

## **The Plaything**

**By: Gabriel LaVedier**

Big Macintosh checked his flanks repeatedly as he moved through Sweet Apple Acres, shuffling through the sweet-grass and the timothy hay, taking his time to wind around through the broad pasture land, his tracks twisting and turning around on themselves to leave anypony following confused and following an old path without even realizing. He was acting suspicious, and far more paranoid than he ever had before. He had to vanish into his own solitude, as he did when nopony was looking. But this time, there was something even more important to be done in that secluded venue.

It was a little shack, built by his own hooves. He had cobbled it together with scrap wood from regular repairs to the barn and homestead and extra nails taken from the same projects. He expanded it as he grew, until it had grown into a fairly substantial structure sufficient to be a good storage shed. But for Big Macintosh, it was his little Stallion-cave, a place far away from the workaday world, where he could be the real stallion, the authentic being under the gentle giant guise.

While the outside looked like a proper colt-made secret clubhouse, the inside was more something a filly might treasure. The walls were bright blue, and it was floored with a threadbare but passable round rug of many faded colors. The two windows of the structure had lace curtains with the remains of stains on them, possibly the cause of their removal from their prior location. A small, nicked and slightly-worse-for-wear bookshelf held a few books and a chipped vase upon a doily, with a silk daffodil sticking out of the top. At the center was a low, foal-sized wooden table with an ill-fitting white linen tablecloth, two chairs around it and a little plastic tea set in the middle.

Big Macintosh reached into his horse collar and extracted the plush doll known as Smarty-Pants, gingerly setting her in one of the chairs. She looked oddly appropriate there, another threadbare-relic that, in a finer condition, would have served as centerpiece to a filly's joy. He smiled at the completed scene, and took a slow, ginger seat in the opposite chair.

Pappy Blenny was not necessarily an unkind man. He was certainly not backwards or unfriendly. But he had a certain way about him. He didn't quite oppose colt cuddlers like Granny did, but he was very strict about mares being mares and stallions being stallions. Fillies had their toys and surroundings; colts had theirs. That was how things were done. Big Macintosh was not *glad* his father was no longer with them, but it made it easier to have such a place, hidden as it was.

He cleared his mind of thoughts of his late father and moved on to his responsibilities as host. He placed a cup and saucer before Smarty-Pants, then gave the same to himself. He smiles as he held up the flower-bedecked teapot, looking into the doll's button eyes. "Would y'all like some tea, Miss Smarty-Pants?"

His hoof reached across the table, nodding the doll's head slowly. While he spoke out of the side of his mouth. "*Why thank yew kindly, sir. Ah would love a bit of tea. You're a very kind host, mister Macintosh.*"

"Awww, shucks, ma'am, t'aint no big thing t'be kind tew a nice and proper lady like yerself. Ah have t'thank yew fer comin' t'this little soiree. Y'see... Ah don't really have many guests over here and, well, ah always have mah tea alone, with whatever

guests ah imagine might come. So, ah likes yer company, miss.”

The doll regarded Big Macintosh with her offset button eyes, which almost appeared to not leave him as he nodded her head. *“That’s really very sad, mister Macintosh. Ah hate tew see such a kind and sweet stallion without guests. It must be very lonely sometimes.”*

Big Macintosh pulled his smile a bit wider, ‘pouring’ some tea into the cup before the doll. “Shucks, ah ain’t all that special. Jes a big ol’ stallion with a passion fer tea an’ purty things. Ah knows t’aint exactly normal, and makes folk like mah pappy an’ Granny Smith look at me funny, but... Ah ain’t a Colt Cuddler, fer whatever it’s worth. Ah jes like purty things. Like yew. Ah think... Ah think yer real purty, miss Smarty-Pants. And they IS some right nice pants.”

His hoof was very active for the next portion of the action. He mimed the nod of a head then brought the teacup up to the doll’s lips, making her ‘sip’ a bit before her he angled her head down and away. *“Awww, yer too kind tew a lil Smarty-Pants like me. Ah’m not that purty.”* The doll was induced to take another sip from her cup. *“Mah word, mister Macintosh, this is some mighty fine tea.”*

Big Macintosh smiled brightly as he took a sip from his own teacup. “Y’all kin jes call me Big Mac. ‘r jes Mac. If’n yew like, ma’am.”

The tea party went on for some time after that. The conversation was light and general. Big Macintosh talked about his day, while Smarty-Pants made comments of support and admiration. Once the ‘tea’ had been drunk, she was put back into the horse collar and taken out of the small structure, back to his room in the farmhouse proper. In there, she was hidden in his bed. “Not that ah’m ashamed o’yew, miss Smarty-Pants. But Applejack’d be laughin’ her fool head off over nuthin’ at all funny, Applebloom’d try n’ take yew, and Granny... Well, never yew mind Granny. Yer safe here with me. Ah promise.”

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The next day, when all of Big Macintosh’s chores were finished, including a rather difficult session with the saggy old plow, he was off again, waving off Applejack’s insistence on activity. Though she raised a brow and wanted to say something about that, soon enough she was off with Rainbow Dash, in her own little world. It gave Big Macintosh the chance to vanish into the anonymity of the farmyard and enter his secret place once more.

Once within he extracted a rolled bundle from within his horse collar and carefully unwound it. While the outer layers were dabbled with sweat the inner layers were pristine, and eventually yielded Smarty-Pants. He placed her on the same chair from the other day, and given the same plastic cup as before. “Sorry about the conditions miss Smarty-Pants. Ah had t’work with the plow, and t’aint very kind of a device. Ah know’d ah’d never get the chance t’get yew out of th’room, so ah had t’keep yew with me all day. Ah hope it wasn’t much of an inconvenience tew ya, ma’am.”

Big Macintosh’s hoof came around to manipulate the doll again, nodding her head agreeably. *“Ah unnerstand, Big Mac. Life is hard on the farm, when yer th’oldest and got all them stallion-sized matters. Yew gotta be strong and sure, gotta be able tew handle all*

*the problems, and gotta work real hard t'keep it all runnin'. An' yew seem t'dew it very well. Y'all should be proud."*

Big Macintosh smiled, and mimed pouring tea as he had done the other day. "Awww, miss Smarty-Pants, yer a kindly lady. Ah really appreciate what yew say. Makes me feel like ah'm doin' sumthin' right 'round these parts." He brought his cup to his lips and imitated taking a sip. "Would you like any cream or sugar or lemon, miss Smarty-Pants?"

*"Ah'd love a little sugar and lemon. But why aren't yew gettin' any sugar in yer tea, Mac?"*

Big Macintosh mimed putting sugar and lemon into Smarty-Pants' cup and stirring it up. He then smiled and sipped at his own empty cup. "'Cause, miss Smarty-Pants, yer so sweet alls ah gots t'dew is sit here 'n look at ya and it's sweet as kin be."

The tea party went on in that friendly fashion, with Big Macintosh talking about the time that he had spent working in more detail, explaining what Smarty-Pants had missed in his horse collar. As before, when the party was done he packed up, placed Smarty Pants back in his horse collar and then put the cloth she had been wrapped in on top.

Back at the house he hid Smarty-Pants away once more, placing a kiss on her head before he went off to wash up from his long day. He left her tucked into his bed, head just above the sheets, tilted slightly to the side, her buttons eyes regarding him as he walked out with a huge smile on his face.

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This activity continued for a period of two weeks, with Big Macintosh doing all of his normal chores during the day, and finishing his time by himself, having a nice, long chat with Smarty-Pants and pretending to pour her tea. All the details of his day, all his feelings, all his fears and hopes and dreams. He told them all to Smarty-Pants, and she was always kind. Always said what he needed to hear to make him feel better. The more it went on the more he found himself enamored of the little doll. Even if he was the one speaking through her, she was comforting. And he kept her with him as much as possible, even in his bed at night.

But Big Macintosh was not the only one concerned with the whereabouts of Smarty-Pants. For all that time, Twilight had been questioning her friends and asking ponies in town if they had seen Smarty-Pants following her failed, yet also successful, attempt at forcing a friendship lesson. But all her searches had been futile. She was growing desperate. That left her only one option.

She studied her spell books, examining two different tomes carefully as she worked to mesh the two different spells together. She knew the Come-To-Life spell well enough, trusting that she'd be able to bring it off perfectly. But without Smarty-Pants there before her, she'd need an alternate means of getting the spell to activate.

Her second spell came out of the book on advanced synecdochic magic. This magic was a helper. It used a part of another object to affect the object itself. She had practiced before, casting spells on a piece of wood that were then made to affect another

piece, and had worked her way up to effective casting on more tenuously connected collective objects, like groups of blocks or cards from the same deck.

She propped each book up on a stand, and then set out Smarty-Pants' notebook and quill. She thought using both would increase the synecdochical link with the third part of the collective. After a few more minutes of preparation her horn began to glow, her eyes still scanning over the book of synecdochic magic as she activated the spell. Her horn's glow soon enveloped the small quill and notebook, making them rise slightly in the air.

With the synecdochical channel open, Twilight quickly looked to the Come-To-Life spell and began to cast it, pushing the magical energy through the link established through the notebook and quill. They glowed a deeper purple as the magical energy poured through them, bound for the missing portion of their collective. Twilight considered her plan and smiled. It was perfect. Smarty-Pants would come to life and immediately walk back to her.

The spell worked as intended, Smarty-Pants' body lighting up with purple energy, shining brightly briefly before there was a small pop and flash, the spell suffusing her plush form and integrating itself into her total form. Very slowly, her plush limbs began to move, her body gaining a greater and greater control of itself, getting her coordination polished in a short time.

With her body animated and with her mind formed from the impressions that had been left on her plush self, she worked her way slowly out of the blankets and the embrace of Big Macintosh. She crawled up the sheets and out of the top, looking to the door and noticing it was open a crack, yet still concealing what was within. With a nod of her head she turned her button eyes back on Big Macintosh and began rocking his huge head with her arms.

The rocking of his head finally managed to rouse Big Macintosh, his bleary eyes half open, head rising a little to look around at the darkened room. "Wha-? Whuzzat? What's goin' on? Who woke me up?"

"I did. It was me mister Macin... I mean, Mac." Smarty-Pants spoke with a tiny voice, but a very cultured one. It was not quite like Rarity's affected accent, nor as formal as a Trottingham or Hoofington accent. There was just something about it that spoke of class.

Big Macintosh finally looked down to the doll that was standing and speaking without a mouth. He shook his head several times and flopped his ears while he did. "Ah must be dreamin'. This sorta thing jes' don't happen..."

Smarty-Pants shook her head and looked up at the more-aware Macintosh. "This is no dream, I can assure you. I stand here before you, alive, in some sense. And here to say that I remember everything."

"E-everything..." Big Macintosh paled slightly, thinking back on the previous two weeks. "So yew were alive all this time? Yew were watchin' and jes... What, waitin' fer sumthin'?"

The plush head shook again. "No. I don't know how to describe it. When the spell was cast, I could FEEL what had happened while I was an object. And the most recent things were strongest because the others had faded some from the magic around me. I can remember being Twilight Sparkle's beloved plaything as a filly, because those days were

long and numerous. But I have such vivid memories of you, cradling me with care, setting me to tea, talking to me like you thought I was listening. Even if you spoke for me, it was wonderful.”

Big Macintosh took a moment to let that sink in. She had not been aware at the time. But she became aware of it after a spell brought her to life. He felt suddenly self-conscious. “Ah’m... Oh miss Smarty-Pants ah’m so sorry about this. Ah never meant tew... Ah mean, ah was jes tryin’ tew have a good talk in a purty place. But ah didn’t mean... Oh ma’am, ah hope yew ain’t mad.”

One of Smarty-Pants’ arms lightly patted Big Macintosh on the cheek. Even though her expression never changed her voice gave an indication of a smile. “Oh Mac. No. I am not mad at all. Not in the slightest. In fact... It made me happy. I had been in a trunk for so long. Forgotten. And then used as a pawn in a scheme. But you... You took me away, and treated me well. You held me against your body at night, kept me against your beating heart through your day and then took me to a pretty place to have a proper tea party and talk about your day. All those words, all those confessions and all that catharsis. It was wonderful. You wanted to make me part of your life. I felt it.”

Big Macintosh swallowed hard, looking down at the doll... At Smarty-Pants. She was the same pretty doll as before. But on her legs, moving on her own. Talking on her own. “Ah... Ah don’t deserve yer nice words, miss Smarty-Pants. After all, ah jes treated yew like any other doll. Cartin’ yew around, stuffin’ yew in mah ol’ horse collar, puttin’ yew where ah wanted and makin’ yew say what ah wanted. Jes squeezin’ yew against me, no thought t’what yew wanted a-tall. Ah was a bad stallion.”

Another pat landed on Big Macintosh’s cheek, followed by a touch of her face that was clearly meant to be a kiss. “Mister Big Macintosh...” The tone was firm; chastising, but not without kindness. “At the time I WAS a doll. You could not have known I would ever come to life. You treated me BETTER than anypony treated a doll, especially as a stallion. A grown stallion and you treated me with respect and care. And you still talked to me. Even if you talked for me, you still spoke to me. All you ever hid from others, you did not hide from me. I know your secrets.” Smarty-Pants came in again and gave another imitation kiss. “And I don’t think I would have said anything differently. Different accent, yes...” She chuckled lightly and shook her head. “But you genuinely are kind and sweet, to treat a doll like me with such care. And you said I was pretty. And sweet. You didn’t have to. You really did care. Really do care.”

Big Macintosh blushed brightly, bringing his lips in to give a huge kiss to Smarty-Pants, making her wobble on her plush legs from the slight contact. “Why thank yew kindly ma’am. Ah jes tried to be th’ best gentlecolt ah could. Mah pappy always taught me tew be kind tew a filly. An’ truth t’tell, yew’ve got the looks of a filly, a right purty filly. Ah wanted t’treat yew right.”

Smarty-Pants sat down on Big Macintosh’s pillow, beside his great head and within his range of vision. “So now that I can talk on my own, I really want to talk. You told me so much, but I want to find out more. I want to know you. I want to know all of you. Please tell me all about you.”

With a smile, the stallion laid his head down. “Well, ah was born t’ Blenheim Apple and Cinnamon Sauce-Apple in a big ol’ property Granny Smith and mah grandpappy owned...”

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The night was filled with talking, two low voices going back and forth for most of the dark time. But Big Macintosh, like all beings of flesh, had to sleep. With a kiss to Smarty-Pants, he laid his head down and drifted off to sweet dreams. When he awoke he looked to the pillow and found Smarty-Pants there, seated and regarding him with a tilted head. “Mm... Morning miss Smarty-Pants. Ah hopes ah didn’t snore. Ah can never tell, y’know, what with me bein’ asleep an’... Miss Smarty-Pants? Miss Smarty-Pants?”

Big Macintosh nudged the doll softly when he got no response, the plush body knocked over immediately. She showed no signs of rising again. He nudged her with a hoof, carefully moving her cloth body around on the bed. His eyes were suddenly huge, staring with a wavering gaze at the still form. Whatever magic had moved her had left her body, leaving nothing but a cloth exterior. He took her up and stumbled out of bed, fumbling to put on his horse collar and settle her into it. Magic had brought her to life. And one pony had magic enough to do it.

The trip through the lanes outside of town and the streets of Ponyville were uneventful, the hour too early for most other ponies. Consequently, it took Big Macintosh very little time to reach the library. Once there, he didn’t hesitate. He knocked. He knocked hard on the door, almost seeming to be trying to batter down the door. He knocked in his desperate way until the door opened up just a crack, one bleary eye looking at him incredulously from very low. “Big Macintosh? Do you know what time it is? What’s going on any...”

The door was pushed in desperately, knocking Spike heavily to the side. “Sorry Spike but ah’ve got some issues...”

“I’ll say you do...” Spike snarked, watching the heavy stallion dash upstairs to Twilight’s private space.

The heavy knocking resumed again, against the trapdoor that led to Twilight’s private space. His sister had been up there before, so he knew exactly where it was. “Miss Twilight! Miss Twilight! I have a serious matter to discuss!”

There was a bit of a delay, and some muffled sounds of confusion on the other side of the door before it was enveloped in a purple aura and opened, giving Big Macintosh a chance enter the room. Inside, he found Twilight with mussed hair, tired eyes and a confused look on her face. “Big Macintosh? To what do I owe this... Surprising visit?”

In response, Big Macintosh went to a table and took Smarty-Pants from his horse collar, laying her out carefully, and arranging her limbs perfectly straight. “Miss Twilight, Smarty-Pants is...”

“Oh, hey! You found Smarty-Pants! I’ve been trying to find her for weeks. Let me gues, you saw her walking around and it kind of scared you. Well, let me explain. You see, I cast a spell that sought her out using her accessories which brought her to life. It was supposed to make her come back to me, but I guess something went wrong. Thank you for finding her and...”

“So, yew did it. Ah was right... She came t’life last night in mah bed. And we started to talk. She was real nice. She’s always been real nice. But... Why didn’t she get

up this mornin'? We was talkin' about this 'n that las' night, and then ah went to sleep. And now she's..."

"Oh! Oh Big Macintosh I'm sorry. I didn't think you had found her the other day. Must have been a surprise when she just got up and started talking. The Come-To-Life spell doesn't last forever. I only poured in enough power to give her the chance to walk from anywhere around Ponyville to the library. I figured she'd rush right back. But... Why are you so desperate to see me? I didn't think a magically-animated toy would bring you out here."

"Umm... Kin ah be... Kin ah be completely honest with yew? Ah'm a little embarrassed. But it means so much t'me."

"Oh, of course! You know I try to be a good friend to everypony, and I can be very, very discreet. So you don't have to be afraid to tell me anything."

Big Macintosh looked from side-to-side and then looked down at Smarty-Pants laying out on the table. "Ah found her two weeks ago, when yew lost her. And ah kept her. Kept her with me all th'time. Ah held her tight at night, had her in mah horse collar when ah was workin' the farm, and ah... ah had little tea parties with her at th'end of the day. Ah talked tew her. Ah told her everythin' in mah life. From how the day went to what ah like. Or what ah didn't like, and what made me unsure. Ah didn't hold back. So when she came to life... She wanted t'talk, an' we talked. She said ah was a gentlecolt, because ah had been kind t'her. Ah had treated her right while she was just a doll. She knew what had been happenin'. An' now she's..."

Twilight regarded the big stallion. He seemed extremely earnest. He was looking down on Smarty-Pants with genuine sorrow. Even if she was just a doll, she meant something to him. Before the spell, he had treated her as a friend, and made her his confidante. During the spell, she had become so much more, because she could respond. And she had touched his heart in that short time. She thought she had loved Smarty-Pants. But this was an entirely different level. A beautiful one. "Big Macintosh... Come with me. Just... Leave her there for a while." Twilight moved away, up the ladder to her personal sleeping space.

Big Macintosh clambered his way up into the upper space, made all too aware that everything in the room design was made for a somewhat dainty mare and not a larger-than-average stallion. He found Twilight brushing her hair calmly, her eyes closed as the brush ran over the top of her head. "Uhh... Yes?"

"Big Macintosh... I think I realize what's going on. You're... Experiencing some strong feelings for Smarty-Pants. You built up this idea of her in your head while you confided in her. And when I brought her to life you found out it was real. You finally had somepony you could trust. Somepony who genuinely liked you, because she got to know you while she was just a toy. You don't want to let that go.

"The thing is... I can infuse Smarty-Pants with magic again. The Come-To-Life spell will not erase or change anything. But it will always be a limited use. I'd have to keep putting more and more applications, like winding up a mechanical toy. Would you want her to be just another walking, talking toy you have to wind up? She'd figure it out eventually, and realize that she's not really alive. And I think she might really want to be that. But it's up to you, Big Mac. You're the one that feels for her."

Big Macintosh looked over the edge of the sleeping area, down to the table with

Smarty-Pants laying upon it. Even as doll, motionless and unseeing, all he saw when he looked at her was the kind lady that kissed him and told him he was sweet. “Ah want... Ah jes want one more day with her. A long day with her, t’talk an’ all that. Even if it’s temporary, all ah want is that one day, knowin’ it’s only one day. So’s ah can get the chance t’say goodbye. Ah don’t want her to come t’life, then drop down when her time runs out. Livin’ an’ dyin’ over and over. But... When her day is up... kin ah keep her with me?”

Twilight smiled, setting her brush aside and nodding her head. “Of course. Now, go down there and stand beside her. I’ll stay up here to cast the spell and then leave you two alone for the day.” Her horn started to glow as Big Macintosh clambered down the ladder, the spell running through her head. One happy day, for both of them. What a decision. At least Smarty-Pants would be where she was truly loved. And as she let the spell loose, Twilight realized that was what really mattered.

**The End**