

Karamel

Day 5

By The Unnamed Pawn

Big Mac slowly inched his way out of bed without waking his little sister and went through his usual morning routine, although it was once again much earlier in the day than he'd prefer.

Barring the embarrassed little sister at the breakfast table and the unnecessary planting Big Macintosh was forced to do; the day was standard up until around lunchtime. Unfortunately, the change in routine was not a welcome one.

While Big Mac and his family were eating a peaceful and, for the first time in a while, normal lunch they were interrupted by a knock on the door. Applejack was, of course, the pony to answer the door, but surprisingly enough the visitor had come for Big Macintosh.

Applejack approached the table with a light gray pony with a long straight dark grey mane in tow. "Big Macintosh," his sister said, "Do you know this pony?"

Big Mac couldn't help but feel that she looked familiar, but he was almost certain he had never met her before. "Nope," he said.

"I don't think we've met before," the mare spoke, "I'm Grayamina Pie. I believe you know my sister, Blueberrie. You are Big Macintosh correct?"

"Eeyup. What's this visit about?"

"Blueberrie is in the hospital." The pony said this with a cold tone that almost seemed to coat the room. Big Mac was almost certain he actually froze for a moment, but he wasn't sure whether it was the news or the tone of voice that caused it.

"S she okay?" he asked with a straight face not drastically dissimilar to the one of the pony he was talking to.

"I came to take you to see her for yourself. If you are finished with your meal I would appreciate it if you came with me."

Big Mac nodded and sat up. "Ah' hope you don't mind AJ, but Ah' don't think Ah'll be able ta' help with the rest of the work today."

Applejack shook her head. "Don't fret so much 'bout it. Go check on yer pal and Ah'll handle the rest of the plantin'."

Big Mac smiled and headed out the door with Grayamina. "Thanks AJ."

The hospital was packed considering the fact that only one pony was actually in it at the moment. Gathered around a hospital bed were Bon Bon, Breezy, and Pinkie Pie. Big Mac couldn't help but notice Pinkie Pie was wearing her mane oddly today. It was completely straight instead of puffy like he had seen it before.

"Wake up soon okay Blueberry," the pink pony said sadly, "I promise I'll throw you a huge party when you wake up okay. Pretty please wake up."

Big Mac and his guide approached the bed to see Blueberry writhing in her sleep. It was almost as if she was running from something. Grayamina sat down next to the pink pony and put an arm around her. She silently stroked her sister's mane.

"She's not looking good Grayie," Pinkie said, "She looks really scared."

"Ah'm sure she's just fine Pinkie," Big Mac said as he took a seat next to the mare, "What's wrong with her anyway? Looks to me like she's just having a nightmare."

"The problem is that she won't wake up," the nurse pony said as she approached. "She's been like this for at least fifteen hours now." The nurse pony placed a hoof on the unconscious pony's head and Big Mac noticed a faint glow coming from underneath her hat. "She's just fine physically, but she's stuck in sleep. I think it's some sort of spell, but I don't know how to dispel it."

"So it's a curse?" Grayamina asked.

"You could call it that if you want. It's a powerful one too. I've had to call in Twilight Sparkle to come in and look at it. "

"I wonder what she's dreaming about," Bon Bon said solemnly, "I hope it's not as terrifying as it looks."

Big Mac put a hoof on the blue pony's shoulder. It seemed to calm her down a bit. "Mind if Ah' stay here for a while nurse?"

The nurse looked at the pony on the bed and smiled. "You all can stay for now, but I'll have to ask you to leave when Ms. Sparkle arrives. I don't want her distracted during the examination."

The pink pony turned from her sister to Big Mac and smiled. "Thanks Big Macintosh." It was the gray sibling that spoke. Despite her cold expression, her appreciation showed in her voice.

Breezy sighed. "I think we're gonna be here a while. What do you guys want for dinner?"

The group was forced to leave at around seven when Twilight Sparkle had finally arrived to examine Blueberrie. Together the group agreed to head to the Wandering Ram if only because a good drink would help cheer Pinkie up.

When the waitress arrived Bon Bon ordered a round of the bars most expensive drink for everyone, although Big Mac and Breezy both opted for the second most expensive drink.

The drink did have its intended effect on the pink pony. The moment her lips hit the sugary concoction her hair managed to regain its usual curls and a burst of excitement jumped back into her voice. "Wow I forgot how good this was," she shouted.

The entirety of the table managed to grin. Even Grayamina managed to curl her lips slightly.

"So where's Blueberrie tonight?" the waitress asked.

The smiles faded from the table's occupants. All except for Pinkie Pie of course who was too busy chugging her drink to even hear what the waitress had said. "She's in the hospital," Big Mac said.

"Did she hurt herself?" the waitress asked clearly concerned.

"She's been cursed," Grayamina said as she took a swig from her bizarre glass. For a moment the entire table stared wide eyed at her, prompting an understandable, "What?"

"It's nothing," Heart Throb said quickly, "What do you mean by cursed?"

"She won't wake up. The nurse said that she was under the influence of a spell of some kind."

The pink pegasus leapt upward and shouted, "Boss!"

"No!" The unicorn at the bar shouted back.

The Pegasus sighed. "I guess I'll have to visit her tomorrow then."

"Why are you so concerned?" Grayamina asked as she finished her drink.

Heart Throb smiled. "I guess I haven't introduced myself have I. I'm Heart Throb, Blueberries fillyfriend."

The surrounding area quickly went cold as Grayamina turned to the filly. "Please leave Ms. Throb." The pegasus complied and backed slowly away from the table.

"What was that about?" Bon Bon asked after the chill faded.

Without answering, Grayamina hopped out of the booth and turned to Big Mac. "Please come with me Big Macintosh," she said and headed to the corner of the bar.

The entire group stared silently at the mare as she walked to the corner. "I think you should probably go check that out Big Mac," Breezy said to the colt on the outside of the booth.

"Be sure to tell us what's going on when you get back okay," Bon Bon said as she reached for her drink. She was disappointed to find that it was now in the hands of Pinkie Pie.

Big Mac stood up and started heading cautiously toward the corner. "Ah'll be back in a minute," he said over his shoulder.

When he reached Grayamina he found her busy examining the labyrinth game. "What is this Big Macintosh?"

"That's just a game that the owner made. Pinkie's got the high score."

Grayamina gazed at the time for a moment. "It will have to wait until later." She turned to Big Mac. "I'm sorry for springing this on you so soon Big Macintosh, but I'm afraid I'd forgotten where we were until that waitress mentioned Blueberrie."

"What're you talkin' about?"

"I need your help for my investigation. Together, we are going to take a look around this place and figure out what happened to my sister."

Big Mac nodded. "Okay Ah' see what yer getting' at now, but why do ya' want my help?"

"You're the only pony I can trust who knows his way around here." Grayamina closed her eyes for a moment and sighed. "The way Blueberrie reacted to you at the hospital earlier shows that I can trust you...I think anyway. At least I can trust you more than anypony else here."

"Okay, but Ah'm not sure how much help Ah' can be."

"I just need you to ask around the bar okay. I understand that you know most of the ponies in here personally. If you could just interrogate them a little I might be able to glean some information from them."

Big Mac sighed. "Okay, but Ah' don't think you should expect much."

"Thank you Big Macintosh." The gray pony tried to curl her lips in a thankful smile but failed and quickly reverted to her previous expression. "To start, would you please interrogate the waitress? I remember seeing her with Blueberrie last night when she came home."

"Eeyup." Big Mac nodded and headed to the other side of the bar where Heart Throb stood. She was still clearly confused by what had just happened.

"What was that all about Big Mac," she asked.

"Ah' don't really know," he said, "Ah' think she's just concerned 'bout her sister. Do ya' mind if Ah' ask you 'bout what happened with you and Blueberrie last night?"

Suddenly Heart Throb's face filled with understanding. "Oh now I get it. She thinks I did this doesn't she?"

"Ah' don't know."

"Well you tell that witch," she said pointing angrily toward the gray pony in the corner, "That I had nothing to do with this. I would never hurt Blueberrie!"

"Ah'll tell her," Big Mac said as he backed calmly away from the angry mare. Heart Throb payed no attention to the colt and trotted angrily back to the booth where Bon Bon, Breezy, and Pinkie sat. "Sorry fer wastin' yer time," Big Mac said mostly to himself.

On his way back to Grayamina Big Mac decided to investigate the counter. The only pony there right now apart from the bartender was Film Reel. Big Mac pulled up a stool and greeted the journalist. "Hello," he said.

Film reel looked up from a pile of paper in front of him. "Hey Mac," he said. He was smiling wider than ever. "Good to see you again. Could I buy you a drink? I'm feeling really good tonight."

"Why're you so happy?"

The pale yellow pony clapped his hooves together. "I just landed a big story that's why. To think I was stuck reviewing this crummy little place, and then Bam! A huge story falls right into my lap."

"What're you talkin' about?"

"Haven't you heard? One of the regulars here has been hospitalized, just like that colt in Manehattan. And I'm the lucky stallion who landed the story, because those jerks at the Weekly Ponyville News stuck me here." The colt was practically giddy as he spoke.

“Hey,” Big Mac slammed his hoof on the counter, “That filly is my friend.”

The joy in Film Reel’s demeanor calmed slightly at the sight of the angry stallion in front of him. “I’m sorry Mac. I didn’t mean to sound rude or anything.” He shrugged. “I mean it’s not like I’m happy she’s in trouble or anything, but you can’t argue that it makes for good news.”

“Is that all you care about,” the bartender chimed in, angrily slamming a glass on the counter, “A filly has been hospitalized and all you care about is your story.” He glared at the colt from behind his glasses. “I knew I shouldn’t have let you in here. Get out of my bar.”

“Hey I have just as much right to be here as anypony else. Besides, if I leave how do you expect me to write this story?”

“I don’t. Get out.”

Film Reel glared angrily at the bartender for a moment before walking off in a huff. “Seeya in the papers Mac,” he said as he walked off.

Big Mac turned to the bartender. “Ya’ didn’t need to kick him out ya’ know.”

“He was lucky I let him in in the first place. I can’t stand reporters.” He picked the glass back up and started shining it.

A moment later Grayamina approached the counter. “It really wasn’t necessary,” she said to the bartender, “It is his job. It’s to be expected.”

“You’re right miss. That’s why I kicked him out. I’m sure you heard me before if you saw all that. I can’t stand reporters.”

“Right.” Grayamina paused and looked the bartender up and down for a moment. “As long as I’m here, could I get one of your pink drinks?”

“Alright miss.” The bartender leaned down under the bar and began mixing the drink. Big Mac thought about peering over, but decided he really didn’t want to know what was put into the painfully sweet concoction.

As the unicorn mixed the drink Big Mac noticed a familiar multicolored Pegasus approach the counter. “Hey Applejack’s brother,” she greeted the stallion.

Grayamina seemed to take notice of the pegasus as she approached as well. “Ms. Dash, nice to see you again.” Big Mac noted the lack of change in her speech, despite the kind wording of her sentence.

Rainbow looked perplexedly at the pony for a moment. "Oh now I recognize you. You're that big shot prosecutor right. Good to see you again too I guess." The pair shook hooves in front of Big Mac and he found himself briefly blinded by a flash he couldn't place the origin of.

"So Applejack's brother," Rainbow said turning back to Big Mac, "I just wanted to thank you again for that advice earlier. I haven't gotten to use it yet, but it's really helped me think you know. Would you like me to buy you a drink?"

"No thank you."

"So Ms. Dash," Grayamina said, "I wasn't aware you were a filly-fooler. Are you seeing anypony?"

Rainbow Dash blushed. "Hold on. Are you asking me out?"

Grayamina shook her head. "I apologize. I was just making conversation. I prefer stallions myself."

"Oh o-of course. I didn't mean anything I was just joking." The colorful filly laughed nervously.

"You don't need to lie Ms. Dash. My sister's a filly fooler after all."

"Wait, say that again."

"My sister's a filly fooler," Grayamina said without missing a beat.

"E-excuse me I have to go take care of something." Rainbow Dash hopped off of the stool. "I'll see you later Applejack's brother. You too Pinkie's sister." She waved goodbye to the ponies and all but skipped out of the bar.

"Ah' wonder what that was about," Big Mac said as he stared at the door.

"I'm not sure, but I have a bad feeling it won't end well." Grayamina took a drink from her newly filled glass. "You should probably head back to the booth Big Macintosh. I'm going to stay here and have a couple more drinks."

Big Mac nodded and hopped off of his stool. "Okay. Sorry Ah' didn't help so much with the investigation."

"You helped me a good deal actually," the gray pony said, "Thank you Big Macintosh."

Big Mac headed back to the booth to see only Bon Bon and Heart Throb. "Where're Breezy and

Pinkie,” he asked.

Bon Bon laughed lightly. “Pinkie overdid it again and Breezy carried her home.”

“I guess I should have cut her off around the fourth drink.” Heart Throb chuckled.

Despite the laughter from both ponies, Big Mac couldn’t help but notice the somber feeling around the table. “Maybe you should go visit Blueberrie, Heart Throb,” he said.

The pink pegasus glanced up at the clock. “Maybe he won’t notice if I leave early,” she muttered. “Do either of you want another drink before I head out.”

Big Mac shook his head and Bon Bon smiled. “I’m fine. Just go visit your filly,” she said.

“Thanks guys.” The waitress smiled at the pair and headed toward the door. Either the bartender didn’t notice, or he simply didn’t care as she managed to leave without a hassle.

Big Mac turned to Bon Bon after the mare had left. “Now what’s wrong with you Bon Bon?” he asked.

Bon Bon just smiled. “What do you mean Big Mac? Apart from this whole fiasco with Blueberrie I’m doing just fine.”

“Alright,” Big Mac said, “But just so ya’ know Ah’m here if ya’ want to talk.”

Bon Bon’s smile dimmed slightly. “Thanks, but you know what, I think I’m going to leave a bit early tonight.” She moved out of the booth. “See you tomorrow I guess Big Mac.” She waved him goodbye and left the bar.

Seeing no reason to stay, Big Mac made to leave as well. He didn’t even think about Karamel as he headed home. His mind was too occupied with thoughts of Blueberrie, and the curse that Heart Throb had mentioned the previous night. As he headed home various thoughts assaulted his mind. One repeated itself constantly.

What if we’re all in danger?

Big Mac found himself in an empty room tonight. At least he thought it was empty until he moved forward and tripped over what appeared to be a chair. In truth the room was just completely black, which explained why he could clearly see the sheep that helped him up.

“Hey newbie,” the ewe said as she lifted him. “Glad to see you’re back. I was afraid we’d lost our

pep squad for a moment there.”

Big Mac smiled at the ewe. “Glad ta’ see yer still here too.”

The ewe let go of his hoof and turned to face the rest of the room. Big Mac saw most of the sheep from the previous night, save for the straight haired ewe. “This is the first loss for most of them,” the ewe in purple glasses said somberly, “I’d be willing to bet they could all use some cheering up.”

“And Ah’ guess Ah’m the pony who has to do that?”

“Well no one else is going to do it. Tell you what if you need some cheering up afterword, you can come chat with me.”

“Thanks, but Ah’ think Ah’ll be fine.” Big Mac smiled at the ewe and went to go talk with the other sheep.

Big Mac first approached the nearby ram in the green hat. The sheep was lying on the ground and staring blankly at a wall. He waved half-heartedly as Big Mac approached. “Hello,” Big Mac greeted the ram, “You feelin’ okay?”

“Of course I’m not,” the ram said without even turning his gaze. After a brief pause he sighed and spoke again. “That ewe that fell last night, she was brimming with confidence when she left. Yet here I am. How ridiculous is that?”

The ram seemed to be talking mostly to himself, but Big Mac decided to chime in anyway. “What do you mean?”

The ram turned to Big Mac for a second before looking away again. “You saw me yesterday,” he said, “I was actually thinking of jumping just for a break for pony’s sake. But I’m here and that little ewe, who was so confident, fell. It’s not fair.”

Big Mac put a friendly hoof on the sheep’s shoulder. “Ah’m sure she’s just fine. Don’t worry ‘bout her. What’s important is that you’re still here, and you need to keep runnin’.”

The sheep glanced sadly upward at Big Mac. “You and I both know that’s a load of horse-apples Big Mac,” he said, “but thanks.” He pushed the hoof off of his shoulder and stood up. “It’s just hard to think that I’ve made it this far you know. Everyone else here has something to run for. All I’ve got is what I’m running from.”

“That’s still a reason to run.”

The ram sighed again. “I know. And I’m going to keep running. It just-“

This time Big Mac cut the sheep off before he could finish,” Whatever it is, it don’t matter. Just remember to keep runnin’.”

The ram stared at him for a moment. “You’re right. Forget it.” The ram smiled lightly. “Thanks for the pep talk.”

“S no trouble,” Big Mac patted the sheep on the back and moved on. The next sheep he needed to talk to was a depressed looking ewe with an odd swirl on her head. “Hello miss,” he said as he approached.

“Hello strawman,” the ewe attempted to smile at the approaching colt. “How’re you doing?”

“Just fine. What about you?”

The ewe sighed and her smile grew a bit dimmer. “Worse than last night I’m afraid. I’ve tried not thinking about the lost sheep, but then all I can think about is my other problem.”

“This have somethin’ to do with what ya’ asked me last night?”

“Yeah. Hey you mind if I ask you another question?”

“Go right ahead.”

The ewe turned away and closed her eyes for a moment before looking back to him. “Remember when I asked you about that whole cheating thing? Well I’ve been thinking, what if you couldn’t forgive the cheater? What would you do then?”

Big Mac paused to think for a moment. “Well the only thing to do would be to leave.”

The sheep looked down at the floor. “But what if you still loved them?”

“Then you forgive them.”

For a moment the ewe looked confusedly at the stallion in front of her. She started to say something, but stopped and paused. “Is it really that simple?” she finally said after a few moments in thought, “Leave or forgive. Are those the only options?...I’ll have to think about that.” She smiled up at Big Mac. “Thanks strawman.”

Big Mac just smiled and nodded before moving on to the next sheep. The colorful ewe was the next nearest one. She looked noticeably less depressed than the rest of the sheep. Still she wasn’t looking quite as confident as the previous night. “Hey,” she greeted Big Mac as he approached.

"Hello," he said, "How're you holdin' up?"

"Pretty good I guess." The ewe shrugged. "I guess it didn't hit me until just now what's going on you know. That poor ewe didn't even last one night."

"Ah' know." Big Mac sighed. "Ah guess now Ah' really know what's at stake."

"Still it's not like it's the first time," the ewe said, "That one ram from before fell too after all. Maybe they're just somewhere else. They could be fine for all we know." The colorful sheep shrugged. "No way to be sure I guess. Just gotta keep running right?" She jabbed Big Mac playfully.

Big Mac smiled. "Eeyup. Now if you'll s'cuse me. Ah' need to go see how one last sheep's doin'."

The ewe pumped an arm. "We can handle this no problem. See you tomorrow night."

Big Mac smiled and waved her goodbye as he approached the final sheep. The last one was of course the ram in the black hat. He was busily rolling his hat back and forth in his hooves when Big Mac greeted him. "Hello," he said.

"Hey," the ram said as he put his hat back on his head. "How do you like this huh? That ewe fell off even after that whole thing last night." He chuckled.

"What's so funny about that," he said.

The ram sighed and looked up at him. "It's just funny is all. I'm pretty sure I know who that ewe was and what happened to her, but when I wake up in a bit I'll just forget it all again." He sighed. "This would make a great story, but it's impossible to write. How do you like that?"

"Don't you even care about the ewe?"

The ram smiled. "Of course I do," he said, "That poor filly will never have her story told properly because of all this nonsense. Not to mention everything she's had to go through." He sighed again and fell onto his back. "We'll only know what's going on in here. What good does that do anypony?" The ram covered his face with his hat and Big Mac stared at him for a few moments. "Sorry to bother you with all this, pal. We just need to run right? That's what you're always saying."

"Eeyup." Big Mac nodded.

"Huh. That's a funny way of saying yes." The ram grinned as Big Mac headed off to the stable.

“Good evenin’,” Big Mac said as he stepped inside.

“Good evening. Take a seat.” Big Mac sat down. “So anymore questions for me tonight?” the voice asked.

“Eeyup. Ah’ was wonderin’, do you know what happens to the sheep who fall?”

The voice took a moment to respond. “I thought you were going to ask me more about why I was doing this.”

“Ah’ only get one answer a night right?”

“Something like that. Sorry, but I don’t really know what happens to the sheep who fall. As far as I’m concerned they just disappear.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well they fall out of my reach. They don’t show up in the sanctuaries I create anymore. They might be dead, or maybe they’re just trapped. For all I know they could have gotten out.”

“So ya’ really don’t know.”

The voice paused once more. “No. I’m sorry.”

Before anything more could be said, Big Mac was surprised by the stable’s launch. This time he was not quite as well prepared as he should have been and almost ended up falling out of the strange vehicle.

He hobbled out of the stable and took a look behind him too see it dissolve. He decided after the previous night that it was probably better to get a look at what was chasing him rather than be surprised later. He was surprised to see that nothing approached from the darkness but a single piece of hay, floating silently in midair.

Unfortunately the silence didn’t last long. A disturbing laugh assaulted Big Mac’s ear no more than a few moments after the straw appeared, and a shadowy hoof reached out to him. Without even thinking Big Mac turned away from the hoof and began running.

His full gallop didn’t last long however. He was slowed to no more than a trot when the creature behind him began speaking in a familiar voice. “Why bother running,” the creature said in *his* voice, “After all, don’t you deserve to fall.”

Big Mac stopped for a moment to shout back at the specter, but was almost crushed once more

by its shadowy hoof. Realizing his mistake, Big Mac took off running once again. "You're a traitor," the shadow taunted as he ran, "He'll never trust you again you know. Why not just give up?" Big Mac ignored it as best as he could, but his pace slowed significantly as he headed through the maze.

"Blueberrie could use the company," the shadow commented once more. It was followed by the same cackle as before. "I'm sure she's okay," it said in a voice and tone absolutely identical to Big Mac's own, "Down in that nightmare."

For some reason the red stallion felt more tired than ever as he reached out for the door at the mazes end. The door wasn't locked this time, but for some reason he had trouble opening it. "You know you deserve to fall," the shadow behind him said coldly, "Just give in already. You won't have to worry about that colt of yours anymore."

Big Mac wasn't entirely sure why, but this last line seemed to awaken him. The feeling of depression faded and he pushed open the door just as a shadowy hoof reached out for the final blow.

The scream that emanated from the beast definitely wasn't pony. Big Mac was thankful for that. He had expected to hear himself screaming in pain as the light struck it. He let out a sigh and trotted slowly into the doorway.

Big Mac was thankful to wake up alone in his bed for once. It gave him some time to breath. Just to be sure, he decided to look around the room for signs that Karamel had been there. He was disappointed to find a scroll from the stallion.

"Thanks for another lovely night," he could almost hear the stallion chuckle as he read, "Sorry I couldn't stay for one of our great chats. Tonight's my last night in town, so be sure to come see me at the bar okay. There's something I need to talk to you about."

After the note was read it vanished in a puff of smoke. Big Mac sighed. He had never been a fan of magic. His mind was loaded with thoughts about what he would say to the colt that night as he trotted downstairs.