

Upgrade

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Chapter 1 - Upgrade

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1 - Upgrade

The name had surprised him, when PC first passed along the good news. 'Vista'. It was...well, it was a word. After a long and well-established lineage of versions named for their birth years, and then a handful with practical little two-letter handles, 'Vista'. It was...kind of cool. That was probably the most surprising part. That, and how much work it apparently was to get it installed. He's a Mac. What does he know about upgrades? He never would've guessed that it'd be a whole week before PC finally IMed him from the hospital, short and concise and as PC-like as ever.

Mac, he'd said. Bandages are off. You will be impressed.

That last bit had been intriguing. To be fair, they don't usually agree on what made something impressive. But it has Mac curious.

He'd been contemplating the slight irony of the place all down the long hallway that led to PC's room. It was...stark. And white. Very clean. His kind of place. And yet, he'd probably never be staying there himself. Hence the irony.

That train of thought dies off when he gets to the room.

PC looks *good*.

Well, yeah, he also looks tired. Which makes sense, in light of what he's apparently been put through. And he hasn't changed dramatically. But that's still the first thought to pop into Mac's head: he looks *good*.

"Mac!" he calls, cheerfully waving him over. Geez, what is it? Mac can't put his finger on it but he looks...better. Healthier. He's definitely lost a little weight.

And are those new glasses?

"Hey, big guy," he responds, clapping a hand on the other's shoulder. It's not quite as soft as he remembers. He'd come in ready to do a little pep-talking, give a morale boost or two – PC'd been excited about the upgrade, but he'd also been wary, and Mac had expected a good deal of aching and brooding as all the new preferences and settings took hold. So the fact that PC's practically glowing has him a little thrown off. "How you feeling?"

"Like a new machine," PC declares proudly, and it's basically true in light of everything that's been replaced. "What do you think? Quite the improvement, isn't it?" he solicits, shifting a little to indicate the general slimming-down that's taken place. He's still not what Mac would call 'svelte', and isn't anywhere near the other's lanky build, but there's definitely less there than used to be. He looks...refined.

"Lookin' good," he agrees, patting that shoulder. Even his hair's a little different. That's all it is, as far as he can see. Little things all adding up to that general sense of 'look at me, new and improved'. And

he's happy for PC. Maybe the not-as-big Big Guy will be able to lighten up on himself a little now, which is nice for everyone involved. Right now, at least, he seems more pleased with himself than he has since...well, in a heck of a long time. It's nice. "You ready to check out? I mean, get dressed and stuff first," he suggests, cocking his head towards the hospital gown still hanging off his buddy's nice new casing like some dreadful paper curtain.

"Oh! Right!" answers PC, and Mac can't help but smile, bemused, at the sheer strangeness of a *chipper* PC. "Don't look," he adds, with a cautionary finger-waggle for punctuation; Mac steps back and obediently turns around. It's not like he hasn't seen it all before. But PC can be sort of picky about privacy, and Mac's not at all sure what visible signs of all the maintenance might be there to make him anxious, so he doesn't mind waiting through the telltale sounds of PC wriggling his way out of bed, of fake-fabric and real fabric rustling.

"Okay," he finally announces, and Mac turns around.

Ooh.

PC looks *good*.

He's pretty sure he's already touched on that fact, but it gets a rehashing now that he's up and dressed. He'd just sort of been assuming a trimmer version of the old suit, or one of PC's charmingly awkward attempts to go more casual, to be "hip, like one of you kids". But this is neither stodgy nor awkward. It's...it's *stylish*, in a very PC sense of the word. He hadn't known that sense existed, but there it is. Sleeves rolled up to his shoulders. A well-fitted sweater vest. No tie. Neat khakis, clean and unwrinkled - but not pressed to within an inch of their life.

And – Mac's processor spins – *sneakers*.

"Wow," he says simply, and PC's already proud glow gets a little prouder and a little glowier. Oh, he is so hip now. Hip and yet still professional. He is one cool machine. Mac is thinking along similar lines. So this is Vista. All the hype is starting to make sense. Once the initial marveling process has been completed, he goes to offer his arm, not sure how steady PC's going to be on his feet after major surgery, but he just smiles and waves it off.

"No, no. I'm good." He says that kind of thing a lot, but it's usually passive-aggressive. That right there is an actual, honest, *cheerful* "I'm good". Mac is impressed, if a little off-balance; moreso of both when they make it home without PC ever needing so much as a pause to pace himself or cool down. He's never had that kind of system overhaul himself, but even he's always a little winded after an upgrade. Stuff just takes a while to kick in. PC, in bold contrast to just about everything he'd expected, is both high-spirited and uncharacteristically energetic. New power source, maybe, though Mac's pretty sure it's more than just that.

Having spent the entire walk home thinking, thinking hard enough to overwrite most of his usual multitasking skills, he doesn't realize that they're at his own place till they actually get there. Whoops. PC doesn't seem to mind, though, and Mac passes it off as intentional as he lets them both in. It's...weird. He hasn't really known PC all that long, hasn't been close enough for long enough to know how this whole upgrade thing goes; what's okay to ask right now? What's appropriate to say?

"You...look really good," he finally says, leaning against the back of the couch, one ankle crossed languidly over the other as he surveys his renovated friend. Sneakers. He can't get over that.

“Thank you,” answers PC, unmistakably proud. This is his *day*. Mac has always been the one to look good, and he still does. But now he gets his turn too, and doesn’t mind preening a little, smoothing out his hair. It’s still neat, still perfectly appropriate for the office, but somehow it’s not quite as...what? Is it a little longer? Something. Just the slightest bit less 9-to-5 than the old model. Mac totally approves, even if he’s just a little weirded out. Good for PC, he thinks. Appropriately, PC thinks, Good for me. It’s funny; his marketshare has never really been threatened, even with Mac getting all the buzz lately. But he’s still managed to pull off an awful lot of insecurity, for someone in his position. Today, he just gets to feel good.

“So...how’s it feel?” Mac asks after a moment, eyes still running on their curious once-over. Which is more like a tenth- or eleventh-over, by now, but he’s allowed to gawk. It’s a big change. PC hums thoughtfully and gives an experimental wiggle of his fingers.

Holy crap. PC has widgets.

“You have widgets,” Mac points out, unnecessarily. He can’t always be cool. Seriously, though! Right there on the desktop! And they’re active and everything!

“Yes,” PC responds contently, more than a little smug at the reaction that got. He opens up a program or two, just to show off. Mac gapes.

“You have...transparency.”

“Yes.”

“And a 3d GUI.”

“Mmhm.”

“Are those *drop shadows*? Under your *menus*?”

“Yes they are.” PC is having his ego stroked, and by god, he is going to bask in that for as long as he can. Mac, meanwhile, feels a little funny. Assuredly, it’s cool. Which is probably why he feels funny. He’s not used to cool on PC. It’s not that he feels like he’s being copied (okay, maybe just a little, but that’s really just because of the color scheme PC’s running at the moment) but...well, cool kind of was *his* thing. Just like neat and professional (others said ‘nerdy’; he was more fond of it) had been PC’s. And while there were definitely still traces of that environment here and there, they were just that – traces.

It’s kind of unsettling.

But PC is happy, and that’s good enough for Mac. Besides, he doesn’t seem to be quite done showing off.

“Hear that?” he asks, grinning almost mischievously. Mischievous PC. Huh. That’s...kind of appealing. Mac strains his input, curious.

“Nope. Hear what?”

PC beams. “Exactly.” The fans aren’t new, but they’re barely running. Part of the package (the part that’d required the heaviest anesthesia; he was groggy for days) was a new processor. Oh, he feels cool. Cool and *fast*. Mac gets it after a moment, and chuckles. This is a side of PC he doesn’t get to see much.

“Very nice,” he admits, perfectly willing to indulge PC’s vanity. Mac knows him. He’ll be back to himself before long, he assumes. Till then, there’s no harm in letting him enjoy this burst of self-confidence. And it is pretty attractive. Attractive enough that Mac figures he can trust those assurances of being fine, pushes away from the couch to walk over, and leans in with the intent of stealing a kiss from this new, cheerful iteration of his PC. The slight reduction in overall softness hasn’t affected PC’s lips, he’s pleased to note. And that moment of startled hesitation, the one that always happens no matter how many times he’s kissed PC by now, that’s still there. The familiarity is actually sort of comforting.

He’s not expecting PC to suddenly start kissing back, and certainly not with the kind of enthusiasm that usually only accompanies lots of nudity and squirming around, so he actually jumps when that’s just what happens.

“Oh,” PC murmurs, taking on a pale pinkish glow that starts at the tips of his ears and moves inward. “I...got a little carried away there, didn’t I? I’m sor---“

The ‘ry’ never happens because Mac’s kissing him again. Hard. For once, his youthful enthusiasm is getting handed right back to him – by PC! – and he’s not about to let that go to waste. His hand fumbles in the air, finds PC’s hand, and then they click and it’s so fast and uncluttered that Mac nearly loses his footing. Enhanced networking capabilities, he notes dazedly. Bless this Vista thing.

PC, meanwhile, couldn’t be happier. He tells Mac that, but with the kissing and all that going on it just sort of comes out as ‘mmffnnh.’ Oh, well. Mac’s good with languages. He’ll get that. And if he doesn’t, he’ll definitely get it when PC, who has grown very tired of sitting by himself in a sterile little room, steers him subtly back to the couch.

Oh yeah. Mac gets that. Actually, he got the ‘mmffnnh’ too, but nothing wrong with a little repetition. He’s too busy being surprised, really, to be anything else – like sensible. At first. That finally does kick in, but by then they’re sitting on the couch and PC’s free hand is starting to wander. Which is not something PC’s hands generally do unless, again, the nude and squirmy part is already well underway. It’s not, and Mac’s a little worried about whether it should be, which is what eventually gets him to break off the kiss and open his eyes.

“Whoa, whoa,” he breathes, surprised by the effort that takes. “Hold up, big guy.” (He actually feels a little funny calling PC that now, but he *is* still bigger than Mac by a longshot, so it’s probably okay.) “You just got out of recovery. I –know- there’s gonna be aftercare stuff to deal with – gotta back up your preferences, reinstall the programs that got wiped...” PC looks a little disheartened; he’d been letting those matters slip his mind, and now that they’re back, it’s just not in his nature to pretend they don’t exist. “All I’m saying,” Mac concludes, thumb rubbing the back of the hand in his grasp, “is just we should probably take it slow for a little while.” PC’s already shown off the processor. And it’s pretty

clear he's gotten more stable; the little pauses and hiccups Mac's long since grown used to have been conspicuously absent since they left the hospital. Still...major surgery. Those were PC's own words. It just seems like some time should be allowed for recovery before they get into the heavy cross-platform stuff.

"You're right," PC finally admits, though he doesn't want to. His system can handle it just fine now. If Mac thought that initial linkup was cool, he's going to...oh, what's that phrase..."totally wig out" when PC shows him just how much those new networking abilities can do. Said wiggling-out, he likes to think, is going to involve Mac panting, and making that one face he makes, the one PC likes so much. But it looks like they aren't going to find out just yet, and maybe that's for the best. It's true; he hasn't put all of his preferences and settings in order. And since Mac knows just how to exploit those preferences, it'll probably be nicer in the long run if he waits till they're back as they should be.

He hasn't let go of Mac's hand, though, something Mac is keenly aware of. There's nothing wrong with just being connected, he figures; PC's doing fine with it so far. It's just file transfers he's a little worried about. Just till PC's recuperated. Then there'll probably be some jumping of those smartly-outfitted bones, but he's putting the EXIF before the proverbial JPEG now. "Ohhere," he blinks, and plucks a flash drive out of his pocket to hand off to PC. "The files you had me back up before you went in." It'd actually been sort of sweet, that whole thing. PC'd seemed genuinely worried that he might not make it through this upgrade, but Mac had been able to talk him down a little, remind him of all the other changes he'd survived. Of course, the unintended side effect was that PC was left feeling a little broody and old, but that was just sort of his personality at work.

"Thank you," he answers, and sighs. May as well get the dull parts over with. He wants to get back to work. And back to the outside-of-work activities too. (Those are basically just Mac.) "I'll...I'm going to get these reinstalled, then rest for a little while." Mac nods, cocking his head towards the bedroom. *Mi casa es su et cetera*, and PC pushes himself up from the couch to go take care of that. The departing view is another reminder of just how kind this upgrade has been to him, and Mac briefly curses the good conscience telling him to wait out PC's recovery, because...well, *damn*. He wonders if PC will still be soft and comfy like before, with this decrease in overall mass. That wonder sets off a whole chain of other wonderings. *iWonder*. Is the new self-confidence part of the package, something that's here to stay? Has this marked the end of the old, endearingly anxious PC? Is he going to start appreciating the things Mac can do, now that he can do a few of them too?

Or is he going to appreciate them less for just that reason?

That one sort of sticks in Mac's processor.

PC has widgets. PC has a sleek interface. PC has *sneakers*. And this is wrong, because Mac knows he's supposed to be happy for the guy, but...well, he is, but it's clouded. Because suddenly all he can think of is PC using that sleek new processor for image editing and home movies, using that cool new GUI to woo the younger generation, and it is bugging the *hell* out of him.

Mac is not used to this. He's the confident one. He's never been the industry leader, but he's always been secure. Now...well, now he's brooding. Brooding calls for appropriate music. He doesn't have a 'brooding' playlist (PC does, but he's not about to try a wireless network with him right now) so he just puts on the old-school rock and closes his eyes.

When PC comes out, a few hours later, Mac's playlist has run through to its end. He messed around in Photoshop for a while, but nothing really great came of it. Now he's asleep, and PC pauses to just watch the light, pulsing glow of unconscious processing. Mac looks...well, he looks asleep. But more than that. He looks like he's been sulking, somehow. Which is weird, because PC doesn't think he's ever seen Mac sulk, awake or not.

Quietly, PC goes to the kitchen.

Mac wakes up to PC tapping his shoulder. "Dinner," he says simply. Huh. It takes a second to get his clock back into sync, and then he boggles. Wow. Got late. He hadn't even realized he'd gone to sleep. Blinking off the last slow whirs of grogginess, he tilts his head to press a kiss to PC's knuckles, nodding. "Mm. You cooked?" It's not something he does often, which Mac chalks up not so much to PC's experience (or lack thereof) but to his own reputation for being...weird about food. He likes exotic stuff well enough (oh god, how easily he could be plied with good sushi) but tends to get all kinds of picky about the more pedestrian offerings. It's just a quirk.

So when he sees that PC's gone out on a limb and made something even he can't quite identify, something with peppers and some other vegetable he's only read about on Wikipedia, he has to steal another kiss, and this one's not on his hand at all. It's delicious. When they're done, Mac washes. PC dries.

They're both a little over-rested by the time evening has segued into night, but PC has work in the morning and Mac hasy'know, stuff to do. He works! Honestly. So they don't technically need it, but they go to bed nonetheless. It'sdifferent, PC staying over without the usual sweaty exhaustion part coming first to make that necessary. But Mac has already volunteered himself to stick around for the whole aftercare stage. It doesn't really matter whose place that happens at. He just likes his own better.

In the name of comfort, they've both lost a few layers for the night, and with PC down to undershirt and boxers (even *those* are new; he's getting a little wary of just how thorough this upgrade is), it's even more clear how streamlined he's gotten. Mac knows perfectly well that most of the bulkiest programs are the ones PC would sooner shut down than be parted from, so either they've been revamped too or he's just had a whole lot of unnecessary extras trimmed off. Either way, it's quite the change. He's still got a healthy degree of fleshy softness to him, a roll here or there, and Mac is surprised at how relieved he is about that. For one thing, it makes it comfier when, ready to turn in for the night, he nestles up to PC's side and tucks his head against his shoulder. He's still the Big Guy. Mac's glad.

PC, for all his pre-upgrade angst about his appearance, is glad too, just because it means Mac looks comfortable where he is. It wouldn't work if they were both cut like him, sleek and thin and pointy around the joints. This...this is nice. Mac sort of sinks against him when he presses up close like that, and sighs; PC has a feeling they're both a little impatient to make up for the lost time he spent undergoing all the renovations, but that'll come in time. He has an intense faith in his new capabilities, but it's sort of touching that Mac doesn't want to risk his well-being, and PC – for whatever people might say about him – does have a soft spot for 'sort of touching'. A Mac-shaped soft spot. He tucks said Mac cozily under his arm.

He almost doesn't want to say anything, because this is really pretty nice. But even Mac, as allegedly cool as he is, has to get this kind of thing out of his system sometimes.

"So...the new processor and everything. Bet you can run a lot more than you used to. More high-strain stuff, more things at one time..."

PC blinks, but goes with this. "I imagine so."

"Heck, you could probably run iLife without breaking a sweat." Okay, he's starting to get a little transparent, but he can't always be subtle either.

Another blink. "IYes, probably." Mac can't physically slump, being horizontal, but his whole CPU hurts all of a sudden.

"I'm not going to," PC adds after a moment, glancing curiously over to him.

Mac lifts his head. "You're not? I mean, I know you've never been into that kind of thing, butwelllook at you. You look...*cooler*. You're running more smoothly. Your whole interface is---"

"But it's *your* thing."

That's it. That's all there is to it, the tone of his voice says. He looks puzzled that Mac would even bring this up, because he is.

"Of course I've gotten'cooler'," he acquiesces. Preen. "Any decent upgrade would have factored in that kind of thing. But that doesn't mean I'm about to start playing around in iVideo---"

"iMovie."

"---iMovie, or Paintershop---"

"close enough."

"---or any of that, he finishes, peering down to meet Mac's eyes. He looks a little startled, but it doesn't last, and then he's himself again, cool and smiling and certain.

" 'Course not," he answers, starting to grin. "You've got spreadsheets to make."

"Exactly." Mac was teasing; PC seems to have missed that, and that just makes him smile more.

Mac leans up, leans over, and gives him the kind of long slow kiss that seriously makes him want to forget about the whole recovery thing. Again. But again, he manages to pull off the common-sense thing with admirable fortitude, and settles for slouching back into his snuggly little spot at PC's side. One way or another, their fingers end up laced together, and when the connection holds up even after PC's gone to Sleep, Mac finds himself feeling a little better about this whole Vista thing again.