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Opening extract from
The Little Prince

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The Little Prince



ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY





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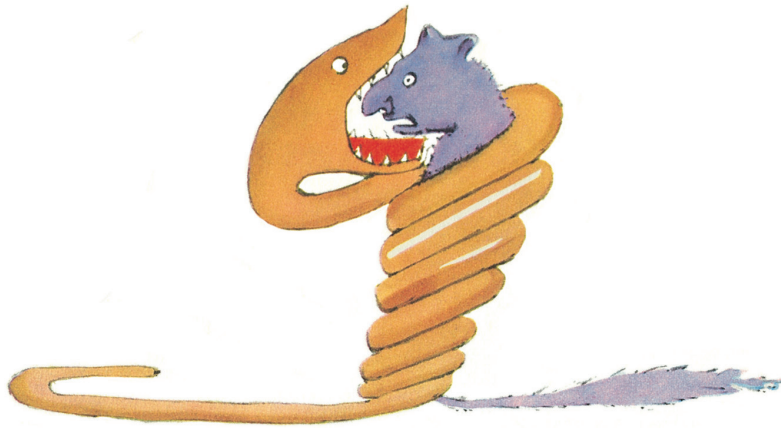
Our story began over a century ago, when seventeen-year-old Egmont Harald Petersen found a coin in the street.

He was on his way to buy a flyswatter, a small hand-operated printing machine that he then set up in his tiny apartment.

The coin brought him such good luck that today Egmont has offices in over 30 countries around the world. And that lucky coin is still kept at the company's head offices in Denmark.



*In order to make his escape, I believe he took advantage
of a migration of wild birds.*

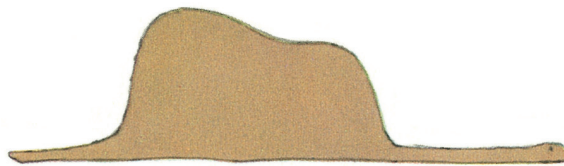


I

Once when I was six I saw a magnificent picture in a book about the jungle, called *True Stories*. It showed a boa constrictor swallowing a wild beast. Here is a copy of the picture.

In the book it said: 'Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing. Afterwards they are no longer able to move, and they sleep during the six months of their digestion.'

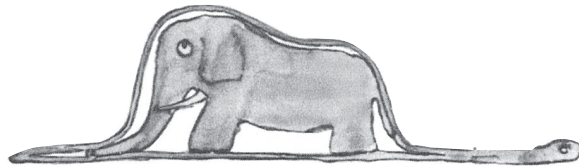
In those days I thought a lot about jungle adventures, and eventually managed to make my first drawing, using a coloured pencil. My drawing Number One looked like this:



I showed the grown-ups my masterpiece, and I asked them if my drawing scared them.

They answered, 'Why be scared of a hat?'

My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. Then I drew the inside of the boa constrictor, so the grown-ups could understand. They always need explanations. My drawing Number Two looked like this:



The grown-ups advised me to put away my drawings of boa constrictors, outside or inside, and apply myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why I abandoned, at the age of six, a magnificent career as an artist. I had been discouraged by the failure of my drawing Number One and of my drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations over and over again.

So then I had to choose another career, and I learned to pilot aeroplanes. I have flown almost everywhere in the world. And, as a matter of fact, geography has been a big help to me. I could tell China from Arizona at first glance, which is very useful if you get lost during the night.

So I have had, in the course of my life, lots of encounters with lots of serious people. I have spent lots of time with grown-ups. I have seen them at close range . . . which hasn't much improved

my opinion of them.

Whenever I encountered a grown-up who seemed to me at all enlightened, I would experiment on him with my drawing Number One, which I have always kept. I wanted to see if he really understood anything. But he would always answer, 'That's a hat.' Then I wouldn't talk about boa constrictors or jungles or stars. I would put myself on his level and talk about bridge and golf and politics and neckties. And my grown-up was glad to know such a reasonable person.

II

So I lived all alone, without anyone I could really talk to, until I had to make a crash-landing in the Sahara Desert six years ago. Something in my plane's engine had broken, and since I had neither a mechanic nor passengers in the plane with me, I was preparing to undertake the difficult repair job by myself. For me, it was a matter of life or death: I had only enough drinking water for eight days.

The first night, then, I went to sleep on the sand a thousand miles from any inhabited country. I was more isolated than a man shipwrecked on a raft in the middle of the ocean. So you can imagine my surprise when I was awakened at daybreak by a funny little voice saying, 'Please . . . draw me a sheep . . .'

'What?'

'Draw me a sheep . . .'

I leaped up as if I had been struck by lightning. I rubbed my eyes hard. I stared. And I saw an extraordinary little fellow staring back at me very seriously. Here is the best portrait I managed to make of him, later on. But of course my drawing is much less attractive than my model. This is not my fault. My career as a painter was discouraged at the age of six by the grown-ups, and I had never learned to draw anything except boa constrictors, outside and inside.

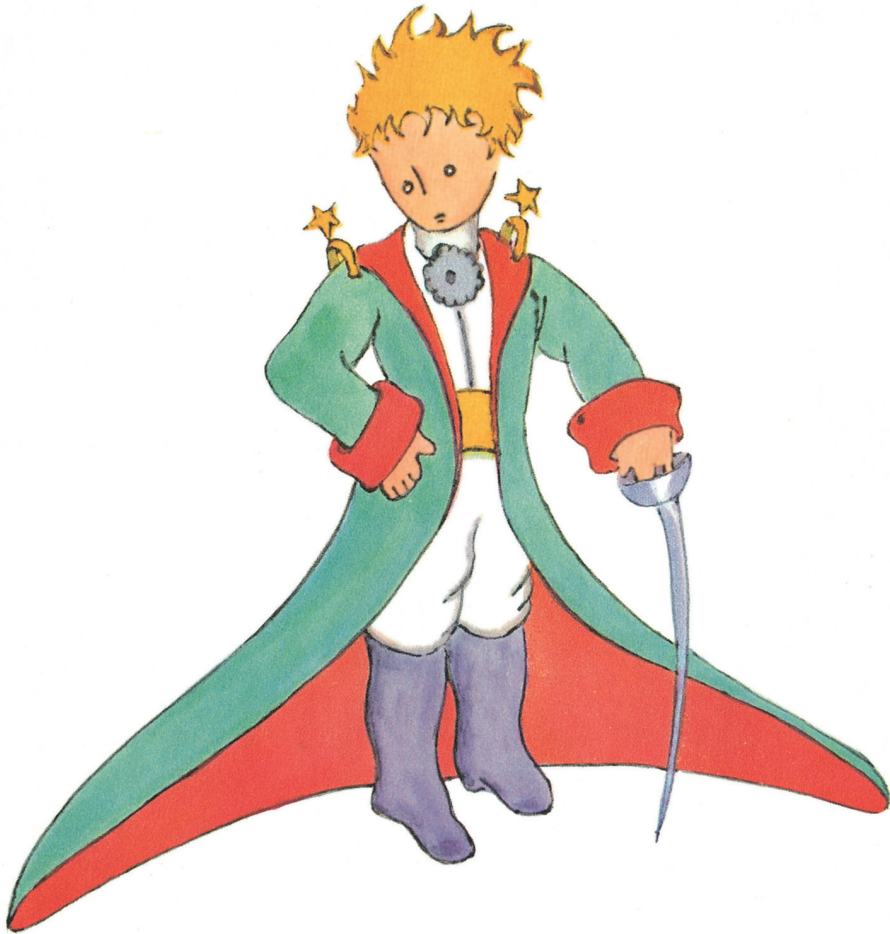
So I stared wide-eyed at this apparition. Don't forget that I was a thousand miles from any inhabited territory. Yet this little fellow seemed to be neither lost nor dying of exhaustion, hunger or thirst; nor did he seem scared to death. There was nothing in his appearance that suggested a child lost in the middle of the desert a thousand miles from any inhabited territory. When I finally managed to speak, I asked him, 'But . . . what are you doing here?'

And then he repeated, very slowly and very seriously, 'Please . . . draw me a sheep . . .'

In the face of an overpowering mystery, you don't dare disobey. Absurd as it seemed, a thousand miles from all inhabited regions and in danger of death, I took a scrap of paper and a pen out of my pocket. But then I remembered that I had mostly studied geography, history, arithmetic and grammar, and I told the little fellow (rather crossly) that I didn't know how to draw.

He replied, 'That doesn't matter. Draw me a sheep.'

Since I had never drawn a sheep, I made him one of the only two



Here is the best portrait I managed to make of him, later on.

drawings I knew how to make – the one of the boa constrictor from outside. And I was astounded to hear the little fellow answer:



‘No! No! I don’t want an elephant inside a boa constrictor. A boa constrictor is very dangerous, and an elephant would get in the way. Where I live, everything is very small. I need a sheep. Draw me a sheep.’

So then I made a drawing. He looked at it carefully, and then said, ‘No. This one is already quite sick. Make another.’

I made another drawing. My friend gave me a kind, indulgent smile: ‘You can see for yourself . . . that’s not a sheep, it’s a ram. It has horns . . .’



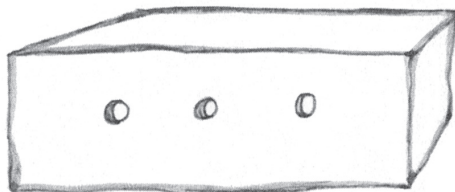
So I made my third drawing, but it was rejected, like the others: ‘This one’s too old. I want a sheep that will live a long time.’

So then, impatiently, since I was in a hurry to start work on my engine, I scribbled this drawing, and added, ‘This is just the crate. The sheep you want is inside.’



But I was amazed to see my young critic’s face light up. ‘That’s just the kind I wanted! Do you think this sheep will need a lot of grass?’

‘Why?’



‘Because where I live, everything is very small . . .’
‘There’s sure to be enough. I’ve given you a very small sheep.’
He bent over the drawing. ‘Not so small as all that . . . Look! He’s gone to sleep . . .’

And that’s how I made the acquaintance of the little prince.

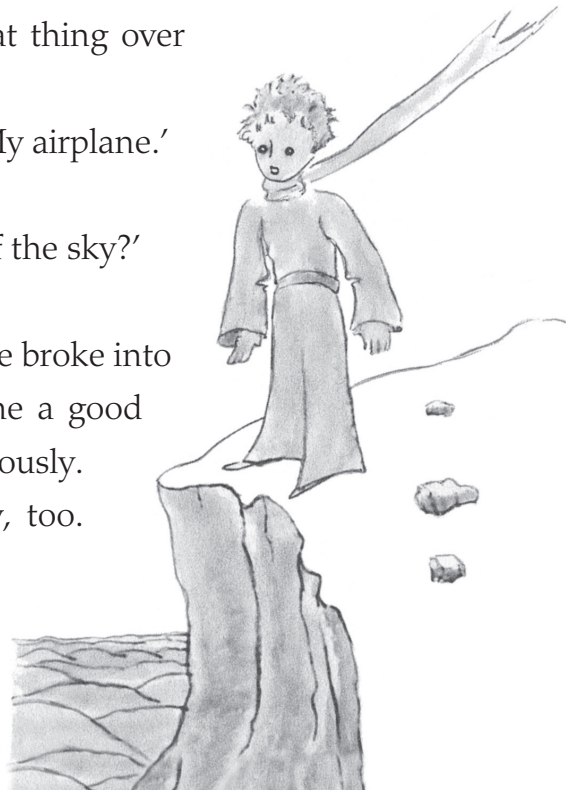
III

It took me a long time to understand where he came from. The little prince, who asked me so many questions, never seemed to hear the ones I asked him. It was things he said quite at random that, bit by bit, explained everything. For instance, when he first caught sight of my airplane (I won’t draw my airplane; that would be much too complicated for me) he asked: ‘What’s that thing over there?’

‘It’s not a thing. It flies. It’s an airplane. My airplane.’
And I was proud to tell him I could fly.

Then he exclaimed: ‘What! You fell out of the sky?’
‘Yes,’ I said modestly.

‘Oh! That’s funny . . .’ And the little prince broke into a lovely peal of laughter, which annoyed me a good deal. I like my misfortunes to be taken seriously. Then he added, ‘So you fell out of the sky, too. What planet are you from?’



That was when I had the first clue to the mystery of his presence, and I questioned him sharply. ‘Do you come from another planet?’

But he made no answer. He shook his head a little, still staring at my airplane. ‘Of course, that couldn’t have brought you from very far . . .’ And he fell into a reverie that lasted a long while. Then, taking my sheep out of his pocket, he plunged into contemplation of his treasure.

YOU CAN IMAGINE how intrigued I was by this hint about ‘other planets’. I tried to learn more: ‘Where do you come from, little fellow? Where is this ‘where I live’ of yours? Where will you be taking my sheep?’

After a thoughtful silence he answered, ‘The good thing about the crate you’ve given me is that he can use it for a house after dark.’

‘Of course. And if you’re good, I’ll give you a rope to tie him up during the day. And a stake to tie him to.’

This proposition seemed to shock the little prince.

‘Tie him up? What a funny idea!’

‘But if you don’t tie him up, he’ll wander off somewhere and get lost.’

My friend burst out laughing again. ‘Where could he go?’

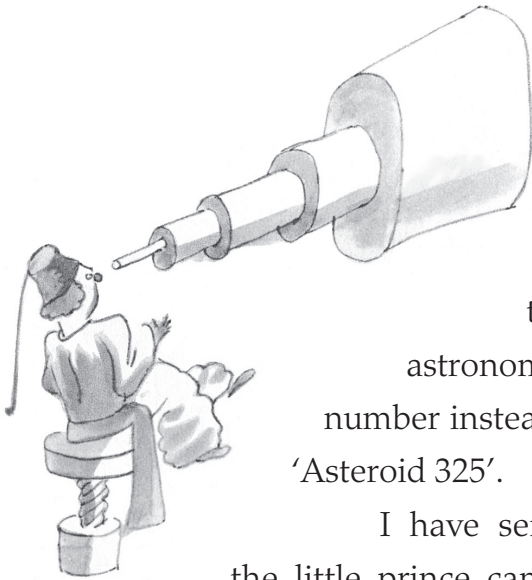
‘Anywhere. Straight ahead . . .’

Then the little prince remarked quite seriously, ‘Even if he did, everything’s so small where I live!’ And he added, perhaps a little sadly, ‘Straight ahead, you can’t go very far.’



IV

That was how I had learned a second very important thing, which was that the planet he came from was hardly bigger than a house!



That couldn't surprise me much. I knew very well that except for the huge planets like Earth, Jupiter, Mars, and Venus, which have been given names, there are hundreds of others that are sometimes so small that it's very difficult to see them through a telescope. When an astronomer discovers one of them, he gives it a number instead of a name. For instance, he would call it 'Asteroid 325'.

I have serious reasons to believe that the planet the little prince came from is Asteroid B-612. This asteroid has been sighted only once by telescope, in 1909 by a Turkish astronomer, who had then made a formal demonstration of his discovery at an International Astronomical Congress. But no one had believed him on account of the way he was dressed. Grown-ups are like that.

Fortunately for the reputation of Asteroid B-612, a Turkish dictator ordered his people, on pain of death, to wear European clothes.