

Sukhomlynsky News



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

The boy who was fearful

A new student joined grade five in the middle of the year. His name was Nikolai. From the first day, everyone was convinced that he was fearful and shy. He was offered a seat in the front row, but he declined it, and requested a seat at the back of the class.

Nikolai studied conscientiously and always completed his homework well. His answers in class were so good that when he was asked to come out to the blackboard to answer a question, a silence fell over the class. Everyone wanted to hear his reply. The teachers often praised Nikolai, saying, 'That is how assignments should be done, and that is how to answer questions.' The boy blushed when he received such praise, and everyone could see he just wanted to return to his seat at the back of the class as quickly as possible.

Nikolai's classmates said, 'He's a good student and a good friend. If you ask him, he will always explain how to solve a problem. But he is really fearful...'

One day the grade five students were returning home from school. It was in May, just before the end of the school year. They were walking in a large group and arguing about something. When they reached a bridge over a stream, they heard a cry. Someone was crying out from below, not far from the bridge. The stream was not wide, but it was fast-flowing and full. Could someone be crying for help?

The boys hardly had time to think about it, when they saw Nikolai leap into the water, in the direction of the cry. The shocked boys ran to the bridge railing. Nikolai was already swimming towards a little girl. She could not swim strongly and was being sucked into a whirlpool. At any moment the girl would be lost. 'Grab on to my shirt!' shouted Nikolai. The girl gripped his shirt and Nikolai quickly swam with her to the bank.



Developing sensitivity

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*This month's newsletter contains more translations of stories from Sukhomlynsky's **Ethics Anthology**. All these stories are from the final section of the book, which is entitled 'Develop your sensitivity'. Many of the stories are about the development of an individual conscience.*

The story 'The white feather' is open to more than one interpretation. I would be interested to hear from readers how they interpret this story.

*Smashwords, an eBook retailer, is holding a sale in early March. If you would like to purchase a digital copy of my book **Each One Must Shine** at half price (US\$3.75), it will be on sale from Sunday 3 March to Saturday 9 March. The Smashwords edition does have some minor edits and a small amount of additional text, compared to the printed edition that is currently available through various retailers.*

The eBook can be purchased at the site shown in the cover email to this newsletter, or by searching the Smashwords site.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

The white feather

A flock of sparrows sat perched on a thatched roof. They chirped happily to each other about the things sparrows are interested in. Suddenly a strange sparrow, who they had never seen before on the thatched roof, flew over and settled among them. He looked somehow different to the other sparrows. He had a haughty little head, a short neck, and a fussy little beak.

But the thing that really made him different was the white feather in his tail. Among the other grey feathers, this white feather looked extraordinary.

'Look! Look!' chirped the sparrows, 'An amazing sparrow with a white feather in its tail has joined us.'

Sparrows came flying from several neighbouring roofs, settled near the sparrow with the white feather in its tail, and asked, 'Where have you flown from?'

'From the other side of the sea...' answered the sparrow with the white feather in its tail.

Meanwhile, all the sparrows were trying to settle closer to the white feather, so they could get a good look at it. Several times they touched the white feather with their beaks, and one curious sparrow pulled on it. The white feather fell out, and the wind picked it up and carried it far away.

Now that the strange sparrow no longer had a white feather in its tail, it suddenly ceased to be unusual. It became just as grey as all the other sparrows that had been born and raised on thatched roofs. Its head looked just the same, its neck and beak looked the same, and when the strange sparrow chirped, all the others just opened their beaks in surprise.

'It's an ordinary sparrow just like us!' they all chirped. 'And we were silly enough to believe in a white feather.'

Mum's watermelon

Kostik is seven years old. During the summer, his mother leaves him at home by himself, while she goes to work all day. She says, 'Stay at home. Feed the chickens, and if it gets hot, water the cabbages in the vegetable garden.'

Today Kostik had a day that was both happy and difficult. It was happy because in the morning, as soon as his mother had left for work, Grandpa Matvei came and brought two watermelons. Kostik knew very well that the watermelons at the plantation had not yet ripened. He asked Grandpa Matvei many times where he had managed to get these two watermelons from, but the old man just smiled and would not say.

'This one is for you,' said Grandpa Matvei, pointing to the smaller of the two watermelons. 'And the other one is for your mother.'

Of course, it could not be any other way. Kostik's mother was bigger than him, so she had to have the bigger watermelon.

'Shall I cut up your watermelon for you now, or will you cut it up yourself?' asked Grandpa Matvei.

'Now, Grandpa, now,' requested Kostik impatiently.

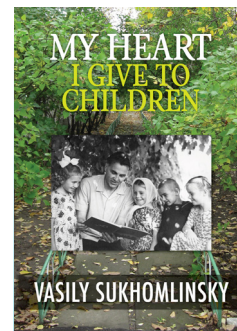
The old man cut up the watermelon. It was red inside and smelt sweet.

Kostik smacked his lips and ate slowly, trying to make his pleasure last as long as possible, while his grandfather sat silently and sometimes

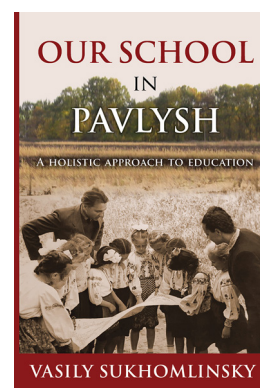


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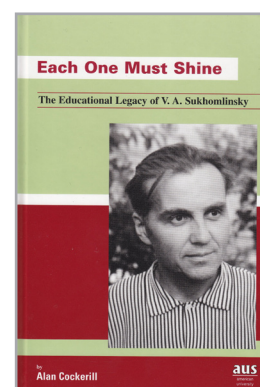
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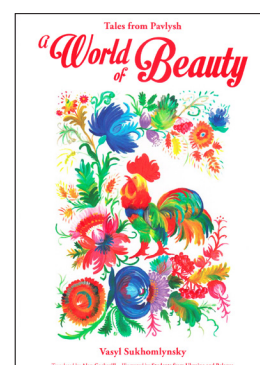
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gave a little laugh. It was a strange sort of laugh that did not express happiness.

Kostik's grandfather left and Kostik finished eating the watermelon. Then he gnawed on the discarded pieces of watermelon rind. He went out to play and then came back inside. He wanted to chew on the watermelon rind again, but there was nothing left to chew.

His mother's watermelon lay on the table. Kostik tried not to look at it, but from time to time it was as if someone turned his head towards the watermelon. So as not to look at the watermelon, Kostik went outside. He gave the chickens some barley and drew a bucket of water from the well. Some irresistible force still drew him to the house. He opened the door, sat by the table, and reached out to touch the watermelon.

'What if I ate half?' he wondered.

But at this thought Kostik suddenly felt ashamed. He remembered his grandfather's disapproving laugh. His grandfather had been unhappy because Kostik had not offered him any of the watermelon—not a single piece. Kostik was so ashamed, he left the house. He went outside and sat under a mulberry tree. He sat there for a long time, watching white clouds float across the blue sky, until he fell asleep.

Kostik woke up in the evening. The sun was setting on the horizon.

'Soon mum will come home,' Kostik thought.

As his mother approached the house, Kostik went out to meet her, carrying her watermelon.

'This is for you, mum,' Kostik said joyfully.

His mother cut up the watermelon and invited him to have some. 'Eat up, Kostik.'

'No, that is for you, mum,' answered Kostik. 'You eat it, mum.'

Kostik's mother had never known him to be so attentive. She looked with amazement at her son's joyful eyes and took a piece of the watermelon.

A piece of bread

Semyon is in grade five and attends after-school care. After school, he goes with his classmates to the dining hall. The children sit down at long tables. Each student has in front of them a bowl of beetroot soup, a rissole and some stewed fruit. On a separate plate they have a piece of bread to go with their dinner. Semyon starts eating. His friend Misha is on duty in the kitchen and will eat after everyone else.

Semyon's piece of bread is not enough for him, and he takes Misha's share. He eats half of it, and quietly drops the half that is left over under the table.

All the children have finished eating and wait for the teacher, who has been sitting opposite Semyon,

to tell them they can go outside to play. But the teacher says, 'I would like you to sit here a little longer, while I tell you a story about something that happened a long time ago. This happened during the war. A detachment was fighting the enemy in a desert far away in the south. Barren sands stretched for hundreds of kilometres under the blazing sun, with not a drop of water to be had. A commander sent two soldiers on a scouting mission. They had to walk for over a hundred kilometres across scorching sands. They could only move at night. Each soldier had a large flask of water and a bag of rusks.

The soldiers walked all night. In the morning they stopped, raked up a big pile of sand, and lay down to sleep through the day. One soldier, named Nikolai, went to sleep. The other, named Andrei, quietly took Nikolai's flask and began to drink his water. He drank from it once, twice, three times. By evening he had emptied the flask.

At nightfall the soldiers set off again. Nikolai wanted to drink a mouthful of water, but his flask was empty. He tried Andrei's flask, and it was empty too. And they were surrounded by a barren, waterless desert. Both soldiers perished. The desert does not fool around with people.

I would like you to think about this story, children.'

The children were thoughtful. Semyon bowed his head. He was too ashamed to look the teacher in the eye.

Pavel and the sun

One day the Pioneer leader came into grade three and said, 'Children, there are a hundred tonnes of wheat lying in the in the yard at the collective farm and we are expecting rain. The wheat needs to be moved into the grain storage area. Let's all go together and help the collective farm workers.

After school the children happily went to help the farm workers. Pavel was the only student not to come and help. Everyone else worked, but he stayed at home. The next day the other children asked Pavel, 'Why didn't you come and help yesterday?'

Pavel answered, 'My mum is sick... I had to help my mum...'

The children believed their friend... Of course, he had to help his mother.

But suddenly, during the lunch break, Pavel's mother came to school. The teacher was standing in the yard and the students were playing nearby. Pavel was playing ball with them. Pavel's mother went over to the teacher and said, 'I wonder if you can help me. My son does not want to do any work at home. He won't fetch water or sweep the floor...'

[continued overleaf]

Pavel and the sun (continued)

When they heard these words, the children surrounded Pavel and looked at him in surprise. Pavel lowered his head... It became very quiet in the school yard.

The sun hid behind a cloud...

'Even the sun is ashamed...' said Katya.

The glass man

A boy had a little friend—a glass man. He was completely transparent and had an amazing ability. He always knew what the boy was thinking and feeling. If the boy had not done his homework and wanted to go out to play, the glass man would become a little darker, so he was no longer completely transparent, and he would say, 'You should not think like that, my boy. First do your work, then go out to play.' The boy would feel ashamed and would sit down to do his homework, then go out to play. The little glass man would become transparent again and say nothing more.

One day the boy's best friend, who he sat next to at school, fell ill. A day passed, and then a second day, and the boy did not think of his friend at all. Then he noticed that the glass man had become as dark as a storm cloud.

'What have I done or thought that was wrong?' asked the boy anxiously.

'You haven't done anything wrong or thought anything wrong... But you have forgotten all about your friend!'

The boy felt ashamed, and he went to see his sick friend. He took some flowers and a huge apple that his mother had given him.

In this way the glass man taught the boy how to live. The glass man was his conscience.

Who ate the *pyrizhok*?

Three brothers—Ivan, Petro and Vasyil—were cutting hay in a meadow. At noon they decided to stop and rest. They lay down in the shade of a haystack and fell deep asleep.

While they were sleeping, their mother came and brought them some lunch: a bowl of porridge, some bread, and three large *pyrizhky* with poppy seeds.* The mother did not want to wake her sons. 'Let them sleep,' she thought. 'When they wake up, they will find the food and eat.' She covered the food with green burdock leaves and returned home.

Meanwhile a traveller passed that way—an old man with a walking stick. He was very tired and hungry. The old man approached the haystack and saw the three brothers sleeping. He also smelt the food. The traveller thought to himself, 'Would

these boys give me something to eat if they were not sleeping? Of course, they would.' He did not want to disturb the brothers' sleep, so he ate one *pyrizhok*, thanked them in a whisper, and walked on.

The brothers woke up and sat down to eat. They saw that there were only two *pyrizhky* and knew that their mother always brought three. Each one thought, 'One of my brothers has woken up and quietly eaten one of the *pyrizhky*.' All three brothers felt ashamed, and all hung their heads, because each one thought one of his brothers was at fault. They ate the porridge and bread, but the *pyrizhky* lay there untouched. They silently went back to cutting the hay. They did not say a single word to each other until evening.

In the evening the traveller came back that way. He walked over to the brothers and was surprised to see them all standing grim and silent, with their heads down. Why, when he greeted them, did they not say a word to each other?

'Good evening,' said the old man. 'Thank you for the *pyrizhok*. I did not want to wake you, so I ate one of your *pyrizhky* without asking you...'

The brothers were overjoyed. 'So, it was you who ate the *pyrizhok*,' said each of the brothers. 'That's wonderful. Come over here, Grandpa. We've left the other two *pyrizhky* for you as well. Come and eat them.'

The old man followed the brothers. Now they were walking happily, and they looked joyfully into each other's eyes.

* A *pyrizhok* (plural *pyrizhky*) is a type of baked or fried bun (a little like a pastie) made of yeast dough. It can have various fillings, including vegetables (usually, potatoes, cabbage or cabbage with eggs and onions), and cottage cheese and fruit (usually, apples, sour cherries, plums, pears, strawberries or raspberries).



Pyrizhky (Ukrainian), also known as *Pirozhki* (Russian)