

ACT I

Scene 1

Music - overture.

As lights come up, CHORUS members emerge from all sides of the stage, and through the house.

CHORUS

This is the tale of four friends...

MOLE, RAT, TOAD and BADGER enter upon their lines.

MOLE

A mole...

RAT

A rat...

TOAD

A toad...

BADGER

And a badger...

CHORUS

...and how one of them lost everything...

MOLE, RAT and BADGER turn to look to TOAD. Lights change, and we are in court. TOAD is seated in the dock. The MAGISTRATE, CLERK and CROWN LAWYER enter. The MAGISTRATE strikes his/her gavel three times.

MAGISTRATE

You have been brought before this court accused of crimes of the utmost gravity. It is now my pleasant duty to pass sentence on one of the most unredeemable creatures it has ever been my displeasure...

CLERK

Excuse me, m'lord...

MAGISTRATE

Yes, what is it?

CLERK

We haven't yet heard any evidence.

MAGISTRATE

(Sulky)

Seems a waste of time...this vermin is obviously guilty...

CLERK

(Clears throat.)

M'lord...

MAGISTRATE

Oh, all right! The crown may present its case.

The CROWN LAWYER steps forward.

CROWN LAWYER

Thank you, m'lord. The crown calls...Rat!

RAT steps forward into the witness box, sits on a stool or chair.

You are acquainted with the accused, known as Toad of Toad Hall?

RAT

I don't know why I'm appearing for the prosecution; Toad's my friend...

CLERK

Answer the question!

RAT

Um...yes.

CROWN LAWYER

Tell us, in your own words, how your friend's troubles began.

RAT

I don't...all right...it was last Spring.

MOLE steps forward, and takes up a brush and whitewash bucket from another member of the CHORUS.

Music, "Spring Cleaning."

RAT

Mole had been working hard all the morning, spring cleaning her little home...

Other members of the CHORUS take up the story. Lights change to define MOLE's home. RAT exits, along with the court.

SPRING CLEANING

CHORUS
HERE'S A BRUSH.

MOLE
More to do?

CHORUS
AND A MOP!

MOLE
Oh, no!

CHORUS
SPRING CLEANING

MOLE
Oh, bother!

CHORUS
WILL NEVER STOP!

MOLE
Oh, blow! Hang spring cleaning!

*MOLE throws down her implements. Members of the
CHORUS clear the remainder of the furniture.*

CHORUS
She made for the steep little tunnel which answered in
her case for a front door.

MOLE enters tunnel.

MOLE
(Climbing)
Up we go! Up we go! Up we go!

*MOLE twists and turns, clawing and climbing her
way up the tunnel.*

Music - "The Call" continues.

CHORUS
Till at last...

*MOLE somersaults out of the hole. Lights change -
outdoors, a sunny Spring day.*

CHORUS
...she found herself rolling in the warm grass of a
great meadow.

MOLE

This is fine! This is better than cleaning!
(Shouting)
Whoop!

CHORUS

She thought her happiness was complete when...

Music - "The River".

MOLE

What is this?

CHORUS

...she beheld a sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal...

CHORUS

...chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a
gurgle...

CHORUS

...and leaving them with a laugh.

Music - "The River" fades to low underscore.

MOLE

Is it you? Did you...call me? What are you trying to
say?

RAT enters in his boat.

RAT

Hullo, Mole!

MOLE

Oh! Hullo, Rat!

RAT

Would you like to come for a row?

MOLE tries to enter the boat, fails.

MOLE

(Peevishly.)
Oh, it's all very well to talk.

RAT offers his hand.

RAT

(Assisting MOLE.)
Lean on that! Now, then, step lively! All's well?

MOLE

Yes, thank you.

They shove off.

MOLE

This has been a wonderful day! Do you know, I've never been in a boat before.

RAT

What? Never been in a...what have you been doing, then?

MOLE

Is it so nice as all that?

RAT

Nice? It's the only thing! Believe me, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing about...messing about...

MOLE

(Spotting an object in the river, or the far bank.)

Look ahead, Rat!

The boat strikes the object. RAT falls back, head over heels.

MOLE

Rat! Are you all right? Oh, dear! Rat?

RAT

(Laughing)

...messing about in boats - or with boats. It doesn't matter!

(Shoving off again.)

Look here! If you've nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we travel down the river together, and have a day of it?

MOLE

What a day I'm having! Let us start at once!

RAT

(Handing MOLE a picnic basket from under his seat.)

Help yourself.

MOLE

What's inside it?

RAT

There's cold chicken inside it...cold tongue, cold ham, cold beef, pickled gherkins, salad, french rolls, cresssandwiches, potted meat, ginger beer, lemonade, sodawater...

MOLE

Stop, stop! This is too much!

RAT

Do you really think so? It's only what I always take on these little excursions; and the other animals are always telling me that I cut it very fine!

A pause. MOLE says nothing, stares at the river, nibbling food from the basket.

A fine day, don't you think?

MOLE

I beg your pardon. You must think me very rude; but all this is so new to me. So...this...is...a...river!

RAT

The River.

MOLE

And you really live by the River? What a jolly life!

RAT

By it and with it and on it and in it. It's my world. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing.

CHORUS

The air was soft and warm as they sculled gently onwards.

CHORUS

But Mole was very full of lunch and self-satisfaction...

MOLE

...and already quite at home in a boat...

CHORUS

...or so she thought.

MOLE

Rat, please, I want to row.

RAT

Not yet, my friend. Wait till you've had a few lessons. It's not so easy as it looks.

MOLE stands up and seizes the sculls from RAT.

MOLE

I can do it - you'll see!

RAT

Stop it, you silly Mole! You'll have us over!

MOLE makes a great, enthusiastic pull on the oars, loses her balance, and falls into the River.

MOLE

Rat, help!

RAT

(Laughing)

Come on then!

RAT pulls MOLE back into the boat, and drapes his coat over MOLE.

MOLE

Oh Rat, I have been foolish and ungrateful. Can you ever forgive me?

Three strikes of the gavel, and we are back in court. The MAGISTRATE and CLERK enter. MOLE and RAT remain in the boat; MOLE is frozen, RAT is not.

MAGISTRATE

I'm sure the witness finds this all very pastoral and amusing, but will you please come round to the point?

RAT

I'm sorry?

MAGISTRATE

The point! Which is...clerk! What is the point?

CLERK

When did the prisoner's "troubles" begin?

RAT

I was just getting to that!

MAGISTRATE

Now none of your cheek! Proceed then, but get on with it!

RAT

Yes, m'lord. Where was I?

The CLERK reads back the transcript as MOLE mouths the lines.

CLERK

Oh Rat, I have been foolish and ungrateful. Can you ever forgive me?

RAT

Don't you think any more about it; and look here, you're shivering! We need to get off the river. Well...why not?

MOLE

(Teeth chattering.)
Why n...not wh...what?

RAT

We're very near to Toad Hall. A fine place to put your feet up and dry off. Toad's good company too.

MOLE

Toad Hall? That sounds r...rather grand.

RAT

(Laughs.)
Yes, it is, I'm afraid. Toad is quite rich, you know, and his house is one of the nicest in these parts, though a little too close to the Wood for my taste.

MOLE

The Wood?

RAT

The Wild Wood. We don't go there very much, we river-bankers.

MOLE

Why? Aren't they nice animals in there?

RAT

Well, there's dear old Badger, of course. She lives right in the heart of it. Nobody interferes with her.

MOLE

Why, who should interfere with her?

RAT

Well...ah, here we are!

CHORUS

Rounding a bend in the river, they came in sight of a handsome, dignified old house of mellowed red brick...

CHORUS

...with well-kept lawns reaching down to the water's edge.

TOAD enters, followed by the BUTLER.

TOAD

Toad Hall!

(Noticing the new arrivals.)

Ratty! This is splendid! I was just going to send a boat down the river for you, with strict orders that you were to be fetched up here at once!

RAT

Calm down Toad!

(To BUTLER)

A towel for my friend, if you don't mind.

(BUTLER doesn't react.)

Mole - this is Toad!

TOAD

(Vigorously shaking MOLE's hand.)

Overjoyed! Any friend of Ratty is a friend of mine!

(MOLE sneezes.)

I say, you're quite wet, aren't you?

(Motions to BUTLER, who leaves to fetch blanket.)

MOLE

Y...yes. Fell out of a b...boat.

TOAD

Pooh! Boating! Tried it myself, you know - thought it was quite the thing for a while!

RAT

I dare say! You went about it as if it were the only thing in the world, Toady! Rowboats, sailboats, houseboats.

(The BUTLER returns with a towel, which he throws onto RAT's head. RAT gives the towel to MOLE.)

It's all the same, whatever he takes up; he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh.

TOAD

Boating - a sheer waste of time! No offense, Ratty.

RAT

(Offense taken)

None taken...

TOAD

I've discovered the real thing, the only genuine occupation for a lifetime. I propose to devote the remainder of mine to it. Come with me, dear friends!

RAT

Oh, dear...

The BUTLER wheels out a canary-yellow caravan.

Music - "The Open Road," under the following.

TOAD

There you are! What do you say to that?

RAT

Well it's...

MOLE

Yes, it's quite...

TOAD

Yes isn't it?

RAT/MOLE

But what is it?

THE OPEN ROAD

TOAD

A CARAVAN! A GYPSY CARAVAN!
IT JUST ARRIVED TODAY!
A CARAVAN! A CANARY YELLOW CARAVAN
TO SPEED US ON OUR WAY!

RAT

I beg your pardon...

MOLE

On our way?

TOAD

Yes, of course!

RAT

Where are we going?

TOAD

THE OPEN ROAD, THE DUSTY HIGHWAY,
THE HEATH, THE ROLLING DOWNS.
HERE TODAY, OFF TO SOMEWHERE ELSE TOMORROW.
FOLLOW NEW HORIZONS DOWN THE OPEN ROAD!

MOLE

Oh Rat, it does sound rather grand, doesn't it? Of course I'll do whatever you like...

TOAD

Come on, Ratty - you surely don't mean to stick to your dull fusty old river all your life, and boat?

RAT

Yes indeed I do, what say you, Mole?

MOLE

Whatever you say, Rat, all the same, it sounds as if it might have been...

...A CARAVAN...

TOAD

HITCH UP THE OLD GREY HORSE!

BUTLER enters, leading the HORSE.

HORSE

I'LL STICK TO MY Paddock IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU.

MOLE

...WE'LL SEE THE WORLD!

RAT

MARK MY WORD, NO GOOD WILL EVER COME OF THIS!

HORSE

MY FETLOCK ACHES AND THERE'S A ROCK IN MY RIGHT FORESHOE!

Music stops - everyone looks at the HORSE, who whinnies.

TOAD

(Selling to MOLE. Backed up by CHORUS)
THE OPEN ROAD, A NEW ADVENTURE
NO CARES; JUST FOUR RED WHEELS.
COME INSIDE, LOOK AT ALL THE FINE ARRANGEMENTS
TRAVELLING IN COMFORT DOWN THE OPEN ROAD!

(To Rat)

You know you've got to come. I can't possibly manage without you. So please, consider it settled. And don't argue! It's the one thing I can't stand.

Music stops, as everyone looks at RAT.

RAT
All right, for you Mole. No harm in it I suppose.

TOAD
It's settled then!

TOAD/MOLE
A CARAVAN, OTHER TRAVELLERS ARE WISHING US...

HEDGEHOG
Good day!

DUCK
Lovely cart!

SQUIRREL
Now that's the way to go!

TOAD/MOLE
WE'LL SEE THE WORLD

CHORUS
IN A CANARY YELLOW CARAVAN
ALONG THE OPEN ROAD

TOAD/MOLE/CHORUS
THE OPEN ROAD, THE DUSTY HIGHWAY,
THE HEATH, THE ROLLING DOWNS.
HERE TODAY, OFF TO SOMEWHERE ELSE TOMORROW.
ON THE OPEN ROAD, THE OPEN ROAD!

TOAD
Well, I dare say we've converted you Ratty, or near
enough.

RAT
How d'you mean?

TOAD
You have to admit, this is the real life! Here to-day,
up and off to somewhere else to-morrow! Travel, change,
interest, excitement! Talk about your old river!

RAT
I don't talk about my river, you know I don't, Toad!
(Aside.)
But I think about it. I think about it - all the time!

Music - variation on "The Open Road."

MOLE
Ratty, do you hear that?

RAT
Sorry, what?

MOLE
A kind of droning, sounds like bees.

TOAD
Well, it's bees, I expect!

RAT
Since when do bees kick up dust in that fashion?

TOAD
I don't consort with bees; I wouldn't know.

*A car, with a CHORUS member driving,
approaches. TOAD finally turns to look.*

TOAD
I say!

RAT
Back, you fool!

*The car speeds by, scattering RAT, MOLE, TOAD and
the HORSE. To the extent possible, the caravan is
knocked over, or is otherwise "damaged."*

Music - "The Open Road" variation fading out.

HORSE
Help! Fire! Wolves! I want my paddock!

RAT
You villains! You scoundrels, you highwaymen,
you...you...road-hogs! I'll have the law on you! I'll
take you through all the Courts!

MOLE
(To HORSE)
Now, now, you're all right. We'll soon have you free of
this.

HORSE
Is it gone? How can you be sure?

TOAD
(Immobile, his legs stretched out before
him.)
Poop-poop!

RAT

What a sorry sight! Windows smashed, axles hopelessly bent. Come on, let's see what can be done.

RAT and MOLE make an effort to right the cart, but it's hopeless.

MOLE

Hi! Toad! Come and bear a hand, can't you!

TOAD

Poop-poop!

RAT

Are you coming to help us, Toad?

TOAD

The only way to travel! Here to-day - in next week tomorrow! Oh bliss! Oh poop-poop!

MOLE

Now, look here, Toad! As soon as we get to the town, you'll have to go straight to the police-station and lodge a complaint against the driver of that car.

TOAD

Complain of that beautiful, that heavenly vision? That swan, that sunbeam, that thunderbolt!

MOLE

Oh, don't be a fool, Toad!

THE OPEN ROAD - REPRISE

TOAD

NOW I KNOW WHAT LIES BEFORE ME
WHAT CLOUDS OF DUST I'LL RAISE!
GLORIOUS! OH, THE POETRY OF MOTION -
FLINGING LITTLE CARTS INTO THE DITCH
ON THE OPEN ROAD!

THE OPEN ROAD, THE DUSTY HIGHWAY
WHAT BLISS - THE GOLDEN WAY!
HERE TODAY, OFF TO SOMEWHERE ELSE TOMORROW
FOLLOW NEW HORIZONS ON THE OPEN ROAD!

Poop-poop!

TOAD exits.

RAT

Nothing to be done. He's quite useless. Come on! Let's go home.

MOLE

But what about Toad?

RAT

Oh, bother Toad! I've done with him.

RAT and MOLE push the caravan offstage with much effort, the HORSE following.

CHORUS

After a long, slow walk back to Toad Hall...

RAT

Look here, Mole; how about you come and stay with me for a little while. I'll teach you to row and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us.

MOLE

Oh, thank you, thank you, Rat.

Lights change to define RAT's home as CHORUS members bring on a bed.

CHORUS

When they got home, the Rat escorted the sleepy Mole to the best bedroom...

CHORUS

...where she soon laid her head on her pillow in great contentment.

RAT tucks MOLE in, exits.

CHORUS

This day was only the first of many similar ones for the emancipated Mole.

CHORUS

She learnt to swim and to row, and entered into the joy of running water...

MOLE

(Sitting up in bed)

...and as she sat beneath the great willows that lined the river bank, she caught, at intervals, something of what the wind whispered so constantly among them.

Music - flute from "The Call."

MOLE exits in blackout.