

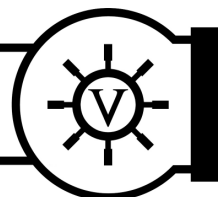
Best Young Flyer

bookplayer

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PONY FICTION VAULT



Hot Mares Where You Least Expect Them

Scotaloo dodged and wove through the air traffic on her way home from work. She heard other pegasi complain about how crowded the Cloudsdale skies were during rush hour, but a stop and go flight full of obstacles suited her quick, flitting style. Sometimes she pretended she was on that daring flight through the Everfree Forest where she had earned her pink and purple swooping star cutie mark just after she learned to fly. Even Rainbow Dash had been impressed with how she had dodged trees and branches with enough speed to get the potion they needed from Zecora.

Despite that, being a late flyer and having small wings left her doubting herself far too often. She had no speed in a straight race, and lacked the wing power needed for a lot of fancy tricks. She was pretty sure she wouldn't stand a chance in something like the Best Young Flyers competition.

The crowded airspace of the city soon gave way to clusters of cloud houses, and Scoot descended on a small plain one just outside the city. Home sweet home.

Scotaloo loved her little two-room cloud house. After living on the ground for so long, it felt like the real symbol that she was grown up, on her own, making her own choices and doing things her way. It didn't hurt that she quickly figured out that she could eat a whole jar of frosting, leave magazines all over the floor of her bedroom, and put her big autographed Wonderbolts poster right over the living room couch if she wanted to. Being grown up was awesome.

She tossed the saddlebag that held her lesson plans on the floor. Lesson plans were really the only thing she didn't like about her job as a junior flight instructor. She had so much fun sharing something she loved with a bunch of excited foals, but she'd rather teach the kids at their own pace than plan lessons and give tests.

She grabbed a packet of 'Hay-for-One' from the cabinet and curled up on the cloud she was using as a couch for the time being, glancing through a magazine as she ate her cheap, bland dinner. She finished the hay and crumpled the wrapper, tossing it across the room and nearly hitting the trash can. Then she looked back to her magazine and sighed a little.

The downside to being on her own was that she was sometimes lonely. She could fly down to Ponyville and see Apple Bloom, or to Canterlot to visit Sweetie Belle, but between the trips and not knowing if they might be busy she saved that for days off,

when she was really bored. She knew that she'd make some new friends eventually so for now she just entertained herself.

As the thought of entertaining herself crossed her mind, Scoot grinned impishly and tossed aside the magazine, then looked up to the Wonderbolts poster on the wall. Her eye traced the curve of the flank of the Wonderbolt on the far left, from the Wonderbolts symbol to the rainbow tail emerging from the outfit. Scootaloo remembered something else she could do whenever she wanted now that she lived alone.

From the time she got her first flood of hormones, she'd been thinking about that cyan flank. She had gone through phases of thinking that it might actually happen someday, but now she was old enough to see it for what it was: a school filly crush. Still, there was no reason not to let herself enjoy the thought every now and then, in the privacy of her own home.

She started teasing herself lightly as her mind brought up her favorite fantasy. Her and Dash, out flying, then landing on a cloud miles away from everything. A long kiss, Dash pushing her back into a cloud, and Dash's mouth and hooves all over her body.

When she had finished her mid-afternoon rendezvous with her hoof, she laid there with her eyes closed a while longer enjoying the afterglow and the slightly wicked feeling of just doing that in her living room. Then she laughed a little to herself and said softly, "Thanks, Dash."

"No problem. Glad I could help."

Scootaloo opened her eyes. That voice didn't come from her head.

Her face turned quickly towards the window, where Rainbow Dash herself was sitting there, smirking.

Scootaloo just stared at her, horrified, as the blush to end all blushes crept to her cheeks.

Dash flew in and landed, looking around. "Nice place, not bad for a first cloud house. You know, you shouldn't leave your windows open in Cloudsdale. Lots of air traffic."

As Dash walked over to the part of the large main room set aside as the kitchen, Scootaloo regained her power of speech. "Thanks. Um..."

Dash opened the refrigerator and looked inside. “Hey, your fridge looks like mine. I didn’t think you’d lived here long enough for carrots to go rubbery.” She closed the fridge and turned around with a smirk. “So, was I good? As if I have to ask.”

“Dash! What are you doing here? You weren’t supposed to –” Scootaloo jumped up suddenly, as if just realizing exactly what had happened. She flew to the kitchen and washed her hooves, wishing that she could just sink through the cloud floor. “I mean, um, heh. I know this is really weird, just please don’t hate me or anything.”

“Just here to check up on ya, kid. The folks back home asked me to keep an eye on you. So, why would I hate you? You think I’m hot. If that was a crime, half of Equestria would be banished.”

“Can we just pretend that never happened?”

“And why should I do that?” Dash teased.

“So that I don’t die of embarrassment.”

“I don’t know...” Dash pretended to consider it. “You’re kind of cute when you blush.”

Scoot rolled her eyes. “Dash! Please?”

Dash grinned. “No, I mean it. Really cute.”

Scoot hid her face in her hoof. There was no way Dash was ever going to let her live this down.

“So anyway, how’s work?” Dash said, changing the subject.

Scoot grinned with relief. “Great! Except for almost getting fired last Wednesday. But I didn’t get fired, so great!”

“What’d you do?”

“Well, see, I’ve got the remedial fliers. Some colt from the top class was picking on them, so I threatened to tie his wings and buck him off a cloud if he didn’t stop.”

“Way to go, squirt!” Dash said, offering her hoof for a bump.

Scoot grinned and bumped hooves. “Yeah, it turns out teachers aren’t really allowed to do that. I got a long talk about ‘handling problem students responsibly.’ But they let me off with a warning, and I haven’t seen that colt around since.”

“Sounds like you like it.”

“I do. At first I thought I’d get frustrated with the remedial kids, cause you don’t get to teach the cool stuff. But they work their wings off, and they get so excited at every success.” Scoot smiled. “Maybe I just know how bad they want it, you know?”

“Yeah. And with a teacher like you, they’ll be flying in no time.”

“I hope so. I’d love to see them all in the air.”

“Speaking of seeing pegasi in the air, guess which Wonderbolt is *not* on judge duty for this year’s Young Flyers Competition?”

“Fleetfoot,” Scoot said sarcastically.

“Well, she’s not, but that’s not important. What is important is that I’m a free agent, and allowed to offer myself out as personal trainer to anypony I think could be Equestria’s Best Young Flyer.” Dash gave her most charming smile.

“I’ll let you know if I see somepony,” Scootaloo said, smiling and rolling her eyes.

“Come on, Scoot! Soarin’ has this big ox of a guy he thinks is a shoo-in, and he’s really getting on my nerves. I know you could win it with my help!”

“If by ‘your help’ you mean you’re going to dye your coat, mane and tail and fly it for me, I’m all in.”

“You can do this. You have to at least try, or you’ll never know.”

“Never know what, that I would’ve been laughed out of the Colosseum? I can live with that.”

“Right Scoot. I’m asking you ‘cause I know you’ll lose. You know how much I *love* losing, and it’s not like I know anything about flying.” Dash laughed. “I think you’re the only pegasus to ever try and talk a Wonderbolt out of training them for the Young Flyers Competition.”

“When you put it that way...” Scoot hesitated. Public humiliation versus getting to hang out and fly with Rainbow Dash. She almost laughed at herself, it wasn’t even a question. “I’ll give it a shot. You know I’ll do my best for you, Dash. Just don’t expect too much.”

“Great!” Dash said with a big grin. “I’ve seen your best, kid. You give me that, you’ve already won the crown.”

Scoot smiled. “We’ll see. I’m not throwing away the empty take-out boxes to make a spot for it just yet.”

“Leave the take-out boxes, it would look better on the shelf next to the dead houseplant anyway.”

Scoot laughed. “That was a present from Apple Bloom. I tried to tell her that my place was a death sentence for plants, but she said I just had to water it and it’d be fine.”

“Did you water it?”

“Um... No?”

Dash laughed.

“Don’t tell her! I can hear it now, ‘Ya can’t even water a houseplant and they’re lettin’ ya teach foals to fly?’”

“Fluttershy gave me my Official Dead Houseplant for my first cloud house. When she found out it died, she insisted we have a funeral for it. It was hilarious! Well, to me at least.”

“Hold on, why are we talking about houseplants? Wonderbolt stories, now! What are you guys working on? I heard Spitfire pulled a wing, is she gonna be okay?”

“Spitfire’s fine. She has to take it easy for a few weeks, so she just bosses us more from the stands. As for what we’re working on, we’re trying this unison star pattern. You know how a star pattern can be rough, with all those 36 degree turns. Try doing it in line with three other flyers. Soarin’ always goes too fast and gets to the points before everypony else... which is a problem he has in other places too.”

Scoot laughed. “We were talking about the Wonderbolts, not your ex-coltfriend.”

“Yeah, well, I’m tired of his timing issues. Anyway, we’ll get it down eventually, if Spitfire screaming at us can make it happen. That usually works.”

“What will the Wonderbolts do if she ever retires?”

“Why do you think I’m training you? I’ve gotta get some screaming practice in.” Dash grinned.

“So you’re gonna go for captain when Spitfire leaves?”

“Can you think of a better pegasus for the job? You know me, Scoot. I’ve gotta keep flying for the top.”

“Oh, I know. And every time I think you got there, you find a new top to aim for.”

“Hey, I’ve gotta stay on top of my game if you’re coming up behind me, Miss Best Young Flyer,” Dash teased.

Scoot rolled her eyes, and Dash went on. “I’ve gotta head out. We have to go be Wonderbolts at this charity thing. But training, 2 o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Meet me out by the flight school, there should be some empty air there on the weekend.”

“Sure.”

“Oh, and Scoot?”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll see if I can show some more flank on next year’s poster,” she said with a wink. “Don’t wear out your hoof in the meantime.”

Scoot laughed nervously as Dash flew out the window. Then she walked over to the wall and attempted to bang her head against it. The cloud didn’t give the satisfying thud that regular walls would. She decided there might be a few problems with a cloud house after all.

• • •

Rainbow Dash smiled as she approached the flight school air fields. Scoot was already flying laps around the area. Dash knew she could count on Scoot to train to win; if there was one thing Scoot had it was determination.

Dash found the cloud with Scoot's saddle bags and water bottle, and waited a minute before Scoot noticed her and flew straight over.

"Warmed up?" Dash said as Scoot took a sip of water.

"Yup! Ready to go."

"Alright, let's get started! So, what's your wing power these days?" Dash asked as she retrieved a clipboard from her saddle bags.

"Still around 9." Scoot looked down. "Sorry, I know it's not much to work with. Small wings, ya know."

Dash nodded. Scoot's wings had always been smaller than average. They'd grown a lot since she was a kid, no one but a professional flyer would even notice the size now, but Dash knew that it would always be a sore spot for Scoot.

"It's good for your wing span, and we can get it up with training. Besides, I know how you fly. This routine isn't going to be about power, it's gonna be quick and sharp and undoubtedly awesome."

Scoot smiled. "Undoubtedly. So let's hear it."

"Slalom first, I know you can do that, it's practically how you got your cutie mark. Then a nice, controlled descending corkscrew, and finish with a five pointed star."

Scoot had been nodding until the last one. "What?! Dash, that's the trick you're working on with the Wonderbolts! There's no way I can –"

"Relax." Dash rolled her eyes. "Yours will be bigger, that makes it easier since there's more time to recover from the turns, and you don't have to be in sync with two other ponies. This is totally at your level, Scoot. Plus it's showy, and it matches your cutie mark. It's the perfect finale for you."

"I'm going to be doing this in front of *Wonderbolts*, Dash. *Wonderbolts* who are currently training to do the same trick! They'll notice if I have a feather out of place!" Scoot's eyes were wide, she was starting to panic. Dash had to get control of the situation.

"Then it's a good thing you have a *Wonderbolt* training you. Look, don't freak out on me now. We'll talk about this later, over dinner or something, for right now let's just work

on the descending corkscrew. Show me what you can do, and keep it even all the way down.”

Scout grinned and gave a little salute, then flew off.

Dash laid back on a cloud to watch. This trainer gig was way easier than actually doing the tricks. And while it wasn't as much fun, in this case there was an extra benefit in the form of watching a seriously hot mare the whole time.

Dash had a shot with pretty much any good looking pegasus, but there was something about Scootaloo that made her special. Probably that she somehow hadn't noticed that she had grown into one of the sexiest mares in Equestria, in Dash's opinion at least. The way her wind-swept pink mane and tail curled at the ends, those huge violet eyes and long lashes, and that lean, toned body with a perfectly rounded flank that no pony could match... for a kid with great taste in other ponies Scout seemed to have no clue about herself.

She was fun too, and a great flyer. Dash was looking forward to training her for more than just the eye candy. When she was hanging out with Scout she always felt more relaxed, like she could say or do anything and Scout would still think she was awesome.

Scootaloo had flown to the top of the sky by now, and started down in a loose but even spiral. Keeping the turns even was the hard part, but Dash wasn't surprised that Scout could do it. That was just how Scout flew, it was her talent. Dash decided that the trick was something they'd need to work on, though. It would have to be tighter to really wow the judges. But even that made Dash smile. More training sessions, more watching that orange body in flight.

As Scout got to the level of the cloud Dash was laying on, Dash called out, “Three more times! And make it as tight as you can get it!”

Scout just nodded, determined, and shot back into the air.

For a minute, Dash wondered if it was really fair to be looking at Scout's body like this. Then she thought about yesterday and decided that not only was it fair, but it made no sense for them both to be thinking about each other but not doing anything about it.

Catching Scout pleasuring herself yesterday had been amazing. Dash had been so turned on that it was all she could do to keep her wings down and act cool so she didn't freak Scout out more. She was sure now that she wanted a chance to get her hooves on Scout, to play a more direct role in something like that. But if that was going to happen, it

would have to be without all the annoying baggage that came with dating and love and stuff. Dash wasn't about to fall in love with Scootaloo, or anypony else really.

When she was younger, Rainbow Dash thought she was good at everything, or could be if she cared to try. But it turned out she was wrong. There was one thing she was really bad at, no matter how hard she tried. Relationships.

She'd had a few in her life, even some serious ones. Applejack, Soarin', she really thought those were going to work. She'd cared about them, they had stuff in common, they liked spending time together. But Dash always screwed it up. A few forgotten dates, missed birthdays, winks at other ponies at the wrong times. Then there were fights and things got said when ponies were angry, and finally the break-up. The Element of Loyalty hated break-ups.

With enough time to smooth things over she was still friends with both AJ and Soarin', but she'd given up on romance. As a Wonderbolt she had access to more than enough adoring ponies who didn't expect anything more than a night of fun, and she liked fun. She liked the short term excitement without all the messy emotional stuff.

So she hoped that with Scoot, she could have it all. Somepony cool to hang out with, somepony really sexy to have fun with, and no messy emotional stuff. If Scoot agreed, this would be perfect. And really, there wasn't much she couldn't get Scoot to agree to.

Scoot landed on the cloud next to Dash, out of breath. She leaned down and took a drink from her water bottle. With a thin layer of sweat on her coat and her hair wild from flying, she just looked that much hotter.

"How did I look?" Scoot asked, obliviously referring to her flying.

Dash just grinned. "Good! Really good. There's stuff to work on, but you'll get it, no question."

Scoot smiled. "I'll try."

"I know..." Dash nodded. Then she decided to go for it. Now or never. "Hey, I wanted to ask you something about yesterday."

"Um, yeah?" Scoot asked, blushing. Which Dash actually did think was totally cute.

Dash gave her best, winning smile. "If you think I'm so hot, why didn't you ever ask me out?"

Scoot looked embarrassed at first, then she grinned. “Because I didn’t want you to hurt yourself when you fell off a cloud laughing at me. It’s just a crush, Dash. I know it’s nothing.”

“Okay, but what if I wanted to give you a shot?”

Scootaloo blinked. “What?”

“You’re fun, you’re cute, and you think I’m hot. I’m not in the market for a marefriend right now, but we could just mess around, no strings attached. What do ya say?” Dash gave a little toss of her mane, a move that always drove ponies wild.

Scootaloo blinked again. “You mean it?”

Dash had to laugh a little. “Um, yeah? I said it, didn’t I?”

“But, why would you want to... I mean, I’m not...” Scoot’s confusion gave way to a slight frown. “Look, I appreciate it, I really really appreciate it, but you don’t have to feel sorry for me. I know I’ll meet somepony, some day. It’s cool.”

Dash raised an eyebrow. This was harder than she expected. “Oh, I know you’ll meet somepony. A mare as hot as you are can have whoever she wants. I was just hoping that in the meantime we could hang out and have some fun.”

“Will you stop that?”

“Stop what?”

Scoot rolled her eyes. “Saying I’m hot. We both know I’m the color of a carrot, my wings are stubby, and my mane looks like I put it in a blender. It’s obvious that you feel sorry for me, and I don’t want your pity. I’ll be fine.”

Dash blinked in confusion. Then she shook her head. “No way. You don’t have to sleep with me if you don’t want to, but there is no way I’m letting you think I feel sorry for you. Rainbow Dash does *not* sleep with ugly ponies. I asked you because you’re fun and pretty, and I’m way better in bed than your hoof. We both win here. That’s it.”

Some gears in Scoot’s head seemed to click into place and her eyes went wide. “You really want me?”

“Look, I’m getting really bored with this conversation. Either we can go to dinner and talk about the routine, or you can come back to my place and help me mess up my bed. It’s your choice.”

“I... I...” Scoot blinked. Then she started to grin. “I’ll race you back to your place!”

Dash grinned back. “You’re on. On your mark... get set... go!”

Rainbow Dash woke up with her face buried in somepony's mane. That was pretty normal. What wasn't normal was that this mane didn't smell like perfume or styling products, like the groupies or the ponies she picked up at clubs usually did. This mane smelled natural and... familiar. Like somepony she knew.

She grinned as she suddenly remembered what happened last night. This was so much cooler than some stranger. Last night had been awesome, and this morning there would be no awkward conversations and good byes. Just two ponies hanging out until it was time for Dash to head to Ponyville for her visit with her friends. She actually couldn't wait for Scoot to wake up.

Dash carefully lifted off from the large cloud bed and hovered over Scoot, close enough to whisper in her ear. "Scootaloo... hey, Scoot."

"Mrmph. Ten more minutes," Scoot said in her sleep.

"Having a good dream?"

"Mmmhmm," Scoot answered.

"It gets better if you wake up," Dash said, giggling. Then she nibbled the tip of Scoot's ear.

Scoot turned her head and half-opened her eyes, still groggy. Her eyes shot open the rest of the way when she saw Dash hovering above her. "Oh gosh, it's real?"

Dash landed hard on top of her, laughing. "This feels real, doesn't it?"

"Oof! Yeah. Real." Scoot started to grin. "So we... oh wow. Wow. Last night was... wow."

"Yes it was," Dash happily agreed.

"Should I, um, make you breakfast or something?"

Dash laughed. "Scoot, this is my house. You don't even know where the kitchen is."

Scoot's face fell a little. "Oh. Yeah."

"I barely know where the kitchen is, to be honest. I usually eat out," Dash said. Her cloud house was really more of a cloud mansion, as was befitting a Wonderbolt. It was really

impressive, with enough bedrooms for all her friends in case they ever came to visit. But it was usually easier for her to go to Ponyville, and Dash traveled a lot with the Wonderbolts, so she never saw most of her own house.

“But hey, I’ll take you out for breakfast,” Dash went on. She flew off of Scoot and landed on the other side of the bed. “So what are your plans for today? Gonna practice those corkscrews?”

Scoot smiled apologetically. “No. I mean, I totally would, but I have to meet Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle out at Sweet Apple Acres. Sweetie’s in Ponyville for the weekend, and we don’t get the chance to hang out much anymore. But I’ll try to get a little practice in, I promise.”

“Don’t sweat it. You think I don’t know that friends come first? I was headed to Ponyville today too, I try to go every week to see the girls. We could fly together.”

“Really? Cool!” Scoot said. “Where are you guys hanging out?”

“The spa.” Dash had to laugh at the disbelieving look on Scoot’s face. “Trust me, this beauty is 100% natural. But after the action you gave me last night I could seriously go for a massage... good job, by the way.”

“Thanks! You were...” Scoot searched for the words. “Exactly as unbelievably amazing as I thought you’d be?”

Dash grinned. “You wanna come back here after?”

“I’d love to, but...” Scoot hesitated. “I kind of have work tomorrow. All my stuff’s at my place, and I really should sleep.”

Dash laughed. “No problem. I leave tomorrow for a show in Las Pegasus, so I should get some sleep too. I don’t think Spitfire would like it if I let you wear me out again.”

Scoot blushed, but she was still grinning. “But we can do this again sometime, right? I mean, if you want.”

“Oh yeah. I definitely want. How about next Friday I pick you up after work, take you out on the town, then we can spend the weekend together?”

“Oh my gosh, that sounds amazing!”

Dash grinned and gave Scoot nuzzle on the cheek. “Cool. Let’s get cleaned up and hit the sky.”

• • •

A few hours later Dash flew in the front door of the spa in Ponyville, just a little late for her weekly meet-up with her friends. It was only after she’d learned that all of the Wonderbolts, male and female, got hooficures regularly that she’d finally given in and agreed that the spa wasn’t a bad place to get together and talk with her five best friends. She still avoided the wraps and facials, but a hooficure or a massage wasn’t out of the question and the hot tub was fun.

Besides, it let her see the girls, something she always tried to make time for. There was no way that getting to be a Wonderbolt was going to cost her the friendship of the ponies who’d helped to make that dream a reality.

“Heya,” Applejack said with a smile as Rainbow Dash flew over.

“Hey!” Dash said happily, landing on the next lounge chair over from where Applejack looked like she just got a massage. In the hot tub Rarity was telling Fluttershy and Pinkie about her new coltfriend, while Twilight sat on another lounge getting her horn filed.

Applejack hadn’t changed much in the years since Dash left, but Sweet Apple Acres certainly had. A second little house had been built there recently, right after AJ planted the peach orchard. The cause of all of that was a pretty peach farmer from Atlaneighta, Peaches N’ Cream, who was supposed to move into the new little house with Applejack after next harvest. Peaches was daintier than AJ, but could spend hours talking about farming and made a peach pie that gave AJ’s apple pie a run for its money. She was apparently showing Applejack how to buck peaches, a phrase that made Dash snicker every time she heard it.

Dash was never above teasing her best friend and former marefriend with stories of her wild exploits, especially now that AJ had retired from that kind of fun. She stretched her wings and gave AJ a grin. “I’m beat... Last night was a work out. I didn’t think she’d ever stop.”

Applejack rolled her eyes, as usual. “Did ya at least ask the pony’s name this time?”

“Oh, I know her name alright.”

“Must be serious then. When’s the weddin’?” AJ said, relaxing and closing her eyes.

“Not serious, just awesome,” Dash said happily, thinking about last night. “Me and Scoot are doing this thing where we just sleep together and –”

There was a loud crash as Applejack scrambled off the lounge chair. She had her hooves on the lounge Dash was sitting on before Twilight grabbed her in a field of magic, holding her back.

“WHAT DID YOU SAY? Tell me ya didn’t just say you’re messin’ around with Scootaloo, cause I’m gonna buck you to next year if you’re takin’ advantage of her!”

This was not the reaction Dash was expecting. “I’m totally not taking advantage of her! She’s a grown mare, and we have this agreement. It’s all out in the open, I don’t love her, she knows I don’t love her, and she doesn’t love me. She just thinks I’m hot and wants to sleep with me, and since she’s hot I’m totally okay with this idea. But if you wanna step outside...”

Their four friends were staring at them, and Applejack gave the rest of the group an exasperated look. “You can lemme down, Twilight. I ain’t gonna kill her... yet.”

Twilight let her go and Applejack returned to her lounge, then glared at Dash. “Rainbow Dash, you’ve lost your ever lovin’ mind. I *never* woulda thought you could do this to Scoot.”

Dash just smirked at her. “You’re just jealous that you don’t have a hot mare who’s just in it for fun.”

Applejack raised her eyebrows. “First off, my marefriend is plenty hot, and second, some ponies like havin’ a real relationship. But that ain’t the point.”

“She’s right,” Twilight added, also looking none too happy with Dash. “The point is that Scootaloo is already emotionally invested in you, no matter what she says. And she’s so young she probably doesn’t even know it. You’re going to break her heart, and I know you don’t want to do that. This is really irresponsible.”

Twilight still lived in the Library, even though she was considered an up and coming magical scholar. She credited her success in part to not getting wrapped up with the Canterlot ivory tower unicorns, though there was one with whom she’d authored quite a few papers and stayed with any time she was in Canterlot. Twilight claimed he was just a friend, but turning down a room in the castle to stay with somepony seemed more than friendly to Dash.

“Hey, Scoot is a grown mare. There’s no reason to think she can’t tell when she’s in love or not,” Dash said, crossing her front legs with a huff.

“Says the pony who’s never figured out how to tell whether *she’s* in love or not,” Applejack muttered.

“I knew you’d bring that up! Look AJ, I said I was –”

“I was just pointin’ out that it ain’t that easy, Sugarcube. Sometimes emotions can be kinda confusin’ when it comes to love and the like. And for somepony who’s just barely a mare, that goes double.”

Twilight nodded. “Dash, look at it this way. You’re way older than her, you have a lot more experience, you’re a Wonderbolt, you’re famous. You know that she worships you. You have all of the advantages in this relationship, it’s almost impossible for you to make an agreement as equals. It’s really not fair to Scootaloo.”

“Twilight, come on. I’d never try to hurt the kid! That’s why I’m being upfront about everything. If she doesn’t want to listen to me she’ll get her heart broken, but the same thing could happen with somepony her own age who wasn’t a Wonderbolt.”

“Then let somepony her own age break her heart,” Twilight said. “Not the pony she idolizes.”

Dash thought about it for a few moments. “Guys, I trust Scoot. She’s an adult, she can handle herself. And at least I know that I’m being honest with her, I’m not gonna lie to her or promise her things I can’t deliver. That’s better than almost anypony, any age would do.”

“Well I know I wouldn’t want to see Sweetie Belle involved in something as sordid as this,” Rarity chimed in, stepping out of the hot tub.

Rarity still designed out of the Carousel Boutique but also kept apartments in Canterlot and Manehattan, which she visited frequently for fashion shows and meetings with buyers. She seemed to have a new stallion every week, and every weekend she cried her eyes out to Spike about her most recent heartbreak over a bottle of wine. Dash wasn’t sure what was going on there, but Spike was taller than a pony now and looking pretty sleek, so that was between him and Rarity.

“Sweetie Belle doesn’t have a chance with me. She isn’t half as cool as Scoot,” Dash said with a grin.

“Rainbow, darling, if you like Scootaloo so much why don’t you try dating her properly? Love is blind, but it’s rather unseemly to use such a young mare for your own fun.”

“Hey, it’s her fun too. Believe me,” Dash said with a smirk.

“I bet Scootaloo would think that’s fun!” Pinkie said, leaning on the edge of the hot tub and grinning.

Pinkie had moved out of Sugarcube Corner, and had her own little house in town where she ran Pinkie’s Parties and Promotion, a party planning business that put on all of the biggest events in Equestria. Over the top didn’t begin to describe the things Pinkie could do if anypony gave her a big budget and free reign. Any information about her love life was lost in a stream of plans, ideas, and random musings. There was no pony serious, Dash knew that. Serious and Pinkie Pie didn’t belong in the same sentence.

“You know it!” Dash grinned, glad to have somepony agree with her.

Pinkie turned her head sideways. “Of course, she would also think it’s fun to stare of a picture of you on the wall. Maybe you should just let her do that instead!”

Dash blushed a little, thinking about that first time she’d gone to Scoot’s cloud house. “Heh, I’m pretty sure she thinks this is a lot more fun.”

“Yeah, well jumpin’ off somethin’ real high up is fun, least till ya hit the ground.”

“We both have wings,” Dash pointed out.

Applejack rolled her eyes. “It’s one of them metaphors.”

“Whatever.” Dash sighed and gave it one last shot. “Fluttershy? What do you think?”

Fluttershy still lived in her cottage, tending to her animals, and seemed to have changed the least of all of them. But secretly Applejack kept Dash updated on the number of times a week Fluttershy or Big Macintosh made some excuse for going to see one another. This had been going on for years, and Applejack was to the point of locking them both in the apple cellar until they got on with it already.

Fluttershy’s eyes went wide, as though she had sincerely hoped that Dash wouldn’t ask her that. “Well, um, since you asked... I just think – I hope Scootaloo doesn’t get her feelings hurt.”

Dash sighed. From Fluttershy that was about the same as AJ threatening to tear her limb from limb. “Alright, that’s it. This is the end of the conversation about Rainbow Dash’s sex life.”

“Hey, could ya make that for good?” Applejack said with a smirk.

Twilight giggled. “It’s the only subject I know more about than I want to.”

Rainbow Dash slumped back in her lounge, and hoped that maybe Scootaloo’s friends were more supportive.

• • •

“Of all of the crazy, stupid, mental, idiotic, insane, crazy –”

“You said crazy already,” Scootaloo said, rolling her eyes. The three ex-Cutie Mark Crusaders were in the orchard at Sweet Apple Acres, waiting for Apple Bloom to finish her chores for the day. Scoot grabbed an apple out of a bushel and started munching it as Sweetie Belle went on.

“Oh, it’s extra crazy! Of all of the crazy ideas you’ve had, Scootaloo, this is the worst. She’s ten years older than you, she’s a Wonderbolt, and you’ve been obsessed with her since before you had a cutie mark. So you’re just going to start sleeping with her, when you know she doesn’t love you, and you think it’s not going to hurt when she dumps you for somepony she actually likes?”

“Yefsh,” Scoot said, mouth full of apple.

“Argh! You’re crazy!”

Ever since Sweetie Belle got her cutie mark first, a ribbon of musical notes she got performing a song for Princess Celestia when the other Crusaders got sick before the performance, she acted like she was the responsible grown-up of the group. She would always be one of Scootaloo’s best friends, so Scoot put up with a lot from her. But that didn’t mean she had to pay attention to it.

“I think what Sweetie’s tryin’ to say is we just don’t wanna see ya get hurt,” Apple Bloom said, turning to buck another tree. Most of the work she did around the farm was keeping up the buildings and fences. Her cutie mark, a paint brush painting a red apple, was a symbol of her talent for keeping Sweet Apple Acres looking fresh and new. But it seemed that no pony who lived on the farm got out of applebucking.

“I know,” Scoot said. “I’m not gonna get hurt. Look, I know Rainbow Dash is never gonna fall in love with me. I’m amazed she’d even want to have sex with me! But since she does, that’s pretty much the most awesome thing that’s happened in my life so far. It’s totally enough. And if she goes on to somepony else, I’ll know that for a little while she wanted *me*.”

“You’re trying to tell us that you’re not in love with Rainbow Dash,” Sweetie Belle said flatly.

“Are you kidding? I think that might make me the creepiest friend ever. I’m pretty sure you can’t be somepony’s biggest fan, and be sleeping with them, and be in love with them when they don’t love you without crossing the line into restraining order territory.”

“So if ya ain’t in love with her, why’re you doin’ this again?”

“Because she’s only one of the sexiest ponies in Equestria. Number 8, according to *Pony* magazine’s 50 Sexiest Ponies. I don’t care how old she is, if one of the sexiest ponies in the world wants to sleep with you, you don’t say no!”

“Don’t ya care at all ‘bout findin’ somepony to really care about?” Apple Bloom pressed.

Scoot shrugged. “That’s another thing that’s cool about this. If I find somepony, I don’t have to worry about telling Dash. She’ll be just as happy for me as you guys will.”

Sweetie shot her a look. “Yeah. ‘There’s this cool, nice, normal pony who wants to date me, so I’ll stop sleeping with Rainbow Dash.’ Who thinks that sounds like something Scootaloo might say, *ever*?”

Scootaloo rolled her eyes.

“Nopony!” Sweetie answered herself, eyes wide. “Nopony thinks you would say that, because you would never say that. As long as she’s stringing you along, you’re never going to try to find a normal relationship.”

“I don’t see why you’re so worked up about this! She’ll probably get bored with me after she finishes training me for the Young Flyers Competition, anyway,” Scoot said with a half-hearted smile.

“Ya know that, and you’re just okay with her usin’ you like that?” Apple Bloom asked as she joined them, finished her bucking for the day.

“Yes! That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you guys. This isn’t a relationship, it’s never going to be a relationship, and either of us can drop it if we want to, for any reason. And that’s just fine with me.”

Apple Bloom shrugged and smiled a little. “Okay then, Scoot. If ya know all that, and it’s what ya want, I guess we oughta be happy for you.”

Scoot looked to Sweetie, who rolled her eyes. “I’m happy that you’re crazy, too.”

“Great! Wanna see the tricks we’ve been working on for the Young Flyers Competition?”

“That isn’t a euphemism for something, is it?” Sweetie asked, raising an eyebrow.

Scoot got up and stretched her wings. “A what-emism?”

Sweetie Belle just giggled. “Never mind.”

Later that night, alone in her cloud house, Scoot worked on her lesson plans. But mostly she thought about Rainbow Dash. It felt like in one weekend all of Scoot’s fantasies had come true. It was impossible, but it happened. And it might even happen again next weekend, if Dash didn’t meet somepony in Las Pegasus.

The second a worry crept in, Scoot pushed it out of the way. If Dash did meet somepony, she had still made Scoot’s dream a reality. That dream always ended on the cloud where it started, Scoot really couldn’t ask for more. And if somehow it happened again next weekend, she could be just as happy, and just as cool with it if that was all.

This was still just the fantasy, Scoot insisted to herself. Her and Rainbow Dash on the cloud. It was just way cooler because it happened to be real.

Scotaloo blew her whistle to gather her class. It was close to the end of the day on Friday, and their attention had started to wander.

“Alright kids, one more time!”

The six pegasus foals sighed and grumbled, but lined up next to each other.

“C’mon guys, get it together. Who here wants to fly?”

Six little hooves went up, and Scoot smiled. “Then you’d better give it your all. Standing around never got anypony into the air. Now, I want two minutes. That’s two minutes of flapping your wings for a lifetime of flying. Today might be your day, and it’s just waiting for you to try for two more minutes. So... everypony ready?”

Her pep talk had its desired effect: her six students nodded, their little faces determined.

“Alright, go!” she shouted. “Good job, Windy, just like that... Kite Tail, even flaps... better. You guys are doing awesome! Keep it up!”

“Miss Scoot! Miss Scoot!” a white foal called to her. She glanced over to see his rear legs pulled off the ground by his little wings.

“Keep going, Blizzard! Great job! Keep going just like that and try to reposition to the front just a little. Like I showed you last week, remember?”

The foal’s eyes were wide; this was the first time he’d gotten any sort of lift. Her words seemed to be washing over him in his excitement.

“Focus, Bliz! Focus on me. Twitch your wings forward. Come on, you can do this kid!”

Blizzard looked straight at her. He scrunched up his face and stuck out his tongue, and tried to make the delicate adjustment to his wings without losing lift.

Unfortunately, he overcompensated. His front legs lifted too fast while his hind legs dropped to the cloud, and he fell backwards onto the cloud.

Scoot blew her whistle and hurried over to him as the other five sets of wings stopped. The other kids crowded around her and Blizzard.

“You okay, Bliz?” she asked.

“Yeah!” he answered, sitting up and shaking his head. “That was awesome! I almost flew, Miss Scoot!”

“You sure did! That was amazing! You’re really getting it now. You’ll be in the air in no time. Now I want everypony to go home tonight and work on those wing movements. Don’t worry about lift, just flap and try to move them forward and back, the tiniest bits you can. If you can see them move to the front or back while you’re flapping it’s too much and it’ll throw you off balance. Got it?”

None of them answered. She looked up from Blizzard to see them all staring someplace behind her, their eyes wide and mouths hanging open.

Scoot glanced back and smiled. Rainbow Dash was hovering there, in uniform, with her coolest smile on her face. “Oh yeah, how would you guys like to meet a real Wonderbolt?”

In the time it took Scoot to blink, every one of her students was gathered beneath Dash. Scoot walked up behind the kids as Dash landed carefully.

“Class, I think you might have heard of Rainbow Dash.”

“Hey there, kids,” Dash said, eating up the attention from the awe struck foals.

“What are you doing here?” one little filly asked with a huge grin on her face.

“I’m here to see your teacher. Did she tell you guys I’m training her for the Best Young Flyers competition?”

Immediately the class’s attention shifted to Scootaloo, but with the exact same faces of amazement and wonder.

“You’re getting trained by a Wonderbolt?” Windy asked, her voice barely a squeak. “That is so... so...”

Scoot smiled. “Awesome? Yeah, I know. Rainbow Dash has been my friend since I was a foal like you guys. She helped me learn to fly, like I’m helping you. And I know I’ve said it before, but remember I was older than most of you when I finally got off the ground.”

“She’s right, but no pony has ever tried harder than Scoot. You guys have to give her one hundred and ten percent, ‘cause that’s what she gave me. Got it?”

The foals replied with shouts of “Yes!” and “Yes, ma’am.”

The horn blew, signaling the end of the school day, but none of the foals seemed ready to move.

“Hey guys, time to go home! Why don’t you go get your saddle bags, and maybe if you ask nicely Rainbow Dash will sign them for you.”

The foals scrambled across the clouds towards the school building, talking excitedly.

Scout turned and smiled at Dash. “So how was Las Pegasus?”

“It was okay. Same old drill. Practice, fly, party, practice, home.”

“Yeah, I’m sure practicing and flying with the Wonderbolts and going to the biggest parties is really boring. Maybe you can take a vacation and teach a few classes,” Scout said, smiling and rolling her eyes.

Dash grinned. “Hey, these kids look like fun.”

“They are. But it’s not exactly flying with the Wonderbolts in Las Pegasus.”

“Scootaloo!” a voice called from a couple of clouds over. Scout looked up to see another junior instructor, Skylark, a white pegasus with a dark blue mane and tail, and a golden feather cutie mark.

She flew over and landed next to Scout and Dash. “Hey, Scootaloo... oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to... interrupt. Aren’t you...?”

“This is Rainbow Dash. She’s a friend from way back. Dash, this is Skylark. What’s up, Sky?”

Skylark’s eyes went wide as she realized who Dash was. But for some reason that didn’t hold her attention, and she turned back to Scout, blushing. “I, um, wanted to ask if you wanted to get together this weekend to hang out. I mean, with a bunch of us. From the school. Not, like, you and me. Not that –”

“Actually, I’m kind of busy this weekend. Sorry.” Scout glanced at Dash. Dash was looking at Sky with a smirk, and Scout was left trying to guess why as she went on. “But I’d like to hang out with you guys sometime. I don’t have a lot of friends up here.”

“Okay! I’ll talk to you Monday. Um, see ya!” She took a few steps, then turned back. “Oh, and nice meeting you, Rainbow Dash.”

“Same here,” Dash said with that same smirk and a little wave.

Scout watched Sky leave, still trying to figure out why Dash was looking at her like that. Did Dash think Sky was cute? Sky was pretty, sure, but she didn’t seem like the type of pony Dash would go for. But then Dash had gone for Scout, so maybe she did want to ask Sky out.

“Dash, what did you think of –”

Scout turned to see that her class had returned, along with every other foal in the school. Obviously word got around that there was a Wonderbolt on campus. Dash had jumped right into signing autographs, leaving Scout with plenty of time to clean up her training space.

As she fluffed up the clouds in the area, she thought about Dash and Skylark. Scout refused to let herself be jealous, Dash wasn’t hers, and it was that simple. If Dash ever asked her about Sky, she’d arrange for them to meet. She’d still be friends with Dash, and she’d even try to be friends with Sky. It’d be disappointing, sure, but it wasn’t like she loved Dash or anything.

When more or less every foal in the school had their Rainbow Dash autograph, Dash flew over to Scout.

“Ready?” Dash asked with a grin.

Scout nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah!”

“Cool. We’ll stop by my place and drop off our stuff first. I know of this great club...”

• • •

A few hours later, Scout was standing in a dark club, drinking a cup of crumby pineapple juice. She watched Dash at the bar, waiting for her drink while a pale green pegasus with light blue hair tried to catch her eye. Dash noticed the pony as she turned around, and smiled at him. Scout held her breath.

But Dash just turned and flew back to where Scout was standing. That had been the 7th time in two hours, not that Scout was counting. She knew that Dash could do whatever

she wanted with who ever she wanted, but she would rather not have their weekend together end right after it started.

Scout wasn't too crazy about the club. It was dark and loud, there was dancing, which Scout didn't like, alcohol, which Scout didn't drink, and a lot of ponies with styled manes and make-up, which Scout didn't have and wasn't into.

The only cool thing here was Rainbow Dash, and she was about to start on her third drink in two hours.

"Having fun?" Dash said happily.

Scout tried to force a smile. "I guess."

Dash raised an eyebrow. "You need a drink."

"Nah."

"Why not?"

"I don't drink." Scout blushed a little.

"You're kidding," Dash said, grinning. "Come on, you're not a foal anymore."

"No, I mean, I've had drinks. That's kind of the problem," Scout said with a little laugh.

"What do you mean? I never heard anything about this."

"We weren't really supposed to tell you guys when we started sneaking alcohol, were we?" Scout grinned.

Dash laughed "I guess not. So what happened that was so bad you swore off the stuff forever?"

Scout blushed, but she was smiling as she explained, "Well, Snails had a party two years ago, and I kind of... told everypony I was a fillyfooler. I mean, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle knew, but I was hoping to tell everypony else in a mature and responsible way. Instead I kinda did it by getting trashed and saying it really loud to Diamond Tiara, then kissing her before she could say anything. She was drunk too, but she sure remembered *that* the next day."

“Well that’s one way to do it,” Dash said, eyes wide.

Scoot laughed “Yeah, but it wasn’t all bad. Sunny Daze asked me out the next weekend, so that was cool. I just Pinkie-promised Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle I’d never get like that again. So I just don’t drink.”

“But you can’t let something like that keep you from having fun,” Dash said, holding out a fruity, multicolored drink temptingly.

Scoot shook her head. “I don’t usually need a drink to have fun. You don’t usually need a drink to have fun either.”

“What do you mean? I always drink at clubs,” Dash said, slightly defensive.

“No, that’s totally cool,” Scoot said quickly, blushing. “...I just thought that you don’t drink much in Ponyville, and you seem to have fun there.”

“Well, yeah...” Dash relaxed a little and smiled. “But that’s a different kind of fun.”

“Yeah, I can see that.” Scoot nodded. “But which would you rather have?”

“I can have both, I don’t have to choose.”

Scoot raised her eyebrows. “Where would you *really* rather be right now? Here or... Sugarcube Corner?”

“I’d rather be...” Dash trailed off as she started to look confused. “Well, I mean...”

Dash grinned. “Come on, let’s go.”

Scoot felt a wave of relief as they left the crowded club and took off towards Ponyville. They had a nice long flight ahead of them, and delicious cupcakes, and then a whole weekend together after that. This was how she really wanted to spend her time with Dash. Even if she only had a few evenings like this, she could at least try to make them perfect.

• • •

An hour later, Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo were sitting in Sugarcube Corner with two bottles of Sweet Apple Acres apple juice and two of Mrs. Cake’s delicious cupcakes in

front of them. They talked and laughed, and it wasn't long before they were joined by Twilight and Spike, then Applejack and Apple Bloom, and finally Pinkie Pie.

At Dash's prompting, Scoot and Apple Bloom shared some stories about things they'd done that they weren't about to tell the older ponies at the time. Even AJ laughed at the story of how Scoot, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle had snuck off to Canterlot to go to a concert and gotten on the wrong train to come home.

The older ponies told some stories too, ones Scoot and Apple Bloom had heard but with details that had been left out to make Dash and AJ and the rest seem more responsible, or at least cooler to little foals. When it was time for the Cakes to close up shop, the group moved to Pinkie's new house for dancing and games, turning the evening into an impromptu party.

Dash had a really great time, and she was glad to see that Scoot seemed a lot happier as soon as they left the club. She had wanted to impress Scoot, but now she wasn't sure why. It was way more fun to just hang around with her.

On the flight home, Dash ran through the list of reasons why she ever wanted to go to clubs. To show off was a big one, but telling stories about being awesome to ponies whose admiration she actually cared about was way more fun. Picking up a hot pony was another, but she had one of those flying home with her anyway. Going to Sugarcube Corner had never seemed cool enough for a night out with any of the ponies she was usually with, but with Scoot it seemed like a way better deal than a club.

"Hey Dash!" Scoot called, pulling Dash from her thoughts. Dash looked up to see Scoot about ten yards ahead. They were just outside of Cloudsdale, but Dash must have slowed down as she was thinking.

"Race ya!" Scoot called, grinning, and she took off as fast as she could go.

Dash just grinned and started after her. There was no reason to complain about Scoot's head start, Dash caught up in no time. She slowed down when she had a healthy lead, grinning over her shoulder at Scoot. "Give in yet?"

Scoot was obviously flying her fastest, so she nodded. Then she seemed to notice something, and her face lit up. "I'll give... if you can catch me!"

Scoot banked hard to the left, and flew off into the night sky. As Dash followed, she realized that Scoot was heading into the area where the clouds were waiting to be sent out all over Equestria for tomorrow's weather.

Dash nearly caught up with Scoot time after time, but Scoot darted between clouds, over, under, changing directions mid loop to throw Dash off. Dash hadn't played games like this since... well, since Scoot was a kid. But Scoot was a lot better now, apparently she'd been practicing. Dash's power and speed meant that she frequently came close to bouncing off clouds, and sometimes crashed into one and had to reorient herself. But Scoot's smaller wings and lighter flying style let her flit through the clouds like a hummingbird between flowers.

Not to be outdone, the older pegasus flew up towards the full moon, waiting well above the field of clouds until she caught a flash of orange in the moonlight.

"Gotcha." She went into a dive, full speed. In just seconds she flew straight into her target, shoving them both down onto a cloud.

"I win," Dash said, grinning at the younger pegasus pinned beneath her. Scoot was grinning too, and they were both out of breath. Looking at that pretty face, Dash couldn't help but give her quick kiss.

Scoot just laughed. "As always. But I really don't mind losing like this."

"See? I can even make losing fun," Dash said, rolling from on top of Scootaloo.

Scoot smiled and looked up at the moon and stars, then around at the nearby clouds.

She pointed to one. "Think I could make it without wings?"

"Only one way to find out," Dash said with a grin.

Scoot grinned back, tucked in her wings, and leapt for the cloud.

She fell short by a long shot, plummeting towards the ground. After only a second she came flying back up, laughing. Dash had to laugh along with her.

"I guess that's a no."

"Stand back and watch a master," Dash said, backing up the two steps that their little cloud would allow, tucking her wings, and taking two steps to gain momentum as she launched herself at the cloud.

She felt the tips of her front hooves clip the edge, but she was no where near landing on it. She started to fall, but spread her wings and flew back to Scoot.

Scout was still laughing a little. “Oh yeah, you totally showed me.”

“That’s completely impossible.” Dash said, glaring at the cloud. “No pony could jump that.”

“Okay, I guess we’re stuck on this one forever,” Scout said, flopping down with a smile and a wink.

“Sounds good to me,” Dash said, laying next to Scout and nuzzling her chin.

Scout grinned and blushed, then hesitated. Finally she leaned over and nuzzled Rainbow Dash next to her ear. Dash responded by leaning her head up and catching Scout’s lips in a kiss.

When they parted, Scout whispered, “Wow.”

Dash laughed. “That’s, like, the tenth time I’ve kissed you and you keep saying that.”

“It’s gonna take some getting used to,” Scout said, still blushing. “It took me three months to stop saying it every time I lifted off, after I learned to fly.”

“I remember that. You finally stopped when you swallowed a moth.” Dash grinned.

Scout laughed. “That’s something I love about the clouds: No moths. I can keep being amazed as long as I want.”

“My kisses are amazing?” Dash said with a smirk.

“Everything about you is amazing! You know that. Your mane, your eyes, your body, your hooves, your –” Scout stopped as Dash put a hoof over her mouth.

“Shut up and kiss me again,” Dash said, looking into her eyes as she removed the hoof.

“On it.” Scout grinned as she leaned in with more certainty this time.

As their lips met again, Dash shifted on top of Scout and ran her hooves down her orange body. Dash could feel her own wings getting stiff, but there was something else happening that worried her. She knew she wanted Scout’s body, but right now she just wanted to kiss her, and look in her big violet eyes. She didn’t want this evening to end, everything about it had been so fun and perfect, all because of Scout.

Dash wrapped her forelegs around Scoot, and realized that she never wanted to let her go. She stubbornly put all of those annoying thoughts out of her mind, and went back to focusing on that orange body with all her attention.

A little over two weeks later Dash was standing in a long line in front of Sweet Apple Acres. She hated being up this early, long lines were boring, and there wasn't even cider at the end. At least she was close to the front, and to the shiny new rainbow colored stand where Apple Bloom was setting up a stack of jars of zap apple jam.

Dash was so focused on the prize that she didn't notice Applejack until she said, "I think you might be in the wrong line. Cider season don't start for a month or so."

Dash grinned and turned to her friend. "Oh I know, it's on my calendar. But Scoot had to work today, and I don't have practice until 2, so I thought I'd pick up some jam and surprise her. You know she loves the stuff."

"Huh," Applejack said, her brow knitted. She looked like she was trying to figure out a puzzle on Dash's face.

Dash raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"You just stopped down here first thing in the mornin' to wait in line for three hours to buy Scootaloo some zap apple jam?" Applejack asked.

"That's what I said," Dash pointed out.

AJ still looked confused. "And there's no special occasion or nothin'?"

"No."

"Right." Applejack nodded, then paused. "So... why'd you do it again?"

"Because it'll make her happy," Dash said, rolling her eyes. "Applejack, I was up way too early to be having this conversation."

Applejack chuckled a little. "Well you two enjoy your jam then."

"What is this about?" Dash asked, exasperated.

AJ smiled. "Dash, do me a favor. Say Scoot's name for me."

Dash looked skeptical. "Promise to explain what you're acting weird about."

"You got my word," AJ said with a nod.

“Fine. Scootaloo,” Dash said. Even though she was thoroughly frustrated with Applejack, a small smile crept onto her face.

Applejack started to laugh. “You got it bad.”

“What?! Tell me!”

“You’re in love, Sugarcube.”

Dash’s eyes went wide. “Oh no. No way. I don’t do love.”

Applejack smirked. “Right then. You just go on home and give Scoot her jam.”

“No, listen to me. There’s no way I can be in love. Not that Scoot isn’t probably the most awesome pony I’ve ever met, it’s just I don’t like being in love.”

“I don’t think ya get a say in it, Dash. Generally you just find the most awesome pony ya ever met, and your heart does the rest. So what’s so awesome ‘bout Scoot, if ya don’t mind me askin’?”

“Everything! She’s so much fun. She loves to just fly, for the heck of it. She’s teaching these little foals to fly and she has the funniest stories, but she never makes fun of them. She’s smart and beautiful and talented, but she never makes a big deal out of it. We can talk for hours about flying or tricks or stuff back here or... something like clouds that isn’t even really something to talk about, and she makes it silly and fun and interesting. She –” Dash frowned suddenly.

Applejack was smirking.

“Shut up,” Dash ordered.

“I didn’t say a word.”

“Well don’t,” Dash said, glaring at Applejack.

Applejack just smirked more.

Dash stared off with AJ, her narrowed eyes versus Applejack’s amused smile, until finally Dash groaned. “Argh. Fine. I admit it.”

“Admit what?” Applejack asked with mock innocence. “Whatever are ya talkin’ ‘bout, Rainbow Dash?”

Dash cringed. “I’m in love.”

“Well how ‘bout that.”

Dash couldn’t even be annoyed with the smug smile on AJ’s face, she was too busy trying to figure out what went wrong. “How did I fall in love? This is impossible. I never thought Scoot would be this cool.”

Applejack chuckled. “It’s not gonna kill ya, Dash. And I’m pretty darn sure that when ya tell Scoot it’ll make her whole life.”

Dash shook her head. “No way am I telling Scoot.”

AJ raised an eyebrow. “You’ll wait in line three hours for jam just to make her happy, but ya won’t tell her how ya feel?”

“If I tell her, she’ll be my marefriend,” Dash said. “Then there will be all that stuff I’m supposed to do, and I’ll screw it up again. I lost you and Soarin’ that way, I – I can’t lose Scoot! I never want to break up with her, so we just won’t be together to start with. We have the arrangement, right? Things can go on just like they are.”

Applejack just stared at her. “Dash, ya know how your friends are supposed to tell ya when you’re doin’ somethin’ really dumb? This is one of those times. You said Scoot ain’t in love with ya. Now, I can’t say I buy that, but she’s gonna be in love with somepony, someday, and if she thinks you don’t love her there’s a good chance she’ll be lookin’ someplace else.”

Dash grinned as the stand opened up and the line started to move. “Are you crazy? I’m her dream come true! I’m hot, I’m awesome, I’ll give her anything she could ever want, I’m gonna take her all around the world. I’ll be everything she could ever want in a marefriend, but just not really her marefriend.”

“Rainbow Dash, you listen to me,” Applejack said, following Dash as she made her way up to the stand. “This is a bad idea. None of that stuff you said matters as much as a simple ‘I love you.’ And I can guarantee that if you can’t give her that, one of these days it’ll break your heart.”

“Ha!” Dash laughed. “There’s no way Scoot is gonna break my heart. Don’t worry so much, AJ. This is all gonna work out.”

Applejack just rolled her eyes. “Ya know I’m always here for you.”

“I know it,” Dash said as she set down her bits and took her jar of jam.

Apple Bloom grinned at AJ. “You gonna sit and talk to your friends all day or do some work ‘round here?”

Applejack laughed a little. “Now you see here, I been runnin’ this farm since –”

“She sounds more like Granny Smith every day, don’t she?” Apple Bloom whispered loudly to Dash.

Applejack’s mouth fell open, and Dash snorted a few times before she fell over laughing.

• • •

After work Scoot dropped her stuff off at her house, then headed back to the school to get some training in. Dash was supposed to meet her later, after she finished her own practice. Scoot was looking forward to it, she looked forward to any time she got to spend with Dash, but especially practice where things were simple.

Scoot set up clouds at the corners of a pentagon in the sky. Dash had talked her into at least working on the star trick, with the promise of planning a back up trick in case she just couldn’t get it. The clouds set up at the points were just for training, in the competition she’d have to judge the points and distances and speed on her own while keeping her form perfect and turning the impossibly sharp corners. It was a lot to think about while flying, but right now it actually seemed easier than everything else between her and Dash.

Scoot felt like she was constantly on edge. She was trying to be a good friend, and a good lover, and doing everything she could to not act like she was Dash’s marefriend. But it kept seeming more and more complicated. Dash was so nice to her, they had such an awesome time together just hanging out, and Dash kept telling her about stuff she wanted them to do together, a trip to Las Pegasus or to some island she’d been to, a rock group she wanted them to see together.

And Scoot had to admit that it hurt a little each time she reminded herself that they might not be together for those trips and plans. They might not be together next

weekend, and she knew that she couldn't let herself dream that they would. As much as this hurt now, it would hurt even worse to fall in love.

She flew down to her starting point and cleared her mind, focusing on the trick at hand, trying to count the seconds each line took to fly, trying to keep her legs straight and flip her body at each sharp point. She flew the trick six times in a row. Each time she missed a cloud she went ahead and finished the crooked star, if she did this in the Best Young Flyers competition she wouldn't have time to just go back and start over. It was better to learn to recover from a mistake now.

After her sixth try, she glanced over at her water bottle and saw Rainbow Dash laying on the cloud next to it, grinning. Scoot had to smile as she flew over.

"Hey! How much did you see?"

"I caught two of them. You're looking pretty good," Dash said with an approving nod. "Oh yeah, and your flying isn't bad either."

Scoot laughed. "I was off course on the last one. I keep flying wide on the upper left line."

"Yeah, I noticed, but you'll get it. Keep your eye on the next cloud as you come out of the turn."

"I'll try," Scoot said.

"I'm telling you, you can do this. Don't look so down." Dash smiled and sat up. "I got something for you."

"Yeah?"

Dash pulled a jar of zap apple jam from her saddle bag. "Fresh from Sweet Apple Acres."

Scoot grinned. "Really? Wow! You didn't have to do that. You don't even like it!"

"It's not bad," Dash said with a shrug, smiling. "But *you* like it, that's why it's a present, right?"

"Yeah. I mean, it's my favorite! Thanks."

"No problem," Dash said, obviously proud of herself.

Scout carefully stowed it in one of her saddlebags sitting on the cloud. “So, um, wanna see me give it another couple tries? I know I have a lot of work to do on this one.”

“Yeah. Go for it.” Dash laid back on the cloud again. “Remember, keep your eyes on the next cloud.”

Scout gave a little salute. “Right!”

She took off, going into the trick again. But her mind wasn't on it, she was thinking about the zap apple jam. Why did Dash get that for her? It was nice, really nice. Should she get something for Dash? What in Equestria could she get for Dash? Something like candy or wine seemed impersonal, and she cared so much about Dash, and appreciated everything she did, and they were sleeping together after all. But if she got Dash something special, would Dash take it the wrong way? Would Dash say they had to stop if she thought Scout was getting too attached? Would –

“Scootaloo! Are you flapping your wings or flying?”

Scout stopped and looked down at Dash. Then she glanced around. She was so far off course she wasn't sure where she was supposed to be headed. A blush rose to her cheeks, and she called back, “Sorry! I'll, um, start again?”

“Try to stay awake this time!” Dash said, smiling.

“Will do!” She said, flying back to her starting position. She had to stop this. She had to focus. She had to win this for Dash, that's what she could give her. That was all Dash really wanted from her, and Scout could deliver.

Scout spent the next two hours in the air, barely stopping for water and to get pointers from Dash. She only quit for the evening when Dash insisted, seeming worried.

“You okay?”

Scout downed half of her water bottle. “Yeah. Yup, totally cool.”

“Scout, first you were so out of it you tried to do the trick sideways. Then you spent so long on practicing that I'm not sure you'll fly straight tomorrow. Something's wrong,” Dash said, concerned.

“Really, it's nothing. Just... stuff, you know?” She said, knowing there was no way she could talk to Dash about these things.

“Okay.” Dash nodded. “What can I do?”

Scoot smiled. “Nothing. Really. I mean, you got me zap apple jam. That’s more than enough.”

“Come back to my place tonight,” Dash said, flying over and wrapping a foreleg around Scoot. “I’ll pick up some dinner, and you can use the hot tub.”

“But I have work tomorrow. My stuff is at –”

“I’ll go get it for you. It’ll take me no time.” Dash smiled and nuzzled her cheek.

Scoot pulled away. “Dash, I couldn’t. I mean, it’s really great of you to offer. And that you got me jam, and helped me with this routine. I just can’t keep taking all of this from you.”

“I wanna help you, Scoot. Anything you need. I –” Dash hesitated for a second. “I’m your friend. I always look out for my friends, right?”

“Right,” Scoot said, looking down. The mention of friends brought to mind the two other ponies she really could talk to about this, but neither of them were here.

“Is it something with your friends?” Dash guessed.

Scotaloo shook her head. “No, I just miss them. But Apple Bloom is busy this time of year, and Sweetie’s in Manehattan for the next few weeks, and then they’ll both be busy with the Gala.”

Dash grinned. “They’ll both be there, right? Apple Bloom is helping AJ with catering, and Sweetie has hooves to shake.”

“Yeah. So I won’t get to see them until after that,” Scoot said with a sigh.

“What if you knew somepony with an extra ticket?” Dash said, still grinning. “Believe me, I know they’d appreciate having a friend there to hang out with.”

“That... that would be cool. I mean, unless there’s somepony else you’d rather ask. And if something comes up before then, I totally don’t mind.”

Dash wrapped her foreleg around Scoot again. “It’s yours. Fly down to the Carousel Boutique and get Rarity to throw together a dress for you tomorrow.”

Scoot smiled. “Okay. I’ll do that.”

Dash leaned in and whispered in her ear, “And come back to my place tonight.”

“Since you insist,” Scoot said, still smiling. The two pegasi strapped on their saddlebags and took off for Dash’s house.

• • •

The next evening, Scoot flew down to Ponyville and made her trip to the Boutique. As she flew into the store, Rarity looked up from her latest design. It looked really frilly, and Scoot hoped she wouldn’t end up in a dress like that.

Rarity smiled. “Hello Scootaloo, what brings you here?”

“Heya. I need a dress. For the Gala,” Scoot said awkwardly.

“For the Gala?” Rarity repeated.

“Yeah. Dash is taking me. But not, you know, a date or anything,” Scoot quickly added. “I’m going to see Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom, and Dash has to perform there.”

“I see...” Rarity said, eyeing Scoot. Then a big grin flashed across her face. “This. Is. Perfect! Stand still.”

Scoot stood still. She pretty much had to, because all of a sudden measuring tape, cloth, scissors and pins were whirling around her.

“Don’t you worry, my dear,” Rarity said, her horn glowing as she carefully watched all of the objects she had in motion. “I will design a dress for you that will make you impossible to ignore.”

“Um, thanks?” Scoot said.

“Now let’s see here... Rainbow is right, you do have a lovely figure. Something fitted, yet romantic should be perfect. Ra- I mean somepony will be sure to respond to that,” Rarity said, turning to a sketch pad as one by one the items floating around Scoot were set aside.

“Ooo-kay,” Scoot said cautiously. She was pretty sure Rarity had finally lost it.

“I have the perfect fabric. You’ll have to have your mane done, of course. I know somepony in Cloudsdale who will do a wonderful job. You’ll look smashing... There we are.” Rarity held up a piece of paper to Scoot. It was a dress, so she nodded.

Rarity turned towards a wall of shelves with bolts of fabric. “I believe I have all I need. One look at you in the dress I’m going to make is going to force those words out of her.”

Scoot just stared at Rarity, thoroughly confused. “Force what words out of who?”

Rarity looked up, surprised. “Oh! Um, no words. Nothing. Forget I said anything, darling. You just go to the Gala in a fabulous dress and have an amazing night.”

Scoot started to back out the door. “Sure, Rarity. No problem. Just... don’t work too hard, okay? Bye!”

Once she was safely back on the street, Scoot shook her head. She wasn’t sure if getting clothes was always like that, but if it was she sure was glad she didn’t have to wear them often.

“So, do I look okay?” Scootaloo asked as Rainbow Dash came to pick her up for the Gala.

Rarity had outdone herself on the dress, which was fitted towards the front but flared to drape over Scoot’s tail. The fabric started an orange-pink and faded through colors like a sunset until it reached a purple trim the same shade as Scoot’s eyes. The beauty shop Rarity had recommended for her mane had managed to tame the fly-away ends into soft curls and Scoot actually got all the way back to her house and got her dress on without messing it up.

“Scootaloo?” Dash blinked in surprise, still standing in the doorway. She was wearing her Wonderbolts uniform, and seemed to have brushed her mane. Scoot always thought she looked amazing in that uniform. It wasn’t so much her body, it was the proud smile Dash always had when she was wearing it.

“Yeah?” Scoot answered, a little confused.

Dash shook her head. “You look... wow. Fantastic! Oh my gosh, you look so good!”

“Thanks,” Scoot said, blushing and hoping it was true.

“Seriously,” Dash whispered, stepping forward and giving Scoot a nuzzle. “I mean, you’re usually hot, but right now you’re the most beautiful pony in all of Equestria.”

“Besides you,” Scoot said, giving a nuzzle back.

Dash opened her mouth, then closed it. Then she said, “You... might be hotter than me. You look amazing.”

“Dash! Stop it.” Scoot laughed.

Dash grinned. “Come on, I can’t wait to walk into the Gala with you next to me. Everypony there is gonna be staring at us.”

“Really?” Scoot asked suspiciously.

“Yup. If they like mares they’re gonna want us, and if they don’t they’ll wish they did. That’s how awesome we are,” Dash said with a cocky smile that made Scoot laugh again.

“Whatever you say, Dash.”

The sun was setting as they took off and flew together to Canterlot. Scoot avoided any fun moves while flying to try to keep her mane do and dress intact at least until she got to show them to Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom. Dash took the opportunity to warm up for her performance by flying ahead and showing off some of her tricks.

In between showing off, Dash made a few things very clear: The Gala sucked. Dash had a whole castle full of ponies who wanted to talk to her so that they could casually mention to their friends that they'd talked to her. Scoot was more than welcome in the Wonderbolts VIP section, but she'd have way more fun if she found Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom and hung out with them all night.

Scoot didn't mind. As soon as they arrived she set off to find her friends. Apple Bloom was easy, Scoot just followed the smells of baked goods to the kitchen. Apple Bloom was helping Applejack with the catering, but agreed to meet in the gardens just as soon as she was set free.

Scoot went looking for Sweetie Belle next, but Sweetie found her first. She was with two young stallions who both seemed determined to have her attention, so as soon as she spotted Scootaloo she grabbed her and insisted to the stallions that they had to powder their muzzles.

"You know I don't wear make up," Scoot said, raising an eyebrow as Sweetie dragged her out of the ballroom.

"Pretend," Sweetie said with a glare back toward the stallions. "Where are we meeting Apple Bloom?"

"The gardens," Scoot said, and Sweetie steered the two of them there.

Once they found a quiet area away from everypony else, Sweetie spent a few moments exclaiming over Scoot's dress and mane. Scoot did the same, Sweetie did look good in the shimmery deep purple dress that Rarity had made for her. It wasn't long after they started talking that Apple Bloom showed up in her satiny red dress, balancing a tray full of pastries on her back.

"Is that for all of us?" Sweetie asked.

"Nuh-uh, you guys get your own. This here's mine." Apple Bloom slid the tray to the ground and dug into a pie. "Mmm! This is amazin'!"

Scoot exchanged a confused glance with Sweetie, then asked, “Um, Apple Bloom? Didn’t you make all this stuff?”

“Nope. This is the stuff Applejack made with Peaches N’ Cream. Peach cobbler, and peach tarts and baked peaches... just look at it!” Apple Bloom gazed lovingly at the pile of treats.

“But isn’t that all the stuff you guys make,” Scoot pressed, “but with peaches instead of apples?”

“Yup!” Apple Bloom happily agreed.

“So how is it so amazing?” Sweetie Belle asked, no less confused.

“It’s peaches! Do y’all know how many apple tarts I’ve had in my life? How many apple fritters and apple pies and apple dumplin’s? This here’s a whole plate of pastries from Sweet Apple Acres with *no apples!* It’s like magic! Applejack better not mess it up with that mare, that’s all I’m sayin’.”

Sweetie looked at Scoot, who just shrugged.

The three of them fell into easy conversation about the pros and cons of the Gala, about colts Sweetie and Apple Bloom were dating, about work and family and home. They debated a visit to the sculpture garden, but decided that if the worst that could happen was destroying Equestria then there probably wasn’t fun to be had there that was worth it.

After a few hours of hanging out they were interrupted by another pony wandering through the gardens a little way away. It was a mare about their own age, a white pegasus with a deep blue mane wearing a gold gown. They stopped their conversation while she passed, but after watching her for a moment Scoot thought that she looked really familiar.

After blinking a few times, Scoot realized it. “Hey, I know that pony. Skylark! Over here!”

Skylark turned, and her mouth fell open. After a second she pulled herself together and trotted over, grinning. “Hi! I mean, um, hi Scootaloo.”

“Guys, this is Skylark, she teaches with me. These are my friends, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle,” Scoot said, gesturing to her friends. The girls smiled and shook hooves.

“It’s nice to meet ya,” Apple Bloom said with a grin.

“Thanks. You too,” Skylark replied politely. Then she turned back to Scoot and hesitated. Finally she said, “You look amazing. I mean, so do your friends. You all look good.”

“Thanks. You look nice too,” Scoot said.

“Thanks.” Skylark blushed. “So, these are your friend from where you grew up?”

Scoot nodded. “Yeah, we all grew up in Ponyville. Where are you from?”

“Here. Canterlot, that is, not the castle. But I’ve been to the castle a lot. My uncle is one of Princess Celestia’s charioteers, that’s why I’m here.” The words seemed to just tumble out of Skylark’s mouth, as though she wasn’t quite sure what she was saying.

Scoot found it kind of endearing. She grinned. “That’s awesome! You know Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom’s sisters are both Elements of Harmony.” Scoot blushed a little. “But I’m not really related to anyone important.”

“It’s over rated,” Sweetie said, rolling her eyes.

“But you’re friends with one of the Wonderbolts,” Skylark pointed out. “That is so cool.”

Scoot’s eyes lit up at the mention of Dash. “Yeah, well, she *is* really cool. She –”

“She’s training Scootaloo for the Best Young Flyer competition,” Sweetie cut in. “Scootaloo knows some really dazzling tricks.”

“Wow, really?” Skylark said, genuinely impressed.

Scoot smiled and looked down, pawing at the dirt. “Well, yeah, some. I just like them, ya know? I’m not aiming for the Wonderbolts or anything.”

“That’s good, because you’re a really great teacher. I don’t know how you’re so patient with those remedial foals. It’s really amazing, I wouldn’t know what to do with a kid that old who couldn’t fly.”

Scoot could feel herself blushing and narrowed her eyes. She still took it personally, she would always take it personally.

Sweetie Belle cringed, and Apple Bloom quickly stepped next to Scoot and said, “Scoot, we’re at the Gala. I ain’t sure this is the time.”

“It’s okay, Apple Bloom,” Scoot said, then she looked Skylark in the eye. “I was nine. When I learned to fly, I mean. And what you do with foals like I was is *you teach them to fly.*”

Skylark’s eyes went wide, and she looked mortified. “Ohmygosh, I didn’t mean anything. I can’t believe I said that, I’m such an – I’m so sorry. I mean, you’re training with a Wonderbolt for the Best Young Flyer competition? That’s so inspirational! And I know you’ll win.”

Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle relaxed as Scoot gave a laugh. “How do you know I’ll win?”

“I don’t know... I mean, you’re just so... cool.”

Scoot just smiled, and Sweetie gave Scoot a curious look. Scoot had no idea what Sweetie was trying to tell her and shrugged.

“Excuse us,” Sweetie said as she shoved Scoot off to the side. Scoot was surprised, and Sweetie kept shoving until they were behind some bushes.

“What’s going on? What was that look about?”

“Scootaloo, that pony is crazy about you!” Sweetie said as if she was stating the obvious.

“What, Skylark? Nah. I mean, she’s just friendly.” Scoot glanced back to where Skylark was nodding at something Apple Bloom was saying.

“She’s friendly *and* crazy about you. You have to ask her out,” Sweetie Belle insisted.

“No! I mean, I couldn’t. I’m – I’m here with Dash, remember?” Scoot said, feeling cornered.

Sweetie narrowed her eyes. “Rainbow Dash isn’t your marefriend, remember? I’m just telling you that there’s a nice, pretty pony over there who definitely wants you to ask her out. Somepony who probably *does* want to be your marefriend, and have a real relationship with you.”

Scoot looked at Skylark again. “She is nice, and pretty. But why would she like *me*?”

“I have no idea,” Sweetie said dryly. “Seriously, Scootaloo, you’re funny and nice and pretty. Anypony would be lucky to have you. So are you going to ask her out?”

“Um, yeah. Sure. But I’d have to stop seeing –”

Sweetie raised an eyebrow. “Rainbow Dash?”

Scoot bit her lip and nodded. The idea of not being with Dash hurt. It hurt more than it should have. They had so much fun together, and Dash was so gorgeous and amazing. And there were all those plans Dash was making about stuff they could do together. Scoot never wanted to give that up.

But those things hurt too. Because right now, Dash could be meeting somepony she’d fall in love with. Scoot knew she couldn’t just sit around and wait for that to happen, hoping for a future that wasn’t going to come. Not when there was a pretty, nice pony who might be able to really give her a future to look forward to. Ending things with Dash would hurt at first, but that was really only a matter of time, and at least this way she had a chance at love with somepony else.

Scoot nodded with resolve. “I’ll do it.”

“Great!” Sweetie grinned and hopped up and down. “I’ll pull Apple Bloom away, and you ask the question.”

“Got it.”

The two returned to Apple Bloom and Skylark. Apple Bloom was talking happily and pointing to items in what was left of her pile of treats.

“...And this one here’s a peach muffin!”

“Apple Bloom,” Sweetie said in a sing-song voice, “Scootaloo and I saw somepony with some kind of peach cupcake. Did you see those?”

“Nope! I didn’t know AJ was makin’ cupcakes! ‘Scuse me, Skylark, I gotta go check this out.”

“I’ll come too!” Sweetie said happily, following the earth pony away.

“Your friends are really nice,” Skylark said, smiling.

“Yeah, they are. Sorry about the lecture on peach pastries, Apple Bloom’s a little excited,” Scoot said, rolling her eyes a little.

“You know, I guessed that.”

There was a pause, and Scoot took a deep breath. Now or never. “So, I was wondering if maybe you wanted to go out sometime? Like a date or something?”

Skylark grinned, her eyes lit up and her wings fluttered her a few feet into the air. “Oh my gosh, I’d love it!” She gave an embarrassed smile and landed. “Wait, that totally wasn’t cool, was it?”

“It was kind of cute.” Scoot smiled, relaxing a little.

“Really?” Skylark said hopefully.

“Yeah. So, tell me some more about growing up in Canterlot...”

• • •

Behind the VIP rope, the Gala was exactly like it always was. That meant that Rainbow Dash had spent the past few hours talking to rich ponies who thought they knew something about flying, and explaining to them that they were wrong. She even tried to be polite for the most part. She was growing dangerously bored, but luckily it was only a few minutes until the performance.

Somepony touched her shoulder, and she was just about to tell them what they could do with their Wonderbolt Derby bets when the pony said, “Rainbow Dash, darling, you’re just the pony I was looking for.”

“You found me.” Dash grinned as she turned around.

Rarity smiled. “I thought you might know where I could find Scootaloo. I’m just dying to see how she looks tonight.”

“I think she’s someplace with Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom. That was her plan anyway,” Dash said with a shrug.

“I just saw the two of them at the buffet, but Scootaloo was nowhere to be seen. I was hoping that she’d be with you.” Rarity’s smile changed. “Did you like her dress?”

Dash grinned, and even blushed a little thinking about it. “Yeah. Oh yeah. Your magic and Scoot’s body are a dangerous combination.”

“I don’t suppose that inspired you to make any... declarations?” Rarity said with a leading hint in her eyes.

Dash raised an eyebrow. “What are you talking about?”

“I just thought that perhaps seeing the true potential of her beauty might be the last straw, and that maybe you’d finally admit your feelings.”

“Wait a minute, how did you know about that?” Dash said, narrowing her eyes.

“Well, Applejack mentioned it,” Rarity said. “But she wasn’t trying to spread rumors, Rainbow dear. She seemed concerned about you.”

Dash rolled her eyes and smiled a little. “Well she doesn’t need to be, and you don’t either. I’ve totally got this under control. I can’t mess up this relationship because there’s no relationship!”

“Perhaps that’s true,” Rarity said slowly. “But you will at least admit to having a friendship with Scootaloo, right? Doesn’t it seem like lying to her might endanger that?”

“I’m not lying,” Dash said, feeling slightly nervous all of a sudden. “I’m just not telling her everything.”

“Oh, well in that case.” Rarity sighed and rolled her eyes. “I think I’ll go and find Scootaloo and at least see how she looks.”

“I’ll come with you. I’m not about to pass up a chance to see her in that dress again. You did an awesome job.” Dash smiled and tried to relax.

“Not awesome enough, apparently,” Rarity muttered.

The two of them scanned each of the rooms of the Gala before Dash spotted a flash of sunset colors above the trees in the garden. As the two came closer, they could hear voices.

“That was amazing! You didn’t hit a single branch!”

“It was nothing.”

“That so was not nothing. Not everypony can fly like that in an evening gown. So it was amazing and you still look pretty.”

Scout laughed, and Rainbow Dash’s heart fell to her stomach as she saw Scout blushing and landing close to a white pegasus with a deep blue mane who looked vaguely familiar.

She and Rarity had stopped just outside the clearing where they sat. It was obvious that the two had been trying to get a little privacy. The thought made Dash clench her teeth.

There was totally nothing special about the girl Scout was with. She was kind of pretty, but next to Scout she couldn’t have looked more boring. Then it clicked, where Dash had seen her before.

“That’s – that’s just a friend. From work,” Dash whispered to Rarity. “She introduced me a few weeks ago. I mean, sure the girl has a crush on Scout, but Scout’s way out of her league, right? I mean, Scout belongs with somepony amazing...”

Rarity was glancing between Scout and Dash nervously, and she hesitated before saying, “...Oh yes, of course.”

“Right.” Dash nodded. “So there’s no way that she could...”

Rarity didn’t say anything.

“It’s totally nothing. I’ll ask her about it later,” Dash said, but she didn’t move. She felt like her eyes were glued to the two young pegasi laughing and talking in the moonlit garden. She was burning with jealousy, that was her mare, Scootaloo was hers.

But she wasn’t. Dash made sure of that.

“Rainbow?” Rarity said slowly.

“Yeah?” Dash said, still staring at them.

“I’m sorry. I tried to make that dress so that Scootaloo would be irresistible, and I’m afraid it may have worked too well.”

“I told you, it’s nothing,” Dash snapped. “I’ll go ask her right now if you –”

Suddenly she heard Spitfire’s voice call out to the garden. “Rainbow Dash, get your tail over here! You’re five minutes late.”

For a split second, Dash considered telling Spitfire that she and the Wonderbolts could get bucked. Dash had much more important things to worry about. But the small amount of self control she had, which existed only as a loyal friend and as a Wonderbolt, told her that there was nothing she was going to say in that garden that she couldn't say after the show.

And there was so much that she had to say after the show...

After the Wonderbolts' performance at the Gala, Scoot met up with Dash to fly home. Scoot was on top of the world, she had a great time with Sweetie and Apple Bloom, and then a pretty amazing time with Skylark. Dash seemed quiet, Scoot thought she probably had a much more boring time. But even if she was quiet, Scoot still had to talk to her. The sooner Scoot told her about Skylark, the easier it would be.

As they flew, Scoot tried to start the conversation. "I had an awesome time, thanks so much for bringing me Dash. I got to hang out with Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom, and I ran into Skylark..."

"Yeah?" Dash asked casually.

"Yeah." Scoot smiled a little and took a nervous breath. "I even asked her out, like, on a date..."

Dash was silent.

Scoot looked over at her, worried. "Dash? I mean, you know I've had a great time with you, right? But, you've gotta be getting bored with me, and I'd kinda like to have a real marefriend, ya know?"

The older pegasus was staring straight ahead.

"Dash? Please say something," Scoot pleaded. Dash couldn't be upset about this, could she? They'd agreed this was just until they found somepony else, and Dash had to know how hard it would be for Scoot to find somepony, she really had to jump at any chance she got.

"We... need to talk," Dash answered, banking to the side, towards some clouds waiting to cover Canterlot tomorrow.

Scoot followed, and landed on the clouds a few seconds after Dash.

She had barely tucked her wings in when Dash blurted out, "Scoot, I... I love you."

Scoot's mouth fell open, and she just stared at Dash.

Dash grinned. "I really love you. So don't go out with Skylark. I'll be your marefriend and it'll be awesome."

“But... but... why me? Why now?” Scoot couldn’t feel anything but utter confusion.

“I’ve been feeling this way for a while but I was... waiting until the time was right to tell you. Heh, you kind of made it so I had to tonight.” Dash rubbed the back of her neck nervously.

“Why?”

“So that you don’t go and fall in love with another pony?”

“No, I mean, why didn’t you tell me? Why wasn’t the time right? Why did you let me think –” Scoot remembered it suddenly, it all came flooding back. Every painful reminder that Dash wasn’t hers. Every hour of worry about seeming too clingy or about the other pony Dash would fall in love with any day now. That had all been for nothing, a waste of time. But only Dash had known that.

Scoot narrowed her eyes. “This is seriously uncool, Dash.”

“I’m sorry, Scoot... I thought you’d be happy,” Dash said, seeming pretty confused herself now.

“I thought I would be too!” Scoot snapped. “I didn’t know you were messing with me for who knows how long! How long, Dash? How long was I freaking out like an idiot while you were falling in love?”

“A month or so,” Dash said, looking worriedly at Scoot. “I didn’t know you were freaking out, you should have said something.”

“No, *you* should have said something! Because I was just trying to keep to the agreement that we both made. Apparently that agreement was only to make me crazy, you were allowed to feel however you wanted and I had to not fall in love with you.”

“Do you love me? Just tell me that, Scoot. I’ll make up for everything, I promise.” Dash was past worried and moving towards panicked.

“No, I don’t love you!” Scoot said with more ease than she ever could have imagined. Of course she never could have imagined being this angry at Dash. “Do you know what I put myself through, trying not to fall in love with you? All the time I spent reminding myself that this might be the last time I’d see you like this, that any other pony you smiled at might be the one you’d leave me for, all because I thought that little bit of pain was worth it to be with you...”

Dash's eyes were wide, as if she couldn't believe this was happening. "It's okay now, Scoot. You don't have to do that anymore. You can love me... Please love me."

"It's totally not okay! You thought I'd always be there, and I'd be happy enough just to be in the same room with you. That was what mattered, right? What about when I wasn't with you? Did you even think for a second about how I felt? That I might want a chance to love you and know you loved me, to think that maybe we had a future together?"

"I'm sorry, Scoot. I'm really –"

Scoot just glared at her and rose into the air. "Well don't worry about it now. You're a jerk, Rainbow Dash. I don't know why I ever cared about you."

"Scoot, wait, let me explain," Dash said, taking off as if to follow her.

"Let me go!" Scoot shouted.

She flew towards home as fast as she could. She knew she couldn't outfly Dash, so she just had to hope that she'd made herself perfectly clear. It seemed to have worked, Dash didn't follow her. When she got to her house she shoved open the door and flew straight to her bed, throwing herself on it and sobbing.

This was hooves down the worst night of her life. How could she have been so close to an unbelievable dream, but find it so hollow? She could have loved Dash so easily. Or she always thought she could have. She never thought that Dash could be so selfish, so unfair.

This whole thing was unfair. Dash had no right to be selfish with her love when she had everything! She knew how little Scoot had, Dash knew the dreams Scoot had given up along the way because they just weren't possible. Dash never had to give up those dreams, is that why she just couldn't see how much a dream like being with her would mean to Scoot?

Rainbow Dash had been flying since before she could walk, and Scoot had struggled for years to get off the ground. Rainbow Dash had large, strong wings and an athletic build, Scoot's wings were small and any muscle she had was hard earned. Dash had been a Wonderbolt from birth. All she had to do was reach for it and it was hers. Scoot could have worked her whole life and never had a chance.

Rainbow Dash could fall in love with whoever she wanted, and Scoot had to wait and hope that someday, somepony would notice her.

And Rainbow Dash herself had noticed her, and loved her, and didn't bother to tell her! Dash could never make Scoot a serious flyer, and she couldn't help Scoot fly before it was time for her to figure it out, but Dash could have made a dream she didn't even dare to imagine come true, and she didn't. She just didn't say anything, and would never have said anything if Scoot hadn't threatened to actually take something away from Rainbow Dash, the pony who always got everything.

Well not this time. Scoot didn't have a lot of room to dream, but she could dream of a marefriend who wasn't a lying, self-centered jerk. A marefriend who would care about how she felt, and who would make sure Scoot knew how much she cared. And since Dash obviously couldn't handle that she'd have to find another adoring fan to use however she wanted.

Not that that would be hard for Rainbow Dash.

Scoot cried herself to sleep, furious at Rainbow Dash, herself, and everypony in all of Equestria for existing in general.

• • •

Rainbow Dash opened her eyes to find she was being assaulted by the evil, painful brightness of a sunny day. She knew she had been drinking the night before, and worse than that she knew *why* she had been drinking the night before. She didn't know why she was sleeping someplace so uncomfortable and bright. At least, she didn't until somepony spoke.

“Um, Rainbow, are you awake? I mean, I'm sorry I woke you, if you were asleep that is. I just thought that maybe you would want to, um, wake up? Or at least move to the couch? Or you can stay on the floor if you want to, I don't mind.”

The floor of Fluttershy's cottage. That made some sense. She considered that the couch might be more comfortable than the floor, but the idea of moving meant that eventually she'd have to wake up. And waking up meant facing a world where last night had happened. Here she just felt numb, which was the best of all possible feelings given what had happened.

“I'm never moving again.”

“Oh. Okay then,” Fluttershy said, apparently content to let Dash lay on her floor forever.

“Fluttershy? What happened last night?” Dash asked. She had all of the pieces, the Gala, the cloud, someplace with alcohol, and here, but she wasn’t sure how they all fit together.

“Well, I think you had some sort of fight with Scootaloo –”

“Not that part.” Dash cringed. She remembered that part too well. “After.”

“I’m not sure. I mean, I think I’m not sure. You must have had something to drink, and you knocked on my door, and you were crying. So I brought you inside and tried to find out what was wrong, but, um, all I could understand was that you and Sco-

“Stop saying that name,” Dash growled.

Fluttershy jumped a little. “Sorry! Was that you and... somepony? Had a big fight.”

Dash sighed. “It wasn’t a fight.”

“Oh, good.”

“She just called me a jerk. Then she left me.”

“Oh Rainbow, I’m so sorry!” Fluttershy said sincerely. “I’m sure she didn’t mean it.”

“She meant it. Because I was a jerk. So I ruined everything, just like always.” Dash closed her eyes. “What’s wrong with me, Fluttershy?”

“You don’t ruin everything always,” Fluttershy said, sitting down next to her. “And there’s... well there’s nothing wrong with you.”

“Yeah, there is. ‘Cause I had the perfect pony, beautiful and fun and crazy about me, and I managed to convince her that I’m a jerk. I think that takes talent, right? I’m Equestria’s best loser.”

Fluttershy stroked her mane. “You’re not a loser. You’re a Wonderbolt...”

Dash rolled her eyes. “A Wonderbolt who’s going to die alone.”

“...and a wonderful friend. You’ve saved Equestria. You’re an amazing pony.”

“I know.” Dash sighed. “So why couldn’t I show her that? No, it’s dumber than that. She already thought I was amazing. All I had to do was not make her think I was a jerk. Why couldn’t I just not be a jerk to the one pony who really mattered?”

“Um...” Fluttershy hesitated, and then said even more softly than usual, “I don’t think you want me to answer that.”

“Go ahead,” Dash said flatly.

“Well, I think that maybe... when it comes to ponies you love, you might be a little, well... scared?” Fluttershy squeaked the last word.

Dash’s eye’s shot open, and she started to sit up. “Scared? Me? Do you know who you’re talking to?”

“The pony who didn’t want to tell the mare she loved that she loved her because she didn’t want to break up with her someday?”

“Oh... yeah,” Dash admitted, falling back to the floor. “So if that was true, that I was...”

“Scared?”

“Yeah, that. If that’s true... why? Love isn’t supposed to be scary! No pony else is scared of love. I mean, except you.”

“I’m not scared of love. I’m scared of talking to ponies,” Fluttershy pointed out.

“Great. So literally no pony, including you, is scared of love. So why would I be?”

“Because you’re not good at it. No pony is, really, but most other ponies can just work at what they aren’t good at until they get it right. You’re good at everything you do, so you don’t know how to keep trying something you’re not good at. It makes you feel like a failure, and you hate that.”

“Hey, I work at things until I’m good at them,” Dash said.

“No, you practice things you’re good at until you’re the best. I know you’ve always worked hard at your flying, but you were already talented. You never started out like me or Sco– other ponies, not even able to get into the air. But it seems like in love you can’t get into the air, and that scares you.”

Dash just laid there, letting her silence concede the point.

“So, um, did you want to get up off the floor? Not that you have to,” Fluttershy asked softly.

“I told you, I’m never moving again.”

“Well... I suppose I’ll just tell Angel to dust around you, in that case.”

“Sounds great.”

Plans had been made for Scootaloo to get together with her friends the day after her date, mostly to keep Sweetie Belle's head from exploding. So the next Saturday she landed in the farm yard of Sweet Apple Acres to find Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom already waiting.

Sweetie nearly pounced on her. "How did the date go? Are you going out again?"

"I don't know..." Scoot said with a sigh. "It was okay, I guess. I told her I'd talk to her Monday at school."

"'Okay' doesn't sound good," Sweetie Belle said suspiciously.

"Scoot don't sound good," Apple Bloom pointed out. "You okay?"

"I guess," Scoot grumbled. "Just kind of... I had a fight with Rainbow Dash. When I told her about Skylark."

Sweetie rolled her eyes. "Gee, who could've seen that one coming?"

Scoot shot Sweetie a glare. "It was because she told me she loves me."

"What!?! *Rainbow Dash* said that she *loves* you?" Sweetie asked, her mouth hanging open.

"Yeah. And she's been in love with me for a month now, and she wasn't going to tell me."

Apple Bloom looked confused. "Why would she do a thing like that?"

"Yeah," Sweetie agreed. "I mean, if she really loved you why didn't she tell you?"

"If she really loved me, she *would* have told me!" Scoot snapped. "Not waited 'til the last minute! Rainbow Dash is a lying, self centered, selfish –" She felt a hoof clap over her mouth. Sweetie was smiling nervously, and the reason why became clear when Apple Bloom spoke up.

"Heya, Sis! How's it goin'?"

"Good," Applejack said, walking by with a bushel of apples on her back. She stopped and smiled at the three friends. "Scootaloo can go on. I'm pretty sure she don't know any words for Dash that I ain't called that mare myself at one time or another."

“I won’t say it,” Scoot said with a sigh. “You’re Dash’s friend.”

“I’m also her ex-marefriend. Welcome to the club, ya paid your dues already.” Applejack chuckled.

Scoot just let out a little snort. “I never got to be her marefriend. I just skipped to the ex part.”

Applejack’s expression changed to a look of sympathy. “I’m sorry, sugarcube.” Then she turned to Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom. “Y’all mind if me and Scoot have a word?”

The two shook their heads, and Applejack motioned for Scoot to follow her into the barn. Scoot went in behind her.

Inside, Applejack slid the bushel off her back and turned to Scoot with a sad smile. “Now you let me say my piece, then you can go right back to tellin’ me just what Dash is, where she can go, and what she can do to herself when she gets there.”

Scoot almost laughed. “Okay.”

“I know you’re pretty mad at Dash right now. And you got every right to be,” Applejack said with a firm nod. “But I know you’re pretty hurt, too.”

Scoot didn’t say anything, and AJ went on softly.

“Scootaloo, either way you gotta realize somethin’. Rainbow Dash is a pony. Just a pony, like you. Not quite as bright as you, now that I think ‘bout it.”

“I don’t care what she is. She lied to me. She broke our agreement.”

“That she did. Cause she’s just a pony. And sometimes a pony forgets things, or doesn’t realize somethin’s important ‘til it’s too late. But I can tell ya she never meant to hurt ya. She really cares about ya, Scoot.”

Scoot looked down. Finally, she whispered. “Applejack, I – I wanted it. The whole time. And she just kept it from me, and she would have gone on keeping it from me... She ruined it all.”

“That she did. And when she’s pulled herself together, everypony is gonna have a heapin’ helpin’ of I-told-ya-so for her. But you gotta understand that what she ruined wasn’t

some dream where ya fly off into the sunset. She was probably gonna do somethin' like this someday anyhow, cause that's what she does."

Scotaloo looked up and blinked.

Applejack raised her eyebrows. "She's just a pony, Scoot. She messes up just like alla us."

"I can't forgive her for this," Scoot said, cautiously. She knew she couldn't. Or, she thought she knew she couldn't.

"I ain't sayin' you oughta. Trust me, I understand, I got tired of it ages ago. I always kinda hoped she'd find somepony to help her out some, to tell her when she's done wrong and show her how to act right. She needs all the help she can get, but Celestia knows I ain't as patient as all that."

"She didn't do this to hurt me, right?" Scoot asked, almost hopefully.

"Course she didn't, Dash would never hurt a pony on purpose. She does it enough on accident, but she'd die to keep a pony she loves from gettin' hurt, and you know that's the truth," Applejack said with a firm nod.

Scoot tilted her head to the side. "Then why did she do it?"

"She was scared of losin' you," Applejack said plainly. "Thought if she never had ya, she'd never get hurt. It never crossed her mind how you might be feelin', she just figured she could make ya happy enough to stick around. It was darn selfish, and dumb to boot."

"It was," Scoot said, deep in thought. The story of what had happened was rewriting itself in her mind, with a lot less drama than she'd been remembering the past week.

"Well, I said my piece, sugarcube." Applejack patted her on the shoulder. "You seem to be feelin' a little better. Or at least not as likely to be sendin' Dash to Tartarus for actin' foolish."

"You gave me some stuff to think about, Applejack." Scotaloo gave a small smile. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it," Applejack said cheerfully. "Now if you'll excuse me, I got work to do."

Scoot walked back out of the barn and found her friends waiting just outside. She still felt kind of dazed.

“What did Applejack say?” Sweetie Belle asked.

“She said that Dash is just a pony,” Scoot said, slowly.

Apple Bloom raised an eyebrow. “Well I coulda told ya that.”

Scoot tried to think of how to explain it. “It helped. I mean, I knew she was a pony, but I never thought about that in terms of... stuff.”

Sweetie rolled her eyes. “I am so getting you a dictionary for Hearth’s Warming.”

Scoot went on. “Like, I know that sometimes things go wrong when she’s flying, or she gets frosting on her nose when she eats a cupcake, or she gets her head stuck in the wall when things get wild in bed –”

Apple Bloom’s head tilted to the side in confusion. “Gets her *head* stuck in the wall?”

Scoot shrugged. “It’s a cloud house thing.”

“Pegasi are weird,” Apple Bloom said to Sweetie Belle, who nodded in response.

“That’s not the point. Anyway, I know that stuff, and it’s always been like, ‘isn’t that funny? Rainbow Dash does those things like a normal pony.’ But she’s not doing those things *like* a normal pony. She *is* a normal pony.

Sweetie Belle wasn’t surprised by this revelation. “Rainbow Dash is a pony. We’ve established this. So?”

“So... she messed up,” Scoot said with a sad shrug. “She just messed up, is all. It stinks, because things could have been really cool, but... I shouldn’t be so angry at her.”

“So are you going back to her?” Sweetie asked.

“No. I – I don’t really know what I think of her now. I mean, I knew I wanted to be with Rainbow Dash the awesome, the amazing, the spectacular, the –”

“So *now* you have a vocabulary.” Sweetie smiled. “We get it.”

Scout stuck her tongue out, then finished. “I never really thought about Dash, the normal pony.”

“Are you going out with Skylark again?” Sweetie asked.

“I don’t know. I’m really confused right now, guys.”

Apple Bloom nuzzled Scout. “How ‘bout if we just give Scout some time to think it over, and we have some fun ‘round Ponyville?”

“I like that idea.” Scout got a big teasing grin on her face. “Let’s try to get another cutie mark, I’m tired of this one.”

Sweetie Belle laughed. “Sure, it’s been ages since I had to wash tree sap out of my mane.”

“Ya know I always had a good feeling ‘bout firework designin’, but I went and got my cutie mark before we could try it out.” Apple Bloom started to giggle.

“YES!” Scout said, stomping her hoof on the ground. “I’m sure that’s what my cutie mark was supposed to be in. We should’ve tried, there’s no way that could’ve possibly gone wrong.”

“You’re right, and Rarity had plenty of room in the boutique to try it out! She wouldn’t have minded three fillies playing with explosives in a room full of flammable cloth.”

“How ‘xactly are we still alive, y’all?”

Sweetie shook her head. “Honestly, I have no idea.”

“We’re too awesome to die,” Scout pointed out.

The three ponies took off towards town, laughing and joking and having fun. Scout was still feeling a little like her world was flipped upside-down, but it was nice to know that something like time with her friends would never change.

• • •

Dash watched Scootaloo practice her Best Young Flyer routine from a safe distance away. The fact that Scout was practicing was a good sign, she thought. Scout hadn’t decided to trash any connection they had, and this gave Dash a reason to go over and apologize.

Dash made it a point to stay friends with ponies she broke up with. First, because she must have liked those ponies for some reason. And second, because it was proof that she wasn't usually a jerk, she was just really bad at love. Soarin' and AJ would both agree that Dash was pretty awesome, just not cut out for a relationship. And she hoped that maybe Scoot would too.

She flew closer, landing on a cloud below Scoot's practice area. Dash laid back and watched, letting her mind wander. Scoot was still beautiful, but Dash really didn't want to think about that now so she gave her thoughts a shove in a different direction. Scoot was an amazing flyer.

Who would've thought it, all those years ago. Dash had wondered sometimes if there was something wrong with the kid, a lot of ponies had, but nopony would ever say it to her face. Good thing they didn't, because they'd be eating their words right now if they could see Scoot weaving through the clouds, then going into her tight corkscrew dive.

That kid never gave up. When every other pegasus in town had learned to fly already, she was still working. She did the same thing with her cutie mark. Dash had to admire it, the ability to keep working at something everypony else could do, while they all looked at her and wondered why she couldn't get something so simple. Thinking back to what Fluttershy pointed out the other day, Dash was a little bit jealous of it.

Dash watched closely as Scoot went into the star trick that had been giving her so much trouble. She was going perfectly with no clouds for guidance anymore, but she came in a little low on the left point. There was no question in Dash's mind that by the competition next weekend, Scoot would have it. She would be the Best Young Flyer.

If Dash couldn't give Scoot anything else, at least she convinced her to do this.

Scoot landed on the cloud and looked at Dash. She didn't seem angry, that was good, but she seemed a little wary. "Hey."

"Heya. You look – I mean, the routine looks good," Dash said with the best grin she could muster, being so close to Scoot and knowing that Scoot didn't love her.

"I'm still off on the star," Scoot said with a slight frown.

"Only a little," Dash said, giving a shrug. "I spotted it because I know the trick, but anypony else would never know."

"The judges know the trick," Scoot pointed out.

“Yeah, but you’ve still got a week…” Dash trailed off. Then she bit her lip. “Scoot, I came here to say I’m sorry. And I want to still be friends.”

Scoot looked at her for a moment, then nodded. “Okay. Apology accepted.”

“And we’re still friends?” Dash asked hopefully.

“Yeah. We’re still friends.” Scoot hesitated, then offered her hoof for a bump.

Dash smiled and relaxed a little, bumping hooves. “Awesome. So, am I still your trainer, too?”

Scoot actually smiled at that. “Sure. How could I turn down a Wonderbolt offering to train me for the Best Young Flyer competition?”

“Great. Let’s see that star again.”

Scoot took off into the sky, and Dash tried to focus on the trick rather than Scoot’s amazing body in flight. Scoot went through the trick over and over. Twice she had it, absolutely nailed it. The rest of the times there was just a little thing off here and there, a corner that wasn’t tight enough, a line where she wobbled.

But she was totally close enough that when she landed, Dash was grinning. “You’re almost there. Just try to remember –”

Scoot shook her head. “I can’t do it.”

“Huh?” Dash blinked.

“I can’t do the star, Dash,” Scoot said simply.

“You totally can. I know you can, you’re so close! You had it perfect twice there, and just a little more –”

“Two out of ten,” Scoot pointed out. “I can’t go into the competition with odds like that.”

Dash rolled her eyes. “Scoot, do you know how many times I’d managed to do a sonic rainboom before –”

“I’m not you,” Scoot said with a shrug. “I can’t do a sonic rainboom, and I can’t do the star.”

“Scootaloo, there’s nothing you can’t get when you try. I’ve seen you. I know you. You can do it.”

“I’m not doing the star,” Scoot said firmly, leveling a stare at Dash. “You said you’d give me another trick if I couldn’t do it. Give me another trick to do, or I’ll pick one out myself.”

Dash was stunned for a second. Scoot was just staring at her, calm and completely serious. Dash was suddenly overcome with the urge to start apologizing again, but she pushed that back and rubbed the back of her neck nervously.

“Okay. Okay, replace it with a figure eight clover. You can do that, right?”

Scoot nodded.

Dash sighed. “It’s not a winning routine, I can tell you that. But if you do the whole thing perfectly, and some of the hot shots mess up, you might make third place.”

“Okay.” Scoot’s expression softened. “Thanks, Dash.”

“No problem,” Dash said. “Do you want me to stick around? I can make sure you’re getting the loops even and stuff.”

Scoot smiled a little. “Yeah, that would be nice.”

Dash settled in on the cloud again to watch Scoot practice, then she gave Scoot some pointers and went home alone. But all evening she couldn’t get that stare out of her mind. Scoot had never looked at her like that before.

It made her think of the other night, of that fight and the way Scoot yelled at her. But Scoot had been mad then, today she was just... in charge.

The only problem was that when Scoot was in charge, she played it safe. Too many years of worrying about what she couldn’t do, from what Dash could tell. She’d rather be a flight instructor than try to be a Wonderbolt, she’d rather fly a safe, clean routine than really go for Best Young Flyer. She’d rather have that Skylark pony than a pony who would give her the world and probably break her heart. Dash wanted to give Scoot one of those big dreams, to show her that she could have it if she wanted, that it didn’t have to end badly.

But apparently Scoot was in charge now. She wasn't going to listen to Dash, she'd have to decide to go for it on her own. All Dash could do was hope she'd see what was in front of her.

“Good job, Windy, you almost had it!” Scoot called to the filly who had just tried and failed to fly through the low hoop she had set up. The kid managed to jump and grab the edge, wings fluttering madly as she tumbled through it. “Blizzard, you’re up next.”

Blizzard stared at the hoop, a determined expression on his face. He jumped up, flapping his wings, and his hooves brushed the edge of the hoop. Then he jerked upwards, hovering in the middle of the hoop.

Scoot’s mouth dropped open. He was flying. His face was scrunched up, all of his concentration was on his wings, and she was almost afraid to make a sound in case he lost it.

The other kids didn’t know that though. “Ohmygosh! Bliz, you’re flying! You’re flying!”

Blizzard opened his eyes cautiously, then looked to Scoot with a wide eyed smile that she’d never forget. “I’m flying!”

Scoot grinned so big that she almost started to tear up. “You sure are, kid! I knew you could do it!”

She flew up in front of him, a few feet away, and stretched her forelegs out. “See if you can come forward. Tilt your wings... that’s right.”

He flew into her outstretched forelegs, and she pulled him close. He was grinning, and started crying against her.

“That was amazing, Bliz! You’re awesome! You can fly!”

The class was going wild with excitement, and Blizzard managed to stammer out. “This is the best day ever, Miss Scoot.”

“Yeah, it is,” Scootaloo said, honestly. Everything was coming back to her, the meadow and the feeling of air under all four of her hooves, the wonder, freedom, relief, and pure utter joy she felt that day so long ago. Dash’s shouts of celebration as she darted around Scoot with pride and excitement, promises of the Best Young Flyer crown and the Wonderbolts. The younger pegasus had never wanted that to end, she never wanted to land.

She still loved flying, but nothing had ever matched the passion she had that day. Until now. Until she saw it in the face of the little white colt in her forelegs who'd just had the whole sky open up to him. Flying wasn't a way of getting around, it wasn't just fun. Flying was everything, it was life, it was happiness. Blizzard knew that today, and now Scoot remembered.

She looked down at the rest of her class. They all seemed happy for Blizzard. There might have been a little envy there, but she saw something in their faces that was more important than that. She saw hope.

She landed, bringing Blizzard back down to the cloud. "Okay kids, I think Bliz deserves some congrats!"

The foals cheered while Blizzard beamed proudly. Scoot waited for them to finish before she went on. "Today was Blizzard's day! I told you guys it would come. And I'm telling you now, it'll come for each and every one of you. You just have to keep working until your day gets here, but it's worth it! It's so worth it. Bliz, tell everypony here if it was worth all the work you've done to get to this day."

"Every single second! I would have worked a billion times as hard if I had to, just to feel like this!"

"You'll still have to work, if you want to be good at flying one day. But that's worth it too. Now if you guys are ready we'll get back to work today. Tomorrow I'll bring in a special treat to celebrate. How's that sound?"

Scoot was met with more cheers and happy nods. She started up the practice again, but her students had a fresh excitement in their practice, and her calls of encouragement had a new honesty. She hovered around the cloud because she had to feel the air around her wings and couldn't stop grinning, thinking about the happy day of her first flight, and looking forward to the days each of these young foals got their chance for that.

Once class finished for the day Scoot hurriedly cleaned up her training space. There was no question about her plans for the evening, she promised her class a treat and cupcakes seemed like just the thing. Not only that, but a flight down to Ponyville seemed like a treat just for her today.

She was just fluffing the last section of cloud when she heard a voice behind her.

"Um, hi Scootaloo, I heard your class cheering today. What happened?" Skylark asked.

“Blizzard learned to fly! It was amazing,” Scoot said, still grinning hours later.

“Good. Cool. Has he got forward and backwards movement yet?” Sky asked, a small smile on her face.

Scoot raised an eyebrow. “He just got lift, Sky. Like, two hours ago. He’s got a little bit of forward, but, I mean, he flew!”

“Well he has wings, right? That’s what’s supposed to happen,” Sky said, a little confused.

Scoot just stared at her. “You... don’t get it.”

“No, I mean, I get it,” Sky hurried and said. “You’re proud! And you totally should be! You’re such a great teacher.”

“Nah... he was ready. I just got to be there.” Scoot grinned again at the memory. “Anyway, I’m getting the class cupcakes, so I have to make a trip down to Ponyville. Wanna come?”

“All the way to Ponyville? Tonight?” Sky said uncertainly.

“Yeah. It’s not that far, we’ll be back before dark,” Scoot said with a shrug.

“Well, I guess.”

“You sure?”

“Sure. It’s just a lot of flying for one evening.”

Scoot eyed the hesitant pegasus. “You don’t have to come if you don’t want to.”

“No! No, it sounds... kinda fun? Let’s go!” Sky replied with a overly cheerful smile.

Scoot smiled back, and took off for Ponyville with Sky right behind her. The trip was slower than she would have liked, and Sky occasionally mentioned what a long flight it was, which was kind of annoying. She avoided pointing out that the flight would be shorter if Sky would just fly a little faster. Scoot was nowhere near the fastest flyer around, and she knew Sky had to have at least an eight wingpower to be a flight school instructor. It was like she just didn’t feel like flying, something Scoot couldn’t understand right now.

They arrived in Ponyville, and Scoot got a box of cupcakes along with one each for her and Sky to eat before they headed home.

Scoot downed her cupcake in two bites, while Sky nibbled at hers.

“Isn’t this the best cupcake you’ve ever had?” Scoot said, enjoying the familiar surroundings.

“It’s good,” Sky said with a shrug. Then she glanced up, over Scoot’s shoulder. “Hey, isn’t that your friend, the Wonderbolt?”

Scoot’s eyes went wide, and she turned to see Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie standing at the counter, waiting for Mrs. Cake. “Oh, yeah. Um, hi Dash! Hi Pinkie!”

Dash looked between Scoot and Skylark, then raised her eyes. Pinkie, on the other hoof, bounced right over. Dash followed cautiously.

“Hi Scootaloo! Who’s this?”

“This is Skylark, she’s a friend from Cloudsdale.”

“I love making new friends!” Pinkie informed Skylark, who smiled politely.

“What are you guys doing down here?” Dash asked casually.

“Cupcakes,” Scoot said, motioning to the bakery box sticking out of her saddlebag. “I have a celebration tomorrow. Remember that colt in my class I told you about, Blizzard? Well... he learned to fly today!”

Dash’s face broke into a huge grin. “That’s so awesome!”

Pinkie hopped up and down. “It’s super duper looper awesome!”

“I wish I could’ve been there. You must be so excited!” Dash said, flapping into the air.

“I am! He was so happy, and the class was amazing, they all know they can do it now.” Scoot was grinning again, something about Dash’s enthusiasm brought back her own. “I can’t wait for the next foal to fly, this is such a rush.”

“It’s the most amazing feeling in the world, isn’t it?” Dash asked.

“Yeah, it is,” Scoot agreed.

Dash shook her head. “There’s nothing like a kid learning to fly to make you remember how much you love it. It’s like a sonic rainboom goes off inside them and hits everypony around who has wings, and suddenly you totally feel like just being in the air is the coolest thing. You see flying the way they see it, and it’s so awesome that you never want to land. At least, that’s how I remember it when...”

She smiled at Scoot. “That was one of the best days of my life.”

“That day was *kinda* okay,” Scoot said, still grinning.

Dash laughed. “I thought you were gonna faint in the air.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t. And now I know how you felt. It’s so cool.” Scoot unconsciously started to open her wings.

“Just thinking about it makes me want to fly,” Dash said, glancing between Scoot and Sky. “Do you guys wanna come and fly in the park with me? Pinkie doesn’t mind watching. We can just do some tricks and have a good time.”

“How about it, Sky?” Scoot grinned at Skylark. “Wanna come and fly with a Wonderbolt?”

Skylark considered it for a moment, then said, “We have kind of a long flight home, don’t we?”

“I guess,” Scoot said, her face falling. “Sorry, Dash.”

“Okay. You guys have fun,” Dash said with a shrug.

“Yeah... Um, do you wanna come watch me train tomorrow? I wanna get some practice in.” Scoot actually couldn’t wait to practice for the competition, it was exactly how she wanted to be flying right now.

“Sounds good,” Dash said cheerfully.

“Great! See ya then.” Scoot smiled. She started towards the door, Skylark following behind her.

“Wait!” Dash called. Scoot stopped and looked back, and Dash turned to Pinkie. “Hey, Pinkie, got a card I could have?”

“Birthday, get well, congratulations, wedding shower, sorry about the mess, baby shower, new puppy or kitten, sympathy, Hearth’s Warming, Hearts and Hooves Day, Friday, or blank?” Pinkie asked.

“Congratulations,” Dash answered with a smirk, and the pink pony pulled a card from seemingly nowhere and stuck it in her hooves.

“Where did that come from?” Sky asked, confused.

“Pinkie,” Dash and Scoot answered at the same time.

“Me, silly!” Pinkie added, as Dash took a pencil in her mouth and started writing something on the card.

“No, but I mean –”

“It’s Pinkie Pie,” Scoot whispered. “You don’t ask. It’s just... Pinkie Pie.”

Skylark gave Scoot a strange look, then turned to Pinkie. “Miss Pie? Where did you pull that card from?”

Pinkie took a deep breath, then started, “Well, once I was in Hoofington, and I saw a store that sold balloons! Nothing but balloons! And I thought ‘I love balloons,’ so I went inside, and the owner had this dog, and the dog was kind of shaggy. And shaggy dogs are so cute! They’re just like little balls of fur! And the dog’s name was Filbert. And I –”

Scoot put her hoof to her face in frustration as Sky became more confused by the minute and Pinkie got no closer to answering her question. Dash finished filling out the card and handed it to Scoot. She looked down at it.

“Congrats on flying, Blizzard! I’ll be watching for you at Wonderbolt try outs. Your friend, Rainbow Dash.”

Scoot smiled at Dash. Dash hadn’t asked how good Bliz was, or even if he wanted to be a Wonderbolt. It didn’t matter, Scoot knew Dash just wanted to give the kid permission to dream. She wanted to be a part of the sky opening up for a foal she’d only seen once for a few minutes.

Scoot’s thoughts tried to turn this into an amazing gesture of generosity, but she pulled them back. It wasn’t that amazing, it was just a nice, friendly thing to do. Keeping those oversized thoughts in check, she really looked at Dash.

She was pretty, and fun and talented. She actually spent a lot of time and energy making sure other ponies thought she was fun and talented, now that Scoot thought about it. It was no wonder Scoot bought into it so thoroughly, Dash practically begged other ponies to think she was awesome.

That was a little sad, that a pony who really had so much going for her couldn't just let other ponies see it for themselves. Scoot was glad she could see that now, but she found herself just as glad that those things were really there. Dash really was a friendly, fun, talented pony.

Scoot suddenly realized that she was staring at Dash, who was staring back confused. Scoot almost laughed at Dash's expression. But instead, she just turned to where Pinkie was still talking to a dazed Skylark.

"So then I found a bit on the ground, and I thought 'I could buy a grapefruit with this!' So I –"

"That's awesome, Pinkie, but me and Sky have to be getting back to Cloudsdale. You can finish the story next time."

"Okey dokey lokey! It was nice meeting you, Skylark!"

"Um, yeah, it was, um..."

"Later, guys!" Scoot said, nudging Sky out the door. Outside they took off in the direction of Cloudsdale.

"Is there something wrong with that pony?" Sky asked, once they were in the air.

"She's Pinkie!" Scoot explained again. "I tried to warn you. Everypony in Ponyville knows that you don't ask Pinkie Pie how she does Pinkie Pie things."

Skylark rolled her eyes. "I'm so glad I grew up in Canterlot. I can show you a bakery in Cloudsdale next time, there's nopony like that there, and you won't have to fly as far."

Scoot glanced at Skylark. On the one hoof, Pinkie could drive a pony crazy. And Skylark might have just been too tired from work for a flight to Ponyville. And a pony didn't have to love Sugarcube Corner cupcakes. And maybe she'd just never seen a foal fly for the first time, so she didn't know how amazing it felt.

On the other hoof, Scoot was pretty sure she should let Skylark know there wasn't going to be a next time.

• • •

The next afternoon, Dash laid on a cloud and watched Scoot go over her routine again and again. The Best Young Flyer competition was the next weekend, but Scoot was practicing with a smile on her face, probably still feeling the love of flight from that foal learning to fly. She was flying perfectly, too. Dash wished she would try the star with that kind of feeling, but she knew better than to bring it up. Besides, she had other things on her mind.

The biggest one was the discussion she had with Spitfire that day. Spitfire was retiring, and she wanted to know if Dash wanted to apply to be captain. There was a strong hint in the conversation that Dash had a very good chance and should think about it seriously, and Dash was.

A few months ago, there was no question. Keep flying for the top. Who cared about the long hours, it wasn't like she had a family or anyone who needed her around. She could sneak a few hours to spend with her friends every week, and she would be *captain* of the *Wonderbolts*.

But that was a few months ago. Before she remembered how nice it was to have somepony always there for her, somepony she could always be there for. Before she remembered how to really have fun doing the things she loved with somepony she loved. When she was with Scoot, every minute seemed awesome and she didn't want to give up any of them.

But she didn't have Scoot anymore, so becoming captain seemed like the logical thing to do. It also seemed like a huge letdown. Dash didn't accept a letdown, she always went for what she wanted if there was a chance she could get it. All she needed was a chance.

Scoot finished and landed, and Dash grinned at her. "It looked awesome. Best you've ever flown."

"Thanks!" Scoot said with a smile, taking a drink from her water bottle as she caught her breath.

Dash tried to sound casual and said, "How are things with Skylark?"

Scout paused a minute, and sat down across the cloud from Dash. “There aren’t really things with Skylark. She’s nice and all, but we didn’t have a lot in common.”

“She wasn’t that hot, either,” Dash added.

Scout stared at her for a moment, then laughed. “She’s okay.”

Dash smiled and shrugged. “You can do way better.”

“Not happening, Dash,” Scout said with a smirk.

“Hey, I wasn’t even talking about that,” Dash said, and decided a change of subject was in order. “How is Blizzard doing? Did he like his card?”

Scout smiled and seemed to relax a little. “I think he’s having it framed. He’s still on top of the world.”

“He should be. It’s an awesome time for him,” Dash said.

“It’s an awesome time for me too,” Scout said. “How long does this take to wear off? I never want it to end.”

Dash laughed a little. “I don’t know, a few weeks? Then everything goes back to normal, except that there’s one more pony who can fly.”

“Yeah, but that kid has a lot ahead of him. By then he’ll probably move to a different class so he can learn the good stuff.”

“That part’s fun too. It’s too bad you don’t get to train them all the way.”

“Are you kidding?” Scout grinned. “This is awesome. I wouldn’t give it up for anything.”

Dash smirked. “I don’t know, I had a lot of fun teaching you *everything* you know about flying.”

“Yeah, you did teach me everything I know. Except the slalom, I learned how to do that on my own. I remember, you always said you would teach me, but there was always another trick you wanted to show me...Wait.” Scout grinned at Dash. “You can’t do a slalom, can you?”

“Of course I can!” Dash protested. “They’re just boring.”

“Uh-huh. Sure,” Scoot said with a smirk.

“I can do a slalom. I’m a *Wonderbolt*.”

Scoot raised an eyebrow. “Even if you can now, you couldn’t then.”

“I could have...” Dash said. “I mean, if I had wanted to.”

“Without clipping the poles?” Scoot asked.

Dash gave an impish grin. “...most of the time?”

Scoot laughed.

“Hey, I just have big wings. That makes it a lot harder. I was, and still am, an awesome flyer,” Dash added quickly.

“I never said you weren’t,” Scoot pointed out.

“And slaloms are dumb anyway.”

Scoot raised an eyebrow. “You put one in my routine.”

Dash laughed. “Well, they aren’t as dumb when you do them.”

“Cause I can do them?” Scoot teased.

“That does help a little,” Dash admitted. “Besides, I put one in my Best Young Flyer routine anyway. Everypony who can fly knows how tough it is.”

Scoot smiled. “Well you won, so you must have done it right.”

Dash blushed a little. She’d been hoping to get Scoot through the competition without admitting the details of her own Best Young Flyer win. “Um... not so much. I clipped it.”

“Seriously?” Scoot said, more amused than surprised.

“Heh, yeah.” Dash rubbed the back of her neck. “Then I kinda tossed a pinwheel cloud at Princess Celestia.”

Scoot raised her eyebrows, still smiling. “You did win, right? You didn’t just beat somepony up and steal the crown, did you?”

“I won fair and square!” Dash said with a grin. “I totally saved Rarity, and a few Wonderbolts, *and* did a sonic rainboom! Those slips were just nerves.”

Scoot just smiled at her.

“What?”

“Oh, sorry. I’m just thinking about some stuff,” Scoot said, shaking her head.

Dash thought that sounded like a good sign. She took a breath and said, “I’ve been thinking about things too. Scoot, I need to talk to you about something.”

Scoot’s face fell. “Dash, don’t. Between you and Skylark I’ve had a rough couple of weeks. And I have the competition coming up... I can’t deal with this now.”

“I know. And I know you shouldn’t have had to deal with that stuff, and I know it’s totally my fault.” She looked down, to avoid those big violet eyes. “But I need to make a decision, and I need to know something from you first.”

“Fine. But you’re not gonna like the answer,” Scoot said sternly.

Dash nodded. “That’s fair. Spitfire is retiring at the end of the year. I need to know if I should go for captain of the Wonderbolts.”

“Um, yeah?” Scoot sounded surprised. “Just for the record, if somepony offers you a million bits you should take that, too.”

Dash shook her head. “It’s not as simple as that. I mean, it’d be cool, don’t get me wrong, but it’s a lot of extra work. Spitfire never had a marefriend or colt friend, I’m not even sure which way she goes, she was married to that job. I could do that, I mean maybe it would be a good idea. It’d save other ponies a lot of trouble. But it’s not what I want.”

“What do you want?” Scoot asked.

“I want to be with somepony who reminds me how much I love flying. I want to lay in bed with somepony ‘til noon, talking and laughing about silly stuff. I want to fly with the Wonderbolts and party in Ponyville, and more than anything I want a pony who can be there with me for all that. And if there’s even a chance, a tiny chance, that I might have that pony someday, I don’t want to be captain, because I don’t want to miss a minute of it,” Dash said, feeling like she just put her heart, her whole future, in Scoot’s hooves.

Scout just whispered, "What you did really hurt me. I know you didn't mean to, but it still hurt."

"I'm sorry, Scout. I was dumb, and I was... scared. And I can't promise you I'll never be dumb or scared again." She sighed. "This is for the best, isn't it? 'Rainbow Dash, captain of the Wonderbolts' has a nice ring to it, and I won't have time to hurt anypony."

They were quiet for a few minutes, while Dash tried to convince herself of what she just said.

Finally, Scout said softly, "I didn't say there's no chance, ever. I just wanted to make sure you knew that just because we're cool now, it doesn't mean that I forgot. But what I said still goes, I can't make a decision now. I have the competition coming up, and I have to focus on that, not untangling ten years of mixed-up feelings."

"You're absolutely right, Scout," Dash said. She knew she had to change the subject quickly to keep Scout from thinking too much about it now, and taking her new found hope away from her. "You nervous about this weekend?"

Scout shrugged. "A little. But it helps that I'm not expecting much. I'll just do my best."

"Scout, I saw your best today, your real best. I can tell you that whatever you want to reach for is yours," Dash said honestly.

"I know it's weird to you, Dash, but some ponies just can't reach it," Scout said with a little laugh.

"You are *not* some ponies, Scootaloo. You are every bit as good as I am," Dash said, looking her in the eye.

Scout looked confused and said, "I know. I... I should be going. School tomorrow, ya know."

Dash nodded. "Have fun. I'll see ya at the competition?"

"I'll be there," Scout said with a smile as she gathered her saddle bags. Then she took off for her little cloud house.

Dash just laid back on the cloud and thought about the conversation. There was a lot about it that was kinda confusing, but the most important thing was crystal clear: there was a chance.

The Best Young Flyer Competition

Scout wasn't nervous the day of the Best Young Flyer competition. She wasn't nervous because she wasn't going to win.

She had a routine that she could do in her sleep, she'd practiced it for months. She knew she wasn't going to make a fool of herself, even if there was no way she could win the crown with it.

With a smile on her face, Scootaloo made her way through the skies towards the Colosseum. It was especially crowded today, giving Scout a great warm up for her routine as she darted into spaces between pegasi.

The sky just got more crowded as she approached the Colosseum, and the clouds outside were backed with ponies. She almost flew right by until she heard Apple Bloom shout at the top of her lungs, "Heya! Scootaloo!"

She turned around, surprised since Apple Bloom was an earth pony. She was even more surprised to see not only Apple Bloom, but Sweetie Belle, Twilight, Fluttershy, Applejack, Rarity and Pinkie. Scout changed course quickly and landed right in front of them.

"Hi! What are you guys doing here?" Scout asked, astounded.

"We went for a walk, and oops! We're in Cloudsdale," Sweetie said with a smirk. "We're here to see you fly, silly!"

"I have a spell that lets other kinds of ponies walk on clouds," Twilight explained. "We couldn't miss a chance to cheer you on."

"Yeah! Everypony knows how important a good cheering section is. It's almost as important as a good brass section! But you don't need a brass section to fly, unless you're getting launched out of a tuba! Do you want to? I have a tuba."

"That would certainly make an impression on the judges," Sweetie said, raising an eyebrow skeptically.

Scout grinned. "Thanks Pinkie, but I'll pass this time. And thanks to all of you guys for coming! You're the best."

"We're all glad to be here for you," Apple Bloom said, giving Scout a nuzzle.

“Yeah, and we know you’re gonna put on a great show,” agreed Applejack.

“I’ll do my best...” Scoot said, smiling a little.

Rarity smiled. “Of course you will, darling. That’s what we’re so excited to see.”

“Well, I guess I’d better go get ready!” Scoot couldn’t wipe the grin from her face. “Thanks again you guys.”

“Less thanking and more warming up!” Sweetie insisted.

“Okay, okay. I’ll see all of you after the competition!” Scoot waved and turned to head towards the contestants entrance.

“If you change your mind about the tuba, let me know!” Pinkie called after her.

Scoot laughed again and followed the cloud path around the huge arena, while her friends from Ponyville headed in the other direction to find seats.

“Miss Scoot!” Scootaloo heard the shout seconds before a white foal flew into her, knocking her off her hooves.

“Oof! Monday, you’re learning how to stop.” Scoot grinned, righting herself and the colt. “Heya, Bliz! What are you doing here?”

“Mom and Dad said we could do anything I wanted this weekend, since I learned to fly. So I told them I wanted to come see you win!”

“That’s great Bliz, but I’m probably not gonna win. There are ponies here who are much better flyers than I am.”

“No way! Don’t say that, Miss Scoot! You’re awesome, and someday I’m gonna be able to fly just like you, with all those cool moves. I can’t wait to see you win!”

Scoot tried to think of something to say. There was no way to explain to a kid that she wasn’t really trying anything hard enough to win, that even if she flew perfectly she was looking at second or third place unless the top flyers in Equestria all got the feather flu.

“I’m just gonna fly my best, Bliz. That’s all I can do, and whatever happens I’ll know I tried.”

“I’ll be cheering for you!” Bliz said, giving her another hug. Scoot hugged him back, feeling strangely guilty.

“Thanks! Now go find some seats.”

Scoot took off into the air this time, making her way to the contestants entrance. Standing outside of it she spotted the pony she had been expecting to see this whole time. Rainbow Dash was pacing there by the entrance in her Wonderbolts uniform, occasionally scanning the skies until she caught sight of Scoot. As soon as she saw her Dash was in the air right in front of Scoot.

“There you are! Where have you been?” Dash asked.

“I ran into the Ponyville crowd,” Scoot said happily. “They’re all here, Dash! Everypony, even your friends!”

“Oh. Good!” Dash blinked, then shook her head. “But you have to get warmed up! Did you eat breakfast?”

“An oat bar...”

“Carbs are good. Everything feeling okay? Wings are good?” Dash’s genuine concern was obvious. What was also obvious was that she was acting really weird.

“Yeah, I’m just fine...” Scoot said, smiling nervously.

“Just fine? What doesn’t feel great?” Dash said worriedly.

“I’m good!” Scoot insisted. “Everything is great, I promise.”

“Is it perfect? Is there anything you need?” Dash glanced around. “Oh shoot, you need to warm up. Let me know what you need, and I’ll get it and send it in.”

“I don’t need anything, Dash.” Scoot raised an eyebrow. “Are you okay?”

“Sure! I’m okay!” Dash took a deep breath. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You’re acting really weird,” Scoot pointed out.

“No way. This is totally normal for me!”

“Uh-huh,” Scoot said dryly. “You’re shaking.”

“It’s... cold?”

“Are you nervous?”

“N- Uh, yeah,” Dash admitted. “I just want you to fly your best, I want everypony to see how great you are at it.”

“Well don’t worry. I’m going to do my best. You made me a good routine, I know it by heart, and I’m not really worried about winning. This is a piece of cake.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m totally sure, Dash. Everything is gonna be cool.”

“Okay, Scoot. I trust you,” Dash said, smiling a little and laying a hoof on her arm. “You do have to get warmed up, though. I’ll see you after the competition.”

“Sure,” Scoot said.

“And Scoot?” Dash hesitated, looking Scoot in the eye. Scoot saw her lean in and expected to feel the press of her lips, but instead she just nuzzled Scoot’s cheek. “Just remember that whatever happens, you’re the best young flyer in my book.”

Scoot smiled. “Thanks, Dash. Thanks for everything.”

Scoot headed into the building, thinking about that kiss that almost happened, and how much she wanted it. She still wasn’t sure whether she wanted it from Rainbow Dash the awesome pony she would never have, or Rainbow Dash the normal pony who was scared of actually being in love. Neither of those sounded like good ponies to want to kiss. But Scoot couldn’t deny what she felt.

She couldn’t deny it, but she had to put it out of her mind. She had to get her number, get warmed up, and then fly in front of thousands of ponies, three of whom would be judging her. And another nine of whom would be routing for her, wanting to see her fly her very best.

Once she had her number Scoot sat in the waiting area stretching her wings. Compared to all of the ponies here, they looked even stubbier than usual. Scoot wasn’t even sure what she was doing here. These were all ponies who’d been flying since they were born. They could do amazing things. All she could do was her boring routine.

Her heart started to speed up, and a few little, involuntary flaps lifted into a hover. She tried to calm herself, reminding herself that she knew her routine inside and out. She wasn't going to win, but she'd be good enough. Good enough was good enough, right?

Blizzard's face came into her mind, but she pushed it out.

The Best Young Flyer crown didn't even matter much. She would still be a cool friend and a good teacher, even if she was too scared to really go after it.

She thought of Rainbow Dash, and quickly tried to think of anything else.

This was her best. It was the best routine she could do. Just because she could do the star once or twice didn't mean she could really do it. Sure this could be one of those times, but odds were that it wouldn't be. Who went and tried a trick they'd only managed twice in the Young Flyers Competition?

Okay, Rainbow Dash. But she didn't count. She was Rainbow Dash, she was awesome and everything she did in life worked just based on the power of her awesomeness. They should have just handed her the Best Young Flyer crown when she was born. And Scoot knew that her name was on some list of pegasi who were never going to do anything cool, so there was no point in trying. Rainbow Dash would try, she did try, but she was –

Scoot stopped in her tracks. Rainbow Dash was just a pony. *Rainbow Dash was just a pony.*

And years ago she was standing in this room, and she was getting ready to fly a trick that she'd only done once in her life, because it was the best trick she'd ever done. She was just a pony, and she was going to do her best.

Scoot wasn't going to do her best. She was going to do something she wasn't embarrassed to try. If the kids in her class did that, they'd never be able to fly. If *she* had done that, she wouldn't be here now. She couldn't face Dash or Blizzard if she went out there with her safe, okay routine. She wasn't sure she could face herself if she did that.

Which meant that she would be stepping off that cloud in another minute, and trying to do a move she hadn't even tried in a week, and only got a few times before that. A move that the judges, the Wonderbolts, were currently using in their routine. In front of everypony she cared about.

Her eyes went wide, and she let out a whimper. *Now* she was nervous.

• • •

Rainbow Dash could think of a number of days she'd been more nervous than she was today.

That number was three.

Wonderbolts audition. Her own Best Young Flyer competition. Fighting Discord.

This knocked out fighting the changeling army for fourth place. That day, she was pretty sure they'd figure something out if they lost, and everything would turn out okay in the end. Today, if Scoot messed up, things would not be okay. That chance she had with Scoot dropped to almost nothing if something went wrong in this Colosseum.

She would rather have been sitting with the Ponyville crowd, where AJ could tease her out of her nerves and Fluttershy could hold her hoof, but she had the uniform on today, so she was Wonderbolt-ing.

She was sitting above the judges booth between Soarin' and Fleetfoot, biting her lip and trying not to start shaking. The rest of the team was just enjoying a chance to sit back and watch somepony else do the flying.

Soarin' had a saddlebag full of snacks he was offering around, and he shoved a box of popcorn towards her. "Want some?"

"I'm gonna be sick," Dash said, not particularly looking at Soarin' or the popcorn.

"That's a no then." He pulled the popcorn back quickly. "What's wrong, figured out that your girl can't beat Gale Force?"

"Huh?" Dash had no idea what he was talking about.

"Gale Force. The guy I've been working with? I mentioned him a hundred times."

"Oh." Dash remembered their competitive boasting during practices. "Whatever. No, I don't give a horseapple if Gale Force wins."

Soarin' raised an eyebrow. "You really are sick. What's wrong?"

"You remember the pony I was seeing? The one that didn't work out?" Dash reminded him.

“Oh, right.” Soarin’ nodded. “Because you can’t commit or deal with emotion like a grown-up.”

Dash glared at him. “You leave the toilet seat up.”

“Classy,” Soarin’ said with a smirk.

“Well you do,” Fleetfoot cut in from the other side of Dash. “I’ve been to your house, and it’s really annoying.”

“I’m the only one who lives there!” Soarin’ said. “Look, if a mare comes over to a stallion’s house –”

“*Anyway*, that mare is the one I was training, and she’s flying today, and if she messes up she’s never going to take a chance on anything or anypony ever again!”

“So if this pony doesn’t mess up, you think she’ll take you back?” Fleetfoot asked.

“I’ll have a chance,” Dash said, anxiously.

Fleetfoot considered this. “How good is she?”

Dash took a deep breath. “Really, really good.”

“Cool.” Fleetfoot nodded, then called down the row of Wonderbolts, “Guys, ten to one Dash’s heart gets broken today! Any takers?”

“I’m in,” Soarin’ answered.

“I hate you guys,” Dash said, glaring at both of them.

“What?” Soarin’ said with his mouth full of popcorn. “I’m gonna have to work with you if it happens, I might as well make some money off it.”

The competition started before they could continue the conversation. Several ponies came out and flew, but Dash hardly cared. Scoot wasn’t really in the competition to win, so it didn’t matter if everypony there came out with a sonic rainboom, as long as Scoot didn’t mess up.

But each time a number was called, Dash’s eyes were glued to the entrance to the arena, until finally number six was a familiar orange pony with a deep pink mane and tail.

“That’s her!” Dash yelled, leaving her seat to stand right at the edge of the box.

“That’s who?” Soarin asked.

“Dash’s ex-marefriend. The one your money’s against,” Fleetfoot answered.

Dash sighed. “She wasn’t my marefriend.”

“Hey speaking of ex-marefriends –” Soarin’ started, trying to sound casual, but Dash cut him off.

“Yes, she’s here. No, she didn’t bring any pies. Yes, I’m sure.”

“Oh. Well how long is she here? I have a kitchen at my place, and I could pick up some apples...”

“Seriously?” Fleetfoot leaned over and looked at Soarin’. “You want Dash’s ex-marefriend to come over and make you a pie?”

“Just a thought!” Soarin’ shrugged.

“If she does, will you at least put the toilet seat down?” Fleetfoot said, rolling her eyes.

“For her pies? Anything.”

“Shut up!” Dash yelled, earning surprised looks from her teammates.

With the first flap of Scoot’s wings, Dash was leaning over the edge of the box. Given how Scoot was acting earlier, she expected Scoot to look calm and professional. But as the orange pegasus neared the columns for her slalom, Dash got a good look at her face. The look she wore was pure determination that Dash hadn’t seen on her since she was a filly. It made Dash grin. If Scoot looked like that, she was unstoppable.

Dash held her breath as Scoot entered the slalom, weaving between the poles. She was flying so close that her lean put her nearly sideways on each drift, but it was obvious that Scoot was in control the whole time. Years of working her wings and body on that scooter before she even got in the air meant that from the time she learned to fly she had amazing dexterity. As soon as Scoot cleared the last pole, Dash let out a cheer so loud that Soarin’ spilled his popcorn.

She didn't even have time to make fun of him, before Dash was even done cheering Scoot was climbing the sky for her next trick. Scoot reached the peak of the sky, and turned, falling into a tight corkscrew. It looked almost like she was drifting, but each loop was perfectly even, all the way to below the Colosseum.

"Oh thank Celestia!" Dash yelled to the sky, breathing a sigh of relief. The clover should be easy for Scoot.

A voice called from a few boxes below: "I had nothing to do with it, Rainbow Dash."

"Um, sorry Princess Celestia," Dash called back, blushing, as Soarin' and Fleetfoot cracked up.

Soarin' stopped suddenly. "Woah, you didn't say she could do a star."

"WHAT?" Dash immediately returned her attention to Scoot, who'd just reached the top of the sky again and started down, her magenta tail leaving a trail forming the top point of the star.

"Not part of the routine?" Fleetfoot asked, watching Scoot closely.

"No! She wasn't going to do it. I mean, she can do it, I know she can do it..." Dash suddenly screamed into the arena, "You can do it, Scoot!"

Scoot made the first bottom point perfectly, and Dash watched anxiously as she approached the left point. The turns she had to make were practically flips, and she executed it perfectly, her body twisting into the straight line across the sky.

Dash's heart was in her throat, she almost wanted to yell at Scoot for making her this scared, but at the same time she loved it. She loved that Scoot was doing this, that Scoot had the guts and determination to give it her all. She loved Scoot, and Scoot was one perfect turn from seeing how amazing her life could be if she just took a chance.

Scootaloo tucked her head down, her body following, forelegs reaching for her starting point. In what seemed to Dash like a split second she nailed the turn and flew to the bottom point, leaving behind a deep pink-purple star as she threw up her forelegs in victory.

Dash took off towards Scoot without thinking, but Soarin' was standing on her tail so she was snapped back into the box. Once she yanked her tail free from Soarin', Dash settled

for flying around the box, nearly bouncing off the clouds. “Yes! She did it! She did it! She did the star! Ohmygosh, this is awesome!”

“Yeah, that was pretty good,” Soarin’ agreed.

“Not good, awesome!” Dash squealed. “She took a chance, and she did it! It worked! This is the best thing that’s ever happened, ever, in the history of Equestria!”

“Spitfire, Dash is going crazy again,” Fleetfoot called to the judges’ booth directly below.

Spitfire happily replied, “Retiring. Not my problem.”

“But I have to sit next to her for the rest of the competition!”

“Oh, well then... nope! Still not my problem.”

Dash hopped off the edge of the box and hovered in front of Spitfire and the other judges. “Who cares about the rest of the competition! Spitfire, you have to give her the crown! Pleasepleaseplease give her the crown! I’ll love you forever! I’ll have your foals!”

“You’re insane, Rainbow Dash,” Spitfire said.

“Told ya,” Fleetfoot called.

Spitfire went on. “This is a flying competition, and we have ten more flyers to go –”

“But –” Dash protested.

“And if you don’t get your cutie mark back in your own box right now, your marefriend is disqualified,” Spitfire finished, dead serious.

This time there was no talk, just the rainbow trail Dash left behind getting back to her spot as fast as she could go. If Scoot flew like that and lost, Dash would be furious. If Scoot flew like that and lost because of *her*, Dash would never, ever forgive herself.

Scout felt amazing as she hovered there in the middle of the Colosseum, having just completed a perfect routine, thousands of ponies cheering for her and stomping their hooves. She'd flown her best, and her best was awesome.

She swooped down and circled the edges of the arena, scanning the groups of ponies until she found the box where her friends were all sitting. She flew over to them, and was greeted with another loud cheer. Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom tackled her with a hug.

"That was great, Scout!"

"Spectacular! Astonishing! Outstanding!" Sweetie added. "And really, really cool!"

Scout had the biggest, dumbest grin on her face, and she didn't even care. "Thanks! I wasn't sure I could do it, but I had to give it a try, ya know?"

"Well that was quite a try," Rarity said with a smile. "I'm sure you're the best I've seen so far."

"You did your best, and you did a really good job. You should be proud of yourself, Scootaloo! But there are other ponies flying now, we should be watching them..." Twilight pointed out.

"Yeah, you're right. Come on, guys. Let's watch." Scout sat down towards the edge of the cloud with Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle on either side. They watched the rest of the flyers, some of them were really impressive. Scout pointed out to her friends which tricks were hard and which ones just looked cool, and she cheered generously for the flyers who really had talent.

She still wasn't nervous. Excited, and maybe a little hopeful, but not really nervous. When a really great flyer came out after her, she oohed and aahed along with all the other ponies. There were some really talented pegasi here, it wasn't like they were sure to give her the crown. But she had done her best, and she had a chance, and now she couldn't stop smiling.

When the last of the flyers finished, the judges turned to talk to each other and Scout huddled next to her friends. The idea that she might get the crown played in her head, along with thoughts of Rainbow Dash grinning and pulling her close and kissing her as the crowd cheered. She knew it was silly, but that was how this day had always gone in

her childhood fantasies. And now, all of it was so close she could taste it. Maybe not exactly as she'd dreamed, but then again, maybe it was better.

The announcer started, and the crowd grew quiet. "Fillies and gentlecolts, your attention please. This year's winner of the Best Young Flyer competition is..."

Scotaloo leaned over the edge of the box in anticipation. Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom leaned over on either side of her, to the point where she was pretty sure she'd have to save at least one of them when they fell off.

"Monsoon!"

A blue pony with a green mane flew to the landing where Princess Celestia was waiting with the gold crown. Scoot let out a disappointed sigh, and let go of another foalish idea. It was nice while it lasted...

She looked to her friends. They were just staring at her.

"Um, you guys okay? I mean, it was only a competition," Scoot said, giving them a little smile.

Apple Bloom looked concerned. "Aww Scoot, ain't ya disappointed?"

"A little, but that's just how it goes, ya know? I still did my best."

"And your best was still terrific," Sweetie said, giving her a nuzzle.

Scoot got hugs from everypony in the Ponyville crowd, all of them telling her that she did her best, that she did a great job, and that she did even better than if she was launched out of a tuba. Well, only Pinkie told her that last one.

As she got to the end of the row, she noticed that somepony had joined them. Rainbow Dash was standing on the edge of the cloud, her ears were down and she was biting her lip. For a moment, Scoot was scared she'd disappointed Dash. Maybe Dash was upset that she tried the star without practicing more, or that she didn't tell her that she was going to do it.

She walked over to Dash, looking down and avoiding her eyes. "Hey, I'm sorry I didn't win."

She didn't expect Dash's eyes to fill with tears, or for Dash to nearly shout, "It's my fault! It's totally my fault. I'm such an idiot! After you flew, I was so excited I flew down to Spitfire and begged her to give you the crown, and she got really ticked off and that's why you didn't win. I can't believe I blew this for you. I totally understand if you hate me. I hate me. I -"

"Dash, calm down," Scoot cut in, giving Dash a nuzzle on the cheek. Whether Dash had anything to do with it or not, it almost broke Scoot's heart to see her so torn up. "I did my best, and you guys all saw me. That's all that matters, right? I flew an awesome, tough routine, and I rocked it. I get to be proud of that."

Dash blinked. "You don't hate me?"

Scoot cocked her head to the side and smiled. "No? I mean, I never expected to win, really."

Dash looked into her eyes for a moment, then said, "Yeah, well, you should have. That was amazing."

"Thanks," Scoot said, telling herself she was glad Dash wasn't pressing their personal issues right now. She told herself that facing another dream that wasn't real would just hurt her more right now. She didn't believe those things, but she told herself anyway.

She shook her head clear. "Why don't we get out of here and find someplace for lunch?"

"That sounds like a great idea!" Sweetie said quickly. "Do you guys know someplace good?"

"There's this place a few clouds up from the corner -" Dash started as the group turned to leave.

"Dash!" a voice called from the arena behind them. Dash turned and looked back as the voice went on. "Dash, wait, don't let her leave yet! Spitfire called the judges back!"

The whole group stopped and rushed back to the edge of the box where Soarin' had landed. Rainbow Dash got there first.

"What?! What for?"

"The kid that won was using silk feathers." Soarin' narrowed his eyes. "We should've known, that kid was making my spins look bad."

“Silk feathers?” asked Apple Bloom, obviously not following.

“Yeah, they’re like feather shaped fans. You can stick them between real feathers so your wings catch the air better. They’re a tail saver on long flights, but totally illegal in competitions,” Scoot explained.

Sweetie’s eyes went wide. “So that kid’s disqualified! The judges are still deciding!”

“Oh Scoot, this is so excitin’! You might still win!”

“Now y’all remember, what Scoot said still goes,” Applejack reminded them. “Whatever happens, she flew her best and that’s what she oughta be proud of.”

Scoot grinned. “Do you always have to make sense?”

AJ chuckled. “Somepony’s gotta.”

“Hey Applejack, speaking of making something...”

Dash nudged him sharply. “Soarin’! More important things are going on!”

“There is nothing more important,” Soarin’ grinned. “Someday I’ll have a wife, and she’ll still be second to a Sweet Apple Acres apple pie.”

“I knew I broke up with you for a reason. Rainbow Dash does *not* come in second to pastries,” Dash said as she flew over next to Scoot.

While Soarin’ and AJ discussed the logistics of pie transportation, Scoot waited nervously. If what Dash said before was true, she didn’t really have a chance at winning the contest. But Dash had been known to exaggerate sometimes.

She felt Dash’s wing drape over her protectively, and it calmed her nerves more than she expected. She leaned against Dash and could feel the older pony trembling a little. This wasn’t the dream, losing the Best Young Flyer crown twice in one day. But Rainbow Dash standing here with her, nerves matching her own, was special in a different way.

“Attention, fillies and gentlecolts, may I have your attention. Monsoon has been disqualified from this year’s Best Young Flyer competition for using performance enhancing equipment.”

A gasp went through the crowd, at least the ponies who didn't have members of the Wonderbolts keeping them up to date. Then the jeers started. The announcer waited a moment, but the booing continued.

Finally Princess Celestia flapped her wings just once from the cloud platform in the arena, and the crowd fell silent.

The announcer continued, "The official winner of this years Best Young Flyer competition is... Scootaloo!"

Scoot was sure she hadn't heard right. She looked to her friends, who were grinning. Then she looked to Dash, who looked almost as shocked as she felt. But Dash's face broke into a grin.

"What are you waiting for? Go get your crown!"

"I - I -" Scoot wanted to ask Dash to come with her, to make the day perfect, but there wasn't time. She realized she was keeping Princess Celestia waiting, so she darted out of the box as fast as she could towards the princess and Spitfire.

Scoot landed on the platform, grinning from ear to ear. She was shaking, she still couldn't believe this was happening. The princess just smiled calmly and set the crown on Scootaloo's head as thousands of ponies cheered.

"Congratulations, Scootaloo. I know you worked hard for this," Princess Celestia said kindly.

"I can't believe it! This can't be happening! I won. I'm the Best Young Flyer!"

Spitfire chuckled. "You sure are. I don't suppose it's that impressive to you, but you've got a day with the Wonderbolts tomorrow. I know one Wonderbolt who's going to be thrilled with that."

Scoot glanced back over to the box, where Dash was cheering her lungs out. Then her eyes landed on another box a few sections over, and she grinned.

"Spitfire? I, um, kind of have an idea for tomorrow... if we can work it out."

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The happy shouts of foals mixed with the laughter of older ponies around the Wonderbolts' gym. Dash, Scoot, and Spitfire spent all afternoon the day before contacting Scoot's class, and every one of them had managed to get their parents to bring them to spend a day with the Wonderbolts. It wasn't that hard, some of the parents looked just as excited as their kids when they walked into the huge building.

The Wonderbolts seemed to be enjoying it, too. They played with the kids on the training equipment, carried them on flights through practice rings and around obstacles, and organized games on the clouds. Rainbow Dash had noticed that most of her teammates were big foals anyway, there was something about the lifestyle of a Wonderbolt that took 'growing up' right off the priority list.

Dash was standing with Scoot and Fleetfoot, watching Spitfire giving wing movement tips to a filly listening in rapt attention. Fleetfoot smiled and turned to Scoot.

"I'm glad you won. This is way more fun than listening to some star-struck hot-shot who thinks the day is an audition for their spot on the team."

"Hey, I was a Best Young Flyer winner, too," Dash pointed out.

Fleetfoot raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, and what did we do on your day?"

"Um..." Dash blushed. Her day had been a blur of showing off, asking for autographs, and not-so-subtle hinting that she was available to audition anytime, anywhere, like maybe right now even. She knew from experience that winners like that usually resulted in a lot of eye-rolling and snickering from the team.

Soarin' flew over from a group of kids. "Dash! Fleetfoot! You gotta see this! This kid knows how to burp the Equestrian Anthem!"

Scoot laughed. "I'm not really supposed to encourage that, but it is pretty impressive. Gross, but impressive."

"I'll check it out!" Fleetfoot said, taking off with Soarin' and leaving Dash alone on the cloud with Scoot.

"Wanna go?" Scoot offered to Dash. "Windy loves an audience..."

"Nah. There's something a little more impressive here," Dash smiled at Scoot. She knew it had only been a day, not really time enough for Scoot to get her head straight. But she still didn't want to lose a moment with the amazing mare of her dreams.

“Dash, I, um... wanted to talk to you,” Scoot said, blushing a little and avoiding Dash’s eyes.

Dash felt her heartbeat racing. She and Scoot were talking, but it sounded like Scoot wanted to *talk*. About important things, like whether Dash would ever be happy again. Dash somehow managed to act normal and called over to Spitfire, “Hey! Can you keep an eye on the kids?”

“That’s my job,” Spitfire called back. “And I’ll make sure Scootaloo’s class is okay too.”

“Thanks,” Scoot called.

Dash lead the way out of the main room, around a corner to the hallway that lead to the locker rooms. Nopony was around, and they stood in the empty hallway for a moment, studying each other without speaking.

Finally Scoot started: “Rainbow Dash, you are a really awesome pony, but –”

“Not ‘but,’” Dash cut in, her heart sinking and her brain grabbing to anything it could offer to keep it afloat. “Please, not ‘but.’ I can be more awesome, Scoot! I can be whatever you want. Just give me a chance, and I’ll –”

“Dash? Shut up,” Scoot said calmly, smiling a little. Then she went on. “Now, what I was gonna say is, you’re a really awesome pony, but you’re trying way too hard. You have been the whole time I’ve known you. Relax. I love you.”

Dash’s heart froze, mid-sink. Her whole body froze. She was pretty sure the best thing ever just happened, but just in case she asked, “You love me? For real?”

Scoot grinned. “Yup. For really real. I love the times you stick your hoof in your mouth, and the times you mess up and try to look cool anyway. And I love that you’re scared of having a relationship, but you wanna give it a shot because you love me. I love the pony that you are, Rainbow Dash. For real.”

Dash didn’t waste a second, she darted forward and kissed Scootaloo passionately. It had been too long since she felt their lips pressed together, not to mention other things that Dash was suddenly letting herself look forward to again. But mostly, she was looking forward to loving her, even if the word still gave her a shiver of fear when she thought it.

Dash broke the kiss and whispered, “Oh Scoot. I, um, I know I mess this stuff up a lot. And I probably will again, but it’s different with you. You’re so... cool, and fun, and

awesome, and I'm not scared of messing up in front of you. It's worth it, if it means I get to spend my life with you. I love you, and I'm gonna give you my best. All of it. You deserve it."

Scout laughed a little.

"What?" Dash said, smiling.

"You might not be the pony I thought I was in love with all those years, but you're the one dream in my life that's even cooler than I imagined."

"Of course I am!" Dash said with a cocky grin, which was wiped from her face when the younger pegasus shoved her, tumbling them both to the cloud floor. "Oof! Hey!"

Scout attacked her face with kisses as Dash started laughing and wrapped her forelegs around her energetic young marefriend. Dash returned the favor, until their lips met again and the kiss turned long and deep.

"Okay you two!" Spitfire called from the end of the hallway. "Break it up! I'm pretty sure that's not included in the 'day with the Wonderbolts' deal."

"It's voluntary overtime. I'm making the Wonderbolts look awesome and stuff," Dash called, then she went right back to kissing the mare in her forelegs.

Dash heard Soarin' chuckle. "Hey, Spitfire, what if we offered something like that as a prize for the Miss Equestria pageant?"

"Talk to the next captain."

"Who's the next captain?"

"Me." Fleetfoot's voice joined the others. "First rule, all Wonderbolts will leave the toilet seats down in their houses."

"Guess I'm quitting then."

"Spitfire! He can't quit, can he?"

"Retiring! I am retiring!" Spitfire cried as the voices faded back towards the foals and other Wonderbolts, leaving Dash and Scout alone again.

Scot pulled away a little and looked down at Dash. “So you’re really not going to be captain?”

“Nope.” Dash smirked. “Turned it down before the competition.”

“You didn’t know if I’d take you back.” Scot smiled but raised an eyebrow.

“I didn’t,” Dash admitted, looking into those big violet eyes. “But I always aim for the top.”

Strings of lights crisscrossed the farmyard at Sweet Apple Acres for the wedding reception. Applejack's wedding to Peaches N' Cream had been a large affair, since both brides had large families, not to mention all of Applejack's friends, most of Ponyville, and both Princesses attending. There were tables full of apple and peach treats, and music came from the barn where ponies were dancing.

Scootaloo was enjoying the party, and talking to Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom when she felt a tug on her tail. She ignored it.

"...so then one of the other teachers suggested some sort of club for the foals who didn't have their cutie marks yet, and I had no idea whether to jump up and volunteer or hide under the table!"

Another tug at her tail as she and her friends laughed.

Apple Bloom calmed down a little, still giggling. "Scoot? I think somepony's tryin' to get your attention."

"Yeah, I know. Three... two... one..." Scoot braced herself as something, or rather somepony landed straight on her back. "Hey Dash, need something?"

"Yeah, I need my marefriend to dance with me," Dash said from her perch on Scoot's back.

"I'm talking to the other grown-ups here." Scoot smirked as she motioned to Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle.

"Talk is totally over-rated," Dash said with a wave of her hoof. "They probably wanna dance, too."

"Actually, we wanted to hear more about Scoot's class," Sweetie said, laughing and rolling her eyes.

"Did you tell them about the plan, yet?" Dash asked, making no move to remove herself from Scoot's back. Scoot didn't mind it anyway.

"No, I thought we weren't gonna tell other ponies."

“These guys aren’t other ponies, they’re family,” Dash grinned at Scoot’s friends. “I’m gonna retire in a few years.”

“*You’re* retiring from the *Wonderbolts*?” Sweetie raised her eyebrows.

“Yup,” Dash said casually. “Been there, done that, got the uniform. Gotta keep aiming for the top.”

“I don’t know if it’s the top, Dash.”

“Are you kidding? It’s gonna be the most awesome thing I’ll ever do!”

“That’s what you used to say about the *Wonderbolts*,” Scoot smirked.

“Hey, everything I do is the most awesome thing I’ll ever do,” Dash said happily.

Scoot laughed.

“What is it?” Apple Bloom asked. “Ain’t ya gonna tell us?”

“We’re gonna open a school.” Scoot smiled. “A private flight school, for any foal who loves to fly –”

“Or wants to love flying,” Dash added.

“Right, whether they know how or not. We’ll both teach there, I can work with beginners, and a lot of advanced students will flap at the chance to train with a former *Wonderbolt*.”

“That sounds nice... but aren’t there already enough flight schools?” Sweetie asked.

“Ours is kind of different,” Dash said, a grin spreading across her face.

Scoot had a grin to match Dash’s as she announced, “We’re going to open it in Ponyville! The first ground based flight school in Equestria. There’s a much more small town feeling here than in Cloudsdale, we both think it’s good for kids.”

“And being here takes a lot of the pressure off. In Cloudsdale, you look around and all you see are ponies who fly better than you. Well, until you’re a *Wonderbolt* at least – Oof!” Dash cut off as she was unceremoniously bumped off Scoot’s back to the ground, landing on her tail. Scoot smirked at her, and she grinned sheepishly. “Um, anyway,

down here foals can work at their own pace, and not feel left out if they aren't as strong or fast or whatever."

"So y'all are gonna be movin' back here?" Apple Bloom asked excitedly as Dash got to her hooves.

Scout nodded. "In a few years. Dash wants to put in ten years with the Wonderbolts, and I'm gonna get a little more experience before I jump into running my own school."

"Speaking of jumping into things..." Dash quickly nudged herself under Scout, scooping the younger pony onto her back.

"Hey!" Scout protested, laughing.

"We're gonna go dance, girls. I'll have her back soon."

"Gotta catch me first!" Scout said, flying off Dash's back, then darting off.

"You're on!" Dash said, right behind her.

The two pegasi flew low over the reception, avoiding the strings of lanterns and the heads of taller ponies. Dash just barely pulled up in time to avoid crashing into Big Mac, who was deep in conversation with Fluttershy. Just past the crowd, Scout headed up into the sky. Dash pulled out the real speed and finally caught up with her over a cloud bank, tackling her onto the cool, fluffy surface.

"Gotcha!" Dash said, looking down at Scout and grinning.

Scout laughed. "You win again."

Dash just smiled at her for a moment. "I already won. Forever."

"Me too," Scout agreed, leaning up and kissing Dash.