

RAT TALES

The moon was rising, shining through the garage window, peering at the rat where it lay in a muddle of paint rags, old golf shoes and bags of wood chips. The rat stirred and squeaked to alert young twin rats, nudging them through a hole under the door.

It had something to show them. Last week it had made a stunning discovery. A door to the warmth of the occupied house, close to the garage, had been left open.

On that occasion the rat had lain doggo for quite a while before scuttling to the kitchen, then crawling up a table leg on to a table, laid for breakfast the night before. Nothing there to eat, it left its calling card and moved silently into the hall, freezing behind a sideboard when a pair of pink slippers came plonking down a staircase. The slippers paused, as if their owner had caught a fleeting glimpse of something moving. They scuffed into the kitchen and the rat heard a tap running and the rumble of a kettle heating.

It had then decided to hibernate for a day or two behind the sideboard, watching and waiting to see what perils the house might hold. At that moment a golden dog jumped down from the couch that could be seen in another room. A good reason to keep quiet.

The following night the rat had ventured up to the top of the sideboard where someone had left a small glass dish of choc mallow biscuits behind a collection of birthday cards. It sniffed the strange objects, but later came back to gnaw at the chocolate coating, retiring to the corner of the floor beside the sideboard, vomiting the unfamiliar rich substance it had eaten. The rat searched for an outlet and found one near the back door, noting its position for an entrance later.

Now by the light of the moon it saw that the small hole had been filled in. No joy there. Marshalling the youngsters it skirted around the perimeter of the house, sniffing at unfamiliar black boxes against the walls. It smelled something enticing but did not enter the holes at either side of the boxes.

It warned the ratlets not to enter the holes. It noticed the position of each box, to be investigated in a day or two.

At dawn, heralded by a fluting magpie, one of the youngsters was missing. The parent rat searched but gave up, returning to the comfort of the garage. It was philosophical about the disappearance of its young.

Towards evening the golden dog, allowed outside to urinate, sniff, bark, and investigate, saw something moving in the fiery red and yellow leaves fallen from the liquidambar and blown against a wall at the front of the house. She nosed down firmly, scattering the leaves on seeing a tail. The young rat, dazed from the poison bait it had nibbled, panicked at the sight of the giant animal. Unable to run, it tried to hide. The dog, fascinated, did not want to obey when her owner, a woman, called to her to come away. At the sound of a bell to which she had been trained to respond, the dog abandoned her search and sat on the porch, watching.

When the woman went inside to answer the telephone, the dog trotted to the hiding place of her plaything, searched and pounced, gripping her victim in her jaws and carrying it to the front lawn, where it lay stunned and injured. The dog pawed it with interest but was again called away, the woman investigating and finding the little rodent. The rat lay still, but breathing, its pelt wet from the jaws of the golden dog. The woman enticed the dog back to the house with the word “dinner”.

The young rat did not hear the gate open, or see the man approaching with a shovel and a bag. It died painlessly as the shovel descended.

THE END