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STOWAWAYS

CHAPTER ONE

Meet the four-legged stowaways

We are boat people and live on narrowboats. We deliver all sorts of cargo to different parts of the country, mostly between London and Manchester. Every time we are about to cast off after loading the latest goods, my pa would yell out to me or my brother Ned, 'Go search the back for any stowaways and be quick about it.' He was always keen to be on our way smartly so that he could get a return cargo and then get paid and tout around for a new load. Always, as if he was having a rethink, pa would then shout, 'Ned, you go and see to Nellie. Bert...' that's me, 'can go and look himself.' Pa would mutter something under his breath before adding, 'Any creature who thinks it can have a free ride with board and lodgings is going to be very unlucky.' Pa meant vermin, rats or mice that could spoil a cargo of sugar or flour or vegetables in next to no time. If we delivered damaged cargo the overseer would dock the cost out of pa's money.

Nellie was the towing horse and Ned would have to stuff her nosebag with fresh hay and make sure the tow rope