

Sunburn in the ice region

Illustrations :
Muriel Dielemans

Text :
Marie Dielemans
Myriam Dielemans

thanks to Graham Keen
for his translation



Dear Colleagues,

Professor Sneeze, Breakneck and Reckless are back and ready to help with your lessons about the environment. This time they tackle the problem of the hole in the ozone layer, refusing to accept the desperate situation. They react. Use them as part of your classroom activities, including decompartmentalizing. Your pupils shouldn't hesitate to write to them and send their drawings. They enjoy seeing them and will send you a reply.

They are all at the same address :

Club of the ice region
International Polar Foundation
120 A, rue des Deux Gares
B – 1070 Bruxelles
Belgium

Dear Parents,

The motto of teachers is to « sow in all weathers ».

We count on you to help us sow the seed among your children – a small grain of passion and mystery about the ice regions.

When the seed germinates it will certainly help in our children learning to respect nature.

All the characters in our story love receiving drawings and little letters.



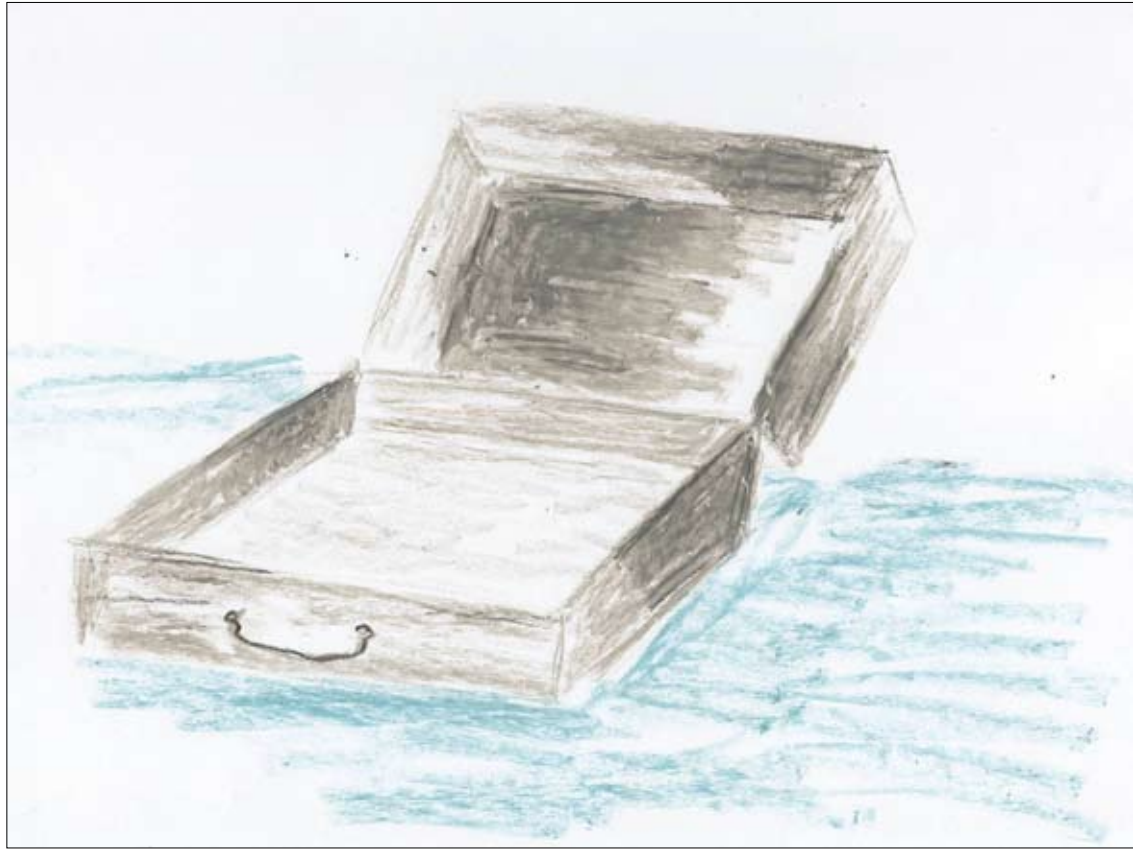
Professor Sneeze is a very famous scientist but rather timid and absent-minded. He lives in Rabbitville, a pretty little village near the sea. He always shuts himself away in his laboratory surrounded by his utensils and measuring instruments. He doesn't have much time for his friends but all the rabbits in the village love him.

But nobody has seen Professor Sneeze for some time...



Mrs Pretty, the village teacher, was rather worried so she decided to pay him a visit.

She put a carrot cake that she had just baked into a bag and set off for the scientist's house.



- Hello there ! Are you there, Professor Sneeze ? Mrs Pretty called out through the open window of the laboratory.
- Not for much longer, Professor Sneeze answered.

Mrs Pretty was so intrigued that she went in and found him packing a big suitcase.

- Are you going on holiday ? she asked him inquisitively.
- No, I received a strange message and have to leave, he said.
- Take a moment for some tea and tell me what's happened to you, said Mrs Pretty with an authoritative air.

She opened up her big bag.



With his mouth full of carrot cake, Professor Sneeze told her his story :

- A few days ago I received this message on my computer, he said and produced a note from his pocket. Look, I printed it !

Mrs Pretty read it :

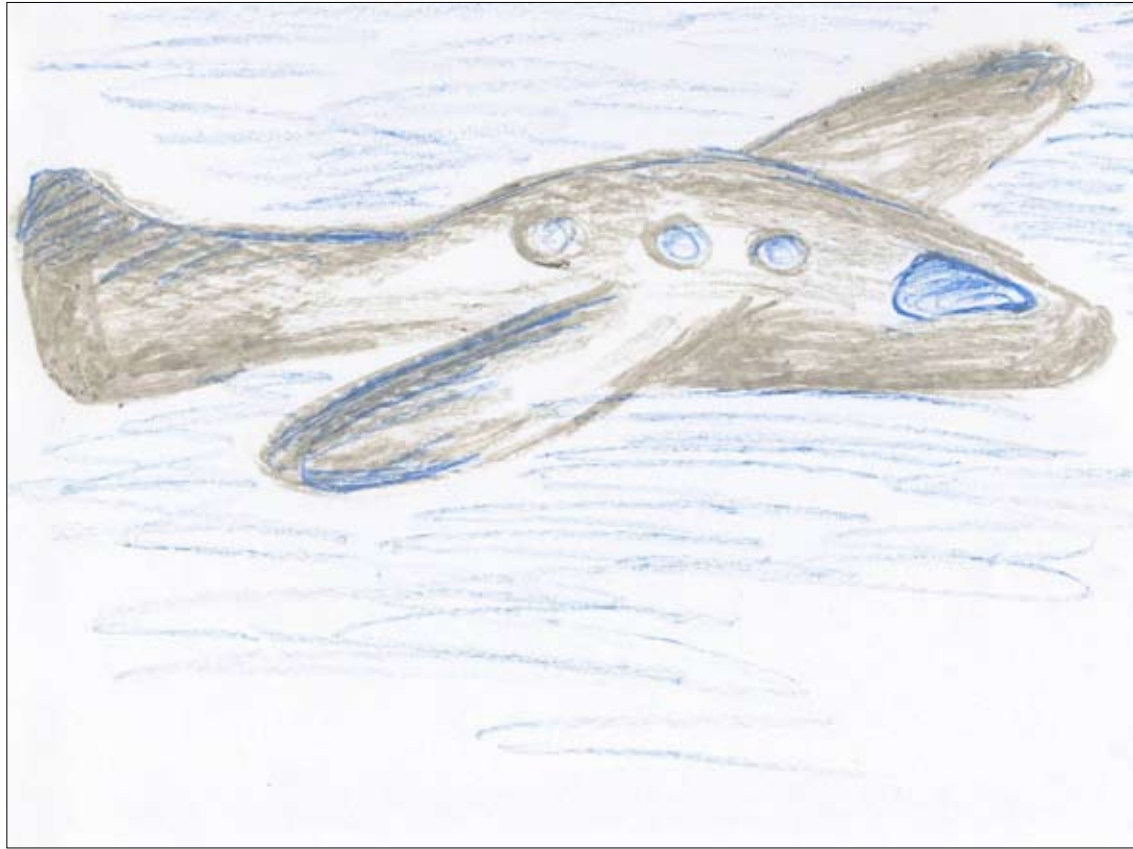
« Worrying results – earth in danger –
climate change – need help »

Signed : T. South Pole



- Who is « T. » ? Mrs Pretty asked.
- I've no idea, Professor Sneeze replied, but this message comes from the South Pole. Nobody lives there apart from some scientists and someone there needs some help.
- And your suitcase is nearly ready ! said Mrs Pretty. I see, you have gone crazy ! You want to go to the South Pole and help someone you don't know. Maybe it's just a joke.
- The climate is changing. I can't just sit here, replied Professor Sneeze.

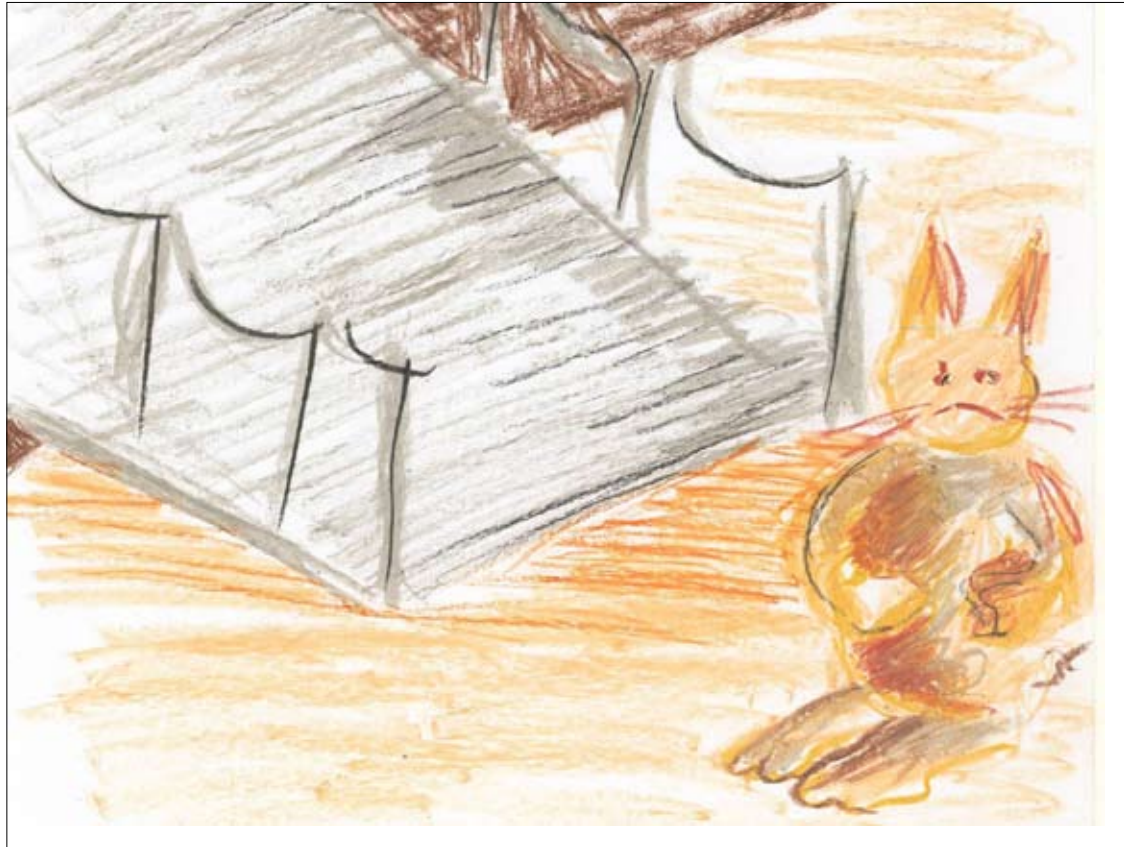
Mrs Pretty helped him finish packing then went back home stopping off at every house in the village to tell everyone : « Professor Sneeze is leaving for the South Pole ».



Professor Sneeze didn't like traveling but he had several plane flights before arriving exhausted at the last inhabited place on earth...

Then he had to take a boat.

- How awful ! Professor Sneeze thought , remembering that this ocean often had violent storms and huge waves, as he had read about in his books.
- I'm so afraid of getting seasick, he murmured in his beard as he approached the port to look for a place on a boat heading for the South Pole.



A big boat came in just then and Professor Sneeze thought he was really lucky but, when he saw the passengers getting off and looking so tense and pale, he changed his mind.

Professor Sneeze was not very reassured and decided to wait for another boat... but each time it was the same thing...



Then one fine morning a beautiful white boat arrived. On the bow of the boat he saw written in large letters the name of a lovely white bird, « Albatross ».

Professor Sneeze told himself he really had to get going and decided he liked that boat.

He saw the rabbits getting off. They didn't look too seasick.

Professor Sneeze decided to go on board to try his luck.

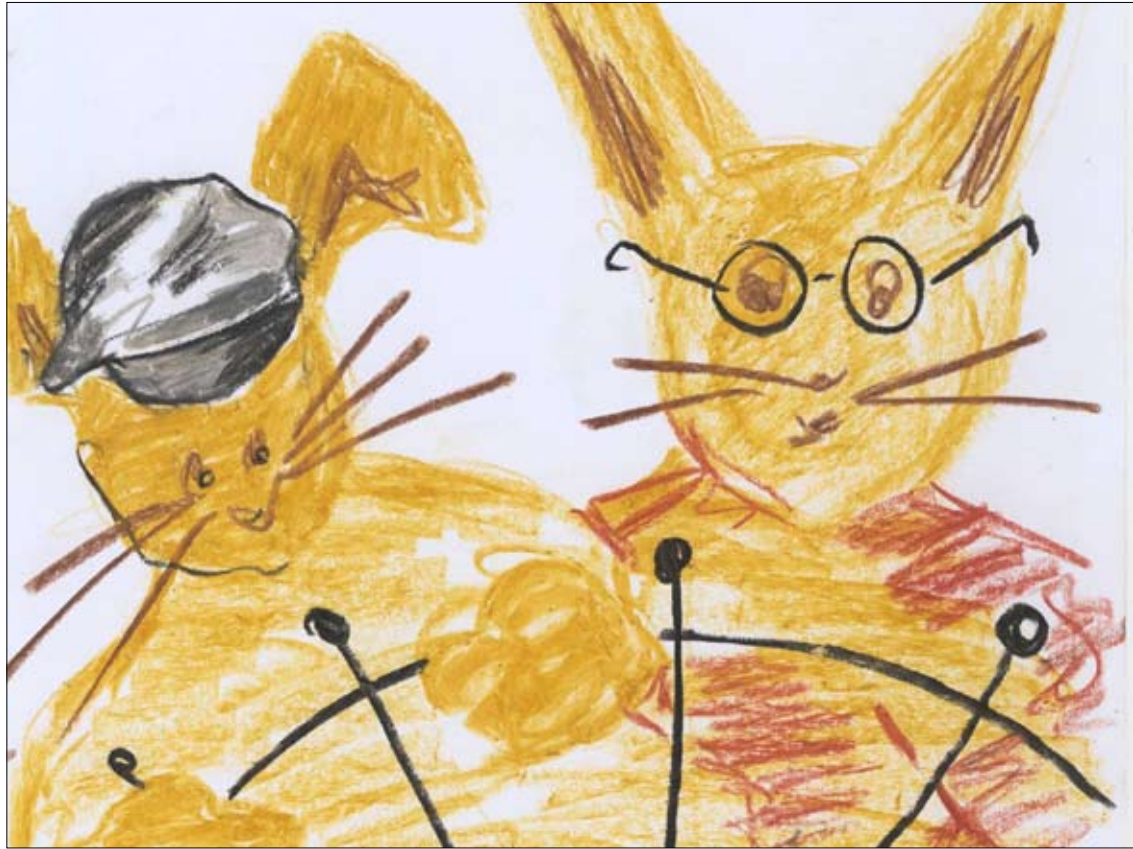


He had chosen the right one.

The Albatross was a boat especially for scientists. It was equipped with a system that kept it upright in the big waves so that the pots used for experiments didn't fall over. This boat could even break through the ice that lay in its way.

- Welcome, the captain greeted him. I'll show you to the cabin that you are going to share with a researcher, who studies minute marine life. The boat leaves tonight.

Professor Sneeze was so happy that he forgot about his suitcase, which he had left on the key.



He didn't stay long in his cabin and went to look round this floating laboratory.

He found everything interesting and didn't see the time go by... or the wind that was getting up.

The boat sounded its siren, announcing that the departure was imminent and that the latecomers should hurry up.

Professor Sneeze glanced at the keyside.
He was astounded to see his suitcase.

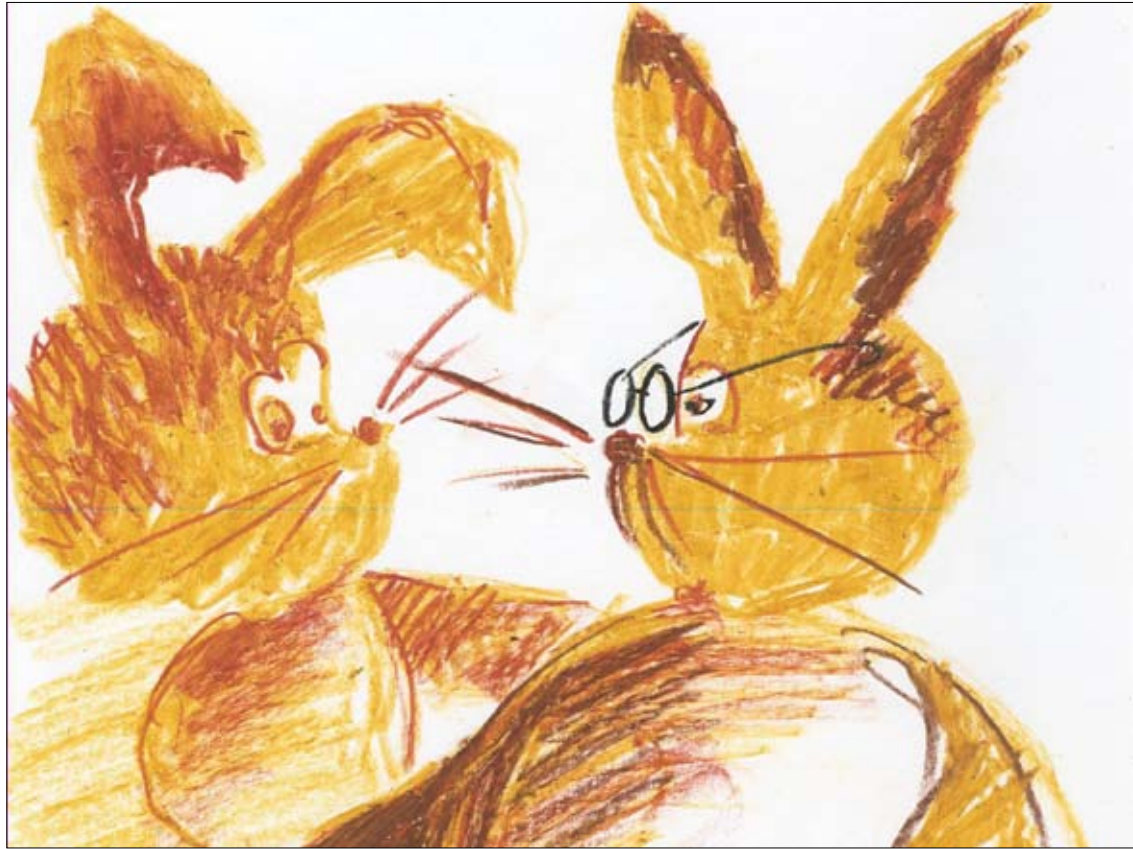


At the same time he heard someone cry out on the keyside :

- Wait for me, hang on ! My plane was late, cried a young rabbit weighed down with two big suitcases and a rucksack.

Professor Sneeze was in such a hurry to get his case that he tripped over a rope used for tying up the boat. He landed in the arms of the young rabbit and both of them fell over. In the process the cases flew open and the contents were scattered all round, carried by the wind.

Professor Sneeze had just made the acquaintance of rabbit who was to share his cabin for the journey.

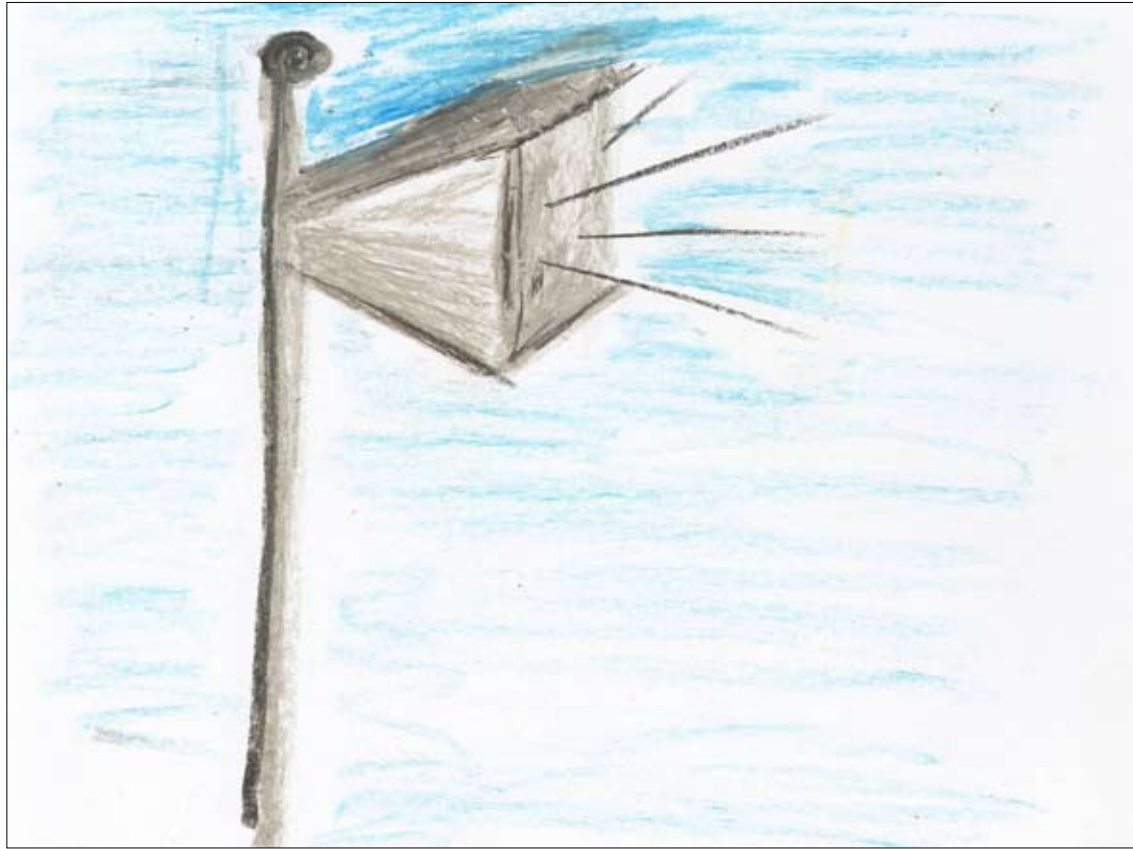


- But, ... aren't you Professor Sneeze ? the young rabbit asked timidly as he picked himself up and swept his long hair away from his eyes. I know your work well and I'm very impressed because you are a real scientist.

Professor Sneeze was moved : he wasn't used to receiving compliments.

- This afternoon I heard on the boat that you study shrimps. It's a pleasure to share my cabin with you, dear Dr Shrimp, Professor Sneeze replied awkwardly.

« Dr Shrimp » seemed to be an affectionate name and the young rabbit was delighted even though it wasn't actually shrimps that he studied.



The captain of the boat had seen what was going on and started getting impatient because the two of them were going to make the boat late. He took the hailer and called out :

- Are you coming on board one of these days ? The boat leaves in five minutes. Make sure you are ready !

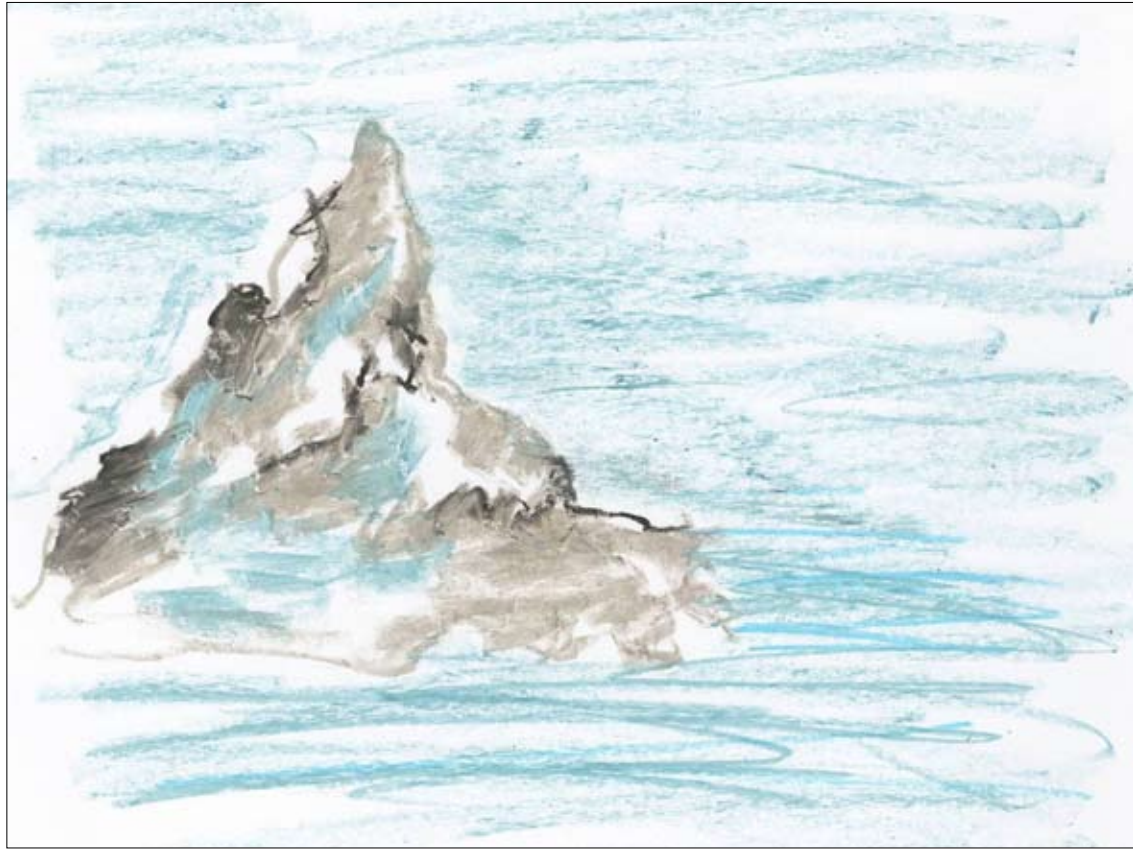
Professor Sneeze and Dr Shrimp rushed to their cabin.



Professor Sneeze and Dr Shrimp spent most of the time on the deck of the boat, watching the sea.

- Look at that jet of water over there ! cried Dr Shrimp pointing with his paw at a whale that was breathing !
- Oh yes ! I can see its humped back and its fin, answered Professor Sneeze excitedly.
- The whale is taking a breath of air before plunging under the water, said Dr Shrimp passionately. Watch ! Another blow or two then when it plunges again we'll see its tail.

Professor Sneeze took his binoculars and watched the spectacle in wonder.



- You seem to know a lot about whales ! said Professor Sneeze to Dr Shrimp.
- The animals that I study and that look like shrimps are the whales' favourite food. Those little creatures swim in huge groups and sometimes at night they are luminous, Dr Shrimp replied.

And he laughed as he continued :

- In fact you ought to call me Dr Krill. That would be more appropriate.

But Professor Sneeze wasn't listening... Once again he was thinking about the message he had received – who was using the name « T. » ?

The journey lasted 10 days.

Professor Sneeze discovered icebergs, penguins and seals... Everything was imposing and magnificent.



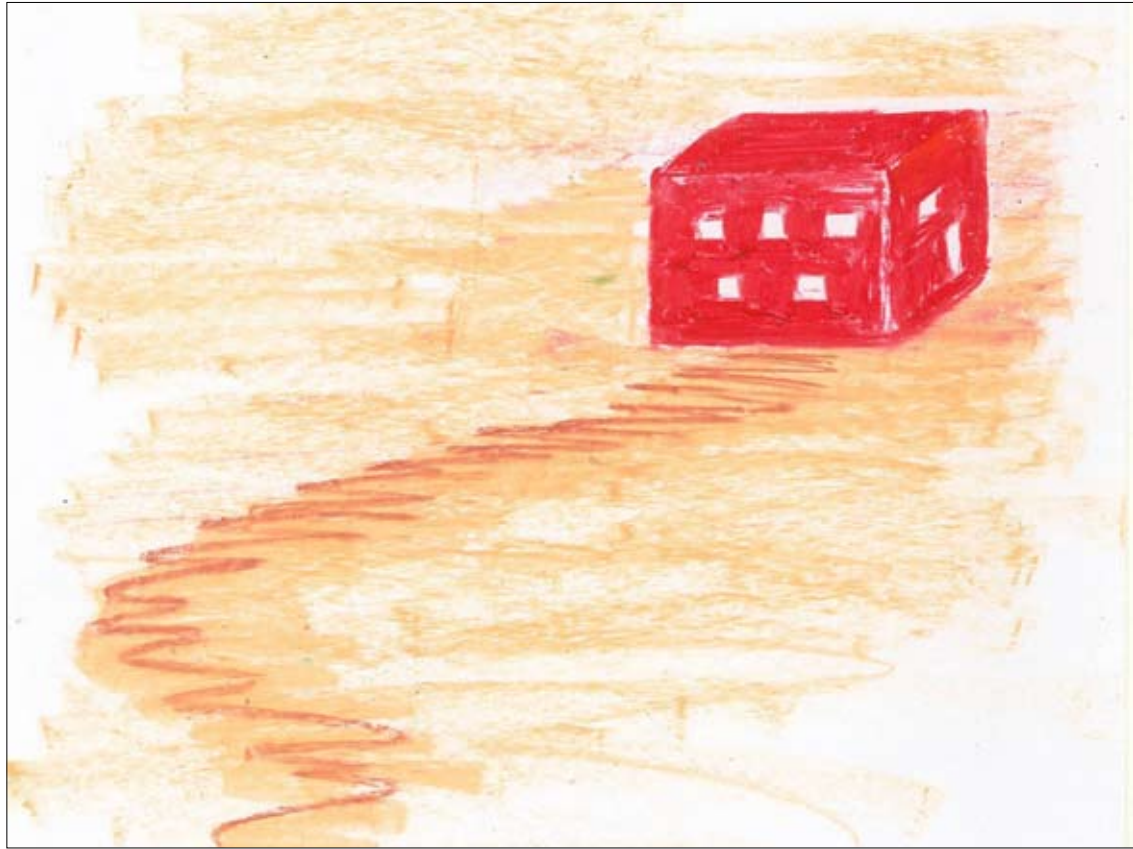
One morning there was a storm and the captain announced :

- The Antarctic continent is in sight ! Get ready to disembark !
- But there's no port ! said one of the passengers.
- No, the boat stops here, said one of the regulars. Then to get to land we have to take the small motor boats that are on the deck.

Professor Sneeze had overheard the conversation.
He was so frightened that all his hair stood up on end.

When he saw that Dr Shrimp told him :

- Don't worry, we will wait for the sea to calm down and they will give us life jackets.
- But nevertheless it's upsetting, replied Professor Sneeze.

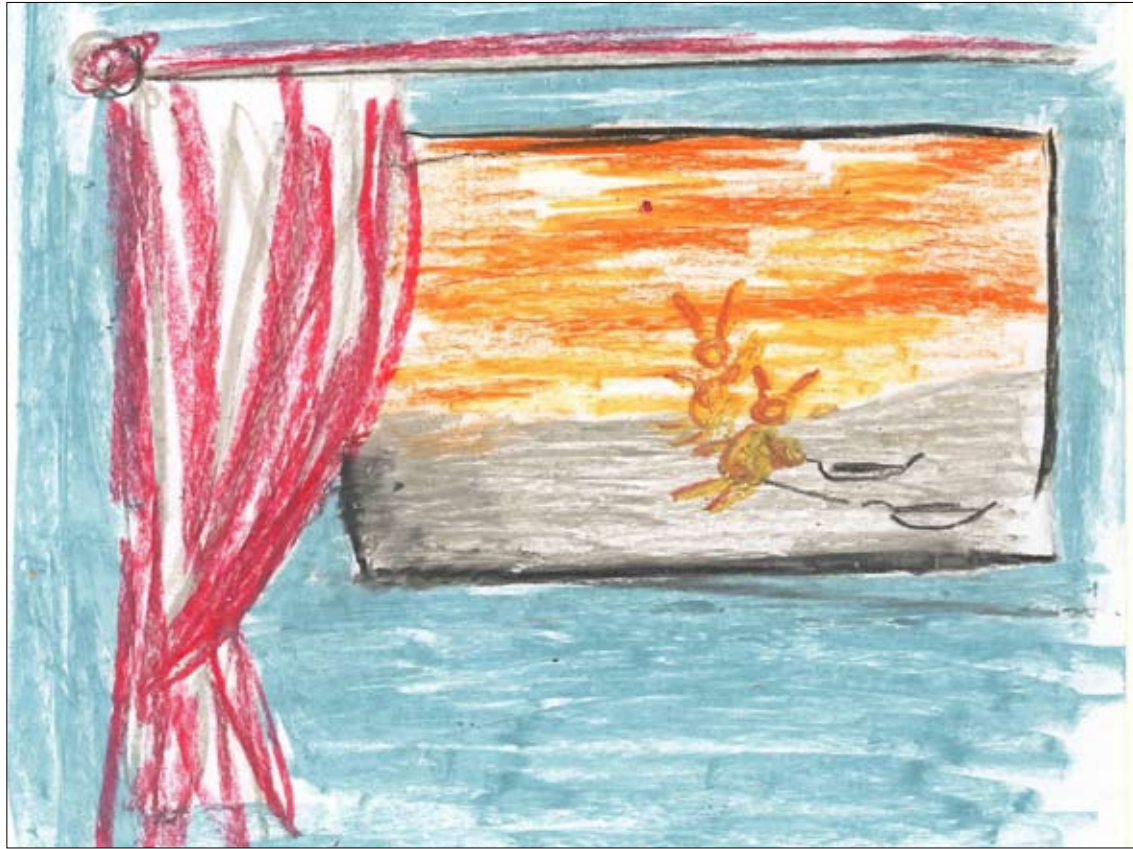


When they reached land Professor Sneeze followed closely the steps of his traveling companions. He didn't want to get lost in that big cold expanse where there were no roads.

They soon saw a large red cube with little windows.

- We're here ! This is our base ! one of the researchers cried with joy.

Professor Sneeze was really excited. He would soon get to the bottom of his mysterious message.



But there weren't many people at the base and nobody had a name beginning with « T ».

- Mrs Pretty had been right ! It was certainly a joke, Professor Sneeze thought disappointedly.

That night, since he couldn't get to sleep, he sat dreamily by the window, looking sadly at the orange colours of the midnight sun.

All of a sudden he noticed far off two sledges pulled by figures that he recognised. He took his binoculars and saw Breakneck and Reckless, his two explorer friends.



- Are you on holiday ? asked Professor Sneeze, not really surprised to meet them here in the middle of nowhere.
- No, we are worried about the climate that is warming up. The researchers need some help. That's why we're here.
- And what about you, what are you doing here ? Breakneck asked the scientist.

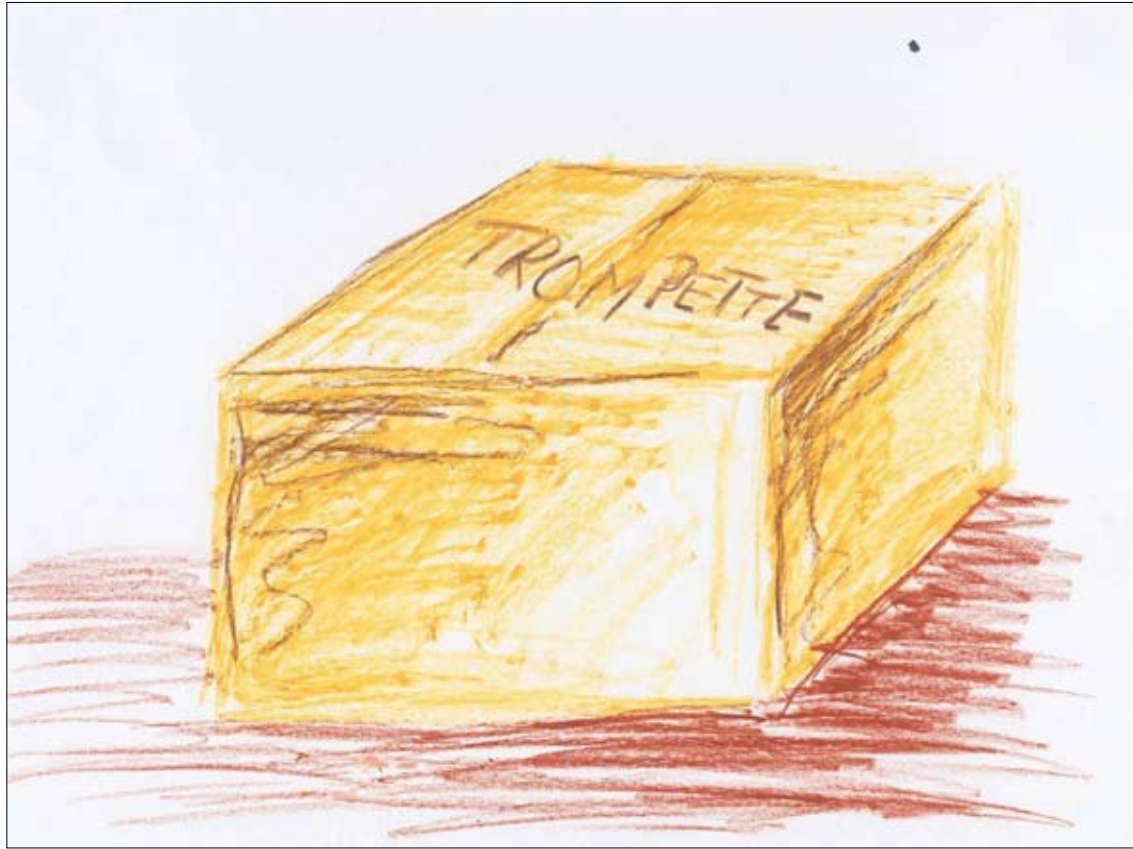
Since Professor Sneeze had a heavy heart and had confidence in Breakneck and Reckless, he told them his whole misadventure.



Breakneck and Reckless burst out laughing when they saw how annoyed he was.

- We know « T. », said Breakneck, who had become serious again. Tomorrow we will take you to meet a team of people that has some problems with their measurement equipment.
- Furthermore we promised to bring them the new equipment that arrived on your boat, said Reckless.
- Let's go straight away, said Professor Sneeze impatiently.
- But it's the middle of the night ! We must get some sleep even if it's light ! said Reckless.

It's true, Professor Sneeze was disturbed by the sun which never sets in the summer.



He spent the rest of the night thinking to himself.

- Someone else must have received the same message as me since they sent some new equipment, but who was it ?

He hunted everywhere and finally found in a hanger next to the base a crate on which there was an envelope indicating « For Trumpet ».

- « Trumpet », that starts with a « T. », he thought.

Professor Sneeze's heart began beating very hard.

- It's not possible that there's a woman among us, he thought. It must be a mistake.

He was so intrigued that he forgot his good manners and opened the envelope and read the message... It was instructions from a university to calculate the thickness of the ozone layer around the earth. Professor Sneeze didn't understand a thing.



At the agreed time Breakneck and Reckless had loaded the new equipment on the sledges and Professor Sneeze arrived with a smile and a big book under his arm.

- I found some literature about the ozone. I'm going to sit on the sledge and carry on reading, he declared without any embarrassment.
- Yes, but you are heavy, grumbled Reckless as he started to pull the sledge.

Professor Sneeze pretended not to hear him and started reading : « The ozone is a gas that you can't see. It's as though the earth is surrounded by a type of balloon that is transparent and undeflatable, preventing the dangerous rays of the sun from burning all living things... »

- Ah ! the scientist sighed. I see now !

The Trumpet woman and her team are measuring the thickness of the balloon.

- How do you know that « T. » is a woman ? said Breakneck suddenly turning round. I didn't tell you anything, I wanted it to be a surprise...

Professor Sneeze was about to admit how inquisitive he had been when Reckless cried :

- I can see them, here we are.
- Thank goodness ! thought Professor Sneeze to himself.



The new equipment was carefully installed but the results were the same. So the equipment wasn't broken... something serious was going on.

- Let's go back ! Trumpet said anxiously to the whole team.

The journey back was made in silence with everyone thinking and calculating...

In the evening they concluded there was only one possible explanation : the balloon protecting the earth had a hole in it. The earth was seriously damaged.

- There must be a way of filling up the hole, said Professor Sneeze, trying to remain optimistic.
- Let's talk about it later on, said Trumpet. We'll meet in an hour at the water's edge.

She asked Dr Shrimp to go and fish some krill and some minute seaweed that was on the surface of the water. They needed a nice meal in order to make some good decisions.



On the beach everyone chose a stone to sit on round the stove that Breakneck and Reckless always had with them on their expeditions.

Professor Sneeze filled a pot with water and put it on the stove. When the water started to boil Dr Shrimp put in what he had caught.

- Fortunately our fur prevents us from getting sun-burnt, Breakneck said suddenly, worried by what he had heard concerning the hole in the balloon that protects the earth. But we ought to protect our eyes.

Seal fat is a good alternative to sun glasses he continued, taking a container out of his bag.

- But it smells ! said Reckless.
- And it's sticky, added Dr Shrimp.
- Too bad ! We must be careful. Breakneck is right ! said Professor Sneeze.

And everyone smeared it on their eyes. A strong smell invaded the whole group.



Trumpet arrived attractively dressed. Glasses protected her from the sun's rays. So the others didn't mention the seal fat.

- I have prepared my special dish for the ice region, she said putting down in their midst a dish of toast covered with plankton. Dr Shrimp brought me some seaweed and i made a dish out of it to put on the toast.

Nobody dared eat it because it had a strange green colour. Breakneck felt he ought to give it a try and found the taste rather strong but nice.



Flat stones found on the ground were used as plates for the next course.

Breakneck tried to shell a shrimp but it was so slippery that it was impossible. Professor Sneeze sent his shrimp flying in the air and Reckless saw his fall by his side.

The petrel birds flying overhead had great fun catching the shrimps.

- That's too much, said Miss Trumpet. These shrimps are delicious, you shouldn't give them to the birds !
- But, answered Dr Shrimp, we aren't doing it deliberately ! Our paws are slippery !

They all laughed heartily explaining to Trumpet that it was the seal fat that made them so clumsy. The meal was such fun.

Professor Sneeze often looked at Trumpet and every time it made his heart beat harder.



The relaxing time didn't last long. They started talking again about the catastrophe that they had just discovered.

Miss Trumpet explained :

- According to our calculations the earth is damaged just above this ice region. The transparent balloon that protects it has a hole in it. It seems to be due to the pollution. It's serious because we might well get burnt.
- What a catastrophe ! said Breakneck. The earth's climate was already warming up and now, in addition, we are going to get burnt.

Everyone came up with a solution.

- We must make less use of our cars and air conditioning, said Dr Shrimp.
- It would be good if we turned off all the electrical equipment that we aren't using, continued Breakneck.
- And why not invent a label to put on all the products that don't damage the earth, suggested Reckless.

When it was Professor Sneeze's turn he didn't know what to say because he hadn't been listening. He had devoted all his attention to Trumpet. The seal fat protects one from sunburn but not from thunderbolts. He had fallen in love.



During the following days the scientists worked hard. When the weather permitted Professor Sneeze liked to think whilst walking beside the water.

He noticed a penguin offering a pretty stone to a young lady penguin and he wondered how he could tell Trumpet that he loved her.

Suddenly he saw her a little further on. He hurried to catch her up because he wanted to walk together with her.



All of a sudden a hungry seal leopard popped its head above the surface of the water. It was waiting for a penguin to jump in the water so it could catch it.

- The poor penguins, thought Professor Sneeze. They wont get away from that ogre.

Just as Professor Sneeze was about to catch Trumpet up, she tripped over a large stone and fell into the cold water. The sea leopard was already swimming towards her thinking of his next unusual meal... but Professor Sneeze Was quicker and in a rapid movement whisked Trumpet out of the water.

Phew ! That was a close thing !



Trumpet was trembling with cold and fear and she couldn't move at all.

- Let's go back quickly, your wet fur will freeze, said Professor Sneeze.

And Professor Sneeze carried Trumpet in leaps and bounds back to the base. Reckless had seen the whole scene through the window and had prepared a cup of hot tea and a sheet to wipe Trumpet dry.

As soon as she had recovered from her experience Trumpet went to look for Professor Sneeze and said to him :

- You saved my life. If it wasn't for you the leopard would have eaten me. I don't know how to thank you.

He forgot all his shyness and answered :

- Marry me !

Surprised but fascinated by the unusual scientist, Trumpet accepted and they decided to go back to Rabbitville.



A few days later the big white boat was transporting Professor Sneeze, Miss Trumpet, Dr Shrimp, Breakneck and Reckless back to the inhabited land, from where they all took the plane to go home.

On the deck, as everyone looked for the last time at the icebergs from a blue glacier, Breakneck had an idea.

- If we all stayed together, he said, we would be stronger and better able to look after the earth. We could set up a club of the ice region, he continued excitedly. We could travel around telling people about the damaged earth.

Reckless, Dr Shrimp, Professor Sneeze and Trumpet were all in agreement because they were worried by what they had discovered.



The club of the ice region got down to work straight away.

They decided that Breakneck and Reckless would give conferences everywhere explaining that people mustn't waste energy, that we should turn off their computers, televisions, electrical equipment and lights as soon as they are no longer using them and not leave them on stand-by.

Dr Shrimp would tell people about alternative ways of heating and lighting our homes based on energy from the sun, wind and water, rather than damaging the earth.

Miss Trumpet would visit the stores to give shoppers advice about buying local goods rather than those from far away, which damage the earth due to their long plane journeys.

As for Professor Sneeze, he was going to work in his laboratory inventing a new type of petrol for cars.



The journey back to Rabbitville seemed so short...

Some time later, thanks to all the people that have joined the club of the ice region and have put the good advice into practice, the damage to the earth can start being repaired. Soon there won't be any more sunburn in the ice region.

- Dedicated to all the members of the International Polar Foundation (IPF) and its president, Alain Hubert. They have been working with zeal and skill, not only on the scientific level but also on the educational and collective level, in their fight to counter the climate changes. May their infectious enthusiasm encourage each one of us to act thoughtfully on behalf of our earth.

- Dedicated to Charlotte who was born just recently... May she one day discover the ice regions ! They are so threatened that we wonder if she will ever have the joy of seeing them.

From the bottom of our heart

« THANK YOU »

to [GAUTHIER CHAPELLE](#), Biology PhD from the International Polar Foundation, who brought us “in the ice region” through the accounts of his own experience, and later corrected our work.