Chapter 1: “Pull Me Under”

 “YAAAHH!”

 Spike jumped back from the window as a large branch crashed down, torn away by the relentless wind and rain.  The tiny dragon quickly composed himself and made sure all his limbs were accounted for. He checked around to see if his guardian and friend had noticed his lapse.

 “What was that, Spike?” came a slightly worried voice from the other room.  A purple unicorn trotted around the corner and scowled at the large branch sitting on the ground just outside the window.  “At this rate, we’ll be lucky to have some place to live after this storm is done.” she said irritably.

 I don’t think the pegasi would let it get *that* out of control, Twilight,” the dragon responded.  “Rainbow Dash is up there somewhere.  Hopefully her weather team won’t let it get too dangerous.”

 The pair looked up at the flat, imposing sky, barely visible through the thunderstorm.  Storms like this were incredibly rare, but weather patterns had gotten a bit out of hoof. There was a lot of extra energy gathering, and this storm was needed to keep things from building beyond the control of the weather teams.  Even so, this storm was just barely within the ability of the pegasi to manage, even with a full team in the sky.  Every so often, a flying pony was just visible among the clouds, ducking down to direct a wind stream before darting back up above the solid grey cloud layer.

 Twilight sighed again.  “They really shouldn’t be out there in this— no pony should be.  At least they can get above it.”

 Spike grunted in assent.  “No kidding.  I’d really hate to be out there.  Can you imagine?  I’d probably look like— well, like that guy, actually.”

 Twilight perked up.  “Like who?  Or, um, whom?”

 Spike pointed out the window towards the main road.  “Like him.”

 Following the outstretched claw, Twilight could just barely see a pony.  His coat was some shade of grey, making him almost invisible in the unnaturally dark afternoon and torrential rains, and he looked tired and thoroughly drenched.  “What the hoof is he doing out there?” she yelled.  “Is he trying to get killed by lightning or something?”  She bolted for the door, horn brightening as she summoned her raincoat and hat, ignoring her assistant’s protests.

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 Dusk looked around with bleary eyes, almost unaware of the gale in which he stood. He found himself on the edge of a small town, and it took him a few minutes to realize that it must have been the lights he had been walking towards in the night. How long had he been walking? Was it daytime now? He looked up at the ominous grey clouds, stirred by angry winds.

 *When did the weather get this bad? I thought it was just a rain shower back in… somewhere. Where was I?*

 He resisted the urge to shake his head to clear it, as the pounding inside it was getting worse and worse. He dropped his head back down, and his deep blue mane swept down in front of his face, plastered down by the unrelenting rain. The panicked shaking had passed as he traveled, but now it was replaced in full by exhaustion and weakness. His legs wobbled unsteadily, barely able to support his weight as he walked. His grey coat was completely saturated, the damp fur darker than normal. Even his wings slumped down, almost dragging on the ground. There didn’t seem to be an ounce of strength left in him.

 *Canterlot. That was it. Why was I there? Why am I here? Where is here?*

 Dusk braced himself as he was caught by a gust of wind. He was left panting from the effort of staying upright, and wondered why the wind wasn’t making as much noise as it should. He looked at his leg, and saw a noticeable swelling around the gash.

 *Huh. That’s probably bad,* he thought vaguely. *It should probably hurt, too.* He glanced about and saw a bright yellow mound appear from a tree, and it was doggedly moving towards him though the storm. He realized as the shapeless mass got closer that it was a pony wrapped in a vibrantly colored raincoat. The pony appeared to be calling to him, but he couldn’t make out any words. He stared woodenly at the sight, amused by how out of place it looked in the middle of the fuzzy grey scene. The pony stopped right in front of him, mouth moving. Dusk wondered why she wasn’t making any noise, and then the pony stuck out a lavender hoof and grabbed his wounded foreleg.

 Dusk felt a jolt of pain, and the world suddenly came into sharp focus. His eyes went wide as the adrenaline came back. He tried to cry out, but nothing came out of his mouth. He noticed the pony before him was still yelling to him.

 “What are you doing out here?” she was asking, barely audible over the suddenly roaring winds.

 He was about to say he didn’t really know when the wind gusted and the mare put a hoof up to keep her rain hood from blowing off, just enough to reveal the dark purple mane and horn beneath it. Dusk suddenly found himself trying to run, but his legs were unable to support him any longer. His first attempt at a step left him on his knees. He could feel his panic starting to dull as the effects of adrenaline gave way to the relentless press of exhaustion.

 She stared at her hoof, eyes going wide as she saw the blood that had been left on her. She leaned in close to him. “I’ve got to get you to a hospital! Hang on, I’ll carry you!” she said, aiming her horn at Dusk’s body.

 “No!” Dusk gasped weakly, writhing to get away from the unicorn as an indescribable dread came over him. She looked very surprised at the objection.

 “Why not?” she asked. He didn’t answer. He was too busy trying to stay out from in front of her horn as she tried to levitate him.

 She straightened up and looked around indecisively, biting her lip. She pointed her horn up, and a red burst of light shot from her horn straight into the clouds, causing Dusk to flinch. Within seconds, a cyan streak broke though the cloud layer. The streak quickly resolved itself into a pegasus mare, who swooped in towards the ponies, evidently summoned by the distress flare. She landed heavily next to the unicorn, spitting her sodden multi-hued mane out of her face. “Twi? What’s going on?”

 “Rainbow Dash, I need to get this pony to Ponyville Medical, but he won’t let me lift him! Can you carry him there?”

 The pegasus looked at Dusk thoughtfully. “I’m pretty sure I can, but we’re gonna need some help. Hang on a sec!” She launched herself back into the air, rolled through the buffeting winds, and quickly disappeared back above the clouds. She returned just as quickly with a yellow pegasus with a light blue mane at her side. The cyan pegasus leaned down next to him. “Hey stranger. I’m Rainbow Dash, and I’ll be your ride for the evening,” she said casually as she looked over his condition. Between the three of them, they managed to get Dusk across her back without the use of magic. “All right,” she called out to the other two. “Let’s do this.”

 Twilight did her best to shield the trio from the rain using her magic, the other pegasus tried to deflect the winds and weather from their path, and Rainbow Dash struggled under Dusk’s weight as the group fought its way across town. Dusk took the opportunity to finally let go, slumping across Rainbow’s withers. Everything started going numb again inside Dusk’s head and he welcomed the relief. Rainbow could feel him relax, though it soon gave way to shivering from the combination of cold and emotional release. “Hang in there, big guy,” she whispered to him. “Almost there.”

 The wind almost ripped the doors of the hospital off their hinges as Twilight opened them and the ponies staggered into the hospital lobby. The other pegasus called out for a medic, and a large earth pony orderly and a doctor rushed to their sides. Dusk gave a weak protest as they hoisted him off of Rainbow’s back and laid him gently on a gurney. Lights shined in his eyes, and he felt pokes and prods at various places on his body before they started to push him off towards the hallway. He finally lost sight of his rescuers as the doors closed behind them.

 It didn’t take long for Dusk to give in to the numbness in his mind, and as he closed his eyes, his mind finally fell silent.