

THE KING'S POST OFFICE

Based on 'The Post Office' by Rabindranath Tagore and the Diary of Janusz Korczak
Adapted by Mike Levy for Keystage Arts and Heritage

PROLOGUE

*Music (accordion)
Dim lights up*

We see Dr K at his writing desk. The children are asleep. He rises and walks among them making sure they are alright. Stefa enters. She is a young woman, assistant to Dr Korczak.

STEFA They are all sleeping Dr Korczak?

KORCZAK It is odd Stefa, you might think that hunger would keep a child awake. And yet I have observed that even with our meagre starvation rations, a child can sleep as soundly as a squirrel in winter *(he returns to his seat and the diary)*.

STEFA *(looks around)* Bless them, they are so weak

KORCZAK Last night I weighed each of the orphans. They had lost a whole kilogram in the night. Poor darlings. What news from outside?

STEFA Nothing good Dr Korczak. There are rumours.

KORCZAK There are always rumours. Rumours spread like typhus in this prison

STEFA They say the Germans are rounding up all the Jews in the ghetto.

KORCZAK All? No, surely not all.

STEFA All

KORCZAK Even the most diehard Nazi has a soul, a conscience. They would not harm the children.

STEFA They say the ghetto is to be liquidated

KORCZAK This is Warsaw not some savage place in the jungle Stefa.

STEFA But this is occupied Warsaw. The old world, the old certainties and morals are gone. The Nazis believe that the Jews are like vermin to be destroyed.

KORCZAK How I wish I were like the King Matt in my children's stories and lived in a world where children could only be happy. Liquidated? *(shakes his head at the obscenity of the word)*

STEFA They say the Jews are all to be sent 'to the east'.

KORCZAK *(laughs)* Well you are good Catholic Stefa, they won't send you anywhere except to Rome.

STEFA They say there are letters – orders – coming soon.

- KORCZAK** Letters? The Jewish council would not allow it. Not the children. Come Stefa, you are tired. Rumours feed on exhaustion – and hunger.
- STEFA** You are right. You are always right Dr Korczak. Maybe tomorrow the sun will shine again in Warsaw and we shall all be free. They say the Russians are near and that the Allies will soon liberate Poland (*she takes out some sewing for few rags*). Anyway, I think you wish to get on with your diary.

The music is wistful but not sad.

- KORCZAK** Reminiscences make a sad, depressing literature. But I must write. I must record what his happening here.
(*To the audience*) July 1942. Warsaw. The little ones are asleep – two hundred of them. My little starving orphans.
(*Writes*) ‘My father who art in heaven...this prayer was carved out of hunger and misery. Our daily bread. Bread.’
(*Goes to write more but stops*) You know something Stefa. I am going to confess – ah like the dying man awaiting execution, I am free to confess my sins.
- STEFA** What possible sins can you have Dr?
- KORCZAK** That I Janusz Korczak, the famous Polish author, the Hans Christian Anderson of Warsaw – don’t like writing! (*She laughs*). Thinking yes, no difficulty. My little fairy tale King Matt was a labour of Hercules! Look what it did to my hair. But my book, ‘How to Love a Child’ –that was easy. How to love a child?
- STEFA** (*remembers a quote*) ‘You must tip-toe to their perceptions and ideals’. That’s what you said.
- KORCZAK** How to love a child? How to love a child in this loveless hell? (*A moment of inspiration*) We shall perform a play! Stefa we shall perform a play and let rumours and ‘going east’ go to hell.
- STEFA** A play? Here in the ghetto? You are a little crazy Dr Korczak?

Music gets lively.

- KORCZAK** Why not? What shall we do, sit here, starve and wait for a letter from Herr Hitler? No, we shall perform a play. But what? Of course! The Post Office by Tagore. Yes. Why this? Of course it shall be this. You old fool Korczak of course it must be this. Come little ones (he urges them to rise and start to sort out costumes from a box of rags).

Music triumphant as the children choose their costumes and get into position for the play.

Come we may be cramped, we may be starving but let them say, that genius Korczak can work miracles – even in a rat hole! Stefa you shall help direct the play and children – you shall play the parts of Amal, a little Indian boy – a sick boy yes, but a boy with powers. An undefeated boy. You Ruven shall play Amal, the sick child and you Esther his aunt....the rest can each have a part too.

(*He gathers the children around him in anticipation of the final tableau. Korczak retreats, Stefa takes a script and the children ready themselves for the play*)

- KORCZAK** It has arrived – our final rehearsal. Tonight we shall perform the Post Office to a real audience. Just imagine, a real audience who are just as hungry, just as imprisoned here in the ghetto....Jews like us, walled up, starved..thinking there is no hope. But we shall

show them something different. That there is hope. Hope as long as we live and breath. And tonight in front of that audience Stefa shall announce.....

STEFA Ladies and Gentlemen of the Warsaw Ghetto. The orphans now present to you a play by the esteemed Indian writer, Tagore. We present – The Post Office. (*The children applaud*). No – they must applaud – but only when you have finished.

KORCZAK You will see – we shall work miracles!

The Post Office

By Rabindranath Tagore
Adapted by Mike Levy

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- * MADHAVI, a poor woman
- * AMAL, her adopted child
- * SUDHA, a little flower girl
- * THE DOCTOR
- * DAIRYMAID
- * WATCHMAN
- * GAFFER
- * VILLAGE HEADMAN, a bully
- * KING'S HERALD (played by Watchman)
- * ROYAL PHYSICIAN (played by Dairymaid)

SCENE I – Madhavi’s House

Madhavi paces nervously, the doctor packs Amal’s case, ready to leave.

- MADHAVI** Oh doctor! Will he live? Will he live?
- DOCTOR** If he is meant to live, he will live Madhavi
- MADHAVI** Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, his little soul fills my heart
- DOCTOR** Calm yourself Madhavi
- MADHAVI** My home will be no home if he leaves us. Tell me straight Doctor, do you think he will... you know? I couldn’t bear it if he should...
- DOCTOR** He needs special care
- MADHAVI** Tell me how, anything
- DOCTOR** I have already mentioned; on no account must he be let out of doors.
- MADHAVI** Poor child, it is very hard to keep him indoors all day long.
- DOCTOR** You want him to live?
- MADHAVI** It is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.
- PHYSICIAN** The worse it tastes, the better it works – as the sages say. Well, I must be going now.
PHYSICIAN exits. GAFFER enters.
- MADHAVI** Oh no, now here’s Gaffer – just when the child needs quiet
- GAFFER** Why, why, I won't bite you
- MADHAVI** No, but you know how to send a child in a merry spin
- GAFFER** But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?
- MADHAVI** Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.
- GAFFER** How? Why?
- MADHAVI** You remember how my husband was dying to adopt a child?
- GAFFER** Yes, but you didn't like the idea.
- MADHAVI** My brother Gaffer, you know how hard it is to make money. I thought an adopted child would drain us of what we had earned so hard to make. I was against adoption. But Gaffer, this little boy has won my heart. It is so strange.
- GAFFER** Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?
- MADHAVI** An orphan from my late husband’s village
- GAFFER** Poor little thing

- MADHAVI** The doctor says he is very sick. There is only one way to save him – to keep him out of the autumn wind and sun. I know you Gaffer; you love to get children all excited with your outdoor games and sports.
- GAFFER** So I'm already as bad as the autumn wind and sun, eh! But after my day's work I will come and – don't worry – find a way to amuse him - indoors (Exit)
- AMAL enters.*
- AMAL** Auntie, Auntie!
- MADHAVI** Amal!
- AMAL** May I play out in the courtyard?
- MADHAVI** No, my dear, no.
- AMAL** Oh! But you see where my uncle is grinding lentils, and there where the squirrel sits, his little hands picking up the broken grains. Can I run up there?
- MADHAVI** No, my darling Amal, no.
- AMAL** Wish I were a squirrel!--it would be lovely. Auntie, why won't you let me go out?
- MADHAVI** Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.
- AMAL** How can the doctor know?
- MADHAVI** What a thing to say! The doctor reads huge books
- AMAL** Does his book-learning tell him everything in the whole world?
- MADHAVI** Of course, don't you know!
- AMAL** *(With a sigh)* Ah, I that's why I am so stupid! I don't read books.
- MADHAVI** You are not stupid and...and clever people spend all day inside, not out.
- AMAL** Why do they Auntie?
- MADHAVI** They work at their books all day and night. See, my little man, you are going to be very learned when you grow up. But to do that, you have to stay indoors, then when you are a man, they will say, what a clever genius that Amal is. And how clever of his aunt to keep him indoors when he was a wee boy!
- AMAL** No, no, Auntie. I don't want to be learned, I don't.
- MADHAVI** Amal! What I would have given to be learned!
- AMAL** No, I would rather go out in the world and see everything that there is.
- MADHAVI** Listen to that! See! What will you see, what is there so much to see?
- AMAL** See that far-away hill from our window? I often dream about going beyond those hills and far far away.

- MADHAVI** Silly boy. Talk sense. Who in their right mind wants to go over a hill? What is a hill for mm? To keep you on one side of it.
- AMAL** But...
- MADHAVI** Why else does God plonk such large stones on top of each other eh? What would be His point otherwise?
- AMAL** Auntie, do you think it is meant to prevent people crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I suppose the learned people--
- MADHAVI** No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.
- AMAL** Do you know, yesterday I met someone quite as crazy as I am.
- MADHAVI** Gracious me, really, how so?
- AMAL** He had a bamboo staff and a small pack on his back. 'Where are you going sir?' I asked. 'I don't know little boy. Somewhere, anywhere.' Imagine that Auntie, not knowing...going somewhere, anywhere. I would go on and on. As far as I could... as far as my legs would take me...that would be wonderful...
- MADHAVI** And what if I let you out to wander so far....you would meet many strangers
- AMAL** But I love to talk to strangers!
- MADHAVI** Suppose they wanted to kidnap you?
- AMAL** Kidnapped? That would be wonderful. No one ever takes me away! They all want me to stay in here.
- MADHAVI** I am off to my work--but, darling, you won't go out, will you?
- AMAL** No, I won't Auntie (*Sighs and looks out of the window*)
- MADHAVI exits. Korczak ushers in the girl playing the Dairymaid. Puts her in place. She seems to weak to carry on but gains strength as she begins. He stays with her at first and pats her on the head as she continues.*
- DAIRYMAID** Curds, curds, good nice curds.
- AMAL** Curdseller, Curdseller.
- DAIRYMAID** You want to buy some curds?
- AMAL** What with? I have no money.
- DAIRYMAID** You waste my time little boy! Why call out then? Ugh! What a waste of time.
- AMAL** I would go with you if I could.
- DAIRYMAID** With me?
- AMAL** Yes, I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road.
- DAIRYMAID** (*Lowering her yoke-pole*) Whatever are you doing here, my child?

- AMAL** The doctor says I'm not to go out, so I sit here all day long.
- DAIRYMAID** My poor child, whatever has happened to you?
- AMAL** I can't tell. You see I am not learned, so I don't know what the matter with me is. Say, Dairymaid, where do you come from?
- DAIRYMAID** From our village.
- AMAL** Your village? Is it very far?
- DAIRYMAID** Our village lies on the river at the foot of the hills.
- AMAL** I may have seen your village.
- DAIRYMAID** Have you been to my village?
- AMAL** Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road--isn't that so?
- DAIRYMAID** That's right, child.
- AMAL** And on the slope of the hill, cattle grazing.
- DAIRYMAID** How wonderful! Yes, cattle grazing in our village! Indeed, there are!
- AMAL** And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.
- DAIRYMAID** Good, that's right. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there – perhaps for a walk some time?
- AMAL** Really, Dairymaid, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out; you are going to take me to your village.
- DAIRYMAID** I will, my child, with pleasure.
- AMAL** And you'll teach me to cry curds and shoulder the yoke like you and walk the long, long road?
- DAIRYMAID** Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.
- AMAL** No, I never want to be learned and stay inside --I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will sell it from cottage to cottage.
- DAIRYMAID** Dear child, please have some curds
- AMAL** But I have no money.
- DAIRYMAID** No, no, no, don't talk of money! You'll make me so happy if you have a little curd from me.
- AMAL** Tell me, have I kept you too long?
- DAIRYMAID** Not a bit. It has been any loss to me at all; you have taught me how to be happy selling curds.

DAIRYMAID exits.

AMAL *(practises)* Curds, fresh curds!

Ruven playing Amal is exhausted and sits. Stefa comes to comfort him.

STEFA Do you need a rest Ruven? Perhaps a short interval Dr Korczak?

KORCZAK Are you able to carry on? (Ruven nods). Good boy (he gives him a drink). Shmule, it's your turn – as the Watchman...Shmuleh, shout so hard that even the Nazis outside our walls hear you eh? (Amal resumes his cries of 'fresh curds').

WATCHMAN enters, carrying a small gong.

AMAL Watchman? Hello! come and have a word with me.

WATCHMAN What's all this noise you are making?

AMAL The cry of the curd seller...Fresh Curds!

WATCHMAN Noisy boy *(puffed up with pride)*. Aren't you afraid of the Watchman?

AMAL No, why should I be?

WATCHMAN Suppose I arrest you and take you in?

AMAL Where will you take me to? Is it very far, right beyond the hills?

WATCHMAN Suppose I march you straight to the King?

AMAL To the King! Do, will you? But the doctor won't let me go out. No one can ever take me away. I've got to stay here all day long.

WATCHMAN Doctor won't let you, poor chap! So I see! Your face is pale and there are dark rings round your eyes. Your veins stick out from your poor thin hands.

AMAL Won't you sound the gong, Watchman?

WATCHMAN I only sound my gong at mealtimes. The time has not yet come.

AMAL How strange! Some say time has not yet come, and some say time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!

WATCHMAN That's not possible; I strike up the gong only when it is time.

AMAL Yes, I love to hear your gong. Tell me what is it for?

WATCHMAN My gong sounds to tell the people that time has passed. Time waits for none, time flies.

AMAL Flies where? To what land?

WATCHMAN That, no-one knows.

AMAL Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land about which no one knows anything.

WATCHMAN All of us have to get there one day, my child.

AMAL Have I too?

WATCHMAN Yes, you too!

AMAL But doctor won't let me out.

WATCHMAN One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

AMAL He won't; you don't know him. He only keeps me in. Locked in. Shut in. Like a prisoner.

WATCHMAN One greater than he comes and lets us free.

AMAL When will this greater person come for me? I can't stick it in here any more. I can't stay here any more!

WATCHMAN Don't talk like that, my child (*he strikes his gong quietly*)

AMAL When your gong goes off, dong, dong, dong, it goes to my heart. Err, Watchman?

WATCHMAN Yes, my dear.

AMAL What is going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and out?

WATCHMAN Oh, there? That's our new Post Office.

AMAL Post Office? Whose?

WATCHMAN Whose? Well....Idon't...err...(he realises the opportunity to give the boy some hope) It must be the King's. Yes, that's it. The King's!

AMAL The King's post office! Do letters come from the King to his post office here?

WATCHMAN Of course. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

AMAL A letter for me? From the king? But I am only a little boy.

WATCHMAN The King sends tiny letters to little boys

AMAL I can't wait! When will I get my letter? How do you know the King will write to me?

WATCHMAN Of course he shall write to you. Why set up his own Post Office so near to your window?

AMAL But I can't go out. how will the king's letter get to me?

WATCHMAN The King has many postmen. Haven't you seen them?

AMAL Well, where do they go?

WATCHMAN Oh, from door to door, all through the country.

AMAL All through the country! I'll be the King's postman when I grow up.

WATCHMAN Ha! ha! Postman, indeed! Rain or shine, rich or poor, from house to house delivering letters--that's very hard work little boy!

AMAL I would love to be out in the rain more than anything in the whole world.

WATCHMAN Would you? *(laughs)* Yes I think you would. Oh there's the village Headman. I must go. If he catches me wasting time with a young boy like you, I will be in trouble

AMAL *(stares out of window)* The headman? Where?

WATCHMAN Right down the road there; see that huge umbrella hopping along? That's him underneath it.

AMAL I suppose the King made him our headman here?

WATCHMAN Made him? Oh, no! A fussy busy-body! One of those people who loves to bring misery to the lives of others. I'll drop in again to-morrow morning and tell you all the news of the town.

AMAL Oh to have a letter from the king every day. I can't wait to read them. Oh no! I can't read writing. Maybe Auntie will read them to me. She reads from the Ramayana so maybe she can read a king's letter. If she can't, I will save all the letters until I am grown up and full of learning. But what if the postman can't find me? I will have no letters to read! Ah there's the Headman! Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

(Stefa brings on the boy playing the Headman adjusting his rags as she does. She prompts him with his first line)

HEADMAN enters.

HEADMAN Who is yelling at me? Oh, you wretched monkey!

AMAL I'm not a monkey sir, but Amal, the boy.

HEADMAN Are you being cheeky?

AMAL Oh no sir, not to the Headman... Everyone is afraid of you

HEADMAN *(Looking pleased)* Yes, oh yes, perhaps they are

AMAL Do the King's postmen listen to you?

HEADMAN Who? Oh yes. They've got to. If they have any sense

AMAL Will you tell the postman it's Amal who sits by the window here?

HEADMAN Why should I?

AMAL In case there's a letter for me.

HEADMAN A letter for you! *(Laughs)* Whoever's going to write to you?

AMAL The king.

HEADMAN Ha! ha! What a special little boy AMAL And you and the king are bosom pals I suppose. You haven't seen each other for so long and I am sure his majesty is pining for his little friend...ha ha...

AMAL Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you angry with me?

- HEADMAN** Angry? I am just amused. Madhavi must be so posh nowadays to have a child in her house who writes to the king. Ha! Madhavi must have made a lot of money to have business with the king! I will make sure his letter gets to you – what nonsense!
HEADMAN exits.
- (Korczak leads on the children in an echo of what he will do at the end. He puts them in place and gives a little bread to one who wolfs it down before speaking)
- AMAL** Where are you all off to? Stop here a little.
- BOYS** We're off to play.
- AMAL** What will you play at, friends?
- BOYS** We'll play at being ploughmen.
- FIRST BOY** (*Showing a stick*) This is our ploughshare.
- SECOND BOY** We two are the pair of oxen.
- AMAL** And you're going to play the whole day?
- BOYS** Yes, all day long.
- AMAL** And you'll come back home in the evening by the road along the river bank?
- BOYS** Yes.
- AMAL** Do you pass our house on your way home?
- BOYS** You come out to play with us, yes do.
- AMAL** Doctor won't let me out.
- BOYS** Doctor! Why take notice of the doctor! Come on – let's be off, its getting late
- AMAL** Don't. Why not play on the road near this window? I could watch you then.
- THIRD BOY** What can we play here?
- AMAL** With all these toys of mine lying about. Here you are, have them. I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me.
- BOYS** Look at these! What fine toys! Look, here's a ship and look at this gorgeous toy soldier? And you'll let us have them all? You don't really mind?
- AMAL** No, not a bit; have them by all means.
- BOYS** You don't want them back?
- AMAL** Oh, no, (*knowingly*) I shan't want them.
- BOYS** Won't you get told off for this?
- AMAL** No one will tell me off. But will you play with them in front of our door for a while every morning? I'll get you new ones when these are old.

- BOYS** Oh, yes, we will. Put these toy soldiers into a line. We'll play at war; where can we get a musket? Oh, look here, this bit of reed will do nicely. Hey, *(to Amal)* you're off to sleep already?
- AMAL** I'm afraid I'm sleepy. I don't know, I feel like it at times. I have been sitting a long while and I'm tired; my back aches.
- BOYS** It's only early noon now. Why are you sleepy? Listen!
The HEADMAN sounds the gong quietly offstage
- AMAL** Yes, dong, dong, dong, it tolls me to sleep.
- BOYS** We had better go then. We'll come in again to-morrow morning.
- AMAL** I want to ask you something before you go. You are always out--do you know of the King's postmen?
- BOYS** *(they lie)* Yes, of course, well, quite well.
- AMAL** Who are they? Tell me their names.
- BOYS** There's so many of them.
- AMAL** Do you think they will know me if there's a letter for me?
- BOYS** Sure, if your name's on the letter they will find you
- AMAL** When you call in to-morrow morning, will you bring one of them along so that he'll know me?
- BOYS** Yes, if you like – bye for now
Stefa and Korczak come on to the stage to help the children off. The girl playing next has clearly fallen asleep. Stefa wakes her gently and puts her on stage. We hear a tinkle.
- AMAL** Who is there? Please stop a while.
A GIRL enters. Stefa enters with her for support and mouths her first words.
- GIRL** I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late!
- AMAL** I see you don't wish to stop; I don't blame you.
- GIRL** Whatever's the matter with you?
Ruven is suddenly overcome. He sobs into his rags. Korczak comes on to comfort him. He regains composure
- AMAL** I don't know; the doctor won't let me out *(he glances at Korczak as if blaming him)*
- GIRL** Don't then! Must listen to the doctor. People will be cross with you if you're naughty. I know, always looking out and watching must make you feel tired. Let me close the window a bit for you.
- AMAL** No, don't, only this one's open! All the others are shut. But will you tell me who you are? Don't seem to know you.

GIRL I am Sudha

AMAL What do you do?

SUDHA I gather flowers in my basket.

AMAL Outside? Wish I could be out there with you.

SUDHA Would you really? Do you know more about flowers than me?

AMAL Yes, I do, quite as much. Would you be my sister?

SUDHA You are silly! It would be nice if I could lounge about here like you!

AMAL What would you do then, all the day long?

SUDHA I could have great times with my dolls - but it is getting late and I mustn't stop, or I won't find a single flower.

AMAL Oh, wait a little longer

SUDHA Ah, well--now don't be naughty. Be good and sit still and on my way back home with the flowers I'll come and talk with you.

AMAL And you'll let me have a flower then?

SUDHA No, how can I? It has to be paid for.

AMAL I'll pay when I grow up--before I leave to look for work out on the other side of that stream there.

SUDHA Very well, then.

AMAL And you'll come back when you have your flowers?

SUDHA I will.

AMAL You will, really?

SUDHA Yes, I will.

AMAL You won't forget me? I am Amal, remember that.

SUDHA I won't forget you... Amal, you'll see.

SUDHA exits. An interval.

KORCZAK Well done children. The play is going very well and I have every confidence that our audience will be reduced to tears. But tears of joy for once. Not sorrow. Just for once. We will have the shortest of breaks and then continue. Does anyone need bread (*they all put up their hands and greedily snatch a bite*). Rivkela, you were wonderful as Sudha, I know we never see flowers inside these walls but one day you shall. When this war is over and these bad people gone, then you shall see flowers once more. Even sell them eh? Let's begin the second act of Tagore's old play. Ruven, into the bed. Esther, remember you are worried about Amal's health. Begin.

SCENE II

AMAL is in bed.

- AMAL** Can't I go near the window to-day, Auntie? Would the doctor mind that too?
- MADHAVI** Yes, darling, you see you've made yourself worse sitting there day after day.
- AMAL** Oh, no, I don't know if it's made me more ill, but I always feel well when I'm there.
- MADHAVI** No, you don't; you squat there and make friends with the whole lot of people round here, old and young – it's like a circus right under my window. I really can't stand the noise and..... (*sees that Amal is unwell*). Your face is pale my dear Amal
- AMAL** Auntie, I fear my fakir will pass and not see me by the window.
- MADHAVI** Your fakir, whoever's that?
- AMAL** He comes and chats to me of the many lands where he's been. I love to hear him.
- MADHAVI** I don't know of any fakirs.
- AMAL** This is about the time he comes in. I beg of you, ask him in for a moment to talk to me here.
- GAFFER enters in a Fakir's Guise*
- AMAL** There you are. Come here, Fakir, by my bedside.
- MADHAVI** Upon my word, but this is--
- GAFFER** (*Winking hard*) I am the fakir!
- MADHAVI** What nonsense!
- AMAL** Where have you been this time, Fakir?
- Fakir** To the Isle of Parrots. I am just back.
- MADHAVI** The Parrots' Isle! To fill his head with such things!
- AMAL** Tell me, Fakir, what the Parrots' Isle is like.
- GAFFER** It's a land of wonders; it's a haunt of birds. There's no man; and they neither speak nor walk, they simply sing and they fly.
- AMAL** How wonderful! And it's by the sea?
- GAFFER** Of course. It's on the sea.
- AMAL** And green hills are there?
- GAFFER** Indeed, the parrots live among the green hills; and in the time of the sunset when there is a red glow on the hillside, all the birds with their green wings flock back to their nests.
- AMAL** And there are waterfalls!

- GAFFER** Dear me, of course; like molten diamonds; and, my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea? *(to Madhavi)* No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment. The birds looked upon me as nothing but a man, a poor creature without wings.....
- AMAL** How I wish I were a bird! Then I would fly away! *(Gaffer takes him on his shoulders to carry Amal into the air)*
- MADHAVI** This is more than I can stand.
MADHAVI exits.
- AMAL** Fakir, now that Auntie's off, just tell me, has the King sent me a letter to the Post Office?
- GAFFER** I gather that his letter has already started; but it's still on the way.
- AMAL** On the way? Where is it? Is it on that road winding through the trees which you can follow to the end of the forest when the sky is quite clear after rain?
- GAFFER** That's so. You know all about it already.
- AMAL** I do everything.
- GAFFER** So I see, but how?
- AMAL** I can see it all: there, the King's postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters climbing down for ever so long, for days and nights, and where at the foot of the mountain the waterfall becomes a stream he takes to the footpath on the bank and walks on through the rye; then comes the sugarcane field and he disappears into the narrow lane cutting through the tall stems of sugarcanes; then he reaches the open meadow where the cricket chirps and where there is not a single man to be seen, only the snipe wagging their tails and poking at the mud with their bills. I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.
- GAFFER** My eyes aren't young; but you make me see the same.
- AMAL** Say, Fakir, do you know the King who has this Post Office?
- GAFFER** I do; I go to him for small gifts every day.
- AMAL** Good! When I get well, I must have my small gifts too from him, mayn't I?
- GAFFER** You won't need to ask, my dear, he'll give it to you of his own accord.
- AMAL** I shall say, "Make me your postman that I may go about lantern in hand, delivering your letters from door to door. Don't let me stay at home all day!"
- GAFFER** What is there to be sad for, my child, even were you to stay at home?
- AMAL** It isn't sad. When they shut me in here first I felt the day was so long. Since the King's Post Office I like it more and more being indoors, and as I think I shall get a letter one day, I feel quite happy and then I don't mind being quiet and alone. I wonder if I will understand what will be in the letter.
- GAFFER** Even if you didn't wouldn't it be enough if it just bore your name?

- AMAL** Say, Fakir, I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all on a sudden, suppose--
- GAFFER** *(Fanning Amal)* The letter's sure to come to-day, my boy.
- KORCZAK** Yankelli, I know you only have rags but try to look like a doctor. A real doctor not like your old Korczak. A medical doctor. Go.
- DOCTOR enters with MADHAVI*
- DOCTOR** And how do you feel today?
- AMAL** I feel very well to-day, Doctor. All pain seems to have left me.
- DOCTOR** *(Aside to Madhavi)* Don't quite like the look of that smile. Bad sign that, his feeling well!
- MADHAVI** For goodness sake, Doctor, tell me what's going to happen?
- DOCTOR** Can't hold him in much longer, I fear! I warned you before
- MADHAVI** No, I've used the utmost care, never let him out of doors; and the windows have been shut almost all the time.
- DOCTOR** You had better shut this window as well; it's letting in the sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.
- MADHAVI** Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me--Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I must lose him!
- DOCTOR** Just see to the doors being properly fastened. I will send on a strong dose directly I get home. Try it on him--it may save him at last, if he can be saved at all.
- MADHAVI and DOCTOR exit. Stefa brings on the Headman and Gaffer and places them on stage.*
HEADMAN enters.
- HEADMAN** Hello, urchin!
- GAFFER** *(Rising hastily)* 'She, be quiet.
- AMAL** No, Fakir, did you think I was asleep? I wasn't. I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away. I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.
- MADHAVI enters.*
- HEADMAN** I say, Madhavi, I hear you hobnob with bigwigs nowadays.
- MADHAVI** Spare me your jokes, Headman, we are common people.
- HEADMAN** But your child here is expecting a letter from the King.
- MADHAVI** Don't take any notice of him, a mere foolish boy!
- HEADMAN** I have something for you Amal. A letter. A letter from the king, urchin!
- AMAL** *(Standing up)* To me, from the king?

- HEADMAN** How can it be false? You're the King's best friend. Here's your letter (*showing a blank slip of paper*). Ha, ha, ha! This is the letter.
- AMAL** Please don't mock me. Say, Fakir, is it right?
- GAFFER** Yes, my dear. I as Fakir tell you it is his letter.
- AMAL** It all looks so blank to me. What is there in the letter, Mr. Headman?
- HEADMAN** The King says, "I am calling on you shortly; you had better arrange rice offerings for me.-
-Palace food is quite tasteless to me now." Ha! ha! ha!
- MADHAVI** (*With folded palms*) I beseech you, headman, don't joke about these things--
- GAFFER** (*takes letter*) I can read plainly that the King writes he will come himself to see Amal, with his own doctor!
- AMAL** Fakir, Fakir, 'she, his trumpet! Can't you hear?
- HEADMAN** Yes, I hear it
- AMAL** Mr. Headman, I thought you were cross with me and didn't love me. I never could think you would fetch me the King's letter. Let me wipe the dust off your feet.
- HEADMAN** You are a silly boy – but you have a good heart I suppose
- AMAL** I can hear the watchman's gong too. "Dong, dong, ding," "Dong, dong, ding." Is the evening star up? How is it I can't see--?
- GAFFER** Oh, the windows are all shut, I'll open them.

A knocking outside
- MADHAVI** What's that?--Who is it--what a bother!
- VOICE** (*From outside*) Open the door.
- MADHAVI** Say, Headman--Hope they're not robbers.

(The KING'S HERALD enters – it is the WATCHMAN. The boy playing him is very weak and has to be supported by Stefa who stands with him throughout the scene but leaves before the end of the play)
- HERALD** Our Sovereign King comes tonight!
- HEADMAN** My God!
- AMAL** At what hour of the night, Herald?
- HERALD** On the second watch.
- AMAL** When from the city gates my friend the Watchman will strike his gong, "ding dong ding, ding dong ding"--then?
- HERALD** Yes, then. The King sends his greatest physician to attend on his young friend.

(STATE PHYSICIAN enters – it is the CURD SELLER also brought on by Korczak who stays in the background).

- PHYSICIAN** What's this? There is no air in here! Open wide all the doors and windows. (*Feeling Amal's body*) How do you feel, my child?
- AMAL** I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.
- PHYSICIAN** Will you feel well enough to leave your bed with the King when he comes in the night?
- AMAL** Of course, I was dying to be outside ever so long. I'll ask the King to find me the polar star.--I must have seen it often, but I don't know exactly which it is.
- PHYSICIAN** (*Indicating the Headman*) We can't have that person in here.
- AMAL** No let him be, Doctor. He is a friend. It was he who brought me the King's letter.
- PHYSICIAN** Very well, my child. He may stay if he is a friend of yours.
- MADHAVI** (*Whispering into Amal's ear*) My child, the King loves you. He is coming himself. Beg for a gift from him. You know our poor circumstances.
- AMAL** Don't worry, Auntie.--I've made up my mind about it.
- MADHAVI** What is it, my child?
- AMAL** I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door (*yawns*)
- PHYSICIAN** Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his pillow; he's dropping into slumber. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let the star-light stream in. Hush, he slumbers.
- MADHAVI** (*Addressing Gaffer*) What are you standing there for like a statue, folding your palms.--I am nervous. -- Why are they darkening the room? How will star-light help?
- GAFFER** Silence, unbeliever.
- SUDHA enters.*
- SUDHA** Amal!
- PHYSICIAN** He's asleep.
- SUDHA** I have some flowers for him. Mayn't I give them into his own hand?
- PHYSICIAN** Yes, you may.
- SUDHA** When will he be awake?
- PHYSICIAN** Directly the King comes and calls him.
- SUDHA** Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?
- PHYSICIAN** What shall I say?
- SUDHA** Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him. Tell him, he will never be forgotten. Never be forgotten.

EPILOGUE

- KORCZAK** Wonderful, wonderful. You were wonderful. And as a reward I present you all with a loaf of bread... *(They rush to grab a crumb)*. Slowly children slowly.
- STEFA enters with a letter.*
- Ah Stefa – did we not do old Tagore’s Post Office some justice? The audience will love the scene with the king’s letter.
- STEFA** *(She looks worried, and then takes him aside)* It has finally come. The letter. A real letter. Here. *(she hands him the letter)*
- KORCZAK** *(Reads and destroys)*. Well children. We must now gather our things. I have exciting news. We are going on a journey. By train. Yes pack your things. I shall be leading the trip.
- STEFA** *(aside)* Dr Korczak – the Germans say that you can be spared
- KORCZAK** Spared? Why a bald old fool like me?
- STEFA** Because they say you are a famous man – they will spare you. I shall take the children.
- KORCZAK** Are you mad Stefa? Leave the children? Here in the Warsaw Ghetto? To abandon them on their final journey? Do you think I have come this far only to betray them? Do you remember my book, my famous book, ‘How to love a child’? Can the author of ‘how to love a child’ leave a single child to the fate destined to them by the Nazis? No – we shall go together. We shall go with our heads held high.
- STEFA** Then I shall come to. I shall not betray them.
- KORCZAK** You are not a Jew Stefa. Your fate is not sealed.
- STEFA** A good Polish Catholic yes, but my fate was sealed long ago. My mind is strong. We shall go to the..to the King’s Post Office together *(they embrace)*
- KORCZAK** *The CHILDREN gather around him.*
- Children! I have some news. We are to leave the ghetto! We are not to be walled in like little Amal any longer. We are going to the station to board a train. To the country. To a little village called Treblinka. Just think of the fresh air. Think of the air! Come let us go with our heads held high children. We have performed Tagore’s Post Office. We shall receive applause and deserved it. We – you – shall not be forgotten! You shall never be forgotten *(as they gather, Ruven steps forward)*
- RUVEN (AMAL)** ‘I can see it all: there, the King’s postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters.....I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.’ *(he joins the group and tableau)*
- KORCZAK** Come children. Come. We are all going - to the King’s Post Office.
- They slowly leave through the audience.*