Dear readers,

Welcome to the second part of the SkyClan manga trilogy. Leafstar has kits! I have a weakness for baby animals of any kind, but in manga they are a particular treat because I get to see my characters leaping around in the illustrations. If you’ve read *Bluestar’s Prophecy*, you’ll know that poor Bluestar felt as if she was forced to choose between her kits and her career when she was on the brink of becoming ThunderClan’s deputy. But here in SkyClan, there is nothing to stop Leafstar from becoming a mother. She has a kind mate, a skilled medicine cat, and supportive senior warriors—even Sharpclaw, whose tongue can be as barbed as his talons!

Of course, raising three lively kits while leading a Clan is never going to be easy. Almost as soon as this story begins, Leafstar is torn between tending to her son’s scratched nose and dealing with a problem reported by a hunting patrol. Later, her loyalties are divided even more dramatically in the thick of a battle, when she has to balance the safety of her kits with fighting alongside her Clanmates. I wanted to show that Leafstar can never stop being a mother, which means that her role as the leader of SkyClan is going to be even more difficult than before. But Leafstar has a huge heart and a great deal of courage, so I hope this is one more challenge that she relishes.

On the other hand (or paw), we have Sol. Never has a cat been more desperate to become a warrior! In this story we get to travel back to his kithood, to his unhappy mother and neglectful father, where stories of mysterious “Sky Warriors” made young Sol wish he could find his own way to escape his mother’s lonely and miserable life. It’s not surprising that SkyClan seems to be exactly what he has been looking for. But do all cats *deserve* to be warriors? Is it enough just to want something badly? And what about Leafstar’s part in his destiny? She has the power to grant Sol’s wish, and she knows how much this means to him. I wonder if you will agree with her decision. . . .

Best wishes always,
Erin Hunter
BAM!

POW!

TAKE THAT!

I'LL GET YOU!
IT WASN'T THAT MANY SEASONS AGO THAT I WAS THEIR AGE... BUT LOOKING AT THEM NOW, IT SEEMS LIKE AN ETERNITY.

FIREKIT, STORMKIT, AND HARRYKIT... MY LITTLE ONES. MINE AND BILLYSTORM'S—MY MATE.

THEY'RE THE BEST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO ME.
Better than becoming leader of SkyClan.

Sometimes I even wonder if they are more important.

I know what my heart tells me. But my heart and my head don't always get along.

I watch them play. They're so tiny, so fragile.

And part of me hopes they never have to go into battle.

What am I thinking?

They're destined to be warriors.
WHAT WAS THAT, LEAFSTAR?

CLOVERTAIL-- YOU SNUCK UP ON ME.

AND IT WAS... NOTHING. JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.

IT’S SO HARD, ISN’T IT, KNOWING THEY WILL GROW UP TO FIGHT AND BE IN DANGER?

BUT WE CAN’T KEEP THEM IN THE NURSERY FOREVER. AND IT’S AN HONOR TO KNOW THEY’LL SERVE THEIR CLAN ONE DAY.

IT’S HARD. YES... BUT YOU’RE RIGHT, OF COURSE.

I’M IN YOUR DEBT, YOU KNOW. YOU’VE BEEN SUCH A BIG HELP SINCE THE KITS WERE BORN.

IT’S MY PLEASURE, OF COURSE. BUT YOU’RE WELCOME.

SPEAKING OF SKYCLAN CATS...

IT SEEMS LIKE SOL IS FITTING IN PRETTY WELL.

SOL, FORMER KITTYPET... LEFT HIS LIFE WITH A TWOLEG BEHIND TO COME AND JOIN OUR CLAN.
SOL’S BEEN A GOOD ADDITION TO THE CLAN.

LEARNING FAST ABOUT HUNTING AND PATROLLING THE BORDER... RESPECTFUL TO THE EXPERIENCED WARRIORS...

SPEAKING OF BEING RESPECTFUL, BIRDPAW AND HONEYPAW COULD USE A LESSON OR TWO.

WELL, LOOKS AS IF OUR YOUNG APPRENTICES DIDN’T ENJOY REMOVING TICKS FROM THE ELDERS’ COATS THIS MORNING.

IF ONLY INCREASING OUR NUMBER WERE ALWAYS THAT EASY.

CAN’T IMAGINE WHY.

LICHENFUR SAID I WAS CLUMSY AS A TURTLE. SHE DIDN’T HAVE TO SAY THAT.

SOL DOESN’T HAVE TO DO APPRENTICE DUTIES. I NEVER SEE HIM PICKING TICKS.

YEAH!

IT’S NOT FAIR.
You both know Sol isn't exactly an apprentice.

He may have joined SkyClan recently, but he's full-grown and has lots of experience.

Even if he hasn't done warrior training.

Then he should have a warrior name.

Don't worry, HoneyPaw. He will soon.

It's been hot lately. Very hot. I don't know that I can remember the last time it felt like this, for this long.

It's uncomfortable, that's certain, but the effects go beyond that.
THANKS TO THE HEAT, THE FRESH-KILL IS SCARCE...

...BECAUSE ALL THE PREY SEEMS TO BE SPENDING DAYTIME IN BURROWS OR NESTS TO AVOID THE SUN.

THIS GIVES RISE TO A PRICKLY SITUATION WITH OUR DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS...

...CATS WHO HUNT WITH US DURING THE DAY, BUT GO TO THEIR TWO-LEG HOMES AT NIGHT.

THEIR SOURCES OF FOOD ARE GUARANTEED...AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH, IN THIS HEAT...

...THEY'D RATHER BASK IN THE SUN THAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE DWINDLING FRESH-KILL PILE.

EVEN MY DAYLIGHT-WARRIOR MATE, BILLYSTORM, DOESN'T SEEM TOO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT GOING OUT ON ANOTHER PATROL.

HMMPH. "DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS."

WHAT WAS THAT, ROCKSHADE? DID YOU WANT TO SAY SOMETHING?

SURE--HOW ABOUT THIS? "WHY DON'T YOU START PULLING YOUR WEIGHT AROUND HERE FOR ONCE?"
JUST BECAUSE YOUR BELLIES ARE FILLED WITH KITTYPET SLOP EVERY NIGHT DOESN'T MEAN THE REST OF THE CLAN SHOULD GO HUNGRY!

ROCKSHADE... THAT'S--

HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT'S FINE. I WON'T EAT ANYTHING IF THAT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY.

YEAH, IT WOULD, ACTUALLY.

I DIDN'T REALIZE MY EATING HABITS UPSET YOU SO MUCH.

MAYBE I JUST WOULDN'T EVEN BOTHER TURNING UP AT ALL?

I BET TWO OF US COULD LIVE ON THE FOOD YOU Gobble DOWN EVERY DAY.

THAT'D SUIT ME JUST FINE.

CLAN CATS SNAPPING AT EACH OTHER LIKE THIS MAKES MY HEAD POUND...

...AND IT'S HAPPENING MORE AND MORE AS THE HEAT Wears ON.
They're just frazzled and frustrated. I know they don't mean the things they say.

But still, I'd better go and put a stop to it before anything bad happens.

I'll get you!

Oh! Uh... uh...

Meeeeeep!

Harrykit! What happened?

My nose! Meeeeeep! Meeeeeep!

Meeeeeep!
“Bouncefire,” what kind of name is that, anyway?

A better one than “HarveyMoon!”

I’ll see to the kits.

Mama!

Harrykit is going to bleed to death!

MEEEEEEEEEP!

Sigh... thank you.

Foxbreath!

Mousebrain!

Quiet.
THE DAYLIGHT-WARRIORS ARE A VALUABLE AND ESSENTIAL PART OF SKYCLAN.

THEY ARE ENTITLED TO EAT FRESH-KILL, BUT THEY MUST MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PILE LIKE OTHER WARRIORS.

WE'RE ALL AWARE THAT HUNTING IS DIFFICULT IN THIS HEAT.

SO...PERHAPS WE SHOULD CHANGE PATROLS TO DAWN AND DUSK ONLY, AND SLEEP DURING THE DAY?

WE WOULDN'T ALL SLEEP AT ONCE, SHREWTOOTH.

OBVIOUSLY.

BUT...BUT...BUT... IF WE DO THAT, WON'T OUR ENEMIES FIND OUT AND ATTACK US??
I think Billystorm might be in over his head with the little ones. Go on. See to your kits.

I'll sort this out.

Thank you.

The weight of trying to lead a clan and be a mother has been heavy on my shoulders...

...since the day I realized I was going to have kits.

Now...with a young one crying in front of me and warriors grumbling behind me...

...it feels as if that weight might finally crush me.
A question rises up in my mind, not for the first time.

Leafstar?

Sol—what is it?

Nothing, I... here. I thought this might help.

For the little one, I mean.

Should clan leaders ever have kits?

There.

Soon you'll be good as new.

Wow...

You've got a tough job. Managing these three and all of us. How do you do it?

Oh... it just takes patience. Is all. Patience, and much-appreciated help from my clanmates.
I bet it's hard to tell us apart from the kits sometimes, isn't it?

Haha-ha... not usually.

Leafstar... I'm sorry I couldn't settle the kits down on my own.

It's okay. They don't seem to be able to take two breaths without me at the moment, do they?

Well, you're a brilliant mother, and they're still young kits. They'll get more independent with time.

Ahem... Sol, don't you have a patrol to go on?

Not that I know of! Why? Do you want to lead one?
MAMA! MAMA!
HARRYKIT’S NOSE IS
GOING TO BE
OKAY!

OH? YOU’VE
DECIDED THAT,
HAVE YOU?

YEAH!
PLUS, WE’RE
HUNGRY!

LET’S DISCUSS
PATROLS AND SUCH
LATER, SHALL WE?

GOOD
IDEA.

OKAY.

LEAFSTAR?

OH—UH...
RIGHT.

I’M GOING TO
LET THE CATS TAKE
SOME TIME OUT UNTIL
THE SUN IS BELOW THE
TREETOPS.

SHARPCLAW—
YES?
They have enough fresh-kill to last the day—no use storing it anyway since it spoils so fast in this heat.

Sharpclaw is a fantastic deputy. I’m not sure how I would have managed without him.

But then, I guess that’s what the clan is all about, helping each other.

The daylight-warriors head back to their twoseg nests as the day comes to an end...

Except, today, for Billystorm and Ebonyclaw, giving me one more reason to be proud of my mate.

You’re doing what, now?

We’ll hunt for the clan without eating from the fresh-kill pile.
RIGHT. WE KNOW WE'LL BE FED WHEN WE GET BACK TO OUR HOUSEFOLK. IT ONLY SEEMS FAIR.

THANK YOU, BOTH OF YOU.

IT'S THE LEAST WE CAN DO.

ALL RIGHT, I WANT THREE PATROLS, FRONT AND CENTER! WARRIORS AND APPRENTICES BOTH! MOVE!

WE WANNA GO ON PATROL TOO, MAMA!

WE WANNA BRING BACK A SKIRREL!

SHARPCLAW DROPS EASILY INTO HIS ROLE OF SHOUTING ORDERS, BUT I CAN TELL... TODAY, IT HIDES HIS RELIEF.

AS LONG AS THE HEAT Keeps up, WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET.

STARCLAN HELP ME...THE KITS'VE BEEN NAPPING ALL AFTERNOON.

IT'LL BE A MIRACLE IF I GET ANY SLEEP AT ALL TONIGHT.
Look how easily Sol fits in with us, Echosong.

I'm really glad he joined Skyclan.

He seems bound and determined to be the best warrior ever!

Yes...but...
Well, we know so little about him, or where he comes from.

That may be true...but, to be fair, I don't really know much about your life before you came to the Gorge, either.

There's not much to tell.

So...maybe the same goes for Sol?

We have to trust him.

"That's what being a Clanmate is all about."
The kits are finally asleep. Though I think getting them there has made me just as sleepy as they are.

But just as I think about closing my eyes...

Help! We need help!

Injured cats!

Echosong!

Come here at once!
OH, EBONYCLAW, YOUR LEG!

CAN YOU MOVE IT?

YES, IT JUST H-HURTS...

MAMA?

M-MAMA?

MEEEEEEEEPP!

MEEP MEEP MEEEEEEEPP!

I'LL SEE TO THE KITS, LEAFSTAR. DON'T WORRY, WE'LL PLAY A GAME OR SOMETHING.

THANK YOU, HONEYPAW. I APPRECIATE IT.
WE MET A BADGER.
WE DIDN'T WANT THE BADGER'S WORMS AND GRUBS, OF COURSE...

WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE?

...BUT THE BADGER FELT THREATENED ANYWAY AND TURNED ON US.

WE MANAGED TO DRIVE IT FARTHER INTO THE WOODS, BUT EVERY ONE OF US GOT HURT.

EBONYCLAW GOT A NASTY BITE ON HER FRONT LEG.

OH—A-ARE YOU SURE?

SHE'S GOING TO HAVE TO STAY THE NIGHT SO I CAN KEEP AN EYE ON HER.

I DON'T WANT MY HOUSEFOLK TO WORRY ABOUT ME...
I promise you can leave as soon as Echosong is confident you can walk back to Twolegplace.

Starclan help us. One encounter with a badger hurt us this badly?

...I think it's because we don't usually hunt at dusk.

Things are... well, I won't try to put a nice face on it. Things are bad. I don't think hunting at dusk will work.

That makes sense, unfortunately. Dusk is when we patrol borders... share food... settle down for the night.

Right. Changing our hunting patterns has put us in competition with badgers and foxes.

But prey is hidden too well during the heat of the day.

So what do we do?

I... don't know yet. I need some time to work it out.
ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE LISTEN.

WE'RE GOING TO TRY SOMETHING NEW TONIGHT. INSTEAD OF A FEW GROUPS OF FOUR OR FIVE CATS...

...WE'LL SEND OUT TWO GROUPS OF EIGHT.

IT'LL BE A CHALLENGE TO MOVE QUIETLY ENOUGH TO CATCH PREY, BUT IT SHOULD OFFER US A LOT MORE PROTECTION.

EIGHT OF US TRYING TO HUNT? WE'LL DRIVE AWAY ANYTHING WORTH CATCHING!

WELL, SPARROWPELT, SINCE OUR OTHER OPTION IS TO BECOME PREY FOR FOXES AND BADGERS, I SAY WE GIVE IT A TRY.

YEAH... I GUESS.

BILLYSTORM... BE CAREFUL, OKAY?

OUR KITS NEED A FATHER, AND... I NEED YOU, TOO.

DON'T WORRY, I'LL KEEP MY EYES OPEN. I PROMISE.

...ALL RIGHT.
KEEP IT QUIET, WARRIORS. LET'S MOVE OUT.

WE COULD TOTALLY GO ON A PATROL, MAMA!

I BET I COULD BRING BACK TWO SKIRRELS!

WELL, IF YOU'RE GOING TO GO ON PATROL, I NEED TO TEACH YOU A FEW BASICS FIRST. WHO WANTS TO LEARN TO HUNT?

MEEE! MEEE! MEEE!

OKAY. THE FIRST THING WE'LL LEARN IS HOW TO SNEAK UP ON SOMETHING. LET'S PRETEND MY TAIL IS A FOX...

QUIET! DON'T MAKE A SOUND!

I'M NOT! I'M NOT!

ROARRRR!

EEEEEEEEEE!

IT'S THE FOX! DON'T LET THE FOX GET ME!
Billystorm returns safely, and I thank StarClan for that...but I can see the disappointment on his face.

It's just as we feared: eight cats in a group can barely catch anything worth eating.

Patchfoot, what happened? Where is everyone else?

Well, see, Sol had an idea...

Um...we're back, too.

What? What idea?

He, um...well, he didn't exactly say, but he talked us into letting him split the patrol in two.
SPLIT THE PATROL--PACHFOOT, THAT DEFEATS THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF WHAT WE'RE DOING! WHERE DID THE OTHERS GO?

I DON'T KNOW.

YOU LET MY KITS JUST WANDER OFF INTO THE FOREST? PLUMWILLOW AND NETTLE SPLASH MIGHT BE TRAPPED BY FOXES NOW!

NOT TO WORRY, EVERYONE! WE'RE ALL FINE!

OR EATEN BY BADGERS! PACHFOOT, HOW COULD YOU?

AND LOOK!

I'M SORRY, I'M SO SORRY, I DIDN'T--

IT TAKES ME A FEW HEARTBEATS TO HAVE ANY CLEAR THOUGHTS, I'M SO SURPRISED.

THAT'S ENOUGH FRESH-KILL TO FEED THE WHOLE CLAN FOR DAYS!
THIS IS AMAZING!

HOW'D YOU CATCH ALL THIS?

YOU'RE THE BEST HUNTERS EVER!

NEVER SHOULD'VE DOUBTED YOU!

THIS SOLVES THE WHOLE PROBLEM!

WE SHOULD CELEBRATE!

WHAT'S ALL THAT NOISE DOWN THERE?

CAN'T YOU LET US SLEEP IN PEACE?

TANGLE! LICHENFUR! COME AND JOIN US!

WE HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FOOD IN MOONS!
THANK STARCLAN THAT ECHOSONG'S MISGIVINGS HAVE BEEN PROVEN WRONG.

SOL MUST BE THE BEST HUNTER WE'VE EVER KNOWN!

THE NEXT DAY, ALL MOST OF US WANT TO DO IS SLEEP. WITH BELLIES THIS FULL, HOW COULD WE NOT?

NATURALLY I CAN DEPEND ON SHARPCLAW TO STICK TO BUSINESS, EVEN AT A TIME LIKE THIS.

LEAFSTAR... THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SOL... SOMETHING NOT RIGHT.

MORE SUSPICIONS...? UGH... ALL RIGHT. WHAT BOTHERS YOU ABOUT HIM?

WELL, FIRST AND FOREMOST: WHERE DID HE LEARN HOW TO HUNT LIKE THAT? HE HASN'T BEEN THAT IMPRESSIVE IN TRAINING.

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE IT JUST STARTED TO CLICK FOR HIM. YOU CAN PICK UP HUNTING TECHNIQUES WITHOUT FORMAL TRAINING, YOU KNOW.

HONESTLY... I FIND THAT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE.
WELL, NO NEED FOR IT TO BE A MYSTERY.

I’LL ASK SOL IF I CAN GO WITH HIM TONIGHT. I COULD DO WITH A NIGHT OUT, ANYWAY. MAYBE I’LL LEARN SOMETHING.

IT ONLY TAKES A SIMPLE REQUEST TO GET CLOVERTAIL AND HONEYPAW TO LOOK AFTER MY KITS FOR AN EVENING.

HONEYPAW LOVES PLAYING GAMES WITH THEM SO MUCH. THEY PROBABLY THINK SHE’S MORE FUN THAN I AM.

SOL, I HAVE A REQUEST FOR YOU.

SURE THING, LEAFSTAR, ANYTHING YOU WANT?

I KNOW WE’RE STILL FULL FROM LAST NIGHT, BUT TONIGHT I’D LIKE YOU TO LEAD ANOTHER HUNTING PATROL.

AND I’LL TAG ALONG, IF YOU DON’T MIND.

“MIND? IT’D BE AN HONOR!”

WE’RE THE ONLY PATROL GOING OUT TONIGHT?

WE’RE THE ONLY PATROL THAT NEEDS TO, PLUMWILLOW. EVERYONE ELSE CAN GET CAUGHT UP ON SOME BATTLE TRAINING.

JUST FOLLOW ME, EVERYONE!
FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, THIS IS A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

SOL DOESN'T STOP TO TASTE THE AIR, OR DO ANY OF THE USUAL THINGS HUNTING CATS DO TO IDENTIFY PREY.

I CAN HEAR THE UNDERGROWTH RUSTLING WITH PREY. SQUIRRELS SIT IN TREES DIRECTLY ABOVE US. BIRDS PECK ON THE GROUND NEARBY.

YET SOL IGNORES ALL OF THAT.

WHAT'S HE UP TO?

SOON WE ENTER PART OF THE WOODS I'VE BARELY BEEN TO BEFORE...MAINLY BECAUSE THERE'S NOT MUCH PREY HERE.
THIS IS HIS HUNTING GROUND?

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

SEE THAT HOLE OVER THERE?

IT'S A FOX DEN.

WHAT? WE HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM HERE!

NO, WAIT! IT'S OKAY, YOU'LL SEE.

THIS IS WRONG. IT'S SO WRONG I CAN BARELY SIT STILL. WHAT'S SOL PLAYING AT?
THE SMELL OF THE FOXES HITS ME JUST BEFORE I HEAR THEIR PADDING FEET.

THANK STARCLAN WE'RE DOWNWIND, OR THEY'D BE ALL OVER US!

WHY AREN'T WE RUNNING AWAY?

NOW!
COME ON!

THE FOXES ARE BRINGING THEIR CUBS OUT OF THE DEN NOW... BRINGING THEM OUT TO FEED!
I can’t even comprehend what just happened.

See, Leafstar? If the foxes want to hunt at dusk, we’ll let them do our hunting for us as well!

Sol, this is... I can’t even begin to--

This is the absolute worst thing you could have done!

You’ve just left a trail for those foxes all the way to our camp! What if they come here and attack us?

What? ...but I figured--

This is not how clan cats hunt! They use skills!

But this is a skill...

No, it’s not. It’s stealing. Stealing from foxes, no less! You must stop it at once.

That’s an order!
MADE IT BACK, HAVE YOU? I WAS--

--WOW! WHAT A HAUL! HOW DID YOU CATCH ALL THAT?

WE DIDN'T CATCH IT. A FOX DID.

...TELL ME YOU'RE JOKING!

LOOK, IT'S FOOD, THE FOXES DIDN'T FOLLOW US, AND WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TO FEED THE WHOLE CLAN USING ONLY FOUR CATS.

I DON'T SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS!

YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE WARRIOR CODE.

YOU'VE PUT THE WHOLE CLAN IN DANGER!

ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, LET'S JUST CALM DOWN, ALL OF US.

MAYBE IT'S OKAY IF THIS IS THE LAST TIME, SOL WAS ONLY TRYING TO HELP.

NONE OF US WILL SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THIS TO THE REST OF THE CLAN.

NO USE IN UPSETTING EVERYONE IF THERE'S NO CAUSE FOR IT.
NONE OF YOU WILL SAY ANYTHING TO ANYONE ELSE ABOUT THIS, WILL YOU?

NO, LEAFSTAR.

YOU MUST LEARN TO HAVE FAITH IN YOUR OWN HUNTING SKILLS.

NOW COME ON, ALL OF YOU. IT'S TIME TO PUT THIS BEHIND US.
AT LEAST, I TRY TO PUT IT BEHIND US.

BUT ALL DAY, SOL AVOIDS THE REST OF THE CLAN AND... WELL, SULKS, MORE OR LESS.

I'M GRATEFUL WHEN WASPWHISKER AND CHERRYTAIL APPROACH HIM.

HEY, SOL!

WE'RE ABOUT TO HAVE A HUNTING SKILLS SESSION WITH THE APPRENTICES.

WANT TO JOIN US?

UGH... SURE! THAT'D BE GREAT. THANKS!
MY KITS ARE NAPPING—ANOTHER THING FOR WHICH I'M GRATEFUL—

SO I SEE NO HARM IN OBSERVING.

OKAY, EVERYONE READY?

THREE... TWO... ONE... POUNCE!

WHUD

YOU OKAY, SOL? I THOUGHT YOU KNEW ALL THIS STUFF ALREADY!

YEAH—SINCE YOU CAUGHT ALL THAT PREY? I FIGURED YOU WERE BETTER THAN ALL OF US!

I'M FINE—I'M FINE!

LET'S JUST GO AGAIN.
WHUD

THE TRAINING SESSION DOES NOT GO WELL. I'M AFRAID HE'LL BE SULKING AGAIN IN NO TIME.

HE WANTS TO BE A WARRIOR. WE OWE IT TO HIM TO GIVE HIM THE RIGHT TRAINING.

WE DON'T QUESTION APPRENTICES LIKE THIS, DO WE?

NO... YOU'RE RIGHT, WE DON'T.

I'LL ASK SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HIS WAY AROUND A HUNT TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH SOL. MAYBE PATCHFOOT. HE'S GOOD.

SOL NEEDS SOME SPECIAL ATTENTION, SHARPCLAW. SOME ONE-ON-ONE TRAINING. I'LL DO IT MYSELF, IF I HAVE TO.

YOU'RE GOING TO A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR ONE CAT, LEAFSTAR.

I'LL TELL YOU THIS, THOUGH. I'VE SEEN SOL TRY TO HUNT.

AND HE JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY NATURAL SKILLS.

AT ALL.
THOUGHT I HEARD A FOOTSTEP?

DID SHARPCLAW SEND OUT A NIGHT PATROL WITHOUT TELLING ME?

THERE IT IS AGAIN.
OH, NO.
OH, NO!
Fox attack! Defend the camp!

Surround them!

Everyone close to me, take the male! Those with Leafstar, go after the female!

Don't get close to their jaws!

Concentrate on their backs and legs!

Ready...!
I know if Sharpclaw and I were simply talking about a fight like this...

...he'd tell me I need to stay back, out of the fight, where I can command.

But these foxes are deadly. They could kill any of us in a heartbeat with one snap of those jaws.

I can't let my warriors face this threat alone. It will take all of us to—

—to... 

...no!
HERE WE COME, MAMA!

WE'LL HELP YOU FIGHT THOSE MEAN FOXES!

JUST HOLD ON!

SOL! GET IN HERE!

SOL! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

TAKE MY PLACE!

SOL, PLEASE!

I NEED TO SAVE MY KITS!
I can't let go—I just can't. Other cats might die if I do.

But if I don't, my kits will...!

You're going nowhere!

Hold it right there, you sorry little scraps!

Awwwww...

Thank StarClan!

Now...it's time to finish this!
YIP YIP
YIP YIP!

THAT’S RIGHT,
YOU MANGY
BEAST!

LICHENFUR...

KEEP
RUNNING!

THANK YOU,
THANK YOU,
THANK YOU!

AH,
IT WAS
NOTHING.

THEY MAY
BE PESTS...BUT
I’VE KIND OF GOTTEN
USED TO HAVING
THEM AROUND.
BUT WE COULD HAVE HELPED, MAMA!

NO, YOU COULDN'T HAVE HELPED. YOU'RE ALL STILL TOO SMALL...

BUT--

NO, NO "BUTS." IF YOU PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT AGAIN, YOU'LL GET NOTHING BUT MOUSE TAILS FOR TWO DAYS.

LEAFSTAR... I...

I'M SO, SO SORRY. I JUST... I JUST GOT SO SCARED.

AND I DIDN'T KNOW. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, HOW TO HELP.

WILL YOU... ARE YOU GOING TO TELL THE REST OF THE CLAN THAT IT WAS MY FAULT THE FOXES CAME?

...NO, NO. THERE'D BE NO POINT. SO...

LISTEN, MAYBE CLAN LIFE JUST ISN'T RIGHT FOR YOU. HUNTING AND FIGHTING ARE AT THE CENTER OF BEING A CLAN WARRIOR. IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT IF YOU'RE JUST NOT BORN WITH THE RIGHT INSTINCTS.
BUT--BUT, NO, NO, I HAVE TO BE A WARRIOR!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

DID YOU KNOW ABOUT SKYCLAN BEFORE WE MET YOU?

IT'S ALL I'VE EVER WANTED!

MY EARLY LIFE... WASN'T EASY.

I'VE KNOWN ABOUT SKYCLAN SINCE BEFORE I OPENED MY EYES.

MY MOTHER WAS CALLED CINDERS. SHE...

SHE... SHE DIDN'T GIVE US NAMES.
"I'm not sure Cinder really wanted to have kits, and she didn't hunt very well."

Quiet, now. You have to be quiet so you can listen.

"But she told us stories. To get us to behave."

"She'd tell us stories to cheer us up. They were all about a clan of cats from long ago..."

"Cats that were heroic... and brave... and honorable."

These cats were all strong and beautiful... and they came down on clouds, like Sky Warriors.

They grew as big as lions when they were angry..."
...and they fought as fiercely as tigers when they went into battle.

They were mighty hunters, and ran as fast as cheetahs when they brought down their prey.

And they could fly!

Up into the trees to hide from their enemies, and to catch birds and squirrels.
“Cinders said there is nothing to be scared of because these cats are good and kind and always look out for the weak.”

“T’they are warriors! She’d say, ‘not like cats today.’”

“Cinders wasn’t... well, she wasn’t very nice to be around, I don’t think. She... complained.”

“A lot.”

“Maybe that’s why our father rarely came by. Rarely brought us any food.”

“He never wanted to play with us.”

“...first time I’ve seen you in moons, and all you bring us is this one pitiful shrew? It’s too sour to eat! It’s useless!

Just like you! What kind of a father treats his kits this way?”

“I don’t think he liked us very much.”
LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING. CATS DIDN'T ALWAYS TREAT EACH OTHER THE WAY YOUR FATHER TREATS US.

CATS USED TO BE WARRIORS, NOBLE AND STRONG. AND GOOD. NOT LIKE HIM.

"CINDERS DIDN'T LIKE TWOLEGs ANY MORE THAN SHE LIKED OTHER CATS."

"...AND ONE TIME, WE WERE REALLY HUNGRy, AND ATE SOME FOOD A TWOLEG PUT OUTSIDE ITS NEST."

"CINDERS YELLED AT US, TOLD US TO GET AWAY FROM THERE."

"I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY! I WAS HUNTING—JUST LIKE A WARRIOR CAT!"

"BUT SHE SAID, 'THAT'S NOT HUNTING. YOU SHOULD CATCH WILD FOOD, NOT EAT THAT BROWN SLOP.'"
YOU’LL EAT WHEN WE’VE FOUND SOMEWHERE OUT OF THE RAIN.

NOW MOVE YOUR TAILS!

MAMA, WHEN I GET BIGGER, I’M GONNA BE A WARRIOR. JUST LIKE THE CAT’S FROM THE SKY.

I’LL CATCH US ALL THE PREY WE CAN EAT!

WELL.

WON’T THAT BE SOMETHING.

"WE LOOKED AND LOOKED FOR SOMEPLACE TO TAKE SHELTER..."
"...but with no friends..."

"...we didn't have much luck."

"...and no twolegs..."

"Quit wasting time, trying to help!"

"But mama--"

"You're too small to be any use. Just come on!"
Well, it's just never going to quit raining, is it? We'll all catch our death before it's over. Not as if anybody would know we were gone anyway.

Ooh--mama? I know what would cheer us up!

Tell us a story about the Sky Warriors!

You can forget about the Sky Warriors. They're not here now, are they? No one is.

No one can help us.

"Finally we found some shelter in a log pile. It was pretty drafty, but it let us stop and rest."

"And we all got excited when our father showed up."

"Though I guess we should've known better."

Well, look who finally shows his face. And foodless again, not that I'm surprised.

Cinders.
Cinders... I'm going away. I've met another mate... one who doesn't complain all the time.

She and I are going somewhere else. Somewhere with more prey.

Oh, so that's how it is, is it? You get me with a litter of kits, and now you're just abandoning us?

Good-bye, Cinders.

What am I going to do now? No mate... no one to help me raise my kits...

Mama... Mama, if you'll tell me what I can do to help, I'll do it. We're all hungry... maybe I can find some food...?

What did I do to deserve such rotten treatment?

Why do things like this always happen to me?

It's pointless. Everything's pointless. I can't go on like this. I just can't.

Mama... just hold on... please! Just hold on, and I'll get bigger, I promise. I will!

And you can be safe... and we'll have enough food... please, Mama...!

I'll get big enough, and I'll be a Sky Warrior...

...and I'll be fast and fierce... and I'll take care of you. I'll take care of all of us.
OH, BE QUIET! JUST BE QUIET ABOUT ALL THAT! IT’S JUST STORIES!

THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS SKY WARRIORS.

“SHE STAYED LIKE THAT, JUST LYING THERE, FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS. THEN SHE GOT UP, AND GATHERED US TOGETHER…”

“…AND LED US OUT INTO THE RAIN. SHE DIDN’T SAY ANYTHING TO US. SHE JUST TOOK US TO A TWOLEG NEST.”

NOW YOU JUST STAY THERE. STAY RIGHT THERE, DON’T MOVE.

M-MAMA? WHERE ARE YOU GOING? …WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK?

I’M NOT COMING BACK. YOU JUST STAY RIGHT THERE, AND THE HOUSEFOLK WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.

“SHE TOOK US TO DIFFERENT TWOLEG NESTS… ONE BY ONE.”

WHAT DID WE DO WRONG, MAMA? WHY ARE YOU LEAVING US? I WON’T DO IT ANYMORE! I PROMISE…!

MAMA, NO, DON’T GO!
THIS LIFE WON'T BE AS GOOD AS WHAT YOU COULD'VE HAD... IF YOU'D REALLY BEEN SKY WARRIORS.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO GO, MAMA! PLEASE DON'T GO!

MAMA!

BE NICE TO THE HOUSEFOLK, AND THEY'LL LOOK AFTER YOU.

BUT THERE'S NO CHOICE.

BECAUSE I CAN'T.

"I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN."

"BUT I WATCHED FOR HER. EVERY SINGLE DAY."
"Wishing over and over that I could've been a SkyClan warrior... because then she..."

"...might've stayed..."

"The old one who took me in was kind, and kept me well-fed."

"But when you showed up, and I found out the clan had returned... I just... couldn't believe it."

"SkyClan was real I'd finally get to be a part of it!"

"Okay, so maybe the cats here don't actually fly or turn into lions..."

"... but they are brave, and honorable, and always look out for each other. You see? My wish has come true!"

"Wherever Cinders is..."

"She must be so proud and happy to know that I've become a SkyClan warrior!"

"Oh, sol...

"But... but you understand now?"

"I'm so sorry that you lost your mother and your brothers and sisters like that."

"You know why being a warrior is so important to me?"
WELL... YOU'VE STILL GOT A FEW MORE THINGS TO LEARN BEFORE WE CAN MAKE YOU A WARRIOR.

BUT I'M GLAD YOU FOUND US.

AND I'M GLAD I FOUND YOU, TOO! I KNOW THIS IS WHERE I BELONG!
Sol gave me a lot of information to take in.

I've been thinking about it a great deal.

And I need some perspective.

Well...I was pretty horrified about what happened during the fox attack.

Sol doesn't seem to have much in the way of courage, or fighting tactics.

Plus, just being honest, he's lazy, and a bit too clever. He always thinks of reasons not to do something.
AND I'M NOT TRYING TO BE SPITEFUL, HERE.
NO, I UNDERSTAND. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN FAIR.
I KNOW HE DOES. MORE SO, IN FACT.
BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SOME SYMPATHY FOR SOL NOW, KNOWING WHERE HE CAME FROM.

AND I'M STILL TRYING TO BE FAIR WHEN I SAY THAT I'M PRETTY SURE SHARPCLAW FEELS THE SAME WAY I DO.

WELL, GOOD LUCK, LEAFSTAR, AND YOU KNOW IF YOU WANT MY HELP, YOU ONLY HAVE TO ASK.

I DON'T THINK I'LL HAVE PATCHFOOT TRAIN SOL...
I BELIEVE I'LL TAKE ON THAT TASK MYSELF.

BUT WANTING TO BE A WARRIOR IS ONLY PART OF BECOMING A MEMBER OF SKYCLAN.
YOU HAVE TO HAVE SKILLS AND INSTINCTS AS WELL—AND IF YOU AREN'T BORN WITH THEM, YOU HAVE TO BE WILLING TO LEARN.

I JUST WANT TO THANK YOU AGAIN, LEAFSTAR, FOR TAKING YOUR OWN TIME TO GIVE ME MORE TRAINING.

YOU'RE VERY WELCOME—AND YOU CAN REWARD ME BY DOING YOUR ABSOLUTE BEST.

OH, I WILL!

THEN LET'S GET STARTED.
I go into this with great hopes...

...that Sol will catch on to what I'm showing him, and really start to shine.

Really low...flatter yourself out...

But he just...doesn't.

Like this?

Hmmm.

Maybe it's because of his moons spent as a kitypet.

Maybe Sharpclaw is right, and he just doesn't have it.

Like this?

Just straight up—as high as you can.

Hmmm.
BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT'S LIKE... WELL... IT'S KIND OF LIKE Trying to teach a Stump.

FIRST YOU THINK ABOUT WHERE THE STRIKE'S GOING TO GO... SEE IT IN YOUR MIND... AND THEN...

...LIKE SO.

OKAY-- THEN LIKE SO!

OH!

AH-AH, NOT QUITE THERE.

WELL... THAT'S THE PAW I STEPPED ON A THORN WITH. THAT'S WHY IT DIDN'T WORK.

CAN WE TRY SOMETHING ELSE INSTEAD?
BESIDES...

YOU SHOULD KNOW BY NOW THAT MOST OF US IN SKYCLAN WEREN'T BORN IN THE WILD.

...IT'S NOT FAIR, EXPECTING ME TO DO ALL THIS STUFF, WHEN I WASN'T BORN IN THE CLAN.

YOU CAN DO THIS. COME ON, LET'S TRY IT AGAIN.

...OKAY.

JUST A LITTLE LOWER...

I CAN'T GET ANY LOWER!

KEEP YOUR LEGS ALIGNED BETTER...

THEY JUST GO ALL OVER THE PLACE!

I'M TERRIBLE AT THIS.
I'm almost ready to agree with Sol, that he is terrible at this...

...when he surprises me. Surprises himself, too.

I did it! Ha! I did it! I did it!

A little bit of success proves to be a turning point of sorts for Sol. We start in on evasion techniques...

...and he doesn't do half bad.

Then we try the same thing I taught my kits... sneaking up on something soundlessly...

...and again, he's surprisingly decent at it.
SO—HOW’S MY WARRIOR TRAINING NOW, LEAFSTAR?

I CAN SAFELY SAY THAT YOU ARE LEARNING, SOL...
YOU’RE ON YOUR WAY.

I’M EXHAUSTED BY THAT NIGHT, BUT I CAN’T SLEEP YET.

IT’S TIME FOR OUR GATHERING.
A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE OUR LAST ONE.

BUT I'M HOPING TO KEEP THINGS FOCUSED ON MOVING FORWARD TONIGHT...

...RATHER THAN LOOKING BACK.

THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD.

SNFF SNFF RAIN'S ON THE WAY.

GOOD.

THE WIND IS SUDDENLY MUCH COLDER, AND WE ALL KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

WE COULD SURE USE SOME!
IT'S BEEN HOT AND DRY FOR FAR TOO LONG.

MAYBE IT WILL EVEN WASH SOME PREY OUT OF THEIR BURROWS!

CATS JOKE AND LAUGH WITH EACH OTHER AS THEY BEGIN TO SETTLE DOWN.

IT'S A WELCOME CHANGE FROM THE SHORT TEMPERS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS.

CATS OF SKYCLAN!

WE'VE ALL WORKED HARD TO HUNT IN THE HOT WEATHER...

...AND I'M PROUD OF THE WAY WE Fought OFF THE FOXES.

THE CLAN IS SAFE AND STRONG NOW, AND ALL IS WELL AS WE HEAD TOWARD LEAF-FALL.
PLUS YOU'VE GOT A NEW WARRIOR AMONG YOU NOW! ISN'T THAT RIGHT, LEAFSTAR?

SOL... THIS IS NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE PLACE FOR THIS, BUT...

I'M AFRAID THAT'S JUST NOT HOW IT WORKS.

WHEN YOU COMPLETE YOUR TRAINING, YOU'LL BE ASSESSED... AND THEN GIVEN A WARRIOR NAME.

I'M READY TO BECOME A FULL WARRIOR OF SKYCLAN!

BUT... BUT YOU SAID I WAS LEARNING! TODAY, IT WAS JUST TODAY, YOU TOLD ME THAT!

SOL...

HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME? HOW COULD YOU HUMILIATE ME IN FRONT OF ALL MY CLANMATES?
SOL, WAIT! COME BACK HERE!

SOL!

WHY DO THINGS LIKE THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?

KRAK-RAK-Z-BOOM

WHOOSH

LEAFSTAR!

BACK TO YOUR DENS!

EVERYONE BACK TO YOUR DENS NOW!

MAMA! MAMA! WHAT WAS THAT NOISE?

IT WAS SO LOUD! IT HURT MY EARS!

IS IT MORE FOXES?
HUSH, LITTLE ONES, HUSH... IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S JUST A STORM.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

BUT I'M SCARED THAT IT MIGHT NOT BE "JUST A STORM."

I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN RAIN THIS HARD BEFORE.

YOU'RE HERE! THANK STARCLAN YOU'RE ALL OKAY!

BILLYSTORM! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

WON'T YOUR HOUSEFOLK BE SCARED?

ICouldn't LEAVE YOU ON YOUR OWN. NOT IN SUCH A BAD STORM.

EASIER TO KEEP THE KITS SAFE WITH BOTH OF US HERE.

THANK YOU.
LEAFSTAR?
CAN I COME IN?

WE MIGHT HAVE TO CONSIDER EVACUATING THE LOWER dens.

YOU THINK IT’S THAT SERIOUS?

THERE ARE ALREADY SOME REALLY BIG PUDDLES FORMING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GORGE.

WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIT INTO THE WARRIORS’ dens FOR THE NIGHT, THOUGH.

WE ALL FEEL IT BEFORE WE HEAR IT. A RUMBLING SOUND, DEEPER AND MORE AWFUL THAN ANY THUNDER.

RRUUMMMBLE

MAMA, MAMA, WHAT’S THAT NOISE?
WHAT IS IT, MAMA?

STARCLAN HELP US...
RUN!

EVERYONE RUN! GET OUT!

GET OUT OF THE RAVINE! GET TO HIGH GROUND!
RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN!

GO!

KEEP GOING...
KEEP GOING...

UNHHH...

MEEEEEEEP!
MEEEEEEEP!
HOLD ON!
EVERYONE
GRAB ON TO THE
ROCKS!

IT TAKES A LONG TIME.
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG. I KNOW
IT FEELS LIKE...A SEASON
OR TWO...

MEEEEEEE!
MEEEEEEEE!

...BUT FINALLY, FINALLY
THE FLOODWATERS DIE DOWN,
AND THE RAIN STOPS.

...IS IT
OVER?

I THINK WE
MIGHT NEED SOME
HELP GETTING DOWN
FROM HERE.
Cats, dazed and bedraggled, make their way back into what’s left of our camp.

I don’t even recognize the forest below the gorge now.

So many trees are just...gone.

Can you—would you mind looking after the kits for a bit?

I need to find out how bad things are.

Of course. We’ll be right here.

Skyclan!

I need all cats accounted for! Is anyone hurt?
THOUGH I REALLY WISH ALL MY HERBS AND SUPPLIES HADN'T JUST BEEN WASHED AWAY!

NOTHING SERIOUS SO FAR, LEAFSTAR!

I'M BEGINNING TO THINK WE'VE GOTTEN OFF EASY, AS FAR AS PERSONAL DAMAGE GOES.

I GUESS I SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO GET TOO OPTIMISTIC.

OH, NO... NO... NOO...

IT'S LICHENFUR!

SHE'S DEAD!
Lichenfur...

No...

Known her my whole life...

...remember how she saved Leafstar's kits?

Lost a hero today...

Leafstar...? Could we... would it be all right if we sit with her?

For the rest of the night, I mean... like we did with Rainfur?

Or... or, I mean, I know the dens are wrecked...

Do you want us to get started putting them back together instead?
FOR A HEARTBEAT
MY BRAIN JUST
WON'T WORK.

THERE'S SO MUCH TO DO...
SO MUCH DESTROYED.

NO...NO.

THE CAMP
CAN WAIT FOR
A WHILE.

TONIGHT
WE'LL SIT VIGIL
FOR OUR LOST
CLANMATE.
Why can’t you let SkyClan live here in peace?

StarClan, why did you let this storm happen?

Don’t worry. We’ll rebuild the dens.

SkyClan will survive.
WILL WE? IS HE RIGHT? ...
I DON'T KNOW.

STARCLAN HELP ME, I'M AFRAID THIS COULD BE A CHALLENGE TOO FAR.

TO BE CONCLUDED
ERIN HUNTER

is inspired by a love of cats and a fascination with the ferocity of the natural world. As well as having great respect for nature in all its forms, Erin enjoys creating rich, mythical explanations for animal behavior. She is also the author of the Seekers series.

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WARRIORS
SKYCLAN & THE STRANGER

AFTER THE FLOOD

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Leafstar is struggling to keep SkyClan united in the wake of the flood that destroyed their camp, but her Clanmates are scared of what might happen next. Meanwhile, Sol continues to demand that Leafstar make him a warrior, but Leafstar isn’t sure that Sol will ever be ready to embrace the warrior code. As SkyClan faces another devastating challenge, Leafstar must figure out what is best for her Clan—once and for all.
DON’T MISS GRAYSTRIPE’S
HARROWING JOURNEY IN

WARRIORS

THE LOST WARRIOR
WARRIOR’S REFUGE
WARRIOR’S RETURN

Find out what really happened to Graystripe when he was captured by Twolegs, and follow him and Millie on their torturous journey through the old forest territory and Twolegplace to find ThunderClan.
Sasha’s story is revealed in

Warriors

Tigerstar and Sasha

#1: INTO THE WOODS
#2: ESCAPE FROM THE FOREST
#3: RETURN TO THE CLANS

Sasha has everything she wants: kind housefolk who take care of her during the day, and the freedom to explore the woods beyond Twoplegplace at night. But when Sasha is forced to leave her home, she must forge a solitary new life in the forest. When Sasha meets Tigerstar, leader of ShadowClan, she begins to think that she may be better off joining the ranks of his forest Clan. But Tigerstar has many secrets, and Sasha must decide whether she can trust him.
Ravenpaw has settled into life on the farm, away from the forest and Tigerstar’s evil eye. He knows that leaving the warrior Clans was the right choice, and he appreciates his quiet days and peaceful nights with his best friend, Barley. But when five rogue cats from Twosegplac come to the barn seeking shelter, Ravenpaw and Barley are forced to flee their new home. With the help of ThunderClan, Ravenpaw and Barley must try to find a way to overpower the rogues—before they lose their home for good.
Black-and-white Tiny may be the runt of the litter, but he’s also the most curious about what lies beyond the backyard fence. When he crosses paths with some wild cats defending their territory, Tiny is left with scars—and a bitter, deep-seated grudge—that he carries with him back to Twolegplace. As his reputation grows among the strays and loners that live in the dirty brick alleyways, Tiny leaves behind his name, his kittypet past, and everything that was once important to him—except his deadly desire for revenge.
OMEN OF THE STARS
WARRIORS
THE FORGOTTEN WARRIOR
ADVENTURE GAME INSIDE!
ERIN HUNTER
As a full-scale battle against the Dark Forest moves closer, Jayfeather, Lionblaze, and Dovewing are desperate to prepare the four Clans to fight. But while tensions reach a breaking point, a stranger appears in ThunderClan’s midst, spinning a web of deceit, and pitting the warriors against each other so that no cat can tell who to trust.
Chapter 1

Jayfeather’s dream dissolved into darkness as he woke and stretched his jaws in a massive yawn. His whole body seemed heavy, and when he sat up in his nest he felt as though ivy tendrils were wrapped around him, dragging him back to the ground. The air was hotter than usual for late newleaf, filled with the scents of prey and lush green growth. Noise filtered through the brambles that screened the medicine cat’s den from the rest of the stone hollow: pawsteps and the excited murmuring of many cats as they gathered for the first patrols of the day.

But Jayfeather couldn’t share his Clanmates’ excitement. Although a moon had passed since he and his companions had returned from their visit to the Tribe, he felt cold and bleak inside. His head was full of images of mountains, endless snow-covered peaks stretching into the distance, outlined crisply against an ice-blue sky. His belly cramped with pain as he recalled one particular image: a white cat with green eyes who gave him a long, sorrowful look before she turned away and padded along a cliff top above a thundering waterfall.

Jayfeather shook his head. What’s the matter with me? That was all a long, long time ago. My life has always been here with the Clans. So
why do I feel as if something has been lost?

“Hi, Jayfeather.” Briarlight’s voice had a muffled, echoing sound, and Jayfeather realized she must have her head inside the cleft where he stored his herbs. “You’re awake at last.”

Jayfeather replied with a grunt. Briarlight was another of his problems. He couldn’t forget what Lionblaze had told him when he returned to the mountains: how Briarlight was so frustrated by being confined to the hollow, trapped by her damaged hindlegs, that she’d persuaded her brother Bumblestripe to carry her into the forest to look for herbs.

“There was a dog running loose,” Lionblaze had told him. “A cat with four functioning legs would have been hard-pressed to outrun it. If it hadn’t been for me and Toadstep luring it away, Briarlight would have been torn to pieces.”

“Mouse-brain!” Jayfeather snapped. “Why would she put herself in danger like that?”

“Because she’s convinced that she’s useless,” Lionblaze explained. “Can’t you give her more to do? Cinderheart and I promised her we’d help her find a proper part to play in the life of the Clan.”

“You had no right to promise her anything without speaking to me first,” Jayfeather retorted. “Are you suggesting I take her as my apprentice? Because I don’t want an apprentice!”

“That’s not what I meant,” Lionblaze meowed, his tail-tip twitching in annoyance. “But you could find more interesting duties for her, couldn’t you?”

Still reluctant, Jayfeather had done as his brother asked. He had to admit that Briarlight was easy to teach. She had
been stuck in the medicine cat’s den for so long that she had already picked up a lot.

She’s actually useful, he mused. Her paws are neat and quick when she sorts the herbs, and she’s good at soaking wilted leaves in the pool without letting them fall to pieces.

“Jayfeather?” Briarlight’s voice roused Jayfeather from his thoughts. He heard her wriggling around, and then her voice came more clearly as if she was poking her head out of the cleft. “Are you okay? You were tossing and turning all night.”

“I’m fine,” Jayfeather muttered, unwilling to dwell any longer on the dreams that had plagued him.

“We’re running low on marigold,” Briarlight went on. “We used up a lot on Dovewing’s scratches when you got back from the mountains. Should I ask Brightheart to collect some more?”

“No, I’ll go,” Jayfeather muttered.

“Fine.” Briarlight’s voice was determinedly cheerful. “I’ll get on with sorting the herbs. Oh, one more thing...”

Jayfeather heard the young she-cat dragging herself across the floor of the den until she reached his nest and pushed something toward him. “Could you throw this out on your way past the dirtplace?” she asked. “It was stuck at the back of the herb store.”

Jayfeather stretched out his neck until his nose touched a tuft of fur with a few dried scraps of leaf dusted on it. He stiffened as he recognized the faint scent that clung to it.

“Who would have put an old bit of fur among the herbs?” Briarlight continued. “It must have been in there for ages. I
don’t recognize the scent or color.”

For a moment Jayfeather didn’t reply. He breathed in his lost sister’s scent, overwhelmed by longing for the time when he and Hollyleaf and Lionblaze had played and trained together, before they knew anything about the prophecy, before they learned how Squirrelflight and Leafpool had lied to them.

_“I don’t know how Hollyleaf’s fur got into the store, he thought, but I should have thrown it out when I first found it there, not left it for another cat to find.”_

“I wonder where it came from,” Briarlight meowed. “Maybe a cat from another Clan got in here to steal herbs.” She stifled a _mrow_ of laughter. “Maybe the kits got in and hid it.”

“How would I know?” Jayfeather snapped, irritated at being jerked out of his memories. “You should stop letting your imagination run away with you.”

Turning so that Briarlight couldn’t see what he was doing, he tucked the scrap of fur deep inside the moss of his nest, and rose to his paws. “I’m going to fetch that marigold,” he mewed, and headed out of the den.
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