



by Douglas Evans

“**A**ll these daffodils. How did they get here?”

Howard stood in a field, surrounded by a sea of daffodils. Each flower nodded its yellow head in the breeze. Kneeling, the boy snapped off a juicy green daffodil stem. He plucked another and another. But the next flower he touched leaped from his fingers.

“Yeow!” he shouted. “Jumping daffodils!”

Upon closer look, however, Howard saw no flower standing there, but a short, slender man dressed in a green suit. His shoes were green, and his gloves were green as well. On his head sat a tall yellow top hat.

“You there, giant!” the little man said. “What are you doing in my field?”

Howard held out his flowers. “I’m picking daffodils for my mom,” he said. “She asked me to pick some for our dinner table.”

“You’re picking my daffodils, giant,” said the man. “And I didn’t plant them for some giant to pick.”

Howard spread his arms. “You planted all these flowers. That’s remarkable.”

The little man's scowl turned to a smile. "You think so, giant?" he said. "But this field was nothing. I've done many other jobs. Perhaps you've seen my daffodils growing along roadsides and lakeshores. They grow in city parks and in country meadows. I planted them all."

"That's even more remarkable," said Howard. For the first time, he noticed a large, brown sack behind the man. "What's in there?" he asked.

The man's grin grew wider. He pushed his yellow top hat farther back on his head. "I'll show you," he said.

He reached into the sack with both hands and hauled out something the size and shape of an onion. He placed it gently on the ground.

"A daffodil bulb!" Howard said.

"Now watch, giant. First, I make a hole."

Here, the man leaped in the air and landed next to the bulb. His feet punched a hole in the soil six inches deep. He climbed out, brushing off his green pants.

"Next comes the planting," he said, and he gave the bulb a hard kick.

Plop!

It fell out of sight.

"Finally, I cover the bulb and pat down the soil."

Now the man began scooping dirt into the hole with his hands. When it was filled, he danced a jig on top of the earth to pat it down flat.

"And that's how it's done."

Howard clapped his hands. "Very quick and neat," he said. "And it's true that you've planted every daffodil I see blooming in the spring?"

"Of course, most of my planting is done in the fall," said the man. "I have all winter to rest and all spring to enjoy my yellow blooms."

At that moment, a cloud floated across the sun, and the field darkened.

"Time for me to leave," said Howard.

The little man pointed to the daffodils in Howard's hand. "Those flowers are for your mother, you say? Well, be my guest and pick all you want. If you pick them gently, new blossoms will grow from my bulbs year after year."

"Thanks," said Howard. "Your flowers will make my mom very happy."

He plucked a few more daffodils. When he looked up again, he searched for the little man, but saw only swaying yellow blooms around him.

On his way home, he kept his eyes toward the ground. Where was the little man dressed in green and yellow? Was that him by the telephone pole? Was he over there in the garden? No, those were just other nodding daffodils sitting on top of long green stems.

