

## Horace, *Sermones* 2.6: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse, Part 2

Our campfire tale continues as the humble country mouse is seduced with promises of the “good life” from the haughty tooth of his urbane friend. The lap of luxury has its rough spots as we travel with these tiny rodents to town and see the other side of the proverbial fence. If the ultimate pleasure was to be free from anxiety, then to subscribe to this restrained kind of hedonism taught by the Epicurean philosophers is the real moral of Horace’s story. But perhaps the country mouse does not have the last word after all, nor does his city cousin; for seldom in Roman history do we find either mice or men who are able to straddle both worlds as successfully as did Horace.

### Text and Translation

haec ubi dicta  
when these words

agrestem pepulere, domo levis exsilit; inde  
struck the country (mouse), lightly he scampers from the house; next

ambo propositum peragunt iter, urbis aventes  
both finish the journey (as) planned, desiring at night

97. **ubi:** here, postpositive
98. **agrestem:** *agrestis, -e:* (belonging to the) country  
**pepulere** = *pepulerunt*  
**levis:** translate as an adverb: lightly; i.e. without a second thought  
**exsilit:** *exsilio, exsilire, exsilui:* leap out, leap up; present tense for perfect  
**inde:** (adverb) next
99. **ambo:** *ambo, ambae, ambo:* both  
**propositum:** *propono, -ponere, -posui, -positum:* put forth, plan  
**peragunt:** *perago, -ere, peregi, peractum:* finish  
**iter:** *iter, itineris, n.:* journey  
**aventes:** *aveo, -ere:* desire

moenia nocturni subrepere. iamque tenebat  
to creep under the walls of the city. And now the night

nox medium caeli spatium, cum ponit uterque  
was holding the middle of the sky's expanse, when each (mouse) sets

in locuplete domo vestigia, rubro ubi cocco  
(his) footsteps in a rich house, where a coverlet

tincta super lectos canderet vestis eburnos  
dyed with reddish-purple glowed on ivory couches.

multaque de magnā superessent fercula cenā,  
There were left over from a great dinner many trays (of food),

100. **moenia:** *moenia, -ium, n. (pl.):* walls (of a city)  
**nocturni:** *nocturnus, -a, -um:* at night; here, modifying the subject of *peragunt*  
**subrepere:** *subrepto, subrepere, subrepsi:* creep under
101. **spatium:** *spatium, -i, n.:* space; here, expanse
102. **locuplete:** *locuples, locupletis:* rich  
**vestigia:** *vestigium, -i, n.:* footprint  
**rubro:** *ruber, rubra, rubrum:* red  
**cocco:** *coccum, -i, n.:* scarlet dye
103. **tincta:** *tingo, -ere, tinxi, tinctum:* dye  
**super:** (adverb) on (top of)  
**canderet:** *candeo, -ere, candui:* glow  
**vestis:** *vestis, -is, f.:* coverlet  
**eburnos:** *eburnus, -a, -um:* (made of) ivory
104. **superessent:** *supersum, superesse, superfui, superfuturus:* left over  
**fercula:** *ferculum, -i, n.:* tray (for serving food)  
**cena:** *cena, -ae, f.:* dinner

quae procul exstructis inerant hesterna canistris.

which (were) last night's (and) were in wicker baskets piled up across the room.

ergo ubi purpureā porrectum in veste locavit

Then, when he seated the country (mouse who) stretched out upon the purple

agrestem, veluti succinctus cursitat hospes

coverlet, just like (a servant with his tunic) hitched up, the host scurries back and forth

continuatque dapes nec non verniliter ipsis

and prolongs the banquet and officiously performs these

fungitur officiis, praelambens omne quod adfert.

(very) duties, licking beforehand everything which he brings.

105. **procul:** (adverb) at a distance; here, across the room  
**exstructis:** *exstruo, -struere, -struxi, -structum:* pile up  
**inerant:** *insum, -esse, -fui:* be in  
**hesterna:** *hesternus, -a, -um:* of yesterday; here, last night's  
**canistris:** *canistra, -orum, n. (pl.):* wicker baskets
106. **ergo:** (adverb) then  
**purpureā:** *purpureus, -a, -um:* purple  
**porrectum:** *porrigo, -ere, porrexi, porrectum:* stretch out  
**locavit:** *loco* (1): place; here, to seat, with the city mouse as the understood subject
107. **veluti:** (adverb) just  
**succinctus:** *succingo, -cingere, -cixi, -cinctum:* tuck up the clothes in the girdle  
**cursitat:** *curro* (1): frequentitive of *curro* showing repeated action; scurry back and forth  
**hospes:** *hospes, hospitis, m.:* host
108. **continuat:** *continuo* (1): make continuous; here, prolong  
**dapes:** *daps, dapis, f.:* banquet  
**nec non:** and also; literally “nor not”  
**verniliter:** (adverb) like a slave; with *nec non*, “officiously” (lit. “not like a slave”)
109. **fungitur:** *fungor, fungi, functus sum:* +ablative: perform  
**praelambens:** *praelambo, -ere:* lick before  
**adfert:** *adfero, adferre, attuli, allatum:* bring

ille cubans gaudet mutatā sorte bonisque

That (mouse) reclining rejoices in (his) changed lot and (surrounded) by good

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rebus agit laetum convivam, cum subito ingens

things, plays the satisfied guest, when suddenly a monstrous

valvarum strepitus lectis excussit utrumque.

rattling of the double doors shook both off (their) couches.

currere per totum pavidu conclave magisque

Frightened, they run through the entire room and even more

110. **cubans:** *cubo, -are, cubui, cubitum*: recline  
**gaudet:** *gaudeo, -ere, gavisus sum*: rejoice  
**mutatā:** *muto* (1): change  
**sorte:** *sors, sortis, f.*: (one's) lot  
**bonis...rebus:** here, "surrounded by good things"; locative ablative
111. **laetum:** *laetus, -a, -um*: satisfied  
**convivam:** *conviva, -ae, m.*: guest; *agit laetum convivam*: "plays the happy guest"  
**subito:** (adverb) suddenly  
**ingens:** *ingens, ingentis*: huge, monstrous
112. **valvarum:** *valvae, -arum, f.* (pl.): double doors  
**strepitus:** *strepitus, -ūs, m.*: noise, rattle  
**lectis:** *lectus, -i, m.*: (dining) couch  
**excussit:** *excutio, excutere, excussi, excussum*: shake off  
**utrumque:** *uterque, utraque, utrumque*: each (of two), both
113. **currere** = *currunt*: historical infinitive used in animated narrative  
**pavidu:** *pavidus, -a, -um*: frightened  
**conclave:** *conclave, -is, n.*: room

exanimēs trepidare, simul domus alta Molossis  
breathless(ly) they tremble, when the lofty mansion resounded

personuit canibus. tum rusticus: “haud mihi vitā  
with Molossian hounds. Then the country (mouse) said: “I have

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est opus hāc” ait et “valeas: me silva cavusque  
no need for this (kind of) life” and (adds) “Good-bye! The forest and (my mouse) hole

tutus ab insidiis tenui solabitur ervo.”  
safe from sudden attack, will comfort me (in spite of its) scanty vetch.”

114. **exanimēs:** *exanimis*, -e: breathless; i.e. from terror  
**trepidare:** *trepido* (1): be agitated; here, *trepidare* = *trepidant* (see *currere*, 113)  
**alta:** *altus*, -a, -um: high; because it is the large home of a rich man  
**Molossis:** *Molossus*, -a, -um: Molossian; Molossia is an area in Greece famous for raising hunting dogs
115. **personuit:** *persono*, *personare*, *personui*, *personitum*: resound  
**canibus:** *canis*, -is, m./f.: dog  
**haud:** (adverb) not at all  
**vitā:** ablative with *opus est* (ablative shows the thing needed)
116. **cavus:** *cavum*, -i, n.: (mouse) hole
117. **tutus:** *tutus*, -a, -um: safe; with *ab insidiis*, “safe from sudden attack”  
**tenui:** *tenuis*, -e: thin, scanty  
**solabitur:** *solor*, -ari, *solatus sum*: comfort  
**ervo:** *ervum*, -i, n.: vetch; a plant in the pea family cultivated for silage