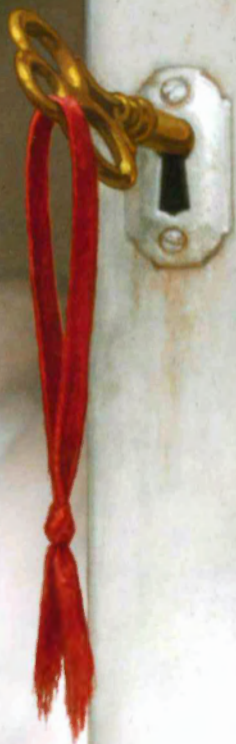


The Classic Bestseller

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

Random House Children's Books supports the First Amendment
and celebrates the right to read.

For Omri—Who Else!

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Breakfast Truce



HHE CREPT DOWNSTAIRS. The house was still asleep. He decided to cook breakfast for himself and his cowboy and Indian. He was quite a good cook, but he'd mostly done sweet stuff before; however, any fool, he felt sure, could fry an egg. The steaks were out of the question, but beans were no problem. Omri put butter in the frying pan on the stove. The fat began to smoke. Omri broke an egg into it, or tried to, but the shell, instead of coming cleanly apart, crumpled up somehow in his hand and landed in the hot fat mixed up with the egg.

H'm. Not as easy as he'd thought. Leaving the mess to cook, shell and all, he got a tin of beans out of the cupboard and opened it without trouble. Then he got a

saucepan and began pouring the beans in. Some of them got into the eggpan somehow and seemed to explode. The egg was beginning to curl and the pan was still smoking. Alarmed, he turned off the heat. The center of the egg still wasn't cooked and the beans in the pan were stone cold, but the smell in the kitchen was beginning to worry him—he didn't want his mother coming down. He tipped the whole lot into a bowl, hacked a lopsided slice off the loaf of bread, and tiptoed up the stairs again.

Little Bear was standing outside his longhouse with hands on hips, waiting for him.

"You bring food?" he asked in his usual bossy way.

"Yes."

"First, Little Bear want ride."

"First, you must eat while it's hot, I've been to a lot of trouble to cook it for you," Omri said, sounding like his mother.

Little Bear didn't know how to take this, so he burst into a rather forced laugh and pointed at him scornfully. "Omri cook—Omri woman!" he teased. But Omri wasn't bothered.

"All the best cooks are men," he retorted. "Come on, you're going to eat with Boone."

Little Bear's laughter died instantly.

"Who Boone?"

"You know who he is. The cowboy."

The Indian's hands came off his hips and one of them went for his knife.

"Oh knock it off, Little Bear! Have a truce for breakfast, otherwise you won't get any."

Leaving him with that thought to chew over, Omri crossed to the crate, in which Boone was grooming his white horse with a wisp of cloth he'd found clinging to a splinter. He'd taken off the little saddle, but the bridle was still on.

"Boone! I've brought something to eat," said Omri.

"Yup. Ah thought Ah smelt some'n good," said Boone. "Let's git to it."

Omri put his hand down. "Climb on."

"Aw shucks—where'm Ah goin'? Why cain't Ah eat in mah box, where it's safe?" whined Boone. But he clambered up into Omri's palm and sat grumpily with his back against his middle finger.

"You're going to eat with the Indian," said Omri.

Boone leaped up so suddenly he nearly fell off, and had to grab hold of a thumb to steady himself.

"Heck no, Ah ain't!" he yelled. "You jest put me down, son, ya hear? I ain't sharin' m'vittles with no lousy scalp-snafflin' Injun and that's m'last word!" It was, as it happened, his last word before being set down within six inches of his enemy on the seed tray.

They both bent their legs into crouches, as if uncertain

whether to leap at each other's throats or turn and flee. Omri hurriedly spooned up some egg and beans and held it between them.

"Smell that!" he ordered them. "Now you eat together or you don't get any at all, so make up your minds to it. You can start fighting again afterward if you must."

He took a bit of clean paper and laid it, like a tablecloth, under the spoon. Then he broke off some crumbs of breadcrust and pushed a little into each of their hands. Still with their eyes fixed on each other's faces, Indian and cowboy sidled toward the big, steaming "bowl" of food from opposite sides. Little Bear, after hesitating, was first to shoot his arm out and dip the bread into the egg. The sudden movement startled Boone so much he let out a yell and tried to run, but Omri's hand was blocking the way.

"Don't be silly, Boone," he said firmly.

"Ah ain't bein' silly! Them Injuns ain't jest ornery and savage. Them's *dirty*. And Ah ain't eatin' from the same bowl as no—"

"Boone," said Omri quietly, "Little Bear is no dirtier than you. You should see your own face."

"Is that mah fault? What kinda hallucy-nation are ya, anyways, tellin' me Ah'm dirty when ya didn't bring me no washin' water?"

This was a fair complaint, but Omri wasn't about to lose the argument on a side issue.



"You can have some after breakfast. But if you don't agree to eat with my Indian, I'm going to tell him your nickname."

The cowboy's face fell. "Now, that ain't fair. That plumb ain't no ways fair," he muttered. But hunger was getting the better of him anyway, so, grumbling and swearing under his breath, he turned back and marched to his side of the spoon. By this time Little Bear was seated cross-legged on the piece of paper, a hunk of bean in one hand and a mess of egg in the other, eating heartily. Seeing this, Boone lost no time in tucking in, eyeing the Indian, who ignored him.

"Whur's mah cawfee?" he complained after he'd eaten a few bites. "Ah cain't start the day till Ah've had mah jug o' cawfee!"

Omri had completely forgotten about coffee, but he was beginning to be pretty well fed up with being bossed around by ungrateful little men, so he settled down to eat the remains of the food and simply said, "Well, you'll have to start this one without any."

Little Bear finished his breakfast and stood up.

"Now we fight," he announced, and reached for his knife.

Omri expected Boone to leap up and run, but he didn't. He just sat there munching bread and beans.

"Ah ain't finished yit," he said. "Ain't gonna fight till

Ah'm plumb full o' vittles. So you kin jest sit down and wait, redskin."

Omri laughed. "Good for you, Boone! Take it easy, Little Bear. Don't forget your promise."

Little Bear scowled. But he sat down again.

Boone ate and ate. It was hard not to suspect, after a while, that he was eating as much and as slowly as possible, to put off the moment when he would have to fight.

At last, very reluctantly, he scraped the last bit of egg from the spoon, wiped his hands on the sides of his trousers, and stood up. Little Bear was on his feet instantly. Omri stood ready to part them.

"Looka here, Injun," said Boone. "If we're gonna fight, we're gonna fight fair. Probably ain't even a word for 'fair' in your language, but Ah'm here to tell ya, with me it's fight fair or don't fight atall."

"Little Bear fight fair, kill fair, scalp fair."

"You ain't gonna scalp nobody. Less'n ya take it off with yer teeth."

For answer, Little Bear raised his knife, which flashed in the morning light. Omri, his hands on his knees, waited.

"Yeah, Ah see it. But you ain't gonna have it much longer. And why ainsa? Because Ah ain't got one. Ah only got m'gun, and m'gun's run plumb outa bullets. What Ah got, and all Ah got, is m'fists. Oh—and one other thing. Ah

got mah hallucy-nation here.” He waved a hand at Omri without taking his eyes off Little Bear for a second. “And Ah know he don’t want to see this here purty red scalp o’ mine hangin’ from no stinkin’ redskin’s belt. So if Ah fight, it’s gonna be fist to fist, face to face—man to man, Injun! D’ja hear me? No weapons! Jest us two, and let’s see if a white man cain’t lick a red man in a fair fight. Less’n mebbe—jest mebbe—you ain’t red atall, but yellin?” And Boone stepped around the bowl of the spoon, threw his empty gun on the ground, and put up his fists like a boxer.

Little Bear was nonplused. He lowered his knife and stared at Boone. Whether Little Bear had completely understood the cowboy’s strange speech was doubtful, but he couldn’t mistake the gesture of throwing the gun away. As Boone began to dance around him, fists up, making little mock jabs toward his face, Little Bear was getting madder and madder. He made a sudden swipe at him with his knife. Boone jumped back.

“Oh you naughty Injun! Ah see Ah’ll have to set mah hallucy-nation onto you!”

But Omri didn’t have to do anything. Little Bear had got the message. Throwing down the knife in a fury, he hurled himself onto Boone.

What followed was not a fist fight, or a wrestling match, or anything so well organized. It was just an all-in, no-holds-barred, two-man war. They rolled on the ground,

pummeling, kicking, and butting with their heads. At one point Omri thought he saw Boone trying to bite. Maybe he succeeded, because Little Bear suddenly let him go and Boone rolled away swift as a barrel down a slope and onto his legs, and then, with a spring like a bowlegged panther, onto the Indian again. Feet first.

Little Bear let out a noise like “OOOF!” He caught Boone by both ankles and heaved him off. Little Bear picked up a clod of compost and flung it after him, catching him full in the face. Then Little Bear got up and ran at him, holding both fists together and swinging them as he had swung the battle-ax. They caught the cowboy a heavy whack on the ear, which sent him flying to one side. But as he flew, he caught Little Bear a blow in the chest with one boot. That left them both on the ground.

The next moment each of the men found himself pinned down by a giant finger.

“All right, boys. That’s enough,” said Omri, in his father’s firm end-of-the-fight voice. “It’s a draw. Now you must get cleaned up for school.”

School



HE BROUGHT THEM A LOW type of egg cup full of hot water, and a corner of soap cut off a big cake, to wash with. They stood on each side of the "bowl." Little Bear stripped off his bandolier, which left him naked to the waist. Then he lost no time plunging his arms in and began energetically rubbing the whole of the top part of his body with his wet hands, throwing water everywhere. He made a lot of noise about it and seemed to be enjoying himself, though he ignored the soap.

Boone was a different matter. Omri had already noticed that Boone was none too fussy about being clean, and in fact didn't look as if he'd washed or shaved for weeks. Now he approached the hot water gingerly, eyeing Omri as if to

see how little washing he could actually get away with.

"Come on, Boone! Off with that shirt, you can't wash your neck with a shirt on," said Omri briskly, echoing his mother.

With extreme reluctance, shivering theatrically, Boone dragged off his plaid shirt, keeping his hat on.

"I should think your hair could do with a wash too," said Omri.

Boone stared at him.

"Wash mah *hair*?" he asked incredulously. "Washin' hair's fer *wimmin*, 'tain't fer men!" But he did consent to rub his hands lightly over the piece of soap, although grimacing hideously as if it were some slimy dead thing, and wash at least the palms of his hands. Then he rinsed them hastily, smeared some water on his face, and reached for his shirt without even drying himself.

"Boone!" said Omri sternly. "Just look at Little Bear! You called him dirty, but at least he's washing himself thoroughly! Now you just do something about your neck and—well, under your arms."

Boone's look was now one of stark horror.

"Under mah arms!"

"*And* your chest, I should think. I'm not taking you to school all sweaty."

"Heck! Don't you go runnin' down sweat! It's sweat that keeps a man clean!"

After a lot of bullying, Omri managed to get him to wash at least a few more bits of himself.

"You'll have to wash your clothes sometime, too," he said.

But this was too much for Boone.

"Ain't nobody gonna touch mah duds, and that's final," he said. "Ain't bin washed since Ah bought 'em. Water takes all the stuffin' outa good cloth, without all the dust 'n' sweat they don't keep ya warm no more."

At last they were ready, and Omri pocketed them and ran down to breakfast. He felt tense with excitement. He'd never carried them around the house before. It was risky, but not so risky as taking them to school—he felt that having family breakfast with them secretly in his pocket was like a training for taking them to school.

Breakfast in his house was often a dicey meal anyway, with everybody more or less bad-tempered. Today, for instance, Adiel had lost his football shorts and was blaming everybody in turn, and their mother had just discovered that Gillon, contrary to his assurances the night before when he had wanted to watch television, had not finished his homework. Their father was grumpy because he had wanted to do some gardening and it was raining yet again.

"I *know* I put them in the laundry basket," Adiel was saying fretfully.

"If you did, I washed them, in which case they're back

in your top drawer," said his mother. "But you didn't, because I didn't, and they're not. Now listen to me, Gillon—"

"It's only a bit of history, one mini little castle to draw, and a tiny paragraph to write," said Gillon. "I can do it at school."

"Stinking climate," muttered their father. "Those onion sets will rot if I don't get them in soon."

"Gillon, did you borrow them?"

"I've got my own."

Omri ate his cereal in silence, grinning to himself, hugging his secret. He slipped a couple of cornflakes into his pockets.

"I bet Omri took them!" said Adiel suddenly.

Omri looked up. "Took what?"

"My *shorts*."

"What on earth would I want your shorts for?"

"It might be your idea of a joke to hide them," Adiel retorted.

This was not as outrageous as it sounds. It had, until very recently, been a common form of revenge, when Adiel or Gillon had been specially unbearable, for Omri to sneak some valuable possession and hide it.

Now, however, Omri felt very far away from such babyishness, and was quite insulted.

"Don't be stupid," he said.

"So you did," said Adiel in triumph.

"I did not!"

"You're red in the face—that's proof you're guilty!"

"I swear!" said Omri.

"They're probably under your bed," said their mother to Adiel. "Go up and have a look."

"I have looked! I've looked everywhere."

"Oh my God, it's starting to hail now," said their father despairingly. "So much for the apple blossom."

Under cover of the moans that went up about the prospect of no apples in the autumn, and the exclamations about the size of the hailstones, Omri slipped his coat on and ran through the bouncing ice lumps to school. On the way he stopped under a protecting yew tree and took the little men out. He showed them each a large hailstone, which, to them, was the size of a football.

"Now, when we get to school," said Omri, "you must lie very still and quiet in my pockets. I'm putting you in separate ones because I can't risk any fighting or quarreling. If you're seen I don't know what will happen."

"Danger?" asked Little Bear, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes. Not of death so much. You might be taken away from me. Then you'd never get back to your own time."

"You mean we'd never wake up outa this here drunken dream," said Boone.

"If that's how you look at it—no."

But Little Bear was staring at him very thoughtfully. "Own time," he said musingly. "Very strange magic."

Omri had never arrived at school with more apprehension in his heart, not even on spelling-test days. And yet he was excited too. Once he had taken a white mouse to school in his blazer pocket. He'd planned to do all sorts of fiendish things with it, like putting it up his teacher's trouser leg (he had had a man teacher then), or down the back of a girl's neck, or just putting it on the floor and letting it run around and throw the whole class into chaos. (He hadn't actually dared do anything with it except let it peep out and make his neighbors giggle.) This time he had no such plans. All he was hoping was that he could get through the day without anybody finding out.

Patrick was waiting for him at the school gate.

"Have you got him?"

"Yes."

His eyes lit up. "Give! I want him."

"All right," said Omri. "But you have to promise that you won't show him to *anybody*."

Omri reached into his right-hand pocket, closed his fingers gently around Boone, and passed him into Patrick's hand.

The moment Omri had let go of him, things started to happen.

A particularly nasty little girl called April, who had



been right across the playground at the moment of the transaction, was at Patrick's side about two seconds later.

"What've you got there then, what did he give you?" she asked in her raucous voice like a crow's.

Patrick flushed red. "Nothing! Push off!" he said.

At once April pointed her witchy finger at him. "Lookit Patrick blu-shing, lookit Patrick blu-shing!" she squawked. Several other children speedily arrived on the scene (as a certain type of child will, whenever somebody is getting taunted) and soon Patrick and Omri found themselves surrounded.

"What's he got? Bet it's something horrid!"

"Bet it's a slimy toad!"

"A little wriggly worm, more like."

"A beetle!"

"Like him!"

Omri felt his blood begin to get hot in his head. He longed to bash them all one by one, or better still, all at once—a giant knocking down hordes of enemies like skittles. He imagined them all rolling backward down a long wide flight of steps, in waves, bowled over by his flashing fist and flying feet.

The best he could manage in reality, though, was to lower his head, and, keeping his hand cupped stiffly over his left pocket, barge through the chanting circle. He caught one of them a good butt in the stomach, which was

rather satisfying. Patrick was hot on his heels, and they belted across the playground and in through the double doors, which fortunately had just been opened.

Once inside, they were relatively safe. There were teachers all over the place, and any kind of fighting or taunting, above a sly pinch or a snide whisper, was out. Patrick and Omri slowed to a walk, went to their places and sat down, trying to look perfectly calm and ordinary so as not to attract their teacher's attention. Their breathing gave them away, though.

"Well, you two, what are you puffing about? Been running?"

They glanced at each other and nodded.

"So long as you've not been fighting," she said, giving them a sharp look. She always behaved as if a little fight was a long step along the road to hell.

Neither of the boys got much work done during the morning. They couldn't concentrate. Each of them was too aware of the passenger in his pocket. Both Little Bear and Boone were restless, particularly Little Bear. Boone was naturally lazier; he kept dozing off in the dark, and then waking with a little jump that made Patrick very nervous. But Little Bear was scrambling about the whole time.

It was during the third period—when they were all in the main hall listening to the headmaster, whose name was Mr. Johnson, announcing plans for the end-of-year show—

that Little Bear got really sick and tired of being imprisoned, and started to take drastic action.

The first thing Omri knew was a sharp prick in his hip, as if an insect had stung him. For a moment he was silly enough to think an ant or even a wasp had somehow got into his clothes, and he only just stopped himself from slapping his hand instinctively against his side to squash it. Then there came another jab, sharper than the first, sharp enough in fact to make Omri let out a short yelp.

“Who did that?” asked Mr. Johnson irritably.

Omri didn’t answer, but the girls sitting near him began giggling and staring.

“Was that you, Omri?”

“Yes. I’m sorry, something stuck into me.”

“Patrick! Did you stick a pencil into Omri?” (Such a thing was not unknown during assemblies when they were bored.)

“No, Mr. Johnson.”

“Well, be quiet when I’m talking!”

Another jab, and this time Little Bear meant business and kept his knife embedded. Omri shouted “Ouch!” and jumped to his feet.

“Omri! Patrick! Leave the hall!”

“But I didn’t—” began Patrick.

“Out, I said!” shouted Mr. Johnson furiously.

They left, Patrick walking normally and Omri dancing

about shouting "Ow! OW!" at every step as Little Bear continued to dig the needlepoint of his knife in. The whole school was in hysterics of laughter (and Mr. Johnson was frothing with rage) by the time they reached the swing doors and departed.

Outside, they ran (well, Patrick ran and Omri performed a series of sideways leaps) to the far end of the playground. On the way Omri plunged his hand into his pocket, seized Little Bear, and dragged him out. The agony stopped.

Safe in a sheltered corner behind some privet bushes, Omri held his persecutor at eye level and shook him violently, the way you shake a bottle of medicine. He called him the worst names he could possibly think of. When he'd run out of swear words (which was not for some time) he hissed, like Mr. Johnson, "What do you mean by it? How dare you? How dare you stick your knife into me?"

"Little Bear dare! Omri keep in dark many hours! Little Bear want see school place, not lie in hot dark! No breathe, no see! Want *enjoy*!"

"I warned you you wouldn't, it's not my fault you made me bring you! Now you've got me into trouble."

Little Bear looked mulish, but he stopped shouting. Seeing this evidence that a truce was on its way, Omri calmed down a bit too.

"Listen. I can't let you see because I can't take you out.

You have no idea what would happen if I did. If any of the other children saw you they'd want to grab you and mess you about—you'd hate it, and it would be terribly dangerous too, you'd probably get hurt or killed. You've got to lie quiet till school's over. I'm sorry if you're bored but it's your own fault."

Little Bear thought this over and then he said a most astonishing thing.

"Want Boone."

"What? Your enemy?"

"Better enemy than alone in dark."

Patrick had taken Boone out of his pocket. The little cowboy was sitting on his hand. They were gazing at each other. Omri said, "Boone, Little Bear says he wants you. He's lonely and bored."

"Well, ain't that jest too bad!" said Boone sarcastically. "After he tried to kill me, now he's come over all lovey-dovey. Listen, you redskin!" he shouted through cupped hands across the yawning gulf between Patrick and Omri. "Ah don't care how lonesome y'are! Ah don't care if'n ya drop down daid! Th' only good Injun's a daid Injun, d' ya hear me?"

Little Bear turned his head haughtily away.

"I think he's lonely too, really," said Patrick in a whisper. "He's been crying."

"Oh no, not again!" said Omri. "Honestly, Boone—at your age—"

Just then they heard their teacher calling them from the school door.

"Come on, you two! You've not got the day off, you know!"

"Give me your knife," said Omri to Little Bear on a sudden impulse. "Then I'll put you together." With only a moment's hesitation, Little Bear handed over his knife. Omri slipped it into the small breast pocket of his shirt, which was empty and where it wouldn't easily get lost. Then he said to Patrick, "Let me have Boone."

"No!"

"Just for the next lesson. Then at lunchtime you can have both of them. They'll keep each other company. They can't do each other much damage in a pocket."

Reluctantly Patrick handed Boone over. Omri held them one in each hand so they were face to face.

"Be good, you two. Try talking to each other instead of fighting. But whatever you do, don't make any noise." And he slipped them both into his left-hand pocket and he and Patrick ran back to the school buildings.

Trouble with Authority



WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE morning passed uneventfully. Omri even got a few sums done. By the time the first whiffs of school lunch were beginning to flood through the classrooms, Omri was congratulating himself on a stroke of genius in putting the two little men together. There had not been another peep out of either of them, and when Omri took an opportunity (when the teacher's back was turned) to open his pocket stealthily and peer down into it, he was pleased to see them, sitting in the bottom of it, face to face, apparently having a conversation, for they were both gesticulating with their arms—there was too much noise all around for Omri to be able to hear their tiny voices.

He had given some thought to the matter of their lunch. He would separate them for that, one into each pocket, and slip some dry bits of food down to them. Omri let himself play with the wonderful fantasy of what the other kids' reaction would be if he casually brought them out and sat them on the edge of his plate. . . . Funny to think that he would certainly have done it, only a week ago, without thinking about the dangers.

The bell rang at last. There was the usual stampede, and Omri found himself in the line next to Patrick.

"Come on then, hand them over," Patrick whispered over his tray as they shuffled forward toward the fragrant food slots.

"Not *now*, everyone'd see."

"You said at lunchtime."

"After lunch."

"Now. *I* want to feed them."

"Well, you can have Boone, but I want to feed Little Bear."

"You said I could have them both!" said Patrick, no longer in a whisper. Others in the line began to turn their heads.

"Will you shut up?" hissed Omri.

"No," said Patrick in a loud, clear voice. He held out his hand.

Omri felt trapped and furious. He looked into Patrick's

eyes and saw what happens even to the nicest people when they want something badly and are determined to get it, come what may. Omri slammed his empty tray down on the floor and, taking Patrick by the wrist, pulled him out of the line and into a quiet corner of the hall.

"Listen to me," Omri grated out between teeth clenched in anger. "If you let anything happen to Little Bear, I will bash you so hard your teeth will fall out." (This, of course, is what happens even to the nicest people when they are in a trap.) With that, he groped in his pocket and brought the two little men out. He didn't look at them or say good-by to them. He just put them carefully into Patrick's hand and walked away.

Omri had lost his appetite, so he didn't get back in the line; but Patrick did. He even pushed a bit, he was so eager to get some food to give to the cowboy and the Indian. Omri watched from a distance. He wished now he hadn't been too angry to give Patrick some pretty clear instructions. Like telling him to separate them. Now that he thought about it, perhaps it wasn't a good idea to feed them in a pocket. Who wants to eat something that's descended between two layers of cloth and collected bits of dust and fluff? If he'd still had them, he would have taken them to some private place and taken them out to eat properly. Why had he ever brought them to school at all? The dangers here were too awful.

Watching, he suddenly stiffened. Patrick had reached the food slot now, and received his dinner. He almost ran with it to a table—he did try to go to one in the outside row near the windows, but a lunch lady stopped him and made him sit in the middle of the hall. There were children all around him and on either side. Surely, thought Omri, surely he wasn't going to try to feed them there?

He saw Patrick take a pinch of bread and slip it into his pocket. He wasn't wearing a jacket; the men were in his jeans pocket. Fortunately the jeans were new and loose, but still he had to half stand up to get the bit of bread in; when he was sitting down the people in his pocket must be pretty well squashed against his leg. Omri imagined them trying to eat, held down flat by two thick layers of cloth. He could almost see Patrick imagining it, too. He was frowning uneasily and shifting around in his chair. The girl next to him spoke to him. She was probably telling him not to wriggle. Patrick said something sharp in reply. Omri sucked in his breath. If only Patrick wouldn't draw attention to himself!

Suddenly he gasped. The girl had given Patrick a hard push. He pushed her back. She nearly went off her chair. She stood up and pushed him with all her might, using both hands. He went flying over backward, half onto the boy on the other side of him, who jumped from his place, spilling part of his dinner. Patrick landed on the floor.

Omri didn't stop to think. He raced toward him across the hall, dodging in and out among the tables. His heart was hammering with terror. If Patrick had fallen on them! Omri had a terrible, fleeting vision of the pocket of Patrick's jeans, with blood stains spreading—he clamped down on his imagination.

By the time he got there, Patrick was back on his feet, but now the other boy was angry and clearly looking for a fight. The girl on his other side looked ready to clobber him too. Omri pushed between them, but a stout lunch lady was ahead of him.

"'Ere, 'ere, what's goin' on?" she asked, barging in with her big stomach and sturdy arms. She grabbed Patrick with one hand and the other boy with the other and kind of dangled them at arm's length like a pair of cats. "No fighting in 'ere, thank you very much, or it'll be off to the 'eadmaster's office before you can say knife, the 'ole boomin' pack of you!" She dumped them down in their separate chairs as if they'd been bags of shopping. They were both thoroughly tousled and red-faced. Omri's eyes shot down to Patrick's thigh. No blood. No movement either, but at least no blood.

Everyone began to eat again as the stout lunch lady stamped away, tut-tutting as she went. Omri leaned over the back of Patrick's chair and whispered out of a dry mouth, "Are they all right?"

“How do I know?” said Patrick sulkily. But his hand crept down and delicately explored the slight bump on the top of his leg where his pocket was. Omri held his breath. “Yeah, they’re okay. They’re moving,” Patrick muttered.

Omri went out into the playground. He felt too jumpy to stay indoors, or eat, or anything. How would he get them back from Patrick, who, quite obviously, was not a fit person to have charge of them? Nice as he was, as a friend, he just wasn’t fit. It must be because he didn’t take them seriously yet. He simply didn’t seem to realize that they were *people*.

When the bell rang Omri still hadn’t come to any decision. He hurried back into school. Patrick was nowhere to be seen. Omri looked around for him frantically. Maybe he’d gone into the toilet to be private and give the men something to eat. Omri went in there and called him softly, but there was no answer. He returned to his place in the classroom. There was no sign of Patrick. And there continued to be no sign of him till about halfway through the lesson—not one word of which Omri took in, he was so worried.

At last, when the teacher turned her back to write on the board, Patrick slipped around a partition, rushed across the room silently, and dropped into his chair.

“Where have you *been*?” asked Omri under his breath.

“In the music room,” said Patrick smugly. The music

room was not a room at all, but a little alcove off the gym in which the musical instruments were stored, together with some of the bulkier apparatus like the long horse. "I sat under the horse and fed them," he muttered out of the side of his mouth. "Only they weren't very hungry."

"I bet they weren't," said Omri, "after all they'd been through!"

"Cowboys and Indians are used to rough treatment," Patrick retorted. "Anyway, I left some food in my pocket for later if they want it."

"It'll get all squashy."

"Oh so what? Don't fuss so much, they don't mind!"

"How do you know what they mind?" said Omri hotly, forgetting to whisper. The teacher turned around.

"Oh ho, so there you are, Patrick! And where have you been, may I inquire?"

"Sorry, Miss Hilton."

"I didn't ask if you were sorry. I asked where you'd been."

Patrick coughed and lowered his head. "In the toilet," he mumbled.

"For nearly twenty minutes? I don't believe you! Are you telling me the truth?" Patrick mumbled something. "Patrick, answer me. Or I'll send you to the headmaster."

This was the ultimate threat. The headmaster was very fierce and could make you feel about two inches high. So

Patrick said, "I was in the music room, and that's true. And I forgot the time."

And that's not true, added Omri silently. Miss Hilton was nobody's fool. She knew it too.

"You'd better go and see Mr. Johnson," she said. "Omri, you go too, chattering away there as usual. Tell him I said you were both disturbing the class and that I'm extremely tired of it."

They got up silently and walked through the tables, while all the girls giggled and the boys smirked or looked sorry for them, according to whether they liked them or not. Omri glanced at Patrick under his eyebrows. They were in for it now.

Outside the headmaster's office they stopped.

"You knock," whispered Omri.

"No, you," retorted Patrick.

They dithered about for a few minutes, but it was useless to put it off, so in the end they both knocked together.

"Yes?" came a rather irritable voice from inside.

They edged around the door. Mr. Johnson was seated at his large desk, working at some papers. He looked up at once.

"Well, you two? What was it this time—fighting in the playground or talking in class?"

"Talking," they said, and Patrick added, "and I was late."

"Why?"

"I just was."

"Oh don't waste my time!" snapped Mr. Johnson.
"There must have been a reason."

"I was in the music room, and I forgot the time,"
Patrick repeated.

"I don't remember you being especially musical. What
were you doing in the music room?"

"Playing."

"Which instrument?" asked Mr. Johnson with a touch
of sarcasm.

"Just—playing."

"*With what?*" he asked, raising his voice.

"With a—with—" He glanced at Omri. Omri threw
him a warning grimace.

"What are you pulling faces about, Omri? You look as
if someone's just stuck a knife into you."

Omri started to giggle, and that set Patrick off.

"Somebody just did!" spluttered Patrick.

Mr. Johnson was in no such jolly mood, however. He
was scowling horribly.

"What are you talking about, you silly boy? Stop that
idiotic noise!"

Patrick's giggles were getting worse. If they hadn't been
where they were, Omri thought, Patrick would have folded
up completely.

"Someone—did—stick a knife into him!" hiccuped Patrick, and added, "A very small one!" His voice went off into a sort of whinny.

Omri had stopped giggling and was staring in awful anticipation at Patrick. When Patrick got into this state he was apt to do and say anything, like someone who's drunk. Omri took hold of his arm and gave it a sharp shake.

"Shut up!" he hissed.

Mr. Johnson got up slowly and came around his desk. Both boys fell back a step, but Patrick didn't stop giggling. On the contrary, it got worse. He seemed to be getting completely helpless. Mr. Johnson loomed over him and took him by the shoulder.

"Listen here, my lad," he said in fearsome tones. "I want you to pull yourself together this moment and tell me what you meant. If there is any child in this school who so far forgets himself as to stick knives into people, or even pretend to, I want to know about it! Now, who was it?"

"Little—Bear!" Patrick squeaked out. Tears were running down his cheeks.

Omri gasped. "Don't!"

"Who?" asked Mr. Johnson, puzzled.

Patrick didn't answer. He couldn't. He was now speechless with nervous, almost hysterical laughter.

Mr. Johnson gave him a shake of his own that rocked him back and forth on his feet like one of those weighted

dolls that won't fall down. Then, abruptly, he let him go and strode back to his desk.

"You seem to be quite beyond yourself," he said sharply. "I think the only thing I can do is telephone your father."

Patrick stopped laughing instantly.

"Ah, that's better!" said Mr. Johnson. "Now. *Who* did you say had stabbed Omri?"

Patrick stood rigid, like a soldier at attention. He didn't look at Omri, he just stared straight at Mr. Johnson.

"I want the truth, Patrick, and I want it now!"

"Little Bear," said Patrick very clearly and much louder than necessary.

"Little who?"

"Bear."

Mr. Johnson looked blank, as well he might.

"Is that somebody's nickname, or is this your idea of a joke?"

Patrick gave his head one stiff shake. Omri was staring at him, as if paralyzed. Was he going to tell? He knew Patrick was afraid of his father.

"Patrick. I shall ask you once more. Who is this—Little Bear?"

Patrick opened his mouth. Omri clenched his teeth. He was helpless. Patrick said, "He's an Indian."

"A what?" asked Mr. Johnson. His voice was very quiet

now. He didn't sound annoyed anymore.

"An Indian."

Mr. Johnson looked at him steadily for some seconds, his chin resting on his hand.

"You are too old to tell those sort of lies," he said quietly.

"It's not a lie!" Patrick shouted suddenly, making both Omri and Mr. Johnson jump. "It's not a lie! He's a real live American Indian!"

To Omri's utter horror, he saw that Patrick was beginning to cry. Mr. Johnson saw it too. He was not an unkind man. No headmaster's much good if he can't scare the wits out of children when necessary, but Mr. Johnson didn't enjoy making them cry.

"Now then, Patrick, none of that," he said gruffly. But Patrick misunderstood. He thought he was still saying he didn't believe him.

He now said the words Omri had been dreading most.

"It's true and I can prove it!"

And his hand went to his pocket.

Omri did the only thing possible. He jumped at him and knocked him over. He sat on his chest and pinned his hands to the ground.

"You dare—you dare—you dare—" he ground out between clenched teeth before Mr. Johnson managed to drag him off.

"Get out of the room!" he roared.



"I won't!" Omri choked out. He'd be crying himself in a minute, he felt so desperate.

"OUT!"

Omri felt his collar seized. He was almost hiked off his feet. The next thing he knew, he was outside the door and hearing the key turning.

Without stopping to think, Omri hurled himself against the door, kicking and banging with his fists.

"Don't show him, Patrick, don't show him! Patrick, don't, I'll kill you if you show him!" he screamed at the top of his lungs.

Footsteps came running. Through his tears and a sort of red haze, Omri saw Mrs. Hunt, the headmaster's elderly secretary, bearing down on him. He got in a couple more good kicks and shouts before she got hold of him and, with both arms around his waist, carried him, shrieking and struggling, bodily into her own little office.

The minute she put him down he tried to bolt, but she hung on.

"Omri! Omri! Stop it, calm down, whatever's come over you, you naughty boy!"

"Please don't let him! Go in and stop him!" Omri cried.

"Who? What?"

Before Omri could explain he heard the sound of footsteps from the next room. Suddenly Mr. Johnson appeared, holding Patrick by the elbow. The headmaster's

face was dead white, and his mouth was partly open. Patrick's head was hung down and his shoulders were heaving with sobs. One look at them told Omri the worst. Patrick had shown him.

Art and Accusation



MR. JOHNSON OPENED AND shut his mouth for several seconds without a sound coming out. At last he croaked: "Mrs. Hunt . . . I'm afraid I'm unwell. . . . I'm going home to bed. . . . Will you take charge of this child. . . ." His voice dropped to a mumble like an old man's. Omri just caught the words, ". . . back to their lessons . . ." Then Mr. Johnson let go of Patrick's arm, turned, walked most unsteadily to the door, and then put his hand on it and swayed as if he might fall over.

"Mr. Johnson!" said Mrs. Hunt in a shocked tone. "Shall I call a taxi. . . ?"

"No . . . no . . . I'll be all right. . . ." And the headmaster, without looking back, tottered out into the corridor.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Hunt. "Whatever have you been doing to the poor man?"

Neither of them answered. Omri was staring at Patrick, or rather, at his pocket. Patrick's shoulders were heaving and he was not looking at anybody. Mrs. Hunt was obviously flummoxed.

"Well. You'd better go to the toilet and wash your faces, both of you, and then go back to your classroom as fast as you can toddle," she said in her funny old-fashioned way. "Run along!"

They needed no second telling. Neither of them said a word until they were in the boys' toilet. Patrick went straight to a basin and began running the cold water. He splashed some onto his face, getting his collar soaked. Omri stood watching him. Obviously he was as upset as Omri, if not more so. Once again Omri felt their friendship trembling on the edge of destruction. He drew a deep breath.

"You showed him," he said at last in a trembling voice.

Patrick said nothing. He dried his face on the roller towel. He was still gasping the way one does when one's been crying.

"Give them back to me. Both of them."

Patrick reached slowly into his pocket. He put his closed hand backward. Omri looked as his fingers slowly opened. Little Bear and Boone were sitting there, absolutely terrified. They were actually clinging on to each other.

Even Little Bear was hiding his face and they were both trembling.

With infinite slowness and care, so as not to frighten them more, Omri took them into his own hand. "It's all right," he whispered, bringing them near to his face. "Please. It's all right." Then he put them carefully in his pocket and said to Patrick in a low voice, "You stupid fool."

Patrick turned. His face gave Omri more of a jolt than Mr. Johnson's had. It was white-mottled-red, with swollen eyes.

"I had to!" he said. "I had to! He'd have phoned my dad! They'd have made me tell in the end. Anyhow, he didn't believe in them. He thought he was seeing things. He just stood there, gaping at them. He didn't even touch them. When they moved he gave a yell and then I thought he was going to fall over. He went white as a ghost. You saw. He didn't believe his eyes, Omri, honest! He'll think he dreamed it!" Omri went on looking at him stonily. "Can't I—can't I have Boone?" asked Patrick in a small voice.

"No."

"Please! I'm sorry I told—I *had* to!"

"They're not safe with you. You *use* them. They're people. You can't use people."

Patrick didn't ask again. He gave one more hiccuping sob and went out.

Omri took the little men out of his pocket again and

lifted them to his face. Boone was lying flat on his front, holding his big hat down over his ears as if trying to shut out the world. But Little Bear stood up.

"Big man shout. Give fear!" he said angrily. "Small ears—big noise—no good!"

"I know. I'm sorry," said Omri. "But it's okay now. I'm going to take you home."

"What about wife?"

His promise! Omri had forgotten all about that.

Another Indian! Another live little person to worry about . . . Omri had heard about people going gray-haired almost overnight if they had too much worry. He felt it might easily happen to him. He thought back to the time, only a few days ago, when this had all started, and he had fondly imagined it was all going to be the greatest fun anybody had ever had. Now he realized that it was more like a nightmare.

But Little Bear was looking at him challengingly. He *had* promised.

"Right after school," he said, "we'll go to the shop."

There was still another hour of lessons to be got through. Fortunately it was two periods of art. In the art room you could go away into a corner and even sit with your back turned to the teacher if you liked. Omri went to the farthest and darkest corner.

"Omri, don't try to draw there," said the art teacher.

"You're in your own light—it's bad for your eyes."

"I'm going to draw something huge anyway," said Omri.

All the others sat near the long windows. He was quite alone, and if the teacher approached him he would hear her feet on the bare floor. He suddenly felt he must—he simply *must* get a little fun out of this somehow. He cautiously fished Little Bear and Boone out of his pocket.

They stood on the sheet of white drawing paper as if on a stretch of snow, and looked about them.

"This school place?" asked Little Bear.

"Yes. Sshhh!"

"Sure don't look much like the school Ah went to!" exclaimed Boone. "Whur's the rows of desks? Whur's the slate 'n' bit o' chalk? Why ain't the teacher talkin'?"

"We're doing art. We can sit where we like. She doesn't talk much, she just lets us get on with it," replied Omri in the softest whisper he could possibly manage.

"Art, eh?" asked Boone, brightening up. "Say, that wuz mah best subject! Ah wuz allus top in art, on'y thing Ah wuz any good at! Still draw a mite when Ah gits a chance, if'n ain't nobody around t' laugh at me." He reached into the pocket of his own tiny jeans and fished out a stub of pencil almost too small to see. "Kin Ah draw a mite on yer paper?" he asked.

Omri nodded. Boone strode to the very center of the paper, looked all around at the white expanse stretching

away from him in every direction, and gave a deep sigh of satisfaction. Then he knelt down and began to draw.

Little Bear and Omri watched. From the microscopic point of Boone's pencil there developed a most amazing scene. It was a prairie landscape, with hills and cacti and a few tufts of sagebrush. Boone sketched in, with sure strokes, some wooden buildings such as Omri had often seen in cowboy films—a saloon with a swinging sign reading “Golden Dollar Saloon” in twirly writing; a post office and general store, a livery stable, and a stone house with a barred window and a sign saying “Jail.” Then, moving swiftly on his knees, as it were from one end of his “street” to another, Boone drew in the foreground—figures of men and women, wagons, horses, dogs, and all the trappings of a little town.

From Boone's point of view, he was drawing something quite large, making the best use of his vast piece of paper; but from Omri's, the drawing was minute, perfect in its detailing but smaller than any human hand could possibly have made it. He and Little Bear watched, fascinated.

“Boone, you're an artist!” Omri breathed at last, when Boone had even made the mud on the unpaved street look real. Little Bear grunted.

“But not like real place,” he said.

Boone didn't trouble to answer; in fact, he was so absorbed he probably didn't hear. But Omri frowned. Then



he understood. Of course! Boone's town was part of an America that was not thought of during Little Bear's time.

"Boone," he whispered, bending his head down, "what year is it—your town—your time?"

"Last time Ah saw a newspaper it was 1889," said Boone. "There! That's mah drawin'. Not bad, huh?"

"It's absolutely brilliant," said Omri, enthralled.

"Omri!"

Omri jumped. His two hands instantly cupped themselves over the two men.

From the other side of the room, the teacher said, "I see it's no use trying to stop you chattering. You even do it when you're alone! Bring me your picture."

For a moment Omri hesitated. But it was too marvelous to be passed up! He scooped the men into his pocket and picked up the sheet of paper. For once he wouldn't stop to think! He'd just enjoy himself.

He carried Boone's drawing to the teacher and put it innocently into her hand.

What happened then made up for a good deal of the worry and general upset the little men had caused him. First she just glanced. At a *glance*, the drawing in the middle of the paper just looked like a scribble or a smudge.

"I thought you said you were going to do something huge," she said with a laugh. "This isn't much more than a—"

And then she took a second, much closer, look.

She stared without speaking for about two minutes, while Omri felt inside him the beginnings of a huge, gleeful, uncontrollable laugh. Abruptly the teacher, who had been perched on a desk, stood up and went to a cupboard. Omri was not surprised to see a magnifying glass in her hand when she turned around.

She put the paper down on a table and bent over it, with the glass poised. She examined the drawing for several minutes more. Her face was something to see! Some of the nearest children had become aware that something unusual was going on, and were also craning to see what the teacher was looking at so attentively. Omri stood with the same innocent look on his face, waiting, the laugh slowly rising inside him. Fun? *This was fun, if you liked! This was what he'd been imagining!*

The teacher looked at him. Her face was not quite as stunned as Mr. Johnson's had been, but it was an absolute picture of bafflement.

"Omri," she said. "How in the name of all that's holy did you *do* this?"

"I like drawing small," said Omri quite truthfully.

"*Small!* This isn't small! It's tiny! It's infinitesimal! It's *microscopic!*" Her voice was rising higher with every word. Several of the other children had now stood up and were crowding around the paper, peering at it in absolute

stupefaction. Small gasps and exclamations of wonder were rising on all sides. Omri's held-in laugh threatened to explode.

The teacher's eyes were now narrow with astonishment—and doubt.

"Show me," she said, "the pencil you used."

This took Omri aback, but only for a second.

"I left it over there. I'll just go and get it," he said sweetly.

He walked back to his table, his hand in his pocket. With his back turned he bent over, apparently searching the top of the table. Then he turned around, smiling, holding something cupped in his hand. He walked back.

"Here it is," he said, and held out his hand.

Everyone bent forward. The art teacher took hold of his hand and pulled it toward her. "Are you putting me on, Omri? There's nothing there!"

"Yes there is."

She peered close until he could feel her warm breath on his hand.

"Don't breathe hard," said Omri, his laugh now trembling on his very lips. "You'll blow it away. Maybe you'd see it better through the magnifying glass," he added kindly.

Slowly she raised the glass into position. She looked through it.

"Can I see? Is it there? Can I look?" clamored the other

children. All except Patrick. He was sitting by himself, not paying attention to the crowd around Omri.

The art teacher lowered the glass. Her eyes were dazed.

"I don't believe it."

"It's there."

"How did you pick it up?"

"Ah. Well, that's a bit of a secret method I have."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, it must be. And you wouldn't feel like telling us?"

"No," said Omri in a trembly voice. His laugh was on the verge—it was going to burst out. "May I be excused?"

"Yes," she said in a dazed voice. "Go on."

He took the drawing back and tottered to the door. He managed to get outside before the laugh actually blew out. But it was so loud, so overpowering that he was obliged to go right out into the playground. There he sank onto a bench and laughed till he felt quite weak. Her face! He had never enjoyed anything so much in his whole life. It had been worth it.

The bell rang. School was over. Omri brought out the men and held them up.

"Guys," he said, "I enjoyed that. Thank you. Now we're going to the shop."

Omri ran all the way to Yapp's and got there before most other children had even got out of school. In ten minutes the place would be full of kids buying potato

chips and sweets and toys and comics. Just now he had it to himself, and he had to make the most of the few minutes he had.

He went directly to the corner where the boxes of plastic figures were kept, and stood with his back to the main counter. He was still holding Little Bear and Boone in his hand, and he put them down among the figures in the cowboys-and-Indians box. He hadn't reckoned on Boone's sensitive nature, however.

"Holy catfish! Lookit all them dead bodies!" he squeaked, hiding his eyes. "There musta bin a massacre!"

"Not dead," said Little Bear scornfully. "Plass-tick." He kicked a plastic cowboy aside. "Too many," he said to Omri. "You find women. I choose."

"You'll have to be quick," said Omri in a low voice. He was already rummaging through the box, picking out the Indian women. There were very few. Of the five he found, one was clearly old, and two had babies tied on their backs in parcels laced up like boots.

"You don't want one with a baby, I suppose?"

Little Bear gave him a look.

"No—I thought not," said Omri hastily. "Well, what about these?"

He stood the two other figures on the edge of the table. Little Bear jumped down and faced them. He looked carefully first at one, then at the other. They both looked the

same to Omri, except that one had a yellow dress on and the other a blue. Each had a black pigtail and a headband with a single feather, and moccasins on her feet.

Little Bear looked up. His face showed furious disappointment.

"No good," he said.

"But there aren't any others."

"Many, many plass-tick! You look good, find other!"

Omri rummaged frantically, right to the bottom of the box. Kids were beginning to come into the shop.

He had almost despaired when he saw her. She lay face down on the very bottom of the box, half hidden by two cowboys on horses. He pulled her out. She was the same as the others (apparently) except that she wore a red dress. They obviously all came out of the same mold, because they were all in the same position, as if walking. If the others were ugly, so would this one be.

Without much hope, he set her before Little Bear.

He stood staring at her. The shop was getting busy now. At any moment somebody would come up behind him, wanting to buy a plastic figure.

"Well?" asked Omri impatiently.

For another five seconds Little Bear stared. Then, without speaking a word, he nodded his head.

Omri didn't wait for him to change his mind. He scooped him and Boone back into his pocket and, picking

up the approved figure, made his way to the counter.

"Just this one, please," he said.

Mr. Yapp was looking at him. A very odd look.

"Are you sure you only want the one?" he asked.

"Yes."

Mr. Yapp took the plastic figure, dropped it into a bag, and gave it back to Omri.

"Ten pence."

Omri paid and left the shop. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. He spun around. It was Mr. Yapp. The look on his face was now not odd at all, but red and angry.

"Now you can hand over the two you stole."

Omri stood aghast. "I didn't steal any!"

"Don't add lying to your faults, my lad! I watched you put them in your pocket—a cowboy and an Indian."

Omri's mouth hung open. He thought he was going to be sick.

"I didn't—" he tried to say, but no words came out.

"Turn out your pockets."

"They're mine!" Omri managed to gasp.

"A likely story! And I suppose you brought them out to help you choose the new one?"

"Yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha," said Mr. Yapp heavily. "Come on, stop playing around. I lose hundreds of pounds' worth of stuff a year to you thieving kids. When I do catch one of you

red-handed, I'm not likely to let it pass—I know your sort—if I let you off, you'd be boasting to your pals at school how easy it is to get away with it, and most likely back you'd come tomorrow for another pocketful!"

Omri was now fighting back tears. Quite a crowd had collected, much like the crowd in the art room—some of the same people, even—but his feelings were no longer so pleasant. He wished he could die or disappear.

"It's no good trying to get around me by crying!" shouted Mr. Yapp. "Give me them back—right now, or I'll call the police!"

All at once Patrick was beside him.

"They're his," he said. "I know they're his because he showed them to me at school. A cowboy with a white hat and an Indian in a chief's headdress. He told me he was coming to buy a new one. Omri wouldn't steal."

Mr. Yapp let go of Omri and looked at Patrick. He knew Patrick quite well, because it happened that Patrick's brother had once been his paperboy.

"Will you vouch for him, then?"

"Course I will!" said Patrick staunchly. "I'm telling you, I saw 'em both this afternoon."

But still the shopkeeper wasn't absolutely convinced. "Let's see if they fit your description," he said.

Omri, who had been staring at Patrick as at some miraculous deliverer, felt his stomach drop into his shoes

once more. But then he had an idea.

He reached both hands into his pockets. Then he held out one hand slowly, still closed, and everyone looked at it, though it was actually empty. The other hand he lifted to his mouth as if to stifle a cough, and whispered into it, "Lie still! Don't move! *Plastic!*" Then he put both hands before him and opened them.

The men played along beautifully. There they lay, side by side, stiff and stark, as like lifeless plastic figures as could possibly be. In any case Omri was taking no chances. He gave Mr. Yapp just long enough to see that they were dressed as Patrick had said before closing his fingers again.

Mr. Yapp grunted.

"Those aren't from my shop anyhow," he said. "All my Indian chiefs are sitting down, and that sort of cowboy is always on a horse. Well, I'm sorry, lad. You'll have to excuse me, but you must admit, it did look suspicious."

Omri managed a sickly smile. The crowd was melting away. Mr. Yapp shuffled back into the shop. Omri and Patrick were left alone on the pavement.

"Thanks," said Omri. It came out as croaky as a frog.

"That's okay. Have a Toffo."

They had one each and walked along side by side. After a while they gave each other a quick grin.

"Let's give them some."

They stopped, took the men out, and gave them each

some bits of the chocolate.

"That's a reward," said Patrick, "for playing dead."

Little Bear then naturally demanded to know what it had all been about, and the boys explained as well as they could. Little Bear was quite intrigued.

"Man think Omri steal Little Bear?"

"Yes."

"And Boone?"

Omri nodded.

"Omri fool to steal Boone!" roared Little Bear, laughing. Boone, stuffing himself with chocolate, gave him a dirty look.

"Where woman?" Little Bear asked eagerly.

"I've got her."

"When make real?"

"Tonight."

Patrick gave him a look of pure longing. But he didn't say anything. They walked along again. They were getting near Omri's house.

Omri was thinking. After a while he said, "Patrick, what about you staying the night?"

Patrick's face lit up like a bulb.

"Could I? And see—"

"Yes."

"Wow! Thanks!"

They ran the rest of the way home.