

## The Gathering

It was dark. The large trees loomed over the forest floor. Their roots snaking about, entwining and interlacing with each other. The great beasts stood still in the night, with only the leaves quivering in the light breeze. Streaks of moonlight shot through small openings above. The ground below was awash in the silver light that bounced across the dense green moss. Small white mushrooms were scattered about like stars in the sky, creating constellations of hunters and bears alike. They were dainty and small, the size of a coin. Purple flowers danced around them, not much larger. Lilac and lavender, they blossomed. Their soft color was striking compared to the almost blackened trees above.

It was utterly silent. The breeze had ceased and the leaves weren't rustling. A twig broke in the distance. An owl hooted high up on a branch. Then it happened.

A flash of white, a dash of blue, a trace of something orange. The illuminations flew past the dancing purple flowers, the quaint white mushrooms, atop the carpet of moss, through the impending forest. They fluttered and swarmed like a flock of small birds. They carried with them a slight hum, as if their luminescent wings were singing a sweet tune. They flickered through the moonlight, racing towards the field. The field was a wondrous place. It was covered with wildflowers that came alive in the moonlight, thousands of them. It was dead set in the center of the shadowed forest, the forests living, and breathing heart. However, inside of that heart was a single oak tree. Its branches spread wide, a home to many forest animals. It was the oldest tree of them all and stood all alone in the middle of the blooming field.

A glowing, radiant creature emerged in the field, the florets crushed beneath its heavy hooves. Its white coat gleamed blindingly as it stepped out of the dark woods. Instead of antlers, there was just a single horn. Purple and blue wound around this piercing horn, making this deadly spike, exquisite. The small colorful flying lights had reached the field and hovered just behind the large animal. They hid in the shadows as the unicorn began to move forward. More creatures appeared, emerging from the forest to stand by white beast. There were nymphs and sprites, fairies that were half hedgehog, and leaf and water fairies.

The brightly decorated sprites had led all the magical creatures to the field with their melodic twinkling and humming. Reasons unknown, they were beckoned to do so by the grand old tree. The unicorn was the first to step out of the dark and into the field. It was the most intrepid of all the creatures, always leading. Next stepped the nymphs, leaving a trail of water lilies in their wake. The water fairies followed, bright blue imps that dripped and trickled as they fluttered, showering the ground below. The hedgehog fairies trailed behind, their ears stretched far and wide, small, with fuzz on their heads and needles on their backs, they waddled out. The leaf faeries were difficult to spot, inconspicuous, blending with the leaves and trees. Other creatures followed suit, one after another, all dancing, hopping, and ambling across the stretch of wildflowers.

The old oak tree was lit up in front of them, the moonlight glistening off of each delicate leaf, shining through to the trunk. The body of the tree was mottled and twisted, history melded into the bark. It was a miracle it had lived as long as it had, shot with lightning strikes too many times to count. The animals had never ventured to the tree before, scared of what was to become of them.

As they slowly made their way out, a pair of eyes peered out from behind the trunk, watching the magical beings. Nothing but the glaringly white and stark blue eyes could be seen. They disappeared in the murky shadows, hidden from the animal's views, for now.