

Sabira Stahlberg

Philip and the snow



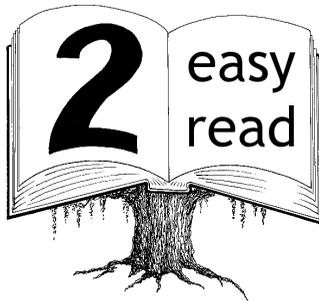
Lecti

book studio

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Philip and the snow

Illustrations Maria Viitasalo



Varna 2018

*Every sold book supports the creation
and distribution of Easy Read books
in Balkan languages*

Easy Read levels

Level 1 Easiest

Level 2 Easier

Level 3 Easy

bokpil.eu

Second edition

Original title *Filip i snön* (Swedish)

Translation Marianne Ståhlberg

and Sabira Ståhlberg

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Varna 2018

ISBN 978-619-192-202-4 (Paper)

ISBN 978-619-192-201-7 (PDF)

ISBN 978-619-192-189-8 (EPUB)

Chapter 1

Philip is sitting indoors during a break at school.
He would like to go out,
because he needs some exercise.
But it is too cold outside.
Philip yawns.

His best friend Greg
reads a book on chemistry.
As usual Philip is reading about biology.
His greatest interest right now
are the so-called invasive species.
'Greg', Philip says.
'Do you know what invasive means?'

Greg nods and replies:
'An illness can be invasive in the body.
It comes from outside.'
'In nature an invasive species
comes from another region.
It adapts itself to our environment
and affects it,' Philip says.
'So our environment changes.'

Before Greg has time to answer,
Mimi rushes into the classroom.

'We have a new pupil in our class,' she cries.
'Who is it?' Philip asks.
'I don't know his name,
but he is cute,' Mimi smiles.
'He has curly hair and...'

Fred runs into the room from the corridor.
'A foreigner is coming this way,' Fred shouts.
'What is he doing here?
Are we going to have Fun Hour?'
'Shush, teacher is coming,' Greg hushes him.

Beside their teacher Henry
stands a boy with black hair.
He has big, brown eyes
and long, thick eyelashes.

'May I present Amir,' Henry says.
'He'll start in our class.
He speaks fairly good English.
Amir comes from a war area.
You should take good care of him.
Amir, you can sit beside Philip.
Do you want to say something to the class?'

Amir shakes his head.
He looks around shyly.
He glances at the class,
but avoids meeting anybody's eyes.

The girls stare at him,
but Amir looks away.
Mimi is right.
The boy is really handsome.

‘Can he talk?’ Fred asks loudly.
‘Welcome, Amir,’ Greg says.
‘We are happy to have you with us.’
‘Open the books at page forty,’ Henry orders.
‘We will talk about cause and consequences.
Greg, could you start, please.
What homework did you have?’

Amir sits down beside Philip,
but he does something strange.
He pulls his chair closer to the wall.
It seems as if he did not wish to sit near Philip.
‘Page forty,’ Philip whispers.
He puts up four fingers.
Amir glances quickly at him,
but does not move. He stares at the desk.

‘Do you need a pencil?’ Philip whispers.
He hands Amir a pencil.
Amir nods and takes it,
but still does not look at Philip.
‘Philip, stop talking,’ says the teacher.

Chapter 2

The lesson finally ends.
Henry leaves the classroom
and Philip turns to Amir.
'Come,' says Philip kindly.
'Let's go to the canteen.
It is time for lunch.'

Greg walks with Philip and Amir.
'I hope you will enjoy it here,' Greg says.
He wants to say something more,
but Mimi interrupts him.
She stops right in front of Amir.
The girls gather around her.

'You have a wonderful shirt,' Mimi begins.
'I can see that you like colours.
I like strong colours, too.
Red is my favourite.
Can you show us on the map from where you are?'
'What kind of music do you listen to?' Tina asks.
'Do you know the latest artists?'
Did you have wireless Internet in your home?'

Annie joins the discussion.
'Do you know how to cook?' she asks.

'Your food is just great.
I love spices and garlic.
When I lived in London, we used to eat
a lot of hot and spicy dishes.
You must put loads of chilli in your food.'
'Do you have a girl friend?' interrupts Kate.
'Will you sit with us in the canteen?'
Tina asks eagerly.
'Yes, come with us,' all the girls shout in chorus.

Amir turns his head away.
He is staring at the wall. His face turns red.
'No thank you,' he says in a low voice.
'No thank you,' Fred imitates him.
'This guy cannot speak properly,
or he is maybe a little stupid.'
'Amir is not stupid,' Mimi snorts to Fred.
'It is you, who have a small brain.'

'Mimi, you are an ass,' says Greg.
'What do you mean?' Mimi is upset.
'You must give Amir some more time
to get used to us,' Greg explains.
'But I want to know more about him,'
Mimi protests.
'We also wish to know more about Amir,'
replies Philip. 'But he has just arrived,
and you already ask him about his private life.
He does not know us yet.'

Do you wish to tell your whole life to strangers?
Let Amir first get to know everybody
and then you can start asking.'
'Everybody is as curious as you are,' Greg adds.
'Amir probably gets a million of questions
every day about himself
and where he comes from. Don't you, Amir?'

Amir does not reply.
He does not move and Philip thinks he is asleep.
His brown eyes stare straight down at the floor.
Philip feels that Amir would like
the floor to swallow him. Philip feels the same.
He is ashamed of Mimi and all the others.
How can they be so silly?
'Come, Amir, let's go,' Philip says.
'Don't mind the girls.'

'Did Amir run away, so that he wouldn't
become a soldier and have to kill people?
Maybe he no longer has a family,'
Mimi is thinking aloud.
'Or he could be poor,' says Annie.
'I have heard about it.
Many become refugees because of poverty.
But poverty is not as dangerous as war.'
'People moved from here to America
more than one hundred years ago.
There was often a lack of food,' Greg remarks.

'People also flee from climate change.
The sandy deserts are growing,' Mimi says.
'There are many flooded areas in the world, too.'
'I think Amir wants money,' says Fred.
'People come here from poor countries for that.
They want our money. We pay and they get rich.'
'Does anyone want to have lunch?'
interrupts Thomas. 'Let that chocolate boy be.
I am terribly hungry.'

Amir does not move.
The others go to the canteen. Only Philip stays.
Amir feels how he is burning inside.
He hates Mimi and the girls.
They do not know his culture.
How can they claim that they love it?
They know nothing about his kind of food either.

'Come,' says Philip. 'We must go now
or we will be without food.'
Amir turns his head and looks
at Philip for the first time.
'I hate chilli,' he says.



Chapter 3

Amir eats only some salad.
He does not touch the meat or the potatoes.
He eats carefully and slowly.
'He must be a vegetarian,'
Mimi whispers to Tina.
'He does not like our food,' whispers Annie.
'It does not taste like anything he is used to.'
'I think he is shy,' Tina says.
'We must be kind to him.'
'We are really nice,' Mimi protests.

All day Amir does not say much.
He does not look at anybody in the class,
only at the teacher.
He answers yes or no when the teacher asks.
Henry does not seem mind it.

During the walk home Amir is thinking
about his first day at school.
The snow is creaking under his boots.
School is so different here.
The pupils have no respect for the teacher.
They walk with their caps on indoors
and they sit on the desks.
They claim to dislike school and homework.

At home nobody would say that.
Amir wants to go to school and learn.
He has not been to a school
since he had to flee from the war.

Amir has only had one course in English
during the last two years.
He is longing for knowledge.
If he had knowledge,
he could do whatever he wants.
His family now lives in a safe country.
Amir wishes to learn the language better.
Now he must only adapt
and start building a new life.

Mother and Father need a new life, too.
Mother is a lawyer, but she does not
get a permanent job here.
She tries to help people who want to
return home to their countries.
Father is a medical doctor.
At home he was a surgeon
and everyone was looking for his help.
He has received a new diploma,
but nobody wants to employ him here.
He does not speak English so well.

It is not easy at all to create a new life.

Chapter 4

Next morning Amir arrives two hours late for school.
'Where have you been?' Mimi asks.
Amir shakes his head.
'He speaks, but I hear nothing,' Fred comments.
'There must be something wrong with his voice.'

Amir sits down beside Philip.
Today he does not pull away his chair.
He follows the teacher's talk,
but his thoughts are elsewhere.

Father informed that he had called the school in the morning.
Amir would be needed elsewhere today.
'You must come with me to the bureau and translate, said Father.
'I should go to school,' Amir tries to protest.
'You'll have time for that.
We have to get an important permission,'
Mother explained.
'You can study up the homework later.
I'll help you in the evening.'

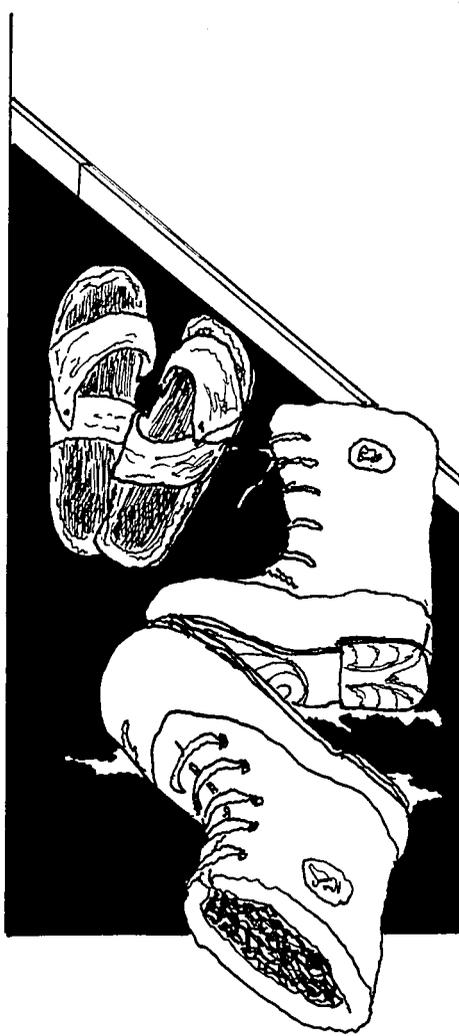
They went early to the office of the authorities,
but then they had to wait for over one hour.
Finally they could go to the counter.
The lady there explained that
one paper was missing.
Father tried to discuss with her.
Mother talked for a long time about their need
to receive the permission.
Amir translated, but the lady did not listen.
His head was finally buzzing loudly.

Amir started to mix the languages.
He started to talk his language with the lady
and English with his father.
He also did not understand all the lady's words.
She used long and difficult words
he had never heard at the course.

'Come back tomorrow with the document,'
the lady said. 'Goodbye.'
She pressed a button.

Mother and Father continued to talk.
They still tried to convince the lady.
A man appeared behind them.
'Go away, it is my turn,' he said rudely.

Amir sighs. Nothing works the way
he is used to from home.



Chapter 5

In the afternoon the class goes out to skate. The weather is sunny and cold and the teacher thinks they should be outdoors. The boys want to play ice-hockey. Mimi and Tina play with the boys.

Amir sits on a bench and looks at them. He does not own any pair of skates. He has never skated in all his life. It looks difficult. He is certain that he would twist his ankle immediately. 'You are really strange,' says Fred. 'You have normal clothes, but no skates. How can you live?'

Philip forgot his skates at home. Greg does not like to play ice-hockey, so he keeps Philip company. Greg and Philip sit on a bench talking about ice. Greg is explaining to Philip how ice is formed in nature.

'Get over here,' Mimi shouts to Amir.
'Put on Greg's skates and come play with us!'
Amir shakes his head.
'Don't you know how to play?' Tina asks.
'I can show you.'
'Stop being a fool,' Mimi cries.
Amir shakes his head again.
'Listen, Ali or whatever is your name,'
Fred begins. 'You are a boy,
so you must know how to play ice-hockey.'

Amir gets up and walks away.
'Amir is not very wise,' Greg mutters.
'He should go with them, when they ask him.
Otherwise he will never get any friends.'
'Fred is not smart, either,' comments Philip.
'Why does Amir have to play ice-hockey
just because he is a boy?
It is the most horrible game I know.'
'So that is the reason why
you forgot your skates,' Greg laughs.

The others glide towards Philip and Greg.
They are all warm and sweaty.
They have taken a break in the game.
'Amir has had a good education,' says Mimi.
'One can see it on him. He is kind and polite.'
'Polite? He does not say anything,'
snorts Thomas.

'I think he behaves like a girl,' states Fred.
'And he does not say one word.
With those eyelashes
he looks like a girl.'
'Not at all,' shout Tina and Mimi.
'He is more handsome
than all of you together.
You are talking behind his back.
Amir is much nicer than you.
We don't want to play with you any more.'

The girls disappear out on the ice.
The boys are alone.
'What was that?' John asks.
'They like that foreigner,' Fred says.
'I wonder why,' adds Thomas.
'He can be anybody.
Dad told Mum yesterday
that those foreigners
can put a bomb at our school.
From where does he actually come?'

'Why was he late today?
He was surely meeting his ugly friends.
I think he is dangerous,' says John.

'I think so, too,' Thomas says.
'Have you seen how he looks at us?
He does not like us at all.'

I am sure he has a knife
in his pocket.'

'If more like him will come,
then we shall disappear,' says Fred.
'Our culture and our language will be gone.
They bring here all kinds of odd
traditions and religions and such things.'

'What do you mean?' John asks.
'We must stop all people from other countries
from coming here,' says Fred.
'They should not be allowed to get here.
They will only create chaos.
All who come from those countries
are dangerous to us.'

'What shall we do?' Thomas asks.
'We must show that Amir is not welcome here,'
suggests Fred. 'Are you with me?'
'Everyone is with you,' says John.
'Who wants to play one more game?'

Chapter 6

The boys glide out onto the ice.

Philip closes his fist.

'How can Fred be so stupid?' he hisses.

'Everything he said was wrong.

Our society needs people who can work.

Mum says that most of those
who come here wish to work.'

'Amir is not dangerous,' Greg says.

'Fred is jealous. He likes Tina.'

'That is no reason to bully Amir,' Philip says.

'I wonder why he does not tell us
anything about himself?

Come, I'm freezing. Let's go in.'

Philip and Greg walk back to the school.

Amir is there, sitting by a window.

He is reading.

'I have to go to the library,' Greg says.

'Are you coming?'

'Yes, in a minute,' Philip answers.

He walks up to Amir.

'Hello, what are you reading?' Philip asks.

Amir looks up, surprised.

'Mathematics,' he replies.

He shows an old book.
'May I see?' Philip asks.
Amir gives him the book.
It is worn and a few pages are missing.
Philip turns the pages.
He cannot read the alphabet,
but he sees the numbers.

'I don't understand anything,' Philip says finally.
'But the maths looks difficult.'
'You are the best in class in maths,' Amir says.
He pronounces the words slowly and clearly.
'Mimi is best in maths,' Philip says.
'Why are you reading that book?
Why don't you read the maths book we have?'

'I want to study physics.
For that one needs a lot of maths,' Amir says.
He holds up three fingers.
'My teacher gave me three books,' he continues.
'I must learn everything in them.
Then I can study at a university.
What are you going to study?'

Philip thinks for a while.
He does not know what to answer.
Biology? Environment? He does not really know.
Then he raises his thumb.
'You are clever,' he says to Amir.

'And so is Greg as well.
He will become a chemist.
I do not know yet.
I have not decided.'

Philip smiles to Amir.
He is surprised when Amir smiles back.
'You will surely find something suitable,'
Amir says. 'You are lucky.
You don't need to study your homework so much.
I must read all my homework many times.
Otherwise I do not understand
what the books say.'
'Can't your Mum and Dad help you?' Philip asks.

He understands at once
that he has said something wrong.
Amir's face darkens.
'They have more difficulties to learn
the language than I have,' says Amir.
'And they do not understand mathematics.'

Philip understands that Amir
does not want to speak about his family.
He tries to think of something else to say.
'Can you explain to me the task
we have today for maths?' Philip asks.
'Yes, I can,' Amir says.
He picks up his exercise book.

In five seconds he writes the solution into the exercise book.

Philip is stunned.

'You are very good,' he says.

'But why don't you speak in class?

How can anyone so good at maths sit quietly during the lessons?'

Amir lifts his hand and swings it in the air.

'What do you mean?' Philip wonders.

'They don't like me,' says Amir.

'Because I am from a foreign country.'

'The girls like you,' Philip protests.

'They don't like me really.

They have fantasies about my country, but they would not like it in reality.

I don't think they would manage there.

Not just now, at least.'

'Why?' asks Philip.

'Everything is destroyed,' Amir replies.

Chapter 7

Philip is thinking about Amir's words, when they go into the classroom. Amir looks sad, which is quite natural. He certainly did not wish to come here, but he had to flee from his home. I wonder how it would feel, if I had to flee with my family? Philip shudders. It is so horrible that he does not even want to think about it.

The geography teacher walks in. 'Today we will talk about volcanoes and magma,' she says. 'I understand that we have a new pupil. Amir, you have surely seen many countries on your way here. You must have knowledge of other places that can be useful for all of us. Do you want to make a presentation next week about your home country or your journey?'

Amir does not move. He does not want to remember all the countries they travelled through. He does not know how the countries looked,

because they walked mostly by night.
How can he explain that to the teacher?
At home he would not dare to oppose a teacher.
The pupils had to follow a teacher's every wish.
'Good,' says the teacher.
'Next week on Wednesday.'

How can Amir make a presentation?
He has no idea what the teacher
expects from him.
It would never occur to him to ask.
He has to manage it all by himself.

Everybody in the class stares at Amir.
Fred sneers and John claps his hands.
Mimi is filled with envy.
She is the favourite of the teacher.
'Amir cannot know more than we do,' she says.
'We travel to some place every holiday.
I have visited three continents
and a lot of countries.'
'He does not even say one word,' Fred points out.

Philip tries to calm down Mimi,
but she becomes even more angry.
'I can tell about volcanoes,' interrupts Greg.
'You should just shut up,' says Mimi to Greg.
'It is I who knows geography in this class.
Nobody else has made their homework,

so don't try to fool me you have.
Amir, you must learn to talk like normal people.'

The teacher smiles to Mimi.
'Yes, Mimi, tell us so everybody may hear,'
she says. 'From where comes the lava
in the volcano?'
'It is not right that Mimi always
gets first chance to tell,' Philip protests.

He is angry, because Mimi is unkind to Amir.
'Amir can talk as well as anybody.
He knows a lot of things,
which nobody here knows,' Philip continues.
'You must simply learn to listen to him.'

'Philip, take it easy,' says the teacher.
'You don't need to shout.
We are sure that Amir knows a lot.
He has other experiences than we have.
He can contribute to our lessons
with his knowledge.'
'The teacher should teach us,
not just someone, who never even
opens his mouth,' Fred cries.

'We sit a lot of time at school,' John says.
'Why should we listen to
a strange guy from nowhere?'

'We don't like the fact that Amir gets any favours,' says Thomas.
'It is not right.'

The teacher does not listen to them.
She usually pays no attention to the boys.
She goes on talking.

'Amir has not been in our school before now,' she says.
'He needs time to adjust.
Now start, Mimi, we will listen to you!'

Chapter 8

After one week Philip has forgotten that Amir is different.

Philip, Greg and Amir do their homework together almost every day.

They often go to Philip's home after school and talk about all kinds of things.

Amir shows them mathematics and Philip helps him with biology.

Greg explains chemistry.

The others in the class have a longer memory than Philip.

Every day someone reminds Amir that he is from abroad.

Especially Fred dislikes Amir, but it is only because Tina likes Amir.

One morning

Tina scratches her hair.

Teacher Henry does not notice it at first, but then he is irritated by it.

'Tina, please stop scratching your head,' he says.

'It is itching,' Tina replies.

'I just can't stop.

It has never itched like this before.'

'You should check what it is,' says Henry
'Go downstairs to the nurse.'

Tina does not move from her chair.

'Now,' says Henry with emphasis.

'May I go with her?' Mimi asks.

'You will stay here. Tina will manage
by herself,' Henry says.

After a while Tina comes back.

The nurse accompanies her.

Tina has been crying.

Her eyes are swollen and red.

'We have lice in the school,' explains the nurse.

'We must check how big the problem is.

Do others in the class scratch their heads?

Have you lent your cap

or borrowed somebody else's cap?

Do you give your comb or brush to others?

It usually takes a week

before the symptoms appear.'

The class is breathless.

Lice! How is that possible?

'The lice come from Amir,' Fred shouts.

'He came here a week ago!'

Chapter 9

The class keeps very silent.

'Amir, come with me,' says the nurse.

Amir does not dare to move.

What does the word lice mean?

He has never before heard it.

'Mimi and Annie should be checked, too,'

Philip suggests.

'They always sit with their heads together.

The lice are spreading through direct contact.'

'Mimi and Annie go as well,' Henry says.

'Amir has lice,' Thomas whispers.

'Those foreigners are all dirty.'

'Dirt has nothing to do with lice,'

Philip says. 'Lice live on blood.'

'Class, be quiet!', Henry roars.

Amir is very upset.

Philip draws a louse on paper.

Now Amir understands what lice means.

He has no lice.

How can Fred claim that he has?

Amir does not like to sit near others.

He never uses other people's caps.

Father thinks that personal hygiene
is the most important thing in the world.
'Wash your hands. Use enough soap.
Wash at least ten seconds,' Father always says.
'Bacteria and viruses exist everywhere.'

Amir stands up and goes off with the nurse.
'Amir is a dirty louse,' Fred whispers.
Soon Amir is back.
'I have no lice,' he says to Henry.
'Good,' Henry says, 'sit down.'

Annie has no lice, but Mimi has them.
She has no symptoms yet,
but they are found in her hair.
Mimi is furious with Tina.
'You have given them to me,' she screams.

Henry sends both girls home.
The nurse calls their parents
and explains what they should do.
Fred tells everybody that Amir
has brought the lice to the school.
The others withdraw from Amir.

Only Philip and Greg sit with him.
They do not believe in Fred's talk.
Philip has read about how lice can spread
and Greg trusts Philip's knowledge.

In the afternoon Amir is the last one to leave the classroom.
He waits until everybody is outside.

Previously his family lived with lots of other people.
That was before they got their own apartment.
Nearby was a petrol station.
Amir used to go there with his friends.
Everyone came from a different country.
People said bad things to them.
Sometimes they even tried to pick a fight.

The owner of the petrol station told them that they could come two and two, or they could stay at home.
They scared off customers, he said.
'You look dangerous,' said the owner.

In fact Amir did not wish to stay here.
He wanted to go somewhere else.
This new country is no good.
He has to be on his guard all the time.
There is always someone who abuses him for something.
Many are afraid of him, too.

It is quiet in the school building.
Amir can finally go out into the yard.

When he turns a corner, Fred, Thomas and John stand before him.
'Where's the knife, you scum?' Fred asks.
Amir does not answer.
He tries to walk past, but Thomas and John take hold of his arms.
'Check his pockets,' Fred orders.

There is nothing in Amir's pockets, except for a packet of handkerchiefs. Mother always puts handkerchiefs in Amir's pockets.
'Why have you come here? Do you want to steal our girls?' Fred asks.
'You ought to have stayed at home. We do not want you here.'

'We don't want your religion either,' says Thomas.
'You suppress women and murder them.'
'And you force them to hide their faces,' John adds.
'You smuggle people over borders illegally,' Fred says. 'And you lie. There is no war in your country.'

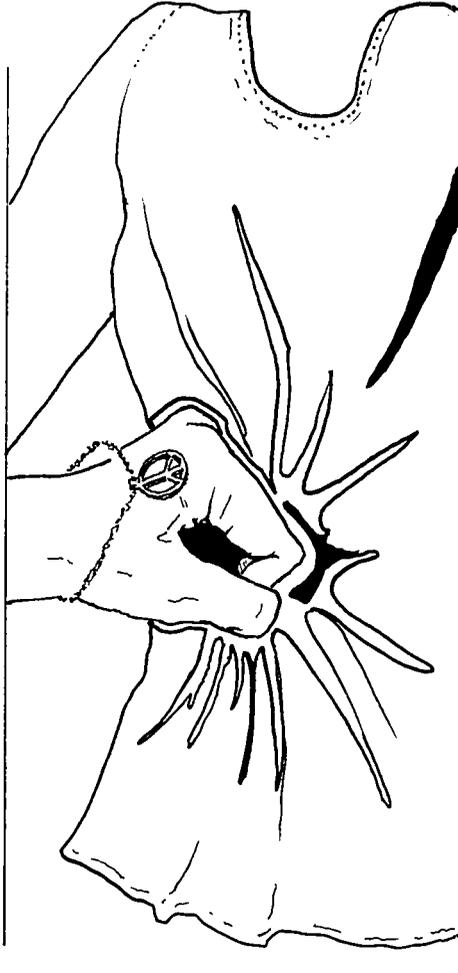
Amir feels how he starts burning inside. He does not care for the girls here. They are not beautiful at all. They are too pale and have light eyes.

His father and mother don't care about religion.
The family celebrates other holidays
than people in this country.
But that does not mean they follow a religion.
It is a family tradition.

And about the war...
If Fred would see the horrors
which Amir has seen, he would shut up.
No, Amir will not think about them.

Amir takes a deep breath.
He would never leave his home,
but the city was destroyed by bombs.
The smugglers earn money
because other people are in trouble.
Amir does not like it.

'We'll beat up the dirty louse,' Fred suggests.



Chapter 10

Before Amir understands what is going on,
Fred hits him in the stomach.
He tries to pull himself free,
but Thomas and John hold him,
so he cannot move.
What can Amir do?
Nothing at all.
He can only hope for help.

Many thoughts rush through Amir's head.
How should he act in this country?
All he does seems wrong.
All he says is wrong.
That is why he has stopped talking before class.
He can speak the language,
but nobody wants to talk with him.
Mostly they speak to him as
if he was a small child.

How can he live in a country,
which is so different?
They boys are right.
He should have stayed at home.
But if the family did not run away,
he would not be alive today.

The mosquitoes are the worst.
Amir can stand the cold
and the strange white nights.
But he can't stand mosquitoes.

At home there were hardly any mosquitoes.
The sun shone and all the colours were bright.
Here he can see no colours.
Especially during winter,
when the world is white and cold.

Still Amir thinks that
the winter is fairly pleasant.
He likes the feeling of snow
and the silence when it snows.

Amir wakes up suddenly from his thoughts.
He stands in the middle of snow
and some boys are hitting him.
He has to do something.

Fred beats him once more in the stomach.
Amir tightens the muscles beforehand
and it does not hurt so much.
He gets really angry.

They say so many nice things
about this country on the Internet.
Reality is far from the descriptions.

Reality is much harder.
Those who come from the outside
stand at the bottom of society.

They are blamed for all problems,
only because they are from abroad.
Everything that is not right is their fault.
All illnesses and dangers come from abroad.

We are like a magic mirror, Amir thinks.
We show how the society really is.
But everyone may hit us, it seems.
And of course nobody will be punished.

'There! And there,' Fred screams.
He hits Amir in the stomach and the breast.
Fred starts to get red in his face.

Suddenly Thomas and John let go.
Philip and Greg push them aside.

Anger is bubbling inside Amir.
He hits Fred straight in the stomach.
Fred bends over and falls down on the snow.

'Come,' Philip says.
'We must get away quickly.'
He pulls Amir by the arm,
but Amir is still angry.

He wants to kick Fred,
but Philip sees it and pulls him away.
'Don't make it worse,' Philip pants.

Greg stands above Fred.
'I am against violence,' he says.
'But you have acted like an asshole.'
You got what you deserved.'

Greg turns around and follows Philip and Amir.

Chapter 11

The next morning the whole school has heard about the fight.

Fred does not come to school.

Half the class avoids Amir.

The other half thinks that Amir did right.

Mimi belongs to those who do not know what to think.

'One must follow school rules,' she says.

'It is forbidden to fight in the school yard.'

'Mimi, you must decide,' Annie says.

'Do you like Fred or Amir?'

'This is not about liking,' Philip points out.

'I do not like fighting at all,' Mimi says.

'The boys must know how to behave.'

'You always say that everybody must behave,'

Philip says. 'Why do you think that?'

'Things goes so much smoother,' Mimi replies.

'If all behave and don't fight, we can talk about things.

You can solve problems if you talk with others.'

'It does not work,' Amir says.

'Not with people like Fred. They don't understand.'

Everybody stares at him.

It is the first time Amir speaks to all.
Teacher Henry comes into the classroom.

'Amir,' Henry says. 'The rector
wants to talk to you.'
'I'll go with Amir,' Philip cries.
'I'll go, too,' Greg says.
'You will sit down,' Henry orders.
'Amir can find the way himself.'
'We saw what happened,' Philip says.
'You get double homework,' says Henry.
'Well, Philip goes with Amir. Greg stays here.'

Philip and Amir walk to the rector's office.
Amir does not talk on the way.
'The rector will listen to us,' Philip says.
'Don't worry.'
The rector is surprised to see Philip.
'What are you doing here?' she asks.
'This is a case between Amir and the school.'
'Henry sent me,' Philip protests.

The rector sighs.
Philip is always there,
when something happens.
Amir turns to Philip and smiles.
Philip is the first person who stands up
for him in this new country.
Amir is both surprised and happy.

'I want Philip to be present,' he says to the rector.

'I can't explain so well.'

'Amir, we have rules in this school,'

the rector begins.

'You are not allowed to fight here.

Violence is not a solution any problems.'

'I was attacked,' Amir explains.

'I had to defend myself.

Otherwise I would end up in hospital.'

'That is clear,' says the rector.

'You must defend yourself, but not with violence.'

'What else could I have done?' asks Amir.

'They come. They hold my arms.

They start hitting and screaming.'

'Fred claims that you started the fight,'

the rector says. 'Thomas and John say so, too.'

'No, they waited for me,' Amir says.

'They claim also that Amir brought lice
to our class,' Philip adds.

'One moment,' interrupts the rector.

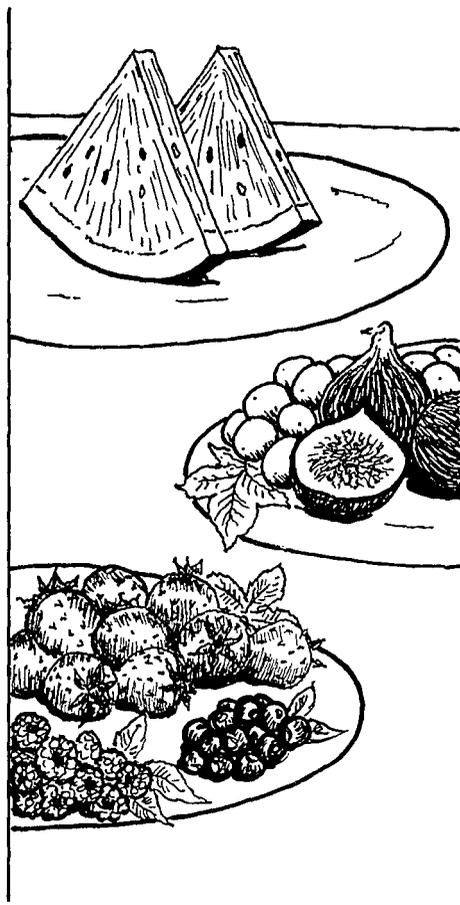
'Tina had the lice from her smaller sister.

There were lice in the kindergarten.

The family forgot to clean the car
and the lice spread to Tina.'

Philip laughs.

Now Fred will have to explain himself!



Chapter 12

‘Was it Fred who started?’ the rector asks.
‘Absolutely,’ Philip says. ‘Fred fights with all.
He beats up the boys and gropes the girls.
Thomas and John help him. They think
that they become more important with him.’

The rector shakes her head.
‘Then I have to speak with Fred again.
I must keep you after school
and give you a note, Amir.
We cannot accept that you use violence.
I must speak with your parents.
Do they speak English?’

Amir nods.
‘A little. But I can translate,’ he says.
‘Fred will never again hit Amir,’ Philip says.
He does not dare. Fred is actually a coward.’

The rector thinks for a moment.
Amir becomes anxious.
What are Mother and Father going to say,
when the rector tells them about the fight?
‘We must call all involved parents
to a meeting,’ says the rector finally.

'May I say something?' Philip asks.
The rector sighs.
'All right,' she mumbles.
'I think that a parental meeting
is not enough,' says Philip.
'Why not?' the rector wonders.
'If the parents meet, they will get to know
the parents of Amir.
Then we can solve the problems faster.'

'The school should do more
to protect Amir,' Philip says.
'And others who are different.'
'We surely need to understand
each other better,' the rector says.
'And to listen to each other.'

'That is not enough.
Everybody must do something.
It is not right that Fred is allowed
to speak as he does.
He accused Amir for the lice.
It is completely wrong,
but nobody said a word against it.
It is not right that someone
is attacked just outside the school yard.
It could be Amir or anybody else.'

'Philip, where have you read all that?'

the rector laughs.

'You speak like a grown-up.'

'I know what rights I have,' Philip says.

'And what obligations.'

Amir shakes his head and says:

'You say that you are modern.

You say that we must not use violence.

I notice that we and you are alike.

Also we say: do not fight.

Still people fight sometimes.'

'We are all different persons,' continues Philip.

'It does not depend on where you are from.

It depends on what kind of person you are.

Greg for example would never hit anyone.

He is simply such a person.'

The rector sighs.

'Why do you make it so difficult?' she asks.

Philip laughs, because the rector is smiling.

'May I continue in this school?'

Amir asks cautiously.

'Yes, of course.' The rector is surprised.

'Nobody is expelled from school for one fight.'

Chapter 13

Philip and Amir walk back to the classroom.

'People are not the same as their countries,' says Amir.

'In my class at home we spoke five languages.

We thought it was normal with many kinds of people.

Nobody was typical for our country.

Everybody was different.

It is you who are odd.

How can you live without having many different people around you?'

Philip laughs.

'I don't know,' he says.

'We have to adapt ourselves.

We have to learn how other people function.

How you function.

Can you show us?'

'I shall do my best.

But you must help me,' Amir says.

'I can't do it by myself.'

'Let's shake hands on that,' Philip laughs.

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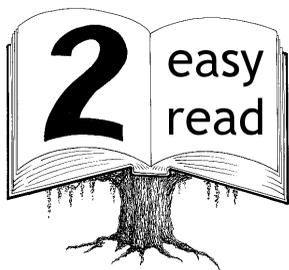


**In Philip's class
a new pupil arrives.**

**He is good at mathematics,
but not everybody likes him,
because Amir comes
from another country.**

**The situation becomes
increasingly heated in the class,
as snow falls outside.**

What could Philip do?



ISBN 978-619-192-202-4 (Paper)

ISBN 978-619-192-201-7 (PDF)

ISBN 978-619-192-189-8 (EPUB)