The Little Tenrec

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In the soft blue night, a little tenrec woke up. He was small and round, about the size of a teacup. His spiky fur had warm brown and cream stripes. His big dark eyes blinked at the moon. "What is out there?" he wondered. He sniffed the air with his tiny pink nose. Something smelled sweet and new.

The tenrec's short legs carried him past sleepy bushes. His little tail wiggled with excitement. He asked the stars, "Where does that sweet smell come from?" The stars just twinkled. He asked a passing beetle, but it was too busy. "I will find it myself," he said. His curiosity pulled him forward into the night.

Then he saw two round amber eyes peeking from behind a leaf. It was a mouse lemur, slender and shy. Her huge eyes shone like lanterns. Her long thin tail curled around a branch. "Hello," said the tenrec. "I'm following a sweet smell. Do you know where it goes?" The mouse lemur blinked and said, "I might."

The mouse lemur stepped out slowly. Her large ears twitched at every sound. "I'm a mouse lemur," she said. "I know this garden well." The tenrec smiled with his tiny snout. "I'm a tenrec!" he said. "What's your name?" "Lila," she said. "And you?" "Tino," he said. "Will you show me the sweet smell?"

Lila nodded and pointed with her delicate hand. "This way," she said. "But stay close. The night is full of surprises." Tino followed her through the grass. His stubby legs hurried to keep up. "What kind of surprises?" he asked. "Good ones," Lila said, "if you're curious and kind." Tino's eyes grew wide with wonder.

They walked past tall ferns and a sleepy pond. "Why is the moon so bright?" Tino asked. "So we can see," Lila said. "Why do flowers smell sweet?" he asked. "To invite friends," she said. "Why do you have such big eyes?" "To see in the dark," Lila laughed. Tino asked question after question, and Lila answered each one.

Soon the sweet smell grew stronger. It tickled Tino's pink nose. "It's close!" he squeaked. They tiptoed around a big rock. Lila's long tail swished behind her. "I've never been this far," she whispered. "Me neither," said Tino. "But I'm not scared with you." Lila smiled. "I'm not scared with you either."

Then they saw a narrow gap in a hedge. The sweet smell drifted through it. "Do we go in?" Tino asked. Lila's ears perked up. "It looks dark," she said. "But the smell is so lovely." Tino took a brave step forward. "Let's go together," he said. "Okay," Lila said. "Together." They squeezed through the gap side by side.

On the other side, they stopped and stared. A secret garden lay before them, glowing in the moonlight. Flowers of every color nodded in the breeze. There were big white blooms and tiny blue bells. Pink petals and yellow stars. "Oh!" whispered Tino. "It's beautiful!" Lila's amber eyes shone. "I've never seen anything like it," she breathed.

The flowers seemed to sparkle. "Why do they glow?" Tino asked. Lila pointed to the moon. "The moonlight makes them shine," she said. Tino sniffed a big white flower. "This one smells like honey," he said. Lila sniffed a blue one. "This one smells like rain," she said. They went from flower to flower, sniffing and smiling.

Then Lila showed Tino a flower with petals like soft fur. "It's called a moonflower," she said. "It only opens at night." Tino gently touched a petal. "It's like us," he said. "We only come out at night." Lila nodded. "We're nighttime friends," she said. They sat together among the flowers, watching the colors glow.

Tino asked, "Lila, why were you shy at first?" Lila looked down. "I don't always know what to say," she said. "But you ask so many questions, I forgot to be shy." Tino's little nose twitched. "Questions are how I make friends," he said. Lila smiled. "They worked," she said. "You made a friend tonight." They shared a happy hug.

A soft light began to peek over the trees. "The sun is coming," Lila said. "We should go home." Tino nodded. "But we'll come back," he said. "Tomorrow night?" "Tomorrow night," Lila promised. They squeezed back through the gap. The secret garden glowed behind them. They walked home slowly, side by side.

At the edge of the garden, Lila stopped. "I had fun," she said. "Me too," said Tino. "You're my best nighttime friend." Lila's big eyes sparkled. "You're mine," she said. "And you can ask me questions anytime." Tino yawned a tiny yawn. "I have one more," he said. "What is it?" Lila asked. "Can we meet again tomorrow?" "Yes!" she laughed.

Back home, Tino curled up in his cozy nest. He thought of the secret garden and the flowers that glowed. He thought of Lila's big amber eyes and her long thin tail. Being curious had led him to a wonderful surprise. And being friendly had turned a shy mouse lemur into a good friend. He smiled as he fell asleep.

In the morning, Tino woke to the sun. He stretched his short legs. He sniffed the air, but the sweet smell was gone. Still, he knew it would come back at night. He couldn't wait to see Lila again. Friendship begins with curiosity, he thought. And the nighttime garden would always be there, waiting for their next visit.