

# The City Mouse and the Country Mouse

*one of Aesop's fables*

*as told by Horace in Satires 2.6.79-117 (1<sup>st</sup> century BC)*

*translated by Adam F McCune*

## *Original Latin*

olim  
rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur  
accepisse cavo, veterem vetus hospes amicum,  
asper et attentus quaesitis, ut tamen artum  
solveret hospitii animum. quid multa? neque ille  
sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae,  
aridum et ore ferens acinum semesaque lardi  
frusta dedit, cupiens varia fastidia cena  
vincere tangentis male singula dente superbo,  
cum pater ipse domus palea porrectus in horna  
esset ador loliumque, dapis meliora relinquens.  
tandem urbanus ad hunc “quid te iuvat” inquit, “amice,  
praerupti nemoris patientem vivere dorso?  
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 aevi brevis.” haec ubi dicta  
agrestem pepulere, domo levis exsilit; inde

## *English Translation*

Once upon a time, they say,  
There was a country mouse,  
Who had a city mouse to stay  
In his small burrow-house.  
  
The host, with all he'd set apart,  
Lived in no luxury  
So he could open up his heart  
In hospitality.  
  
The saved-up chickpeas and the grains,  
He did not hold them back.  
He brought him raisins, all his gains,  
And bacon as a snack.  
  
He knew his choosy city friend  
And hoped a varied plate  
Would win him over. — In the end,  
The town mouse hardly ate.  
  
The host, stretched in the straw to rest,  
Ate farro and some rye,  
Left what was best out for his guest.  
His guest made this reply.  
  
He said, “This wild and rugged wood—  
Now, wouldn't you prefer  
The city's people? For what good  
Is it to just endure?  
  
“Live with the blessings that life brings!  
You can't outrun the end,  
So journey to more pleasant things—  
And take the road, my friend!”  
  
The country mouse bounds from his house,  
So stirred, he heard the call.  
He creeps in with the city mouse  
Beneath the city wall.

ambo propositum peragunt iter, urbis aventes  
moenia nocturni subrepere. iamque tenebat  
nox medium caeli spatium, cum ponit uterque  
in locuplete domo vestigia, rubro ubi cocco  
tincta super lectos canderet vestis eburnos  
multaque de magna superessent fercula cena,  
quae procul exstructis inerant hesterna canistris.  
ergo ubi purpurea porrectum in veste locavit  
agrestem, veluti succinctus cursitat hospes  
continuatque dapes nec non verniliter ipsis  
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  
exanimes trepidare, simul domus alta Molossis  
personuit canibus. tum rusticus: “haud mihi vita  
est opus hac” ait et “valeas: me silva cavosque  
tutus ab insidiis tenui solabitur ervo.”

Night fills the sky; they step inside  
A house of luxury  
Where tapestries lie crimson-dyed  
On seats of ivory.

And many dishes still remain  
On one side, cleared away  
In heaps the baskets can't contain,  
From feasting yesterday.

The country mouse receives a seat  
On rose-red tapestry;  
The city mouse stays on his feet,  
And serves with courtesy.

The ready host runs to and fro  
To serve course after course,  
And tastes each one so as to know  
The savor from the source.

Rejoicing at his change of fate,  
Reclining at his rest,  
The country mouse enjoys the state  
Of the delighted guest.

Then suddenly an awful bang  
Came from the folding door  
And drove them from their seats; they sprang  
To flee across the floor.

Gone mad with fear, they hear the house  
Resound with barking sounds  
That terrify each shaking mouse—  
Those are Molossian hounds!

“I do not need this life—goodbye!”  
Declares the country mouse.  
“I'll take my common grain in my  
Secure old burrow-house.”