

"Dad. There's a lizard in the porch!"

There was no answer, just the muffle of his parents' voices from the kitchen. He tramped through the house, leaving a trail of mud behind him.

"Dad..."

"Not now. We're busy," said his dad. He was standing over the kitchen table.

"But there's a lizard. A LIZ ...ARD," he repeated, hoping that it might have the same effect as when his mum said BUG ... GAR, that always made his dad look up straight away. But Mum and Dad were never very interested in anything Cedric did or found, when they were doing the bills.

"Dad, there's a lizard," he said again, quieter this time. His dad looked up,

"Cedric. Look at the mess. How many times do I have to tell you to take your boots off"

He walked back through the house. His mum and dad probably didn't know anything about lizards anyway. Ever since they had moved from London, they didn't seem to be interested in the country anymore. 'Not now Cedric,' they would say when he brought them a spider or a slug or a feather he had found.

The lizard was still in the porch, sitting in the corner all covered in cobwebs. It lifted its chin and Cedric crouched down beside it. It looked tired and he could see its little throat beating as if it was panting. As he reached out a hand, the lizard scabbled furiously against the wall.

"Do that then," he said as he withdrew. The lizard's scabbbling upset him. All he wanted to do was help. Cedric crept back into the kitchen in his stockinged feet. His mum and dad were still busy at the table, the pile of bills between them. He grabbed a Jay-cloth from the sink and went back to the porch. Holding his hand high above it, he dropped the cloth on top of the lizard, and then quickly scooped it up. With the lizard safely wrapped in his palm, he managed to put his boots back on, transferring it from hand to hand, nearly losing his balance a couple of times, and thinking that he should have thought his rescue plan through before he started. That was what his grandad always said. "You've got to have a plan, Cedric."

His grandad had lived in Australia and said that out there, the lizards were man's best friend, because they sat on the ceilings and ate the mosquitoes. Cedric wondered why his lizard hadn't crawled onto the ceiling as well, but he supposed it must be tired. He looked at his feet as he walked. The grass was longer now and swishing around his boots. He hoped there weren't any snakes. His grandad had also told him about snakes and how some of them could swim in the sea and kill a man with one poisonous bite. "They're evil," his grandad had said, "You can never trust a snake."

The stream wasn't far, but he could see there was already someone there crouched down beside it, poking around. He stopped. The lizard began to wriggle in his hand. It was getting dark and as he drew nearer, he still couldn't make out whether the figure was a boy or a man, but could see it was wearing a large hat. The lizard wriggled again and he felt the scabble of its little lizardy feet through the cloth. He didn't look at the figure, but just stared at the water instead. In the fading light it looked inky, almost black and glinted as it moved.

"Hello," said the figure. It was a man. Cedric firmed his lip, keeping his mouth as still as possible as he said "Hello" back.

"What have you got there then?"

"Nothing much."

Cedric glanced sideways. The man was wearing a large canvas hat pulled low over his face. The lizard struggled again. Cedric looked at the wriggling Jay-cloth. He hadn't thought his plan through properly.

"It's a lizard," said Cedric.

"A lizard?" laughed the man. "Where did you find a lizard?"

"In the porch."

"Are you sure it's a lizard?"

"Yes," said Cedric, "I've seen lizards before. I know a great deal about lizards."

"Can I have a look?"

"I don't know ... lizards are very shy, you know."

Cedric held out his Jay-cloth to the man and watched him peeling up the corner very gently.

"I think," said the man, his eyes glinting, "it's a newt."

"A newt? Are you sure?"

"Yes," said the man, as he looked at Cedric's face, "it's an easy mistake to be made.

They're closely related to lizards. However, you shouldn't put it in the stream."

"Why not?"

"Newts like still water. You should put it in the pond."

"Right," said Cedric, "thank you."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Well, I'm quite new in the area."

The two of them walked through a gate and up a small track to the pond. The man's name was Geoff and when Cedric had handed him the newt, he said..."My name's Cedric."

By the pond, it was even darker and the water's stillness made it look thick like a pool of tar.

"There we go," said Geoff, putting the newt gently under a rock. "He should be alright there."

"Are there other liz-," Cedric corrected himself, "newts up here as well?"

"Oh yes, and crested newts too. They're much bigger and darker with a warty kind of skin, and they have this big crest with a white line along the top which you can see when they swim."

"Really?" said Cedric scanning the water. It seemed that newts might be just as interesting as lizards. "What about snakes?" he said, "are there snakes here?"

"Sometimes in the summer the grass snakes swim in the pond to cool off, but most of the time they stay out of the way."

"I can't stand snakes," said Cedric. "Evil creatures."

"No, they're not," said Geoff. "Snakes are greatly misunderstood. Grass snakes aren't even poisonous and they rarely bite unless provoked. And they're beautiful. If you see a grass snake basking in the sun, it looks like someone's covered it in green and brown mosaics."

"Yuk!" said Cedric. The snakes he knew were big writhing creatures with coils of

muscle and fangs. "I hate snakes."

"Well, that's a great shame," said Geoff sternly. "You're missing out."

On the way back, Geoff stopped and turned to Cedric, his face hardly visible under his hat.

"Well I better be getting home," he said.

"Yes. Me too," said Cedric.

"I'll be seeing you then."

"Yes," said Cedric, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Bye then," said Geoff.

"Bye," said Cedric, kicking about in the gravel and as he did, he saw something move, something wriggle into the grass. It looked like a tail. A lizard's tail.

"Geoff," called Cedric trying to whisper.

Geoff turned, "What?"

"There's a lizard. I'm sure of it. I saw its tail disappear into the grass."

Geoff moved towards him, treading his feet down slowly. "Where?" he whispered.

"There."

Geoff crouched down by the grass and separated it with his hands. Something wriggled again. Cedric could see it was a coppery colour. "Oh," said Geoff.

"What is it? Another newt? One of those big crested ones?"

"No. Here, have a look. It's a slow worm."

Cedric bent down, and where Geoff was parting the grass he could see a small glistening thing about a foot long. It slithered off into the grass and Cedric watched transfixed. Geoff stood up, brushing the dew from his hands.

"You were right about it being a lizard though."

"But I thought you said it was a worm."

"That's just its name. It's actually a legless lizard."

"So it doesn't have any legs?."

"No."

"So how come it isn't a snake?"

"Well some people consider them snakes, but officially it's a legless lizard."

"How do you know?" "Because it's got a tail."

"But how do you know it's got a tail, when it doesn't have any legs? Where does it begin?"

"I don't know," laughed Geoff, "you'd have to ask the slow worm that."

"The legless lizard," corrected Cedric.

"Yes, the legless lizard."

Cedric was quiet for a moment.

"So all snakes could be legless lizards?" he said.

"I suppose so, yes, if you want them to be." Geoff smiled. "Here's your Jay-cloth," he said, pulling it out of his pocket.

"Thanks," said Cedric.

"Nice to meet you, Cedric. Maybe see you again. I'm often by the river or the pond."

"Okay," said Cedric.

They shook hands. Cedric started to run, hungry now from the day's discoveries. He had found out that a lizard was a newt and a snake was a legless lizard.