

Chapter 2

Family.

Ponyville, much like Twilight did, had trouble getting up in the morning. The town was slow to start; only a few ponies were up and about in the slightly chill morning. It would get much livelier once everypony had woken up. Life seemed to go about in a much more somber pace in the countryside.

Passing through Main Street, I saw Rose off in the distance, one of the town's several florists. I found it novel how to ponies, flowers were both decoration and food. No need for flowers *and* candy. When Twilight had started nibbling on the bouquet I had given her, I was pretty surprised. In hindsight it should have been obvious—horses ate flowers, even back home I used to pick clovers from the side of the road and then feed them to cows and horses.

Rose was watering her roses, a bright red waterspout in her hoof. She was quietly speaking something soothing to them, I was too far away to make out what.

As I approached, Rose finally noticed me in the periphery of her vision.

I waved hello. "Morning, Rose. Lovely flowers you have."

Her eyes opened wide, round as dinner plates, clearly surprised at finding a six-foot tall creature standing in front of her house so early in the morning. Though, I doubt it was the time of day that was the problem.

"Um, morning to you too, uh..." She forced herself to form a smile. It came out very false and stilted, more an angry grimace than anything resembling a real smile. Even though she faced me, she could not meet my eyes. Was she uncomfortable because I was a weird scary creature, because she couldn't recall my name, or both?

"Anon—it's Anon." I smiled to her as warmly as I could. I didn't fault Rose one bit if she couldn't remember my name, I myself was terrible with names. Pony names were much easier to remember, it also helped that ponies had a colourful image on their flank that identified some unique inner quality or skill, often working as a visual clue to their name.

"Yes—Anon. Um, thank you." She seemed to have forgotten the waterspout in her hoof, as it drained out onto the grass.

"Well, see you around, Rose!" Turning, I waved her cheerily goodbye when I passed her and her little house, picketed by a white-stake fence.

The townsponties of Ponyville could be an odd sort. How they reacted to me could vary greatly from pony to pony. Some were a little apprehensive and scared of me, and it didn't exactly calm them that I had incisors and canines, regardless of how comparatively small they

were. Just giving a pony a friendly smile would remind them of a predator, and it didn't help either that I actually was one.

Other ponies however, were interested in me, they would get close to me and poke and prod me, asking blunt and forward questions about me and my nature. Though they could be pushy and lacking manners, they did it without ill will. I thought it strange how they reacted to me while their national heroes, the Elements of Harmony, were their close neighbours. They were seemingly treating them with little or no interest. Perhaps the reason that they were cautious or curious was just that I wasn't a pony. Either way, it didn't matter, as long as they weren't outright hostile to me, I didn't care. If I was just pleasant and friendly to them they would come around eventually, and if they didn't—then to heck with 'em.

Regardless, I hurried along.

As the quaint thatch-roofed houses starting thinning out, nearing the edge of Ponyville proper, I could see the huge apple orchard and farm that was Sweet Apple Acres in the distance. Up and down the rolling hills and valleys stood countless numbers of splendid apple trees, planted in long, endless rows. Luscious green and red apples hung from every branch, sparkling from the morning dew, just begging to be picked and eaten.

Approaching, I could see the actual farm house over the hill. The red barn that was the Apple residence always looked so welcoming with its large door open.

First, I heard the sound of hooves thundering, and then I saw Big McIntosh, or more cordially, Big Mac, who was up and about, ploughing a large field.

I went up to the white fence lining the field, and leaned over. "Morning, Big Mac, you up already?" The big red workhorse swished past me, pulling the heavy plough seemingly without effort.

"Yup," he replied, succinct as always, before galloping down another length and carving up a new furrow of soft earth.

The more I had spoken with Big Mac the more I found his tendency to rarely use more than two words annoying. Not so much that he did it, rather, I wished he could hold a conversation that went beyond yes or no answers. I didn't think he was shy or anything like that, just that he preferred using as few words as possible.

I waited until he came back around. "So, is Applejack up?"

"Yup."

"Well, I'll go inside and start working on that sink." Before I had even finished my sentence he was halfway down another length. I sighed, "Well, talk to you later."

I knocked on the door and a little yellow filly with a big pink bow atop her mane opened up the door.

“Well, hello there, Apple Bloom, how are you?” I bent down to get to her eye-level, close to the tiny filly, I could see the keen glitter in her eyes.

“Oh-oh, Anon! Good mornin’!” I could see that the bundle of energy was already going full throttle. “I’m fine! Are you here to fix the sink?”

“That I am. Is your sister inside?”

“Yup, she’s in the kitchen with Granny bakin’ pie.”

“A blueberry pie?”

She looked at me incredulously, her head tilted and a look on her face that asked if I was simple. “Of course not –apple.”

I chuckled and gently tussled her mane. “I know, Apple Bloom, just a little joke. Are you heading to school?”

“Yup, today Ms. Cheerilee is going to teach us about other countries outside of Equestria.” She stood up straight and puffed out her chest, full of pride for her teacher.

“How exciting, maybe I should join your class someday, seeing as how I’m still new here and I’ve got plenty to learn.”

“Hmm.” Apple Bloom put a hoof on her chin and seemed to think hard on the suggestion. “I think you might be a tad old for Ms. Cheerilee’s class.”

“Ha, ha, well maybe I’ll just ask Twilight then.” I stood up and brushed off the dirt from my knees and walked in. “I have to go and take a look at that sink. See you around, Apple Bloom.”

“Good luck, bye, Anon!” she yelled as she darted out the door, galloping full speed away from the farm.

I shook my head. I loved kids, they were easy to speak to and always so eager and excited about everything. Fillies like Apple Bloom and her friends were just too precious, though that particular trio could tend to be a little too...intense for their own good.

I went into the kitchen, ducking under the door frame, not wanting to butt heads with the pine. “Knock, knock, anypony home?”

Applejack turned away from the pie in the oven and to me, her face instantly beaming with neighbourly warmth and welcome. “Well howdy there, Anon, a good mornin’ to you.” I loved her country drawl.

“Good morning, Applejack, and to you too, Mrs. Smith.”

“Aw, fiddlesticks, don’t be missus-in’ me, just call me Granny –everypony does.” The lime-green and grey-maned mare, wiry and tough as an old jerkin, kept her focus on the pie. “Callin’ me missus just makes me feel old.”

“Okay, G-granny,” I replied, her preference of moniker a little confusing. Well, Granny Smith *was* widely known throughout Ponyville as an eccentric sort.

“You’re that meat-eater who’s herding some of my granddaughters’ friends, aren’t ya?”

“I-I wouldn’t exactly put it in those words, I’m more of an omnivore,” I stammered, caught off guard by her bluntness. While she was rather curt about it, she didn’t seem all that bothered about my nature, which I appreciated. “But, yes, I guess that’s me.”

Applejack coughed, noticing my discomfort. “Well, let’s get workin’ on that clogged up sink of ours.”

“Let’s.” I followed Applejack up to the kitchen counter. “Did you get the tools I asked for?”

“Sure did,” Applejack replied, her tone proud and loud, opening the cupboard under the sink and taking out a red metallic toolbox, which was of course adorned with an apple. “Here you go, partner.”

“Thanks, Applejack.” I walked up to the sink and turned on the water tap. The water ran fine, but drained very, very slowly. The drain bubbled and gurgled. “Applejack, could you be so kind and get me a bucket or a container of about equal size? I know I should have asked for you to get it beforehand, but I forgot.”

Applejack shook her head. “No problem at all.” She turned around and opened up a little cubby with cleaning supplies, brooms and mops, and brought out a mid-sized metal bucket. “Think this’ll do?”

“Yeah, bring that over here.” I placed the bucket under the S-bend of the sink pipe. I opened up the tool box and took out a wrench, I put it in my pocket and I curled up my shirt-sleeves, and laid down on my back. I tightened the wrench onto the pipe and began loosening it, while Applejack looked on with interest, even Granny Smith tore herself from guarding the pie and took a curious glance at me.

The pipe loosened and began to drip water into the bucket. Finally the pipe was free at both ends and I peered into the pipe. “Just as I suspected—“ I took the pipe and shot a hard stream of water through it, the water draining down into bucket from the sink. Little white and yellow gobs loosened from inside the pipe. “—fat. I’m guessing that it’s from cleaning your bakeware. Fat can build up and collect over time, probably from eggs and butter.”

“Well I’ll be—“ Applejack took a look at the sink. “—you fixed that lickety-split, Anon.”

“It was nothing, but if you’d had some cleaner or Drain-o—I don’t know if you have that or any equivalent here in Equestria—you’d have fixed this even faster than that.”

“Well thank you kindly anyway. You fixed it faster than I ever could’ve. It would have been near-impossible for me to do it; it’s too tight under there for me to work a wrench. I’m more a farmpony than a plumberpony.”

“You’re welcome,” I replied, “but I wouldn’t say that I’m any kind of plumber, I’ve just picked up random skills over time. This was a rather simple job all things considered.”

“Ah, don’t be so modest.” Applejack threw a friendly jab at me.

I saw that this would quickly devolve into Applejack wanting to seem appreciative, and me feeling that her level of thanks was inappropriate to my work.

“Let’s just say that you are thankful and that I appreciate your thanks.”

“Sure thing,” she replied.

A timer dinged and Granny Smith, with mittens on her hooves, pulled out the freshly baked pie. It smelled lovely, a wafting scent of sweet apple and cinnamon spreading out into the kitchen.

“Will you stay for a slice of pie?” Applejack asked, pulling out a chair for me.

“How can I refuse?” I sniffed the enticing aroma and my mouth instantly watered. “Just let me screw this pipe back together and wash up beforehand.”

“Sure thing, pie needs to cool off anyhow,” she replied, taking off her hat and letting it rest on the ear of her chair.

While I screwed everything back together, Granny put out plates and utensils on the table. I cleaned everything up and emptied the nasty contents of the bucket into the toilet down the hall, and flushed. I lathered up my hands with copious amount of soap and washed them thoroughly with hot water.

When I came back into the kitchen, three plates with slices of pie sat on the table. I took a seat together with Applejack and Granny Smith. “Wow, this looks really delicious,” I said.

“Why thank you kindly, sonny. It’s an ol’ Apple-family recipe.” Granny seemed to puff up her chest with pride, much like Apple Bloom had done. The Apples seemed to grow a little in size whenever it came to family pride. “Now be a dear and have a bite, you’re our guest after all.”

“Won’t Big Mac be joining us?” I asked, a piece already on my spoon and heading towards my mouth. I could hear his thundering hooves in the background.

“That big lug can have some pie once he’s done with the fields, he won’t mind,” Granny Smith said bluntly, as she seemed to say all things.

“Well, okay.” I didn’t bother arguing and instead took a bite from the pie. It was beyond delicious, just melting in my mouth the moment it hit my tongue. “Wow, this is the tastiest pie I’ve ever had.”

Granny chuckled. “There’s plenty more where that came from.”

“We make and sell them,” Applejack added, “though usually only at special events like if there’s a fair or on market day.”

“I didn’t know that, besides, it’s usually Twilight or Spike that buys groceries for me.”

Applejack smiled. “Well, if you’re ever hankerin’ for a slice you’re more than welcome to our home for one.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“So—” Granny began, drawing out the word, “—I hear that Ms. Sparkle is part of your herd.”

“Um, yes, she is.” For me this sort of conversation was rather awkward, to me it was tantamount to asking *are you sleeping with her?* I know ponies are much more open about this sort of thing and that I shouldn’t be embarrassed,—I still was.

I took another bite of pie, giving me an excuse to not talk.

“Are you here, measurin’ up my granddaughter for your herd?” She smiled coyly.

I immediately choked on the pie and went into a coughing fit.

“Granny!” Applejack exclaimed, shocked, embarrassed, and appalled by her grandmother’s words.

I quickly downed a glass of water, trying to clear my throat from the unpleasant crumbs of pie stuck in my throat. The mare had been beyond blunt, I guess tact and decorum slowly whittled away with the years.

“I ask because that no good-nick grandson of mine refuses to build one of his own.” Granny sneered out the window. “Big, strong, doesn’t say much—he’s the perfect stallion! He should be surrounded by mares, fending them off with both hooves, in fact. For apples’ sake, this town has more mares than anypony knows what to do with. Does he even have a single mare? Eh—nope,” she said, imitating him. “Just stays cooped up here on the farm and works. Sometimes, I wonder if he ain’t like his cousin.”

Applejack gasped. “Granny, you know full-well that cousin Braeburn—”

Granny waved her hoof dismissively and shook her head. “I know, I know.”

I coughed, finally having washed down the pie. “Well,” *cough*, “you certainly have a way with words, don’t you?”

“Please excuse her, she means nothin’ by it.” Applejack smiled awkwardly.

“The buck I do,” she interjected. “Well, what do you think of her? Her friends are in your herd, aren’t they? You seem like a decent stallion, or your kind’s equivalent of one. She ain’t good enough for ye, issat it?” She gave me a mean stink-eye, just daring me to say that she wasn’t.

I raised my hands defensively and gulped, and turned to Applejack.

“Your grand-daughter is very lovely, in every meaning of the word,” I started, my voice wavering. This was not how I had imagined my morning would go. “Applejack and I—“ I turned to Applejack “—look, AJ, is it okay if I tell her?”

Applejack looked to me and stared quietly, holding my eyes for what seemed to be a painfully long moment, before crossing her hooves and huffed, turning away from the both of us. “Fine, you can tell her.”

I let out a sigh of relief and put my hands back down. “Applejack and I have talked about her joining my herd, I certainly wanted her and my herdmates would not object, seeing as they’re her close personal friends. Applejack is very attractive—“ I could practically feel the blush radiating out from Applejack as I said it. “—but certain... realties keep it from working out for the both of us.”

“Realties?” Granny asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Applejack wants foals, and as a non-pony, especially as someone not even from this world, I can’t give her that,” I answered, matter-of-factly.

The kitchen immediately grew uncomfortably quiet. Applejack looked like she wanted to sink into the floor.

“Well, that *is* mighty sensible of her,” Granny said, breaking the awkward silence. “Family is the most important thing to us Apples, after all.”

Feeling beyond awkward, I wanted nothing but to get out of the house. “Well. thank you very much for the pie, ma’am, it was very good. Applejack, could you please show me out?”

The orange mare jerked up at the mention of her name, and slowly slid off her chair, putting her hat back on. As we walked out, she seemed intensely interested by the floor, with her hat pulled down to hide her face.

She opened the door for me and I stepped out onto the stone porch.

“Look,” she began, finally lifting up her head and meeting my eyes, “don’t let any of what Granny said or made you feel bother you—she’s getting kooky in her later years.”

“Applejack, I’m not bothered by what she said, I was more embarrassed by her bluntness than anything else.”

“I just thought that you’d be mad on account of me not joining your herd ‘cause of you not being able to give me foals. It’s like I’m saying that you’re not stallion enough for me.” She tittered nervously.

I sighed. “Look, AJ, we talked about this before. I’m not mad or anything at you, I perfectly understand and respect your reasons. And I don’t fault you for thinking that I’d take offense, I know you’re used to stallions that see herds as an extension of themselves.

“Maybe that’s why your brother doesn’t want to build a herd, afraid that he’d become a jerk. I dunno, just a guess.” I mused.

“So you ain’t mad?” She faced me with a smile.

“Of course not, AJ. I thought you thought better of me than that.”

She chuckled awkwardly and rubbed behind her hoof. “So...friends then?”

“Sure, friends. Look, right now we’re both feeling a little awkward. Let’s just put some time and distance between us and we’ll be back to being good ‘ol friends.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Applejack seemed to relax.

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help, or just come talk to me about anything, okay?” I placed my hand on her hat and jokingly pulled it down, over her face.

“Yeah, sure, get going, don’t let me keep you, partner.” She pushed the tip of the hat back up, smiling.

We waved each other goodbye and I left the farm. Though I tried to seem mature and speak sensibly to her, about how it wasn’t a big deal and that she shouldn’t worry, I couldn’t deny how intensely awkward I felt. I was glad that we got away from each other.

As I came back into town I could see that activity in town had picked up. Ponies were up and about, opening their stores, pulling out their carts, cleaning their stands, and hawking their wares to passing ponies. I looked at the town clock tower, it read ten past ten. That would mean that Sugarcube Corner would be open, and I could go say hello and talk to Pinkie.

Lost in thought of what pastries I should get for tonight and what to talk to Pinkie about, I totally missed the building swooshing sound centering in on me. I just barely lifted my head and registered the blue blur coming straight for me. It slammed into my chest and I had to take a step backwards to keep myself from falling.

“Anon!” exclaimed the little pony hugging me tightly. “Did you see me?” Her voice was exuberant as she grinned from ear to ear. “Did you see my awesome moves?”

“Hello, Rainbow. I did, but just barely.” I coughed, her blow emptying my lungs. I patted her head. “Just barely.”