

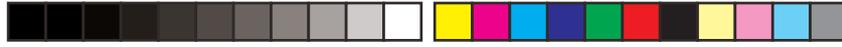
It Isn't Fair!

Ivan stared miserably out of his apartment window. Outside, the golden Moscow autumn filled the streets with color. A playful wind scooped leaves from the lawn below and tossed them into the blue, cloudless sky that hung over the great Russian city.

Ivan closed his eyes, trying to shut out the view. Every falling leaf reminded him that harvest was near. Harvest! His teacher, Sophia Alexandrovna, had been smiling when she made the announcement. The class was being given a wonderful opportunity! They were to be excused from school for a week to work in the harvest. They would take their places beside the honoured agricultural workers on the Lenin Collective Farm in the village of Dedinovo near Moscow and would assist in fulfilling the region's produce quota in the current Five Year Plan.

A knot of dread was tightening in his stomach as he remembered the way Sophia Alexandrovna's eyes had rested on him. 'The Young Pioneers program will be continued while you students are on the farm. It will include outdoor sports and games, horseback riding, and camping techniques.'

The class had stirred in pleasure, the students exchanging smiles of anticipation. Ivan's face had flushed, although he tried to ignore his teacher's



IVAN AND THE HIDDEN BIBLE

glance at his empty collar. As a Christian, he did not wear the red scarf that identified the members of the Communist Young Pioneers. He was the only one in his class who did not belong. Ivan knew he would not be included in the Pioneer games and activities on the collective farm. In his mind, Ivan could hear the familiar taunts of his schoolmates.

‘Ivan is too *good* to be a Young Pioneer!’

‘Only dummies can’t join Young Pioneers. Why don’t you learn something once in a while?’

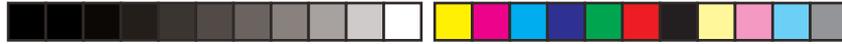
‘Are you a foreign spy, Ivan, that you don’t join our Young Pioneers?’

‘Won’t your God let you join, Ivan? Doesn’t He like us?’

Ivan had always shrugged off their scorn with an easy smile that hid the way he really felt. ‘I’m a Christian and Christians believe in God. Young Pioneers don’t. That’s all. That’s why I don’t belong.’

But today striding along the leaf-scattered sidewalk, his smile had vanished as soon as his classmates were a distance from him. Out of the corner of his eye, he had seen small groups of boys laughing together, throwing leaves, pushing and falling into the grass park way that ran along the side of the wide city street. A terrible ache had overcome him. ‘I don’t belong. I don’t belong. I don’t belong.’ Remembering it, Ivan turned away from the window in a sudden rush of pain.

‘It isn’t *fair!*’ the words burst out at the same moment as his mother entered the small living-room.



IT ISN'T FAIR

She put the gleaming supper plates and cutlery she was carrying on the table and raised her eyebrows in question.

Katya, Ivan's ten-year-old sister, jumped up from the chair where she had been reading and began laying the places for dinner, watching her brother with interest. Ivan rarely complained. He was the one who had taught her to smile when troubles came. And he had taught her to pray about them, too.

'What isn't fair, Ivan?' There was something in the tired way that Momma asked the question that made Katya feel suddenly sad. She looked quickly away from Momma's face and concentrated on setting the table with special care.

'It's not fair to be left out of everything just because I am a Christian. Everyone is happy about working in the harvest except me. I won't be able to join in camping and the sports, and I'll be bothered all day long about being a Christian. Momma, you must admit it really isn't fair!'

A smile dimpled Momma's cheek as she pushed back a strand of hair from her forehead. In spite of the borscht that was bubbling and pushing at the lid of the soup pot in the kitchen, she sat down on the sofa and patted the place beside her. Ivan flung himself on the couch.

'It isn't fair,' she began, still smiling.

'Then what's so funny about it?' Ivan knew he was almost rude, but hurt twisted inside him.

'Ivan, I am only smiling because life isn't fair. Where did you get the idea that things are fair?'



IVAN AND THE HIDDEN BIBLE

‘They’re supposed to be! They are for other people!’

‘It’s fair, is it, that you should belong to the Lord Jesus, when others are lost? It’s fair that you should know His forgiveness and peace when so many other boys and girls have nowhere to go with their guilt and sin?’

Katya smiled hopefully at Ivan. She didn’t like him to be upset.

Ivan caught her anxious expression and suddenly began to laugh.

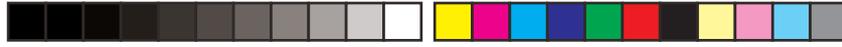
‘I’m sorry, Momma,’ he gasped when he could get his breath. ‘I was remembering the mocking things some in my class have said to me. And I guess I was angry because I won’t be able to play on the farm soccer team while I am there.’

‘But Katya is like a little mother, always worried about me – the way she looked just now – as if she would fight the world for me. I don’t know – it was funny. And sweet.’

He quickly added the last two words as he saw Katya looking offended at his amusement.

‘Come on, Katya! I’ll help you set the table!’





IT ISN'T FAIR

Momma lifted herself off the sofa and hurried into the kitchen. The lid of the soup was dancing, the steam rising in great puffs to the high ceiling of their apartment.

She turned down the gas flame under the borscht and sat down thoughtfully on a kitchen chair.

Her quiet face became clouded with a question.

'Shall I tell them?' she wondered.

'Perhaps it is time for the children to know.'