

Sukhomlynsky News



Who is scarier, God or Grandpa Trokhym?

Yurko had a grandfather and a grandmother—Grandpa Trokhym and Grandma Paraska. The grandfather was a beekeeper. The grandmother was a housewife. Both were very religious. They believed in God and went to church.

Yurko was a grade two student. Grandma Paraska would tell him a lot about God, about how powerful he was, and how he knew everything. 'Do you see that icon on the wall? That is God's image,' his grandmother told him. 'God sees everything and knows everything. He sees everything that we do, and if we do something wrong, he punishes us.'

Over the summer, the beehives were always taken far away into the fields, and Grandpa Trokhym lived with the bees from spring to winter. He lived in a small, brightly lit hut that had been built for him. Each spring, Grandma Paraska would hang an icon on the wall in that hut in the steppes, so that Grandpa Trokhym would not forget God. She would take the icon home over winter.

During the summer, Grandma Paraska and Yurko would often visit Grandpa Trokhym. They would bring him clean linen and clothes, freshly cooked borsch (the grandfather loved borsch!) and fried chicken.

In the hut there were some large tanks of honey. One day, Grandpa Trokhym stepped out for a moment, and Grandma Paraska quickly stepped over to one of the metal tanks, opened it, filled a jar with honey and hid it in her basket. Then she took out another empty jar. She was about to fill it as well, when she heard Grandpa Trokhym's heavy footsteps outside. She quickly hid the jar in her basket, sat down on a bench by the window, folded her arms, and looked intently at a beehive outside.

Yurko watched everything that his grandmother did. He saw that God was also carefully watching her from the icon on the wall.

'If Grandma isn't afraid of God,' thought Yurko. 'Why is she afraid of Grandpa Trokhym?'

That thought kept bothering Yurko. On their way home, he asked, 'Grandma, who is scarier, God or Grandpa Trokhym?'

'Why are you asking?' asked his grandmother in surprise.

'God saw you steal the honey, and you weren't afraid,' said Yurko. 'But as soon as you heard Grandpa Trokhym coming, you looked scared and hid the empty jar.'

Yurko's grandmother looked at him reproachfully and shook her head.



Words and deeds

Dear reader,

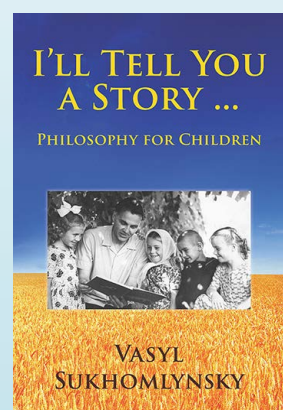
I hope you are keeping well in these troubled times.

This month's stories are quite varied, but two of the most interesting ones show that adults' behaviour can be very puzzling when seen from the point of view of a child.

In 'Who is scarier, God or Grandpa Trokhym?' a boy's grandmother acts in a way that is quite contrary to what she has taught him. In 'The sound of an axe,' a boy's father behaves in a way that his son cannot understand. Most of the stories relate in some way to how a person's conscience operates.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



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From *I'll tell you a story ...*

The man with one leg

At the bus stop, a man clambered on who only had one leg and walked on crutches. On his chest were several ribbon bars from the medals he had been awarded. He had lost a leg during World War II.

The bus was packed full. The war veteran stood next to a seat where a young man and an old woman were sitting. The young man had a transistor radio. He saw the handicapped war veteran, but quickly turned his eyes away and looked out the window.

The old woman stood and invited the war veteran to sit down.

'What an idea,' snorted the man with one leg. 'How can I take a seat from a lady? There are men sitting here.'

The young man heard these words but did not even turn his head.

They travelled on like this for several stops. The young man sat on a seat for two, while next to him stood a man with one leg and an old woman. An oppressive silence fell over the bus.

'Good for nothing,' muttered an old man sitting by the door. The young man appeared not to hear these words.

Hurtful words

A little boy was playing loudly. His mother asked him not to make so much noise because his father was sick. Instead of listening to his mother, the boy lost his temper and said some rude, hurtful words to her.

Deeply wounded, the mother started crying. The boy felt ashamed and begged his mother, 'Please, Mum, forget those rude words I said. Forgive me!'

'I can forgive you, but I cannot forget your rude words,' his mother replied. 'It is easier to catch a swallow in the sky than to forget hurtful words.'

Lost coins

Stepanko found some coins in the schoolyard—twenty *kopiika*.

'Somebody must have lost them,' thought the boy. 'I'll take them to Mariia Grygorivna.' And he took the money to his teacher.

Mariia Grygorivna praised him. 'You are a good, honest person, Stepanko,' she said.

It was during the lunch break. Stepanko was surprised to hear the school radio airing a story about what he had done. They were saying how Stepanko, a student from grade one, had found some money in the schoolyard and had not kept it to spend on candy and ice-cream, but instead had taken the money to his teacher.

The next day, Stepanko's photo was in the school bulletin. He managed to sound out the headline one syllable at a time: 'We should follow Stepanko's example.'

Several days later, during the lunch break, another grade one student, Semenko, approached the teacher and said, 'Mariia Grygorivna, I found thirty *kopiika* in the schoolyard. Somebody must have lost it.'

'Really?' asked the teacher in surprise. 'Two fifteen-*kopiika* coins?'

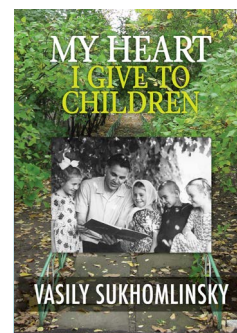
'No ... Two ten-*kopiika* coins and two five-*kopiika* coins ...'

Mariia Grygorivna smiled strangely and shook her head. 'All right. I expect we will find the owner,' she said.

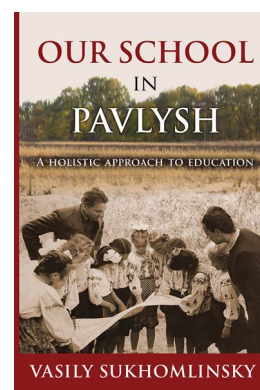
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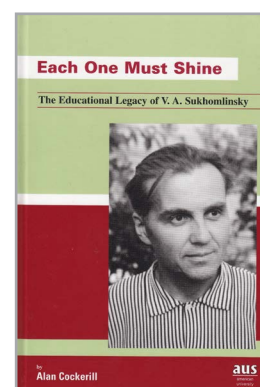
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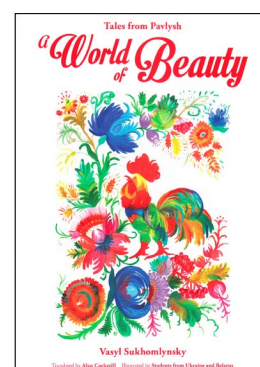
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One day passed, then a second, and a third. Semenکو came to the teacher and asked her, 'Have you found the person who lost the money?'

'No, I haven't,' she said. 'But think hard, Semenکو. Perhaps it was you who lost the money, and forgot that you lost it, and then found it again?'

Semenکو's face turned a deep red ...

Why was mum upset?

One day, we had visitors—an elderly couple. They were not our relatives. They were good friends from a village nearby.

My mother invited our guests into the living room. She set up the dinner table, seated the guests, and served dinner. That day she had made borshch with chicken. It was delicious. After the borshch, my mother served fried fish.

Our elderly guests did not eat much. They left borshch in their bowls and only tried a little fish. My mother was concerned about it and kept urging them, 'Please eat up, dear guests.'

The old people assured her that they were not hungry. Only after the guests had left did my mother realise why they had not eaten much, and it made her very upset.

She had placed a loaf of white bread on the table but had only cut two small slices from it. She could not say why she had neglected to cut more. Perhaps she was just in a hurry. The old people ate their food with bread and had felt too uncomfortable to ask for more, and that must be why they had eaten so little.

My mother never forgot that visit, and whenever she recalled it, her face would turn red.

Fried chicken

This happened during the difficult year that followed the war. Those were hard times for everyone, at home and at work. When people went to work in the fields, all they brought for lunch was a small piece of dark rye bread, a boiled potato and an onion.

One day, the farmers sat down in the middle of the field to eat, and everyone took out their lunches, but Karpo had fried chicken for lunch. He did not feel comfortable putting his delicious food out next to everyone else's rye bread and potatoes, so he went and hid behind some bushes and ate his lunch there.

Everybody else finished their food in complete silence and felt rather awkward.

Eventually, everyone, including Karpo, finished their lunch. Once Karpo had eaten his chicken, he

wrapped the bones in some newspaper and put them in his pocket.

Karpo came out from behind the bushes and joined the other workers, but he could not look them in the eye.

Juicy red apples

Some children were heading home after a long hiking trip. They still had about seven kilometres to walk. They were passing through a large village. It was very hot.

The children stopped by a house. In the front yard, they could see a well and an apple tree. The children could not take their eyes off its juicy red apples.

'I wish I could have an apple,' said little Olesia.

'Let's go in and ask for a drink of water,' suggested Mykola. 'Maybe the owner will let us each have an apple. There she is, sitting by the well.'

The children knocked at the gates.

'What do you want?' asked the woman, approaching the fence.

'Could you please give us a drink of water?' asked Olesia.

The woman looked grimly at the children and said, 'I'll bring you some.'

A minute later she brought a bucket of water and put it down outside the gate.

'Help yourselves,' she said.

The children drank the water but kept looking over at the apples.

Betrayal

A woman's husband passed away. She buried him and planted a rose bush on his grave. However, after the funeral, the woman did not once visit the cemetery and never watered the rose, so it died.

The husband had a dog who was his faithful friend. As a matter of fact, the dog's name was 'Friend'. When the man was buried and everyone left the cemetery, Friend stayed by the grave. He lay down on the grass and whined mournfully. Then he fell silent and watched the rose as it slowly withered. When the rose finally died, Friend whined one last time, closed his eyes, and died.

People might say that if the woman had watered the rose, and it had flourished and bloomed, Friend would still be alive.

The dog had at least learnt to be faithful to a human being. But the woman ... She forgot her husband so quickly that even the flowers on his grave did not have time to bloom.

Disapproval

A building was being constructed on a vacant lot. The workers excavated a trench for the foundation and a deep pit for the boiler room. A tree was growing in the middle of the construction site: a beautiful cherry tree covered in blossom.

Everybody understood that the tree was doomed and was living out its last days, because workers had already started laying bricks for the walls. The tree had to be cut down, but nobody would lift a hand to do it.

And then somebody suggested, 'Let's ask Fedko.'

This Fedko was a grim, silent, merciless fellow. Two years ago, he had left his wife and his three children, and he had not visited the children once.

Fedko heard his name mentioned and asked the supervisor, 'How much will you pay me to do it?'

When Fedko cut down the cherry tree, everyone left the construction site. They all suddenly had a job to do somewhere else, as long as it was nowhere near the walls of the building.

Later, everyone avoided Fedko and did not want to talk to him. 'Why are you treating me like this?' Fedko asked, 'Somebody had to cut the tree down.'

Yes, somebody had to. Everyone understood that to be true, but somehow, they still disapproved of what Fedko had done.

The sound of an axe

One Sunday, nine-year-old Yashko was returning from a neighbouring village with his father. They had been to visit Yashko's grandmother. The path led through a forest.

It was a clear spring day. It was not yet hot, but the sun was already beating down. It was nice and cool in the shade of the trees. The boy's father said, 'Let's have a little rest.'

They sat on the grass. Suddenly they heard the chopping of an axe in the distance.

'Someone's cutting down a tree,' said Yashko's father with concern. 'How dare they? No-one is allowed to cut trees in this forest. Let's go quickly, Yashko, and catch the thief.'

They got up quickly and walked towards the sound of the axe. Soon they could see people. Two men were standing near a graceful oak tree. One was chopping while the other had a rest.

Yashko could see that his father was becoming more and more agitated.

'That is how you destroy a forest,' he said with indignation.

But when they drew close enough to recognise the men, Yashko's father suddenly lowered his head and fell silent. He seemed to be ashamed of something. He hid behind some bushes and took Yashko with him.

'It's Uncle Mykola chopping the tree,' mumbled Yashko's father with a sigh. 'Let's go home, son.'

Quietly, so as not to be seen, the father walked out of the forest, leading his son by the hand.

Yashko could not understand why his father's indignation had given way to awkwardness. 'Dad, they're still thieves, aren't they?' he asked.

His father did not answer.

The girl in felt boots

It was a cold winter morning. The sky in the east was crimson-red, and the trees were covered with frost. Three girls were making their way along a snow-covered path that led from a farm hidden in a deep ravine. They were hurrying to a New Year's party that was taking place at school. They still had to cover another five kilometres on foot.

Two of the girls, Tania and Galia, were wearing shoes, while the third girl, Olia, was wearing warm felt boots.

'My feet are freezing!' said Tania.

'So are mine!' replied Galia.

Olia was silent. Her feet were not cold. They were warm, but she felt uncomfortable. She felt guilty because she was wearing warm felt boots. 'Why did I put on these warm felt boots?' she thought.

'My feet are really freezing!' groaned Tania again.

'So are mine!' echoed Galia.

Olia remained silent.

