

Lodge

don't like moles. They belong in holes. We don't like moles. We don't like moles. We don't...

*The Wild Wooders have Mole on the floor now and are kicking and beating him and the Chief Weasel having taken off Mole's spectacles, is about to do his worst and gestures for silence to accentuate the horror when in the silence is heard a distant but familiar voice*

Rat (off, calling) Moley.  
Chief Weasel It's Rat!

*The Wild Wooders scatter, only the Chief Weasel, who is as two-faced as they come, runs back with Mole's spectacles. Rat enters*

Put your glasses on, mate. Only a bit of fun.

Rat Moley. Where are you? It's me. It's old Rat. Moley.

Mole Ratty? Ratty? Is that really you?

Rat Moley?

*The Wild Wooders have withdrawn to a respectful distance but are watching the proceedings, still wondering if they could be in there with a chance. Rat, catching sight of them, puts paid to that idea*

Don't even think about it. (To Mole) Oh, thank goodness I've found you, old chap.

Mole Oh, Rat, I've been so frightened, you can't think. Frightened to death. Oh, oh.

Rat Hold up, hold up. It's all right. Safe now. Rat's here. You shouldn't have done it, Moley. We River Bankers hardly ever come here by ourselves.

Mole But why do they do it, Rat?

Rat It's just their nature. We can't stop here. The weasels are still somewhere about and it's snowing. Trouble is, I don't quite know where we are. Up you get, Moley. We must get on.

Mole I'm tired out, Ratty.

Rat Me too, but our only hope is to find some shelter or we're done for. Come on.

*Mole trips and falls headlong*

Mole Oh, my leg, my leg.

Rat What's up.

Mole I must have tripped over a tree stump. Oh my, oh my.

Rat (getting out his handkerchief) No, you didn't.

Mole Yes, I did.

Rat You didn't, Mole. This is a very clean cut. It's not from a tree stump, it's from something sharp.

Mole Well, never mind what done it. It hurts just the same whatever done it.

Rat "Whatever did it?" Just because we've hurt our leg doesn't mean we can forget our grammar. (He starts scraping away the snow)

Mole Hey, Ratty, what about my leg?

Rat Never mind your leg. Look.

Mole So? A doorcraper. What of it?

Rat What of it? Don't you see what it means, you dull creature?

Mole Of course I see what it means. It means that some very careless person has left his doorcraper in the middle of the Wild Wood. And you seem to have forgotten I've hurt my leg.

Rat Where there's a doorcraper, what else is there?

Mole How should I know? Sometimes, Rat, I don't understand you.

Rat Yes — that's because you're a thick-headed beast. Now dig.

Mole I'm not thick-headed. I'm not thick-headed, at all. Ratty! A front door!

Rat Exactly. Now do you understand?

Mole It's Mr Badger's.

Rat Exactly. Pull the bell.

Mole You saved us! You saved us!

*Mole pulls the bell. Rat seizes it from him and yanks it even harder*

Oh, Rat, you're a wonder. You've wasted here — among us simple creatures. You should be at Oxford. Or in the Government.

Rat I'd rather be beside a warm fire. (He batters on the door) Wake up, Badger, wake up. Pull, Mole, pull. We must wake him. Badger. Badger. Wake up!

*There is a sound of many locks being unlocked and bolts drawn and of a gruff voice inside*

Badger (off) Now the very next time this happens, I shall be very cross. Very cross indeed. Disturbing someone on a night like this. Who is it? Come on, speak up.

Rat Badger, let us in, please. It's me, Rat, and my friend Mole. We're lost.

Badger (off) Lost? How can you be lost? You're outside my front door.

*He opens it. Badger is all dressing-gown. His hair, once black, now has a broad streak of grey down it and though there is a tail somewhere, since he is never out of his dressing-gown we don't see it. His bark, needless to say, is much worse than his bite and his heart melts at the sight of the two friends*

Ratty! My dear little man. And it's snowing. I'd no idea — and who's this little chap?

Rat Mr Mole.

Badger Mr Mole. But he's colder than you are, Ratty. My dear fellows. Come in. Come inside this minute.

*Badger lights the way with his lantern along the passage that goes deep below the Wild Wood into his cosy kitchen. Above ground, where it is not cosy at all, the Chief Weasel is beginning to get a little testy*

Chief Weasel That's the second time they've given us the slip. I'm beginning to get annoyed about this.

Weasel Norman You see, Chief, that's why I wanted to take them at the caravan.

Chief Weasel Norman.

Weasel Norman Yes, Chief?

Chief Weasel A word of advice. Never say "I told you so."

Weasel Norman Why, Chief?

Chief Weasel Because it gets right up my nose.

*Meanwhile, back in Badger's house, Rat and Mole are getting into dressing-gowns in front of the fire*

Badger You shouldn't be out on a night like this, little chaps like you. But I've got a grand fire going — your little friend's shivering, Ratty. Rat Well, we both are.

Badger But look at his face. I bet your little toes are like ice.

Mole Oh, thank you, Mr Badger.

Rat It was his own fault.

Badger No, Ratty. None of that. You've had a narrow escape. What's this, have you hurt yourself? Ratty, your little friend's hurt himself. Rat I know.

*It's fairly plain by now that most of Badger's attention is concentrated on Mole and this makes Rat somewhat testy*

Badger How did you come to do that?

Mole On the dooiscraper.

Badger On my dooiscraper? Oh dear. How come you let him do that, Ratty?

Rat The truth is, Badger, Mr Mole has been a bit of a scamp.

Mole I have, yes.

Badger Well he's young, you see, Rat. They get ideas into their heads. Look at that face. So cold. Here we are.

*Badger binds up Mole's leg*

Rat He would go off on his own. Wouldn't be told.

Badger Sense of adventure was it? I understand that, I'm the same. Rat's more cautious, you see. But you won't do it again, will you Master Mole?

Mole No. Never.

Badger Do you hear that, Ratty? He won't do it again. Now what's wanted is a bowl of piping hot soup. And I've got just the thing on the hob.

*Badger gets Mole a bowl*

A bowl for Mole. Poetry, eh Rat, your province.

Rat Shall I get my own?

Badger Oh yes, you help yourself. Feeling better now, are we? Warmth coming back into those little toes of yours?

Mole Yes thank you, Mr Badger.

Badger Goodness me, you mustn't call me Mr Badger. No, no. My friends call me — Badger.

Mole My friends call me Moley.

Badger Do they?

Rat Badger's too old for nicknames. He'd probably be happier calling you Mole.

Badger Rat knows best, as always. Anyway, tell me what's been happening in your part of the world. How's friend Toad getting on?

Rat Another smash up last week and this time a bad one. He will insist on driving himself and he can't do it for toffee.

Badger What he wants is a chauffeur.

Rat Exactly. I said to him "Get a steady well-trained animal — a hedgehog for instance, they're very good on the road."

Badger How many has he had?

Rat Smashes or machines? Oh well, it's the same thing with Toad. This is his seventh.

Mole He's been in hospital three times and he's paid out a fortune in fines.

Badger Has he, Moley? Dear me.

Rat And that's part of the trouble. Toad's well off, we all know, but he's not a millionaire. Bankrupt or killed, it's going to happen sooner or later, unless ...

Badger Unless you and me take him in hand.

Rat Quite.

Badger Of course, you understand that I can't do anything right now.

Rat Oh yes. Of course. (Pause) Why not?

Badger Winter. I never do anything much in the winter. But it's a different

thing once it gets to spring. One starts to get more bounce. Do you feel that in the spring, Moley?

Mole Oh yes.

Badger Well I know I do — but that's decided, as soon as it gets to spring the first item on the agenda is for you, me and Mole to take Toad seriously in hand. Now, you're going to have to snuggle down in these chairs if that's all right.

*It's all right with Mole because Badger has installed him in a big comfy armchair. Rat on the other hand has been allotted an upright dining-chair that is not comfy at all. Nor does he do any better when Badger comes to allocate the bedding*

Now, here's a blanket for Rat and a nice quilt for Mole. Just this once we'll skip brushing our teeth. That's it. Little toes warm, are they?

Mole Oh yes, thank you, Badger.

Badger Good, good. You comfortable, Rat?

Rat I'm all right.

Badger Night night.

*Pause*

Mole Night, Badger.

*Badger retires*

Rat Do you like old Badger?

Mole Oh yes.

Rat Not too fierce for you?

Mole Fierce? I thought he was very kind.

Rat He is kind.

Mole And understanding.

Rat Of course that comes with age, you see he's much older than you or me.

Mole He didn't seem old to me. *(He falls asleep with the quilt over his head)*

Rat Oh he is — how old exactly would you say Badger was, Moley?

*There is no answer from Mole*

Moley? Oh. Little fellow's asleep. Seems old to me, Badger.

*Outside in the Wild Wood Weasel Norman is still managing to strike the wrong note*

Weasel Norman Of course, Chief, if I'd bitten their heads off when I wanted to we should have been fast asleep by now.

Chief Weasel Norman.

Weasel Norman Yes, Chief?

Chief Weasel Are you a happy weasel?

Weasel Norman Yes, Chief, by and large.

Chief Weasel Are you desirous of continuing in that state?

Weasel Norman Yes, Chief.

Chief Weasel Then shut your gob.

*Next morning finds Badger serving some very adhesive porridge to two small hedgehogs, Tommy and Billy*

Badger One spoonful for Tommy.

Hedgehog Tommy Oh thank you, sir.

Badger And another spoonful for Billy.

Hedgehog Tommy Say "Thank you".

Hedgehog Billy Thank you, sir.

Badger I'm just going into my study to — to catch up on my correspondence.

*We see Badger go into his study, settle down in his chair with a handkerchief over his face*

Hedgehog Billy *(pulling a face)* It's not like Mumi's porridge.

Hedgehog Tommy I know, but we mustn't leave any.

*Rat, who has plainly had a less than comfortable night, edges painfully off his dining-chair. Mole has slept much better of course, and not only because he has been in the comfortable chair but because being underground suits him. Tommy stands up and pulls Billy to his feet*

Good-morning, sir.

Rat As you were, as you were. Where's Mr Badger?

Hedgehog Tommy The master's gone into his study, sir, to catch up on his correspondence.

Rat And what brings you here?

Hedgehog Tommy We were trying to find our way to school — and we lost ourselves in the snow, sir.

Mole Hello, Tommy. Hello, Billy.

Hedgehogs Hello, Mr Mole.

*Badger enters*