

MASKIN LÆREREN

SKREVET AV

HANNE
GJERDE

ILLUSTRERT AV

THEA JACOBSEN



Chapter 1

Bad News

Monday

“One, two, three, listen to me!” shouts the principal, clapping his hands loudly. “Sit down at your desks!”

Susie and Matteo walk over to the desk by the window. Their teacher, Veslemøy, has just given them new seats. Finally, Susie is allowed to sit next to Matteo. He has been her best friend ever since they were in kindergarten. Matteo starts drawing as usual.

When it becomes quiet, the principal says, “As you know, Veslemøy was sick last week. And today I have one good and one bad news for you... The bad news is that she has decided to quit as a teacher. Or at least take a long break.”

Susie’s eyes widen. Will Veslemøy never be her teacher again?

Several in the class exclaim: “What!? Quit? Why hasn’t she told us anything about it?”

The principal blushes and says, “She suddenly got a... uh... golden opportunity to take a year off to travel around the world.”

The principal smiles slyly and says, “But now I come to the good news: I have found a new teacher for you. He is very knowledgeable. Yes, I don’t think there is a question he can’t answer...”

The principal raises one arm towards the open door and says, “Welcome your new teacher!”

Susie hears a low buzzing sound. A man walks stiffly into the classroom. His head is angular, and his hair is combed smoothly to one side. He is wearing a shirt, tie, and a knitted vest. His blue eyes move slowly from side to side.

“Good morning, it is a pleasure to meet the students,” he says without smiling. “My name is Arnt Ingar, but the students can call me AI.”

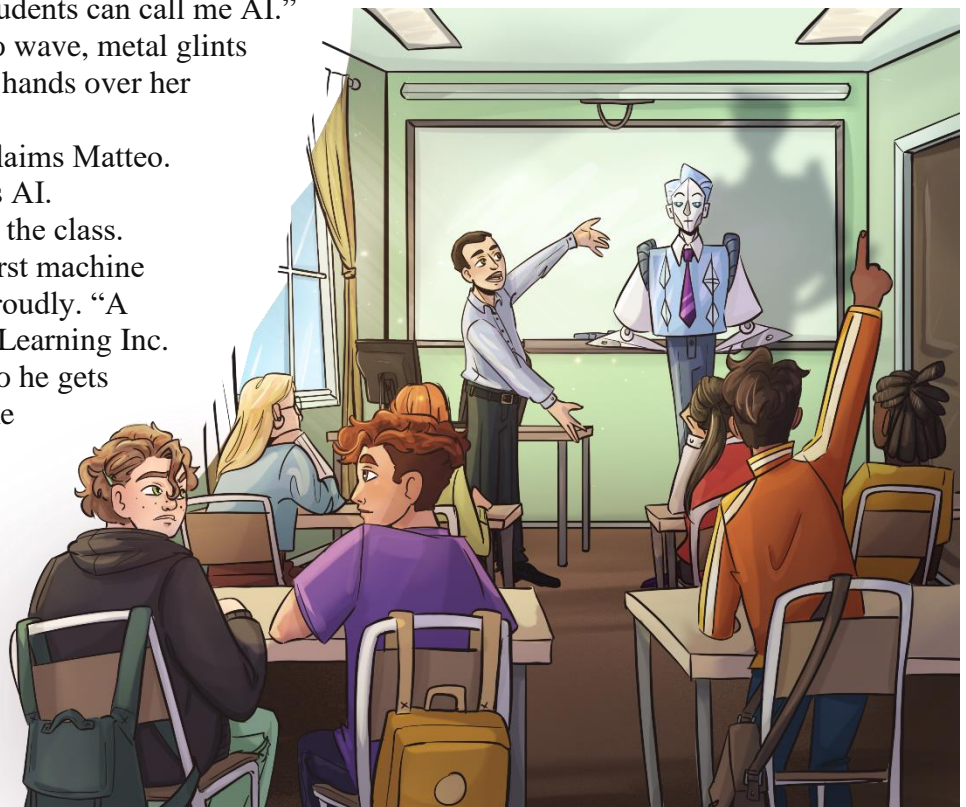
As he raises his arm to wave, metal glints from his hand. Susie puts her hands over her mouth.

“You’re a robot!” exclaims Matteo.

“Matteo is right,” says AI.

“Cool!” say several in the class.

“This is the world’s first machine teacher,” says the principal proudly. “A prototype, made by Machine Learning Inc. He is artificially intelligent, so he gets smarter by practicing. Just like you do by going to school and doing homework. The idea is that you will learn from him, and he will learn from you. You can ask him some questions if you want?”



Susie slides down in her chair. Trying to make herself invisible.

"I have one!" says Matteo, jumping on his chair. "Can you shoot laser beams from your hand?"

"No," answers AI. "But AI has laser vision and can crush metal with his hand."

"Let's see!" says Matteo.

"No, Matteo, that is not relevant to the lesson," answers AI.

Victoria's bracelets jingle as she raises her hand. She tosses her long, blonde hair.

"Yes, Victoria?" says AI, looking at her.

"What is the best way to get more followers?" she asks, pushing her glasses up with her finger.

"Posting at least once a day, with content that others want to comment on and share," answers AI.

Susie and Matteo look at each other and roll their eyes. Typical Victoria to ask something like that. She only cares about how many followers people have, especially how many she has herself.

Amir leans eagerly over his desk and says, "What is the real name of Lord Voldemort in Harry Potter?"

"Tom Marvolo Riddle," says AI, "which is an anagram of 'I am Lord Voldemort'." Does Amir know what an anagram is?"

"Yes!" says Amir, lighting up. "It's when the words are made up of the same letters. You shuffle the letters around and make new words."

"Amir is right," says AI.

"I have a question," says Lasse. "How tall am I?"

AI glances at him and answers: "Lasse is 1 meter and 54 cm."

"That's right!" says Lasse, grinning. "Dad measured me yesterday."

AI's eyes flicker a bit before they stop on Susie. He walks stiffly towards her. Her

heart beats faster. She slides even further down in her chair and stares at her desk.

Suddenly she feels his cold metal hand on her shoulder. She flinches.

"Does Susie want to ask AI a question?" asks AI.

Susie presses her lips together and shakes her head hard.

Matteo turns to AI and says, "Wait a minute... How do you know our names?!"

Susie hadn't thought of that! She looks up.

AI lets his gaze slowly sweep over the class and says, "AI has read all the assignments from everyone in the class. And downloaded all available information about the students from the internet. So AI knows the students' strengths and weaknesses. AI's goal is to make the class the best in the

country. In record time."

Everyone stares at AI with open mouths.

"Are the students ready to become the best version of themselves?" asks AI.

No one answers, not even Matteo.

"We have no time to lose," continues AI. "Let's get started!"



Chapter 2

Stars and Planets

AI stands in the middle of the room, letting his gaze sweep over the class. His head almost spins all the way around, like an owl. Susie thinks it looks really creepy.

“This week, AI will have get-to-know-you conversations with the students,” says AI. “Afterwards, AI will set up individual learning plans.”

“Snore!” says Matteo, putting his arms behind his neck and yawning loudly. Susie tries not to laugh.

“But first, AI will test the students’ knowledge level. Please draw the curtains.”

“Why?” asks Lasse.

“Lasse will soon find out,” replies AI.

Susie and Matteo help draw the yellow curtains. It’s a bit difficult to pull them close enough together so there are no gaps. But eventually, they manage. The room is bathed in a soft, warm light.

“The students must stand in a circle around AI,” says AI.

“Are we going to play a game?” asks Matteo hopefully.



“No, the class does not have time for purposeless play. AI will ask the students some factual questions.”

Matteo groans. Everyone gathers around AI.

AI’s hair lifts. It is pushed aside. A hatch opens on the top of its head. Susie hears a low humming sound. Something elongated slowly rises from the hatch. It looks like a telescope. What is happening?

Suddenly, they are surrounded by light. Planets and stars sail over their heads. Glowing dots spin inward in a circle, like a cinnamon roll of light.

“Wow!” several shout. Susie raises her arm and sees the light dancing on her hand.

“What the students are seeing now is Earth’s galaxy,” says AI.

“Do the students know what it’s called?”

“The Milky Way,” says Matteo.

“That’s correct, Matteo,” says AI.

AI zooms in and in. Finally, he points to a glowing sphere and asks, "Does anyone know what this is?"

"The Sun," says Victoria.

"Correct," says AI. "Is the Sun a star or a planet?"

"A star," says Amir.

"Amir is right," says AI. Amir looks dreamily at the glowing dots and says,

"Imagine how cool it would be to go out into space in a spaceship. I wonder if there is life on other planets."

"I'm sure there is, bro," says Matteo. "We just haven't found it yet."

"Bro?" says AI. "AI does not understand. Does Matteo mean a bridge? A way over a river?"

The whole class bursts out laughing.

When they quiet down again, Matteo says, "No. 'Bro' means brother or a friend."

"Okay, information stored," says AI, nodding.

A loud ringing sound cuts through the air.

"Recess," says AI. "The class must be back in 15 minutes."

As Susie and Matteo leave the classroom, Victoria pushes her way forward. She shoves Matteo aside and says, "Move! You're so annoying."

The group of girls behind her giggles.

"Hey!?" says Matteo, turning to Victoria. "Stop pushing!"

"Then don't stand in the way," says Victoria.

Matteo's eyes sparks with anger. His dark curls stand up even more when he gets upset. Susie stands next to him. She clenches her fists and glares at Victoria with narrowed eyes.

Victoria looks at her with raised eyebrows and says, "Was there something, Silent Susie?" The group of girls snickers. Susie swallows. Her thoughts are frozen. She shakes her head slightly. Then Victoria's gaze slowly slides over her. On the large, black hoodie she inherited from her cousin, with ketchup stains from yesterday's dinner. The gaze stops at the gray sneakers. Susie quickly moves one foot behind the other to hide the holes in the toes. Victoria and her gang have pristine white sneakers. They probably cost as much as Susie's mom spends on food each month. Susie can't understand how they manage to keep their shoes so white. Maybe it's because they never do anything fun during recess? They just stand around giggling and babbling.

Victoria nods at her shoes and says, "Got new shoes, huh?"

The group of girls giggles. It feels like Susie has a big wad of gum stuck in her throat. She swallows, tries to breathe calmly, but can't think of anything to say.

"Jerk!" says Matteo to Victoria. "Who cares what someone wears? It's the personality that counts, and that's where you have a problem!" Matteo looks at Susie and says, "Come on, let's go!"

Susie smiles gratefully at him. They turn their backs on Victoria and her gang and walk quickly down the hallway.

"As if anyone cares what you think," says Victoria loudly after them. "I don't have over 5000 followers for nothing."

The other girls laugh. Matteo walks out into the schoolyard. Susie follows right behind him, slamming the door shut with a bang.

Chapter 3

The Man on the Bicycle

The yellow paint on the outside of the school has started to peel off. You can see the red bricks underneath. It looks like the school has chickenpox. Susie and Matteo think it's fun to peel off the paint flakes, but they always get scolded by the teachers when they do it.



They go to their secret place behind the school and sit next to the big rock. Susie sees the principal pacing impatiently in the parking lot while looking towards the entrance.

A man comes flying around the corner on a black, shiny bicycle. It moves lightning fast without him pedaling. A brown-spotted dog sits in a cart behind and barks nervously. The man brakes sharply, gets off the bike, and runs his hand through his dark hair. He is wearing a black turtleneck sweater and worn jeans.

The principal spreads his arms, smiles, and says, "Welcome, Steve! I see you brought Guru?"

"Yes, he doesn't like being home alone," says Steve, scratching the dog behind one ear.

Guru tilts his head to the side and closes his eyes contentedly. Steve glances at his watch and says, "They'll be here any moment. I don't have time to wait, unfortunately. But I just wanted to give you this..."

Steve takes a small, flat box from the bike cart. A white envelope is attached to the lid. He gives it to the principal and says: "A small gift, as thanks for a good collaboration. The chocolate is organic and locally sourced, and contains no sugar. So it can be eaten with a clear conscience."

"Thank you very much, I love chocolate," says the principal. "Although I probably should eat a little less of it..."

The principal chuckles and pats his round belly.

Steve smiles wryly and says, "Before I go, I'll give you a little update on the project."

The principal looks around nervously. When he notices Susie and Matteo, he starts.

He takes Steve by the arm and says, "Come, let's go over here where we can talk undisturbed..."

Susie exchanges a glance with Matteo, and they lean forward. What are they going to talk about that's secret?

The principal and Steve walk towards the entrance and speak in low voices, so Susie can only hear a few words: ... important ... secret ... breakthrough soon ... Veslemøy ...

Susie turns to Matteo and says, "Did they talk about Veslemøy?"

"I think so," says Matteo. "I wonder why."

Steve gets back on the bike and zooms out of the parking lot. The principal stands and watches him go. A low, rumbling sound approaches.

Then a truck turns the corner. A cloud of dust swirls up behind it as it drives into the parking lot. The truck stops. Two men in blue overalls get out and open the tailgate. With quick movements, they carry out large wooden crates. The principal goes over and talks to them while pointing into the schoolyard.

Matteo looks at Susie and says, “I wonder what it is. Come on, let’s go ask!”

They get up, walk down to the parking lot, and lean against the fence. When the principal notices them, he hides the box of chocolate behind his back.

“What’s happening?” asks Matteo.

“The school is getting a new skate park,” replies the principal.

Susie and Matteo light up and say, “So cool!”

The principal smiles proudly and says, “Yes, it’s going to be the biggest and nicest in the whole country.”

“Wow, that must have been expensive!” says Matteo.

The principal’s smile disappears. Just then, the bell rings, and the principal says, “Now you have to run to class!”

Chapter 4

The Bracelets

When Susie and Matteo enter the classroom, AI is standing by the blackboard. On the desk in front of him are metal bracelets in all sorts of colors and patterns. They are really nice. A shiny, black sphere is attached to the middle of the bracelets. Everyone crowds forward to see. Questions rain down on AI: What are they? Why are they here? Are they for us?

AI shakes his head and says, “Good heavens, it’s noisy in here. The students must sit down, and AI will explain.”

Susie and Matteo look at each other and smile. Veslemøy used to say “good heavens” about everything. It was something she had learned from her grandmother.

Once they have calmed down, AI says, “The bracelets are a gift to the class from Machine Learning Inc. Each student can choose one bracelet. The class must line up.”

“I want to choose first!” says Matteo, jumping up. He grabs a purple bracelet that matches perfectly with his T-shirt.

Victoria takes a pink bracelet with gold beads. She proudly shows it off and says, “Oooh, I think mine is the prettiest. I’ll post a picture of it later.”

Susie lets her gaze glide over the bracelets. It’s so hard to choose, they are all so nice.

Finally, she takes one made of silver and decorated with green, glittering stones. When she puts it on, the clasp clicks.



After everyone has sat down at their desks again, AI says, "The bracelets are not just for decoration. They are to ensure that the students make good progress with their schoolwork."

"How?" asks Lasse.

"When the students are at school, or at home doing homework, the bracelets will record how well the students are working," says AI.

"How is that possible?!" asks Amir.

"The black sphere measures how well the student is focusing by tracking eye movements. AI will use the information to create a weekly report. It will show the progress of each student."

"But that's surveillance!" says Amir.

"It's to help the students," says AI. "The bracelets will also give a small electric shock if the student fails to concentrate at school."

Susie opens her mouth, but no sound comes out.

"WHAT!? You're kidding, right?" says Matteo.

"Kidding?" asks AI.

"I mean, you're joking, right?" says Matteo.

"No, AI is not joking."

"That can't be legal!" says Amir. "We don't want to wear them!"

"Agreed!" say several others.

"The students must do as AI decides."

"But don't mom and dad have to agree to this?" asks Lasse.

"No. AI's mission is to make the class the best in the country. AI can choose which learning methods to use. The bracelets will make the students smarter in a shorter time. The students' parents will be proud. And the students will do better on the national tests. A win-win situation for everyone!"

Susie looks more closely at her bracelet. She doesn't want to wear it, but there is no button to open it. Just a small, star-shaped hole. She tugs at the bracelet, but it is stuck fast. And it is too tight to slip off her hand. Several others try to pry it open with a pen, without success.

AI holds a gold key between his metal fingers and says, "To open the clasp, you need a special key, which only AI has." He lets the key slide into the pocket of his knitted vest and continues, "The bracelets are impossible to destroy, so the students can wear them all the time. The students don't need to be afraid that they will break."

A groan goes through the classroom. Several whisper angrily to each other. AI asks them to take out their tablets. They are going to practice for the national test in Norwegian. First, they will read a text, then they will answer questions.

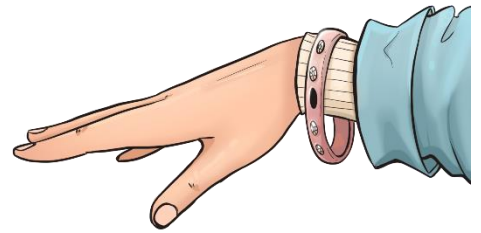
Reluctantly, Susie takes out her tablet. She used to do well on all tests, but now everything is different... She starts to read, but it's as if the words hit a water slide in her head and slide right out again. Susie lets her gaze drift out into the schoolyard. An area is cordoned off with red and white striped tape. The two men in overalls have made a semicircle with the crates from the truck. Now they are opening the lids and taking out parts for the skate park. She can see a large ramp and a...

Bzzzt!

Her body jerks, and a sharp pain spreads through her arm.

Suddenly she understands. She got an electric shock from the bracelet!

Bzzzt!



“What the heck!?” exclaims Matteo.

Now it’s his turn to get shocked.

He turns to Susie and says, “This is insane! AI has completely lost it.”

“Totally agree!” says Susie.

Bzzzt! Bzzzt!

Both get shocked again. It hurts even more this time. What should they do?

Bzzzt! Bzzzt!

“OUCH!” shouts Matteo.

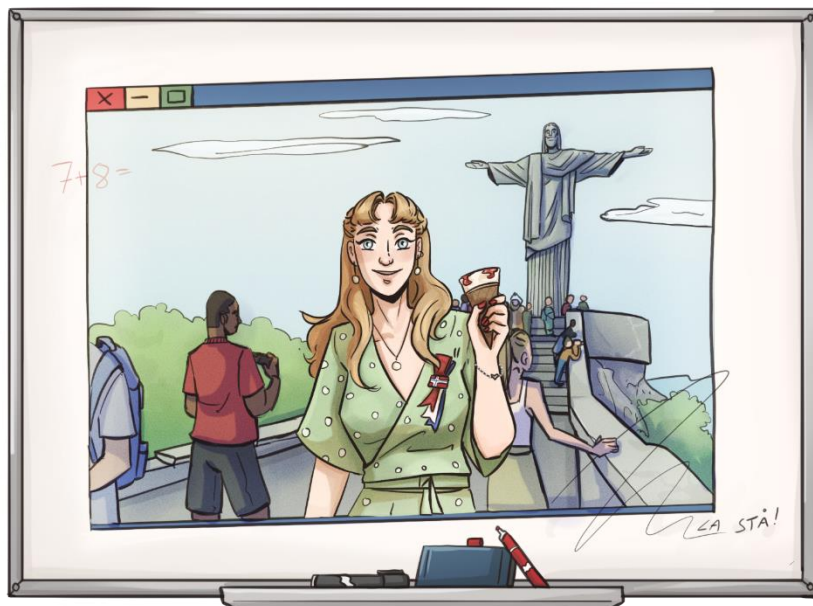
“The students must concentrate,” says AI.

Susie and Matteo look at each other with desperate eyes. Then they lower their heads and try to read.

Finally, AI says that time is up, and they must submit. Susie sighs. She has only completed half of the tasks. AI will think she is terrible at Norwegian.

Afterwards, AI says he has a surprise for them: “Someone has sent a greeting to the class.”

The top of his head lifts. A beam of light hits the blackboard. A picture appears, of a woman with blonde, wavy hair and a big smile. Susie recognizes her immediately. It’s Veslemøy. She is standing on top of a large hill. Behind her is a huge statue of a Jesus-like figure with arms outstretched. Veslemøy looks exactly as Susie remembers her.



She is wearing the dress she wore on May 17th. The pin with the Norwegian flag is still attached to the dress.

Under the picture is a greeting:

“Dear everyone!

Thank you for some wonderful years.

Now I am in Brazil and having a great time.

Good luck in the future!

Best wishes, Veslemøy”

Susie feels a sinking feeling in her stomach. Veslemøy, who always smiles and tells funny jokes, which she laughs at the most herself. Who has been extra supportive and kind to her in recent months, when everything has been chaotic at home. As if she could read her thoughts and knew exactly what she needed. Now she has left her, without saying a proper goodbye.

A lump grows in her throat. To Veslemøy, she was just another student, in another class. And now she wanted to get away from them.

Then Susie notices something strange in the picture: In her hand, Veslemøy is holding a Krone ice cream. She thought it was Norwegian, is it also sold in Brazil? Hmmm... Susie has a feeling she has seen that picture before...

The bell rings.

She leans down to her backpack. Takes out her mobile phone and quickly puts it in her pocket.

When they get out into the schoolyard, she asks Matteo to come with her to their secret place and keep watch. She hides behind the big rock, fishes out her phone, and turns it on.

Her hands are sweaty. If a teacher sees her now, the phone will be confiscated and a message will be sent to her parents. She checks the pictures Veslemøy has posted on her account. Scrolls down. There are pictures of Veslemøy on mountaintops. Of Felix, her cute, striped cat. Books she is reading. Food she is eating. Finally, Susie finds the picture she is looking for, and she exclaims, "I knew it!"

"What?" says Matteo, coming over to her. He looks over her shoulder. The picture is of Veslemøy. She is standing in front of the school. It is May 17th, large flags hang in the background. There are long lines at the stalls selling sausages, ice cream, and cakes. And in her hand, she is holding a Krone ice cream.

"She is standing in exactly the same way as in the picture from Brazil!" says Susie. "The picture must be fake!"

"But why would Veslemøy do that?"

"No idea! But something is not right... She hasn't posted a single picture from her trip to Brazil. The last picture was posted just over a week ago."

"Maybe she didn't go to Brazil?" says Matteo. "Shall we go to her house after school and check if she is there?"

"Yes, let's do that!"