

Beyond the Code: Brightspirit's Mercy

A Warriors Play by Erin Hunter

Characters

ThunderClan

Firestar: a ginger tom with a flame-colored pelt, leader of ThunderClan

Brambleclaw: dark brown tabby tom, deputy of ThunderClan

Lionblaze: golden tabby tom with amber eyes, warrior

Hollyleaf: black she-cat with green eyes, warrior

Jaypaw: gray tabby tom with blue eyes, apprentice medicine cat

Lionblaze, Hollyleaf and Jaypaw are littermates; Jaypaw is blind.

ShadowClan

Blackstar: large white tom with huge jet-black paws, leader of ShadowClan

Russetfur: dark ginger she-cat, deputy of ShadowClan

WindClan

Onestar: brown tabby tom, leader of WindClan

Ashfoot: gray she-cat, deputy of WindClan

Whitetail: small white she-cat, warrior (*non-speaking part*)

Breezepaw: black tom, Whitetail's apprentice

RiverClan

Leopardstar: spotted golden tabby she-cat, leader of RiverClan

Mistyfoot: gray she-cat, deputy of RiverClan

StarClan

Brightspirit: a silver tabby she-cat

Shiningheart: a silver tabby she-cat, Brightspirit's mother

Braveheart: a dark tabby tom, Brightspirit's father

In addition, use as many extras as possible to be cats in each of the four main Clans at the Gathering, reacting appropriately to their leaders' startling admissions that they are starving (with the exception of the ThunderClan cats, who are smugly well-fed). . . .

SCENE ONE

A bitterly cold full moon in leaf-bare, on the island where the Clans gather. Trees sparkle with frost, breath hangs in the air, all the cats are shivering—and some look very hungry indeed. The leaders of each Clan sit in the low branches of a tree at the head of the clearing (possibly use a stepladder?) with their deputies and medicine cats sitting below. Facing them are cats from all four Clans (not every cat from each Clan—about eight to ten per Clan).

NARRATOR: It is a bitterly cold night in winter. The four Clans of warrior cats who live by the lake have gathered to share news in a truce that only lasts while the moon is full. ThunderClan, RiverClan, WindClan, and ShadowClan are represented by their leaders, their deputies, and a patrol of warriors. All are bound by the warrior code, a list of rules that ensures they are loyal, well-trained, and true to the traditions of the cats that lived in the Clans before them. The Clans have been at peace with one another for a while, but rivalries and tensions are always close to the surface, even on the night of the full moon.

Onestar: (looking around) Are we all here?

Leopardstar: (climbing up to her branch) Yes, we are now. Come on. Let's get started before we all freeze to death.

Blackstar: Would that be quicker than starving to death? Because that's what we're all doing right now.

Startled meows from watching cats. The leader of ShadowClan has admitted severe weakness!

Russetfur: (whispering furiously) Blackstar, what are you doing? If the other Clans know how weak we are, they'll be crossing our borders before sunrise.

Blackstar: Don't be a mousebrain, Russetfur. Any cat can see we're all hungry. *(louder)* Tell me, does any Clan have enough to eat?

Onestar: Every leaf-bare is hard. . . .

Leopardstar: Not this hard! Have you seen that the lake has frozen over? How are we supposed to catch fish when they are hidden under ice?

Blackstar: You're very quiet, Firestar. Too scared to admit your Clan is suffering, too?

Firestar: Not at all. As Onestar said, it's always a challenge to find food in leaf-bare.

Lionblaze: (whispering to Hollyleaf in the crowd below the tree) What's he talking about? We're fine! I caught two blackbirds and a vole yesterday.

Hollyleaf: Hush! If Firestar tells the other Clans we have enough fresh-kill, they might invade our territory to steal prey!

Lionblaze: That bunch of weaklings? I'd soon chase them off.

Hollyleaf: Yes, because a battle is exactly what we need when all the medicine herbs have been killed with frost.

Jaypaw: (padding up from sitting with the medicine cats) What's up?

Lionblaze: Hollyleaf reckons we're going to be invaded by other Clans wanting our prey. They've got feathers for brains if they try. Have you seen how thin they are?

Jaypaw: Well no, Lionblaze, I haven't seen, actually.

Brambleclaw: (appearing behind him—the leaders have finished talking and have climbed down from the tree) But ThunderClan is as strong as ever, which is the only thing we need to worry about. Come on, let's get back to camp.

Hollyleaf: So soon? But the Gathering's only just started.

Brambleclaw: (with a regretful look over his shoulder) Blackstar was right: The other Clans are struggling to survive right now. There's no time for making new apprentices or warriors—and no she-cat would be mouse-brained enough to risk having kits in this weather, so there's nothing to report. Our neighbors are no threat to us, that's for sure.

Lionblaze: (heading out of the clearing with his Clanmates) Yay! ThunderClan's the best! We win again!

SCENE TWO

The ThunderClan hollow, before dawn. Jaypaw emerges from the medicine cat's den. He walks sure-footedly, but senses other than sight—hearing, smell, touch—help him move confidently around his territory. Brambleclaw enters the hollow, just back from patrolling the forest alone.

NARRATOR: In the ThunderClan camp at dawn the following day, Jaypaw wakes early. Jaypaw is the apprentice to ThunderClan's medicine cat, Leafpool. All medicine cats need to have a good memory for herbs and remedies, as well as having the ability to talk to StarClan, their warrior ancestors, in their dreams. Jaypaw has more power than any other medicine cat and sees cats from StarClan as if they were right there beside him—even though he is blind in his everyday life.

Brambleclaw: You're up early, Jaypaw. Is everything all right?

Jaypaw: (quietly) Yes, fine.

Brambleclaw: You don't sound fine. Did something happen at the Gathering last night? Were any cats mean to you?

Jaypaw: No, nothing like that. Anyway, they're all too thin to be mean. Do you think the other Clans have any fresh-kill right now?

Brambleclaw: (coming over, looking concerned) Jaypaw, there's nothing in the warrior code that says we have to feed the other Clans when prey is scarce. Leaf-bare is tough for all of us. The others chose to live where they do; it's not our problem if they can't find fresh-kill in every season.

Jaypaw: (under his breath as he heads out into the forest) He's right. It's not part of the warrior code. If I can just find the stick. . . .

NARRATOR: Jaypaw heads through the trees to the shore, where he has hidden the stick he found in the lake under some roots at the edge of the water. The stick is stripped bare of bark, about two cat-lengths long, with short scratches on its surface. It comes from the ancient community of cats who used to live by the lake. The scratches represent new warriors who made it safely through the initiation ceremonies held far underground. Jaypaw learned about the ancient cats from a cat called Rock, who lives in the tunnels beneath ThunderClan.

Jaypaw: (pulls the stick out and crouches over it, running his front paw over the scratches) Rock? Rock, are you there? Why won't you talk to me?

Hollyleaf appears behind him, having followed him through the trees. Lionblaze is a couple of paces behind her.

NARRATOR: Jaypaw's littermates, Lionblaze and Hollyleaf, also have special powers. These three cats are part of a long-ago prophecy that promised they would have the powers of the stars in their paws. They know they have a unique destiny, and are waiting to learn what it is. In the meantime, they keep the prophecy secret from their Clanmates, knowing that some cats might be afraid of the power they have been promised.

Hollyleaf: Jaypaw, are you talking to rocks?

Jaypaw: (looking up guiltily) Uh. . . no, not exactly.

Lionblaze: What are you doing with that stick?

Jaypaw: It's medicine cat stuff.

Lionblaze: (crossly) Okay, don't tell us, then.

Jaypaw: (standing up, fur bristling) Did you follow me?

Hollyleaf: Brambleclaw said you were being weird.

Jaypaw: I was not being weird! I was thinking—that's all. You should try it some time. (He looks down at the stick again.)

As he's speaking, three cats appear in a row at the back of the stage: Brightspirit, Braveheart, and Shiningheart.

Brightspirit: Don't quarrel. Leaf-bare is cruel enough.

Jaypaw: (still looking at the stick) I wasn't quarrelling, Hollyleaf. Anyway, he started it.

Hollyleaf: Er, Jaypaw? Are you talking to me?

Jaypaw: (looking up in surprise) Yes. You just told me to stop quarrelling and—

Hollyleaf: No, I didn't.

Jaypaw: Yes, you did.

Lionblaze: She didn't.

Jaypaw: She did! I heard her!

Shiningheart: Actually, it was Brightspirit.

Jaypaw looks up, and he sees the three starry cats behind his littermates. His mouth drops open in amazement. He knows he's having a vision because he can see. He's met these cats before, just briefly. Because they are cats from StarClan, only Jaypaw can see them, since he is a medicine cat. His littermates have no idea the starry cats are there.

Jaypaw: Brightspirit!

Lionblaze: Who?

Hollyleaf: (looking around) Jaypaw, are there cats from StarClan here?

Jaypaw: (walking past his littermates, ignoring them) Shiningheart, Braveheart! What are you doing here? Is something wrong?

Brightspirit: (steps forward and bows her head solemnly) Yes, there is. The other Clans are starving.

Shiningheart: They need your help.

Braveheart: ThunderClan has more prey than the other Clans. You will have to share your food with them.

Jaypaw: No way! That's not part of the warrior code! Brambleclaw said so, and he's right.

Shiningheart: Do you only do things that the warrior code tells you to?

Jaypaw: Well, yes. . . .of course. That's what being a Clan cat is all about.

Braveheart: Does the code tell you to eat? Sleep? Drink?

Jaypaw: No, but. . . .

Shiningheart: (gently) But you do these things every day.

Brightspirit: (walking forward to touch her muzzle to Jaypaw's) Does the warrior code tell you to believe in StarClan?

Jaypaw: (staring at her, wide-eyed) No. No, it doesn't.

Brightspirit: And yet you do. If you didn't, we wouldn't be here.

Hollyleaf: Jaypaw, are you going to introduce us?

Jaypaw: Can. . . can you see them?!

Lionblaze: No, it looks like you've lost your mind and are talking to a birch tree. But they're obviously there. So, who is it? Bluestar? Spottedleaf?

Jaypaw: No, it's Brightspirit, and her parents, Shiningheart and Braveheart. (Each starry cat in turn dips its head to the other cats, who can't see them.)

Hollyleaf: Brightspirit? I've never heard that name before. Was she once in ThunderClan?

Jaypaw: I. . . I don't think so. I've only met her once before. But she knows all about us, and ThunderClan!

Brightspirit: Tell Lionblaze and Hollyleaf that you can't let the other Clans starve.

Shiningheart: There have to be four Clans. If one leaves, the others become vulnerable.

Braveheart: The biggest battle the Clans ever face is with what lies outside their territories. For that, you need one another.

Brightspirit: And right now, the other Clans need you. Have mercy on them, Jaypaw. Don't rely on the warrior code to tell you what to do all the time. Do what you know is right.

Hollyleaf: What are they saying?

Lionblaze: (looking wildly around) Can they see us? I mean—we can't see them, but does that mean they don't know we're here?

Jaypaw: They can see you. They're telling me that we must share our fresh-kill with the other Clans.

Lionblaze: (circling aggressively, just missing the starry visitors) That's nonsense! What kind of StarClan cats are they? Don't tell me—they're from ShadowClan, trying to weaken us so their favorites can invade our territory.

Jaypaw: They're not from ShadowClan. Actually, I don't know what Clan they belong to.

Shiningheart: That doesn't matter, Jaypaw. We are here for the sake of all the Clans.

Braveheart: And the other Clans will starve to death unless you help them.

Lionblaze: Have you told them it's not part of the warrior code? (Glancing at the place where he thinks they're standing, he raises his voice.) The warrior code doesn't say anything about feeding our enemies! We're not going to do it!

Brightspirit: What about you, Jaypaw? Can you find mercy in your heart? As a medicine cat, you are not bound by the same rivalries as your littermates. Can you watch the other Clans die when you have enough food to share?

Jaypaw: (quietly) No, I cannot.

Lionblaze: That's right. We cannot give away our fresh-kill.

Jaypaw: No. I mean, we cannot let our fellow Clans starve. We must take food to them until newleaf comes.

Lionblaze leaps at Jaypaw and swipes at him with his claws sheathed. Jaypaw stumbles, caught unawares (he can't see his brother, only the starry cats). Hollyleaf springs forward to stop Lionblaze.

Hollyleaf: Stop! What in the name of StarClan are you doing?

Lionblaze: (growling) In case you hadn't noticed, our brother is about to give away all our food.

Brightspirit You must listen to your heart, Jaypaw. It might be speaking so softly you can hardly hear it. But it will tell you what is right.

Brightspirit, Shiningheart, and Braveheart take turns touching Jaypaw's head with their muzzles, then exit, fading.

Hollyleaf: Jaypaw, are you okay?

Jaypaw straightens up and faces her, although he is again entirely blind.

Jaypaw: I'm fine. Come on. We need to hunt.

Lionblaze: (planting his paws squarely) You. Are. Talking. Feathers. No way am I going to waste my hunting skills feeding our enemies!

Jaypaw: Then I'll hunt on my own. Unless you want to come, Hollyleaf?

Hollyleaf : (glancing at Lionblaze) Yes, I'll come. The other Clans won't attack us if we give them food. And they'll be in our debt after this.

Jaypaw: (sadly, to himself) That's not the reason we have to do this. But if it means you'll help me, then it's good enough.

SCENE THREE

The forest, ThunderClan territory. Jaypaw, Hollyleaf, and Lionblaze are stalking prey, pouncing, occasionally catching and neatly dispatching a mouse, vole, or little bird. Hollyleaf hunts cautiously and cleverly, stalking the tiniest scent. Lionblaze is better at taking giant leaps from a distance, using strength and power. Jaypaw is the least experienced because he's a medicine cat, not a warrior, and also because he's blind,

but he does his best. They're collecting a small pile of fresh-kill at the foot of a tree. (Improvised speech or action would be fine here!)

NARRATOR: The three young ThunderClan cats set out to catch prey for their starving neighbors. Jaypaw struggles, not just because he is blind, but because he is a medicine cat and hasn't been trained to hunt like the others. But he still tries his hardest, with Brightspirit's message ringing in his ears.

Hollyleaf: Good catch, Lionblaze! Thanks for coming with us. We wouldn't have caught as much without your help.

Lionblaze: (gruffly) I still think what we're doing is mouse-brained, but we're the Three in the prophecy, remember? We have to keep together, whatever happens. Though if any cat catches us, you can do the explaining.

Jaypaw: (trotting up with a mouse, which he drops on the fresh-kill pile) The prophecy already sets us apart from our Clanmates. And no cat can accuse us of breaking the warrior code.

Hollyleaf: Come on. We won't be able to carry much more. Let's head to WindClan first since that border's closest.

The cats pick up the fresh-kill; Hollyleaf helps Jaypaw pick up some mice by their tails. Lionblaze drapes a squirrel across his broad shoulders. They set off through the trees to the WindClan border, which is marked by a stream at the edge of the open moor. The cats put down the fresh-kill and stand at the edge of the stream, gazing across the moor.

NARRATOR: They reach the border with WindClan, where the forest gives way to an open stretch of moorland. If they go one step farther, they will be trespassing!

Jaypaw: Can you see any patrols?

Hollyleaf: Not yet.

Lionblaze: The way the wind is blowing, they'll pick up our scents in no time. We just have to hope they don't claw our ears off before we can explain what we're doing. You know what WindClan's like; they're bound to be too proud to accept our help.

Jaypaw: They will if they're hungry enough.

Hollyleaf: I think I can see some cats! (They shuffle nervously on their side of the stream.)

A patrol of WindClan cats arrives: Ashfoot, the deputy; Whitetail his apprentice, and Breezepaw. All are thin and very suspicious of being attacked in their weakened state.

NARRATOR: A WindClan patrol arrives: Ashfoot, the deputy, with Whitetail and Breezepaw. Breezepaw has crossed paths with the ThunderClan cats before—and there's no love lost between them!

Breezepaw: (hostile) What are you doing here? (spotting the fresh-kill, he arches his back and bristles) Have you been stealing prey from us?

Lionblaze: Hardly, you mangy lump of crowfood. Unless squirrels and mice have started living on your territory.

Breezepaw: (squaring up to Lionblaze on the edge of the stream) Who are you calling crowfood? I'll rip your pelt if you're not careful!

Ashfoot: I'll deal with this, Breezepaw. Lionblaze, what are you doing so close to WindClan territory? Does Firestar know you're here?

Hollyleaf: We brought you this (indicates fresh-kill).

Breezepaw: Don't touch it, Ashfoot! They've probably put deathberries in it!

Ashfoot: Why would you bring us food?

Lionblaze: (looking at Jaypaw) Because. . . .

Jaypaw: Because it's the right thing to do. Because if one Clan suffers, all the Clans suffer. We have enough food to help all the Clans survive leaf-bare.

Ashfoot: It doesn't say anything about this in the warrior code.

Jaypaw: (exasperated) Our lives are not confined by the warrior code! We should do what is right, not only what we are told to do.

As they are debating, Brightspirit, Shiningheart, and Braveheart appear behind the ThunderClan cats, watching and listening.

Hollyleaf: It's all right, Jaypaw. You knew it would be hard to make them understand.

Ashfoot: Then we thank you for this gift. May StarClan walk your path, always.

Breezepaw: You're not going to accept it, are you?

Ashfoot: Breezepaw, if StarClan hadn't wanted these cats to share their food, our warrior ancestors would have made sure every last creature stayed hidden in the forest. But this is a good catch, better than we have seen in moons, which must mean we have StarClan's blessing.

Breezepaw: Well, I'm not going to eat any of it.

Ashfoot: That's your choice. But as your deputy, I'm ordering you to help carry it back to your camp.

The WindClan cats leap across the stream and collect the prey. There are shy murmured thanks, although not from Breezepaw, who's still bristling with fury. Once back across the stream, Ashfoot pauses to speak to the ThunderClan cats once more.

Ashfoot: This changes nothing between our Clans. We thank you, but we will not be in your debt for this gift. Set one paw across our border and we'll rip your fur off.

Breezepaw: Yeah! I'll be waiting for you, crowfood!

Jaypaw: We understand. This is the way it must be.

Hollyleaf: (quietly) The warrior code has to mean something. Sharing our food doesn't make us allies.

Lionblaze: Come on. If we're going to take fresh-kill to the rest of the Clans, we'd better get a move on or it'll be dark.

He starts to lead them away from the stream. Jaypaw brings up the rear. He stops by Brightspirit and looks up at her.

Jaypaw: You're sure this was the right thing to do?

Brightspirit: Always. It takes great strength to have mercy—more strength than it takes to win a battle. Go well, Jaypaw. I will see you again.

Exit Jaypaw, following Lionblaze and Hollyleaf. The starry cats watch them go.

Shiningheart: You did well, Brightspirit. I'm very proud of you.

Brightspirit: Jaypaw is a good cat. He just needs to trust himself more.

Braveheart: He has a difficult path ahead of him.

Brightspirit: But I will be with him, every step of the way.

They exit in opposite directions, with Brightspirit casting one last glance back toward ThunderClan.

THE END