

[The following is an unfinished piece, another idea for a picture book. I recently rediscovered it in my stuff, felt it had some nice lines, and thought I would share them. That's all.]

[Title]

R. F. Tripp

Albert was in a mood.
He had been, to his mother, nasty and rude.
He found himself
beside himself
—half the time mad,
the other half sad,
and between times he roared
or sat in a stupor, bored.

Outside, the winter sky was dark dark blue.
Storm clouds grew,
and a wind shook the window pane
threatening rain.

Albert just wanted to be alone.
He wouldn't answer the telephone,
he hated the cold, the winter weather.
He couldn't decide whether
to be in this room or that,
and his only enjoyment was in being a brat.

His mother suggested he might read a book,

or, if not read, he might just look
at some pictures or some prints
of country scenes or military events.
But all he could do was sigh
and ask his favorite question:
“Why?”

Finally, he went to his room, lay on his bed,
picked up a book he'd never read
and thumbed the edges of the pages,
growing sleepy by stages.

He stopped his thumbing on page twenty-three.
At the top of the page he noticed a tree,
and beside the tree a man
stood next to a horse,
and in his hand
the man was holding the horse's bridle.
Then Albert read the chapter title:
“Instructions for Travel. Final Stage”

Albert ran a finger across the page
and traced
a few of the words,
which is when he noticed a drawing of birds,
and below the birds
another tree, a fountain,
and behind all this,
a mountain.

Albert rubbed his eyes and blinked.
He began to think
something was wrong
when he saw,
he was almost sure,
even though his eyes were wanting to blur,
and it was something he couldn't prove,
he thought he saw the drawing move.

Albert's head grew light.
He felt a strange sensation, like flight.
And then it seemed
he was less awake than in a dream.
And yet he'd seen all this before,
like stepping through a familiar door
and finding yourself in a familiar hall
where you've never actually been before.

Albert sensed he was being lifted,
and for a moment he hovered, drifted,
until he felt a wind,
and finally he watched himself descend.
And after a few moments passed
he saw he was standing in knee deep grass.

Now you might think you'd be afraid
—might be in need of some serious aid—
if this were happening to you.

Well, Albert knew
this *wasn't* exactly ordinary,
and to tell the truth, it was down right scary!
So he stood a moment in that grass
to let a few seconds pass.

Then he heard a sound,
and when he looked around
there was the man holding the bridle
that had stood above the chapter title.

“Well, my lad,
have you not had
just the most curious trip?”
said the man, biting his lip, trying not to smile
and all the while
leaning against the horse's saddle.

Albert felt a little addled.
How had he done that flying trick?
He felt a little motion sick.

“Look at this,” said the man with a grin
—he spoke as though they were very good friends—
“I learned this a few chapters back
—the one concerning the zodiac.
But I'd be willing to bet
you haven't actually read it yet.”

The man touched the horse's nose,
and from it grew a single rose,
then from the rose grew a vine
that enter-laced and enter-twined
down its neck, across its back,
round and round the horse's tack,
blooming every other inch
until the horse was floral-drenched
with roses of every earthly sort,
and some one wouldn't dare report
to be in neighborhoods and yards,
city parks or boulevards.

The horse didn't appear to mind
but picked a blossom off the vine
and seemed content to slowly chew
as the roses grew and grew
until at last the flaming vine
braided down its tailed behind.

The man turned and smiled.
His eyes were deep and wild.
He had a beard, with a touch of gray,
and his face seemed full of things to say.

“You see, my lad, you’re a book.
Would you like a second look?”

Now Albert wanted to be polite

—if nothing else, to conceal his fright—
so he finally mustered a timid, "Yes,
I mean...I think...I suppose...I guess."
“But really,” said Albert, “I should get home.
It's not like me to roam.
And it's almost supper time—out there,”
he said, pointing, though he wasn't sure where.
And it was just about this time
he realized he was speaking rhyme!

“Come here, look at this,” said the man,
holding out an open hand.

Now Albert wasn't prepared for this!
He looked into the opened fist
and saw his room, himself in bed,
holding that book he'd never read.
And through the window
of his room
the wind was blowing
—but instead of raining, it was snowing.

“You mean I'm really there?”
he asked, pushing back his shaggy hair.
“There, and here of course,”
said the man, casually stroking the horse.
“I don't want to seem misleading
but strange things happen when you're reading.”

"I'll show you," said the man,
and gestured for Albert to take his hand.

And when he took the stranger's hands
they began to drift above the land,
then settled onto the horse's back.
Albert then heard the man's whip crack,
and with a jarring bound
they left behind the friendly ground.

They went so fast and high
the roses began to freeze and die.
Yet Albert didn't feel the cold
—nor did he feel very bold—
but in a while he looked around
and saw the earth—ten thousand feet down!
They climbed, it seemed, for maybe an hour
through lightening, thunder clouds, a shower.
And against the wind the man would talk,
but the best that Albert could do was gawk
and hold on tightly and try to sit,
so he didn't hear a word of it.
The man's words came without a sound
and tumbled pell-mell to the ground...

[From this point in the story, the idea is for Albert to fly around the world, then back home to Albert's bedroom. Along the way, Albert would see below on the earth stories and events played out books, both fiction and nonfiction, *if* he would only start reading. The image of the

man, the horse, and the birds, by the way, is from a woodcut from one of my childhood school readers.]