



## *A READER'S JOURNAL*

### **The Little Prince**

by

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2007



This is a fairy tale for adults. It provides a chance for each of us to see the world for a short time through the eyes of a child. Each adult lives on a small planet, as it were alone. If we are of a monarchical bent, every person who comes into our presence will be treated like a subject. If we are of a conceited nature, any words spoken to us but words of praise will go unheard and unheeded. If we drink to forget, the biggest thing we want to forget will be that we are ashamed of drinking. If we like business things we will spend our time counting the things that we consider to be ours, be it cattle, oil wells, buildings, or money. When the little prince visits each of these people, he goes away saying, "Adults are strange." Only the lamplighter who has to light his lamp at sunset and douse the light at dawn seems to have a useful occupation. Since the days on the lamplighter's planet only lasts for a minute, he is kept constantly busy, even during a short conversation with the little prince.

**[page 46, 47 little prince to himself] "It may well be that this man is absurd. But he is not so absurd as the king, the conceited man, the businessman, and the tippler. For at least his work has some meaning. When he lights his street lamp, it is as if he brought one more star to life, or one flower. When he puts out his lamp, he sends the flower, or the star, to sleep. That is a beautiful occupation. And since it is beautiful, it is truly useful."**

Children live in a world of their own. When at six, the author made a drawing of a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant, all the adults saw only a hat. So he did another drawing of the inside of the boa revealing the elephant, and the same adults convinced him to abandon drawing as a career. His reaction as an adult now should be a constant reminder to us of how little adults understand the world of small children:

**[page 2] Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.**

So little Antoine grew up to be an airplane pilot. He flew all over the world. He met a lot of people of all levels of importance and consequence.

**[page 3] I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately. And that hasn't improved my opinion of them.**

He carried his drawing No. 1 with him, and whenever he showed it to an adult and asked them what they saw, they always said, "It's a hat." People who can only see the surfaces of things can be a bore, but worse, if you do not accept their version of reality, they might become downright nasty. What's a kid in grown-up clothes to do with such people?

**[page 3] 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 gold, and politics, and neckties. And the grown-up would be greatly pleased to have met such a sensible man.**



As an adult, the pilot's plane broke down and he landed in the middle of the Sahara Desert one day. He met an extraordinary little boy who asked him pleadingly, "Draw me a sheep." Over and over he pleaded, nicely, but demandingly, too. What the pilot said about this strange demand from a little boy who had appeared from nowhere in the middle of nowhere is intriguing. I have studied the work of Milton Erickson, M.D., a world-famous hypnotherapist for over fifty years. He told long stories to his clients and often made mysterious demands of them. The pilot comments about the demand of the little prince that he draw a sheep for him:

**[page 6] When a mystery is too overpowering, one dare not disobey.**

He draws one sheep, then another, then another, and each sheep is unacceptable to the prince, until finally, in desperation, he draws a box with air holes and the prince is

delighted! The reason for his delight will be lost on parents who give their children tons of fancy toys to play with. Or dozens of elegantly coiffured and clad porcelain dolls. The little girl would be delighted to have a doll made from a stuffed sock with buttons for its eyes, because their imagination would do the rest!

**[page 7] So I tossed off this drawing.**

**And I threw out an explanation with it.**

**"This is only his box. The sheep you asked for is inside."**

**I was very surprised to see a light break over the face of my young judge:**

**"That is exactly the way I wanted it! Do you think that this sheep will have to eat a great deal of grass?"**

Unable to cross-examine the little prince, by fits and starts, the pilot began to form an idea of the little prince's home planet, a small asteroid the size of a house called B-612. It was discovered by a Turkish astronomer in 1909, but clothing is important to adults, and since he went dressed in his native Turkish costume, the International Congress to which he presented his finding laughed at him. Later, in 1920, he dressed in a business suit, offered the same finding, and they accepted his discovery.

Adults don't accept living proof, they want numbers, figures, data, statistics, descriptions of the surface of the thing discussed. The author asks us to consider what would qualify as evidence for adults that the little

prince existed. He suggests that we might offer as proof that he wanted a sheep. Only a living being could want a sheep.

**[page 13, 14] "The proof that the little prince existed is that he was charming, that he laughed, and that he was looking for a sheep. If anybody wants a sheep, that is a proof that he exists." And what good would that do to tell them that? They would shrug their shoulders, and treat you like a child. But if you said to them: "The planet he came from is Asteroid B-612," then they would be convinced, and leave you in peace from their questions.**

Have you ever had a friend? Sure, you say, many friends. But I'm talking about a special friend, one you are always overjoyed to see, who is always available when you need help, who likes you even when you two disagree with each other. My wife is such a friend and she taught me a special name for such a friend. It's a useful name but it helps distinguish the dime-a-dozen friends from a real friend. She calls a real friend, a *friendie*. That is not a grown-up name, I assure you. No grown-up would use such a name, so be careful that you only use it far away from the ears of grown-ups. The little prince quickly became the pilot's friendie. He dared not forget his friendie as he informs us in this next passage:

**[page 14] For I do not want anyone to read my book carelessly. I have suffered too much grief in setting down these memories. Six years have already passed since my friend went away from me, with his sheep. If I try to describe him here, it is to make sure that I shall not forget him. To forget a friend is sad. Not everyone has had a friend. And if I forget him, I may become like the grown-ups who are no longer interested in anything but figures . . .**

His friendie was not an adult. How can we be sure?

**[page 15] My friend never explained anything to me. He thought, perhaps, that I was like himself. But I, alas, do not know how to see sheep through the walls of boxes. Perhaps I am a little like the grown-ups. I have had to grow old.**

Your young children, dear Parents, will grow old and that will be soon enough to ask for explanations from them. Until then treat them as the royalty they are in the kingdom of childhood. Ask them to describe, not to explain, and you will be welcomed into their court and you will leave amply rewards with jewels from their royal treasury.

The little prince spent his time pulling up any baobab seedlings and wanted a sheep to eat them before they got so big they would overwhelm his small planet. One day he noticed a strange plant arising which had thorns on it. It turned into a beautiful rose which talked him. He tended to her needs and he loved her. But soon he began to notice something in what she told him. He realized that "he had taken seriously words which were without importance, and it made him very unhappy." It was then he began thinking of leaving. He recalled that day to the pilot. It seems to be the tale of many a young man who was attracted to some sweet young thing.

**[page 28, 29] "I ought not to have listened to her," he confided to me once. "One never ought to listen to the flowers. One should simply look at them and breathe their fragrance. Mine perfumed all my planet. but I did not know how to take pleasure in all her grace. This tale of claws, which disturbed me so much, should only have filled my heart with tenderness and pity."**

And he continued his confidences:

**"The fact is that I did not know how to understand anything! I ought to have judged by deeds and not by words. She cast her fragrance and her radiance over me. I ought never to have run away from her . . . I ought to have guessed all the affection that lay behind her poor little stratagems. Flowers are so inconsistent! But I was too young to know how to love her. . ."**

Soon the little prince on his travel to the sixth planet met a geographer, who greeted him with the words, "Oh, look! Here is an explorer!" The geographer explained that he never left his study to explore. That was the job of the explorers who returned to him to explain what they found on their explorations so that he could include that information in his maps. The geographer suggested that the little prince visit Earth for his next planet. "It has a good reputation." (Page 54)

The first animal the little prince found was the snake in the desert. He asked the snake where are the men, and commented that it was a little lonely in the desert. The snake opined, "It's a little lonely among men." (Page 58) The snake offered to help the little prince, er, well, on his way. And he proffered a riddle for us by giving us the answer. Who is it that solves all of our riddles? Read the answer and discover who it is for yourself. Or simply wait for the answer to come. Either way you'll find out.

**[page 60] "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(1).**

**And they were both silent.**

The little prince came upon a solitary flower blooming in the desert and asked her if there were any men. Her answer is very revealing to all humans, especially those who cannot stay in one place long enough to create a space of love for themselves and their family. A plant is forced to respect its roots, but humans have the freedom to disregard their roots and move away on the slightest whim, as if blown by the wind.

**[page 62 The flower speaking to little prince about the absence of men] "No one knows where to find them. The wind blows them away. They have no roots, and that makes their life very difficult."**

The little prince bumped into a fox who asked to be tamed by him. To be tamed by someone is establish ties with them, so that each one becomes special to the other. When the little prince demurred, saying he had lots of friends to discover and many things to understand, the fox told him earnestly:

**[page 70] "One only understands the things that one tames," said the fox. "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends anymore. If you want a friend, tame me . . ."**

A friend, as the fox defined one, is a friendie, someone you know is coming at four pm and you begin being happy at three. The little prince tamed the fox and the fox sent him away to look at lots of roses so that he would come to understand how unique his one rose back home was. The fox promised him a gift when he returned. The fox's gift has become such a gift to the entire world that it is now known best as "The Fox's Secret."

The prince went to visit the roses and found that they not at all like his rose. His rose was tamed, but they were not. He told the roses:

**[page 73] "You are beautiful, but you are empty," he went on. "One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you — the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundred of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is *my* rose."**

He went back to the fox who gave him the gift he promised.

**[page 73] "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."**

The fox explained further what he meant, "It is the time you have devoted to your rose that makes your rose so important." This reminds me of what Oscar Kokoschka in the movie, "Bride of the Wind," said: "Time is the money of love." A rag doll made of a sock stuffed with rags with two buttons for eyes turns *over time* into a beloved object for a little girl. Like the sheep in the box came alive for the little prince, the rag doll comes alive for any little girl lucky enough to be given one. The fancy porcelain dolls purchased by her mother are mere decorations in her room like the wallpaper or curtains. Her mother may change them at will and the child will scarcely notice. But take away her rag doll and she will cry.

The pilot and the little prince walked in search of water. The pilot carried him some of the way. That water was not only life-giving, but it was good for the heart, as the pilot discovered when he gave water to the little prince.

**[page 81] I raised the bucket to his lips. He drank, his eyes closed. It was as sweet as some special festival treat. This water was indeed a different thing from ordinary nourishment. Its sweetness was born of the walk under the stars, the song of the pulley, the effort of my arms. It was good for the heart, like a present. When I was a little boy, the lights of the Christmas tree, the music of the Midnight Mass, the tenderness of smiling faces, used to make up, so, the radiance of the gifts I received.**

Every year on the day of our arrival on planet Earth, our birthday, the star which appeared directly above us on the day of our birth returns to the same place in the sky. The little prince told the pilot about the star over the place where he came to Earth a year earlier. "Tonight, it will be a year . . . My star, then, can be found right above the place where I came to Earth, a year ago . . ." The pilot didn't want to hear this, that his friendie would be leaving him. The little prince had a present to give the pilot. It is an eternal present, one that the little prince shared with all the world who have read his story or seen his movies.

**[page 88] "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!"**

One more flash of yellow snake in the sand and the little prince was soon gone. He had tamed the pilot and taught him to remember him in joy as he looked up at the stars each night and heard them laughing. But there was another lovely spot for the pilot to remember. It was the barren crease of two sand dunes where the little prince appeared on Earth and then disappeared. He commends this place to us and leaves us with an earnest request. It is the least we could do in return for the many gifts he has given us in this tiny book about a tiny prince who came from a star, laughed for a while, and returned to his star to laugh throughout eternity.

***[page 97] This is, to me, the loveliest and saddest landscape in the world. It is the same as that on the preceding page, but I have drawn it again to impress it on your memory. It is here that the little prince appeared on Earth, and disappeared.***

***Look at it carefully so that you will be sure to recognize it in case you travel some day to the African desert. And, if you should come upon this spot, please do not hurry on. Wait for a time, exactly under the star. Then, if a little man appears who laughs, who has golden hair and who refuses to answer questions, you will know who he is. If this should happen, please comfort me. Send me word that he has come back.***

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## EPILOGUE

On page 91, the little prince tells the pilot, "I cannot carry this body with me. It is too heavy." The pilot said nothing. The little prince continued, "But it will be like an old abandoned shell. There is nothing sad about old shells . . ." That passage inspired me to write a poem about the empty shell.

### **The Empty Shell**

**The Little Prince said,  
"It is not sad to look upon an empty shell."**

**God is a Hunter who loads us into his gun  
and fires us towards our goal.**

**We leave behind only an empty shell  
after a life well-spent.**

**It is not sad to look upon an empty shell.  
It is a sign of a life well-spent.**

**Do not look upon this empty shell in sadness.**

**In His time He loaded us into His gun  
and fired us towards our goal.**

**Let us spend our life well  
so when others look upon  
our empty shell  
They will see a sign of a life well-spent.**

**It is not sad to look upon an empty shell.  
It is a sign of a life well-spent.**

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----- *Footnotes* -----

**Footnote 1.** One might suppose that the author meant the snake as a metaphor for death who reveals the answers of all riddles to us eventually.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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