

The Wind in the Willows

by Kenneth Grahame

Adapted for the stage by Michael Ranieri

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The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame.

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Casting Note: Most roles allow for flexible casting of either male or female actors. Please adjust pronouns, honorifics, etc., in the dialogue and stage directions, to reflect the gender chosen for the character.

RABBIT
HEDGEHOG
DUCK
MOLE
ENSEMBLE*
RAT
OTTER
MR. TOAD
HORSE
WEASELS**
FIELD MICE CAROLERS†
BADGER
POLICE CONSTABLE
JUDGE
OTHER POLICE‡
JAILER’S DAUGHTER
CHIEF WEASEL

*Ensemble consists of various riverbank and woodland creatures (animals or nymphs) who perform the songs. In the No Songs Version of the play the Ensemble is cut entirely.

**As many Weasels as seem appropriate for the Wild Wood, Courtroom, and Toad Hall scenes.

†Field Mice appear only in Act 1, Scene 6 to perform the “Carol” song and are omitted in the No Songs Version of the play.

‡Other Police officers (4 or 5) that join the Police Constable in the Courtroom and Chase for Toad scenes.

SETTING

The English countryside, down by the willows, along the riverbank in the 1900s.

(“Down by the willows” typically refers to a location near willow trees, often by a riverbank or other body of water, where these trees are commonly found. It evokes a sense of peacefulness and connection with nature, particularly associated with the gentle rustling of willow leaves in the wind.)

ACT ONE

- SCENE 1. Down by the Willows near the Riverbank (spring)
- SCENE 2. Rat’s Home by the Riverbank (summer)
- SCENE 3. Toad Hall and the Open Road (summer)
- SCENE 4. The Open Road and Caravan Collision (summer)
- SCENE 5. The Wild Wood (winter)
- SCENE 6. Badger’s Home (winter)

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1. Toad Hall (spring)
- SCENE 2. Toad’s Bedroom Weeks Later (spring)
- SCENE 3. Toad in a Car on the Road (spring)
- SCENE 4. Courtroom (spring)
- SCENE 5. Castle Dungeon (summer)
- SCENE 6. Town Outside Castle Dungeon (summer)
- SCENE 7. Rat’s Home by the Riverbank (summer)
- SCENE 8. Dining Room in Toad Hall (summer)
- SCENE 9. Dining Room After the Battle (summer)

SONGS

(The following songs are offered as suggestions for amateur productions and may be included, omitted, or replaced. The script includes both a Songs Version and a No Songs Version. “Carol (of the Field Mice),” drawn from the original story, has been frequently set to music, and other versions may be substituted for the selection provided here.

“Toad’s Conceited Song,” also from the novel, can be performed either as a recited poem or sung rhythmically to improvised vocal or instrumental accompaniment.)

1. “Riversong,” by Andy Beck
2. “Together, Wherever We Go,” from *Gypsy*, by Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne
3. “Carol (of the Field Mice),” from *Toadlibet*, music by Craig Carnahan
4. “Toad’s Conceited Song” (from the original story)
5. “Homeward Bound,” by Marta Keen

SOUND EFFECTS

Spring and Nature Sounds
Nature and River Sounds
Horse and Cart
Horse and Cart Crash
Horse Whinny
Old-fashioned Motorcar Driving
Wild Wood Night Sounds
Scary Wild Wood Sounds
Wind and Snowstorm Sounds
Police Car Siren

Car Crash
Prison Break Siren/Alarm
Dungeon/Prison Door Slamming Shut
Silent Movie Chase Music
(optional) Musical Sting (Heroes burst into Toad Hall to fight the Weasels)
Fight Music
Knockout Punch and Tweeting Birds
(as Chief Weasel is knocked out)

PROP LIST

Bouquet of Flowers (Rabbit)
Wooden Pail and Brush (Mole)
Fishing Pole (Rat)
Picnic Basket (Rat)
Checked Tablecloth (Rat)
Folding Roadmap (Toad)
Coconut Halves (Horse)
Bushes or Branches (Wild Wood Weasels)
Snowflakes (Narrators)
Lantern (Rat)
(optional) Police Car Steering Wheel
Police Flashing Red Light
Judge's Gavel
Chains and Manacles (Toad)

Jailer's Daughter's Basket of Clothes
Police Billy Clubs
Police Whistle (Constable)
Green Grass-like Blanket
4 Battle Sticks
(optional) Toasting Glasses (Weasels)
(optional) Signs (Weasels): "Happy Birthday" and/or "Happy Birthday Chief Weasel" and/or "Weasel Birthday Celebration" etc. on one side and "Fight Words" on the other side (BAM!, KAPOW!, KRUNCH!, SOCK!, THWACK!, WHAMM!!)

SET PIECES

Long Hanging Willow Vines
(optional) Wooden Stool (Mole)
River Water Long Blue Fabric Sheets
3 Lawn-Chairs (Toad Hall)
Gypsy Caravan
Wood Chairs (Rat's/Badger's Home)
(optional) Fireplace (Badger's Home)
Toad's Bed

Old Fashioned Motorcar Front: with a Steering Wheel, Licence Plate, and working Headlights
Judge's Bench
Road Sign: "Town Square" (centre), "Castle Dungeon" (pointing right), "Toad Hall" (pointing left)
Dining Room Table (Toad Hall)

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1. Down by the Willows near the Riverbank (spring)

(At the opening, in the black, some sounds of spring and nature are heard. The downstage lights come up as the RABBIT enters. She carries a bouquet of flowers placing flowers on the ground as she walks along, when suddenly she notices the audience. Note: the NARRATORS: RABBIT, HEDGEHOG and DUCK break the fourth wall, speaking directly to the audience.)

RABBIT. *(To audience.)* Oh, hullo. What brings you to The Willows this fine day? *(Pausing for a response which she pretends to hear.)* Ah, looking for Mole End. Well, you've found it. Are you here for the homecoming?

(HEDGEHOG enters.)

HEDGEHOG. Here now, Rabbit, who are you talking to?

RABBIT. Hedgehog, old chap, these people have come to celebrate the return of the Mole.

HEDGEHOG. That's smashing. So, you've heard the tale of the famous Mole? *(Pause.)* No?

RABBIT. My, my, what about the adventures of Mr. Toad? *(Pause.)* No Toad? No Mole?

(DUCK enters.)

DUCK. Well, I can tell them all about it. It was the gossip on the Riverbank for many seasons.

HEDGEHOG. Hullo, Ducky, how's the water?

DUCK. Don't Ducky me, you cheeky devil. It's Lady Duck! I'll have you know that I hold a distinguished pedigree. Everyone who's anyone has heard of the Duck Dynasty.

HEDGEHOG. Well, excuse me, Your Majesty. *(To audience.)* Ain't she in a foul mood?

RABBIT. Look here, while we wait, why don't we tell them the story?

HEDGEHOG. Now that's a proper idea. You start us off, Rabbit.

RABBIT. Well now... the Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning her little underground home.

(A spotlight comes up on MOLE, with a brush and pail standing on a stool, whitewashing.)

DUCK. First with brooms, and then with dusters, and then with a brush and a pail of whitewash!

HEDGEHOG. And the Mole had splashes of whitewash all over, and an aching back and weary arms!

RABBIT. The spring was moving in the air above, and down below in the earth all around her, with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. Suddenly Mole said—

MOLE. Bother! Oh blow! Hang spring-cleaning! *(MOLE throws down the brush and pail.)*

RABBIT. And she bolted out of the house!

(MOLE exits.)

DUCK. So, she scraped and scratched and scrabbled and scooged—

HEDGEHOG. And then she scooged again and scrabbled and scratched and scraped—

RABBIT. Up we go! Up we go! And pop! Mole came out into the sunlight—into the warm grass of a great meadow.

(The lights come up on a warm spring morning in the English countryside, down by the willows in a lovely meadow. The sounds of spring can be heard as MOLE enters and looks around in wonder.)

MOLE. This is fine! This is better than whitewashing!

RABBIT. Mole thought her happiness might be complete when she suddenly found herself standing by the edge of a full-fed river!

(MOLE walks downstage to the Riverbank.)

MOLE: Oh my, oh my!

DUCK. The water was full of life and movement, glints and gleams and sparkles, chatter, and bubble.

SONGS VERSION

(ENSEMBLE enters to sing and portray The River. Note: The Ensemble is made up of a choice of water nymphs [preferred], and/or wood nymphs, or animals.)

ENSEMBLE. *(Singing.)* RIVERSONG by Andy Beck.

(ENSEMBLE exit.)

DUCK. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated.

HEDGEHOG. And that's where the Mole met the Water Rat.

(The NARRATORS move upstage and take a background position while watching the scenes take place. Enter RAT carrying a fishing pole and a wicker picnic-basket. RAT stops and looks at MOLE. The two animals regard each other cautiously.)

RAT. Hullo, Mole!

MOLE. Hullo, Rat!

RAT. Don't seem to have seen you about before.

MOLE. *(Shyly.)* I—I don't go out much, as a rule. All this is so new to me. So, this is a river!

RAT. *(Emphatic.)* The River.

MOLE. I've never seen a river before.

RAT. *(Surprised.)* Never seen a—you never—well I—what have you been doing, then?

MOLE. Is it so nice as all that?

RAT. Nice? It's the only thing. Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about by a river.

MOLE. And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!

RAT. By it and with it and on it and in it. It's my world, and I don't want any other.

MOLE. I am afraid you must think me very ignorant.

RAT. Not at all. Look here! If you've nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?

MOLE. Oh yes! Let's start at once. What a day I'm having!

(MOLE and RAT walk along the riverbank and find a nice spot to have a picnic. RAT spreads a checked tablecloth on the grass and begins to unpack the wicker picnic-basket. MOLE goes to the edge of the bank, still fascinated by the river.)

MOLE. Oh my! Oh my!

RAT. What are you looking at?

MOLE. I am looking at a streak of bubbles that I see travelling along the surface of the water.

RAT. Bubbles? *(Cheerily.)* Oh ho!

(OTTER's head pops out from the river above the edge of the bank.)

MOLE. Oh my!

OTTER. *(Climbing out of the water.)* Greedy beggars, eating all this nosh by yourselves! Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?

RAT. This was an impromptu affair. By the way—*(Gesturing.)* My friend Mole.

OTTER. Proud, I'm sure. *(MOLE waves at OTTER.)* Such a rumpus everywhere! 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!

RAT. Well, tell us, who's out on the river?

OTTER. Toad's out, for one. In his brand-new racing boat!

(RAT and OTTER looked at each other and laugh.)

MOLE. Oh, what's so amusing?

RAT. You tell her, Otter.

OTTER. Crazes. He always has crazes. First, it's for sailing, and then it's for punting, and then it's for astronomy; and whatever it is, he always has the most expensive gear, and lots of it, and knows all about it, or thinks he does, and—

RAT. And then in a week he's forgotten about it and started something else.

MOLE. I've heard of the great Mr. Toad. He's very rich, isn't he?

OTTER. Richest animal in these parts and got one of the nicest houses too. Entertains a lot. Always glad to see you, night or day. A good fellow, Toady.

MOLE. It would be a privilege to make his acquaintance.

RAT. Oh, you'll meet him all right.

MOLE. What lies over there? *(MOLE points offstage, across the river towards the woodland.)*

OTTER. That? Oh, that's just the Wild Wood.

RAT. We don't go there very much, we river-bankers.

MOLE. *(Nervously.)* Aren't they—aren't they very nice people in there?

RAT. W-e-ll, let me see. The squirrels are all right.

OTTER. And the rabbits.

RAT. And then there's Badger, of course.

OTTER. Lives right in the heart of it; wouldn't live anywhere else if you paid him to do it.

RAT. Dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with Badger.

OTTER. They'd better not.

MOLE. Why, who should interfere with him?

RAT. Well, of course—there—are others. (*Hesitating.*) The weasels—

DUCK. (*Shivering slightly.*) Oh yes, they're quite hateful!

OTTER. And stoats and ferrets.

HEDGEHOG. Also, villainous!

RAT. Usually they're not a problem, but they break out sometimes.

OTTER. There's no denying it.

RAT. And then—well, you really can't trust them, and that's a fact.

DUCK. Beware of the weasels!

OTTER. If the Wild Wooders don't like you, they show it. (*Abruptly.*) Well, I'm off. Good day!

(*OTTER dives into the river and swims off.*)

MOLE. Oh dear, Otter left quite abruptly. Could I have said something inappropriate?

RAT. Nonsense. Animal-etiquette, my friend. It's our way on the Riverbank. Coming and going at a moment's notice. You're always busy on the river. Look here! I really think you had better come and stay with me at my hole in the riverbank for a little time. It's very plain and rough, you know; still, I can make you comfortable. And I'll teach you boating, and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us.

MOLE. Oh yes, that would be wonderful!

(*To black.*)

SCENE 2. Rat's Home by the Riverbank (summer)

(Time has passed and it is a late summer day. MOLE is sitting on the bank fishing. RAT is pacing back and forth composing poetry. DUCK enters and speaks to the audience.)

DUCK. As the ripening summer moved onward, the emancipated Mole became accustomed to life on the water. The Rat told her river stories that were quite thrilling to an earth-dwelling animal like Mole. Stories about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping pike, and night-fishings with Otter, and excursions far a-field with the Badger. But, unfortunately for us ducks, the Water Rat considered herself something of a poet.

MOLE. Ratty, if you please, I want to ask you a favour.

RAT. Certainly, my friend, but first listen to this new poem I've just written:

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!

MOLE. I'm no poet, Rat, but I don't know that I think so very much of that.

RAT. Well, neither do the ducks!

DUCK. Indeed! Why must all our doings be scrutinized by self-styled poets? What nonsense it all is!

RAT. That's what the ducks say.

MOLE. And so it is, so it is.

RAT. *(Indignantly.)* No, it isn't!

MOLE. *(Soothingly.)* Well then, it isn't, it isn't. 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.

RAT. Why, certainly! It's never the wrong time to call on Toad. Always good-tempered, always glad to see you, always sorry when you go!

MOLE. He must be a very nice animal.

RAT. He is indeed! 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. Come on. Off we go!

(To black.)

SCENE 3. Toad Hall and the Open Road (summer)

(Toad Hall: a handsome, dignified old house of mellowed red brick, with well-kept lawns reaching down to the water's edge. TOAD is sitting on one of the two lawn-chairs pre-occupied with a roadmap spread out on his lap. The lights come up as RABBIT enters.)

RABBIT. They soon came in sight of a handsome, dignified old house with well-kept lawns reaching down to the water's edge—Toad Hall. They strolled across the gay flower-decked lawns in search of Toad.

(RABBIT exits as RAT and MOLE enter.)

TOAD. *(Jumping up on seeing them.)* Hooray! Hulloo, you fellows. This is splendid! Dear old Ratty. *(Shakes RAT's paw warmly.)* Hulloo! *(Seizes MOLE's paw and works it up and down.)* How are you?

RAT. *(Introducing MOLE.)* My friend, Mole.

TOAD. *(Going back enthusiastically to MOLE.)* How are you? *(Shakes her paw again vigorously.)* How kind of you! *(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. You don't know how lucky it is, your turning up just now!

RAT. Let's sit quiet a bit, Toady! *(Throws herself into a chair.)*

TOAD. You've got to help me. It's most important!

RAT. It's about your boating, I suppose. Haven't seen you on the river this last day or two.

TOAD. The river! Boating! Bah! Silly boyish amusement. I've given that up long ago. Sheer waste of time. No, I've discovered the real thing, the only genuine occupation. I propose to devote the remainder of my life to it.

(We hear a "clip-clop" and see a gaily painted gypsy caravan roll in, drawn by an old gray HORSE. The cart is shining with newness, painted a canary-yellow picked out with green and red wheels.)

MOLE. Oh my, whatever is that?

HORSE. *(To TOAD.)* Oh, there you are. I've been looking for you everywhere. Introduce me to your friends, won't you? I do get so frightfully left out of it.

TOAD. Rat, Mole—(*Gesturing.*) Horse.

HORSE. Pleased to meet you.

MOLE. Hullo.

RAT. So, this is the latest?

TOAD. Absolutely the very latest. There isn't a more beautiful one, a more compact one, a more—what's the word?

HORSE. Heavy.

TOAD. A more up-to-date gypsy caravan!

RAT. So, this is the latest craze!

TOAD. My dear old Ratty, you don't understand. (*Waves a paw at the cart.*) 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!

HORSE. (*Moody.*) And the rolling ups! However, nobody minds what I think.

MOLE. (*Ecstatically.*) Oh my! Oh my!

TOAD. What do you think of it, Mole?

MOLE. It's lovely!

TOAD. Glad you like it. (*Triumphantly.*) All complete! Fully stocked! You'll find that nothing whatever has been forgotten when we make our start this afternoon.

RAT. I beg your pardon, but did I hear you say something about "we," and "start," and "this afternoon?"

HORSE. That's what he said. And I'm not even consulted. Mark my words, no good will come of this.

TOAD. Now, you dear good old Ratty, (*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. Surely you don't mean to stick to your dull fusty old river all your life, and just live in a hole in a bank. I want to show you the world!

RAT. I don't care, (*doggedly*) I'm not coming, and that's flat. And I am going to stick to my old river, and live in a hole, 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?

MOLE. I'll always stick to you, Rat, and what you say is to be—has got to be. *(Wistfully.)* All the same, it sounds as if it might be—well, rather fun, you know.

TOAD. You stick with Rat, Mole! And Ratty, old friend, you stick with me! And we'll all stick together!

SONGS VERSION

(ENSEMBLE enter to sing. Note: Ensemble is made up of a choice of wood nymphs or animals.)

ENSEMBLE. *(Singing.)* TOGETHER, WHEREVER WE GO from *Gypsy* by Stephen Sondheim and Jule Styne.

(As the ENSEMBLE sing, RAT, MOLE, and TOAD get into the caravan, pulled by HORSE, and ride out on the open road. When the song ends, fade to black.)

SCENE 4. The Open Road and Caravan Collision (summer)

(The stage is black. A spot downstage comes up on HEDEGHOG. We continue to hear the "clip-clop" of the HORSE in the background.)

NO SONGS VERSION

HEDGEHOG. Notwithstanding the Water Rat's earnest protests, off they set in the gaily painted caravan.

HEDGEHOG. They were strolling along the high road easily, when far behind them they heard a faint warning hum. Glancing back, they saw a small cloud of dust advancing on them at incredible speed!

(Suddenly we see two bright lights—car headlights—and the sound of a motorcar roaring down the road honking its horn: "poop-poop, poop-poop!")

HEDGEHOG. With a blast of wind and a whirl of sound the magnificent motorcar was on them!

(In the dark we hear the high-pitched whinny of the HORSE, the screams of the travellers, and the sound of a crash as the cart is run off the road into a ditch. We see the headlights drive off. HEDGEHOG exits.)

The lights come up on the caravan wreckage. All the travellers are in disarray. MOLE is trying to calm the HORSE. RAT is angrily looking in the direction of the disappearing motorcar. TOAD is dazed lying flat on the road.)

MOLE. *(Soothingly to HORSE.)* There, there. It's all right. It's all right.

RAT. *(Shaking her fist and transported with passion.)* You villains! You scoundrels, you highwaymen, you—you—

HORSE. Road hogs.

RAT. You road hogs! I'll have the law on you! I'll report you! I'll take you through all the courts! (*Turning anxiously to TOAD.*) How are you feeling, Toady? Mole, come and give us a hand with poor old Toad. I'm afraid he's pretty bad.

MOLE. Poor old Toad. (*MOLE and RAT help TOAD sit up.*)

HORSE. I said that no good would come of it, and now you see. A cataclysm, that's what this whole thing has been.

RAT. (*Anxiously.*) Speak to us, Toady, old man. Can you see straight? (*RAT holds her paw up to TOAD's face.*) How many fingers am I holding up?

TOAD. (*Staring in front of him with a rapt expression.*) Poop-poop! Poop-poop! Poop-poop!

(*TOAD sits in a sort of a trance, a happy smile on his face, his eyes still fixed on the dusty wake of their destroyer—at intervals he faintly murmurs: "poop-poop!"*)

MOLE. What's he saying?

RAT. I think he thinks he's the motorcar.

TOAD. Poop-poop!

MOLE. (*Soothingly.*) It's all right, Mr. Toad. It's all right now.

RAT. We'll have the law of 'em, Toad. We'll make 'em pay. We'll go to the police station and lodge a formal complaint! We'll get you another cart!

HORSE. Another cart! (*Sarcastic.*) Oh yes, that's what we need.

TOAD. Police station? Complaint? Me complain of that beautiful, that heavenly vision. I've done with carts forever!

MOLE. Now Toad, don't do anything rash!

TOAD. Glorious, stirring sight! The poetry of motion. The real way to travel. The only way to travel. Here today, in the middle of next week tomorrow. Oh bliss! Oh rapture! Oh, oh—poop-poop!

RAT. I see what it is. I recognize the symptoms. He is in the grip of a new craze.

MOLE. Oh my!

TOAD. Poop-poop!

(*To black.*)



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before making your final decision.

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