


Toad learns a lesson?



Kenneth Grahame invented the animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows* for his four-year-old son; the complete novel was first published in 1908. In this extract, Toad, who has been causing havoc in his motor-car (a new invention at the time), is swaggering out for another jaunt, when Badger and Toad's friends, Rat and Mole, intercept him ...

“You knew it must come to this, sooner or later, Toad,” the Badger explained severely. “You’ve disregarded all the warnings we’ve given you, you’ve gone on squandering the money your father left you and you’re getting us animals a bad name in the district by your furious driving and your smashes and your rows with the police. Independence is all very well, but we animals never allow our friends to make fools of themselves beyond a certain limit and that limit you’ve reached. Now, you’re a good fellow in many respects, and I don’t want to be too hard on you. I’ll make one more effort to bring you to reason. You will come with me into the smoking room, and there you will hear some facts about yourself; and we’ll see whether you come out of that room the same Toad that you went in.”

He took Toad firmly by the arm, led him into the smoking room, and closed the door behind them.

“That’s no good!” said the Rat contemptuously. “*Talking* to Toad’ll never cure him. He’ll *say* anything.”

They made themselves comfortable in arm-chairs and waited patiently. Through the closed door they could just hear the long continuous drone of the Badger’s voice, rising and falling in waves of oratory; and presently they noticed that the sermon began to be punctuated at intervals by long-drawn sobs, evidently proceeding from the bosom of Toad, who was a soft-hearted and affectionate fellow, very easily converted – for the time being – to any point of view.

After some three-quarters of an hour the door opened, and the Badger reappeared, solemnly leading by the paw a very limp and dejected Toad. His skin hung baggily about him, his legs wobbled, and his cheeks were furrowed by the tears so plentifully called forth by the Badger’s moving discourse.

“Sit down there, Toad,” said the Badger kindly, pointing to a chair. “My friends,” he went on, “I am pleased to inform you that Toad has at last seen the error of his ways. He is truly sorry for his misguided conduct in the past, and he has undertaken to give up motor-cars entirely and for ever. I have his solemn promise to that effect.”

“That is very good news,” said the Mole gravely.

“Very good news indeed,” observed the Rat dubiously, “if only – *if* only – ”

He was looking very hard at Toad as he said this, and could not help thinking he perceived something vaguely resembling a twinkle in that animal’s still sorrowful eye.