

Mistake Corrections

There was a dark silhouette of a school building standing out in the background of the starlit sky. That moonshiny March night two guys were seen climbing a high birch tree to the staff room on the third floor. When they got to the precious window, they quietly opened the top part of it with a penknife. The smallest boy, Petka Philippov, nicknamed "Philya", climbed in through it and opened the rest of the window from the inside. Two more guys were hiding below, in the lilac bushes, and were watching the school yard. After the first pair had disappeared into the room they also began to climb up from one branch to another, rushing to take part in the great affair of "mistake corrections".

Yurka Lisochkin, the boy with thick brown hair that was second to climb into the staff room, was bigger than the first one and was wearing a short jacket and a blue scarf. Having found himself in the dark room, he threw himself onto a chair and stared at the wall. Two months ago he was standing in the exact same place in front of the teachers and promising not to skip lessons. That day he was also staring at the wall where there hung a big portrait of a bloke with a round face. Tonight the moon would light the room, then suddenly get obscured with the tree branches moving in the wind, slide on Khrushchev's bald head, stop for a while and disappear. The boy appeared to be stroking the big head of the Head of the country and praying to him, "Please don't tell anyone. OK? Please don't!"

At that time Philippov had already found a big wooden bookcase in the far corner near the door, and started touching all its boards with his thin fingers as if they were violin strings. At last he found the lock, pushed it with a crow bar and the door opened. The form registers were standing on the shelves in even levels. On the binding, he could see the form numbers painted in white oil.

"Wait for us!" a blonde boy in a light coloured coat and cap shouted, he was Serezhka Bogdanov, the third out of the teenagers who got inside through the opened window. When climbing through the window sill, he overturned a pile of exercise-books and was now trying to put them back.

The fourth boy, who had hair as black as tar and was wearing a school uniform and a scarf round his neck, Vovka Spivak, bumped into Bogdanov, who was picking up the exercise books from the floor, and fell off the window sill. His leg got stuck between the wall and the desk and was now struggling to climb out from there.

"Shhh!" snapped the boy that was sitting on the chair and "stroking" the bald head of the outstanding leader, then he turned to Philippov dealing with the registers and added confidently, "We've got to take several of them, otherwise they will know."

The boys walked around the staff room celebrating the victory over all the teachers in the country in their mind. The fact that they were in the enemy's headquarters dazzled them. Everything interested and attracted them. What's on the desks? What's in the drawers? Whose exercise books? They could hardly see anything because of the darkness, though.

Along the windows of the staff room there were desks and lots of chairs. Under them there lay women's shoes carelessly. On the other side of the room there stood bookcases different in shape and height with half glass doors. In the stuffy room it smelt of shoes and wet chalk.

Without waiting for his partners, skinny Petka Philipov in a new school blazer with its collar cut off in the Beatles style, grabbed seven registers in brown faux leather from the right end with a single movement, tucked them under his shirt and rushed back to the window. Now he could feel with every cell in his skinny body that he owned the most important documents of the modern times. It was that Talmud of form 7B that condemned all four participants of the secret affair to finishing the term with a mark "3" and even threatened him with a "2" in Maths. Now everything would change! Now they would have a chance!

Suddenly, they heard shuffling footsteps quickly approaching in the hallway. It could only be the DT teacher. All the pupils at the school liked him. Vasiliych would let them stay in the workshop and make something whenever they wanted. Just for themselves. He, being a war invalid and having lost his left arm at the front, would spend his nights mostly at school, near the shooting gallery, and had no family of his own. The boys would see him in the basement many times when they wandered there without a torch or matches. But today as unlucky as they were, he happened to be on the third floor during their act of rebellion. They were not ready for that. They had no backup plan, no plan of escape. They started panicking. Everyone saw Vovka Spivak, now not being scared of making any noise, with a loud crack of a broken desk leg get out of the trap between the wall and the desk and jump on the window-sill a second later.

All the exercise books that Serezhka had just folded in a pile fell down again. Bogdanov could clearly hear Spivak shout, "Watch out! Run!" Vovka, without wasting time to look for support, was very fast, like a monkey, climbing down while jumping from one branch to another, using just his arms. Once he was on the ground, he quickly got up and ran.

One second later, holding with his hands the registers hidden under his blazer, small Philka climbed the window sill. How easy it had been to climb up the tree and get into the window! It was a different story to climb down. He didn't have any time to calculate the trajectory or walk step by step on the narrow moulding. Without thinking, the boy long jumped straight onto the birch tree, deciding to grab the nearest thick twig. His blazer got torn by the little twigs, the registers fell to the ground and he himself hung on the twig unable to reach the nearest branch or the tree trunk. Being annoyed or frightened and in pain, he whined not daring to call for help loudly.

The room was still dark. Bogdanov was in the far corner of the big room, behind the bookcases, and didn't see anyone, and Yurka Lisochkin was waiting impatiently for Philya to climb down the window. When he couldn't wait any longer, he hid behind the heavy curtain. The same second the light switched on in the staff room.

Serega understood he would be found any moment, so he rushed to the furthest bookcase with globes and maps, opened one of its doors, got out a black globe with white stars, got himself between the two bottom shelves and covered himself with a badly folded map of the Arctics. He doubled up and managed to close the bookcase door with the end of his boot. Only one door. His heart was beating so loudly that he was thinking of getting out of his hiding place. He would be heard and found anyway.

Outside the window they could hear Petka Philipov's whining and sniffing.

Having entered the staff room, Vasiliych stopped for a second, then he turned and flicked the light switch, which was to the left of the door. The big room became bright at once. Over the row of the desks there shone the window glass. Only one of them was black and the cold spring air was bursting into the room. From behind the window the teacher could hear someone weeping. He walked to

the window quickly and confidently, looked out of it and saw the boy hanging on his weakening arms. He bent over, leaning on the window sill.

"Hey!.. Hold on, just a moment!" the teacher couldn't find anything suitable at hand so he bent over the window and clinging his toes to the iron radiator stretched his arm to the lad. "Hold on! Can you reach? Come on! Come on! A bit more..." He didn't even think about what his pupil was doing there and what was going on. The main thing was to pull that skinny boy back in or he would fall and kill himself. Down on the ground there lay a stack of concrete kerb stones prepared by the builders in winter for the future pavement. A long line of light was falling on the stones through the brightly lit window. The shadow play made them even more scary.

At that very time the boy hiding behind the curtain got out and sneakily started walking around Vasiliych trying to leave the ill-fortunate staff room, go the the corridor and there... Vasiliych heard someone's steps behind his back and, still bending over the window-sill and stretching his arm to Petka Philippov, he turned his head towards the light...

"Lisochkin, what are you doing here?" he said harshly when he recognized his pupil.

Everything was knocked down like a house of cards. At first he was so lucky! All he had to do was to quietly leave the crime scene... Now he had been recognized. That was it! A huge charge of anger overfilled his conscience and suddenly shot towards himself, little Philya who was still squeaking behind the window, the disabled DT teacher with three shiny blocks on the lapel of his worn-out blazer...

Without understanding what he was doing, Yurka slipped behind the curtain again. The teacher turned and made a sidestep. The curtain suddenly stretched and pulled the massive wooden pole with the screws from the

plastered wall. Maybe, the teacher had trod on the heavy burgundy curtain. Or...

One end of the pole hit Lisochkin's head, after which the other end fell on Vasiliych' neck with even stronger force. The centre of gravity moved, the teacher's legs came off the parquet floor and lifted up... A second later the teacher disappeared behind the window...

Petka could see his body weaken, bend over the window bay, slide down the wall. He didn't even try to grab the skirting of the birch-tree branches. He fell on the stones and didn't move.

Frightened from what he had just seen and instinctively trying to do a runner and disappear, Philya tried to swing as much as he could on the branch, let his arms go, leapt to another branch below, but he couldn't get hold of it, and so slipped to the third one and in the end fell... It was not that high but he still hurt himself. As he limped and covered his stomach with his white shirt, reddish stains of blood appeared through his shirt, and he got close to Vasilyich. The wide open motionless eyes were looking at the boy and they were the eyes which reflected the bright light from the third floor window. Some dark liquid was flowing under the teacher's head, in all directions. Petka touched the puddle of blood with his finger and smelt it. Then he smelt his wet and bloody palm, jumped up and was about to run. But in a moment he changed his mind. Suddenly he remembered that in the eyes of the departed there left an image of the last person he saw while alive. So squatting near the motionless body, without realizing what he was doing, the lad began to rub Vasilyich' eyes frantically with his palm. After some time, he calmed down and realized that it was ok as he had managed to destroy the evidence or maybe having just thought it was silly, so he got up, looked around and walked away quickly, bending over and hobbling.

After that Lisochkin appeared in the window. Slowly he sat on the window sill with his back to the staff room, touched his head with his hand, then raised his palm to his face and looked at it. Staggering, he walked along the border of the wall. On the border there was thin ice and the boy slid a few times but he didn't fall. He got to the tree and slowly, stopping once or twice, climbed down from one branch to another, until he reached the ground. There around the birch-tree he could see the registers lying around, and further along, on the long stones the DT teacher was lying with his right leg clumsily turned. His eyes and cheeks were stained with blood. Lisochkin didn't approach him. He didn't pick up the registers, he just took a couple of those which were lying nearby. He looked around once more and disappeared in the darkness.

Only an hour later the last of the boys left the staff room. Down below he saw the same dreadful scene. He couldn't think straight but he thought he should get some help. How could he do that? He had been standing for a few minutes over the DT teacher's body and hesitating but he couldn't think of anything so he headed home.