

Wind in the Willows
by Bill Robertson
{adapted from "The Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame}

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Wind in the Willows

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cast

MOLE / DAUGHTER / WIFE

RAT / GAOLER / WEASEL3 / RAILWAYMAN

TOAD / OTTER / WEASEL2 / RABBIT2 / MOUSE2

BADGER / WEASEL1 / RABBIT1 / MOUSE1 / WASHERWOMAN / POLICEMAN/ Driver/Farmer

SCENE 1 The Riverbank (Spring)

[Two RABBITS are getting the audience in and stay with them when MOLE enters with a paint brush in his hand.]

MOLE: Bother! O Blow! Hang spring cleaning! *[He throws down the paintbrush. Looks around. Breathes in the fine spring air.]* Ah! I think I've been underground too long. Who wants to be spring cleaning, when you can run through the countryside and breathe in all this lovely sweet spring air. Ha! Ha! This is much better than spring cleaning! **[Chuckles. Jumps up & down and he starts to run around the audience but is stopped by RABBIT1]**

RABBIT1: Hold up, Mole. It'll cost you sixpence for the privilege of going along this private road.

MOLE: Onion Sauce. *[He laughs & pushes past]* Onion Sauce *[He whoops & carries on round the audience jumping up and down and shouting "Onion sauce" at teachers & rabbits.]*

RABBIT1: Well, I never! How rude!

RABBIT2: Why didn't you tell him?

RABBIT1: Me ? Why me? Why didn't you say something ?

RABBIT2: Well... it was you he pushed past....

RABBIT1: Well perhaps, but he was past me in a trice...

[The RABBITS exit bickering as to whose fault it was. As MOLE returns to the stage, RATTY is just arriving in his boat. MOLE stops short when he sees the river.]

MOLE: Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!

RAT: Ah hello there! Fine day, Mr. Mole.

MOLE: Indeed.....em.. Excuse me, Mr. Water Rat ?

RAT: No need to stand on ceremony, old chap, call me Ratty, everyone around here does. Haven't seen you about, have I? New to these parts, eh! Well, welcome to the riverbank.

MOLE: *[spellbound]* So... this... is... a... River.

RAT: The River....and the riverbank is my home.

MOLE: You really live by the river ?

RAT: *[RATTY ties up and unloads a picnic basket.]* By it and with it and on it and in it. 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. Ah! 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 the brown water runs by my best bedroom window; or again when it all drops away and shows patches of mud that smell like plumcake, and the rushes and weed clog the channels, and I can potter about over most of the bed of it. *[sighs. RATTY lays a tablecloth on the ground].*

MOLE: But isn't it a bit dull at times ? Just you and the river, and no one else to talk to ?

RAT: No one else to... well, you're new to this, and of course you don't know, but let me tell you... the riverbank is so crowded nowadays, that people are actually moving away altogether. It just isn't what it used to be, I'm afraid. 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!... Would you care to join me for a spot of lunch?

MOLE: Oh, yes please.... Might I ask what's inside your basket ?

RAT: *[very quickly without taking a breath]* There's cold chicken... cold ham, cold tongue, cold beef, pickled gherkins, salad, french rolls, cress sandwiches, potted meat, ginger beer, lemonade, soda water....

MOLE: *[Laughing]* Oh my! Oh my! Stop! Stop! This is too much.

RAT: *[as he unpacks]* Do you really think so? 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 ! Well... pitch in, old fellow.

MOLE: *[In between bites]* Tell me, eh! Ratty.... what lies over there ?

RAT: Where ? O that's just the Wild Wood, we don't go there very much, we river-bankers.

MOLE: Aren't they very nice people in there ?

[RABBIT1 wanders through.]

RAT: W..e..ll, let me see. The squirrels are all right. Then the rabbits... some of 'em, *[the RABBIT sniffs]* but rabbits are a mixed lot. And then there's Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it, and wouldn't live anywhere else if you paid him. Dear old Badger! Of course nobody would dare interfere with him.

MOLE: Why ? Who would interfere with him?

RAT: Well, of course .. there ... are.... others *[looking around(3 stooges)]*..... Foxes...

MOLE: Oh!

[RABBIT1 exits hurriedly at the mention of a Fox.]

RAT:and Stoats....

MOLE: *[bigger]* Oh!

RAT:and Weasels...

MOLE: W..w..weasels *[BADGER enters and frightens MOLE into a quaking mass]*. Argh!

RAT: Why if it isn't, old Badger, himself. I say, Badger, come and join us.

BADGER: Humph ! Company. [*He leaves*]

RAT: Ah well! Never mind. That's just the sort of fellow he is, I'm afraid... simply hates company ... we shan't see any more of him today..... Now where was I ?

MOLE: W..w..w..weasels a..a..and so on.

RAT: Ah Yes. Well.... you can't really trust weasels, and that's a fact.

MOLE: [*MOLE points at the water*] W..w..what's that ?

RAT: Where ?

MOLE: There ! B..b..b.bubbles ? [*OTTER arrives suddenly*] Argh!

RAT: Otter!

OTTER: Greedy beggars! Why didn't you invite me Ratty ?

RAT: This was an impromptu affair, Otter old boy... by the way... my friend Mr. Mole.

OTTER: Pleased to meet you I'm sure. [*He sits down and joins the picnic*] Such a rumpus everywhere, all the world's out on the river today. I came up this backwater to try and get a moment's peace, and then stumbled across you fellows! [*He helps himself*]

RAT: Em!... Do help yourself Otter. [*pause*] Well then, tell us who it is that's out on the river?

OTTER: Toad's out, for one, in his brand new motor boat... new togs, new everything.[*laugh*]

RAT: [*laugh*] Ah, that's our Toad. Once it was nothing but sailing then he tired of that and took to punting. Nothing would please him but to punt all day and every day and a fine mess he made of it. It's always the same with Toad, whatever he takes up, he soon gets tired of it and starts on something fresh.

OTTER: Such a good fellow too, but no stability... especially in a boat. [*laughs*] Did I ever tell you the story about Toad and the lock-keeper ? No ? Well, it was early last spring and Toad... [*OTTER sees a mayfly, pauses and exits mid-sentence*]

RAT: [*Pause until they realise that OTTER has in fact gone for good*] Well, well.... I suppose we ought to be moving, too.

[*They pack up the basket and go to the boat.*]

MOLE: Do you know, I've never been in a boat in all my life ?

RAT: What ? Never been in a ... you never... well, I... what have you been doing, then ?

MOLE: Is it as 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 in boats. [*RAT hums "Messing about on the river", as he puts the basket into the boat & starts to get in*]

MOLE: [*MOLE turns to go.*] Well, It was very nice to meet you, Ratty, and thank you for a lovely picnic.

RAT: I say, Moley... I've..em...I've just had a thought.... Why don't you come and stop with me for a while. It's plain and rough, you know... not a grand mansion like Toad's house... but I can still make you comfortable, and I could.. em... always teach you to row... and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us. What do you say ?

MOLE: [*delighted*] Oh! Ratty. I'd love to. What a day I'm having ? Do you think I might be allowed to row, now ?

RAT: Not so fast, my young friend, it's not as easy as it looks, you know.... but you'll learn. You'll learn.

MOLE: How long will it take, for me to learn do you think ?

RAT: Oh, I'd say we'll have you quite an expert by the Summer.

MOLE: Can we start at once, Ratty? Can we? Oh, can we please?

RAT: We'll see. Ha! Ha! [*They get into the boat and push off.*] This is going to be great fun Moley, we'll be inseparable. Like bread and cheese or.... mustard and cress or.....Ant and Dec...

MOLE: [*off*] Who ?

[*RABBITS enter and change the scene*]

SCENE 2 Outside Toad Hall (Summer)

[*MOLE and RATTY enter.*]

RAT: Here's Toad Hall. You'll find that this is really one of the finest houses on the whole river... or anywhere else, for that matter... though we never admit as much to Toad. Now, the stables are over there, to the right. And if you look through here you'll see the banqueting-hall....it's very old.

MOLE: It's so good of you to take me to meet Mr. Toad, Ratty. You've told me so much about him while I've been staying with you, I almost feel that we've already met. Do you think he'll mind us just dropping in like this ?

RAT: Toad! No! It's never the wrong time to call on Toad. Early or late, Spring or Summer, he's always the same fellow. Always good-tempered, always glad to see you, always sorry to see you go!

MOLE: He must be a very nice animal.

RAT: He is indeed the best of animals, so simple, so good-natured, and so affectionate. Perhaps he's not very clever and he can be rather boastful and conceited. But he has got some great qualities, has Toady.

TOAD: [*TOAD enters.*] Hooray! This is splendid! [*shaking hands vigorously*] 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. I badly need your help, you see... both of you. You don't know how lucky it is, your turning up just now! You've simply got to help me !

RAT: And what exactly is the problem, Toad ? Your rowing, I suppose.....

TOAD: O, pooh! rowing! Silly waste of time, that's what it is. Gave that up long ago. It makes me downright sorry to see you fellows, who ought to know better, spending all your energies in such an aimless manner. No, I've discovered the real thing, the only genuine occupation for a lifetime and I propose to devote the remainder of my life to it. Come with me, dear Ratty, and you too.... em ?....

MOLE: Mole.

TOAD: Ah, quite! You too. Both of you. Now, just stand here and close your eyes, and you shall see what you shall see.

MOLE: If we close our eyes we shall see nothing at all.