Ey Up! Julie Dawson

The sharp cry of a kestrel pierces the awakening sky.

Hesitant rays turn heather from black to grey.

A shimmer of mist.

Jenny scans the horizon.

Nothing.

For a moment the wheeze and sloppy snorts of plodding cows catch her attention, but anxiety draws her back to her search.

Where are they?

A restless sun frees itself from the night and the moor becomes a purple pulse of expectant heat and humidity. She watches antlers dip into dew drenched grass but takes no pleasure in their daintiness.

They should be here by now.

The deer, suddenly alert, lift their heads. Their ears twitch and turn. In the distance her eye catches the dipping, floating colour she’s been waiting for.

‘Go! Go! Go!’ she yells into her walkie talkie. ‘Blundell’s farm. That’s where they’ll come down.’

Hemmed tight by dry stone walls, two USV’s skittle, twist and turn.

Four pairs of eyes scan the road and the skies.

With a rattle of glasses and champagne, the first jeep bumps through the farm gate, just in time to see the balloon swoop and land. Its passengers are silent for a moment and then clamber out in a chatter of nerves and congratulations.

Then, champagne glasses poised, they focus on the brightening sky, until one of them cries out. ‘There it is!’ A second balloon looms and lurches towards them. There’s an anxious moment as it skims electricity wires, but it dips away slumping along the ragged hawthorn hedge. Finally, with a sharp thump it dumps its passengers into the soggy field.

As rumpled faces appear, above the tilted basket, the crowd breathes a collective sigh. Arms and legs are thrust over the side. People rub sore buttocks, stumble free, laugh and roar, ‘Never again!’

But of course, we all know they will!