

Audition Piece One – pages 3 - 9

Rabbits Morning, Mr. Rat.

Rat Good morning. (*To Mole*) Hello.

Mole Hello.

Rat You're Mole, aren't you?

Mole That's right, you're Rat.

Rat That's right. How d'you do. Well, this is an unexpected pleasure. A bit far from home, aren't we? Never seen you around here before.

Mole No. I've.....I've taken the day off.

Rat Taken the day off! I say, that's bold.

Mole That's a lovely boat!

Rat Well, I like it.

Mole I've never been in a boat.

Rat I'm sorry. I thought for a moment you said you'd never been in a boat.

Mole I haven't.

Rat Bless my soul.

Mole Why? Is it so nice?

Rat Nice? No, it's not nice. It's the only thing. Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. In them or out of them, whether you get away or you don't, or whether you never get anywhere at all, there's always something to do, you're always busy. But nice that's not the half of it. Listen, if you've nothing else on this morning, what say we drop down the river together and make a day of it?

Mole In the boat? Together? Could we? Could we really?

Rat Certainly. Hop in. Careful. Splendid. (*Hands Mole a hamper*) Put that on your lap.

Mole What's in it?

Rat Our lunch. There's cold chicken, cold ham, cold tongue, cold beef, pickled gherkin, sausage rolls, cress sandwiches, ginger beer, lemonade....

Mole Oh stop, stop. This is too much.

Rat Do you really think so? It's only what I always take. The other animals are always saying I'm a mean beast and cut it very fine. Comfy?

Mole Rather.

Rat Right. Off we go.

Mole So this is a river.

Rat My dear Mole, if I may correct you. Not a river. *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 and I don't want any other.

Mole Isn't it a bit dull at times?

Rat Dull?

Mole Just you and the river and no one else to chat to.....

Rat No one else? My dear fellow, the bank is so crowded nowadays, some people are moving away altogether.

Mole What's over there?

Rat Where?

Mole There. That dark place on the horizon.

Rat Oh.... nothing.

Mole Yes there is. It's.... a wood. (*Stands up to get a better view*)

Rat Don't stand up, you idiot. You'll have the boat over.

Mole sits down again. Pause.

Sorry about that. My fault. Shouldn't have called you an idiot. Only Rule One where boats are concerned is 'Never stand up'.

Mole Sorry.

Rat This looks a good spot. What say we pitch camp here? Steady as she goes. That's it. Make a sailor of you yet. You unpack the hamper and I'll lay the tablecloth. Peckish?

Mole A bit. Well a lot actually.

Rat Well, we won't stand on ceremony. Tuck in.

Mole reaches into the hamper.

Only Mole. Manners. Napkin first.

Mole Oh sorry. Sorry.

Rat Allow me. (*He tucks in Mole's napkin.*) Now eat away!

They start to eat, observed somewhat sceptically, by a hedgehog and a rabbit.

Hedgehog Herbert They seem to have clicked.

Rabbit Ronald The old fellow's probably lonely. Wants a bit of company.

Hedgehog Herbert Somebody to rabbit on to.

Rabbit Ronald Do you mind. I find that remark rather offensive.

Mole is still fascinated with the distant wood.

Rat What is it, old chap?

Mole Nothing.

Rat All right. I'll tell you what it is. It's called the Wild Wood....and it's just that we River Bankers don't go there very much.

Mole Why? Aren't they nice people?

Rat We-ell, let's see. The squirrels are all right. And the rabbits I suppose. Then there's Badger, of course. He's all right. He lives bang in the middle of it and wouldn't live anywhere else. Dear old Badger. Nobody takes any liberties with him.

Mole Why? Who would.....?

Rat It's the others you see.....the ferrets, the stoats and worst of all, the weasels. And yet they're all right most of the time. One passes the time of day, 'Morning, Rat', 'Morning, Weasel'.... but just occasionally, they..... break out.

Hearing themselves talked about the weasels put in a brief appearance. They too have tails and whiskers but in every other respect, camel-hair coats, Homburg hats and co-respondent shoes. They are gangsters.

Another sausage roll?

Mole When? When do they.... break out?

Rat Mole. Can I say something? One of the ways we animals have the edge on our human friends and why we're happier than they are is that we don't dwell on possible trouble ahead. Sometimes we need reminding about that, don't we?

Mole Sorry, Rat.

Rat It's a question of manners, really. I find most things are. Apple pie?

Mole But Rat....

Rat Mole, please.

MoleBut what's beyond the Wild Wood?

Rat Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World. And that's another topic we avoid. Point taken, Mole?

Mole Sorry.....(Pause) Rat.

Rat What is it now?

Mole I'm not sure this isn't something else I ought not to mention but there are some bubbles in the water.

Rat Bubbles? Oh Lord! Clear the food! Quick!

Mole Why? What's the matter?

Rat Too late.

Otter, wearing a striped Victorian bathing suit, has catapulted out of the water and stands in the middle of the picnic, shaking water over everything.

Otter Hello.... what's all this? It's a picnic? Rat, you sly beggar. I don't recall receiving an invitation.

Rat Because I knew you'd turn up. You never stand on ceremony, though you have stood on Mr. Mole's sausage roll.

Otter Oh gosh, have I? And we haven't even been introduced.

Rat Otter, may I present Mr. Mole, the wreck of whose sausage roll is now going down your throat.

Otter Delighted to make your acquaintance... (*Eating the sausage roll*)
Not wrecked at all. Flavour rather improved I'd say. Is that bloater
paste? Splendid!

Rat Really!

Otter Take no notice of Rat. Old comrades-in-arms, Rat and I. Is he
looking after you?

Mole I'm having a wonderful time.

*A small child with goggles and water wings and a large L on his back struggles
up on to the bank.*

Otter This is Portly, my youngest. He's just had his first swimming
lesson.

Rat Well, Portly. What did you think of the water?

Portly Wet, sir.

Rat Make you hungry, did it? Fancy some potted meat?

Portly Oh yes, sir.

Rat Well, tuck in, tuck in.

Portly takes a sandwich.

Otter What do you say, Portly?

Portly Thank you, sir.

Rat Who's out on the river today?

Otter Who's not out, you mean. Talk about cheek by jowl. Never known
the place so crowded. And Toad's out for one.

Mole Who's Toad?

Rat Was he in the punt?

Otter No. The skiff. I said to him, 'Where's the punt?' He said, 'What
punt?' I said, 'You had a punt'. He said, 'Did I?' I said, 'Well, I
thought you did.' Turns out he'd been showing the punt off to the
ducks and ran it over the weir. Mind you, he was already getting
bored with it. You know Toad.

Rat It's the houseboat saga all over again.

Otter First of all it was sailing....

Rat Then came the houseboat and we all had to go and stay with him on the houseboat....

Mole Oh how lovely.....

Ratand pretend we liked the houseboat. He was going to spend the rest of his life in a houseboat. It's the same whatever he takes up.

Otter He's lucky to have the money to do it.

Mole Has he got a lot of money?

Otter Toad's a good fellow, I'm not saying that. Just.... unreliable. *(Otter's attention has been caught by something on the river.)*

We must go. In you get, Portly.

Portly Must I?

Otter Yes, and sharpish. Our lunch is rapidly disappearing upstream. *(He somersaults back into the river.)*

Portly Thank you for the potted meat, sir. *(He holds his nose and nervously jumps in.)*

Rat Time we were moving on.

Rat and Mole pack up

Mole His lunch? What was the bloater paste?

Rat Oh that was just a snack. No. What otters really like are mayflies.