

Arthur Rackham's illustration  
of 'The Cat and Mouse in  
Partnership', 1909.



# Cat & Mouse

Susanna Goldfinger

Everyone called her Mouse because of her scared, pinched-up face. She had grown up in a noisy house full of kids in the Castletown neighbourhood of Nowhere, Florida. His name was Carlo but everyone called him Cat. He had slicked-back hair and watery blue eyes. He was one of Don Carmino's lesser soldiers and to Mouse he looked like salvation. He got her out of that overcrowded house in Castletown and for a minute it looked like maybe they would be happy together setting up house, cooking dinner, driving to the hardware store to buy a curtain rod.

At that time there was a war in the Carmino family and the men would disappear for days, weeks at a stretch. There was a shipment of stolen fur coats and cocaine and Cat got an envelope that contained thirty-one hundred-dollar bills. He told Mouse that he was going to hide it in the basement so they wouldn't be tempted, and it would be there for Mouse if he ever had to go to war.

But the money sang to Cat and he worried it might get mildewy in the basement or there might be a flood so he moved it upstairs under the sink and then he was paranoid about a break-in and decided it was best to carry the money on his person at all times, tucked into his jacket.

One day Cat told Mouse that his cousin had given birth and asked him to be the goombata, the godfather, and hold the baby at the christening. Cat said he was sorry but he would need to leave her for the day. Mouse wasn't sure if it was a true story but of course she agreed.

There was no christening. He went out for the day and spent five of the one-hundred-dollar bills on the worst things you can imagine.

"Here you are!" cried Mouse when he came home. "How was the christening?"

"All good," said Cat.

"What's the baby's name?" asked Mouse.

"Top-off," said Cat in a cool tone of voice.

"Top-off!" cried Mouse. "Is that a family name?"

"Why do you care?" growled Cat. "Stop fucking asking me questions. Your family would probably call the kid asswipe."

He had the glassy look in his eye so she crept away.

The money sang to Cat. Before long he told Mouse, "I've gotten another request to be a godfather." He went out into the hot sticky Nowhere night and spent ten of the original

thirty-one hundred-dollar bills on girls, drugs, guns, gambling – whatever you can think of, that's what he did.

When he returned home Mouse asked him, "What was the child called?

"Half-done," said Cat.

"Half-done? I've never in my life heard of a child called Half-done!"

And yet.

Cat's fingers were itching.

"All good things go in threes," he said, "Would you believe it, I have one more godchild. Be a good girl and let me go, won't you?"

As though there was anything she could say to stop him.

"I don't get it!" said Mouse, "Top-off! Half-done!"

Something wasn't right.

"There's nothing to get," said Cat, "You sit at home and you make up stories in your head. Maybe you should shut up."

He left and she began to clean the house, pouring bleach on the floors and scrubbing at the tiles, scratching at the mould on the caulking with her bare hands.

Cat knew he would not be at peace until he had spent all the money – the remaining fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills – so that's what he did.

When he came home, Mouse whispered, "What is the name?"

"Well," said Cat. "The child is called All-gone."

Mouse couldn't help herself.

"All-gone!" She gasped. "What does it mean?"

She started to cry.

He barked at her to be quiet.

A few days later the body of an esteemed member of the Carmino family was found in the trunk of an abandoned car next to a side road right outside Nowhere. Cat and Mouse were drinking wine and whiskey when Cat received instructions to go to a remote location in the Swamps.

Mouse started to panic.

"I don't want to lose you," cried Mouse.

Then she remembered: "At least we have the money if something happens. Show me where it is, just in case. I promise I won't touch it unless it's an emergency."

"Sure," Cat said, "I can do that," and they went down into the mildewy basement, stumbling from the dark and the alcohol.

"Where is it?" asked Mouse.

"It's gone. Dunzo. Finished," said Cat.

And finally she understood.

"So that's where you were all this time!" said Mouse. "First Top-off, then Half-done, then –"

"Will you shut up," said Cat. "Don't say another goddamn word."

But Mouse couldn't stop, the words were already leaving her lips.

"All-gone," she whispered.

A dark rage eclipsed him.

He finished her like he had finished the money.

Mouse was buried in the cemetery near the Orange Groves. Cat did time for homicide and then a short stint in rehab but men like him don't change. They go from woman to woman destroying each one in turn. You see, that is the way of the world.

.....

**Susanna Goldfinger**

## ADVERTISEMENT

# Mel Osborne

---

## Proofreading services

I am a friendly and experienced proofreader who will help polish up your work to perfection. Even the most experience writer needs a proofreader to catch a mistake or a typo that could distract from how amazing your work is. I am also experienced with working with writers with neurodiversities and can offer tips and advice.

10% off quoted rates given when mentioning this advertisement. For more details and rates please contact Mel on **07913905217** or **Email-mellieosborne@mail.com**

