

The Little Prince

Autor(en): **Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de**

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from THE LITTLE PRINCE

by *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a true artist and airman of poetic imagination, once made a forced landing in the Sahara, alone and a thousand miles from help. On the burning sands of the desert he loved so dearly, he was awakened by a voice saying «If you please, draw me a sheep». Thus it was he met the Little Prince, whose strange history he learned bit by bit in the days that followed.

The Little Prince lived alone on a tiny planet no larger than a house. He possessed three volcanoes, two active and one extinct, although one never knows about volcanoes. He also owned a flower, unlike any flower in all the galaxy, of great beauty and of inordinate pride. It was this pride that ruined the serenity of the Little Prince's world and started him on the travels that brought him at last to the Earth, where he learned finally, from a fox, the secret of what is really important in life.

* * *

When the little prince arrived on the Earth, he was very much surprised not to see any people. He was beginning to be afraid he had come to the wrong planet, when a coil of gold the colour of the moonlight flashed across the sand.

«Good evening», said the little prince courteously.

«Good evening», said the snake.

«What planet is this on which I have come down?» asked the little prince.

«This is the Earth; this is Africa», the snake answered.

«Ah! Then there are no people on the Earth? »

«This is the desert. There are no people in the desert. The Earth is large», said the snake.

The little prince sat down on a stone and raised his eyes toward the sky. «I wonder», he said, «whether the stars are set alight in heaven so that one day each one of us may find his own again... Look at my planet. It is right there above us. But how far away it is!»

«It is beautiful», the snake said. «What has brought you here?»

«I have been having some trouble with a flower», said the little prince.

«Ah!» said the snake. And they were both silent.

«Where are the men?» the little prince at last took up the conversation again. «It is a little lonely in the desert...»

«It is also lonely among men», the snake said.

The little prince gazed at him for a long time. «You are a funny animal», he said at last. «You are no thicker than a finger...»

«But I am more powerful than the finger of a king», said the snake.

The little prince smiled. «You are not very powerful. You haven't even any feet. You cannot even travel...»

«I can carry you farther than any ship could take you», said the snake.

He twined himself around the little prince's ankle like a golden bracelet. «Whomever I touch, I send back to the earth from whence they came», the snake spoke again. «But you are innocent and true, and you come from a star . . .»

The little prince made no reply.

«You move me to pity — you are so weak on this Earth made of granite», the snake spoke again. «I can help you, some day, if you grow too homesick for your own planet. I can —»

«Oh! I understand you very well», said the little prince. «But why do you always speak in riddles?»

«I solve them all», said the snake.

And they were both silent.

* * *

It was then that the fox appeared.

«Good morning», said the fox.

«Good morning», the little prince responded politely. «Who are you?» And he added, «You are very pretty to look at.»

«I am a fox», the fox said.

«Come and play with me», proposed the little prince. «I am so unhappy».

«I cannot play with you», the fox said. «I am not tamed.»

«What does that mean — 'tame'?»

«It is an act too often neglected», said the fox. «It means to establish ties.»

«To establish ties?»

«Just that», said the fox. «To me you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me you will be unique in all the world. To you I shall be unique in all the world . . .»

«I am beginning to understand», said the little prince. «There is a flower . . . I think that she has tamed me . . .»

«My life is very monotonous», said the fox. «I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat . . .»

The fox gazed at the little prince for a long time.

«Please — tame me!» he said.

«I want to, very much», the little prince replied. «But I have not much time. I have friends to discover, and a great many things to understand.»

«One only understands the things that one tames», said the fox. «Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things already made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me . . .»

So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew near — —.

«Ah», said the fox, «I shall cry».

«It is your own fault», said the little prince. «I never wished you any sort of harm; but you wanted me to tame you . . .»

«Yes, that is so», said the fox.

«But now you are going to cry!» said the little prince.

«Yes, that is so», said the fox.

«Then it has done you no good at all!»

«It has done me good», said the fox, «because of the colour of the wheat fields.»

«Goodbye», said the little prince.

«Goodbye», said the fox. «And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important. Men have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed. You are responsible for your rose . . .»

«I am responsible for my rose», the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember.

* * *

It was now the eighth day since I had had my accident in the desert, and I was drinking the last drop of my water supply.

«Ah», I said to the little prince, «I have not yet succeeded in repairing my plane; I have nothing more to drink; and I am about to die of thirst . . .»

He answered me, «It is a good thing to have a friend, even if one is about to die. I, for instance, am very glad to have a fox as a friend . . .»

«He has no way of guessing the danger», I said to myself. «He has never been either hungry or thirsty. A little sunshine is all that he needs . . .»

But he looked at me steadily and replied to my thought:

«I am thirsty, too. Let us look for a well . . .»

I made a gesture of weariness. It is absurd to look for a well, at random, in the immensity of the desert. But nevertheless we started walking.

When we had trudged along for several hours, in silence, the darkness fell and the stars began to come out. He was tired. He sat down. I sat down beside him. And, after a little silence, he spoke:

«The stars are beautiful because of a flower that cannot be seen.»

I replied, «Yes, that is so.» And, without saying anything more, I looked across the ridges of sand that were stretched out before us in the moonlight.

«The desert is beautiful», the little prince added. «What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well...»

I was astonished by a sudden understanding of that mysterious radiation of the sands. «Yes», I said to the little prince. «The stars, the desert — what gives them their beauty is something that is invisible!»

«I am glad», he said, «that you agree with my fox.»

As the little prince dropped off to sleep, I took him in my arms and set out walking once more. I felt deeply moved and stirred. It seemed to me that I was carrying a very fragile treasure. It seemed to me, even, that there was nothing more fragile on all the Earth. In the moonlight I looked at his pale forehead, his closed eyes, his locks of hair that trembled in the wind, and I said to myself: «What I see here is nothing but a shell. What is most important is invisible...»

As his lips opened slightly with the suspicion of a half-smile, I said to myself again: «What moves me so deeply about this little prince who is sleeping here is his loyalty to a flower — the image of a rose that shines through his whole being like the flame of a lamp, even when he is asleep...» And I felt him to be more fragile still. I felt the need of protecting him, as if he himself were a flame that might be extinguished by a little puff of wind...

And, as I walked on so, I found the well, at daybreak.

* * *

Beside the well there was the ruin of an old stone wall. When I came back from my work the next evening, I saw from some distance away my little prince sitting on top of this wall, with his feet dangling. I dropped my eyes to the foot of the wall — and I leaped into the air. There before me, facing the little prince, was one of those yellow snakes that take thirty seconds to bring your life to an end. Even as I was digging into my pocket to get out my revolver I made a running step back. But, at the noise I made, the snake let himself flow easily across the sand like the dying spray of a fountain and, in no apparent hurry, disappeared, with a light metallic sound, among the stones. I reached the wall just in time to catch my little man in my arms: his face was white as snow.

«What does this mean?» I demanded. «Why are you talking with snakes?»

I had loosened the golden muffler that he always wore. I had moistened his temples and had given him some water to drink. And now I did not dare ask him any more questions. He looked at me very gravely and put his arms around my neck. I felt his heart beating like the heart of a dying bird shot with someone's rifle...

«I am glad that you have found what was the matter with your engine», he said. «Now you can go back home —».

«How do you know about that?»

I was just coming to tell him that my work had been successful beyond anything that I had dared to hope.

He made no answer to my question, but he added:

«I, too, am going back home today...»

Then, sadly —. «It is much farther... It is much more difficult...»

I realized clearly that something extraordinary was happening. I was holding him close in my arms as if he were a little child; and yet it seemed to me that he was rushing headlong toward an abyss from which I could do nothing to restrain him...

His look was very serious, like someone lost far away. And he gave me a sad smile.

I waited a long time. I could see that he was reviving little by little. «Little man», I said, «I want to hear you laugh again.»

But he said to me:

«Tonight it will be a year... My star, then, can be found right above the place where I came to the Earth a year ago...»

«Little man,» I said, «tell me that it is only a bad dream — this affair of the snake, and the meeting-place, and the star...»

But he did not answer my plea. He said to me, instead:

«The thing that is important is the thing that is not seen...»

«Yes, I know...»

«It is just as it is with the flower. If you love a flower that lives on a star, it is sweet to look at the sky at night. All the stars are a-bloom with flowers...»

«Yes, I know...»

«It is just as it is with the water. Because of the pulley, and the rope, what you gave me to drink was like music. You remember-how good it was.»

«Yes, I know...»

«And at night you will look up at the stars. Where I live everything is so small that I cannot show you where my star is to be found. It is better, like that. My star will be just one of the stars, for you. And so you will love watch all the stars in the heavens... They will all be your friends.»

«Ah, little prince, dear little prince! I love to hear your laughter!»

«In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night... You — only you — will have stars that can laugh!»

And he laughed.

«And when your sorrow is comforted (time soothes all sorrows) you will be content that you have known me. You will always be my friend. You will want to laugh with me. And you will sometimes open your window, so, for that pleasure.. And your friends will be properly astonished to see you laughing as you look up at the sky! It will be as if, in place of the stars, I had given you a great number of little bells that knew how to laugh...»

And he laughed again. Then he quickly became serious:

«Tonight — you know... Do not come.»

«I shall not leave you,» I said.

«I shall look as if I were dying. It is like that. Do not come to see that. It is not worth the trouble...»

«I shall not leave you.»

That night I did not see him set out on his way. He got away from me without making a sound. When I succeeded in catching up with him he was walking along with a quick and resolute step. He said to me merely:

«Ah! You are there...»

And he took me by the hand. But he was still worrying.

«It was wrong of you to come. You will suffer. I shall look as if I were dead; and that will not be true...»

I said nothing.

He was a little discouraged. But he made one more effort:

«You know, it will be very nice. I, too, shall look at the stars. All the stars will be wells with a rusty pulley. All the stars will pour out fresh water for me to drink...»

I said nothing.

«That will be so amusing! You will have five hundred million little bells, and I shall have five hundred million springs of fresh water...»

And he too said nothing more, because he was crying...

«Here it is. Let me go on by myself.»

And he sat down, because he was afraid. Then he said, again:

You know — my flower — I am responsible for her. And she is so weak! She is so naive! She has four thorns, of no use at all, to protect herself against all the world...»

I too sat down, because I was not able to stand up any longer.

«There now — that is all...»

He still hesitated a little; then he got up. He took one step. I could not move.

There was nothing there but a flash of yellow close to his ankle. He remained motionless for an instant. He did not cry out. He fell as gently as a tree falls. There was not even any sound, because of the sand.

* * *

And now six years have already gone by... I have never yet told this story. The companions who met me on my return were well content to see me alive. I was sad, but told them: «I am tired.»

Now my sorrow is comforted a little. That is to say -- not entirely. But I know that he did go back to his planet, because I did not find his body at daybreak. It was not such a heavy body... And at night I love to listen to the stars. It is like five hundred million little bells...

Here, then, is a great mystery. For you who also love the little prince, and for me, nothing in the universe can be the same. Look up at the sky. And you will see how everything changes...

