

A TAIL of ADVENTURE

# BRAVE PAW

and the

CLAWSTONE of

ROTWOOD MIRE



L.M. WILKINSON

Art by LAVANYA NAIDU



*For my brave nibling, Sebastian - L.M.W.*

*To Aloo and Montu, the bravest and best boys I know - L.N.*

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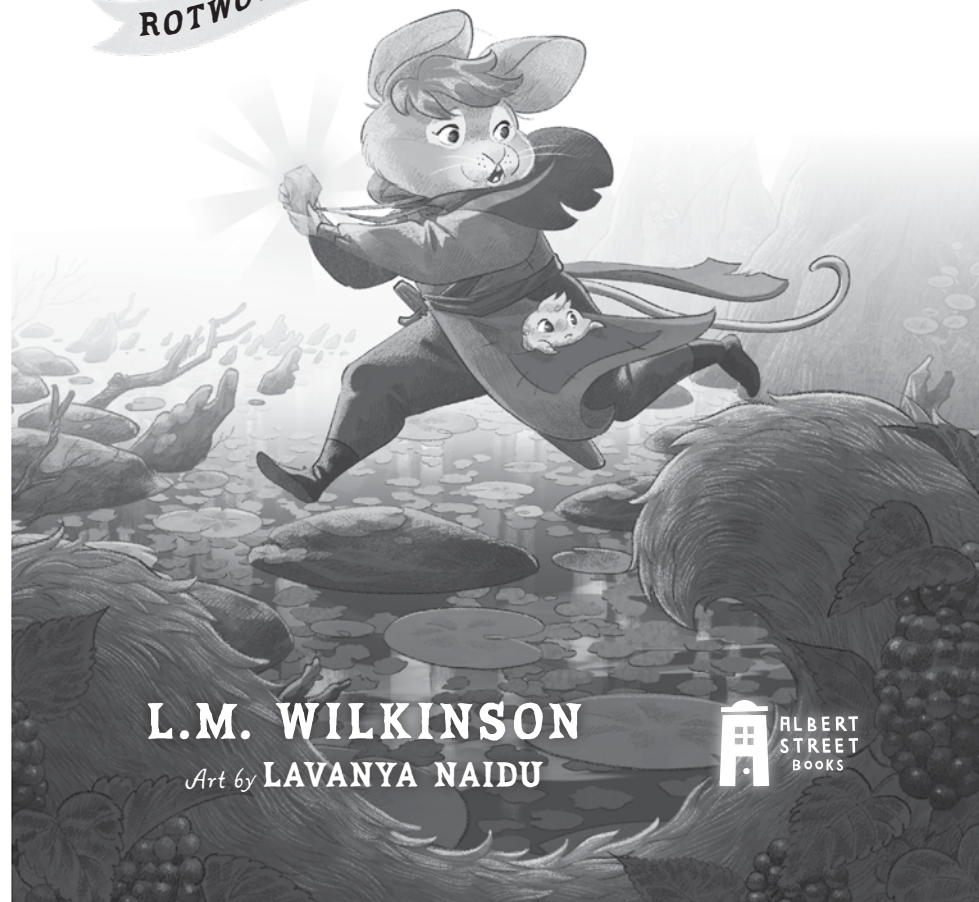


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# BRAVEPAW

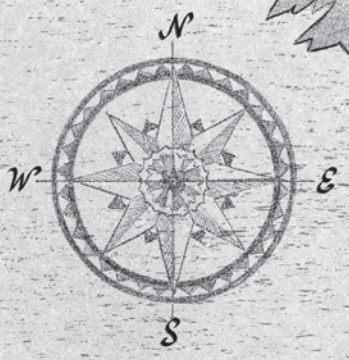
and the  
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# Alluria





# 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.



The swamp stretched out in all directions,  
*grey, miserable* and **ENDLESS**.  
The sky hung over them like a blanket.  
The sun hadn't appeared for days.

Huckleberry slapped at a mosquito, his ears drooping miserably. 'I'm so hungry,' he said in a small voice.

Dollop squeaked in agreement from Titch's pocket.

Titch sat down on a hillock of sharp grey grass.

'We're lost,' she admitted.

Huckleberry sank down next to her. 'How can we be lost, when we don't even know where we're going?'



‘We *do* know where we’re going,’ Titch said. ‘We’re going to the **HEART OF ALLURIA**, to use the Heartstone to mend the crack in the world.’

It sounded ridiculous, even to her.

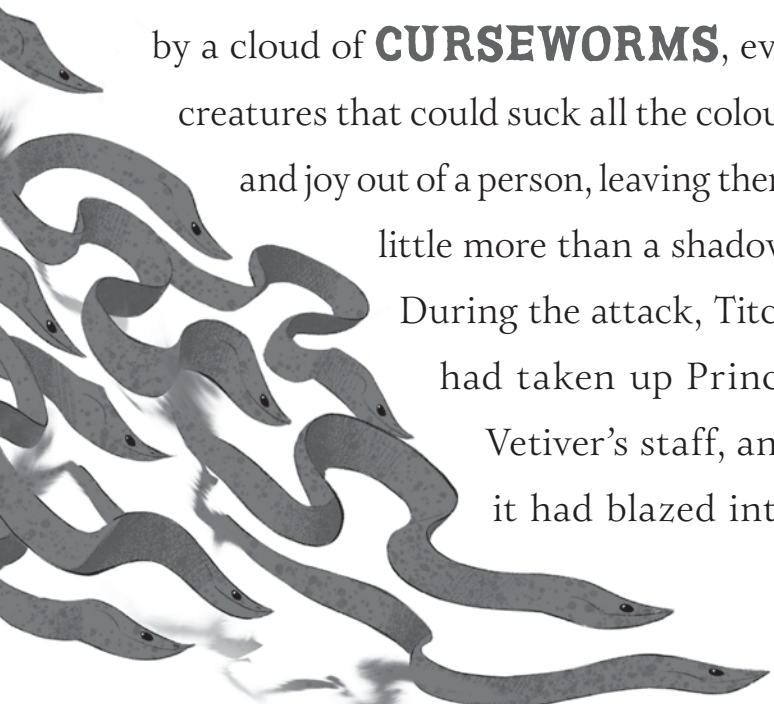
But it had all happened. A mountain hare Prince had crashed onto the Plateau, where Titch and Huckleberry lived with all the other mousefolk. He was followed by a cloud of **CURSEWORMS**, evil creatures that could suck all the colour and joy out of a person, leaving them little more than a shadow. During the attack, Titch had taken up Prince Vetiver’s staff, and it had blazed into

life, driving the curseworms away. Prince Vetiver had been certain that Titch was Bravepaw, the famous warrior of old, brought back to life.

‘Maybe we should try listening to our hearts again?’ Huckleberry suggested.

Titch’s heart wasn’t doing a very good job. After falling off the edge of the Plateau, she’d led them straight into a band of **GRABBERS** who had imprisoned them and nearly eaten them. It was only some quick thinking and help from a giant eaglebear that had saved their skins.

Titch put her head in her paws. ‘I can’t hear my heart over the rumbling of my stomach,’ she said miserably.



‘And the buzzing of these blasted bugs,’ added Huckleberry, slapping at another mosquito. ‘They’ve sucked so much of my blood, I’m surprised there’s any of me left.’

‘Are there any more mushrooms?’ Titch asked.

Dollop crawled out of Titch’s pocket and *squeaked* hopefully.

Huckleberry looked in the pouch at his waist and shook his head. ‘We can gather some more bog cress?’

Titch made a face. Bog cress was **slimy** and tasted like **mud**.



‘You know what I fancy right now?’ Huckleberry asked, closing his eyes. *‘Brambleberry pie.’*

‘With whipped cream,’ Titch said with a sigh.

Huckleberry groaned. ‘Roasted turnips with honey,’ he said, rolling onto his back. ‘And a basket of fresh damson plums. I hope we’ll be home before damson plum season is over.’

Titch hoped so too, but in her heart she knew that it would be a long, long time before they went home. She looked down at her paws. ‘You could go home now, if you wanted,’ she said softly.



Huckleberry wasn't Bravepaw. He didn't have a destiny he had to follow. A prince hadn't given *him* a quest.

Huckleberry glanced at her. 'We could *both* go home now,' he replied.

Titch felt a *tugging* in her heart.

She could go *home*.

She could feel her mother's arms around her again. Eat a hearty bowl of hot vegetable soup, with a fresh loaf of crusty bread baked by her father. Sleep in a real bed.

*But if she went home, it  
would mean she wasn't  
**BRAVEPAW.***

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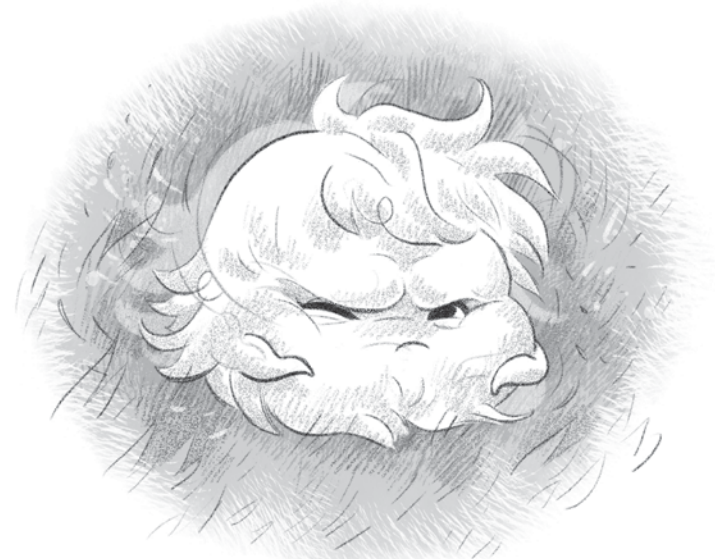
'I can't go home,' Titch said, swallowing down a lump in her throat.

Huckleberry sighed. 'I know.'

Titch stared out at the bleak swamp. An insect buzzed in her ear, and she swatted it away.

'We should keep moving,' she said. 'Try to find somewhere dry to camp tonight.'

A fat drop of rain landed on her paw. Then another. Dollop shook himself, puffing up his fur.



# 'NO!'

Huckleberry shouted at the sky.

## 'NO RAIN! *It's too much!*

His words seemed to hang in the air for a moment, and then the rain started to fall in earnest.



The hillock of grass seemed to shift slightly beneath them. Large ripples appeared in the muddy water.

'What's that sound?' Huckleberry asked. He was still lying on his back.

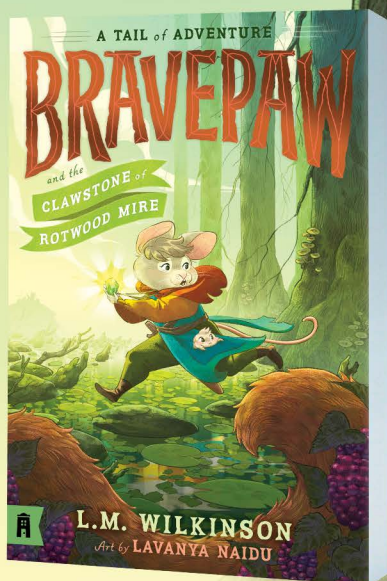
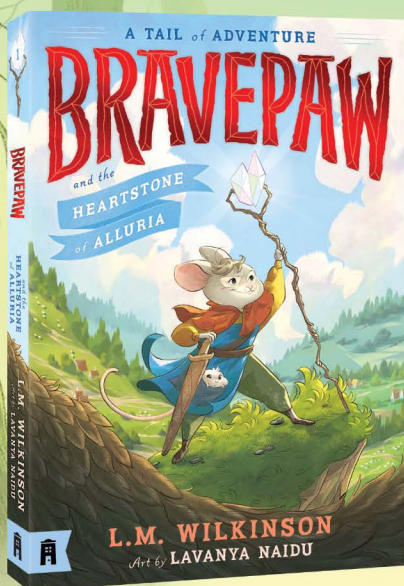
'Thunder?' Titch said, but it didn't sound like thunder.

Dollop burrowed out of sight into Titch's pocket, as the swamp **EXPLODED** around them.



ONE SMALL MOUSE.

ONE EPIC QUEST.



OUT NOW

