

THE SPROUT FAIRIES

Forever Fairies

Nova Shimmers

by Maddy Mara

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All the fairies were fast asleep. All the fairies, that is, but one. Nova the Sprout Wing had just woken up. She was confused. *Where am I?*

Nova sat up and looked around. *Oh, that's right. The bedroom branch in the Forever Tree!*

Until recently, Nova had been curled inside her

flower, growing and growing. Her tulip had sung her songs and whispered stories, helping Nova learn the ways of the Magic Forest. Two days ago, on the first day of spring, Nova had sprouted! And so had three other fairies: Lulu, Coco, and Zali. The four new fairies were called Sprout Wings—and now they lived in the Forever Tree with all the other, bigger Forever Fairies.

The fairies hadn't known one another for long, but it already felt like they'd be friends for life. *It's because we sprouted on the same day, decided Nova. That makes us forever friends.*

Morning was just breaking, but Nova knew it would be a while before anyone else awoke.

Even the glow bee on night-light duty had his eyes shut.

She tried reading the book she'd borrowed from the library branch. But she couldn't focus—her brain was whirring! She kept thinking about the fairy pods. There were the Flutterflies, the Shimmerbuds, the Twinklestars, and the Sparkleberries. Which pod would she be put in? And what about her friends? Nova knew it all depended on how they each did in the pod tryouts.

Yesterday, Nova and the other Sprout Wings had finished their very first tryout. It was for the Flutterfly pod. They had all done well, but Lulu was definitely the best flyer. Next up was Shimmerbud!

This was the pod that looked after the creatures of the Magic Forest.

Nova couldn't stay in bed a moment longer. She decided she would watch the sun rise while she waited for everyone else to wake up. Very quietly, she tiptoed across the smooth wooden floor and opened a window. The delicious smells of the Magic Forest filled her little nose. Nova stretched her wings and flew out the window into the cool air.

All around, the forest was slowly coming to life. There were the low buzz of insects and the happy chirping of birds. Nova listened to their intricate songs. One bird in particular caught her attention. Its whistle was so happy, it made her want to

dance! Nova pursed her lips and tried to copy the sound.

Not quite right . . . She tried again, and this time she was much closer!

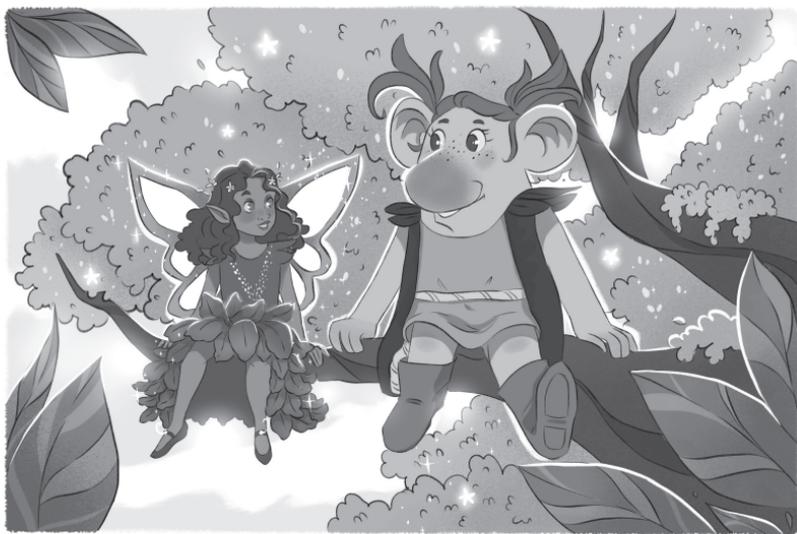
Just then she heard someone else whistle. Looking about, Nova saw a creature sitting on a nearby branch. A troll! She had green hair tied into high bunches and dark-green freckles splashed across her green face. In fact, the only part of her that wasn't green was the very tip of her nose, which was pink.

The troll waved at Nova. "Early riser, huh? I'm the same. How can anyone lie in bed when there's a whole forest waiting to be explored? You're good at

bird sounds. That's a gleebird you just imitated. I've been trying for ages to copy it. I'm Lex, by the way."

"I'm Nova," said Nova, fluttering over. "Mind if I join you?"

Nova wasn't normally chatty, but she was very excited to meet a troll. When she was growing in her flower, Nova had loved hearing stories about



trolls. She knew they were a lot more mischievous than fairies, but they loved the Magic Forest just the same. Nova and the other Sprout Wings had already met a pair of trolls called Tex and Rox. But this troll was new and exciting and . . .

“Achoo!”

. . . unwell?

“Wow! That was my biggest sneeze yet.” Lex pulled out a giant green hankie and blew her nose loudly. “As you can see, I have a cold. But don’t worry—I won’t sneeze on you. You’re one of the Sprout Wings, right? Do you know which pod you’re going to be in?”

“Not yet,” said Nova. “We’re still doing tryouts.”

Lex swung her legs back and forth. “If I were a fairy, I’d want to be in the pod that looks after the forest’s creatures. You know, the one that makes remedies and medicines for the sick and injured animals?”

“That’s the Shimmerbud pod,” Nova said. “They wear the purple-and-green costumes. We’re doing their tryout next.”

Nova was still learning about the different pods, but she had to agree with Lex: The Shimmerbuds sounded wonderful.

“That’s the one.” Lex nodded. “They run the hospital burrow under the Forever Tree. We often

take wounded creatures there if we can tell they need fairy medicine more than troll medicine.”

“Trolls make medicine, too?” Nova asked.

“Of course!” Lex sounded proud. “It’s not the same as fairy medicine because trolls don’t do magic like fairies do. But we use ancient troll knowledge, and our remedies are very powerful. I am on my way to pick tangfruits now, actually. Tangfruit juice is an important ingredient in our cold remedy.”

Nova was about to ask Lex what else was in the troll remedy when she heard a tinkling bell.

Lex laughed. “There’s always a bell ringing

somewhere in the fairy world! What does that one mean?”

“I think it’s the breakfast bell. I’d better get going.” Nova was reluctant to leave—she wanted to stay and chat with Lex. But Nova was not a very fast flyer, and she didn’t like being late.

She spread her wings wide and rose into the air. “It was very nice meeting you, Lex!”

The troll let out another explosive sneeze. This one was so loud it shook the leaves. Lex grinned at Nova. “Nice to meet you, too. I’d better go and pick that tangfruit before my next sneeze knocks over the Forever Tree!”