
Uninvited Brothers



OMRI WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO ride his bicycle in the road, but then he wasn't supposed to ride it on the pavement either, not fast at any rate, so he compromised. He rode it slowly on the pavement as far as the corner, then bumped down off the curb and went like the wind.

The hardware shop was still open. He bought the seed tray and the seeds and was just paying for them when he noticed something. On the seed packet, under the word "Marrow," was written another word in brackets: "Squash."

So one of the "three sisters" was marrow! On impulse he asked the shopkeeper, "Do you know what maize is?"

"Maize, son? That's sweet corn, isn't it?"

"Have you some seeds of that?"

Outside, standing by Omri's bike, was Patrick.

"Hi."

"Hi. I saw you going in. What did you get?"

Omri showed him.

"More presents for the Indian?" Patrick asked sarcastically.

"Well, sort of. If—"

"If what?"

"If I can keep him long enough. Till they grow."

Patrick stared at him and Omri stared back.

"I've been to Yapp's," said Patrick. "I bought you something."

"Yeah? What?" asked Omri, hopefully.

Slowly Patrick took his hand out of his pocket, held it in front of him, and opened the fingers. In his palm lay a cowboy on a horse, with a pistol in one hand pointing upward, or what would have been upward if it hadn't been lying on its side.

Omri looked at it silently. Then he shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I don't want it."

"Why not? Now you can play a proper game with the Indian."

"They'd fight."

"Isn't that the whole idea?"

"They might hurt each other."

There was a pause, and then Patrick leaned forward

and asked, very slowly and loudly, *"How can they hurt each other? They are made of plastic!"*

"Listen," said Omri, and then stopped, and then started again. "The Indian isn't plastic. He's real."

Patrick heaved a deep, deep sigh and put the cowboy back in his pocket. He'd been friends with Omri for years, ever since they'd started school. They knew each other very well. Just as Patrick knew when Omri was lying, he also knew when he wasn't. The only trouble was that this was a non-lie he couldn't believe.

"I want to see him," he said.

Omri debated with himself. He somehow felt that if he didn't share his secret with Patrick, their friendship would be over. He didn't want that. And besides, the thrill of showing his Indian to someone else was something he could not do without for much longer.

"Okay. Come on."

Going home they broke the law even more, riding on the road *and* with Patrick on the crossbar. They went around the back way by the alley in case anyone happened to be looking out of a window.

Omri said, "He wants a fire. I suppose we can't make one indoors."

"You could, on a tin plate, like for indoor fireworks," said Patrick.

Omri looked at him.

"Let's collect some twigs."

Patrick picked up a twig about a foot long. Omri laughed.

"That's no good! They've got to be tiny twigs. Like this." And he picked some slivers off the privet hedge.

"Does he want the fire to cook on?" asked Patrick slowly.

"Yes."

"Then that's no use. A fire made of those would burn out in a couple of seconds."

Omri hadn't thought of that.

"What you need," said Patrick, "is a little ball of tar. That burns for ages. And you could put the twigs on top to look like a real campfire."

"That's a brilliant idea!"

"I know where they've been tarring a road, too," said Patrick.

"Come on, let's go."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't believe in him yet. I want to see."

"All right. But first I have to give this stuff to my dad."

There was a further delay when his father at first insisted on Omri filling the seed tray with compost and planting the seeds in it then and there. But when Omri gave him the corn seed as a present he said, "Well! Thanks. Oh all right, I can see you're bursting to get away. You can do

the planting tomorrow before school.”

Omri and Patrick rushed upstairs. At the top Omri stopped cold. His bedroom door, which he always shut automatically, was wide open. And just inside, crouching side by side with their backs to him, were his brothers.

They were so absolutely still that Omri knew they were watching something. He couldn't bear it. They had come into his room without his permission, and they had seen his Indian. Now they would tell everybody! His secret, his precious secret, his alone to keep or share, was a secret no more. Something broke inside him and he heard himself scream: “Get out of my room! Get out of my room!”

Both boys spun around.

“Shut up, you'll frighten him,” said Adiel at once. “Gillon came in to look for his rat and he found it, and then he saw this absolutely fabulous little house you've made and he called me in to look at it.”

Omri looked at the floor. The seed tray with the long-house, now nearly finished, had been moved into the center of the room. It was *that* they had been looking at. A quick glance all around showed no sign of Indian or horse, but Gillon's tame white rat was on his shoulder.

“I can't get over it,” Adiel went on. “How on earth did you do it, without using any glue or anything? It's all done with tiny little threads, and pegs, and—look, Gillon! It's all made of real twigs and bark. It's absolutely *terrific*,” he said



with such awe-struck admiration in his voice that Omri felt ashamed.

"I didn't—" he began. But Patrick, who had been gaping at the longhouse in amazement, gave him a heavy nudge that nearly knocked him over.

"Yes," said Omri. "Well. Would you mind leaving now? And take the rat. You're not to let him in here! This is my room, you know."

"And this is my magnifying glass, you know," echoed Gillon, but he was obviously too overcome with admiration to be angry with Omri for pinching it. He was using it now to examine the fine details of the building. "I knew you were good at making things," he said, "but this is uncanny. You must have fingers like a fairy to tie those *witchy* little knots. What's that?" he asked suddenly.

They'd all heard it—a high, faint whinny coming from under the bed.

Omri was galvanized into action. At all costs he must prevent their finding out now! He flung himself on his knees and pretended to grope under the bed. "It's nothing, only that little clockwork dolphin I got in my Christmas stocking," he burred. "I must have wound it up and it suddenly started clicking, you know how they do, it's quite creepy sometimes when they suddenly start—clicking—"

By this time he'd leaped up again and was almost pushing the two older boys out of the room.

"Why are you in such a hurry to get rid of us?" asked Gillon suspiciously.

"Just go, you know you have to get out of my room when I ask you—" He could hear the little horse whinnying again and it didn't sound a bit like the dolphin.

"That sounds just like a pony," said Adiel.

"Oh *beard* it's a pony, a tiny witchy pony under my bed!" said Omri mockingly. At last they went, not without glancing back suspiciously several times, and Omri slammed the door, bolted it, and leaned against it with closed eyes.

"Is it a pony?" whispered Patrick, agog.

Omri nodded. Then he opened his eyes, lay down again, and peered under the bed.

"Give me that flashlight from the chest of drawers."

Patrick gave it to him and lay beside him. They peered together as the beam probed the darkness.

"Crumbs!" breathed Patrick reverently. "It's true!"

The horse was standing, seemingly alone, whinnying. When the light hit him he stopped and turned his head. Omri could see a pair of leggings behind him.

"It's all right, Little Bear, it's me!" said Omri.

Slowly a crest of feathers, then a pair of eyes appeared over the top of the horse's back.

"Who others?" he asked.

"My brothers. It's okay, they didn't see you."

“Little Bear hear coming. Take horse, run, hide.”

“Good. Come on out and meet my friend Patrick.”

Little Bear jumped astride the horse and rode proudly out, wearing his new cloak and headdress. He gazed up imperiously at Patrick, who gazed back in wonder.

Then he nodded to Patrick who tried several times to say something, but his voice just came out as a squeak.

“Omri’s friend, Little Bear’s friend,” said Little Bear magnanimously.

Patrick swallowed. His eyes seemed in danger of popping right out of his head.

Little Bear waited politely, but when Patrick didn’t speak he rode over to the seed tray. The brothers had brought it out from behind the crate; they’d been careful, but the ramp had got moved. Omri hurried to put it back, and Little Bear rode the horse up it, dismounted, and tied it by its halter to the post he had driven into the compost. Then he went calmly on with his work on his longhouse.

Patrick licked his lips, swallowed twice more, and croaked out, “He’s real. He’s a real live Indian.”

“I told you.”

“How did it happen?”

“Don’t ask me. Something to do with this cupboard, or maybe it’s the key—it’s very old. You lock plastic people inside, and they come alive.”

Patrick goggled at him. “You mean—it’s not only him?

You can do it with any toy?"

"Only plastic ones."

An incredulous grin spread over Patrick's face.

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's bring loads of things to life! Whole armies—"

And he sprang toward the biscuit tins. Omri grabbed him.

"No, wait! It's not so simple."

Patrick, his hands already full of soldiers, was making for the cupboard. "Why not?"

"Because they'd all—don't you see—they'd be *real*."

"Real? What do you mean?"

"Little Bear isn't a toy. He's a real man. He really lived. Maybe he's still—I don't know—he's in the middle of his life—somewhere in America in seventeen-something-or-other. He's from the *past*," Omri struggled to explain as Patrick looked blank.

"I don't get it."

"Listen. Little Bear has told me about his life. He's fought in wars, and scalped people, and grown stuff to eat like marrows and stuff, and had a wife. She died. He doesn't know how he got here but he thinks it's magic and he accepts magic, he believes in it, he thinks I'm some kind of spirit or something. What I mean," Omri persisted, as Patrick's eyes strayed longingly to the cupboard, "is that if you put all those men in there, when they came to life they'd be real men with real lives of their own, from their

own times and countries, talking their own languages. You couldn't just—set them up and make them do what you wanted them to. They'd do what *they* wanted to, or they might get terrified and run away or—well, one I tried it with, an old Indian, actually died of—of fright when he saw me. Look, if you don't believe me!" And Omri opened the cupboard.

There lay the body of the old chief, now made of plastic, but still unmistakably dead, and not dead the way some plastic soldiers are made to look dead but the way real people look—crumpled up, empty.

Patrick picked it up, turning it in his hand. He'd put the soldiers down by now.

"This isn't the one you bought at lunchtime?"

"Yes."

"Crumbs."

"You see?"

"Where's his headdress?"

"Little Bear took it. He says he's a chief now. It's made him even more bossy and—and *difficult* than before," said Omri, using a word his mother often used when he was insisting on having his own way.

Patrick put the dead Indian down hurriedly and wiped his hand on the seat of his jeans.

"Maybe this isn't such fun as I thought."

Omri considered for a moment.

"No," he agreed soberly, "it's not *fun*."

They stared at Little Bear. He had finished the shell of the longhouse now. Taking off his headdress he tucked it under his arm, stooped, and entered through the low doorway at one end. After a moment he came out and looked up at Omri.

"Little Bear hungry," he said. "You get deer? Bear? Moose?"

"No."

He scowled. "I say get. Why you not get?"

"The shops are shut. Besides," added Omri, thinking he sounded rather feeble, especially in front of Patrick, "I'm not sure I like the idea of having bears shambling about my room, *or* of having them killed. I'll give you meat and a fire and you can cook it and that'll have to do."

Little Bear looked baffled for a moment. Then he swiftly put on the headdress, and drew himself to his full height of almost three inches (three and a quarter with the feathers). He folded his arms and glared at Omri.

"Little Bear chief now. Chief hunts. Kills own meat. Not take meat others kill. If not hunt, lose skill with bow. For today, you give meat. Tomorrow, go shop, get bear, plasstick. Make real. I hunt. Not here," he added, looking up scornfully at the distant ceiling. "Out. Under sky. Now fire."

Patrick, who had been crouching, stood up. He, too,

seemed to be under Little Bear's spell.

"I'll run and get the tar," he said.

"No, wait a minute," said Omri. "I've got another idea."

He ran downstairs. Fortunately the living room was empty. In the coal scuttle beside the open fireplace was a packet of firelighters. He broke a fairly large bit off one and wrapped it in a scrap of newspaper. Then he went to the kitchen. His mother was standing at the sink peeling apples.

Omri hesitated, then went to the refrigerator.

"Don't eat now, Omri, it's nearly suppertime."

"Just a tiny bit," he said.

There was a lovely chunk of raw meat on a plate. Omri sniffed his fingers, wiped them hard on his sweater to get the stink of the firelighter off them, then took a big carving knife from the drawer, and, with an anxious glance at his mother's back, began sawing a corner off the meat.

Luckily it was steak and cut easily. Even so he nearly had the whole plate off the shelf and onto the floor before he'd got his corner off.

His mother swung around just as he closed the refrigerator door.

"A tiny bit of what?" she asked. She often reacted late to things he said.

"Nothing," he said, hiding the raw bit of meat in his hand. "Mum, could I borrow a tin plate?"

"I haven't got such a thing."

"Yes you have, the one you bought Adiel to go camping."

"That's in Adiel's room somewhere, I haven't got it. A tiny bit of *what?*"

But Omri was already on his way upstairs. Adiel was in his room (he would be!) doing his homework.

"What do *you* want?" he asked the second Omri crept in.

"That plate—you know—your camping one."

"Oh that!" said Adiel, going back to his French.

"Well, can I have it?"

"Yeah, I suppose so. It's over there somewhere."

Omri found it eventually in an old knapsack, covered with disgusting bits of baked beans, dry and hard as cement. He hurried across to his own room. Whenever he'd been away from it for even a few minutes, he felt his heart beating in panic as he opened the door for fear of what he might find (or not find). The burden of constant worry was beginning to wear him out.

But all was as he had left it this time. Patrick was crouching near the seed tray. Little Bear was directing him to take the tops off several of the jars of poster paint while he himself fashioned something almost too small to see.

"It's a paintbrush," whispered Patrick. "He cut a bit off his own hair and he's tying it to a tiny scrap of wood he

found, about the size of a big splinter.”

“Pour a bit of paint into the lids so he can reach to dip,” said Omri.

Meanwhile he was scraping the dry beans off the plate with his nails. He took the fragment of firelighter and the twigs out of his pocket and arranged them in the center of the plate. He washed the bit of meat in his bedside water glass. He’d had a wonderful idea for a spit to cook it on. From a flat box in which his first Erector set had once been neatly laid out, but which was now in chaos, he took a rod, ready bent into a handle shape, and pushed this through the meat. Then, from small bits of the set, he quickly made a sort of stand for it to rest on, with legs each side of the fire so that the meat hung over the middle of it.

“Let’s light it now!” said Patrick, who was getting very excited again.

“Little Bear—come and see your fire,” said Omri.

Little Bear looked up from his paints and then ran down the ramp, across the carpet, and vaulted onto the edge of the plate. Omri struck a match and lit the firelighter, which flared up at once with a bluish flame, engulfing the twigs and the meat at once. The twigs gave off a gratifying crackle while they lasted, but the firelighter gave off a very ungratifying stench, which made Little Bear wrinkle up his nose.

"Stink," he cried. "Spoil meat!"

"No it won't!" Omri said. "Turn the handle of the spit, Little Bear."

Evidently he wasn't much used to spits, but he soon got the hang of it. The chunk of steak turned and turned in the flame, and soon lost its raw red look and began to go gray and then brown. The good juicy smell of roasting beef began to compete with the spirituous reek of the firelighter.

"Mmm!" said Little Bear appreciatively, turning till the sweat ran off his face. "Meat!" He had thrown off his chief's cloak and his chest shone red. Patrick couldn't take his eyes off him.

"Please, Omri," he whispered, "couldn't I have one? Couldn't I choose just one—a soldier, or anything I liked—and make him come to life in your cupboard?"

Cowboy!



OMRI GAPPED AT HIM. He hadn't thought of this, but of course now that he did it was obvious—no boy who knew the secret could possibly rest until he had a little live person of his own.

“Patrick—it's not like you think—just something to play with—”

“Of course not, you've explained all about it, now just let me put—”

“But you have to think about it first. No, no, stop, you can't yet! And anyway I don't agree to you using one of mine!” Omri didn't know why he was so reluctant. It wasn't that he was mean. He just knew, somehow, that something awful would happen if he let Patrick have his own way. But

it wasn't easy to stop him. Omri had grabbed him, but he wrenched free.

"I've got to—" he panted. "I've got to—!"

He stretched out his hand toward the pile of soldiers again. They struggled. Patrick seemed to have gone a bit crazy. Suddenly Omri felt the rim of the tin plate under his shifting feet.

He shoved Patrick out of the way and they both stared downward. The plate had tipped, the fire slipped off onto the carpet. Little Bear, with a yell, had leaped clear, and was now waving his arms and shouting horrible things at them. His roast meat had disappeared under Omri's foot, which instinctively stamped down on the fire to put it out. He felt a squishy feeling under his shoe.

"Now look! We've spoiled the meat!" he shouted at Patrick. "If all you can do is fight, I wish I'd never brought you!"

Patrick looked mulish. "It was your fault. You should have let me put something in the cupboard."

Omri lifted his shoe. Underneath was a nasty mess of burned stuff, squashed meat, and bent Erector set. Little Bear let out a wail.

"You no Great Spirit! Only stupid boy! Fight, spoil good meal! You feel shame!"

"Maybe we can rescue it—"

He crouched down and disentangled the meat from the

mess, burning his fingers. He tried to brush it clean but it was no use—it was all mixed up with the smelly stuff of the firelighter, and stuck with bits of carpet hairs.

"I'm terribly sorry, Little Bear," he mumbled.

"No good sorry! Little Bear hungry, work all day, cook meat—now what eat? I chop you down like tree!" And to Omri's horror he saw Little Bear run to where the battle-ax was lying, pick it up, and advance toward his leg, swinging it in great circles as he came.

Patrick fairly danced with excitement. "Isn't he fantastically brave, though! Much more than David with Goliath!"

Omri felt the whole thing was going too far. He removed his leg from harm's way. "Little Bear! Calm down," he said. "I've said I'm sorry."

Little Bear looked at him, blazing-eyed. Then he rushed over to the chair Omri used at his table and began chopping wedges out of the leg of it.

"Stop! Stop! Or I'll put you back in the cupboard!"

Little Bear stopped abruptly and dropped the ax. He stood with his back to them, his shoulders heaving.

"I'll get you something to eat—right now—something delicious. Go and paint. It'll make you feel better. I won't be long." To Patrick he said, "Hang on. I can smell supper cooking, I'll go and get a bit of whatever we're having," and he rushed downstairs without stopping to think.

His mother was dishing up a nice hot stew.

"Can I have a tiny bit of that, Mum? Just a little bit, in a spoon. It's for a game we're playing."

His mother obligingly gave him a big spoonful. "Don't let it drip," she said. "Does Patrick want to stay for supper?"

"I don't know—I'll ask," said Omri.

"Were you two fighting up there? I heard thumps."

"No-o—not really. It was just that he wanted to do something that I—"

Omri stopped dead, as if frozen to the ground. He might have been frozen, his face went so cold. Patrick was up there—with the cupboard—and two biscuit tinsful of little plastic figures—alone!

Omri ran. He usually won the egg-and-spoon race at the school sports, which was just as well—it's hard enough to carry an egg in a spoon running along a flat field; it's a great deal harder to carry a tablespoonful of boiling hot stew steady while you rush up a flight of stairs. If most of it was still there when he got to the top it was more by good luck than skill because he was hardly noticing the spoon at all—all he could think of was what might be—no, *must* be happening in his room, and how much more of it would happen if he didn't hurry.

He burst in through the door and saw exactly what he'd dreaded—Patrick, bent over the cupboard, just turning the key to open it.

“What—” Omri gasped out between panting breaths, but he had no need to go on. Patrick, without turning around, opened the cupboard and reached in. Then he did turn. He was gazing into his cupped hands with eyes like huge marbles. He slowly extended his hands toward Omri and whispered, “Look!”

Omri, stepping forward, had just time to feel intensely glad that at least Patrick had not put a whole handful of figures in but had only changed one. But which? He leaned over, then drew back with a gasp.

It was the cowboy. And his horse.

The horse was in an absolute panic. It was scrambling about wildly in the cup of Patrick’s hands, snorting and pawing, up one minute and down on its side the next, stirrups and reins flying. It was a beautiful horse, snow-white with a long mane and tail, and the sight of it acting so frightened gave Omri heart pains.

As for the cowboy, he was too busy dodging the horse’s flying feet and jumping out of the way when it fell to notice much about his surroundings. He probably thought he was caught in an earthquake. Omri and Patrick watched, spell-bound, as the little man in his plaid shirt, buckskin trousers, high-heeled leather boots, and big hat, scrambled frantically up the side of Patrick’s right hand and, dodging through the space between his index finger and thumb, swung himself clear of the horse—only to look down and

find he was dangling over empty space.

His hat came off and fell, slowly like a leaf, down, down, down to the floor so infinitely far below. The cowboy gave a yell, and scrabbled with his feet against the back of Patrick's hand, hanging on for dear life to the ridge beside his thumbnail.

"Hold your hands still!" Omri commanded Patrick, who in his excitement was jerking them nervously about. There was a moment of stillness. The horse stood up, trembling all over, prancing about with terror. Beside his hooves was some tiny black thing. Omri peered closer. It was the pistol.

The cowboy had now recovered a little. He scrambled back through the finger gap and said something to the horse that sounded like, "Whoaback, steady fella." Then he slid down and grabbed the reins, holding them just below the horse's nose. He patted its face. That seemed to calm it. Then, looking around swiftly but not apparently noticing the enormous faces hanging over him, he reached cautiously down and picked the pistol up from between the horse's hooves.

"Whoa there! Stand—"

Omri watched like a person hypnotized. He wanted to cry out to Patrick that it was a real gun, but somehow he couldn't. He could only think that the sound of his voice would throw the horse once more into a panic and that

horse or man would get hurt. Instead he watched while the cowboy pointed the gun in various directions warily. Then he lowered it. Still holding the reins he moved until he could press his hand against Patrick's skin. Then he let his eyes move upward toward the curved fingers just level with the top of his head.

"What the dawggone heck—" he said. "It sure looks like a great big—aw, what'm Ah talkin' about? It cain't be. Heck, it just ain't possible!" But the more he looked, the more certain he must have become that he was, indeed, in a pair of cupped hands. And finally, after scratching his gingery head for a moment, he ventured to look right up past the fingers, and then of course he saw Patrick's face looking at him.

There was a petrified moment when he couldn't move. Then he raised his pistol in a flash.

"Patrick! Shut your eyes!"

Bang!

It was only a little bang, but it was a real bang, and a puff of real, gun-smelling smoke appeared. Patrick shouted with pain and surprise and would have dropped the pair if Omri hadn't thrust his hand underneath to catch them. Patrick's own hand had clapped itself to his cheek.

"Ow! Ow! He's shot me!" Patrick screamed.

Omri was not much bothered about Patrick at that moment. He was furious with him, and very anxious about

the little man and his horse. Quickly he put them down on the bed, saying, like the cowboy himself, "Steady! Whoa! I won't hurt you! It's okay!"

"Ow!" Patrick kept yelling. "It hurts! Ow!"

"Serves you right, I warned you," said Omri. Then he felt sorry and said, "Let's have a look."

Gingerly Patrick took his hand down. A drop of blood had been smeared on his cheek, and by peering very close Omri could see something very like a bee's stinger embedded in his skin.

"Hang on! I see it—I'll squeeze it out—"

"OW!"

A quick squeeze between his thumbnails and the almost invisible speck of black metal, which had only just penetrated the skin, popped out.

"He—he shot me!" Patrick got out again in a shocked voice.

"I *told* you. My Indian stuck a knife in me," said Omri, not to be outdone. "I think we ought to put him back—your cowboy I mean, of course, not my Indian."

"Put him back where?"

Omri explained how the cupboard could change him back to plastic again, but Patrick wasn't having any of that.

"Oh no! I want him! He's terrific. Look at him now—!"

Patrick feasted his eyes admiringly on the little cowboy, who, ignoring the "giants," whom he clearly thought he



must have imagined, was doggedly dragging his horse across Omri's quilt as if he were wading through the dunes of some infinite pale-blue desert.

Omri reached for him determinedly, but Patrick stepped into his path.

"Don't you touch him! I bought him, I changed him—he's mine!"

"You bought him for me!"

"You said you didn't want him."

"Well, but the cupboard's mine, and I told you not to use it."

"And so what if I did? Anyway, it's done, he's alive now, and I'm keeping him. I'll bash you right in if you try to take him. Wouldn't you bash me if I took your Indian?"

Omri was silent. That reminded him—where was Little Bear? He looked around. He soon spotted him at the other side of the room, busy with his paints. Some beautiful, minute designs, showing turtles, herons, and beavers, mainly in red and yellow, had appeared on the side of the tepee Omri had made. As Omri crouched beside him to admire them, Little Bear, without looking at him, said, "You bring food? I very soon die, if not eat."

Omri looked around. What had he done with the spoonful of stew? But he soon saw that he'd put it down on the table without thinking. There it sat, tilting slightly and spilling a few drops of gravy, but still steaming. He hurried

to get Little Bear's—or rather Action Man's—mess tin (the paper plate had got all soggy) and carefully filled it with the hot, savory stuff.

“Here you are.”

Little Bear stopped work, laid down his paintbrush, and sniffed eagerly.

“Ah! Good!” He sat down cross-legged among the paint lids to eat, dipping some of yesterday's stale bread in as a spoon. “Your wife cook? Ah. No. Little Bear forgot. Omri not got wife.” He ate ravenously for a few moments and then said, “Not want?”

“I'm having mine downstairs in a minute,” Omri said.

“Mean, Omri not want wife,” said Little Bear, who was now in a much better mood.

“I'm not old enough.”

Little Bear looked at him for a moment. “No. I see. Boy.” He grinned. “Big boy, but boy.” He went on eating. “Little Bear want,” he said finally, not looking up.

“Another wife?”

“Chief need wife. Want one beautiful. Good cook.” He put his face into the mess tin and licked it clean. Then he looked up. “With Iroquois, mother find wife for son. But Little Bear mother not here. Omri be mother and find.”

Omri couldn't quite see himself as Little Bear's mother, but he said, “I might try. I think there were some lady Indians in Yapp's. But what if I get one and make her real

and then you don't like her?"

"I like. You get."

"Tomorrow."

Little Bear grinned at him happily, his face smeared with gravy.

Patrick had come up behind him.

"Let's put them together and see what they do!"

Omri jumped up quickly.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"You idiot, because yours has got a gun and mine's got a bow and arrow and one of them's sure to kill the other!"

Patrick considered this. "Well, we could take their weapons away from them. Come on, I'm going to!" And he reached toward the bed.

Just at that moment there was the sound of steps on the stairs. They froze. Then Omri swiftly moved the dressing-up crate enough to hide Little Bear, and Patrick sat down on the end of the bed, masking the poor cowboy, who was still toiling along over the humps in the quilt.

Just in time! Omri's mother opened the door the next second and said, "Patrick, that was your mum on the phone. She wants you to come home right away. And Omri—it's supper." And she went.

Omri opened his mouth to protest, but Patrick at once said, "Oh, okay." With one quick movement he had

scooped up cowboy and horse in his left hand and thrust them into his pocket. Omri winced—he could easily imagine the horse's legs being injured by such rough treatment, not to mention the matter of fright. But Patrick was already halfway out the door.

Omri jumped up and grabbed his arm.

"Patrick!" he whispered. "You must be careful! Treat them carefully! They're *people*—I mean, they're alive—what will you do with them? How will you hide them from your family?"

"I won't. I'll show them to my brother, anyway, he'll go out of his mind."

Omri began to think he might go out of his. He shook Patrick's arm. "*Will you think?* How are you going to explain? What will happen? If you say you got him from me I'll do worse than bash you—you'll ruin everything—they'll take the cupboard away—"

That got through to Patrick at last. He put his hand slowly back into his pocket.

"Listen then. You can look after them. But remember—they're mine. If you put them back in the cupboard, I'll tell everyone. I'm warning you. I will. Bring them to school tomorrow."

"To school!" cried Omri aghast. "I'm not bringing Little Bear to school!"

"You can do what you like about Little Bear, he's yours."

The cowboy's mine, and I want him at school tomorrow. Otherwise I'll tell."

Omri let go of his arm and for a moment they looked at each other as if they'd been strangers. But they weren't strangers; they were friends. That counts for a lot in this life. Omri gave in.

"All right," he said, "I'll bring them. Now give them to me. *Gently.*" And Patrick brought man and horse out of his pocket and tipped them very carefully into Omri's waiting hand.

Shooting Match



OMRI PUT THE COWBOY AND horse in his sock drawer while he had the quickest supper on record. Then he raced upstairs again, stopping only to pinch a few grains of Gillon's rat feed for the two horses.

Shut up in his room, he took stock. A room this size was like a sort of indoor national park to the cowboy and the Indian. It should be easy enough to keep them apart for one night. Omri thought first of putting the new pair straight back in the cupboard, and then bringing them back to life next morning in time for school, but he had promised Patrick not to. So he decided to empty out the dressing-up crate and put the cowboy and his horse in there for the night.

The crate was about two feet square, made of planks. There was certainly no visible way out of it for the cowboy. Omri put him carefully down into it. Looking down at him, he felt curious—about his name, where he came from, and so on; but he decided it was better not to talk to him. The cowboy had clearly decided that Omri was not really there at all. When his big hands reached down, carrying some cold stew, grain for the horse, some fragments of apple for them both, and, later, some cotton wool and scraps of material for bedding, the cowboy deliberately covered his eyes by pulling down his big hatbrim. It was only when Omri reached in one final time to give him a drink of water in a minute green glass bottle that he had found in the bathroom cupboard, that the cowboy spoke a word.

“Take that filthy stuff outa here!” he suddenly shouted in his strong Texas accent. “Ah ain’t aimin’ to drink no more o’ that as lawng as Ah live!” And he heaved the bottle (which was almost as big as himself) up by its base and tipped its contents out onto the boards at the bottom of the crate.

“It’s only water,” Omri ventured to say.

“You shet yer mouth!” shouted the little man. “Ah won’t take no lip from no gol-darned hallucy-nation, no, sir! Mebbe Ah do drink too much, mebbe Ah cain’t hold m’likker like some o’ them real tough guys do. But if’n Ah’m gittin’ the dee-lirium tremens, and startin’ in to see things, why couldn’t Ah see pink elly-fants and dancin’ rats

and all them purty things other fellas see when they gits far gone? It ain't fair fer me to see giants and blue deserts and git put in boxes the size of the Grand Canyon with no one but m'little hoss fer comp'ny!" He sat down on the pile of hay, took the horse's nose in his arms, put his face against it, and began to sob.

Omri was shattered. A cowboy crying! He didn't know what to do. When his mother cried, as she did sometimes when things got too much, she only asked to be left alone till she felt better. Maybe all grown-ups were like that. Omri turned away and got slowly into his pajamas, and then went to see how Little Bear was getting along on the far side of the crate.

He'd finished the painting. The tepee looked really good. Little Bear was now in the longhouse, arranging his blanket for the night. The pony was tethered to his post on a long rope. Omri took out the rat food and gave it to him. Then he called Little Bear out.

"Are you okay? Anything you need?"

He should have known better than to ask.

"Plenty! Want fire in longhouse, keep warm, keep animals away. Want tomahawk—"

"So you can chop bits out of my leg?"

"Little Bear angry when say that. Sorry now. Use tomahawk cut down trees, chop firewood, kill fish—"

"What fish?"

Little Bear replied with a very good imitation of a fish swimming. Then he did a mime of catching it, putting it onto a block, and, with a whirl of his arm, chopping off its head with gleeful relish.

"I don't know about that!"

"You get. Tomorrow. Fish from plass-tick. Good tools. But fire—now. Chief Little Bear say!"

Omri sighed. He went to the wastepaper basket and picked out the remains of the other fire that he'd thrown away in there. There was quite a lot of the firelighter left. He gathered up some of the bits of willowbark and twigs from where Little Bear had been working. "You're not having it inside, though—far too dangerous!"

He arranged the fire on the packed earth of the seed tray, about six inches from the entrance to the longhouse, first moving the tepee to safety. Then he struck a match and soon there was a cozy blaze.

Little Bear crouched beside it, his red skin glowing and his eyes bright with pleasure.

"Little Bear, can you dance?"

"Yes. Many kinds."

"Would you do one now so I can see?"

He hesitated, then he shook his head once.

"Why not, though?"

"No reason dance."

"Maybe if I got you a wife—"

The Indian looked up eagerly. "You get? Give word?"

"I only said I'd try."

"Then Little Bear dance. Then do best dance—love dance."

Omri turned off his light and drew back from the scene. It looked amazingly real, with the fire making shadows, the little horse munching his grain, and the Indian sitting on his heels warming himself, wearing his colorful headdress and chief's cloak. Omri wished he himself were small enough to join Little Bear by the fire.

"Om-ri! Are you in bed? I'm coming up in five minutes to kiss you good night!"

Omri felt panicky. But it was all right. The fire was going out. Already Little Bear was standing up, yawning and stretching. He peered up through the darkness.

"Hey Omri! Paintings good?"

"Great!"

"You sleep now?"

"Yes."

"Peace of Great Spirits be with you."

"Thanks, same to you."

Omri peered quickly into the crate. The poor cowboy had crawled away into his makeshift bed and was snoring loudly. He hadn't eaten a thing. Omri sighed. He hoped Patrick was making plans and arrangements. After all, if Omri could keep his Indian secret, Patrick might be able to

do the same. All might yet be well. But Omri certainly wasn't going to try the experiment again. It was all just too much worry.

He climbed into bed, feeling unusually tired. His mother came in and kissed him, and the door was shut. He felt himself drifting off almost right away. . . .

When suddenly a piercing whinny sounded. And was answered by another.

The horses had smelled each other!

They were not so far apart—and the cowboy's wasn't tied up. Omri could hear his little hooves clattering on the bare boards of the crate, and then the whinnies began again, high, shrill—almost questioning. Omri thought of putting on his light, but he was awfully tired—besides, what could he do? They couldn't possibly reach each other through the planks of the crate wall. Let them whinny their heads off, they'd soon get fed up.

Omri rolled over and fell asleep.

He was awakened just after dawn by shots.

He was out of bed in about one fifth of a second. One glance into the crate showed him all too clearly that the cowboy and his horse had escaped. The second glance showed how: A knot in the wood had been pushed out (or perhaps kicked out by the horse), leaving an oval-shaped hole like an arched doorway, just big enough to let horse and rider through.

Omri looked around wildly. At first he could see nothing. He dropped to his knees beside the seed box and peered into the longhouse. Little Bear was not there—nor was his horse.

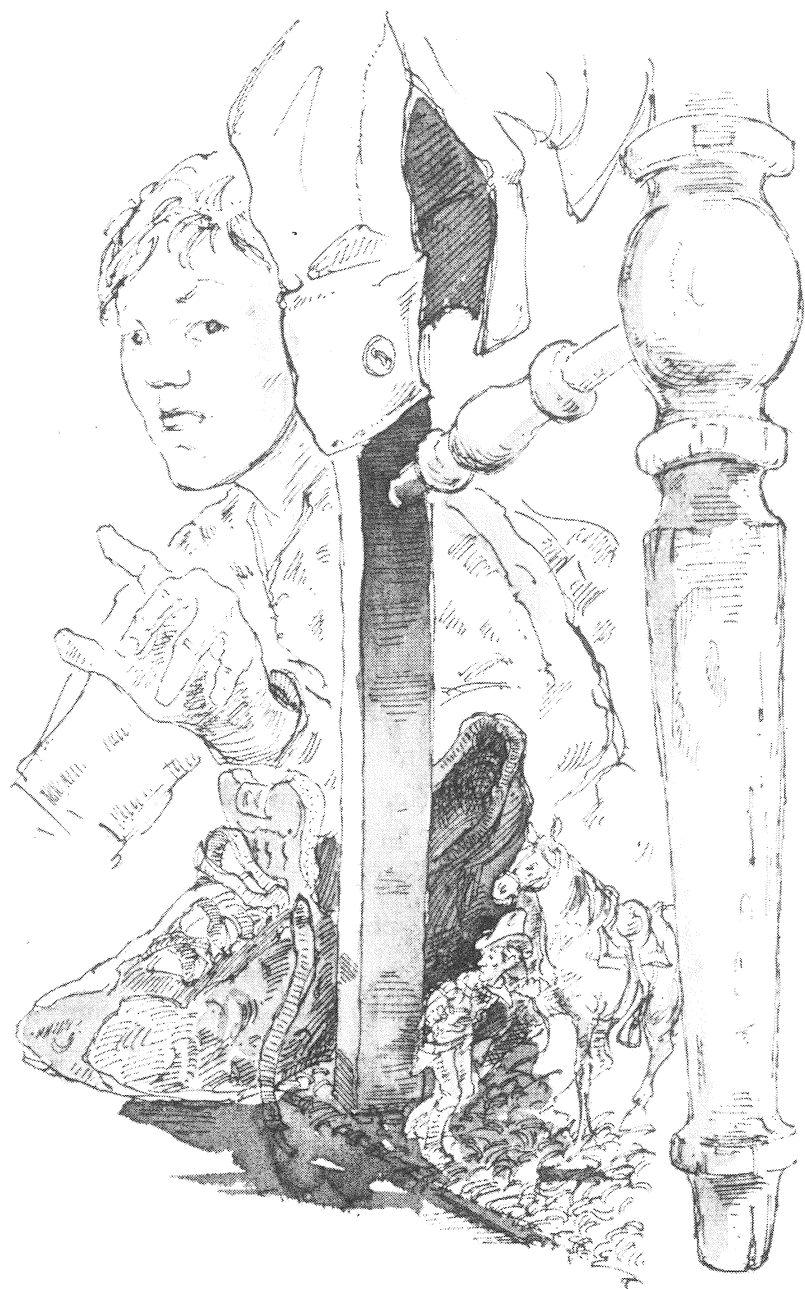
Suddenly some tiny thing whizzed past Omri's ear and struck the crate beside him with a ping! Twisting his head, Omri saw it—a feathered arrow the size of a pin, still quivering from its flight.

Was Little Bear shooting at *him*?

"Little Bear! Where are you?"

No answer. But suddenly, a movement, like that of a mouse, caught the corner of his eye. It was the cowboy. Dragging his horse behind him, he was running, half bent over, from behind one chair leg to another. He had his revolver in his hand, his hat on his head. Another arrow flew, missing the crate this time and burying itself in the carpet—just ahead of the running cowboy, who stopped dead, jumped backward till his horse hid him, and then fired another two shots from behind the horse's shoulder.

Omri, following his aim, spotted Little Bear at once. He and his horse were behind a small heap of cloth, which was like a snow-covered hill to them but was actually Omri's vest, dropped carelessly on the floor the night before. Little Bear, safe in the shelter of this cotton mountain, was just preparing to shoot another arrow at the cowboy, one that could hardly fail to hit its mark. The poor fellow was now



scrambling desperately onto his horse to try to ride away and was in full sight of the Indian as he drew back his bow-string.

“Little Bear! Stop!”

Omri’s frenzied voice rang out. Little Bear did not stop; but his surprise spoiled his aim, and the arrow sped over the cowboy, doing no worse than sweep away his big hat and pin it to the baseboard behind the chair.

This infuriated the little man, who, forgetting his fear, stood up in his stirrups and shouted, “Tarnation take ya, ya red varmint! Wait’ll Ah ketch ya. Ah’ll have yer stinkin’ red hide for a sleepin’ bag!”

With that he rode straight toward the vest-hill at full gallop, shouting out strange cowboy war cries and waving his gun, which, by Omri’s count, still had two bullets in it.

Little Bear had not expected this, but he was only out-faced for a moment. Then he coolly drew another arrow from his quiver and fitted it to his bow.

“Little Bear, if you shoot I’ll pick you up and *squeeze* you!” Omri cried.

Little Bear kept his arrow pointing toward the oncoming horseman.

“What you do if he shoot?” he asked.

“He won’t shoot! Look at him.”

Sure enough, the carpet was too soft for much galloping, and even as Omri spoke the cowboy’s horse stumbled

and fell, pitching its rider over its head.

Little Bear lowered his bow and laughed. Then, to Omri's horror, he laid down the bow among the folds of the vest, reached for his knife, and began to advance on the prostrate cowboy.

"Little Bear, you are not to touch him, do you hear?"

Little Bear stopped. "He try to shoot Little Bear. White enemy. Try take Indians' land. Why not kill? Better dead. I act quick, he not feel, you see!" And he began to move forward again.

When he was nearly up to the cowboy Omri swooped on him. He didn't squeeze him, of course, but he did lift him high and fast enough to give him a fright.

"Listen to me now. That cowboy isn't after your land. He's got nothing to do with you. He's Patrick's cowboy, like you're my Indian. I'm taking him to school with me today, so you won't be bothered by him anymore. Now you take your horse and get back to your longhouse and leave him to me."

Little Bear, sitting cross-legged in the palm of his hand, gave him a sly look.

"You take him to school? Place you learn about ancestors?"

"That's what I said."

He folded his arms, offended. "Why you not take Little Bear?"

Omri was startled into silence.

"If white fool with coward's face good enough, Indian Chief good enough."

"You wouldn't enjoy it—"

"If he enjoy, I enjoy."

"I'm not taking you. It's too risky."

"Risky? Firewater?"

"Not *whiskey*—risky. Dangerous."

He shouldn't have said that. Little Bear's eyes lit up.

"Like danger! Here too quiet. No hunting, *him* only enemy," he said scornfully, peering over the edge of Omri's hand at the cowboy, who, despite the softness of his landing place, was only just scrambling to his feet. "Look! He no use for fight. Little Bear soon kill, take scalp, finish. Very good scalp," he added generously. "Fine color, look good on belt."

Omri looked across at the cowboy. He was leaning his ginger head against his saddle. It looked as if he might be crying again. Omri felt very sorry for him.

"You're not going to hurt him," he said to the Indian, "because I won't let you. If he's such a coward, it wouldn't do your honor any good anyway."

Little Bear's face fell, then grew mulish. "No tell from scalp on belt if belong to coward or brave man," he said slyly. "Let me kill and I do dance around campfire," he coaxed.



“No—” Omri began. Then he changed his tactics. “All right, you kill him. But then I won’t bring you a wife.”

The Indian looked at him a long time. Then he slowly put his knife away.

“No touch. Give word. Now you give word. Take Little Bear to school. Take to plass-tick. Let Little Bear choose own woman.”

Omri considered. He could keep Little Bear in his pocket all day. No need to take any chances. If he were tempted to show the other children, well, he must resist temptation, that was all.

And after school he could take him to Yapp’s. The boxes with the plastic figures in them were in a corner behind a high stand. Provided there weren’t too many other kids in the shop, he might be able to give Little Bear a quick look at the lady Indians before he bought one, which would be a very good thing. Otherwise he might pick an old or ugly one without realizing it. It was so hard to see from their tiny plastic faces what they would look like when they came to life.

“Okay then, I’ll take you. But you must do as I tell you and not make any noise.”

He put him down on the seed tray and gently shooed the horse up the ramp. Little Bear tied it to its post, and Omri gave it some more rat food. Then he crawled on hands and knees over to where the cowboy was now sitting

dolefully on the carpet, his horse's rein looped around his arm, looking too miserable to move.

"What's the matter?" Omri asked him.

The little man didn't look up. "Lost mah hat," he mumbled.

"Oh is that all?" Omri reached over to the baseboard and pulled the pinlike arrow out of the wide brim of the hat. "Here it is," he said kindly, laying it in the cowboy's lap.

The cowboy looked at it, looked up at Omri, then stood up and put the hat on. "You shore ain't no reg'lar hallucy-nation," he said. "I'm obliged to ya." Suddenly he laughed. "Jest imagine, thankin' a piece o' yer dee-lirium tremens fer givin' you yer hat back! Ah jest cain't figger out what's goin' on around here. Say! Are you real, or was that Injun real? 'Cause in case you ain't noticed, you're a danged sight bigger'n he is. You cain't both be real."

"I don't think you ought to worry about it. What's your name?"

The cowboy seemed embarrassed and hung his head. "M'name's Boone. But the fellas all call me Boohoo. That's on account of Ah cry so easy. It's m'soft heart. Show me some'n sad, or scare me just a little, and the tears jest come to mah eyes. Ah cain't help it."

Omri, who had been somewhat of a crybaby himself until very recently, was not inclined to be scornful about this, and said, "That's okay. Only you needn't be scared of

me. And as for the Indian, he's my friend and he won't hurt you, he's promised. Now I'd like you and your horse to go back into that big crate. I'll stick the knot back in the wood, you'll feel safer. Then I'll get you some breakfast." Boone brightened visibly at this. "What would you like?"

"Aw shucks, Ah ain't that hungry. Coupla bits o' steak and three or four eggs sittin' on a small heap o' beans and washed down with a jug o' cawfee'll suit me jest dandy."

"You'll be lucky," thought Omri.

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 ainch? 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.