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THE GREAT CROSS-COUNTRY RACE

or

The Hare and the Tortoise

An Entertainment for Children

by

ALAN BROADHURST

Proposed Production Plan

by IRENE COREY

available from the publisher



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(THE GREAT CROSS-COUNTRY RACE or The Hare and the Tortoise)

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Cast

MR. FLEET	a Hare
MR. SETT	a Badger
MRS. WARREN	a Rabbit
MR. SPINEY	a Hedgehog
MR. PADDLE	a Water-Rat
MR. BRUSH	a Squirrel
MR. SLOE	a Tortoise
MRS. DARK	a Rook
MR. BASKET	a Dog
JACKIE	a very nice young human
ROBIN	another
A FISHERMAN	the common variety
MAUDE	one-half of a courting couple
GEORGE	the other half
MR. URBAN NOTCOUTH	a picnicker
MRS. URBAN NOTCOUTH	his wife
SOPHIA	his daughter
BRANDO	his son
FARMER BLACK	an irate farmer
MRS. STAINER	a near-sighted housewife

Note: By doubling, the cast for this play can be reduced to 7 men, 5 women.

The Action of the Play takes place in and about the Woodlands. Yesterday—if it was fine; or, even this very afternoon.

Basic are permanent Wings and Sky Cloth.

The ground rows are changed each time, and a central Set Piece keys the Scene.

The Continuity Scenes take place on the Apron and in the Auditorium. The Action is continuous but the Intervals may be arranged as desired.

SCENE 1 . . .	FROG ROCK QUARRY
SCENE 2 . . .	THE BRAMBLE THICKET
SCENE 3 . . .	THE RIVER BANK
SCENE 4 . . .	THE GRASSY BANK
SCENE 5 . . .	THE RIVER BANK AGAIN
SCENE 6 . . .	THE GRASSY BANK AGAIN
SCENE 7 . . .	MR. BRUSH'S TREE
SCENE 8 . . .	THE CORNFIELD
SCENE 9 . . .	THE COTTAGE GARDEN
SCENE 10 . . .	FROG ROCK QUARRY

TO MY GRANDSON

MARK RODERICK

who happily timed his arrival to
coincide with that of Mr. Fleet
and Company: August 1964.

SCENE 1—FROG ROCK QUARRY

A Ground-row of boulders.

Centre—Frog-shaped rock.

Downstage of the Rock is a smaller rock of a regular mound shape. It is, in fact, Mr. Sloe, the Tortoise, in retreat.

Around him, puzzled and arguing, are Mr. Sett, Mrs. Warren, Mr. Paddle, Mr. Spiney, and Mr. Brush. Mrs. Dark is a little apart, Up-left.

RABBIT. Well, I'm quite certain that it wasn't here yesterday.

HEDGEHOG. It must have been. Rocks don't grow in the night.

BADGER. But is it a rock? That's the point.

RAT. What else can it be?

SQUIRREL. It's hard like a rock.

RABBIT. It's rough like a rock.

HEDGEHOG. It's round like a rock.

BADGER. All the same, I've never seen a rock like it. And look at this sticking out—surely that is a leg?

HEDGEHOG. Whoever heard of a rock with a leg!

RABBIT. Well, there seems to be three more—one at each corner.

RAT. Please—you'll be saying that this stubby bit is a tail next!

SQUIRREL. And there's something here that could be a head—if it had ears—which it hasn't.

BADGER. A most odd rock.

HEDGEHOG. It would be an even odder animal.

SQUIRREL. Of course, there are some very odd animals. Far be it from me to be personal, Spiney, but you yourself—prickles instead of fur!

HEDGEHOG. At least I live on the ground and don't make my home in the trees like a skyflyer.

BADGER. Now, gentlemen, live and let live. We all have our little peculiarities.

RAT. Shall we get on with the sports? After all that's the purpose of this meeting.

BADGER. Quite. We were side-tracked by this—uh—thing here. I suppose it must be a rock.

(He sits on it).

It's as firm as a rock, anyway. Now, then—you've all sent in your suggestions for the events so we just have to see who's going to compete in what, and the Sports Day can begin. First, the Grass Eating Competition. Who's going in for that?

RABBIT. Me.

BADGER. Yes, Mrs. Warren, it was your suggestion. Now, who's for Grass Eating?

SQUIRREL. Not me, for one. Nuts, yes: grass, no.

RAT. Grass—ugh!

HEDGEHOG. We all know that Mrs. Warren could nibble more grass in an afternoon than the rest of us in a week.

BADGER. Mrs. Dark?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. The Grass Eating Competition?

ROOK. It chokes my craw.

BADGER. Oh, dear. Well, no other entries. It looks as though you've won that, Mrs. Warren.

RABBIT. Oh, good. Is there a prize?

BADGER. We'll have to see. Next. Mr. Brush proposes a tree climbing race. Twice up and down the Leaning Pine.

RABBIT. I couldn't possibly. I even get dizzy on top of our bank.

RAT. Much too cold up there for any civilized animal. Swimming now—twice across the river. That's the thing. Four times—ten times—hundred times, if you like. I'll take all comers.

BADGER. We'll come to that Mr. Paddle—but let's settle the Tree Climbing entries first.

HEDGEHOG. No thank you.

BADGER. Mrs. Dark?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. Tree Climbing?

ROOK. Climbing's for morons. I soar.

SQUIRREL. Well, really!

BADGER. Quite. How about the Swimming Race? Would anybody like to challenge Mr. Paddle?—No? Nobody. Oh dear.—Well here's one you can all join in. A most novel idea from Mr. Spiney—a Curling in a Ball and Rolling Down Hill Race.

SQUIRREL. Most undignified.

RABBIT. I haven't done it since my bunny days. I'm afraid I'm much too matronly now for that.

RAT. Who can curl in a ball on land? Animal Bob Apple in the water, if you like.

BADGER. Oh, dear.—Mrs. Dark?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. The Curling in a Ball and Rolling Down Hill Race?

ROOK. Deplorable.

BADGER. Then if nobody is going to enter these events, it just leaves the Cross Country Race. At least we have two competitors for that—Mr. Reynard and Mr. Fleet.

SQUIRREL. Reynard won't be entering, Mr. Sett. He asked me to say he was sorry but he sprained a paw yesterday on a hunt.

BADGER. Not badly I trust!

SQUIRREL. Nothing, really. But he's resting up today. Apparently there's another hunt at the week-end which he doesn't want to miss. The Horses and Hounds do look forward to it so, and he hates to disappoint them.

BADGER. What a kind fellow he is! Well, I'm sure we'll find plenty of others to give Mr. Fleet a run for his money.

RABBIT. Where is Mr. Fleet, anyway?

RAT. Late again—as usual.

HEDGEHOG. I've never known him be on time for an appointment yet.

RAT. He's certainly the dawdlingest animal.

BADGER. Something will have delayed him.

SQUIRREL. Food, most probably.

BADGER. Mrs. Dark?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. Did you see Mr. Fleet on your way?

ROOK. Snoring in the straw.

BADGER. Sleeping again. It's too bad of him! Well, while we're waiting, who will enter for the Cross Country?

HEDGEHOG. Against Mr. Fleet! He's the fastest animal on earth.

RABBIT. I can do half a field quite quickly, but I'm afraid a Cross Country run would be far too much for me. I'd get dizzy.

SQUIRREL. Include a few trees as obstacles and I'd have a crack. But not Cross Country against a Hare. Oh, no!

BADGER. Mrs. Dark?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. We must have somebody to race Mr. Fleet in the Cross Country.

ROOK. Circular tour?

BADGER. Yes. I've worked out an exciting course.

ROOK. All our family fly straight.

BADGER. This is most upsetting. We must have one race. How can we have a Sports Day if nobody competes against anybody!

ROOK. Warning! Warning!

(She hides in the wings. The others camouflage themselves to merge with the rocks, all curling motionless. Badger becomes an extension of Frog Rock.

The Dog bounds in.)

DOG. It's only me, Basket. Come on out.

(They uncurl. Rook re-enters).

BADGER. Why didn't you call?

DOG. Didn't want to make too much noise. *They* are with me. Or they think they are.

SQUIRREL. Slipped your lead again, eh?

DOG. No. We're hunting! What about that?

RABBIT. Hunting! Those two nice little doe humans? Oh, dear.

DOG. Not for you Woodlanders.

HEDGEHOG. Then what?

DOG. A new member of the family. Mr. Sloe. He got out of the garden.

BADGER. Mr. Sloe? What's his family name?

DOG. Tortoise.

BADGER. I don't think I know them.

DOG. This is the first one I've met. Came from a long way off, he says. What's a ship?

RAT. Like a floating log, I believe. But very big.

DOG. That's it then—he came from somewhere on a big floating log.

BADGER. What is he, a Woodlander?

DOG. I don't know exactly.

RAT. A Riverswimmer?

DOG. No. He'd sink for sure.

HEDGEHOG. A Skyflyer?

DOG. Impossible.

BADGER. I suppose he is Animal?

DOG. Oh, yes—sort of.

BADGER. Don't you know. How many legs?

DOG. Four—when you can see them.

SQUIRREL. Tail?

DOG. Sort of.

SQUIRREL. Head?

DOG. Sometimes.

SQUIRREL. Eyes?

DOG. I think so.

RABBIT. Ears?

DOG. Never saw any.

HEDGEHOG. What's his coat—fur or proper prickles?

DOG. Neither.

BADGER. Then what? Feathers?

DOG. No. You won't believe this . . . Well, it seems to me to be rock.

BADGER. Rock! — Stranger — dubious legs—no ears—rock? Oh my goodness!

(He leaps up).

I do believe . . .

DOG. That's him. See what I mean?

SQUIRREL. But it's not alive is it?

DOG. Oh, yes. Sleeps a lot.

HEDGEHOG. But what's he doing here?

DOG. Just having a look round. Said he'd explored our garden and wanted to meet you Woodlanders. My humans think he's run away. Run away! That's good!

RABBIT. Why?

DOG. Because he moves so slowly that sometimes you think he's going backwards.

BADGER. He seems to have reached here all right.

DOG. So he should have—he left last night.

SQUIRREL. Run away from the humans has he?

DOG. No more than me. But we both like a bit of intelligent conversation with friends. And poor old Mr. Sloe hasn't picked up any of the human language yet.

RABBIT. I'm sure I couldn't either. I do think you're clever, Mr. Basket—you understand every word they say.

DOG. True. The great thing, of course, is not to let on. Anyway today I'm with you. What's it to be?

BADGER. It was to have been sports—but no one will compete. I wonder if your Mr. Sloe would enter? He can't run fast, you say, so the Cross Country's out, but he might—uh—Swim . . . ?

(All are surveying the Tortoise: All shake heads on each query).

Climb the Tree . . . ? Roll Down the Hill . . . ? Ah! Grass Eating!

DOG. He eats grass and such. Day before yesterday he ate a whole dandelion leaf. Started at sun-up and took the last bit to bed with him.—Still, perhaps he's good at something.

(He raps smartly on the shell).

Anyone at home? Heh. Torto—wakey, wakey! It's me, Basket. I want to introduce you to my friends.

(Tortoise emerges and rises slowly to his hind legs).

TORTOISE. Ah, it's you, Mr. Basket. Must have dropped off for a moment.

DOG. You found the Quarry, then.

TORTOISE. Just as you directed. There was no one about, so I waited.

DOG. Good for you. Well, we're all here now. Let's see . . . This is Mr. Sett, Leader of the Woodlanders, Chairman of the Winter Stores Committee, Secretary of the Sports and Pastimes, and all that sort of thing.

TORTOISE. How do you do, Mr. Sett.

BADGER. Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Sloe. You've been puzzling us a little. From over the Hill, are you?

TORTOISE. And beyond. My native home is over the sea.

BADGER. Sea?

RAT. Where all the rivers meet. Otter's been. Told me about it.

They say there are Woodlands on the other side, but you can't see them, it's so big.

TORTOISE. Oh, there are, believe me.

DOG. This is Mr. Paddle.

TORTOISE. Delighted.

RAT. A pleasure.

DOG. And Mrs. Warren.

RABBIT. I'm so glad you're not a rock.

TORTOISE. My house? Yes, it's meant to look like a rock. Stops being pestered.

RABBIT. Do you take it everywhere?

TORTOISE. I find it convenient. It saves going home every night.

SQUIRREL. Ah, you're a relative of the Snails, I take it.

DOG. This is Mr. Brush.

TORTOISE. Pleased to meet you. Very distant cousins, the Snails. Very distant indeed. They haven't our swiftness of movement, you know. Our nearest relatives are the Turtle family.

BADGER. The Turtles?

TORTOISE. You don't know them? Pity. Charming creatures. The Turtles, the Terrapins and the Tortoise—we're quite a clan over the sea.

BADGER. And it's very nice to meet you. Mrs. Dark . . . ?

ROOK. Wha'?

BADGER. This is Mr. Sloe. He has come to live with Mr. Basket and the little female humans. Thought he'd visit us.

ROOK. What for?

TORTOISE. Just to be sociable. It's very pleasant in the garden, but lonely. One pines for a friendly chat now and then.

SQUIRREL. I thought the humans were forever talking to the Garden Animals.

TORTOISE. They do. They do. But it's such gobble-di-gook, it makes my head swim. So if you don't mind, I would like to join you here in the Woodlands from time to time.

BADGER. Delighted to have you just whenever.

SQUIRREL. By all means. You must visit my Tree one evening: we'll have a bit of a crack.

TORTOISE. Thank you. Thank you.

(There is a commotion at the rear of the auditorium. Mr. Fleet has arrived. He charges down an aisle, and on to the stage).

HARE. Right, everybody, I'm here! Sorry to be a little late: Was delayed. Important conference.

(He is with them).

Are we all met? The Sports can begin. I'm here.

(He sees Tortoise).

Ah, who—what—is this?

BADGER. A new friend. Mr. Sloe. Mr. Sloe, meet Mr. Fleet.

TORTOISE. How do you do, Mr. Fleet.

HARE. Howdo. You competing in the sports?

TORTOISE. I had not really thought about it.

HARE. Just as well. Not much of a runner, I should say.

TORTOISE. I get where I want to be, you know.

HARE. Ah, but when?

TORTOISE. Slow and steady wins the race, they say.

HARE. Do they? Well, take it from me, they're wrong. 'To the Swift, the Lettuce'—my old school motto.

TORTOISE. I dare say you are right, Mr. Fleet.

HARE. I'm always right. And what's this on your back?

BADGER. Please, Mr. Fleet!

HARE. He don't mind me asking. You don't mind me asking, do you Mr.—uh . . .

TORTOISE. Sloe.

HARE. Slow. I should have remembered that easily enough.

TORTOISE. It is my back.

HARE. This great lump of whatever it is!

SQUIRREL. Shell. You know, Fleet—like Snails, only bigger. Terrapins and Turtles—same idea. Carry your house with you.

HARE. What's the point of that? He'd never get anywhere in a month of Sundays.

TORTOISE. You'd be surprised, Mr. Fleet, how we Tortoise do get around.

HARE. But not in athletic sports. I suppose we could use you as a finishing post.

(He turns away, rudely).

Why don't we start? I'll just win this race, then run over to Hambledon Hill for tea with the Moles—it's only ten miles. Where's Reynard?

SQUIRREL. Not coming. Laid up with a sprained paw.

HARE. That's what he says. Afraid of me beating him, more like it.

BADGER. I'm sure it's not that. Mr. Reynard is a very fine Cross Country runner.

HARE. Horse radish! I can beat Reynard with one paw strapped to my back! I can run faster and straighter and longer than any animal in the Woodlands. I can run so fast, that if I set out now to the Cabbage Field to fetch a head for dinner, I should meet myself coming back!

HEDGEHOG. If you didn't stop for a nap on the way.

HARE. What's that! I could stop for fifty naps, and still beat any of you slow-coaches. And if you don't believe me, just enter for the Cross Country now. Come on—anybody.

RABBIT. You know we wouldn't stand a chance against you.

HARE. I tell you what, I'll give any of you five minutes start. What about it, Basket?

DOG. How d'you expect me to race you if my Greyhound cousins can't catch you? I'm not built for speed.

HARE. No good asking you, Paddle—you'd trip over your own tail.

RAT. I'll swim you a mile up the river.

HARE. Fiddle-di-de—swimming! I'm talking about real animal sport—running. And none of you are any good. Brush—he can't run for nuts. Nobody can beat me.

BADGER. That's the last event gone west. It is a shame. I've been to no end of trouble to arrange the course.

TORTOISE. Is it a long course, Mr. Sett?

BADGER. Three miles exactly. It starts here and goes to the Bramble Thicket, then to . . . Wait, I'll show you. Mr. Spiney and Mr. Brush, would you fetch the old gate I was working on, please?

(Hedgehog and Squirrel exit, to return with a solid gate on which is chalked a pictorial diagram of the Course).

HARE. Thinking of issuing a challenge, Mr. Sloe?

TORTOISE. Just interested. We often had Cross Country runs at home. Most enjoyable.

HARE. What did you use for legs!

TORTOISE. These I have served quite well.

(On comes the gate).

Ah.

BADGER (*Lecturing*). Now, here's the Start—Frog Rock. First check point—the Bramble Thicket. Then to the River Bank: From there to the Grassy Bank; then to Mr. Brush's Tree; half a mile to the Cornfield; then past the end of the Keeper's Cottage, and a straight run home to here again in the Old Quarry and Frog Rock, where the runners have to pass Frog Rock and do one more full lap of the Quarry to win—There will be judges at each point, and Mr. Basket will take short cuts and be general referee.

TORTOISE. Very, very interesting.

HARE. Too easy. Hardly worth running.

TORTOISE. Very similar to our courses at home. Not too short and not too long.

HARE. Well, you're wrong again, fat legs. This race is too short *and* too long for any animal—except me. And to me it doesn't matter. Short or long—Hares can't go wrong. We Hares are the fastest runners on earth.

TORTOISE. Mr. Sett . . .

HARE. We Hares are the most athletic creatures in creation.

TORTOISE. Mr. Sett, I think I will . . .

HARE. We Hares have the longest legs and longest ears of all animals.

TORTOISE. I think I will, if it's all the same to everybody . . .

HARE. We Hares are invincible—and bright and intelligent—and pretty—and witty—and charming—and no animal dares compete against us.

TORTOISE. I think I will enter for the Cross Country Race.

HARE. We Hares in general, and myself in particular—What!

BADGER. Are you sure, Mr. Sloe?

TORTOISE. Yes, I would enjoy a good run.

HARE. You! You want to race me?

TORTOISE. If you'd be so kind.

HARE. Ridiculous! I'd be past the winning post before you'd started.

TORTOISE. In that case, you would be the winner.

HARE. Winner? Of course I'd be the winner! No—I won't do it.

TORTOISE. Then I would be the winner. Mr. Fleet beaten at last.

SQUIRREL. That would be a tid-bit of news throughout the Woodlands.

HARE. But I can't be beaten if I don't run.

HEDGEHOG. And you can't win if you don't run.

SQUIRREL. Mr. Fleet refuses a challenge from a stranger!

HARE. I don't refuse a challenge. I just refuse to run against a fat-legged, hump-backed, earless old slow coach. I would be the laughing stock of the corn stukes!

DOG. You will be if my friend has a walk-over.

HARE. Walk-over! Crawl-over, you mean!

RABBIT. And he might win if you give him a good enough start.

HARE. Talk sense. He couldn't beat me if I gave him a half-way round start.

TORTOISE. Oh, I don't want a start.

HARE. You seriously think you can run faster than me?

TORTOISE. No.

HARE. Ah!

TORTOISE. But I'm sure I can win the Cross Country Race. In fact, I think any animal here could beat you, young Hare.

HARE. What!

TORTOISE. And, if I may say so, I think that some animal should have done it long ago.

HARE. Why, you . . .

TORTOISE. Because, I'm afraid you really need a lesson. You strike me as being just a little too proud of yourself—too boastful—not to say, cocky, young Hare.

HARE. Will you stop calling me 'young Hare'! I am three! And in the prime of my animalhood.

TORTOISE. Are you? I am twenty-four.

(A general gasp).

And am still a comparatively young tortoise. Now, do we race, or are you too scatter-brained even to start?

HARE *(Thumping his feet on the ground in temper).* That does it! We race!

ROOK. Warning! Warning! Withdraw! Withdraw!

(The Animals freeze as previously, albeit with heads cocked until the last second. The Hare merely leans nonchalantly against a wing, confident that, if he is spotted, he can run from danger. The Dog listens and sniffs.

We hear human voices—but NOT intelligible speech. We are with the animals and can understand their speech: We cannot, therefore, reasonably expect to comprehend human speech as well. Only Dogs and some of the Birds are so bi-lingual. But we can

sense general meanings from the expression of the human speech . . . and it is the general sense of what the humans say that is indicated in our play. The articulations with which they express it are as incomprehensible in detail to us as they are to our animal friends.

So: two young female voices approach, making calling sounds. Jackie and Robin are seeking Basket . . . It might be written: "Ah-skit! Ah-skit! Oo-ah-oo? Skit—good og. Ear oy! Whistle. O air iz at aughty og! Ah-skit! Ood og. Whistle. Ear oy!" Etc. This applies to all human speech tonight, and Producers and Artistes will no doubt devise their own expressive—and amusing—gobble-di-gook. Certainly no more will be phonetically illustrated).

DOG. It's all right. It's only my humans. Keep still. They won't see you.

HARE. Let 'em. They can't catch me.

RABBIT. Are you sure they won't, Mr. Basket?

DOG. I don't know how the humans manage—they have ears and noses and eyes, but they can't hear or smell or see. Not what we'd call hearing, smelling and seeing. You stay put: they'll walk all round, and not know you're here. Just hark at them!

BADGER. What are they saying?

DOG. They are calling me.

SQUIRREL. Oughtn't you to go?

DOG. Not yet. They don't really expect me to. Hear that? 'Good dog.' Good dog!—It's funny: the more naughty a dog is, the more the humans call 'Good dog.' Keep down now. I'll lead them off. Back in a minute.

(He shouts—the Girls would say he was barking—off).

Here I am! Here I am! Just try to catch me!

JACKIE'S VOICE *(Is saying that she has heard Basket. Come on).*

ROBIN'S VOICE *(Is saying that he is a good dog and must come to them).
(They run on. Two very pleasant young ladies in jeans).*

DOG. Hello, you two. Nice to see you. Follow me. This way.
(He exits and re-enters, inviting).

JACKIE *(Is pleased to find him).*

ROBIN *(Wonders what he wants).*

JACKIE *(Thinks he wants them to follow).*

ROBIN *(Is sure he's found Tortoise: clever dog).*