



# **The Wind in the Willows (1908), by Kenneth Grahame ( children's novel )**

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The Wind in the Willows is a children's novel by Kenneth Grahame, first published in 1908. Alternately slow moving and fast paced, it focuses on four anthropomorphised animals in a pastoral version of England. The novel is notable for its mixture of mysticism, adventure, morality, and camaraderie and celebrated for its evocation of the nature of the Thames valley. In 1908, Grahame retired from his position as secretary of the Bank of England. He moved back to Berkshire, where he had lived as a child and spent his time by the River Thames doing much as the animal characters in his book do—namely, as one of the phrases from the book says, "simply messing about in boats"—and expanding the bedtime stories he had earlier told his son Alistair into a manuscript for the book. With the arrival of spring and fine weather outside, the good-natured Mole loses patience with spring cleaning. He flees his underground home, emerging to take in the air and ends up at the river, which he has never seen before. Here he meets Rat (a water vole), who at this time of year spends all his days in, on and close by the river. Rat takes Mole for a ride in his rowing boat. They get along well and spend many more days boating, with Rat teaching Mole the ways of the river. One summer day, Rat and Mole disembark near the grand Toad Hall and pay a visit to Toad. Toad is rich, jovial, friendly and kind-hearted, but aimless and conceited; he regularly becomes obsessed with current fads, only to abandon them as quickly as he took them up. Having recently given up boating, Toad's current craze is his horse-drawn caravan. He persuades the reluctant Rat and willing Mole to join him on a trip. Toad soon tires of the realities of camp life and sleeps-in the following day to avoid chores. Later that day, a passing motorcar scares the horse, causing the caravan to overturn into a ditch. Rat threatens to have the law on the motorcar drivers while Mole calms the horse, but Toad's craze for caravan travel is immediately replaced by a motorcar obsession. Mole wants to meet the respected but elusive Badger, who lives deep in the Wild Wood, but Rat—knowing that Badger does not appreciate visits—tells Mole to be patient and wait and Badger will pay them a visit himself. Nevertheless, on a snowy winter's day, while the seasonally somnolent Rat dozes, Mole impulsively goes to the Wild Wood to explore, hoping to meet Badger. He gets lost in the woods, sees many "evil faces" among the wood's less-welcoming denizens, succumbs to fright and panic and hides, trying to stay warm, among the sheltering roots of a tree. Rat, finding Mole gone, guesses his mission from the direction of Mole's tracks and, equipping himself with two pistols and a stout cudgel, goes in search, finding him as snow begins to fall in earnest. Attempting to find their way home, Rat and Mole quite literally stumble across Badger's home—Mole barks his shin upon the boot scraper on Badger's doorstep. Badger—en route to bed in his dressing-gown and slippers—nonetheless warmly welcomes Rat and Mole to his large and cozy underground home, providing them hot food and dry clothes. Badger learns from his visitors that Toad has crashed seven cars, has been hospitalised three times, and has spent a fortune on fines. Though nothing can be done at the moment (it being winter), they resolve that when the time is right they will make a plan to protect Toad from himself; they are, after all, his friends and are worried for his well-being. With the arrival of summer, Badger visits Mole and Rat to take action over Toad's self-destructive obsession. The three of them go to Toad Hall, and Badger tries talking Toad out of his behaviour, to no avail. They put Toad under house arrest, with themselves as the guards, until Toad changes his mind. Feigning illness, ....

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