

## *The Thieving Life of Young Qibli*

*Based on Wings of Fire, by Tui T. Sutherland*

Qibli was never much of a thief, unlike the rest of the dragons in Scorpion Den. But practically raising himself forced him to act like the others. That was exactly what he was thinking as he rummaged through some wealthier dragon's food supply. He was searching for meat; he wanted it large so he wouldn't have to thief again soon (he probably would though).

Suddenly, he heard a voice nearing the door. No. Multiple voices. "I haven't eaten hardly anything these nights working for Cobra," the one nearest the door said. "A good camel roast sounds better than owning the entire desert!" That, ironically, was the thing in Qibli's talons. But to Qibli, that wasn't the most important thing. *Cobra*, Qibli thought. Cobra is his mother, so he didn't know what to think. *I thought she worked by herself. If this is the home of someone who works for her, I need to get out.* IMMEDIATELY. At that moment, though, Qibli didn't dart out of the house. He didn't put the roast down. Instead, he silently slithered up the stairs, crouched by the window, and listened.

Qibli learned two things by listening. Cobra owned a criminal gang that did her bidding (which should have come as more of a shock), and the gang knew his exact location. This surprised Qibli, as this had never happened to him before. He had never been caught stealing. First, he forgot to find a way to dispose of the camel roast's container. Second, he forgot to remove the sand stuck to his wings. Now there was a trail of sand leading directly to the nook where Qibli hid. "WHERE'S MY CAMEL ROAST?!" roared the original dragon, as he stomped thunderously upstairs. "WHAT SLIMY LITTLE LIZARD WOULD TAKE MY CAMEL ROAST?!" he roared again. For Qibli, it was now or never. As the dragons leaped up the stairs (frighteningly close to Qibli, plus there were at least four), Qibli took a flying leap through the window. Right before he hit the ground, he saw the crazed sneer of the closest dragon chasing him, leaping towards him.

Unless Qibli wanted to be shredded to pieces, he had to run. Qibli darted down the broken, sandy, cobblestone paths of Scorpion Den. He was a long way from safety, but if he played this right, he wouldn't have to run all the way back. Now Qibli noticed that he was being chased from behind, above, and, even though it was probably destroying the homes, from on top of the buildings. From every direction, the criminals were closing in. In a split-second, Qibli ducked and rolled into a side alley, where only a young dragonet could fit. There was a crash and some yelling, probably because all the dragons dove for him at once (resulting in the destruction of a couple stands nearby). Now Qibli crept slowly through the thin space, watching rats, scorpions, and other creatures scuttle away as he crawled through. Once he got to the other side, he melted into the sand-colored crowd. Once he found a darker part of the Den, Qibli ran quickly towards the safety of home. But something was off. He not only heard his own quick steps on the sand. There were multiple dragons heading his way. In his rush to get away, Qibli somehow managed to get himself cornered.

Qibli was pinned to a wall, with multiple poisonous SandWing tail barbs inches from his chest. If stabbed just right, it could instantly kill any dragon. "Well, well, you filthy dragonet. You thought you could get away with this, but it looks like your time's up. This is for stealing my camel roast, making my house dirty, and for Cobra!" he roared, right before a SandWing tail barb flew towards Qibli's chest. Qibli shut his eyes and waited for the blow. But it never came. Instead, all the dragons that pinned him flew into the wall behind him. Unlike his normal self, Qibli didn't investigate. He took the chance and ran through the broken wall, all the way home.

When Qibli ran away from the criminals, he saw the dragon that fought them. The satchel that the mystery dragon carried had a picture of a thorn... *hmmm*, Qibli thought. The mysterious dragon threw the criminal gang in prison, hopefully for the rest of their lives. And while they angrily stomped around their cells, Qibli happily enjoyed his sweet, sweet, camel roast.