

The following extract is taken from the novel, *The 10 p.m. Question* by Kate de Goldi, who is from New Zealand. In this extract, the main character, Frankie, is awoken from his sleep by his cat, the Fat Controller, who brings a dead rat into his bedroom.

Extract

1 The day began in the worst possible way. Twice. First, it began at 3:49am. when the Fat Controller
jumped through Frankie's bedroom window with a rat and proceeded to do a presentation juggle
on the floor in front of his bed. Frankie knew this was happening even before he turned on the
light. It had happened before; he recognized the particular sounds of this tumbling act. It was as
5 loud as forty Cossacks* and accompanied by the Fat Controller's very peculiar deep-throated
meow of triumph.

This was enough to make Frankie queasy. But when he snapped on the light and saw that the Fat
Controller's trophy was a bush rat, he almost barfed on the spot. There'd been plenty of mice in
the FC's hunting career, and any number of birds, but this was the first rat Frankie knew of. The rat
10 was large, dirty brown, and utterly repulsive, with an alarmingly long tail. As far as Frankie could
tell it was dead. But maybe it had merely been terrified into unconsciousness. Either way, he
decidedly did not want it in his bedroom. The Fat Controller had so effectively eviscerated** her
last victim (the world's tiniest gray mouse) that Frankie had used an entire bottle of laundry soap
eradicating the blood and entrails from the carpet.

15 But removing the Fat Controller wasn't easy, since she became ferocious and most uncooperative if
her hunting celebrations were interrupted. Since Frankie couldn't bring himself to pick up the rat
(in case it was still alive) and since the Fat Controller couldn't be persuaded to leave the rat, he *had*
to pick up the Fat Controller - no mean feat, considering her body mass - with the rat in her mouth,
and cart them both down the hall, out through the kitchen, and into the backyard, all as quietly as
20 possible and holding the growling cat at rigid arms' length in case any part of the rat brushed his
skin and he somehow contracted bubonic plague.

The back section was creepy at night and doubly creepy when the wind was up. The peach tree,
the grapevine along the back fence, the garden bench, the trellising*** on the side of the garage,
all took on most sinister aspects, shape-changing and seeming almost to mutter at him. The walnut
25 tree hung over the garden shed in an especially threatening way, a malevolent giant, swaying
heftily. Even as Frankie thought this, walnuts rained down on the shed roof and the clatter startled
him so much, he dropped the Fat Controller. She gave a prolonged growl and bounded under a
garden chair, the rat still firmly in her jaws. Frankie raced back across the damp grass and into the
house, banging the back door behind him.

Glossary

*Cossacks are Russian soldiers

** eviscerated means killed or destroyed completely

*** trellising is a support used for a climbing plant