

Barge Woman

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The Wind in the Willows

pursued by the crazed car-hating Train Driver wielding an axe. When he has chased them all from the stage Toad slowly raises his head and finds himself looking up into the inquiring face of Albert

Albert Hello, Toad.

Toad I beg your pardon.

Albert I said "Hello, Toad".

Toad Toad? I'm a washerwoman.

Albert Yes, and I'm Sherlock Holmes. It's not another one of your crazes, is it? Caravans, cars and now dressing up in women's clothing.

Toad Ssh. This is my disguise.

Albert Well, I've penetrated it.

Toad Who are you?

Albert You don't recognize me? I'm not in disguise. I'm one of your ex-employees. Albert.

Toad Albert, of course. My trusty steed. My long-lost friend.

Albert Cue for bottom-snacking.

Toad snacks Albert's bottom

Toad What are you doing here?

Albert After the caravan incident my doctor advised me to seek employment in a less, as it were, stressful occupation, and preferably one where motor cars didn't come up behind me and without so much as a by your leave biff me on the bottom. Hence the barge now coming slowly round the bend.

The barge comes on very slowly

The lady on the barge is the barge lady, my new employer. Virginia Woolf she isn't, but her pie and peas is to cooking what Michelangelo was to ceiling painting. I will introduce you.

Toad No, no. She musn't know we know each other. There, there, old fellow.

Toad starts snacking Albert's bottom

Albert (*under his breath*) Don't do that.

Bargewoman Nice morning, ma'am.

Toad Is it? Not for a poor washerwoman who this very morning got a letter from her married daughter telling her to drop everything and come at once.

Are you a mother, ma'am?

Bargewoman I was once. Where was this married daughter of yours living, ma'am?

Part Two

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Toad Near the river, ma'am, not far from an elegant, self-contained gentleman's residence called Toad Hall. Perhaps you've heard of it?

Bargewoman Toad Hall? I certainly have. And it just so happens I'm headed that way myself. Hop on the barge. One more don't make no difference to Albert.

Albert Oh no. And why draw the line at one? One washerwoman doesn't make no difference — why not offer a lift to the entire staff of the Snow White Laundry? Plus their dependent relatives. Albert doesn't mind. The more the merrier.

Bargewoman He's cheered up. He was very depressed earlier on. So, you're in the washing line, ma'am?

Toad Yes. One is a career woman, for one's sins.

Bargewoman Are you very fond of washing?

Toad I love it. Love it. It's my vocation. Laundry is my life!

Bargewoman Well, what a blessing it is that I met you. We can both do each other a good turn.

Toad (*nervously*) In what way, precisely?

Bargewoman Why, my washing, silly, a whole heap of my scanties and whatnot.

Toad Scanties?

The Bargewoman gets him his tub, washboard and a packet of Rinso soapflakes

Bargewoman There you are — the tools of your trade. The raw materials of your art.

Toad Well, I suppose any fool can wash.

Bargewoman I bet you can't wait. Look at these — it's a laundress's banquet.

Toad I don't feel very well.

Toad starts to rinse and scrub with no great enthusiasm and a great deal of slopping the water about and general mess, while at the same time getting tied up in the stuff that he's washing and gradually getting furious and furious

Washerwoman's Song

Bargewoman

Happy to float
In a lazy old boat
On a lovely sunny day.
Drifting along,
Singing a song

E: sales@burnandwarne.co.uk

T: 020 8642 1234
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Bank House, 3 Sutton Court Road
Sutton, Surrey SM1 4SY

Rub all your troubles away
Completely. Happy to glide
As you go with the tide,

As you wend your weary way,
Drifting along
As you're singing a song
On this lovely sunny,
Lovely sunny day, hey hey hey,
On this lovely sunny day.

This traditional ballad from the pen of Mr Jeremy Sams comes to an abrupt end when Toad hangs the washboard on the line rather than the washing, a departure from established laundry procedures that convinces the Bargewoman of something she has suspected for some time

Ha ha ha. I've been watching you. You're never a washerwoman. I bet you've never washed so much as a dishcloth all your life.

Toad Don't take that tone with me, madam. Washerwoman? No, I am not a washerwoman. I am Toad, the well-known and distinguished Toad, the landed proprietor. I'm under a bit of a cloud at present but I'm still streets ahead of you — a common bargewoman.

Bargewoman A toad? Why so you are. Ugh. A horrid crawling toad and in my nice clean barge too. Now that's something I will not have.

She grabs hold of Toad and thrusts him overboard

Over you go! and good riddance! Ugh, what a nasty, scaly hand.

Toad Did you see that? Did you see it?

Albert Why, laundry person, I see you're wet through! (Notice how I'm keeping up your disguise.)

Toad There's no need to, stupid. She's twigged that I'm a toad.

Albert I'm not surprised. You never deceived me for a minute.

Toad starts undoing Albert's harness

Here, what're you doing?

Toad I'm riding you back to Toad Hall.

Albert You can't do that.

Bargewoman Stop that. Stop that this minute.

Albert I've got a bad back. Besides, I'm quite happy here. My only complaint is that it lacks a bit of civilization.

Bargewoman Albert. It's a toad. That washerwoman is a toad.

Now that Albert is out of harness the barge naturally begins to drift, so the Bargewoman has to leap for the bank and grab the tow rope herself. Meanwhile Toad tries unsuccessfully to mount the horse

Toad I'll give you civilization. I'll give you as much civilization as you want.
Albert Can I have the run of the library?

Toad Yes, yes.

Albert And you won't object if I put my nose in a book?

Toad No.

Albert Because I like a bit of Tennyson now and again.

Toad She's got out of the barge.

Bargewoman Listen, you horrible toad. That horse is my property.

Albert Property? I'm not your property. I'm not anybody's property. You'd better get on, Toady. Her property indeed. All property is theft.

They gallop off and the Bargewoman, unable to follow because she is still tethered to her tow rope, promptly bursts into tears

Two young rabbits come innocently along trailed by the Chief Weasel and Weasel Norman. Suddenly the two weasels bring out bags of sweets which they offer to the rabbits, who, very sensibly, scream in terror and take to their heels. Only then does the Chief Weasel notice the blubbing Bargewoman

Chief Weasel The good lady seems a trifle upset. Perhaps you should enquire why. And, Norman, sensitively.

Weasel Norman Hello, darling. Why the waterworks?

Bargewoman I haven't got anybody to pull my barge.

Weasel Norman Come again, my love?

Bargewoman I've been robbed.

Weasel Norman The stupid cow's been robbed, Chief.

Chief Weasel Who by, Norman?

Weasel Norman Who by, my little slice of suet pudding?

Bargewoman A toad — he stole my horse.

Weasel Norman A likely story. A toad stealing a horse — a toad! A toad,

Chief. You don't think ...?

Chief Weasel Just ask her which way it went, Norman.

Bargewoman That way.

They rush off after Toad

Having eluded their pursuers Toad and Albert come upon a Gypsy eating stew from a pan