

ECO-WORRIERS

Dolphin
Disasters



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Chapter One

'That is so unfair!' I exclaim, bristling with eco-indignation.

Mum has just told me that our neighbour, elderly Mrs Baggot, has moaned about finding a discarded plastic bottle in her front garden. She told Mum that she has noticed that young people on their way to school buy snacks and fizzy drinks from the corner shop and then drop the wrappers and empty plastic bottles in the street or throw them into people's gardens.

'What a cheek!' I explode. 'I have never done anything like that!'

'I don't think she specifically meant you, dear,' says Mum, soothingly. 'You know what Enid Baggot's like – her favourite hobby is complaining. But she has a

point – I’ve noticed a lot of litter in the street, recently. Mrs Baggot said that litter is a national disgrace, and she thinks that parents and schools should be targeted in a campaign to clean up the area.’

‘I still think it’s unfair to blame it all on people on their way to school,’ I say. ‘It could be anyone – lots of people drop litter. But I agree that it’s disgusting.’

‘Mrs Baggot says that part of the problem is that young people don’t eat a proper breakfast,’ Mum continues. ‘So they fill up on snacks and fizzy drinks on their way to school – hence the litter.’

‘Ah! So it’s definitely not me, then!’ I say smugly, finishing my healthy nutritious breakfast of mini-wheats with half a sliced banana, followed by a slice of wholemeal toast with choconut spread, plus an additional spoonful of choconut spread for extra energy. This is important for Olympic hopefuls, such as myself. One of my New Year’s resolutions was to step up my training schedule, cycling and swimming more, and running to and from school every day . . .

‘Slow down!’ gasps Evie, struggling to keep up with me. *‘Pleease* slow down!’

‘But I’ve got to keep running,’ I reply, over my shoulder. ‘It was my New Year’s resolution – remember?’

I am determined to keep my New Year's resolution as I am already feeling fitter – and I can do up my skinny jeans without experiencing breathing and sitting-down difficulties when they are on!

'But New Year was over a month ago!' Evie protests. 'Most normal people give up their New Year's resolutions halfway through January – they don't carry on well into February.'

'I've got will-power – unlike some people,' I yell at her, laughing and racing away before she can catch up with me to whack me with her bag. One of Evie's New Year's resolutions was to give up chocolate – this lasted until halfway through the afternoon on the first of January, when she devoured a whole bag of chocolate coins. Another of her New Year's resolutions was to be nice to everyone. She kept this one until the second of January, when she fell out with her brother Liam after she discovered that he'd eaten the rest of her Christmas chocolate, assuming – wrongly – that she no longer wanted it.

'Come on, Evie!' I call to her. 'Think about how fit you'll be after all this exercise!'

'I'm thinking about how dead I am going to be if you don't slow down!' Evie gasps. 'Oh – look!' She stops and stares up at the branches of a nearby tree,

where a Kwikspend supermarket plastic bag is caught, rustling slightly in the breeze.

I stop and stare at it, angrily. As committed eco-worriers, Evie and I are both concerned about the number of plastic bags being thrown away and sent to landfill, causing plastic pollution, instead of being reused or recycled. I tell Evie about Mrs Baggot's complaint about litter being thrown into her front garden, as she gives me a boost up to grab the bag down. I put it in my schoolbag in case I need it some time. We agree that more needs to be done to persuade people to pick up litter and dispose of it properly, and we decide to redouble our eco-efforts, both at home and at school.

'Eco-worriers will triumph!' yells Evie. 'Together we will defeat the plastic menace!'

It is morning break on Monday and we are standing in the draughty courtyard, stamping our feet to keep warm. A sharp breeze whirls a couple of discarded cereal bar wrappers around our ankles.

'People still aren't getting the message!' exclaims Evie angrily, stooping to pick up the wrappers. 'Why are you all standing around knee-deep in rubbish? Why don't you do something about it – like pick it up?'

She isn't addressing anyone in particular, but Aisha takes her remarks personally.

'I'm always picking up rubbish!' she retorts. 'So stop having a go at me! I'm tired of your nagging!'

'Yes – stop making us all feel bad!' says Jack.

'I'm not!' Evie exclaims. 'I mean – that's not what I want to do. I just want everyone to help get rid of all the litter responsibly, and use the recycling bins when they can, otherwise what's the point of having them?'

Jack pretends to nod off, snoring loudly. Evie glares at him.

'Perhaps we could have a litter-pick,' I suggest, wanting to support Evie, but not wanting to nag. 'It needn't be too difficult. Just stuff any litter in your pockets or your schoolbags until you get to the bins – the recycling ones if it's the right sort of litter.'

'Yuk!' exclaims Shaheen. 'I don't want other people's putrid rubbish in my pockets, or my bag!'

'Eww!' says Amelia, who has joined us with her retinue of So Cool Girls, as we call them. 'You can forget it! I'm certainly not doing *that!* Think of all the *germs!*' Amelia flutters her hands in front of her face as if feeling faint. 'Trust you to have such a rubbish idea!' she scoffs at us.

All the So Cool Girls go 'EWW!' in unison.

‘You’re rubbish, Amelia!’ Evie snaps back. ‘Why don’t you go and recycle yourself and come back as someone nicer?’

‘Speak for yourself, eco-freak!’ Amelia snaps back.

Amelia and the So Cool Girls melt away, sneering at us over their shoulders. Evie and I turn our backs on them.

‘OK,’ I continue. ‘As I was saying, before that rude interruption, I don’t mind how we do it – we could bring in a bin-liner tomorrow, perhaps —’

‘A recycled one, of course,’ interrupts Evie.

‘Yes – a recycled one – and you could use it to put litter in.’ I look at everyone hopefully, and smile brightly in what I hope is a winning way.

There is a distinct lack of response.

‘Why are Ellen, Gemma, Victoria and Danii standing over there, whispering and giving you funny looks?’ Lee asks Evie.

‘I’ve no idea,’ replies Evie, shortly. Her arms are still tightly folded.

I look warily over to where Ellen, Gemma, Victoria and Danii are standing. I give them a little wave, but they don’t wave back. They are joined by Cassia and Salma, and they immediately start whispering to them and giving Evie – and me – more strange looks.

'I've a good mind to go and ask them what their problem is!' Evie mutters to me angrily. 'Why are they being so weird?' she asks the people around us – but the conversation has jumped to the more exciting subject of next week's school trip to a sea life centre. Evie and I are thrilled to be going there and everyone else is equally excited – although Jack and Lee are mainly excited at the thought of getting out of lessons for a day. We join in the happy chatter – but it is a shame that we couldn't whip up a similar amount of enthusiasm for picking up litter.

I feel discouraged during double maths. It is not unusual for me to feel discouraged during double maths, but today I feel especially discouraged because of our friends' bad reaction to the litter-pick idea, and the 'green fatigue' which seems to have swept through the school recently – no one is that bothered about being green.

Evie and I even had to give up our healthy eating stall due to lack of support. People's interest in it tailed off and we found that we were spending more on ingredients than we were making from the stall.

I have also noticed that people's eyes tend to glaze over whenever Evie or I mention 'saving the world'.

Jack's reaction when Evie was talking about recycling – pretending to go to sleep – has become alarmingly common.

I am not sure what Evie or I can do about it, and I must be looking worried because Mr Hobson, the maths teacher, approaches me and says, gently, 'I know that you find equations challenging, Evie – but please don't get upset! Let me help you.'

The next lesson after double maths is geography. Before the lesson begins, Evie and I go up to Mr Woodsage at the front of the class and, over the background noise of chatter and the scraping of chairs, we ask him if he will help us to get people properly organised to pick up the litter in the school grounds. He says that it is a great idea, and he will certainly give it some thought and get back to us.

As we return to our seats, Amelia hisses at us, 'Teacher's pets!'. We ignore her.

The lesson begins. We are learning about the plastic vortex in the Pacific Ocean. This is a huge swirling mass of plastic rubbish that has collected in the middle of the ocean, and consists mainly of plastic bags and plastic bottles. I can't help feeling sad about it – those things are so easy to reuse and recycle, but because people can't be bothered, it is spoiling the ocean

instead, killing the sea creatures that live there. Hopefully this will inspire people to get involved in the litter-pick. Mr Woodsage tells us lots of fascinating facts, such as describing what happens when the plastic reaches land.

‘It’s like a big animal,’ he says. ‘It moves around and, when it reaches land, it vomits, and you get a beach covered in plastic rubbish.’

‘Eurgh!’ exclaims Aisha. ‘That’s disgusting!’

The lesson continues. Amelia gets told off for whispering. Jemima gets told off for whispering. Jack gets told off for whispering. Even Shaheen, who never misbehaves, gets told off for whispering.

I look around uneasily. What is going on? Why are they all whispering? I notice that Ellen is glaring at me, and Cassia is giving Evie a hard stare. Evie is staring back, mouthing, ‘*What?*’

I catch Amelia’s eye, and a big sly grin slides across her face.

‘Could you all please concentrate on your work?’ Mr Woodsage appeals to the class, taking off his little round glasses and cleaning them. He has short, stubbly hair and a short neatly-trimmed beard, and he is the most eco-minded of all the teachers. He is very popular and doesn’t usually have any trouble with bad

behaviour during his lessons.

As we leave the classroom at the end of the lesson, Ellen pushes past me roughly.

‘Watch out, Ellen!’ I exclaim. ‘You nearly knocked me over!’

‘It’s no more than you deserve!’ she snaps at me.

‘What? What are you talking about?’ Evie and I demand, following her and Cassia down the corridor. ‘Can someone please tell us what’s going on?’

‘You *know!*’ retorts Ellen, spinning around and confronting us.

‘Know what?’ I appeal to her.

‘You and Evie want Mr Woodsage to give us extra homework. You want him to give us special eco-homework. You’re so keen to stuff your pick-up-a-plastic-wrapper-and-save-the-world campaign down our throats that you want him to hand out eco-detentions if we don’t do our eco-homework well enough! And we’re all going to get eco-detentions if we don’t pick up all the litter in the school! I wouldn’t mind helping you if you didn’t keep trying to force people to be green – and now you’re getting a teacher to make sure we all do it.’

‘But that’s rubbish – literally!’ I exclaim.

‘Who told you all this?’ Evie asks.

‘Amelia.’

‘And you believed her?’ Evie is incensed.

‘But you know what Amelia’s like!’ I appeal to Ellen. ‘She’s always starting rumours and stirring things!’

‘I can’t believe that you took her seriously,’ says Evie, running her hands through her red curls in frustration. ‘And now you’ve told other people, and they believed you?’

‘They believe that you’ll do anything to get people picking up litter and doing what you want them to do. And they think you’re sucking up to Mr Woodsage because he supports the same green causes as you do.’

‘We do *not* suck up to Mr Woodsage!’ explodes Evie. ‘All we did was ask for his help organising a litter-pick! I would *never* ask for extra homework. What kind of an idiot do you think I am? And no one’s getting any eco-detentions, so you really needn’t worry.’

‘You make us sound like eco-bullies,’ I say in a low voice, feeling very hurt.

‘You do tend to go on about litter and recycling and stuff,’ remarks Lee, who is walking down the corridor beside us. ‘And on. And on . . .’

‘Well – I’m *sorry!*’ exclaims Evie, her face flushing an angry red under her freckles. ‘I’m so sorry for caring about the world we live in!’ And she rushes off to the

girls' cloakroom in tears. I go after her.

Unfortunately, Amelia and a crowd of So Cool Girls are in the cloakroom.

'Oh dear!' drawls Amelia. 'What's wrong with you, Evie? You've gone all red. Are you suffering from global warming?'

The So Cool Girls titter and flock around Amelia.

'Leave Evie alone!' I shout at Amelia. 'And stop spreading stupid rumours, Amelia – it's pathetic!'

'*You're* pathetic!' Amelia retorts. 'Haven't you noticed? No one likes you!'

'Let's go somewhere else,' I mutter to Evie, grabbing her arm and dragging her out of the cloakroom before she has a chance to explode at Amelia. I can feel her seething.

We sit outside in the courtyard to eat our lunch, perched on the circular seat around our favourite tree. But all the flavour seems to have gone out of my tub of sun-dried tomato pasta with pesto and roasted pine nuts. Evie seems to have lost her appetite, too. No one comes to join us, or talk to us.

'Do we smell, or something?'

 Evie asks.

'I suppose Amelia's stupid rumours have had an effect,' I say, 'even if people are beginning to find out they're not true.'

'I hate it when people talk behind your back!' Evie exclaims. She doesn't seem willing to accept any responsibility for upsetting people, although I can understand how our repeated attempts to spread the eco-message may be getting on people's nerves. Perhaps we need to talk about other things for a while, such as music, clothes, school trips and so on. But I am unwilling to upset Evie further by mentioning this. Maybe I will have a word later about broadening her topics of conversation.

A thin cold drizzle begins to fall. Evie picks up a couple of empty plastic bottles, and I go with her to take them to the recycling bins.

Eco-info

13 billion plastic bottles are thrown away in the UK each year that could have been recycled, or, better still, reused. Many products can be made from recycled plastic - from new plastic bottles, to bin-liners and even fleece jackets!

