

Sukhomlinsky News



Image source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/07/Florida_grasshopper_sparrow_and_chicks_FWS.jpg

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

The following story is from the section in Sukhomlinsky's *Ethics Anthology* entitled 'People leave themselves in others'.

Love and cruelty

A baby sparrow fell out of its nest. Its little wings were not yet strong enough to fly. It was flopping about in the grass while its mother hovered over it and cheeped anxiously.

A hawk spotted the chick and flew towards it. It thought it could grab the chick and eat it. It landed near the chick and moved towards it. All the birds in the trees froze with fear. What was about to happen? They were amazed to see that the mother sparrow did not retreat in fear but dived towards the hawk. It puffed itself up, landed on the hawk, pecked it in the eyes and sunk its claws into its head. The hawk took fright and flew away.

All the birds were astonished. What a brave mother sparrow! How could she defeat the hawk?

'I'll tell you how,' said the owl. 'The mother sparrow loves its chick. But the hawk feels no love. It only knows cruelty. And cruelty has never defeated love.'



Love versus cruelty

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

I saw on the news recently that a shopping centre in Kremenchuk, central Ukraine, had been destroyed by a Russian missile, killing innocent civilians, including women and children. Kremenchuk is only 20 kilometres from Sukhomlinsky's school in Pavlysh.

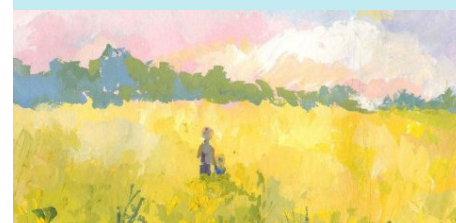
The contrast between this senseless cruelty and destruction and Sukhomlinsky's creative, nurturing approach could not be more stark. I also recently saw some beautiful video footage of the grounds at Sukhomlinsky's school, where flowers are flourishing. The footage was shot this month on 3 June, and you can view it on YouTube at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W71EIZO6ZPs>

I was very impressed by how much work had been done on the school grounds since I visited in 2009.

I hope you enjoy this month's translations of Sukhomlinsky's stories, which are taken from his *Ethics Anthology*.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

A little bit of summer

Five-year-old Larissa got up early, at dawn, and went to the orchard. Her mother had told her that it was time to say good-bye to autumn: soon snow would fall, and blizzards would swirl. At night Grandpa Frost would come and breathe on their windows with his icy breath, and the glass would be covered in patterns.

The orchard was empty and quiet. All the leaves had long fallen from the trees. The wind rocked the bare branches.

Under the trees lay dry leaves that quietly rustled underfoot.

Suddenly among the grey leaves Larisa saw a big pink apple. It must have fallen recently because it was whole and fresh.

The girl was overjoyed. She picked up the apple, looked around her, and felt that the orchard had become brighter and cosier. Perhaps Larissa only imagined it, or perhaps it was real, but she thought she heard a bumblebee droning.

Larisa took the apple home. She put the pink apple on the table and said to her mother, 'This is a little bit of summer. Let's leave it here until spring.'

Her mother smiled.

From that day on, the apple lay on the table: big, pink and fresh, as if it had just fallen from the tree.

Outside there was frost, and a blizzard howled, but it still lay on the table. Whoever came into the house would see the apple and smile.

The swallows say goodbye to their homeland

For many years swallows lived under the eaves of a house. In spring they came from warmer lands and raised some chicks, but in autumn they flew away again to where it was warm.

In the house lived a mother and father, and a little girl named Alyonka. She would wait impatiently for the warm spring day when the swallows would arrive. That was a very special day for Alyonka. In summer the little girl liked to watch how the swallows fed their chicks and then went to sleep.

In autumn, when the swallows flew away, Alyonka was sad. She felt like she was parting with dear friends.

For several days before they flew away the swallows would gather in a flock, settle on the telephone line near their yard, and sit there for a long time. It seemed to Alyonka that they were sad about something. She listened to their anxious twittering, and wondered, 'Why do they sit there for so long?'

She asked her mother, 'Mum, why do the swallows gather on the telephone line and stay there for so long before they fly away?'

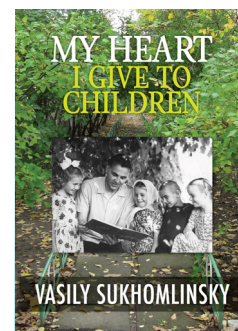
'They are saying goodbye to their homeland. It is a long and dangerous route they must fly to get to warmer lands.'

Alyonka stood under the telephone line where the swallows were gathered. She wanted them to say goodbye to her as well.

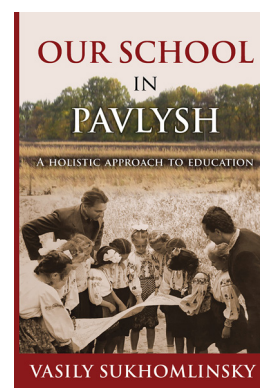
Is Teddy mean or kind?

This happened during the years of the Great Patriotic War. Twelve-year-old Pavlik used to graze the calves. At that time all children, even little girls and boys, worked in the fields. Their fathers were fighting in the war, and their mothers could not do all the work by themselves. In Pavlik's herd there were forty-five calves. All of them were quiet and friendly, except for one bull calf named Teddy, who was angry and aggressive. He often put his head down and pushed Pavlik. The boy was frightened of Teddy.

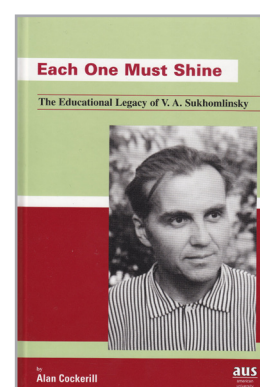
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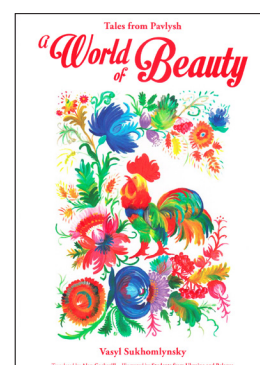
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One quiet June day the postman brought a funeral notice. Pavlik's father had been killed in battle. His mother cried, his little sister cried, and Pavlik cried. He was still crying when he drove the calves to the pasture.

Pavlik sat under a birch tree with his head on his knees and cried. Suddenly he felt someone tenderly touch his shoulder. 'Who could that be?' wondered Pavlik. 'There is no-one else here in the pasture.' He looked up and saw Teddy standing next to him. He had lowered his head and was rubbing his shoulder.

Pavlik stroked the bull calf. Teddy lay down next to him and put his head in the boy's lap.

The larks have arrived

When the first larks appear in the spring sky, mothers bake little larks from bread dough. Seryozha's mother baked a little bird for him. Seryozha put it by the open window. The spring sun was shining, and a warm breeze was singing in the green willow tree. The little lark sat on the windowsill, looking at the sky with its little black eyes. It seemed to Seryozha that at any moment it would spread its wings and fly into the sky.

Night came and Seryozha went to bed. The little lark kept looking up into the sky. Seryozha dreamt that the lark was cold, and that he took it into his bed to get warm. Or perhaps that really did happen.

In the morning Seryozha opened his eyes and the first thing he did was look over at the windowsill. The window was open, but the lark was gone. Seryozha ran over to the window, looked at the blue morning sky and called out, 'Mum! Our lark has flown away into the sky! I can hear it singing.'

His mother looked at Seryozha and asked, 'Did you take it into your bed last night?'

'I only took it for a minute in the middle of the night. It was cold. I warmed it up...'

'Then it must have flown away this morning,' said his mother with a smile.

The boy and the lily of the valley

Spring came, and a little green stalk rose from the earth. It grew quickly and divided into two leaves. The leaves were soon quite large, and a little shoot appeared between them. It rose up, leaned towards one of the leaves, and early one morning it produced a flower like a little silver bell. It was the flower of a lily of the valley.

Early one morning the lily of the valley was discovered by a little boy. He could not take his eyes off the flower and reached out his hand to pick it.

The flower whispered to the boy, 'Little boy, why do you want to pick me?'

'Because I like you very much. You are very beautiful.'

'All right,' said the lily of the valley with a quiet sigh, 'Pick me. But before you do, tell me how beautiful I am.'

The boy looked at the lily of the valley. It was really beautiful. It was like the morning sky, and the azure water in the pond, and like something else that was very beautiful. The boy felt all this, but he could not put it into words. He just stood looking at the lily of the valley, enchanted by the beauty of the flower. He stood there without saying a word.

'You can keep growing, little bell,' whispered the boy quietly.

The girl and the chamomile flower

One bright sunny day, a little girl was playing in a green glade. Suddenly, she heard someone crying. She listened more attentively and realized that the cry was coming from under a stone at the end of the glade. The stone was not large, but very hard. The girl leaned over the stone and asked, 'Who is that crying under the stone?'

'It is me, a chamomile flower,' replied a soft, weak voice from under the stone. 'Please free me, little girl, I can't breathe under this stone.'

The girl threw the stone aside and saw a tender chamomile flower.

'Thank you, little girl,' said the chamomile, breathing a deep sigh of relief. 'You have freed me from my stone prison.'

'How did you end up under the stone?' asked the girl.

'The stone tricked me,' said the chamomile flower. 'In autumn, when I was just a little seed, I was seeking a warm place to shelter from the winter cold. The stone gave me shelter, promising to protect me from the cold and heat. However, when I told him that I want to see the sun, it nearly crushed me. Little girl, I want to be yours! Let's be friends!'

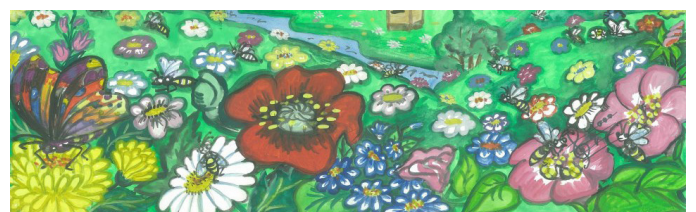
'All right, I'll be your friend,' the girl agreed.

The girl and the chamomile flower became friends. Every morning, the girl would come to visit the chamomile flower and they would greet the sun together.

'It is so nice to be yours!' the chamomile liked to say.

'But what if you grew in the forest or by the road? What if you didn't belong to anybody?' asked the girl.

'I would die from grief,' quietly replied the chamomile. 'But I know that there are no flowers that do not belong to anybody. They are always somebody's. Can you see that bell-shaped poppy flower? He is friends with the sun. The tiny blue forget-me-not is a friend of the spring breeze. A flower cannot live if it doesn't belong to anybody.'





Stories

We need both the nightingale and the beetle

A nightingale sang in the garden. Its song was beautiful. It knew that everyone loved its singing, and it looked around with pride at the flowering orchard, the bright blue sky, and a little girl who was sitting in the orchard and listening to its song.

Not far from the nightingale flew a large horned beetle. It made a loud buzzing sound as it flew. The nightingale stopped singing and said to the beetle with irritation, 'Stop your buzzing. You're spoiling my singing. No-one needs your buzzing. In fact, it would be better, beetle, if you did not exist at all.'

The beetle answered with dignity, 'No, nightingale, the world needs me, just as it needs you.'

'You are a wise one!' laughed the nightingale. 'Do you really believe people need you. Let's ask that little girl. She will tell us who people need and who they do not need.'

The nightingale and the beetle flew over to the little girl and asked her, 'Tell us little, girl, who should we keep in this world, the nightingale or the beetle?'

'We should keep both the nightingale and the beetle,' answered the little girl. She thought a little more and added, 'How could we have a world without beetles?'

The little girl and the tit

It was a cold winter. A little girl named Natasha hung a feeder for tits on an apple tree and every day she brought roasted flax seeds. A tit was always waiting for her. Natasha smiled joyfully and the tit sang for her and pecked at the seeds.

In spring the tit said to the little girl, 'You don't need to bring me food anymore. Now I can find

food for myself. Good-bye until next winter!'

'Good-bye, little tit,' Natasha replied.

Next winter, when the ground was covered in snow, the tit came once again to the bird feeder, but it was full of snow. The tit was worried. It asked the apple tree, 'Apple tree, please tell me why Natasha is not here. Surely, she has not forgotten me?'

'No, she has not forgotten. She is sick.'

The tit fell ill at heart. It sat on a branch and thought to itself, 'I will fly to see the little girl. I need to find a way to cheer her up. I should bring her a present, but what can I give her? Everything is covered in snow.'

The tit decided to bring Natasha a song. It flew to her house, in through the little ventilation window, settled on the end of Natasha's bed, and sang to her.

Natasha began to feel better.

The purple flower

In the middle of the night, a rose bud opened and straightened its gentle purple petals. A new flower was born. She was not beautiful yet: her petals had still not fully straightened, and one petal was a bit wrinkled.

The rose looked at the stars twinkling in the sky, quietly shivered, and whispered, 'The dawn is breaking. I need to introduce myself to the sun in all my beauty. The whole world will be looking at me and my purple petals.'

The petals roused themselves. The wrinkled petal straightened up. A drop of dew fell onto its purple surface, trembled, and also turned purple.

The flower stood tall, its petals quivered, the drop of dew shuddered and shone with many shades of purple.

'Look,' the flower told its petals, 'Even the sky in the east has turned purple. It is because of our beauty. The whole world will be purple!'

Having made this pronouncement, the flower froze in anticipation.

But the purple sky turned pale, then scarlet, and then a rosy blue.

Surprised, the rose looked around. Suddenly, she saw a green tree with a white candle on it.

'Who are you?' asked the flower.

'I am a chestnut. A chestnut flower.'

'Why are you not purple? Why are you white? Why is the sky blue? And why are the trees green?'

'If everything looked the same, there would not be any beauty in the world,' answered the chestnut flower.

