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opening extract from

Cool!

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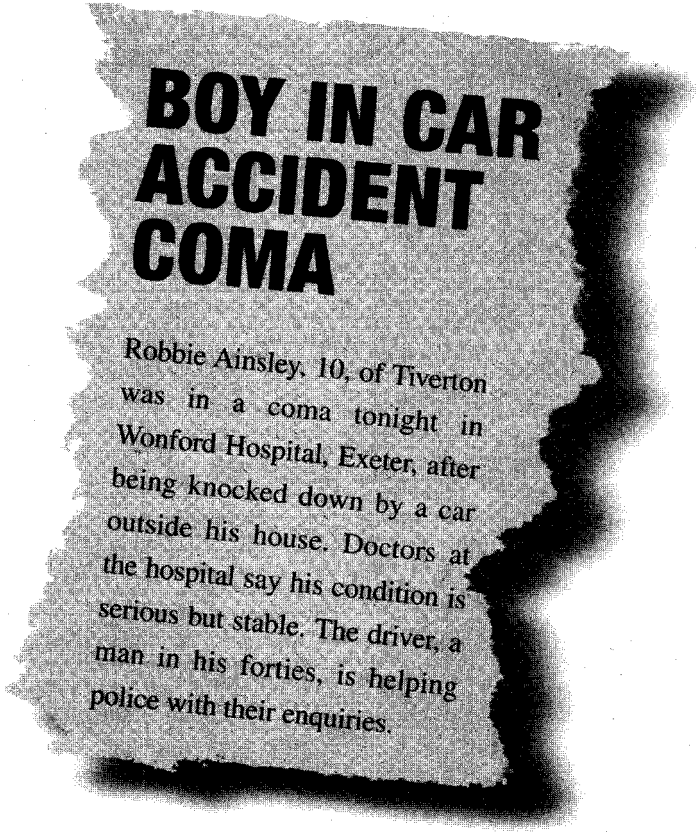
BOY IN CAR ACCIDENT COMA
Robbie Ainsley, 10, of Tiverton was in a coma tonight in Wonford Hospital, Exeter, after being knocked down by a car outside his house. Doctors at the hospital say his condition is serious but stable. The driver, a man in his forties, is helping police with their enquiries.



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I think a lot about Lucky, and I wish I didn't, because Lucky's dead. It makes me so sad. It was me that chose his name, too. But Lucky turned out to be not so lucky after all. I want to cry, but I can't. What's worse is I don't know why I can't cry. I just can't.

Sometimes I tell myself that maybe I'm in the middle of a bad dream, a terrible nightmare, that soon I'll wake up and Lucky will be alive and everything will be just as it was. But dreams and nightmares only end when you wake up, and I can't wake up. I try. I try all the

time, but I can't. So then I know it can't be a dream, that what happened to me and to Lucky was real and true, that Lucky is dead and I'm locked inside my head and can't get out.

I can't wake up. But I *can* hear. I can feel, too. I can smell. And I can remember. I remember it all, every moment of how it happened. It was Saturday, just after breakfast. I had the whole weekend ahead of me. Footie in the park with Marty and the others. Then I'd be going out with Dad on Sunday. We'd be going sailing again at Salcombe. I couldn't wait.

The phone rang. Dad. It would be Dad. He always rang on Saturday mornings. As usual, Mum didn't pick it up at once. She just let it ring and ring. And when she did pick it up she wasn't at all friendly. It was

a long time now since she'd been friendly with Dad. Lucky yapped at the phone. Lucky yapped like a puppy at just about everything – the postman, the milkman, a fly on the window, a dog on TV. He wasn't actually a puppy at all. He was even older than me. He'd just never grown up, that's all. Always busy, always bouncy.

Mum had the phone in her hand now, and I could hear Dad saying, "Hello? Hello?"

"Take him for a walk, Robbie," said Mum, ignoring Dad on the phone. "I want a word with your father." She was always 'having a word' with Dad, but they never sorted things out between them. I sat where I was because I wanted to hear what was going on. "Robbie! Do as I say. Take Lucky for a walk!" I pretended I hadn't heard her. "Robbie, *please* take that

dog for a walk. All right you can get yourself an ice-cream."

"Cool," I said.

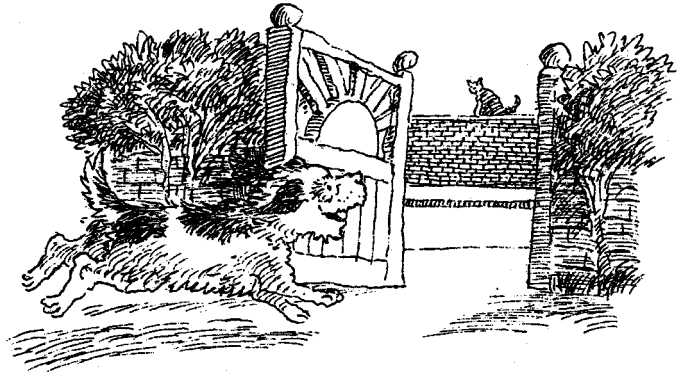
Then she got really mad. "Don't say 'cool'. You know how I hate it. Out!"

"OK. Cool," I said, just to irritate her. "Come on, Lucky. Walkies."

Ellie called out from upstairs, asking if she could come with me. I said no because she'd be ages putting on her boots, and because she always wanted to stop to feed the ducks. Lucky was jumping up and down, yapping. After all, he'd just heard the best word in the world – *walkies*. I opened the front door and Lucky shot off down the path, still yapping. We were going walkies in the park and he was loving it already.

Normally, I put Lucky's lead on and he

jumps up and down while I open our front gate. But the front gate was open already. Someone had left it open. Then I saw the cat – Mrs Chilton's big tabby cat. She was sitting on the wall in the sunshine, licking herself – on the far side of the road. It all happened so fast after that. Lucky was gone,



skittering down the path, his little legs going like crazy underneath him, growling and yapping all at the same time. And I was laughing because he looked so funny. Suddenly I stopped laughing because I saw

the danger I should have seen in the first place. I shouted, but it was too late.

Lucky was out of the gate and into the road before I could stop him. I ran after him. I heard the car, heard the squeal of brakes, saw Lucky disappear underneath the wheels. But I never saw the car that hit me. I felt it though. I even heard my own scream. I was flying through the air, and falling, tumbling, rolling.

Then I was in the ambulance. But somehow I couldn't wake up. Nothing seemed to work. I couldn't move anything, not my fingers, not my legs. But *inside* my head I *had* woken up. Inside I was wide awake.

I remember thinking in the ambulance, "Maybe I'm dead. Maybe this is what being dead really feels like." I've thought

a lot about that ever since, and it doesn't worry me any more, not often anyway. I know I can't be dead because my leg hurts all the time, so does my head. I feel like I've been walked all over by a herd of elephants. I mean, you can't hurt if you're dead, can you?

I could hear Mum crying, and the ambulance man telling her I would be all right, that she wasn't to worry, that it wasn't far to the hospital. I remember he put a mask over my mouth. When we got here, I felt the cold air on my face. Mum held my hand the whole time. She kept kissing me and crying, and I wanted to open my eyes and tell her I was fine. But I couldn't, and I still can't.

She's here in the room with me now, with Ellie. There were times I couldn't stand

the sight of my little sister – she could be so annoying. Now I'd give anything, anything in the world, just to be able to open my eyes and see her again.

Mum and Ellie don't cry as often as they did, thank goodness. Dr Smellybreath told them that crying would only upset me, that they should talk to me, that I can hear them if they do. But from the way they talk to me, I know they don't really believe I can hear them. They just hope I can. They do try to talk to me sometimes, but mostly they talk *about* me, not to me, like they're doing now.

"He looks very pink," Ellie's saying, and she's touching my cheek. I can feel the sharpness of her little fingernail. "And he's very hot, too." She's sitting on my bed now. She's playing with my fingers like

they were toys. "This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed at home..." She's done this before. She'll do the whole nursery rhyme including the tickling bit at the end. Here we go: "And this little piggy cried 'wee wee wee' all the way home." And she's running her tickling fingers all the way up my arm. They do tickle too, but I can't giggle like she wants me to. I want to wake up right now and tickle her back, tickle her till she bursts. I love to make her giggle. But I can't do it. I can't.

"What's Robbie got that pipe thing in his mouth for, Mum?" she asks again. And Mum explains, again, and tells her not to touch my tubes, again. "Why doesn't he wake up, Mum?"

"He will, Ellie, he will. When he's ready to, he will. He's just sleeping. He's tired."