

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

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### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

### **Content Note**

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

### **Source Text**

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Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

## Part 1: Mole Leaves His Home

Mole had been working hard all morning. He was cleaning his small home under the ground because spring had come. First he used brooms, then cloths, and then a brush with white paint. He climbed on chairs and steps, and he tried to make every dark corner clean. Soon dust was in his throat and eyes. White marks were all over his black fur. His back hurt, his arms were tired, and he began to feel very unhappy.

Outside, spring was moving everywhere. It was in the warm air above the earth and in the soft ground below it. Even Mole's low little house seemed to feel it. The fresh life of spring came down into his rooms and made him restless. At last he threw down his brush on the floor. "Oh, this is enough!" he said. "I am tired of cleaning!" Then, without even putting on his coat, he ran out of the house.

Something above him seemed to call. Mole did not stop to think. He hurried to the steep little tunnel that led up from his home. Other animals had fine paths and wide drives before their houses, but Mole had only this narrow way through the earth. He pushed and scratched with his small paws. He pressed his body through the tunnel and moved higher and higher. "Up I go! Up I go!" he said to himself, and he worked with all his strength.

At last his nose came out into the sunlight. Then his head came out, and then his whole body. He rolled over in the warm grass of a wide meadow. The sun felt hot and kind on his fur. A soft wind touched his face. After the dark rooms under the ground, the songs of the birds sounded almost too loud and too bright. But Mole loved the sound, and his heart felt light.

"This is wonderful!" he said to himself. "This is much better than painting walls." He jumped up in the grass because he was so happy. He had no plan, and he did not need one. He only wanted to move, smell, listen, and look. He ran across the meadow until he came to a hedge. The world seemed open before him,

and he felt as if he had been set free.

At a gap in the hedge, an old rabbit tried to stop him. “Wait there!” the rabbit said. “You must pay sixpence to pass along this private road.” But Mole was in no mood to be stopped. He pushed past the rabbit and sent him rolling over. Then he ran along by the hedge while other rabbits looked out from their holes. Mole laughed at them and called, “Onion sauce!” before they could think of anything to say back.

After he had gone, the rabbits began to argue with one another. One rabbit said, “Why did you not tell him?” Another said, “Why did you not stop him?” A third rabbit said that someone should have reminded Mole of the rules. But it was too late now. Mole had already disappeared into the open fields. And when something is already too late, talking about it never helps very much.

Mole walked here and there through the meadows. He went along the hedges and across little groups of trees. Everywhere he looked, birds were building nests. Flowers were beginning to open. Young leaves were pushing out from branches. Everything was busy and full of life. Mole was the only animal doing nothing useful, but that made him even happier.

Usually, when someone stops working, a small voice inside says, “You should go back.” Mole almost expected that voice to speak about his unfinished cleaning. But on this day the voice did not trouble him. He did not feel guilty. He only felt the joy of being free while all the others were busy. Perhaps, he thought, one of the best things about a holiday is watching other people work.

He walked without knowing where he was going. He crossed more grass, passed more trees, and followed the shape of the land. Then, quite suddenly, he came to the edge of a river. He stopped at once. He had never seen a river before. It was full, bright, and alive, and it moved as if it were a long shining animal.

The river ran and laughed in front of him. It took small things in its moving hands, held them for a moment, and then let them go. It made soft sounds over stones and roots. It shone in the sun, and little lights danced on its surface. It seemed to talk all the time, in a quick, happy voice. Mole stood there and could hardly breathe.

He began to walk beside the river. He followed it as a small child might follow an older friend who is telling a wonderful story. The river turned and moved, and Mole moved with it. Sometimes it hurried. Sometimes it slowed and whispered near the bank. Mole listened to it, though he could not understand its words. He felt that it knew many stories from far away places.

After a while he became tired and sat down on the grass. The river still talked beside him. It seemed to bring stories from deep inside the earth and carry them onward toward the sea. Mole looked at the water and felt that the world was much larger than he had ever known. His small underground home was behind him now. Before him was light, movement, and a new kind of life.

He looked across the river to the bank on the other side. There, just above the water, he saw a dark round hole. It looked like a comfortable little doorway. Mole thought it would be a very good home for an animal who wanted only a few things. It was near the water, but high enough to be safe. It was quiet, away from dust and noise, and the view was beautiful.

Mole sat still and stared at the hole. He did not yet know who lived there. He did not know that this river would change his life. He only knew that he had left his dark rooms behind and found something bright and new. The river moved on beside him, shining and speaking softly. Mole stayed where he was, full of wonder, and waited without knowing that a friend was very near.

## Part 2: Rat and the River

As Mole looked at the dark hole across the river, he saw something small and bright inside it. It shone for a moment, disappeared, and then shone again. It was too bright to be a worm and too strange to be a star. Then it moved, and Mole saw that it was an eye. Slowly a small brown face appeared around it, with whiskers, neat ears, and soft hair.

The animal looked at Mole, and Mole looked back at him. For a little while neither of them moved. Then the animal spoke in a friendly way. "Hello, Mole," he said. Mole answered, "Hello, Rat." This was the Water Rat, and from that

moment Mole's new life truly began.

Rat asked if Mole would like to come across the river. Mole looked at the water and felt unsure, because he knew nothing about rivers or boats. Rat did not laugh at him. He pulled on a rope, stepped into a small boat, and came across the water. The boat was blue outside and white inside. Mole loved it at once, though he did not yet understand how it worked.

Rat held out his paw and helped Mole into the boat. Mole sat down carefully and felt the boat move under him. It was a wonderful feeling, half safe and half strange. "This has been a wonderful day," he said. "I have never been in a boat before." Rat stared at him in surprise and could hardly believe it.

Rat began to row along the river. He said that there was nothing better than spending time in boats. He spoke as if boats were the center of all happiness. As he talked, he became dreamy and forgot to look ahead. Suddenly the boat hit the bank, and Rat fell backward with his legs in the air. Mole was frightened for a moment, but Rat only laughed and sat up again.

Rat asked Mole to spend the day with him on the river. Mole was so happy that he could hardly keep still. Rat went back into his home and returned with a large lunch basket. Mole wanted to know what was inside it. Rat began to list many good things, one after another, until Mole begged him to stop because it sounded too wonderful. Then they moved down the river together.

Mole leaned back in the boat and let one paw trail in the water. The sun, the smells, the sounds, and the bright moving river filled him with joy. Rat rowed steadily and kindly let him dream. After a while Rat spoke about Mole's black fur and said it looked very fine. Mole suddenly remembered his manners and apologized for being quiet. "Everything is so new to me," he said. "So this is a river."

Rat corrected him gently and said it was the River. He spoke of it as if it were family, friend, food, drink, and world all together. Mole asked if life by the river was sometimes lonely. Rat said no, because many animals lived near the bank. There were otters, birds, and many others, always coming and going. Then Mole asked about the dark wood beyond the fields, and Rat said it was the Wild Wood.

Rat did not like to speak much about the Wild Wood. He said some animals there were all right, but others could not be trusted. Badger lived deep inside it, and everyone respected him. Beyond the Wild Wood was the Wide World, but Rat said that did not matter to them. Mole understood that it was better not to ask too much. Soon they left the main river and entered a quiet backwater.

The place was beautiful. Green grass came down to the water on both sides, and tree roots showed under the clear surface. A mill-wheel turned nearby, and the sound of water filled the air. Rat tied up the boat and helped Mole onto the bank. Mole asked if he might unpack the lunch basket himself. Rat agreed, and Mole set out the food with deep pleasure.

They ate beside the water until their first great hunger was gone. Then Mole noticed a line of bubbles moving across the river. Rat gave a cheerful call, and an Otter came up from the water. Otter greeted Rat, met Mole, and joined them at the food. Soon there was a noise in the hedge, and Badger appeared for a moment. But when he saw company, he turned away and disappeared again.

Otter told them that Toad was out on the river in a new boat. Rat and Otter laughed, because Toad was always taking up some new interest and then dropping it. A little later they saw him rowing badly in the distance. Rat called to him, but Toad did not stop. Otter began to tell a story, but then a fly crossed the water. There was a small splash, and Otter was gone too.

Mole looked around in surprise, but Rat said nothing about Otter's sudden disappearance. Mole remembered that river animals had their own ways, and it was polite not to ask too many questions. Soon Rat said they should go home. Mole packed the basket, though packing was much less fun than unpacking. He forgot a plate, then a fork, and then found the mustard pot under him, but at last everything was ready.

On the way home, Rat rowed quietly and said little bits of poetry to himself. Mole was full of food, pride, and happiness. He began to think that rowing looked easy. He asked Rat if he could try. Rat told him to wait until he had learned properly, but Mole's pride grew stronger. Suddenly he grabbed the oars and tried to row.

Everything went wrong at once. Mole missed the water, fell backward, and landed on Rat. Then the boat turned over, and Mole fell into the cold river. He went down, came up coughing, and then felt himself sinking again. Rat caught him by the neck, pushed oars under his arms, and brought him safely to the bank. Mole was wet, cold, and deeply ashamed.

Rat was not angry. He told Mole to run up and down the path until he was warm, while he saved the boat and the basket. When they were ready to go again, Mole said he was truly sorry for his foolishness. Rat forgave him at once and invited him to stay for a while at his riverside home. That evening Rat made a warm fire, gave Mole dry clothes, and told him river stories until supper. Mole slept happily that night, listening to the river outside his window, and in the days that followed he learned to swim, row, and love the moving water.

### Part 3: A Visit to Toad Hall

One bright summer morning, Mole found Rat sitting on the river bank. Rat was in a very happy mood. He had been swimming with the ducks since early morning, and now he was making a little song about them. Rat liked songs, and when he made one himself, he enjoyed it very much. Mole waited for a little while, because Rat seemed busy with his own thoughts.

The ducks had not enjoyed Rat's games as much as Rat had. When they put their heads under the water, Rat had dived down and tickled them. Then they came up quickly, shaking their feathers and looking very cross. At last they told him to go away and leave them alone. So Rat sat on the bank in the sun and made a song about ducks putting their tails in the air.

Mole listened politely, but he was honest by nature. "I am not sure it is a very good song, Rat," he said carefully. Rat did not look hurt. He said the ducks did not like it either. Then he laughed and told Mole that ducks only wanted to do what they liked, when they liked, without anyone watching them and making songs about them.

Mole agreed at once, because he wanted to keep Rat in a good mood. But Rat

suddenly said that the ducks were wrong, not right. Mole changed his answer just as quickly. Then he remembered what he really wanted to ask. “Rat,” he said, “will you take me to visit Mr. Toad? I have heard so much about him, and I want very much to meet him.”

Rat jumped up at once. He was always kind when a friend asked for something simple. “Of course,” he said. “We can go now. It is never a bad time to visit Toad. He is always glad to see people, and he is always sorry when they leave.” Mole felt pleased, and soon they had the boat ready.

As they went up the river, Mole asked what kind of animal Toad was. Rat said Toad was one of the best animals in the world. He was friendly, warm-hearted, and generous. Rat admitted that Toad could be boastful and not very wise. But he said Toad had many good points, and Mole believed him.

After they turned around a bend, Mole saw a large old house of red brick. Smooth lawns came down from the house to the water. Everything looked rich, quiet, and well cared for. “That is Toad Hall,” Rat said. He pointed out the boat-house, the stables, and the old hall where many meals had been eaten.

Mole looked with great interest. Toad Hall seemed very grand to him. Rat said that Toad was quite rich and that the house was one of the best in that part of the country. Then Rat added that they never told Toad this too openly. Mole understood why when he remembered what Rat had said about Toad’s pride.

They rowed into a small creek that led to the boat-house. Inside, Mole saw many fine boats. Some hung from beams, and others rested out of the water. But none of them looked ready to use. The place felt quiet and empty, as if no one had cared about boats for some time.

Rat looked around and understood at once. “So boating is finished,” he said. “Toad is tired of it now. I wonder what new thing he likes this time.” Mole did not know what Rat meant, but he soon would. They got out of the boat and walked across the bright lawns in search of Toad.

They soon found him sitting in a garden chair. A large map lay open on his knees, and his face looked busy and excited. When he saw Rat and Mole, he jumped up with delight. He shook their paws warmly and did not even wait for

Rat to introduce Mole. “This is wonderful!” he cried. “You are just the animals I need.”

Toad hurried around them, talking quickly. He said he had been about to send someone to bring Rat at once. He wanted both of them, and the matter was very important. Rat suggested that they sit quietly for a moment, and Mole made a polite comment about the beautiful house. Toad immediately said it was the finest house on the river, and then added that it was the finest anywhere.

Rat quietly touched Mole to show him that this was exactly Toad’s way. Toad noticed, turned red, and for a moment everyone felt uncomfortable. Then Toad laughed loudly and said they all knew how he was. He admitted that the house was not bad, but he wanted to talk about something more important. He said they had to help him.

Rat guessed that Toad wanted help with his rowing. He spoke in a serious voice and said that Toad might improve if he had much teaching and patience. Toad was deeply offended. “Boating?” he cried. “I gave that up long ago.” He said boating was a foolish waste of time, and Rat listened with a doubtful face.

Toad then announced that he had found the true purpose of life. He said he had wasted too many years on small things. From now on, he wanted only one great thing. He told Rat and Mole to follow him to the stable-yard. Mole went eagerly, while Rat followed more slowly and looked very suspicious.

In the stable-yard stood a new yellow caravan with green sides and red wheels. It shone brightly in the sun. Toad stood before it with his chest out and his face full of pride. “There it is!” he cried. “That is real life.” He spoke of open roads, dusty paths, fields, villages, towns, and new places every day.

Mole was deeply excited. The caravan looked like a small house that could move through the world. Toad took him up the steps and showed him the inside. There were little beds, a folding table, a small stove, cupboards, shelves, pots, pans, jugs, and many useful things. Toad opened one cupboard after another and proudly explained that everything had been planned by him.

Rat stayed outside with his paws in his pockets. He did not look excited at all. Mole, however, loved every small part of the caravan. It seemed neat, clever, and

full of adventure. Toad was delighted by Mole's interest and kept showing him more. To Mole, the yellow caravan already seemed like a door into another new life.

#### Part 4: The Open Road and the Motor-Car

Toad came down from the caravan with Mole behind him. He looked at Rat, who still stood outside and did not seem pleased. "Now, dear Ratty," Toad said, "you must not speak in that cold way. You have to come with us. I cannot manage without you." Rat chewed a piece of straw and said slowly that he had heard Toad speak about "we" and "starting this afternoon," and he did not like the sound of it.

Toad would not listen to any refusal. He said the river was dull, old, and narrow. He wanted to show Rat the world beyond the bank. Rat answered firmly that he loved his river and would stay with it. He also said that Mole would stay with him. Mole quickly agreed, because he loved Rat and trusted him, but his eyes still went back to the bright yellow caravan.

Rat saw the look on Mole's face. He did not want to disappoint his friend. Toad also saw it and became clever at once. He invited them inside for lunch and said they did not have to decide immediately. During lunch, he spoke not to Rat but to Mole. He described the road, the fields, the camps at night, and the joy of waking in a new place.

Mole listened with shining eyes. The open road sounded wonderful to him, just as the river had once sounded wonderful. Little by little, the journey began to feel already decided. Rat still disliked the plan, but his kind heart was stronger than his wish to stay home. At last he gave way, because Mole was excited and Toad was impossible to stop.

When they were ready to leave, Toad led them to the field to catch the old grey horse. The horse had not been asked if he wanted to join this journey. He liked his field much better than dusty roads, and he did not wish to pull a caravan. He walked away again and again when they came near him. It took a long time and

much trouble before they could catch him and put him in the harness.

Toad filled the caravan with even more things. He packed food into cupboards and hung bags, nets of onions, hay, and baskets from the cart. At last they set off together in the golden afternoon. Sometimes they walked beside the cart, and sometimes one of them sat on the shaft. The dust rose softly under their feet, birds called from the trees, and people on the road smiled at the bright little caravan.

Mole was very happy. Everything seemed fresh and full of promise. Even the rabbits at the hedges stopped to stare and cry out in wonder. Toad talked almost all the time. He spoke of the great things they would do and the far places they would see. Rat said little, but he stayed with them, though his thoughts often went back to the river.

Late in the evening they stopped on a quiet open place far from houses. They let the horse eat grass and sat near the caravan for supper. The stars came out slowly above them, and the moon rose yellow and calm. Toad stretched himself proudly and said this was the real life for a gentleman. Rat answered that he did not talk about his river, but he thought about it all the time.

Mole felt sorry for Rat. In the dark, he reached out and found Rat's paw. He whispered that they could run away early in the morning and go back to the dear little house by the river. Rat was touched, but he said they should finish the trip. He thought Toad should not be left alone. He also believed that Toad's new interests never lasted long.

The next morning proved that Rat was right about Toad's weakness for comfort. Toad slept late and could not be woken easily. Rat looked after the horse, made a fire, cleaned the cups, and prepared breakfast. Mole walked a long way to the nearest village for milk, eggs, and other things Toad had forgotten. When Toad finally appeared, fresh and cheerful, he said how easy and pleasant this simple life was.

That day they travelled again over green land and narrow roads. In the evening they camped as before, but this time Rat and Mole made sure that Toad did his share of the work. By the next morning Toad liked the simple life much less. He even tried to stay in bed, but the others pulled him out. They went on again, and

in the afternoon they reached a wider, busier road.

They were walking quietly along this road when they heard a faint sound behind them. It was like a faraway bee. They looked back and saw a small cloud of dust coming fast. In the middle of the dust was something dark and powerful. Then came a sharp cry from a horn: “Poop-poop!”

In a moment the thing was upon them. A great motor-car rushed past with noise, wind, and shining glass. It filled the air with dust and made all three animals jump toward the ditch. Then it was gone, smaller and smaller in the distance, until it sounded again like a faraway bee. For a few seconds no one could see clearly.

The old grey horse was terrified. He reared, backed, and pushed the caravan toward the ditch. Mole tried to calm him, but the horse was too frightened to listen. The caravan shook, leaned, and then fell over with a terrible crash. Their beautiful yellow cart lay broken in the ditch. Windows were smashed, wheels were bent, and food tins rolled everywhere.

Rat was furious. He shouted after the motor-car and shook his fists in the road. He called the drivers terrible names and said he would report them. Mole tried to quiet the horse and then went to look at the broken cart. But Toad did not help at all. He sat in the middle of the road, staring after the motor-car with a soft, happy smile.

Rat shook Toad and told him to come and help. Toad only breathed deeply and whispered, “Poop-poop.” He said the motor-car was beautiful, powerful, and the only true way to travel. He no longer cared about the caravan. Rat understood the danger at once. Toad had found a new madness, and this one was much worse than the others.

There was nothing to do but walk to the nearest town. Rat led the horse and carried the bird-cage, while Mole walked beside him. Toad followed in a dream, still thinking of the motor-car. Rat told him he must complain to the police and arrange for the cart to be repaired. But Toad said he never wanted to see the cart again.

When they reached the town, Rat and Mole left the horse at an inn and gave instructions about the broken caravan. Then they took Toad to the railway station

and watched him carefully. A slow train brought them near Toad Hall, and they took the still-dreaming Toad home. After that, Rat and Mole returned by boat to their own warm riverside house. The next evening Rat brought Mole the news: Toad had gone to town and ordered a very large, very expensive motor-car.

## Part 5: Mole Enters the Wild Wood

Mole had wanted for a long time to meet Mr. Badger. Everyone spoke of him with respect. He did not often appear, but somehow everyone felt his power in the country around the river. Whenever Mole asked Rat about him, Rat always said that Badger would come one day. Rat liked Badger very much, but he also seemed careful when he spoke about him.

“Can we invite him to dinner?” Mole asked more than once. Rat always shook his head. Badger did not like visits, dinners, invitations, or polite gatherings. Mole then suggested that they might go and visit Badger instead. Rat looked almost frightened at that idea. He said Badger lived deep in the Wild Wood, and that it was better not to go there.

Mole remembered that Rat had said some animals in the Wild Wood were harmless enough. So he did not fully understand why Rat was so unwilling. Rat only answered that the wood was a long way off and that Badger would not be at home. He said they should wait quietly, and Badger would appear in his own time. Mole accepted this for a while, but he did not forget.

Summer passed, and autumn passed too. The bright days on the river became memories. Winter came, and the river ran high and fast outside Rat’s windows. The weather was cold and wet, so there was little boating. Rat slept more than before, went to bed early, and got up late. During the short days, he wrote small poems, repaired things in the house, or sat by the fire with visitors.

There was still plenty to talk about in winter. Animals came in from the cold, warmed themselves, and remembered the summer. They spoke of swims in the morning, long boat trips, hot afternoons in the grass, and quiet evenings on the bank. Rat enjoyed these talks, but Mole had many empty hours. During those

hours his mind often returned to Badger, living alone in the middle of the Wild Wood.

One afternoon Rat was asleep in his chair by the fire. A half-finished poem had slipped from his knee. The room was warm, still, and comfortable. Mole sat there for a while and looked at his friend. Then he made up his mind. He would go out alone, walk to the Wild Wood, and perhaps find Badger for himself.

Outside, the day was cold and quiet. The sky was hard and grey, like metal. The fields looked bare because the leaves had fallen from the trees. In summer, many places had seemed secret and full of green life. Now everything was open. Mole could see into corners, hollows, and little paths that had once been hidden.

At first this bare winter world pleased him. It was not soft or pretty, but it felt clean and honest. The country seemed to show its bones. Mole walked on bravely and told himself that he liked it this way. Ahead of him the Wild Wood lay dark and low. It looked like a black island rising out of the pale winter land.

When Mole first entered the wood, nothing terrible happened. Small branches cracked under his feet. Fallen logs made him stumble. Strange shapes on old tree stumps startled him for a moment, but then he saw they were only wood and fungus. He laughed softly at himself and went farther in. The adventure still seemed exciting.

But little by little the light changed. The trees stood closer together. The path grew darker, and holes appeared in the banks on both sides. They looked like small black mouths. Mole went on, but he was no longer quite so happy. The quiet of the wood felt different from the quiet of the fields. It seemed to be waiting.

Then he thought he saw a face. It was behind him, half hidden, looking out from a hole. It was small, sharp, and unfriendly. When Mole turned, it was gone. He told himself not to be foolish. In a dark wood, many things could look like faces. He walked faster and tried to think of Rat's warm room and bright fire.

Soon he passed another hole, and then another. A narrow face flashed out and disappeared. Then another came and went. Mole stopped for a moment, but only for a moment. He forced himself to go on. Then suddenly it seemed that every hole had eyes. Little hard faces looked at him from all sides and vanished as

quickly as they had come.

Mole's heart began to beat faster. He thought that if he left the path and moved away from the holes, the faces would stop. So he turned into the deeper trees, where there was no clear path. This did not help. The wood only became thicker and darker. He could not see far ahead, and he was no longer sure which way he had come.

Then the whistling began. At first it was very thin and far behind him. The sound made him hurry forward. Then it seemed to come from far ahead, and he wanted to turn back. When he stopped, the same sound came from both sides. It passed through the wood from one place to another, as if many unseen animals were sending a message.

Mole understood then that he was alone and far from help. He had no stick, no weapon, and no knowledge of this place. The evening was coming quickly. The trees looked blacker every minute. He tried to stay calm, but fear had entered him, and it was growing stronger. He began to wish with all his heart that he had listened to Rat.

After the whistling came the sound of small feet. At first Mole thought it was only dry leaves moving in the wind. But there was no wind. The sound became faster and more regular. It came from behind him, then from in front of him, then from everywhere at once. The whole wood seemed to be running.

A rabbit suddenly rushed toward him through the trees. Mole expected it to turn away, but it almost ran into him. Its eyes were wide and hard with fear. As it passed, Mole heard it mutter, "Get out of here, you fool!" Then it disappeared into a hole. Those words frightened Mole more than all the faces and sounds.

Now Mole began to run too. He did not know where he was going. He hit trees, tripped over roots, and pushed through branches. Dry leaves flew under his feet. The sounds around him grew louder, as if the wood itself were hunting something. Mole felt sure that the thing being hunted was himself.

At last he found a dark hollow inside an old beech tree. He pushed himself into it and fell down among the dry leaves. He was too tired to run any farther. His body shook, and his breath came fast. Outside, the whistling and the pattering still

moved through the trees. There, hidden in the hollow, Mole finally understood the thing Rat had tried to protect him from: the terror of the Wild Wood.

#### Part 6: Rat Searches in the Snow

While Mole lay hidden in the old tree, Rat was still at home by the fire. He was warm and comfortable in his chair, and his poem had fallen from his knee. He slept for a while and dreamed of green river banks and sunny water. Then the fire made a sharp sound, and Rat woke suddenly. He picked up his paper and looked around for Mole, because he wanted to ask him about a rhyme.

But Mole was not in the room. Rat listened carefully. The house was very quiet. He called, "Moly!" several times, but no answer came. Then he got up and went into the hall. Mole's cap was gone from its place, and his winter boots were gone too.

Rat understood at once that something was wrong. He went outside and looked closely at the soft ground near the house. Mole's new boots had left clear marks in the mud. The marks went straight away from the river and toward the Wild Wood. Rat stood still for a moment with a very serious face. Then he went back into the house and prepared himself.

He put on a belt and took a strong stick. He also took two small guns, because he knew the Wild Wood and did not trust it after dark. Then he left the house at a fast pace. The light was already beginning to fail when he reached the first trees. Rat did not stop or turn back. He went straight into the wood and began to search for his friend.

Little sharp faces appeared from holes as Rat passed. But when they saw his stick and his brave look, they disappeared again at once. The whistling and pattering that had frightened Mole became softer and then stopped. Rat moved through the trees with care and courage. Again and again he called, "Moly! Moly! Where are you? It is me, old Rat!"

He searched for a long time. He went along paths, across open places, and between thick trees. At last, from somewhere ahead, he heard a small weak cry.

He followed the sound through the darkening wood. Soon he came to the old beech tree. From inside its hollow, a tired voice said, “Ratty, is that really you?”

Rat pushed into the hollow and found Mole lying among the dry leaves. Mole was still shaking from fear. “Oh, Rat,” he said, “I have been so frightened.” Rat spoke gently and told him that he understood. He did not scold Mole harshly, but he did say that Mole should not have come into the Wild Wood alone.

Rat explained that river animals did not usually come there by themselves. If they had to enter the wood, they came in pairs and used special knowledge. They knew signs, safe words, good paths, and little tricks that helped them. Mole knew none of these things yet. Rat said that Badger and Otter could go there more safely, but small animals had to be careful.

Mole began to feel a little better. Rat’s voice was calm, and his presence made the dark hollow seem less terrible. Mole even asked if Toad would be brave enough to come there alone. Rat laughed loudly and said that Toad would never do such a thing for any amount of money. That made Mole smile, and some of his fear left him.

After a short rest, Rat said they must try to go home before it became fully dark. Mole wanted to obey, but he was too tired. His legs felt weak, and his body still shook. He begged Rat to let him rest a little longer. Rat agreed, though he did not like the thought of staying in the wood at night.

Mole settled down again among the dry leaves and soon fell into an uneasy sleep. Rat covered himself as well as he could and waited beside him. He kept one paw near his weapon and listened to the sounds outside. The cold grew stronger, and the dark became deeper. Still, Rat stayed quiet and patient, because Mole needed him.

When Mole woke, he felt stronger. Rat went to the opening of the hollow and looked out. Then Mole heard him speak in a low voice. Something had changed outside. Mole asked what was the matter. Rat answered simply, “Snow. It is snowing hard.”

Mole came to the opening and looked out beside him. The wood did not look the same. The dark holes, rough places, and dangerous pits were being covered

by white snow. The air was full of fine powder, and the black tree trunks stood out against the whiteness. It was beautiful, but it also made everything strange. Rat admitted that he no longer knew exactly where they were.

They started bravely, holding on to each other. They tried to pretend that they knew the trees and paths, but they did not. The snow grew deeper, and the wood looked the same in every direction. They walked for a long time and lost all sense of time. At last they sat down on a fallen tree, tired, wet, cold, and almost without hope.

Rat said they could not sit there for long. If they stayed still, the cold would hurt them. He saw a low place ahead where the ground rose and fell in small hills. He thought they might find a hole or a dry corner there. So they stood up again and struggled down into the hollow place, pushing through the snow with their short legs.

While they were searching, Mole suddenly tripped and fell forward with a cry. He sat up and held his leg. Rat came to him at once and looked at the cut. It was sharp and clean, not like a cut from wood or stone. Rat thought hard. Then he began to scrape away the snow near the place where Mole had fallen.

Mole was cold and sore, and he did not understand what Rat was doing. Rat kept digging with great excitement. Soon he found a metal door-scraper. Mole only thought that someone had carelessly left it in the snow. Rat dug again and uncovered a worn door-mat. Mole still did not understand, but Rat now felt sure that a door must be close by.

Both animals scraped and scratched at the snow. Rat pushed his stick into the bank and heard a hollow sound. They worked harder, throwing snow behind them. At last a small dark green door appeared in the side of the bank. Beside it was a bell-pull, and on a small brass plate they could read the words: Mr. Badger.

Mole fell back in the snow with surprise and joy. He praised Rat and said Rat had understood everything from the first sign. Rat did not want a long speech in the cold. He told Mole to pull the bell while he knocked on the door. Mole jumped up, held the bell-pull with both paws, and hung from it with his feet off the ground. Far inside the earth, they heard a deep bell ring.

## Part 7: Inside Badger's House

Mole and Rat waited in the snow for what felt like a very long time. They stamped their feet to keep them warm and listened hard. At last they heard slow steps inside the house. The steps came nearer and nearer to the door. Mole whispered that it sounded like someone walking in old slippers that were too large.

A heavy bolt moved back. Then the door opened only a little. A long nose appeared in the gap, and above it were two sleepy eyes. A rough voice spoke from inside. "Who is there at this time of night? I will be very angry if this is another foolish visit."

Rat quickly stepped forward. "Badger, please let us in," he said. "It is me, Rat, and this is my friend Mole. We lost our way in the snow." At once the voice changed. Badger opened the door wider and cried, "Ratty! Come in, both of you. You must be frozen."

Mole and Rat almost fell over each other in their hurry to get inside. The door shut behind them, and the sound was like safety itself. The cold wind and the dark Wild Wood were suddenly outside. They were in Badger's house now. For the first time in many hours, Mole felt that nothing terrible could reach him.

Badger stood before them in a long dressing-gown. His slippers were old and loose, just as Mole had guessed. He carried a candle in one paw and looked down at them with kind, serious eyes. "This is no night for small animals to be outside," he said. Then he patted both of them gently on the head.

Badger told them to follow him to the kitchen. He said there was a good fire there and something to eat. Rat and Mole followed him down a long passage. The passage was dark, old, and not very neat, but it felt strong and safe. Other passages opened from it, going away into the earth like tunnels without end.

Soon they came into a large kitchen. The change was wonderful. A bright fire burned on the wide hearth, and warm light filled the room. The floor was made of red brick, worn smooth by many feet. A long wooden table stood in the middle, with benches on both sides.

There were plates on the shelves, clean and shining in the firelight. Hams, dried herbs, onions, and baskets of eggs hung from above. Everything in the room spoke of food, shelter, and quiet comfort. Mole looked around with deep pleasure. This was not a grand house like Toad Hall, but it felt older, kinder, and more serious.

Badger made them sit near the fire. He told them to take off their wet coats and boots. Then he brought warm dressing-gowns and slippers for them. He washed Mole's hurt leg with warm water and carefully covered the cut. Mole watched his large paws moving gently and felt very grateful.

Soon both friends were warm and dry. Their tired legs rested in front of the fire. Behind them, they could hear Badger putting plates and food on the table. The Wild Wood, with its faces and sounds, already seemed far away. It felt almost like a bad dream from another life.

When they were warm enough, Badger called them to supper. At first they had thought they were hungry. But when they saw the food on the table, they understood that they were much hungrier than they had known. There was plain food, good food, and plenty of it. Mole could hardly decide where to begin.

For a while no one spoke very clearly. Rat and Mole were too busy eating. Sometimes they tried to answer Badger with their mouths full, which was not very polite. Badger did not seem to mind. He was not a great lover of formal manners, and on such a night he cared more about feeding his guests than correcting them.

Badger sat at the head of the table in his large chair. He listened while Rat and Mole began to tell him what had happened. Rat explained how Mole had gone alone into the Wild Wood. Mole looked down at his plate and felt ashamed. But Badger did not say, "I told you so," and he did not make Mole feel worse.

This made Mole like Badger more and more. Badger was stern, but he was not unkind. He seemed to understand that fear and trouble were already strong teachers. He only listened, nodded, and let them speak. His quiet way made the kitchen feel even safer.

Mole told a little of the faces in the holes. He spoke of the whistling and the sound of small feet. Rat told how he had found the tracks in the mud and followed

them into the wood. Badger listened without surprise. It was clear that he knew all about the Wild Wood and its ways.

After the story was finished, they ate again. The fire burned lower but warmer, and red light moved over the walls. The snow outside could not be heard in that deep house under the ground. Mole felt sleepy, but not in a sad or frightened way. He felt full, safe, and cared for.

Rat also grew quiet. He leaned back and looked very comfortable, though the underground air was different from the fresh air of his river home. Badger watched them both with a small smile. He seemed pleased to have them there, though he would never say so too warmly. His house was private, but his friendship was real.

At last the meal ended. The three animals moved closer to the fire and sat in its soft glow. Mole thought how strange the day had been. He had gone out to find Badger, had almost been lost in terror, and now was sitting safely inside Badger's own home. He did not know what would happen next, but for that night, warmth and friendship were enough.

## Part 8: Badger Speaks of Toad

After supper, the three animals sat by the fire and talked more quietly. Mole and Rat were no longer shaking with cold, and their fear had passed away. Badger filled his pipe, leaned back in his chair, and listened while Rat told him the news from the river bank. He spoke of the winter weather, the animals who had visited, and the quiet days indoors. But after a while the talk turned, as it often did, to Toad.

Badger's face became serious when he heard Toad's name. Rat told him about the caravan, the crash on the road, and Toad's new love of motor-cars. Badger shook his head slowly. "This is bad," he said. "Toad is not a bad animal, but he has no steady mind. When he wants something, he wants it too much. That is dangerous, especially when the thing is a motor-car."

Rat said that Toad had already ordered a large new car. Badger looked even more troubled. He said Toad would hurt himself, or hurt someone else, if no one

stopped him. Mole listened carefully. He had seen Toad's excitement on the road, and he knew Badger was right. Toad's joy had not looked safe or sensible.

"When winter is over," Badger said, "we must take him in hand." His voice was calm, but it left no room for argument. Rat nodded at once, and Mole felt proud to be included in such important work. They would help Toad become a wiser animal. At least, that was what they hoped. But none of them knew how difficult Toad would be.

Soon after that, Badger said they should all go to bed. He led Mole and Rat down another passage to a comfortable room. There were clean beds, thick blankets, and everything tired animals could need. Mole lay down with a deep sigh. He felt that Badger's underground house was one of the safest places in the world.

In the morning, they woke to the smell of breakfast. The snow outside still covered the ground, but the kitchen was bright and warm. Badger was already there, moving about in his quiet, heavy way. Two young hedgehogs were sitting at the table too. They had lost their way in the snow while trying to go to school.

The young hedgehogs looked very shy when they saw Mole and Rat. They knew Badger well enough to trust him, but they were not used to visitors. Badger gave them hot food and spoke to them kindly. He told them they were not to go wandering about in bad weather again. Then he gave them each a little money and arranged for someone to show them the way home.

After breakfast, the house became peaceful again. Rat and Badger talked about river matters, old friends, and the trouble made by careless animals. Mole listened for a while, but his mind was full of the house itself. He liked the deep rooms, the strong walls, and the feeling of being safe under the earth. It reminded him of his own old home, though Badger's house was much larger.

At lunch, Mole found himself sitting next to Badger. Rat was busy talking about eels and river food, so Mole had a chance to speak. He told Badger that the house felt wonderfully comfortable to him. "When you are underground," Mole said, "you know where you are. Nothing can fall on you from the sky, and no weather can trouble you. You can come up when you want, but you always have

a safe place below.”

Badger’s face brightened. He was pleased that Mole understood. He said there was no real peace like peace underground. If a house under the ground was too small, you could dig more. If it was too large, you could close a passage. You did not need builders, workmen, or neighbors looking over your wall and making comments. Best of all, there was no wind or rain inside.

Badger spoke of Rat’s river house and said floods could make life difficult there. Then he spoke of Toad Hall. He admitted that Toad Hall was a fine house, perhaps the finest in the area. But a fine house could still have broken windows, falling tiles, smoke, cold rooms, and many other troubles. “For going out and finding food, the open air is good,” Badger said. “But for coming home at the end, underground is best.”

Mole agreed with all his heart. Badger saw this and became even friendlier toward him. After lunch, he took a lantern and told Mole to follow him. Rat stayed by the fire, still talking and arguing happily. Mole went with Badger through the hall and down one of the main tunnels. The lantern light moved over walls, doors, and deep side passages.

Mole was amazed by the size of the place. There were small rooms like cupboards and large rooms almost as grand as halls. There were store-rooms, stone floors, arches, and strong old walls. Passages crossed other passages and seemed to go on without end. At last Mole asked how Badger had ever found the time and strength to make such a great home.

Badger smiled and said he had not made it. He had only cleaned and used the parts he needed. Long ago, he explained, there had been a city above and around that very place. People had lived there, worked there, eaten there, kept horses there, and gone out from there to trade or fight. They had been rich and powerful, and they had built strongly because they thought their city would last forever.

Mole asked where those people had gone. Badger said no one could really tell. People came, stayed for a time, built great things, and then went away. That was their way. But badgers were different. Badgers had been there before the city, and now they were there again. They could wait, and they could return.

Badger explained that wind, rain, time, plants, and trees had slowly covered the old city. The stones went down, and the forest grew up. Soil filled places that had once been open. Roots and leaves covered the past, and animals came to live above it. The Wild Wood grew where people had once walked, and most animals did not think about what had been there before.

When they returned to the kitchen, the short winter day was already passing. The snow had made the world outside quiet and white, but the house remained warm below the earth. Badger said that Rat and Mole could not go home yet by the open paths. Instead, when it was time, he would guide them through the old underground ways. He knew passages that came out near the edge of the wood.

Later, Badger led them through the tunnels with his lantern. Mole and Rat followed close behind him. The way was long, but it was dry and safe, and Badger knew every turn. At last they came out near familiar land, not far from the river. Rat and Mole thanked him warmly before going home. Mole felt tired, but his heart was full. He had found Badger, and Badger had become not only a great animal in stories, but a real friend.

## Part 9: Mole Smells Home

One winter evening, Mole and Rat were walking home after a long day out with Otter. They had been far from the river, up on the higher land where small streams began. The short winter day was already ending, and the air was sharp with cold. They were tired, but they were in good spirits. They talked and laughed as they hurried across the fields.

Near a sheepfold, the sheep moved close together against the wooden rails. Their breath rose like pale smoke in the cold air. Mole and Rat passed them quickly and found a beaten path leading away from the field. The path was easier than the rough ground. It also seemed to tell them, in that quiet way animals understand, that it led toward home.

After a while, the path became a lane, and the lane came to a road. Mole slowed down and looked ahead. "It seems we are coming to a village," he said. Animals

did not usually care much for villages. Human roads, houses, and lights belonged to another world, and small animals were happier when they could pass unseen.

Rat was not worried. "It will be all right," he said. "At this time of year, everyone will be inside by the fire. We can pass through quietly. We may even look through the windows and see what they are doing." Mole agreed, and they went on over the thin snow that had begun to cover the ground.

The village was already dark. Only the windows shone warmly on both sides of the street. Through them Mole and Rat could see families at tea, people sewing, people talking, and children growing sleepy beside the fire. A cat was being stroked in one room. In another, a tired man stretched himself and knocked his pipe against a log.

The two animals stood outside and watched. They were far from their own homes, and the sight made them quiet. These homes were not theirs, but they understood the feeling inside them. The walls shut out the cold world. The light, the fire, and the small daily things made a safe little life.

One window moved Mole most of all. A white blind covered it, and a bird-cage hung close against the blind. The shape of the cage showed clearly in the light from inside. On its perch, a little bird slept with its head tucked into its feathers. Then the bird woke, opened its beak in a small yawn, shook itself, and settled back into sleep.

Just then a cold wind struck Mole and Rat from behind. Snow touched their necks like little points of ice. The warm windows suddenly seemed farther away. Their toes were cold, their legs were tired, and their own home was still a long way off. So they left the village and went back into the dark open country.

Once they were past the last cottage, they could smell the fields again. Rat walked a little ahead, as he often did. His shoulders were raised against the cold, and his eyes were on the grey road before him. Mole followed quietly behind. He was thinking mostly of supper and of the warm room waiting at Rat's house.

Then, suddenly, something reached Mole through the darkness. It came not as a clear sound or sight, but as a smell. Yet it was much more than an ordinary smell. It went through him like a message. He stopped at once, lifted his nose, and

searched the air.

For a moment he could not understand it. Then it came again, soft but strong. Mole knew it now. It was his old home. His own little house, the home he had left on the spring morning when he found the river, was somewhere close by in the dark.

All at once, memories came back to him. He saw the small rooms, the worn furniture, and the quiet corners he had known so well. It was not a grand home like Toad Hall, and it was not wide and comfortable like Badger's house. It was small and plain. But it was his own, and he had once been very happy there.

The smell seemed to call him. It seemed to say, "Come back. I am here. You forgot me, but I did not forget you." Mole's heart filled with a sudden deep longing. He wanted to run to the door, open it, and see everything again. "Ratty!" he called. "Stop! Please come back. I need you!"

Rat was already some distance ahead. He did not understand Mole's voice clearly. He was thinking about the weather, because he too could smell something in the air, and that something was snow. "Come on, Mole!" he called back. "We cannot stop now. We can look for it tomorrow, whatever it is. It is late, and I am not sure of the way."

Mole called again, and now there was pain in his voice. "It is my home, Ratty! My old home is close by. I must go to it. Please come back!" But Rat had gone too far ahead to hear the full meaning of the words. He only called for Mole to hurry, because they needed to get home before the snow grew worse.

Mole stood alone in the road. The call of his old home pulled at him, but his love for Rat pulled him too. He could not leave his friend in the dark. At last, with great pain, he turned away from the smell and followed Rat. As he walked, the faint message from his home seemed to follow him, softer and sadder, until he could hardly bear it.

When Mole caught up with Rat, Rat began talking cheerfully about the fire and supper waiting at home. He did not notice Mole's silence at first. But after they had gone some way, he saw that Mole was dragging his feet and saying nothing. He stopped near some tree stumps and told Mole they should rest. Mole

sat down, tried to hold himself together, and then began to cry.

Rat was shocked and deeply sorry. He sat beside Mole and gently touched his shoulder. Between sobs, Mole told him everything. He said his home was poor and small, but it was his, and he had smelled it in the dark. He said he had wanted only one look, but Rat had not turned back. Rat stared ahead in silence for a while. Then he said in a low voice, “Now I understand. I have been very selfish.”

#### Part 10: The Return to Mole End

Rat stood up at once and took Mole by the paw. “Come on,” he said. “We are going back.” Mole looked at him through his tears and could hardly believe it. He said the snow was falling, the night was dark, and perhaps they could not find the place again. Rat answered that they would try. He had made a mistake, and he meant to put it right.

They turned back along the road. Rat asked Mole to lead by smell, because Mole’s home was calling to him more strongly than any path could. Mole lifted his nose again and searched the cold air. At first he was afraid that the message had gone. Then it came back, faint but true, and he moved slowly toward it with Rat close behind him.

The way was not easy. They left the road and crossed rough ground under low trees. Snow lay on roots and stones, and the darkness made every step uncertain. Mole stopped many times, turned his head, and tried again. Rat said nothing to hurry him. He only followed and gave him courage by being near.

At last Mole gave a small cry and ran forward. Before them was a little doorway set low in the earth. Near it was a small board with the name Mole End on it. Snow had blown against the door, and dead leaves lay in the corner. The place looked poor and forgotten, but to Mole it was dearer than any grand house.

Mole stood still and looked at it with shining eyes. His heart hurt and was happy at the same time. He had left this home in a rush on a spring morning and had not returned since. Now it waited for him in winter darkness, small, cold, and quiet. “Here it is,” he said softly. “This is my home.”

The door was stiff, and for a moment it would not open. Rat pushed with his shoulder, and Mole pulled at the latch. At last the door gave way, and they went inside. The air was cold and shut up. Dust lay on the floor, and everything looked smaller than Mole remembered. Yet every chair, shelf, and corner seemed to know him.

Mole was ashamed at first. He saw the poor little room through Rat's eyes and thought it must seem plain and shabby. There was no fine food ready, no bright fire, and no easy chairs like Rat had by the river. "It is not much," Mole said sadly. "I am sorry I brought you here." Rat would not allow that. He said it was a fine little house, and he spoke as if he meant every word.

Then Rat became practical. He told Mole they must make the place warm. Together they found wood, cleared the hearth, and started a fire. Mole shook the dust from the chairs and straightened the room as well as he could. Rat moved about quickly, opening cupboards and looking for anything useful. Soon the fire began to burn, and the little room changed before their eyes.

The red light touched the old walls and made them friendly again. The familiar things came out of the dark, one by one. Mole saw his own table, his own books, his old pictures, and the small objects he had once used every day. They were not fine things, but they belonged to him. They seemed glad that he had come back.

Rat found some food in the cupboards. There was not very much, but it was enough to begin with. He found a bottle too, and he looked pleased with it. Mole felt better when Rat praised the things he found. His shame slowly left him. The house was poor, but Rat's kindness made it feel full and warm.

Just then they heard small voices outside the door. The voices were singing in the snow. Mole listened and suddenly knew them. They were field-mice from the neighborhood, singing winter songs as they often did at this time of year. He opened the door, and there they stood with a lantern, shy faces, and cold paws.

The field-mice sang their song bravely in the dark. Their small voices rose and fell together. They sang of a cold night, a low stable, and animals waiting near a holy child. Mole stood in the doorway and listened with deep feeling. Rat stood beside him, smiling kindly. The snow fell softly behind the little singers.

When the song was over, Rat praised them warmly. Mole invited them in at once. "Come in and warm yourselves," he said. "This is like the old days." The field-mice came inside, stamped the snow from their feet, and sat near the fire. Their small legs swung from the bench, and their faces grew bright in the warmth.

Then Mole suddenly remembered that he had almost nothing to give them. His face fell, and tears came close again. Rat quickly took charge. He called one field-mouse with the lantern and gave him money and a basket. He told him to go to the shops and buy good food, the best he could find. The field-mouse listened seriously, nodded, and went off into the night.

While they waited, Mole tried to talk with the others. The field-mice were shy at first, so he asked about their families. Soon they were telling him the names of their brothers and sisters, and which ones were still too young to go singing in the snow. Rat prepared a warm drink by the fire. Before long everyone was sipping, coughing a little, laughing, and forgetting the cold outside.

The field-mouse with the lantern returned with a heavy basket. Rat opened it and put everyone to work. One animal set the table, another brought plates, and another helped near the fire. In a few minutes, the bare table was full of good things. Mole sat at the head of the table almost like a dreamer. He had thought his homecoming would be sad, but it had become a feast.

They ate and talked for a long time. The field-mice told Mole all the small news of the area. Mole asked question after question, because he wanted to know everything he had missed. Rat said little, but he watched over the meal and made sure everyone had enough. Mole saw this and loved him more than ever.

At last the field-mice went away, happy and thankful, with small gifts for the younger ones at home. Mole and Rat closed the door, made the fire bright again, and sat quietly together. The long day had been full of walking, cold, tears, and joy. Soon Rat gave a great yawn and climbed into one of the little beds. He said the house was very comfortable and everything was close at hand.

Mole lay down too, but before sleeping he looked around the room. He saw clearly that his home was small and simple. He also saw how much it meant to him. He did not want to leave the river, the sun, the boats, or the wide world above.

That new life still called to him. But now he knew he had a place of his own to return to, a quiet place that would always welcome him back.

## Part 11: Toad Is Stopped

Early in summer, the river was quiet again and the boating season had begun. The water had gone back inside its usual banks, and the sun was pulling green life up from the earth. Mole and Rat had been busy since dawn with boat work. They had painted, repaired paddles, looked for lost hooks, and put cushions in order. Now they were finishing breakfast in their small room and talking happily about the day ahead.

Suddenly there was a heavy knock at the door. Rat was eating egg and did not want to move. "Mole, please see who it is," he said. Mole went to the door, and Rat heard him give a cry of surprise. A moment later Mole opened the room door wide and announced, with great importance, "Mr. Badger!"

This was a very unusual event. Badger almost never made formal visits. If anyone wanted to see him, they usually had to find him on a path in the early morning, or visit his own house in the Wild Wood. He now walked heavily into the room and looked at Mole and Rat with a very serious face. Rat dropped his spoon and stared.

"The time has come," Badger said. Rat looked at the clock and asked what time he meant. Badger answered that he meant Toad's time. He had promised to take Toad in hand when winter was over, and he meant to do it that very day. Mole remembered at once and became excited. They were going to teach Toad to be sensible.

Badger sat down and explained the danger. He had learned that another new and very powerful motor-car was coming to Toad Hall that morning. Toad was probably already putting on his terrible driving clothes. Badger said they must act before it was too late. Rat jumped up and agreed. They would save poor Toad from himself, whether Toad liked it or not.

The three friends set out at once. Badger walked first, and Mole and Rat

followed behind him. Animals usually walk in a line when they are serious, because it is safer and more useful than spreading across the road. They reached Toad Hall and saw exactly what Badger had expected. A large new red motor-car stood in front of the house, shining proudly in the sun.

As they came near, the front door flew open. Toad came down the steps wearing goggles, a cap, gaiters, gloves, and a huge driving coat. He looked very pleased with himself. When he saw his friends, he called out cheerfully that they were just in time to come with him for a ride. But then he saw their stern faces, and his voice grew weak.

Badger did not waste words. He walked up the steps and told Mole and Rat to take Toad inside. Toad struggled and protested, but they pushed him through the door. Badger turned to the driver who had brought the new car. He said Mr. Toad had changed his mind and would not need the car that day. Then he shut the door firmly.

In the hall, Badger looked at Toad and told him to take off those foolish clothes. Toad refused at once and demanded an explanation. Badger told Mole and Rat to remove the clothes for him. This was not easy. Toad kicked, shouted, and called them names, but Rat held him down while Mole took off the driving coat, gloves, cap, and goggles.

When Toad stood up again, he looked much less grand. Without his motor clothes, he was only Toad, not a great hero of the road. Some of his loud courage seemed to leave him. He gave a weak little laugh and looked from one friend to another. He seemed to understand that this time they were truly serious.

Badger spoke to him in a firm voice. He said Toad had ignored every warning. He had wasted his father's money, driven wildly, broken cars, and brought trouble with the police. Badger said that animals let their friends be free, but not free to make complete fools of themselves. Toad had reached that point. Now his friends had to stop him.

Then Badger took Toad by the arm and led him into the smoking-room. He closed the door behind them. Mole and Rat sat down outside and waited. Rat did not believe that talking would cure Toad. He said Toad could promise anything

while someone was speaking to him, but promises did not stay long in Toad's mind.

For a long time they heard Badger's voice through the door. It rose and fell, steady and serious. After a while they also heard Toad sobbing. Toad was soft-hearted, and strong words could move him very quickly. Mole began to hope that Badger might succeed. Rat was less sure, but he listened carefully all the same.

At last the door opened. Badger came out, leading Toad by the paw. Toad looked weak, sad, and wet with tears. His legs shook a little, and his face had long tear marks on it. Badger said he was pleased to tell them that Toad now saw his mistake. Toad, he said, had promised to give up motor-cars forever.

Mole said this was very good news. Rat said it was good news too, but he looked hard at Toad as he spoke. He thought he saw a small light in Toad's eye, not quite the light of true sorrow. Badger then asked Toad to repeat his promise in front of them all. There was a long silence.

At last Toad spoke. "No," he said. "I am not sorry." The others stared at him. Toad said motor-cars were not foolish at all. They were glorious. He admitted that he had said different things in the smoking-room, but only because Badger had spoken so powerfully. Outside that room, Toad had thought again and found that he was not truly sorry.

Badger asked if he would promise never to touch a motor-car again. Toad answered that he would not. In fact, he promised that the first motor-car he saw, he would jump into it and drive away. Rat quietly told Mole that this was just what he had expected. Badger rose from his chair. If words would not work, he said, they would try stronger methods.

Badger announced that the three of them would stay at Toad Hall. They would watch Toad until his motor-car madness passed. Mole and Rat took Toad upstairs while he kicked and struggled. They told him it was for his own good and that they would look after everything. Then they pushed him into his bedroom and locked the door.

Toad shouted angrily through the keyhole, but his friends went downstairs and made their plans. Badger said Toad must never be left alone, not even for a

moment. They would take turns watching him by day and night. At first Toad was very difficult. He made chairs into a pretend motor-car, crouched over them, made terrible engine noises, and then fell among them as if he had crashed. His friends were patient, but they knew the work would be long and tiring.

## Part 12: Toad Escapes and Falls

As the days passed, Toad's wild fits became less common. He no longer made chairs into a pretend motor-car so often. His friends tried to turn his mind to other things, but Toad seemed to care for nothing. He lay about, sighed deeply, and answered in a weak voice. Badger did not trust this change, because he knew Toad too well.

One fine morning, it was Rat's turn to watch Toad. Badger was glad to leave the room, because he wanted a long walk in his own woods. Before he went, he warned Rat carefully. "Watch him closely," he said. "When Toad is quiet and gentle, he is often at his most dangerous." Rat promised to be careful, though he did not feel very worried.

Rat went to Toad's bed and spoke cheerfully. "How are you today, old friend?" he asked. Toad did not answer at once. At last he said in a weak, sad voice that Rat was very kind to ask. Then he asked after Rat and Mole, as if he were a very sick animal thinking only of others. Rat said they were both well and that Mole had gone out with Badger.

Toad heard this with interest, though he hid it well. He now knew that Rat was alone in the house with him. He sighed again and said that he was too weak to get up. Rat told him not to talk nonsense and said the morning was beautiful. Toad only smiled sadly and said Rat did not understand how serious his condition was.

Rat began to feel uneasy. Toad lay very still, and his voice was soft and tired. Toad said he did not want to be trouble to his friends. He said that perhaps he would not trouble them much longer. Rat answered rather sharply that he hoped Toad would stop being trouble soon, because the boating season had begun and they were all missing a great deal.

Toad used this at once. He said Rat was tired of him, and he understood. Then he became weaker still and asked Rat to go to the village for a doctor. He said it might already be too late, but Rat need not worry if it was too much trouble. Rat came closer and looked at him. Toad did seem pale, quiet, and strangely changed.

Rat said he would fetch a doctor if Toad truly needed one. Toad thanked him in a soft voice. Then, as if remembering something very painful, he asked Rat to call the lawyer too. Rat was alarmed when he heard this. Toad had often imagined that he was ill, but he had never before asked for a lawyer.

Rat locked the bedroom door and stood outside thinking. Badger and Mole were far away, and there was no one to ask. At last he decided it was safest to do what Toad wanted. If Toad was not ill, the doctor would tell him so. If he was ill, then help would come quickly. Rat hurried off toward the village.

The moment Toad heard the key turn, he jumped out of bed. He ran to the window and watched Rat disappear down the drive. Then he laughed with delight. He dressed quickly in the smartest clothes he could find and put money in his pockets. Next, he tied his bed sheets together into a rope, fastened one end to the window, and climbed down to the ground.

Toad walked away in the opposite direction from Rat. He felt light, free, and wonderfully clever. He was sure that he had beaten all three of his friends. He told himself that mind had won against force. He even began to feel sorry for poor Rat, who, in Toad's opinion, was a good animal but not very bright.

When Badger and Mole returned, lunch was a sad meal for Rat. He had to tell them what had happened. Badger was angry, and Mole, though he wanted to be kind, could not fully defend Rat. Rat said Toad had acted the illness very well. Badger answered that Toad had acted Rat very well. Then he said talking would not bring Toad back.

Badger was most worried about what Toad might do next. Toad would now be proud of his own cleverness, and that could make him more foolish than ever. They decided to stay at Toad Hall for the present. Toad might be brought back at any time, hurt, frightened, or between two policemen. None of them knew how soon Badger's words would prove true.

Meanwhile, Toad walked along the road several miles from home. At first he had taken small paths and crossed fields, because he feared that his friends might follow him. But after a while he felt safe. The sun was bright, the world seemed friendly, and his heart was singing a song about himself. He walked with his head high and praised his own clever plan.

By midday, he reached a little town. He saw the sign of an inn and suddenly remembered that he had not eaten breakfast. After his long walk, he was very hungry. He went inside, ordered the best lunch they could give him, and sat down proudly in the dining-room. For a time, he was happy with food, comfort, and his own grand thoughts.

Then he heard a sound from the street. It was the sound he loved more than any other sound in the world. "Poop-poop!" came nearer and nearer. Toad trembled from head to foot. A motor-car came into the inn yard and stopped there. Soon the people from the car came into the room, talking happily about their drive.

Toad tried to keep eating, but he could not. He listened to every word they said about the car. At last he slipped out quietly, paid his bill, and went into the yard. The car stood there alone. Toad walked slowly around it and told himself that there was no harm in only looking. Then he wondered if it was easy to start.

Almost before he knew what he was doing, his paw was on the handle. The engine started, and the old madness took hold of him completely. He climbed into the driver's seat, moved the car, and drove out of the yard. For that moment, he forgot right and wrong, friends and warnings, danger and police. He was Toad again, proud, loud, and wild on the open road.

The joy did not last. The next scene was a court, and Toad was no longer proud. He stood before the judges, accused of stealing a motor-car, dangerous driving, and rude behavior toward the police. The judges spoke severely and decided that he must be punished very hard. They added the punishments together and made the sentence twenty years.

Toad cried out, begged, and protested, but it did not help. He was taken away from the court, past people who laughed and shouted at him. He was led across the town and into a grim old castle used as a prison. Doors shut behind him, keys

turned, and heavy walls stood between him and the free world. At last, deep inside the strongest part of the castle, Toad was locked in a dark prison room, helpless and alone.

### Part 13: The Search for Portly

It was a very hot night in midsummer. Even though it was already past ten o'clock, the day's heat still seemed to hang over the river. A small bird sang quietly from the dark edge of the bank. Mole lay stretched out on cool leaves and waited for Rat to come home. He had been on the river earlier with other friends, while Rat had gone to visit Otter.

When Mole came back, Rat's house had been dark and empty. Mole guessed that Rat had stayed late with Otter, because the two old friends always had much to say. It was too hot to stay indoors, so Mole rested outside. He thought about the long bright day and all the good things that had happened. The river moved softly near him, and the night slowly grew cooler.

After a while, Mole heard Rat's light step on the dry grass. Rat came and sat beside him with a sigh of relief. "How good the cool air feels," he said. But after that he did not speak for a while. He looked at the river in a thoughtful way, and Mole saw that something was wrong.

"Did you stay for supper?" Mole asked at last. Rat said he had almost been forced to stay, because Otter and his family were always kind. They had tried to make everything cheerful for him. But Rat had felt unhappy all the time. He could see that they were hiding great worry.

Then Rat told Mole the reason. Little Portly, Otter's child, was missing again. Mole at first tried to take the news lightly. Portly was always wandering off and getting lost. Everyone along the river knew him and liked him, and usually someone found him and brought him home safely. Mole wanted to comfort Rat, and perhaps himself too.

Rat shook his head. This time, he said, the matter was more serious. Portly had been missing for several days. The Otters had searched everywhere and had asked

every animal for miles around, but no one had seen him. Otter was trying to look brave, but Rat knew he was deeply afraid. Portly had not yet learned to swim well, and the river still had a strong flow.

Rat said Otter was especially worried about the old ford. It was a shallow place where the river could once be crossed before the bridge was built. Otter had given Portly his first swimming lesson there. He had also taught him to fish in that place. Portly loved it, and Otter thought that, if the child were trying to find his way home, he might go there.

Mole knew the place well. He could imagine Otter crouching there through the long night, watching the water and listening for a small sound. Rat said Otter had gone there only because there was a chance. Not a good chance, perhaps, but still a chance. For a while both animals were silent. They were thinking of the same lonely father waiting beside the ford.

Rat said at last that they should probably go to bed. But he did not move. Mole also stayed still, looking at the dark water. Then he spoke in a low but firm voice. He said he could not go to sleep while Portly was missing. Even if there was little they could do, searching was better than doing nothing.

Rat looked at him and nodded. He had been thinking the same thing. The night was too warm for sleep, and dawn was not so far away. They might find signs along the bank, or hear news from early animals when morning came. Without more talk, they went to get the boat. Rat took the oars, and Mole sat ready to steer.

They moved carefully out onto the river. In the middle of the stream, a thin pale line of water reflected the sky. But near the banks, the shadows of trees and bushes looked almost solid. Mole had to steer with great care. The river he knew by day had become another river by night.

All around them, small night sounds filled the darkness. There were rustlings in the grass, soft calls from the bank, and tiny movements in reeds and bushes. Many little animals were awake and busy while the day animals slept. The water itself sounded louder than usual. It made sudden drops, turns, and small hollow sounds that startled them again and again.

The sky near the horizon began to grow silver in one place. Slowly the moon

rose over the edge of the land. It climbed into the sky and spread a soft light across the fields. Meadows, gardens, trees, and the whole river came into view again. They were familiar places, but in moonlight they looked clean, strange, and new.

Rat tied the boat to a willow, and the two friends went ashore. They searched hedges, hollow trees, ditches, small water channels, and every hidden place they could find. They called softly now and then, but no answer came. Then they crossed the river and searched the other bank in the same way. The moon stayed above them like a quiet helper.

Hour after hour, they worked upstream. Sometimes they found marks in the mud, but they were old or unclear. Sometimes a small animal moved away quickly, and their hearts jumped, but it was never Portly. At last the moon began to sink. The silver light faded, and once again the river and fields became full of shadow.

Then, very slowly, another change began. The sky ahead became clearer. Trees and fields took shape again, but now they looked different from the way they had looked under the moon. A bird gave one short note and then became silent. A light wind passed through the reeds and made them whisper together.

Rat, who was now sitting in the back of the boat while Mole rowed, suddenly sat up straight. His whole body seemed to listen. Mole kept the boat moving with gentle strokes and looked at him in surprise. Rat's face was full of wonder and pain. Then he sank back and whispered, "It is gone."

Mole asked what was gone, but Rat hardly seemed to hear him. Rat said it had been beautiful, strange, and new. He almost wished he had not heard it, because now he wanted only to hear it again. Then his face changed, and he cried softly that it had returned. He listened, trembling with joy, while Mole heard only the wind among the reeds.

Rat leaned forward and spoke as if the sound were calling them. He said the music was moving farther on, and that they must follow it. Mole did not understand, but he trusted Rat. He bent to the oars and rowed steadily up the quiet river. The first light of morning grew stronger around them, and Rat sat still, listening to a call that seemed meant for them alone.

## Part 14: The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

Mole rowed on while Rat listened. The river was very quiet now, as if all the small night sounds had gone to sleep. The first light of morning lay low over the water. The reeds stood still on both sides, and the trees looked dark against the pale sky. Mole could hear only the soft pull of the oars and the little drops of water falling from them.

Rat sat forward with shining eyes. He did not speak for a long time. Then he lifted one paw and pointed ahead. "There," he whispered. "It is coming from there." Mole looked where Rat pointed and saw that the river was bending toward a small island. The island was thick with willow trees and low bushes. In the grey morning light, it seemed almost separate from the ordinary world.

Mole felt something strange in the air. He still could not hear the music clearly, but he could feel that Rat was hearing it. Rat's face had changed. It was full of fear, love, and deep happiness all together. Mole was almost afraid to ask anything. He only rowed more softly, as if a loud sound might break the spell around them.

The boat moved nearer to the island. A sweet smell came from the grass and flowers there. The air felt cool, fresh, and very still. Rat leaned forward and closed his eyes for a moment. "Now I hear it," he said. "It is stronger now. Mole, do you not hear it? It is the best sound in the world."

Mole listened with all his heart. At first there was nothing. Then, far away and yet very near, he seemed to hear a thin, beautiful sound. It was like music, but it was also like wind, water, birds, and sunlight before sunrise. It made him feel small and safe at the same time. He stopped rowing for a moment, because his paws trembled.

The boat touched the island gently. Rat stepped out first and held the boat steady. Mole followed him, and together they moved through the wet grass. The trees on the island made a green shadow, though the day had hardly begun. Every leaf seemed quiet. Every flower seemed awake. Mole felt that they had come to a holy place, though he did not know what words to use for it.

They went a little way between the trees. Then both animals stopped. Before

them, in a small open place, stood a great figure, strong and gentle. He had horns, kind eyes, and a calm face. His body seemed part animal and part something greater than any animal. The music came from him, and the whole morning seemed to listen.

Mole could not move. His fear was not the fear of danger. It was the fear of seeing something too great and too beautiful. Rat stood beside him, very still, with tears in his eyes. Neither of them spoke. They knew without being told that this great one had been watching over the lost child.

Then Mole saw Portly. The little otter was lying safely between the great one's feet. He was sleeping as peacefully as if he had been in his own bed at home. His small body was warm and unhurt. His face looked tired but happy. The friends had searched all night through darkness and fear, and here he was, safe in the quiet morning.

Mole wanted to cry out with joy, but no sound came. Rat put one paw over his heart. The great figure looked at them, and his eyes were kind. In that look, Mole felt comfort for every fear he had ever known. He thought of the Wild Wood, the cold night, lost children, lonely parents, and all small animals who needed help.

For a short time, Rat and Mole forgot everything except that moment. The river, the island, the music, and the sleeping child seemed to be held together in one deep peace. Mole felt that the world was not only wide and dangerous. It was also cared for. There were powers of kindness in it, though small animals did not often see them.

Then the music began to fade. The light of morning grew brighter. A soft wind moved through the leaves, and the grass bent under it. Rat and Mole bowed their heads without thinking. When they looked up again, the great figure was gone. The open place was full only of early sunlight, wet grass, and the small sleeping body of Portly.

For a little while neither friend moved. Rat's face was still full of wonder. Mole felt that he must remember everything forever. But even as he tried to hold the memory, it began to grow soft at the edges. It was not lost exactly. It was more like a dream that becomes gentle and far away when morning comes.

Rat seemed to understand. "It is better so," he said quietly. "If we remembered it too clearly, we could not go back to ordinary life." Mole nodded. He felt sad for a moment, but the sadness was sweet, not bitter. Something peaceful remained inside him. The sharp pain of wonder had gone, but the comfort stayed.

They lifted Portly carefully and carried him to the boat. The little otter stirred once and gave a soft sound in his sleep, but he did not wake. Rat wrapped him warmly, and Mole took the oars again. They pushed away from the island and let the current help them down the river. Behind them, the trees stood quiet in the new day.

As they rowed back, the world became ordinary again. Birds began to call from the bank. Small animals moved in the grass. The water shone with morning light, and the familiar bends of the river appeared one after another. Mole felt tired now, but deeply happy. Rat sat with one paw on Portly to keep him safe and warm.

Near the old ford, they saw Otter waiting. He stood almost without moving, his eyes fixed on the river. When he saw the boat, he came forward quickly, but he hardly dared to hope. Then he saw Portly sleeping in the bottom of the boat. His face changed all at once, and he could not speak.

Rat and Mole brought the boat to the bank. Otter reached down and took his child in his arms. Portly woke a little, looked up, and knew his father. He smiled sleepily and pressed his head against him. Otter held him close, and his strong body shook. He thanked Rat and Mole again and again, though the words were broken.

Rat and Mole did not try to tell the whole story. They said only that they had found Portly on the island, safe and asleep. Otter was too full of joy to ask many questions. He carried his child away toward home, holding him as if he would never let him go again. The morning sun rose higher over the river.

Rat and Mole watched them until they were out of sight. Then they turned the boat toward home. Both were silent for a long time. They were tired from the long search, but their hearts were calm. The river moved beside them as it had always moved, bright, gentle, and full of secret life. By the time they reached Rat's house, the strange music was no longer clear in their minds, but the peace of it was still

there.

## Part 15: Toad in Prison

Toad lay on the floor of his prison room and cried bitterly. The room was dark, damp, and unpleasant. Thick walls stood between him and the bright roads where he had once driven so proudly. Heavy doors were locked behind him, and strong men held the keys. For the first time in a long while, Toad could not do what he wanted.

At first he believed that his life was over. He told himself that no one would remember him now. He thought of Toad Hall, his fine dinners, his grand clothes, and his famous name. Then he thought of Badger, Rat, and Mole, and he felt the pain of knowing that they had been right. He had been foolish, and his foolishness had brought him to this cold place.

For many days and nights, Toad lived in this sad way. He cried, sighed, and refused much of his food. The old prison-keeper knew that Toad had money and often told him that better food and small comforts could be brought in for a price. But Toad was too deep in sorrow to care. He only lay there and spoke sadly about poor unhappy Toad.

The prison-keeper had a daughter. She was a kind young woman and often helped her father with easier parts of his work. She liked animals very much. She kept a canary, some mice, and a restless squirrel, and she cared for them all. When she heard Toad crying day after day, she began to feel sorry for him.

One day she said to her father, "I cannot bear to see that poor animal so unhappy. Let me try to help him." Her father did not mind. He was tired of Toad's crying, pride, and complaints. So he told her she could do what she liked. That same day she went to Toad's prison room and knocked on the door.

She came in carrying hot food from her own dinner. "Come now, Toad," she said kindly. "Sit up, dry your eyes, and try to eat something." Toad did not answer at first. He lay on the floor and acted as if nothing in the world could comfort him. But then the smell of hot cabbage and potatoes reached his nose.

The smell did a little work in Toad's heart. It reminded him that life was not completely empty. He still moaned and kicked his legs, because he wanted to seem deeply unhappy. But after the girl left, the smell stayed in the room. Toad sniffed once, then again. Slowly he began to think of warm kitchens, good meals, sunny fields, and his own table at Toad Hall.

These thoughts made him feel stronger. He thought of his friends and wondered if they might help him. He thought of lawyers and wished he had called some before the trial. Then, most important of all, he began to think of his own cleverness. If only he used his great mind, he told himself, perhaps not everything was lost. By the time the girl came back, Toad was already less hopeless.

This time she brought tea and thick hot toast. The butter had melted into the brown bread, and the smell filled the little room. Toad sat up at once. He dried his eyes, drank the tea, and ate the toast with deep feeling. Soon he began to talk. As usual, when Toad felt better, he talked mostly about himself.

The girl saw that talking was helping him as much as the tea. So she asked him about Toad Hall. Toad began in a very grand way, using words that sounded like an advertisement for a house. The girl laughed and stopped him. "I do not want to buy it," she said. "Tell me what it is really like. But wait first. I will bring more tea and toast."

When she returned, Toad was ready to speak at length. He told her about the boat-house, the fish-pond, the old garden walls, the stables, and the many rooms. He told her about dinners in the great hall and the happy times when his friends came to eat with him. He also told her about Rat, Mole, Badger, and the river. The girl listened with real interest, and Toad became almost himself again.

After that day, the girl often came to talk with him. The prison days were still long and dull, but they were not quite so terrible. She felt more and more sorry for him. To her, stealing a car did not seem like a reason to shut a poor animal away for twenty years. Toad, being vain, thought she must admire him deeply.

One morning the girl seemed very thoughtful. Toad was talking in his usual clever way, but she did not laugh at the right places. She answered only a little and seemed to be thinking of something else. Toad was slightly hurt, because he

liked full attention. At last she looked at him and said, “Toad, please listen. I have an aunt who works as a washerwoman.”

Toad tried to answer lightly. He said he had several aunts who probably should work as washerwomen too. But the girl told him to be quiet for once. She said he talked too much, and she needed to think. Her aunt washed clothes for all the prisoners in the castle. She took dirty washing away on Monday morning and brought clean washing back on Friday evening. This was Thursday, so the timing might be useful.

The girl explained her idea slowly. Toad was rich, or at least he often said he was. Her aunt was poor, and a few pounds would mean a great deal to her. Perhaps, if Toad paid her well, she would lend him her dress, apron, shawl, and bonnet. Then Toad could leave the prison dressed as the official washerwoman. The girl added, rather unwisely, that Toad and her aunt were much alike in shape.

Toad was offended at once. He said he had a very fine figure, for a toad. The girl answered that her aunt had a very fine figure too, for a washerwoman. Then she became angry and said he was proud and ungrateful when she was only trying to help. Toad quickly understood that this was no time to protect his dignity too strongly.

Still, he found the idea painful. “You do not really expect Mr. Toad of Toad Hall to go through the country dressed as a washerwoman, do you?” he asked. The girl answered sharply that he could stay in prison as Mr. Toad if he preferred. That settled the matter. Toad saw that freedom was better than pride.

He praised the girl and said she was kind and clever. He also admitted that he had been proud and foolish. Then he asked her to introduce him to her aunt. He was sure, he said, that he and that good woman could make an arrangement. As he spoke, hope rose in him again. The dark prison room no longer seemed quite so strong, and outside its walls the open road began to call.

## Part 16: Toad’s Escape by Train

The next evening, the girl brought her aunt into Toad’s prison room. The old

washerwoman carried Toad's clean washing, tied up in a towel. She already knew the plan, and her eyes went straight to the gold coins Toad had put on the table. After that, there was not much to discuss. Toad gave her the money, and she gave him a cotton dress, an apron, a shawl, and an old black bonnet.

The washerwoman had one condition. She said she must be tied up and left in the corner, so she could say she had been forced to help. Toad liked this very much. It made him seem bold and dangerous, not only clever. The girl and Toad tied the old woman carefully, but not cruelly, and made sure she looked like someone who had been overpowered against her will.

Then the girl turned to Toad. "Now it is your turn," she said. Toad had to take off his coat and waistcoat. The girl laughed as she helped him into the dress and tied the bonnet under his chin. Toad did not enjoy this part at all. He felt that no animal of his position should have to wear such clothes.

The girl told him he looked exactly like her aunt. Toad did not think this was a compliment. Still, he knew he must be practical. The girl gave him final advice. He was to go down the same way he had come up, walk steadily, and answer if anyone spoke to him. She also reminded him that he was supposed to be a poor widow woman, alone in the world.

Toad opened the door with a beating heart. He tried to walk like a washerwoman, though he did not know how washerwomen walked. At the first locked door, the guard only opened it and told him to hurry. At the next, another guard joked with him in a familiar way. Toad wanted to answer proudly, but he remembered the girl's warning and answered in the rough, simple voice he thought suitable.

Door after door opened before him. The cotton dress and old bonnet worked like magic. Everyone seemed to know the washerwoman and expected her to pass. Sometimes Toad did not know where to turn, but a guard would call out and show him the way. This was helpful, though the jokes he received were not to his taste. He thought most of them were foolish and badly made.

At last he crossed the final yard. One guard called after him, asking for a goodbye kiss. Toad almost forgot himself and nearly turned back to give the man

a serious lesson in manners. But he kept his head, pulled the shawl closer around him, and hurried on. Then the small gate in the great outer door shut behind him. Fresh air touched his face, and he knew he was free.

For a few moments Toad could hardly think. His escape had been so easy that it felt like a dream. Then he remembered that he was still close to the prison and still wearing a washerwoman's clothes. He walked quickly toward the lights of the town. He did not know what to do next, but he knew he must get away from anyone who knew the real washerwoman too well.

As he walked, he saw red and green lights to one side of the town. He heard engines breathing, trucks striking together, and men calling in the distance. A railway station was near. Toad's heart rose at once. A train could take him toward home without forcing him to walk through the town in this terrible disguise.

He found the station and looked at the time-table. A train was leaving in half an hour, and it was going more or less toward the country near Toad Hall. Toad felt lucky again. He went to the ticket window and named the station nearest his home. Then he put his paw where his waistcoat pocket should have been.

There was no waistcoat pocket. There was no waistcoat. Then Toad remembered the awful truth. His coat, waistcoat, money, keys, watch, and everything useful were still in his prison room. The cotton dress, which had saved him so far, now seemed to trap his paws and laugh at him. People behind him in the line began to grow impatient.

Toad tried to recover his grand manner. He told the clerk that he had left his purse behind and would send the money the next day. He said he was well known in the area. The clerk looked at the old black bonnet and laughed. Then an impatient old gentleman pushed Toad away from the window and called him "good woman," which made Toad more angry than almost anything else that evening.

Toad wandered sadly along the platform. The train was there, almost ready, and safety seemed close enough to touch. Yet he had no ticket and no money. Soon his escape would be discovered. Then guards, police, chains, prison food, and straw beds would all return. Worse still, the kind girl would laugh at him for failing

so quickly.

Near the engine, Toad found the engine driver cleaning and oiling his beloved machine. The man looked at him and asked what was wrong. Toad began to cry again and said he was a poor washerwoman who had lost all her money. He said he had to get home that night and had hungry children waiting. This was not true, but Toad felt that the story needed children.

The engine driver was a kind man. He said engine work made shirts very dirty, and his wife was tired of washing them. If the poor washerwoman would wash some shirts for him later, he would give her a ride on the engine. Toad was filled with joy. He had never washed a shirt in his life, but he decided he could send money later and make everything right.

The train started, and Toad climbed into the engine cab. As fields, trees, cows, and hedges flew past, his spirits rose higher and higher. Every mile brought him closer to Toad Hall, warm food, soft beds, money, and friends who would surely admire his clever escape. He began to jump about, sing little songs, and praise himself loudly. The engine driver stared at him, because he had never met a washerwoman quite like this one.

After many miles, the driver became quiet. He leaned out and listened, then climbed up to look behind the train. When he came back, his face was troubled. He said another engine seemed to be following them, though theirs should be the last train on that line. Toad stopped singing at once. A cold feeling moved down his back.

Soon the moonlight showed the truth. Another engine was racing behind them. It was crowded with guards, policemen, and men who were clearly chasing someone. They waved their weapons and shouted for the train to stop. Toad fell on his knees among the coal and confessed everything to the driver. He said he was not really a washerwoman, but Mr. Toad of Toad Hall, escaped from prison and in terrible danger.

The driver looked stern when he heard about the stolen car. Still, he did not give Toad up. He did not like motor-cars, and he did not like policemen ordering him about on his own engine. So he and Toad threw more coal on the fire, and the

engine roared forward. But the chasing engine was lighter and faster, and it slowly came closer. At last the driver told Toad his only chance: after a tunnel, the train would slow near a wood, and Toad must jump.

They rushed through the tunnel with terrible noise. Then they came out into moonlight, and the dark wood lay on both sides of the line. The driver slowed the train as much as he safely could. "Now!" he shouted. Toad jumped, rolled down the bank, and scrambled into the trees. He watched his train rush away, and then the chasing engine shot past after it. Toad laughed for the first time since prison, but the laugh soon died. He was free again, but he was alone in a dark wood, with no money, no supper, and still a long way from home.

#### Part 17: Rat and the Traveller

Rat was restless, and he did not know why. Summer still seemed bright and full. The fields were turning from green to gold, and red berries shone on the trees. The woods had warm brown and yellow places among the leaves. There was still light, color, and heat everywhere, but something had changed in the air.

Rat felt the change more than he wanted to admit. The birds in the hedges no longer sang all day. Many of the summer birds had gone, and others were preparing to go. At night, when Rat lay awake in bed, he thought he could hear wings passing above him in the dark. They were going south, obeying a call that Rat could not hear clearly but somehow felt.

Rat was not an animal who usually wanted change. He belonged to the river and to the river bank. Other animals might leave, but Rat stayed. The water, the reeds, the boat, the bank, and the small rooms of his house were enough for him. Yet now, while others were leaving, he felt unsettled. Their goodbyes entered him like a sadness.

He tried to do his usual work, but it was difficult. He looked at his boat, cleaned a few things, and then stopped. He picked up paper to write a song, but the words did not come. He walked along the bank and looked at the sky. Everything seemed to be moving away from him, though the river still ran past his door as always.

One morning he met several swallows sitting on a fence. They were busy talking together, making quick little sounds. Rat knew at once what they were discussing. They were talking about leaving. Their small bodies were full of excitement, and their eyes looked toward the south.

Rat asked them why they wanted to go. He said the river bank was still pleasant and warm. There were insects in the air, soft mud near the water, and quiet places under the trees. Why leave such a good home? Why fly away to places that were far, strange, and dangerous?

The swallows answered him in their quick bright way. They said the call had come, and when the call came, they had to go. They spoke of warm countries, blue water, white walls, bright skies, and insects dancing in the sun. They did not speak as if they disliked the river bank. They only said that, for now, another world was calling them.

Rat listened and felt a strange pain. He asked why they ever came back, if those far places were so wonderful. The swallows told him that the call worked both ways. One day they would again long for English fields, soft rain, wet grass, and the sound of the cuckoo. But today their blood moved to a different music, and they could not stay.

After they flew away, Rat wandered without purpose. He climbed the slope above the north bank and looked south. Usually the low hills in the distance were the end of his world. He had never cared much about what lay beyond them. But now the sky above those hills seemed full of promise. The unknown world suddenly felt more real than the places he knew best.

He imagined seas beyond the hills. He imagined warm coasts, white houses, green trees, quiet harbors, and ships ready to leave for islands. He had never seen these things, but the swallows had made them live in his mind. For a moment, the river below him seemed cold and small. Then his loyal heart reproached him, and he felt ashamed.

Rat went down from the hill and walked to a dusty lane. He lay in the cool grass under a hedge and looked at the road. The road itself seemed to speak of travel. So many feet had passed along it. So many animals had gone away by it,

searching for work, food, danger, pleasure, or some dream they could not name.

While Rat lay there thinking, he heard footsteps. Someone was coming along the road, walking slowly and wearily. Soon a stranger came into view. He was a rat, but not a river rat like Ratty. He was dusty, thin, and tired, and he carried his few things tied in a blue cloth. When he reached Rat, he greeted him politely and sat down beside him in the grass.

Rat did not question him at once. The stranger looked as if he had walked a long way. His shoulders were bent, his paws were thin, and there were lines around his eyes. He wore small gold earrings, a faded blue shirt, and patched clothes. Everything about him seemed worn by travel, but his eyes were bright and alive.

After resting for a while, the stranger breathed in the air and looked around. He knew the smell of clover and the sound of cows feeding in the field. He heard the river nearby and guessed that Rat was a freshwater animal. He said Rat seemed to live a very good life. It might even be the best life, if someone had the strength to stay with it.

Rat answered that river life was the only life worth living, but his voice did not sound as sure as usual. The stranger noticed this and smiled a little. He said he had tried such a life himself for six months on a good little farm. He had had food, safety, comfort, and everything an animal could reasonably want. Yet here he was, walking away from it.

Rat felt that he had met another creature who had heard the same call as the birds. He asked where the stranger had come from. The stranger said only that he had come from a farm to the north. He did not want to speak much about it. His eyes were already looking south, as if his real life lay somewhere beyond the horizon.

Rat studied him more closely. "You are not from here," he said. "And you are not really a farmer." The stranger nodded. He said he was a sea rat. He had been born far away, in a great old city by the sea. But he did not belong to one city only. Any port, any ship, and any shore could feel like home to him.

Rat became more interested in spite of himself. He imagined long voyages,

empty seas, hard days, and ships far from land. The Sea Rat laughed gently and said that was not his kind of life. He liked coast travel, where land was never far away. What he loved most was not danger, but the life of southern ports: the lights at night, the smell of the sea, the noise of ships, and the warm streets where a traveller could always find another road.

#### Part 18: Rat Almost Leaves Home

Rat asked the stranger to tell him more about his life by the sea. His own life, he said, felt rather small that day. The Sea Rat smiled, because he understood this feeling very well. He began to speak of his last journey. He had left a great old city and gone aboard a small trading ship that moved from port to port across warm southern seas.

He spoke of golden days and soft nights. He spoke of islands, harbors, old stone places, and friends waiting in every town. In the heat of the day, he slept in cool corners or among old ruins. In the evening, he ate with other travellers under bright stars. Rat listened with growing wonder, and the quiet lane around him seemed to fade away.

Then the Sea Rat told of sailing north along another coast. He spoke of a famous city built on water. Boats moved along its shining canals, and music floated through the night air. Lights trembled on the dark water, and friends sat together eating and talking until late. Rat could almost see it, though he had never been there.

The Sea Rat paused, and Rat sat silent beside him. In his mind, Rat was no longer beside an English lane. He was floating through strange water between old walls. He heard songs that were not river songs and saw lamps shining on black canals. For a moment, his own river seemed far away and very still.

The traveller continued. He told of sailing south again, stopping in warm islands, and staying with friends on land. He never liked to remain on one ship too long. A ship was good for movement, but too much of the same ship made the mind narrow. When restlessness returned, he found another vessel and went on

again.

Rat asked if life below in the ship was hot and uncomfortable. The Sea Rat gave a small knowing smile. He said he was an old hand and often found better places than ordinary sailors did. Rat thought this life sounded hard. The Sea Rat answered that it was hard for the crew, but not always for a clever traveller. Rat was not sure whether to believe him, but he was too fascinated to argue.

The Sea Rat told of wine barrels floated from ship to shore, of men singing in boats, and of horses pulling the barrels up steep streets. He told of olive trees on hillsides and blue sea far below. He told of walking slowly from place to place, never hurrying, because each town had food, friends, and sun. At last he spoke of another great port where shellfish were so good that he still dreamed of them.

At the word food, Rat suddenly remembered his manners. He invited the Sea Rat to eat with him at his home. The traveller thanked him warmly, but asked if the food could be brought outside. He did not like going indoors unless he had to. Rat hurried home, packed a basket with bread, sausage, cheese, and a bottle of good drink, and came back as fast as he could.

The Sea Rat praised the meal, and Rat felt pleased. They sat in the grass by the roadside and ate together. When the traveller's hunger was less sharp, he began again. He spoke of ports in Spain, Portugal, and France, of small harbors, rough weather, and narrow rivers leading to busy towns. Rat followed every word as if he were travelling with him.

After the meal, the Sea Rat's voice grew deeper and stronger. His eyes seemed to hold the color of stormy sea water. The red drink in his glass seemed to hold the heat of the south. Rat looked from the eyes to the glass and back again. The quiet fields, the hedge, and the familiar road seemed to move far away.

The Sea Rat's talk became almost like music. Rat seemed to hear sailors singing while they pulled up an anchor. He heard wind in ropes, waves against stones, and gulls crying over the sea. He imagined fishing boats coming home at sunset and great ships appearing through fog. He saw harbors full of lights and narrow streets climbing up from the water.

The traveller rose to his feet, but his voice still held Rat fast. He spoke of going

south-west along the road until he reached a small grey town beside the sea. There, he said, boats lay tied to old walls, fish flashed in the water, and ships from many countries came and went. He would wait there until the right ship arrived. Then, one morning, he would slip aboard and begin again.

Then the Sea Rat turned the full power of his words on Rat. “You can come too,” he said softly. “The days pass and do not return. The south is still waiting. Shut the door behind you, step out, and begin a new life.” He said Rat could follow him easily, because Rat was younger and stronger. Then his voice faded, and Rat saw him walking away down the white road.

For a long time Rat sat without moving. Then, slowly and mechanically, he packed the basket. He went home like an animal walking in sleep. He gathered a few special things, put them in a small bag, and chose a strong walking stick. His face was calm, but his eyes looked strange and far away.

Just as Rat stepped over the doorway, Mole appeared. “Ratty, where are you going?” he asked in surprise. Rat answered in a flat, dreamy voice that he was going south with the others. First he would go to the sea, then to a ship, and then to the shores that were calling him. He tried to move past Mole, slow but determined.

Mole looked into Rat’s eyes and became frightened. They were not the warm brown eyes he knew. They seemed grey and fixed, as if another animal were looking through them. Mole threw his arms around Rat and pulled him back into the house. Rat struggled for a short time, but then his strength left him, and he sank down, shaking and exhausted.

Mole shut the door, locked away the bag, and stayed close to his friend. Rat fell into a troubled sleep, muttering strange words about ships, harbors, and far countries. Mole was very worried, but he waited patiently. When evening came, Rat woke. His eyes were brown again, but he looked weak, sad, and empty.

Mole tried to comfort him. He talked gently of harvest wagons, apples, nuts, warm winter rooms, and good quiet days at home. Little by little, Rat began to listen. Then Mole placed paper and a pencil near him and said that Rat had not written a poem for a long time. At first Rat pushed them away, but Mole left him

alone. Later, when Mole looked in, Rat was writing slowly and biting the end of his pencil. Mole smiled with relief, because the cure had begun.

#### Part 19: Toad and the Barge-Woman

Toad woke early the next morning inside the hollow tree. The front of the tree faced the east, so the sunlight came straight in and touched his face. His toes were very cold, and for a moment he dreamed that he was back at Toad Hall in his own fine bed. Then he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and remembered everything. He had escaped from prison. He had escaped from the train. Best of all, he was free.

The word “free” made him warm from head to foot. He shook the dry leaves from his clothes and tried to make himself look respectable. This was not easy, because he was still dressed as a washerwoman. But Toad was not the sort of animal to worry about facts for very long. He stepped out into the morning sun, cold, hungry, and hopeful.

The wood was quiet and wet with dew. Toad walked through it alone, feeling much braver by daylight than he had felt in the dark. Soon he came out into green fields, and after that he found a road. The road looked friendly enough, but it did not tell him where to go. Toad became annoyed with it, because he needed information, not beauty.

He had no map, no money, no food, and no idea where he was. Still, he told himself that a clever animal could always manage. He walked for some time, hoping to meet someone who could give him directions. But the morning world was strangely empty. Birds sang, cows looked at him, and the road went on saying nothing useful at all.

After a while he heard the sound of water. It was not the lively sound of Rat’s river, but a slower and more even sound. Toad pushed through some bushes and found himself beside a canal. A straight path ran along it, and the water lay calm and quiet between its banks. Toad felt pleased. A canal had boats, and boats had people, and people could sometimes be useful.

Soon he saw a barge coming slowly along the canal. A horse walked on the

towpath, pulling it by a rope. A large woman stood at the back of the barge and held the tiller. Toad hurried along the bank and called to her. He made his voice as soft and sad as he could. He hoped she would see only a poor washerwoman, not Mr. Toad of Toad Hall.

The barge-woman asked what he wanted. Toad said he was a poor unhappy woman who had lost her money and needed to get home. He said he had walked all night and was almost faint with hunger. This was not fully true, but part of it was true enough to make him sound sincere. He added a few sighs, because he thought they improved the story.

The barge-woman looked at him for a while. She was not easily fooled, but she was not unkind. She said he could come aboard for a little way if he liked. Toad thanked her in the most humble voice he could manage. Then he climbed onto the barge, rather awkwardly because of the dress, and sat down with great relief.

The barge moved slowly through the quiet morning. Toad soon began to feel important again. The danger of the night was behind him, and the prison was far away. The woman asked him questions, and Toad answered more and more freely. Before long, he was talking not like a poor lost washerwoman, but like an expert in washing with a very large business.

He said that washing was his trade and that he understood every part of it. He spoke of washing, ironing, and fine shirts as if he had spent his whole life among tubs and soap. The barge-woman listened with growing interest. Toad enjoyed her attention and made the story larger. He said he had many girls working under him and that he watched everything with great care.

The barge-woman was impressed. She said it was lucky she had met him, because she had washing of her own to do and no time to do it. Her husband had gone off with the dog, leaving her to manage the barge alone. The horse was sensible enough to walk by itself, but the woman still had to steer. So, she said, Toad could wash a few things in the cabin as they moved along.

Toad's heart sank. He tried to laugh and change the subject. He spoke of rabbits, dinner, and the pleasure of sitting in the fresh air. But the barge-woman would not

be turned aside. She told him there was a tub, soap, hot water, and clothes ready in the cabin. Since he loved washing so much, she said, he would surely enjoy himself.

Toad became frightened. He quickly offered to steer the barge while she did the washing herself. He said he might spoil her things because every washerwoman had her own special ways. The woman would not accept this. She told him that washing was his own work and that he should not be lazy. Poor Toad went into the cabin with a heavy heart.

Inside, he found a pile of clothes and a tub waiting for him. He looked at them as if they were enemies. He poured water, used soap, and pushed the clothes around with his paws. Nothing behaved as it should. The water splashed everywhere, the soap slipped away, and the clothes twisted themselves into heavy wet knots. Toad grew hotter, wetter, and angrier every minute.

He tried to remember how washerwomen worked, but he had never truly watched one. He rubbed too hard, then not hard enough. He dropped things on the floor and then stepped on them. He pulled one item from the tub and found that it looked worse than before. His bonnet fell over one eye, and his dress stuck to him. It was a terrible fall for an animal of his importance.

Suddenly he heard loud laughter behind him. He turned around, holding a dripping piece of washing in both paws. The barge-woman was standing at the cabin door, laughing so hard that tears came into her eyes. She said she had been watching him for some time. She had guessed from his proud talk that he was not a real washerwoman at all.

Toad's anger burst out. He forgot his disguise, his danger, and all common sense. He shouted that he was not a washerwoman but Mr. Toad, a famous and important animal. He said he would not be laughed at by a common barge-woman. The woman came closer, looked under his bonnet, and saw the truth. She cried out that he really was a toad, and that she would not have such a creature in her clean barge.

Before Toad could protect himself, she caught him firmly. The world turned upside down. The barge, the sky, and the canal all seemed to fly around him. Then

Toad was thrown through the air and landed in the water with a great splash. The canal was cold, dirty, and full of weeds. Toad came up coughing and shaking, while the barge moved away and the woman laughed from the back of it.

Toad struggled to the bank, but the wet dress made swimming very difficult. He kicked, pulled, and fought with the heavy cloth until at last he reached the side. Climbing out was almost as hard as swimming. He lay on the grass for a moment, breathless and furious. Then he sat up, wiped water and weed from his face, and stared after the barge. He had been beaten, laughed at, and thrown into the canal, and now all he could think about was revenge.

## Part 20: Toad Steals a Horse and Finds a Car

Toad did not stay long on the grass beside the canal. He was cold, wet, and angry, but anger gave him strength. He gathered the heavy wet dress in his paws and began to run along the towpath after the barge. The barge-woman was still laughing at him from the back of the boat. She called out rude things about his face and his washing, but Toad did not answer.

Words were not enough for Toad now. He wanted a stronger kind of revenge. Ahead of him, the barge-horse walked slowly along the path, pulling the boat by the towrope. Toad ran up to it, untied the rope, and climbed onto the horse's back. Then he kicked the horse hard and rode away from the canal as fast as he could.

Behind him, the barge drifted uselessly and then ran into the bank. The barge-woman shouted for him to stop, but Toad only laughed. He turned down a rough lane and left the canal behind. The horse could not gallop for long, and soon it slowed to a trot. Then it slowed again to a walk, but Toad did not mind. He was moving, and the barge-woman was not.

After a while, Toad's good temper came back. The sun was warm, and his clothes began to dry. He was hungry, but he was also proud of himself. He thought he had handled the whole matter very cleverly. First he had been thrown into the water, but then he had taken the horse. In Toad's mind, that made him the winner.

He rode for some miles along small lanes and paths. The horse went where it

liked, more or less, and Toad was too tired to guide it strongly. At last the horse stopped on a wide common and began to eat grass. Toad nearly fell off, but he saved himself just in time. He looked around and saw a dirty caravan nearby, with a man sitting beside a small fire.

Over the fire hung an iron pot. From the pot came rich, warm smells. Toad suddenly understood that he had been only a little hungry before. Now he was truly hungry. His whole body seemed to ask for food. He sat on the horse and stared at the pot, while the man smoked his pipe and stared at Toad.

After a while the man asked if Toad wanted to sell the horse. Toad was surprised, because he had not thought of this. Then he quickly saw that selling the horse might give him two things he badly needed: money and breakfast. He pretended to be shocked. "Sell this fine young horse?" he said. "Oh no, I could not possibly do that."

The man looked at the horse calmly and offered one shilling for each leg. Toad got down and counted on his fingers. Four legs made four shillings. He said that was far too little for such a wonderful horse. The man then offered five shillings and said that was his last offer. Toad sat down and thought deeply, or at least looked as if he was thinking deeply.

Toad was hungry, penniless, still far from home, and still in danger. Five shillings began to seem like a large amount of money. But he did not want to accept too quickly. At last he made his own offer. The man must give him six shillings and sixpence, and also as much breakfast as he could eat from the iron pot. In return, Toad would give him the horse and the harness.

The man complained loudly, as people often do when they are really going to agree. Then he took out a dirty bag and counted the money into Toad's paw. After that he brought a plate, a knife, a fork, and a spoon. He filled the plate with hot stew from the pot. To Toad, it was the best food in the world.

Toad ate and ate. The man gave him more whenever he asked, and Toad asked many times. Warm food filled him, strengthened him, and made him cheerful again. When he could eat no more, he said goodbye to the man and even said goodbye kindly to the horse. The man told him the right road toward the river, and

Toad went on his way in excellent spirits.

He was now a very different Toad from the wet, angry animal beside the canal. His clothes were dry, his stomach was full, and he had money in his pocket. Home, friends, and safety seemed closer. As he walked, he thought about all his adventures. He had escaped prison, escaped the train, beaten the barge-woman, sold the horse, and eaten a fine breakfast. His pride began to swell again.

Soon Toad was singing a song about himself. He sang that the world had many great heroes, but none as great as Toad. He sang that clever men knew less than he did. He sang that kings, queens, armies, and all important people should admire him. The song was very foolish and very proud, but Toad enjoyed it deeply. He walked with his head high and his voice loud.

After several miles, he reached a high road. There, in the distance, he saw a moving speck. The speck became larger and turned into something very familiar. Then he heard the sound he knew so well: "Poop-poop!" His heart jumped with joy. A motor-car was coming toward him.

Toad stepped into the road, ready to ask for a ride. He imagined himself arriving at Toad Hall in a motor-car, to Badger's great surprise. But as the car came nearer, his face suddenly changed. His knees shook, and he almost fell. It was the very same car he had stolen from the inn. Worse still, the same people were riding in it.

Toad dropped down in the road, certain that everything was over. He thought of police, chains, prison, and dry bread again. But the people in the car did not know him. They saw only a poor old washerwoman lying in the road. They stopped, lifted him kindly into the car, and said they would take him to the nearest village. Toad kept one eye half open and felt his courage slowly return.

Soon he asked if he might sit in the front seat for fresh air. The men thought this was sensible and helped him forward. Toad sat beside the driver, and the old desire rose in him again. He asked politely if he might try driving for a little. The men laughed, but they allowed it. At first Toad drove slowly and carefully, while the people behind praised the clever washerwoman.

Then he went faster. The driver tried to stop him, but Toad held him down with

one elbow. The wind rushed into his face, and the engine sang under him. Suddenly Toad forgot all caution. “Washerwoman?” he shouted. “No! I am Toad, the great driver, the prison-breaker, the animal who always escapes!” At once everyone cried out in horror and tried to seize him.

In the struggle, Toad turned the wheel badly. The car burst through a hedge and crashed into a muddy pond. Toad flew through the air and landed on his back in a meadow. He sat up and saw the car sinking in the mud, while the men struggled in the water. Then he ran across the fields as fast as he could. Soon he stopped under a hedge and laughed until he began singing again about his own cleverness.

But his song did not last. A noise behind him made him turn his head. Two policemen and the driver were running after him across the fields. Toad sprang up and ran again, but he was tired, fat, and short-legged. They came closer and closer. Looking back in terror, he did not watch where he was going. Suddenly the ground disappeared under his feet, and he fell straight into the river.

The strong water carried him away. He tried to catch the reeds, but they slipped from his paws. He went under, came up coughing, and promised himself that he would never steal a car or sing a proud song again. Then he saw a dark hole in the bank just above the water. As the stream swept him past, he reached up and caught the edge. Slowly, with great effort, he pulled himself up until his elbows rested on the floor of the hole.

Toad lay there, breathing hard and dripping with water. Then he saw a small bright thing shining in the darkness before him. It came nearer, and a familiar face grew around it. The face was brown and round, with whiskers, neat ears, and soft hair. It was the Water Rat. Toad had reached Rat’s own home by the river.

## Part 21: Toad Comes Home in Tears

Rat stared at the dripping creature who hung from the edge of his doorway. For a moment he could not speak. Toad’s face was muddy, his bonnet was twisted, and weeds hung from his wet dress. Water ran from him onto Rat’s clean floor.

Then Rat understood who it was. "Toad!" he cried. "What in the world are you doing there?"

Toad tried to answer with dignity, but he was too tired to be very grand. Rat took him by the paws and pulled him fully inside. Toad rolled onto the floor in a wet heap. He lay there breathing hard, while Rat shut the door and looked at him with amazement. The river ran quietly outside, as if it had only delivered a strange parcel and had nothing more to do with the matter.

Rat asked no questions at first. He knew that Toad needed help before he needed judgment. He fetched towels, dry clothes, and something warm to drink. Toad sat in front of the fire and slowly became himself again. As the warmth entered him, his courage returned too. Soon his eyes brightened, and his mouth began to move in the dangerous way Rat knew so well.

"Ratty," Toad said at last, "you see before you a very remarkable animal." Rat raised his eyebrows but said nothing. Toad leaned back in the chair and began to tell his story. He spoke of prison, the washerwoman's clothes, the train, the chase, the jump, the barge, the horse, the gypsy, the motor-car, the pond, the police, and the river. In Toad's mouth, every mistake became a victory.

Rat listened while he prepared food. He had known Toad for a long time, so he was not easily impressed. Still, even Rat had to admit that Toad had passed through many strange dangers. Toad, seeing that Rat was listening, became louder and prouder. He said no prison could hold him, no police could catch him, and no river could drown him. He said the world had never known such courage and cleverness.

Rat put supper on the table and told Toad to eat before he burst. Toad ate with great speed, stopping only to praise himself between mouthfuls. He said his escape would be famous for years. Songs would be written about it. Young animals would learn the story at school. Rat only said, "Yes, perhaps," in a dry voice and gave him more food.

After supper, Toad wanted to sing his own song. He stood up on the hearth-rug and began in a loud voice. The song was about great Toad, brave Toad, clever Toad, and free Toad. It was not a good song, but Toad sang it with deep feeling.

Rat let him continue for a short time. Then he told him to sit down, because there were more serious things to discuss.

Toad did not like this. He said serious things could wait until tomorrow. First, he wanted to go home to Toad Hall, take a hot bath, put on his best clothes, and order the finest dinner in the house. After that, he would invite all his friends and tell them the whole story properly. Rat looked at him for a long moment. Then he said quietly that Toad could not go home in that way.

Toad did not understand. He said Toad Hall was his own house and that he could go there whenever he liked. Rat told him to sit still and listen. While Toad had been away, very bad things had happened. The weasels, stoats, and ferrets from the Wild Wood had come together. They had attacked Toad Hall and taken it.

Toad stared at Rat. At first he thought Rat must be joking. Rat's face showed that he was not. Rat explained that Badger and Mole had been at Toad Hall, trying to protect it. But the Wild Wood animals came in great numbers. Badger and Mole were only two against many. They fought as well as they could, but they were beaten, insulted, and driven out.

Toad made a small laughing sound before he could stop himself. The thought of Badger and Mole being forced out by wild animals seemed, for one foolish second, almost funny to him. Rat gave him such a look that Toad quickly became serious. Rat went on. The Wild Wood animals were living in Toad Hall now. They ate Toad's food, drank Toad's drink, slept in Toad's beds, and sang rude songs about him.

Toad's face changed. His pride, which had been standing very tall inside him, suddenly fell down. The great escape, the train, the barge, and the motor-car no longer seemed so important. His own home was in enemy hands. His best rooms were being spoiled. His name was being laughed at by low creatures who had no right to be there.

"They have taken my house?" Toad said slowly. Rat nodded. "They have been sleeping in my beds?" Rat nodded again. "They have been eating my food?" Rat said yes, and added that they had been doing so very badly, at all hours, with no

order at all. This last detail hurt Toad deeply. Disorder in his house seemed almost worse than danger.

Then Toad jumped up and seized Rat's stick. "I will soon stop this," he cried. "I will go there now." Rat told him it was no use. The enemy had guards, and some of them had guns. Toad would only get himself hurt. But Toad was too angry to listen. He rushed out of Rat's house and went up the road toward Toad Hall.

Before long he reached his own front gate. The evening light lay softly on the road, and for a moment Toad felt brave. Then a long yellow ferret appeared behind the fence, holding a gun. The ferret asked who was there. Toad shouted that this was nonsense and that he was the owner of the house. The ferret did not argue. He lifted the gun and fired.

The shot went over Toad's head. Toad dropped flat on the road and then scrambled up in terror. His courage ran out of him like water from a broken pot. He ran back to Rat's house as fast as his legs could carry him. Behind him, he heard thin cruel laughter from the fence. When he burst through Rat's door again, he looked much less like a hero.

Rat said nothing unkind. He only asked if Toad had now understood. Toad was still angry and ashamed, and he did not want to give up. He said there was more than one way into Toad Hall. If the front gate was guarded, he would go by the river. Rat warned him again, but Toad was already moving toward the boat.

He rowed upstream toward his house, keeping low and careful. From the river, Toad Hall looked peaceful and beautiful. The old walls shone in the evening sun. The pigeons sat along the roof. The garden was bright with flowers, and the little creek led quietly toward the boat-house. For a moment Toad's heart rose. Surely his house was waiting for him.

He guided the boat into the creek. He was just passing under the small wooden bridge when a great stone fell from above. It smashed through the bottom of the boat. Water rushed in at once. The boat sank, and Toad found himself struggling in deep water again. Somehow he reached the bank and crawled out, wet for the second time that day.

Toad returned to Rat's house in a terrible state. He was cold, muddy, hurt in

his pride, and almost broken in spirit. Rat helped him inside and made him sit down, but this time Toad had no song to sing. He thought of his home, his lost rooms, his friends beaten and driven away, and the enemies laughing inside Toad Hall. Then the tears came. He cried loudly and helplessly, like summer rain in a storm, while Rat stood near him and waited for the storm to pass.

## Part 22: Badger's Plan

Rat did not try to stop Toad's tears too quickly. Poor Toad had lost his house, his boat, his pride, and most of his courage in one evening. After a while, he grew quieter and wiped his face. Rat told him that the best thing now was to wait. They could do nothing useful until Badger and Mole returned with fresh news.

Toad agreed at once, because he was tired, wet, and hungry. But then he remembered Badger and Mole only as an afterthought. Rat looked at him reproachfully. He told Toad that while Toad had been riding, escaping, eating, boasting, and falling into rivers, Badger and Mole had been living very roughly in the open. They had watched Toad Hall day and night and had tried to think of a way to get it back.

Toad was touched and ashamed. He said he was a thankless animal and that he would go out at once into the dark to find them. Then he stopped suddenly, because he heard dishes outside the door. Supper had arrived. His sorrow did not disappear, but his hunger was stronger for the moment. Rat remembered that Toad had eaten prison food for a long time, so he let him enjoy the meal.

They had just finished supper and sat down again by the fire when there was a heavy knock at the door. Toad looked nervous, but Rat seemed to know who it was. He opened the door, and Badger came in. Badger was muddy, tired, and rough-looking. He had clearly spent several hard nights away from home.

Badger walked solemnly to Toad and shook his paw. He welcomed him back, but then sadly corrected himself and said this was not much of a homecoming. After that he sat down at the table and helped himself to a large piece of cold pie. Toad was rather frightened by Badger's serious manner. Rat whispered that

Badger was always gloomy when he was hungry, and that food would improve him.

Soon there was another, lighter knock. Rat opened the door again, and Mole came in. Mole was dirty, untidy, and covered with bits of hay and straw, but his face was bright with joy. When he saw Toad, he cried out happily and danced around him. He praised Toad for escaping so soon, and Toad began to swell with pride at once.

Rat tried to stop Mole, but it was too late. Toad stood on the hearth-rug and began to speak of his adventures again. He said that escaping from prison, tricking people, and running across the country were only small matters for him. Mole, who had not eaten since breakfast, sat down at the table and told Toad to talk while he ate. Toad was very pleased and began to show the money he had received for selling the barge-horse.

Rat became impatient. He told Toad to be quiet and asked Mole to explain the real situation. Mole said it was as bad as possible. Badger and he had gone around Toad Hall again and again, by day and by night. Everywhere there were guards, guns, stones, insults, and cruel laughter. The laughter, Mole said, was almost the worst part.

Rat began to suggest a plan, but Mole interrupted him. Toad interrupted both of them. Soon all three were talking at once, loudly and uselessly. Then a dry voice cut through the noise. "Be quiet, all of you," Badger said. Everyone stopped at once. Badger had finished his pie and was now ready to think.

Badger first scolded Toad. He asked what Toad's father would have thought if he could see such behavior. Toad fell onto the sofa and began to cry again. Badger softened his voice and told him that the past was past. Then he said Mole was right: the guards were too many and too well placed. A direct attack would fail.

Toad cried that all hope was lost. He said he would join the army and never see dear Toad Hall again. Badger told him not to be foolish. There were other ways to take back a house. Then he said he would tell them a great secret. Toad sat up at once, because secrets always interested him.

Badger said there was an underground passage. It began near the river bank,

not far from Rat's house, and it led straight into the middle of Toad Hall. Toad said this was nonsense. He knew every part of his own house, and there was no such passage. Badger looked at him severely and said Toad's father had known about it and had shown it to him long ago.

Badger explained that Toad's father had repaired and cleaned the passage in case it might be useful one day. He had also told Badger not to tell young Toad unless there was real need. Toad looked offended for a moment, especially when Badger said his father knew Toad could not keep quiet. But then Toad brightened. He admitted that perhaps he talked a little too much, but only because he was interesting company.

Badger went on with the plan. Otter had disguised himself and gone to Toad Hall to learn what was happening inside. The next night there would be a great dinner for the Chief Weasel's birthday. All the weasels would be in the dining-hall, eating, drinking, singing, and feeling safe. They would have no guns or sticks with them, because they trusted the guards outside.

Rat understood at once. The guards would watch the outside of the house, but the friends would come from below. Badger said the tunnel came up under the butler's pantry, right next to the dining-hall. Mole imagined them creeping into the pantry. Rat imagined them carrying weapons. Toad imagined them rushing in and beating the enemies. He became so excited that he ran around the room and jumped over chairs.

Badger told them the plan was settled and that there was nothing more to argue about. It was late, so everyone had to go to bed. Toad obeyed, though he was much too excited to sleep at first. But the day had been long, and a real bed felt wonderful after prison straw and cold stone. In a few moments he was sleeping deeply and dreaming of roads, canals, secret passages, and a triumphant return to Toad Hall.

The next morning Toad came down late. The others had already finished breakfast. Badger sat calmly in an armchair with a newspaper, as if no battle were coming that night. Rat, however, was very busy. He ran around the room with belts, sticks, swords, and pistols, making four neat little piles on the floor and

saying which things belonged to each animal.

Badger looked over his paper and said that too many weapons would not be needed. Once they were inside the dining-hall with good sticks, the four of them could clear the room quickly enough. Rat still thought it was best to be ready. Toad picked up a strong stick and swung it at imaginary enemies. He shouted that he would teach them a lesson for stealing his house.

Then Mole came in looking very pleased with himself. He had found Toad's old washerwoman clothes and had gone near Toad Hall in disguise. The guards had taken him for a washerwoman, and he had frightened them with a wild story. He told them that a hundred fierce badgers, many armed rats, and a brave company of toads would attack from different sides that night. The guards had become confused and nervous, just as Mole had hoped.

Toad was jealous and said Mole had spoiled everything. But Badger praised Mole warmly. He said Mole had done very well and had more sense than some much larger animals. Toad did not like this, but lunch arrived before he could say anything foolish. After the meal, Badger slept in his chair, Rat went back to his preparations, and Mole led Toad outside. There, in the open air, Mole listened patiently while Toad told all his adventures again, making some of them even grander than before.

### Part 23: The Secret Attack

The day moved slowly toward evening. Rat checked the sticks again and again, though Badger said they were ready. Mole tried to stay calm, but his eyes often went toward the door. Toad walked up and down, first proud, then nervous, then proud again. Every sound from outside made him turn his head. He wanted to be brave, but the thought of his own dining-hall full of enemies made his stomach feel cold.

At last Badger stood up and said it was time. The four friends took their sticks and went out quietly. The air was cool, and the sky was growing dark. They did not use the main road, because guards might see them. Badger led them by a lower

path near the river, where bushes and trees hid them well. Rat followed close behind him, then Mole, and Toad came last.

They moved without speaking. Toad wanted very much to say something brave, but Rat had warned him to keep quiet. The river shone faintly through the leaves. Somewhere in the distance, Toad Hall stood bright with stolen lights and loud enemy voices. Toad heard the noise and felt both angry and afraid. That was his house, his food, his chairs, and his best table being used by those rude animals.

Badger stopped near a rough place in the bank. He pushed aside some plants and showed them a low opening half hidden by roots. "Here it is," he whispered. "Follow me, and do not make noise." He went in first with the lantern. Rat and Mole followed carefully. Toad looked into the black hole and suddenly wished the plan had been less underground.

As he tried to enter, Toad slipped on the wet bank. He gave a small cry, lost his balance, and fell into the water. Rat and Mole pulled him out as quickly as they could. Badger was very angry, though he spoke in a low voice. He said that if Toad made one more foolish mistake, they would leave him behind. Toad shook with cold and promised to behave.

Then they entered the secret passage. It was low, narrow, damp, and dark. The lantern was ahead with Badger, and its light looked small in the long black tunnel. Toad was wet through, and the cold earth seemed to breathe on him. He tried to keep close to the others, but his feet slipped and his teeth shook. He began to fear not only the enemies ahead, but also the darkness behind him.

Rat looked back and whispered, "Come on, Toad." Toad heard this and became afraid that he would be left alone in the tunnel. He rushed forward too fast. He bumped into Rat, Rat bumped into Mole, and Mole bumped into Badger. For one terrible moment everyone was mixed together in the narrow dark. Badger thought they were being attacked from behind and almost struck out before he understood.

When Badger learned that the trouble was only Toad, he was angry again. Toad almost cried and said he had not meant any harm. Mole and Rat promised that they would make sure he behaved from now on. Badger gave a deep growl, but he let the matter pass. After that, Rat walked behind Toad and kept one firm paw

on his shoulder. This made Toad feel safer, though also less grand.

They went on slowly through the tunnel. Their paws touched cold walls, and the earth floor was uneven under their feet. Sometimes water dropped from the roof. Sometimes the passage turned sharply, and the lantern disappeared for a moment around a corner. Each time this happened, Toad held his breath. Mole, who knew underground places better than the others, moved more easily and helped Rat when the way became rough.

After a long time, Badger stopped. He raised one paw and listened. From far above them came a low mixed sound. It was like shouting, cheering, stamping feet, and knocking on tables. Toad's eyes grew wide. Badger only nodded and said, "They are having a very good time up there." His quiet voice made the others feel braver.

The passage now began to rise. The noise became clearer with every step. They could hear glasses being struck on the table, chairs scraping, and many rough voices singing together. The weasels were so busy with their party that they could not hear anything below. Badger smiled in the lantern light. "Good," he said. "That is exactly what we need."

Soon the tunnel ended under a wooden trap-door. Above it was the butler's pantry, and beyond that was the dining-hall. The noise was now so loud that even Toad felt a little courage come back. Badger told them to put their shoulders against the door. Together they pushed hard. The old wood lifted with a soft groan, and one by one they climbed up into the pantry.

The pantry was dark, but smells of food filled it. Plates, dishes, bottles, and cold meat stood everywhere, because the enemies had taken what they wanted and left the rest in disorder. Toad looked around and nearly forgot the battle. His family plates had been used badly, and someone had dropped sauce on the floor. He opened his mouth to complain, but Rat gave him a sharp look, and he closed it again.

The door to the dining-hall stood just ahead of them. From behind it came wild singing and the sound of paws beating time on the table. Badger put his ear to the door and listened. Then he turned to the others. "Now," he whispered, "stay close

together. Hit hard, shout loudly, and do not stop until the room is ours.”

He threw the door open. The four friends rushed into the dining-hall together. The weasels, stoats, and ferrets were sitting at Toad’s table with food and drink before them. They had no sticks ready, and most of them were singing with their mouths full. For one second, they only stared. Then Badger gave a great shout, and the battle began.

Badger went straight down the middle of the room like a storm. His stick rose and fell, and enemies jumped out of his way. Rat fought fiercely on one side, quick and sharp, driving animals under chairs and tables. Mole fought on the other side with steady courage, and many weasels learned that a small quiet animal can be very strong when he is defending a friend’s home. Toad followed behind, shouting loudly and striking at anyone who came too near.

The enemies had been brave when they were many and the guards were outside. But this sudden attack from inside the house frightened them badly. Some tried to hide under the table. Some climbed onto chairs and then fell off again. Some ran toward the windows, while others tried to reach the door. Badger, Rat, and Mole kept driving them back, and Toad shouted, “Out of my house! Out of my house!”

Soon the dining-hall was full of running feet, broken dishes, flying food, and cries of fear. The Chief Weasel tried to stand on a chair and give orders, but Rat knocked the chair from under him. A large stoat made for the pantry, but Mole met him there and sent him spinning back. Badger guarded the main door, so no one could form a proper group. The enemy had lost the fight almost before they understood it had begun.

At last the Wild Wood animals broke completely. They fled through doors, windows, and any opening they could find. Some left their hats behind, and some left their pride. A few were caught and made to sit on the floor under Mole’s watchful eye. The house grew quieter, though from outside came the sound of frightened animals running across the lawn. Toad Hall was won back.

The four friends stood in the middle of the dining-hall, breathing hard. Their fur was dusty, their clothes were torn, and their paws were sore. But they looked at one another and began to smile. Toad’s smile was the largest of all. He wanted

to make a speech immediately, but Badger told him to help put the room in order first. For once, Toad obeyed.

Mole took charge of the prisoners and made them clean the bedrooms. Rat opened windows, checked passages, and made sure no enemy was hiding in a cupboard. Badger sat down at the table and began to eat some of the food the enemies had left. Toad looked unhappy about the disorder, but he also looked deeply proud. His home was his again, and his friends were with him.

Later that night, the rooms were ready, the prisoners had been sent away, and the doors were safely locked. The four friends sat down together at Toad's own table. They were tired, hungry, and very happy. Toad thanked Mole for his clever work and thanked the others too, though he did it with some effort. Badger was pleased with him, and Rat smiled quietly. That night they slept in clean beds under Toad Hall's roof, safe in the house they had won back together.

#### Part 24: Toad's Better Ending

The next morning, Toad slept very late. When he came down to breakfast, the others had already finished most of the food. There were only bits of toast, some egg-shells, and a little coffee left on the table. Toad did not think this was fair, because it was his own house. But Badger looked up from the newspaper and told him that there was work to do.

Badger said they must hold a banquet that evening to celebrate the return of Toad Hall. Toad became cheerful at once. A banquet meant food, guests, attention, and perhaps a chance to speak. Badger then said that the invitations had to be written immediately. Toad's face fell, because he had hoped to walk around his land and enjoy being master again.

At first Toad protested. He said it was a beautiful morning and that writing letters indoors was dull work. Then a new idea came to him, and his face changed. If he wrote the invitations himself, he could mention his own bravery. He could also add a little program for the evening, with speeches and songs by Toad. So he suddenly agreed and sat down at the writing table with great energy.

Toad worked hard until noon. He wrote many invitations on fine paper with the name of Toad Hall at the top. In his mind, he imagined the evening very clearly. First there would be a speech by Toad. Later there would be another speech by Toad, then a song by Toad, and perhaps several more songs if the guests asked warmly enough.

A small weasel came to the door and asked if he could help. He was one of the prisoners from the night before, and he looked nervous but polite. Toad gave him the invitations and told him to deliver them quickly. The weasel seemed grateful and ran off at once. Toad watched him go and felt that he was already ruling his house with great wisdom.

When Rat, Mole, and Badger came back for lunch, they found Toad in a very proud mood. He tried to look calm, but he could not hide his excitement. Rat and Badger exchanged looks. They knew Toad too well. After lunch, when Toad tried to go into the garden to think about his speeches, Rat caught one arm and Badger caught the other.

They took him into a small room and shut the door. Toad sat in a chair and looked at them suspiciously. Rat spoke first. He said there would be no speeches and no songs at the banquet. Toad opened his mouth, but Rat lifted a paw. This was not a discussion, Rat said. This was something Toad had to accept.

Toad was deeply hurt. He asked if he might sing just one small song. Rat said no, not even one. He told Toad that his songs and speeches were usually full of self-praise. Badger added that they were also full of empty talk. Toad's face grew long, because his beautiful evening was being taken away from him.

Rat said this was for Toad's own good. Toad had to become a better animal sometime, and this was the right moment to begin. Toad sat for a long time in silence. At last he said, in a sad voice, that his friends had won. He said he would try to be a different Toad, though the world was very hard. Then he left the room slowly, holding a handkerchief to his face.

Rat felt sorry for him. Badger did not look sorry at all. "He will survive," Badger said. Mole was not sure what to think. He loved Toad, but he knew that Toad needed strong friends. Without them, Toad's pride would soon grow as wild

as before. So they kept their decision firm.

That evening the guests arrived. Many river-bank animals came, and some animals from the fields and lanes came too. They had heard many stories about the battle, and everyone wanted to see Toad Hall after its recovery. The house was bright with lamps, the table was full, and the servants moved quickly from room to room. It was a great evening, just as a house like Toad Hall required.

Toad came forward to receive his guests. Many of them expected him to boast at once. One young animal began to praise his bravery and asked how many weasels he had beaten by himself. Toad looked modest and answered gently. He said Badger had made the plan, Rat and Mole had done most of the fighting, and he himself had only helped a little.

The guest stared at him in surprise. Other guests heard this and became surprised too. Toad moved from group to group, giving the same quiet kind of answer. Inside, he was pleased by their surprise. It was a new kind of attention, and he found that he rather liked it. Being modest, he discovered, could make people look at him even more closely.

The banquet itself was excellent. Badger had ordered everything well, and Toad Hall knew how to feed guests properly. There was talk, laughter, and much good food. Toad sat at the head of the table, as master of the house. From time to time he looked toward Rat and Badger. They were watching him with open mouths, and this gave him secret joy.

As the evening went on, some of the younger animals grew restless. They remembered older dinners at Toad Hall, when Toad had sung loudly and spoken about himself for a very long time. Soon they began to knock on the table and call for a speech. Others called for one of Mr. Toad's songs. Toad lifted one paw gently and shook his head.

This was the hardest moment of the evening for him. The old Toad inside him wanted to leap onto a chair and begin at once. He wanted to tell the story of prison, trains, boats, horses, cars, rivers, and victory. But he stayed in his seat. He asked one guest about his family and offered another more food. In this way, he made it clear that the dinner would be calm and proper.

Rat could hardly believe what he saw. Mole smiled with quiet happiness. Badger nodded once, as if a difficult job had at last been done properly. Toad saw all this and felt proud, but not in quite the old noisy way. He was still Toad, and he would always enjoy admiration. Yet for once, he had chosen friendship and good sense over applause.

After that night, the four friends returned to their lives. There were no more attacks on Toad Hall. The Wild Wood animals had learned their lesson, and they caused no more trouble. Toad, after speaking with his friends, sent a fine gold chain and locket to the gaoler's daughter, along with a grateful letter. Even Badger admitted that the letter was polite and modest.

The engine driver was also thanked and paid for his trouble. This was only right, because he had helped Toad when Toad was in great danger. The barge-woman was harder for Toad to forgive, because he still remembered being thrown into the canal. But Badger insisted, and at last Toad paid her for the horse he had taken. He complained a good deal while doing it, but he did it all the same.

In the long summer evenings, the four friends sometimes walked together in the Wild Wood. It was no longer terrible to them as it once had been to Mole. The weasels and other animals greeted them with respect. Mother-weasels brought their children to the mouths of their holes and pointed at the friends as they passed. They told the little ones about great Mr. Toad, brave Rat, and famous Mole.

They spoke of Badger differently. When young weasels were noisy and would not behave, their mothers said that the terrible grey Badger might come for them. This was not fair to Badger, because he actually liked children more than he liked most social visits. But the warning always worked. And so peace returned to the river, the wood, and Toad Hall, while Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad lived on together in friendship.