

Alice under the table by Jane Broughton

Alice was in her hiding place, under the gateleg table, hidden by a heavy cloth. Humming to herself, she arranged her grandmother's miniature ceramic animals in order of ferocity – mouse, hedgehog, peacock, otter. None of them were as ferocious as Grandma. Grandma would be the sharp toothed old fox.

Alice watched as Grandma popped peas with the practised precision of an assassin. Grandad had brought a bag of pods from the allotment. He'd tipped them onto an old oilcloth, its worn sheen reflecting rays of the setting sun like a golden pool. Her Grandma had sighed as she scooped them into the colander. He'd reached out a hand to help but she'd batted him away.

'Be off with you now, Albert, wash those hands. Our Alice doesn't need any encouragement to be slovenly.'

Alice, feeling invincible in her den, stuck her tongue out and returned to the animals, debating whether a rabbit or a squirrel would win in a fight to the death.

Grandad returned and held his hands out for inspection. He's like a little mouse, Alice thought scornfully.

Then, with a conjuror's flourish, he reached into a faded Co-op bag and produced a posy of candy- coloured wildflowers. Alice was surprised to see Grandma's flushed cheeks. Grandma stroked the velvet petals and looked into her husband's eyes.

Alice returned to the animals. She moved the mouse to the front. Then she emerged from her lair.

Her Grandad grinned at her and disappeared behind the newspaper.