

# Mamba

by Steven Gowin

I thought a little zoo on the almond ranch might be fun.

Got hold of a tiny Amazon monkey, a spitting llama, as foul and deadly an expectorator as you'd want, a big Gulf Coast rodent called a nutria, and yes, the serpent.

How does Bandie feel about snakes? This is my thought. What good is a serpent without venom? School boys sell and handle rattlesnakes in Earlham, and you can find a coral or cottonmouth if you drive to a fellow in Bakersfield. These are nothing special.

But a mamba, that is a snake worthy of Lloyd Bandie. I ordered Mamba from a dealer in New Orleans. The man had a connection in Congo. He assured me that Mamba radiated beauty and charm. Bandie needs beauty. On the other hand, if something's repugnant, it really must go.

By then the ugly nutria had disgusted me. So, once the serpent arrived, I and the followers decided we'd see Mamba in action. We withheld the viper's mice for weeks, ravished him I'd say, until his hungry black tongue forked in and out obsessively, hundreds of times a minute.

Then, on a moonless night, we built a huge bonfire in the orchard. We celebrated the dark. We drank, imbibed potions, danced, and chanted. Nakedness occurred, fornication, but we are not shameful people.

Just before dawn, that true witching hour, the moment had arrived. We loosed the rodent and opened Mamba's cage. He shot out faster than a man can run, a fast one, and snaked instantly toward the big rat.

Mamba caught sight of Nutria's eyes and roped up off the ground to a height of six feet at least. He struck; he struck again; Mamba struck again, a dozen fold, each shot of bitter dark venom ten times more potent than the last.

In only minutes, the toxin liquified Nutria's nerves which leaked out its orifices, a banana colored slime finely veined with blood. It all delighted the crowd.

Mamba was a bit hard to capture in the morning. A follower was nipped in the attempt but did not die.

That was some wicked good poison. Ah, those were the salad days.

*- excerpted from a longer story, "Bandie"*

