

Jem and the Humans

by Jamie Harbison

Early one morning, just as the birds of Wilderberry Wood started their song, Jem woke up with a wonderful idea. He would go and see if he could find any humans. He had heard lots about them in stories but had never actually seen any. The older elves in the village did not seem to think much of them but Jem's mother had once taught him never to judge another elf before walking in his slippers. He wondered if that went for humans as well. He decided that on that very morning, he would find out for himself. He was in for a wonderful adventure.

During his breakfast he asked his Dad about them.

"Where do humans live, Dad?" he asked.

"Well Jem," his father answered, "A few of them live on the other side of Deepstone River but over there, beyond the hills, is a town where hundreds of them live."

"Can we go and catch one Dad?" Jem asked.

"Oh no," chuckled his father. "They are about a hundred times bigger than the biggest elf. What would you do with such a thing?"

"Really Dad? *That* big? What do they do all day then?" he asked.

"Being so big, Jem, they are very clumsy and go around breaking things mostly," answered Dad. "Why Uncle Morris told me that just the other day, he saw some of them wearing these daft yellow hats, smashing a perfectly good house to rubble."

"Why on earth would they do something so silly?" asked Jem.

"Nobody knows, my son. It's a mystery."

"Can I go and see them Dad, can I please?" asked Jem. Not very happy with the idea, Jem's father told him that humans did not know anything about elves and could be very dangerous. Jem begged and pleaded with his father who eventually gave in.

"As long as you're careful and you take someone with you," said Dad finally. With that, Jem quickly finished his breakfast and ran down to Aelyn's house. Aelyn was his best friend in the whole world and he would not dream of going on such an adventure without him. After much persuasion, Aelyn's mother also agreed to let them go, but not without a stern warning.

"They are mean and nasty things, those humans," she said. "If you get in their way, they're likely to squash you like a bug. As long as you promise not to get into any trouble and you're both very, very careful, you can go."

"We promise," sang Jem and Aelyn together. Aelyn's mother gave them both some mushroom sandwiches and dwarf apples to eat for lunch, and she packed a small bottle of dewberry juice in case they got thirsty. So off they went, headed for the hills in search of humans.

Excited, the young elves skipped along the path and wondered what they would do when they found what they were looking for.

"Let's catch one and make it our prisoner," said Jem. "With such a big slave, we could make it do anything!"

"My Mom said that they are so stupid that they do more damage than good," Aelyn warned. "So we will probably end up doing more work cleaning up after it."

"They must be an awful nuisance then," thought Jem as they came to the edge of the forest. "Well, we'll just have to go and see," called Aelyn as he ran ahead across the meadow. Jem raced after him.

After a little while they found their first signs of human life. Jem was the first to spot it – a great big metal thing, about twice their size with a hole at one end. It looked like an enormous tin can and smelled just like cooking apples.

"There's something in there," noticed Aelyn as they walked around it, inspecting their find closely. Sure enough, when the little elves looked closer, they saw ants marching in, taking turns collecting some of the sticky stuff that lay in a puddle at the bottom and marching back out again. Aelyn was about to climb inside to see what the sticky stuff was when Jem suddenly noticed how sharp the edges of the hole were.

"Look out!" shouted Jem.

"Whew, thanks mate," said Aelyn. "I didn't realise how dangerous this thing was."

"No problem," answered Jem. "These humans must be pretty awful to leave such a treacherous thing lying around." They left the ants to their endless task and continued on their way, not very impressed with humans so far.

After a brief rest under a tree and some delicious lunch, Jem and Aelyn continued.

They had not gone far when Aelyn noticed some smoke rising up from over a nearby hill. They walked quickly to the top and peered over the other side. They were dismayed at what they saw.

"What a mess!" exclaimed Jem.

"Whew, and it stinks too!" said Aelyn holding his nose.

"That must be the town where the humans live," said Jem as he started walking towards it.

"Do we have to?" moaned Aelyn.

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