

## In the time of plenty

For a mustard seed moment, she felt joy. All she could smell was food, all she could hear was silence, all she could sense was stillness, safety. She danced over stacked timber, leapt with ease across cobwebbed pots, and paused at an unspooled roll of straw.

*Such bounty, my dear ones, my dear ones to be.*

*Such a warm nest for my late brood, my last brood.*

Her whiskers trembled and the three wood mouse embryos trembled in reply. And on she raced, a blink of sandy-brown, over dusty boxes of outdoor games, over the old lawnmower still bearing strands of summer, to the unguarded banquets.

They towered above her, a new challenge among many in her two years. A small shift in their bulk would crush her. She sought the pressure points where the plastic strained and would yield more easily to her needle teeth, her needle claws. The first incision was so well-judged that seeds and grains burst over her. She dashed sideways and her startled brood wriggled their complaint. She sat on her haunches, licking her pale belly, her arms and legs, grooming away the fright. She checked the slowing fountain of birdseed, then bit into the next bag.

Her teeth sawed patiently at the thick polythene until she could taste her next treasure. She set to the peanut feast, eating the most plump, selecting what to store and what to delineate her fine new territory. The skins of the nuts were perfect, weighing little, easy to move and staying in place along two walls of the garage. Her new land. She rested on a gardening glove which wrapped her in the scents of

leather, plants, bark and soil. Half-asleep and her stomach full, yet she nibbled its thumb, just in case.

Light blazed through the small garage windows. She raced for shelter. A blinding, roaring stench was invading her new home. She watched tall, dark shapes move out of a large, dark shape then the noise and light vanished. She licked and groomed until the sharp exhaust fumes fell and faded. She saw a nut skin spin. A tiny draught of air. The air came from a hole. She rippled through and emerged into the kitchen.

*Warm as summer here, my lovelies. More food. New food.*

She explored with care and speed but could not reach the tantalising smells behind the closed cupboards. She bit between the slits of the food recycling box, spitting out shreds of the green corn-starch bag in search of some recompense for her effort.

Nothing.

*Another search tomorrow, little ones. Just in case.*

The next night, as the full moon lit the kitchen floor, she found her reward.

*Nut smell. No, more than nut with more than berry smell. What can that be, dear ones?*

Her large eyes took in the strange, alluring form, not a rounded shape as food should be, but the scent was so seductive and as she sank her teeth into the chocolate, the trap lid clicked gently shut.