

SARAH MCENEANEY

ACT with Me (AB), 2014
Acrylic on gessoed linen, 36.25 x 48 in



COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

MELISSA SANDERS-SELF

Where Everything Disappears

Family, pets,
and pest control

*It's true that every time you hear
a bell, an angel gets its wings.
But what they don't tell you is
every time you hear a mousetrap
snap, an angel gets set on fire.*

—Jack Handy

One day at cat-feeding time I opened the cabinet, bent over, and lifted out a new can of Friskies salmon pâté. Two little mouse poops fell off the top. My first response was a pure uh-oh. When our boys were little our house was pet central, and at one point, along with our current cat, Oola, we had two other cats, a newt, a snake, a lizard, and a cage of rats who had their own room in a dormer upstairs. But the very first pet the boys ever owned was a mouse, a little black mouse we had bought in a weak moment at a pet store. He was meant to be python food, but we got him a cage and a wheel and a water dropper and we called him Silly Billy. He provided hours of endless fun, some based on the tales of Beatrix Potter.

My husband, Nigel, is British and he would take Silly Billy out and hold him and let him run up and down the boys' arms while Nigel narrated, turning his already beautiful English accent into various mouse voices—*Silly Billy is confused—should he run up Luke's neck and tickle him? Should he? Should he go back to the Lego house instead? Or take a little trip around the BRIO tracks? On the train? Ohhhhhhh look at Silly Billy! He's having such a good ride!* The boys giggled until they cried and collapsed exhausted and then Silly Billy went back to his cage. We loved Silly Billy. Until he escaped, and populated a kitchen drawer of pot holders with twenty Silly Billy babies, and Nigel decided there had to be limits. I can't remember how he got rid of all those mice because it was twenty years ago, but somehow when the mouse poops fell on the floor that day I knew immediately they were going to be a bigger problem than Silly Billy's progeny ever had been.

I fed Oola then opened the cabinet wider and crouched down eye level with its dark recesses of jumble. That entire four-foot-by-three-foot-deep space has a reputation as the cabinet where everything disappears. The cat food is right in the front, but behind it I put things I don't care if I never see again. Mismatched Tupperware, cake pans I am unlikely to ever use, and archaic appliances like 1960s mixers with beaters I used as a child and inherited or antique iron meat grinders I do not know why I own. There in the far back corner I saw a telltale ripped up napkin and I knew after twenty years, we had mice again.

For most of those twenty years our two other cats, Spider and Panther, both hunters of small rodents, had kept