

BUZZTAIL

THE STORY OF A RATTLESNAKE

Robert McClung

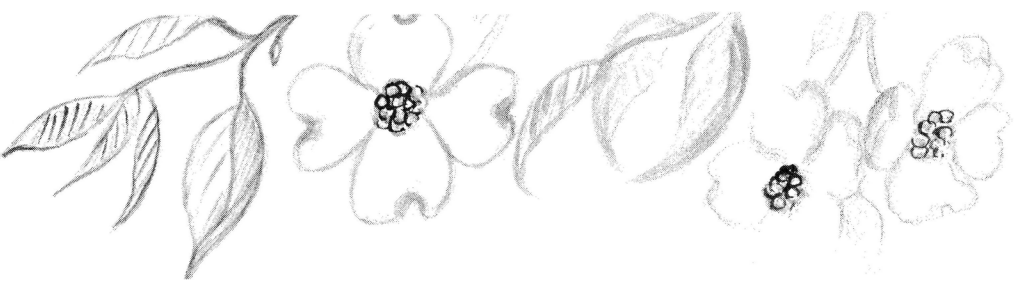


THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



The rattlesnake had crawled out of his den at noon and was basking in the bright sunshine. The ground beneath him felt warm, for the rocky ridge got the full benefit of the afternoon sun. It was late May.

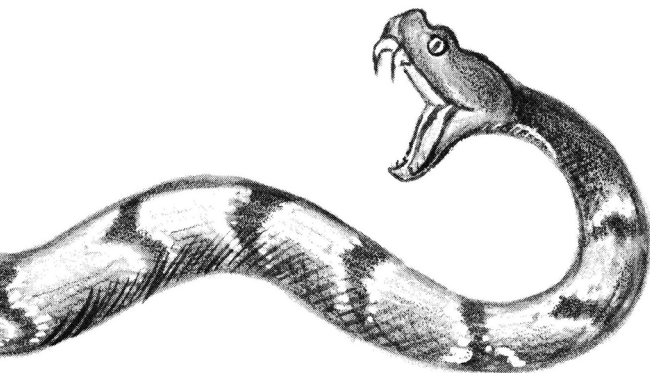
A dogwood tree was in bloom beside the trail, and a big green-clouded swallowtail was fluttering around a sassafras tree, laying her eggs on the newly opened leaves. The big snake shifted his coils. High over the ridge an eagle, soaring on motionless wings, saw him. Downward the great bird of prey plummeted.

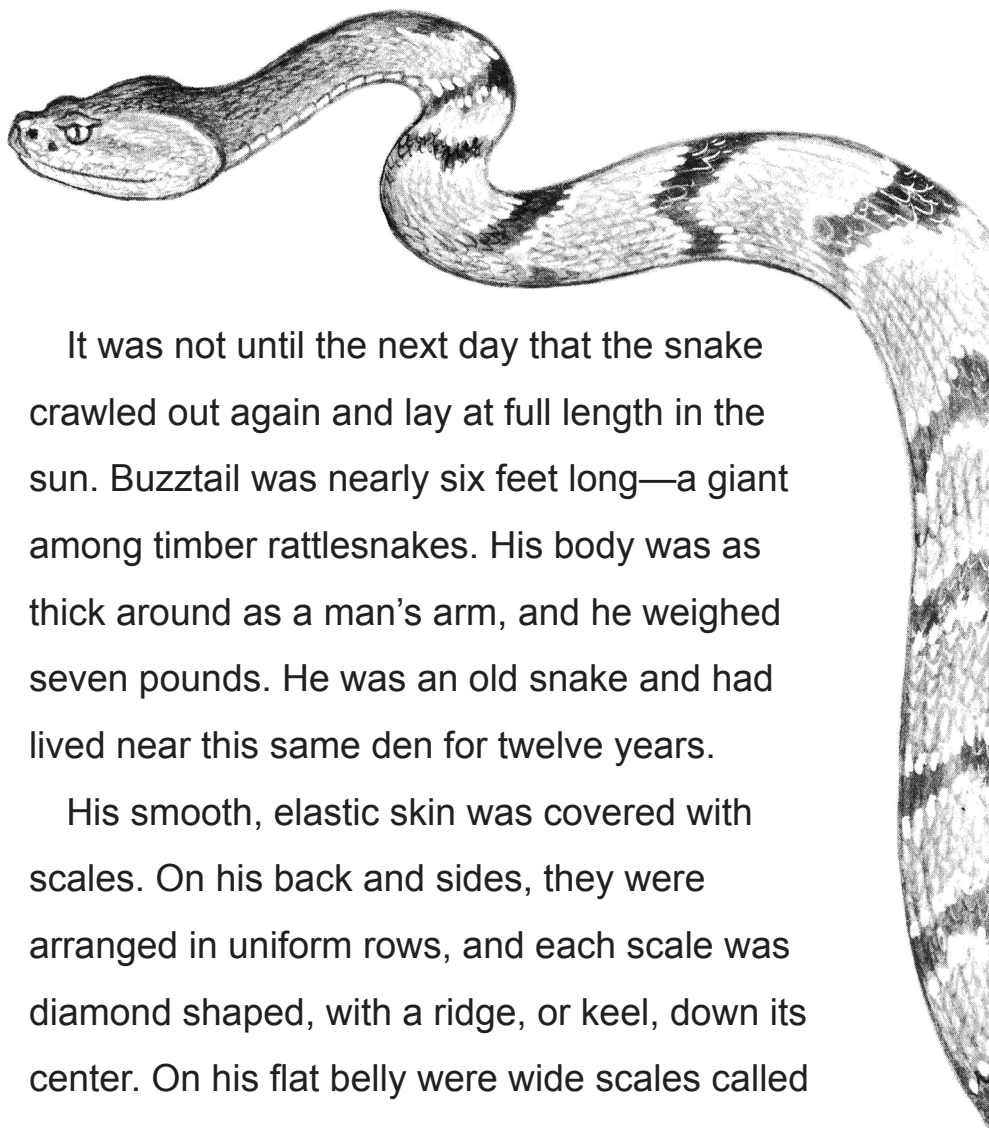




The eagle attacked quickly, its sharp talons grasping the snake's middle. Surprised, the snake struck back, and his fangs just grazed the tip of one of the eagle's rapidly beating wings.

For a split second, the eagle relaxed its grip. Before it could seize the snake again, he had glided under a big overhanging rock. Bobbing its head, the eagle peered under the rock for a moment. Then it flapped heavily away.



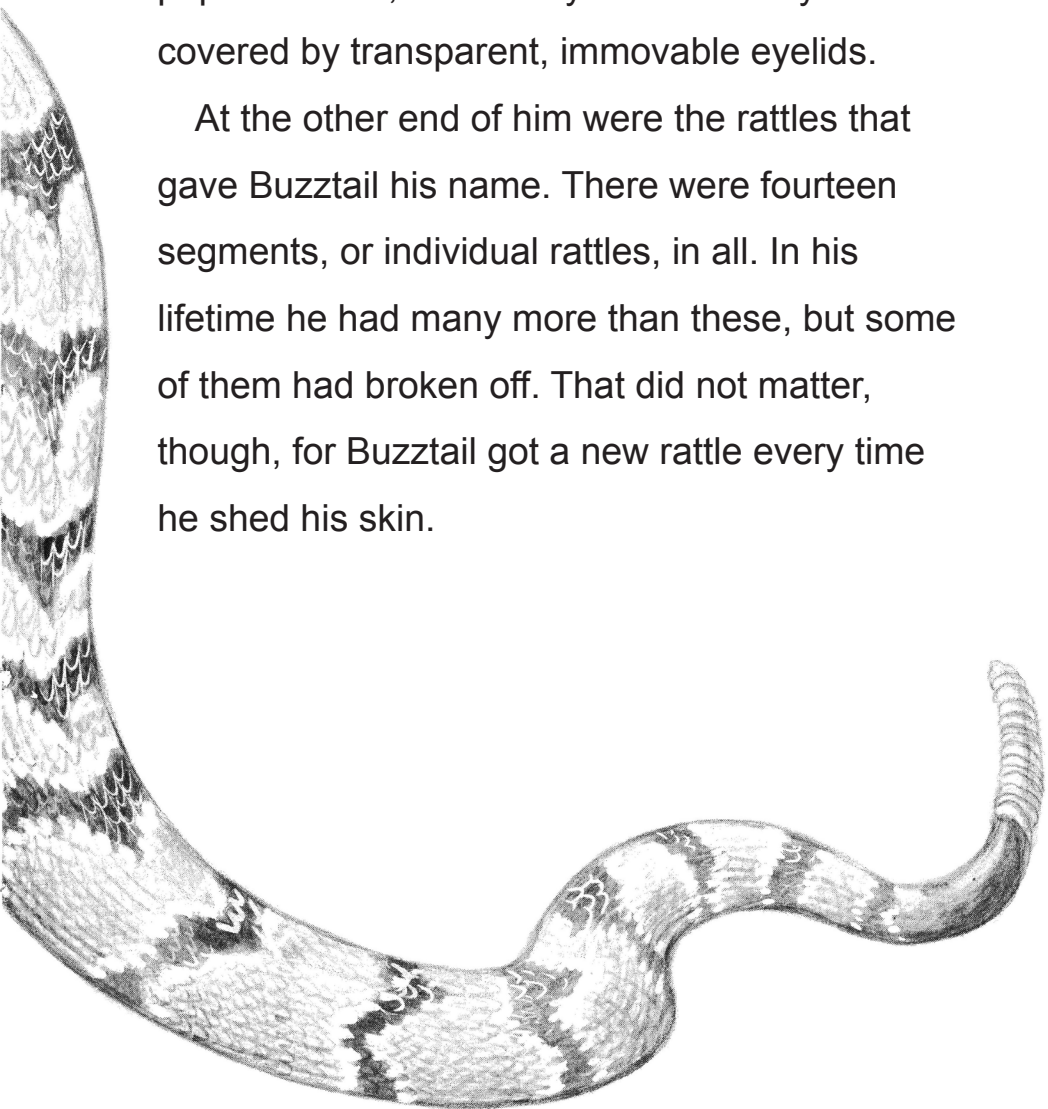


It was not until the next day that the snake crawled out again and lay at full length in the sun. Buzztail was nearly six feet long—a giant among timber rattlesnakes. His body was as thick around as a man's arm, and he weighed seven pounds. He was an old snake and had lived near this same den for twelve years.

His smooth, elastic skin was covered with scales. On his back and sides, they were arranged in uniform rows, and each scale was diamond shaped, with a ridge, or keel, down its center. On his flat belly were wide scales called scutes, each of which overlapped the one behind it. Buzztail's scales formed definite patterns of different colors. His background color was a dull yellowish-brown, with many dark, sooty crossbands.

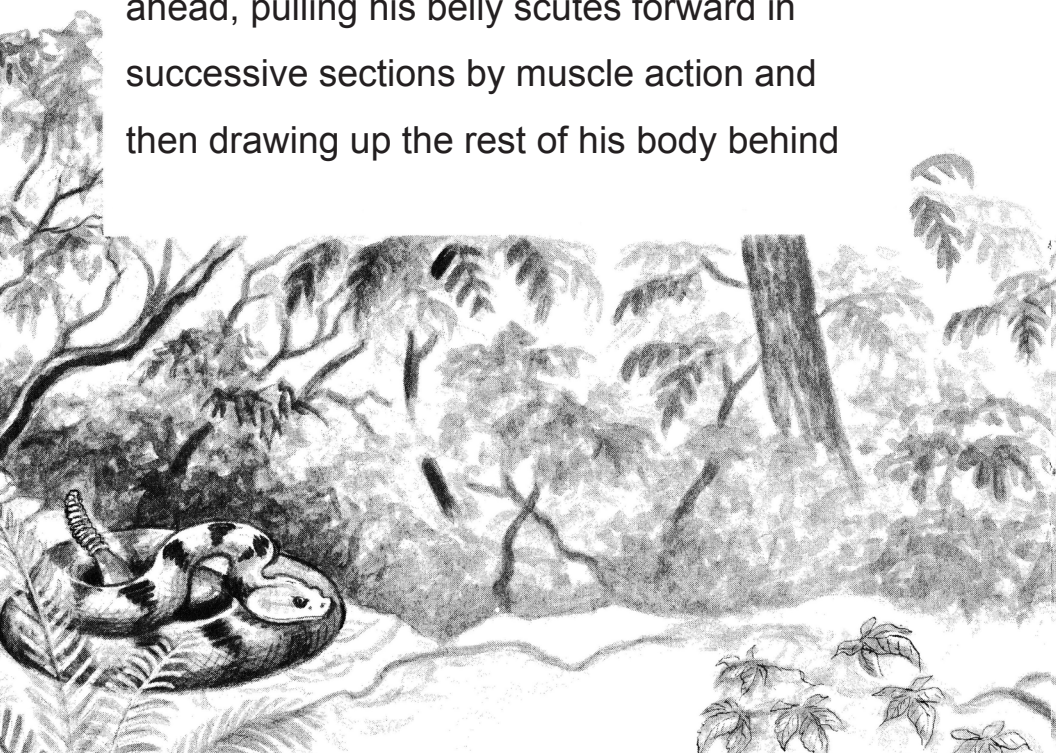
His head was broad and flat with a blunt snout. His round, pale yellow eyes had vertical pupils in them, as cats' eyes have. They were covered by transparent, immovable eyelids.

At the other end of him were the rattles that gave Buzztail his name. There were fourteen segments, or individual rattles, in all. In his lifetime he had many more than these, but some of them had broken off. That did not matter, though, for Buzztail got a new rattle every time he shed his skin.



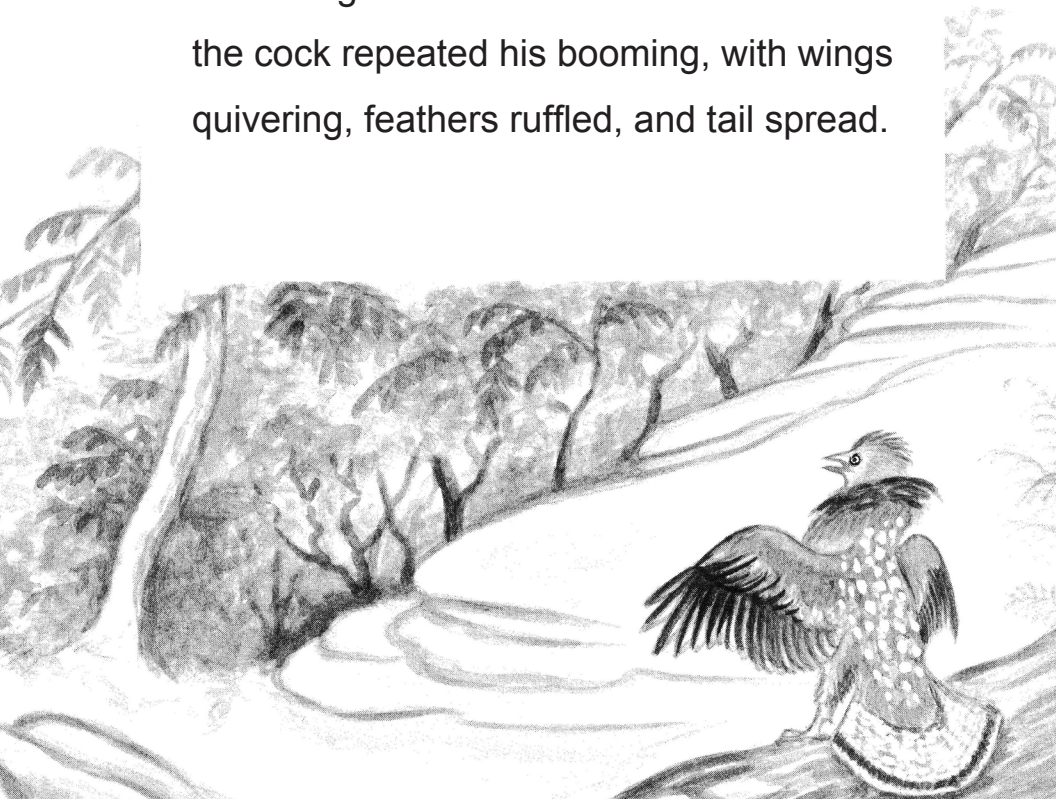
The sun rose higher in the sky and warmed Buzztail. As is the case with all cold-blooded animals, his body heat changed with the temperature of his surroundings. He could not maintain a constant temperature the way warm-blooded animals—mammals and birds—do. He felt restive in the warm air and started to crawl across the rocks and through a patch of low huckleberry bushes.

Buzztail had no legs, but he was able to move along very well without them. He glided ahead, pulling his belly scutes forward in successive sections by muscle action and then drawing up the rest of his body behind



them. He wasn't in a hurry today, but when he was, his whole body squirmed from side to side, forming S-shaped curves. The outer sides of the curves pressed against the rough spots in the ground, pushing him forward. After crawling slowly through the underbrush, Buzztail coiled up among some dead leaves.

A dull booming noise started nearby. It was made by a male ruffed grouse, drumming to attract a mate. Time after time the cock repeated his booming, with wings quivering, feathers ruffled, and tail spread.



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*Something else moved
in front of him. It was a big male rattler. Buzztail
reared his head at this new threat, hissing loudly.
The rival, almost as big as Buzztail, was a dull
black color all over, with bands of an even
deeper black showing faintly.*

As the "biggest rattler on the mountainside,"
Buzztail has seen it all. As you follow along with
his adventures and challenges, you will learn
about the life cycle of a rattlesnake. You will also
meet many other animals and plants that share
his ecosystem. This entertaining, yet
informative, story will leave you with a deeper
knowledge and appreciation of these scaly,
slithering creatures.