



# Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

## 3: THE WILD WOOD

The Mole had long wanted to make the acquaintance of the Badger. But whenever the Mole mentioned his wish to the Water Rat he always found himself put off. 'It's all right,' the Rat would say. 'Badger'll turn up some day or other - he's always turning up - and then I'll introduce you.'

'Couldn't you ask him here...dinner or something?' said the Mole.

'He wouldn't come,' replied the Rat simply. 'Badger hates Society, and invitations, and dinner, and all that sort of thing.'

'Well, then, supposing we go and call on HIM?' suggested the Mole.

'O, I'm sure he wouldn't like that at ALL,' said the Rat, quite alarmed. 'He's so very shy, he'd be sure to be offended. Besides, we can't. It's quite out of the question, because he lives in the very middle of the Wild Wood.'

But the Badger never came along and it was not till summer was long over, and cold and frost kept them much indoors, that the Mole found his thoughts dwelling again on the grey Badger.

In the winter time the Rat slept a great deal, retiring early and rising late. During his short day he sometimes scribbled poetry or did other small domestic jobs about the house; and, of course, there were always animals dropping in for a chat.

Still, the Mole had a good deal of spare time on his hands, and so one afternoon, he formed the resolution to go out by himself and explore the Wild Wood, and perhaps strike up an acquaintance with Mr. Badger.

It was a cold still afternoon with a hard steely sky overhead, when he slipped out of the warm parlour into the open air. The country lay bare and entirely leafless around him as he pushed on towards the Wild Wood, which lay before him low and threatening.

There was nothing to alarm him at first entry. Twigs crackled under his feet, logs tripped him, funguses on stumps startled him for the moment by their likeness to something familiar and far away; but that was all fun, and exciting. It led him on, and he penetrated to where the light was less, and trees crouched nearer and nearer, and holes made ugly mouths at him on either side.



Everything was very still now. The dusk advanced on him steadily, rapidly, and the light seemed to be draining away like flood-water.

Then the faces began. It was over his shoulder, that he first thought he saw a face; a little evil wedge-shaped face, looking out at him from a hole. When he turned and confronted it, the thing had vanished.

He quickened his pace, telling himself cheerfully not to begin imagining things, or there would be simply no end to it. He passed another hole, and another, and another; and then - yes! - no! - yes! certainly a little narrow face, with hard eyes, had flashed up for an instant from a hole, and was gone. Then suddenly, every hole, far and near, seemed to possess its face, all hard-eyed and evil and sharp.

Then the pattering began. He thought it was only falling leaves at first, so slight and delicate was the sound of it. Then as it grew it took a regular rhythm, and he knew it for nothing else but the pat-pat-pat of little feet still a very long way off. As he listened anxiously, leaning this way and that, it seemed to be closing in on him.

The whole wood seemed running now, running hard, hunting, chasing, closing in round something or - somebody? In panic, he began to run and ran into things, he fell over things and

into things, he darted under things and dodged round things. At last he took refuge in the deep dark hollow of an old beech tree.

And as he lay there panting and trembling, and listened to the whistlings and the patterings outside, he knew it at last, that thing which the Rat had tried to shield him from - the Terror of the Wild Wood!

Meantime the Rat, warm and comfortable, dozed by his fireside. Then a coal slipped, the fire crackled and sent up a spurt of flame, and he woke with a start. He reached down to the floor for his verses, pored over them for a minute, and then looked round for the Mole.

But the Mole was not there. He listened for a time. The house seemed very quiet. Then he called 'Moly!' several times, and, receiving no answer, got up and went out into the hall.

The Mole's cap was missing from its accustomed peg. His boots, which always lay by the umbrella-stand, were also gone.

The Rat left the house, and carefully examined the muddy surface of the ground outside, hoping to find the Mole's tracks. There they were, sure enough. He could see the imprints in the mud, running along straight and purposeful, leading direct to the Wild Wood.

The Rat looked very grave, and stood in deep thought for a minute or two. Then he re-entered the house, strapped a belt round his waist, shoved a brace of pistols into it, took up a stout cudgel that stood in a corner of the hall, and set off for the Wild Wood at a smart pace.

It was already getting towards dusk when he reached the first fringe of trees and plunged without hesitation into the wood, looking anxiously on either side for any sign of his friend. Here and there wicked little faces popped out of holes, but vanished immediately at sight of the Rat, his pistols, and the great ugly cudgel in his grasp; and the whistling and pattering, which he had heard quite plainly on his first entry, died away and all was very still. He made his way manfully through the length of the wood, to its furthest edge; calling out cheerfully, 'Moly, Moly, Moly! Where are you? It's me - it's old Rat!'

He had patiently hunted through the wood for an hour or more, when at last to his joy he heard a little answering cry. He made his way through the gathering darkness to the foot of an old beech tree, with a hole in it, and from out of the hole came a feeble voice, saying 'Ratty! Is that really you?'

The Rat crept into the hollow, and there he found the Mole, exhausted and still trembling. 'O Rat!' he cried, 'I've been so frightened, you can't think!'

'O, I quite understand,' said the Rat soothingly. 'You shouldn't really have gone and done it, Mole. I did my best to keep you from it. We river-bankers, we hardly ever come here by ourselves. If we have to come, we come in couples, at least; then we're generally all right.'

'Dear Ratty,' said the poor Mole, 'I'm dreadfully sorry, you MUST let me rest here a while longer, and get my strength back, if I'm to get home at all.'

'O, all right,' said the good-natured Rat, 'rest away. It's pretty nearly pitch dark now, anyhow; and there ought to be a bit of a moon later.'

So the Mole got well into the dry leaves and stretched himself out, and presently dropped off into sleep, while the Rat covered himself up, too, as best he might, for warmth, and lay patiently waiting, with a pistol in his paw.

When at last the Mole woke up, much refreshed and in his usual spirits, the Rat went to the entrance of their retreat and put his head out. Then the Mole heard him saying quietly to himself, 'Hullo! hullo! here - is - a - go!'

'What's up, Ratty?' asked the Mole.

'SNOW is up,' replied the Rat 'or rather, DOWN. It's snowing hard.'

The Mole came and crouched beside him, and, looking out, saw the wood in quite a changed aspect. Holes, hollows, pools, pitfalls, were vanishing fast, and a gleaming carpet was springing up everywhere, that looked too delicate to be trodden upon by rough feet.

'Well, well, it can't be helped,' said the Rat, after pondering. 'We must make a start, and take our chance, I suppose.'

They set out bravely, and took the line that seemed most promising, holding on to each other.

An hour or two later they sat down on a fallen tree-trunk to recover their breath.

'We can't sit here very long,' said the Rat. 'We shall have to make another push for it, and do something or other.'

So once more they got on their feet, and struggled down into the dell, when suddenly the Mole tripped up and fell forward on his face with a squeal.

'O my leg!' he cried. 'O my poor shin!' and he sat up on the snow and nursed his leg in both his front paws.

'Poor old Mole!' said the Rat kindly. 'You don't seem to be having much luck today, do you? Let's have a look at the leg.'

'I must have tripped over a hidden branch or a stump,' said the Mole miserably. 'O, my! O, my!'

'It's a very clean cut,' said the Rat. 'That was never done by a branch or a stump. Looks as if it was made by a sharp edge of something in metal. Funny!'

The Rat, after carefully tying up the leg with his handkerchief, had left him and was busy scraping in the snow.

Suddenly the Rat cried 'Hooray!' and then 'Hooray-oo-ray-oo-ray-oo-ray!' and fell to executing a feeble jig in the snow.

'What HAVE you found, Ratty?' asked the Mole, still nursing his leg.

'Come and see!' said the delighted Rat, as he jigged on.

The Mole hobbled up to the spot and had a good look.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I SEE it right enough. A door-scraper! Well, what of it? Why dance jigs around a door-scraper?'

'But don't you see what it MEANS, you - you dull-witted animal?' cried the Rat impatiently.

'Of course I see what it means,' replied the Mole. 'It simply means that some VERY care-

less and forgetful person has left his door-scraper lying about in the middle of the Wild Wood, JUST where it's SURE to trip EVERYBODY up.

'O, dear! O, dear!' cried the Rat. 'Here, stop arguing and come and scrape!' And he set to work again and made the snow fly in all directions around him.

After some further efforts a very shabby door-mat lay exposed to view.

'There, what did I tell you?' exclaimed the Rat in great triumph.

'Absolutely nothing whatever,' replied the Mole, with perfect truthfulness. 'Can we EAT a doormat? Or sleep under a door-mat? Or sit on a door-mat and sledge home over the snow on it?

'Do - you - mean - to - say,' cried the excited Rat, 'that this door-mat doesn't TELL you anything?'

'Really, Rat,' said the Mole 'Who ever heard of a door-mat TELLING anyone anything? They simply don't do it. Door-mats know their place.' 'Now look here, you - you thick-headed beast, this must stop. Not another word, but scrape - scrape and scratch and dig and hunt round, if you want to sleep dry and warm tonight, for it's our last chance!'

The Rat attacked a snow-bank probing with his cudgel everywhere and then digging with fury; and the Mole scraped busily too.

Some ten minutes' hard work, and the point of the Rat's cudgel struck something that sounded hollow. He worked till he could get a paw through and feel; then called the Mole to come and help him.

Hard at it went the two animals, till at last in the side of what had seemed to be a snow-bank stood a solid-looking little door, painted a dark green. An iron bell-pull hung by the side, and below it, on a small brass plate, neatly engraved in square capital letters, they could read by the aid of moonlight MR. BADGER.

The Mole fell backwards on the snow from sheer surprise and delight. 'Rat!' he cried 'you're a wonder! A real wonder, that's what you are. If only I had your head, Ratty - '

'But as you haven't,' interrupted the Rat, rather unkindly, 'get up at once and hang on to that bell-pull you see there, and ring hard, as hard as you can, while I hammer!'

While the Rat attacked the door with his stick, the Mole sprang up at the bell-pull, clutched it and swung there, both feet well off the ground, and from quite a long way off they could faintly hear a deep-toned bell respond.