

Prologue

Above, the black sky was as dark as a raven's feathers. Stars, along with the moon, were absent from the sky. The trees were sapped of any life, leaving only long gray branches. The ground was muddy and the woods were covered in mist. Nothing could be seen far away nor up close, making it impossible to find a way out of the forest.

Alone in the dark, a cat wandered his way through the forest, surveying his surroundings. His gray fur was bristled, and his eyes were a deep orange. He knew of the place he was. The Dark Forest. No ordinary cat would've been thrown into this place. Only the warrior cats, who he heard of from his mother, were supposed to inhabit this forest if they had done evil in their life, but why was he here? He wasn't dead yet. He was only 8 moons old, so it must be a nightmare. But was it real?

Suddenly, he unsheathed his claws, looking towards a large group of trees. Something was making noise behind them. He crouched slowly, sniffing for any kind of scent, but the only smell that hit his nose was the reeking mud. That didn't stop him from trying to identify the noise behind the dense lifeless trees. He crept closer, recognizing a cat's low moan. It sounded like it was in pain. As he reached the jumble of trees, he looked around them, peering into the mist to find the source of the noise.

It was a young-looking dark brown cat covered in blood. Scratches were all over its body, and its face was empty of expression. Blue eyes filled with fear stared right at the white cat. The gray cat ran over to the other cat, sheathing his claws. He spoke quietly, "What did this to you?"

The only reply was another moan as the brown cat started to fade away. His body became see-through for a couple moments, then disappeared altogether. Light sparks were the only things leftover, seeping into the ground before they also vanished.

The mist started to thicken around him. The Dark Forest became even darker until the gray cat could barely see 2 tail-lengths in front of him. Trying his best, he walked forward, almost banging his head into a nearby tree. His strides became longer when he heard a faint voice far behind him, "...Hey, did you see a cat?"

The gray cat kept gaining speed until he was dashing and swerving his ways through the trees. The voices behind him were no longer able to be heard after a few seconds, but he knew better than to stop and check. The darkness started to clear the farther he went. He continued to run, concentrating

not on where he was going, but how to escape this place. Soon enough, he started to hear something else. Water?

The tom came upon a break in the trees and approached a huge river. It was almost as muddy as the ground itself, as it flowed with grime sluggishly. Across the dirty river, a shadow was seeming to be walking with the flow of the river. The gray cat froze as the shadow saw him. It's green eyes stared right at him. He knew he wasn't the fastest of his litter, so if any other thing wanted to catch him, he'd be easy prey. The shadow jumped into the river, clumsily wading in the grime towards him.

He readied himself for a fight, unsheathing his claws and crouching to the wet ground. He tried to "mreooow," but he wasn't gifted with intimidation either.

The shadow became easier to make out. It was a cat with a gray pelt and dark flecks with green eyes and short fur across it's flank. It also looked like... a she-cat. The overbearing weight of the mud in the river was nothing to her, making her way to him quicker than he expected. When she reached the shore, she shook herself off and strode toward me with her claws sheathed. Was she friendly? Her eyes glimpsed into his. She spoke with something in her voice that made it strange to him.

"Are you lost?"

The tom sheathed his claws and sighed. He sat down and answered, "Yeah. But I'm sure I'll wake up and leave this place soon."

The she-cat seemed startled at his answer and gasped. "You're not dead?"

He shook his head. "Not that I know of. First I fell asleep in a small hollow behind a bush and then I'm here."

"That could only mean you were chosen to share dreams with the Dark Forest cats. I knew something was going on! Have you seen any other cats?" She looked around the river quickly. Her speech was getting rapid

He remembered the other cats he saw and heard. "Yeah, I saw one cat die and fade away. It looked like a cat had killed him. Then I heard other cat's voices and ran. That's when I got here."

The she-cat turned towards me again. "You mean some cat was killed again? That could only mean *he* is close. Come on, I need you to get to safety. I need you to follow me to the border." She started to dash down the river, following the flow of it.

The tom ran after her and yelled, "What border?"

She called back, “The border between StarClan and the Dark Forest.”

“Wait, what?”

“Just hurry.”

Again, he wasn't the fastest of his litter, and she ran faster than any cat he'd seen before.

Before he could catch up to her, the Dark Forest started to fade away. The trees melted into each other and the river disappeared. He was losing the she-cat in the trees, and he slowed down. When he stopped, the gray cat couldn't recognize his surroundings.

Soon, he closed his eyes, and opened them again to see the sun rising in between the tangle of the bush. Birds chirped in the distance as butterflies floated over his hiding place. Clouds shifted their way across the blue sky, and the trees in the distance let their leaves on their branches dance with the wind. He looked around, knowing he was awake.