

# **Wings of Fire: Silver Ashes**

**from Ava Coffey**

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# Introduction

Wings of Fire, Silver Ashes is about a NightWing named Starlight. Yes, there will be more books.  
(Please no hate in comments, this took me forever.)

# Chapter 1

(This book takes place roughly two years after the events of arc two, and ignores the events of arc three)

A scarred black NightWing was pacing back and forth along with the ashes of the decimated volcano. This volcano had once been his home. He growled softly at the thought, and he slashed his talons furiously on the ashes. After it had exploded, everyone thought he had died, turned into tiny flakes of dust and a pile of hardened lava, especially those horrible dragonets, who insisted they saw him perish. But he hadn't. Morrowseer suppressed a smile as he thought about how he had so cleverly hidden when they went back to inspect the volcano after the NightWings were safely in the Rainforest, and how he was so smart for staying here in the ruins, planning his revenge on the world for his misfortune. Oh yes, he was alive, and he was still as menacing as ever, matched only with his determined hatred for Pyriah. Maybe even more so, due to his horrible burns and scars. He had a long, burned gash on his wing, so it drooped and dragged pointlessly behind him, and a missing foot, so he limped along, groaning, and a large burn over his snout that folded over, causing him to not be able to open his mouth all the way. On one side of his body his scales were melted into a blobby mass, and he had a gaping, sagging, horrendous pocket under his left eye, and his tail was lumpy and broken, so the bits left were spread out and ugly, like it had melted into a solid bloody puddle. He lived on the volcano, supposedly a pile of ashes, with only two dragons at his side. 'Furryslayer,' He growled intimidated, 'have you seen anyone that could be of use to me in your- visions? Or in your last trip to the Rainforest?' 'Us, you mean, lord Morrowseer.' Hissed Furryslayer in a slick voice with an unreadable expression, as she emerged from the small makeshift house that she stayed in when she was on the volcano. Furryslayer was black with deep green underscales, and no teardrop scales, but the dragon she had been with did have them, and they were huge. 'And as a matter of fact, yes, I have.' 'Who?' Morrowseer said, trying to sound bored. 'Uh uh, payment first.' Furryslayer said, mimicking his tone. Morrowseer hissed and reached into the green leather pouch around his neck. It was small and dirty, with a burnt patch on it and coated with ash and dust, but he handled it with care. He pulled out a small wood case and ran his claws over the smooth surface before he handed it to Furryslayer. 'Come here Darkstrike.' she ordered with excitement spilling into her voice. A ridiculously enormous black NightWing with uncolored underscales slipped out from the shadows and slithered up to Furryslayer. 'Ah, our payment has come.' Darkstrike said in a deep voice. Furryslayer opened the case with trembling claws and pulled out a glowing blue sapphire that sparkled in the dim pulsing firelight. She smiled at it before She placed it back into the wood slot and slid it in her own pouch. She then paused with her claw over the pouch before saying, 'Alright. Let's see.' Furryslayer opened her blue leather pouch again and she took out a small scroll. 'Ok- Now I do have a dragon who might be of use to you-us. I have deduced that she will quickly befriend all of the dragons in her winglet at school-she is going to Jade Mountain, you know.' 'I see.' Morrowseer rumbled. Furryslayer flipped the scroll over and began again. 'And there are a few things slightly strange about her. She is silver

ALL SILVER. Can you believe that? And the thing is, she has no NightWing powers. But she does power. Some sort of power, that few NightWings have had in centuries. Some power that the SeaWings have, That we need to get revenge. "No. It's not possible. I can't be." Morrowseer interjected sharply. "Oh, but it is. This dragon is an Animus. But she just does not know it yet." Furryslayer said with a grin. "You have been most helpful." Morrowseer said wickedly. "Another payment will be in order then?" Darkstike said as Furryslayer put the paperback in her pouch. "Now, now, I just gave you the dream visitor. And I am positive that once I have Animus dragonet you can get much much more payment." "We. I am positive that once we have Animus dragonet." Darkstike muttered under his breath. "But I suppose you do deserve something now." Morrowseer growled. He reached into his pouch once more and pulled out a small little round object wrapped in red silk. Furryslayer snatched it from him and put it in her pouch quickly but not before the silk slipped slightly and Darkstrike caught a small flash of silver underneath the red silk. "Well." She said smoothly. "We must now plan how to get this little animus." "Yes," He hissed in his dust-filled voice, flicking his tongue over his teeth. "Follow me." He snapped around and briskly went into Furryslayer's hut, dragging her along, and slammed the door, making the whole structure shake. "You say she will be attending Jade mountain?" The huge NightWing demanded. "Yes Lord Morrowseer." Furryslayer said with a drop of venom in her voice. "Well, then we must capture her before she gets there." Morrowseer said breezily. "That's the problem though." The female dragon said, "She will be going next week. We will have no time to plan and get her before she is safely inside the walls of the school," smoke billowed out of Morrowseer's nose and enveloped his snout and horns. "What did you just say?" He growled as he stood up. "She will be going next week." Furryslayer repeated. "Well, I think that would have been useful before! How are we going to do this- Wait? we CAN get her in school." Morrowseer observed, sitting back down. He tapped his claws on the wood table. "Yes, if we play our cards right, we might be able to get more than just an animus dragon. In fact, we might be able to get more than we originally thought. We could get more than what is beyond your wildest dreams." An evil smile was creeping across the huge NightWing's face. "I could get even more than I wanted." He said in barely more than a whisper. "And you could get," He said, his voice rising. "More than you could have ever hoped for!" he bellowed, almost shouting with excitement. "Get Darkstrike! We will plan and soon we will have the whole continent of Pyrrhia at our claw tips." Furryslayer's eyes were shining with excitement as she scurried from the room to fetch Darkstrike. When she returned, Morrowseer had already started talking. Darkstrike's eyes sparkled as Furryslayer and Morrowseer planned in front of him. When they finished, both were breathless. "Now," Furryslayer said. "I have one more thing to tell you." Morrowseer turned in interest. "What?" he asked. "She is very close to Starflight." "Ok, that would make sense. And this is important how?" Morrowseer rumbled. "Don't you see? If we capture her, surely the dragonets of destiny will go looking for her." "Aha!" Morrowseer said, catching on. "Kill two birds with one stone. You are quite clever, Furryslayer." "Just like you, Sir." She said humbly. "Now wait," Morrowseer said, frowning. "You never told me this dragonet's name." "Oh didn't I?" Furryslayer asked. She smiled a sinister, spine-crawling smile as she relished the moment. "Well then. Her name is Starlight." Morrowseer smiled. "I have a feeling that this Starlight could be very useful indeed."

## Chapter 2

Starlight was not a dragon who liked to get noticed. But she did. She always got noticed. That was expected, of course, because the silver dragon was very different. Unlike most NightWings, who were black with dark blue, purple, or green under scales, and silver scales scattered scales like stars, Starlight was silver. No black. No purple. No green. No blue. Just silver. That's all. Her mother, Allsight, who was normal looking, by the way, said she was beautiful. But Starlight wanted to be normal. Not like she ever would be. She sighed and flopped onto her bed of leaves and blankets. She thought about how everything would be so different if she just looked like a normal dragon, for the moon's sake. She then turned and tossed her pillow on her head and thought some more. She was nothing special. But yet she had been chosen to go to Jade Mountain. She really did not want to, anyway. She wanted to stay home with her mother (And her father, if he ever came back from his last mission) and keep spending her days in the library, and keep her head low. She did not want to go to Jade Mountain, because with her silver scales she might as well be parading around yelling and carrying a banner that says Hello! I'm Starlight and I have silver scales! Please notice me! In all caps. She was annoyed that her mother insisted that she go. Did she not understand that she wanted to be normal? Going to Jade Mountain would not help her stay normal. She got up and walked over to her wall mirror and traced her claw around the black flowered frame, looking at herself. Even her horns were silver. The only non-silver thing on her body was her eyes. She had gray eyes. Well, she did have little, tiny, black scales around her eyes, wings, and tail. But other than that, silver, silver, silver. She had no friends. She was just the dragon who caused the whispers and pointing. "I don't want to go to school," She whispered. Her mother then said behind her, "It will be good for you, Starlight." Starlight winced slightly and shook her head. She hated it when dragons said that. "It will be good for you!" "It's for your own good!" and such. "No mother. It won't." "It will," Allsight said sternly. "And you go tomorrow, so get packing." Then she gave Starlight a significant look and left the room with her door slightly ajar. Starlight reached out and pulled her favorite necklace off of her carved wooden tree with silver leaves that her mother had given her for her last birthday. She wrapped the black chain around her claws and flipped the charm over. It was a purple little star, with wisps of galaxy blue and green in it. She then picked up the tree and pulled her purple bracelet, her black moon earrings, her spike-chained cinnamon-colored necklace, and her braided flower petal ring off the jewelry stand. Then she put them in a big brown oak box lined with dark blue velvet and put the box in her open suitcase. She carefully took a painting of her and her mother that she had painted last year and put it in the suitcase too. It was a pretty painting, made from shades of black and gray so she looked a little more like she was a normal colored NightWing. She realized with a start what her mother had said. She only had one day. One day left with her mother. She suddenly sat up and jumped to her feet. With a surge of energy, she walked out of her bedroom and lept off of the open hallway into the sky. She then soared without stopping until she reached the library treehouse. She almost passed it, but her sharp gray eyes caught it before she would have to turn around. Starlight landed with a subdued thump on the wooden landing platform and quickly raced into the library. Then she vaulted up to one of the

top shelves and grabbed a scroll tightly bound in pink and yellow rope with a black wire melted to the tie forming the code h5n9k she hugged the scroll to her chest and lowered it to the ground with relief. She was certain that the scroll would be gone, but she had gotten it just in the nick of time. She crept up to the front desk where a Deep purple NightWing and emerald green Rainwing with wisps of Orange and sky blue that danced through her scales were seated. Their name-tags read:

Sterling: NightWing: Librarian

And: Tiki: RainWing: Librarian in training

?Uh? Excuse me?? Starlight squeaked. Sterling looked up sharply but her eyes crinkled into a smile when she saw the Silver dragonet. ?Hello, Starlight darling. Tiki, this is Starlight, she is a very nice dragon with a mutual love of scrolls. And Starlight, this is Tiki, my new librarian in training. Tiki looked up and smiled at starlight. ?Uh hi. I was just wondering if I could maybe keep this scroll for a while? It's my favorite and I'm going to Jade mountain in a few days and I just really want to be able to read it at school??

The dragonet asked in a small voice as though the last sentence were a question. ?Of course darling! You are a great scroll lover and I know you will take good care of it.? Sterling said with truth in her tone. ?Thank you!? Starlight cried and then she looked down, embarrassed, and slipped away as Tiki and sterling looked at their work again.

At home again, Starlight had packed the scroll and 15 of her other favorites. It was the day before Starlight had to go to school, and she was a little nervous. Well, a little was an understatement. She was very nervous and she was not able to sleep that night. She tossed and turned, thinking and thinking about school. She did not even notice the pair of eyes watching her through her window? The next morning Starlight was eating some tangelo and lemony tasting green berries when her mother walked in. ?alright go get your suitcase and I will take you to school in a few minutes ok?? She Said. Starlight nodded and got up, walking to her room. Starlight checked around to make sure she did not miss anything And sat on her bed to look around. She saw her pale walls, her brown carpet, her many drawings, her scroll case, her desk covered in paper and ink. This was the last time she would see these things for a while. She picked up the most recent scroll she had been writing and placed it in her bag with a bottle of ink. She then glanced one last time at the room and left. During the walk to the mountain, she did not talk, She just looked around at the flowers and trees and smelled the flowers and trees and saw more flowers and trees? It was a little boring if she was honest. Maybe some new dragons and scenery would be good. But she definitely did not want to leave her mother. But she had to. She remembered the first time she had seen her mother. She remembered? Starlight was in total darkness. She did not know it, but she wanted the light. So she rolled onto her side and the darkness tilted-. She heard a voice outside? ?Oh, She?s a mover!? Then she had tilted again. ?Who says it's a girl?? another voice asked. ?I do,? said the first voice. She wanted that voice. So she turned again and heard a crack. A tiny ray of light shone through. So she pushed again and the egg fell apart. She looked up for the voice and saw the most wonderful thing ever. Her mother. She was black with green under scales and she was filled with joy at the sight of her face. It was her mother. Hers. and they would never be separated. She almost ran into a tree in thought because she was not paying attention. ?Here we are,? Allsight said unexpectedly. There it was. A huge mountain looming over their heads. The rest was a blur. She remembered a hurried ?Goodbye? and a hug, and teary eyes, and suddenly she

was standing on a rock. She drew in a sharp breath at the sight of the ginormous school. She was at Mountain at last.

## Chapter 3

When she walked in, She was not sure what to expect. So she wandered around until a large MudWing hurried to her. "Hi Starlight, I'm Clay. Welcome to Jade Mountain. Follow me." He took her shoulder and guided her to a nearby cave. "Here you are! Your winglet!" Clay said proudly. "Here is a pamphlet- and this is your sleeping cave." He handed her a pamphlet and spread his wings around the cave. Starlight took the pamphlet. It read:

Welcome to Jade mountain! You are in Jade Winglet! Please feel free to explore and come to us if you have any questions!

Classes:

Art History fighting hunting kindness

Music tribe study outdoor activity

Any further information will be given later or at time of need

Then there was a map of the mountain. Starlight cocked her head at the paper before turning to the sleeping cave. Inside there were 3 female dragons. A light blue Icewing who was sitting on the floor and looking around the cave in slight interest, a purple and orange Rainwing who was swinging delightedly in a hammock, and a pale yellow SandWing who was hurriedly reading and writing in a scroll. When she walked in, the Rainwing swooped down and threw her wings around the startled Starlight. "Hi!" the RainWing said in a rush. "I'm Hibiscus and This is Snowshoe and Mirage. You must be Starlight, come in!" Hibiscus fluttered her wings and adjusted her silver glasses that perched on her nose. She excitedly took Starlight's claws and pumped them up and down before she dragged her into the room. "And you can sleep there!" Hibiscus added, pointing to a pile of moss and leaves. "I'm sleeping in the hammock and Mirage has the corner ledge and Snowshoe has the tall ledge if that's ok and guys say hi!" "Uh that's fine" Starlight stammered. Mirage said nothing and did not look up from her scroll. Snowshoe gave a smile and said, "Hi I'm Snowshoe" "Oh and the rest of our Winglet should be here soon." Hibiscus informed them. Starlight's head was already spinning. Why was this RainWing so upbeat? And why was Mirage so quiet? And was Snowshoe going to be nice? And did she say there were MORE dragons in this Winglet? Just Then, as if on cue, a dark blue SeaWing, a coppery brown MudWing, and a deep orange SkyWing walked in. "Oh and this is Tiger shark, Copper, And Falcon." Hibiscus said, pouncing on the chance to talk. "Oh-hi." Starlight tried to say, "Hello," Falcon said snootily. "And RainWing, you have no right to talk to me as if I am a mere SkyWing. I am Queen Ruby's very own Nephew." Snowshoe snorted, and Starlight was pretty sure Mirage rolled her eyes, but she could not be sure. "Hi." Copper said with a smile Before he walked in and sat next to Snowshoe. Starlight noticed that Snowshoe slid away cautiously when he did this. "Hey, Silverscales." Tiger shark said with a sideways smile. Then he went with Falcon into the room and sat in the center. Just then, a large sound rang out. "Class!" Hibiscus squealed and bounced up. She grabbed Starlight's talons and dragged her over to the door. "Come on! I am so excited!" Starlight could not bring herself to say, "Me too!" but she did go with the RainWing. In art class, they had free creativity. They were supposed to make something for another dragon, and they picked names

out of a hat. Hibiscus got Copper, Copper got Falcon, Falcon got Snowshoe, Snowshoe got Tiger Tiger shark got Starlight, and Starlight got-Mirage, who got Hibiscus. Starlight had no idea what Mirage would like. So she settled for a necklace. The SandWing would like a necklace, maybe. The necklace was almost perfect, in Starlight's opinion. It was a warm gold braided chain, with 7 little amber drops hanging from the bottom, with one 2 on one side, 3 in the center, and 2 on the other side. When she was done, it was time to give the gifts. Starlight saw Mirage hand Hibiscus a clay yellow flower without saying anything, but she gave a tiny little smile at the look of delight on the RainWing's face. Then she turned to Starlight, who handed her the necklace. She took it and inspected it for a moment, before she put it on, giving a small nod of thanks. Then she walked away. Then Tiger Shark walked up to her. "Here." He said. "I did not know what to give you so I just copied what Snowshoe gave me." He held up a little figure of a fish. "So you carved me a fish?" Starlight asked, confused. Tiger shark gave a laugh. "No, I carved you this," He said, holding up a little wood carving. It was perfect in every detail. It was a beautiful little carving of a star, painted to look like the night sky in an explosion of galaxy color. There were little silver pinpricks of silver, for stars, and she noticed they each emitted a tiny light, and she released with satisfaction that it was for her name, Starlight. Starlight smiled at it, and then said, "Thank you so much!" "Your welcome." The SeaWing said, also smiling. After class, she carefully placed the carving on her shelf in her corner. Mirage was still wearing her necklace, and Hibiscus had put away her flower, and Starlight saw Snowshoe toying with her painting from Falcon. It was of a white snowy background with spires of ice and blocks of snow as the centerpiece-It was the ice palace, Starlight now knew. Starlight barely had time to arrange her items around her little space before the bell rang again. "Now we have music!" Hibiscus said in a sing-song voice. "Let's go!" In music class, everyone had picked an instrument. Snowshoe and falcon were sharing a harp and Tiger shark was playing a pair of shell claps. Mirage was beating some drums with her tail, to Starlight's surprise, because she did not seem such a musical dragon, and Copper and Hibiscus were sharing a long stringy thing that sounded low and sad. (This did not match Hibiscus's personality at all, which is probably why she switched to a tambourine made of wood and leaves that rang like bells when she hit it.) Starlight had selected a flute made from bamboo and green leaves. Altogether, they sounded quite nice. After music class, it was time for lunch. Starlight went into the prey center with Hibiscus and snowshoe. Mirage had stayed behind for some reason, still reading her scroll. The prey center was a huge cave with a large enclosure of many animals and lots of separate piles of fruit. Starlight stopped over to the prey enclosure and set her eyes on a small and hairy ugly monkey that was prowling around the fenced area, yapping annoyingly. She started toward it, but a commotion behind her stopped her in her tracks. Falcon was angrily advancing on a little SandWing who was holding a half-eaten bird in her trembling claws. "GIVE IT TO ME!" Falcon roared at the whimpering dragonet. She sank low to the floor, hiding her face. The SandWing tried to whisper something to Falcon but he ignored her. He took a deep breath to yell again but a voice interjected. "What is going on?" Tiger shark demanded. "She took my bird! And I want it back!" Falcon snarled. "Uh, no, she caught it on the floor." Tiger Shark said. The little SandWing nodded immediately. "Well I am a prince and I WANT THAT BIRD!" he insisted. Starlight suddenly found herself in front of the dragonet too. "Let her have it." Starlight said. "Can't you see she's hungry and she got it first?" Falcon tossed his head. "I don't care. I WANT that bird." Starlight stared at him. Why was he acting

like a one-year-old dragonet? What she said? Hibiscus said, bristling behind Falcon. The SkyWing at the dragons surrounding the little SandWing and shrugged, trying to look unconcerned. Fine. it's probably gross anyway. but as he walked away he muttered, Stupid RainWing? The little SandWing squeaked a thank you and hurried away. Relieved, Starlight turned back to the monkey. After lunch, It was time for another class. Starlight was walking to the history cave when she suddenly felt a weird twinge in her claws. huh.? She wondered. That had never happened before. For all of the history class, she felt the strange twang again and again, and by kindness class, it was not even a throb, it was a long, steady, line of agonizing stinging. By the end of the day, She was sick of it. She collapsed with a groan on her bed and felt the pain again. Stop hurting! she snarled at her claws. To her immediate surprise, they did. She tilted her head. How had that worked? She would have to figure it out tomorrow. She was too tired to do anything about it now. She then turned sideways and tried to fall asleep. Once she did, she dreamed of her in the library, reading, until the dream flipped, and she found cold eyes staring back at her in a too-real dream. She cried out, in terror and alarm, because these were not the eyes of any mere dragon. These were the cold, dark, piercing eyes of Morrowseer, the dead NightWing.

## Chapter 4

"Hello there Starlight?" Morrowseer said in a choked, dusty voice. Starlight's heart leapt with terror at the sight of the NightWing. He was covered in horrible injuries and burns, and he definitely looked like he had been exploded by a volcano. And yet, how was he alive? But then, suddenly-He just flickered, somehow, and Starlight saw the sleeping cave behind him. "Oh." She said, relaxing. "This is just a dream?" "That may be, little animus, but I am very real and very alive," Morrowseer said slyly. "What? Wait, but that means you must have a dreamsvisor and wait- did you just call me an animus?" Starlight cried. "I did," Morrowseer confirmed pleasantly. "But I'm not an animus!" She panicked. "Oh, but you are." Morrowseer hissed. "Don't you know? How did you just stop your claws from hurting?" "Luck." she pressed. She was not an animus she just could not be, so she just wasn't. "I made your claws hurt, little animus. To let you know, so you could find your true power." Morrowseer said, smoke wrapping around his snout. "No!" She hissed. "No. I have no power. I AM NOT AN ANIMUS!" She was backing away from Morrowseer's patient eyes. She did not know why this was so hard for her to grasp. She was different. But this was something beyond her imagination. But yet, something seemed true about his tone. Maybe she was. Maybe he was right. "How did I not know before?" she asked, calming down a little bit. She swept her tail over her front talons and settled her silver wings at her sides. She blinked expectantly at Morrowseer, silently demanding an answer. "Because you never tried." The large black NightWing responded. He too had sat down, and he curled his tail around a rock behind him, with his huge wings spread low like the night sky sweeping in, surrounding Starlight, like smoky blackness closing in on her? she shook herself out and nodded. It was true. She had never once thought about being an animus. It just seemed so impossible that it never even was a possibility in her practical mind. A small pinprick of belief suddenly turned into a tidal wave of truth. She was an animus. Her. Starlight, the quiet weirdo with the silver scales. Starlight, the library dragon who never talked to anyone because she was too shy. Starlight, who had always felt as though she never belonged because she now knew, she did not. She was special. She had power that everyone else could only dream of. She suddenly felt pride and understanding cascade through her silver body. She was an animus. She was herself now. She was now the queen of her own mind. "Thank you!" she cried. "For what?" Morrowseer asked gently. "For telling me who I am," she said humbly. She bowed her head and settled her wings back. Morrowseer's face crinkled into a smile. She could never even think of a time where she would have imagined him to smile. "Your welcome, then, little dragon." And then he left her dream.

Morrowseer was slightly mad at himself for forgetting to ask the dragonet. But part of him liked her smile, part of him did not want to manipulate the sweet little animus. He hated himself for it, but part of him even liked her. His talons closed around the blue dreamsvisor. He would do it tomorrow. He had no time to delay. His revenge rested in this little animus's unknowing talons.

Starlight had no idea what to do. Tell? Or don't tell. She could either tell the teachers about Morrowseer's visit? but she felt as though it was not her information to tell. Well, maybe it was. But she decided not to tell yet. She liked Morrowseer, a little bit. And she was interested in him. Maybe

they could even be friends. So she would keep his secret, at least for now. But her being an animus? maybe she should test out her power before she decided what to do. She looked around the cave where Mirage, Snowshoe, and Hibiscus were sleeping peacefully. Well, some of them were. Mirage was twitching slightly, while her talons opened and closed around something that was not there, and her tail twisted as though she was trying to steady herself. Starlight tore her gaze away from the SandWing and set her eyes on the first thing she saw-her star necklace. Her claws were aching to try something. But she reluctantly sat down and closed her eyes. She needed to think of an enchantment. Protection, maybe. Or she could do something about her silver scales? no. She was just starting to like her sparkly silvery body. She was going to keep that. After all, it was part of who she was. But maybe she could do something smaller? like her horns, maybe. Yes, her horns. She could make them black, like the teeny black scales that dotted parts of her body. Starlight took a deep breath and reached for her necklace. When she grasped it, She whispered, "I enchant this necklace to make my horns black." She waited breathlessly for a moment, looking in her mirror. But nothing changed. With an aggravated sigh, she sank to the floor. She angrily tossed the necklace aside. And flexed her talons. Why hadn't it worked? Why were her horns still STUPIDLY SILVER? She then realized something and she reached out and took the necklace. She carefully placed it over her head. Still nothing. But wait? She took the necklace off and thought for a moment. Maybe she needed to make the enchantment more specific. So she whispered to it, "Enchant this necklace so that whenever Starlight the NightWing wears it, It will cause her horns to become black and it is undetectable that they ever were silver." When she finished, she felt something in her claws. Like a little pang of cold that whisked through her body, along with a little zing of- I can do whatever I want. She suddenly remembered something, like a little thought poking through her skull, but she could not put her talon on what it was. So she slid the necklace on with hope in her mind, and as soon as it touched her scales, her horns started to ripple like molten lava. They crinkled as though evaporating before suddenly a wrapping of black closed itself over her horns and smoothed out until her horns were undeniably black. She wanted to shriek with joy. It had worked! She smiled up at the ceiling and thought, Thank you, Morrowseer. she then tried to think about what her brain had tried to tell her. Something about being an animus, maybe. And then it hit her like a bolt of lightning. She remembered the cold feeling when she had cast her spell. Her heart plummeted like a shooting star in the night sky. She remembered what happened to Animi who used their power too much. A little dusting of fear covered her now. She could not use her power. Except for little things. She could not tell anyone about her being an animus. And she had to be careful. Very, very careful. So she made a vow to herself to not use her power unless necessary. She grimaced at the thought of her turning evil. She hated the thought of her hurting any of her clawmates, even though she had just met them. They were all great so far, except Falcon, who was stuck up, and Mirage, who was silent. But the rest of them were so nice to her. And honestly, she knew much worse dragons than Mirage and Falcon. She looked ruefully at her talons. All the happiness had fallen away and was replaced by a hard shell of understanding. She would never use her magic except for important things. She would never hurt anyone. She looked over at her sleeping clawmates. I won't hurt you. She promised them in her thoughts. But I will protect you.

## Chapter 5

The next morning Starlight was wearing her necklace. When Hibiscus noticed this she smiled her huge RainWing smile, but when she looked up and saw the NightWing's horns she startled left back with a yelp of confusion. "What in all the moons happened to your horns?" Hibiscus practically yelled. "What's wrong with them?" Starlight asked innocently, reaching up to run her claws on them. "It's just their black!" The RainWing stammered. Huh. Starlight thought. She had never seen upbeat, energetic Hibiscus stammer before. Starlight tilted her snout. "So?" She asked, slightly hurt. "Uh?" Hibiscus said. She seemed to realize she had upset Starlight, so she sat down and swept her tail over Starlight's and angled her wing to brush against the NightWing's. She bit her lip as though thinking about how to phrase her next sentence, and ducked her head, clicking her talons to the stone floor, while waves of thoughtful blue and a serious cloudy gray rolled over her scales. "Well it's not that I don't like them, but how in all of Pyrrhia did you do that? And for Queen Glory's sakes please tell me that you just put a cover over them or something?" Hibiscus said, tapping her own horns as though afraid they would suddenly change color. "Well, uh, I just-" But Starlight was cut off by another voice. "What happened to your horns?" Snowshoe asked sharply, like a claw slicing through an ice block. She leaned against her leg and snaked her neck forward, peering at Starlight. Now Mirage was up too, and she said nothing, but she lashed her tail furiously and opened one wing slightly, as though she was testing the air for answers. Starlight was overwhelmed. She opened her mouth to speak, but suddenly Mirage jabbed a talon at the other two dragons and opened her wing to the door. Hibiscus moved away from Starlight and took Snowshoe's talon and led her to the cave exit. "We are going to go get breakfast." She informed them as she left. Once they were gone, out of sight to the last tip of a tail, a voice said, "You're an Animus, aren't you?" The accusation felt like a stab in the heart. Starlight turned to the door, expecting to see a dragon outside, but only Mirage was there. "Just tell me the truth." The voice said again. It was nice to listen to, but it held secrets and fear and sadness at the same time. Starlight stared at Mirage. Her mouth had definitely just moved. "I thought you couldn't speak." the NightWing said. "You and everyone else." Mirage answered sadly. Starlight could definitely hear the emotion in her voice. She could hear the secrets, the pain, the terror, the crying, the bleeding, the slight hints of a dragon who was deeper and smarter and stronger than anybody knew, that had been glossed over with the pleasant covering tone. "How did you know?" Starlight asked. "We all have our secrets." Mirage said, silkily skidding around the question. Starlight remembered the position that Mirage had been in. She had stood still, tail poised over her head, her sandy-colored wings tilted sideways, her tongue sliding over her white teeth, with one talon scraping a weird symbol on the floor. Starlight racked her brain trying to think of something that could be what caused her to have such amazing senses. Starlight looked the SandWing over. She had her necklace on, and she wore no other jewelry on her pale scales. Her gleaming black eyes were sharp and watchful, and she had a gold and black cuff on her tail barb, that wrapped and twisted around her weapon, so she couldn't scrape anyone with it. The cuff made a little chink rattle click when it bumped along the floor, but other than that she made no noise when she moved. "But?" Mirage started. "I could tell you my story if you want to hear

it.? Starlight desperately wanted to hear it, but she also knew that Snowshoe and Hibiscus would be soon. ?Ok,? Starlight said. Mirage drew in a deep breath. ?I don?t have any family. I lived alone. I?ve done? terrible things. But so has the world. And for all I care, they deserved it. A long time ago, when I was little, I lived with my mom and my brother. And? this NightWing I knew. She was like another mother to me. But one day, she and- it was horrible, and- and my mother had a fight about letting me go to our school. and... ? Mirage stopped for a moment. ?And my mother killed her.? She said in barely more than a whisper. ?And then she went all funny and weird. And so we just kept our distance, until one day she just went on a tail stabbing rampage, and my brother, who was such a great dragon, tried to stop her and she-she killed him too. So I ran away. And as far as I?m concerned, that dragon is no mother of mine.? Mirage turned away. ?But how I knew-how I know things-? Mirage looked at her talons. ?I have powers. I have senses, and I can-? she sighed. ?See the future.? Starlight was awestruck. ?But why don?t you talk to anyone?? She asked curiously. ?I speak only to those who are worthy of hearing me.? Mirage said, facing back to Starlight. ?Which is why I haven't said a word in two years.? Starlight was amazed. ?Anyway, the other dragons are back.? the SandWing said. Starlight turned and saw Hibiscus bounding inside. Mirage had already dropped a veil of mystery and silence over her face. ?We are going to go meet the Silver Winglet! Then we have a Hunting class with them! I am SO excited!? Hibiscus jumped up and down around the room until Snowshoe had to take her shoulder and calm her down. ?Let's GO!? Hibiscus squealed. In the hunting cave, seven other dragons were seated around the room, all facing a bigger blue SeaWing. ?Hi. I?m Tsunami.? The SeaWing said. ?Let?s all introduce ourselves.? After Starlight and her group introduced themselves, the silver winglet started too. First, there was an IceWing named Frostbite, who evidently was as self-absorbed as Falcon, a bouncy, talk-happy SeaWing named Starfish who immediately got along with Hibiscus, a downright beautiful SandWing who was named the Atacama, and who sidled over to sit with Mirage, a NightWing by the name of Galexia who was black with a pattern of galaxy spirals under her wings, a MudWing named MudSlide who was messing with a little chunk of rock, a RainWing named Papaya who was lazily flopped over on the floor, half asleep, and finally a SkyWing named Garnet, who had her nose in the air and was flicking her tail away from everybody. ?Ok! Does anybody have any questions for each other?? Tsunami asked. Hibiscus raised her arm. ?I was wondering if like Falcon and Garnet were related, maybe, because they are both kinds of grumpy and superior-looking.? she asked, with no shame. Falcon opened his mouth in outrage, but Garnet cut him off. ?No. we are not related.? She said, twisting her wing away from Falcon. ?Ok!? Hibiscus said brightly. ?Uh, I have a question too.? Galexia piped up. ?What?? Tsunami asked. ?I was wondering why Starlight has silver scales. I?ve never seen that before.? she tilted her head at her. ?Ooh, I was wondering that too!? Starfish squealed. ?Me too,? Mudslide confessed. Garnet was looking at her talons, thoroughly unconcerned, and the Atacama was sitting with her tail flipped over her talons, leaning into Frostbite and whispering something to him. Something like snippets of, ?And don?t- stuck- we are- have enough- quiet.?

?Oh, uh?? Starlight stuttered. ?She doesn't know,? Hibiscus answered for her. Snowshoe, Copper, and Tiger shark all nodded. Galexia squinted at her. ?Well let?s go hunt!? Tsunami said, smiling, trying to distract them. She leaped from the floor and spread her sapphire blue wings. ?Are you coming?? She asked before she jumped out the huge window behind her. Hibiscus, Snowshoe, Mirage,

Tiger Shark, Copper, Falcon, Papaya, Frostbite, Atacama, Starfish, Mudslide, Garnet, and Galexia out after her, leaving Starlight alone in the room.

She breathed in and flew out behind them. "We are going in pairs." Tsunami informed her. Hibiscus and Starfish had been paired up, and Mirage, who Starlight would have liked to be with was with Garnet, Falcon and Frostbite were together, Galexia and Snowshoe had paired up, Mudslide and Tiger shark were together, and Copper and was with Papaya, Witch left Starlight with the Atacama. The SandWing spread her talons out and pointed her tail toward a cliff nearby. "I saw a herd of goats over there if you want to catch them," She offered. "Sure." Starlight said. "So you really don't know why your scales are silver?" The Atacama asked, tilting her head around to look at Starlight. "You really don't? And Galaxia knows practically everything, so like, if she doesn't know then, well, it must be really rare, if not one of a kind." she fiddled with her gold bracelet. Starlight tipped her wings forward and dropped her tail so it dragged in the air behind her, limp and wet-seeming. "I really don't." She said sadly. Her SandWing companion had a little umh noise and turned away. She was a truly spectacular hunter, swiftly stabbing her tail at the prey. After hunting, all of the Silver winglet dragons and all of Jade Winglet were sitting together in Starlight's cave. In one corner, Falcon and Garnet were sitting, not looking at each other, but each trying to look more impressive than the other SkyWing. Hibiscus and Starfish were happily bouncing around, talking, and Snowshoe, who was trailing behind them, was trying to calm them. The Atacama was next to Frostbite who was across from Mudslide who was next to Galexia, so Galexia and the Atacama talked while the two boy dragons argued, with their tails all entwined in a big circle. (Starlight guessed they were a group of best friends) Tiger Shark and Copper were arm wrestling, and Papaya was taking a nap, so that left only Mirage with nothing to do, and she was Following Snowshoe, watching her try to get Starfish and Hibiscus to stop tramping her homework. Copper beckoned Starlight over. "Who do you think will win?" he asked her. Starlight shrugged and sat down next to them. Then she felt a poke in the shoulder. It was Garnet. "Tell your little RainWing friend to stop making so much noise. She and hyper are getting on my nerves!" she hissed. But before she could do anything, a loud bang came from behind them. "Stay away from her!" a voice roared. Starlight turned around. A confused-looking NightWing was staring at the MudWing who had yelled. "Uh oh," Atacama whispered from behind her. "Mudslide gets super protective of Galexia and last time she was with that Nightwing, a meteor almost killed the four of us, so he kind of yells whenever he gets near him." The mudslide was lashing his tail angrily. "Uh, I just came to tell the silver winglet that they need to leave and go to art and the Jade winglet needs to go to History so? yeah." the NightWing mumbled. Mudslide stopped and bowed his head. "Oh. Sorry," he mumbled. On the way to history, the other dragons were still reenacting the scene, but it was not even that funny to Starlight. Hibiscus came over and bumped wings with her. "It will be alright. History will be so fun!" she said with a little smile. "Ok." Starlight agreed, smiling faintly at the little RainWing. She dearly hoped it would be.

## Chapter 6

History was not fun. Not in any means fun. It was an endless, boring hour of a rusty old SeaWing with a voice like claws on metal droning on and on and on and on about before the Scorching and all this boring nonsense that one-year-old dragonets knew, and that a bunch of six-year-old dragonets like Starlight and her clawmates had known for years. Starlight was a very good student who was smart and loved learning. But this? She would rather be torn apart bit by bit by starving lions than waste her time on this horrible excuse of a class. She could go on and on about it, but you get the point. ?Before the scorching when we had no queens, scavengers killed a lot of us. But once the queens were elected we were much safer. For example, it was thanks to one historic IceWing queen that they have a great wall to protect them. And obviously, this calls for a paper on the queens. I would like all of you to write a page on the current queens, state a few facts about them, and what they have done for Pyyria. Make sure that all your facts-? And that went on and on and on. Starlight was batting the tip of her tail back and forth on her desk with her claws, and she kept re-settling her wings. Her eyes darted around the room, spotting Falcon, who was whispering to himself, Snowshoe, who was scratching a drawing into her wood desk, Hibiscus who was anxiously beating her tail around and twitching her wings, and Mirage, who was the only one listening intently. The other two boys were asleep. Suddenly she spotted Webs, standing next to her, his eyes narrowed and his talons tapping impatiently on the stone floor. ?I said go get a scroll and start your essay on Pyyrian queens, Miss Starlight, did you hear me? Or are your talons more interesting than my class, hmm?? the teacher growled. Starlight went red in the face and dropped her tail. ?Sorry,? she whispered and raced up to get a scroll. The next class, which was a special hybrid presentation, was much more interesting. There were five dragons in the center of the room, all hybrids. There was a middle-aged male SeaWing-SandWing who was a strange greenish-yellow color. He had a barb on his tail and he had webbed claws with gills. There was an old male IceWing-SkyWing with white scales and red veins in them and huge wings, with icicle horns. Next to him, there was a young SeaWing-NightWing dragoness who had gorgeous dark blue scales with purple eyes and webbed talons, with silver scales under her wings. Then there was a male RainWing-MudWing of about twenty years with gold scales and long venomous teeth, and a curled slim tail with a long neck, but he had lots of strong muscle. Finally, there was a creaky old MudWing-Icewing with pale tan scales with streaks of white and brown and blue, and many horns on her muscular neck, with spikes on her blue-brown tail that rattle on the floor. ?This is Sandshark, Freezeburn, Azure, Mallard, and Amberfrost.? Sunny introduced them. ?Why don?t you all go talk to them?? Starlight was very interested in all of them, but she decided to go to Azure first since she was part NightWing. ?Hi.? Azure greeted her. Starlight glanced around. All the boys were talking to the handsome Mallard, and Snowshoe and Mirage were speaking with Amberfrost. Hibiscus was the only one talking to SandShark, which left Freezeburn shuffling his talons awkwardly. Tiger shark was the only one to notice this, and he went over to talk to him. Azure was looking confused at Starlight. ?Heeelllooo?? she asked. ?Oh, uh, hi. I?m Starlight. And I?m a NightWing if you were wondering.? Starlight said, shaking out her wings. ?Huh. I guess we?re both weird-looking NightWings then.

Though personally, I like your silver scales.? Azure swept her tail up with a smile. ?I guess being a taught me that being unique-looking doesn't mean you look bad. Being unique is good.? Azure opened her midnight blue wings. With a mischievous grin. ?Don't you think?? she asked. ?I do.? Starlight said wholeheartedly. ?And I think you are absolutely beautiful.? The smile on Azure's face was enough to brighten the sun. ?Thank you. Nobody has ever told me that before.? she said. ?Well anyway, why don't you go talk to Sandshark over there. He knows tons about SeaWing hybrids, so he might help answer some questions about SeaWing hybrids like me.? Azure suggested. ?Ok!.? Starlight said and stepped over to talk with Sandshark. ?Hey.? Sandshark said as she stepped over. He flopped his tail over his dark green talons and resettled his green-yellow wings. ?What can I tell you about?? he asked her. ?I was wondering if you could just tell me all you know about SeaWing hybrids.? Starlight said. ?Alright then? he wrinkled his pale yellow brow thoughtfully and tapped his talons on the floor. ?So basically, when there is a SeaWing hybrid, let's start on powers. Now when a SeaWing crosses with a fire-breathing tribe, the offspring can not breathe fire. And if they crossed with an IceWing or RainWing, however, they can use venom or ice breath. And if you are crossed with a SandWing or IceWing, you get the physical weapons too like the tail barb or the spikes. And all SeaWing hybrids can breathe underwater, except MudWing SeaWing hybrids, they can hold their breath for up to five hours. And for looks, you will just be a mix of colors, and the similar color will decide if you are green or blue. Like an IceWing hybrid, the SeaWing color would be blue, and for me it's green. Oh, and one more thing is that SeaWing hybrids that are crossed with NighWings like Azure do in fact have the potential to have NightWing powers. Is that all you want to know?? Sandshark finished. ?Yes that is good, thank you.? Starlight said and shuffled over to talk to the old Freezeburn. ?Hello, little darling.? he said kindly, extending one white, red-veined claw to her. Starlight reached out and pressed her silver talons to his palm before she sat in front of him, curling up her tail tightly and letting her wings sink on the floor. ?What would you like to know?? he asked in a slow voice, smiling at her, displaying his shockingly white teeth. ?I would like to know about your powers, please.? Starlight asked tentatively. ?Sure. So I have No breathing abilities, my fire and ice cancel each other out. Although I have huge wings and I was a very strong fighter back in my time.? He stretched one wing out and Starlight gasped at the huge white and red mass. Wow, she thought. ?And I have serrated claws and these spikes.? he showed his dangerous talons and turned, displaying his line of spiky horns stretching from his head to his tail. ?That is really cool. And I like your red veins.? Starlight told him. ?Thank you little darling.? he said. ?Well go on your way, I suggest speaking with AmberFrost over there, she knows all about IceWing hybrids and she is quite the nice gal.? Freezeburn told her, pushing her to the other side of the room toward Amberfrost. Amberfrost was a very old MudWing-IceWing, older than Freezeburn, and she looked tired and her tail and neck were thin, and her MudWing muscle was a bit flimsy looking. ?Hello.? She said in a tired and shallow voice. ?I just had a few questions about IceWing hybrids.? Starlight told her. ?Alright but make it quick. My voice is wearing out.? Amberfrost wheezed. ?So I think I get the color situation. But I was just wondering if you could hold your breath, for how long, and if you can breathe anything.? Starlight stated. ?Well I can hold my breath for an hour and I can breathe fire if I am very hot and Ice if I am very cold. Is that all?? ?almost. I was just wondering if all IceWing hybrids have spikes and streaks, or no.? ?They do.? Amberfrost concluded. ?Thank you!.? Starlight said, and walked over to talk to

Malard, the only hybrid left. He was very handsome, and his gold scales shined around flecks of and green. "Ok." Starlight started immediately. "Can you spit venom, can you change color, do you like the rainforest, can you breathe fire, can you hold your breath." she asked without missing a beat. "Yes, no, yes, yes-no, only for fifteen minutes." answered, as fast as her. Starlight finished her writing in her scroll and rolled it up with a deep breath. She had gotten everything she needed. Now she was as close to an expert on hybrids as she could get. She gave a sigh of relief when the bell rang for dinner. Maybe today wasn't so bad after all.

## Chapter 7

That night, Morrowseer visited Starlight again. "So," he hissed softly. "I see you have already cast a spell." he looked slightly disapproving, but he tried to cover it up with a twitchy smile. "But don't cast anymore without my consultancy." "Why?" Starlight demanded. "It's my power. I can do whatever I want with it." Morrowseer clenched his teeth. "Because I said so." Starlight tossed her head and glared challengingly at him. "No." "Fine. you two, come." two dragons stepped out from behind him. One was a large, no huge, and burly black NightWing with underscales with no color and silver teardrop scales by his eyes, and a bony, thin female NightWing with green underscales and a pouch around her long neck holding up a sharp-eyed face. "Who-who are they?" asked Starlight. "Starlight, meet Darkstrike and Furryslayer. Also known as Darkstalker and Foeslayer."

## Chapter 8

Starlight's face drained of color. She felt like she couldn't breathe. She took a step back, her wings trembling. She could see it now. She squinted at Darkstalker/Darkstrike. He was so big that Foeslayer/Furryslayer was dwarfed beside her, and she assumed that the dreamvisitor altered his size, because she would have expected him to be bigger. She noticed a long line of chilly blue scales under his wings. Starlight pressed her claws to her head. 'Don't be scared of him, Starlight. He is powerless compared to me.' Morrowseer hissed. She doubted that. 'But? but Foeslayer, didn't she want to change? Isn't she good now?' Starlight asked weakly. 'Ah. yes. I had dear Darkstalker here mind control her, well, make her cold and want to follow me, before I demanded that he follow me. The price for disobedience was her life.' He jabbed a talon at Foeslayer. 'But? how are they free?' she whispered. 'How did you know what happened to them?' He asked disapprovingly. Starlight seized her tail and squeezed it. 'Moonwatcher is my cousin,' she whispered. 'She told me about it? she is like a sister to me.' Darkstalker raised his head. 'Moonwatcher? She's? your cousin?' His eyes widened in fury. 'YOUR COUSIN?' he roared to Morrowseer. 'You told me she had run off with that annoying SandWing and gotten lost in the sea.' the huge NightWing hissed angrily. Morrowseer glared at him. 'So what? You follow me. Who cares about her?' 'I do.' Darkstalker hissed. Starlight had never imagined him like this. Maybe being the one under control with their claws tied had changed him. 'I've had enough.' the giant NightWing turned and stormed away, leaving a blank-eyed Foeslayer and an angry Morrowseer behind. Starlight decided she did not like Morrowseer too much anymore. Starlight glared at Morrowseer. 'How?' She asked angrily. 'I've seen Hope and her son recently.' Morrowseer rolled his cold eyes. 'That was never them. Do you know how Darkstalker ate that strawberry? He enchanted himself to be immune to transformation. Hope and her brat are just faking. Darkstalker and Foeslayer have worked for me this whole time.' He paused. 'And you could too.' Starlight dropped her tail and growled, bringing her wings back. 'Never,' Morrowseer's eyes flashed dangerously. and then she woke up.

Starlight hurried along the halls at school the next day, trying to escape before her winglet saw her. But of course, Snowshoe stepped in front of her. 'We need to talk to you before school starts,' she said, raising her talons to gesture around at Hibiscus and Mirage. Hibiscus nodded as sharply as possible, but the effect was kind of ruined by the spirals of lemon yellow, splashes of bright pink, explosions of lime green, and dazzling sky blue patches that whisked through her bright scales, making her look like a rainbow blew up all over her. Mirage ducked her head and looked away. 'Well actually I will probably do all the talking and Snowshoe might say like two words and Mirage will just probably do that thing where she listens and is part of a conversation but NEVER talks.' Hibiscus reasons, scrunching up her snout while clouds of smokey gray-purple enveloped her wings. 'Well anyway, let's go.' The little RainWing bounced ahead, the purple fading back to vibrant orange. When they were all seated comfortably in the cave, Starlight saw Tiger shark, Copper, and Falcon emerge into the room too. Exasperated, Starlight threw up her wings. 'What do all of you annoying dragons want?' She asked, annoyed. 'We want to know why you've been acting weird,' Snowshoe announced.

"I have not been acting weird!?" Starlight exploded. Everyone gave her a look. Even Mirage looked "Uh-huh. What about when you forgot class? Or lost that scroll? It's not like you, Starlight, and you know it." Copper told her. "Fine." Starlight snapped. She took a deep breath. "I just found out I'm an animus and I've been dreamvisited by Morrowseer and he had Darkstalker and Foeslayer working for him and he wants me to help him get revenge and Mirage had nightWing powers and guess what? I already cast a spell and I might turn evil and I look weird so if you're wondering why I'm not myself recently, there's your answer, and if that's not good enough I really don't know what to tell you." She glared around at the group, silently challenging them to argue. Copper's mouth dropped open. Snowshoe was opening and closing her snout, and Mirage looked thoroughly unsurprised. Starlight ducked her head. Nobody would want to be her friend now. She was even more of a freak than her clawmates had known. But then, unexpectedly, she felt wings wrap around her. She looked around to see Tiger Shark hugging her. He smiled at her and beckoned Hibiscus over. She happily jumped up and joined the hug, practically shoving the NightWing and SeaWing over, her glasses knocked off her face in the process. They all laughed, pushing each other until Snowshoe gracefully stepped over and stretched a wing around them too. Copper and Mirage came as well, so Starlight was nearly suffocating in an ocean of blue, yellow, white, brown, and pink wings and tails. Even Falcon, against his will, grumpily slid over to put himself in the mix. The six dragonets giggled as he angrily shouted at them about personal space, and clawed at their tails. "So I guess you don't think I'm horrible after all? You still want to be friends with me??" Starlight said incredulously. In a muffled voice Tiger Shark said, "What do you think??" "You're totally awesome." Hibiscus agreed. Falcon rolled his yellow eyes. "I do NOT want to be a part of all this mushy awesome friend stuff. You can all be a big clump of happy butterflies, but I am not going to be a part of your "Let's all be best friends" nonsense." "I think he means that he thinks you're awesome too." Snowshoe translated, lightly bopping him on the snout with her tail. "Guys, this is so great, but we kind of has more important things to do," Copper said, lifting his snout to look at them. "That's true. We have class." Hibiscus said, scrunching up her snout. "On second thought, maybe we can skip that. Surely all of this very important stuff and info is more important than class. Like maaaayybbeeee Starlight being an animus is a good excuse for missing kindness class, maybe." Starlight snorted a laugh. And that was when they heard the scream. Talons thumped outside on the entrance ledge. Starlight rushed out to see what was going on. And she saw the most terrifying sight she had ever seen.

## Chapter 9

It was Queen Glory. But It did not look like Queen Glory of the NightWings and RainWings at all. She was a horrible, scary purple black, with blood red zipping through her scales. Her face was contorted in an angry, awful look and she had a twisted thorny black crown on her head, with a purpley black gemstone on it that had clouds of gray smoke swirling inside it. Her talons were longer than usual, sharper than usual, more menacing than usual. She had ropes of black spiky chains wrapped around her neck and dangling on her wrists and claws, and she had a silvery purple bracelet with thick sharp spikes pointing inward, digging into her wrist. Her usual flowers and viny rings and beautiful elegance was gone. She was now a dragon that screamed evil, from her wicked sharp horns to her lashing purple tail. But the scariest part of all was not her killer expression or her thorn crown or her scales, it was her eyes. They were pure glowing orbs of red. Red like a bloodstained flower, red like the setting sun, red like the blood her talons that weren't hers wanted to shed. Those eyes would haunt Starlight for the rest of her life. Queen Glory lifted her blank eyed, cruel snout and said in a voice nothing like her own, like poisonous snakes hissing and dragons screaming and death, with only the smallest fragment of the voice of Queen Glory inside, "Bring me Starlight." Her blank eyes glared around at the petrified watching dragons. "Or you will be sorry. Bring me Starlight or you all die." Nobody moved. A few eyes flickered in Starlight's direction, but nobody turned her in. Nobody moved. A few moments passed. Still, nobody moved. "HOW DARE YOU DEFY THE ORDERS OF YOUR QUEEN!" Glory roared to the crowd. Glory swept down and in one giant swoop she snatched up a whimpering little SeaWing and hissed around at the school. "Bring me Starlight or this dragonet dies." She looked around and then, suddenly, Glory changed. It was like a snake shedding her skin. her eyes returned to emerald green, her scales to lime, the smoke in her crown stopped. Glory stared around for a moment, then started scrapping at her bracelet desperately. She looked in horror at the dragonet and lifted him gently back down before she said hoarsely, "Run Starlight." and then evil glory returned.

Purple and black billowed over her scales, and her eyes glossed over red. She snapped her neck over to Starlight, a wicked snarl on her face. Starlight felt scales and talons grab her arm gently. "We need to go! Hurry come on!" and so they ran. They ran and ran and ran. And Starlight did not look back. When they reached a corner, Starlight was turned. RainWings were coming for every side. Hibiscus tugged them into the wall and she and Copper covered them as best they could. Even so, a pale blue wing stuck out, and a sandy tail, and a black horn, but they dared not move. They all waited with bated breath. Starlight's tail was sore and her scales scraped on rough stone, but even though her head was jammed between Snowshoe and the wall, and her scales felt scraped raw, and her talons were aching, but even so, she stayed still and quiet. Finally, Starlight saw two red eyed RainWings whisk past, looking for them. After they passed, the group kept going down the hall. Until they reached the dead end. Starlight looked in horror at it. They were trapped. Snowshoe turned trying to look for a place to

hide. Tiger shark reached out and felt the wall. "Hey, I feel a? there?s a crack! Copper, help me pull rock out." he said excitedly. Tiger Shark inserted a talon into the crack and yanked. A teeny, tiny, little pebble popped out, and a tiny beam of orange sunlight flitted through the hole. "Well we aren?t getting through this." Falcon observed. "Wait- we have an Animus!?" Hibiscus jumped in. Starlight started at her. "Me??" "Yeah, just blast the wall down or something." Snowshoe said as though this was obvious. Starlight looked down. "I kind of don?t want to use my power? unless absolutely necessary." her friends looked at her like she was insane. "Uh, It kind of is absolutely necessary, Starlight." Hibiscus said solemnly. Starlight looked around at her Winglet?s pleading faces. "Alright." she said. Starlight pressed her talons to the rock. A moment later, the rock cracked and slid away from her claws, so a hole just big enough for a dragon to slip through was cut into the rock. "So cool!?" Copper whispered in awe. Starlight beckoned for them to follow her through the hole. Outside, a hot steamy breeze rustled through their wings and played with their tails. They were on a ledge, a ledge on the back of the mountain. It was empty except for a couple of large boulders. Moss grew in thickets, smothering out the gray boulders and a fuzzy layer of moss and soft plants covered the ledge like a carpet. A few purple and blue swirled, curling flowers grew in cracks on the rocks and in the moss rug. It was nice and peaceful and beautiful. Interrupting the pretty silence, Falcon said, "We need to hide. This is not where we stop. We need to keep flying." "Maybe not." Starlight murmured, examining the ledge. She studied the boulders and the moss. There was no way to hide behind the rocks on the moss. Maybe if they hid under the ledge, or maybe they could even hide under the moss and act like rocks. Maybe they could? But wait? she cautiously moved toward the largest boulder. It was sitting to the side, with a huge curtain of moss that ran from all over the boulder to cover a patch of rock floor next to it. It looked normal, and it looked like just a natural phenomenon, but still- She carefully poked the moss dangling on the floor and it shifted slightly. excited, She took the corner and tugged it. In one swoop, the moss was gone, to reveal a hole in the rock, leading to a deep, dark passage far below. Hibiscus let out a sigh of awe. Starlight craned her neck to see. It was almost totally dark. The only light was the sun. She beckoned for the others to come see. "We need to go down there. It?s the only place to hide." Starlight said immediately. Without missing a beat, Tiger Shark leaped from the ledge and spiraled downward into the hole. She followed, and the others followed behind her. When the moss was restored, the tunnel faded into pitch black, broken only by thin, dull green beams that made it through the thick moss. The air was cold as it rushed by her. She tucked in her wings and let herself fall, down down down, until she sensed the end was near. She flung out her wings and floated down some more. When her talons finally thumped on solid rock, she looked ahead and saw nothing but another dark passageway. She tentatively stepped forward and then again, until she was briskly walking along. She checked to see that everyone was still there, and she went a little faster. Eventually, she saw a pinprick of light ahead. She walked faster, flapping her wings to go quicker. The light was growing bigger and brighter. Soon, she exploded into a big, wide cave. It was huge, with a river trickling in the middle and moss growing everywhere. A fire was lit in the center, and the cave was homey and warm, like it was built for them to stay in. "This is perfect." she said breathlessly. The other nodded. They split off to explore the cave. Starlight was looking at a beautiful pink flower growing in a patch of dirt, and swishing her tail in the cold river, when suddenly, movement came from the side. Something large emerged from a small passageway on the left side of the room. As the thing got closer, she gasped.

That's a dragon! Starlight thought in terror. She tried to dive in the river, But the white dragon stepping them had normal eyes, and she walked gently. She looked kind. Starlight paused. The IceWing stepped into the light. She was a pale, pretty white with little shimmers of blue along her wings and tail. Her cobalt blue eyes were slightly concerned, but she seemed like she was not too surprised to see them in the cave. And she spoke in a voice like crystalized sugar and honey, sweet and snow like, in a way that made you want to just forget all your worries. Starlight found herself already liking the strange dragon. "Hello, friends." she said softly. "I see you've found the Jade hideout."

## Chapter 10

Starlight's jaw dropped. "Who-who are you? And what's the Jade?" "I'm Chalcedony. I know it's kind of a mouthful. And you just found the Jade. Well, I'm part of the Jade, which is part of the Gemstone, anyway. Your lucky Sunburst isn't here. She would go absolutely ballistic if she found you in here." Chalcedony said conversationally. "Who's Sunburst?" Snowshoe asked in interest. "She's a SkyWing in the Jade." Chalcedony explained. "Who is everyone in the Jade?" Starlight asked. "Let's see." The IceWing said thoughtfully. "Me, Sunburst, Lilypad, the girls, Hurricane, Shadowflight, Reed, and Dingo the boys." she listed "Oh, here they are now!" she said brightly. Six dragons thumped down behind them. There was a absolutely furious looking red-orange SkyWing with her colors swirling out in a spiral pattern, like bursts of fire, a brown, sweet looking Mudwing with a white flowered necklace that had little green leaves still attached, a SeaWing of a foamy, flamboyant sea green color with blue swishes like paint streaks across his back, a black and blue Nightwing with a pair of gold chains on his horns, another brown and amber MudWing with bracelets of green and brown reeds on his wrists, and finally a SandWing with sand colored scales and brown dots matched with a ghastly bleeding scar on his side. Once they were all safely inside, the SkyWing opened her mouth to shout. Noticing this, Chalcedony said, "Why don't we introduce ourselves first." "Chalcedony, you know good and well that these dragonets should not be here." Sunburst growled, bristling. "And they do not need to know anything about us or the Jade. We should just kill them right now." "No!" Chalcedony cried. "They are just dragonets! Queen Glory is after them! They need a place to hide, and I think we should help them." "They are just dragonets, Sunburst." Lilypad said gently. "And it is kind of the point of the Jade to help dragons." "Idiot furbrains. Eclipse was never this stupid. Why did she have to die instead of one of you dopes?" Sunburst muttered furiously. Hibiscus looked shocked. "She doesn't mean that." Lilypad assured the RainWing. "Come on." Whispered Chalcedony. "I'll show you the other caves." "What's in the other caves?" Starlight whispered back. "One is a sleeping cave, and the other? well, you will see." "Not me." Falcon announced. "I'm staying here. I'm tired and I can see the tour later." "I guess we'll stay too. Falcon could bring down the cave with his yelling if we are not here to supervise him." Tiger Shark said apologetically. The others nodded in agreement. "Relatable." Dingo smirked, with a sideways glance at Sunburst. She glared back. "Alright then." Chalcedony said. "Come on." When she showed her the sleeping cave, Starlight was mildly impressed. It was a small but sweet room, with seven little moss cots and an intricately woven vine carpet. The walls were covered in tapestries of glowing yellow flowers that smelled like if you took a dream and mixed it with sugar and happiness and sprinkled it on everything. It was easy to tell who's cot was who's. But what surprised Starlight was the photo next to Sunburst's bed. It was a portrait of a blood red SkyWing with curved horns and a long snout. On the far side, there was a beautiful life sized carving of a NightWing with a knowing expression on her delicate snout. "Ah, that's Eclipse. She died a few months ago. Too bad, she was quite smart?" Chalcedony said, catching Starlight looking at it. She was purple and black, with gold spirals on her

horns and a necklace with a moon on it, and the statue was made of dark marble and it had moonstones eyes. Yet, there was something off, about it. Yes it was beautiful, and yes it was just a statue, but something about it was a little eerie and empty like. Chalcedony stepped up to it and looked at it for a moment before she carefully took the moon charm off of the carving's necklace. She then led them out of the room to the main cave. She stepped over the waterfall leading to the stream and slipped behind it. There was a flat rocky wall behind, and it was so unextraordinary it took Starlight a moment to notice a deep circular groove in the stone. It looked natural, but Starlight knew that it was not. Chalcedony inserted the moon in the groove, and lightly pushed against the wall. Then the wall swung open. A blast of cold air came rushing out as the door opened. Inside there was a long, well lit hallway with wreathes of lilac, periwinkle, and aquamarine pointed flowers that looked like they were dripping with ice decorating the hall walls. Icicles were strung from the ceiling like banners, and the floor was covered with glass. When they reached the cave, Starlight gasped. The room was throbbingly chilly, with more wreaths of flowers lining the walls, and the floor was dusted with drifts of soft white snow. Small snowflakes fell in thin flurries in the room, coming from the ceiling that was dripping with icicles. The snow spiraled around in chilly precipitation that felt soft against Starlight's scales as they fell, but were ferociously cold in that piercing way like freezing needles on your scales. Snow clumped around Starlight's talons as she walked, numbing her claws and becoming tight ice chunks under her feet. She barely noticed what she was looking at as she battled the cold room and freezing snow. When she wiped the frozen rain out of her face and cleared a spot to sit with her tail, she saw what they were here for. At the end, there was a throne made of ice. It had a polar bear fur blanket casually laid over the side and a stuffed fox fur cushion on the bottom. Draped across the throne was a stunningly beautiful IceWing. She was light blue, with white snowflake patterns on her scales and dark blue sprinkled scales under her wings. Her eyes were a strange pinkish blue and she had a crown of soft pink flowers with tiny diamonds in the center wrapped around her horns and the top of her head. Her tail curled gracefully over the throne, the spikes hovering just about the floor as she curved her neck to watch the snow fall. She was old, but she looked younger than she was, and she held herself like a queen. The regal appearance was punctured only by the IceWing's expression. She looked happy and she smiled at them, as she ran her claws on the snow piling on the armrests of her seat. Starlight had never seen somebody so queenlike look like she was thoroughly enjoying herself. Even Gory, who, prior to her red eyes, had never looked this happy. Chalcedony bowed to her when she entered and Starlight followed suit. "You may rise." The Icewing said in a kind but firm voice. "This is Neige. She is the leader of the Gemstones and is visiting the Jade right now." Chalcedony explained. "The Gemstones is our peace movement, and there are five branches. The Jade, the Sapphire, the Ruby, the Diamond, and the Emerald. Neige usually stays in the Diamond but she is here for now. And we all kind of worship her. We call her Queen Elegant, and she is the ruler of the world to us." "I always tell them they are a bit over the top. Queen Elegant is a bit too much." Neige said dryly. She adjusted her long slender tail and started again. "Elegant is fine. And Chalcedony, we agreed never to call me Neige anymore." "Yes, Queen Elegant." Chalcedony said. Elegant gave her a reproachful look. The IceWing did not seem to notice. "Have the others returned?" Elegant asked. "Yes. they have." Chalcedony answered her. "Great. Let's go and hear their report." Elegant rose from her seat and stepped gracefully down through the snow. Chalcedony followed her, watching Elegant closely. Once they were back in the

main cave, Starlight's friends waved, but only Copper noticed their new IceWing companion at first. is that?? He yelped, seeing the beautiful blue dragoness. ?This is-? Chalcedony started, but Elegant interrupted. ?I am Queen Elegant. At least, that's what everyone calls me. You may refer to me as Elegant. I am the leader of the Gemstones, and I am staying here at the Jade for the moment.? Elegant regally swept her tail around her talons and looked around with her pink-blue eyes. Falcon studied his talons, unconcerned, but everybody else's mouths dropped open. Except for Mirage's, of course, because she was never surprised by anything. Hibiscus stepped up to her and studied her for a moment, before intently trying to match her colors and arranging her frill to look like icicles. her eyes popped to the same color as Elegant's, and her scales to blue. ?Impressive.? Elegant murmured, looking approvingly at the RainWing's scales. ?Who might you be? And them?? asked her, glancing at the winglet. ?Oh, I'm Hibiscus and this is Falcon, Copper, Tiger Shark, Snowshoe, and Mirage, and I think you already know Starlight.? She answered quickly. ?So I do?? Elegant responded, tilting her head to each dragon in a silent hello. ?Well, Chalcedony, go get the others and let's hear the report.? She sat down and looked expectantly at the IceWing. ?Er, of course Queen Elegant.? Chalcedony hurried away to the sleeping cave. ?So- you started the Gemstones?? Snowshoe asked disbelievingly. ?I did.? Elegant responded simply. ?Wow.? gasped Snowshoe. ?That is so cool! What do you like to do?? ?I spend most of my time running the Gemstones, but I like painting and playing instruments.? ?Do you have any instruments here?? Hibiscus burst out. Elegant blinked at her. ?Yes. in the storage bin in the corner. Why?? But Hibiscus had already rushed over and grabbed an object from it before dashing away to behind the waterfall. ?What was that about?? Tiger shark asked Starlight. She shrugged ?No idea. But I'm about to find out.? Starlight briskly walked to the waterfall. She tapped the rock with her claw before she slid in, expecting to see her RainWing friend. Hibiscus wasn't there. Starlight glanced at the open doorway and slipped inside. As she stepped through the hallway dotted with flower wreaths and chandeliers of diamonds and fire encased in glass flowers, she started to hear a sweet little ringing tune. As she got closer to the snow cave, the song grew louder. When she stepped inside, she saw Hibiscus sitting in the corner. In her talons she delicately held a long wooden object. It was slim at the top with a wider base. There were stings strung over the wood, and Hibiscus was gently plucking them with her claw. Pale purple and frosted pink swirled around on her scales. Her face was in total concentration as she played the instrument. The sound it made was like an orange, Starlight loved it, and it was sweet but tangy at the same time. The music reminded Starlight of water falling and birds chirping. Hibiscus was singing softly under her breath. Starlight could just make out a little bit, scattered words- She paused. ?Uh? am I interrupting you?? Starlight asked uncertainty. Hibiscus looked blankly before turning away. ?Ok, well, we can talk about this after I hear the report?? Starlight said, confused. Hibiscus still stayed quiet. She looked in concern at the RainWing. And then, Hibiscus dropped the instrument. It landed with a thud on the rock floor dusted with snow. The gently molded wood splintered into three pieces, and the strings snapped with a dull twang. Hibiscus stood up, and shoved the pieces aside with her tail. And when she turned, Starlight was looking into the glowing red eyes of Queen Glory.

# Chapter 11

Starlight let out a shriek and stumbled back. She scrambled to her claws and pressed up against the wall, kicking snow up in thick, wet clouds of frost. Her claws scrabbled on the damp rock, sliding as she tried to scurry to the door. She scrambled around and was almost there when- In one step, Hibiscus strode over and with a flick of her tail, a mound of snow fell in front of the doorway, blocking the exit. Starlight let out a helpless moan and flapped her wings as she tried to stay upright. She pressed up to the wall again and twitched her tail, sending flakes of freezing snow spiraling up into the air, like sharp raindrops. Hibiscus was now facing the other wall, letting her talons sink into the piercing cold snow. Starlight said still, letting the flurrying snow pelt her in cold droplets and the snow on her tail and talons sit and numb her scales. Starlight, realizing her chance, took a deep breath and thought for a moment, before she filled her mind with an open doorway. She then turned to the snow-covered entryway and opened her talons. In one swift motion, the snow exploded around the doorway and flew up into the air, particles flying everywhere. She looked around, expecting to see Hibiscus turning around, but- she was still there, standing silently. With trembling claws, she crept over to the RainWing and gently tapped her wing. And suddenly, Hibiscus disintegrated, like snow just falling away. Starlight suppressed the urge to scream. The snow fell serenely to the ground and blended into the snow already on the stone floor. Starlight, too horrified to make a sound, turned on her heel and rushed out the door. She stumbled out to behind the waterfall and- straight into Hibiscus. The little RainWing toppled over, confused. She sat up and pushed her glasses back on her face and stood up. ?What was THAT about? Did I miss something? Why do you look surprised? And happy? What is going on? Are we on the moons or something? I'm so confused.? In one swoop, Starlight flung herself onto the RainWing, hugging her fiercely. ?Awww, I love you too! You're my best friend!? Hibiscus said. ?Also, they finished the report, and guess what! The Diamond is coming! Exiting!?! ?They ARE?? Starlight yelped. ?Yep. right- Now!?! Talons thumped on a rock nearby. Starlight vaulted out from behind the waterfall. All of the Jade and Starlight?s friends were watching as five very sparkly and impressive-looking dragons landed in the cave. There were two IceWings, a SeaWing, a SkyWing, and a RainWing. Huh. Starlight thought. She had not expected a RainWing. ?Apparently, the Diamond is only for the possibly royal, very rich, pretty, and totally snooty fancy dragons.? Hibiscus informed her, her voice regal and prompt. The two IceWings were female, and both were bored and uninterested looking. They looked almost the same, a frosted white-blue color and dripping with diamonds and sapphires used for necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and headbands. They were beautiful in a glassy way, like snow, it was pretty but got boring so quickly. The SkyWing was male, and he was devastatingly handsome. He was a ruby red, and he had gold chain mail matched with the ruby and amber chains that wrapped around his horns, forearms, tail, and wings. He had orange eyes, and he used them to study his ruby-tipped black painted claws that gleamed with gold rings. The SeaWing was also male, and he was so obviously, ridiculously descended from Whirlpool that Starlight needn't hear his voice to know exactly what it sounded like. He was dark green with pea-green on his back, like Whirlpool, but he had managed to skim off the weird eyes. He had pearls

dangling from almost everywhere on his body, and emeralds were embedded in his scales. Gold chains woven all over him, and he had a crown of shells completed with a cape of blue silk that rested around his neck, over his shoulders, and down his spine. He looked ridiculous like he was trying so hard to look expensive, and he was succeeding, but it came at the price of his own self-dignity. Starlight noticed that the IceWing pair was slowly inching away from him. What really surprised Starlight, however, was the Rainwing. She was old and absolutely dripping with wealth. There was an annoying snort from behind them. ?Introduce yourselves to our visitors.? Sunburst said icily. ?Crystal.? Sniffed the first IceWing, the one with the light blue eyes. ?Kyanite,? The other one said. She had dark blue eyes. ?Realgar.? the SkyWing said, without looking up from his claws. ?Whirlpool the second.? The SeaWing oozed. Starlight almost laughed out loud. ?But I am really Maw Sit Sit. So you understand why I go by Whirlpool the second. Nothing personal.? Starlight stared at him. ?Guess.? the RainWing said. Startled, Starlight studied the dragon. She was a Rainbow of colors, and she had white dragon claw petal flowers all over her body. Opals were embedded in her scales and strung over her wings. The jewels were all over her too, on her bracelet and her pendant. The RainWing opened her wings to display a row of opals woven into her scales. ?Opal?? Starlight guessed. ?No no, it?s?? She stopped and frowned slightly. ?Yes, it is Opal.? Starlight snickered. ?And I am the only RainWing in all of the Gemstones!? Opal said dramatically, opening her wings and tossing her head. ?I used to be a Queen! I was actually Royalty! But then I left to join the Diamond, and they practically forgot about me.? Opal studied her talons. ?Too bad, so sad. I?m here now.? Opal, Crystal, Kyanite, Realgar, even Maw Sit Sit? all gemstones. Elegant stepped up and frowned. ?Where is Citrine?? She asked. ?Right there.? Opal said, pointing to the door. A SandWing was standing at the cave entrance. She was a lemon yellow (unusual!) and She had Citrine jewels and gold chains wrapped around her horns, legs, and wings. White silk was wrapped around a gold twisted bracelet on her arm, but most of the silk was frayed and ripped. A white silk sling that looked like it was torn from something was tied around her neck and it had a smooth-surfaced object inside. The SandWing set the sling down and the silk slid away from the thing inside. Citrine gently pushed it into the middle of the room and peeled off the last protective layer of silk clinging to the round object. It was an egg. But, surprisingly, it was not a sandy-colored egg. The egg trembled slightly in Citrine?s claws. She rested her claws on it, and the light hit it. The smooth, round, slightly cracked egg was a pale, silvery-white blue that shimmered like ice when the light gleamed on it. This was the egg of an IceWing.

## Chapter 12

WHAT in the WORLD of Pyrrhia is THAT?? Sunburst shrieked. PLEASE tell me that is one of YOUR? She looked at Kyanite and Crystal, Eggs! And if it's not, SO HELP ME I will STRANGLE you and that brat inside! Well? IS IT?? nether IceWing spoke. Crystal raised her eyebrows at Kyanite, who shook her head. Oh, for QUEEN RUBY'S SAKE who's egg is that? Don't tell me you found it in some random place on the continent!? Sunburst howled. That's kind of exactly what happened, Citrine said quietly. So you mean to tell me that this egg is some RANDOM dragon's egg from some RANDOM place and you have NO idea where it came from? What is WRONG with you? Some dragons are so stupid!? Well I'm sorry but it is staying here. Citrine snapped. NO! Absolutely NOT I will not have some random dragonet ruining my life!? Sunburst growled. Well I'm so sorry to ruin your life because this is all about YOU but this egg is going NOWHERE.,? the SandWing said in a final voice. Sunburst stomped around, hissing and snorting fire, before she grumbled, I'm going to bed.? and then she angrily stamped to the sleeping cave. Starlight curled up next to the egg and rested a claw on it. It was biting cold. Tiger Shark and Hibiscus curled up next to her, flopping their wings over her back. Starlight felt her eyelids drooping. In just a moment or two, she was fast asleep, and all her troubles had faded away.

The next morning, she awoke to the smell of cooking fish and roasting birds. She looked up to see most of the adult dragons, but not any of the IceWings or SeaWings, crowded around a table and they took turns bursting a pile of fish and assorted birds with flames. In a few moments, they were called over to pick food. Starlight took a sleek, gray silverfish and a bright blue parrot between her claws and began to eat. The fish was a little burned, and the bird was a bit underdone, but she did not complain. It was still something, and Starlight had been STARVING. After breakfast was done, She sighed and walked over to the river. she dipped her head and drank from it, then she tilted her wings and felt the water brush on her wings and tail. A little sound came from across the stream. A little urg hmm hworg and a little tapping and cracking sound. Starlight looked up to see the egg from last night splintering and breaking apart. She hopped across the water and cupped her claws around the egg. When her scales brushed it, the egg chipped more and a little claw poked out. Nervous, Starlight waited as more of the egg broke and fell apart. No! Wait for Citrine! I've never seen a hatching before?? Starlight said, covering the cracks with her claws. A Tip of a wing burst through and Starlight poked it back in with her claw. Bruuble?? squeaked the egg. Chrippy? and a little dragonet tumbled out. She had enormous indigo eyes and grayish-white scales with shots of pale blue. her tiny wings were all white, and she had a little band of indigo scales that circled the end of her tail and a longer, thinner ring around her collar bone. She blinked her huge, innocent eyes and poked her serrated white talon at Starlight's nose. Hurrmmphy.? She wheedled. Bregumph.? What is it, little dragon?? asked Starlight. Dragoon!? The IceWing flung her tail out and smacked Starlight in the face. Hey!? She shouted. Ouch!? Burble Ouch.? The baby said serenely. What do you want?? Starlight asked. Delighted, The dragonet gleefully said, Hunree? She clapped her talons and flailed her wings. HUNREE? She shouted in her squeaky voice. I think she's hungry Starlight.? Hibiscus said,

laughing as she stepped up behind her. The little IceWing tilted her head. "Strariht. Me so HUNREE!?" whined. "Oh, dear. I think that's her saying STARLIGHT FEED ME! I'm Hibiscus little one." Hibiscus said, reaching out a talon. The dragonet took her claw and tried to gnaw on it. "Hebicus. Me hunree." The dragonet said woefully. "I think there are two things I need to do. Get this loud baby some food, and name her." Starlight said, hugging the dragonet to her chest. "I see my dragonet hatched." Said a voice behind them. It was Citrine. "You would 't mind keeping her, would you? It would be great. And by all means, name her." "Sure." Hibiscus said happily. "I was thinking? Harp. Like the seal. So cute and innocent." Starrlight said, "Aww, I LOVE it!?" Hibiscus said, jumping up and down. Harp reached out for Starlight to pick her up. "Strariht. Hebicus. I want ood. Because me so Hunree." Hibiscus laughed and picked up a fish from the pile of food. "Here." Hibiscus said. Harp hungrily munched on the fish. When she was done, Starlight set the tiny IceWing down so she could find something to contain Harp. She brought back a few vines and a leaf. Carefully she made a little pouch-harness that fitted to her chest. She set Harp inside and the dragonet snuggled up. She snatched Starlight's talon and whispered, "Me still hunree." "Here you go." Starlight produced a long strip of hard, cooked apple and gave it to Harp. She immediately began munching on it. "The Diamond just left." Chalcedony said, stepping up to them. "And? The Lost is coming." "The Lost??" Starlight echoed, confused. "The 6th branch." Chalcedony explained. "You will understand when they get here." Starlight stroked Harp's nose thoughtfully. "Hmm. Interesting." "Why are they called the lost?" But Chalcedony was already gone. It was not until past nightfall that the Lost had arrived at the Jade. Starlight was quite bored sitting with her friends by the stream as they waited. Tiger shark and Copper were tossing fish bones as a game, and Falcon kept turning his gold medallion over in his claws as he kept glancing at the door. Mirage was mouthing something over and over again as she lay down in the streambed, and Hibiscus was asleep with her glasses ajar, while Harp snored on top of her. Starlight was thinking like mad. What was the Lost? Why were they coming? WHEN were they coming? This is so weird! Why would they take so long? Maybe they live far away?? A tap on rock made them all sit up. "Ah, you're here!?" Reed said, bustling over. Hurricane nodded politely and Shadowflight hurried over as well to greet them. When they stepped away, Starlight saw four very strange dragons. She gasped when she noticed that they were not dragons that she had ever seen before. Mirage drew in a sharp, hissing breath. One was a crisp, dark red with scales of dusty yellow scales on his wings and tail. Scatterings of orange and black also dotted his body. A white silk scarf was tied around his ankle, and a rusty gold chain with a wood circle was slung around his neck. The wood was carved, and it had a large heart on it. His wings, however, were absolutely crazy. There were four, and each one looked a bit like a bee wing. There was a thin stinger on the tip of his tail. The one next to him was bright, forest green with tiny brown scales around her, and the tip of her snout was brown like it had been dipped in mud, as was all her feet. Her wings were huge and shaped like leaves, and a few pouches labeled, "Seeds," "Leaves," and "Bark" were tied under her wings. She looked slightly nervous. Starlight noticed she had the white silk on her ankle too. The last two had the same, huge butterfly shaped four wings and long antenna, but they were different colors. The first, male, was a light, soft pink color with pale, slightly blue, green wings and little circles of lavender and white around his tail, legs, and snout. He had a light green and lavender silk strand that was tied around his wings. The second, a female, was a dark midnight blue with buried scales of tangerine and lighter blue and yellow

around her wings and a long line of dark purple along her tail. She had an earring with an amethyst from it, as well as an orange silk scarf around her neck and on her shoulders. Both were wearing the silk scarves, and Starlight noticed that the words The lost was scrawled on the bands. ?This is Beetle, Maple, Rhipheus, and Queen.? said Lilypad. ?Beetle is a HiveWing, Maple is a LeafWing, and Rhipheus and Queen are SilkWings. And they are the members of the Gemstones from the lost continent.?

## Chapter 13

Queen nodded. "We are! And it is JUST delightful, Pantala could NEVER! And the Queens here are lovely, (Not to be confused with my name, I'm named after a Queen butterfly)no mind-controlling her subjects at all!" Hmm. She must not know about the Glory fiasco. Even so, that's not Glory's fault. "Yes. Just wonderful." Maple said nervously. "Pantala was a lot less friendly to my kind." She bit her talon in a terrified fashion. "I'm quite lucky, to be honest." "Yes." Said Beetle contentedly. "I cannot be controlled by the queen. I would be dead if I had not come here." "Wow." Said Copper. "Tough deal." "You could say that." Smirked Rhipheus. "I ran because the queen is a jerk and SilkWings are mistreated and Pantala kinda just fell to the dogs when she became queen." "I ran because Queen Wasp killed my family. She treats us like we are some semi-precious thing. Useful, but totally underrated and just something pretty to use for the hard work. She thinks we are just pretty servants that can be tossed around like we don't have feelings. She has to be stopped." Queen said angrily. "Wow." Starlight said. "That's horrible." "THANK you," Queen said. "And NOBODY cares! It's insane! Like, Sister, If you can treat us like garbage, then all that shows is that YOU won't lift a talon to do anything because it's easier to sit and let us suffer." "She sounds like a total vulture." Starlight observed. "More like something a vulture would eat." Snorted Rhipheus. Starlight liked the SilkWings already. "Wait, so this Queen Wasp is the queen of HiveWings AND SilkWings?" asked Hibiscus. "Yep," Queen said ruefully. "Honestly, We need our own queen. I would volunteer myself, except Queen Queen would sound SUPER weird." Queen answered. "Huh. I guess it would." Hibiscus said thoughtfully. "What about you?" Falcon asked Maple. "Don't you have a queen?" "Yes," said Maple. "Queen Sequoia. We live in the poison jungle where Queen Wasp has no idea. Queen Sequoia is amazing." "Interesting." Said Tiger Shark. "So, how did you get here?" Asked Starlight. "We flew." Beetle said simply. "Oh wow! That's amazing!" Hibiscus said in awe. "I know, right?" Giggled Queen. "I never thought we could do it! But here we are." "So you are called the Lost, correct?"

Because you come from the Lost

continent?" Copper asked. "Yep." Said Maple. "Well, It is really called Pantala, but the Lost is more secretive." Beetle reasons. Suddenly, something gently pulled on Starlight's tail. "Starlight," Hissed a voice in her ear. "Starlight come here!" "Excuse me," Starlight said and turned. It was Mirage. "Come on!" The SandWing took Starlight's talon and pulled her away. "I had a prophecy." She said.

"Really?" gasped Starlight. "How?" "Prophecy now questions later." Mirage breathed in and said, "I hope this doesn't scare you?" And then she spoke, like words flowing out like a waterfall.

"A darkness has risen from ashes

A darkness has come from afar

Darkness is closer than anyone thinks

And yet still further than the stars

A secret hides just out of sight

A secret hides within your scales

But cannot quite be unveiled

New dragons will come but few can you trust

For evil is deep in their souls

So beware the dragon of silver and magic

So beware the one in the cloak

And face the great evil with torches of fire

And after will follow the light

Pyrrhia will drown in waves of destruction

Unless the secret is safe out of sight?

Mirage stopped. "Wow." Starlight said in awe. "That's it. I was hoping you could help me figure out what it means." Mirage said. "Sure!" Said Starlight. "A darkness has come from afar? New dragons will come but few can you trust For evil is deep in their souls? Is that the Lost? I mean, they come from afar? and they are new?" "I think so." Said Mirage gravely. "But we can deal with that later. What really worries me is? So beware the dragon of silver and magic. Starlight? I think that's you." "What?" Starlight exclaimed. She looked at her silver talons and shivered. "But? why?" She asked. "I have no idea. But it also said to beware the one in the cloak, I have no idea what that means. And? darkness risen from ashes, that was weird too? And A secret hides just out of sight A secret hides within your scales A secret bursting out for light But cannot quite be unveiled? We need to find this secret, but keep it away from everyone else, because Pyrrhia will drown in waves of destruction Unless the secret is safe out of sight? this is SO confusing!" "I have no idea about the secret, but? I think I know what the darkness risen from ashes is." Starlight said hesitantly. "Really?" Mirage said skeptically. "Yes? I kind of know that Morrowseer is still alive? on the volcano. So, could he be the darkness risen from ashes? It WOULD make sense." Mirage blinked a few times. "We need to talk about this later." She said and turned around. "Wait. I have one more question?" "No." Mirage snapped and walked away. "It is time to go to sleep," Chalcedony called. Starlight nodded and lay down, not bothering to move to somewhere more comfortable. And when she slept, a little voice said, "Hello Starlight."

"What do you want?" She asked blearily. "To give you a message," Morrowseer said. "What?" She asked. Morrowseer smiled. "Oh, idiot girl. Don't you know? I have delivered a prophecy." "What?" Starlight said again. "But Mirage just gave a prophecy." "What is hers is mine." Morrowseer rumbled. Starlight stared at him. "I'm inside her. I am her. I see her thoughts. She can never be free from me. That prophecy is as much mine as hers. And, Dragonet, how else would she give a prophecy? She is a SandWing, after all." "She had NightWing powers." Starlight said fiercely. "It is HER prophecy. And how can you control her? She is my friend and I know her." "I don't control her per se. I just push her. I am there. Always. I see her thoughts, speak into her mind, shove her in the direction I want. But she can never tell anyone about me." Morrowseer grinned a sinister, spiders up your spine smile. "Why, You may ask. On the price of his life." Morrowseer held up a scroll. On it was painted a portrait of a male SandWing. He was handsome but nervous looking like he thought that he could not possibly be

chosen to be painted. He was big and strong, with a necklace of gold around his neck. "Who is he?" wondered aloud. "That is for you to ask and you to find out, My niece." Starlight shivered and glanced up. "What did you say?" "My favorite part of this conversation." Morrowseer rolled up the scroll and swept out his talons. "Secretkeeper. Moon's mother. My apparent mate. I am Moon's father. Your mother, Allsight, is Secretkeeper's sister. Secretkeeper's daughter is Moon who is your cousin. Witch loops back to me being Moon's father. Henceforth, I am your uncle." Starlight felt like she was being stabbed in the chest. She KNEW that Morrowseer was Moon's father. So how had she not known that he was her uncle? It made sense. She liked things that made sense. But this was true and made sense but STILL how was it true? Starlight clutched her head. "I will allow you to ask me one question," Morrowseer said suddenly. Hmm, Starlight thought. One question. Should she ask about the prophecy? Yes, definitely. But what part? Maybe the part of beware the dragon of silver and magic? Or Pyrriah will drown in waves of destruction? Or? Darkness is closer than anyone thinks and yet still further than the stars? That was the part that made no sense? but she really wanted to know what the secret was. But time was ticking. "Ok. It says in the prophecy A darkness is closer than anyone thinks and yet still further than the stars. What is that about?" "Ahh. How do you not realize? It's me, my darling. Darkness risen from ashes? me. The great evil? me. Darkness is closer than anyone thinks and yet still further than the stars? I am closer because I am talking to you. I am alive when they think of me as dead. But still, I am so far away from you, from my revenge, from destroying what should be destroyed. Can't you see? I am what the prophecy is about. The "One in the Cloak" The "dragon of silver and magic" The "New dragons will come" are all minor worries compared to me. And if I get them on my side, I will dominate the entire world. And here is the fun part. You think you have a choice. You think you can slip away from me. You think that I will let you waltz on out and try to defeat me. But I won't. You think that the good guys always win, and so you must prevail! But you can't. You chose not to follow me. I gave you your chance. And you said no. But don't worry. I WILL best you in the end. You WILL be on my side soon. You can't hide from me, Starlight. You can't run away from me. I am here. And you can't stop me. Nothing can. Not even the scraping claws of immediate death."

## Chapter 14

Starlight stumbled back. And then she was awake, panting, and terrified out of her wits. "Are you ok? You look like my pet sloth Tangerine when that panther scared her one time." Hibiscus said. "You have a sloth?" Starlight asked, yawning. "Oh yes. I got her a few years ago. She LOVES tangerines. And she is so sweet! And adorable. I mean, SO adorable! Even more adorable than Glory's sloth, Silver." "Oh, that reminds me. How is Glory? Is she back to normal?" "Oh! Chalcedony told me before. So now she is not, sadly. She can't be normal until she finds you. But we know how it's happening! So you know that spike bracelet she has, well it has this serum in the spikes that poke her, and it controls her to be evil. So, if we can take the bracelet, we can take the evil!" "That's great." Starlight said sleepily. "You had a dream, didn't you?" Hibiscus said suddenly. "Yes. Why?" Starlight asked. "Tell me about it NOW!" Her friend yelped. "Well there was this prophecy? and he said it's about him? and he said he can rule the world?" her words tumbled out and jumbled together. "Start from the beginning," Hibiscus ordered. And so Starlight told her. She told her everything. "And I don't know what to do!" She finished. Hibiscus pushed her glasses up her nose and said thoughtfully, "So why don't you just do nothing? You are not the one who has to save the world. Someone else can do it." "But I am the only Animus! I am the only one who gets dreams visited. I am the only one Queen Glory wants! It's me, Hibiscus, and I have to fix it!" "But you don't have to do it alone." The RainWing said gently. Starlight pulled her wing away. "I'm leaving in a few." "And we are coming too." said a voice behind her. Mirage, Snowshoe, Copper, Tiger Shark, and Falcon were standing behind her. "You need us." "Guys! You can't come!" hissed Starlight. "Did you not just hear me? You need us, you goof." Tiger Shark smirked. Starlight sputtered and stammered before, "Fine." Starlight said. "But Hibiscus, you stay here." Hibiscus's face fell as she had just been crushed by a pound of rocks. "But? Why?" she asked. "Because you are loud and overly happy and we need someone to stay here. It's going to be you." Snapped Falcon. Starlight winced at the shock and sadness on the RainWing's face. "Ignore him. He's just a bully. We will be back soon." Starlight said, wrapping her wings around her friend. "Bye." but as Starlight left, she felt a horrible responsibility for the crushed, dejected look on Hibiscus's face.

As quickly as possible, Starlight had scribbled a note to Chalcedony and left it on the floor for her to find before she and her friends were out for the count and flying away at top speed. After carefully exiting the hideout and replacing the moss, they were aloft. In the air, Falcon asked, "Where exactly are we going?" "To see Queen Thorn. She is the only one we can trust now. Snowfall won't care, Glory is under a spell, Coral can't always be trusted, and I do not know Moorhen or Ruby very well. So we see Thorn." "Fair enough," Copper said with a shrug. A long while later, after countless games of "Who can fly the longest without fainting?" they had finally reached the edge of SandWing territory. "Here we are! Come on, not much further to Thorn!" But only a few moments in, disaster struck. A scream tore through the air. Starlight turned, only to see Snowshoe writhing under the pin of a SandWing. Three others were with her. As soon as they saw Starlight and the rest of the gang, they did not waste time attacking. Copper and Tiger Shark rushed forward to fight. Snowshoe screamed again,

and Starlight saw that the SandWing's claws were digging into her neck as she clawed at his wings. SandWing bit her on the tail and slashed her nose. Blue blood splattered onto the sand. Tiger Shark was wrestling with two SandWings in midair, fighting. He kicked his legs at the one to his left and slashed ferociously at the other. But where was the fourth? Copper had started helping the SeaWing, and the fourth SandWing was nowhere to be found. As Snowshoe hissed and breathed frost breath, missing every time, she suddenly looked up. "Look out!?" screamed the IceWing, her voice muffled and terrified. Starlight was too scared to turn around. But she saw what happened right in front of her. Tiger Shark shot like a bullet away from his fight and grappled with the fourth SandWing. She had been creeping along, trying to stab Starlight from behind. Copper was now pinned to the ground as well as Snowshoe and Mirage. Falcon and Tiger Shark fought, a raging battle overhead. Falcon was breathing fire at the SandWing, and the burning flames licked the edge of her wing. She cried out and breathed her own fire at Tiger Shark, and it hit him on the tail. His tail burned and blacked at the tip, but no further damage was done. But there was no party to be had. Falcon got the full blast of fire in his face. He roared in agony. After the fire burned out, his scales on one side of his royal face were blackened and burned. Copper gasped and cried out as Falcon fell from the sky, having fainted. He landed in a heap of red scales on the sand. Mirage said nothing, but her eyes were the eyes of a terrified dragonet. But then, out of the blue, The SandWing pinning Snowshoe swung his tail around and stabbed her right through her wing. The scream was like nothing Starlight had ever heard before. "Help me!?" The IceWing cried as blood poured out of her neck and the spot she had been stabbed. Tears streamed down her scales and poison spread along her wing. Then the SandWing stuck again. Her other wing was stabbed in the same way, and her shout was so loud it hurt Starlight's ears. And that was enough for Starlight. She opened her wings and with an angry burst of power, the sky went dark. A streak of lightning flashed behind Starlight. Her talons stretched out, and then everything went quiet. The sky flashed dangerously again, and then, as though they had died of natural accords, all of the four SandWings all dropped to the ground, dead.

Snowshoe was hurt the worst of all. That was pretty obvious. But Starlight had no idea how bad it was until she opened her wings. A dark, black, seeping hole was torn in each of Snowshoe's wings. "I know that I can't fly anymore." She said hollowly. "Nothing can heal that much damage." She looked away. It punctured Starlight's heart to see the poisoned, burned, holes in her friend's wings. I clawed her chest to see the injuries and the pain and the long-dragged-out suffering her Clawmates experience. I almost cut off her ability to breathe to know what had happened today. Hibiscus had been stabbed in the back by her friends. Everyone had been injured. Falcon's face was ruined. Tiger Shark's tail was broken. Copper and Mirage were scratched but traumatized. And worse of all, Snowshoe would never fly again. And it was all Starlight's fault.

Snowshoe did not speak with anyone as they all walked along the sand. They had agreed that if Snowshoe could not fly, nobody would fly. And so they walked. For miles of desert and burning, sinking ground, they walked. Snowshoe got slower with each step. The heat and the weight of her injuries were almost too much for her to carry on her weak shoulders. At one point, as they were reaching the place where they could find Queen Thorn, Snowshoe fainted altogether and had to be carried to lie in an oasis so she could wake up. Each time Starlight looked at the IceWing, she wanted to tear off her own wings and give them to Snowshoe, to rip away Snowshoe's pain and lay it on

herself, to stab holes in her own body to atone for Snowshoe's pain. She wanted to give her own tail to Shark, to yank off her own scales and lay them on Falcon's face. Every time they stopped to sleep, Starlight would have nightmares about it and have to wake up and hide beneath Tiger Shark's wings and sob. Oh, how she wished Hibiscus was here. The RainWing could always make Starlight feel better about anything. But instead, Hibiscus was alone and miserable in a dark cave without her friends. It was a true miracle when they reached the SandWing palace and they deposited Snowshoe off to the healers. Starlight was itching to talk to Queen Thorn, to talk to anyone about anything that was not related to the flight or Snowshoe. Mirage was the only SandWing, and she could easily have gotten them into the palace. Too bad she did not talk. Starlight ran over what she would say to get them in in her head one last time before she rapped on the gate. A Sandwing with a medallion of copper and a broken horn opened the gate. "Are you here to see Queen Thorn?" He asked. "Yes." Said Starlight timidly. "Come In then, and wait in the throne room." He ordered. Huh. Thought Starlight. That was easier than I thought. Starlight and her friends stepped inside the gates and walked down a path of sandstone to the actual castle doors. "What happened to you, pretty boy?" asked the guard at the gate. "Nothing." snapped Falcon. "Is that IceWing with you?" she asked. Starlight spotted Snowshoe being carried on a stretcher across the courtyard. "Um. Yes." Copper said. "Why?" "What happened to her?" The guard asked. Nobody answered her. "Come in then," the SandWing said as the gates opened. As they stepped inside, Starlight heard the guard whisper to another, "I wonder if that IceWing was involved in the kidnapping of Queen Snowfall's egg." Starlight felt like the color had drained from her scales. When had an IceWing princess been kidnapped? And in her egg? Starlight shoved away the thought rising in her brain. No way. She told herself. In the throne room, Thorn was waiting for them. "Make it snappy. I have things to do." She said. Taking a deep breath, Starlight blurted, "Queen Glory is under a spell and she is trying to kill us. She was chasing us and we were hiding and we really need help to take her bracelet so she will go back to normal!" Not to mention Morrowseer is back, and who knows what he might do. "Will you help us?" Tiger Shark pleaded. "It would mean a lot, not to mention save the world." Copper added. The Sandwing Queen flicked her forked tongue through her teeth, as though thinking. And then Thorn's eyes flashed, Starlight's hope started to crumble away. "We really need your help. We have no idea who else to turn to." Starlight begged. Thorn scraped one claw on her throne's arm and stayed silent. As she looked at them, her eyes nowhere close to kind, a bad feeling crept over Starlight's body. As she opened her mouth to speak again, speech from the Queen startled her. "I see. Well, you have come to the right place to escape her." Thorn said. But her tone made Starlight shiver. Starlight was starting to get creeped out. She tugged on Mirage's tail and jerked her head to the door. Mirage gently poked Falcon with her tail and drew a square in the sand. She pointed to it, and then to her. Falcon understood and turned to pass the message to Tiger Shark. But before the SeaWing could let Copper know, "That's great. Because we need somewhere to stay before we hit the road again. I mean, we just were hiding out at Jade Mountain, and then we left, so it would be nice to rest up before we head to the volcano." Copper said casually. Everyone snapped their necks to glare at Copper. "What?" He asked. Thorn raised her eyebrows and rearranged her wings. "Volcano, you say?" as Starlight was starting to panic, "Oh, um, he meant that we are going to go see an exhibit of old volcano clutter for school after Glory goes back to normal! Haha, That's what he meant, we have to leave after a while to get back to school." Tiger

Shark interjected quickly. Thorn's eyes were stony as she looked at him. "No, I wasn't. We are going the actual volcano." Copper told him, confused. "Shut up!" Falcon hissed to him. "You know what!" Starlight said loudly. "I think we better go. Sorry to bother you, your majesty." Starlight kicked Copper in the arm and mentioned to the others that they were leaving. But before she could even turn around, a hiss came from behind them. "Oh, but you must stay here." the SandWing Queen ordered. "Why?" Starlight asked tentatively, turning around. Thorn smirked and said nothing. Starlight was dying to get out, but the doors were closed. She inched closer to a window but she got a sinister glare from another guard. "Why?" She asked again, Thinking like mad for a way to escape. "Because, darling, Glory is out to get you!" Thorn cackled unexpectedly wickedly. "Too bad I got you first." Starlight felt talons grab her arm in a terrifying death grip. Panic flooded her friend's eyes as SandWings leaped from every corner and snatched up the group's wrists, keeping them in place. Starlight thought fear might drag her to the ground as Thorn stood up and seemed to grow bigger before their eyes. And then, Thorn's eyes turned red. Every speck of humanity drained from her face as she flicked her poisonous tail. It was Glory all over again. They had come here for help. But instead, they were going to die.

## Chapter 15

Starlight tried to scream, but her mouth refused to open. Oh, wait. She was already screaming. Thorn took one step towards them, her tail barb quivering above her head, like it was lying in wait, prepared to stab and kill at a moment's notice. The SandWing Queen threw back her head and cackled again, an evil, eerie laugh. That's when Starlight had an idea. She flicked her gaze to Mirage for just a split second, and then hurriedly glanced back at the Queen. Queen Thorn swiveled her head back to face them and squinted her eyes. "I see your little brain working in there, tiny star dragon. But whatever plan you are thinking of trying will never work, you little brat-AEHHHHHHHHH!" Thorn's words suddenly turned into a piercing shriek. Starlight winked at Mirage, who, being the one nobody notices, had snuck up behind the Queen and stabbed her venomous tail barb right into the vulnerable spot on her tail. Thorn's eyes flickered back to black for a moment, a second before she reared back and snatched Mirage up by the throat. Terror flashed on Mirage's face. Queen Thorn's tongue flashed between her teeth as she hissed in anger at the SandWing. Starlight's mind was filled with rage. A fire flickered in her eyes. She glared at the guards holding her. "Out of my way." She growled. The guards, annoyingly but expectedly, did not move. "I SAID," Starlight hissed. "Out. Of. My. WAY!" Starlight flicked one of her talons in a casual but anger-powered way, and both of the SandWings were thrown back into the wall by an invisible force. She could hear a snap as bones cracked and broke against the sandstone walls. Starlight prowled closer to the Queen and her friend, the floor shaking beneath her talons. Thorn was now toying with Mirage's wings, letting her claws 'accidentally' scratch them, and swaying her poisonous tail closer to Mirage's face. Starlight could not- would not let any of her friends be hurt again. Burning hot chains suddenly burst from the ground, snaking their way along the Queen's body and slipping around her neck. "Let her go." Snarled Starlight. The Queen dropped Mirage and the SandWing collapsed in a heap on the floor. The chains sunk and loosened. Starlight turned, mentioned to her friends, and the doors burst open. Sunlight flowed inside. She could see that Mirage was on her feet, and so Starlight marched out of the palace and into the courtyard. Every SandWing who tried to stop them or even looked at them threateningly was flung back by Starlight's magic. She was done with dragons doing this. She was over it. If dragons tried to stop her, they would find out the hard way that she was not to be messed with. She had a purpose and a place to be-and that place was the IceWing palace. "What?" All her friends had said when she had mentioned it later when they were out of the

SandWing kingdom. "We will surely freeze to death!" "No, we won't, I am an animus, remember? And I just saved all of your BUTTS. We need to see Queen Snowfall. She might be the only one who can help us." Starlight said defiantly. Copper shrugged, and Tiger Shark nodded. "Are you sure?" Falcon asked roughly. "That sounds like a bad idea." "Feel free to stay here, then." Starlight snapped. "Let's just go." Tiger Shark said with a sigh. "Arguing gets us nowhere." And that was when the SkyWings attacked. Starlight instinctively threw her wings over her head. But? The SkyWings did not try to fight. Instead, two of the largest SkyWings, a male with scales so violently red they were almost purple, and a female with dark orange scales and a few missing claws swooped down- and grabbed

Copper by the arm. "This MudWing is coming with us." The male rumbled. "What?" gasped Starlight, "Don't make us repeat it. He is COMING with US." The female snapped. Without another word, the two leaped off the ground into the sky, bringing Copper with them.

## Chapter 16

The trek to the Ice Kingdom was not very fun. With the only Starlight, Tiger Shark, Mirage, and Falcon left in their group things tended to be a little less fun. Starlight was worried sick about Snowshoe and Copper, and she missed Hibiscus dearly. It had been such a long time since they left—three weeks? Was it really that long? When they finally got to the border of the Ice Kingdom, Starlight was so depressed she considered just going home. But no. She had to do this. She had to find Queen Snowfall and make everything right. It was all up to her. “Ok guys. I made bracelets that will protect us from the cold, that way we won’t freeze to death before we make it to the palace.” Starlight said, handing each of them a bracelet made from a blade of grass. The grass was made into a loop and tied into a knot to keep it together. On each bracelet, there was another blade of grass to reinforce the bracelet. “It’s not very flattering, but ok.” Falcon said dryly, looking at the lopsided knot and dying grass. “It’s the best I could do, ok? And it will protect us. That’s what matters.” Starlight said defensively. “It’s great, Starlight. Thanks.” Tiger Shark said kindly. When all four of them had their bracelet on their wrists, the group set off again. As they trudged through snow and battled the falling snowflakes they barely noticed when night fell. All that mattered at the moment was finding the IceWing castle and getting help. It was around midnight when they finally reached the palace. “It’s a lot more? how do I say this? bland? Then I expected.” Tiger Shark said when they were at the gates. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, it looks nice, but it’s so? white.” “Agreed,” said Falcon. “The SkyWing palace is so much prettier. Even though she was surprised by Falcon agreeing with anything anyone said, Starlight ignored them and cleared her throat one of the guards looked up. “Eh?? He asked sleepily. “We need to see Queen Snowfall. Like now. It’s urgent.” Starlight said quickly. “Alrighty then.” The guard said. With a yawn, he opened the gates. “That was easy.” Starlight whispered to Mirage. When they entered the gates, another IceWing rushed up to them. She had light blue scales with little freckles of pearly white and dark blue along with her wings and nose. “I’m Blizzard, and I’ll take you to the Queen.” She said in a friendly manner. “Just follow me.” Starlight and her group quickly trudged through the snow after her, stumbling in the ice mounds and tripping over piles of frozen rain. Once they were inside the palace, it was almost a relief to be on solid ground. Pristine walls of ice, carpets of polar bear fur, wreaths of holly and snowdrops, and crystal chandeliers were everywhere. Every step sent a clinking echo around the large hallways. When they entered the throne room, Starlight bit back a gasp. The ceiling suddenly slanted up into an elegant dome, and the icy floor exploded with snowflakes. Inside the ice, there seemed to be snow falling, like it was a mirror of the snowing world outside. Blue and white banners cascaded around the room from the walls, rippling in the chilly breeze. But the main focus was the huge throne right in the middle of the back wall. A sparkling chandelier hung above it and flowers dusted the armrests and seat. And sitting on it was the most beautiful IceWing Starlight had ever seen. She was wintery white, with shimmers of ice blue on each scale. The inside of her wings was a pale sunset pink-orange-yellow when the light shone through it. A small tiara set with opals was on her head. As soon as she was close enough Starlight crouched into a low bow. “You may rise.” The Queen said gently. “These dragons need your help, your

majesty.? Blizzard told the Snowfall. ?What is it you need?? She asked kindly. Starlight looked up, a deep breath, and told her everything. Queen Snowfall did not interrupt, she just listened and nodded and gasped. ?And we really needed to tell someone and we need some help, and somewhere to stay, before we figure out what to do.? Starlight finished. To her surprise, the IceWing Queen said, ?You may stay here as long as you need.? ? Really?? asked Tiger Shark, relieved. ?Of course.? Queen Snowfall said firmly. ? I am not one to turn away dragons in need. You may stay as long as you need, and make yourselves at home. Blizzard, prepare the guest rooms.? ? Thank you so much, your majesty.? Starlight said, meaning it with her whole heart. ?You are so welcome, Starlight.? Snowfall said with a smile. Now, go look around a bit, but stay in this area, and do not enter any rooms with guards at the entrance. If the door is open and no one is guarding it, you are welcome to go in and explore.? The IceWing Queen instructed. Starlight bowed again and then scurried out of the room to check around. She discovered the library, the kitchen, and the guest rooms. But as she was trying to find her way back, she found herself to be lost. ?Oh, for moon's sake!?! She cried in annoyance. Starlight wandered around for a moment or two when she found a room with the door open and no guards outside. She slipped into the room to find a bedroom. There was a jewelry cabinet, a window seat, and some fancy rugs. But what she noticed first was that the bed was moved aside to reveal a large hole in the floor. When Starlight came over to inspect it she realized that it was really a long tunneling passageway. Curiosity taking over her, Starlight looked around and then entered the tunnel.

## Chapter 17

After she entered the tunnel, Starlight quickly realized that she should definitely not be here. But she kept going anyway, and soon the passageway emptied into a cave. The cave was huge and seemed to be a hallway that curled inward into a tight spiral. On the walls, there were thousands of little groves to hold things. Many were labeled things like Truth and Harmony and Beauty and Sight. But the one that really caught Starlight's attention was a grove labeled Ashes, which had a scroll bound with a dusty gray ribbon. Starlight gingerly slid the scroll out and unrolled it. She gasped audibly when she saw what it said. Quietly, she read it aloud.

?Cloaked in starlight she waits in the wings  
Being the dragon who thinks she is free  
She has more power than she believes  
She fights more battles than she can see

Dragon of rainbows and dragon of light  
She does not know the nearing night  
From tears and pain and suffering she comes  
To save the lives of those she loves

The one in the riptide, caught between two  
He has a major path to choose  
His decision relies on the sea and the tide  
A great storm is coming, there is nowhere to hide

No words leave her mouth, her thoughts not her own  
She's sinking in quicksand, dying alone  
Illusions on dessert and illusions on ice  
She can only survive if she pays a great price

On the wings of a bird, he soars in the clouds  
He only stays up by not looking down  
But his failures, his coldness are bringing him to  
A decision he makes that would split him in two

Up high in the mountains, he waits all alone

He learns from his misery, he's ready to fight  
He won't rest till he's won, though he fights on his own

Pain eats up her body, but she won't give up now  
She tried too hard to hide from the spell  
But as pressure and lies bury her beneath the sand  
She can't get up, but she'll hang on till she can?

When she finished reading, Starlight dropped the scroll to the ground. That was another prophecy. But this one was about her and her friends. And it was from over three thousand years ago.

## Chapter 18

Starlight paced back and forth, thinking about the prophecy. She almost decided to leave, but in the end, she decided to go deeper into the cave. She wanted to know more about this place. So she kept on. She noticed that the cave got thinner and thinner as it spiraled in, and Starlight had to tuck her wings in to fit. When she finally reached the center, she was surprised. There was not a single groove in the wall like there was everywhere else. There was only a tall object covered in a white fur cloth. Starlight reached out and pulled off the cloth. And She screamed when she saw what it was. Underneath there was a mirror. But the mirror was not like any mirror Starlight had ever seen before. Because when she looked into its glass, she was looking into the reflection of the unmistakable face, body, and eyes of none other than Morrowseer.

## Chapter 19

Morrowseer was sitting on the volcano, talking aloud. "I have such a brilliant plan." He said triumphantly, glancing down at the scroll beneath his talons. "It all starts with me having animus magic. And now that I have it, I know exactly what to do. So first, I get whoever I want on my side. I already have the best Queens- Glory and Thorn. I have all the SandWings and all the RainWings, which is perfect. And even though she does not know it, I have Moonwatcher as well. And of course, I have you." He glanced up at his companion. "And then I need the dragonets of destiny. With them, I will have such amazing leverage. I will get so many more dragons on my side, and then, once they are mine and I have their minds in my talons, I can kill those stupid prophecy dragonets! Wonderful. And then I can get my claws on their things. I know what they have. I want it, so I'm taking it. Isn't that splendid? Then I can deal with those little bugs from Jade Mountain. Oh, I have so many ideas! But the best part is how it ends." He grinned an unhinged, evil, terrifying grin. "There are two options. We control them all, or we burn this world to the ground." Morrowseer smiled again, rolling his scroll back up. "So. What do you think, Starlight?"

# Chapter 20

Hope you liked it!