

DULCE DOMUM

from *The Wind in the Willows*

After a day of adventures, Rat and Mole are returning to Rat's home by the river. Mole has been living with Rat since abandoning his own snug home in the spring.



BY KENNETH GRAHAME

THE SHEEP RAN huddling together against the hurdles, blowing out thin nostrils and stamping with delicate fore-feet, their heads thrown back and a light steam rising from the crowded sheep-pen into the frosty air, as Rat and Mole hastened by in high spirits, with much chatter and laughter. Plodding at random across the plough, they had heard the sheep and had made for them; and now, leading from the sheep-pen, they found a beaten track that made walking a lighter business, and responded, moreover, to that small inquiring something which all animals carry inside them, saying unmistakably, "Yes, quite right; *this* leads home!"

They braced themselves for the last long stretch, each of them thinking his own thoughts. The Mole's ran a good deal on supper, as it was pitch-dark, and it was all a strange country for him as far as he knew, and he was following obediently in the wake of the

Rat, leaving the guidance entirely to him. As for the Rat, he was walking a little way ahead, as his habit was, his shoulders humped, his eyes fixed on the straight gray road in front of him; so he did not notice poor Mole when suddenly the summons reached him, and took him like an electric shock.

We others, who have long lost the more subtle of the physical senses, have not even proper terms to express an animal's intercommunications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word 'smell,' for instance, to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling. It was one of these mysterious fairy calls from out the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its very familiar appeal, even while yet he could not clearly remember what it was. A moment, and he had

Illustrated by Brian Lies

DULCE DOMUM MEANS
SWEET HOME IN LATIN.



HERE, HURDLES ARE FENCES
AROUND SHEEP PENS, AND A
PLOUGH IS A PLOWED FIELD.



caught it again; and with it this time came recollection in fullest flood.

Home! That was what they meant, those caressing appeals, those soft touches wafted through the air, those invisible little hands pulling and tugging, all one way! Why, it must be quite close by him at that moment, his old home that he had hurriedly forsaken and never sought again, that day when he first found the river!

The call was clear, the summons was plain. He must obey it instantly, and go. "Ratty!" he called, full of joyful excitement, "Hold on! Come back! I want you, quick!"

"O, *come* along, Mole, do!" replied the Rat cheerfully, still plodding along.

"*Please* stop, Ratty!" pleaded the poor Mole, in anguish of heart. "You don't understand! It's my home, my old home! I've just come across the smell of it, and it's close by here, really quite close. And I *must* go to it, I must, I must! O, come back, Ratty! Please, please come back!"

The Rat was by this time very far ahead, too far to hear clearly what the Mole was calling, too far to catch the sharp note of painful appeal in his voice. And he was much taken up with the weather, for he, too, could smell something—something suspiciously like approaching snow.

"Mole, we mustn't stop now, really!" he called back. "We'll come for it tomorrow, whatever it is you've found. But I daren't stop now—it's late, and the snow's coming on again. And the Rat pressed forward on his way without waiting for an answer.

Poor Mole stood alone in the road, his heart torn asunder, and a big sob gathering, gathering, somewhere low down inside him. But even under such a test as this, his loyalty to his friend stood firm. Never for a moment did he dream of abandoning him.

With an effort, he caught up to the unsuspecting Rat, who began chattering cheerfully about what they would do when they got back, and how jolly a fire of logs in the parlour would be, and what a supper he meant to eat; never noticing his companion's silence and distressful state of mind. At last, however, he stopped and said kindly, "Look here, Mole old chap, you seem dead tired. No talk left in you, and your feet dragging like lead. We'll sit down here for a minute and rest. The snow has held off so far, and the best part of our journey is over."

The Mole subsided forlornly on a tree-stump and tried to control himself, for he felt it surely coming. The sob he had fought with so long refused to be beaten. Up and up, it forced its way to the air, and then another, and another, and others thick and fast; till poor Mole at last gave up the struggle, and cried freely and helplessly and openly, now that he knew it was all over and he had lost what he could hardly be said to have found.

The Rat did not dare to speak for a while. At last he said, very quietly and sympathetically, "What is it, old fellow? Whatever can be the matter? Tell us your trouble, and let me see what I can do."

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out between the upheavals of his chest

that followed one upon another so quickly and held back speech and choked it as it came. "I know it's a—shabby, dingy little place," he sobbed forth at last, brokenly: "not like—your cosy quarters—or Toad's beautiful hall—or Badger's great house—but it was my own little home—and I was fond of it—and I went away and forgot all about it—and then I smelt it suddenly—on the road, when I called and you wouldn't listen, Rat—and everything came back to me with a rush—and I *wanted* it!—O dear, O dear!—and when you *wouldn't* turn back, Ratty—and I had to leave it, though I was smelling it all the time—I thought my heart would break. We might have just gone and had one look at it, Ratty—only one look—it was close by—but you wouldn't turn back, Ratty, you wouldn't turn back! O dear, O dear!"

The Rat stared straight in front of him, saying nothing, only patting Mole gently on the shoulder. After a time he muttered gloomily, "I see it all now! What a *pig* I have been! A pig that's me! Just a pig—a plain pig!"

He rose from his seat, and, remarking carelessly, "Well, now we'd really better be getting on, old chap!" set off up the road again, over the toilsome way they had come.

"Wherever are you (*hic*) going to (*hic*), Ratty?" cried the tearful Mole, looking up in alarm.

"We're going to find that home of yours, old fellow, so you had better come along, for it will take some finding, and we shall want your nose."

"O, come back, Ratty, do!" cried the Mole, getting up and hurrying after him. "It's no

good, I tell you! It's too late, and too dark, and the place is too far off, and the snow's coming! And think of River Bank, and your supper!"

"Hang River Bank, and supper, too!" said the Rat heartily. "I tell you, I'm going to find this place now, if I stay out all night. So cheer up, old chap, and take my arm, and we'll very soon be back there again."

They moved on in silence for some little way, when suddenly the Rat was conscious, through his arm that was linked in Mole's, of a faint sort of electric thrill that was passing down that animal's body. Instantly he disengaged himself, fell back a pace, and waited, all attention.

The signals were coming through!

Mole stood a moment rigid, while his uplifted nose, quivering slightly, felt the air.

The Rat, much excited, kept close to his heels as the Mole, with something of the air of a sleepwalker, crossed a dry ditch, scrambled through a hedge, and nosed his way over a field open and trackless and bare in the faint starlight.

Suddenly, without giving warning, he dived; but the Rat was on the alert, and promptly followed him down the tunnel to which his unerring nose had faithfully led him.

It was close and airless, and the earthy smell was strong, and it seemed a long time to Rat ere the passage ended and he could stand erect and stretch and shake himself. The Mole struck a match, and by its light the Rat saw that they were standing in an open space, neatly swept and sanded underfoot, and directly facing them was Mole's little front

UNERRING MEANS
ALWAYS, ALWAYS,
ALWAYS RIGHT.



ERE MEANS BEFORE, AS
IN I SHOULD CONSIDER THE
CONSEQUENCES, ERE I MAKE
ANY COMMENT AT THIS POINT.



DOLEFUL SELF-REPROACHES MEANS
REGRETFULLY BLAMING YOURSELF.

door, with “Mole End” painted, in Gothic lettering, over the bell-pull at the side.

Mole’s face beamed, and he hurried Rat through the door, lit a lamp in the hall, and took one glance round his old home. He saw the dust lying thick on everything, saw the cheerless, deserted look of the long-neglected house, and collapsed on a hall-chair, his nose to his paws. “O, Ratty!” he cried dismally. “Why did I bring you to this poor, cold little place on a night like this, when you might have been at River Bank by this time, toasting your toes before a blazing fire, with all your own nice things about you!”

The Rat paid no heed to his doleful self-reproaches. He was running here and there, opening doors, inspecting rooms and cupboards, and lighting lamps and candles and sticking them up everywhere. “What a capital little house this is!” he called out cheerily. “So compact! So well planned! Everything here and everything in its place! We’ll make a jolly night of it. The first thing we want is a good fire; I’ll see to that—I always know where to find things. Now, I’ll fetch the wood and the coals, and you get a duster, Mole—you’ll find one in the drawer of the kitchen table—and try and smarten things up a bit. Bustle about, old chap!”



Encouraged by his companion, the Mole roused himself and dusted and polished with energy and heartiness, while the Rat, running to and fro with armfuls of fuel, soon had a cheerful blaze roaring up the chimney. He hailed the Mole to come and warm himself; but Mole promptly had another fit of the blues, dropping down on a couch in dark despair and burying his face in his duster. "Rat," he moaned, "how about your supper, you poor, cold, hungry, weary animal? I've nothing to give you—nothing—not a crumb!"

"What a fellow you are for giving in!" said the Rat reproachfully. "Why, only just now I saw a sardine-opener on the kitchen dresser, quite distinctly; and everybody knows that means there are sardines about somewhere in the neighborhood. Rouse yourself! Pull yourself together, and come with me and forage."

They went and foraged accordingly, hunting through every cupboard and turning out every drawer. The result was not so very depressing after all, though of course it might have been better; a tin of sardines—a box of captain's biscuits, nearly full—and a German sausage encased in silver paper.

"There's a banquet for you!" observed the Rat, as he arranged the table. "I know some animals who would give their ears to be sitting down to supper with us tonight!"

"No bread!" groaned the Mole dolorously; "no butter, no—"

"No *pâté de foie gras*, no champagne!" continued the Rat, grinning.

Then the Rat busied himself fetching plates and knives and forks and mustard,

which he mixed in an egg-cup. He had just got seriously to work with the sardine-opener when sounds were heard from the fore-court without—sounds like the scuffling of small feet in the gravel and a confused murmur of tiny voices, while broken sentences reached them—"Now, all in a line—hold the lantern up a bit, Tommy—clear your throats first—no coughing after I say one, two, three. Where's young Bill?—Here, come on, do, we're all a-waiting—"

"What's up?" inquired the Rat, pausing in his labors.

"I think it must be the field-mice," replied the Mole, with a touch of pride in his manner. "They go round carol-singing regularly at this time of the year. They're quite an institution in these parts. And they never pass me over—they come to Mole End last of all; and I used to give them hot drinks, and supper, too, sometimes, when I could afford it. It will be like old times to hear them again."

"Let's have a look at them!" cried the Rat, jumping up and running to the door.

It was a pretty sight, and a seasonable one, that met their eyes when they flung the door open. In the fore-court, lit by the dim rays of a horn lantern, some eight or ten little field-mice stood in a semicircle, red worsted comforters round their throats, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jiggling for warmth. As the door opened, one of the elder ones that carried the lantern was just saying, "Now then, one, two, three!" and forthwith their shrill little voices uprose on the air:

DOLOROUSLY MEANS
WITH PAINFUL SADNESS AND
WOE. (SOB)



DON'T WORRY,
I'M OK. JUST
GETTING INTO
THE DEFINITIONS.
(SNIFF)



WOW, YOU'RE GOOD!
FORAGE MEANS TO
SEARCH FOR FOOD.

HERE, **WORSTED**
COMFORTERS
MEAN WOOLEN
SCARVES.



MEWY COMFY!



IMPENDING MEANS SOMETHING
IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.



ENSUED MEANS FOLLOWED...
WHICH WAY ARE WE GOING,
ANYWAY?

CAROL

*Villagers all, this frosty tide,
Let your doors swing open wide,
Though wind may follow, and snow beside,
Yet draw us in by your fire to bide;
Joy shall be yours in the morning!*

*Goodman Joseph toiled through the snow—
Saw the star o'er a stable low;
Mary she might not further go—
Welcome thatch, and litter below!
Joy was hers in the morning!*

*And then they heard the angels tell
Who were the first to cry Nowell?
Animals all, as it befell,
In the stable where they did dwell!
Joy shall be theirs in the morning!*

The voices ceased, the singers, bashful but smiling, exchanged sidelong glances, and silence succeeded—but for a moment only.

“Very well sung, boys!” cried the Rat heartily. “And now come along in, all of you, and warm yourselves by the fire, and have something hot!”

“Yes, come along, field-mice,” cried the Mole eagerly. “This is quite like old times! Shut the door after you. Pull up that settle to the fire. Now, you just wait a minute, while we—O, Ratty!” he cried in despair, plumping down on a seat, with tears impending. “Whatever are we doing? We’ve nothing to give them!”

“You leave all that to me,” said the masterful Rat. “Here, you with the lantern! Come over this way. I want to talk to you. Now, tell me, are there any shops open at this hour of the night?”

“Why, certainly, sir,” replied the field-mouse respectfully. “At this time of the year our shops keep open to all sorts of hours.”

“Then look here!” said the Rat. “You go off at once, you and your lantern, and you get me—”

Here much muttered conversation ensued, and the Mole only heard bits of it, such as—“Fresh, mind!—no, a pound of that will do—see you get Buggins’s, for I won’t have any other—no, only the best—!” Finally, there was a chink of coin passing from paw to paw, the field-mouse was provided with an ample basket for his purchases, and off he hurried, he and his lantern.

The rest of the field-mice, perched in a row on the settle, their small legs swinging, gave themselves up to enjoyment of the fire, and toasted their chilblains till they tingled; while the Mole, failing to draw them into easy conversation, plunged into family history and made each of them recite the names of his numerous brothers, who were too young, it appeared, to be allowed to go out a-caroling this year, but looked forward very shortly to winning the parental consent.

“They act plays, too, these fellows,” the Mole explained to the Rat. “Make them up all by themselves, and act them afterwards. They gave us a capital one last year, about a field-mouse who was captured at sea by a Barbary

A SETTLE IS A
HIGH-BACKED BENCH
WITH ARMS



CHILBLAINS ARE AN INFLAMMATION
OF THE HANDS AND FEET DUE TO COLD.
(DOUBLE OUCH!)



A BARBARY CORSAIR WAS A PIRATE
SHIP FROM NORTH AFRICA, ONCE AN
INFAMOUS REFUGE OF PIRATES.



corsair and made to row in a galley; and when he escaped and got home again, his lady-love had gone into a convent! Here, *you!* You were in it, I remember. Get up and recite a bit.”

The field-mouse addressed got up on his legs, giggled shyly, looked round the room, and remained absolutely tongue-tied. His comrades cheered him on, Mole coaxed and encouraged him, and the Rat went so far as to take him by the shoulders and shake him; but nothing could overcome his stage-fright. They were all busily engaged on him like watermen applying the Royal Humane Society’s regulations to a case of long submersion, when the latch clicked, the door opened, and the field-mouse with the lantern reappeared, staggering under the weight of his basket.

In a very few minutes supper was ready, and Mole, as he took the head of the table in a sort of a dream, saw a lately barren board set thick with savoury comforts; saw his little friends’ faces brighten and beam as they fell to without delay and then let himself loose—for he was famished indeed—on the provender so magically provided, thinking what a happy home-coming this had turned out, after all. As they ate, they talked of old times, and the field-mice gave him the local gossip up to date, and answered as well as they could the hundred questions he had to ask them. The Rat said little or nothing, only taking care that each guest had what he wanted, and plenty of it, and that Mole had no trouble or anxiety about anything.

They clattered off at last, very grateful and showering wishes of the season, with their

PROVENDER IS A FANCY
WORD FOR FOOD.



MEW-LA-LA!

DON'T ALL THOSE LITTLE RATS
AND MICE REMIND YOU OF
CRICKET COUNTRY?



YES! IF THEY
WERE BUGS...



WITHOUT RANCOUR MEANS
WITHOUT BITTERNESS OR
RESENTMENT.

jacket pockets stuffed with remembrances for the small brothers and sisters at home. When the door had closed on the last of them and the chink of the lanterns had died away, Mole and Rat kicked the fire up, drew their chairs in, and discussed the events of the long day. At last the Rat, with a tremendous yawn, said, "Mole, old chap, I'm ready to drop. Sleepy is simply not the word. That your own bunk over on that side? Very well, then, I'll take this. What a ripping little house this is! Everything so handy!"

He clambered into his bunk and rolled himself well up in the blankets, and slumber gathered him forthwith, as a swathe of barley is folded into the arms of the reaping machine.

The weary Mole also was glad to turn in without delay and soon had his head on his

pillow in great joy and contentment. But ere he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room, mellow in the glow of the fire-light that played or rested on familiar and friendly things which had long been unconsciously a part of him and now smilingly received him back, without rancour. He did not at all want to abandon the new life and its splendid spaces, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him and creep home and stay there; the upper world was all too strong, it called to him still, even down there, and he knew he must return to the larger stage. But it was good to think he had this to come back to, this place which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same simple welcome. 

GOD
NIGHT,
AND GOD
BLESS US,
EVERYONE.



THAT'S A
DIFFERENT
STORY.
(HEE HEE)

