

The Little Prince



Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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ABOUT THE BOOK & AUTHOR

SAINT-EXUPÉRY, Antoine de (1900-44). An adventurous pilot and a lyrical poet, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry conveyed in his books the solitude and mystic grandeur of the early days of flight. He described dangerous adventures in the skies and also wrote the whimsical children's fable 'The Little Prince'.

Antoine-Saint-Exupéry was born on June 29, 1900, in Lyon, France. In the 1920s he helped establish airmail routes overseas. During World War II he flew as a military reconnaissance pilot. After the Germans occupied France in 1940, he escaped to the United States. He rejoined the air force in North Africa in 1943. During what was to have been his final reconnaissance mission over the Mediterranean

Sea, he died when his plane was shot down on July 31, 1944.

Saint-Exupéry's first book, 'Southern Mail', was about the life and death of an airmail pilot. It was published in French in 1929. Other books include 'Night Flight' (1931), about the first airline pilots, and 'Wind, Sand, and Stars' (1939), in which he describes his feelings during flights over the desert.

'The Little Prince' (1943), which in a way is really a children's book for grown-ups, was written during Saint-Exupéry's stay in the United States. A gentle and thoughtful book, it tells the story of a boy who lives alone on a tiny planet.

A final volume of reflections, which provides an insight into the author's views on the meaning of life, is 'The Wisdom of the Sands' (1948). This book was published after the pilot's death.

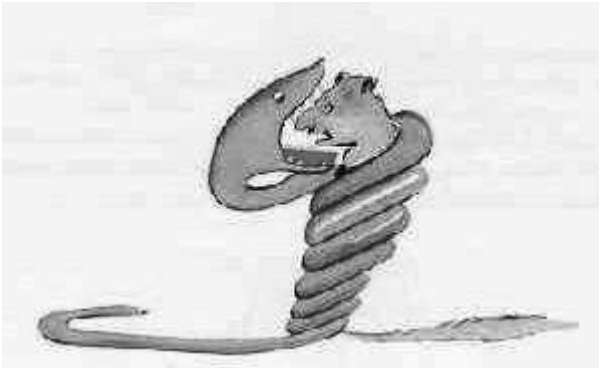
To Leon Werth

I ask the indulgence of the children who may read this book for dedicating it to a grown-up. I have a serious reason: he is the best friend I have in the world. I have another reason: this grown-up understands everything, even books about children. I have a third reason: he lives in France where he is hungry and cold. He needs cheering up. If all these reasons are not enough, I will dedicate the book to the child from whom this grown-up grew. All grown-ups were once children--although few of them remember it. And so I correct my dedication:

To Leon Werth
when he was a little boy

Chapter 1

we are introduced to the narrator, a pilot, and his ideas about grown-ups



Once when I was six years old I saw a magnificent picture in a book, called True Stories from Nature, about the primeval forest. It was a picture of a boa constrictor in the act of swallowing an animal. Here is a copy of the drawing.

In the book it said: "Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing it. After that they are not able to move, and they sleep through the six months that they need for digestion."

I pondered deeply, then, over the adventures of the jungle. And after some work with a colored pencil I

succeeded in making my first drawing. My Drawing Number One. It looked like this:



I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them.

But they answered: "Frighten? Why should any one be frightened by a hat?"

My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. But since the grown-ups were not able to understand it, I made another drawing: I drew the inside of the boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could see it clearly. They always need to have things explained. My Drawing Number Two looked like this:



The grown-ups' response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter. I had been disheartened by the failure of my Drawing Number One and my Drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

So then I chose another profession, and learned to pilot airplanes. I have flown a little over all parts of the world; and it is true that geography has been very useful to me. At a glance I can distinguish China from Arizona. If one gets lost in the night, such knowledge is valuable.

In the course of this life I have had a great many encounters with a great many people who have been concerned with matters of consequence. I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn't much improved my opinion of them.

Whenever I met one of them who seemed to me at

all clear-sighted, I tried the experiment of showing him my Drawing Number One, which I have always kept. I would try to find out, so, if this was a person of true understanding. But, whoever it was, he, or she, would always say:

"That is a hat."

Then I would never talk to that person about boa constrictors, or primeval forests, or stars. I would bring myself down to his level. I would talk to him about bridge, and golf, and politics, and neckties. And the grown-up would be greatly pleased to have met such a sensible man.

Chapter 2

**the narrator crashes in the desert and makes
the acquaintance of the little prince**

So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to, until I had an accident with my plane in the Desert of Sahara, six years ago. Something was broken in my engine. And as I had with me neither a mechanic nor any passengers, I set myself to attempt the difficult repairs all alone. It was a question of life or death for me: I had scarcely enough drinking water to last a week.

The first night, then, I went to sleep on the sand, a thousand miles from any human habitation. I was more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. Thus you can imagine my amazement, at sunrise, when I was awakened by an odd little voice. It said:

"If you please-- draw me a sheep!" "What!"

"Draw me a sheep!"

I jumped to my feet, completely thunderstruck. I blinked my eyes hard. I looked carefully all around

me. And I saw a most extraordinary small person, who stood there examining me with great seriousness. Here you may see the best potrait that, later, I was able to make of him. But my drawing is certainly very much less charming than its model.



That, however, is not my fault. The grown-ups discouraged me in my painter's career when I was six years old, and I never learned to draw anything, except boas from the outside and boas from the inside.

Now I stared at this sudden apparition with my eyes fairly starting out of my head in astonishment. Remember, I had crashed in the desert a thousand miles from any inhabited region. And yet my little man seemed neither to be straying uncertainly among the sands, nor to be fainting from fatigue or hunger or thirst or fear. Nothing about him gave any suggestion

of a child lost in the middle of the desert, a thousand miles from any human habitation.

When at last I was able to speak, I said to him:

"But-- what are you doing here?"

And in answer he repeated, very slowly, as if he were speaking of a matter of great consequence: "If you please-- draw me a sheep..."

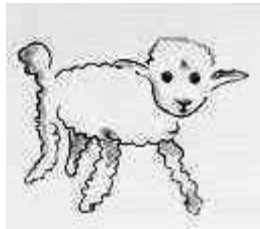
When a mystery is too overpowering, one dare not disobey. Absurd as it might seem to me, a thousand miles from any human habitation and in danger of death, I took out of my pocket a sheet of paper and my fountain-pen. But then I remembered how my studies had been concentrated on geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar, and I told the little chap (a little crossly, too) that I did not know how to draw. He answered me:

"That doesn't matter. Draw me a sheep..."

But I had never drawn a sheep. So I drew for him one of the two pictures I had drawn so often. It was that of the boa constrictor from the outside. And I was astounded to hear the little fellow greet it with,

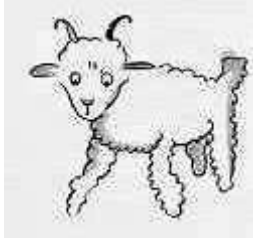
"No, no, no! I do not want an elephant inside a boa constrictor. A boa constrictor is a very dangerous creature, and an elephant is very cumbersome. Where I live, everything is very small. What I need is a sheep. Draw me a sheep."

So then I made a drawing.



He looked at it carefully, then he said:

"No. This sheep is already very sickly. Make me another." So I made another drawing.



My friend smiled gently and indulgently.

"You see yourself," he said, "that this is not a sheep. This is a ram. It has horns."

So then I did my drawing over once more.



But it was rejected too, just like the others.