

### **The City Mouse and the Country Mouse (part 1).**

Once upon a time, a country mouse named Oliver lived in a hole under the root of a big, old oak tree. Oliver loved the sound of squirrels chattering during the day and crickets chirping at night. He loved the smell of rich dirt and sweet grass all around him. One day Oliver invited his city cousin, Alistair, for a visit. Before Alistair arrived, Oliver tidied up his hole. He straightened his leaf bed. He spread fresh pine needles on the floor. He scrubbed the tuna can table and polished the bottle cap plates. Then Oliver sat by the entrance to his hole, gazed out at the stars, and waited for his cousin to arrive.

When Alistair arrived, he put his fine leather suitcase on the pine needles.

"I say, cousin, is this your cellar?" he asked Oliver. "No," said Oliver, "it's my home." Oliver showed Alistair the back of the hole, where he stored his grain. He led Alistair up to the top of the old oak root, where he sometimes sat to watch the sunset. Then he sat Alistair down at the tuna can table and served him a dinner of barley and corn. Alistair nibbled his meal politely. "This certainly tastes as though it's good for me." He coughed and swallowed. "A bit dry, perhaps. Could I bother you for a cup of tea?" Oliver brewed a thimble of dandelion tea for them both. "Here's to my cousin Alistair! Thanks for visiting," toasted Oliver. When the thimbles were empty, Oliver changed into his long johns, Alistair changed into his silk pajamas, and the mice settled into their leaves for the night. After Alistair rustled around in his oak leaf for a while, he finally went to sleep.

Oliver woke up early the next morning, as usual. A robin family was singing in the old oak tree. A rooster crowed in a nearby farm. Alistair squeezed his pillow over his ears. "Oh, dear. What is that terrible noise?" he mumbled. "That's the sound of morning in the country," said Oliver. "It's the wonderful music that makes me want to start the new day." Alistair pulled the pillow from his face and opened one eye. "You start your day in the morning?" he asked. "Here in the country we rise at dawn," Oliver said, putting on his clothes. He pulled on his work boots, and pushed his wheelbarrow out into the garden. Alistair rolled to the edge of his bed. He wiped the sleep from his eyes. He slid his feet into his shiny black shoes, and followed his cousin outside.