

Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Abridged in 10 episodes

5: DOLCE DOMUM

The sheep ran huddling together against the hurdles, their heads thrown back and a light steam rising from the crowded sheep-pen into the frosty air, as the Rat and the Mole hastened by in high spirits, with much chatter and laughter. They were returning across country after a long day's outing and the shades of the short winter day were closing in on them, and they had still some distance to go.

'It looks as if we're coming to a village,' said the Mole.

'Oh, never mind!' said the Rat. 'At this season of the year they're all safe indoors by this time, sitting round the fire; men, women, and children, dogs and cats and all.'

Once beyond the village, where the cottages ceased abruptly, they plodded along steadily and silently, each of them thinking his own thoughts. The Mole's ran a good deal on supper. As for the Rat, he was walking a little way ahead, his shoulders humped, his eyes fixed on the straight grey road in front of him.

Suddenly Mole stopped dead in his tracks, his nose searching hither and thither. Home! That was what they meant, 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.

'Ratty!' he called, full of joyful excitement, 'hold on! Come back! I want you, quick!'

'Oh, COME along, Mole, do!' replied the Rat cheerfully, still plodding along.

'PLEASE stop, Ratty!' pleaded the poor Mole, '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! Oh, 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.

'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 I'm not sure of the way! So come on quick, there's a good fellow!' 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.

With a wrench that tore his very heart-strings he set his face down the road and followed in the track of the Rat.

The Mole 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.

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out, '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, O dear, O dear! We might just have 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!'

The Rat stared straight in front of him, saying nothing, only patting Mole gently on the

shoulder. After a time he muttered, 'I see it all now! What a PIG I have been! A pig - that's me! Just a pig - a plain pig!'

Then 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 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,' replied the Rat pleasantly; 'so you had better come along, for it will take some finding, and we shall want your nose.'

'Oh, 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.'

When at last it seemed to the Rat that they must be nearing that part of the road where the Mole had been 'held up,' he said, 'Now, no more talking. Business! Use your nose, and give your mind to it.'

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

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

It was close and airless, and the earthy smell was strong. 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 door, with 'Mole End' painted, in Gothic lettering, over the bell-pull at the side.

Mole reached down a lantern from a nail on the wall and lit it, and the Rat, looking round him, saw that they were in a sort of fore-court. A garden-seat stood on one side of the door, and on the walls hung wire baskets with ferns in them and in the middle was a small round pond containing gold-fish, surrounded by a cockle-shell border.

Mole's face-beamed at the sight of all these objects so dear to him, 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 its worn and shabby contents--and collapsed again on a hall-chair, his nose to his paws.

'O Ratty!' he cried dismally, 'why ever did I do it? 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 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! The first thing we want is a good fire; I'll see to that - I always know where to find things. So this is the parlour? Splendid! 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 neighbourhood.'

They went and foraged accordingly, hunting through every cupboard and turning out every drawer. The result was not so very depressing after all, 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 to-night!'

'No bread!' groaned the Mole 'no butter, no - '

'No pate de foie gras, no champagne!' continued the Rat, grinning. 'This is really the jolliest little place I ever was in...' and had just got seriously to work with the sardine-opener when sounds were heard from the fore-court - sounds like the scuffling of small feet in the gravel and a confused murmur of tiny voices.

'I think it must be the field-mice,' said 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 forecourt, lit by the dim rays of a lantern, some eight or ten little fieldmice stood in a semicircle, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jiggling for warmth. With bright beady eyes they glanced shyly at each other, sniggering a little. As the door opened, their shrill little voices arose on the air.

'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. - O, Ratty!' he cried in despair. '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!. 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 -'

The Mole only heard bits of it, such as - 'Fresh, mind! - no, no, a pound of that will do - no, only the best - if you can't get it there, try somewhere else - yes, of course, home-made, no tinned stuff - well then, do the best you can!' 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.

The rest of the field-mice, perched in a row on the settee, their small legs swinging.

When the latch clicked, the door opened, and the field-mouse with the lantern reappeared, staggering under the weight of his basket. Under the generalship of Rat, everybody was set to do something or to fetch something.

In a very few minutes supper was ready, and Mole, saw his little friends' faces brighten and beam as they fell to without delay; 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, 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.

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.

The weary Mole also was glad to turn in without delay, and soon had his head on his pillow. But ere he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room. He saw clearly how plain and simple - how narrow, even - it all was; but clearly, too, how much it all meant to him.

He did not at all want to abandon the new life, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him. 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.