**MOLT DOWN**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to Rarity and Spike following a trail through a stretch of woodland during the day. The unicorn has her saddlebags slung up, while the dragon has a hand up to cover a spot just past the outer corner of his right eye and angles his head to keep her from seeing it.*)

**Rarity:** I do appreciate you showing me the way to the phoenix nest, Spike.

**Spike:** Anything for you, Rarity. Besides, I’ve been meaning to visit Pee-Wee.

(*Recall that Pee-Wee was the baby phoenix whose egg Spike saved from being smashed in “Dragon Quest,” brought back to Ponyville to raise, then returned to the wild at some point before “Just for Sidekicks.” A degree of puzzlement registers on Rarity’s face as she tries, without success, to get a clear look at whatever Spike is trying to conceal.*)

**Rarity:** He really was an excellent pet. Can’t imagine why you set him free. (*Both stop.*)

**Spike:** (*easing away from her*) Phoenixes aren’t meant to be domesticated. Even in the wild, they like to keep to themselves.

**Rarity:** (*circling around him, steadily speeding up; he pivots away*) Well, they are beautiful. A few of their feathers will add just the right splash of color to my latest—

(*Finally losing her patience, she hoists him up with her magic and sees his cover-up in full.*)

**Rarity:** Spike! (*He is set down facing her.*) What are you doing?

**Spike:** (*grunting, easing away*) Nothing!

**Rarity:** Is there something wrong with your face? (*Long pause.*)

**Spike:** (*sighing*) It’s a stone scale. It isn’t magical or anything, like the call of the Dragon Lord. It’s just…red… (*scratching spot*) …and itchy…

(*His grunt of discomfort and the motion of his fingers combine to reveal an inflamed spot and a partly dislodged scale on that cheek.*)

**Spike:** …and embarrassing.

(*Zoom in to an extreme close-up that frames the diamond-shaped, throbbing lesion, then cut back to the two.*)

**Rarity:** Oh, precious pants, that *does* look uncomfortable. But even I get the odd blemish from time to time. It’s nothing to be embarrassed by. (*Both start along the trail again, Spike briefly covering the spot.*) You could pay Zecora a visit. She makes a cream that works wonders. Just don’t get the shampoo.

(*Referring to her near-total mane loss after inadvertently using heavy-duty cleaner as shampoo in “It Isn’t the Mane Thing About You.” A few more steps bring them to a tree that hosts a nest occupied by a fully grown phoenix, whose mate descends to perch alongside it with a cry of affection.*)

**Spike:** There’s Pee-Wee’s parents! (*They embrace.*) But I don’t see Pee-Wee.

**Rarity:** Oh, maybe he moved out. Everypony has to leave the nest at some point.

(*Spike mulls this over as a third firebird swoops in from behind them, blowing Rarity’s mane/tail sideways with its turbulent wake.*)

**Spike:** (*elated, waving*) Pee-Wee!

(*As he hurries toward the nest, the camera cuts to the cawing new arrival, sporting the same magnificent red/orange/yellow plumage as his elders. No longer the chick Spike took in, he is full-grown and stands perhaps half again as tall as the baby dragon when he doubles back to land on the trail so the two can hug. A light brush of the tip of Pee-Wee’s beak against Spike’s afflicted cheek causes him to jump backwards in pained surprise.*)

**Spike:** Ouch!

(*Whereupon his avian buddy takes to the trees with an alarmed squawk, a couple of feathers dropping loose and fluttering down to the turf. Rarity is quick to float one of these up and into her bags.*)

**Rarity:** Perhaps you should pay Zecora a visit sooner rather than later.

**Spike:** (*sighing, pointing to spot*) I don’t want anypony else to see this. Besides, I’m sure it’ll clear up after a good night’s sleep.

(*The unicorn’s grimace reveals just how little stock she puts in this opinion. Dissolve to a close-up of Spike in bed and wrapped up in a blanket, within his bedroom at the Castle of Friendship. Only his tail and the top of his head are immediately visible, and he snores heartily as the camera zooms out to frame the entire room, whose curtains and door are closed. A magic glow wreathes the knob and pulls the door open so Twilight Sparkle can peek in.*)

**Twilight:** I can’t believe you’re still asleep!

**Spike:** (*grumbling, muffled by blanket*) Just five more minutes…

(*The tail makes itself useful by tucking the cloth completely down around itself and the feet, left exposed by his stirring, and the snoring resumes. His boss is having none of it, though; she enters the room, opening the curtains with horn-power.*)

**Twilight:** It’s nearly noon and you promised to help me with my lecture for class today. (*He sits up in bed, facing away from the camera.*)

**Spike:** Noon? Whoa! (*rubbing eyes*) I slept like a rock! Which reminds me— (*facing Twilight*) —all that sleep probably cleared up my stone scale.

(*Or not, judging from her popping eyes and stunned gasp.*)

**Twilight:** Um, on second thought— (*laughing shakily*) —you can go back to sleep if you want.

(*Her tentative grin turns into a look of mild horror as he runs a hand over his face. Cut to a wall mirror as he crosses to it for a look at himself, giving the first clear view of his face since he woke up. The angry red stone scales have formed clusters that dot his cheeks, forehead, and nose; he claps hands to temples and uncorks yell of pure fright before the view snaps to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to Spike’s bedroom as he hastily yanks the window curtains shut and huddles under the blanket on his bed.*)

**Twilight:** Spike, what are you doing?

**Spike:** (*muffled by blanket, as she sits on her haunches by the bed*) Hiding from my hideous face.

**Twilight:** (*patting him*) I’m sure it feels terrible, but it’s just a breakout. It’s not the end of the world. (*He peeks sourly out at her.*)

**Spike:** That’s easy for you to say. Your face isn’t covered in itchy red spots. (*He scratches madly at a few.*)

**Twilight:** I used to get terrible breakouts, anytime I had a final exam with Celestia— (*under her breath*) —who probably never had a blemish her whole life!

(*The acerbic recollection ends with a placating grin directed at her number-one assistant.*)

**Spike:** Well, I’m not in magic school.

**Twilight:** (*standing up*) No, but these things can be stress-related, and you did spend yesterday with Rarity.

**Spike:** (*laughing weakly, half-hiding behind blanket*) What could possibly be stressful about that?

**Twilight:** (*groaning, magically re-opening window curtains*) You could try Zecora. She makes a cream that—

**Spike:** —works wonders. (*Toss off blanket.*) I’ve heard.

(*He plods across the room; close-up of the mirror and his approaching image.*)

**Spike:** (*squashing cheeks*) But I’m not leaving the Castle until my face is back to its adorable self.

(*His attempt to squeeze one spot as if it were a pimple only causes him to wince audibly in great pain; Twilight’s reflection leans into view next to his.*)

**Twilight:** Fine. (*levitating a stack of notes to him*) But you’re still gonna help me practice my lecture.

(*The scaly secretary voices a weary groan and glances at the topmost sheet as she steps away. Cut to a close-up of her in the middle of the floor, clearing her throat.*)

**Twilight:** The Element of Generosity and its importance in relation to the other Elements of Harmony—

(*This is as far as she gets before a gout of green fire blazes across the screen behind her, accompanied by a mighty belch. It lasts a good two seconds before dying away to leave scorch marks over most of the furniture behind her. She whirls to find Spike standing in an equally barbecued zone, staring wide-eyed with one hand clapped over his mouth and the other holding a pile of ashes that used to be Twilight’s lecture notes.*)

**Twilight:** (*gasping, floating them back to herself*) My lecture! (*They plop sadly to the floor.*)

**Spike:** I don’t know what happened! (*She pokes at them.*) I just had a sudden case of—

(*Now it is his turn for words to fail him, caused this time by bulging cheeks that portend another incendiary blast. Twilight teleports away a split-second before he can cook her where she stands, then returns behind him with a fire extinguisher floating in her aura. Its foamy contents spray out from the nozzle, covering every square inch except for his eyes.*)

**Spike:** —indigestion. (*Face and arms poke out.*) I’m so sorry!

**Twilight:** Ooh, that’s okay. (*floating up a second pile of papers*) I’m sure I can rewrite the lecture from my notes. (*scratching back of head*) I have a lot.

(*Now free of the foam, Spike reaches eagerly toward the stack.*)

**Spike:** I can help you with— (*She hastily shifts them out of grabbing range.*)

**Twilight:** (*pointing toward door*) Maybe you should leave the Castle after all, and go somewhere less…flammable?

(*Her big dopey grin just causes his spirits to sink a little lower; he trudges toward the exit with a deflated sigh. Dissolve to a long shot of the front entrance to the School of Friendship. Now clad in a trenchcoat with turned-up collar, fedora, and oversized sunglasses, Spike plods along the walkway leading to the open doors and stops to sit and gaze at his reflection in the perimeter lake. The shades are removed.*)

**Spike:** Hey there, not-handsome.

**Rarity:** (*from o.s., singsong*) Oh, Spi-i-ike!

(*Well and truly scared out of his wits by that voice, he looks toward the door and finds the white mare waving to him from the step, no longer wearing her saddlebags. By the time she makes her way out to him, he has clapped the sunglasses back on and stood up.*)

**Rarity:** (*as he stands up*) My, what a fetching ensemble you’ve put together! Very *noir*-esque. (*giggling, poking his nose*) I believe Shadow Spade herself would approve.

**Spike:** (*hurrying past, tilting hat down over eyes*) Uh, thanks. (*She hustles to catch up.*)

**Rarity:** But I wonder if you wouldn’t mind taking it off. (*Both stop.*)

**Spike:** What? Oh, I, uh, I…

(*He turns away, voice trailing off into a mumble.*)

**Rarity:** (*hoof cupped to one ear*) Sorry, you’ll have to speak up. (*scratching at it, voice raised*) My ears are a little bit clogged or something. (*pacing, normal volume*) It’s just that I absolutely must have a model for my phoenix-feather dress, and nopony else is available.

**Spike:** Sorry, Rarity, but I…I am super-busy all day…giving…tours of the School. (*Big grin.*)

**Pinkie Pie:** (*from o.s.*) Really?

(*All four eyes widen at the sound of this voice; cut to Pinkie at the end of the walkway that gives onto the side entrance of the Castle. She is holding a long-handled sign showing the School’s crest and leading a group of tourists.*)

**Pinkie:** I thought I was giving tours today. Guess not. Free day!

(*With a joyous whoop, she pitches the sign over her shoulder and hops off along the stepping stones that branch to either side from the walkway. The visitors aim a great many puzzled stares at Rarity and Spike, the latter pulling his coat collar up even farther and shrinking into himself as he sinks from sight. Wipe to the School’s courtyard, Spike now carrying Pinkie’s sign and leading the tour group as students go about their daily activities. His next words are punctuated by occasional pained grunts and bouts of scratching.*)

**Spike:** (*hastily, pointing in various directions*) Classrooms are that way, dorms are that way, Twilight’s office is up there, this is a fountain… (*Throw the sign aside and scratch like mad.*)

**Tourist:** Uh, could you slow down a bit? Heh…we’ve come a long way to see the School, and I-I don’t want to miss anything.

**Spike:** Oh! Um, yeah. (*Grunt and scratch.*) Sorry.

**Tourist:** I-Is something wrong?

**Spike:** What? Why? No!

(*But his sudden drop onto his back, so he can get his legs up to work a spot under his chin, gives the lie to these words.*)

**Tourist:** Uh, do all the dragons at this school suffer from scale issues? (*Spike stands up.*)

**Spike:** (*raspy whisper*) I don’t know. (*He massages his throat.*)

**Tourist:** What?

**Spike:** I don’t know!

**Tourist:** (*hoof to ear*) I-I’m sorry, did—did you say “fireworks show”?

**Spike:** I said… (*full volume*) …I DON’T KNOW!!

(*The shift comes with no warning, startles the tourist into falling on his rump and losing his cap, and throws a good scare into the rest of the group. Spike gasps at his outburst and hurries away, the hapless stallion sitting rooted as the others scramble to keep up with the tour. Shaking his head clear, this one jumps to his hooves, grabs the bill of his cap in his teeth, and gallops after them.*)

(*Wipe to a slow pan through the School’s library, which boasts shelves at both the ground floor and around a balcony. Students are using tables, floor cushions, and armchairs in the pursuit of academic excellence as a unicorn mare floats books out of the cart she is pulling and slots them back onto the shelves. Cut to Sandbar, Smolder, and Yona reading and taking notes at one table, then to a long shot of the entire room as Spike leads the tour group in.*)

**Spike:** THIS IS THE SCHOOL LIBRARY! IT’S ONE OF THE MOST SERENE SPOTS ON CAMPUS, WHERE STUDENTS CAN SPEND TIME IN QUIET REFLECTION OR STUDY!

(*Very long pause, marked by hopelessly perplexed stares on the visitors’ part.*)

**Spike:** WHAT? (*The studios trio approaches, Smolder more than a bit put out.*)

**Smolder:** Could you please stop shouting? We’re trying to do our homework, and it’s kind of distracting.

**Spike:** (*scratching*) WAS I SHOUTING?

(*The tour group mumbles in the affirmative.*)

**Spike:** (*clearing throat, scratching, normal volume*) I have no idea what you’re talking—

(*Just as in his bedroom, his gut chooses this moment to generate a blast of green flame—this one lifting him nearly to the balcony and burning his disguise to ash. He thuds gracelessly onto his back, revealing that the stone scales have now spread all over the violet portions of his hide. Some are red, others purple; he sits up and looks himself over with fresh panic.*)

**Spike:** Huh?

(*He jumps up and bolts from the library, shouting and scratching, as Smolder directs a quizzical look after him. Dissolve to a T-junction of two hallways, the orange dragon flying slowly past along the straightaway. Just after she has gone, a resounding belch sounds from behind one door, which bulges outward to release the same emerald pyrotechnics. Smolder doubles back on foot as streams of black smoke dribble out; cut to the door’s other side as she lets herself in to find Spike sitting despondently in a storage closet. Fumes waft up from both nostrils to join the dense blanket already floating overhead.*)

**Smolder:** If you’re trying to hide, you need to do a better job. All I had to do was follow the smoke. (*She closes the door as Spike tries to wave it away.*)

**Spike:** (*raspy whisper*) Leave me alone!

**Smolder:** (*leaning closer, hand to ear*) What?

**Spike:** Leave me alone!

**Smolder:** I can’t under—was that “sleeves made of foam”?

**Spike:** (*to full volume*) I said, leave ME ALONE!!

(*And here comes a fresh incinerating blast, which Smolder barely avoids by going airborne. A heap of cinders can be seen in a corner behind Spike, marking the unfortunate end of some innocent supply item due to the shot that attracted her attention. This one destroys a number of brooms and mops and lasts long enough for him to swivel his head through 180 degrees; it is followed by Spike’s weary sigh and Smolder’s laughter from o.s. above. Cut to her, hanging from the ceiling rafters.*)

**Smolder:** Wow! I have seen some pretty bad molts in my time, but yours takes the cake!

**Spike:** Molts? (*Smolder drops down.*)

**Smolder:** (*poking, circling around him*) The molt? Super-painful stone scales? Fire burps? Uncontrollable volume shifts? It’s all part of growing up dragon. Congrats!

(*A celebratory slap on the back causes him to wince and cry out in pain.*)

**Smolder:** Oh. Sorry.

(*Zoom in slowly on Spike as a fresh wave of worry overtakes him, then fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to Smolder lounging at the closet’s window, sitting on the sill with her back and legs propped against opposite sides while her tail dangles toward the floor. She regards Spike’s nervous pacing with a degree of bewilderment.*)

**Spike:** No, no, no, no, no. The last time I grew up, I turned into a giant greedy monster!

**Smolder:** (*nodding*) Greed-induced bigness. That’s totally different.

(*A reference to the little guy’s uncontrolled growth spurt in “Secret of My Excess.” She hops off the sill.*)

**Smolder:** The molt is completely normal. Every dragon goes through it. Pretty soon you’ll leave and strike out on your own.

**Spike:** Why would I do that?

**Smolder:** (*incredulously*) Have you been living with ponies your whole life?

**Spike:** (*nodding*) Uh-huh.

**Smolder:** Oh. Well, in the Dragon Lands, a molter’s loved ones kicks [*sic*] them out at the first stone scale.

**Spike:** What? Why?

**Smolder:** Well, I think it’s biological. We call it the molt effect. I haven’t even told you about the smell.

**Spike:** Smell?

(*Sniffing at one armpit, he voices a cry of revulsion.*)

**Smolder:** Yeah. I mean, I love my brother and all, but one whiff and I was all, “See you!”

(*Now she risks a lungful of his aroma, her brain nearly locking up as a result.*)

**Smolder:** Speaking of which… (*She goes for the door.*)

**Spike:** Wait! (*He throws herself down and grabs her tail.*) Does the molt effect happen to ponies too? (*Gasp.*) Twilight already asked me to leave the Castle today! If she kicks me out, where am I gonna live? I’m too young to grow up!

**Smolder:** (*pulling her tail free*) I’m sure you’ll find a nice hoard of gems to guard or a village to terrorize. (*An idea occurs to her.*) Oh, now that dragons and ponies are friends, I guess that’s off the table.

**Spike:** (*standing up*) So no creature’s gonna want to be around me?

**Smolder:** Oh, I didn’t say that. That molt stench is a magnet for predators. Tatzlwurms, hydras, rocs…

**Spike:** (*skeptically*) Dragons are scared of rocks?

**Smolder:** R-O-C-S. Rocs? (*hovering in his face*) Humongous birds of prey that can snack on a molting dragon like candy. (*Touch down.*)

**Spike:** (*raspy whisper*) So Twilight’s kicking me out and the only creatures who don’t find me disgusting want to eat me?

**Smolder:** Seriously, I heard none of that.

**Spike:** (*full volume*) TWILIGHT’S KICKING ME OUT AND THE ONLY CREATURES WHO DON’T FIND ME DISGUSTING WANT TO EAT ME? (*He claps both hands over his mouth.*)

**Smolder:** Congrats!

(*Comes now the sound of the door opening; Pinkie peeks in.*)

**Pinkie:** HEY! IS THIS THE SHOUTING CLOSET? BECAUSE I’VE GOT A FREE DAY AND I’M TOTALLY UP FOR SOME SHOUTING!

(*Her toothy grin goes bye-bye in the time it takes her to sniff the air.*)

**Pinkie:** Also, where’s that Brussels-sprouts-covered-in-cotton-candy smell coming from? (*smiling slyly*) Because it is really interesting.

(*The downcast Spike finds himself on the receiving end of both her penetrating stare and Smolder’s smug sidewise glance as the camera zooms in to a close-up. Behind him, the background dissolves to the interior of Zecora’s hut.*)

**Spike:** I didn’t know where else to go. I can’t take the chance that Twilight will kick me out. You aren’t getting any molt effects, are you?

(*Almost as soon as the zebra leans in to scrutinize him, her gorge rises and both blue-green eyes begin watering profusely.*)

**Zecora:** (*pinching nose*) When it comes to breakouts, I’ve seen all circumstances.

(*turning to shelves*) But as for the molt’s smell…

(*A quick bit of fiddling, and she pivots back to him with her nostrils clamped shut by a pair of clothespins. The nasal tone caused by the pinch continues.*)

**Zecora:** ….let’s not take any chances.

(*The patient gets caught up in a fit of scratching and sighs quietly during a brief respite.*)

**Spike:** Is there anything you can do to cure me?

**Zecora:** The ailments you have aren’t something to cure.

The molt’s a condition that dragons endure.

(*Cut to Spike; rattling from the shelves underscores his next words.*)

**Spike:** But if anypony sees or smells me right now, they’ll be so grossed out they’ll avoid me forever! (*Zecora retrieves a gourd.*)

**Zecora:** Perhaps we can lessen this strange molt effect.

The smell is the most likely cause, I suspect.

(*She sets the container down.*)

**Spike:** (*raspy whisper*) It’s also embarrassing.

**Zecora:** (*poking at ear*) I know you are speaking, but I can’t hear a thing.

Are you talking about teaching asparagus to sing?

**Spike:** (*to full volume*) I said, it’s EMBARRASSING!!

(*As he hastily covers his mouth, Zecora backs away and stuffs a wad of cotton into each ear.*)

**Zecora:** If the goal is to not have your friends all depart,

Perhaps your volume is where we should start.

(*Spike’s gut rumbles warningly…*)

**Spike:** Oh, no.

(*…and the bulging of his cheeks gives Zecora enough time to zip behind him and angle his head toward the base of her cold caldron. The belch, when it comes, lifts him several feet into the air for its duration and does a fine job of putting the heat to the pot. He sighs resignedly before a new voice butts in.*)

**Rarity:** (*from outside, muffled by door*) Zecora! Hel-looo? Are you there?

**Spike:** (*grabbing Zecora’s chest*) I CAN’T LET RARITY SEE ME LIKE THIS! PLEASE DON’T LET HER KNOW I’M HERE!

(*The herbal expert casts a concerned eye toward the door. Cut to a long shot of Rarity outside, knocking vigorously at it and wearing her saddlebags, and zoom in slowly as Zecora swings it open.*)

**Rarity:** OH, DEAR! (*Inside again; she enters.*) I’M TALKING EVEN LOUDER THAN I THOUGHT, AREN’T I?

**Zecora:** I have volume concerns today by the scores,

But it seems that I’m ready to help you with yours.

**Rarity:** (*digging in ear*) UH, I’M SORRY? I-I CAN’T SEEM TO HEAR ANYTHING! (*grabbing Zecora’s chest*) I WAS HOPING YOU COULD HELP! (*Zecora extricates herself.*) I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENED! ONE MINUTE, I WAS SEWING PHOENIX FEATHERS ONTO A DRESS, AND THE NEXT, I COULDN’T HEAR MY OWN VOICE!

**Zecora:** Ah, the feathers of that bird can affect ponies’ ears.

It’s a magic ailment I’ve treated for years.

(*Cut to the dim interior of a basket, Spike’s arms rising into view to lift its lid slightly—this is his perspective—and give him a view of the unicorn and zebra on the other side of the room. The first few words of the next line come through muffled until the lid goes up.*)

**Rarity:** I ONLY KNOW YOU’RE TALKING ’CAUSE YOUR MOUTH IS GOING UP AND DOWN!

(*A sigh; cut to her sniffing at the air and breaking into a violent retching spasm—the little guy’s emanations are now getting to her as well.*)

**Rarity:** Oh, goodness! (*glancing toward Spike’s basket; he hastily ducks away just in time*) I hope that incredibly pungent odor belongs to some sort of magical curative.

(*A clatter of instruments is heard under this comment, after which the camera cuts to Zecora pouring liquid into a bowl and mixing with a spoon in her teeth.*)

**Rarity:** (*crossing to her, scratching at ear*) I HOPE YOU’RE NOT BUSY, BUT I MUST HAVE MY HEARING BACK! IT TURNS OUT THAT I TALK TO MYSELF WHILE I SEW, AND WITHOUT THAT CONVERSATION I SIMPLY CAN’T THINK!

(*The cotton packed in Zecora’s ears has allowed her to finish the prep work without any distractions, and she finishes by trading the spoon for an ornate eyedropper whose tip is sheathed in a small vial. Close-up of this item resting on her hoof, zooming out to frame both on the next line.*)

**Zecora:** It’s a simple cure, and the directions are clear.

(*Rarity lifts it in her aura.*)

Just one or two drops in each of your ears.

(*With a sigh of relief, the designer extracts the dropper and applies the medicine as instructed while she speaks.*)

**Rarity:** Oh, thank you. You’re an ear saver. (*Back into the vial, then to her bag.*) OH, AND WHILE I AM HERE, DO YOU HAVE ANY BLEMISH CREAM?

(*Zecora recoils slightly at the apparent failure of her offering.*)

**Rarity:** SPIKE IS HAVING SOME SCALE ISSUES!

**Spike:** (*muffled, from within basket*) YOU HAVE NO IDEA!!

(*Cut briefly to an extreme close-up of him inside, sweating buckets and with hands clapped over his mouth, then back to Rarity and Zecora. The former pivots toward the source of the interruption with a surprised gasp.*)

**Rarity:** I think I heard something! YOUR CURE IS WORKING ALREADY!

**Zecora:** (*escorting her toward shelves*) The cream that you want is just over here.

It’s a popular potion for all creatures this year.

(*During the second line of this couplet, the camera cuts briefly to Spike’s perspective as he eases the lid up to watch the pair, then back to them as Zecora takes down a flask and offers it. Spike is now standing at the far wall, unseen by Rarity.*)

**Rarity:** (*sighing with relief, taking/stowing flask*) Thank you, Zecora.

(*While she is thus occupied, Zecora flips a nod to the stricken dragon, who pops open a small side window and slips out. Cut to a long shot of the hut as he puts his head up among the gnarled tree’s massive roots and bails out, just in time for Rarity not to see him when Zecora ushers her out. Zecora has shed the makeshift plugs for her ears and nose, and her voice returns to normal when next she speaks.*)

**Rarity:** (*trotting away*) I DON’T MEAN TO BE RUDE, BUT I DO THINK YOUR HUT COULD USE AN AIRING OUT!

(*A beat of silence after she has passed o.s.*)

**Zecora:** (*addressing the area*) Rarity’s gone!

(*No response, so she circles around to the window Spike used.*)

**Zecora:** There’s no need to hide!

(*Still nothing; she sniffs, grunts her distaste, and begins to pace the grounds. Her steps carry her toward a mask that is lying flat on the earth and trembling.*)

**Zecora:** Though I wonder if we should continue outside.

Can’t treat your symptoms down there on the ground.

(*lifting mask to expose Spike, backing o.s.*)

It’s safe to come out. There’s no ponies around.

**Spike:** I’m not hiding from ponies. (*pointing into air*) I’m hiding from *that!*

(*Cut to Zecora, who turns to look behind herself, and zoom out to frame a very large and very annoyed bird glaring down at her from its midair hover. The feathers on the back, wings, and tail are three shades of gray, the head and breast are white, and the belly and legs are tan. The beady black eyes with yellow whites are ringed by gray markings to form a natural mask, matching the tips of the white head plumage, and a brown band encircles the throat. The formidable talons are tipped in dark gray, and the entire creature—a roc—would easily stand at least five times Zecora’s height if it came in for a landing. It proceeds to deliver a deafening screech squarely into the earthbound zebra’s face. She recoils in silent fear as Spike cowers and covers his eyes, the camera zooming in slowly on both before the view fades to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a patch of empty sky against which the roc rises into view with a cry. It dives toward Spike and Zecora, the talons ripping a huge divot out of the forest floor but missing both of them.*)

**Spike:** Did I forget to mention the molt smell attracts predators? (*Scared grin.*)

**Zecora:** That’s something that would have been quite nice to know.

(*grabbing him*) But it’s not worth discussing right now! We should go!

(*Feet and hooves get moving at the sound of the roc’s approaching keen, but they get only a few yards before it touches down to cut off their escape. A point-blank screech sends them fleeing back the way they came, and it gives chase through the trees.*)

**Spike:** It’s only after me! I’ll lead it away while you get help! (*The two split up; he addresses himself overhead.*) This way, birdy-bird! Molting dragon over here!

(*Said dragon climbs a tree and hides among its boughs, only for the roc to tear most of them away in one snatch. He pokes his head up.*)

**Spike:** Okay, maybe this wasn’t a good plan. (*Pan to frame Zecora on the next line.*)

**Zecora:** You can’t hide in a tree! You have to come down!

We stand a much better chance on the ground!

(*As Spike slides down the trunk, she moves toward him but is grabbed up with a yell.*)

**Spike:** Zecora! (*addressing the roc*) Bring her back!

(*Before he can come to her rescue, though, a reddish glow briefly suffuses his entire form and he is caught up in a scratching fit that leaves him snarling in agony. Here comes the roc, its free talons extended to pluck him away; he comes to his senses and breaks into a dead run, which ends when he plows into Rarity and crashes down on his back.*)

**Rarity:** Oh, Spike, what are you doing here?

**Spike:** (*standing, pushing her back*) Rarity, you have to get outta here! There’s a giant roc trying to eat me! It’s got Zecora!

**Rarity:** (*pushing him back*) Yes…uh? (*Spike resumes scratching.*) I-I WAS JUST AT ZECORA’S, BUT I’M HEADING BACK! (*levitating dropper/vial from her bags; the roc flies past*) I CAN’T READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS! DOES THIS SAY “TWO DROPS ONCE A DAY” OR “ONE DROP TWICE A DAY”?

**Spike:** (*pushing it aside*) Rarity, there’s no time! We have to get help! (*Long shot of them; zoom in slowly as the roc closes in.*)

**Rarity:** (*poking at ear*) YES, MY EARS ARE COMPLETELY CLOGGED! (*noticing his plight*) Why, Spike, your stone scales look worse! Ooh, here. I picked up just the thing. (*floating a small container from her bags*) Ah!

(*She never gets a chance to extol its virtues, as the colossal bird completes its approach and airlifts them both from the forest floor. Her scream of purest terror splits the air in their wake. Spike has wound up gripped by his tail in one set of talons, Rarity and Zecora in the other; the unicorn has dropped the remedy she was about to offer.*)

**Zecora:** Oh, I wish you’d escaped either claw of this bird!

But the both of us trapped in the same one’s absurd!

**Rarity:** (*hoof to ear*) WHAT?

**Spike:** (*growling*) Let my ponies go!

(*The roc shows no interest in following this command, instead trying repeatedly to peck at him on the fly and missing as he throws his weight backwards. The familiar internal rumble kicks up.*)

**Spike:** Whoa!

(*Cheeks bulge dangerously, and a flaming green belch comes within an ace of blowtorching the beaked face right off the skull. Spike is flung clear, screaming as he goes head over heels toward the unforgiving ground; only a series of bounces off the boughs and a slide down a tree trunk on his back allow him to reach it in one piece. By the time he comes to rest, his whole face has relaxed and he has voiced a sigh of deepest relief, the tree bark having served as a most effective backscratcher. The bliss dissipates all too quickly in the wake of that reddish full-body corona, which brings him to his feet and sets him scratching and groaning all over again. Twilight walks up as he works his back madly against the trunk.*)

**Twilight:** Spike, what are you doing?

**Spike:** If my stone scales didn’t itch so much, and we weren’t in immediate danger— (*laughing weakly*) —this would be really embarrassing.

**Twilight:** Danger?

(*Further discussion is cut off by the roc’s cry, and down it comes from the sun, ready to eat whatever it cannot carry. A flash of teleportation removes both of them from the area; it clamps its beak around the trunk and uproots the entire tree, after which they pop back in.*)

**Twilight:** Well, I was headed to Zecora’s to get some cream for your scales. I had no idea you were—

**Spike:** (*grunting*) —about to be eaten by a giant predator attracted to my molt smell?

**Twilight:** Molt smell?

(*Another screech, this one mingled with Rarity’s shriek, and Twilight plows Spike out of the way to avoid the lethal talons ripping a crater out of the earth. The roc has ditched the tree it tore up.*)

**Spike:** (*now o.s.*) Whoa! (*Cut to him and TS sprawled on the dirt.*)

**Twilight:** (*looking up after it*) Was that Rarity?

**Spike:** (*sitting up*) And Zecora! I tried to save them, but it’s all I can do to stop scratching long enough to dive out of the way when that bird attacks!

(*Purple eyes narrow in steely determination, and the violet Princess lifts off to get a piece of the action. Within seconds she is following the roc and harrying it with horn blasts to every piece of its anatomy she can target.*)

**Rarity:** (*to Zecora*) THIS ISN’T THE FIRST TIME I’VE BEEN IN THE CLUTCHES OF A HORRIBLE GIANT CREATURE— (*sobbing*) —BUT IT DOESN’T GET ANY EASIER!

(*The zebra rolls her eyes at this round of histrionics. Meanwhile, Spike pulls in a deep gasp at the overhead brouhaha and is very surprised when his glow and frantic itching stop almost at once. The vivid red/purple hues fade from his stone scales, leaving only slightly darkened patches on his hide.*)

**Spike:** (*sighing happily, slumping on his feet*) Finally! I didn’t think that itching would ever stop!

(*But he gets a new and most unwelcome surprise in the form of a layer of gray stone that begins to extend over his body. All too quickly it has spread up from his chest, engulfed every limb and his tail, and started to encase his chin.*)

**Spike:** What’s happening? I…c-can’t mo—

(*The last word is cut off when the mineral mantle seals his mouth and encrusts the rest of his head, leaving him immobilized as a very rough likeness of himself. Spike stands petrified in the clearing as Twilight continues her flying gun battle against the avian predator, the only sounds being those of the four beating wings and her spell assault. After almost ten seconds that could be a week, the stone over a couple of fingers crumbles away and cracks race up that arm. In short order, the fissures are spreading all over him and glowing white from within; the radiance grows to a blinding, screen-filling flash that clears to show him sitting dazedly in a fresh crater. He is entirely back to his old self, but with one slight change to his physiology: a brand-new pair of wings growing from his back. They twitch to full extension, revealing lower surfaces the same pale yellow-green as his underbelly, and he gets confusedly to his feet.*)

**Spike:** What just happened? (*poking at one wing*) Did I just sprout wings?

(*This new fact brings an ear-to-ear grin to his face once it sets in.*)

**Spike:** I JUST SPROUTED WINGS!!

(*The roc’s screeching and the sound of Twilight’s blasts shake him back to reality. One well-placed shot jolts it into opening the talons that hold Rarity and Zecora; both wind up hanging on to the tip of one, Rarity having lost her saddlebags. Spike gasps as their peril.*)

**Spike:** I’ve gotta help ’em.

(*Sparing the briefest of glances to each new appendage, he gets them flapping and lifts off into a string of very wobbly loops and swoops.*)

**Spike:** Whoa, whoooaaa, whoooaaa!

(*Once he has himself under some decent bit of control, he tries a new direction only to slam his back against a tree trunk, slide down headfirst with an undignified yell, and bounce back up into a hover. Now feeling a good bit more confident about his maneuverability, he charges up to join the battle—and immediately overshoots it.*)

**Spike:** Whoops.

(*He pulls in to flank Twilight, whose eyes pop when she sees him moving at her level.*)

**Twilight:** Spike, how did you get wings?

**Spike:** I don’t know! (*shifting to a standing position*) But they’re pretty aweso—

(*The boast turns into a yell of fright as an air current sweeps him away and o.s., but he quickly rises again to offer an apologetic grin. The roc’s approaching shadow falls over both, and they split up just long enough to avoid its grab at them.*)

**Twilight:** Do you think you can fly up and distract him while I work on freeing Zecora and Rarity?

(*The newly minted aviator gives her a smart nod and peels out in a blur of violet and green, and she sets off in the same direction. It takes Spike only a few moments to pull ahead of the roc and turn so that he can stare it in the eye while flying backwards.*)

**Spike:** Hey, giant chicken! If you like dragons so much, come and get me!

(*It screeches and snaps at him time after time, getting nothing for its trouble as he darts nimbly out of reach. He flies a tight circle in front of its face, achieving high enough speeds to leave him visible as a violet blur and make the roc very, very dizzy as it tries to track him. A vigorous head shake fails to clear its vision and leaves it squawking woozily; cut to its fuzzy perspective, which gradually resolves into an upside-down Spike pulling into view for a sardonic salute.*)

**Spike:** Greetings.

(*Back to him, flipping right side up and speeding away to avoid another keening snap of the immense beak. Thumping a fist against his gut to start his digestive engines, he lets the roc have it full force; it screams and throws up its free talons to guard its face, while Rarity and Zecora are released to do a little free falling. Rarity’s hyperextended scream hangs in the air behind her.*)

**Twilight:** SPIKE!!

(*She and Spike dive after the plummeting pair, leaving a nicely charbroiled and very dazed roc in their wake, and make the catch with only a foot or two to spare. Twilight sets Zecora down on all four hooves, while Spike does the same for Rarity; the defeated predator wings away into the forest, trailing smoke.*)

**Zecora:** (*crossing to Spike*) I know that the molt produced surprising things.

(*touching his shoulder*) But I’m glad that the last was a new pair of wings!

(*Close-up of these two as she finishes; on the start of the next line, cut to frame all four again.*)

**Rarity:** YES, AND ALSO I’M GLAD YOU’VE GOT WINGS! (*Twilight recoils slightly at the elevated volume.*)

**Twilight:** This is amazing! (*crossing to Spike*) I didn’t know if you’d ever get wings. I’m so happy for you. Does it have something to do with this molt you were talking about?

(*Spike sighs and his wings droop as all the jubilation drains out of him.*)

**Spike:** It’s what’s been going on with me. The breakout, the fire burps—the molt is when dragons get older and start to change. I wish I could stop it, but I can’t. I-I should go. (*He starts to walk away…*)

**Twilight:** Go? (*…but stops.*) What are you talking about?

**Spike:** In the Dragon Lands, families make molters leave home. It’s called the molt effect.

**Twilight:** (*crossing to him, touching his chest*) Well, this isn’t the Dragon Lands, and molt effect or no, I don’t want you going anywhere.

**Spike:** But I’m growing up. What if something even worse happens?

**Twilight:** You’re supposed to grow up, but you’ll always be you. And whatever happens, we’ll get through it together.

(*Her extended foreleg is the cue for a hug, which he eagerly accepts—and then breaks in favor of a little airborne goofing off.*)

**Spike:** (*whooping*) Yeah! Look at me! (*He lands on her back.*) Let’s go home! (*Puzzled glance from Twilight, followed by a smirk.*)

**Twilight:** Uh, I don’t need to carry you anymore, do I? (*magically lifting one wing from his shoulder*) You have wings.

**Spike:** They are new, and I don’t want to overdo it.

(*Realizing that his wisecracking will remain invariable no matter what his form, she groans, gives him a top-tier eye roll, and starts for home. Rarity follows the pair, while Zecora heads in a different direction. Dissolve to an extreme close-up of a pincushion strapped to the white unicorn’s foreleg, a length of measuring tape hanging into view behind it. On the start of the next line zoom out slowly to put Rarity in her upper-story workroom/living space within the Carousel Boutique. She has her reading glasses on and is levitating a pin toward a hanging length of red cloth marked by orange flame accents—an outfit based on the feather she gathered from Pee-Wee in the prologue. The presence of a dotted line drawn in on the material marks this as a work in progress.*)

**Rarity:** I can’t believe you thought any of us would send you away because of some silly molt effect.

(*A light chuckle accompanies the end of this sentence, after which she slides the pin through the cloth and sighs contentedly.*)

**Rarity:** (*floating scissors across*) Even if the symptoms were slightly unsettling, and let’s face it, the odor wasn’t pleasant— (*Laugh; a ribbon is brought in and snipped.*) —nopony would stop caring for you just because you were getting older.

(*Her field gathers in a fold and pins it.*)

**Rarity:** Everypony goes through changes. Sometimes change can be wonderful, like…

(*Longer shot of the room. Spike is wearing the half-finished, sleeveless dress and hovering at her eye level.*)

**Rarity:** …being able to model for any length of dress! (*Giggle.*) Uh, a bit higher, darling, please?

(*He accommodates the request, shifting enough to get the hem clear of the carpet, and she applies another pin.*)

**Spike:** I’m glad to help, Rarity, but don’t you think there’s wonderful things about flying that don’t involve dresses?

**Rarity:** Of course, darling. Flying will also be beneficial for you to help me with gowns, frocks, robes, shifts, skirts, minis, maxis…

(*Cut to a close-up of the little guy as she reels off her list. He sighs softly, realizing that the molt may have given him more than he bargained for, but works his way around to an indulgent little smile, serene in the knowledge that Rarity will always be Rarity no matter what. Fade to black.*)