

Sukhomlinsky News



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

A kind word

A mother had a little girl named Olya. When Olya turned five years old, she fell gravely ill. She caught a cold, took to her bed, began to cough and weakened by the minute.

One by one, relatives began to visit the sorrowful mother: Olya's aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers. Everyone brought something delicious and nutritious: linden honey and scrumptious butter, fresh wild berries and nuts, quail eggs and chicken soup. Everyone said, 'You should eat well, you should breathe fresh air, then the illness will disappear into the deep forests and swamps.'

Olya ate the honeycomb and the scrumptious butter, wild berries and nuts, quail eggs and chicken soup, but nothing helped. The little girl could hardly get out of bed.

One day, all her relatives gathered around the sick girl's bed. Ninety-year old grandfather Athanasius said, 'She is missing something, but I cannot tell what.'

Suddenly the door opened, and Olya's one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother walked into the house. All the relatives had long forgotten her. She kept to herself for many years now, not going anywhere and not visiting anyone. However, when she found out about her great-granddaughter's illness, she decided to set out to visit Olya.

The great-grandmother approached the sick girl's bed, sat on a stool, took Olya's hand into her own wrinkled one and said, 'I don't have honeycomb or scrumptious butter. I don't have fresh wild berries or nuts. I don't have quail eggs or chicken soup. I am old and can hardly see. I have brought to you, my dear great-granddaughter, only one gift: my sincere wish. One wish has planted itself in my heart—that you, my little flower, be healed and rejoice again in the bright sun.'

And this kind word carried such great strength of love that little Olya's heart began to beat more quickly, her cheeks became rosier, and in her eyes joyful little fires began to flicker.

'That's what little Olya was missing,' said Grandfather Athanasius, 'a kind word.'



Stories about friendship, kindness and love

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

This month I am once again presenting translations of stories from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology, all from the section entitled 'Journeys to the wellsprings of thought'. Thematically they are similar to the stories in last month's newsletter, touching on friendship, kindness and love.

The stories include some sensitive portrayals of friendship, and the internal feelings of young people.

I hope you find them meaningful.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

The lily of the valley by the window

Natasha from our class has been ill for six months. She has a serious illness: her legs lie motionless, as if they do not belong to her. Natasha has to stay in bed day and night.

We do not forget Natasha, and visit her every day. We have learnt to read well, and so has Natasha. We often draw pictures of a butterfly or a lark and take them to her. She loves butterflies and larks.

When spring arrives Natasha's bed is placed by the window. She looks at the grass and the leaves and says, 'I so want to walk on the grass.'

One day Natasha sees two big green leaves, like two ribbons, in the middle of the grass.

'Look,' she whispers, 'A lily of the valley!'

A lily of the valley really has grown in her garden. How did it end up here, in the middle of the grass?

Every day we go to see if the lily of the valley has flowered yet. When at last little white bells appear between the green leaves, Natasha is so pleased that her cheeks turn rosy.

But then, suddenly, trouble comes. During the night there is a heavy downpour. Early in the morning, before sunrise, while Natasha is still asleep, we come to her garden and see that the lily of the valley is flattened. What should we do? This will be a source of great sorrow for Natasha...

We take a spade into the forest, dig up a lily of the valley, and transplant it to the spot under Natasha's window.

When Natasha wakes, she asks her mother to open her window. We are already waiting for her. Natasha smiles and asks us, 'How is the lily of the valley?'

'It is flowering. You can see its little white bells.'

'And I was so worried... There was a thunderstorm last night, with strong winds, and I dreamt that the storm flattened the lily of the valley.'

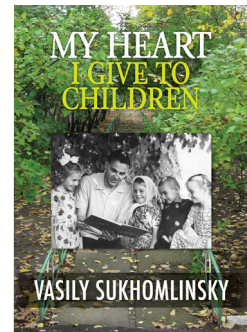
The hardest test

Two grade four students, Mitya and Sasha, are bending over their sheets of paper. Today they have their most difficult maths test. Galina Grigorievna said that whatever mark they get on this test will be their mark for the year.

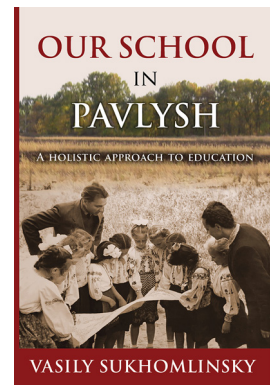
Mitya has already solved the problem and is copying his answer from his rough notes onto a clean sheet of paper. Mitya is the best maths student in the class.

Sasha has been seated next to Mitya to help him improve, because Sasha is lagging behind. But even though he is a slow thinker, he is a very proud boy. He will never copy someone else's work. Even now, Mitya has placed his rough notes where Sasha can see them, as if to say, 'Look, here is the solution to the problem.' But Sasha is frowning, fixing his eyes on his own sheet of paper, and will not look at Mitya's work.

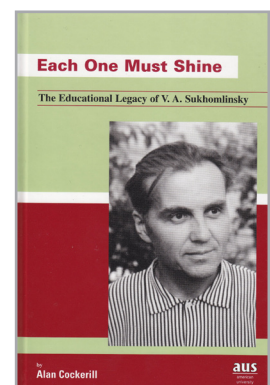
Mitya feels sorry for Sasha. His heart aches with a feeling of foreboding. Once again it is going to be like it always is after a test. Mitya will have a top mark, and Sasha will just manage to scrape a pass. Perhaps Galina Grigorievna will not even give Sasha a mark, saying that he has not yet earned a mark and needs to do a bit more work. Mitya will be ashamed to look Sasha in the eyes. For two weeks Sasha will be silent and brooding. And when Mitya asks him to go somewhere (it is already warm enough to swim in the river), Sasha will say he does not have time, because he has to help his mother...



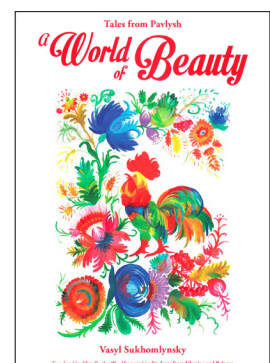
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With a deep sigh, Mitya deliberately makes a mistake. He leaves out one line of his answer, so that he can get just a pass mark on this difficult test, the same as Sasha. A wave of joy pours over Mitya's heart, and it stops aching. He has passed the hardest test.

Strawberries for Natasha

In grade three there is a little girl named Natasha. She was sick for a long time. When she came back to school, she was very pale, and tired quickly. Andreika told his mother about Natasha.

'That girl needs to eat honey and strawberries,' said his mother. 'Then she will become strong, with rosy cheeks... Take her some strawberries, Andreika.'

Andreika wanted to take some strawberries for Natasha, but for some reason he felt ashamed. That is what he told his mother: 'I'd feel ashamed. I won't take them...'

'Why would you feel ashamed?' his mother asked in surprise.

Andreika did not know why.

The next day he took a pack of strawberries anyway. When lessons ended, he went over to Natasha. He gave her the pack of strawberries and quietly said, 'These are strawberries. Eat them, and your cheeks will turn red.'

The little girl took the strawberries. And then something amazing happened. Her cheeks turned as red as a poppy flower. She tenderly looked into Andreika's eyes and whispered, 'Thank you.'

'Why did her cheeks suddenly turn red?' wondered Andreika. 'She hasn't even eaten the strawberries yet.'

The flower of friendship

Mitya was in grade three. His father had died, and his mother was often sick. He had two little sisters. His mother often could not work, and then it was very difficult for the family. Sometimes, when Mitya's mother saw him off for school, she did not give him any lunch or any money for lunch. On days like that, Mitya spent the lunch break waiting for the next lesson, standing by a window with an aquarium. He used to watch the fish and wait for the bell to ring. The break seemed very long, and the boy wanted it to end as soon as possible.

One day, during the lunch break, a girl with blonde hair and deep blue eyes approached Mitya. He knew that her name was Katya and that she was studying in grade four. One day at a Pioneer meeting he had spent a lot of time looking at her eyes and admiring how beautiful they were. Katya had looked over at him and had been embarrassed... When Katya came over to the aquarium, stood next to him, and even touched his hand with hers, Mitya's heartbeat raced.

'Mitya, would you like some bread and butter?' asked Katya.

Mitya felt uncomfortable and ashamed, and his

face turned red.

'Take it, don't be ashamed,' said Katya. 'And here's a piece of sausage and half an apple. Mum always cuts my apple into halves so it will be easier to eat.'

Mitya accepted the bread and butter, and the sausage and the apple. It all tasted very good. He forgot to thank Katya, and when he thought of it during the lesson, he felt very ashamed.

The next day the same thing happened. Katya gave Mitya half her lunch. Mitya had a feeling that she was giving him the bigger halves. They stood by the aquarium, ate, and watched the goldfish.

After they had eaten, the boy and girl dreamt about what it would be like to be a fish in an aquarium. Do they realise that outside the walls of their little home there is a wide and wonderful world with a sky, a sun, clouds and stars? Now Mitya did not want the break to end so quickly. Now, for some reason, the lunch break seemed shorter.

And then one day someone noticed that Katya was giving half her lunch to Mitya and wrote about it in the school newspaper. Wasn't it great, they wrote, that she had the awareness to help a fellow student? If only everyone could be like Katya...

At the next lunch break Katya ran to the aquarium, but Mitya was not there. She cried. Mitya was sitting on a bench at the far end of a half-lit corridor. He was afraid that someone would come up to him and ask, 'Was that you they wrote about in the school newspaper?'

And sure enough, two girls ran up to him. He did not know what class they were in. They were about two years older than him. They sat down next to Mitya and one of them said, 'This is where he was hiding... We have been looking for you, Mitya. Our Pioneer troop has decided to help you. Look, we have brought you some lunch. Please take it and don't be shy...'

Mitya burst into tears and ran away. He ran to his class, collected his books, and walked home. The next day he came to school pale, with tortured eyes. Now Katya and Mitya kept far apart, but they were experiencing the same feeling. It seemed to them that the beautiful flower that they loved and admired, that is known as friendship, had been seized by dozens of hands, and that dozens of fingers were now poking at every petal.





Stories

A flower or a wolf's jaws?

Two boys, Sergeika and Mikola, were walking home from school. Sergeika was happy. The teacher had asked him three questions today and had given him a top mark.

But Mikola was sad and thoughtful. He had been asked out to the blackboard twice and had answered badly. The teacher had written a failing mark in his homework diary and had said, 'When I see your mother, I will tell her about your mark.'

It was a warm spring day, and the sun was shining. A white cloud was drifting across the blue sky. Sergeika looked at the cloud and said, 'Look, Mikola. What a beautiful cloud! It looks like a white rose. Look, its delicate petals have just opened, and they are trembling in the wind!'

Mikola looked at the cloud for a long time, then quietly said, 'What petals? What flower? The cloud looks like a wolf. Look, its head is on that side. The wolf has opened its jaws. It is vicious and ready to attack someone.'

The boys looked at the cloud for a long time, and each one saw something different.

A scarf for Grandma Efrosinya

Grandma Efrosinya had worked at our school for forty years. She knew all the students, and all their parents too, because she had watched the mothers and fathers grow up. Long ago, when they first enrolled in the school as little children, she had led them to their various classes, and now they would soon be grandparents.

After lessons, all the students came to a meeting. The school principal said, 'I would like you to think about what gifts we can present to Grandma Efrosinya. On Saturday we will have a gathering of the whole school community to see her off.'

The grade five students returned to their classroom after the meeting and began to discuss what they could give Grandma Efrosinya. Some thought they should give her a picture album. Others proposed buying a book, and some

suggested a little alarm clock.

Maksim said, 'My father told me that a long time ago, a little grade one student cut his leg with a piece of glass. Grandma Efrosinya—she was a young woman back then—took a white scarf from her head and bandaged the wound with it. There was a lily of the valley embroidered in the corner of the scarf. The whole scarf was covered in blood...'

'We'll buy Grandma Efrosinya a white silk scarf!' the children decided.

They collected scrap metal and received money for it. They went to the shop, but there were no scarves there. Someone told them there were silk scarves in the city. They travelled to the city, but there were no white silk scarves there either. They bought some white silk, and the girls embroidered a lily of the valley in the corner.

When they presented the white silk scarf to Grandma Efrosinya, she looked Maksim in the eyes and said, 'That is just like the scarf I bandaged your father's leg with... He had eyes just like you... Thank you, children...'

My dad is all better

Katya is a little girl in grade one with thick blonde hair in pig tails. Today she is very happy. Her father was sick in hospital for more than a year and had three operations. It was a very sad time for Katya and her mother. Sometimes Katya would wake in the middle of the night and hear her mother crying.

But today her father was back at work, fit and healthy. Joy shone in Katya's eyes. When she arrived at school, she met two of her classmates, Petya and Grisha, in the yard. She shared her happiness with them: 'My dad is all better.'

Petya and Grisha looked at Katya and shrugged their shoulders in surprise. Without saying a word, they ran off to play with their ball.

Katya went over to some girls who were playing school. 'My dad is all better,' she said, and joy shone in her eyes. One of the girls, Nina, seemed surprised and asked, 'So what?'

Katya felt a lump in her throat and found it hard to breathe. She went over to a solitary poplar tree on the edge of the school yard and burst into tears.

'Why are you crying Katya?' asked a quiet, tender voice. It was Kostya, a boy who hardly ever talked and who sat in the back row.

Katya raised her head, and between her sobs she said, 'My dad is all better...'

'That's great!' said Kostya joyfully. 'In the pine forest near my house there are already some snowdrops in flower. Why don't you come to my place after school, and we can pick some snowdrops and take them to your dad.'

Joy shone in Katya's eyes.