

FATHER KNOWS BEAST

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Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to a patch of tranquil daytime sky, against which a flying Spike rises into view in a head-on close-up. He swerves to one side, then the other, and passes the camera before closing in a row of poles; an easy serpentine run carries him through and toward the Castle of Friendship. Twilight Sparkle pivots to observe him from the ground, a notepad held in her magic; back to him.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Woo-hoo-hoo! *(He clumsily applies the brakes...)*

Spike: Whoa!

(...and comes in for a landing in front of his boss. She now holds a quill in addition to the pad.)

Spike: Ta-da!

(She drops to her haunches and claps proudly as he takes a bow.)

Twilight: *(jotting notes)* Okay, Spike. Now let's try a flip. Remember—two flaps, then straight up. *(He does a quick test flap.)*

Spike: Got it!

(Longer shot of the two; now she is on all fours again. He lifts off, gaining several yards of altitude, and tries to follow these directions—with the result that his wings completely lock up at full span in close-up. His grunt of exertion does nothing to free them, and he plummets o.s. to the sound of a loud splash. At ground level, he surfaces with an air-starved gasp from the lake that surrounds the School of Friendship, to Twilight's dismay. Wipe to a close-up of the little guy, dried off and winging cheerfully over the hills outside Ponyville. He waves to Twilight, who responds in kind with her writing tools put away, and the momentary distraction causes him to crash head-on into a tree. Down he goes into a clump of bushes at its base, causing Twilight to wince in sympathetic pain.)

(Wipe to a point just below one of the Castle's balconies, the camera angled up at it, as Spike make a high-speed, backwards entry through the doorway. After a camera-shaking crash from within, he executes a very wobbly liftoff while tangled up in a length of drapery. As he passes one

of the poles, this snags on its upper end and slingshots him downward. He comes loose of the cloth and ends up making a perfect spreadeagle landing on his face in the grass; Twilight allows herself a split-second grimace, which shifts into an encouraging smile.)

Twilight: You're doing great, Spike! *(He gets up, rubbing his head.)* Now let's see the big finish!

(One weary sigh later, the dragon steels himself and goes airborne, cutting a turn around the star on the Castle's topmost spire. As Twilight grins hopefully, he pitches himself into a backflip but comes out of it in a yelling dive and not a shred of control. He plows into the turf, barely missing her, and carves a trench that extends o.s. past the wing she has thrown up to shield her face. A hearty crash shakes the camera to mark his impact; after it fades away to nothing, she gallops away to find him climbing up from the smoking far end of the furrow with a pained groan. Scuffs and splotches of dirt mark quite a lot of his hide.)

Spike: *(climbing out)* I don't know about big, but I am definitely finished.

Twilight: Maybe I should get Rainbow Dash. She's the one who taught me advanced flying techniques.

Spike: *(brushing himself off)* No, thanks. If I'm gonna mess up, I'd rather do it in front of you.

(He plucks off a flower that has wound up stuck to his head and considers it for a gloomy moment.)

Spike: *(tossing it aside)* I just don't understand why none of your advice is helping.

(On the start of the next line, cut to the speaker leaning insouciantly against a nearby tree.)

Smolder: *(scornfully)* Because she's teaching you to fly like a pony instead of a dragon.

Spike: *(to Twilight)* What's the difference?

Smolder: *(flying to them, pulling at his wing)* Well, we don't have feathers, for starters.

(This statement of fact gives Twilight pause and spurs her to give one of her own wings a concerned look. Dissolve to a patch of sky against which the two dragons pull into view, flying effortlessly side by side; Spike is now cleaned up.)

Spike: *(whooping, rolling)* Yes!

(This time, his attempt at a loop is successful and he even winds up coasting along on his back, delighting Twilight no end. After he and Smolder do a loop and a half around the Castle's spire, he descends to do a low-altitude pirouette and touches down nimbly on one foot. Twilight trots over to bump a hoof against his fist as Smolder lands.)

Spike: *(laughing, to Smolder)* Wow! Thank you so much! *(flexing a wing)* How did you know I just needed to bend my wings?

Smolder: Honestly, this is Dragon 101. Usually dragon parents teach this stuff.

(Twilight and Spike trade concerned glances at this remark. Dissolve to a close-up of a shut door within the Castle; a knock is heard from the other side before it opens and Twilight peeks in.)

Twilight: Spike, I've been thinking about our flying lesson.

Spike: *(from o.s., distractedly)* Uh-huh.

(Cut to frame both in his bedroom, he with his back turned to her in the foreground and seen from the shoulders up.)

Twilight: *(stepping farther in, spreading wings briefly)* I can't believe I overlooked something as simple as feathers. It's no wonder you were having trouble.

(The camera angle changes to show him sitting on the edge of his bed opposite her, now with wings spread.)

Twilight: I wish I had more dragonish knowledge to give you. Do you think being raised by ponies has affected you in other ways? *(No immediate response.)* Spike?

(Close-up: the number-one assistant is hunched intently over a small pillow in his lap.)

Spike: Did you say something, Twilight?

(He turns it around, showing a dragon wing on the other side, and smiles as the clawed fingers deftly work a threaded needle through this.)

Spike: Uh, sorry. I'm just finishing up this thank-you throw pillow for Smolder—and you know how I get when I'm in the embroidery zone.

(Twilight manages a slightly weak chuckle at this revelation. Fade to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of the finished pillow, held in Smolder's hands and being carried through Ponyville, and cut to her and Spike out for a walk. She runs a puzzled eye over the article and tilts it slightly, as if expecting the new angle to give her new information.)

Spike: It's a pillow. But not for your head—although it could be. I-It's a throw pillow. They're more casual. You can use 'em anywhere. *(She gives it a bemused glance; he deflates.)* You don't like it.

Smolder: *(groaning)* It's not that. It's just—dragons don't really use pillows. At all. *(He stops, flabbergasted; she keeps moving.)*

Spike: What?

Smolder: *(now o.s.)* Hey! *(Cut to frame both; she points skyward.)* What's that?

(Behind them; now the object of her attention can be seen as a fireball streaking out of the blue toward Ponyville. Cut to it and back on the next line.)

Spike: I don't know, but it's HEADING RIGHT FOR US!!

(As the mass of flames crashes down and cuts a track in the road on its way o.s., he avoids it by launching himself into a backflip while she drops the pillow and hits the dirt. They find themselves staring at a fresh, smoking crater in the middle of the block; Spike picks up the pillow; only to find that it has been reduced to a mass of ashes that crumbles away in his hands.)

Spike: Okay, now I really owe you for the lesson.

(If he was in sorry shape after his wipeout in the prologue, the dragon that groans and heaves painfully up to the surface looks like five miles of bad road. Light green hide with darker spots and ear fins; lighter underbelly; blue eyes and brows, head/tail spines, and tail-tip projection; ear fins, head spines, and tiny wings split and torn; scuffs, dirt and soot all over his fat body. This is Sludge, an adult male with a gravelly voice.)

Sludge: *(coughing/wheezing)* Hey there, young dragons. Name's Sludge. How're your tails shakin'?' *(He grunts and clutches at one arm.)*

Spike: You all right?

Smolder: Yeah. What happened?

Sludge: *(stepping toward them)* To what?

(Not realizing that the crater is directly in his path, he topples back into it.)

Sludge: Ohh. *(defensively, putting head up to face them.)* I-I don't need to explain myself to a couple of baby dragons.

(He does a remarkably poor job of muscling through the pain, instead whimpering and yelping with every step he takes past them. When he brings his wings to bear, he barely rises to half his own height before crashing down on his belly.)

Sludge: Ow. *(Spike hurries over to him.)*

Spike: Maybe not, but you're hurt and need help. *(He drapes a meaty arm over his shoulders and pulls Sludge up in close-up.)* So I'm taking you to Twilight's castle whether you like it or not.

(Tilt up to the big guy's puzzled/thoughtful face.)

Sludge: Castle, eh?

(He shudders as Spike leads him away. Dissolve to an overhead shot of the Castle's throne room, its central table bare, and zoom in slowly. The holders of the six full-size thrones are present and accounted for, Spike is on the way to his small one, and Sludge is in a wheelchair parked next to Applejack. Cut to Twilight as he climbs up into the seat.)

Twilight: I'm glad Spike brought you here, Sludge. I understand you made quite an impression in town.

Pinkie Pie: *(popping up behind Sludge)* Literally! There's a hole and everything!

Sludge: Well, I hope you're not expectin' me to fix it. *(Wince.)*

Applejack: It doesn't look like you're in much shape to do anything.

Sludge: I'll manage. Dragons take care of themselves. I don't need help from a buncha castle-livin' ponies.

(But his cries of discomfort upon standing up out of the chair and trying to walk away tell a very different story.)

Rarity: Darling, do be careful.

Sludge: I'm— *(Yelp.)* —fine. *(Fall flat on his face.)*

Fluttershy: I can't watch!

(She turns her face away; cut to just outside the throne room doors, one of which has been knocked open by Sludge's head striking it. Rainbow Dash opens the other.)

Rainbow: You're not the first stubborn dragon we've met, you know. *(Spike flies over to them.)*

Spike: And sometimes, even dragons need help.

(The big lug mulls this over as Twilight's aura envelops him and brings him back to the wheelchair; she has left her throne.)

Twilight: I promise, my friends and I will only do enough to get you back on your claws.

(The rest of the gang gathers around her, prompting him to turn over her offer in his mind. Dissolve to Rarity working at the sewing machine in her workspace/living area on the upper floor of the Carousel Boutique. Once the fabric stitching is done to her liking, a bit of telekinesis pulls it free; cut to Sludge up here, sitting in his chair with a blanket covering his lap. The piece settles into place as a glittery, flame-patterned sling for his left arm, and the straps tie themselves together in back. A longer shot frames Spike on the scene as well; Sludge smiles broadly at their attention to his needs, and they flip a grin to one another for a job well done.)

(Wipe to a close-up of a pillow on a bed. Fluttershy reaches into view to remove it, then clamps her teeth around a folded blanket on a shelf. Her rabbit Angel gets his nap interrupted when she whisks his pillow away, leaving him to bump his head on the floor. These goings-on are taking place in the Castle, and the spare pillows are quickly tossed onto the head end of Spike's bed; Sludge lies down here, followed by the blanket being draped over him. He dozes off as Fluttershy flies around to tuck him in, but Angel gives the pegasus a very funny look.)

(Wipe to Applejack leading an ambulatory, cleaned-up Sludge to the treadmill-powered cider press that the Apples used to go up against the Flim Flam Brothers in “The Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000.” It stands in the main barn at Sweet Apple Acres. She hops and begins to trot; at her wave, he groans softly to himself and joins her. Big Macintosh contributes to the effort by bringing in a tub of apples on his head and dumping them into the chute that runs under the great stone wheel, which crushes them to cider that streams from a spigot on the opposite end and collects in an open barrel. Sludge, sweating from his exertion, claps eyes on the product and gets an idea; cut to Applejack, who grins back over her shoulder and then immediately registers surprise. Looking ahead of herself, she finds that Sludge has taken the place of the barrel and is lying on his back, open mouth directly under the spigot so he can drink his fill. Applejack glowers at him, but forgets to keep her hooves moving—and the treadmill sweeps her backward and o.s., dislodging her hat. The camera shakes with the sound of a splintering impact, a barrel rolls into view from that direction, and a cut to the wall shows her fetched up amid a smashed one and a scatter of intact others. The mishap has left her in a foul mood, and the apples that drop from above to bounce off her head do nothing to improve it. This sequence reveals that Sludge’s wings have healed, but his ear fins and head spines still carry minor splits.)

(A cupcake swings past the camera on the end of a string; behind it, wipe to a set of closed doors within the Castle. Twilight’s field opens them from within and she emerges reading from the library, but stops short at the sight of Sludge moving through the corridor on all fours, with Pinkie riding on his back and holding a branch with a cupcake dangling from the other end in front of his face. The enticement is enough to keep him crawling on, and she grins at her own ingenuity in devising this bit of unorthodox physical therapy. He has shed his sling.)

(Wipe to Rainbow in flight. She looks back over her shoulder, only to immediately stop and stare in shock; pan quickly to an extreme close-up of Sludge’s lazily smiling mug. A longer shot picks out the two flight-suited Wonderbolts—Blaze and Fleetfoot—struggling to support his weight and move him about. She darts off after the convalescent, irritated at his lassitude, and gestures to indicate that he needs to put his wings in gear. He begins to flap as the backup pair lifts him a bit higher; Rainbow grins at the effort, but it proves for naught as their strength gives out and all three drop o.s. The blue flyer claps a disgusted hoof to her face.)

(Wipe to Sludge lounging in a room of the Castle. Pinkie passes in the corridor, pushing a trolley loaded with fresh, gem-studded baked treats whose aroma drifts in through the open doorway. One sniff later, the camera cuts to the corridor as he glances out after her; in short order he is giving chase, but Pinkie smiles deviously and accelerates. The tubby dragon lifts off and closes the gap, the baker hits the gas again, and the race come to an abrupt end when the trolley crashes into the edge of the throne room’s central table. Pony and goodies go flying, the former landing neatly on her throne and the latter hitting the table without so much as a crumb out of place; a moment later Sludge impacts the smooth crystal surface on his belly in close-up and begins to stuff his face. Zoom out to an overhead shot of the entire room, framing all six ponies and one little dragon in their seats and cheering at the progress he has made in his rehabilitation. Applejack has recovered and donned her hat.)

(Dissolve to an overhead shot of the Castle's main entrance, where Sludge practices a bit of flying for the septet. Upon touching down in an upright position, he produces a cupcake and gulps it down.)

Twilight: I know you had your reservations, but it's good to see you feeling better.

Sludge: *(puzzled, stammering a bit)* Thanks, I guess.

Rarity: That's what friends are for, darling. *(He turns away, spirits sinking.)*

Sludge: You're pretty lucky to have friends like these, kid.

Spike: Actually, I was orphaned as an egg and Twilight raised me. So these ponies are more than my friends. *(hugging Twilight)* They're my family.

Twilight: *(returning it with a wing)* We try our best, but sometimes I worry maybe Spike is...

Spike: ...missing something deep down and dragonish. *(Sludge turns back to them with a smile.)*

Sludge: Really? Wow. It...I-I can't tell you how glad I am to hear that.

(Applejack, Pinkie, and Rainbow are not sure what to make of this bit.)

Applejack: Why in Equestria would you be glad to hear that?

Sludge: I wasn't gonna say anything since your life seemed so perfect, but...I have a confession to make.

(He steps closer to Twilight and Spike and drops to one knee.)

Sludge: Comin' to Ponyville wasn't an accident. *(gesturing to Spike)* I was lookin' for you.

Spike:... *(Heavy sigh.)* ...I'm your father.

(Cut to Applejack/Fluttershy/Rainbow, who gasp in unison. A much longer gasp from the o.s. Pinkie is overlaid on this response; pan to the pink pony, who keeps it going for a full three extra seconds even in the face of annoyed looks from Applejack and Rainbow.)

Pinkie: Sorry.

(Snap to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to the eight and zoom in slowly.)

Twilight: *(crossing to Spike, Sludge)* So you crashed in Ponyville on purpose?

Sludge: *(crossing back with Spike's hand in his)* Well, the crash part wasn't on purpose, but headin' here was. *(to him, now at the doors)* I've been searchin' everywhere for you, kid.

Spike: Did you ask in the Crystal Empire? I'm kinda well-known there.

Pinkie: *(leaning against Sludge)* Actually, Spike's well-known everywhere. Not a lot of dragons were hatched by the Princess of Friendship.

Applejack: *(nodding)* Mmm-hmm.

Sludge: (voice breaking) You make it sound so simple. (*opening one door, pushing Spike in*) I wish you'd been there to help me search.

(*Perplexed looks pass between the ponies as they move to follow. Cut to the throne room; a broadly smiling Sludge throws the doors open from outside, and he and Spike enter as the other six hang back. The central table has been cleared of baked goods, and the trolley Pinkie rode to bring them in has been removed.*)

Spike: I can't believe it. I have so many questions. (*Sludge sits on Twilight's throne and gets comfortable.*)

Sludge: Well, ask away. Answerin' questions is what dads are for.

Spike: I guess my biggest question is simple. Why was I an orphaned egg?

(*The query causes the guest to very nearly choke in surprise.*)

Sludge: You sure you don't want to ask somethin' else? (*melodramatically*) It's a lot of painful memories.

(*He spares a glance across the room. Cut to his perspective of the six ponies, who have entered and are listening with great concern. He transfers his attention to Spike, whose big green eyes stare up full of hope, and sighs; back to him.*)

Spike: (*warmly, pulling Spike close*) Your mother was the best dragon I'd ever met.

(*The little violet face breaks into a huge grin as the view undergoes a wavering dissolve to a worried female dragon standing in the rocky Dragon Lands. Her body coloration is a lighter version of Spike's, but eyes/spines/ear fins are a much closer match. The entire view is rendered much as it might appear in a storybook. Zoom out to frame Dragon Lord Torch sitting on his stone throne and staring down at her; he points emphatically out toward the distance.*)

Sludge: (*voice over*) The Dragon Lord even picked her to scout for the Great Migration, and—

(*Close-up of a light violet egg covered with blue-violet spots and being passed from the female over to Sludge. Tears gather in the anguished green eyes.*)

Sludge: (*voice over*) —and even though she'd just laid your egg, we knew she'd have to go. (*He forlornly watches and waves as she flies away, then stares at the egg.*) But findin' the Migration route could take a lifetime, and you deserved a chance to know your mother.

(*Close-up of it, being hoisted in a bindle tied to one end of a stick.*)

Sludge: (*voice over*) So I went lookin' for her. (*Longer shot; he flies along with it slung over one shoulder.*) Carried your egg to places no dragon or pony has ever been! (*Close-up of the upper reaches of Mount Aeris; zoom out to frame all of it.*) Past Mount Aeris, the abandoned home of the hippogriffs—

(The real-life Pinkie rises into view with shining eyes and hooves to cheeks, the storybook backdrop evaporating around her to expose the throne room.)

Pinkie: Ooooh! Did you visit Klugetown?

(Being the desert settlement in which Twilight and company were very nearly sold during My Little Pony: The Movie. A change in camera angle shows her sitting on the table before Spike and Sludge, but she quickly gets upright.)

Sludge: You've been to Klugetown? *(Nods and sounds of assent all around.)*

Twilight: Also, the hippogriffs returned to Mount Aeris after we helped them defeat the Storm King.

Sludge: *(surprised)* Oh, well, have you heard of the land of the...Scale Collectors?

Twilight: *(shaking head)* Uh-uh.

Sludge: *(arm around Spike's shoulders)* Because *that's* where your mother's trail finally led.

(Wavering dissolve to a slow pan through a realm of islands that float among the clouds, pocked with caves and connected one to the next with chains. The storybook style resumes.)

Sludge: *(voice over)* To a prison world of dragon hunters!

(In one cave, he backs up against a wall as shadowy forms close in. He has discarded the bindle and is clutching the egg.)

Sludge: *(voice over)* Where I was forced to choose between surrendering myself— *(They display glowing red eyes and snarl as he holds the egg behind his back. Zoom in on it.)* —or surrendering your egg. *(A set of prison bars slams over the view.)* Of course—

(Close-up of him, zooming out slowly; he is locked in a small cell and holding the bars of its door despondently.)

Sludge: *(voice over, on verge of tears)* —there was no way I was gonna sacrifice my boy. So they took me instead. *(The original shot of this realm, panning slowly; the egg has been stashed behind some rocks.)* And that's where I've been ever since.

(Wavering dissolve to him in the present.)

Sludge: *(pulling Twilight close)* Locked up somewhere not even the Princess of Friendship has heard of. *(Spike, awestruck, now sits in his own seat.)*

Spike: Whoa. *(A thought occurs to him.)* How did you know I was a boy?

Fluttershy: Whatever happened to Spike's mom? *(Rainbow hovers out of her seat.)*

Rainbow: And how did the egg make it all the way back to Equestria by itself?

Pinkie: Hmm?

Sludge: I wish I had all the answers.

(He settled for putting his head on the table and crying his eyes out. Spike gives his head a consoling pat as Applejack and Rarity exchange looks of clear unease.)

Spike: Well, that's all in the past. *(as Sludge stops crying)* The only thing that matters now is that we're together— *(cradling one blubbery arm)* —and I'm gonna make up for lost time.

(The owner of said arm glances his way with a teary-eyed smile. Dissolve to the two walking down a Ponyville street.)

Spike: I hope you don't mind, but I have a list of all the things I always wanted to do with my dad.

Sludge: Mind? Spike, my boy, with you by my side, I feel like we can do anything. *(Both stop.)* What do you want to do first?

Spike: *(bashfully, producing/opening a scroll)* Well, I've kinda been working on a list for a long time.

(The document unrolls across the roadbed, covering several feet.)

Sludge: Dude! You want to do *all* of this?

Spike: *(blushing, rolling it up)* Oh. I mean, we don't have to.

(After a bit of thought, Sludge smiles and plants a foot on a free length of parchment to stop the little guy cold.)

Sludge: *(patting Spike's head)* If you think doin' everything on this incredibly long list is gonna fill the hole where your dragonish-ness should be— *(hoisting him)* —then that is exactly what we're gonna do!

(Spike voices an ecstatic gasp almost as soon as he is set down. Dissolve to the School's buckball field; where Pinkie and Spike stand facing each other across the midfield line and Sludge and Fluttershy are hovering as their respective airborne goalies. Granny Smith has donned a referee's jersey, cap, and whistle and is holding the ball between the two players; with no unicorns present, the goal baskets have been mounted on poles. Spike has put away his to-do list. Granny sounds a blast and sends the ball up for a buck-off; Spike leaps high to kick it toward the goal opposite him, but Fluttershy easily swats it away with a wing. It hurtles toward Sludge, who takes his time scarfing down a cupcake he has brought along and then lets go with a flaming belch that torches the ball to a sprinkle of ash. He flips a thumbs-up to the two ground-level players, whose next lines overlap.)

Pinkie: Whee-heel!

Spike: Whoa, yeah!

(Dissolve to a close-up of a Castle window past which snow is falling, seen from outside. Through the glass, Sludge can be seen sitting next to a blazing fireplace set for Hearth's

Warming and a spread of wrapped gifts, with Spike standing and facing him. Zoom into the room; the little dragon picks a box from the mantel and offers it to the big one, who dons a dark green stocking cap and accepts it with a smile. A quick bit of tearing at the package, and he has brought up a small pillow with a stitched-on red heart. His mild confusion is met by a big-eyed grin from the crafter and is swiftly replaced by a panicked grimace. Here comes Rarity, levitating a small gift; she taps Sludge for attention and passes this over so he can give it to Spike. This is ripped open to yield a scarf, which he readily wraps around his neck, and the camera cuts to outside the window again. The snow is localized entirely to this one spot, the rest of the sky being completely clear; and a tilt up presents the cause of the weird weather—it is Rainbow, hovering up near a balcony and shaking flour from a bag. Two ponies watching from the ground trade looks whose meaning carries through the opaque lenses of the sunglasses they wear: “Just how crazy is this bunch, anyway?”)

(Wipe to the Castle kitchen. Spike and Sludge both wear frilly white aprons decorated with hearts, Spike a chef’s white toque in addition, and both have put aside their holiday apparel. Spike begins to stir the contents of a bowl; Sludge fiddles impatiently with the hem of his apron, but sticks on a big grin and gives a thumbs-up when Spike looks his way. As soon as the little guy has turned toward the ovens, though, the big lummoX wastes no time in peeling off his apron and tossing it over his shoulder. Cut to a kitchen timer as it rings, then pan to a tray of fresh cupcakes. Icing is dispensed onto one, then another, and in a trice Spike has the entire batch decorated and on a platter, which he holds up to an eager Sludge. In perhaps a trice and a half, the latter has gobbled down every last one, to Spike’s consternation.)

(Dissolve to a close-up of Sludge walking contentedly through a set of open doors and swallowing one last mouthful. On the start of the next line, cut to frame Spike walking alongside him, checklist trailing at full length and apron/toque gone.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* I can’t believe we got so many things done! *(He stops; Sludge carries on.)* But this is all my stuff.

(A few hurried steps bring him even with Sludge as the checklist is discarded, and a clawed violet hand on a light green forearm brings him to a pause.)

Spike: Is there anything you always wanted to do with me?

Sludge: *(digging gunk out of one ear)* Not really.

(Flick it away; cut to Spike, his good mood instantly wrecked. The camera shifts to frame both again on the start of the next line.)

Sludge: *(hastily)* I—I mean, uh, I’m happy to do whatever you want. *(pacing)* But if I had a castle like this, with all this stuff, I’d probably just lay around all day doin’ nothin’ like a real dragon.

(He ends this line with an amiable arm across Spike’s shoulders.)

Spike: (*puzzled*) Like a real dragon?

Sludge: Sure! I'm not surprised you don't know any better. Twilight basically raised you as a pony. (*walking away*) You're barely a dragon at all.

Spike: Huh?

(He exits in a different direction. Dissolve to Twilight in the throne room, seated in her chair and reading one of several books piled up on the table. The doors open to admit Spike.)

Twilight: Hey, Spike. How are things going with Sludge?

Spike: Honestly, I thought having him around would make me feel more dragonish, but I kinda feel less. (*Now a stack of books is seen on the floor as well.*)

Twilight: Oh, I'm sorry. I wish I could help.

Sludge: (*from o.s.*) Aw, shucks.

(Pan quickly to him entering the room and carrying two cupcakes on a plate. These are speedily chomped down and the dish tossed aside.)

Sludge: (*crossing to Twilight/Spike*) I-I guess I shouldn't-a said anything about you bein' more pony than dragon. (*Twilight climbs off her throne.*) I just wish we had more in common.

Twilight: Maybe you two can come up with ways to turn up Spike's, uh...dragonish-ness.

Spike: (*brightening, to Sludge*) You think that's something we can do?

Sludge: (*arm across Spike's shoulders*) You know what, son? I think it is.

(They set off for the doors, Twilight sending a warm smile after them, and are soon descending the stairs in the entrance hall.)

Swing rhythm on drums and bass guitar, fast 4 (A flat minor)

Sludge: Spike, I'm gonna teach you a thing or two about bein' a dragon. (*arm across shoulders*) So listen up, my boy, because I'm only gonna say this once.

Strings/horns in

(He rises into an ungainly pirouette.)

Sludge: Look at this castle where you live

Spike: It's pretty sweet, right?

Sludge: (*poking his chest*) You can't be a dragon here

Spike: Uh, I can't?

(Sludge rides a rolling ladder to sweep all the books off a shelf in the library.)

Sludge: Look at these books upon the walls

Spike: (*as they bury him*) Hey, I just finished organizing those!

Sludge: (*lying on the heap*) This treasure pile's not right, I fear

Drums/horns/strings drop back; flute/glockenspiel in

(He extracts Spike from the mess and picks up a book. As he continues, he opens the cover and the camera zooms in on one page's moving image of himself hovering in Spike's bedroom, with the usual occupant taking notes.)

Sludge: Trust me. I gotcha covered here. You see all this soft pony stuff you're surrounded with?

(He touches down on the end of this line, one foot mashing a stuffed Rarity doll on the floor.)

Sludge: *(yanking Spike's chair away; he falls on the floor)* This has got to be the first thing to go.

Full instrumentation resumes; flute/glockenspiel out
Lyrics in square brackets are spoken in rhythm rather than sung

Sludge: *(jumping on Spike's bed)* Nothin' 'bout this place says "dragon den" [There's too much fluff]

(He bounces away to a rack of clothes and tosses one outfit after another onto Spike.)

All these fancy robes, toss in a pile

(One loose sleeve is yanked to spin him like a top toward the screen; the view blacks out at his approach, then snaps to Sludge flying down the length of a loaded table in the dining room. He throws one ornate piece of the table setting after another into a pile held by Spike, who has disengaged from the sartorial castoffs.)

Take those goblets, dishes [Is that gold? Still not enough]
(tossing platters of treats over shoulders)

De-ponifying might just take a while

(The whole mess comes down right on top of Spike, followed by a tide of goodies flying past the screen. Behind this, wipe to the pair walking down a corridor whose wall boasts a picture of Twilight and a winking Starlight Glimmer.)

Sludge: Sure, this place is grandiose, but to a dragon, it's just gross
(He grabs Spike and squeezes him under one arm, forcing the squirt to spew out a jet of flame that washes over the entire area.)

Time we make the lot all disappear

(Smoke fills the screen and dissipates to put them on the roof, overlooking Ponyville.)

Reality, you need a dose, to all these ponies you're too close

(jumping off, hovering) You just can't be a dragon here

Drums/horns/strings drop back; flute/glockenspiel in

(Spike breaks out his pad and quill to take notes.)

Sludge: Good job, my boy! *(Both fly toward the camera.)* But this is still just the beginning!

(Fade to black at their approach, then snap to them strutting down a corridor, Spike with hands empty.)

Full instrumentation resumes; flute/glockenspiel out

Sludge: Each and every dragon has a swagger all his own
Watch and I'll show you what I mean
(He produces a massive pile of furniture and drops the lot on Spike, crushing him to the floor.)
You can't move like this with so much stuff to weigh you down
A dragon always keeps it lean

Drums/horns/strings drop back; flute/glockenspiel in

Sludge: *(flying up, tossing items off the stack)* Lose this...this... *(pulling out a robe; everything else tumbles down)* ...oh, this is nice.

Full instrumentation resumes; flute/glockenspiel out

(Spike stands on his bed as Sludge eyes him critically and pokes at the scaly violet hide.)

Sludge: Your life is soft, your scales are coiffed, these pillows, beds, and sheets
are washed
(Two pillows are slung away.)
A delight, but it's just not right, what's underneath
(He snaps the bed's blanket toward the camera, the view wiping behind its edge to frame him crashed out in Twilight's bed with a sleep mask covering his eyes. He bounds up through the canopy curtains at the foot end to surprise Spike, shedding the mask, then catches him brushing his teeth at the bathroom sink with towels on forehead and around waist.)

Sludge: Every dragon must be free, look at you, then look at me
Since when do dragons brush their teeth?

(He commandeers and dumps the brush, showing off a mouthful of teeth that have never come within fifty yards of one in his life.)

Sludge: Ha! Please!
(They walk the halls, Spike no longer wearing his towels, and Sludge pushes a vase of flowers out a window.)

Sure, this place is grandiose, but to a dragon it's just gross
(They are followed by an armchair and a bathtub full of water and an extremely surprised Starlight, who gets her horn going just in time to stop herself mid-fall.)

Time we make the lot all disappear
(They are now in Spike's bedroom, which is filled with accumulated items from their jaunt.)

Spike: What do I do?

Sludge: Just grab it all and give to me, after that, then you'll be free

You just can't be a dragon here

Drums/horns/strings drop back; flute/glockenspiel in

(Cut briefly to the exterior of the Castle, zooming out quickly to a very long shot, then back to them.)

Spike: Ha! You're right! I feel better already!

Sludge: *(ruffling Spike's spines)* See? What'd I tell you? *(Spike hugs him.)* You're very lucky that I found you. *(He pushes Spike back.)* Now go get me some more.

Spike: *(hustling to door)* You got it! I'm gonna go get you all the cushy pony stuff I've got... *(He whisks away, but immediately returns with eyes shining.)* ...Dad.

Sludge: Great! Go get 'em...son.

String/piano chords only (slow 4)

(Spike zips off again; Sludge flops comfortably back onto the bed.)

Sludge: 'Cause this dragon just can't wait to live here

(Overhead close-up of his visage, which creases with a gale of malicious laughter.)

Song ends after a swelling, sinister brass chord

(The screen fades to black around the whites of his narrowed, avaricious eyes, which vanish in like manner after a brief delay.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of a shut door. A knock sounds from the other side, after which Twilight opens it and looks in.)

Twilight: Spike?

(Longer shot: she has entered his bedroom, still jam-packed with loot. Sludge lies in the bed, completely covered by a blanket except for the end of his tail. The window curtains have been closed, dimming the light level.)

Twilight: *(walking in, magically opening curtains)* I just thought I'd check to see if you and Sludge had any luck turning up turning up your dragonish-ness. It's hard not to feel like somehow I let you down all these years.

(Sludge produces a cavernous yawn and turns over, dislodging the blanket to expose the robe he now wears—the one he picked out during his Act Two song, its belt undone. It takes Twilight a moment to realize that this is not her assistant.)

Twilight: *(grinning/laughing stupidly, backing off)* Oh! I'm so sorry! *(turning away, covering eyes)* I didn't mean to barge in on you.

(The out-of-towner stretches with a groan, stands upright on the mattress, and shakes his head to clear it.)

Sludge: Ah, don't worry about it. Mi castle es su castle. *(She lowers her hoof and turns to him, surprised.)*

Twilight: Right! Well, I'll just get out of your way.

(She ducks out of the room, pulling the door shut. Cut to Spike carrying a precariously balanced stack of trays, all loaded with an impressive range of yummys; the boss backs into him with no warning, sending him to the floor. Items splatter and clatter on the tiles all around him, except for two fried eggs that land over his eyes; he wipes these away and sees Twilight turning toward him from the door to his room.)

Twilight: Oh, Spike! I'm so sorry. My morning is *not* going well.

(As he stands up, her aura re-plates all the goodies.)

Twilight: What is all this? *(They are stacked up in his hands.)* Why'd you leave the Castle so early?

Spike: I didn't leave. I spent the night outdoors to get in touch with my dragon side.

Twilight: Outdoors?

Spike: Yeah! *(Twilight's horn power stops the snacks from keeling over.)* And Sludge asked me to bring him the best breakfast Ponyville has to offer, so he can show me how a real dragon would eat it.

(On the second half of this, he crosses past her to the door and lets himself in.)

Spike: See you later!

(He closes the door in Twilight's face, and she gives it a suspicious glance while walking off. Clock wipe to a set of closed doors, which open under her influence to let her and the rest of the gang into the throne room from a corridor.)

Twilight: And that's why I thought we could use the map to—

(They stop short; cut to the table, on which Sludge is stretched out on his back so Spike—standing on Rainbow's throne—can file the claws on one foot. On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame the ponies looking on.)

Spike: Hey, gang. Dad was just showing me how a real dragon would act in the throne room.

(A wiggle of toes prompts him to get back to work.)

Sludge: *(pushing away from him across table)* Dragons like to sprawl when they get their claws done.

(He sits up and blows dust from them.)

Sludge: *(hopping off, ambling toward doors)* Now if you'll all excuse me, it's time for my bath.

Spike: *(sighing blissfully)* Isn't he the best?

Rarity: I'm not sure that's exactly the word I would use. *(Sludge peeks in.)*

Sludge: Uh, Spike? The bath isn't gonna fill itself, son.

(He backs away, giving the youngster a pair of index-finger guns and missing Rarity's disapproving eye roll.)

Spike: Be right there... *(eyes shining)* ...Dad.

(Wings carry him off the seat of power and after the big lug as the mares direct looks of great concern after him. Dissolve to him in the library, flipping through one of the many books Sludge dumped off the shelves during his Act Two song. He throws it aside after a few pages, then picks up another as Twilight trots in, her mood improved.)

Twilight: I'm glad you're not spending the night outside again.

Spike: Oh, I am. I'm just looking for a good bedtime story to read to my dad first.

(On the end of this, she ignites her horn and floats up a stack of three books with a brief, worried frown.)

Twilight: *(directing them up to a shelf)* It's nice that you have somepony to show you dragon culture. But are you sure that's what Sludge is doing?

Spike: What do you mean?

Twilight: Well...taking over your room, making a mess of things...

(He blows out a scoffing breath with enough force to flap his lips.)

Spike: That *is* dragon culture.

Twilight: You never acted like that.

Spike: That's because *you* raised me. Now I finally have a chance to see how I'm supposed to be.

Twilight: I don't think you're supposed to be any different than who you are.

Spike: *(accusingly)* Maybe you just don't like that I have a real parent now.

(His words strike a nerve in the Princess's mind, and a dissolve replaces her body with an X-ray view of itself as the background fades away. The heart, front and center among the assorted bones, shatters to pieces, and the normal view quickly re-establishes itself. She turns away, wiping at a teary eye.)

Twilight: That's not true. I'm glad Sludge is here. I just wish he wasn't such a— *(Spike slides over to her, book in hand.)*

Spike: —dragon? Of all ponies, I can't believe *you* would have a problem with that.

(She moans sadly and dips her head as he stalks out. Dissolve to a stretch of the School's perimeter lake; Smolder stands at the shore and tosses a stone so that it skips across the water. She is about to try again when a rustling from the nearby bushes stops her hand. Out comes a thoroughly bedraggled, sleep-deprived Spike, who brushes off one of the many leaves stuck to his head and plods over to Smolder.)

Smolder: What happened to you?

Spike: *(passing her, picking off another leaf)* Just sleeping outside like we're meant to. It's not like dragons are supposed to live in castles.

Smolder: *(puzzled)* I...guess not. But I live in the School. Nothing says we *have* to live outside.

Spike: *(sighing)* I'm so confused. It's been great having Sludge show me how to be a real dragon, and Twilight just doesn't get it. *(Both sit.)*

Smolder: What do you mean?

Spike: She can't handle how good at being a dragon Sludge is. *(smiling, lying on his back)* Maybe someday I'll be able to lay around doing nothing as well as he does.

Smolder: What? *(Spike sits up.)*

Spike: Well, not now, of course. I'm too busy bringing him pony stuff so he can show me what a dragon would do with it.

Smolder: So Sludge just lays around while you wait on him claw and tail? *(Her blunt assessment saps his cheer; she stands up.)* Uh, dragons are rude and rebellious, but they *aren't* lazy lumps who take advantage of their kids.

Spike: Huh. Now I'm really confused.

Smolder: *(sitting)* Me too. Why don't you tell me *everything* Sludge said about being a dragon?

(Dissolve to Spike's bedroom, the camera positioned near the closed door. It swings open and Sludge walks in, chomping noisily on a cupcake. He has belted his borrowed robe at long last.)

Sludge: Hey!

(Zoom out; his progeny stands across the room, all cleaned up from his rough night and picking up a book from a dresser. The piles of swag have been cleared out, and a couple of suitcases rest on the floor, one of them open.)

Sludge: What's goin' on, son? *(The rest of the snack goes down the hatch.)*

Spike: *(putting book in open suitcase)* Twilight doesn't like having real dragons in the Castle— *(Cut to Sludge; he continues o.s.)* —so I told her we're moving out.

(The lazy fatso chokes on his mouthful and rushes over to him.)

Sludge: You what?! *(Smolder leans in at an open window.)*

Smolder: Spike! *(flying to him)* I found the perfect cave where you two can live! There aren't even any comfortable rocks inside!

Spike: That does sound perfect.

Sludge: No, it doesn't! *(catching himself, forcing a smile)* I-I-I mean, uh, I'm not sure I've fully demonstrated all the ways a dragon would live here.

Spike: *(crossing to him)* But we're not gonna live here anymore, so it doesn't matter.

Sludge: *(completely blowing his cool)* It matters to me! *(catching himself, stammering badly)* Uh, I want to make sure you have all the knowledge you need.

Spike: *(taking Sludge's hand)* But I do. Dad, you've already shared so much.

Polka swing with tuba/trumpet/light percussion, fast 4 (D major)
Same melody as the start of Sludge's song

(He backs away and strips the blanket from his bed, while Smolder flies across to swipe Sludge's robe.)

Spike: This bed is much too soft, just take that silk robe off
We can't be dragons living here

Song ends

(His eyes and Sludge's turn toward the one pillow still on the bed, and violet and green hands snatch onto opposite ends to pull it back and forth in a grunting tug-of-war. Smolder swings in to give Spike a little extra muscle, but the two sides find themselves at a stalemate.)

Sludge: Ah, stop!

(He lets go; the other two dragons tumble to the floor, the pillow onto the bed.)

Sludge: I'm not your father!

Spike: *(stunned)* What? *(He and Smolder stand up.)*

Sludge: I just said that to get in on this sweet castle life!

Spike: So...you...pretended to be my dad?

Sludge: Ah, n-n-n-now don't look at me like that, kid. I did what any dragon would do.

Smolder: *(icily)* No, you didn't.

Sludge: Hey, I saw an opportunity and I took it. *That's* what dragons do.

Smolder: No, it isn't!

Sludge: You know what? I don't need this. *(lifting off)* I'm outta here. *(flying toward window)*
Enjoy lovin' Ponytown!

(Out he goes; Spike sighs and gets a comforting pat from Smolder before the jerk returns and reaches in to snag the pillow.)

Sludge: I'm takin' this pillow!

(After he has absconded with it, Spike moves to the window and stares into the sky, still blue even though the sting he and Smolder set up has worked perfectly. She joins him at the sill on the next line.)

Spike: I can't believe I thought somepony like that could show me how to be anything.

Smolder: *(sighing heavily, touching his shoulder)* It must be hard, growing up not really knowing who you are.

Spike: That's the thing. *(Zoom in on his newly determined visage.)* I know exactly who I am—and how I got that way.

(A confident smile curves his lips upward. Dissolve a set of closed doors; he lets himself in from the other side and finds a preoccupied Twilight listlessly floating a couple of books onto a shelf in the library.)

Spike: Um, Twilight?

Twilight: Oh, hi. Where's your...father? *(A trace of bitterness on this last word.)*

Spike: He's gone. *(scratching back of head)* Turns out he wasn't what a real dragon should be after all. He also wasn't my real dad.

Twilight: Oh, Spike...

(One wing-assisted bound carries her across the floor so she can sweep him into a hug that gets him smiling again.)

Twilight: ...I'm so sorry.

Spike: I'm the one who's sorry. You were just worried about me and I lost my temper. *(angrily)* Sludge was just a great big phony.

Twilight: I have to say, I-I'm not surprised. There's no way a dragon like *that* was related to you. *(foreleg across shoulders; he smiles)* But if you still want to search for your real family, I'd understand if you spent more time in the Dragon Lands.

Spike: I don't think so. I already know who my real family is. *(They embrace again.)*

Twilight: Ooh...it's me, right? *(Pull apart.)*

Spike: *(nodding)* Mmm-hmm. *(walking past her)* Besides...

(Now it is his turn to boost his jump with a bit of wing-power, this one landing him on a giant cushion set with its own pillow.)

Spike: ...there's no way I'm living without pillows.

(Twilight stifles a giggle behind a hoof as the view fades to black.)