

followed by his friends, whereupon the Wild Wooders run cackling across the stage bearing bits of the looted caravan

Summer has gone and autumn. So now it is winter and Rat and Mole are taking a brisk walk along the deserted River Bank

Mole Nobody on the river.

Rat No. Too cold.

Mole Nobody at all.

Rat There's a duck.

Mole Yes.

Rat Well, that's interesting. I like ducks.

Mole gives Rat a pitying look

Mole We should go see Toad.

Rat Won't be home. He'll be perambulating the countryside in his latest motor car. That is if he's not smashed it up already.

Mole I wouldn't mind going out in a motor car.

Rat What did you say?

Mole Nothing. We could go and see Badger.

Rat Out of the question. Hates callers. Besides, he lives in the middle of the Wild Wood.

Mole You said the Wild Wood was all right.

Rat So it is. But it's not somewhere we want to go on a cold winter's afternoon.

Mole I've never met Badger.

Rat Once the warmer weather comes I'll introduce you. Though you'll probably find him as dull as you're finding me. I'm off back. Coming?

Mole I'll catch you up.

Rat goes

Whereupon an elegant Fox waylays the unsuspecting Mole. The Fox, possibly on the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em principle, is dressed in hunting pink

Fox I say, did I hear you mention the Wild Wood?

Mole Yes, do you know it?

Fox One has various elderly female relatives there, largely bedridden, alas.

Mole I'm sorry.

Fox They would welcome a visit, a little ray of sunshine like you. That way. Give them my love.

The weasels, the ferrets and the stoats are busy lording it over their territory. This happens to be the Wild Wood but it could be any provincial bus station on a Saturday night. But they are not alone

Chief Weasel Mole!

The place is suddenly deserted as Mole comes wandering along

Mole Well, I don't see what all the fuss is about. It's a bit dark, I admit. But it's only a wood. Somebody might think those trees had faces but I don't. I mean, what is there to be frightened of?

But if Mole is as bold as he is pretending to be, why is he saying this out loud? Meanwhile the Wild Wooders flit between the trees and it grows darker

Still, I wish I was back with Raty round his cosy fireside.

Then the whistling begins, and the panting and all sorts of other frightful noises, and Mole begins to panic. He runs this way and that but whichever way he runs he finds his path blocked by one of the Wild Wooders

Chief Weasel Well, well, well.

Ferret Fred Hello, Mole.

Ferret Gerald How's it going?

Weasel Norman Hello, Mole.

Stoat Ian Lovely weather.

Weasel Norman All right, Mole?

Stoat Stuart Where's friend Rat?

Weasel Norman Where's friend Toad?

Weasel Wilfred All right then?

The Wild Wooders close in on Mole

Chief Weasel A hole is where you belong.

Stoat Stuart Go back to where you belong.

Ferret Fred We don't like moles.

Weasel Norman We don't like little black animals.

Stoat Ian We don't like moles who are friends with Toad.

Weasel Wilfred Moles are dirty.

Weasel Norman Moles smell.

Ferret Fred Who's a smelly little mole then?

Wild Wooders (*chanting*) We don't like moles. They belong in holes. We

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 doortrapper.

Badger On my doortrapper? 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 Munn's porridge.

Hedgehog Tommy I know, but we musn'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