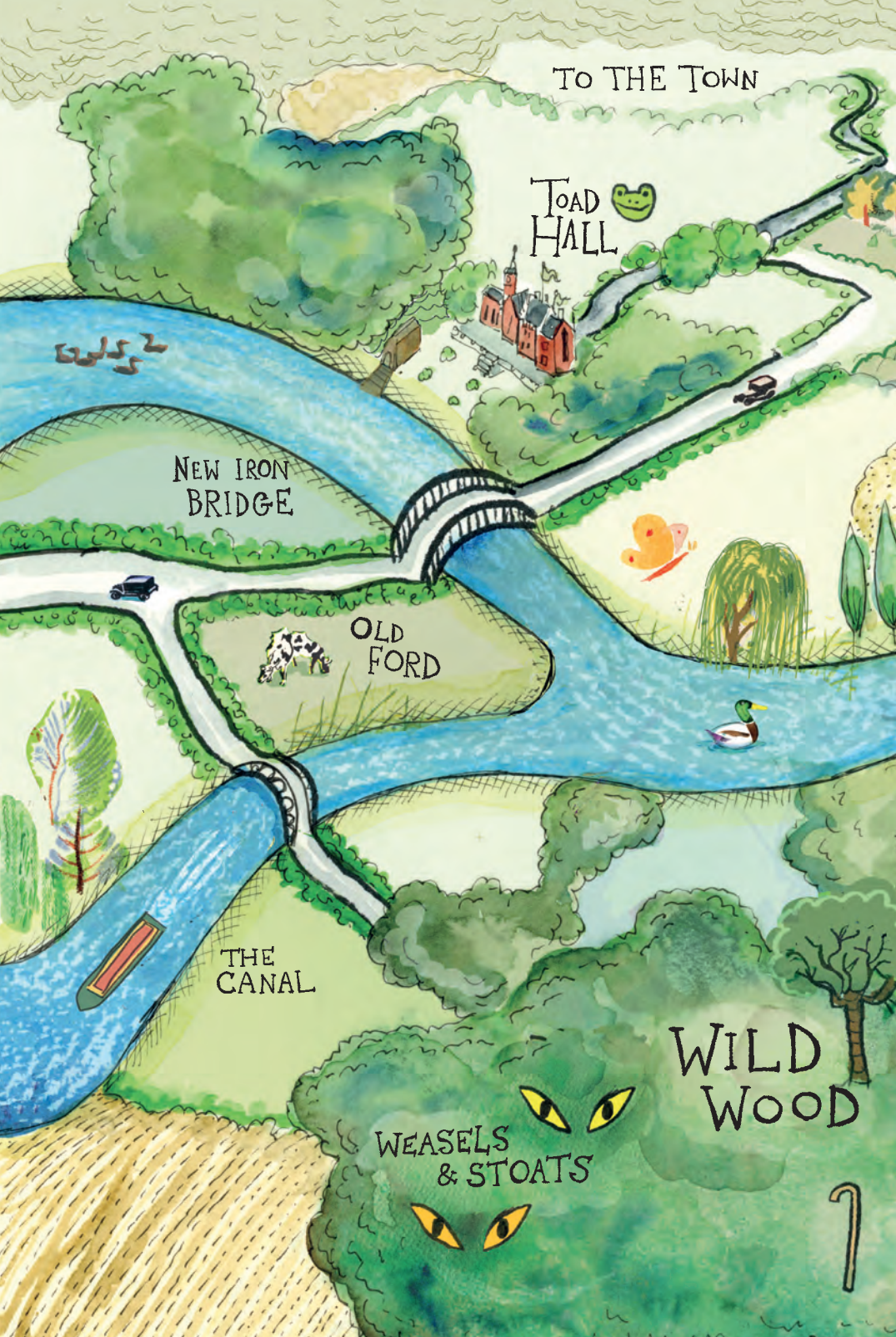



TO THE TOWN
TOAD HALL
NEW IRON BRIDGE
OLD FORD
THE CANAL
WILD WOOD
WEASELS & STOATS


CANARY COTTAGE
SHEEP PEN
N
W
E
S
MOLE'S HOUSE
OSIER BED
RAT'S HOUSE
OTTER HOME HOLT
PAN ISLAND
BADGER'S HOUSE
THE WEIR

For Maya, aged eight — M.G.L.
For Madeline, aged seven — P.D.



THE ADVENTURES OF

Portly the Otter

UNTOLD TALES FROM
THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS



BY

M.G. LEONARD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

POLLY DUNBAR

Farshore



CONTENTS

Chapter 1: The Swimming Lesson 9

Chapter 2: The Big Fish 30

Chapter 3: The Way of the Toad 51

Chapter 4: The Wisdom of Badger 67

Chapter 5: Yule-time at Home Holt 81

Chapter 6: Upstream or Downriver? 99

Chapter 7: The Wild Wood 115

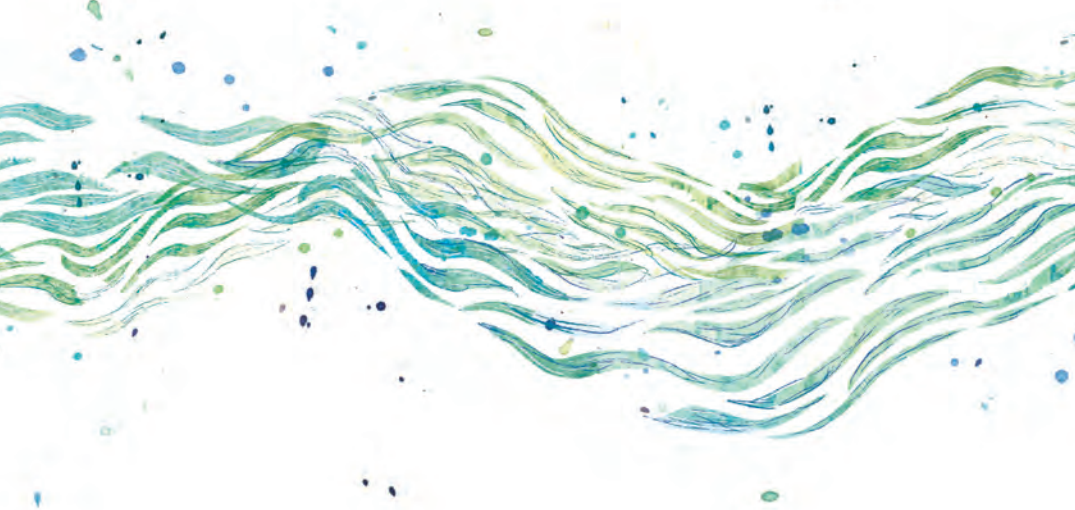
Chapter 8: A New Friend 138

Chapter 9: *Invitatio Maris* (The Call of the Sea) . . 155

Chapter 10: Midnight Feasters 173

Chapter 11: Pan's Island 191

Chapter 12: Sweetly Homeward 206



". . . he sat on the bank, while the river still
chattered on to him, a babbling procession
of the best stories in the world,
sent from the heart of the earth to be
told at last to the insatiable sea."
Kenneth Grahame

When a freshwater spring grows into a bubbly brook, then journeys downhill in an ever-sliding body to the sea, we call it a river.

A river is a marvellous, moving thing.

It shapes the land through which it travels.

Many plants and creatures depend on it for food, society and adventure; and among them are the otters.





Chapter 1

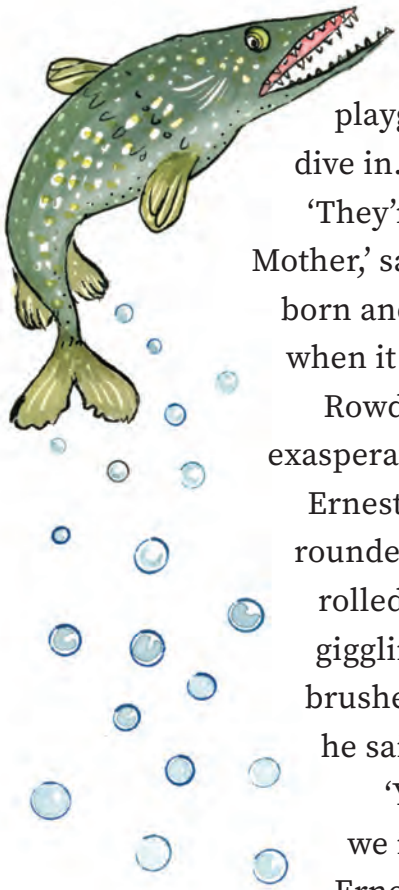
The Swimming Lesson

There is a time in a young otter's life when they must be introduced to their river, and for Portly today was that day.

Mrs Otter fussed over Portly and his sister Maymie, grooming any tufts of fur that might let the cold water touch their skin, working hard to ensure their coats were waterproof. 'Are you ready for your first outing, my littlest dears?' she asked, her snout prodding them encouragingly.

Portly squeaked and squirmed with excitement. All he'd ever known was the Otter family home: a sparsely furnished, shadow-soft holt with walls of twisting tree roots and compact earth.

At the circular door to Bank Tunnel, jostling to be the first through, were the older Otter litter: Ernest, Rowdy and Flo. The river was their



playground and they were eager to dive in.

'They're not ready for the river yet, Mother,' said Ernest, who was the first born and liked to give his opinion even when it wasn't sought.

Rowdy and Flo exchanged exasperated looks and rolled their eyes. Ernest was peering down his rounded snout at Portly, who had rolled on to his back and was giggling as Mrs Otter's rough tongue brushed his coat. 'He's such a baby,' he said in a superior manner.

'You were eight weeks old when we introduced you to the river, Ernest,' Mrs Otter told him, her whiskers twitching as she gave him an affectionate smile.

'Yes, but I was ready for the river,' Ernest replied, turning to Bank Tunnel, 'and the river was ready for me.'

'Isn't it amazing that Ernest's big head doesn't make him sink!' Rowdy whispered loudly and Flo laughed.

'Their coats are soft as thistle fluff,' Ernest said, stretching out his paw to admire his own sleek chestnut coat. 'Maymie might be able to handle the current, if she can keep her eyes open, but Portly?' He shook his head. 'Portly looks like a chocolate dandelion clock. He'll be swept away or gobbled up by a pike.'

'What are pikes?' Portly asked anxiously, scrambling on to all paws.

'Big fish with a pointed snout and sharp teeth,' Ernest replied.

Portly trembled as he imagined a monstrous pike trying to eat him and his excitement about meeting the river faded. He looked longingly across the room at the comfortable hollow where he and Maymie slept, coiled around Mrs Otter, and wished he could go back to bed.

'You've never seen a pike,' Rowdy said, giving Ernest a shove.

'Enough!' Mrs Otter waved her paw. 'We are all going.' She opened the door to Bank Tunnel.

In the distance, Portly heard the heavy sloshing of water and shrank backwards.

'Don't you listen to Ernest,' Flo whispered, fixing him with her kind eyes. 'The river is a

hubbly-bubbly, wonderful thing.'

'It is?' Portly wasn't sure.

'Yes. It's where otters belong. You'll see. Not to like it, is to not like being an otter.'

'I love being an otter,' Portly told her.

'Then you and the river will be good friends,' said Flo.

Portly looked down the dark tunnel and swallowed. 'Really? Truly?'

'Truly. Really.' Flo took his tiny paw in hers. 'Be brave, little brother, and you'll see it's impossible not to fall in love with the river.'

'Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!' Rowdy cried, his eyes alight with the prospect of a swim. He scrambled over Ernest and scampered away down the tunnel, whooping, 'Mud slide, here I come!'

'Rowdy's so childish,' Ernest said to no one in particular.

Mrs Otter chuckled. 'You boys! You're as different as a meadow and a manicured lawn.'

Portly heard a distant *dolp!* then a *kcussh!* followed by a gurgling.

'Flo!' he gasped, pulling back. 'The river ate Rowdy!'