**SWEET AND SMOKY**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the sun shining in a cheery daytime sky. A bird loops downward, the camera following its motion and stopping on a long shot of the School of Friendship. The sound of knocking is heard; cut to a set of closed doors inside, which are pushed open from beyond to expose Smolder standing in a corridor.*)

**Smolder:** Uh, Headmare Twilight?

(*A longer shot puts her at the entrance to the teachers’ lounge. Twilight Sparkle sits at a table, signing her way through a stack of paperwork with help from her telekinesis, while Fluttershy and Spike are relaxing on one of the couches. The pegasus has helped herself to a cup of tea from a handy table.*)

**Smolder:** Sorry to bug you in the teachers’ lounge. (*She flies in and lands at the table.*) Is it okay if I miss class?

**Twilight:** Mmm-hmm. You can make it up tomorrow.

**Smolder:** Actually, I’ll be gone for a week. (*Twilight lets page and quill drop, eyes popping in shock.*)

**Twilight:** A week?! In the middle of the semester?

**Fluttershy:** Oh! Is everything all right, Smolder?

**Smolder:** (*a bit reluctantly*) Not exactly. (*Sigh.*) My brother’s been having a hard time since I left for school. I want to go home and check on him. He’s a really sweet guy, and the other dragons can be kinda rough. (*Spike hovers up to her level.*)

**Spike:** Did you say “sweet guy” and “dragon” in the same sentence?

**Smolder:** (*smiling, elbowing him in the gut, poking his nose*) Yeah. He’s sorta like you, Spike.

**Spike:** (*bashfully*) Awww…

(*Twilight climbs off her chair and crosses to the two dragons.*)

**Twilight:** I’m sorry to hear about your brother, Smolder, but the Dragon Lands are really far for you to go by yourself. And I’m not sure about you missing so much class.

**Spike:** (*brightening*) Hey! What if she got a school credit for it? Kinda like a, a…a kindness field trip! (*arm around Smolder’s shoulders*) I’ll go with her! (*She returns the gesture.*)

**Smolder:** Thanks! (*Fluttershy has put her cup aside.*) The Dragon Lord is way too busy for personal problems when it’s baby dragon hatching season.

(*Fluttershy moves almost faster than thought to hunch eagerly toward her over the nearest armrest.*)

**Fluttershy:** Baby dragon hatching season? (*Gasp.*) All those cute little snouts poking out of those adorable little shells? Teeny tiny twitchy tails? Can I go too? (*Big, shiny-eyed, pleading grin.*)

**Twilight:** Well, you *are* the perfect pony to lead a kindness field trip.

(*The grin copies itself across the scaly violet and orange faces, and after a long bit of deliberation, Twilight relents with a smiling sigh.*)

**Twilight:** Fine. (*turning to table*) But I’m gonna expect a full report when you get back. (*The enthusiasm level drops noticeably.*)

**Smolder:** How many pages?

**Twilight:** (*smirking*) I was talking to Fluttershy. Hatching season sounds fascinating!

(*Cut to other three on the end of this, their spirits instantly lifting. Giggles pass from one to another as the view fades to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a slow pan from the sunlit grasslands of Equestria to the rocky, overcast territory of the Dragon Lands.*)

**Spike:** (*voice over*) Okay. I made a list of what cheers me up when I’m down, so if your brother’s like me, he’s gonna love it!

(*Close-up of him walking alongside Smolder with backpack slung up and list in hand. The older dragon is framed from the neck down. They are still on Equestrian turf.*)

**Spike:** Oh, what should we do first? The smile song, the sharing circle, or friendship bracelet weaving? (*Tilt up to Smolder’s face.*)

**Smolder:** I’m not sure those are the kind of things my brother’s gonna be into. (*Longer shot; Fluttershy is a pace or two back.*)

**Fluttershy:** Well, what *would* make your brother happy? (*All stop.*)

**Smolder:** Just having Spike and me accept him for who he is will make a huge difference. (*Close-up.*) Dragons who appreciate his more sensitive side.

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) I got it! (*Zoom out to frame all three; he has stowed the list.*) Show tunes!

**Smolder:** (*walking on*) Yeah, no, but good try.

(*Fluttershy moves out after her, leaving Spike at a bit of a loss. Wipe to the group now within the Dragon Lands and following a winding path toward a lava flow that cascades down from a craggy rock formation to pool at the base. Wisps of steam rise from the ground, and Fluttershy sniffs cautiously at the air.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh! (*Pinch nostrils shut.*) Um, that’s an interesting smell. (*Smolder takes a lungful of the fumes and smiles.*)

**Smolder:** Ahhhhh, the stink of sulfur… (*Close-up of one foot grinding into the hardpan; she continues o.s.*) …sharp rocks under my claws… (*Cut to her and Spike; she sighs.*) …it’s good to be home.

**Spike:** I can’t wait to meet your brother, Smolder. (*Fluttershy lets go of her nose.*) We’re gonna be best buddies. I just know it!

**Smolder:** He usually hangs out near here. I’ll go try and find him.

(*Once she has lifted off, Spike flaps up to a boulder and sits so that he is roughly at Fluttershy’s eye level, then removes his pack and sets it down. On the next line, he fishes around and brings out a pink cloth decorated with a large central heart ringed by smaller ones; the knitting needles protruding from this give it away as a homemade project.*)

**Fluttershy:** Spike, do you mind if I take a peek at the cute little baby eggs?

**Spike:** No problem. I’ll stay here and finish this comfort blanket. (*nuzzling it*) It’ll be like a hug every time Smolder’s brother wraps it around himself.

**Fluttershy:** Aww, I’m sure he’ll love it, Spike.

(*She heads out as he puts his needles into gear. Wipe to a narrow, unforgiving trail that branches and winds its way downhill through a stretch of jagged formations. Fluttershy flies cautiously down along it to ground level, then switches to leg-power and stops short with a long gasp after a few yards.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*eyes shining*) Oh…my…goodness!

(*She has arrived at a long, narrow plain whose surface is marked by dozens of shallow holes, each of which contains several eggs in a variety of shell colors and patterns. Flying over the panorama, she comes to rest at the edge of one depression and hunkers down to smile over a particular egg.*)

**Fluttershy:** Good morning, little one. I’ve come a long way to meet you. Did you know there’s a whole wide world out here waiting to say hello? (*caressing it, shifting to baby talk*) Did you? Oh, did you, boo?

(*The string of nonverbal cooing that follows is cut off abruptly by the next voice after a few seconds.*)

**Dragon Lord Ember:** (*from o.s.*) It can’t answer you.

(*Fluttershy glances up; cut to frame both, Ember standing next to her.*)

**Ember:** It’s an egg. (*Fluttershy straightens up and bows.*)

**Fluttershy:** Uh, Dragon Lord Ember! How nice to see you!

**Ember:** Nice to see you too…uh…which one are you again? The party one? Apple Dash. Or was that the country one?

**Fluttershy:** Fluttershy. (*sitting, cuddling an egg*) The one who loves creatures. (*hesitantly*) Are…all these…yours?

**Ember:** (*blushing*) *What?!* No! None of them are! (*a bit wearily*) Watching over eggs is just part of the glamorous life of a Dragon Lord.

**Fluttershy:** (*setting egg down*) I think it sounds wonderful.

**Ember:** Yeah? Then maybe you can help.

**Fluttershy:** (*gasping excitedly*) I’d love to! Just tell me what to do. (*Grin.*)

**Ember:** (*sighing, pacing away*) I don’t know. (*Fluttershy stands.*) It’s my first time being in charge. Dad wasn’t big on sharing Dragon Lord details. It’s kind of a “burn or be burned” job.

**Fluttershy:** Well, I’m sure you’re doing great.

**Ember:** Not really. (*kneeling, tapping an egg*) The eggs should’ve hatched by now, but none of them have even cracked. (*Fluttershy peers at it.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh, dear. Maybe they’re…lonely? (*to them; both straighten up*) Don’t you worry. Auntie Fluttershy’s here, and the Dragon Lord and I are going to do everything we can to welcome you into this world.

**Ember:** Really? How?

**Fluttershy:** Um… (*Her smile fades as her eyes constrict in mild panic.*) …I have no idea.

(*Her uncertain look fails to inspire confidence in the reptilian ruler. Wipe to Spike, now sitting at the base of an outcropping near the lava pool and knitting happily away. One or two more stitches, and he stands up, extricates the needles, and holds up the completed blanket he fished out of his backpack earlier. The bag itself has been stashed elsewhere.*)

**Spike:** Now *that’s* a thing of beauty.

(*He has only a fraction of a second to admire it before a cluster of winged shadows falls over him; looking up, he finds no fewer than four dragons silhouetted against the sun. One drops toward the camera, filling the screen with a patch of underbelly before the view shifts back to Spike.*)

**Spike:** Whoa!

(*He crouches down, raising the blanket as a meager shield, as the new arrivals land—Garble and three other males, one each of brown, orange, and purple.*)

**Garble:** Well, if it isn’t our little pony friend Spike.

(*The little guy lowers his craft project and draws himself up to full height.*)

**Spike:** That’s “Equestria’s official friendship ambassador to the Dragon Lands” to you. And I’m not little. I had the molt. (*spreading wings*) See?

(*The show-off move brings a round of derisive laughter from the quartet of ne’er-do-wells.*)

**Garble:** Oh-ho-ho, runt’s got wings! I’m *so* impressed. (*puzzled, pointing*) What’s that supposed to be?

(*Realizing that the red finger is targeting the blanket, Spike hastily yanks it behind his back.*)

**Spike:** Nothing!

(*His big dopey grin does nothing whatever to slow down Garble’s grab at it. The first try hits only air, but the second gets a fistful of fabric and drags Spike off his feet with a yell as he dangles from the opposite end. A bit of shaking dislodges him.*)

**Garble:** Looks like a baby blanket to me! (*Spike stands up, all indignation.*)

**Spike:** It’s not a baby blanket! It’s a… (*deflating*) …comfort blanket.

(*After a long, incredulous pause, the delinquents let go with an even heartier gale of laughter.*)

**Garble:** (*wrapping it around his head like a kerchief*) Aw, did your pony pals make it for you with friendship and gumdrops?

**Spike:** No, *I* made it. And by the way, knitting is a lot harder than it looks.

**Garble:** (*running to a clear spot*) Check out the baby blanket, guys! (*whirling it overhead*) It’s a lot harder than it looks!

(*He ends by flicking it like a rubber band; Purple snags it out of the air and tosses it back, and it is kept well out of Spike’s reach during the following despite his flying lunges.*)

**Garble:** (*laughing*) Got your bwankie! (*He passes off to Orange.*)

**Orange:** Aw, diddle baby crying! (*Throw to Brown.*)

**Garble:** Oop! Missed! (*Orange shoves Spike down.*)

**Orange:** (*catching*) Bet he broke a claw and everything! (*The mockery continues as he throws it in a new direction.*)

**Spike:** Give it back! (*It sails back to Garble.*) That’s for my friend!

(*The keep-away players find this so amusing that they emit jets of flame while laughing themselves stupid—yellow at first, then bright pink, and finally pale blue—and Spike hits the deck when they swing his way.*)

**Spike:** Cut it out! You know laugh-fire’s dangerous! It can…

(*The blanket is held up and torched to leave only a charred remnant, and he stands up as the pyrotechnic mirth winds down.*)

**Spike:** …do that.

**Smolder:** (*from o.s.*) Garble! (*Surprised, Garble, drops the scrap and smiles.*)

**Garble:** Smolder? (*running past Spike, elbowing him aside*) What are you doing here?

(*The two dragons arrive face to face and go into a greeting routine. Fist bump; stand back to back and bang elbows together; give/receive double high fives; end by smacking the ends of their tails into one another.*)

**Brown:** (*to Smolder*) How’s it scaling, brah?

(*Spike wings across to push Smolder aside for a quick private talk.*)

**Spike:** (*whispering*) We’d better get out of here before your brother shows up. (*holding up ruined blanket*) Garble isn’t very nice to sensitive dragons.

**Smolder:** (*as he lands*) But Garble *is* my brother.

**Spike:** (*flabbergasted*) *Your brother?!?*

(*Who chooses this moment to stand behind him with a most unpleasant grin.*)

**Garble:** (*jabbing a finger onto Spike’s forehead, spinning him 180 degrees*) Got a problem with that, pony boy?

**Spike:** (*small voice*) Oh, brother.

(*He breaks into a full-body shiver as the realization sinks all the way in. Fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a surly Garble, a befuddled Smolder, and a scared-out-of-his-wits Spike. The smallest dragon shudders audibly as the largest sneers down at him.*)

**Smolder:** (*to Garble, pushing Spike aside*) I’ve missed you, bro! (*bumping fists, thumping his chest*) We got a lot of fun to catch up on. There’s no lava diving at school. (*Cut to the other three dragons on the next line.*)

**Brown:** Good luck getting Garble to do anything.

**Orange:** Huh, yeah. He’s been so weird since you left—hiding and moping around.

**Garble:** (*needled, blowing yellow fire at him*) I have not!

**Brown, Orange, Purple:** Have so!

**Smolder:** Easy, guys. I learned at Twilight’s school, ganging up on each other isn’t half as cool as you think.

**Brown:** (*sarcastically*) Aww, pony school made you soft!

(*In close-up, he finds himself being yanked down for a one-on-one with the “soft” dragon, who is having exactly none of his sass.*)

**Smolder:** Want to try me and find out?

**Brown:** (*cowed, swallowing hard*) M-Maybe later. (*Cut to frame all six on the next line.*)

**Spike:** (*brightly*) So, uh, let’s get lava diving. What do you say?

**Orange:** Better stay here, shrimp. Lava might ruin your blankie-wankie.

**Garble:** (*thumping Spike’s shoulder*) Let the wimp tag along. Then we’ll have somedragon to gonk!

(*He delivers a smack to the side of the violet head on this last word and laughs harshly as its owner struggles to keep his balance.*)

**Smolder:** (*shifting to stand between them*) Hmph. Only gonna warn you once. Spike’s my friend. You mess with him, you mess with me. Besides, he came here to hang out with *you*, Garble.

(*The older sibling’s beady eyes stare aghast at her, then shift worriedly toward his three buddies, who get a rise out of this declaration and give voice to it along with pale blue “laugh-fire.”*)

**Orange:** Aww, how sweet. Hah!

**Brown:** Let’s go do dragon stuff. Garble can have fun with his new friend!

(*The soulful eyes he adds to the end of this spark him and the other two hangers-on into further laughs and blue flames as they lift off.*)

**Garble:** (*calling after them*) But I’m *not* having fun, a-and he’s not my friend! (*He snarls to himself; behind him, Spike has ditched the remains of the blanket now.*)

**Smolder:** Nah, just ignore him, Gar-Gar. (*He wheels on her, suddenly even more ill at ease.*)

**Garble:** Smolder, not in public! (*She smiles down at Spike.*)

**Spike:** Oh, it’s okay to have a nickname. Sometimes I’m called Spikey-wikey.

**Garble:** Seriously? You’re admitting this? (*He claps a hand disgustedly to his face and addresses Smolder.*) I am *not* hanging out with him.

**Smolder:** Give him a chance, Garble. You guys have a lot in common.

**Garble:** (*groaning loudly*) Fine! Race you to the lava pit.

(*A few pumps of his wings carry him away; Smolder makes to follow, but is stopped by Spike.*)

**Spike:** Wait! I thought you said your brother was sweet.

**Smolder:** All the tough-guy stuff is just an act. He’s a big marshmallow.

**Spike:** Yeah, not seeing it.

**Smolder:** Well…maybe a burned marshmallow. Smoky on the outside, but squishy inside. He just needs friends who can appreciate that part, like you. (*concerned*) You’re not changing your mind about helping me cheer him up, are you?

**Spike:** Me? ’Course not!

(*He chuckles and holds a slightly strained grin for the time it takes her to go airborne and head after Garble, then lets it drop with a heavy sigh at the prospect of having to deal with this lout. Wipe to the three standing at the edge of a pit filled with sluggishly bubbling lava, at the bottom of a wide crater.*)

**Smolder:** Okay! Lava jumping! Just like old times, huh, Gar-Gar?

**Garble:** (*sourly*) Yeah, just like old times— (*glaring at Spike*) —except for one little annoying thing.

**Smolder:** (*racing to edge*) Scales awaaayyy!

(*A headfirst dive plunges her into the molten rock; head and shoulders quickly break the surface so she can spit out a mouthful.*)

**Smolder:** Come on in! The lava’s fine!

(*She does a lazy backstroke to underscore the point, but Garble only voices an irritated sigh.*)

**Spike:** You know, whenever I’m feeling a little down, it—it always helps if I do something with a friend. How about we jump together?

(*Cut to the scarlet grump on the end of this, staring in mild disbelief at the violet hand being extended his way. The toothy mouth curves into a smile—and then, instead of grasping the clawed digits, he swings his tail around to bat Spike into the lava. There follows a most undignified belly flop in close-up, then a slow descent below the surface; zoom out to frame Smolder on the next line.*)

**Smolder:** (*sympathetically*) Ooh! (*Wince.*) Spike? You okay?

(*He comes up for air with a gasp, the tip of his nose red and inflamed, and speaks his next two lines in a congested tone of voice.*)

**Spike:** Uh, I know there must be something worse than lava up your nose.

(*A violent sneeze expels a runnel of the hot stuff, but leaves a bit dribbling from his nostrils and causes his eyes to tear up. He wipes himself clean, the angry tinge gone from his nose.*)

**Spike:** I just don’t know what it is.

**Garble:** (*from o.s.*) CANNONBALL!!

(*Cut to him on the end of this, now balanced at the lip of the crater high above the pit. He jumps, curling his body into a ball, and Spike has just enough time for one scream before the splash from Garble’s impact sends a gobbet of lava down his throat and submerges him all over again. Garble pops up, arms raised in triumph.*)

**Garble:** Woo-hoo!

(*He and Smolder look around, neither finding any immediate trace of Spike.*)

**Garble:** (*mockingly*) Oops!

(*As he backstrokes insouciantly across the pit, little sister dives in and fishes up the baby dragon, who coughs up a goodly amount of the contents as his eyes go bloodshot and swollen.*)

**Spike:** (*hoarsely*) Swallowing lava— (*Gulp.*) —swallowing lava is definitely worse.

**Garble:** My bad.

(*He continues to swim as Smolder rolls her eyes and Spike offers a faint smile, his eyes back to normal. Dissolve to a slow tilt down toward the plain that serves as the dragon eggs’ hatchery; Fluttershy sits at the edge of one hole, holding a book.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*reading, tenderly*) “And then they all lived happily ever after.” (*Set it aside; pet an egg.*) Time to come out, little ones.

(*As before, she shifts into baby-talk cooing and lets a hoof play across the ovoid surface. When this fails to produce any change in its condition, she shifts back to recognizable words.*)

**Fluttershy:** Maybe you’d like a song?

(*She pulls in a deep breath in preparation, but bites it off at the sound of Ember’s voice; zoom out on the start of the next line to put her in the fore.*)

**Ember:** I think you might be encouraging them to stay in. Dragons aren’t much for touchy-feely stuff. (*Fluttershy stands up to face her.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh! I’m sorry.

(*A rattling from o.s.; she gasps and turns to find the eggs rattling where they lie.*)

**Fluttershy:** Goodness! Why are the eggs shaking? (*Gasp and smile; hunker down to them.*) Are they finally hatching?

**Ember:** I wish. (*Fluttershy gets up.*) They’ve been doing that for days. I’m sure it means something, but it’s probably not good.

(*Dragon and pony brains begin to mull over this new development before the view wipes to a close-up of a disdainful Garble, now out of the lava pit. Spike holds a cupcake into view toward him and speaks in his normal voice.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) Try this! Red velvet!

(*Longer shot: brother and sister are sitting at a makeshift table, covered with a red/white-checked cloth and at the edge of the pit. It has been set for teatime, with cups/bowls full of gemstones instead of any conventional refreshments, and Spike hovers to hold his treat for Garble’s inspection. Smolder has appropriated a cupcake for herself, which she happily tosses into her mouth and swallows.*)

**Spike:** Guaranteed to brighten anycreature’s spirits.

(*Except this particular one, apparently; he smacks the treat from Spike’s hand so that is splatters on the stones, then grinds the remains underfoot.*)

**Garble:** (*sitting again*) Feeling better already!

(*The thwarted baker can only stare at the wreckage, a few traces of tears gathering in the green eyes. Wipe to the three in flight.*)

**Spike:** (*brightly, to Garble*) I don’t know about you, but a change of scenery always turns my frown upside down.

(*He flips onto his back for these last two words, but is then roughly shoved away with a yell to plow into a nearby cloud. By the time he digs himself out and dusts off the puffs of vapor clinging to him—looking somewhat like a diaper and a baby’s pacifier—Garble is sticking his tongue out and holding one hand up with thumb and forefinger extended as a capital L. Spike seethes to himself at having been silently called a loser as Garble and Smolder continue on their way.*)

**Spike:** (*quietly, to himself, flying after them*) I will be the bigger dragon. I will be the bigger dragon. I will be the bigger dragon. I will be the bigger dragon.

(*Wipe to the three in a different stretch of the Dragon Lands, this one studded with protruding red crystal growths. Spike sits between Smolder, also seated, and Garble, who lounges testily against a boulder.*)

**Spike:** Sometimes, just hearing what someone appreciates about you can make you feel better about yourself.

**Smolder:** I’ll go first. Spike, I think it’s really nice that you’re trying to cheer up Gar-Gar. (*Who groans.*)

**Spike:** Thank you, Smolder. My turn. (*to Garble*) I like how you always let everycreature know how you’re feeling, Gar-Gar.

**Garble:** (*incensed, breathing yellow fire*) Only Smolder gets to call me that!

(*The outburst leaves a coating of soot on the violet face.*)

**Spike:** (*hoarsely, wheezing*) Thank you for speaking your truth.

(*He keels over with a moan. Wipe to a long shot of a lava flow oozing slowly down a tumbled mountainside and pooling in a natural basin along the way. Garble’s three no-account friends are up here, Brown at a higher elevation than Orange and Purple.*)

**Brown:** (*flying down to them*) More fresh lava, coming up!

(*All three put their effort into shifting one of the great stones that make up the side of the basin. Once it gives way, the glowing-hot liquid gushes out through the new opening and the level in the pool starts to drop rapidly. Cut to the base of the slope; it oozes down to join a stream as Garble, Smolder, and Spike fly into view, the last with his face clean again.*)

**Spike:** Okay, new activity. (*All land.*) Who wants to make vision boards?

**Orange:** (*from o.s.*) Hey, Garble! Smolder!

(*Cut to him at the top of the newly opened spillway, balanced on a flat slab of rock as if it were a surfboard.*)

**Orange:** SURF’S UUUUUP!!

(*Down he comes, followed by Brown and Purple on their own boards.*)

**Garble:** (*grabbing a fourth, running to stream edge*) Let *me* show you how it’s done!

(*Spike finds himself knocked to a sitting position by the red dragon’s passage. Once Garble has hurled himself in to ride the current, Smolder wraps her claws around a formation and prepares to uproot it.*)

**Smolder:** (*to Spike*) You coming?

**Spike:** I’ll…catch up with you.

(*The young orange dragon nods, wrenches it loose, and is off to the races after flipping him a salute, leaving him to sigh dejectedly to himself. Pan slightly away from the stream to frame Fluttershy as she descends to the stony bank.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh, Spike! (*Land.*) There you are!

**Spike:** Hey, Fluttershy.

**Fluttershy:** For a land that’s all rocks, this place is surprisingly easy to get lost in.

**Spike:** How are the baby dragons doing?

**Fluttershy:** (*worried*) The eggs won’t hatch! They just keep shaking! I’m starting to think the dragons are too scared to come out. I was hoping you could help, if you’re not too busy cheering up Smolder’s brother.

**Spike:** (*sullenly*) Not a chance. Smolder’s brother is Garble. (*Fluttershy gasps in shock.*) The only thing that cheers him up is to make me miserable.

**Garble:** (*from o.s.*) Hey, Spike!

(*Looking up, Spike finds him and the other three troublemakers hovering over the lava stream without their boards.*)

**Garble:** Want to play lava ball?

(*He demonstrates the sport by scooping up a double handful of the stuff and pitching it directly at Spike…*)

**Spike:** Huh?

(*…who sidesteps just in time to avoid catching it with his face. One vexed yellow pegasus flaps over to address the foursome.*)

**Fluttershy:** Excuse me, but that’s not a very nice game!

(*The whole crew proceeds to get in on the act, serving sliders and change-ups and fastballs as Garble laughs nastily. Cut to Fluttershy and Spike, the latter dodging one after another as they splat on the stream bank.*)

**Brown:** (*from o.s.*) Ah, nearly got you!

**Fluttershy:** *ENOUGH!!*

(*All four, instantly stunned into silence, let their balls drop back into the stream as the last echoes of her shout fade away. She clears her throat demurely before continuing at her normal speaking volume, but with an assertive undertone.*)

**Fluttershy:** I mean, leave my friend alone, please. Spike came all this way to cheer up Garble, which was a very kind thing to do.

**Orange:** (*to Garble, tauntingly*) Aww, do you need cheering up?

**Brown:** (*baby talk*) What’s wrong, Garble? Did somedwagon hurt your wittle feelings?

**Garble:** (*angrily, shoving him back*) No! I-I don’t know what she’s talking about! Spike’s the one that’s gonna cry!

**Smolder:** (*from o.s.*) Hey!

(*Cut to her, still balanced on her board and farther down the slope.*)

**Smolder:** Are we lava surfing or what?

**Garble:** (*hastily, leaning into view*) O-Oh, yeah, yeah! Heh. (*to his friends*) Let’s go hang with a *real* dragon, not a pony wannabe!

(*They fly down to the teen, leaving a preoccupied Fluttershy and Spike—the latter now hovering.*)

**Spike:** See? It’s no use. (*He touches down with a quiet sigh.*) Why don’t I see what I can do about the eggs, and you cheer up Garble? (*walking away*) At least he listens to you.

**Fluttershy:** (*determinedly, to herself*) Just you wait, Garble. You’re dealing with Fluttershy now, and she’s packing a whole lifetime of kindness.

(*Zoom in to a close-up of her fierce countenance, then wipe to an overhead shot of a couple of pits in the hatchery plain. The eggs vibrate where they lie, in time with a weary sigh from Ember, and the camera swivels up to frame her bent down over a different clutch.*)

**Ember:** (*poking one egg*) Coochie-coochie-coo… (*Another sigh.*) …coochie-coochie-coo… (*losing/regaining patience*) …coochie! Coochie-coo…coochie-coochie… (*temper fraying again*) …I said, coochie—

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) Uh, what are you doing?

(*She stands up with a sharp gasp and smiles as he flies down to her, spirits much improved.*)

**Ember:** Spike!

**Spike:** Hi, Ember! (*He hugs as much of her as he can reach.*)

**Ember:** (*patting his head*) Shouldn’t you be doing whatever it is you do at Twilight’s school? (*He backs off, good cheer instantly evaporating.*)

**Spike:** I wish. It’s a long story. (*Now he gets an eyeful of the clutches.*) Wow! These eggs really do look scared.

(*Every single one of them is quaking, up and down the plain as far as the eye can see. Now he bends down and places a palm and cheek against the floor of one depression.*)

**Spike:** Wait. Aren’t the hatching grounds supposed to be hot?

**Ember:** (*disdainfully*) Uh, of course. (*Spike stands up.*) There’s a lake of molten lava under them. That’s why the eggs are laid here. The heat makes them hatch.

**Spike:** Then something’s wrong. I don’t think the eggs are shaking ’cause they’re afraid. (*He kneels and touches two of them.*) They’re cold.

(*The Dragon Lord presses a palm of her own against the bottom of the hole he has chosen, red eyes popping wide as her brain sorts out the sensory data.*)

**Ember:** You’re right! But what happened to the lava? (*Spike stands up and smiles after a moment’s pondering.*)

**Spike:** I might have an idea.

(*Wipe to Fluttershy in flight over a stretch of stony landscape.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*voice raised*) Garble! (*She perches on a mesa.*) Smolder! (*Hover off it.*) Is anydragon there?

(*After a few dozen yards’ flight in a random direction, she touches down but almost immediately stops short at the sound of a rhythm being played on a pair of bongos.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*normal volume, thunderstruck*) Oh, my! Are those…bongo drums?

(*The situation goes a little farther out in left field when Garble’s voice layers itself over the percussion—quiet and intense, a far cry from his usual surly tone. She trots off in search of the source, the camera panning to follow.*)

**Garble:** (*from o.s.*) Fire, dragon.

Wig-and-waggin’.

Feelin’ like

I be saggin’.

(*The motion brings him and Smolder into view on the end of the last line, and she stops short with a gasp. The elder dragon has donned a striped sweater, short scarf, and beret in the style of a 1950s-era beatnik, and is the one playing the bongos—fashioned from stone—while the younger snaps her clawed fingers to the beat, utterly lost in the groove.*)

**Smolder:** (*laughing*) Oh, yeah. I dig.

**Garble:** Raging lava,

Balaclava.

(*Only after Fluttershy has come within a few feet do they notice her presence; Smolder stops snapping.*)

**Smolder:** Huh?

(*Garble voices a half-choked cry of surprise and throws off his poet getup, bringing a puzzled look to the yellow mare’s face. Wipe to Brown flying up to a slab of rock that forms part of a natural wall.*)

**Brown:** (*pulling it away; lava pours out*) Fresh lava, coming up!

(*It courses down into a pool where Orange and Purple are luxuriating, and he zips in to join them as the level falls in the one he has just tapped. Ember and Spike fly into view in the fore to survey the goings-on.*)

**Spike:** See? (*They land at the edge of the upper pool.*) I wondered where that lava was coming from. They must be draining it from the underground lake!

(*The Dragon Lord gives voice to an incensed snarl and dives through the air, planting both feet at the edge of the pool in which the three miscreants are cooling it.*)

**Ember:** Put that rock back! Immediately!

**Brown:** (*instantly unnerved*) Uh, yes, Dragon Lord Ember!

**Ember:** How long have you been removing these boulders?

**Brown:** Uh…a while?

**Orange:** I-It made our lava pool so…nice and warm-like.

(*He finds himself nose to nose with a sovereign whose rising growl tells just how badly she wants to turn him into cold cuts.*)

**Ember:** It’s supposed to be heating the eggs! Now they’ll never hatch!

(*Chastened, her three subjects sink into the lava until every last bit of them is lost to sight. Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a longer shot of the mountainside lava pools. Ember and Spike keep watch as the three hooligans scramble and strain to plug the holes they opened and scoop the lava back into its original place.*)

**Brown:** Sorry, Dragon Lord Ember!

**Orange:** We’ll put the lava back!

**Brown:** Here you go, lava! Oh, come on! So difficult! (*wiping a glob off his face*) And liquid-y!

**Spike:** I don’t think it works that way. (*to Ember*) The hatching grounds can’t be the only warm place in the Dragon Lands. There’s gotta be somewhere else we can take the eggs.

**Ember:** You know how fragile those things are? No way we’ll be able to move them all safely. (*snarling, to Brown/Orange/Purple*) You! Go and bring all the dragons to the hatching grounds. We’ll have to make the heat ourselves.

(*Resignedly, all three take to the air. Wipe to Fluttershy, Garble, and Smolder in the spot where the mare stumbled across the tough guy’s love of poetry.*)

**Garble:** (*setting bongos down, leaning into her face*) What do you think you’re doing, sneaking around here, pony?

**Fluttershy:** (*smiling*) Sneaking? It looks to me like the only one sneaking around is you, Garble. Why didn’t you tell me you were a poet?

(*A moment’s mental lockup translates to a brief pause before he can manage an answer.*)

**Garble:** I’m not!

(*Fluttershy notices the discarded drums, gasps softly, and scoops them up. A couple of experimental taps prompt bewildered looks between Garble and Smolder and a shrug of the orange shoulders for good measure. In short order, though, Fluttershy has worked up a rhythm and some words to put over it in Garble’s style of performing.*)

**Fluttershy:** Words, rhythm, sometimes rhyme.

Weird punctu…ation.

(*normal cadence*) Sure sounds like poetry to me. (*Stop playing.*)

**Smolder:** (*patting Garble’s shoulder*) It’s okay, Gar-Gar. Fluttershy won’t think you’re soft for being a poet, and neither would anydragon who was your real friend.

(*A long pause as Garble chews this over, followed by a shrug and deep sigh.*)

**Garble:** ’Kay, fine. But I’m not a flowery namby-pamby poet! (*Flluttershy has put the bongos aside.*) I’m a beat poet. Dig?

**Fluttershy:** I totally feel you.

**Garble:** A-And you better not tell my friends about it!

**Fluttershy:** But why? (*smiling*) If I was a poet, I’d want to share my creations with everypony.

**Smolder:** I’m the only one Garble will perform for. He hasn’t written any poetry since I left. (*patting Garble’s shoulder*) That’s why he’s been so sad.

**Garble:** I need to create. But if the other dragons ever found out I like this junk, they’d make fun of me forever.

**Fluttershy:** Is that why you pick on Spike? To make your friends think you’re tough?

**Smolder:** Wait. (*accusingly, to Garble*) *You’ve* been picking on Spike?

**Garble:** Uh…only when you’re not looking. But if I didn’t pick on Spike, they’d just pick on me! And he *is* kind of a weakling.

(*Fluttershy’s sudden flying lunge into his face, and her two-hooved grab at his jaw to turn his head so that he has no choice but to look her dead on, tell him that these were the absolute worst words he could have chosen.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*jabbing his chest*) Hmph! I’ll have you know Spike is stronger than you are any day!

**Garble:** (*pushing her back*) Yeah, right. That little cupcake-making, blanket-cuddling pony-dragon? Ha! Gimme a break.

(*Her first reaction is to gasp in shock; her second is to re-compose herself and shift to a whole new level of rancor.*)

**Fluttershy:** What?! First of all, there’s nothing wrong with being a pony. Second, Spike isn’t afraid to be who he is, no matter what you—or anycreature thinks! That’s *real* strength, not like some dragons I know.

**Smolder:** (*to Garble*) For a pony without a horn, she’s sure got a point.

(*Big brother slumps on his feet, seeing no way around this astute observation. On the start of the next line, zoom out quickly to frame Spike hovering nearby.*)

**Spike:** I’ve been looking all over for you guys! We need your help! Hurry!

(*He darts away, the other three lifting off and following. Wipe to a close-up of a dragon cutting loose with a jet of yellow fire, then cut to two others doing likewise; the next shot is of Brown, Orange, and Purple letting their flames wash over a clutch of eggs. A long shot of the hatchery frames a dozen or so dragons engaged in this task as Ember keeps an eye on them from a ledge. Fluttershy and company land beside her.*)

**Ember:** I’ve ordered everydragon to warm up the eggs, but they still won’t hatch. I don’t know what else we can try.

**Spike:** (*hovering*) We *can’t* give up! (*He drops to ground level.*) There’s gotta be something we can do!

(*On the start of the next line, zoom out to show Brown gesturing in his direction.*)

**Brown:** How about we wrap the eggs in a bunch of baby bwankets? (*He laughs, unloading a fresh yellow gout.*)

**Orange:** (*laughing*) Yeah! The wimp can knit ’em up real quick-like!

(*His malicious chuckle is marked by a little burst, then all three yukking it up and doing a little flame-throwing, high and low. Spike has to pop into a hover to avoid being crisped.*)

**Spike:** Hey, watch it! That laugh-fire could burn somepony!

(*The streams shift from yellow to pink as he says this. Garble crosses to the three tormentors and their victim and begins to think, seeing the vivid licks play through the air just above the eggs. A brainstorm occurs as the jets retract a bit and Spike lands nearby.*)

**Garble:** (*smiling, patting Spike’s head*) Burn! Good idea, Spikey-wikey!

(*Before the baby dragon can work a response through his muddled synapses, Garble has made a lightning-fast round trip to suit up in his beatnik outfit and grab his bongos. Laughs and burns stop dead at the sight, and he takes advantage of the distraction to tap away and spit some verse in his preferred delivery style.*)

**Garble:** Eggs, come!

Burst into that light!

Break through shells that bind!

(*Spike snaps in hep-cat fashion.*)

Break free! Explore!

Stuck between rock and…haaaaaard place.

(*Pause. Pan quickly from him and Spike to the three-dragon audience, who stare uncomprehendingly for a moment before laughing themselves stupid and letting go with blasts of pink fire. The effect begins to spread up and down the length of the hatchery; Garble is briefly taken aback at the reaction, but soon smiles and resumes his performance without Spike’s snapping.*)

**Garble:** Freedom! Come! Don’t be shy.

Look those others in the eye.

(*Pause. The chortles kick up anew, the accompanying laugh-fire shifting from pink to blue, and he pushes on.*)

**Garble:** Stake your claim! Don’t stop, just do!

Be the one and only you.

(*Here come Fluttershy on wing, and Ember and Smolder on foot, as he keeps at it on the bongos; one eggshell begins to fracture.*)

**Fluttershy:** Spike, look! (*Cracks spread across one after another.*)

**Spike:** What? Huh? (*laughing half-crazily*) Their laugh-fire is so hot, it’s hatching the eggs!

**Garble:** Come to light! Proud to be!

Open up! Bam! Be! Free.

(*He plays on, any shred of self-conscious hesitation gone, and the laugh-fire born of the dragons’ mirth continues to do its job. Shells part to reveal the babies inside—as varied in color and body type as the adults, and all looking very, very happy to be free at last. The dragons get themselves under control and cut their flames, and Garble stops drumming.*)

**Smolder:** You did it, Gar-Gar! You performed in front of other dragons! (*Cut to Orange and Purple.*)

**Orange:** Heh. And it was super-lame! What kind of weakling writes poetry?

(*A broad shadow falls over both of them, bringing a swift end to the japery. The source proves to be Ember, hovering above them and now holding the Bloodstone Scepter that is her badge of office.*)

**Ember:** The hero of the Dragon Lands! (*They drop into a hasty bow.*) That’s who! (*Tilt down to ground level.*)

**Smolder:** Yeah! Garble saved our eggs because he was strong enough to be who he is, whether *you* liked it or not! I grew up thinking it was okay to make fun of differences, but my friends have taught me to celebrate them.

(*Understanding nods and grunts ripple through the crowd as Ember rises higher above the hatchery.*)

**Ember:** And from now on in my kingdom, that’s exactly what we will do. (*to Garble, smiling*) Now if you don’t mind, can you teach me how to write poetry like that? It’s pretty cool.

**Garble:** Uh…yeah, sure! Uh, no problem!

**Orange:** (*crossing to him*) Yeah, me too!

**Brown:** (*ditto*) I want to learn! (*Purple joins them.*)

**Spike:** Take a number, guys.

(*Fluttershy rises above the hatchery floor, blue-green eyes gleaming and three newborns gathered into her forelegs.*)

**Fluttershy:** I’ll take them all!

(*She gives them a laughing, cooing nuzzle as the view fades to black.*)