

‘A TREASURE CHEST OF WISDOM’
FABLE SERIES FOR YOUNG AND OLD
Book I

*Of Wolves
and Lambs
and Others*

by

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Illustrated by Daniel J. Burke

ATInternational  Publishers

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To my dearest grandchildren:

Danny –

*the illustrator of this book,
Jeremy, and Faina.*

Acknowledgments

As one of the fables in this collection ascerts, a tree can't survive and blossom without roots, no matter how gorgeous and useful is its leafy crown. Similarly, no book springs up "on thin air" out of the author's egotism. From such point of view, this book is no exception. Of course, there are many people at the roots of this book and it is their contributions that made the book possible.

I will have to start this list with the names of three of my famous predecessors, Aesop, La Fontaine, and especially I.A. Krylov. Each and every fable in this particular collection is based on or is a direct or "creative" rewrite in "poetical" English of the eternal masterpieces of those Fable Giants of the Past.

This said, my respect and love go to my family members who were the first listeners, critics, and supporters of this work:

— My wife Nelly who patiently put up with quirks of an "old young" aspiring author and stoically survived through the dozens of readings of the dozens of versions of the dozens of stories in this book;

— My grandchildren Danny, Jeremy, and Faina, who provided an important encouragement for this work, often contributed to the fable contents, expression, and grammar, and on whom the fable "effectiveness" was frequently tested;

— My daughters, Olga and Fradiana, who at least never tried to discourage me from proceeding with this work, while condescendingly accepting it.

Now, to the “technical” side of the book’s “biography”. I would have a hard time to make this book without professional help that incorporated many dimensions, indeed:

— Almost all the fables went through quite rigorous, but friendly review in the North Brunswick, NJ, Writer Anonymous group;

— Mrs. Beth Epstein was the first to take a comprehensive professional look at this book as a whole, made important points with regard to the book’s contents and grammatical issues, and whose advice was decisive in finalizing the book targeted audience and use.

— The chapter illustrations and cover design produced by Daniel Burke became an integral part of the book’s fabric, enhancing the message, moral outreach, and readability, especially for the younger generation of readers.

— And last, but by any means not least, my gratitude and appreciation extend to my editor, Mrs. Reine D. Bethany, who literally “adopted” this project and, in my opinion, went far and beyond her duties when working on it and giving me professional advice. Combine this with deep understanding of the fable subjects, with excellent English, editorial and proofreading skills, and with generous amount of labor she put in this project, be it the word choice and cadence, or plain English grammar and usage! It becomes clear then that if, despite the author’s misgivings, this book has any chance for success, it is due in a great measure to the brilliant work done by the editor.

To all these good people my sincere thanks and appreciation!

Table of Contents

FOREWORD

Goodness, Kindness, and Smarts	viii
How to Use This Book	x

Chapter 1

BE AWARE

OF WHAT'S NOT FAIR

1	
The Wolf and the Crane	3
The Farmer and the Fox	4
The Lion and the Mouse	6
The Leaves and the Roots	8
The Hog under the Oak Tree.....	9

Chapter 2

THINKING SMART

IS HELPFUL ART

11	
The Lion and the Fox	13
The Crow and the Fox.....	14
The Lion and the Man	16
The Dragonfly and the Ant.....	18
The Monkeys.....	20

Chapter 3

BAD GUYS IN DISGUISE

23	
The Snake and the Goat Kid	25
The Wolf and the Lamb	26
The Wolf and the Cat.....	28
The Lion and the Gnat.....	30
The Wolf in the Kennel	32

Chapter 4

HONEST MIRROR

SHOWS IT CLEARER 35

The Monkey at the Mirror 37

The Elephant and the Poodle 38

The Fox and the Grapes 39

Two Barrels 40

The Cuckoo Bird and the Rooster 41

Chapter 5

COMMON SENSE

SAVES GREAT EXPENSE 43

The Monkey and the Glasses 45

The Cat and the Cook 46

The Ass and the Nightingale 48

Quartet 50

The Swan, the Pike, and the Lobster 52

Chapter 6

CHOOSE FRIENDS WISELY —

TREAT THEM NICELY 53

The Friend of a Snake 55

Two Boys 56

The Fire 58

The Robin and the Sparrow 59

Dog's Friendship 60

A WORD TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Goodness, Kindness, and Smarts

I don't think it will be an overstatement to say that when beasts, fishes, and birds speak up, we humans pay attention, often more than to people. Just imagine that at the next elections in your state, a boring and ineffective incumbent, who has reneged on all pre-election promises, is facing a strong roaring LION who has a host of new ideas. Who do you think would win? There is no doubt, about who!

Of course this scenario is just a joke. But the art of the fable often renders a powerful and persuasive interpretation of important issues and their implications — issues that can lose their appeal as points of discussion because, although important, they may sound as commonplace. Allegory somehow trips a logical wire in the human brain, inviting us to draw conclusions and driving these conclusions home. More so under oppressive regimes, where telling the truth in the open can put the “messenger” in a harms way! Therefore, although the original elements of fables can be traced far back into the ages, they have never lost appeal.

In the Western World, the fable literary genre per se is usually associated with the ancient Greek Aesop (around the V-th century BCE), although much earlier collections of fables were known thousands of years before (e.g., Rig Veda partially included later in Panchatantram in India, tales from ancient Egypt, Persia, even from the Bible). The fable tradition was carried on by fabulists of more recent times, like the French writer La Fontaine (1621— 1695), Lessing (1729 — 1781) of Germany, or Russian I.A. Krylov (1768 — 1844), to name just a few.

While neither of these great fabulists of the past ever lived in America, but perhaps today in this country we need fables more than ever! In our troubled world, the fable can provide a kind of moral reference and remind us of eternal humanistic values at the background of important contentious and not always happy events.

Not that there is lack of other references – religion, law, philosophy, literature and arts, our American Constitution, even the Emma Lazarus’s poem on the Statue of Liberty pedestal. But an additional reference, especially one tested by time and millions of readers, can be of great value. Besides, in our free but litigious society there still might be a need for an ingenious but effective libel protection, when one would rather call a spade a tool, instead of a spade. In short, it seems like a proper time to remind fellow Americans of the age-proven common sense that a fable offers.

This book aims to complement the existing literature, presenting the readers with stories that address the problems of human behavior. Many of these stories may sound familiar, but the fables are rendered here in meter and rhyme, and often re-interpreted, modernized, and “Americanized” to tackle our contemporary life. In fact, when writing this book there was never a goal to adhere to “the letter” of those old “prototype” plots, while “the spirit” and the morals of the fables, as presented here, were intended very much to fit our today’s reality.

Otherwise, I was largely following the works and tradition of I.A. Krylov and, to a lesser degree, the works of Aesop and La Fontaine. Krylov’s fables were an important part of my childhood reading, helping me to separate “good” from “bad” and to form a realistic outlook on the world at large. It is also important that, in original Russian, Krylov’s fables and interpretations of those “new old” topics are fascinating in presentation. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to compare the rich artistic language, the cultural beauty, the magic music of rhythm and rhyme created by the genius of Krylov and Russian national tradition with usually “gray”, boring, and frequently tasteless prose often being used to present fables in modern American literature. Thus, last but not least in these book objectives, stands the desire to introduce American readers to the heritage of I.A. Krylov, who is practically unknown in this country.

Anatoly Tsaliovich, 2005

How to Use This Book

You are reading Book I of 'A Treasure Chest Of Wisdom' Fable Series For Young And Old, entitled "Of Wolves and Lambs and Others"

This particular volume aims at readers, approximately corresponding to junior high and high school in American educational system, and up. However, keep in mind that such designation is necessarily arbitrary and incomplete. Take for example the fable "*The Wolf and the Lamb*," found in the Chapter 3. While young readers will see in it an engaging (albeit sad) animal story, older school students may recognize in the wolf familiar bullies from their class, while adults may draw a parallel with the Nazi Germany occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, or Saddam Hussein doing the same to Kuwait in more recent times, and similar. But whatever are the "real life" analogies, the fable's conclusion stays unequivocal: the pleas to and appeasement of a determined villain are "a losing proposition". At least, in the opinion of this author.

This book can be read individually, as well as within a group. It is the author's hope that kids (and also, maybe, parents and teachers) will enjoy reading it, as well as draw appropriate conclusions. And of course, a book of this kind is always an excellent present, "working" to the recipient's benefit long after the celebration cake is eaten!

However, there is more! Didactically, fables constitute an extremely persuasive and adaptive material making a case for discussing and interpreting real life with family, with friends, in school, at work. Isn't it for a reason, that in ancient Greece the most eloquent and skillful orators used fables to emphasize their political and social points? The fables can illustrate and even explain many timely issues of today, asking us to think about relationships at different levels: private and social, governmental and commercial, educational and domestic — the utility is infinite.

Following is a tentative and by no means all-encompassing set of possible general questions and activities that can be associated with reading these fables: