

# THE HIDDEN PROPHECY

The hole appeared behind a jagged rock as if it had been lying in wait for them. Cinderpaw stopped.

*It's just the Moonstone. There's nothing to be frightened about.*

"Come on!" Yellowfang growled from inside the tunnel.

Cinderpaw followed her mentor into the darkness. Soon the taste of the air changed and Cinderpaw knew they were nearing the cavern. Outside, the moon was hidden by clouds so the Moonstone was invisible. She only knew they had reached it when her nose bumped into the rock.

Yellowfang settled down on the hard floor. Cinderpaw folded her paws and lay down beside her. She didn't know why they had come so urgently to Highstones. She was tired from walking so she was looking forward to sleeping while Yellowfang dreamed. She covered her nose with her paws and closed her eyes. She decided to dream herself back into her cosy nest.

Instead, she was wakened by hail lashing her fur. She was in a dense forest, bare branches clattering above her head. Her pelt was drenched and slicked to her flanks. She could just make out Yellowfang ahead of her, trudging forward with her head bent against the wind.

Suddenly Yellowfang stopped. A shaft of light filtered through the trees, revealing the shadowy outline of a cat.

"What are you doing here?" Cinderpaw heard Yellowfang growl.

"I could say the same to you," came the reply. Cinderpaw strained her ears, but the voice was too faint to recognise.

"Did you bring me here?" Yellowfang demanded.

The cat twitched its tail. "I didn't know who would come. But since it is you, you must listen: *Fox red and raven black will save us from the storm of stone and water.*"

As the cat spoke, the wind dropped and the words seemed to boom around the trees. *Is it a prophecy?* Cinderpaw wondered.

"Is that a prophecy?" rasped Yellowfang.

The wind rose again. "If you wish," meowed the cat.

"Wake up, Cinderpaw!"

Cinderpaw opened her eyes. She was in the cave once more, the Moonstone glowing faintly above her. Yellowfang scowled at her in the half-light.

"Let's go." She turned and began to stomp back up the tunnel.

Cinderpaw scrambled after her. "What about your dream? Was it a prophecy?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Your dream," Cinderpaw repeated. "The cat who talked about a storm of stone and water."

"Were you spying on me?" the old she-cat hissed.

"N-no!" Cinderpaw stammered.

Yellowfang carried on walking. "Forget about it. Whatever that cat said, it wasn't important."

"But it sounded important! *Fox red and raven black will save us from the storm of stone and water!* We must tell Bluestar!"

"We'll tell Bluestar nothing," Yellowfang growled. "It was just a dream."

Cinderpaw blinked. Perhaps not everything heard in a dream was a prophecy. Cinderpaw didn't even know who the shadowy cat was.

But if this was a prophecy, could it really stay hidden forever?

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*The following section was written by Neve Sugars-Keen, who won the competition for the 13 years and older category.*

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The bramble walls of the nursery felt sturdy and comforting around Cinderpelt, but she knew they were only a thin barrier against what was happening in the stone hollow. The roars of the badgers and the higher-pitched screeching of her Clanmates outside felt distant and muted, almost like a dream. In front of her, Sorreltail was curled in her nest, her ears flattened as spasms shook her body.

"Sorreltail, I'm here. Focus on me, the kits will come soon and

we'll get all of you to safety. Or our Clanmates will. Sorreltail, I won't let you die with me. I know this is my end, but it will not be yours as well."

Light from a hole in the nursery wall played over her friend's pelt. It brought back a memory she had not thought of in years. A trip to the Moonstone, a windy forest, a shaft of light outlining a cat. In a flash of recognition, Cinderpelt realized who that cat had been: Raggedstar, the former ShadowClan leader whom she had occasionally glimpsed in StarClan. She understood now Yellowfang's anger and secretiveness about the prophecy as a rejection of the Clan that had exiled her.

As she comforted her friend between spasms, Cinderpelt forced herself not to worry about Leafpool's plight with Crowfeather. Will the Clan be left without a medicine cat? There was nothing she could do to change that now. Her world had narrowed to herself and Sorreltail, and an overwhelming desire for her death to mean something, to not be as arbitrary as it had felt since StarClan had given her their grim warning.

She licked her friend's orange-and-black head soothingly. "Not long now. You're doing well."

Orange and black...*Fox red and raven black will save us from the storm of stones and water.* Could this be a hint of that almost forgotten prophecy? If it was not about Sorreltail, whose pelt was mixed with white, could it refer to her kits? Or was Cinderpelt merely a scared, dying cat grasping at something that would give her destiny

meaning?

Heavy footsteps sounded outside the den. A striped black-and-white head pushed through the entrance, beady eyes gazing around, and Sorreltail gasped in fear. Cinderpelt crouched over her friend and bared her teeth menacingly. But the badger pushed its way into the den, snarling to itself as it stepped over nests towards her.

Facing her death, Cinderpelt felt suddenly peaceful. "Sorreltail, I will save you." She darted forward and raked her claws along the badger's cheek, and it turned away from Sorreltail towards her. She darted forwards again, but this time she was too slow, and she felt the badger's teeth meet in her throat. Her last thought as everything went black was that Yellowfang was right. The prophecy would stay hidden forever.

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*The following section was written by Sarah Livingston, who won the competition for the under 13 years category.*

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Cinderpaw's thoughts raced like a squirrel darting from tree to tree, never staying long on one branch. Suddenly, one thing stood out from the rest and confidence hardened in Cinderpaw's belly. *I must go back to the Moonstone!*

She slowly let herself lag behind, then when a bird fluttered from a nearby shrub, she made her escape. She crept along until she was sure Yellowfang would not be able to hear her pawsteps, then broke into a sprint, racing along until she found herself back at the

craggy opening once more. Mothermouth.

She padded down the tunnel until she reached the glowing chamber. The clouds must've moved. Pressing her nose to the smooth surface, she let herself drift into darkness. A soft, warm light bathed her muzzle.

*I'm in StarClan!*

She blinked awake to find the same ginger tom that had spoken to Yellowfang standing next to her. "Hello young one. You are brave to come back here, for I have much to show you. I am Fallen Leaves, and I lived long before the Clans or any warrior in StarClan."

And with that, he started fading, and images began to flash through Cinderpaw's head. An enormous group of cats, hungry yet hopeful, journeying through lands unknown. A lake with cats patrolling borders around it. Herself in a different medicine den in a gorge. A pool, the surface reflecting the starlit sky. A bloody battle, cats yowling in pain. A beautiful pale gray she-cat drowning a gray tabby tom, malice glinting in his blue eyes as the evil light within them faded, replaced with a glassy unseen darkness.

All of a sudden, all was black and thousands of voices yowled to the sky, *"Blood will spill blood! There will be three! Darkness, air, water, and sky! Embrace what you find! Three must become four!"*

However, one voice yowled louder than all the others. *"Fox red and raven black will save us from the storm of stones and water!"*

More pictures, a red loner catching a mouse. A tan-and-brown striped queen nursing a black kit. A crack of thunder and the brown

queen faded, while the kit grew into a warrior. Next came a cream-colored tom, wrecked forest in a wake behind him. A raindrop hit Cinderpaw's nose, and immediately she saw a raging flood. Though her thoughts were chaotic, they were nothing compared to the turmoil around her.

Then she returned to the forest she had started at, accompanied by Fallen Leaves. "Fallen Leaves, when will this happen?"

"That I cannot tell you," the tom replied, his voice sounding distant, a faraway look in his eyes.

"Should I tell Bluestar?" Cinderpaw asked, her eyes pleading with him to tell her what she must do.

"Remember all you have seen. You will know when it is the time to make this known. The time of red and black, fox and raven, will come. All will change. If they change for better or worse, is up to you."