

A Snake's Worth

Late one fall, as Oliver was stacking wood for his father, a snake appeared. Startled, the boy threw a small log at it.

“Go away!” he shouted.

The snake looked up at him. “Why did you throw a log at me, boy? I am only warming myself in the sun.”

“You look creepy with your scaly skin and **shifty** eyes.” He flung another piece of wood at the snake. “Now go away, and do not ever come back!”

The snake **uncoiled** its body and slithered away.

The next day, as Oliver was raking leaves, he uncovered a large rat. Disgusted by its filthy fur and beady eyes, he swatted the rat with his rake, shouting, “Go away, rat!”

The rat scurried away before Oliver could **utter** another sound.

After he finished raking the yard, Oliver returned the rake to the shed. There, he came across another rat. Just before he took a swat at it, another rat came into view from behind the tractor. Then, a third rat sprung from inside a wagon.

Oliver slammed shut the door of the shed.

*Why had all these **vile** rats suddenly appeared?* he thought.

It didn't take long for Oliver to realize what he had done.

He returned to where he had been stacking wood the day before.

“Come back!” Oliver shouted, hoping the snake could hear him. “I was wrong to send you away.”

Oliver yelled into the field behind the woodpile several more times.



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Who could have known it was the snake that had kept all those rats away from his family's home? Oliver worried that his father would be angry that the rats were now growing in number.

"What is it you want, boy?" hissed a voice from above.

Oliver looked up. There, wrapped around a thick branch, was the snake!

"Please come back," Oliver **pleaded** to the snake. "I should never have gotten rid of you."

The snake flicked its tongue. "Why were you so cruel? You did not even know me."

The boy dipped his head. "You look scary, and I did not know you were so helpful to us."

The snake made its way down the tree. It slithered up to the foot of the boy, where it said, "I'll stay, but you must promise from now on to **judge** others on their worth and not on how they appear."

Oliver smiled. "I promise."

Vocabulary

Shifty: *tricky or sneaky looking*

Uncoil: *to straighten from a curled position*

Utter: *to speak or pronounce*

Vile: *bad, mean, or foul*

Pleaded: *to ask or beg*

Judge: *to form an opinion*