

Alluria



Lexhelm

Mulberry Wood

Rotwood Mire

Castle Keep

The Great Forest

Twisted Spires

The Plateau

Flintfall

The Wastes

Mirror Peak

The Abyss






THE PROPHECY



When the sky fills with shadows
And all is turned to grey
Bravepaw will come.

When hope turns to ashes
And all have lost their way
Bravepaw will come.

The heart will light the dark
Night will turn to day
When Bravepaw comes.





ONE

'Surrender, you
VILE FIEND!

Titch cried as she brandished a wooden sword at her opponent.

Two beady eyes stared unblinking at her from beneath fluffy white fur.

'I am Bravepaw. Face me or meet your doom!' Titch yelled, waving the sword in what she imagined was a threatening manner.

The puffling didn't move from its tree stump. Pufflings rarely moved, unless there was lettuce to eat. They were very fond of lettuce.

'I don't know why you're bothering,' Titch's best friend Huckleberry said lazily. He was sprawled under the shade of a damson plum, his paws stained with purple juice. 'Nothing exciting ever happens on the Plateau.'



Huckleberry bit into another plum and made a contented sound. Who needed excitement when there were *damson plums?*



Titch sighed. Huckleberry was right. Their home sat high above the Great Forest, with cliffs all around. Climbing the cliffs was impossible. Even birds struggled to make the journey up to the Plateau. Titch's home was the safest place in all of Alluria.

Safe... and boring.

'Tithonia Proudleaf, **come here this instant!**'

Huckleberry scurried away behind the cabbages. Violet Proudleaf stomped into view, scattering Puffballs left and right. Titch tried very hard to make herself look

smaller. It wasn't easy, as she was already the smallest mouse on the Plateau.

'I asked you to move the puffballs to the north pasture,' Violet Proudleaf said. Her whiskers quivered with **FURY**.



Titch scuffed her foot in the dirt. ‘Yes, Mama.’

‘So why aren’t you doing it?’

Titch tried to hide her wooden sword behind her back. Her mother noticed, and snatched the sword from Titch’s paws.

‘What is *this*?’

‘A—a sword, Mama.’

Violet sniffed. ‘A **sword**. What possible use does a mouseling have for a *sword*?’

‘I-I was practicing being a warrior, Mama.’

‘We have no need for warriors here. We need farmers to till the soil. We need stonemasons to make our cottages. Thatchers to put roofs over our heads. And we need **puffling herders**. To move our

pufflings to the north pasture so they can grow thick, fluffy coats ready for shearing season!’

Violet tugged on her own vest under her apron to prove her point. Made from puffling wool, it was soft and light as clouds, but ever so **warm** in winter.

Titch’s ears drooped, and Violet’s expression softened. ‘I know you love the old stories,’ she said in a gentler voice. ‘We all do. Tales of Bravepaw, saving Alluria from all those monsters. But they’re just stories, Tithonia. Not real life.’

‘They ARE real!’

Titch said hotly. ‘They really happened.’

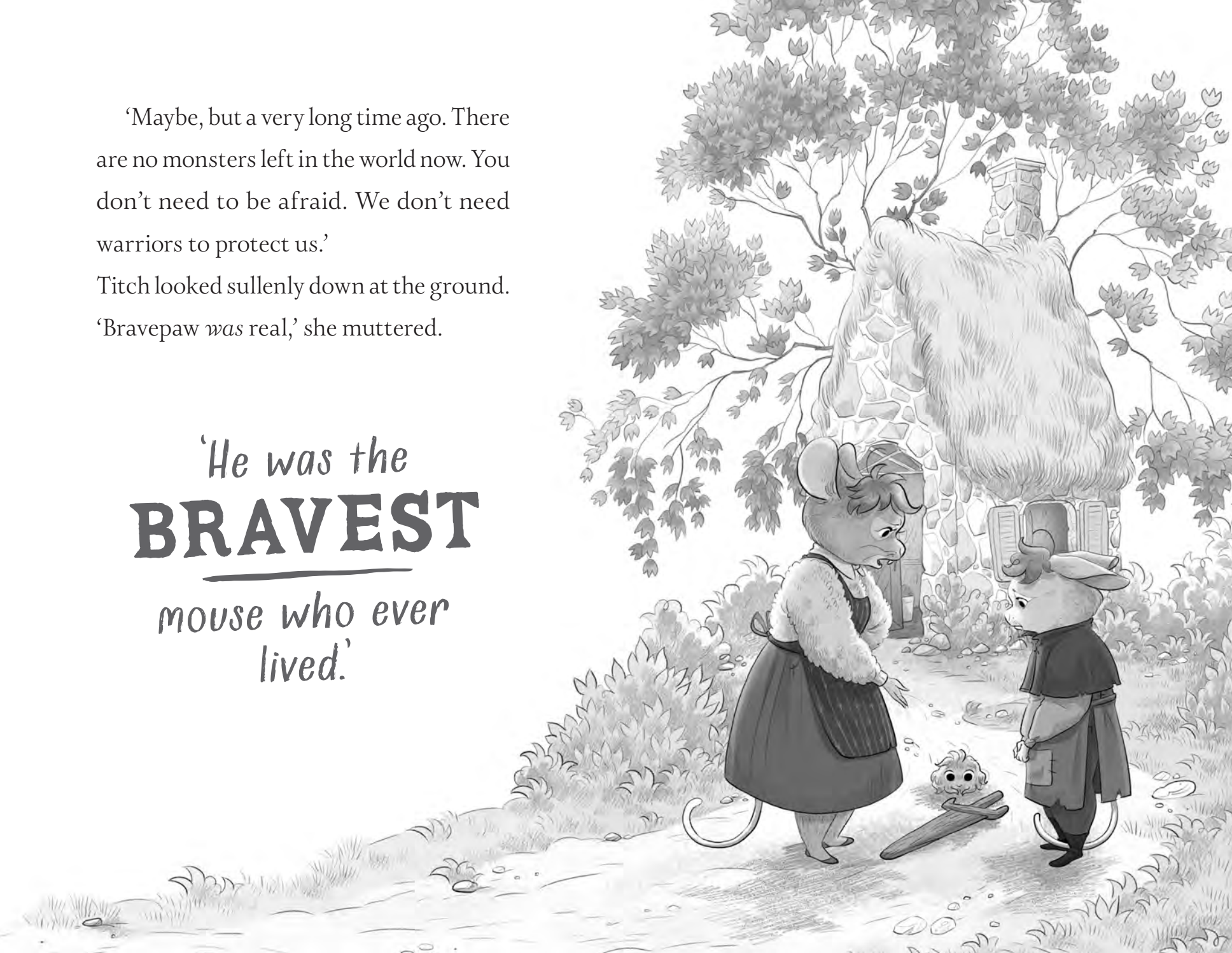


‘Maybe, but a very long time ago. There are no monsters left in the world now. You don’t need to be afraid. We don’t need warriors to protect us.’

Titch looked sullenly down at the ground.

‘Bravepaw *was* real,’ she muttered.

‘He was the
BRAVEST
mouse who ever
lived.’





Violet Proudleaf sighed. ‘Life isn’t all about swords and battles, Tithonia. You have *responsibilities* here. To your community. We must all do our bit, whether we like it or not.’

‘I *know*, Mama.’

‘I have to get back to my pickles,’ Violet said, and turned to make her way back to the little cottage under the sycamore tree. But she paused a moment and looked over her shoulder.

‘There are lots of ways to be **brave**, Tithonia,’ she said. ‘It’s not all about swords and battles.’



Titch watched her go, then picked up her wooden sword and examined it. She’d made it herself from a sturdy oak branch, whittled it in secret away from the eyes of sensible mousefolk.

But there was no need for warriors on the Plateau. Titch looked back to make sure her mother wasn’t watching any more. Then she set off across the grass to the edge of the Proudleaf farm.

The puffling on the tree stump squeaked as she passed. Titch scooped it up in one paw and slipped it into her pocket. ‘*Be quiet, Dollop,*’ she muttered.



‘Titch, where are you going?’ Huckleberry called, as he emerged from the cabbage patch.

Titch didn’t answer. She pushed through the hedgerow. On the other side there was a tangle of grasses and wildflowers.

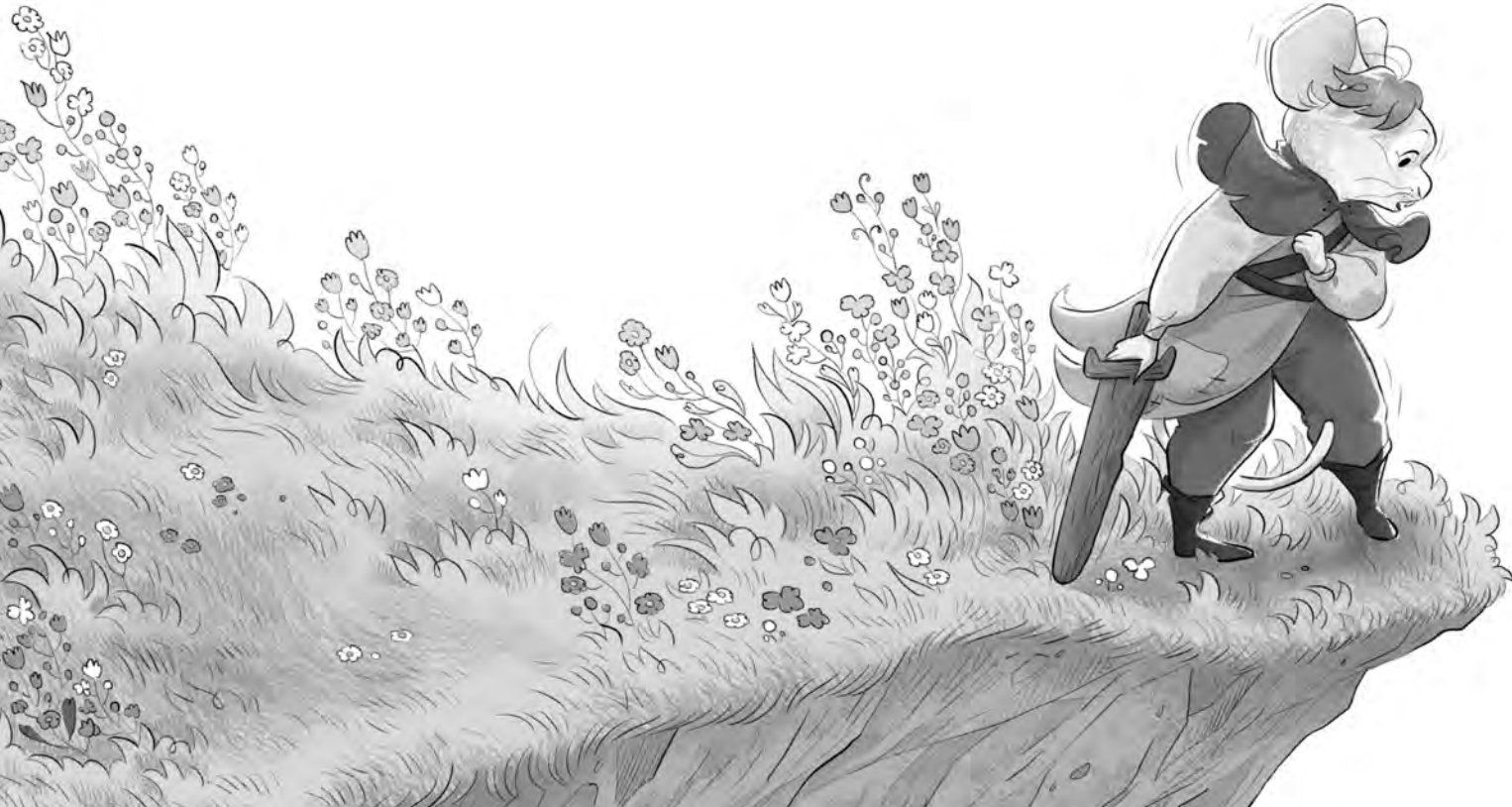
‘*Titch, wait!*’ Huckleberry scrambled after her. ‘You’ll get in trouble!’

Titch ignored him. She kept marching through the tall grass. Right to the very edge of the Plateau.

Her stomach lurched as she approached the edge. It was a

DIZZYING
sheer drop

to the Forest
far below.



No mouse had left the Plateau in several generations. Occasionally a stork or a crow would manage to reach the Plateau, with tales of the Forest and the world beyond. But they never stayed long.

What **DANGERS**
lurked in the Forest?



What **ADVENTURES**
were there to be had?



Titch would never know.

‘Titch!’ Huckleberry came crashing through the wildflowers, panting heavily.

Titch took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and gripped the wooden sword in her paw.

Her mother was right. It was time to put aside childish games and dreams of adventure. It was time to be a good mouse. She lifted her sword to **HURL** it over the edge—

‘Don’t do it, Titch,’ Huckleberry said. ‘You love that sword.’



‘It’s not a sword,’ Titch said. ‘It’s just a stick.’

But she didn’t throw it away. She couldn’t. Maybe she could hide it in the blackberry patch instead.

She turned her back on the edge of the Plateau and started towards home.



Huckleberry didn't move.

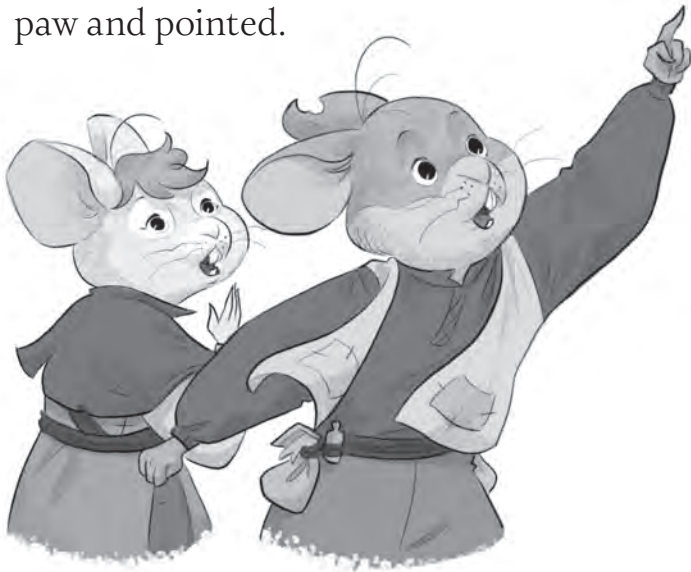
'Come on,' Titch said to him. 'Let's move the pufflings to the north pasture.'

But Huckleberry didn't respond.

He stood, still as a statue, staring over Titch's shoulder. One of his whiskers twitched.

'Huckleberry?'

Slowly, Huckleberry raised a shaking paw and pointed.



Titch turned around and felt all of her fur stand instantly on end.

SOMETHING

*was emerging over the
edge of the Plateau.*

