**TRIPLE THREAT**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the Ponyville town hall during the day and zoom in slowly. The entire town square is being decorated for a festival, including a flame-patterned banner that Twilight Sparkle and Starlight Glimmer are stringing up on the third-story balcony with the help of their magic. Spike paces the square with a quill and a long checklist in hand; close-up of him, visibly worried.*)

**Spike:** Is the banner even?

(*A glance upward tells him that his boss and her student are getting the ends just so.*)

**Spike:** Are the flowers in place—by which I mean “completely out of view”?

(*On the end of this, cut to Twinkleshine using her field to uproot one bunch and transfer them to a cart pulled by Berry Punch, who hauls them away.*)

**Spike:** I’m pretty sure dragons don’t like flowers.

(*The reptilian green eyes flick in a different direction; cut to a low circular platform, roughly hewn from red gems, with a hole bored down through its center.*)

**Spike:** (*crossing to it, peeking in*) And what about the ceremonial Dragonfire Flame of Friendship? Is it still flaming?

(*A gout of pale blue fire roars up, hurling him and the checklist away; he winds up nicely charred, but the scroll survives undamaged and is lying nearby.*)

**Twilight:** (*flying to him, as he dusts his face/belly off*) Spike, everything looks great! You’re getting yourself worked up for no reason.

**Spike:** I have lots of reasons.

(*He stands up, now fully clean of soot, and fishes in a hidden pocket.*)

**Spike:** In fact— (*pulling out a second, short list*) —I wrote them down. (*Cut to Twilight, joined by Starlight.*)

**Starlight:** Ugh. You’ve been hanging around Twilight for too long. (*Twilight chuckles lamely.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) Reason number one— (*Back to him.*) —I invited Dragon Lord Ember to Ponyville today. Reason two—the Dragon Lord is a dragon. Reason three—she’s coming here to learn more about friendship.

**Twilight:** (*from o.s., gesturing into view*) According to Ember’s letters— (*Cut to her and Starlight.*) —the dragons are trying to be friends. But competing is in their nature, and it’s leading to more and more fights.

**Spike:** (*from o.s., holding scroll into view/pointing at it*) Which brings me to reason number four. (*Pull it away; cut to him.*) The Dragon Lord wants my advice, and as the new official Equestrian friendship ambassador to the dragons, I can’t let her down.

**Twilight:** I know you feel a lot of pressure, but you got this, Spike. (*He beams, then deflates.*)

**Spike:** I…I just want things to be perfect.

(*A yellow-green hoof reaches into view to tap him on the shoulder, throwing a mild shock into both mares. Spike glances behind himself; cut to his perspective, tilting up from ground level to frame all of Thorax’s figure, including his smiling face and spread wings.*)

**Spike:** (*gasping softly*) Thorax! (*Grin; cut to all four.*) You’re in Ponyville!

**Thorax:** (*thumping his shoulder*) Of course I am, silly! You invited me, and I’m not one to back out of an invitation. (*waving*) Hey, Twilight! Hey, Starlight! (*Cut to these two.*)

**Twilight, Starlight:** (*weakly, Starlight waving*) Hey./Hello.

**Thorax:** (*from o.s.*) Ooh! (*Overhead shot of the group, panning slowly.*) I can’t believe you did all this for me! (*flying around*) Great banner! Love the stage! (*He lands by the Dragonfire Flame of Friendship.*) What’s this flame thingie? (*Close-up, the fire reflecting in his eyes.*) Oh, it’s pretty.

(*He leans toward the camera for an entranced, extreme close-up.*)

**Twilight:** (*whispering, to Spike*) You invited Thorax over to Ponyville on the same day as Ember!?

**Spike:** Apparently.

**Starlight:** That doesn’t seem like a good idea. (*whispering*) How are you gonna entertain them both? (*Spike’s ears droop.*)

**Spike:** I have no idea.

(*Zoom in as he sweats and shudders through clenched teeth, claws digging panicked furrows in his cheeks, then fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to Thorax, now seated on his haunches before the Flame of Friendship and stretching his forelegs happily toward it. On the start of the next line, pan away from him to Twilight, Starlight, and Spike.*)

**Spike:** I completely forgot! Thorax wrote and said he needed to talk, and I told him to come over. I didn’t realize it was the same day I invited Ember! What am I gonna do? (*Shiver.*)

**Starlight:** Well, maybe they’ll like each other.

**Spike:** Probably not. Ember is tough and self-assured and intimidating, and Thorax is…

**Thorax:** (*from o.s., excitedly*) Spike!

(*Cut to the quartet; he is now up on all four hooves, and a stallion pushes an ice sculpture in Dragon Lord Ember’s likeness past them.*)

**Thorax:** (*rearing up briefly*) I’m so glad you invited me. (*hugging him*) You are one of my closest, nicest, most caring, most understanding friends ever! (*He glances after the sculpture.*) Ooh! Is that ice in the shape of a dragon?

(*Four legs become a blur of motion as he races after it, leaving a properly confounded pair of mares in his wake. Close-up of them.*)

**Starlight:** Yeah, I see your point. They might not get each other. (*Zoom out to frame Spike on the next line.*)

**Spike:** Or worse, they’ll hate each other! (*pacing*) And if the leader of the changelings and the Dragon Lord get into a fight… (*He swallows hard.*) …I could be responsible for starting a war that could ruin Equestria as we know it!

(*Zoom in on one slitted pupil until it fills the screen as he pulls in a huge, terrified breath. Stars wink into being against the darkness, and stylized figures of Ember and Thorax glare at each other with open enmity. They start to butt heads, the camera zooming out to frame their respective armies closing in on one another over a barren, rocky landscape that resolves into the curve of a planet. Now lost behind the horizon, the two combatants annihilate one another in a blinding glare that spills over the terrain like a nuclear explosion, obliterating all in its path and washing out the screen. From here, fade in to one fear-stricken baby dragon, who overcomes his momentary paralysis with a fit of sweaty hyperventilation. Twilight bends down to him.*)

**Twilight:** I’m sure that won’t happen. (*He calms down.*) Now pull it together.

(*He glances after Thorax; cut to the latter admiring the Ember statue.*)

**Spike:** (*crossing to him, chuckling*) So, Thorax. Everything good with you? (*Thorax turns to face him.*)

**Thorax:** Ugh, well, honestly, no, not really. I have indigestion. I’m not sure if it’s the new diet or stress, or—or maybe it’s both.

(*During this line, Spike looks up to the sky and voices a strangled little yelp, having seen something closing in fast, and the camera zooms in to pick it out as the Dragon Lord herself.*)

**Spike:** NO!!

**Thorax:** (*smiling, relieved*) Yeah, it really could be both. (*Spike throws a desperate look to Twilight and Starlight.*) And it might be affecting my sleeping, too. I’m a real tosser and turner these— (*Cut to them on the end of this; both glance up.*)

**Twilight:** (*softly, over previous*) Uh-oh. (*Worried moan as she moves in; back to Spike and Thorax.*)

**Spike:** Sounds like you really need to unwind. Uh, how about a, uh…a trip to the Castle? Heh. You can’t miss that view. (*He starts to push Thorax along.*)

**Twilight:** (*crossing to them*) Yes, the Castle! I’ll give you a personal tour.

(*She begins to lead her fellow ruler away, leaving Spike to his own devices—but they stop after a few steps and Thorax looks back over his shoulder.*)

**Thorax:** Uh, aren’t you coming?

**Spike:** (*trying to sound casual*) Yeah, I’m just gonna grab some ice cream for us and catch up.

(*His not-entirely-convincing chuckle sends them on their way, and he shoots a scared look into the sky just as Ember rockets down, landing in a crouch with enough force to crack the earth. She stands proudly upright, hands on hips, and Spike directs a nod to one side. In a trice, three unicorn mares in gold-trimmed livery line up with trumpets aloft in their fields. A thumbs-up to his other side brings three more into formation. Cut to Ember, whose confident reverie is shattered when all six blow a rousing fanfare; she covers her ears and glares around herself, scaring them into lowering the horns and one into dropping hers. She is about to jump this hapless mare when Spike’s voice cuts in.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) Dragon Lord Ember!

(*The almost-victim peels out, taking her trumpet with her. Cut to Spike.*)

**Spike:** As the official Equestrian friendship ambassador for the Dragon Lands and for Ponyville— (*crossing to Ember*) —I, Spike of Ponyville, welcome you to… (*losing steam*) …uh, Ponyville. (*softly, to himself*) I gotta work on my official speech.

**Ember:** (*smiling*) Okay, thanks.

(*The hug that he latches around her midsection catches her off guard, but she manages a humoring chuckle.*)

**Ember:** Right. The hug thing.

(*He backs off with a laugh; she pats his head and glances around herself.*)

**Ember:** This place has a lot of colors. In the Dragon Lands, everything’s just rocks or the color of ash.

(*She lets go with a sudden flaming sneeze that does heavy damage to the decorations festooning the town hall; gasps and surprised cries from the nearest spectators.*)

**Ember:** That’s probably why.

(*The remaining five heralds, too stunned for words, abandon their instruments and beat a frenzied retreat with those same onlookers close behind. Ember smiles and looks past Spike with a wave.*)

**Ember:** Hey, Twilight!

(*The next cut reveals that she has actually addressed Starlight, who looks around only to find that the pony in question is nowhere in sight.*)

**Starlight:** Actually, I’m *Star*light. Starlight Glimmer. (*She approaches and holds out a hoof.*) Nice to meet you.

**Ember:** (*shaking it*) Oh! Sorry. I’m…really gonna have to get used to these pony names. Lots of “lights” and shiny things. (*A brief look around.*) Uh, so where is Twilight?

**Spike:** She’s in her castle.

(*He immediately claps both clawed hands over his mouth, realizing that he has just said too much.*)

**Ember:** We should go visit her, then. Part of friendship is saying hi to your friends, right?

**Spike:** (*nervously, sweating*) Uh…well…yeah, but… (*He trails off into mumbling.*)

**Ember:** You’re making weird noises. Do you have a stomachache?

**Spike:** Uh…I think I feel one coming on. (*Tentative grin.*)

**Ember:** Well, you know what us dragons say. “Push past the pain!” (*walking past Starlight/Spike*) Now let’s go!

**Spike:** Or we could stay here. (*Ember stops.*)

**Ember:** Or I could go without you.

(*Start off again; Spike’s face falls in a mighty grimace as Starlight chuckles airily.*)

**Starlight:** I like her.

(*The little guy voices a choked noise of fear and hurries after his visitor, Starlight ambling along to bring up the rear. Dissolve to the entrance hall of the Castle of Friendship, one door creaking open just far enough for Spike to peek in.*)

**Spike:** Good. They’re not here.

(*The door is pulled out of his grip and opened farther thanks to Ember.*)

**Ember:** What was that? (*Starlight catches up.*)

**Spike:** Uh…I… (*forcing a smile*) …I said it’s all clean in here.

(*He works up a grin that manages to convince exactly none of the other two, and the sweat starting to dribble down his face helps not a bit.*)

**Spike:** Uh, you must be hungry from your travels. Please, I-I’d love to present you with an official friendship welcome banquet.

(*The Dragon Lord strides in, Starlight and Spike following as the unicorn magically exerts her magic over the open door. Dissolve to these two seated at a fully loaded table in the dining room and watching with mild horror as the sound of enthusiastic munching floats across to them. Bits fly in their direction before the camera pans to frame Ember sitting a short distance away. In front of her is a basket filled with an assortment of sweet treats; however, she has ignored the food and is chomping down on the container itself, which is made of crystal. Lying around it are the remains of several upended dishes. Ember finishes by dumping the basket out and taking another big bite.*)

**Ember:** (*mouth full*) So this is something friends do? I can get used to this. (*Munch; cut to Starlight and Spike.*)

**Starlight:** Actually, that’s not food. (*Spike elbows her.*)

**Spike:** (*whispering, to her*) Dragons love gems!

**Starlight:** (*pointing*) Fine, but you’re telling Twilight what happened to her wall.

(*Pan quickly in the direction she has indicated and stop on Ember, who is now putting a sizable dent in a nice crunchy column.*)

**Ember:** Mmm!

**Spike:** (*softly, to Starlight*) Just keep her here. (*full volume, to Ember*) Okay, yeah! (*Laugh; hurry out.*) Enjoy all the, uh, crystal…things! (*Cut to him.*)

**Ember:** (*from o.s., mouth empty*) Where are you going? (*Stop short; back to her.*) I thought this was an official friendship banquet.

**Spike:** (*racing off again*) Just gotta use the little dragons’ room!

(*The hasty exit leaves Starlight to slump sullenly in her seat as the out-of-towner keeps working on the column. Wipe to Twilight and Thorax in the library; she sits in an upholstered armchair under a reading lamp, levitating a book, and his smile is showing a bit of strain.*)

**Twilight:** So this is my comfy chair for fictional reads.

(*She grunts and squirms a bit to find just the right support, then levitates the book out of the way and jumps off. A few quick steps bring her to a table stacked with scrolls and equipped with crystal chairs, and Thorax crosses to her.*)

**Twilight:** (*jumping onto one*) This is my studying chair because the hard back keeps me awake.

(*Thumping her back against it causes her to wince slightly; he works up a grin of feigned understanding before the creak of a door snaps him back to the world. He turns in its general direction with a real smile and hurries over to where Spike is about to sneak out.*)

**Thorax:** Oh, Spike! (*trotting in place*) I’m so glad you’re here. (*softly*) Uh, this Castle visit is getting weird. Twilight really likes chairs.

(*A cut back to her discloses the fact that she is now floating three wooden ones overhead. From o.s., Thorax’s breath catches in his throat for a moment.*)

**Thorax:** (*from o.s.*) Oh! (*Pan to him and Spike.*) What happened to the ice cream?

**Spike:** What? (*remembering*) Oh, right! Uh, they ran out. Heh. Hey, I-I’m really sorry, but I gotta borrow Twilight quickly.

(*He runs across and yanks her bodily out of the library, leaving behind only her surprised yelp as the chairs crash to the floor.*)

**Spike:** Be right back!

**Thorax:** Uh, but we didn’t get a talk yet!

(*He grumbles to himself. Cut to the throne room, whose doors burst open just long enough for Spike to bulldoze Twilight in and slam them shut again. The central table is set with its magical map.*)

**Spike:** Ember’s here!

**Twilight:** I know. I saw you coming and had to distract Thorax by showing him chairs. Why did you bring Ember to the Castle, of all places?

**Spike:** I don’t know! (*pacing*) Ember was asking for you, Thorax wants to talk with me— (*He zips back to her.*) —we need to switch places. They might be getting suspicious!

**Twilight:** (*smiling*) All we have to do is make both Thorax and Ember feel special and keep them apart for a few more hours. We can do this.

(*Confidence in their pooled abilities goes bye-bye when Spike’s head spines start doing something new—namely, flashing from the top of his head down. He yells in pure terror.*)

**Spike:** (*sobbing*) What’s happening?

(*He tacks on a shuddery little cry before the camera cuts to an overhead shot of the pair. A pale green light shines from the vicinity of the table; on the next line, zoom out slightly to reveal that it has entirely turned this color.*)

**Twilight:** I-I think it’s the map! (*A tiny copy of Spike’s head descends to hover over it.*) It’s calling *you!* (*They step to the edge, green slowly yielding to blue.*) Apparently you also have to solve a friendship problem.

(*The camera cuts closer to the freaked-out baby dragon in three steps, stopping at an extreme close-up of his face and the clawed fingers pulling down at both cheeks. Sweat begins to run down the violet hide before the view snaps to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to Twilight and Spike.*)

**Spike:** The map is calling *me?!?*

**Twilight:** Oh, amazing! The map is really reaching out! (*He throws her a squinty sidewise glance.*) Not a good time? I get it. (*Sound of the doors opening.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) Spike, are you here? (*Cut to her, entering.*) Ember’s eaten all of Twilight’s decorations and— (*She stops short with a big smile.*) —oh! (*laughing a bit, walking again*) Hey, Twilight!

(*The light show atop Spike’s head freezes her again and brings a sharp gasp.*)

**Starlight:** (*apprehensively*) Glowing map…

(*Cut to it, now all blue again. The sound of her hard swallow comes through loud and clear; back to her.*)

**Starlight:** …glowing spikes…

(*Pan quickly to the number-one assistant, sweat glands working double time.*)

**Starlight:** …that’s not good.

**Spike:** *I know!* (*He starts pacing.*)

**Starlight:** At least your friendship problem is in Ponyville? (*Weak laugh; he stops.*)

**Spike:** Okay, okay. To pull this off, I’m gonna need both of you to help. (*Dart back to them.*) You two need to keep Ember and Thorax separate while I get ice cream.

**Twilight:** (*pointedly*) You mean, find the friendship problem.

**Spike:** (*pained*) Yes! Go easy on me. (*walking out*) I’m under a lot of pressure.

[*Animation goof: He briefly appears in the library during the previous exchange.*]

(*Twilight moves to follow him away. Dissolve to a busy Ponyville street; Spike tops a rise and comes into view, his spines no longer flashing.*)

**Spike:** (*voice raised*) Friendship problem? Anypony got a friendship problem here?

(*Daisy trots past in the foreground; behind her, the view wipes to Twinkleshine and a stallion talking beneath a tree. Spike hangs his head into view from the leaves, upside down.*)

**Spike:** Any problems to solve?

(*He pulls back into the foliage, leaving two very surprised ponies to stare up at where it had been. Pan down the block; he pops up from a bush to address a construction worker.*)

**Spike:** Friendship problems?

(*This stallion is so spooked that he leaps into a nearby freshly dug hole. The pan continues and stops on a bin of apples being looked over by a mare out to do a little produce shopping. He emerges from within the pile, scaring her off.*)

**Spike:** Friendship problems!

(*His face falls at the sudden abandonment. Cut to within a house’s kitchen; Spike opens a window and climbs halfway in to address the two stallions sitting at a table.*)

**Spike:** Anypony got a friendship problem here? (*They just stare at him.*) No? Okay.

(*Exit, closing the window; the two trade hopelessly confused stares. Cut to Bon Bon and Lyra Heartstrings, out in the street and out of sorts.*)

**Lyra:** (*scoffing*) Well, I think vanilla strawberry crème *is* overused!

**Bon Bon:** Hmph! (*Zoom out to put Spike in the fore.*)

**Spike:** Yes! Fighting! (*Both shoot him vexed looks.*) Um, I mean…what seems to be the problem?

(*Their reaction mirrors that of the stallions. Wipe to Ember in the dining room, chewing on a bite of crystal from the columns and tossing another fragment down the hatch.*)

**Ember:** (*mouth full*) Mmm…mmm, good stuff!

(*She converts the mouthful to a flaming belch as Twilight opens the door and looks in.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling, waving*) Ember! There you are! (*She darts over to hug the dragon.*)

**Ember:** Okay, right. More pony hugs. (*Twilight backs off.*)

**Twilight:** How’s your trip to Ponyville so far?

**Ember:** Well, I’m certainly learning a lot about friendship. I had no idea it was polite to decorate your walls in your friends’ favorite foods.

(*A shot of the entire room shows that she has taken this “lesson” a bit too far by eating hunks out of every single column at heights ranging from floor to ceiling. Twilight looks around at the extensive damage and voices a weak giggle.*)

**Twilight:** Oh, my.

**Ember:** Where’d Spike and Starlight go? (*testily*) I feel like I’m being avoided.

(*Crossing her arms, she huffs out a burst of black smoke to underscore the sentiment.*)

**Twilight:** (*reassuringly*) No! They’re just making sure everything is perfect for your welcome party later. In the meantime, how about I show you around town?

**Ember:** (*smiling*) Sounds good. I can’t exactly learn about friendship if I don’t make new friends.

(*Off she goes, passing Twilight and the fixed grin that has settled on her face. Once the winged unicorn is sure she will not be heard, she lets it drop with a sigh and grimace. Wipe to Thorax in the library, now sitting on her “comfy” chair and straining to find just the right spot for maximum relaxation. Eventually he hits it.*)

**Thorax:** Ahhhh…

(*Enter Starlight; the sound of the door closing behind her startles him out of his bliss with a gasp.*)

**Starlight:** Uh, hey, Thorax. Um, Twilight and Spike had some boring official paperwork to deal with, so, looks like you and I get to hang out. What would you like to do?

**Thorax:** But I wanted to talk with Spike. He said he’d be right back.

**Starlight:** Oh, you will, but first, how about we grab a bite to eat?

**Thorax:** Huh. (*rubbing belly*) Well, you know, now that you’ve said it, I am a little hungry. (*climbing off chair, walking off*) Is there a dining room in the Castle?

**Starlight:** (*suddenly panicked*) No! (*Puzzled look from him; she catches herself.*) I-I mean, yeah, but that’s Castle food. If you want the good stuff, we gotta go to town.

(*Grinning at the suggestion, he crosses past her.*)

**Starlight:** (*to herself, wiping forehead*) Phew!

(*She gets her hooves moving to catch up. Wipe to a close-up of Spike walking down a street between Bon Bon and Lyra.*)

**Spike:** And that’s why you should never let cupcake flavors get in the way of your friendship.

(*Longer shot, framing all three as they pass a table outside Sugarcube Corner at which Starlight and Thorax are having tea. The two mares’ mood is much improved.*)

**Lyra:** Huh. I guess I never thought of it that way. Thanks, Spike.

(*She and Bon Bon continue on their way, while Spike stops, waves goodbye, and looks expectantly up at the top of his head in close-up. When his spines fail to start flashing—his particular equivalent of a pony’s cutie mark flaring to indicate a completed mission—his face falls and sweat starts to run down his exasperated features.*)

**Spike:** Aw, come on, glow!

**Thorax:** (*from o.s.*) Spike!

(*The little guy straightens up and turns to the table.*)

**Thorax:** There you are! Uh, done with your boring paperwork, I see.

(*As he sips his tea, the dragon gives him an odd look while the unicorn voices a big fake laugh.*)

**Starlight:** (*jerking head toward Thorax, as a signal to Spike*) Uh-huh? Uh-huh? (*He catches on and grins.*)

**Spike:** Yep! (*laughing, crossing to table*) I am done with whatever Starlight says I was doing. (*He climbs up onto a nearby fence.*)

**Starlight:** Thorax wanted to get out of the Castle. I thought coming to town was a really, *really* great idea.

**Thorax:** Well, maybe now we can talk. (*Starlight, between Spike and Thorax, slides down and out of sight.*)

**Spike:** (*uneasily*) Uh, sure.

(*He takes Starlight’s place at the table and she backs off from it.*)

**Starlight:** I’ll leave you guys to it. (*Exit.*)

**Thorax:** First of all, I want to say thank you for having me over. (*scratching back of head*) I’m in a bit of a leadership pickle, and I could use some advice.

**Spike:** Well, I definitely want to help you out as quickly as possible.

**Thorax:** Here’s my problem. There’s this renegade group of changelings who still feed off of love. Even though I said, “Hey, let’s not do that anymore,” they say, “Hey, this is how we’ve been doing things for hundreds of years…”

(*The unlikely confidant does his level best to present himself as alert and attentive throughout the previous line. On the end of it, dissolve to a close-up of him, ears wilting, lower lip caught in teeth, and eyes darting desperately back and forth in his sweaty face. The previous line fades away as the next one fades up.*)

**Thorax:** (*from o.s.*) …but it’s like they don’t want to, even though I’m the leader and I asked them…

(*His last few words fade out as the view wipes to Twilight and Ember following a stallion and his apple cart down the block. When they pause after a few paces, quite a few ponies stop to stare for a moment and then gather in close, murmuring excitedly.*)

**Ember:** (*voice raised*) Hello! I am Ember, daughter of Torch, winner of the Gauntlet of Fire and lord of all dragons!

(*She ends her introduction with a fiery exhalation directed skyward that turns the onlookers’ interest to screaming, fleeing panic.*)

**Ember:** (*normal volume, chastened*) Usually when I do that, the dragons are eager to meet me.

**Twilight:** That’s not how ponies make friends. (*Ember thinks a bit, smiles, and starts to pace.*)

**Ember:** Ahh, I get it.

(*Cut to a close-up of Derpy Hooves, poised to scarf down a muffin. Ember reaches into view and swipes it off her hoof.*)

**Ember:** This is a weird friendship thing you ponies do, right?

(*She proceeds to mash it against the nearest patch of wall, causing the cross-eyed pegasus to flinch in utter disbelief at this crime against baked goods. The brows above the red eyes and grinning mouth quirk twitch upward, as if encouraging Derpy to see the humor in it all, but the latter just backs away fearfully. Starlight hurries up to the scene of friendship gone a bit off the rails.*)

**Starlight:** Uh… (*The muffin falls off the wall.*) …you guys are in town too?

**Ember:** What are you talking about? You’ve been with me this whole time.

**Starlight:** No, I’m *Star*light.

(*Zoom out slightly to put Twilight in view, standing behind Ember. The Dragon Lord looks from one to the other.*)

**Ember:** Riiight. I’m sorry, but you can’t blame me. You both look and act so much alike.

**Twilight, Starlight:** (*needled*) What?!

(*Another look between the two equine faces, and the view dissolves to an extreme close-up of Spike’s fingers tapping distractedly against the table next to his teacup. On the next line, zoom out to frame all of him, still perspiring profusely and wishing he could take a crash course in teleportation, and cut to his perspective of the cup.*)

**Thorax:** (*from o.s., fading up*) …and they said to me they just keep saying the same thing. You know, I think my leadership problem started in childhood. (*fading out*) I must have been three when…

(*Under this last, a dissolve shifts the cup’s shadow from one side to the other, marking the passage of a sizable length of time.*)

**Thorax:** (*from o.s., fading up*) Three’s a different story— (*Cut to just behind his head, framing Spike, as he continues.*) —a-and you’ve definitely gotta hear it.

(*Under his next words, the inattentive dragon peers past him, eyes popping wide, and the camera cuts to his perspective of a stallion and mare getting into a confrontation over a single stool at the next table behind Thorax.*)

**Thorax:** But the story about my brother was when I was two—or was I one? (*Close-up of the two.*)

**Stallion:** This is my seat! I saw it first!

**Mare:** Well, *I* got here first! (*They butt heads.*)

**Spike:** Thorax, uh, excuse me for a second.

(*He wastes no time in pushing his own stool over to the table and pushing their noggins apart.*)

**Spike:** Ponies, please! If I may— (*now standing on stool*) —I think I can help solve this friendship problem.

(*Hopping down, he pushes both seats together.*)

**Spike:** (*jumping back up*) You two should sit together. You both like the same place, you both ordered muffins, you’re both ponies. I think if you made a little effort, you’d find—

(*The customers, now smiling, plunk themselves down back to back and force him off the stools with a yell. He gets up and walks away, brushing dust from his hands.*)

**Spike:** Okay. That had to have done it. (*sweating, addressing himself upward*) Come on, spikes. Glow!

(*A moment’s silent strain fails to set off any light show on his head spines, and he groans softly to himself.*)

**Thorax:** (*from o.s.*) Hey. (*Zoom out; he is looking down at Spike from his stool.*) That was really great advice. So what do you think I should do?

(*The little guy throws back a frightened grin and casts his eyes all around the area in desperation. Cut to his perspective, spotting Twilight, Starlight, and Ember a short way down the block, and zoom in to the sound of his startled gasp before cutting back to the table.*)

**Spike:** (*backing away*) Actually, I, uh…uh, need a minute…alone, to, uh…really come up with great advice! (*Now o.s., he pokes his head back into frame.*) I’ll be right back. (*Away again.*)

**Thorax:** (*deflated, sighing*) Great. No problem. (*Head meets table.*) Leave me again. It’s fine.

(*Wipe to the other trio, Ember now a little out of sorts.*)

**Ember:** I’m just saying, you’re both purple ponies with purple hair.

(*Twilight and Starlight run confused eyes over each other and, in close-up, train them in the Dragon Lord’s direction. The mood is starting to deteriorate on both sides now.*)

**Ember:** (*from o.s., pointing at them*) You both have cutie marks with sparkly things. (*Both turn to show them.*)

**Starlight:** (*laughing, but with slight disdain*) Mine’s more of a glimmer. (*Ember leans toward them.*)

**Ember:** How is that different? (*looking off to one side with relief*) Oh, good! Spike! (*He crosses to them.*) Can you please tell these two I’m right? They look very similar.

**Spike:** Uh…well, you know, one thing friends do is let something go when it’s upsetting somepony else.

**Ember:** But I’m right. (*leaning into his face*) Besides, who are you to be telling me about friendship? I’ve barely seen you all day.

**Spike:** Uh…well, I-I’ve seen you.

**Ember:** *ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR?!?*

(*Delivered with enough oomph to deposit him several feet back on his rump, not too far from Thorax’s table. He shivers in fear as the changeling ruler stands, dander up.*)

**Thorax:** Hey! No one yells at my friend!

(*A burst of green flame wreathes his form and subsides to leave a very large and very angry bear standing in his place. He uncorks a chest-pounding roar and leaps, casting an immense shadow over Spike and landing to insert himself between the two dragons.*)

**Ember:** Spike, get away from the bear! (*Twilight and Starlight grin as reassuringly as they can.*)

**Twilight:** Actually, the bear is a changeling, and he’s quite gentle.

**Thorax:** Not anymore!

(*He roars again, sparking Ember to let go with a flaming one of her own, and the two hurl themselves at one another with fury written in foot-high letters across each face. A split-screen view of them is punctuated by a terrified yell from Spike, and the panels slide apart to give a close-up of him looking up toward the camera, the face-off reflected all too clearly in his eyes.*)

**Spike:** My worst fears are happening!

(*Zoom in slowly and snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a split screen of Ember and Thorax, still going full throttle and determined to rip each other to pieces. The view flicks briefly between this shot and a close-up of each n turn, after which the background changes to the Ponyville street and they freeze just inches short of making contact.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) NOOOOO!! (*Zoom out to frame him and both mares as well.*)

**Thorax:** Back away, Spike! I’m not gonna let this dragon harm a scale on your back!

**Ember:** (*to Thorax*) *You* back away! I’m not gonna let *you* harm *him!* (*Eyes pop wide as it all sinks in.*) Wait. Did you say you’re *not* gonna let me harm Spike?

**Thorax:** Yeah!

**Ember:** But that’s what *I’m* doing! (*Thorax’s breath catches a bit.*)

**Thorax:** What?

**Ember:** Yeah. What?

(*She drops out of her hover as Spike huddles sobbing on the ground.*)

**Spike:** Equestria as we know it is over! (*Thorax reverts to his natural form.*) The war that pits changeling against dragon is about to begin! And it’s all my fault! My title of Equestria’s friendship ambassador is a lie!

(*Only now does he realize that hostilities have failed to break out.*)

**Spike:** Oh. Hey. You guys aren’t fighting?

**Ember:** Why would we be fighting?

**Spike:** (*standing up*) Because I accidentally invited you both over to Ponyville on the same day? (*Tilt up to both visitors’ faces.*)

**Ember, Thorax:** So what?

**Spike:** So I… (*They lean down to him.*) …was trying to keep you apart because I didn’t think you’d get along.

**Ember:** (*needled*) Ohh! I get it. You thought he wouldn’t like me just because I’m a dragon and I’m bad at friendship?

**Spike:** No, no, of course not! But…wait. Isn’t that why you’re here?

**Ember:** *I* can say I’m bad at friendship! *You* can’t say it about *me!* You know what? I don’t want to talk about it. (*She flies off.*)

**Spike:** Wait! Please! (*Sigh; he addresses Thorax.*) I’m sorry.

**Thorax:** (*bitterly*) No, no. It’s cool. You thought I would be too soft and someone like Ember would never respect me—just like my own changelings! (*He too takes wing.*)

**Spike:** No! That’s not it! Thorax, wait!

(*He finds himself standing alone in the street, his ears wilting.*)

**Spike:** Oh, no! What have I done?

(*Dissolve to a stretch of water, a pebble plunging in with a loud splash, and cut to a close-up of Thorax’s hooves at the shore. One of several loose stones is kicked in, and a longer shot puts him dropping to his haunches at the edge of a small pond. Close-up of his reflection and dejectedly drooping head as Ember comes in for a landing behind him.*)

**Ember:** Why are *you* still here? (*Cut to both; she sits.*)

**Thorax:** (*sighing*) Because I’m having trouble leading my pack, so I don’t really want to go home.

**Ember:** Wait. You’re in charge? (*chuckling*) Oh, boy. You need to be more assertive. (*Cut to him.*)

**Thorax:** Well, that’s my problem. I don’t know how. I tried asking them to please follow my directions, I-I even offered a prize, and then—

**Ember:** (*from o.s., putting a finger to his lips*) Shhh! (*She stands and leans in close.*) Stop talking!

(*Two dumbfounded magenta eyes blink toward her.*)

**Ember:** *That’s* how you do it.

**Thorax:** (*laughing*) Whoa! That just gave me chills.

**Ember:** I know you have it in you. You turned into a bear to defend Spike.

**Thorax:** Huh. I guess I can be tough when I’m defending my friends, but when I’m just enforcing my rules, I-I feel unsure of myself. (*She puts a hand to his shoulder.*)

**Ember:** There’s nothing to be unsure of. You’re the leader for a reason. Make a decision and let it be known that the decision is final.

(*She socks a fist into a palm for emphasis on the end of this, then continues with a smug smile.*)

**Ember:** And if that doesn’t work, turn into a bear.

**Thorax:** (*chuckling*) Well, that’s good advice.

**Ember:** I know it is. (*He stands up.*)

**Thorax:** So what’s your deal? Why do you think you’re so bad at friendship? (*Most of the starch goes out of her.*)

**Ember:** I don’t want to talk about it.

**Thorax:** Oh, you have to. How else are you gonna solve your problems?

(*A few yards’ quick flight, and she is hoisting up a boulder nearly as big as she is.*)

**Ember:** Through feats of strength and fire duels, of course.

(*The mass is flung for distance and a fiery exhalation goes up after it, scoring a direct hit. Nothing but gravel is left to patter down on and around Thorax in close-up.*)

**Thorax:** Uh, how does that help?

(*Zoom out to put a much larger boulder in the fore; Ember lands atop this, hard enough to crack the surface.*)

**Ember:** Crushing another dragon in competition establishes my dominance and makes me feel great!

**Thorax:** (*pacing toward her*) Right, but, uh, how do you think they feel?

**Ember:** Humiliated! Ashamed! They probably want to run away and bury themselves under a rock and… (*losing steam*) …never come out. They’re probably sad. (*She flies down to him.*) Kinda low. Definitely not happy.

**Thorax:** (*touching his chest, then hers; zoom in slowly*) That’s because that kind of competition can divide you. And it doesn’t get to the heart of the issue. Talking about your feelings does.

(*Close-up of Ember, who lets go with a flaming sneeze and wipes her nose.*)

**Ember:** Ugh! I think I’m allergic to feelings. (*Cut to frame both on the start of the next line.*)

**Thorax:** (*as she blows out a smoldering spot on an antler*) You know, you don’t have to be sappy or huggy-feely about it, but you should let your friends know how you feel.

**Ember:** (*smiling*) Uh, I know where we can start. (*She lifts off.*)

**Thorax:** Where? (*Pause, then smile.*) Oh! Spike. Heh. I got there.

(*Dissolve to the town square, where Twilight, Starlight, and Spike are working on various portions of the cleanup from Ember’s welcome reception. Twilight pulls down one end of the half-torched banner, Starlight pushes a wagon full of trash with her magic, and Spike sweeps up debris. The Flame of Friendship has been removed. Close-up of the crestfallen little guy.*)

**Spike:** I think they’re gone. They probably never want to see me again.

(*Two legs—one blue-green, one yellow-green—slam down in the fore to shake him out of this deep blue funk.*)

**Starlight:** (*brightly*) Or, they want to see you now.

(*The little guy swallows hard and raises his eyes to the stern countenances glaring down at him.*)

**Ember:** Guess what, Spike?

**Spike:** I know. I’m so sorry.

**Ember:** LET ME TALK ABOUT THIS!! (*with great effort*) I…feel…

(*Her whole face goes purple and sweaty for a few seconds as she struggles not to blow a gasket, but she gets herself back under control.*)

**Ember:** …mad. (*Relieved sigh.*)

**Thorax:** (*smiling encouragingly, tapping front hooves together*) Okay, that’s a good first attempt. Now maybe try to be more specific?

(*She does a few stretches to limber up and fans at her face before speaking again.*)

**Ember:** I’m… (*Sigh.*) …*upset!*

**Spike:** You have every right to be.

**Ember:** I know I do! And I know I need to tell you how I feel because my friend Thorax— (*flying over him, landing on other side*) —said it would make me feel better. And it does!

**Thorax:** (*to Spike*) Yeah! And I have no problem telling you what you did was wrong because my friend Ember is helping me be more assertive.

(*The end result is to send the little dragon to the ground on his back.*)

**Spike:** (*awestruck*) Whoa.

**Ember:** (*to Thorax, giving thumbs-up*) Nice!

(*The two trade a laughing high five and turn to Spike, who sits up.*)

**Spike:** You guys should be mad at me. I was so worried about how it could go wrong, I didn’t even think about how it could go right.

(*He lies down on his belly, hands clasped, and raises two contrite green eyes.*)

**Spike:** Can you forgive me? (*Ember and Thorax trade a glance.*)

**Ember:** I really do feel better. So, yeah. I’m good.

**Thorax:** Heh. Me too.

(*One foreleg reels in Spike, the other Ember, and both dragons find themselves in a crushing hug. No points for guessing which one is more caught off guard by it.*)

**Ember:** Ugh! Again?

(*Spike just laughs as his spines flash—friendship mission accomplished.*)

**Spike:** No way! It’s finally happening! (*pumping fist*) I solved a friendship problem! (*Cut to Twilight and Starlight walking up on the following.*)

**Starlight:** Actually, you created the friendship problem by not trusting your friends. (*Thorax has let go of Ember now.*)

**Spike:** Yeah, but then I solved it by learning my lesson. (*He jumps down to face Ember and Thorax.*) I should’ve told my two friends about each other immediately— (*pacing away from them*) —instead of assuming they wouldn’t get along.

**Twilight:** (*crossing to them with Starlight*) Good job, Spike. (*He hugs her.*)

**Ember:** Is this another part of pony friendship? Telling each other what you learned all the time?

(*The three locals ponder this query for a moment, then laugh.*)

**Starlight:** Yeah, pretty much.

**Spike:** Yep.

(*A mass of balloons floats up past the camera; behind them, wipe to a slow pan across the town square, whose decorations have been fully reset for a lively crowd of spectators. Ember and Thorax stand facing each other opposite sides of the steps, Twilight and Starlight a short distance back from Thorax, and Spike is behind the lectern on the porch. The Flame of Friendship has been reinstalled and continues to burn brightly.*)

**Spike:** (*voice raised*) So, as a show of unity, I present the Dragonfire Flame of Friendship— (*Close-up.*) —to both Dragon Lord Ember and Thorax, leader of the changeling pack! May the flame of friendship burn for eternity.

(*Cheers and confetti mark this announcement, as do pleased smiles from Twilight and Starlight—but just as in Act One, the riot of color triggers a pyrotechnic sneeze from Ember. Thorax and the mares sidestep just in time to let the fireball hit an ice sculpture of Twilight and both honorees, reducing most of it to puddles and slush. Once the shock wears off, Ember glowers in Spike’s general direction.*)

**Ember:** You should have more things made of rocks.

(*The tension breaks with a hearty three-way laugh. Fade to black.*)