



Written and illustrated by
EMER STAMP

ME!

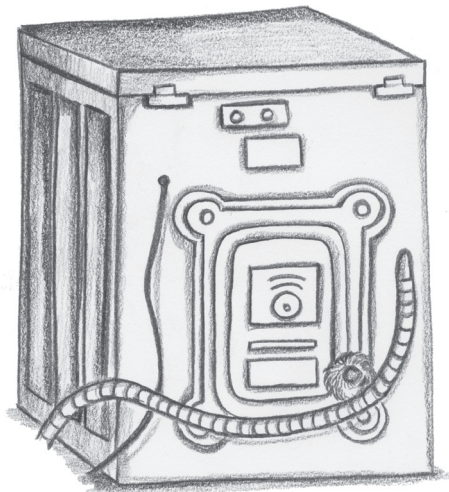
I'm almost the height of an egg cup (I have measured myself against lots of objects and this is the thing that is the closest to my size).

I live here, in a nest hidden away behind the washing machine, in the kitchen of Flat 3, Peewit Mansions. I know the exact address because it is written on the envelopes we sometimes shred up to make our home.



This is me,
stix





I live here



with my
grandma.

She is VERY OLD. But we are not allowed to talk about exactly how ancient, because Grandma says a lady mouse never lets on her age.

I did once, before I can remember, have parents. But we don't talk about them either. Whenever I ask what happened - how they died -



Grandma just shakes her head and says, 'You're not ready for that kind of information yet.'

I used to have a grandpa too. I can just about remember his face. It was old like Grandma's, only with a lot more whiskers. He died soon after my parents. Grandma said it was from a broken heart. But I don't think that's actually possible - whoever heard of a heart breaking!

Another thing Grandma says is that as a mouse you have to be smart.

A smart mouse, she says, gets to do as it pleases, gets to go where it likes and eat what it wants. A smart mouse knows how to go undetected. On the other paw, a silly mouse doesn't cover its tracks. A silly mouse gets seen. And as Grandma likes to say (often): 'a seen mouse is a dead mouse.' She also says:

A slow mouse is a dead mouse

A greedy mouse is a dead mouse

A noisy mouse is a dead mouse

A stupid mouse is a dead mouse

Sometimes I wonder how me and Grandma are still here. It seems staying alive is a hard thing for a mouse to do.

MY HOME

We share Flat 3 with a family of mans (that's our word for these funny-looking creatures) and their odd-shaped dog, **Trevor**.

Of course, apart from Trevor,
they have no idea we
live with them.

I know he'd love to
tell them all about
us, but he can't
speak mans.

Bad luck, Trevor!

Mr Mans

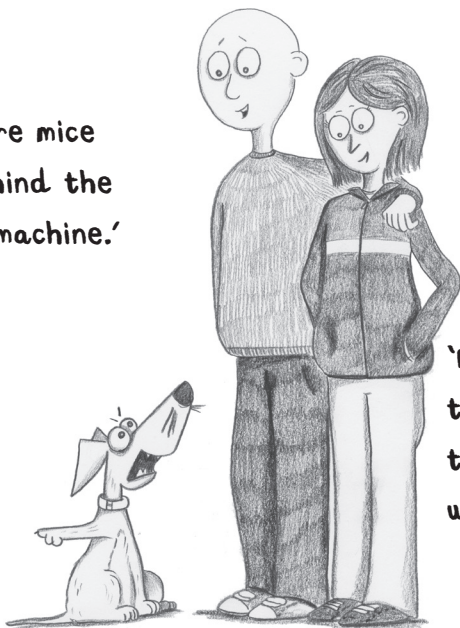
Baby Mans

Mrs Mans

Trevor



'There are mice
living behind the
washing machine.'



'I think he's
trying to tell us
that he wants a
walk.'

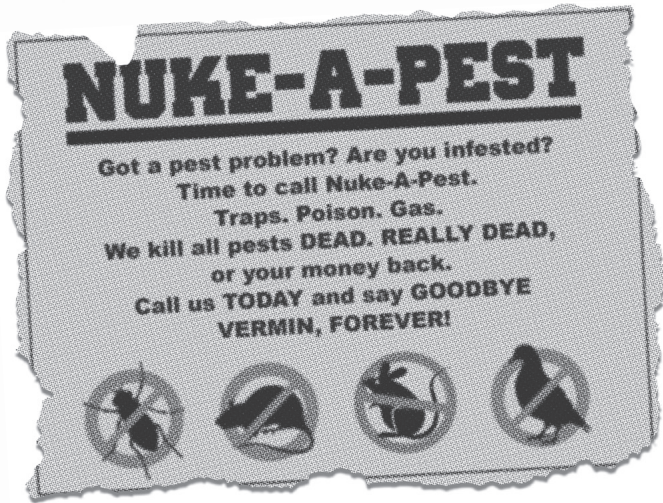
To be fair, none of us creatures can speak mans, but at least we can understand it, and we can all understand each other. We're smart like that – much cleverer than those stupid mans who can only talk to each other!

The lady mans in our home is called **Schnookums** and the man mans is called **MyLove**. They have a baby mans who makes **A LOT** of noise. Her name is **Boo-Boo**.

Grandma says there are good mans and bad mans. She says we are lucky, as we have very good ones. Apparently, some mice have terrible mans that clean all the time so there are no scraps to eat, or that never sleep so you can never sneak out at night undetected. But ours aren't like that. They:

1. Only clean once a week - which makes the chances of finding food much higher.
2. Don't have a cat - Trevor is annoying, but he is never going to try and eat us.
3. Go to bed early - which gives us plenty of time to forage.
4. Have never called **Nuke-A-Pest**.

The last point is VERY important. **Nuke-A-Pest** is the worst thing that could happen to us. Worse than the mans cleaning up every day. Worse even than a cat. **Nuke-A-Pest** is **BAD, BAD NEWS**. They know every possible way to kill us: traps, poison, gas. Grandma says, 'when they come, we go.' And by 'go' she means 'die'.



Though our mans have never called **Nuke-A-Pest**, they do have one of their ads stuck on their fridge. Grandma makes me read it every night so I always remember to be **EXTREMELY** careful.

Wherever we are looking for food, we always follow one **VERY IMPORTANT RULE** – Grandma is very strict about this. We never, ever leave any sign of what we have been up to. Grandma has another saying: 'A trace equals a trap'. By this she means if mans get even the faintest whiff we are here they will call the dreaded **Nuke-A-Pest**.

She says we must ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS 'Keep It Tidy'.

The Four Rules of Keeping It Tidy:

1. **Never tear open packets.**
2. **Never chew holes in cardboard or plastic containers.**
3. **Never poop in places mans will see.**
4. **Never let your nails grow so long they scratch on the floor.**

I've had these drummed into me every day since I can remember.

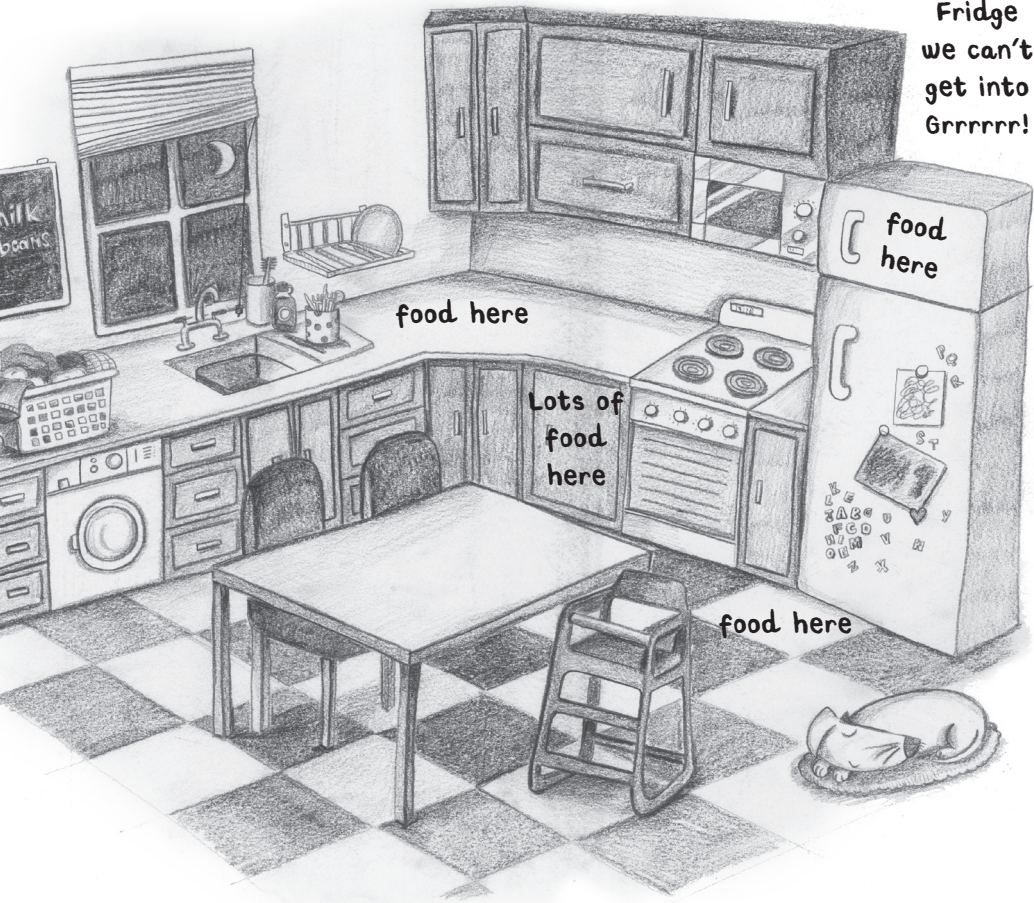
So, all day we hide and sleep, tucked away in our little nest. Then, when night falls – once we are sure the coast is clear and the mans is fast asleep – we creep out of bed and down the back of the washing machine and out into ... the kitchen!

My grandma chose the washing machine to live behind because it's warm and it's safe (no mans ever looks behind their washing machine) and most importantly, it's near food.

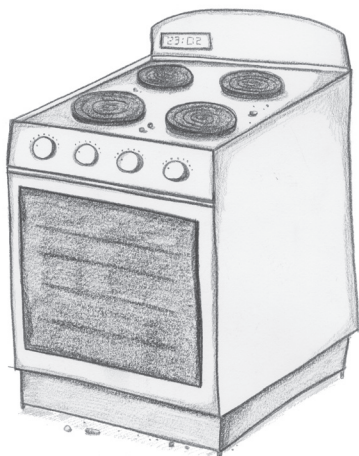
cupboard of tins
and packets

Annoying machine
that goes ping
and wakes us up

Fridge
we can't
get into
Grrrrrrr!



The kitchen is where we find most of what we eat. We call it **Zone 1**. The mans we live with are rather messy (Grandma says they used to be tidier, but then Boo-Boo came along and made them too tired to clean) which means there is always yummy stuff to be found. You just have to know where to look.



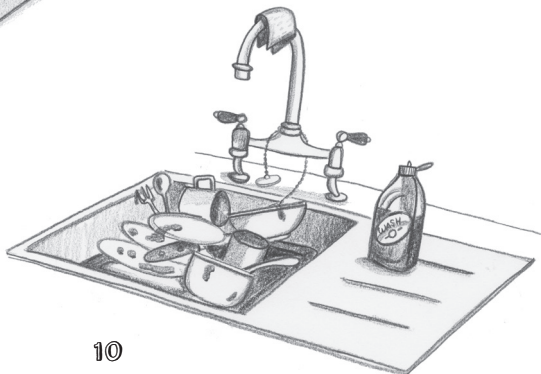
THE COOKER

Lumps of dried vegetables, grains of rice and odd bits of pasta.

Dried peas, sweetcorn or a chip if you're very lucky.

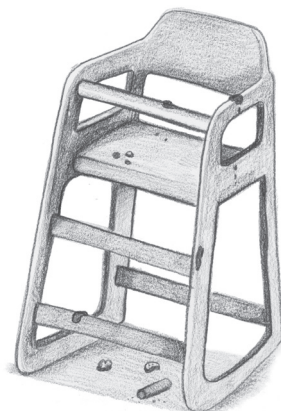
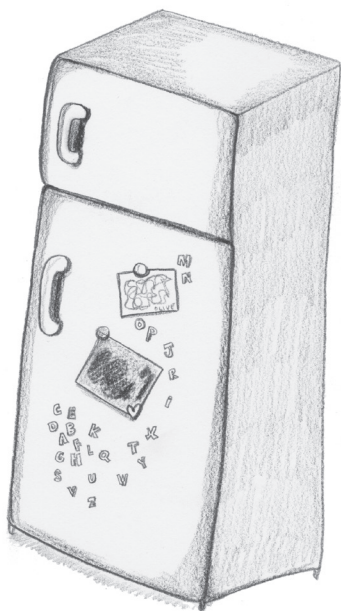
THE SINK

Smears of sauce, mashed potato, gravy, sometimes left-over cereal.



THE FRIDGE

Whatever has been
brushed underneath
e.g. bread crumbs,
peas, cubed carrot,
sweetcorn.



THE BABY
MAN'S CHAIR
(our favourite)

Lumps of rice cake,
crumbs of rusk,
hunks of breadstick,
bits of cheese,
chunks of sausage,
balls of mashed
potato ...

There is also a chance of food in **Zone 2 - the living room**. When the mans watch TV in the evening they like to



eat biscuits. There are always crumbs to be found. Schnookums likes Custard Creams. MyLove likes Bourbons. Grandma likes the Custard Cream crumbs, but I prefer the

Bourbons ones, especially if they still have a bit of the chocolatey middle stuck to them.



Zone 3 is the bathroom. This is the most boring room in the whole flat. There is never any food in here. It's also the strangest room. When Grandma told me what a toilet was and how mans sit on it when they poop, I laughed so much I gave myself a stitch.

There is also this thing called a bath. Mans fill it up with water and then lie in it. Grandma says this is how they clean themselves. It seems like the most stupid thing ever. Mans' tongues are HUGE – why don't they just lick themselves all over like a normal animal?

Zone 4 is **the bedrooms**, which are upstairs. MyLove and Schnookums share one and Boo-Boo has the other. There is no food in here either. Well, unless the mans have had something called 'BREAKFAST IN BED'. But they have never done this in my lifetime. Grandma says they haven't done it since they had Boo-Boo.

Zone 5 is **the hallway**. This is where the mans keep their coats, shoes, MyLove's shiny green bicycle, and Boo-Boo's pushchair (Grandma finds it very funny that mans need something like this to move their children around). We often find crumbs of food around its seat and in the bag that hangs underneath it. Sometimes we even find half-eaten snack bars.

At the end of the hallway is the Frontier Door. This is much bigger than the other doors in the flat, and on the other side of it lies ... The Beyond. I am expressly forbidden from ever going further than The Frontier Door. The Beyond is strictly out of bounds. Grandma says we have absolutely no need to go there, that we have all we need to survive right where we are.

Sometimes I wonder what it's like out there in The

Beyond – are there other little mice just like me? – but apparently only a greedy or a stupid mouse would go out into The Beyond, and we all know what happens to them!

And besides, tonight is my **FAVOURITE** night of the week, the one I **REALLY** look forward to. Tonight it's **PIZZA NIGHT**. The mans always leave their pizza boxes stacked up by the rubbish bin. Whichever mans designed the pizza box is a **GENIUS**! They put a perfect mouse-sized hole in every one!



All we have to do is climb through the hole and **BINGO**, we're in a world of soft, doughy crusts smeared with tomato sauce – and if we are lucky, a bit of cheese.

When we have finished eating, Grandma goes back to bed. She says her old bones need rest. But my bones don't feel old in the slightest. In fact, when night-time comes, I usually feel I could literally burst with energy.

So some nights ...

Like tonight ...

(Well, OK, most nights ...)

After

she's

gone

to

sleep ...



... I sneak out of bed.

I mean, if I am careful and follow all Grandma's rules, it's not like anything bad is going to happen to me, is it?

AFTER HOURS FUN! FUN! FUN!

The kitchen is very dark at night. Apart from the green glow from the clock on the cooker, there is no light at all. But this isn't a problem for me. Using my whiskers to feel and my nose to smell, I can find my way around easily.

Trevor, who smells like the dog food he eats (unless the mans have recently washed him in the bath, haha!), sleeps on a fluffy rug next to the fridge. It is very important

I don't wake him. A yapping Trevor would definitely wake the mans. To make sure he's properly asleep, I use a special technique I call the Trevor Whisker Tickle. Basically, I twang one of his nose hairs and if he doesn't stir, which he usually doesn't, I know I'm good to go.



I like to warm up with what I call my Stix Skills. I am very proud of these and am adding to them all the time.

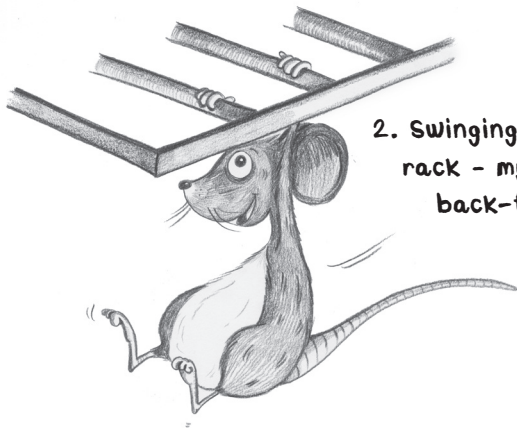
My top six right now are:

STIX SKILLS:

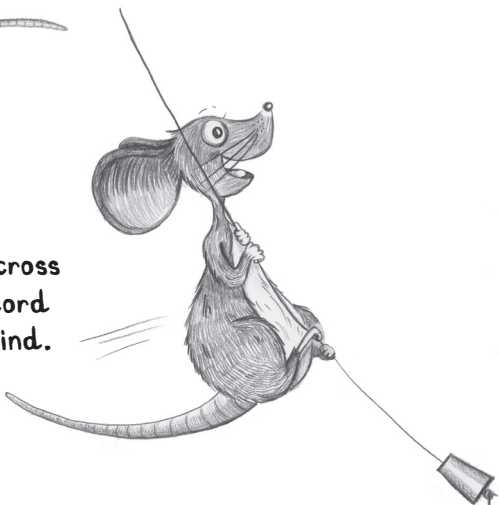
1. climbing up the leg of a dining chair. I can get all the way to the top. (The really fun bit is sliding all the way back down again.)



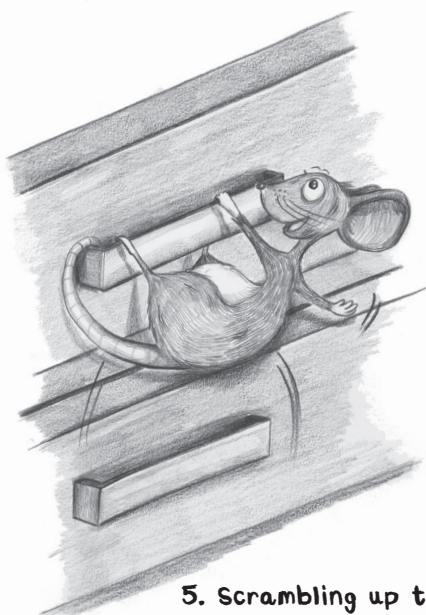
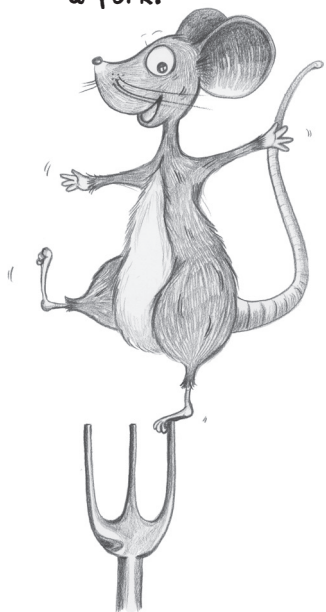
2. Swinging across the draining rack - my record is twelve back-to-back swings.



3. Swinging myself across the sink using the cord from the kitchen blind.



4. Balancing
on the tip of
a fork.



5. Scrambling up the front
of the kitchen drawers
(I use the handles to help).



6. Somersaulting over Trevor's tail whilst he
sleeps. (I am working up to an attempt to
get over his bottom and one day his entire
body if he doesn't get any fatter!)

If I am feeling energetic – which I am tonight – I add in a special challenge. I have to choose four skills (four is my lucky number) and do them back to back. I call this the Stix Steeplechase.

Tonight, the order is:

**KITCHEN DRAWERS > DRAINING RACK > BLIND SWING >
TREVOR'S TAIL**

It's the biggest jump I've done by far, and ... I nail it!

The landing is not quite as neat as I'd like, I land on my bottom then skid across the kitchen floor, but I've done it, and fast ... really fast.

I lie on the floor laughing quietly to myself. I wish someone had seen me. I bet it looked funny, me whizzing around like a lunatic.

At times like this, I wonder what it would be like to have a friend, someone to lie here and laugh with. Someone to play with other than a sleeping dog's bottom!

I look over at Trevor's plump, furry bum.

I'm not tired. I don't want to get back into the nest with Grandma yet. Perhaps this is the night, I whisper to myself ... the night I will do it. The night I will perform **THE STIX SPECTACULAR** and somersault over Trevor's bottom!



As I prepare myself, I realise that this is the most difficult and dangerous thing I have ever tried. I am very excited and nervous all at once.

I perform another quick **TREVOR WHISKER TICKLE**. His nose doesn't even twitch; he's deep, deep asleep.

Next, I warm myself up, doing some special **STIX STRETCHES**.



5 star-jumps



4 sit-ups



3 roly-polys



**2 1 press-up
(I hate these.)**

Once I've finished, I'm ready to go! To give myself the longest run-up possible, I walk to the far side of the kitchen. I take my usual four deep breaths (like I said, four is my lucky number) and begin my run.

I've just got up to maximum speed when I hear a sound that fills my body with terror.

The creak

of the kitchen

door opening!