Once when I was six years old I saw a wonderful picture in a book about the ancient forests called True Stories. It was a picture of a boa constrictor swallowing an animal. Here is a copy of the drawing.

It said in the book, 'Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing it. Then they can't move any more, so they go to sleep for the six months they need to digest it'.

Afterwards I couldn't stop thinking about the adventures in the jungle, and in my turn, I too managed to draw my first picture, with a coloured pencil. My drawing Number 1. It looked like this:

Una volta, quando avevo sei anni, vidi una magnifica figura in un libro sulla foresta vergine che si intitolava "Storie vere della Natura". Rappresentava un serpente boa nell'atto di ingoiare un animale. Ecco la copia del disegno.

Nel libro c’era scritto: "I serpenti boa ingoiano la loro preda tutta intera, senza masticarla. Dopo di che non sono più in grado di muoversi e dormono durante i sei mesi che impiegano a digerire".

Allora riflettei a lungo sulle avventure della giungla e, a mia volta, riuscii, con una matita colorata, a tracciare il mio primo disegno. Il mio disegno numero uno. Era come questo:
I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them if my drawing frightened them.

They answered, "Why would we be frightened by a hat?"

My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. So I drew the inside of the boa constrictor, to make everything clear to the grown-ups. They always need to have things explained to them. My drawing Number 2 came out like this:

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The grown-ups' advice was to give up my drawings of boa constrictors, seen from the inside and the outside, and concentrate on history, geography, arithmetic and grammar instead. That was how, at age six, I abandoned my ambition to become an accomplished draftsman.
the age of six, I came to abandon a magnificent career as a painter. I was discouraged by the lack of success of drawing Number 1 and drawing Number 2. Grown-ups can never understand anything on their own, and it's exhausting for children always to have to be explaining things to them...

So I had to choose a different career and I learnt to fly aeroplanes. I flew pretty much all over the world. And, to be fair, the geography helped a lot. I could tell China from Arizona at first sight. And this can be useful, if you get lost at night.

Over the course of my life I've had lots of contacts with lots of serious-minded people. I've spent a lot of time living among grown-ups. I've studied them at very close quarters. That hasn't made me think any better of them.

Whenever I met one who seemed at all sensible, I tried out an experiment. I showed them my drawing number 1, which I had always kept. I wanted to know if they had real understanding. But they always said, "It's a hat." So I never talked to them about boa constrictors, or ancient forests, or stars. I went down to their level. I talked to them about bridge, about golf, about politics and ties. And the grown-up would be very happy to have met such a sensible person...
S
o I lived alone, without anyone I could really talk to, until six years ago, when my plane crashed in the Sahara desert. There was something wrong with the engine. I had no mechanic with me, and no passengers, so I had to try to get a difficult repair job done all on my own. It was a matter of life or death for me. I had barely enough water to last me eight days.

So the first night I fell asleep on the sand, a thousand miles from any inhabited place. I was much more isolated than any shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. So you can just imagine my surprise, at daybreak, when a funny little voice woke me up, saying:

— Please … draw me a sheep!

— What?

— Draw me a sheep.

I jumped to my feet as if I'd been struck by lightning. I rubbed my eyes hard. I looked all around me. And I set eyes on a quite extraordinary little gentleman, looking at me solemnly. Here is the best picture of him that I could manage, afterwards.

C
osi ho vissuto la mia vita da solo, senza qualcuno cui poter parlare veramente, finché non rimasi in panne nel deserto del Sahara, sei anni fa. Si era rotta qualcosa dentro al motore. E siccome non avevo con me né un meccanico, né dei passeggeri, mi accinsi a cercare di fare, da solo, una difficile riparazione. Per me era una questione di vita o di morte. Avevo acqua da bere a malapena per otto giorni.

La prima notte quindi, dormii sulla sabbia, a mille miglia da ogni luogo abitato. Ero molto più isolato di un naufrago su una zattera in mezzo all'oceano. Potete quindi immaginare la mia sorpresa, al levar del giorno, quando una strana voce mi svegliò, dicendo:

— Per favore… mi disegni una pecora!

— Eh!

— Disegnami una pecora…

Balzai in piedi come se fossi stato colpito da un fulmine. Mi strofinai bene gli occhi. Guardai meglio. E vidi un tipetto davvero straordinario che mi stava guardando con grande serietà. Ecco potete vedere il miglior ritratto che, in seguito, riuscii a fare di lui.