



Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

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.

He suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said 'Bother!' and 'O blow!' and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat.

He made for the steep little tunnel which answered in his case to the gravelled drive owned by animals whose residences are nearer to the sun and air. So he scraped and scratched and scrabbled and scrooged and then he scrooged again and scrabbled 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!' 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.

Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting.

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. 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 and when tired at last, he sat on the bank and looked across the river. Then a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye.

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. 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.

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!

'Hullo, Mole!' said the Water Rat.

'Hullo, Rat!' said the Mole.

The Rat stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it; then lightly stepped into a little boat. 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 rowed smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his forepaw as the Mole stepped down. To his surprise he found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.

'This has been a wonderful day!' he said, as the Rat shoved off and took to the oars 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.

'Nice? It's the ONLY thing,' said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forward for his stroke. 'Believe me, my young friend, there is NOTHING - absolute 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. Rat 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 picking himself up with a pleasant laugh. 'In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter. Look here! If you've really nothing else on this morning, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?'

The Mole waggled his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh and leaned 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 climbed up into his hole above, and after a short interval reappeared staggering under a fat, wicker lunch basket. 'Shove that under your feet,' he observed to the Mole.

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

'There's cold chicken inside it,' replied the Rat; 'coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkins-saladfrenchrollscresssandwichespottedmeat-gingerbeerlemonadesodawater----'

'O stop, stop,' cried the Mole: 'This is too much!'

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

The Mole never heard a word he was saying. He trailed a paw in the water and dreamed long waking dreams. The Water Rat, like the good little fellow he was, rowed steadily on.

'You must think me very rude; but this is all so new to me. So - this - is - a - River!' said the Mole, pulling himself together with an effort.

'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 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!'

'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? O, that's just the Wild Wood,' said the Rat shortly. 'We don't go there very much, we river-bankers.'

'Aren't they - very NICE people in there?' asked the Mole.

'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, Dear old Badger! Of course - there - are others,' explained the Rat in a hesitating sort of way. 'Weasels - and stoats - and foxes - well, you can't really trust them, and that's the fact.'

'And beyond the Wild Wood again?' asked the Mole.

'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.'

Leaving the main stream, they now passed into what seemed at first sight like a little land-locked lake. The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank, made her fast, helped the still awkward Mole safely ashore, and swung out the lunch basket.

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.

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. 'Such a rumpus everywhere!' he observed. 'All the world seems out on the river to-day. I came up this backwater to try and get a moment's peace, and then stumble upon you fellows!'

There was a rustle from a hedge behind them, and a stripey head, with high shoulders behind it, peered forth on them.

'Come on, old Badger!' shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forward 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 boat; new togs, new everything!'

The two animals looked at each other and laughed.

'Once, it was nothing but sailing,' said the Rat, 'It's all the same, whatever he takes up; he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh.'

From where they sat they could get a glimpse of the main stream across the island that sepa-

rated them; just then a 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. 'Well, well, I suppose we ought to be moving'.

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat rowed gently homewards in a dreamy mood. 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 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. He jumped up and seized the oars, so suddenly, that the Rat 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.

'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 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 top of the 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.

O my, how cold the water was, and O, how VERY wet it felt. 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.

The Rat got hold of an oar and shoved it under the Mole's arm; then he did the same by the other side of him and, hauled him out, and set him down on the bank, a squashy, pulpy lump of misery.

'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 lunch basket.'

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. I have been a complete ass. 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. '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. 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.

When they got home, the Rat made a bright fire in the parlour, and planted the Mole in an arm-chair in front of it, having fetched down a dressing-gown and slippers for him, and told him river stories till supper-time.

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.