

## Cat and Mouse by Jane Money

Flailing, wild and wind-whipped, the wet sheet clings to her, wraps itself around her in a cold, damp embrace. She feels herself dragged into an urgent, frenzied dance. Then the sheet snaps, the sound as harsh as the report of a gun. She is unwrapped, the new partner invisible, airborne, urges the sheet up and away until it's taut, straining against the line. Momentarily she feels herself falling then staggers, regains her balance and finds she is laughing, exhilarated, her lungs almost overfull with the pushing, impatient air.

She sits down on the gently sloping lawn, the basket half full beside her, its freshly washed aromas stolen by the greedy gusts - which snatch at her hair. She has tantalising glimpses of a forested valley in turmoil, thrashing limbs and leaves frantic to break loose and join those already free and flying. The black, chaotic rags of jackdaws are discordant notes against the soft, boiling sky. There is all sound and no sound, everything, all bird song, bees buzzing, the hum of aircraft, call of a neighbour, subsumed under rushing, driving, roaring air. Air as powerful as water, irresistible, unstoppable.

And then as suddenly as it came it goes, the sheet bereft hangs limp and lifeless. The trees stand to attention, all formality restored, errant leaves lie on the ground, their attempts at truancy forgotten. She hears a tentative note from a nearby bird and then another until the whole choir of the woods is in full song. And the sun pours down filling the basket with painfully white washing. She closes her eyes and draws out a sheet its coolness welcome against her skin. She takes a deep breath of gentle fragrant air and slowly stands, turning until, with her back to the sun and the view, she opens her eyes and reaches up to hang the sheet on the line.

She re-enters the house, the dreamy expression on her face causing her husband's idle glance to be followed by a longer, more searching look. He feels slightly ill at ease, unsettled, but he's not sure why, there's something not quite right, something illicit in her countenance. He feels separate, as if there's an invisible line defining her individuality. Momentarily he feels bereft, then she catches his hands and without speaking begins to waltz with him across the room. He pulls her close as they continue their silent dance, his lips brush her hair and he has to fight the urge to tighten his grip, to hold her so she can't move, can't ever pull away, feeling the urge to make her his prisoner. But it's as if she senses his thoughts, she dips under his arms and escapes laughing and dancing into the kitchen. *It's like a game of cat and mouse*, he thinks, *and I don't know which I am, she plays with me*. A thought occurs to him: *I could play too*. He walks on silent feet.

She's unaware of him until she feels her hair lifted with infinite care and the softness of his lips on her neck. 'I'm the cat,' she hears him murmur.