



Sharon M. Draper

By the author of TEARS OF A TIGER  
and FORGED BY FIRE



Romiette  
and Julio



# 1.

## Fear

The water thundered into her ears, forced itself down her throat, and burned its way into her nose, her lungs, her brain. This water was fierce and deadly—no cool, gentle waves, but hot, choking liquid flames, sucking the breath of life from her. She struggled, searching for air, for land, for something to hold on to. But there was only the water, pulling her into its depths. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't swim. She couldn't even scream. The water filled her, seared her thoughts, and she drifted slowly into unconsciousness. The fire cooled, the terror ebbed, and the dark shadow of death embraced her.

She drifted then—in a haze of colors and swirls and black, frightening void. Voices? Could she hear voices? One voice? Maybe it was a song. No, all was silence. Thick, enveloping quiet that led to despair. No reason to care, to breathe, to live. So easy to let the silence swallow her. That voice. It pierced the darkness. It was calling her name, grabbing her thoughts and making her remember the fear, the pain, the cold, clammy water. The water! She gasped, and the water grabbed her once more, viciously dragging her to its depths. But that voice. A man's voice. It floated down to where she lay, cradled in the arms of the victorious water. The voice called her one last time.



Suddenly, Romiette sat up in her bed. Her nightgown was damp and clinging to her body. She was sweaty and disoriented. Her heart, still pounding from the fear of almost drowning, made her breathing jagged and tight in the darkness. She turned on her light, looked around her pale blue bedroom, and started to relax. She got up quietly, changed her nightgown, then opened her bedroom window. The night air was cool and soft; peace and silence ruled the street. No cars, no movement, not even a barking dog. Slowly, Romiette began to breathe more evenly. She took a deep breath of the night.

This was the third night in a row that she had been awakened by a dream of drowning, but she had been dreaming various versions of this dream for several months. She could find no reason for such a dream. True, she couldn't swim, but she wasn't taking swimming at school, and she purposely made her life tiptoe far around anything having to do with more water than a bathtub. *So why the terror dream?* she thought again. *Why? And who did that voice belong to?* She could hear it still, and it made her tremble, not with fear, but with excitement. It was not a voice she had heard before—she was sure of that.

It was 3 A.M. Romiette knew she couldn't get back to sleep, so she decided to write in her journal. Writing soothed her, relaxed her, and tonight, she thought, was one of those nights that she needed to really chill. *This was my favorite Christmas present,* thought Romiette as she stroked the smooth leather cover of her new journal.



She sat cross-legged on her bed with a blanket around her shoulders, relaxed a bit, breathed deeply, and opened the journal slowly. She carefully wrote her name on the soft cream-colored front page. She blew on it gently to make sure it would not smear, then, with great anticipation, opened to the first page. She liked starting a fresh journal. It was full of possibilities and unanswered questions—of days yet to come and events yet to happen. She decided to start by describing who she was. Maybe somehow she'd find an answer to the terrible dreams.



## Star-Crossed Lovers

When Romiette Cappelle meets Julio Montague, she feels as though she has met the soul mate who can rescue her from her recurring nightmare about fire and water. But like the Shakespearean characters whose names echo theirs, Romiette and Julio discover that not everyone approves of their budding romance. In their case, it is because Romiette is African-American and Julio is Hispanic, and the Devildogs, a dangerous local gang, violently oppose their interracial relationship.

When the Devildogs threaten to teach them a lesson, Romiette and Julio come up with a risky plan to escape from the gang's fearsome shadow. But things go terribly awry, and the two find themselves caught up in a deadly reality more frightening than Romiette's nightmare—and in a desperate struggle to avoid the tragic fate of Shakespeare's famous young lovers.

"A first-rate novel about contemporary teens."

—*School Library Journal*

"Draper has given readers a pair of intriguing, unusual protagonists with the sort of real thoughts and feelings that will make this interracial story satisfying."

—*Booklist*

"Gripping romantic adventure sure to keep [readers] turning pages until the end."

—*VOYA*



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