

Robert Burns To a Mouse
On turning her up in her nest with the plough, November 1785

WEE, sleekit,¹ cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,
O what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi' bickerin' brattle!²
I wad be laith³ to rin an' chase thee 5
 Wi' murd'rin' pattle!⁴

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
 Which makes thee startle 10
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
 An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whiles,⁵ but thou mayst thieve:
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker⁶ in a thrave⁷ 15
 'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessing wi' the lave,⁸
 An' never miss't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin'; 20
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
 O' foggage⁹ green!

1 sleek
2 fluttering flight
3 loth
4 ploughstaff
5 at times
6 a corn-ear now and then
7 shock
8 rest
9 aftergrass

An' bleak December's winds ensuin',
 Baith snell¹⁰ an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste, 25
An' weary winter comin' fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
 Thou thought to dwell—
Till, crash! the cruel coulter past
 Out thro' thy cell. 30

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
 But house or hald,¹¹
To thole¹² the winter's sleety dribble 35
 An' cranreuch¹³ cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane¹⁴
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
 Gang aft agley,¹⁵ 40
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
 For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But, och! I backward cast my e'e 45
 On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see
 I guess an' fear!

10 biting
11 without dwelling-place
12 bear
13 hoar-frost
14 alone
15 awry