



The Farmer and the Rat

Centuries ago, farm families had major problems with rats that ate their grain. In the hope of ridding their property of rodents, some farmers wrote letters to the rats and placed the letters in the walls of their home or barn. This is the story of one such farmer and one smart rat.

With winter coming, Farmer John filled livestock bins with feed: Oats for horses, corn for cows, and for spring crops, some seed. He checked the stockpile every day. He hoped to make it last. But then one day, too much was gone. Cried Farmer John aghast, "What happened to my stores of feed? I'm sure I've used just some. My livestock will run out of food before the snow has come!"

Right then a brown rat scurried by. He looked the well-fed sort. As Farmer John yelled "Scat!" to him, he laughed a little snort. "I'll drive you out, you thieving rat!" And then turned loose his dog. Dog chased the rat, but Rat still laughed, "Why, thank you for the jog!" The next day when the farmer checked again, the grain had dwindled. And with the loss, the farmer found his anger was rekindled.



"A trap," John said, "of finest steel is what I need to set, And bait it with some stinky cheese. I'll catch this robber yet." He set the trap and left it where it could be found with ease Unaware that Mister Rat had dairy allergies. Rat did not even give a lick. He did not want to try it. He'd lived a long and prosperous life upon his cheese-free diet.

"What should I do to stop that rat?" John asked his friend, Judge Sloan. "I want that rat to go away and leave my grain alone." "Then send a letter," said Judge Sloan, sounding quite judicial. "A Notice of Eviction signed and sealed, to be official." So John prepared the missive with unshakable conviction: That rat would go once he received this Notice of Eviction.

"Dear Rat," wrote John, "I must protect the livestock in my care. What's in my barn must go to them and you'll not have a share. I am the landlord of this place, so heed the words I say. You must vacate the premises before the break of day." Rat found the notice, studied it, and then took out his pen. And came up with a sly reply while winking at a hen.



"Dear Farmer," wrote the clever rat in round and perfect scrawl, "I examined that fine note that you have nailed upon the wall. Of all the farmers I have met, you're funniest, indeed, Since every farmer ought to know a rodent can not read!" It was signed along the bottom with the same neat *Rattus* scrawl: "Please take care of Earth's creatures be they very great or small."

When John was doing chores, he found the note within the feed. "He surely writes a fine hand for a rat who can not read." He pondered Rat's short message, though, and then he just gave in. "But I will only set aside one tiny little bin." He posted notice number two: "Please take just what you need. And share with my good cows and pigs the balance of the feed."

To his literary prowess, Mr. Rat never confessed. But he only ate a small amount and he felt truly blessed. And so at last a pact was reached; their differences surmountable. As for the mice that just moved in, Rat couldn't be held accountable.