

Jem's Birthday

by Jamie Harbison

It was the night before his birthday and Jem could barely sleep. He had no idea what he was getting from his parents but he knew it would be big. He had not seen any boxes in any cupboards (he had looked) and there wasn't any wrapping paper lying around. He just knew by the excited look his mother had in her eyes when she kissed him goodnight that it was going to be a very special birthday indeed. He turned on to his side to get more comfortable and drifted off to sleep with a smile on his face.

He woke up the next morning just as the sun peeked its cheery face over the distant hills. Jem still wore the same smile with which he had fallen asleep. The rest of the house was still quiet so he had to wait before he could get out of bed. His Mom always used to say to him: 'When you wake up early, Jem, turn around and go back to sleep' but he was bursting with excitement and he just could not wait. He stretched over and pulled the curtain open to see what kind of day it would be. It was just about light and, as far as he could see, there was not a cloud in sight. It was sheer torture for him to have to be so still but he did not want to make a noise and wake his parents up.

Luckily he did not have to wait very much longer because, just when he thought he could not stand it any longer, he heard the door to his parents' room open with a soft "click". Jem bolted out of bed and ran into the hall, almost knocking his mother over as she tiptoed to the kitchen.

"You're up early, my precious little elfling. Is it somebody's birthday?" she teased.

"It's mine, it's mine!" said Jem, laughing and he hugged her fiercely.

"Let's make Dad some tea and then we will see if he has anything planned for today," said Mom as they walked into the kitchen together. Mom got the cups and teapot ready while Jem put the milk and sugar on the tray. He was too excited to carry it without spilling so he had to let his Mom take the tea to the bedroom.

"Can I go in now?" pleaded Jem, waiting anxiously by the door.

"Knock first," said Mom, not wanting Jem to forget his manners. He knocked loudly on the door and waited breathlessly for his Dad to answer.

"Is that the birthday boy?" asked his Dad through the door.

"Yes it is!" grinned Jem.

"I think you should get in here then," replied Dad. His words were barely out of his mouth when Jem flung the door open and jumped on the bed. He cuddled up to his Dad as Mom came in and carefully set the tea tray on the bedside table.

Jem was sure they got him a present but he did not say anything because his Mom had taught him never to expect anything from another elf, even if it was your birthday. He just sat there next to his Dad, brimming with joy.

"What is that behind the cupboard there, Jem?" asked Dad with a smile.

"Where?" asked Jem eagerly. He bounced off the bed, nearly knocking the tea tray over. He looked behind the cupboard where Dad was pointing and found his present, carefully hidden. It was wrapped in shiny green paper with a great big orange bow. It was long and thin, and felt strange underneath the wrapping. He opened it quickly, tearing the paper and dropping the bow on the floor as he went. When he saw what it was, he whooped with delight: a brand new fishing rod! It was exactly what he had wanted. It came complete with a reel, line and a fully loaded tackle box. There were sinkers, floats and hooks of all kinds in there and Jem was overjoyed with his gift.

"Thank you Mom, Thank you Dad," he said, giving them each a kiss.

"When can I go fishing?" he asked in earnest.

"You can go right after breakfast if you like," said Dad. He was very pleased that his son was so happy.

After breakfast, Mom packed a basket of goodies while Jem and his Dad got the fishing gear ready. Before long Jem was ready to go.

"Why don't you take your friend, Aelyn along with you?" asked Dad as Jem was walking through the door.

"He doesn't even have a rod," said Jem. "And besides, I don't think he likes fishing anyway." The truth was that Aelyn would probably love to go but, because Aelyn did not have a rod, he would want to use Jem's. It was *his* present and he did not want to have to share it with anybody. So off Jem went to the river, alone.

When he got there, he sat down underneath a shady tree and cast his line into the water. It was a long time before he even got a nibble so he had some time to think about what he had done. He discovered that he was not having a very good time at all and he was very lonely without his best friend. Just when he was about to reel in the line, the float ducked under the water and bobbed up again. Jem froze. The float disappeared again and Jem yanked the rod as hard as he could. The fish was caught and gave a tremendous struggle as Jem tried to reel it in. It leapt out of the water and came down again with a tremendous splash. It was enormous and he wished Aelyn were there to see it.

"Help!" he cried as he tried desperately to reel it in, but there was no one there. The fish pulled Jem right to the edge of the water and with one last tug, Jem slipped and fell

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