

## **You Can't Be Missed If You Never Left**

“But Ms. Sparkle, if I do that, everypony in class will laugh at me! It’s not worth it!” A filly, her face drawn in a pout, stomped her hooves on the ground, staring up at a much older mare, whose face was darkened slightly with age. Lines ran across the once-supple skin, and the eyes which had once beheld the would-be destroyer of Equestria’s daytime frolicking were dim and listless. However, she smiled down at the filly before her, ruffling the girl’s hair with her hoof.

“Now now, Marina,” she said, “if you go getting all upset like that, all you’re going to do is make it harder for me to help you.”

The filly paused a moment, her bottom lip retracting slightly. She was an energetic young thing, with a shiny blue coat and short curls of yellow-red hair which were lit up by the sunlight filtering through the windows of a large, regal building.

“But Twilight!” she cried, sighing at her accidental breach of etiquette, “didn’t you once tell me that it’s not always best to run after what you want, or what you need? That it could possibly get you into a lot of trouble?” Twilight Sparkle chuckled a little, turning and walking away from her student, towards a bookshelf. Her horn glowed momentarily, and a small book floated out from the shelf, laying itself open on a nearby desk.

“Come here, Marina,” she said. “There’s something I need to discuss with you. It’s a story I’ve never told you before; one which took place many, many years ago, all about two ponies who were too afraid to go after what they wanted.” Marina raised an eyebrow, a humorless look on her face.

“Teacher,” she said, “are you sure this isn’t going to be another of your ‘This is a story about something that happened to me, and you can learn from it’ stories that you try to disguise as tales from a book?” Twilight laughed heartily, a sound Marina had gotten very used to in the years she’d spent with her beloved teacher.

“You know me far, far too well Marina,” she said. “Yes, it is one of those stories. But believe me, it’s one you need to hear.” She flipped the pages of the book, rifling through the photos which had been stuck inside. “This is an old scrapbook of mine, and inside, there are many ponies who were very special to me.”

“The other bearers of the Elements of Harmony, if I’m not mistaken, teacher?” The little filly smiled widely, her big blue eyes lighting up. “I always love hearing stories about them! They sound like they were a wonderful group of ponies!” Twilight smiled back at Marina, looking out of the window dreamily as the pages of the book stopped flipping, landing on a pony with a radiant rainbow mane, glowing magenta eyes, and a big, confident smile.

“They still are, dear student,” she said with a smile. “They still are—even my earth pony friends have hung on well past the ages anypony expected them to, even if they don’t get around as well anymore.” She chuckled. “But I digress; this is a story about two ponies who were scared, far too scared to go after what they wanted. But, after realizing that they’d both regretted the decision to hold back, things improved for them greatly.” Marina sat down in the chair across from Twilight, listening with interest. “And when they did come to that realization, things were happier than ever...”

---

It was a beautiful day out, and Twilight was enjoying reading out in the sun. This particular day, she was reading an old copy of *Narrow Minds: The Study of Claustrophobia in Ponies*. Princess Celestia would most likely have told her that such a book was worth less than spending time with her friends, but Twilight had always been a studious mare, and even now that Nightmare Moon had been defeated, several Grand Galloping Galas had gone by, and the age was beginning to show in her once-exuberant group, she was still sometimes more interested in having her snout buried in a good book.

“Twilight!” came a loud voice. “Twilight, you around here?”

The purple mare smiled, closing the book after dog-earing the page she was on. “Yes, Rainbow,” she said, hauling herself to her feet and turning around, “I’m here. Did you need something?” The colorful pegasus lighted down next to Twilight with a big grin.

“Nothin’ special,” she said, rolling onto her back to place her hooves behind her head, “just comin’ out to see what Ponyville’s favorite bookworm is up to.” She paused for a moment, looking at the book the purple mare was reading. “Uh...so what exactly are you up to, anyway? Been having some trouble with small spaces or something?”

Twilight laughed, the sound clear as a bell in the still air, and shook her head. “No, Rainbow, you should know by now that I’m not claustrophobic.” Rainbow giggled a little, rolling her eyes.

“Puh-leaze,” she said, “you do something new every day, Twilight. I change the weather less often than you change your brain!”

Twilight smirked a little, nudging the pegasus. “In any case,” she said, “I haven’t suddenly developed claustrophobia, no.” She sat back on her haunches in front of the brash pony, cocking an eyebrow. “And what about you? Gotten stage fright about this weekend yet?” Rainbow snorted, standing on her back legs to pound her chest with one hoof.

“Me?!” she asked, as though the question were an insult, “You know I’m the

coolest pony around, Twilight! I don't even know the meaning of stage fright!"

Twilight rolled her eyes with a smile, unable to resist a friendly jab. "Is that why we all thought your heart was going to leap out of your chest at the Best Young Fliers competition, Dash?" she asked with a smirk.

Dash frowned a little. "Hey now! I went and performed a Sonic Rainboom during that thing, *plus* I was the one who won the trophy! You callin' that stage fright?!"

Twilight giggled a little, shaking her head. "I guess you've got a point. But you still can't slack off, Dash." She gave her friend a look of slight concern. "I know you're a wonderful flier, but the Wonderbolts take these auditions very seriously, and it's been several years since you last tried out." She looked deep into the blue pony's eyes. "Are you ready for this, Dash?" The pegasus shrunk back, biting her lip.

"Twilight," she said, "I've been practicing for this for years and years now...if I can't pull it off this time, well...there's probably not much point trying again." She chuckled a little, moving her mane back with a hoof. "Even if I do get in, Soarin' and Spitfire have both retired, and I'll get maybe five or six years with the Wonderbolts." Twilight was taken aback by her friend's sudden honesty—the last time she'd said anything this plainly had been right before the Best Young Fliers Competition!

"Rainbow..." the purple mare said softly, her face a mask of concern, "I know you can do it, but...why do you want to do it *now*? The Princess already contracts you to teach the Royal Guard initiates how to fly, and she pays you really well!" She paused, seeing Dash put her hoof up in a silencing gesture.

"Twi, it's called 'having a dream'." She smiled, then sighed. "I've wanted to be in the Wonderbolts since I was a dumb little filly in flight school who could barely spell 'wing.'" Twilight nodded, prompting Dash to continue. "And well...ugh, I've never been too good with words, but, I guess if I have to explain it..." She paused, rubbing her chin with a hoof. "I just gotta do it. It's something I promised myself I'd do, so I gotta do it. I've never been a promise-breaking pony, I guess." Dash hovered off the ground, flexing her forelegs with a big smile, an oft-used gesture from yester-year. "So I'm gonna go out there, and I'm gonna make the Wonderbolts realize that I'm best flier in Equestria!"

Twilight couldn't explain it, even with all the knowledge stored in her brain, but at just that moment, her heart fluttered in her chest. Seeing her friend so confident, so secure in herself, so committed to her dream...it brought a big smile to the purple unicorn's face. "I know you will, Dash," she said simply, reaching her forelegs out to hug her pegasus friend tightly. "I'll be there to watch you knock them dead."

Dash's forelegs wrapped around Twilight's back tentatively. "Hey, c'mon," she said, the heat from her blush on Twilight's neck, "you know I'm not into all this mushy-gushy stuff. All you had to tell me was 'good luck.'" Twilight let go, rolling her eyes at Dash.

“Just get out there and practice before I hug you some more,” she said, laughing. Dash made a face of mock horror.

“Nooo!” she cried. “Anything but that!” She turned to fly away, but turned back for a brief moment, grinning. “Uh...thanks, Twilight,” she said. “I feel a lot better now.” With that, she took off, leaving a rainbow streak.

Twilight levitated her book into her bag, still feeling heat radiating from her cheeks. What were these feelings? Why was she having them? She’d known Dash for so many years now...they’d been through so much together! Dragons, flying contests, auditions for the Wonderbolts, late-night study sessions, magic practice; it didn’t make sense that anything would be cropping up now! The purple mare shook her head, sighing as she began the walk back to the library—she figured the complicated years of her life were already over.

---

“Is that it?!” came Marina’s voice as Twilight shut the book, turning back to her student.

“Of course not, Marina,” the studious unicorn said with a giggle. “There’s never been a well-written story which ends on the first few pages. I just need to take a small break and rest this old voice of mine.” She levitated a glass of water over to herself from the faucet, taking a few sips. “And here I thought you weren’t interested in my stories?” She giggled a little.

“Well, teacher,” Marina said with a small sigh, “it’s a very interesting story...I’m looking forward to seeing what happens between you and Rainbow Dash! I’m sorry if I was rude before.”

“I’m sure that if I was your age, I would have been as well,” she said with a smirk, “but try to keep in mind that patience is a virtue, and you must think before you speak. The entire story will be told in due time; nothing about me works entirely right these days.” She sighed. “Not like it did back then.” Marina nodded once more, sitting down on her haunches, the wood flooring actually quite comfortable underneath.

Twilight, meanwhile, looked out of the open window at the sun-stained day outside. Ponies were talking walks with their children, colts and fillies were playing cute little games of tag while simultaneously trying not to touch each other, and vendors were set up in the cobblestone streets, peddling ice cream and candies. It was definitely a summer day.

And so the two sat in silence, one enjoying the peace of a warm day, the other eagerly awaiting the next chapter in the great tapestry of her teacher’s life.