

Stay Secret, Stay Hidden, Stay Safe
(Based on Wings of Fire: Moon Rising by Tui T. Sutherland)

By: Lia Castro

"Mommy?" The dragonet whispered. Only the hum of the rainforest answered her. She was alone. Moonwatcher longed for the curve of her mother's wing where she fit perfectly. Instead, she curled up in the leaves, well-hidden by the ferns. Here, her dark scales would simply be another shadow. She thought of the things Mother had shown her. Dragons finding her and taking her away, large animals stalking her, danger lurking in every corner. In the hours that she had been alive, Moonwatcher had learned two things: Mother could not stay, and the world was a dangerous place.

Rain started to fall, and soon it started pouring. Water droplets streaked down, drenching the grass and chilling the air. Moonwatcher shivered. The trees provided little protection from the rain, and soon she was soaked. She thought of moving to a more sheltered place, but she remembered Mother saying not to move. The dragonet sighed. Sneaking out a talon, she snagged a large leaf and pulled it on top of her, giving her some protection from the rain. Soon, the hush of falling water lulled her to sleep.

Moonwatcher awoke to sunlight streaming through the leaves. Morning had arrived, but Mother wasn't here yet. The small dragonet curled into the ferns, watching the rainforest wake up around her. Sloths dangled in the trees. Birds fluttered every which way, and frogs crouched in the shade. Moonwatcher was fascinated. This world was so different from what Mother had shown her. There were colors and sounds, and so many things tempting her to leap out of the shadows and throw her mother's caution to the wind. There was a moment when Moonwatcher almost did that. But she didn't jump out. She hid, waiting for Mother to come and find her and make everything better.

The sun slowly climbed in the sky and then began its descent, and Moonwatcher was still waiting. A dull ache in her stomach began to form. When would Mother come back?

The sky turned scarlet, then dark blue, then black. The moons shone again tonight, orbs of white, sitting there in the sky. Moonwatcher gazed at them. Two full moons. And finally, Mother came.

"Moonwatcher!" Mother raced toward her, wrapping her wings around Moonwatcher. She was sure this was how things were meant to be. Time seemed to stand still in Mother's embrace. Her wings were a fortress where no one could hurt her. Mother would surely stay after seeing how perfect this was. Moments later, Mother stepped back. *Oh, no, I'd better get her something to eat.* Moonwatcher only heard this part in her head, the words were never said aloud. It sounded like Mother's voice, but her mouth never moved.

"I'll be back, Moon, just wait here," Mother whispered. Then she disappeared as quickly as she came. Soon, Mother reappeared in the trees. She was going to stay! Happiness bubbled through her. Mother dropped a furry thing in front of Moonwatcher. It smelled good, and Moonwatcher was hungry, so she dug in. Everything was great. Mother was here, Moonwatcher wasn't hungry anymore, and the moons were bright.

Mother picked up Moonwatcher. "Oh, Moon, I love you and I want to stay, but I have to go." She set Moonwatcher down in the ferns. "Stay secret, stay hidden, and stay safe, Moon. I'll be back, I promise."

Moonwatcher didn't understand Mother's words, but she heard her thoughts. No! Mother was leaving? The dragonet wanted to tell her mother to stay where everything was perfect, but all that came out was, "Awrk?"

Mother sighed. "I'm sorry, Moon, but I have to go." Moonwatcher saw the pain in her eyes as she left. Mother was gone. Again. Only then did she realize that Mother had called her Moon, not Moonwatcher. *Moon sounds good*, she thought.

The weeks that followed were similar: Mother coming at night, but leaving again, even after Moon was positive she would stay. After a few weeks, Mother came less often.

One day, when Mother hadn't come for three days, and Moon was starving, she decided that she wasn't going to stay still like a good dragonet. She was going to find some food. Moon scanned the trees for anything edible and found a piece of fruit in the grass.

As soon as she scrambled over to it, Moon ate the pear. *That was good, but I'm still hungry.* Spotting a mango hanging from another tree, she grinned. *No more hiding in the shadows. I am Moon. I am brave.*