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opening extract from

Littlenose the Hero

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Littlenose Meets Two-Eyes

Littlenose was a boy who lived long, long ago. His people were called the Neanderthal folk. In the days when they lived, the world was very cold. It was called the Ice Age.

There were lots of wild animals. Lions, tigers, bears and wolves had thick furry coats to keep them warm. Even the rhinoceros, and a kind of elephant called a mammoth, were big woolly creatures.

The Neanderthal folk were stocky, sturdy people with short necks and big noses. They were very proud of their noses, which were large and snuffly. Littlenose got his name because his nose was no bigger than a berry.

Littlenose's home was not a house, but a cave where he lived with his mum and dad. Near the front of the cave a huge fire was always burning. This kept the family warm, and also frightened away wild creatures, which was just as well because there was no door on the cave.



Sometimes Littlenose was naughty, and that could be dangerous. A child who strayed from his family cave, or loitered on an errand,

might be eaten by a sabre-tooth tiger, or squashed flat as a pancake by a woolly rhinoceros.

But today Littlenose had been very naughty indeed. While his parents were hunting, he had let the fire go out.

Now he sat at the back of the cave and watched Dad trying to relight it. Dad had two stones called flints which he banged together to make a spark. (There were no matches in those days.) But he couldn't strike a spark.

"Perhaps you need a new flint," said Mum.

"I'll need a new son if he lets the fire out again," grumbled Dad. Littlenose expected to be thrown to the bears right away.

However, as they had no fire, Dad blocked the cave entrance with rocks to keep out wild beasts instead.

In the morning they had a cold breakfast. Dad got ready to go for the flint.

"Have you enough money?" said Mum.

"I think so," said Dad, and pulled out a handful of the coloured pebbles which they used for money.

He kissed Mum goodbye, and was just going when Littlenose said, "Can I come too?"

For a moment Dad said nothing. Then: "After the way you behaved, yesterday?" he exclaimed. "Oh, all right," and off he went, leaving Littlenose to follow.

"Goodbye, Littlenose," Mum called after him. "Be good. And always look both ways before you cross."

But Littlenose wasn't listening. He was thinking about his secret. He had a pebble of his own. A green pebble, which he had

found by the river. He had never been to a market before. But he was sure he would see something worth buying today.



They made their way by a woodland path. Dad strode along with his club in his hand, and Littlenose skipped gaily behind him. Ahead, the path was crossed by a broad animal trail. Littlenose was about to dash straight across, when a strong arm reached out and grabbed him.

"Don't you *ever* do what your mother tells you?" said Dad, angrily. Shamefaced, Littlenose stood on the grass verge and:

Looked right!

Looked left!

And right again!

As he looked right the second time, a herd of woolly rhinoceros came round the bend. He and Dad dived into the bushes. They lay hidden as the great beasts lumbered by. Their small eyes blinked through their fur, and their long horns looked very dangerous.

When the rhinos had passed, Littlenose and Dad went on their way.

Littlenose felt like he had been walking for ever. But soon they left the woods and began climbing a grassy hillside.

At last they came to a circle of trees. Littlenose realised that this was the market.

There seemed to be hundreds of people. Littlenose hadn't thought there were so many people in the whole world. He trotted behind Dad, and he was bumped, pushed, trodden on, tripped over and shouted at. The sheer noise made him speechless –

but not for long.

Suddenly: "I'm hungry," he said.

"You're always hungry," grumbled Dad. But he bought each of them a steaming hot hunk of meat from a man who was roasting a deer over a fire.

Then he went over to an old man who was sitting under a tree. There was a sign with his name on it.

At least, Littlenose thought it was his name. When he got closer, he saw that it had once read:



But the words had faded with the weather. Only "Skin" and "Flint" could be made out now. Most people thought it was the old man's name.

Neither Dad nor the old man seemed in

a hurry to settle about the new flint. Littlenose soon grew bored.

He wandered through the market, looking here and listening there. Everyone was bustling about buying the things they couldn't find or make for themselves. There were bone and ivory combs, and needles and pins. There were strange nuts, fruits and berries. And there were furs. Hundreds and hundreds of furs. From tiny mink and ermine to enormous white bear skins from the far north.

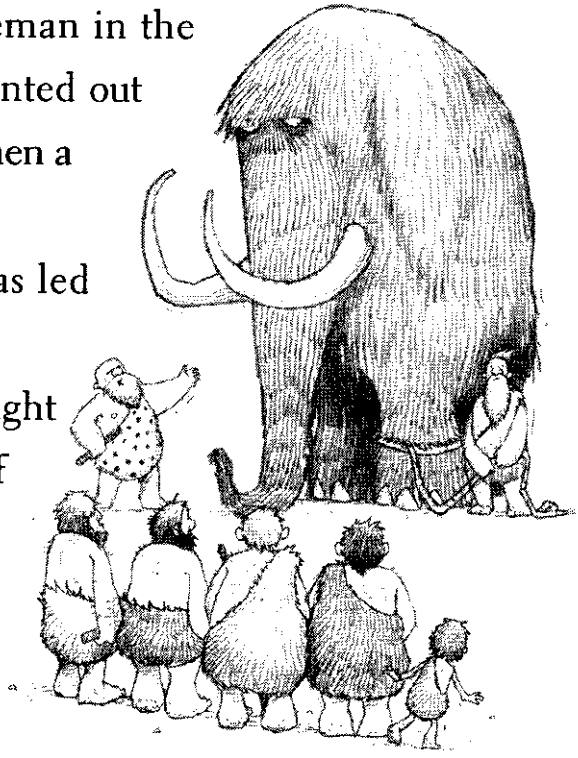
But Littlenose didn't see anything he wanted to buy. He had almost decided to keep his pebble for another day, when, over the heads of the crowd, he saw a sign:



Littlenose pushed forward. In a clear space, a little man stood on a tree stump.

"Five red pebbles I'm bid," he shouted. "Five! Going at five! Going! Going! GONE! Sold to the gentleman in the lion-skin for five red pebbles."

The gentleman in the lion-skin counted out his money. Then a huge woolly mammoth was led over to him.



"Oh," thought Littlenose, "if only I could buy one of those. I would march home, leading him by his trunk.

Everyone would cheer. When I got home I would . . . oh dear, no! I forgot. I'm not even allowed pet mice in the cave. Anyway, a mammoth would hardly get its tail through the door. And a tail's about all I could buy with my pebble."

And, feeling very sad, Littlenose walked away. He sat down by the mammoth pen to rest. The pen was built of huge logs and was too high to see over.

Suddenly he jumped. Something soft and warm had tickled his neck.

It was a trunk – a very little one.

Littlenose looked through the bars of the pen.

He saw the smallest, woolliest, saddest mammoth you could imagine. He climbed up and reached over the top rail to stroke its furry ears.