Conscience

Nina Karnaukhova hadn't prepared her algebra lesson and decided not to go to school.

But so that acquaintances wouldn't accidentally see her wandering around the city with books during the workday, Nina slipped off into the grove.

After placing the bag with her breakfast and the bundle of books under a bush, she ran off to chase a beautiful butterfly and ran into a little boy who was looking at her with kind, trusting eyes.

And since he was clutching an alphabet book with a notebook tucked inside it, Nina figured out what was going on and decided to tease him.

"Unfortunate truant!" she said sternly. "And at such a young age you're already deceiving your parents and the school?"

"No!" the little boy answered, surprised. "I was just on my way to class. But there's a big dog in the woods here. It barked, and I got lost."

Nina frowned. But the little boy was so funny and good-natured that she had to take him by the hand and lead him through the grove.

And Nina's bundle of books and her breakfast remained lying under the bush, because it would have been shameful to pick them up in front of the little boy now.

A dog slipped out from behind the branches, didn't touch the books, but ate the breakfast.

Nina came back, sat down, and burst into tears. No! She didn't feel sorry about the stolen breakfast. But the cheerful birds were singing too beautifully overhead. And it was very heavy on her heart, which was being gnawed by merciless conscience.