

YOU TAMED ME

Robert I. Steinberger

Theodor
Fontane,
Lieben lerne!

*«Und zur Fremde wird die Heimat,
Und zur Nähe wird die Ferne.»*

Antoine de
Saint Exupéry
Le Petit Prince

*«On ne connaît que les choses que l'on
apprivoise, dit le renard.»*

I have a friend
somewhere far away.
I miss her.

As the fox explains to the Little Prince, to be «unique in all the world» to somebody, you need to be tamed — to «establish ties.»¹ Wandering on this great planet, we are grateful for our taming — for needing someone and being needed; it's what makes us feel unique and understood. When we matter to someone and they matter to us, our existence in this universe makes a little more sense.

The saying goes, «Home is where the heart is.» Although cheesy, when you cannot define «home» as a location, the saying suddenly gains a lot of truth. I am a rootless child. My parents emigrated from Hungary to Germany in 1969. They left out of political reasons, too complex to explain in a few sentences. Simplified: They wanted out of the system of communism. 36 years

later their 16-year-old son moved away to the U.S.A., but for personal reasons. I never grew roots in Germany, during the 16 years that I grew up there. I did not feel foreign, but I felt strange, weird and different. When I came to the States, I was clearly a foreigner, but I was not strange, weird or different anymore, because diversity allows for otherness. I made friends easily in the U.S., and yes, many qualified rather as acquaintances. However, I also met my closest friends there, who domesticated me; who gave me a home. We shared laughs, we revealed our insecurities, we talked and listened, we argued, we made up, we played, and most importantly: we wasted time together. «It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important,» says the fox to the Little Prince at the end of their meeting.² It is the time I have wasted for my friends, that makes them so important. Not all friendships last forever, but some have the longevity and bond comparable to family. So how can we define friendship? It is as elusive as love or happiness. Etel Adnan writes in her Essay *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay*, «But what is love? [...] Love is not to be described, it is to be lived.»³ Friendship also is not to be described, it is to be lived. Instead, I would rather (try to) describe the process of befriending.

The dance of friendship consists of slow movements towards each other, retreating steps away from each other just to run towards each other again until we meet at the point of contact. A strong intuition tells me, when I connect with someone. Sensitive people experience the world with an intensity sometimes hard to bear, and sharing this experience can be the only comfort at times. We have sensitive antennas — sensing moods, seeing shades of colors, touching fabrics, watching people, listening to conversations and silence. And: We recognize when somebody mirrors our sensitivity. Delicate moments are the most telling: a gaze, an inflection in the voice, a silence. Once we pick up on these cues, curiosity leads us to get to know each other. Conversations ensue and we inevitably move closer to one another — a delicate process. We make ourselves vulnerable and take a risk, when we open up and trust the other. Only when we have the courage to let someone else inside, can a deeply meaningful friendship develop. We need patience to develop such depth. Friendships can change us, influence us. We intertwine until we become inseparable. We lean on each other, we hold each other and give each other stability, warmth and comfort. When we need to separate, the other still lingers in us. The touch of the duet stays present in our solo dance.

When a bond has grown too close too quickly, doubts set in; questions of trust and belonging arise. These questions emerge, but do not need to be answered, because the beauty of friendships is perseverance. If we allow ourselves to trust, we do not need to reason. We simply know, we are friends. Out of this confidence originates the loyalty between friends, the support for each other. It gives us the backbone to stem hardships, multiplies our joy in good times and keeps us grounded in times of success.

A nomad has the disadvantage not to always have his close friends near. Three years ago, I moved again. I left the U.S. to live in Switzerland. Honestly, I am afraid of losing touch. When I first left the States, keeping in touch was easy — as my new life in Switzerland was slowly developing, I still had the time to write and talk with friends on the other side of the planet. As time went on and my daily life got filled with more and more activity and more and more new friends to keep up with locally, the virtual contact slid. Writing a letter that will do the time gone by justice became an uncomfortable pressure. The expectations for that letter or that call became so humungous, that we avoided disappointment by not calling or writing. A vicious cycle hard to break. My desire to keep in touch, to stay connected is insatiable, though. I miss my

friend, but do not know how to still the desire. I would rather see you than talk on the phone. I would rather laugh than write. I would rather swing at night at the park playground and talk about our worries and fantasies of the future. I would rather hold you than see you on the computer screen. Because I know it is what we experience together that nourishes our relationship, not the information we share. It is the moments in which we sit in silence, wasting time, and knowing what the other is thinking.

I wish it was easier to jump to your side of the ocean. A childish fantasy to visit you as if you lived in the same city. Out of this dream came the idea to befriend two locations. If we can make two immovable spaces become friends and the in-between become a route of exchange of experiences and feelings, could experiences and feelings also cross the ocean someday? Could I befriend the places I call home, so that my heart is not split? A fantasy to make the world a small planet, so that I could also «see the day end and the twilight falling»⁴ and see my friends whenever I felt like it. Sadly, an impossible dream. Yet, I find solace in the existing connection between us — an invisible exchange of thoughts and emotions. You are on my mind and I am on yours. When we see each other it feels as though we were never apart. Maybe the true magic of

friendship lies in this invisible, undefinable in-between — the established ties through which we touch each other without touching. Our bond crosses borders, crosses oceans, because it is immaterial and travels faster than we ever could. I am thinking of you, dear friend. Are you thinking of me?

- 1 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince*. Trans. Katherine Woods. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1971. p. 46, Print.
- 2 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince*. Trans. Katherine Woods. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1971. p. 48, Print.
- 3 Etel Adnan. *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2011. p. 8, Print.
- 4 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince*. Trans. Katherine Woods. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1971. p. 16, Print.