



## The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse

*Classical Greece*

Once upon a time there was a mouse who lived in the country and was happy to have everything he needed to make a living. Without having to work, he could enjoy the seeds that the fields gave him and the wild berries that grew at the different seasons on trees and shrubs. In addition, he enjoyed a cosy hole in an oak tree where he found shelter from the autumn rains and cold winter winds. And, since he had plenty of free time, he enjoyed what life gave him every day, squinting in the heat of the early morning sun, bathing in the bubbling streams at noon, or frolicking at dusk in the fluffiest mosses in the forest.

One day a cousin of his from the town came to see him. He was a somewhat nervous and hyperactive guy. The country mouse showed him around the area and invited him to eat at his house. However, he was surprised to see that his cousin, the town mouse, looked at everything with an air of disapproval. Even when he offered him a little pile of wild oat seeds, two blackberries and a walnut, the town mouse looked at it all with disdain and said:

‘Thank you very much for everything you have shown me and offered me, but I’m surprised that you can be happy living in these conditions, in such a boring place, inhabiting such a small hole and eating such bland things. Why don’t you come to my house in the town? You’ll see that there is another way of living which is much more comfortable and rewarding.’

A few days later, the field mouse went to the town to visit his cousin who lived in a huge house. Of course, he had to seclude himself

in a hole as small as his own whenever any of the humans who lived in the house appeared. Yes, he had a piece of foam rubber stolen from an armchair to sleep on, but the country mouse could not see the appeal of this artificial thing when comparing with his bed of moss in the oak's hole.

'Come, let's eat something!' said his cousin heading to the kitchen.

There, the country mouse was surprised when he found, in a space smaller than a forest clearing, all kinds of delicacies and sweets. There was even cheese, and of different types and colours!

But, just at that moment, the owner of the house appeared and the two mice had to sneak away quickly so she would not see them. They hadn't had a chance to taste even one of those cheeses!

When the woman left they tried again and, this time, they managed to sink their teeth into a slice of raspberry cheesecake. But then a child came into the kitchen trying to find something to eat, and the mice had to hide again with their hearts racing.

'Well', said the town mouse when the child left, 'to eat these delicacies you have to make a little effort, and sometimes you'll have a hard time, it's true, but look how many delicious things you can try here.'

They came out into the open again and, this time, they were able to enjoy different dishes with different flavours, although with their ears and eyes circling in all directions all of the time, attentive to the slightest sound or movement that could indicate some danger. And, just as they were beginning to think that no one was coming, the huge head of a cat emerged from under the kitchen table.

The two mice ran in terror in the direction of the town mouse's hole, arriving there just in time to avoid being attacked by the cat's claws.

Huddled at the back of the hole, they could see how the cat was watching them from the opening, occasionally inserting its paw, probing the space to see if it could reach any of them. With his heart in mouth

when seeing the cat's muzzle so close, the country mouse said to the town mouse:

'Certainly, I've eaten very well, cousin, but don't take what I'm about to tell you in the wrong way. You've everything any mouse in the world could wish for, but the price you have to pay for it is shock, fear and lack of freedom. That's too high for me. I prefer to live a simple quiet life, even though I can't enjoy the delicacies that you enjoy. But, in return, I enjoy other luxuries that the countryside gives me and which you cannot access from here.'

And, when the cat got tired of watching them and sticking his paw through the hole, the two cousins said goodbye, and the country mouse returned to his warm hole in the oak. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2020).

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## Comments

This is an adaptation of one of Aesop's (ca. 600-564 B.C.E.) fables. He was a well-known figure at the time of Classical Greece, but for whom there is not much reliable data. In fact, there are some authors who say that he never existed, although most do recognise his existence. Legend says that he died, very young, in Delphi, thrown from a cliff by an angry mob.

He shouldn't have gone to town.

Perhaps a detail in this fable of Aesop's should be put into context. This is because there will be those who think that this story could well be a covert message to convince the poorest sectors of society not to aspire to the comforts and lifestyle of the privileged classes who hold power. And yes, certainly, this fable could be interpreted in this way, if it were not because such an interpretation is what another 'city mouse' would do. A 'country mouse', convinced of his higher 'quality of life', would probably would not consider such an interpretation, since he would clearly see the message which Aesop tried to convey with this

story. And this message is the same message that the Earth Charter conveys, in its Principle 7f (see below).

## Sources

- Aesop (2005). The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse. In *Aesop's Fables* (pp. 8-9). Planet PDF.
- Esopo (2000). El ratón campesino y el ratón cortésano. In *Fábulas de Esopo* (p. 169). San José, Costa Rica: Educación y Desarrollo Contemporáneo.
- Livo, N.J. (2003). The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse. In *Bringing Out Their Best: Values Education and Character Development through Traditional Tales* (p. 33). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

## Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 7f: Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

## Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: Earth, our home.- Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution.

Preamble: The challenges ahead.- Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

Principle 6c: Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.