

You Can't Be Missed If You Never Left, Chapter 3

Twilight needed the half-hour to rest in the bathroom and cry with her head between her hooves—even with everything resolved, talking about what had happened, reminding herself of the way everything had felt during that gut-wrenching period of her life was nearly too much for the old mare to bear. But no matter how many tears she cried, Marina was still waiting out in the living area, dying to hear the rest of her tale. And so, with considerable effort, Twilight picked herself up from her resting position on the countertop and wiped away the remaining tears, opening the door magically and stepping back out into the sunlit living room.

As soon as Marina saw her, she bolted away from the table, wrapping her forelegs around her teacher's neck with a snuffle. Twilight let a smile crawl across her face as the little filly spoke.

"Teacher, I'm so sorry about what happened!" she cried. "You don't have to tell the story anymore, it's okay!"

Twilight shook her head slightly, signaling for Marina to let go. "The story will continue, Marina," she said, clopping back over to the small table where the book still sat. "I told you that you needed to hear the whole thing, and you will, no matter how painful it may be for me to retell it at certain points." The little filly, still seemingly upset, took her place at the other end of the table, one eyebrow cocked.

"But Teacher," she said, tone puzzled, "how can the story be painful to tell if it has a happy ending? That's the one thing I haven't understood since the beginning of the lesson!"

Her instructor smiled somberly, the sunlight catching in her grey mane, which had lost its bright pink streaks. "It might be hard for you to understand, Marina—you are still a filly, after all—but things have changed a lot since these things happened. I'm not the same mare I was, and Dash, well...she's not, either. After all, it's been four decades. I'm sure you can understand how big a span of time that is, especially for those of us not gifted with long lifespans like the princesses. Unicorns and pegasi only live a few decades longer than earth ponies."

Marina nodded. "I remember, Ms. Twilight," she said, "you taught me all about how long all the pony spe--uh, speci--um...what was that word, Ms. Twilight?"

The purple unicorn laughed. "'Species,' Marina," she responded, "the proper word is 'species.' And yes, I remember that lesson as well. Pinkie Pie and Applejack are the exception, not the rule. They've both lived many years past what was expected of them." Twilight bit her lip, not able to tell the filly that both ponies had been infirm for the past few years of their lives—Applejack was too stubborn to be the first to go, and

Pinkie wanted to throw one last party before it was all over, with everyone gathered together.

“Yeah, species!” Marina cried, happy to be able to pronounce it. “Your friends must be really great ponies if they’re still alive!” She was smiling widely, which pulled at Twilight’s heartstrings all the more. “I bet they could, like, beat up a dragon or something!” Twilight finally allowed herself to laugh at the filly’s precociousness.

“I doubt Applejack or Pinkie would want to fight a dragon, though I have no doubts about them winning that fight,” she said, smiling. However, she noticed that the sun was waning further outside, and shook her head. “But that’s enough about those two for right now—it’s getting late, and I wouldn’t want you to get scolded by your parents because I kept you late.” Marina shook her head.

“I promise they won’t be mad, Teacher!” she said, “They know your lessons are really important! They won’t be mad!”

Twilight sighed, smiled, and nodded. “Even so, it’s best that I continue with the story. It’s been long enough.” When Marina gave an accepting nod, Twilight flipped the pages of the book open to a picture of a beautiful white unicorn, with curly purple tresses, all dressed up in finery.

“Wow, she’s really pretty, Ms. Sparkle!” Marina said, marveling at the photo. “Is that Rarity?”

The purple mare nodded, smiling. “Yes, it is. She is a pony of grace, civility, and the absolute peak of what it means to be a lady.” Twilight chuckled. “She was always dragging us into the boutique she owned to have us try on dresses she was creating. As soon as I realized the full extent of my feelings for Rainbow Dash, I knew Rarity was the first one I needed to talk to about it...”

The walk across town had been less than easy. The wind whipped at Twilight, slapping her long hair across her face and threatening to tear her coat straight off her shoulders. However, even with the wind screeching around her, Twilight felt safe and secure in the chaos, like nothing bad could touch her. Even with the wind, she was nearly at her destination.

Rarity’s boutique had grown in size over the years; what was once a small, yet colorful shop was now an expansive store, spanning several acres and four floors—Rarity’s bedroom still sat all the way at the top of the building. Twilight had hoped she might get lucky and find the lights still on for a late-night project, but no such luck.

Twilight raised her hoof and rapped on the door several times, hoping that she

could be heard over the howling wind. When several minutes went by with no answer, the unicorn knocked a little harder. Still no answer. Twilight knew that Rarity would be unable to hear her on the fourth floor without magic and so, despite her reluctance, Twilight allowed the familiar glow of magic to spread throughout her horn, materializing a hoof right next to the window of Rarity's bedroom. It knocked a few times, loudly, before vanishing.

An eternity went by, and Twilight's stomach refused to stop its nervous churning, but finally the window opened slightly, and a white unicorn, hair mussed up from sleep, peeked out, ducking back in upon seeing who was waiting at her door. A few more minutes passed, and finally the locks on the door clicked open, allowing the pink door to swing free and reveal Rarity, dressed in a frilly pink bathrobe, her hair showing signs of being hastily fixed.

"Twilight, darling!" she yelled over the wind, "what *are* you doing out at this time of night?! And in this weather?! Shouldn't you be in bed sleeping?" Her expression indicated that this statement didn't apply so much to Twilight as herself. *I should be in bed sleeping*, is what it seemed to say.

"I know, Rarity," the purple mare responded sheepishly, walking past the white unicorn as she was ushered in, "but I just haven't been able to sleep. I haven't gotten a proper amount in three days!" Rarity balked at this statement.

"Three days?!" she cried, "Darling, that's terrible! Oh, the bags under your eyes must look so awful by now! Please, have a seat, dear!" Rarity magically pulled out one of the chairs, a small scraping noise echoing throughout the boutique. Twilight gratefully took the seat, smiling over at Rarity.

"I really appreciate you being so understanding, Rarity. I know it's late, and I woke you up." The other mare shook her head dismissively, sitting down next to Twilight.

"Darling, you and I have been best friends for years now!" She grinned, the laugh-lines showing clearly on her once-flawless face. "I would be a terrible friend if I weren't always there for you! Now, what seems to be the problem? I, Rarity, will do my very best to assist you!" Twilight couldn't help but giggle at the white unicorn's pseudo-gallant demeanor—it was an act she had learned to love over the years.

"Well, see, it's probably not the type of problem you're used to dealing with. I mean, I know you've helped me out with wardrobe choices when I see Celestia, things like that, but this is, well...it's very complicated."

Rarity nodded. "Even so," she said, "it is my duty to help in whatever way I can. If you have been losing sleep over this issue, then we must do whatever we can to deal with it. Not sleeping is terrible for one's health. You really should have come and spoken

to me sooner.” Twilight nodded, leaning her cheek into one of her hooves.

“I know, Rarity, I know...but I was just a little afraid. See, my problem is something that I’m not too sure many fillies or mares around here have dealt with, and, well...” She sighed in frustration.

“What is it, dear?” Rarity said, leaning forward. “Please, stop beating around the bush and tell me! I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.”

Twilight bit her lip for a few moments, hesitant, before finally shouting out, “I’m in love with Rainbow Dash!” Immediately, she clapped her hooves over her mouth, embarrassed that she had said it that loudly. Rarity sat there, staring at her for a few moments, blinking slowly as recognition came over her.

“You’re...what?” she asked, her voice a little soft. Twilight knew this was a bad idea; she just hoped Rarity wasn’t going to disown her, or worse...

“I’m...in love with Dash,” she repeated, swallowing hard. “When I’m around her, well...my stomach gets all full of butterflies and my heart beats a little faster. And when I see her flying, I can always feel myself blushing, and my tail starts doing that stupid thing where it swishes back and forth, and—” Rarity shoved her hoof into the mare’s mouth, smiling and shaking her head.

“Dear, you’re rambling,” she said, taking her hoof away. “I understand what it’s like to be in love perfectly well, believe me. There is no need for such elaboration.” She giggled a little. “At least, not this early in the morning.” Twilight felt waves of relief wash over her; she just knew that Rarity would understand!

“Rarity...” Twilight said softly, “I’m so glad you’re okay with all this. I was just really confused. I didn’t really know how to feel about being, y’know...a fillyfoo-” Again the hoof silenced her, and Twilight found Rarity giving her a look, her eyes hard.

“Do not use such a despicable word within my boutique, please,” she said, her tone serious, “I will not allow one of my friends, especially one who has just discovered love for the first time, to think of herself in such a horrid way.” When Twilight nodded, tears beginning to form in her eyes, Rarity pulled her hoof away. “Why are you crying, dear?” she asked, concerned.

“It’s just, well...Rarity, you have to realize that this is pretty much the first time for me! I mean, I had schoolyard crushes when I was just a filly, but nothing like this.” She paused to take a deep breath, steadying her voice. “I thought that these feelings just crept up on me out of nowhere, but the more I think about it, the more I realize that I’ve always loved Rainbow Dash!”

Rarity raised an eyebrow quizzically. “You have spoken to Rainbow about this,

have you not? You've told her these things?"

"No," Twilight said, more tears beginning to seep out, "she doesn't know a thing about it. I didn't want to tell her because, well...Rarity, I know I can trust you, but I'm worried about what everypony else will think."

Rarity nodded, but sighed. "Dear, if you hold these feelings inside, you are going to spend the rest of your life wondering whether Dash loved you as well. You cannot continue to hold onto this until you're old and grey." She giggled a little, ironically. "After all, it won't be very long before we're all old and grey, now will it?"

Twilight sniffed, rubbing her eyes. "But, even past the concerns about being a...you know..." She paused for a moment. "Dash has her tryout for the Wonderbolts! If she makes it in, well...who's to say she won't be too focused on her career to love me? I don't want to put that kind of pressure on her."

Rarity nodded. "An understandable concern, love, but there's one problem with it." Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Even if she was too busy, you know that she would tell you, rather than holding it inside. Not to mention, I haven't a doubt in my mind that she would be all the more upset with you if you neglected to inform her about this. You must tell her. If you ask me, there will be no better opportunity than tomorrow—the day of her tryouts."

Twilight's jaw dropped.

"The day of the tryouts?!" she cried. "There's no way I could do that! I mean, what if she says no? She'll probably feel so terrible for the rest of the day that she would fail her tryouts!" The purple mare shook her head. "I can't be responsible for something like that."

Rarity sighed and shook her head. "If you don't do it tomorrow, you never will, darling." Her tone was concerned, but her eyes commanding. "There is no reason to allow this golden opportunity to pass you by. Especially not when you have the Elements of Harmony ourselves backing you up! You know that we're all here for you. And as for Dash...she can get through her audition no matter what. She's a strong pony." She giggled. "Go home, get some sleep, wake up tomorrow, find Dash, and tell her this..."

The white unicorn took Twilight by the hooves, looking deep into her eyes, and began, "You are the most beautiful pony I have ever laid eyes on. We have known each other for a long time now, and these feelings have been bubbling underneath the surface the entire time. You are brash, bold, and I love the way I feel when I'm in your arms." Twilight felt a blush in her cheeks. "Please, Rainbow Dash, be mine. You will make me the happiest mare in all of Equestria, if you will just be mine." She let go and grinned. "Easy."

Twilight nodded dumbly. "Right...easy," she said, standing up. "I think I'm gonna get going. If I'm going to get any kind of sleep, I need to get home right now."

Rarity nodded, standing up as well. "And I have some beauty sleep to catch up on. Goodbye and goodnight, Twilight Sparkle. I wish you luck in your romantic endeavors!" With that, Twilight turned and left, the door closing and locking magically behind her.

The purple unicorn looked up at the sky, letting a wistful sigh slip out as she began to walk; it seemed the windstorm, which had made her feel so secure, so safe within even as she was out in it, had died down, leaving the night chilly, forbidding, and far, far too silent.

What Rarity had said...could it really be as easy as just telling Dash all that stuff? Would Twilight be able to find the sky blue pegasus in time to tell her before tryouts? All these thoughts swam about inside her head as she walked. However, as mixed up as her head was, her mouth continued forming the same words, over and over again.

"You are the most beautiful pony I've ever laid eyes on. You are the most beautiful pony I've ever laid eyes on. You are the most beautiful pony..."

"Aww...that's so cute!" Marina cried, smiling widely. Twilight nodded, chuckling a little.

"I suppose it is," she responded, "but it certainly didn't seem cute back then. I had my insides all tied up in knots over Dash, you see. I had no idea then whether she was going to say yes or no. Of course, knowing what I know now, it should've been obvious that she was going to say yes. She later told me that she'd been in love with me for a while, but she'd held back because she was afraid I'd be too busy as Celestia's student to love her."

Marina laughed. "That's silly!" she said, tail swishing back and forth a little. "You two should've just told each other right from the start! But I guess I already said that, huh?" The filly giggled softly. Twilight mirrored the action, leaning back in her seat.

"You have, though at least the statement is funnier this time." She sighed, looking out of the window. "I'm just glad she and I finally came to our senses and stopped miscommunicating. We've been so much happier ever since." Marina was silent for a few moments, but finally piped up.

"Ms. Twilight?" she asked, leaning forward on her hooves. "If you and Ms. Dash got married, like you've told me before, well...how come I've never seen her around here? I've been your student for four years, Ms. Twilight, and I've never even talked to Ms. Dash!" She grinned, not noticing the look of anguish on Twilight's face. "You weren't lying to me when you said that this was your house, were you?"

The faded-purple mare shook her head, trying not to show that she was fighting back tears. “Dash, well...she’s not really around here anymore,” she said, swallowing hard. “Seven years ago, she went off to take a vacation. She was getting very old, and as you know, unicorns live the longest out of any species, so she, uh...went to find a fountain of youth, to be with me longer.”

Marina cocked an eyebrow. “Fountain of youth?” she said disbelievingly. “Is there such a thing? You’ve never taught me anything about that, Teacher.”

Twilight took a deep breath, smiling at Marina. “Well...that’s because it’s so exciting, and so very far away, that I didn’t want to tell you when you were too young and have you go looking for it alone or something. You know as well as I do how young fillies can be.” Marina still had her eyebrow raised, but seemed appeased for now.

“I guess so...” she said. “But when she gets back, I wanna meet her! After all, if you married her, she’s gotta be, like, the most awesome pony around!” Twilight forced a giggle, the sound masking a great pain. “But, Teacher...don’t you miss her? I mean, if she’s been gone seven years...that’s a really long time to be without the pony you love!”

The purple unicorn bit her lip, smiling and nodding. “It is, Marina, but there was something a wise pony, one who I consider much wiser than myself, once told me, and it’s helped me get through these long years without her by my side.”

Marina tilted her head inquiringly, smiling. “What was that, teacher?”

Twilight looked over at a bookshelf, where a framed photo of her and Rainbow Dash sat in a frame. In the photo, they were both done up in extravagant gowns, their lips meeting in front of a cheering crowd as Celestia stood above them, smiling knowingly. A single tear slipped down Twilight’s cheek and plopped onto the table as she recited the words: “‘You can’t be missed if you never really left.’ That’s what the pony told me. And as far as I’m concerned, she never did leave. She’s always been right here, by my side.” Marina smiled so big Twilight thought her cheeks might break.

“That’s so sweet!” she cried. “That must’ve been one smart pony.” She giggled a little. “I guess it wasn’t Dash, huh? The way you talk about her, she sounds too simple for mushy stuff like that.”

“Her simplicity was one of the best things about her,” the purple mare said, “alongside many other things. But I’m getting off track.” She looked behind Marina, and saw that the last golden fingers of the sun were receding over the horizon. “I’m going to go upstairs for a few minutes, and then I’ll come back and continue the story. We’re getting to one of the better parts.”

Marina giggled and nodded, staying put as Twilight rose, heading up the stairs. “You never went away, Dash,” she whispered to herself, “you’ve always been right here.”

And as she spoke, she could swear she felt her mate's blush on her neck once again.