

Jem and the Tiger Lily

by Jamie Harbison

Jem skipped along the path towards the river. He was especially happy because that very day, all the elves of Wilderberry Wood past their tenth birthday were gathering flowers for the competition being held at the Spring Festival the following day. That year would be Jem's first and he was more excited than he had ever been in his whole entire life. Even Nefar who was the naughtiest elf of them all, would be entering.

Whoever could find the biggest and most beautiful flower to present before King Julius would be the winner. First prize was a humungous silver trophy, and an invitation to sit at the Royal Table next to Princess Kia during the Spring Feast. Jem thought that was about the best prize anyone could win.

Not long before, Jem had discovered growing behind an enormous leafy fern, the most amazing Tiger Lily he had ever seen. Each time he went to look at it, it seemed to grow bigger and more beautiful. He was on his way to cut it down to take home for the competition. About half way to the river, just before the bottlebrush bush, he met Gander, the orphan mouse.

"Hiya Jem! How are your Mum and Dad?" he asked. "Have you had your breakfast yet? I'm so hungry. Did you bring me a peanut? Goodness, what a lovely day it is today..." babbled Gander. Before Jem could even answer, Gander, who was such a chatterbox, started off again, "Where are you going? Are you looking for a flower too? Did you know that Aerin and Buddy went over to the farmhouse looking for dandelions? Ooh, if they get caught they will be in so much trouble. I wonder if naughty Nefar is with them?"

"Sorry Gander, no peanuts, got to go!" interrupted Jem quickly. He hurried off before Gander could start nattering again and left him talking to himself.

What Jem did not realise, was that hiding behind the thorn tree close to where Gander was standing, was the naughtiest elf in the Kingdom, Nefar who could not be bothered to find a flower of his own. After Jem had left, he slipped out from his hiding place and crept closely behind, making sure that he was very, very quiet.

As Jem got deeper into the woods, it got darker and colder. He was not scared though, because he had been that way many times before and he was a very brave elf. He was nearing the grove of ferns when he heard a twig snap, close behind him. He turned around quickly but to his surprise, saw nothing there. He stood with his ears pricked and his nose in the air for a moment but decided it must have been a rabbit or a squirrel. After all, there was nobody following him, was there? When he got to the ferns, he found the gap between the two largest ones and, after taking a quick look around to make sure he was still alone, ducked through.

Nefar peeked out from underneath a pile of rotting leaves, relieved that Jem had not seen him. As he did, he saw the tip of Jem's hat as it disappeared among the fronds. He crept out of his smelly hiding place and tiptoed towards the same gap through which Jem had just gone. As he stepped through, he saw just why Jem had been so excited to get there. Before him, towering way above his head was the most enormous Tiger Lily in the world. He gasped so loudly that it gave Jem a start. Surprised, Jem dropped the axe that he was pulling out from under his belt. It fell to the floor between his feet.

"What are you doing here?" cried Jem.

"Oh, just out shopping for Tiger Lilies," sniggered Nefar.

"Well you can't have this one, its mine!" said Jem defiantly. "I saw it first!"

"We'll just have to see about that," said Nefar and in the blink of an eye, he grabbed the axe off the floor. Nefar took a mighty swing and struck the stem. Jem's axe was very

sharp so the blow almost toppled the flower straight away. Nefar was about to swing once more when suddenly Jem sneezed.

"ACHOO!"

It was Nefar's turn to get a fright and drop the axe. It landed with a smack, right on his baby toe.

"Ow!" screamed Nefar, jumping about, holding his poor foot. Jem wanted to laugh out loud but he had another sneeze coming.

"ACHOO!" splurged Jem again. As he took out his handkerchief to wipe his nose, he looked up at the lily to see what was making him sneeze. Nefar's mighty chop had shaken the flower so much, it had made some pollen fall out and flutter down like yellow snow all around them. He was about to sneeze yet again when he saw something that made him very frightened indeed.

It seemed that Nefar had forgotten the golden rule (that every good elf should know) about cutting down flowers: Always, *always* check for bees.

"Bee!" screamed Jem as he scrambled away. The bee looked very annoyed at being so rudely disturbed. Nefar was too busy rubbing his sore toe to take any notice of the warning. The bee was already in the air and hurtling towards him at a tremendous speed. Jem got up in a flash and ran straight towards Nefar, crashing into him. The elves tumbled along the ground and landed with a thump against a tree. Nefar was about to punch Jem on the nose for pushing him over but as he lifted his fist, he saw the bee whoosh past the very spot where he had been standing only seconds before. Nefar's fist dropped to his side and he looked at Jem in astonishment.

"Y-You saved my life," he stuttered.

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