

Pawnee

The Boy and His Mud Horses

In ancient times the Pawnee people did not have horses, only dogs helped them carry everything they needed.

There was a poor boy in the village. He had no mother or father, nobody he could call his family. He would go from one lodge to another asking for something to eat. Many turned him away, others pretended not to notice.

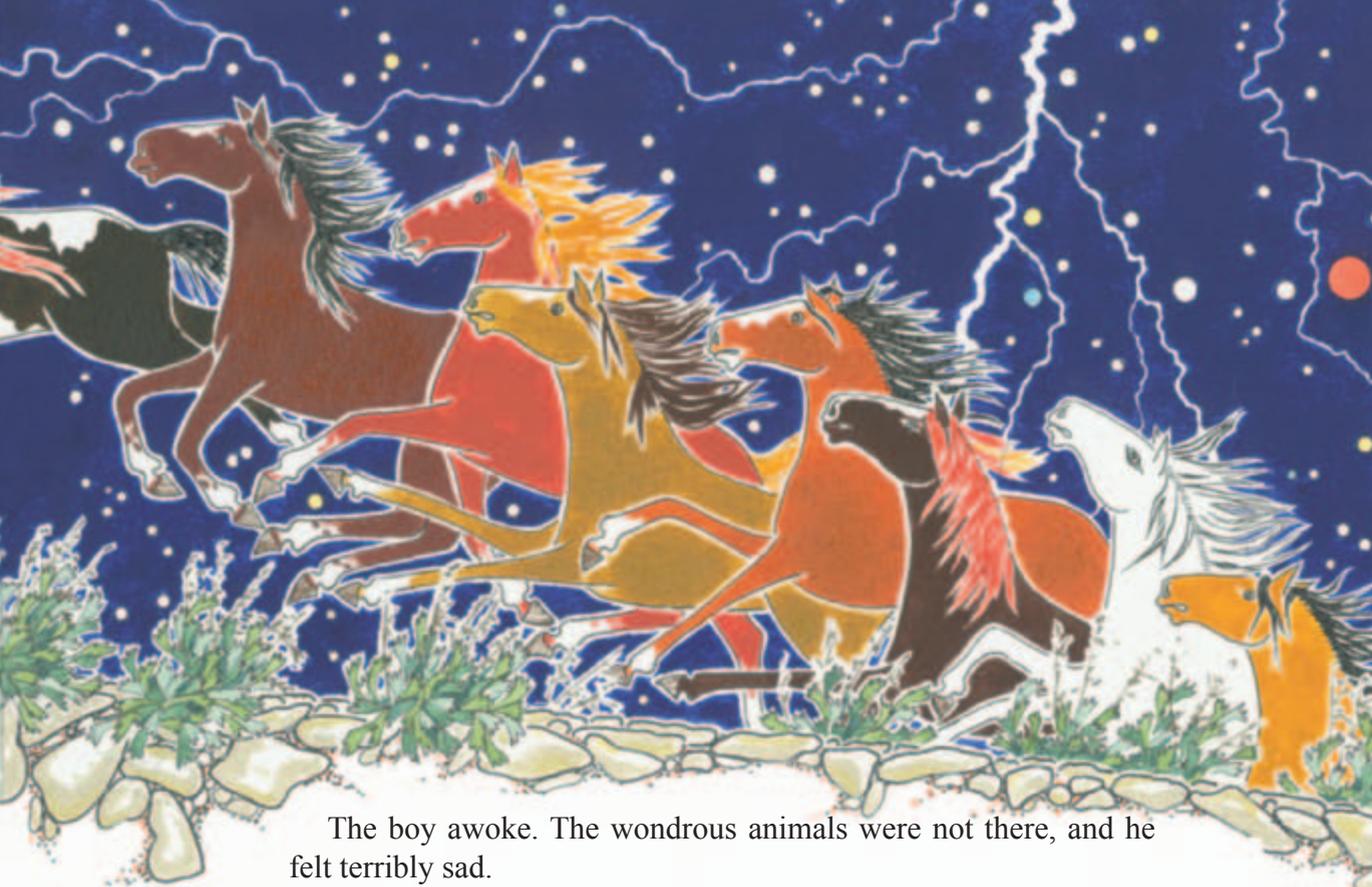
Sometimes he went to the chief's lodge. The chief was kind. He felt the misery of the poor boy, and was sad to see him hungry and poorly clothed. He asked the women to give the boy food, as for an honored guest. When he sent the boy away, it was always with something to wear, a fine blanket, fringed leggings, or decorated moccasins. People chided the chief: "Why waste anything nice on the boy?" But the chief would always answer: "*Tirawa* loves him. One day he may be of help to us." People laughed.

One night the boy took his blanket to a hilltop near the village.

When we lie down looking up at the stars, and we hear the rumble of far-off thunder, who can say if we fall asleep?

Suddenly there were strange and magnificent animals in the sky, prancing hither and thither, back and forth. Thunder and lightning were in their legs, and hair on their necks and tails were swirling clouds. "Horses! These will be yours!" a voice said. "Look after them and they will carry you far."





The boy awoke. The wondrous animals were not there, and he felt terribly sad.

Before anyone was awake, he went to the river bank where there were clays of many colors: red, yellow, blue, black, and white. He shaped and smoothed, and lovingly molded the mud, keeping in his mind's eye the wonderful animals he had seen in the sky. "Horses!" the voice had called them. "All these will be yours." He made mud horses of every pattern and color, just as he had seen.

Every morning he took his mud horses to drink at the river. "Look after them," the voice said, "and they will carry you far." He loved them. They were his family. He took them from one pasture to another, looking for the choicest grass, the sweetest flowers. When evening came, he laid them down for the night in the shelter of bushes.

Another night the boy went to the hilltop, hoping to see the riders in the sky once more.

Hearing distant thunder drumming, who knows whether we dream?

The drumming grew louder and louder and everything, everywhere, was rushing wind and rain and flashing lightning. Despite the din, he heard singing, and again the voice: "Your horses are waiting! Now, this night!"

The boy ran down to where he had left his mud horses. There, standing in the moonlight and shadows, looking at him with glistening eyes and pointed ears, were real living horses. Neighing