



CHAPTER 1

Sunny had always known that she was the right dragon for a Big Heroic Destiny.

She was going to save the world. She and her friends were going to swoop in on wings of fire, whatever that meant, and bring peace to every dragon in Pyrrhia. It was right there in the prophecy: *five dragons born to end the fight*. That was her fate. That was her *purpose*.

Besides, it explained everything. Why else was she so small and weird-looking? She wasn't a normal SandWing. Her scales and eyes were the wrong color, and she had no venomous barb at the end of her tail. But that didn't matter; in fact, it made sense. Of course a dragon hero with an epic noble quest would be a little different from everyone else. And who would care how strange she looked once she stopped the war?

Then there were her parents, the mysterious dragons who had left her egg buried in the sand in the desert, alone and unguarded. It didn't matter that they obviously didn't want her. It didn't bother Sunny at all, because it was part of the prophecy: *Hidden alone from the rival queens, the SandWing egg awaits unseen*. That was all right; heroes in the scrolls

often had no parents. Their heroic destiny was more important than any family.

And her destiny *was* important. There was nothing more important than stopping the war between the dragon tribes. All her life, especially whenever she felt trapped or sad or worried about anything, Sunny had imagined fulfilling the prophecy — how many lives they would save and all the happy, reunited families and all the future dragonets who could grow up in peace, without the constant fear of war.

That was the entire point of her life.

And it was a lie.

Rock walls scraped against her wings as she scrambled away from the NightWing island. She could feel the rumbles of the volcano all the way through her claws. Her friends were behind her, still facing Morrowseer, but she had to get away from them, from him, from everything.

He made up the prophecy. It was all a trick.

No. I don't believe it. He's a vindictive, cruel dragon who's always manipulated us and everyone around him. He would say anything to hurt us.

The prophecy is real. It has to be.

She burst out of the tunnel into the rainforest and immediately slammed into the side of a skinny black dragon. The NightWing grunted with surprise and glared at her. Sunny tried to turn and fly the other way, but a floundering wall of black wings and talons and tails drove her back.

In the moonlight, the entire rainforest seemed to be seething with dragons. Roars and hisses and growls drowned out the sound of the raindrops pattering on the leaves all

around them. It didn't help that half of the dragons were dark as the shadows and the other half were camouflaged, so claws and corners of wings seemed to suddenly poke out of nowhere. Sunny narrowly avoided a tail in her ear when two NightWings got caught in a dangling vine and whipped around violently as if they were being attacked.

"Everyone calm down!" Glory's voice shouted.

"Listen!" bellowed Grandeur, the old royal RainWing. "Your new queen is speaking!"

Several NightWings muttered under their breath, but none loud enough to be heard, and even they fell silent as others hissed at them.

Sunny ducked and wriggled through the crowd, but she couldn't get any farther than the stream. Several RainWings stood by the water, in shades of blue and purple, holding NightWing spears. Most of them were ruining the effect by peering at the spears with mystified expressions, or holding them upside down.

Still, Sunny decided not to try pushing past them. Those spears would hurt just as much if they poked her by accident as on purpose.

What she really wanted to do was crash away into the rainforest and not come back. She wasn't sure she could face her friends — who acted as if they didn't care about the prophecy at all — and she couldn't even look at the NightWings.

Tsunami wants to believe Morrowseer. She's never wanted to fulfill the prophecy. She doesn't understand how important it is.

Clay would be just as happy if nobody ever noticed how wonderful he is. Then he could sleep and eat and take care of us instead of fighting.

Starflight would love to stop worrying about the prophecy.

And Glory has enough to do here, now that she's queen.

None of them will fight for our destiny. They certainly won't listen to me if I try to explain that Morrowseer must have been lying. They'll give me that look I always get, the one that says: "Oh, silly little Sunny and her crazy dreams, isn't she cute and harmless."

She gazed up at the mass of dark trees overhead, where the moonbeams and raindrops skittered in the wind. Even if she tried to run off, she'd probably get her tail stuck in a tree branch and need to be rescued, and then her friends would get to roll their eyes and pat her on the head again.

It wouldn't be like this in the desert, she thought. She looked across the stream at the other tunnel, the one that led to the Kingdom of Sand. There I could fly and fly and fly all the way to the horizon without ever stopping to think.

Not thinking sounded pretty appealing right now.

"You're just as ordinary as any other dragon."

Morrowseer's spiteful words kept going around and around in her head. *"I made up the whole prophecy. . . . Now the war will drag on endlessly, and more dragons will die every day, probably for generations. All of them wondering what happened to the amazing dragonets who were supposed to save them, but obviously failed."*

Sunny clenched her talons and crouched low to the ground.

He was lying, he was lying, *he was lying*. She wouldn't let these NightWings see her cry.

Glory climbed onto a boulder and flapped her wings loudly. Even up there, and even with her queenliest face on, Glory still looked like a dragonet, smaller than almost all the NightWings surrounding her.

If the prophecy is fake, then why was everyone so awful to Glory about not being in it? Sunny thought, feeling another surge of fury at Morrowseer. Why make her feel so useless — if we're all useless?

Because it is real. It has to be.

But how can I prove it?

"NightWings," Glory said firmly, speaking up to be heard over the shuffling dragons and the rainstorm. "Your home is gone. Your queen is dead. But this is your chance to start over. If you mess it up, you'll lose this home, too." She pointed to the RainWings. "You will treat these dragons with respect, and in return, because that's the kind of dragons they are, they will be much kinder to you than you deserve."

The RainWing across the stream from Sunny mustered an expression that looked almost fierce.

Rain splattered across Sunny's snout and wings. The storm was picking up strength, ripping through the treetops way over their heads.

"Tonight you'll stay right here," Glory went on. "I don't want any NightWings wandering off until we can count you and write you all down. You will each be assigned two RainWings to keep an eye on you. And yes, if you're feeling

like perhaps we don't trust you very much, it's because we don't. None of you are welcome in the RainWing village until you earn that trust. We will find you somewhere else to live."

"We'll get wet out here," one of the burlier NightWings complained.

Glory gave him a steely glare. "Feel free to go back and sleep on your nice dry island instead," she snapped. "I hear it's quite warm there."

Sunny glanced around at the NightWings. Even in the moonlight, she could see that most of them looked badly shaken and subdued. Seeing their home buried by the volcano — even if they knew it would happen eventually, and even though the island had been a terrible place to live — it still must have been an awful shock.

Something like being told your whole life is a lie, I imagine.

A roar suddenly erupted from the crowd behind her. Black dragons surged toward Sunny, flapping their wings in alarm, as two deep-red RainWings dove into their midst and dragged a yowling, petrified NightWing in front of Queen Glory.

"This one!" growled one of the RainWings. "He can't stay here! He's the worst of all of them."

"He's the one who did all the venom experiments on us," said the other. She lashed her tail and hissed at him. Sunny had never seen any RainWings look so angry before, besides Glory. She craned her neck to peer at the NightWing and realized it was Starflight's father, Mastermind, the head scientist of the NightWing tribe. From the look on Glory's face, the queen was probably guessing exactly who it was, too.

The NightWings had been kidnapping RainWings for the last year, imprisoning them and doing experiments to understand their venom-shooting abilities. They'd been planning to invade the rainforest to steal it from the RainWings — either by killing or enslaving all the peaceful rainforest dragons who already lived here.

Sunny had seen the lava-riddled wasteland of an island where the NightWings lived. She knew they were desperate for a new home, and at first, she'd thought Starflight was brilliant for offering to let them come through to the rainforest as long as they pledged their loyalty to Queen Glory — along with a promise to behave peacefully. She liked the idea of dragons from different tribes learning to live together, she felt sorry for the sick and starving black dragons, and she loved the poetic justice of a RainWing becoming the new queen of the NightWings.

But looking at the muttering dragons around her — the NightWings who didn't look as sorry as they should, and the hissing RainWings who were only beginning to realize what their friends had been through — Sunny wondered if this had been a huge mistake. Maybe they should have let the NightWings be swallowed up by the volcano. Maybe it wasn't possible to forgive them. *Maybe we shouldn't even try.*

If they could lie about something as huge and important as the prophecy and stopping the war, what else would they lie about? How could Glory ever trust them?

"I'm sorry," Mastermind croaked weakly. "It was . . . I was just . . . for science . . ." His voice sputtered out, and he cringed away from the RainWings beside him.

Glory flared her wings and several colors rippled quickly through her scales. "Tie him up. We'll figure out what to —"

"Look out!" a dragon by the tunnel roared. "Stand clear!"

Fatespeaker shot out of the hole and a moment later, Tsunami hurtled after her. "Everyone get down!" the SeaWing yelled.

The NightWings by the tunnel all threw themselves to the ground. A blast of scorching heat crackled out of the hole, turning the raindrops around it to hissing steam. Sunny was one of the few still standing, looking at the tunnel, when two more dragons burst out of it.

It was Clay, with his wings shielding Starflight. Starflight's front talons were covering his eyes and long burns were blistering along his scales. As soon as they reached the open air, he collapsed to the ground.

"Stay back!" Tsunami shouted ferociously at the dragons who were flapping around them.

"Starflight!" Sunny cried, feeling a stab of guilt. *He's hurt. I never should have left my friends with Morrowseer.* She jumped forward, trying to squeeze through the crowd of frantic dragons to get to him.

But suddenly talons wrapped around her snout and shoulders, and she was yanked backward into the dark trees.