

Warriors: Forest's Blood

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Blackkit/paw has a long history... A long painful history, and when trouble comes to the forest, it must be revealed.

"A danger will come to the forest...And it will be stopped only by your blood."

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Warriors: Forest's Blood

By Kirsten Wheeler

CHAPTER ONE

"It was your fault," yowled a tom angrily. "And you know it!"

"No," sounded a she-cat in pure desperation. "It was not I! It was not I, I swear! It was-" but the she-cat's sentence was cut short, interrupted by a cry of pain, then blood gurgling. Blackkit howled, guessing what had happened to the she-cat.

"Quiet, Blackkit! Do you want another scar to remember us by?"

A flash of pain quieted the kit as she remembered the deep cut that never healed, still dripping blood, running from her ear through her eye, and down to the tip of her small nose. A new wave of pain came flooding, but she held her tongue in fear of a new scar. Blackkit whimpered, she could not hold it in. She yowled as loud as a kit can yowl, feeling claws raking her small leg, then a ferocious bite on her tail. She backed away blindly, as her eyes had not yet opened. Blackkit's leg hit a mound of fur. With a jolt of fear, she knew what it was. It was one of her dead brothers.

She'd had enough. This cat was a murderer. He had killed all three of her brothers, and this she-cat. He'd probably killed her parents, too. She scented the large tom, then unsheathed her tiny claws, and pounced.

A surprised growl came from the tom, and he flung her off. Blackkit knew she was no match for this large, powerful tom, and ran to where she scented a forest, hitting leaves immediately. *Keep on running*, she thought. *I will find someone eventually. Or someone will find me.*

* * *

Blackkit squealed in surprise as a bright light filtered through the tree she had slept under in the night. *My eyes have opened!* She thought happily. *If only I could see that horrible cat, so I can get revenge later when I am strong.* She remembered the horrible event that had happened just yesterday. She padded over to a stream, and looked at her reflection.

Suddenly Blackkit realized that only one of her eyes was opened. The one without the scar. A flash of fear and hope washed over her as she wondered if that eye would ever work. *Maybe it has just been... delayed.* She thought hopefully. She proudly admired her black pelt, with a white blotch on her chest, and one over her good eye and nose. She already knew she had one on her tail. The bloody scar made the small kit flinch, backing away from the stream. Feeling older than the few moons she was, she padded onward through the forest, holding her tail high.

Blackkit wandered aimlessly, knowing she would soon die of starvation, if not any other sickness, so the kit enjoyed the rich colors and smells of the forest while she could.

Suddenly, she was being lifted up, by the scruff of fur on her neck. "Reooow!" She squealed.

"It's ok, it's ok," Said a calm voice quickly. "I'm not going to hurt you, I'm going to take care of you."

Blackkit twisted her head to see who-- or what was carrying her. It was another cat, but larger in size. A she-cat, white with ginger splotches on her chest. She stared at the cat. The cat stared back. She was staring at the scar.

"How did you do that?" asked the she cat, panicking. "Never mind, it doesn't matter. We need to get you to Leopardheart, now!"

"Who--" Blackkit began to say,

"Our medicine cat. By the way, my name is Gingerhunt." Interrupted the she-cat. "Don't worry, you'll be safe." Gingerhunt laughed, reading the expression on Blackkit's face.

The two cats reached a ravine. Gingerhunt was panting by the time she took the kit through the tunnel.

"Welcome to ThunderClan." Gaspd the cat, putting down the kit in the middle of a large clearing, filled with cats. Blackkit looked around in amazement. There were three dens, and a large rock with a den carved into it. There was, on one side of the clearing, a pile filled with prey, fresh caught. A gray cat padded over to it, picked up a large, fat mouse. All around the clearing where cats laying side my side, talking to and licking each other.

"They are sharing tongues." Gingerhunt answered her silent question, shaking her head with relief to have the weight of the kit off her. "Now, come. You must see Fightingstar, our leader," She led Blackkit to the large rock, then to the entrance of the den. "Fightingstar? I must see you."

"Enter." said a voice from inside the hollow rock. Gingerhunt led her through the lichen-draped entrance and down through the tunnel. In the den lay a cat that looked like fire. He looked calmly at Blackkit.

"And who is this?" He asked Gingerhunt.

"I don't know," She replied hastily. "I found her wandering through the forest. She has no clan scent, but smells faintly of kittypet and loner."

"Yes I can tell," replied Fightingstar. "Do you know her name?"

"No, Fightingstar" Gingerhunt said, sending Blackkit a plea to remain silent. The small kit decided to obey, and held her tongue.

"I will decide on something by tomorrow at sunhigh," Fightingstar said thoughtfully, then flicking his tail dismissively, laid his hands on his paws to think. "That kit is starving. Go find a queen to give her milk.

Gingerhunt picked up Blackkit and carried her out of the den. In the clearing, she headed towards another den, and squeezed through the tight entrance.

"This is the nursery, where the kits and queens, or mothers, are. We'll find you a queen to take care of you."

She wove her way through nests, Blackkit swinging around from her powerful jaws. She stopped in front of a pale she-cat. "Mousepelt, will you--"

"What are you doing to that poor kit? Don't let it swing like that" Snapped Mousepelt.

"Sorry..." Murmured Gingerhunt through Blackkit's dark fur.

"You haven't learned yet, don't worry." Said Mousepelt, edging one of her wandering kits closer to her. "Now, what are you here for?"

"I was wondering if you could take care of this kit. I found her stranded in the woods. Fightingstar's orders..."

"Alright..." Quietly replied Mousepelt, eyeing Blackkit warily. She craned her head to sniff the kit. "She's hungry; put her down and let her eat. She's a little older than my other kits, but she still can't eat meat."

Gingerhunt bent over and gently put down the kit, who crawled in a desperate sort of way, to get the queen's milk.

Gingerhunt hastily left the nursery, flicking her tail with satisfaction.

"Young warriors," Sniffed Mousepelt with a satisfaction of her own. "I remember when I was one... Anyways, hello there little girl. Can you speak?"

"Yes," mumbled Blackkit quietly. "My name is Blackkit."

"Well, Blackkit, you need to see Leopardheart," said Mousepelt with a motherly tone in her voice. "GRAACEPAAAW!" She called.

One of the other queens sternly told her, "Are you trying to make us all deaf?"

"Well look at this poor kits face! She can't go alone, and I can't leave these kits!" She told the queen.

Just then a gray medium-sized cat walked in. "Yes?"

"Can you escort Blackkit here to our medicine cat, Leopardheart?"

The gray cat gave a puzzled look at the small intruder in the clan. But, instead of saying anything, he nodded, and padded over to the kit, and nudged her.

"Thank you, young apprentice." meowed Mousepelt, behind them.

Gracepaw led her through the clearing to the den far to the right. They went in, walking past piles of assorted herbs, then to a large rock with a crack in it. "Leopardheart? I need you!" Gracepaw called through the crack. He glanced at Blackkit's face. "It's sort of... big." He added.

A sleek pale tom with dark splotches on his back came rushing out of the crack. "What- The kit? Poor thing... I'll get right on it." Leopardheart said, then rushed to one of the piles.

What is he doing? Thought Blackkit, watching him warily. I'm so confused! I just want to live a simple, easy life! This is too confusing!

The cat came back to him with two different plants. "These are poppy seeds," He said, laying them down in front of him. "Eat them, and they'll take some of the pain away." Relief washed over Blackkit as she heard the pain would go soon. "And these," Continued Leopardheart, "Are cobwebs, and I'm going to put them on the wound."

"Will they sting?" asked Blackkit nervously.

"Yes," said Gracepaw "But just a little bit" He added hastily.

Leopardheart wrapped the cobwebs around his paw, and then pressed the cobwebs against the wound, making Blackkit flinch. He kept it there for a few seconds, then backed away. He then nudged two poppy seeds towards Blackkit.

I...I guess I better eat them. she thought nervously, then licked them up nervously. Well I hope they're not trying to kill me...Well, either way, it wouldn't be the first time someone has tried to...

"Let me see your eye." Leopardheart said, moving closer. He inspected it, then surprisingly, the other one, too. "This one opened recently?"

"Yes," Said Blackkit "Just today... Will the other one work?"

"I can't say..." Said Leopardheart, still looking at Blackkit's eye.

"But it HAS to work!" she panicked, "How will I survive!" Blackkit ran in a circle.

A deep voice sounded. It was Fightingstar. "You won't, unless you join a clan, or go to a kittypet home." He acknowledged Gracepaw and Leopardheart with a nod. "If you don't mind, I'd like to speak with young Blackkit alone. I will take him to my den, if you are done with him?"

Leopardheart nodded, and Fightingstar took Blackkit and brought her out of Leopardheart's den. They went through the clearing, and all of the other cats stared at Fightingstar, with the small kit placed in his firm jaws. Fightingstar didn't care, just kept on going to the den under the large rock.

CHAPTER TWO

"*Young kit, I would like to hear about your past,*" Fightingstar announced as soon as they reached his den. "I would like to hear all that you remember."

"Ok," replied Blackkit nervously. She was unsure about these cats. They seemed just like the murdering one. "All I remember was a horrible cat. He was big, and strong. He killed all of my brothers. My mother and father, too. The last time I saw him was killing a she-cat. He was going to kill me, too. But I ran away, into the forest."

"Did he give you that scar?" Fightingstar flicked his tail towards the sickening scar on Blackkit's face.

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"Yes," Blackkit's heart twisted as she revealed his past. "Before that, I had a mother, and one day that cat came. I didn't know he was so mean then, but after he left, my mother said she was going to get some more comfortable bedding, but she never came back. My brothers and I were left all alone, but eventually the big cat came and took care of us... he protected us, but he still was so mean. This went on, but he knew we were starving. It was so cold, and he couldn't take care of himself either. But anyway, he was so mean to us! He batted us around as he pleased. He killed one of my brothers that way. But he didn't care. Much, much later, a strange she cat came to live with us. She was angry, and took her anger out on us kits, along with the big cat. He and she fought a lot, and I think--" But Blackkit's sentence was cut short as a sickening feeling came over her, remembering what had happened so recently.

"That's ok. You do not have to tell me, if you wish not too."

Blackkit nodded warily, feeling like she would fall over.

"Just one more thing," Fightingstar continued, "You have a warrior name but have not been born in a clan. How did you get your name?"

"I-I don't remember. I was just always called Blackkit," she hesitated, then said "by the big strong cat..."

"Will you describe him?" Fightingstar inquired, unable to hide his curiosity.

Blackkit nodded. "Well, he was strong and muscular," she began, a lump in her throat was rising. "and his pelt—" but the lump exploded. Memories blasted through her head and she fell over, unconscious.

* * *

"Yes...she'll...ok." said a voice.

Blackkit blinked her eyes open, to see a cloudy sky hanging above her. A cat leaned over her, and she recognized him as Leopardheart.

"Are you sure?" asked a nervous voice. It was Fightingstar.

"What did I just say? She'll be ok. Oh, there you are. How are you feeling?" he asked Blackkit. She blinked. Mixed feelings washed over her. Anger burst through her chest, but sadness soon swept over her. *I just want a normal life... I want a break!*

"I want to go home. I don't feel good! I don't like this. Where am I? Who are you? You look just like the horrible cat!" Blackkit voiced her thoughts.

Fightingstar cast an uneasy, questionable glance at Leopardheart, who hesitated, then flicked his tail. An apprentice bounded at Leopardheart's bidding.

"Yes? Can I help you?" inquired the apprentice, dipping his head respectfully.

"Windpaw, please take young Blackkit here to Mousepelt. She will know what to do." Windpaw nodded, and Leopardheart murmured a thanks. They left the two cats to speak alone.

Windpaw lead Blackkit through a group of cats that had been crowded around where she had woken. She just noticed they'd been there the whole time. As Blackkit followed the apprentice into the nursery, the group began to break up. Cats went into groups, gossiping about the newer cat.

"Mousepelt?" called Windpaw, "Blackkit is here..."

"Yes, yes. Hello, there, Blackkit. Come, you're probably hungry." she said, nudging Blackkit to her stomach.

"Starving..." muttered Blackkit.

Windpaw left the nursery at a yowl. He padded out, twisting his head to watch the kit join the others by Mousepelt.

After having some of Mousepelt's milk, Blackkit curled up in the crook of her shoulder and sank into sleep.

Claws slashed at Blackkit's small body. As they faded back into the darkness, Blackkit panted. She'd been dodging things for a while now, and felt tired. Suddenly a cat's face popped out of the darkness, snarling, its teeth bared. It lunged for Blackkit. She tried to dodge it, but its aim was true and it collided into her, and a burning pain came through.

"Blackkit Blackkit! Are you Ok? You've been screaming all night!" said a voice, who Blackkit recognized as Mousepelt.

Blackkit hesitated, and then said, "Yes, it was just a dream. I'll go back to sleep." she looked at the quarter moon outside the nursery. For a minute she thought she saw eyes flashing at the entrance, but then shook her head and they were gone. She yawned, feeling confused.

"Ok. But if you can't sleep, you're welcome to tell me about your dream." She said, the motherly tone returning to her voice.

But Blackkit curled back up, and so did the queen. Blackkit was shaken about her dream, and knew she wouldn't be able to go back to sleep, and waited for the queen. Soon, she felt the rhythmic rise and fall of her belly, and stood up quietly. She padded out of the den and into the clearing. Blackkit strode to the center of the clearing and gazed up to the stars. *Silverpelt*, thought Blackkit. *That's what somebody called it...*

She twisted around to face Leopardheart sitting next to her. "You act older than you really are." He told her thoughtfully.

"I-I guess I'm just confused." She told him, looking back up.

"Wise, too." He studied the stars as if they told him the answers of life.

"Why are the stars so special? Asked Blackkit, watching him anxiously. He seemed so close to them!

"Silverpelt," he began, using the word another cat had called it before, "is where the cats of StarClan are. They are dead warriors. StarClan control all. They help us survive, sending us prophecies, and more."

Blackkit nodded in understanding. *Wow*, she thought, *these cats are amazing! They've got this whole world around them, and they use it!*

She looked back up at the sky in awe, wondering if there really were warriors up there. She believed in StarClan though. She didn't doubt it for a second. Minutes past, and Blackkit almost forgot that Leopardheart was still there, but she could smell his scent which was lingering beside her. A new scent came, and she whirled around to face it, crouching and ready to spring if needed. But it was only Fightingstar. To her surprise, when she saw it was him, a good feeling left her chest. *I think I wanted a battle!* She thought awkwardly.

She looked at Fightingstar, who'd been watching her. "The battle in her eyes faded away when she recognized me." He mentioned to Leopardheart with pleasure, "She'll be a fighter. Now. How are you feeling?"

Blackkit sat back down, and nodded. "I'm ok. I just couldn't sleep." She told him.

"Well you really need to get some. You're exhausted." Leopardheart informed her. He nudged her back to the nursery. "Go to sleep."

Blackkit nodded, and with heavy paws, trudged back to her den. She entered warily, then curled up beside Mousepelt.

"Blackkit is only a kit, and has been through too much." Said Leopardheart from outside

"I know that. But she has all the stuff for a warrior. And she has shown signs early. Her brothers were all murdered, and she was supposed to also. But she survived. I know that she will do fine here." Replied Fightingstar.

The conversation went on, but was blurred as Blackkit fell into darkness.

* * *

Swimming up from the depths of sleep, Blackkit yawned and stretched. A yowl rang out, and Mousepelt also got up. "Come, Fightingstar had called a clan meeting about you." She picked up Blackkit and left her other kits with a white queen with pale blue eyes.

Almost the whole clan was seated by the rock with the den in it.

"This is highrock." Muttered Mousepelt watching Fightingstar,

who was waiting patiently on top. He spotted Blackkit, and beckoned her with his tail. She padded over to the base of the rock.

"Come up here" Fightingstar told her. Blackkit worked her way up the rock, unable to leap up like the bigger cats. Eventually she was at the top, and stood by the ThunderClan leader. She peered down at all the other cats below. She looked up at Fightingstar with delight. A glimmer in his eye sparkled as he watched her jump around the rock until she panted.

He twitched his tail and yowled to the cats below, "As you may have noticed, we've a new guest in our clan. This small cat here is called Blackkit."

"She smells like a *kittypet!*" A cat yowled angrily.

"No, a loner!"

The crowd buzzed with excitement, cats hissing and whispering to each other in tight groups.

"Silence!" said Fightingstar quickly. When all cats had full his full attention, he continued. "This small kit was found helpless in the forest. Wounded, starving, and dying. Gingerhunt found her and brought her to Mousepelt, who gave her milk. Leopardheart took care of her wounds." Blackkit flinched at being reminded of the fresh wounds on her leg, tail, and the horrible one across her face. She'd others, but they were smaller ones. Leopardheart noticed her flinch, and nodded encouragingly.

"Why does she smell like that though?"

“Blackkit has a long history,” Fightingstar began. Once again, mixed feelings burst through her chest, but she held them away, worrying of going unconscious and falling off the rock. Fightingstar cast a side glance and saw Blackkit's uneasy feelings through. He pressed his flank into hers comfortably and waited for her to calm before continuing. “Blackkit—” he hesitated “Would you like to tell your story?”

She rolled the thoughts around in her head, then finally said shook her head. Fightingstar cocked his head, but shrugged it off.

“Ok then.” He continued, “Well, she had three other brothers—” But Blackkit interrupted him.

“No...”

“What?” queried a confused looking Fightingstar.

“I don't want them to know,” she muttered close to his ear. She noticed the other cats straining their ears to hear what she said. “it's a really horrible story...”

Fightingstar hesitated for what seemed to be moons, and then nodded in understanding. He marveled at how intelligent she was for a kit.

“If she accepts, she will join the clan and become a warrior. Blackkit, will you join our clan? You will become an apprentice at six moons, and train to be a warrior. You will follow the warrior code, which you shall learn. Will you join ThunderClan?” he asked

“I will.” She told him. She felt like a warrior already.

“Then welcome to the clan.” He said, pride filling his eyes.

The cats below muttered wildly. When the clan leader flicked his tail the cats broke up into tight groups and muttered excitedly. Fightingstar turned to face her.

“How are your wounds?” he asked, eyeing them with sympathy.

“Oh, they're fine. They don't really hurt.” She lied. *Warriors don't complain about them* she thought. But she felt the pain still there.

A light showed her that Fightingstar knew she was lying. “Go see Leopardheart again.” He told her.

Blackkit sighed and nodded, and hopped down from the highrock then padded over to Leopardheart's den. He was waiting outside.

“Let me see that tail of yours.” He spun her around and looked at it. “That should be ok, just a bite. I need to put some more herbs on your eye though.” Leopardheart picked up a pasty substance from the ground which was on a leaf. He gently put it on her scar, then wrapped some cobwebs around his paw and pressed them on.

When he finished, Blackkit pranced around the camp. A cat stopped her.

“Hi, Blackkit!” she said cheerfully. She was also a kit, gray with black spots and a white chest.

“Hi!” Blackkit said back. She was grateful to see another cat as young as her. All of the cats she'd seen until then were older than her.

“My name is Rainkit. Wanna playfight?” Rainkit asked, tensing her muscles as if they were already playing.

“Ok!”

Blackkit sprang, ready to pounce on Rainkit square on the shoulders, but she jumped out of the way, and Blackkit missed by less than an inch. Thinking fast, she stuck her paw out and caught Rainkit by the leg. This knocked her off balance, and she was pulled back. But the momentum of her body was already pushing her, and Rainkit's body twisted, fighting against itself. She landed on the ground with a thud, and Blackkit pinned her down, feeling victorious.

“Yay!” She cried.

“Alright, alright, you won. Now let me up you big furball!” mewed Rainkit goodheartedly. Blackkit did so and Rainkit began to lick her fur, getting the dirt out of it.

“You know,” she told Blackkit between licks, “I'm the best kit at fighting, and you just beat me! That makes you the best kit-fighter!”

“Really?”

“Yep. C'mon! Let's go find and tell the other kits!”

“So there are other kits! You're the first one I've seen.” Blackkit told her.

“Yes. They're eating and sleeping until right about now.” Rainkit informed her. “Come one, let's go see if anybody's ready to play!”

But a yowl interrupted them. “RAAAAANKIT!” Rainkit's eyes narrowed in frustration.

“That's my mother. I have to go. We'll tell the kits later. Bye!” she said grimly. Blackkit murmured goodbye and watched Rainkit bound away towards the nursery. She spotted a shadow on the ground cast by nothing next to the nursery.

Huh? What's that? Wondered Blackkit. Hmm... There's nothing to cast it! I'll go investigate! And she bounded off towards the nursery; just in case another cat saw her and asked her where she was going she could say, `To the nursery'.

When Blackkit arrived at the nursery, she turned to see if anybody was watching her. It was all clear, so she quickly strode around to the shadow. She went and stood in front of it, only to find it wasn't a shadow, but a hole. The kit could not see the hole's bottom, only darkness. *Smells funny...* thought

Blackkit nervously. *A bit like mouse, vole...bird...all sorts of prey... I wonder why!*

She put her paw down in the hole, to see if she could feel its bottom, but it just wasn't there.

"It's a never-ending hole!" she exclaimed out loud. There was a shuffle of leaves, and Blackkit froze in horror as she realized that another cat had heard her, and was coming over. She'd no choice but to jump in to hide. The kit hopped forward, then plunged into the darkness. The hole did end, as she hit the ground with a thud. She stood up, shaking herself madly, as if it would fix her problems, and then looked around, only to see nothing. But there were walls around her, as she bumped into them. *Oh no!* she worried what she would do next. *I'm stuck, but if I get help, everybody will start asking questions! What will I do?*

There was a scuffling noise above her as she saw the outline of a cat's head above. A leaf fell down.

"Hello?" called the cat, "Is anybody down there?"

CHAPTER 3

Blackkit froze in horror as she saw the cat. She couldn't be found! I'd be in so much trouble! I shouldn't have been sneaking around camp! She thought disdainfully. The kit didn't say anything to the cat above, and luckily, the cat above didn't even know she was there. *She didn't even smell my scent!*

The head popped out of the hole, but Blackkit waited until she was sure the other cat was gone before moving, just in case it decided to make sure there was nobody in the hole. Angrily, she kicked the wall with her hind leg.

Thud!

Confused, she kicked it again, but this time, it cracked. She backed up to the wall, then body slammed the cracked one as hard as she could, and there was a loud thud, and the whole wall collapsed. Blackkit gaped in surprise, sticking a paw in experimentally. When nothing came out, she poked her head in, then her whole body. It was a tunnel! The kit wandered aimlessly down it, her pawsteps echoing in the murky darkness. To the kit's silent protest, it led to a dead end. *Hmm... If it worked last time...* she thought, and she body slammed the wall. *It didn't break...But it sounded hollow!* She kept on body slamming it, accomplishing nothing.

"Mouse dung!" she said to herself, and with a heavy heart, Blackkit began to trudge back through the tunnel, then came up with an idea. She turned back to the wall, unsheathed her claws, and began to dig into the wall. *Phew!* She realized happily, *I didn't lose this adventure after all! I can still get to the other side of this wall!*

Soon, hunger twisted her stomach, and she wondered how long she'd been digging. *Uh-oh! Mousepelt must be worried sick!* Blackkit turned and bounded back to the tunnel entrance. Reaching there, she dug a hole in the wall to put her paw in, wondering why she hadn't thought of that before. Soon, she'd a type of ingrown ladder that she could climb up to the outside world.

She'd gone in at about sunhigh, and the sun had long since sunk now, and the moon was high in the sky. Worried, Blackkit crawled through the small entrance of the nursery, and over to Mousepelt, who licked the top of her head furiously.

"Where... have you been... all day?" meowed Mousepelt between licks. Her eyes were filled with worry.

"Exploring the camp!" mewed Blackkit excitedly. "And I met another kit! Her name is Rainkit! She's fun. She's my new best friend! We're gonna play together every day!"

"Oh...I see. Well I was very nervous. But as long as your safe now." Said the queen, with a motherly tone in her voice. "I hope you have fun with your new friend. Now, it's time for sleep. Good night, Blackkit."

"Good night." Murmured Blackkit, curling up by the other kits, who were much younger than her. Before drifting off to sleep, Blackkit thought she saw, again, a flash of eyes at the entrance of the nursery.

* * *

Blackkit darted out of the nursery, undetected. She plunged down the hole, bidding farewell to the last bit of light, which was the moon, high in the sky. She bounded blindly down the dark tunnel, reaching the dead end.

Unsheathing her claws, she dug her claws into the hole she'd been digging for days. It was very deep. She pounded her whole paw into the dirt, and winced as she hit a rock. Digging it out, it left a hole! It was a tiny hole, but she could make it big enough for herself to fit through! With new energy the kit attempted to make the hole bigger, and soon, she could fit her paw in it. But she was getting tired, and her muscles flexed as she kept driving her paw. *I can't do this!* She thought sadly. *There has to be another way to do this! A shortcut...* suddenly, an idea sprang into her head.

Backing up, Blackkit crouched down, then sprinted with her belly close to the ground and sprang, not even bringing back her head collided into the wall, with all her strength. It exploded, and Blackkit was sent flying through. She'd done it! The wall was broke and she was through!

Looking around, she found herself in a sandy underground hollow. *With light!* She noticed, peering up. The hollow was covered by a bush, with light filtering through its leaves, lighting the area. *It's just like an arena!* Then, an idea leaped into her head. She could use this as a battle arena with the other kits! It would be so fun! Excitement gripped Blackkit as she bounded back through the tunnel, up the hole, and

back through camp.

Turning around, and wandering through camp, she looked for Rainkit. Blackkit had decided she wanted her to be the first to know. Spotting her coming out of the nursery, Blackkit met her.

“Hi Blackkit!” exclaimed the kit happily. Blackkit murmured a greeting, and then got right to the point. “Rainkit, I need to show you something. Will you follow me?”

“Alright,” she replied, examining her friend suspiciously. “But will you tell me where you've been lately, and how in StarClan you've gotten so muscular?” With a jolt, Blackkit realized that digging the hole had made her as strong and muscular as a warrior. *But I'm only a kit!* She protested silently.

“Yes, it'll explain,” mumbled Blackkit. “Just follow me.” And with that she padded away toward the hole. When she reached it, she turned to Rainkit, who said, “You want to know what it is? It's the extra fresh-kill storage hole for leaf-bare. Now how does that explain how you're so strong?”

“It doesn't...yet.” Her friend looked expectantly at her. Sighing, Blackkit began to explain. “Well, one day after playing with you, I saw that hole. At first I thought it was a shadow, but when I went over to see it, I fell in, and thought I was stuck. I got so frustrated I slammed into the wall and it collapsed, and left a tunnel. It was cool! Well anyway, I went down the tunnel, but there was a dead end, so I dug. I just kept digging for days, and days. THAT'S where I've been. So, then I was tired and wanted to get done so badly that I just ran into the wall and broke it. I was so happy! But it left something so cool. C'mon!” she exclaimed, then without waiting for a reply, hopped in the hole. She hit the ground, and a few moments later, she heard a soft thud beside her, signaling her friend had come in too. She led the way through the tunnel and into the clearing she'd discovered.

“Wow! It's amazing, Blackkit! And it's even lighted!” Rainkit exclaimed, staring at the bush-roof above her as if it were a fat mouse and she was starving. “So what's your idea?”

“Well... I thought maybe we could use this as a battle dome! It would be fun, don't you think?” asked Blackkit eagerly. She'd become anxious. *What if she hates my idea? Was all this work wasted?*

“That's a perfect idea!” yelled Rainkit, already trotting around the small clearing. She halted in front of her friend. “Let's go get them now!”

Blackkit nodded. “You go get them. I'll stay here, since I don't know where to find them.” And with that, Rainkit padded off. “Oh by the way, there's a built in ladder to get out at the entrance.” She yelled as her friend headed towards the entrance. She flicked her tail to show she heard. When she saw her friend's tail get drowned in the darkness, Blackkit sat down and admired all her work. She let her mind wander. *I hope the other kits like it as much as I do. It was really, really hard to make.* She thought. Then, changing the subject, *I wonder what the rest of ThunderClan thinks of me. I really like this clan, but what if they never accept me? After all, I'm an old kit and will become an apprentice soon. What if my mentor never accepts me? Just because my mother is a kittypet, and my father is a rogue... Or at least, they WERE. Until that horrible cat killed them!*

Suddenly she noticed the kits arrived, and shook her head to clear it. “Like it?” she asked her fellow kits. They all just nodded in awe, staring around them just like Rainkit did. Relief washed over Blackkit.

"It took forever to dig." She couldn't help but brag. After all, it was so hard to do!

"You dug this?" Asked one of the kits. His eyes filled with more awe, and there was a glow of admiration in his eyes.

"Yeah," she told him. It was a pale sand colored tom with a white nose and belly. "My name is Blackkit. What's yours?"

"Dustykit." He told her. The other kits stepped up, introducing themselves.

"Grasskit." Said a gray tom.

"Rosekit." Said an orange, almost reddish colored she-cat.

"Slidingkit." Another gray she-cat said.

"And I'm Berrykit." Mewed a tiny calico she-cat. Blackkit worried about her, being so small, and young, by the looks of it.

Rainkit was watching all of them. When they'd finished introducing themselves, she got up, and began to talk. "Everybody grab a partner to start with. We're having a competition now! It's time for the first round!" And the cats scattered, and then regrouped with each a partner. Berrykit was left out, to Blackkit's relief. She didn't want the small kit getting hurt. "She'll judge." Rainkit muttered in her ear. Nodding, she looked at the pairs. Dustykit was with Slidingkit. Rosekit was with Grasskit. "I'll be with you in the first round." Rainkit offered. When Blackkit nodded, she continued. "Dustykit and Slidingkit will be first. Then Rosekit and Grasskit. And we'll go last. Berrykit, it's all yours."

Berrykit murmured a thanks, then when the other cats backed out of the center of the arena, and the two first cats were up, she exclaimed, "Ready...FIGHT!" And with that, she backed away, and Dustykit flung himself at his opponent. Nimbly, Slidingkit hopped out of the way, and when Dustykit landed, she tackled him and knocked him off balance. Quickly, she jumped and landed on top of him, only to be thrown off by his power. Seeing this opportunity, Dustykit turned the tables and jumped on top of Slidingkit, who relaxed her shoulders. Dustykit yowled a victory call, but just then his opponent jumped up, keeping the battle going. The tom's eyes widened with surprise, and Slidingkit pinned him down, claiming victory.

Berrykit stepped forward. "Slidingkit has won and will advance to the next battle. Dustykit shall be eliminated. The next battle is between Rosekit and Grasskit!" the two kits stepped forward, and Berrykit continued. "Ready...FIGHT!" and she stepped back, allowing the two other kits to battle. Neither of them moved a muscle, but instead just stood there, watching each other. What exactly they were doing Blackkit didn't know, but eventually Grasskit faked to the right, then bounded left. Rosekit just watched her, her eyes flicking this way and that as Grasskit whirled around silently. Suddenly, the blurred kit faked left and back, and sprang on top of Rosekit, who mewed in surprise, being toppled over. She rolled on her side before Grasskit could hurt her stomach, and flung out her legs, hitting her opponent. Rosekit jumped, twisting in the air, and landed square on the shoulders of the attacking kit. They both collided in midair, and fell backwards, but Grasskit was faster, she scrambled up and, like the other kits had done, pinned Rosekit down. "I won!" she squealed happily, bouncing around. Rosekit stalked off to the side, and kicked a dirt stone across the arena. Casting a side glance at Rosekit, Berrykit said,

“Grasskit won this battle, and will continue on. Next, Rainkit shall battle Blackkit. Come up here.”

Obediently, the two friends walked over to the center, facing each other. “Ready?” Berrykit asked, and Blackkit’s heart lurched. She was about to battle her best friend, Rainkit! *I HAD beaten her before...But she was probably going easy on me...* She worried, uneasily. “Go!” She didn’t even realize the small kit had backed away from the battling ones. Instead, she watched her opponent carefully, when suddenly Rainkit sprang. Knowing she was stronger, Blackkit stood her ground, but got on her hind legs with her forepaws extended, and they hit her opponent’s stomach, flinging her back and hitting the ground with a thud. Seeing a window of chance with her enemy on the ground, she quickly pinned Rainkit and won. *Well that was easy.* Thought Blackkit proudly. *Fighting comes naturally to me, I guess.*

She realized the other cats were cheering, and turned her head to them. “Great job, I’ve never seen a battle that fast.” Laughed Grasskit.

“You made it look easy!” added Dustypelt.

“Nobody’s ever beaten her!” concluded Slidingkit, who was looking amazed but fearful. *She must be scared that she has to face me, soon.* Blackkit convinced herself.

“So who’s next?” asked Blackkit to Berrykit. She’d gained a new confidence after winning against Rainkit, although she couldn’t help but notice Rosekit, still pouting in the corner didn’t share their enthusiasm.

“First get off me you big furball!” stuttered Rainkit, from still under Blackkit’s large paws. “Sorry, Rainkit” mewed Blackkit apologetically, letting her friend up. Suddenly, she worried that her best friend didn’t like her anymore, and she searched her eyes for a clue. Finding only surprise and awe, she turned back to Berrykit. “So what do I do now?”

“Next, Slidingkit will battle Grasskit, and whoever wins that will go on to Blackkit.” She mewed, absorbed in the competition.

Nodding, Blackkit moved back, letting Slidingkit and Grasskit slide into place. “Ready...GO!” and Berrykit stepped back also. Something burned in her eyes. She turned, feeling Blackkit’s gaze in her fur. “Sometime I’ll be big enough to fight. Then, I’ll be the best warrior in the forest.” Nodding, Blackkit turned back to the battle.

Grasskit had pounced, but Slidingkit moved out of the way and counterattacked him. He went flying, but quickly regained his balance. “This one’s close. They’ve both been practicing.” Dustykit murmured beside her. She silently agreed, not able to rip her eyes away from the battle. Slidingkit’s feet barely touched the ground as she raced over to Grasskit. His muscles tensed and he raced towards her too. Neither of them slowed, and both kits collided, flinging them back. They shook their heads, and got up. Grasskit wobbled, getting the harder end of the collision, because he’d less speed, having started running later. Slidingkit took this as a chance, and shakily sprang at him. He fell right over, with the winner—Slidingkit on top of him. She let out a yowl of triumph, while Grasskit groaned. Letting him up, Blackkit’s new opponent trotted over to her. “Alright...Ready?” she asked her. The kit nodded. Grasskit had evacuated the area, leaving the empty space for the finalists. Berrykit came up.

“Ready? GO! GO! GO!” she yowled, stepping back into the crowd, who also burst into cheering. Except for Rosekit, who was still pouting. Rolling her eyes, Blackkit looked back at her current enemy, who was glaring at her. She knew Slidingkit wouldn't make a move until she did; it was her style to counterattack, slide out of the way, and defend. *Well she'll have to attack first, because I sure won't.* She sat down and started licking her paw, as if she wasn't in battle at all. The other kits gasped in surprise. “That's no way to win.” snarled Rosekit, speaking for the first time since her loss. Slidingkit's eyes were round with surprise, too. Blackkit watched her loosen her muscles. *Oh no!* she worried. *What if she never attacks, either?* Wondering what to do, she started licking her chest fur. Would this battle go on forever? Suddenly, Slidingkit faked left then sprang. Once again, Blackkit got up on her hind legs and pushed the other kit's stomach, and she landed unevenly on the ground. Groaning, because she knew she'd hesitated too long, Blackkit jumped, and watched her opponent spring out of the way a few seconds away from her. “You live up to your name,” Blackkit murmured to Slidingkit, who ignored her and instead knocked her head, making her dizzy. *I can't let her do this,* she thought, as she felt Slidingkit's gray paw land on her shoulder. She was about to pin her and claim victory! But Blackkit wouldn't let her. She tensed her muscles, preparing for a slam, but she barely felt it. *She's so light!* She silently exclaimed, watching her enemy being flung back. When she didn't get up, Blackkit cautiously padded over, too see if she was ok. She put a firm paw on her just in case. Slidingkit seemed fine. Suddenly she tried to get up and attack, but Blackkit's paw held her down, and she hauled herself upon Slidingkit's back, and yowled happily.

“We have a new champion!” squealed Berrykit excitedly. The other kits started mewling her name loudly. “Blackkit! Blackkit! Blackkit!”

Proudly, Blackkit trotted over to the other kits. Maybe she could earn everybody else's trust!

Or maybe just the kits'.

CHAPTER 4

It had been a moon since Blackkit had been called the champion kit among them. They hadn't gone back to the arena, but instead exposed their battles in the clearing, for the whole clan to see. The queens had noticed the kits' disappearance, especially Blackkit's. Mousepelt had been worried sick, and Blackkit felt guilty for making her so worried! But, there was something to be happy about. Soon she would be old enough to be an apprentice! She felt a tongue rasp her back. She'd been turned to Mousepelt for warmth in their nest that night. Turning around, she met gazes with Fightingstar. "Come to my den when your ready." He told her.

She nodded. Was she in trouble? Was he going to tell her she couldn't be a warrior because she wasn't clan-born? She swallowed the bile that was rising in her throat. No! She *had* to become a warrior. She was determined. Burying her nose into Mousepelt, she breathed in her scent that she'd become so accustomed to. "Are you ok, Blackkit?" she asked, blinking the sleep out of her eyes.

Nodding, Blackkit told her, "Fightingstar wants to see me. See you later, Mousepelt." Her adopted mother nudged her towards the doorway, and she pelted to Fightingstar's den, aware of the gazes that burned in her fur from the other cats in the clearing. Rushing into the lichen draped entrance, she saw Fightingstar's eyes watching her curiously. Then they turned warm, to her relief.

"Yes, Fightingstar?" she asked, dipping her head politely.

"As you know, tomorrow you are supposed to become an apprentice," he began.

Supposed to become an apprentice? She worried, swallowing more bile. "Well I'm wondering if you still want to be in ThunderClan." He said slowly, as if picking which words to say.

"Of course!" she squealed. "I love it here, and I'm gonna be the best warrior in the forest! And I'll catch the most prey for my clan, and drive off badgers, and—"

"I'm sure you will help." He told her, with a twinkle in his eye.

2 - Apprentice

No, I'll do it all by myself! And I'll be the most helpful cat in ThunderClan! And when the other clans see me in battle, they'll be shaking in their fur! mewled Blackkit dreamily.

You're sure you want to stay? You're welcome to go when you're ready, to somewhere new to have a different life. He meowed, changing the subject, and interrupting Blackkit's dreams.

Yeah! she told Fightingstar positively.

Then your apprentice ceremony will be tonight! he yowled triumphantly, looking relieved. He flicked his tail, telling her she was dismissed, and she bounded away to the nursery.

Mousepelt! Mousepelt! her voice squeaked with excitement, even though she was old enough for it not to.

And a very good morning to you. She meowed, shaking sleep out of her head. I think you've just woken up the entire clan. And as if in response, a head raised, and she recognized her friend, Rainkit. Good morning, Blackkit! How are you?

I've got big news, everybody! she announced loudly, feeling proud with new authority. Tonight I'm going to be made an apprentice! Meows of approval echoed the small nursery. Really? came an astonished mewl from Rainkit. She nodded, raising her chin. I wish I was you! squeaked a kit. She felt teeth dragging her down, and she saw Mousepelt struggling, trying to pin her. Come on, then. Let's get to work on your fur. It looks as if a twoleg monster ran through it backwards! and to Blackkit's protest, Mousepelt's warm tongue rasped rhythmically.

I can't believe it, Blackkit! said Rainkit, sprinting over. You're gonna be an apprentice!

I know! And then I'm gonna be a warrior.

But first you gotta be an apprentice.

Yeah&But being a warrior will be the greatest& murmured Blackkit.

You know, her friend began, with a bit of sourness in her tone, It's great that you're gonna be an apprentice and all, but&I want to be an apprentice, too! I mean, we could train together, and battle using our super-cool moves, and stuff like that. We could even sleep right next to each other! Sorrow panged in Blackkit as she realized that this was true. You're right, Rainkit&

Well you ll both have your turn. Besides, it s not like you won t both be an apprentice at the same time! Meowed Mousepelt, taking a break from her adopted daughter s dirty, mangled fur.

You re right. Anyway, I ll be yowling your name from the nursery when you re given your apprentice name! Mewed Rainkit. *Rainkit is a true friend.* Thought Blackkit happily, grateful that she had a friend. She sighed, letting Mousepelt clean her fur again.

* * *

May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather under the highrock for a clan meeting! Fightingstar s yowl sounded loud and clear, echoing through the camp, and ringing through Blackkit s ears. This was it! She was about to become an apprentice. Who would her mentor be? Questions streamed her mind as she sat down directly below Fightingstar. Mousepelt sat beside her, giving her head one last lick. When the cats gathered, Fightingstar looked up at Silverpelt, and yowled, I say these words before StarClan! This kit has reached the age of six moons. *Or by the looks of it.* Thought Blackkit. Even though her painful history. He continued confidently. With that, cats started mumbling, only to be silenced by elders glares. He turned to Blackkit. You shall train to become a warrior, and learn the code. And so, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Blackpaw. And your mentor, he continued, shall be, Moonshadow. And with that a silver and black tabby with yellow eyes strode up, looking down at Blackpaw with a sure sense of authority. Blackpaw reached up to touch noses, and he seemed to be wondering if he should accept the apprentice. The Clan seemed to noticed

and waited in total silence. Blackpaw's nose reached up farther in a rough uneasy gesture, and she began to wobble. Suddenly she collapsed on the ground. She scrambled up, her face burning with annoyance, desperation and embarrassment. That's when Moonshadow, looking pleased and full of amusement finally leaned forward to touch noses, and Blackpaw met his.

Blackpaw! Blackpaw! A single voice rang out from the nursery. It was Rainkit. Soon the voice was accompanied by the rest of the clan, yowling her new name. She lifted her chin up high proudly, and stood next to her mentor. Soon the Clan broke into groups to chat, leaving her and her mentor side by side. Moonshadow turned to her. Training is starting tomorrow at dawn. You better be there early. Go to the training hollow. He growled then headed off toward the warrior den.

Blackpaw shivered. She'd been given the worst mentor in the world, and by Fightingstar. Why him? Was it some kind of test?

CHAPTER 5

Blackpaw awoke staring at a leafy ceiling. Moonlight filtered through the entrance to the unfamiliar den. She got up and stretched before exiting. In the clearing, she looked around to find a dawn patrol up getting ready to go, but other than that nobody was up. Leopardheart trotted out of his den, and looked quizzically at Blackpaw before trotting her way. What are you doing up this early? You should be resting! Technically you re still a kit! he protested.

Training. Blurted out Blackpaw before she realized she would set a bad reputation for her mentor.

Training doesn't start until dawn. He retorted. So march right back into that den and rest.

Oh I was just too excited to sleep. She lied quickly, trying to sound excited. Besides, I'm going early today to surprise Moonshadow! Leopardheart sighed, and then let her go. Blackpaw was going to get some fresh kill first, but now she didn't have time. She bounded out of the entrance. Have some food first! The medicine cat called after her, but she pretended not to hear.

Reaching the training hollow, she spotted Moonshadow pacing. He turned and saw her. You're late. He growled. WHY were you late!?!?

Blackpaw flinched before protesting, I tried to get out of camp early but Leopardheart caught me and said I should be resting!

Oh? And what did you tell him?

I told him I wanted to get there early to surprise you.

And I suppose you'll just tell him that every day?

No&

So what will you do? Moonshadow snarled.

Blackpaw was caught. Suddenly an idea popped into her head. Well I could go behind the nursery and around camp! she exclaimed.

Her mentor leaned back. Huh. Well let's begin with you seeing the territory. Follow me. And try to keep up! And with that he sprinted off with Blackpaw panting on his heels.

* * *

Blackpaw dragged herself back to camp that day tired, hungry, and panting. She went straight to the

fresh-kill pile with Moonshadow's eyes burning into her pelt. She shyly picked out a thin little mouse. It wouldn't feed her, but she'd still not hunted. There was a shady little spot in the corner of the camp where she took the scrawny mouse.

That's not going to feed you. She turned to see Fightingstar behind her. You should get another piece of fresh-kill.

Oh I'm not that hungry. She told him.

You need to grow.

Well I still haven't hunted yet so I don't even deserve this. She motioned to the mouse.

Yes but you serve the Clan by being here. You'll make a fine warrior so eat up; you'll make up for it later. Now go get that starling there and eat both of them. He told her proudly.

But-

That was an order.

Alright. And she bounded over, trying to be unnoticed, picked up the starling and sprinted back. Fightingstar motioned for her to eat, and she leaned down and took a bite of the mouse. His eyes were concerned as he turned away and went to the nursery. Moonshadow trotted up to her. I'll take that, thank you. He said scooping up the large starling. That was the reason she'd not picked much. He'd punish her. Sighing, she finished the mouse in another bite then desperately licked the bones clean for any trace of meat. After burying them, she went to the prey storage hole, or the battle arena. She dropped in, and padded calmly down the corridor into the clearing. Blackpaw sat in the center, closing her eyes and sitting solemnly. Reviewing what had gone on. This would be a long while.

* * *

This would not be a good day. Blackpaw felt it. She woke a bit after moonhigh. It was about a moon since her first day of training. Well, almost. She looked at the fresh-kill pile longingly as she slipped out of camp from behind the nursery. She slowed to a trot as she entered the training hollow, where Moonshadow was laying on his side enjoying a couple plump sparrows and water voles. Take a lap. He growled lazily. I'll make sure you do.

She nodded and prepared to do her usual sprint around the territory. It was so big! As she raced as fast

as she could away from the training hollow, she braced herself for the challenge. It took her a long time to go around the huge territory, and if she took too long then she'd be punished. Soon enough, she was at Fourtrees, signaling the halfway point. She was gasping for breath. She ran along the edge of the river, and finally was looking at the gorge. Blackpaw was about to collapse when she heard a yowling, and twisted to see her own mentor chasing her. If I get you you'll see the gorge close up! he threatened, and the apprentice just pushed harder and ended up running through ThunderClan camp. She went through and ran to the training hollow panting. A minute later Moonshadow appeared. Ok, time for training. Attack me,

Blackpaw had no choice but to obey. Her feet struck the sandy floor as she bounded toward her mentor, kicking up sand. She leaped, ready to pounce, when Moonshadow moved out of the way at the last second, leaving her crashing through the sand. She felt his claws rip her back and she moaned, trying to get up. Finally, Blackpaw managed to writhe free. Try again, genius.

Blackpaw backed up. It was dawn now, and the other apprentices were showing up with their mentors. Thank StarClan. She breathed. He couldn't try to kill her if they were there.

Moonshadow? a deep voice cracked the concentration of everybody's training as Fightingstar beckoned to Blackpaw's mentor. You're on hunting patrol. You can take Blackpaw out later.

The two of them, mentor and apprentice followed their leader back to camp. As soon as they reached the ravine, Moonshadow joined a hunting party, and Blackpaw went to the fresh-kill pile, not seeing where Fightingstar went. Under her mentor's horrid gaze, she picked a tiny vole that was skin and bones and dragged it to the corner. After licking the bones clean, she went to her usual spot in the old arena. The kits no longer used it since she left, and she'd been forbidden by her mentor to visit Rainkit anymore. She sat solemnly in the middle, all alone&

Sneaky, are you?

Blackpaw looked up, terrified, only to relax seeing Fightingstar. Blackpaw, I want to know everything.

How&How did you find me?

Easy, I found the bones of your prey licked clean, followed your scent here. I don't remember this being here. But I want to know everything! He repeated. Why your so scrawny, where you go after moonhigh&WHY your scent is always going around ThunderClan border when your not on patrol&Everything.

Alright. Blackpaw looked at Fightingstar like he was her savior. I'll start with this place. I dug it when I was a kit.

You DUG it? He asked, obviously impressed.

She nodded. We kits used it as a battle arena. Then I was made an apprentice. Moonshadow&He's horrible. He makes me get up in the middle of the night and he chases me around the border and he tries to kill me and he scratches me, and he doesn't let me eat or see my friends-

That s enough. I ve heard enough. It s time to get a new mentor. He turned. Follow me.

Blackpaw could hardly hide her relief and excitement.