The Anguished and the Enchanted

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The boy started out by visiting nearby planets, in the hope of gaining knowledge and finding a suitable occupation. On the first planet he saw a king, wearing purple and fine furs, seated on a majestic throne.

When the king saw the boy, he exclaimed, “Finally, a subject!”

For kings, everyone is a subject.

“Come closer, so I may see you better,” commanded the king.

The boy was tired from his travels and yawned until the king said: “It is rude to yawn before a king. I forbid it!”

The boy replied: “I can’t help it. I’ve traveled very far, and haven’t slept.”

“In that case,” said the king, “I command you to yawn. I have not seen anyone yawn in years. It’s a curiosity to me. Yawn again. I command it!”

Then the boy was intimidated and couldn’t yawn any more.
“In that case,” said the king, “I command to you to yawn sometimes.”

The boy felt that the king was reasonable, for he only insisted that his authority be respected, and he commanded nothing impossible.

When the boy asked if he could sit down to rest, the king commanded him to sit.

Then the boy asked: “Sire, if I may: Over what do you rule?”

“Over everything,” said the king with a grand gesture.

“Over everything?” asked the boy.

“Over everything,” said the king.

“And the stars obey you?”

“Of course,” said the king. “I do not tolerate indiscipline [kurit-tomuus].”

The boy marveled at the immense power [vahvuus] of the king. He thought, if he had such power, he could have watched not fifty but one hundred, or even two hundred sunsets a day.

Then he felt sad because he remembered his abandoned planet. He asked the king to order the sun to set, so he could watch it once more.

But the king replied: “If I ordered a general to fly like a butterfly, or to write a great tragedy, or to become a goose, and if this
general failed to obey my commands, which of us would be in the wrong?”1

“You would, sir,” the boy answered.

“Exactly. You can only ask from others what they are able to give. Authority depends, primarily, on reason. If you command all your subjects to throw themselves into the sea, they will revolt. I have the right to demand obedience, but only if my commands are reasonable.”

“And my sunset?” asked the boy, who never let go of a question once he got it in his head.

The king replied that he would have it, but only when the conditions were favorable, say, in the evening, at about seven-thirty.

The boy yawned again. He thought about all the sunsets he was missing, and was bored by the king, so he told the king he would leave.

The king became upset: “Don’t go!” he shouted. “I will make you a Minister of Justice if you stay.”

“But there is no one here to judge,” said the boy.

“That is not certain,” said the king, “for I’ve never seen my entire kingdom. I’m very old and it hurts me to walk.”

“But I have looked,” said the boy. “There is no one else.”

“Then you must judge yourself,” said the king. “That is the most difficult of all, much more difficult than judging others. If you can judge yourself correctly, then you are truly wise.”

1 Here, Saint-Exupéry’s term is *oiseau de mer* [sea bird]. Once again, a bird has been changed to a goose by Matinpoika.
The king tried again to get the boy to stay, but the boy was in-
tent on leaving, so, in spite of his invitations, the boy departed,
thinking: “Adults are strange indeed.”

§

On the second planet the boy found a vain man [turhaan mies
/un vaniteux].

When this man saw the boy, he cried out: “Ah, a visit from an
admirer!”

As with a king and his subjects, to a vain man, everyone is an
admirer.

“Good day” said the boy, but then added insolently [röyhkeästi],
“You have a ridiculous hat.”

The man said: “It is a hat to raise in salute when people applaud
me. Sadly, no one comes by this way anymore.”

“Is that so?” asked the boy.

“Clap your hands together,” the man instructed.

So the boy clapped, and the man raised his hat in salute.

The boy clapped again, and the man raised his hat again.

After five minutes of this, the boy again became bored.

“What if I want to knock your hat off your head?” asked the boy,
insolently.
But the man wasn’t listening. Vain men only listen to applause, just as people only listen to what they want to hear.²

Instead, the vain man asked: “Do you admire me greatly?”

The boy asked, as if he did not know, what ‘admire’ means.

“To admire,” the man said, “means to recognize that I am the most beautiful, best dressed, wealthiest, and most intelligent man on the planet.”

The boy said: “But you are the only man on this planet,” to which the man replied: “Admire me anyway.”

The boy reluctantly agreed and told the man that he admired him, but did not understand why being admired interested the man so much.

As he departed, he thought, once again: “Adults are strange indeed.”

§

On the next planet lived a drunkard. The boy’s visit to his planet was short but, for some reason, left him feeling deeply dejected.

“Why are you here?” the boy asked the drunkard.

“I’m drinking.”

“Why are you drinking?” asked the boy.

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² The final phrase, *ihmiset kuuntelevat vain sitä, mitä he haluavat kuulla* [people only listen to what they want to hear] is added by Matinpoika, but is clearly implied in the text.
“To forget.”

“To forget what?” asked the boy, with a disrespectful tone.

“To forget my shame,” replied the drunkard, lowering his head.

“What are you ashamed of?” asked the boy, who suddenly felt the urge to help the drunkard.

“I am ashamed of my drinking!” the drunkard confessed, and fell silent.

So, once again, the boy departed thinking: “Adults are strange indeed.”

The fourth planet belonged to a businessman [liikemies / businessman] who was so occupied with his work that he didn’t even notice the boy.

“Good day,” said the boy. “Your cigarette is out.”

But the man only replied: “Two and three make five. Five and seven twelve. Twelve and three fifteen. Hello. Fifteen and seven twenty-two. Twenty-two and six twenty-eight. No time to re-light it. Twenty-six and five thirty-one. So: Five hundred and one million, six hundred and eighty thousand, seven hundred and thirty-one.”

“Five hundred million what?” asked the boy.

“Are you still there?” asked the businessman, annoyed at being disturbed. “Five hundred million…I can’t remember. I have a lot of work to do. I don’t have time for foolishness [typeryyttä].”
Again, the boy, who never let go of a question once he got it in his head, insisted: “Five hundred million what?”

The businessman glowered at the boy and said: “In my whole life, I have only been disturbed three times. First, twenty years ago, a goose fell on me from God knows where. He made an awful sound and I made mistakes in my calculations. The second time, eleven years ago, I got sick. And the third time…well, here you are!”


The businessman, who finally realized that the child would never relent, said reluctantly: “Millions of those little objects you see in the sky.”

“Flies?” the boy asked.

“No,” said the businessman. “Little shiny things.”

“Bees?”

“No, said the businessman. “Little glittering golden objects that fools [tyhmat] daydream about. But I have important work to do. I don’t have time to daydream.”

“Do you mean the stars?” asked the boy.

“Yes, the stars,” replied the businessman quickly.

“And what do you do with five hundred million stars?”

“You mean five hundred and one million, six hundred and eighty thousand, seven hundred and thirty-one. I have to be precise.”

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3 Here, the hanneton [goose] is a goose in Saint-Exupéry’s original text.
“What do you do with them?” repeated the boy.

“Nothing. I own them,” the businessman said.

“You own the stars?”

“Yes.”

“But,” protested the boy, “I have already met a king who —”

The businessman interrupted him: “Kings don’t ‘own.’ They ‘reign.’ It’s different.”

“What’s the point of owning stars?” asked the boy.

“The point is to make me rich,” said the businessman.

“And what’s the point of being rich?”

“To buy more stars, any time they are discovered.”

The boy thought this businessman reasoned like a drunkard. He also felt it wasn’t really possible to own stars. But the businessman said he owned the stars because he was the first to lay claim to them. Just as with a diamond or an island, when you are the first to find it, it belongs to you.

“Even an idea,” the businessman said, “when you have it first and get it patented, it’s yours. And I own the stars because no one else ever dreamed of owning them.”

The boy had to agree with the businessman’s logic and asked: “What exactly do you do with them?”

“I manage them. I count and re-count them. It’s difficult but important work.”
“I have a silk scarf,” said the boy, “that I wear around my neck. And I have a flower, which I can pick up and take with me. But you can’t wear or pick up stars.”

“No,” said the businessman, “but I can put them in the bank.”

“And that’s it?” asked the boy.

“That’s it!” said the businessman.

The boy thought that counting the stars was poetic, in a way, but not really important. The boy, like the pilot, held beliefs about what was important that were quite different from those of the adults he met.

He said to the businessman, in departing: “I water my flower every day. I have three volcanoes that I clean every week. I even clean the one that is dormant, since one never knows. I serve the things I own and am important to them: to my volcanoes, and to my flower. But you are not important to the stars.”

The businessman said nothing to this, so the boy departed again, thinking, “Adults are strange indeed.”

§

The fifth planet the boy visited was the strangest and smallest of all. There was only enough room on it for a streetlamp and a lamplighter. The boy couldn’t imagine whom the lamp was for, and thought:

“This man is absurd [järjetön]. But, even so, he is less absurd than the king, the vain man, the drunkard, and the businessman. At least his work means something [merkityksellistä]:

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4 Järjetön carries a connotation not only of absurdity but of madness or insanity.
when he lights his lamp, he gives birth to a star, or a flower. And when he puts it out, he puts the star or the flower to bed. It’s a beautiful [ihana / très jolie] occupation, and because it’s beautiful, it’s meaningful.”

The boy greeted the lamplighter.

“Good day,” he said, and asked, “Why have you just put out your lamp?”

The man replied, simply: “My orders. Good day.”

“What are your orders?” asked the boy.

“To put out my lamp. Good night,” answered the lamplighter, only to relight his lamp.

“But then why have you just relit it?” asked the boy.

“My orders,” the lamplighter said.

“I don’t understand,” said the boy.

“There’s nothing to understand,” replied the lamplighter. “Orders are orders. Good day.”

And he put out his lamp once again.

Finally, the lamplighter wiped the sweat off his forehead and took a moment to explain: “Look, I have a terrible job. Before, it wasn’t so bad. I put out the lamp in the morning and lit it in the evening. I had the rest of the day to do what I wanted and the rest of the night to sleep.”

“But since then,” the boy asked, “your orders have changed?”
“No,” said the lamplighter firmly, “my orders have not changed. That’s the problem! Every year, the planet turns faster and faster, but my orders haven’t changed! Now, it makes a full rotation every minute, and I can’t get a moment’s rest. I have to light it and put it out every single minute!”

“That’s funny,” said the boy, “your days last only a minute!”

“It is not funny at all,” said the lamplighter. “It has already been a month since we began speaking.”

“A month?”

“Yes. Thirty minutes, thirty days. Good night.”

And the lamplighter lit his lamp once again.

The boy liked this lamplighter who was so devoted to his orders, even though they made no sense. The lamplighter reminded him of the sunsets he used to chase around his tiny world, and of something else he could not put his finger on. He decided he wanted to help.

“You know,” said the boy, “I can give you a way to rest when you like.”

“I would love some rest,” said the lamplighter.

“Just walk very slowly and remain forever in the sun, suggested the boy. “That way, the day can last as long as you like.”

But the lamplighter replied:

“Sadly, that doesn’t help me much. What I love most in life is to sleep.”

“That’s a shame,” said the boy.
“It’s a shame,” agreed the lamplighter. And he put out his lamp.

As the boy prepared yet another departure, he considered how the lamplighter would be scorned by the king, the vain man, the drunkard, and the businessman. And yet the lamplighter was the only man he had met who did not strike him as completely foolish [typerää]. At least the lamplighter was devoted [omistettiin] to something other than himself.

He felt a pang of regret and thought:

“This man is the only person I’ve met with whom I could be friends. But his planet is too small. There isn’t enough room for two.”

What the boy didn’t dare to admit, even to himself, was that he missed his own home and envied the lamplighter’s planet for its one thousand four hundred and forty sunsets per day.

§

The sixth planet was ten times larger than the last. On it lived an old gentleman who wrote long books.

“Ah, an explorer!” the gentleman said, when he saw the boy approaching.

The boy sat down, out of breath.

“Where are you from?” asked the gentleman.

But the boy ignored his question and asked: “What is that giant book?” and “What do you do here?”

“I’m a geographer,” said the gentleman.

“What’s a geographer?” asked the boy.
“A geographer is a scholar who knows the location of the seas, the rivers, the cities, the mountains, and the deserts.”

“Fascinating [lumoava]!” said the boy. “At last, a truly worthwhile [mielenkiintoinen] occupation!”

The boy looked over the geographer’s planet. He had never seen such a majestic land.

“Your planet is very beautiful,” said the boy. “Does it have oceans?”

“I don’t know,” replied the geographer.

Disappointed, the boy asked: “…or mountains?”

“I don’t know.”

“…or cities or rivers or deserts?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you are a geographer!” cried the boy.

“Exactly,” said the geographer. “I am geographer, not an explorer. There is a dearth of explorers here. Geographers don’t go around looking for cities, rivers, mountains, seas, and oceans. We’re too important for that. We must never leave our desks. But we take visits from explorers, question them, and note their recollections. And if an explorer has a recollection that seems interesting, we conduct a moral inquiry.”

“Why?” asked the boy.

“Because a lying explorer would be a catastrophe, for obvious reasons, and a drunk explorer would see two of everything.”
“I know someone,” said the boy, “who would make a very bad explorer.”

“It’s possible,” said the geographer. “But when the morality of the explorer appears to be good, we conduct a further inquiry into his discoveries.”

“You go to see them?”

“No, no. That’s too complicated. You ask the explorer to furnish evidence. If, for example, the discovery is of a great mountain, then we ask him to bring back some large rocks.”

Suddenly, the geographer realized his stroke of luck and said to the boy: “But you — you come from far away! You are an explorer! You must tell me all about your planet!”

And the geographer opened his register and took out his pencil. Apparently, first, geographers take notes in pencil, waiting to see the evidence of any discoveries before writing over them in ink.

“Well?” asked the geographer. “Oh,” said the boy, “my planet isn’t really interesting. It’s pretty small. I have three volcanoes — two active, one dormant — but one never knows. I also have a flower.”

“We don’t make records of flowers,” said the geographer.

“Why not?” demanded the boy. “She’s the prettiest of all.”

“Because flowers are ephemeral [lyhytaikaisia],” said the geographer.

“What does ‘ephemeral’ mean?” asked the boy.

And the geographer explained: “Geographies are the most important [tärkein] books of all. They never become obsolete.
Mountains do not come and go. Geographers write of eternal things."

“But dormant volcanoes can become active again,” the boy interrupted, and repeated: “What does ‘ephemeral’ mean?”

“Whether volcanoes are active or inactive doesn’t matter to us,” said the geographer. “What matters is the mountain. The mountain doesn’t change.”

“But what does ‘ephemeral’ mean?” asked the boy, who never let go of a question once he got it in his head.

“It means to be likely to disappear quickly.”

“My flower is likely to disappear quickly?” asked the boy, surprised by a truth he already knew [yllättynyt totuudesta, jonka hän jo tiesi].

“Of course!” said the geographer.

“Of course my flower is ephemeral,” the boy thought to himself. “And I’ve abandoned it with only four thorns to defend itself against the world! I’ve left it all alone!”

He knew then, for the first time, the true feeling of regret [pahoillani] and departed, thinking, this time, not about adults, but about his flower.

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5 This phrase is an addition of Matinpoika’s but is not out of place in the text, since the boy has already worried and wept over the likelihood (nay, the certainty) that his flower will not survive his abandonment.