

THE PRINCE AND THE CHANGELING

By GeodesicDragon

Pre-read by Chessboard Jack

"You're kidding, right? Please tell me that you're kidding."

"I wish I was, Geo, but I'm afraid I'm not. The situation up north has become critical, and extensive negotiations are required in order to prevent things getting worse."

"That's understandable," I replied, "but does it really take three of you? Come on, Twi, you and I both know that Celestia and Luna are more than capable of handling this."

Twilight sighed gently and laid a forehoof on my shoulder, looking deep into my eyes with a reassuring smile on her face.

"Both of them decided that I would need training in diplomacy," she replied, "so I have to go."

"But why do I have to stay here?" I moaned, "I don't know the first thing about running a country!"

Twilight giggled.

"Then this will be the ideal time for you to learn." she said, "Don't worry, Geo, you've got plenty of advisers to keep you informed. And as long as you continue being your wonderfully charming self, you'll have nothing to worry about."

I sighed and brought Twilight in for a hug.

"You're right," I replied, "I just need to be myself and stop fretting about something so trivial. I'm a Prince, so it's high time that I started acting like one!"

Twilight kissed my cheek softly and nodded.

"That's the spirit." she whispered, "You keep telling yourself that, and all will be well. But if you'll excuse me, I really need to leave. We've got a schedule to stick to, and the gryphons don't exactly have an appreciation of tardiness."

I pulled away from the hug and gave Twilight a final passionate kiss, which she returned eagerly. We broke apart and she picked up her bags, before we walked to the waiting chariot where Celestia and Luna were saying their own goodbyes.

"Be careful, Luna," Dusk Wind said, "and know that I'll miss you."

"And I'll miss you too, Celestia." Worthy Cause lamented, "It just won't be the same without you around."

Celestia and Luna nodded, giving their respective special somepony a farewell hug and kiss as Twilight clambered aboard the chariot. After a moment the pegasi pulling it took off, and within minutes our loved ones were mere specks on the ever-expansive horizon.

Dusk Wind and Worthy Cause turned to me, the former saluting while the latter bowed.

"What now, your Highness?" Dusk asked.

"Now, gentlecolts..." I cracked my knuckles, "we work."

The next two days passed by in a dull whirlwind of meetings, paperwork and dinners. I was sitting on the throne with a bored expression on my face, when the doors swung open and two Royal Guards bustled in with a pegasus behind them bound in chains.

I perked up and observed the guards as they brought their prisoner before me. I raised an eyebrow at them.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded, "And why have you brought this pony before me?"

Both of the guards, an Earth pony and a unicorn, snapped to attention and saluted me briskly before the unicorn addressed me.

"With respect, your Highness," he said, "this is no pony. What you are seeing is merely a disguise. Watch, I'll prove it."

He charged some magic into his horn and concentrated a beam of light onto the prisoner, who squirmed and moaned. When the flow of magic stopped there was a flash of green light, and the pony before me now looked completely different.

Instead of a pegasus, I was now looking at something else entirely. It resembled a pony, but its coat was black as night, and reflected the light coming in through the windows. It had a flowing dark aquamarine mane and tail, but what struck me the most about this creature were the fangs it possessed.

"What..." I said hesitantly, "what the hell is that?"

"This," the unicorn guard replied tersely, "is a Changeling. We found it walking around the castle disguised as one of the cook staff... who is supposed to be on holiday in Manehattan."

I looked down at the Changeling, which looked back at me in turn. Upon seeing me it hid behind its mane nervously, making a noise similar to those Fluttershy makes when she's scared.

"And what do you expect me to do about it?" I asked, "I'll have you know that this is the first Changeling I've ever seen."

The guards exchanged a glance.

"Several months ago," the Earth pony guard said, "the Changelings tried to take over Canterlot. Under the command of their Queen, Chrysalis, they sought to enslave all of ponykind."

"B-but..." the changeling speaking made me realise it was a female, "not all of us were there! You can't judge me based on what the others have done!"

I looked at the two guards and back to the changeling. She had stood up and was now glaring at me.

"I'll handle this," I said to the guards, "you may take your leave."

"B-but, your Highness," the unicorn guard stuttered, "with all due respect, that is a bad idea! What if it tries to hurt you?!"

"Stop calling me an 'it!'" the changeling yelled, "My name is Tenna!"

"Just go." I said sternly, "That's an order."

The guards saluted and left the room, casting cautious glances back towards me. I waved them away and stood up before approaching Tenna, who shied away as I approached.

"With those two gone," I said, "perhaps you and I can talk?"

Despite her earlier boldness, Tenna now seemed reluctant to speak to me. I sighed and sat down so that I was at her level.

"Come now," I said persuasively, "surely you have something you'd like to talk about?"

Tenna backed away some more.

"P-please," she said nervously, "don't hurt me."

I did a double take.

"What?!" I said, "Why on Equestria would you think I'd want to hurt you?! I'm trying to help you!"

"Y-you're a human," Tenna replied, "and I've heard the stories about humans from years gone by."

I dragged my palm down my face as I groaned.

"Tell you what," I said, "I won't hurt you if you promise not to turn into my wife and suck all the love out of my brain."

Tenna looked at me as if I had just insulted her mother. She took a few steps forward and stomped a hoof into the ground.

"Changelings don't suck love out of ponies' brains!" she said indignantly, "Where did you get that idea from?"

"You're not the only one who has heard stories, you know." I said with a chuckle, "I'm guessing not everything you've heard about my species has been positive?"

Tenna nodded.

"I thought as much," I continued, "because it's so easy to judge somepony when you don't have all the facts. But I think you and I, we can change all that if we just... talk."

Tenna sat on her haunches a few metres away and pawed at the floor with a forehoof before a smile crossed her lips.

"I'd like that very much." she said, "Because if you were as bad as the humans I've heard about, I wouldn't be sitting here."

"And if you were as bad as the Changelings I've heard about," I grinned, "I'd be a drooling pile of love."

Tenna ran a hoof through her mane and chuckled.

"So," she said hesitantly, "what exactly have you heard about the invasion of Canterlot?"

"All I've heard," I replied, "is that Queen Chrysalis took the place of Princess Cadence and tried to mind-control Shining Armour, Cadence's groom-to-be. Only Twilight Sparkle, my current wife, saw 'Cadence' for what she really was, but no pony believed her."

"Twilight tried calling out the fake Cadence during the rehearsal, only for her friends to think she was being rude. They shunned her, and Twilight was devastated. She went to make amends with 'Cadence', only to be sent to some underground cave."

"It was in this cave where she met the real Cadence. The two of them escaped and managed to stop the wedding, where Chrysalis revealed her true form. But by that time, it was too late. Her army soon smashed through the protective shield around Canterlot, and all hell broke loose."

"Twilight and her friends tried to retrieve the Elements of Harmony but, despite fighting bravely, were overpowered and captured before being taken back to Chrysalis. While she was distracted Twilight managed to free herself and Cadence, the latter then going on to break the mind-control spell on Shining Armour. He tried casting his shield again, but failed. Cadence helped him, and together the two of them produced a spell powerful enough to force Chrysalis and her army out of Canterlot."

"No pony knows what happened to them after that. In all honesty, the majority of ponies think they're dead. You're the first to set hoof in Canterlot ever since the invasion... unless there have been others I've just not been told about."

As I finished my story Tenna's face was unreadable, and it was a while before she spoke.

"Chrysalis," she spat the name, "was a fool. She believed that she was superior simply because she was stronger than other Changelings. Before she came along we were a peaceful race, living amongst the ponies without a care in the world. We would go out, collect love, and bring it back to our hives."

Her face twisted into a frown as she bared her fangs.

"Chrysalis, however, didn't appreciate that life. She thought that the Changelings could do better, that they needed an empire of their own. So she gathered some like-minded followers and began planning her attack on Canterlot."

"Those of us who refused to follow her madness, like me, were banished from the hive. I travelled from town to town, fitting in where I could and feeding as often as possible. But once word spread of what Chrysalis had done, a deep anti-changeling sentiment filled the populace. Whenever I was discovered for what I really am, I was chased out of town."

She let out a hollow laugh as her expression softened.

"I came to Canterlot to try and prove that I was different. That I wanted the same as everypony else in Equestria."

"And what's that?" I queried.

Tenna looked me straight in the eyes and spoke a single word.

"Peace."

We sat in silence for a moment before I finally spoke.

"That's quite a tale," I said, "and I like to think that I've learned something about your species today. Now tell me, what have you heard about mine?"

"I've only heard whispers," Tenna replied, "while I was travelling from town to town. It was a couple of days after the invasion when I first heard whispers of a human appearing in Ponyville. I'm guessing that was you?"

I nodded.

"Right." Tenna continued, "When word reached everypony about who you were and how you arrived, ponies were stunned. They couldn't believe that your species could be so callous towards each other, hurting and killing without a care in the world."

"And what about the good bits?" I interrupted, "Did anypony bother to tell you about *those*?"

"N-no," Tenna shook her head, "I only ever heard the bad. It was all anypony seemed to talk about. The papers carried reports that, where you come from, wars are waged nearly all the time, greed and crime are rampant and that you are even growing ever closer to destroying your whole planet."

I sighed.

"That's mostly true," I said, "but for every human who partakes in such activities, there is someone else doing the opposite."

Tenna cocked her head at me.

"What do you mean by that?" she queried.

"I mean," I replied, "that for every human waging war, there is another human pressing for peace. For every human committing a crime, there is another human trying to fight it. And for every human polluting the environment there is another human trying their utmost to reverse the damage."

"And which category do you fit into?" Tenna asked, her tone serious, "The good or the bad?"

"I will do what I can to help others," I said quietly, "even if that means taking a life to protect a friend."

Tenna's eyes widened and she stared at me. The sudden silence that descended upon the throne room was unbearable.

"You..." she stuttered, "you killed someone?"

I nodded.

"But if I hadn't," I defended, "then my friend and I would have died, and Equestria would have a dangerous man on the loose. I'm not proud of what I did, but I had no choice."

Tenna shifted uncomfortably, but said nothing.

"If I could try and make amends with the man I killed," I said, "then I would. I would do it in a heartbeat. But if he wasn't the way he was, then he wouldn't have died. Such is the vicious circle that humanity occupies."

I paused for a moment.

"But then again... if he wasn't the way he was, I wouldn't be sitting here right now talking to you. That man is partly responsible for me coming to Equestria in the first place. So I guess I have something to thank him for at least."

Tenna looked at me in confusion.

"He sent you to Equestria?" she asked, "How is that possible?"

"It's a very long story," I chuckled, "but to summarise: I was walking home from work one day when this man, Derek, nearly runs me over in his car... a car being a vehicle humans use to get around. Anyway, I shout at him about it and he turns round, gets out of his car, shouts at me and then beats me up."

"He then pulls out a gun, which is a weapon, and shoots me with it as I try to run away. I fall into a portal and hey presto! I'm in Equestria. I meet Twilight and her friends, fall in love and then Derek somehow arrives in Equestria as well. We fight, again, and he shoots me... again. Next thing I know I'm back in my own world, whereupon I immediately try to return to Equestria."

"I meet a scientist named Ace, who's experiments in inter-dimensional travel led to the portal which I fell into. He tells John, a friend of mine, and I that he is building a device which will stop said portals opening in random places. John and I help him to build it and once again I'm back in Equestria."

Tenna nodded in understanding.

"I think I understand," she says, "so I won't pressure you for further details. But I think that everything I've heard about your species has been a big fat lie... at least where you're concerned. After all, when you set eyes on me for the first time you didn't scream and try to put chains on me. Speaking of which..."

She motioned to her hind legs, which were still bound in chains. I moved closer and removed the objects, using a skeleton key I had around my neck. Tenna smiled in gratitude and began stretching her legs, which were no doubt stiff after being immobile for so long.

"Thank you," she said, "I really appreciate what you've done. You've shown me that I can't let rumours cloud my judgement."

"And you've shown me the same." I replied, "I like to think that I understand Changelings just a little bit better now."

We sat in silence for a moment before Tenna coughed nervously.

"So..." she said, "what happens to me now?"

I stood up and paced around the room with my hands behind my back. Tenna watched me with a neutral expression on her face.

"With Celestia, Luna and Twilight out of the country," I said, "the decision on what to do with you falls to me. But after seeing the reactions of the guards, I can tell that there is still a very strong sense of resentment towards your species."

Tenna looked crestfallen, casting her gaze down to the floor.

"That said," I continued, "I think that a Royal Decree naming you an official citizen of Equestria should ease their apprehensions."

Tenna didn't look up for a moment as she processed what I said. When realisation finally dawned on her she snapped her head up and looked at me with a large smile.

"You mean..." she said eagerly, "that I will finally get what I want?"

I nodded.

"You have shown me that you're not a threat, and that you simply wish to be left alone to live your life. I have learned a lot about second chances, so it would be stupid of me to cast those lessons aside simply because of what others think of you."

Tenna buzzed her wings in excitement and shot over to me, wrapping her forelegs around my chest in a tight hug.

"Thank you!" she squealed, "I promise I won't ruin this opportunity that you've given me!"

As I patted her on the back, an equally large grin on my face, the throne room doors swung open and three figures entered. They were talking amongst themselves, but that conversation soon stopped when they noticed the black mass around my chest.

"Ah, Princesses," I said, "you're back earlier than expected."

Tenna froze at the mention of 'Princesses' and detached herself from my chest, choosing instead to hide behind my legs. The three alicorns looked at her, and then to me with raised eyebrows. This caused me to sigh and roll my eyes.

"Don't tell me that you're still bitter about what happened at the wedding?" I groaned, "For goodness sake, I thought you were all better than this!"

Celestia took a few tentative steps forward, causing Tenna to squeak in fear and tighten her grip on my legs.

"Geo," she said, "with all due respect, you don't understand what Changelings are capable of."

I narrowed my eyes at this statement.

"No, Celestia," I shot back, "I think you'll find that it's *you* who doesn't fully understand."

"Tenna here," I pointed at her, "has shown me that not all Changelings are evil. She has helped me understand her species, and told me that not all of them were warped by Chrysalis' twisted words and hollow promises of power and glory."

"But Changelings are masters of deceit!" Luna shouted, "They use lies and trickery in order to achieve their goals! Can you not see that she is trying to trick you?!"

"I've seen first-hoof just how vicious Changelings can be," Twilight added, "They are cold and calculating creatures."

"I'm sorry, Geo," Celestia said, "but in order to protect Equestria, I must overrule your decision to let the Changeling stay."

"So that's it then?" I snarled, "You're just going to let the past get in the way of progress?"

Celestia nodded curtly.

"Really?" I gave a hollow laugh, "Because you seemed willing to give *me* a chance, given the horrific things my species does."

Celestia looked at me, her mouth and eyes wide open. She had been caught bang to rights, and she knew it.

"I-I..." she stuttered.

"That's right," I replied, "you were willing to let the misdeeds of my species go, and we've done things to each other that the Changelings can only *dream* of. Yet when it comes to the Changelings themselves... one poxy invasion and that's it, game over, no continues available?"

Celestia hung her head in shame, followed by her sister and even Twilight. The three alicorns couldn't bear to look either Tenna or myself in the eye.

"You're right, Geo," Luna said eventually, "we have let the past get in the way of progress. This is the first Changeling we've seen since the invasion, and immediately we assume the worst."

"We should be ashamed of ourselves," Twilight added, "because this is not how friendships are formed."

Tenna came out from behind my legs and approached the three Princesses, each of them turning their gaze away.

"Looks like the Prince and I aren't the only ones who have learned something today." she pointed at me, "You should be proud of this one. He has helped me understand a lot, but it is you three who have learned the biggest lesson."

Twilight nodded.

"We have." she said, "We have learned that the actions of the many cannot cloud your judgement of the individual."

Celestia approached me and laid a forehoof on my shoulder. She looked into my eyes and sighed.

"I knew that I made the right decision in making you a Prince." she said with a small laugh, "Because once again you have shown us how you have a way with words."

She turned to face Tenna, who looked back with a small smile on her face, as if trying to get Celestia to relax.

"I can't apologise enough for my brash words and actions, Tenna," she said, "but I will be happy to support Prince Geo's decision to let you stay here as an Equestrian citizen."

"As will I." Luna added, "If I got a second chance, there should be no reason why you can't get one too."

"Yes," Twilight mused, "a second chance to live your life in peace, free to walk the streets as you are."

Tenna's smile grew to Pinkie Pie levels as she nodded furiously. She bowed to the three alicorns, who returned the gesture warmly, before turning to me and hugging my leg.

"Thanks, Prince Geo," she said, "for everything."

"Now, now," I mock scolded, "I must insist that you simply refer to me as 'Geo'. All my friends call me that."

Tenna's eyes sparkled.

"You see me as... a friend?" she asked in disbelief, "But I've barely known you a day!"

"You are somepony who wanted a fresh start." I shrugged, "Just like I did before I came to Equestria. You remind me of me in that aspect. Plus there's the fact you've taught me a lot about acceptance. And if I'm honest... you're quite adorable."

Tenna giggled as Twilight raised an eyebrow at me.

"What?" I held my arms up, "She *is* adorable!"

Twilight chuckled.

"Okay, Romeo," she said, "why don't you and your new friend pay a visit to the Registry Office and fill out her citizenship papers?"

"Sounds like a plan to me." I said, "Coming, Tenna?"

Tenna nodded and followed me out of the room, leaving behind three alicorns with very satisfied smiles on their faces.