



Hedgehog Herbert Somebody to rabbit on to.

Rabbit Ronald Do you mind. I find that remark rather offensive.

*Mole is still fascinated with the distant wood.*

Rat What is it, old chap?

Mole Nothing.

Rat All right. I'll tell you what it is. It's called the Wild Wood . . . and it's just that we River Bankers don't go there very much.

Mole Why? Aren't they nice people?

Rat We-ell, let's see. The squirrels are all right. And the rabbits I suppose. Then there's Badger, of course. He's all right. He lives bang in the middle of it, and wouldn't live anywhere else. Dear old Badger. Nobody takes any liberties with him.

Mole Why? Who would . . .

Rat It's the others you see . . . the ferrets, the stoats and worst of all, the weasels. And yet they're all right most of the time. One passes the time of day, 'Morning, Rat' 'Morning Weasel' . . . but just occasionally they . . . break out.

*Hearing themselves talked about the weasels put in a brief appearance. They too have tails and whiskers but in every other respect, camel-hair coats, Homburg hats and co-respondent shoes, they are gangsters.*

Another sausage roll?

Mole When? When do they . . . break out?

Rat Mole. Can I say something? One of the ways we animals have the edge on our human friends and why we're happier than they are is that we don't dwell on

possible trouble ahead. Sometimes we need reminding about that, don't we?

Mole Sorry, Rat.

Rat It's a question of manners, really. I find most things are. Apple pie?

Mole But, Rat . . .

Rat Mole, please.

Mole . . . But what's beyond the Wild Wood?

Rat Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World. And that's another topic we avoid. Point taken, Mole?

Mole Sorry . . . (*Pause.*) Rat.

Rat What is it now?

Mole I'm not sure this isn't something else I ought not to mention but there are some bubbles in the water.

Rat Bubbles? Oh Lord! Clear the food! Quick!

Mole Why? What's the matter?

Rat Too late.

*Otter, wearing a striped Victorian bathing suit, has catapulted out of the water and stands in the middle of the picnic, shaking water over everything.*

Otter Hello . . . what's all this? It's a picnic? Rat, you sly beggar. I don't recall receiving an invitation.

Rat Because I knew you'd turn up. You never stand on ceremony, though you have stood on Mr Mole's sausage roll.

Otter Oh gosh, have I? And we haven't even been introduced.