

Theme – My River in the Valley

“The Toad in the Hole”

I have lived most of my life in Holme Village, and during my childhood spent many happy weekends with my sister playing in Holme River with poo-sticks, sailing boats and swimming in the Turtle Pools.

I will never forget one warm sunny day, many summers ago. We had raced down past Corn Hey Cottage, up the 99 steps and across the meadow heading for the pools. Laughing and breathless we splashed in the river enjoying the cool water. We had been weeks without rain and the water level was far lower than usual.

As we lazed about on the grass, I suddenly noticed something strange in the opposite bank. I slipped back into the water and waded across to investigate. It was a tiny door! Painted bright red with a gleaming gold door knocker. As the river level was far lower than usual it would normally have been hidden by the water.

“Sophie” I yelled at my sister, “Come and have a look at this!”

Together we stood staring at the door in disbelief.

“I dare you” she said, pointing at the gold knocker.

I gently lifted the tiny knocker and rapped sharply.

To our absolute surprise we heard footsteps. The door creaked slowly open. We jumped back, afraid, hardly believing what we were seeing.

And there, in the doorway, stood a great big fat ugly toad. He had huge bulging eyes and a wonky grin. He was wearing an apron and had a tea towel draped over one arm.

“Hello girls” he said, in a peculiar rasping voice.

Sophie and I stared open-mouthed in astonishment at the talking toad.

“h..hello” I stammered, not quite believing that I was talking to a toad.

He held out his slimy hand and introduced himself as Tony the Toad. He went on to tell us that he had been cooking and he invited us to join him for lunch.

He explained that the river water level had dropped so low that for the first time, in a very long time, he had been able to go out and enjoy some sunshine at last.

Sophie and I had a lovely afternoon with Tony and when we left later, we promised to return the very next day and bring him some cakes. We decided that we would keep our surprise meeting with Tony a secret, as no-one in their right mind would believe us.

That night was a raging thunderstorm and the rain gushed off Holme Moss into the river. The water levels rose.

Sophie and I rushed back the next morning armed with cakes and goodies looking forward to seeing Tony again. To our dismay his front door was entirely covered with gushing water. The current was so strong we daren't wade over.

We never saw Tony again. We returned regularly to the pools over the years, but the water level never fell so low again. My own children now play in those pools every summer. I often wonder whether they'll ever meet him.