



# Snow in July

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**H**UNTER'S DRAGONFLY WINGS BUZZED AS SHE SLIPPED A little on the branch. They were black and orange today. She liked the effect as they blurred in motion.

Pine Cone stood beside her, peering past a leaf at the meadow—All Across Meadow. His four translucent, gossamer wings were silver-blue. They were always silver-blue.

“Why do you come here?” she said, irritated. It was warm and sunny. She wanted to be down near the waterfall.

“I just want to see what they’re doing.” He pulled the beach leaf lower and leaned on a twig.

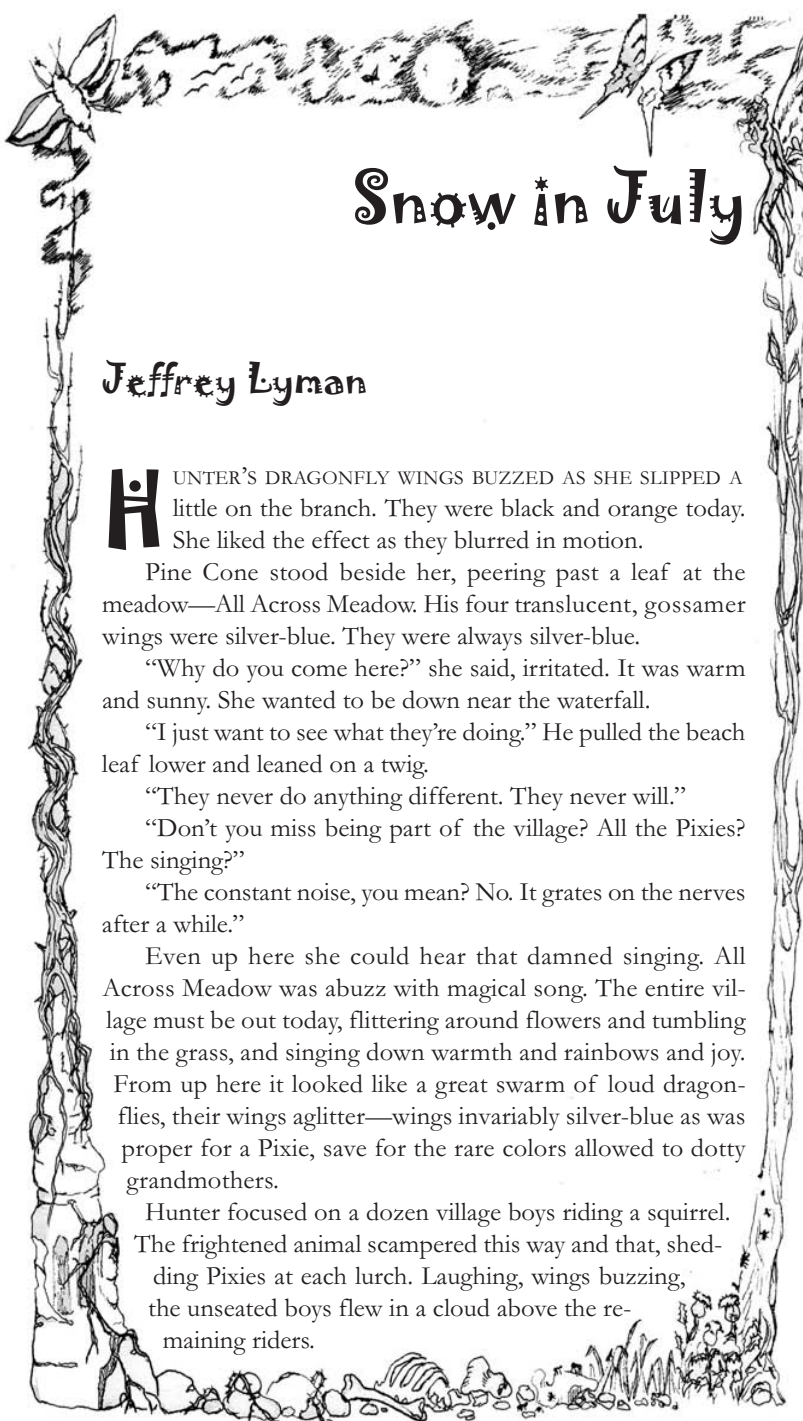
“They never do anything different. They never will.”

“Don’t you miss being part of the village? All the Pixies? The singing?”

“The constant noise, you mean? No. It grates on the nerves after a while.”

Even up here she could hear that damned singing. All Across Meadow was abuzz with magical song. The entire village must be out today, flittering around flowers and tumbling in the grass, and singing down warmth and rainbows and joy. From up here it looked like a great swarm of loud dragonflies, their wings aglitter—wings invariably silver-blue as was proper for a Pixie, save for the rare colors allowed to dotty grandmothers.

Hunter focused on a dozen village boys riding a squirrel. The frightened animal scampered this way and that, shedding Pixies at each lurch. Laughing, wings buzzing, the unseated boys flew in a cloud above the remaining riders.



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Hunter thought it would have been more sporting if the animal could see them. But animals couldn't see through Pixie glamour. The squirrel had no idea what was tormenting it. The last boy jumped off as the squirrel successfully darted into a hole.

"You should change your name," Hunter said. Pine Cone was still fairly new at this outcast thing and clung to old traditions, old names, old wing colors. She was working on him gradually, turning him wild. He was cute. She didn't want to lose him back to the village like she had lost WarSong, formerly known as Dandelion. WarSong was probably down there now somewhere, fluttering and drinking nectar from flowers. And singing.

"What would I change my name to?" Pine Cone let go of the leaf and it sprang up to block the meadow.

"How about 'Sex in the Sky'?"

He frowned. "That's not a good name. Oh." His frown sprang into a grin.

Hunter leaped off the branch, dropping down around the trunk of the tree in a spiral, diving through a bramble, and soaring back up. Pine Cone followed close, laughing.

In moments, Hunter broke through the tree-canopy and into the wide blue nothing. Air all around; blue sky and a bright, warm sun; a few patchy white clouds. Unconfined. No forest around her, no meadow and grass, no Pixies or singing. It was almost as good as sitting under the waterfall, water droplets beating on her head and wings.

"Gotcha," Pine Cone said as she let him grab her foot.

"What are you going to do with me?" She transformed her sturdy, green-wool clothes into green silk, nearly transparent. Pine Cone's brown-wool clothes vanished altogether, revealing his long, taugt stomach and tight chest. His shoulders bunched and unbunched as his wings beat.

"Naked already?" Hunter said, fluttering close and poking him in the stomach. "You're impatient."

Pixies didn't wear real clothes, nor did their wings have any color at all. It was all part of the glamour. All part of the reason Hunter left. Pixies had the power to transform themselves, but they limited their appearance to brown wool with silver-blue wings. They could appear and disappear at will, but used it only to play tricks on animals. They built houses, but were hopeless at gathering and storing food for the winter. Instead they huddled together in a great Pixie ball for warmth, and stole acorns from squirrel hoards to avoid starving. Hunter had had enough of the idiocy long ago, and the magical singing that masked doubts and fears. She was the leader of the thirty or so outcasts, and the oldest.

"Of course I'm impatient," Pine Cone said, trying to catch her arm. She fluttered back. "You're beautiful; the sun is bright; we want each other."

Hunter let him catch her. She thought it might be time to show him the excitement of danger and the wonder of honest fear. She wrapped her long, pale legs