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The Wind in the Willows

A Family Entertainment

John Morley

Based on *The Wind in the Willows*
by Kenneth Grahame

Samuel French - London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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ISBN 978-0-573-05073-2

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CHARACTERS

Toad
Ratty
Mole
Mr Badger
The Chief Weasel

The following parts can be doubled, if required:

Dobbin, the Horse
Mrs Otter
Portly Otter, her young son
Reginald } Edwardian motorists
Fiona }
High Court Magistrate
High Court Clerk
High Court Policeman
Jenny, the policeman's daughter
Nelly
Maggie }
Ada } Jenny's aunts
Flo } (see note on page ix)
Patsy }
Clementina }
Bargewoman
Zelda, leader of the gypsies

Chorus of:

Good Animals—rabbits, field-mice and perhaps squirrels

Bad Animals—wicked weasels, ferrets and perhaps stoats

Gypsies

ACT I

- Scene 1 The Riverbank and the Willows
- Scene 2 The Corridor leading to the Courtroom
- Scene 3(a) The Courtroom at the Castle
- Scene 3(b) "The Hole"—a dismal dungeon

ACT II

- Scene 1 The Canal bank near the Castle
- Scene 2 The Gypsy Camp further along the Canal
- Scene 3 The Riverbank again
- Scene 4 Inside Toad Hall

Period: Edwardian Summertime

MUSICAL NUMBERS

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OVERTURE Song 5

ACT I

- | | | |
|------|---|------------------------|
| 1(a) | *Cruising Down the River | Rabbits and Field-mice |
| 1(b) | *Row, Row, Row (ragtime production routine) | Ratty and the Animals |
| 2 | Toad's Song (parody of <i>The British Grenadiers</i>) | Toad and the Animals |
| 3 | *Run, Rabbit, Run or The Ghost's High Noon (from <i>Ruddigore</i>) or *a "wicked sounding" rock number | Weasels |
| 4(a) | Bow Ye Lower Middle Classes (from <i>Iolanthe</i>) | Company |
| 4(b) | I've Got A Little List (parody from <i>The Mikado</i>) | Judge and Company |
| 5 | *Get Out and Get Under (The Motor Car Song) | Toad and Company |
| 6 | *My Old Man (Said Follow the Van) | Jenny's Aunts |

ACT II

- | | | |
|----|--|------------------------|
| 7 | *Out of Town or *The Entertainer Rag (Scott Joplin) or *I Like Country Music (with a rustic dance that is almost a square dance) | Rabbits and Field-mice |
| 8 | Chase Music. Any Offenbach Can-Can or the William Tell Overture | Bargewoman and Rabbits |
| 9 | Dance a Cachucha (parody from <i>The Gondoliers</i>) | Gypsies |
| 10 | *Jealousy or *Twist and Shout or *In The Mood | Weasels |

| | | |
|----|---|---------|
| 11 | Victory For Toad (parody of <i>Phil The Fluter's Ball</i>) | Company |
| 12 | Reprise of Song 5 | Company |
| | Finale Reprise of Song 6 | Company |

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Flexible Casting

This family entertainment is for five main principals. There are ten other parts but they can be doubled. The adult and/or juvenile chorus play the small parts.

Because the story is a fantasy (the animals speak and are human sized) it is possible to have an all-female cast, an all-male cast or a mixed cast. The casting is adaptable, too, for the Magistrate can become female as can the Policeman, and all the animals may be female.

You may find that audience involvement is clearer and costume problems are simpler with just Weasels (as “baddies”) and Rabbits (as “goodies”) and that the other chorus animals mentioned in Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* are not needed.

Setting

The entire story can be played in a permanent set, or in-the-round, with no scenery at all.

The principals have no costume change. The chorus costumes are rabbits, then weasels, then gypsies.

Please refer to the detailed scenery and costume notes at the end of the script

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

Toad is boisterous, hearty, with a comically grating laugh (“Har har har”), swaggering, jaunty, not too brainy, amazingly conceited but a kind and warmhearted soul, so he is popular. He has a butterfly brain that flits from one craze to the next. He is devoted to his home, Toad Hall. Particularly in the first scene he should walk about with strange galumping strides—as if wearing flippers—to suggest how a Toad would indeed walk.

Ratty is cheerful, energetic, efficient, frank in his criticisms, and nautical, for he is besotted about the river and the boats on it.

Mole is gentle, easily impressed, shy and loyal. He stands with his toes turned in but his paws, being a mole’s, are strong. He wears thick rimmed glasses. Male or female part.

Badger is stolid, a bit condescending but a nice old buffer and older than the others so he is a father figure. He plods along, usually with a clumsy-looking walking stick, like a farmer and perhaps he has a mild rustic accent.

The Chief Weasel is insolent, loud, aggressive, ambitious and scheming. He is a 1908 gangster and we realize why all the Riverbankers are scared of him.

Dobbin the Horse is almost a pantomime horse—no dialogue—but he has character. He is sensitive and “doesn’t like to be left out of things”. A part for two females, perhaps?

Reginald and Fiona are Edwardian motorists. They are written as an upper class, silly couple, but you can easily localize them to Welsh, Glaswegian, Geordie—some local accent, if this is fun for your audience.

The Magistrate is eccentric, comical, brisk and prejudiced against Toad. Male or female part.

The Clerk wears glasses on the end of his nose, is a fool and a bit spiteful. Male or female part.

The Policeman is red-faced, preferably fat and clumsy, and is dim, with either a Cockney accent, or a comedy version of some local accent.

The Magistrate, Clerk and Policeman are not just comedy characters. They should appreciate that they are in fact Toad’s enemies until half way through Act Two.

Mrs Otter should really be sleek, just as all otters are, but it is more important to play her as a fussy and much worried mum.

Portly Otter is as young as possible and there are deliberately few lines for him (or her) due to this age factor. The moment when Mrs Otter and her young son are reconciled is highly emotional if a very young child plays Portly. Portly doesn't walk, he waddles.

Jenny the Policeman's daughter is intelligent, vivacious and kind. Mild Cockney or "local" accent.

Jenny's six Aunts These six washerwomen (or fewer if preferred) plus Jenny and the Policeman are all the same family, so whatever accent you choose for one applies to all. The main moment for the Aunts is a Cockney "knees-up" song, so Cockney seems best for this family. Their scene can be played with only two Aunts if preferred; or just one Aunt can be used. See alternative scene on p.31.

The Bargewoman is a fat country woman, with a cruel streak.

Zelda is a weird old gypsy hag, extrovert, shrewd and clearly the leader of the Gypsies.

THE CHORUS

The Good Animals (Rabbits etc.) have a Beatrix Potter warmth and charm.
The Bad Animals (Weasels etc.) are cocky, sniggering, energetic 1908 gangsters.

The Gypsies are poor and desperate but extrovert and noisy.

Note All the animals hold their hands up at chest level, as though paws. When the animals are pleased, or are gloating, they jump in the air several times.

ACT I

Overture

SCENE 1

The Riverbank and the Willows

Song 1(A)

All the animals are on stage singing Song 1(a). Field-mice run with small paces, Squirrels run with paws held up high and eyes darting about. More animals enter and wave greetings to each other. The adults have parasols or carry straw boaters, giving an impression of the animal version of a summer afternoon in 1908

After a chorus the music continues under the dialogue as one of the Rabbits points offstage

1st Rabbit Eeeek! Eeeek! Look who's on the river!

2nd Rabbit Who is it?

1st Rabbit It's the Water Rat!

All turn to each other excitedly

They cheer as Ratty, wearing a jaunty nautical cap, enters upstage, sitting behind a cut-out of a blue rowing boat, miming as though he is rowing. Then he stops, and waves

Ratty (*calling over the music*) Ship ahoy! Hove to! Hullo, animals!

All Hullo Ratty!

Two of the Field-mice help Ratty as he jumps out of his boat

Two Field-mice Eeek! Eeek! Hullo, Mr Ratty!

Ratty Hullo you two! Belay there! (*To all*) Enjoying yourselves?

All Yes!

1st Rabbit It's a lovely day, that's why!

Ratty It's a lovely day all right! Lovely for rowing on the river! (*He sings, at fast ragtime tempo, with rowing actions*)

Song 1(B)

Everyone joins in and the song becomes

Ragtime Production Routine

After the routine ends Mrs Otter loudly bursts into tears, takes out a handkerchief and wipes her eyes

Ratty Well, shiver me timbers, what's up, Mrs Otter?

Mrs Otter (*greatly distressed*) Oh, Ratty, it's my little boy. He's missing!

Ratty Little Portly?

Mrs Otter (*nodding*) Why am I here when I ought to be looking for him? I must go.

Ratty But he's just a young otter! He's gone off to play somewhere!

All (*agreeing*) That's right! He'll be back soon! It's all right Mrs Otter!

Mrs Otter (*shaking her head; scared*) I'm wondering if little Portly has been kidnapped by them.

Ratty "Them"? (*To the others*) She means the Weasels and the Stoats!

There is a dramatic chord and everyone clutches each other in terror

All The Weasels and the Stoats!

Ratty Haven't you heard the terrible news?

All What's that?

Ratty The Chief Weasel says he's not content with living in the Wild Wood anymore! He wants to take over the Riverbank from here right down to Toad Hall! (*He gestures off*)

Ist Rabbit Then we'd better look for little Portly!

Ratty Yes, I think we had! (*Putting an arm around Mrs Otter's shoulder*) Now, *don't worry* Mrs Otter—we'll find Portly won't we?

All Yes!

Ratty So, easy does it. Keep on an even keel. There, there.

All start to exit, urgently talking to each other, Ratty still with his arm round Mrs Otter's shoulder

All (*solo lines*) The Chief Weasel is the trouble!

The Weasels and the Ferrets have captured Portly!

We must search everywhere!

Poor Little Portly!

Never trust a Weasel or a Stoat!

Come on—we must find Portly!

As the animals exit, there is dramatic music, the Lights darken and in a green spot-light the Chief Weasel runs in, pointing viciously to the animals

Chief Weasel (*triumphantly*) There they go—the Rabbits and the Riverbankers—and each one is frightened to death of the Chief Weasel! (*He laughs cruelly*) Ha, ha, ha! Oh, but I must introduce myself. I *am* the Chief Weasel. (*He strolls across the stage*) I'm slimy, sinister and sarcastic. I'm deadly, distasteful and disasterous. Oh, I forgot, I'm *ambitious* as well. So I've made some poisonous little plans. (*He points off right*) I'm going to invade the valley, conquer the countryside, and *rule over the Riverbank!* My followers are the ferrets, the weasels and the stoats, and if any other dear little cuddly animals get in my way, they'll live to regret it! And that includes Little Portly. I haven't found him yet, but when I do I'll use him

as a hostage. (*Sarcastically*) Poor Little Portly. I've an idea he's lost in the Wild Wood—(*with relish*)—I do hope so. (*He makes his hand like claws*) I can't wait to get my paws on poor . . . little . . . Portly. Then there'll be trouble—and trouble's my favourite word! Ha, ha, ha!

Chief Weasel claws the air at the Audience then exits left to dramatic music

Ratty enters right

Ratty (*calling*) Ahoy there! Portly! Where are you Portly? (*Seeing someone about to enter*) Ah, are you Portly?

Mole enters very timidly. He is holding a bucket with white-wash splashed on it. He stands with his toes turned in and blinks a lot, and bites his nails

(*Breezily*) Oh—hullo!

Mole (*shyly*) Hullo. It's a nice day. (*He takes a big brush from the bucket and mimes painting a wall*) I was working very hard, white-washing my little home, doing the spring cleaning, when I suddenly thought "Hang spring cleaning!" (*He puts the brush in the bucket and bangs it on the floor, and then makes mole tunnelling gestures with his paws*) I sensed Spring was here, so I tunneled upwards out of my hole. I scraped and scratched and scabbled and scrooged till POP! My snout popped out! I'd hit the daylight! (*He lifts up his nose and blinks at the sunlight*)

Ratty (*laughing*) So you're a mole! Good morning, Mole!

Mole Good morning Rat. (*He gazes round, beaming*) Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! I am enjoying myself. How exciting the world is! I've just seen a big blue log in the river. (*He points upstage*)

Ratty (*shocked*) A big blue log? That's my boat!

Mole I'm sorry, I've never seen a boat before.

Ratty (*shocked even more*) What?

Mole (*shyly*) Is it very nice?

Ratty NICE?

Ratty brings Mole downstage talking expansively with great enthusiasm

It's the *only* thing! Believe me, my young friend there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. (*Dreamily*) Simply messing . . . messing about in boats . . . all Spring. (*He comes out of his dream*) What have you been doing all Spring?

Mole (*making digging gestures with his paws*) Making mole-hills. I lead a very quiet life. (*Gesturing further*) I burrow.

Palms outwards, Mole mimes pushing earth aside, and then sticks his head forward peering intently out front. Ratty watches with interest.

Ratty So where do you live?

Mole (*pointing off*) In the fields near Toad Hall.

Ratty nods recognition

Ratty And then you wanted some fresh air, so you weighed anchor—heave

ho—and you toddled down here to the River Bank! Welcome to The Willows!

Mole Thank you, Ratty. (*He looks around*) So *these* are the Willows. (*Pointing off*) But what are those trees over there?

Ratty (*suddenly nervous*) Oh nothing, nothing, don't talk about them.

Mole But it's only a wood!

Ratty It's the *Wild Wood*.

There is a dramatic chord

Mole (*alarmed*) The *Wild Wood*—I've heard of it.

Ratty There are some *nice* animals in the *Wood*—just as there are in any wood—but, mainly it's the home of the ferrets, the stoats, the weasels—and their leader, The Chief Weasel.

Mole The Chief Weasel—I've heard of him as well!

Ratty (*grimly*) I'm sure you have. Oh, shipmate, if only there was someone to challenge him, to stop him *threatening* us Riverbankers—but who is that someone?

Mole Don't look at me. I'm a mole, a gentle soul, and I'm scared! (*He bites his nails anxiously*)

Ratty Cheer up matey! There may be a storm blowing on the starboard but why should we let the Chief Weasel rule our lives? (*He claps his hands together in sudden inspiration*) Mole, why don't we go on the river?

Mole is delighted and jumps up in the air

Mole Oh, yes! What a day I'm having!

Ratty We'll take a picnic!

Mole Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! (*Excited, he marches and stamps about and consequently puts his foot in the white-wash bucket*)

Mole (*gloomily*) Oh my . . .

Mole takes his foot out, pulling a face. Ratty laughs

I'm fed up with whitewash. (*He picks up the bucket deposits it in the wings and returns*)

Ratty (*as he goes*) So you'd like a picnic! I'll get the picnic basket—it is packed—there's a red tablecloth and white plates and green lettuce and brown bread and blue cheese and pink blancmange and yellow custard and—

Ratty exits

Mole is squirming with delight at the sound of all the food

Mole Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! This is better than spring cleaning! (*He lies on the floor and bicycles with his feet*) A picnic with a tablecloth! Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!

Ratty staggers in with a heavy basket and plonks it down CS

Ratty What are you doing down there?

Mole (*getting up*) I'm happy, that's all. (*He sees the basket*) Oh, I say!

Ratty I'm afraid it's only a snack lunch. Just (*like a verbal waterfall*) cold tongue, cold ham, cold chicken, cold beef, pickled gherkins, salad, French rolls, watercress sandwiches, potted meat, ginger ale, lemonade—

Mole (*in an ecstasy*) Oh stop! Stop! This is too much!

Ratty (*laughing*) Come on, help me with it to the boat, then we'll set sail.

They start to pick up the basket when a Field-mouse runs on waving a small Union Jack

1st Field-mouse (*in a piping voice*) Hooray!

Another Field-mouse runs on also waving a Union Jack

2nd Field-mouse Hooray!

Others, mainly the juvenile animals, run on cheering and waving small flags

Ratty What are you all cheering for?

1st Field-mouse For Mr Toad!

Ratty But why are you cheering *Toad*?

2nd Field-mouse He gave us a penny each if we'd cheer him, so (*loudly*) hooray!

3rd Field-mouse (*chanting*) Mr Toad's coming! Mr Toad's coming! Mr Toad's coming!

Mole Is that Mr Toad who lives at Toad Hall?

Ratty Yes—and I've just realized something. If Toad sees the picnic basket, we're sunk! He'll eat the lot! Come on!

They close the lid, pick up the picnic basket and are about to exit but Toad enters, with his huge galumping strides, royally waving to the Field-mice

Toad Hullo! Hullo! Thank you for your greetings. And so spontaneous too! (*With his hearty laugh*) Har, har, har! Why, hullo Ratty! (*He shakes Ratty's hand heartily*) And who is this?

Mole (*quietly*) I'm Mole.

Toad Well, you can't help it! We all make mistakes sometimes! Even I do! Har, har, har! I'm Toad, you're Mole—shake a paw! (*He heartily shakes hands, but breaks off quickly*) OW! (*He wrings his hand with the pain*)

Mole I'm sorry. My hands are rather strong—I need them for burrowing. (*He gestures with his hands like flippers, as before*) As I said, I'm Mole.

Toad Well, I'm Toad. The handsome, the popular, the successful Toad! (*To the Field-mice*) Right?

Field-mice Right! (*They wave their flags*)

Toad Clever Toad, great Toad, good Toad—right?

Field-mice Right!

Ratty (*to Mole*) You'll never believe this, but underneath it all he's a very nice fellow!

Toad moves CS with the Field-mice on each side of him. Ratty and Mole move to a downstage corner and watch, Ratty disapprovingly

Toad (*miming blowing a trumpet*) Ta—ta—ta—ta!

Field-mice (*with the same gesture*) Ta—ta—ta—ta!

The music sounds a fanfare now, and Toad sings as the Rabbits and Field-mice mark time "stationary marching".

Song 2

Toad The world has held great heroes
As history books have showed
But never a name with a claim to fame
Compared to that of Toad
The clever men at Oxford
Know all there is to be known
But none of them know how to put on a show
Compared to Mister Toad.

Field-mice But none of them know how to put on a show
Compared to Mister Toad.

Toad The soldiers all saluted
As they marched along the road
And did they cheer the Brigadier?
No—it was Mister Toad
The sailors in the Navy
Saluted as they rowed
Was it the Queen that they had seen?
No—it was Mister Toad

Field-mice Was it the Queen that they had seen?
No—it was Mister Toad.

They do a short routine of marching and then:

Toad You've heard of Boadicea
With her chariot covered in woad
She was brave and fair but she couldn't compare
With victorious Mister Toad.
And what about Napoleon
As into battle he strode—
Well, he met his Waterloo which Toad didn't do
Oh, wonderful Mister Toad.

Field-mice Well, he met his Waterloo which Toad didn't do
Oh, wonderful Mister Toad.

Coda, with much waving of flags:

That wonderful, victorious
And absolutely glorious
Clever Mister Toad!!!

Ratty (*to Mole, after the song*) Doesn't it make you sea-sick?

Toad (*to the others*) Field-mice, Rabbits, Countrymen—lend me your ears! I won't be needing you any more today. But when I want another spontaneous welcome, I'll contact you! Goodbye my friends! Har, har, har!

Field-mice } (*together; in high pitched voices*) Goodbye, Mr Toad!
Rabbits }

The Field-mice and Rabbits exit but one Field-mouse runs back

Field-mouse Mister Toad . . .

Toad Yes, my boy?

Field-mouse You gave us all a penny but I've lost mine and I wanted to buy some nuts with it.

Toad Are you telling the truth?

Field-mouse Oh, yes, Mister Toad. Cross my heart. (*He crosses his heart*)

Toad All right. Here's a shilling.

Field-mouse Oh, thank you, Mr Toad. You are generous.

The Field-mouse exits

Toad That's me all over. Generous, warmhearted, charming—what more could you want?

Ratty Modesty. My friend Mole and I are wondering what you're doing so far from Toad Hall. (*Warningly*) You must take care Toad, the Chief Weasel's been seen skulking about.

Toad Oh, pooh! (*He gives a dismissive gesture*)

Ratty Besides, I've never seen you walk anywhere before.

Toad My dear Ratty, I didn't walk. (*To Mole*) Can you imagine a toad walking? No, I came here by transport.

Ratty Oh, matey, don't tell me you've bought another bicycle? (*To Mole*) He's had six and smashed them all.

Toad (*airily*) Oh no, no, no.

Ratty Another motor bike? (*To Mole*) He's got through eight of those.

Toad There's a huge pile of smashed-up motor bikes at home! It must be the largest pile of smashed-up motor bikes in the world! (*Laughing proudly*) Har, har, har! (*To Mole*) I never do anything by halves.

Ratty Don't I know it! (*With an ominous and serious warning*) One of these days Toad, you'll end up in trouble—terrible trouble.

Toad Oh pooh! (*He pulls a face*) Pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh.

Mole Then how *did* you get here Mr Toad? It took me hours, but then, I've only got short legs.

Toad Ah! I got here the *new* way, the *only* way. Excuse me. (*Toad takes a whistle on a string round his neck and blows it*)

Ratty (*to Mole*) I'm dreading this. It'll be the latest of his crazes—something garish and expensive and probably *highly dangerous*.

Dobbin the Horse neighs as he enters—to coconut shells hoof-beat effects—pulling on a cut-out of a vividly painted yellow caravan

(*Groaning*) What did I tell you? (*Pointing to the caravan*) Toad's latest craze.

Mole (*impressed*) Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!

Toad A luxury caravan and a luxury horse to go with it! (*To Dobbin*) Now Dobbin, say hullo to everyone! (*Aside; to the others*) He doesn't like to be left out, you know.

Dobbin neighs and nods to Mole and Ratty, who nod back, then he looks at the Audience and decides to nod to them also

(*Pointing proudly to the caravan*) There you are—my caravan! Remember my luxury yacht? My beautiful boat? My push-bike? My motor-bike? But now, who cares about such things?

Ratty Toad . . .

Toad There's *real* life for you, embodied in this lovely caravan!

Dobbin glares at Toad and neighs

Oh, embodied in this lovely horse as well! (*Aside; to the others*) He doesn't like to be left out, you know.

Mole Then I'll let him out of the shafts.

Mole removes Dobbin from the shafts, strokes his head and brings him downstage. Meanwhile Toad is downstage pacing to and fro, followed by Ratty trying to keep up with him. As Toad declaims and the others listen, so the Tabs slowly close behind them and Toad, Ratty, Mole and Dobbin are in front of Tabs or a wood-land frontcloth

Toad What a time we shall have! The open road, the dusty highway, the heath, the common, the hedgerows, the rolling downs!

Ratty Toad . . .

Toad Finest caravan that was ever built—without exception. And why? I designed it all myself, I did.

Ratty Toad, you don't think it might be *dangerous* in some way?

Toad Dangerous? Oh, I hope so! Har, har, har! (*To Mole*) Life is one long adventure to be lived recklessly! Don't you agree?

Mole Well . . . er . . .

Ratty No, he doesn't. He's a quiet person, unlike some people I know. Now, this caravan . . .

Toad Oh yes. (*He paces about again*) Well, it's full of pots, pans, jugs, kettles, biscuits, potted lobster, sardines, soda water, jam, a set of dominoes—anything you could possibly want!

Ratty I don't like it.

Toad So we now start on our adventures!

Ratty Did you say "WE" start?

Toad My dear old Ratty, don't talk in that sniffy sort of way, because you know you've got to come!

Ratty But . . .

Toad Now, don't argue—it's the one thing I can't stand. You *surely* don't mean to stick to your dull old river all your life, and just live on a *boat*? We're going to see villages, towns, cities—aren't we Dobbin?

Dobbin nods and neighs

He doesn't like to be left out, you know.

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