

WARRIORS

A Vision of Shadows
Shattered Sky
Exclusive Bonus Scene

Chapter 1

Dovewing opened her eyes to see the rays of the early morning sun slanting through gaps in the branches of the warriors' den, and she stretched her jaws into a yawn. She had slept badly, and though her bedding was soft and thick, she felt as if thorns were stabbing into her pelt from every direction. The night before, she had gone to her nest angry—and she was feeling just as irritated now as she woke up.

I can't believe Ivypool argued against sending the patrol. Alderheart said he'd had a vision of a cat who looks like Twigpaw—surely Ivypool, as Twigpaw's mentor, would want to help find her kin.

Fury still burning in her belly, Dovewing rose to her paws, gave her pelt a brisk shake to scatter the scraps of fern and moss that clung to it, and then padded across the den until she stood over her sister.

The pale tabby she-cat was just waking up, and she blinked in surprise when she saw Dovewing looming over her.

"Yesterday . . . what was that all about?" Dovewing demanded.

Ivypool didn't reply at once. Instead she rubbed a paw over her eyes, then thrust out her forelegs, raising her hindquarters to give her whole body a good long stretch.

Dovewing knew when her sister was stalling.

Finally, Ivypool sat up and cocked her head to one side. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Don't play dumb," Dovewing retorted, unable to stop her claws from digging into the moss that covered the floor of the den. "You *know* what I mean. What got into you when you argued against a quest to find Twigpaw's kin?"

"Nothing 'got into' me," Ivypool replied, an edge to her voice. "Do you really think ThunderClan can afford to send any warriors away when we're in the middle of all this trouble with Darktail? Besides," she went on, before Dovewing could respond, "I don't think Twigpaw needs the distraction right now. It would be wrong to get her hopes up—she'd only be more hurt if the search turned up nothing. Why do that to an apprentice? My apprentice, in case you've forgotten."

"I haven't forgotten," Dovewing spoke through gritted teeth. "But Twigpaw is already upset. As her mentor, you should care about that."

The tip of Ivypool's tail twitched slowly to and fro. "Might I suggest that you mind your own business?" she hissed. "It's about time you concentrated on things that matter to ThunderClan, and not one of our *guests*."

Dovewing wasn't sure what her sister meant by that. *Is she hinting something about . . . Tigerheart? Did she insist that the quest was a bad*

idea because he was so quick to volunteer to join it? Would she have had a such a problem if a ThunderClan warrior had spoken up?

As Dovewing thought over her sister's words, she noticed that Ivypool's gaze was fixed on something behind her, Dovewing turned to see that Bumblestripe was padding slowly toward them, his gaze half-eager and half-cautious.

Ivypool angled her ears toward him. You should be able to find everything you want in ThunderClan," she muttered, then rose to her paws and slipped out into the camp, her silver tabby pelt brushing the branches at the entrance to the den.

Dovewing stormed off in the other direction, across the den. She was still frustrated that she couldn't do anything to help Twigpaw—and Ivypool's parting words had just made her more angry.

Ivypool knows Bumblestripe and I aren't mates anymore. Why does she have to keep meowing on about him?

Rolling her eyes as she heard Bumblestripe's soft paw steps following behind her, Dovewing whipped around to confront him. "What do you think you're doing?" she snapped. "I'm not prey you can stalk!"

Bumblestripe backed away from her, a hurt look in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he mewed. "I was just going to ask you if you want to go on a hunt with me, that's all."

Dovewing's head dropped as she regretted her harsh words. "I'm sorry, too," she told him. "I didn't sleep well last night."

"It's okay," Bumblestripe responded with a wave of his tail. "Would you like to go, then?"

Dovewing wondered if this was a good idea. She knew that Bumblestripe wanted them to get back together, and she was always careful not to be too encouraging. But now she was desperate to take her mind off Twigpaw's sadness, and her own quarrel with Ivypool. "Okay," she agreed.

Bumblestripe's tail shot straight up in the air as he led the way out of the den and headed across the camp to the thorn tunnel. As Dovewing followed, she glimpsed Ivypool standing beside the fresh-kill pile with Thornclaw and Poppyfrost. Dovewing could feel her sister's gaze trained on her, but she willed herself not to look back.

The rising sun shed pools of golden light on the forest floor, shifting as the branches overhead moved in a gentle breeze. The air was warm, and enticing scents of prey drifted into Dovewing's nose.

"It's a perfect day!" Bumblestripe exclaimed, his whiskers quivering with enthusiasm. "Let's hunt near the old Twoleg nest. I don't think any patrols have gone that way for a day or two."

He set off, bounding along the abandoned Thunderpath, beckoning Dovewing to follow him with a whisk of his tail. Dovewing raced after him, enjoying the cool sensation of wind flowing through her fur, and pushing Twigpaw's troubles and Ivypool's snarky remarks to the back of her mind for the time being.

Before long, the crumbling walls of the old Twoleg den came into

sight. Thick green, clumps of herbs covered the ground in front of it, their healthy growth showing how carefully Leafpool and Jayfeather had tended them. Dovewing breathed in deeply, letting their sharp scent flow between her jaws.

Her ears pricked alertly as she picked up another scent. "Squirrel," she whispered to Bumblestripe.

She tasted the air again, managing to pinpoint the direction of the scent. The squirrel was scrabbling around among the debris at the foot of an oak tree, long grass hiding all but the tip of its bushy tail.

Dovewing angled her ears toward it. "Over there."

"Wow!" Bumblestripe breathed out. "Dovewing, you're good at this!"

Dovewing couldn't help feeling warmed by his compliment. After Ivypool's criticisms, it felt good to be around a positive cat.

Things are always so easy with Bumblestripe, she thought. Of course they are . . . that's a big part of why we became mates in the first place.

"I'll work my way around the other side of the tree," Bumblestripe murmured. "Then you can drive the squirrel straight into my claws."

"Okay," Dovewing responded. "But be ready in case it tries to escape up the tree."

Bumblestripe had already set off, creeping along in a wide circle with his belly pressed close to the ground. His pale gray pelt with its black stripes was nearly invisible in the long grass.

Dovewing raised her head to check the direction of the breeze, and was relieved to find it was blowing straight toward her. She dropped into the hunter's crouch and eased herself forward, paw step by paw step, keeping her eyes fixed on the squirrel.

But before she could reach pouncing distance, a black bird exploded out of a nearby thicket, letting out a strident alarm call. Dovewing wasn't sure whether she or Bumblestripe had disturbed it.

"Mouse dung!" she hissed.

The squirrel sat up, alerted, then sprang up the trunk of the oak tree. With a yowl of frustration, Dovewing hurled herself at it, and managed to snag her claws into its tail. A heartbeat later, Bumblestripe was beside her, pulling down the struggling squirrel and killing it with a swift bite to its neck.

"Great catch!" he exclaimed.

"It was yours, really," Dovewing meowed.

"We did it together." Bumblestripe's eyes glowed as he looked at her. "Don't we make the *best* team, Dovewing?"

Her pelt hot with embarrassment, Dovewing ducked her head and turned aside, not wanting to meet that intense gaze. "Let's see what else we can find," she mumbled.

Bumblestripe padded alongside her, his pelt brushing hers, as the two cats headed farther into the forest. Dovewing wished she could feel what he wanted her to feel.

He's such a great cat, she thought. He's not just a brave warrior; he's kind and gentle as well. Am I being a real mouse-brain? Should I be

his mate again?

Her thoughts churned around inside her until, rounding a bramble thicket, she spotted a starling fluttering to the ground from the branch of a holly bush. She touched Bumblestripe on the shoulder with her tail-tip, then pointed toward the bird.

“Great!” Bumblestripe whispered. “You stay here. I’ve got this.”

Dovewing opened her jaws to protest, then realized that any sound she made would alert the prey. Bumblestripe had already flattened himself against the ground and was sliding cautiously through the undergrowth toward the starling.

All I can do is sit here like a frozen rabbit while he catches my starling!

Dovewing’s claws flexed, digging into the earth, and her tail-tip twitched as she watched Bumblestripe launch himself into a long, smooth pounce and kill the starling before it even knew he was there.

He turned back, padding toward Dovewing with the prey in his jaws and the light of triumph in his eyes. Dovewing knew that she should praise him for such a skillful catch, but she was too irritated.

“I spotted that!” she snapped at him. “I’m not a kit, you know. I can catch my own prey! If you wanted to do all the hunting yourself, you shouldn’t have asked me to come.”

Bumblestripe’s eyes widened with dismay as she spoke, and he bowed his head as he let the starling fall at Dovewing’s paws. “Sorry,” he muttered.

Dovewing immediately felt bad. She knew that Bumblestripe had only been trying to impress her.

He just wants to make me happy, and I don’t mean to hurt his feelings . . . but that doesn’t make it right for him to treat me like a kit just out of the nest. I can look after myself just fine, and he needs to realize that.

“I’m sorry, too,” she mewed. “I don’t like snapping at you, but you need to let me take part. I’m a warrior, just the same as you.”

“I know, Dovewing,” Bumblestripe responded. His eyes as he gazed at her were full of longing. “It’s just that I really—”

“We should be getting back to camp,” Dovewing interrupted, afraid that he was going to tell her he loved her, and ask her to be his mate again. *I’m not ready to make that decision yet.* “We’ve caught enough prey for one hunt.”

Bumblestripe didn’t protest, though his tail drooped in disappointment as Dovewing led him back toward the stone hollow, stopping on the way to collect the squirrel. They padded along the abandoned Thunderpath in silence; Dovewing couldn’t help remembering how exhilarated she had felt on the way out.

That didn’t last long.

But when the two cats were already in sight of the thorn barrier across the entrance to the camp, a sudden horrified caterwauling rose up from inside the hollow.

Dovewing halted, her heart beginning to pound with fear. “What’s that?” she asked, dropping the squirrel. “Is Darktail attacking?”

Even as she spoke, she realized that wasn't possible. There was no sign of any cat trying to invade the camp through the thorn tunnel.

Abandoning her prey, she raced along the Thunderpath, her muscles pumping as she forced her legs to move faster and faster. Bumblestripe sped along at her side.

When she was a few fox-lengths away from the entrance, Dovewing began to make out words in the terrible yowling.

“Purdy! Purdy!”

Her belly felt as if it were full of claws, tearing her apart from the inside.

Something is wrong with Purdy. . . Oh, StarClan, hasn't ThunderClan suffered enough?

Chapter 2

Dovewing felt numb from her tail to her ears as she watched Graystripe and Millie gently raise Purdy's body and carry him to the center of the camp. Leafpool sat down beside the dead elder and began to smooth his rumpled tabby fur, while the rest of his Clanmates gathered around, waiting for night to come and the vigil to begin. The ShadowClan cats padded up, too, though they kept a respectful distance.

I can't join the others yet, Dovewing thought, quietly stepping away. *It's all so dreadful. . . . I need time to get it into my head that Purdy is gone.*

But as she headed toward the warriors' den, Dovewing realized that Bumblestripe was at her tail. Annoyance surged through her, pushing aside her sadness, and she had to swallow it so that she didn't snap at Bumblestripe again.

Can't I go anywhere without him wanting to go too? Can't I even grieve by myself?

She paused just outside the warriors' den and waited for Bumblestripe to catch up. He stood close beside her and bent his head toward hers, speaking in a low voice so that no other cat could hear.

“Dovewing, do you remember after the Great Storm, how you boosted Seedpaw's confidence on that hunting patrol?”

Dovewing stared at him, puzzled, and fought down another pang of grief as she thought of the young apprentice, who had drowned in the floodwater before she had the chance to become a warrior.

“Yes . . . why?” she asked cautiously.

“I told you then what a great mother you would be,” Bumblestripe replied. “I couldn't wait for us to have kits of our own—and then everything went wrong between us, and I still don't understand why. Dovewing, couldn't we try again? Losing Purdy like this . . . it's made me realize that life is short. What are we waiting for? You're the only cat I want, and . . . and a Clan is always given new life when it welcomes new kits. Wouldn't you agree?”

Bumblestripe fell silent, his gaze fixed on Dovewing with a desperate hope as he waited for her reply.

Why does he have to bring this up now? Dovewing wondered, struggling to stop her shoulder fur from bristling with anger. *We're all grieving for Purdy, and even before that I wasn't sure. . . . Oh, StarClan, I'm so confused!*

"Have you forgotten that Darktail is still out there?" she asked Bumblestripe, a growl in her throat even though she tried to speak calmly. "He's still looming over the Clans like we're all a bunch of mice he and his Kin can pick off when they feel like it. Every Clan needs its warriors to be strong and healthy, able to fight—and I won't be able to do much fighting if I have a bellyful of kits, will I?"

"But Dovewing—" Bumblestripe began to protest.

"You don't know what you're meowing about!" Dovewing ignored the interruption. "Bringing new kits into a Clan right now is not giving it new life! All it will do is bring us more death and heartbreak. I will not go through a kitting just so Darktail and his Kin can have more fresh, helpless victims!"

By the time she had finished speaking, Dovewing had given up trying to stay calm. Her voice was a low hiss of fury, and her pelt brushed up like she was facing an enemy.

Bumblestripe took a pace back, his eyes filled with hurt. For a few heartbeats he did not respond, as if he was giving Dovewing the chance to settle down again.

"ThunderClan will be stronger with new kits," he meowed at last. "It will give us more cats who can fight in the future, as well as giving our warriors something to fight for today." As Dovewing realized that he hadn't understood a word she had said, he added, "I really, really want you to think about this." Then with a dip of his head, he turned away to join the cats who were gathering around Purdy's body, waiting for the vigil to begin.

As Dovewing headed toward the center of the camp to take her place with her Clanmates, she spotted Alderheart padding up to Bramblestar, where he sat with Squirrelflight beside Purdy's body.

"Bramblestar," the young medicine cat began hesitantly, "Purdy was never a warrior. Do you think he'll be allowed to walk with StarClan?"

Dovewing didn't wait to hear Bramblestar's reply. Sadness stabbed her again at the thought that the old tabby might be really gone, not allowed to walk with the spirits of his friends, among the stars. She turned back and bounded across the camp, pushing her way through the thorn tunnel until she stood outside in the forest.

Almost at once, Dovewing heard paw steps creeping up behind her. She tensed, sliding out her claws. *If Darktail and his rogues think they can take advantage of our grief, they can think again!*

But when Dovewing spun around, it was to see Tigerheart's dark brown tabby pelt appearing around a tuft of long grass.

"Are you okay, Dovewing?" he asked.

Dovewing felt a jolt of alarm in her belly. "Of course I am!" she

replied.

Tigerheart padded up to her and sat beside her, blinking sympathetically. "I can see why you'd be upset," he mewed. "I know how important Purdy was to your Clan. But there's something else, isn't there?"

Dovewing didn't want to answer. *How can I tell Tigerheart about what Bumblestripe said to me?*

Then Tigerheart touched her shoulder with the tip of his tail. "If you want to talk, I won't repeat it to any cat," he promised.

After another heartbeat's hesitation, Dovewing let out a sigh. "I feel bad about an argument I had with Bumblestripe," she confessed. "He wants us to have kits together. I told him I wouldn't. This is *not* the time to talk about having kits, is it?"

For a long moment Tigerheart was silent. Dovewing tried to read his expression; his eyes were deep and dark, giving away nothing about what he was thinking.

"You're right, Dovewing," he responded at last. "This is not the time—not at all. I don't think any cats should have kits when their hearts are so heavy with grief. Surely they'd pass that bad feeling on to their kits."

As he spoke, Dovewing felt a twinge of something in her chest: a mixture of relief and sadness, which combined into a feeling of utter frustration. *Tigerheart understands*, she thought. *Why does he have to be a ShadowClan cat?*

Tigerheart tilted his head to one side. "I guess we're all coming up to that age," he meowed. "The age when we start having kits."

Dovewing turned her head away, unsure how she felt about that remark. *Do I want him to agree with me? To tell me not to have kits with Bumblestripe?*

Once again, Tigerheart was silent for a few moments that seemed to stretch out for moons. Dovewing couldn't begin to guess what he was thinking. When he finally spoke, it was only to say, "I think we should go back. Otherwise some cats might . . . might ask *questions*."

Nodding agreement, Dovewing headed back through the thorn tunnel. Her feelings were in chaos, as if a whole nestful of sparrows were chasing once another around her chest and belly. All she was sure of was that she didn't want to catch Bumblestripe's eye when she returned to the hollow.

As she slid out of the thorn tunnel, she heard Bramblestar's voice, ringing out clearly across the camp.

"Alderheart," he was meowing to the young medicine cat, "which of us deserves better than Purdy to walk with StarClan? I know he'll be there, watching over us."

Alderheart dipped his head, saying something to Bramblestar that Dovewing was too far away to catch. Then he rose to his paws with a sigh and padded away, toward the medicine cats' den.

The rest of the Clan fell into a somber silence as they watched over Purdy's body. Dovewing felt that Bumblestripe was staring at her, though she resolutely avoided his gaze. Sharp claws of guilt dug into her

again.

I should be thinking about him, not Tigerheart—but I wish I knew why Tigerheart behaved so strangely when I told him what Bumblestripe had said about us having kits together.

Swift movement from near the medicine cats' den caught Dovewing's attention and tore her thoughts to shreds. Alderheart came barreling back into the cluster of cats, heading to Bramblestar's side. A flutter of anxiety in her belly, Dovewing drew closer to hear what was suddenly so important.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Alderheart murmured, "but this is an emergency. I need to talk to you."

Bramblestar nodded, rising to his paws and leading Alderheart to a spot out of earshot, just outside the entrance to the warriors' den. Dovewing let out a hiss of frustration, wishing she still had the power to see and hear things that were far away, so she could overhear what they were saying.

It has to be something serious, she thought, seeing her Clan leader tense and dig his claws into the ground.

Dovewing didn't have long to wait. After a swift, urgent exchange with Alderheart, Bramblestar turned back toward the center of the camp and rejoined the crowd of his Clanmates.

"Cats of ThunderClan!" he called. "Yesterday we decided not to send out cats to look for SkyClan. But now Twigpaw is missing, and Alderheart and I believe that is where she has gone—to find her kin. The journey is too dangerous for an apprentice traveling alone, and so we must bring her back."

Dovewing shivered with tension at her leader's words. *We should have known Twigpaw is too spirited to just accept the Clan's decision. Now she has given us no choice.*

As soon as Bramblestar had finished speaking, Ivypool sprang to her paws.

"This is all my fault," her sister mewed. "I spoke out against sending a patrol, and I know that upset Twigpaw. But I didn't realize she would react like this. I should have known . . .," she finished, shaking her head in distress.

"Don't blame yourself," Bramblestar reassured her. "We *all* agreed that this was not the right time to search for SkyClan. No one cat is responsible. All we can do now is send some cats out to look for Twigpaw and bring her home safe."

"I'll go," Tigerheart offered immediately, his eyes gleaming at the prospect of adventure.

Dovewing's gaze flew instantly to Bumblestripe, to see his head turned away from Bramblestar. Obviously, he had no intention of volunteering for this quest.

"And so will I," she meowed, weaving her way through the assembled cats until she reached Tigerheart's side.

Are you going because you want to find Twigpaw? a voice in her head asked her. *Or are you taking any chance to get away from the Clan, and all that Bumblestripe is expecting from you?*

Shut up! she told herself, trying to silence the annoying voice. *I'm going, and that's that!*

Meanwhile Bramblestar had accepted her offer and Tigerheart's, and now he chose Molewhisker to go with them. "You made the first journey with Alderheart," he meowed, "and you know the way to the barn where he saw SkyClan in his vision."

"Sure, Bramblestar." Molewhisker got up, nodding to Dovewing and Tigerheart as he padded over to join them.

All three cats dipped their heads to Bramblestar. Giving Tigerheart a sidelong glance, she saw her own excitement reflected in his eyes. A tingle of optimism shivered through her. *With me and Tigerheart teaming up, we will definitely find Twigpaw!*

But as Dovewing turned to leave, she caught Bumblestripe's gaze as he stared at her from across the camp. Her heart clenched in pity at his hurt, almost disbelieving expression.

I know he's worried about me. He must hate that I'm so eager to leave.

For a moment Dovewing felt a thorn scratch of fear that Bumblestripe would change his mind and offer to go on the quest. She had a sudden urge to go to him and tell him that it would be better if he didn't.

But that's just mouse-brained, she told herself. *How would I even find the words to say that to him? It would be like sticking an invisible claw into his heart.*

To her relief, Bumblestripe dragged his gaze away and said nothing as Molewhisker led the way across the camp toward the thorn tunnel.

Dovewing shook her head, banishing her guilt. *I can talk with Bumblestripe about everything when I get back. Right now,* she thought as she raced into the forest after Tigerheart, *I feel like I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. . . .*