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March 21, 1985

Yoshiko Uchida
1685 Solano Avenue #102
Berkeley, California 94707

Dear Ms. Uchida:

Enclosed please find a check in the amount of \$100.00, payment for reprinting "The Terrible Black Snake's Revenge" in our publication CELEBRATIONS by Caroline Feller Bauer.

We were delighted to be able to include your story, and are grateful to you for considering a fee reduction. Thanks very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Lehman

Ellen Lehman
General Publications

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The Terrible Black Snake's Revenge

by YOSHOKO UCHIDA

High in a small mountain village, there once lived a man whose name was Badger. One day Badger had to go to the village on the other side of the mountains, and in order to do that, he had to travel through a deep and dark forest. The mountain forest was full of bears and wolves and snakes that hid in the tall grass, and Badger trembled as he thought about them.

"Be especially careful of the terrible Black Snake of the Mountains," the villagers warned, "for if he catches you, he will swallow you alive and we will never see you again."

"I know, I know," Badger answered weakly, and his knees wobbled at the very thought of this monstrous snake.

Before dawn the next morning, Badger set out so that he would be clear of the forest by nightfall. He walked briskly into the mountains, whistling to keep up his spirits. Soon he was tramping along the narrow path deep in the shadowy woods, trying hard not to think of the fearful snake. He walked and he walked and he walked, but no matter how far he went, he couldn't seem to get over the mountains. He looked up at the sky and saw the sun creeping higher and higher over his head. Soon it began to dip beyond the treetops and still Badger had not gotten out of the mountain forest. Before long, the dusky shadows of nightfall were all about him and poor Badger knew that he had lost his way.

"Of all the dreadful terrible places to be lost," he muttered, shuddering as he thought of what the night would bring. But it was useless to roam any longer. I must find a safe place to spend the night, he thought, and he looked about for a good hiding place.

At last he came upon a deep cave sheltered behind a mass of boulders. Ah, this will do nicely until morning, Badger thought, and he quickly crawled inside and tried to sleep.

As the night wore on, the wind shrieked and moaned, and the trees of the forest seemed to whisper and sigh like a gathering of sorrowful ghosts. An owl hooted dismally above his head, and somewhere in the distant hills a wolf was howling at the moon. Badger closed his eyes tight and tried not to hear the night sounds of the forest, but it was impossible for him to sleep.

About midnight he heard a strange sound. At first it was a faint rustle and then it came closer and closer and closer. Badger shrank into the corner of the cave scarcely daring to breathe. And then something appeared at the mouth of the cave and Badger saw a dark shadow moving inside. It was something long and black and slippery. It was the terrible Black Snake of the Mountains himself, and he slithered closer and closer and closer!

Badger tried to call for help. His mouth was open, but not a sound came out. Frantically, he looked about for a stone or a stick, for if he did not strike the snake first, he would surely be swallowed alive. As he fumbled about desperately, the snake suddenly stopped and spoke to him.

"Who are you and what are you doing in my cave?" he asked quite politely.

"M-m-m-my n-n-n-name—" Poor Badger was so terrified he could not speak. Finally, he simply stuttered. "B-b-b-badger!"

The snake hissed a snakelike laugh. "Ah, so you are a badger," he said. "For a moment I thought you were a human being. You have surely turned yourself into a very good imitation of a human being."

And the snake, believing that he was talking to another animal, relaxed and curled himself into a nice round coil.

"I have heard that you badgers are very clever at disguising yourselves," he said almost enviously. "Now I have seen for myself how well you do."

The snake talked on and on, for he did not have many friends, and furthermore they did not usually come to share his cave in the middle of the night. He told Badger of all the villagers he had swallowed and how delicious they had been.

"They are very frightened of me, I hear," he said boastfully. Then he turned to Badger and asked, "Tell me, is there anything at all that you are truly afraid of?"

Badger almost stammered, "You!" But of course he could never say that. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "I hear that gold is a very cursed thing and that it can very well ruin one. I suppose the thing I fear most is gold."

The snake nodded his big black head and then, because he believed he was talking to a friend, he said, "If you promise never to tell anyone, I will tell you what I fear the most."

"I promise," Badger replied. "Tell me what it is."

"Well," said the snake, writhing at the thought, "what frightens me most is hot melted tar. I could very well be trapped and killed with it." Then the snake stopped and looked straight into Badger's eyes. "If you tell anyone what I have just told you, I will find you no matter where you are and I will seek a fearful revenge. Do you understand?"

Once more Badger was too frightened to speak. He simply nodded his head and wished with all his heart that he were back home in his village.

At last the sun began to rise, and when a streak of light burst into the cave, the snake slithered off, muttering, "I must find another place of darkness until midnight."

Badger gave up all thought of doing any business in the village beyond the mountains. He somehow found his way out of the forest and ran back to his village like a mouse running from a cat. He sputtered out his story of spending the night in the dark cave with the terrible Black Snake of the Mountains. "And I have discovered what it is that the snake fears the most!" he burst out. "Now we can kill him and no one need ever be afraid of crossing the mountains again."

"Badger, you are a brave man!" the villagers cried. And that very night, Badger led them into the forest with a tub full of hot melted tar. They hid behind the boulders beside the cave and waited silently in the black-velvet forest night. About midnight they finally heard the

Black Snake moving over the leaves. The moment he entered his cave they leaped out, and with a great shout they poured in the hot melted tar.

"Never again will you swallow up our villagers!" they cried angrily.

The snake let out a great hissing sound, but he was very clever and very quick, and he somehow escaped the hot melted tar. He managed to slip out of the cave and disappeared into a deep mountain pool before any of the villagers could catch him.

"We have missed our chance," Badger said desolately. "We didn't kill the Black Snake after all." And they all returned to the village feeling anxious and disappointed.

But of all the villagers, Badger was more frightened than anyone else, for he remembered the snake's last words to him. Now he will surely come to find me and seek revenge, Badger thought miserably, and he wondered what terrible fate awaited him that night.

He bolted his door and pushed a great heavy charcoal brazier in front of it. He tried to sleep, but he was much too frightened for that, so he sat before the hearth and waited as the night grew cold and still. Then, at last, toward midnight, he heard a sound outside.

"He has found me already," Badger said with a shiver.

Now there was a rustling at the window, and soon the terrible Black Snake thrust his big black head inside.

"You traitor!" he hissed. "You not only lied to me, you broke your promise and you even tried to kill me. I have come to punish you with a basketful of the one thing you fear most!"

And with a great clatter and crash he threw in an enormous basket that was filled with gold coins.

"Now I have been avenged," the snake hissed and he quickly disappeared into the darkness.

Badger blinked hard and looked at all the gold that was strewn about his floor. Then, when he realized what had happened, he threw back his head and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. He had not only fooled the Black Snake, he had become a wealthy man.

The snake soon discovered that he had been deceived and grew so angry and embarrassed that he disappeared completely from the mountains and never swallowed another human being again. The mountains and forest became safe once more, and Badger lived a good and long life with all the gold he received from the terrible Black Snake.



Poetry Selections

The Python

by JOHN GARDNER

One afternoon, while sitting in a
tree,
God thought up the Python.
He cracked a grin and clapped his
hands
And at once got down and made
one.

When the Son came by, the Python
hissed
When the Son only meant to touch
him.

"He's a wonderful kind of snake,"
said the Son,
"But if I was you, I'd watch him."

The Python from then on did
nothing wrong
Till in Eden trouble came,
And Adam and Eve swore up and
down

That the Python was to blame.

All Heaven had doubts, but the
Python was cleared
By a full investigation;
Yet no one has trusted a Python
since.

Beware of a bad reputation.



Boa Constrictor

by SHEL SILVERSTEIN

[illegible]

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August 28, 1985

Yoshiko Uchida
1685 Solano Avenue #102
Berkeley, California 94707

Dear Ms. Uchida:

It has just come to my attention that we misspelled your name in Celebrations, by Caroline Bauer, and I wanted to tell you how sorry I am that the mistake was not caught earlier.

We've noted the error in our correction file, and shall correct it for the next printing.

Again, thank you for your permission to reprint your wonderful story, and in particular, for reducing the fee. We were happy to have the opportunity to include such a lovely tale.

With best wishes,

Ellen Lehman

Ellen Lehman
General Publications