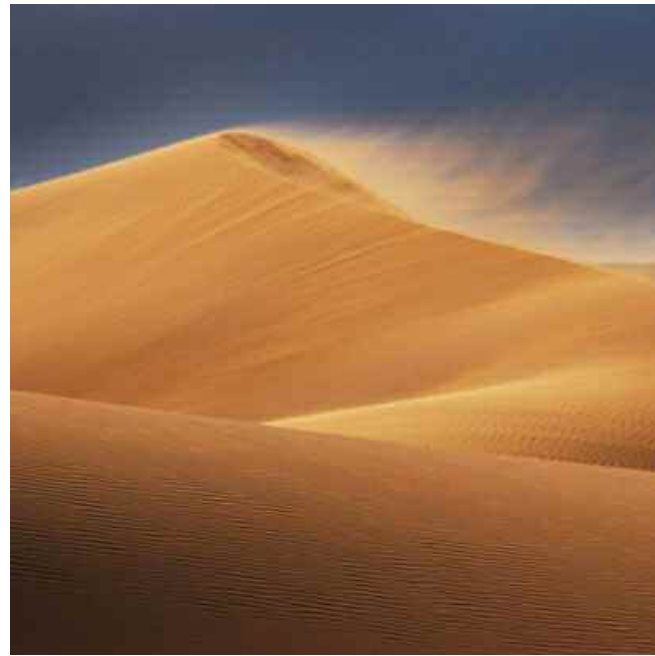
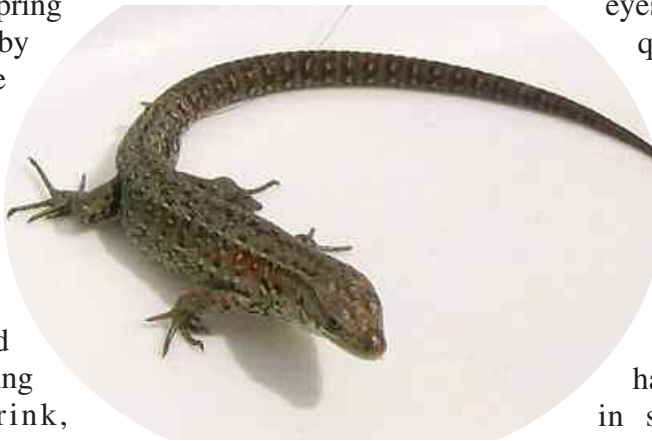


A Peri of the Desert

AS FAR AS ONE COULD SEE, the hot and shining sand dunes stretched blinding and bare in the slanting rays of the sun, for the season of flowers in the desert was past. The fierce summer heat held all that land in its fiery grasp and for many, many miles the only spot of green was by a tiny spring which lay half hidden beneath a giant clump of mesquite. Near it, panting in the dusty shade of a rock lay a tiny sand lizard who lifted his head occasionally and looked with wondering anxious eyes toward the little Peri who sat pouting on one of the stones in the edge of the spring.

Why, he thought in his little lizard mind, was the guardian of the spring so quiet, and why had she neglected to brush from the rocks about the spring the sand grains brought by yesterday's windstorm. He only thought these things, he didn't dare to ask them, for Neria, the little Peri, had been so very, very cross these last few days. Only yesterday she had scolded a hot little road runner, who had come racing to her spring for a drink, because he had scattered dust into the water, and the day before she had stamped her feet angrily and cried because the mesquite bush had dropped some leaves into the freshly cleaned pool. This was all so strange, so



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unlike her, that the sand lizard shook his head in puzzled wonder. It made the whole place seem different, for always before this Neria had been so full of song and laughter that the spring had been a happy place near which to live.

Presently Neria turned and seeing Sand lizard's curious bright little eyes fixed upon her, cried with quick anger in her voice, "Why do you look at me like that? I don't care if I am cross. I hate this place. I don't see why Necksa ever sent me out to this little old spring in the desert. Even if she is the queen of the fairies she hasn't the right to leave me in such a horrid, lonesome place. Nobody ever comes here but road runners, and fat little old sand lizards," she finished scornfully.

This was too much. The sand lizard was deeply hurt and somewhat indignant. He was rather

Peter Carmichael

plump, of course, but he certainly wasn't at all fat, and he considered Neria's remark very rude indeed. Therefore, in dignified silence, he crawled across the rock and slipped into the cool shadows of his home on the other side, where he made some very cutting remarks to his small dusty wife about people who took out their crossness upon others.

With his departure, Neria felt more lonely than ever. Almost she wished she hadn't made that last hateful little allusion to sand lizard's fatness. She knew he didn't like to be called fat, but she wouldn't call him back. She only sat thinking angry thoughts and these bad thoughts began taking ugly little forms which hovered close about her whispering all sorts of naughty suggestions into her mind.

At last she jumped up and shook her shiny, many-colored wings. The ugly thoughts had made her decide to run away from her spring without telling her queen anything about it. The old spring could just get along by itself and if it choked up with sand it didn't matter one bit to her. Angrily she gave her wings another flip and quick as light sped through the air, far faraway, to see the world and find some other more pleasant work to do.

All over the world she traveled. Great rivers, and racing, storming mountain streams called her by their beauty, but when she thought to stay and work with them, she found other Peri busy keeping them clean and pure, and learned that they had no need of her.

She wandered by the shores of the oceans where little waves ran far up the beach or beat endlessly against giant cliffs, and here were the mermaids and the water fairies busy at their work. She paused by the blue jewels of mountain lakes set among the sweeping green firs only to learn that they too had their guardian spirits who tended them and she was forced to go yet farther.

At last, after long weeks of wandering, she stood by a dark, shadowed lake in the heart of a mountain. Great grey rimrocks mirrored themselves in

its depths; birds flashed across the water, stooping to snatch at the tiny darting gnats; squirrels scampered chattering down to take their evening drink; and slipping softly through the forest, which at one place edged the quiet waters, came a mother deer and her baby to wade in the coolness of the shallows.

Surely, Neria thought, as she poised for a moment on the overhanging rimrock, this lake so hidden away in the mountains would be forgotten and she could stay and care for it, so cool and lovely and peaceful. But as she looked about, she discovered that it, also, had its keeper.

Heartsick and discouraged, Neria threw herself down upon the warm brown needles beneath a huge fir and began weeping bitterly. For a long while she sobbed.

Then as she became more quiet she felt that someone was near, and lifting her tear-brimmed eyes, she found her Queen watching her with a gentle, understanding gaze. Swiftly Neria rose and folding her weary, shining wings, bowed low, then stood waiting.



Roadrunner

At last Necksa, her Queen, spoke softly, "You have wandered far, my little Neria. What have you found?"

Again the tears brimmed over and rolled down Neria's cheeks as she answered slowly, "O beautiful Queen, I have seen many lovely lakes, and rivers and streams, but there was no place for me. All were in the care of others."

Necksa asked gravely, "In all the world, Neria, was there no spring which was uncared for?"

Neria dropped her head in sudden shame. "Yes, O Queen," she whispered, "my own spring in the desert lies uncared for, but no one ever comes there."

The Queen made no answer, and after a long moment Neria added slowly, "That is, no one but the little road runners and a fat old sand lizard and his dusty wife."

Gently Necksa laid her hand upon the little Peri's bowed head. "My dear, are they not God's creatures also? They came to your spring for life-

Kenneth L. Carlson

giving water. They were in your care. Because the desert is so hot and dry, your tiny spring is far more important than a lake would be among the mountains. I trusted you.”

Quickly Neria raised her face, radiant now with understanding. “O my Queen, forgive me. I will return to my desert spring.” As Necksa smiled her forgiveness, Neria rose, and swiftly as her weary wings would carry her, flew toward her far-off desert home.

It was a long, long journey, and alas, she found a sad desolation when she reached the little hollow among the sand dunes. Beneath the burning sun the gnarled old mesquite bush was slowly dying; the spring was choked with sand and near the last tiny spot of dampness lay the little sand lizard and his panting, dusty little wife.

Bitterly ashamed, frightened lest she had returned too late, Neria began clearing the sand from the rock-bordered pool until once more clear water bubbled up. Then she sprinkled the old mesquite with cool drops and picked from it the withered leaves. Often as she worked she would touch the two tiny lizards with gentle loving fingers as they lay on the rock she had brushed smooth for them.

At last all was finished, and she sat down to rest for a moment, when, suddenly, she was startled by the dark form of an old prospector stumbling through the hindering sand and dragging a weary burro after him. Eagerly the two lurched forward and began drinking in great thirsty swallows. At last, as she watched with gladness in her heart, the old miner rose to his feet and patting the burro’s dusty, drooping head, cried happily, “Well, old pal, if this spring had been dry this would have been our last trip across the desert.”

His words flooded Neria’s heart with a great happiness and content, and as she and the two little lizards watched the old man making his camp close to the spring, she whispered softly, “O little sand lizards, what if I had not come back in time? Never again shall I leave my spring uncared for.”

Sleepily the little lizard murmured, “Tomorrow the road runner will come back. I sent word to him by the night wind.” □

—Vera Swift



I have a house inside of me,
A house that people never see
It has a door through which none pass,
And windows, but they’re not of glass.

Sometimes I like to go inside
Where no one sees, and hide, and hide,
And doctor up my wounded pride
When I’ve been treated rough outside.

And sometimes when I’ve been to blame
I go inside and blush for shame,
And get my mind in better frame
And get my tongue and temper tame.

I meet my heavenly Father there,
For He stoops down to hear my prayer,
To heal my wounds and cure my care,
And make me strong to do and dare.

Then after I am made quite strong
And things are right that were all wrong,
I go outside, where I belong,
And sing a new and happy song.

And then I hear the people say
“You’re blithe and bonny, good and gay,”
And it’s because I feel that way,
But they don’t know the price I pay.

You have a house inside of you
Where you can fight your battles through,
And God will tell you what to do
And make your heart both strong and true.

—Author Unknown