

Leave the Door !



Rat had developed a fascination for doors. His new home under the roots of a willow tree was highly valued. It commanded spectacular views of open meadows and had the benefit of the river lapping to lull a weary creature to sleep. However, as the season changed he began to see the need for a door. The north east winds blew straight down the river, dragging warm air from his well-lined hole. There were other factors too, which made up his mind. Chief among those was the neighbours. His home was roomy and with autumn coming he had been busy building up his winter stores. Mice and voles from along the riverbank were always calling in - just to say 'how are you.' That was what they said, but they very rarely went away with empty stomachs and handfuls of nuts and grain. 'Sociable beggars' was how rat described them and while he was unusually generous for his kind, he did not relish the thought of feeding them all through the winter.

With doors at the front of his mind, rat looked at every possible way of blocking up the entrance to his home. The tree roots made a perfect frame. He had to find something to fit into it. One sunny afternoon he chanced upon just the thing. A piece of wood floating down stream caught his eye. He swam out and nosed it carefully to the riverbank. Amazingly it was just about the right size and beautifully shiny on one side. Rat was able to gnaw the edges of the board to make a perfect fit into the tree roots. There were two holes on one side of the wood through which he threaded bark chewed from willow branches to make hinges. Soon he was able to close the door, pulling it inwards against the frame and fastening it with a tie on the inside.

Rat had been inside only minutes before he heard a loud knocking on his new door. Pushing it open, he looked up into the beak of a bright green mallard. 'I see you've a door,' quacked his nosey neighbour. 'But you've forgotten to put a handle on this side.'

'Oh no I haven't,' Rat assured him with the air of one who has thought long and hard about the matter. 'It only opens out, so only I can open it. I'll say who comes in. I don't want everyone opening my door. People can knock as you did if they want to come.'

However, time and tide had a hand in changing that. Some weeks later as leaves fell from the trees and floated downstream like an armada of little ships, the autumn rains began and the river rose fast. Rat woke one morning to find himself paddling in water. It was coming under his door from the flooded river outside. He unlatched the door and pushed to open it, but the water outside jammed it shut. No-one could hear his cries through the door and the water. Rat was a prisoner in his own home.

He would surely have drowned there under the willows if it had not been for Mole who, searching for worms in the newly wet soil had blindly broken into Rat's store-room where worms had taken refuge under piles of last year's rotting nuts. In a while Rat was able to widen the mole's run and dig his way to safety.

A few days later, with his home drying out, Rat received a visit from a couple of neighbourly mice. Being both polite and tactful they made no comment on the new acorn handle on the outside of Rat's front door or about the fact that the door opened in AND out now. Rat was pleased to see them. When they had had their fill of grain from his store, they said their farewells.

'Leave the door!' Rat called after them. 'It's a coming and going door!'

***In the human world people know
that doors open both in and out
- for friendship.***