

LBRIS

We know
books



The Little Prince

ANTOINE
DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

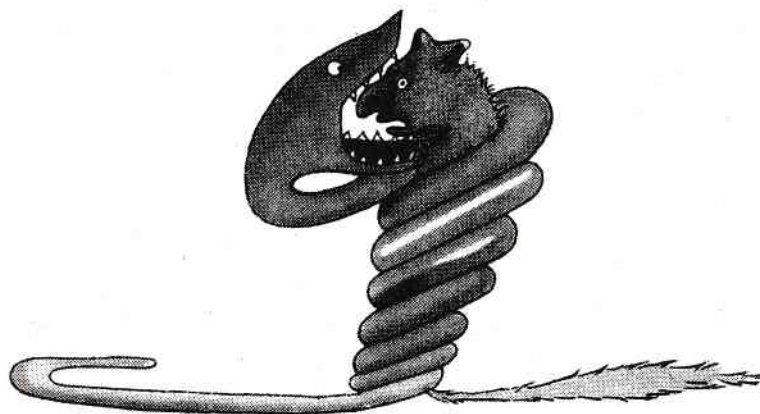
Translated by
IRENE TESTOT-FERRY



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

CHAPTER ONE

Once when I was six years old I saw a beautiful picture in a book about the primeval forest called *True Stories*. It showed a boa constrictor swallowing an animal. Here is a copy of the drawing.



The book stated: 'Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole without chewing it whereupon they can no longer move and sleep for six months digesting it.'

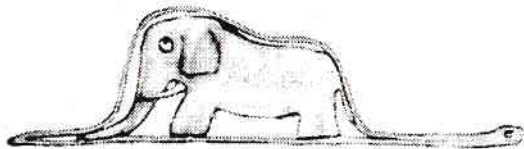
I then reflected deeply upon the adventures in the jungle and in turn succeeded in making my first

drawing with a colour pencil. My drawing No. 1 was like this:



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

They answered: 'Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?' My drawing did not represent a hat. It was supposed to be a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. So I made another drawing of the inside of the boa constrictor to enable the grown-ups to understand. They always need explanations. My drawing No. 2 looked like this:



The grown-ups then advised me to give up my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside

or the outside, and to devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. Thus it was that I gave up a magnificent career as a painter at the age of six. I had been disappointed by the lack of success of my drawing No. 1 and my drawing No. 2. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves and it is rather tedious for children to have to explain things to them time and again.

So I had to choose another job and I learnt to pilot aeroplanes. I flew more or less all over the world. And indeed geography has been extremely useful to me. I am able to distinguish between China and Arizona at a glance. It is extremely helpful if one gets lost in the night.

As a result of which I have been in touch, throughout my life, with all kinds of serious people. I have spent a lot of time with grown-ups. I have seen them at very close quarters which I'm afraid has not greatly enhanced my opinion of them.

Whenever I met one who seemed reasonably clear-sighted to me, I showed them my drawing No 1, which I had kept, as an experiment. I wanted to find out whether he or she was truly understanding. But the answer was always: 'It is a hat.' So I gave up mentioning boa constrictors or primeval forests or stars. I would bring myself down to his or her level and talk about bridge, golf, politics and neckties. And the grown-up would be very pleased to have met such a sensible person.

CHAPTER TWO

Thus I lived alone, with no one I could really talk to, until I had an accident in the Sahara Desert six years ago. Something broke down in my engine. And since there was neither a mechanic nor a passenger with me, I prepared myself for a difficult but what I hoped would be a successful repair. It was a matter of life or death for me. I had scarcely enough drinking water for a week.

On the first night, I fell asleep on the sand, a thousand miles from any human habitation. I was far more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. So you can imagine my surprise at sunrise when an odd little voice woke me up.

It said: 'Please . . . draw me a sheep.'

'What?'

'Draw me a sheep.'

I jumped up, completely thunderstruck. I rubbed my eyes, blinked hard and looked carefully around me. And I discovered an extraordinary little boy watching me gravely. Here is the best portrait I was able to draw of him later. But of course, my drawing is not half as charming as its model. It is not my fault. I had been discouraged by grown-ups in my career as a painter when I was six years old, and I hadn't learnt to draw anything with the exception of boas from the outside and boas from the inside.

I therefore stared in total astonishment at this

THE LITTLE PRINCE



sudden apparition. Do not forget that I was a thousand miles away from any inhabited region.

But my little chap did not seem to be either lost or dead tired or dying of hunger, thirst or fear. He did not look like a child lost in the middle of the desert, a thousand miles from any inhabited region.

When I finally managed to speak, I said to him: 'But . . . what are you doing here?'

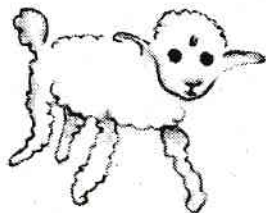
Whereupon he repeated softly and gravely: 'Please draw me a sheep'

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

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

Since I had never drawn a sheep I drew for him one of the two pictures I had drawn before. That of the boa constrictor from the outside. And I was astounded to hear the little fellow saying: 'No! No! I don't want an elephant inside a boa. A boa constrictor is a very dangerous creature and an elephant is very cumbersome. Everything is very small where I live. I need a sheep. Draw me a sheep.'

So I drew.



He looked at it carefully and said: 'No. That one is already very sick. Draw me another one.'

And I drew.

My little friend said gently and indulgently: 'Don't you see that is not a sheep, it is a ram. It has horns . . .'



Once again, I made another drawing.

But it was rejected too, like the previous ones.

'This one is too old. I want a sheep that will live for a long time.'

My patience had run out by then as I was in a hurry to start dismantling my engine as soon as possible, so I scribbled this drawing. And I explained: 'That is only the box. The sheep you asked for is inside.'

But I was very surprised to see the face of my young judge lighting up: 'That is exactly the way I wanted it. Do you think this sheep will need a lot of grass?'

