**THE BEGINNING OF THE END—PART ONE**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of Twilight Sparkle’s galloping hooves, seen in time with her labored breathing. The camera tilts up to frame her racing along a stony path that snakes through a meadowland, Spike beating his wings furiously to keep up. It is daytime, and a cut to behind the pair brings their objective into view—Canterlot. Planting all four hooves on the rise she has just topped, she hurls herself into a desperate flight alongside her number-one assistant to close in on the grand city. In the far distance, a row of multicolored specks that can only be her friends has gathered at the far end of the open drawbridge. Cut to them, turning to fly/gallop through the archway and its open gates once Twilight and Spike have rocketed in over their heads.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh, good. We’re all here.

**Twilight:** So everypony got an urgent summons to the castle with no explanation?

**Pinkie Pie:** Yep! I just love a good mysterious summons.

(*She gathers part of her mane in front of her face to act as a false beard on the end of this line, then lets it go and sidles up to Rainbow Dash.*)

**Pinkie:** What’s it about? (*to Fluttershy*) Do you think it’s a surprise party? (*to all*) Hey! Why are we running?

**Twilight:** Because something could be terribly wrong! Somepony turned bad? Another evil creature back for revenge?

**Applejack:** Don’t you think you’re bein’ a little paranoid?

**Twilight:** Why else would the Princesses send scrolls in such a hurry?

**Rarity:** Good point. They’d know better than to make us worry.

**Pinkie:** Plus, I like it when you run so fast, the walls get all blurry!

(*The camera pivots and pans around her at a sickeningly fast velocity to produce that very effect, then returns to her—eyes replaced by vertiginous blue spirals.*)

**Pinkie:** Whee!

**Rainbow:** Race you!

(*She is gone in a blaze of multicolored light, leaving the pink mare to bounce rump over teakettle along the thoroughfare. In no time the seven are hurtling through a courtyard toward one of the entrances to Canterlot Castle; cut to a set of closed doors within as they burst through from the other side and hit the brakes, Spike having shifted to leg-power. Pinkie is the last to arrive, barreling in as an equine cannonball to knock the dragon off his feet, but a couple of flaps are all he needs to right himself.*)

**Princess Celestia:** (*from o.s., solemnly*) Girls…

(*Cut to just behind Twilight and Spike. The group has arrived in the throne room, in which Celestia and Princess Luna occupy their seats of power on the top level of the dais.*)

**Celestia:** …thank you so much for coming.

**Twilight:** What’s wrong? What can we do?

**Luna:** That’s just it. (*as both sisters smile*) Nothing’s wrong! Everything’s perfect! (*Cut to Twilight/Applejack/Pinkie.*)

**Applejack:** Did y’all call us down here just to tell us that? (*Pan to Rarity on the next line.*)

**Rarity:** With all due respect, Majesties, you might want to save your urgent summons for matters that are a bit more…well, urgent.

(*Celestia and Luna trade a gentle laugh.*)

**Luna:** Well, there is more to it. (*Long shot of the room; slow pan.*) Equestria is currently enjoying its longest period of harmony in recent years. (*Cut to Celestia.*)

**Celestia:** And it’s all thanks to you, Twilight… (*Close-up of a surprised Twilight; she continues o.s.*) …and your friends, of course. (*Zoom out to frame all seven.*)

**Spike:** (*smugly*) Who, us?

**Rarity:** Oh, pshaw. (*Demure giggle.*)

**Rainbow:** It’s about time you noticed.

**Twilight:** (*bowing*) Thank you!

**Luna:** Because of your efforts, there’s been less and less for us to do.

**Celestia:** So after much consideration, my sister and I have decided it is time for us… (*firmly*) …to retire!

(*Sounds of unmitigated disbelief from the gang, followed by a flash that heralds the arrival of Discord. Dress shirt with rolled-up sleeves, necktie, vest, fedora with press card in the band, notepad and pencil at the ready—a reporter itching for a scoop.*)

**Discord:** (*taking notes*) Breaking news! The Royal Princesses retiring! I have so many questions! (*He floats over to the pair.*) Who’ll take over? Who will run Equestria? Will it be someone tall, dark, and handsome— (*vanishing pad/pencil*) —or will it be the Lord of Chaos?

(*No fewer than four copies of his taloned forelimb wink into view and point directly at his grinning mug. Celestia just throws him an indulgent smile and points down off the dais; cut to ground level, one pair of eyes after another widening at the realization that the gesture is aimed at Twilight.*)

**Discord:** (*disdainfully*) Oh, fine. Go with the obvious choice.

(*The spare appendages have cleared the area now. Zoom in slowly on the newly upped Princess, who manages a half-choked cry, and fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a stretch of one of the throne room’s stained-glass windows, against which Twilight stands up into view in a full-on tizzy.*)

**Twilight:** You’re retiring?!?

**Spike:** (*hovering up alongside her*) Princesses can retire? (*Long shot of the room; slow pan.*)

**Luna:** (*laughing gently*) Of course we can. I for one am looking forward to a little R&R—maybe a trip to Silver Shoals. (*Cut to Twilight.*)

**Twilight:** And you want *me* to take your place?

**Celestia, Luna:** (*nodding*) Mmm-hmm.

**Luna:** With the help of your friends, of course.

(*The violet face shifts from brain-locked fright to a welcoming smile as her six fellow travelers gather in close.*)

**Celestia:** We can’t think of anypony more worthy. (*She lifts off from the dais and touches down facing Twilight.*) Over the years, we’ve watched you grow. You’ve faced task after task. (*Luna joins her.*)

**Luna:** Challenge after challenge.

**Discord:** (*floating lazily past on his back, reporter attire gone*) Countless adversities, yeah, yeah, yeah, we get it.

**Celestia:** And you’ve always prevailed. (*She rests a hoof briefly on Twilight’s shoulder.*)

**Twilight:** Thank you, but that doesn’t mean that I’m—that *we’re* ready to do what *you* do! (*Cut to Celestia, backing up next to Luna.*)

**Celestia:** (*laughing*) Oh, of course you are. I realize this is a lot to take in, but—

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) Nope. (*She hovers near Twilight.*) Makes perfect sense. We’re awesome! (*Gasp.*) Does this mean we get all your powers? Ooh, ooh! I call dibs on showing up in everypony’s dreams!

(*The grinning flyer is unceremoniously hauled back in Twilight’s aura.*)

**Twilight:** You can’t be ready to step into their horseshoes just like that!

**Applejack:** Well, if the Princesses think it’s time to retire, we’re not a bad choice. We always have Equestria’s best interests at heart. (*Spike nods.*)

**Twilight:** That’s a fair point— (*floating out quill and notepaper*) —which should be taken into consideration when we have a round-table discussion!

**Rarity:** Well, I’m in! (*The items drop into Spike’s grip; she brings up a measuring tape.*) Darlings, we’ll all need a complete wardrobe update. (*Send it away; address the Princesses.*) And I would love to pick your brain about mane maintenance—when you have a moment.

**Fluttershy:** As long as we all have each other, I’m sure we can do it.

**Pinkie:** (*jumping in place, rising to hind legs*) Yay! “Protectors of Equestria” on three!

(*She leans forward, extending a foreleg, and Rarity touches one of hers to it.*)

**Pinkie:** One… (*Applejack follows suit.*) …two…

(*A yellow hoof is put in, then a sky-blue one and a clawed violet hand; Spike has put aside his quill and paper. The twelve eyes wired to these appendages turn expectantly toward Twilight, who blows out a long breath.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling*) If you’re all on board, I guess I am too. (*She adds a hoof to the pile; overhead shot of the group.*)

**All seven:** (*throwing limbs upward*) PROTECTORS OF EQUESTRIA! (*Ground level again.*)

**Twilight:** It’ll be a bit of an adjustment, but I imagine the transfer of power will be a lengthy process which will give us— (*Cut to Celestia and Luna on the next line.*)

**Celestia:** Actually, we just need a few days to put together a little ceremony.

(*Discord, standing behind them, is noticeably caught out at this assessment.*)

**Twilight:** (*giggling weakly*) A few *DAYS?!?* (*“Uh-oh” groans pass among the other six.*) But that’s so soon! Shouldn’t there be some sort of training program that lasts weeks—no, months, if not *YEARS?!?*

**Celestia:** Everything you’ve gone through over the years has been a training program.

**Twilight:** Okay, but there’s gotta be a guide or a rulebook?

**Discord:** (*holding up a thick book with her picture on the cover*) Yes, I have it right here. (*flipping through it*) *How to Rule Equestria*, by Nopony McPretendsmith.

(*As she leans in to peer at the pages, he slams the thing shut and avoids crushing her nose by the slimmest of margins. Now Luna floats up a copy of the friendship journal that Twilight and company published in “Fame and Misfortune.” On the next line, she projects it down to Twilight and the camera cuts to the latter, who takes it in hoof.*)

**Luna:** The friendship journal you wrote yourselves is a better guide than any we could provide.

(*The high-strung Princess clasps it to her chest and launches into a bout of hyperventilation.*)

**Celestia:** We have the utmost confidence in you.

**Luna:** And we hope you’ll have the same in yourself.

(*These reassurances do nothing whatever to calm Twilight down; next she levitates up a paper bag and breathes madly into it.*)

**Discord:** Oh, I’m absolutely certain she does.

(*Wipe to a close-up of a pair of closed doors within the Castle of Friendship; Twilight stands up into view, having ditched the bag and journal and worked herself around to an especially foul frame of mind.*)

**Twilight:** I am not confident about this at all!

(*She paces away; cut to a long overhead shot of the area—the throne room. Spike and the other five mares are here, as is Discord, lounging on the bare central table. He has dispelled the book he showed off in the Canterlot Castle throne room and is combing his beard with a fork.*)

**Discord:** Well, that’s what I thought. I was being sarcastic before.

(*A bit of hairspray is applied from a tiny can; Applejack shoots him a pointed look as she rests a hoof on Twilight’s shoulder.*)

**Discord:** What? (*tossing fork/can away*) This is all so predictable. Now’s the part where you all tell little Sparkle here that everything is going to be fine, but she won’t believe you. Ugh, I don’t need to be here for this.

(*He creates a little rainbow with his talons during this line, then snaps himself out of the room at its end.*)

**Twilight:** It’s just…I know I said yes, but then they said “in a few days,” and there’s still so much to figure out! It’s all happening so fast!

(*Accompanied by Applejack gently pushing her to the star-marked throne and setting her on it, then Twilight pulling at her own cheeks and summoning the paper bag for a few quick breaths. As she sends it away again, Rarity approaches from the other side, levitating a glass of water.*)

**Twilight:** I think I need some…

(*A moue of surprise crosses her face as she notices the container at eye level, and she gets her hooves to it, guzzles the water, and sets the empty on the table.*)

**Twilight:** (*calmer, smiling*) Okay. I’ll feel much better—

**Rarity:** (*cocking an eyebrow*) —once you make a plan?

(*Right on cue, here comes Spike for a landing on the table, quill and paper ready to deploy.*)

**Twilight:** Oh, wow! It’s like you—

**Spike:** —knew you were going to react this way? We did. (*Rarity floats the glass away as Pinkie peeks out from behind the top of the throne.*)

**Pinkie:** (*knowingly*) Classic Twilighting.

**Twilight:** (*taken aback*) “Twilighting”? You…you made me a verb? (*She slumps dejectedly as Pinkie nods.*)

**Applejack:** (*patting her shoulder*) It’s not a bad thing. We just know you have a…process. (*Rainbow flies over to the group.*)

**Rainbow:** Stage one—you get big news, and you’re like, “Noooo!” But then you pace, and you chart, you worry— (*Fluttershy crosses to them.*)

**Fluttershy:** It’s okay. (*patting Twilight’s hoof*) You go ahead and Twilight, and we’ll be here for you.

(*The mare whose name has become a synonym for freaking out yanks clear of the yellow grip.*)

**Twilight:** You’re all acting so calm, but this is a big deal. What do we do if something big happens and the Princesses aren’t there to help? (*She huddles down, chin on table and hooves pressed to head. Long pause.*)

**Rainbow:** Um…if you think about it, they literally almost never help. (*Twilight sits up, floored.*)

**Applejack:** Huh.

**Pinkie:** *And* we still always win! (*rapid fire*) Like when Sombra almost took back the Crystal Empire, or when Chrysalis pretended to be Cadence, or when Tirek came back and absorbed all the magic, or the other time Chrysalis tried to take over, or with Cozy Glow and the School! (*Deep breath.*) Am I missing anything?

(*Twilight steadily shrinks in her seat under this disaster-laden tale of the tape until she is almost completely out of sight. Cut to her perspective of the table; each speaker swings into view in turn, Spike no longer carrying his writing gear.*)

**Rarity:** Pony of Shadows.

**Spike:** Starlight when she was evil.

**Fluttershy:** Discord when *he* was evil.

**Applejack:** Do Flim and Flam count?

**Rainbow:** See? We’ve almost always done things without the Princesses’ help. (*Side view of her and Twilight.*) Which makes sense now, because it was all just training for you to take over.

(*By the time she finishes, she has plunked herself next to Twilight on the throne and extended a blue foreleg to pull its original occupant chummily close.*)

**Spike:** And it worked! I mean, if you think about it, there hasn’t been a single villain that we couldn’t defeat.

**Twilight:** (*relieved*) Phew.

(*Dissolve to a slow pan through a remarkably uninviting stretch of the Everfree Forest. The weeds and spiderwebs have been accented with globs and runners of sickly green slime whose source is visible as a perforated silhouette in the distance.*)

**Chrysalis:** One day, you’ll see. (*Close-up.*) I will defeat Twilight Sparkle and her friends— (*Twisted little chuckle.*) —and they will pay for stealing my kingdom!

(*A cut to just behind her picks out the recipient of her words—a log balanced on a tree stump and etched with the face of a snarling changeling drone. The half-crazed former queen levitates up a second chunk of wood and carves a face onto its surface in like manner, then vanishes abruptly in a swirl of black flames. Her new “minion” thuds to the forest floor near a pile of others.*)

(*Tilt down through the earth, the camera passing a layer of blackness before entering the rocky prison of Tartarus. Two cages stand in the foreground, one occupied by a sullen-faced, horned monstrosity; much farther back is an isolated, craggy platform accessible only by a narrow, winding set of stairs. Two cages stand here, one considerably smaller than the other—holding Cozy Glow and Lord Tirek, respectively, the former imprisoned as the latter’s neighbor after her attempt to take over Equestria in “School Raze”—and Cerberus keeps watch on both. Cut to an extreme close-up of a panel as Tirek’s red hand reaches into view. The surface is covered with hash marks in groups of five, and the index finger scratches one more.*)

**Cozy:** (*from o.s., whispering*) Pssst! Tirek! (*Cut to frame both.*)

**Tirek:** It is *Lord* Tirek. And what is it now? (*Close-up of her, the camera just outside the bars.*)

**Cozy:** (*normal volume*) I just want to make sure you can see my “Best Friends” rock sculpture from over there.

(*Zoom out slightly to frame said structure as she points beamingly at it: a small carving of her riding on the centaur’s shoulders as he rears up. He just throws a sour look at the effort and turns back to his tally, which proves to be inscribed into the floor of his cage. Sighing tiredly at having had such an insipid cellmate dumped on him, he vanishes without warning in the same manner as Chrysalis. Cozy has the same experience a moment later, whereupon her sculpture crumbles into gravel.*)

(*The camera tilts down once again, passing through blackness and into a cave even deeper below the surface. Amid the foul vegetative growths and hollowly dripping water, the only illumination is a shaft of unwholesome greenish light from above. The tip of a stick draws a blue-glowing circle on the floor of this chamber, runes and inscriptions instantly appearing just within it as a concentric ring. A diameter is added, then four strokes as an inverted W, oriented so that the diameter cuts off the two lower points—or upper ones, as the case may be. Once the stick is withdrawn, the brightness of the assembly grows a notch and a clump of dark, jagged crystals erupts from its center, with tendrils of black energy whirling around its base. These last rapidly grow to fill the screen, against which two lurid green eyes open wide with no trace of pupil or iris. A curved horn kindles red above them as purple flames flare to life around their edges—the hallmarks of King Sombra as first seen six seasons earlier.*)

(*Zoom in slowly on the phantom features and dissolve to a different cavern, in which Tirek and then Cozy arrive in the same way they left Tartarus. Chrysalis is next to come in, puzzlement swiftly replaced by hostility. Flowing water can be heard.*)

**Chrysalis:** Lord Tirek!

**Tirek:** (*baffled*) A changeling? (*to Cozy*) See? She gets it.

(*The filly shoots him a nasty glance. Cut to a long shot of this cavern; Cozy/Tirek and Chrysalis are standing on ledges at opposite sides of a chamber at whose center a table is placed, holding a crystal ball that glows yellow and somewhat resembles a giant red-orange eye. Long, sweeping ramps and staircases lead from one spot to another, and the whole is situated at the shore of a subterranean lake choked with slabs of rock. A waterfall gushes behind the tableau.*)

**Chrysalis:** (*descending ramp*) Chrysalis, queen of the changelings—or at least I will be, when I’m restored to my rightful place!

(*A wing-assisted leap brings her to ground level as Cozy and Tirek make their way down.*)

**Chrysalis:** Why did you summon me? (*Horn glows.*) What do you want?

(*The display of power prompts the youngster to yell in fright and dive behind Tirek’s foreleg.*)

**Cozy:** Oh, golly! We didn’t bring you. I thought *you* freed *us* from Tartarus.

**Chrysalis:** Tartarus? (*powering down*) Whoever pulled you from there must have been somepony very powerful indeed.

(*All three are brought up short by the sound of a cackling male voice, and they turn to stare up at an elevated central platform where that black energy has begun to swirl. Armored forelegs in dark gray emerge from the miasma, which gradually clears to present the flesh-and-blood form of Sombra himself. Chrysalis and Tirek are well and truly flabbergasted by his appearance, but Cozy just looks scared and confused.*)

**Chrysalis:** King Sombra! You have returned? (*Tirek warms up a spell between his horns.*) Why did you bring us here?

(*In the far distance, a silhouette marked by glowing eyes and a pair of expansively curving horns appears in a shaft of light on the other side of the lake. It speaks with a deep, rough, contemptuous male voice.*)

**Male voice:** He didn’t.

(*Tirek’s spell winks out; eyes widen and turn toward the new arrival, who begins to pace toward the water. Cut to an extreme close-up of legs furred in medium blue, with darker hoof tips, stepping across the stones that span the lake. The next shot frames the body from the neck down; the tail is a very pale blue and cut short, and around the neck is a broad red collar set with rune-inscribed gold studs. The one at the throat has a ring attached, as if for securing the wearer to a post or attaching a cowbell, and a cross-strap passes over the belly from one side of the collar to the other. Cozy hunkers down behind Tirek’s leg and Sombra vacates his vantage point in a black burst as the figure strides on. Now the tops of two curving, dark blue horns can just be discerned before it stops behind the crystal ball. The front hooves slam onto the table to either side of this.*)

**Male voice:** It was I.

(*Zoom out to frame the speaker in full: a massive goat, mane cut as short as the tail and matching the bushy brows above beady red eyes with yellowed whites and slitted pupils. The horns curve back from the skull, each forming nearly a complete circle. This is Grogar.*)

**Grogar:** (*leaning forward*) You may call me Grogar. (*Chrysalis and Tirek gasp.*)

**Chrysalis:** *The* Grogar? (*Sombra appears at her side.*)

**Tirek:** I thought you were a legend!

**Sombra:** I’ve heard of you!

**Cozy:** (*hovering*) Who?

(*Sombra’s voice is full of pomp and carries a trace of a British accent. All four approach the table; zoom in slowly.*)

**Grogar:** I assure you, I am very real. And you have all been brought here as part of my plan to rid Equestria of Twilight Sparkle and her friends—once and for all.

(*He chuckles malevolently as the view fades to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a dismal stretch of swamp under a diseased gray-green sky. Amid the murky waters is a moss-blanketed stone structure that vaguely resembles Grogar’s head on a massive scale. On the start of the following line, tilt down through the ground and stop on the five nefarious characters in their underground meeting place.*)

**Cozy:** I am so sorry, but the name “Grofar”—it just doesn’t ring any bells. (*Grogar leans across the table and into her face.*)

**Grogar:** (*incensed*) Grogar! (*She topples backwards; he crosses to stand over her.*) I have been away too long if my name no longer strikes fear into the heart of one so tiny. (*He pivots away; she sits up.*) Perhaps a demonstration of power is in order?

(*Cozy flits up onto the table to watch. The studs on his collar glow bright yellow, and he puts a hoof to the front and draws a ball of power away from it. A gentle breath sends this drifting over to Tirek, who eagerly cradles it in his palms and wastes no time in devouring it. A blinding white glow briefly envelops his entire body and fades to show him having grown considerably in both size and muscle mass; he flexes his biceps and kisses one, impressed with the result.*)

**Tirek:** Grogar is ancient and extremely powerful. The land that would become Equestria was a mere collection of farms and pastures until he declared himself emperor of all he saw. I remember hearing tales of his tyranny when I was young.

**Sombra:** I have also heard of the first emperor of Equestria—the Father of Monsters.

**Grogar:** I gave life to the foulest of creatures and allowed them to run wild, taking what they wanted and destroying the rest.

(*During this line, the camera tilts down from him to the crystal ball between his hooves and zooms in, putting him out of view. The pupil-like bar at its heart expands to blacken the entire surface, which resolves into silhouettes of fearsome beasts that consume those of frightened ponies and then smear together into one inky spiral. For the next line, this forms into a phantasm of the old goat menacing a cluster of huts, which grows to fill the sphere except for one last flicker of white that holds out for a time before vanishing.*)

**Grogar:** (*from o.s.*) My reign was a glorious, fear-soaked epoch of darkness in Equestria.

**Chrysalis:** (*from o.s.*) Ha!

(*Grogar looks up with surprise; cut to Chrysalis and Sombra.*)

**Chrysalis:** Until Gusty the Great rose up and banished you.

**Grogar:** That fool believed taking my bell would defeat me, but she only weakened me temporarily. (*Cozy pops up to hover by Tirek.*)

**Cozy:** Um, Tirek is *really* old. (*to Tirek; he scowls*) No offense, you look great. (*to Grogar*) But if he knew about you when he was young, we have super-different ideas about what “temporarily” means.

**Grogar:** *Silence!*

(*The force of that word pushes the filly back into the black chest, disordering its fur so that she has to push the strands out of her eyes for a clear view. The ball has resumed its original appearance.*)

**Grogar:** (*pacing up ramp to central platform*) I’ve spent millennia gathering power, biding my time, waiting for the perfect opportunity to seize control of Equestria— (*glaring down at others*) —and watching all of you. I’ve seen each of your humiliating defeats at the hooves of six puny ponies. And do you know why they’ve always bested you?

(*Cut to Sombra, who opens his mouth to speak but is cut off by Chrysalis’s lean in.*)

**Chrysalis:** Because they cheat! (*Pan quickly to Tirek.*)

**Tirek:** Because they are annoyingly lucky! (*To Cozy.*)

**Cozy:** I’m just a kid, so…

**Grogar:** It is because they work together. Where one is weak, another is strong, and thus unified, they are a formidable force. But we shall use their own strategy to defeat them.

**Chrysalis:** What are you suggesting? (*He jumps down onto the table and leans hard into her face.*)

**Grogar:** I suggest nothing. (*stomping for emphasis; all back off*) I *demand* that you join me, and together, Equestria will be ours.

**Sombra:** I don’t do “ours,” I only do “mine”! (*He swirls onto the table.*) *I* will take back the Crystal Empire on my own, and *I* will destroy anypony who gets in *my* way!

**Grogar:** (*mockingly*) Such confidence. Go. (*Hop down.*) Try to take back your kingdom. I shall send you there myself. If you prevail, you may keep it. But when you fail, you will submit to me.

**Sombra:** And if I refuse this deal?

**Grogar:** Then I shall return you to the darkness from which you were summoned.

**Sombra:** Fine! But this is a waste of time, as I will crush those who defy me.

(*Cut to Grogar, whose patience quickly wears thin; he warms up his collar and throws a burst of power in the deposed dictator’s direction.*)

**Sombra:** (*from o.s.*) I will defeat all who get in my way. (*Back to him.*) I—

(*He gets no farther before the toss wreathes him in yellow and smears him out of the place. On the start of the next line, cut to frame the remaining four, Grogar stalking away.*)

**Grogar:** I advise the rest of you to prepare to work together.

**Cozy:** (*slyly, to Chrysalis/Tirek*) Well, working together sounds an awful lot like making friends, so… (*brightly, sitting on Tirek’s shoulder*) …you two are in luck, because I know all about that!

(*One meaty red forefinger flicks her away without a word. Dissolve to the exterior of the School of Friendship during the day and zoom in slowly to the sound of knocking. A cut to one corridor reveals the cause to be Starlight Glimmer seeking entry at the closed doors of Twilight’s office.*)

**Starlight:** (*voice raised*) Twi? You in here?

(*A bit of magic on one knob opens the way; she continues at normal volume, the camera cutting to just inside on the next line as she steps in.*)

**Starlight:** With the School closed for the summer, I didn’t think anypony would be here.

(*She is just in time to take a checklist to the face, thrown by the headmare herself—seated at her desk amid a spaghetti tangle of long parchments closely covered with writing.*)

**Twilight:** (*frantically shifting quill and documents*) So much to do, not enough time—no! I already did that—wait! No! I didn’t! (*Groan.*) Not enough time! (*Spike hovers into view to face Starlight.*)

**Spike:** Help! She’s spiraling! We’re at the “my plan needs a plan” stage of a total Twilight meltdown!

(*A glance past the little guy is all Starlight needs to apprise herself of the situation.*)

**Starlight:** (*hushed, winking*) Ohhh! Got it.

(*She enters the office wearing a cocked-eyebrow smirk, but is all sweetness as she leans across the desk.*)

**Starlight:** Twilight…

**Twilight:** (*still working*) Did I write down “eliminate redundant lists” on my School of Friendship to-do list or my personal to-do list?

(*Her smile gone, the guidance counselor circles to face her boss point-blank.*)

**Starlight:** (*slamming front hooves on desk*) Twilight!

(*A yell of fright, and Twilight is dropping the quill and pages and grabbing Starlight’s cheeks with a shaky smile.*)

**Twilight:** Starlight! Oh, good, you’re here! I need to talk to you.

**Starlight:** (*unnerved*) Okay…

**Twilight:** (*letting go, checking lists*) Hang on. I had “talk to Starlight” written down on one of these. (*Her field brings others to herself.*) Just let me find it so I can cross it off. (*Preoccupied mumbling.*)

**Starlight:** Wow. You are Twilighting hard.

**Twilight:** You say “Twilighting” too? (*The papers are shoved away in a fit of pique.*) Well, excuuuuuse me! This is the first time I’ve ever been asked to run a whole kingdom! (*Cut to Starlight.*)

**Starlight:** (*hastily, smiling*) Uh, you’re right, you’re right. (*Laugh.*) So, what did you want to talk to me about? (*Zoom out to frame Twilight on the start of the next line.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling, checking a page*) Ah, here it is. I wrote it down. (*reading quickly*) “Starlight, you have blossomed into one of the strongest, smartest, most caring ponies I know, and I can’t think of anypony better to leave in charge of my castle and the School of Friendship. So what do you think?”

(*She offers a cross-eyed, unhinged grin that utterly fails to put Starlight at ease.*)

**Starlight:** What?! You want *me* to take care of the Castle and run the School?

**Twilight:** (*calmer, but hesitantly*) Yes?

**Starlight:** Uh…I can’t. I’m not ready! Remember what happened the last time you left me in charge? (*She pitches onto her belly.*) And now you want me to do it *permanently?!?* What if I don’t do the right things? (*A brief fit of hyperventilation.*) What if—

(*She is referring to the events of “School Raze.”*)

**Twilight:** (*leaving desk, levitating Starlight back*) Starlight, get a hold of yourself! You’ve risen to every challenge you’ve ever faced. (*touching her chest*) You can do anything you put your mind to. You’ve got this.

**Starlight:** (*smiling*) Heh! And so do you. See what I did there? You just said everything *you* need to hear.

**Twilight:** Ha-ha-ha, nice try. (*sitting behind desk*) But running a school and running a country are two very different things. (*magically lifting pages, slowly freaking out*) Now if you don’t mind, I have seven thousand, four hundred and thirty-two more things to take care of before I become the new ruler of Equestria!

(*Lungs cycle in a lively ragtime as a mildly disgruntled Spike flies a paper bag over so her field can position it in front of her mouth.*)

**Spike:** (*resignedly, to Starlight*) It was a valiant effort.

(*The unicorn claps a hoof to her forehead as the weight of his words sinks in. Dissolve to a long shot of the Crystal Empire, seen from the boundary between its temperate clime and the harsh snowscape surrounding it on all sides. It is daytime here, but black clouds are seeping in all too rapidly; cut to one street in the realm proper, filled with screaming and fleeing crystal ponies. The sky has already gone a scabrous brown—what can still be seen of it through the advancing clouds, that is—and jags of hideous dark crystals begin to stab up through the lustrous roadbed. One filly stumbles and falls just short of her family’s doorstep; by the time she can turn her head to look behind herself, Sombra has taken shape to grin savagely down at her. Mother and father hurry to scoop her up, but he lets his eyes burn green/violet as in Act One and projects images of them toward the three. All six sockets fill with pale green light that blots out irises and pupils, the faces turning slack and emotionless. Before Sombra can visit any further torment on the family, a spear is flung into view from somewhere behind, scoring a near miss. He glares over his shoulder, his eyes returning to normal, and finds two armored Royal Guard pegasus stallions bearing down on him at full speed; one has a spear in his teeth, while the other does not, pegging him as the thrower. Two more are coming in from the other end of the block, one armed.*)

(*Sombra holds his position and summons up three crystalline monoliths; one lifts him several feet off the ground, while the emergence of the other two throws the four guards off their hooves. Sick purple magic bubbles from his horn as he conjures an armored helmet on one upraised hoof—the type he used to brainwash his subjects into fighting for him during Part One of “The Cutie Re-Mark.” One guard pulls himself up, woozy and with his helmet gone, and gets the awful headgear slapped onto his noggin before he can react. The slitted eyes glow an evil green, and soon he has several guards kitted out and is leading them on a march toward the Crystal Castle. He raises one black slab after another in front of himself, forming a rough staircase that leads him up toward one of the entrances above street level, as the conscripts continue their advance to either side. Cut to a corridor within; two closed double doors are bashed open from the other side, and here come Shining Armor and two guards at a gallop. The white unicorn is wearing his armor.*)

**Shining:** The guards said Sombra’s breached the castle!

(*Cut to Princess Cadence, seated on her throne and frantically scrawling a message using a levitated quill and scroll—the trio have barged into the throne room.*)

**Cadence:** Hurry, Twilight. We need you.

(*The quill is tucked away under a wing, the message is rolled up, and a shot of magic turns it into a wisp of pink smoke that lances out the nearest window. Cadence flaps down to meet Shining at the base of the throne.*)

**Cadence:** Do you have Flurry Heart?

**Shining:** I thought you had her!

(*Both parents gasp at the realization that they have left their daughter alone. Cut to their perspective, sprinting toward a pair of closed doors and magically throwing them open to show the nursery beyond. Sombra has made his way in here and exerted his field to lift Flurry Heart from her cradle.*)

**Flurry:** Mama!

(*Cut to Cadence and Shining, both uttering terrified gasps. Cadence grits her teeth and prepares a spell, but Shining throws out a foreleg to back her down in the face of the usurper’s madly triumphant grin.*)

**Cadence:** (*icily*) You won’t get away with this.

**Sombra:** (*floating Flurry onto his back*) Oh, but I already have.

(*An affectionate poke at the little white nose spurs Flurry to try and bite off the end of his hoof, but he just laughs exultantly. Cut to a close-up of the Crystal Heart being impaled on two dark gray crystal outcroppings, rather than spinning between its usual upper/lower anchor points in the city square under the Crystal Castle. It sends out a pulse of dark light, cracks spreading from the points of contact.*)

**Sombra:** (*from o.s.*) With the Crystal Heart now in my possession…

(*Long shot of the throne, zooming out slowly. He has placed himself comfortably in the seat of power, two of his guards stand to either side—now fully armored as in “The Cutie Re-Mark”—and the jagged protrusions have sprouted from the floor and are poking through one window. The supports for the Heart are the pinnacles of the two largest formations, which curve over the throne from either side to form a rough arch with it as the capstone.*)

**Sombra:** …there’s nothing to stop me from ruling the Crystal Empire!

(*The royal family is led in—a steel muzzle clamped onto each face, heavy chains linking one to the next in a line, unadulterated fury blazing in all six eyes. The guards escorting them carry their spears and wear Sombra’s helmets, but are still clad in the rest of their standard Royal Guard armor. Shining, on the other hand, has been stripped of his.*)

**Sombra:** Kneel before Sombra!

(*Suddenly finding themselves at spear-point, the two adults reluctantly do as ordered—but Flurry stays upright and glares daggers over her muzzle. Sombra relaxes onto his throne with a contented sigh.*)

**Sombra:** Long live the king.

(*The scene fades to black except for his eyes, which go pure green before fading out a moment later.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to an overhead shot of the throne room in the Castle of Friendship, the magical map now set up on the central table. Zoom in slowly as Twilight paces the floor; the doors are closed, but fly open to put her friends, Starlight, and Spike in the corridor just outside. Cut to the eight.*)

**Twilight:** Thanks for coming so quickly.

(*Discord teleports in among the bunch to send them yelling and tumbling in all directions.*)

**Discord:** Sure thing. (*Close-up.*) But if you’re going to be the ruler of Equestria, you may want to work on your penmanship.

(*He conjures up an opened scroll in midair and produces a pair of large square eyeglasses.*)

**Discord:** This looks like it says… (*reading, donning glasses to magnify his pupils*) …“Cadence sent an emergency message: ‘Sombra’s back, and he’s taking over the Crystal Empire.’ ” (*Twilight flies up to him.*)

**Twilight:** That’s exactly what it says.

**Rarity:** (*from o.s.*) But— (*The group again; those on the floor start to stand.*) —but how is that possible? I-I thought the Crystal Heart had dispelled him into the ether!

**Twilight:** I have no idea! But he’s back, and it’s up to us to save the Empire and my family.

**Fluttershy:** Shouldn’t somepony tell Celestia and Luna?

**Discord:** (*bending down to her; glasses/scroll gone*) Ooh, good point! (*pulling her, Pinkie, Spike close*) One of us should probably loop in the *real* rulers of Equestria.

**Twilight:** (*turning to map; cut to her*) No. If we’re going to run Equestria, we’ll need to handle things like this on our own.

(*Applejack, Rarity, and Starlight, in view behind her, let their eyes widen at the winged unicorn’s steely tone.*)

**Discord:** (*from o.s, mildly awestruck*) Oh, Twilight! (*Cut to him.*) Could this mean that you finally have the confidence to ascend the throne like the Princesses believe you can?

(*As he speaks, he creates a miniature effigy of her and holds it in his talons: narrowed, white-glowing eyes, seated on a rough stone throne studded with deadly sharp projections, the whole surrounded by a corona of pale blue fire. A curl of the fist as he finishes his question, and it is gone again.*)

**Twilight:** (*grinning tentatively*) Maybe? (*She flies up to his level.*) Unless you’d consider taking care of Sombra for us?

(*Now the grin is half-endearing, half-entreating, and accompanied by a pair of big shiny purple eyes. The expression is swiftly copied to varying degrees by the other six mares and Spike.*)

**Discord:** (*hastily, pushing Twilight back*) Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. You’re absolutely right. You need to learn how to handle these things on your own.

(*On this line, he shakes her foreleg vigorously, plunks a mortarboard cap onto the royal brain bucket, and shoves a gold “#1” trophy and an oversized check for ten thousand bits into her hooves.*)

**Discord:** Ta-ta!

(*He executes an exit by pulling a length of invisible cloth down over himself, which causes him to vanish from sight.*)

**Applejack:** Handlin’ things on our own is all well and good, but…last time, we defeated Sombra with the Crystal Heart.

**Spike:** What if he has it already? How are we gonna stop him?

(*Twilight floats the mortarboard away and lets the trophy and check drop. After a bit of deep thought, she gasps as an idea comes to her; the purple eyes go to the map, then her own cutie mark, then the rest of the gang.*)

**Twilight:** With the Elements of Harmony! (*Drop out of her hover.*) With those, we can defeat anypony, even Sombra!

(*The intangible cloth is pushed aside behind the group as if it were a curtain; Discord peeks out from beyond this, now wearing a shower cap and holding a soapy scrub brush.*)

**Discord:** Ah, no, no, no, no. (*scrubbing back of neck*) You didn’t need the Elements the last time you defeated Sombra. And I’m not sure that using them still counts as handling things on your own.

(*He makes quotation marks with his talons and lion-paw digits to point up his last five words.*)

**Twilight:** (*irked*) My family is in danger. I’m not taking any chances. (*Rainbow hovers up to Discord.*)

**Rainbow:** She’s got a point.

**Discord:** Ugh, fine!

(*He pulls the “shower curtain” back into place and is gone.*)

**Pinkie:** What’s his problem?

**Twilight:** Starlight, can you stay here and take care of the School?

**Starlight:** I’ve gotcha covered.

(*Her power lifts a copy of the weighty rulebook Twilight authored to govern School operations. Dissolve to the Tree of Harmony in its cavern below the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters and zoom in slowly as Twilight teleports in with her friends and Spike. A bit of carefully applied arcane energy separates the five visible Element jewels from the ends of the branches in which they are embedded and opens the star-shaped cavity in the trunk to release Magic. These float down to their bearers, necklaces and tiara winking into place at the appropriate spots on their bodies to receive them, and all seven get moving again and disappear in another mass teleport.*)

(*Wipe to an extreme close-up of a bunch of grapes being held aloft in a crackle of Sombra’s dark magic. One comes free and drifts lazily down to be chewed up in the fanged mouth, after which the camera cuts to a longer shot of the Crystal Castle throne room. One crystal pony has been pressed into service to hold up a platter of exotic fruits by the throne for him to enjoy where he sits, while another is fanning him. His eyes have returned to normal. Off to one side, a ring of spikes has grown from the floor to serve as a holding pen for Cadence, Shining, and Flurry, none of whom are wearing their muzzles and chains anymore. Pan slowly across the room, then cut to the family’s perspective from within the ring. A blast of Flurry’s sunny yellow magic threads between the spikes and zeroes in on Sombra, only to dissipate on contact with an invisible shield. Head-on view of them, a curl of smoke dissipating from the tip of Flurry’s horn as all direct murderous glares toward their jailer. Sombra maneuvers the grapes away.*)

**Sombra:** It’s cute that you think that will do anything.

**Cadence:** It might not— (*pointing across room*) —but they will!

(*Red eyes swivel to follow her gesture; pan quickly in that direction and stop on the six mares from Ponyville charging in.*)

**Pinkie:** (*rearing up happily*) Cavalry’s here! (*They sprint toward Sombra, who chuckles richly.*)

**Sombra:** How can I be surprised when I’m waiting to show all of you your greatest fear?

(*As with the crystal pony family he menaced in the street during Act Two, he lets his eyes burn green/purple and sends out a copy of them. All six stop short, voicing a unison gasp as they are lifted off the floor in a spatter of black sparks and the ghostly eyes grow to encompass all of them before fading away. Twilight is the first to open hers, revealing that they have gone this same color with pupils/irises gone, and the camera zooms in on one until it fills the screen.*)

(*Fade quickly to black, then in to a close-up of her standing bewildered against a dark field. Her eyes are her own again, and her tiara is gone. Zoom out slowly to put the others, Cadence, Shining, Flurry, and Spike in the fore—all caught under Sombra’s spell and not moving one whit as his helmets settle onto their heads. Twilight can only get out a scared little moan as two more featureless green eyes bore into her from the void, purple flames kindling at the edges. These separate to form two complete pairs, and the figures of Celestia and Luna—many times normal size—fade into view to incorporate the eyes into two impassive regal faces. Their voices reverberate across the no-space.*)

**Celestia:** Oh, Twilight, how disappointing.

**Luna:** Equestria was in your care, and you let it be destroyed!

(*A split-second flash of white transforms them into Daybreaker and Nightmare Moon, respectively. Recall that Daybreaker was the crazed alter ego that Starlight dreamed Celestia could become in “A Royal Problem.” Cut to a close-up of the young Princess, who would be scared out of her socks by this point if she were wearing any, and zoom in slowly before dissolving to her in the here and now. The zoom continues.*)

**Sombra:** (*from o.s.*) You should all surrender! (*He paces toward the six, all under his influence.*) Nothing can defeat your own fears!

(*Twilight’s tiara would beg to differ, judging from the intense flare of light kindling within its jewel. She forces her eyes open, letting them burn full white with no trace of his magic, and ribbons of color-coded energy snake from the tiara and thread among one necklace after the other. The five wearers are swiftly cleansed of the corrupting spell, their eyes going white.*)

**Twilight:** We didn’t need to defeat them. We just needed to face them long enough to distract you!

(*Sombra throws an uncomprehending glance toward the royals’ prison and is stunned to find Spike now on the scene, blowing a stream of fire over one patch of the barricade. Cadence hits it from inside like a four-legged wrecking ball, shattering it and flying up to lift the Heart clear of its unwholesome supports. Her next move is to dive out a window, towing the artifact in her aura.*)

**Sombra:** NOOOOO!!

(*There follows a brief tug-of-war between her power and his, but a blast from Flurry spooks him into letting go as it scorches the sill, missing him by inches. He whirls to glare in her direction with a feral snarl, only to find the baby now airborne and sending the guards into a full retreat with shot after shot. Shining steps out from the ruined stockade.*)

**Shining:** (*mockingly*) It’s cute that you think that’ll do anything.

(*Cut to the square below the Crystal Castle. Cadence flies the Heart into position between its usual anchors and zaps it to repair the cracks marring its surface. Fully restored, it spins up to full speed and sends out an intense pulse that radiates down every street; spirits lift, the clouds clear, and the distressing brown sky instantly goes a happy blue. Inside the throne room, the intruding crystals are erased from existence, the enslaved ponies lose their helmets, and the two on fan/fruit duty drop their gear. All eyes lock onto a snarling Sombra, glaring at him with enough super-concentrated hostility to burn a hole through six yards of solid granite.*)

**Sombra:** You may have won the battle— (*rearing up, stomping*) —but I shall win the war!

(*Twilight meets this taunt by firing a rainbow beam—striped in the six mares’ coat colors—from her tiara to engulf him. The dastardly unicorn barely has time to start a bellowing scream before he fades to a black silhouette, then disintegrates into wisps of vapor. When the light show fades, no trace is left of him except a column of dark smoke rising from a scorched spot on the floor. A long, stunned silence hangs in the room before Spike breaks it.*)

**Spike:** Yeah!

[*Animation goof: The remains of the spiked prison wall have returned.*]

(*He adds a celebratory whoop as the mares touch down and the power coursing through the Elements fades away to leave their eyes as they were.*)

**Rainbow:** (*looping around Twilight*) We totally just wiped the castle with that guy!

(*Flurry flies into her aunt’s embrace, followed closely by Spike on foot. Here comes Cadence back in through a window, horn aglow and ready for a scrap; it takes her a moment to realize that the danger is past and relax, and she and Shining gather in around Twilight.*)

**Shining:** Thanks, Twilie. (*They join in the hug.*)

**Pinkie:** But that was fun!

**Applejack:** And easy.

**Rarity:** As magical battles go, that was a cake walk. (*Pinkie pops up between her and Applejack.*)

**Pinkie:** (*rubbing front hooves together*) Mmmm, cake walk.

(*Before either can react, she has jammed a cake onto each rear hoof and is sashaying backwards across the throne room on those two appendages. The other mares laugh at her antics as she twirls and strikes a pose.*)

**Twilight:** We did handle this pretty well, on our own.

**Spike:** Does this mean—?

**Twilight:** I still don’t feel like I’m one hundred percent ready, but will I ever?

**Applejack:** (*lifting her chin*) Knowing you, nope.

**Twilight:** I have you guys, and we have the Elements. And together, we’ve never failed. We’ll be okay.

(*Her fellow world-savers and her number-one assistant gather in for a whooping, cheering embrace. Dissolve to a close-up of one branch on the Tree as the Loyalty gem is floated back onto it; the same is done to Laughter, then Magic is returned to its trunk cavity and sealed away. Zoom out to frame Twilight looking on within the Tree’s cavern; she is no longer wearing her tiara, and all the gems are back where they belong. The others will have shed their necklaces when seen next, and Pinkie will no longer be wearing cakes as shoes.*)

**Twilight:** Once again, Equestria is safe. (*They head out; Spike is not with them.*)

**Fluttershy:** What should we do to celebrate?

**Pinkie:** I vote for a cake walk!

(*As they amble away, the camera pans back toward the tree and tilts up slightly to stop on one jeweled stretch of the ceiling. A spear of dark crystals punches through, a stream of dense gray smoke issuing in around its base and quickly swirling to fill and black out the screen. Just as when Sombra was summoned to Grogar’s lair near the end of Act One, his purple-flamed green eyes and red horn appear within the inky gloom. The manifestation is accompanied by a reverberating basso chuckle and a tremor that shakes the entire cavern, dislodges showers of rock fragments, and stops the mares dead in their tracks.*)

**Applejack:** What’s goin’ on?

**Twilight:** I don’t know!

(*More growths pierce the walls and ceiling, smashing at the luminous branches, and a final strike through the floor shatters the Tree into a mass of glimmering shards. The impact hurls the Elements away so that they smash to pieces on the cavern floor; the mares voice a collective gasp of pure horror as the smoke swirls down to them and resolves into Sombra. Zoom in on him, letting go with a chuckle that turns into a full exultant laugh, then cut to a “To be continued…” title card and snap to black.*)

**Continued in Part Two**