The Planet Rescue Club

The Black Swans

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**CHAPTER 1**

**THE CRASH**

Sivert and Vanja are on their way down to the beach. It is a school planning day.

“I hope the water isn’t cold,” Sivert shivers.   
Vanja laughs.

“You’re always such a sissy, Sivert,” she teases.

The beach is on the innermost part of the fjord, not far from the big factory. They lay their towels on the ground and are about to test the water, when they hear a huge bang.

“Hang on! What was that?”

Sivert looks around. A large boat is listing awkwardly against the quay by the factory. Smoke is coming out of it!

“What’s happening?” Vanja shouts. “Did the boat crash?”

A boy comes running up.

“Did you hear the bang?”

Sivert has never seen this boy before. Who is he? All the summer holidaymakers have left.

“Mum and I were about to have our tea,” the strange boy shouts. “The plates and glasses started rattling. It was crazy. Like an earthquake.”

It wasn’t that bad, Sivert thinks. But he doesn’t say anything. Because finally something is happening and it’s about time.

“Do you want to come with us over to the quay to see what happened?” Vanja asks.

“Sure,” the boy answers.

“What’s your name, by the way?” Vanja says.

“Mo,” the boy says. “I just moved here. I’m starting primary five.”

“Oh! What fun!”

Vanja bounces up and down with joy. “We’re starting primary five too!”

A crowd of people have gathered over by the quay. Sivert catches a glimpse of the front end of the boat, where there is a colossal dent.

“Where did all these people come from?” Mo asks.

“From the factory,” Vanja replies. “Before, almost everyone around here was a farmer. Now almost everyone works at the factory.”

“What do they make there?”

“Tyres,” Sivert answers.

“No, they make rims,” Vanja corrects him. “The part that’s sort of inside the tyre.”

Sivert feels a jab of irritation. It’s like Vanja *always* has to have the last word.

“Hey,” a loud voice calls out. A man emerges from the boat and climbs onto the quay. He stops right in front of them. “No kids allowed now!”

The man waves his hands. Sivert cranes his neck trying to see past the man. It’s not only the boat that’s damaged but the quay as well. Two more people get out of the boat. The director of the factory. And a lady.

“Children, you heard me. Get out of here!”

“Take it easy,” Vanja mumbles dejectedly, but all the same she starts to leave.

“Who was that sourpuss?” Mo asks as they walk away.

“Luke,” Vanja says. “I think he is the assistant director at the factory.”

Mo shakes his head.

“What a horrid man!”

**CHAPTER 2**

**BLACK SWANS**

“Do you want to come to the beach with us?”

Vanja smiles at Mo.

“He was about to have his tea,” Sivert interrupts. Typical Vanja just to ask such a thing. He likes it best when it’s only the two of them.

“Sure,” Mo says. “I can have my tea later. But … do you go swimming here a lot?”

“Yes! From March to October.”

Vanja hops and skips ahead of them.

“Vanja always exaggerates,” Sivert says. “But we do go swimming all summer long.”

They arrive at the beach.

“Wow, there’s loads of rubbish here!” Mo says in surprise. “How can you go swimming here?”

Vanja wrinkles her forehead. “It isn’t usually like this …”

“No,” Sivert says.

But there *has* been more rubbish here lately. It must be that they hadn’t really noticed how much there was before now.

“We have to do something. This won’t do!”

Sivert goes and gets a roll of bin bags from the outhouse on the beach. They start picking up rubbish and throwing it in the bags. One for plastic and one for other things. There are empty bottles, tin cans, old boots …

“So much plastic.”

Mo holds up a small plastic bottle. “This is really dangerous. The fish get it in their stomachs. And then we get it inside us when we eat the fish.”

“How do you know all this?” Vanja asks.

“My dad’s a biologist, an expert on marine life.”

“Here?” Sivert marvels.

“No, it’s impossible to find a job like that in this village. So now he works at the supermarket. Yikes, look at that!”

Mo points out across the water.

“Woah,” Vanja says.

A big swan and three baby swans are swimming a few meters away from shore. It is the same family they’ve seen all summer long, but the babies have grown and are much bigger.

“The swans are black,” Mo exclaims.

“Gosh,” Vanja says. “What is that they’ve got all over them?”

“It must be oil,” Mo says.

“But how did it happen?”   
Sivert swallows hard. Looking at the poor swans gives him a stomach-ache.

“Don’t know. But could it have something to do with the boat that crashed?”

When Sivert gets home, he rides around and around on his new bicycle. But the whole time he is thinking about the black swans. They had flapped their wings, picked at their feathers, and tried to clean off the black sludge. And their eyes were frightened.

Before Sivert goes to bed, he takes a bath. He often does this if he is worried about something. What really happened to the swans? he wonders. And will they be all right? Are they going to die? Were they covered with oil like Mo said?

Bedtime comes, but Sivert has a hard time falling asleep.

In the end he must have fallen asleep after all. He awakens with a start and feels wide awake, even though he could only have been sleeping for an hour or so. He swings his legs out of bed, walks over to the window and looks out.

A white lorry drives slowly past on the road outside his window. Over by the little quay the gate opens. The lorry drives in. The gate closes.

Sivert opens the window carefully. Are those splashing sounds he is hearing over there? After a little while, the gate opens again. The lorry drives to the factory on the other side of the channel.

Sivert stands by the window and looks and thinks for a long while. How strange to see a lorry driving by at this time of day. And the splashing sounds. Now falling asleep will be even more difficult. Black swans and white lorries dance around in his head.

**CHAPTER 3**

**ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL**

The next morning Vanja and Sivert stop at Mo’s house and ring the doorbell. Sivert yawns. He is dead tired. A woman opens the door.

“We wondered if Mo wanted to walk to school with us,” Vanja asks.

“Oh, how nice! Mo?”

Mo’s mother turns around and calls into the house. Mo comes running out immediately and pulls on his rucksack.

“Do you walk to school together every day?” he asks as they walk down the road.

“Yes, mostly,” Vanja says.

They pass the council building, the store, the library and the little café.

“This isn’t exactly a big place,” Mo smiles.

“Big enough,” Vanja says. “There are ten boys in our year.”

“But just three girls,” Sivert says. “And Vanja doesn’t like any of them.”

Vanja glares at him. Sivert knows she can’t stand it when he talks about that.

“But wait, I have to tell you something,” he exclaims.

And Sivert tells them about the lorry he saw the night before, that he has never seen lorries so late at night before, and that he heard splashing sounds.

“Golly! What do you think it means?”

Vanja looks surprised.

“No idea,” Sivert says.

“Today we are going to make a school newspaper,” Ane the teacher says. “I will divide the class into groups and then you can leave the classroom and each group will write an article.”

“Maybe we can interview the director of the factory?” Vanja whispers. “Then we can take a look around?”

It seems scary. Even so, Sivert doesn’t object, because he doesn’t want to be the sissy. Vanja raises her hand.

“Can the three of us be a group? Mo is new here, but he knows Sivert and me. Wouldn’t it be nice for him to be in a group with someone he knows?”

Sivert smiles. Vanja is sly, as usual. Ane nods.

“That’s great. Where do you want to go?”

Again, Vanja answers for all three of them.

“The factory, maybe?” she answers. “Then we can interview someone who works there?”

As they approach the factory, a white lorry drives out of the factory grounds and barrels towards them. All three of them are caught by surprise and leap out of the way. As the lorry passes, the driver honks the horn fiercely. He glares at them angrily.

“What on earth?! What was his problem?” Mo asks.

“Who knows. But the lorry is the same one I saw last night,” Sivert answers.

“Bingo! I *knew* we had to talk to Johs. Johnsen,” Vanja says.

“Johs who??”

Mo looks puzzled. Both Sivert and Vanja can’t help laughing a little.

“Easy to tell that you’re new here, Mo,” Vanja says. “Johs. Johnsen is the director of the factory, he’s the one we’re going to talk to. He owns everything around here.”

“He’s the one who got out of the boat together with Luke the Grouch and that lady,” Sivert adds.

**CHAPTER 4**

**THE DIRECTOR**

The woman at the reception desk is reluctant to let them in.

“We have an appointment, cross my heart …”

Sivert sees from the corner of his eye that as Vanja says this she is smiling her sweetest smile.

“Do you now. With whom?”

The woman’s face is still severe. She is wearing a name tag on her chest that says Mona-Lill. She must be new. The mother of one of their classmates, Mads, used to work here.

“Unfortunately, we can’t remember the name of the man we made the appointment with,” Vanja says.

“You don’t say,” Mona-Lill says and peers over her eyeglasses. “Well, walk to that hallway over there. At the far end of the hallway you’ll find Luke’s office, he’s the assistant director. I’m sure he can help you.”

“It feels like I’ve seen her somewhere before,” Sivert muses as they walk down the hallway.

Vanja nods. “I was thinking the same thing. But I can’t think of where.”

On their way to Luke they pass the door to Johs. Johnsen’s office.

“Let’s forget about Luke the Grouch… It’s Johnsen we need to talk to. There’s *no* point talking with an assistant,” Vanja says. Without waiting for the others to respond she knocks on the door.

“Come in,” a voice calls out.

Vanja opens the door. The director is seated behind a desk and looking at a computer. He has a big stomach and is almost bald.

“Hello! We are going to interview you for the school newspaper,” Vanja says.

“Interview? I don’t have anything like that in my calendar,” the director mumbles.

“Strange,” Vanja says. “We made an appointment a long time ago. With someone named Leif? Lars? Anyway, it was some strange name beginning with L …”

“Luke, no doubt,” Johnsen sighs. “He must have forgotten to mention it. Well, he hasn’t been himself since he crashed my boat into the quay. Afterwards he even tried to deny it. I was below deck and didn’t see what happened. But okay, let’s be quick about it. I’m a busy man.”

They sit down.

“Yes, let me see,” Johnsen says. “My great-great-grandfather, the first Johs. Johnsen, built this factory. That was in the 1880s. Since then …” Johnsen babbles away about the old days and it turns out he’s not such a busy man after all. Sivert, Mo and Vanja nod, smile and take notes. At the same time, they try to inspect their surroundings.

“What is it they are transporting at night?” Sivert asks after a while.

Johnsen looks at him in irritation.

“We don’t transport anything at night! No, all our operations take place during the day.”

Sivert nods, jots something down.

“We’ve seen swans covered with oil in the channel. Do you know anything about that?”

“No, I most definitely do not,” the factory director mumbles.

“This boat that crashed yesterday,” Vanja ventures. “Can you tell us a little more about what …”

But this time Johnsen interrupts her.

“What kind of an interview is this? Weren’t we supposed to talk about factory operations?”

“Yes,” Sivert nods. He understands that the safest strategy is not to say another word.

Johnsen continues his history lesson.

“Thanks, I think we have the information we need,” Vanja says finally.

At that moment, Johnsen’s mobile phone rings.

“We’ll find our own way out,” Vanja mutters. On the way out the door Sivert sees Johnsen give them a thumbs up and turn away.

**At the end of each book there will be 2 pages with facts, in this first book like this:**

FACTS ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

**By OLE MATHISMOEN**

Ole is a journalist and the author of «Green Things»

(«*Grønne greier»).*

WHAT IS OIL?

Millions of years ago, there was a lot of algae in the ocean. Algae are teeny-tiny plants. When the algae died, it sank to the bottom of the sea. With time, sand covered up the algae and it turned into oil. So, oil is a kind of algae fossil. That is why oil is called a fossil fuel.

WHERE DOES OIL COME FROM?

Under the sea floor off the coast of Norway a large amount of this kind of ancient «algae oil» has been discovered. Oil platforms drill large pipes down to the oil and pump it out.

WHAT IS WASTE OIL?

Waste oil is oil that boats and factories can no longer use. Dumping this oil into the ocean is strictly prohibited. Every year from five to eight million tons of oil are emitted into the natural environment.

WHAT DO WE USE OIL FOR?

The engines of many cars, airplanes, busses, and boats run on petrol or diesel. Petrol and diesel are made from oil. Plastic, paint, fleece jackets and raincoats are also made from oil.

ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES TO OIL?

Yes. Energy can also be produced from sunlight, running water, and the wind. This is called renewable energy. A lot of investments are being made in renewable energy now and more busses and cars run on electricity instead of petrol.

WHY IS OIL A PROBLEM?

There are two reasons. If the oil ends up in the natural environment, in rivers or in the ocean, plants, animals, and birds can be hurt or killed. When we burn oil products such as petrol and plastic, CO2 gasses are emitted. This is the gas that is causing global warming and climate change.

SIVERT MO

GARDEN TIL

VANJA

BADESTRANDA

VESLE

BRYGGA

AVISA

SKULEN

FABRIKKEN

BRYGGA

POLITI