The Biggest Christmas Tree Ever

by Steven Kroll

illustrated by Jeni Bassett
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For Kathleen
— S.K.

For Ralph
— J.B.
Once there were two mice who fell in love with the same Christmas tree, but you had to see it to believe it.
Everyone in Mouseville loved Christmas trees. Every Christmas, families all over town put up the biggest, most beautiful tree they could find.
But first came Thanksgiving. The day before the celebration, Clayton, the house mouse, took a walk around Mouseville. He knew he should be thinking about giving thanks, but the chill in the air reminded him of Christmas.

“You know what?” he said out loud. “This year I’m going to find the biggest Christmas tree ever!”

Not far away, Clayton’s friend Desmond, the field mouse, said exactly the same thing.
That night, Clayton helped his mom and dad, his brother, Andy, and his sister, Trudy, make a special cheese casserole and a nut pie for Thanksgiving dinner.

Over at Desmond’s house, Desmond and his brother, Morris, helped Uncle Vernon fix a big pot of vegetable stew and a cheesecake.
Everyone ate much too much. After dinner, Clayton’s grandma and grandpa sat in the living room, holding their tummies and grumbling.

Over at Desmond’s, the cousins from across the road stretched out on Uncle Vernon’s sofa and took a nap.
The following morning, Clayton woke up early. He wanted to be first at Clara’s Christmas Tree Farm at the edge of town. That way, he could have his pick of the biggest trees!
Over at Desmond’s house, Desmond tumbled out of bed with the same thought.
Clayton hurried over to Clara’s, but it was hard to go very fast. He was still too full of Thanksgiving dinner. By the time he reached the Christmas tree farm, he was out of breath. He looked around. No one else was there.
Moments later, Desmond arrived. He too was full of Thanksgiving dinner. He too had found it hard to hurry. He took a deep breath and stumbled inside.
Clayton wobbled down the rows of trees. Here was a nice one, but it was much too small. There was another, but it was squat and had a crooked top. Over there was a third, but it was average height and had big gaps between the branches.
Struggling down another row, Desmond was having the same problems.
Clayton leaned against a tree. It was scrawny and not very tall. "I'll never find the tree I want," he said. "I'd better go home."

And not far away, squinting at another tree, Desmond said, "I'll never find the tree I want. I'd better go home."
When Clayton reached his house, it was only the middle of the morning. But he was still full, and he was tired. He fell back into bed.
When Desmond reached his house, he too went back to bed.
Clayton woke up for lunch and spoke to his dad.
Dad said, “Go out this afternoon. Walk to the far edge of the Christmas tree farm. The biggest trees are there.”
When Desmond woke up for lunch, Uncle Vernon told him the same thing.
That afternoon, Clayton went out again. At the very same time, Desmond did too.
Clayton walked to the far edge of the Christmas tree farm. He looked at one big tree after another, but none of them looked like the biggest Christmas tree ever.

Down another path, Desmond was having the same bad luck.
Starting to lose hope, Clayton peered around a very thick trunk. Desmond peered around the same thick trunk. They bumped heads and fell down.
“I bet you’re looking for the biggest Christmas tree ever!” said Clayton.

“I bet you’re looking for the biggest Christmas tree ever!” said Desmond.

“Why don’t we find it together?” said Clayton.

“No one said we couldn’t,” said Desmond.
They set out through the rows of trees. They looked and looked until it was almost dark.
Just as they were ready to give up, there it was: a Christmas tree so big and so tall, it reached the sky!
“How will we cut it down?” Clayton asked. “It’s much too big for the two of us.”

“Where will we put it?” Desmond added. “It won’t fit in your house or mine.”

Clayton and Desmond smiled.

“Our families will help us,” they said together.
And that is what happened. Clayton’s dad and Uncle Vernon came out with their axes, and with the help of Clayton and Desmond, they chopped down the giant tree.
Both families called on friends and relations, and together they loaded the tree onto a hundred red wagons and pulled it to Clayton’s front yard. There they decorated it with the most wondrous ornaments and colored lights . . .
...and on Christmas Eve, with all of Mouseville celebrating around it, the biggest Christmas tree ever lit up the entire hillside. Clayton and Desmond shared a high five.

“We did it!” said Clayton.

“All of us together!” said Desmond.