

The Wind in the Willows-The River Bank

by Kenneth Graeme  
adapted by Jules de Jongh  
Season 1 Episode 15

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Welcome my listening friends, today we have another epic tale, so epic in fact my neighbour Jules will be here with it any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: Minute now. Who ever could that be? Who is it?

Jules: It's your neighbour Jules with another epic tale?

Nanny Bea: We were expecting you. I've brought the tea this time.

Jules: Why thank you very much, then I better tell you all about our story. Today we're messing about on the water with the likes of Mole and Ratty in a classic tale.

Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please.

Okay then, The Wind in the Willows-The River Bank Chapter by Kenneth Graeme adapted for radio.

The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home till he had an aching back and weary arms. Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house underground with its spirit of discontent and longing. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, saying, "Blow spring-cleaning!" and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him. So he scraped and scratched and scabbled and scrooged, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, "Up we go! Up we go!" till at last, pop! his snout came out into the sunlight and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"Oh, this is fine!" he said to himself. The sunshine struck hot on his fur, soft breezes caressed his brow, and after the seclusion of the underground cellar he had lived in so long, the carol of happy birds fell on his dulled hearing almost like a shout. Jumping off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring without spring cleaning, he pursued his way across the meadow till he reached the hedge on the further side.

"Hold up!" said an elderly rabbit at the gap. "Sixpence for the privilege of passing the private road!" but impatient Mole bowled Rabbit right over saying, "Onion-sauce! Onion-sauce!" and was gone before Rabbit could think of a satisfactory reply, if one even existed.

It all seemed too good to be true. Finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering "spring clean!" he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only idle one among all these busy citizens.

He thought his happiness was complete when suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before—the sleek, sinuous, full-bodied creature, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh. The Mole was entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a babbling procession.

Soon he saw a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge. "What a nice, snug dwelling-place it would make for an animal with few wants and fondness for a bijou riverside residence," he thought. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture. A brown little face, with whiskers and the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted the Mole's notice.

It was the Water Rat!

The two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

"Hullo, Mole!" said the Water Rat.

"Hullo, Rat!" said the Mole.

"Would you like to come over?" enquired the Rat at once.

"Oh, it's all very well to just, *talk*," said Mole, being new to riverside life and its ways.

The Rat said nothing, but stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled it in; then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Mole had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just the size for two animals; and the Mole's whole heart went out to it at once, even though he did not yet fully understand its uses.

The Rat rowed across, then he held up his fore-paw to Mole. "Now then, step lively!" said Rat and the Mole to his surprise and rapture found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.

"This has been a wonderful day!" said he, as the Rat shoved off. "Do you know, I've never been in a boat before in all my life."

"What?" cried the Rat, open-mouthed: "Wha aa, you, you've never —well I—what have you been doing, then?"

"Is it so nice as all that?" asked the Mole shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it.

"Nice? It's the *only* thing," said the Water Rat solemnly as he leant forward for his stroke. "Believe me, my friend, there is *nothing*—absolute nothing—half so good as messing about in boats.," he went on dreamily: "simply messing—"

"Look ahead, Rat!" cried the Mole suddenly.

It was too late. The boat struck the bank full tilt. The dreamer, the joyous oarsman, lay on his back at the bottom of the boat, with his heels in the air.

"—messaging," the Rat went on unrattled, picking himself up with a pleasant laugh. "In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter. Nothing seems really to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do. Look here! If you've really nothing else on hand, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?"

The Mole waggled his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh of full contentment, and leant back blissfully into the soft cushions. "*What* a day I'm having!" he said. "Let us start at once!"

"Hold hard a minute, then!" said the Rat. He tied the boat up for a moment, climbed up into his hole above, and after a short interval reappeared staggering under a fat wicker luncheon-basket. Then he untied the boat and they were off again.

"What's inside it?" asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.

"There's cold chicken inside it," replied the Rat briefly:  
"coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkinssaladfrenchrolls—  
cresssandwichespottedmeatgingerbeerlemonadesodawater—"

"O stop, stop!" cried the Mole in ecstasies. "This is too much!"

"Do you really think so?" enquired the Rat seriously. "It's only what I always bring on these little excursions!"

But the Mole was no longer listening, he was intoxicated with the sparkle, the ripple, the scents and the sounds and the sunlight, he trailed a paw in the water and dreamed long waking dreams. "So—this—is—a—River!" said the Mole pulling himself together with an effort.

"*The* River," corrected the Rat.

"And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!"

"By it and with it and on it and in it," said the Rat. "It's brother and sister to me, 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. The times we've had together!"

"But isn't it a bit dull at times?" the Mole ventured to ask. "Just you and the river, and no one else to pass a word with?"

"No one else to—well, I mustn't be hard on you," said the Rat with forbearance. "You're new to it, and of course you don't know. The bank is so crowded nowadays that many people are moving away altogether. O no, it isn't what it used to be, at all. Otters, king-fishers, dabchicks, moorhens, and all of them wanting you to *do* something—as if a fellow had no business of his own to attend to!"

"What lies over *there*?" asked the Mole, waving a paw towards a background of woodland that darkly framed the water-meadows.

"That? O, that's just the Wild Wood," said the Rat shortly. "We don't go there very much, we river-bankers."

"Aren't they— very *nice* people in there?" said the Mole a trifle nervously.

"W-e-ll," replied the Rat, "let me see. The squirrels are all right. *And* the rabbits—some of them. And then there's Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it. Dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with *him*. They'd better not," he added significantly.

"Why, who *should* interfere with him?" asked the Mole.

"Well, of course—there—are others," explained the Rat in a hesitating sort of way. "Weasels—and stoats—and foxes—and so on. They're all right in a way—I'm very good friends with them—pass the time of day when we meet, and all that—but they break out sometimes, there's no denying it, and then—well, you can't really trust them, and that's the fact."

The Mole knew well that it is quite against animal-etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, or even to allude to it; so he dropped the subject.

"And beyond the Wild Wood again?" he asked; "where it's all blue and dim, and one sees what may be hills perhaps, and something like the smoke of towns, or is it only cloud-drift?"

"Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World," said the Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please. Now then! Here's our backwater at last, where we're going to lunch."

Leaving the main stream, they now passed into what seemed at first sight like a little landlocked lake. It was so very beautiful that the Mole could only hold up both fore-paws and gasp: "O my! O my! O my!"

The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank, made her secure, helped the still awkward Mole safely ashore, and swung out the luncheon-basket. The Mole begged as a favour to be allowed to unpack it all by himself; and the Rat was very pleased to indulge him, so sprawled out on the grass to rest, while his excited friend shook out the table-cloth and took out all the mysterious packets one by one and arranged their contents in due order, still gasping: "O my! O my!" at each fresh revelation. When all was ready, the Rat said, "Now, pitch in, old fellow!" and the Mole was indeed very glad to obey, for he had started his spring-cleaning at a very early hour that morning, which now having experienced so much, seemed like many days ago, all without a bite to eat.

When the edge of their hunger was somewhat dulled, the Mole's eyes were able to wander off the table-cloth a little. "What are you looking at?" said the Rat presently.

"I am looking at a streak of bubbles that I see travelling along the surface of the water," said the Mole. "That is a thing that strikes me as funny."

"Bubbles? Oho!" said the Rat.

A broad glistening muzzle showed itself above the edge of the bank, and the Otter hauled himself out and shook the water from his coat.

"Greedy beggars! Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?" " he observed, making for the food.

"This was an impromptu affair," explained the Rat. "By the way—my friend Mr. Mole."

"Proud, I'm sure," said the Otter, and the two animals were friends forthwith.

"Such a rumpus everywhere!" continued the Otter. "All the world seems to be out on the river to-day. I came up this backwater to try and get a moment's peace, and then stumble upon you fellows!—I beg pardon—I don't exactly mean that, you know."

They understood and where distracted, there was a rustle behind them, and a stripy head, with high shoulders behind it, peered forth.

"Come on, old Badger!" shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forward a pace or two, then grunted, "H'm! Company," and he turned his back and disappeared from view.

"That's *just* the sort of fellow he is!" observed the disappointed Rat. "Simply hates Society! Now we shan't see any more of him to-day. Well, tell us, *who's* out on the river?"

"Toad's out, for one," replied the Otter. "In his brand-new wager-boat; new togs, new everything!"

The two animals looked at each other and laughed.

"Once, it was nothing but sailing," said the Rat. "Then he tired of that and took to punting. Nothing would please him but to punt all day and every day, and a nice mess he made of it. Last year it was house-boating, and we all had to go and stay with him in his house-boat, and pretend we liked it. He was going to spend the rest of his life in a house-boat. It's all the same, whatever he takes up; he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh."

"Such a good fellow, too," remarked the Otter reflectively; "but no stability—especially in a boat!"

Just then a wager-boat flashed into view, the rower—a short, stout figure—splashing badly and rolling a good deal, but working his hardest. The Rat stood up and hailed him, but Toad—for it was he—shook his head and settled sternly to his work.

"He'll be out of the boat in a minute if he rolls like that," said the Rat, sitting down again.

"Of course he will," chuckled the Otter. "Did I ever tell you that good story about Toad and the lock-keeper? It happened this way. Toad was....huh?"

An errant May-fly swerved unsteadily past. Then a swirl of water and a "cloop!" and the May-fly was visible no more.

Neither was the Otter.

The Mole looked down. The voice was still in his ears, but the turf where he had sprawled was clearly vacant. Not an Otter to be seen, as far as the distant horizon.

But again there was a streak of bubbles on the water.

The Rat hummed a tune, and the Mole recollected that animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatsoever.

"Well, well," said the Rat, "I suppose we ought to be moving. I wonder which of us had better pack the luncheon-basket?" He did not speak as if he was frightfully eager for the treat.

"O, please let me," said the Mole. So, of course, the Rat let him.

Packing the basket was not quite such pleasant work as unpacking the basket. It never is.

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat rowed gently homewards in a dreamy mood, murmuring poetry-things over to himself, and not paying much attention to the Mole. But the Mole was very full of lunch, and self-satisfaction, and already quite at home in a boat (so he thought), and was getting a bit restless besides: and presently he said, "Ratty! Please, / want to row, now!"

The Rat shook his head with a smile. "Not yet, my young friend, wait till you've had a few lessons. It's not so easy as it looks."

The Mole was quiet for a minute or two. But he began to feel more and more jealous of the Rat, and his pride began to whisper that he could do it every bit as well. He jumped up and seized the rowing sculls so suddenly that the Rat was taken by surprise and fell backwards off his seat with his legs in the air for the second time, while the triumphant Mole took his place and grabbed the sculls with entire confidence.

"Stop it, you *silly* billygoat!" cried the Rat, from the bottom of the boat. "You can't do it! You'll have us over!"

The Mole flung his sculls back with a flourish, and made a great dig at the water. He missed the surface altogether, his legs flew up above his head, and he found himself lying on the top of the upright Rat. Greatly alarmed, he made a grab at the side of the boat, and the next moment—Sploosh!

Over went the boat, and he found himself struggling in the river.

O my, how cold the water was, and O, how very wet it felt! How it sang in his ears as he went down, down, down! How black was his despair when he felt himself sinking again! Then a firm paw gripped him by the back of his neck. It was the Rat, and he was evidently laughing.

The Rat got hold of a scull and shoved it under the Mole's arm; then he did the same by the other side of him and, swimming behind, propelled the helpless animal to shore, hauled him out, and set him down on the bank.

When the Rat had rubbed him down a bit, and wrung some of the wet out of him, he said, "Now then, old fellow! Trot up and down the towing-path, till you're warm and dry again, while I dive for the luncheon-basket."

So the dismal Mole, wet without and ashamed within, trotted about till he was fairly dry, while the Rat plunged into the water again, recovered the boat, fetched his floating property to shore, and finally dived successfully for the luncheon-basket and struggled to land with it.

When all was ready to start once more, the Mole, limp and dejected, took his seat in the stern of the boat; and as they set off, he said in a low voice, broken with emotion, "Ratty, my generous friend! I am very sorry indeed for my foolish and ungrateful conduct. My heart quite fails me when I think how I may have lost that beautiful luncheon-basket. Indeed, I have been a complete billy goat. Will you overlook it this once and forgive me, and let things go on as before?"

"That's all right, bless you! What's a little wet to a Water Rat?" responded the Rat cheerily. "Don't you think any more about it; and look here! I really think you had better come and stop with me for a little time. It's very plain and rough, you know, still, I can make you comfortable. And I'll teach you to row and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us."

The Mole was so touched by his kind manner of speaking that he could find no voice to answer him; and he had to brush away a tear or two with the back of his paw. But the Rat kindly looked in another direction, soon the Mole's spirits revived again, and he was even able to give some straight back-talk to a couple of moorhens who were sniggering to each other about his bedraggled appearance.

When they got home, the Rat made a bright fire in the parlour, and planted the Mole in an arm-chair in front of it, having fetched down a dressing-gown and slippers for him, and told him river stories till supper-time. Stories about leaping pike fish, and sudden floods, about

night-fishings with Otter, or excursions far a-field with Badger. Shortly afterward a most cheerful meal, a terribly sleepy Mole had to be escorted upstairs by his considerate host, to the best bedroom, where he soon laid his head on his pillow in great peace and contentment, knowing that his new-found friend, the River, was lapping the sill of his window.

This day was only the first of many similar ones for the emancipated Mole, free from his life underground. Each day longer and full of interest as the ripening summer moved onward. He learnt to swim and to row, and started to understand what the wind whispered in the willows.

The end

Nanny Bea: Why thank you Jules. You know, you've inspired me. Next time I'm faced with a difficult question, I will reply like Mole "Onion sauce, onion sauce!" Oh splendid nonsense. You bring the most delightful stories. Will you come again next week for another Tales and Tea?

Jules: I sure will.

Thomas: Go to [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com)

Jules: Go there to find out more details including the stories written out so you can read along and our contact details so you can feature on the show.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com).