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## CONTENTS

<i>Thirteen ways to leave your mother</i> by Deborah Harvey	3
<i>Speaking In Tongues</i> by Bethany W Pope	5
<i>Chute</i> by Bethany W Pope	6
<i>The Horned God</i> by Bethany W Pope	7
<i>The Colors Mushrooms Wear</i> by Nancy K. Jentsch	8
<i>Shiny Things</i> by Nancy K. Jentsch	9
<i>beauvairt airport, feeling like a line</i> by Blossom Hibbert	10
<i>The Night Before Battle</i> by Lisa Lopresti	11
<i>Flowstone Grotto</i> by Lisa Lopresti	12
<i>Reversing the Charges</i> by Mark Cassidy	13
<i>January Evening</i> by Reyzl Grace	14
<i>against darkness and ice</i> by Geraldine Fleming	15
<i>and the rain fell</i> by Geraldine Fleming	16
<i>night fear</i> by Geraldine Fleming	17
<i>The Gleaning</i> by Siegfried Baber	18
<i>Seaside</i> by Kevin Moffat	19
<i>Carrying</i> by Susan Shea	20
<i>Tuned Out</i> by Susan Shea	21
<i>A High Cabriole of Fire</i> by Oisín Breen	22

## Thirteen ways to leave your mother

after Paul Simon

We might have stayed longer in the pub  
but you popped to the toilet, locked yourself in, climbed  
out through the window

We might have shopped till we dropped  
but you strolled from the changing rooms in disguise  
so I'd not recognise you

We might have wandered the length of the beach  
but the tide was in flood, I got stuck in mud,  
you kept on walking

We might have learnt how to sketch from life  
but you took a line for a walk that led  
where I couldn't follow

We might have had cream teas in a garden  
but you set seed and made your escape  
down verges and hedgerows

We might have sat out the storm together  
but gale force winds came roaring in, sucked you  
up through the chimney

We might have spent all day at the zoo  
but you set loose the zebras and kangaroos,  
hitched a lift on a camel

We might have journeyed to the moon  
but the rocket took off too soon, stranding me  
on the launch pad

We might have shelled walnuts and baked a cake  
but you made a boat with a paper sail  
I was too big to fit in

We might have watched cartoons on the telly  
but I drew a door in a wall of rock

and you ran through it

We might have held tightly to each other  
but I've grown old, my hands are cold  
you slipped through my fingers  
We might have come up with a happy ending  
but I lost the words, you found it absurd, the plot  
dropped through the grating

We might have stayed family till the end  
but you wrote a message and pressed send, clicked on  
Block

**Deborah Harvey** (she/her) lives in Bristol, UK. She has an MA in Creative Writing and is co-director of *The Leaping Word*, which provides creative and editorial advice, as well as counselling support for writers exploring the personal in their work. Her sixth poetry collection, *Love the Albatross*, which explores the theme of estrangement, will be published by Indigo Dreams in 2024: [theleapingword.com/publications/](https://theleapingword.com/publications/)

## Speaking In Tongues

An icon of cheap, brittle plastic  
(the texture of a Necco wafer)  
was pressed into the wet sand of the road.  
The pink back, sun-faded and piebald,  
caught under the toe of my boot,  
snagging me like the time (breaking  
into an abandoned house) I mis stepped and shot  
a three-inch nail through my sole. It emerged  
through the top, gleaming wetly, with malevolence,  
and I hid it from my parents for a week.  
I hid it until my sister eventually noticed the smell.  
If Christ was pinned to the cross  
with a red-iron spike, it would have  
been driven in above the ankles.  
Anywhere else and the flesh would tear  
like a liquorice whip, unravelling  
from the bone in slick, bright ropes.  
Anyway, this was a different kind of icon.  
When I flipped over the arched token,  
paper Guanyin stared up at me, throned,  
and garlanded, pointing towards her chest,  
and I was back in Sacred Heart,  
sneaking into the rear of the sanctuary  
in the middle of the service, with my dog  
and my guilty Protestantism, fingering  
the Bakelite beads of the rosaries that dangled  
in the shop, like vines, and wondering  
how the fuck, exactly, they were supposed to work.  
The church was in the Spanish style  
(pink tiles, flat roof, a plain, peach spire)  
and a garden filled with the kind of rancorous,  
untameable vegetation that does well in the heat.  
There was a fountain filled with chlorinated water,  
bluer than the Virgin's veil, with a grey statue  
of Mary standing in it with her arms spread.  
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me,  
all the days of my life, but I never expected mercy  
to show up looking like this. I slipped Guanyin  
into my pocket, next to a bead,  
a stone, between my keys, and my flesh,

yanked back like a dog on a chain  
to something I longed for then, and long for still,  
but have never been able to reach.

## Chute

I'm not going to write about what I saw in the barn.  
I don't owe it to anyone. I don't owe it to you.  
I'll set the scene, but not the action: the cow pen  
(kick bar coated with sour faeces and a thin scrim of blood)  
the glinting metal; milk vats, rubber hoses, rope.  
I'll show you the blue-black oil on the surface  
of the water in the trough. Sorghum, fermenting  
in the cracks of the floor. And the shadow of a man  
cast against the wall, moving ever closer,  
through the cold and the dark.  
You can have the thin, unignorable hum of the fluorescent lights.  
You can have the cries of babies, torn from the teat,  
and the feel of their toothed mouths, rubbery lips  
clapsed round your finger. You can take all that away,  
and with my blessing, but the action's mine to keep.  
And if you flinch, when the scoop of a shovel  
skitters its way down a rough stone wall  
you can rejoice in the torn edges of your memories,  
wrapped as you are, safe and warm in the armour,  
of what you'll never know.

## The Horned God

A seventeen year old boy  
with a scrawny, paedophile moustache,  
spent every morning welding milk-cows  
to mechanical mouths, suction leeching  
cream from their teats. I hated that boy,  
and the chaw he spat in my face —  
warm and brown as the shit I scooped  
with the flat-edged barn shovel.  
He lived at home, at his own home,  
he just worked for the orphanage,  
and he drove to the barn

in his daddy's battered brown ford.  
Often there was an off-season deer  
in the bed of it, sharp hooves jiggling  
against metal and paint at every  
bump in the road — a bullet hole  
puckering in at the thick base  
of the neck. In late spring, flies  
skittered across the rubbery  
glaze of the eye. A dark wound  
that would never blink or startle again.  
I watched him take a hatchet to a skull,  
once, jostling plates of bone loose  
from the brain, his grip strong  
against the base of the antlers  
as though he were tearing roses up  
by the roots. Sometimes the sound of it  
wakes me up in the night, the wet  
squelch of roots torn through thick mud.  
When I wake up, the bones in my jaw  
ache with the memory of the blade  
of the shovel, of what all else his hands did.  
I see the near-weightless feet of a fat  
horsefly indenting the jelly of an eye.  
We are where we've been, we are  
what we've been through.  
There's nothing else to it.

**Bethany W Pope** has won many literary awards and published several novels and collections of poetry. Nicholas Lezard, writing for *The Guardian*, described Bethany's latest book as 'poetry as salvation'.....'This harrowing collection drawn from a youth spent in an orphanage delights in language as a place of private escape.' Bethany currently lives and works in China.

## The Colors Mushrooms Wear

Scarlet garbs and warms, recalls  
embers on white-hot ash, pulses  
sanguine and unstoppable. It is  
the color of a day devoted to good  
causes with strawberry shortcake  
and whipped cream at its end.

Pumpkin rushes to amuse with its maze  
of vines, its promise of toothless grins.  
It soothes and beckons, weaves tendril  
shawls and taunts dull hours. It is  
the color of autumn afternoons—  
plump and filled with sweet-tooth wishes.

For an evening out choose melon, veined  
with whispers of white lace. Slow-dance  
melodies flow from the folds, but leave  
no footprints. These are the colors  
of a woodland ball and if you  
carry a fan, you will fit right in.

Gray is necessary for quiet days  
though it harbours the slumbering energy  
of blue and purple in the trim  
of its morning attire. It is the color  
of a dirge, that with time will wander  
toward a major key's Picardy Third.

Black worn at night rustles past  
unseen, unsettling complacency  
and leaving an aftertaste  
of poppy-seed enchantment.  
It is the color any dream can  
ask to dance.



## Shiny Things

" . . . childhood teaches us/to covet shiny things." Kari Gunter-Seymour

The moon never sleeps—clever  
illusionist—she disappears,  
shifts shapes, clips on masks,  
tempts cheese fans, backdrops  
swooning lovers, steals sun's  
light, tugs at tides without strings.

We would have called her  
looney at home, where some  
of the shiny things I learned to bow to  
in childhood were handcuffs of duty and rigor.

Now, barred in my room of scribbled lists  
and mental deadlines, I am far from  
knowing if by moongazing I might  
someday pay my bail, be free.

**Nancy K. Jentsch's** poetry has appeared recently in *Amethyst Review*, *Braided Way* and *Verse-Virtual*. Her chapbook, *Authorized Visitors*, was published in 2017 (Cherry Grove Collections) and *Between the Rows*, her first poetry collection, was released by Shanti Arts in 2022. More information is available on her website:

<https://jentsch8.wixsite.com/my-site>.

## beauvairst airport, feeling like a line

ate so many nuts waiting in line ate like the whole  
bag of nuts and even when i felt like growing an

ovoid sphere in the middle of a line i finished the  
whole pack of nuts please would you get me a

coffee or tea or something hot so i can sip cos that  
feels like being back at the tit, and good again and

the airport so small here and rubbing my  
tongue on sleep feeling like a skinned pig ready to

be eaten when my sister appeared round the corner  
or an unsteady four year old

with a tiny steam hot black tiny death coffee and i felt all  
twisted up to my mouth like a circle

**Blossom Hibbert** has a pamphlet, *Suddenly, It's Now*, published by Leaf Press. Her work has been published in places such as *The Temz Review*, *Litter*, *International Times* and *Buttonhook Press*. She is currently hopping from place to place on her little toe, visiting magical cities, writing prose about the unknown, searching for some monotony.

## The Night Before Battle

He needed the wisdom of ancestors  
and knew the past is very close if you  
approach it in the right way

with him the young druid with hair shaved and  
gilded headwear inhabited both the male and female  
burned sage and advice

he held a round polished surface up, reflective  
though not as a still pond, but a blurred soft passage  
behind the boundary to kin

he could see his face in a softness of his grandfather's  
war braids and greys. All around, the fire light and fire dog  
outlines jumped

in a language he tried to interpret, patient, stoic and still  
in a trance of charcoal, aware of the moment  
and breath of life.

The druid's chant, sweet voice of a robin  
at once delicate and powerful  
tells him he is the tutelary,

his champion sword of metal, horn and bright enamel  
imbued with the strength of earth, stag and rock  
is sharpened with a heart shaped whetstone

his blade flashes red and gold by the hearth  
in readiness for the conflict  
death always in the moving shadows.

## Flowstone Grotto

The submerged bones were found  
at the back of the cave  
narrow, anxious, tunnels of heft  
opening to Cathedral heights.

The cold of the dead permeates  
water drips, to the city of stalactites  
and stalagmite reflections, that glisten  
in candlewax splendour.

Flowstone cascades the cavern end  
into a deep pool, of clear water  
of the coldest unfrozen clarity  
that greens the way, to deeper paths.

Will the Ferryman ask for payment  
to cross and unlock this mirrored portal  
to the reverse, where souls are stored  
and our universe held

or will a madman, in an oil slick skin  
with a cyclops miner's lamp  
plunge, into history's depression  
to discover extinct giant elk antlers.

**Lisa Lopresti** is a working-class poet from Banksy's Bristol. She is regularly broadcast on local BBC Radio and widely published in journals such as *Mono*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears* and *Acumen* who described her slim-line pamphlet *Birdsong and Nectar in the Silences* as 'slightly uproarious': <https://www.birdsongpoetry.com/about>

## Reversing the Charges

With eyes wide shut, I saw  
that unchanged box: the crown above  
a concrete base, cast-iron sides  
and dome of currant red.  
Four fingers crooked to prise ajar  
its glazed, teak-heavy door.

Inside, the glass is uglified.  
NF stickers clash with brazen massage ads –  
hate meets hanky-panky.

I unhook the hard black handset,  
unwind its cable, tightly coiled.  
Paused at the dialling tone

my head fills with excuses,  
speaks to those ghosts of lost entanglement.  
The nagging hum of piss,

patting pockets down for 10p pieces  
before I get cut off.  
Outside a geezer, glaring, checks his watch.

Headstrong nights had ambition then.  
Listening for things to come  
my shape became an ear.  
But round the bend and out of sight,  
in dreams I hear just nameless cars  
pass by as streams of light.

**Mark Cassidy** is an almost retired radiographer originally from Birmingham via the Isle of Wight. He now lives in Bury St Edmunds. He writes in the gaps between family, birdwatching, and Oxfam books. His poems have appeared in various European magazines and anthologies, and may also be found on-line at: <http://markbcassidy.blogspot.co.uk>

## January Evening

How many of my mother's mothers willed  
this same wisp of hair free from careful  
braids, cold fingers playing col legno  
for some watched ship? But you are  
a brown-haired girl like me,  
just of more stately  
sail, and a  
Gaelic  
charm  
to knot  
your tresses  
to mine fails  
my dry, knotted tongue  
in landlocked winter air.  
You've brought your own coat. You don't  
need mine. We leave separately. Cold  
fingers tuck a strand of hair behind  
my ear and return to the snowy sea.

**Reyzi Grace** is a poet, essayist, translator, and librarian whose work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and named a finalist for the Jewish Women's Poetry Award. You can find her in the mastheads of *Cordella Magazine* and *Psalter & Lyre*, at [reyzilgrace.com](http://reyzilgrace.com), and on Twitter/BlueSky @reyzilgrace.

## against darkness and ice

beneath spangling skies our ancestors  
battle against shortening days and biting ice  
in flight and fight from claw and fang  
generations spurred by struggles

tease and hone to set a trap  
watchful until the moment when  
fire is caged by smooth round cobbles  
                    blaze controlled  
                    rage contained

fire performs when nudged  
wood-fed poor dead things empty of sap  
laced with bobs of rabbit fur trailed from thickets  
air razed to agitate and flirt the flame

dancing orange and yellow  
traced with licks of blue-green  
adding its own pitch of sizzle and hiss  
                    small hunted edibles spit-turned  
                    drip fat to flare

after the exuberant display  
fire feels the famine  
fallen furious into a box of lint and flint  
                    destined to smoulder until revived again  
                    a nexus for every moment since  
                                    good or evil

## and the rain fell

cooling microscopic droplets   gravity governed  
collide and expand   density determined  
they explode on earthly surfaces

that airplane is drenched as it cloud-slices  
gaining height to avoid the tempest

those birds   preened slick   don't even quiver  
immune to the fall of tight packed molecules

unfazed the concrete city   glides to a rush in grey light  
as water purges through gullies   silver-toned back to the sea

ancient trees are mist-crowned and cloaked in liquid diamonds  
welcoming this essential dressing down   every time

it reaches into crowds of hunched shoulders and splish-splash feet  
even the sugar-minded find a secret joy in this renewal

watertight the cars confirm their potency  
waving away   the watery blur with each to and fro swipe

it falls on you   on the baby's head  
sitting on that bench   lucky broolly deployed

and throaty grumbles of countless cats rumble  
unlike Schrodinger's they just want to exist in one state   dry

finally   racing along curved blades of green grass  
into the earth   the sky salve is delivered again



## night fear

beyond the artificial buzz of street lights  
tar dark nights recast homely impressions

sweet tap of raindrops prattling along the downpipe  
lunge to revamp as thick slick blood soured by the  
butcher-sharp knives mainlining mayhem into the earth

the jacket's jaunty drape loose- hung on the door  
refashions to a fearsome glaring figure deep-set eyes  
a crooked nose half hood hidden consuming the air

hypnotic washing on the line moves from a lazy flap  
to reawaken wings of unspeakable night demons  
whip-cracking and yowling in their wild ghostly rodeo

playful barks from neighbourhood dogs revise  
their tone and timbre fierce fangs froth  
demanding the release of the hounds of hell or else

the swing of branches ease into the swag of shrubs  
revised in silhouette the sinister troupe crowd close  
and closer still ready to smother and crush your world

twilight logic garbling clues once solved by daylight  
spar in sticky treacle conjuring bone chilling alternatives  
to thwart the release of sleep

**Geraldine Fleming** reconnected with creative writing after retirement. Her poetry and prose have appeared in many anthologies and journals. In 2022, two poems were published in Community Arts Partnership Anthology, *Threshold*, and her poem *Cartographer* was long listed for the Seamus Heaney Award. The following year a poem was published in the annual CAP anthology, *Compass*. She has published a short story collection, *Curiosity*, January 2023 and a poetry collection, *Fractured Echoes*, June 2023, both by Impspired Press.

## The Gleaning

Once a year we flood these fields  
with a sisterhood of shadows,  
mothers and daughters, sons in drag  
stooped and fumbling, hands busy as crows  
until each corner is picked clean.  
If we could, we'd even sieve the sunlight  
from the sky. Whatever remains  
after the parson has taken his tithe  
we claim as our own, every wisp of wheat  
plucked like a diamond from the rough.  
This is our humble allowance of hope.  
Between the ringing of two bells  
a second harvest is slowly gathered in:  
today's guinea-golden acreage  
stripped right down to the dusk.

**Siegfried Baber** was born in Devon in 1989. His debut pamphlet *When Love Came To The Cartoon Kid* was published by Telltale Press, with its title poem nominated for the 2015 Forward Prize. In 2020, he published *London Road West*, an eBook of poems and photographs. A new collection, *The Twice-Turned Earth*, is forthcoming.

## Seaside

Sea, glass serenity becalmed cellophane, layered  
liquorice liquid molten coco  
I sit, folded, listening  
It creeps, not angry like a storm this time, but gently  
pushing the weeds of sea up with that chocolricee  
As the beach retreats the Bladder Wracks grip, Sea Lettuce and Dulce  
guided purple and green.  
Old seashells tumble rocks hide in seek  
This maritime rhythm brinefed swathe  
Mer mour murm--aaide meer---maaiden wishper  
It covers and wraps, with the gyre of ocean and the pull of the moon  
Mer mour murm--aaide meer---maaiden wishper  
And today today it slithers searise seaside  
Mer mour murm--aaide meer---maaiden wishper

**Kevin Moffat:** a Professor of Biology, crashing the arts and sciences together. Music and fruit-flies, tardigrades and tennis, guitars and gardening. An academic for forty years, researching genetics and dementia. He's been a musician for longer. A Cornishman bereft of the sea, he has been inspired to take up poetry.

## Carrying

Only a toddler, you carried the  
long brussel sprouts stalk around  
the farmer's market hugging it  
showing everyone its beauty

as gratitude ran through you  
from across an ocean you  
couldn't see or know

from women who tended  
to the purple of eggplants  
the yellow of limoncello  
they drank up flavors  
from the pouring sun

following you as you doted  
on your thriving bulbous reed

refusing to let me take it  
from you, maybe worried by  
the thought of taking it out  
of your life

while you were still  
feasting on the shoots and  
streams of your  
cultivators

## Tuned Out

The forest has gone  
bird silent even though  
we have poured water  
into grandfather's  
cool stone bath

I have to ask

where are you

have we spent  
too many  
days forgetting  
to listen

**Susan Shea** is a retired school psychologist who now lives in a forest in Pennsylvania. She has been published in several journals including *The Bluebird Word*, and *The Agape Review*. Recently Susan has had poems accepted for *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, *Ekstasis*, *The Bookends Review*, *Poetry Breakfast*, and in four anthologies.

## A High Cabriole of Fire

As I rested, between the dozen hearths I placed to minister  
The bones that soon would constitute my bed,  
A hunger wove through me, not in sound, but in sight,  
As maroon and mustard licks of burning light, tongued the air,  
Kicking high, in one indented curve – lordosis, but woven not from flesh,  
Composed, instead, of the residue of combusted wood -- curling upwards,  
Thirst-heavy for space, in one long, high and doubled cabriole.

I watched then, the borders of the flame, in near fluorescence, as its lemon tips became  
A rimming wave that lulled then reached -- a painted impasto outline spun --  
And the shape of this latest outcropping of burning wood, enthralled me, too,  
Turning thought to thick string pulled by horizontal force between a tailpiece and a peg.

Next, I saw a twisted heliconia – a lobster claw – as the geometries of living heat kicked,  
But then the fire, it tore, again, upon itself, cannibalizing itself – one holy brick red maw –  
To weave a fresher melody in the skein, splitting, as it climbed, metres high, unto a joining  
Parallelism -- its core cleaved to produce a double -- two legs of burning air, each eager, and apart.

Between them opened a cavern, too, through which even birds might fly,  
But each lick of fire swift grabbed hold of folded of air and space, dreaming of its renewal  
In flushed pinks, in scarlet and amber twinned, and in the hue of powdered cinnabar, too,  
All to become a raging vermilion blossom birthed between split legs – its theme a hunger --  
It born a living invocation to burn, an elegy for glutting heat, and a birth fugue for love.

And then it surged again, that double inhalation of a thirsty lung, stretching to create its pair,  
Its double: two equal but opposing arms, open to the sky, carmine frames throbbing,  
Equidistant from the other's leaping flanks of flame, each, all the while, bordered by veils  
Of thin white and Saxe blue, each, all the while, a living rumination of hewed lumber,  
Each, a last thought before an inevitable snap-ping inward pull, wrought of heat and warmth:  
One holy high cabriole of fire.

**Oisín Breen** is an Irish poet, doctoral candidate, and journalist. He is a multiple Best of the Net nominee and Erbacce Prize finalist, is published in 112 journals in 22 countries, including in *Agenda*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Books Ireland*, *About Place*, *Door is a Jar*, *Northern Gravy*, *Quadrant*, *Decomp*, and *The Tahoma Literary Review*. Breen's widely reviewed and highly praised second collection, *Lilies on the Deathbed of Étaín* will be reissued by Downfield in October. It follows his critically well received debut, *Flowers, All Sorts, in Blossom, figs, berries, and fruits forgotten* (Dreich, 2020).