

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## To a Mouse

*On Turning up in Her Nest with the Plough, November, 1785*

By Robert Burns  
1785

*Robert Burns (1759-1796) was a Scottish poet and lyricist. In the following poem, a speaker come across a mouse while ploughing a field. As you read, take notes on the speaker's feelings toward the mouse.*

### MODERN VERSION

- [1] Little, artful, cowering,<sup>1</sup> timid beast,  
Oh, what a panic is in your heart!  
You need not start away so hasty  
    With bickering prattle!<sup>2</sup>
- [5] I would be loath<sup>3</sup> to run and chase you,  
    With murdering scraper

I'm truly sorry man's dominion<sup>4</sup>  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
And justifies that ill opinion

- [10]       Which makes you startle  
At me, your poor, earth born companion  
    And fellow mortal!

I doubt not, sometimes, that you may steal;  
What then? Poor beast, you must live!

- [15] An odd ear<sup>5</sup> in twenty-four sheaves<sup>6</sup>  
    Is a small request;  
I will get a blessing with what is left,  
    And never miss it.

Your small house, too, in ruin!

- [20] Its feeble walls the winds are scattering!  
And nothing now, to build a new one,  
    Of coarse green foliage!<sup>7</sup>  
And bleak December's winds coming,  
    Both bitter and piercing!



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1. **Cower** (*verb*): to crouch down in fear
  2. foolish talk
  3. unwilling
  4. **Dominion** (*noun*): control
  5. a single grain plant
  6. a bundle of grain stalks that are tied together after being cut
  7. plant leaves

[25] You saw the fields laid bare and empty,  
And weary winter coming fast,  
And cozy here, beneath the blast,  
    You thought to dwell,  
Till crash! The cruel plough passed  
[30]       Out through your cell.

That small heap of leaves and stubble,  
Has cost you many a weary nibble!  
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,  
    Without house or holding,  
[35] To endure the winter's sleety dribble,  
    And hoar-frost<sup>8</sup> cold.

But Mouse, you are not alone,  
In proving foresight<sup>9</sup> may be vain:<sup>10</sup>  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
[40]       Go often askew,<sup>11</sup>  
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,  
    For promised joy!

Still you are blessed, compared with me!  
The present only touches you:  
[45] But oh! I backward cast my eye,  
    On prospects<sup>12</sup> dreary!  
And forward, though I cannot see,  
    I guess and fear!

## SCOTS VERSION

[46] Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,  
[51] O, what a panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
    Wi' bickerin brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee  
    Wi' murd'ring pattle!

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8. a white coating of ice crystals  
9. **Foresight** (*noun*): the ability to predict what will happen or what is needed in the future  
10. **Vain** (*adjective*): producing no result; useless  
11. crooked, out of line, or wrong  
12. a view or outlook

[56] I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion,  
Which makes thee startle,  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,  
[61] An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen-icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' request:  
[66] I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,  
An' never miss 't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!  
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
[71] O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,  
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,  
An' weary Winter comin fast,  
[76] An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald,  
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,  
[81] An' cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
[91] For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
[96] An' forward tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear!