

Though the sky is blue and the sun is shining brightly from its place in the sky, the air in the Hidden Garden is still a bit chilly as winter continues to stubbornly linger around, reluctant to fully let go of its grasp on the biome. Days like today, however, make for a refreshing walk, and Caelum has chosen to do exactly that. A day like today, he thinks, would be better with amicable company to share it with, but all of his friends were already busy and he doesn't want to let the day pass by unappreciated, so he decides to go it alone. Turning his face to the sky, he basks in the sun's warmth for a moment before continuing on his way. He's in good spirits, slightly bouncing with each step and singing along to the music flowing from his headphones. His pace, while upbeat, is leisurely, and periodically he passes by other Scarfoxes which he'll nod or wave to. Just as he's making his way towards a bench near the willow trees, a group of minis runs across the path, and he has to hop back to avoid colliding with them. One of them, trailing behind the others, stops and apologizes to Caelum before running to catch up with the others without waiting for a reply. He shrugs, witnessed by nobody but himself, and then approaches the bench and sits down to relax for a bit.

Not one to sit still, he takes his MP3 player out of his pocket and changes the music track currently playing until he finds one he likes, swaying in his seat and tapping his sneakered foot against the ground while his ear twitches to the beat. As he vibes on the spot, he takes in the willow trees and surrounding scenery, admiring the already lush greens and plant life blooming in the garden. It's pretty, he thinks to himself, pretty enough to want to keep as a memory forever. Reaching into his hoodie pocket, he extracts his cellphone and opens the camera app, finding a good angle before snapping a picture to admire in the future. Looking at the photo he's taken, he realizes there's a figure in the distance, but can't quite make out who it is, and zooming in doesn't help much. Looking up, he looks at the spot where the figure was standing in the photo, but there's no one there. *"Must have been someone passing by,"* he mumbles to himself out loud, and puts his cellphone back in his pocket. He takes another minute or two to admire the scenery once more, and then he's back on the move.

Leaving the lush willow trees and waterfalls behind, he now makes his way towards Eden's Garden, once again moving at a leisurely pace. It was still early in the day, and he didn't want to rush through things, but he supposes that he could travel to other places in the biome if he *did* end up clearing through the sights too quickly. As he draws closer to Eden's Garden, the welcoming smell of the fresh blooms wafts through the air, and Caelum picks up the pace, eager to see the pretty flowers. He gets sidetracked, however, by an open field boasting a small pond filled with lily pads, and flowering shrubs of pink, blue, and purple at the edge of a forest. His ears perk up as he looks at the lily pads, noticing some of them have their blossoms already visible. Unable to resist, he bounds closer and then gets down on his hands and feet, crawling up to the edge of the pond for a better look at the colorful blooms. In addition to the colors, he detects hints of a subtle but pleasing fragrance, though he's not sure if it's from the lilies in the pond or the flowering shrubs just a few meters behind the pond. Still, this would serve as another lovely commemorative photo, so he stands up and extracts his cellphone once more, stalking around the pond's edge to find the best perspective for the shot. Or, in this case, shots, since he ends up taking multiple pictures

from different angles and perspectives. Satisfied, he pockets his phone once more and sits down at the edge of the pond, taking off his sneakers and dipping his feet into the water. It's brisk, the pond still cold after the winter season, but it's not enough to deter him. As he swishes his feet around in the cold water, he leans back on his hands and looks up at the sky once again. *"You'd probably like this place, especially in the night time,"* he muses quietly to someone unseen. *"I bet it's really pretty in the moonlight. Wonder if anything glows? That would be so cool... If you ever come here at night, I hope you take pictures so that I can see it too."*

At this point, Caelum feels content to stay sitting, and continues to swish his feet around in the pond. By now, he's gotten used to the temperature of the water, and it feels invigorating for him. Removing his headphones, he places them around his neck instead and lies back in the grass, feet still in the water and arms now loosely folded across his thin body as he gazes up at the clouds, making a mental game of seeing if they resemble anything. After a while, he yawns. There's a desire to nap, since he's been sitting for so long in one place, but he shakes it off. There's more to see, after all! Sitting up, he withdraws his feet from the water and climbs onto his hands and feet, wandering over to the flowering shrubs. This is where the pleasant fragrance is coming from, he realizes, and leans in closer. At first, he resists the urge to just shove his face into the colorful blossoms, but the temptation wins him over, nuzzling and rubbing his face against the soft petals.

"Do you like flowers?"

The soft voice startles him and he dives into the shrubs with a startled cry.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you."

Caelum peeks out of the shrubbery, only his tall tufted ears, the spikes of hair, and his eyes visible above the leaves. Before him stands Fleur, the Goddess of Spring and the deity of the Hidden Garden biome. He takes a moment to gaze at her, in awe of her sheer height, before slowly climbing out of the bushes and sheepishly rubbing the back of his head.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were here. Wait no, that's dumb, this is your domain so you're always here, but I didn't expect to see you. Um..." He stammers awkwardly, and then remembers her initial question. "Oh! Yeah, I love flowers!" He looks up at her excitedly, but then his ears droop. "...Not very good at looking after them, though. I don't have the 'green thumb,' as they say."

Fleur rests her scythe against her shoulder, holding it in the crook of her arm, looking thoughtful at that. "You know, I might have something for you, in that case. I'm testing something out, and I'm asking for the help of the Scarfoxes in my domain. Would you be interested in assisting?"

Caelum tilts his head, clearly intrigued. "What do you have in mind?"

Reaching into a satchel hanging from her shoulder, Fleur withdraws a single seedling which she holds in her palm for Caelum to see. "Many of the Scarfoxes here love the flowers, but like yourself, maybe aren't so gifted with taking care of them. I want to develop something that can help, so that we can continue to spread the beauty of the flowers."

The smaller Scarfox leans in closer, inspecting the seedling. "Huh, that's interesting. What do I have to do?"

"Take this," Fleur offers him the seedling, "and infuse it with your magic to help it grow. Oh, but I should mention, it isn't *just* magic that will sprout the plant contained within. You have to imbue it with your feelings, too. Particularly, your feelings - and your thoughts - about the Spring season."

Blue and orange ears perk up instantly, wiggling excitedly. "I'd love to! Erm, but... Do I have to do it right this second?"

The goddess chuckles. "Of course not. Please, take your time and consider what I've asked. I'm sure the result will be much more beautiful if you take the time to think instead of just rushing into it."

"Sounds good. Oh, but how will I find you once I'm ready to show you the flower?"

The verdant Scarfox gestures around her. "I roam my land frequently. If you come back here, I will find you."

"Okay, I can do that," Caelum nods. "Then, give me a bit of time, and I'll come back with my result."

"I look forward to it," Fleur smiles softly. Taking her scythe once again in her hands, she spreads her wings and takes off, likely seeking out another volunteer for her project.

Looking down at the seedling now held in his hands, Caelum rolls it gently around his palms for a moment. "Thoughts and feelings of Spring, huh? That shouldn't be too hard. Just wait, little one. I'll help you grow into something nice~" He pockets the seedling for now to keep it safe, and then makes his way for the garden he was originally heading to. Before, he was just going to admire the plant life. Now, he's seeking out inspiration.

After spending the afternoon in Eden's Garden, Caelum returns home brimming with ideas for his seedling. He wonders, in the end, just how much influence he's going to be able to have on the overall appearance of the plant that sprouts from it, but even if it's not much, the idea still excites him. And this time, he believes, there's no chance of him drowning the poor

thing since it's not grown by traditional means. The magic part will be easy, but he wonders how his thoughts and feelings about the Spring season will manifest in the resulting plantlife. Afterall, how DID he feel about the season? Well, it was his favorite, that was for sure. But *why*? What feelings did the season draw out of him? Dragging a chair over to his kitchen table, he sets the seedling gently on the tabletop and props his head up on his hand to ponder. The fresh buds were visually appealing, the gentle spring rains bringing a sense of tranquility. The petrichor always soothed him when he was upset. Was that it? Was Spring "comfort" for him, then? His ear twitches, and he shakes his head. No, there had to be more to it than that. As the sun starts to dip towards the horizon, painting the sky in vivid hues of pink and orange, Caelum yawns once more. As excited as he was about the seedling, he'd had a relatively active day wandering around the biome, and he was sleepy. Getting out a notepad, he scrawls a reminder on the paper for himself: "*What does Spring mean to you?*" With that, he says goodnight to the seedling on the table, and heads to bed.

The sky is dark, the moon's pale light shining in the window from above when the Scarfox wakes from his slumber. His ears pull back as he stretches and clambers out of bed, turning on the lights inside the small house and making his way out into the kitchen. Putting the kettle on to boil, he grabs two teabags from the cupboard and drops them into a mug, setting it on the counter. Approaching the table, he sees the seedling and the note, and his head tilts thoughtfully. Tearing off the top piece of paper, Nycht sits down and grabs a pen, holding it in his night-colored hand as he neatly writes a reply.

*Fresh starts, or new beginnings. Rejuvenation, invigoration.
Rebirth and renewal. A sense of restfulness, like feeling
energized after a good, long nap. Transformation,
metamorphosis. Change, both in oneself and in the world
around us. Peace, tranquility. It's calm; not dormant like
the hibernation of winter, but not busy like the bustle of
summer. Optimism, moving from a dull and colorless
pessimistic winter into hopeful buds and blossoming colors
of springtime cheer.*

He taps the pen on the table, contemplating what else the season means to him, but the whistle of the kettle interrupts his train of thought. He pours himself a hot cup of tea and sits by the window, looking out into the night. As he dwells on the note and sips his tea, he finds himself irritated that nothing else seems to be coming to mind and heaves a quiet sigh. The more he tries to think about it, the more his thoughts elude him, and eventually he gives up and resigns himself to watching the fireflies dance around beyond the window. Once his cup is empty, he returns to the table, taking his seat and propping his head up on his hand, gazing down at the seedling lying on the tabletop. Poking it gently, he rolls it back and forth in its spot for a moment or two before picking it up and examining it.

Unlike the natural seeds he was accustomed to seeing, this one felt more artificial. An almost plastic-like shell that was extremely firm, refusing to give under pressure as he pinched it between his fingers. "Hm," Nycht mutters, "will this even grow...?" Tossing it up in the air and then catching it in his palm, he closes his eyes and focuses on the seedling. A faint glow of magic radiates from his hand, and he hears the faint sound of plastic splitting apart, the top point of the seed having separated and peeled back slightly, revealing a green sprout. "Ah, I see..." Putting two and two together - the seedling and the notes - Nycht sets the sprouting seed back on the tabletop. He was intrigued, but for now, he had other things to do. Making a new note and placing it with the others, he heads out into the night with his insect net, ready to acquire more specimens for his collection.

The next week went by with preparations being made for the seedling, the bi-colored Scarfox's personalities communicating and planning through notes. After a couple of days, Nycht had managed to craft a clay pot, which he and Caelum then decorated, each with his own idea of what Spring represented. When they were done, the pot itself resembled a scenic panorama depicting the time between the melting snow and the aggressive heat of the summer, with various trees and bushes becoming more lush and colorful the further away from winter the scenery moved. Satisfied with their work, the only thing left was for them to grow the plant and return it to Fleur. Caelum had left a detailed recalling of his encounter with Fleur for Nyct, explaining what the seedling was for and how to grow it. Nycht had already figured it out on his own, but after exchanging notes back and forth, neither one could agree with the other on a shared idea of what Spring meant to them so they decided to take turns imbuing the seedling with their magic.

It took several days to complete the growth, but once it had finished, the seedling had sprouted into multiple Pretend Peonies with a chimeric mutation and a variety of different textures and materials for its petals. Nycht's favorite was the one he'd sprouted that boasted a black, glittery fabric on one side and a soft gradient of the sunrise on the other. The petals were soft, velvety to the touch, but they were firm and unyielding when pinched or poked. His other favorite was a chimeric bloom made of soft, silky material that boasted the colors of the sunrise on one half, and the colors of the sunset on the other. For Caelum, his favorite bloom ended up being a white and pastel blue chimera; on the white half, the very edges of the petals were rimmed with a pale yellow and felt like the petals of a lily, while the blue petals were cool to the touch and almost felt like a gel. As he looked closer, he noticed that they were transparent, as well, leading to the more dense areas of the bloom becoming more opaque and having a more pronounced color. Further spreading out from the pot where transitional buds in various stages of blooming, with some appearing as a fully bloomed flower on one half, and the other half bearing petals that resembled a closed seed.

If Caelum and Nycht had to pick a word to describe their creation, it would be "unique." Or perhaps, Caelum thought to himself, "chaotic." Caelum was nervous about presenting it, after all, other Scarfoxes had likely made something more coherent and unified in design. Still, the task he had been given was done, and it was time to present this creation to Fleur.

Picking up the pot in his arms, Caelum ventures out into the Hidden Garden, making his way back towards the field where he and Fleur had agreed to meet up. As he walked, a couple of minis gawked at the plant he was carrying, and he could hear their loud whispers about how strange the plant looked which made him somewhat self-conscious. *He* liked it, so did Nycht, but seeing the stares and whispers from others made him wary of presenting it to Fleur, and as he drew closer to the field, he started to feel like maybe he shouldn't present it to her. Write it off as a failure, so to speak. Halting his pace, he thinks about it for a minute, but then shakes his head. No, even if the outcome was bizarre, the job was done and he was going to present it anyway. When he reaches the field, Fleur is already there tending to one of the flowering bushes. As Caelum draws closer, he hears her gasp.

"Goodness, me!" She stands up and approaches the smaller Scarfox, examining the plant in his arms. "This is... Certainly a unique result. It suits you, though."

Caelum isn't sure how to interpret that. "It was a joint effort," he mumbles out. "I'm a different person at night than I am during the day, and we had a... hard time agreeing on things..."

Fleur chuckles. "Well, do YOU like it?"

"I do, actually!" Caelum perks up. "It's kinda bizarre, but I think it's cool, too."

"Then, that's what matters!" Fleur takes the plant from Caelum and examines it closer. "Wow! There's a lot of different elements here!" She touches the petals, rubbing some of them with her thumb and examining the textures and materials. "You even decorated the pot!"

Caelum's ears pull back and he rubs the back of his neck, laughing awkwardly. "Yeah. That's actually one of my favorite parts. I had a lot of fun with that part. A-anyway, um, I think that was all I needed to do, right?"

"Yes, thank you for helping me with my little project," Fleur smiles. "I have a reward for you, for helping me out, but I'll need a bit of time to get it to you."

"Oh? That's fine," Caelum looks at her curiously, but then grins. "No rush!"

After bidding goodbye to the Spring Goddess, Caelum returns home and writes a note, telling Nycht about the encounter, spending the rest of the day playing video games before eventually conking out as the sun sets. When he wakes up the next morning, there's a new addition to his front yard - a small plant bed of fresh soil bordered by smooth rocks boasting a variety of colorful plants and even some aromatic herbs on the outer sides. And, in the center, Caelum grins as he spots the familiar chaotic blossoms of his own Pretend Peony. In a green envelope with a single pink flower and curled leaves in the corner. As he opens it, he realizes it's a small card from Fleur.

*"Thanks again for helping me with my project.
I hope you like your gift. - Fleur"*

"I sure do," Caelum chuckles. "I sure do."