

Erin Hunter's Confidential Notes 2: Unhappily Ever After? Ending the Doomed Romances

One of the biggest challenges about writing *The Last Hope* was keeping track of all the story lines that hadn't yet been concluded, including the significance of the Ancient cats in the history and present of the Clans; Hollyleaf's tormented past; and Jayfeather's murder charge. And then there were some characters who were waiting for their own endings, happy or not. Oh, how I have loved my doomed romances!

From the moment Graystripe fell into the river and had to be rescued by a very sarcastic Silverstream, I have relished the conflict between heart and code, love and loyalty. I know I've been cruel, but be honest: Did you really get as much enjoyment from the solid, enduring relationships between Brackenfur and Sorreltail, or Dustpelt and Ferncloud? The sharp-tongued banter between Squirrelflight and Brambleclaw in *The New Prophecy* paved the way for a partnership that was never going to run smoothly, even without the crashing lie she told him about the three kits. And Crowfeather seemed to be one of those characters who would always struggle with romance, right from his awkward courtship of Feathertail. I couldn't even let lovely Lionblaze find a mate without putting prophecies and past lives in the way! But I knew their stories had to have some sort of conclusion in this book.

I know many of you wanted to see a reunion between Brambleclaw and Squirrelflight, and I'll admit that I would have liked that too, because they are so well matched and we know how great they can be together. But it just didn't seem possible. How could Brambleclaw ever get over the lie that Squirrelflight told? She did it for the very best of reasons, but she put her sister before her mate, and that chipped away at the foundations of her relationship. If she had been honest with Brambleclaw from the start, things might have been different—but then, would Brambleclaw have tolerated such an outrageous deceit of the whole Clan? So no, they were never going to get back together, not as mates, at least. But as ThunderClan leader and deputy, I think they make a perfect team. Brambleclaw has seen Squirrelflight at her finest and her lowest; there will be no more surprises. As soon as I decided that Brambleclaw would succeed Firestar, there was only ever one choice he could make for his second in command.

There could be no happy endings for Leafpool and Crowfeather, either, but I think you knew that all along. They are from different Clans! Leafpool is a medicine cat! Crowfeather has a mate in WindClan! The spark of passion that made them run away together has long been quenched by the rather grim reality that followed their return, but they will always mean something to each other. I wanted to give them a tiny moment in the middle of the battle in which Crowfeather could tell Leafpool that he had no regrets—and from that statement we know that he is proud of his three other children, and would have been a good father if he'd had the chance.

As for Lionblaze and Cinderheart, I never had any doubts that their romance would survive. Cinderheart does a great job of tempering Lionblaze's hotheadedness, while he gives her the courage to choose her own future—which is exactly what StarClan wanted all along. Cinderpelt gave up so much after the accident that prevented her from becoming a warrior, and part of that was the

chance to be a loyal, loving mate. She still loved Firestar with all her heart, but she never breathed a word about how she really felt: She was his medicine cat, and he had a mate, so she never expected anything different. Lionblaze, Firestar's grandson, is her reward for being so patient!

There's one romance that should have been doomed, and that I just can't seem to let go. Jayfeather and Half Moon meet again in this book, moons and moons and moons after he left her in the mountains as the first Healer of the Tribe of Rushing Water. She has waited for him in the cold, starry places, and when he finally walks in StarClan, they will be together. Maybe they caught me at a weak moment; maybe I can't resist the lure of giving a medicine cat a happy ending. As soon as Half Moon popped up in the prologue, I knew she wasn't going to give up her beloved Jay's Wing because of something as trivial as vast amounts of time. Jayfeather will still be a loyal, gifted, and often troublesome medicine cat for his new leader, Bramblestar, but he will not walk alone in StarClan.