

WARRIORS
The Broken Code
Lost Stars
Exclusive Bonus Scene

Chapter 1

"Have you been eating crowfood?" Jayfeather asked suspiciously.

"No," Finleap replied from where he was crouched in the medicine cats' den. "I know better than that," he added.

Jayfeather let out a snort. *Then he's been stuffing himself with too many mice. As if I didn't have enough to do, now that—*

He cut off the thought abruptly. "Have you eaten anything unusual today?"

"No!" Finleap protested. "I just know that my belly hurts. I have no idea why."

Jayfeather gave Finleap's pelt a good stiff, picking up the sour odor of vomit. Laying a paw on the young warrior's side, he could feel an unnatural heat rising from his body.

"He will be okay, won't he?" Twigbranch was crouched beside him. Jayfeather already knew this because, more than once, his pelt had brushed against the she-cat's as he tried to work.

He bit back the gentle growl that formed in his throat. *Ever since she was a kit, she's been cluttering up this den. I thought we'd finally gotten rid of her, but here she is again, getting under my paws.*

"Of course he'll be okay," Alderheart mewed soothingly. "You know cats get bellyaches all the time. Jayfeather will find the right herb, and I'll go to fetch some moss and soak it in water to cool him down."

With these words the younger medicine cat whisked out of the den. Jayfeather didn't try to stop him, though he knew it wasn't water that Finleap needed. He rose to his paws and padded to the herb store at the back of the den.

Rustling through the piles of leaves, Jayfeather tried to sniff out what he wanted, but he found it almost as hard as when he had been a new apprentice.

It feels like everything's out of place, ever since—

Jayfeather tried to stop the memories from rising into his mind, but this time they were too strong. *Leafpool, you shouldn't have died like that, he thought. It wasn't your time. And now . . . it's like the whole world is somehow wrong.*

He gave his pelt a shake, as if he could dismiss his grief like it was a bug crawling through his fur. *There's no time for this. I've got work to do.*

He snatched up the herb he needed, then hurried back to Finleap. "Here's some watermint," he meowed. "Once you get it down, you'll feel better in no time."

He set the leaves in front of Finleap, but before the young warrior could lap them up, Jayfeather heard Alderheart brush past the bramble screen at the entrance to the den.

"No!" Alderheart yowled. "Finleap, stop! That's coltsfoot, not watermint."

Jayfeather opened his jaws to tell his former apprentice not to be a mouse-brain. *I may not be able to see, but I wouldn't mistake coltsfoot for water. And this is . . .* He bent to give the herb a thorough sniff. *Coltsfoot.* Alderheart was right.

For a moment Jayfeather was at a loss for words; he felt as though his head were spinning. *A kit would know the difference. What's wrong with me?*

He heard Alderheart pick up the coltsfoot and retreat with it to the back of the den, then return a moment later with what smelled like a sprig of watermint. "Here you go, Finleap," Alderheart mewed. "Swallow this down. You'll be soon right as rain."

"I don't know how any cat can find the right herb, the way Leafpool organized the store," Jayfeather snapped. "It makes no sense."

"Then why don't you change it?" Twigbranch asked. "You can organize the herb store any way you like, now that Leafpool is—"

She broke off, but Jayfeather knew exactly what she had started to say. *Now that Leafpool is gone.* He knew that Twigbranch was only trying to help, but a spurt of annoyance shot through him. *Does she think I don't know that?*

Twisting his head around, Jayfeather turned to face Leafpool's old nest. He inspected it every day, to remind himself it was still just as she had left it. *Sometimes it doesn't feel like she's dead,* he thought. He would walk into the den they had shared and still expect to find her there, or to hear her voice.

There were times I found her irritating—he could admit it; he found most cats irritating—but somehow the den feels empty without her.

"Twigbranch, you don't give the orders around here," he hissed, swiveling toward her again. "Why can't you mind your own business?"

He heard a gasp from Twigbranch. "I—I'm sorry," she stammered. "I didn't mean to overstep."

Before he could respond, Jayfeather felt Alderheart's muzzle close to his ear. "That was a bit harsh, even for you," the younger medicine cat whispered. "All Twigbranch ever wants to do is help."

Here we go again! Jayfeather thought. According to Alderheart, he had been snarling at a lot of cats lately. *But even if that's true, they all deserved it!*

As if he could read Jayfeather's thoughts, Alderheart leaned closer still and added, "Twigbranch didn't deserve that. After all, she's right. You *can* organize the herbs any way you see fit. But you've got a problem, Jayfeather, and I don't think Leafpool's herb stores are the cause of it."

Jayfeather whipped around to face him. "Problem? What are you trying to say? That I'm just bad at my job?" He turned back toward Twigbranch and Finleap, his pelt prickling with resentment that Alderheart had started this conversation in front of them.

He could sense Twigbranch's awkwardness as she murmured comfortingly to Finleap. Jayfeather would have liked to pretend they weren't there, but he couldn't ignore Alderheart, who pressed up close to his side again.

"That's not what I meant at all," Alderheart mewed. "It's just that lately you've been bit . . . distracted. Maybe if we just talked about it . . ."

Jayfeather dismissed his words with a whisk of his tail. "You're softer than your own fur, Alderheart, so you might need all these heart-to-heart discussions, but I don't. I'm fine."

Alderheart sighed. "No, you're *not* fine," he grumbled.

Jayfeather whisked his tail again and turned away. He knew exactly why Alderheart felt the way he did. *I should never have skipped the last half-moon meeting*, he told himself. *I never do that. But I was busy—some cat has to do the work around here!*

Alderheart had told Jayfeather that it was a silly excuse. In his opinion, Jayfeather was reluctant to go to the Moonpool because he was afraid he would have to meet Leafpool in StarClan and face the reality that she was dead.

Not that Alderheart has seen Leafpool in StarClan yet.

At least, Jayfeather reflected, Alderheart had been sensible enough not to repeat any of that in front of the two young warriors. *I'd have clawed his ears off!*

"Fine," Alderheart sighed after a moment. "Have it our own difficult way. But you owe Twigbranch an apology."

"Sorry," Jayfeather grunted in Twigbranch's general direction. *Too bad if that's not a good enough apology. It's the only one she's going to get!* Alderheart padded past Jayfeather to the nest where Finleap was lying. "I'm sorry about all that, Twigbranch," he murmured. "Things have been difficult around here since the Clan lost Leafpool."

A sad silence seemed to spread out from the young cat, enveloping the den. Twigbranch broke it a few moments later. "Maybe it's time for one of you to take over the nest," she whispered. "It might help you move past her loss a bit. Besides, it's the nicest nest in the den."

Jayfeather's pelt began to bristle. He couldn't see, but that didn't mean he couldn't hear. And if Alderheart and Twigbranch thought their low-voiced conversation was private, they could think again.

Words exploded out of him. “So *now* you’re going to try to tell us where to *sleep*?” He took a breath, ready to release all his irritation, but Alderheart interrupted before he could say any more.

“Calm down, Jayfeather,” he meowed. “Twigbranch is giving us good advice, though I don’t want to follow it myself. I think you should move into that nest; you’ve been a medicine cat the longest.”

Jayfeather let out a disdainful sniff. “There’s nothing wrong with the nest I have, thank you very much. Why should I have to go to all the trouble of moving? You can take the nest if you want.”

“No thanks,” Alderheart replied. “I like sleeping near the entrance, so I can hear if a cat needs help.”

Jayfeather doubted that. *If a cat needs help around here, they can hear the wailing over in RiverClan!* He suspected that Alderheart’s real reason for refusing the nest was that he didn’t have the heart to take it, either. Moving into Leafpool’s nest would be just one more paw step toward accepting that she was gone forever.

And Alderheart has always been sensitive—too sensitive, if you ask me.

“If you don’t want the nest, don’t expect me to take it,” he snapped.

Alderheart sighed. “Whatever you want.”

That night, when the two medicine cats settled down to sleep, Leafpool’s nest remained empty. But Jayfeather couldn’t help thinking about Twigbranch’s suggestion that he move. He still felt it wasn’t necessary, but the idea kept pricking at him like a thorn in his bedding.

Alderheart was deeply asleep in his own nest, his gentle snores riffling his whiskers. Quietly, so as not to disturb him, Jayfeather rose to his paws and crept over to the thick swirl of moss and bracken where Leafpool used to sleep.

The nest still retained a faint trace of Leafpool’s scent, and the bracken stems were neatly arranged, just like her herb stores, to give her the most comfort possible. His paws still dragging reluctantly, Jayfeather climbed into it and curled up. At once he fell into sleep, as sudden and all-consuming as if he had plunged into a dark pond.

He was roused by something stirring, like a soft puff of air caressing his face. Blinking his eyes open, he saw a faint glow hovering above him, shimmering around the edges. As he watched, the sparkles formed into a familiar shape.

“Leafpool!” he choked out.

Jayfeather’s mother was standing over him, her amber eyes full of sympathy as she gazed down. Her mouth was opening and closing as if she was speaking, but the sounds didn’t reach him. She was leaning forward, her expression urgent, as if she was trying to tell him something important.

Jayfeather writhed in frustration. It was as though because he wasn't blind in his dreams, he had gone deaf instead.

He rose to his paws in the hope that if he could draw closer to Leafpool, he would be able to hear her words. He stretched out one foreleg, but his paw passed right through her glimmering shape, and the vision began to dissolve, spiraling away like smoke.

"Leafpool!" he yowled.

Instantly Jayfeather startled awake, realizing he had been calling his mother's name out loud. He was even standing in her nest, exactly as he had been in the dream. Shaken by what he had seen, he turned toward where Alderheart still lay in his nest.

Blind again, Jayfeather could tell by the younger cat's breathing that he was awake, and imagined him staring across the den, concern in his eyes.

"Jayfeather, are you okay?" Alderheart asked.

"Of course I'm okay," Jayfeather growled. "Why wouldn't I be?"

But he wasn't sure that he was telling Alderheart the truth. *Was it just a dream? Or did Leafpool really come to visit me?*

And if Leafpool really had been there, Jayfeather asked himself, what was it that she wanted to say?

Chapter 2

Two nights had passed since Jayfeather had seen his mother in a dream. On the third morning he was digging through the fresh-kill pile, muttering to himself that he'd never come across a scrawnier collection of prey, when he picked up the sound of a cat charging into the stone hollow through the thorn tunnel. Turning, he heard paw steps bounding across the camp and drew in Alderheart's scent.

"What's the matter?" he demanded as his former apprentice skidded to a halt beside him.

For a moment, all the reply he got was the rasping sound of Alderheart's breath. "Jayfeather!" he panted at last. "You have to come with me. There's an injured cat at the Moonpool. Hurry!"

Shock and dismay briefly froze Jayfeather's paws to the ground. "What cat was fool enough to wander to the Moonpool?" he snarled. "I bet it was one of those nosy apprentices, always sticking their whiskers where they don't belong! How many times have I told them that the Moonpool is off-limits except for medicine cats?"

"True," Alderheart agreed. "Apprentices always have bees in their brains and the Moonpool isn't that far from the WindClan border. Anyway, you're needed there, now."

Masking his concern with an irritated flip of his tail, Jayfeather followed Alderheart out of the camp and through the forest until they

reached the moorland slopes that led to the Moonpool. They kept up a brisk pace, and there was still some time before sunhigh when they climbed the last rocky slope to the top of the hollow.

Jayfeather took the lead in pushing his way through the line of bushes that screened the Moonpool. When he reached the top of the path that spiraled down to the waterside, he paused, listening. He had half expected to hear the wails of the injured cat; instead, beneath the noise of the water cascading into the pool, he could make out the movement and murmuring of several cats. He drew in a breath, tasting their mingled scents.

"Kestrelflight," he rasped, fighting confusion. "Mothwing and Willowshine. Puddleshine. Frecklewish and Fidgetflake. And Alderheart," he finished, glaring at his Clanmate as the younger cat slid through the bushes to stand beside him. "What are all the medicine cats doing here? And where is the injured cat?"

"I asked them all to come," Alderheart explained calmly. "And the injured cat is you, Jayfeather."

"What?" Jayfeather was so outraged that he could barely speak. "How dare you lie to me? You told me there was an injured WindClan apprentice up here."

"No, I didn't," Alderheart asserted, still in that infuriatingly calm voice.

Jayfeather thought back to what Alderheart had told him in the ThunderClan camp, and realized to his annoyance that it hadn't been a lie. He'd just pointed out how close the WindClan border was to the Moonpool. *Crafty . . .*

"Well, you let me believe it," he grumbled.

Alderheart nudged his shoulder. "Come down to the pool and talk to us," he mewed.

For a few heartbeats Jayfeather resisted; then he began padding reluctantly down the path to join his fellow medicine cats at the water's edge. "I don't know what you're meowing about," he protested. "Alderheart, you have bees in your brain."

"No, Alderheart is right," Mothwing told him. "You've changed, Jayfeather, and not for the better."

"I've noticed it, too," Kestrelflight pointed out. "Do you remember, Jayfeather, when we met the other day, foraging for herbs beside our border stream? You said you were looking for chickweed, but you were gathering elder leaves. And when I tried to point out your mistake—"

"Let me guess. He bit your head off," Willowshine put in, and when Kestrelflight agreed, added, "How did I know that?"

Jayfeather clenched his teeth in an attempt to keep back an angry retort. He and Willowshine had never been best friends, and he hated being embarrassed in front of her. It was bad enough being reminded of an error that even the greenest apprentice would never make. Listening to

Willowshine address him with a mixture of amusement and compassion was enough to make his anger spill over.

"Listen, you stupid furball—" he began.

"You've never exactly been pleasant," Mothwing interrupted, before Willowshine could retaliate. "But lately it's been worse than usual, and we all know why."

"You're hurt over losing Leafpool," Puddleshine stated. The ShadowClan medicine cat had once been shy and nervous, but now his voice was level and full of certainty. "We all miss her," he continued, "but you're the only cat who hasn't come to terms with it."

Jayfeather felt offended to the tips of his claws at the way his fellow medicine cats were ganging up on him. At least Frecklewish and Fidgetflake hadn't joined in; he guessed that they didn't feel like they knew him or Leafpool well enough. "How do you know I haven't come to terms with it?" he challenged Puddleshine.

"You cried out her name in your sleep the other night," Alderheart pointed out quietly.

Jayfeather's throat closed up with grief at the memory, and he bowed his head. "Maybe you're right," he murmured, every word forced out. "But what am I supposed to do about it?"

"There's only one way to deal with this," Puddleshine meowed, resting the tip of his tail on Jayfeather's shoulder. "You must talk to StarClan and see what they have to tell you. You can't avoid it any longer."

Jayfeather's belly twisted with sheer terror at Puddleshine's words, but he knew that the ShadowClan medicine cat was right. He couldn't speak, but he gave a grudging nod.

"Good," Mothwing mewed briskly. "Come on, let's give him some privacy. Jayfeather, we'll wait for you at the top of the path."

Jayfeather heard the departing paw steps of the medicine cats; their scent began to fade. Alderheart was the last to go, but before he was out of earshot, Jayfeather called his name.

Alderheart halted. "Yes?"

"Don't go far—please," Jayfeather choked out, disgusted at his own weakness. "I don't know if I can do this alone."

"Of course you can," Alderheart reassured him, his voice full of affection. "But I'll be nearby if you need me."

His scent strengthened again, and Jayfeather pictured him sitting at the bottom of the spiral path.

Do I really have to go to StarClan's hunting grounds? Jayfeather asked himself, padding up to the Moonpool and settling himself at the water's edge. *And see my mother among all those spirits? I don't know if I'm ready for that.*

He bent his head and touched his nose to the water, concentrating on Leafpool.

At first there was only darkness. The icy touch of the Moonpool spread throughout his body, and he was no longer aware of the ground underneath him, but the sunlit forest of StarClan did not appear.

For a heartbeat Jayfeather began to panic. *Am I blind in my dreams now, as well as when I'm awake?*

Then a star appeared in the darkness, a single, glittering point of light. A voice spoke. "Jayfeather?" But it wasn't Leafpool's voice.

"Hollyleaf?" Jayfeather responded.

The star expanded into a shimmering path of light, stretching down to where Jayfeather crouched in the void. His sister came padding down the path toward him, her black pelt lustrous, with a frosty glimmer around her paws.

"It's good to see you again," she mewed as she approached Jayfeather.

Jayfeather nodded. "You too." His shoulders tensed as he waited for Leafpool to follow her daughter, but no other cat appeared. "Does this mean Leafpool couldn't be bothered?" he demanded with an offended scowl. "Everyone is on my pelt to talk to my dead mother, but apparently she has better things to do."

"No, no, that's not true," Hollyleaf assured him. She came close to him and touched her nose to his before sinking gracefully to the ground and beckoning with her tail for Jayfeather to sit beside her. Now he could feel fresh grass beneath his paws, and the light folded itself around him and his sister in a shimmering bubble. On its edges he could make out dim shapes of leaves, as if StarClan had created a tiny forest clearing for this meeting to take place. Letting out a sigh, he settled himself beside Hollyleaf, taking comfort from the warmth of her pelt.

"Leafpool wants to speak with you very much," Hollyleaf continued. "But she knows that you still have sore feelings toward her, and seeing her again might be a shock. So she sent me to talk to you first."

"I can manage the shock just fine, thanks," Jayfeather muttered, then added a heartbeat later, "but I'm glad you're here."

"I have issues with Leafpool too," Hollyleaf told him. "We all felt like we'd been abandoned, and we were hurt by the way she deceived us. But since Leafpool joined StarClan, we've finally had the chance to really talk about what happened, and now I feel like I understand her." She let out a purr. "Now that we're both in StarClan, we can be mother and daughter at last, the way we never could when we were alive. It turns out Leafpool is a wonderful mother. She just never had the chance to be one until now."

Jayfeather wanted to believe that, but something inside him remained unconvinced. "She could have been our mother all along," he growled, "but she was more concerned with protecting herself."

The leaves at the edge of the clearing rustled, and Leafpool stepped out into the circle of light. A gentle radiance surrounded her, and starlight touched her paws and the tips of her ears. Jayfeather's belly clenched at the

sight of his mother; he didn't know whether to lash out, or to run up to her and nuzzle her as if he were still a kit.

"I'm sorry if it seemed that way," she responded, dipping her head to Jayfeather. "But what I did was as much for my kits' sake as my own. It tore me apart to give you up. But if I hadn't, the Clan might never have accepted a litter of half-Clan kits. I couldn't bear to have you pay for my mistakes."

Jayfeather didn't know what to say to her. Leafpool paused for a heartbeat, as if waiting for a reaction, but when none came, she continued.

"I knew Squirrelflight would protect all three of you as if you were her own kits, and Brambleclaw would be a great father. If I couldn't be a mother to you myself, I could at least give you to my sister—my kin, who would care for you just as I would have." Her gaze suddenly grew brighter. "Given how wonderfully all of you turned out," she added, "my decision couldn't have been all bad."

For once Jayfeather didn't snap to judgement and respond immediately. Instead he took his time, considering her words carefully. "But you left me. Twice," he murmured at last.

"It may seem that way," Leafpool replied, her voice full of love. "But I didn't. As part of StarClan, I'll be with you always, watching over you and guiding your paw steps as much as I can . . . if you'll let me."

She stepped forward and nuzzled first Hollyleaf's cheek and then Jayfeather's, and Jayfeather didn't draw back. He felt as if he was understanding for the first time what it meant for the Clans to have the StarClan cats with them: how strange it was that, in death, Leafpool might finally get to be a mother to him, in a way that she could never have been in life.

He had never felt more grateful for his connection to StarClan.

"I love you," Leafpool mewed.

On the last word her voice began to die away, and before Jayfeather could respond, she and Hollyleaf dissolved into a glittering mist. Each separate point of light hovered for a heartbeat, then winked out like sparks from a fire. Jayfeather found himself in darkness again, crouching on the ground at the edge of the Moonpool. Sighing, he rose and began to stretch cramped legs.

After a moment he heard Alderheart's approaching paw steps. "Are you alright?" his former apprentice asked anxiously.

Jayfeather nodded. "I finally saw her in StarClan," he replied. "And everything's all right."

Epilogue

Jayfeather padded out of the herb store, a dock leaf in his jaws, and dropped the herb in front of Berrynose. "Rub that on your pads," he

instructed. "it will help the soreness. And next time watch where you're putting your paws."

"Thanks, Jayfeather." Berrynose picked up the leaf and limped out of the den.

When he was gone, Jayfeather settled himself in Leafpool's old nest, letting out a sigh of satisfaction. "Come to think of it," he mewed, "Leafpool organized everything really well. Her system makes perfect sense now."

Alderheart's voice came from Jayfeather's old nest, where he was giving himself a thorough wash. "I'm glad to hear it," he murmured between vigorous licks.

The bramble screen at the entrance to the den swung back as Squirrelflight entered. From the erratic sound of her steps, Jayfeather could tell she was tottering on three legs.

"Look at this thorn!" she exclaimed: Jayfeather imagined she must be holding up one forepaw to show them an enormous thorn sticking out of it. "If I've told the apprentices once to check the fresh bedding, I've told them—"

She broke off, startled: Jayfeather guessed she had noticed that he had taken over Leafpool's nest. He pictured her glance flicking from him to Alderheart in his old nest. For a moment she stood silent; then she let out a long, peaceful purr.

"Yes," she mewed. "This is the way it should be."

Squirrelflight is exactly right. Jayfeather mused, a purr rumbling in his throat. He bit it back. *Not that I'd ever tell her so!*