

The Wind in the Willows

*The Wind in the
Willows*

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The Wind in the Willows



1

The River Bank

THE MOLE HAD BEEN WORKING very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters, then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash, till he had dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said “Bother!” and “Oh blow!” and also “Hang spring-cleaning!” and bolted out of the house without

even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him imperiously, and he made for the steep little tunnel which answered, in his case, to the gravelled carriage drive owned by animals whose residences are nearer to the sun and air. So he scraped and scratched and scabbled and scrooged, and then he scrooged again and scabbled and scratched and scraped, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, "Up we go! Up we go!" till at last, pop! His snout came out into the sunlight, and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"This is fine!" he said to himself. "This is better than whitewashing!" The sunshine struck hot on his fur, soft breezes caressed his heated brow, and after the seclusion of the cellarage he had lived in so long, the carol of happy birds fell on his dulled hearing almost like a shout. Jumping off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring without its cleaning, he pursued his way across the meadow till he reached the hedge on the further side.

"Hold up!" said an elderly rabbit at the gap. "Sixpence for the privilege of passing by the private road!" He was bowled over in an instant by the impatient and contemptuous Mole, who trotted along the side of the hedge chaffing the other rabbits as they peeped hurriedly from their holes to see what the row was about.

"Onion sauce! Onion sauce!" he remarked jeeringly, and was gone before they could think of a thoroughly satisfactory reply. Then they all started grumbling at each other:

"How *stupid* you are! Why didn't you tell him—"

"Well, why didn't *you* say—"

“You might have reminded him—” and so on in the usual way; but, of course, it was then much too late, as is always the case.

It all seemed too good to be true. Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting – everything happy, and progressive, and occupied. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering “Whitewash!” he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only idle dog among all these busy citizens. After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working.

He thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before – this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver – glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spellbound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea.

As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye, and dreamily he fell to considering what a nice snug dwelling place it would make for an animal with few wants and fond of a bijou riverside residence, above flood level and remote from noise and dust. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star. But it could hardly be a star in such an unlikely situation, and it was too glittering and small for a glow-worm. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture.

A brown little face, with whiskers.

A grave round face, with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice.

Small neat ears and thick silky hair.

It was the Water Rat!

Then the two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

"Hullo, Mole!" said the Water Rat.

"Hullo, Rat!" said the Mole.

"Would you like to come over?" enquired the Rat presently.

"Oh, it's all very well to *talk*," said the Mole, rather pettishly, he being new to a river and riverside life and its ways.

The Rat said nothing, but stopped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it, then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Mole had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just

the size for two animals; and the Mole's whole heart went out to it at once, even though he did not yet fully understand its uses.

The Rat sculled smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his forepaw as the Mole stepped gingerly down. "Lean on that!" he said. "Now then, step lively!" and the Mole, to his surprise and rapture, found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.

"This has been a wonderful day!" said he, as the Rat shoved off and took to the sculls again. "Do you know, I've never been in a boat before in all my life."

"What?" cried the Rat, open-mouthed. "Never been in a – you never – well, I – what have you been doing, then?"

"Is it so nice as all that?" asked the Mole shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it, as he leant back in his seat and surveyed the cushions, the oars, the rowlocks and all the fascinating fittings, and felt the boat sway lightly under him.

"Nice? It's the *only* thing," said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forwards for his stroke. "Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing* – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing," he went on dreamily. "Messing – about – in – boats; messing—"

"Look ahead, Rat!" cried the Mole suddenly.

It was too late. The boat struck the bank full tilt. The dreamer, the joyous oarsman, lay on his back at the bottom of the boat, his heels in the air.

"—about in boats – or *with* boats," the Rat went on composedly, picking himself up with a pleasant laugh. "In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter.

Nothing seems really to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular – and when you've done it, there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not. Look here! If you've really nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?"

The Mole wagged his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh of full contentment, and leant back blissfully into the soft cushions. "*What* a day I'm having!" he said. "Let us start at once!"

"Hold hard a minute, then!" said the Rat. He looped the painter through a ring in his landing stage, climbed up into his hole above, and after a short interval reappeared, staggering under a fat, wicker luncheon basket.

"Shove that under your feet," he observed to the Mole, as he passed it down into the boat. Then he untied the painter and took the sculls again.

"What's inside it?" asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.

"There's cold chicken inside it," replied the Rat briefly; "coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkins-saladFrenchrollscresssandwichespottedmeatgingerbeer-lemonadesodawater—"

"Oh stop, stop," cried the Mole, in ecstasies. "This is too much!"

"Do you really think so?" enquired the Rat seriously. "It's only what I always take on these little excursions

– and the other animals are always telling me that I’m a mean beast and cut it *very* fine!”

The Mole never heard a word he was saying. Absorbed in the new life he was entering upon, intoxicated with the sparkle, the ripple, the scents and the sounds and the sunlight, he trailed a paw in the water and dreamt long waking dreams. The Water Rat, like the good little fellow he was, sculled steadily on and forbore to disturb him.

“I like your clothes awfully, old chap,” he remarked, after some half an hour or so had passed. “I’m going to get a black velvet smoking suit myself some day, as soon as I can afford it.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the Mole, pulling himself together with an effort. “You must think me very rude, but all this is so new to me. So – this – is – a – river!”

“*The* river,” corrected the Rat.

“And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!”

“By it and with it and on it and in it,” said the Rat. “It’s brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It’s my world, and I don’t want any other. What it hasn’t got is not worth having, and what it doesn’t know is not worth knowing. Lord! The times we’ve had together! Whether in winter or summer, spring or autumn, it’s always got its fun and its excitements. When the floods are on in February, and my cellars and basement are brimming with drink that’s no good to me, and the brown water runs by my best bedroom window; or again when it all drops away and shows patches of mud that smell like plum cake, and the rushes and weed clog the channels, and I can potter about dry-shod over most

of the bed of it and find fresh food to eat, and things careless people have dropped out of boats!”

“But isn’t it a bit dull at times?” the Mole ventured to ask. “Just you and the river, and no one else to pass a word with?”

“No one else to – well, I mustn’t be hard on you,” said the Rat, with forbearance. “You’re new to it, and of course you don’t know. The bank is so crowded nowadays that many people are moving away altogether. Oh no, it isn’t what it used to be, at all. Otters, kingfishers, dabchicks, moorhens – all of them about all day long and always wanting you to *do* something – as if a fellow had no business of his own to attend to!”

“What lies over *there*?” asked the Mole, waving a paw towards a background of woodland that darkly framed the water meadows on one side of the river.

“That? Oh, that’s just the Wild Wood,” said the Rat shortly. “We don’t go there very much, we Riverbankers.”

“Aren’t they – aren’t they very *nice* people in there?” said the Mole, a trifle nervously.

“W-e-ll,” replied the Rat, “let me see. The squirrels are all right. *And* the rabbits – some of ’em, but rabbits are a mixed lot. And then there’s Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it – wouldn’t live anywhere else, either, if you paid him to do it. Dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with *him*. They’d better not,” he added significantly.

“Why, who *should* interfere with him?” asked the Mole.

“Well, of course – there – are others,” explained the Rat in a hesitating sort of way. “Weasels – and stoats – and foxes – and so on. They’re all right in a

way – I’m very good friends with them – pass the time of day when we meet, and all that – but they break out sometimes, there’s no denying it, and then – well, you can’t really trust them, and that’s the fact.”

The Mole knew well that it is quite against animal etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, or even to allude to it, so he dropped the subject.

“And beyond the Wild Wood again?” he asked. “Where it’s all blue and dim, and one sees what may be hills, or perhaps they mayn’t, and something like the smoke of towns – or is it only cloud drift?”

“Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World,” said the Rat. “And that’s something that doesn’t matter, either to you or me. I’ve never been there, and I’m never going, nor you either, if you’ve got any sense at all. Don’t ever refer to it again, please. Now then! Here’s our backwater at last, where we’re going to lunch.”

Leaving the main stream, they now passed into what seemed at first sight like a little landlocked lake. Green turf sloped down to either edge; brown, snaky tree roots gleamed below the surface of the quiet water, while ahead of them the silvery shoulder and foamy tumble of a weir, arm in arm with a restless dripping mill wheel, that held up in its turn a grey-gabled mill house, filled the air with a soothing murmur of sound, dull and smothery, yet with little clear voices speaking up cheerfully out of it at intervals. It was so very beautiful that the Mole could only hold up both forepaws and gasp, “Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!”

The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank, made her fast, helped the still awkward Mole safely ashore, and swung out the luncheon basket. The Mole begged

as a favour to be allowed to unpack it all by himself, and the Rat was very pleased to indulge him, and to sprawl at full length on the grass and rest, while his excited friend shook out the tablecloth and spread it, took out all the mysterious packets one by one and arranged their contents in due order, still gasping, "Oh my! Oh my!" at each fresh revelation.

When all was ready, the Rat said, "Now, pitch in, old fellow!" and the Mole was indeed very glad to obey, for he had started his spring-cleaning at a very early hour that morning, as people *will* do, and had not paused for bite or sup, and he had been through a very great deal since that distant time which now seemed so many days ago.

"What are you looking at?" said the Rat presently, when the edge of their hunger was somewhat dulled, and the Mole's eyes were able to wander off the tablecloth a little.

"I am looking," said the Mole, "at a streak of bubbles that I see travelling along the surface of the water. That is a thing that strikes me as funny."

"Bubbles? Oho!" said the Rat, and chirruped cheerily in an inviting sort of way.

A broad, glistening muzzle showed itself above the edge of the bank, and the Otter hauled himself out and shook the water from his coat.

"Greedy beggars!" he observed, making for the provender. "Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?"

"This was an impromptu affair," explained the Rat. "By the way – my friend, Mr Mole."

"Proud, I'm sure," said the Otter, and the two animals were friends forthwith.

“Such a rumpus everywhere!” continued the Otter. “All the world seems out on the river today. I came up this backwater to try and get a moment’s peace, and then stumble upon you fellows! At least – I beg pardon – I don’t exactly mean that, you know.”

There was a rustle behind them, proceeding from a hedge wherein last year’s leaves still clung thick, and a stripy head, with high shoulders behind it, peered forth on them.

“Come on, old Badger!” shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forwards a pace or two, then grunted: “H’m! Company,” and turned his back and disappeared from view.

“That’s *just* the sort of fellow he is!” observed the disappointed Rat. “Simply hates Society! Now we shan’t see any more of him today. Well, tell us *who’s* out on the river?”

“Toad’s out, for one,” replied the Otter. “In his brand-new wager boat – new togs, new everything!”

The two animals looked at each other and laughed.

“Once, it was nothing but sailing,” said the Rat. “Then he tired of that and took to punting. Nothing would please him but to punt all day and every day, and a nice mess he made of it. Last year it was houseboating, and we all had to go and stay with him in his houseboat, and pretend we liked it. He was going to spend the rest of his life in a houseboat. It’s all the same, whatever he takes up: he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh.”

“Such a good fellow, too,” remarked the Otter reflectively. “But no stability – especially in a boat!”

From where they sat, they could get a glimpse of the main stream across the island that separated

them, and just then a wicker boat flashed into view, the rower – a short, stout figure – splashing badly and rolling a good deal, but working his hardest. The Rat stood up and hailed him, but Toad – for it was he – shook his head and settled sternly to his work.

“He’ll be out of the boat in a minute if he rolls like that,” said the Rat, sitting down again.

“Of course he will,” chuckled the Otter. “Did I ever tell you that good story about Toad and the lock keeper? It happened this way. Toad...”

An errant Mayfly swerved unsteadily athwart the current in the intoxicated fashion affected by young bloods of mayflies seeing life. A swirl of water and a “cloop!” and the Mayfly was visible no more.

Neither was the Otter.

The Mole looked down. The voice was still in his ears, but the turf whereon he had sprawled was clearly vacant. Not an Otter to be seen, as far as the distant horizon.

But again there was a streak of bubbles on the surface of the river.

The Rat hummed a tune, and the Mole recollected that animal etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one’s friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever.

“Well, well,” said the Rat, “I suppose we ought to be moving. I wonder which of us had better pack the luncheon basket?” He did not speak as if he was frantically eager for the treat.

“Oh, please let me,” said the Mole. So, of course, the Rat let him.

Packing the basket was not quite such pleasant work as unpacking the basket. It never is. But the Mole was bent on enjoying everything, and although just when he had got the basket packed and strapped up tightly he saw a plate staring up at him from the grass, and when the job had been done again the Rat pointed out a fork which anybody ought to have seen, and last of all, behold: the mustard pot, which he had been sitting on without knowing it – still, somehow, the thing got finished at last, without much loss of temper.

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat sculled gently homewards in a dreamy mood, murmuring poetry things over to himself, and not paying much attention to Mole. But the Mole was very full of lunch, and self-satisfaction and pride, and already quite at home in a boat (so he thought) and was getting a bit restless, besides, and presently he said: “Ratty! Please – *I* want to row now!”

The Rat shook his head with a smile. “Not yet, my young friend,” he said. “Wait till you’ve had a few lessons. It’s not so easy as it looks.”

The Mole was quiet for a minute or two. But he began to feel more and more jealous of Rat, sculling so strongly and so easily along, and his pride began to whisper that he could do it every bit as well. He jumped up and seized the sculls – so suddenly that the Rat, who was gazing out over the water and saying more poetry things to himself, was taken by surprise, and fell backwards off his seat with his legs in the air for the second time, while the triumphant Mole took his place and grabbed the sculls with entire confidence.

“Stop it, you *silly* ass!” cried the Rat, from the bottom of the boat. “You can’t do it! You’ll have us over!”

The Mole flung his sculls back with a flourish, and made a great dig at the water. He missed the surface altogether, his legs flew up above his head, and he found himself lying on the top of the prostrate Rat. Greatly alarmed, he made a grab at the side of the boat, and the next moment – sploosh!

Over went the boat, and he found himself struggling in the river.

Oh my, how cold the water was, and oh, how *very* wet it felt. How it sang in his ears as he went down, down, down! How bright and welcome the sun looked as he rose to the surface coughing and spluttering! How black was his despair when he felt himself sinking again! Then a firm paw gripped him by the back of his neck. It was the Rat, and he was evidently laughing – the Mole could *feel* him laughing, right down his arm and through his paw, and so into his – the Mole’s – neck.

The Rat got hold of a scull and shoved it under the Mole’s arm; then he did the same by the other side of him and, swimming behind, propelled the helpless animal to shore, hauled him out, and set him down on the bank: a squashy, pulpy lump of misery.

When the Rat had rubbed him down a bit, and wrung some of the wet out of him, he said, “Now then, old fellow! Trot up and down the towing path as hard as you can, till you’re warm and dry again, while I dive for the luncheon basket.”

So the dismal Mole, wet without and ashamed within, trotted about till he was fairly dry, while the Rat plunged into the water again, recovered the boat, righted her and

made her fast, fetched his floating property to shore by degrees, and finally dived successfully for the luncheon basket and struggled to land with it.

When all was ready for a start once more, the Mole, limp and dejected, took his seat in the stern of the boat, and as they set off, he said in a low voice, broken with emotion, "Ratty, my generous friend! I am very sorry indeed for my foolish and ungrateful conduct. My heart quite fails me when I think how I might have lost that beautiful luncheon basket. Indeed, I have been a complete ass, and I know it. Will you overlook it this once and forgive me, and let things go on as before?"

"That's all right, bless you!" responded the Rat cheerily. "What's a little wet to a Water Rat? I'm more in the water than out of it most days. Don't you think any more about it – and, look here! I really think you had better come and stop with me for a little time. It's very plain and rough, you know – not like Toad's house at all – but you haven't seen that yet; still, I can make you comfortable. And I'll teach you to row, and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us."

The Mole was so touched by his kind manner of speaking that he could find no voice to answer him, and he had to brush away a tear or two with the back of his paw. But the Rat kindly looked in another direction, and presently the Mole's spirits revived again, and he was even able to give some straight back talk to a couple of moorhens who were sniggering to each other about his bedraggled appearance.

When they got home, the Rat made a bright fire in the parlour, and planted the Mole in an armchair in front of it, having fetched down a dressing gown and slippers

for him, and told him river stories till supper time. Very thrilling stories they were, too, to an earth-dwelling animal like Mole. Stories about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping pike, and steamers that flung hard bottles – at least bottles were certainly flung, and *from* steamers, so presumably *by* them – and about herons, and how particular they were whom they spoke to, and about adventures down drains, and night-fishings with Otter, or excursions far afield with Badger. Supper was a most cheerful meal, but very shortly afterwards a terribly sleepy Mole had to be escorted upstairs by his considerate host, to the best bedroom, where he soon laid his head on his pillow in great peace and contentment, knowing that his new-found friend, the river, was lapping the sill of his window.

This day was only the first of many similar ones for the emancipated Mole, each of them longer and fuller of interest as the ripening summer moved onward. He learnt to swim and to row, and entered into the joy of running water; and with his ear to the reed stems, he caught, at intervals, something of what the wind went whispering so constantly among them.



2 The Open Road

“RATTY,” SAID THE MOLE SUDDENLY, one bright summer morning, “if you please, I want to ask you a favour.”

The Rat was sitting on the riverbank, singing a little song. He had just composed it himself, so he was very taken up with it, and would not pay proper attention to Mole or anything else. Since early morning he had been swimming in the river, in company with his friends the ducks. And when the ducks stood on their heads suddenly, as ducks will, he would dive down and tickle their necks, just under where their chins would be if ducks had chins, till they were forced to come to the surface

again in a hurry, spluttering and angry and shaking their feathers at him, for it is impossible to say quite *all* you feel when your head is underwater. At last they implored him to go away and attend to his own affairs and leave them to mind theirs. So the Rat went away, and sat on the riverbank in the sun, and made up a song about them, which he called:

DUCKS' DITTY

All along the backwater,
Through the rushes tall,
Ducks are a-dabbling,
Up tails all!

Ducks' tails, drakes' tails,
Yellow feet a-quiver,
Yellow bills all out of sight
Busy in the river!

Slushy green undergrowth
Where the roach swim –
Here we keep our larder,
Cool and full and dim.

Every one for what he likes!
We like to be
Heads down, tails up,
Dabbling free!

High in the blue above
 Swifts whirl and call –
 We are down a-dabbling,
 Up tails all!

“I don’t know that I think so *very* much of that little song, Rat,” observed the Mole cautiously. He was no poet himself and didn’t care who knew it, and he had a candid nature.

“Nor don’t the ducks neither,” replied the Rat cheerfully. “They say, ‘*Why* can’t fellows be allowed to do what they like *when* they like and *as* they like, instead of other fellows sitting on banks and watching them all the time and making remarks and poetry and things about them? What *nonsense* it all is!’ That’s what the ducks say.”

“So it is, so it is,” said the Mole, with great heartiness.

“No, it isn’t!” cried the Rat indignantly.

“Well then, it isn’t, it isn’t,” replied the Mole soothingly.

“But 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 and dismissing poetry from his mind for the day. “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 sculls, while the Rat settled himself comfortably in the stern.

“He is indeed the best of animals,” replied Rat. “So simple, so good-natured and so affectionate. Perhaps he’s not very clever – we can’t all be geniuses – 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 noticeboard says ‘Private. No landing allowed’, leads to his boathouse, where we’ll leave the boat. The stables are over there to the right. That’s the banqueting hall you’re looking at now – very old, that is. 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 the Mole shipped his sculls as they passed into the shadow of a large boathouse. Here they saw many handsome boats, slung from the cross-beams or hauled up on a slip, but none in the water, and the place had an unused and a deserted air.

The Rat looked around him. “I understand,” said he. “Boating is played out. He’s tired of it, and done with it. I wonder what new fad he has taken up now? Come along and let’s look him up. We shall hear all about it quite soon enough.”

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, with a preoccupied expression of face, 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. I want you badly – both of you. Now what will you take? Come inside and have something! 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 and made some civil remark about Toad’s “delightful residence”.

“Finest house on the whole river,” cried Toad boisterously. “Or anywhere else, for that matter,” he could not help adding.

Here the Rat nudged the Mole. Unfortunately, the Toad saw him do it, and turned very red. There was a moment’s painful silence. Then Toad burst out laughing. “All right, Ratty,” he said. “It’s only my way, you know. And it’s not such a very bad house, is it? You know you rather like it yourself. Now, look here. Let’s be sensible. You are the very animals I wanted. You’ve got to help me. It’s most important!”

“It’s about your rowing, I suppose,” said the Rat, with an innocent air. “You’re getting on fairly well, though you splash a good bit still. With a great deal of patience, and any quantity of coaching, you may—”

“Oh, pooh! Boating!” interrupted the Toad, in great disgust. “Silly boyish amusement. I’ve given that up *long* ago. Sheer waste of time, that’s what it is. It makes

me downright sorry to see you fellows, who ought to know better, spending all your energies in that aimless manner. No, I've discovered the real thing, the only genuine occupation for a lifetime. I propose to devote the remainder of mine to it, and can only regret the wasted years that lie behind me, squandered in trivialities. Come with me, dear Ratty, and your amiable friend also, if he will be so very good, just as far as the stable yard, and you shall see what you shall see!"

He led the way to the stable-yard accordingly – the Rat following with a most mistrustful expression – and there, drawn out of the coach house into the open, they saw a gypsy 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. "There's real life for you, embodied in that little cart. 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! Travel, change, interest, excitement! The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing! And mind, this is the very finest cart of its sort that was ever built, without any exception. Come inside and look at the arrangements. Planned 'em all myself, I did!"

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 birdcage

with a bird in it, and pots, pans, jugs and kettles of every size and variety.

“All complete!” said the Toad triumphantly, pulling open a locker. “You see – biscuits, potted lobster, sardines – everything you can possibly want. Soda water here, baccy there, letter paper, bacon, jam, cards and dominoes. You’ll find,” he continued, as they descended the steps again, “you’ll find that nothing whatever has been forgotten, when we make our start this afternoon.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the Rat slowly, as he chewed a straw, “but did I overhear you say something about ‘we’, and ‘start’ and ‘this afternoon’?”

“Now, you dear, good old Ratty,” said Toad imploringly, “don’t begin talking in that stiff and sniffy sort of way, because you know you’ve got to come. I can’t possibly manage without you, so please consider it settled, and don’t argue – it’s the one thing I can’t stand. You surely don’t mean to stick to your dull, fusty old river all your life, and just live in a hole in a bank, and *boat*? 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 doggedly. “I’m not coming, and that’s flat. And I *am* going to stick to my old river, *and* live in a hole, *and* boat, as I’ve always done. And what’s more, Mole’s going to stick to me and do as I do, aren’t you, Mole?”

“Of course I am,” said the Mole loyally. “I’ll always stick to you, Rat, and what you say is to be – has got to be. All the same, it sounds as if it might have been – well, rather fun, you know!” he added wistfully. Poor Mole! The Life Adventurous was so new a thing to

him and so thrilling – and this fresh aspect of it was so tempting – and he had fallen in love at first sight with the canary-coloured cart and all its little fitments.

The Rat saw what was passing in his mind, and wavered. He hated disappointing people, and he was fond of the Mole, and would do almost anything to oblige him. Toad was watching both of them closely.

“Come along in and have some lunch,” he said diplomatically, “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. ‘Live for others!’ That’s my motto in life.”

During luncheon – which was excellent, of course, as everything at Toad Hall always was – the Toad simply let himself go. Disregarding the Rat, he proceeded to play upon the inexperienced Mole as on a harp. Naturally a voluble animal, and always mastered by his imagination, he painted the prospects of the trip and 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 – though still unconvinced in his mind – allowed his good nature to override his personal objections. He could not bear to disappoint his two friends, who were already deep in schemes and anticipations, planning out each day’s separate occupation 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, without having been consulted, and to his own extreme annoyance,

had been told off by Toad for the dustiest job in this dusty expedition. He frankly preferred the paddock, and took a deal of catching. Meantime, Toad packed the lockers still tighter with necessaries, and hung nosebags, nets of onions, bundles of hay, and baskets from the bottom of the cart. At last the horse was caught and harnessed, and they set off, all talking at once, each animal either trudging by the side of the cart or sitting on the shaft, as the humour took him. It was a golden afternoon. The smell of the dust they kicked up was rich and satisfying; out of thick orchards on either side of the road, 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 forepaws, and said, "Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!"

Late in the evening, tired and happy and miles from home, they drew up on a remote common far from habitations, turned the horse loose to graze, and ate their simple supper sitting on the grass by the side of the cart. Toad talked big about all he was going to do in the days to come, while stars grew fuller and larger all around them, and a yellow moon, appearing suddenly and silently from nowhere in particular, came to keep them company and listen to their talk. At last, they turned in to their little bunks in the cart, and Toad, kicking out his legs, sleepily said, "Well, good night, you fellows! This is the real life for a gentleman! Talk about your old river!"

"I *don't* talk about my river," replied the patient Rat. "You know I don't, Toad. But I think about it,"

he added pathetically, in a lower tone: "I think about it – all the time!"

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 tomorrow morning, quite early – *very* early – 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!"

The end was indeed nearer than even the Rat suspected.

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 the Mole and Rat turned to, quietly and manfully, and while the Rat saw to the horse, and lit a fire, and cleaned last night's cups and platters 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, fresh and gay, remarking what a pleasant, easy life it was they were all leading now, after the cares and worries and fatigues of housekeeping at home.

They had a pleasant ramble that day over grassy downs and along narrow by-lanes, and camped, as before, on a common – only, this time, the two guests took care that Toad should do his fair share of work.

In consequence, when the time came for starting next morning, Toad was by no means so rapturous about the simplicity of the primitive life, and indeed attempted to resume his place in his bunk, whence he was hauled by force. Their way lay, as before, across country by narrow lanes, and it was not till the afternoon that they came out on the high road – their first high road – and there disaster, fleet and unforeseen, sprang out on them – disaster momentous indeed to their expedition, but simply overwhelming in its effect on the after-career of Toad.

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, and nobody considered him in the least; the Toad and the Water Rat walking behind the cart talking together – at least, Toad was talking, and Rat was saying at intervals, “Yes, precisely – and what did *you* say to *him*?” – and thinking all the time of something very different, 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 of the dust a faint “Poop-poop!” wailed like an uneasy animal in pain. Hardly regarding it, they turned to resume their conversation, when in an instant (as it seemed) the peaceful scene was changed, and with a blast of wind and a whirl of sound that made them jump for the nearest ditch, it was on them! The “poop-poop” rang with a brazen shout in their ears, they had a moment's glimpse of an interior of glittering plate glass and rich morocco, and the magnificent

motor car, immense, breath-snatching, passionate, with its pilot tense and hugging his wheel, possessed all earth and air for the fraction of a second, flung an enveloping cloud of dust that blinded and enwrapped them utterly, and then dwindled to a speck in the far distance, changed back into a droning bee once more.

The old grey horse, dreaming, as he plodded along, of his quiet paddock, in a new raw situation such as this simply abandoned himself to his natural emotions. Rearing, plunging, backing steadily, in spite of all the Mole's efforts at his head, and all the Mole's lively language directed at his better feelings, he drove the cart backwards towards the deep ditch at the side of the road. It wavered an instant – then there was a heart-rending crash, and the canary-coloured cart, their pride and their joy, lay on its side in the ditch: an irredeemable wreck.

The Rat danced up and down in the road, simply transported with passion. "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! I'll take you through all the courts!" His homesickness had quite slipped away from him, and for the moment he was the skipper of the canary-coloured vessel, driven on a shoal by the reckless jockeying of rival mariners, and he was trying to recollect all the fine and biting things he used to say to masters of steam launches when their wash, as they drove too near the bank, used to flood his parlour carpet at home.

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 motor

car. He breathed short, his face wore a placid, satisfied expression, and at intervals he faintly murmured “Poop-poop!”

The Mole was busy trying to quiet the horse, which he succeeded in doing after a time. Then he went to look at the cart, on its side in the ditch. It was indeed a sorry sight. Panels and windows smashed, axles hopelessly bent, one wheel off, sardine tins scattered over the wide world, and the bird in the birdcage sobbing pitifully and calling to be let out.

The Rat came to help him, but their united efforts were not sufficient to right the cart. “Hi! Toad!” they cried. “Come and bear a hand, can’t you!”

The Toad never answered a word, or budged from his seat in the road, so they went to see what was the matter with him. They found him in a sort of trance, a happy smile on his face, his eyes still fixed on the dusty wake of their destroyer. At intervals he was still heard to murmur “Poop-poop!”

The Rat shook him by the shoulder. “Are you coming to help us, Toad?” he demanded sternly.

“Glorious, stirring sight!” murmured Toad, never offering to move. “The poetry of motion! The *real* way to travel! The *only* way to travel! Here today – in next week tomorrow! Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped – always somebody else’s horizon! Oh bliss! Oh poop-poop! Oh my! Oh my!”

“Oh *stop* being an ass, Toad!” cried the Mole despairingly.

“And to think I never *knew!*” went on the Toad in a dreamy monotone. “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 realize! Oh, what a flowery track lies spread before me, henceforth! What dust clouds shall spring up behind me as I speed on my reckless way! What carts I shall fling carelessly into the ditch in the wake of my magnificent onset! Horrid little carts – common carts – canary-coloured carts!”

“What are we to do with him?” asked the Mole of the Water Rat.

“Nothing at all,” replied the Rat firmly. “Because there is really nothing to be done. You see, I know him from of old. He is now possessed. 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, like an animal walking in a happy dream, quite useless for all practical purposes. Never mind him. Let’s go and see what there is to be done about the cart.”

A careful inspection showed them that, even if they succeeded in righting it by themselves, 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, carrying the birdcage and its hysterical occupant in the other hand. “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, in the distracted state he’s in! It’s not safe. Supposing another Thing were to come along?”

“Oh, *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, still breathing short and staring into vacancy.

“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 motor car and who it belongs to, and lodge a complaint against it. And then you’ll have to go to a blacksmith’s or a wheelwright’s and arrange for the cart to be fetched and mended and put to rights. It’ll take time, but it’s not quite a hopeless smash. Meanwhile, the Mole and I will go to an inn and find comfortable rooms where we can stay till the cart’s ready, and till your nerves have recovered from their shock.”

“Police station! Complaint!” murmured Toad dreamily. “Me *complain* of that beautiful – that heavenly vision that has been vouchsafed me! *Mend* the *cart*! I’ve done with carts for ever. I never want to see the cart, or to hear of it again. Oh Ratty! You can’t think how obliged I am to you for consenting to come on this trip! I wouldn’t have gone without you, and then I might never have seen that – that swan, that sunbeam, that thunderbolt! I might never have heard that entrancing sound, or smelt that bewitching smell! I owe it all to you, my best of friends!”

The Rat turned from him in despair. “You see what it is?” he said to the Mole, addressing him across Toad’s head. “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 Riverbank tonight. And if ever you catch me going a-pleasuring with this provoking animal again!" He snorted, and, during the rest of that weary trudge, addressed his remarks exclusively to Mole.

On reaching the town, they went straight to the station and deposited Toad in the second-class waiting room, giving a porter two pence to keep a strict eye on him. They then left the horse at an inn stable, and gave what directions they could about the cart and its contents. Eventually, a slow train having landed them at a station not very far from Toad Hall, they escorted the spellbound, sleepwalking 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 boathouse, sculled 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, who had been looking up his friends and gossiping, came strolling along to find him. "Heard the news?" he said. "There's nothing else being talked about, all along the riverbank. Toad went up to town by an early train this morning. And he has ordered a large and very expensive motor car."