

## Macintosh

By TotalOverflow, '11

### Chapter 1

The sky was just barely changing from navy blue to orange when Big Macintosh hopped out of bed. He always got up before the sunrise to begin working the fields, and today was no different. Combing his orange mane and throwing on his harness, he took one glance in his mirror to see a large, red earth pony with a few freckles glance back at him, his cutie mark a halved green apple. Not what you would call a vain pony by any stretch of the imagination, Macintosh preferred to keep himself looking somewhat groomed, even if there wasn't anypony in particular he was trying to impress. *Well, you never know*, he thought, *maybe somepony is watching from the sky...*

Turning towards the door his eyes fell upon a stack of books on the floor. 'The Equestrian Language,' 'Equine Etiquette' and 'Applied Theoretical Mathematics' among other similar titles sat beneath a small scrap of paper that read (in messy handwriting) 'RETURN BY TUESDAY,' which, he recalled, was today. *I'll have to get Apple Bloom to run those back to the Library*, he thought to himself as he stepped out into the hall.

On any other morning, the house would have been completely silent and, despite his large size, Big Macintosh was quite skilled at keeping it that way as he had a quick breakfast and let himself outside to begin work. Today however, he could clearly hear the voices of the rest of his family whispering in the kitchen. Briefly wondering if he overslept, he ambled down the staircase and turned into the kitchen to see his two younger sisters and grandmother huddled around the table. He wasn't one for eavesdropping, so he trotted right on in.

"Well, tan mah hide if it ain't the whole dang family up bright'n early," he said cheerfully. The others hadn't noticed his presence and all jumped slightly when they heard him, but quickly put on large, fake smiles.

"Well howdy Big Mac!" Applejack grinned.

"Hiya Big Brother!" Apple Bloom beamed.

"If it ain't mah favorite gran'son!" Granny Smith smiled.

Macintosh looked slowly at each one in turn before breaking the uncomfortable silence. "All right, y'all, what's goin' on here?" The other three exchanged nervous glances before Applejack finally swallowed and stepped up to the plate, fiddling with the old, worn hat upon her head with the funny bite in its brim.

"Well, Big Mac, we were talkin' an' we thought that maybe it would be a good idea fer ya to take the day off," she said, wincing slightly.

"Heh, that's a goodun, sis," chuckled Big Macintosh as he ate one of the apples from the basket on the table, "Yer a regular comedian." Apple Bloom took a deep breath and stepped forward, the pink bow in her hair bouncing.

"We thought that maybe you should go out an' try ta make some friends," she said sheepishly, ducking from the angry glare Applejack shot at her. Big Mac stared down at her incredulously.

"Because, y'know," Applejack was regaining some confidence as she stepped towards

her brother, “y’all spend so much time in the fields we’re worried that ya ain’t got any friends; that all ya do all day is work and hardly talk ta no pony outside o’ us three.” Her younger sister had started towards him as well; together they were forcing him towards the front door.

“Yeah!” Apple Bloom squealed, “I made some great friends in town! Y’all gotta too!”

“It’s a lovely day out!”

“Perfect for meetin’ new faces!”

“Real friendly folk out there, just waitin’ ta say howdy!”

“After all, you’ve got those books ta return an’-”

“Now hold on just one cotton-pickin’ minute!” Big Mac bellowed as he planted his hooves on the floor and stood as tall as he could. His siblings cowered away, ears folded back and giving the large stallion the respect he demanded. Their brother almost never raised his voice; when he did, it meant he was very angry and they knew better than to try and argue. “Ah dun’ know what y’all think yer doin’, but that ain’t no way ta talk ta yer big brother! Ah ain’t got no need fer friends nor any such nonsense; Ah’ve got apples ta buck, an’ Ah intend ta buck’em! Y’all may be in charge o’ the farm now, Applejack, but Ah’m still the head o’ this family! It ain’t yer place ta be comin’ up with fanciful ideas fer yer big brother’s way o’ life!”

“Now y’all calm down, young man!” chided Granny Smith as she strolled into the front entrance, behind the two fillies, “This here idea were mine, an’ y’all are gun’ do as Ah say!”

Macintosh drooped his head and stared sadly at the floor. “Yes, Gramma.” His sisters stood straight again, grinning from ear to ear. “Ah’ll go get mah books, Ah s’pose.” As he trotted slowly back upstairs the old mare winked at her granddaughters who giggled quietly.

“Don’t worry, Big Mac!” Applejack shouted up the stairs, “Yer gonna have fun!”

“Go make some friends,” he growled, plodding up the path towards town, “yer gun’ have fun! Where do those three get off comin’ up with ideas like that?” Groaning and shifting the stalk of hay he was chewing to the other side of his mouth, he looked back at the books that filled his satchels. Although he had read them and many others like them cover to cover, he found it hard to understand anything written in them. Not having the best reading ability didn’t help, and many of the concepts went clear over his head, but he wanted desperately to be able to act and talk like a city pony by the time he was ready to go into town for a day and meet some new ponies, but today was much too soon; he didn’t feel confident in his speaking skills nor his social skills. Working on a farm for your whole life, even one as nice as Sweet Apple Acres, severely hampered one’s social life outside of their family. He loved his family very much, and he knew they were right; he didn’t have any friends and almost never went into town since his sisters were more than happy to take care of any errands that needed to be run. His sisters had many friends, but he never interacted with them or got to know them personally whenever they came around the farm; after all, there was extra work to be done when Applejack was caught up with her friends. Even when working with others during Winter Wrap Up he kept to himself, just working, guiding others (like the accident prone Caramel) and he’d just go straight home after the closing ceremonies and before the party, since he really wasn’t the partying type. He appreciated the fact that his family was concerned on his behalf, but he couldn’t help but feel nervous. *I don’t know anypony in town, he thought, well at least not since school, and it’s been years since I’ve seen any of them. I’m going to look like such a foal in front*

*of everyone. I don't even know where the new library was built!* He sighed heavily as he realized that Apple Bloom always picked up and returned books for him, and that the last time he was in town was for the last Winter Wrap Up, which was several months ago. He even stayed home to work when Princess Celestia paid a visit, and he missed out on the whole phoenix fiasco; something he regretted missing, especially after reading up on the mythical birds that week.

Cresting the hill that overlooked the small city of Ponyville, Macintosh had to stop and admire the scenery. The sun had just started rising, tossing a warm orange glow between the branches of trees and down the roads. There were already a few ponies strolling about town, but the streets were empty for the most part. Macintosh savored these moments: the view of the town was always a remarkable sight to him, although most others took it for granted. He used to walk this road many times to get to school as a foal, but that was a long time ago, and the town had changed much since then. Saying a quick 'thank you' to Celestia for rising the sun, he cantered slowly into town, head low and eyes darting nervously.

"Now where in the hay am Ah s'posed ta find that library?" He muttered, but his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of shouting from above.

"No, no, no!" berated a blue, rainbow-maned pegasus at a yellow, pink-maned one. They seemed familiar to him. He was pretty sure they were friends of his sister, but he didn't know them any better than that; he didn't even know their names. "How many times do I have to tell you! 'Spin, Lift, and Buck!'" she demonstrated on a nearby cloud, swiftly dissipating it. Her bucking actually was very similar to bucking apple trees. "Now, try again!" The yellow one floated to a nearby cloud and did her best to recreate what the blue one did, but merely bounced off the white pillow and had to straighten herself up again, letting her long bangs hide her face.

"Ugh! I got up at six in the morning for this!? Call me when you're ready to learn how to clear the sky for real!" With that, the blue pegasus dashed off, leaving the other one to float back to the ground, sighing quietly. Looking up, she saw Big Macintosh watching, his brow knitted. Blushing, she averted her gaze and flew off quickly, keeping low to the road.

"Never ceases ta amaze me," he whispered to himself as the mare disappeared from view. Staring longingly to the sky, he let out another sigh. "What Ah wouldn't give for a pair o' wings of mah very own..." Before he let himself get all sentimental again he resumed his mission, aimless as it was. Wandering the roads he searched for something that resembled a library, before stopping dead in his tracks. "Oh hay seed," he grumbled as he realized he didn't even know what a library was supposed to look like. *Am I really that out of touch?*

"Excuse me," a sing-song voice came from behind him. He turned to see a cream-colored earth pony with crimson hair highlighted by a streak of pink, a rose for a cutie mark and the deepest green eyes he had ever seen. "You seem lost. Were you looking for something?" She smiled broadly, but only received a wide-eyed stare from the stallion. "Are you new in town? I don't think we've ever met."

"Yeah," he stuttered, "Ah mean, no! Er, well kinda." He had to force himself to remove his eyes from hers. *Horse apples! This is just what I was afraid of!* Clearing his throat, he did his best to explain. "Ah'm tryin' ta find a book ta return mah libraries."

The mare laughed; it was such a light, flighty laugh, but it was still sincere and matched

her tuneful voice. "A little too early in the morning for you, huh?" Big Mac blushed, grinning sheepishly. *Why did the first pony I meet have to be the prettiest one!?* He panicked slightly, completely befuddled in how to react.

"Er, yeah, early, heh heh."

"That's the library over there," she pointed over to a large tree that had somehow been turned into a building, "but I'm afraid it doesn't open for a few hours yet." Picking up a basket of flowers by her hooves she turned to leave. "I need to go open my flower stand now, but maybe we'll bump into each other again! See you!"

"Oh! Uh, goodbah!" Macintosh awkwardly raised a hoof to wave goodbye as the mare trotted away. When she was out of view he shook himself back to reality. "Well that was jes' perfect," he groaned, "Ah reckon she thinks yer as dumb as a bucket 'o nails. 'Returnin' libraries,' what a stupid thing ta say." Pulling at his harness he turned to stare at the library; beams of light passed through its branches and fell on the road before his hooves. *If only I could speak as well as I can think...*

Cantering over, he indeed found a sign by the door that read 'Open Nine to Nine.'

"Now let's see...The sun's 'bout right so," mumbling, he pointed at the sphere of light, "so that'd mean it's almost-" he jumped as he was interrupted by the sound of the clock tower ringing out seven loud chimes. From the farm, you couldn't hear the sound of the bells, and looking around town, he realized once again just how different it was.

The buildings seemed to be very old, but also looked very well built. Most of them had hay roofs, and some were even multi-storied, possibly housing more than one family. A couple of small fillies and colts were playing on the doorstep of one such house, as their mother was trying fruitlessly to get them ready for school. Ponies trotted to and fro, stopping to chat with others along their way. Stores were opening, carts being pushed and school bells ringing. Even though it was a small town, Macintosh suddenly felt extremely uncomfortable around so many ponies; it was much more activity than he was used to finding himself around. Swallowing, he slowly maneuvered through the growing crowds towards the edge of town.

Just as he turned the last corner, he was greeted by a view of a cottage, although a hill might be a better word for it. Its roof was covered by a tremendous amount of what looked like moss, grass and leaves, decorated with several occupied bird houses of varying sizes. A tall chimney at its peak let off a small trail of smoke, casting a thin shadow upon the dirt road. The path in front led to a bridge over a small stream, which ran down the hill towards the EverFree Forest. Although it was dozens of yards away, Big Mac still found it surprising that anypony would live so close to the dreaded forest. Whoever it was must be a very brave pony.

Rounding the hillside came into view the same yellow pegasus as before, guiding a small bunch of ducklings towards the river and their waiting mother. She didn't notice Macintosh's presence on the other side of the stream and turned away to face the rising sun, stretching out her long, slender wings. As she extended them outwards, he marveled once again at the sight of a pegasus' outstretched wings. *What an amazing sight...Those are the longest wings I've ever seen.* Yet, somehow, they kept getting longer. Stretching farther and farther, her golden wings dwarfed most pegasi's, extending perhaps even further than the Princess Celestia's wingspan! Tremendous and elegant, they reached towards the sky,

fluttering softly in the gentle breeze. Entranced, Macintosh took a step forward, snapping a twig beneath his hoof. The pegasus flinched and spun to face the stallion, her wings snapping to her sides in a flash of gold; her aqua eyes a mix of shock, embarrassment and irritation.

“Oh, er, um, Ah...” Big Mac stumbled, his red face somehow turning redder, “Ah didn’t mean ta be spyin’ or nuthin, Ah was jes’...” before he could say whatever he was trying to say, the pegasus squeaked and ran into her cottage, slamming and locking the door behind her. The nearby birds flew away at the noise, and the ducks in the stream hurried to hide under the bridge.

“Oh yeah, t’day’s gun’ be real fun.”

Not wanting to bother the mare any more than he already had, Macintosh headed back into town, looking for a quiet spot to sit and wait for the library to open. He finally found an empty bench in the park where he sat down, chewing absentmindedly on his stalk of wheat which somehow had stayed in his mouth that morning. Dozens of ponies strolled through the park, but he didn’t see any of them. His mind was completely focused on that yellow pegasus. *I didn’t even know wings could get that enormous*, he thought, shuffling uncomfortably under the weight of his harness and satchels. Ever since he was a tiny colt, he had watched the pegasus ponies fly through the air with great envy. He felt it wasn’t fair that they were stuck on the ground while others were soaring through the air, and he often voiced these feelings to his father. The response he got every time, however, was a swift smack to the head and a long talking-to about the duties and responsibilities of being an earth pony, and how it was a much more satisfying life than that of a ‘horsey-pony-pigeon,’ as his father called them. At one time, Macintosh (he hadn’t yet earned the title of ‘Big’) even became resentful of his winged brethren, believing that they felt themselves superior to the rest of the world. It wasn’t until he actually met a pegasus that his resentment returned to admiration. He remembered that day well...It was just after his sister Applejack had left for ManeHatten, and she said...

“Hey! Buddy!”

“Huh? Wha?”

“You’re using up the whole bench! Mind letting somepony else have a seat?” the tan pony with a massive handlebar-mustache snapped Big Macintosh from his reminiscing. He was dressed in sports gear, a tennis racket slung across his back and a giddy, cyan unicorn filly at his side.

“Oh, uh, sorry,” Macintosh apologized as he stood up and left the bench for the two.

“Hey, thanks buddy!” said the colt as they sat down; he resumed telling tales of his latest tennis match to his friend, who hung on his every word. Macintosh, dejected, wandered around the park a bit more, but it wasn’t long before the clock tower finally struck eight o’ clock.

“One more hour,” Big Mac reminded himself as he unsuccessfully tried to find another bench. Finally, he settled for just plopping down under a tree and removed his heavy bags. *May as well look through them one last time*, he reasoned as he took out a random book. ‘Relative Theories of Antimatter: A Comprehensive Analysis on the InterDimensional Borders.’ He decided to get a different one.

“Whatchya got there?” a high-pitched voice inquired. Looking around, Mac couldn’t see anypony. “Up here!” Up in the tree, hanging upside down from a branch alongside her helmet

and scooter was a young, orange pegasus filly with unruly purple hair, covered in scrapes and bruises.

“Uh, are y’all all right?” asked the stallion as he rose to his hooves.

“Yeah, I’m fine, just hangin’ out,” she wiggled herself free and fell with a thud. “I was tryin’ out a new trick; it didn’t go so well. Hey, you’re Apple Bloom’s big brother, right?”

“Eeyup,” he smiled, resting on the grass again, “Big Macintosh. Ah’m afraid Ah can’t recall yer name, though.”

“Scootaloo,” she grinned, striking a pose. Hopping over she stared down at the large book. “‘Related Threes of Auntie Mudder?’ That’s funny, your cutie mark looks like an apple, not a book reading...thingy.”

Macintosh rolled his eyes as he tucked the book back in his satchel. “Ah’m readin’ up on stuff everypony knows.”

“Well, I don’t know who Auntie Mudder is.”

“Ah jes borrowed ‘em from the library; Ah work out on Sweet Apple Acres, buckin’ trees, plantin’ seeds. All day long, every day.”

“Oh, that explains the apple!”

“Eeyup,” sighing deeply, he looked longingly back at the sky. Scootaloo tried to see what he was looking at, but her attention span didn’t last.

“You’re boring. Can you help me get my scooter out of the tree?” she was trying to climb the tree, her tiny wings flapping furiously, but she couldn’t make it up more than a few feet.

“Why don’t ya jes’ fly up?” wrong question. The little filly’s face fell and her wings drooped uselessly at her sides, but she tried to put on a brave face.

“Um, I’m just...Saving my energy!” her small wings fluttered a bit as she dropped to the grass, “me and my friends have a lot of crusading to do today.” Her wings, which were smaller than one of Mac’s hooves and bore only a couple feathers each, flittered a bit in the breeze before she tucked them at her sides, her eyes lighting up. “And hopefully I can get some practice flying with the master later!”

“An’ who’s that?”

“Rainbow Dash, duh! She’s only the most mega-awesome pony around! Her tricks are amazing!” She was hopping all over the place, striking poses and punching the air.

“Sound’s like a plan ta me,” Big Mac smiled, reaching up and pulling down her scooter and helmet, “Ah’ll bet yer cutie mark must be a pair o’ wings or some such, eh?” Wrong question again. The filly stopped bouncing around and stared at her blank flanks sadly. *Crud, how could I not notice that?*

“I wake up every morning hoping it’s there, but it never is,” she sighed as she sat on her scooter, “but once I can fly like Rainbow, it’ll definitely show up!”

Big Macintosh thoughtfully chewed his hay for a moment before answering. “Is flyin’ like that pony ya mentioned what ya really want ta do?” The orange pegasus looked at him, bemused.

“More than anything!”

Macintosh smiled and patted her on the head. “Then you chase them dreams and don’t let up ‘till ya got the cutie mark ya want.”

“Yeah!” she sprang up, threw on her helmet and popped onto her scooter, grinning back

at the stallion. "I'm gonna get the most awesomest cutie mark ever! I've gotta get to class! See ya!" Her wings buzzing like a motor, she dashed away, squeezing through the crowds with ease. Macintosh smiled, but it was a sad smile. *I sure hope she gets the destiny she wants. I hope she never has to go through what I did.*

After absentmindedly flipping through his other books for a while, the clock tower finally struck nine o' clock. Packing up his things and straightening his pulling collar, the stallion cantered through town towards the tree-turned-library. He had to stop and ask for directions again at one point, but he got there pretty quickly.

"Welp, nuthin' else fer it, Ah s'pose," he muttered as he knocked on the door. A couple of voices came from within; he heard what sounded like a faint crash followed by arguing. Finally, the door opened, revealing a short, purple and green dragon who yawned dramatically.

"Yeah, what?" he grumbled, wiping the dust from his eye.

"Spike, smarten up!" came a second voice from within the library.

Macintosh cleared his throat. "Ah'm here ta return mah books."

"Oh, okay. C'mon in," the dragon yawned again as he opened the door to allow Macintosh into a very messy library. Piles of books were scattered across the floor and desks, with a wooden ladder on top. "Just toss 'em anywhere," he shrugged.

"Ugh! Spike!" The second voice came from a purple unicorn mare that Macintosh recognized; she was the new pony in town who saved last Winter Wrap Up and arrived in Ponyville just in time to stop NightMare Moon. *Was that already a year ago?* He thought, *what's her name again?* "So sorry about Spike, sir," she apologized, too busy focusing on levitating a stack of books to look at the stallion, "he's always like this in the morning before he gets something to eat."

"Ain't no worry," Macintosh smiled, "would ya'll like some help cleanin' up this here mess?" The unicorn placed the books on a table and finally turned to face him.

"Hey, you're Big Macintosh, right? Applejack's brother?"

"Eeyup, Ah reckon Ah am," he grinned, popping off his satchels and pulling out his books. The unicorn trotted over and started lifting them off the ground with her magic. *Shoot, having magic like that would sure make work on the farm a whole lot easier.*

"Oh, so that's where these books went!" she was much more excited than would be considered normal; it was almost as though she were being reunited with old friends.

"I *told* you I didn't touch them!" Spike huffed as he waded through the mess towards the kitchen.

"Um, yeah, sorry about that, Spike," chuckled the mare nervously as she resumed looking through Mac's books. The dragon just sighed and disappeared around the corner. "That's funny, I don't remember you ever coming by to pick up any books," she pondered, separating the books to different piles.

"Mah li'l sister Apple Bloom takes 'em out," saying it aloud made him feel a little badly, but his sister was so eager to make the errands (in the hopes of earning her cutie mark) that he'd never thought about it much.

"Apple Bloom picked them up?" asked the unicorn, raising an eyebrow, "Apple Bloom?"

"I *told* you she took them out!" Spike shouted, "why don't you ever believe me!?"

“Well, excuse me for questioning what a young filly would want with a book about...‘Applied Theoretical Math?’” She read the cover before looking up at Macintosh, baffled. “Apple Bloom read these?”

“Uh, no, they were fer me,” Macintosh replied. Twilight’s expression became one of understanding, but it only lasted a moment before returning to confusion.

“Did you enjoy them?”

“Er, yeah, Ah s’pose,” he shifted his weight. *Dang, what’s her name again?* “Ah’m tryin’ ta learn up on useful stuff.” *Twinkle? Trixie?* “So, would ya’ll like some help?”

“Huh?” she was focusing on the contents of a different book titled ‘Magnets: How Do They Work?’ before she heard his question. “Oh! No, I couldn’t possibly ask you to do that!”

“T’ain’t no trouble, Ah’d be more’n happy ta help.”

“Well, in that case, thank you!” a look of relief washed across her face, “I’ve actually got a lot of stuff to do later in the morning, so help getting this done would be great! Would you mind putting those books over there back on the third shelf?” Macintosh nodded and began his work. “You know, we wouldn’t have to clean at all if *someone* didn’t try to put away all the books at once!”

“I *said* I was sorry, Twilight!” came a voice from the kitchen. *Twilight, of course!* thought Big Macintosh as he carefully refilled the shelves.

“So, Twilight,” the red stallion said, “ya’ve been here fer a while; how’re ya likin’ life in Ponyville?”

“Honestly, it’s much better than I thought it would be,” she hummed, dusting a shelf, “it took a while to get used to, but I’m so glad I came here. I’ve made so many wonderful friends!” Macintosh winced slightly at the word. “How about you? I don’t see you come into town very often. What’s life like on the farm?”

“Oh, er, y’know,” sighed Big Mac, “same as ever, Ah s’pose. Plantin’ and buckin’ trees all day.”

“You have a very nice family, you know. Apple Bloom is so adorable! I wish I had a little sister.”

Big Macintosh’s eyes lit up. “So would anypony after meetin’ li’l Apple Bloom! She’s the sweetest thing. An’ Applejack is the most honest, hardworkin’ pony Ah’ve ever known, even if she’s a mite stubborn.” He laughed softly as he lifted another pile of books. “Do y’all ‘member the time she tried ta buck the entire orchard by herself?”

“I don’t think anypony could forget!” Twilight chuckled.

“An’ Granny Smith is very wise; she may be old, an’ she sleeps a lot, but she’s still got a lot o’ fight left in ‘er!”

“It sounds like you love them very much.”

“They mean the whole world ta me,” he smiled contentedly as he put away the last book. “There y’are! We can see the floor again!”

“Oh, thank you so much, Big Macintosh!” Twilight said as she trotted over to admire their work, “with your help we got this cleaned up in no time!” Looking over the room, Macintosh noticed something hidden behind a desk.

“Oops, looks like we missed one,” he said as he pulled out a book covered in dust, “‘Mathematics 101,’” he read the title, “Ah ‘member this one; it got me started learnin’ math.”



“Oh, that’s one of my favorites!” Twilight smiled as she took the book and flipped through it, “so that’s where it was this whole time!”

“I told you I didn’t burn it by accident!” came a voice from the kitchen.

“Heh heh, sorry again, Spike!” Twilight said sheepishly. She put the book away and turned to Big Mac. “You said you like math?”

“Eeyup, Ah like workin’ with numbers,” he smiled, “Ah handle all the accountin’ an’ orderin’ on the farm.”

“Most ponies hate math; I’ve never understood them!” shaking her head she trotted over to a table and sat down, motioning for Big Mac to do the same. “Spike! Could you bring us some tea?”

“Sure thing, Twilight!” Spike popped his head around the counter, gnawing on a gem, “what kind?”

“What kind of tea would you like, Big Macintosh?” Twilight asked. The red pony looked around nervously. *Tea? How did I suddenly get invited for tea?*

“Uh, there’s more than one kind?” he grimaced.

“Ha! I know what you mean, bro!” Spike laughed, “how does mint tea sound?”

“Good idea,” Twilight replied, prompting Spike to start the water boiling. Mac sat across from the purple unicorn, deep in thought. *Should I ask her about that yellow pegasus’ wings?* He decided against it: it wasn’t his place, after all.

“So, Big Mac,” began Twilight, flipping absentmindedly through the math book, “did you find any of the books hard to read?”

“Er, um, no, uh,” chewing furiously on his straw the stallion blushed slightly, “they’re, well...No.”

“Is your whole family that bad at lying?”

“Eeyup.”

“Hey, listen, if you need any help with studying, feel free to ask. I have a little bit of time before I need to leave this morning, was there anything in particular you had trouble with?” At this moment Spike sprung back into the room carrying a tray filled with a tea kettle, teacups and various biscuits. The tray itself was fancier than anything Macintosh owned.

“That was fast,” marveled the stallion as Spike rested the tray on the table.

“Being able to breathe fire helps,” Spike boasted, letting out a small puff of green flame, “I’m gonna get started on organizing the second floor, ‘kay, Twilight?”

“Thanks Spike,” said Twilight as the dragon hopped upstairs. She added a sugar cube and a pinch of cream before noticing Big Macintosh’s bemused stare at his teacup. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s so...Tiny,” he muttered, placing his giant hoof next to the little cup. Delicately lifting it with both hooves he slowly raised it to his mouth, but couldn’t keep it balanced and sent it and tea across the table with a clatter. “Horse apples! Ah’m so sorry!”

“Oh, it’s okay,” she levitated over a nearby towel and mopped up the mess, “I suppose those cups are a little small...”

Macintosh swallowed. *Should I tell her?* he wondered. *She would be able to help, I suppose...* “Well, ya see, Ah don’t really understand proper table manners,” clearing his throat he hoped she didn’t notice him blushing, “Ah mean, Ah read the books, but Ah couldn’t get

much practice..."

The unicorn stared at him thoughtfully before snickering a little.

Macintosh's face became even redder. "Well now, Ah know it's embarrassin', but ya'll dun' have ta laugh!"

"No, it's not that," she giggled, "I just remembered my first slumber party with Rarity and Applejack. I wonder what Rarity would think of you?" She failed at stifling her laughter.

*I don't see what's so funny,* thought Big Mac, *and who's Rarity?*

"Let me just get my book on table etiquette and let's go through it together, shall we?"

"Uh, no, y'all dun' hafta do that," Macintosh said hurriedly, unsure himself if we wanted to be tutored or not.

"No, it's fine! I've wanted to try out this book anyway! Besides, I owe you one for helping me clean up!"

"Oh, okay then..." *This is so embarrassing...*

The next hour sped by. Macintosh learned much about correct manners and, to his surprise, found himself enjoying the 'lesson.' He was learning exactly what he'd tried and failed to teach himself by borrowing all those books. In fact, he even found himself excited for dinner that night so he could show off what he'd learned to his family. Before long, though, the clock tower struck ten, and Twilight began cleaning up the remains from tea time.

"Phew, time sure flies when you're having fun, eh?" levitating the tray around the corner and into the kitchen, she also shut her book and stood, prompting Macintosh to do the same (he'd learned a gentlecolt was supposed to stand when a filly leaves the table). "I enjoyed that; I think we covered a lot of ground. Maybe we could do it again sometime?"

"Sounds good ta me!" Macintosh beamed, trotting towards the door, "thank ya kindly fer takin' the time ta edumacate me!"

Using her magic she held the door open for him. "No problem at all. Say 'hi' to Applejack for me!"

"Will do," he bowed his head as he left the library.

The sun had risen high, and the streets were even busier now than earlier that morning. Breathing deeply, Big Macintosh took in the sight of a bustling town. Most of the young fillies and colts were still in school, no doubt learning academics and how to act properly, but a few still played in the parks and roads, perhaps gleefully running from exasperated teachers and parents. Vendors lined the streets, selling everything from carrots to flowers to dresses, smiling to potential customers and chatting idly to each other. The hour he had spent inside the library had almost caused him to forget how very different it was to him. He was just about to head out into the city looking for something to do when he heard a quiet, trembling voice behind him.

"Um, excuse me..." it said. Turning, he saw the yellow pegasus, hair hiding her head save for one eye looking up at him before nervously glancing away again. "Um, I was...Just...Well..." She spoke so incredibly quietly that Macintosh wondered if he hadn't gone deaf from all the city noise for a moment.

"Hey, listen," he said loudly, causing the mare to flinch, "Ah wanted ta say sorry fer sneakin' up on ya this mornin'. Ah was jes' tryin' to find somewhere quiet an' stumbled across yer place."

“Oh, um, it’s okay...I guess...” she whispered. The next few moments were filled with silence and awkwardness. Mac tried his best to smile, and eventually cleared his throat.

“Well, Ah s’pose Ah should get goin’ now...” he turned to leave.

“Wait!” the pegasus said suddenly. When he looked back at her she ducked away and hid her face again. “I mean, if it’s all right with you...I just wanted to...um...”

“What was that?” Big Macintosh asked, more confused than he’d been in recent memory. *This pony sure is a strange one...* The yellow pegasus glanced nervously at some passing ponies and motioned for Macintosh to step around to the back of the library. When they were hidden in the shade and out of sight of others, the filly did her best to speak but couldn’t get any words out, her face turning the color of her mane. Macintosh felt unbelievably uncomfortable.

“Listen, Ah dun’ wanna trouble ya, so Ah should go...”

“No, please! Wait!” she begged. Taking a deep breath she finally looked up at the stallion, her mesmerizing eyes large and earnest. “Please promise me you won’t tell anyone about my wings!” As soon as she had said it she ducked away as if expecting to be struck. Macintosh shuffled for a moment, his face incredibly warm before answering.

“Um, Ah don’t really understand,” he blubbered. She opened one eye and stared at him. “Ah mean, yer wings are amazin’. Y’all must be a real great flyer,” she blushed again and looked at him deeply.

“Please, just promise me you won’t tell anyone, *anyone* at all!” she was biting her lip now, her large glassy eyes piercing his.

“Ah swear Ah won’t tell no pony,” he promised. The mare let out a huge sigh of relief and took to the air.

“Thank you so much!” she said quietly as she flew away. Funny, now her wings were only about average for a pegasus. Turning a corner in the direction of her cottage and not flying more than ten feet above the road, she disappeared from the sight of the bewildered stallion. He shook his head, trying and failing to regain his composure.

This was not how he had expected today to turn out at all.