

TOAD'S STORY

all around leave their land homes and make for their birthplace. and acquaintances. And every spring we have a reunion. Toads born there. My parents were born there . . . and all my relatives, Toad looked at Fox with an expression of disbelieving deny this awful piece of information; but he received no answer. from one sad face to another, almost compelling someone to They couldn't take that away from us!' He looked pathetically horror. 'But . . . but . . . they couldn't!' he whispered. 'I was

all dried up anyway.' He knew his words were of no comfort. very little left of it really. With this drought the water had nearly 'Filled all of it in? Is it . . . quite gone?' Toad's voice shook. 'I'm afraid so,' Badger mumbled. 'But, you know, there was

'What about the other toads?' Toad asked hoarsely.



TOAD'S STORY

happened,' Fox said encouragingly. 'After all, it is May now . . 'I think they had probably left the pond before this

any more, really. Not what we toads call spring.' 'Yes, yes,' Toad agreed morosely. 'I'm late. It's not spring

None anywhere in Farthing Wood. We just don't know what That's why I called this Assembly. There's no water left, Toad. 'This drought,' Badger rejoined, 'is a danger for all of us

can all of you!' expression. He looked considerably more hopeful. 'I've got it!' he exclaimed excitedly. 'We'll leave! All of us! If I could do it, so Toad did not reply. His downcast face took on a new

'How could we? What do you mean?' 'Leave Farthing Wood?' Badger queried with some alarm.

But I'm sure we could manage it, together!' I know the very place to go to. Oh, it's miles away, of course. 'Yes, yes! Let me explain.' Toad stood up in his excitement.

completely failed to quieten them. The other animals began to chatter all at once, and Badger

a jolt. Farthing Wood is finished; in another couple of years it won't even exist. We must all find a new home. Now - before it's me about the pond has brought our danger home to me with 'We must face the facts!' Toad cried. 'What you've just told

whisper. 'The Nature Reserve,' he announced dramatically. The other voices broke off. Toad's voice dropped to a



in peace again. And I shall be your guide.' He looked round triumphantly. We shall all go to the Nature Reserve, where we can live

'You'd better tell us all about it, Toad. I don't know if it's a good idea. If it's so far . . .' 'Dear, dear! I don't know.' Badger shook his striped head.

right from the beginning. 'Go on, Toad,' Fox broke in. 'Tell us about your adventure,

and cleared his throat. Toad sank back into his accustomed comfortable squat,

jar and carried away.' But it was no use. They found me; and I was prodded into a jameagerness to capture us. I remember I dived underwater and were even wading out nearly to the middle of the pond in their there seemed to be no escape anywhere. The young humans tremendous number of humans at the pond; young ones with tried to hide in the mud on the bottom. So did a lot of others. their parents along. Everything in the pond was in a panic; their horrible nets and glass jars – and a lot of them had brought particularly,' he began. 'Well, one weekend there were a 'You'll recall how last spring was very warm – in March

made specially slippery, so that you can hardly grip the bottom. 'They come after us, too, with those stifling glass jars that are 'How awful for you,' one of the lizards commiserated.

in it for three or four hours, I should think. I was submitted to 'Ghastly things,' muttered Toad. 'I must have been kept



TOAD'S STORY

dried up.' me. If the weather had been any hotter, I'm sure I would have to scale the sides of the jar, without so much as a leaf to protect of my pond, while I was left out in the sun, trying frustratedly the indignity of watching my captors eat their food by the side

you amphibians have never really learnt to live comfortably on 'I like to sunbathe, myself,' said Adder. 'But, of course,

diving!' retorted Toad Just the same as you reptiles can't adapt to swimming and

'I can swim when I have to,' Adder returned

far, because I took the opportunity of having a nap during the I knew I was being tipped into a glass box in their garden.' journey. They put me in the back of their car, and the next thing 'Well, well,' nodded Badger. 'What happened next, Toad?' 'They took me away,' he said. 'I don't know for sure how

the box and hide behind a shed. That very night I started my off. So I leapt as high as I could, and I managed to jump out of was always prowling around trying to get at me, knocked it netting on the top as a lid, and one day their wretched cat, who 'I suppose about four weeks,' replied Toad. 'They put some 'How long did they keep you in this glass box?' asked Fox.

myself with a good meal. All the humans had ever given me was mealworms; tasty enough, but so boring without some 'I hadn't got very far before I decided I ought to strengthen



change to relieve the diet. I still think you can't beat a juicy earthworm, fresh and moist from its burrow.'

'Hear, hear!' cried Mole feelingly. 'Nothing like them! I could eat them till I burst. Never tire of 'em.'

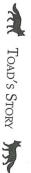
'It's a wonder there are any left at all, with your appetite,' remarked Tawny Owl.

'Oh, nonsense, there are plenty for everyone,' Mole justified himself a little shamefacedly. 'Though during this dry weather I have my work cut out finding them. They do go down so deep, you know.'

'Yes, of course,' said Toad. 'Anyway, when I had eaten my fill, my first problem was to get out of that garden. The great difficulty lay in getting round the wall. There was no wooden fence with convenient gaps in it – just a stone wall all round the garden. However, I was determined not to be disheartened, and there was one thing in my favour. The wall had bits of pebble and flint stuck into it – for decoration perhaps, I don't know – and I knew I could use these projecting pieces to climb up.

'It took so long, however, that I was sure daylight would break before I had reached the top, particularly as I fell off about four times, and had to start again. But I knew I had to get up that wall, even to have a chance of setting out for Farthing Wood.

'Well, I got to the top eventually, and walked along to the end of the wall. By that time it was just starting to get light, and I knew I would have to jump for it. I looked all round for a plant or something to break my fall, but there was nothing; only



concrete all around. Of course, I couldn't possibly risk jumping on to that, so I had to lower my legs over the edge, and climb down the pebbles again. Fortunately, it didn't take as long as going up, and I was just thinking I could probably jump the last few inches when that horrible cat came out of the house. I pressed myself close to the wall and froze.'

Toad broke off, and contemplated his enthralled audience. The room was completely, utterly silent, so that you could have heard a pine needle drop. The young squirrels had wrapped themselves cosily in their mothers' thick tails, and the fieldmice and voles were now all bunched together in a large, furry mass, which was animated only by a score or so of quivering pink noses. Every animal gave Toad his rapt attention. Only Adder appeared to be taking no further interest in the proceedings. He had allowed his head to drop forward, but whether he was asleep or not would have been difficult to say.

Would you believe me,' Toad went on quietly, 'if I told you I stayed in that spot all day, trying to look like another pebble? I couldn't risk climbing down any further because there was nowhere to hide, and if the cat had seen me it would have been the end of me.

'Fortunately, the day was reasonably cool, and as soon as it was safely dark, I let myself drop the rest of the way to the ground, and then crawled and hopped as far as I could away from the house. There were only one or two other houses nearby, and once I'd got past them I began to feel much freer. My sense



two things didn't present much of a barrier to me. I hadn't gone of direction told me what course to take, and I kept on down to both directions. private park, because the fence stretched as far as I could see in far on the other side when I realized I must be in some sort of behind that a fence. I knew I was on the right route, and those the end of the road. This was sealed off by a sort of ditch, and

at that fence, the safer I felt. I suppose it was because I knew I was on the right side of it. 'Now I don't know exactly why it was, but the more I looked

so I scooped out a little hole in the earth, and pulled some dry moon was shining as I made my way along, flicking up a few from the birds, no one seemed to be about. leaves round me. I slept quite well during the day because, apart insects on the way. I decided to make my bed under some trees, 'It was very quiet and peaceful in there, and a lovely bright

forward. After a while, the trees gave way to some open land, excited I became at that, after all those weeks without a dip. and ahead of me I could sense water. You can't imagine how making a tremendous racket. It was a call I couldn't place, whole party of the pool's inhabitants started croaking in unison, from the water. I realized I had not been mistaken, when the I approached I thought I could hear one or two croaks coming see a pool ahead, where the moon was reflected perfectly. As It was another bright, moonlit night, and eventually I could When it was dusk I emerged again, and continued



but what sort of frogs? unlike any I had heard before. They were obviously frogs -

bubbles in their efforts to croak the loudest making the noise. They were blowing out their cheeks like two splashing about in the centre of the pool, and some were just floating, with their heads out of the water. These were the ones approached the water's edge cautiously, and just watched them for a while. There seemed to be quite a number of them 'As I didn't know if they were likely to be friendly, I

clambered out, one of them called, "We've got a visitor. A toad." some swimming in my direction. I stood my ground. As they was time to leave the water. They began to make for the shore, croaking, and seemed to decide amongst themselves that it 'After I had been there for a little while, they stopped

pond to feed, and invited me to join them. them my story. They explained to me that they had just left the pond in the spring had all been gone a week or more to make hadn't seen me before, and that the toads who shared their their homes on land. They made quite a fuss of me when I told They all came up to have a look, remarking that they

swim, and I was glad to accept. When we had finished eating, they asked me to join them in a spots, and a stripe of a paler colour down the centre of the back. these unusual frogs were a definite shade of green, with darker our fill. Although it was night-time, I was able to discover that There was no shortage of food, and we were all able to eat



park. Their spokesman was an old, fat male who seemed to be a White Deer Park, and it was a Nature Reserve. sort of patriarch of their society. He told me the park was called weed, and I took the opportunity of asking them about the 'We swam out to the centre, and rested amongst the water-

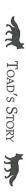
of, 'Ah' and 'Of course - the Nature Reserve.' Toad paused for effect, and there were obliging murmurs

they, in fact, reserve nature?' 'We have heard of these Nature Reserves,' said Badger. 'Do

a piece of land - or water - of exceptional value and interest a certain breed of human called a Naturalist, who, unlike most because of the rare animals or plants – or both – in it. There is 'My friends the frogs told me all about it. A Nature Reserve is that their homeland, White Deer Park, was too valuable to be work in groups, and it was one of these groups that decided being and safety. The frogs told me these Naturalists usually for, animals and plants. Their prime consideration is our wellordinary humans, spends his time learning about, and caring to it without a special pass. Even then, they may not remove any designated a Reserve, and now no humans are permitted entry left unprotected. So, about three years ago, it was sealed off, animal or plant from the Reserve whatsoever.' 'Exactly as the name implies,' Toad answered emphatically.

all the time. No hiding. No running away. No guns!' 'It sounds wonderful,' said Hare's mate. 'Peace and security

'And that's not all,' Toad went on. 'The Reserve is under



he patrols the Reserve to ensure their protection. Warden. The animals' health and safety is in his keeping, and the permanent care of one of the Naturalists, who is called a

live there and benefit from the protection. representation of the commoner animals, like ourselves, who feed in the Park. But they assured me that there is also a good which is unique. They themselves are a colony of rare frogs, plant in their pond, and they believe one or two rare butterflies allowed to eat them. There is also an unusual type of watercalled Edible Frogs by the humans, although luckily nobody is 'Apparently, in the frogs' park there is a herd of albino deer

understand why you did. But . . . but . . . tell me, Toad, how far meaningfully, and Badger went on quickly, 'That is, of course, I can't think why you wanted to leave it.' Fox looked at him is it? It's taken you months to get here.' 'Why, it sounds like Paradise,' breathed Badger. 'I

I spent a week with the frogs, and then explained to them that I had to go on. Of course, they understood perfectly.' 'It's certainly a long way,' agreed Toad. 'I wouldn't deny it.

'Is it a large park?' asked Fox.

hold all of Farthing Wood! And I mean the old wood - as it hundred acres, which, as you can imagine, would more than 'One of the frogs told me that he'd heard it was about five

completely. Then, every day after that, I pressed on, never 'Anyway, it took about another week to cross the park

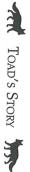
staying in one place more than a day. I travelled mostly in the dark hours, finding a convenient hiding-place during the day-time. I ate what I could on the move . . . and so the weeks went on. I must tell you that I was constantly buoyed up by the thought that every day, every step or hop, brought me nearer

'Good old Toad,' said Badger under his breath.

'When I noticed the weather was beginning to get colder I tried to hurry. I could sense there wasn't a tremendous distance left, and I wanted to get home before the winter really arrived. But I knew if I didn't eat properly, and the winter overtook me, I would die. So I compromised, I kept on going, but at a more leisurely pace, eating as much as I could find every night. Finally, I knew it was time to hibernate. The other frogs and toads, and lizards too, that I had encountered during the previous week or so, had been looking for a comfortable roost, and I found one on some farm land.

'I chose a grassy bank, by a ditch where there was plenty of cover. Food was becoming scarce by now, and I spent all day picking up what I could. Then, as night was approaching, I dug myself a nice hole under a large stone, and settled into that. It was really quite cold by then, and I felt so sleepy that I went out like a light as soon as I closed my eyes.

'Well, there I stayed until the warm spell at the beginning of March woke me up, and then I had a good meal at an ants' nest, and set off again. And . . . the rest you know, really.'



'A brave fellow indeed,' remarked Badger warmly.

Very courageous,' agreed Weasel.

'What tremendous perseverance!' commented Fox. 'I have always admired you toads for that. Once started on something, you just won't be diverted!'

'I'd do it again, gladly, if you'd all come with me,' said Toad stoutly.

'That's fighting talk!' cried Badger. 'How about it, everyone? Shall Toad be our guide to a new home?'

'And a fresh start for everybody,' Toad added, 'away from the threat we've been living under here for so long?'

There was a deafening chorus of agreement.

'Then it's farewell to Farthing Wood?'

There were more shouts of approval. The animals were xcited now.

'Better to say, "Welcome to White Deer Park",' said Mole.
'Now Mole, don't get carried away,' said Badger kindly.
'We haven't even taken our first step yet, you know.'

Mole grinned contritely. Badger looked around the chamber.

'Are there any dissenters?' he asked formally, and studied every individual face. There was no reply.

Then I take it as unanimous. We go to White Deer Park!