



3. It Warms You Twice

CHRISTMAS was over at Grandmother's house. The old oak beams were still decorated with trails of ivy and there were still branches of holly stuck in the tops of picture-frames. The last turkey-bone had been picked, the last thimble found in the pudding. They had even got a good way round the Christmas cake. They had been to a circus.

Barney lay in bed in the grey morning light. For once he was not in a hurry to jump out of bed. The air in the bedroom felt icy to the end of his nose. 'Let me see,' he thought, 'is there

anything special to look forward to today?' He couldn't think of anything.

He was looking at the thick black beam in the wall that grew out of the floor right up to the ceiling. It had been part of a ship before it was part of the house, Grandfather said. It had deep holes cut out of it where other bits of timber had fitted into it. What was that hidden in one of the holes?

Barney sat up in bed suddenly. It was the flint! Stig's flint, left there since last time he had come to stay. And he hadn't even *thought* about Stig all over Christmas.

He got out of bed and looked out of the window. There was white frost on the grass. A few hopeful birds hung about the bird table, fluffed up like woolly balls, waiting for some food to be put out for them. He reached up and took out the flint. It was like a lump of ice.

I wonder what it's like living in a cave these days, thought Barney. Poor Stig! He must be cold.

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After breakfast Barney slipped out of the house and went off to the pit. In the copse the frozen leaves crunched like cornflakes under his feet. He climbed down into the pit on the far side, where the cliff was lowest, and it hurt his fingers to hold on to the icy tree roots. The nettles were all dead in the bottom of the pit and the old cans had lumps of solid ice in them.

There was no sign of life in the shelter, though he noticed the ashes of a small dead fire and a faint smell of wood-smoke still hung around. But at the back of the cave was a kind of nest made of bracken and dead grass and newspaper. He thought he heard breathing sounds coming out of it.

'Stig!' Barney called. Nothing happened. I wonder if he's like a dormouse, he thought, and goes to sleep all the winter.

He called again. 'Stig! Are you there?'

There was a rustle in the nest, and a mop of black hair poked up out of it. Underneath it

was Stig's face, but it was screwed up in a very strange expression.

Is he cross? wondered Barney anxiously.

His eyes still screwed up and his mouth shut, Stig took a deep breath.

Then he sneezed. It was a sneeze like a cannon going off, and it made the cave echo.

'You did give me a fright!' said Barney.

'You've got a cold, Stig. No wonder, when you live in this damp place. You need a good fire.'

He looked around the shelter and the cave. There didn't seem to be any wood to burn. Stig's heavy flint axe was leaning against the wall and Barney picked it up, but he saw that the edge was crumbled and blunt.

'You'll have to sharpen this,' said Barney.

Stig crawled out of his nest, blinking stupidly. He moved as if his joints were rusty and he did not take the axe as Barney held it out to him.

'All right, I'll do it then,' said Barney. 'I expect it's quite easy.' He sat down with the

axe between his knees and picked up a heavy iron bolt and tried to remember how he had seen Stig chip the flint. But it was painful holding the cold flint and the cold iron and his fingers were so clumsy that they would not do what he wanted them to.

'Oh, never mind,' said Barney. 'Come on, we've got to get some wood.' He stood up with the axe and went out of the shelter. Stig followed, half awake, half frozen, and silent. They climbed up out of the pit and looked around the copse for wood to cut. Barney could see now that someone, probably Stig, had already been chopping and breaking down the dry branches. He chose a fairly thin thorn tree and set to work on it.

The axe swung, the tree shook, the flint bounced off the tough bark, but he didn't seem to be getting anywhere. Stig just squatted miserably on a bank, with his arms wrapped round his knees.

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'Here, you have a go!' puffed Barney. 'It'll warm you up anyhow. My Grandfather always says wood warms you twice, once when you cut it and once when you burn it.'

He handed the axe to Stig, but Stig only looked at it sadly and shook his head. Barney got worried. He really must do something about Stig. Suddenly he had an idea.

'Wait here, Stig!' he said. 'I won't be long.'

Barney ran off through the copse and up the field towards the house. He went to the shed at the back and got his Grandfather's big steel axe and the long sharp cross-cut saw – and what else did he need? Yes, a coil of rope. He slung it over his shoulder and made off again down the field to the copse.

'Here you are, Stig!' he called, as he came up to Stig still huddled on the bank.

The sight of the shining steel axe worked like medicine on Stig. He uncurled himself and picked up the axe by its long handle. He tried its

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sharp edge with his thumb. He weighed it in his hands and swung it like a golfer testing a new club. His black eyes lit up and he looked around for something to use his new weapon on.

Standing among the saplings of the copse was a tall ash tree with a trunk at least two feet thick. Stig marched up to it, swinging the axe.

'Oh, no!' cried Barney. 'You mustn't! Not that one, Stig!'

But there was no stopping Stig. At the first blow the blade bit deep into the tree. White chips flew as he swung again and again.

Barney hopped round him excitedly. 'Stig,' he called. 'Do you think you ought to? Oh Stig, isn't it too *big*, Stig? *Stig*, I didn't know you were such a chopper! Well done Stig! Stig, Stig, let me have a go!'

There was soon a great wedge cut into the side of the tree, but it was still only halfway through. Stig stopped for a rest and they both looked at the tree. It swayed a little in the light breeze.

'You know what, Stig?' said Barney. 'It's going to fall and smash the fence if we're not careful. I better tie a rope to it.'

He slung the coil of rope round him and pulled himself up by the lower branches of the tree. He had climbed most of the trees round about before, but he had never climbed one that was already chopped halfway through. He supposed he should have tied the rope on before they had started cutting. As he climbed higher he could feel something different about the swaying of this tree. It did not have the springy exciting sway of a sound tree. It was only swaying a few inches but at the end of each sway you had the feeling that it was waiting, not quite sure whether it would sway back again or whether it would just go on and fall. He tied the rope to the trunk as high up as he dared, threw the rope outwards and watched it uncoil to the ground, and scrambled down again himself.

'Now we ought to saw it on the other side,' said Barney. 'I've seen Grandfather do it.' He picked up the big cross-cut saw. 'Here, you take the other end,' he told Stig.

Stig looked at the saw doubtfully. He felt its sharp teeth and grunted approval, but he still did not understand what they were going to do with it.

'Look,' said Barney. 'You hold that end and I hold this end. I pull and then you pull. It's easy once you get started.'

Stig still looked a bit blank. They scraped away clumsily at the bark of the tree-trunk until at last the saw teeth cut a straight groove and settled into it. Stig's eyes widened as the sawdust began to fly and he pumped the handle furiously.

'Ouch!' cried Barney. 'You're pulling too far. You've made me skin my knuckles.'

'Steady!' cried Barney. 'Must we go so fast? We've got a long way to go yet.'



‘Stop!’ cried Barney. ‘Look, Stig, you’re pushing as well as pulling. It makes the saw bend and it makes you tired too.’

At last they settled down to a steady in – out, snore-snore. The blade sang as it bit deeper into the wood and the sawdust spurted out each end. Then the whole thing seemed to get sticky, and at last, however hard they struggled, they could not move it either way.

‘Bother!’ said Barney. ‘Now what?’

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They stood back and looked at the tree. The weight of branches on one side was making the trunk lean that way and closing up the crack the saw had made.

'We'll have to pull,' said Barney.

Stig and he took the end of the rope and heaved. The crest of the tree came slowly towards them, hung still, and swayed back again. They heaved again. This time the tree seemed to come a little further, hung longer, but still it swung back. With their third pull, as it rocked towards them there came a cracking sound from the trunk.

'It's coming!' cried Barney excitedly.

The tree swayed away from them again, but they heaved again and this time there were more splintering cracks.

'Once more!' shouted Barney.

They tugged, the tree rocked slowly, hung at the end of its swing, then instead of rocking back again lurched further over towards them. From the trunk came a splitting, rending,

screeching sound, and Stig and Barney turned and ran. Barney heard an appalling rush and crash and splintering of branches behind him as the crest hit the ground, and the topmost twigs thrashed the back of his legs as he ran.

They turned round to look. Barney's heart was bouncing with excitement.

'Phew, we've done it!' he gasped, gaping at the ruin they had made and the great empty hole they had left in the sky line. 'What a lot of firewood!'

That afternoon Barney brought a hatchet, iron wedges, and the big sledge-hammer down to the copse. Stig and he trimmed off the smaller branches, cut up the boughs into long logs, and managed, after long and patient sawing, to cut the main trunk into three. Then they set to work to split it up. This seemed to be a thing Stig understood. They started a split with the axe, put in an iron wedge, drove it in with the hammer to make the split grow,

then drove in other wedges until at last there was a satisfying SCHPLITTTT! – and the fibres of the timber parted from end to end.

The sky was now getting grey and dark and an icy wind had begun to blow, but they did not notice it. It warms you twice, cutting wood! They trundled the logs to the edge of the pit, and sent them crashing to the bottom – not too near the den. Barney looked up at the pale sunset and saw a kind of dust floating down from the sky. Sawdust? No, as it settled on the ground it was white. It was fine snow.

‘Come on, Stig, let’s get the fire going!’ said Barney. They went round to the entrance to the pit and along the bottom to the shelter, humped what they thought were enough logs and kindling inside, and then sat down, very tired, on the floor of the dark den. Now for a nice fire, thought Barney.

Stig stirred himself. He picked up the gear-lever of a motor-car that was lying around the den and poked carefully at the ashes of what

had been the fire. But they were well and truly dead. Stig sighed. Then he reached for his bow, which was propped against the wall. It was a fine steel bow, made out of a springy television aerial and strung with picture wire. He took the leg of a hardwood chair, which was sharpened to a point at one end. He fitted the point into a hole in a block of wood which he held with his toes, passed the bowstring round the leg of the chair, held the top of the chair leg with a cracked eggcup, and began to draw the bow backwards and forwards so that the string made the chair leg twirl. Barney watched fascinated as Stig worked away, but though Stig seemed warm enough at the job, Barney was getting cold. At last the point of the chair leg twirling in the block of wood began to smoke. Stig quickly fed it with a handful of grass and started blowing on it, still fiddling away frantically with the bow. The grass glowed, Stig fiddled and blew, but everything in the cave was damp

and the little fire died out with a wisp of smoke. The bowstring frayed and snapped. Stig, exhausted, said something in his strange language, threw the chair leg across the cave and sat there biting his nails.

'D'you want a *light*, Stig?' asked Barney brightly, and he took a box of matches from his pocket and struck one. The little flame suddenly lit up the cave.

The effect on Stig was amazing. He uncurled himself and leapt to his feet in a bound, and stood staring at the lighted match with round eyes. When the flame burnt down to Barney's fingers and he had to blow it out, Stig gave a sort of despairing moan.

'It's all right, Stig. I've got lots more,' Barney said. He struck another and Stig jumped again, but this time crept up to stare at it close to.

'Come on, let's have some paper and twigs,' said Barney. By the light of a third match they found some, but they were not very dry and it took another three or four to get a little fire

going. Stig was lying on his stomach blowing like a bellows, now gently, now fiercely, adding a twig here and a splinter from a wooden box there, building a careful pile, feeding the fire where it was needed. At last the flames licked upwards, the smoke began to clear itself through the hole in the bath and a warm glow began to light up the walls of the cave. Stig put two big logs crossed at the back of the fire, and they began hissing and sizzling happily.

Stig stretched himself out in the warmth like a cat, then held out his hand to Barney as if asking for something. Barney handed him the matchbox.

'You want me to show you how to strike a match, Stig? Here, push the little drawer thing! That's right, but not too far. Take out a match. Now you better shut the box. Hold the match by the white end, not the black end, silly! Now rub it on the side of the box. No, the *side*. There!'

After one or two tries Stig managed to strike the match. He held the little flame and gazed at it until he burnt his fingers and he had to drop it.

'Go on, strike another!' urged Barney. 'Granny's got plenty. A box only costs about a penny, I think.'

But Stig wouldn't waste another. He took the box and hid it in his bed. It was clear he thought a match was a very precious thing indeed.

Stig came back to the fire with his hands full of chestnuts. He put them in the ashes and they lay and waited until the chestnuts popped, then they hooked them out with the gear-lever and blew on them and ate them. There were plenty of nuts in Stig's hoard, and Barney ate twenty-three. He felt wonderfully full and warm, and he lay looking at the fire and at the shadows dancing on the walls of the cave.

But Stig was squatting with a faraway look in his eyes and a piece of charred board in his

hand, looking towards a blank wall of the cave. He seemed to be looking through it, not at it. He moved up to the wall, his eyes fixed intently as though he was watching something interesting through a window. Then suddenly he attacked the white wall with his blackened stick. On the chalk he made sweeping black lines – and there was the outline of a galloping horse! More fierce scrapes of the stick – and there was a stag with antlers, galloping. Soon there were little men running with spears and bows and arrows.

Barney was hopping with excitement. 'Stig, you *are* a good drawer! I wish I could do pictures like that. Do some more, Stig! Oooh! The men are killing the deer!' For there was a spear, stuck in the shoulder of a galloping deer, so that it hurt to look at it.

But Stig took no notice and did not seem to be aware of Barney. For Stig was not thinking about making pictures. He was out there with the hunt, galloping with the animals, running

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with the hunters. And his hands, practised as they were at working with hard flint and tough bone, went on drawing the springy black lines on the white wall as if they could not help it.

Barney watched the hunting scene grow on the cave wall, and the last thing he thought about was the time. There was no clock in Stig's cave – not one that went anyway. He went back to the fire to make it up and caught a glimpse of the darkness outside the entrance. It was night! And he had to go back to the house through the dark, alone.

'Stig, I've got to go,' he said, but Stig didn't hear. Barney looked at Stig's collection of weapons leaning up against the entrance. There was a spear, with a long shaft of smooth hazelwood and a head of gleaming flint. It quivered when he picked it up as if it were alive.

'Stig, can I borrow one of your spears to see me home?' Barney asked. Stig turned his head,

saw Barney with the spear, and grinned. Barney took that as permission to have the spear, though Stig was still probably lost in the excitement of the hunt. Barney took a piece of wood from the fire, one end of which was flaming brightly, and with the spear in the other hand he crept out. It was pitch dark and very cold. An icy wind made the flame of his torch flicker. He hoped it wouldn't go out. As he made his way along the bottom of the pit he kept his spear ready, just in case. Perhaps the bears and things were asleep for the winter. Perhaps there weren't any bears. After all, this was Nowadays, wasn't it? The only dangerous things were motor-cars when you crossed the road. Or *was* it Nowadays? It was difficult to feel sure in the dark at the bottom of the pit.

There was something squatting in his path. Barney gripped his spear tightly and held it poised. It was all right, it was a big can, with 'SLAPITON PAINT' printed on it. He gave it a friendly kick as he passed it. He climbed up

into the copse and as he went through the trees a white thing swept towards him through the air. Without thinking he jabbed at it wildly with his spear, but the owl – for that's what it was – swerved away sharply and ghosted off into the dark. 'Off with you, Mr Owl,' said Barney crossly. 'What do you mean by trying to frighten me?'

He was soon out of the copse, and by the time he reached the house he was sorry to have to come in out of the dark. He put out the torch in the water-butt, put the spear in the broom cupboard, and changed his shoes.

His grandmother and sister were sitting at the table eating crumpets.

'Barney, where *have* you been? Were you up in your room all this time?'

'No, Granny. I'm sorry I'm late, but I've been out with Stig.'

'You've been out in the cold and dark all this time! Oh *Barney!*'

‘I wasn’t cold, really Granny. But poor Stig was nearly frozen to death and I had to warm him up and his axe wasn’t sharp enough to cut down the little trees so we cut down a big one and the saw got stuck so I had to climb up it and pull it down and then we cut it up and pushed it down the pit. And Stig tried to light the fire with a chair leg and an egg-cup and a television aerial but I showed him how to strike matches and we ate chestnuts. And Lou, Stig’s jolly good at drawing horses and things and he was still drawing them when I left with a piece of black board on the chalk.’

Lou giggled. ‘Granny, Barney said Stig was drawing with a blackboard on the chalk. He meant a chalk on the blackboard.’

Barney decided to join in the laughter. They didn’t ask him any more questions after that. But Barney felt happier about helping Stig with his firewood than he did about all the presents he had got for Christmas.