

THE TALES OF RAT ALLEY

by

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THE CHARACTERS

ARCHIE TALES ---A hardworking, industrious rat, and loving father, in the Ozzie Nelson mold.

PATSY TALES ---An equally hardworking, industrious houserat, who gave up her career in show business (she was an understudy for Minnie Mouse at Disney Studios) for her present life. She is sweet and accomodating, but shows a great deal of strength and courage when pushed.

REGINA TALES ---A spoiled, beautiful adolescent to whom the work ethic is as foreign as the Koran. She is a good manipulator, especially with her father. She is almost a monster in the early part of the play, but her capacity for redemption should be just beneath the surface.

OSCAR ---The Hal Holbrook of Rat Alley. A proverbial *deus ex machina* of the rodent world.

RATLEY --A rat who has worked himself up from the gutter, has a lot of power and enjoys using it. Sensual, cruel, and sardonic.

MS. GNAWLEY ---Regina's teacher. Kind, understanding, without being condescending or cloying.

THE REPO MEN ---They're basically the same person, only with different hats. They're just doing their job.

*THE SETTING: AN ALLEY IN A TYPICAL CITY---BITS OF TRASH STREWN ABOUT. AGAINST THE RED BRICK WALL ARE THREE GARBAGE CANS, THE COLORFUL ALUMINUM KIND. THE CANS ARE IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE---A FACT THAT MARKS THIS ALLEY AS MIDDLE CLASS. THE CANS ALSO HAVE FALSE BACKS, WHICH ENABLES THE ACTORS TO ENTER THEM FROM BEHIND THE WALL WITHOUT BEING SEEN. WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THE PLAY TO BEGIN---DAWN---OSCAR, THE SANITATION WORKER, ENTERS, PUSHING A LONG BROOM.*

*HE IS LIKE ANY OTHER SANITATION WORKER, EXCEPT HE IS A RAT. AS ARE ALL OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY. AFTER A SPELL, HE STOPS SWEEPING AND LEANS AGAINST HIS BROOM. HE TAKES OUT A HUGE RED BANDANNA AND MOPS HIS FACE. HE SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE.*

### OSCAR

Beautiful mornin'. My, this trash business is hard work. Every mornin' I push trash into this alley. Yep, I know what you're thinkin'. It's a beautiful neighborhood--lots of garbage. Well, it's come a long way, I can tell you. I remember when it didn't have any trash at all. Oh, maybe a Snickers wrapper, or an occasional beer can, but no real garbage, no juicy stuff. That was before the Tales moved in. What a family! They'd make any rat proud. Look at this.

(HOLDS UP THE REMAINS OF A CANTALOUPE.)

Real garbage. And this.

(HOLDS UP A CHICKEN CARCASS.)

Still plenty of meat left on that. Yep, Mister Tales is some terrific provider, all right. I just push in this old dry street trash, but Archie... that's Mister Tales... he goes out every day and brings back the good stuff. And you know, it's not as easy as it used to be. People don't throw away as much stuff as they used to.

(MORE)

OSCAR (CONT'D)

They're making soup out of stuff that used to be good garbage. I remember when a kid used to get an old dry tuna fish sandwich in his lunch... why, he'd take one bite and toss the rest in the wastebasket. No more. Times are tough. But not for the Tales. Archie brings it home, Patsy whips it up into some kind of casserole by dinnertime, and Regina... well, Regina just sits back and looks pretty. Oh!

(HE PULLS OUT A HUGE WATCH.)

I'd better be waking them up. Archie likes to get out there early and get that breakfast garbage.

HE WALKS TO THE FIRST CAN AND BEATS ON IT RHYTHMICALLY. FROM INSIDE THE CAN, THERE IS A SYNCOPATED ANSWER. OSCAR LIFTS THE CAN LID AS HE CHANTS "TIME TO GET UP... TIME TO GET UP". ARCHIE SLOWLY APPEARS, BEATING TIME WITH AN OLD PAIR OF DRUM STICKS. OSCAR WAKES, IN THEIR TURN, PATSY AND REGINA. THEY ALL SING THE RHYTHM SONG "A LITTLE BIT O' THIS, A LITTLE BIT O' THAT" [SEE APPENDIX]. THE SONG ENDS.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Good morning, folks.

ARCHIE

Good morning, Oscar.

PATSY

Good morning, Oscar.

REGINA

Good morning, Oscar.

ARCHIE

What's the news?

PATSY

Have you had breakfast yet?

REGINA

What did you bring me?

OSCAR

Well... the news is that the Skeffingtons down the block had a big seafood buffet last night, and that means that their garbage just might be full of...

ALL  
(EXCITEDLY)

OYSTER SHELLS!

ARCHIE

I'll get my bag.

*HE GOES INTO HIS CAN.*

OSCAR

And, Patsy, I've had my breakfast. I picked up a bite behind the doughnut shop.

PATSY

Doughnuts! That's not nourishing. I'll get you an apple core. You can eat it on your way.

*SHE GOES INTO HER CAN.*

OSCAR  
(TEASING)

I forgot what your question was, Regina.

REGINA

Oh, Oscar. I asked you what you brought me. Did you bring me anything, huh, did you? I know you brought me something, you just won't tell me. Come on, what did you bring me, what did you bring me? What, Oscar, what?

OSCAR  
(STALLING)

Wellll....

REGINA  
(SCREAMING)

WHAT DID YOU BRING ME?!

OSCAR  
(HE PULLS OUT A BROKEN  
WATCH.)

I brought you this. Found it behind the jewelry store.

REGINA

A watch!

(SHE LOOKS CLOSER.)

It's broken. The hands are stopped.

OSCAR

Yes, but twice a day, it's as right as any watch in the world.

REGINA

Oh, Oscar, don't be stupid. Even if it's broken, I'll bet I can sell it to one of my schoolmates for two lettuce leaves.

PATSY

Regina! You don't sell a gift!

REGINA

Why not? It's mine, isn't it? I can do whatever I want with it, isn't that right, daddy?

ARCHIE

Well...

REGINA

Isn't that right, Oscar?

OSCAR

Well...

REGINA

Then it's all settled.

(SHE POCKETS THE WATCH AND  
KISSES OSCAR SWEETLY ON THE  
CHEEK.)

Thank you, Oscarkins.

ARCHIE

Regina, I'll tell you what, honey, I'll give you two lettuce leaves for that watch... and you keep your watch. How will that be?

*HE HOLDS OUT LETTUCE LEAVES.*

REGINA

Oh daddy!

(SHE HUGS HIM.)

You're just the sweetest, wonderfulest daddy in the whole wide world!

(SHE SNATCHES THE LETTUCE  
LEAVES FROM HIM.)

Where's my allowance?

ARCHIE

I almost forgot.

(HE HANDS HER ANOTHER LEAF.)

Here you go.

OSCAR

Regina, what are you doing with all this money?

REGINA

Who wants to know! It's my money isn't it?

OSCAR

Yes, I was just thinking that you must have to do an awful lot of chores to earn all that money you've got... hidden away.

REGINA

Chores? What's chores?

PATSY

That's what some girls do to earn their allowances and help out around the house. Things like bringing in the garbage... doing the dishes... housework.

REGINA

(SHUDDERS)

Ugghhhl

ARCHIE

Well, if I'm going get those oyster shells, I'd better to get cracking.

OSCAR  
 (LOOKING AT HIS WATCH)

Yeah, in a few minutes, they'll be emptying the Dempster Dumpster at the Skeffingtons' and those shells will be gone.

## ARCHIE

Well, I'm gone. Goodbye, Patsy, honey.

(THEY KISS.)

Goodbye, princess. Have a good day at school.

(HE KISSES REGINA.)

## REGINA

Goodbye, daddy.

(HE LEAVES. SHE CALLS AFTER HIM.)

Don't forget to check for pearls!

## OSCAR

Well, I guess I'd better hit the trail too. So long, Ms. Tales. Thanks for the apple core. Goodbye, Regina. I'm kinda glad you decided not to sell the watch.

## REGINA

(LOOKS SHIFTY-EYED)

Uh.... right.

*OSCAR EXITS.*

## REGINA (CONT'D)

Well, I'd better put these lettuce leaves away with the rest of them.

(LONG PAUSE.)

## PATSY

What are you waiting for?

## REGINA

I'm waiting for you to close your eyes.

## PATSY

Regina, I'm your mother! I'm not going to steal your money!

REGINA

You can't be too careful! I've heard about parents breaking open their children's piggy banks!

PATSY

Oh, all right. But hurry. I have to get started on dinner.

*SHE CLOSES HER EYES.*

*REGINA TRIES A FEW TESTS TO MAKE  
SURE HER MOTHER ISN'T PEEKING.  
THEN SHE CREEPS TOWARD THE BACK  
OF THE ALLEY, LOOKS AROUND  
FURTIVELY, AND REMOVES A LOOSE  
BRICK. SHE LOOKS INSIDE THE HOLE  
AND GASPS.*

REGINA

AHHHHHH! GONE! IT'S GONE! ALL MY MONEY IS GONE! AHHHHHH!

PATSY

(OPENING HER EYES)

What? What's the matter?

REGINA

YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHAT'S THE MATTER! MY MONEY'S GONE! A HUNDRED AND FOURTEEN LETTUCE LEAVES GONE WITH THE WIND!

PATSY

Are you sure?

REGINA

AM I SURE?! AM I SURE?! OF COURSE I'M SURE! I HAD IT HIDDEN BEHIND THIS BRICK AND NOW IT'S GONE!

PATSY

Are you sure you're looking behind the right brick?

REGINA

AM I SURE! AM I SURE? DO RATS EAT GARBAGE? OF COURSE I'M SURE! IT'S GONE! I MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD!

PATSY

Now Regina, I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation...

REGINA

SURE THERE'S AN EXPLANATION!

(TURNS TO AUDIENCE)

SOMEONE OUT THERE IS A THIEF!

(HEADING INTO THE AUDIENCE,  
INTERROGATING, AND  
SEARCHING PEOPLE)

Did you steal my lettuce leaves? Huh, speak up! You don't fool me, you've always wanted my money and now you've got it. Well, I want it back and I'll search every one of you till I find it!

*ARCHIE ENTERS ON CRUTCHES.*

ARCHIE

Regina! What are you doing?

REGINA

(PAUSE)

Oh, nothing Daddy. We were just playing a game, you know... Twenty Questions!

(GOES TO HIM, ALL SWEETNESS,  
HUGGING HIM)

Oh, Daddy dear it's so good to see you!

ARCHIE

(IN PAIN)

Thank you Regina. That's very sweet...

REGINA

You see, there's something I wanted to ask you. Ask me?

ARCHIE

Ask me?

REGINA

It's very important.

ARCHIE

I see.