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(THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS)

ISBN 0-87129-160-6
THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

A Play in Two Acts

For Seventeen Characters

CHARACTERS

MR. MOLE ............. a small friendly animal

MR. RAT ............. a water-rat, resident of the river bank

MR. BADGER ..... venerable and respected resident of the Wild Wood

MR. TOAD ............. English country gentleman, owner of Toad Hall

JACK WEASEL ............. a disreputable fellow

JEN WEASEL .................. his wife

TOM WEASEL .................. a young weasel

TILLY WEASEL .................. his wife

MRS. OTTER ... a widow residing on the river bank

PORTLY OTTER ..... very young son of Mrs. Otter

CHAUFFEUR .................. driver for His Lordship and Her Ladyship

POLICEMAN ............. a rural constable

JAILER .................. keeper of the dungeon

PENELOPE ............. the jailer's pretty daughter

BILL .................. a locomotive fireman

ALF .................. the engine-driver

WEASEL COOK .................. employee of the weasels

EXTRAS: Offstage voices, such as those of the Prisoners in the dungeon and the Weasels carousing at their banquet.

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TIME: 1908.

PLACE: The English countryside; in and about Toad Hall, the Wild Wood, and the Castle (dungeon).
ACT ONE
Scene One

Before the curtain rises there is flute music, as if Pan himself were playing, and as the curtain rises, bird calls are heard. The scene is the neighborhood of Toad Hall. If convenient, there may be a weeping willow tree painted on the backdrop (remembering that on the stage it is outline rather than detail that counts). On the side wings, portions of willows and/or shadows of willows may be painted. If desired there may be a small, real or artificial willow tree. Toad Hall may be merely some impressive chimney-tops above the willow tree painted on flats or a backdrop, or an actual stage setting. A small sign reading:

TOAD HALL
PRIVATE PROPERTY
KEEP OFF
THIS MEANS YOU!

should be appropriately located. A pointer should indicate the direction to Wild Wood. A few pieces of lawn furniture are desirable, including a bench.

MOLE and RAT enter R, having presumably just landed at Toad's dock.

MOLE
What a wonderful day for a trip on the river! I'm deeply grateful to you, Mr. Rat.
RAT
Just call me "Ratty"--all my pals do.

MOLE
Thanks--Ratty.
    (Anxiously)
You're sure Mr. Toad won't mind your bringing me along?

RAT
Toad mind? He's always glad to show off Toad Hall and there it is, in all its glory.
    (Gestures largely)

MOLE
    (Leaning his head back)
But I can only see the chimney-tops. And how many there are! It's a palace! Mr. Toad must be very rich!

RAT
Rich--and foolish. Always some new fad! Now he's throwing away his money on cars!

MOLE
    (Worried)
Do you mean he might even lose this beautiful home?

RAT
That's exactly what I mean.
    (Pulls folded newspaper from his pocket and gives it to MOLE)
This was in last week's paper.
    (As MOLE takes it)
Go ahead. Read it.

MOLE
    (Reading)
"Toad in hospital--car a total loss!" Oh, my!

RAT
Read on.

MOLE
"Toad demolishes bakery van. Police charges Toad with being an incompetent driver! Magistrate fines Toad!"

RAT
(Extending his hand for the paper)
That's enough. That tells the story.

MOLE
But shouldn't somebody do something?

RAT
Of course. That's why we're here. We're meeting Badger.

MOLE
(Impressed)
Mr. Badger of Wild Wood?

RAT
The same. He knew Toad's father and he's worried, too! And, if I'm not mistaken, there he comes.

MOLE
There's someone with him. Following along behind--

RAT
(Peering)
By George, there is someone!

MOLE
A very small person.
RAT
Old Badger doesn't know he's there. Now we'll have some fun!

(Moves forward and greets Badger)
Isn't this a long walk for you--all the way from the Wild Wood?

(BADGER enters, carrying a thorny walking-stick. Trailing BADGER is PORTLY, the young otter, whom BADGER has not seen)

BADGER
Well you may ask, my young friend. I'm pretty well winded.

(Flops into a chair, breathing hard. PORTLY moves over behind Badger's chair)

RAT
Who's this fine, strapping young fellow you have with you?

(Indicates PORTLY, who backs away. BADGER turns, then rises with an exclamation)

BADGER
Portly Otter! And I gave you a penny to go home!

(PORTLY scuffs his foot and hangs his head. BADGER turns to the others)
Always tagging along where he isn't wanted!

(To PORTLY)
Off with you, my lad.

(Turns PORTLY R)
Off. Off. Go home!

(PORTLY doesn't budge)

RAT
Try him with another penny, Badger.

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BADGER

That's encouraging him!

(A struggle within himself)

Well--yes. Here, you little rascal! Now be off!

(Gives the penny to PORTLY, who pockets
it, backs away and then lingers unnoticed)

MOLE

He didn't even say thank you.

(Makes a tsk-tsk sound of disapproval)

BADGER

(Returning to his chair)

Oh, he's completely spoiled. No discipline. Let Mrs.
Otter turn her back and off he goes!

(PORTLY crosses to RAT and touches his
sleeve)

PORTLY

Go with you?

RAT

(Sharply)

Kid, you're a complete nuisance. Now clear out!

(MRS. OTTER enters R)

MRS. OTTER

(Approaching others)

Have you seen----

(Sees PORTLY)

Oh, there you are! Mama was worried!

(Takes his hand and turns to the others)

It's good of you to take Portly about with you so
much.

RAT

Well--actually----
MOLE
(Speaking almost at the same time)
The fact is----

MRS. OTTER
(Puzzled)
What are you talking about?

RAT
We sometimes wonder why the kid doesn't stay home and play with his friends.

MRS. OTTER
But Portly hasn't any friends. There aren't any children his age around.

MOLE
Doesn't he have chores to do around home?

MRS. OTTER
(Stiffly)
I'll see he doesn't bother you in the future. Come along, Portly. Good day, gentlemen.

MOLE
We didn't exactly mean----

(MRS. OTTER and PORTLY exit)
Oh, dear!

RAT
But we do exactly mean. The kid's a nuisance.

MOLE
He's cute, too--sort of.

BADGER
At least, we don't have to drag him along with us
today. And now for our interview with Toad.

RAT
(To BADGER)
Are you sure he's home?

BADGER
He said he'd be, when he invited us.
(Striking the ground with his stick)
I consider it reasonable to expect him there.
(Offstage R we hear the sound of an auto horn: "Poop-poop!")

MOLE
What sound is that?
(The horn sounds again, and we hear the car. The animals leap upon the bench to get a view of the road. RAT is up first)

RAT
It's roaring down the road!

MOLE
There's a cloud of dust!

RAT
It's a red car! Coming full speed!

BADGER
Look at the cows gallop!

MOLE
The driver's waving his cap! Yeah!
(Waves his own cap)

BADGER
(Peering)
Could it be---- Oh, no!
   (Covers his eyes)

RAT
It's Toad!

BADGER
Too fast! Reckless!
   (The poop-poop of the horn is heard. All turn their heads from R to L as the car seemingly dashes past)

MOLE
My, it's a grand car!

RAT
   (Excited)
He's not slowing for the turn!

BADGER
He's looking back and waving----

RAT
   (Shouting)
Toad! Look ahead, you idiot!

BADGER
Too late!
   (A loud crash off L)

MOLE
   (Covering his eyes)
I can't look.

BADGER
Ah!

RAT
The car's flipping over----
MOLE
(Who has uncovered his eyes)
Look at him sail!

RAT
Into the haystack!

BADGER
Fool's luck!
(Starts for the gate)
Come, let's help the poor lad.

RAT
The car's smashed.

MOLE
(Mournfully)
It was so beautiful.

(BADGER and RAT exit. We hear them calling to TOAD. After a moment's hesitation, MOLE also rushes out. In just a moment, the group returns, MOLE and RAT supporting the somewhat breathless MR. TOAD, BADGER hobbling along behind, anxious about his friend's condition. TOAD is dressed in cap, goggles, motor-ing coat, etc., and still grasps the steering wheel in his hand. A bit of the steering column remains, to which is attached a horn with a bulb)

TOAD
(Somewhat dazed, but elated)
Stopped her at last! Hooray!

RAT
(Ruefully, looking off)
That's the last of *that* car. It's a wonder you lived.

TOAD

The trick is to *leap* at the right moment. Did you see me leap?

RAT

I did.

TOAD

The next car I buy, I shall learn, first off, how to stop her.

BADGER

The *next* car?

(Muttering)

This is what I feared!

TOAD

Ratty, Badger, my best friends----

(Pauses, as he sees MOLE clearly)

RAT

(Quick to make introductions)

Mr. Mole--Mr. Toad.

TOAD

(Pumping Mole's hand)

Welcome to Toad Hall!

MOLE

(Much impressed)

Mr. Toad.

TOAD

(To the group)

How about a cool drink? Such luck you all happened
to turn up just now!

RAT
Don't you remember you invited us to come?

TOAD
(Laughing)
Oh, yes--so I did, so I did!

BADGER
He's dazed.

RAT
(Taking Toad's arm and leading him to a chair)
Sit quiet a bit, Toady.

TOAD
Yes, I wanted you all here. For I've discovered the true purpose of life! Cars!
(MOLE helps RAT seat TOAD)

BADGER
(Staring gloomily toward the road)
You'll never drive this one again. And the money lost!
(Throws up his hands in despair)

TOAD
Pooh! What's money? I shall simply ring up for another car.
(Tugs Rat's sleeve)
Ah, Ratty, this is really living!
(Presses the horn-bulb: "poop-poop!")
The open road, the dusty highway, fields and parks, towns and cities! Here today, gone tomorrow! Travel, change, excitement!