



by  
**Suzanne Mancini**

'Twas the end of November in the Taylor household and everyone was getting ready for the countdown to Christmas. It was a family tradition to decorate the house and trim the trees; and especially to make the house festive so that the young Taylor twins, Cash and Chase, could share in the magic of Christmas. The boys had been helping with this for a few years now, and both usually enjoyed it; but for some reason, this time Cash didn't seem very interested. "Don't you think we're getting too old for this, Chase?" he whispered so that their parents didn't hear. "I mean, a lot of it is just make-believe."

"Maybe it is," Chase whispered back, "But I still like it, and we should do it for Mom and Pop, because I reckon they still believe, even though they are old."

So, when the box of Christmas decorations came out, Chase was really looking forward to it being opened, while Cash tried to seem as happy as he could be. What neither of the boys knew, and not even their Mom and Pop, was that people weren't the only ones who enjoyed Christmas. The decorations too were so excited. They only got to come out once a year and then they could meet new friends that visited the Taylors. All fresh and sparkly, the decorations were truly happy to be hung above doorways, in windows and on walls, spreading the Christmas spirit about the home.

Being only decorations, nobody ever imagined they could be anything more; so they never let on about being something special; but they had a suspicion that Mom and Pop Taylor knew their secret. As Pop pulled a tree out of the decorations box, he handed it to Mom. Taking it, she actually spoke to the tree: "Now, Big T," said Mom, "Come with me and you can sit on the floor near the TV as you do every year."

While she was placing Big T where he had to go, Pop was taking a much smaller tree out of the box; and he too spoke to it as if it was real. "You know where you belong, Little T," he said with a smile. "The coffee table is your spot where you can keep an eye on Santa's cookies. You need to make sure the dogs Jackson and Bella don't steal them. They get extra rascally when they're dressed up as reindeer."

"And," added Mom, "You also have to be on the alert for that sneaky Cat who pretends to be an elf. You can't trust her either. I'm sure she's an undercover agent for the reindeer."

The boys watched on. Cash was frowning. "Isn't it a bit silly, talking to Christmas trees?"

"I don't think so," said Chase. "If it makes Mom and Pop happy, that's all that matters. You really should try to get with the spirit of Christmas, Cash; if only for their sake."

Cash did try, but it was hard when it all seemed so childish. Once the family had gone to bed and they were on their own, the Christmas trees were able to talk. Little T said: "We need to do something. Cash is really unhappy, and it's making Chase glum too."

"I agree," replied Big T, "If only we could talk to Cash, but we aren't allowed to speak to people."

"Not in words," said Little T, "But maybe you could do your leaf-rustling and make something for him; something that will start him believing in the spirit of Christmas again."

Little T was meaning what Big T did when he noticed the other decorations looking sad and tired. He would say: "Cheer up little ones, it's Christmas. We need to be happy for our family." Then he would ruffle his branches; and when he did, twinkling yellow dust would spray over the decorations. This was not just any dust: it was magic; and when it touched the decorations, it carried with it a warm, loving feeling just like a big hug. Then they no longer felt sad, and sparkled as brightly as they ever had. "Perhaps," Little T continued, "You could make something with your dust; something magic to unlock the spirit of Christmas for Cash."

"That's it!" said Big T excitedly. "I'll make him a special key and you can look after it. It will be there for him when the boys put Santa's cookies on your coffee table."

"I like it," said Little T, "But what if someone else finds it first?"

"They won't even know it's there," declared Big T. "I'll add a bit of extra magic so that only Cash will be able to see it." Big T began to ruffle his branches, spraying a cloud of sparkling yellow dust into the air. It simply floated slowly over to Little T's coffee table; then, in a magical moment, the dust gathered together to create a shimmering, golden key.

"Well done," said Little T, looking down at the key now resting on her coffee table. "I'll take good care of it. Let's just hope it does the job."

Christmas Eve arrived at last and almost everything was ready. Then disaster struck. The flashing lights on Big T flickered, fizzed and went out. "Oh dear," sighed Mom, "It won't be the same without the lights."

"No," agreed Pop, "And it's too late to do anything about it now. We'll just have to put up with it."

Although he hadn't been into the spirit of Christmas, for some reason even Cash was disappointed. Maybe it was because everyone else was, but he was sure it was something more. While the others went into the kitchen to get Santa's cookies, he stayed behind. This was when he noticed something sparkling on the coffee table. Walking over, he picked up the strange golden key and was a little surprised no-one had mentioned it before. In fact, until that moment, he hadn't seen it either.

There was no doubt in his mind what it was; and he guessed it would open a lock; but which lock? Maybe he should ask the trees - Mom and Pop would – but surely that was silly, wasn't it? The instant the thought popped into his head, he felt a tingling on his hand and looked down to see the key had begun to shimmer. The closer he came to the big Christmas tree, the brighter the key sparkled. Cash stopped, looked behind to make sure nobody else was in the room, then turned back and said quietly: "What's it for, Big T? What does it open?" Naturally, the tree didn't reply, not in words; but the lights on it flicked on and off, just once. "Is that it, Big T?" whispered Cash, "Will it make the lights work again?" The lights flicked on and off again. "Can you do it? Please."

Big T gave his answer as only he could. The key in Cash's hand suddenly became sparkling yellow dust which rose and wafted over the tree. As it fell, each of the lights began to shine, and in no time at all they were flashing. Just at that moment Mom and Pop entered with Chase behind them holding Santa's bowl of cookies. They were so surprised to see the Christmas tree lights working again. Pop frowned at Cash. "You haven't been fiddling with them, I hope?" he said sternly, "You know you shouldn't mess with electricity." While saying this, he walked to the wall and looked down at where the wire from the lights was supposed to be plugged in. It wasn't - the plug was simply laying on the floor. "Funny," said Pop, "The lights aren't even plugged in. How is that possible?"

"Big T doesn't need electricity," explained Cash with a chuckle. "It's his Christmas gift to all of us."

Mom was shaking her head in disbelief. "How do you know that? Did he tell you?"

"Not in words," said Cash. "But I admit I did talk to him, and he showed me how to get it back."

"What, the Christmas tree lights?" asked Chase.

"No, silly," replied Cash, "The spirit of Christmas. The lights are just a part of it. What truly matters is how we all feel. Does anyone feel sad or unhappy?" He watched as they all shook their heads. "Well, then. Seeing as we've all found the spirit of Christmas again, maybe we'd best go to bed." On his way out, he was passing the coffee table and said: "Take care of Santa's cookies, Little T." Turning to look back across the room, he said: "Merry Christmas, Big T, and thank you for my special present."

"Which special present was that?" asked Chase.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Cash, "But it was probably the best present I've ever had. And the beauty is, I can keep it forever."

"Are you talking about the spirit of Christmas," asked his brother.

"I might be," answered Cash with a cheeky grin, "On the other hand I might not. You'll just have to key-yeep guessing."