



Crowstep  
Poetry Journal

COLLECTION 4

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## Desert Spaces

You sent a photo of landscape utterly removed  
from mine, where bare-branched trees are coming into bud,  
greeny-yellow snouts of bulbs nosing up  
through last year's leaves,

great gray winds creaking and breaking,  
sudden snow squalls sending whirls of winter  
wildness swirling even as spring sidles in.

You sent a photo of hard-packed earth, shades of gold,  
tawny stretch of ridge and hollow, harsh-carved  
furrows slashing through ungreened ground.

Whose inner landscape more matches the outer?  
Whose outlook promises hope, deep-rooted in the faith  
of life perennially returning and whose is more in line

with stark beauty of desert spaces, where life clings  
to whatever foothold it can grasp,  
and against all odds  
blooms?

## Starfish

She has small hands that fit in a man's palm  
like a daughter's. Strong hands  
all the same, crab claws or snapping turtle  
jaws, biting through to the bone  
if you get too close. Others  
must reach. She spreads fingers  
like a star and you fall  
into her orbit.

**Carole Greenfield** grew up in Columbia and lives in New England where she teaches multilingual learners at a public elementary school. Her work has appeared in *Sky Island Journal*, *Amethyst Review* and *Humana Obscura* among others. Her first collection of poetry titled *Weathering Agents* can be purchased [HERE](#)

## Aftermath

Winter beach with the salt storm froth,  
foam scuzz, rope tangled, weed knot flotsam.  
Driftwood and a dan flag.  
Mermaids purse.  
Cuttlefish bones and a bottle from Japan,  
pinecone and a 12 bore cartridge.

Sunset of the shortest day. Ice cold, blood red.  
West wind. Black clouds racing, tendrils of sleet.  
On the sea, white veils. Rainbows trail into dusk,  
In a cave we shelter and hug.  
I breathe through the hair of your head.

If you ever remember, remember this.  
It was where I took you to show you that I loved you.

**Pete Chambers** is a poet from Cornwall. He likes swimming in the sea, splashing in faraway coves. His dream is to live this life as long as possible and for people to read his poems and for it to mean something to them. Some of his work can be found in *Tempest: Wild Weather Collections* and *Wave Hub: New Poetry from Cornwall*

## Biscuit Tins

When exotic was a postcard from Brighton,  
they kept Polaroids in old tins; snapshots  
of crooked, shawled ladies, spines arched

like curlew beaks, barely fused by a prayer  
of crumbling bones. Shrinking men  
stretched in the glare of a lens,

scaffolded by braces and a spade;  
a prodigal son on the other arm clutching  
offerings of just raked spuds, caked

in loamy soil and sticks of blush-pink rhubarb.  
When sunken cheeks and missing teeth  
were relics of resilience, tweed caps framed

their weathered skin, the herringbone weave  
shiny from summers gone, when summers  
were a miscellany of birdsong, church bells and hawthorn.

The cuttlefish extract of sepia tones softened maps  
of ancestral faces, blurred ghostly children on the move.  
With sun-streaked hair and berry-stained mouths

they scampered off; warm coins clenched in sticky fists,  
free as leverets in a scrub of gorse, the air sweet  
with honeysuckle blossom.

Lorraine Carey's poems appear in *Magma*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Prole*, *New Isles Press*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *One* and *Panoply*. Runner up in The Trocaire/Poetry Ireland Competition 2022, she has poetry forthcoming in *Trasna*, *Allium* and *The Alchemy Spoon*. Her debut collection is *From Doll House Windows* (Revival Press)

## Harlequin

That summer a Viking landed on Mars  
and ladybirds invaded Earth.

On the asphalt I found you abandoned  
by the swarm as it melted away.

I gave you shelter in a clear acrylic  
pillbox that I'd stolen from the nurse –

then tried a show-and-tell but no one  
cared. The Olympics were on.

Halfway up the fire escape I sat  
and listened to the choking hydrants

dying in the street  
as I watched you crawl around the box,

and willed you to run, to be the fastest  
harlequin on legs.

But you only stopped.

Did I know you needed air? A leaf,  
a drop of rain? Perhaps. I don't remember.

seven polka dots –  
noir on ruby carapace –  
painted fingernail

**Patrick Chapman** has published nine poetry collections since 1991, as well as five other books. Other writing includes for film, television and radio. His next poetry collection, *The Following Year*, is due from Salmon in 2023. He lives in Ireland.

## What It's Like

Let me tell you what it's like:

It's like a rust-stained glacier  
or a beach at ten degrees.

It's like a night softball game glimpsed  
from the highway, insects swarming  
eternally about the fluorescent.

It is a small apartment with tatami mats,  
a pair of street shoes at the door and, inside,  
a basket of slippers, all wrapped, save one.

**James King's** poetry has appeared in *The Dillyduon Review*, *The Thieving Magpie*, *OpenDoor Poetry Magazine*, *BigCityLit*, *The Oddville Press*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. He is also the author of the award-winning novel, *Bill Warrington's Last Chance*, published by Viking/Penguin. He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and holds an M.A. in Writing from Manhattanville College. He lives in Connecticut. Also visit: [www.jamesking-writer.com](http://www.jamesking-writer.com)

## Light Mountains

The light mountains  
scale my ceiling at night.

Or they could be large,  
milk-coloured mushrooms;  
or shattered glass,  
arranged in reflective rows;

or a corn-flour Newtonian liquid,  
trapped in an arrhythmic beat;  
or up-ended cones  
drenched in ice cream;

or pale and strangely  
melted, isosceles triangles;  
or sugar-peaked meringues  
stacked on a baker's shelf;

or a reef of bleached coral  
under a chop of foamy waves;  
or the eerie birth  
of limestone stalagmites;

or a regatta of sailing boats,  
becalmed on a silver sea;  
or tens of tiny ghosts  
in shining white winding sheets;

or a curtain of flame in a slow-burning,  
sleepless, magnesium fire;  
or a forest of snow-capped fir trees  
in the moonlight.

Kaleidoscopically they hover and shift,  
above the window to my dreams.



## Hengistbury Head

The January storm threw a wave  
over the Long Groyne, and swept us both  
out to sea in a shock of ice cold.

So this is what it's like to drown?  
a cool voice whispered in my head,  
as the water-log pulled from below.

And later I'll be more surprised  
by the calm curiosity of the thought,  
than by the face of imminent death.

**Mandy Schiffrin** is half-British, half-Argentinian, and lives in Amstelveen, just south of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. She has recently had poetry accepted in the *Black Nore Review* and for an upcoming Yaffle Press anthology.

## Things that will outlive me:

For better or worse: Polymer plastics; Seasoned cast iron;  
Pine, Birch, and Oak; Pleiades: her sisters,  
born together; Grandfather's aluminum  
canning pot sitting in the garage; Seasoned  
mahogany and maple slabs; Our garage;  
Juniper, hickory, and bonsai; Better and worse;  
All kinds of evergreen; My body, name; Magenta  
marker stain on beige ottoman;  
Apple, cherry, peach; Bamboo; Better; These 195  
words on SSD; Harmony of wind in leaves  
and branches; Better; You; Clay cast and fired, brick,  
teapot, ashtray; Worse; Matterhorn and Rainier;  
Niagara and Angel; Angels ephemeral, ceramic;  
Rust and yeast, things that eat;  
Plastic plants, trees; Irony; Echo;  
Both better and worse, simultaneous; Roots  
after the tree; My roots; Willow and her vines, ropes,  
dangling down for a swing; My childhood swinging;  
The swingset torn down two years ago, blue slide  
pelted by BBs, the monkey bars falling out their  
posts; Facebook posts from the dead, still alive  
online; Prints and paintings of me; The photograph  
of me at 16, the tree in the backyard, split into 4 trunks,  
chopped down, gone now, that I'm still sitting there,  
where I outlive myself, though funny to call it living;  
The trees, my love; the trees.

**John Spiegel** is a poet and teacher from Ohio where he lives with his wife and two daughters. He received his MFA from Miami University. He loves bonsai trees, cooking, and driving barefoot. His poetry, nonfiction, and reviews can be read in *Fence Digital*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *Milk & Cake Press*, *Trouvaille Review*, and others. His first book is due to be published by Finishing Line Press in October.

## sea burial

N.O.A.A.\* took her in a ship to bury  
her at sea among the marine animals:  
dolphins, manatees, seals and sea  
lions she'd dedicated her life to  
protecting, an overcast, gray day,  
the clouds like a coffin lid above the  
raging spindrift, but suddenly a shaft  
of light breaks through the satin-padded  
sky and three humpback whales appear  
slippery in the distant waves, leather-arched  
and smooth curves gleaming in the light,  
to escort her to the purple deep.

\*National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

Jan Ball's poems appear internationally in journals such as: *Calyx*, *Orbis*, *Parnassus* and *Phoebe*. Her three chapbooks were published with Finishing Line Press as well as her first full-length poetry collection, *I Wanted to Dance with My Father*. *Chapter of Faults* discusses in poetry, her seven years as a Catholic nun. *Orbis* nominated one of her poems for The Pushcart in 2020 and *Constellations* nominated her in 2021, and twice so far for The Best of the Net.

## Examination

First, you must know  
you are structure, unfinished.  
A window without glass,  
a room of shifting walls.  
Wind, rain, snow melting on rough  
planks of wood, all knots and warp.

The physiatrist who looked at my xrays  
and bent in close to mutter in a low  
voice, "you are not hinged correctly".  
She meant my shoulders, perhaps.

Look up at the width of tree limbs  
holding rooms of memory, a giant oak  
seems trustworthy. There is a door, of course,  
one in every tree story. Walk through and see.  
Breathe now. Of course, you know that  
this is home.

## Suggestions for Survival

Own no long mirrors. Nothing with the number  
thirteen. Fold up ladders tight as a heart.  
No red paint. Chicken bones, once wished on,  
should be buried in the yard seven feet  
from the back steps. Burn sage when the moon  
is full. Keep your windows locked.

Unplug everything. Fold up bags so they  
stay empty. Give the trees thanks before  
and after storms for not falling. Leave  
small gifts in the yard, saucers of honey  
and milk. Add tea leaves that settle like  
memories in the cup to your plants. Take

your coffee black and sweet as dreams. Own  
nothing that says it has no secrets. Put  
someone else's name on your diary. Have  
a dog that barks and a kettle that whistles. Place

scissors and knives carefully in drawers after  
the shades are drawn. Books rest face up,

magazines face down. On top of the china  
closet, set a thick fern as shelter. Close  
doors to empty rooms. Sprinkle the top  
of door frames with the ashes of old poems.  
Keep boots by the door, ever ready.

**Susan Moorhead** writes poetry and stories in New York. Her work has appeared in many literary journals and anthologies. Nominated multiple times for a Pushcart prize, her poetry collections are, *The Night Ghost* and *Carry Darkness, Carry Light*. Daytimes find her working as a librarian where she is happy to be surrounded by books.

### **A greyness on the deck**

A post-office in the afternoon  
And a glassed peon.  
Any letter for the remote destination?  
A grey basin.  
A sea-voyage of the river  
And a morbid ship.  
Gradually become the sea-gull  
And the night  
And becomes black the night like the night  
And there is no nocturnal bird.  
Then who will cheer the pole-star?

Awakens the soul only the flapping of the nocturnal bird.

**Partha Sarkar** is a resident of Ichapur, a small town in West Bengal, India. He is a graduate who writes poems as a protest against the social injustice and crime against nature and is inspired by the late Sankar Sarkar. His poems have appeared in various magazines both in Bangla and in English.

## No skin is too thick

Let us hold men in our hands to feel their rough edges between our fingers,  
and massage their temper before we misunderstand.  
let us have them submit to our attention  
and call that moment the vibes,  
so their inner voice will speak through puffing cigars  
and the smell of intoxicated pores through thick skins.  
let us speak to them in silence  
since they already know the meaning of that word  
but not in the shape and form of poetry,  
let them know that giants cannot crush the rain with bare hands  
or sweep away the river with their lashes.  
let them know that it is ok to empty the soul in front of the universe for all to see  
and release the clogged tunnel in their veins,  
let them know that petals bleed when no one is looking  
but birds and butterflies will know.

**Fadrian Bartley** is a creative writer from Kingston Jamaica. His poetry is available in journals and online web magazines such as [mixedmag.com](http://mixedmag.com), [Pif-Magazine](http://Pif-Magazine), [The-horrzinemagazine.com](http://The-horrzinemagazine.com), [Bloodmoonrising.com](http://Bloodmoonrising.com) and [Festivalforpoetry.com](http://Festivalforpoetry.com). Fadrian is currently pursuing his degree as a freelance writer. You can find him on Facebook and Instagram

## Glass Harp Presage

For Ben Franklin, Inventor

Black moon ascending  
precedes a solar eclipse  
fodder for soothsayers  
on the far side of prediction,

good omen for cat burglars  
scaling buildings, lifting  
ice, procuring algorithms  
as hip-hop millionaires  
purchase another gold chain,  
hone their art, lionize doggerel,  
sip white wine from crystal stem  
goblets held by digits softly calloused,  
saluting back doors of every entrance  
where solar energy street lights  
project automated luminescence  
until the dim shadows abate, release  
the dark orb, and sounds of clashing

toasts ring like a glass armonic  
spinning with great consequence:  
friction idiophones emitting high pitched  
rings driving me as crazy as Lunar beams.

**Sterling Warner** is an award-winning author, poet and educator. His works have appeared in literary magazines, journals, and anthologies including *Danse Macabre*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and *Anti-Heroic Chic*. Warner's collections include *Rags & Feathers*, *Without Wheels*, *Shadow Cat*, *Edges*, *Serpent's Tooth*, *Flytraps*, *Cracks of Light*, and *Masques: Flash Fiction & Short Stories*.