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Cast of Characters

JANUSZ KORCZAK
GEINA
STEFFA
SYMONEK
BIG HANNAH
SABINA
HENRYK
NATALIA
COOK
LITTLE HANNAH
IVAN
MADMAN
WAIF
MARCEL
EVA
CHAIRMAN
MRS. BRON
GEPNER
ESTERKA
JAKUB
SZULC
BOY / ADEK

HALINKA
MAJOR KEPP
GEINA'S BROTHER
MADHAV
AMAL
VILLAGE DOCTOR
NURSES
DAIRYMAN
WATCHMAN
WATERMAN
HEAD MAN
FLUNKIES
SUDHA
HERALD
KING'S DOCTOR
NEWERLY
EVALUATOR
WOMAN
NAZI OFFICIAL
SOLDIERS
FEMALE SOLDIER

Acknowledgments

Korczak’s Children was developed in The Children’s Theatre Company’s new play lab THRESHOLD. It originally premiered at the Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota on March 21, 2003, directed by Eric Simonson. The cast and crew were as follows:

JANUSZ KORCZAK..... Clyde Lund
CHAIRMAN Julian Bailey
GEPNER Gerald Drake
SZULC / EVALUATOR.....Tony Papenfuss
NEWERLY / NAZI.....Dean Holt
MAJOR KEPP Doug Scholz-Carlson
STEFFA Barbara Kingsley
MRS. BRON Claudia Wilkens
GEINA Elizabeth Kimberly
SIMONEK..... Mitchell Y. Perry
BIG HANNAH Teresa Marie
LITTLE HANNAH..... Sarah M. Beaumont
SABINA Kristina K. Mitchell
HENRYK Jason Armbruster
NATALIA..... Katie McGroarty
IVAN Matthew Posnansky
WAIF Maeve Moynihan
EVA Maggie D’Ambrose
MARCEL Charlie Textor
ESTERKA Angela Harold
BROTHER Ben Blair
HALINKA Jacqueline Stahlman
JAKUB..... Stephen Anthony
MYTEK Jared Smith
ADEK Grant Sorenson
WATCHMAN..... Gabrielle Anczarski
HERALD Sabrina Crews
DAIRYMAN Conor McDonald
WATERMAN..... Miles Tagtmeyer
DOCTOR Tyrus Thompson

Scenic Design by Neil Patel
Costume Design by Kärin Kopischke

Lighting Design by Nancy Schertler
Music and Sound Design by Victor Zupanc
Dramaturgy by Elissa Adams
Stage Managed by Lark Hackshaw

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

Korczak's Children was originally developed at The Children's Theatre Company with support from the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights.

KORCZAK'S CHILDREN

by Jeffrey Hatcher

ACT I

Scene 1

(In the darkness, a solo clarinet. A mournful tune. It dies away as...)

(A light comes up on JANUSZ KORCZAK and a small 8 year old girl, GEINA.)

(KORCZAK wears a long gray overcoat. GEINA wears a night-dress with a child's winter coat over it.)

(We cannot see the set yet. KORCZAK and GEINA are downstage center and seem to be surrounded by a dark night sky, with little pinpoints of stars.)

(GEINA looks up at KORCZAK.)

GEINA. Tell me the story.

KORCZAK. ...There was an astronomer. Professor Zi. Professor Zi lived on the Planet Ro and had a vast telescope, called an...

GEINA. An astropsychomicrometer.

KORCZAK. Yes. How could I forget? Professor Zi of Planet Ro had an astropsychomicrometer, and with that astropsychomicrometer the Professor could convert heat radiation into moral power. It was also capable of projecting—

GEINA. Spiritual rays.

KORCZAK. Yes. And these spiritual rays, when projected from Planet Ro, could bestow tranquility and order everywhere in the universe except one place. That restless spark, Planet Earth.

(The lights are coming up now. We begin to pick out the vast, cathedral like structure of the main hall of the orphanage. We are inside a warehouse, made over to serve as a children's home.)

(Exposed bricks, shuttered windows, symmetrical staircases that go up, up, up high from center stage and crisscross to catwalks above.

We see that the pinpoints of starlight are actually the gaps in the boarded windows; dawn daylight peeking in through cracks.)

(At the upstage center rear of the stage are two huge wooden doors that lead to the outside courtyard.)

(KORCZAK has just said the words “Planet Earth” when a bell rings.)

(KORCZAK smiles at GEINA.)

It is morning. Let us begin the day.

(KORCZAK picks up GEINA and puts her on top of a banister. She laughs and squeals with delight.)

(Side doors open, stage left and stage right. STEFFA, Korczak’s assistant, enters with plates and cutlery. She looks at GEINA up on the banister.)

STEFFA. Breakfast! Geina!

GEINA. Yes, madam!

STEFFA. You are on the place setting division, yes?

GEINA. Yes, madam!

STEFFA. Then start setting places!

GEINA. Yes, madam!

(GEINA hops down and joins her “division.”:)

KORCZAK. *(Smiles wryly:)* “Madam.” Like a finishing school.

STEFFA. More like the army.

(Softer.)

Have you slept?

KORCZAK. A little.

STEFFA. Make your diary entry.

(Calls.)

All right, all! Morning! Make up beds! Clean faces and teeth! Dress! And sing!

(CHILDREN come into the hall from every entrance. Sleepy-eyed. Tattered clothes. Little ones with blankets and toys. Other, older ones in charge of the young ones. As they make up their beds — neatly shoving them against the walls — and put out the tables for breakfast, they sing.)

CHILDREN.

WHITE AND BROWN AND BLACK AND YELLOW,
MIX THE COLORS WITH ONE ANOTHER.
WE ARE ALL SISTERS AND BROTHERS
OF ONE FATHER AND ONE MOTHER,
AND GOD CREATED US ALL.
THE WHOLE WORLD IS OUR FATHERLAND.
WE ARE ALL SISTERS AND BROTHERS,
THIS IS WHAT WE MUST UNDERSTAND.

(Over this, KORCZAK speaks his entry.)

KORCZAK. “Ghetto Diary. Strange Happenings.” It is half past six in the morning in the dormitory of our “newest” orphanage. I sit on the side of my bed and watch the unforgettable sight of the dormitory coming awake. A beehive beginning to hum. Much to do today. A full day, like all the others since we came here, to the ghetto. It is July 18, 1942. The weather is hot and sultry. No sun. We will welcome many visitors to the orphanage today, some well known: the officials of the Jewish Council, an old friend whom Madam Steffa will not wish me to welcome...and the Germans. The Germans are always with us.

(Light rise.)

Ah. The sun is threatening to pierce the gray. Perhaps this will be a good day after all. Oh. I almost forgot: there is a war going on.

(The nearby clock tolls seven.)

(STEFFA blows a whistle.)

(The breakfast tables are all set now. The CHILDREN stand at attention.)

STEFFA. Breakfast is set!

KORCZAK. Brava! Bravo! Bravissimo!

SYMONEK. Pan Doktor?

KORCZAK. Yes, Symonek.

SYMONEK. What does “bravabravobravissimo” mean?

KORCZAK. Ah, that is the name of a little elf who lived in a forest. An elf so little he always said, “Oh, I am so little, I cannot do anything!” Brava-Bravo-Bravissimo was always asking for help to do the littlest things. But he was alone, and so he had a choice there in the forest: do for himself, or do nothing at all. And if he did nothing at all...he would die. So what did Brava-Bravo-Bravissimo do?

SYMONEK. Nothing?

KORCZAK. You’re missing the point of the story, Symonek.

BIG HANNAH. (*Very eager:*) He did it all for himself!

KORCZAK. Yes, Hannah, that he did! And so, whenever I see little guys as little as you, Symonek, make your beds and brush your teeth and set your own breakfast, no matter how teeny-tiny you are, I say, “Brava-Bravo-Bravissimo!”

SYMONEK. Thank you, Pan Doktor.

STEFFA. (*Loud, claps:*) All right, now! Chairs! Sit! You may begin!

(The CHILDREN follow her orders.)

KORCZAK. Are you sure you were never in the military?

STEFFA. Better! I take care of children for a living. Sabina! Henryk! Natalia! Check names! Seats! Places!

(Three young teachers: SABINA, strong and athletic; NATALIA, who limps; and HENRYK, a blonde intellectual of good build, come forward and begin checking the CHILDREN to make sure they’re all there. STEFFA comes up to KORCZAK and gives him a look.)

(Sotto voce:)

Actually, “brava-bravo-bravissimo” is, as you know, Italian for “Good work” in the feminine, masculine, and plural case.

KORCZAK. (*Shrugs.*) Eh.

STEFFA. When will they learn it if they don't learn it now?

KORCZAK. They'll learn it slowly and painfully like we did: at the opera.

(STEFFA serves food. The cook enters.)

COOK. Good morning, doctor.

KORCZAK. Good morning, my friend, and how are we in the kitchen?

COOK. We are out of potatoes and milk and butter and—

(KORCZAK glances at STEFFA, not wanting her to hear.)

KORCZAK. The milk and butter is coming this morning. I didn't know about the potatoes.

COOK. I didn't either. We had to eat the potatoes for dinner last night because the meat we got turned out to be spoiled.

KORCZAK. So we need potatoes?

COOK. Potatoes at least.

(SABINA comes up to KORCZAK.)

SABINA. We need shoes, too.

(Hands him a slip of paper.)

At least a dozen pair. Here are sizes.

KORCZAK. Don't let Miss Wylczsinka see.

SABINA. No, doctor.

(A fight breaks out between two girls. BIG HANNAH and LITTLE HANNAH.)

BIG HANNAH. Hey! You stole that!

STEFFA. What is going on? Sabina, is this your table so out of control?

SABINA. Excuse me, madam, I was speaking with the doctor.

STEFFA. Big Hannah, are you fighting again with Little Hannah?

BIG HANNAH. She stole my potato!

STEFFA. Did you, Little Hannah?

LITTLE HANNAH. (*Shakes head, mouth full:*) MMMPH!

STEFFA. What is in your mouth?

LITTLE HANNAH. (*Swallows.*) ...Nothing.

BIG HANNAH. She stole it, she ate it, I saw her!

LITTLE HANNAH. Prove it!

STEFFA. Did anyone see this?

SYMONEK. I saw.

LITTLE HANNAH. You did not!

BIG HANNAH. Yes, he did, Symonek, tell her!

STEFFA. Symonek shall tell no one! Big Hannah. Do you wish to press charges against Little Hannah?

BIG HANNAH. Yes, madam, I do. I accuse! I accuse Little Hannah with stealing food!

LITTLE HANNAH. But I didn't do anything of the sort!

STEFFA. Save it for later! Little Hannah, your case will be heard at court this afternoon at five.

LITTLE HANNAH. Yes, madam.

STEFFA. And no more yelling or arguing about it until then, you hear, Big Hannah?

BIG HANNAH. Yes, madam.

(HENRYK *approaches with a list.*)

HENRYK. Miss Wilczynska?

STEFFA. What is it, Henryk?

HENRYK. We're missing two of them.

STEFFA. Which ones?

HENRYK. Marcel and Eva.

STEFFA. OH NO!

KORCZAK. Thirteen year olds. It's like being a parent.

STEFFA. When was the last anyone saw them?

SABINA. I saw them late last night in my physical education class.

KORCZAK. Physical education for pubescent adolescence. Always a mistake.

STEFFA. What were they doing?

SABINA. Well... "physical education."

(KORCZAK laughs. NATALIA and SABINA join in. HENRYK smiles. STEFFA fumes.)

STEFFA. This is not humorous!

KORCZAK. No, of course not.

(Sobers.)

Henryk, check the upper level, attic, nooks and crannies.

HENRYK. Yes, doctor.

(HENRYK gives his list to STEFFA and exits up a staircase.)

KORCZAK. Sabina, go outside to the courtyard, around the perimeter.

SABINA. Yes, doctor.

KORCZAK. And keep away from the gun tower.

(SABINA goes off through a lower level door upstage left.)

NATALIA. Doctor, do you want me to check the basement?

KORCZAK. That would be very good, Natalia.

NATALIA. Yes, doctor.

(NATALIA limps off downstage right where we assume the kitchen to be.)

STEFFA. *(Checks list.)* Doctor! We're missing one more! We're missing Ivan! He was not checked off? Did one of you answer for Ivan?

CHILDREN. No, Miss! — No, madam! —

SYMONEK. Just a little.

STEFFA. Symonek! You answered for Ivan when I called?

SYMONEK. Yes, madam.

STEFFA. You know that is a lie punishable at court?

LITTLE HANNAH. Ha! This will make his testimony in my case less believable.

KORCZAK. Where is Ivan?

SYMONEK. He went out before dawn. He thought he heard crying.

KORCZAK. Where did he go, Symonek?

SYMONEK. Out the window, down the drain pipe. Like he always does.

KORCZAK. To the side where the soldiers patrol.

(KORCZAK has noticed the other CHILDREN watching this discussion, worried now.)

It's all right. He'll be fine. Ivan has curiosity and a good, little soul, but not much brain. I'll go look for him.

(Some of the CHILDREN turn and see someone coming into the hall.)

CHILDREN. Ivan! — Ivan! — Ivan, you're in a lot of trouble!

(IVAN, an angelic five year old enters with a little girl, whom we will know as the WAIF.)

STEFFA. Ivan! Ivan, step forward! Where have you been? Answer me!

IVAN. I found a friend. She was crying on the street. I saw her from the window.

STEFFA. Oh, no, doctor, not another—

(Stops herself.)

I won't say a word, I won't say a word.

KORCZAK. My dear. How do you do? My name is Janusz Korczak, what is yours? You have a good new friend in Ivan, although he is always getting into trouble.

IVAN. She won't speak. I thought if she was found by the soldiers—

KORCZAK. Yes, quite right, Ivan. Good boy. Next time, though, don't sneak down the drainpipe and get Symonek to lie for you.

STEFFA. Lying is very bad!

KORCZAK. And Symonek is a very bad liar.

STEFFA. These two will be brought up on charges before the court this afternoon!

SYMONEK/IVAN. *(Overlap:)* Ohhhh! But Doctor! Pan Doktor!

KORCZAK. Men, you must face the consequences. Able to take a trial?

IVAN. Sure.

SYMONEK. Me too.

KORCZAK. Bravery in the face of fire. My status in the veteran's auxiliary salutes you.

STEFFA. Well, if she's staying, I'd better get her bedding and soap. Doctor, will you check her for lice?

KORCZAK. Yes, Madam.

STEFFA. The rest of you eat!

(STEFFA exits. The CHILDREN eat. KORCZAK addresses the WAIF.)

KORCZAK. Well, my dear, until you tell us your name, we shall have to call you...Waif. But Waif is a good name. Short, a breath of air, a sigh. Waif! We know nothing about you except that you were

alone on a street and crying. That is enough for an orphanage. This is an orphanage, you do know that, don't you? 170 children live here. Well...171 now. All the children here are without parents. The mama and the papa, they died, or they weren't able to care for their children, so Madam Steffa and Miss Natalia and Miss Sabina and Mr. Henryk and Cook and I, we care for them instead. Our orphanage has seen better days, that is not hard to guess. We used to have quite a grand place over on Krochmalna Street — warm and bright and plenty of room— but that was before the Germans came and made all of us — all of us who are Jews — move here. The soldiers told us: “You don't need your old home, we have a different one for you in a lovely, old district, called the ghetto.” (*Bitter:*) Lovely, small, dark, and cramped. 350,000 Jews crammed together. The Germans like to keep the Jews packed in tight where they can watch us. (*Dismisses his bitterness:*) Are you a Jew? You don't wear a star. The Germans try to make us all wear a star, but I say no to that. You will find lots of girls and boys your age, as well as some older and wiser and indeed some younger, in need of your own wisdom.

(We hear a voice outside. It is an old man's voice singing a child's plaintive lullaby.)

MADMAN.

FIND ME, FIND ME,
WHERE I HIDE.
IN THE WOODS
OR DEEP INSIDE.
FIND ME, PAPA,
MAMA, DEAR.
FIND ME, FIND ME,
I AM HERE.

KORCZAK. Ah, you hear the singing. That is Mendalek, the madman. He is the official madman of the Warsaw Ghetto. Self appointed. He roams the streets saying odd things and making a nuisance of himself. Not unlike me. Oddly enough, the soldiers never punish him. “He's a harmless, mad, old Jew!...”

(The Madman's song ends.)

(SABINA re-enters.)

SABINA. Pan Doktor, Eva and Marcel are not in the courtyard.

(HENRYK re-enters. He's next to SABINA.)

HENRYK. No one in the upper floors.

KORCZAK. You checked the attic? I am given to believe some couples occasionally go up to the attic.

(HENRYK and SABINA exchange glances and move a step away from each other.)

HENRYK. There's no one in the attic, doctor.

(STEFFA returns with bedding.)

STEFFA. No Marcel? No Eva?

KORCZAK. *(Calls off:)* Natalia! How goes the search downstairs?!

(NATALIA comes limping on.)

NATALIA. Doctor, I'm sorry, they're not in the basement.

KORCZAK. Well. At what point precisely do we panic?

(A young student, MARCEL, rushes in with a small book.)

MARCEL. Miss Wilczynska! Pan Doktor!

STEFFA. Marcel! Where have you been? You were not at breakfast by the breakfast bell! Where is your cohort Eva?

(EVA enters. she carries a pile of scripts.)

EVA. Pan Doktor—

STEFFA. There she is! I demand to know immediately what you were doing last evening in Sabina's physical education room and where you have been all night. But first! All the other children must be taken from the hall. We cannot let them hear this.

KORCZAK. Natalia, Henryk, escort the children to innocence.

(HENRYK and NATALIA take all the CHILDREN out.)

STEFFA. Sabina, you may interrogate the transgressors.

SABINA. Couldn't I just go with the other kids?

STEFFA. You most certainly may not! Doctor, this is what comes of children teaching children! Sabina is barely an adult herself!

SABINA. I'm nineteen!

STEFFA. When I was nineteen I was responsible!

KORCZAK. When you were nineteen, you were frightening.

EVA. Miss Wylcynska—

MARCEL. No, let me! I shall explain!

STEFFA. You just stand there and—

KORCZAK. Steffa, please, at least let the condemned man utter his last words.

MARCEL. You want to know what we were doing in the gymnasium, what we were doing all night? We were reading?

KORCZAK. Reading?

EVA. First we read singly, then we read aloud to each other, then we needed to get some paper so we could copy the script.

KORCZAK. Script?

EVA. It's a play! A play we wish to perform here at the orphanage!

KORCZAK. We grow impresarios now.

EVA. We slipped away at bedtime to go to the printer's on Gruzka Street. He was willing to trade us a ream of paper if I watched his children while he went out last night.

MARCEL. We've copied all the parts.

EVA. In longhand.

KORCZAK. And just what play is this?

MARCEL. It's called "The Post Office."

EVA. By the Indian writer, Tagore.

KORCZAK. Yes, I know "The Post Office." Where did you get it?

MARCEL. We took a copy from your book shelf, Pan Doktor.

STEFFA. Stealing! Stealing books!

KORCZAK. Steffa! They're books on shelves, like cookies on sheets, they're meant to be taken. What made you take that book?

MARCEL. It was short.

EVA. It's a wonderful play!

KORCZAK. Tell me what it's about?

MARCEL. It's about a poor boy in a poor village, and the boy is dying of a mysterious disease. And there's this flower girl—

EVA. In large part, it's about the flower girl —

MARCEL. —and the boy isn't allowed outside because all the grown ups say the sun and sky is bad for his health—

EVA. We think that's a metaphor.

MARCEL. — and while he's looking out the window, the boy becomes fascinated by the Village Post Office, and he is convinced he is going to get a letter from the King!

EVA. And then a Village Head Man, a bad character, this bad Head Man tricks the boy into believing he's going to get the letter...*as a joke!*

STEFFA. So what happens in the end?

KORCZAK. See, so much suspense, you've got her attention.

MARCEL. In the end a mysterious messenger comes and tells the boy the King is coming.

KORCZAK. And then?

EVA. And then the boy dies.

KORCZAK. I see. And you liked this play?

MARCEL. Oh, yes!

KORCZAK. Because...?

MARCEL. Because it's funny, it's sad, it's strange, it's got suspense and colorful characters...

KORCZAK. Hmmm... What's it about?

MARCEL. About?

EVA. We just told you.

KORCZAK. No, you told me the story, the plot. I'm asking you what it's "about." What does it *mean*? For example, who is the messenger?

EVA. Pardon?

KORCZAK. The messenger. Is he a real messenger and or does he stand for something else?

MARCEL. I think he stands for God!

EVA. I think he's Death!

KORCZAK. God and Death. And a little boy dies. The ghetto community will love this.

EVA. But Pan Doktor, what is the right answer?

KORCZAK. I don't know! For all I know the messenger is a messenger, and nothing more!

EVA. We can figure out all that during rehearsals.

KORCZAK. Yes, I'm sure you would *IF* we were putting on the play.

EVA. But Pan Doktor—!

KORCZAK. Now I'm sorry you stayed up all night and ran off to the printers and did all that longhand copying without asking permission against the laws of the orphanage and the curfew which can get you more than a summons before the children's court, *IT CAN GET YOU SHOT!*

MARCEL. (*Puffs up:*) If someone had tried to shoot us, I would've just—

EVA. We know we could have got in trouble, but it seemed worth the risk.

KORCZAK. I understand. But there will be no play.

EVA. Pan Doktor!

MARCEL. Doctor Korczak!

KORCZAK. Enough! No more! See you in court.

(NATALIA enters.)

NATALIA. Pan Doktor? The Jewish Council has arrived.

KORCZAK. *(Bad timing:)* The Jewish Council—! Usher in the chairman.

(NATALIA exits.)

STEFFA. You two! Out! The day is half over! You have missed already a wonderful breakfast of potato and bread and milk.

MARCEL. Yes, Madam Steffa.

EVA. Yes, Madam Steffa.

KORCZAK. *(Sotto voce:)* Get yourself a plate before you go.

(EVA and MARCEL grab some food and rush off with SABINA. KORCZAK signals STEFFA to open the door.)

(NATALIA ushers in the CHAIRMAN, a big, fat man in a proper suit, bowler, and cane. his demeanor matches his clothes. He is joined by MRS. BRON and MR. GEPNER.)

CHAIRMAN. My dear Korczak!

KORCZAK. My dear Chairman. Mrs. Bron. Mr. Gepner.

CHAIRMAN. You have kept us waiting, Korczak! Almost three minutes.

KORCZAK. We must be on German time.

CHAIRMAN. As you know, I have a special car assigned me by the Germans. It does get us faster through the streets.

KORCZAK. Can we offer you some tea, coffee?

CHAIRMAN. You have coffee?

KORCZAK. Actually, no, I was hoping you'd say tea.

MRS. BRON. Tea is perfect.

KORCZAK. Sit, please!

(They do.)

GEPNER. I should say, Korczak, I'm surprised you have tea at all.

KORCZAK. Well, there is something about a tea bag. You can always squeeze out another cup.

(We hear the MADMAN sing off. They speak over his song.)

MADMAN.

FIND ME, FIND ME,

WHERE I HIDE.

IN THE WOODS

OR DEEP INSIDE.

FIND ME, PAPA,

MAMA, DEAR.

FIND ME, FIND ME,

I AM HERE.

KORCZAK. So. What news of the world outside?

CHAIRMAN. New rules!

KORCZAK. New rules. Oh, good. New ones, we need.

(The CHAIRMAN nods to GEPNER, who passes out important looking papers.)

CHAIRMAN. Water rules, trash removal, a new curfew hour for Sunday evenings. It's *earlier*.

KORCZAK. These are from the ghetto police?

CHAIRMAN. Yes.

KORCZAK. I used to teach the children: whenever you are in trouble, if you are lost or scared...find a policeman. Not anymore. Well! What else have we on the agenda? You could have sent these over by messenger.

CHAIRMAN. Korczak, the Germans are taking a very hard line on...difficult cases. Most of our Jews are well behaved. But there are always others.

KORCZAK. What “others” do you refer to?

CHAIRMAN. (Re: MADMAN:) Well, for example, fellows like that one. Mandelek. Jews who want to be noticed even though they bring destruction on us all!

KORCZAK. Mandelek is mad.

MRS. BRON. Some are not as mad as they look. And some, to the casual observer, don't seem as mad as they are.

CHAIRMAN. Our major concern here are troublemakers. Rabble rousers, loud mouths, smugglers.

MRS. BRON. And the people who deal with smugglers.

KORCZAK. I only deal with certain businessmen when the welfare of my children is involved.

CHAIRMAN. Smuggling is a crime punishable by death. And the Germans won't stop with the smuggler. They'll track down those who deal with him as well.

KORCZAK. What other kinds of “troublemakers” do you refer to?

MRS. BRON. Children!

CHAIRMAN. Mrs. Bron—

MRS. BRON. Children who do not follow the curfew rules, who throw rocks at German soldiers, sneak out at night and meet in basements planning I do not know what!

GEPNER. Mrs. Bron refers, of course, to the “older” children.

KORCZAK. All the children are “older” now.

CHAIRMAN. Korczak, from now on, you must promise to keep your children within these walls.

MRS. BRON. No going outside!

KORCZAK. Inside. All right, I will do my best to keep the children inside.

MRS. BRON. And...?

KORCZAK. And I do my utmost to restrain the “troublemakers.”

MRS. BRON. And—

KORCZAK. And vow never again to do business with smugglers.

CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Korczak. We shall leave you to your important work. Now—

(The door opens and ESTERKA WINOGRAD rushes in.)

ESTERKA. Pan Doktor! Oh! Excuse me!

KORCZAK. Er, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Gepner, Mrs. Bron, this is Esterka Winograd, one of my former students. She now teaches at the Upper School on Flagel Square.

CHAIRMAN. We won't keep you. We were just leaving.

ESTERKA. Oh, don't go! I just wanted to speak to Dr. Korczak about rehearsals!

CHAIRMAN. Rehearsals?

ESTERKA. For the play!

MRS. BRON. You are presenting a play, doctor?

GEPNER. You did not tell us you were doing a play.

ESTERKA. It was just decided this morning! The children picked it!

MRS. BRON. The children?

ESTERKA. It's called "The Post Office."

KORCZAK. Esterka, if I might take you aside—

GEPNER. When, doctor, are you presenting this play?

MRS. BRON. Yes, perhaps we would **all** like to come.

ESTERKA. Oh, everyone should come! We should put posters up everywhere in the ghetto!

CHAIRMAN. Miss Winograd, what is this play, "The Post Office" about?

ESTERKA. About? It's a political allegory about the Germans!

KORCZAK. *(Closes his eyes, groans:)* Ohhhh!

MRS. BRON. What?!

GEPNER. Pardon me, did you say the, the..."Germans?"

CHAIRMAN. (*Doing a slow burn:*) Would you all excuse the doctor and myself for a moment, please.

STEFFA. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

(*They leave. KORCZAK and the CHAIRMAN are left alone. The CHAIRMAN glares.*)

CHAIRMAN. "A political allegory about the Germans." Do the Germans come across **well**?

KORCZAK. It is not a political allegory! The play is a fable, It's about a little boy who's dying and he is not allowed to go outside, and then one day he sees a post office and becomes convinced the king is going to send him a letter, and then, at the end, when he's dying a letter does arrive and the king does come.

CHAIRMAN. So where are the Germans?

KORCZAK. I suppose one sees in it what one sees.

CHAIRMAN. Korczak, we are Jews! The Germans hate us! We must not draw attention! We cannot put the spotlight on ourselves!

KORCZAK. We are Jews, forced by the Germans to wear yellow stars in a ghetto surrounded by walls and barbed wire and searchlights and gun towers! How much more attention can we have?

(*STEFFA enters.*)

CHAIRMAN. There is no reason to court danger! The Jews of Poland have withstood invasions before. We are always persecuted, but we always survive as long as we keep our heads! Janusz. Abandon this play! Miss Wylczynska! You have back your leader.

(*He exits.*)

STEFFA. What did the Chairman say?

KORCZAK. That we must not do the play.

STEFFA. So? You already said you weren't going to do it.

KORCZAK. Yes, but the Chairman doesn't know that! I do not like people telling me what to do!

(The MADMAN sings again off.)

(EVA, MARCEL, SABINA, NATALIA, HENRYK, IVAN, SYMONEK, GEINA, BIG HANNAH, LITTLE HANNAH, and a few others slip back in too. They look at KORCZAK.)

STEFFA. So? What are we going to do?

KORCZAK. We're doing "The Post Office."

Scene 1A

(As the ACTORS disperse from the previous scene, KORCZAK looks out front. Spot on him.)

KORCZAK. "Ghetto Diary. Strange Happenings." The orphanage is going to put on a play. "The Post Office" by the Indian writer Tagore. Very well known playwright, especially in his own Hindu language. Now I did not decide to do the play because I want to tweak the noses of the Jewish Council. Nor do I desire to challenge our German visitors. A community needs projects, programs to keep it tightly knit and moving forward. And this play, which I do know well, can give us that. Not too long, not too complicated, plenty of roles for children of every age. For example.

(SYMONEK, IVAN, and GEINA come downstage.)

These are the youngest in the orphanage: Symonek, his pal Ivan, and Geina. Ivan and Symonek are inseparable, so they'll have to play a pair of soldiers.

(SYMONEK and IVAN giggle.)

Tiny, giggling soldiers. Geina is our quiet little flower. She is sweet but shy, so we'll have to find a role for her in which sweetness and shyness is shown to be a virtue.

(BIG HANNAH and LITTLE HANNAH come downstage.)

This is Big Hannah. And this is Little Hannah. Some of my teachers thought it was cruel to call Big Hannah "big" but what were we

going to do? Call her "Larger Little Hannah?" These two don't get along at all. Little Hannah is always being picked on by Big Hannah. Little Hannah has a bad cough.

LITTLE HANNAH. COUGH!

KORCZAK. Which may require some imagination to incorporate into the play, but I'm sure every play needs a cougher, heavens knows they have them in the audience. As for Big Hannah, whenever we do a play she always says the same thing.

BIG HANNAH. I want to be a man!

KORCZAK. And she usually gets her way.

(MARCEL and EVA come downstage.)

Marcel and Eva, our impresarios. They argue and bicker all the time, contradicting each other, insulting each other. Naturally, they are very much in love.

MARCEL / EVA. Gasp!

(ESTERKA comes downstage.)

KORCZAK. And Esterka. She is not one of my charges. Not anymore. She was though. One of the smartest, the brightest, speaks many languages. When she was old enough to leave the orphanage, we all wept. Maybe that's why she became a teacher and comes back so often. She is also a member of various "secret organizations" in the ghetto. She is a "troublemaker." And I couldn't be more proud of her. Esterka was a happy girl all the days of her life...until two years ago. I can mark the end of her innocence by how tall she was when the Germans came. The war began when Ivan learned to talk. The Germans took Warsaw when Geina lost her baby teeth. They sent us to the ghetto when Symonek spoke his first words.

(The WAIF enters and comes downstage.)

And the waif...she is so young and the war now so long she has probably never known a time without the shadow of death. They are the rings in the trees, my children.

Scene 2

(Later that morning.)

(A rehearsal of "The Post Office":)

(HENRYK is reading "MADHAV." SABINA is reading "THE VILLAGE DOCTOR." ESTERKA and the CHILDREN watch.)

MADHAV / HENRYK. "Doctor! Tell me the truth! Is my poor little boy going to live?"

VILLAGE DOCTOR / SABINA. "If his fate is to live, then he shall live. If it is not, he shall not."

MADHAV / HENRYK. "What is your prescription?"

VILLAGE DOCTOR / SABINA. "On no account must the patient be allowed outside. Sun, wind, and sky all are very bad for his condition! As the medical book says: 'Protect against what you can, what you can't...don't.' If he goes outside I cannot be responsible. "

MADHAV / HENRYK. "O, poor boy! Poor, poor boy!"

(MARCEL steps forward, reading the role of AMAL.)

AMAL / MARCEL. "Uncle! I heard the doctor. I can't go out and play?"

MADHAV / HENRYK. "No, Amal. The doctor says the outdoors, the sun and wind, are very bad for you."

AMAL / MARCEL. "But I want to go out and see the hills and that mountain there! Do you know what is beyond them?"

MADHAV / HENRYK. "No."

AMAL / MARCEL. "Neither do I! That's why I want to climb them!"

MADHAV / HENRYK. "My poor boy. I must go off to work. Now remember the doctor's orders: Do not go outdoors!"

(ESTERKA stops the rehearsal.)

ESTERKA. So! We see the problem!

MARCEL. What did I do wrong?

ESTERKA. No, I mean the problem in the play! The little boy wants to go out and play, but the doctor says if he does so, he will die. The little boy equals the Jews. The doctor equals the Germans.

EVA. I think the doctor is the Jewish Council!

BIG HANNAH. He's the Chairman.

IVAN. (*Impersonating the CHAIRMAN:*) "You can't go out and play!"

ESTERKA. Now, now! I just wanted us to read the first scene so we would get an idea what the play is about.

MARCEL. It's about God!

EVA. It's about Death!

IVAN. It's about a minute long!

(*The CHILDREN laugh.*)

EVA. And about as long as there have been children, they've been making that stupid joke.

SYMONEK. It wasn't stupid. They laughed.

BIG HANNAH. I didn't!

ESTERKA. I don't care if ALL of you laughed. This is not a democracy.

LITTLE HANNAH. Yes, it is! This whole orphanage is a democracy.

(*All the BOYS clap and cheer!*)

ESTERKA. I mean the play! There must be one director, one person in charge, and that is me.

ALL. OHH!— THIS ISN'T FAIR!

(*KORCZAK enters.*)

BIG HANNAH. She thinks she's special because she's grown up and lives outside the orphanage now.

KORCZAK. No, she thinks she's special because she's already in charge. Go on with your rehearsal. I'm just here to observe.

ESTERKA. Thank you, Pan Doktor. To begin with, we must assign the roles!

ALL. Oh! — ME! — PICK ME! — I WANT A ROLE!!

ESTERKA. First, the doting father... let me see...

HENRYK. I thought I was playing the role of the doting father.

EVA. This was not decided.

HENRYK. But I just read it.

ESTERKA. Just as an example. You're a teacher, this is a play for the children.

HENRYK. You're a teacher.

SABINA. Henryk, shh!

HENRYK. Well, she is.

MARCEL. But I am playing Amal, yes?

ESTERKA. After what we just saw you do with the part?

MARCEL. You mean that was an audition? Wait, no, give me another chance, I can be much better!

ESTERKA. Since we are performing the play tomorrow night, we don't have time for full auditions. I will assign the roles based on what I have seen of you at recitals and spelling contests.

CHILDREN. Ohhh!

(ESTERKA calls names and hands out scripts.)

ESTERKA. First we have the role of Amal.

MARCEL. Esterka, now—

ESTERKA. That goes to Abrasha.

IVAN. Why?

ESTERKA. Because he's handsome and he plays the violin.

IVAN. There's a violin in the story?

ESTERKA. No, but I like violin music. Next there's Amal's father—

MARCEL. Esterka—

ESTERKA. That will be Misha.

IVAN. Why?

ESTERKA. Because he's taller than Abrasha, who must seem to be his son.

IVAN. But the son spends all his time in bed. How will we know how tall he is?

ESTERKA. The physician is next—

MARCEL. I can do that!

ESTERKA. The physician will be played by Chaimek.

IVAN. Why?

ESTERKA. Because Chaimek is a know-it-all just like the doctor. Next is The Head Man's Guard—

MARCEL. Hang on, now, I—

ESTERKA. ...and that will be Ivan.

IVAN. Wh—Oh. Thank you.

ESTERKA. (To EVA:) Anything to stop him asking why.

IVAN. Why?

ESTERKA. NEXT! Sudha, the flower girl—

MARCEL. I...

ESTERKA. Yes?

MARCEL. Never mind.

ESTERKA. Sudha, the flower girl is...

LITTLE HANNAH. Pick me! Pick me! Please!

ESTERKA. Geina.

LITTLE HANNAH. *(On the verge of tears:)* Ohhh.

GEINA. If Little Hannah wants the part, I don't mind.

ESTERKA. Little Hannah is up on charges. I don't want my cast missing rehearsals because they're in jail.

LITTLE HANNAH. I am unjustly accused and unjustly deprived of a major role!

IVAN. *(Blows a raspberry.)*

ESTERKA. The Head Man... that can be Symonek.

MARCEL. Ah, the villain! I would have been perfect!

ESTERKA. The Mail Deliverer, that's Jakub.

JAKUB. Ha! Victory!

ESTERKA. The King's Doctor, Mietek. The Watchman, Helena.

MARCEL. Wait a minute, is there no part for me at all?!

KORCZAK. There are no small roles, Marcel, just small children.

BIG HANNAH. What about the girls?

ESTERKA. I gave Geina the role of Sudha, the flower girl.

EVA. Should I remind you a girl brought you this script?

KORCZAK. Ah, the producer heard from!

MARCEL. I brought it too! And look what happened to me?

ESTERKA. I have assigned these roles each according to your ability.

CHILDREN. *AWW! — THIS IS NO FAIR! — I WAS CHEATED OF A PART!- WAHH!*

KORCZAK. *(Calms them.)* Now, wait, here. Everyone who wants one must have a part.

ESTERKA. Pan Doktor, I remind you am I the director.

EVA. And we are the producers.

KORCZAK. Yes, and I own theater.

ESTERKA. You have 170 children here!

KORCZAK. 171.

ESTERKA. The play has 12 roles. I can't cast the whole orphanage!

KORCZAK. Not all will want to. Some are shy, some are sick.

ESTERKA. But still — How am I to accommodate?

KORCZAK. Crowd scenes? Musicians. Singers! You have a Head Man, correct? A bureaucrat in charge of things, very officious?

ESTERKA. Yes?

KORCZAK. Give him some assistants.

ESTERKA. How many?

KORCZAK. Most bureaucrats I know need many, many assistants.

(We suddenly hear STEFFA off.)

STEFFA. *(Off:)* Who took my list of breakfast latecomers?!!

KORCZAK. For that matter, many a Head Man is really a Head Woman.

ESTERKA. *(Slams down script:)* Fine, Big Hannah is now the Head Woman!

SYMONEK. Awwwwww!

BIG HANNAH. Hooray! I will lord it over all of you!

MARCEL. But I still don't know what I am to play!

ESTERKA. You shall be the carpenter.

MARCEL. There's a carpenter in the play?

ESTERKA. No, you shall build the set.

MARCEL. *(Suddenly proud:)* You mean: I'm a designer?

EVA. If we have a set, we'll need costumes!

GEINA. Colorful costumes.

ALL. Yes! — That's right! — Color! — Oh, that would be so nice!

ESTERKA. Eva is right. We need to suggest a tropical place, with magical colors. Scarves and dresses and—

BIG HANNAH. And very big hats!

(*NATALIA limps in.*)

NATALIA. Pan Doktor? A gentleman to see you.

KORCZAK. (*Meaningfully:*) Is it...?

NATALIA. Yes.

KORCZAK. Two minutes, then bring him in.

ESTERKA. Now, children—

IVAN. Don't call us children!

SYMONEK. We're actors!

LITTLE HANNAH. And actors demand respect!

KORCZAK. (*Wry:*) Believe me, you'll get more respect as children.

BIG HANNAH. I insist the director call me Madam!

ESTERKA. And what if I don't?

LITTLE HANNAH. We'll bring you up on charges at court!

ESTERKA. I don't even live here anymore!

EVA. I want to discuss the matter of the —

BIG HANNAH. I am the Head Woman! We will discuss what I want!

SYMONEK. Can I juggle?

(*The CHILDREN ad-lib a cacophony of questions.*)

KORCZAK. (*Yells:*) Esterka. One of the rules of any theatrical endeavor is that when things get tense, TAKE A BREAK!

ESTERKA. BREAK!

SABINA. (*Claps hands:*) Everyone outside for some air and exercise. I mean— everyone to the gymnasium! Ten minutes!

(Everyone exits except KORCZAK and NATALIA. He nods at her.)

KORCZAK. Bring him in. And keep Miss Wylcynska occupied until we're finished.

NATALIA. Yes, doctor.

(SZULC, a greasy, Dickensian smuggler enters, followed by a ragged little BOY we'll know as "BOY" for now. the BOY hauls a huge sack. SZULC grins.)

SZULC. My good Doctor!

KORCZAK. My dear Szulc!

SZULC. It is good to see you, but I can't say you look fit. You need fruit. And vegetables. And vodka. All these I can get. Not cheap. But not exorbitant either.

KORCZAK. Fruit and vegetables I will take.

SZULC. How much?

KORCZAK. For 171 children and eight adults.

SZULC. I meant for you, alone.

KORCZAK. Then never mind. We are discussing today milk and butter.

SZULC. Such dangers I face just to come here, and all for milk and butter. Boy! Bring!

(The BOY hauls the sack over.)

KORCZAK. What is the boy's name?

SZULC. You don't need to know.

(Digs in sack.)

Milk and butter. As promised.

KORCZAK. Very good. I also need shoes.

(Hands him slip.)

Here are sizes.

SZULC. Shoes I have, sizes forget it. How many you need?

KORCZAK. Twelve. A dozen.

SZULC. Fifty zlotys.

KORCZAK. Last time it was 25.

SZULC. Times change. Last time 25 zlotys bought you twelve pair. Now 25 buys you twelve shoes, and not necessarily matching.

KORCZAK. I only have so much.

SZULC. *(Looks in sack.)* For 25 I can give you...one, two, three, four pairs and some odd singles. Squeeze some toes, stuff some ends, they'll do. I can get more, but not until the evening. Things aren't moving as quickly as I'd been promised.

KORCZAK. *(Hands over some money.)* 25 zlotys.

SZULC. *(Takes money.)* What about my fee for the butter and eggs?

KORCZAK. *(Takes out more money.)* Here. Twelve zlotys.

SZULC. We said fifteen.

KORCZAK. My friend, I have no more zlotys for the butter.

SZULC. You cheat me, Pan Doktor, I take back the butter!

KORCZAK. You would haul all this butter back across the ghetto? On a hot day like this? Butter melting out of your sack leaving a trail for the Germans to follow you by?

(Beat. SZULC fumes and grabs the money.)

SZULC. Fine! Take your butter! I have been robbed though.

KORCZAK. *(Looks at shoes.)* Where are the laces?

SZULC. Laces are extra.

KORCZAK. Szulc, I sometimes think of you as one of my few failures.

SZULC. Thank you, Pan Doktor. From my old teacher, that is a compliment. Anything else you need besides the shoes?

KORCZAK. Potatoes.

SZULC. For you, the best! Is that it?

KORCZAK. No...Color.

SZULC. What?

KORCZAK. I need colorful fabric... cloth, curtains, scarves...yes, scarves! Lots of scarves! But color!

SZULC. I can do this.

KORCZAK. How much?

SZULC. Ten zlotys.

KORCZAK. Three.

SZULC. Eight.

KORCZAK. Four.

SZULC. Five.

KORCZAK. Five.

SZULC. In advance.

KORCZAK. (*Hands over money.*) Here.

SZULC. You said you didn't have any more zlotys!

KORCZAK. I said I didn't have any more zlotys for the butter. These were for the scarves.

(*STEFFA enters with NATALIA.*)

STEFFA. Doctor?

KORCZAK. Yes?

STEFFA. A German officer is here

SZULC. (*Frightened:*) Gah!

KORCZAK. Natalia! Take this sack!

NATALIA. Yes, Pan Doktor!

(*NATALIA drags the sack to the kitchen.*)

STEFFA. (*Sees SZULC:*) Who is this? Szulc?!!

SZULC. Greetings, Madam!

STEFFA. Who let Szluc in here?!! Doctor, you know what the Council said about smugglers and black marketeers!

SZULC. I'm going, I'm going!

STEFFA. Not that way! He's coming!

SZULC. The boy stays here!

KORCZAK. What?

SZULC. Say he's one of yours!

STEFFA. What?

SZULC. Say he's one of your orph—

(A German officer, MAJOR KEPP, enters.)

MAJOR KEPP. Doctor Korczak?

KORCZAK. Yes.

MAJOR KEPP. Major Kepp.

KORCZAK. Good morning, Major.

MAJOR KEPP. Almost afternoon.

KORCZAK. I didn't think "almost" counted with the Germans. Like being "a little" Jewish.

MAJOR KEPP. *(Sees SZULC:)* You!

SZULC. Yes?

MAJOR KEPP. What is your name?

SZULC. Sziefferman! Boris Sziefferman!

MAJOR KEPP. Papers!

SZULC. *(Hands over same:)* Here!

MAJOR KEPP. What is your work?

SZULC. *(Points to papers:)* I am clerk at the ball bearing plant. Essential labor. Special dispensation, as you see.

MAJOR KEPP. Your name is not Szluc? Bula Szulc?

SZULC. No! Szeiferman, Boris Szeifferman.

MAJOR KEPP. What are you doing here?

SZULC. I wanted the doctor to look at my glands.

MAJOR KEPP. Sick are you?

SZULC. No! Turns out I'm very healthy, very fit! Ready to rush back to work at my essential labor!

MAJOR KEPP. You fit the description of a smuggler named Szulc.

SZULC. No, sir. I am Sziefferman, clerk at the ball bearing plant, essential labor, special dispensation. As you see from my papers here.

MAJOR KEPP. He is also a counterfeiter. Goes around with a boy.

(MAJOR KEPP looks at the BOY. KORCZAK goes to the BOY.)

KORCZAK. This is one of our orphans. Chelmo Gurdheid. Chelmo, bow to the Major.

(BOY bows.)

(A moment. MAJOR KEPP switches gears.)

MAJOR KEPP. Doctor, some privacy.

SZULC. I'll see my way out. Good day, Herr Major! Doctor! Heil Hitler!

(SZULC gives a Nazi salute and exits. He and the BOY don't exchange a glance.)

KORCZAK. Miss Wylcinska, will you take Chelmo off to his class.

STEFFA. Yes, doctor.

(STEFFA takes the BOY off.)

MAJOR KEPP. I see you wear your old Army overcoat. Despite the weather.

KORCZAK. It is a way of holding to my Polish pride. You speak Polish very well. No German accent at all.

MAJOR KEPP. I lived in Poland for a time in my youth.

KORCZAK. In Warsaw?

MAJOR KEPP. Long ago, yes. I have just now arrived in Warsaw, in charge of this district.

(MARCEL and EVA enter, arguing.)

EVA. We do not have paint, we do not have curtains, we do not have lighting equipment—

MARCEL. How can I create the world of the play if I am denied essential building materials?!

EVA. Improvise!

MARCEL. Producers! You're no better than the Germ—

EVA. *(Sees MAJOR KEPP:)* Oh!

KORCZAK. Major, these are two of my oldest charges. This is Major Kepp. Of the German army.

MAJOR KEPP. *(Cold:)* You run in here without permission?

MARCEL. We have permission. We were on a break.

MAJOR KEPP. You are rehearsing a play?

EVA. Yes.

MARCEL. For tomorrow night.

EVA. "The Post Office."

MAJOR KEPP. By Tagore. And we are in your rehearsal hall?

EVA. Yes.

MAJOR KEPP. Then you'll have to wait until we're done. Outside!

(MARCEL and EVA go off quickly.)

KORCZAK. What can I do for you, Major Kepp?

MAJOR KEPP. Doctor, I am a great admirer of your work. I have read your books, poetry, *plays*...since I was a boy. You have made so many of us aware of how differently one should treat a child.

KORCZAK. And how is that?

MAJOR KEPP. As a person. As a human being with its own mind and soul.

KORCZAK. So, what, you came for an autograph?

MAJOR KEPP. I fear not. Doctor, changes are coming for the ghetto.

KORCZAK. Of what sort?

MAJOR KEPP. Upon that I shall not elaborate. But things cannot remain as they are. I say this to you in case you would make other arrangements.

KORCZAK. Of what sort?

MAJOR KEPP. Upon that I shall not elaborate. All I can add... and this based purely on my own personal experience... is that when one travels one should always travel light. For the sake of speed.

KORCZAK. Major, it is my understanding that when the Germans travel, they do it without warning. They love surprises. Why then are you here with this...advice?

MAJOR KEPP. Doctor, this is not an official visit. I am not here.

KORCZAK. Well, I'll grant a metaphysical German is sometimes better than a real one, but I should think a German officer's unofficial visit to a nest of Jews would entail some risk. To himself.

MAJOR KEPP. You are free to think so. I must be off.

(Starts off, stops.)

You really will be performing this play tomorrow night?

KORCZAK. Yes. Why?

MAJOR KEPP. I have never seen "The Post Office." Only read it. Be interesting to find out what your urchins do with it.

KORCZAK. Well, Major, since you've read the play, perhaps I may avail myself of your thoughts on it. In your interpretation, what does the tale of the little boy who is locked in his house mean?

MAJOR KEPP. You mean what is it about?

KORCZAK. Yes.

MAJOR KEPP. It is about someone who is trapped...and should get out as soon as he can. Remember me to Miss Wylcinska.

(MAJOR KEPP exits. KORCZAK is alone a moment. He looks worried. The boy slips back in. KORCZAK senses him.)

KORCZAK. He's gone. You can stay here until Szulc comes back.

BOY. No.

KORCZAK. It would be safer.

BOY. No.

KORCZAK. All right, then.

(Digs out money, hands it over.)

When you see your employer...remind him I need the scarves.

(The BOY takes the money and rushes off.)

Scene 2A

KORCZAK. "Ghetto Diary. Strange Happenings." It is time for the Children's Court. Now this is an idea I had long ago, when I started my first orphanage over twenty years ago. If children were to be given respect, then they must have responsibility. And so we created a Children's Court. Crimes include: spitting, selfishness, loud yelling, not doing one's chores... it's a long list. Well, it was created by both children and teachers. There are very grave crimes...like stealing and hurting another child, and not so grave ones. Each crime requires an accuser and a witness. The judges are three: two children, and one adult. The penalties are various: private apology, public apology, work details, revoking of privileges...all the way to expulsion. The welfare of the many outweighs the welfare of one. Now that the Germans are here, a court of justice and order and dignity is more important than ever.

(CHILDREN enter. The court is set up. MARCEL and EVA come downstage.)

KORCZAK. Marcel and Eva have just been tried, convicted, and sentenced to two weeks of kitchen duty.

(MARCEL and EVA look glum.)

Together.

(MARCEL and EVA look happy.)

(JAKUB bangs his gavel.)

KORCZAK. Shhh!

Scene 3

(The Children's court.)

(All the CHILDREN and staff have gathered for the trial.)

(HALINKA, JAKUB, and NATALIA sit at the judge's table.)

(HENRYK takes notes.)

(GEINA calls out.)

GEINA. Next case! The court versus Mietek.

(MIETEK steps forward.)

HALINKA. Read the charge.

GEINA. Staying too long in the toilet.

(The CHILDREN groan.)

HALINKA. Who prosecutes?

(BIG HANNAH comes forward.)

BIG HANNAH. I do.

HALINKA. Is there evidence against the accused?

CHILDREN. YES!

HALINKA. Mietek, this is the sixth time you have come before us for spending too much time in the toilet.

NATALIA. Is there a reason you have to spend so much time there?

MIETEK. I haven't finished my book!

CHILDREN. OHHHHH!

MIETEK. It's very private there!

BIG HANNAH. I demand a verdict.

JAKUB. We find the defendant guilty. *Again.*

BIG HANNAH. Sentence?

HALINKA. Public apology and a vow to cut his time in the toilet in half.

MIETEK. I apologize for spending too much time in the toilet. I will try to cut my time in the toilet by half.

BIG HANNAH. He better try harder this time!

MIETEK. I will! I will! It's a very big book. "David Copperfield!"

KORCZAK. Just don't move on too quickly to "Bleak House."

JAKUB. Next case!

GEINA. Big Hannah Versus Little Hannah.

KORCZAK. Big Hannah brings a lot of grievances to the court.

HALINKA. What is the charge?

GEINA. Stealing food.

JAKUB. (*Nods gravely.*) A very serious crime.

KORCZAK. Jakub wants to be a REAL judge.

JAKUB. Have you witnesses?

BIG HANNAH. I do. Symonek.

SYMONEK. Yes?

BIG HANNAH. Did you see Little Hannah eat my potato this morning?

NATALIA. You must answer, Symonek. Truthfully.

BIG HANNAH. You said you saw, now answer!

SYMONEK. I don't want to get Little Hannah in trouble. All right. I saw. Little Hannah did eat Big Hannah's potato...

BIG HANNAH. See!

SYMONEK. ...after Big Hannah ate hers.

JAKUB. Big Hannah! Is this true?

BIG HANNAH. No!

JAKUB. Perjury is a very serious crime, Big Hannah.

BIG HANNAH. I didn't! I didn't! (*Beat.*) All right! I did, but she never eats her full plate!

JAKUB. Is the court ready to rule?

HALINKA. The court finds Little Hannah not guilty of stealing food. Little Hannah, do you wish to press charges against Big Hannah?

LITTLE HANNAH. No. I don't want her to pinch me.

JAKUB. And Big Hannah? From now on, no more frivolous suits. It wastes the court's time when we could be playing stick ball.

HALINKA. Next case!

GEINA. Madam Steffa versus Ivan and Symonek.

KORCZAK. It's a rough court day for Symonek.

GEINA. The charge is leaving the orphanage building after bedtime, indulging in a dangerous shimmy down the drainpipe, missing breakfast—

STEFFA. And lying to cover up for a pal!

JAKUB. How respond you?

KORCZAK. "How respond you." He's a judge *already*.

IVAN. Guilty.

SYMONEK. Guilty.

IVAN. With an explanation!

STEFFA. We heard the explanation this morning!

HALINKA. Pan Doktor? Have you a comment on the case?

KORCZAK. Well, these are serious crimes, but the motives were humane. We must forget neither.

HALINKA. Conference.

(The judges whisper.)

Given the circumstances, and your demeanor before the court, sentence is suspended. A verbal apology and a promise not to do it again is all that is needed.

IVAN. I apologize.

SYMONEK. *(Looks conflicted.)* I ... I don't...

HALINKA. You refuse to apologize?

SYMONEK. Ivan took the risk. He was the brave one. I just covered for him. It was the least I could do.

HALINKA. No, you misunderstand. We acknowledge that, we're just saying: apologize and don't lie again.

SYMONEK. I can't promise that. I may lie again, if my friend needs my protection. And I don't think that's wrong.

HALINKA. Very well. One week three hours to bed early.

IVAN. I take back my apology too!

(CHILDREN hub-bub.)

NATALIA. Enough! The sentences have been made. You two may sit.

KORCZAK. *(To us:)* I have never seen that before. I think I think it's good.

NATALIA. I believe that is the last case, so—

JAKUB. No. That is not the last case.

NATALIA. I was given to believe—

JAKUB. This was a last minute addition.

KORCZAK. Ah. A mystery charge!

JAKUB. Will the accused come before the court.

KORCZAK. Will the court first tell us who the accused is?

JAKUB. Dr. Janusz Korczak.

CHILDREN. (*Ad-lib:*) Oh! —Pan Doktor! — Pan Doktor is on trial!

KORCZAK. Pardon me, what have I done? Of what crime am I accused?

JAKUB. Will the accuser come forward?

(*GEINA steps forward.*)

KORCZAK. Geina... You bring charges against me? What did I do?

JAKUB. The court shall ask these questions. Geina, what is Dr. Korczak charged with?

GEINA. Putting a small child, namely myself, in a precarious position.

NATALIA. Could you expand on the details, Geina? What was the incident? Where was the infraction committed?

GEINA. This morning, before breakfast, Pan Doktor, put me on top of one of the railings. The banister.

JAKUB. Do you deny it?

KORCZAK. I put children there all the time! You were laughing, Geina!

HALINKA. Was the doctor's action malicious, do you think?

GEINA. No. I think he thinks it was fun.

HALINKA. But he — the doctor says you laughed. Were you laughing?

GEINA. Yes, but—

KORCZAK. Yes?

GEINA. I was laughing because I was so afraid of falling off the bannister.

NATALIA. So the charge is that... the doctor scared you and didn't think to question the real nature of your laughter.

GEINA. Yes, that's it!

HALINKA. Dr. Korczak? How do you plead?

KORCZAK. If it pleases the court, I might say the following: my normal defense, would be to say I had no idea that what I was doing was frightening or scary in any way, and that my ignorance proved my innocence. But I fear ignorance at my age is really an unforgiveable crime. My plea: guilty as charged. Do with me as you will.

HALINKA. Geina, it is up to you to suggest an apt punishment. The court will decide whether it is unjust.

GEINA. What are my choices?

JAKUB. Public apology. Loss of a privilege for a short period. We are open to other possibilities.

GEINA. I choose...Professor Zi.

KORCZAK. What?

GEINA. This morning Pan Doktor was telling me about Professor Zi and the Planet Ro and then he forgot all about it! I want him to tell more about Ro.

KORCZAK. Ro?

CHILDREN. (*Ad-libs:*) Yes! Ro! Ro!

KORCZAK. I feel I have been tricked, Madam Geina.

GEINA. The banister does scare me.

CHILDREN. (*Ad-libs:*) Ro! Ro! Ro!

KORCZAK. (*Loud:*) Very well, quiet, enough! There was an astronomer. Professor Zi. Professor Zi lived on the Planet Ro and had a vast telescope, called an...an...

GEINA. An astropsychomicrometer.

KORCZAK. Yes. How could I forget? Professor Zi of Planet Ro had an astropsychomicrometer, and with that astropsychomicrometer the Professor could convert heat radiation into moral power. It was also capable of projecting—

GEINA. Spiritual rays.

KORCZAK. Yes. And these spiritual rays when projected from Planet Ro can bestow tranquility and order everywhere in the universe except one place. That restless spark, Planet Earth. And so, on earth.

GEINA. Go on.

KORCZAK. And so, on the days when it was cold and the inhabitants of the planet were freezing, the Professor would use his astropsychomicrometer to make a heat machine. And here's how it worked: gather round, we're all going to be the heat machine.

(The CHILDREN huddle together with KORCZAK in the middle.)

We hold close like all the pieces of a machine would. And now...do you feel the heat?

CHILDREN. *(Ad-libs:)* Yes. It's very warm! It's hot!

KORCZAK. Yes, well, and when the planet became too hot, he'd make a cooling machine made of fans! Here, flutter out like fans.

(The CHILDREN have done this before.)

(They flutter out and spin like tops.)

Can you feel the breeze and the cool?

CHILDREN. *(Ad-libs:)* Yes — It's like wind — I'm getting dizzy!

(KORCZAK stands in the middle, the ringmaster of this vast spinning.)

KORCZAK. Professor Zi of Planet R can do anything! But he can't do anything at all without his children!

(The BOY enters with a sack.)

BOY. I brought the scarves.

(KORCZAK stops. He claps his hands. the CHILDREN stop spinning.)

KORCZAK. Everyone! Look! Esterka, Eva, Marcel!

(KORCZAK digs out wonderful colorful fabrics of many types and shapes.)

ALL. *(Ad-libs:)* Oh look! The colors! That one's mine! — OooH!

BOY. Some are ties, belts, curtains.

KORCZAK. You have done wonders! Everyone! Choose what would be appropriate for your roles! The Head Man, the Physician, the Messenger, the Boy! Geina! Ahh, this would be perfect for the flower girl!

GEINA. Ohh! It's so beautiful!

KORCZAK. Everyone, try them on!

(A teen aged boy enters. He is dirty, gaunt, haunted and looks like a worker. We will know him as Geina's BROTHER. All the CHILDREN are laughing and falling. One by one they notice him standing there. Last to see is EVA.)

EVA. Oh!

STEFFA. Quiet, please! Who are you?

BROTHER. I have come for Geina.

STEFFA. What?

BROTHER. I have come for Geina.

GEINA. This is my brother.

KORCZAK. Samuel? ...Forgive us. I did not recognize you. You have... aged.

BROTHER. I have come for my sister. I want to take her home.

KORCZAK. You do?

BROTHER. Yes.

KORCZAK. How old are you?

BROTHER. Almost eighteen.

KORCZAK. You only left here yourself a year ago.

BROTHER. Geina should be with her family now. She should be at home.

KORCZAK. Where is home?

BROTHER. On the Hrushka Platt, with the labor groups.

KORCZAK. Ah. So home is a basement with fifty other boys your age.

BROTHER. I am her family!

KORCZAK. What is your reason for taking her?

BROTHER. I have the right, that is my reason.

KORCZAK. Yes, but is this the best decision? Think, Samuel, late at night, the curfew...? Come back in the morning when she's slept and had breakfast—

BROTHER. *I WANT HER NOW!*

KORCZAK. (*Suspicious:*) ...What has happened tonight?

BROTHER. (*After a beat:*) I don't wish to scare the children.

KORCZAK. ...Is this what you want, Geina?

GEINA. That is what my brother wants. I will do what my brother wants me to do.

KORCZAK. Sabina, get Geina's things, will you. Send a bit of food with her. What she would have had for the week.

(SABINA goes off. GEINA removes her scarf.)

GEINA. Here.

KORCZAK. Keep it.

GEINA. But it's not mine, it's for the play. The flower girl. It's part of her costume.

KORCZAK. This scarf was for your version of the flower girl. When...Little Hannah plays the flower girl, there will be a new costume entirely. Go on. Go well.

(SABINA brings a small bag and a sack for GEINA. CHILDREN ad-lib goodbyes. GEINA and her BROTHER exit.)

Well. We are 170 children again.

STEFFA. All right! Bedtime now! Line up! No more playing! There will be plenty more time to rehearse tomorrow!

IVAN. Madam? May we take our colorful scarves to bed?

STEFFA. No, not ... Yes. Whyever not!

CHILDREN. Hooray!

(The CHILDREN head to bed, trailing their colors. EVA and MARCEL stay behind. KORCZAK goes to the BOY.)

KORCZAK. Young sir, I couldn't be more pleased. Was the money enough for Szulc?

BOY. I didn't see Szulc. I got these on my own.

KORCZAK. What happened to him?

BOY. ...He had a meeting with some men at a warehouse off Slivaya Street. He went in. He never came out.

KORCZAK. ...Where are you going to go?

BOY. I don't know.

KORCZAK. You could stay here the night.

BOY. How much?

KORCZAK. Hm?

BOY. What is the price to staying here the night?

KORCZAK. ...A penny. And you have to obey the rules of the house.

BOY. All right.

KORCZAK. You have a name. What is it?

BOY. ...Adek.

KORCZAK. Eva and Marcel will show you the house. Go on now, Adek.

(BOY/ADEK gives KORCZAK a penny. He goes off with EVA and MARCEL.)

STEFFA. Why did you charge him?

KORCZAK. I charged him a penny. He has lived all his life in a world where everything costs something. If I give him room and board for nothing, he will treat it as nothing. Charge him a penny, the tiniest sum, he will think he's earned it. And he'll respect us more.

(Smiles, thinks.)

Back to 171 again. There is a balance in this life.

(STEFFA goes up the steps to bed.)

(We hear the MADMAN sing outside.)

(KORCZAK turns to see the WAIF.)

KORCZAK. Where did you come from? Didn't you go up with the others? Afraid? Yes. Well. I sleep down here. Close to the door. In case someone comes.

(Outside, as the MADMAN sings, we hear footsteps coming down the street.)

You want to keep me company? Until you're ready to go back upstairs to bed, that is. I know. New place. Scary. I thought so when I came here. Are you afraid of this house? No. Are you afraid of the dark? Not that. Are you afraid to fall asleep? Ah, yes. That's it. You're afraid of your dreams. The things we dream in our nightmares are so much worse than what can happen in real life. Or so we used to think. You are afraid of what you'll dream. Tell you what. You stay down here with me then. And we just won't sleep. We'll just stay awake all night. Hm? How about that?

MADMAN.

FIND ME, FIND ME,
WHERE I HIDE.

IN THE WOODS
OR DEEP INSIDE.
FIND ME, PAPA,
MAMA, DEAR.
FIND ME, FIND—

(Two rifle shots cut through the night. The MADMAN's singing abruptly cuts off in mid-lyric.)

(KORCZAK looks towards the window. He listens. Nothing.)

(A long moment. The silence is frightening.)

(Then KORCZAK hugs the WAIF. She begins to fall asleep.)

KORCZAK. We won't sleep. We won't sleep. And when we wake it will be morning.

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1A

(KORCZAK onstage alone.)

KORCZAK. “Ghetto Diary. Strange Happenings.” “The Post Office” is to be performed this evening. The rehearsals proceed apace with all the actors in their roles!

(Lights rise to show the CHILDREN entering to start rehearsals.)

It is a cast of thousands! Well, maybe not thousands, but at least a few more than the author, Mr. Tagore, might have imagined. Esterka commands the stage. Eva worries about “production issues.” And Marcel struggles with his assignment to depict “the world of the play.” All the while the children give voice to the words.

(KORCZAK exits as the scene commences.)

Scene 1

MADHAV. “Doctor! Tell me the truth! Is my poor little boy going to live?”

VILLAGE DOCTOR. “If his fate is to live, then he shall live. If it is not, he shall not.

MADHAV. “What is your prescription?”

VILLAGE DOCTOR. “On no account must the patient be allowed outside. Sun, wind, and sky all are very bad for his condition! As the medical book says: “Protect against what you can, what you can’t...don’t.” If he goes outside I cannot be responsible. “

(The VILLAGE DOCTOR exits.)

MADHAV. “O, poor boy! Poor, poor boy!”

AMAL. “Uncle! I heard the doctor. I can’t go out and play?”

ESTERKA. All right, that’s good, let’s skip ahead to the evil Head Man scene.

MARCEL. Why?

ESTERKA. Because Big Hannah is playing the Head Man, and she has to go to the bathroom.

BIG HANNAH. I do, y'know!

ESTERKA. In this scene, Amal has just learned about the existence of the King's Post Office and is eager to get a letter from him. The Head Man and his flunkies enter. Begin!

(BIG HANNAH *as the* HEAD MAN *enters with two* FLUNKIES.)

HEAD MAN. Burp!

FLUNKIES. BURP! BURP!

AMAL. Mr. Head Man, may I have a word with you?

HEAD MAN. Who disturbs the Head Man on his highway?

FLUNKIES. Yeah, yeah, yeah!

HEAD MAN. What's your name, boy?

AMAL. Amal, sir. Mr. Head Man, do the King's postmen listen to you?

HEAD MAN. Of course they do! Why?

AMAL. Will you tell the postman that Amal sits by the window here?

HEAD MAN. Why would I do that?

AMAL. Well, I'm hoping the King will send me a letter.

HEAD MAN. The King?!! HA!

FLUNKIES. HHAHAHAHHAHAHA!

HEAD MAN. King's a big pal of yours, eh? Tell you what: wait til tonight...and you will have your letter from him.

AMAL. Tonight?

HEAD MAN. We'll tell the King all about you! He'll want to get back to you first thing! Come on, boys!

FLUNKIES. HEHHEHEHHEHHEH!

(The HEAD MAN and the FLUNKIES exit. ESTERKA moves to the stage again and is about to speak when ADEK interrupts the rehearsal.)

ADEK. Well, that's stupid.

ESTERKA. What? Who spoke? Who is interrupting rehearsal?

ADEK. Me.

ESTERKA. And what is your name?

ADEK. Adek.

ESTERKA. Are you part of this cast?

IVAN. *(Reminding her:)* Everyone who wants must have a role...

ADEK. I don't have a role.

EVA. Then what is it your business to speak up?

ESTERKA. And just what, Adek, are you calling "stupid?"

ADEK. The way she's playing the Head Man?

BIG HANNAH. Is he criticizing my acting?

ADEK. Oh, that's acting, is it?

BIG HANNAH. I have based my performance on the Chairman of the Jewish Council!

ADEK. The Head Man is not like the Chairman.

ESTERKA. Oh, no?

ADEK. The Head Man is much farther down the line. He just pretends to be important.

IVAN. What's he likes then? A soldier?

SYMONEK. A policeman?

ADEK. He's more like that Madam Steffa woman!

CHILDREN. *(Ad-lib; shocked:)* Oooo! Uh-Oh!

EVA. We love Madam Steffa.

ADEK. She's an OLD WITCH!

CHILDREN. (*Ad-lib; shocked:*) OHHHHH! —He's gonna get it! — (*Etc.*)

EVA. We shall not make a mockery of Madam Steffa, no matter how difficult and overbearing she is.

MARCEL. What do you know about her? Or the doctor? Or any of us?

BIG HANNAH. You're just a little street boy!

MARCEL. A crook by the looks of you!

LITTLE HANNAH. Get this kid outta here!

BIG HANNAH. Yeah, "Boy!"

MARCEL. Yeah!

(ADEK hits MARCEL. They start to fight. Everybody gets in the act.)

(KORCZAK enters with IGOR NEWERLY.)

KORCZAK. Here! What's this? Marcel, Adek—!

MARCEL. He started it!

EVA. Marcel, are you all right?

BIG HANNAH. The little street boy hit Marcel!

KORCZAK. Stop! Quiet! We will deal with this matter in court later today.

EVA. Court's been cancelled today, Pan Doktor! The rehearsals...?

KORCZAK. Ah, yes. Well, then, we will deal with this in court tomorrow. Marcel?

MARCEL. Yes, Pan Doktor.

KORCZAK. Adek?

(*No reply.*)

Adek.

ADEK. He called me a crook.

KORCZAK. Tomorrow, Adek.

ADEK. Yeah, sure. Don't matter. I am a crook.

KORCZAK. Well, it's good to see everyone getting along.

(NATALIA enters. She carries a key.)

NATALIA. Doctor Korczak? Do you want me to open the medicine closet?

KORCZAK. Yes, thank you, Natalia. I want to give shots to the new children. Adek, and our little waif girl.

ADEK. I got shots already. Szulc can get hold of any medicine he wants.

KORCZAK. Yes, well, medicine is very precious and hard to get.

ADEK. And worth a lot of money.

KORCZAK. Natalia, do you have the key to the medicine closet?

NATALIA. Yes, doctor.

KORCZAK. Unlock it and prepare the injections, will you?

NATALIA. Yes, doctor.

(NATALIA drops the key. She tries to bend to pick it up, but her bad leg makes it difficult. ADEK picks up the key and gives it to NATALIA. NATALIA smiles and goes upstairs.)

KORCZAK. Everyone, gather round and meet a good friend, Mr. Igor Newerly. Igor, these are my fellow convicted felons.

NEWERLY. They look like a hardened bunch.

ADEK. Why don't you wear a Yellow Star? Did you refuse, like him? Or did you pay your way out?

KORCZAK. Mr. Newerly is not Jewish. He visits the ghetto from the outside.

ADEK. What's he doing here?

KORCZAK. I told you: He is a friend.

NEWERLY. I very much look forward to your show this evening.

ADEK. *(Sneers.)* Sure you do.

ESTERKA. Uh, perhaps we should take a break, Pan Doktor.

(Everyone goes, leaving KORCZAK and NEWERLY alone.)

KORCZAK. So. You like the new place?

NEWERLY. They cram you into smaller and smaller cells.

KORCZAK. I think it's rather lofty. Like a cathedral...or a synagogue. I can make that joke to you. You're not Jewish; you won't be offended. Tea?

NEWERLY. I don't have time.

KORCZAK. Good, because we don't have tea.

NEWERLY. You sent me a message.

KORCZAK. A German officer came yesterday. He was giving me warning.

NEWERLY. Of...?

KORCZAK. He was vague on specifics, but I got the idea we were in great and imminent danger.

NEWERLY. Why would a German officer warn you?

KORCZAK. I don't know. I am not accustomed to such courtesy from our visitors. *(Beat.)* So?

NEWERLY. ...The word is that the Germans will begin emptying the ghetto within the week.

KORCZAK. Empty a ghetto filled with over 350,000 Jews?

NEWERLY. Yes.

KORCZAK. How will they do this?

NEWERLY. Deportation.

KORCZAK. To?

NEWERLY. Treblinka. It's a camp. Doctor, do you know what the camps are?

KORCZAK. ...Those are just rumors.

NEWERLY. Yes, very difficult to check because no one ever comes back from them. There are twelve trains to Treblinka each morning and afternoon. Now they're adding night runs. They want the tracks filled 24 hours a day.

KORCZAK. The Jewish Council has told us nothing of this.

NEWERLY. The Council hasn't been informed. The Chairman is last to know anything now. The Germans enjoy humiliating him.

KORCZAK. Trains. Ivan likes trains. He and Symonek... They've never been on one.

NEWERLY. Pan Doktor. We had a meeting last night. About you.

KORCZAK. Do I want to hear what the Underground says about me?

NEWERLY. (*Hands him documents.*) Here.

KORCZAK. What are these?

NEWERLY. Passport. Identification cards. Certificate of birth. You are Zelko Brundemann. You are a Czech national. Catholic.

KORCZAK. And I am to use this...?

NEWERLY. To go through the ghetto gates tomorrow morning. Seven a.m. Friends will be waiting for you. You will go out as part of a work detail. When you're on the other side, you will be met by other friends, who will move to a safe country.

KORCZAK. I won't take them!

NEWERLY. The Germans will be here at your door by lunch tomorrow, dinner at the latest!

KORCZAK. And you would have them find me absent? "Where, children, is the doctor?" "Ah, he stole away in the night."

NEWERLY. Pan Doktor, you cannot stop what will happen, what is going to happen is inevitable! But you can save yourself! The world will be poorer without your voice!

KORCZAK. Igor, you obviously have no children.

NEWERLY. No. But I feel I have a father.

(Beat; another attempt.)

These are the best counterfeit papers money can buy! They came from Szulc!

KORCZAK. Then they should help someone tomorrow at seven. Is there news of Szulc?

NEWERLY. ...There was an execution of smugglers last night on Givelny Street. In a Warehouse.

(KORCZAK hands back the papers.)

NEWERLY. Goodbye, Pan Doktor.

KORCZAK. Au revoir, Igor.

(NEWERLY exits.)

(KORCZAK looks around the room. He starts to exit when MARCEL and EVA enter. He stops and overhears.)

EVA. ...that's nonsense, you're being foolhardy!

MARCEL. We need some sort of structure to suggest the house Amal lives in. It's just like you to scrimp on things like sets!

EVA. It's prudent! You just want to show off your carpentry! Besides, we can suggest the house simply by saying there is a house!

MARCEL. My creativity is being stifled! An audience wants spectacle!

EVA. Who says?!

MARCEL. Aristotle!

EVA. Construction materials are out of the question. Make something out of rugs, pillows, and a bed. That's it!

MARCEL. *(After a beat, softer:)* I could build a good house.

EVA. *(Also softer:)* I know you could. But we don't have time to build a house.

(They look at each other. They get closer together. They may kiss.)

KORCZAK. Aren't you going to kiss her?

(MARCEL and EVA jump back.)

EVA. Doctor!

MARCEL. Pan Doktor! We weren't...I wasn't going to kiss Eva!

EVA. *(Surprised:)* You weren't?

MARCEL. *(Red faced:)* Well, I mean I... It's against the rules.

EVA. *(To KORCZAK:)* Yes, yes, that's what he meant.

(Shoots him a glance.)

I hope.

KORCZAK. I hereby dissolve the rules.

MARCEL. For how long?

KORCZAK. For the duration of a kiss.

(A commotion off.)

VOICES. Here, you can't go in there! — Pan Doktor! — Get out of my way! — Do you know who I am?!

(STEFFA, SABINA, a man and a woman enter. The man is the EVALUATOR. He wears a long, dark coat and a dark homburg. The WOMAN is his secretary. The EVALUATOR looks small time and bureaucratic. He carries a cane. They are pushing their way in.)

STEFFA. Doctor, they forced their way in, we couldn't—

KORCZAK. It's all right. This is the price we pay for no lock on the door. May I help you?

EVALUATOR. *(Takes out measuring tape.)* Just keep out of our way. We have work to do.

KORCZAK. This is my orphanage. I don't—

EVALUATOR. (*Measuring.*) Move aside. We'll just be a moment. 27 feet.

(*The WOMAN jots notes.*)

KORCZAK. Are you measuring us for a new rug?

EVALUATOR. (*Still working:*) 38 feet. How many bedrooms does this have?

KORCZAK. There are no bedrooms per se. We use various spaces for the chil—

EVALUATOR. How many can you sleep?

KORCZAK. We currently have 171 children.

EVALUATOR. I mean adults.

KORCZAK. I do not know how many adults it would—

EVALUATOR. Make it 90 adults. Your basement. What does that sleep?

STEFFA. None of our children sleep in the basement!

EVALUATOR. Put 25.

(*ADEK enters and watches silently.*)

You have plumbing?

KORCZAK. When it works.

STEFFA. I demand to know—

EVALUATOR. We're almost done.

(*More CHILDREN enter: LITTLE HANNAH, the WAIF, JAKUB, IVAN, HALINKA, SYMONEK. The EVALUATOR checks light fixtures.*)

Gas fixtures. No electricity?

STEFFA. Not in here.

EVALUATOR. Gas is cheaper anyway.

(*Puts away tape and book.*)

Right. That's it.

(To STEFFA:)

You shouldn't be so forward, Jewess.

(He slaps STEFFA.)

STEFFA. OHH!

CHILDREN. GASP! — Madam Steffa! — OHH! — Pan Doktor!

KORCZAK. *(Comes forward, angrily:)* Steffa!

(MARCEL restrains KORCZAK.)

MARCEL. Doctor!

(The EVALUATOR slugs KORCZAK in the stomach. MARCEL grabs the EVALUATOR. The Evaluator's homburg flies off and lands on the floor. The EVALUATOR cracks MARCEL with his cane. MARCEL collapses to the floor.)

EVALUATOR. Stinking pigs! Don't interfere again, or I'll take the stick to your Jew babies!

KORCZAK. *(Looks up, icy:)* If you have what you came to get, you should leave.

EVALUATOR. I don't want to smell your stench any more than I have to.

(The EVALUATOR nods to the WOMAN. They leave, leaving the homburg hat behind.)

(Pause.)

(ADEK picks up the homburg and speaks.)

ADEK. That is what the Head Man is like.

Scene 2A

(KORCZAK in his light.)

KORCZAK. "Ghetto Diary. Strange Happenings." What do the children know? Do they have any inkling what is happening?

Surely the older ones can make some sense of it. But the younger ones, what are they thinking? What do they know?

(Lights come up on each of the following as they speak.)

IVAN. A funny man with a hat and cane visited the orphanage.

LITTLE HANNAH. A mean man hurt Madame Steffa and the doctor.

MARCEL. A crook tried to beat me up, but I got him instead!

EVA. Something frightening has begun, but I don't know what.

ESTERKA. The Nazis came today.

(The CHILDREN move offstage. KORCZAK stares out front.)

KORCZAK. But we are diverted from such thoughts by more immediate problems. It appears the potatoes Szluc delivered were not of as high a quality as he suggested. By four o'clock, children began to get sick. By five o'clock, half of them were throwing up. By six o'clock, the other half had diarrhea. Big Hannah had eaten many potatoes. And by six thirty it was determined she was too ill to play the Head Man. But as they say, the play must go on, and so a new actor was cast in this pivotal role.

(The audience files in.)

By eight o'clock that evening, everyone in the ghetto who could fit into our hall was there. The Chairman and the rest of the Jewish Council. Former students. Friends. All to watch a bunch of orphans put on a play. Since Marcel was denied his chance to create a great set with much splendid scenery, he made do with what he had and followed Eva's advice. A scene could be set by a word. Provided he was the one allowed to say the word.

Scene 2

(That night.)

(The performance of "The Post Office.")

(The ACTORS file in.)

(MARCEL as "a fakir" takes the stage and bangs his staff three times.)

MARCEL. Ladies and gentlemen, greetings and welcome! I am a Fakir. A fakir is a magician of sorts...a bit of a wizard, a bit of a fraud. I am your host and guide for tonight. For tonight, The Little Theater of Dr. Janusz Korczak presents "The Post Office" by the Indian poet Tagore.

(ACTORS lower the gas lights.)

Now! This is supposed to be a theater. So we need a curtain.

(ACTORS hold an oriental rug across the "apron." MARCEL stands in front of it.)

And a stage.

(ACTORS flip the rug down onto the floor.)

And some lights...

(ACTORS place milk bottles with candles downstage.)

...and a bed.

(ACTORS bring a cot and a pillow onstage and place it up center.)

And a boy.

(Two male ACTORS carry AMAL onstage and place him on the cot. he stands facing upstage, looking up.)

He's looking at the dawn. At the morning sky.

(An ACTOR holds up a "sun.")

(MUSICIANS play flutes.)

His name is Amal. Amal lives in a poor hut in a poor village in a valley at the base of a distant mountain.

(MADHAV enters.)

This is Madhav, a merchant. Madhav cares for Amal for Amal is his adopted son and lives in Madhav's house.

(The VILLAGE DOCTOR enters.)

And this is the village doctor...

(About ten GIRLS dressed as nurses follow him in.)

...and his many nurses. The doctor has come to treat Amal. For, you see, Amal is very ill.

MADHAV. "O, woe is me! Doctor! Tell me the truth! Is my poor little boy going to live?"

VILLAGE DOCTOR. "If his fate is to live, then he shall live. If it is not, he shall not."

MADHAV. "What is your prescription?"

VILLAGE DOCTOR. "On no account must the patient be allowed outside. Sun, wind, and sky all are very bad for his condition! As the medical book says: "Protect against what you can, what you can't...don't." If he goes outside I cannot be responsible. "

(The VILLAGE DOCTOR exits.)

MADHAV. "O, poor boy! Poor, poor boy!"

AMAL. "Uncle! I heard the doctor. I can't go out and play?"

MADHAV. "No, Amal. The doctor says the outdoors, the sun and wind, it's bad for you."

AMAL. "But I want to go to the hills and mountain there! Do you know what is beyond them?"

MADHAV. "No."

AMAL. "Neither do I! That's why I want to climb up to it! Uncle, when will I be well again?"

MADHAV. "Soon, my boy. Soon. I'm off to work. Now remember the doctor's orders: Do not go outdoors!"

(MADHAV exits as ESTERKA steps forward, reading the script.)

ESTERKA. And so Madhav kissed Amal on his flushed and fevered brow... and left. Now it is late morning. Amal has been watching the road ever since the break of dawn. Anyone traveling from the sea to the shore to the meadow to the mountain must pass by Amal's window. As must...this man.

(The DAIRYMAN enters.)

DAIRYMAN. *(Sings:)* Cheese! Cheese! Goat's milk cheese! Please! Please! Buy my cheese!

ESTERKA. This is a dairyman who rises before dawn to milk the goats and make his cheese and sell his wares upon the road.

DAIRYMAN. *(Sings:)* Cheese! Cheese! Goat's milk cheese! Please! Please! Buy my cheese!

AMAL. Cheese seller!

DAIRYMAN. You, boy! You want some cheese?

AMAL. I fear I have no money!

DAIRYMAN. Then I fear I sell no cheese. Here, boy, what are you doing indoors on such a beautiful day. You should be out playing.

AMAL. My doctor says I can't.

DAIRYMAN. What kind of doctor keeps a little boy inside on a day like this?

AMAL. A learned one.

DAIRYMAN. They're the worst kind.

AMAL. Oh, I wish I could make cheese and shoulder a yoke like you and walk the long, long road.

DAIRYMAN. Why should you choose my hard life?

AMAL. You get to visit everyone and everywhere. And you get to sing that song!

DAIRYMAN. The cheese song? Isn't much of a tune—

AMAL. Oh, but I live to hear it. When I hear your song, I can tell just how far away you are... the woods, then the field, then the bend in the road, then here... then gone!

DAIRYMAN. I have never heard my poor profession described in such emotional terms before! Have some cheese!

AMAL. But I told you I have no money.

DAIRYMAN. Don't insult me! Take a piece!

AMAL. Thank you.

DAIRYMAN. I owe it to you. You have taught me how to be happy selling cheese. (*Sings:*) Cheese! Cheese! Goat's milk cheese! Please! Please! Buy my cheese!

(*DAIRYMAN exits.*)

ESTERKA. Now it is afternoon... and the village watchman is on his rounds. Our watchman is part policeman, part human clock. Well, I suppose that's why we call him "Watchman."

(*The WATCHMAN enters.*)

WATCHMAN. Twelve o'clock and all is well! Twelve o'clock and all is well! Twelve o'clock, and all is —well, well, well, what have we here? A boy! Not at work! Not at school! Something tells me a crime is afoot!

AMAL. Watchman—!

WATCHMAN. He knows my name! Boy, what are you doing at home in the middle of the day?

AMAL. The village doctor won't let me outside. He says I've got to stay here all day long.

WATCHMAN. Poor fella! I am touched. Is there anything I can do?

AMAL. Well. You could sound the gong.

WATCHMAN. Noon gong's come and gone. Can't gong for another hour. Rules are rules.

AMAL. Watchman? What is that big building on the other side of the road there? The one with the flag flying on top?

WATCHMAN. Why, that's the King's new Post Office.

AMAL. The King's Post Office? Do letters from the King ever come there?

WATCHMAN. I should think. If you're a good boy, maybe you'll get one some day.

AMAL. But I'm only a little boy.

WATCHMAN. Little boys get little letters.

AMAL. When will my letter come?

WATCHMAN. I can't say. You see, the King has what they call postmen. They run about with round gilt badges on their chests going from door to door, all through the countryside.

AMAL. I would like to be a King's postman when I grow up. Running around, delivering news and letters and gifts. It sounds wonderful.

WATCHMAN. A watchman gets around too, you know. And we have the gong.

AMAL. Oh, I know! Sometimes at night when I wake all of a sudden and find the lamp blown out, I'm frightened... but then I hear your gong slowly sounding in the darkness and I'm not frightened anymore.

WATCHMAN. Well... I never knew before what value was put on my profession. Maybe I was wrong about it being noontime. Perhaps I was a bit hasty in my gonging. I must be off. But you listen.

AMAL. I will!

WATCHMAN. Twelve o'clock and all is well! Twelve o'clock and all is well! Twelve o'clock, and all is well, well, well.

(The WATCHMAN exits.)

MARCEL. Afternoon now. Hot. Dry. Dusty. Time for a nap. But not Amal. He doesn't want to miss a thing this day.

(SUDHA, the flower girl enters with bells on her heels.)

AMAL. Who are you walking there? How your anklets tinkle! Stop a while, won't you?

SUDHA. I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late! What's the matter with you? Are you sick?

AMAL. How did you know?

SUDHA. You're inside on such a beautiful day.

AMAL. The doctor won't let me out. But looking out the window all day has made me tired.

SUDHA. I'll come inside if you want.

AMAL. Please. What's your name?

SUDHA. Sudha. Daughter of the flower-seller.

AMAL. What do you do?

SUDHA. I gather flowers from the field, then put them in my basket for my father to sell.

AMAL. Flower gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets jingle as you walk. I wish I could do that.

SUDHA. It's hard work bending down all day. My back aches. My feet hurt.

AMAL. Then don't bend so much.

SUDHA. How else should I pick flowers?

AMAL. Pick the flowers from the trees.

SUDHA. Can't. I'm too short.

AMAL. Then I'll go right into the dense forest where you can't reach, and where the hummingbird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will get you a flower.

SUDHA. You're silly. But you're sweet. I wish I could lounge about all day like you! But it's getting late. I must go.

AMAL. Can't you stay a little longer?

SUDHA. Be good and sit still and on my way back from the market I'll come and talk with you again.

AMAL. Will you bring me a flower?

SUDHA. It has to be paid for.

AMAL. I'll pay when I grow up.

SUDHA. All right, then. I'll see you soon.

AMAL. My name is Amal. Remember that.

SUDHA. Amal. I will remember.

(SUDHA exits. MARCEL re-enters.)

MARCEL. Now it is late in the afternoon. And down the dry and dusty road comes someone Amal would have done better to avoid. It is the Village Head Man, and everyone in the village is afraid of him.

(ADEK enters wearing the homburg and waving a stick. His FLUNKIES flank him.)

HEAD MAN. Burp!

MARCEL. These are his assistants.

FLUNKIES. Burp! Burp!

MARCEL. Now you may well ask: who made him Head Man? What are the qualifications? Well, first you have to be ugly. Then you must be a busybody. Then you have to know lots of ways of annoying people and making life unpleasant for everybody. The whole village is afraid of him, and he loves it that way.

AMAL. Mr. Head Man, sir?

HEAD MAN. Who disturbs the Head Man on his highway?

FLUNKIES. Yeah, yeah, yeah!

HEAD MAN. What's your name, boy!

AMAL. Amal.

HEAD MAN. Amal, huh?

AMAL. Mr. Head Man, do the King's postmen listen to you?

HEAD MAN. Of course they do! Why do you ask?

AMAL. Will you tell the postman that Amal sits by the window here?

HEAD MAN. And why would I do that?

AMAL. Well... someone is going to send me a letter.

HEAD MAN. Who?

AMAL. The king.

HEAD MAN. HA!

FLUNKIES. HHAHAHAHHAHAHA!

HEAD MAN. King's a big pal of yours, huh? Been out of touch, wants to get back together with you, right? Tell you what: wait til tonight...and you'll have your letter.

AMAL. Tonight?

HEAD MAN. We'll tell the King all about you! He'll want to get back to you first thing! Come on, boys!

FLUNKIES. HEHHEHEHHEHHEH!

(The HEAD MAN and the FLUNKIES exit.)

MARCEL. Now the gong is sounding the first watch of the evening. Madhav returns to his hut. And finds Amal asleep.

(MADHAV enters. He sees AMAL.)

He looks at his face.

MADHAV. So pale.

MARCEL. Feels his head.

MADHAV. Such fever.

MARCEL. He doesn't sleep long.

AMAL. Uncle?

MADHAV. How are you my boy? Did you do as the doctor said?

AMAL. Just as he said. Uncle, do you know the postman for these parts?

MADHAV. Why? Are expecting a letter?

AMAL. Yes. From the King.

MADHAV. Who told you the King was sending you a letter?

AMAL. The Head Man. He said the letter would come tonight. Do you think the postman has already come down this way?

MADHAV. I...don't know.

AMAL. I can see him coming.

MADHAV. You can?

AMAL. Not with my eyes, but I see him quite clearly all the same. Do you know what I would like to be when I grow up?

MADHAV. What, child?

AMAL. A post man for the king.

(The VILLAGE DOCTOR enters with his assistants.)

VILLAGE DOCTOR. And how is the boy this evening?

MADHAV. Doctor. Tell me what's going to happen?

VILLAGE DOCTOR. We all know what's going to happen. We knew that this morning.

MADHAV. But I've kept him from the outdoors, I've—

VILLAGE DOCTOR. It doesn't matter if you lock all the doors and bar all the windows. The end is preordained.

(The HEAD MAN enters with the FLUNKIES.)

FLUNKIES. Make way! Make way for the Head Man! Make way!

HEAD MAN. So, Madhav, I hear your boy here is expecting a letter from the King.

MADHAV. Please, master, he's but a child!

HEAD MAN. But the King's a friend of his! Here's your letter from the King, boy!

(Hands over blank letter:)

AMAL. It looks... blank...

HEAD MAN. HAHAAHAAHAAHHA!

FLUNKIES. HAHAAHAAHAAHHA!

AMAL. What does it say, Mr. Head Man?

HEAD MAN. Say? Why, it says, "I, The King will call upon you shortly." HAHAAHAAHAAHHA!

MADHAV. I beseech you, Head Man, don't joke about these things! Amal, the Head Man has tricked you! This letter is blank! It is not from the King!

AMAL. Father! The King will come. And he is bringing with him the King's own doctor to make me well again!

(The HEAD MAN and the FLUNKIES double over and laugh like hyenas.)

(Then the sound of a drum roll.)

HEAD MAN. What's that?

AMAL. It's a flourish! A flourish for the King! Uncle, do you hear?

MADHAV. I... I do!

AMAL. And just in time. The sun is just setting in the desert. It is night now!

(A knocking.)

VOICE. *(From outside:)* Open the door.

MADHAV. Head Man —are these your men at my door?

HEAD MAN. No! Men! Hide me!

(The HEAD MAN hides behind the FLUNKIES.)

(The HERALD enters.)

HERALD. Our Sovereign King comes tonight!

HEAD MAN. The King?

AMAL. Are you the King's Post man?

HERALD. I am his messenger.

AMAL. When will the King come? Now?

HERALD. Soon.

AMAL. Tonight?

HERALD. Soon.

AMAL. When the Watchman's gong sounds midnight?

HERALD. Sooner still. The King has sent his greatest physician to attend his young friend.

(The KING'S DOCTOR enters.)

KING'S DOCTOR. Why are these windows closed?

MADHAV. The Village Doctor said to!

KING'S DOCTOR. Open them wide.

(MADHAV does.)

How do you feel, my child?

AMAL. All my pain is gone. I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

KING'S DOCTOR. My child, is there anything you would ask of the King?

AMAL. Yes.

MADHAV. What is it, my child?

AMAL. I wish to ask him...to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door.

MADHAV. Is that all?

AMAL. It is more than I could ever dream. *(Eyes close.)*

KING'S DOCTOR. Sleep has come over him. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let in the star-light.

(SUDHA enters with flowers.)

SUDHA. Excuse me. Is Amal here?

KING'S DOCTOR. He's...asleep.

SUDHA. Oh. I promised him I'd come back. He must have forgotten.

KING'S DOCTOR. He did not forget.

SUDHA. I have some flowers for him. May I put them into his hand?

KING'S DOCTOR. Place them in his palm. Gently.

SUDHA. *(Does so, then:)* When will he wake?

KING'S DOCTOR. When the King comes.

SUDHA. Then... will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

KING'S DOCTOR. Of course. What shall I say?

SUDHA. Tell him... Sudha has not forgotten him.

(A flute plays.)

(The ACTORS drape their scarves over AMAL.)

(The play is over.)

(The CAST takes a bow to great applause. The CAST disperses. The AUDIENCE mills about. the members of the Judenrat approach KORCZAK.)

MRS. BRON. *(Weeping:)* Dr. Korczak! That was so moving!

KORCZAK. Thank you, Mrs. Bron. What did you think the play was about?

MRS. BRON. I haven't any idea. But I cried and cried! It reminded me of my own children. They used to put on plays for us in the ballroom. They flew! They actually flew...! *(Overcome:)* Forgive us not staying, but we must be getting home. The curfew, you know.

KORCZAK. So soon? The Chairman's official car drives so slowly?

(The CHAIRMAN goes red. MRS. BRON and GEPNER exchange a pained look.)

MRS. BRON. The Germans have confiscated the Chairman's automobile. We are walking now.

(MRS. BRON and GEPNER exit.)

CHAIRMAN. Korczak. I hope the play did for you what you wanted. Whatever that may have been.

KORCZAK. Are my motives so suspect?

CHAIRMAN. It was so dark, so grim.

KORCZAK. Is that how you see it?

CHAIRMAN. A child dies. How else can I see it?

KORCZAK. My friend. Do you know you are going to die?

CHAIRMAN. What are you talking about?

KORCZAK. Do you know you are mortal?

CHAIRMAN. Of course.

KORCZAK. How does that effect...how you lead your life?

CHAIRMAN. ...It makes it more precious. I hope it makes me a better person in the eyes of God and those I love.

KORCZAK. Then perhaps that is what I was doing. I wanted the children to know the time was coming...and how to prepare.

(ESTERKA enters.)

CHAIRMAN. I am often harsh and unyielding. I am easily a figure of mockery. Perhaps I am too much an adult. But I will fight until the last, Doctor. You know I would never do harm to our people. Goodnight.

(GEPNER exits.)

KORCZAK. *(To ESTERKA:)* Will you stay the night? It's getting late. Curfew. Steffa could make up a bed.

ESTERKA. You still think I'm one of your charges.

KORCZAK. No matter how old you are, how big you grow, how smart and accomplished...yes.

ESTERKA. I can't. We have a meeting of the —

KORCZAK. I don't want to know of your clandestine activities. You're a troublemaker, you know that?

ESTERKA. (*Laughs.*) Well, I should hope so! I learned to be one from you!

(Re: the stage:)

It was good, wasn't it?

KORCZAK. Yes.

(Kisses her head.)

You should have quite a career in the theater, my dear.

ESTERKA. Yes. I should...shouldn't I?

(ESTERKA exits.)

(NEWERLY looks at KORCZAK.)

NEWERLY. It's not too late.

KORCZAK. Yes, it is.

NEWERLY. Tomorrow. At seven.

KORCZAK. No.

NEWERLY. The documents—

KORCZAK. No.

NEWERLY. If you change your mind—

KORCZAK. Goodbye, Igor.

(NEWERLY exits. IVAN and SYMONEK come through, giggling.)

IVAN/SYMONKE. BURP! BURP!

(They exit.)

(KORCZAK is alone.)

(He starts to turn out lights.)

(He looks around to see no one is watching, then he sneaks a smoke. He exhales. He smiles. Then he starts to the steps. a door opens, throwing a shaft of light across the floor. KORCZAK stops on the steps.)

(ADEK enters. He has a sack. He sneaks towards the door. Korczak's voice stops him.)

KORCZAK. Do you think I'm stupid?

ADEK. *(Spins around.)* What!

KORCZAK. *(Goes to him.)* Open the bag.

ADEK. I have nothing!

KORCZAK. You're lying!

ADEK. You have no right to open my bag!

KORCZAK. No. I don't. I'm not a policeman. I can't stop and search citizens at will. But I can tell if they're guilty.

(Grabs ADEK's wrist and stares in his eyes.)

ADEK. What are you doing?

KORCZAK. I'm a doctor. I can tell if the eyes are dilated, if the pulse is quickened—

ADEK. *(Pulls away.)* Let go of me!

(Tosses down the bag.)

There!

KORCZAK. *(Looks in bag.)* Medical supplies. How did you get into the closet?

ADEK. The keys. Natalia keeps them in her apron pocket. When she took off the apron before the play...I took them.

KORCZAK. You're a clever boy, aren't you? Medicine! Why not take the food and shoes too? They'd bring a lot on the black market? What else have you got?

(Rummages again.)

ADEK. Leave those!

KORCZAK. *(Takes out books.)* Books? Who is going to buy books now?

ADEK. I'm not selling them! I want to read them!

KORCZAK. *(Reads titles.)* "Treasure Island." "Oliver Twist." Little boys, great dangers, happy endings. You're, what, ten? Eleven?

ADEK. Nine.

KORCZAK. So old. Szulc did you a great disservice, making you grow up so fast. You know what's going to happen? Don't you? What the Germans are planning.

ADEK. Yes.

KORCZAK. So you're running away?

ADEK. I don't have to stay here! I'm not one of your orphans!

(MARCEL and EVA enter.)

EVA. What's going on?

KORCZAK. Nothing. Go back to bed.

(LITTLE HANNAH and BIG HANNAH enter.)

BIG HANNAH. Who's making all that noise?

LITTLE HANNAH. What's in the sack?

(JAKUB and HALINKA enter with IVAN and SYMONEK.)

MARCEL. Is that...? Those are the doctor's medicine bottles.

IVAN. Adek's taking our medicine?

KORCZAK. I want you to go back to bed now!

ADEK. I'll leave them behind. Just let me go.

SYMONEK. He's trying to run away.

ADEK. I have to find my father!

BIG HANNAH. I accuse!

ADEK. What?

BIG HANNAH. I accuse Adek of trying to steal medicine!

KORCZAK. Hannah—!

JAKUB. SILENCE! An accusation has been made. There must be a trial. Set things up. Get Miss Natalia.

(HALINKA runs off.)

KORCZAK. This is ridiculous! There is no need for an emergency trial!

JAKUB. Doctor. Please. Court is in session.

(HALINKA returns with NATALIA.)

NATALIA. Doctor, the medicine cabinet, I can't find my keys—

JAKUB. Miss Natalia, we are having a special trial. The community versus Adek, the smuggler's boy. You are charged with stealing medical supplies and books. How plead you?

ADEK. I plea nothing.

JAKUB. No plea is taken as a plea of not guilty.

BIG HANNAH. There is a witness.

NATALIA. Who?

BIG HANNAH. The doctor.

JAKUB. Doctor Korczak. You saw the accused take the supplies?

KORCZAK. No. I did not see the act of taking the supplies, I —

BIG HANNAH. The sack is Adek's. The medicine belongs to the orphanage. Adek was found downstairs after the curfew with a window open.

HALINKA. Pan Doktor. What is your testimony?

BIG HANNAH. Remember: you must tell the truth! You always tell us to tell the truth!

KORCZAK. Before I testify... I must ask the court a question. If Adek is found guilty, what punishment does the court have in mind?

HALINKA. I fear I would suggest we...call in the police.

KORCZAK. The police?

HALINKA. Yes.

KORCZAK. The police who are supervised by the Germans?

HALINKA. The police are the police, doctor.

JAKUB. And Adek's crime, if proven, is very serious.

KORCZAK. Yes.

JAKUB. So we ask you again, doctor: what did you witness?

KORCZAK. ...I saw nothing.

BIG HANNAH. The doctor is lying!

JAKUB. Doctor. We all saw much evidence. Surely you saw more.

KORCZAK. I saw nothing. I refuse to testify.

HALINKA. Now what do we do?

BIG HANNAH. We call the police!

KORCZAK. (*Explodes.*) What do you think this is? This is not a game! These are not the police as we knew them at our old orphanage. The police who helped find stolen bicycles and lost cats. These are a different kind of police altogether! The police are the villains here! They are more dangerous than any Head Man! And no one is coming from the King to save us!

BIG HANNAH. (*Frightened of him:*) Doctor...?

KORCZAK. (*Hugs BIG HANNAH.*) Hannah, I held you as a baby! I see the woman you can be! Do not be so harsh and unforgiving!

BIG HANNAH. He committed a crime. There must be a penalty. You always say!

KORCZAK. I am not always right.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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