

## Chapter 2: Rain, Kites, and Capitalism

Gold Standard had graciously allowed Ritardando to sleep in a spare room overnight until morning, when he could begin his little job, and now it was time for him to do that job.

Sure enough, the rain had let up the next morning. Ground was soggy as it gets, but that's to be expected when it rains all day the previous day. It'd probably be a fair few hours before it dried up, and as such, there weren't many ponies out and about.

In other words, Ritardando could've picked a better time to try giving away fliers. If nothing else, at least he'd have been able to sleep in a little later. But he didn't, so he couldn't.

There were some ponies out, though. Two fillies – a unicorn and an earth pony. One of them was white, with a blue mane and a blue cutie mark in the shape of a kite. The other was a grey pegasus with a grey cloud and blue raindrops as her cutie mark. She appeared to be napping on top of a grey cloud that was lying a little closer to the ground than clouds are generally expected to.

The white one was carrying a kite with her, and stopped every few steps, trying to see if there was a breeze. There wasn't. Spotting the grey cloud, she eagerly approached it, whereupon the pegasus looked down on her.

“Good morning, Raincloud!” The filly called up.

“Kite.” Raincloud said. “Let me guess, want some wind in your kite?”

“Well, I'd thought about it.”

“Well, think about it later, I'm trying to get some sleep.” She said, lowering her head and trying to catch some shut-eye.

“Um, excuse me....”

Kite jumped. But it was just Ritardando behind her, wearing a pack. “Oh, sheesh, you scared me.”

“Oh...” Ritardando said. “Sorry.”

“Oh, it's alright. Just with your voice, I thought you were Phoenix, and-“

“And why is Phoenix scary?”

That did not come from Ritardando. It was, in fact instead a larger red unicorn, with a gold bird on his flank. He was older than the others, and he carried himself with a slightly

pompous air. “Well?” he asked, in an intimidating bass-baritone voice.

“Oh, wow, your voice does sound like mine.” Ritardando said. Phoenix turned and looked at him quizzically.

“Do I know you?” he asked, after a lengthy pause.

Ritardando looked behind him. “I don’t think so. You want a flier?” he asked, taking one of them from his pack and holding it in front of him.

Phoenix’ eyes narrowed. “No, I can’t say I’m particularly interested...” Ritardando’s head drooped. “Oh, all right.” He said, taking one of them and walking off in a huff. Kite walked over, looking at the fliers with an expression of disapproval.

“You’re working for Gold Standard?” she asked. “She’s a corporatist, you know.”

“Umm...” Ritardando stood there for a minute. “I don’t think I know what that means.”

“Oh.” Kite said. Getting the impression that he wouldn’t understand whatever definition she gave, she decided to skip that part of the conversation. “My name’s Kite, and this is Raincloud.”

“Because he totally needs to be introduced to me right now,” Raincloud mumbled.

“What’s your name?” Kite asked.

“Ritardando.” He said. “I think I like your name better. It’s shorter and easier to remember.”

“Well, I don’t see why somepony’s name should be hard to remember.” Kite said.

“Well, my name’s long and apparently it’s Italian, so...”

All this time, Raincloud looked down at the two, wondering what was up with the black pony.

“So,” Ritardando said. “You want a flier? Comes with a discount coupon.”

“Oh, alright,” Kite said, swallowing her pride and taking one of the fliers.

“Thank you!” Ritardando said, trotting off.

“So, Raincloud, about that wind...”

Routines similar to this carried on for most of the day, albeit with much less small-talk.

Ritardando went around town, asking random ponies if they wanted the fliers with discount coupons. This got easier, as more ponies came out as the day grew later, and he eventually managed to hand them all out, eventually returning to Gold Standard's shop.

"'Ello?" he asked, entering. "I handed out all the things."

"Wonderful." Gold Standard said, not particularly paying attention to him, as she was occupied restocking the shelves, "You can just leave the bag on the counter, and I'll be over there in a jiffy with some payment."

"Thank you kindly," Ritardando said. "Somepony out there called you a 'coproratist.'"

That, however, got Goldie's attention.

"What does that mean?" Ritardando asked.

"Ugh," Goldie said, walking over to the counter, "Kite? One of these days, I need to explain to her – I am a proprietor, not a corporatist. There is a difference."

"Um..." Ritardando said. "I don't think I know what that other word means, either."

Gold Standard took a breath. "It works like this – I own this shop, you see?"

"I think so."

"Now, I own the establishment, so that makes me a proprietor."

"Uh-huh."

"Now, a corporation is different. A corporation is made up of many ponies, with investors who own stock and elect a board of directors who make managing decisions."

Ritardando blinked. He didn't get it. "That sounds confusing." He conceded.

"It can be." She said, opening the cash register. "Now, here you are – there's your payment for handing all those fliers out, and for everypony who comes in here with a discount coupon, you'll get some more money." Then another thought occurred to her. "So, you're just passing through?" she asked. "Where are you from?"

"Not sure." Ritardando said.

"You're not sure? What do you mean?"

"I dunno..." Ritardando said, shrugging. "I guess I'm just not 'from' anywhere?"

“You don’t have a home or anything?”

There was a pause. “I…” Ritardando thought. “I don’t think so.”

Gold Standard remembered what Constable Brownie had said. A vagabond. “Well, how long are you planning on staying here?” she asked.

“I dunno.” He said, getting a little nervous. “I mean, I haven’t been any trouble or anything, have I? You’re very nice to me for letting me spend the night when it’s raining, and I don’t mean to impose-”

“No, no no.” Gold Standard laughed. “You haven’t been any trouble at all.”

“Not even with the towel thing?”

“Towels get wet, Ritardando. As long as you don’t dunk them in the toilet or something, that’s fine.”

Ritardando was quiet. “Should I make a list of things not to do with a towel?”

“It’s quite all right.” Gold Standard said, deciding that some of his questions would go over much better without answer. “As long as you’re staying in town, you can use my guest room. I don’t use it very often.”

“Gee, that’s very nice of you.”

“Not at all.” Gold Standard said. “And as long as you’re here, you can do jobs for me, keep an eye around the shop, and I’ll pay you. Does that sound good?”

“Yes it does.” Ritardando was starting to perk up.

“Wonderful.” Goldie said, returning to the shelves. “Now, one thing I’ll want you to do is keep an eye on the shop, make sure nobody leaves with anything that’s not paid for.”

“Okay, I can do that… just, how do I tell whether it’s paid for or not?”

“Well, if they just take something off of the shelves and try to leave the store, stop them.”

“Ohhhhhh, okay…” Ritardando said, nodding, in one of those rare occurrences of him ‘getting it,’ so to speak.

The bell rang, indicating a customer walking in. Gold Standard craned her head to see the pony carrying a coupon in his mouth. Beaming, she walked over to the counter.

“Good afternoon.” She said, eager to make a sale. “Can I help you with something.”

“Hello. I was here to get an umbrella.” The pony said. “I realized yesterday that I could really use one of them.”

“Here!” Ritardando said, grabbing an umbrella off of a rack and running over to the customer. Gold Standard was more than a little surprised at how eager Ritardando seemed to help. So did the customer.

“Thank you...” the customer said, placing the coupon on the counter and taking the umbrella. “Let’s see, coupon is...” he mumbled to himself, working out the amount of money, paying, and leaving, giving a funny look to the black colt.

“Did I do good?” Ritardando asked. Gold Standard was a little lost for words, as so many different thoughts were going through her head. He certainly seemed nice, but maybe a little *too* nice, the kind of nice that ceases to be endearing and instead becomes irritating. And she’d pretty much locked herself into an agreement where she’d give him room, board, and even money.

“Yes, but...” she started. “I’ll need to give you a few pointers about how shopkeeping works...”