

# SPOTTEDLEAF'S HONEST ANSWER

Hello? Hi, I'm Spottedleaf. Whitestorm said you were looking for me. Welcome to StarClan, and congratulations on finding your way here! I know it's not easy. Don't worry, you'll be allowed to leave after we've talked. It is not your time to stay, little one.

Let's sit down on that patch of moss beneath the willow tree. The sun can grow quite hot here, enough to scorch a dark-colored pelt, but the moss will keep us cool. Are you comfortable? Good. We shouldn't be disturbed here. Most of my Clanmates will have found their own sunning places by now.

So, you'd like to know about Firestar and Sandstorm, would you? Well, Firestar is the leader of ThunderClan, and Sandstorm is his mate. Firestar was born a kittypet—when he came to the forest, he was called Rusty. Can you believe it? Honestly, Twolegs give their kittypets the most ridiculous names! Bluestar found this inquisitive kit wandering at the edge of our territory, and—

What? You know this already? So why— Ah. I get it. You want to know what I think of Firestar and Sandstorm, don't you? Okay. I'm not going to pretend that I don't know why you're interested—every cat in StarClan knows how I feel about the ThunderClan leader, but they're too polite to say anything. After all, I'm a medicine cat. We can't have mates or kits; our role is to care for the whole Clan as if each and every cat were our kin.

And of course, I'm in StarClan now, while Firestar is still very much alive, with a few lives yet to lose. He has a mate, too, who has given him kits and stayed by his side all through the Great Journey

and never stopped loving him, not even when it looked as if the Clans would not survive in their new homes. Perhaps you think I should have gotten over him by now, that I should have given up long ago and accepted that we could only ever be friends? I can tell by the way your eyes have narrowed that this is exactly what you think. But like my Clanmates, you're too kind to say anything. Do you think I don't know how hopeless this is? Do you think I still hope that he'll be mine one day, that somehow I'll stop being a medicine cat and Sandstorm will vanish like the dew, and every cat will forget that we should never have been together?

I'm sorry, you asked an honest question and it's only fair I should give you an honest answer without clawing your fur off. The truth is, I love Firestar now as much as I ever did, and I'll watch over him forever, knowing that he can never be mine. He belongs to Sandstorm and to ThunderClan. But my heart is his, and always will be. It wasn't love at first sight, you know. When he first came to the forest, I had been a medicine cat for several seasons, and I loved every part of it, from knowing which herbs heal and soothe, to sharing tongues with our warrior ancestors and interpreting omens for the Clan. How ironic that one of the last prophecies StarClan sent to me—a shooting star that clearly meant Only fire can save the Clan—foretold Firestar's arrival in the forest. He has saved the Clan many times over—and not just his own Clan, but all five of them. You know about SkyClan, yes? Those are my warrior ancestors, mine and Tigerstar's, because we are descended from Cloudstar and his mate Birdflight, who stayed with ThunderClan when her Clanmates were

driven out of the forest. The fate of the Clans was Firestar's destiny—but I was never a part of it.

At first he was just another apprentice to me—different in that he had been born a kittypet, but as curious, bold, and occasionally mouse-brained as the rest of them. I knew Bluestar felt a special connection with him, even if it took her a while to recognize that he was the fire that would save the Clan. It was only when Yellowfang came to ThunderClan that I began to see Firepaw differently. He refused to be intimidated by the cranky old she-cat, and yet he learned to respect her and care for her even when his Clanmates couldn't see past the fact that she was born in ShadowClan. Perhaps it was because Firepaw knew what it was like to be the outsider, to have to earn a place in the Clan by proving his loyalty over and over. I soon stopped doubting him, that's for sure. I started to watch him more closely listen to Bluestar's reports of his training, and I talked to him whenever our paths crossed not just the gossip of Clan life, but about things that mattered to both of us, like the rising threat of ShadowClan, or what StarClan held in store for us. He was kind, brave, and stubbornly loyal to the Clan that had taken him in. I saw in him the cat that he was, and I knew how fortunate we were to have him, and also the cat that he would be: He was the fire that would save the Clan—and the cat I should never have fallen in love with.

When ShadowClan invaded the ravine and sent me to StarClan much, much too soon, I lay in my den for a moon, wishing Firepaw could join me. I should not have died then!

Even if I always had to be a medicine cat, cut off from Firepaw

in the most meaningful ways, I could have walked beside him as he became a warrior, and then deputy and leader. Instead, I was condemned to watch him from far away, not always clearly, like gazing at fish flitting at the bottom of a pool. Sometimes ripples hid him from me, and I would pace StarClan's forests night after night, searching for him. When I found him again, things would be different; he would have seen things, done things without me knowing, and it was like meeting a stranger for the first time. But I never stopped watching, never gave up trying to help him. I walked with him in his dreams, shared his fears, guided him with all the knowledge that being in StarClan gave me. I know how much he looked forward to seeing me, how glad he was to have my scent wreath around him and linger on his pelt. Can you imagine how much that hurts, to be closer to him now that I am in StarClan than we were when I was alive?

After one of those moonless nights, Sandstorm was his mate, and I knew that the invisible river between us had grown too wide to leap across. Did you know that he came looking for me in a dream, sought me out to explain that he had to move on and that he couldn't be in love with a memory anymore? I am not a memory! I wanted to wail, like a kit abandoned by its mother. I am here, I still love you. I will walk beside you forever. But what is that compared with the warmth that Sandstorm can offer him, the solid presence of a mate to help him lead the Clan, to give him beautiful children and watch their kin grow up together? I will still be young when Firestar grows old, but Sandstorm will match him step for step, reflecting his graying fur

and slowing paws like a pool of clear water. Does Firestar love Sandstorm? Oh, yes, I have no doubt about that. Sandstorm is a good mate to him; any cat can see how much she loves him, how much she believes in him as leader of her Clan. Their daughters are wonderful cats, and I love them as if they were my own. Leafpool has a special destiny, just like her father did, and it is an honor to be able to walk in her dreams and guide her. But sometimes I can't help wishing that I was her mother instead, standing side by side with Firestar to watch her grow. I will do everything I can to make sure that no harm comes to her, or to her sister, Squirrelflight, until the time is right for them to join me here.

Look, the shadows are lengthening; it's time for you to go. Cherrypaw will show you to the border. Cherrypaw, come here, please! Thank you for visiting. I hope I've told you what you wanted to hear—and if I haven't, then perhaps it's best to say nothing of our conversation. Especially not to Firestar! The truth is that he and Sandstorm are happy, which is all that matters. I could wish and wish for things to be different, but they aren't, and never will be. I would not change a single heartbeat of my life, nor all the time since, if it meant losing a moment of Firestar's friendship.

Now, go well, and may StarClan walk your path always.