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WHAT IS A MOLE ANYWAY?

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Former Idiot

When I first arrived at Denison, I was what many would call a total idiot. I knew very little, and, as time went on, I came to realize that much of what I thought I knew was not only wildly misled but also, far more commonly, completely and utterly wrong. But through it all, there was one, single truth that proved completely unshakeable. You see, I have been interested in biology since I was very young and, over the years, I sought to acquire knowledge of all the creatures with whom we share a planet. It was in pursuit of this goal that I discovered the definition that served, up until very recently, as my anchor, my single point of clarity in the madness and mayhem that is the universe we live in. Though many have tried to articulate this truth, none as of yet have held a candle to the beauty and succinctness of Merriam-Webster dictionary, and so it is this definition that I shall include here. "Mole: any of numerous burrowing insectivores (especially family Talpidae) with tiny eyes, concealed ears, and soft fur."

For years, this was the knowledge that I lived by. Whatever else went wrong, whatever else changed around me, I always knew that I could come back to the humble mole and see it unaltered. I knew what moles looked like. I knew how big they were. I knew exactly what sorts of irritating things they did to people's yards. I knew all of this because I knew exactly what moles were. What they would always be. Or so I thought.

You see, this semester I managed to get myself enrolled in introductory chemistry. Now I am by no means a chemical genius, and I was certainly not "cruising along" by any means, but I must admit that when the professor wrote the word "mole" on the board, I felt a wave of confidence wash over me. "Finally," I thought, "Something I can understand." I did wonder slightly how a small burrowing mammal could be relevant to chemistry, but I presumed that we were about to discuss some organic process or another. Not so. The professor explained that a mole is an amount of a substance containing 6.022×10^{23} particles. I raised my hand in protest. Granted, I had never counted the number of atoms in one of the delightful little creatures, but I found it hard to believe that every mole could possibly have this exact number. After all, what if the mole had just eaten something? What if it was a very skinny mole? The professor looked at me, perplexed, and explained that this "mole" had nothing to do with the furry yard pests that I had come to know and love. She pressed on with the lesson, but I couldn't hear a thing. My world had just collapsed around me.

As I stumbled from the classroom, slowly recovering from my stupor, I resolved to find the truth. Perhaps that professor had been wrong. Perhaps all the students in that classroom who had been so dutifully nodding along to this lesson about "moles" were simply brainwashed. I would ask the next person I saw about it, and they would reassure me that I had been right all along. Alas, it was not to be.

The first person that I saw was a PPE major. When I told them about my predicament, I was relieved to discover that they also did not know what the chemistry professor was talking about. However, my relief was short-lived. "No, I agree, that's not what a mole is," they said, "A mole is a spy who secures a spot within a rival government or organization to secretly collect information."

I was properly reeling after that conversation, and I returned to my dorm to gather my thoughts. There were two people cooking in the communal kitchen at the time, and I decided to pick their brains on the matter. Imagine my surprise when they told me that, not only was my definition incorrect, but that I was pronouncing the word wrong too. Mol-ay, they said, was a delicious spiced sauce of Mexican origin.

“MOLE?” CONT.

Exasperated, I ran to the only place that I assumed I could find solace: the biology department. Surely, I thought, surely these people will understand me. I walked into Talbot and found a pre-med student slumped dejectedly on one of the desks near the bathrooms on the second floor. I approached them cautiously, and, after shaking them from a stress-induced catatonic episode, I asked them that same, fateful question: “Do you know what a mole is?” They smiled weakly. “Of course,” they said. “A mole is a pigmented spot on the skin.” My heart shattered.

After these encounters, I am afraid I don’t know what to think anymore. And so, I am turning it over to you dear readers. What is a mole? Is it truly something that we can define? Or is it ever-shifting and nebulous? Should we even care? All mole-related grievances and/or threats of violence should be painted in gigantic, bright red letters on the Bullsheet office windows, please and thank you.

MOLE’S LAMENT

Emmy Ayad, not a mole
but totally could be

The office hasn’t radioed for days. I’ve been left alone in this wasteland. It doesn’t matter if I try to call in first, there’s no one on the other side. They’ve sent me deep undercover with no plans of retrieval.

I’ve been here for eight weeks and I don’t know how much longer I can take. Every day, I walk outside and am brutally reminded of the sins of my past. Every time I forgot to add chocolate to my family’s famous delicious spiced dish of Mexican origin, every skipped dermatologist appointment because the spot “didn’t look that pigmented.” I reflect on every time I was home too late to read my daughter a bedtime story. The too-bright sun burns my tiny eyes, and my concealed ears fold further in on themselves, hoping to escape the anguish.

Sometimes, I lie awake at night, listening to the crickets, and think of the creaking and crunching of the dirt, the slithering worms, and the shuffling of the cable guy as he installs our latest TV. The sounds of home ring in my fortune cookie ears as I wrap my pillow tighter around my head. No matter how many times I trudge through the dirt on my way to class, no matter how many times the door to my six-man creaks, it will never be the same.

Must I be kept here? Must I be made to waste the hours away, spying for an agency that doesn’t even care about me? I know it was one of the higher-ups that stole my chocolate from the company fridge. If I must be reminded of my failed dish, I will redirect any blame possible. It’s no surprise they haven’t checked in with me. They’re hoping I disappear on this university campus. They say they’re worried about the students discovering too much, but I know if that were really true, they would have come themselves. Or at least offered a “hello” every once in a while. There was an alleged close call in a “daily publication” but I’ve not been able to find any evidence to confirm. I’m being shunned. That much I know. And maybe that much I deserve.

I hoped that, in the earlier weeks, I would find quick evidence and make it home in time for my weekly dermo appointment but now the reality sets in. I’m on this campus indefinitely and there are no delicious spiced dishes of Mexican origin in my future.



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