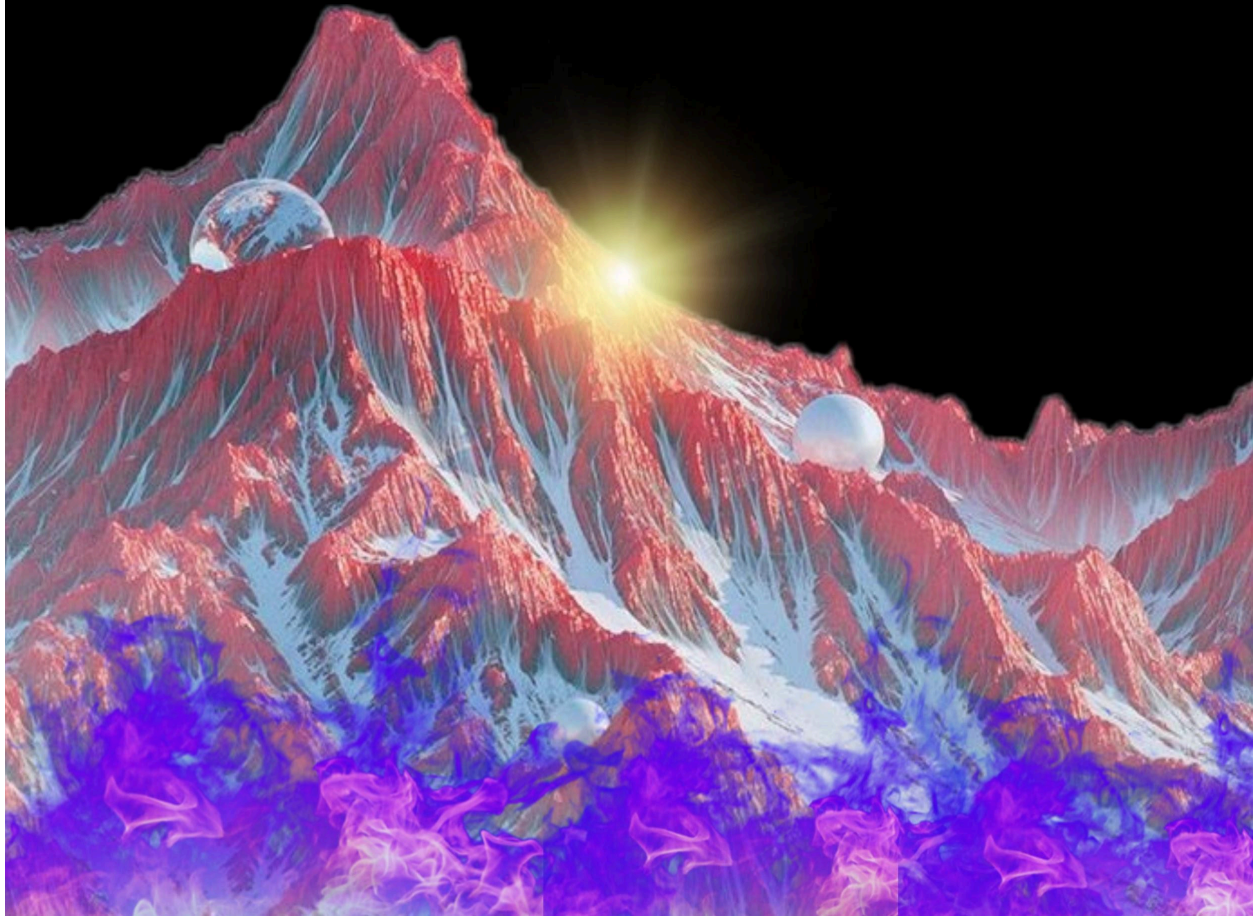


Nightshade's mystery



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Credit: Anagha M.



DiveWings:

DiveWings are fearless creatures that rule the seas. These compassionate dragons are very dependable. They would never go back on their word or break a promise. They come in many colors, some of which are black and white, or rarely, blue. They can also be multicolored but most commonly come in a black and white mix resembling an orca. Their queen's name is Aquarius.



ShadowFlames:

ShadowFlames are reckless animals that can get angered easily. Aggressive when faced with an enemy, these dragons will not even feel pity for those that they have killed. A ShadowFlame's warm yet beautiful colors make them look friendly, but their strength shouldn't be underestimated. The flames color change according to the dragons feelings. They come in black, blue, purple, red, orange, and yellow. Rarely their scales are tinted gold. Their queen's name is Flare.



NilesScales:

When you're a NilesScale, it's never too late for an adventure. These creatures are very bold and ambitious. They are extremely daring and willing to take on any predators or enemies threatening them. They come in pale grey and light brown. Sometimes they are tinted white. Their queen's name is Sahara.



ForestClaw: ForestClaws are clever enemies, hunting you down in the blink of an eye. They can camouflage with the forest foliage. These dragons are very mysterious animals that keep to themselves. Behind the scales of the shy ForestClaw hides extraordinary power and skill. They come in green, brown, and sage. Their queen's name is Rafflesia.



FrostTails:

FrostTails feel right at home in the ice and snow, and they can endure long periods of the cold. They are sly and skilled, and attack when no one is expecting it. These creatures are generous but protective of other dragons in their tribe. Fast, agile, and extremely strong, FrostTails can defeat even the most difficult enemies just to protect their hatchlings. They come in blue, white, and rarely a silverish color. Their queen's name is Blizzard.

(FrostTail egg)



(ForestClaw egg)



(NileScale egg)



(ShadowFlame eggs)



(DiveWing egg)

The Wings of Night Prophecy

Two dragons meet for forbidden love
An egg born from rivals blood
This egg to hatch on the darkest night
Will have the power of Wings Of Night

Underneath her scales and claws
There's a destiny awaiting her call
If she sees the threat that rises unseen
Five dragons destined to meet under Twilight's faint gleam

A question forms deciding our fate
If she chooses the path of light then no blood shall be lost in a fight
But if she chooses the path of darkness and death
Then she will become part of this unseen threat
Until the day comes when she makes a choice
All you can do is block out the voice

Prologue

As I said goodbye to StarCloud, my wings unfurled as I launched my body into the air. "Bye, Mist!" she called to me as I flew away. "Bye," I called back to her with a spark of happiness in my voice. StarCloud nursed me back to health after I was attacked in the woods by a ShadowFlame. The elegant and talented NileScale was a healer, and she was very kind to me in my time of need. I looked around. My surroundings were pitch black except for the faint glow of twilight, and the wind constantly pushed me in different directions. I sent thanks to my ancestors in the twilight for letting me live. Suddenly a strong gust of wind pushed me down. I lost control, and my wings failed to save me. I flung to the ground and landed with a loud thud. I lay there for a second, trying to catch my breath. I hadn't flown in almost two weeks, so I just remembered how to do it properly, and I was only a fledgling, so my wings were pretty small. When I opened my eyes, I saw something scarlet glistening in the grass out of the corner of my eye. I looked closer and gasped when I realized that it was dragon blood. I lifted my head and saw another drop a few dragon lengths away. I got up cautiously and started walking toward it. More scarlet drops scattered the ground. I followed the drops through the forest. After a few minutes of walking silently through the dark forest, I came across something horrifying. I froze, and my eyes widened with fear. Laying in front of me was the dead body of a FrostTail. I looked closer at the body and realized that I knew this FrostTaill. But I really wished I hadn't. "MoonFrost," I whispered, my voice catching in my throat. A big gash on her side indicated that she had been thrown up in the air and ripped to shreds by something, or someone and then dragged her to this well-hidden spot. I stared in sorrow at the body. Moonfrost was one of my only friends. Unlike other dragons, she wouldn't be mean or act weird because I was a hybrid. Instead, she treated me like a normal dragon and even defended me sometimes. "Why did it have to be you..." I said in between sobs. Her silverish-blue wings looked shiny under the moonlight, and she kind of resembled a ghost. A shiver ran through my spine, and I shook my head, trying to clear my

mind. I suddenly heard the bushes behind me rustle, and I froze, tears still streaming down my face. "H-Hello," I called out. I heard a hiss behind me. I felt like I was spinning. My legs grew weak, and I was afraid they would give out. "You weren't supposed to see this," a dragon snarled. I turned around to look at MoonFrost's murderer. A Black and purple ForestClaw stood eye to eye with me. "You're a hybrid," I whispered half to myself. She looked a little shocked to see I was also a hybrid. "And so are you," she said, recovering from her surprise. "Woow, another hybrid sooo interesting," she sarcastically said as she stepped closer. Her wings and back were instantly engulfed in a blue-purple flame. I jumped, and I realized what exactly she was. I was a ForestClaw FrostTail hybrid, and she was obviously a ForestClaw ShadowFlame hybrid due to the fact that her scales were literally on fire!!! "You killed her," I said. "Yeah, I did," she responded carelessly. Her tail flicked impatiently. "Why?" I spat in a tone that must have annoyed her because her eye twitched. "If I told you, I would have to...." she glanced at the body. "Kill me," I finished for her, taking a full step back. The corner of her mouth curled into a quick smile but quickly it disappeared. Did she enjoy killing, I thought angrily. She started circling me menacingly; her teeth bared and her wings raised. The flames on her back rose a bit. I felt so small next to this dragon even though she looked only a year older than me and still only a fledgling. All I wanted to do was run, but my talons felt embedded in the ground. She stopped behind me and hissed again. There was an eerie silence. Why did she stop circling me? I thought. I turned my head cautiously and saw her lunge toward me. I shrieked in fear and tried to run, but she easily jumped onto me and stood on my back, forcing me to the ground. I tried to squirm out of her grasp, but she dug her claws into me and weighed me down. I turned my head and shifted my gaze to the tip of her wing. At birth, every dragon has their name implanted on the tip of their wing for identification purposes. N-I-G-H-T-S-H-A-D-E, I read in my head. "Nightshade, *what* are you doing?!" I asked quickly. "Getting rid of the witness," she snarled, tightening her grip on my shoulder. I screamed in agony as she used her claws to rip open my wing. Blood dripped silently to the ground. "Please, NightShade, don't do this," I said.

"And why shouldn't I?" she hissed into my ear. "Because this is wrong," I responded. She hesitated, and her grip softened after a moment of silence. Her grip suddenly tightened again, and she looked me directly in the eyes. "I'm doing what's best for the ShadowFlames. My decisions aren't wrong," she growled. "You're willing to kill dragons like this," I retorted. "Stop filling my head with nonsense, dragon," she yelled. "It isn't nonsense," I said. "What makes you think that?" she snarled. "It's not right to kill dragons like this," I said again. "What made you like this? I've never seen a ForestClaw act like this," I whispered. "Well, I'm not like other ForestClaws then," she said, her powerful tail raised threateningly. "They abandoned me," she sighed, "and I want my revenge," she said through gritted teeth. "So you're going to get revenge by killing innocent dragons?" I asked angrily. She paused. "What's your name," she asked, not letting her guard down. "I'm Mist.." I said. Was I finally getting through to her? I thought hopefully. She moved her claw to my neck, then holding it firmly, she said, "Goodbye, Mist." My heart plummeted as I realized what she was about to do. I tried to struggle free again, but her grip never loosened. She looked straight into my eyes then snapped my neck. The disturbing sound of Mist's neck cracking echoed through the forest. Nightshade stepped back, looking at Mist, then sighed and lowered her head. "May your spirit join the twilight," NightShade said to Mist's dead body. The flames on her body vanished as quickly as they appeared. Why did Mist care so much about a dragon that was outside the tribe? NightShade thought. Her wings spread, and she launched off into the starry black sky. She didn't look back, not even once, leaving the two bodies there where she could hide them. "I'm sorry, Mist.." Nightshade whispered to herself, "I'm sorry."

Chapter 1

Ever since the moment Nightshade had hatched, everyone could tell she was different. Not just because she was a hybrid but also how she acted. Instead of being shy like the other ForestClaws, she was social and very talkative. Her weird behavior made everyone uncomfortable, and the ForestClaws wanted her gone. Her dad had protested and said that as a part of the tribe, we shouldn't abandon her. They avoided Nightshade whenever possible, so she felt lonely and scared of what they might do to her. She was banished from the forest at age four because she had accidentally set the north huts on fire. Her dad had hugged her goodbye then sent Nightshade to live with her mother and the other ShadowFlames. Little did the ForestClaws know that the ShadowFlames would use her hybrid skills to their advantage. They trained her to be an assassin, and by the age of six, she was fully trained and loyal to the shadow flames. NightShade's mother didn't like the idea of training her fledgling to be an assassin because it seemed too risky, but she didn't dare argue with queen Flare's decisions. Ever since that moment when she became an assassin, she has felt that she had finally found her place in the world. But after meeting Mist, her world felt inside out.

Wind whipped against NightShade's face as she dove toward the tunnel entrance. Seconds away from colliding with Stone, her wings flared to the sides catching the wind and gracefully plopping her down on the cold, smooth rock. Her wings folded back, and she walked forward. A few heads turned to see who had landed, and once they realized who it was, they scrambled away to let NightShade pass. I rolled my eyes when I passed a mother and her hatchling. She looked me straight in the eye and curled her wings around her hatchling protectively. Why would I hurt her hatchling? I thought angrily. Because you're an assassin, a voice whispered in her head. NightShade frowned and walked on. Her tail dragged behind her as she recalled the

event from last night. NightShade paused and looked down at her claws sadly. She still remembered the gruesome sight of Mist's torn-up and lifeless body in front of her. Her ears pricked up at the sound of someone calling her name. She looked up and saw three dragons stalking toward her blocking her way into the sleeping cave she was heading to. "Stone," I said, bowing my head briefly in acknowledgment. "Ahh, NightShade, just the dragon I was looking for," Stone said, spreading his wings majestically. "My grandmother was wondering where her pet was," he said with a smug smile, his wings still spread out. I gritted my teeth, "I'm *nobody's* pet," I spat, holding back the urge to thump him in the head with my powerful tail. He sat down, folding his wings back. "Isn't that what you are, NightShade?" he said, his irritating smile still plastered on his face, "just because you're a prince doesn't mean you can walk around being a total jerk," I retorted angrily, trying to walk around him to get to my cave. He flicked his tail, and the dragon to his right pushed me back and sat down in front of me. "Hey," I said, frustrated, "Bullfrog, get up" I growled and poked him with my tail. I turned to Stone as sparks and wisps of a greenish-yellow aura came off my back. "Get out of my way," I said, trying to suppress the flames about to come off me. He was only a year older than me, but he still had to lean down a bit to level his gaze with mine. His eyes narrowed into slits. "Make me," he snarled. My body engulfed into a bright red flame as I leaped forward, talons outstretched. Stone's shoulders wore a bright blue flame as I tackled him and threw him against the wall. He yelped with pain as I bit down on his hind leg. We tussled on the ground, clawing at each other. Dragons fled from the scene as fast as they could. I slammed into Bullfrog, and he stopped looking as fierce as I thought he was. Then he got up and flew away. "You're such a big-mouthed JERK," I said as I clawed his chest. He looked up at me with pleading eyes; the same expression Mist had worn when I had tackled her. I saw a head pop out of my sleeping cave, but I didn't really pay attention. Stone wriggled free and stood gasping for air. "I can finish this scrap easily," I murmured to myself. The only ones left in the tunnel were me, Stone, and Bat, who was constantly at his brother's side looking for protection. Throughout the fight, he hadn't moved

an inch. All he had done was stare at me, his horns covered in vibrant red and black flame. I was about to deliver my final blow when a wing suddenly unfurled to block my path. Bat was standing his ground, staring angrily at his older brother Stone. Someone grabbed my shoulders, and I turned around and whacked my tail on the dragon's head. "Hey, it's just me," the dragon said, wrapping her wings around her body in case Nightshade attacked again. My flames died down as I recognized Cecropia's voice. "WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING" she whisper-shouted. "He was getting in my way," I said, casting a glance at Stone. "So you decided you were gonna attack him?!!" Bat walked over and tried twining his tail with mine, but I bared my teeth at him, and he jumped back, startled. He hung his head and went over to help Stone. He always acts so weirdly around me, I thought. Cecropia grabbed my forearm and led me into our sleeping cave. "Stop making Bat feel sad," Cecropia growled. "What did I do?" I asked her. "He obviously has a crush on you mouse-brain," she said with a sigh. "What?? Why." I asked, shocked, Cecropia shrugged. "UGH," I said. "Just add that to the list of my problems," I grumbled. "Having someone besides me that really cares about you isn't a problem," Cecropia argued, "but it's BAT?" I said, looking at the cave entrance. "I mean, he's okay, I guess," I said, blushing a little. I never admitted it, but I kind of liked Bat. He was funny and kind, and he always tried to be nice to me, and I guessed he hated his older brother Stone as much as I did, but he only stayed with him because he was always bullied and the only way to be free of that was to be near someone who had a lot of authority. "So you like him," Cecropia inquired. "WHAT, No, he is just a um a friend" I kinda lied. 'Okay fine, he's just a friend,' she said, eyeing me suspiciously. I knew I hadn't fooled her with my lies, but she decided to put this conversation off for another time. I heard someone running through the hallway toward us, and I instantly turned around to see my mother standing in the cave entrance glaring at me. "What the heck did you do?" she growled, "Stone is out there dripping blood all over the ground," she continued, a worried expression crossing over her face. I looked down at my claws and replied hesitantly, "I attacked him" I replied, "Now why would you do that" she asked, taking a step forward into the cave.

Some of her dark red scales looked like dried blood in the darkness, making her look even more menacing. "He was in my way," I responded quickly. She looked at me up and down. "I know I shouldn't have attacked him, but he was getting on my nerve," I said before my mom said anything else. "I agree that was a terrible decision," she finally said. My wings dropped. I hated it when my mom disapproved of my actions, but she continued taking another step forward and placing a wing around me in a tight embrace. "We all have our bad days, and you're no exception," she finished. I leaned into her chest and took a deep breath. Maybe it was just a bad day. I thought hopefully. I squirmed out of my mom's hug and leaped onto the highest rock ledge, which I had covered in moss to make it more comfortable, and lay down, closing my eyes.

Chapter 2

Something poked my side, and I grumbled. I put my wing over my head. I felt another poke. This one was harder, and my scales stung for a few seconds. "Get up," a voice said harshly. I opened my eyes, still groggy. I bared my teeth as light poured in through the hole at the top of the cave and glared into my eyes. I had barely gotten any sleep, so I was really tired. I jumped when I saw two guards with long spears staring at me a dragon's length away. One of them jabbed me with their spear, and I snapped at him angrily. "Hey, quit it," I yelled as the other guard poked me again. Cecropia's head shot up, eyes blinking as though she had no idea where she was "what's going on," she asked, stretching her wings, "none of your business" both of them growled simultaneously. I looked around and realized my mom wasn't on her ledge. My eyes finally adjusted the light, and I looked both guards up and down. One was a big red dragon with some rubies implanted above her eyes. The other one was a slightly smaller dragon who was a weird shade of purple with one gold earring hanging from his right ear. "What do you want?" I grumbled angrily at them. "The queen requires an audience with you," the taller dragon said, straightening her back. "Is it mandatory?" I inquired sleepily. "Yes," she growled "Fine," I said, getting up and stretching my wings. I hopped down from the ledge and followed the guards to the cave entrance. Cecropia trailed behind me as I stepped out into the long light filled hall. I took a deep breath then started walking to the left. "HEY where are you going?" the smaller guard shouted "To the meeting room" I said turning my head. "We always meet there before admission or war planning" i continued to walk forward "She actually wants to meet in the throne room" the bigger dragon chimed in "Oh" i said turning around. That's weird, why would she want to meet in the throne room? I wondered "Come ON, we don't have all day" she said impatiently "what are your names" Cecropia asked "I'm Smoke." the odd purple dragon said "and that's Ember" smoke said, flicking his tail at the other guard "Enough talking" Ember

roared "The queen said this was urgent" she finished. I stole a worried glance at Cecropia. Oh no what if she found out about Mist. She'll have my head for sure I thought worried. I heard someone scoff that they would be dead if they tried. I whipped around but the only one behind me was Cecropia "What's wrong?" she asked "Oh nothing" I said turning around to see the guards staring at me fiercely gripping their spears. I continued down the hall not meeting anyone's gaze. "How pathetic, they're scared of a fledgling," the voice said with a harsh tone. "You should show them what you can really do," the voice continued." What I can really do? They already know what I can do. I thought "NO they dont"the voice responded, i jumped of course i have had thoughts before but never a conversation with it. "Okay seriously what's going on" Cecropia asked, steering toward me "You have been acting super weird ever since you came back from your mission" she continued. "Poor Cecropia friends with a killer" the voice continued in a disappointed voice. "SHUT UP" I thought loudly to the voice "Nightshade, why did you just make that face?" Cecropia inquired, hiding a laugh. "What face" i asked "This face" Cecropia said frowning and flaring her nostrils, bunching up her face."I don't do that" I said laughing a bit "You just did" she giggled "Hey" smoke said "We're gonna fly the rest of the way" Ember finished. Smoke glared at her. "What?" Ember asked, flying upward then hovering over him "Do you just want me to stop talking, because you're always interrupting me?" Smoke said with a cross expression on his face. "No, I just think you're a slow talker," Ember said with a shrug. "Oh that's so much better," Smoke continued sarcastically. I started to fly upward with Cecropia still trailing behind, smoke followed trying to catch up with Ember. "We're not done with this conversation," Smoke huffed furiously as we flew on. Ember glanced at us then replied "I know, but can we talk about it at the cave" she said gently which surprised me. "Fine" Smoke grunted.

We landed on a large platform in front of the palace a few minutes later, 4 guards immediately rushed out of the palace "we'll take it from here" the biggest one said gruffly staring at me, his

claws twitching. Smoke and Ember flew away quickly. Cecropia stepped closer to me, her warm scales pressing against mine. The biggest guard flicked his tail toward me, the other 3 guards all lunged at me with thick chains in their talons. Nobody chains me up, I thought in pure rage. I pushed Cecropia away and flung my wings open letting a bright red flame engulf me. My mother says I wear red flames too much. I stabbed the first guard then jumped on him. I flapped my wings and pushed the guard I had under me into another guard who then almost stumbled off the platform. I grabbed one of the chains and flung myself at the biggest dragon I clawed at his back then wrapped the chain around his neck cutting off his air supply he stopped struggling against me and instead clawed desperately at the chain. "Wow she is quick " a guard whispered half to himself. "Stop, or I'll kill him" I roared. The guards stopped, eyes growing wide with fear. Kill him, the voice whispered in my head. Killing him would be kinda fun and easy but i had a bad feeling about killing this particular dragon. I pulled the chains tighter around the dragon's scared neck. Is this what you meant by showing them what I can do? I asked in my head. The voice chuckled, "You've only begun to scratch the surface, Your power is far greater than this" he hissed. Something grabbed my wings and pulled me back, the dragon I was holding down gasped for air as I released the chains on his neck. I saw what had pulled me back in a blur of flames, another dragon was sitting on me grabbing some chains that had fallen on the ground. "Kill him, Nightshade" the voice called out "Kill him." No, I snapped back I'm not gonna kill my tribe, I continued. There was no response, I struggled under the dragon's weight and bit his claw. He wrapped a chain around my snout, and with the other guards' help he managed to bind my wing and talons together. I twisted and turned trying to get out of the chains but it was no use. Two Guards put me between them and dragged me into a tunnel. The tunnel went straight to the Queen's dungeons. My wings drooped further into the dungeons we got. "You let them catch you," the voice hissed. "That's it!" I roared to the voice "I want to know who you are and I want to know NOW"" You want to know who I am?" the voice asked "YES, I want to know who my inner voice calls himself" I responded. The voice laughed, "I'm not your

inner voice" he said. "Then who are you?" I was a little irritated. He paused. "I'm Stalagmite," the voice finally answered. "Oh look at that, " Stalagmite said before I could say anything. I looked around and saw a male NileScale pressing himself against the bars of his prison looking curiously at me. "Poor thing locked up and alone like that," Stalagmite said sympathetically. The guards opened the cell in front of the NileScale and threw me in harshly, they locked me in and trotted away. "What are you in for?" the NileScale mused. "Who's asking?" I tried to say but the chains muffled my words and it turned out sounding more like "hoo aking" "Never mind" he said, disappointed. I wonder how long it's been since the last time he talked to another dragon. "I know you can't talk" The NileScale said, "I'm just gonna imagine what you're gonna say" he said with a smile appearing on his face. I shook my head "pwease bont do thwart" I said in my muffled voice "Okay first question" he asked excitedly "What are you in for, I mean why would they lock up their own fledglings?" I held up my talons and pretended to strangle myself, but it looked so weird since my talons were still bound together. "Uhhh " he said, staring at me blankly "I give up" he finished, turning around and sitting down near the far wall of his cell. He gave up pretty quickly I thought. The room was dark except for some lanterns lighting up the caves. I looked at my shadow sadly, it moved and I yelped in fear trying to stand up but my talons slipped and I slammed my head on the ground. "Are you okay?" the NileScale asked with a hint of panic in his voice. My eyes fluttered as I went unconscious. I opened my eyes suddenly but i wasn't in the cell, I was in my sleeping cave unchained "what" I asked, the words echoing inside the empty cave "Finally, a proper talk" Staglamite said. I moved my head from side to side but I was still the only one in the room "Down here Nightshade" Stalagmite called, I looked down, my shadow moved and then outstretched its wings. I stepped back but the shadow didn't move with me. "How are you doing this?" I asked fearfully "Not me Nightshade, YOU" Stalagmite said. "Me?" I asked. "What else do you expect from our Wings Of Night?" he chuckled "Wings Of Night?" I asked, confused and dizzy. "I can tell you have many questions, NightShade" Stalagmite said as I nodded, unable to speak. It felt so weird looking down to talk

with a shadow. I wish he wasn't so....so flat. Just like smoke the shadow spiraled upward into a black ball then shaped itself into a dragon. "Okay, now you're just being plain creepy" I said as the shadow opened its eyes "Ha" Stalagmite laughed "So.. You're my shadow," I stammered. "Yeah" he replied "So um what is this Wings Of Night you mentioned earlier?" I asked him. Stalagmite looked me up and down. "You really don't know?" he said, stopping in front of me. I shook my head. "Have you ever heard of The Wings of Night Prophecy" he questioned.

Chapter 3

“No” I answered. Stalagmite sighed then walked forward. I expected him to stop in front of me but instead he walked right through me, sending a cold shiver down my spine. He grabbed a scroll and turned it over to the blank side. “How am I doing this?” I asked looking down at my talons “You’ll understand once you have heard the prophecy” Stalagmite replied not looking up from the scroll “What’s the Prophecy” I asked “Can you please just wait” Stalagmite snapped. “Jeezz, i was just asking” I retorted “Well, stop asking!” Stalagmite said loudly, putting a claw over the scroll. I walked over to him, He still looked like a shadow, pitch black with no features whatsoever. I reached out my claw to feel his scales but it passed right through him. “Do you mind not doing that” Stalagmite sighed. I pulled my claw away “Sorry,” I said, trying to sound apologetic. I stood there awkwardly staring at Stalagmite for a minute. “There” he said, shoving the scroll at me. “Go on read it” he encouraged “Okay.” I said lifting the scroll up “Two dragons meet for forbidden love, an egg born from rival’s blood, this egg to hatch on darkest night, Will have the power of Wings Of Night. Underneath her scales and claws, There’s a destiny awaiting her call, If she sees the Threat that rises unseen, 5 dragons destined to meet under Twilight's faint gleam, A question forms deciding our fate, If she chooses the path of light then no blood shall be lost in a fight, But if she chooses the path of darkness and death, then she will become part of this unseen threat, until the day comes when she makes a choice all you can do is block out the voice” I read aloud “so I’m the Wings Of Night from the Prophecy?” I asked “Yep” he replied “Can I do this in the real world?” I asked hopefully “Depends” he said, hopping to my mom’s sleeping ledge “Depends on what” I asked quickly. “Depends on 2 things, your imagination and your power” he replied. I heard a loud clunk and then a thud. What's that? I thought “I think your time in the cell is up, you should wake up” How? I thought “I can help with that,” he said, jumping off the ledge and sinking into the ground “Stalagmite” I yelled as the room started to shake “STALAGMITE” I yelled again. “Close your eyes,” he whispered in my

head. I closed my eyes, and the shaking stopped. I opened my eyes and I was back in the real world. I was being dragged off by the same two guards as before. I twitched my body violently in an attempt to get the chains off which I could guess scared the guards half to Twilight cause they both jumped away from me almost dropping me. I cracked a smile holding back my laughter. "Stupid Fledling" one of the guards grumbled. I looked back and saw that the NileScale was also trying to hold back his laughter, with his claw over his snout. The guards pulled me back up the tunnel to the platform. They stopped "Are you sure this is a good idea?" one of them whispered. The other guard nodded. To my surprise they slowly took off the chains on my snout and claws, but they left the bindings on my wings untouched. "Be quiet and walk" the first guard ordered "Now where's the fun in that?" I asked innocently. Stalagmite started giggling. "It's not supposed to be fun" the guard grumbled. I like you, Stalagmite said happily. You're not so bad yourself I told him "Move it" the guard said, shoving me in the palace. "You're such a smoke-breather" I said, walking forward. The inside of the palace was so beautiful. The walls were embedded with gems and the floor was made of marble. Gold lined everything from the huge chandeliers to the small paper weights on desks. We walked through the large ballroom where Queen Flare hosted parties and I stopped for a second to look at the coy pond in the middle of the ballroom before the guards urged me forward. A servant rushed past us with a bag full of living boars. We finally came upon a huge door with a statue of the queen in the same regal pose on either side of it, both studded with every precious gem imaginable. Four guards stood outside the door to the throne room. They pushed the doors open revealing the most amazing room I had ever seen, even grander than Queen Blizzards throne room which I had seen 3 years ago on a mission. A shining Crystal path in the smooth marble floor led straight to the throne which was made of pure obsidian. Instead of a ceiling there was a huge glass dome and when the light spilled in, it reflected the colors of the gems perfectly, and a huge portrait of Queen Flare hung above the throne. Finally, big wooden bleachers surrounded half the room. Dragons in battle were carved into the smooth wood. There were more than a

few dragons already in the throne room. A pair of guards stood in front of the throne, a servant cleaning it behind them, the whole royal council was present filling up the back 2 rows of bleachers, talking about who knows what, some of them eyeing me suspiciously. In the third row were several dragons that looked familiar but I couldn't quite remember who they were. I felt a wave of anger as I recognized some of the dragons in the 2 row. The First dragon I saw was Stone. He had a bandage around his back leg and didn't put weight on it. He looked tired and in pain but he wore a kind of mischievous smile. Next to him was Bullfrog. I also saw my mother and Cecropia in the second row with afraid expressions. It took me a second to find where Bat was but I finally got sight of his totally black scales and big wings in between Stone and Cecropia. Oh I thought, this was about me attacking Stone yesterday. I was a little relieved to see that Bat edged toward Cecropia. He is on my side, I thought happily. The guard pointed to the bleachers "Sit in the first row and no funny business" he growled. "Who me? Why would I do anything?" I said, trying to annoy him "Just go and sit down" he said my attempt to annoy him coming out successful. I trotted to the bleachers and climbed onto the first row. I was a little surprised that the first one to come greet me was Bat. He jumped down from the second row with a big smile on his face. Without thinking he wrapped his wings around me in a hug. My first instinct was to pull away and bite his ears off but I kinda wanted to hug him back instead. "Barf that is gross," Stalagmite said in a disgusted voice. "Oh shut up," I said sharply. Bat finally realized what he was doing and pulled away. Mother came down second "Honey where were you?" she inquired, clearly concerned. "In the dungeons" I said with a shrug "WHAT?!" she shouted "I'm gonna give Flare a piece of my mind" she mumbled angrily. "You don't have to" I quickly said before my mother had any idea that might anger the queen. She smiled at me. "Cecropia, I was wondering what happened to you after the fight," I said as she finally glided down toward me. We exchanged stories about what happened to us, and then they all jumped back up to the second row. I watched as Stone tripped Bat as he landed "What were you doing" he hissed. Ba shrank "Did what" Bat asked. Stone pointed at me and growled low in

his throat. He glanced at me. I knew what he was thinking and he was looking for my approval. I nodded my head and he instantly turned to tell Stone what he was doing. "I....I was messing with her mind" he stammered "Really?" Stone asked suspiciously. "Yeah," he replied. Stone saw me listening and started whispering instead. I looked up at the dome, the sun was at its peak and it was a beautiful site that never got old no matter how many times I saw it. I Heard the doors to the room fling open, hitting the wall with a thud. I looked down, and Queen Flare stood in the doorway; her wings spread majestically and her head turned sideways. She finally folded her wings back and walked forward. She wore a huge ruby hanging from a gold chain around her neck. She sat down on the throne and curled her tail over her talons. An old orange dragon that I recognized as Boulder stepped off the bleachers followed by a younger blue dragon which everyone called Spark. Spark wore a wickedly happy smile. "I have seen Queen Flare in pictures in your mind but she really is more menacing-looking in real life," Stalagmite said. Boulder stood to the left of the queen while Spark stood to the right of Queen Flare. Flare cleared her throat and spoke in a clear loud voice that echoed throughout the room.

"Nightshade's trial will now commence."

Chapter 4

“Bring out the defendant,” Boulder said. “I can get there myself!” I yelled as I jumped down from the bleachers. “Still, I want guards on you” Flare said cautiously as the guards closest to her walked over to me. I scoffed at her. “Are you afraid of me?” I said laughing a bit. A gasp rippled through the crowd. “Of course not,” Queen Flare said, trying to sound offended. The guard grabbed one of my antlers and pulled my head up. “You should be the one afraid of me, fledgling” Flare spat. “Spark, please state why she is here,” she continued. Spark quickly bowed and said, “She has been accused of attacking her fellow tribemates” I flicked my tail impatiently and the guards flinched away. “Yesterday, she attacked Stone, the queen’s grandson.” All heads turned to see Stone “And earlier today she attacked 4 guards,” Flare said in a booming voice. “This is outrageous! Stone provoked me and the guards attacked me first.” I roared. “That’s still no reason to almost kill them” Spark snarled. “I believe the exact words you said this morning were ‘Stop or I’ll kill him’. Am I mistaken?” Spark continued smugly as I bared my teeth. “A fitting punishment would be to kill her,” Spark said to Flare. “We can’t kill her,” Boulder blurted out. “Why not?” Spark said, narrowing her eyes. “She can still be useful to the tribe and we can’t kill a fledgeling. If Queen Blizzard found out, she would end our alliance with them,” Boulder argued. “Even though killing her would be easy-” Flare said before I cut her off. “Killing me won’t be anywhere close to easy” I growled. “As I was saying, killing her would be easy but I agree with Boulder, she could still be useful to me” Flare continued ignoring my comment “I’m not some useful trinket you can toy around with,” I yelled. “Yes you are,” she snapped. Why did I ever follow such a horrible queen? I thought furiously. “I agree that was a bad idea,” Stalagmite said. “Not helping,” I replied. “We can’t just not punish her, your Majesty, ” Spark said, fluttering her wings angrily. “Of course, I’ll punish her but killing her is not the punishment.” Flare said, waving her claw. “But she’s dangerous...” a voice called out from the risers. “Silence everyone!” Queen Flare called out. A hush fell over the crowd of watching dragons. “As punishment for

causing harm to other ShadowFlames, NightShade will spend the next week treated as a prisoner living in the dungeons below us,” Flare said reagally. I growled and stepped forward threateningly. The guards immediately grabbed my antlers and pushed my head to the hard floor. When I was little I had known having antlers was a disadvantage and I tried to break them off, but they always grew back within a week or two. “You see,” Queen Flare said, pointing at me, “You all know her as a skilled fighter and assassin, but when she is faced with a queen, she is nothing.” She snarled. I spotted my mother stamping her feet in frustration and anger. I tried lifting my head but it was still pinned to the ground. “Compared to me she is worthless,” Flare continued. My tail lashed angrily as the word worthless rang in my mind. “I am not worthless,” I growled. “How dare she say that about you?” Stalagmite spat “I am more powerful than you ever were. You will never control me,” I said “Yes I can ” the queen responded looking at Mother. A dragon materialized behind Mother placing a blade at her neck threateningly. “You wouldn't dare,” I said, my voice cracking. I felt a sort of cold feeling growing in the pit of my stomach, it made me feel powerful. I threw off my guard easily and my nostrils flared. Suddenly my scales were consumed with the cold feeling. I watched as the guards' shadows started to move and crawl up their body's, the shadows seemed to seep into their scales slowly suffocating them. After a minute their body's thudded to the ground, lifeless. Shrieks of terror quickly flooded through the crowd. Dragons started fleeing in absolute terror. A swirl of black covered my eyes blinding me. I staggered backwards in confusion. Suddenly, I was looking up at the Queen. She was clutching her throne wildly and staring at me. My eyes were pitch black and I looked incredibly confused. “Am I looking through the queen's shadow?” I asked Stalagmite. “Yessssssssssssss,” he hissed. That's the one thing about using this sort of magic. You can only see through the shadow's perspective. I lifted my talons to my eyes. “Oh, and try not to look someone straight in the eye after using shadow magic,” Stalagmite advised me. An evil smile spread on my face as my body melted into the shadows. I felt like I was underwater. All I could hear was the sound of soft waves, then I saw a rift in the water. It looked like someone had

ripped a hole in the world. I could see the queen looking around wildly, most likely looking for me. I beat my wings hard, breaking the bindings and lunged through the hole, claws met scales as I grabbed Flare's chest. Now's your chance Nightshade, kill her and end her reign over the tribe Stalagmite hissed excitedly. I watched myself attack the queen, my claws being covered in blood. I used my talons to slice open Flare's throat as I watched her die drowning in her own blood. "GRANDMOTHER, NO!!" Stone screamed as Flare finally stopped twitching and laid there dead in front of me. "What are you doing?!!" he yelled at me. My head shot up and I stared at him. "The queen is dead," one of the guards who wailed. "And it's all your fault," Stone growled. I hadn't realized that several guards had formed a circle around me, but now I could see from their shadows where each of them were. I felt frozen. My scales seemed as cold as ice. A shearing pain swept through my back and I closed my black eyes with a hiss. When I opened them I could see normally through my own eyes. I twisted my head and saw a guard holding a spear that was driven in between my scales. My body collapsed and my mind was plunged back underwater. Besides the faint sound of the water, I could hear shrieks and yelps and sobs coming from all directions. I twisted and turned, but I couldn't see the source of the noise. I curled into a small floating ball hoping that this was all a bad dream. "This isn't a dream, Nightshade," Stalagmite said. "I wish it was," I replied. I listened to the mournful sounds I could hear in the distance. "Had I really caused pain like that?" I thought, remembering the look on Stone's face as he realized his grandmother was gone. "I don't want to be here. Let me out. I want to be awake," I ordered Stalagmite. I continued firmly. The world I was in fell silent and I drifted to the surface of the water. As soon as my head came out of the water I woke up. I gasped for air and looked around. I was back in the cell in front of the NileScale. Extra chains on the bars made it harder to see. All four talons were chained to the floor, and my wings were clamped again. A thick muzzle was tied around my snout, I could still open and close my mouth but it made sure I couldn't bite anything. "Are my eyes still black?" I asked Stalagmite. "No," he responded quietly. "Hey" said the NileScale. "What do you want?" I asked "What did you do?"

he asked, his eyes landing on my blood splattered talons. "How many times are you gonna ask?" I grumbled. "Until I get an answer," he said stubbornly. I groaned. "Should I tell him?" I asked Stalagmite. "I suggest only telling him part of the truth, " Stalagmite said. "I killed the queen," I said, pulling at the chains that were attached to the ground. "That was subtle, " Stalagmite said sarcastically, as the NileScale gasped in surprise and horror. "What dragon kills their own Queen" he growled. "First of all she was a terrible queen, second of all she was threatening my mother, and third of all I'm an assassin so killing is what I do." I snapped. "Oh, they are still horrible reasons," he replied. I rolled my eyes and stood up. "You're crazy" the NileScale said "If we were in a claw to claw battle right now you would be so dead." I growled. He edged away from the bars of his cell. I touched my back and winced. Blood was still trickling down my scales. I heard talon steps and turned around. "You look like a mass murderer right now," Stalagmite said. "Well I technically am," I responded, pulling at the chains again. "What" The NileScale asked, "Oh, did I say that out loud?" I asked. He nodded. The talon steps were growing closer and I bared my teeth. Maybe it will be Cecropia or Mother, maybe even Bat I thought, clinging to the little hope that I had. "Don't get your hopes up, NightShade" Stalagmite advised. Don't worry, I won't, I said.

Chapter 5

Stone stepped in front of my cell followed by several heavily armed guards. “You think any of this is gonna stop me” I said laughing. Stone hesitated to answer. “Yes,” he responded calmly. “Let me guess. As the oldest heir to the throne, when Flare died, you inherited the kingdom and you came here to scold me or something,” I said in an annoyed voice. He growled low in his throat. “Actually, I was gonna do just that,” Stone said, obviously trying to conceal his fury. “Well then i guess now you have no reason to be here, correct?” Stone turned around and stomped away the guards following. “You really know how to get under his scales” the NileScale said, gazing down the hall. “Hey” i said to him “What” He replied confused, I nodded to his wing tip where his name was implanted. “Oh you want my name?” He asked, smiling a little bit. He lifted up his wing revealing his name. He grinned, “I’m Cactus. You?” “NightShade,” I replied. I have to help Cactus get out of here, I thought, eyeing the bars. “Do you have a plan to get out of here already?” Cactus asked. I didn't reply, but instead I closed my eyes and listened to my slow breathing. My muscles tensed when I heard metal clank to the ground. I opened my eyes And as I expected I was looking through Cactus’s shadow. I walked forward toward the bars, my wings, snout, and talons free. Cactus looked terrified when I easily walked through the bars and chains. My eyes were black again. I walked over to Cactus and somehow managed to break the lock. I could sense he was holding back a shriek when I stepped in his cell. I grabbed his forearm and dragged him down the hallway I stopped to catch my breath about midway to the exit. I turned and smiled at Cactus who was shrinking under my gaze. “YOUR EYES NIGHTSHADE, TURN AWAY!” Stalagmite yelped. I shook my head and my eyes turned back to normal. I was looking through my own eyes again. “C'mon we gotta get out of here” I whispered to Cactus. He nodded and then I slowly trotted forward. Two guards were stationed at the exit to the prisons. I snuck up from behind and whacked them both in the head. “They're just unconscious” I said reassuringly as Cactus looked at the bodies in terror. “I know a place where

we can hide but we can only make it safely if we go now.” I said anxiously looking at the sky.

“Okay... lead the way,” Cactus replied hesitating a bit. I beat my wings and within seconds I was soaring down towards the ground. “I haven’t flown in weeks” Cactus exclaimed, spiraling upwards in the air. “Why were you down there?” I asked. “Oh, I strayed from my hunting party,” he replied. “And why were you hunting in ShadowFlame territory?” I snapped, turning around in mid-air to meet his gaze. “Food was getting scarce in the desert. We had to hunt in your territory,” he replied defensively. “Still, you stay in your territory and I stay in mine,” I growled. “After what you did, they will never accept you back in the tribe.” he growled. I winced, because he did have a point. They would never accept me back. “I’m going back home now” Cactus said through a frown, but I could tell he was excited. “Are you crazy?! Guards will be everywhere since we escaped. You couldn’t even take on one guard if they found you” I said, blocking his way to the desert. “Could too!” he said through bared teeth as he flew underneath me “Prove it, hit me.” I yelled, flapping after him. Cactus paused then turned around and lunged at me flapping his wings wildly trying to confuse me. I dodged and grabbed his tail, then pulled him to the ground and sat on his chest. “You’re so predictable,” I laughed. “If you can’t even deliver one blow to me, how are you gonna survive a party of full grown ShadowFlames?” I asked, still laughing a bit. My talons gave off sparks of yellow flames. “Yowch” Cactus yelped as the sparks landed on his snout. “Oops.” I said, jumping off him. “As a dragon who lives in the scorching hot desert wouldn’t you be more....heat resistant?” I asked “Fire and the sun’s heat are different” he huffed while getting up. “Look at the Twilight it’s out ” I said pointing to the horizon. Cactus immediately turned away from me and looked at the horizon “It’s beautiful,” Cactus whispered. I stepped next to him. “Me, Cecropia, and my mom used to meet every week to see who could match the colors of twilight the best” I said “Cecropia always won” I sighed thinking about how i may never see them again “Who’s Cecropia?” Cactus asked. “She’s my only friend.” I replied, my muscles tensing up. “I’ll never be able to do any of that again” I thought sadly. A shriek came from the bushes and a ForestClaw and FrostTail tumbled out wrestling. “What is wrong with

you?!" the ForestClaw yelped. "What's wrong with you, snooping in our allies territory, now that's shady." the FrostTail snapped. "I wasn't snooping," The ForestClaw replied. "Yeah right, everyone knows that the ForestClaws and ShadowFlames HATE each other." the FrostTail yelled. My parents didn't hate each other I thought. "We should do something right?" Cactus whispered, stepping forward. I put my wing in front of him, "Shh, I want to see who kills who!" I whispered back. Cactus stared at me angrily, "Seriously??" he said, huffing out a puff of smoke. "Ugh fine..." I said putting my wing down "You should do it," Cactus said. "Nope" I responded "They would listen to you since this is your territory. Well.. kinda your territory," He pointed out, looking me up and down. I looked at the two fighting dragons, who hadn't even seen us yet. "Why do you have to suck the fun out of this?" I mumbled "This is not fun," he said pointing to the fighting dragons. I rolled my eyes while I cleared my throat. Both dragons stopped mid-fight and looked straight at me. "Has anyone ever told you that you have 2 different colored eyes?" the FrostTail rudely asked. "Eek! Hybrid!" the ForestClaw yelped. "Do you have a problem with that?" I snarled. She shook her head. "I have a hostage, can you take me to the palace- " The FrostTail demanded. "No. How can I trust you?" I said fiercely before she could finish her sentence. "Because I'm your ally." The FrostTail said. "Why would a FrostTail have a DiveWing trailing behind them?" I said, pointing to the sky. "What DiveWing?" she said, waving her claw. "That one." I said, stepping to the right. A DiveWing suddenly crashed into the ground where I had been standing. "Oww," the DiveWing said, rubbing his head. "How did she know?" he continued. "You're not very stealthy," I responded. The ForestClaw put her wings around her and I could see her trembling. The DiveWing whipped around and spread his wings, obscuring the FrostTail and ForestClaw from view. His teeth were bared and he looked ready to give a good fight. I scoffed. "Try me," I dared him. He looked at my talons, which were still splattered in blood, Then his eyes darted to Cactus. I could see Cactus shaking his head slowly and mouthing the words, "Don't do it." "I'm not blind," I growled. "EEL, YOU IDIOT! What are you doing?" The FrostTail yelped! "I'm saving your life, Caribou," he said quickly. I groaned and

looked up at the stars which were now coming into view. "Why is my life so hectic?" I thought to myself. "How would I know why?" Stalagmite said. "That was a private thought," I snapped. I lowered my head and locked my gaze with the ForestClaw. She immediately took off into the air and I followed easily catching up. I grabbed her head and forced her back into the clearing, landing with a loud thud. Everyone turned towards me. "What?" I asked. Eel looked at Boa and then back at me. "Oh, well.. Now that I have your attention, WHAT ARE YOU ALL DOING HERE?" "I said angrily. Caribou opened her mouth then closed it obviously realizing she wasn't in the best situation. Everyone was silent. I looked down at the ForestClaws's wingtip. B-O-A I read in my head. "If I had a body, I would fly away right now," Stalagmite said. "Then grow one like you did earlier," I said annoyed. "That was you. You created a 3D version of me." Stalagmite replied "Boa, I have a pretty good guess why you're here and cactus, I was with you so.. Now I just need an explanation from you two." I said pointing at Caribou and Eel, "I swear if you were just out here exploring..." They both gave shocked expressions. "By the stars" I said, realizing that I had guessed correctly. "Why do I even care if you're here? It's not like I'm ever gonna be accepted back into the tribe," I sighed, my wings dropping. I stomped off, frustrated. Cactus ran after me, then flung his wing in front of me. I glared at him and I realized that the dragons had gone quiet again. He looked up and I followed his gaze. 4 Shadowflames were flying above us scanning the ground thoroughly. "Hide," I whispered to the other. Everyone jumped into the bushes except Caribou. Who looked sure that they would not be hostile to her. One of the shadow flames saw her blue and white scales against the dark green grass. They dove down and landed in front of her. "She is gonna be in so much trouble," Stalagmite whispered.

To be continued

