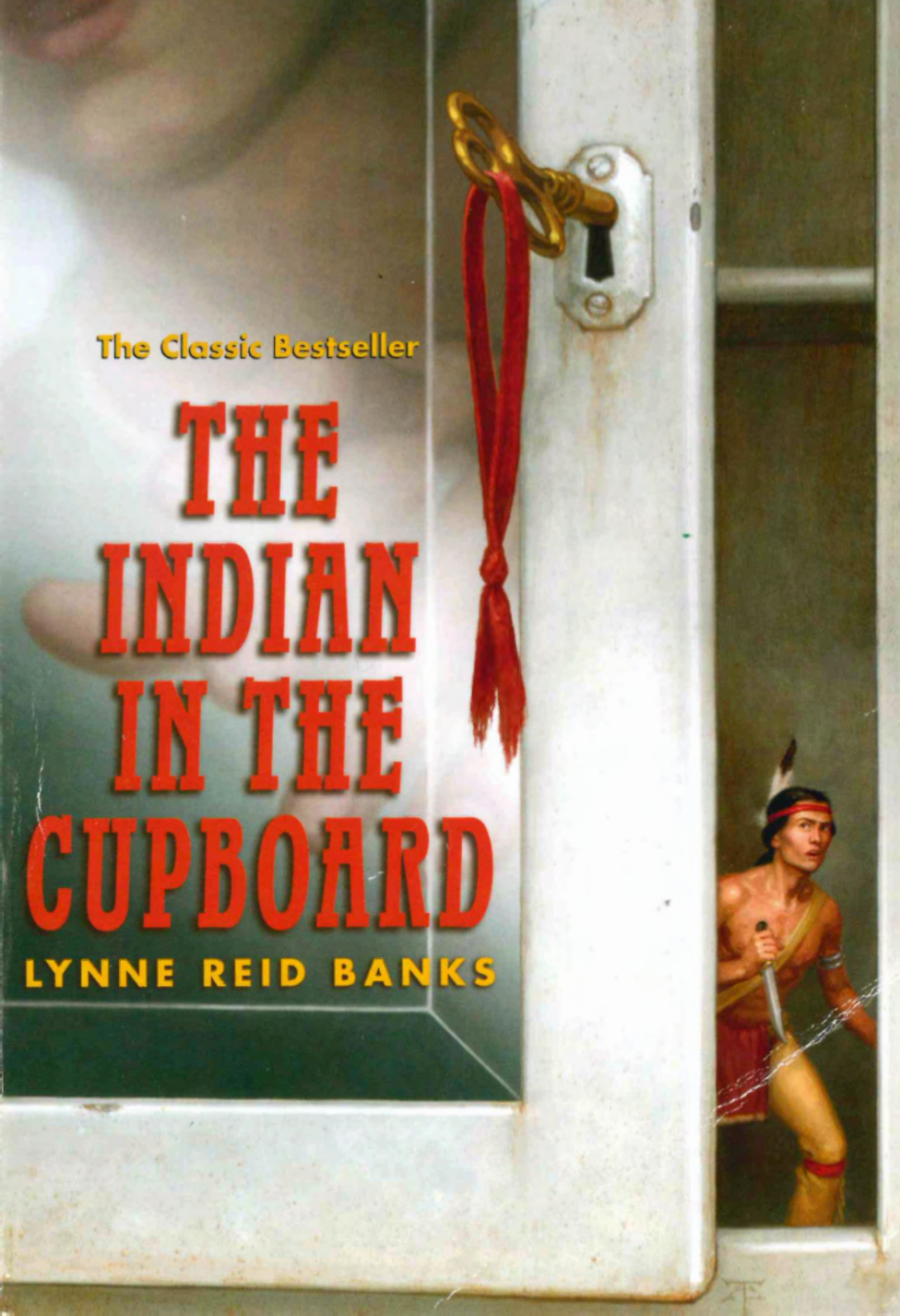
The Classic Bestseller
THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD
LYNNE REID BANKS

The INDIAN in the CUPBOARD

Lynne Reid Banks

Illustrated by Brock Cole

A YEARLING BOOK

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition of this work as follows:
Banks, Lynne Reid.
The Indian in the Cupboard / Banks, Lynne Reid.
p. cm.
Summary: A nine-year-old boy receives a plastic Indian, a cupboard, and a little key for his birthday and finds himself involved in adventure when the Indian comes to life in the cupboard and befriends him.
ISBN: 978-0-385-17051-2 (trade)
[1. Indians of North America—Fiction. 2. Toys—Fiction. 3. Magic—Fiction.]
I. Title.
PZ7.B2262In
[Fic]—dc19
79006533

ISBN: 978-0-375-84753-0 (pbk.)

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4
First Yearling Edition

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For Omri—Who Else!

Contents

1

Birthday Presents

IT WAS NOT THAT OMRI didn't appreciate Patrick's birthday present to him. Far from it. He was really very grateful—sort of. It was, without a doubt, *very* kind of Patrick to give Omri anything at all, let alone a secondhand plastic Indian that he himself had finished with.

The trouble was, though, that Omri was getting a little fed up with small plastic figures, of which he had loads. Biscuit tinsful, probably three or four if they were all put away at the same time, which they never were because most of the time they were scattered about in the bathroom, the loft, the kitchen, the breakfast room, not to mention Omri's bedroom and the garden. The compost heap was full of soldiers which, over several autumns, had been

raked up with the leaves by Omri's mother, who was rather careless about such things.

Omri and Patrick had spent many hours together playing with their joint collections of plastic toys. But now they'd had about enough of them, at least for the moment, and that was why, when Patrick brought his present to school on Omri's birthday, Omri was disappointed. He tried not to show it, but he was.

"Do you really like him?" asked Patrick as Omri stood silently with the Indian in his hand.

"Yes, he's fantastic," said Omri in only a slightly flattish voice. "I haven't got an Indian."

"I know."

"I haven't got any cowboys either."

"Nor have I. That's why I couldn't play anything with him."

Omri opened his mouth to say, "I won't be able to either," but, thinking that might hurt Patrick's feelings, he said nothing, put the Indian in his pocket, and forgot about it.

After school there was a family tea, and all the excitement of his presents from his parents and his two older brothers. He got his dearest wish—a skateboard complete with kickboard and kryptonic wheels from his mum and dad, and from his eldest brother, Adiel, a helmet. Gillon, his other brother, hadn't bought him anything because he

had no money (his pocket money had been stopped some time ago in connection with a very unfortunate accident involving their father's bicycle). So when Gillon's turn came to give Omri a present, Omri was very surprised when a large parcel was put before him, untidily wrapped in brown paper and string.

"What is it?"

"Have a look. I found it in the alley."

The alley was a narrow passage that ran along the bottom of the garden where the dustbins stood. The three boys used to play there sometimes, and occasionally found treasures that other—perhaps richer—neighbors had thrown away. So Omri was quite excited as he tore off the paper.

Inside was a small white metal cupboard with a mirror in the door, the kind you see over the basin in old-fashioned bathrooms.

You might suppose Omri would get another disappointment about this because the cupboard was fairly plain and, except for a shelf, completely empty, but oddly enough he was very pleased with it. He loved cupboards of any sort because of the fun of keeping things in them. He was not a very tidy boy in general, but he did like arranging things in cupboards and drawers and then opening them later and finding them just as he'd left them.

"I do wish it locked," he said.

"You might say thank you before you start complaining," said Gillon.

"It's got a keyhole," said their mother. "And I've got a whole boxful of keys. Why don't you try all the smaller ones and see if any of them fit?"

Most of the keys were much too big, but there were half a dozen that were about the right size. All but one of these were very ordinary. The unordinary one was the most interesting key in the whole collection, small with a complicated lock part and a fancy top. A narrow strip of red satin ribbon was looped through one of its curly openings. Omri saved that key to the last.

None of the others fitted, and at last he picked up the curly-topped key and carefully put it in the keyhole on the cupboard door, just below the knob. He did hope very much that it would turn, and regretted wasting his birthday-cake-cutting wish on something so silly (or rather, unlikely) as that he might pass his spelling test next day, which it would take real magic to bring about as he hadn't even looked at the words since they'd been given out four days ago. Now he closed his eyes and unwished the test pass and wished instead that this little twisty key would turn Gillon's present into a secret cupboard.

The key turned smoothly in the lock. The door wouldn't open.

"Hey! Mum! I've found one!"

"Have you, darling? Which one?" His mother came to look. "Oh *that* one! How very odd. That was the key to my grandmother's jewel box, that she got from Florence. It was made of red leather and it fell to bits at last, but she kept the key and gave it to me. She was most terribly poor when she died, poor old sweetie, and kept crying because she had nothing to leave me, so in the end I said I'd rather have this little key than all the jewels in the world. I threaded it on that bit of ribbon—it was much longer then—and hung it around my neck and told her I'd always wear it and remember her. And I did for a long time. But then the ribbon broke and I nearly lost it."

"You could have got a chain for it," said Omri.

She looked at him. "You're right," she said. "I should have done just that. But I didn't. And now it's your cupboard key. Please don't lose it, Omri, will you?"

Omri put the cupboard on his bedside table, and opening it, looked inside thoughtfully. What would he put in it?

"It's supposed to be for medicines," said Gillon. "You could keep your nosedrops in it."

"No! That's just wasting it. Besides, I haven't any other medicines."

"Why don't you pop this in?" his mother suggested, and opened her hand. In it was Patrick's Indian. "I found it when I was putting your trousers in the washing machine."

Omri carefully stood the Indian on the shelf.

"Are you going to shut the door?" asked his mother.

"Yes. And lock it."

He did this and then kissed his mother and she turned the light out and he lay down on his side looking at the cupboard. He felt very content. Just as he was dropping off to sleep his eyes snapped open. He had thought he heard a little noise . . . but no. All was quiet. His eyes closed again.

In the morning there was no doubt about it. The noise actually woke him.

He lay perfectly still in the dawn light staring at the cupboard, from which was now coming a most extraordinary series of sounds. A pattering; a tapping; a scrabbling; and—surely?—a high-pitched noise like—well, almost like a tiny voice.

To be truthful, Omri was petrified. Who wouldn't be? Undoubtedly there was something alive in that cupboard. At last, he put out his hand and touched it. He pulled very carefully. The door was shut tight. But as he pulled, the cupboard moved, just slightly. The noise from inside instantly stopped.

He lay still for a long time, wondering. Had he imagined it? The noise did not start again. At last he cautiously turned the key and opened the cupboard door.

The Indian was gone.

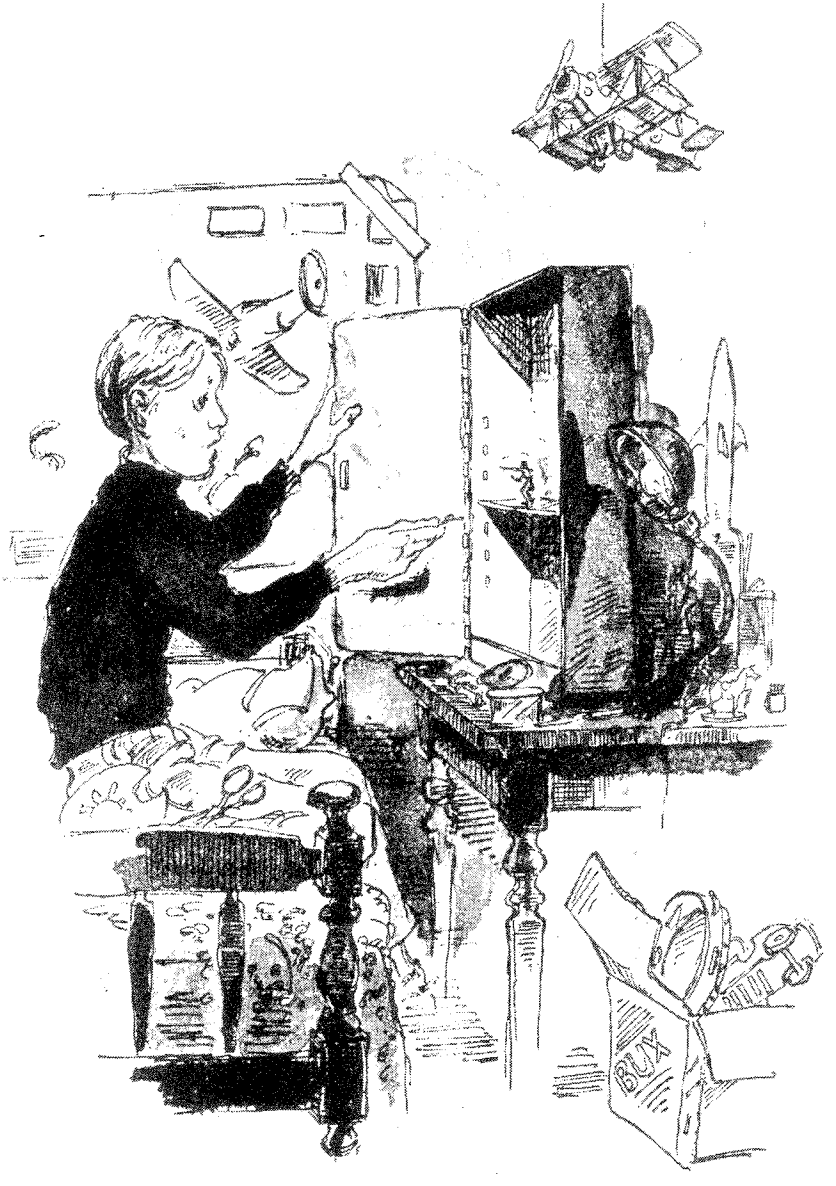
Omri sat up sharply in bed and peered into the dark

corners. Suddenly he saw him. But he wasn't on the shelf anymore, he was in the bottom of the cupboard. And he wasn't standing upright. He was crouching in the darkest corner, half hidden by the front of the cupboard. And he was alive.

Omri knew that immediately. To begin with, though the Indian was trying to keep perfectly still—as still as Omri had kept, lying in bed a moment ago—he was breathing heavily. His bare, bronze shoulders rose and fell, and were shiny with sweat. The single feather sticking out of the back of his headband quivered, as if the Indian were trembling. And as Omri peered closer, and his breath fell on the tiny huddled figure, he saw it jump to its feet; its minute hand made a sudden, darting movement toward its belt and came to rest clutching the handle of a knife smaller than the shaft of a tack.

Neither Omri nor the Indian moved for perhaps a minute and a half. They hardly breathed either. They just stared at each other. The Indian's eyes were black and fierce and frightened. His lips were drawn back from shining white teeth, so small you could scarcely see them except when they caught the light. He stood pressed against the inside wall of the cupboard, clutching his knife, rigid with terror, but defiant.

The first coherent thought that came into Omri's mind as he began to get over the shock was, "I must call the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others!"—meaning his parents and brothers. But something (he wasn't sure what) stopped him. Maybe he was afraid that if he took his eyes off the Indian for even a moment, he would vanish, or become plastic again, and then when the others came running they would all laugh and accuse Omri of making things up. And who could blame anyone for not believing *this* unless they saw it with their own eyes?

Another reason Omri didn't call anyone was that, if he was not dreaming and the Indian had really come alive, it was certainly the most marvelous thing that had ever happened to Omri in his life and he wanted to keep it to himself, at least at first.

His next thought was that he must somehow get the Indian in his hand. He didn't want to frighten him any further, but he *had* to touch him. He simply had to. He reached his hand slowly into the cupboard.

The Indian gave a fantastic leap into the air. His black hair flew and the fringes on his leggings fluttered. His knife, raised above his head, flashed. He gave a shout, which, even though it was a tiny shout to match his body, was nevertheless loud enough to make Omri jump. But not so much as he jumped when the little knife pierced his finger deeply enough to draw a drop of blood.

Omri stuck his finger in his mouth and sucked it and thought how gigantic he must look to the tiny Indian and

how fantastically brave he had been to stab him. The Indian stood there, his feet, in moccasins, planted apart on the white-painted metal floor, his chest heaving, his knife held ready, and his black eyes quite wild. Omri thought he was magnificent.

"I won't hurt you," he said. "I only want to pick you up."

The Indian opened his mouth and a stream of words, spoken in that loud-tiny voice, came out, not one of which Omri could understand.

"Don't you speak English?" asked Omri. All the Indians in films spoke a sort of English; it would be terrible if his Indian couldn't. How would they talk to each other?

The Indian lowered his knife a fraction.

"I speak," he grunted.

Omri breathed deeply in relief. "Oh good! Listen, I don't know how it happened that you came to life, but it must be something to do with this cupboard, or perhaps the key—anyway, here you are, and I think you're great, I don't mind that you stabbed me, only please can I pick you up? After all, you are my Indian," he finished in a very reasonable tone.

He said all this very quickly while the Indian stared at him. The knife point went down a little farther, but he didn't answer.

"Well? Can I? Say something!" urged Omri impatiently.

"I speak *slowly,*" grunted the miniature Indian at last.

"Oh." Omri thought, and then said, very slowly, "Let—me—pick—you—up."

The knife came up again in an instant, and the Indian's knees bent into a croùch.

"No."

"Oh *please*."

"You touch—I kill!" the Indian growled ferociously.

You might have expected Omri to laugh at this absurd threat from a tiny creature scarcely bigger than his middle finger, armed with only a pinpoint. But Omri didn't laugh. He didn't even feel like laughing. This Indian—*his* Indian—was behaving in every way like a real live Indian brave, and despite the vast difference in their sizes and strengths, Omri respected him and even, odd as it sounds, feared him at that moment.

"Oh okay, I won't then. But there's no need to get angry. I don't want to hurt you." Then, as the Indian looked baffled, he said, in what he supposed was Indian English, "Me—no—hurt—you."

"You come near, I hurt *you*," said the Indian swiftly.

Omri had been half lying in bed all this time. Now, cautiously and slowly, he got up. His heart was thundering in his chest. He couldn't be sure why he was being cautious. Was it so as not to frighten the Indian, or because he was frightened himself? He wished one of his brothers would come in, or better still, his father. . . . But no one came.

Standing in his bare feet he took the cupboard by its top corners and turned it till it faced the window. He did this very carefully but nevertheless the Indian was jolted, and, having nothing to hold on to, he fell down. But he was on his feet again in a second, and he had not let go of his knife.

"Sorry," said Omri.

The Indian responded with a noise like a snarl.

There was no more conversation for the next few minutes. Omri looked at the Indian in the early sunlight. He was a splendid sight. He was just under three inches tall. His blue-black hair, done in a plait and pressed to his head by a colored headband, gleamed in the sun. So did the minuscule muscles of his tiny naked torso, and the skin of his arms. His legs were covered with buckskin leggings, which had some decoration on them too small to see properly. He wore a kind of bandolier across his chest and his belt seemed to be made of several strands of some shiny white beads. Best of all, somehow, were his moccasins. Omri found himself wondering (not for the first time recently) where his magnifying glass was. It was the only way he would ever be able to see and appreciate the intricate details of the Indian's clothes.

Omri looked as closely as he dared at the Indian's face. He expected to see paint on it, war paint, but there was none. The turkey feather that had been stuck in the

headband had come out when the Indian fell and was now lying on the floor of the cupboard. It was about as big as the spike on a horse chestnut, but it was a real feather. Omri suddenly asked, "Were you always this small?"

"I not small! You, big!" the Indian shouted angrily.

"No—" began Omri, but then he stopped.

He heard his mother beginning to move about next door.

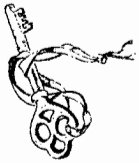
The Indian heard it too. He froze. The door of the next room opened. Omri knew that at any moment his mother would come in to wake him for school. In a flash he had bent down and whispered, "Don't worry! I'll be back." And he closed and locked the cupboard door and jumped back into bed.

"Come on, Omri. Time to get up."

She bent down and kissed him, paying no attention to the cupboard, and went out again, leaving the door wide open.

2

The Door Is Shut



OMRI GOT DRESSED IN a state of such high excitement that he could scarcely control his fumbling fingers enough to do up buttons and tie his shoelaces. He'd thought he was excited yesterday, on his birthday, but it was nothing compared to how he felt now.

He was dying to open the cupboard door and have another look, but the landing outside his bedroom door was like a railway station at this hour of the morning—parents and brothers passing continually, and if he were to close his door for a moment's privacy somebody would be sure to burst in. He'd nip up after breakfast and have a quick look when he was supposed to be cleaning his teeth. . . .

However, it didn't work out. There was a stupid row at

the breakfast table because Adiel took the last of the Rice Krispies, and although there were plenty of cornflakes, not to mention Sugar Puffs, the other two fairly set upon Adiel and made such an awful fuss that their mother lost her temper, and the end of it was nobody got to clean their teeth at all.

They were all bundled out of the house at the last minute—Omri even forgot to take his swimming things although it was Thursday, the day his class went to the pool. He was an excellent swimmer and he was so annoyed when he remembered (halfway to school, too late to go back) that he turned on Adiel and shouted, "You made me forget my swimming stuff!" and bashed him. That naturally led to them all being late for school, and furthermore, arriving in a very grubby condition.

All this actually pushed the Indian right out of Omri's mind. But the minute he set eyes on Patrick, he remembered. And not for one single second for the rest of the day was that Indian out of Omri's thoughts.

You may imagine the temptation to tell Patrick what had happened. Several times Omri very nearly did tell him, and he couldn't help dropping a number of tantalizing hints.

"Your present was the best thing I got."

Patrick looked rather astonished. "I thought you got a skateboard?"

"Ye-es . . . but I like yours better."

"Better than a skateboard? Are you kidding me?"

"Yours turned out to be more exciting."

Patrick just stared at him. "Are you being sarcastic?"

"No."

Later, after they'd had the spelling test and Omri had been marked three right out of ten, Patrick joked, "I bet the plastic Indian could have done better."

Unwarily, Omri replied, "Oh I don't think he can *write* English, he can only just speak—"

He stopped himself quickly, but Patrick was giving him a very odd look. "What?"

"Nothing."

"No, what did you say about him speaking?"

Omri wrestled with himself. He wanted to keep his secret; in any case Patrick wouldn't believe him. Yet the need to talk about it was very strong. "He can speak," he said slowly at last.

"Beard," said Patrick, which was their school slang for "I don't believe you."

Instead of insisting, Omri said nothing more, and that led Patrick to ask, "Why did you say that, about him speaking?"

"He does."

"*Itchy* beard." (Which of course means the same only more so.)

Omri refused to get involved in an argument. He was somehow scared that if he talked about the Indian, something bad would happen. In fact, as the day went on and he longed more and more to get home, he began to feel certain that the whole incredible happening—well, not that it hadn't happened, but that something would go wrong. All his thoughts, all his dreams were centered on the miraculous, endless possibilities opened up by a real, live, miniature Indian of his very own. It would be too terrible if the whole thing turned out to be some sort of mistake.

After school Patrick wanted him to stay on the school grounds and skateboard. For *weeks* Omri had longed to do this, but had never had his own skateboard till now. So it was quite beyond Patrick's understanding when Omri said, "I can't, I have to get home. Anyway, I didn't bring it."

"Why not? Are you crazy? Why do you have to get home, anyway?"

"I want to play with the Indian."

Patrick's eyes narrowed in disbelief. "Can I come?"

Omri hesitated. But no, it wouldn't do. He must get to know the Indian himself before he even thought of introducing him to anyone else, even Patrick.

Besides, the most awful thought had come to Omri during the last lesson, which had made it almost impossible for him to sit still. If the Indian *were* real, and not just—well, moving plastic, as Pinocchio had been moving wood,

then he would need food and other things. And Omri had left him shut up in the dark all day with nothing. Perhaps—what if there were not enough air for him in that cupboard? The door fitted very tight. How much air would such a very small creature need? What if—what if the Indian were—what if he'd *died,* shut up there? What if Omri had killed him?

At the very best, the Indian must have passed a horrible day in that dark prison. Omri was appalled at the thought of it. Why had he allowed himself to be drawn into that silly row at breakfast instead of slipping away and making sure the Indian was all right? The mere thought that he might be dead was frightening Omri sick. He ran all the way home, burst through the back door, and raced up the stairs without even saying hello to his mother.

He shut the door of his bedroom and fell on his knees beside the bedside table. With a hand that shook, he turned the key in the lock and opened the cupboard door.

The Indian lay there on the floor of the cupboard, stiff and stark. Too stiff! That was not a dead body. Omri picked it up. It was an "it," not a "he" anymore.

The Indian was made of plastic again.

Omri knelt there, appalled—too appalled to move. He *had* killed his Indian, or done something awful to him. At the same time he had killed his dream—all the wonderful, exciting, secret games that had filled his imagination all

day. But that was not the main horror. His Indian had been real—not a mere toy, but a person. And now here he lay in Omri's hand—cold, stiff, lifeless. Somehow through Omri's own fault.

How had it happened?

It never occurred to Omri now that he had imagined the whole incredible episode this morning. The Indian was in a completely different position from the one he had been in when Patrick gave him to Omri. *Then* he had been standing on one leg, as if doing a war dance—knees bent, one moccasined foot raised, both elbows bent, with one fist (with the knife in it) in the air. Now he lay flat, legs apart, arms at his sides. His eyes were closed. The knife was no longer a part of him. It lay separately on the floor of the cupboard.

Omri picked it up. The easiest way to do this, he found, was to wet his finger and press it down on the tiny knife, which stuck to it. It, too, was plastic, and could no more have pierced human skin than a twist of paper. Yet it had pierced Omri's finger this morning—the little mark was still there. But this morning it had been a real knife.

Omri stroked the Indian with his finger. There was a painful thickness in the back of his throat. The pain of sadness, disappointment, and a strange sort of guilt burned inside him as if he had swallowed a very hot potato that wouldn't cool down. He let the tears come, and just knelt

there and cried for about ten minutes.

Then he put the Indian back in the cupboard and locked the door because he couldn't bear to look at him any longer.

That night at supper he couldn't eat anything, and he couldn't talk. His father touched Omri's face and said it felt very hot. His mother took him upstairs and put him to bed and oddly enough he didn't object. He didn't know if he was ill or not, but he felt so bad he was quite glad to be made a fuss of. Not that that improved the basic situation, but it was some comfort.

"What is it, Omri? Tell me," coaxed his mother. She stroked his hair and looked at him tenderly and questioningly, and he nearly told her everything, but then he suddenly rolled over on his face.

"Nothing. Really."

She sighed, kissed him (or rather, the back of him), and left the room, closing the door softly after her.

As soon as she had gone, he heard something. A scratching—a muttering—a definitely *alive* sound. Coming from the cupboard.

Omri snapped his bedside light on and stared wide-eyed at his own face in the mirror on the cupboard door. He stared at the key with its twisted ribbon. He listened to the sounds, now unmistakable.

He tremblingly turned the key and there was the

Indian, on the shelf this time, almost exactly level with Omri's face. Alive again!

Again they stared at each other. Then Omri asked falteringly, "What happened to you?"

"Happen? Good sleep happen. Cold ground. Need blanket. Food. Fire."

Omri gaped. Was the little man giving him orders? Undoubtedly he was! Because he waved his knife, now back in his hand, in an unmistakable way.

Omri was so happy he could scarcely speak.

"Okay—you stay there—I'll get food—don't worry—" he gasped as he scrambled out of bed.

He hurried downstairs, excited but thoughtful. What could it all mean? That the moment the cupboard door closed, the Indian went to sleep? It was puzzling, but he didn't bother worrying about it too much. His main concern was to get downstairs without his parents hearing him, get to the kitchen, find some food that would suit the Indian, and bring it back without anyone asking questions.

Fortunately his parents were in the living room watching television, so he was able to tiptoe to the kitchen along the dark passage. Once there, he dared not turn on a light, but there was the refrigerator light and that was enough.

He surveyed the inside of the refrigerator. What did Indians eat? Meat, chiefly, he supposed—deer meat, rabbits, the sort of animals they could shoot on their land.

Needless to say there was nothing of that sort.

Biscuits, jam, peanut butter, that sort of thing was no problem, but somehow Omri felt sure these were not Indian foods. Suddenly his searching eyes fell on an open tin of sweet corn. He found a paper plate in the drawer where the picnic stuff lived, and took a good teaspoonful of corn. Then he broke off a crusty corner of bread. Then he thought of some cheese. And what about a drink? Milk? Surely Indian braves did not drink milk? They usually drank something called "firewater" in films, which was presumably a hot drink, and Omri dared not heat anything. Ordinary nonfirewater would have to do, unless . . . What about some Coke? That was an American drink. Lucky there was a bit in a big bottle left over from his birthday, so he took that. He did wish there was some cold meat, but there just wasn't.

Clutching the Coke bottle by the neck in one hand and the paper plate in the other, Omri sneaked back upstairs with fast-beating heart. All was just as he had left it, except that the Indian was sitting on the edge of the shelf dangling his legs and trying to sharpen his knife on the metal. He jumped up as soon as he saw Omri.

"Food?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, but I don't know if it's what you like."

"I like. Give, quick!"

But Omri wanted to arrange things a little. He took a

pair of scissors and cut a small circle out of the paper plate. On this he put a crumb of bread, another of cheese, and one kernel of the sweet corn. He handed this offering to the Indian, who backed off, looking at the food with hungry eyes but trying to keep watch on Omri at the same time.

"Not touch! You touch, I use knife!" he warned.

"All right, I promise not to. Now you can eat."

Very cautiously the Indian sat down, this time cross-legged on the shelf. At first he tried to eat with his left hand, keeping the knife at the ready in his right, but he was so hungry he soon abandoned this effort, laid the knife close at his side and, grabbing the bread in one hand and the little crumb of cheese in the other, he began to tear at them ravenously.

When these two apparently familiar foods had taken the edge off his appetite, he turned his attention to the single kernel of corn.

"What?" he asked suspiciously.

"Corn. Like you have—" Omri hesitated. "Where you come from," he said.

It was a shot in the dark. He didn't know if the Indian "came from" anywhere, but he meant to find out. The Indian grunted, turning the corn about in both hands, for it was half as big as his head. He smelled it. A great grin spread over his face. He nibbled it. The grin grew wider. But then

he held it away and looked again, and the grin vanished.

"Too big," he said. "Like you," he added accusingly.

"Eat it. It's the same stuff."

The Indian took a bite. He still looked very suspicious, but he ate and ate. He couldn't finish it, but he evidently liked it.

"Give meat," he said finally.

"I'm sorry, I can't find any tonight, but I'll get you some tomorrow," said Omri.

After another grunt, the Indian said, "Drink!"

Omri had been waiting for this. From the box where he kept his Action Man things he had brought a plastic mug. It was much too big for the Indian but it was the best he could do. Into it, with extreme care, he now poured a minute amount of Coke from the huge bottle.

He handed it to the Indian, who had to hold it with both hands and still almost dropped it.

"What?" he barked, after smelling it.

"Coca-Cola," said Omri, enthusiastically pouring some for himself into a cup.

"Firewater?"

"No, it's cold. But you'll like it."

The Indian sipped, swallowed, gulped. Gulped again. Grinned.

"Good?" asked Omri.

"Good!" said the Indian.

"Cheers!" said Omri, raising his cup as he'd seen his parents do when they were having a drink together.

"What 'cheers'?"

"I don't know!" said Omri, feeling excessively happy, and drank. His Indian—eating and drinking! He *was* real, a real, flesh-and-blood person! It was too marvelous. Omri felt he might die of delight.

"Do you feel better now?" he asked.

"I better. You not better," said the Indian. "You still big. You stop eat. Get right size."

Omri laughed aloud, then stopped himself hastily.

"It's time to sleep," he said.

"Not now. Big light. Sleep when light go."

"I can make the light go," said Omri, and switched out his bedside lamp.

In the darkness came a thin cry of astonishment and fear. Omri switched the light on again.

The Indian was now gazing at him with something more than respect—a sort of awe.

"You Great White Spirit?" he asked in a whisper.

"No," said Omri. "And this isn't the sun. It's a lamp. Don't you have lamps?"

The Indian peered where he was pointing. "That lamp?" he asked unbelievingly. "Much big lamp. Need much oil."

"But this isn't an oil lamp. It works by electricity."

"Magic?"

"No, electricity. But speaking of magic—how did you get here?"

The Indian looked at him steadily out of his black eyes. "You not know?"

"No, I don't. You were a toy. Then I put you in the cupboard and locked the door. When I opened it, you were real. Then I locked it again, and you went back to being plastic. Then—"

He stopped sharply. Wait! What if—he thought furiously. It was possible! In which case . . .

"Listen," he said excitedly. "I want you to come out of there. I'll find you a much more comfortable place. You said you were cold. I'll make you a proper tepee—"

"Tepee!" the Indian shouted. "I no live tepee. I live longhouse!"

Omri was so eager to test his theory about the cupboard that he was impatient. "You'll have to make do with a tepee tonight," he said. Hastily he opened a drawer and took out a biscuit tin full of little plastic people. Somewhere in here was a plastic tepee. . . . "Ah, here!" He pounced on it—a small, pinkish, cone-shaped object with designs rather badly painted on its plastic sides. "Will this do?"

He put it on the shelf beside the Indian, who looked at it with the utmost scorn.

"*This*—tepee?" he said. He touched its plastic side and

made a face. He pushed it with both hands—it slid along the shelf. He bent and peered in through the triangular opening. Then he actually spat on the ground, or rather, on the shelf.

"Oh," said Omri, rather crestfallen. "You mean it's not good enough."

"Not want toy," said the Indian, and turned his back, folding both arms across his chest with an air of finality.

Omri saw his chance. With one quick movement he had picked up the Indian by the waist between his thumb and forefinger. In doing this he pinned the knife, which was in the Indian's belt, firmly to his side. The dangling Indian twisted, writhed, kicked, made a number of ferocious and hideous faces—but beyond that he was helpless and he evidently knew it, for after a few moments he decided it was more dignified to stop struggling. Instead, he folded his tiny arms across his chest once again, put his head back, and stared with proud defiance at Omri's face, which was now level with his own.

For Omri, the feeling of holding this little creature in his fingers was very strange and wonderful. If he had had any doubts that the Indian was truly alive, the sensation he had now would have put them to rest. His body was heavier now, warm and firm and full of life—through Omri's thumb, on the Indian's left side, he could feel his heart beating wildly, like a bird's.

Although the Indian felt strong, Omri could sense how fragile he was, how easily an extra squeeze could injure him. He would have liked to feel him all over, his tiny arms and legs, his hair, his ears, almost too small to see—yet when he saw how the Indian, who was altogether in his power, faced him boldly and hid his fear, he lost all desire to handle him—he felt it was cruel, and insulting to the Indian, who was no longer his plaything but a person who had to be respected.

Omri put him down gently on the chest of drawers where the cupboard stood. Then he crouched down till his face was again level with the Indian's.

"Sorry I did that," he said.

The Indian, breathing heavily and with his arms still folded, said nothing, but stared haughtily at him, as if nothing he did could affect him in any way.

"What's your name?" asked Omri.

"Little Bear," said the Indian, pointing proudly to himself. "Iroquois brave. Son of chief. You son of chief?" he shot at Omri fiercely.

"No," said Omri humbly.

"Hm!" snorted Little Bear with a superior look. "Name?"

Omri told him. "Now we must find you another place to sleep—outside the cupboard. Surely you sleep in tepees sometimes?"

"Never," said Little Bear firmly.

"I've never heard of an Indian who didn't," said Omri, with equal firmness. "You'll have to tonight, anyway."

"Not toy," said the Indian. "This no good. And fire. I want fire."

"I can't light a real fire in here. But I'll make you a tepee. It won't be very good, but I promise you a better one tomorrow."

He looked around. It was good, he thought, that he never put anything away. Now everything he needed was strewn about the floor and on tables and shelves, ready to hand.

Starting with some pick-up sticks and a bit of string, he made a sort of cone shape, tied at the top. Around this he draped first a handkerchief, and then, when that didn't seem firm enough, a bit of old felt from a hat that had been in the dressing-up crate. It was fawn-colored, fortunately, and looked rather like animal hide. In fact, when it was pinned together at the back with a couple of safety pins and a slit cut for an entrance, the whole thing looked pretty good, especially with the poles sticking up through a hole in the top.

Omri stood it up carefully on the chest of drawers and anxiously awaited Little Bear's verdict. The Indian walked around it three times slowly, went down on hands and knees and crawled in through the flap, came out again after a minute, tugged at the felt, stood back to look at the poles,

and finally gave a fairly satisfied grunt. However, he wasn't going to pass it without any criticism at all.

"No pictures," he growled. "*If* tepee, then need pictures."

"I don't know how to do them," said Omri.

"I know. You give colors. I make."

"Tomorrow," said Omri, who, despite himself, was beginning to feel very sleepy.

"Blanket?"

Omri fished out one of Action Man's sleeping rolls.

"No good. No keep out wind."

Omri started to object that there was no wind in his bedroom, but then he decided it was easier to cut up a square out of one of his old sweaters, so he did that. It was a red one with a stripe around the bottom, and even Little Bear couldn't hide his approval as he held it up, then wrapped it around himself.

"Good. Warm. I sleep now."

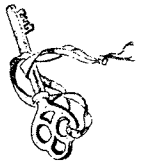
He dropped on his knees and crawled into the tent. After a moment he stuck his head out.

"Tomorrow talk. You give Little Bear meat—fire—color—much things." He scowled fiercely up at Omri. "Good?"

"Good," said Omri, and indeed nothing in his life had ever promised better.

3

Thirty Scalps



WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, loud snores—well, not loud, but loud for the Indian—began to come out of the tepee, but Omri, sleepy as he was himself, was not quite ready for bed. He had an experiment to do.

As he had figured it out so far, the cupboard, or the key, or both together, brought plastic things to life, *or if they were already alive, turned them into plastic.* There were a lot of questions to be answered, though. Did it only work with plastic? Would, say, wooden or metal figures also come to life if shut up in the cupboard? How long did they have to stay in there for the magic to work? Overnight? Or did it happen right away?

And another thing: What about objects? The Indian's

clothes, his feather, his knife, all had become real. Was this just because they were part of the original plastic figure? If he put—well, anything you like, the despised plastic tepee, for instance—into the cupboard and locked the door, would that be real in the morning? And what would happen to a real object if he put that in?

He decided to make a double trial.

He stood the plastic Indian tent on the shelf of the cupboard. Beside it he put a Matchbox car. Then he closed the cupboard door. He didn't lock it. He counted slowly to ten.

Then he opened the door.

Nothing had happened.

He closed the door again, and this time locked it with his great-grandmother's key. He decided to give it a bit longer this time, and while he was waiting he lay down in bed. He began counting to ten slowly. He got roughly as far as five before he fell asleep.

He was awakened at dawn by Little Bear bawling at him.

The Indian was standing outside the felt tepee, on the edge of the table, his hands cupped to his mouth as if shouting across a measureless canyon. As soon as Omri's eyes opened, the Indian shouted:

"Day come! Why you still sleep? Time eat—hunt—fight—make pictures!"

Omri leaped up. He cried, "Wait—" and almost wrenched the cupboard open.

There on the shelf stood a small tepee made of real leather. Even the stitches on it were real. The poles were twigs, tied together with a strip of hide. The designs were real Indian symbols, put on with bright dyes.

The car was still a toy car made of metal, no more real than it had ever been.

"It works," breathed Omri. And then he caught his breath. "Little Bear!" he shouted. "It works, it works! I can make any plastic toy I like come alive, come real! It's real magic, don't you understand? Magic!"

The Indian stood calmly with folded arms, evidently disapproving of this display of excitement.

"So? Magic. The spirits work much magic. No need wake dead with howls."

Omri hastily pulled himself together. Never mind the dead, it was his parents he must take care not to wake. He picked up the new tepee and set it down beside the one he had made the night before.

"Here's the good one I promised you," he said.

Little Bear examined it carefully. "No good," he said at last.

"What? Why not?"

"Good tepee, but no good Iroquois brave. See?" He pointed to the painted symbols. "Not Iroquois signs. Algonquin. Little Bear sleep there, Iroquois spirits angry."

"Oh," said Omri, disappointed.

"Little Bear like Omri tepee. Need paint. Make strong pictures—Iroquois signs. Please spirits."

Omri's disappointment melted into intense pride. He had made a tepee that satisfied his Indian! "It's not finished," he said. "I'll take it to school and finish it in handicrafts lesson. I'll take out the pins and sew it up properly. Then when I come home I'll give you poster paints and you can paint your signs."

"I paint. But must have longhouse. Tepee no good for Iroquois."

"Just for now?"

Little Bear scowled. "Yes. But very short. Now eat."

"Er . . . Yes. What do you like to eat in the mornings?"

"Meat," said the Indian immediately.

"Wouldn't you like some bread and cheese?"

"Meat."

"Or corn? Or some egg?"

The Indian folded his arms uncompromisingly across his chest.

"Meat," said Omri with a sigh. "Yes. Well, I'll have to see what I can do. In the meantime, I think I'd better put you down on the ground."

"Not on ground now?"

"No. You're high above the ground. Go to the edge and look—but don't fall!"

The Indian took no chances. Lying on his stomach he

crawled, commando fashion, to the edge of the chest of drawers and peered over.

"Big mountain," he commented at last.

"Well . . . " But it seemed too difficult to explain. "May I lift you down?"

Little Bear stood up and looked at Omri measuringly. "Not hold tight?" he asked.

"No. I won't hold you at all. You can ride in my hand."

He laid his hand palm up next to Little Bear, who, after only a moment's hesitation, stepped onto it and, for greater stability, sat down cross-legged. Omri gently transported him to the floor. The Indian rose lithely to his feet and jumped off onto the gray carpet.

At once he began looking about with suspicion. He dropped to his knees, felt the carpet, and smelled it.

"Not ground," he said. "Blanket."

"Little Bear, look up."

He obeyed, narrowing his eyes and peering.

"Do you see the sky? Or the sun?"

The Indian shook his head, puzzled.

"That's because we're not outdoors. We're in a room, in a house. A house big enough for people my size. You're not even in America. You're in England."

The Indian's face lit up. "English good! Iroquois fight with English against French!"

"Really?" asked Omri, wishing he had read more. "Did *you* fight?"

"Fight? Little Bear fight like mountain lion! Take many scalps!"

Scalps? Omri swallowed. "How many?"

Little Bear proudly held up all ten fingers. Then he closed his fists, opening them again with another lot of ten, and another.

"I don't believe you killed so many people!" said Omri, shocked.

"Little Bear not lie. Great hunter. Great fighter."

"Any white scalps?" Omri ventured to ask.

"Some. French. Not take English scalps. Englishmen friends to Iroquois. Help Indian fight Algonquin enemy."

Omri stared at him. He suddenly wanted to get away. "I'll go and get you some—meat," he said in a choking voice.

He went out of his room, closing the bedroom door behind him.

For a moment he did not move on, but leaned back against the door. He was sweating slightly. This was a bit more than he had bargained for!

Not only was his Indian no mere toy come to life, he was a real person, somehow magicked out of the past of over two hundred years ago. It occurred to Omri for the

first time that his idea of Indians, taken entirely from Western films, had been somehow false. After all, those had all been actors playing Indians, and afterward wiping their war paint off and going home for their dinners, not in tepees but in houses like his.

Little Bear was no actor. Omri swallowed hard. Thirty scalps . . . phew! Of course, things were different in those days. Those tribes were always making war on each other, and when you came to think of it, the English and French (whatever they thought they were doing, fighting in America) were probably no better, killing each other like mad as often as they could. . . .

Even now, weren't soldiers doing the same thing? Weren't there wars and battles and terrorism going on all over the place? You couldn't switch on television without seeing news about people killing and being killed. Were thirty scalps, even including some French ones, taken hundreds of years ago, so very bad after all?

Still, when he tried to imagine Little Bear, full size, bent over some French soldier, holding his hair in one hand and running the point of his scalping knife . . . yuk!

Omri pushed away from the door and walked rather unsteadily downstairs. No wonder he had felt, from the first, slightly afraid of his Indian. He asked himself, swallowing repeatedly and feeling that just the same he might be sick, whether he wouldn't do better to put Little Bear

back in the cupboard, lock the door, and turn him back into plastic, knife and all.

Down in the kitchen he ransacked his mother's store cupboard for a tin of meat. He found some corned beef at last and opened it with the tin opener on the wall. He dug a chunk out with a teaspoon, put it absently into his own mouth, and stood there chewing it.

The Indian hadn't seemed very surprised about being in a giant house in England. He had shown that he was very superstitious, believing in magic and in good and evil spirits. Perhaps he thought of Omri as—well, some kind of genie, or whatever Indians believed in instead. The wonder was that he wasn't more frightened of him then, for genies, or giants, or spirits, or whatever, were always supposed to be very powerful. Omri supposed that if one happened to be the son of an Indian chief, one simply didn't get scared as easily as ordinary people. Especially, perhaps, if one had taken thirty scalps . . .

Maybe Omri ought to tell someone about Little Bear.

The trouble was that although grown-ups usually knew what to do, *what* they did was very seldom what children wanted to be done. What if they took the Indian to—say, some scientist, or—whoever knew about strange things like that, who would question him and examine him and probably keep him in a laboratory or something of that sort? They would certainly want to take the cupboard away

too, and then Omri wouldn't be able to have any more fun with it at all.

Just when his mind was seething with ideas, such as putting in plastic bows and arrows, and horses, and maybe even other little people—well, no, probably that was too risky. Who knew what sort you might land up with? They might start fighting each other! But still, he knew for certain he didn't want to give up his secret, not yet, no matter how many Frenchmen had been scalped.

Having made his decision, for the moment anyway, Omri turned to go upstairs, discovering only halfway up that the tin of corned beef was practically empty. Still, there was a fair-sized bit left in the bottom. It ought to do.

Little Bear was nowhere to be seen, but when Omri called him softly he ran out from under the bed and stood waving both arms up at Omri.

"Bring meat?"

"Yes." Omri put it on the miniature plate he'd cut the night before and placed it before the Indian, who seized it in both hands and began to gnaw on it.

"Very good! Soft! Your wife cook this?"

Omri started to laugh. "I haven't got a wife!"

The Indian stopped and looked at him. "Omri not got wife? Who grow corn, grind, cook, make clothes?"

"My mother," said Omri, still grinning. "Have you got a wife then?"

The Indian looked away. After a moment he said, "No."

"Why not?"

"Dead," said Little Bear shortly.

"Oh."

The Indian finished eating in silence and then stood up, wiping his greasy hands on the sides of his trousers. "Now. Do magic. Make things for Little Bear."

"What do you want?"

"Gun," he answered promptly. "White man's gun. Like English soldier."

Omri's brain raced. If a tiny knife could stab, a tiny gun could shoot. Maybe it couldn't do much harm, but then again, maybe it could.

"No, no gun. But I can make you a bow and arrows. I'll have to buy plastic ones, though. What else? A horse?"

"Horse!" Little Bear seemed surprised.

"Don't you ride? I thought all Indians rode."

Little Bear shook his head. "Iroquois walk."

"But wouldn't you like to ride?"

Little Bear stood quite still, frowning, wrestling with this novel idea. At last he said, "Maybe. Show horse. Then I see."

Again Omri rummaged in the biscuit tin. There were a number of horses here. Big heavy ones for carrying armored knights. Smaller ones for pulling gun carriages in the Napoleonic wars. Several cavalry horses—those might

be the best. Omri ranged five or six of various sizes and colors before Little Bear, whose black eyes began to shine.

"I have," he said promptly.

"You mean all of them?"

Little Bear nodded hungrily.

"No, that's too much. I can't have herds of horses galloping all over my room. You can choose one."

"One?" said Little Bear sadly.

"One."

Little Bear then made a very thorough examination of every horse, feeling their legs, running his hands over their rumps, looking straight into their plastic faces. At last he selected a smallish brown horse with two white feet that had originally (as far as Omri could remember) carried an Arab, brandishing a curved sword at a platoon of French Foreign Legionnaires.

Omri lifted the cupboard onto the floor, shut the horse in, and turned the key. Almost at once they could hear the clatter of tiny hooves on metal. They looked at each other with joyful faces.

"Open! Open door!" commanded Little Bear.

Omri lost no time in doing so. There, prancing and pawing the white paint, was a lovely, shiny-coated little brown Arab horse. As the door swung open he shied nervously, turning his face and pricking his ears so far forward they almost met over his forelock. His tiny nostrils flared,

and his black tail plumed above his haunches as he gave a high, shrill neigh.

"Aaiii!" cried Little Bear.

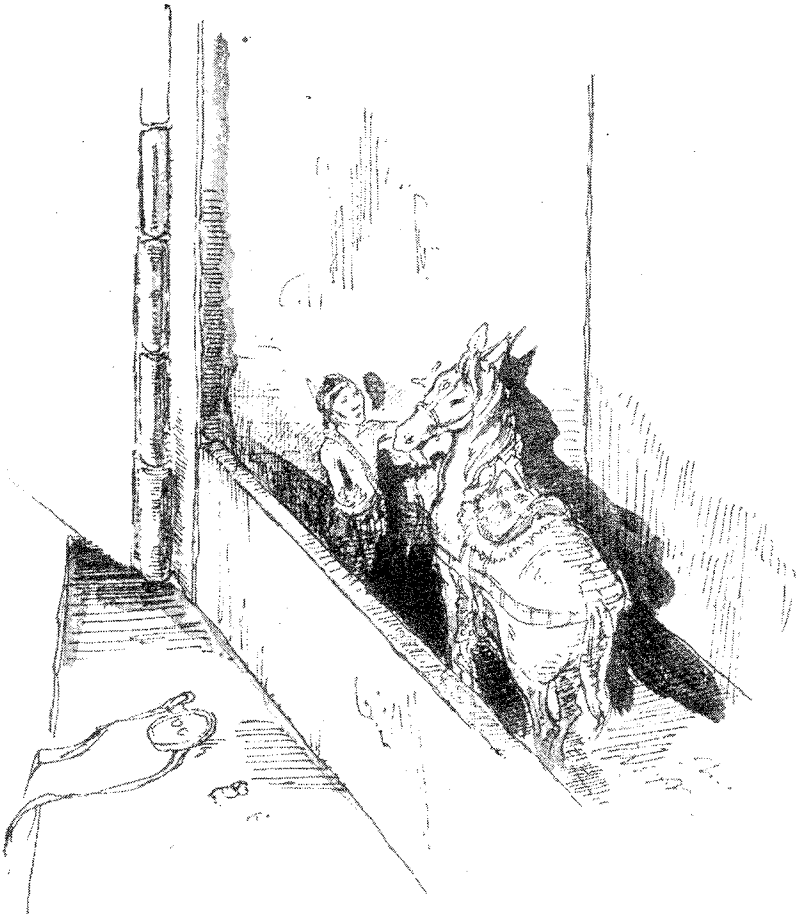
In a moment he had vaulted over the bottom edge of the cupboard and, as the horse reared in fright, jumped into the air under its flying hooves and grasped the leather reins. The horse fought to free its head, but Little Bear hung on with both hands. Even as the horse plunged and bucked, the Indian had moved from the front to the side. Grasping the high pommel of the saddle, he swung himself into it. He ignored the swinging stirrups, holding on by gripping with his knees.

The horse flung himself back on his haunches, then threw himself forward in a mighty buck, head low, heels flying. To Omri's dismay, Little Bear, instead of clinging on somehow, came loose and flew through the air in a curve, landing on the carpet just beyond the edge of the cupboard.

Omri thought his neck must be broken, but he had landed in a sort of somersault, and was instantly on his feet again. The face he turned to Omri was shining with happiness.

"Crazy-horse!" he cried with fierce delight.

The crazy-horse was meanwhile standing quite still, reins hanging loose, looking watchfully at the Indian through wild, wide-apart eyes.



Little Bear made no sudden moves. He stood quite still for a long time, just looking back at the horse. Then, so slowly you could scarcely notice, he edged toward him, making strange hissing sounds between his clenched teeth that almost seemed to hypnotize the horse. Inch by inch he moved, softly, cautiously, until he and the horse stood almost nose to nose. Then, quite calmly, Little Bear reached up and laid his hand on the horse's neck.

That was all. He did not hold the reins. The horse could have jumped away, but he didn't. He raised his nose a little, so that he and the Indian seemed to be breathing into each other's nostrils. Then, in a quiet voice, Little Bear said, "Now horse mine. Crazy-horse mine."

Still moving slowly, though not as slowly as before, he took the reins and moved alongside the horse. After a certain amount of fiddling he found out how to unbuckle the straps that held the Arabian saddle, and lifted it off, laying it on the floor. The horse snorted and tossed his head, but did not move. Hissing gently now, the Indian first leaned his weight against the horse's side, then lifted himself up by his arms until he was astride. Letting the reins hang loose on the horse's neck, he squeezed with his legs. The horse moved forward, as tame and obedient as you please, and the pair rode once around the inside of the cupboard as if it had been a circus arena.

Suddenly Little Bear caught up the reins and pulled

them to one side, turning the horse's head, at the same time kicking him sharply. The horse wheeled, and bounded forward toward the edge of the cupboard.

This metal rim was up to the small horse's chest—like a five-barred gate to a full-sized horse. There was no room to ride straight at it, from the back of the cupboard to the front, so Little Bear rode diagonally—a very difficult angle, yet the horse cleared it in a flying leap.

Omri realized at once that the carpet was too soft for him—his feet simply sank into it like soft sand.

"Need ground. Not blanket," said Little Bear sternly. "Blanket not good for ride."

Omri looked at his clock. It was still only a little after six in the morning—at least another hour before anyone else would be up.

"I could take you outside," he said hesitantly.

"Good!" said Little Bear. "But not touch horse. You touch, much fear."

Omri quickly found a small cardboard box that had held a Matchbox lorry. It even had a sort of window through which he could see what was happening inside. He laid that on the carpet with the end flaps open.

Little Bear rode the horse into the box, and Omri carefully shut the end up and even more carefully lifted it. Then, in his bare feet, he carried the box slowly down the stairs and let himself out through the back door.

It was a lovely fresh spring morning. Omri stood on the back steps with the box in his hands, looking round for a suitable spot. The lawn wasn't much good—the grass would be over the Indian's head in most places. The terrace at the foot of the steps was no use at all, with its hard, uneven bricks and the cracks between them. But the path was beaten earth and small stones—real riding ground if they were careful. Omri walked to the path and laid the Matchbox carton down.

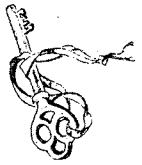
For a moment he hesitated. Could the Indian run away? How fast could such a small horse run? As fast as, say, a mouse? If so, and they wanted to escape, Omri wouldn't be able to catch them. A cat, on the other hand, would. Omri knelt on the path in his pajamas and put his face to the cellophane "window." The Indian stood inside holding the horse's head.

"Little Bear," he said clearly, "we're outdoors now. I'm going to let you out to ride. But remember—you're not on a prairie now. There are mountain lions here, but they're big enough to swallow you whole and the horse too. Don't run away, you wouldn't survive. Do you understand?"

Little Bear looked at him steadily and nodded. Omri opened the flap and Indian and horse stepped out into the morning sunlight.

4

The Great Outdoors



BOTH HORSE AND MAN seemed to sniff the air, tasting its freshness, and testing it for danger at the same time. The horse was still making circles with his nose when Little Bear sprang onto his back.

The horse, startled, reared slightly, but this time Little Bear clung onto his long mane. The horse's front feet had no sooner touched the path than he was galloping. Omri leaped to his feet and gave chase.

The horse's speed was remarkable, but Omri found that by running along the lawn beside the path he could keep up quite easily. The ground was dry and as Indian and horse raced along, a most satisfying cloud of dust rose behind them so that Omri could easily imagine that they

were galloping across some wild, unbroken territory.

More and more, he found, he was able to see things from the Indian's point of view. The little stones on the path became huge boulders that had to be dodged, weeds became trees, the lawn's edge an escarpment twice the height of a man. As for living things, an ant, scuttling across the horse's path, made him shy wildly. The shadow of a passing bird falling on him brought him to a dead stop, crouching and cowering as a full-sized horse might if some huge bird of prey swooped at him. Once again, Omri marveled at the courage of Little Bear, faced with all these terrors.

But it was not the courage of recklessness. Little Bear clearly recognized his peril, and, when he had had his gallop, turned the horse's head and came trotting back to Omri, who crouched down to hear what he said. (This was much more difficult in the open air, somehow.)

"Danger," said the Indian. "Much. I need bow, arrows, club. Maybe gun?" he asked pleadingly. Omri shook his head. "Then Indian weapons."

"Yes," said Omri. "You need those. I'll find them today. In the meantime we'd better go back in the house."

"Not go shut-in place! Stay here. You stay, drive off wild animals."

"I can't. I've got to go to school."

"What school?"

"A place where you learn."

"Ah! Learn. Good," said Little Bear approvingly. "Learn law of tribe, honor for ancestors, ways of the spirits?"

"Well . . . something like that."

Little Bear was clearly reluctant to return to the house, but he had the sense to realize he couldn't cope outside by himself. He galloped back along the path, with Omri running alongside, and, dismounting, re-entered the carton.

Omri was just carrying it up the back steps when the back door suddenly opened and there was his father.

"Omri! What on earth are you doing out here in your pajamas? And nothing on your feet, you naughty boy!

What are you up to?"

Omri clutched the box to him so hard in his fright that he felt the sides bend and quickly relaxed his hold. He felt himself break into a sweat.

"Nothing—I—couldn't sleep. I wanted to go out."

"What's wrong with putting on your slippers, at least?"

"Sorry. I forgot."

"Well, hurry up and get dressed now."

Omri rushed upstairs and, panting, laid the box on the floor. He opened the flap. The horse rushed out alone, and stood under the table, whinnying and trembling—he had had a rough ride. Full of foreboding, Omri bent down and peered into the box. Little Bear was sitting in a corner of it, hugging his leg, which Omri saw, to his horror, was bleeding right through his buckskin leggings.

"Box jump. Horse get fear. Kick Little Bear," said the Indian, who, though calm, was clearly in pain.

"Oh I'm sorry!" cried Omri. "Can you come out? I'll see what I can do."

Little Bear stood up and walked out of the box. He did not let himself limp.

"Take off your leggings—let me see the cut," said Omri.

The Indian obeyed him and stood in his breechcloth. On his tiny leg was a wound from the horse's hoof, streaming blood onto the carpet. Omri didn't know what

to do, but Little Bear did.

"Water," he ordered. "Cloths."

Omri, through his panic, forced himself to think clearly. He had water in a glass by his bed, but that would not be clean enough to wash a wound. His mother had some Listerine in her medicine cupboard; when any of the boys had a cut she would add a few drops to some warm water and that was a disinfectant.

Omri dashed to the bathroom, and with trembling hands did what he had seen his mother do. He took a small piece of cotton wool. What could be used as a bandage he had no idea at all. But he hurried back with the water, and poured some into the Action Man's mess tin. The Indian tore off a minute wisp of cotton wool and dipped it into the liquid and applied it to his leg.

The Indian's eyes opened wide, though he did not wince. "This not water. This fire!"

"It's better than water."

"Now tie," said the Indian next. "Hold in blood."

Omri looked around desperately. A bandage small enough for a wound like that! Suddenly his eyes lighted on the biscuit tin. There, lying on top, was a First World War soldier with the red armband of a medical orderly. In his hand was a doctor's bag with a red cross on it. What might that not contain if Omri could make it real?

Not stopping to think too far ahead, he snatched the

figure up and thrust it into the cupboard, shutting the door and turning the key.

A moment later a thin English voice from inside called: "Here! Where am I? Come back, you blokes—don't leave a chap alone in the dark!"