



Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

7: TOAD'S ADVENTURES

When Toad found himself in a dank dungeon, he flung himself at full length on the floor, and shed bitter tears, 'This is the end of everything' he said, 'at least it is the end of the career of Toad, which is the same thing; the popular and handsome Toad, the rich and hospitable Toad, the Toad so free and careless! O unhappy and forsaken Toad!'

Now the gaoler had a daughter. This kind-hearted girl, pitying the misery of Toad, said to her father one day, 'Father! I can't bear to see that poor beast so unhappy, and getting so thin! You know how fond of animals I am. I'll make him eat from my hand, and sit up, and do all sorts of things.'

Her father replied that she could do what she liked with him. So that day she knocked at the door of Toad's cell.

'Now, cheer up, Toad,' she said, entering.

She carried a tray, with a cup of fragrant tea steaming on it; and a plate piled up with very hot buttered toast. The smell of that buttered toast simply talked to Toad, talked of warm kitchens, of breakfasts on bright frosty mornings, of cosy parlour firesides on winter evenings, of the

purring of contented cats, and the twitter of sleepy canaries. Toad sat up, dried his eyes, sipped his tea and munched his toast, and soon began talking freely about himself, and the house he lived in, and his doings there, and how important he was, and what a lot his friends thought of him.

The gaoler's daughter saw that the topic was doing him as much good as the tea, and encouraged him to go on.

'Tell me about Toad Hall,' said she.

And Toad, his spirits quite restored to their usual level, told her about the boathouse, and the fish-pond, and the old walled kitchen-garden; and about the pig-stys, and the stables, and the pigeon-house and about the dairy, and the china-cupboards, and the linen-presses; and about the banqueting-hall, and the fun they had there when the other animals were gathered round the table and Toad was at his best, singing songs, telling stories, carrying on generally.



They had many interesting talks together, after that, as the dreary days went on; and the gaoler's daughter grew very sorry for Toad, and thought it a great shame that a poor little animal should be locked up in prison for what seemed to her a very trivial offence.

One morning the girl said, 'Listen. I have an aunt who is a washerwoman.'

'There, there,' said Toad, graciously 'never mind; think no more about it. I have several aunts who OUGHT to be washerwomen.'

'Do be quiet a minute, Toad,' said the girl. 'You talk too much. As I said, I have an aunt who is a washerwoman; she does the washing for all the prisoners in this castle. She takes out the washing on Monday morning, and brings it in on Friday evening. This is a Thursday. Now, you're very rich - and she's very poor. A few pounds wouldn't make any difference to you, and it would mean a lot to her. You could come to some arrangement by which she would let you have her dress and bonnet and so on, and you could escape from the castle as the official washerwoman. You're very alike in many respects - particularly about the figure.'

'We are NOT,' said the Toad in a huff. 'I have a very elegant figure...'

'So has my aunt,' replied the girl, 'But have it your own way. You horrid, proud, ungrateful

animal, when I'm sorry for you, and trying to help you!'

Honest Toad was always ready to admit himself in the wrong. 'You are a good, kind, clever girl,' he said, 'and I am indeed a proud and stupid toad. Introduce me to your worthy aunt, if you will be so kind.'

Next evening the girl ushered her aunt into Toad's cell, bearing his week's washing pinned up in a towel.

In return for his cash, Toad received a cotton print gown, an apron, a shawl, and a rusty black bonnet.

'Now it's your turn, Toad,' said the girl. 'Take off that coat and waistcoat of yours; you're fat enough as it is.'

Shaking with laughter, she proceeded to dress him in the cotton print gown, arranged the shawl with a professional fold, and tied the strings of the rusty bonnet under his chin.

'You're the very image of her,' she giggled, 'only I'm sure you never looked half so respectable in all your life before. Now, good-bye, Toad, and good luck.'

With a quaking heart, Toad set forth cautiously on what seemed to be a most hare-brained and hazardous undertaking; but he was soon

surprised to find how easy everything was made for him. At last he heard the wicket-gate in the great outer door click behind him, felt the fresh air of the outer world upon his anxious brow, and knew that he was free!

As he walked along, his attention was caught by some red and green lights a little way off, to one side of the town, and the sound of the puffing and snorting of engines fell on his ear.

'Aha!' he thought, 'this is a piece of luck! A railway station is the thing I want most in the whole world at this moment.'

He made his way to the station, consulted a time-table, and found that a train, bound more or less in the direction of his home, was due to start in half-an-hour. 'More luck!' said Toad, his spirits rising rapidly, and went off to the booking-office to buy his ticket.

He gave the name of the station that he knew to be nearest to Toad Hall and mechanically put his fingers, where his waistcoat pocket should have been, and found - not only no money, but no pocket to hold it, and no waistcoat to hold the pocket!

To his horror he recollected that he had left both coat and waistcoat behind him in his cell.

'Look here! I find I've left my purse behind. Just give me that ticket, will you, and I'll send the

money on tomorrow? I'm well-known in these parts.'

The clerk stared at him and the rusty black bonnet a moment, and then laughed. 'I should think you were pretty well known in these parts,' he said, 'if you've tried this game on often. Here, stand away from the window, please, madam; you're obstructing the other passengers!'

Baffled and full of despair, he wandered blindly down the platform where the train was standing, and tears trickled down each side of his nose. As he pondered, he found himself opposite the engine, which was being oiled, wiped, and generally caressed by its affectionate driver.

'Hullo, mother!' said the engine-driver, 'what's the trouble? You don't look particularly cheerful.'

'O, sir!' said Toad, crying afresh, 'I am a poor unhappy washerwoman, and I've lost all my money, and can't pay for a ticket, and I must get home to-night somehow, and whatever I am to do I don't know. O dear, O dear!'

'That's a bad business, indeed,' said the engine-driver. 'Lost your money - and can't get home - and got some kids, too, waiting for you, I dare say?'

'Any amount of them,' sobbed Toad. 'And they'll be hungry - the little innocents! - and quarrelling, and going on generally. O dear, O dear!'

‘Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,’ said the good engine-driver. ‘You’re a washerwoman to your trade, says you. And I’m an engine-driver, and there’s no denying it’s terribly dirty work. If you’ll wash a few shirts for me when you get home, and send ‘em along, I’ll give you a ride on my engine.’

The Toad’s misery turned into rapture as he eagerly scrambled up into the cab of the engine. Of course, he had never washed a shirt in his life, and couldn’t if he tried and, anyhow, he wasn’t going to begin; but he thought: ‘When I get safely home to Toad Hall, and have money again, and pockets to put it in, I will send the engine-driver enough to pay for quite a quantity of washing, and that will be the same thing, or better.’

The guard waved his flag, the engine-driver whistled in cheerful response, and the train moved out of the station. As the speed increased, Toad could see on either side of him real fields, and trees, and hedges, and cows, and horses, all flying past him. He began to skip up and down and shout and sing snatches of song, to the great astonishment of the engine-driver, who had come across washerwomen before, but never one at all like this.

They had covered many and many a mile, when he noticed that the engine-driver, with a puzzled expression on his face, was leaning over the side of the engine and listening hard.

‘It’s very strange; we’re the last train running in this direction to-night, yet I could be sworn that I heard another following us!’

‘I can see it clearly now! It is an engine, on our rails, coming along at a great pace! It looks as if we were being pursued!’

The miserable Toad, crouching in the coal-dust, tried hard to think of something to do.

‘They are gaining on us fast!’ cried the engine-driver. And the engine is crowded with the queerest lot of people! Men like policemen in their helmets, waving truncheons; waving revolvers and walking-sticks; all waving, and all shouting the same thing - “Stop, stop, stop!”

Then Toad fell on his knees among the coals and cried, ‘Save me, save me, dear kind Mr Engine-driver, and I will confess everything! I am not the simple washerwoman I seem to be! I am a toad - the well-known and popular Mr. Toad, I have just escaped, from a loathsome dungeon into which my enemies had flung me; and if those fellows on that engine recapture me, it will be chains and bread-and-water and straw and misery once more for poor, unhappy, innocent Toad!’

The engine-driver looked down upon him very sternly, and said, ‘Now tell the truth; what were you put in prison for?’

'It was nothing very much,' said poor Toad, 'I only borrowed a motorcar while the owners were at lunch; they had no need of it at the time. I didn't mean to steal it, really.'

The engine-driver looked very grave and said, 'by rights I ought to give you up. But you are evidently in sore trouble and distress, so I will not desert you. I don't hold with motorcars, for one thing; and I don't hold with being ordered about by policemen when I'm on my own engine, for another. So cheer up, Toad! I'll do my best, and we may beat them yet!'

They piled on more coals, shovelling furiously; the furnace roared, the sparks flew, the engine leapt and swung but still their pursuers slowly gained. The engine-driver, with a sigh, wiped his brow and said, 'I'm afraid it's no good, Toad. You see, they are running light, and they have the better engine. There's just one thing left for us to do, and it's your only chance. Now mind and be ready to jump when I tell you!'

They piled on more coals, and the train shot into a tunnel, and the engine rushed and roared and rattled, till at last they shot out at the other end into fresh air and peaceful moonlight. The driver shut off steam and put on brakes, the Toad got down on the step, and as the train slowed down to almost a walking pace he heard the driver call out, 'Now, jump!'

Toad jumped, rolled down a short embankment, picked himself up unhurt, scrambled into the wood and hid.

Peeping out, he saw his train get up speed again and disappear at a great pace. Then out of the tunnel burst the pursuing engine, roaring and whistling, her motley crew waving their various weapons and shouting, 'Stop! stop! stop! stop!' When they were past, the Toad had a hearty laugh - for the first time since he was thrown into prison.

But he soon stopped laughing when he came to consider that it was now very late and dark and cold, and he was in an unknown wood, with no money and no chance of supper, and still far from friends and home.

At last, cold, hungry, and tired out, he sought the shelter of a hollow tree, where with branches and dead leaves he made himself as comfortable a bed as he could, and slept soundly till the morning.