

“... Even in the darkest of times, you can always reach forward to achieve your goals! Just as long as you remember... you don't need to face the darkness alone.”

Starlight Glimmer had a hopeful smile while holding the tape recorder in her magic, and kept the audio going as Twilight's speech ended with enthusiastic applause. Despite the awkward origins about where that speech was given (not to mention, what happened *during* the speech), the Alicorn's powerful words seemed to make quite an impact for the mare listening to it. The Twilight from their *own* world was standing across from Starlight, and was carrying a touched smile she tried to cover up with a hoof. However, even with how much she tried to hide it, it was clear that Twilight was *beyond* appreciative to have heard the speech in its entirety.

After pressing the stop button on the recorder, Starlight looked up at her friend/Mentor to ask, “So... what do you think of your speech?”

Even though that question was technically accurate, Twilight huffed with a bewildered smirk upon hearing Starlight's wording. Fortunately, the Princess was still able to nod in approval as she said, “Well... it definitely could've been a bit longer, but... I suppose I can't blame *that* version of me for keeping it short.”

“Hey, it was straight to the point *and* effective,” retorted Starlight with a more optimistic tone that matched her smile. “But still, it definitely sounded like the kind of speech you would give in that situation.”

“Indeed it did,” she admitted with an apprehensive shrug, even though her smile was a bit more skewed in uncertainty than Starlight’s. “I mean... it is comforting to know that my--er... *her* condition isn’t too demoralizing for her career.”

“Yeah, I get what you mean,” nodded Starlight in agreement, before she scratched the back of her neck with a hoof and looked away from Twilight guiltily. “Ughhhh... I know that I’ve probably done **way** worse things in other alternate universes, but... *Jeeze*, that’s a big screwup.”

Despite understanding Starlight’s qualms completely, Twilight still giggled to herself while thinking retrospectively. Given how intense their time-warping duel became, there was likely *several* universes that stemmed from Starlight successfully defeating (or even *murdering*) Twilight Sparkle with her master plan. But at the same time, the Alicorn was sure that there were at least a few ponies out there who would’ve considered the *Alternate* Twilight’s fate to be far worse overall; Twilight obviously wasn’t one of *those* ponies, but she couldn’t blame Starlight if she felt differently. So after taking a moment for herself, Twilight kept a sincere smile while placing her hoof on Starlight’s shoulder.

“Well, what should *really* matter isn’t the decisions we’ve made in the past, but the choices we make in *response* to them in the present and future. And as far as I’m concerned, you’ve been doing an *amazing* job in making the right choices in *this* world. Even if there have been a few mishaps along the way, you’ve always tried your hardest to make amends and prove just how

good of a friend you can be. Not just for myself, but for *all* of us. And I don't want you to ever forget that."

Starlight blinked a couple times in response to Twilight's impromptu speech, and her smile started to tremble from how effectively it impacted her. Since the unicorn looked like she was about to start tearing up from her friend's sentiment, Twilight wasn't surprised when she lunged in to give her a well-deserved hug. Instead, the Alicorn just smiled with her eyes closed while hugging Starlight just as tightly in response.

Since the two were hugging in the middle of one of the castle's massive hallways, it wasn't much of a shock when the sound of somepony else's hoofsteps caught their attention. Twilight and Starlight pulled back from their friendly embrace, and saw Sunburst trotting down the hallway towards them. "Wow!" he said with an impressed smile on his goateed muzzle. "Sorry if I was eavesdropping on anything personal, but I gotta say! Even on the *fly*, you're able to give a great speech, Twilight."

Twilight looked away from the stallion as she giggled bashfully, hopeful that he couldn't see her overwhelmed blush. However, *Starlight* wasn't one to let that response be ignored, and pulled her in close with a foreleg around her shoulders. "Oh, don't be so sheepish about it!" she jeered with a coyer-looking smirk. "Sunburst isn't wrong! You really *are* good at those speeches~"

Twilight pulled her friend's hoof off of her with a scoff, but still carried a thankful smile that both of the ponies could see. "Well, I think that's more to do with Celestia's teachings than my own accord," she tried to retort out of humbleness; unfortunately, that answer only made both of the unicorns huff with unamused glances towards her. After taking a few seconds to finally notice their stares on her, Twilight groaned with a strong roll of her eyes before exclaiming, "Alright, alright! I'm good at giving speeches, okay? But I *still* learned how to overcome my anxieties and stagefright because of *her*, so it's not something I'm comfortable taking *all* the credit for."

Even with the Alicorn's unnecessary detraction, Starlight and Sunburst were able to accept that answer with a couple of approving nods. "Alright, I think that's good enough for Twilight to say about herself," said Starlight with a genuinely caring smile. Twilight looked like she wanted to question her friend's compliment, but she eventually just sighed in reluctance. Meanwhile, Sunburst was the first to turn his attention towards the other end of the hallway upon hearing someone *else's* incoming steps.

"Guys! GUYS!" Spike slid across the crystal floors with heavy skidding of his bare feet, and stopped himself just in time to be in view of the three ponies. The dragon had an *unbelievably* wide smile across his face, and pointed a claw towards where he just came from to shout excitedly, "Guys, guess who just came back from the Changeling Kingdom?!"

Twilight and Starlight both gasped with surprised smiles, and quickly ran off to follow Spike. As those three made a beeline towards the castle's entrance, Sunburst needed a second to contemplate what was happening before he went off after them. "W-Wait, is this about *Pharynx*?"

"No, Sunburst!" said Starlight while looking back at him. As the two continued to run down the massive hallways, the mare kept her focus on Sunburst to remind him, "It's about *Rainbow Dash*, remember? He was supposed to come back after his treatments were done!"

"O-OH!" Sunburst's eyes widened upon recalling that detail, and he blinked a couple times in puzzlement. "Wait a minute, Rainbow already finished up? I mean, that's *great* to hear!" he said insistently with a genuine smile. "But doesn't that sort of thing take *years* to complete?"

"Well, I think it's only the first couple of trials..." Starlight paused her words while she and Sunburst kept running, needing a moment to remember the details she read from Rainbow's letters. Even though she wished that Rainbow talked with her about his transition plans face-to-face, she was grateful that the pegasus had told her through *some* form of communication. Not to mention, Rainbow made sure to include his scheduled dates for when his sessions were taking place, just in case anything came up that needed his attention. Because of that, Starlight was quick to add in better detail, "I think the trip he took a couple weeks back was for the *first* couple of trials. The process overall takes a few *months* to complete through Changeling magic."

“Ohhhh...” Sunburst’s brows rose, and he nodded in better understanding before growing a more curious smile. “Wow, I was actually just reading about that in the *Equestrian Scientific Quarterly* last week! I wouldn’t have thought they’d start *pony*-based trials already.”

Starlight nodded back at him with an equally happy expression on her face. “Yeah, apparently Dash is the first one. Which kinda makes sense, considering how Rainbow can be sometimes~”

“Yeah, I suppose that’s true,” he admitted with a sheepish nod. Even though he didn’t know Rainbow too well on a *personal* level, he understood that the pegasus had a knack for going into things head-first. And if the Wonderbolt was *that* determined to undergo his transition through such an untested means, Sunburst felt more *curious* about the ongoing results than anything else.

“Well, how far along do you think he is by now?”

“No idea,” she replied with a quick shrug as the two rounded the last corner. “But after a couple weeks of Changeling research, I’m *really* eager to find out!”

Sunburst nodded in agreement, but couldn’t say anything else before the two found themselves at the castle’s main entranceway. Even with the room’s massive arched ceilings, grand curved staircase up toward the upper floors, and the beautiful chandelier that was hanging above the space with stunning splendor, all of the attention was focused solely on the prismatic pony who was standing at the open doorway...

“Ummm... H-Hey, guys,” said Rainbow Dash with a timidly raspy tone of voice, which was also significantly *deeper*-sounding than when he originally left. Starlight and Sunburst’s mouths were just as agape as Twilight’s, but that didn’t seem to deepen the stallion’s blush any further than it had already become. Behind Rainbow Dash stood Spike and Pharynx, who were struggling not to snicker too audibly from their friends’ stunned responses to the Wonderbolt’s new appearance.

The pegasus’ overall bone structure wasn’t exactly changed, as he still had most of his feminine curves and shorter stature like before. However, while Twilight stood to the side with her wide-eyed stare as bewildered as the two unicorns who just arrived, it was obvious that he looked *much* more masculine from the neck-up. Along with having a significantly shorter mane (including a tasteful buzz-cut along his left side, which was probably done by a stylist), the bridge of his snout was much more pronounced and straighter than what he used to have. His brows were notably thicker as well, and had an odd zig-zag pattern that looked like a couple of black lightning bolts above his magenta eyes. There was even a hint of some *stubble* that went along the edge of his toned cheeks and chin, which emphasized just how much thicker they had become from his sessions.

But most of all, to the three ponies who were present to see Dash’s new appearance for the first time, they could all say from their secret experimentation that he looked *phenomenally* similar to the Rainbow Blitz they witnessed from that alternate dimension. So despite knowing that their

friend still had a long way to go for their transitioning, it was crystal clear that he was already *well* on his way to becoming a full-blown stallion.

“Uhhhhh... C-Can one of you guys *say* something, please?” asked Rainbow as he blushed more profusely, and scratched the back of his neck with the tip of his wing. “It’s *kinda* freaking me out not knowing how you all feel about it.”

Despite the pegasus’ justified worries, Spike was able to see the tearful and prideful smile that was trembling across Twilight’s muzzle. The Princess was struggling not to choke up while staring at her friend with pure adoration, and caught him by surprise as she instantly lunged in to give a much-deserved hug. “Oh my gosh, *Rainbow!*” she exclaimed while hugging him tightly, and smiling in absolute pride with tears trailing down her cheeks. “You... You look *amazing!*~”

Rainbow blinked a couple times while the mare was hugging him, and quickly started to tear up while growing a whimpering smile of his own. The stallion didn’t want to act too overemotional from his friend’s acceptance, but the moment proved to be too much for him. He wrapped his hooves tightly around Twilight’s back, and hugged her just as affectionately while trying not to sob. Meanwhile, Starlight and Sunburst had to look away from the two with hooves over their faces, desperately trying to conceal how badly the moment was getting to *them* as well. But to Spike and Pharynx, who were both smiling to themselves with prideful looks on their faces, not a word needed to be said while they stood to the sides and appreciated the scene.

Starlight didn't wait for her Mentor to pull back from Dash's embrace, and rushed up to hug him from behind in additional support. "We're *so* proud of you for doing this, Rainbow Dash!" she exclaimed with absolute sincerity, before giving him a light kiss on the cheek. As she pulled back, Starlight's brows were raised up as she added with a more surprised tone, "Okay, *that* was weird! That stubble felt like *sandpaper*."

Rainbow and Twilight both pulled away from their friend to regain their footing, which proved to be necessary while they laughed out-loud from that remark. Sunburst giggled as well, and used the underside of his cape to wipe away the tears that were matting his cheeks. Even *Pharynx* couldn't help stifling a brief snicker alongside Spike. Eventually, Rainbow was able to shrug in agreement as he brought up one of his hooves to rub his scraggly chin. "Yeah I *know*, right?" he asked with a tone of voice that sounded downright *giddy*. "I've honestly been contemplating whether or not to try and *shave* it yet."

"Give it a little more time, Rainbow," chided Pharynx firmly from behind him. "You don't wanna accidentally get *razor burn* before you meet up with the other Elements, do you?"

Spike grunted with a pout as he nudged his boyfriend warningly against his side, even though he didn't have much strength to elicit a strong response from the Changeling. However, that remark *was* enough to make Dash ponder it for a moment, before he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Ehhh... You know what, yeah. That makes sense."

“N-Not to mention,” piped Sunburst as he tried to step in as a supportive guest, and said with a complimentary smile towards Rainbow, “I... I honestly think the stubble is a *great* addition, Rainbow Dash! I mean... I think you pull it off quite naturally.”

Rainbow smiled back at the other stallion with an affirming nod, and then put out his hoof as he said, “Thanks, Sunburst! I gotta say, it’s good hearing that from an outside perspective that *isn’t* another Element or a mare.”

“Hey, I totally get it,” replied Sunburst while he shook Rainbow’s hoof, and blinked a couple times in surprise from the pony’s firm grip. After Dash let go, the unicorn winced a little as he pulled his hoof back and wriggled it in slight pain. “Yeesh, talk about *Wonderbolt strength*,” he muttered to himself.

While Rainbow Dash rolled his eyes with an amused scoff, Pharynx came up to wrap a hoof around the stallion’s back and say towards the others, “He’s still going to need a few more sessions done before we can verify the process as being complete. But considering how advanced Rainbow’s transitioning progress has gone already, Doctor Coxi is confident that we can finish everything up in less than two more months.”

“WHOA!” Starlight looked absolutely floored by that surprising estimate, and glanced back at Twilight to see that she looked equally as stunned. “That’s *incredible!*”

“I *know*, right?~” Rainbow said with a pridefully wide and cocky grin. “I **never** thought I would say this in my *life*, but Changeling magic is friggin’ *awesome!*”

Pharynx pull his foreleg away from Rainbow while sighing with a roll of his eyes. Spike covered his giggling with a claw over his mouth, but it wasn’t enough to keep his boyfriend from glaring warningly down at him. Twilight quickly said to the General, “Honestly, that’s a *pretty* progressive statement for Rainbow to say given our recent history.”

“Yeah, I know, I know...” Even though he couldn’t necessarily blame Rainbow for any past issues he had against his kind (especially following the Royal Wedding), Pharynx still sighed with an apprehensive skew of his muzzle. Fortunately, the pegasus himself made sure to peer back at him with a cheekier-looking smirk.

“Hey, if it means anything,” Dash said with a more carefree and sensual-sounding tone of voice, “Spike and I had *quite* a few conversations back at the Hive. And if even *half* of his claims about you are exaggerated, I can safely say I’m curious about bagging a Changeling myself~”

Pharynx and Spike both froze up with their eyes wide-open in shock, not expecting the stallion to make such a proclamation while *Twilight* was right next to them. And while Starlight and Sunburst both struggled not to burst out laughing, the Princess was left with a *deeply* heavy blush across her cheeks as she glared at the interspecies couple. Spike and Pharynx had to look away from the pissed-off Princess with identically worried-looking smiles, and tried to chuckle

nervously to counteract the obvious tension. Unfortunately, the Alicorn eventually closed her eyes while making a frustrated wince, and let out a seething exhale before muttering, “You know what? I... I’m going to pretend I *didn’t* hear that remark, Rainbow Dash.”

“Fine by me,” he said with a carefree shrug, clearly not too worried about his *own* safety like the couple whose exploits he just outed to Twilight. While the dragon and Changeling tried not to glare too obviously towards Dash, Starlight was the first to get herself settled down following that interaction.

“S-So, ummm... What are your plans *after* your transitioning is complete, Rainbow?” she asked with a genuinely curious tone. “Were you considering a name-change or something?”

Rainbow Dash glanced back at her with a raised brow, appearing as if he wasn’t expecting that sort of question. Even though it was obvious that Starlight just asked that to try and change the subject *away* from Spike and Pharynx, Dash’s head tilted to the side while pondering such a question. “Wait, why would I do something like *that*? I mean, I know lots of *other* trans ponies do it,” he admitted while rolling his eyes, “But like, I’m THE Rainbow Dash! That’s how ponies know me! And the name isn’t really *girly* or anything, so why shouldn’t I keep it as a dude?”

Starlight seemed a little unsure about Rainbow’s reasoning, but still nodded with a small accepting shrug. Meanwhile, Sunburst leaned in from the side while behind Starlight to suggest, “Well... how about a name like, ‘Rainbow *Blitz*’?”

Starlight and Twilight both whipped their heads back to gawk at him silently. Even though that was the name of the male version of Rainbow they saw in that recording, it seemed that neither of the mares were even *contemplating* bringing up that detail out of confidentiality. But for the Rainbow standing right beside them, how eyes widened quite a bit upon hearing that name. He blinked a couple times before narrowing his eyes on Sunburst, and wriggled his hoof while it was pointed at him. “Okay, you know what?” he said with an impressed smirk on his muzzle. “That actually sounds pretty good, I’m not gonna lie.”

Sunburst looked like he wanted to grin giddily at that response, but it was quickly extinguished the moment he took notice of Twilight *and* Starlight’s unamused stares on him. Luckily for the three, Spike and Pharynx didn’t seem too suspicious as they shrugged in agreement with Rainbow’s approval of that name. “Yeah, I like that name too!” Spike said while smiling cheerfully. “Where did you come up with that one, Sunburst?”

“Uhhh... I don’t know, heh heh heh...” The Crystaller scratched the back of his shaggy mane with a hoof while avoiding eye contact with the dragon. “It, ummmm... It just sorta, *popped-up* in my head, I guess...”

Despite the fact that Sunburst gave that false answer with such an unconvincing tone of voice, it was doubtful that any of the guys would try to question it. So while Dash shrugged his head with

a cooperative smirk on his face, Pharynx chimed in to say, “Well, I’m sure that if he *does* decide to change his name, it can be worked out with the other legalities that come with transitioning.”

“Already ahead of you, dude!” said Rainbow Dash with a confident motion of his head towards Twilight. “She’s been working that stuff out the *instant* I came out to her. It was really cool, actually.”

Even though the truth was that she had the paperwork planned out *before* Rainbow officially told her about his transitioning, Twilight still nodded while giving the slightest blush from his praise.

“Well, what did you *expect* I’d do?” she asked back at him with a snarkier-looking smile.

“You’re one of my best friends, Rainbow! Besides, I know you would do the same thing for *me* if it was the other way around.”

“Oh, *definitely!*” he said while nodding his head instantly, before he leaned in to give the Princess a playful nudge against her shoulder. “Although I gotta say, you’d probably look like a *bit* of a dork if you were a stallion. No offense.”

“Ummm, how is that *not* supposed to be taken by offense?” asked Twilight with a confounded stare back at Rainbow.

Pharynx tapped the bottom of his chin with a hoof while pondering something. “Hmmm... how about *this?*” The Changeling lit up his horn before letting a quick flash of green flame

envelop his body, quickly catching the attention of everyone else in the room. In less than a couple seconds, Pharynx took on a new form as the flames dissipated from his form, and a handsome-looking Alicorn appeared who looked *very* similar to Twilight. However, despite carrying the identical lavender fur and purple mane that Twilight possessed, the pony also had a masculine physique that made Blitz's current state look meeker in comparison. The male interpretation of Twilight also looked *remarkably* attractive, while carrying the same qualities to be instantly recognized by everyone else. Pharynx even kept the pony's trademark bangs over his forehead, even though they were done more stylishly than what the Princess currently had.

Twilight's jaw dropped when she saw the male version that Pharynx crafted out of nowhere, and quickly blushed while marveling at all the details he nailed down obscenely well. Meanwhile, the Changeling shrugged while in the hypothetical form, and shot a cheeky grin back at the stunned-looking Rainbow Dash. "Well?" asked the 'Prince' with a couple perks of his slim and finely-crafted brows. "Does this look dorky to *you*, Dashie?~"

Rainbow looked away with an annoyed huff while pouting like a colt, and sat down with his forelegs crossed tightly across his chest. Meanwhile, everyone else couldn't help cracking up from Pharynx's coy retort. Even *Twilight* snickered a little, even though she still looked unnerved by the Changeling's uncanny interpretation of her as a stallion. Meanwhile, Rainbow only needed a moment to scoff bitterly before saying back at him, "Way to out-stallion me in like, a *millisecond*."

“Hey, I’m just standing up for Equestrian Royalty,” retorted Pharynx while motioning to the Princess. Twilight may have not wanted to make Rainbow feel bad, but she still nodded with a thankful smile back at Pharynx. The General then added with a shrug, “What? My brother would be *really* upset with me if I didn’t upkeep international ties.”

Despite how logical that point may have sounded, Rainbow still groaned with a roll of his eyes while Pharynx reverted back to his normal form. Spike waited until the flames were gone before he went up to give Pharynx a loving kiss on the cheek. “Well, I think you look good just the way you are~”

“Psh~” scoffed Dash without even turning to acknowledge the couple. “Oh, *really*? Then did I keep hearing *Shining Armor’s* voice whenever I walked past your guys’ room at night?~”

The room got deathly silent the instant Rainbow said that *outrageously* inappropriate detail, which left Spike and Pharynx’s faces identically pale and upset. Twilight gawked at the two with her eyes as open as her agape jaw. Sunburst made a beeline out of the room, not wanting to get in the middle of any ensuing blowout that might occur. Meanwhile, Starlight used her magic to keep the front door open, and glared at Rainbow with several jerking motions of her head towards the exit. “*Go! Go! Go!*” she mouthed as silently as she could, hopeful that the stallion would take notice and get the heck out before it was too late.

Unfortunately, Rainbow didn't get that hint until *after* Spike and Pharynx looked back at him, and grew **very** intense glares with their fanged teeth gritted tightly.

“... *Uhhhhhhh...*” Dash realized too late that he probably shouldn't have informed Twilight of *that* unsavory fact, and nervously smiled while scooting backwards towards the doorway. “Y-You know what? I'll ummm... I'll just come out to the other girls myself, you know? M-Maybe like, take them out to dinner, or maybe--Oh, fuck it! *SEE YA!!*”

Rainbow Dash may have changed a *lot*, but his flying skills weren't impeded in the slightest as he zoomed out off the castle with his trademark rainbow trail in tow. Spike and Pharynx's wings sprung out, and they both shot out of the doorway with enraged looks on their faces. As soon as they got outside, Pharynx changed his form to that of a *gigantic* dragon, and roared violently loud while chasing the cyan stallion. Back inside of the castle, Twilight and Starlight were left alone with bewildered expressions as they stood in *extremely* uncomfortable silence.

Twilight didn't say a word, and just left her protégè to walk up the stairs in an attempt to focus on something other than the unneeded knowledge of Spike's sex life. Meanwhile, Starlight just winced painfully before looking around, and muttering under her breath, “Well, I guess Sunburst and I won't be watching any more scenes with *her* today...”