

Blåse

By Håkon Øvreås (ill. Øyvind Torseter)

Åse wakes up to find a carved wooden owl on her bedstand. It can only mean one thing – her dad is home early from the oil platforms, where he works as an engineer. There's a winter market coming up, and Åse's mum, who works at the Mayor's office, is busy preparing for it. Dad wasn't supposed to come home until after the market, but here he is, behind his newspaper wall.

Åse lives in a small village with her angry teenage sister, Gro; her mom; and her dad, whenever he's not at the platform. After school, she sometimes visits Mrs. Wang, an elderly lady who folds origami birds and serves tea from small floral cups. But normally she hangs out with her best friends, Rune and Atle. They have a secret clubhouse that they've built it themselves. Once they had to put it back up when bullies tore it down.

When the pastor's son, the local bully, bothers Mrs. Wang's cat, he brings the wrath of three local superheroes upon himself. Armed with paint and brushes, Åse, Rune and Atle transform into Blue, Brown and Black, the masked avengers. The pastor's son and his family are about to move away, but the avengers still find a way to get back at him: They sneak into his garage at night, where the pastor's family has stored their boxes of household goods, packed and ready to go. And then they paint them. In the thick of it, the pastor's son suddenly turns up with a torch, almost catching them red-handed. However, Blue outsmarts him and empties her bucket of paint over his head, allowing them to escape.

The following day, the demasked superheroes meet up at the clubhouse. Looking over their reserves of biscuits, they discuss whether getting paint in your nostrils is dangerous (hopefully not), and whether they gave themselves away (possibly). It doesn't matter, really, as the pastor's son is moving away anyway. Then there'll be no-one left to ruin their clubhouse.

On the telly that night, after an interview with the prime minister (who uses difficult words like 'disqualified'), a man named Tom Rooster climbs out of a helicopter with a hen painted on it. Mr. Rooster is a rich, mysterious investor, with sunglasses and a golden tooth, who plans to build a huge chicken farm in their village. "It'll stink", says Åse's mum, but that's not the worst part: Mr. Rooster has bought the plot where the clubhouse is! Åse's dad fails to see the problem, saying that progress is important. And who knows, it might lead to new job openings, possibly for an engineer.

Åse, Rune and Atle have to save the clubhouse. Visiting Åse's mum at work, they pop by the Mayor's office to talk him out of it, only to be kicked out. He's not very pleasant. From Mrs. Wang, Åse gets the idea of making a petition to stop Mr. Rooster (Mrs. Wang was in plenty of demonstrations in her youth), but they only manage to collect five signatures. One is from the new priest, who has long hair and plays the sax. His daughter, Ulrikke, is not keen on getting to know the local kids after someone painted all their stuff, which was stored in the garage before they moved in! Now all are favourite things are stained blue, black and brown. Later, Åse writes a letter apologizing, signing it 'Blue'.

It turns out that Åse's dad supports Tom Rooster and his chicken farm because he's lost his job. That's why he returned early from the platform. Maybe Mr. Rooster will employ him? Åse asks her mum if she can't help him get a job. She works at the Mayor's office, after all. Mum explains that it doesn't work that way, she's disqualified when it comes to dad. Just like the prime minister talked about. You can't just give your friends and family an advantage.

Maybe Åse, Rune and Atle can sell raffle tickets at the winter market, and buy the plot themselves? Surely Mrs. Wang and their parents will help them bake cakes for prizes. Åse soon learns that Mrs. Wang is way better at telling stories than at baking, and listens to her talking about her lost love (an origami-loving policeman who folded birds that could actually fly). On a shelf, Åse notices a photo of two almost identical boys. Mrs. Wang says she used to watch them when they were little, they were twins. Funnily enough, that exact same photo was in the Mayor's office, too.

The day before the market, Åse's dad asks her to fetch Gro. He's got a present for them. It turns out to be an empty box – they can fill it themselves, dad reveals, because they're all moving north! He's got a new job! Åse and Gro are aghast, and Åse's mum is angry; he can't just make that decision without asking the rest of the family. Disappointed and sad, Åse decides to run away. She's not moving north. Packing her book of birds and a warm sweater, she grabs a sleeping bag and sneaks out to the clubhouse, prepared to stay for life, if necessary. It's a little cold and lonely, though. She eats a biscuit and folds some origami birds, willing them to fly. When they don't, she falls asleep.

The next day she's woken up by Rune and Atle, who tells her that everyone is super worried. And it's the day of the winter market, they've got raffle tickets to sell, maybe she can run away from home later? Åse had forgotten about the market. She reluctantly agrees to come with them and help sell tickets. They've got to stop Tom Rooster, after all, or there won't be a clubhouse to run away to. She wants to bring her birds, but they're all gone.

At the market, they sell plenty of raffle tickets. Suddenly, a guy in a trench coat and sunglasses asks to buy a ticket, waving a huge bank note in Åse's face. As he flashes a golden tooth, Åse recognises him as Tom Rooster. When she tells him to build his farm elsewhere, he just laughs. As he leaves, Atle suggests that they paint him in the face as well, but it all seems pretty hopeless.

Just as the pastor gets ready to play a sax concert, Åse leaves, passing a woman followed by three men in black suits. She looks oddly familiar. Out in the hallway Åse runs into Mrs. Wang. She tells her that they'll never win, Tom Rooster is way too rich, and the Mayor won't listen. "Yeah, when they were kids they always did as they pleased," Mrs. Wang says. Åse perks up. Is Rooster the Mayor's brother? Åse turns back, making her way onto the stage, telling everyone that she's figured out something really important: If the Mayor is Tom Rooster's brother, he can't sell him the plot. He's disqualified. He's breaking the law.

The room goes quiet. Then the familiar-looking lady speaks up, saying that Åse is absolutely right. The Mayor has to go, and Rooster can't build his farm. Åse suddenly recognises her – it's the Prime Minister herself, who was just passing through the village, and happens to love markets. Afterwards, she admits that she noticed some odd, colourful birds, and followed them here.

When they get back home, Åse's dad asks them to hurry. They've hardly packed anything, and they need to get moving, quite literally. Nope, says Åse's mum, they're staying put. Åse's dad protests, but to no avail, Åse's mum has made up her mind, she's running for Mayor. As they go to the garage to fetch the few boxes that they'd already packed, they realize that they're sticky. It's paint everywhere! On the floor, next to Åse's now brightly yellow owl, there's a note. It says: "Now we're even. – Yellow".