

Sukhomlinsky News



Sukhomlinsky and his students worked on the local collective farm.

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

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

An argument between two books

Two books stood side by side on a library shelf. One had a leather cover with a gold embossed title. It was a book about the Great Conqueror. The other book had a thin grey cover. It was about the Ploughman and the Sower of Seeds.

The book about the Conqueror said, 'People will become more intelligent when they read me. If it were not for Conquerors, there would be no Power and no Glory.'

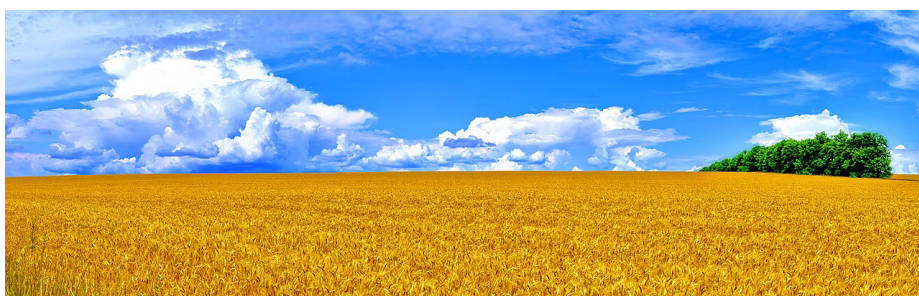
The book about the Ploughman and the Sower of Seeds asked, 'And where is that Conqueror of whom you tell? Which Conqueror are you talking about?'

'He travelled the whole world. Nations quaked as he approached. He burnt a thousand cities and subjugated a hundred nations.'

'And where is he now?'

The book about the Great Conqueror did not reply.

'I know where your Conqueror is,' said the book about the Ploughman and the Sower of Seeds. 'He is rotting in the ground. But my Ploughman and Sower of Seeds will live forever.'



The appreciation of beauty

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

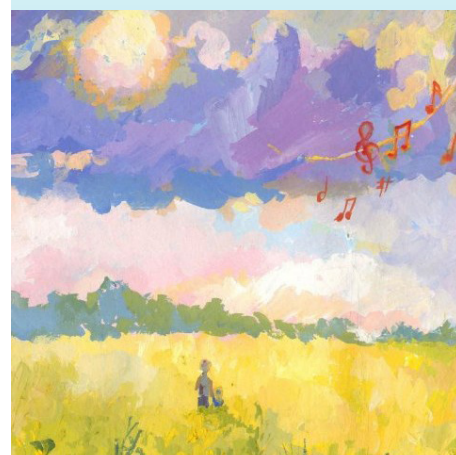
Once again, I am offering you my translations of stories from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology. Most are taken from the section on 'Beauty—The Joy of Life'; though the introductory story, 'An argument between two books' is taken from the section 'Journeys to the well springs of thought'.

Sukhomlinsky's stories express a particular view of the world, in which all living things have intrinsic value, and the special value of human beings is their capacity to appreciate beauty, and to be creative. When human beings intervene in nature, it should be to sustain life and to create beauty.

I hope you enjoy these translations of Sukhomlinsky's stories.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

The cuckoo's sorrow

A cuckoo lays its eggs in other birds' nests. When the cuckoo chicks hatch, they throw the owners' chicks out of the nest.

'Why are you so cruel, cuckoo? Why don't you make your own nest and raise your chicks yourself?' asked the wind one day.

'Let me explain, wind,' answered the cuckoo. 'I am not as cruel as people think. As soon as the forest begins to turn green, caterpillars crawl out of their cocoons. All sorts of caterpillars appear in the forest: big, hairy, green, poisonous. No other bird eats them, but I do. If I did not eat these pests, the forest would die. The caterpillars would eat all the leaves. I don't have time to raise my chicks...'

That is what the cuckoo told the wind. It told its story and expressed its grief with a mournful 'Cuckoo, cuckoo!'

'Why do you cry so pitifully?' asked the wind.

'I miss my children,' answered the cuckoo.

'But you do not feed them,' said the wind. 'Other birds feed them.'

'I am saving the forest for them,' said the cuckoo softly.

The old tree stump

A large tree with wide spreading branches grew in the forest. In spring it was covered with green leaves and white flowers that attracted the bees and the bumblebees. Songbirds build their nests in the tree's branches. Every year in spring they returned from warmer lands, found their tree, and happily chirped, 'Happy Spring to you, dear tree. We have come to visit you again.' The tree lived very happily because it had so many friends.

Many years passed. The tree grew old and withered. Some people came to the forest and cut down the dry old tree and took it away.

All that was left of the tree was a stump. Lonely and sad, it was gradually covered in a layer of grey dust. It was painful for it to remember how the bees and bumblebees used to visit it, and how the songbirds built their nests in its branches... The songbirds did arrive in spring, circled above the stump, cheeped anxiously, and flew away. The lonely stump wept. It so much wanted someone's friendship.

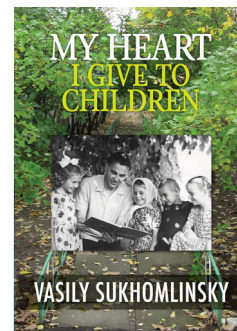
Autumn came. One day a hedgehog came running up to the tree stump. It dug a hole next to the stump and brought sweet smelling dry leaves and moss to make a winter bed for itself. The old tree stump was overjoyed, and tenderly embraced the hedgehog. And the hedgehog was kind to the tree stump. They made friends and told each other about their lives. The tree stump even began to look younger and was covered with beautiful green moss. Now it had a friend.

Poplars in the steppe

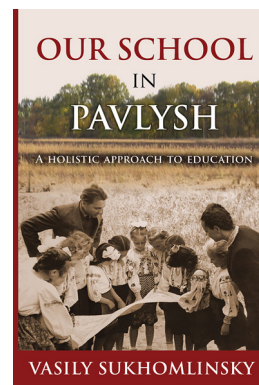
By a road in the steppe three poplars are growing. One is old and tall, and the other two are young and supple. My grandma told me that there used to be only one poplar growing there—the tall, old one. It was sad all alone by the roadside. One day a traveller passed that way and sat down to rest under the old poplar. The poplar asked the traveller, 'Kind man, please cut two twigs from my branches and plant them next to me. I would be very happy to have a poplar growing on either side of me.'

The kind man cut two twigs, planted them and watered them. The twigs sprouted green leaves and grew into young poplars. They are watered by the heavy rains and rocked to sleep by the wind. The old poplar is very happy to have two sons.

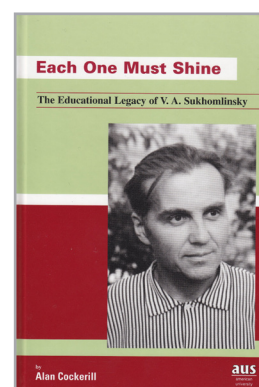
Now you can often hear the three poplars rustling. That is them talking



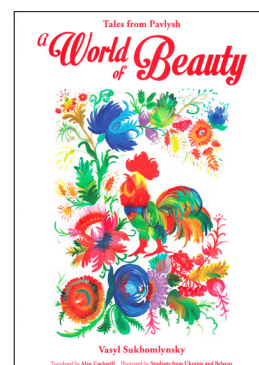
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about something. They are probably saying how sad it is to live alone, and how happy they are living together.

Olya's magic

An autumn flower and a spring flower met in the school greenhouse. This is how it came about.

We transplanted some autumn flowers—chrysanthemums—into the greenhouse. They flowered there: white, violet and pink. Next to them was a green shoot of lilac. It was nearly New Year. Outside it was snowing and a cold winter wind was blowing, but inside the greenhouse it was warm and cosy. One sunny winter morning the lilac flowered. The lilac flower opened its light blue eyes and saw a white chrysanthemum. It exclaimed in amazement, 'You're an autumn flower, chrysanthemum. Why are you flowering now?'

The chrysanthemum replied, 'And you're a spring flower. Why have you flowered now, when there is a hard frost outside?'

The lilac flower looked and saw that it was true: it was winter outside.

'It is all because of that little girl Olya,' said the chrysanthemum. 'She brought us here. If not for her, we would never have met.'

Without Olya's magic, spring would not have met autumn.

A fir tree for the sparrows

In three days, it would be New Year, but Vitya was sick in bed. His mother put a New Year fir tree at the foot of Vitya's bed, and decorated it with toys, sweets and apples. In the evening it was lit up by coloured lights.

The morning of New Year's Eve arrived. Vitya looked out the window and saw three little sparrows. They were hopping from foot to foot, looking for food. Vitya felt sorry for the little birds.

'Mum,' said Vitya, 'Let's make a New Year tree for the sparrows.'

'How?' asked his mother in surprise.

'I'll show you how,' said Vitya.

He stuck a twig from the fir tree into a sweet box, and scattered grain and crumbs all over it. His mother took the little New Year tree and put it in the garden. The sparrows saw it, and flew over to the grains, feasting and chirping joyfully.

Vitya had a very happy New Year!

The swallow with a broken wing

At the end of a hot summer day a thunderstorm rumbled in the sky. Rain poured down. Water drenched a swallow's nest stuck to the wall of our old barn. The nest collapsed, and some chicks fell out. They had already developed feathers but had not yet learned to fly. The mother sparrow fluttered above her chicks and called them under a bush. The chicks lived under the bush for several days.

The mother swallow brought them food, and they huddled together, waiting for her.

Four of the chicks learned to fly, and began to flit everywhere, but one still could not. The mother swallow would sit next to the chick that could not fly. It had a broken wing. It had been crippled when it fell out of the nest.

The crippled swallow lived under the bush until autumn. When the time came for swallows to fly to warmer lands, they gathered in a large flock, settled in a bush, and for a long time you could hear an anxious cheeping.

The birds flew away to warmer lands. The young swallow with the broken wing was left behind. I picked it up and took it home. It snuggled up to me trustingly. I put it on the windowsill, and it looked out at the blue sky. I thought I could see tears in its eyes.

The beautiful song of the lark

A man was walking through a field of wheat. Suddenly a lark burst from under his feet. It rose high in the air above the man and began to sing its wonderful song. As the man listened to the song, he felt he was listening to a fairy tale about silver strings stretching from the sun to the earth. The song told him of the golden sun, which went to rest each evening in a magic garden, and about a rainbow—a golden bridge over which giant blacksmiths came down to earth to find iron and coal...

The man listened to the lark's song, and followed it further and further, towards the forest. Finally, when the lark saw that the man had reached the edge of the forest, it flew quickly back and hid once again in the wheat.

That was where its nest was. It reached its nest, where its babies had been waiting anxiously for their mother. They asked, 'Mum, what were you singing about in your song?'

'I was singing about the man. I asked him to go far away from my nest and leave my chicks in peace.'

'And did the man like your song?'

'He liked it very much. He followed me all the way to the edge of the forest.'





Stories

Without the nightingale

In one of our villages a kindergarten was housed in an old peasant home with a straw roof. Inside there were new tables and beds that were very comfortable for the children. There were lots of toys. The children especially liked one toy horse and rider. He looked like a Red Army soldier. He had a red star on his hat and was lifting his sabre high in the air.

The other thing that the children especially loved was the nightingale in the garden. It lived in a wild cherry tree right next to the building. When the children arrived at the kindergarten in the morning, they quietly crept up to the open window, and listened to the song of the nightingale. Those were their happiest moments. But then the collective farm constructed a big stone building for the kindergarten. One day two trucks came to the kindergarten. Into one they loaded the tables, beds, bowls and spoons. The children climbed into the other truck with all their toys.

The new building was well lit with lots more room. But when the little children arrived in the morning and opened the window to listen to the song of nightingale, there was no nightingale to be heard.

A sadness descended on those wide, well-lit rooms.

A blizzard

Our home stands on the edge of the village. One winter morning, snow began to fall, and then the wind picked up. The field was covered in a cloud of snow. It swirled, like a white waterfall. Wherever you looked, there were white waves, sweeping quickly and irresistibly over the land. I opened the door and looked outside. Suddenly I saw a little grey bird swept through the air

towards a haystack in the field nearby. It seemed not to be flying of its own accord, but to be carried along on a white wave. The bird fell to the ground next to the haystack. What should I do? The bird would be covered with snow and freeze to death. I put on my sheepskin coat and trudged over to the haystack. I found the bird already half covered with snow. I picked it up, put it inside my shirt, and took it home. I put it on the table, and it was hardly breathing. When it had warmed up a bit, it lifted its head. I could see blood on one of its wings. It must have been injured by a predator. The little bird lived in our hut for a few weeks. Its wing healed, and when I released it, it flew away. In the evening it came and perched on my open ventilation window and chirped. I suppose it was saying, 'I am grateful to you. I love you, but it is still better for me to be free.'

There are so many folk pipes here!

Twelve-year-old Nikolai grazed a cow. One hot summer day, when everything around was trying to hide from the sun, Nikolai sat down under a willow tree. On the green grass he noticed a stick from an elder tree.

'I could make a folk pipe from that,' thought the boy.

He evened off the ends of the stick, carved out the soft core, and dried it in the hot wind.

A quiet melody began to play. It was a song about a sunny summer's day, the blue sky, and the song of the lark.

Nikolai looked around, and it seemed that everything had become more beautiful: the willow leaning over the pond, the green meadow, and a chamomile flower.

The afternoon drew to a close and Nikolai drove his cow home. By the pond he saw a big elder bush. Its slender, flexible, spreading branches swayed in the soft evening breeze.

'There are so many pipes here!' thought Nikolai. He stepped up to the elder bush and reached up to an even, bendy branch. He thought he could hear the branch begin to sing and make music.

The boy stood by the pond and listened to the magical music.

