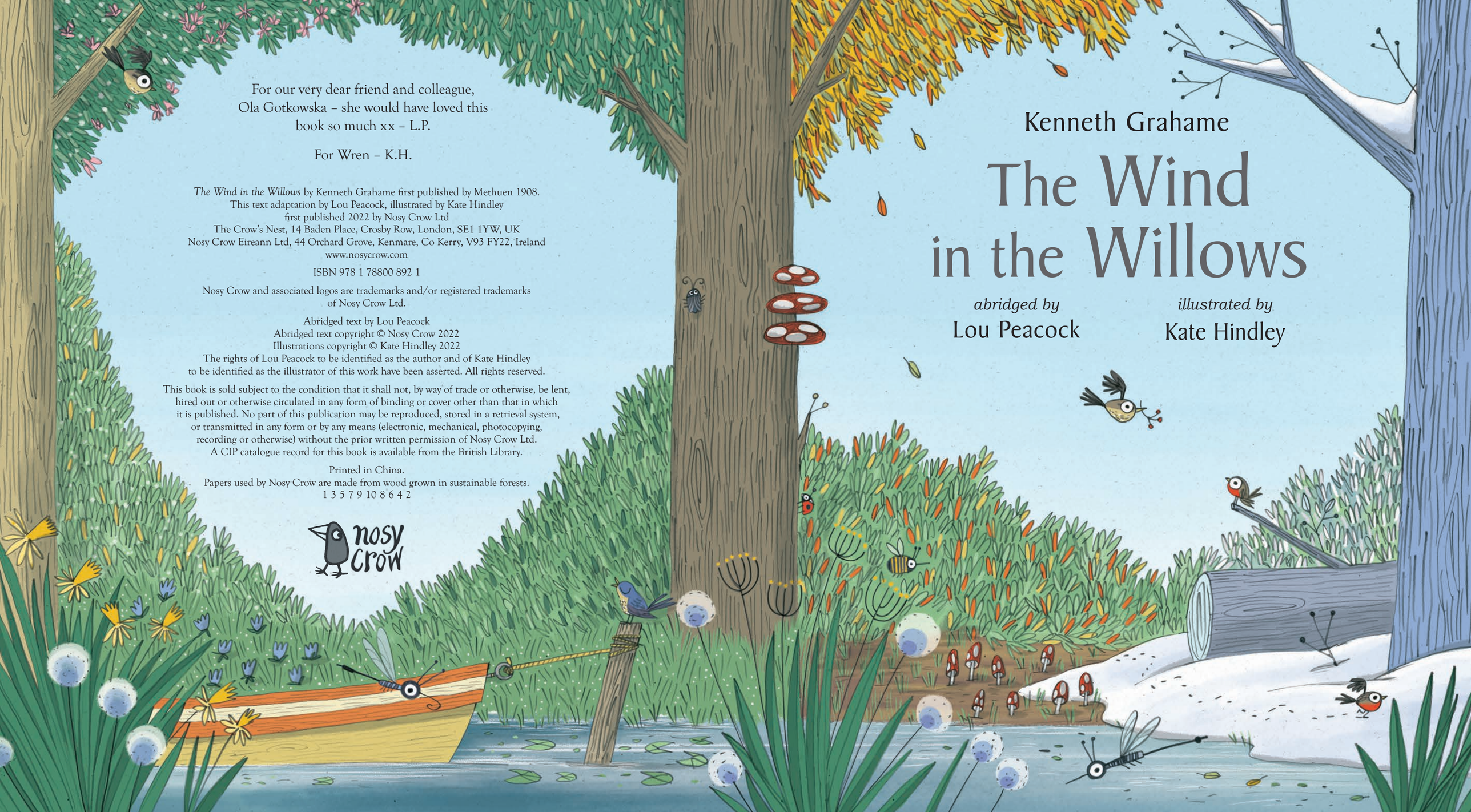


For our very dear friend and colleague,
Ola Gotkowska – she would have loved this
book so much xx – L.P.

For Wren – K.H.

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Kenneth Grahame

The Wind in the Willows

abridged by
Lou Peacock

illustrated by
Kate Hindley

CHAPTER 1

THE RIVERBANK

The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters, then on ladders with a brush and a pail of whitewash, till he had splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring was moving in the air above, and it was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush, said, "Bother spring cleaning!" and bolted out of the house.

He scraped and scratched, working busily with his little paws till at last, *Pop!* his snout came out into the sunlight, and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"This is better than whitewashing!" he said. And he jumped off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring.

He thought his happiness was complete when, suddenly, he found himself by the edge of a river. Never in his life had he seen a river before – all was a-shake and a-shiver, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble, and the Mole was bewitched. Then, as he sat on the grass, a dark hole in the bank opposite caught his eye. As he gazed, something bright and small winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it.

It was the Water Rat!

"Hullo, Mole!" said the Water Rat. "Would you like to come over?"

"Oh, it's all very well to TALK," said the Mole, being new to riverside life.

The Rat said nothing, but stepped into a little boat, sculled smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his forepaw as the Mole stepped down and, to his surprise, Mole found himself seated in the stern of a real boat.



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

"What?" cried the Rat. "Never been in a – well, I – what have you been doing, then?"

"Is it so nice as all that?" asked the Mole shyly.

"Nice? It's the ONLY thing," said the Water Rat. "There is NOTHING – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Look here! Supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?"

"WHAT a day I'm having!" said the Mole. "Let us start at once!"

"Hold a minute, then!" said the Rat and he climbed up into his hole and reappeared with a fat picnic basket.

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

"There's cold chicken," replied the Rat briefly. "Coldtonguecoldhamcold beefpickledgherkinssaladfrenchrollscresssandwichespottedmeatlemonade . . ."

"Oh, stop!" cried the Mole. "This is too much!"

"Do you really think so?" inquired the Rat. "It's only what I always take."

"All this is so new to me," said the Mole. "And you really live by the river?"

"By it and with it and on it and in it," said the Rat. "It's my world, and I don't want any other."

"What lies over THERE?" asked the Mole, waving towards a woodland that darkly framed the water meadows on one side of the river.

"Oh, that's the Wild Wood," said the Rat shortly. "We don't go there, we riverbankers. Though the squirrels are all right. AND the rabbits – and dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with HIM!"

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

"Well," explained the Rat, "weasels – and stoats – and foxes – and so on. They're all right but you can't really trust them, and that's the fact. Now then! Here's where we're going to lunch."

It was so very beautiful that the Mole could only gasp, "Oh my! Oh my!"

The Rat helped the Mole ashore and swung out the picnic basket. When all was ready, the Rat said, "Now, pitch in, old fellow!" and the Mole was very glad to, for he had started his spring cleaning very early and had not paused for a bite since.

"What are you looking at?" said the Rat presently, when the Mole's eyes were able to wander off the tablecloth a little.

"I am looking," said the Mole, "at a streak of bubbles on the water."

"Bubbles? Oho!" said the Rat.

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

"Hullo, hullo!" he said. "Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?"

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

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

"All the world seems out today!" he continued. "I try and get a moment's peace, and then stumble upon you fellows!"

Then there was a rustle behind them, and a stripy head peered out.

"Come on, Badger!" shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forward, then grunted, "Hmm! Company!" and disappeared from view.





"That's just the sort of fellow he is!" observed the disappointed Rat. "Well, tell us, WHO'S out on the river?"

"Toad's out," replied the Otter, "in his brand-new boat!"

The two animals looked at each other and laughed.

"Once, it was nothing but sailing," said the Rat. "Then it was punting. Whatever he takes up, he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh."

"Such a good fellow, too," remarked the Otter. "But no stability – especially in a boat!"

From where they sat, they could see the main stream, and just then a boat flashed into view, the rower – a short, stout figure – splashing badly but working his hardest. The Rat waved, but Toad shook his head and settled sternly to his work.

Just then, a mayfly swerved past. A swirl of water and a *cloop!* and the mayfly was gone. So was the Otter. And, again, there was a streak of bubbles on the river.

"Well, well," said the Rat, "I suppose we ought to be moving. I wonder which of us had better pack the picnic basket?"

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

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat sculled gently homewards in a dreamy mood. But the Mole was getting a bit restless, and presently he said, "Ratty! Please, I want to row, now!"

The Rat shook his head with a smile. "Not yet, my friend," he said. "It's not so easy as it looks."

But the Mole began to feel jealous, and his pride began to whisper that he could do it every bit as well. He jumped up and seized the oars so suddenly that the Rat fell backwards, while the triumphant Mole took his place. The Mole flung his oars back and made a great dig at the water. He missed the surface, his legs flew up above his head and—



SPLOOSH!

Oh my, how cold the water was, and, oh, how VERY wet it felt.

Then a firm paw gripped him by the back of his neck. It was the Rat, and he was laughing.

The Rat helped Mole to shore, then, when the Rat had wrung some of the wet out of him, he said, "Now then! Trot up and down till you're warm and dry, while I dive for the picnic basket."

So the Mole trotted about, while the Rat recovered the boat and the picnic basket, and when all was ready, the Mole took his seat in the stern of the boat. "Ratty," he said in a low voice, "I am very sorry indeed. When I think how I might have lost that beautiful picnic basket! Will you overlook it this once and let things go on as before?"

"That's all right!" responded the Rat cheerily. "What's a little wet to a Water Rat? Look here! I really think you had better come and stay with me. 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 he had to brush away a tear or two with his paw.

When they got home, the Rat made a fire in the parlour, and told Mole river stories till suppertime. Supper was a most cheerful meal, but very shortly afterwards a sleepy Mole had to be escorted upstairs where he soon laid his head on his pillow in great peace and contentment.

This day was only the first of many happy days for the Mole, as the ripening summer moved onward. He learnt to swim and to row and entered into the joy of running water.



CHAPTER 2

THE OPEN ROAD

"Ratty," said the Mole suddenly, one bright summer morning, "I want to ask you a favour."

The Rat was sitting on the riverbank, singing a little song he had just composed, which he called 'Duck's Ditty'.



All along the backwater,
Through the rushes tall,
Ducks are a-dabbling,
Up tails all!

Ducks' tails, drakes' tails,
Yellow feet a-quiver,
Yellow bills all out of sight
Busy in the river!

