Epilogue

They say it took six years for the pilot to tell anyone his story. Of course, his friends were thrilled just to see him alive. He remained mute and depressed [masentunut] for a long time, but told everyone it was just fatigue.

Later, his grief abated a little, which is to say: never completely. But he came to believe that the boy had returned to his planet because, the morning after the snake bit him, his body was nowhere to be found. “Maybe,” he thought, “it wasn’t so heavy after all.”

The pilot listened to the stars every night. They were like five hundred million bells.

But then something extraordinary happened. The pilot realized that he had forgotten to add a leather strap to the muzzle he had drawn! It would never stay on the sheep!

In this way, the pilot tormented himself with absurd worries and questions: “What was happening on his planet?”

“Could the sheep have already eaten the flower? Surely not. Every night the boy puts the glass cover over the flower, and watches the sheep carefully.”
With such thoughts, he could be happy for a time. All the stars would laugh sweetly.

But, then, he would think to himself: “Anyone can get distracted at one time or another. And that’s all it takes. Say he forgot, one night, the glass case, or the sheep snuck out of his box.”

And the five hundred million bells would turn into five hundred million tears.

The status of Asteroid B-261 became for the pilot a terrible obsession.

Nothing in the universe could ever be the same for the pilot if he did not know whether a drawing of a sheep had eaten an abandoned rose.

The pilot looked at the sky and posited ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ and with each answer, everything changed inside him.

Although he was certain that no adult would ever understand, he exhorted others who traveled to Africa, and, not only that, to walk deep into the desert, and to linger there under a certain star, and to keep watch for a boy who laughs and never answers questions, and in this way to give the pilot hope of being relieved of his unrelenting anguish by promising to send correspondence at once, should the boy should ever return.

*The End*