The Three Wooden Figures

In the center of a field stood a small rickety cabin about three kilometers from Blandburg, a small town in a valley surrounded by mountains. In the cabin lived a petite boy named Liney, his two older brothers, and their father. Liney was only nine years old, and had nothing but the love of his father and the animals he played with every afternoon after fetching water from their well. His older brothers paid him little attention as they were often preoccupied with the rich children from the town, playing with the ones who gave them toys, and bullying the ones they were jealous of.

One winter was especially hard for the little family who lived on nothing but the few pennies their father collected from chopping wood in town for the rich. They huddled next to their small wood stove and Christmas tree, which was more like a twig with some ribbon. The only thing standing in the cabin besides three hungry boys and their father were three carefully sculpted one-inch tall wooden figures under their tree: A beautiful campfire, a mouthwatering piece of cake, and a brown bear. Lineys' two older brothers shouted and whined, picking up their figures and tossing them at the cabin wall. They were angry at their father for being so poor, and upset they did not have the things the rich kids in town had. Liney picked the figures off the ground and admired his fathers work, promising to cherish them because his brothers would not.

They began to run out of food just days after Christmas, and their father began cutting down on his own portions of food in order to keep his boys healthy. On one cold night, he grew extremely ill. Liney sat by his side while the older boys wrestled and pinned each other to the cabin's floor. Just two days later, the kids were orphans. Before their father had passed, he had told Liney to hold what he had given him close to his heart no matter what challenges came his way.

Liney wept and wept for days. He was angry at his older brothers for showing little remorse for the passing. Their father had left them with a small map to his sister's house over the mountain range that surrounded their valley. The older brothers were so caught up in hope that their aunt would be rich that they paid little attention to their dead father and their grieving younger brother.

After just a few days of their father’s passing, they packed the little food they had left, and headed out in what they thought was the end of winter. While the older brothers rushed ahead, Liney quickly snatched up the three wooden objects their dad had carved for Christmas, stashed them in his pants pocket, and shut the door to their crumbling cabin for the last time.

The older boys fought over who got to read the map, and would constantly pinch and grab at each other while excitedly tearing through the fields towards the mountains. Just a few hours went by and they were down to half a piece of dried meat and Liney’s grumbling stomach.

Eventually they made it to the base of the towering mountains. The temperature had dropped significantly since the morning when they left their house, and the sun was beginning to drop below the peaks. They continued on through the evening, and eventually the boys got too weary to walk any further. They sat under the last tree that stood before entering the treeline and decided to wait until morning. The older boys hogged the cover of the tree, and left Liney to huddle without the protection of the branches.

After hours of cold restless turning listening to his brother's snoring, Liney thought he felt something on his cheek. He sat up from his huddled position and looked around to see what could be bothering him, but only the black night stared back at him. He lay back down, and once again just a few moments later, he felt something land on his cheek; this time he felt the coldness that came with the touch.

They fell faster and faster as he watched the white flurries coat the ground around him. It had been months since the last snow had melted in Blandburg, and Liney had missed the comfort that the snow had brought. However, his fingers were beginning to frost over, and his vision was growing blurry with the snowflakes that rested on his eyelashes. As he held himself tight, struggling to keep warm, he remembered when his dad would sit by their small stove and tell him stories during the coldest nights.

Lineys eyes widened in realization as he remembered what his father had told him before he died. Desperately, he moved his freezing hand into his pocket and retrieved the wooden fire figure. He pressed it to his chest with only a thin layer of fabric blocking the wood from touching his bare skin, and immediately a sensation of warmth spread throughout his body. The figure was still a cold piece of wood, but his body was now filled with a warmth he had never felt in his life, causing him to doze off.

Liney awoke with a julting shove from his eldest brother. He opened his eyes and looked up at what could have been one of the ice statues from the ice festivals held in Blandburg each winter. Liney was puzzled though, because it seemed when he had fallen asleep, the snow had melted. He was laying on soft warm ground, giving no signs that a winter storm had blown through the mountains. Now both his brothers were shaking him, so Liney sat up, and what he saw shocked him.

Outside of Lineys warm patch of ground, was over a foot of snow as far as he could see. His brothers demanded how he had been protected from the cold with jealousy in their voices, and Liney admitted that he did not know, although, as he said so, his grip around the wooden fire in his palm tightened. The brothers took the map and stormed upward through the snow. Liney knew his father was still with him, and he began the trek after his now angry and determined brothers with hope in his heart.

They managed to get over the first of the two big mountains to pass the range, with no new snowfall, but a new problem was beginning to arise: They were hungry. The brothers' fast strides turned into slow dragging footsteps as they began the long climb to the top of the second mountain. This time, it was not *his* stomach that was grumbling. He clutched the wooden piece of cake tight in his fist over his heart, feeling something he had almost certainly never experienced: being full.

About half way up, the dragging footsteps in front of him came to a stop. The brothers' cold and weary faces turned towards Liney with so much anger that Liney now felt sick to his stomach. They had seen his warm and happy grin, and with jealousy, they began to scramble at Liney. Liney immediately found the bear in his pocket and held it strong against his chest. In one swift motion the boys stumbled backward. Even though Liney was still only a small boy, the brothers now saw a huge brown bear staring them down. With fear in their eyes they continued to stumble backwards, making the grave mistake of forgetting to look behind themselves.

With one wrong step on an unstable rock, both boys tumbled off the edge of the mountain. Liney watched in shock, dropping his wooden pieces, as his brothers continued to roll. He was even more astonished at the transformation that was beginning to occur. His older brothers became very small and a hard brown coat began to take over their skin. The last thing Liney saw before they disappeared into the river at the base of the mountain, was the small bark covered faces of his now wooden brothers.

Liney immediately felt as cold, hungry, and weak as ever before. He scrambled around the snow covered rocky ground on his hands and knees searching for his once protective wooden pieces, but he couldn’t find them. He gave up his search and with his last remaining strength dragged his legs over the peak of the last mountain, his aunt's cabin now a visible speck in the distance.

40 years later:

“Daddy, daddy!” Johnny shouted, “Come look at these!”

His pant legs were sopping wet as he splashed along the river bed, pulling his fathers hand behind him. He finally came to the treasure he was so proud to have found. Slowly Johnny's father crouched down in the shallow waters and picked up the moss covered boys. He pressed them so close to his heart they pierced his skin, and Liney sat down and wept.