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The week before Christmas, Nutmeg shook the wooden star out of her mitten drawer. It had a dent in one point where she had dropped it when she was small. She put the red loop round her wrist.



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“I’ve found our tree!” she called to Corgi. “It’s just the right size. This year even I can reach the top.” Out they went with the library’s little red cart. The wheels made two neat lines in the snow.



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The fir stood in a wooden barrel behind the library. It smelled of cold rain and pine. One branch stuck straight out, like a paw waiting to shake. “Ready, fir?” said Nutmeg.



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Corgi held the cart steady. Nutmeg took hold of the barrel. They counted to three. The cart bumped. The snow slipped. The barrel stayed exactly where it was.



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“Perhaps it’s frozen to the ground,” said Corgi. He swept away the loose snow with one paw. Nutmeg brushed a little farther. Under the rim of the barrel, something brown curved into the earth.



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It was a root. It had slipped out through a split in the wood. In the time it took Nutmeg to grow out of two pairs of mittens, the little fir had gone and planted itself.



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Nutmeg let go of the barrel. “The whole square is waiting for this tree,” she said. She looked up at the green tips. She looked down at the little root. She put the star back in her pocket.



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They walked round to the square. Professor Hooten was putting a low bench by the noticeboard. Panda-Cake had brought a tin of star biscuits. In the middle of the square was a big, swept circle. It looked terribly empty.





“The fir has roots,” Nutmeg told them. “I told everybody there would be a tree.” She rubbed the dent in her star through her pocket. Hooten set the bench down and listened.



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“We could make one out of broom handles,” said Corgi. He crossed two brooms and put his tail through the middle. Nutmeg laughed in spite of herself. Then both brooms slid over with a clack.



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Nutmeg looked from the empty square to the empty cart. “We were going to bring the tree to the party,” she said. She touched the cart’s cold handle. “What if the party could come to the tree?”



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They brought Hooten to see the garden. He liked the fir’s crooked branch. He liked the long wall that kept off the wind. Then he pointed to the stone step at the front. “How will we get my bench down that?”



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Corgi disappeared round the corner. A moment later his ears popped up on the other side of the garden gate. “There’s a lane back here,” he called. Nutmeg could just see his tail between two tall snowbanks.





The lane was wide enough for the cart, if they cleared the snow. Scritch went Hooten’s shovel. Shush went Nutmeg’s broom. Corgi tried to help with his tail. “You’re sweeping it straight at me,” said Nutmeg.



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Hooten walked the whole lane with the loaded cart. It rolled through the gate without a bump. Nutmeg put fallen pinecones along the edge. Corgi carried one at a time, very carefully, as if each one were an egg.



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Back in the square, somebody had put up a long paper chain. Nutmeg and Corgi each took an end. They had nearly reached the garden when the wind caught the middle.



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Rip! The chain came apart. A red loop landed over Corgi’s nose. Nutmeg picked up three muddy loops and sat very still. For a moment she wished she had stayed home with her mittens.



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Then Panda-Cake came round the corner with his biscuit tin. He sat down right there in the snow. “Did you know a broken star biscuit still tastes like cinnamon?” he said, and gave Nutmeg the bigger piece.





Nutmeg took a bite. “A little piece of paper chain will still look nice, too.” They rescued the dry parts. The longest went on the library door, the shortest on the back of Hooten’s bench.



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Then Nutmeg walked back to the square. By now there were neighbours in hats and boots, standing round the empty circle. She climbed onto the low step. “Our Christmas tree has settled in,” she said. “Follow my pinecones.”





The smallest neighbour spotted the next pinecone and hurried ahead. The slowest took Hooten’s arm. One by one they came through the garden gate. No one had to climb the stone step.





The fir was quite small with everyone around it. Nutmeg found she could reach the crooked branch without standing on tiptoe. She pulled the star out of her pocket and slipped its red loop over the green needles.





At first the wooden star looked very plain. Then Hooten switched on the garden lantern. A little light caught in the dent. Panda-Cake opened his tin. Somebody began a song, and Nutmeg knew the second line.



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Later, when only the little footprints were left, Nutmeg came back for her cart. A dusting of snow lay on the branch above the star. “See you tomorrow, fir,” she said. And she left the star just where it was.