

**Horace, Satires II.80-117: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse**

[Olim] rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur  
Accepisse cavo, veterem vetus hospes amicum,  
Asper et attentus quaesitis, ut tamen artum  
Solveret hospitiis animum. Quid multa? Neque ille  
Sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae,  
Aridum et ore ferens acinum semesaque lardi  
Frustra dedit, cupiens varia fastidia cena  
Vincere tangentis male singular dente superbo;  
Cum pater ipse domus palea porrectus in horna  
Esset ador loliumque, dapis Meliora relinuens.  
Tandem urbanus ad hunc, "Quid te iuvat," inquit, "amice,  
Praerupti memoris patientem vivere domo?  
Vis tu homines urbemque feris praeponere silvis?  
Carpe viam, mihi crede, comes. Terrestria quando  
Mortalis animas vivunt sortita, neque ulla est  
Aut magno aut parvo leti fuga, quo, bone, circa,  
Dum licet, in rebus iucundis vive beatus;  
Vive memor, quam sis aevia brevis." Haec urbe dicta  
Agrestem pepulere, domo levis exsilit; inde  
Ambo propositum peragunt iter, urbis aventes  
Moenia nocturni subrepere. Iamque tenebat  
Nox meium caeli spatium, cum point uterque  
In locuplete domo vestigial, rubro ubi cocco  
Tincta super lectos canderet vestis eburnos,

Multaque de magna superessent fercula cena,  
 Quae procul exstructis inerrant hesterna canistris,  
 Ergo ubi purpurea porrectum in veste locavit  
 Agrestem, veluti succinctus cursitat hospes  
 Fungitur officiis, praelambens omne quod adfert.  
 Ille cubans gaudet mutata sorte bonisque  
 Rebus agit laetum convivam, cum subito ingens  
 Valvarum strepitus lectis excussit utrumque.  
 Currere per totum pavidi conclave, magisque  
 Examines trepidare, simul domus alta Molossis  
 Personuit canibus. Tum rusticus, "Haud mihi vita  
 Est opus hac," ait, "et valeas: me silva cavusque  
 Tutus ab insidiis tenui solabitur ervo."

Once upon a time – so they say – a country mouse welcomed a city mouse in his poor hole. The host and guest were both old friends. [The country mouse] lived roughly and was frugal with the food he had stored up. Yet he could loosen up his thrifty mind to be hospitable. He was not stingy with his hoard of chickpeas or long oats. In his mouth he brought a dried raisin and some nibbled bits of bacon and served them [to his city friend]. [The country mouse] was eager, by [bringing] different things to eat, to overcome the pickiness of his guest. [The city mouse] would barely touch a single morsel with his haughty teeth. While leaving the better parts of the feast [to his city friend], the head of the house, stretched out on fresh straw, ate [only] grains of spelt and rye.

Finally the city mouse said to him, "How can it please you, my friend, to stand living like this on the ridge of a steep forest? Don't you want to put people and the city above these wild woods? Trust me – come along with me. Since all creatures that live on earth have mortal souls, and there is no escape from death for [anything] either great or small, live happily among pleasures while you can, my good friend, and remember how short a time you have to live!"

When [the city mouse] had spoken these words, they drove the country mouse to lightly leap from his house. Then they both went on their way as they had planned, eager to creep under the city walls by night.

It was the middle of the night when the two mice set foot in a rich home. Covers dyed in scarlet glittered on ivory couches, and many dishes stood piled up nearby in baskets, left over from a great feast from the night before. The city mouse had his country friend stretch out on purple couch covers. Meanwhile, he scurried about like a waiter, serving his guest course after course, doing all the duties of a household servant, [even] first tasting everything he served.

The country mouse lay back at his ease, enjoying his change of fortune as a happy guest amid the good cheer. But all of a sudden a terrible banging of the doors knocked both mice from their couches. In panic they ran the full length of the hall. They were even more terrified when the lofty house rang with the barking of dogs from Molossia. At that point, the country mouse declared, "I don't have any need for a life like this, so goodbye! My woods and my hole are safe from alarms, and will comfort me with humble vetch." (*Translation by LMT, based on the Loeb Classical Library translation of H.R. Fairclough*)

- Note: People in ancient times would have considered the grains spelt and rye as food suitable only for poor people.
- Furniture coverings of scarlet and purple were a sign of wealth.
- Dogs from Molossia (an old name for an area in western Greece) are a large breed, similar to mastiffs, and were known in ancient times for their ferocity.
- Vetch is a kind of pea.