THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS
Alternate Beginning

SCENE 1
The Riverbank in Spring

(Music Cue - Prelude)
(After a minute or so, the music becomes quieter and a spot comes up on Mrs. Moorehen, who is standing, stage right, in front of the curtain with an oversized THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS book in her hand.)

MRS. MOOREHEN: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome to THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS. I am Mrs. Moorehen, the animal who tells the story, and here are the other animals you will see in our play today: (One by one the main characters walk through audience, introducing themselves.) And now it’s time to use your imagination, to set the scene. Our story begins in the cozy but dark little underground house of Mr. Mole.

(Spot comes up on Mole, stage left, in front of the curtain. He has a chair, a pail, brush, broom, and feather duster to work with.)

The Mole has been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash; till he has dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring is moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It is small wonder, then, that he suddenly flings down his brush, says —

MOLE: Hang spring-cleaning!

— and he bolts out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above is calling him, and he makes for the steep little tunnel that leads to the world outside. He scrapes and scratches and scrabbles and scrooges, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself:

MOLE: Up we go! Up we go!

(During the next sentence, curtain opens and lights come up on the riverbank world in springtime. A two-dimensional grassy bank with bullrushes and daffodils is in front of the river. Water Rat’s front door is a hole in the bank on the far side of the river, stage left, with a sign reading “A. Water Rat, Esq.” Backdrop of the Wildwood.)

MRS. MOOREHEN: — till at last, pop! his snout comes out into the sunlight, and he finds himself rolling in the warm green grass of a great green meadow. With the sun on his back and the breeze on his brow and birdsong in his ears, he
Rambles through the meadow and sings a little song.

*(Music Cue — “Mole’s Song”)*

**MOLE:** Flowers are budding, leaves are thrusting,
No more whitewash, no more dusting,
Everyone’s working but me but me,
Everyone’s working but me.

Squirrels scurry, badgers bustle,
Everywhere it’s hurry, hustle,
Everyone’s rushing but me but me,
Everyone’s rushing but me.

Bees are buzzing, larks are laying and
Only I am holidaying,
Everyone’s busy but me but me,
Oh, everyone is busy but me. Oh—

Sun is shining, grass is greening,
Spring is great without spring cleaning,
Come and be happy like me like me
Why not be happy like me!

**MRS. MOOREHEN:** The Mole thinks his happiness is complete, but then he sees — a river! Never in his life has he seen a river before. It gleams and sparkles, chases and chuckles, it grips things with a gurgle and leaves them with a laugh. Mole trots along the riverbank and listens to the stories the river tells. There is a dark hole in the opposite bank, just above the water’s edge. As Mole watches, he sees something twinkle. It is an eye, then two eyes, then a face with whiskers. It’s the Water Rat!

**RATTY:** *(cautiously)* Hullo, Mole.

**MOLE:** *(cautiously)* Hullo, Rat.

**RATTY:** Would you like to come over?

**MOLE:** I don’t know how to swim!

**RATTY:** Never mind. I’ll come fetch you in my boat.

*(Ratty rows across the river and helps Mole get into his little blue and white rowboat.)*

**MOLE:** *(excited and a little afraid)* I’ve never been in a boat before in all my life!

**RATTY:** Never been in a boat before — you’ve *never* — well I — what *have* you
been doing, then?

MOLE:  *(shyly)* Is it really so nice as all that?

RATTY:  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! *(Starts singing. During the first verse Riverbankers drift onstage, with Mrs. Moorehen joining them. After the first verse, Mole and Riverbankers join Rat on the chorus.)*

*(Music Cue — “Messing About in Boats”)*