

Audition Piece Three – pages 46 - 53

Toad Ratty, I just wondered...it's probably too late already but could you fetch me.... a doctor?

Rat Why? You're not ill, old chap.

Toad Ill? Not really. I just know, as we animals do know, that I have come to the end of some kind of road.

Rat Nonsense, Toady. I'll fetch a doctor if you want one, but I'm sure he'd just say you needed a tonic.

Toad A tonic. If it were only that. Is it getting dark? Has the sun gone in?

Rat No.

Toad It seems dark to me, Ratty...

Rat Toady, let go of my arm...

Toad Listen, Ratty. Forget the doctor. Fetch me a lawyer.

Rat A lawyer?

Toad Quickly, Ratty. I have many responsibilities.

Rat Yes, yes, of course. But Toady, let go of my arm. Badger should have told me how bad it was, Mole too. But they don't care. I'm the only one who cares. Toady, Toady. Can you hear me?

Toad Are you the lawyer? Take this down. This is the Last Will and Testament of Toad.....

Rat No, Toady, it's still me, Ratty.

Toad Haven't you gone yet? It's so dark...I want the sun. Give me the sun, Ratty, give me the sun!

Rat Toady...Toady.

Toad What?

Rat Hang on. Please hang on.

He rushes away and there is silence for a minute before from the huddled heap in the chair we hear:

Toad I could have been an actor, I suppose, though it's no job for someone of my intelligence. 'Is it getting dark?' Brilliant. I was quite moved. Not that it takes much to fool Rat. I mean he's a

worthy fellow with many good qualities but very little in the intelligence department. As in due course Badger will doubtless tell him. Ha ha! They're all such children. They think I'm a fool but sometimes I feel I'm the only one who's really grown up.

Toad sets off down the road. He can walk but he is so rich he normally doesn't need to, so while it not be true to say he is hitch-hiking, he is certainly on the lookout for any likely-looking motor vehicle. This being a story, it is not long before there is the sound of a motor horn (poop poop) and a splendid car draws up beside him. Two goggled Motorists alight.

Motorist Rupert Well, how do you like her, Monica?

Motorist Monica Like her, Rupert? I love her!

Motorist Rupert Peckish?

Motorist Monica I'll say. This motoring lark really gives a girl an appetite.

Motorist Rupert What say we adjourn to yonder hostelry. See what Mine Host can do in the way of fodder?

Motorist Monica What a topping idea!

Motorist Rupert Give the old girl time to cool off.

They adjourn, leaving Toad transfixed by the car.

Toad But I know this car. It's the one Badger sent away. Should I go for a drive? No. That would be stealing. Just a little drive, maybe...while they're having their lunch. It would be very naughty. I'll just see if it starts easily.

Toad, having started the engine, releases the handbrake, depresses the clutch, puts the car in gear and, gently easing his foot off the clutch and giving a touch on the accelerator, slowly moves off. Purists and driving instructors will have noted that he has omitted to check his driving mirror and to give the signal for 'I am moving off' but after all, this is the first motor car he has driven for several months so it is an exciting moment. It is so exciting in fact that he soon throws caution to the winds, goes faster and faster until suddenly (and possibly avoiding a hedgehog), he drives into a pond. Fans of Racine and Corneille will again be relieved to learn this takes place off-stage but one thing leading to another, the next scene takes place in a magistrate's court.

Magistrate I understand that the prisoner is a member of the middle classes and has a charming home in a riverside setting, parts of which date back to the fourteenth century. Moreover, he regularly sits down to meals of at least five courses, besides

which, and one might think that this is the clincher, he doesn't have to do his own washing up. Is that right?

Toad Quite right. I've never done the washing up in my life.

Magistrate I'm glad to hear it. That is one side of the picture... The other need not detain us long. The prisoner has been accused of taking and driving away a motor car, apropos of which I'd just like to ask the court one question. Why should the prisoner, a person of means, steal a motor care when he can, as we have heard, just as easily buy one?

Ch. Weasel Why should he buy one when he can just as easily steal one?

Magistrate I hadn't thought of that. Are you a witness?

Ch. Weasel No, your honour. Just a weasel with the public interest at heart.

Magistrate Now the prisoner is alleged to have driven the car into a pond. Tell me, have you ever driven into a pond before?

Toad No, your honour.

Magistrate So this is a first offence?

Ferret Fred He's driven into a haystack.

Magistrate Really? Who are you? Identify yourself.

Ferret Fred I'm just a ferret who cares for justice, your honour.

Magistrate Well, a haystack and a pond are a very different kettle of fish so I'm going to ignore that.

Stoat Stuart He had a close shave with a cow, your honour.

Magistrate Dear, oh dear! And who are you?

Stoat Stuart A stoat who knows the difference between right and wrong, your honour.

Magistrate I don't like the sound of a close shave with a cow.

Clerk Is the cow in court, your honour?

Ch. Weasel Yes, your honour.

There is an awkward pause until the Chief Weasel nudges Weasel Norman, and though he is hardly a cow look-alike, he dutifully stands up.

Rat That's not a cow, your honour. It's a weasel.

W. Norman I'm a cow

Rat You are a weasel.

W. Norman I'm a cow. Moo.

There is pandemonium in the court, shouts of 'Cow! Cow!' and counter-cries of 'Weasel' 'Weasel'.

Magistrate Stop it, stop it. Whether the witness is a cow or a weasel might exercise an Oxford philosopher but it need not detain us here.

Fox Sir, sir.

Magistrate Oh, I'm fed up with being interrupted. What is it?

Fox The prisoner's driving brought a hen of my acquaintance to the brink of nervous collapse. She didn't know whether she was coming or going.

Magistrate Hens never do know whether they're coming or going.

Fox This one did. She was very single-minded. Only now she's lost her head completely.

Magistrate And who are you?

Fox I'm a fox with a conscience.

Badger Ha!

Magistrate I don't want to hear any more. Despite all these objections I still retain the favourable impression I had of the prisoner when he first stepped into the dock. I keep thinking of that riverside mansion, where, who knows, I might one day be a guest...

Toad has begun to doze off and it takes a poke from Rat to alert him to the benefits that might accrue from an offer of hospitality.

Toad Oh yes. Any time you please. It will be a pleasure.

Magistrate Oh that's very kind of you... though that does not affect my judgment in the least. Do you do kedgerie for breakfast at all?

Toad Oh yes. And devilled kidneys.

Magistrate Oh my favourite. However, kidneys and kedgerie to one side, my inclination is to let the prisoner go free. With one

small proviso, namely the prisoner must never under any circumstances go near a motor car again. He must never ever drive.

Clerk What do you say to that?

Toad (*Very subdued.*) Never.

Magistrate Excellent. Case dismissed.

Toad No. Stop. I don't mean I never will. I mean I never won't.

Magistrate You never won't what?

Toad I never won't...not drive. I love motor cars. Motoring is my destiny! Petrol runs in my blood. I was born to drive. Poop poop, poop poop.

He starts driving around the dock and there is uproar in the court. Shouts of 'Seize him!' 'Restrain him!' 'Put him in neutral!'

Badger } He is not himself, your honour.

Rat } The trial has turned his head.

Toad } No, it hasn't. Poop poop.

Mole } Believe me, your honour, he's very nice underneath.

Toad I am Toad, the King of the Road. Out of my way, out of my way.

Magistrate Seize him somebody. Now that the prisoner has revealed himself in his true colours, the only difficulty that presents itself is how we can make it sufficiently hot for the incorrigible rogue and hardened criminal now cowering in the dock before us.

Ferret Objection, your honour. He isn't cowering.

The Chief Weasel gives Toad a rabbit punch. I think this is all right: cf. The Englishman gave her a French kiss, or, The cat dogged his every footstep.

Weasel He is now.

Magistrate Thank you. That was very public-spirited of you. Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty on the clearest evidence of stealing a valuable motor car. What is the stiffest penalty we can impose for this offence?

The Wild Wooders all hold up nooses.

Clerk Twelve months, which is lenient.

Magistrate Oh, I was hoping to pass a much longer sentence.

Toad Well you can't, Big Nose.

Magistrate What did the prisoner say?

Clerk Big nose, your honour?

Magistrate Do I have a big nose?

Clerk Not especially.

Magistrate So it's not fair comment?

Clerk No. Cheek.

Magistrate Can I give him anything for that?

Clerk Oh yes. Twenty years.

Magistrate Jolly good. That's cheered me up no end. Twenty years. Take him down.

As he struggles with the ushers and policemen the valiant Toad – and at this low point in his fortunes he is valiant – still continues to sing his song.

Toad (defiantly) The world has held great heroes
As history books have showed
But never a name to go down to fame
Compared with Mr. Toad
Poop poop.

The policemen hit him with their truncheons.

Mole Don't hurt him. Oh, Ratty. They're hurting him.

Rat No, no. They're policemen. They don't hurt people.

Mole Oh, Toady.

Toad Moley, Ratty, Badger. My friends. Help me. Help me.

Toad is led away between the jeering ranks of weasels, ferrets and stoats, but as he is hauled past Badger, this gentleman solemnly raises his hat – a literary reference which is likely to pass unnoticed. In the downfall and trial of Toad Kenneth Grahame was probably thinking of Wilde's trial. When Wilde was led away after being sentenced his friend Robert Ross was seen to raise his hat. There are great clankings of doors, turning of keys and dripping of walls as Toad is taken down into the depths of the castle.

Meanwhile Badger, Rat and Mole make their melancholy way home from the trial.