



ישראל קורצ'אק
اسرائيل تقرا كورتشاك

I beg your pardon, children

By: Janosz Korczak

- Someone else is supposed to teach us, sir - Adam's voice was heard from the back bench, the same Adam who repeated the grade. The teacher didn't answer and just looked at Adam.

- Won't the new teacher teach us?

The teacher did not answer - he adjusted his glasses.

There was silence in the classroom. Zosia thought: "He's really cheeky, this Adam, how dare he." Many children thought that the teacher felt uneasy, but they were all alert with curiosity.

Because three teachers arrived at the school. One before the summer vacation, after that another one, and another one. But they were all young. The second talked to them a lot. Vatzek was just playing ball, and the young man called out to him:

- Hey, man, where is your school?

- He didn't say "kid" - he said "man".

- Throw me the ball!

He caught the ball, took a swing back, and threw the ball high into the sky. Vatzek thought he had lost it, because the ball disappeared from his sight.

Many children immediately surrounded him. Everyone guessed that it was the new teacher. The young teacher acted as if he had been here for a long time. Joked, asked - and all about happy things: about the river, about mushrooms, who can swim, who can jump?

- You must have been in the war, sir.

- I was, brother. If necessary, I will go again.

- And you will teach us? – Fajtec dared.

- We'll see.

He waited a bit in front of the school. Ask if girls sing better than boys. and sang. Then he went inside to the teacher, walked around the school and said:

- "Take care, guys" - and he drove off. and never came back.

The children sit and wait, maybe the old teacher will say something. But nothing happens. He only told them to get up and pray. Here and there children sighed.

- Take your seats!

However, he does not sit down - he stands - and is now looking out the window, not at Adam. In the past they rejoiced when the teacher looked out the window,





because this meant that the person who had to give an answer was not obliged to know and could have given an incorrect answer, and the teacher did not Listen at all.

But now it was as if sadness fell on the children: they want to know. The teacher took off his glasses, wiped them again even though they were clean, and put them back on his nose.

Surely, he will say something. And just let Adam keep his mouth shut. Look, now - he is just starting.

- Quiet, don't chatter.

He will speak immediately.

- Well... what did I want to say?

The children guessed correctly. He started.

- Come here, Adam.

Adam pauses.

- Adam, go - go already. The teacher is calling you.

- You must know, my child, that I will teach you.

The other one said: "Man" - "My brother" - "Guys".

- Yes, I will teach you. Be patient. One more year, this year.

These young gentlemen do not like our school. We have poverty, too little, too crowded, too sad. There were already five of them here.

- Three.

- You only saw three, because two didn't even want to see. Surely there were more.

And I taught the fathers of all of you, here, in the school. You remember, I told you...

- Why should we not remember?

The teacher began to tell what they apparently already know, but again he tells the story in a different way. He is no longer talking about all of Poland, nor about Warsaw, Vilnius, Poznan and Lithuania, but only about the school. That the school is old and that he is old, and that this school will die soon like an old, tired and sick grandfather.

- It won't take long, and a brick house like the one in the center of the city will be built here. There will be a playground next to the school. There will be large halls and tall windows. Beautiful pictures will hang on the walls. Exercise, trips - with an orchestra - with a flag. All kinds of shows, joyful celebrations, big balls - of course Dartboard too.





- And a swing?

- Sure, swing too. There will also be videos projected on the wall, the people walking in these pictures -

Just like in life. But you have to darken the room, and darken the windows, otherwise you won't see. And in the newspaper it was written that they had invented a new telegraph, that if someone was telling a story in Warsaw it would be possible to hear it with the help of electricity in every school. And that's all.

I know that you are crowded and do not sit comfortably, and there are better books in other places.

But it costs a lot of money. And we are still poor. And if a mother can't buy something for her child, she won't buy it, even if she wants it very much and sheds tears. And what can be done, after all she will not be able to sell her tears, no one needs them.

Only God counts the tears of fathers and mothers, and also of people like me, old teachers - and builds from these tears.

God gave us a Polish school, but it is difficult to get the means to renew everything, much more difficult. Now there will be a new, rich school here. Workers will come, destroy this shack, clear away the ruins and the rotten boards. They will throw the doors and the windows into the pile - they will bring the bricks here - the work will begin - nothing will remain of what is now. Only memories.

And you will go to school in the winter and also in the summer with shoes on. You will have many more books, with more interesting pictures. You will have young teachers to teach you and play.

Now they don't want to come here. They say: "What, in this wreck?"

And I ask your forgiveness, my children. Adam, my child, I beg your pardon that we are still poor, like in a family where the father was ill for a very long time with a serious illness, but he began to recover. He suddenly realizes that he was saved from death. He got up from his bed the first time, but he is weak and dizzy and still not able to stand on his own feet - and he leans on his son...

And the old teacher leaned on Adam's shoulder. Adam came closer to him and straightened up.

- And I ask your forgiveness, children, that this year you will still have a teacher who is not new, not young, not cheerful - I will teach you. Be patient because it won't last long.

And two tears flowed from under his glasses. A deep silence prevails in the classroom, so everyone hears Zoshya's whisper:

- Adam, you see what you did.





ישראל קורצאק קורצאק
اسرائيل تقرا كورتشاك

And the teacher looked at Adam and asked:

- Are you not angry with me?

- What do I have to be angry about? After all, it's not us. We love you.

This is how the new year began in a poor school in the village.

