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opening extract from

# **Mudpuddle Farm**

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## For Anna

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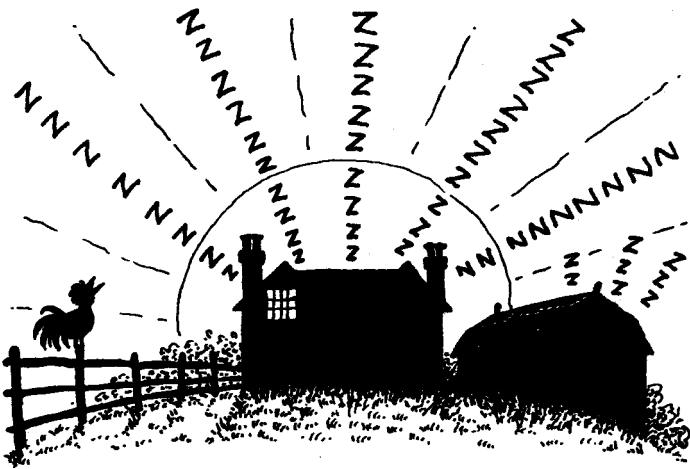


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## Chapter One

There was once a family of all sorts of animals that lived in the farmyard behind the tumble-down barn on Mudpuddle Farm.



At first light every morning Frederick, the flame-feathered cockerel, lifted his eyes to the sun and crowed and crowed, until the light came on at old Farmer Rafferty's bedroom window.

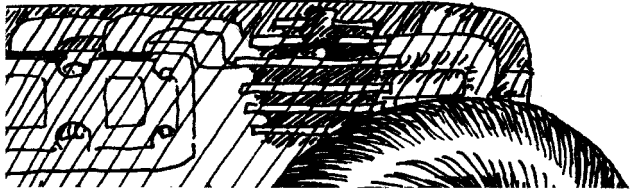
**WAKEY!**

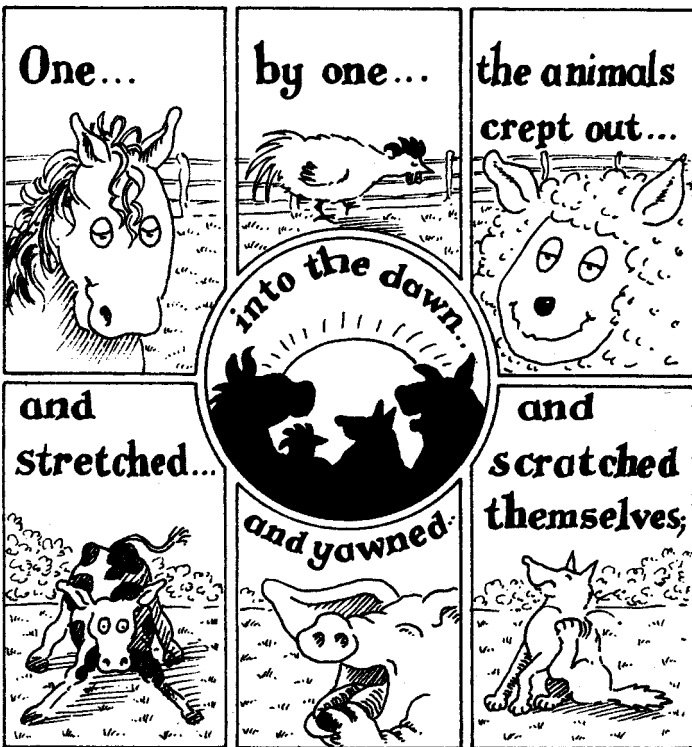
**WAKEY!**

**WAKEY!**

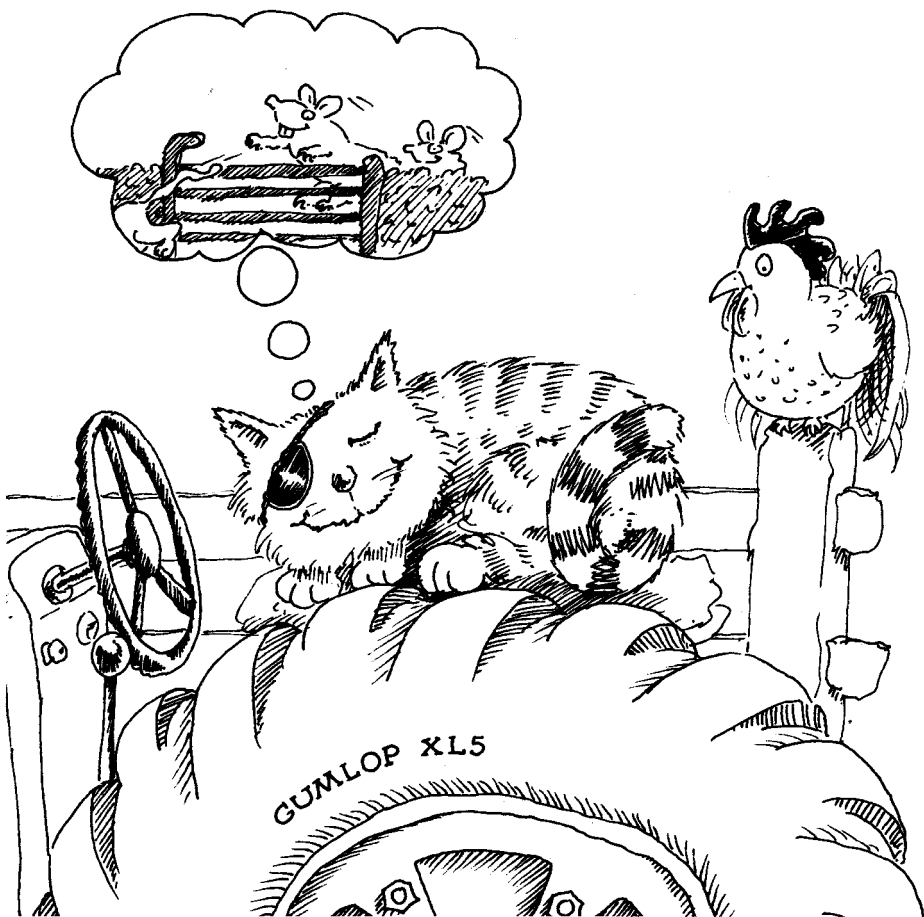


**SON OF A BEE!**





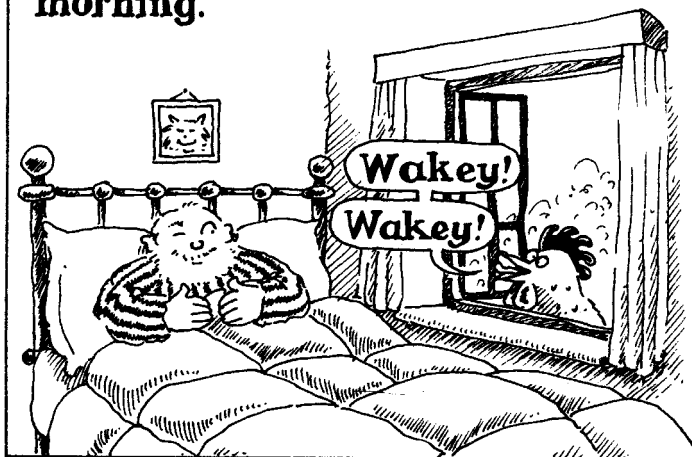
Mossop was a tired old farm cat who spent most of his day curled up asleep on the seat of Farmer Rafferty's tractor. Mossop paid no attention to Frederick – he got up when he pleased.



Farmer Rafferty was usually a kind man with smiling eyes, but like Mossop he was old and tired, and he ached in his bones in the wet weather. His animals were his only friends and his only family.



So, Frederick woke him up every morning.

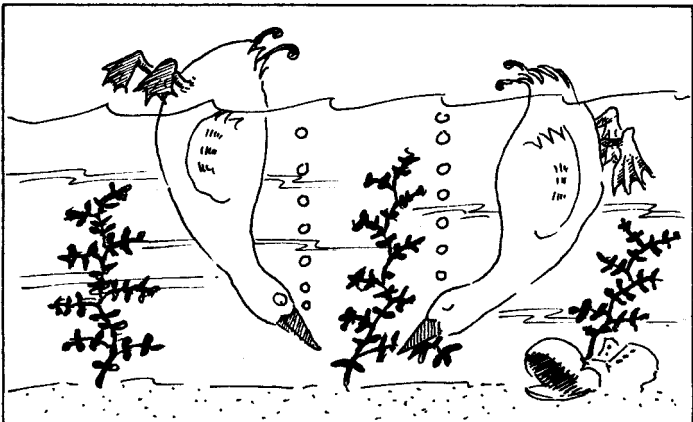
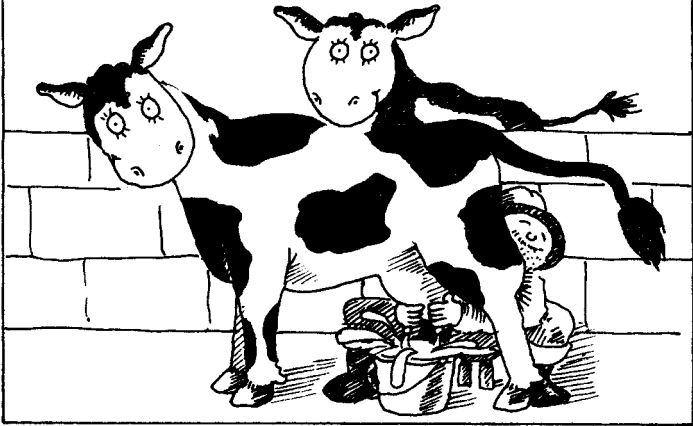


Penelope and her speckled friends laid their eggs for him.



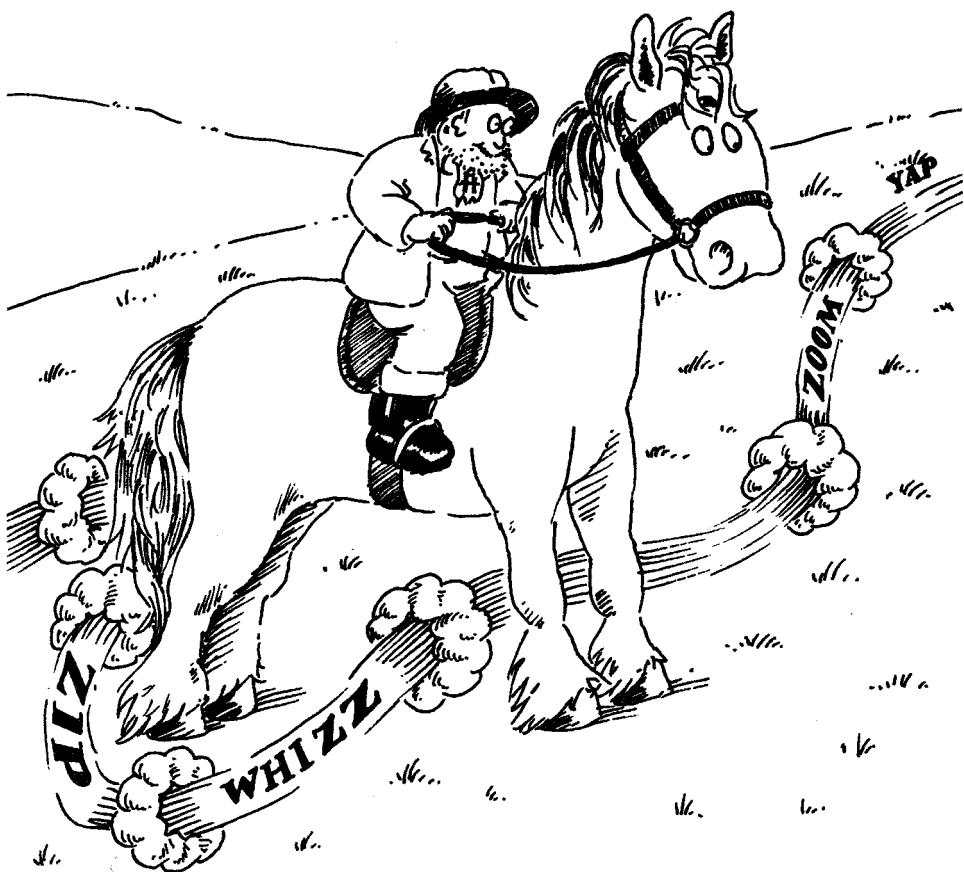


**Auntie Grace and Primrose let  
down their milk for him.**

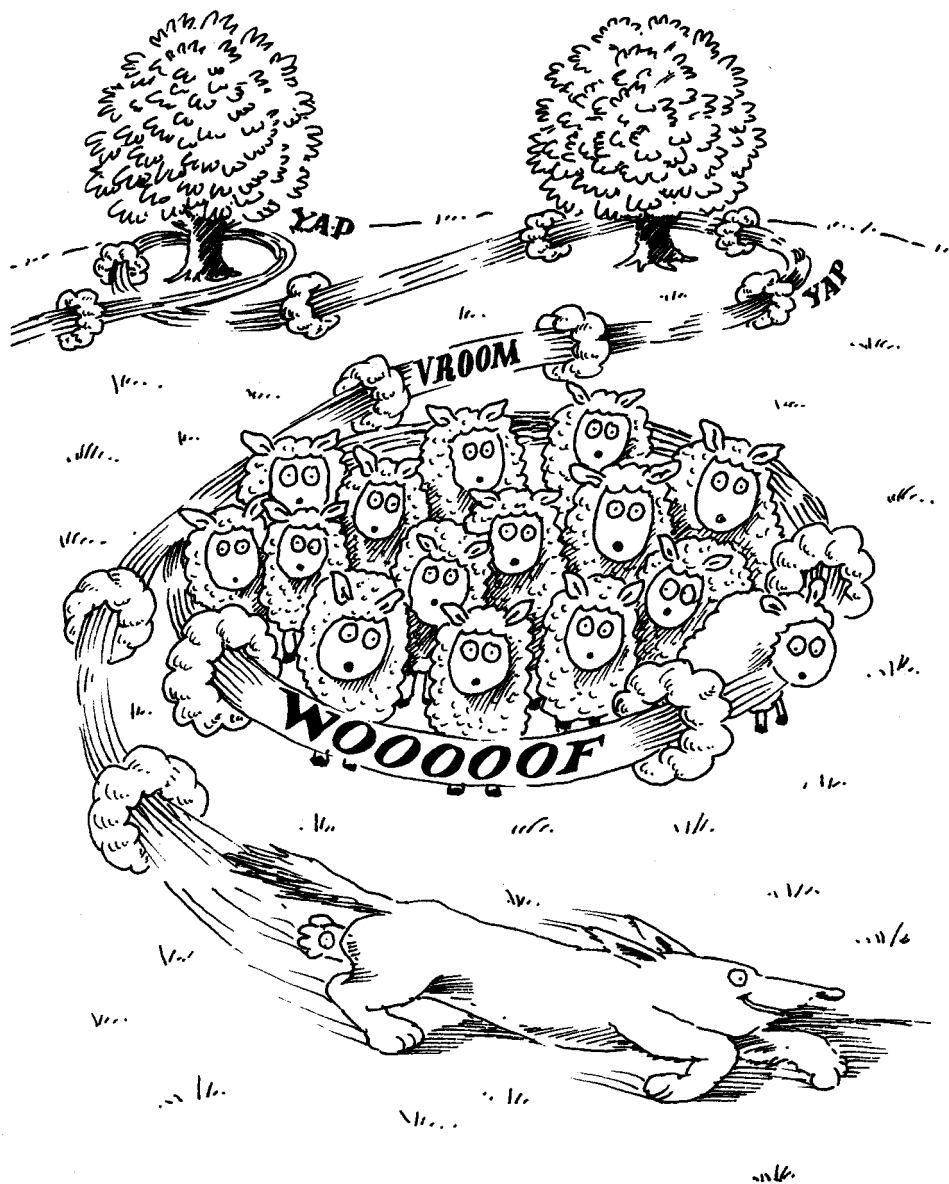


**Upside and Down kept the pond  
clear of weeds.**

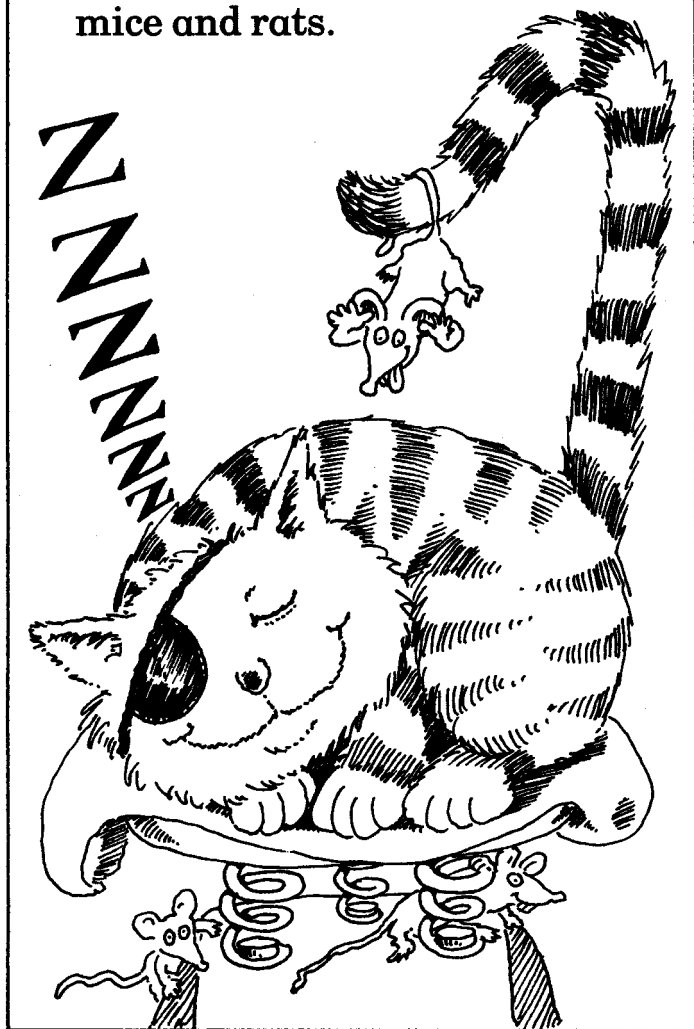
Captain carried him all around the farm to check the sheep.



Jigger, the almost-always-sensible  
sheepdog, rounded up the sheep.



And Mossop was  
supposed to catch  
mice and rats.



# Chapter Two

Farmer Rafferty always liked to sing as he worked. He sang in a crusty, croaky kind of voice.

la-la-di-di-doo-ho-ho-hum-y

idley-pom-pom (whistle) yum-pom-pom  
yum-pom-pom



Hmmm! It's Beethoven's Violin Concerto today.

He's in a good mood today.

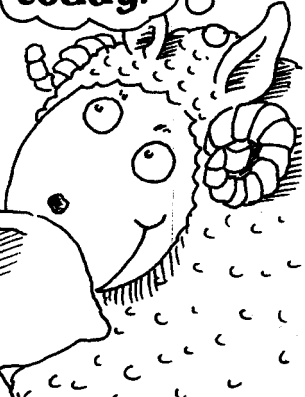
I like to hear him sing.



Now that's what I call music!



Dummy!





The animals crowded into the barn to find out what was the matter. They found Farmer Rafferty standing by the corn bin holding a mouse up by its tail.

**This is a mouse, and there are three more in there, Mossop.**

**Mossop!**

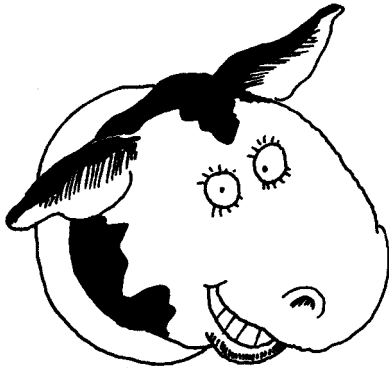
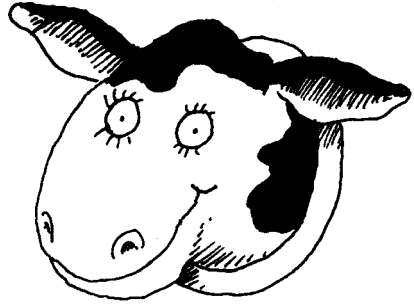
**Where is that Mossop?**





Have we or have we not  
got a cat on this farm?’  
said Farmer Rafferty  
in the nasty,  
raspy voice  
he kept for  
special occasions.

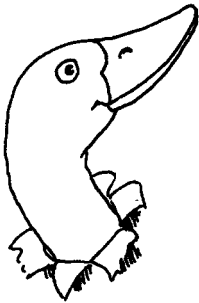
‘We have,’ said  
Auntie Grace, the  
dreamy-eyed  
brown cow.



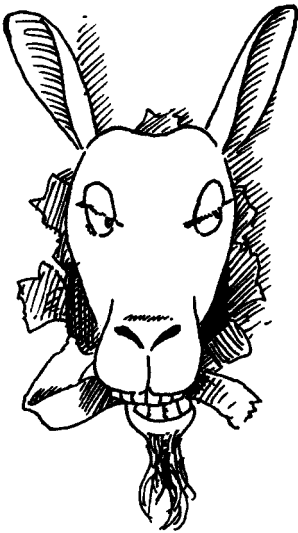
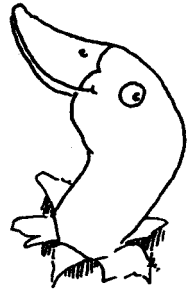
‘She’s right,’ said  
her friend Primrose,  
who always agreed  
with her.

‘We have, and  
he’s asleep on  
the tractor seat.’





'Having a catnap,'  
sniggered Upside  
or Down – no one  
could ever tell  
which was which.

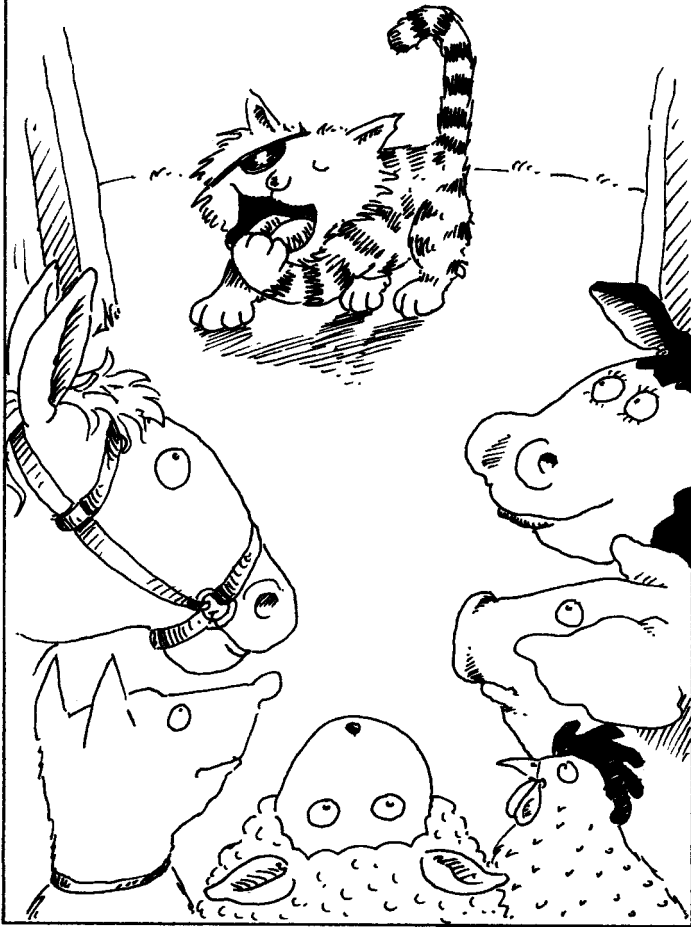


'Having his beauty sleep,'  
mumbled Egbert,  
the greedy, grumbly  
goat who ate anything  
and everything.  
'Not that it'll help  
him much.'

'Fetch him,' ordered old  
Farmer Rafferty.  
'Fetch that Mossop  
here. I have a thing  
or two to say to him.'



But at that very same moment  
Mossop wandered into the barn,  
yawning hugely.



# MOSSOP!

Everywhere I go these days there's mice or there's rats. There's mice in my barley sacks, there's rats in my roof and now there's mice in my corn bin. I've warned you before and this time I have had enough. If you aren't up to the job, you will have to go. That's all there is to it.

Gulp!



Oh please, Mr Rafferty,  
Mossop does his best.  
He's just old  
that's all.



All right Captain, I'll give him one  
last chance to prove he's still cat  
enough to stay on this farm. Mossop,  
by tomorrow I want twenty-six mice  
dropped outside my backdoor,  
d'you hear me? Twenty-six mice or  
you're on your way.

