

THE BONFIRE

(Written to be illustrated.)

This man is Mr Lovejoy—Mr Robert Lovejoy, but his friends call him Bob.

It was autumn time and the leaves were falling from the trees. Bob thought it would be fun to build his own bonfire for November 5th—Bonfire Night.

“I’m off up the lane to collect some wood,” he called to Mrs Lovejoy. Her name was Catherine, but everybody called her Kitty.

Bob took his wheelbarrow and went up the hill to where the trees reached over the lane from both sides to make a tunnel. It was very quiet, except for his squeaking wheelbarrow.

“I must oil that wheel,” thought Bob.

He picked up all sorts of bits of wood:

long, straight, whippy ash twigs

knobbly lumps of oak

spiky bits of hawthorn

sticky, sweet-smelling pine branches

twisty bits of holly

crumbly lengths of dead elm

--and a long, long branch of oak which scraped the ground as Bob wheeled his full barrow home.

When Bob got home, he tipped all the wood into a heap just inside his gateway.

“Any chance of a cup of tea, Kitty?” Bob yelled.

He need not have shouted. Kitty came round the corner of the house with a mug of tea and a plate of biscuits. She knew that Bob never finished any job without a cup of tea and at least two biscuits.

Bob stood by the gate, a mug in one hand, a biscuit in the other, and a whole shortbread in his mouth too.

His neighbour, Trevor, came along and spotted Bob's pile of wood.

"Can you spare me that piece by your foot? My wife needs a clothes prop for her washing line. That branch would be just right."

Bob could not say 'no' without spraying Trevor with crumbs.

Then Mrs Curwood walked past.

"Oh, Bob, this bit is just what I want for my flower arrangement. Thanks ever so much!"

And off she went, carefully holding a lump of oak in both hands.

Trevor's son, Chris, dashed in through the gate with his friends Joe and Ed. They ran round the woodpile, each snatching a sword-like ash twig. They disappeared up the lane in a swirl of grey sticks.

Kitty came back to collect the mug and plate.

"There looks to be a few sticks in that pile that we could use next spring in the vegetable garden. Be a love and put them behind the shed for me. They'll be just right for the peas to climb up," she said.

If everyone else was taking his wood, Bob could hardly complain if Kitty wanted some as well. So he sorted out ten tall sticks with lots of little twigs pointing in all directions. Then he put the bundle on his shoulder and went to his shed.

Alan the dairy farmer came past with his cows. One large cow tried to get into Bob's garden. Alan leaped into the gateway and picked up a strong stick from the pile.

"Gitoff, gerrowt! Hup! Hup!" he shouted as he whacked the cow's rump. The cow lurched away and Alan followed behind, swishing the air with his new stick.

Little Meg, who was helping her Dad with the cows, also stopped. She bent down to take a stick just like her Dad. Then she grabbed a spray of cones and pine needles. She wiped the sticky sap off her hand onto her jeans and ran off.

"Daddy, look what I've got for our school nature table!"

Meg's brother, David, came running back down the hill, chased by Ed, Chris and Joe. He ran up to Bob's gate and spotted a small piece of wood shaped like a letter Y.

"Cor! Look at this. What a catapult this will make. I'm going home to get some elastic!"

After a while, Bob came back from the shed. He had stayed there to tidy it up a bit. He looked at the ground where his wood had been piled.

"I don't believe it! I just don't believe it!"

There were only two sticks left now.

“I’m blowned if I’m collecting any more loads of wood if this is what happens to it!”

Toby, a black dog, bounced in, his tail wagging and his bright pink tongue hanging out. He sniffed at one stick, looked up at Bob, sniffed it again, and then picked it up in his mouth and ran off.

“Go on then, dog. Fetch!” said Bob, as he threw the last stick over Toby’s head.

The sound of his voice brought Kitty to the gate.

“There’ll be no bonfire tonight, Kitty.”

“Then let’s go to the public bonfire in the town tonight instead, shall we?” replied Kitty.

That evening the sky turned from deep blue to black and stars twinkled brightly. One group of stars, orange, yellow and white, rose high into the sky and then fell in a curve.

“Rockets!” said Bob.

Bob and Kitty put on warm coats, gloves, scarves and hats. Bob sniffed the air.

“I love the smell of autumn”

When they reached the park, the bonfire was already alight. It was huge. They ate hot sausages and jacket potatoes and parkin. They chatted to friends near the bonfire. Everybody cheered when rockets went off and big shells exploded in the sky. As the last firework fell to the ground, Kitty put her arm round Bob and said:

“That was much more fun than anything we could have done on our own.”

“Yes,” said Bob.

He bent down and picked up a rocket stick.

“I wonder if anyone’s got a use for this stick,” he said.

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