

## Gentleness gets locked up

They call me Gentleness because I always look after my babies very carefully. I am a mother to four beautiful kittens who love cuddling up to me and meowing away, asking to be fed.

To produce milk for my babies, I need to eat too; and every time I leave the den to go hunting at night, I feel nervous and worried about leaving them on their own. They're so tiny, and very precious to me! But I have no choice.

Tonight, as I trot down a dark alley after a long search, I finally spot a rat scurrying towards an old barn, looking for grain. I watch it disappear inside and run after it, every step as silent as a cloud passing over the moon. My fur is pitch black, which is very useful for hiding in the dark. My bright eyes allow me to see prey at night, but somehow their natural glow seems to scare some people away.

I get closer and closer to the rat, lowering my body like a lioness in the tall grass until all of a sudden.... pounce! With one mighty strike, I catch the rodent and kill it quickly by tightening my grip around its neck and shaking it around.

As I am about to tuck into my dinner while looking forward to running home to my babies, a tall man appears through the door. Catching a glimpse of my glowing eyes, he shouts "Black cats bring bad luck!" And with this, he slams the barn door and runs away, still mumbling about black cats.

I spring to the door; hoping to pry it open with my paws but it is well and truly locked. Images of my defenceless babies run through my mind as I desperately search for an opening through which I could squeeze my sleek body. But there is no other way out. My heart is beating so fast that it feels like it's been replaced with a little creature scuttling to jump out of my chest. How on cats' earth am I going to get out?

Meow! Meow! I've never cried so loud in my life. But the more I call, the more worried I get, and the more faint my cries become. As I lie on the dusty floor, feeling the darkness inside and out, I think of my poor babies all alone in their den and I picture them crying away with hunger. What if a ferocious animal was to find them? Hopeless and ready to give up, I shut my eyes.

But what is this noise in the distance? Footsteps? Quick! I stretch up along the door and scratch the old wood while crying with my last flow of energy. The footsteps stop at the door and I hear the voice of a little girl, peeping through the window. "Why does my big brother always lock black cats in the barn? They're just as sweet as all other cats!" she exclaims. As the door finally opens, I spring out and head straight home, hoping nothing bad has happened to my little ones.

Back at the den, I'm so relieved to see that all of my babies are there, waiting for me with loving eyes. One by one, they come out of the den and rub their heads against me. It feels good to be home safe and sound. As we all fall asleep, curled up against one another, I wish for us never to be separated for this long again.

The end