

Story  
*Arthur the Rat*

Once upon a time, there was a young rat named Arthur who couldn't make up his mind. Whenever the other rats asked him if he would like to go out hunting with them, he would answer in a soft voice, "I don't know." And when they said, "Would you rather stay inside?" he wouldn't say yes or no either. He'd always avoid making a choice.

One fine day, his aunt Zelda appealed to him, "Now look here! No one is going to care about you if you carry on like this. You have no more mind of your own than a greasy old blade of grass!" Arthur coughed and looked wise as usual, but said nothing. "Don't you think so?" said Zelda, stamping her foot, for she couldn't bear to see the poor little rat so coldblooded. "I don't know," was all he ever answered, and then he'd walk off to think for an hour or more about whether he would stay in his hole in the ground or go up into the loft.

One night the rats heard a loud noise. They lived in a very dark and dreary old place. The roof let the rain come washing in, making shallow pools on the muddy floor. The beams and rafters were all rotten through, so eventually the whole structure was quite unsafe. At last, one of the joists gave way and the beams fell down. The walls shook and the ceiling collapsed with a loud bang. The rats shrieked and their fur stood on end with fear and horror. "This won't do," said their leader with a scowl. "We can't stay cooped up here any longer." So he sent out scouts to search for a new home.

A little later on in the evening they came back, having found an old-fashioned barn near a stone house where there would be room, board and food for all of them. There, they saw a kindly mare named Alberta, a cow, and some birds in the garden with an elm tree in the middle. The leader gave the order at once, "Company fall in!". The rats crawled out of their holes right away and the sad mob stood on the floor in a long line.

Just then, the old rat caught sight of young Arthur. He wasn't in the line, and he wasn't exactly outside it; he stood just nearby, ears pricked. "Come on, get in line!" growled the old rodent unamused. "You are coming too, aren't you?" "I don't know," said Arthur calmly. "Why, the idea of it! You don't think it's safe here anymore, do you?" "I'm not certain," said Arthur undaunted. "The roof may not fall down yet." "Well," said the old rat, "you would be stupid not to join us." Then he turned to the assembled group and shouted, "Right about face! March!" and the long line marched out of the barn while the young rat watched them.

"I think I'll go tomorrow," he said to himself, "but then again, perhaps I won't - it's so nice and snug here. I guess I'll go back to my hole under the log for a while before I make up my mind."

But during the night there was a big crash. Down came beams, rafters, joists — the whole business in a pile of rubble.

Next morning, there was a foggy dew. Some boys and girls ran to the barn and a man in boots came to view the damage. It seemed odd that the old building was not haunted by rats. But at last one of the children happened to nudge a board and he saw a puny rat, quite dead, tail half in and half out of his hole. Thus the coward got his due, and there was no mourning for him.

The End