

# Two Poems

## Ceridwen Hall

### *Making School for Danger*

*Jacqueline Nearne 1944  
RAF Film Production Unit*

After my circuit's blown, I play myself—my own stunt girl—  
in black and white, where dangers pop up on schedule,  
in stilted dialogue. Ridiculous to cast spies as movie stars;  
trained to shed attention, we read our script like schoolchildren,  
let the soundtrack evoke terror on the streets, and in the farmers' fields.

S.O.E. selects all the details, which seem to reveal more  
than they do. Handlers pull labels from our coats,  
search pockets for stray coins. I'm given lipstick,  
told for the camera that it contains lethal tablets—  
dangerous things to be caught alive with, facts glossed  
between weapons training and propaganda-laced banter.

We recreate war by the full moon. Silk mushrooms bloom  
as we step through the floor of the plane, into French skies  
and English subtitles. The London Symphony makes a ballet  
of our descent—ropes dance in a rush of wind; then strange hissing  
creeps under the music as we coil risers, whistle our signal. Run.

As directed, I learn to perform a borrowed role:  
radio operator receiving orders and folding them  
in newspapers for our courier. I'm a gray silhouette,

a manicured sketch of a sidekick speaking mostly Morse,  
or asking convenient questions for the audience's education.

At night, the Germans knock, but I'm listening to music,  
my wireless hidden under the record player; we pretend  
I'm shocked and idle—a young widow, knitting. Alone,  
I tap at the wireless and words dart across the screen:  
*les lions sont terribles*. Signal for a supply drop.

Then various sabotage attempts on fields and factories,  
worshipful praise for the air force, British resolve etc.  
If this spy movie has any hint of plot, it's Felix's search  
for landing sites so the RAF can swoop in to rescue  
downed pilots. I'm left in the field, an afterthought, shouting  
as we part, *don't forget my wool*; over the engine's roar,  
it sounds like work.

## Study in Moon & Silk

*RAF Base, Tempsford  
to \_\_\_\_\_ France, 1942*

I.

The engine's so loud you can't hear  
your thoughts; then you adjust. We've adjusted  
to much these past few months. Pearly light

on the airfield makes winged beasts of machines;

it's bright enough for navigation across  
the Channel and to help our pilot find the French  
farmers assembled to guide us.

The moon determines when we'll drop

—visible silhouettes, racing  
pulses. She gives our enemies equal illumination,  
a schedule: expect parachutes under the full moon  
and bridges blown in the new dark.

Our bodies recognize this hour. Soon,  
is whispered, and we test our harnesses, stretch  
numbness from our legs. We sense

the plane lowering, seeking guide lights.

II.

Already, we've surrendered our names and family  
photographs, even bus tokens and spare coins.

We've dressed ourselves as French peasants,  
put on wedding rings to become widows; tucked

medicine and death within reach. Our lives have ceased  
to exist on paper. We're nameless Janes to our pilot,

live weapons, trained to listen and to resist.

III.

Our door opens and the plane shrinks—a tin can  
in a sky full of wind. The signal light's a long red

wait. Then green. We leap, one woman, another,

and fall

IV.

and count three long seconds until silk blooms  
overhead—full and pale as the moon; we drag  
our veils earthward. We're puppets now, pulling

our own strings to steer away from trees, swaying  
like pendulums. There's time for a brief scan

of the flare-lit field before our legs absorb

V.

the shock of landing. Tumbling backward,  
we free ourselves and coil the risers, run  
circles to spill the air from our parachutes,

which our allies will bury or burn or risk  
turning into sheets. We gather our dropped  
weapons and rations, must vanish by dawn

into new boarding rooms, new lies.

**Ceridwen Hall** is a poet and educator. She holds a PhD from the University of Utah and is the author of *Acoustic Shadows* (Broadstone Books) and two chapbooks: *Automotive* (Finishing Line Press), *fields drawn from subtle arrows* (Co-winner of the 2022 Midwest Chapbook Award). Her work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Craft*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals. You can find her at [www.ceridwenhall.com](http://www.ceridwenhall.com).