



HOW  
THE LIZARD  
GOT BACK  
HER LEGS

*A Short Story  
of Ancient Greece*

ILANA WATERS

## **“How the Lizard Got Back Her Legs”**

A Short Story of Ancient Greece

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*Once upon a time, in ancient Greece, there was a lizard who lost her legs when she angered the gods. Now a lowly snake, she'd do anything to prove herself worthy of having legs again. When three very important gods need her help, the snake gets her chance. But can she accomplish the nearly impossible tasks they set before her? Especially if one is rescuing the son of the mighty Zeus? The snake has to try, or she'll be doomed to slither along the ground . . . forever!*

*Are you a fan of Rick Riordan, The Goddess Girls, or Heroes in Training? Looking for a funny short story? If so, you're in luck—read this exciting myth today!*

*(Approximately 3,000 words, or 12 pages).*

## **“How the Lizard Got Back Her Legs”**

ONCE UPON A TIME, the lizard lost her legs because she did something that displeased the gods. Rumor had it she had grown too proud of her limbs, and as punishment, the gods made them shrivel up and disappear. But you can never be too sure. She may have done nothing at all.

The lizard was the only one of her kind, the gods having neglected to make more than one lizard to begin with. This was long before the gods all lived together on Mount Olympus, watching (and interfering) with mortal affairs. At the time of the lizard’s punishment, they lived in separate kingdoms down on earth. They only went back to Mount Olympus for special occasions.

The gods enjoyed having such a great and vast world to rule over. However, the lizard (now a snake, for she was legless) grew tired of crawling on her belly. It wasn’t the most pleasant way to travel between kingdoms. She longed to prove herself worthy of having legs again. Many years later, she got her chance.

The snake was slithering along one morning when she happened on Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The beautiful lady was sitting on a log and weeping. The snake sat on the log next to the goddess and asked what was wrong. Aphrodite replied:

“Long ago I gave a ring—a ring *very* special to me—to a mortal man I was in love with. His name is Minos. Now, he refuses my love. Worse, he refuses to return the ring! Whatever shall I do?” The goddess began to wail.

“The ungrateful lover I can’t replace,” said the snake. “But what will you give me for returning the ring to you?”

“Oh, you could never get it back from him,” sobbed Aphrodite into a white silk handkerchief. “He is a powerful king in a land far away. It is hopeless—completely hopeless!” She continued to wail.

“Do not underestimate me,” replied the snake. “I may look small, but what I lack in size and strength I make up in speed and wit.”

The goddess stopped crying for a moment and raised her eyebrows. She was surprised to hear the snake say this. “Well, for the return of my ring, I would give you anything,” she said, dabbing the tops of her cheekbones. “Flowers, love potions, a husband—”

“I have no need of those, thank you,” interrupted the snake. “What I would really like is to have my legs back.”

“I’m afraid I don’t have the power to give back *all* your legs,” said Aphrodite. “But I could give you *one* back.” She blew her nose loudly into the handkerchief.

“Fair enough,” said the snake, turning to leave. “Tomorrow I will return with your ring, and you will return to me one leg.”

“Good luck,” called Aphrodite, waving to the reptile with her handkerchief. Then, she sat down and wept again. For who would believe that one little snake could accomplish such a feat?

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Later that day, the snake reached Mino’s kingdom. She slithered right up to the palace gate and asked the guard:

“Excuse me, but if Minos had a ring he treasured deeply, where would he keep it?”

The guard looked to the left. He looked to the right. He even looked a bit fearfully above him and raised his spear. But he could not tell who had asked the question, or where the voice had come from.

“Ahem.” The snake cleared her throat. “Down here.”

When the guard glanced down and spotted the reptile, he gave a little laugh. Then he scratched his head. Would he get in trouble for talking to a snake while on duty?

“A-hem,” repeated the snake, but this time it was not to clear her throat. “I *said*, where would King Minos keep a treasured ring?” She tapped the tip of her tail impatiently on the guard’s boot.

The guard yanked his foot back. Talking to snakes was one thing, but he did *not* want one crawling all over him. “Well, I, er . . . the treasure room,” he replied quickly. “It’s where Minos

keeps all the gold and jewels of the kingdom. But the room boasts thirty guards to protect it. No one's ever gotten in and escaped alive."

The snake gave a small nod. "Thank you," she said. Then she slid between the guard's feet and made for the palace.

The guard scratched his head again. He looked around once more, just in case his boss was nearby and had seen him chatting. Then he continued standing watch, wondering what was for lunch.

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As soon as the snake was inside the palace, she heard Mino's young daughter speaking. She told her father she was going to the treasure room to fetch some trinket of hers.

"What trinket is that, my precious?" Minos asked.

"The necklace with the red rubies and gold swirls, Daddy," the princess informed him, resting her hand on a marble table. The snake slid onto the little girl's wrist, making herself cold and hard. She hoped to fool the girl into thinking she was wearing a set of bracelets. Indeed, when the princess looked down, she admired the pretty green bangles she hadn't remembered putting on that morning.

"All right then, pumpkin," replied her father. "But hurry back!"

The princess skipped to the treasure room and smiled at the row of guards outside. They bowed and let her pass. Then she did the same with the guards on the inside of the treasure room.

"Guards on the *inside*?" thought the snake. "I guess Minos wants to make sure that whoever gets *inside* to steal treasure never gets back *out*."

But the princess was free to come and go as she pleased. As soon as the girl was within the room's walls, the snake slid silently off her arm. Then she looked for Aphrodite's ring. The snake searched long and hard, but eventually she found the ring inside a golden jar. Unfortunately, by that time, the princess was long gone. The snake had been so absorbed in her search, she hadn't seen or heard the girl leave.

But the snake had not lied when she told Aphrodite she was cunning. She slithered over to the feet of the "inside" guards. There, she quickly coiled and uncoiled herself around their ankles. This made them think there were many more snakes in the room than just one. And no matter how brave a man is, there is none who can stand the thought of scaly creatures touching

him. Within moments, the guards on the *inside* were screaming to the guards on the *outside* to open the doors.

“What’s wrong?” snapped an outside guard. “What’s going on in there that a stalwart group of king’s men can’t handle?”

“Oh save us, save us!” cried the inside guards. “The palace is infested with snakes!”

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The next day, the snake made her way back to Aphrodite’s kingdom. She found the goddess on the same log where she’d been weeping the previous day. Aphrodite was very surprised to find that the snake had returned, and delighted to see her beloved ring again. As promised, she returned one leg to the snake.

All this was well and good for a while, until the snake grew tired of having only one leg. She longed for a chance to prove herself worthy of *two* legs, at least. And one day her chance came.

Early in the morning, she found herself in the woods again (for snakes often inhabit the woods). She was both crawling and walking with her one leg and snake’s body. Suddenly, she came upon Ares—the god of war. Everyone knew that Ares was a brave and skilled fighter. But today, as he sharpened his sword, the snake noticed he looked very sad. She asked him what was wrong.

“There is a giant plaguing my kingdom,” Ares replied. “And try as I might, I cannot kill him. He is covered with skin that is hard and silver, like armor. The only vulnerable place is his neck. But he is so big and strong that even *I*—the great Ares—cannot get near it. Whatever shall I do?”

“Do not fear,” replied the snake. “I will kill this giant and make your kingdom peaceful once again. But if I do, what will you give me in return?”

“You?” Ares raised his eyebrows. “*You* could never kill him. I already told you—he is far too big and strong. He is also incredibly scary.”

“Do not underestimate me,” said the snake. “What I lack in size and strength I make up in speed and wit.”

The god looked surprised. Still, he seemed willing to accept the snake’s help. “Well, I would give you anything. Weapons, generals, armies—”

“Thank you, but I have no need of those,” replied the snake. “What I’d really like is my other three legs back.”

“I don’t have the power to give back all your legs,” explained Ares. “But I could manage to give one back.”

“Fair enough,” said the snake, turning to leave. “Tomorrow, I shall return with the giant’s head. And you shall return to me one leg.” And away she slithered. It was easy for the snake to still slither when she needed to. All she had to do was lift her one leg off the ground.

“Good luck!” called Ares, waving to the snake as she left. Then, he went back to sadly sharpening his sword. For who would believe that a little snake could accomplish such a feat?

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Later that day, the snake reached the cave of the giant. Just as Ares had said, the giant was very large and terribly scary. His face boasted bulging eyes and ugly scars; the rest of him was indeed covered with silvery scales of armor. But the snake could also see the pink flesh of his neck peeking out from between the scales. Unafraid, she went right in and said hello.

The giant immediately drew his sword and looked around the cave.

“Who goes there?” he bellowed.

The snake coughed and the giant looked down. He sheathed his sword and began to laugh.

“To think I was afraid of a silly little snake!” he chuckled.

“And afraid you should be, sir,” said the snake. “Do not underestimate me. I may look small, but what I lack in size and strength I make up in speed and wit.”

This made the giant laugh even harder. “Speed and wit are no match for my mighty sword here,” he replied. And he held the weapon high, admiring its glint in the dim cave light.

“Let us have a battle, then,” said the snake. “And I will prove to you that an enemy’s strength can always be used against him.”

“I fear I am wasting my time,” sighed the giant, “but so be it. You will make a tiny—though tasty—snack.” The giant brought his sword to his side again. “Let us begin,” he cried. “Hey! Where are you?”

“Over here,” a small voice called.

The giant looked down to see the snake in a dark corner of the cave. He charged, but just when he was about to skewer her, the snake rushed to the other side of the cave. The giant

charged again, and brought down his sword to pierce her. But the snake slithered in the opposite direction *again*. This went on for quite a while—until the giant finally fell down dead from exhaustion.

The snake was also breathless, but all she needed was a short rest to revive her strength. Then she took the giant's own sword and cut off his head, much aided by her one leg. She was beginning to feel quite proud of herself. She couldn't wait to see what she could do with *two* legs!

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Later that evening, the snake made her way back to Ares. He was still in the same forest where he'd been sharpening his sword. The god was very surprised to see that the snake had returned—and in one piece. But he was overjoyed she was dragging the head of the giant behind her. As promised, he returned to her one leg.

All this was well and good for a time, until the snake got tired of having only two legs. She longed to prove herself worthy of having *three* legs this time. Finally—and for good—her chance came.

She was traveling near the palace of Zeus when she caught a glimpse of the mighty king of the gods himself. He was sitting on a golden chair in his enormous marble courtyard.

"Hmmm . . ." the snake thought. "It wouldn't hurt to make friends with the most powerful figure in the Greek world. Perhaps I should stop and say hello." And so the snake went over to Zeus. Tears were running down his face. She asked him what was wrong.

"Don't you know?" Zeus replied. He tried to wipe the tears away, but fresh ones quickly appeared in their place. "An enemy of mine has held my son, Apollo, captive this past year and a day. He asks for a huge ransom for Apollo's safe return. But even though I am very wealthy, my riches are not enough to rescue my son. My enemy plans to hang the boy from the highest cliff in the kingdom at noon today. How will I ever live without him?" And Zeus cried out in anguish, clutching at his heart.

"I am sorry, sir, that I haven't heard of your troubles," said the snake sympathetically. "I've been away from the kingdom on several small journeys. What would you give if I rescue your son for you?" she asked.

"Oh, could you really rescue him?" Zeus exclaimed. "The cliff I spoke of is steep and treacherous. And there are bound to be many fierce guards to fight."



“Do not underestimate me,” replied the snake. “I may look small, but what I lack in size and strength I make up in speed and wit.”

This time, the god did not look surprised. “I am a wise man,” he replied gravely. “I have heard of such things. I would give you anything you want—your other legs back, perhaps?”

*Both* legs! thought the snake, her heart leaping with joy. That was an even better bargain than she could have hoped for. “You read my mind,” she said to Zeus. “Tomorrow, I will be back with your son. And you will give me back my other two legs.” Then she dashed off as quickly as she could.

“Good luck!” called Zeus, waving to the snake as she left. The god dried his tears, and began to have hope. Maybe, where all his troops, armies, and riches had failed, one little snake could succeed.

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Just before noon, the snake reached the highest cliff in the kingdom. Now, the cliff may have been considered steep and treacherous to mortal men. But the snake had no trouble maneuvering through the slopes and rocks. She outwitted the guards on duty the same way she had with Minos’: by slithering around their ankles. They ran off screaming, just as the snake knew they would.

Only one little man remained. He had been stationed far away from the other guards. He had not heard their screaming, nor seen them run away. It was his job to tie the rope around Apollo’s neck and push him off. The young god’s arms were already tied with indestructible chains, so he could not escape. He was also gagged with a handkerchief so that he could not talk.

The snake confidently snuck up behind the little man and began weaving in and out of his ankles.

“Awww . . . a little snake!” he cooed. “How cute. Maybe I should take it home and make it into a pet. Heeere, snakey-snakey . . .” and he reached down to stroke her.

The snake blinked several times and quickly slithered away. Curses! she thought. The *one* person in all the kingdoms who isn’t afraid of snakes. What dreadful luck, she muttered to herself.

For once, the snake did not know what to do. She couldn’t break through the chains that bound Apollo. Nor could she stop the little man from tying one end of the rope to a large rock and pushing the boy to his death. But when the man realized he couldn’t make a pet of the snake,

he decided to eat lunch instead. It gave her time to form a plan. Her eyes settled on the coil of hangman's rope nearby.

Aha! she thought. You see, the snake really was quite clever. Cleverer than even *she'd* realized. By the time the man finished his food, she knew how to rescue Apollo.

The man went over to the rock on which he'd planned to fasten the rope. He looked at it and tilted his head to one side. He didn't remember tying the rope to the rock before he ate. Still, there it was—plain as day and ready to go. He shrugged his shoulders.

“Guess I'm more efficient at executions than I thought,” he said. He tied the other end of the rope around Apollo's neck. He told the young god to say his prayers. A single tear fell from Apollo's cheek, and the heartless man pushed him over the cliff. Then he calmly walked away, whistling all the while.

But the rope wasn't really a rope at all. It was our friend, the snake! Just as she'd pretended to be a bracelet on the princess's wrist, she'd changed herself to look like a rope. She'd twisted and turned and magicked herself, until she was as yellow and coarse as the thickest rope. Then she held onto the rock with her two front legs. She even let the little man wrap her other end around Apollo.

To the young god's astonishment, the “rope” began pulling him off the edge of the cliff. It loosened itself from his neck the moment the little man turned his back. Apollo was shocked when the rope quickly wrapped around his waist and pulled him back up. He was even *more* shocked when it changed into a snake. And he nearly fell over when that snake informed him she was sent by Zeus to rescue him.

Needless to say, Apollo returned immediately to his father and told him all that had happened. There was great rejoicing throughout the land. The gods even came to Mount Olympus from their separate kingdoms to celebrate. They threw a special party, with the snake as the guest of honor.

Not only did Zeus give the snake back both her legs, but Apollo bestowed a further reward for saving his life. He promised to make an entire race of creatures just like her. They'd have both a snake-like body *and* four legs. Never had the snake (now a lizard once more) been happier.

And she never had to prove herself to anyone ever again.

THE END

## Afterword

Thank you so much for reading “How the Lizard Got Back Her Legs.” Look for more of my middle-grade fiction later in 2013!

In the meantime, feel free to visit me at [ilanawaters.com](http://ilanawaters.com), on [twitter](#), or [shoot me an e-mail](#). You can also [sign up for my newsletter](#). You’ll receive insider information on new releases, contests, giveaways, and other supercool stuff!

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## The Adventures of Stanley Delacourt: Book 1 of Hartlandia

Ten-year-old Stanley Delacourt loves his quiet life in the peaceful village of Meadowwood. At least, he does until his best friend is killed. Then the town library—where Stanley lives and works—is burned to the ground. The individuals responsible for both tragedies are a nasty group of soldiers. They work for the kingdom’s new leader: Christopher Siren.

No one understands the rules Siren’s creating. They don’t know why breaking them means death, or why the leader is so keen to destroy books. And no one can figure out where the former queen and king disappeared to—or if they’ll ever return.

With the grown-ups too fearful to take action, Stanley vows to confront Siren. He plans to get answers and demand justice. Little does he know that his journey will involve sword-wielding knights, kidnapper fairies, and dark magic.

Stanley has only two allies back home. One is an intimidated witch named Meredith. The other is a young apothecary called Sophie—who may have enchantment problems of her own. Can they help him discover the reason behind Siren’s crimes and end this terrible reign? Or is Stanley set to become the next victim in the tyrant’s evil plot?

If you enjoy the fantasy works of Rick Riordan, Lemony Snicket, or Philip Pullman, then explore the world of Stanley Delacourt today. [Read the first chapter here for FREE!](#) Or, you can buy it at [Amazon](#), [Amazon.com/uk](#), [Barnesandnoble](#), [Apple](#), [Kobo](#), and [Smashwords](#).

## Castles in the Air

Ten-year-old Wikkley McStag and his family are born farmers, happy to work and live off the land. But then they—and all other royal subjects—are forced to buy strange, useless machines. Money starts running out. Now the McStags have two days before they lose their farm. As the eldest child, Wikkley must journey to the palace and ask for the king's help. His loved ones only hope his reckless nature won't get him in trouble once he's there!

When Wikkley arrives at the palace, he finds the royal family building a huge, unnecessary castle right into the sky. With his own ruler too busy to help, Wikkley turns to the neighboring kingdom. But the royal family *there* is making subjects buy bizarre things as well. They're also building a castle too high to be safe.

When the kings' foolishness leads to disaster, it's up to Wikkley to save several lives. Will his recklessness finally come in handy? Or will it mean the end of his family, his farm, and possibly . . . his life?

From the fantasy world of *The Adventures of Stanley Delacourt*, Ilana Waters brings you another alternate-medieval adventure. If you like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, don't miss the chance to meet Wikkley McStag!

This middle-grade novella is [available here](#). You can also [grab the FREE sample](#) on my website!

## **Paying Piper**

The people of Hamelin have a problem with rats. There are rats in their houses, their stores—even swimming in their stew! The rats don't think they're a problem. They just want to live their lives in peace. With the town's approval, the mayor thinks of a clever way to solve the problem. He offers twenty gold pieces to a piper to rid the town of rats. He delivers only five.

But he's cheated the wrong piper, who'll have to use both skill and wit to teach this town a lesson. Because there's more than money at stake. An evil pattern is emerging in the way Hamelin treats any creature it considers inferior. And the Piper vows to put an end to it—once and for all.

Think you know everything about this classic folktale of greed and cunning? In “Paying Piper,” you'll learn what really happened the day a magical musician came to Hamelin—and why.

Fans of fairy tales with a twist will delight in this tricky, witty middle-grade short story. (And if you're a parent or teacher, stay tuned for bonus discussion questions at the end!)

“Paying Piper” is [available here](#). You can also [grab the FREE sample](#) on my website!

## **About the Author**

Ilana Waters is a freelance writer who lives in New Jersey. When not creating content for websites, she can be found working on novels and short stories—as well as nibbling string cheese. She once pet-sat an electric eel, and enjoys walking in circles around the park for no particular reason.

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