



TUI T. SUTHERLAND

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WINGS OF FIRE

THE FLAMES OF HOPE

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WINGS
OF
FIRE

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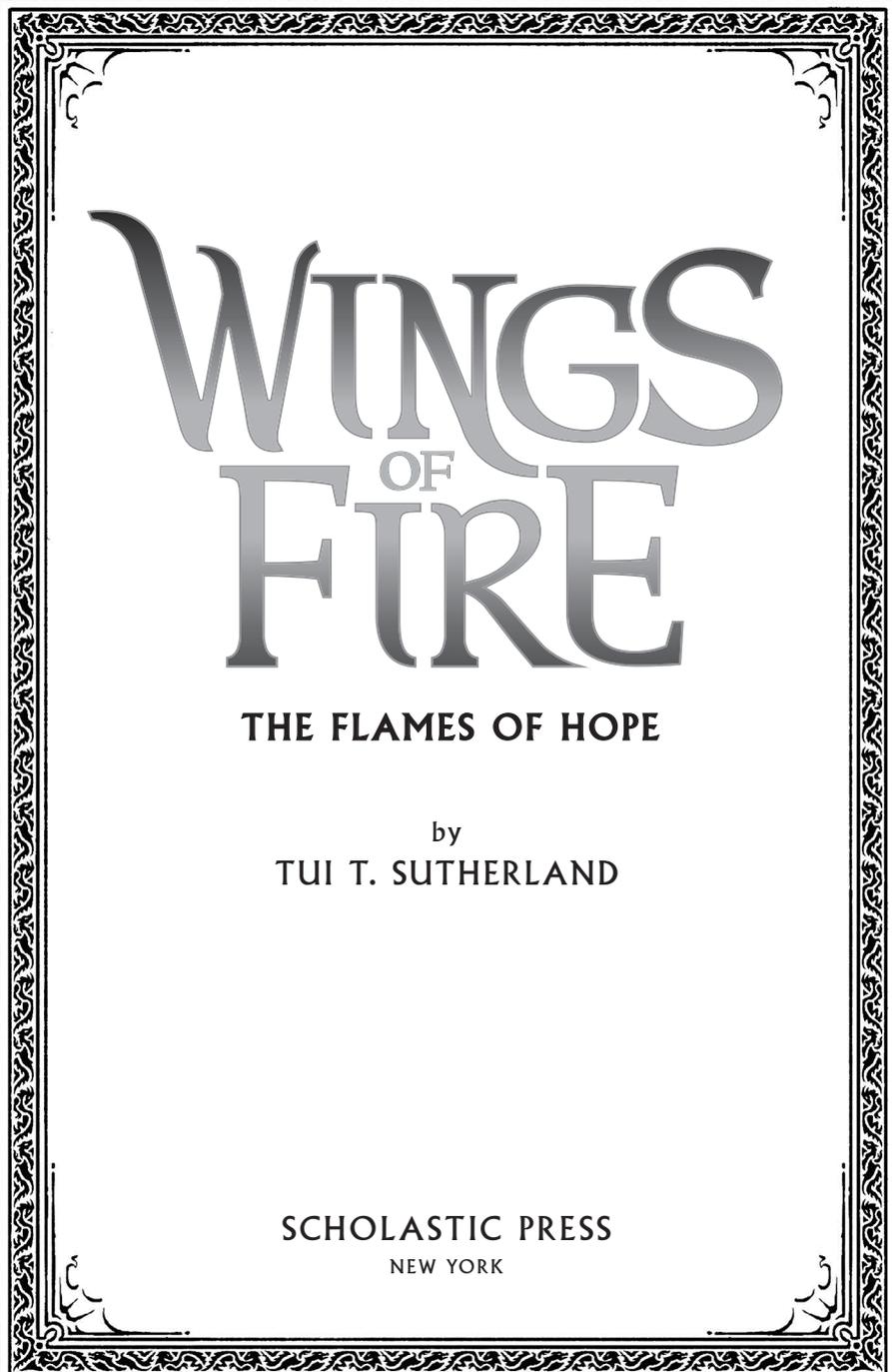
BOOK THIRTEEN
THE POISON JUNGLE

BOOK FOURTEEN
THE DANGEROUS GIFT

BOOK FIFTEEN
THE FLAMES OF HOPE

LEGENDS

DARKSTALKER
DRAGONSLAYER



WINGS OF FIRE

THE FLAMES OF HOPE

by
TUI T. SUTHERLAND

SCHOLASTIC PRESS
NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

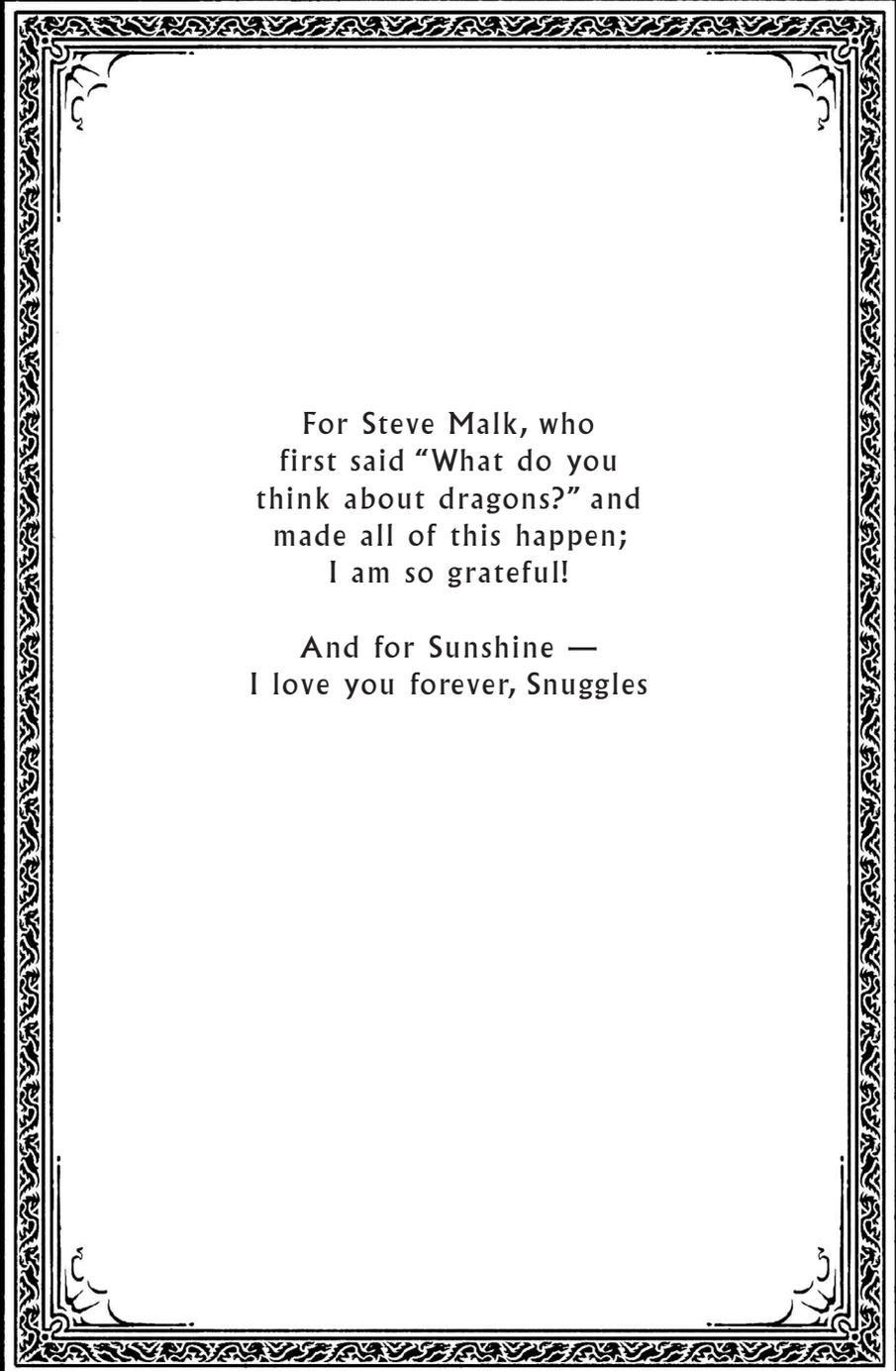
ISBN 978-1-338-21457-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

22 23 24 25 26

Printed in Italy 183
First printing, April 2022

Book design by Phil Falco



For Steve Malk, who
first said "What do you
think about dragons?" and
made all of this happen;
I am so grateful!

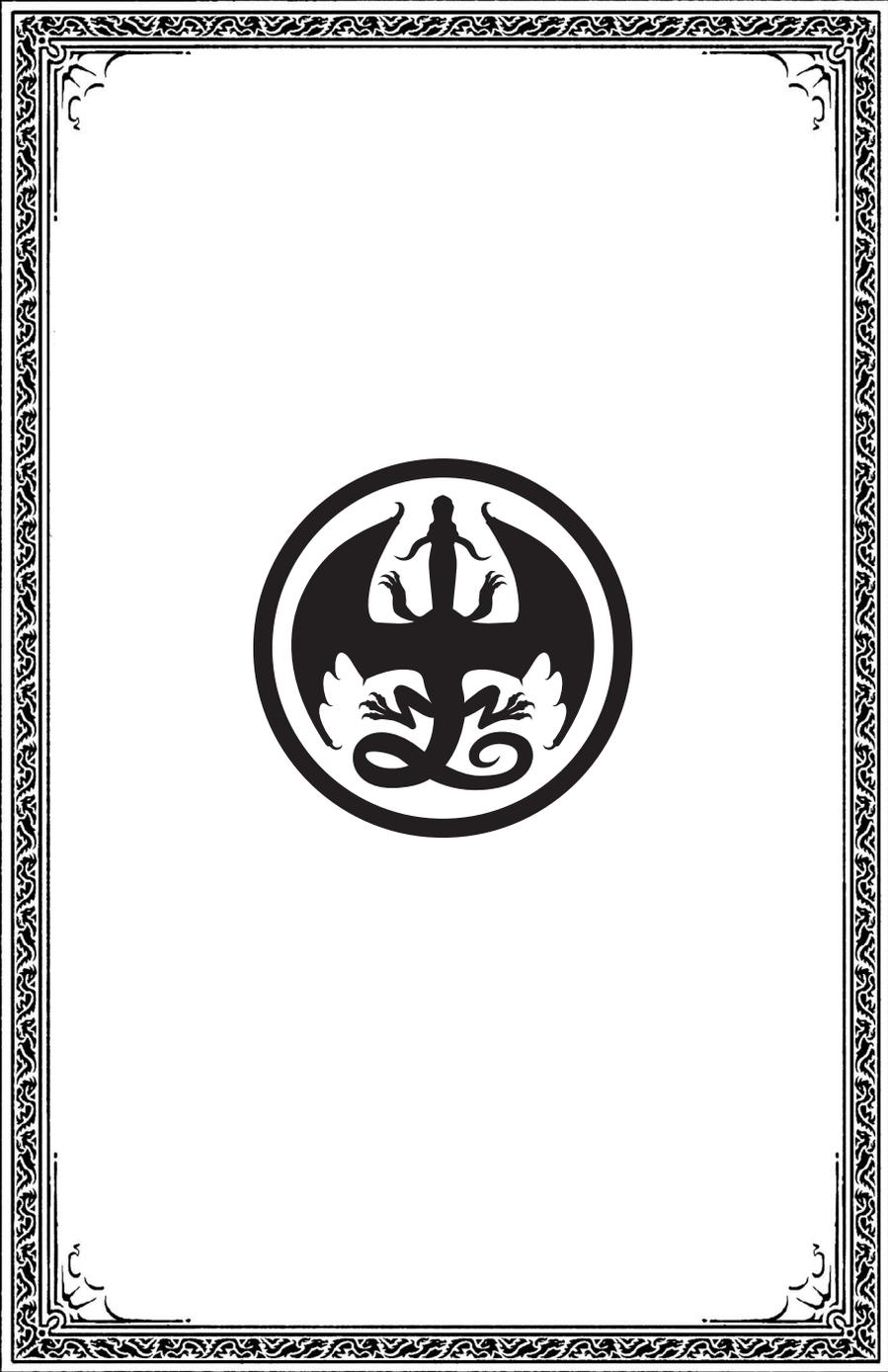
And for Sunshine —
I love you forever, Snuggles

THE LOST CONTINENT PROPHECY

*Turn your eyes, your wings, your fire
To the land across the sea
Where dragons are poisoned and dragons are dying
And no one can ever be free.*

*A secret lurks inside their eggs.
A secret hides within their book.
A secret buried far below
May save those brave enough to look.*

*Open your hearts, your minds, your wings
To the dragons who flee from the Hive.
Face a great evil with talons united
Or none of the tribes will survive.*



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WINGS
OF
FIRE



Poison Jungle

Yellowjacket
Hive

Wasp
Hive

PART ONE

THE LAND ACROSS THE SEA

Bloodworm
Hive

Union



CHAPTER 1

Luna wanted to change the world.

She knew what it should be like; she knew it *could* be more just and more beautiful and more safe and more kind. A world where dragons loved whoever they wanted to love, where they created art and took care of one another and were happy instead of hurtful.

Surely everyone wanted that world, so why couldn't it exist already?

Luna knew exactly what she wanted to change and why. She just wasn't quite sure *how* yet.

She wished the world was more like a weaving, where she could tear out the bits that were knotted wrong or colors twisted in the wrong places, then reweave it all again, better and mended and perfect. She knew how to fix a messed-up tapestry; she had no idea where to start fixing a broken world.

The problem was, there were so *many* things wrong and they *all* needed fixing. And the other problem was how many dragons didn't seem to see that. A lot of dragons thought

everything was fine! Even some of Luna's very favorite most-loved dragons didn't seem to care about all the wrong, bad things!

This had been baffling her all her life. She had started noticing the problems with her world from the first moment her mothers had walked her through Cicada Hive, and even more clearly during her earliest days of school at Silkworm Hall. How could anyone else miss them?

For instance: It was wrong that the HiveWings had cut down all the trees, and it was very, very, *very wrong* that the HiveWings had wiped out all the LeafWings. It was wrong that a SilkWing couldn't choose her own life partner, her job, or where she lived. It was awful that Luna's father had been taken away before she even hatched, and it was unfair that Queen Wasp got to decide everything that happened to the SilkWings, and they couldn't say anything about it.

A lot of dragons might argue that those things were fine because Queen Wasp was the dragon in charge and she said so, and also something something war and something something danger, so that was how the world had to be. But even if you accepted all of that (which Luna didn't), it was still obviously wrong, all wrong, that HiveWings could treat SilkWings like tiny bugs under their talons.

SilkWings were dragons, too, just like them. SilkWings didn't deserve to be stepped on, sneered at, poked without permission, punished for no reason, or ignored. It made no sense. Why would a different wing shape, or a slightly

different scale color, or antennae, make one dragon superior and another dragon worth nothing?

But how did you *fix* that? How could one dragon, even a dragon who cared *very much*, make a whole tribe change how they thought and behaved? How could she get into the heads of all those sneering HiveWings and shake their brains around until they stopped being awful?

She wanted them to see the better world she could picture. She wanted to stuff it into their eyeballs until every HiveWing went, “YES! That world is WAY BETTER than this one! Let’s be like that instead!”

Luna wished she had magic. Magic would be so *useful* for problems like this! Even if it was a magic like Clearsight’s, seeing the future — well, she’d find a way to make it useful! But proper magic, like spells and enchantments and brain changers, like in the old dragon fairy tales, that’s what she really wanted. Something to go, “POOF! Now you are all fair and kind and incapable of cruelty or injustice!” That’s what she needed, but apparently it didn’t exist — or if it had existed, once, in the Distant Kingdoms, now it didn’t work anymore.

She traced her claw through the sand with a sigh. The sun was rising behind her, casting golden ripples across the ocean like trails of flamesilk. On the other side of that ocean was Pantala: her home, her mothers, her tribe, Blue, and Swordtail, and they were all in trouble, and it was all a mess, and she didn’t know how to begin untangling it.

Before her Metamorphosis, Luna had dreamed of flying.

She dreamed of scattering the clouds with her new pale green wings, and she imagined sunshine pouring through her scales the higher she flew. She planned to weave tapestries with secret Chrysalis messages in them. She imagined herself and Swordtail at clandestine Chrysalis meetings, whispering with other SilkWings about how to change things together.

But as it turned out, she couldn't simply be Luna, an ordinary SilkWing quietly changing the world alongside other SilkWings. Now she had to be LUNA THE FLAMESILK! Luna, who spun FIRE from her wrists! A flamesilk, RAREST OF ALL SILKWINGS! Chosen to save everyone somehow!

To Queen Wasp, a flamesilk was a valuable tool to be locked up and controlled.

To the Chrysalis and the LeafWings, flamesilk was power — a weapon they could use to fight back.

Luna didn't particularly like thinking of herself as a tool *or* a weapon. She had planned on changing the world in a SilkWing way, not in a “setting your enemies on fire” way. Setting your enemies on fire *sounded* fun, but it was actually extremely scary, once you had a real dragon in front of you who would really burn if you wanted them to.

Not to mention, the first time she tried, her flamesilk got caught in a hurricane that then blew her to a whole other continent. So that wasn't the most auspicious start for the Great and Glorious Flamesilk Savior Luna.

But she had to use this power now that she had it, didn't she? She'd been chosen by the universe to be a dragon who could throw flaming lassos. She couldn't exactly be like, *Oh*,

no, thank you, someone else go set Queen Wasp on fire instead of me, please.

This was fine. She just had to rethink her plans to change the world, now that she was a little bit scarier than she used to be. Now that she had a Destiny and maybe had to save the world all by herself with fire.

I'm not all alone, though. Even though I feel that way, without Blue and Swordtail.

Today she was returning to Pantala with nine other dragons, a human, and a mission.

One of those dragons went galloping past, charging into the water and plunging his head below the surface. His human stopped near the edge of the waves, crossed her arms, and sighed.

"Did you see one?" the RainWing called from the air, swooping overhead.

"No, of course he didn't," Wren called back.

Sky's head shot out of the water again, and he shook himself vigorously, then stood with his snout tilted as though he was waiting for water to drain out of his ears. "False alarm! Not a dolphin!" he called to the RainWing. "Just a confused jellyfish!"

Pineapple, Luna reminded herself. *Pineapple the RainWing*. She was great at remembering faces because they were kind of like tapestries on dragon snouts, but usually she had trouble with names. This time, though, she was determined to memorize all the names of her traveling companions.

It would help if Pineapple could pick *one color* and *stay that color*, because her trick of picturing him in a tapestry holding

a pineapple didn't work if he kept looking completely different all the time.

Not that I'm complaining. Having all these dragons to figure out is much better than sitting on this beach by myself, staring wistfully at an ocean that's entirely too big.

"Are you still here?" a voice demanded behind her.

Luna smiled over her shoulder at Jerboa. "We're leaving as soon as the IceWing arrives," she said reassuringly. "Soon this beach will be so quiet and you'll miss us so much."

"That sounds GREAT," Jerboa grumbled, clomping up to sit beside Luna and scattering sand everywhere. "I haven't talked to this many dragons in *literally centuries*, and now I remember why."

Jerboa always moved in an odd way, which at first Luna had thought was how all two-winged dragons walked. But now that she'd met a bunch more, she was pretty sure there was something different about Jerboa . . . as though she was secretly in pain, or her bones didn't fit together quite right.

"I, um — I made you something," Luna said tentatively. She handed Jerboa the leaf-wrapped packet beside her.

The SandWing furrowed her brow at it, as though every present she'd ever been given before had bitten her.

"It's just a little thing. It's terrible," Luna said in a rush. "I don't have a loom here, so I couldn't weave you the tapestry I was imagining in my head, and then I thought, maybe I can create a new kind of art with my fire, so I've been trying to carve pictures into wood with bits of flamesilk, and it's harder than you'd think! So this is the best I was able to do

so far, but it is still pretty awful and you don't have to keep it if you don't want to. I just wanted to give you something to say thank you."

"Thank you for what?" Jerboa asked.

"For helping me get better and for putting up with all of us in your space. You didn't have to come find me when I crashed here," Luna said. "I know you could have stayed in your hut and kept out of all of this."

Jerboa didn't say very much about herself or her past, but she had clearly lived alone for a long time, and Luna got the sense that the SandWing both really wanted to connect with someone and also got very overwhelmed very quickly by normal dragon interactions. That was a guess; Jerboa was not in the business of discussing her feelings or making facial expressions. She mostly looked either bored or mildly annoyed.

But Luna was familiar with the "no feelings here" face. Her own was more of a "see, I'm smiling, I'm not causing any problems, everything is totally fine" face, but it was still in the same genre of face.

"It's no problem," the SandWing said brusquely. "I figured I might as well do something useful."

Jerboa gingerly peeled the leaves off the gift, revealing the soft white curve of driftwood underneath. Luna had burned the shape of two little dragons into it, each sitting on their own continent on either side of the ocean. One had four wings, and the other had two. They were looking toward each other and waving. Well, they were supposed to be. The one with four wings looked like she was about to fall over backward, and

the other one's face had come out all wrong, so she looked like she was sneezing.

"Never mind," Luna said, trying to grab it out of Jerboa's talons. "It's an awful, weird-looking art fail, sorry."

"Stop that," Jerboa said, batting her away. "This is *my* weird-looking art fail; get your claws off it."

"When the world is all fixed, I'll make you a tapestry," Luna said. "It'll be much better than this, I promise."

Jerboa squinted at the dark clouds that were huddled like suspicious HiveWing guards on the far horizon. "When the world is all fixed," she echoed. "Hrm. Don't get your hopes up. Every time you think you've fixed something, something else always goes wrong."

"That's the spirit," Qibli, the other SandWing, said, popping up behind her. "Hey, I have an idea: let's stop fixing things, and then maybe nothing else will go wrong."

Jerboa frowned at him.

"Uh-oh," Qibli said to Luna. "I think I'm about to be called a preposterous whippersnapper."

"Tell your continent they can keep this one," Jerboa said, flicking her tail at Qibli.

Qibli grinned at her, then turned to Luna again. "Tsunami wants to show you something important, if you have a minute." He pointed up the beach to where the blue SeaWing was sitting with Cricket.

"Oh — sure, thanks," Luna said. Her scales always gave an odd little shiver when she saw Cricket from a distance. Even though her brain knew *this* HiveWing was safe and had

helped them, her body still sent her an instinctive “eep! run! hide! set it on fire!” reaction to the yellow-and-black dragon’s face. There was a difference between *knowing* she should trust this dragon and *feeling* like she could.

She knew Blue trusted her, but she’d only seen Cricket and Blue together for a moment before Luna was blown out to sea. And to be honest, Blue wasn’t the *most* reliable truster-of-dragons. He would probably trust a giant hissing scorpion wielding knives if it said something sympathetic.

Also, there was a small part of Luna that was *really angry* that Blue and Swordtail had fallen into Wasp’s mind-control clutches, but Cricket hadn’t. After all that, why should this blissfully lucky HiveWing get to escape yet again, but the dragons Luna loved didn’t?

It wasn’t fair.

She couldn’t say that out loud.

But it really wasn’t.

“Luna,” Tsunami said, beckoning her closer as she approached. “I’m going to share another Pyrrhian secret with you. Because I think it will help and I think it’s important and, you know what, it’s *my* thing — well, the Jade Mountain Academy’s thing — and I’m the headmaster, basically, and so I don’t need any queens’ permission is what I’ve decided, so there.”

“Um,” Luna said. “OK.”

Tsunami held out a star-shaped sapphire that fit neatly in her cupped front talons. “This is a dreamvisitor,” she said. “One of those animus-touched magic objects you heard about.”

Luna's heart sped up. Magic! "What does it do?" she blurted. *Please say it'll save my tribe.* She glanced sideways at Cricket, who was unusually silent. Normally the HiveWing would have been the first one asking questions, but she was staring down at her claws, half-buried in the sand. She looked as though someone had set all her favorite books on fire.

"I've already let Cricket use it," Tsunami explained.

Why?! Luna thought mutinously. Why her first and not me? How is that fair, when she's one of the bad guys?

No, no, don't let anyone see you think that. I'm smiling, I'm not causing problems, everything is fine.

Tsunami went on. "A dreamvisitor lets you step into the dreams of a sleeping dragon, no matter where they are, so long as it's someone you've seen before. I figured it's probably still nighttime in Pantala . . . and maybe there's someone there you want to check on?"

She carefully placed the sapphire in Luna's talons. Luna's mind was spinning. She could actually see one of them again? Right now? It wasn't tribe-saving magic, but it was still amazing. Who should she pick—Swordtail or Blue? Blue or Swordtail? And then she realized —

"Did you visit Blue?" she asked Cricket.

The HiveWing nodded. "I tried," she said quietly. "He couldn't really hear me, though. He was having a nightmare."

"About what?" Luna asked sharply. That was *her* little brother. *She* should be the one worrying about his nightmares.

"A room full of SilkWings," Cricket said. "Plants growing out of the walls, strangling them. It can't be real. Can it?"

she appealed to Tsunami. “I mean, was I seeing something he actually saw?”

Tsunami spread her wings. “I don’t know. We have dreams about real things and not-real things and both mixed together all the time.”

Cricket sighed, took off her glasses, and rubbed her eyes.

“I’ll visit Swordtail,” Luna said. “What do I have to do?”

“Hold it up to your forehead,” Tsunami said. “Close your eyes and concentrate on him. If it doesn’t work, he might not be asleep right now — or if he’s having a nightmare, like Blue, you might see him but he might not hear you. But if he’s having a normal dream, you might be able to communicate with him.”

Luna’s claws were trembling as she pressed the dream-visitor to her forehead. It wasn’t magic that could make all HiveWings disappear, which would have been nice. But the chance to talk to Swordtail, after all this time, was a magic she hadn’t dared hope for. They’d never gone this long without talking to each other, not since the day they first met five years ago.

“Swordtail,” she whispered, closing her eyes. She pictured his unexpectedly sweet face. Other dragons saw his mischief, his loud jokes, and his reckless arguments with guards or teachers. They might notice that he was strong and brave, too. But hardly anyone seemed to see the true Swordtail under all his noisy silliness.

It was like the red leaf, the secret Chrysalis symbol hidden in the Metamorphosis tapestries. You had to look for it; you had to know to care about it.

Swordtail understood about all the things Luna saw that were wrong. Even if he hadn't noticed them before, he understood immediately when she pointed them out. He was the absolute best at going from vaguely interested to completely outraged in the span of a conversation.

Swordtail looked back into her eyes, and his whole face lit up.

Three moons. She was really — somewhere; somewhere that wasn't a sunrise-lit beach in the Distant Kingdoms. Somewhere dark, although a single bright light shone over Swordtail's head. He was standing up on a pedestal, his wings spread behind him, his front talons outstretched.

"Swordtail!" she cried.

He didn't respond. His claws twitched like he wanted to reach for her, but he didn't move.

Oh. She knew where they were now. This was Misbehavior's Way — the place troublemakers like Swordtail were sent to be punished whenever they disobeyed HiveWings.

She walked up to the base of the pedestal and touched the letters carved in the stone. They looked like real words until she tried to read them, and then they went wobbly and slipped away from her brain.

Like in a dream.

"Swordtail," she said. "This isn't real. You're not on Misbehavior's Way. This isn't even what it really looks like." She turned to look behind her. There were no other pedestals, no other prisoners. The stone paths rolled away into darkness, and the darkness hummed like it was full of bees.

The light over Swordtail's head was wrong, too; it was too bright, and she couldn't see a fixture or a ceiling — just the light blazing down on him.

"Swordtail, get down from there right now," she said. "I don't know why you're dreaming about this."

"This is where I'm supposed to be," he said suddenly, sounding resigned and reasonable, which was not a very Swordtail way to sound. "I'm always here. Remember? You come and sit with me. You should weave a hammock and live here because I'll probably be here more and more as we get older."

Luna felt like she was about to cry. The three times he'd been punished like this before, she'd found a way to go sit with him for as long as she could. On Misbehavior's Way, the prisoners were temporarily paralyzed with a HiveWing nerve toxin so they couldn't move or speak — but they could still hear and see, so she'd read to him, or sing, or tell him about the day he'd missed.

"You're not going to end up here again," Luna said. "I'm coming to set you free, Swordtail."

"No, no," he said. "I'm coming to rescue *you*. I'm helpful! That's what . . . Wait, didn't I already . . ." He trailed off, looking confused.

"You did," she said. "Swordtail, this is a dream, but *I'm* real. You can get off that pedestal. Get off it right now and come hug me."

He thought for a moment. "I like that idea much better than standing here." He furrowed his brow, concentrating.

“Moving is tricky, though. Not sure if everyone knows that. Hey, who’s the boss of me? Are these my muscles or what? Don’t I tell them what to do? Look at them, arguing back, not listening to me. Hey, do what *I* say, stupid talons.” He glared at his claws, but they stayed frozen in place. “All right, hang on. I’ll fix this. I AM the boss of me! Nobody else tells my talons what to do! Let’s all not look at me for a minute while I yell at myself. Luna, talk about you instead. What do you mean, you’re real?”

“I’m in the Distant Kingdoms, using magic to talk to you.” Luna spread her wings and flew up to him. This pedestal was also higher than the real ones on Misbehavior’s Way. But it was only a dream, so she did not feel guilty about shoving him off.

“YARRGH!” he yelped, flapping around to break his fall. “Hey! My wings can move! Check me out! Guess those ants-for-brains guards didn’t stab me the right way this time!”

“Swordtail!” Luna took one of his talons and tugged him down to the ground. He settled his wings behind him and looked down at their intertwined claws. A thread of silvery-gray silk spun out of his wrist and wrapped around hers.

Now she was crying. She wondered if she was crying in the real world, too, sitting on that beach with Tsunami. She let a thread of harmless flamesilk — the kind that shimmered gold but didn’t burn — spin out and wrap around his talons, twining through his own silk.

“Listen,” she said. “I’m in the Distant Kingdoms, but I’m coming for you. I’m coming with Sundew and Cricket and

some other dragons and we're going to save you, OK? Do you know where you are? I mean, really in real life, not in this dream?"

"Cicada Hive," he said, blinking. "Guarding SilkWings until Wasp has enough of her plant to infect them." He tried to laugh. "Very boring job, actually. It's a bit like guarding a flower shop to make sure the orchids don't make a run for it. I can see why the HiveWing guards were always so excited when I gave them something to chase."

"Wasp sent you back to our own Hive?" Luna asked. "So the SilkWings you're guarding —"

"Yeah, everyone we know," he said with an awkward shrug. "Your moms are here. They're all right."

"What about Blue?" she asked.

"Here, too," he said in a quieter voice. "But not really, you know? It's like he's gone into a Blue cocoon somewhere inside himself. I kind of wish I could do that, too. I mean, I want to *fight* something, but I *can't*. I can't do *anything* with these stupid traitor talons." He looked down at their intertwined claws and took a deep breath. "She — *we* captured Io. So she's here, too. She can't even look at me."

"It's not you," Luna said fiercely. "Whatever Queen Wasp is making you do, it's not *you*, Swordtail. Don't forget that. You're still in there, and we're going to get you away from her, I promise."

"I wish I were really talking to you," he said. "These dreams always end with you being dragged away in chains made of lightning."

“You *are* really talking to me, you lummoX,” Luna said, shaking his talons. She wrapped her wings around him and pulled him closer. With a sigh, he rested his head on her shoulder. “Swordtail, there’s a dragon on this continent who’s like ClearSight. She told us this prophecy about Pantala and a buried secret, so we’re coming to look for an abyss that we think is connected to the mind control. We’re going to fly into the abyss, find a big obnoxious plant with a grudge, and then Sundew’s going to kill it a lot until it’s really, really dead, and then the mind control won’t work anymore and you’ll be free. All right? Isn’t that a great plan?”

“I . . . feel like I missed something,” Swordtail said.

“Me too. It’s very confusing,” Luna agreed. “But it’s going to work! We’re leaving the Distant Kingdoms today! So pay attention, and in a few days, you’ll be like, *Oh wow, they did it! The mind control doesn’t work anymore! Let’s go stab Queen Wasp in the face! And then find Luna and hug her forever!*”

He laughed, shaking his head to clear the tears from his eyes. “You do sound like real Luna. Where will I find you after you save us?”

“The Mosaic Garden,” Luna said off the top of her head. “That hill where you finally confessed your desperate love for me and said you couldn’t live without me.”

“Um, I believe my exact words were: ‘Hey, Luna, want to be my girlfriend?’” he said with a grin.

“Yes. You’re very lucky I can translate Swordtail,” she retorted.

“And let’s see — I believe *your* romantic response was ‘Swordtail, did you sit on this box of honey drops? Why are

they all squashed?’ and then I was like, ‘LUNA, pay attention to ME, I am TRYING to make us an official couple,’ and *you* were like, ‘Yes, all right, obviously that’s fine, now go get us some more honey drops and DON’T sit on them this time.’”

“You do have a weird habit of squashing any candy you get your talons on,” she pointed out. “Or your butt on, more accurately.”

“I don’t sit on candy on PURPOSE!” he objected.

“I certainly hope not,” she said. “That would be weird, Swordtail.” She nudged his snout with hers. “But it’s all right. I love you anyway.”

“I love you, too.” He squeezed her talons. “I think I’m about to wake up.”

“Oh no,” she said, starting to panic. “Already? Wait —”

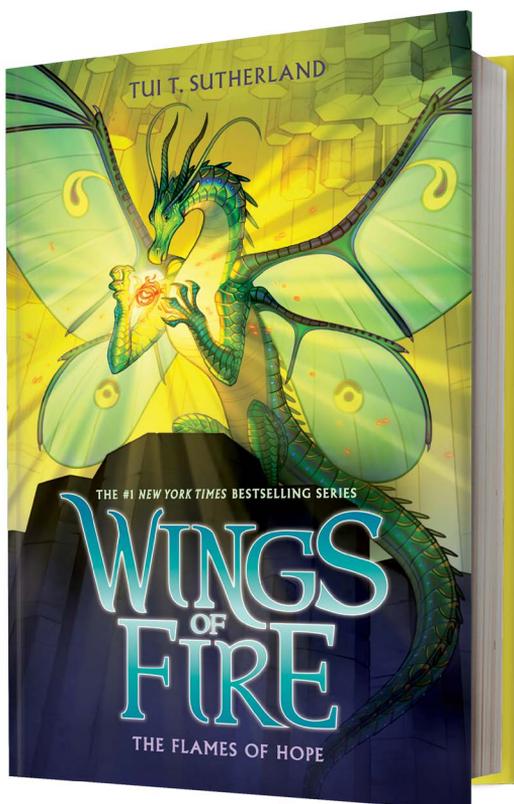
“I don’t have a choice,” he said. “She wants us for something. Luna — I’m all right, but — if you could come quickly, it would — it would be better.”

“I will, I promise. Tell Blue we’ll be there soon,” she said. More silk was spinning out of her, wrapping around his wrists, trying to keep him with her. “Just hold on, Swordtail. We’re coming, we’ll —”

But he was gone.

Luna was back on the beach, early morning light brushing the clouds pink overhead. Tears were rolling down her snout, and her talons held a cold sapphire instead of Swordtail’s warm claws.

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