

The adventures of Charles O'Fox

That day, I was busy checking up my bills in my office. I was distressed to owe all that money since I was completely hard up. When you are a private, you know hard times. My name is Charles O'Fox. The best sleuth all over Antartica, the only one too. To be more accurate, I'm a crab eater seal. That's the reason why I like catching thieves. "Pinces" and "pinch" are words I know well. Oh I know ! You'll think I'm being witty !

So, that day I was in my office, a very comfortable ice-cube when Stella announced me a visit. Stella is my secretary. She's kinda cute artic stern.

Stella announced then the coming of clients. Business was slack ! And I was ready to accept any job as long as it could bring a great deal of dough. Stella let Mr and Mrs in, a couple of penguins driven to despair by the loss of their unique chick : the little Prince of snows.

That story bothered me. I told them I would do my best, but deep inside I couldn't delude myself. The chances of survival of a chick that is far away from his bases are very scarce. Here, predators and above all cold are ruthless.

Once the Emperor Family away, after I had been given an advance on salary (which had restored my good mood !) I got equipped in order to carry out my investigation. I put on my putty beige raincoat. You can easily find a warmer outfit, but I polish my detective image. I took my pipe too. A pipe fits a detective like a glove. But I never light it. No need to be a private to know that tobacco is real garbage for your health.

I stepped out in the white immensity (that's the way human being call it) and I started my investigation by going on the scene of crime : the penguins den. There, I found thousands of chicks that where in keeping with the profile of the average victim. But none of them was the Prince of snows. As for the clues I couldn't wish for anything more : down, droppings and footprints could be found everywhere. Can you imagine ! Thousands of penguins were coming to and fro each day over that place. I could not find any witness neither. The mystery still remained unresolved. Was it a murder, a case of kidnapping, or the victim gone on the loose ?

There was just one thing left for me to do : go and see my informer, Max Sumotarie. It's an elephant seal that spends his days lounging around the ice field. Max keeps his nose stuck in things that are none of his business. That kind of guy always knows a lot of information. I found him dozing off in the sun. He was running with sweat and seemed to be stifling in the sweltering heat of that day. I had to take off my trench-coat. I sensed something didn't go well. I had

never known such a temperature before. Was that the heatwave Stella had talked me about ?

That day, Max gave me a first class tip. He had seen a caterpillar vehicle driven by men. And when he had seen it, that vehicle was just coming back from the penguin den, carrying a wooden box on his back. A little bird told me the key of the mystery, was to be found inside that wooden box.

I followed the trail of caterpillars and I ended up in a nest of human beings. Among them, they call that a “scientific base”. All around the base, the snow had melted. In Antarctica, the land is not often to be sighted. Besides, the word “mud” is more appropriate. The base was lying in that dirty, sticky, liquid mud. I was up to my eyes in that mud. An idea flashed through my mind : and if the men were responsible for that sudden thaw ? No, it was impossible. I knew it well that no animal has in its power to change the weather forecast.

Anyway, my trail led to that base. But, how could you get inside ? The very same day, the detective luck kept me company. Charlie, the Snowy Sheathbill, was there scrounging into human dustbins. One day, I had helped him to get out of a nasty mess, and today, he wouldn't refuse to help me along a bit. I asked Charlie what he was doing scrounging into human garbage. He was not used doing that. Charlie is a little thug that pilfers his own food from other animals. He explained to me that, at the moment, penguins and seals were at pains to bring back food to their offspring, and he had not been able to nick them just one fish for a week. For my part, I thought that Charlie was getting old and blind and I can assure you that Antarctica waters are well stocked with fish. But thinking it over, the truth is, that last week, I went to a lot of trouble to find my own square meal (I'm mad about krill). I had to cover long distances offshore to satisfy my hunger. Indeed, something here wasn't going well.

I explained away the situation to Charlie and he went flying over each window of the base. Bingo ! Prince of snows was there. Human beings had kidnapped him to check him up and put him a plastic ring on his wing... funny custom ! We then devised a super scheme (and I'm modest) straight away. Human beings were rather surprised when they heard a big bang against the window. Charlie the snowy sheathbill had deceived them into thinking that he had smashed his beak on their windowpane. The men came running out of their shelter. The door was left ajar and I took advantage of the situation to crawl inside. I had the feeling of throwing myself into the killer whale's jaws (the wolf's jaws if you prefer). Quite soon, I found Prince of snows and dragged him outside and took him far away from that base. Charlie would get off with being pampered a few days by the scientists. At least, meanwhile he wouldn't be in trouble to find food.

Prince of snows and myself had been walking for half an hour towards the penguin den when, all a sudden, a leopard seal appeared. It was the Ravenous Horace. He wanted to write us down on his menu. We cleared off. But Horace was faster than us. Finally an ice cliff obstructed our way. Horace was about to munch us when there was a terrible din. Part of the cliff had just collapsed upon him. The thaw was speeding up and the ice was melting faster and faster. It was incredible.

I found it more careful to finish our travel by sea. I hadn't the slightest intention of coming to a bad end, like Horace, smashed like a frozen pancake. Though young, Prince of snows was rather a good swimmer. I thought our misadventures were over : I was wrong. I saw huge jaws wide open just in front of us, filled with sharp and pointed teeth. I recognized the bloodthirsty Norbert by his dentition : a killer whale. Eventually, we wouldn't be gulped down by a leopard seal. The killer whale was about to do the job ! Prince of snows and me were swimming in zigzags but the leopard seal was still clinging to us. It was hopeless, we were growing more and more tired. Norbert had already his jaws wide open to do the job in double quick time. All my life of a crab eater seal defiled through my head. According to me it was too short a life. But, the very instant Norbert shut again his jaws upon us, he was stopped dead in his action with a heavy flick of fin on his skull. Thanks to my old pal Marylou the whale I had a narrow escape. It was my lucky day ! Norbert went to cure himself in a clinic for severely brain damaged animals.

As a matter of fact, Marylou was not there by coincidence. She had already been looking for me for a few hours. She wanted to bid me goodbye for she was about to settle elsewhere. Here she could no longer find enough krill to survive. She explained to me that the sea streams that used to revolve around Antartica seemed to have changed their way. Now,

these are the streams responsible for the wealth of life in Antartica. I could make out now, why everybody had more and more difficulties to find food.

Marylou escorted us to the penguin den. With a heavy heart, I bade her adieu. We were through with the small restaurants where we used to go, stuffing ourselves with krill. I gave back Prince of snows to his parents. Their reunion was very hearty. Tears welled up in my eyes. I came back to my office. The job had been completed in less than no time and I was rather satisfied. I told Stella all my adventures. I talked to her too about that strange global warming and these modifications of the sea streams. Stella laughed to my face. She explained that these changes had been lasting for several years. The birds, just like her, knew the phenomena well. The aerial streams had been disturbed too and they didn't blow like they used to do. According to Stella, who had travelled around the world several times, similar disorders had taken place all over the planet.

As for me, a new investigation was about to start. I decided to hold an inquiry on that mysterious global warming. You can count on Charles O'Fox, that new matter won't remain unresolved very long !