

WHISPERS OF CHANGE  
**WARRIORS**  
Rose and Thorn



# Warriors: Whispers of Change

Book 3: Rose and Thorn

# Allegiances:

## ThunderClan

**Leader:** Bramblestar·dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

**Deputy:** Berrynose· cream coloured tom with a stump for a tail

**Medicine Cats:** Jayfeather· gray tabby tom with blind, blue eyes

Eagleheart· small, fluffy orange tabby she·cat with green eyes

### Warriors:

Poppyfrost· pale tortoiseshell·and·white she·cat

Lionblaze·golden tabby tom with amber eyes

Bumblestripe· very pale gray tom with black stripes

Blossomfall· tortoiseshell·and·white she·cat with petal·shaped white patches

Ivypool· silver·and·white tabby she·cat with dark blue eyes

Molewhisker· brown·and·cream tom

Dewnose· gray·and·white tom

Stormcloud· gray tabby tom

Fernsong· yellow tabby tom

Shellfur ·tortoiseshell tom

Plumstone ·black·and·ginger she·cat

Twigbranch· gray she·cat with green eyes

Stoatail ·white tom with black ears and tailtip and a double limp

Rosecloud ·dark russet she·cat with yellow eyes

Bristlefrost ·pale gray she·cat with aqua eyes

Brambleheart ·small brown tabby she·cat with blue eyes and a fluffy tail

Ravenwing ·small black tom with a white chest and green eyes

Hawkfeather ·thick·furred, fluffy silver tabby tom

### **Queens:**

Squirrelflight· dark ginger she-cat with green eyes and one white paw

Sorrelstripe· dark brown she-cat (mother to Ashkit, a gray tabby tom, and Tinykit, a black-and-white tom)

Sparkpelt· orange tabby she-cat (mother to Ratkit, a calico she-kit, and Sorrelkit, a tortoiseshell tabby with a white underbelly)

### **Elders:**

Graystripe· long-haired gray tom

Thornclaw· golden-brown tabby tom

Honeyfrost· white she-cat with yellow splotches

Whitewing· white she-cat with green eyes

Birchfall· light brown tabby tom

Mousewhisker· gray-and-white tom

## **ShadowClan**

**Leader:** Tigerstar· dark brown tabby tom

**Deputy:** Cloverfoot· gray tabby she-cat

**Medicine Cats:** Puddleshine· brown tom with white patches

Shadowsight· gray tabby tom with black stripes and dark ginger eyes

### **Warriors:**

Dovewing· pale gray she-cat with green eyes

Stonewing· white tom

Sparrowtail· large brown tabby tom

Berryheart· black and white she-cat

Grassheart· pale brown tabby she-cat

Whorlpelt· gray-and-white tom

Antfur· tom with a brown-and-black splotched pelt

Blazefire· white-and-ginger tom

Cinnamontail· brown tabby she-cat with white paws

Flowerstem· silver she-cat

Snaketooth· honey-colored tabby she-cat

Slatefur· sleek gray tom

Ravenheart· black tom with white flecks and stripes

Lightleap· brown tabby she-cat

Conefoot· white-and-gray tom

Gullswoop· white she-cat

Spireclaw· black-and-white tom

Hollowspring· black tom

Sunbeam· brown-and-white tabby she-cat

Flaxfoot· brown tabby tom

Hopwhisker· calico she-cat

Darkpounce· large black tom

#### **Queens:**

Willowlight· beautiful calico she-cat (mother to Littlekit, a dark brown tom)

#### **Elders:**

Scorchfur· dark gray tom with slashed ears

### **SkyClan**

**Leader:** Hawkstar· dark gray tom with yellow eyes

**Deputy:** Sagenose· pale gray tom

**Medicine cat(s):** Fidgetflake· black-and-white tom

Alderheart· dark ginger tom with amber eyes

**Mediator:** Tree·yellow tom with amber eyes

**Warriors:**

Dewspring· sturdy gray tom

Apprentice, Rootpaw (yellow tom)

Harrybrook· gray tom

Blossomheart· ginger-and-white she-cat

Sandynose· stocky light brown tom with ginger legs

Rabbitleap· brown tom

Apprentice, Wrenpaw (golden she-cat)

Reedclaw· small pale tabby she-cat

Apprentice, Needlepaw (black-and-white she-cat)

Mintfur· gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Nettlesplash· pale brown tom

Nectar-song· brown she-cat

Quailfeather· white tom with crow-black ears

Pigeonfoot· gray-and-white she-cat

Fringewhisker· white she-cat with brown splotches

Gravelnose· tan tom

Sunnypelt· ginger she-cat

Violetshine· black-and-white she-cat with yellow eyes

Turtlecrawl· tortoiseshell she-cat

Kitescratch· reddish-brown tom

**Queens:**

Bellaleaf· pale orange she-cat with green eyes

**Elders:**

Fallowfern· pale brown she-cat who has lost her hearing

Frecklewish· mottled light brown tabby she-cat with spotted legs

Macgyver· black and white tom

**WindClan**

**Leader:** Harestar· brown-and-white tom

**Deputy:** Crowfeather· dark gray tom

**Medicine cat:** Kestrelflight· mottled gray tom with white splotches like kestrel feathers

**Warriors:**

Heathertail· light brown tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Brindlewing· mottled brown she-cat

Apprentice, Applepaw (yellow tabby she-cat)

Leaftail· dark tabby tom with amber eyes

Emberfoot· gray tom with two dark paws

Smokehaze· gray she-cat

Breezepelt· black tom with amber eyes

Crouchfoot· ginger tom

Larkwing· pale brown tabby she-cat

Sedgewhisker· light brown tabby she-cat

Slightfoot· black tom with white flash on his chest

Oatclaw· pale brown tabby tom

Fernstripe· gray tabby she-cat

**Queens:**

Featherpelt· gray tabby she-cat (mother to Outclaw's kits: Whistlekit, a gray tabby she-kit; and Flutterkit, a brown-and-white tom)

## **RiverClan**

**Leader:** Mistystar· gray she-cat with blue eyes

**Deputy:** Minnowtail· dark gray-and-white she-cat

**Medicine cat:** Willowshine· gray tabby she-cat

### **Warriors:**

Mallownose· light brown tabby tom

Beetlewhisker· brown-and-white tabby tom

Shimmerpelt· silver she-cat

Lizardtail· light brown tom

Apprentice, Fogpaw (gray-and-white she-cat)

Sneezecloud· gray-and-white tom

Havenpelt· black-and-white she-cat

Jayclaw· gray tom

Apprentice, Leechpaw (taupe tabby tom)

Owlnose· brown tabby tom

Softpelt· gray she-cat

Gorseclaw· white tom with gray ears

Night sky· dark gray she-cat with blue eyes

Harelight· white tom

Breezeheart· brown-and-white she-cat

Dappletuft· gray-and-white tom

### **Queens:**

Curlfeather- pale brown she-cat (Mother to Frostkit, a gray pointe she-kit; Graykit, a dark gray tom;  
and Mistkit, a calico-tabby she-kit)

**Elders:**

Mossbelt- tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Icewing- white she-cat with blue eyes











## Prologue

*They're beautiful!* Four mewling kits lay on the belly of a proud mother cat. She admired the beautiful colors of her babies as she lapped and nursed them. One of them was a black kit; another, gray-and-white. Two of them were ginger-and-white, looking almost identical other than their size. The small one, the runt of the litter, mewled pathetically as he tried to get the milk that his littermates hoarded.

The mother cat thought of the kits' father. He was a strong, golden tom, with a fluffy mane like a lion. The birth was hard, as it was her very first litter. She had also been trapped in a stump after a storm, away from her birthing den. Luckily she knew her way back, but decided to rest first before carrying her mewling kits. She dared not exit in fear that the group of cats she scented were hostile and drove away her and her newborns.

That night, a dream filled the rest of the mother cat. It was of her tiniest son. He had grown as large and noble as his father, with a few battle scars to prove his resilience. The mother cat watched as her son did not fight foxes and rogues like she did, but instead fought pain and suffering

as he tended to wounds and helped aid in births. The group of cats, which the mother cat could tell laid claim to her stump, had welcomed and nursed her son. *But where am I? I'm his mother!*

Dawn had broken the dark night sky. It was time for the mother cat to move her kits and introduce them to their father. As she moved the larger three, she could tell that they had suckled well. They let out mewls, not of hunger, but of the discomfort of being carried for the first time. One by one, the mother cat carried her kits by the scruff to their father, who beamed in love and pride for his babies.

The mother cat went to the stump to carry her fourth kit, the runt. Her son mewled with hunger and despair. She licked him, only to realize that he had not drunk any milk; he lacked the scent. *I can't feed him if his littermates need all of my milk!* The mother cat thought of her dream, and how the mysterious cats found her son and took him in as their own. She gazed at the scrap, eyes watering in grief. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "I can't take you with me. You'll have to stay here. Some cat will find you."

The kit let out a wail. He was so helpless! Was this the right choice for him? It had to be. The mother cat rolled around the stump, marking it with her milk scent, and walked away from her son, tail drooped.

"Goodbye, my Peanut."

## Chapter 1

Brambleheart walked towards the medicine den to greet her sister. One moon had passed since she became a warrior, but Eagleheart was still concerned about Brambleheart's health. Such a case of greencough took a while to recover from. Luckily, Brambleheart was well enough to join patrols and serve her Clan. In fact, she was bringing a plump squirrel to the den for Eagleheart and Jayfeather. Newleaf had begun its full force, and prey was starting to rebound from their measly amounts from the cold weather. Brambleheart hated cold weather, and now her places to relax had expanded from sunbeams.

"Hi Eagleheart. I just got back from patrol. Here's a squirrel for you and Jayfeather," Brambleheart mewed.

"Thanks!" Eagleheart replied, licking her chops. Jayfeather padded towards the prey as well, and gave a blink of gratitude to Brambleheart.

"I assume you caught this on Stormcloud's patrol?" Jayfeather mewed.

“I sure did,” Brambleheart chirped. “You should have seen how many mice Ravenwing found, though. It was big enough to be a Clan.”

“Imagine a Clan of mice,” Eagleheart chuckled. “I’ll have to tell Ravenwing to be careful, or ThunderClan may be at war with MouseClan!”

“Is there anything you need help with here?” Brambleheart asked. Even though she was well again, Berrynose didn’t assign her to as many patrols as the other warriors. Brambleheart often found herself having to clean the nursery and elders’ den, gathering moss like an apprentice, since the Clan lacked them. Sometimes Hawkfeather and Ravenwing helped, but they never did it as often as her.

“Itching to help your Clan, I see,” Jayfeather gruffed. “I’ll have to tell Berrynose to up your duties. I never ordered you to be a glorified kit!”

“Tell me about it,” Brambleheart said dryly. “Sometimes it feels like he mixes me up with the kits since I’m so small and they’re getting so big.” Brambleheart was right, she was quite small. Ratkit was approaching her size already! Ashkit, a younger kit, was catching up fast. Tinykit and Sorrelkit were little for their ages, so at least Brambleheart had the edge on that.

“They should be apprenticed soon, yes?” Eagleheart asked, ears pricked.

“Hopefully tomorrow, from what I’ve heard,” Jayfeather answered.

“I wonder who their mentors will be!” Eagleheart said, licking her part of the squirrel’s bones for a last taste.

“Bristlefrost is moving to the nursery today. She told me that the kits are coming in half a moon!” While making the point, Brambleheart’s thoughts trailed off. Bristlefrost needed a lot of help with her kits, seeing how her mate, Stemleaf, had died of greencough before she could tell him that he would be a father.

“What a shame,” Eagleheart cooed. “She’d make a great mentor, and it’d take her mind off her loss.”

Brambleheart mewed farewell to the medicine cats, and padded towards the center of the camp. There, the elders were sunning and gossiping, also about the soon-to-be apprentices.

“It’s going to be odd for us, what with not having kits pouncing on our tails all day!” Graystripe, the oldest elder, remarked.

“They’ll still be around, just being useful for a change,” Thornclaw huffed.

“Well, Bristlefrost will be having her litter soon, and you know how quick kits learn how to pester their Clanmates!” Whitewing purred. Her mate, Birchfall, chuckled and licked her cheek.

“Hi!” Brambleheart chirped. “May I sit with you?”

“Of course,” Squirrelflight beckoned. She wasn’t an elder, however she was retired from warrior duties due to greencough complicating her health. She decided to be a full-time queen, helping out in the nursery and giving advice to cats of all ages. “Would you like to share a mouse?”

“One Ravenwing caught? Sure!” Brambleheart took a few bites, making sure to leave enough for Squirrelflight. “What will you do when the kits are apprenticed? Bristlefrost’s won’t come for a while!”

“Well, I will still help Bristlefrost,” Squirrelflight mewed. “And someone has to teach those apprentices how to clean the nursery!”

“Speaking of apprentices,” Mousewhisker grunted, “I wonder who will be their mentors?”

“Rosepetal always mentored well,” Squirrelflight mewed. “If she was still around, she’d be the first choice, I’m sure.”

“I remember when younger warriors were first chosen to mentor cats,” Graystripe mewed. “Maybe Bramblestar will try that to help with experience!”

“I actually hinted at that,” Thornclaw replied. “Ever wonder how Twigbranch and Finleap got apprentices so young? Bramblestar loves that idea.”

“Maybe you’ll get an apprentice, Brambleheart!” Whitewing squeaked.

“I remember when I first became a mentor...” Graystripe reminisced. Thornclaw made a snide remark on how Firestar had mentored Brackenfur more than Graystripe ever did. Brambleheart, excusing herself, went into the warriors den to have some space. She saw Twigbranch doing the same.

*Imagine me being a mentor. Maybe Twigbranch could mentor me on mentoring!*

## Chapter 2

The half moon shone in the sky, casting silver light to the forest. Eagleheart and Jayfeather were on their way to the Moonpool for their meeting with StarClan. Eagleheart was very careful not to step on any sprouts of potential herbs, and was trying to guide Jayfeather to do the same.

Eventually, the grass turned to sand. They were almost there! The screech of an owl pierced the night, making Eagleheart jump. "I'd assume you'd be rusty at jumping since your training ended," Jayfeather remarked. Eagleheart's jump had made air brush by the blind tabby's muzzle, so she assumed he detected how high she had went.

"Well, if you're the color of bright marigold like I am, you'd be a bit more wary of giant birds!" Eagleheart joked back. She saw Jayfeather's whiskers slightly twitch.

"Hey," Alderheart greeted, his white tailtip high in the air in welcome. "Looks like someone finally found Jayfeather's funny bone. Should we examine it for a break?" Eagleheart trilled and touched noses with the SkyClan medicine cat.

The medicine cats chatted for a while. Eagleheart still found these times awkward. She was a full medicine cat, yes, but she hadn't nearly the experience or closeness to the other medicine cats as Jayfeather had. Maybe it would be better in a few moons once they got to know each other as equals. Eagleheart could tell that her friend Shadowsight felt similarly.

"How's it going with your full name?" Eagleheart asked.

"Alright," he mewed. "We've got our paws full with our new Clanmates."

During the greencough epidemic in ThunderClan, ShadowClan had an issue of their own. Two loners had sought refuge in the pine forest, with a tiny kit. Tigerstar had accepted until leaf-bare ended, but caved when Shadowsight and Ravenheart begged for them to stay for the sake of the Clan needing kits. Ravenheart ended up becoming Darkpounce's mentor for a few moons to teach ShadowClan life. Darkpounce had become a warrior early after saving Cloverfoot from a stoat.

"I'd imagine. I bet Littlekit is being spoiled rotten by the elders!" Eagleheart replied.

Shadowsight nodded. "He sure does love stories and learning. He's like a little moss ball- absorbing everything he can. It's as if he was Clanborn!" While saying that, Shadowsight shifted his paws. Eagleheart knew why. Shadowsight himself didn't join the pine forest until he was a few moons old. He and his littermates had been born in the City. *No wonder Ravenheart feels responsible for the kit.*

“Alright, starlings, let’s do what we are meant to do here,” Kestrelflight huffed. The cats lined up around the Moonpool and crouched down. Eagleheart lapped the water and closed her eyes.

Eagleheart found herself in StarClan’s hunting grounds. She was greeted by a gray tabby she-cat. *It can’t be...* “Mother!”

Cinderheart ran to her daughter and nuzzled her. “Hi, Eagleheart. If you weren’t my daughter, I wouldn’t recognise you— your winter fur is falling out fast!”

“Thanks, Cinderheart,” Eagleheart said wryly. “It really is good to see you again. Brambleheart’s doing really well. We both really miss you, but—”

“No need to let me know,” Cinderheart purred. “I’m watching it all from up here. But Eagleheart, I have something important to say.”

“What is it? Is everything okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. And so are Finleap, and Hollytuft, and Leafpool. But things will change for you and your living Clanmates. Every rose has a thorn, but not every thorn needs a rose. When clouds cover the sky, the truth will be muddled. But my dearest Eagleheart, please remember this: eyes will only know what’s real when they are open.”

“That’s a lot of information,” Eagleheart mewed. “I- I don’t know what to do!”

“Keep your eyes open, and you will see.”

### Chapter 3

“Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!”

Brambleheart stopped kneading the water out of moss to attend the meeting. With the new apprentices being made, hopefully this meant the end of busy work! As Brambleheart curled her tail around her chilly paws, Eagleheart sat next to her.

“Any last predictions?” Eagleheart asked wearily.

“Nope. I’m just going with it now,” Brambleheart replied. Eagleheart gave a slow nod. *What is up with her?*

The rest of the Clan gathered, surrounding the Highledge. Sorrelstripe and Sparkpelt excused themselves to the front along with their kits.

“Ashkit! How did you mess up your fur *again*? I’ve already cleaned it *three times*!”

Sorrelstripe sighed. She licked Ashkit’s fur back in place, and gave him a glare to say that she won’t do it again next time.

Sparkpelt, however, had a different approach. She decided to clean her kits at the last moment, to avoid any accidents. “Ratkit, stay still! I know you want to help wash Sorrelkit, but I’ve got it.”

Brambleheart noted that Sparkpelt had a bittersweet look in her eyes, rightfully so. Sorrelkit and Ratkit’s father, Larksong, died as they were born. To make things even more tragic, Sparkpelt’s only son had been stillborn. *They should be here.* Brambleheart padded to Sparkpelt to see if the queen needed any help.

“Oh, Brambleheart,” the orange cat mewed. “You’ve done enough. I’ll be fine.”

Brambleheart nodded and returned to her spot.

When all four kits were washed, Bramblestar stood high. “The reason I gather you today,” he yowled, “is for one of the most important steps a Clanmate will take in their journey. Four new apprentices are being made today, for the joy of the Clan, and the relief of our young warriors.”

The Clan cheered. “Ashkit, Tinykit, Sorrelkit, and Ratkit, please step forward,” the leader meowed. The kits bounded to the Highledge. Bramblestar stepped towards Ratkit. “From this moment until she earns her warrior name, this kit shall be known as Ratpaw.” Bramblestar turned to the Clan, sweeping his gaze among the warriors. “Twigbranch,” Bramblestar announced, “You have proven yourself a fine mentor. I’m sure you can use your experience to mentor young Ratpaw.”

“RATPAW! RATPAW!” Brambleheart’s heart swelled at the thought of Twigbranch having another apprentice. *It’s not normal for a cat to have an apprentice so soon.* Brambleheart then realized her leader’s reasoning– Twigbranch had been awfully down since Finleap died. Mentoring Ratpaw would help ease her mind and give her purpose. Twigbranch touched noses with Ratpaw, and the two sat down near Brambleheart. Brambleheart gave a mew of congratulations, and Twigbranch licked her cheek in thanks.

Bramblestar shifted his attention to the next kit. “From this moment until she earns her warrior name, this kit shall be known as Sorrelpaw. Ravenwing, you are a very kind and gentle cat, like Sorrelpaw. Teach her how to be fierce with her kindness.”

“SORRELPAW! SORRELPAW!” So Bramblestar was giving apprentices to the young warriors. Brambleheart was very proud of her friend. He was a perfect choice.

Ashkit and Tinykit squirmed with excitement and impatience. “From this moment until he earns his warrior name, this kit shall be known as Tinypaw.” Tinypaw let out an excited squeak. “Hawkfeather, you are strong and loyal. Pass these skills to Tinypaw.”

“TINYPAW! TINYPAW!” As Tinypaw went to touch noses with Hawkfeather, only one kit– Ashkit– remained.

“Last but certainly not least,” Bramblestar called, “We have Ashkit. From this moment until he earns his warrior name, this kit shall be known as Ashpaw.”

Brambleheart watched closely. If Bramblestar continued to assign young warriors as mentors, then the options were herself, Stoattail, and Rosecloud. Brambleheart was good with teaching, but since she was stuck with busy work, she may not be the best choice. Stoattail was a pain, and probably wasn't able to connect with an apprentice. But he was a good hunter and had training from two different Clans. He could offer a different perspective. And Rosecloud, she was out. Rosecloud was arrogant and mean. She spent her apprentice moons bullying Brambleheart and the rest of the apprentices, and as a warrior, she was no better.

"I have taken consideration as to who should mentor Ashpaw," The leader's words broke Brambleheart's thoughts. "And while a good mentor is able to see themselves in their apprentice, it is also good for a mentor to differ from their apprentice. That way, the mentor can learn valuable lessons too. With that, Rosecloud will be mentor to Ashpaw. She will pass down her passion and courage to Ashpaw, while learning from his collaborative skills."

"ASHPAW! ASHPAW!"

Brambleheart cheered for the new apprentices, but felt a pang of worry. She could see where Bramblestar was coming from. When Brambleheart was an apprentice, she and Twigbranch had personalities that often clashed. When the two learned how to work with one another, both cats grew as a result. But Rosecloud was mean. She never showed interest in self growth as an apprentice, Would she as a warrior? Brambleheart sighed as she remembered that she and Rosecloud didn't spend nearly as much time now as they had as apprentices. Being a warrior meant there was a bigger pool of cats to work with besides one's peers. *Perhaps Rosecloud has changed after all, and I haven't noticed.*

The ceremony came to a close, and the ThunderClan cats scattered back to their activities. The apprentices looked at their mentors, waiting for instruction. Brambleheart weaved herself through the dispersing cats towards the new mentors.

“Congratulations, all of you!” Brambleheart trilled. She looked at her friends, and gave them slow blinks of happiness. She padded towards Rosecloud and Ashpaw. “I’m sure everyone will do great!”

Rosecloud gave a wide smile and a purr, chest puffed in pride. “It’s a shame you haven’t gotten an apprentice, but maybe it’s because you still need to prove yourself as a warrior!”

“Rosecloud,” Ravenwing said gently yet firmly, “Brambleheart has been a good help. She’s made sure *you* didn’t get stuck with apprentice tasks while waiting for these cats to be ready.”

“Ah yes, maybe you can teach the apprentices how to care for the elders,” Rosecloud mewed. “Don’t worry. I’ll try not to hoard Ashpaw. I’m sure you will be a great substitute when I’m too busy!”

Brambleheart touched noses with Rosecloud. Although the comments seemed passive-aggressive, they weren’t nearly as bad as before. At least Rosecloud was letting Brambleheart gain experience. Maybe she was turning over a new leaf after all.

## Chapter 4

“Ouch!”

It was another day as a medicine cat, and with new apprentices, chaos had ensued. Bumps and bruises from play-fighting, lessons on tending to the elders, and cracks on untrained pads were all to be expected for Eagleheart to work with. At least it was preferable to sickness bouts. Sometimes the apprentices were amusing to be around. But when all the apprentices were so young, accidents were bound to happen.

“Ashpaw, stay still! It’s only going to hurt more if you squirm,” Eagleheart soothed. Ashpaw had come in with a thorn in his pad. Rosecloud had brought him into the medicine den for treatment, and she looked angry. Eagleheart had tried to explain to her sister that it was perfectly normal for cats to have accidents, especially young apprentices.

“I’m trying!” Ashpaw squealed.

Eagleheart located the thorn and nipped it so that it was between her jaws. She carefully yet quickly removed the thorn. It was a good sized one, but not big enough to cause any damage. A bead of blood appeared where the thorn used to be, and Eagleheart lapped the wound until the blood was gone.

“Is he done?” Eagleheart whipped her head towards the entrance of the den. Rosecloud had reappeared, tail twitching in irritation.

“Yes, we’ve just finished. The wound isn’t too bad, and he can continue training, but I want to see it again in the morning to ensure there isn’t any infection.” Eagleheart blinked at Ashpaw and nodded at Rosecloud.

“Good. Come on, Ashpaw, we need to finish your lesson,” Rosecloud grunted.

“What is he learning?” Eagleheart asked curiously.

“Well, we were *trying* to learn how to hunt mice at the spot Ravenwing found. But Ashpaw missed terribly and landed on a thistle.” Rosecloud sighed. “Even Stoattail did better.”

Eagleheart narrowed her eyes. “Stoattail is a fully trained warrior who has learned hunting techniques from two Clans. Ashpaw has only been an apprentice for a quarter-moon. You’ve seen what happens when apprentices are thrust into complex situations when they aren’t ready. Try little steps first.”

“I did,” Rosecloud growled. “I showed him the hunting crouch beforehand. That was enough for me.”

“Remember when we first became apprentices? You learned quickly, but Brambleheart and I needed more time. Every cat is different, Rosecloud.”

“Are you trying to teach me how to mentor?” Rosecloud asked sarcastically.

“No, I’m just trying to give advice as a wise medicine cat,” Eagleheart shot back.

“Wise you are,” Rosecloud mewed. “It’s good I can trust you with Ashpaw’s thorns seeing that you’ve had ample experience getting things stuck on your paws!” *Is that her way of bantering?* Rosecloud lashed her tail and walked away with Ashpaw.

Eagleheart put the extra herbs away and decided to check on Bristlefrost. Her kits were due any day now, despite her moving to the nursery very recently. While a bit reckless, it was admirable of how Bristlefrost tried to perform her duties until the last moment. She was often helping Brambleheart with mundane tasks and taking her hunting while the brown tabby was recovering from her illness. She had told Eagleheart that it was to keep her mind off of the loss of Stemleaf. Eagleheart walked to the nursery, where she caught a whiff of milk scent from the expecting queen.

“Hi, Bristlefrost!” Eagleheart trilled. “How are you feeling?”

“Like these kits need to leave *now*,” Bristlefrost grumbled. “I can barely stand up.”

“Three kits can be a lot,” Eagleheart mewed.

“What you’re doing is the easy part!” Squirrelflight remarked. “Now imagine them whining, batting at your tail, and begging to be apprentices.”

“How reassuring,” Bristlefrost snarked.

“Well, try your best to get fresh air. It never hurts. And it’ll give the apprentices time to clean your nest!” Eagleheart recommended.

“Anything for fresh moss,” Bristlefrost meowed. She struggled to get up and walked outside the nursery to a bright sunbeam, where she lay down to wash her paws.

An elder walked up to Eagleheart. “Are you encouraging her to steal our territory?” he chuffed.

“No, Graystripe. If you want to wage war against the nursery, just be warned that they will be expanding their ranks soon enough.”

Eagleheart’s whiskers twitched as she watched Graystripe’s do the same. The fluffy gray tom went to grab a vole to share with Bristlefrost. Eagleheart went back to the medicine den to count herbs. The job of a medicine cat never ended.

## Chapter 5

Brambleheart was washing her tail. She was untangling a knot in it caused by her winter fur shedding. After struggling for a bit, she sighed in relief when the knot was gone.

“Hi, Brambleheart,” a voice chirped. It was Stoattail! “Would you mind going on a walk with me?”

“How come?” Brambleheart tilted her head confusedly. “There are already patrols out.”

“The Clan could always use more prey,” Stoattail replied. “And besides, it’s not like cats can’t just go on walks. We don’t have apprentices; we may as well have leisure.”

“Okay,” Brambleheart agreed. She followed Stoattail outside of camp, and followed the tom to the water’s edge. They walked around the coastline. It was a very warm day, and the water lapped at the sand. A gentle breeze from the water ruffled Brambleheart’s fur.

“I don’t think we can catch much prey here. We’re not RiverClan,” Brambleheart said.

“Who knows?” Stoattail remarked. “I didn’t know I could climb. Now look at me! Just try to put your paws in the water.”

“I don’t know...” Brambleheart doubted. Although the water looked shallow, Brambleheart wasn’t too sure if it would suddenly deepen. And she didn’t know how to swim, and neither did Stoattail. Stoattail twitched his ears. “Here I go...” Brambleheart put her paws into the water. Despite the nice and warm newleaf weather, the water was freezing. Brambleheart ran back to where Stoattail was standing, giving him an angry glare.

“Not a fish, huh?” Stoattail jeered. “You are definitely a cat, then.”

Brambleheart winced. “What are you doing? Collecting information on me? Did Bramblestar ask you to do this?”

Stoattail laughed. “Yes, I am totally a spy. Let me spill all your secrets. ‘Hey, WindClan. Brambleheart can’t handle wet paws, Hawkfeather makes his nest a mess, and Eagleheart failed an assessment with Bramblestar!’”

“Wait, Stoattail,” Brambleheart’s eyes widened in panic. “What did you say about Eagleheart?”

“That she failed an assessment with Bramblestar,” Stoattail chuffed. “You know, the one that made her switch to a medicine cat.”

“Where did you learn that? Ravenwing and I are the only other apprentices who knew the entire truth. And we certainly didn’t tell anyone else.” Brambleheart felt her hackles raise.

“Probably a lucky guess. How else would she have switched?” Stoattail’s whiskers twitched.

Brambleheart hissed. Of course Stoattail would still be a creep! She should have known better than to be alone with him. Something was still off about the white tom. He had to have learned this from *somewhere*. Perhaps he had overheard a conversation in the medicine den when his leg was healing. But why would he commit it to memory?

“I’m going back to camp. You’re welcome to stay here and try to swim yourself,” Brambleheart growled. She walked through the forest, trying to get back as quickly as possible. She had walked for a bit before catching the scent of apprentices. *Maybe I can help out there.*

“Hello, Brambleheart!” Twigbranch greeted. “Your paws are wet. Is everything okay?”

“Stoattail tried to see if I was part fish when we were on a walk. I am not amused,” Brambleheart answered wryly.

“What a silly cat!” Ratpaw chuckled. “That sounds like something like Ashpaw would do!”

“Ratpaw, focus on tracking,” Twigbranch ordered gently. She turned back to Brambleheart. “She’s determined to catch her first squirrel.”

“Determination is good,” Brambleheart mewed. The two warriors observed Ratpaw, commenting on her skillset and encouraging her with tips and tricks.

“I think I smell Ashpaw!” Ratpaw squeaked.

“He must be training around here, too,” Brambleheart acknowledged. “I am going to see what he’s up to. Hopefully he’s not scaring away any squirrels!”

Brambleheart carefully followed Ashpaw’s scent. It led her to a small hollow, one common for one-on-one training. Now that she thought about it, Rosecloud really did a lot of that. Seldom would she and Ashpaw work with the other apprentices. It would only be when someone insisted. Brambleheart wanted to see how Rosecloud did it. Did she need help? *She definitely would be too proud to admit it.*

“No, Ashpaw! That’s the *complete opposite* of what I showed you! You are no better than a newborn deer at stalking!”

“I’m trying my best, Rosecloud! Really! I can’t do everything first try, remember what Eagleheart said?”

“I am not letting Eagleheart tell me how to train an apprentice! She was terrible at hunting. What does she know?”

“OUCH!!”

Brambleheart ran into the hollow. She saw Ashpaw next to a tree with a nasty scratch. Rosecloud looked furious, even more so that she was interrupted.

“What are you doing here?” Rosecloud snarled.

“Bringing Ashpaw to the medicine den to treat his scratch,” Brambleheart hissed.

“Oh, that is a bad one,” Rosecloud grunted. “Honestly, he is so clumsy. I’ve seen less wounds in the battle with the Sisters than what he has gotten since his ceremony!”

“Maybe find a bigger hollow,” Brambleheart huffed. She turned to Ashpaw, who looked up at her with his wide, green eyes. “We’re going to get medicine.” Ashpaw followed Brambleheart out of the hollow to camp. On the way, Twigbranch gave a concerned glance after Brambleheart explained what had happened.

At last, the two cats returned to camp. Brambleheart brought Ashpaw to the medicine den, where Jayfeather was taking out some herbs.

“Hi, Jayfeather,” Brambleheart meowed. “Ashpaw has a scratch, can you please take a look?”

“Sure,” Jayfeather sniffed. He padded to Ashpaw and inspected his wound. “What happened this time?”

“I scratched it on some loose bark,” Ashpaw stammered. “Rosecloud is staying behind, I think. That’s why Brambleheart is here with me.”

Jayfeather nodded, and put some cobwebs to stop the bleeding. He muttered something about Rosecloud being careless before coming up to Brambleheart. “Would you bring this to the nursery? Eagleheart needs these. Bristlefrost is having her kits!”

## Chapter 6

“You’re doing great!” Eagleheart encouraged. Bristlefrost was in labor and starting to get ready to welcome her kits into the world. Eagleheart was nervous— she had helped deliver kits before, but not completely by herself like now. And Daisy was gone, too. She had always been a big help, and the nursery was awkward without her.

Eagleheart saw Brambleheart walk into the nursery carrying a stick, and some herbs. “Hello! Jayfeather told me what’s happening. Here are the herbs he got, and a stick I found!” Eagleheart blinked gratefully. Brambleheart was a good helper with medicine, despite never being trained.

“Thank you,” Eagleheart mewed. “Would you like to wait outside? We don’t want too many cats right now, and Bristlefrost can use a patient friend for motivation.” Brambleheart nodded and waited outside the nursery, looking as if she were to claw anyone who dared approach her best friend. In the nursery, Ivypool was licking her daughter, while Squirrelflight helped her stay calm during the delivery. Eagleheart turned back to Bristlefrost. “How’s it going?”

“I feel like mouse-dung, thanks for asking,” Bristlefrost sharply gasped as she convulsed. Eagleheart paid close attention to the time between them. The closer they were to each other, the more ready she was to have her kits. Luckily, it was time for the kits to be born now.

“Bristlefrost, Brambleheart gave you this stick,” Eagleheart explained. “We want you to bite down on this when it hurts. The kits are ready to be born. I need you to focus on pushing them out.” Bristlefrost nodded. She bit down on the stick again and grimaced as a kit started coming.

“Good job,” Squirrelflight encouraged. “We’ve got her, Eagleheart. Just focus on the kits.” Eagleheart dipped her head in gratitude. She shifted her gaze onto the first kit. It was a tom! His tiny pelt was black, and as dark as the night sky. She nipped the kitting sac and guided the kit to Bristlefrost’s belly.

“Your first kit is here,” Eagleheart mewed. “He’s an adorable little tom. He needs to be licked.” Bristlefrost let go of the stick to lap her son who started to mewl. Suddenly another convulsion started. Bristlefrost went back to her stick while Ivypool finished licking the kit.

The second kit was a she-kit. Her pelt was a milky cream color. Eagleheart guided the kit to her brother, and announced her arrival. “A she-kit! She is beautiful, like her mother. One more to go.”

When the tom-kit settled down, the she-kit started to wail. She snuggled up to her mother and fell asleep when Ivypool licked her. At last, the third kit came. This one was another tom. He looked a lot like Stemleaf, except the orange spots were more of a tan color. Like his littermates, he mewed when licked, and settled down to suckle.

“You’re all done,” Eagleheart mewed as she gave Bristlefrost a lick. “Come meet your kits. They are so precious, and healthy, too!”

Bristlefrost gave Eagleheart an exhausted purr of gratitude. She started to nuzzle her new babies, and looked at them with love and pride. “These kits will grow up to be amazing cats,” she told Eagleheart.

Eagleheart stuck her nose out to welcome Brambleheart in. Brambleheart’s heart melted at the new kits. Eagleheart left the two friends to chat as she went to her den. On her way, Clanmates pestered her with news of the birth.

“Two toms and a she-kit,” Eagleheart reported to everyone who asked. “They are small but healthy.”

When she shared the news with Jayfeather, he gave a happy nod. “You did well for your first solo delivery,” he praised. “I will have a pawful yet with the little rascals destroying supplies.” Eagleheart noted how he organized the herbs to where the kits wouldn’t get to them once they grew a bit. It was a very good idea. She thought back to how when she was a kit, she and Brambleheart spent a lot of time in the medicine den. Brambleheart got sick often, and the two sisters also just loved spending time with Leafpool. One time, Eagleheart wanted to try the medicine her sister got, and ended up eating a good portion of the herb supplies.

“Jayfeather, no kit can be worse than I was.”

## Chapter 7

Brambleheart went into the nursery to give Bristlefrost a sparrow. A few days had passed since the kits were born, and they were growing fast. Their eyes were starting to open, and they were squirming around after learning that they could move. Brambleheart had helped Bristlefrost name the kits. The small black tom was named Nightkit for his dark fur. The she-kit was named Milkkit, and the brown-and-white tom was named Weedkit. Weedkit's name had started as a joke since Bristlefrost was pulling a weed out from the nursery entrance when she started going into labor. But the name ended up sticking, and it suited the young tom well.

"Here you go," Brambleheart mewed as she dropped the sparrow. "Caught by yours truly!"

"Thank you," Bristlefrost chirped. "Are you going to the gathering tonight? If you do, tell Ravenheart and Sunbeam about the news!"

"I sure am, and I sure will!" Brambleheart blinked.

\* \* \* \* \*

Brambleheart jumped off the bridge to the Island. This was her first gathering as a warrior—she was deemed too weak to come last moon. She was very excited to see her friends. Brambleheart weaved through the crowd until she saw Ravenheart. He was sitting with Sunbeam, Applepaw, and a large black tom who looked about their age.

“Hi, Ravenheart, Sunbeam, and Applepaw!” Brambleheart chuffed.

“Hi, Bramblepaw!” Applepaw mewed.

“Oh, right, you both didn’t come to the gathering,” Ravenheart meowed as Sunbeam chuckled. “Applepaw is Appleshine now, and Bramblepaw is Brambleheart!” Appleshine and Brambleheart congratulated each other. “Oh, and Brambleheart, this is Darkpounce. He and his sister, Willowlight, joined our Clan. Willowlight has a kit— Littlekit!”

“That’s amazing!” Brambleheart purred. “Bristlefrost had her kits the other day. They are so little and cute! Their names are Nightkit, Milkkit, and Weedkit.”

Brambleheart was interrupted when a yellow apprentice joined in. “Tell her I say congratulations!” he squeaked.

“Who are you?” Brambleheart asked.

“Rootpaw, of course! I’m the apprentice she saved. I’m showing Wrenpaw around here. It’s her first time.” Rootpaw blinked at a smaller apprentice.

“We have some new apprentices, too,” Brambleheart pointed her tail to the ThunderClan apprentices. A new apprentice came up. He was a taupe tabby who smelled of RiverClan.

“Hi! I heard Wrenpaw is new. I’m Leechpaw. This is my second gathering!” Leechpaw squealed. “Let’s meet the ThunderClan cats!” The apprentices left Brambleheart and her group alone again.

“Bristlefrost saved him?” Appleshine mewed. “What happened?”

“Kitepaw and Turtlepaw– Stoattail and Rosecloud’s friends– were teasing him. He fell into some water and nearly drowned until Bristlefrost came! That’s why she became a warrior early,” Brambleheart explained.

“*Them*,” Appleshine grunted.

“They’re warriors now, too!” Sunbeam laughed. “Kitescratch and Turtlecrawl. They’ve mellowed out quite a bit. They actually sat with us last moon.”

“They finally found the right crowd,” Ravenheart snarked.

“StarClan’s kits, Eagleheart missed telling me a lot!” Brambleheart sighed dramatically. “I need to pay attention this time.”

And just after, Mistystar announced the start of the gathering, and RiverClan’s news: the fish were swimming well, and although there was a little flood in camp, it was nothing RiverClan

couldn't handle. Bramblestar announced the birth of Bristlefrost's kits, and the naming of the four apprentices. Harestar reported on the newly grown heather attracting rabbits and moorhens. Tigerstar told the Clans about how Darkpounce became a fully-fledged warrior very early after proving himself by saving Cloverfoot. The leader said that he adjusted to Clan life quickly thanks to Ravenheart's mentoring. Lastly, Hawkstar told the Clan of Wrenpaw being an apprentice, and how Nectarsong was expecting kits. Cheers were yowled, but were quickly silenced by Crowfeather.

"Bramblestar, I don't know if you have noticed, but last night, Emberfoot noticed WindClan scent from across the border."

"I didn't," Bramblestar meowed. "Thank you for alerting me of your warrior's mistake. Do you know who it is?"

"No," Emberfoot yowled. "I didn't want to trespass. I did come back with Kestrelflight soon after, but the markers were gone."

"We will increase patrols," Bramblestar nodded. "And if we see this again, we will let you know."

"Rest assured," Crowfeather dipped his head, "the last thing we need is war. I do not want to be like Onestar. Whoever this cat is will be punished." The dark gray warrior looked up at Harestar, who nodded sheepishly.

"Do you have anything to say, Harestar?" Berrynose hissed. "Why is your deputy doing everything for you?"

“Well, I wasn’t aware that we are self-reporting reckless cats now,” Harestar growled. “And I was never told of this.”

Brambleheart could tell that Berrynose was trying his best to not leap onto Harestar. The ThunderClan deputy let out a deep growl and flattened his fur. Harestar glared at Crowfeather, who was whispering to Minnowtail.

“On that note,” Mistystar announced, “The gathering is at an end.”

## Chapter 8

“Do you smell any borage?” Brambleheart instructed Ashpaw. She and Ashpaw were charged with finding borage for Bristlefrost. Eagleheart and Stoattail had split off to go near the moor to find their own herbs. Rosecloud had taken the day off due to being charged to guard the camp the night before.

“Um, I think so,” Ashpaw mumbled. Brambleheart was starting to be concerned for Ashpaw. As a kit, he was goofy, confident, and protective over others. But after being apprenticed, he changed. He was shyer, more doubtful, and distrustful of most cats. Perhaps his clumsiness and subsequent minor injuries stunted his confidence. *But he is doing very well. He tracked the borage scent the whole way since we split up. And his crouches are very good when he play fights with his friends.* Yet Rosecloud always told her that he was behind, that he never listened, and that he may as well go back to the nursery.

“How is training going?” Brambleheart asked.

Ashpaw froze for a bit. He waited before he responded. "It's going well. I didn't get a scratch yesterday. I must be doing well." He paused again. "Yeah, I am doing well. Ravenwing complimented my hunting this morning when I caught a mouse!"

"But what does your mentor say?" Brambleheart asked. She wanted to know what happened during individual training.

"She still says I am behind. But I am trying my best! And when we did group training yesterday, I was able to catch up with the other apprentices!" Ashpaw licked his chest fur.

*Interesting. The one day he didn't get hurt was the one day he wasn't only with Rosecloud. And he's doing great today. How could he be so clumsy when he's only with her? Something must be wrong!*

"Well, let me know how it goes. I'd love to help out," Brambleheart mewed. "Look, you led us to the borage! Let's go harvest it. You did great today!" Ashpaw carefully pulled up the plants. He carried his harvest in his jaws and trotted back to Brambleheart, tail held high. "Good!" Brambleheart praised. "Let's go meet Eagleheart and Stoattail."

The two padded towards the moor where they met up with Eagleheart and Stoattail. Eagleheart was carrying her own bundle. She told Brambleheart that she and Ashpaw were heading back to camp.

"We should mark the border," Stoattail blurted out when Brambleheart started following her sister. "We don't want any more flea-brained trespassers."

“Alright,” Brambleheart sighed. They marked their borders and started heading home. Partway, Stoattail veered off the route and flicked his tail for Brambleheart to follow. “What do you want now?”

“You see these?” Stoattail pointed his tail at a tunnel entrance. “Those are the tunnels. They connect our territories together.” His tone was very condescending.

“You know I went on the same tour as you?” Brambleheart retorted. “They also go far beyond. You’ve heard the stories about Hollyleaf– she was living in the tunnels for many moons.”

“Do you know who else spent time there?” Stoattail tilted his head. “When they were apprentices, your father and my mother used to sneak out of their camps to play in the tunnels.”

“And?” Brambleheart was confused. “They were young, and Lionblaze thought it was stupid. He isn’t wrong.”

“Well, next time we go on a walk, we are going into the tunnels. If our parents spent time there, it’s only natural that we should. It’s written in the stars, and in our blood. You can’t argue with that, can you, Brambleheart?”

Brambleheart scoffed. “Not this again. I don’t want to go on walks with you. Not when you act like this. I’m going to camp; I have something important to report to Bramblestar about Ashpaw.” Brambleheart lashed her tail and left.

Upon returning to camp, Brambleheart asked Berrynose if their leader was available, which he was. Brambleheart entered Bramblestar's den. The leader was sitting in his nest, washing his paw.

"What's happening?" the leader asked.

"I'm concerned about Ashpaw," Brambleheart explained. "He's behaving differently than normal. He's been less confident and more doubtful of others since his ceremony."

"Apprentices have a lot more responsibility," Bramblestar replied. "It's a big transition. I'm sure Rosecloud is trying to help."

"That's the problem," Brambleheart mewed. "I don't think she's a good fit for Ashpaw. I've heard her yell at him. She tells him he is a bad apprentice, and is mean to him when he makes a mistake. She almost never does group training, and does not accept criticism about mentoring. And Ashpaw's scratches—"

"Do you have proof?" Bramblestar inquired.

"Ashpaw's scratches are," Brambleheart meowed frantically. "He gets them every day that he trains. But yesterday, and today, he wasn't training with Rosecloud. He didn't get scratched at all!"

“It could be a coincidence,” Bramblestar said. “Rosecloud keeps Ashpaw in a small hollow when they train. Perhaps they need more room. I will talk to Rosecloud about that. I appreciate your concern, but I can’t do anything without concrete evidence.”

Brambleheart dipped her head. She left the den, tail drooping. Ashpaw needed help, and nobody believed it. Bramblestar was right, it could be a coincidence, but why would Ashpaw only be hurt during individual training, if not being injured by Rosecloud? *Something has to be done!*

## Chapter 9

Eagleheart was sunning. It was the height of newleaf, and it brought warm weather. The last few days had been rainy, but the shining sun had evaporated all of the puddles, and was a welcome change in the weather.

Bristlefrost's kits were venturing out of the nursery for the first time. They had recently learned to run and were very clumsily toddling around camp.

"Look, a cat!" Nightkit mewed.

"Me?" Eagleheart purred. "I'm Eagleheart, a medicine cat. I helped you be born!"

Nightkit gave the tiniest indignant sniff. "No! No you! Look, a cat!"

Eagleheart padded to the small black kit. He was using his needle-sharp claws to point to... not a cat. It was a grasshopper, in fact. It was the same size as Nightkit! "No, Nightkit, that's not a cat. Those are called grasshoppers. They love to play here during Newleaf."

“No, no, no!” Nightkit wailed. “You are all mixed up. That is a cat. We are grasshoppers! See, I am hopping in the grass!”

Eagleheart couldn't help but twitch her whiskers. Nightkit was so small. He was just learning about the world. Not to mention learning how to speak. No wonder he got things mixed up!

Bristlefrost appeared to greet Eagleheart and talk to her son. “Is he calling himself a grasshopper?” Bristlefrost asked. Eagleheart nodded, still chuckling. “He saw one this morning outside the nursery. He thought it was a weird looking kit! But when I told him it was a grasshopper... well... I think it backfired.”

“He'll outgrow it,” Eagleheart chuffed. “Kits always do. Remember when we were that little? It was our first snow as kits, and Cinderheart taught us how to lick snowflakes. But Brambleheart wouldn't”

“Because she thought she was licking a star? Yeah, you two were so goofy!” Bristlefrost reminisced. “And Hawkfeather, well, I don't think he outgrew that at all. We all must have had bees in our brains!”

“What's a bee?” Nightkit asked.

Bristlefrost carried Nightkit to be with his littermates. Eagleheart continued to sun until she was interrupted again by Brambleheart.

“Hey, I need to go to the medicine den,” Brambleheart sighed.

“Is everything okay? You know Jayfeather is there?” Eagleheart murmured.

“No, come with me, please,” A look of desperation shone through Brambleheart’s blue eyes. Eagleheart knew that it meant something deeper was going on. She walked with her sister to the medicine den, but out of the corner of her eye, Eagleheart saw Stoattail glaring suspiciously.

“What’s up?” Eagleheart asked.

“Thanks,” Brambleheart panted. “It’s Stoattail. He always wants me to come with him on walks but I can’t take it anymore! He says these creepy things and...”

“What kind of things? Eagleheart narrowed her eyes. “I knew he was a piece of work, but it’s getting this bad?”

“Well, when we were gathering herbs, he took me to the tunnels. He said something weird about how Heathertail and Lionblaze played there when they were young. He somehow equated it to us having to go there and do... something or other. I told him no, but he is still expecting me to go!” Brambleheart took a deep breath. “And another time, we were hanging out at the lakeside. He said something again, but about you.”

“What about me?” Eagleheart asked.

“It was an offpaw comment,” Brambleheart explained. “He made a joke about how he is a WindClan spy, and made silly comments. Me not wanting to get my paws wet and cold, Hawkfeather kicking his moss in his sleep, and you failing a test with Bramblestar.”

Eagleheart’s eyes widened. “How did he know that? All the Clan was told was that Bramblestar trained with me before I switched. Even Ravenwing had assumed that it was him trying to help. Nobody really knew that it was an assessment, at least, nobody important.”

“Was it mentioned in the medicine den when he was healing?” Brambleheart asked.

“I guess it was, since it was still pretty fresh news,” Eagleheart answered. “I’m sure it came up about my progress and finding my place in the Clan.”

“Then why commit it to memory?” Brambleheart asked.

“He is an odd furball,” Eagleheart mewed. “Maybe it was to break the ice in the future.” She opened her mouth to say something else when Stoattail himself started to enter the den.

“Hurry up, you’re *late*,” Stoattail hissed, eyes glaring like ice.

“I’m sorry, I was talking to Eagleheart,” Brambleheart retorted.

“About *what*?” Stoattail spat.

“None of your business!” Eagleheart growled.

“It most certainly is,” Stoattail replied. “You are acting secretive. Tell me the reason you are late!”

“Well, some cats are just late!” Brambleheart snarled. “And no, I don’t want to go to the tunnels tonight!”

“Really?” Stoattail frowned. “So when are you coming?”

“Brambleheart is not interested,” Eagleheart said firmly.

“You two are lying through your teeth,” Stoattail sneered. “Tell me why you are late, and why you don’t want to be in the tunnels. Are you afraid of the dark? There is no need to worry. I know them like the back of my paw.”

“No,” Brambleheart hissed. “I just don’t want to.”

“Your mother may have had amazing stories, but their father doesn’t,” Jayfeather explained from across the den. “We both thought our sister was killed there.”

“But she wasn’t,” Stoattail mewed matter-of-factly. “You are weird for still dwelling on that. Interesting...”

“Get out of my den!” Jayfeather shouted. Stoattail skipped away like he had just heard the best news of his life. “Now, you two, I need some cobwebs. Can you get some?”

“Sure!” Both sisters squeaked in unison.

“Good,” Jayfeather huffed. “Now get out. I need to check the den for fleas from Stoattail’s brain.”

## Chapter 10

Brambleheart padded with her sister to find marigold. They had been chatting about Stoattail's comments, and Ashpaw's injuries. Brambleheart had expressed concern to Eagleheart about Rosecloud possibly abusing the apprentice.

"Honestly, I wouldn't put it past her," Eagleheart gruffed. "It wouldn't be surprising."

"Well, I know that she is suspicious of me right now," Brambleheart pointed out. "Hey, I have an idea!"

"What is it?" Eagleheart perked her ears.

"They are training. Could you get a glimpse of the action? If they notice, just tell them you want to give Ashpaw a tracking lesson. You are better at tracking than the two of us could ever wish to be!" Brambleheart blinked. It was true. As warrior apprentices, Eagleheart would always pick up the first scent of prey or markers. It also made her a gifted medicine cat. She could smell infection before even Jayfeather!

“Sure,” Eagleheart mewed. “And, if you can, try to go near the edge of the territory, the one that doesn’t border the Clans. It’s practically untouched!”

Brambleheart nodded, and the two parted ways. Brambleheart padded north from the camp exit. She weaved through trees, and got dripped with leftover rain. Luckily it went away with a shake of her fur. She continued towards the very edge, where the scents of that morning’s border patrols were very strong.

The breeze cooled Brambleheart’s tongue as she opened her mouth to catch a scent. She soon caught a whiff of some kind of flower. After padding towards it, she identified that it was indeed a marigold scent. *Eagleheart would have known before I even caught the scent!* Brambleheart smiled as she remarked that in her head.

As she got closer and closer, Brambleheart caught another scent- milk. Did Bristlefrost come on a walk here? No, she wouldn’t have! This border was the most dangerous, since no other Clan defended it. Most foxes and rogues came through from this area. Brambleheart’s neck fur started to bristle. There may be a skirmish if a queen was trespassing. ShadowClan may have accepted a queen, but they were fresh out of kits, and needed more numbers. ThunderClan was already very busy. And even though Bramblestar would be accepting of any new cats, Berrynose sure wouldn’t be.

The milk scent ended in a stump. Brambleheart investigated and heard the worst. Small, weak mewls came from the inside of the hollowed stump, which must have been a birthing den. Brambleheart peered inside. There was a newborn kit, tiny and helpless. He was orange-and-white,

and his eyes were still shut. He was the smallest kit that Brambleheart had ever seen! Even Tinykit was bigger, and he was named for his size.

Brambleheart started licking the kit. Despite the insulation that the den gave him, he was still shaking. His pelt was matted from trying desperately to find his mother. The scent of three other kits was there, along with a mother cat. She must have abandoned her son for being so tiny. Brambleheart picked up the small scrap of fur in her jaws, and ran back to camp.

The marigold could wait.

## Chapter 11

Brambleheart walked as fast as she could. Running would just jostle and bother the kit too much. The kit mewled; this must have been the first time he had been outside the den. Brambleheart knew that he didn't have a lot of time. Small kits were helpless and needed the care of a queen to survive. They needed milk, warmth, comfort, and most importantly, love. This poor kit looked no more than a day old, and had most likely lacked those needs for most of his short life. Brambleheart continued her trek when she was interrupted by a gray blur that almost knocked her over.

"Hi, Brambleheart! Eagleheart said that you needed help tracking. Oh, is that marigold? That was quick!" Ashpaw squeaked. He looked at the bundle, before realizing that it was not marigold, but a kit. "Where'd you find him? Was he from WindClan? Was he abandoned? Why would someone abandon the kit? He's so cute!"

Brambleheart muttered through her jaws. "I found him when I was trying to find marigold. He was abandoned by some rogue or loner. We need to bring him back to save him." The kit's mewls were growing weaker. He hadn't much time left.

“I’ll lead the patrol!” Ashpaw mewed. He went in front of Brambleheart, tail held high like always, and started trotting along the path to camp. He gleefully explained the territory to the kit.

“That’s a tree. We like trees. They’re really fun to climb!”

“That’s a thistle. The flowers are fluffy, but they’re prickly, too. Watch out!”

“That’s a rock. See that sharp top? I caught my fur there once while training. Rosecloud was a bit too happy for a mock fight!”

“Ashpaw,” Brambleheart purred. “The kit can’t see. His eyes aren’t open! And his ears are closed, too. He may not hear us right now.”

“Well, maybe he can!” Ashpaw chirped.

“And did Rosecloud really push you onto the rock?” Brambleheart meowed.

“...yeah.” Ashpaw murmured. “It was an accident, though! She was teaching me how to pin a cat. I pinned her, and she kicked me off. She couldn’t see the rock since it blended in with my fur! She did apologize after, though. Then we moved somewhere else.”

Brambleheart narrowed her eyes. It very well could have been an accident, but she wasn’t so sure. Rosecloud was a good liar. She could make anything out to seem like an accident.

After entering Camp, Brambleheart rushed to the nursery where Bristlefrost was trying to settle down her kits for a nap. “Nightkit, let your sister have some room. Weedkit, stop kicking!” Bristlefrost looked up to see Brambleheart. “Hold on, kits. I need to talk with Brambleheart. Settle down now! Squirrelflight will keep an eye on you.”

Brambleheart and Bristlefrost stood near the nursery entrance. Brambleheart presented the small kit to her friend. “I found this kit on patrol. He was abandoned. He’s so small...”

Bristlefrost’s eyes shone with emotion. “He... he looks like...”

“Stemleaf,” Brambleheart whispered solemnly. “He even has the white eartip.”

Bristlefrost instinctively licked the kit to warm it up. “If this is StarClan’s sign that Stemleaf will live on, I have to heed it. I will care for the poor scrap! I- I just hope the Clan will agree.”

The sound of the mewling kit attracted curious Clanmates who surrounded Brambleheart and Bristlefrost.

“Whose kit is that?” Ravenwing chirped.

“It reeks of an outsider,” grumbled Shellfur.

“He’s so small,” fretted Poppyfrost.

Bramblestar weaved through the cats to see the commotion. "A kit," he observed. He gave the kit a sniff. "Who found him?"

"I did," Brambleheart meowed. "I was helping to collect marigold, but I found the kit. I had to take him here... he had no mother!"

"What mother would leave her kit to die?" Blossomfall hissed. "Honestly, no Clan cat would do this! Rogues have no honor."

"Perhaps the mother died," Twigbranch murmured. "Mine did. Or perhaps she couldn't care for him."

Stormcloud sighed. "In a loner's eyes, the loss of a small kit who wouldn't be likely to make it is better than all kits starving." The Clan nodded at his wisdom. Stormcloud had previously been a kittypet. He had met a lot of rogues and loners in his time.

"Can we keep him?" Brambleheart pleaded to her leader, eyes widened almost like she was a kit herself.

"It would just be another mouth to feed," Berrynose grumbled. Bumblestripe and Thornclaw nodded in agreement.

Whitewing stomped her foot. "My father was born an outsider," she yowled. "But now he is remembered as the most loyal cat you could meet. Why deny a kit's life just because of its birth?"

“It shouldn’t even be a question on whether the kit would be an asset or not,” Brambleheart replied. “The warrior code says we shall not neglect a kit in pain or danger. If we leave this kit to die, we are no better than the rogue who did the same.”

“But doesn’t the code only apply for Clanborn kits?” Rosecloud shot back. She had returned to camp as the debate started.

“All kits are important!” Brambleheart protested. “They are our future. If we deny this kit a home and a family, we are doing a disservice. Imagine if we never took in any orphaned kit. We’d be horrid! Part of being a Clan is taking care of each other. Taking in the young, the sick, and the old! Our kindness and mercy towards those who cannot care for themselves is what makes ThunderClan strong and brave. We would be dishonoring our ancestors by not following their lessons.”

Bramblestar swished his tail to silence the murmurs of the arguing cats. “This young warrior makes a good point. The kit will stay. He will be raised a Clan cat and nothing less. He will be treated as one of us, because as he grows older, he will only know himself as that.”

“But the kit needs a name!” Sorrelstripe said.

“We could name him Stemkit,” Plumstone suggested.

“That’s a good idea,” Honeyfrost agreed.

Suddenly, the kit rolled over so that Bristlefrost could lick his underside. Revealed was a round, white belly, which was as fluffy and soft as a cloud.

“I think we only have one option,” Bristlefrost conceded. “This kit will be named Cloudkit, for his fluffy white fur, and for the beloved Clanmate we’ve lost.”

“CLOUDKIT! CLOUDKIT!” The Clan cheered. Bristlefrost rushed her newly adopted son into the nursery, and was swiftly followed by Jayfeather.

Brambleheart smiled. She grabbed a squirrel to give to Bristlefrost. She would definitely need it now.

## Chapter 12

Eagleheart stretched. She had just woken from a nap. The night patrol had just left, with Brambleheart leading Lionblaze, Poppyfrost, and Dewnose. It was her sister's first time leading the patrol. When they were announced, Brambleheart came rushing to tell her sister. Both cats puffed up in pride, much to Jayfeather's annoyance. "Your shedding is making the den have more debris than ShadowClan in the winter," he grumbled.

Both cats had shared a mouse before their nap. It was another half moon, which meant another journey to the Moonpool. Luckily, it was a calm day for the Clan. The elders' joints were feeling better because of the warm weather. The kits were growing bigger every day, and were starting to wean. Nightkit was picky— he would only eat shrews. And Cloudkit had opened his eyes. He was learning to walk, and loved to play with his new family. The small kit's health had quickly rebounded, and he was growing very fast. It was as if he had never been the runt of his litter!

Eagleheart tapped Jayfeather with her tail to wake him up. He had spent most of the past night salvaging herbs that the kits had cheekily messed up. Milkkit and Weedkit had convinced

Cloudkit to roll in the herbs on his first day out of the nursery. The queens were very upset. They had gently let Cloudkit know that that behavior was unacceptable, and had punished the older kits for tricking one who didn't know better.

Jayfeather groggily opened his eyes. "It's time already?" Eagleheart nodded.

The two medicine cats made their way to the Moonpool, taking the all too familiar path. They had at last made it, where the other medicine cats touched noses in welcome. Eagleheart noticed a distressed look in Kestrelflight's eyes. She padded to the WindClan medicine cat to check on him.

"Is everything okay?"

Kestrelflight sighed. "It's just been a stressful half-moon," he explained. "Featherpelt's kits are becoming apprentices, and I think I found a potential candidate for my own."

Eagleheart nodded. Kestrelflight was the same age as Harestar, and trained alongside Jayfeather and Willowshine. He had never had an apprentice. Eagleheart's thoughts went to Puddleshine. He had become a medicine cat with rushed training and no choice, because Littlecloud had refused to take an apprentice before he died. He did have one, Flametail, but after Flametail drowned, there was never another.

"Whistlekit is eager. But I'm worried that the Clan won't agree, you know," Kestrelflight continued. "There's been a lot of divide, and Harestar can't seem to keep it together. And with the cats tonight..."

“What about them?” Eagleheart asked.

“I thought I saw some cats sneaking out of camp,” he responded. “I”

The conversation was interrupted by Jayfeather complaining about small talk and insisting the meeting began, as always. Eagleheart and Kestrelflight dipped heads in respect, and crouched down to speak with StarClan.

Once more, Eagleheart saw Moth Flight. The ancient spirit looked disappointed.

“Hello,” Eagleheart greeted. “Did I do something wrong?” Eagleheart hated to let anyone down, no less the first medicine cat.

“No,” Moth Flight replied. “I’m disappointed in my Clan.”

“How come?” Eagleheart asked. “Is it because they don’t want Whistlekit to be a medicine cat? Are you worried Kestrelflight will die without one?”

“That is a concern,” Moth Flight mewed. “It’s a wise one to have. But I foresee that not being an issue. My problem is with trespassing. WindClan warriors are taking something sacred and using it for bad.” Eagleheart tipped her head in confusion. “Ah, you don’t know, silly me!” Moth Flight chuckled. “Even the best medicine cats can be feather-brains. Let me show you.”

Eagleheart's vision quickly transformed into a large moor. It didn't look at all like the one she knew. *This must be the Old Forest!* She focused on what looked like a rabbit hole. And out of it came... a cat! The cat was dirty and his pelt was patched; he must spend a lot of time underground. Eagleheart followed the cat as he went back to camp and reported to his leader. Despite never seeing these cats before, their names instantly came into Eagleheart's mind as if she had grown up with them. *Rabbit Tail is speaking with Duststar.* Eagleheart heard them talk about how tunneling was going well, and that they planned to use the system all throughout the territory. The den shifted until another leader was speaking with another tunneler. *Featherstar and Pebblefur.* The tunnels have been expanded and in use for many moons.

Once more, Eagleheart's vision shifted. This time, it was the middle of WindClan camp, with a leader on the Tallrock. Near her was the corpse of a tunneler, and a devastated apprentice. *Heatherstar. And Tallstar Tallpaw now... he must be mourning his father, Sandgorse.* Eagleheart watched as Heatherstar denounced tunneling, ending the tradition in WindClan that had been a part of them for countless lifetimes.

Eagleheart was then brought back to Moth Flight. "You see?" the starry cat asked somberly. "WindClan has forgotten the honor of tunneling. They recognize its history, but fail to respect it."

"What's going on in the tunnels?" Eagleheart asked. This was still not making any sense! But as soon as the words left her mouth, Eagleheart was brought back to the waking world. The other medicine cats were also stirring. They had some final smalltalk before heading home.

The journey back was silent. Jayfeather was busy pondering his own dream, while all Eagleheart could think about was her own. *Why do I need to know this? I'm not even WindClan!*

As Eagleheart went through the Camp entrance, she noticed the fresh scent of Stoattail. *He's not supposed to be out tonight.* Eagleheart tried to calm herself. Perhaps it was from an evening walk. But she couldn't shake the suspicion burning her fur. Eagleheart peered into the warrior's den, and saw that Stoattail's nest was empty.

The images of tunnelers filled Eagleheart's mind as she ran outside of camp. He must be the cat that Moth Flight was referring to!

## Chapter 13

“Follow me,” Brambleheart mewed as she led her patrol. We’re going to the birch hollow.”

Lionblaze, Poppyfrost, and Dewnose nodded, much to Brambleheart’s relief. It was her first time leading a patrol, and she was very nervous. What if she messed up? She had to do well, especially since her father was with her.

As she walked in front of her Clanmates, Lionblaze joined her. “You don’t need to be scared,” he mewed. “Just trust your instincts. And if something happens, it’s not your fault. Just control what you can.” Brambleheart nuzzled her father, who returned with the other two cats.

Brambleheart raised her tail as she heard a scurry. It was most likely a squirrel, but when it was this dark, no cat could be too careful. When the noise stopped, the patrol continued through the darkened woods.

At last, the moonlit leaves of birch trees showed themselves. The white bark was nearly the same shade as the leaves at night, and the stripes looked like dark shadows. Brambleheart was never

used to hunting this late. But the evening patrol was delayed thanks to some extra paws needed to repair the warrior's den when a nasty gust of wind blew part of its roof away. Luckily it was a quick fox. Birchfall, despite his age and retirement, was able to direct its repair.

"Let's try to hunt some nightingales," Brambleheart announced.

"Isn't that ShadowClan prey?" Dewnose asked.

"Usually," Brambleheart confirmed, "but that means there's plenty here. We may as well take advantage of the late patrol."

"Good idea," Lionblaze praised.

The patrol started to stalk the birds, hunting them near the bushtops. Brambleheart made it clear that no nesting bird was to be hunted, since it would make the prey scarce down the line. Two good sized nightingales ended up being caught, and satisfied, Brambleheart decided to return home.

On the way back, an alternate path through the territory was taken. It had less undergrowth so that the prey wouldn't be disturbed. Brambleheart caught the whiff of Rosecloud. It makes sense, she had insisted on training Ashpaw for scenarios just like this patrol.

"Hey, this must be where Ashpaw is!" Dewnose mewed. He was Ashpaw's father. "I wonder what he's doing this late."

"Rosecloud did say she wanted to night-train," Poppyfrost explained.

A scream echoed through the woods, right from where the scent was leading. Instantly, Brambleheart signaled for Dewnose and Poppyfrost to return the prey they were carrying back to camp. They were swift and nimble, so they agreed to make sure the prey went home safe. Meanwhile, Brambleheart and Lionblaze quickly yet carefully went towards the origin of the scream. Was a fox attacking Rosecloud and Ashpaw? Was an enemy trying to trespass?

But to the surprise of Brambleheart and her father, the only thing they saw was Ashpaw. He had a scratch on his face, dripping with blood... *fresh* blood. And as if she hadn't noticed her kin, Rosecloud was screeching at Ashpaw.

"You're WORTHLESS!"

"I- I know..."

"You're a FAILURE!"

"I'm sorry!"

"You'll NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING!"

"I'll do better!"

"Good," Rosecloud growled. "We will try the move again in daylight, but if you DARE embarrass me like that again, you know what'll happen... now get out of my sight."

Brambleheart and Lionblaze slinked away from the hollow, eyes widened in horror. Rosecloud didn't change her ways with Ashpaw. She became far, far, worse than Brambleheart could ever imagine.

And Brambleheart knew that something had to be done before it was too late.

## Chapter 14

Eagleheart weaved through the trees, following the fading scent of Stoattail. The smart tom had rolled around to conceal his scent, but even that never deterred Eagleheart from his trail. She continued tracking and running, until she knew exactly where he was.

### *The tunnels!*

Not needing to keep track, Eagleheart made a direct line to the tunnel entrance. There, she saw... nothing. But Eagleheart knew that someone was inside. Carefully making her way into the darkness, Eagleheart entered the hole. She felt her fur get caught in dirt and stone. No wonder WindClan cats were lithe and short-furred! Her eyes slowly adjusted to the lack of light, and her senses recalibrated to help. Instantly, Eagleheart heard murmurs and whispers.

“No, Stoattail! You can’t come back yet. We have so much more we need to know!”

“But· but they’re catching on. I cannot risk our Clans fighting prematurely.”

“You know the drill. I’m becoming a well-respected warrior. I’ve mentored many apprentices. I’m a loving father, so much so that I let my son go to a rival Clan. I don’t like this either, but it’s what I have to do for Harestar. He said if I continue my work, if we keep on getting information, then we will get a great reward. And it’s paying off. Rumors are starting... Crowfeather is getting old. A younger cat of his type is bound to be a deputy!”

“Fine. What else do you need to know?”

“Cinderheart’s kit, the brown one. How is she getting on? Has she an apprentice, too?”

“No, that’s Rosecloud. And don’t worry. Brambleheart may be hopeless, but I am trying to have her join my cause. If only she just trusted me.”

“Well, is there an alternative?”

“Rosecloud is more likely to join my cause. You know, the cat I’ve been friends with for moons. She’s trying to get her apprentice to be like her, you know? A shame that he isn’t living up to her expectations. Maybe once she is less busy, then I can help her.”

“Good. But try to get Brambleheart, too. The more, the merrier...”

Eagleheart, fed up and horrified, leapt towards the two toms and screeched. “You were right, Stoattail! YOU ARE A TRAITOR!”

“I never lie,” Stoattail mewed charmingly. “And what are you going to do? The Clan loves me. They wouldn;t want to see the medicine cat bully a cripple... would they?”

“Did you?”

“Now that you know too much,” Stoattail sighed. “I guess I should tell you more. Since you and your sister can’t get enough answers, it seems. Yes, I injured myself on purpose. Reopened a wound from kithood. And it worked. The Clan pitied me, thought I’d never fit in in WindClan. They took me in, and were awed when I was actually competent. The truth is, I’ve always had a limp. I’m just good at hiding it. What a medicine cat you are...”

“That’s it,” Eagleheart snapped. “I am telling Bramblestar and Berrynose right away. You know how Berrynose feels about WindClan.”

“Go ahead,” Stoattail mewed gently. “Would a leader really believe the tracking skills of a failed warrior?”

“You forget that I work with the other best tracker in the Clan,” Eagleheart hissed. She knew exactly what Stoattail was doing. He was riling Eagleheart up– it worked; she was puffy as can be– to stall her in hopes his scent would fade.

Eagleheart ran out of the tunnels, digging enough dirt so that escaping would be complex, but not enough to suffocate them. She rushed back to Camp, completely forgetting about the mud and dust covering her fur, making it so it wouldn’t settle. At this point, Eagleheart genuinely didn’t know if it was the muck or her anger keeping her puffed up. She took the alternate entrance into

Camp so as to not disturb any more evidence. The Camp was quiet. Cats were still sleeping, but it wouldn't be long until the dawn patrol was woken.

Without skipping a beat, Eagleheart trotted to Bramblestar's den. Usually cats needed to ask to enter, but Eagleheart didn't have to. She was a medicine cat, and, more importantly, this was an emergency. The leader was still asleep, curled up in his nest. Eagleheart knew that there wasn't any right way to do this. She prodded Bramblestar, and the leader woke up confused.

"What is going on, Eagleheart?" the leader rasped.

"You need to see this!"

## Chapter 15

Brambleheart couldn't sleep, no matter how hard she tried. Thoughts of poor, poor Ashpaw filled her mind. *I should have fought harder for him.* And with those thoughts, thoughts of Rosecloud entered as well. *What a fool I am! I should have known better, never given the benefit of the doubt. Now Ashpaw's suffering, and it's my fault!*

The pale light that was the early sunrise appeared after what felt like moons of agony. Finally, Brambleheart could stop pretending and actually do something. She padded out of the warrior's den where Berrynose was meeting with the dawn patrol.

"You should be resting," Berrynose grunted.

"Couldn't sleep," Brambleheart explained.

"Don't worry, all warriors feel that way. It's the thrill of the first patrol," Berrynose replied.

Brambleheart dipped her head to the deputy, and walked into the apprentice den. Ratpaw had left her nest, as she was set to patrol any moment. Brambleheart carefully prodded Ashpaw awake, not wanting to wake up anyone else. The poor apprentice insisted his scratch go untreated, and refused to leave the den upon returning to Camp.

Ashpaw's eyes snapped open. "Ti-time to train? Yes, I-I'll be there..." His forest-green eyes focused on Brambleheart, recognizing her. "Oh... sorry, I thought you were"

"It's okay, Ashpaw. Come with me. We're going on a walk," Brambleheart whispered.

The two cats strolled outside of Camp. "Why did you wake me?" Ashpaw mewed.

"I saw you training last night," Brambleheart answered. "I was heading back with my patrol when I heard you scream. Lionblaze came, too. We saw what Rosecloud did to you."

"It was an accident, I swear!" Ashpaw pleaded.

"No, it wasn't," Bramblepaw meowed firmly. "What Rosecloud is doing isn't good. No mentor should abuse their apprentice. And I want to protect you."

"Why?" Ashpaw asked.

"Because we're Clanmates," Brambleheart replied. "And Rosecloud's my sister. She has been nothing but a bully since we were kits."

Ashpaw nodded. “But- but Rosecloud told me that no other cat should know! If she knows we spoke, you will be in trouble, too!”

“No, I won’t. She is just as much a warrior as I am. The only cat who can punish her or I is the Clan leader. And she is saying that precisely to avoid that punishment,” Brambleheart tried not to coat her voice with emotion. “Ashpaw, I need you to be brave here.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Bramblestar is busy right now. I think he’s discussing medicine cat stuff with Eagleheart. But when he gets back, I need you to tell him the truth. Tell him what Rosecloud has been doing. Tell him how it makes you feel. He will listen, but only to you.”

“But how do you know?”

“Because he said so.”

“And why did he say so?”

“Because I asked,” Brambleheart nuzzled Ashpaw. “Because I care about you. You’re a good cat. Remember that. You are a good apprentice, a quick learner, a considerate brother, and a kind cat. One day, you will be a good warrior, and perhaps a good mentor. The way you tried to show Cloudkit the territory– that’s good teaching, and the makings of a fine cat.”

“But what if I-”

“I believe in you, Ashpaw. I know you can do this,” Brambleheart murmured. “Now, let’s get that scratch fixed up. I don’t want it getting infected.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Ashpaw, next time you get a scratch, see me sooner!” Jayfeather grumbled. He dabbed some wet moss on the wound, and sniffed it for infection. “You’re lucky it won’t scar. I want you to come back later today, and tomorrow morning. A wound healed this late after its inflictment is prone to infection.”

“I understand, Jayfeather,” Ashpaw mewed. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Brambleheart mewed. “You had good reason. After today, hopefully you won’t have this happen much more.”

“I hope,” Ashpaw muttered. A flash of anxiety filled his gaze. Brambleheart could tell that Jayfeather sensed it too, most likely from scent. Brambleheart explained the ordeal in hushed whispers to the medicine cat. He was not surprised in the slightest.

After the treatment was finished, Brambleheart beckoned a nervous Ashpaw out of the den. She had not yet seen Bramblestar return, but it would have to be soon, for Ashpaw’s sake.

## Chapter 16

“What’s the problem? Can’t you wait until dawn?” Bramblestar huffed. “And what is on your fur?” A hint of amusement and concern coated the leader’s question.

“It’s close enough,” Eagleheart explained. “And it’s an emergency. Follow me, please!”

Bramblestar followed the still-messy Eagleheart towards the den entrance. There, she pointed out Stoattail’s fur. “See?” she pointed out. “It’s fresh. Stoattail snuck out of camp.”

“Could have been a walk,” Bramblestar sighed, “but I know better from you. What else?”

“Do you catch that scent of him? It may be faint...” Eagleheart worried that the leader may not smell it. Would he believe her then?

“Yes, I do,” the brown tabby said after a while of tasting the air.

Eagleheart and Bramblestar followed the scent. Eagleheart explained how she knew of the scent masking, and how she followed that new scent towards the tunnels, thanks to her guidance from the Moonpool. It was kind of funny in a morbid way how a half moon was how Stoattail was able to get into the mess, and another half moon would hopefully mark its end.

Eventually, the two cats made it to the tunnels, where Stoattail and Breezepelt, in all of their foolishness, were still under. She could hear panic from both their impending fate of being caught, and the thought of being stuck– which they most certainly weren't.

Bramblestar rushed into the tunnels, signaling for Eagleheart to do the same.

“Stoattail! Breezepelt! What is the meaning of this?”

“Your medicine cat...” Stoattail gasped. “She trapped us! She left us to... to die!”

“Doesn't she know better? Why, I can't believe she'd subject me to suffocate again! Don't you remember?”

Bramblestar hissed. “I most certainly remember a certain bratty apprentice nearly dying, but now I can see a cat who never learned his lesson grooming his son into heinous crimes. You two are coming back to camp at once!”

The journey back to camp was silent. Breezepelt and Stoattail dared not say anything. When they arrived back at camp, the confused Clan was ignored, and Berrynose was told to summon the senior warriors.

Bramblestar's den was packed now. It already felt stuffed with him, Eagleheart, Breezepelt, and Stoattail. But now Lionblaze, Bumblestripe, Molewhisker, and Ivypool were there, too, to hear and provide their opinions on the matter.

"Explain yourselves," Bramblestar growled.

Breezepelt tried to gather his words, but Stoattail started to sweet-talk. "Bramblestar caught us at an... inappropriate time. I was catching up with Breezepelt, as any cat would. He just wanted to hear about my time in ThunderClan. Is that a crime?"

"Gossiping is for gatherings," Berrynose hissed. "Gatherings that are tense because of your recklessness."

"Well, we used the tunnels since nobody does these days," Stoattail continued. "But then Eagleheart stalked me, and tattled before I could explain myself!"

"Why tattle on a cripple?" Breezepelt added.

"Because Stoattail's lying!" Eagleheart snarled. "He admitted to my face that he has been a spy this whole time! He rewounded himself for pity and snuck his way into being respected!"

The senior warriors started to talk amongst themselves.

“I believe Eagleheart,” Ivypool stated. “Remember yesterday? A huge gust of wind damaged the warrior’s den. It was clearly a sign from StarClan.”

“A gust of wind was in our ranks, and was trying to destroy the Clan,” Molewhisker completed.

“And it wasn’t because of a storm,” Lionblaze added. “It was completely isolated.”

“Eagleheart is our connection to StarClan,” Bumblestripe stated. “If she agrees with our ancestors, it must be true. Tell us, did you receive a sign?”

“Yes,” Eagleheart replied. “I did. That’s what convinced me something was wrong in the first place,”

“We’re all in agreement then,” Berrynose announced. “Bramblestar, it’s your call to punish our ‘warrior’.”

“Very well,” Bramblestar hissed. “Breezepelt can go home. Bumblestripe and Molewhisker, you take him. Stoattail stays right here. Ivypool, guard him. Eagleheart, thank you for alerting me. Get some rest, please!”

Eagleheart dipped her head. She left to the medicine den, where she saw Brambleheart and Ashpaw enter the den in the same manner she did. *Did Brambleheart uncover the truth, too?*

## Chapter 17

“Brambleheart and Ashpaw,” Berrynose growled. “Why are you here? We are busy!”

Brambleheart was shocked at the sight. Lionblaze and Bumblestripe were leaving the den, presumably escorting Breezepelt. Ivypool left with a keen and angry eye on Stoattail. Now Bramblestar, Berrynose, and Molewhisker were there, disappointed and furious.

“I know you are busy, this seems big,” Brambleheart mewed. “But Ashpaw has something very important to say. I’m here to support him.”

“Go on” Bramblestar mewed gently to the apprentice.

“Y-you probably smell the herbs on my face...” Ashpaw started. *And the blood, too.* “The truth is, Rosecloud did this. Brambleheart and Lionblaze saw it with their own eyes! Brambleheart said that this was wrong, and that I should tell you.”

Bramblestar investigated the scratch. “Unsheathe your claws,” he instructed. Ashpaw obeyed. Sure enough, dark russet fur was in his claws, and some stuck to his whiskers. “I see,” Bramblestar observed. “This is horrid. I never should have let her mentor you.”

“This makes two traitors,” Molewhisker hissed.

“Two cats that need to be dealt with,” Bramblestar agreed.

Brambleheart tilted her head. “Who is the other?”

“Stoattail,” Molewhisker mewed. “Are you surprised?”

“Honestly, no. That cat is a creep. He made a joke about spying...” Brambleheart mewed.

“That wasn’t a joke,” the three older toms said in unison.

“Brambleheart,” Berrynose ordered. “Please get Rosecloud. We need to talk.”

Brambleheart left the den in search of her littermate. She wasn’t in the warrior’s den. Brambleheart caught her outside of Camp, screeching for her apprentice.

“Rosecloud,” Brambleheart called.

“Where is my apprentice?!” Rosecloud snarled.

“He is in the leader’s den, where you have been summoned,” Brambleheart explained.

“Summoned for what?” Rosecloud snorted.

“We know,” Brambleheart hissed.

“And you’re tattling on your darling sister? I thought you wanted to start new!” Rosecloud raged. “I will not be going. Make me!”

“I’m sorry I have to do this,” Brambleheart mewed. She pounced onto Rosecloud, knocking her down. Rosecloud tried to break free, but Brambleheart trained enough with her sister to know her every move and strategy. Brambleheart took advantage of Rosecloud twisting to rise when she pinned the russet cat, Rosecloud’s belly to the ground.

“Don’t stand on me!” Rosecloud screamed. “Stop!”

“Make me,” Brambleheart shot back.

Rosecloud rolled her eyes, clearly defeated. “Fine... I’ll go with you. But I will make sure Bramblestar knows how much of a liar you are!”

Brambleheart escorted Rosecloud to Bramblestar and his council. They waited until Lionblaze and Bumblestripe returned. The two warriors were exasperated on having to deal with another case.

“Thank you, Brambleheart,” Bramblestar meowed. “You can leave now. We can take good care of this!”

## Chapter 18

“Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!”

Brambleheart watched as confused cats cat down beneath the Highledge. Gossip had spread on Breezepelt’s visit and on why the senior warriors looked so angry. Finally, the rest of the Clan would be able to get their answers.

“Today I have received some tragic and unfortunate news about our Clanmates,” Bramblestar started. “Two of our youngest warriors have betrayed the trust of myself and the Clan.” Murmurs started as cats suspected who the traitors were. “Last night, Eagleheart received a sign from StarClan, which led her to catch Stoattail spilling our secrets and conspiring with a WindClan warrior.”

The Clan gasped. The whispers turned into confused shouting.

“But why would he do that?” Sorrelstripe asked. “He chose to be here!”

“He’s a spy, that’s why!” Thornclaw hissed. “Once a rival, always a rival.”

Blossomfall turned towards Stormcloud and Twigbranch. “Who’s to say he’s the only one?”

“SILENCE!” Bramblestar hissed. “Stoattail has lied to us about his intentions and loyalty, that part is true. But he is his own cat, and his actions do not imply anything about anybody else’s character, unless they helped those actions.”

Brambleheart watched Berrynose try, and fail, to keep composure. The Clan deputy stepped up to his former apprentice. “I can’t believe you,” the cream tom snarled. “I took you in, trained you, taught you what it meant to be a loyal ThunderClan cat. But you threw my teachings all away, no, you never even accepted them. You are no better to me than a piece of crow-food.”

Stoattail gave a sarcastic blink to the deputy. “If you revoke me as your apprentice,” he mewed calmly, “then you shouldn’t be a deputy.”

“I may not accept you as an apprentice, but I most certainly accept my experience!” Berrynose lashed as Brambleheart stared in horror. If it wasn’t for Stoattail quickly dodging the deputy, he would have been slashed then and there.

“Enough of this!” Bramblestar yowled. “Stoattail isn’t the only cat whose crimes must be exposed. Another promising young warrior, Rosecloud, has also disgraced her Clan.” The Clan exchanged glances at Rosecloud, who still looked stoic and calm, as if she had done nothing wrong. “I made a mistake to have her be a mentor herself. Last night, Lionblaze and Brambleheart caught her doing the unthinkable: beating and abusing her innocent young apprentice.”

Sorrelstripe ran towards Ashpaw, putting her tail around him. Dewnose gasped and glared at Rosecloud. "That was the scream," he growled. "It was my son... YOU HURT MY SON!"

"I gave her the benefit of the doubt," Bramblestar admitted. "I turned the most unfortunate blind eye. But they have opened, and I see now that Rosecloud is not to be trusted with any ThunderClan cat, no less an apprentice."

"Are you exiling us?" Stoattail called.

"Yes, we are," Bramblestar growled. "Cats of StarClan, these two cats have disgraced both you and the cats you watch over. As punishment, they will be banished from the territory." The leader glared at Rosecloud and Stoattail. "You have until sunset to leave the territory. Never come back, If you trespass, we will take action." When Rosecloud opened her mouth, probably using the code as an excuse, Bramblestar shut her down. "And the code states that we may kill cats outside the code. Heed this warning and leave immediately."

Stoattail gave one last glance at Brambleheart before leaving through the exit. Rosecloud, however, did not want to leave without a scene.

"I see what is happening," Rosecloud started. "Everyone in this Clan has failed me. Cinderheart and Lionblaze only cared for the other two kits, while scolding my every move. Finleap, Leafshade, and Twigbranch– they failed me too. I was the best apprentice, yet I was still treated like crow-food. So what if I was being arrogant? I was just showing off the skills StarClan had blessed

me with. Brambleheart and Eagleheart— you sabotaged my time to shine! And Ashpaw, oh, Ashpaw, who will teach you greatness?”

“Do you really want to know?” Bramblestar interrupted. “Ashpaw needs a new mentor. From this day until he earns his warrior name, Ashpaw’s mentor will be”

“Uh, Bramblestar?” Ashpaw squeaked timidly. “If it’s alright with you, can I choose my new mentor?”

“Well, it’s usually my job as leader to appoint the mentor,” said Bramblestar. “But if you believe your new mentor will be better than who I foolishly chose, I suppose I can make an exception. Who do you want to continue your training with?”

“I want Brambleheart,” Ashpaw said, chest now puffed with confidence. “She was the first cat who noticed something was wrong. She cares, and we work well.” Brambleheart felt emotion cloud her eyes. She felt as if she was showing basic compassion and just doing the right thing when helping Ashpaw. Did her kindness really deserve a reward? *I saved an apprentice. And that apprentice deserves someone who cares.*

“She is an excellent choice,” Bramblestar chuffed. Brambleheart couldn’t believe her ears. She was getting an apprentice. *This shouldn’t be happening! I’d rather never mentor a single cat than have to mentor one under these conditions. No apprentice deserves what happened. But it’s what I have to do. I can’t change what happened. I can only help make the path forward the best it can be.* She padded towards Ashpaw, and the two cats touched noses.

“ASHPAW! ASHPAW!”

From the corner of her eye, Brambleheart saw Rosecloud’s face recoil with envy, disgust, and hatred. The russet she-cat ran away from camp, clearly humiliated. The meeting was dismissed shortly after.

Brambleheart looked at Ashpaw. A clear relief glowed in the young cat’s eyes. “So, Ashpaw,” Brambleheart mewed. “What do you want to do first?”

## Chapter 19

Eagleheart was checking on the kits. They were now two moons old. Cloudkit had reached the same size as his adopted littermates, and loved to play with them. They were getting more precarious with their mischief every day, and more and more impatient to become apprentices.

“I’m starting to see why our mothers were just as excited for our apprentice ceremonies as we were,” Bristlefrost reminisced. “It’s hard to believe that the den will be even more crowded in a few moons’ time!” Eagleheart laughed. Kits have and always will be energetic and impatient.

Nightkit stopped playing mossball to greet Eagleheart. “What are you doing?” he squeaked. Nightkit was ever so curious, especially about medicine. *He may make a great apprentice!*

“I’m just seeing if everyone is doing well. Bristlefrost’s milk should be starting to dry up. You’re big cats now, eating prey! And I want to make sure you are growing well.” Eagleheart loved to explain her job, and Nightkit absorbed the information like moss.

“Are we doing well?” Nightkit asked, tipping his head.

“Yes, you are very strong!” Eagleheart trilled. “Even Cloudkit. He’s catching up to you quickly!”

“Oh, Cloudkit is weaning well,” Bristlefrost commented. “I may not need borage now.”

“That was another question,” Eagleheart chuffed. “You know, you may be able to go to the next gathering. Squirrelflight is more than happy to stay behind and care for the kits.”

“Can we come, too?” Nightkit pleaded. “We’re big cats now!”

“No,” Eagleheart mewed. “You may be big cats, but you need to be an apprentice to go. You need to focus on growing even bigger.”

“Well, I’m going to be the biggest apprentice,” Nightkit announced. “I’m going to go to every gathering. I will fight off all the rogues and stinky WindClan cats. Maybe I will even fight a huge badger!” He turned to Bristlefrost. “Can we get badger rides from the elders?”

Bristlefrost nodded, and the kit rushed to the elder’s den. Eagleheart bid Bristlefrost farewell and went to see what the other kits were up to. Cloudkit was batting at a feather, trying to get it in his jaws. After a while, the orange-and-white kit did just that, and pranced towards Sorrelpaw with a gleam of mischief in his eyes. Sorrelpaw was licking her tail, unknowing of Cloudkit starting to tickle her on the back with the feather.

“Cut it out!” Sorrelpaw hissed as she jumped. “I thought you were a fox!”

“But” Cloudkit mewed.

Sorrelpaw glared at the kit. Eagleheart winced. Sorrelpaw was usually the sweetest cat in the Clan. She always did her chores, helped wash her peers, and was eager to help. But she didn't seem to like Cloudkit all too much. Perhaps it was because the kit was prone to making rambunctious decisions.

“I'm sorry,” Cloudkit mewed.

Sorrelpaw sighed. “Me, too. Training is hard. Sometimes I just need to relax alone.” Cloudkit nodded and scurried towards Ratpaw to annoy her, Eagleheart presumed. Despite Sorrelpaw's kindness and willingness to listen, she was a boldly spoken cat. She was a natural leader amongst the kits and apprentices, and they knew better than to disobey her judgment. She finished licking her tail, flattening her puffy fur from being startled. She then curled up in a sunbeam to bathe in the late newleaf heat.

Eagleheart joined the apprentice. The two chatted about training, and their shared traits of kindness and clumsiness. Sorrelpaw asked Eagleheart for some mouse bile to tend the elders with. Eagleheart proudly nodded, knowing the apprentice was offering to help without being asked prior. Despite the traitors recently being exiled after festering in the Clan, they clearly never affected the loyalty of ThunderClan's next generation.

*We're in good paws now.*

## Chapter 20

“Alright, apprentices!” Brambleheart called. “Today, we are doing patrol training.”

It was a beautiful sunny day. Brambleheart had been training Ashpaw for quite a while now. The young apprentice was thriving now, improving and almost surpassing his peers in hunting and tracking skills. Today, Brambleheart was working with Hawkfeather, Ravenwing, and Twigbranch on a group exercise. The apprentices were to pretend that they were on a patrol. The mentors would pretend to be certain creatures, or create certain scenarios. This way, the apprentices could learn how to manage situations in a non-emergency scenario to better prepare themselves for dealing with them in real life.

“I want to lead!” Tinypaw announced.

“No, I want to!” Sorrelpaw trilled.

“Tinypaw can lead first, and Sorrelpaw can later,” Brambleheart mewed. She hid with the other mentors in the bushes, waiting before they would jump out with the first problem.

Twigbranch was crouching next to Brambleheart. Being Brambleheart's mentor herself, they often worked together with their apprentices. Ratpaw could be grumpy, but was developing a close bond with Ashpaw. "Good job mediating the apprentices," Twigbranch praised. "I'm thinking we make an easy scenario— trespassing warriors."

"That's a good idea," Brambleheart replied. "Which Clan?"

"ShadowClan would do," Hawkfeather replied. The mentors nodded, and leapt out of the bushes.

"Who goes there?" Ratpaw hissed.

"We're ShadowClan cats!" Ravenwing growled.

"Maybe he's Ravenheart," Hawkfeather whispered in Brambleheart's ear. It took everything for Brambleheart not to snort in laughter.

"No wonder why you stink!" Sorrelpaw growled. "You need to leave now!"

"Why should we?" Hawkfeather said. He sat down. "We were just catching a shrew."

"Because it's our shrew!" Ratpaw snarled. "It's on our territory!"

"But it ran from ours," Twigbranch mewed.

“It crossed the border, and you did too!” Ashpaw retorted. “We don;t want to fight, but we need you gone!”

“Or else what?” Brambleheart asked.

“Or else or else we will tell Bramblestar! And Tigerstar!” Tinypaw hissed. “Leave, or we will make you!”

Brambleheart swished her tail, signaling that the scenario was over. “Good job,” she praised. “We don’t always want to spill blood. But the code states that no cat should trespass, no matter what. And you did the right thing, threatening to get the leaders involved.”

The patrol training continued with another scenario, this one being scenting a fox. The apprentices correctly decided to investigate without getting too close to the source, and report to the deputy about their discovery. Two fake patrols wore the apprentices out, so the training ended. Brambleheart walked back to Camp with Ashpaw.

“How was training?” she asked her apprentice.

“Good. It was really fun! I learned a lot,” the gray tom replied.

“That’s awesome!” Brambleheart blinked. “You are doing really well, too. We may have your first assessment soon.”

Ashpaw tensed up a bit, clearly afraid of being tested. Brambleheart gave him a gentle lick. “Don’t worry. It won’t be hard. And if you don’t do well, we will practice a lot with the training!” Ashpaw was relieved. This kind of conversation would never happen with Rosecloud, who treated every small and honest mistake as a sign of Ashpaw being a failure. But he was quite the opposite.

Ashpaw then started sharing with Brambleheart the stories that the elders had told him that morning. He was talking about how he learned about Darkstripe– another bad mentor. Darkstripe had many apprentices, and although he was a tough mentor, it was poisoning a kit that had gotten him exiled.

“I won’t let anyone hurt the kits,” Brambleheart mewed. “I will make sure you and our Clanmates will never feel scared, for as long as I live.”

Turn the page for a Bonus Scene!

## Chapter 1

Appleshine was sunning on a rock. Her favorite thing about being a WindClan warrior was the feeling of freedom and openness that came with the moor. Cats slept outside camp, saw the entire sky when hunting, and had no undergrowth to block their path. *I don't know how Stoattail lives like that, all cramped up in brambles and thistles.*

Ever since her littermate left the Clan, Appleshine had felt very lonely. She was one of the only young warriors in the Clan. Her sisters were nice, and the kits had boundless energy. But Appleshine was still bored by talk of the grass growing, and too old to relate to the kits' fears of the grass's shadow.

What made Appleshine truly happy was listening to tales of her ancestors. The last remaining elders were killed in the Great Freeze, but the senior warriors were overcompensating for the lack of remarks about how life was in their day. Appleshine was enthralled by tales of Crowfeather going on the Great Journey, how WindClan and ThunderClan came together to fight badgers and to drive out Mudclaw's coup. It gave Appleshine hope. If Stoattail was in a rival Clan, the two littermates would have to fight— a lot. But if WindClan's relations with ThunderClan

remained strong, then they could instead work together, just as they had as kits and young apprentices.

“Hello, Appleshine,” Her thoughts were broken by Crowfeather himself standing over her. The deputy was organizing patrols for the day. “Would you like to go hunting near the ThunderClan border?”

“Yes!” Appleshine accepted the offer. “Who am I going with?”

“Well, I was going to appoint Breezepelt,” Crowfeather sighed, “but he told me he had a late night. So I’m thinking of coming with you myself! We’ll leave tonight.”

Appleshine nodded, beaming. She was going on a patrol with the Clan deputy! Appleshine needed to be on tip-top behavior. The Gathering was tomorrow, and she hoped she could go. Last moon, she wasn’t chosen to go. She had just become a warrior and needed to sit her silent vigil. But this moon, she really wanted to catch up with Stoatail; and her friends, Ravenheart and Bramblepaw.

She took a gopher from the fresh-kill pile, curled up, and ate it. She would need all the energy she could get to show off her skills to Crowfeather!

## Chapter 2

The moon was nearly full, and its light illuminated the moor, providing clear sight for eager hunters taking advantage of it. WindClan wasn't known for night hunting, but it would be foolish not to hunt with the moon shining through the clear territory.

Appleshine followed Crowfeather. The dark gray tom was leading her towards the stream. There, they would try to catch prey using the moonlight to drink from the stream. Sure enough, a large hare was grazing near the water's edge.

"Let's try to get that hare," Appleshine mewed, pointing her tail to the prey. "It would feed a lot of cats!"

"Yes. I will startle it, and you can chase it. You are a lot faster than me, but I can catch up if you need to," Crowfeather said. Appleshine nodded and went away to let Crowfeather do his job. The deputy was getting older, and a bit slower with his age. But that didn't stop him from being one of the best hunters than even several of the younger cats.

Crowfeather stalked the hare, and pounced on it. The hare, detecting a car with its large ears, bounded exactly in the direction that Appleshine anticipated. Appleshine intercepted the hare, which was then cornered between her and Crowfeather. Appleshine pounced on the hare, giving a swift nip on the neck.

“Thank you, StarClan, for the prey,” Appleshine prayed. “It will feed Featherpelt and her growing kits!”

Crowfeather muttered something similar while staring at the stream. Appleshine looked too, and her eyes widened.

*ThunderClan cats!*

The cats were silhouetted by the moon, appearing as grayish shapes from the distance. Appleshine exchanged glances with Crowfeather, before examining the cats even closer. There were two cats, seemingly speaking with a single other. Maybe they were on patrol, too! But the shapes seemed oddly lean for ThunderClan cats. They were usually more muscular with thicker fur. But these cats had thin, short fur, and looked lean and lithe. The breeze shifted, carrying the scent of ThunderClan across the stream. But also...

“Crowfeather,” Appleshine gasped. “I think those are WindClan cats!”

“Indeed they are,” Crowfeather hissed.

“Well, shouldn’t we get them?” Appleshine asked.

‘We could,’ Crowfeather mewed. ‘But many ThunderClan cats know my scent. It would be more suspicious if a deputy crossed the border, especially with our prey-scent.’

‘Should we tell Harestar?’

‘You know how he is,’ Crowfeather grunted. ‘Not willing to make a fuss about anything until he knows who to punish. He’ll think we’re feather-brains. I will address this myself at the gathering. Bramblestar deserves to know.’

### Chapter 3

Appleshine teetered across the Island bridge. She thought of the story of Mudclaw, and how his death was StarClan's way of giving the Clans a place to gather. It was strange that she had crossed a tree so many times that had killed a Clanmate moons ago.

ThunderClan had just arrived before. Cats were finding their friends and cliques to sit with. Appleshine wanted to do the same, but wished to speak with Stoattail first. She found her brother pacing around the Island impatiently. He looked exhausted.

"Hi, Stoattail!" Appleshine greeted. "It's go great to see each other as warriors!"

Stoattail took an uncharacteristic while to respond. "Indeed it is," he said coolly. "Do you know if Breezepelt is present?"

"Um... I think so," Appleshine replied. "But—" It was too late. Stoattail ran to the entrance, watching cats from ThunderClan and WindClan file through the bridge and entrance. Appleshine felt a twinge of dread and sadness. She and Stoattail had been so very close when they were

younger. When he had first left WindClan, he and Appleshine would always keep in touch in Gatherings. But ever since he had become close to Rosecloud, and especially after becoming a warrior, it was almost as if he had forgotten Appleshine even existed.

Appleshine shook her head. They both had their own lives now. She needed to move on, as Stoattail sure had. She padded around the Island until she found Ravenheart and Sunbeam. The two ShadowClan cats happily made room for her to sit, and chatted with her about how she was faring after earning her Clan name.

Shortly after, Bramblepaw joined them. It was very awkward, as the two cats discovered that they had earned their Clan names. Brambleheart had missed the last Gathering herself, as she was recovering from a bad case of greencough.

And as promised, Crowfeather told the Clans about the suspicious activity at the border. Appleshine stared at Stoattail, whose hackles slightly raised. He must have been one of the cats, but why? Why would he hang out with WindClan warriors, but not his own sister? *Stoattail has really changed.* Appleshine was frightened by it. Was Stoattail working with the mysterious WindClan cats? And why was he betraying his Clan, unless he was helping those cats to betray theirs?

*What has happened to my brother?*