

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse

I don't mind admitting that I'm a simple sort of mouse. I live inside a nice cosy log by the side of a field. My needs are not great. A few sunflower seeds or wheat stalks will do me for a meal. For a special treat, the farmer sometimes leaves me a some crumbs of bread and cheese from his lunch. When I am thirsty, I drink from the bubbling stream. And I swear that that pure cold water is the freshest, most delicious taste in the world. Finer than champaign even – and I don't just mean that as a boast or a figure of speech. I tried champaign once – so I know what I'm talking about.

How did a poor simple country mouse like myself try champaign? Well, I shall tell you.

A while back I received a visit from my uncle, the town mouse. Everyone in my family knows that Uncle Town Mouse is very rich and successful, and lives in a big smart house in the city. It was of course an honour that he should come and stay with me for a weekend away from his business. But to tell you the truth, I felt a little bit nervous? What would he make of my humble abode and my simple tastes?

Well of course he was very nice and polite.

“Charming, simply charming” he said as I showed him around my log.

And when I put some crumbs of cheddar cheese before him for his supper he exclaimed:

“Just the ticket. Exactly what I wanted. Thank you dear nephew for taking such good care of me.”

At night he slept in my spare bed in the hedgerow, and in the morning, when I asked him how he had slept he said:

“Splendid, just splendidly. This clear country air of yours is so restful.”

In fact, he was so full of praise for my country life-style that I asked him if he was planning to retire to the countryside. Uncle Town Mouse laughed, and I felt that I had perhaps said something silly or tactless.

“My dear nephew,” he said, “The countryside is all very well for a rest. But the town is the place to live if you appreciate gourmet food, fine wine, and, by the way, the most stylish and elegant lady-mice. Why, I thank you for your hospitality, but I would die or boredom if I lived your life for more than a weekend.”

I was very impressed by my uncles words, and I could not stop thinking about the attractions of the city that he had described.

That evening, as he was preparing to leave for home, my uncle said, “Say Nephew, why don't you come back with me and give your taste buds a real treat. I say – a mouse hasn't lived until he's tried gorgonzola cheese – and we always keep a good supply in our lada, not to mention the ardennes Pâté, Avocado pears with french dressing, Chicken Vols-au-Vent, Mushrooms a la Grecque, and grilled Mediterranean vegetables. Come come. We'll have a feast. And afterwards

we'll call on some pretty friends of mine.”

When he put it like that, I couldn't resist. And so that very evening I travelled with my uncle to his house in the city.

And when I first set eyes on Uncle's house I was truly impressed. It was four storeys high with white stucco pillars and cast iron railings. Inside it was not less magnificent. Crystal chandeliers sparkled over antique furniture and polished oak floors.

Uncle took me directly to the pantry, where the remains of a magnificent banquet were laid on the table. Uncle insisted that we begin with an aperitif of champagne – and as I had never tried it before, the bubbles went straight to my head. I dived into a custard tart and came out all sticky and yellow .

Uncle sat up and his nose switched:

“Oh what a lucky mouse you are,” he exclaimed. “I can smell Truffles !”

And he led me to the other side of the table where we tried some black food that he said was known to be the most delicious in the world. I didn't like to admit that it tasted a little strange to me.

But then we tried the gorgonzola cheese. Oh my Goodness! Uncle had been right. I hadn't lived until I tried that wonderful cheese. I didn't like to be vulgar, but gobbled up a large chunk in a flash. And I was still stuffing myself when I saw a shadow move in the corner. I dived for cover. It probably wasn't polite to shoot off like that in mid-mouthful, but the reflex action saved my life, for the very next moment a terrible cat pounced on where I had been sitting and eating my fill. Uncle and I scurried across the table and the cat followed, smashing glasses and knocking over jugs and vases. We both jumped off the edge of the table and landed on the ground, but then the maid came in with a broom and was beating the floor with a broom, trying to squash us both. We made it to a hole in the skirting board – but only just. We were both within half an inch of being beaten to death!”

“Wow that was a close shave !” said Uncle. “Exciting hey what !”

My heart was pounding and I had to regain my breath before I could say,

“Yes, a little too exciting for a poor country mouse I'm afraid. I thank you for your hospitality, but I must be off home now. ”

And that's the story of how I learned that other people's lives are rarely quite as attractive as they sometimes make they appear to be.