

## Chapter 7

Spitfire flew as fast as she could. Wind ripping through her mane, she crossed Manehattan in record time to arrive at her penthouse suite. Landing on the patio, she flung open the sliding glass door and slammed it behind her, diving for the pull string and snapping the blinds closed.

In total darkness, she held her breath as she slowly backed away from the door. Her rump hit the wall behind her, and she slid to the floor. Every sound in the room became amplified. Flashes of rainboom echoed in her vision, as well as the faint silhouettes of her mother and father.

What had she just done? She couldn't have. She knew *exactly* what she did, but there was no way. She brought her hooves to her mouth, the feeling of another mare's lips on her own forever embedded into her mind. She pressed down, puckered them, smacked them, and twisted them into every shape possible. She then buried her entire face into her hooves.

"Oh no."

Her own voice echoed through her brain: *WHAT THE HAY DO WE DO NOW, DASH? WHAT THE HAY DO WE DO NOW?*

"What the hay, Spitfire?" she whispered to herself. She pounded the floor with a hoof, producing a rather satisfying echo. She did it a few more times, punctuating each word. "What- the- hay- Spit-"

Suddenly, the door slid open. Spitfire's heart exploded into her throat as she shot up to her hooves. The dark silhouette of a pegasus with a Wonderbolts flight suit stood in the doorway.

Spitfire stood against the wall, breath held and legs shaking.

"You know, you should really lock this door," said Rapidfire's chuckling voice.

The light switched on, revealing her big brother with a goofy grin plastered across his face. She sighed in deep relief and slid back to the floor.

"SHE DID IT!" He yelled. "She did it and I STILL can't believe it!" He began jumping around the room. "I never doubted her! Never, *ever* doubted her! Ok, maybe a little, but STILL! She did it and I've never seen anything like it! I feel so... *alive!* I feel like I can do anything! I could even-" He stopped as he caught sight of his sister's face. "What's the matter with you?" said Rapidfire. "You look like you just saw a ghost."

Staring at the ground, Spitfire simply shook her head.

"Dude! Come on! You just randomly took off, and I had to follow you all the way here! The most

amazing thing in the world just happened, and you're not even excited about it? We need to celebrate! Let's go!"

Spitfire remained silent.

"Hey," said Rapidfire as he walked over to her. "What's up?"

"Not amazing," she mumbled. Her voice rose, " Everything's ruined, out the window, gone!"

Rapidfire chuckled. "Quit messing around. What are you talking about?"

"I'm not messing around."

"You know, sooner or later you're going to realize that I can practically *read* your *mind*."

" I'm *not* messing around. I'm *not*."

"Ok then, what is it?"

Spitfire looked up at her brother. His care-free and expectant smile made her cringe. She looked away. There was no denying the inevitable. She could never keep it secret, especially from Rapidfire.

"C'mon," he said. "Tell me."

"I did something weird," said Spitfire. "Something bad. *Really* bad."

Rapidfire laughed. "Really? And what is this 'weird, bad thing' that you did?"

"I-" Spitfire began. She sighed and hit her head against the wall a few times.

Rapidfire raised his eyebrows. "Hmm?"

Spitfire looked at him, then buried her face in her hooves.

"I- I kissed Rainbow Dash."

A thick silence fell over them. Spitfire could feel the air as it solidified around her.

"Like..." Rapidfire began. "*Kissed* kissed? Like mouth to mouth kiss?"

Spitfire sat in silence. After a moment, Rapidfire began snorting with laughter.

"Ok, wait," he said. "Let's back up. Say what you just said again," his voice grew into chuckles, "because it sounded like you said that you-" He stopped and put a hoof to his mouth, stifling laughter

with obvious difficulty. "That you- you *kissed* Rainbow Dash."

Spitfire stood up and confronted her brother, planting a hoof on his chest. "Don't tell *any* pony, or I'll kill you. You hear me? I will get a knife, go into your room while you're sleeping, and *stab* you. Ok?"

Rapidfire's grin widened. "Oh, no no, don't worry. Your secret's safe with me." He broke down into laughter again.

Spitfire groaned loudly in frustration. "Will you listen to me! This is serious! My career, my life, maybe even *yours* could be in danger!"

"So how did the rainbow taste?" He said between laughs. "Would you say it was... *spicy*?" He lost it again.

"RAPIDFIRE!" Spitfire yelled.

"H- Hey," he said, trying to catch his breath. "Come on. Lighten up. Listen, we're heading down to Hoofbeat. DJ-Pon3's playing tonight, and the place is supposed to be packed. It should help you relax and take your mind off things. Sounds like you've had a pretty long day."

Spitfire sighed. Hoofbeat, the most famous nightclub in all of Equestria, was one of Spitfire's favorite places to relax. The hypnotic bass rhythm constantly beating her body, the packed floor full of other ponies where she danced among them as one; it was the only time she truly felt *normal*, as if her life had more meaning than just being famous.

"Is Dash going?" she asked.

"Of course. Why? You looking for some more face time?" He chuckled.

She opened her mouth to raise her voice at him, but stopped herself and sighed.

"Nevermind."

They made eye contact, just enough for Rapidfire to break into fits again. He held his stomach as he gasped desperately for air.

"K- *kissed* Rainbow Dash!"

Spitfire looked at her brother with a blank expression. He finally caught his breath and stood up.

"C- c'mon! Vinyl's already started her set! We need the captain of the Wonderbolts!" He went to the door and opened it. Spitfire's rump hit the floor as she watched her brother fly off into the moon, his laughter echoing off the neighboring buildings.

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Through the cool quiet of the deserted streets in downtown Manehattan, a low, pulsating rumble resounded through the air. Hoofbeat stood just off to the side of a high-end shopping mall, a line of ponies from the entrance stretching down the street, around the corner, and out of sight. Its simple, cubic shape and monochrome facade heavily contradicted the party of epic proportions that took place inside.

Comprised of a lower and upper level, the circular dance floor sat in the dead center. The balcony railing overlooked the packed floor full of ponies under the strobing, color and laser-ridden air above them. The DJ's booth towered over the floor, where Vinyl Scratch herself bobbed her head back and forth to the chest-punching bass, holding an earphone to the side of her head as she magicked around several switches and knobs.

Rainbow Dash stood against the wall with her forelegs crossed, hidden away in the dark corner. She stared with a blank expression into the hypnotic mass of dancing ponies as they lost themselves in the music.

"There you are," said a familiar voice.

Dash turned and saw Rapidfire walking up to her.

"Hey," she said.

"Come join the party! Why are you sitting back here all alone?"

"I'm not much of a partier," she lied.

"Are you kidding? You should be the *life* of the party right now! Everypony's ecstatic over you!"

Just then, the dance floor erupted in cheers as Soarin' climbed to the top of the DJ booth and dove into the crowd.

"Where's Spitfire?" said Dash.

"Oh, she's around." He laughed. "Your rainboom gave her a total hallucination earlier."

"What?"

"She said that she kissed you."

Dash's insides froze.

"Rainbows do some weird stuff to you," said Rapidfire.

"Heh, yeah. I guess."

An awkward silence fell over them as Rapidfire looked at her for an uncomfortably long period of time. Dash tried to distract him by looking into the crowd inquiringly.

"I want you to know something," he finally said. Dash met his eyes, the same dark-amber color as Spitfire's. His mouth formed into a heartfelt smile.

"You are the most amazing pegasus I've ever had the pleasure of knowing."

Startled, Dash nearly slid off the wall. "Oh, uh- um-"

"The rainboom was the most incredible, indescribable thing I've ever seen. You're extremely talented and smart." He paused for effect. "And beautiful."

Dash knew where this was going. She desperately looked for a way to escape, but Rapidfire had her cornered.

He put a hoof on Dash's cheek. "And I want you to know," he said at a barely audible whisper, "You mean more to me than just a co-flier. I want you to know that-"

"WHATDYA MEAN WE NEED A PASS?! NO PONY GETS BETWEEN ME AND A PARTY!"

Dash's ears perked up at the shrill sound of Pinkie Pie's voice as it cut through the air like a diamond knife. Dash shoved Rapidfire aside while he was still distracted, left the ground, and glided over the dance floor, drawing cheers from the crowd below. She landed at the entrance, where Silvertongue held a struggling Pinkie Pie in his huge forelegs.

“Dashie!” She squealed. “Tell this- guy- to- let us- IN!”

Dash peeked over Silvertongue’s shoulder and saw all five of her friends standing at the front of the long line.

“Rainbow Dash!” they said in unison.

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“I’m *not* going up there!”

“Why the hay not?”

“Because.”

“Because why?”

Spitfire stared at Soarin’s inquiring expression. “Just because.”

Soarin’ and Spitfire stood at the base of the DJ tower, just off to the side from the dance floor. Their argument drew several curious eyes.

“You *have* to say something. You’re the captain of the Wonderbolts.”

“Well why can’t *you* do it?”

“Because *I’m* not the captain of the *Wonderbolts!*”

Spitfire rolled her eyes.

“What the hay is wrong with you?” said Soarin’. “You *always* talk in front of ponies! Why can’t you do it now?”

“I just don’t want to.”

Soarin’ sighed heavily and grabbed her. “This is ridiculous.”

“Hey- NO! Stop! What are you-”

He dragged her through the air to the top of the DJ tower. The crowd caught sight of her and erupted into a loud cheer. She smiled nervously and waved a hoof. Vinyl Scratch stopped the music and picked up a microphone.

“Fillies and gentlecolts, I give you, Spitfire.”

As Vinyl gave her the microphone, her eyes darted around the crowd for Rainbow Dash. She was here, and she was watching. Her mind in a flurry of activity, she gave no thought to the first words from her mouth.

“Rainbow D- uh-”

Her mouth clamped. Her stomach turned to ice. The crowd cheered at the sound of Dash’s name as blood rushed to Spitfire’s face and darkened to a very impressive shade of scarlet.

"I- uh- I'd like to thank the crew from Mane Arena for coordinating the show." The crowd applauded. "The entourage, Jetstream, Silvertongue, um-" Her mind blanked as she tried to block Rainbow Dash out of her mind. "Uh, yeah. Thanks everypony for coming out tonight, and yeah. Party it up!" She made a hoof-pumping motion in the air and handed the microphone back to Vinyl. The audience slowly began to applaud.

Soarin' gave her an incredulous look as she gave the microphone back to a now befuddled Vinyl Scratch.

"And let's not forget the most awesome of awesome fliers around, Rainbow Dash!"

The crowd roared. Several pegasi lept into the air in a very extreme form of standing ovation.

"What was that?" said Soarin' as he and Spitfire landed.

"What was what?"

"That. What you just did."

Spitfire turned to walk away. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Soarin's hoof met her shoulder. "No, wait. You're gonna tell me what's going on."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"I don't *have* to tell you *anything*." She turned away again.

Soarin' reached for her shoulder. "What is the matter w-"

Spitfire slapped away his foreleg and her voice rose several dynamic levels. "Just lay off me, alright?!"

Soarin' stared completely bewildered as she walked away.



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“Rainbow, why do you keep glancing over your shoulder?”

Dash turned back to the table. “Huh? Oh, uh... nothing.” She turned her head the other direction.

Rainbow Dash sat with her five friends in a booth recessed into the wall. She jerked her head around each time she thought she heard her name.

“Well, the suite we had was *incredible*,” said Rarity, continuing the conversation. “We were above the Manehattan skyline and had the most dazzling view of the arena!”

“Yeah,” said Twilight. “That stadium is gigantic! We could see for *miles*. I’ve always wondered how magical engineering and architecture works, especially on huge buildings like that one.”

“I didn’t like it,” said Fluttershy from behind her mane.

“Oh, come now Fluttershy,” said Rarity. “You’re a pegasus! Pegasi aren’t supposed to *be* afraid of heights!”

Fluttershy took a side glance at Pinkie Pie, who was giggling uncontrollably at the pictures of famous DJs and electronic artists along the wall, all dressed in ridiculous outfits and large amounts of makeup.

“It was weird when we came out though,” said Applejack. “Everypony was cryin’, jumpin’ up and down, actin’ all happy.” She winced. “An’ makin’ out in broad daylight.”

“Yes, I thought that was rather... odd,” added Rarity. “Well, Rainbow Dash, that show of yours must have-” Rarity made eye contact with the back of Dash’s head. “Rainbow, my dear, are you alright?”

“Yeah,” said Applejack. “You’re actin’ kinda-”

Dash suddenly zipped back around. “Have you guys been noticing anything weird about everypony lately?”

“Uhh-” Twilight started.

“Because everypony, and I mean *everypony* is acting weird.”

“Dash, that’s what we were just talking about,” said Twilight. “Everypony just seems... really happy.”

“It’s the rainboom,” said Dash. “I think it *does* something to you. Remember when we were all fillies and you all saw it happen? Remember how we all got our cutie marks *at the same time?*”

“Interesting,” said Twilight. “It would explain a lot. But I’m curious as to how polychromatic magic would have an effect on psychological-

A random voice suddenly yelled out over the music, “RAINBOW DASH!”

Dash jumped ten feet in the air.

“I LOVE YOU, RAINBOW DASH!”

“Darling, relax!” said Rarity. “It’s only one of your fans! I mean really, what in Equestria has gotten into you?”

“So yer rainboom makes everypony happy and love ya,” said Applejack. “What’s the problem?”

Dash sighed. “Ok, if I tell you, do you promise not to tell anypony else?”

“Yes,” they said in unison.

“Ok. So after the show, Spitfire-”

“Yo Dash!”

Instead of reacting suddenly to Soarin’s voice behind her, she froze. Wherever Soarin’ was, Spitfire was bound to be with him.

His blue hoof landed on her shoulder. “Hey kid, wanna come hang with us for a bit?”

She slowly turned around. To her palpable relief, Soarin’ was with only Tyco and Misty. And to her slight surprise, Tyco had his foreleg around Misty’s neck.

“Well,” said Dash. “I’m kinda hanging with my friends right now-”

“Oh, Rainbow, It’s alright,” said Rarity. “You must go and enjoy yourself.”

“Yeah, we’ll still be here,” added Twilight. “We can chat some more later.”

“But- are you sure?”

“Go on, sugarcube,” said Applejack. “Live it up.”

“Well, I-”

“C’mon Dash,” said Soarin’. “Party’s waitin’ for ya.”

Dash looked back to her friends. “Ok- I guess.”

Shocked at her friends’ willingness to let her leave, she got up from the table and followed Soarin’. She had not expected it at all. It seemed like her friends would have wanted to hang out *all* the time, just as she did. Had they already come to terms with her newfound fame? Had they *disowned* her?

Ponies oged them as they walked through the crowd, hurling cheers and praise toward them every other second. They came to a circular booth where a few other ponies were already sitting.

Dash’s stomach turned over. She had made eye contact with the one pegasus she had hoped to avoid.

Soarin’ motioned Dash to the booth’s opening. “You first.”

No pony sat next to Spitfire, which meant Dash would have to if she went first. Panicked, her mind went blank.

“Uh-”

“Something wrong?” said Soarin’.

Dash could feel their eyes as they questioned her silently. She was back at the Wonderbolts headquarters, back in the chair as they stared her down. Whatever she did, she had to do it *now*.

“N- no- nothing.” Slowly and awkwardly, she climbed into the booth, forearms trembling and sweat trickling down her neck. She slid over to allow the other three Wonderbolts to follow and sat down, inches from Spitfire. Soarin’ slid in behind her, followed by Misty and Tyco. Dash looked up and made eye contact with Rapidfire. He winked, and she looked away. Spitfire seemed to emanate pure cold from her body.

“So!” Soarin’ began rather enthusiastically. “What are we doing?”

“You mean we don’t have a plan?” said Rapidfire.

Soarin’ shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t have a plan, do *you* have a plan?”

Rapidfire shrugged his shoulders back.

“Well what the hay are we gonna do?”

Dash heard giggles coming from her other side. She took a glance, and Tyco had his arm around Misty and his snout buried in her neck.

“Let’s get some shots, we’ll figure it out later,” said Rapidfire. “WAITER!”

A black-maned unicorn rushed up to the table with a pen and pad of paper floating next to him.

“Six shots, and bring the bottle.”

“Yes sir!” he said as he shot off into the crowd.

“Um,” said Dash. “*Shots?*”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Soarin’.

A split second later, the waiter returned with a tray of tiny water glasses and a dark-amber bottle.

“Thank you, sir,” said Soarin’ as he took the tray, uncorked the bottle, and began pouring a light-tan liquid into the glasses.

“Uh,” Spitfire said suddenly, and Dash jumped. “That’s probably not such a good id-”

“To Rainbow Dash,” said Soarin’ as he raised a glass. “The baddest most awesomest flier in Equestria.”

Rapidfire, Misty, and Tyco followed suit. Spitfire hesitated.

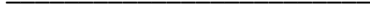
“Oh, come on Spitty,” said Rapidfire. “It’s a party.”

She sighed and reached for a glass. Dash now had no choice but to follow.

They clinged glasses. Dash watched as Soarin’ downed his in one gulp, then sighed with his mouth wide open. The others did the same, as well as Spitfire, who seemed to melt into her seat. Dash looked down at her glass.

“Go on,” said Rapidfire. “Once it’s down, you’ll forget you even drank it.”

Dash sighed, threw caution to the wind, and took a gulp. The entire world around her burned away in warm serenity.



< [Chapter 6](#) | [Chapter 8](#) >