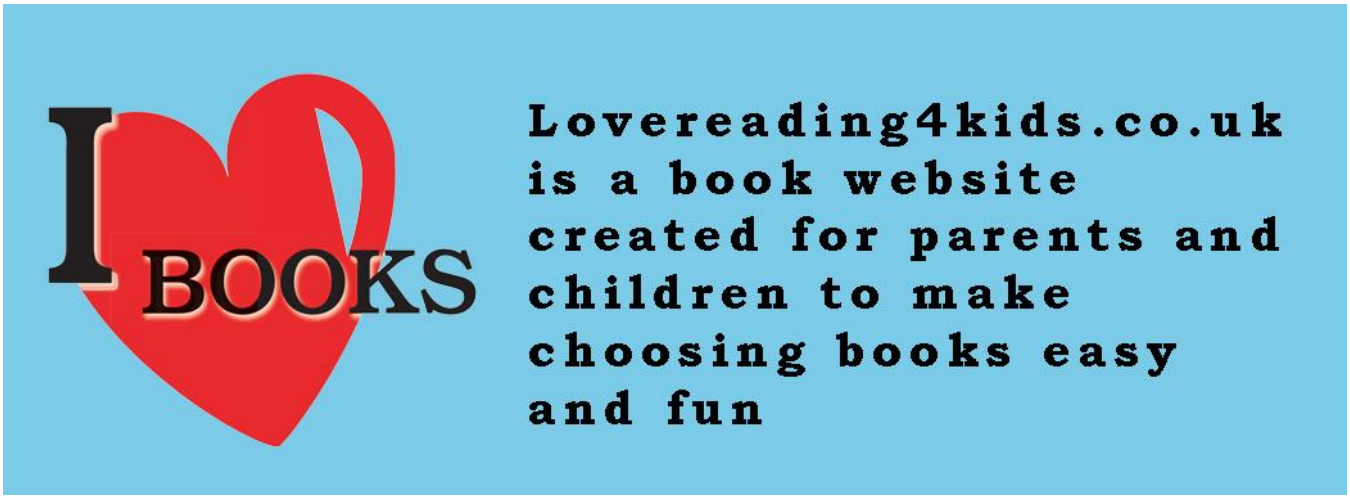


Opening extract from

Toad and the Miracle at Croco Lake

Written by

Ken Metcalfe

Illustrated by

Neil Chapman

Published by

Mereo an imprint of Memoirs Publishing

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Ken Metcalfe was born in Lancashire and worked in the Engineering Industry until he retired in 2001. He now lives in North Cornwall with his wife, Val. He has four children and twelve grandchildren. When he's not writing stories about Toad, he likes gardening, walking and an occasional game of golf.

Copyright © 2017 Ken Metcalfe

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

First published 2017 by Mereo Books

ISBN: 978-1-86151-502-5

This is Toad. His real name is Syd Toad,
but he *hates* his first name and never, ever
uses it. So everyone in the part of Africa where
he lives just calls him Toad.



Chapter One

Plans and Surprises

Toad was bored. Although happily married, he had been on his own for the past week. He and his wife he had been invited to a birthday celebration for his wife's mother, but Toad had refused to go. He knew his mother-in-law only too well and considered her to be extremely bossy and rude. It was also several weeks since he had seen Old Camel and he was really beginning to miss his friend, so on impulse he decided to go and look for him.

As Toad made his way to the rocks near the water's edge he began to worry. *What if Old Camel has gone back to work for Mr. Johnson?* he wondered. Toad burst out of the water onto the smallest of the three rocks that jutted out above the surface near the edge of Wellybelly Lake. He looked around him but there was no sign of Old Camel. Whilst waiting, he continued looking around continuously and noticed some movement in the distance coming from the direction of Churchtown. As they came closer he identified the movement as three young children. *I wonder if they are the same children who live on the nearby farm*, thought Toad. Out of sight of the children he watched and listened. As they were passing, a girl with fair hair whose name was Alicia shouted to the others, "Race you to Old Camel!" And then they were off, scampering along the dusty path that ran by the side of the lake. *How wonderful!* thought Toad. *Old Camel's still here!*

He swam to the larger of the three rocks and laboriously climbed up the steep side until he reached the top. From this higher vantage point he looked to where the children had run. As the dust settled, he watched as they made a fuss of Old Camel. They stroked him and the other girl called Rosie, who was Alicia's twin sister but did not look very much like her, appeared to give him something to eat. Then they were off again taking the path that led to their farm. Toad realised he would have to wait for Old Camel to come and have a drink.

Toad was not a patient person, but patient he was going to have to be if he wanted to see Old Camel again.

Toad waited by the rock for two days until Old Camel came to drink! As the camel waded through the water by the rocks, it was a quite deep part of the lake and the water came up so his legs were almost fully covered. As the camel waded by, Toad shouted cheekily, "Hey, Old Camel! Where have you been? I've been waiting here for you for days."

Old Camel was startled and jumped involuntarily. He looked slightly bewildered when he saw his best friend, Toad. Finally, after a few deep breaths, he spoke, "Oh Toad, I have missed you! Apart from the children who come to see me I have been on my own and I've been very lonely."

"Me too, Old Camel, but I'm back for good now." Toad looked at his friend and, noticing the pouch was still attached said, "If you come nearer I'll climb on and get in the pouch." Jeri's mother had made the pouch for Toad out of material that the sacks were made of and this was attached to Old Camel by tree rope. The Kendani made the tree rope from plant material twisted together in long strands.

Old Camel took his usual time to speak and replied, "Right away," as he slowly but steadily made his way over to Toad. Toad sighed involuntarily. He knew Old Camel took his time in deciding what to say and sometimes he got things wrong, but Toad also knew that he had really missed their friendship. Old Camel had taught Toad the true meaning of friendship by enduring real hardship as he had struggled to get Toad back to Wellybelly for his wedding. On that journey Toad had learnt that sometimes you have to make allowances if you want your friendship to last.

* * *

During the next few days Toad and Old Camel spent every day together renewing their friendship and reliving their first adventure. The children from the farm were pleased to see that Toad had returned and spent even more time with the two creatures. Although Toad had missed his friend, he also missed all the travelling. At the time it had been dangerous, but at the same time it had also been exciting and Toad wanted to feel the exhilaration of an adventure again.

"Let's go to Churchtown and see if we can find Jeri," suggested Toad.

As usual, Old Camel took a while to answer. "Who is going to take us?" said Old Camel at last. "We can't go on our own."

"That's true," agreed Toad, "but I would still love to travel a bit farther and see other places, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Toad, I would," said Old Camel, "particularly as I'm feeling stronger and fitter."

Toad thought again. "Oh, well, he said, resignedly. "If we haven't got anyone to take us, we'll just have to stay here. At least we've got the children. It would be a shame to miss them. I really look forward to their visits."

Whilst Old Camel had been resident at the side of Wellybelly Lake, Alicia, Rosie and their younger brother Paul had come every day from their farm and brought him carrots and other things to eat. But whilst the two sisters chatted on, their brother never spoke.

"It's a shame about the little boy, he doesn't say anything at all," commented Toad.

Old Camel knew the story of the people who ran the farm and waited a while before he began to tell Toad all about the Rogers family.

"Old Mr and Mrs Rogers own the farm and their son's wife, Mary, helps with the running of it," he said at last. "The little boy Paul hasn't spoken because his father, Fred Rogers, hasn't returned from the war."

Toad didn't understand what *war* meant, so Old Camel gave him an explanation. Old Camel's interpretation of war was a mixture of what he knew and what he had heard and maybe what he thought. "When there's a war, Toad, men go to fight people they don't know. They kill people they don't know or they get killed by people they don't know."

Toad was flabbergasted and puffed out his cheeks before letting out a spluttering sound. "PHYEEW! Old Camel, that's about the most *STUPID* thing I've ever heard," he said, emphasizing the word *STUPID*. Then he added, "But then I always said humans were stupid, didn't I?"

"Yes," sighed Old Camel, yawning wearily. He didn't want to hear Toad's prejudices again. He had heard them many times before.

* * *

Jeri, the kind human who had also helped Toad get to his wedding, had been spending some time helping Mr Johnson with his camel deliveries but these had now been reduced as Mr Johnson had bought a new van for his son, Billy. Billy seemed very happy to be working for his father again, driving the van and making deliveries up and down the black road. Jeri was pleased that Billy had recovered from the injury he had sustained and was doing something that made him happy. Mr Johnson told Jeri he could have some time off work as the next big delivery with the camels was a few weeks away.

Following Billy Johnson's operation, Dr Williams had asked Jeri to call in when he had some time and this was the first opportunity the young man had had. The doctor was very pleased when Jeri came to see him. After they had talked for a while, Dr Williams said, "Jeri, how would you like to be a proper doctor, like me?"

Jeri was taken aback and speechless. He just stared at the doctor with his mouth slightly open. The doctor continued, "I know some of the things that may concern you about this, so I'll give you some information and then you can let me know if there's anything else preventing you from learning to become a doctor. I know you can read and write and have empathy for those who are sick because you treated Billy, even though you knew he had done something bad. I have written to one of my doctor friends at the learning college in Jacobsville and he has agreed to accept you on trial. It does cost money to go and stay there. However, I have spoken to Mr Johnson and he is prepared to sponsor you. On one condition…"

Jeri was still trying to take in what the doctor had said and just stammered, "P-P- Please, Dr Williams, what is the condition?"

"When you have completed your studies and have passed your exams, you are to return to Churchtown and take over from me here when I retire," the doctor replied. "I am getting older and someday soon I will have to finish. What this area needs is a doctor who knows the local people and, in you Jeri, I think we may have found one"

Jeri thought for a while and then said to the older man, "I feel very honoured that you have asked me and would be very pleased to go the learning college. But I am concerned about what my family will think. I would like to speak to my grandfather and ask for his permission."

Dr. Williams said the he would travel with Jeri to see his grandfather and take Mr Johnson with him. Jeri's grandfather was the head of the village of Kenda and known to everyone as Jumbe.

* * *

That afternoon, when Paul came home from school, he wanted to go to see Old Camel and Toad by Wellybelly Lake. His two sisters usually had to accompany him, but today they were busy helping their grandparents and mother on the farm, so Paul just set off by himself. He knew he shouldn't go alone but he also knew the way and didn't think anyone would miss him.

The walk to the lake was along a dusty little path by the side of the farm and it took him ten minutes to reach Wellybelly. Old Camel and Toad were pleased to see him but surprised he was on his own. He came very close to Old Camel and began to gently stroke the knee that had been injured. He seemed to know that the old animal was recovering from his injuries.

"I wish you could talk to us," said Toad. "I wouldn't even mind if you just said *croak croak*."

And then Paul actually spoke!

"Why would I say that?" said Paul, sounding surprised.

Old Camel and Toad were amazed. They couldn't believe Paul was speaking to them and it was a while before Toad was able to reply.

"I…er…um," hesitated Toad, "I thought you couldn't talk. "You've never spoken before."

"That's because I am alone with you. I have always spoken to animals," explained Paul with a big beam on his face. "I just don't speak to my family or other people anymore."

Old Camel could see where this conversation was going. Toad would need to find everything out, including what had happened to Paul's father. He coughed indicating his wish to speak, but he wasn't quick enough.

