

Chapter 3 – The Way It Helps

Everything hurt. From her head to her back to her smallest toe, pain ran through every inch of her, and Samantha didn't want to move at all for fear of only making it worse. Groaning, she slowly opened one eye, then closed it when even that small action made her face feel like it was setting aflame. For a few moments, she just lay there with her eyes shut, unable and unwilling to move. She probably would have remained that way had she not started to hear footsteps and voices coming her way. Adrenaline pumped through her veins instinctively, numbing the pain a bit.

"So then I told her, 'Lady, if you can't handle the accent, you better rethink this relationship.'" a soft yet irritated voice said out loud.

"Oh nice. What did she tell you?" another voice responded, this one sounding only marginally higher-pitched than the last.

"She told me to get my shapely too-good-for-her ass out of her home before she used me as fertilizer for her garden." came the response.

A single laugh rang out through the air, which confused Samantha. Weren't there two people there? Then the laughter and steps abruptly stopped, and she tensed.

"Hold on, what's this?" the voice said, coming up behind her. Samantha felt her heart do a leap; she forced her eyes open, ignoring the burning sensation that followed, and tried to stand up, but none of her arms or legs seemed to be working, and all she ended up doing was squirming a little where she lay. She grunted in frustration, feeling helpless as she panted from the effort alone, her eyes closing shut again.

"Oi, you ok there?" the voice said. Samantha tried again to stand up, but this attempt was even worse than the last, and she cried out in agony as something rubbed against her back, which felt strangely heavy.

"Don't touch me!" she yelled...or at least she tried to, for it came out more like a dry croak; even her throat felt strained and sore.

"Oh ok...hold on, I think I have just the thing for you." the voice said. A bag being popped open and rustling noises could be heard. "Ah, here it is!" the voice called. "Hold still."

Samantha was about to respond something along the lines of 'Already doing that' when she suddenly felt relief coming over her with a cold spray. A quiet hissing sounded behind her, and she breathed a sigh of relief as the pain she felt melted away from wherever the spray

touched. The hissing stopped, and she felt a tap on her shoulder, which no longer stung with every touch.

"Feel better?" whoever was behind her asked.

Samantha nodded, hoping the gesture would suffice. She slowly opened her eyes, greeted by the sight of a sideways forest. Groaning, she tried to turn her head, stopping when she found she was having trouble twisting it as far as she wanted to. She took a breath and rolled onto all fours, pushing herself up with both paws and...wait, all fours? Paws?

Samantha looked down at her hands again, gasping as she saw that sure enough, there were two stubby green three toed paws staring back at her, with small but sharp claws at the ends. She followed her arm up to her shoulder, and then down to her equally green chest, and green legs...

"You alright?" said someone said behind her, and Samantha jumped, having forgotten in her discovery that someone else was there with her. She turned around, laying her wide green eyes on a smiling Breloom with a small brown satchel hanging from a strap on his shoulder.

"Howdy do." he greeted, tilting the mushroom on his head at her with his red pincer-like claws as though it were a hat. Samantha blinked a few times at him, her vision starting to become a little hazy as dizziness washed over her. The Breloom's smile faded as his expression turned worried.

"Whoa, you don't look so good." he said. "You sure you're feeling ok?"

Samantha opened her mouth to say something, but nothing came out. She closed her eyes tightly and shook her head, trying to wake herself up, for she was clearly dreaming...she had to be, for all of this to be real. But when she opened her eyes again, the Breloom was still there, now rubbing the back of his head anxiously.

"So, um, my name's Flowen." he said. "What's yours?"

"You just talked." Samantha said, amazed at what she was hearing out of the Pokemon's mouth.

"Er...yeah?" Flowen said, his eyes shifting warily. "I can talk."

Silence fell between the two, the only sound being of the rushing water of the river a few feet away. Samantha stood up...or at least, she tried to, for as soon as she got up on her hind legs, she lost her balance and fell right back onto all fours. She tried again, and got the same result; something was on her back, throwing her off balance. She looked behind herself, and her heart

skipped a beat as she laid eyes on the closed flower bulb that was attached to her. She recognized that bulb, and instantly it all came together.

"I'm a Bulbasaur." she whispered to herself, looking down at the ground as her own words sunk in. "I'm...really a Bulbasaur."

"Don't worry, I believe you." Flowen answered, not being psychic and therefore unable to sense Samantha's distress. "Do you not have a name? I mean, that's ok if that's what you like. There's not many of your kind around this region to confuse you with anyway. Not that I would..." he quickly added.

Samantha wasn't really listening to the Breloom anymore. She was too busy studying her new Pokemon body. Looking around at the surrounding forest, it seemed much bigger to her then before. Then again, she hadn't taken that into account when she had thought to wish for this in the first place.

That last thought made the former human pause for a second. Then she grinned and looked down at her body again, but this time looking excited rather than horrified. "Wait...I'm a Bulbasaur!" she cheered, hugging her paws around herself, happy that she had finally gotten her wish.

Flowen took a step back from Samantha, disturbed by this change in attitude. "Heheh...yeah..." he mumbled nervously, starting to regret helping her. The human turned Bulbasaur looked up at the Breloom, noticing his reaction, and smirked.

"Sorry, I'm just kinda happy about something going right for once in my life." she said. "Been awhile since that last happened."

"Really now?" Flowen said, appearing a little more assured. "I understand. After all..." he did a small flourish and stepped forward, softly caressing Samantha's chin, who gasped at the sudden action. "There are a lot of females out there who would consider themselves lucky after meeting me." he said, his voice turning sultry.

Samantha blinked, then leaned away from the Breloom, feeling more than a little creeped out at the grass Pokemon's sly undertone. With a little bit of effort, she rolled onto all fours, trying to adjust to balancing the weight on her back with her smaller body. "Dang, how does Bulbasaur do this?" she mumbled, thinking back to her starter Pokemon...then her eyes widened as she remembered what had transpired earlier.

"Oh Arceus, Bulbasaur!" she cried, looking at the river.

"What's the matter?" Flowen said, backing up and waving his hands in front of him defensively. "Did I come on too strong?"

"My Pokemon! He's still out there somewhere, in the river." she said. "I need to find him."

"Your Pokemon?" the Breloom said, looking a little disappointed. Then, out of the corner of his mouth, Samantha heard him whisper. "See, I told you she was taken."

"Shut up." the Breloom whispered, out of the opposite corner with a higher pitch. "It was worth a shot at least."

"Who are you talking to?!" Samantha asked, glaring accusingly at the fellow grass Pokemon. The Breloom appeared mortified that the Bulbasaur had managed to hear him.

"Um...no one." Flowen answered, looking off to the side with his hands clasped behind his back. Samantha glared at him, a low growl escaping her as he kicked the dirt with his feet.

"But I-ugh, never mind! I have more important things to worry about!" she said, turning on her heels and following the river, leaving the other Pokemon standing there, bewildered at what had just happened.

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It took Samantha quite a while to get familiar with how to walk comfortably in her new body, which wasn't helped by the fact that little light was coming through the trees, making it hard to see where she was going. She looked up and saw the orange and red sky, feeling her heart sink; how long had she been passed out?

"Bulbasaur, please be ok." she mumbled pleadingly, following the downstream flow of the water. She couldn't help but remember his fearful expression from the last time she had seen him, and with the rapids she was seeing, she could only imagine how much of a watery hell he had gone through. She kicked herself for having never taught him how to swim. Then she kicked herself again for not saving him. Then again for making him risk his life for her stupid desires, and again for sending him against that Ninetales all by himself...

Samantha suddenly felt angry. More angry than she had ever felt in her life, and the worst part was, it was all directed at herself. Why hadn't she thought this through? Planned ahead for if things hadn't worked out like she had imagined. Yes, she was a Bulbasaur herself now (which was something she was, for now, getting used to surprisingly quickly), but it didn't matter if it meant her friend had had to die for it, the only reason she had wanted to become one in the first

place.

Samantha felt something wet run down her cheek, and she stopped to reach up and wipe it off, but her paw strained to reach her face, and she was again reminded that her body wasn't built like a humans at all. Her comfort in her new form began to fade as multiple new concerns she hadn't thought about ran through her, all stemming from the possibility that her friend was most likely dead. What if she met a predator? She couldn't defend herself in this body yet! She was completely at the mercy of this forest, and she had no idea where she even was. It was getting dark, she had no shelter, and with every passing moment Samantha felt smaller and smaller, the looming trees around her starting to morph into potential predators.

Samantha stumbled, feeling quite dizzy all of a sudden. She hadn't realized how much of her plan had depended on Bulbasaur to show her the ropes, or to be more specific, her vines, which she had no idea how to even use. She strained her shoulders, hoping that might do something, but nothing happened, only confirming her helplessness. Panting in what she knew wasn't exhaustion, Samantha watched as the shadows of the forest became larger, and the rushing rapids next to her starting to sound louder and louder. Her heart thumped rapidly against her chest, and she spun around in place, feeling terror piercing her very soul. She sniffled, feeling another tear running down her cheek as she tried to think of what her Bulbasaur would do in this situation, but that only succeeded at reminding her of his plight, and possible death...

"Help me." she whispered to the darkness, although she already knew no one could hear her. A loud growl sounded out, and she let out a small cry, looking all around before realizing that was her own stomach. It was almost a relief, until she realized that she had almost no idea of what Bulbasaur's ate in the wild. Did they hunt and eat other Pokemon? Would she have to kill to survive out here? Could she kill? Even if she could, she had no idea how.

"Mom...Bulbasaur..." Samantha whispered, closing her eyes as she weakly called out for someone, anyone, to come and help her. She sniffled, feeling so alone and helpless where she stood, unknowing of what to do with herself. She wanted to curl up in a ball and hide herself away, but she didn't even know if her body could do that anymore.

The loud crunch of dead leaves behind her made Samantha jump, and she spun around, adrenaline pumping through her. Her teary, bloodshot green eyes peered into the darkness yet again, but there was no light anymore, so for all she knew it could have been her imagination...or a predator...

"S-stay b-back!" she cried out, her voice hoarse and cracked, another snuffle escaping her. "I'll...I'll..." she stuttered, now even knowing what to threaten.

"Hey, relax, I mean no harm!" a familiar voice said, and a beam of light shined across Samantha's face as the Breloom from earlier appeared, holding a flashlight out in front of him.

"Oh, it's you." he said happily, moving the flashlight onto himself to show her it was indeed him. "Funny, I was just wondering if we'd ever meet again."

Samantha sighed with relief; at least she wasn't alone now. "H-hello...and sorry about earlier. I...I'm just worried about him...my friend." she explained, still sniffing a bit. She wiped her face into the ground, not knowing of any other way to clear off her tears.

"Ah, don't worry about it. If I had a mate, I'd be worried too..." he said, walking over to her. Samantha breathed deeply, her mouth dry as she debated what to say.

"Listen...I-I need help." she said.

"With what?" the Breloom asked. Samantha was tempted to answer 'everything!', but she was too desperately in need of help to start being difficult.

"Um...finding shelter." she said. Her stomach rumbled loudly, causing the Breloom to whip his head around for a second looking for the source. "And food too, I guess." she said, cheeks blushing a little.

"Oh, well I can help on that last part, certainly." the Breloom said. He set his flashlight down and reached into his satchel, searching inside for a minute before pulling out a couple berries with his claws, holding them in a practiced fashion. "Here we go. I know it's not much, but that should hold you over until we can find something else." he said, holding them out to her. Samantha reached a paw up to take them, but without fingers, she quickly found there was no way she was grabbing any of them.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Here." the Breloom said, pulling out a small handkerchief from his bag and laying it on the ground, before setting the berries on it. Samantha stared at them, then back up at the Breloom, who was waiting for her to eat them.

"You ok?" he asked, now looking slightly worried. Samantha just nodded, reminding herself that she was a Bulbasaur, and would have to eat as one. She bent her head down awkwardly, biting into one of the berries. It was very ripe, being extremely sweet. She chewed slowly, and a lump formed in her throat as when she remembered Bulbasaur had picked some for her just a few days before...it felt like long time ago...

She couldn't hold it back anymore; Samantha burst into tears.

"Whoa, hey, what's the matter?!" Breloom said, taken off guard by her reaction. "What's wrong?"

Samantha shook her head, closing her eyes as she bawled out incessantly. The Breloom wrung his hands together, looking left and right, trying to find something, anything to make the Bulbasaur quiet down. Desperate to calm her, the Pokemon did the only thing he could think of.

He walked over, picked the Bulbasaur off her front paws, and wrapped his arms around her softly.

Samantha stopped crying almost immediately. She gasped when she saw the Breloom's face right next to hers, his mushroom hat touching her head. At first, she was unsure of what the latter was doing. But when she felt his paw rubbing her back, she gasped, smiled a little, and returned the hug as best she could with her stubby paws.

"Whew, looks like this worked." she heard him whisper, but she just closed her eyes and hugged him tighter, ignoring the fellow's Pokemon's eccentricities for the moment. She rubbed her face into his shoulder, and she could feel him tense up, but other than that, he didn't react. He was giving her exactly what she needed, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

"So...uh...are you alright now?" he asked, feeling more than a little awkward.

"Yeah." she answered, still holding on to him.

There was a pause.

"Can I stop hugging you?" he asked.

Another pause.

"Sure." she finally responded.

They let go of each other, the Breloom stepping back and trying to hide the blush on his cheeks. Samantha sat where she was, giggling a little at his cute expression, still sniffing every now and again. Then she saw that the berries he had placed down were still there, and promptly bent down to eat them, feeling a little more comfortable doing so than before. Breloom smiled at this and picked up his flashlight, waiting for her to finish eating.

"I think there might be this one place we can stay at." he said. "It's only a bit of a walk. You up for it?"

Samantha ate the last berry, cringing as this one had been slightly more bitter than the others, but nonetheless nodded and picked up the Breloom's handkerchief with her mouth,

handing it back to him. He took it gratefully, stuffing it back into his satchel, then pulled out a compass, studying it for a moment.

"It's this way." he said, setting off eastward, away from the river. Samantha hesitated, looking at the river, then sighed and followed behind the Breloom without a word, eyes settling pleasingly onto his back muscles. For some reason, they reminded her of Bulbasaur's...