

My Friend in Africa

Written and Illustrated by
Frederick Franck

With a foreword by
Rhena Schweitzer Miller

REVISED EDITION

Royal Fineworks Press
UNIONVILLE, NEW YORK

*In cooperation with
The Albert Schweitzer Institute for the Humanities,
Wallingford, Connecticut*



Copyright © 1996
Frederick S. Franck
All Rights Reserved.

Royal Fireworks Press
P.O. Box 399
41 First Avenue
Unionville, NY 10988-0399
(845) 726-4444
fax: (845) 726-3824
email: mail@rftp.com
website: rftp.com



ISBN: 978-1-63856-110-1

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz
Editor: Jennifer Ault
Book and Cover Designer: Kerri Ann Ruhl

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York,
at the Royal Fireworks facility. 19my23

local  363

I wrote this book for Professor Bolo,
for my son Lukas, and for their
brothers and sisters in America
and Africa, Black and white.

When I showed it to
Dr. Schweitzer, he was pleased.
"How wonderful that this story
comes out of my hospital," he said.

— Frederick Franck

FOREWORD

This is a wonderful edition of *My Friend in Africa* by Frederick Franck, a writer-artist with the exceptional talent to bring my father, Albert Schweitzer, to abundant life in both words and drawings. He makes one feel present at the hospital in the African forest more than any photographs could.

When Franck showed the first edition of *My Friend in Africa* to my father, then about ninety years old, my father was deeply touched by it. “That this could still come out of my hospital!” he said. It is an expression of love for my father, for the hospital he built from scratch, and for my father’s motto “Reverence for life,” of which his entire life was the expression.

And let me add that I love Franck’s dedication to his son Lukas and to his brothers and sisters, Black and white, in Africa and America. It is in the spirit of his sculpture titled “Not black, not white, just human.”

– *Rhena Schweitzer Miller*

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I wrote this story in 1958 when I was serving on the medical staff of Dr. Albert Schweitzer at his legendary jungle hospital in Lambaréné, which he had begun building in 1913.

I met Bolo in the last years of the colonial era, when Africa was divided and ruled over by European powers, by white businessmen and administrators who grew up in Europe and whose first concern was to suit themselves and much less to meet the needs of the African population. In this regard, Dr. Schweitzer and his coworkers were rare and outstanding exceptions, and Bolo was particularly lucky to get to know Dr. Schweitzer and his reverence for life. Bolo became a forerunner of what was exceptional in those days but has become reachable for many African children through his ideals, energy, and ability.



CHAPTER ONE

Bolo woke to the sounds of the African dawn: rustling sounds, twittering sounds, sounds of the jungle and the river. He blinked and yawned, waking up slowly and wondering for a moment where he was. Then he remembered.

He was not at home in his village by the river. He was in a hospital—the hospital of Dr. Schweitzer on the edge of the jungle.

Bolo stretched his legs on the narrow bunk and wiggled one foot—the sore foot that had nearly made him a cripple before he'd come here to the hospital. Every morning now he tested that foot to see whether it hurt when he moved. Every morning he smiled to discover how much better it was. Soon he would be walking again with a stick, the doctors said. And before long, he would not even need the help of a stick. The ulcer on his heel would vanish, and he would run and climb and play without limping and without pain.

“And the first thing I will do is explore this hospital,” Bolo thought. “I will go and see all of the animals and the buildings and the people—but especially the animals!”

The thought of the animals made Bolo smile again. He listened closely to the sounds of the morning outside, trying to sort out the animal sounds from the others.

Bolo shut his eyes and began to play one of his favorite games. He wanted to see if he could tell by the noises exactly what was going on outdoors.

“The rustling means the chickens are stretching their wings,” he thought. “Or else it’s the goats eating in the bushes. All of the birds are twittering and chattering. Some are over in the jungle; some are right outside the building. I think I hear a wild boar squealing, too. And the loudest bird must be the big old toucan.”

What a funny bird the toucan was! Bolo had seen the bird the day before from the door of the hospital ward, one of the long, low sheds with open doorways between every two bunks but no windows. Bolo had hopped on one foot to the doorway. Outside was a toucan, and beside it was a short-legged pelican standing on one foot, too! The pelican’s name was Percival, a name that made Bolo laugh just to think of it.

Every day now Bolo heard names that seemed almost as funny as “Percival.” His ears were used to African names—and French ones, too, because this part of Africa was a French colony for a long time. But here at the hospital, he heard names from many countries. People came here from all over the world to help Dr. Schweitzer with his work or to visit the famous hospital. It was strange and exciting to hear all of the foreign languages and imagine the far places where the people lived.

“Someday,” Bolo promised himself, “I will see all those places. Then I will come back to this hospital. Maybe I could be a doctor, too, in a white coat with that funny earphone around my neck! I wonder: Could I ever become a doctor?”

Bolo had thought of becoming a doctor from the first day the pain in his foot had begun to go away. The better he felt, the more wonderful he thought the doctors and the hospital were. They had cured so quickly something that had bothered him for so long.

For weeks he had limped about. The ulcer on his heel grew, and the pain grew. At school the teacher said, “Bolo, you should see a doctor about that foot. Dr. Schweitzer’s hospital is not far away. You should tell your family to take you there.”

In Bolo’s village, many people said, “See how ugly and angry-looking it is! Surely an evil spirit is trying to hurt the boy. Only a traditional healer’s magic can fight such an evil spirit. Bolo should have our healer cure that foot.”

But nothing at all was done. Bolo’s parents didn’t worry about him because he didn’t look or act like a sick boy. He ran about with the other boys, even though he limped badly. His parents didn’t see his face when he bumped his bad foot by accident, and they never heard him complain. How could they know how much his foot really hurt?

Besides, like all of the men and women of their tribe, Bolo’s father and mother were busy with their own affairs. His father was always busy talking with other men, and his mother was every more busy working. It was she who grew food in the fields for her family to eat, cooked, did the washing, and took care of the children who were younger than Bolo.

Then a stranger stopped at the village one day. He saw Bolo limping after the other children as they ran along the riverbanks. “What’s the matter with your foot, boy?” the white man asked.

“Well,” said Bolo, “it’s not very good.”



The man was a doctor. He looked at Bolo's heel and scowled. "Come, let us talk to your father," he said.

And to Bolo's father, he said firmly, "Your boy must come with me to Dr. Schweitzer's hospital. The foot must be cared for at once. It will cost you nothing, but you must let him come. I will look after him. I am Dr. Frederick, the tooth doctor there."

Bolo's father nodded and said, "I know of the hospital. I've heard much about it. Many people from our tribe have been healed there. The Old Doctor does not know our healer's magic, but he knows the white man's magic. It is well to have Bolo go there."

From then on, Bolo had a wonderful time. The trip downriver in Dr. Frederick's canoe was fun. The river was like a busy highway, full of the comings and goings of many people. A man could paddle a canoe much easier than he could push through the thick jungle on foot, so the people who lived near a river always traveled by water.

There were many craft on the river. Most of them were tipsy canoes called pirogues, made from hollowed-out logs. There were boats both going to and coming from the markets in the town of Lambaréné, where Bolo went to school. There were families in boats going visiting; there were men in boats going fishing. There were other people, like Bolo and Dr. Frederick, who were going to the hospital. Still others were coming back, well and strong again.

Bolo shouted greetings to every boat he saw. He called in French to the white men because French was the language that everyone knew. He shouted in the language of his tribe to the African people. And to everyone he waved and smiled. That was something that anyone, Black or white, could understand.

"What fun to go to the hospital with you, Mr. Doctor," he said to his new friend.

"It may not be all fun when you get there, though," Dr. Frederick answered.

"Everything is fun," Bolo insisted, "if I have never done it before." He called in his own language to the passing boats, "Look at me! I'm going to the hospital to see Dr. Schweitzer! I am going to see the *Grand Docteur!*"

The people in the boats waved and nodded. Everyone seemed to know about the hospital, and Bolo felt proud.

