



# Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

## 2. THE OPEN ROAD

'Ratty,' said the Mole suddenly, one bright summer morning, 'if you please, I want to ask you a favour. What I wanted to ask you was, won't you take me to call on Mr. Toad? I've heard so much about him, and I do so want to make his acquaintance.'

'Why, certainly,' said the good-natured Rat, jumping to his feet 'Get the boat out, and we'll paddle up there at once. It's never the wrong time to call on Toad. Early or late he's always the same fellow. Always good-tempered, always glad to see you, always sorry when you go!'

'He must be a very nice animal,' observed the Mole, as he got into the boat and took the oars, while the Rat settled himself comfortably.

'He is indeed the best of animals,' replied Rat. 'So simple, so good-natured, and so affectionate. Perhaps he's not very clever and it may be that he is both boastful and conceited. But he has got some great qualities, has Toady.'

Rounding a bend in the river, they came in sight of a handsome, dignified old house of mellowed red brick, with well-kept lawns reaching down to the water's edge.

'There's Toad Hall,' said the Rat; 'and that creek on the left, where the notice-board says, "Private. No landing allowed," leads to his boat-house, where we'll leave the boat. Toad is rather rich, you know, and this is really one of the nicest houses in these parts, though we never admit as much to Toad.'

They glided up the creek and they passed into the shadow of a large boat-house.

They disembarked, and strolled across the gay flower-decked lawns in search of Toad, whom they presently happened upon resting in a wicker garden-chair, and a large map spread out on his knees.

'Hooray!' he cried, jumping up on seeing them, 'this is splendid!' He shook the paws of both of them warmly, never waiting for an introduction to the Mole. 'How KIND of you!' he went on, dancing round them. 'I was just going to send a boat down the river for you, Ratty, with strict orders that you were to be fetched up here at once, whatever you were doing. You don't know how lucky it is, your turning up just now!'



'Let's sit quiet a bit, Toady!' said the Rat, throwing himself into an easy chair, while the Mole took another by the side of him.

'It's about your rowing, I suppose,' said the Rat. 'You're getting on fairly well, though you splash a good bit still. With a great deal of patience, and coaching, you may -'

'O, pooh! Boating!' interrupted the Toad, in great disgust. 'I've given that up LONG ago. Sheer waste of time, that's what it is. No, I've discovered the real thing, the only genuine occupation for a life time. Come with me and you shall see what you shall see!'

He led the way to the stable-yard and there, drawn out of the coach house into the open, they saw a gipsy caravan, shining with newness, painted a canary-yellow picked out with green, and red wheels.

'There you are!' cried the Toad, straddling and expanding himself. 'The open road, the dusty highway, the heath, the common, the hedgerows, the rolling downs! Camps, villages, towns, cities! Here today, up and off to somewhere else tomorrow!'

The Mole was tremendously interested and excited, and followed him eagerly up the steps and into the interior of the caravan. The Rat only snorted and thrust his hands deep into his pockets, remaining where he was.

It was indeed very compact and comfortable. Little sleeping bunks - a little table that folded up against the wall - a cooking-stove, lockers, bookshelves, a bird-cage with a bird in it; and pots, pans, jugs and kettles of every size and variety.

'All complete!' said the Toad. 'You see - biscuits, potted lobster, sardines - everything you can possibly want. Soda-water here - letter-paper, bacon, jam, cards and dominoes - you'll find that nothing what ever has been forgotten, when we make our start this afternoon.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the Rat slowly, 'but did I overhear you say something about "WE," and "START," and "THIS AFTERNOON?"'

'Now, you dear good old Ratty,' said Toad, you know you've GOT to come. I can't possibly manage without you, so please consider it settled, I want to show you the world! I'm going to make an ANIMAL of you, my boy!'

'I don't care,' said the Rat, 'I'm not coming, and that's flat. And what's more, Mole's going to stick with me and do as I do, aren't you, Mole?'

'Of course I am,' said the Mole, loyally. 'All the same, it sounds as if it might have been - well, rather fun, you know!'

Poor Mole! He had fallen in love at first sight with the canary-coloured cart.

Toad was watching both of them closely.

‘Come along in, and have some lunch,’ he said, ‘and we’ll talk it over. We needn’t decide anything in a hurry. Of course, I don’t really care. I only want to give pleasure to you fellows.’

During lunch - which was excellent, of course, as everything at Toad Hall always was - the Toad simply let himself go. He painted the joys of the open life and the roadside in such glowing colours that the Mole could hardly sit in his chair for excitement. Somehow, it soon seemed taken for granted by all three of them that the trip was a settled thing; and the Rat, could not bear to disappoint his two friends, who were already planning out each day for several weeks ahead.

When they were quite ready, the now triumphant Toad led his companions to the paddock and set them to capture the old grey horse, who took a deal of catching. At last the horse was caught and harnessed, and they set off, all talking at once.

It was a golden afternoon. Birds called and whistled to them cheerily, good-natured wayfarers, passing them, gave them ‘Good-day,’ or stopped to say nice things about their beautiful cart; and rabbits, sitting at their front doors in the hedgerows, held up their fore-paws, and said, ‘O my! O my! O my!’

Late in the evening, tired and happy and miles from home, they drew up on a remote common, turned the horse loose to graze, and ate their simple supper sitting on the grass by the side of the cart. At last they turned in to their little bunks in the cart.

The Mole reached out from under his blanket, felt for the Rat’s paw in the darkness, and gave it a squeeze. ‘I’ll do whatever you like, Ratty,’ he whispered. ‘Shall we run away to-morrow morning and go back to our dear old hole on the river?’

‘No, no, we’ll see it out,’ whispered back the Rat. ‘Thanks awfully, but I ought to stick by Toad till this trip is ended. It wouldn’t be safe for him to be left to himself. It won’t take very long. His fads never do. Good night!’

After so much open air and excitement the Toad slept very soundly, and no amount of shaking could rouse him out of bed next morning. So while the Rat saw to the horse, and lit a fire, and cleaned last night’s cups and plates, and got things ready for breakfast, the Mole trudged off to the nearest village, a long way off, for milk and eggs and various necessaries the Toad had, of course, forgotten to provide. The hard work had all been done, and the two animals were resting, thoroughly exhausted, by the time Toad appeared on the scene.

Their way lay, as before, across country by narrow lanes, and it was not till the afternoon that they came out on their first high-road.

They were strolling along the high-road easily, the Mole by the horse's head, talking to him, since the horse had complained that he was being frightfully left out of it, the Toad and the Water Rat walking behind the cart talking together - when far behind them they heard a faint warning hum; like the drone of a distant bee.

Glancing back, they saw a small cloud of dust, with a dark centre of energy, advancing on them at incredible speed, while from out the dust a faint 'Poop-poop!' wailed.

Hardly regarding it, they turned to resume their conversation, when in an instant the peaceful scene was changed, and a blast of wind and a whirl of sound made them jump for the nearest ditch.

The 'Poop-poop' rang with a brazen shout in their ears and the magnificent motor-car, with its pilot tense and hugging his wheel, flung an enveloping cloud of dust that blinded and enwrapped them utterly, and then dwindled to a speck in the far distance.

The old grey horse, rearing, plunging, backing steadily, in spite of all the Mole's efforts, drove the cart backwards towards the deep ditch

at the side of the road. It wavered an instant - then there was a heartrending crash - and the canary-coloured cart, their pride and their joy, lay on its side in the ditch.

The Rat danced up and down in the road, 'You villains!' he shouted, shaking both fists, 'You scoundrels, you highwaymen, you - you - road-hogs! - I'll have the law on you! I'll report you!

Toad sat straight down in the middle of the dusty road, his legs stretched out before him, and stared fixedly in the direction of the disappearing motorcar.

'Glorious, stirring sight!' murmured Toad. 'The poetry of motion! The REAL way to travel! The ONLY way to travel! O bliss! O poop-poop! O my! O my!'

'All those wasted years that lie behind me, I never knew, never even DREAMT! But NOW - but now that I know, now that I fully realise! What dust-clouds shall spring up behind me as I speed on my way! What carts I shall fling carelessly into the ditch!! Horrid little carts - common carts - canary-coloured carts!'

'What are we to do with him?' asked the Mole.

'Nothing at all,' replied the Rat firmly. Because there is really nothing to be done. He has got a new craze, and it always takes him that way, in its first stage. He'll continue like that for days

now. Never mind him. Let's go and see what there is to be done about the cart.'

A careful inspection showed them that the cart would travel no longer. The axles were in a hopeless state, and the missing wheel was shattered into pieces.

The Rat knotted the horse's reins over his back and took him by the head, 'Come on!' he said grimly to the Mole. 'It's five or six miles to the nearest town, and we shall just have to walk it. The sooner we make a start the better.'

'But what about Toad?' asked the Mole anxiously, as they set off together. 'We can't leave him here, sitting in the middle of the road by himself.'

'O, BOTHER Toad,' said the Rat savagely; 'I've done with him!'

They had not proceeded very far on their way, however, when there was a pattering of feet behind them, and Toad caught them up and thrust a paw inside the elbow of each of them.

'Now, look here, Toad!' said the Rat sharply: 'as soon as we get to the town, you'll have to go straight to the police-station, and see if they know anything about that motorcar and who it belongs to, and lodge a complaint against it.'

'Police-station! Complaint!' murmured Toad dreamily. 'Me COMPLAIN of that beautiful, that heavenly vision. O, Ratty! That swan, that sunbeam, that thunderbolt!'

The Rat turned from him in despair. 'He's quite hopeless. I give it up - when we get to the town we'll go to the railway station, and with luck we may pick up a train there that'll get us back to the riverbank tonight.'

Eventually, a slow train landed them at a station not very far from Toad Hall, they escorted the spell-bound, sleep-walking Toad to his door, put him inside it, and instructed his housekeeper to feed him, undress him, and put him to bed. Then they got out their boat from the boat-house, rowed down the river home, and at a very late hour sat down to supper in their own cosy riverside parlour, to the Rat's great joy and contentment.

The following evening the Mole, who had risen late and taken things very easy all day, was sitting on the bank fishing, when the Rat, came strolling along to find him. 'Heard the news?' he said. 'There's nothing else being talked about, all along the river bank. Toad went up to Town by an early train this morning. And he has ordered a large and very expensive motorcar.'