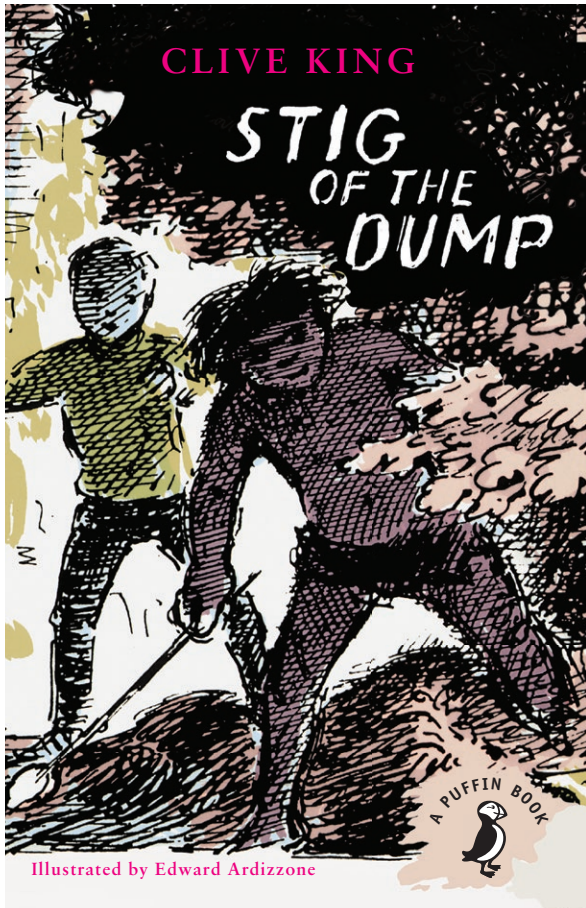


Stig of the Dump



The sun was bright. Yellow leaves fluttered down from the elm tree on to the grass. A robin puffed its breast on a rose tree and squeaked at him. Barney suddenly wasn't sure that he believed in Stig himself. It wasn't a Stiggish day, like yesterday when he had fallen down the pit.

He had fallen, hadn't he? He felt the bump on the back of his head. Yes, that was real enough. He'd fallen and bumped his head. And then what? Funny things did happen when you bumped your head. Perhaps you only saw Stigs when you fell and bumped your head. He didn't think he wanted to fall over the cliff again on purpose and bump his head again.

Was Stig a person you could just go and play with like the children at the end of the road at home? He had to find out, but he didn't want to go to the chalk pit and find – nothing! He stood with his hands in his pockets in the middle of the lawn, his fingers playing with something hard in the left-hand pocket of his jeans.

He remembered something, and pulled out the thing he had in his hand. Of course – the flint! He looked at it glinting in the sunlight, like a black diamond with its chipped pattern. He'd seen Stig make it! There was no mistake about that. Of course Stig was real!

He set off again at a run, climbed the fence into the paddock, and waded through the long wet grass the other side. The copse round the edge of the chalk pit looked dark beyond the sunlit grass.

In the middle of the paddock he found himself slowing down and stopping again. Something at the back of his mind was telling him that he'd seen pictures of chipped flints in books, and real ones in museums, and that they were made thousands of years ago by rough people who weren't alive any longer. People found them and put them in cases with notices on them. Perhaps he'd just found this one. And imagined everything else.

And supposing he hadn't imagined Stig, was he the sort of person who liked people coming to play? Well, he told himself, all he really wanted to do was to look at the place where he had fallen over yesterday. Have another look down the dump. There was that bicycle, anyway.

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