

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 ideal!

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 had 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 take place offstage, 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 car when he can, as we have heard, just as easily buy one?

Chief 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?

Chief 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?

Magistrate I don't know. Is the cow in court?

Chief 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.

Weasel Norman I'm a cow.

Rat You are a weasel.

Weasel 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.