

# Fur and Scales

By StayArmy

Runner Up | Best Nature Story Award

The little white and grey kitten opened its big green eyes to the bright morning sun and yawned. He got up and stretched before bounding off to look for some water and food. It was spring in the forest he lived in and he loved to stop and smell the newly opened flowers. He soon found a river and stopped to take a drink. Something small bumped into his leg and he jumped into the air and spun around to face his enemy.

A small green snake had been what scared him. The kitten started at it, surprised. He raised a paw and gently batted its head. The snake did nothing at first, then it slithered closer and booped the kitten's nose with hers. The kitten responded by licking the snake's smooth head.

The kitten and snake became fast friends. They went everywhere together, and at night the little kitten would curl around the snake, keeping her warm. During the day the snake would ride on the top of the kitten's head and he would walk with his head up high as if to say "Yeah that's right! I have a snake on my head! Whatcha gonna do 'bout it?" At first the other forest animals would give the kitten and snake duo strange looks but they soon got used to it.

When the two grew up they started getting into more and more trouble. At first it was small things like stealing berries from the birds or filling in the ants nests. Then it was waking the bears a week or two early. And when camping season started they figured out where the humans stored their food and the cat would make small holes for the snake to slither through and she would carry small amounts of food out and they would dash off before anyone could catch them.

But sometimes, they would help the other animals. Once, in the fall, the squirrels had not been able to gather enough food for winter so the cat and snake duo filled the stash with nuts and snacks they had pawed that year. Another time a wolf pup had gotten lost and they led it back to its pack. They didn't do this often, for the two enjoyed causing trouble more, but it felt good to help out every now and then.

Over the years, as the forest grew and changed, so did the cat and snake. One day they went to the river where they had first met. They drank and layed down in the sun. They were very old now, nothing like the kitten and snakelet they once were. They curled up together like they always had, with the cat curled around the snake. Just before they fell asleep the snake booped the cat's nose and he returned the gesture by licking her head. Then the two fell asleep in the warm sun, with the birds chirping, newborn baby animals playing, and the beautiful flowers welcoming spring with their smiling faces open to the sun.

A few days later a park ranger found the two still curled up together and shook his head smiling. He had watched the two grow up together, playing and getting into trouble, and now here they were, still inseparable even in death. He picked up their still bodys, careful not to move them too much, wrapped them up, and took them to a secret animal cemetery the park had for animals like these and buried them together. He left then came back with a little headstone and set it down to mark their grave. He smiled sadly, wiped a tear, then left.

The small stone only had three words: Fur and Scales.