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There's No Place Like Home

by Georgina Burrows

'It's all very well for you to say there's no place like home,' Alan grumbled to Dudley, one cool autumn evening in the garden, as winter tipped the seasonal scales from flaming leaves to bare-branched trees.

After the blazing hot summer had crackled to a close, the days were drawing in, and the two of them were relaxing on a low brick wall that separated the vegetable patch from the herbaceous border, enjoying the last rays of a four o'clock sun. Stretching out slowly – Alan did everything slowly – he continued to make his point.

'You can call anywhere your home, Dudley. Plant pot, garden shed, underneath a bin – you just slide straight in and make it your own. Anywhere you lay your hat is your home, it's a terribly carefree lifestyle, and I just don't think that you appreciate it enough.'

Dudley finally finished the succulent radish he had been chomping on, and said, rather irritably, through a mouthful of leaf, 'But this is just what I've said a thousand times before, I'm getting too old for all that. I just want a nice permanent home that I can call my own, like you've always been able to. It has to be said, I envy your shell, Alan.'

Alan sighed. 'I just can't see you dealing with the responsibility of being a snail. You like to be out all night, seeking out those beer cans they leave out sometimes, having a few drinks and getting merry, then passing out in a doorway.'

You can't do that when you've got a shell, you've got to keep it protected. Invest in some home insurance, keep an eye out for Frenchmen – you'd never manage it.'

'That's where you're wrong,' said Dudley, 'I'm a reformed character these days. I don't even hang out at the bins any more, you know. I'll have you know that I steer well clear of the shed too, ever since Bert ate that blue thing and just...exploded.'

There was a moment of silence.

'Anyway, moving around is a young slug's game, and I just want a bit of stability now I'm getting on a bit,' Dudley continued, 'and I think I've found just the thing. You wait til you see this, Alan!'

With a triumphant air, Dudley retreated back down the wall, returning (several hours later), sporting a conical structure on his back.

'Where on earth did you get that?' squawked Alan.

'In the rockery!' Dudley said triumphantly. 'Clive, the heron from the pond next door had a week in Whitby and he brought back a load of shells with him from his fish supper. He dropped this one and now it's mine!' With a muffled, 'there's no place like home!', Dudley retreated into his brand new limpet shell. Alan rolled his eyes, and then ducked to avoid a low-flying wren.