

Macintosh

By TotalOverflow, '11

Chapter 2

Taking a moment to reorient himself and toss the remains of his chewing straw, Big Macintosh sauntered once again into town, now bathed in the warmth of a midmorning sun. Townsfolk bustled to and fro, going cheerfully about their business completely oblivious to the strange encounter Macintosh had with the pegasus not five minutes prior. *Two awkward run-ins with the same pony in the same morning*, he mused, *is this a normal morning for most ponies?* Although being by far the most uncomfortable few hours he'd endured in years, they were also the most productive. While caring for his family and the farm was his top priority, reading and learning all he could understand in those complicated books was something he frequently attempted but often failed. Dropping out of school was a necessary measure to take charge of his family, and he'd always regretted the years he wasted goofing off in class when he could have been learning how to read properly. *If only I could be a little colt again*, he often reflected, recalling his father's disappointed sighs when presented with his son's report cards. *I never realized how badly I wanted to make you proud, Pa, until it was too late.*

He shook his head in an effort to clear it. Those persistent, nagging thoughts would eat at him, distracting him to the point of walking into trees on the farm. He'd already been embarrassed enough this morning with the strange encounters he had, so he steeled himself, breathed deeply and ventured into town.

While the ponies puttering around town were friendly and offered smiles to him, they were content in keeping to themselves, or chatting with friends. Slightly disheartened, Macintosh briefly wished he could return to Twilight's library if she didn't have business of her own to attend to. He considered returning to the farm, but realized that his family would only push him out of the house again if he returned early, so he continued taking in the sights and sounds, ambling about town in no particular direction. Rounding a turn, he caught sight of an elaborate (if a bit tacky) flower stand selling more kinds of flowers than Macintosh thought existed. Smiling and presenting her flowers to passersby was the earth pony with the rose cutie mark Big Mac spoke to earlier. On the other side doing the same thing were two other earth ponies, one a pink, green-haired filly with flowers as her cutie mark (Big Mac knew almost nothing about flowers and couldn't identify them), the other a darker pink with a flower in her blonde mane, and a trio of the same flowers as her cutiemark. The crimson haired one from earlier caught sight of the red stallion, her face lighting up and hoof raised.

"Hello!" she smiled, calling him over, "did you get to return your books?"

Macintosh, blushing slightly, trotted over to the trio who tilted their heads in interest, smiling warmly at him. "Eeyup, Ah sure did."

"Oh!" she said suddenly, "I just remembered! I completely forgot to introduce myself this morning!" the green-maned one rolled her eyes at this, but she didn't notice. "My name is Rose. These are my friends Daisy," the green-maned mare nodded, "and Lily!" the blonde haired filly grinned widely and curtsied.

"Mah name's Big Macintosh," he bowed, "or at least that's what mah family calls me."

“Ooh! I love macintosh apples!” Lily bubbled, her amber eyes teeming with life, “Applejack makes the best apple pies with them! Do you know her?”

“Eeyup, Ah reckon Ah do, what with her bein’ mah li’l sister an’ all,” Big Mac chuckled. Suddenly all their eyes grew wide with excitement.

“She went to the Grand Galloping Gala, didn’t she!?” Rose beamed.

“Does she make apple pies every day!?” Lily bounced.

“Has she ever considered selling apple tree flowers!?” Daisy grinned.

“Whoa now!” Big Macintosh stepped back, “is mah sister really that famous?”

“Sorry about that,” Rose blushed, “it’s just that she’s made quite a name for herself around here; she’s sort of known as the most dependable one around.” Macintosh sighed. *Great. My sister is the one these three are interested in, not me, he thought, they just want me to be the middle-pony for my sister.*

“Oh dear! I hope you don’t think we want you to be the middle-pony for your sister!” Lily said, eyes wide and apologetic, “I’m so sorry for being so rude!”

Daisy stared sideways at her friend before rolling her eyes. “I *would* like to talk with Applejack sometime about potential business partnership ventures.”

“But it can wait!” Lily glared at Daisy, “Big Macintosh is new in town and we mustn’t be so inconsiderate to his feelings!”

“Er, how-”

“Because I haven’t seen you around before!” Lily smiled, pleased with herself for cutting him off and answering his question, “well, at least not since that running leaf thingy. I said hi to you! But you probably don’t remember; I’m not that memorable. Just last night I went into my living room to get something but I couldn’t remember what it was! I think. It was last night so it was a while ago, so I kinda forgot what happened. Like I said, I’m not that memorable. Or, wait, did I already say that?” She pondered for a second, oblivious to (or just ignoring) Daisy’s frustrated scowl. “But I never forget a face, especially when that face is yours! Actually, no, that sounds kind of creepy. But I promise I’m not creepy! Well, except for that one time I-”

“Okay, Lily, I think he gets the idea,” Rose patted her friend on the head, “Lily’s just kind of like that.”

Macintosh grinned nervously. Lily’s energy reminded him of another pony. Macintosh didn’t know many ponies in town, but *everypony* knew that one. It would be quite a feat to ever forget about her. Lily shrugged and began rearranging flowers.

“So tell us about yourself, Big Macintosh,” said Rose, “what brings you into town today?”

“Well, mah family thought that Ah didn’t have enough fr-” he caught himself mid-word, “...Time off. They said Ah should take the day off and spend it in town.” *I don’t want them to think I’m a complete social shut-in, even if I am.*

“And do you work on the farm?”

“Ah sure do. Ah used ta run it ‘till a few years back when Ah gave the farm ta Applejack,” he scratched at the ground, aware of how boring his life was and wanting desperately to change the subject, “An’ how ‘bout y’all? You three run this here flower stand?”

“It’s a living,” Daisy said dryly, waving to passing ponies.

“I love it!” Lily blurted, hopping over with a basket of flowers, “and so does Daisy, even if she’s acting like an old boring mule,” Daisy rolled her green eyes once again as Lily pulled out a

big flower like the one in her hair. "Here we go! A nice lily, just like mine!" she pounced over to Macintosh and slid the flower into his mane, turning the stallion an even brighter tone of red. "It's so beautiful!" she squealed. Rose sauntered over and casually removed the flower from Mac's mane, placing it back in the basket, much to Lily's chagrin.

"These are for the customers, Lily," she said flatly, "besides, I don't think Big Macintosh wants a flower in his mane, do you?"

"Not really," he stuttered. Lily's face fell. "Ah mean, it's real purdy an' all, but Ah'm...Well, flowers ain't really mah...Um..." Lily hung her head, stepped slowly over to the side of the cart and plumped down onto the road, facing away from them. It almost seemed like the color and life drained from her body.

"Stop being so dramatic, Lily!" Daisy snapped. Instantly Lily popped back to her hooves, her vigour and color restored and stuck her tongue out at Daisy.

"You're no fun at all!"

Macintosh chuckled nervously and looked back to Rose, who shook her head dismissively.

"Don't mind them," said the mare as she resumed smiling and waving to potential customers. The three ponies seemed to know most of the town folk by name, often teasing them or showing off certain breeds of flowers with which they were familiar. Business seemed to hold up well enough, as ponies purchased flowers on a whim, often giving them to a friend they traveled with or hinted at what their evenings would consist of; one blue unicorn colt with a particularly pointed horn and a safety pin cutie mark bought a bouquet for what he called 'The Big Night,' eliciting congratulations from Lily and Rose and a nod from Daisy.

"Y'all seem ta be familiar with half the town," Big Mac marveled.

"You get to know your regulars quickly enough," Rose grinned, dropping several newly acquired bits into a small box, "I always do my best to get to know a little about every customer I get."

"We'd be a lot more efficient and make a lot more money if you didn't talk to everypony for ten minutes," huffed Daisy as she prepared a bunch of flowers for a pegasus and his fillyfriend.

"Let's not get into this again," Rose sighed, "and I don't talk that much."

"Not like me!!" shouted Lily. Looking up, Rose caught sight of a blue earth colt with a darker blue mane marching towards them, grinning.

"Hey, it's the Flower Triplets!" he laughed, receiving a swift, playful smack to the head from Rose.

"Shut up! We're not related!"

"Thank goodness," Daisy mumbled.

"Big Macintosh, this is Blues," Rose introduced the two, "he's a friend of ours who helps out with the stand every now and then." Macintosh bobbed his head and smiled. "Blues, this is Big Macintosh. He works out on Sweet Apple Acres."

"Sweet, I love apples," Blues said, saluting the red stallion, before he squinted his eyes. "Wait a second... You seem familiar..."

"...Ah do?"

"Ugh, it's going to bother me all day until I figure it out! Ah well," he turned to look at the

three mares. "So are you fillies coming tonight?"

"Of course!" said Lily, "I heard it's going to be awesome!"

"Yeah, it sounds like fun," nodded Rose, "I'll be there." Macintosh swallowed anxiously, feeling like a fifth wheel. Blues turned his attention to Daisy, who remained silent.

"What about you, Flower Wishes?" Blues smirked, earning another smack to the head, this time from Daisy.

"Shut up!" she did her best to hide her smile, but failed, "fine, I'll go." Clearing his throat, Mac stood straight.

"Well it sounds like y'all have got a big evenin' ahead o' ya, so Ah'll jes' be takin' off then," he waved goodbye and turned to leave the stand when Lily spoke up.

"Why don't you come with us?"

Big Macintosh winced. *Just what I was afraid of. Well, actually...*

"Yeah, man!" Blues smiled, "you should totally come!"

"Well, uh, Ah don't really know what it is y'all are talkin' 'bout..." Macintosh scratched his neck tensely. Lily's jaw fell open.

"It's only the best party slash dance ever!" she chirped, "I even heard Vinyl Scratch is going to be there!" Something pinged in the back of Macintosh's mind. *Party? Then that must mean...*

"Uh, Ah probably shouldn't," he stammered, "Ah mean, Ah've got a lot of work ta do on the farm, and, um, other things Ah should..."

"Aw, c'mon, I bet you'll have fun!" reassured Rose, her large green eyes staring expectantly at the earth pony.

"Ah've never really been much of, um, a party pony," he said sheepishly, searching desperately for some excuse he could use. *I can't go to a party...SHE'LL be there for sure!*

"Well maybe you'll change your tune," said Blues, "wherever Vinyl Scratch goes good music follows. Besides, there'll be food!"

Well, I suppose it does kind of sound like fun...After all, I did end up enjoying my time with Twilight, and maybe SHE won't be there after all...

"All right, Ah s'pose Ah could go."

"Cool!" smiled Rose, "it's at the east side of town tonight; I think they're setting up a tent or something. I'll see you there!" The others all smiled and waved goodbye (except for Daisy, who simply nodded) as Macintosh took his leave of the group. Hardly five seconds later the clock tower struck eleven. This was by far the most eventful day he could remember, and it wasn't even noon.

A robin chirped in the tree above Macintosh's head. He had made his way back to the same tree he sat under earlier and rested for a minute, enjoying the scenery, which he hadn't taken a real look at last time. From this grassy knoll, he could watch the river run through the park, under a bridge and between the woods out of sight towards the edge of town. Several ponies took leisurely strolls along its bank, a few even taking a moment to stop and dip their hooves, pulling them sharply away with a shudder and a giggle from their friends. Almost no pony traveled alone; most had at least one friend with them, some even a small group of friends, chatting about their plans for the day and how they feel about their jobs and what they

should eat for lunch. It was all very carefree, with no sense of urgency or worry exhibited by anypony (save for one cross-eyed pegasus, who was stressing about a muffin while darting throughout the park). This feeling of ease and peace was unfamiliar to Big Macintosh. His father had instilled in him a strong work ethic: that if you weren't working, you'd better start. Little tolerance was given to exhaustion and even less to laziness. The weekends were always a powerful relief from work as he only had to do his morning chores, but even those often lasted into the early afternoon.

"How did ya do it, Pa?" Macintosh whispered to himself. His father loved the farm he worked on, calling it his true love (which earned him many whacks to the head from Mac's mother) and he did his best to pass on that passion to his children.

Stretching his legs, Macintosh took a light canter around the park, hoping to return his mind to the present. It was difficult, however. The memory of his father's disappointed looks at his son were enough to...

"Nope!" Big Mac said suddenly, "Ah've got ta keep mah mind focused on t'day!" His canter had broken into a gallop, and soon he was racing around the park trying to distract himself. He hardly even noticed as he raced between ponies, ducked under branches and hopped over rocks, but the image of his father's hat and harness after the...

"WATCH OUT!!!"

CRASH!

"Ugh..." the blue pegasus slowly pulled herself off of Macintosh, checking herself and her wings for any bruises. "What's the big idea, buddy?" she accused, running a hoof through her rainbow mane, "why don't you watch where you're goin'?"

"Sorry," said Macintosh meekly as he stood up; although he was knocked to the ground by her speed he wasn't hurt at all. "Ah wasn't payin' attention. Why were ya flyin' so low?"

"Practicing a new move," exclaimed the filly, flapping her wings, "It should work as long as there aren't any big *hay-seeds* in my way next time!" Macintosh rose up at this, glaring down his snout at the pegasus he towered over. Unimpressed, she stood as straight as she could, trying to match his height, and tipping her head back she stared down her nose right back at him.

"Ah think y'all best settle down," he said slowly, watching himself. He didn't take kindly to being called names, but did his best to control his temper.

"And I think you should get out of my way so I can get back to practicing!" When she saw the stallion had no intention of moving she hovered in the air above him, firing daggers into his determined eyes. "What's the matter? Got too much hay in your ears?"

"This sorta behavior is uncalled for, young lady."

"*You're* uncalled for! What do you think you're doing running, anyways? Do you think you're fast or something? You wanna become a race-horse?" By this time most ponies had stopped what they were doing to watch the potential scuffle. Macintosh was not ready to make a big show out of this and earn a bad reputation on his first real day out in town.

"Y'all don't hafta go floatin' around thinkin' yer better than the rest of us, y'know!" His anger was swelling; he hadn't felt this way about pegasi in a long time.

"I don't think I'm better than the rest of you, I *know* I'm better than the rest of you!" She was pumping her hoof in the air, energizing the growing crowd of ponies. "Why? You wanna make something of it? You think you're faster than me?"

"Ah never said anythin' of the sort."

"You wanna race?"

"No. Now you just calm down an' Ah'll be on mah way," he had turned away, stomping heavily as the crowd cleared a path for him. *I'm not going to let some pegasus embarrass me in front of the whole town.* The blue pony wasn't finished, however.

"You're just chicken!"

He stopped.

"Nopony calls me chicken."

The race was to span the park, following the path and up the hill, weaving through the trees and back to the fountain, where the two crouched in position, ready to run. It all happened so fast; Macintosh didn't truly realize it was happening until a rather excitable cyan unicorn (the same one from earlier, he reckoned) guided them through the course and made the blue pegasus swear not to use her wings, which she boasted weren't necessary to win. The track wasn't very long and it was only one lap, but Big Mac still regretted ever 'agreeing' to do it. Already a sizable crowd had gathered to watch the event, and he earned more attention than he desired. Fortunately he didn't spot any of the friends he'd made that morning, so he was satisfied that they wouldn't see him embarrass himself.

Wait...Friends?

"GO!"

The blue pegasus shot away from the starting line leaving a trail of rainbow and a stunned Macintosh in her wake. Rearing up with a whinny he kicked off the ground and ran as fast as his hooves could take him, rapidly closing distance with the pegasus.

"Easy peasy," he heard her gloat as he pulled up beside her, gaining a dumbstruck expression from the filly. He quickly overtook her, his powerful legs throwing dirt behind him in a cloud of dust. The feeling was exhilarating; maybe he should have run in the Running of the Leaves last year?

The feeling didn't last long however as the pegasus kicked into overdrive and blasted ahead, blazing over the bridge and around the bend towards the woods. The edge of Big Mac's mouth curled into a grin as he felt a sudden burst of adrenaline surge throughout his body. His heavy hooves pounded the path through the trees as he effortlessly weaved through their trunks, ducking and dodging limbs and branches as he closed distance with his opponent. Clinking loudly with every step, his harness bounced on his shoulders, its weight unnoticed by its bearer. This energy he felt...It was completely unlike anything he'd experienced before. Years of applebucking had strengthened his limbs into steel bars, pumping him ahead with extreme speed.

Jumping over a large rock he found himself side-by-side with the pegasus again as they rounded the corner; the finish was in sight! The two glanced quickly at each other, their eyes ablaze. In a rare moment of pride, Macintosh winked as he pushed ahead, closing in on the

finish line and victory.

“Oh no you don’t!!” yelled the pegasus as she used every ounce of her power to charge forward, head down. Just feet away from the finish line a multi-colored bolt of lightning hurtled past the stallion and across the finish, slowing down and returning to the shape of a pony. The crowd exploded into cheers and applause; some ponies exchanged hoof-fuls of bits. His jaw hanging open, Mac skid to a halt, gasping for air.

“How’d...y’all...do...that?” From the look of it, the blue pony wasn’t much better off.

“Be...cause...I’m...awesome!” she panted, taking a chug from a glass of water somepony hoofed her. Another pony passed one to Big Mac, which he downed in a flash.

“Yer...a mighty fine...athlete,” he grinned. Even though he lost the race and his muscles ached, he was still elated with the excitement of it all.

“Thanks...You’re really fast,” she said, recovering and wiping the sweat from her brow, “I like you; we should race again sometime.”

“Sounds good ta me,” Macintosh smiled, “so what should Ah call ya?”

“Amazing is good, but my name is Rainbow Dash!”

“Right, course y’are!” Macintosh face-hoofed, disgusted at himself for not recognizing her sooner, “shoulda recognized ya right off; y’all come round the farm pretty often ta see AJ.”

“Oh, duh!” Rainbow slapped herself, “that’s right! I thought I recognized you! You’re Big Macintosh! You just never talk or stuff whenever I come by. How come you never come into town?”

“Too much work ta do on the farm,” Mac shrugged, “never had the time.”

The pegasus nodded, saluted, and flew off, earning another cheer from the crowd, which slowly began dispersing with her departure. A few ponies congratulated Big Mac, exclaiming how rare it is for anypony to come so close to beating Rainbow Dash, but most simply went their way, laughing and joking with their friends. Before long, he was left alone by the fountain, the soft crash of its water a continuous applause.

He smiled.

That was fun.