

As usual Blackbird was up early and already out on the lawn. He had this special hopping technique, which he knew would sound underground like a gentle thumping, like rain in fact. He then stood still for a moment, his head tilted with his best ear to the ground. In this manner he went around to wake up the rain worms, hear them find their way up and ready to surprise them 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 from 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 say you are being rather stupid.'

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

'Feeding your family is not 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 all voluntarily climb up 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 think we take you for rain, that we get fooled by your silly little hopping noises?'

'Well, why else would you come up when I hop around on the lawn?' said Blackbird.

'If you want the truth' said Worm, 'it is because we pity you. We know you have a family to feed, and that it is our duty to help. We're just worms you see, not very important really, happy to serve as your meal.'

'Than why did you just stop me pecking you up?' said Blackbird.

'Because there is a much better way, sleepy head!' said Worm. 'You see, if you eat me now, all six children in my home down there 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, embarrassed to have to ask.

'It means' said Worm, 'that today worms may be plenty, but tomorrow they'll be few. It means that tomorrow you will have to work just as hard, if not harder, to fill your plate.' Blackbird started to look thoughtful now.

'You see' said Worm, 'food stocks need to be managed carefully. If you eat me now, there will be less for you tomorrow. Whereas, if you were a little less hasty and a little more patient, my six children would have time to grow bigger and even start a family of their own. So then there would be plenty of them to feed you and yours.'

'Mmm, I see what you mean' said Blackbird.

Worm gave Blackbird some more time to think it over and then said: 'Why don't you come back next week?'

'I will', said Blackbird. 'Thank you for your advice Worm, that is really useful. I will see you next week.'

'You're welcome, friend' said Blackbird, and popped back into the earth.