

Toad

The rabbits and hedgehogs have formed up behind Rat and they take up the chorus as the scene changes and to a burst of English Heritage music the rivers and terraces of Toad Hall rise slowly into view

Ducks' Ditty

All

Dabbling free! (Ah)
All along the backwater,
Through the rushes tall
Ducks are a-dabbling,
Up tails all!

Rat And here we are at Toad Hall.

Mole My goodness!

Rat Yes. It really is one of the nicest houses in these parts, though don't say that in front of Toad.

Mole Why?

Rat Toad is a lovely creature and very good-natured but — well, he's not very clever and he does tend to be just a trifle boastful.

Mole He must be very rich. What does he do?

Rat Nothing very much. His father was rich, you see, so he doesn't have to earn money, though he's quite good at spending it.

Rat's enthusiasm tails off as Toad appears. While Toad is dressed like a country gentleman in a loud suit of plus-fours, his green hair and large, round glasses stamp him as a toad

Toad Ratty! Good-morning. No, don't tell me. This is Mr Mole. We meet at last! How do you do. I'm told you've given the old rascal a new lease of life. And what do you think of my humble home, Mr Mole?

Mole It's magnificent.

Toad Yes, it's been said that it's the finest house on the whole of the river, and (some would say) anywhere else.

Rat nudges Mole

I saw that, Ratty. He's warning you that I show off, Mr Mole. And I do from time to time. But it's only my way. Some people are modest. Some people are not. And I'm not. Why should I be? I've nothing to be modest about. But listen. This is most important. You have to help me. Both of you.

Rat With your rowing, I suppose. Well, you're getting on fairly well, though you still splash a bit.

Toad Rat, stop. Boating — pooh. A fooling amusement. I can see it suits you, but in a curious way I find I've somehow — outgrown it. Prepare

yourselves for a revelation. Shut your eyes. I've now hit on the real thing — something to which I want to devote the rest of my life.

A gypsy caravan is brought on, pulled by Albert the horse

Rat Good Lord.

Mole Oh, it's beautiful. Ratty, isn't it beautiful!

Rat (dryly) Lovely.

Toad That's the real life for you, Rat — The open road, the dusty highway — go inside, my young friend.

Mole goes into the caravan

The heath, the common, the hedgerow. Here today and somewhere else tomorrow. Travel, change, interest, excitement.

Mole (pushing his head out of a sky-light) Come in, Ratty. You won't believe it — there's little bunks and a cooking stove and lockers and bookshelves, and it's all so snug.

Toad I see your young friend is a person of taste, Ratty. Sardines, Mr Mole?

You'll find some in the locker. Or a chocolate biscuit. Or both. I promise you nothing whatever has been forgotten. Now I suggest we start off in what — half an hour?

Mole Oh yes. Yes, please.

Rat Did I hear you say something about "we" and "start"?

Toad Now my dear, good old Ratty, don't go all stiff and huffy. You've got to come. You can't mean to stick to your dull old river all your life and just live in a hole in the bank and boat?

Rat Why not?

Toad But, Rat, Mole — I am going to show you the World.

Rat I do not want to see the World. From what I've seen of it so far it has very little to recommend it. Everybody doing things, getting somewhere.

Toad You mean the rat race.

Rat I can't think why they call it *that*. Well, I'm not coming and that's flat. And what's more, Mole is not coming either, are you, Mole?

Mole No. No, I'm not. Still, it does sound as if it might have been — well — rather fun.

Rat No. I belong here.

Toad But Ratty, old chap. I want to show you an England you've only dreamed of — the England of heath and common and hedgerow. We'll camp tonight on the downs, dine off chops, cheese, new bread, freshly churned butter and great swills of beer. And when we've done we'll smoke a pipe and lie gazing up at the quiet stars that have shone down on this England of ours for thousands of years.

Rat Oh yes — yes — yes.