

SPARK TO FLAME



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Spark to Flame: A Journal of Collaborative Poetry

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

This fourth issue of Spark to Flame exists because the contributors within this issue decided to collaborate, try, and play. In a world where art can feel so individualistic and serious, I am grateful for you, contributors and readers, for valuing the collaborative process. That's not to say these poems are not fully each writer's, and that they are not serious. In this issue you will find pieces that highlight the experience of grief, queerness, love, and cycles of life, as well as caves, animals escaping zoos, and love for the '80s. I love all of it.

Three of these poems were accepted as complete collaborative pieces, where the authors worked together directly. The other seven were created through Spark to Flame's anonymous "spark" to "flame" process—where contributors submit fragments (sparks) and sign up to write a final poem (flame) from another person's spark. Spark writers wrote one thing; the flame writer went and made it their own.

Watching the sparks turn into flames is such a privilege; it's a front row seat to studying the creative process in real time. Thank you for trusting us with your words.

Kindly,
Katherine Schmidt
Editor-in-Chief

here in the dreaming

Ashley Varela (Flame) and mk zariel (Spark)

“We gotta keep each other alive any way we can ‘cause nobody else is goin’ do it.”

— Larry Mitchell

you would have been here | you were | unfortunately | lost | in an alternative
ribbon of time | in which there was no dreaming | in which care transcended
all & the whole world faded | into the soft oblivion of the queer | &
the revolution was coming | coming but gently | you had time to prepare |
you had trained for survival | time passed by you | & flowed into
the anonymous night | the heavenly night who would not tell you her name
but was a great & wretched imitator | of stars | you loved the heavenly blue
night & while you loved the night | we wearied of waiting | we dreamed you
into the dreaming that the watchers & the watched repress | in our dreaming
we created many rituals | burial & prom queen & unkissing & infinite
parallels | infinite weirdnesses | everything we created came before us
& would come after us | & we wove it into armor | we hammered ourselves
into silver & we were beautiful | more beautiful than we imagined | or ever
did imagine | & you were there | you were | dressed to live in another world |
with blood on your hands | we held you | then | we held you so tight

Purge

Angelica Urquizo (Flame) and Michael Kellichner (Spark)

Hold me and tell me lies
about how the birds
cracking against the glass
are not ill omens, how
the trembling earth
will still hold. The pill bottles
lined up in the cabinet
will calcify into armor
capable of withstanding
acidic demon breath.

Now you are asleep.
The house settles
into silence. Upstairs,
the neighbors' muffled
voices drift down
in their nightly precipitation.
They might be speaking
another language, they might
be God talking
to the angels, making
plans for tomorrow.

When we wake, you will
know me by the texture
of the roughened walls,
scratching fingertips for prints
taken by the flood.
Leaving heaven
to rest, stagnant water clogs
the drain on the street,
begging at the devil's door.

A hungry mouth spits us
into salt, settling layer
by layer into calcium
carbonate statues reaching
back up to the angels.

Familiar eyelashes brush over
skin, abyssal eyes blink
insomnia-induced translations.
I only wanted you to make
me immortal.

The broken things I love

The idea of absinthe

Afterthoughts

Cracked crockery

Drooling dogs

Escalators where people get stuck

Fried eggs

Grandmother's garden, even now

Impetuous behavior

Kings from the 1500s

Love (and if too broken, licking lollipops)

Moss growing in pavement cracks

Niggly knees

Ophelia, in the painting

People

(un) Quiet and unrest

Rong spellings

Siblings

Thun figurines, when I rescue them

Upside down houses

Ventricles, when they make your heart murmur

Winter

(e)xes

Yes...

Zoos, when the animals escape

Well alright I admit I'm in love with a girl who came from the eighties

Lori D'Angelo (Flame) and C. M. Gigliotti (Spark)

With her *Breakfast Club* leather
Jackets and her *Secret of My Success*
Shoulder pads.
With her Prince
Soundtrack and her falsetto
Voice as she *Pretty Woman* sings.
With her
Sloane Peterson boots, her
Top Gun pencil skirts.
With her
“Karma Chameleon” slide
In and out of lives,
Loving the bad boys, rejecting
the good geeks.
She casts a hex of neon and jelly
Bracelets with white jeans.
A *Material Girl* who fades
into the *Thriller* mist.

When It's Time To Leave

Annie Klier Newcomer (Flame) and Mahailey Oliver (Spark)

I wanted you
in my forever. Fought to be one
of the handsome princes in a fairy tale,
who offers his beloved a castle.
But standing before the Lohr mirrors
with messages about truth inscribed in their frames,
I am unable to bear the weight of your expectations.
I finally see the light outline the jagged
edges of our future scattering my essence everywhere
with my reflection no longer visible to me,
anywhere.

Now, I want me
back, so I choose confrontation
of unresolved emotions, to deal
with life's shifting journey, needing
to be reminded of who I am. Nature
unscrambles minds so I leave
to hike with my dog, Jasper in Iroquois Park.
Mood lightens even as my boots stomp
down on withered leaves making sad sounds,
like the memories of old promises
that no longer whisper, expectantly.

Break up {after Valentine}

Angela Yap (Flame) and Luca Fois (Spark)

Light has fallen in the garden
you tend. Love but a waning
season, who is here to witness?

Last Valentine
you gave me an onion—
its layers i peeled into
a quiet sting,
slight tears i blamed
the wicked weather
for.

I gave you a rose,
that is to say
my satin heart
is none but yours.

We have always loved
this way, in metaphors
to decipher with no
gauze to still the

blood, unprick the thorns.
But if this is not love
in a morning garden
mourning us,
what is?

The Call Center for Grief

Michael Kellichner (Flame) and Ashley Varela (Spark)

Thank you for calling
the call center for grief.
Press one if your sorrow
falls like a thousand
seeds from feeders

stormed by squirrels whom science
still questions their missing corpses:
whether the vanishing dead
are simply moved or taken
somewhere to mourn the loss.

Press two if your misery
pierces like pellets
accompanied by a report
bouncing from the mountains,
echoing across pond,

scattering a flock of geese
except one tracing
ripples on water
radiating around its mate,
calling, calling, calling.

Press three if you cradle
your anguish to your chest,
arms burning with the burden,
carry it through
every daily task

like a chimp hugging
a baby's body
to its heart, still grooming
its fur unwilling
or unable to just let go.

I'm sorry, your grief
cannot be processed
at this time. Thank you
for your loss, your
unbearable animal suffering.

Uprooting

Lauren E. Burrow and Mahailey Oliver

She branched out at 18,
left her roots to scale new heights.
If a girl falls in her journey to independence,
does she even make a sound? Linger, lingering,
she leaves her securities, leaves through new perspectives—
heart pining, palms sweaty; she is ready to embark
upon new chances, wondering will, oh,
will the bows break? But,
little Miss Sassafras doesn't loiter out on a limb,
doesn't loblolly-gag around, doesn't lose sight
of the forest for the trees.
She bends; she sways; she forges her own way
creating rippling rings in her wake.
She yells, "Timber!" and takes the leap!

The Cave Mouth Yawned

Luigi Coppola (Flame) and Angelica Urquizo (Spark)

for it had seen it all: the stalactites
and stalagmites weeping up and
down ages; the moss spreading
its green fingers across the floor;
the bats hanging and straining
and dropping droppings. Most
annoying of all of course were
the grunTERS. Not only did they
graffiti their finger-painted hunts
across stone and rocks, they left
burnt wood, gnawed bones, chipped tat
everywhere once done with the studio
space. Now, their children's children
flash their cameras, corner off
the entrance, blast through to make
way for a way through as they pass
though their own lives. Nothing is new.
The cave will yawn-out our years
—a mouth opened by nature,
used by us and closed by time.

Sun-psalm

Ana Reizens and Eartha Davis

Can you
see it?

Light
is untying her
skirt

blowing on
a clan of
mountains

∞ the whole world
gathers at
her feet

Can you
hold it?

the blush
of folded
star

a lone owl
perched beneath
the pause

her blue breath
humming—
an unraveled scarf

Can you
taste it?

the honey
of heart's
humbling

a quietening
winter

*bodies unborn &
seeking, crossing*

*the wing-bone of
the world*

or the red breath,
damp with wind

crickets, chamomile
whisper-chant

lit and blinking
beneath velvet dust

& Do you
understand?

*light
nurses the river
inside*

*her heart swings
here & there &
far away*

*whittles a lesson
from the
leaving*

*a love from
the listening –*

born & reborn
ceaseless & weaving,

becoming one
& one again.

Contributor Bios

Lauren E. Burrow is a professor of teacher education and recent alumna of Stephen F. Austin State University. She is a MotherScholar raising three small town kiddos with her hubby.

Luigi Coppola, www.LinkTr.ee/LuigiCoppola, is a poet, teacher, and avid rum and coke drinker. Selected for Southbank Centre's New Poets Collective 23/24, Poetry Archive Worldview winner's list, Bridport Prize shortlist, Ledbury and National Poetry Competition longlist, he performs music as 'The Only Emperor' and has a debut collection from Broken Sleep Books due 2025. He set "The Cave Mouth Yawned" to music, which you can find here: www.linktr.ee/TheCaveMouthYawned

Lori D'Angelo's first book, *The Monsters Are Here*, was published by ELJ Editions in October 2024. Find out more at loridangelo.com.

Eartha Davis is a woman of Ngāpuhi heritage living on Wurundjeri land. She placed second in the 2022 Woorilla Poetry Prize Youth Section and was shortlisted for the 2024 Creative Writing New Zealand's Short Story Prize. Her work is published or forthcoming in the Australian Poetry Anthology, Cordite, Rabbit, Wildness, takahē, Minarets, Circular Publishing, Baby Teeth Journal, Frozen Sea, South Florida Poetry Journal, Revolute, JMWW, LEON Literary Review, Sunday Mornings at the River, and ELJ Editions, among others. She is currently working with Red Room Poetry on their POEM FOREST project. She dreams of birds, mountains, trees, and gentle, rivered love.

Luca Fois is a poet living in Edinburgh. He loves poetry, writing, and words. You can find him in a local café, or on X @cuttinghail. Obsessed with death and unconventional relationships.

C. M. Gigliotti is a multi-hyphenate artist with degrees from Central Connecticut State University and the Writers Institute at Susquehanna University. Her poetry appears in CommuterLit, The Twin Bill, MEMEZINE, and elsewhere. She lives in Germany.

Michael Kellichner is originally from Pennsylvania, but has settled in South Korea. If you ever run into him, he'd happily buy you a coffee if you want to talk poetry.

Annie Klier Newcomer resides in Prairie Village, Kansas with her two Muses, her husband David and their blue-eyed Aussiedoodle, Summit. She loves visualizing pieces on a chess board, arranging words on the page and creating flash interviews for poets. Annie commits to doing mitzvahs with her friends and observing small miracles all around her that serve as inspiration for acquiring a happy life.

Mahailey Oliver holds an MA in English and Advanced Pedagogy from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Her work has recently appeared in *Hearth & Coffin*, *Forget Me Not Press*, and *Interstellar Flight Magazine*.

Ana Reisens is a poet, writer, and avid enthusiast of all things winged and wild. Her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, and you can find them in *The Threepenny Review*, *Crannóg*, and *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, among other places. She was born in the United States but now lives in Spain, where she enjoys long walks in the woods and is always in search of her next meal.

The idea of absinthe is a collective group of writers and artists residing in Scotland.

Angelica Urquizo is a poet seeking the magic in the mundane, finding inspiration from the natural world, mythology, shadow work and most of all, the human experience.

Ashley Varela (they/them) is a queer writer & author based in Seattle, Washington.

Angela Yap is an aspiring poet hailing from sunny-side Singapore. Her poem has been published in the *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*.

mk zariel {it/its} is a transmasculine lesbian poet, theater artist, movement journalist, & insurrectionary anarchist. it is fueled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. it can be found online at <https://linktr.ee/mkzariel>, creating conflictually queer-anarchic spaces, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. it is kinda gay ngl.

Cover Artist Bio

Emily Cai is a textiles and material designer who thinks a lot about sustainability in the fashion and textile context. She is an east coast native, but she goes where the wind blows, especially if it is in the direction of a loom. She is a firm believer in an interdisciplinary approach to creating and her personal philosophy is that you can never know enough. <https://www.emilycai.me/about>