

### Chapter 3

*The endless sea of fans spanned the stadium stands before her. She took her goggles off and breathed in the immense quantities of awe and admiration that rose like steam from the crowd.*

*RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH!*

*She quickly plotted a course in her head for the Buckaneer Blaze that involved a low fly-by over the stands. Taking another deep breath, she dove out of the sky and leveled out low enough to nearly touch somepony's hoof. She turned around, and a long, blinding trail of blue and white lightning had traced her path through the sky as the rest of the Wonderbolts followed closely behind in formation. The crowd erupted into a deafening roar.*

*RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH!*

*The stadium faded away and she fell into a bed inside a dark room. Spitfire's voice came from nowhere.*

*"Your fans love you, Dash. You don't want to disappoint them."*

*Several TV cameras appeared, and all of them pointed at her. She could still hear the crowd.*

*RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH!*

*Spitfire suddenly wrapped her forelegs around Dash from behind, and her warm body pressed up against hers. She put her lips to Dash's ear and whispered.*

*"I know what you want."*

*RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH! RAINBOW DASH!*

*"I know what you really want."*

*A shiver went up Dash's spine as Spitfire caressed her wing.*

*"What are you waiting for? Take it."*

*"Ugh..."*

Rainbow Dash slowly woke and rubbed her eyes, reaching for her alarm clock. All she felt was air.

The alarm hadn't even gone off. She then realized her alarm clock had gone, along with her nightstand. The bed she was asleep on wasn't even hers, let alone a *bed*. She opened her eyes, trying to focus on a yellow blob across from her. When she realized what it was, she jumped and nearly fell off the couch.

Spitfire was sitting in a recliner, looking at her.

"You faint in front of the press, they'll be all over you," she said.

Rainbow Dash's eyes shot wide open, her body frozen in place.

"Oh no." Spitfire smiled. "You're not about to again, are you?"

"But I- It-" She whispered to herself.

"Hmm? What?"

Dash patted her face and checked to make sure all of her body was still there. She looked around the room at the lavish decorum covering the walls, the suede material of the couch she had passed out on, and back up at Spitfire. "Am I... *dreaming?*"

Spitfire laughed. "Want me to pinch you?"

"I don't believe it."

"Believe it or not."

Dash felt a sudden throbbing of pain in the side of her head. Her attempt to hide the wince failed.

"You ok?" said Spitfire.

Dash waved her hoof. "Yeah yeah, I'm fine."

"You sure? You hit your head on the floor pretty hard when you passed out."

Dash looked around the room. "How long was I out?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"Where'd the Bolts go?"

“They went out to dinner, I think. I was gonna go too, but...” They made eye contact, and a silence fell between them. Spitfire looked away and cleared her throat. “I guess they figured you’d be fine... So listen. I want you in the act at the Manehattan show. I figured the Rainboom would be an ok finale.”

A shiver traveled up Rainbow Dash’s spine. “M- Manehattan? A- as in *Mane Arena* Manehattan?”

Spitfire nodded.

Dash’s voice shook violently. “You mean like... I’m g- gonna fly with the sh- show team?” She gasped. “W- With my own *flight suit*?”

“Yep. Which also means I need you at the rehearsal tomorrow... You know, it seems like every other second, your mouth’s hanging wide open.”

Dash shook her head and straightened up. “Sorry... this is just happening really fast.”

Spitfire bit her lip. “Yeah.” She sat in silence for a moment, looking at the golden jungle of trophies along the wall. Dash noticed how they made the room glow the same color as Spitfire’s coat. “Maybe it is.” She looked back to Dash. “Can you be here in the morning?”

Dash nodded.

“Alright. Go home and get some real rest. You’ll need it.”

“Ok.”

Rainbow Dash got off the couch and went to the door. She opened it and Spitfire said, “Wait, actually... can I fly you home?”

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Rainbow Dash and Spitfire stepped out into the cool night. Spitfire sniffed the air, holding her nose high. She released a satisfied sigh.

Before Dash advanced any further, Spitfire stopped her.

“Wait.” She turned her head left and right, obviously on the lookout for something. She flared her wings and prepped for takeoff. “Follow me and *stay close*.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“I’ll tell you later. I think they’re already on to us.” She launched into the air, leaving behind a swirl of cloud.

“Hey, wait!” Dash said as she took off.

She kept close enough to Spitfire so their wings wouldn’t collide and tried to whisper loud enough for her to hear.

“What’s going on? Why are we-”

“*Stop!*”

Spitfire yanked Dash by the neck, pulled her behind a house, and put a hoof over her mouth.

“Shh.”

She slowly peeked around the corner, and suddenly jerked her head back.

“Yeah, they’re on to us.”

“Whof onfoo ufs?” Dash said from behind Spitfire’s hoof.

“We gotta loose ‘em. C’mon. Ready? GO!”

With a loud *CRACK* Spitfire was gone into the sky.

“WOAH! What the hay! SPITFIRE!”

Dash took off after her. Adrenaline surged through her veins. Dash caught up to her and tried to yell over the roaring wind.

“SPITFIRE! WHAT IN THE HAY IS GOING ON?”

“LOOK BEHIND YOU AND SEE FOR YOURSELF!”

Rainbow Dash turned her head as far as she could and looked from the corner of her eye. Three pegasi dressed in black, full-body suits with cameras strapped to their necks were hot on their trail.

“WHY ARE WE RUNNING FROM THEM? WHY CAN’T WE LET THEM TAKE PICTURES?”

“I’LL TELL YOU LATER, FOR NOW, *SPEED UP!*”

Dash and Spitfire dove and doubled their speed in an instant. Dash turned her head. Their chasers were now nothing but black dots in the sky, becoming further away each second.

“I THINK WE’RE LOSING THEM!” Dash yelled.

“THEN PULL UP!”

Spitfire grabbed Dash’s hoof and pulled her into the air. She flared her wings and broke their speed, landing on the backside of another house. As they struggled to catch their breath, Spitfire’s head swivled left and right.

“Stay- stay here for a- a second,” Spitfire said as she flew up to the roof of the house. She peeked over the top, hovered motionless for a few seconds, and called down to Dash. “Ok, we lost ‘em.”

Dash breathed a sigh of relief and followed Spitfire over the top of the roof.

“Who the hay were those guys?”

“Freelance photographers. They work for the *Equestria Daily*, but they won’t admit publically that they hired them. Usually they’re not this quick.”

“Why do they want pictures so bad?”

“Pictures of the Bolts are going for a lot of money lately. There’s some rumors going around that we have a new... recruit.”

“But why not just let them take pictures?”

Spitfire chuckled. “You’ve got a lot to learn. We’re keeping you a secret until we announce the Manehattan show.”

“Oh. Wait a minute,” said Dash as she went to the edge of the roof and looked down. “This is-”

“-Your house.”

Dash’s expression turned skeptical. “How’d you know where I live?”

Spitfire scoffed. “Are you kidding? All that fan mail? I’ve got your address *memorized*.” She smirked. “Involuntarily.”

"...Oh. Heh. Well, um, thanks. For flying me home."

"No prob."

"Well. I guess I'll see ya tomorrow."

Dash took a step off the edge, and Spitfire stopped her. "Wait."

Dash's insides froze, and she turned around.

"You've got to understand something."

Dash found it difficult to maintain eye contact with Spitfire with her expression and tone so serious.

"Fame," she continued. "It's..." looked around for the right words. "It's not easy to deal with. At all. You've got to understand what you're getting into. It's hectic, it's stressful, you almost never get a break." She sighed. "I don't wanna make it sound like more trouble than it's worth. Because believe me, it's worth it. It's just..." She looked around for a moment, then back to Dash. "I've lost some people I really care about to fame. And I don't want you-" She closed her eyes and sighed again. "...I want you to know what you're getting into."

Warmth flooded Dash's chest. Spitfire cared about her. She cared about her to a point that she didn't mind hinting at it, however obvious, even when they had never had any real interaction before.

"You're good at what you do," Spitfire continued, "you're *very* good. Some of the stuff you showed us after the competition that day, I would *never* have thought anything up like that." She looked around for a moment again, lost in thought. "I'm sorry I'm being like this right now. It's just... You sorta saved my life. And risked your own. No pony's ever done anything like that for me before." She smiled. "And a sonic rainboom at the same time? Major style points."

She was comfortable with her. *The* Spitfire was comfortable with her.

"Well I mean," Dash began. "It wasn't a big deal. I was trying to save my friend at first."

Spitfire laughed and her eyebrows rose. "Oh, really? So I *shouldn't* be so happy you saved my life, then."

Dash laughed. "No, that's not what I meant!"

Spitfire turned away from Dash and began walking into the yard. "Maybe I should forget the whole Wonderbolt thing and leave."

“No! I mean-”

Spitfire turned around with a huge smile on her face. “Be at the HQ at nine. Sleep well, eat plenty.” She took off into the sky and was gone in an instant, leaving behind a long, amber trail.

“Woah.”

Dash dropped down into her yard, opened her front door, walked inside, and the familiar air of her house hit her in the face. She closed the door and stood still. Reality failed to reach her. Her mind had entered an entirely different state of being.

“I’m a Wonderbolt.”

She looked around at her home, at all her belongings and memories of her life. It suddenly seemed unreal, like none of it even happened. Everything she had ever done failed in comparison to what just happened to her.

“I’m a Wonderbolt...”

Her voice grew louder.

“I’m a *Wonderbolt!*”

She wished she could shout it from the top of the Canterlot mountains for all of Equestria to hear. She felt tears building in her eyes, but she didn’t care at all. She could fill a bucket if she really wanted to.

She plopped down on the couch, exhausted beyond comprehension. She had not the energy nor the reason to hold back tears. They fell from her face like a waterfall.

There was a knock at the door.

“Rainbow Dash! Are you in there?” said Twilight Sparkle’s voice.

Rarity’s voice followed, “We saw a Sonic Rainboom earlier! Darling, everypony is buzzing madly about it!”

“And we mean *everypony*,” said Applejack, “Yer on the front page of the *Equestria Daily!*”

The doorknob glowed purple for a moment, and the door opened.

“Rainbow Da- oh...” Twilight, Fluttershy, Pinkie, Rarity, and Applejack all stood in the doorway,

looking at a teary-eyed Rainbow Dash.

“Oh no,” said Applejack. She took a first few tentative steps toward Dash, carrying a worried expression. She sat next to her and ran a hoof through Dash's mane.

“Sugarcube, what’s eatin’ ya?”

Dash didn’t respond. She didn’t feel that she needed to.

“What happened?” asked Twilight. “We heard that you flew off with Soarin’ and Spitfire, but…” A look of sudden realization spread across her face. “Oh. So you did the Sonic Rainboom *for* them. What did they say? They didn’t say… *no*, did they?”

“They must have been impressed!” said Rarity. “A Sonic Rainboom is one of the most thrilling sights a pony can witness!”

“Yeah, I should know!” squealed Pinkie.

“What’s wrong? Something’s going on.” said Twilight.

Dash took a deep breath and released it slowly.

“I’m in.”

A stunned silence fell over them.

“C- come again?” said Applejack.

“They want me. I…” She swallowed. “I’m a Wonderbolt.”

Everypony’s jaw dropped. Twilight put a hoof on her mouth. “Oh my.”

As if on cue, Pinkie Pie and Rarity screamed in unison and pulled Dash into a tight embrace, knocking Applejack off the couch. They jumped up and down with Rainbow Dash in their arms.

“WOOHOO!” screamed Pinkie Pie, releasing Rainbow Dash. “I knew you could do it! I told you! I told her Rarity, I told her she could do it, and now look, she did it! And I told her! AH!”

“Darling, this is… this is *stupendous* news!” shrilled Rarity. “What else did they say? What do you do now?”

“They want me at a rehearsal tomorrow. I’m gonna perform in Manehattan next week.”



Everypony gasped.

“We. Are. So. THERE!” said Pinkie Pie.

“Oh, definitely,” concurred Rarity.

“Shoot,” said Applejack. “Rainbow Dash, *our* Rainbow Dash, she’s a Wonderbolt.”

“Think of all of the references, all the clients!” screamed Rarity. “I mean, I don’t mean to steal any from you, Rainbow dear, of course, but just think of the *possibilities!*”

“Woohoo,” whispered Fluttershy.

“Dash, you ok?” asked Applejack. “I reckon ya’d be a bit more excited, ya know, about your dreams comin’ true an’ all.”

“Yeah,” said Twilight. “You seem a little... out of it.”

“It’s nothing,” said Dash. “I...” She searched for a suitable excuse. “I’m just really tired. It’s been a long day.

“Oh, of course,” said Twilight. “We should probably let you sleep. Let’s go, guys.”

“Alright,” said Applejack. “See ya later. And Dash?”

“Yeah?”

“We’re proud o’ ya. So, so proud o’ ya.” Applejack hugged her tight. The others followed, and they all clumped together in a group embrace. It was true. Her dreams had become reality. Yet, it still felt as if everything she *really* ever wanted was right here, hugging her close. She returned the embrace, trying to derive every bit of feeling from it she could. Tears began cascading down her face.

She knew it would all go away. She knew she would have to leave them behind.

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Spitfire opened her eyes.

“Ugh...”

She sat up from her bed and stretched her forelegs with a yawn.

Spitfire's room was an absolute wreck. Fan mail lay scattered across the floor along with several dirty changes of flight suits.

"I'm not gonna tell them," she said to herself. "No pony has to know. Just leave it alone, and everypony'll be happy."

She got out of bed and looked in the bathroom mirror; her mane was much more disheveled than usual and she saw dark circles under her eyes. She could feel that she didn't sleep well.

Spitfire's morning routine consisted of a shower, breakfast, and a long flight around Cloudsdale; she had no problem with paparazzi because they just weren't fast enough. She finished showering and went downstairs to the dining room, where she found the main flight team already eating. The alternates were still in bed.

"Good morning, sunshine!" said Rapidfire, his tone dripping sarcasm. "You look positively radiant today!"

Spitfire rolled her eyes, sat next to Soarin', and clopped her hooves twice. "AL!" A butler dressed in a tuxedo and white apron burst through the double doors leading to the kitchen.

"What is your fancy this morning, m'lady?"

"I'll have an omelet. Extra crispy, extra cheese."

"Right away." The butler flew back into the kitchen, yelling at the cooks in a foreign language and flinging cooking utensils at them.

"Woah, somepony's feeling reckless with their stomach today," said Soarin'. "Did you sleep ok?"

"Ugh, no. I kept having this... *dream*. I kept waking up, and when I fell back asleep, I started having the same dream again."

"What was it about?"

She paused and stared at her coffee cup for a moment. Obviously, she couldn't tell them.

"It's not important."

"Well you know," said Misty between bites of cereal, "we have that awesome psychiatrist, what's her name?"

“Synapse,” said Rapidfire. “That’s a good idea, you should go get your brain evaluated!” He chuckled.

“It’s not that bad,” said Spitfire. “I don’t need a psychiatrist.”

“First step to recovery is admitting you have a problem,” said Misty, and everypony laughed.

“Anyway,” said Spitfire. “Rainbow Dash will be here in a bit. We should start thinking about how we’re gonna work her in next week.” She reached under the table and pushed a button. “I had this idea.” The lights dimmed, and a projector screen lowered from the ceiling. A picture showing a series of lines and X’s in different patterns flashed on the screen. “This is the finale. Normal terminal-delta pattern, right?” She picked up a big red X and placed it in the middle of a circle of X’s. “There’s the Rainboom.” Noises of approval came from the rest of the team. Spitfire laughed. “It’s gonna be so bucking awesome.”

“But,” said Rapidfire. “Will she be able to do it horizontally like that?”

Spitfire shrugged. “Why not?”

“It’s just... it seems like gravity helps her. Without it, can she still do it?”

“Probably. I mean, I’ve seen some of the stuff she can do. I’d be surprised.”

A low voice came out of the intercom.

“Ma’am? That, uh... Dashin’... Rain, uh-”

“Rainbow Dash,” said Spitfire.

“Yeah, that. She’s here.”

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Dash nudged the door open with her nose.

“Hello?”

It was just the way she had left it. Despite its thorough decoration, the rec room was empty. It

was a big house, and the Bolts could be anywhere. She went inside and took a seat on the suede couch, wondering how big the Wonderbolts headquarters really was.

A picture on the wall caught her eye. It was a pegasus enclosed by a giant oval cone, very close to breaking the sound barrier. Dash got up to get a closer look. It was Spitfire, who was no more than a tiny yellow dot in the sky. The cone around her was very well defined.

“Woah,” said Dash.

A very casual, softspoken voice came from behind her.

“That was the closest I ever got.”

Dash spun around. Spitfire stood in the doorway with a slight smirk on her face.

“After I heard that you did it at the BYFC, I kept trying and trying for weeks. That picture was the closest I got.”

Dash’s eyebrows rose. “Really?”

Spitfire nodded. “I have no clue how you do it.”

Dash felt a bubbling of pride inside her. She had done what the best flier in Equestria couldn’t do.

“Well, yeah,” said Dash with a pleased grin. “Once you start doing it, you know. It gets pretty easy.”

“Really,” Spitfire said sarcastically.

Dash shut her eyes and held her head high. “Yeah. I guess you could say that for all the moves I do.”

“Then dodge this.”

“Wha-”

Rainbow Dash had just enough time to avoid a couch pillow coming straight to her face at an alarming rate.

“WOAH! Whatdya do th-”

A second pillow made contact.

“Aw, come on!” said Spitfire. “I thought you said you got better the more you did it!”

Spitfire continued pitching pillows at Rainbow Dash, knocking over trophies and pictures from the wall. Dash flew into the air to get away from the feathery onslaught.

“I didn’t mean- AH! Why’re you- WOAHH Stop it! Spitf- GAH- WHERE ARE YOU GETTING ALL THESE PILLOWS?!”

Spitfire was in hysterics. She stopped and doubled over in laughter. Rainbow Dash had no clue what to make of this.

“What the hay was that for?” Dash said as Spitfire fell over laughing.

“If- If you can dodge a- a pillow-”

“YO!” yelled Soarin’s voice. He poked his head through the door and his eyes met the scene. His expression glossed over with confusion. “What in the... am I interrupting something?”

“No, no,” said Spitfire as she struggled to catch her breath. “We- we were j- just... I’ll tell you later.”

“Uhh... M’kay. Well we’re starting.”

“Ok, ok.” Spitfire stood up, turned to Dash, and pointed a hoof at her neck. “Watch your back. I know every pillow in this mansion.”

Dash stood, utterly bewildered. She couldn’t think straight. No matter what way she tried, she couldn’t piece together what was happening. None of the unexplainable events of her life could compare to this.

Spitfire chuckled. “Lighten up, dude! You’re part of the most famous group of ponies in Equestria! You gotta learn to be crazy. You can ask Soarin’ all about it.”

Soarin’s eyes narrowed. “The hay is that supposed to mean?”

Spitfire gave Soarin’ a playful punch on the forehead, which produced a resonant echo. “All muscle, no brains. Ya learn to love him.” Dash could no longer hold back a smile.

Soarin’ scoffed. “Really? In front of Rainbow Dash?”

Spitfire smirked. “Go to the field, we’ll catch up.”

Soarin’ turned with an annoyed sigh and started down the hallway. Rainbow Dash waited until

he was out of earshot.

“Spitfire?”

“Yeah?”

“I’ve always wondered... were you and Soarin’ ever-”

“-in a relationship?” She sighed. “Yeah. Big mistake.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing at all. With something like that, you have to constantly keep it from the press. Otherwise, they’ll have a field day with it. We didn’t really have time... for each other.”

Dash’s stomach dropped. She didn’t know why.

Spitfire’s voice altered dynamic quite dramatically. “Anyway! Topic for another time. I take it you’ve already memorized every Bolt routine there is.”

Dash lifted her head high. “Backwards and forwards.”

“How are you on number seven?”

Dash gasped. “You mean the Canterlot Arena show routine from three years ago?”

Spitfire nodded. “The very same.”

“That’s... my... favorite... *one!*”

“Good, cause that’s the Manehattan routine for Saturday.” Spitfire went to the door and opened it. “Let’s go! Your fans are waiting.”

“F- fans?”

Spitfire laughed. “You’re gonna love this.”

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