

Badger

Badger Is that a dress?

Toad Ey — yes, Badger.

Badger (*shaking his head*) I thought it was,

Rat (*in into my bedroom this minute, Toad, and look in my wardrobe. In it you'll find a choice of tweeds. When you've got into something decent lying down that dress and I will burn it.*

Toad But ...

Badger Toad.

Toad Yes, Badger.

Badger Do as you're told.

Toad starts to go

And Toad ...

Toad Yes, Badger.

Badger Have a cold bath while you're about it.

Toad (*whispering to Mole*) At least you're pleased to see me.

A disapproving look from Rat sends Toad scuttling off upstairs

Badger No improvement there. Have you told him?

Rat Not yet. Perhaps that'll make him change his tune.

Badger I doubt it.

Rat You were awfully late the pair of you. And you went out without your muffler again, Moley.

Badger Oh, Rat, don't fuss. Mole's perfectly safe with me. Pork pie, Mole?

Rat And chew it.

Toad comes down dressed in Rat's tweeds

Toad Now, Where shall I start? I imagine the first thing you will all want to know is how I escaped from the deepest dungeon of the castle, disguised as a glamorous blanchisseuse.

Mole and Badger are eating and say nothing

Rat Toad, don't you see what an awful ass you've been making of yourself?

Handcuffed, imprisoned, starved, chased, insulted, and this I find hardest to bear — ignominiously thrown off a barge — by a woman.

Toad Who told you that?

Rat Albert.

Toad She was a very strong woman. However, since none of you seems to be interested in hearing about my adventures or even particularly pleased to see me — —

Mole (*with his mouth full*) I am, Toad.

Rat Don't talk with your mouth full.

Toad — I propose to stroll gently down to Toad Hall, get rid of these terrible tweeds and resume my old life.

Rat I don't think there can be any strolling gently down to Toad Hall, old fellow.

Toad Oh and why not?

Rat Because if you do "stroll gently down" then the first thing that will happen will be that a stoat or a weasel will not so gently take a shot at you.

Toad Wild Wooders around Toad Hall?

Rat They're not just around it. They're in it and on it and all over it and have been for months.

Toad But this is outrageous! It's my property.

Mole They eat your grub and drink your drink and make bad jokes about you.

Toad What sort of jokes?

Rat About prisons and magistrates and policemen. Not funny at all.

Mole No, although there was one I heard — —

Toad I don't want to know. You should never have let them get in there in the first place.

Rat Oh, Toad, you ungrateful beast.

Toad I don't care. I come home. Nobody's pleased to see me. Nobody wants to hear about my lovely adventures — —

Mole I do ...

Toad — then to cap it all I find the Wild Wooders have taken over my beautiful riverside home. Parts of which date back to the fourteenth century. It's too much. Well I'm not scared of them even if you are. I'm going down there this minute to sort them out.

Badger (*having finished his dinner*) Toad, Sit down.

Toad No, I — —

Badger Sit down. You haven't heard the worst of it. Mole and I have come back from one of our patrols. The weasels must have got word of your return and the guards have been doubled. Toad Hall is now a fortress. It's impregnable.

Toad To ordinary folk, yes. But to someone who's stolen a railway train, mere child's play. I'm going down there now.

Mole { And I'm coming with you.

Rat { No you are not, Mole.

Toad { (together, talking over each other) He can if he wants to,

Rat { Be sensible, the pair of you.

Badger Shut up, the lot of you. There are more ways of capturing a place than by taking it by storm. Now I am going to tell you a great secret. Coming right up in the middle of Toad Hall and leading from the river bank quite near here is an underground passage.

Toad Oh nonsense, Badger. I know every inch of Toad Hall inside and out and there's no such passage. You've been listening to some of the tales they tell in public houses.

Badger I wasn't told it in a public house, Toad, for the good reason that I have never been in a public house. It was told me by someone for whom I had an immense respect, your father. He discovered the passage, repaired it and cleaned it out just in case and when he showed it to me he said "Don't let my son know about it. He's — a good boy —"

Toad begins to snuffle

"— only what he's not good at is holding his tongue. But if he's ever in a fix, Badger, you can reveal the secret."

Toad It's not my fault if I am a bit of talker.

Badger I've found out a thing or two lately. There's going to be a big meeting tonight and all the weasels will be gathered in the dining hall eating, drinking and generally carrying on and, this is the important thing, with no guns, pistols or anything.

Rat But that's no good. There'll still be the sentries.

Badger Exactly. That's where the secret passage comes in. It leads right up into the butler's pantry.

Toad Of course. That squeaky board. Now I understand.

Mole So we then creep out quietly into the butler's pantry —

Rat With our swords and sticks ...

Badger Rush in on them ...

Toad And whack 'em and whack 'em and whack 'em.

Toad rushes round and round the room, jumping over the chairs, and felling imaginary adversaries

Rat When do we move?

Badger Tonight. And it will be a hard-fought fight, so I for one am going to take a nap. I suggest you all do the same. *(He puts a handkerchief over his face and settles down)*

Rat I'm still worried about those sentries.

Which is a cue for the scene to change

Two Stoats on sentry duty outside Toad Hall

Sergeant Fred Now Gerald, what are your orders?

Stoat Gerald Nobody is to pass, Sergeant Fred, but if anybody does try to get in then I stop at anything to prevent them. Is that right?

Sergeant Fred More or less. Just keep your eyes peeled.

Stoat Gerald Yes, Sergeant Fred. Right, Sergeant Fred.

Rat's orders to burn the washerwoman's dress must have been ignored because here comes Mole wearing it

Who comes there?

Mole Forgive me for saying so but it should be "Who goes there".

Stoat Gerald Coming or going, you've no business here.

Mole Oh yes I have. I've come to see if you want any washing done today.

Stoat Gerald No we don't. We don't do any washing on duty.

Mole Or any other time, I bet.

Sergeant Fred What's the trouble, Gerald? Run away, my good woman, run away.

Mole Don't you "my good woman" me. And as for running away it won't be me that'll be running away in a very short time from now.

Stoat Gerald What's she mean, Sergeant Fred?

Sergeant Fred Take no notice, Gerald. She don't know what she's talking about.

Mole Oh don't! Well, let me tell you something. My daughter, she washes for Mr Badger, so I do know what I'm talking about, and you'll know too pretty soon. A hundred bloodthirsty badgers are going to attack Toad Hall this very night.

Sergeant Fred A hundred?

Mole Armed with rifles. That's via the paddock.

Sergeant Fred Thanks very much for telling us. If we all concentrate on the paddock, we'll easily repel 'em.

Mole Well, you might. And then you might not. Because that's not all.

Stoat Gerald Not all? Not all? Oh, Sergeant.

Mole Six boat loads of rats with pistols and cutlasses will come up the river and effect a landing in the garden.

Sergeant Fred But I can't cope with that.

Mole Not to mention the picked body of toads known as the Die Hards or the Death Or Glory Toads.

Stoat Gerald And which way are they coming?

Mole Through the orchard. I'll call again in the morning. You might have some undies to wash.

Stoat Gerald Through the orchard, via the paddock, up the river! We shan't know which way to turn. Oh, Sergeant Fred.

Sergeant Fred What?

Stoat Gerald If my mum sends a note is it all right if I don't come in tonight?

Back in Rat's house Badger is still in the armchair reading a newspaper