Dave hurried up the last stretch of the grassy hill. Another gust of cold December wind brushed past him, but he didn’t mind. The oak tree at the top of the steep hill just had to have some mistletoe in its branches. He had a big Christmas surprise to pull off! And he needed to collect lots of mistletoe to do it.

But his pillowcase wasn’t even half full yet, and he’d been out hiking the hills with Dad all morning.

“Do you see any?” Dad asked from behind him on the trail.

Dave ran to the oak tree and peered up into its branches. There were no leaves this time of year, which made it easy to see that the branches were completely bare. There was no mistletoe growing in this tree.

“No mistletoe,” Dave said. He slumped down against the tree and sighed. This was taking forever! He thought mistletoe would be easier to find.

“Too bad,” Dad said. But then he smiled. “At least we’re up here in this clean air, enjoying some great exercise.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Dave said. Then he looked around. Green hills covered with nothing but grass and trees spread out in all directions. “Whoa! This view is awesome. Look! There’s the lake! I can’t believe we can see it this far away.”

Dad faced the direction of the lake. “You’re right! What a beautiful day to be outside.”

Dad eyed Dave’s pillowcase. “How are you holding up? Should we call it a day, or do you want to keep searching? You already have more mistletoe than I’ve ever seen in one place before.”

There was no question in Dave’s mind. He had something special planned for Mom and Dad. He needed to fill his pillowcase to the very top. “I want to keep going.”

Dad laughed and stretched his arms over his head. “This secret project of yours must be pretty special. All right. I love a good hike. Where do you want to try next?”

Dave spun in a slow circle. “How about that group of trees?” he said, pointing to the next big hill over. It would probably take them another hour to reach those trees, but there were a whole bunch of them together. He never would have noticed if they hadn’t climbed this huge hill.

“Sounds great to me,” Dad said. “If we get a move on, I’ll bet we can get there in time to eat lunch.”
Dave had big plans for Christmas gifts this year.