

Chapter 1

Low Tide

Dandelion-hued eyes fixated on the roaring water in front of her. The river's loud rumble felt like a Lullaby, a song she had lost before the battle against the other Clans. Goldfish's tail remained curled around her paws, tortoiseshell pelt faintly damp from the spray of the water. The faint chill was rather refreshing for the Riverclan Lionheart, and her paws itched with the desire to swim. To dive beneath the surface, watching the sunlight shine from

above her head and reflect down on the rocks, swimming gracefully and elegantly like an otter. Her eternal fondness of the river remained strong despite living in the mountains for two moons. The soft, green grass felt lovely on her pink colored pads, a bright contrast to the hard cool stone she had been forced to grown accustomed to. A small, peaceful sigh escaped between her slightly parted jaws, the taste of the world around her refreshing and so, so primitively relaxing she couldn't possibly hate it. It felt natural and clear, the air not nearly as thin and distasteful as the mountains had been, where the slightest scent would strike her in the nose so powerfully Goldfish wouldn't have more than a moment to shake her head and clear it away before another scent would catch her attention. In the forest, each scent was leveled evenly, older ones fainter than newer. It felt a lot less confusing here, where she had grown up. Where she had learned to hunt and to fish and to swim. A sudden thought struck The Ace of Spades, her angular ears pricking up at her ponder. Had the Atari, cats who had resided as neighbors in RiverClan's temporary territory, always been where they were? Had all the cats of this faction been born there? Or perhaps did they begin as rogues, or cats of the clans? Maybe Kittypets. That thought forced a snort from Goldfish, the scarred molly feeling wryly amused at the thought. Kittypets? Forming a *group of wild cats*? Ridiculous! Kittypets could learn to be clan cats- Wisteriawren had, hadn't she?- but a kittypet not being weak and surviving in the mountains felt pretty unlikely. The mountains were dangerous, and honestly Goldfish

doubted that if Wisteriawren, when she had first joined the clan, would have been able to survive the mountains. It just.. seemed impossible.

Unexpectedly, something jolted her from her thoughts. Goldfish, confused, looked around? What had so violently brought her from her wonders? Oh!

Wait. Oh, she must have fallen asleep, sitting up, or something. As Heroneye had! That had been amusing, she remembered that very clearly. The Lionheart looked around and noticed... she wasn't home. This wasn't Riverclan territory. Across the river was a dark, dreary looking forest. But beneath her own paws was a sparkling, grassy forest floor. StarClan! She was in StarClan. Again. For the second time in her life. That was a bit often, wasn't it? On another note, why was the forest so dreary? The trees were dead or crumbling, the thick scent of mold and blood hung in the air when she leaned closer. Was that.. was that what the dark forest looked like.

Goldfish took a tentative step back from the river, realizing it was.. red. The river wasn't water anymore. It was *blood*. A small gasp escaped from her as she jumped back, confused and alarmed. The dead.. was spreading.

What was happening? But with a blink of the eye it all disappeared, and she just stood alert with her fur bushed and ears pinned back. Relaxing, the tortoiseshell feline looked around for any trace of what in the world had just happened. But.. there was nothing. The whole place looked completely and totally normal. Was that some sort of vision? Had she been seeing things?

No, no, the whole place had felt too real. The Ace of Spades raised one brow as she slid into a more casual stance. "Hello?" She called out, looking around. "Hello, kitten." A familiar voice responded smoothly. Oh, stars.. it was her mother. Cormorantcrash, seemingly in a shadow of darkness and blood stepped from the shadows, grass dying with each step of her paws and reviving when they left the earth. Alarmed and virtually mortified, Goldfish stepped back quickly, ears pinned. "Mother." Her voice was a low growl, filled with malice and disdain. "What do you want?" For some reason, the vitiligo tortoiseshell seemed offended. "That's no way to greet your mama." She said silkily, voice laced with hurt. Goldfish stayed rigid and alert, claws unsheathed and seemingly ready to attack. But alas, Cormorantcrash was a ghost, out of reach of her deadly claws and sharp teeth. "Aw, come now, Goldie, don't be so.. *uptight*. I'm just a little kitty in a big world. What could I do?" She mewed, voice innocent. But The Ace of

Spades knew better. Her mother was psychotic. A murderer. An abuser. Someone not to be trusted. "What are you here for?" She asked, not relaxing in the slightest. But her mother had begun sniffing about curiously, black burgundy and white pelt shadowed and unkept. Her nose led her to a bramble bush, which she tried to touch but her paw went directly through. Her disappointment that she lacked pain was evident, but her amber eyes remained bright and she simply laughed. Loudly. The kind of wheezing, cackling laugh that keeps your breath away. This proved to be properly terrifying to Goldfish, of course, so she began taking stumbling steps backwards. But Cormorantcrash's laughter halted abruptly and she, desperately, ran toward Goldfish with a wheeze, but the lionheart jumped back angrily, gazing and spitting uncontrollably, fur impossibly puffed up. "Ready yourself, Kitten!" She howled, breaking into laughter once more and she stumble-ran toward her daughter. Shower terror rocketed through The Ace of Spades' bones like lightning, breath coming in short, hiccuping gasps. "I'm coming home!" And then she was gone. When Goldfish squeezed her eyes closed and opened them, any trace of her mother was gone. And she was left, bushed and tense with terror, alone. Haunting horror clear in her eyes. Because her nightmare- her enemy, her murderous mother- was coming *home*.