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Opening extract from

Littlenose the Joker

Written by

John Grant

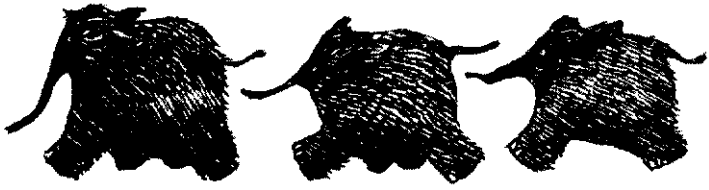
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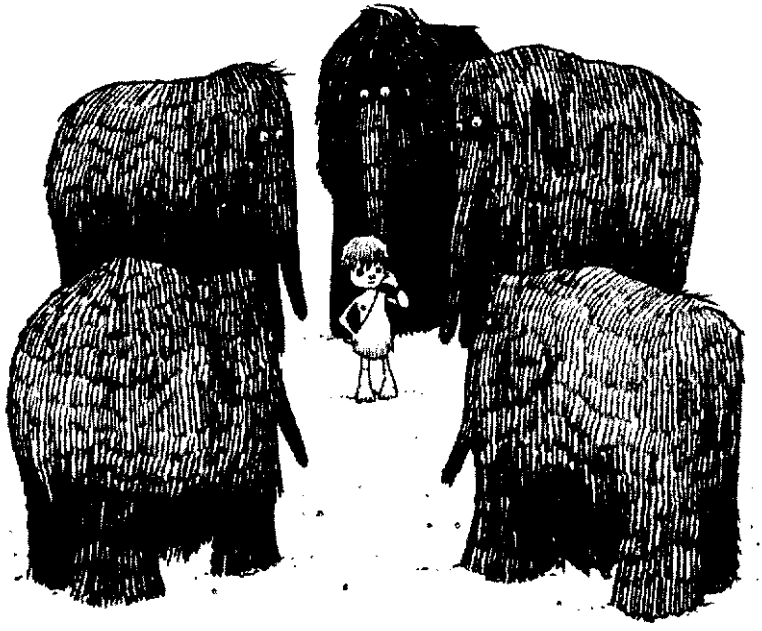
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Littlenose the Joker

Littlenose was a boy in a Neanderthal tribe, and Neanderthal folk were quite a merry lot. Despite the cold of the Ice Age, the frequent lack of food and the danger from wild animals, they enjoyed a joke as much as anyone. They could be heard laughing and singing as they worked at chipping flints to make tools, or cut and sewed animal skins to make clothes. And

one of the most fun-loving Neanderthal people was Littlenose.

While Littlenose and his family and friends were ready for a laugh at any time, there was one day in the year which they kept especially for playing tricks on each other. They called it Crocus Day. As soon as the first crocus appeared in bloom in the spring, then for that day anyone could play tricks on anyone else, the person playing the trick shouting, "CROCUS!" at the person tricked. As you might expect, it was one of Littlenose's favourite times of the year.

One spring day, Littlenose sat under his special tree where he did his more important thinking. Two-Eyes, his pet mammoth was with him, half asleep in the first warm weather since the previous autumn.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Two-Eyes," said Littlenose. "Any day now the first crocus will be out, and I haven't thought of a single trick to play."

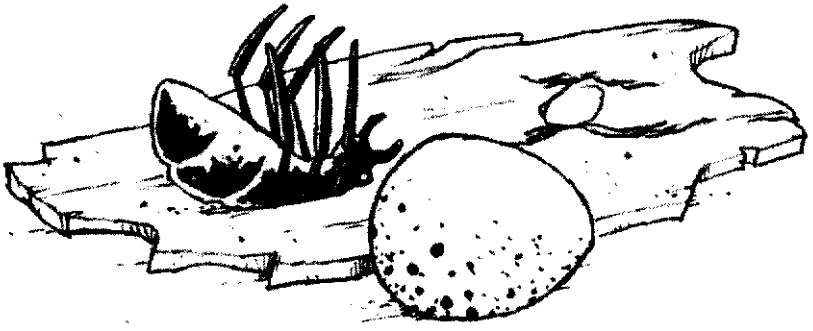
"If you ask me," thought Two-Eyes in his own mammoth way, "the whole idea is a piece of nonsense!" But, as usual, nobody asked him, and Littlenose went on: "I could tie a rope across the cave entrance to trip up Dad . . . but I did that last year! Or I could tie a long string to the tiger-skin rug, and pull it so that Mum would think it was alive . . . but I did that the year before!" He thought a while longer, then, as it was almost lunchtime, he went home.

After lunch, he still hadn't thought of a good Crocus joke, so he decided to look over his collection, in case an idea might just come to him.

Littlenose was a very enthusiastic collector. His collection contained dried leaves, stones with interesting marks on them, birds' feathers, snail shells, and a piece of broken antler. By evening he still hadn't had any ideas, but the collection in his corner of the cave was looking much tidier. He had almost forgotten Crocus Day, and he said to Two-Eyes, "Let's go collecting tomorrow. I've a feeling I'll be extra lucky, and find something special to collect."

Next morning after breakfast, he slung his hunting bag across his shoulder and set off with Two-Eyes. They went along by the river, up the hill and into the forest, and in no time at all Littlenose had collected quite a few interesting items: a bird's egg, a large dead beetle, and a piece of bark with

markings that looked vaguely like a picture of Dad. So much for the forest, now for the open grassland. He'd found some of the best items in his collection there.

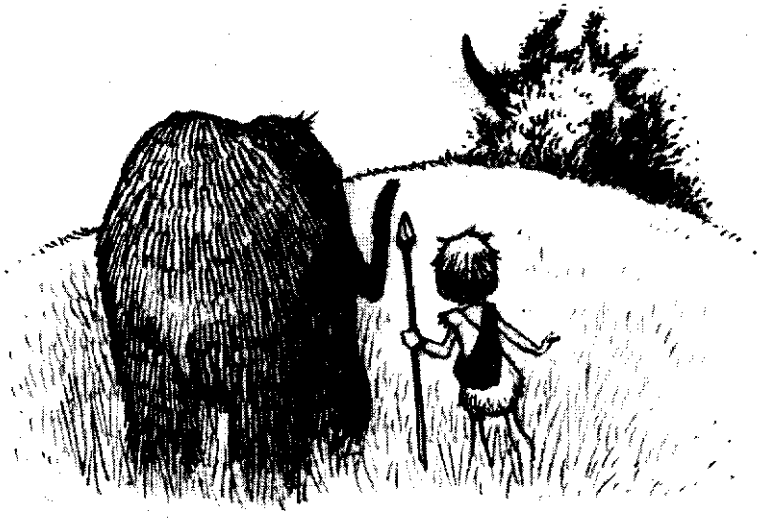


But not this time, it seemed. "Keep looking, Two-Eyes," said Littlenose. Two-Eyes gave a sort of mammoth "Hmph!" and turned his head this way and that as he wandered in a casual sort of fashion through the long grass and around the clumps of gorse which grew here and there.

Suddenly, he stopped. "What is it, Two-

Eyes?" said Littlenose. "Have you found something?"

Two-Eyes made not a sound, but stood stock still, his big ears spread to catch the faintest sound, and his trunk held out sniffing delicately at the breeze. Some way in front was a particularly large clump of gorse, and as Littlenose followed Two-Eyes' gaze, he thought he could just make out something. Something big was lurking in the bushes. And things which lurked in bushes were invariably dangerous. He couldn't actually see anything among the foliage, but he could see what had attracted Two-Eyes' attention. A large object was sticking out from among the leaves. It was a horn. Not an ordinary horn, but one which was quite extraordinary. It was *huge*. It was half as big as Littlenose.



"That can only be one thing, Two-Eyes," he said in a whisper. "A giant wild bull!"

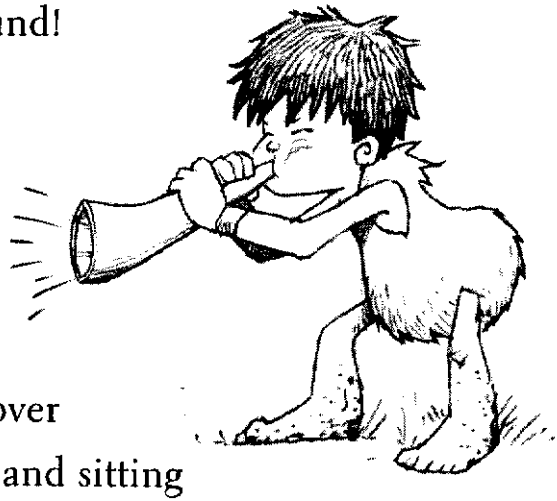
But Two-Eyes was a mammoth, and mammoths had much keener eyesight than Neanderthal boys. He also remembered what Littlenose had forgotten. The great wild bulls lived deep in the forest, and it would be most unlikely to find one out on the open grassland. Also, giant bulls didn't usually stay as still as this, particularly if people were near. He decided to have a

closer look. "No, don't, Two-Eyes," said Littlenose, as the little mammoth walked boldly up to the bush, reached up with his trunk, and touched the horn. The horn dropped to the ground with a soft thump. One thing was certain. There was no wild giant bull on the other end!

Littlenose ran to join Two-Eyes. He examined the horn. It was old and discoloured. And the sharp tip had been broken off. But it seemed worth collecting. It might be useful for keeping things in. Littlenose lifted up the horn and looked inside. It was full of dirt and dust, and he tried to blow it out, but his hair and eyes got full of dust as it blew back in his face. So, he turned it round, put the broken tip to his mouth, and blew again. There was another great cloud of dust . . . then a loud

bellowing sound!

Littlenose dropped the horn as if it were red-hot and jumped back, falling over a tuft of grass and sitting down with a thump. Two-Eyes was nowhere to be seen. Littlenose cautiously reached out to the horn and picked it up. Two-Eyes equally cautiously peered out from a distant clump of bushes. He walked slowly towards Littlenose and looked suspiciously at the horn. Timidly, he touched it with the tip of his trunk. Littlenose took a deep breath, and blew hard into the horn. The noise echoed across the landscape and set a flock of



crows cawing in alarm at the edge of the forest. This time Two-Eyes ran only a short distance before he stopped and came back sheepishly towards Littlenose. And Littlenose now knew why Two-Eyes had been frightened. The sound from the horn was exactly like the bellow of an enraged woolly rhinoceros. He gave it a more gentle blow, and it sounded like a slightly annoyed woolly rhinoceros.

This was a treasure indeed! Littlenose said as much to Two-Eyes. Two-Eyes grunted in a resigned sort of fashion. He knew what was coming next. He was right. Littlenose heaved the horn across Two-Eyes' back where it balanced precariously, and they set off back home.

They were not far from the caves when they saw two figures ahead of them. It was

Nosey and one of the other men returning empty-handed from a day's hunting. Littlenose liked Nosey, and he was about to shout and run after the men when he had a brilliant idea. Did the horn *really* make a sound like an enraged woolly rhinoceros? Maybe he and Two-Eyes had imagined it. They found a patch of long grass and hid. Then Littlenose lifted the horn . . . and BLEW!

