

Heads and Tails



Snake and Lizard came to know each other through an argument, the first of many. This is how it happened.

Snake came out from her hole under the rock, where she had been sleeping all winter. In need of warmth, she looked for a place to sunbathe. The desert round her was stony and spiked with cacti, and Snake wanted a flat smooth patch of earth heated by the sun.

She found the perfect spot and stretched out across it with a comfortable sigh. No sooner had she relaxed than a voice said, 'Excuse me, you're blocking my path.'

Beside her was a lizard who walked and talked in an important way.

'Your path?' murmured Snake.

'Absolutely!' said the lizard. 'Your tail is right across it.'

Snake raised her head. The smooth earth did look like some kind of path but she was too comfortable to move. 'No it isn't.'

'Yes, it is!' cried Lizard. 'It goes from one side of the path to the other.'

'No, it doesn't,' said Snake.

'It does! It does!' said Lizard, jumping up and down. 'I tell you, your tail blocks the entire path.'

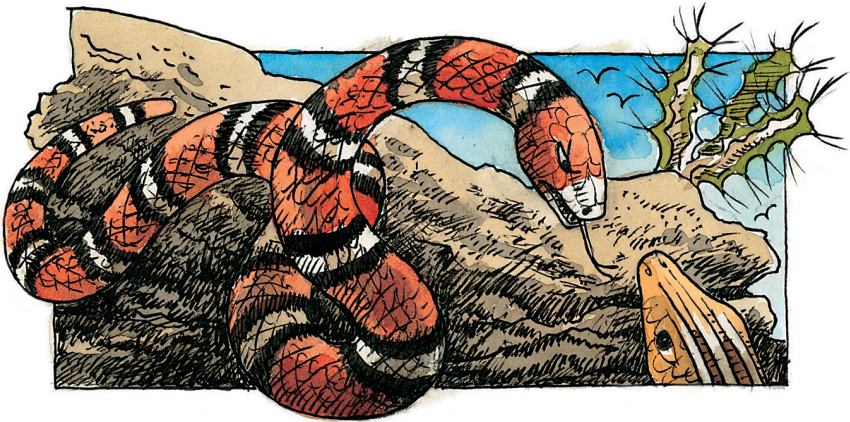
'And I tell you it doesn't,' said Snake. 'That's my body, not my tail. The tail is the bit on the end.'

Lizard stopped, his head darting from side to side. 'What body? You don't have a body. Your tail starts at your head.'

'How come you're such an expert on tails?' asked Snake. 'Yours is so short, one hiss and I miss it. You're just envious.'

'Not! Not! Not!' screeched Lizard.

'Yesssssss!' hissed Snake.



Lizard jumped back and yelled, 'You can never trust a creature without legs!'

'You know your trouble?' Snake shouted back. 'You've got a big mouth.'

The argument could have gone on but now Lizard was getting very upset. He was shaking and blue with rage. Although she was bigger, Snake had only small courage. She knew that when an animal got into

Lizard's state, anything might happen. She drew her body round in a circle so that Lizard could get by.

All the anger went out of him. He sniffed and stood tall. 'Thank you,' he said in a crisp voice.

'Where are you going?' Snake asked.

'To find a place to sunbathe.'

'This is a good spot,' said Snake.

Lizard hesitated.

'Very good,' said Snake, who was feeling that she'd been a bit unfair. 'It's smooth and warm. I'd be happy to share it with you.'

'Really?' said Lizard.

'I'd be glad of the company,' said Snake.

For a while Lizard stood there—his legs leaning in one direction, his head in another. Then he lowered his body to the warm dust.

Above them, the sun shone out of a bright blue bowl of sky. Some early spring bugs were out, flapping or crawling. Lizard opened his mouth and neatly snapped up a green beetle. 'You know,' he said, 'you were an eeny weeny bit right.'

'About what?' asked Snake.

Lizard looked up at the sky. ‘Envy,’ he said. ‘You do have a most remarkable tail.’

Snake smiled. ‘And I think your legs are very handsome.’

After that, there was no stopping them. They lay on the path and talked and talked as though they’d known each other for years.

