

Warriors: Into the Wild

By Erin Hunter

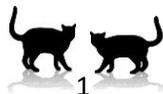
Chapter 1

It was very dark. Rusty could sense something was near. The young tomcat's eyes opened wide as he scanned the dense undergrowth. This place was unfamiliar, but the strange scents drew him onward, deeper into the shadows. His stomach growled, reminding him of his hunger. He opened his jaws slightly to let the warm smells of the forest reach the scent glands on the roof of his mouth. Musty odors of leaf mold mingled with the tempting aroma of a small furry creature.

Suddenly a flash of gray raced past him. Rusty stopped still, listening. It was hiding in the leaves less than two tail-lengths away. Rusty knew it was a mouse; he could feel the rapid pulsing of a tiny hearty deep within his ear fur. He swallowed, stifling his rumbling stomach. Soon his hunger would be satisfied.

Slowly he lowered his body into position, crouching for the attack. He was downwind of the mouse. He knew it was not aware of him. With one final check on his prey's position, Rusty pushed back hard on his haunches and sprang, kicking up leaves on the forest floor as he rose.

The mouse dived for cover, heading toward a hole in the ground. But Rusty was already on top of it. He scooped it into the air, hooking the helpless creature with his thorn-sharp claws, flinging it up in a high arc onto the leaf-covered ground. The mouse landed dazed, but alive. It tried to run, but Rusty snatched it up again. He tossed the mouse once more, this time a little farther away. The mouse managed to scramble a few paces before Rusty caught up with it.



Suddenly a noise roared nearby. Rusty looked around, and as he did so the mouse was able to pull away from his claws. When Rusty turned back he saw it dart into the darkness among the tangled roots of a tree.

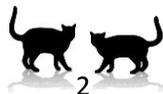
Angry, Rusty gave up the hunt. He spun around, his green eyes glaring, intent on searching out the noise that had cost him his kill. The sound rattled on, becoming more familiar. Rusty blinked open his eyes.

The forest had disappeared. He was inside a hot and airless kitchen, curled in his bed. Moonlight filtered through the window, casting shadows on the smooth, hard floor. The noise had been the rattle of hard, dried pellets of food as they were tipped into his dish. Rusty had been dreaming.

Lifting his head, he rested his chin on the side of his bed. His collar rubbed uncomfortably around his neck. In his dream he had felt fresh air ruffling the soft fur where the collar usually pinched. Rusty rolled onto his back, savoring the dream for a few more moments. He could still smell mouse. It was the third time since full moon that he'd had the dream, and every time the mouse had escaped his grasp.

He licked his lips. From his bed he could smell the bland odor of his food. His owners always refilled his dish before they went to bed. The dusty smell chased away the warm scents of his dream. But the hunger rumbled on in his stomach, so Rusty stretched the sleep out of his limbs and padded across the kitchen floor to his dinner. The food felt dry and tasteless on his tongue. Rusty reluctantly swallowed one more mouthful. Then he turned away from the food dish and pushed his way out through the cat flap, hoping that the smell of the garden would bring back the feelings from his dream.

Outside, the moon was bright. it was raining lightly. Rusty stalked down the tidy garden, following the starlit gravel path, feeling the stone cold and sharp beneath his paws. He made his dirt beneath a large bush with glossy green leaves and heavy purple flowers. Their sickly-sweet



scent cloyed the damp air around him, and he curled his lip to drive the smell out of his nostrils.

Afterward, Rusty settled down on top of one of the posts in the fence that marked the limits of his garden. It was a favorite spot of his, as he could see right into the neighboring gardens as well as into the dense green forest on the other side of the garden fence.

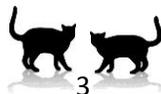
The rain had stopped. Behind him, the close-cropped lawn was bathed in moonlight, but beyond his fence the woods were full of shadows. Rusty stretched his head forward to take a sniff of the damp air. His skin was warm and dry under his thick coat, but he could feel the weight of the rain drops that sparkled on his ginger fur.

He heard his owners giving him one last call from the back door. If he went to them now, they would greet him with gentle words and caresses and welcome him onto their bed, where he would curl, purring, warm in the crook of a bent knee.

But this time Rusty ignored his owners' voices and turned his gaze back to the forest. The crisp smell of the woods had grown fresher after the rain.

Suddenly the fur on his spine prickled. Was something moving out there? Was something watching him? Rusty stared ahead, but it was impossible to see or smell anything in the dark, tree-scented air. He lifted his chin boldly, stood up, and stretched, one paw gripping each corner of the fence post as he straightened his legs and arched his back. He closed his eyes and breathed in the smell of the woods once more. It seemed to promise him something, tempting him onward into the whispering shadows. Tensing his muscles, he crouched for a moment. Then he leaped lightly down into the rough grass on the other side of the garden fence. As he landed, the bell on his collar rang out through the still night air.

"Where are you off to, Rusty?" meowed a familiar voice behind him.



Rusty looked up. A young black-and-white cat was balancing ungracefully on the fence.

"Hello, Smudge," Rusty replied.

"You're not going to go in the woods, are you?" Smudge's amber eyes were huge.

"Just for a look," Rusty promised, shifting uncomfortably.

"You wouldn't get me out there. It's dangerous!" Smudge wrinkled his black nose with distaste. "Henry said he went into the woods once." The cat lifted his head and gestured with his nose over the rows of fences toward the garden where Henry lived.

"That fat old tabby never went into the woods!" Rusty scoffed. "He's hardly been beyond his own garden since his trip to the vet. All he wants to do is eat and sleep."

"No, really. He caught a robin there!" Smudge insisted.

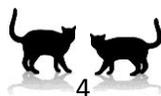
"Well, if he did, then it was before the vet. Now he complains about birds because they disturb his dozing."

"Well, anyway," Smudge went on, ignoring the scorn in Rusty's mew, "Henry told me there are all sorts of dangerous animals out there. Huge wildcats who eat live rabbit for breakfast and sharpen their claws on old bones!"

"I'm only going for a look around," Rusty meowed. "I won't stay long."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you!" purred Smudge. The black-and-white cat turned and plunged off the fence back down into his own garden.

Rusty sat down in the coarse grass beyond the garden fence. He gave his shoulder a nervous lick and wondered how much of Smudge's gossip was true.



Suddenly the movement of a tiny creature caught his eye. He watched it scuttle under some brambles.

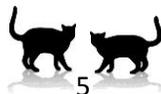
Instinct made him drop into a low crouch. With one slow paw after another he drew his body forward through the undergrowth. Ears pricked, nostrils flared, eyes unblinking, he moved toward the animal. He could see it clearly now, sitting up among the barbed branches, nibbling on a large seed held between its paws. It was a mouse.

Rusty rocked his haunches from side to side, preparing to leap. He held his breath in case his bell rang again. Excitement coursed through him, making his heart pound. This was even better than his dreams! Then a sudden noise of cracking twigs and crunching leaves made him jump. His bell jangled treacherously, and the mouse darted away into the thickest tangle of the bramble bush.

Rusty stood very still and looked around. He could see the white tip of a red bushy tail trailing through a clump of tall ferns up ahead. He smelled a strong, strange scent, definitely a meat-eater, but neither cat nor dog. Distracted, Rusty forgot about the mouse and watched the red tail curiously. He wanted a better look.

All of Rusty's senses strained ahead as he prowled forward. Then he detected another noise. It came from behind, but sounded muted and distant. He swiveled his ears backward to hear it better. *Paw steps?* he wondered, but he kept his eyes fixed on the strange red fur up ahead, and continued to creep onward. It was only when the faint rustling behind him became a loud and fast-approaching leaf-crackle that Rusty realized he was in danger.

The creature hit him like an explosion and Rusty was thrown sideways into a clump of nettles. Twisting and yowling, he tried to throw off the attacker that had fastened itself to his back. It was gripping him with incredibly sharp claws. Rusty could feel spiked teeth pricking at his neck. He writhed and squirmed from whisker to tail, but he



couldn't free himself. For a second he felt helpless; then he froze. Thinking fast, he flipped over onto his back. He knew instinctively how dangerous it was to expose his soft belly, but it was his only chance.

He was lucky; the ploy seemed to work. He heard a "hhuuffff" beneath him as the breath was knocked out of his attacker. Thrashing fiercely, Rusty managed to wriggle free. Without looking back, he sprinted toward his home.

Behind him, a rush of paw steps told Rusty his attacker was giving a chase. Even through the pain from his scratches stung beneath his fur, Rusty decided he would rather turn and fight than let himself be jumped on again.

He skidded to a stop, spun around, and faced his pursuer.

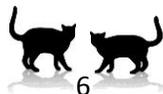
It was another kitten, with a thick coat of shaggy gray fur, strong legs, and a broad face. In a heartbeat, Rusty smelled that it was a tom, and sensed the power in the sturdy shoulders underneath the soft coat. Then the kitten crashed into Rusty at full pelt. Taken by surprise by Rusty's turnabout, it felt back into a dazed heap.

The impact knocked the breath out of Rusty, and he staggered. He quickly found his footing and arched his back, puffing out his orange fur, ready to spring onto the other kitten. But his attacker simply sat up and began to lick a forepaw, all signs of aggression gone.

Rusty felt strangely disappointed. Every part of him was tense, ready for battle.

"Hi there, kittypet!" meowed the gray tom cheerily. "You put up quite a fight for a tame kitty!"

Rusty remained on tiptoe for a second, wondering whether to attack anyway. Then he remembered the strength he had felt in this kitten's paws when he had pinned him to the ground. He dropped onto his pads,



loosened his muscles, and let his spine unbend. "And I'll fight you again if I have to," he growled.

"I'm Graypaw, by the way," the gray kitten went on, ignoring Rusty's threat. "I'm training to be a ThunderClan warrior."

Rusty remained silent. He didn't understand what this Gray-whatsit was meowing about, but he sensed the threat had passed. He hid his confusion by leaning down to lick his ruffled chest.

"What's a kittypet like you doing out in the woods? Don't you know it's dangerous?" asked Graypaw.

"If you're the most dangerous thing the woods has to offer, then I think I can handle it," Rusty bluffed.

Graypaw looked up at him for a moment, narrowing his big yellow eyes "Oh, I'm far from the most dangerous. If I were even half a warrior, I'd have given an intruder like you some real wounds to think about."

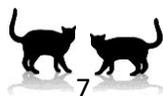
Rusty felt a thrill of fear at these ominous words. What did this cat mean by "intruder"?

"Anyway," meowed Graypaw, using his sharp teeth to tug clumps of grass from between his claws, "I didn't think it was worth hurting you. You're obviously not from one of the other Clans."

"Other clans?" Rusty echoed, confused.

Graypaw let out an impatient hiss. "You must have heard of the four warrior Clans that hunt around here! I belong to ThunderClan. The other Clans are always trying to steal prey from our territory, especially ShadowClan. They're so fierce they would have ripped you to shreds, no questions asked."

Graypaw paused to spit angrily and continued: "They come to take prey that is rightfully ours. It's the job of the ThunderClan warriors to keep them out of our territory. When I've finished my training, I'll be so



dangerous, I'll have the other Clans shaking in their flea-bitten skins. They won't dare come near us then!"

Rusty narrowed his eyes. This must be one of the wildcats Smudge had warned him about! Living rough in the woods, hunting and fighting each other for every last scrap of food. Yet Rusty didn't feel scared. In fact, it was hard not to admire this confident kitten. "So you're not a warrior yet?" he asked.

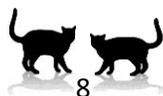
"Why? Did you think I was?" Graypaw purred proudly. Then he shook his wide, furry head. "I won't be a real warrior for ages. I have to go through the training first. Kits have to be six moons old before the even being training. Tonight is my first night out as an apprentice."

"Why don't you find yourself an owner with a nice cozy house instead? Your life would be so much easier," Rusty meowed. "There are plenty of housefolk who'd take in a kitten like you. All you have to do is sit where they can see you and look hungry for a couple of days--"

"And they'd feed me pellets that look like rabbit droppings and soft slop!" Graypaw interrupted. "No way! I can't think of anything worse than being a kittypet! They're nothing but Twoleg toys! Eating stuff that doesn't look like food, making dirt in a box of gravel, sticking their noses outside only when the Twolegs allow them? That's no life! Out here it's wild, and it's free. We come and go as we please." He finished his speech with a proud spit, then meowed mischievously, "Until you've tasted a fresh-killed mouse, you haven't lived. Have you ever tasted mouse?"

"No," Rusty admitted, a little defensively. "Not yet."

"I guess you'll never understand." Graypaw sighed. "You weren't born wild. It makes a big difference. You need to be born with warrior blood in your veins, or the feel of the wind in your whiskers. Kitties born into Twoleg nest could never feel the same way."



Rusty remembered the way he had felt in his dream. "That's not true!" he mewed indignantly.

Graypaw did not reply. He suddenly sniffed mid-lick, one paw still raised, and sniffed the air. "I smell cats from my Clan," he hissed. "You should go. They won't be pleased to find you hunting in our territory!"

Rusty looked around, wondering how Graypaw knew a cat was approaching. He couldn't smell anything different on the leaf-scented breeze. But his fur stood on end at the note of urgency in Graypaw's voice.

"Quick!" hissed Graypaw again. "Run!"

Rusty prepared to spring into the bushes, not knowing which way was safe to jump.

He was too late. A voice meowed behind him, firm and menacing. "What's going on here?"

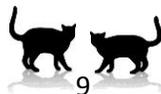
Rusty turned to see a large gray she-cat strolling majestically out from the undergrowth. She was magnificent. White hairs streaked her muzzle, and an ugly scar parted the fur across her shoulders, but her smooth gray coat shone like silver in the moonlight.

"Bluestar!" Beside Rusty, Graypaw crouched down and narrowed his eyes. He crouched even lower when a second cat- A handsome, golden tabby- followed the gray cat into the clearing.

"You shouldn't be so near Twolegplace, Graypaw!" growled the golden tabby angrily, narrowing his green eyes.

"I know, Lionheart, I'm sorry." Graypaw looked down at his paws.

Rusty copied Graypaw and crouched low to the forest floor, his ears twitching nervously. These cats had an air of strength he had never seen in any of his garden friends. Maybe what Smudge had warned him about was true.



"Who is this?" asked the she-cat.

Rusty flinched as she turned her gaze on him. Her piercing blue eyes made him feel even more vulnerable.

"He's no threat," mewed Graypaw quickly "He's not another Clan warrior, just a Twoleg pet from beyond our territories."

Just a Twoleg pet! The words inflamed Rusty, but he held his tongue. The warning look in Bluestar's stare told him that she had observed the anger in his eyes, and he looked away.

"This is Bluestar, she's leader of my Clan!" Graypaw hissed to Rusty under his breath. "And Lionheart. He's my mentor, which means he's training me to be a warrior."

"Thank you for the introduction, Graypaw," meowed Lionheart coolly.

Bluestar was still staring at Rusty. "You fight well for a Twoleg pet," she meowed.

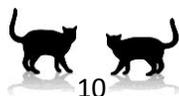
Rusty and Graypaw exchanged confused glances. How could she know?

"We have been watching you both," Bluestar went on, as if she had read their thoughts. "We wondered how you would deal with an intruder, Graypaw. You attacked him bravely."

Graypaw looked pleased at Bluestar's praise.

"Sit up now, both of you!" Bluestar looked at Rusty. "You too, kittypet." He sat up immediately and held Bluestar's gaze evenly as she addressed him.

"You reacted well to the attack, kittypet. Graypaw is stronger than you, but you used your wits to defend yourself. And you turned to face him when he chased you. I've not seen a kittypet do that before."



Rusty managed to nod his thanks, taken aback by such and unexpected praise. Her next words surprised him even more.

"I have been wondering how you would perform out here, beyond the Twolegplace. We patrol this border frequently, so I have often seen you sitting on your boundary, staring out into the forest. And now, at last, you have dared to place your paws here." Bluestar stared at Rusty thoughtfully. "You do seem to have a natural hunting ability. Sharp eyes. You would have caught that mouse if you had not hesitated so long."

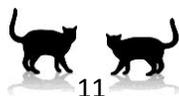
"R-really?" Rusty stammered.

Lionheart spoke now. His deep meow was respectful but insistent. "Bluestar, this is a kittypet. He should not be hunting in ThunderClan territory. Send him home to his Twolegs!"

Rusty prickled at Lionheart's dismissive words. "Send me home?" he mewed impatiently. Bluestar's words had made him glow with pride. She had noticed him, she had been impressed by him. "But I've only come here to hunt for a mouse or two. I'm sure there's enough to go around."

Bluestar had turned her head to acknowledge Lionheart's words. Now her gaze snapped back to Rusty. Her blue eyes were blazing with anger. "There's never enough to go around," she spat. "If you didn't live such a soft, overfed life, you would know that!"

Rusty was confused by Bluestar's sudden rage, but one glance at the horrified look on Graypaw's face was enough to tell him he that spoken too freely. Lionheart stepped to his leader's side. Both warriors loomed over him now. Rusty looked into Bluestar's threatening stare and his pride dissolved. These were not cozy fireside cats he was dealing with. They were mean, hungry cats who were probably going to finish what Graypaw had started.



Into the Wild is the first book in the Warriors series. It was written by Kate Cary and Cherith Baldry under the pen name of Erin Hunter. Rusty was an ordinary house cat who dreamed of living in the wild, catching his own prey and sleeping under the stars. One night, he decided to explore the nearby forest but was warned by his friend, Smudge, that the forest was filled with dangerous, wild cats. Rusty continued into the forest anyway and meets with the leader of ThunderClan, Bluestar leader of one of Into the Wild is a fantasy novel written by Erin Hunter. The novel was published by HarperCollins in Canada and the United States in January 2003, and in the United Kingdom in February 2003. It is the first novel in the Warriors series. The book has been published in paperback, and e-book formats in twenty different languages. The story is about a young domestic cat named Rusty who leaves his human owners to join a group of forest-dwelling feral cats called ThunderClan, adopting a new name: Firepaw Into The Wild. For Billy-who left our Twoleg home to become a Warrior. We still miss him very much. And for Benjamin-his brother.Â The drenched RiverClan warriors bounded silently up the shore and hurled themselves into battle without even stopping to shake the water from their fur. The dark tabby glared down at Oakheart. â€œYou may swim like otters, but you and your warriors do not belong in this forest!â€ He drew back his lips and showed his teeth as the cat struggled beneath him. The desperate scream of a ThunderClan she-cat rose above the clamor. A wiry RiverClan tom had pinned the brown warrior flat on her belly. Now he lunged toward her neck with jaws still dripping from his swim across the river. Tigerclaw heard the c