

# Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

## 6: MR TOAD

It was a bright morning in the early part of summer. The Mole and the Water Rat had been up since dawn and were finishing breakfast in their little parlour and eagerly discussing their plans for the day, when a heavy knock sounded at the door.

'Bother!' said the Rat, 'See who it is, Mole, like a good chap.'

The Mole went to attend the summons and the Rat heard him utter a cry of surprise, 'Oh'. Then he flung the parlour door open and announced with much importance, 'Mr. Badger!'

The Badger strode heavily into the room and stood looking at the two animals with an expression full of seriousness.

'The hour has come!' said the Badger.

'What hour?' asked the Rat uneasily, glancing at the clock.

'WHOSE hour, you should rather say,' replied the Badger. 'Why, Toad's hour! The hour of Toad! The day to take Toad in hand.'

'Toad's hour, of course!' cried the Mole delightedly. 'Hooray! WE'LL teach him to be a sensible Toad!'

They set off up the road on their mission, Badger leading the way.

They reached the carriage-drive of Toad Hall to find a shiny new motorcar, of great size, painted a bright red (Toad's favourite colour), standing in front of the house.

As they neared the door it was flung open, and Mr. Toad, arrayed in goggles, cap, gaiters, and enormous overcoat, came swaggering down the steps.

'Hullo! come on, you fellows!' he cried cheerfully on catching sight of them.

The Badger strode up the steps. 'Take him inside,' he said sternly to his companions. Then, as Toad was hustled through the door, struggling and protesting, he followed the others inside and shut the door.

'Now then!' he said to the Toad, when the four of them stood together in the Hall, 'first of all, take those ridiculous things off!'



'Shan't!' replied Toad, with great spirit. 'What is the meaning of this?'

'Take them off him, then, you two,' ordered the Badger briefly.

They had to lay Toad out on the floor, kicking and calling all sorts of names, before they could get to work properly. Then the Rat sat on him, and the Mole got his motor-clothes off him bit by bit, and they stood him up on his legs again. Now that he was merely Toad, and no longer the Terror of the Highway, he giggled feebly and looked from one to the other appealingly.

'You knew it must come to this, sooner or later, Toad,' the Badger explained severely. 'You've disregarded all the warnings we've given you, you're getting us animals a bad name in the district by your furious driving and your smashes and your rows with the police. Now, you're a good fellow in many respects, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'll make one more effort to bring you to reason.'

He took Toad firmly by the arm, led him into another room, and closed the door behind them.

'THAT'S no good!' said the Rat. 'TALKING to Toad'll never cure him. He'll SAY anything.'

They made themselves comfortable in arm-chairs and waited patiently. Through the closed door they could just hear the long continuous drone of the Badger's voice, punctuated at intervals by long-drawn sobs, from Toad.

After some three-quarters of an hour the door opened, and the Badger reappeared, solemnly leading by the paw a very limp and dejected Toad.

'Sit down there, Toad,' said the Badger kindly, pointing to a chair. 'My friends,' he went on, 'I am pleased to inform you that Toad has at last seen the error of his ways. I have his solemn promise to that effect. Toad, I want you solemnly to repeat, before your friends here, what you fully admitted to me in the other room just now. First, you are sorry for what you've done, and you see the folly of it all?'

There was a long, long pause. Toad looked desperately this way and that, while the other animals waited in grave silence. At last he spoke.

'No!' he said, a little sullenly, but stoutly; 'I'm NOT sorry. And it wasn't folly at all! It was simply glorious!'

'What?' cried the Badger, 'You backsliding animal, didn't you tell me just now, in there -'

'Oh, yes, yes, in THERE,' said Toad impatiently. 'I'd have said anything in THERE. But I find that I'm not a bit sorry really, so it's no earthly good saying I am; now, is it?'

'Then you don't promise,' said the Badger, 'never to touch a motorcar again?'

'Certainly not!' replied Toad emphatically.

'Very well, then,' said the Badger firmly, rising to his feet. 'I feared it would come to this all along. You've often asked us three to come and stay with you, Toad, in this handsome house of yours; well, now we're going to. Take him upstairs, you two, and lock him up in his bedroom, while we arrange matters between ourselves.'

'It's for your own good, Toady, you know,' said the Rat kindly, as Toad, kicking and struggling, was hauled up the stairs by his two faithful friends.

'No more incidents with the police, Toad,' said the Rat, as they thrust him into his bedroom, turning the key.

'It's going to be a tedious business,' said the Badger, sighing. 'I've never seen Toad so determined. However, we will see it out. He must never be left an instant unguarded. We shall have to take it in turns to be with him, till the poison has worked itself out of his system.'

Each animal took it in turns to sleep in Toad's room at night, and they divided the day up between them.

One fine morning the Rat, whose turn it was to go on duty, went upstairs to relieve Badger, whom he found fidgeting to be off and stretch his legs.

'Toad's still in bed,' he told the Rat, outside the door. 'Can't get much out of him' except "O leave him alone". Now, you look out, Rat! When Toad's quiet and submissive then he's at his artfullest. There's sure to be something up. I know him. Well, now, I must be off.'

'How are you today, old chap?' inquired the Rat cheerfully, as he approached Toad's bedside.

He had to wait some minutes for an answer. At last a feeble voice replied, 'Thank you so much, dear Ratty! So good of you to inquire! But first tell me how you are yourself, and the excellent Mole?'

'O, WE'RE all right,' replied the Rat. 'Mole,' he added 'is going out for a run round with Badger. Now jump up, there's a good fellow, and don't lie moping there on a fine morning like this!'

'Dear, kind Rat,' murmured Toad, 'how little you realise my condition, and how very far I am from "jumping up" now - if ever! I beg you - for the last time, probably - to step round to the village

as quickly as possible - even now it may be too late - and fetch the doctor.

'Why, what do you want a doctor for?' inquired the Rat, coming closer and examining him. He certainly lay very still and flat, and his voice was weaker and his manner much changed.

'Surely you have noticed of late -' murmured Toad. 'But, no - why should you? Noticing things is only a trouble. Tomorrow, indeed, you may be saying to yourself, "O, if only I had noticed sooner! If only I had done something!" But no; it's a trouble. Never mind - forget that I asked.'

'It's best to be on the safe side,' he said, on reflection. 'I'd better go; it won't take very long.' So he ran off to the village on his errand of mercy.

The Toad, who had hopped lightly out of bed as soon as he heard the key turned in the lock, watched him eagerly from the window till he disappeared down the carriage-drive.

Then, laughing heartily, he dressed as quickly as possible in the smartest suit he could lay hands on at the moment, filled his pockets with cash which he took from a small drawer in the dressing-table, and next, knotting the sheets from his bed together and tying one end round the central pillar of the window, he scrambled out, slid lightly to the ground, and, taking the

opposite direction to the Rat, marched off, whistling a merry tune.

'Smart piece of work that!' he remarked to himself chuckling. 'Poor old Ratty! My! Won't he catch it when the Badger gets back!'

Filled full of conceited thoughts such as these he strode along, his head in the air, till he reached a little town, where the sign of 'The Red Lion,' swinging across the road halfway down the main street, reminded him that he had not breakfasted that day, and that he was exceedingly hungry after his long walk. He marched into the Inn, ordered the best lunch and sat down to eat it in the coffee-room.

He was about half-way through his meal when an only too familiar sound, approaching down the street, made him start and fall a-trembling all over. The poop-poop! drew nearer and nearer, the car could be heard to turn into the inn-yard and come to a stop. Presently the party entered the coffee-room, hungry, talkative, and gay. He slipped out of the room quietly, paid his bill at the bar, and as soon as he got outside sauntered round quietly to the inn-yard. 'There cannot be any harm,' he said to himself, 'in my just LOOKING at it!'

The car stood in the middle of the yard, quite unattended. Toad walked slowly round it.

'I wonder,' he said to himself, 'I wonder if this sort of car STARTS easily?'

As if in a dream he found himself, somehow, seated in the driver's seat; as if in a dream, he pulled the lever and swung the car round the yard and out through the archway. He increased his pace, and as the car devoured the street and leapt forth on the high road through the open country, he was only conscious that he was Toad once more, Toad at his best and highest, Toad the terror, the traffic-queller, the Lord of the lone trail. The miles were eaten up under him as he sped he knew not whither, reckless of what might come to him.

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'To my mind,' observed the Chairman of the Bench of Magistrates cheerfully, 'the ONLY difficulty that presents itself in this otherwise very clear case is, how we can possibly make it sufficiently hot for the rogue cowering in the dock before us. Let me see: he has been found guilty on the clearest evidence, first, of stealing a valuable motor-car; secondly, of driving to the public danger; and, thirdly, of gross impertinence to the rural police. Mr. Clerk, will you tell us, please, what is the very stiffest penalty we can impose for each of these offences?'

The Clerk scratched his nose with his pen. 'Supposing you were to say twelve months for the theft, which is mild; and three years for the

furious driving, and fifteen years for the cheek, those figures, if added together correctly, tot up to nineteen years -'

'First-rate!' said the Chairman.

'So you had better make it a round twenty years and be on the safe side,' concluded the Clerk.

'An excellent suggestion!' said the Chairman approvingly. 'Prisoner! Pull yourself together and try and stand up straight. It's going to be twenty years for you this time. And mind, if you appear before us again, upon any charge whatever, we shall have to deal with you very seriously!'

Toad, loaded with chains, was dragged from the Court House, shrieking, praying, protesting; across the marketplace, across the hollow-sounding drawbridge, below the spiky portcullis, under the frowning archway of the grim old castle, whose ancient towers soared high overhead; till they reached the door of the grimmest dungeon.

The rusty key creaked in the lock, the great door clanged behind them; Toad was a helpless prisoner in the remotest dungeon of the best-guarded keep of the stoutest castle in all the length and breadth of Merry England.