

# Nature's Mirror

Original Fables

by Father and Son

Ben and David Talley

Published by: The Better Earth Foundation

ISBN: **978-0-578-02124-9**

May it do you good to know that profits from the sale of this book go toward supporting Nature's Way Camp and/or other worthy endeavors for children.

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The authors' hopes are that those who read *Nature's Mirror* come away with lives more compassionate, courageous, and committed toward making the world a better place.

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# The Three Leaves' Wishes

Early one spring, three young leaves were born beneath the sun. The young three sprouted out . . . each from a tiny twig near the top of a tall tree.

Every new day, the sun rose a bit earlier and found the three young leaves wishing.

Each leaf wished for all the wonderful things they might do someday when they became grown leaves.

None of the three leaves had yet decided what their one most special wish might be.

One day, toward the middle of spring, the three leaves awoke to find the Wind taking on one of his many forms. This time the Wind visited the leaves as a sweet springtime breeze, blowing gently through their tree.

The spring breeze brought with it a strange sound. It was sort of a rustling noise that the three leaves had not heard before.

This strange rustling noise seemed to be coming from above.

The three leaves looked up toward the top of their tree. There they saw a crinkled-up, wrinkled old leaf. This old leaf was rare indeed, one of the few of his kind who would ever live to see a fifth season. (None of the three would admit it, but they were each a bit surprised that they had never noticed this old leaf before.)

The very old leaf looked down and began to speak. His voice crackled with age. "Be careful for what you wish, because wishes really do come true."

"You mean *your* wish came true?" asked the first leaf of the three.

"Every day," answered the old leaf. "My wish came true every day of my life."

"But you look so wrinkly and old," said the second leaf. "Is *that* what you wished for - to become all wrinkled and crinkled up?"

The three young leaves giggled together with silliness, as young leaves will do.

The old leaf waited patiently (for he had grown very used to waiting patiently) until the three young leaves ceased their silly giggling. Then he spoke again.

"I wished to become wise," he answered. "To become wise, I had to live through a long hard winter."

"But did you know all along", asked the third leaf, "that your wish was coming true?"

"My wish came true every day of my life," answered Wise Old Leaf. "But all along I never knew it . . . that is, until today. Today I discovered that wishes often come true in disguise."

The spring breeze blew again, only the tiniest bit harder than before.

*Snap!*

Wise Old Leaf fell loose from the tree and twirled down past the young three.

As he floated, Wise Old Leaf strained hard to speak his last words. "Your wishes will come true, I promise you! But I promise this too - you may not recognize your wishes as they happen. Wishes often come true in disguise!"

Never again did the three leaves mention Wise Old Leaf . . . never again, at least not to each other. But each night, as they slept, his dying words returned to life.

His words lived on in their dreams.

. . .

By the end of spring, each of the three leaves had decided on one very special wish, all their own.

The first leaf, the elder brother, was the first to announce his wish. "I wish to become a great explorer!" he proclaimed. "Someday I'll go on the most fantastic adventures. I'll discover many new places. From now on, you can call me Explorer Leaf!"

The other two leaves burst out laughing at their big brother, making Explorer a bit angry . . . and more than a bit embarrassed. They tried to restrain their laughter, but just couldn't seem to help it.

"My wish *will* come true. You'll see!" Explorer Leaf shouted at his little brother and sister. "Then you'll both be sorry you made fun of me."

"We're sorry we laughed at you," admitted his younger brother and little sister. "And we really don't mean to make fun of your wish. But, big brother, it's just that . . . well, how can a leaf explore the world when hanging from a tree?"

Explorer Leaf stiffened his green stem and said, "Just you wait and see! I've been listening to the migrating birds while they roost in our tree. I've heard them speak of wondrous faraway things and places. I'm going to explore places a leaf can't even imagine."

This time, his little brother and sister said . . . nothing. They only exchanged a brief glance with each other in silence.

So Explorer Leaf spoke again, "Anyway, now it's your turn to tell me about your wishes."

The second leaf spoke up quickly, stretching out to his tallest height. He had the look of a leaf who been preparing a speech in his mind for quite some time. "I wish to become a famous soldier! I predict that someday I'll be known to every tree in the forest. And I'll be known for

one thing above all - unselfish courage. From now on, call me Soldier Leaf."

His brother and sister laughed harder than they'd ever laughed before.

When they finally stopped, Soldier Leaf spoke up again. "You'll be sorry you laughed at me. You'll see! Someday I'll be known as the bravest soldier this forest ever knew."

His older brother and little sister both apologized. "We're truly sorry," they said. "But we just can't imagine anything so brave that a *leaf* could ever do . . . at least, nothing so brave and courageous that every tree in the forest would know about it."

"You'll see!" shouted Soldier Leaf, now more certain than ever of his wish. "I'll do something so brave and unselfish that even Ancient Oak will speak out about it. And our tree says she hasn't uttered a word in two hundred seasons. Anyway . . . little sister, tell us about *your* wish."

"Yes," agreed Explorer Leaf. "Now, tell us, little sister. What great things are *you* going to do?"

The third leaf mumbled and stuttered around a bit on her stem.

Then she replied, "I suppose I'll just do what leaves do. I'll capture sunlight to feed our tree. And when the time comes that our tree doesn't need me anymore, I'll fall away to Mother Earth and feed the soil. Even my death will bring life to others. So I guess I just want to be . . . I want to be . . . a good leaf."

"A *good* leaf!" cried her brothers. "Good grief! What kind of wish is that?"

"Well," mumbled their little sister, "it doesn't matter to me if I never go on any great adventures. And I don't care if I'm ever famous. I just want to be who I am. From now on, you can call me . . . well, I guess . . . just call me Good Leaf."



Neither brother laughed. Certainly, neither one understood what their little sister meant. And really, neither did Good Leaf. She knew only to follow her wish.

Each of the three leaves kept their wishes throughout the spring. In fact, their wishes grew stronger with each day that the forest turned greener.

. . .

Then one day spring turned into summer, as spring always does.

A sudden summer thunderstorm swooped down and caught the three leaves by surprise. Again the Wind would visit the leaves, but not as a gentle, sweet breeze. This time the Wind came as a strong, rough gust.

Soldier Leaf shouted out orders. "Brace your selves!" he commanded. "Hold your stems tight!"

But his brother, Explorer Leaf, was much too filled with curiosity and wonder.

"Oh, my first thunderstorm!" cried Explorer. "I've got to stretch out my stem just a bit more to gain a better view! Oh, if only I could reach out just a tiny . . . *umph* . . . bit more."

"Don't stretch out any more, big brother!" cried his little sister.

"No, this is no time to explore!" yelled his younger brother.

*Snap!*

Suddenly, Explorer was snatched up by the gusty Wind and sent swirling high into the dark sky.

"No!" he cried. "This wasn't supposed to happen to me! Now my wish will *never* come true. Wise Old Leaf was wrong . . . so very wrong."

Far away the Wind carried Explorer.

Finally, the Wind stopped.

But not the leaf.

"Ooh! What is that?" said Explorer. "I feel something cool and wet against my back. It smells even wetter than a thunderstorm. I'm floating now . . . Wow! This must be what the migrating birds call a mountain brook."

The brook raced on into a stream. "And what's this ahead? Whee!" squealed Explorer. "I'm bouncing down . . . Wow! This must be a waterfall. What a ride!"

On down the stream floated Explorer. Soon on his every side leaped large fish of some sort. Gliding along on his back, Explorer glanced up to see the sun suddenly grow dark at midday. Above him stood a creature as furry as Groundhog back home, but as tall as a young tree and as wide as a boulder. This creature, with a quick and mighty swipe of his paw, snatched up one of the big leaping fish.

Explorer journeyed on.

At every turn, the water grew wider and deeper. "I suppose I'm now floating down what's called a river. All along both sides I see flowers blooming. I can even smell their colors -- purple, red, yellow, and orange. And I'm beginning to feel so warm. The further I go, the warmer the water grows."

At last, the river grew into something wider and deeper than a young leaf could ever have imagined.

"No longer can I see the river banks," said Explorer. "No more moss. No more willows. These little waves, they pull me under a bit more each day. And this water - it tastes so . . . so *salty*."

At that instant the first leaf saw a thunderous wall of water come rolling toward him. Explorer knew this wave would pull him under to stay . . . and he smiled.

"What an explorer I've become!" he cried. "Wise Old Leaf was right . . . so very right. My wish was coming true all along. It only wore a disguise."

. . .

Far away, back in the forest, Explorer's younger brother and sister remained.

The hottest days of summer came, as those days always do.

The Wind was nowhere to be found. Not even the tiniest breeze stirred the thick, sticky air.

Soldier Leaf and Good Leaf awoke one morning to hear the strangest sound they'd ever known -- total silence. It was so quiet that it almost hurt to listen.

Then, an even stranger sound began.

"Little sister, shhh . . . did you hear that?" asked Soldier.

"It sounds like clicking," said Good Leaf. "And it sounds as if it's coming from very far away."

"But," said Soldier, "the clicking grows closer all the time. Shhh . . . little sister, just listen."

Swift Wren, the messenger bird of the forest, flew close by their tree. Wren carried a message that gave the strange clicking a name. "All things green beware!" she warned. "The locusts are leaving the fields and filling the air. All things green beware!"

Closer and closer flew the locusts.

"Listen, big brother," said Good Leaf. "The locusts are so close now I can hear their jaws smacking as they eat."

"Yes," agreed Soldier. "As they eat *green leaves like us*! Now, little sister, stay behind me, as best you can. Okay? I'll protect you somehow, I promise. I'll push myself down as low as I can. *Umph!* Like this. Oh, if only I could stretch down the tiniest bit lower! Then I'd have you covered."

Suddenly, the Wind returned from above in the form of a single puff, with just enough force to push Soldier down in front of his little sister.

At that same instant, an entire swarm of locusts attacked their tree. Every leaf on the tree was torn . . . and most were eaten alive.

Every leaf but one.

The locusts finally grew full and turned to go.

Soldier, or what was left of him, moaned in pain. "No! This wasn't supposed to happen to me. Wise Old Leaf was wrong . . . so very wrong. Now my wish can never come true."

Once more the Wind returned and ripped what was left of Soldier from the tree. In deep silence, Soldier fell toward the earth. As he began to fall, he heard the trees of the forest begin to speak.

Ancient Oak, who stood nearby, had seen it all. She was the oldest tree in the forest, so the others honored her as the first to have her say.

And since Ancient Oak rarely spoke, few trees were still alive who had ever before heard her voice. This fact made everyone in the forest all the more eager to hear her words.

Ancient Oak's voice vibrated so deeply that her roots shook the ground all around. "Never in two hundred seasons . . . no, not even once in a thousand seasons, have I ever seen such bravery! Not from Lion. Not from Wolf. Not even from Bear. Not even close."

"I say no braver leaf ever lived!" cried Pine, who had watched it all from her stand on the next ridge.

Grandmother Beech, who grew down in the shady valley below, shouted out, "We trees should tell everyone in all the forest about this brave leaf! From one tree to another, let us each pass it on about how he gave his life to save his sister!"

"Every tree in the forest will know of this leaf!" boomed Ancient Oak. "No leaf will be more famous, for no leaf deserves it more."

Just before Soldier hit the ground, he realized the truth. "I've become a famous soldier!" he shouted. "Wise Old Leaf was right . . . so very right. My wish was coming true all along. It only wore a disguise."

Summer ended, as summers always do.

Of the leaves in our story, only the little sister remained.

Then along came autumn with her paintbrush.

Soon, Good Leaf showed off her true colors. She sparkled purplish-red, with a splash of yellowish-orange.

But the third leaf complained. (Her brothers were now famous, and with the changing seasons she had forgotten her reasons for wanting to become a good leaf in the first place.)

"I'm not happy," she said. "Winter is nearly on his way and I have not at all lived up to my name. I have been good for nothing. When will *my* wish come true?"

Each day the sun rose later . . . and set earlier.

Each night the cold came sooner . . . and lasted a few shivers longer.

Little by little, good Leaf's bright colors faded away to a crinkly brown.

"No!" she finally crackled with anger. "This wasn't supposed to happen to me. Wise Old Leaf was wrong . . . so very wrong. Now my wish can never come true."

Late one night, the Wind leaped through the trees like a pack of hungry wolves. This time the Wind came neither as a puff, nor as a breeze, or a gust. This time the Wind appeared in the form of a howling autumn gale.

"I can't hold on anymore," whispered Good Leaf. "My stem . . . it grows so weak. I just . . . I just want to go . . . to sleep."

Soon, the third leaf drifted into a deep sleep. But this sleep was different. This sleep was unlike any she'd ever known.

The third leaf appeared to be dreaming. And in her dream, she met Wise Old Leaf again and spoke to him.

"I'm falling," she said. "I can tell I'm falling. But . . . I'm not disappointed anymore. Somehow, I can see it all now . . . I can see how every day of my life was a new adventure. I was never famous, but I lived each day as best I could. And I'm happy . . . really happy. Now I'll become part of the soil. Because of me, other plants and animals will live. None of them will ever even know my name. How could they? I'll be in disguise. But it won't matter. My wish will always be coming true -- even long, long after I'm gone. I *am* a good leaf."

## Crow Breaks Some Old Habits

Crow had several old habits that he swore he'd never break.

One of Crow's most famous habits was that he traveled everywhere in a straight line. (At least, that's what Crow claimed to do.)

"It's the only way to go," said Crow. "A straight line is the quickest and the easiest way to travel anywhere. And besides . . . it's the way I've always done it. Old habits are hard to break."

Worm, however, claimed to do all her traveling by twisting and turning and half-circling.

"I never travel in a straight line," said Worm. "Actually, it's *impossible* for anyone to travel in a straight line. But even if one could, it would be the slowest and most difficult way to go . . . especially for traveling over a long distance."

Crow had a second old habit – he absolutely loved a good argument (as crows are widely known to do). Crow especially loved to argue on a full stomach . . . and he would argue 'till his face turned blue.

One day, just after gorging his gut with a big meal, Crow searched for Worm until he found her, squirming along the edge of a muddy riverbank. Crow had long been aware of Worm's different ideas on traveling. This fact, along with Crow's bloated belly, made him especially eager to start a long argument with Worm.

Crow knew that Worm couldn't get away, and since his gut was stuffed, Crow also knew he wouldn't be tempted to turn Worm into a snack. Everyone in the forest knew that Crow, when full, would much rather argue than eat.

So Crow relished the thought of arguing with Worm for most of the afternoon.

Before going on with our story, it must be said that Crow had a third old habit – he was never wrong.

Well, at least, according to Crow.

“I’ve always been right,” Crow was fond of telling anyone who would listen. “Except for that one time . . . the time I thought I was wrong. But then I found out I wasn’t. So that made me wrong . . . well, sort of . . . just once.”

So Crow flew down and landed beside Worm alongside the muddy riverbank.

"Is it true," asked Crow, "that you say it's impossible to travel in a straight line?"

"It is true," answered Worm. "And even if it *were* possible, it's the slowest and most difficult way to go . . . especially for traveling over a long distance."

"Worm, I think you're completely wrong and I'm ready to argue with you 'till my face turns blue."

"Crow, did you ever think that maybe *you* could be wrong?"

"Worm, I'm always right. It's the third old habit of mine that I've sworn I'll never break. It ranks right up alongside my loving to argue on a full stomach and my flying everywhere in a straight line."

"You mean you've never been wrong about anything?" asked Worm.

"Well," said Crow, "there was that one time . . . the time I thought I was wrong. But I found out I wasn't. So that made me wrong . . . well, sort of . . . just once."

"Crow, you're making me dizzy with words. You sure don't talk straight, like you claim to fly. You talk in twists and turns, the way I like to travel."

"Say, that reminds me," said Crow, "of why I came to visit. I came here to argue with you until I prove you are wrong."



“But arguing is no way to find out who’s right,” said Worm.

“And why not?” asked Crow. “It’s the way I’ve always done it.”

“Because,” answered Worm, “you don’t find out the truth that way. You only find out who is the best at arguing.”

“And that would be me! I love to argue ‘till my face turns blue,” cawed Crow.

“I agree!” said Worm.

“So you agree that I’m right?” answered Crow.

“No, Crow! Now let’s do an experiment to find out the truth. We’ll still try our best to prove each other wrong, but we won’t do it by arguing.”

“Tell me, Worm, what experiment did you have in mind?”

Worm replied, “An experiment that would prove to us both which really is the best way to travel – either in a straight line, as you say . . . or by twisting and turning, as I say.”

“Okay,” agreed Crow. “That seems fair enough to me.” Then he mumbled, “Though I’m not so sure I can agree not to argue about it, especially if my stomach is stuffed.”

“Oh, Crow, you can still argue all you want. It’s just that, well . . . if you’re wrong, you have to be able to admit that you’re wrong.”

“Hmmm,” muttered Crow. “I suppose I can at least give it some thought . . . *if* my gut is empty at the time . . . and *if* the experiment can prove to me which way of travel is the best.”

“A really good experiment can do that,” replied Worm. “So where would you like to go, Crow?”

“Worm, let’s cross this river. I’ll fly in a straight line and you go around. Then we’ll see which way is the quickest and the easiest. Are you ready?”

"I'm ready," said Worm. "But let's make it a longer distance. I like a challenge."

"Uh . . . sure," said Crow. "How about let's go over the river and through the woods? My grandmother lives there."

"Still too short a distance," answered Worm.

"Caw! Caw!" laughed Crow. "Then how about let's go to the moon, silly Worm? Is that far enough for you?"

"I was thinking," said Worm, "of something a little more down to earth."

"Remember," said Crow, "that no matter where you choose to go, I'm going to travel in a straight line."

"Why?" asked Worm.

"Because that's the way I've always done it. Old habits are hard to break, you know. Worm, there ought to be a saying in honor of me – go straight as the crow flies – as the quickest way to travel anywhere. Besides, there's no mistake about it -- a straight line is the best way to go anywhere and everywhere."

"Then how about we travel to the big lake, the one far to the south of here?" asked Worm.

"You mean the one beyond the hills in the distance?" asked Crow. "I've got to tell you, Worm, I've flown straight to it many times already."

"Not *that* lake," said Worm. "I'm talking about the lake far and away beyond the hills in the distance, even past the desert that lies far south of here. I've heard the migrating geese say that this lake exists somewhere beyond the high purple mountains -- far, far to the south."

"That would be the Great Blue Lake!" cried Crow. "Now, Worm, I've got to tell you that nobody around here has ever even seen this lake -- except for the migrating geese."

"That's the one!" said Worm. "Now, Crow, let's don't waste any more time. Off we go . . . toward the Great Blue Lake."

Slowly, Worm began to crawl toward the river.

"Wait!" yelled Crow. "You might drown while crossing the river. I'm a little worried about you."

"Well, that's very thoughtful for a Crow who'd actually like to eat a Worm, if the Crow weren't so full."

"Worm, I'm not *that* thoughtful. I'm actually just trying to keep you alive for when I'm not so full anymore. So please don't drown while crossing the river."

"I don't plan to cross it," replied Worm. "But I'll still beat you to the Great Blue Lake. I'm telling you, Crow, you'd better get started."

Away flew Crow, shaking his head. "Poor Worm," he whispered. "She is making a serious mistake. Even if she does manage to catch a ride on a log and float down the river, it flows the wrong way. The river flows north, which is the opposite direction of where she should go. The Great Blue Lake lies far and away to the south."

Meanwhile, back at the river, Worm patiently spied a big log floating down the river near the shore. "Here's my ride!" she cried.

So Worm wriggled onto a fallen leaf by the water's edge and threw her weight out a bit, shoving the leaf off toward the path of the oncoming log.

When the log drew near, Worm squirmed aboard.

"Exactly what I needed - a log with plenty of mud caked on top, and a few good sideways cracks where I can take shelter from storms during my journey."

Worm wormed around until she found a mossy crack on the highest part of the log. Then she curled up for a long cozy nap.

The next morning, Worm awoke to see the river making a wide turn up ahead.

"Just as I thought," said Worm. "The river is making a half-circle. Since all water must flow downhill, I'll soon be heading south -- toward the Great Blue Lake."

Worm was right. All water does flow downhill. But the river appeared to be headed straight toward a desert, which Worm began to glimpse in the distance.

"This river most likely doesn't flow straight through the middle of the desert," Worm predicted, "because if it did, the sun would return this water to the sky along the way."

Sure enough, the river meandered along the desert's edge and flowed on into a grassy plain. Worm was right again.

Soon Worm rounded another big bend in the river. "There they are!" she squealed. "The high purple mountains are rising over the horizon. I see their snowy peaks. Since all water flows downhill, somewhere up ahead there must be a hidden pass between these mountains. Now the river is surely ready to twist and turn down through a steep mountain valley, with faster flowing water. I'd better wriggle in and hold on tight."

Worm was right again. She drifted and bounced and bumped along on her log, through the steep green valley of the purple mountains -- and on toward the Great Blue Lake.

Meanwhile . . . Crow flew straight out over the desert . . . and straight into some problems.

"All this swirling sand is choking my throat," he wheezed. "This desert is too dry for me to fly straight across. I've made a mistake. I must . . . go back. I'm so . . . thirsty."

So Crow flew back in the same direction by which he came. He found the river and drank until he passed out.

For a full day, Crow was too bloated with water to fly.

"I must circle around the desert," he said. "It's the best way to go."