

Sukhomlinsky News



Students from Sukhomlinsky's school in Pavlysh



The destruction in Ukraine

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*This month's newsletter contains new translations of stories from Sukhomlinsky's **Ethics Anthology**. The story on the front page suggests that the most beautiful human quality is creativity, and conversely the most ugly thing is the waste and destruction of the fruits of human labour.*

Most of the other stories are about the beauty of the natural world, which is one of the most recurrent themes in Sukhomlinsky's work.

Every day on our television screens we are presented with images of the war in Ukraine, and the senseless destruction that goes with it. Decades of human labour is being destroyed, along with countless lives. The impact of the war on the plants and animals in the natural environment must also be devastating.

This reminder of the ugliness of war should spur us to renew our efforts to work for peace, and to educate our children to find happiness in being creative, rather than in consumption, or in seeking to dominate others.

Let us seek out ways to support those suffering from the war, and do what we can to work and pray for peace.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

This month's issue is devoted to translations of stories in Sukhomlinsky's *Krestomatiya po etike* [An Ethics Anthology].

The most beautiful and the most ugly

At school, a boy was asked to write an essay about what he thought was most beautiful and what was most ugly. The boy thought hard, but he could not come up with an answer. It seemed to him that a flowering lilac would be the most beautiful thing in the world, and a toad would be the ugliest. However, he was not sure, so he asked his grandfather whether he was right. The grandfather said that the boy was wrong.

'The most beautiful thing,' said his grandfather, 'Is human work. And the ugliest, the most despicable thing, is when human work is cast to the wind. Go and spend a couple of days observing what is going on around you, and you will see these two opposites.'

The boy went walking through a wheat field. The wheat was almost ready to harvest, its golden ears heavy with grain.

'This is what is most beautiful,' thought the boy, 'This is human work.'

The boy continued observing. He went to school. The students were running around, playing, and laughing. One girl was eating bread and butter, but without finishing it, she threw her piece of bread to the ground and rushed to her friends.

'And this is most ugly,' concluded the boy. 'She is casting human work to the wind.'

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

A bee flew into the classroom

It was a warm, sunny autumn day. The windows were open in the grade three classroom. The class was very, very quiet. The teacher asked Natasha to come out to the blackboard. She had to write a sentence about autumn rain, to show she could spell the word 'autumn'.

Suddenly everyone could hear the buzzing of a bee. It had flown into the classroom and was flying around the class. We put our pens down and watched the bee with bated breath. It flew up to the teacher's desk and then towards the wall. It did not seem able to see the open windows. We wanted to call out, 'Why don't you fly towards the window?' but we were afraid to say anything in case we startled the bee.

Then it flew around the teacher's desk and out the window. We all gave a sigh of relief. Outside the sun was shining. Natasha smiled and wrote on the blackboard the words 'autumn sun'.

The field and the meadow

The field and the meadow have lived side by side for a long time. From early spring to late autumn people come to the field. They plough the earth, sow seeds, pull out weeds, gather in the harvest, and plough again. They are full of joy when the field gives a rich harvest of wheat.

In the meadow grass grows. In spring flowers bloom and bees hover over them. From spring to late autumn, cows and sheep graze. The meadow is green from spring to autumn.

One day the field asks the meadow, 'Tell me, meadow, how is it that you are green from spring to autumn, though nobody ploughs you or sows you with seeds?'

'I am fed by spring waters. They give me strength.'

The field replies, 'I am green because I am fed by human labour.'

The sunflower

On a tall stem grows a big flower with golden petals. It looks like the sun. That is why it is called a sunflower. At night the sunflower sleeps, bowing its head of golden petals. But as soon as light appears in the morning sky, its petals quiver, because it knows the sun will soon rise. At last, the sun appears on the horizon. The sunflower turns its golden head towards the rising sun and gazes at the big red circle of fire. The sunflower is full of gladness and smiles. It greets the sun, saying, 'Good morning, sun, I have been waiting for you all night.'

The sun rises higher and higher, sailing across the sky, and the sunflower turns its golden head to follow it. Finally, the sun disappears over the horizon, and the sunflower smiles one last time at its golden rays. The sun has set.

The sunflower turns its head back to where the sun will rise the following day. The golden flower sleeps, and dreams of the morning dawn.

A spring day in the forest

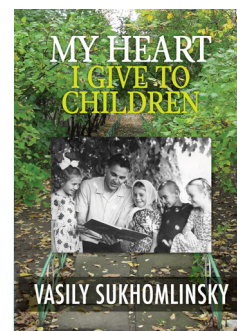
The green stem of a snowdrop, as sharp as an arrow, poked through last year's carpet of dry leaves. It spread its leaves, and between them trembled two blue eyes—two little flowers. The flowers looked all around, and what did they see? A big, red circle, like a ball of fire.

'What is that?' asked the little blue eyes.

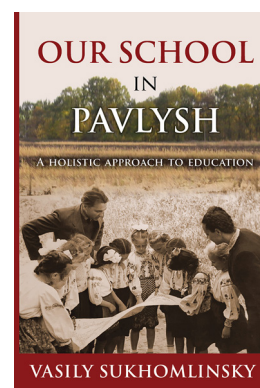
'That is the sun,' answered a bumblebee.

Then the little blue eyes saw tall trees, the blue sky, and a V-shaped formation of cranes in the sky.

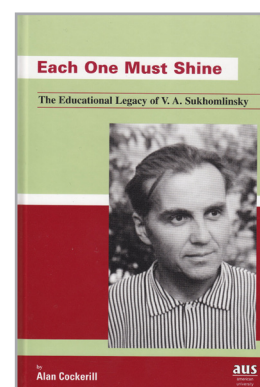
The sun rose higher and higher, until it was in the middle of the sky. Then it began to descend towards the earth and changed its colour.



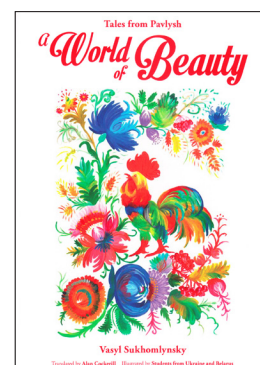
AUS\$24.95 (special price)



AUS\$34.95



AUS\$34.95 (original hardback)



AUS\$14.95 (original edition)

'Why has the sun turned red?' asked the little blue eyes.

'That is its way of saying goodbye to the earth,' said a wasp.

The sun hid itself. It grew dark.

'Why has it got dark?' asked the little blue eyes, with fear in their voices. 'We're scared.'

'Don't be afraid,' said a little mosquito. 'That is just the day ending. Go to sleep. The night will pass, and a new day will begin.'

Dusk

When the sun sets, dusk begins. Everything around us begins to live a magical, fairy-tale life.

Far away in the steppe stands an ancient burial mound. As soon as dusk shrouds the steppe it is a burial mound no longer. It is a little island in the middle of a sea. Waves of wheat caress the shores of this little island.

On the edge of the village are three haystacks. In the dusk these are no longer haystacks, but big ships with lilac sails. They have sailed across the boundless ocean and arrived at our village.

And the green forest is no longer a forest, but waves frozen in time, waves in a sea of green. They only seem to be trees.

From a deep ravine dusk spreads out across the steppe, through our village, and all over the world.

Spring rain

It was a warm spring day. A mother ant ran out of her anthill and hurried along her path to a tall poplar. She ran up to the poplar and crawled up its trunk. On the leaves of the poplar were sweet little drops of sap. The mother ant crawled out onto a leaf, took a sweet drop between her legs and put it on her back. She was about to head home when she suddenly heard a clap of thunder. Big drops of warm spring rain began to fall. The mother ant took fright. 'What if the rain washes away the sweet food that I am taking to my babies. What will I feed them?' she thought. The ant hid under the bark and sat and listened. The rain thundered down.

At last, the rain stopped. The mother ant looked out and saw the sun was shining. She crawled out from her cosy shelter and crawled down the tree. She found her path and returned home. There her baby ants were waiting for her. She shared out her sweet drop of poplar sap to all her children, and there was even some left over for herself.

The oriole's nest

An oriole has beautiful, many-coloured feathers. When you look at an oriole, you are reminded of a rainbow. Its coat is made up of red, orange, yellow and blue-grey feathers.

An oriole built her nest in a thicket, in a blackthorn bush. She raised some chicks. Then she flew to warmer lands for the winter.

It was a cold winter. Someone cut down the blackthorn bush.

In spring, the oriole returned from warmer lands, but the blackthorn bush was gone. The oriole flew all over the place where the bushes had been. There had been a thicket there, but now there were only weeds. The oriole was sad. She sat on the dry twig that was all that was left of the blackthorn bush and sang a sad song. That was her way of crying.

Where would the Oriole build its nest now?

The weeping willow

By the pond stands a weeping willow. Its green branches reach down as it looks into the water. When the wind breathes on it, its branches sway like the tresses of a maiden's hair.

Near the trunk a little bird has built a nest. Whenever it flies out from its warm nest, the green tresses stir. That is the willow listening to the bird's song.

Autumn comes. A cold wind turns the willow's leaves yellow. Now the maiden has golden tresses. But the bird has disappeared. Where has it gone? It has flown to warmer lands, far beyond the sea. In spring it will return, and the willow will grieve no longer. Once more her tresses will turn green, and she will wake each morning a happy maiden. And the bird will also be happy, because she will be home, in the land where she was born. Our homeland is the dearest thing in the world. Nothing is dearer than one's homeland.

But for now, the golden-haired maiden is sad. A stillness hangs over the pond. A golden leaf falls into the water and drifts somewhere far, far away. The willow sighs.

The forest in spring

The forest wakes from its long winter sleep. Buds have opened on the hazelnut trees and the elms, on the maples and the linden trees. Small, bright green leaves reach towards the warm sun. They are fragrant and sticky, spring leaves. A drop of dew falls on a tiny leaf, and it quivers in surprise.

The leaves are not rustling, but quietly whispering. The branches are swaying, and one leaf stretches out to touch another, but cannot reach. The branches make a sound like a magic wooden flute. Somewhere a woodpecker is tapping on a tree trunk and an oriole is singing.

But what is that sound in the depths of the forest. We walk towards a quiet ringing sound. In a deep ravine we find a stream. That is where the sound was coming from. We come to the edge of the forest and see a wide field stretching before us. And above the field and the forest is the deep blue sky, with a solitary white cloud.

Only an oak tree is still sleeping. What are you waiting for, oak? Probably the first thunderstorm. That will wake you from your sleep.



Stories

The autumn maple

We went to the forest to admire the trees' autumn colours. We stopped by a tall maple tree and sat on the ground. How beautiful it was! The maple stood there dressed in its gorgeous bright colours, and not a single leaf stirred or made a sound.

"Look, children, the maple is asleep. He is dreaming of all the things he saw from spring to autumn. Look at that yellow leaf, the colour of a dandelion. In spring the maple was enchanted by the beauty of a dandelion, and he remembered that beauty. He went to sleep recalling the beauty of the dandelion, and that leaf turned yellow.

And over there you can see a leaf the colour of the morning dawn, a tender pink. And that one is like the evening sky on the eve of a windy day. And look over there at that branch. That leaf is as bright and beautiful as the wing of an oriole. Probably an oriole once settled on that branch, and now the maple is dreaming of its wing."

We all admire the beauty with bated breath. Everyone is silent, as if afraid of disturbing the maple's magic sleep.

The willow by the pond

Little Oksanka was walking by a pond. She picked up a willow twig on the bank of the pond and stuck it into the damp earth. And then she went home. Soon Oksanka's parents moved to the city, and Oksanka went to school there.

Ten years passed. Oksanka returned to her native village. Now she was a tall girl with long black hair. Oksanka visited the bank of the pond again. She saw a tall, spreading willow, leaning over the pond. Oksanka was surprised.

'Willow, where did you come from?' she asked.

'You planted me when I was just a little twig,' answered the willow.

'How big you have grown,' said Oksanka. 'I did not recognise you.'

'But I recognised you,' whispered the willow gratefully.

How autumn begins

Autumn is the elder daughter of Grandpa Frost. He also has a younger daughter named Spring. Autumn's hair is decorated with ears of wheat and the red berries of the guelder rose. Autumn likes to wander through the meadows and along the banks of rivers and ponds. Wherever she breathes, cold is in the air. Autumn loves to spend her nights sitting on the bank of a pond. In the morning, a grey mist rises from the pond and lingers for a long time. That is how autumn begins.

Birds are frightened of Autumn. As soon as the swallows see her, they flock together and whisper anxiously. The cranes soar up in the sky and cry out anxiously.

Autumn likes to go into the orchards. Whenever she touches an apple tree the apples turn yellow. But the woodpeckers are very happy when they meet Autumn. They cry out loudly and fly from one place to another, looking for good things on the trees.

Today is a warm, sunny day. The sun is low in the sky, shining, but not giving much warmth. Grandpa Frost's elder daughter sits leaning against a haystack, unplaits her hair, and warms herself. She sings a song about silver spider webs.

The ants and the pumpkin seed

Some ants found a pumpkin seed in the vegetable garden. It was fragrant and tasty, but very heavy. They needed to carry the seed to their anthill. Such a treasure was too good to leave behind. But their anthill was far away in the forest, beyond high mountains and wide valleys. One ant just managed to lift the pumpkin seed onto his back. All his friends followed him, the whole tribe of ants. As soon as the ant was too tired to go on, and put the seed down, another ant immediately picked it up.

In this way the ants carried the pumpkin seed, one after another, over high mountains and across wide valleys. When the sun was nearly setting, they brought the seed to their anthill. They delivered it and headed back to the vegetable garden. Perhaps there would be another seed there, just as good?

