

# The Bigger Picture



*Forty Friendly Fables*

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## Forty Friendly Fables

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## 1 Feeding Your Family

Blackbird was up early, as usual, and already hopping around on the lawn. He had this special technique of making some quick hops in succession, which he knew would, in the earth below him, sound like gentle thumping, like rain in fact. He then stood still and tilted his head slightly, listening closely with his better ear. In this manner he went around the lawn to wake up the earthworms, to hear them making their way to the surface, and be there — at the ready — when they would least expect it. Ah, there it was: the sound of moving earth that he'd been listening out for. Now, all set for the peck...

'Stop!' shouted the purple worm that had just popped up with wide open eyes and a furious roar resonating in his throat.

Blackbird stopped in surprise. Worms normally never had time to speak before he got them.

'Why?' he said. 'I need to feed my family.'

'That's fair enough,' said Worm, 'but forgive me when I ask if you can't see that you're being rather stupid.'

'What's stupid about feeding your family?' asked Blackbird.

'Feeding your family isn't stupid at all,' said Worm. 'Nobody in their right mind would hold that against you. It's the way you go about it.'

‘What do you mean?’ said Blackbird. ‘Don’t you think I’m rather clever, making you all think that I am rain, so that you wake up, one by one, and make your way, voluntarily, to my dinner plate? Wouldn’t you say it’s you lot who are the stupid ones?’

‘Don’t be daft,’ said Worm. ‘Do you really believe that we all think that you are rain, that we are fooled by your silly little hopping noises?’

‘Well, why else would you come up to the surface when I hop around on the lawn?’ said Blackbird.

‘If you want to know the truth,’ said Worm, ‘it’s because we pity you. We know you have a family to feed, and we also know that it’s our duty to fill your plate. We’re just humble earthworms, you see, not very important like you, and therefore willing and pleased to serve you as a meal.’

‘Then, why did you just stop me pecking you up?’ said Blackbird.

‘Because there’s a much better way, sleepy head!’ said Worm. ‘You see, what will happen if you eat me now is that all my six children in my home down below will not get fed today. So, they will die of hunger. And you know what that means, don’t you?’

‘What does that mean?’ said Blackbird, slightly embarrassed to have to ask.

‘It means,’ said Worm, ‘that today us worms may be plenty, but tomorrow we will be sparse. It means that tomorrow you will have to work just as hard, if

not harder, to put food on your plate.'

Blackbird now looked thoughtful.

'You see,' said Worm, 'food stocks need to be managed carefully. If you eat me now, it means that there will be less for you to eat tomorrow. Whereas, if you could be a little less hasty and a little more forward thinking, my six children will have time to grow bigger and even start a family of their own. Soon there would be plenty of them to feed you and yours for many days and weeks to come.'

'I see what you mean,' said Blackbird.

Worm gave him a little more time to reflect on this and then said, 'Why don't you come back next week?'

'I'll do that, Worm,' said Blackbird. 'Thank you for your advice. It's very kind. I'll see you next week.'

'See you next week, friend,' said Worm.

And he popped himself back into the earth.