



The River Bank



THE Mole¹ had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him.

Then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said, “Bother!” and “O blow!” and also “Hang spring-cleaning!” and bolted² out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat.

He scraped³ and scratched⁴ and scabbled⁵ and scrooged⁶, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, “Up we go! Up we go!” till at last, pop! his snout⁷ came out into the sunlight and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

“This is fine!” he said to himself. “This is better than whitewashing⁸!”

Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily. He thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered⁹ aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before.

As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, he saw a dark hole in the bank opposite.

- 1 mole [məʊl] (n.) a small mammal which is nearly blind, has dark fur and lives in passages that it digs under the ground
- 2 bolt [bɒlt] (v.) to suddenly run somewhere very quickly, especially in order to escape or because you are frightened
- 3 scrape [skreɪp] (v.) to move something hard, sharp, or rough across a surface, especially in order to clean it
- 4 scratch [skrætʃ] (v.) to rub or scrape a surface, e.g. with claws or a scraping instrument
- 5 scabble ['skræbəl] (v.) to scrape or scratch at something with small, hurried movements of the fingers, toes, or claws
- 6 scrooge [skruːdʒ] (v.) to push forward
- 7 snout [snaʊt] (n.) the long nose of some kinds of animals, such as pigs
- 8 whitewash ['waɪtwɑːʃ] (v.) to paint something, usually a wall, with whitewash
- 9 meander [mi'ændəɪ] (v.) to walk somewhere in a slow relaxed way rather than take the most direct way possible



As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it.

A brown little face, with whiskers.

It was the Water Rat!

Then the two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

“Hullo, Mole!” said the Water Rat.

“Hullo, Rat!” said the Mole.

“Would you like to come over?” enquired the Rat.

Then the Rat sculled¹⁰ smartly across and made fast. He held up his fore-paw as the Mole stepped gingerly¹¹ down. “Lean on that!” he said. “Now then, step lively!”



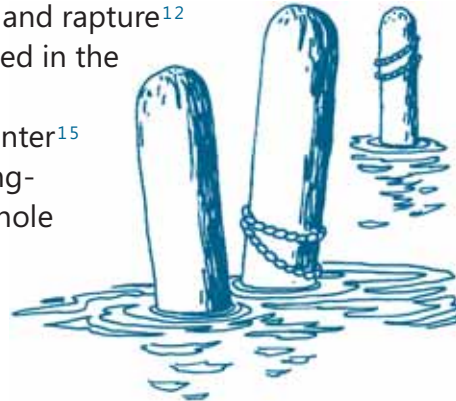
¹⁰ scull [skʌl] (v.) to make a small boat move along using a pair of oars

¹¹ gingerly [ˈgɪŋdʒərlɪ] (adv.) in a very cautious, wary, or tentative way



The Mole to his surprise and rapture¹² found himself actually seated in the stern¹³ of a real boat.

The Rat looped¹⁴ the painter¹⁵ through a ring in his landing-stage, climbed up into his hole above, and after a short interval reappeared staggering¹⁶ under a fat wicker¹⁷ luncheon-basket.



“Shove¹⁸ that under your feet,” he observed to the Mole, as he passed it down into the boat. Then he untied the painter and took the sculls again.

“By it and with it and on it and in it,” said the Rat. “It’s brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It’s my world, and I don’t want any other.”

12 rapture [ˈræptʃər] (n.) extreme pleasure and happiness or excitement

13 stern [stɜːrn] (n.) the back of a ship

14 loop [luːp] (v.) to form the shape of a loop, or make something form the shape of a loop

15 painter [ˈpeɪntər] (n.) a line that is attached to the bow of a boat and used for tying up

16 stagger [ˈstæɡər] (v.) to move or walk unsteadily, almost but not quite falling over

17 wicker [ˈwɪkər] (a.) made of very thin pieces of wood twisted together

18 shove [ʃʌv] (v.) to push someone or something in a rough or careless way, using your hands or shoulders





“What lies over *there*?” asked the Mole, waving a paw towards a background of woodland that darkly framed the water-meadows on one side of the river.

“That? O, that’s just the Wild Wood,” said the Rat shortly. “We don’t go there very much, we river-bankers.”

“Aren’t they—aren’t they very *nice* people in there?” said the Mole a trifle¹⁹ nervously.

“W-e-ll,” replied the Rat, “let me see. The squirrels are all right. *And* the rabbits—some of ’em, but rabbits are a mixed lot. And then there’s Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it; wouldn’t live anywhere else, either, if you paid him to do it. Dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with *him*. They’d better not,” he added significantly.



¹⁹ a trifle: slightly