




Meet at  
the Ark at  
Eight!



**Ulrich Hub**

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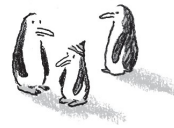
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Somewhere in the world is a place made of ice and snow. Wherever you look, you see only snow and ice and ice and snow and snow and ice.

If you look more closely, you can see three small figures in the snow and ice. They are standing close together, looking around. Wherever they look, they too can see nothing but ice and snow and snow and ice and ice and snow.

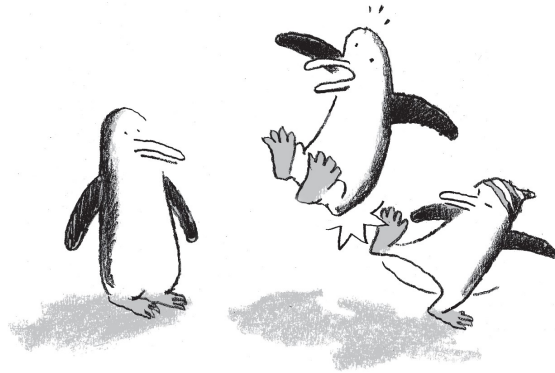
If you get closer to these three figures, you can tell that they are three penguins. They all look the same. But that's the way it is. All penguins look the same. If you've seen one, you've seen them all.

Get even closer to these three penguins, though, and you can definitely see that one of them is different. He's a bit smaller than the other two. But beware! No one should get too close to penguins. They might be completely harmless, but they have a distinctly fishy smell.

"You stink," says the first penguin.

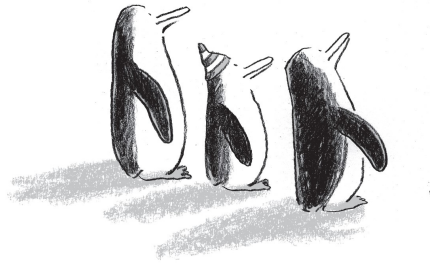
"So do you," replies the second.

"Oh, stop bickering," says the little one, giving the other two a kick.



If you kick a penguin, he will always kick you back, probably a bit harder. One kick follows another, then a full-scale brawl quickly ensues until all the penguins suddenly flop down in the snow and look at each other in complete bafflement. "Why on earth are we always fighting?"

Every day is the same. First the penguins look around, then they look at one another, and then they start fighting. "If only something would happen for a change," sighs the little penguin.



On this particular day, something does happen. Something unusual. The unusual thing is small and yellow. It flutters three times around the penguins' heads and then lands in the snow.

"A butterfly!" The penguins leap for joy, clapping their wings excitedly. Only much later will they realize that the appearance of the butterfly means the start of a huge catastrophe. The penguins waddle cautiously over to the butterfly and gaze at it, enchanted. They have never seen anything so beautiful.

"I'm going to do him in right now," says the little penguin.

"Leave the butterfly alone!" the other two cry.

"But I want to do him in," pleads the little one.

"Thou shalt not kill."

"Who says so?"

"God," the other two penguins reply. "God said, 'Thou shalt not kill!'"

"Oh," the little one says. He pauses for a moment, then asks, "So who is God?"

If you ask a penguin who God is, he never knows quite how to answer. “Oh, God... that’s a difficult question,” the first penguin stammers. “Well, God is great and very, very powerful. He came up with all kinds of rules and can become quite grumpy if you don’t stick to them. Other than that, he’s very friendly.”

“There’s just one small disadvantage to God,” the second penguin adds.

“What’s that?” the little one asks, intrigued.

“God is invisible.”

“Well, that’s a huge disadvantage,” the little penguin says, looking disappointed. “If you can’t see God, you can’t be sure whether he really exists.”

The other two penguins look at one another helplessly. Then they ask the little one, “Look around you and describe what you see.”

“Snow,” the little penguin says. He doesn’t look around, since he already knows the answer.

“What else?”

“Ice.”

“What else?”

“Snow.”

“What else?!”

“Ice and snow and snow and ice and ice —”

“And who made it all?”

“God?” says the little penguin doubtfully.

“Precisely.” The other two nod vigorously. “So what do you have to say about that?”

“I’d say he was a bit short on inspiration when he made this place.”

The other two penguins flinch and look up at the sky nervously. “Be quiet — he might hear you,” they whisper.

“God has incredibly good hearing and, what’s more, he made us penguins.”

“In that case, he must have got confused somehow,” the little penguin retorts. “We’re birds, but we smell like fish; we have wings, but we can’t fly.”

“But we can swim!”

True. Penguins are, in fact, excellent swimmers. But it’s hard to discuss things with penguins. Once they have an idea in their heads, it’s impossible to convince them otherwise.

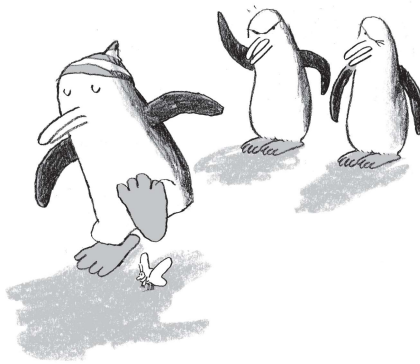
“Anyway,” the little penguin says stubbornly, “God made more of an effort with this butterfly, because it can use its wings to fly wherever it likes. That’s not fair, and that’s why I’m going to do it in right now.”

“If you do, you’ll be punished,” the other two warn him.

“By whom?”

“By God!”

“Well, I can’t wait,” the little penguin giggles, raising his foot so he can stomp on the butterfly.



That would have been the end of the butterfly, but something stops the little penguin — a smack on both ears. He looks bewildered, then starts to wail.

“Yes, cry all you like,” say the others, unmoved. “You behave badly, you have to be told everything three times, and you’re altogether a very bad penguin.”

No penguin enjoys being told that he is a bad penguin. But the little one acts as though he doesn’t care. Defiantly, he flops down onto the snow. “So what? There are good penguins and bad ones; I’m one of the bad ones. That’s the way I’ve always been. I can’t do anything about it. In any case, it’s not my fault. That’s just the way God made me.”





Horried, the other two penguins flap their wings in front of his face. "You just sat on the butterfly!"

The little penguin jumps up quickly and looks around. The butterfly is lying in the snow right where he has been sitting. It is still small and yellow, but it is no longer fluttering. Its left wing is completely crushed.

Together, the three penguins bend down over the butterfly.

"The poor thing is dead," the first one says.

The second one adds: "He'll go to heaven now."

"Does everyone who dies go to heaven?" the little penguin asks.

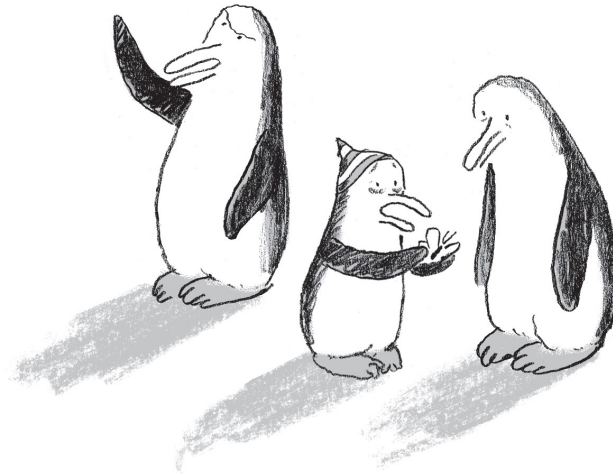
"No, not everyone. Only good people go to heaven. So you won't."

"I'm not good?" the little one asks, baffled.

The other two shake their heads. "You just killed a butterfly."



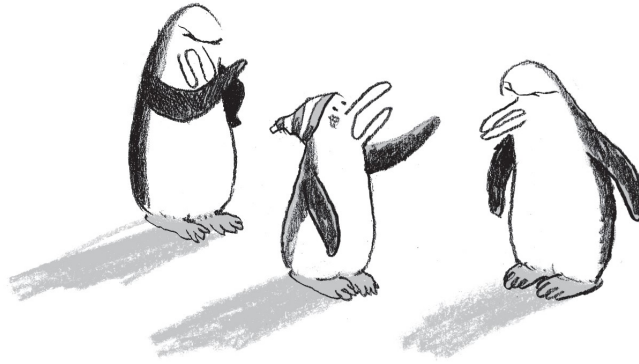
“But I didn’t mean to!”  
“You said you wanted to do him in, and now he’s dead.”  
They point to the butterfly, lying motionless in the snow.  
“God won’t be very pleased with that.”  
“Maybe God wasn’t looking,” the little penguin murmurs.  
“God has incredibly good eyesight. He can see every-



thing, and when you die and think you can just stroll into heaven, he’ll be there in person at the gates, waiting to have a word with you.”

“By then,” says the little one, trying to hide the slight tremble in his voice, “he’ll have long since forgotten about the butterfly.”

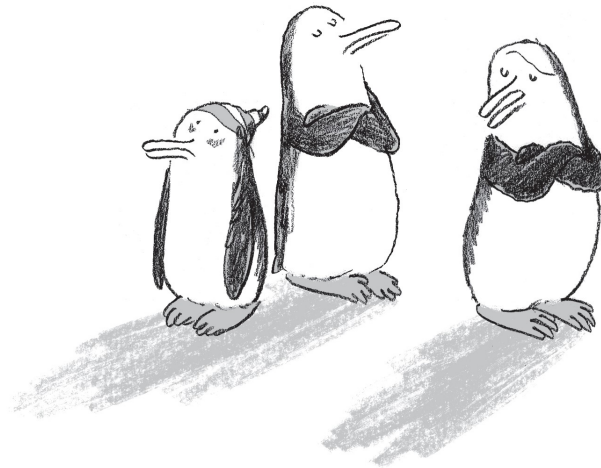
“I wouldn’t bet your life on it. God has a superb memory and he never forgets to punish a penguin who hasn’t stuck to the rules.”



“What kind of punishment?”

“You just wait and see.” The other two penguins exchange looks, grinning. “God might have been short on inspiration when he created this place, but he’s full of ideas when it comes to inventing punishments.”

“I don’t believe in God.” The little penguin stamps his foot. “You’ve just made him up to scare me. I don’t need any



God. I've got along fine without him up until now. And as for you two" — the little penguin has tears in his eyes by this point — "I don't need you either. I don't want friends who scare me. I never want to see you again!"

Then he waddles off so quickly that snow flies up in clouds behind him.

Perplexed, the other two penguins watch him go.

"What's got into him all of a sudden?" asks the first penguin.

"Maybe he's right," replies the second penguin. "I've never seen God, and I don't know anyone who has. God ought to show himself occasionally."

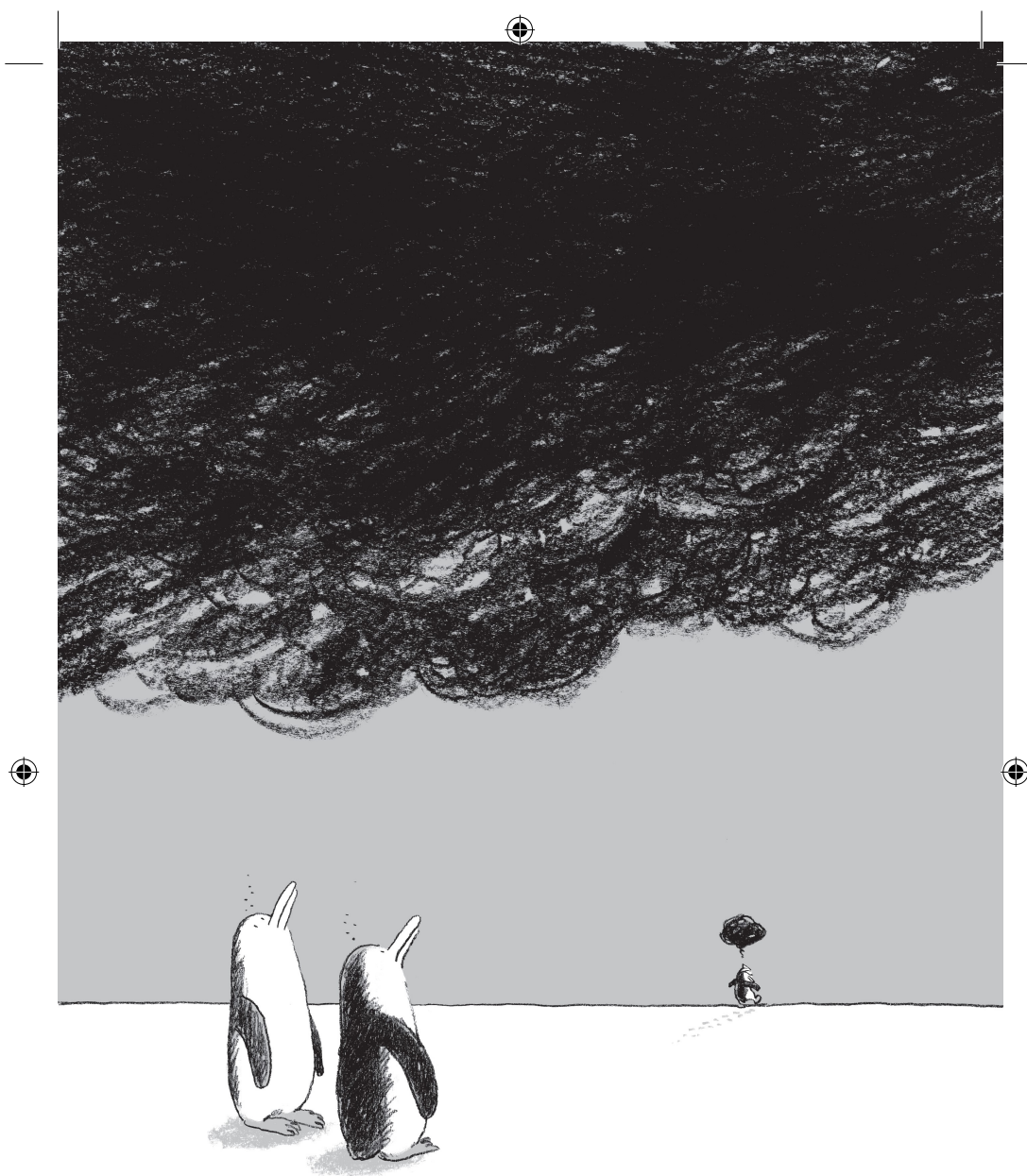
"Shh." The first penguin lowers his voice. "God's watching us. Even now — can't you feel it? Just look at the sky."

Both penguins tilt their heads back and look up. They see dark, heavy clouds. The first penguin points his wing at the sky and says solemnly, "God is marching up and down behind those clouds, watching us closely."

"Nonsense," the second penguin replies. "God can't see us at all. The black clouds stop him from seeing when he's marching around on the edge of the sky."

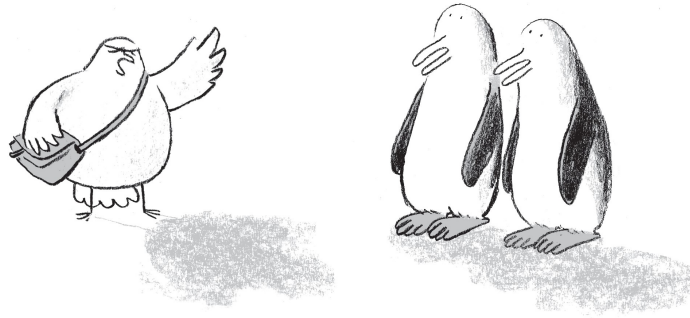
At that very moment a large white dove comes fluttering through the air, steers toward them, and lands clumsily in the snow, doing several somersaults in the process.

The two penguins watch this landing manoeuvre with much fascination. *Well, we can't complain about being bored today*, they think. *First the little butterfly, and now a dove.*



The dove, meanwhile, has recovered. She staggers up, shakes the snow from her wings, and stands before the two penguins, her legs apart. “Do you have a minute?” she asks. She continues before they have a chance to say anything. “Okay then. I’m bringing you a message from God. Listen closely. God says — But what’s that fishy smell?”

“That’s us,” the two penguins reply. Intrigued, they waddle closer to the dove.



“Then don’t get so close to me, for God’s sake!” the dove screeches, leaping backward. “God’s had enough of humans and animals. They never stop arguing, and you have to say everything to them three times. God’s finally lost patience with them. That’s what he said.” The dove pauses for effect before continuing in a lowered voice, “God said, ‘I’m going to send a great flood. The seas and rivers will rise higher and higher until they wash over the shores and everything vanishes under water. The water will rise above the houses, above the treetops, and even above the top of the highest mountain. Eventually the whole planet will be flooded with water. And that’ll be that.’” The dove takes a deep breath and

then drops down onto the snow, exhausted. "Now I've told all the animals in the world. You two were the last."

The two penguins listen, open-beaked. "But that means the end of the world!"

"That's precisely God's plan." The dove pulls a little bottle from her bag, unscrews the top, and takes a long swig. "God wants to wipe out the whole world and start again from scratch. And you two," she adds, giving them a stern look, "really do stink."

"But what's going to happen to all the humans and animals?" the penguins ask, their voices trembling.

The dove doesn't reply. She carefully screws the cap back on her bottle. Finally, she shrugs and says, "They'll find out soon enough."

"Find out what?"

"Well..."

"That they're all going to drown?"

"You said it." The dove gives the two penguins a reproachful look.

The first penguin turns toward the second one. "You always wanted God to show himself," he says. "Well, you got what you wanted. I don't think he can show himself any more clearly than that."

"But does it have to be a full-scale flood?" the second penguin asks the dove despairingly. "Can't someone have another chat with God and get him to change his mind?"

The dove tilts her head to one side. "I don't know God personally, but it's hard to discuss things with him. Once he has an idea in his head, it's impossible to convince him otherwise. In any case, it's too late. It's already starting to rain."

Indeed it is. The two penguins look upward. Fat raindrops are already splashing down onto their heads.

"Stop, please stop," the two penguins whimper, reaching their wings out pleadingly to the sky. "We promise we'll never quarrel again. We'll be good for ever and ever."

"Stop wailing," the dove says firmly, "and start packing."

"Packing?"

"There's space in Noah's ark for two penguins — didn't I mention that?" asks the dove. She continues without waiting for an answer. "We're taking two of each species on board. We need two elephants, two weasels, two hedgehogs, two zebras,





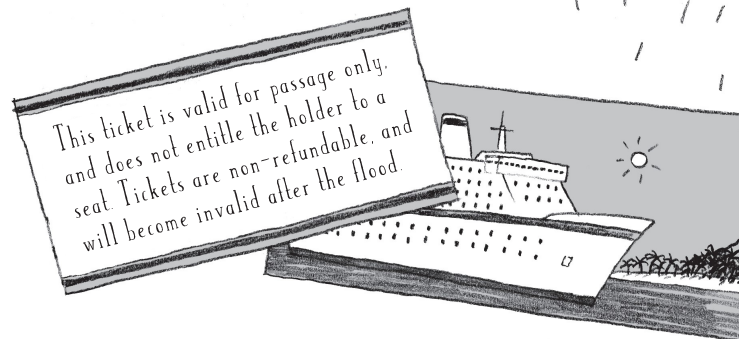
two kangaroos, two raccoons, two snakes, two deer, two squirrels, two giraffes, two sparrows, two lions, two dogs, two crocodiles, two geese, two camels, two cats, two ants —”



The penguins’ heads are starting to spin. “But why just two?”

“Noah’s ark is enormous,” the dove replies impatiently, “but it doesn’t have unlimited space. So only two of each species is allowed on board. Here are the tickets. Don’t lose them!”

On the front of the tickets is a picture of a big ship sailing across a blue sea. On the back it says in small print:



Neither penguin has any objections. But reading is in any case not a penguin’s strong point.

“Remember,” the dove warns them, “you have to meet at the ark at eight o’clock. If you’re late, you’ll drown.”