

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

1 Introduction

All: Listen to the sound of the wind in the willows

Whispering through the branches and the leaves.

Come away and listen to a story of long ago and far away;

When the river murmured its magical music to the scented breeze.

Listen to the echo of soft distant voices calling us away.

Narrator: 'Hang spring cleaning,' said Mole, flinging down his whitewash brush. 'Bother and blow,' said Mole, and he bolted out of the house, without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him into the sunlight and away . . . across the meadows and alongside the copses . . . trotting along the river bank where, all of a sudden, he sat down, entranced and bewitched. As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, he became aware of a bright little star winking at him from the opposite bank. The star became an eye, and then there was another eye . . . then a small brown face . . . with whiskers.

2 Rat and Mole meet

Rat: Hallo, Mole!

Mole: Hallo, Rat!

Rat: I was just going off for a trip down the river – would you like to come?

Mole: Well . . . I'm not sure . . .

Rat: Oh come on, old chap – just step into the boat; Now you really are afloat!

Put the picnic hamper under your seat,
Sit back, relax, there'll be plenty to eat!

Rat and Chorus: A life on the river – *me oh my!*

Yes, a life on the river – *my oh me!*

Why, a life on the river – *oh my, oh me!*

That's the life to set my heart all a-quiver – *ooh!*

With the splashing of the oars – *splish, splosh!*

And the buzzing of the bees – *bzz, bzz!*

Now I ask, did you ever – *me oh my!*

See a happier fella – *my oh me!*

Than a fella who's afloat – *heigh ho!*

In his little wooden boat? *Rapture!*

All: Cucumber sandwiches, savoury relish,

Paté with truffles and cranberry jelly,

Ham and tongue and beef and gooseberry pie:

Oh my!

Mustard and cress and Russian salad,

Banbury cakes and sugary doughnuts,

Brandy snaps and fudge and bottles of squash:

Oh gosh!

Hard-boiled eggs, peaches and cream,

Apricot flan, lemon meringue,

Venison pasty with walnuts and grapes

Cut up in convenient little wedge shapes –

Just so!

Mole and Chorus: My heart's all a-shiver – *pit-a-pat!*

It feels all a-shiver – *pat-a-pit!*

My heart's all a-shiver – *ooh!*

Just to be in a boat on the river –

Floating down the stream!

With the sighing of the breeze – *ooh!*

And the birdies in the trees – *quack, quack!*

Rat, Mole and Chorus: Now I ask, did you ever – *in your life*

See two happier fellas – *blissful!*

Than Rat and Mole afloat – *heigh ho!*

In their little wooden boat? *Heaven!*

Narrator: And so the two contented animals made their way slowly up the river to Rat's house. Rat spent the summer and the autumn showing Mole the sights of the River Bank, and introducing him to all his friends – except for one . . . the rather grumpy Mr Badger, who lived in the Wild Wood.

'Couldn't you invite him to dinner?' asked Mole.

'He wouldn't come,' said Rat. 'Simply hates society.'

'Well then, why don't we go and call on him?' suggested Mole.

'It's a long journey,' replied Rat. 'But perhaps we should pay him a visit, especially as Christmas is coming on.'

So one cold December day they set off together through the Wild Wood till they reached Badger's house.

3 Scene at Badger's house

(Rat knocks on the door of Badger's house.)

Badger: Go away!

Rat and Mole: But Badger, it's us, Rat and Mole!

Badger: Why, come in, come in! I thought you were those confounded field mice carol-singing again. . . Come in, come in, and sit by the fire. *(They enter.)*

(Two field mice knock loudly.)

Field mice (outside): We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas . . .

Badger: Oh confound you, wretched field mice! I suppose you'd better come in.

Field mice: Oh thank you, Mr Badger, sir, thank you!

Badger: You may later sing *our* verse of some brief soothing carol. . . for the moment be silent while I talk with Mr Rat and Mr Mole. Now tell me, dear Rat: what is the news of the outside world? And in particular, what of our reckless young friend Toad?

Rat: There's nothing new about the Toad Except his latest crazes.

Badger: Alack! A prey to foolish crazes . . .

Rat: There is no end to what he'll find; His stamina amazes.

Badger: Amazes?

Mole: I blame his parents – such well-intentioned folk – but then, alas, they spoiled him.

Badger: I feel they must have spoiled him.

Field mice: Our auntie says 'e tried to knock the village policeman's helmet off, but then they foiled him!

Badger: Be silent!

Rat and Badger: It's a problem, it's a problem, It's a terrible, terrible problem!

Rat, Mole and Badger: It's a problem, it's a problem, What a terrible, terrible problem!

We'll have to do something about Mr Toad, His conduct is truly appalling, He's foolish and fickle and easily led,

Conceited and boastful and weak in the head, He'll go to the bad and then soon he'll be dead: What can we do to prevent him from falling?

Rat: Last month he bought a gipsy caravan In bright canary yellow.

Badger: Oh no! Not bright canary yellow!

Rat: The colour's surely bad enough, But worse was still to follow.

Badger: Alack!

Mole: I think that Oxford did for him – All those aesthetic parties!

Badger: I disapprove of parties.

Field mice: Our Dad says Toad gets drunk On brandy balls and Smarties.

Badger: Hold your tongue!

Rat and Badger: It's a problem, it's a problem, It's a terrible, terrible problem!

Rat, Badger and Mole: It's a problem, etc.

Rat: This month, I think you must have heard: It's motor cars and speeding. . .

At more than twenty miles an hour!

His reckless folly as he drives

To tragedy is leading.

Badger: How true!

Mole: The countryside is now no longer safe; His motoring's a menace!

Field mice: Our grandma says . . .

Badger: Shush!

Rat, Mole and Badger: We'll have to do something about Mr Toad,

His conduct is truly appalling.

He's foolish and fickle and easily led,

Conceited and boastful and weak in the head, He'll go to the bad and then soon he'll be dead: What shall we do?

Field mice: Good King Wenceslas looked out On the feast of Stephen; Brightly shone the moon that night . . . The first Nowell the angel did say . . .

Rat, Mole and Badger: We'll sort him out, we'll put him right,
We'll set him straight, we'll lecture him,
We'll get him on the rails
And bash him up if all else fails,
Yes, that's what we'll do to prevent him from falling.

Field mice: On the first day of Christmas
My true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear tree . . .

Rat, Mole and Badger: Be off!

Narrator: And that's how things were left. Rat and Mole returned home the next day, determined to save Toad from the dreadful consequences of his new motor car craze.

4 Toad's car

Narrator: The rest of the winter passed quietly, but one morning, quite early in the spring, all three animals happened to be standing in a peaceful lane near the river bank when they heard a most terrible commotion in the distance. Sure enough, it was Toad; he jumped down from his car.

'I say you chaps,' he said, 'what do you think of her? Straight eight, with sleeve valves, of course . . . family crest on the door . . . does nearly fifty downhill!'

Badger interrupted sternly. 'Toad, you unhappy creature!'

'Me unhappy?' exclaimed Toad. 'What a lot of rot you do talk, Badger. Why, I'm the happiest creature alive! The open road . . . the smell of hot oil . . . If you chaps can't recognize the coming thing when you see it, then I'm afraid progress won't wait for you, and no more shall I . . . Must be off! See you all up at my place some time.'

And with that, Toad started the car up again and drove off. But that wasn't the end of it, as I'm afraid we shall see . . .

5 Court scene

Usher: Silence! Silence in court!

Magistrate: Never in all my time as a magistrate . . . never in all the long years I've served on this bench . . .

never has been seen a creature more abjectly despicable, a Toad more steeped in the molasses of criminality, more tarred with the glue of felonious turpitude than the hardened criminal we see melting like a fly-blown marshmallow before our averted eyes. Pull yourself together, prisoner! Be a man, and prepare to hear your sentence! You shall be taken from this place and be flung into the deepest, darkest and most vile-smelling dungeon that the resources of the County Gaol can provide. And there you shall languish, on the first count – stealing a motor car – ten years; on the second count – driving in a most reckless and dangerous manner – fifteen years; on the third count – insulting a policeman – twenty years. And in view of the seriousness of the offences and the hardened criminality of the felon, I order that these terms of imprisonment be served both consecutively and concurrently . . . Take him away!

Narrator: Toad, abject and downcast, was led roughly away by two horny-handed gaolers and thrown into the nastiest of dungeons with nothing for company save the occasional spider, and no solace save that provided by a tin mug of brackish water and the stale crusts thrown to him from time to time . . . and, oh, I nearly forgot – the rather comely and kind-hearted daughter of one of the gaolers. Let us eavesdrop as she attempts to rally the starving and disconsolate felon . . .

6 Toad in gaol

Gaoler's daughter: Let me tickle your fancy, Toad:

Nice bowl o' tripe?

Can't you work up an appetite?

How about liver an' lights?

Fish is good for the brain, they say;

Like some bloaters in brine?

Toad: Some other time . . .

Gaoler's daughter: Don't you fancy things salty, then?

Well, Toad-in-the-hole tastes simply divine!

Faggots is nice all swimming in grease –

Don't you fancy a few?

Toad: I don't think I do . . .

Gaoler's daughter: Want to try something new?

Well there's cold jellied eel
With a nice slimy feel.
Pig's trotter and sheep's head brawn
Tastes all juicy and fine;

Toad: I can just imagine . . .

Gaoler's daughter: Wash it down with a glass or two
Of me home-made senna pod wine!
Sweetbreads and kippers with spinach for veg
Takes your appetite over the edge.
Black pudding and dumplings, then,
Just walk up and help yourself again and again!
I bet you I got a few treats you never sampled before . . .

Toad: No thank you!

Gaoler's daughter: And you can always come back for more . . .

Narrator: Nothing the gaoler's daughter had to offer seemed to rouse him. But like all great men of history, his single-mindedness saw him through. He escaped by exchanging clothes with a humble washerwoman.

7 Toad's song

Narrator: Let us join him as he makes his way back to Toad Hall, a sadder and a wiser Toad . . . I'm not sure that's true, actually, but perhaps I'd better let you be the judge; here he is.

Toad: I've got style, I've got chic,
I've got charisma, I've got mystique:
All my friends tell me so,
And after all, they ought to know.
Such an air debonair!
Such sophisticated savoir-faire!
So dégage, so élite,
The people come and cheer me when I walk down the street.

Toad and Chorus: I'm the Toad, I'm the greatest!

I set the style – it's the latest!

So stay awhile and I'll tell you how –

In the strictest confidence –

I get called by Scotland Yard;

They have to bring me in when a case gets too hard.

Einstein took lessons from me;

I showed him that me squared equals e; Eureka!
Mozart and Schubert and Ludwig van B.
Would have had a lot more hits if they had studied with me!

Michelangelo's drawing was absolutely appalling;

If Toad had done the Sistine ceiling

You would find it more appealing.

Toad is the greatest! You said it!

Genius is really the word –

It occurred to us.

A knighthood should be conferred –

At the Palace?

On Toad – well! O.K., make it a peerage.

Toad: So I hope you get the message loud and clear;
If you can't resolve a problem, why, just bring it here.

Pluck up courage, don't be shy;

Galileo made the big time 'cos he gave me a try!

When Newton saw that apple drop from the tree;

Well, he asked me what it meant and I said:

Chorus: That's gravity!

Toad: Science and invention are mostly due to Professor Toad.

Chorus: He's too good to be true!

Toad and Chorus: Toad is the greatest;

Chorus: We know it;

So let's get the show on the road,

And salute the phenomenal

The fabulous, fantastic;

Toad: Sensational, successful,
Scintillating, superstar Toad!

Chorus: Toad, Yeah!

8 The recapture of Toad Hall

Badger: Unhappy animal! Homeless reprobate!
Dispossessed dissolute!

Toad: Steady on, old chap! It's only me, your old friend,
Toad! Why hallo, Rat! Hallo Mole! Why don't you all come down to my place for a spot of luncheon?

Badger: Luckless Toad! You no longer have a place!
While you were in prison, Toad Hall was invaded by the weasels, the ferrets and the stoats.

Toad: Oh horror! Catastrophe appalling! Oh misery!
Oh injustice! Now I'm ruined! Alack!

Badger: Now listen to me, Toad: all is not lost,
undeserving though you are; I have a plan. We must arm
ourselves with knives, with cudgels, and with pistols of
alarming aspect; gain entry to Toad Hall by a secret
tunnel, then we advance upon the weasels and the ferrets
and the stoats, brandishing our weapons and singing a
ferocious and blood-curdling chorus.

Rat, Mole and Toad: A ferocious and blood-curdling
chorus?

Badger: Indeed; with solos by Toad. The weasels, the
ferrets and the stoats will all flee in abject and mortal
terror! Comrades, advance!

Badger, Rat, Mole and Toad: Let's wallop a weasel,
let's strangle a stoat!

Let's frazzle a ferret or two – have 'em by the throat!
Twist their arms and pull their necks until their eyes go
pop;

Toad Hall is Toad's hall – let's go over the top!

Mole: Tiptoe up the staircase . . .

All: Tiptoe, tiptoe!

Badger: Potter down to the pantry . . .

All: Pit-pat-pit!

Rat: Back again to the foot of the stairs,

Badger: Catch the villains unawares,

Mole: Lay them neatly out in pairs,

Toad: Listen while they say their prayers,

All: Let's go over the top!

Pin 'em up by the ears, chaps,

Spear 'em down to the floor!

Weaselburger and chips

Is a treat we all adore!

Rat: Shred the stoats in little bits,

Toad: Let's have a ferret chop!

All: It's weasel-whackin' good,

So, let's go over the top!

(Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!)

Mole: Watch it! There goes a weasel!

All: Thunk! Thunk! Splat!

Toad: Strike him! Yes, it's a stoat!

All: Got him! Squashed him flat!

Rat: Ferret by the door there,
He'd look more peaceful dead!

All: Yes, Toad Hall is Toad's hall;
Have we taken care of them all?

Badger: Search behind the garden wall!

Toad: Didn't I hear a weasel call?

Two weasels: Blimey, let's get out of here quick!

Rat, Mole, Badger and Weasels: He's gone over the
top!

Narrator: Every last weasel, ferret and stoat fled in
panic and disorder, and Toad Hall was once more
Toad's. Badger lectured Toad sternly, reminding him
that his folly and boastfulness had nearly cost him his
liberty and his home, and Toad promised to mend his
ways. The next night a celebration banquet was held at
Toad Hall, and everyone made merry. It was nearly
midnight when Badger rose to his feet and addressed the
assembled company.

[9] The banquet at Toad Hall

Badger: My friends, this is a happy occasion.

All: Hear, hear!

Badger: Toad Hall, lately fallen into the evil hands of
the weasels, the ferrets and the stoats, has finally been
restored to its rightful owner. I give you the toast: hearth
and home!

All: Hearth and home!

Badger: And now I call upon our good friend, Mr Toad,
to make a brief reply.

All: Hear, hear!

[10] Finale

Toad: I could never have come back

If it hadn't been for you, my friends;

A house can seem empty, so you wander,

And you think you've no friends . . .

There are so many things that I never really saw before,

But I think that I can see them clearly now:

The kettle on the hob,

The chestnuts in the fire,

The slippers by the rocking-chair

And woodsmoke drifting through the air . . .

I think that perhaps . . .

It's time that perhaps . . .

I started, perhaps,

To think about settling down.

All: Home is a special kind of feeling;

The feeling of a place where you belong;

A feeling that the world is left behind you

Like a shelter from your care

That seems to want you to be there.

Home is that special kind of feeling;

The feeling that you've made it all your own;

Somewhere which you know is really your place;

A place for living,

Your special place, your home.

Home has a welcome kind of feeling –

The firelight and the warmth of hearth and home;

A welcome that you know will always cheer you

Like a gentle fond 'hello'

That seems to touch you with a glow.

Home has a quiet kind of feeling;

An island when you need to be alone;

A haven for the times you spend together.

There's nowhere better;

No other place like home.

Narrator: Mole caught Rat's eye; Rat's eye caught
Badger's eye. Each knew what home meant to the other.
Nobody managed to catch Toad's eye, but then Toad's
eye was roving and resting lovingly on every detail of his
home: worth a thousand gipsy caravans, worth a million
motor cars, thought Toad.

(Words by David Grant)