

Horace, *Sermones* 2.6: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse, Part 1

Horace was born in Venusia (south central Italy) on December 8, 65 BCE. His father (or grandfather) had been a slave in the important Horatii *gens* of Rome, and, according to standard Roman practice, upon his manumission his family adopted the Roman name. While Horace was pursuing his education at Rome and later Athens, civil war erupted between Caesar and Pompey. Unfortunately, Horace joined the wrong side, Pompey's, and ended up losing his family farm but was spared by Caesar.

Maecenas, the secretary of the arts for Octavian (soon-to-be Augustus), took the penniless Horace under his powerful wing and began supporting the fledgling poet as part of the imperial program fostering the native arts in Rome, including poetry written in Latin. Horace would never know hunger and poverty again. Augustus would try to convince him to become more active in the government, but Horace preferred the simple pleasures and joys of life: friendship, travel, the lighter side of love, the scenery of nature.

Our excerpt comes from Horace's second book of *Sermones* ("Conversations"), satirical poems on a multitude of topics. The sixth is a hymn to his contentment with his farm and the simple life he leads in the country. In the first part of the poem, Horace sits around the campfire with friends, and someone praises wealth. One of Horace's companions, Cervius ("Bucky"), recounts a tale of a country mouse who invited a friend from the city to dinner only to be told that his way of life is narrow and shabby.

Olim
Once upon a time,

rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur 80
a country mouse is said to have received a city mouse

accepisse cavo, veterem vetus hospes amicum,
in his poor hole, an old friend (and) old guest,

asper et attentus quaesitis, ut tamen artum
unrefined and attentive to his supplies, (and) although frugal,

solveret hospitium animum. quid multa? neque ille
he could relax his basic nature for guests. Why (say) more? He did not

sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae,
begrudge the select chick-pea nor the long-grained oat,

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aridum et ore ferens acinum semesaque lardi 85
and he offered a dried grape seed and half-eaten morsels of bacon carrying (them)

frusta dedit, cupiens varia fastidia cena
in his mouth, hoping to overcome with various food

vincere tangentis male singula dente superbo,
the disdain of the one hardly touching (them) one by one with a haughty tooth,

cum pater ipse domūs paleā porrectus in hornā
after the master of the house himself, having stretched out on (a bed of) this year's chaff,

esset ador loliumque, dapis meliora relinquens.
was eating spelt and darnel, leaving behind the better parts of the banquet.

tandem urbanus ad hunc "quid te iuvat" inquit, "amice," 90
At length the city (mouse) said to that one, "What fun is it for you, (my) friend,

praerupti nemoris patientem vivere dorso?
to live (in such) suffering on the edge of a rough pastureland?

vis tu homines urbemque feris praeponere silvis?
Don't you want to put men and the city before the savage woods?

carpe viam, mihi crede, comes, terrestria quando
Seize the way, trust me, pal, since things on earth

mortalīs animas vivunt sortita neque ulla est
have been allotted mortal souls and there is no

aut magno aut parvo leti fuga: quo, bone, circa 95
escape from death for either the great or the small: therefore, good (fellow),

dum licet, in rebus iucundis vive beatus,
while one may, live happy in pleasant circumstances,

vive memor, quam sis aevi brevis."
live mindful of how short-lived you are."

Worksheet – Horace, The City Mouse and the Country Mouse, Part 1

- a. The questions below pertain to the forms underlined in the passage
- b. When you're asked to change a word from one form to another, change only **that** form of the word. For instance, if you're asked to change *habet* to the passive voice, make *habet* passive but leave it in the 3rd person singular, present indicative.

1. What case is **rusticus** and why? _____
2. Change **fertur** to perfect subjunctive plural. _____
3. Make **accepisse** passive (nom. masc. sing.). _____
4. Make **asper** plural. _____
5. Make **solveret** pluperfect. _____
6. What case is **multa** and why? _____
7. Make **ciceris** plural. _____
8. Change **invidit** to present. _____
9. What case is **ore** and why? _____
10. Make **dedit** future plural. _____
11. What mood is **vincere** and why? _____
12. Change **tangentis** to perfect subjunctive (2nd pl). _____
13. What mood is **esset** and why? _____
14. Make **meliora** superlative. _____
15. Make **amice** plural. _____
16. Make **patientem** future passive. _____

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