved tone of voice, giving the Freedom Fighters some good news. Wishing he wasn't being stared at, Miles said awkwardly, "I just, I was wasting my time. I have no reason to go back to that now. Y-You don't have to worry about a thing. I won't use my powers for things you'll disapprove of. There's no reason to," scratching the back of his neck. Everyone smiled at him in response to that, and while some of the Freedom Fighters were still a bit nervous, their reaction was still enough to make him feel better.
When they all returned to the Freedom Fighters HQ, they went into the living room to watch a movie Sonic had bought, and Miles, who had no interest in any movies in the slightest, was thankful at being ordered by Sally, "Why don't you help out with the chores? The dishes need to be taken out of the dishwasher. Nicole, could you supervise him?" Nicole agreed, "Sure," and went into the kitchen with Miles. He was expecting to spend the entire time he was in the kitchen dealing with an awkward and tense silence, but to his surprise, Nicole actually wanted to talk to him, and in a polite way at that.

She asked, "So does Tails have those powers too and just not know it yet?" looking curious and intrigued as she sat on the kitchen table chair watching him. She would've helped him, but it didn't seem like something that could be done with two people at once, considering how small the space in front of the dishwasher was.

"For the most part, no. He can't summon electricity or ice or fire, or make it rain or snow. I'd be surprised if he ever did." Miles answered nonchalantly as he took the dishes out of the dishwasher putting them in the cupboard one at a time, showing no emotion in his tone to look dignified and cover up how stunned he was at her treatment of him.

Nicole thought to herself fascinated, "He can summon fire, too? I wonder why he didn't show us that. Perhaps it's his least favorite power. But, why?... Wait a minute, something doesn't make sense here." She asked him, "You're the counterpart of Tails from another dimension. But you said you were born with all the powers you displayed, so it isn't as if they only became something you possessed from your training with magic. So how is it that you have powers that your prime counterpart doesn't?"

Miles, after briefly hesitating, finally answered emotionlessly, "Because if both of us had power over lightning, there would be a thunderstorm every other day and it'd be blatantly obvious. I know that for a fact." His eyes darted around nervously as he worried that Nicole would become uneasy with him and upset with him upon figuring out that his mere presence increased the amount of lightning storms that occurred in the area, something that no doubt made life harder for Tails. He wasn't able to look over at Nicole to see her reaction to what he said, and as a result, he failed to see how she had an awestruck look of intrigue rather than being disapproving of him.

"To make a long story short, I was fortunate enough to discover a book on the history of two-tailed, foxes, in my dimension. Tails and I are a special variety of mutant who are officially called 'kitsune,' and we developed our powers and, extra tail, as a result of an unusually large amount of the world's naturally occurring chaos energy affecting a fox before birth." Nicole corrected in confusion, "Don't you mean anarchy energy? Since you're from that dimension and all?"

Miles responded, "Oh, same thing. Never understood why it has a different name for some arbitrary reason. Anyways, it turns out there have been various historical records of people like us being born for thousands of years, to the point where there's well-documented information on the different types of elemental abilities we can have. Which set of abilities a kitsune has is random, so Tails could've had the same powers as I did, but due to random chance, he didn't. There's a kitsune variety for all of the elements of nature, and even some more interesting ones like creativity, time and spirit."

It was only by the end of his explanation that he realized how long he had been talking about the subject, and was embarrassed and frustrated with himself for blathering on for so long about it when she might not even believe he was telling her the truth. He couldn't help talking for so long about it when it was something he was so passionate about, and the fact that he barely got to talk about kitsune with anyone didn't help.
"I'm trying to summarize this the best I can, so I'll make this quick: there's only two kitsune varieties that have the power to fly by spinning their tails, the air kitsune, and the lightning kitsune, the most powerful variety of all. Which one do you think I am?" Miles said nervously and quickly, sounding frustrated. He hoped that he wasn't offending her with his irritated disposition, as it was more frustration with himself than with her. Nicole was a little upset, but acted like nothing was wrong to avoid worrying him.

"Fascinating! That explains so much! I have always wondered why Tails doesn't have his tails twisted around each other when he tries to fly with them, and that isn't even getting into the fact that no matter how fast he's somehow able to spin them, he shouldn't be able to provide enough lift to get off the ground. But your explanation makes perfect sense. It's chaos energy allowing him to achieve such a feat, and chaos energy that gives you all of your own powers. A living being born with so many powers, they're like a natural-born version of Shadow!" Nicole responded with a smile, happy to learn so much about Tails after years of knowing him. "All this time, I thought he was merely a 'mutant.' I never knew he had so much potential. Is this why Miles wanted him to focus more on his connection to Chaos Force over engineering?" Nicole thought.

Miles was stunned to hear a pleased and impressed tone from her, which caused him to stop what he was doing, and for once, he looked over to see her facial expression, and upon seeing her smiling at him, he was immediately grateful he did. "I think I'm going to like this girl," Miles thought with a warm smile, and turned back to the dishwasher to continue taking the plates and bowls out of it, absent-mindedly so lost in his own thoughts that he failed to realize he just let down his intimidating image and smiled sweetly in front of her.

Nicole was struck speechless. She never saw Miles smile sincerely before; she wasn't even sure if it was possible. When she saw that smile on him as opposed to a condescending look or an evil smirk, he looked like a completely different person. "He looked like Tails!" Nicole thought, her eyes widened in shock at the heartwarming image.

That one thought made her conflicted to the point of being speechless, as she wasn't sure whether she should be filled with hope that Miles could become just as kind and cheerful as Tails from having a happier life, or if she should find it depressing and concerning that Miles was showing what he could've been but wasn't. She wasn't sure what that sweet smile meant, beyond gratitude at her appreciating him and his powers, which she hoped meant that they would have a close relationship as allies… even if it was only temporary.

There was a silence for several seconds after he smiled at her, before Nicole said to him understandingly, "Are you worried that Tails will be upset if he finds out what your presence does to the storm rate? I won't tell anyone, Miles, don't worry." Miles was stunned at her display of compassion and understanding, and to him of all people. After a few seconds of being speechless and doubtful, he replied quietly, "Thank you, Nicole," with a relieved smile on his face.

"She knows what I am, she knows how powerful I am, and she... doesn't hate me for it?" Miles thought, not being sure what to believe. She accepted him for what he was. She didn't purely see his powers as something he was too dangerous to have. She even thought they were cool, just like the Suppression Squad. Finally having it sink in at long last, Miles smiled to himself, thinking, "She'll be a good friend. I can already tell."
Chapter 7

After being introduced to them as an ally for the first time, Miles was following the Freedom Fighters through a forest on his way to his first ever mission with them. He still hadn't told them all that he was more than just a temporary ally. He believed that the more missions he'd help out with, the more they'd get used to having him around, until eventually they would cease questioning it and accept his presence without complaint. Eventually, if he was lucky, they would grow to take his presence for granted, and fail to realize how long their "temporary" ally had been on their side until they had already warmed up to him. It would take time, but as long as he was subtle, he just might be able to get them used to him.

But just before starting the mission, Miles was startled by the sound of a gun being fired nearby, and vividly remembering every other time he had heard such a noise, he became hysterically frightened in an instant. He gasped sharply, trembling with his pupils shrunken and a horrified look on his face, and instinctively took off running into the woods behind him, forgetting in his panicked state that he was not permitted to leave Sally's sight.

Sally called out to him, "Hey, come back!" and Sonic immediately ran after him with Tails following behind him, causing the rest of the group to try to follow behind them in all the commotion. Miles ran as fast as he could, gasping to almost the point of hyperventilation as he moved as fast as he could, blasting wind out of his palms behind him to propel him forwards at 2128 miles per hour in desperation. When he had been running for over a minute, his mind flooded with flashbacks of all the times he had armed bullies or policemen chasing him down, he gasped and hysterically panicked after tripping on a thick tree branch and collapsing to the ground below, being immediately reminded of all the times he had tripped while being chased and being caught up to immediately by his bullies.

"NO! Not again! Please!" Miles exclaimed frantically, shaking uncontrollably. He pushed himself up off the ground as fast as he could, hearing the sound of people running up to him from behind making him increasingly frantic, and before he could completely lose all hope and start desperately trying to fight back, he recognized the familiar scent of someone he had grown to trust, someone that over the years he had grown to love like a member of his family and associate with kindness and love. As he found himself being helped up from the ground and pulled close in a hug, he put his arms around the person he believed to be his brother, holding him as if he was terrified that he would leave his side.

Still frightened, Miles begged him hysterically, "Sonic, please! Don't let 'em shoot me! Please! I don't wanna die!... It's not fair..." with tears escaping his eyes as he cried into his shoulder, his eyes squeezed shut with his heartbeat rapid and trembling uncontrollably. Looking worried and confused, Sonic reassured him, "It's alright, it's alright, no one's trying to hurt you! That was just a car engine backfiring, it happens all the time! Relax!" as the rest of his friends caught up to him in a hurry; Tails had reached Miles at about the same time, but in spite of clearly sensing his electromagnetic field nearby, Miles failed to react to his presence, being too focused on how many things were reminding him of his past experiences to even spare a single thought on the present. While he knew that Tails and the rest of his friends were nearby, he was too distracted to care.

"A car?... That's where the noise came from?" Miles said in a whispered voice, skeptical of his claim while wanting to believe it. "Of course! Come on, Miles, nobody's gonna be trying to shoot ya! Besides, even if that was true, I'd never let 'em hurt ya like that. And neither would the rest of us. Right, guys?" Sonic reassured him, trying to force a smile in spite of the deeply upsetting situation.
It was at that point that Miles looked confused from hearing that there were other people around in support of him, and while he instinctively assumed they were the members of the Suppression Squad, opening his eyes revealed to him that Tails was standing behind Sonic as he let go of him, ending the hug at last. "Right!" Sally responded, getting his immediate attention, and he looked stunned from seeing the rest of the Freedom Fighters nodding in agreement with her, reassuring him that they would protect him, even in spite of everything he had done as their enemy.

His profound confusion at their sympathy for him snapped him back to reality, forcing him to remember them and the circumstances he was in from their complete absence from the memories he had been forced to relive. Upon realizing that he had looked hysterically frightened in front of the Freedom Fighters, and for what had turned out to be a flimsy reason, Miles awkwardly cleared his throat and looked away from them in embarrassment, trying unsuccessfully to look dignified again after having completely lost his composure. He couldn't believe how quick they were to feel sorry for him, instead of dismissing him as pathetic and irrational for being so easily frightened into hysteria, or thinking he was just putting on an act and treating him with suspicion and hatred. He tried to hold back his tears as he said in his usual dignified manner, "Yes, um, of course. I-I knew I was not in any danger… I, I-I was only testing you, to, to see what you would do if I was in danger. A-And you passed! Congratulations, you passed. T-The mission shall resume!" His attempt at looking composed and dignified failed miserably from all the stammering he was doing in his blatant lies and the fact that he was still shaking. Everyone knew he was lying, but decided against pointing it out, knowing that no good would come of it.

With that, he started walking back to where he had first started running away, feeling uncomfortable and ashamed, and hoping he wouldn't be disapproved of for deciding to walk there first rather than following behind the people trying to supervise him. Fortunately for him, he had nothing to be worried about. Everyone unhappily kept themselves from inquiring too much into his emotional outburst, knowing that he wasn't willing to explain it in-depth and feeling sorry for him from the implications it had. While Amy and Sally were still very wary and untrusting of the evil genius insisting on helping them out, they couldn't help but be distracted from their suspicion of him by their pity, once again feeling sorry for him and wondering just what he had suffered through in the past.

Miles quickly became well-known for effortlessly destroying Eggman's robots and mechas by the dozens with his new abilities, to the point where some civilians said in impressed awe that he was unstoppable. While this slightly worried the people who didn't trust him, they at least appreciated the fact that he was using his powers for good, becoming an incredible asset to the Freedom Fighters when it came to combat situations. Eggman was terrified seeing how easily Miles could take on his robot armies; almost effortlessly ripping the electricity out of them, getting them all struck with lightning at the same time multiple times in a row, taking control of the electric charges running through their "nerves" in order to freeze them in place or make them fire their projectiles at each other or at his Eggmobile, and starting strong winds and thunderstorms as he summoned sharp icicles to throw in rapid succession.

Eggman soon realized that he had no choice but to start waterproofing all of his robots, as their short-circuiting by the dozens from the many thunderstorms Miles caused became something he would get rather sick of. He didn't fail to notice how Miles' presence caused the rate of thunderstorms in the area to increase by seven times the normal rate, and unfortunately for Miles, the Freedom Fighter watching the weather report regularly didn't fail to notice that, either.

Worried that he couldn't win against him in combat, Eggman at least hoped that manipulation
would be the key in getting him out of the picture, and once tried to trick him into revealing that he was still evil after getting Sally to watch from behind a bush without his knowledge. "Come on, fox-boy, you're his evil twin. Do you really expect everyone to believe that you've suddenly changed?"

Miles nonchalantly and emotionlessly revealed, "I never tried to lie that I had suddenly converted to their 'heroic morals.' They already know. It would be so blatantly obvious from my apathy and bitterness that there would be no point," and quietly muttering so that only he could hear, "They'll hate me no matter what I do regardless of what I say," before finishing up more audibly, "The point is, I'm done wasting my time lashing out at the world and that's all that matters. And they know that. So your plan to turn Sally against me was a waste of your time, and everyone else's as well. You aren't revealing anything new, and you can't even if you try. It shouldn't matter that I'm not passionate about what they are, because I'm still accomplishing 'good' regardless. Even if I always stay bitter, it won't matter if my actions won't reflect it."

With that, Miles turned and walked away unhappily, looking only mildly annoyed with him. Eggman and Sally were baffled and dumbfounded, not expecting that he had sensed the latter's presence behind the bush, and Eggman left cursing his new enemy. Sally came up to Miles sheepishly at not trusting him, and there was an awkward silence that both of them disliked, before Miles said emotionlessly in an attempt at looking dignified, "Our mission is complete," and started walking to the Mystic Ruins with her following behind him.

Sonic and Tails left Miles alone with the Freedom Fighters to get snacks, and much to his dismay, this caused an awkward silence that went on for a few seconds afterwards as he was stared at by everyone in the room. After being reminded of his vandalism of Knothole by a resentful Amy, Miles explained uncomfortably in an almost monotone depressed tone, "The only reason I did that is because Scourge ordered me to. The people of Knothole didn't do anything to me, so I never had a personal grudge against them. They didn't have anything against me, so if I had the choice, I would've left them alone."

He was uncomfortable throughout the entire explanation. Not only was it because he was subtly admitting his guilt over victimizing people who had nothing against him for once, but mainly because he was almost certain that he was being seen as just making excuses, and wondered why he was even bothering explaining his technical innocence in those crimes. He didn't see the point of apologizing if he wouldn't be believed or forgiven anyways.

"You wouldn't have bothered them because they did nothing to you? So, what about the people you terrorized on your own planet? You're saying they all deserved it?" Amy said with her hands on her hips. "Exactly- oh, um..." Miles responded, before nervously realizing that Amy was disapproving of it. He promptly felt like an idiot for only digging himself deeper, and looked down at the floor to try to distract himself from how everyone in the room was staring at him in either anxiety or disapproval.

Convincing them to trust him would not be easy with him insisting on being honest about himself, but if he lied, their friendship with him would feel fake and meaningless because they wouldn't be caring about the real him. So he had to persuade them to not hate him the hard way, and he was starting to doubt it was even possible. Amy said disapprovingly, "Not exactly showing remorse there, mister. That's the exact opposite of an apology."

Miles didn't feel comfortable trying to explain to the Freedom Fighters exactly why he felt like his previous victims had deserved it. What if they didn't sympathize with him and hated him anyways for believing his crimes were justified, or worse, thought he deserved what he was put through? What if Antoine already told them and they just didn't care? He wasn't even sure if he could talk
about the discrimination he went through without his voice breaking and looking weak and pitiful in front of them, and he was worried that even if they didn't accuse him of faking his sadness after that, they might start to see him as less competent for being psychologically compromised. So there was yet another awkward silence as he said nothing in his own defense, not having any faith that he could make them forgive him.

Another source of disapproval for Miles was his nonchalant usage of the words, "hell," "damn," and even, "bastard," when he was at the height of his anger, mainly when he was fighting Eggman with them, and he was confused, surprised and worried about Sally, Tails, or even Sonic lighty scolding him for swearing and complaining that Scourge was a bad influence. At one point during breakfast, he was confronted on it after ranting bitterly once again. "Could you, you know, not use that kind of language around us?" Sonic nervously requested, hoping he wasn't going to upset him too much.

"What's wrong with that? They're just words," Miles said in confusion. No friend of his had ever had a problem with him swearing before. "Now don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to dictate to you how you should talk. I'm not THAT controlling. I-It's just that when you use that kinda language, it doesn't sound like you. It sounds like Scourge," Sonic explained. Miles looked away in mild embarrassment as he responded meekly, "Well..." knowing full well that he was the reason he spoke that way.

"I mean, you usually talk like all sophisticated, like an intellectual, so when you suddenly start using curse words, it's jarring. Plus there's the fact that you're trying to help world-famous heroes who don't really talk that way, so, you kinda stand out," Sonic continued awkwardly.

Looking depressed at the final sentence, Miles said with downcast eyes, "I'm sorry. I-I've been speaking that way since I met him. If I stopped, I'd feel less like myself. I already have to restrain myself so much... Maybe I should just stop speaking entirely..." wondering if he would ever truly be accepted among the Freedom Fighters, or if he was just too different.

"D-Don't worry, it's not a big deal, you don't have to talk like us. We're not the kind of people that'll hate and avoid someone just for bad language. Shadow says those words, too. It's not something on the top of the list of stuff you have to stop doing with us, you know? It's just a bad habit... from a bad influence," Sonic explained, with a nervous smile for most of it until the last sentence made him look resentful, more annoyed with Scourge than anything else.

Even when he said those words in a good mood in a casual context, it made people uncomfortable, and it was especially frustrating in that sense, as him being in a good mood meant he was coming out of his shell and loosening up around the Freedom Fighters, only to be shot down again and forced to withdraw once more for not being enough like them. Even Nicole, his closest friend among them aside from Sonic and Tails, didn't like how those words were a normal part of his vocabulary.

And that wasn't the only way in which he felt like an outsider. He often felt ignorant around everyone else, as due to him not having any interest in works of fiction like TV or movies, he lacked a lot of common knowledge that everyone else, especially the people of Sonic's dimension, were aware of, so everything from pop culture references to the very concept of a "comic book" went straight over his head. He wanted to keep looking aloof rather than expressing any interest in those things by trying to learn about them, and he didn't want to potentially wreck his "genius" reputation by revealing that he didn't know so many commonly known things. So he felt awkward when hearing the Freedom Fighters or people in general talk about pop culture or fiction when he had no knowledge of it himself.
He was pressured to keep the spikes in his bracelets retracted when he wasn't in a combat situation, as not only did they make him look evil and intimidating – failing to understand that it was the point - but they made his more nervous teammates like Sally and Rotor wary that they might be hurt by them if they went too close. He felt uncomfortable with the idea and how it made his bracelets look different and harmless, resembling the black cufflinks on Tails' gloves instead. But after briefly pointing out in annoyance that, "I've never hurt myself or any of my associates with those spikes," he was lectured by Sally on safety and image yet again.

Because of that, Miles reluctantly agreed, "Very well," and flipped the switch on his bracelets to bend the spikes back into them forming a harmless metallic ring in the center, retracting the spikes for most of the day. He was hoping that it would speed up the amount of time it would take for half of his new allies to finally stop staying an arm's length from him whenever possible; while Antoine, Nicole, Sonic and Tails had no problem with being close to him and giving him comforting gestures, Rotor, Amy and Sally were still wary around an evil twin in spite of the sympathy they felt for him. It was frustrating how they knew that he could care deeply for someone other than himself and yet they still only thought of him as a troublemaker. And being forced to keep the spikes on his bracelets retracted most of the time only made that visually clear every second of the day.

He was always going to have the spikes out in public regardless and was at least thankful he was still permitted to do that. He wasn't trying to look outright intimidating to the Freedom Fighters anymore, he merely wanted them to continue not hurting him. It was bad enough that Amy was still holding a grudge against his old condescending behavior, occasionally tricking him or insulting him to his face. He knew very well that even Bunnie would often complain about his past evil deeds when he was taken out of the room, even though she was one of the people defending him most of the time, and hearing Sonic and Tails try to defend him to no avail didn't reassure him. He wondered if Antoine being expected to tell them about his experiences with him on Moebius was truly helping his case, or if they were just focusing on the evil he was committing with the Suppression Squad that Antoine was possibly being pressured to talk about first and foremost.

While he understood the social and even pragmatic reason for it, he wasn't entirely comfortable with changing his outward appearance in even a slight way from what it normally was, just to make him more accepted in a new social group; he felt a slight loss of identity as a result, as if they could only like him for what they could change him into, rather than who he was. He was grateful that they at least weren't pressuring him to change his hairstyle and stop dying his hair as well – he would never want them to make him look just like Tails despite being a separate person from him.

He was also thankful that they were at least courteous enough to let him get sweaters that had the same style as the ones he wore in the Suppression Squad, with Sally taking advantage of her power and wealth to arrange for Miles getting new custom turtleneck sweaters made for himself with the same distinctive square design in the center of them. Surprisingly, some of them were in blue, having a color formed by a mixture of dark and light blue dots of sweater material forming a calm and harmless color reminding him of the sea, and to his own surprise, Miles actually liked it. "It looks good in blue…" he commented quietly with a small smile at Nicole, whose idea it was.

"But why? Why make it look different?" he asked. Nicole explained shrugging, "We figured society might find it easier to accept that you've changed if you change the way you look on the outside, at the very least with your clothes." Miles replied bitterly in a depressed tone, "Yeah, there's no surprise, society only caring about how someone looks," to Nicole's sympathy, as Antoine had told her a lot about how much he had suffered because of that.

As a result, while he was found by Tails possessing only the clothes on his back, he at least didn't end up spending most of his time wearing completely different-looking clothes from the ones he
wore with the Suppression Squad, despite only having one sweater, pair of boots and bracelets starting out.

Compared to everything else he was allowed to keep the same, having to keep his bracelets safe most of the time was a minor price to pay. Miles was lucky they weren't sending him to anger management from seeing the amount of rage he let out fighting Eggman's mechs, and that they instead appreciated how it made him fight harder and he was at least saving his anger until he could channel it into something productive. Since he spent most of his time around them silent looking mildly resentful at worst, it made sense considering that he clearly knew how to hold back his anger already, even in the face of constant unfair treatment; it was still clear even weeks later that he was the least favorite of the group, in spite of everyone acknowledging that he had a heart and had been treated unfairly in his past.

Unfortunately, his sweaters wouldn't all look exactly like his old ones for long. Only a day after taking Miles in as an ally, Sally made the decision one meeting, " A badge having the Acorn emblem will be placed onto the side-center of your sweaters to make it obvious that you're working for us. " This was partly as a test of his loyalty to see how he would react; if he reacted with anger and disgust, she would know that he still hated them and wasn't truly loyal. Miles awkwardly scratched the back of his neck looking down and away from her and quietly agreed, " Alright, " not sure if he'd ever get used to wearing it. All it did was make him start thinking about how he was no longer with the Suppression Squad every time he looked down at it, and he didn't need another reason to get depressed at his own reflection in the mirror.

After putting it on, he at least smiled a little in a sweet if nervous way, and said, " It looks good, " in a more hopeful tone, starting to like the idea of wearing a badge making official his new allegiance. He also liked having something in his reflection to focus on aside from his tails for once. Nicole, Antoine, Sonic and Tails smiled in relief at that, and no one else in the room seemed worried or suspicious either.

But wearing a badge of a social group that he didn't always belong to and used to fight against with his closest friends was unusual to him at first, and he once again felt lost and uncertain at the slight change in his outward appearance and therefore persona shown to the world. That combined with him not rebelling against society anymore, and he was feeling a loss of identity, being acutely aware of how different he was acting and looking.

Because of this, he was grateful that he was still at least showing off his powers in combat as he used to, reminding himself that he was still in fact the same person. He hadn't changed, too much. In fact, because he was fighting against robots and was allowed to be as destructive towards them as he wanted provided there was no collateral damage, he savored the combat missions as a brief highlight of it all, taking out all of his pent-up frustrations and anguish out on them as a thunderstorm raged on in the background, even if it intimidated people in the process; if anything, that made it all the better, warning people not to mistreat him. And any time he came close to causing property damage or hurting innocent people by accident, he used his powers over the wind to heroically prevent that from happening, gasping and panicking before doing so, getting the good will of any witnesses nearby.
Chapter 8

It wasn't long before Sally decided that Miles should see Tails' doctor for a check-up, mainly in a response to him acting nervous and uneasy when she questioned him on how long it had been since he had gotten any vaccines. Before he knew it, Sonic was taking him to the doctor's office, and he was silent and full of dread the whole time, with Sonic assuming it was purely because of the fact that he was going out in public where everyone in Station Square would notice his presence rather easily.

After taking a train to the city where Miles avoided looking at all the passengers staring at him, they walked along the sidewalk on their way to their clinic. The only reason they didn't run to their destination to get it over with faster was that Miles didn't know the way to the doctor's office or what it looked like, and while he trusted Sonic not to leave him behind and knew he was fast enough to keep up with him, he didn't want to risk either of them running out in front of any cars. The last thing Miles wanted was to be hit by a car again. The last time that happened to him, he ended up being kidnapped for weeks. "At least he gave me medical attention for it," Miles thought as he reflected back on the man he ran out in front of several years ago," even if he was so bitter over wanting to do that for me that he bullied me…" he thought resentfully as he followed Sonic into the doctor's office at last, with the resulting look on his face getting everyone around him worried.

Sonic walked up to the receptionist in the waiting room, a young woman with black hair in a short ponytail, and said, "Yeah, I'm here with a new patient for Dr. Howzstater," being casual while Miles awkwardly looked down at the floor nervously with his arms crossed. The receptionist looked up at the child in front of her and she nodded understandingly after her eyes widened in recognition, which Sonic didn't fail to notice. "So I see he'll have two patients called Miles," she dryly joked with a cocked eyebrow and smile, trying to lighten the mood. Sonic chuckled and said," Yeah, but he's the only one who will go by it, so it's fine. He hasn't had a check-up in a while, and we don't have his medical records from his old doctors, whoever they were, so we're not sure if he's all caught up on his vaccines or anything?" He said in a quieter voice to her so Miles wouldn't overhear," And he's not talking much about any previous ones, so, is the flu one ready yet? I know it's autumn." Miles looked suspicious and nervous at Sonic speaking more quietly to her, knowing in a properly paranoid way that he must have been talking about him, only to become anxious at her saying," Yes, it's ready," and worrying that he would have to deal with his least favorite part of any check-up.

The receptionist proceeded to tell Sonic," Your appointment will be in just a few minutes, have a seat," and Sonic said cheerfully," Alright!" stretched and yawned, before saying to Miles," I'm just gonna take a quick bathroom break, if you don't mind," with a cheeky grin. Looking over at all the different people in the waiting room who were staring at him the entire time, Miles gasped and said nervously," What?! But Sonic!" Not wanting to look pathetic, he had to hold himself back from finishing his thought," Why are you going to leave me here all alone?!" Sonic strained a smile, remembering how Tails used to be that way, and quietly reassured him," The people of Station Square aren't gonna hurt ya, Miles. I'll be right back." With that, he ran into the washroom in a blue blur, leaving Miles standing alone with his outstretched hand soon dropping to his side dejectedly.

Trying to avoid trembling, he reluctantly turned to face the various people sitting in chairs in the waiting room, looking away from their eyes as some of them continued to stare while others
pretended to not be paying attention. One man was reading the newspaper, despite being suspiciously stuck on the same page since he entered the building. Unfortunately for Miles, there were exactly two chairs in the waiting room that were empty, with one of them being on the edge of a row of chairs in front of a window with a brown-haired woman sitting to the left of it, and the other having an intimidatingly bulky-looking construction worker sitting beside it.

To the surprise of no one, Miles chose to sit beside the harmless-looking brunette woman, shaking in fear as he quickly went up to the empty chair, sat down next to the stranger and looked down at his boots ignoring everyone with his arms crossed. "It's okay, Miles," the woman reassured him, which made him jump startled at being addressed by a stranger at all, before looking embarrassed and frustrated with himself. "Do you think anyone here is about to hurt you?" she asked him in a gentle concerned tone that he recognized from Alicia. He turned to face her looking stunned, sad and confused. He had never been spoken to like that by someone as old as her before; the people who showed him any compassion were always restricted to teenagers.

"No, no one would be foolish enough to pick a fight with me," Miles replied quietly, trying to appear proud and intimidating when his stammering and quiet voice gave his cowardice away. The woman raised her eyebrows at his reaction, but continued to appear sympathetic, and nodded understandingly. This confused him even more. He had a feeling she was acting in a certain way, a way that anyone should instinctively find familiar and be reminded of someone close to them because of it, but something was missing in his life that made him unable to fully understand.

The closest comparison he could make to her was Alicia, the one who was the most understanding and accommodating of him in the Suppression Squad, but even she wasn't a proper comparison because she was too young compared to her. She was more like an older sister if anything, at least as far as he could understand; he considered all of the Suppression Squad as family, but in terms of describing exactly what family figures each of them were, he was confused and hopeless, having no firsthand experience with how it felt to actually have any family member for real. So he may have thought of Alicia as his sister, or he may have loved her in a romantic way or even viewed her as a mother figure for all he knew... "A mother figure?" he was led to think in realization from his train of thought, wondering if the woman beside him was acting that way. She looked old enough to be his mother, the mother that abandoned him, and the idea that she was trying to act like one provoked old hostility in him from sheer principle.

"Of course..." he muttered to himself looking away from her, his arms and legs crossed and scowling. "What's wrong?" the woman asked unhappily, and he replied bitterly, "I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to manipulate me by acting in a 'motherly' way, and it's not going to work. I trust no one who hasn't proven themselves to me." The woman looked sad, her eyes darting around the room clearly thinking about him and his reactions, judging him, but not in a judgmental way. It was confusing. If she was judging him, why didn't she hate him? Why didn't she view him as weak like Buns did, or as a condescending brat like the Freedom Fighters used to?

There was a chance that she wasn't like either of them, that she was showing him genuine compassion and sympathy, and despite not knowing him as well as his friends did. Just thinking about the possibility that he was being rude to one of the rare strangers who cared about him made him tear up, and after rapidly blinking in a preventative measure, he said reluctantly in a quiet voice, "I apologize for being rude. If you're sincere about your sympathy, you don't deserve to be punished for it. I-I haven't received that very often from a stranger, as you can probably tell..."

After letting it all sink in, the woman smiled warmly at him and replied, "That's alright, Miles. That was very considerate of you, apologizing, but I hold no grudges," in her old understanding way exactly as she had before – something that Miles had to resist being frustrated about and paranoidly believing she was faking being sad earlier. Her smile soon became replaced with a
worried expression before she said with a nervous smile, "I'm not sure if we'll ever meet again," which made Miles incredibly sad and anxious, having never met any compassionate stranger only one time and never again before, and he was distracted from that depressing train of thought when the woman pulled a card out of her jacket and handed it to him saying quietly so no one but the two of them could hear, "But this doesn't have to be the only time. If you ever want somewhere to relax where you can talk to me, why don't you come to my office? It's close by."

Miles looked at the business card with his eyes widened holding it with both hands, with a sad, anxious expression on his face. It read, "Dr. Amelia Albright, Child Psychologist." Holding back his impulsive defensive reaction to the insinuation that he needed help, he reminded himself how kind she was to him to calm himself down, and said politely with a nervous smile, "Thank you, Albright. I'll see if I can bring myself to ask any of the Freedom Fighters permission. Don't count on it for some time," hiding the business card in his sweater pocket.

He knew that she might be the only person for the time being that he'd be able to speak with about what was bothering him without risking being judged by any of the Freedom Fighters, who he needed to keep the approval of, while with her, there was no risk. While he felt comfortable around Nicole and had lots of different conversations with her, there was still a risk that if he told her something Sally might disapprove of, word might get out to her. With a stranger, with no connection to the Freedom Fighters, he could be completely honest.

Before he knew it, Sonic had left the washroom to return to the waiting room at last, and the receptionist, conveniently enough, told him right away, "The doctor is ready for you two."

Miles reluctantly stood up from the chair and followed Sonic out of the waiting room as he remembered why he was dreading the check-up in the first place. He entered the room slowly and forced himself to sit down in front of the doctor, resisting the urge to hold onto Sonic for comfort as he started shaking again. The doctor reassured him, "The nurse is getting things ready for us. Don't worry, you won't be here for long," and started giving him the typical check-up that a child of his age would be given.

Sonic was a little worried by what the doctor seemed to be discovering. His stethoscope revealed that Miles' heart rate was more rapid than Tails' was, even when he told him to breathe deeply and slowly to calm himself down. He dismissed it as him merely being anxious, however, much to the relief of Miles, who didn't want him worrying Sonic even more than he already would. In truth, he was well aware of how the increased amount of stress he had to deal with put a strain on his own heart and immune system, and he wasn't comfortable with Sonic finding out about it so soon. He would figure it out eventually from him getting sick more often than Tails, particularly with mild fevers and coughing fits, and he wanted to put that off for as long as possible.

The doctor also proceeded to lightly tap his knee with the small "hammer" to test his reflexes – which he learned from his startled response were oversensitive – and tell him to read the letters on a poster across the room out loud to test his vision. Unfortunately, there were two things Sonic ended up learning about Miles from that. The first was that Miles didn't know how to pronounce the names of all the letters of the alphabet, implying he wasn't as well-educated as his vocabulary suggested, as he had to awkwardly sound out the letters instead of calling them by their proper names. The second was that despite being identical in DNA to Tails, he might be a lot closer to needing glasses than him, squinting desperately at trying to read most of the letters on the eye chart. At present, his vision was serviceable, but he was coming closer to being officially nearsighted, and it confused and worried Sonic who wondered how it could've been possible. Miles knew the answer, but he didn't want to scare and worry him with the news that he had been bullied so harshly that it might have given him permanent internal damage.
It wasn't until the nurse came into the room holding a syringe that the check-up really started to get him anxious, and the instant she walked over to him holding it, he gasped and hugged Sonic's chest terrified, his pupils shrunken in an instant with a haunted expression on his face. Concerned for the child resembling Tails trembling in response to her, the redheaded nurse reassured him, "Don't worry, Miles, it's to keep you from getting the flu. It'll only take a second."

Sonic was full of pity and concern for him as Miles hugged him a little more tightly and exclaimed hysterically, "Please, no, think about what you're doing! I'm too young to die! Please!" Sonic thought, "Oh, man, what kind of mishaps has he been through?" and returned the hug to hold him close, reassuring him, "It's okay, it's okay, Miles, relax! It's to prevent you from getting sick. What else could it be? She's a nurse, she'd lose her job if she did anything to hurt you."

The nurse slowly and cautiously walked up to him, shushed him while placing her hand on his shoulder, and quickly gave him the needle while doing so, thankful that Sonic was holding him still. His anxiety spiked tremendously while it was happening, and it didn't seem to alleviate when it was finished, as he started quietly sobbing into his chest. He was hysterical, with the closeness and scent of someone he trusted so implicitly being his only tether to reality. As far as he was concerned, he was back on his home island, tormented by flashbacks to when he was four years old and someone pinned him to the ground of the woods and tranquilized him with a needle, mockingly calling it a vaccine as he chased him down, like so many other bullies had chased him down with needles in the past. He remembered how he managed to survive being thrown off that cliff and landed near the house of his next kidnapper, yet another person who took him in when he was injured just to verbally and psychologically abuse him, taking their frustrations out on him for "tricking" them into giving him medical attention because they didn't notice his second tail in time. If it weren't for the sunken cost fallacy, he wouldn't still be alive.

As Miles was lost in thought, the nurse commented with concern, "I've never seen anyone react that strongly to a needle before. This goes far beyond a mere phobia! What happened to him?" Sonic sighed unhappily, stroked the back of his head as he reassured him, "You feeling alright, kiddo?" He quickly caught himself and apologized, "Sorry, I mean-" assuming that he was offended by being treated like a kid, only for Miles to stammer, "I-It's okay, Sonic, I'm not upset. It's sweet coming from you!... I-I'm not scared, I was..." finally back in touch with reality.

Sonic slowly ended the hug feeling guilty about doing so, and Miles reluctantly forced himself to let go. Still trembling, he tried to smile briefly at him to act like nothing was wrong with him, before saying to him in confusion, "Aren't you cold?" Sonic looked puzzled at that reaction, before saying proudly, "Nah, I'm fine. Remember, you're talking to someone who runs through windy fields in the fall and freezing ice mountains without a jacket on a regular basis! An air-conditioned doctor's office is nothing for me!"

Miles stared at him confused with a cocked eyebrow for multiple seconds, still trembling from getting a needle earlier, before it finally dawned on him why Sonic wasn't wearing a leather jacket. He promptly felt like an idiot, internally called himself insane, and stood up with a forced nervous smile trying to distract him from potentially figuring him out, mentally berating himself.

"Are you sure you're okay to walk home?" Sonic asked Miles as he slightly stumbled towards the door, fortunately not figuring out his little slip-up. Feeling light-headed, Miles continued trembling as Sonic walked up to him, put his arm around him, and he leaned on Sonic as he started getting blurry vision with a whirling sensation. His body was still convinced that he had just been tranquilized again, and the placebo effect of that combined with his hysterical panic still not entirely dealt with was causing him to feel faint. His eyes half-closed as he stared at the tiled floor below him, he heard the low voice of the doctor nearby say to Sonic, "Let him rest on the bed," and he was guided to the small hospital bed in the corner, just in time for him to collapse into it in
exhaustion. His vision was obscured entirely by red dots as he closed his eyes slowly, and within seconds, he had passed out from sheer fright at being given a needle again, too absorbed in flashbacks to be humiliated at it happening in front of Sonic.

"Man, the poor kid..." Sonic said sympathetically about Miles, sitting at his bedside stroking his hair like he did with Tails. The doctor and nurse wondered if he realized that he was treating Miles in that specific way, and decided to stay quiet, not wanting him to stop when it may have been the only thing keeping him together. Sonic wondered if he should confront him over it and ask if he had that reaction normally, or simply stay quiet and take him home as if the whole thing never happened.

Whether it was a meeting or a casual get-together in the living room, Miles would always sit next to Sonic, and if that wasn't an option, he'd sit next to Tails, and if he couldn't sit beside either of them, he would always try to sit beside Antoine, who reminded him so strongly of the friend he tried to have as a substitute brother figure when Scourge left, to the point where he still felt the same strong emotional attachment despite knowing he wasn't Patch. Fortunately for him, the year he spent with him disguised as Patch had long since gotten him used to the idea that he was like an older brother figure to him, and he acted just like one, giving him reassuring gestures and comforting him when he needed it. Bunnie often looked at the sight thinking with a smile, "He'll make a great dad."

Hearing Antoine speaking would help calm him down from a state of severe unease or fear because he only heard one person in his life with that kind of accent, and only after the part of his life that he was absorbed in. So the sound of a French accent combined with the distinctive voice immediately reminded him of a close friend and reassured him that he was not among enemies.

Bunnie was more inclined to forgive Miles than the more paranoid Sally was, even if she still started out wary of his criminal reputation. She appreciated every time he didn't take the opportunity to be rude, and always remembered them to thank him and be polite to him, in a way that felt more sincere than when Sally did the same thing. She would reassure him often, noticing more and more how certain things scared him or set him off, like the sound of a fork scratching on a bowl, and this caused the Freedom Fighters to wonder what happened to him to give him that fear. His fear at seeing someone chop vegetables with the kitchen knife staring at it with a look of dread on his face before forcibly looking away wasn't something that went unnoticed, nor was his uneasiness at seeing rulers or crowbars in Tails' lab.

He was so untrusted that one of the Freedom Fighters was always pressured by Sally to follow him to the bathroom and wait outside the door the whole time just in case, and he took extra time in the bathroom to cry in private, having the loud sound of the rushing water from the tap drown out his sniffling and gasping. When he was asked why his face was wet later on, he would reply quietly that he was washing it for the sake of good hygiene. Things that he could potentially use to cause trouble in the washroom and the base in general were kept out of his reach, kept in locked cabinets with a fingerprint scanner in most cases, which felt demeaning to him, as if he was being treated like a toddler and they needed to keep things out of his reach.

Sally was the main proponent of all the paranoid measures against him, both out of fear of being betrayed by Tails' evil twin and to reassure people outside of the group who didn't trust him. But in spite of that, she still cared about him and tried to be polite to him, never insulting him and always saying, "Thank you," for his help. Eventually, she even started to smile at him. It went from her trying to keep him from snapping and betraying her out of disgruntled revenge, to her sincerely appreciating his help and new polite behavior around her and wanting to reassure him and reward his harmless behavior.
Miles never showed any interest in Rotor's engineering or Tails' for that matter, but he at least was appreciated for not being openly disrespectful, and Rotor didn't fail to notice his concern for Tails and Sonic's wellbeing, especially Tails, who he was rather overprotective of, wanting him to focus more on his inventing over combat in spite of his lack of respect for it.

Miles still missed his violin, which he didn't think he was able to get away with bringing with him from Moebius. Once again, he was feeling a loss of identity from not being able to keep to his daily routine of practicing it or the piano, and his depression at not being accepted was only made worse by the lack of a musical instrument for him to play, and the anxiety that going weeks without playing one was making him out of practice and rusty, somehow losing the years of skills he had built up. He was too shy and afraid to voice his complaint, though, worried that it would be asking for too much, especially considering that he felt he was lucky he was even allowed to be around them in the first place. It wouldn't be until he was more trusted and accepted that he would receive a violin as a Christmas gift, a few months after Tails had saved his life.

In the meantime, he was given a radio to listen to by Tails, who had learned from Antoine that his evil twin was a music lover, and Miles was delighted that the radio was full of songs he never heard before. He was slightly disappointed that the songs of Mobius were mostly happy songs he couldn't relate to, involving relationships most of the time, rather than being hard rock songs full of sadness and anger that he could relate to. This gave Sonic an idea for gifts for him.

Ever since he started going to the Freedom Fighters' base with Sonic, he was always thankful that he at least got to go back to Sonic's home and have tea every evening. Being able to have his favorite drink in peace without being stared at suspiciously was soothing and relaxing to him, calming his frazzled nerves after a hard day. Sonic and Tails made sure to have tea on the grocery list every week for him.

Tails turned on the lights in Miles' room to wake him up one morning. Naturally, he was tired and groggy from having gotten back to sleep after waking up miserable at 4 in the morning, so being suddenly told to wake up to the bright light of his room's lightbulb wasn't a pleasant sight. "Wakey-wakey! Time for a new day!" Tails said cheerfully, hoping it would lighten things up for his grumpy evil twin, who slowly forced himself out of bed rubbing his eyes.

"You know what would be nice? A light switch that doesn't blind me when it's turned on in the morning. It should at least have the decency to start out dim first!" Miles complained under his breath, looking irritated. "You mean a dimmer switch? I could give your room that!" Tails said in excitement as Miles held his aching head sitting down. Snapped out of his annoyance by what he said, Miles was stunned and dumbfounded for a moment, and said in sad confusion, "What? You, you don't have to waste time on that for me…"

While he appreciated Tails doing favors for him without even being asked to, he was worried that him going through all that trouble for him frequently would be pushing his luck, and a part of him didn't feel like he had earned it. He already had to struggle with feelings of self-loathing and regret as it was, getting increasingly less comfortable with remembering the crimes he would commit with his friends, rather than merely justifying his actions to himself and not thinking anything further into it. It had only been a month since Tails had saved his life, and he was already started to worry that he was changing him.

Caught up in excitement over his idea, Tails said happily, "No, it's okay! I've got inventor's block anyways, so this is a godsend! I'd love to make that for you. A light switch that can naturally adjust to how large a person's pupils are would be pretty cool! And it would only focus on the person with the lowest brightness tolerance, obviously. This could revolutionize light switches the world over! Hee hee. Anyways, don't worry about that. Breakfast's almost done!" With that, Miles
reluctantly left the room following Tails, still looking confused and unhappy. He wondered if he would ever get used to his luckier counterpart being friends with him.
Chapter 9

Sitting at the meeting room table with his hand on his chin apathetically, Miles stared at Bunnie and Antoine's lovestruck interactions with each other and ended up smiling before he knew it, and wondered why he wasn't getting envious of their obnoxiously perfect relationship when he himself was so deprived of love. Instead, he felt comforted and relaxed from seeing that there was a happy married couple in his life who he could rely on. He wondered if this stemmed from a long-standing desire to finally have parents in his life, normal conventional parents in a stable relationship with each other who were always there for him, rather than having either parents who weren't there, or substitute "parental figures" that were either almost never there for him or weren't actually in a relationship. Lost in thought from wondering if he could get them to parent him like he may have wanted, he was snapped out of it when he realized that all of the Freedom Fighters were staring at him confused about why he was having that happy reaction, and anxiously looked down in embarrassment.

It was a rainy Wednesday, and the rest of the Freedom Fighters were having yet another secret meeting regarding Miles where Antoine told them more about him, which Miles correctly estimated was only an excuse to insult him behind his back for his interactions with them as an enemy. This time, it was Sally who had decided to keep an eye on Miles on the living room couch, having the television on to keep him from becoming too bored, A news forecast mentioned regular crime being committed in various areas of the world as usual. Testing him, Sally sarcastically asked him if he felt sorry for any of the crime victims mentioned on the news. Caught in a sour mood, Miles bitterly showed no sympathy for the victims in the slightest as if they deserved it, complaining about how people are all cruel and heartless and can't stand anyone who is different from them in any sense. " I don't see why I should care, " he grumbled in an almost whispered hiss of resentment. He didn't see the point of trying to lie to her about it and not express his frustration when she would see right through it and hate him regardless.

" You have issues… " Sally muttered under her breath, unaware that Miles could hear her as she got off the couch rolling her eyes. She left the room to get a snack from the kitchen, planning to give him a scolding if she caught the evil genius misbehaving in the time he wasn't around. The only reason she decided to leave him alone for a second in the first place was from all the times Antoine, Sonic and Tails kept insisting to her that he could be trusted, and she hoped that Miles would prove them wrong.

When Sally returned to the living room, she saw Miles faced away from her with his head low, sniffling every so often with his hands in front of his eyes. Approaching him slowly in confusion and suspicion, she gasped at seeing Miles crying quietly on the couch, and realized that her insult had hit too close to home. She didn't entirely trust the troubled child not to lash out at her from her attempt at an apology, and worried that he would only push her away and tell her to leave him be, but she couldn't stand the idea of not doing anything at all to undo what she did. Hesitating briefly from not knowing how he'd react, Sally quickly put her arms around him and held him close in a hug, saying, " Here, " feeling terrible about what she said to the point of deciding it was worth the risk to comfort him.

" You're right… I need help… " Miles whimpered miserably, returning the hug in an instant, being reminded of how Alicia would comfort him. Sally had never expected him to react that way, let alone outright admit she was right so easily, and she wondered if she had hit an insecurity in him that she wasn't aware of. She also didn't expect him to return the hug so quickly, without even so much as stiffening in surprise and needing to adjust to it. It was as if he implicitly trusted her.
After a minute of crying into her shoulder, Miles took a shaky breath, and explained in a depressed but calm tone, "You're right. Something is wrong with me. But I wasn't born like this! I just… I'm so sick of feeling like this every waking day, remembering how heartless people are… constantly being reminded of things used to be, how I felt when I was alone, and despised, and unwanted… No matter how much I try to focus on the present, I can't move on… It's not something I can just get over… It's already obvious that I've been deeply affected by what people put me through in the past, even several years after it's happened, but…"

Feeling terrible for him, Sally said quietly, "Why didn't you tell us it was that bad?" not sure how to respond without offending him. She had a good idea of why Antoine didn't; he wanted to respect the privacy of someone already ashamed of himself to begin with.

Miles sadly explained, "Because I didn't want to be seen as a liability. I don't want people to think of me as fragile and overly sensitive, I don't want them to walk on eggshells around me like I'm weak! I don't want to be mainly thought of as, 'the kid with PTSD,' as, 'traumatized…' I don't want to be seen as a burden. Sometimes the Freedom Fighters aren't comfortable with me around, they don't act the way they usually do just because I'm there. I-It creates the impression that they don't want me here, that they'd take any excuse to get rid of me, so I thought that if I was more honest about, my troubles, I'd be thought of as psychologically compromised and seen as less useful, less competent, and less trustworthy. I didn't want to look weak! I'm already on thin ice! I can't risk having it look like I'll be too much to handle, when already… Already I'm difficult…"

With that last sentence, he remembered how guilty he felt about worrying Scourge from telling him about his past, and felt like a failure of a friend for doing nothing but making him unhappy.

After a brief reflective silence where he tried to hold back tears, his voice cracked at various points as he continued, "I can't take this anymore. It's already obvious enough that I have nothing to gain from trying to lie about it! Everyone's already aware of how, jumpy I can be… I already have the reputation of a 'coward.' I might as well try to do something about it. If I ever want to have my suffering decrease, if I ever want to get better… I need help. It won't be easy for me… but it's the only solution I can think of. I met a kindhearted woman a few days ago in the clinic waiting room. She said that if I ever wanted someone to talk to, I could go to her office… I'd need someone to take me to it… every so often…"

Sally let go of Tails' evil counterpart dumbfounded, almost in a daze from what he was revealing. The child reluctantly took a business card out of his left boot to show it to her silently. It was a card for a children's therapist. Her heart sank when she saw it.

"Okay, if it's for the best… I'll have to inform the rest of the team about this, Miles. They need to know where I'm taking you and why, or they'll get worried and think you're up to something. I don't think Sonic, Antoine and Tails would, but… I'll have to tell them." she said warily, knowing she was treading around a sensitive topic for him. She didn't want to make it sound like she was judging him and get him even more upset. Miles sighed and said melancholically, "If you must… I just hope they don't think… Never mind."

After two months had passed, by which point it was the middle of December, Sally started to send him on missions without supervision increasingly more often, with them starting out as rare from a lack of trust and becoming almost as common as his missions with them. To make sure he would behave and follow the orders on the lone missions, he was made to wear a wrist-phone with a screen on it that would allow Nicole to contact him at any time. He was unhappy at how it looked slightly awkward wearing two different things on his left wrist, his spiked bracelet and below that the communicator. But eventually, he began to think of it as him being a more official team member to be trusted like that, and was grateful for getting to be trusted on lone missions at all, and that Sonic was nice enough to buy him a warm blue winter coat and earmuffs for when he had
to go outside in the cold winter.

But while things had gotten better for him over the months, he still felt like he didn't belong. While the Freedom Fighters did have a lot of sympathy for him and appreciated the good things about him, he still wasn't entirely trusted due to him being an evil twin, and he could tell that if there was ever a moment where they were made to suspect that one of the Freedom Fighters was a traitor, they would all turn against him without any evidence. He had nightmares about that.

"What's wrong, Miles? " Nicole said, nervously going up to him when he was alone to check on him; with the group growing less suspicious and paranoid of him over time, he had finally gotten to the point where he was allowed to be alone in the base for more than just bathroom breaks, even if it was only for a small amount of time. He was sitting in a chair in front of the kitchen table, his head hung low. After a silence, he replied in a depressed tone with a bitter expression to cover it up, "I'm not wanted here…"

Miles unhappily complained to Nicole about how unwelcome he felt in the group, saying that, "No one can get over the fact that I was Tails' evil twin! Even Sonic, Tails, and Antoine are a bit uncomfortable about me at times, and they're some of the people who like me the most! Everyone treats me like an outsider, because I'm different from them…" "Even me? " she asked unhappily, wondering if she had done something wrong. "No, not you, you're a nice person," Miles stated offhandedly, not realizing how much that meant to Nicole. "He called me a person! " she thought, stunned and pleased with him. Miles continued without even looking at her,

"Antoine is like the brother I never had, and Sonic and Tails are very understanding with me, calling me their friend and reassuring me. But sometimes people act like I'm a ticking time bomb or something, like I can't be trusted not to betray them inexplicably the instant they look the other way, like I'm someone who shouldn't exist, h-here… I mean, I broke the law a lot, big deal, my only friends were criminals, it's not like I had a choice! I didn't always hate people! I didn't choose to have my eyes opened to the cruelty of the world. I used to be all naïve like them, and I learned my lesson early on! They never had to worry about being treated like they're different and wrong and not worth anything. They're 'normal.' So of course they like people. Society is decent to them."

Nicole looked unhappy. His speech hit close to home for her; she knew very well what it was like to be treated like she was different from everyone else, even if for a different reason.

"So I used to lash out at the world when I was little, that was the past! That doesn't mean I shouldn't be here. It doesn't mean I won't be loyal and trustworthy and useful to you guys! What else am I supposed to do?! I can't, it, just… I don't know why I bother even wasting my breath. I'm just a criminal to you, right? Just whining and ranting, right? Sticking out like a sore thumb in a group of 'heroes,' they look at me like a fre… Forget it…" Miles ranted, with his voice cracking by the final sentence. Realizing that tears were welling up in his eyes, he quickly left his chair and impulsively ran into the nearest room, ignoring Nicole as she called out, "Miles!" and ran after him.

Reassuring him as he laid in the living room couch covering himself with the blankets, she sat beside him and started comfortingly stroking his head as she said, "I know how it feels to be different from everyone else, and, to not be accepted. I don't think you're wrong, I understand what it's like to feel like, well, a…" Miles sighed, and replied sadly, "You're not that, Nicole. You're special! I bet your parents, I mean I guess 'creators,' I bet you're their pride and joy, the best thing they ever created in life, because your intelligence and competence surpassed their expectations. You are exactly what they wanted you to be, an intelligent artificial, uh, intelligence. But my parents didn't want me to be anything like this. I could've been born normal. I at least had a chance. I'm a mutation of a normal being, a-an
aberration of what should be, and I've been treated like the scum of the earth for it… and not only that, but I'm an alternate universe criminal version of someone that was a hero their whole life. Guess what that makes me? " as tears ran down his face and humiliated him because of it. Feeling sorry for him, Nicole embraced him in a hug, having appreciated the compliments from him, and told him, " Don't talk about yourself that way. We're both special… "

Miles was stunned at receiving such compassion, and so quickly after everything he had done as her enemy in the past, and said, " I-I'm sorry, Nicole, I, I know you're right. I, it was sweet of you to try to relate to me. Even if you didn't suffer in nearly the same way that I have, but it's not a contest, it's just… All that matters is that you actually care. Thank you. "

He smiled sweetly at her as he got up off the couch with her, slightly forcing it because he was still unhappy, and admitted to her, " You know, Nikki, out of all of the Freedom Fighters, you're my favorite. " Amused at being called a nickname as a term of endearment, Nicole asked cheerfully with a cocked eyebrow, " I am? Why? " and Miles answered with a shy smile,

" Well, you're the one who's the nicest to me, and the most relatable to me. We can go on long conversations for hours about just about anything! And part of it is because, well, we click. We're kindred spirits! Not only because you're special, but also because of your intelligence. It's nice to have someone around that I can have intelligent conversations with, and share my interests with, and, just be open with myself around! With everyone else, there's more pressure to stay quiet so I won't be disapproved of or judged as weak, or, hated… Even with Sonic, I-I-I respect him so much that I don't wanna say the wrong thing or make a bad impression, because he's such an important figure in my life… You're a lot more curious without being too judging. I can just talk to you about who I am, or what I am, and… you're the most amazing girl I've ever known. "

Nicole giggled, finding him sweet as she started blushing from his slightly awkward speech, and she said with her arm around him, " And I confide in you, too. You're a good friend, Miles. In fact, you're my closest friend next to Sally! " She whispered, " Don't tell anyone, " gave him a quick kiss on the forehead that left Miles blushing, and said cheerfully, " If you ever need someone to make you feel better, come to me. " With that, she ruffled his hair and left the room, with him staring at her as she left looking sad and conflicted, still not taking it for granted that he was in her good favor.

" I'm getting kind of hungry, " Tails commented, walking with Miles through the park in the suburbs of Emerald Town. " You are? " Miles replied, looking surprised. " Yeah, but I don't have any money with me. And I left Sonic's card at home, " Tails said unhappily as Miles had his hand on his chin in thought, coming up with a plan.

Noticing the owner of a hot dog stand nearby that was taking advantage of the unusually warm weather in the middle of the winter, Miles proceeded to charge up two golden electricity spheres in his hands as he glared at the hot dog stand owner with his head lowered threateningly and his palms sparking, growling with a menacing look on his face as the sky darkened from being covered by dark clouds. Terrified as the child looked almost demonic in front of him, the hot dog stand owner trembled and said, " What do you want from me?! " Miles ordered, " A hot dog with chili on it! Free of charge for my friend here! " and pointed back at Tails, who was watching with a nervous look on his face.

The hot dog stand owner looked at Tails still afraid, wondering why he was spending time as a friend with someone as evil as that, and Tails had a sheepish look on his face as he prepared a free chili dog for him under Miles' threat. On the one hand, he didn't think it was right what Miles was doing, making it very clear that he still hated humanity and hadn't been tamed from his old ways, having no problem with victimizing random civilians. But on the other hand, Tails was worried
about offending him by telling him off for what was, technically, an act born of compassion and generosity for someone he cared about, even if it did involve him breaking the law in the process. Not wanting to make him uncomfortable, Tails stayed silent looking at the hot dog stand owner apologetically as Miles said bitterly with his arms crossed, "Considering all of his heroic deeds, it's ungrateful of you to not do this for him unprompted. If anyone has earned a free meal every so often, it is him. Consider yourself lucky that threatening you is all I planned to do."

The hot dog stand owner finally handed Tails the chili dog, with a nervous expression, and Tails said with a sheepish smile, "Aw, thanks, Miles, that's, uh, a nice thought! You didn't have to do that for me!" Then he said awkwardly in a quieter voice, thankful that no one but him and the hot dog stand owner had witnessed his behavior,

"But, uh, I don't really want you to make a habit out of breaking the law. You're a Freedom Fighter now. I get why it'd take a while to adjust to being completely law-abiding. You're not in trouble, I won't tell anyone. Just try not to do it too often, alright? I don't want people to have a hard time accepting you as one of the heroes. Got it, pal?" with a nervous smile at the end.

Feeling very self-conscious from realizing he looked bad in front of him, Miles looked away awkwardly with an annoyed expression, and muttered unhappily, "Got it," feeling unappreciated. "Why'd I bother? I should've known he'd complain." he thought bitterly.

Trying to make him feel better, Tails gave him an affectionate shoulder rub to make him smile and reassured him, "You were just trying to be a good friend, Miles. It was nice of you, in your own unique way. Just, keep in mind that there's OTHER ways of being a good friend to me, without intimidating innocent people."

While he looked at him nervously at the end, he went back to smiling at him and giggled afterwards, and Miles smiled a little because of it, still feeling self-conscious, but relieved that he at least appreciated what he did for him. Miles soon became distracted as he thought about how much his feelings towards his old enemy had changed, and he was so absorbed in thought afterwards that he didn't hear Tails whisper to the hot dog salesman, "I'll pay you for it later," before they walked away.

It took until a few days before Christmas for Miles to reveal to Tails during a mission alone with him the high possibility that he would stay with his side continuing to repay him for the rest of their lives, and that he kept that secret because he didn't think the others would react to it very well. He believed that they would freak out and refuse him if they realized he was planning to join them permanently and that being a temporary ally would be easier for them to swallow, and that he still needed a little more time for them to go from being used to him, to outright wanting to have him stay, and only then would he ask to stay for good, when he knew that the reaction would be universally positive.

During a days-long mission alone with Tails, Miles was acting as a Stealth Mentor, subtly trying to get Tails to realize his potential as an air kitsune without making him feel pressured or insecure; telling him everything right away could cause objections from Tails, who might worry that Miles was trying to get him to stop focusing mostly on his engineering. He spent the next few days traveling with Tails subtly trying to get him to realize that he could sense the wind, asking him the wind direction and whether it was windy when he hadn't gone outside yet to reveal to him how good he was at "guessing" the answer correctly, and even getting him to predict all the gusts of wind as a "game," to soothe him to sleep during a stormy night in their inflatable tent.

During that time, he was dedicated to protecting him from any harm, both to prevent himself from getting in trouble for it and out of a brotherly/paternal instinct to keep his more innocent and "
weaker twin safe from harm, and Tails was conflicted between finding his efforts to take care of him overprotective and coddling, and appreciating his clear show of empathy for it, quickly settling on the latter from his idealism.

Spotting Eggman's newly built tower on the end of the mission, Miles started running with Tails towards it, and showed Tails through example that he could "boost" by blasting wind out of his palms when they're behind him while his tails are spinning behind him. Upon seeing Tails use the same ability without even being told to do so, he was delighted, and exclaimed happily, "Great job, you did it! You catch on quick," and Tails was stunned at seeing the genuine smile on his evil twin's face, being once again reminded of how sympathetic he could look.

"Thanks! That's so nice of you. You really have changed for the better." A little bashful and uncomfortable, Miles admitted immediately, "I wouldn't say that I've changed. It'd be more accurate to say I've grown fond of you. D-Don't tell anyone I just said that." Tails gave him a confused smile, and chose to remain silent to humor him, wishing that he wasn't awkward about softening up.

Miles then proceeded to explain to him how to slow down while using that ability so he wouldn't crash into walls or have to stop too suddenly. He taught him to think about the wind blasting out of his palms at a progressively smaller amount of force. He had never intended to try to teach him how to send wind out of his palms so early, and intended to take it very slow with him to avoid overwhelming him with his capabilities and making him panic over them. As a result, he kept things simple and easy, summarizing to him that anything he did with the wind was something Tails was also capable of, including flying on top of a tornado and making it a lot more windy. Miles chose not to tell Tails that his mere presence made the area he was in more windy, worried that he would panic and be upset with himself for something he couldn't even help. After all, Miles had a hard enough time in life feeling guilty for causing the spike in thunderstorms that Tails was dealing with so much. He didn't want to pass on a similar feeling to him.

When they returned to home base with the mission accomplished, Tails excitedly revealed to his friends what Miles had taught him, saying stuff like, "It was great! He taught me that I can do this!" and sending a gust of wind out of his palms, before explaining, "Turns out I can control the wind! This'll make dealing with Eggman's robots a snap! I can even use this power as a boost! Cool, huh?"

There was a worrying silence, as Tails' friends were a mixture of suspicious and concerned that Miles was teaching him things - with Sally asking with her arms crossed, "Did he teach you other things?" - to genuinely proud of him and excited for his newfound power, with Sonic being the biggest example of that. He exclaimed happily, "Awesome! I'm so proud of you! You gotta show me what my little brother can do! Come on!" With that, Sonic left the room with Tails, leaving Sally alone with Miles.

When Sally approached him about his intentions, she asked him with a mixture of curiosity and wariness, "It's good that you did that, but, why? Why'd you do that for him?" She thought it was unusual of him to teach Tails abilities that he'd be able to use against him if he ever went back to being his enemy, and was confused because of it.

Miles calmly explained, "I felt it was right for Tails to learn about his powers as a two-tailed fox. He should know who he is," and added that he appreciated Tails because "it's nice to have another kitsune around," with a small sweet smile as he looked away.

Sally, agreeing with his reasoning, compared it to Shadow wanting to find out what he was while having amnesia, with Miles saying that it was a good part of growing up to become more
understanding of one's own capabilities and what exactly they were. Still, the Freedom Fighters wondered why Miles was teaching Tails to become more powerful when it would be to his detriment if they became enemies again, and occasionally worried if he intended to take advantage of him.

Soon after that, a lab accident involving chemicals ended up making Tails temporarily blind for a week. This forced him to spend the week blindfolded, listening to science documentaries on TV to pass the time as he wished that he was able to help his friends. It was a devastating setback, but Miles was able to see the good in it.

While volunteering to protect him for the entirety of the week, he started subtly trying to teach Tails that "you can rely on your other senses," which included his ability to sense the wind. One of the most important things he did with him to accomplish that goal, was that he started to play catch with him in the castle garden using a small softball he found in the city. Naturally, Tails objected to it at first, saying, "That's ridiculous, I can't see! How am I supposed to catch the ball?" Miles responded with, "You will, trust me. I have complete faith in you."

Baffled, Tails asked, "How?!" still not entirely used to the idea that his evil twin respected him that much. "Look, when something moves through the air, it displaces the air in the process. And that creates wind in the area from the sheer force of it moving through the air. Just try, alright? It'll be a fun experiment!" Miles replied, smiling at the end. For the first time in months, Tails wondered if his evil twin was up to something. But he knew from experience that being honest about suspicion of him would only hurt his feelings again, so he sighed and said, "Alright, I'll humor you. Just don't throw it too hard." Miles said happily, "Great! Okay, here's the first catch." Tails panicked at trying to catch something he couldn't even see, but to his complete shock and confusion, he managed to do it, complete with running a little to the left in order to reach its destination.

At first, he wondered if him catching the ball was just a lucky coincidence, but as the game of catch progressed through the day, and kept being revisited that week, he started to wonder if Miles was onto something. Eventually, Miles' training him to rely on his wind sense paid off, causing him to be more aware of his surroundings as he was able to detect motion in the room he was in from the air it displaced alone.

By the time he was able to see again, Tails had kept that sense, and Miles, full of excitement and respect for his potential, told him all about how useful it would be for an air kitsune like him. He explained just how integral to his powers it was having the ability to sense electricity by default, and Tails was left stunned and conflicted. He wasn't being discouraged from being an engineer first and foremost, as Miles was still telling him that he was better off staying in the lab doing what he was most talented at, but knowing that he could control the wind still changed the way he looked at himself a little. He started practicing it in secret when he was bored, and eventually, he got precise enough that he was able to do things like summon a small gust of wind that would bend around to carry a pen to him from the other side of the room. He could bring the smallest of tools to his side just by using his newfound power, and he couldn't be more proud of that.
Deep in thought from memories of his past returning, Miles accidentally spilled a drink on the kitchen table in front of Amy and Antoine, and gasped in a panic before he rushed to start cleaning it up with a washcloth wet by the kitchen sink's tap, saying in a hurry, "Sorry, I'm sorry! " just before Amy was about to clean it herself. They both were dumbfounded at how jumpy and afraid Miles was of getting in serious trouble with them for even something as minor as that. They worried that they were intimidating him with their resentment, that they were controlling him with fear and intimidation. Was that really who they wanted to be?

"I-It was an accident! I wasn't, I was distracted, I…" Miles stammered almost hysterically, before Amy reassured him, "Relax, it's fine! We know you didn't mean to, we're not gonna yell at you. Come on, I'll help," placing her hands on his shoulders to help calm him down. Miles stared at her in a mixture of confusion and leftover anxiety as she removed cleaning spray from a cabinet below the kitchen sink and helped him clean the stain properly. After she did that, she gave him a hug. "Huh?" was his only response, and it was in a sad and whispered voice of complete confusion, returning the hug absent-mindedly out of loneliness.

"I-I'm sorry, I just…" Miles replied nervously as he slowly reluctantly let go of her. His eyes darted around a little and he scratched the back of his neck while saying with a bashful smile, "T-That's okay, I… I'm about ready to go home for the day anyways. Thank you." Amy stared at him sadly as he left the Freedom Fighters HQ with Sonic in a hurry, who had cheerfully walked into the room oblivious to what had just happened only to end up quickly taking him home with him reassuringly.

As Miles spent his time assisting the Freedom Fighters, he ended up being introduced as an ally to friends of Sonic outside of the team, like the Chaotix and Blaze. The meetings were usually uncomfortable for him from either not being used to being called a hero, or from still being treated with suspicion. The one he really took a liking to was Cream, who Nicole brought him to. The little girl asked him with her hands behind her back, "So, um, wanna have a tea party with me?" being a bit shy about doing so from knowing his previous reputation. To Nicole's amusement, Miles smiled in excitement and said, "Tea? Sure! I love tea."

Cream couldn't help but smile at that enthusiasm, and she led him into her room holding his arm, and he sat down at the table while Cream poured him tea with the tea cup, tea that he smiled in relaxation upon sipping. It was clear just looking at it that it was full of milk and sugar, exactly the way he liked it. "So when you said party, you didn't mean an actual one, right? With loud music and dancing and, large crowds?" To his relief, Cream shook her head and said, "No, it's pretty calm and quiet. You just sit down at the table and enjoy the tea."

Cream was so happy with him for redeeming himself that she was nice to him from the very beginning, and tried to get him to open up to her, wanting to know why he could've been so willing to commit crime with the Suppression Squad – to the point of believing his victims deserved it – and yet still had enough good in him to become a Freedom Fighter. She wanted to know what caused him to be so evil and bitter, when the good still in him proved that he wasn't always that way. Miles was uneasy about giving her the answers she wanted; he didn't want to embarrass himself by getting too worked up in front of her or tell her too much, and he worried that being told about his past would scare her, and risk getting him in trouble. After some hesitation, Miles sadly explained to Cream, "I was bullied in the past, for having two tails… Life was a struggle, " not telling her the full story to avoid upsetting her.
Eventually, Vanilla walked into the room to check on Cream, and in the middle of a long casual conversation with her about the previous mission he had been on, Miles nonchalantly said the word, "hell." "Watch your language!" Vanilla scolded, startling Miles into jumping and gasping turning to face her with a scared expression. In an instant, he had gone from being in a casual and friendly environment to once again being judged and looked down upon, being stared at disapprovingly by an adult that he didn't trust for something that wasn't much of a flaw in him to begin with. Feeling powerless, Miles started trembling and apologized with his ears drooping looking sad, "I-I'm sorry! It just, I didn't know I wasn't supposed to say that here! I just, please don't hate me!"

His final sentence shook Vanilla out of her disapproving glare from the sheer impact of it, and her expression changed to one of concern as she noticed that Miles was about to break down crying because of her. He was blinking erratically and frequently to hold back the tears, looking down at the table and away from everyone else to try to hide how he was feeling as eventually, tears started to run down his face at last.

"It's okay!" Vanilla exclaimed, and rushed to his side to embrace him in a hug, apologizing, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Calm down, you're safe here... I didn't mean to yell at you," with him returning the hug and savoring the affection with his eyes closed. Cream watched the scene in front of her concerned just like her mother, and wished that there was something she could do to help. "I never would've imagined he was so sensitive..." she thought.

Humiliated, Miles tried his best to speak without his voice breaking feeling self-conscious enough as it was, as he explained sadly, "I've been yelled at every day for the first four years of my life, I should be used to it by now! But instead, it just takes me back to it... Normally I can handle being judged, I put up with that all the time, but it was the fact that you caught me so off guard, when I was relaxing and enjoying myself, and then all of a sudden..."

Cream asked nervously, "Was she reminding you of one of your old bullies?" There was an awkward silence before Miles admitted, "Yeah, no offense. Now I know that you're nothing like them. You would've just insulted me then... My point is, I'm sorry I say those words so often, they're just a normal part of my vocabulary now. My only friends for most of my life had no problem with swearing, particularly Scourge, who essentially raised me for the first year we knew each other, so of course he was going to be a big influence! He taught me a lot of words that everyone else already knew, but I was ignorant of because of a limited exposure to the world. And he was the only person who bothered to have full-on casual conversations with me on a daily basis, so I couldn't help starting to talk like him. It's all Scourge's fault!" Vanilla stroked the back of his head in sympathy, and reluctantly ended the hug, feeling like she knew him a lot better than she did before.

"So it was just him?" she inquired, and Miles reluctantly admitted, "And Buns, and Boomer, they both cursed when they were annoyed at something. Patch only swears in French, and French is his thing. I'd be looked at weird if I tried speaking it without being French myself. " Vanilla, trying to lighten the mood as Miles and Cream finished up their tea, said, "You don't need to be French to be allowed to speak the language."

Miles awkwardly said, "You do for using it unnecessarily when not talking to anyone else. That was always Patch's thing, French, so I didn't think I could be too open about being interested in it. I'd always look up the words he used in a French-English dictionary in private. In fact, uh, I ended up reading the whole thing a few times. But I-I-I don't think I'm good at it, myself, I just recognize a lot of words. Structuring a whole sentence with its, um, complex grammar is something I don't have much experience with doing verbally on the spot. The amounts of different endings to words in it is just staggering, and it's not even always consistent, " as the two of them listened interested,
and encouraged him about it afterwards.

The two of them were very kind to him, with Vanilla acting as a mother figure to him like she did with all children. Liking how Vanilla also appreciated tea and treated him in a motherly way that he had never known before, Miles began to view her as a sort of mother figure, although he didn't know it at the time.

Seeing Tails' parents for the first time spending Christmas with the Freedom Fighters made Miles upset, sad and confused, as he glanced over at them before gasping and looking at them again in shock, staring at them anxiously with a feeling of loneliness and separation anxiety as he wondered who exactly they were to make him feel that way. " W-Who are they? " he asked Tails sadly with his eyebrows lowered, sitting beside him on Vanilla's couch as everyone opened their Christmas presents. " They're my mom and dad… What's wrong? " Tails answered sadly, noticing how unhappy he was. " I… don't trust them, " Miles said sadly, causing them to look concerned about him.

Worried, and feeling especially sorry for him for reminding him of her own son, Tails' mother said to him, " Did you not have a good relationship with your parents? " with a compassionate look. Miles sighed and looked away in shame, before saying bitterly, " T-They abandoned me for being a mutant… " He could barely even talk about it without getting choked up, and had to force himself to say the final word, embarrassed at making himself look so pathetic.

" At least that's what the workers at the orphanage told me. They thought I was a disgrace to the family, and left me on the island so that no one could trace me back to them! " Miles exclaimed unhappily, with tears running down his face, and this caused all of the Freedom Fighters to turn to look at him and add to his humiliation. He buried his face in his hands in shame, drying it as fast as he could, unable to see their concerned expressions as he only focused on his shame.

Tails' parents looked shocked at how heartless his parents were, and after a brief silence, Rosemary reassured him, " We're not like them, Miles. We promise! We got separated from him because of Robotnik. If we had the choice, we would've kept him, and we would've kept you! " After another, slightly intimidating silence, she carefully placed her hand on his shoulder and asked, " Want a hug? "

Miles looked around the living room, noticing at last how sympathetic everyone from Antoine and Amy to Rotor looked, reassuring him silently that he wouldn't be disapproved of for jumping at the opportunity to finally have a mother of his own. Then he looked back at Tails' mother, and noticed fear and hesitation in her eyes, no doubt from understanding that he was, technically, her son's evil twin, and that Antoine's evil twin had done something rather reprehensible to his father. He didn't want her to be afraid of him, feeling the burden of guilt weighing down on him once again; he had felt that more and more from being around the Freedom Fighters, looking back on all of his crimes from a new perspective as he couldn't help thinking of how they'd disapprove of him for it. He had learned to hate that feeling of guilt, and how he wasn't able to repress it as well anymore.

Finally, he sighed and said with a nervous smile, " Of course, " and hugged Tails' mother immediately, getting not only a hug from her in return, but a reassuring caress on the head as well. Amy commented with a smile, " Aw! " finding it sweet, as Miles whispered too quietly for anyone but Tails' mother to hear, " I-I hope I'll see you more often, um… Mom? " Rosemary raised her eyebrows at first, only to whisper with a smile, " Of course you will, " accepting his request to his relief.

Seeing for himself how he didn't even want Tails' parents to be afraid of him, let alone kill them, everyone in the Freedom Fighters who had any doubts about him finally let go of their suspicion
against him and smiled, as they realized that he truly had changed after all. When the hug ended, Sally went up to him with a smile, holding eggnog in a glass in her hand, and said cheerfully, "You can stay with us helping us out for as long as you want, Miles. No more suspicion and mistrust, I promise. We'll make it our New Year's Resolution!"

Full of hope in spite of the lingering fear and unease, Miles smiled warmly at her and asked, "May I… um… continue working for you, for the rest of my life?" He looked away from her nervously flinching, expecting the worst.

"Of course you can! You've been an asset to our team, and you've never really caused us any trouble. So, why not? Why end a good thing? If you want to stay with us and keep being friends, why would we say no? I officially declare you, one of the Freedom Fighters!" Sally said happily, and everyone around Miles felt the urge to start applauding at that, lightheartedly trying to make it feel more official.

Sonic handed him a Christmas gift with a grin, happy that he was accepted into the group at last. "Here you go, buddy. This is for you," he said, and after some brief hesitation, Miles tore open the red and green giftwrap paper until he gasped happily at seeing exactly what he wanted inside of it; a violin. "It's beautiful…" he said blissfully, and looked up at him saying, "Thank you! I'll play it every day! I missed having one of these so much…" as everyone smiled at him.

After that, Tails cheerfully handed him another gift, saying, "And here! I think you'll really like this!" Miles unwrapped the giftwrap paper with some difficulty, and revealed that contained in it was a CD-player with several CDs from various rock bands, with song lists that looked very appealing to him. "Thanks! How'd you know I liked these?" Miles thanked him, and Tails cheerfully joked around, "Hey, I'm you from another dimension, of course I'd be able to figure it out," and chuckled.

When Miles finally got used to being accepted as one of the Freedom Fighters, he started to be more consistently happy and relaxed, sincerely smiling and laughing more frequently rather than being too shy and afraid to enjoy himself. After a while, he seemed like a completely different person from the vengeful and condescending person he used to present himself as, only returning to that persona to intimidate his enemies. For the most part, just like Tails, he was being cheerful rather than bitter and depressed, with Nicole being the best at putting him in a good mood. At last, he began to slowly let go of his hatred of humanity, at the very least making Mobians an exception to the rule; it was hard to continue hating them as much as Moebians when they never treated him differently for being a mutant. Instead, it was for the evil deeds he had done in the past, which was more justified in comparison in spite of him not having much of a choice in the matter. While his past would always continue to haunt him and he would always be cynical of people for their discriminatory ways, he no longer hated being a hero for them, as long as he had a place where he felt like he belonged.
Months later, when it was the first week of spring, Miles was using a magically created tornado to fly him through an open meadow with a forest overlooking it. He was on the way to the destination of his next lone mission, when he stopped dead in his tracks from seeing a familiar face running up to him in a green blur. He gasped with his pupils shrunken in fear, unable to believe what he was seeing. "Sonic?! I mean, Scourge?!... That can't be him! Am I hallucinating again? This can't be happening!"

Scourge stopped in front of him at last, but rather than being angry with him like he had feared, he had that serious look on his face that he always had when he had been worrying about his well-being. "Hey! Bro! I've been looking everywhere for you! I thought you had..." Scourge said to him in a hurried panic, only to look wide-eyed and shocked at getting a closer look at him. "What's with that badge? And that gadget on your wrist? And, why'd your shirt turn blue?" Scourge asked him bewildered, briefly touching the Acorn badge pinned to his blue turtleneck with a black-edged square design on the center.

After trembling for a while in anxiety, Miles shouted, "You!" and flew into a rage, electrocuting Scourge with golden electricity at the twitch of his wrists. Scourge screamed as he was zapped and kept still by the burst of electrical energy surrounding him, with Miles keeping him slightly above the ground from a wind current from below as he glared at him demonically with anxiety-filled eyes. After a couple seconds of keeping him helpless, it finally dawned on Miles what he was doing to him, and with a quick tossing motion from his arms, he threw him to the ground in front of him re-absorbing the electricity at the first thought that he might injure the first person who ever loved him. His look of rage briefly faltered as a result, but he forced it back on him as soon as he could and shouted, "Don't you dare!" acting even more intimidating to hide his moment of weakness. Fortunately for him, Scourge had his eyes closed in a grimace the entire time and never saw the remorseful look on his face that revealed what he was hiding beneath the mask.

Scourge laid on the ground on his back for a moment before forcing himself to sit up in a daze, saying quietly, "Wha... What are you talking about?" in a tone of both fear and exasperation. A couple seconds later, he managed to stand himself back up, only to be zapped again while held still with the twitch of Miles' wrists, screaming at the pain and how he was rendered unable to move.

"Don't even think about taking it all away from me!" Miles shouted passionately, with a twisted twitching of his eye. He moved his right arm to the right and turned to the right in one swift motion to generate a blast of wind against Scourge, which slammed him against the trunk of a tree pinning him to it with roaring wind. "I'm the most powerful being in the world! So don't even think about getting into a fight with me! You can't even run until I let you!" Miles shouted triumphantly, although his moment of pride was very short-lived, as his anger was soon replaced with guilt and fear once again, and he returned to looking concerned about his older brother, knowing how much he'd regret hurting the person he owed his life to. He felt pathetic about being so conflicted, when from his perspective he should've felt good about tormenting Sonic's evil twin on sheer principle.

Scourge rubbed the side of his head sitting in front of the tree in a daze, before... smiling at him. "Man... You've gotten stronger! I told ya that practicing would pay off!" he said with a pleased smile, proud of him, his words directly reminding him of how impressed he was when he threw lightning in front of him for the first time. Even after Miles betrayed him, he still couldn't help but be proud of his little brother for realizing his true potential.

The sheer sight of Scourge acting like his caring older brother again in the face of hate-filled
mistreatment destroyed what little rage he had left and replaced it with remorse. " What?... You're being... " Miles said quietly with an expression full of guilt and uncertainty. " Nice, after everything I did? " he thought, finishing his sentence where he couldn't hear it. With that, he looked regretful, and his lack of a desire to keep fighting stopped the wind keeping Scourge against the tree, allowing him to stand himself up, walk up to him and talk to him casually.

Scourge said nostalgically with a smile, " Aw, that's better. That's the Miles I know! I'll admit it, I missed ya, little bro. " With relief as well as worry in his tone, he continued with a smile that was more nervous, " Glad I found ya so fast. The minute I got back home with Fiona and saw you weren't there, I've been searching like crazy for you! So while I told my soldiers and the Destructix to go looking for you in Moebius, I decided to go see if you went here to try and beg Sonic for forgiveness. And you did! Ah, you're so predictable. You know, I oughta give ya what for, running away like that, but honestly, I'm just glad you're still alive. Knowing you... " Scourge looked serious in concern again, and decided against finishing that thought, knowing that it was best left unsaid. After all, Miles already knew what he was going to say; directly confronting him with it would only upset him even more.

" You... What are you doing? I can't be seen with you! What if people jump to conclusions?! " Miles said anxiously about his friendly way of speaking to him, being quiet and resentful at first only to return to shouting at him trembling uncontrollably by the middle of it, terrified of being accused of being a traitor just from being seen with him. The fact that a similar thing already happened with Fiona didn't help. Scourge deadpanned, " Miles, there's no one here. I see you're just paranoid as eve-"

" Shut up! Don't try to act like you're your old self again! J-Just to go right back to your old ways 'cause you think you're too good for me! You never cared about me! You lying bastard! All you care about is yourself! " Miles shouted with his fists clenched at his sides, snatching at last. Scourge replied in frustrated confusion, " What?! What the hell kind of thoughts did those traitors put in your head?! What are you talking about, I never cared?! I raised you myself! "

" For a year! And then you just ditched me to chase after girls! Face it, Scourge, you didn't raise me, the Suppression Squad did! You cared so much about me that the minute you became a teenager, you abandoned me just like my parents! You didn't care about raising me anymore! Just wanted to keep a friendship with a kid from ruining your ' street cred, ' as if that was even possible! All you ever did after that was boss me around and treat me condescendingly for being a kid, when you promised me that you'd never treat me differently for what I can't help, but you're just like everyone else! " Miles ranted furiously, letting out years of frustration that he had kept all bottled up. He shouted,

" All this ' I still care about you and miss you ' talk, all of it's empty words! Even if you are sincere, it won't change how you act and you'll probably change your mind! You expect me to come back to you after years of neglect?! You're just like your parents! " Scourge gasped, looking shocked and upset at the accusation. Had he really made the same mistake that they did?

Knowing full well what that meant to him, Miles continued to rant passionately. " There, I said it! You're never there! You just showed up occasionally to remind me that you existed and didn't care about me anymore! Do you have any idea how hard it was getting the Freedom Fighters to trust me? Those were the most miserable months of my life! I'd rather DIE than have to go through that again! Even if I go insane and I do come back to you, how do I know you won't just go back to ignoring me so your precious Destructix won't judge you for treating me right?! If I leave now, I'll never be able to come back! You think I'm going to risk losing my best friends just to give you another chance to screw things up?! Forget it! You had your chance! And you blew it! I'm never going back to being alone! They love me, Sonic, and you don't! "
There was a silence, as Scourge looked stunned and devastated. The fact that Miles had instinctively called him by the name he called him for most of his life only made it all the more clear how upset he was. Finally, he said, "That's not true!... Damn it... Was that what this was all about?... Man, I wish you told me that earlier. We could've fixed things years ago! I would've spent more time around you if I knew you still wanted that! I thought you just 'outgrew' me, or that those traitors turned you against me! I thought with the Suppression Squad around, you'd have so many friends that you wouldn't need me anymore!"

Trying to resist the urge to forgive him right away from the sheer impact of him reacting like that, Miles exclaimed with tears welling up in his eyes, "Why would you ever think that?!... And you thought you knew me! You insensitive jerk! Don't you dare try to blame it all on me! You're the one who abandoned me when you knew I had been put through that before! You used to do everything right, but you changed! And I've already gotten that back! With Sonic! With the Freedom Fighters! And they make me happier than I have ever been! I don't need you! I don't need you anymore! I never wanna see you again!"

There was another silence between them as Miles blinked rapidly holding back the tears and Scourge looked upset and let it all sink in. Finally, the silence was broken when he sighed heavily. "I'm sorry..." he apologized reluctantly with his head hung low. The sheer impact of it made Miles' anger fade away completely and caused him to listen. "You're right. I screwed up. I never had a friend before, and I didn't know what I was doing..." Scourge admitted, showing humility to him for the first time in several years. After awkwardly scratching the back of his neck, he continued,

"Look, all I ever wanted was for you to be happy. When we first met, you were so depressed, you had been through hell... traumatized far more than you were willing to admit. How do you think that was like for a ten-year-old kid? Meeting somebody like that? I never knew anyone like that before, I never had a friend like you, and I always figured I'd end up screwing up, 'cause it's not an easy friend to keep, especially for someone impatient like me. But that's not your fault! It's those bastards back home for making you who you are!..."

"Sonic... I-I mean, Scourge... You haven't apologized to me in years! Especially not for..." Miles replied quietly looking stunned. By the end of it, he squeezed his eyes shut and looked annoyed as he tried to hold back the tears welling up in his eyes. Unfortunately, a single tear managed to escape, and rolled down his face as he said sadly, "Thank you..."

"Hey, that wasn't exactly easy for me... That's what you do to me, I guess. You're my soft side. You and Fiona, " Scourge said lightheartedly with a chuckle, trying to lighten up the mood while Miles wiped away tears from his eyes. Finally, Miles admitted with his head hung low, "I owe you an apology as well, for... obvious reasons. I... wasn't thinking very far ahead when I did it, and I got the exact opposite of what I wanted! Every time I saw you I was reminded of how things had changed between us, but instead of talking it over with you, I lashed out... I didn't want to look clingy and needy, I wanted to look like I had become stronger, that I had gotten over it..."

Scourge sighed sadly, appreciating the long-overdue apology for the betrayal while still pitying him, and said lightheartedly, "Hey, news flash, kiddo, that's kind of common knowledge back home. No sense hiding an open secret..." Miles sighed with shame, and whispered, "I know..."

Scourge continued with a smile as sincere and friendly as Sonic's, "My point is, if being a hero is what gets you truly happy, finally, then that's what I want for you. After all, traitor or not, you're still my brother, and my brother deserves better than what he got!"

Miles looked at him stunned for a couple seconds, taken aback by everything he said. One word in
particular had him take pause. "I-I'm not a hero, shut up," he muttered resentfully as he looked away in embarrassment. "What'dya call palling around with Sonic then? What happened to getting back at the people who bullied you? You don't even seem to care about that anymore! So much for getting revenge..." Scourge replied, starting out with a forced lighthearted tone and going back to his infamous evil self by the end.

"I... That doesn't mean anything! I got older and wiser and accepted that getting revenge was pointless! I've been giving those discriminatory bastards what they deserve for years and it's never made me feel better for longer than a minute! They still hate me for something I can't help, so what's the point of it all?! It only got me to hate myself more!" Miles exclaimed defensively, in denial right from the start. By the final sentence, he looked depressed and embarrassed, with the sympathetic reaction of Scourge only making him feel worse, and he stammered before continuing resentfully,

"I, uh, what I mean is, I'm sick of wasting my time. Wasting my life! All I wanted was for them to at least respect me, and they don't! You've heard what the people of our world say about me, how weak and, hideous and, deranged they think I am! Even getting them to fear me didn't change the core problem. At least in this dimension, I never hear anyone call me a mutant! All they cared about was my past taking revenge on humanity, and now they don't anymore because I'm making up for it! Why would I go back to wasting my time with you?! My only goal in life was to get acceptance and respect, and that's something I can only have over here! Your hateful heartless world can burn for all I care, because I'm done with it! I'm done wasting my life breaking the law with you!"

After briefly smiling at Miles in an impressed smirk at how much braver he seemed to have gotten – standing up to him so passionately and for so long that even he was proud of him for it – Scourge scoffed lightheartedly with a wave of his hand and said jokingly, "See?! You suddenly think you're too good for breaking the law. Ha! Who are you?! Man, have they brainwashed you or what? You've changed."

Miles stared at him speechless from his reaction, looking wide-eyed and lost in thought once again. "Huh?... What?! No I haven't! I'm the same person I always was! The kind of weak, desperate and pathetic person who would do anything to keep having friends! I go along with whatever they say and go along with whatever they do to keep them from becoming sick of me, and I don't care if that makes me the hero or the villain! I never did!... That's how I've always been!" Scourge rolled his eyes at that last sentence, remembering vividly how he could only convince Miles to lash out at criminals when he first knew him.

"I just want allies, emotional support, I'm not a hero if I have entirely selfish motivation. I'd fight for whatever cause they want me to, heroic or 'villainous'. If you had been a hero, I would've gone along with it just to avoid being alone! I wouldn't have felt right about it at first, but I still-"

"At first?" Scourge deadpanned with a smug smirk and his arms crossed. Realizing what he admitted and implied, Miles stayed silent for a while before saying, "I, don't know why I said that…" Scourge, less lighthearted but still with a slight playfulness in his tone, said,

"Exactly. You're still the same person, obviously, but being around them is changing the way you look at things. Would you even feel right about going back to terrorizing the world with me? Or would you just remember how the Freedom Fighters would disapprove?" Still with his arms crossed, he gave him a doubtful and skeptical look as Miles' eyes darted around and he nervously insisted,

"Um... T-That doesn't mean anything, I just know what their opinions are, and since I'm around
them so often, it's easy to be reminded of that. I just don't want them to disapprove of me and hate me and throw me out! That doesn't mean I care what they think! That doesn't mean they've changed who I am!

Scourge rolled his eyes and said sarcastically with a smile, "Sure it doesn't. Keep telling yourself that. " "I will!" Miles said immediately. "Hey, anything to make you feel better about adjusting to this whole 'hero' bullcrap. If it gets you happy and well-adjusted, finally, I'm all for it,"

Scourge said cheerfully with a cocked eyebrow, as he turned around and started walking away from him into the distance.

"W-What are you doing?" Miles asked him as he left, full of anxiety that he tried to hide with annoyance and failed miserably. Scourge replied as he walked away casually, "Goin' home. All I came here to do was get ya back, but knowin' that you're happier here, there's no point. Enjoy your life with Sonic, bro! I'm goin' back to the world where I'm king!"

"You're… really leaving…" Miles whispered sadly looking stunned and almost in denial. Tears welled up in his eyes reducing his vision to a white blur, and he covered it up with intimidating anger once again, shouting, "Fine! Go then! Get out of my life! Leave me again! Damn it, damn it all!" As tears started running down his face at last and his body began to shake, he fell to his knees and covered his eyes with his hands sobbing as quietly as he possibly could, thinking, "Why does it have to be this way?!" Hearing the familiar commotion behind him, Scourge hesitated awkwardly, and started walking away more slowly, forcing himself not to go back on his word and comfort him like he always had when it was hard enough to make that decision as it was.

"You okay?!" Scourge heard Sonic exclaim behind him, which made him jump startled and turn around to face him in an instant. He was afraid, terrified of the possibility that Sonic would get him sent back to prison once more, the possibility that had him swear off fighting with him again to avoid risking everything he had, determining that becoming the king of Moebius again was good enough for proving himself. He looked back at Miles and Sonic on edge prepared for the worst, only to see Sonic and Tails comforting Miles instead, with Sonic holding him close, just like he used to, as if he was his replacement.

Scourge watched from a distance at his most hated enemy hugging his little brother figure and caressing the back of his head just like he did, and at first, he growled irritated in a knee-jerk reaction at his good counterpart stealing Miles from him, thinking that he had no right to do that when it should've been him… but soon, he remembered what Miles had said about how becoming a Freedom Fighter had made him happier than he had ever been. He had finally gotten what he wanted, a world where people didn't hate him for having two tails, but instead liked and respected him along with a group of friends that were close enough to the Suppression Squad to be replacements. He had everything he ever dreamed of.

And while he still wished that Miles could go back to being just as close of a friend as he was when they first met, he realized that those days were over, and he owed it to him to let him move on to a happy life. He couldn't have that life with him, at least not if he stayed on Moebius and kept up his criminal ways, and joining Sonic himself wasn't something he would even consider doing. All that mattered was that Miles was alive, and for once, happy. Trying to take him back with him would only be pointless, and either ruin the life he had earned for himself or get Miles to defeat him in a fight for good, and even if he did get him back to Moebius, he would be miserable at best and quick to betray him at worst. Knowing that he had made the right decision in giving him permission to stay with Sonic, he smiled a little, turned right back around, and ran into the forest nearby at last.

When he ran up to Fiona in a green blur, he saw that she had been watching Miles through the
bushes the entire time, and had eavesdropped on their entire conversation. She turned to him looking stunned at how he interacted with Miles, saying, "You forgave him so fast…" Being more confused about how to phrase it, she continued in shock, "And… he's been abandoned, too? Wow. Not to mention how people treated him…" She thought, "I hate to say it, but he makes my past look… Well, not exactly good, but… Do I even have a right to complain about it anymore?"

Scourge was a little embarrassed at her witnessing his soft side so blatantly, but was in such a good mood that he shrugged it off and said, "Come on, Fi, let's go home. I don't need him! I'm awesome!" Reminded of why she found him so charming, Fiona giggled and rolled her eyes, before saying affectionately, "I love ya," and kissing him on the cheek. With that, he lifted her into his arms and ran off to a safe place with her.

"You did the right thing," Tails reassured Miles as he sat beside him, briefly stroking his shoulder as Sonic held him close. "You have no idea how hard it was for me to do that…" Miles whimpered, humiliated at crying in front of them again. "Were you and him ever close?" Sonic asked him gently, still stunned that Scourge had such a soft side. "YES!" Miles exclaimed tearfully, and continued hysterically,

"We were! We were inseparable, just like you and Tails!... When I was his only friend… I was his whole world… Sonic! Promise me you'll never abandon me! Promise me we'll be friends for the rest of my life! I don't want it to happen with us, too!"

Sonic understood exactly what he meant. He wanted him to replace Scourge's role in his life, and he was more than happy to officially do that for him. "I promise…" Sonic said seriously, vowing to be a positive influence on him. "You can have more than one brother, can't you?" Miles finally asked shyly, hoping it wouldn't ruin everything for him. Sonic replied, "Of course I can. I've had one for months! Right, Tails?" "Exactly!" Tails reassured him immediately, causing him to sigh with relief at his lack of objection, finally stop crying, and smile.

While a part of him wished he hadn't seen Scourge again and felt like it had only broken his heart again, the rest of him was incredibly thankful that he finally got to see him again for not only for the incredible catharsis of telling him off, but for the peace of mind he obtained in getting his blessing to stay with Sonic and live a happy life.

Sonic had been worried for multiple reasons when he was watching the two of them from the bushes, mainly because Miles showed a lot of signs of still having an evil side to him and needed to resist the urge to come back to Scourge just for the sake of it and leave him for Scourge, just like Fiona had. His comment about him wanting Scourge's world to burn for all he cared was particularly menacing, not to mention confusing since he had said revenge was pointless. But while he gave out mixed messages, in the end he revealed that the Freedom Fighters had given him more of a conscience, changing him for the better from their constant presence in his life, to the point where it seemed that he couldn't remember his crimes without thinking of how much they'd disapprove. While he was certainly a troubled child and still didn't quite care about the Freedom Fighter cause, he was coming around, and if what Scourge was saying was true, he was on his way to becoming happy and well-adjusted, just like Tails was.
Miles' Perspective on his Evil Deeds, Better Apology

Shortly after Miles had first apologized to all of the Freedom Fighters and been given permission to help them, he woke up from his rest on their base's sofa and saw Tails, who smiled at him in the living room saying, “Hey, Miles. Um… Wanna hang out?” Miles was stunned for a second, sat up and said with a nervous smile, “You were taking care of me at your island cabin for days, not even a week ago, and you didn’t get enough of me? Well, good. What do you have in mind?” He still felt awkward about interacting with Tails as a friend, when he was used to him being someone he lashed out at whenever he felt like it, and now he was forbidden from doing that out of principle.

Tails replied as Miles slowly stood up from the sofa, “Well, I know you’re not really interested in engineering. What do you wanna do?” asking out of curiosity for what he’d come up with. He was his former evil twin, after all. Miles was stunned for a second since it was never him who was in charge of that, and asked, “Um, well, what do people do together normally? Can we smash some robots, are there any of those around? “ looking excited at the second question.

Tails looked concerned and replied, “Miles, you’re exhausted. You passed out on the couch hours ago, you look like you haven’t slept in days!” Miles reluctantly said, “Okay, fine, I know.” Tails asked him, “What do YOU like to do for fun? “ hoping he’d understand the obvious “that’s legal,” addendum that he didn’t mention since it’d be awkward.

Miles thought deeply with his hand on his chin and the eyes darting back and forth at first, saying uncertainly, “Well, let’s see, I, play the piano and violin. No, those are solo activities.” “I’d be open to hearing you play! I don’t have to play an instrument myself- “ Tails responded, only for him to interrupt nervously, “N-No, I’m not used to playing in front of other people. Not since my teachers taught me.” Tails understood, thinking, “Stage fright. Never thought my evil twin would have that,” and Miles continued,

“If there was an arcade in your city, I’d like to go there, but I’m not ready to go out in public and be seen by them, they’d all be asking questions constantly about me, and when I was back home, I could get away with my friends scaring everyone out of the arcade, but here, I’d have to put up with everyone staring at me the whole time I’d be there. And it’s not like we’re familiar with when exactly the arcade wouldn’t have anyone in it but would still be open, right? I’d only go in there if no customers were there.”

Tails smiled at learning that his “mature, dignified” evil twin wasn’t above enjoying the simple pleasure of arcade games, but looked sad as he learned just how much his social anxiety restrained him and kept him from enjoying life the way other people did. He replied unhappily, “I-I’ll try to find out the quietest hours for that place later, but right now I don’t know, and if you really don’t want people to see you, they’ll see you on the way there anyways. Though if you can really move as fast as you said with your wind magic, you might just look like a blur to them, but you couldn’t be that fast when you wouldn’t know where to go, so you’d have to slow down and let me guide you there anyways. Right now, I guess it’s not feasible. What else? I’d love for you to help in the lab with me, but if you’re not enthusiastic about it, there’s no point.”

Miles thought about what else he did for fun, and said with his hand on his chin, “Well, I listen to music – definitely a solo activity, you might not share my taste anyways…” Then his eyes widened in realization and he finally smiled, saying looking hopeful, “We could cook! We could cook something together! Yeah, that’ll be fun! I haven’t cooked with someone since Antoine lived with me! It was something we did in our ‘let’s not and say we did’ missions, where we were sent to someone’s house to, do something we disagreed with and we just warned the accused criminals
to get out of town instead. Then we spent that time cooking in their kitchen. Wanna make a soufflé?"

Tails, who was glad he had something he was excited about doing with him, said with a nervous smile, "Well, I’m not that well-versed at cooking, maybe we could start small? How about we bake some cookies?" Miles looked less enthusiastic, but fortunately continued to smile and look forward to the idea, and said, "Alright, as long as I get to cook."

As they walked to the kitchen of Freedom HQ, Miles continued, "It’ll be easy, kiddo. I’ll use the cooking tools, and you can hand me the ingredients!" with an excited tone completely devoid of intentional condescension with that last sentence. Tails still felt a little annoyed, but still smiled, saying in the kitchen with his arms crossed, "Come on, I can do more than that."

Miles replied getting increasingly nervous, "I’m sure you can, but I don’t want, I want to make absolutely sure it works out. I suppose I could give you the easy tasks. I’m NOT trying to insult you, I promise. I just want things to turn out well, it’s been forever since I cooked something and failed at it." He briefly looked solemn and unhappy at remembering the consequences of making a failure when he was little; when he couldn’t eat what he cooked to remove the evidence of using the food from people’s fridges, throwing the failure in the trash ran the risk of them finding it and learning that he was hiding in their homes. That was even worse than the annoyance of having to start all over again with cooking his meal, or missing out on supper if he ruined it and didn’t have time to make a decent replacement before they’d come home. He didn’t let Tails know about all of that, believing that he had learned enough about his life before Scourge already and could infer it on his own anyways.

Tails understood his justification for being careful, nodding in response, and after the two had put the cookie dough in the oven, they sat down on the chairs at the kitchen table with a digital clock in front of them to make sure they wouldn’t burn the cookies. There was immediately an awkward silence as they looked bored, and before Tails could suggest them watching TV, which Miles had already had enough of after days of watching it, Miles sighed with his arms crossed, and said reluctantly, "C-Can we talk? T-Tails, I… There’s a lot I haven’t, explained myself about. I just said I was sorry for everything, I don’t feel like I fully explained myself."

As Tails looked at him sadly and said with sympathy, "Alright, go ahead, " Antoine, Bunnie and Rotor, who had returned to Freedom HQ, started to overhear, and hid behind a wall to listen to what he was going to say. Preparing himself for a long period of talking, Miles took a deep breath, sighed, and awkwardly explained trying to sound calm and not too unhappy, "I feel like I owe you a lot of apologies, and explanations. This isn’t easy for me in the slightest. I suppose I’ll start from the beginning. When I impersonated you, I had to go along with what my friends were doing, or they’d judge me for it. And I had to live with those people, it’s not like I could shrug off them not respecting me. I’m not going to pretend I didn’t have any enjoyment from it. Let me explain. They all decided on their own what their act of framing would be. That included me. I had to do something, so I thought back to the ways people used to mistreat ME and chose the most petty, least unforgivable thing, throwing tomatoes at someone. People did that to me when I was 4, and I even became ill from eating them afterwards. How was I supposed to know they were rotten? I just wanted someone else to know how it felt for a change. It doesn’t seem fair that only I went through that. But looking back on it, I feel uncomfortable. I always did."

He sighed and said, "I tried to enjoy it at the time, I threw as well as I could and I remembered the bullies that I had to deal with when that happened to me. I imagined I was throwing tomatoes at THEM."

Miles looked depressed with his eyes downcast and head a little lowered, continuing, “But I had nothing against the turtle man, I didn’t know if he did anything wrong. I tried to convince myself that he did a lot to deserve it, that he was an intolerant jerk who thought that my extra tail was disgusting. But I know that’s not guaranteed. It never is with innocent people. He probably didn’t deserve it, and I was being almost just as bad as the islanders who threw them at ME. M-M- Maybe you should tell him that for me. I would be much too awkward to even talk to him myself. “ Tails nodded, agreeing, as he looked sad.

Still looking melancholic, he looked Tails in the eyes sadly and said, “And then it got you into trouble, all so we could have a fight. Logically, we could’ve just gone to you directly and gotten a fight right away if we wanted some excitement, but my friends were criminals. If they could cause trouble and rebel against society and get away with it, they would. The point is, you didn’t deserve that, Tails. Even back then, I knew that. I don’t think so, at least, it’s not like you tried to kill me. I hadn’t even seen you before back then. “

His eyes were downcast as he explained, “That was when we first met, and it wasn’t a good first impression. You didn’t get an accurate impression of who I am beyond being your enemy and an evil twin. And I never got an impression of you, either. Normally, I’d have been excited to meet another two-tailed fox, I thought maybe I could relate to you, but since we had to fight, I didn’t know anything about you. You were just an enemy and I had to defend myself. “ Tails looked depressed at hearing that, realizing the tragic missed opportunity at how they could’ve simply had a conversation back then and were forced to fight by the circumstances.

Miles continued sadly, “I feel awkward about all of that, and even after that, when I was being sent home, it left a bitter taste. I would’ve preferred just a talk over a pointless fight that didn’t achieve anything. At least I was getting out some frustration with the fight, but I had no reason to hate you back then. I had nothing against you because I knew nothing about you to begin with. Other than that you’re more of a hero. I never thought that was really a bad thing to deserve a fight from. And I’m repeating myself now, so I should move on. The point is, I’m sorry. I’m not happy about that day, “ showing self-awareness briefly at the end. After a brief silence, Tails said compassionately, “It’s okay, Miles. I forgave you for all that days ago. “

Miles thought, “But I couldn’t forgive myself, “ bitter at himself, and continued with even greater reluctance speaking quickly, “And the next time I saw you was when Scourge took over my world and had my gang come to take over your base. Right away I want you to know that if I was in charge, we would’ve built our OWN base and focused on Robotnik as a deserving enemy, and not even considered trying to bomb your city! I don’t know what Scourge was thinking, I don’t think he was thinking at all! Just an idiotic stupid whim, out of spite. And I don’t know why he thought I’d actually go through with it. That was actually the sixth time I got rid of a bomb instead of using it; I always get them sent into a volcano in an uninhabited island. But, well, about all that, where do I even begin? There’s SO many things about that whole ordeal that I hated. “

Forcing himself to talk about it, Miles practically blurted out, “I’m sorry about how I treated Rotor! “ As Rotor’s eyes widened in surprise and started listening with more curiosity and sympathy, Miles continued looking sadder than ever, “I was just following orders. If it were up to me, I would’ve let him leave, even though he did shove me down like my bullies did last time. But at least he said, ‘Sorry, ‘ which none of them ever did even sarcastically. That was really confusing, and it took a long time for it to sink in. Other than that, though, I never had anything against Rotor! Again, he didn’t try to kill me. He went really easy on me, considering what he could’ve done! “

He then forced another apology out looking the most upset and stressed out of all, “A-A million ‘ sorrys ‘ to Antoine and Bunnie, there, I didn’t mean what I said! I was looking away because I
hated the entire experience and wanted nothing to do with it. “ As Antoine smiled with his eyes sad from pity and Bunnie stared at him shocked trying to take it all in, Miles continued looking angry, “ I’m glad Patch failed at what he was trying to do! And at his plan on Mobius earlier, while we’re at it. I never looked at him the same way again. Antoine I could relate to! I never had anything against either of those two, she and him never tried to kill me either. “

No longer looking past him stressed out, Miles looked Tails in the eyes again sincerely and said awkwardly, “ And then there was, well, everything I said to you. Where do I even begin? There’s a lot to explain. Alright, first, the ‘ magical heritage ‘ part? I only know that because of Scourge’s girlfriend Fi mentioning your uncle was a wizard. Was it your uncle? I never knew any of my family, remember. And a week before I came to Mobius-Prime, I’d discovered I could throw lightning for the first time when a bully was especially insulting to me. That’s why I knew about that. I knew you could do better. And it was frustrating. Perhaps you can throw lightning too, to name just one example. “ Tails asked in curiosity, “ But if you could throw lightning even back then, why didn’t you do that in our fight? “

Miles explained, “ Well, obviously I didn’t want to actually HIT a person with them, especially not that early on when I hadn’t mastered it. Nowadays, I could do it because I can adjust the voltage to be safe and I did the research on what levels of voltage do what in terms of damage, now I know how to make my electricity completely harmless and just keep-we’re getting sidetracked here, it doesn’t matter right now. “ He partly interrupted himself from the fear that if he outright told Tails he could take control of the electricity in the nervous system to control a person’s body as if they were electrocuted, he’d be creeped out, and not want to be around someone who could do that to him. He planned to keep that ability of his a secret from his friends for as long as possible.

He cleared his throat and then said sadly, “ Also, I ‘ followed Sonic around ‘ when I was 5, too, and it was the happiest year of my life. It was before he got a girlfriend, became a teenager, and I had to join a gang and he had other friends, and he became too busy for me. But he used to be such a great friend. He took care of me when I was sick and always reassured me and told me to enjoy myself. When I was feeling uneasy about eating stuff like cookies, for example, he’d always tell me I could eat whatever I wanted if it made me happy! I always missed those days. ” He felt tears in his eyes by the end, and continued with a slightly heartbroken expression,

" And for you, they never ended. You still have a Sonic who cares about you. Well, Scourge never stopped caring, just got busy, but Sonic is still trying to be a brother. I never knew just how lucky you are until I got that information from Traitor Girl. Blame her for how jealous I got of you. At least in part. Otherwise, I would’ve known nothing about you, and had no reason to be especially angry at you. “

He looked awkward and stammered with downcast eyes, “ And that last sentence of it? That was more aimed at ME than you. It’s not easy for me to admit that. I didn’t know much about you as a person, your actual personality, beyond being my enemy who wanted to beat me up, who even called DIBS on it like my bullies! Some of them even had arguments over who would try to hurt me first, and I slipped away in the commotion. “ He at least briefly cheered up finding the humor in that memory at the final sentence, before continuing full of shame,

“ An-In any case, you couldn’t have ‘ made me sick, ‘ if anything you’re who I always wanted to be, because not only did your good times with Sonic never end, but you, you’re a lot happier than I ever was. And that angered me. It didn’t seem fair. We both should’ve had happy lives! I take all of that back, what I said that day! “

He continued more calmly, “ I mean, I do hope you start taking advantage of your magical abilities from your heritage, aside from just flying, but you’re doing fine without using them. So ‘ ignoring ‘
it hasn’t been the end of the world. “Miles nervously smiled as he admitted, “This is uplifting,
actually, I’m, starting to enjoy this! And that LAST insult, I take that back, too, “ and Tails smiled in
response, glad that he was starting to calm down.

Miles apologized sadly being the most upset by the end, “I didn’t really mean it, I just meant you
were naïve. You don’t know how horrible people can really be to people who are different. You’re
trusting in comparison to me. Again, I only know that because of that Fi girl. But I always knew
you were intelligent. I mean, Fi had to confirm to me the extent of it, and no, she and I were never
really friends, I just asked her for some information on you. But Scourge always told me that I was
smarter than most children. So I knew that had to apply to my twin. I just wanted to let you know
how it felt to always be treated like a kid, like Scourge did with me – albeit in an affectionate
manner that was full of love and only unintentionally patronizing. “ Tails couldn’t help being
annoyed at being reminded of how insufferable Miles was the last time he had insulted him, but he
tried to be calm and forgiving because of how clear it was that he felt terrible about it.

Opening the floodgates into more of a sad rant, Miles complained, “I know I looked like I thought
I was so smart, but I never really felt like I was a genius myself! Even the kind of planning skills
that Scourge told me made me a genius, figuring out how to survive on my own, I never thought it
was a big deal! I never had a formal education, had to teach myself with books which was hardly a
normal school curriculum. Boomer only taught me about a few subjects and I don’t know much of
anything about the media and ‘pop culture,’ common knowledge like that. Even after all the time I
spent reading cookbooks, it took me forever to even learn the alphabet, and I still have trouble with
alphabetical order! If anything, I feel like the one in my gang who knew the LEAST, aside from
my specific areas of interest that aren’t openly practical, and most people treated me like an idiot
because of it! Boomer applied his intelligence towards engineering, I didn’t even apply it to plans
because I wasn’t in charge. Just the weather and music, that’s all I’m really smart at. “

As Antoine, Bunnie, Rotor and Tails had to hold back tears at hearing about just how insecure
Miles really was deep down, he added very awkwardly, “That’s not even getting into the fact that
you’re, thinking more rationally than I am, your thoughts aren’t clouded with, well, fears that
aren’t always rational in context. I wanted you to know how I felt for a change. But I DIDN’T think
I was smarter than you, okay? I’m sorry. “

He continued looking ashamed and even bitter with himself at times, “I knew I wasn’t being smart
lashing out at you, or ANYONE, in the fragile situation I was in. I realized I made a mistake the
second afterwards. I was trying to convince Sally I could be trusted! Not exactly the right time for
being sarcastic. Both of those insults, they could’ve cost me the truce. I don’t know why you and
your allies didn’t beat me up right there, “ the most ashamed of all at the final sentence.

Tails put his hand on his shoulder moving his chair closer to him, holding back tears of sympathy,
and Miles continued unhappily, “I was so nervous from trying to talk someone who absolutely
hated me into working together for the first time that the ONLY way, I could keep my composure,
and act calm, act how I was expected to act, was to plan out exactly what I’d say to Sally before I
said it. I was basically speaking from a script. But every time I really felt the resentment weigh
down on me from you and your friends, I lashed out. On impulse, because I knew you already
hated me regardless. When you all acted apprehensive and wanted to beat me on sight like my
bullies, just ASSUMING I was up to no good, and just the resentment in your tone when you
responded to me, it set me off! “

Showing self-awareness again, Miles admitted, “I KNOW I’m not exactly sounding sympathetic
here. I just want to explain why I said what I did. I was under a tremendous amount of pressure, I’d
never convinced an enemy to do anything to help me before without being punched in the face
instead. I snapped, made some stupid mistakes, and you know what, when I said I didn’t want you
all to hurt yourselves, I MEANT it. I didn’t really want that even then. Not injured, definitely, no matter how unhappy I was at being threatened. Granted, you thought I was your enemy, of course you’d be that way approaching me. How were you supposed to know? But you have to understand, that’s how I felt about it! But I was never, there was never the possibility of me, of you all getting hurt by me, okay? I was the one with the ‘bravado,’ I always am. I was projecting if anything…”

As Sonic walked into Freedom HQ and was about to head for the kitchen, he saw them at the table, and Miles sighed deeply as Tails put his other hand on his other shoulder. He said with tears in his eyes from the last few sentences,

“ It wasn’t a pleasant memory. None of it was. Especially not what I did to Sonic and Scourge! I thought perhaps Sonic was just as selfish as him, I tried to believe it back then. All of my ‘enjoyment’ was at getting back at SCOURGE. Sonic didn’t deserve it, and even back then, I still ended up regretting it. That’s why I convinced Alicia to let that portal get created so fast when I was the one who, got them in there in the first place. I was trying to undo my action. I was proud of that, at least. But after what I did last time, I-I can understand why Sonic gave me the death glare that he did, holding my tails, even if he had a good reason for trying to keep me from running for my life. I know why, but it still wasn’t, a good memory, and I can’t believe Sonic had any sympathy for me and let me rest in your cabin after that!”

Towards the end, the tears started to come out and his voice started to falter from just remembering making Sonic resentful of him, and the minute he said, “I’m sorry,“ covering his hands with his elbows on the kitchen table, Tails gave him a hug, unable to take it anymore, and comforted him saying, “There’s no hard feelings,“ as he noticed a concerned Bunnie, Antoine and Rotor rushing into the room. The oven timer went off startling Miles, and alerting his attention to the other people in the room as he gasped. But to his relief, they were all just as reassuring as Tails was, as Bunnie removed the cookie dough from the oven so that it wouldn’t burn.

When he saw Sonic walking up to him with his arms a little up, he let go of Miles, who jumped at the opportunity to give him a hug, trying to comfort himself the best he could and remind himself that the past was only the past. Sonic reassured him during the hug, “It’s okay, I’m not mad at you anymore. You’re obviously not as bad as we all thought. And I only, grabbed them, to keep you still. I hope I didn’t bring up something nasty for ya. I’m not like those bullies, I promise.”

As he briefly caressed the back of his head, Bunnie said trying to smile nervously, “Apology accepted, Miles, “ and Antoine said, “Exactly. I knew you weren’t happy to go along with it. You were always saying you had to play the part.”

Miles sniffled and said looking at him through tears, “I saw how you looked skeptical of me at Bunnie! Why? Why didn’t you trust me? We were friends for a year, didn’t you know me at all?“ his voice cracking. Antoine reassured him briefly caressing his head, “I’m sorry, petit frère. It’s only that, I knew how you were loyal to a fault to your friends, even when they weren’t the sort of people who deserved to be loyal to, so while I knew you weren’t really a bad person, I thought it could go either way with you. You could’ve been just following orders to lead us into a trap, I didn’t know. That was the only time you ever tried to convince anyone against you to help your gang like that, but you also never tried to lure someone into a trap before, you’re not really the ‘talking’ type. If it was going to be someone doing that, it would’ve been Alicia.”

Antoine looked ashamed and awkward, and admitted, “I’m sorry, I, I should’ve vouched for you. I knew full well what you were really like and I said nothing. I just knew it could’ve gone either way, regardless of, your sympathizing with us. I knew you were never really against us, but you’re also the type who would do almost anything for your friends, even if you’d end up regretting it afterwards.” Miles said sadly, “And I proved it with what I did to Sonic, “ his voice breaking as he
understood why Antoine had felt the way he did at the time. Sonic ruffled his hair and carefully let
of him as he reassured, “Water under the bridge, kiddo, I promise. That was forever ago and a
lot has happened since then. I’m glad we got to know you better. “

Miles, full of bitter shame, said with his head lowered, “It should’ve happened YEARS earlier. I
was considering going to help you since I MET you, but I was always too, reluctant, to ask. “ Sonic
said with a carefree smile, “Better late than never, “ as the rest of the Freedom Fighters in the
kitchen were pleasantly surprised at the revelation. Miles finally started to smile again, and wiped
his tears looking at them. “Thanks, guys, “ he said, still feeling awkward; not only about being
nice to them like it was no big deal, but about speaking casually just like Tails did when that
wasn’t expected of him. He kept expecting to be teased for dropping the mature speech and
slipping in it, but it never seemed to happen.

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