

FLORABELL FAIRE PART 1

Featuring: Basil / Rowi / Nameless worrywart

Word Count: 1705

"It should be good to cross here, but watch where you leap!"

Basil called from the edge of the stream. There was a large map stretched out between his paws, and he was tilting it this way and that, trying to plot their next steps. He plucked a pale purple leaf from his hair with a tired sigh.

Basil, assisted by Rowi and their worrisome friend, had been exploring Hohol Forest for Sugar Weaver treats. While one normally wouldn't wander far from Pastol Meadows in search of the sugary crystals, Florabell festival was just a week away now, and the most popular areas had already been picked clean by previous gatherers. There were still requests for more sugar crystals coming in from Lothain, so as a last resort, the trio of Bowroos had taken it upon themselves to scout deeper into the forest, digging about for treats tucked away where larger crederians couldn't reach. It was a gamble that had paid off well, their bag bulging after only half a day's search.

"There's a glade just ahead, I think we'll find more there."

Basil tucked away his map and brushed his long ears back, gazing up at the canopy while he waited for his friends to cross the little brook after him. They were getting rather far in now, and the sunlight that had been bearing down on them for the past few hours could no longer warm their fur. Despite that, Hohol forest wasn't gloomy at all; its trees seemed to have a unique luminescence of their own and bathed everything in an ethereal, lilac glow. Cute little light-motes bobbed about aimlessly, swirling dizzily in the air as the bowroos passed by, and would get into eyes if you weren't careful.

The silence was the most unsettling however, and it wasn't hard to understand why this place had such spooky rumors accompanying it. Rowi's friend--whose name escaped Basil--kept glancing around nervously and muttering about things being "haunted" or that they were "for sure being followed". The worrisome fellow's fidgeting was a little off-putting, but he was extremely fastidious in his work and an excellent climber; his keen eye helped them find many sugar crystals already.

Rowi on the other hand was fearless and energetic, bounding ahead without qualm. He would squirm into every gap he came across no matter how mossy or 'gross', and turned over every boulder he found, not minding the explosion of glimmering bugs that ensued. Currently he had

his rump pointed skyward, using his thick claws to burrow deep into the hollow of a stump for what appeared to be a cluster of round and fat jelly puffs, their scent tantalizing and sweet. A gleeful albeit muffled shout came from within and Basil gave Rowi's tail a firm tug, freeing his furry friend with a *POP!*

Lifting a paw triumphantly over his head, and uncaring of the insects scuttling through his fluffy mane, Rowi crowed joyously;

"Yahoo~! I got a big one!"

Basil and the worrywart scampered closer to get a good look, squatted down at the edge of the stump and pulled their guidebooks from their satchel. Basil glanced from the page to the impressively large jelly puff clutched in Rowi's paws. While the color and texture were indeed close, this one seemed to be...moving?

"Ah...um, Rowi....That's a frog."

"Wha-!?"

Rowi's head jerked back to his paw, still held aloft. Two large, bulbous eyes popped open and the frog in question let out a vexed *RIBBIT*, legs flapping about angrily. Basil sputtered a laugh at his friend's dumbfounded expression, and worrywart could only facepalm when Rowi dropped the fat toad in shock. The heavy thud disturbed the other sleeping inhabitants, and they too let out a chorus of indignant croaks – bursting from their home in a panic, before hopping off into the undergrowth while the bowroo trio stared on, bubbling with giggles. Before they could get back to work however, worrywart's ears pricked in another direction and they froze.

From beyond the swaying pampas grass, in the dimness between trees came a tinkling; soft, light, and mirthful, like the ghostly laughter of a thousand flowers. The sound was sweet and haunting, but Worrywart clutched the horns on their head in terror, eyes wide and trembling. A cluster of tony sprites came drifting lazily across the glade toward them, chirping and chiming as they swirled around their guests.

"Ohhh, i knew it!" Worrywart whimpered, tail curling in fear. "I told you they were watching us...waiting!" The sprites seemed to detect his fear and began spinning faster, their movements becoming erratic and jerky. Basil tried to calm his friend down and reached out for his shoulder, but surprisingly his paw grasped only thin air.

"W-wait, don't move!" Rowi warned with fur bristling, but it was too late.

"They're gonna charm us--lead us to our deaths!" Worrywart stammered, slithering across the grass on trembling legs. "We have to run for it while we can! Quick!"

In a panic, the blue bowroo sprinted off, running for their life in the direction their group had come from; leaping clear of the stream and scrabbling through the curtain of curling vines. Worrywart dipped and dived between looming purple trees in a beeline for the glow of sunlight beckoning in the distance. Basil and Rowi did their best to keep up, calling after him frantically while sprites chirped around them in a flurry all the while.

They eventually caught up to their wayward friend in a small, bright clearing where Worrywart had stopped, slumped to their knees and clutching his head in defeat. The warming glow they'd chased so ardently had not been blessed sunlight after all, but an immense crystal growing from an ancient tree. They'd never come across this immense tree before, and Basil hurriedly tried to check his map; to see where they ended up...but unfortunately there was no such mark on the paper. He couldn't make sense of it.

They were lost...?

Worrywart continued to struggle in their friend's grip, while Rowi made up several reckless plans to "try their luck" and find their way. The sprites continued to linger and swarm about them, drawn in evermore by the tension. Basil, with a flash of enlightenment reached into his satchel for a small, worn-out book and flipped through it rapidly, keeping an eye on the accosting critters. Landing on the worn section of Sprite knowledge he began scanning rapidly, reading in a flash. It was a log handed down by an old leloko carting friend of his, documenting a myriad of Hohol specific flora and fauna -- He found the paragraph he recalled moments ago, and read aloud for his friends;

"The sprites feed on ambient energy and can react to it -- If you are feeling intense emotions in the forest, they will be drawn to you and swirl around until you stop feeling the intense emotion. Then they will disperse...."

Worrywart understood these words were for their benefit and grimaced, biting their lip as they tried to calm down; their struggles in Rowi's hold slowly becoming a clinging. After a few long moments their breathing evened out and their full-body rattle settled into an ever present, but more bearable shiver. In turn, the sprites' sporadic, jerking motions became a smoother, calmer swirl once more. Basil continued;

"It says here that not only do they react to emotions, but also to will -- There's documentation of those blessed by the forest who can control them if they focused hard enough -- Even the blind using them for navigation!--There it is!"

"Maybe..." He murmured, "We could ask them for help? If we think of home as hard as we can, they should lead the way." He beamed hopefully to his companions, nodding urgently. "Try it, picture Pastol Meadows as clearly as you can!"

Closing his eyes with the others and thinking hard, Basil reached out a paw, in his mind drawing a picture of Pastol Meadows; *Shimmering lilac grass...An endless blue sky...Lothain regally perched on the far horizon...*

Slowly, cautiously, a few sprites drifted down to perch on his fingertips, sipping at the energy focused around him and glowing gently, their tiny forms huddled close as if listening carefully. Worrywart squeaked as the same phenomenon occurred to them, their movements tickling their fur. Rowi peeked one eye open and watched in fascination, fighting the urge to reach out and touch one.

Just as Basil was about to give up hope, the sprites slowly took flight once more, bobbing and swaying for a moment before pulling away like the tide and retreating to the tree-line in a ghostly trail. They seemed to wait there, whirling in little circles, tinkling softly.

Rowi and Basil exchanged an excited glance, before dragging a reluctant Worrywart after them to follow the sprites, And for almost an hour little was heard except the gentle chime and the crunch of paws on undergrowth, as they were led left...right...up...and then back down several banks. Gradually the forest lightened around them, the mysterious glow of pastel leaves giving way to the buttery hues of sunlight. The edge of the forest came into view as a dazzling pinprick of light.

Rowi and Worrywart gave a holler filled with relief, and after shaking each other with glee, they made a break for it, crossing the tree line and skipping out into bright, familiar purple grass. Worrywart flopped down into the soil, basking in the presence of their much missed sun, vowing to never enter that cursed forest again!

Basil followed along at a slower pace, pausing before the edge of the trees before looking back. In the radiant glow of daylight, the sprites seemed to fade away, their tiny shapes barely discernible against the dark backdrop. With their guests leaving, the energy they'd been drawn too dwindled, and one by one they began swaying back toward the silent heart of their home.

Rowi called after him from across the meadow, waving a paw enthusiastically. Worrywart's back was turned, eager to get away from the forest and not caring to give it so much as a backward glance.

Turning, he offered a humble bow of thanks to the forest, before scurrying to catch up with his friends.