

Toad Toad Hall is a self-contained gentleman's residence in a picturesque riverside setting. It is very unique in its way and through parts of it date back to the fourteenth century it has up to the minute sanitation and the last word in billiard rooms.

Gaoler's Daughter It sounds paradise.

Toad Toad Hall? (*Airily*) No. Just a well-run gentleman's residence.

Gaoler's Daughter I wish I could see it, Toady. [When all's said and done he is rather a pet.]

Toad I wish I could take you there, my dear. [She's a comely enough lass.]

They cuddle

Who knows? Perhaps one day I can find you a position below stairs.

They uncuddle smartish

Gaoler's Daughter Below stairs? You're a convict. You're in here for twenty years.

Toad I was forgetting. Twenty years! Twenty years!

Gaoler's Daughter There, there. I'm a fool to myself, I know, but I've got a real soft spot for you.

Toad I know. So many people do. It's known as charm.

He blows his nose vigorously and while he doesn't quite examine the results, it's still a bit off-putting

Gaoler's Daughter I just wish I could think of a way of getting you out of here.

There is a distant call, echoing down the prison corridors

Washerwoman (*off*) Washing! Bring out your washing!

Gaoler's Daughter Here comes my aunt. She's a washerwoman.

Toad Think no more about it. I have several aunts who ought to be washerwomen.

The call gets closer

Washerwoman (*off*) Washing! Put out your washing!

Gaoler's Daughter She washes for all the convicts in the castle.

Toad How lovely for her — all those terrible vests and big men's smalls.

The Washerwoman comes into the dungeon

PART TWO

These days an offender of Toad's social position and financial resources could expect to be sent directly to an open prison, but Toad's prison is anything but open. He has the dungeon to himself, it's true, but Toad is not at the moment disposed to look on the positive side. Dressed in the traditional prison garb of overalls printed with broad (green) arrows he sits on his little bench contemplating his lot with no equanimity at all. Were there a psychiatrist attached to this gaol he would diagnose Toad as "subject to violent mood swings"

Toad Poor Toad. Poor little Toady. All alone. On his own. Nobody wants him. Nobody cares. I had a big house once. Servants. Friends. Wise old Badger. Clever intelligent Rat. Sensible little Mole. Why did I not listen to you? O foolish, foolish Toad. It's the end of everything. At least it's the end of Toad, which comes to the same thing. Thrust into this dark, damp dungeon, despised by the world, deserted by his friends, whom he entertained entirely at his own expense. Ungrateful Badger. Sanctimonious Rat. Silly Mole. Where are they when I need them? All nice and snug at home while I'm stuck here for twenty years. Twenty years! Oh, it's not fair. (*He goes into a paroxysm of grief, kicking his legs and banging his fists on the ground*) I can't bear it.

There is a shaft of light as the Gaoler's Daughter comes in with a plate

Gaoler's Daughter Dinner.

Toad Dinner? Dinner! At a time like this? I couldn't. (*Pause*) What is it?

Gaoler's Daughter Bubble and squeak.

Toad Bubble. And squeak. How insensitive people are. No. No. Never.

Gaoler's Daughter I'll take it away then.

Toad (*Inustily*) No. I might just manage to force down a mouthful. After all, I owe it to my friends. (*Snuffling, he takes a mouthful or two*)

Gaoler's Daughter You like that?

Toad Not particularly.

Gaoler's Daughter Oh well. (*She makes to take it away again*)

Toad No. I mean I don't dislike it. It's perfectly acceptable, in its way. Only, it's not what I'm used to at Toad Hall.

Gaoler's Daughter Toad Hall? Tell me about Toad Hall.

Gaoler's Daughter (*thoughtfully*) Actually, you're not unlike one another — Toad. I beg your pardon?

Gaoler's Daughter (*still thoughtful*) Only she can come and go as she pleases ...

Toad Lucky her.

You can see what's coming and I know it's no business of mine but prisoners in plays and operas so often escape by getting round gaoler's daughters that you'd think that for gaoler's daughterlessness would have long ago become part of the job specification

Gaoler's Daughter (*decisively*) Listen, Toad. You're very rich and aunty's very poor.

Toad That's the way the world is, I'm afraid. Aunty is doubtless carefree and happy, whereas we rich are burdened with our responsibilities. I myself am on the board of several companies.

Gaoler's Daughter What I mean, silly, is that if you made it worth her while, she might lend you her clothes and you could escape disguised as her. Aunty!

Toad Me dress up as a washerwoman? What a distasteful idea.

But the Gaoler's Daughter is already explaining her plan to Aunty

Couldn't I be a lady novelist — or a high-born prison visitor? I mean her? **Washerwoman** Him? I don't see the likeness at all.

Gaoler's Daughter (*mouths*) Give her some money.

Toad never quick on the uptake where self-preservation is concerned, doesn't immediately twig. The Gaoler's Daughter mimes bribery

Toad (*giving her a coin*) Oh yes, sorry.

Washerwoman I do begin to see a distant resemblance.

More money changes hands

Yes. Come to think of it we could be sisters.

Gaoler's Daughter Now, Aunty — the first thing is to change your clothes.

Washerwoman What for? It's not Friday.

Toad The disguise, madam.

Gaoler's Daughter Undress.

Washerwoman Here? I'm a married woman.

Toad Are you stupid or something? You've had your money.

Washerwoman Oh yes. That's it, isn't it! You've been paid. Now take your clothes off! Very well, but only to my bloomers. A line's got to be drawn somewhere. (*She begins to undress — an awesome sight*)

Toad Believe me, madam, this is far more distressing for me than it is for you. They're so smelly.

Washerwoman I wash other people's clothes. I'm not paid to wash my own.

Gaoler's Daughter Now we'll tie you up.

Washerwoman Tied up? You didn't say anything about being tied up.

Toad Let me. They'll imagine I overpowered her.

Washerwoman Get off me.

She sends Toad flying

Gaoler's Daughter Aunty, you've been paid, behave.

Washerwoman I don't care. The nasty little blighter, I'll ...

Toad That's enough out of you, madam.

Toad puts a laundry bag over the Washerwoman's head, which puts paid to further argument

Gaoler's Daughter Now, Toad. Put the dress on. You'll make a very good woman.

Toad Yes. I'm not unattractive — though I'm not sure this is really my colour.

Gaoler's Daughter You look just the ticket. Aunty, stop moaning.

A furious grunt

I don't think it will be difficult to get past the guard. My aunt is a woman of unblemished reputation and a keen Methodist and the guard is sure to keep his distance.

Toad What do you mean, keep his distance?

Gaoler's Daughter Well, you know men. So good luck, little toad, and if you get back to your nice house remember the humble gaoler's daughter who took a fancy to you.

Toad I shall. Perhaps when I open the house to ordinary people, you can come over to tea. Bye bye to Aunty.

The sack lunges blindly at Toad but happily misses

This is a far far better thing you do than you ever did before. Free at last! And now I must make a beeline for home where I can get out of this malodorous frock. And how convenient! A railway station.