

*After the first time Matthew mentions the name “MP.”*

“Who’s MP?” Steven asks, casual but curious.

“That was my name for Mitch.”

“Oh. What’s it stand for?”

Matthew looks at his son. A soft smile covers the sadness that always trails behind that name.

“Well, now,” he begins, slipping into a playful old-man voice like he’s about to tell a whopper. But as the memory takes over, his tone shifts—gentler, steadier.

“When we were twelve, a new toy hit the shelves. Big with little kids. *My Little Pony*.”

“I think I’ve heard of that,” Steven says.

“Mitch loved all things colorful—and My Little Pony was definitely full of color. He wanted one so badly. But his dad said he was too old for baby toys and refused to let his mom buy it.”

Matthew’s jaw tightens at the memory. His voice stills for a beat.

“I loved that softer side of Mitch. I wanted him to have it, maybe even more than he did. So I used my birthday money and bought him one.”

He glances at Steven, then reaches for Crystal’s hand. She takes it without a word, weaving her fingers through his like she’s holding part of the memory too.

“Mitch was so excited—got all blubbery about it. So I told him I was gonna call him *My Little Pony* from now on. But that was too long, and *MLP* kept tripping me up. So I shortened it to *MP*. And it stuck.”

He pauses, eyes far away.

“He was the most colorful *MP* in my life.”

Crystal squeezes his hand. “I didn’t even know that,” she says softly, glancing at Steven with quiet wonder.