Fluffy Everlark AU where the Mellarks go on a camping trip to District 10. (Basically ALL THE FLUFF.) Prompt: Green.

Bat Walk

“What’s that? Dad, Dad! What’s that?”

I hear Peeta fumble and um, I grin, poking my head out of the tent.

“Kids, come on, I told you you’re Dad doesn’t know about plants, that’s not fair.”

Peeta turns to me sheepishly, his teeth chewing on his bottom lip, his eyes wide and blank and desperately trying to think of an answer for our children.

I’m the botanist, the biologist. Peeta is the baker, the artist and the typical Dad-like fixer of all things. And he is not your generic, typical father. He is kind and gentle and patient and wonderfully happy, you don’t even have to watch him to know how much he loves our kids, and how much they think he hung the moon and made the sun happy enough to shine as brightly as it does by doing so.

I push myself out of the flap, the sleeping bags all ready now. Not that they matter. I’ll wind up half on top of Peeta, and Willow and Rye pressed into both or either of us.

“What have you got?”
Willow holds out a pale pink flower on a long stem, a patch of yellow and purple stripes on the one lone white petal. I smile; she’ll love it when I tell her its name.

“Wow, Willow. Now this flower, you don’t see these a lot, aren’t you clever for finding it! You want to know what it’s called?”

She grins excitedly, proud for finding something so rare. I lower my voice and she leans in closer. “Fairy slipper.”

She gasps, pulling the flower back to her chest as if it, like it’s namesake, could magically disappear from her grasp. “Fairy?” Her mouth is gaping in awe and delight and when I nod again she beams, running over to her father.

“Daddy, daddy!! Mommy said I have a fairy flower – a fairy flower!” she squeals, and I follow her with a smile to match, as Peeta kneels down to inspect the now precious plant with her, with equal enthusiasm.

“What about you, Rye-Rye?”

He kneels on his hands and knees, nose pressed over a patch of white crocuses. “They smell nice, Mama.”

“Yeah?” I kneel beside him. “These are one of my favourites.”

I pull one from the ground for him, brushing it over the tip of his nose, making him scrunch his face but giggle wonderfully too. He takes it into his hands, lightly stroking the petals, his silver grey eyes studying it carefully, a curious spark behind them, but his lips pouted seriously. I press my lips to his soft blond hair and stand, looking at my watch.

“It’s nearly time for the bat walk, should we get going?”

Peeta looks over to me, and I know that look. The look that says “Ehm, I was thinking…”

He stands, Willow running over to her brother now, and walks over to me. “I was thinking…”

Oh here we go, I think playfully. He’s been dreading this bat walk ever since I mentioned it.

“Why don’t I set up here, I’ll get a fire going, make a start on some s’mores and hot chocolate, have everything all ready for you three coming back?”

He’s avoiding my eyes and I know he doesn’t want to seem scared, which he isn’t.

“Just admit it. You don’t want to walk in the dark forest, do you?” I smirk.

He looks up, sees my less than annoyed expression and laughs. “Fine. You caught me.”

“I want the best s’mores in the District Peeta Mellark,” I lean into his lips.

“Mmhmm, of course,” he closes the distance, pressing his to mine softly. “Katniss Mellark.”

I smile and turn to Willow and Rye, excited smiles looking up at me.

“Ready to see some bats, you two?”

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I wave quickly at Gale as we join the group, before turning back to my children. Rye tugs at my
hand as we fall into the crowd, and Willow starts to brush closer against my legs. They’re a clear mix between Peeta and me, both in how they look and how they act. Curious and explorative and determined, but with enough apprehension to pull them back from recklessness. “Mom?”

“Yes sweetie?” I look down at Rye, who peers back up at me with his big grey eyes, his hands reaching up. “Carry?”

I purse my lips and think quickly. He’s getting too old for him to be so clingy. But I like that he is. Though I won’t be able to hold them both. But he can’t see a thing.

He whines and I sigh, bending down and holding him to my hip, my other hand running through Willow’s soft, dark hair.

“You ready to see some bats?”

They both grin and nod eagerly, Willow looking up at me and Rye squealing in excitement.

“But, Mom, I can’t see anything. Can you lift me too?”

I have to admire how much strength my children believe I have. That they would think I could carry them both at the same time. If I could I definitely would.

“I’m sorry, Wills, I can’t carry you both. You’ll have to take turns.” I’ve suddenly remembered another, more practical reason for having Peeta here.

She pouts and sighs, as a hush falls over the crowd, turning to the front as a collective, ready. And then Gale speaks.

“Hey everyone. I’m assuming we’re all here for the bat walk? Yeah? Good, okay. My name’s Gale and I’m going to be showing you around these woods this evening. You’ve had the safety talk, don’t stray too far, kids: I know it’s hard but try and not let your parents run away as they get all excited.” The adults titter a laugh, the kids giggle. “Now, can I ask if those of you of… of a short stature make your way to the front, and anyone with children too, we want to make sure everyone gets to see the action.”

Willow beams and tugs my hand toward the front, Rye wriggling to be put down. I smile at them, and find a spot off to the side, aware of trying not to block anyone’s view behind me, even though I barely reach five foot three myself. Gale smiles at me again, a knowing look in his eye and I know he did this for me and the kids. I mouth a thank you and he smiles before he turns away, going back into tour guide mode.

“Right, let’s get started!”

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The forest is like my home. I’ve always loved the trees and the green. I could get lost staring up at the void of branches, birds and so many creatures living there. Gale knows his stuff, but I expect him to. We studied together, even worked together before he moved to 10. And while he isn’t doing as heavy going science as I always thought he would, I can tell he is happy in the outdoors.

Willow and Rye stand in awe, wandering through leaves and roots and branches clumsily as they stare up at the high trees, drinking in the green, beautifulness of it all. I’ve had to pull them up more than once as they kept walking, mouths gaping and eyes wide and to the forest ceiling, losing their footing frequently.

We see where the bats sleep, we get to hold one. Gale is full of information, telling us about their
lives, why they do things, the different kinds of bats, what they all eat.

We’re heading back to the start, and I clasp Willow and Rye’s hands in each of mine. Gale slips away from the group and over to us.

“Hey, Catnip.”

“It’s good to see you too,” I joke, stopping and untangling my hand from Willows to give Gale a quick, one armed hug. “Nice tour.” I pull back and take Willows hand back into my own. “You guys remember mom’s friend Gale, don’t you?”

Willow nods shyly, rubbing her toe into the dirt, Rye gazes up at him, frowning. They don’t really know Gale and I don’t expect them to remember him as my friend; they were only tiny when he moved away.

“Where’s Peeta?” he grins, knowing full well this isn’t Peeta’s scene.

I smile playfully back. “Setting up camp.”

“I see,” he smirks, and I shoot him a look that tells him if my children weren’t here he’d be getting an ear bashing and a shove. He just grins wider and starts walking.

The crowd regroups, and Gale gives a speech to end it all, wishing us a good night. We turn to leave, when a little voice perks up.

“Wait! Are vampire bats real?” a boy asks, older than my two but with an older brother who grins wickedly beside him. I press my lips together and look to Gale, hoping he has developed some tact not to scare a forest of children into –

“Yes they definitely are real!” He smiles, excited at the question and the chance to share more knowledge with us. Willow and Rye’s mouths fall open, they glance at me, and then back to Gale.

“Do they really drink blood?” another kid asks with a gasp. I think about leaving, but that would cause more of a scene than not.

“Yeah, that’s exactly what they feed on – any animal here, or even a human, like one of us!” I groan quietly and close my eyes, exasperated. “Want to know the really interesting thing about vampire bats?” I watch as the children all peer over to him, hanging on his every word. “If a vampire bat feeds on you one night, they will pick you to feed from again, even if you’re in a room with a hundred other people.”

I feel my face fall, and feel Ryes arms grip around my leg, and Willow reach for my hand. I shoot another futile look at Gale and he finally notices, my eyes darting to my now, slightly terrified children. He gets the hint and wraps up, but it’s too little too late.

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“Hey, how was it? Did you see Gale?”

Peeta stands from the fire which crackles and snaps beside him. It relaxes me at least and I nod tiredly, having distracted Willow and Rye the whole way back with the promise of chocolate and their father’s baking, camp style. He bends and pulls them to him, asking if they enjoyed themselves. They nod and I sigh, thinking Gale’s ending just might’ve gone unnoticed. I don’t know what Peeta tells them, but they break into smiles and dive into our tent after each other. I unfold my arms and walk to him, his arms welcoming me into his embrace.
“How was the walk, how was Gale?” He asks again quietly, and I deflate.

“He’s a fucking asshole, that’s what,” I start, and then I decide I’m being too harsh, so I relax and press myself to Peeta even more, arms tightening around him. “It was fine… and then he wouldn’t shut up about freaking vampire bats. Vampire bats!”

He chuckles. “So Gale’s still Gale.”

I smile into his shoulder and nod. “Yeah.” I pull a long breath in through my nose, the air filled with smoke and fire and trees, green and grass, and because my nose is buried into his shirt, Peeta. I loosen my grip and press my lips to his finally.

Willow and Rye reappear, blankets and stuffed animals at the ready, eyes excited for food. “Well, I do believe we were promised s’mores and hot chocolate,” I smirk, sitting down by the fire and pulling Willow into my lap. Peeta grins, ruffling Rye’s hair.

“Of course – just what you three need after a trip to the forest. You two going to tell me all about it?”

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Full up on Peeta’s camp food, and lulled into sleepiness with me singing by the diminishing fire under the stars, we bundle together into the tent, the children pressed in beside Peeta and me. It is silent apart from the occasional shuffling in sleeping bags and now constant buzz of crickets from the world outside. I look to Peeta and catch his eye. He smiles and I smile back, mouthing “I love you.” He smiles even wider and mouths “I love you too,” back, making me feel warm and happy. I close my eyes and burrow my head into my pillow, getting ready to let sleep carry me. And then I feel Rye move. And then Willow. My eyes fly open and find them sitting up together staring down at Peeta and me. We both push up on to our elbows, neither getting a word out before Rye blurts, “Mom. Do you get vampire bats in District ten?”

And I know I’m going to spend the whole night trying to convince them they are safe, that they will not be bitten by anything, much less a vampire bat. Oh I could kill Gale Hawthorne.

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