

A Great Digger

by Arthur Scott Bailey

Of course, Benny Badger had the best of reasons for living on the high, dry plains. There he had for neighbors plenty of ground squirrels and prairie dogs. And it is likely that he enjoyed their company much more than they did his.

If anyone had asked them, those little wild people would no doubt have confessed that they wished Benny Badger was somewhere else. But their wishes meant nothing to Benny—if he knew anything of them. Although he couldn't help noticing that his small neighbors hurried into their homes whenever they caught sight of him, Benny never took the hint and went away. On the contrary, when he spied a prairie dog or a ground squirrel disappearing into his burrow Benny was more than ready to go right in after him.

Now, the tunnels that led to the houses of those smaller folk were too small to admit anybody as bulky as Benny Badger. But that difficulty never hindered Benny. Digging was the easiest thing he did. He had a powerful body, short, stout legs, and big feet, which bore long, strong claws. And when he started to dig his way into somebody else's home he certainly did make the dirt fly.

He was so fond of digging that he even dug countless holes of his own, just for the fun it gave him—so far as anybody could find out. And if he had only left other folk's holes alone some of his neighbors would not have objected to his favorite sport. For more than one fox and coyote had been known to make his home in a hole dug by Benny Badger. And, though they never took the trouble to thank him for saving them work, they often chuckled about his odd way of having fun, and remarked among themselves that Benny must be a stupid fellow.

If they really thought that, they made a great mistake. To be sure, at anything except digging he was slow and awkward. He was too heavy and squat to be spry on his feet—to chase and catch his more nimble neighbors. But no one that knew much about Benny Badger would have said that his wits were dull. They were sharp. And so, too, were his teeth, which he never hesitated to use in a fight.

Left alone, Benny Badger—when he wasn't too hungry—was a peaceable person. But if a dog ever tried to worry him Benny had a most unpleasant way of seizing his annoyer with his powerful jaws and holding the poor creature as if he never intended to let him go.

Cornered, Benny knew no such thing as fear. He had the heart of a lion, and jaws like a steel trap. And no wise dog ever let Benny get a good, firm grip on him.

Usually no one saw Benny Badger except at night. He seldom left his den in the daytime except to sun himself. And even then not many noticed him. Though he did not hide when anyone surprised him while taking a sun-bath, he had a trick of lying flat in the grass without moving. And it took a sharp eye to spy him when he lay low in that fashion.

Curled up asleep, with his long fur on end, he looked too comfortable to disturb. At least, that was what the ground squirrels thought. And if one of those busy little fellows ever paused to stare curiously at Benny when he was having a nap in the warm sunshine, Benny Badger had only to awake and turn his head toward the onlooker to make him scamper for home as fast as he could go.

It was not Benny's face, either, that frightened the ground squirrels away, though everybody had to admit that he had a queer one. A black patch spread over his eyes and ran like the point of a V down his nose. For the most part, however, he was of a grayish color, with still more black running in streaks across his back. Underneath he was a—yes! a dirty white color. But then, one must remember that he was forever digging in the dirt; and there was very little water where he lived. Anyhow, he was particular enough about one thing: his long hair was always carefully parted in the middle from his head to his tail.

And certainly that ought to show that he tried to keep himself looking neat.

Source:

Bailey, Arthur Scott. "A Great Digger." *The Tale of Benny Badger*. New York: Grossett & Dunlap Publishers, 1919. 1 – 6. Electronic.