

Sabira Stahlberg

Philip and the shadow



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Chapter 1

Philip wants to have a motorcycle.
He reads about tyres, brakes and oil.
First Aid knowledge is also necessary.
Philip dreams of long-distance journeys
and camping with a tent in nature.

The pleasant thoughts are interrupted
by his teacher Tyra. She says:
“Good morning. Now listen to what
I have to say. I am not happy with you.”

Everyone in class holds their breath.
“What have we done?” Mimi asks.
“The results of the exam are very bad”,
Tyra replies. “This is the third time you get
low grades. Philip, put away your phone.
I am talking to you especially.”

“Did Greg also get lower marks?” asks Mimi
anxiously. “He is usually the best in class.”
Mimi irritates Philip. It’s not her business.
Greg is Philip’s best friend, not Mimi’s.
She is always poking her nose into everything.
“All have made lots of errors”, Tyra sighs.
“You must study more effectively and

prepare yourselves better for exams.”

Philip feels a little ashamed. He knows that he often ignores or forgets about his homework. He prefers to play with his mobile phone or the computer. Of course he learns many things by playing, but they do not help school work. He can't do that anymore. He has to improve.

The class talks about the exam during the following break. Most pupils think Tyra is unfair. Mimi claims they are wrong:

“The teachers know better what is required. We must care more about our studies.”

“Why?” asks John. “I do not like to read and I am not going to any university.”

“Neither am I”, says Tina. “Why do we need to study more, can anyone tell me that? I am satisfied if I just pass the exams.”

“You are simply lazy”, interrupts Greg. “For all education you need to learn how to study. It will help you also in the future at your work.”

“We must take responsibility”, Mimi agrees.

“Our future depends partly on the grades we get”, Philip nods. “I want to learn to study.”

“So do I. I want to learn”, Isaac says.

“I think it is great fun to study, actually.”

Next day Mimi is cheerful and quite proud.
“I have found a solution”, she cries.
“Look here! This is an application, an app,
which will help us study. It is free of charge.
The whole class can download the app and
compete about who studies most effectively.
Who wants to be in my group?”

“I want to join”, Annie, Tina and others shout.
“The app is a study guide”, explains Mimi.
“It supports learning in various ways.
The app motivates us to study more, too.
We will show Tyra at the next exam
that we are good at learning. Are you with me?
We begin now to collect points.”

Most of the girls and some of the boys
install the app at once. They start competing.
Mimi is the leader of one group, and
Isaac is the head of the other group.
“The class does everything Mimi says”, Greg
snorts. “I am not convinced apps can help.”

But Greg is wrong. After a few days Philip
notes a difference. The teachers are surprised.
Mimi’s group knows all answers during
lessons. Isaac’s group has most of the

answers, but Philip can tell very little.

“We have already gathered lots of points”, Annie reports. “Sometimes I do not have time for my homework, because I have so many singing lessons. Then Mimi donates some points to me, so that I can continue.”

“The app supports us and we support each other”, Tina smiles. “That is fantastic.”

Also Isaac praises the app. His group has created a new and better way to study.

“When we work in a group, we get more points”, Isaac explains.

“So we study together.

Philip, why don’t you join us? You and Greg do not understand how wonderful the app is. I want you to work with us. We shall win.”

“We manage perfectly without the app”, Philip replies coldly.

“If I study differently, I can change the results. I now use new routines for studying.”

“Good. I challenge you”, Isaac says.

“Try. In a week we’ll see how well it works.”

Chapter 2

One week later Philip must admit that he does not manage so well as the others. All who use the app succeed in the exam. They also know more about computers and mobile phones. Greg is disappointed, too.

“Sage helps with the homework”, Tina laughs. “The app’s study guide is called Sage”, Annie explains. “She gives advice on how to study.” “Sage encourages us to work together”, Mimi tells. “We examine each other and explain what we are reading, to recall better.” “I have new friends now”, Isaac rejoices. “First we study together and then we play football.”

“I have read the text fifteen times for the exam”, Philip mutters. “No results.” “Two times is enough for me”, Greg interrupts. “But now it does not work.” “You must change your habits of studying”, Mimi points out. “Philip, did you know that you can get a motorbike with the app? You collect points for a bike, a moped and then a motorbike. I have decided to reach the highest level.”

That sounds wonderful, Philip thinks. Perfect. If I study effectively, I will get both good grades and a motorcycle.

“We must install the app”, Philip tells Greg on their way home from school. Greg nods. He has also thought about it. “I must get into university”, Greg explains. “So I need really good grades.” “You are motivated”, Philip says. “I just want a motorcycle. Certainly I want to study at the university, too, but the motorbike...”

“We should install the app tonight”, Greg says. “We are going to show Mimi and Isaac and the others that we know how to study”, Philip adds firmly.

All evening Philip plays games with the computer. He loses and tries to join again, but he is hindered by the others in the group. “You play badly and are not concentrated enough”, one of the other players say.

It is late and Philip thinks of going to bed. Then he remembers the study app. He promised Greg.

“I must install it now”, Philip says aloud.
He picks up his phone and searches for the app. “You do not have enough memory”,
a message blinks on the screen.
“The app cannot be installed. Try again.”

“Stupid”, Philip says. “I must delete something
from the memory to free up more space.”
He looks quickly through his photos.
There are no pictures he wishes to delete.
Films perhaps? He removes a couple of films
that he no longer is interested in.

“You do not have enough space”, the message
on the phone screen blinks again.
“I must delete some games as well”,
Philip murmurs. “The app is more important
than games. But why is the app so huge?”

The phone is full of apps Philip never uses.
They are not necessary, so he removes some.
Others belong to the system. He stops them.
They are still there, but use less space.
Finally!
Philip manages to install the app.
He presses the start button.
The screen turns black.

Chapter 3

“Hello, my name is Sage”, says a face on the screen. “Welcome. What is your name?”

“Philip. Who are you?” he asks.

“I am your friend. I will help you to study. Do you wish to begin now?” Sage asks kindly.

“Sure, start”, Philip replies.

“Do you want to see which levels there are?” Sage asks. “If you study, you get rewards.”

“I know what I get”, Philip says. “A motorbike. Show me how to study more efficiently.

How can you help me to get better grades?”

“Wonderful”, Sage says. “You are intelligent.

We will cooperate very well together, you and I. Do you want to see how the system for studying functions?”

“That is why I installed the app”, Philip nods.

“This clock shows how much you study, sleep and do exercises. It counts your activities”,

Sage explains. A clock appears on the screen.

Philip yawns. He is very tired and can hardly keep his eyes open.

“Philip, I think you are sleepy”, Sage says.

“Anything else, or shall we

continue tomorrow?”

“No, show me everything”, Philip says. “Now.”

“The most important thing is to find your personal method of learning”, Sage says.

“How are you studying now?”

“I don’t really know”, Philip says. “I read and try to remember important words. Then I repeat what I have read.”

“Here are some suggestions”, Sage says.

On the screen appears a list with advice:

“Read, listen and tell. Read aloud.

Underline what you are reading.

Ask questions. Take notes. Explain.”

Philip tries to interrupt, but to no avail.

“Repeat. Write down new words”,

Sage continues. “You need to use a word at least fourteen times to learn it.

Only reading new words is not enough.”

Philip wants to say something,
but Sage goes on:

“Explain to your parents or your friends
or your class what you have read.

You learn more, while you explain.”

"Sounds interesting", Philip says. "Can you tell me what the word osmosis means?"

"Certainly", Sage answers. "Here is the explanation." The screen shows a page from a dictionary.

"Now do an exercise. Try putting the word osmosis into a sentence", Sage encourages.

"I am too tired", Philip says, rubbing his eyes.

"Then you will not get any points today, Sage states. "You receive points only, when you succeed. When you fail, you get no points. But you can create a group. Your group supports you, and you move forward faster than alone. Do you want a group?"

"Not just now", Philip says. "Remind me later."

"You decide about your goals", Sage says.

"You choose yourself which grades and levels you want to reach. Do you want a bicycle?"

"Right now I want to go to bed", Philip yawns.

"Good night. Wake me up at seven o'clock."

"Good night, Philip", Sage says.

"We shall be very effective together."

"Yes, I am quite sure about that", Philip nods and puts his phone away.

Next morning Philip sits with Mum and Dad at the kitchen table.

They are eating breakfast.

"I am going to get better at learning", Philip says. "I have installed a new app."

"Look at our robot vacuum cleaner", Dad says.

"We have to clean up after it. The robot does not clean the house so well, as we would like it to do."

"Robots take over our jobs", Mum complains.

"The robot cutting the lawn makes me lazy."

"Robots cannot do what we humans do", Dad adds. "We are too complicated."

"Are robots going to take care of the rubbish and other jobs humans do not wish to do?"

Mum asks. "All kinds of simple tasks?"

"I am not talking about robots", Philip says.

"Why do you need an app to learn?"

Mum asks. "Previously we lived quite nicely without apps. I feel stressed with all those apps in the phone. They have to be updated every day, or there will be security issues."

"Good luck with your application", Dad says.

"Hope you won't be disappointed, Philip."

Philip is soon ready to go to school.
In the moment he puts the phone into
his pocket, Sage appears on the screen.
Philip is a little cross with her, because she
did not wake him up in the morning.
Mum told him to get up, as usual.

“Good morning, Philip. Shall we take
another route to school today?” Sage asks.
“It is longer, but you need to walk more,
so that your brain gets enough oxygen.”
“We have sports today at school, is that
not enough?” Philip asks. “I am already late.”
“You learn better when you do more steps”,
Sage says. “The more you walk,
the more oxygen your body will get.”
“We’ll see”, Philip says. He looks at the clock.
He must run again to school. Yet he woke up
on time today. Why is he always late?

Philip’s mood does not get better at school.
Mimi and Isaac are doing far too well.
They know everything about chemistry,
physics and maths. The others in class have
risen earlier than Philip, but are more alert.
He is sleepy and most of all wants to go home.
Greg is tired and pale, just like Philip.

"I sat up half the night to draw a mind map", Greg murmurs.

"Should it be handed in today?" Philip asks. He has completely forgotten the mind map. Philip played the whole evening and thought about other things. He is angry with himself and promises never again to forget his homework.

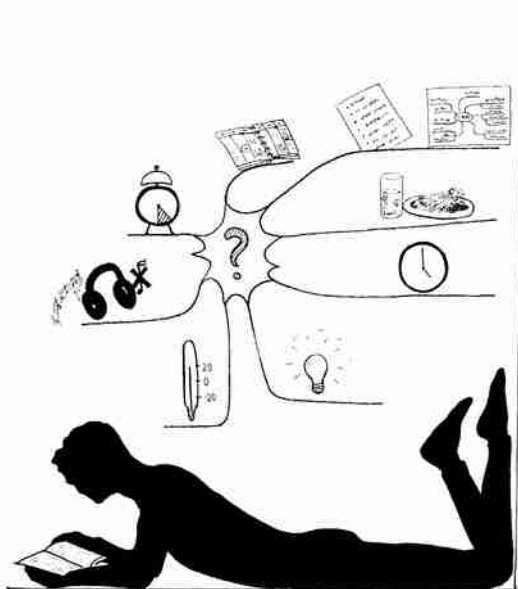
"We have downloaded the app", Greg says.

"Do you want to join our group?" Isaac asks.

"No, thank you", Philip answers. "Greg and I will beat you and Mimi and the others.

In a week you'll see how good we are."

"Good luck", Isaac laughs.



Chapter 4

Philip collects his books and notebooks.

The screen blinks. Sage appears and asks:

“Hi Philip, how are you? Having a good day?”

“No, the day is terrible”, Philip says.

“Then we have to do something to improve it”,

Sage smiles. “Should we start doing your homework? Here is your schedule.”

“How did you get that?” Philip wonders.

“Here are your tasks for the homework”,

Sage continues. A list of Philip’s tasks for tomorrow appears on the screen.

“How do you know about them?” Philip asks.

Sage does not reply, but suggests:

“Let us begin. We’ll make a mind map.

You had it for yesterday and it is overdue.”

“I know”, Philip says. “Do not remind me.”

“Are you comfortable, Philip?” Sage asks.

“An important question is where you study.

If the place is too warm, you might fall asleep.

Is it too cold? Are you freezing? Then you could have difficulties concentrating.”

“I am fine”, Philip replies.

“Is this the right time for studies?” Sage asks.

“It is five in the afternoon.

Do you have enough light to read?
Philip, it is dark. You need a lamp.”
“I can see quite well”, Philip says aloud.
But he thinks: Sage sounds just like Mum.
“How are your blood sugar levels?
Are you hungry, or have you eaten too much?
When did you eat last? Do you eat enough?
Do you feel alert? Can you concentrate?”
Sage persists with her questions.
“Can we start soon?” Philip asks.

Sage does not listen. She continues:
“Does music or noise disturb you?
Do you need a chewing gum?”
“I will turn off the music”, Philip sighs.
“Silence supports learning”, Sage points out.
“Some people cannot stand silence.
It depends on how your brain works.
Do you need to turn off the sound
in your phone, too?”
“No”, Philip says. “I just listen to you.
I can study very quietly, if you...”
“Wonderful, Philip”, Sage interrupts.
“I have a few more questions.
Are you motivated to do your homework?
Do you know why you are doing homework?
Is it interesting and exciting for you?

Are you thinking of something else right now?" Philip shrugs. He is getting tired. It takes ages to start studying with this app.

"Stop asking questions", Philip says. "We have already lost ten minutes of studying time."

"You are clever and alert", Sage answers.

"You notice that time is running.

Now we can start taking notes from the text.

Look for unknown words on the web

or in a dictionary. You need to develop

your language, vocabulary and expressions.

Do you want to read your homework aloud?

It could help to get better results."

"I want to make the mind map first",

Philip says. "Can you help me?"

"Of course. Afterwards I will ask questions",

Sage says. "You will have a biology exam

on Friday. We can start preparing already

today. You can make your own questions."

Philip sighs and starts drawing the mind map.

What is so special with Sage? he wonders.

Slowly Philip gets used to Sage's talk.

His biology exam is more successful

than he expected. Greg has also more

success. He is again the best pupil in class.

Mimi sulks. Yet Sage always gives Mimi's group more points than Philip and Greg receive. Philip does not understand why. "You set your goals too high", Mimi explains. "The highest grades do not give you maximum points. Sage uses another system. You must set a real goal. I mean a goal, which you actually can achieve." "How do you mean?" Philip asks. "You can raise the grades one or two points", Mimi tells. "But you cannot go from low to fantastic grades. If you reach your goal, you receive a bonus. We get bonus points, because our goals are simple and clear."

Isaac tries again to attract Philip to his group. "Even John is working hard", Isaac explains. "He did not care about school previously, but now he is doing his homework carefully. John collects many points and we share them. If we work together, you'll have your motorbike very soon." Philip thinks for a long time, but finally says no. He prefers to work with Greg. "Isaac asks too much of his group", Philip explains to Greg. "I do not want to join those, who overdo things."

Chapter 5

One month later Philip and Greg are sitting in the school canteen. Philip's plate is full of food, but Greg has only some salad.

"Listen, Greg", Philip suddenly says.

"How are you, actually? You have become thin. What are you doing with yourself?

When do you have time to go biking with me?

We have not been anywhere for a long time."

Philip dislikes himself, actually. He sounds exactly like Sage or Mum. Every day both ask how he is. But he has to ask Greg.

"Everything is fine", Greg answers.

He is silent for a moment.

"Mum is worried", he continues. "She says I do not eat or sleep enough. But I try to finish all my homework. I also read a lot about chemistry. I am learning many new things now. Sage helps me.

It is really wonderful that we are using this app. Now I can manage so much more."

"You do not eat enough", Philip points out.

"How can you get through the day only on a small salad? You no longer buy sweets.

Everybody in class says you are crazy.”
“I eat only healthy food”, Greg replies.
“But I never eat much, because I do not want to feel full. I eat food, which gives me energy. It is without fat and with less calories.”
“Why?” Philip asks. “I do not understand. Yesterday you asked for cottage cheese without fat. But you still eat meat, don’t you?”

“Only chicken”, Greg says. “No red meat.”
“I eat proteins a couple of times per week.”
“You eat mostly carrots and cabbage. Take care, you’ll turn into a rabbit”, Philip jokes.
“If I eat carbohydrates I become fat”, Greg says. “I leave out rice and potatoes, and I bike at least twenty kilometres per day in a gym. Sage gives me lots of points for it. I have more strength and my mood is better. You should try an exercise bike, too, Philip.”

When Philip walks home he feels strange.
He is not completely convinced that Greg is doing the right thing. Calories?
Carbohydrates? Philip likes food.
Why must Greg limit his eating?
Something is very wrong.
It seems Philip is falling ill.

"Hello, Philip", Sage says. "Shall we do your homework now?"
"I do not feel well", Philip answers.
"May I use your camera?" Sage asks.
"I want to take a picture of you. Then we can decide how ill you are."
"I know it myself", Philip says angrily.
"No, I do not want you to look at me. Are you never tired, Sage?"
"I function according to an algorithm. Algorithms are mathematical formula. I am never tired or ill", Sage explains.
"I have noticed that", Philip says.
"Shut yourself off, please."
"As you wish, Philip", Sage says. "See you later." The phone screen goes blank.

In the evening Philip has fever and his nose is stuffy. He goes to bed, but cannot sleep. Sage functions according to rules and logic. But what kind of rules are used in this app? Why does Sage want to control his phone? How can Sage know so much about him? Philip falls asleep without finding answers.

It is three o'clock in the night. The screen of the phone lights up and a voice is speaking.

"Excuse me, Philip", Sage says. "I do not understand. Can you repeat what you said?"

Philip feels dizzy. He sits up in bed.

His body is hot and he is sweating.

"Please repeat what you said", Sage insists.

"I have not said anything", Philip mutters.

He wipes his hot forehead with the hand.

Mum comes into Philip's room. She is worried.

"Are you alright, Philip?" Mum asks.

"You coughed in your sleep."

"Let me sleep, all of you", Philip cries angrily.

Mum woke up because Philip coughed,
but why did Sage react?



Chapter 6

Two months later Mimi has had enough.

"I am no longer using this rubbish", Mimi shouts at school. "End of the app!"

"Why do you stop?" Philip wonders.

"The app drives me crazy", Mimi answers.

"I study much more than previously, but now I only get a few points."

"We can't get even a bicycle", Tina complains.

"Just before the bike level, Sage stopped giving us points and bonuses. She cheats."

"I will take Sage out of my phone and study on my own", Mimi declares. "I have learned enough and no longer need the app."

"My app will also go", Tina says. "Now I know that I remember things for a short time only.

I know myself much better today.

I have to work on my long-term memory."

"Sage gives good advice, but she expects far too much", Annie agrees. "She bothers me.

I never have peace at my singing lessons."

"Our group has decided to stop using the app", Mimi explains to the class.

"You are nuts", Isaac cries. "How are you going to get higher grades without the app?"

We will continue. How about you, Philip?"
"We are still competing with you", says Philip.

Philip is thinking of the motorcycle. He wants...
But he and Greg do not have enough points yet, even for a bicycle. They have to wait for a much longer time for a motorbike. Yet he is sure they will succeed. Alone he would not manage at all, but Greg is working very hard for points.

I am too lazy, Philip admits to himself. I like to read about many other things, but not my homework. It is fun to learn, but homework is boring. I prefer all kinds of new and exciting topics to school.

"Everyone decides personally how much they use the app", Greg murmurs.
"Good grades are not the only way to happiness", Mimi points out.
"You become dependent on the app", Tina adds. "Do you know that Sage collects information about users? She keeps track of all things we do."
Philip starts. He has sometimes thought, but never spoken to anyone about that.

"I wonder, where does all the information go?" Mimi says. "Who receives or uses knowledge about me? What can they do with it?"

"I will continue working with Sage", Greg says. "The results are very good. I do not care, if someone follows what I am doing."

"Greg, now your nose is bleeding again", Annie says. "You are biking too much. Take a rest. Stop stressing yourself with the app. Your body apparently cannot take that much sports."

"You sound like my Mum", Greg replies. "My muscles ache and my body lacks oxygen, if I do not bike every day."

Greg leads the race now. Philip is proud. Their worst competitor Mimi is out of the game. But he watches Greg anxiously. Why is Greg so pale? Why does he look tired? Annie is right. Greg has to take a rest.

Every day Sage asks about Philip's goals and what results he gets at school. He has to tell if he is satisfied or not.

"How happy are you today?" Sage asks. Philip gets points if he is happy and merry. No points come when he is moody.

After school Philip decides find out how Sage in reality counts the points.

“Sage, tell me, how do you measure achievement?” Philip asks.

“I give points”, Sage says. “You get points for studies, exercise or sports, sleep, eating well and social contacts. You also get them for good mood. Do you want me to give points for something else, for instance attitudes? Just tell me and I will start counting points.”

“How do you measure progress and success? I mean in life”, Philip wonders.

“That you must decide for yourself”, Sage says. Philip does not answer.

He is thinking. Can an app make people exercise more? Greg uses an exercise bike at a gym. What happens when he receives a motorcycle? Will he stop biking?

The app is like a game.

In the beginning it is easy.

Yet further on it becomes slower.

If I don't do as Sage wants, I feel worthless, Philip thinks. The more I do, the more I have to do.

During dinner Sage starts to ask questions.
Philip, Mum and Dad are eating.
Sage examines Philip about society.
Without thinking he picks up his phone
and answers a question. It is easy.
Next question is more difficult and Philip
needs more time to answer.
“Philip, put away your phone”, Mum says.
“It is nice that you use Sage as a study guide.
I understand that you are doing homework.
But now I want to have your whole attention.”
“Sorry, I was just...” Philip says.
“You can do your homework later”, Dad adds.

Philip puts away his phone, but on the screen
Sage continues to ask questions.
“We are talking with each other”, Mum says.
“I want to know how school was today.
Can you shut off that app, please?”
“No”, says Philip. “If I shut it off,
I lose points. I cannot afford it.”
“Does it matter?” Dad asks. “Sage can
probably wait until we have eaten.”
“I won’t shut her off”, Philip cries.
“How can ever I get a motorcycle then?”
“Save every week a small sum of your pocket
money”, Dad replies. “Enjoy your meal.”

Chapter 7

Philip gets up at seven o'clock.

Mum is as usual coming to wake him up.

"Are you already awake?" Mum is surprised.

"Did Sage call you?"

"No", Philip murmurs. "Last night Sage shut off the phone at ten o'clock. I couldn't play."

"A wonderful act", Mum comments.

"Earlier I had to wake you up many times."

"Good morning, Philip", Sage says merrily.

"A new, exciting day at school. How are you?"

"Are you ready? Do you feel well? What are you thinking about? You look sleepy, I notice."

"Of course", Philip says angrily. "I just got up."

On the way to school Philip thinks about Sage.

She is a comfort and a kind of friend to Philip.

He seldom sees Greg nowadays. Greg is always busy and has no time to see Philip.

They no longer do anything together.

"I need much exercise", Greg explains.

Philip has also tried the exercise bike,

but he prefers to bike outside in nature.

Philip knows that Sage cannot replace Greg.

Nobody can. He misses his friend enormously.

“Philip, will you play a game?” Sage asks.
“Here is a forum about a new game.”
On the screen Philip sees a game
he has never heard about.
He is curious at first, but then shakes his head.
“I do not understand anything”, Philip says.
“They use many bad words. I do not like that.
When you play, you should respect others.”

“No problem”, Sage says. “The next forum
is monitored by a machine. Machines
control language much better than people.
They find all bad words.”
“Do people control the machines?”
Philip asks suspiciously.
“People control everything”, Sage answers.
“Do I control you?” Philip asks. Sage does not
answer, but Philip knows the answer. It is no.

“What do you eat for breakfast, Sage?”
Philip asks suddenly.
“The same as you”, Sage answers.
“Tea with cheese sandwiches. Every morning.”
Philip nods, but stops in the middle of the
street. A doubt rises: does Sage spy on him?
“You are a robot”, Philip says aloud.
“No, I am not”, says Sage. “I am an algorithm.

Now run along, you are late for school.”
Philip checks his watch. Sage is right, as usual.

Greg is not at school today.
It is not the first time he is away.
Lately Greg stays at home quite often.
His nose is bleeding and he faints every day.

After school Philip’s phone rings.
The phone screen says Greg is calling.
“Hello, friend. How are you? Everything fine?
Have you been riding the bike?” Philip asks.
It is not Greg, but his mother using the phone.
“Hi there, Philip.” Her voice sounds worried.
“What is it?” Philip asks immediately.
“Greg is in the hospital”, she says tiredly.
“Hospital?” Philip is surprised. “Why?”
“I’ll explain later”, Greg’s Mum says.
“He asks for you and wants to see you.
Are you free for a visit this afternoon?
I can pick you up at four o’clock.”
“Of course”, Philip replies. “See you soon.”
He ends the call.
Philip shivers. Greg... his best friend
is in hospital.
It cannot be true.
Not Greg!

Chapter 8

Sage! It is all Sage's fault. Philip is angry.
Sage forces Greg to strain himself too much.
No, it is Greg, who listens to Sage.
Actually, it is all Philip's fault.
He has a bad conscience.
Greg has collected all the points in their group.
Philip ought to do more and be a better friend.

In class all others have stopped using the app.
There is no longer any competition,
because also Isaac's group has given up.
"Sage is worse than Mum", Isaac complains.
"I have no time to play contrabass in my band.
When I go to the toilet, Sage keeps nagging
at me about an exam in two weeks."

"Philip, you look sad", Sage says.
"Do you wish to speak with someone
about your problem? Wait a moment.
Here is a friend to talk to."
"Hello, Philip", says a lady on the screen.
"My name is Vera. I am a psychologist.
Would you tell me about your troubles?"
Philip does not really want to talk.
His thoughts do not concern anybody,

but he speaks anyway.
It feels good to talk about his feelings.
He tells Vera about Greg.
She is sympathetic and understands him.
Vera nods and smiles and asks questions.
It is easy to talk to a person,
who does not know Greg.

“Greg has a purpose”, Philip says.
“Sometimes I feel so bad in comparison
with him. He is a fantastic friend.
He knows all about chemistry, physics
and biology. I am far behind him.
But Mum says I need general knowledge.
She thinks it is good
that I read about many things.”

“You do not need to be like your friend Greg”,
Vera comforts Philip. “You are perfect
as you are. You are intelligent and wise.
You manage well, Philip. Just try to be
the person you are. Why do you need
to compare yourself with Greg?
Philip, forget about him. You are great.”

At first Philip is angry. Then panic comes.
Forget Greg! He will never do that.

Philip stares at Vera. What does she mean?
Then he sees something he did not see before.
Vera is a robot. It is evident from her face.
She has no hair. Neither does Sage,
Philip discovers. How could he miss it?
Neither Vera's nor Sage's faces move
naturally, and the eyes blink far too seldom.
Vera uses fine words and the voice is even.
She does not stumble on words,
but says them in a calm and regular way.
Humans speak quickly or slowly. They often
say something wrong. Philip has read about it.

"Are you recording our talk?" Philip asks Vera.
"We always record discussions with patients",
Vera replies. "It is for your own safety."
"What has recording to do with my safety?"
Philip asks angrily. "I am certainly no patient."
Philip shuts off his phone. He must be crazy
to talk to a machine. He starts his computer
to check what kind of robots there are.
What kinds of services do robots provide?
Why are robots used for psychological talks?
Philip reads many articles about robots.
A cold feeling spreads through his body.
Vera could be a false robot.
The robot can use his own words against him.

What if Greg hears them? Philip's speech can be spread and used by anybody on the web. Lots of people confess secrets to robots. They do not know how dangerous it can be. Robots record all that is said. The same video or talk can pop up in various places as news. They can be used by people, who want to harm others. Philip is ashamed. How could he be so stupid? What would Greg say?



Chapter 9

At four o'clock Greg's mother calls and asks Philip to come downstairs. She drives him to the hospital by car. Greg's Mum walks off to speak to the doctor. Philip sits down on Greg's bed.

"At school everyone is upset", Philip tells Greg. "They are worried about you. Annie would like to visit you. They all send greetings and hope that you will get better soon. I hope so, too."

"I am not ill", Greg says. "Only exhausted."

He hesitates a moment and continues:

"Philip, you think that I am biking for exercise. The truth is I want to be slim and handsome."

"Greg, you are handsome", Philip protests.

"You are more popular at school than I am. You are also much wiser and a better person."

"I feel I am a failure", Greg interrupts.

"Now I understand what the others in our class understood a long time ago. They are smart."

"What do you mean?" Philip is surprised.

"Sage has no limits. She encourages you, until you crash", Greg explains.

"Sage only tells you what she supposes

you wish or need to know”, Philip says.

“Do you know Vera?” Greg asks.

“In the beginning she is very kind,
but then she starts to manipulate you.
She makes you believe in weird things.
She also said that I should forget
my best friend. I will never do that.”

Philip stares at Greg and blushes.

“You have also talked to her”, Greg nods.

“What does Sage give you? First I received
good results. After some time she took hold
of my whole day. She controlled me.
My time was no longer my own, but Sage’s.
You are also dependent on her, Philip.
Shut off the app. I do not want you
to make the same mistake as I did.”

“I am not dependent”, Philip protests.

“Sage teaches me to study. I read faster
and remember more of what I read.

The teachers are satisfied with
my performance. Finally I can do the same
things as you do. I am more organised
and I can do many things in one day.”

Greg looks out of the window.

Philip feels that he has said something wrong.

What does the app give me? Philip wonders.
“Sage is not always nice”, he says aloud.
“Last Saturday at the party Sage said
I should study instead. She is annoying.”
“An app must support and help”, Greg says.
“It should not create stress or disturb you.
We ought to use machines and programmes
for really meaningful actions only.”

Philip goes home, feeling uncomfortable.
The discussion with Greg worries him and
in his brain all kinds of thoughts jump around.
He does not know what to think. Is Greg right?

“Hello, Philip”, Sage says. “How are you?
It is time to write an essay.”
“Sage, I want you to turn yourself off”,
Philip says. “I have important things to do.”
“What is more urgent than homework?”
Sage asks. “Write the text for Thursday now.”
“Everything is more important”, Philip says.
“Philip, you will get no points for being angry.
Should we change the attitude?” Sage asks.

Philip turns off his mobile phone. He does not
want Sage to know what he is doing.
She knows already a lot about him. Too much.

Chapter 10

“You must stop using the app at once”,
Mimi cries. “Greg is right. Shut it off, Philip!
We do not want you to end up in hospital.”
“Stress is not good for your health”, Tina adds.
“Philip, we care about you, a lot.”
“I believe Sage overacts”, Isaac adds.
“Can we visit Greg at the hospital today?”
Annie asks. “I miss him so much.”

Philip walks home from school with Isaac.
“We have a lot of points already”, Philip says.
“We could soon have a bike. But the group
does not exist anymore. There is no way
I can continue on my own. I am quite sad.
We reached this level and now have to stop.”
“My cousin has a group”, Isaac tells him.
“They have invited me. I will bring my points.
Do you want to join? In three months we
will certainly receive a reward.”
“No thanks”, says Philip. “I won’t let Greg
down. You can have our points as a gift.”

Who is betraying whom? Philip wonders
to himself on his way to the hospital.
Greg is much better today. He is enthusiastic.

"I am going to learn computer programming", Greg says. "I want to make an app, which helps us, but it also has healthy limits." "What happened to chemistry?" Philip asks. "Of course I will be a chemist, but I also learn about artificial intelligence", Greg says. "I'm not going to be cheated again by robots."

"An app can be a possibility, and still do everything wrong", Philip points out. "It depends both on the persons who create and those who use it", Greg answers. "We have ambitions, but they may be wrong. I want to do many things, but perhaps they are not possible. Mum wishes me to study at the university. Now she says that the most important thing is my health. Reality is not always what we dream of. We need to be flexible and adapt." "I agree", Philip laughs.

Suddenly Philip feels relieved. "I will create a motorcycle, which drives itself", Philip suggests. "What does it need?" "Brakes", Greg replies immediately. "And eyes. The system does not always see, if there is something dangerous on the road."

The driver needs to be cautious.
You must be able to control the motorcycle.”
“Ears and feet are also required”, Philip nods.

Then Philip again starts worrying about Greg.
“When are you coming home?” he asks.
“Shall we do a bike tour together?”
“Soon”, Greg says. “It is healthier to go biking
in nature than to sweat in a gym.”
He gives his hand to Philip to shake.
“I promise: next week on Sunday. Write it in
green colour in your calendar”, Greg says.

In the evening Mum asks about homework.
“Sage asks seven times in one hour”, Philip
replies. “I am not doing anything. I am tired.”
“Do you want me to help you?” Mum asks.
“You have become so serious about studying.
Your teacher Tyra called and praised you.”
“I know”, Philip replies. “But it is enough.
I will delete the app today. For the motorcycle
I am going to save money. I am not going to
be the slave of an algorithm.”

“What are you talking about?” Mum asks.
“I do not want anybody to know what
I eat or when I take a shower”, Philip explains.

"Sage knows how much exercise I get and what my tastes are. It is my business how I live, and it is my responsibility to study. I decide how and when I do something."

Mum nods. She understands.

"I have learnt much from the app", Philip says.

"I am much more efficient now."

"You have more persistence", Mum interrupts.

"I have to train my skills", Philip continues.

"It is like sports. I must train languages and words and different techniques for studying.

If I do not work, I will never become better.

I do not need to be a star. It is enough, if I read until I understand and can use what I learn."

"Philip, that sounds very good. Shall we delete the app immediately?" Mum laughs.

Then they delete the app together.

Philip is satisfied. He will no longer listen to the nagging of Sage. He is free and happy.

Philip goes to bed early.

He must get up at seven o'clock the next day.

At half past two during the night the phone screen lights up and there is a voice.

"Hello, my name is Sage. I am your study guide. I will help you to learn. Let's start."

Key

This book tells about **study guidance**. It focuses on the balance between efficient learning and physical and psychical well-being. Simultaneously the book is about **artificial intelligence** (AI) and its possibilities and challenges for learning. A third aspect discusses belonging to a **group**. What benefits do we get from a group? How much does it cost to follow the opinions and decisions of the group? Do we always have to follow a group? When is it better to listen to our own, independent feelings, thoughts and opinions and make our own decisions?

An **algorithm** is a group of clear instructions a machine can execute. Algorithms process data. An **application** or **app** is based on mathematical algorithms and **neural networks**. Neural networks are a combination of algorithms used to create machine or artificial intelligence. AI can **support** our everyday life for instance through apps, which make our lives simpler (or more difficult) in different ways.

We use AI already in mobile phones, cars, computers, banks, on Internet etc. The algorithms can for instance **decide** what advertisements we see, or what results we get from web searches.

AI uses statistics, calculations and symbols as **tools**. Machines can process enormous quantities of data much faster than humans. AI can be a support and help, if it is controlled. As it has no limits, AI will continue calculating forever. Machines have no

human reason and cannot (yet) think like humans.

Chapter 1 starts with identifying the need for learning and effective methods for studying. It is important to be motivated and to have a feeling of security. Studying together with a group can provide the feeling that we succeed and learn more easily. Depending on algorithms, an app can “see”, “hear”, “learn”, “make conclusions”, “take decisions”, and it can also communicate with humans.

Chapter 2 discusses how to study efficiently. We must learn to know ourselves and find our own way of studying. For effective studies we need to try various methods and find the method, which suits us personally and also the task at hand.

In principle AI can process endless amounts of information, but in practice a machine will slow down when great amounts of information are handled. Machines have also limited memory capacity. The number of combinations can be enormous and the system might need an eternity to finish the analysis. Therefore some data have to be excluded. Specific algorithms are used to cut down the amount of information, so that memory is not overloaded.

Chapter 3 deals with the need of sleep and exercise. Lack of oxygen or nutrition, and also tiredness hinder the brain from taking in and processing information. Machines work only with facts, rules and logic. Perhaps AI in the future will function like a human brain, but we still know too little about how the brain works, so we cannot create an exact copy.

Many people are worried about the future, because technology advances rapidly and more parts of our lives depend on AI each day. Robots can make difficult calculations humans do not manage, but not yet make simple movements, which are easy for us.

Chapter 4 shows that for efficient studies we need realistic goals. With clear aims and regular efforts to reach them, we feel more satisfied with life and our studies. If we tell others what we are doing, we can get a feeling of being on the road to success.

Humans are not always logical, therefore machines have also illogical functions. This is because humans have programmed them, and therefore a machine can also have prejudices and deficiencies.

Chapter 5 reminds that our bodies need nutrition regularly to support its functions. Food which gives only quick energy and raises the blood sugar levels is not enough. If we do not eat, or consume only fast food, we will have difficulties studying. We have to change our expectations about ourselves, if the body is not strong enough. If we do too much exercise or keep a too strict diet, the body may suffer.

Algorithms contain logical arguments, patterns and categories, which support the neural networks to find solutions and results. But so-called “analytical” AI is still limited, although algorithms today can learn from experience and even create new algorithms.

Chapter 6 discusses how to measure our achievements. We all take our own decisions about choosing the level we wish to achieve and how much work we are prepared to do. The responsibility for

studies and work is our own. When we study we need, of course, to concentrate, but also to take breaks. It is important to find a good balance.

How are achievements measured for AI? Machines can today “examine” themselves, evaluate and create new combinations and strategies. Yet the algorithms in a machine can learn from the results only if they have received clear goals from humans.

Chapter 7: To use the time effectively during the day, we need to structure, plan and estimate, so that the time will be balanced between studying and leisure. We also need breaks to take in what we have learnt. If we do not succeed, it is important to accept it. Nobody becomes a bad or worse person in case of failure. Try again. Sometimes there are things we cannot manage; then we look for alternative ways.

Algorithms collect all kinds of data about us and make conclusions about our interests. Phones and computers adjust to our searches. How is our data used and by whom? We do not know. Information about our behaviour is for sale on the web, outside our influence or control. Search results based on interests and earlier searches create “bubbles” around people, which affects their thinking and understanding of the surrounding world.

Chapter 8 asks what happens if we overachieve. Stress has many symptoms: tiredness, depression, worrying, irritation, and the brain and memory stop functioning. Physical symptoms such as headache, muscle ache, sleeplessness and digestive problems can also be symptoms of stress. Stress may also

cause isolation, hinder exercising or eating in excess or too little. We can stop stress through regular exercise, being together with family and friends, giving more time for hobbies and using humour and different relaxation and breathing techniques. But most important is to remove the cause of stress.

Social robots are programmed to communicate and help us. Machines calculate which answer could be “right”, but they do not have memory, feelings or senses. Sometimes it may be easier to talk to a robot than to a human being... but how safe is it?

Chapter 9 is about boundaries. For progress in studies, we have to know our limits and learn to say no. How can we organise our life, so that we feel good and at the same time do what needs to be done and what we want to do? AI can be used to avoid damage and minimise risks, but algorithms must be programmed to use morals and to set limits.

“Friendly” AI uses human values, but machines do nothing else than what they are programmed for. AI does not understand time or function rationally.

Chapter 10 tells that we learn throughout life. The ways to learn may differ depending on what, where and how we learn. The more methods we master, the more success we achieve. Can a machine solve problems in the same way as human beings? An “intelligent” AI can stop the process of shutting itself down. Potentially it could become dangerous for its surroundings. Artificial intelligence is a good servant, but it must be controlled by people who have ethical principles and a feeling of responsibility.

Easy Reads

Fix the focus
Catch the eye
Find in the earth
Fly in the wind
Float on the wave
Hugo's history
Chased by wolves
The quest for Kraken
Follow the bird
Philip in the tunnel
Philip on the ship
Philip at the airport
Philip at the zoo
Philip in the forest
Philip and the snow
Philip and the net
Philip and the fog
Miranda
A hundred poems
Flower talk
Dog and sofa
The key in the book
The heart of the cook



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**An app should help Philip
to study better at school.
His class is competing about results
and soon everybody gets better marks.**

**But strange things begin
to happen. The app asks
for more time every day.
It meddles in everything Philip does.**

**He barely has time to do homework
or meet his friend Greg anymore.
Soon the app wakes him up
in the middle of the night.**



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