

In the misty forest, tall redwoods with trunks 20 feet around, towered above the damp mossy ground. The treehouses nailed to the 10 foot wide branches lay still and quiet, for it was the wee hours of the day, the third of Gresse, 1823 yagf. The only sound was the quiet chittering of sleeping birds and the night watchmen pacing under the wood board that served as shelter, with bows-and-arrows on their backs. The waterfall softly thundered, muffled by distance and trees.

A few hours later, when the sunlight made the forest glow and the mist drift away, Nyla and Srline awoke. Nyla had dark brown hair, green-blue eyes, and was 11 years old. Srline was a bobcat, Nyla's pet, and had golden-grey fur with speckles of black. They heard their mother Lyna, who had light brown hair and green eyes, and her thrush, Nacai, talking and cooking food in the kitchen. Nyla looked out the window towards the bottom of the redwood tree.

Srline meowed, "It looks like sun today," and pushed open the door to the living room and kitchen. The air smelled of the mushroom bread Lyna was making. Nyla and Srline sat at the redwood table, in the chairs of blue alder berry wood and cushions of soft deer leather. Lyna rang the shiny hunk of metal that signaled breakfast was ready. Nyla's younger brother, Effelk, who was 7 years old, with black curly hair and green eyes, and his kestrel, Dynitha, came rushing, shouting, and keeing out of their room.

After a breakfast of quail eggs, venison slices, and a loaf of mushroom bread, Nyla and Srline asked Nacai if they could go outside. The yellow and brown thrush said yes, and Srline and Nyla opened the door and bolted down the tree. It was a refreshingly cool day, and they went over to the rock spring near the border of Treeclan's, her clan's, border. They sipped the cool refreshingly sweet water. Suddenly, Srline froze, amid a drink of water. Nyla heard it too, a soft clanging from underground.

Nyla whispered to Srline, "Do you know what it is?"

Srline softly growled, "I think it's people underground, coming up. I can smell them, they smell of Rillards, those dirty scraps!"

"What dya think they're doing?" asked Nyla

"I dunno," replied Srline, "for all I know, they could be raiding our village or trying to kill themselves."

"I'll tell mom," whispered Nyla, stroking Srline's soft cat fur

They slowly trudged back to their tree, and up the trunk, for they knew that they had given up their playtime. There was an ancient tradition that if a child and her pet came in before their playtime was over, they couldn't go back outside. Nyla and Srline thought this to be a stupid law, "but whatever, we'll get the whole week's playtime forfeited if we complain," thought Nyla. Once they told Nacai, who was perched on the balcony singing, he flicked his feathers dismissing it as make believe. He chirruped, "Ye guys are just imaginin'. We kicked those stupid Rillards out when ye guys were five."

Nyla protested, "That was six years ago! They could have come back!"

Just then, Nyla's mother came out. She had heard their argument through Nacai's ears and come in to break it up.

She said, "You, Srline go catch some quails for lunch, and Nyla, you go collect mushrooms or some lizards or snakes. Go!" She dismissed them with a flick of her hand. Nyla and Srline climbed down the tree. Once they reached the bottom, Srline headed nearer to the waterfall, where the underbrush was dense and quails thrived. Nyla, in turn went to the rotten log she had found the day before. She spotted two fat bolete mushrooms growing out of the side of the log. She picked them and put them in her deer leather game bag. Then, Nyla lifted the log and two fat blue belly lizards skittered out. She quickly pinned one of the down softly with her heel, and lifted it into the gamebag. The other one had gotten away. Now that her mind was clear, she