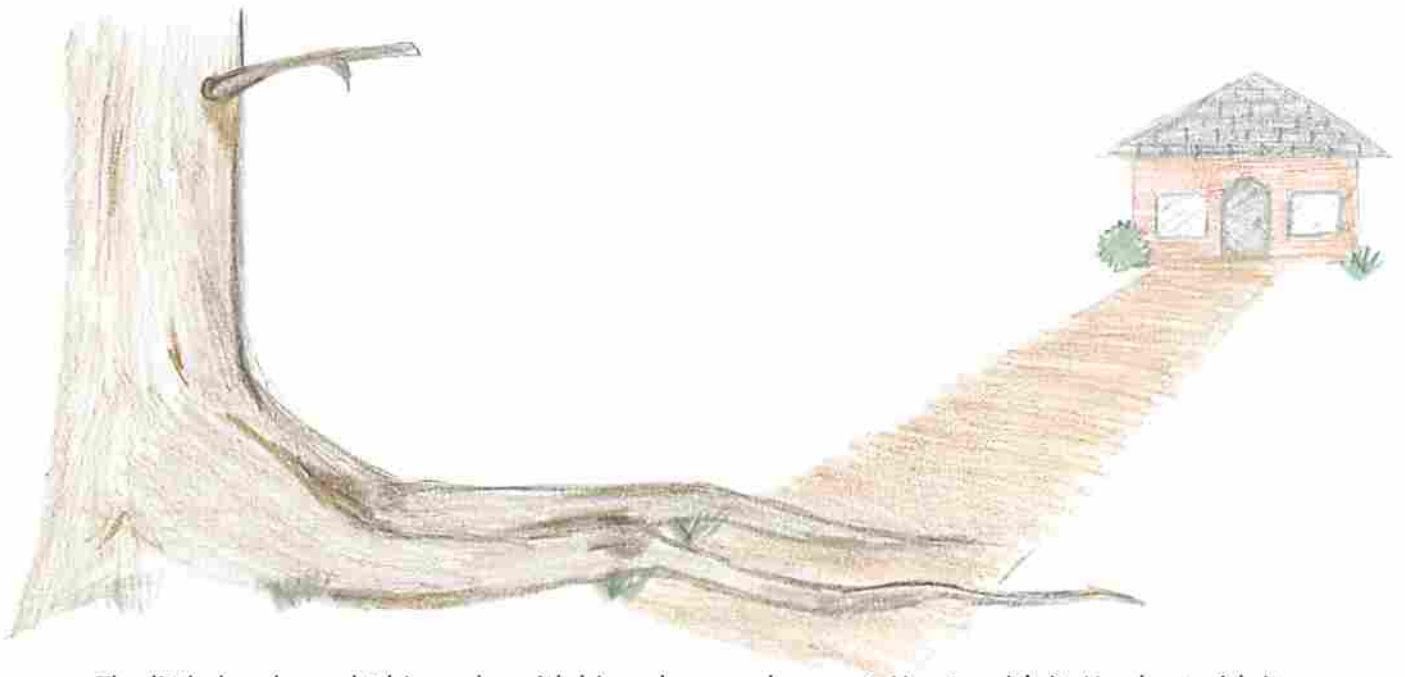


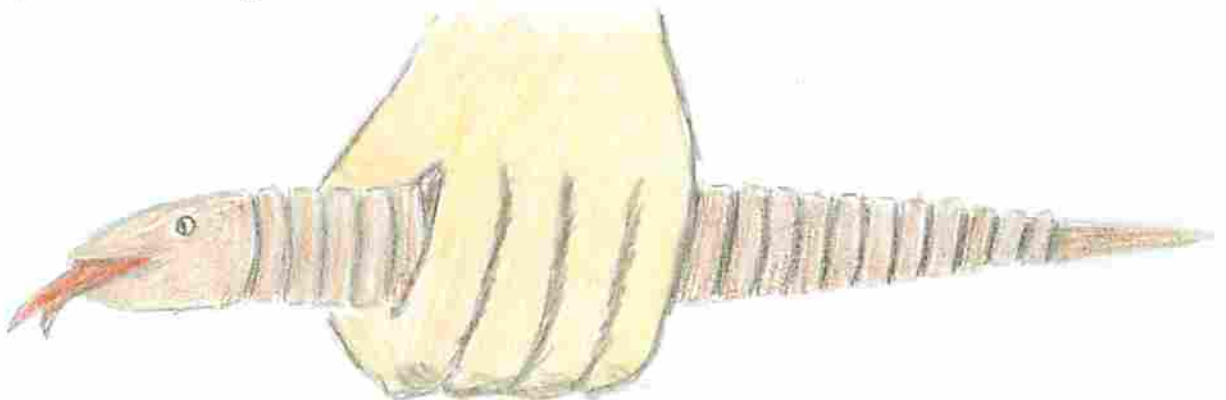
The Real Banana

Marc-Alain Miller

Deep in the jungle there was a clearing, high on a hill. On the top of that hill there was a banana tree, whose roots lay over the walkway to a small house. That house belonged to a very special boy. But what was even more special was his wooden toy snake, which he loved.



The little boy brought his snake with him wherever he went. He ate with it. He slept with it. He took it to his school. He took it out when he and his father went hunting. He even gave him a name. Everywhere he went, he made sure all his adventures were with Banana. He felt very clever coming up with that name. He thought of it when he found his toy in a bushel of them, resting quietly on a branch. Together he a Banana the snake were the best of friends.

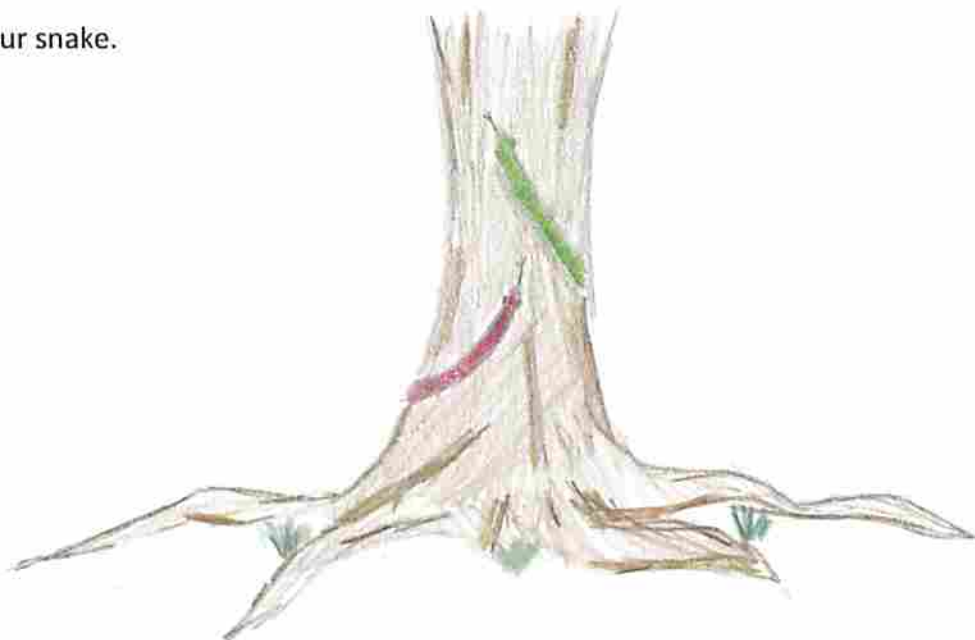


Every night before he went to sleep, he put Banana inside a tin box near the window to look at the stars, so he didn't feel so lonely. He watched the other snakes outside, easily spiraling up the banana tree and hissing their tongues in laughter.

One night as the boy slept the top to the tin box made a loud POP! and flew across the desk. Out slithered Banana as best he could, inching his way along and clicking his wooden tail. It was very hard for him to move when his wooden frame was as stiff as a twig. He looked at the stars and said to himself:

"I hate being the only snake who can't climb the trees and slide along the grass with the others! I'm tired of lapping water with a felt tongue! I would give anything to be real!"

Banana, furious, pouted his way to sleep that night. He closed his eyes tight and went to bed a sour snake.



The next morning he woke up and cursed when he saw his wooden-ringed behind. Still the same old snake, he smacked his tail with all his might. The boy carried him all day, but whenever he could, Banana eyed the banana tree, wishing he could climb it and feast on its

tasty fruit, as the other snakes had remarked to him in his sleep. Alas Banana's mouth was two wood planks hinged by string. He thought about the tree all day.

The next night he closed his eyes tighter and hissed to himself:

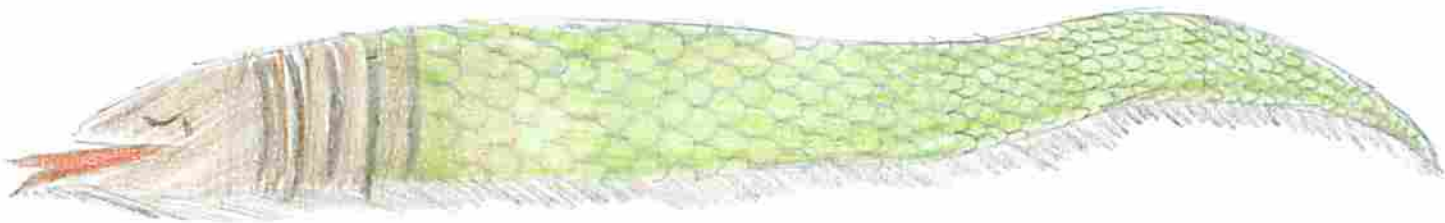
"I wish I was real! I wish I was real! I wish I was real!"

The other snakes laughed.

When he woke up the next morning and saw his wooden tail he cursed again. The same old snake smacked his tail with all his might and hissed until his tongue was tired and red. Again, he thought about the banana tree all day.

The next night he closed his eyes and wished so hard that his tiny face cracked and he fell into a deep slumber.

When he awoke he saw that his wooden rings had turned into scales and his tongue could flicker instead of hang in the wind. After all his waiting, he was finally a real snake. His dream had come true! He was so happy that although he had no arms and legs, he managed to dance around the table.



He left the boy and slithered outside and visited the banana tree, looking up at the fruit which hanged from it. Just then when the other snakes saw him, they couldn't tell the difference.

"Ha!" hissed Banana. "You never thought it would be. But look at me. No longer am I brittle and bare, but alive again!"

But just then, a bird whose feathers were as bright as the rainbows, landed high on a branch above Banana. He looked down at him and chuckled, singing a rhyme.

"Chickadee Chickadee Pickle pea ree!

How many bumblebees live in a tree?!

I'll give you an answer and tell what I asked.

How many apples grow in the grass?"



It was an odd riddle, but Banana didn't think much of this, and began to climb up the tree to reach the tasty fruit. The bird danced wildly on the branch and chuckled at Banana. Then he sang:

"Fiddle-rum Fiddle-roo Fiddle me good.

A bad man sailed to the west of the wood.

How many days did he stand where he stood,

When the man turned bad from when he thought he was good?"

Again, Banana thought nothing of this and sneered at the bird, who stood between him and the fruit. When he reached the top of the branch he looked the bird straight in the eye, but the bird flashed its wings and sang:

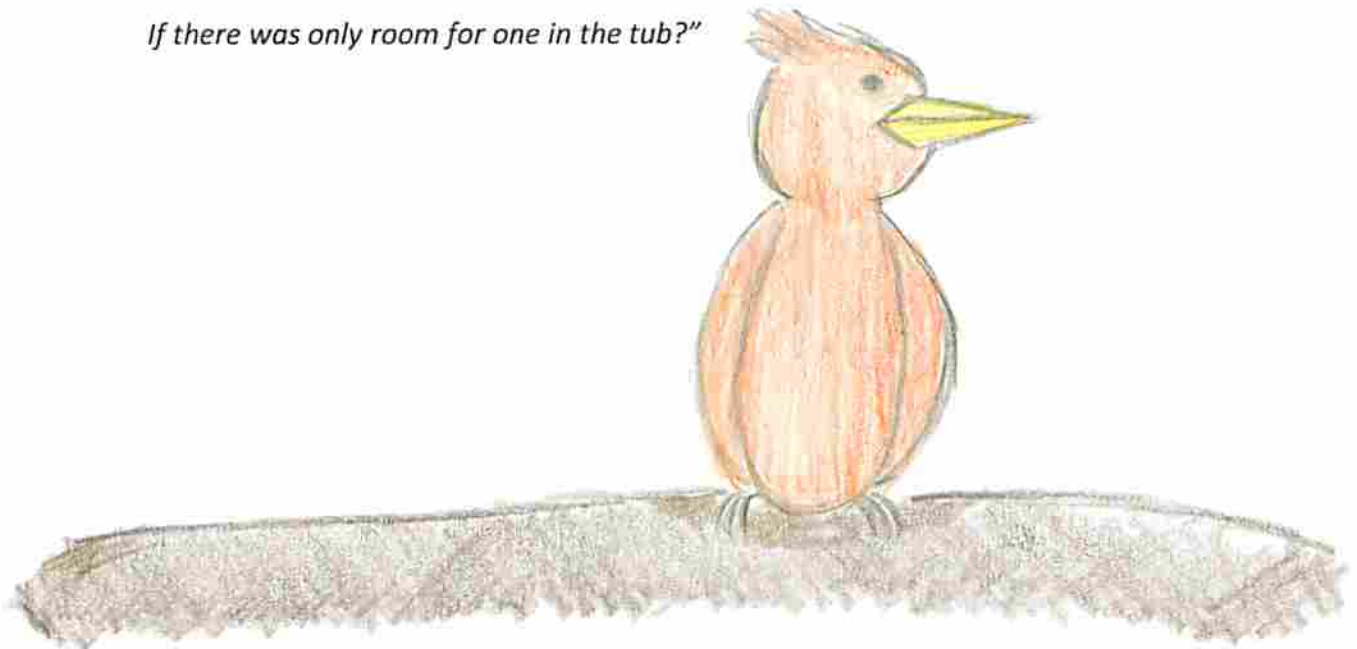
"Teedle-tum Teedle-tee rub a dub dub!

The fox was a snail. The snail was a stub.

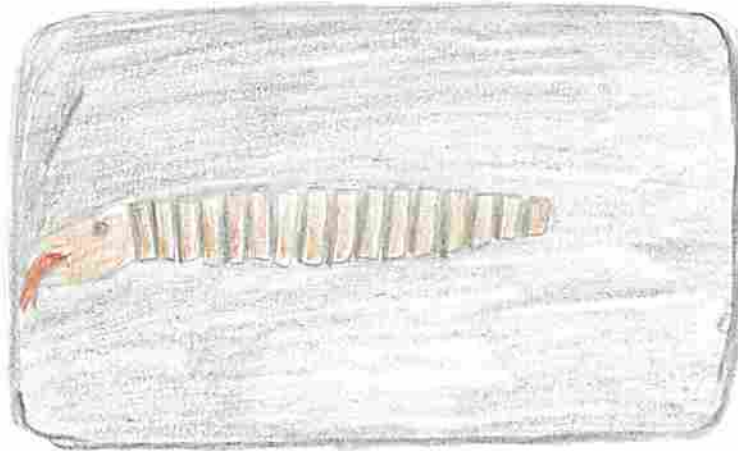
How many more will fall in the tub?

But how did the snail be the fox be a stub,

If there was only room for one in the tub?"



But Banana had been looking at the fruit behind him, and did not realize until suddenly with a great YEEEEEP! The other snakes ran away, and all was silent. When they turned to look back from behind the tree, they saw the bird, sitting quietly, with Banana in his mouth. He wriggled and shrieked, but then he fell silent, caught in the beak.



When the boy woke up in the morning, he looked inside the tin box to see his wooden snake missing its tail, and when he turned his back, the snake smacked his head with all his might, and all the other snakes outside were hissing away, telling the story over and over again until the nightfall.

The End