

SPARK TO FLAME

A Journal of Collaborative Poetry

ISSUE 7: JUNE 2026



Spark to Flame: A Journal of Collaborative Poetry

Published June 2026

Issue Seven

www.s2fjournal.com

©2026 Spark to Flame

Katherine Schmidt

Editor-in-Chief

Adam (Instagram: @digitallycomposed)

Cover Art

Renato Paucar

Graphic Designer

©2026 by Spark to Flame. All rights revert to authors upon publication. No part of this may be reproduced without prior consent from the authors and/or Spark to Flame editorial team. The poetry in this issue is a work of fiction, with any resemblance to actual events or people coincidental.

Table of Contents

Letter from the Editor.....	4
A Brother's Gotta Tell Me Goodbye	5
The Deadly Sins of Space.....	6
Forgotten.....	7
Lost Sea.....	8
Truths That Don't Land.....	9
Crow Queens' Sexiest Song.....	10
End-Of-Season Sale.....	11
Old and New Propositions.....	12
cotton rose blues.....	13
Phantom Thread.....	14
red CAPS.....	15
Unfortunate Breath.....	16
When The Forest Is Quiet, You Must Be Quiet Also.....	17
Contributor Bios.....	18
Cover Artist Bio.....	20

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I've been trying to write this letter for so long and I simply can't put it off anymore. So I think I start with where I'm coming from: lately, I've been letting myself *feel* more. I'm working on connecting with others. I'm practicing love, and bravery, and the effort of trying, constantly.

This letter is kinda a love letter to Baltimore, in the sense that I've been going to queer and trans literary shenanigans in that city more and more, and *feeling*. But it's also a love letter to everyone I've met and will meet through this thing of art that we do. I am learning that we must do this for ourselves, and for each other.

If you are reading this, if I see you out in D.C. or in Baltimore, or beyond, if you are part of my online writing groups, if you submitted or will submit to Spark to Flame, thank you. Let's keep doing this because the feeling of it—the process—seems to be what life is about. Something about connection, something about love, something about humanity, ya know?

This journal is about process. The poems in this issue are collaborative: two of them were accepted as completed, collaborative pieces; for the remaining eleven, the two authors, as strangers, took part in Spark to Flame's anonymous “spark” to “flame” process. In this process, contributors submit fragments (sparks) and sign up to write a final poem (flame) from another person's spark. It is magical, as an editor, to watch this type of creation happen.

Welcome to Spark to Flame's seventh issue.

Kindly,
Katherine Schmidt
Editor-in-Chief

A Brother's Gotta Tell Me Goodbye

Ryan McCarty (Flame) and Dylan Night (Spark)

“A little shame goes a long way to stir the drink.” – Jim Daniels

The patch of dirt I was standing on was always perfect for the tree he decided to plant. Any legs wrapped around my back were where he'd planned to drop his seed. I laid down in traffic for that mutherfucker and got a text saying *how u wanna make me step round you all the time?!?* When his new son was still and purple as uncertain walks up the night road home, I squeezed all my hope into a stone and prayed it toward the lake, side-armed so every skip counted like another wish—like another fist brought down hard on a stilled heart or the silence of a yellow kitchen table. I just wanted enough ripples to keep that stillness broke forever. He called me *showoff*, like pulling a plug to drain the world and all our eyes bone dry shoulda been the answer. To be fair, I let him offer me the first sip of life and I found it at the bottom then expected him to dance to the song blown through the bottle's empty neck. I could watch the easy path of stars over highways cuz he drove the latest, darkest legs. I made him come to where I lay around these days. Like the fall wind that remembers spring, I whispered *Hey, I'm glad you came*, and I think he laughed a little while he cried the kind of tears that don't make nothing grow.

The Deadly Sins of Space

The Hivemind

The sea spat the fallen stars onto the shore,
dead as diamonds. Autopsy revealed bullets with hollow points
that could have swallowed moons.

They match only one gun in the Universe:
Jupiter's. He visited Earth's sea like a thief in the night
for its expensive affections, gingerly feeding
his ill-gotten space crystals into its wide gullet. *You will be
just like me when you grow up*, he assured it,
ignoring the grime and rust already caking the shipwrecked arteries,
the pearls of packaging plastic like hairballs trapped in the belly,
the humpbacks mourning the emptying sky
by throwing their bodies against its reflection on the water.
But a gas giant's loving heart
pumps only ambition. If he sees it, he likes it, he takes it,
taxidermied if he must, or skinned and leathered into an asteroid belt.
Every visit, a little more ocean inches toward space,
squeezes through the holes of his fissuring footsteps,
evaporates towards him. The sun
finds fewer colors with which to paint each morning.

Forgotten

M (Flame) and Abraham Aondoana (Spark)

The night smells of burnt sugar.
Somebody has left a kettle on the stove,
the steam curling into a question mark.

A boy is counting the places between
snowflakes, his lips frozen, as though silence
could hold the sky together.

There is a glow in the gutter—
not fire, not reflection—
a moment that cannot be called.

The wind batters the windowpane—
shackled and chained—
a moment lost to the blizzard.

Slowly, slowly, the sky closes
and his lips open, snow and whispers
drown in midnight serenade.

Hand in hand, word by word, feather by feather,
memories like puzzle pieces, snow like sugar,
falling. And he remembers.

Lost Sea

Michael Kellichner (Flame) and Sorren Briarwood (Spark)

Your name is still comfortable in my mouth:

worn sea glass smooth under abrasive worry,

only as valuable now as bright turquoise

aquarium stones, plastic fooling fish

fishbowls contain oceans. You know the ones:

pale imitation of coral's prismatic fans

painstakingly built among swaying kelp you hated

tangled around your ankle like something wouldn't let go.

The sea is gone.

Saturday I shivered alone in the shallow end

of another hotel pool waveless and stagnant.

The chlorine stench would be bearable

if I were sucking it from your hair.

Truths That Don't Land

Mahailey Oliver (Flame) and Lilly Purdy (Spark)

Clouds pretend to win a race against night—
home is merely a word. Towns rearrange,
meaning fades. Saturated light
spills from its own mouth. “Forever” is strange...

With heavy eyes, it feels more tangible,
smelling of autumn's fruits and waning rooms,
worried voices warning: *be sensible*.
Records spin. Far from the window it looms

to no end. Forever dooms forever.
I pass through these old tombs, confuse the sounds
until it's true; something here must sever—
the heavens, the buildings, the seas, the grounds...

I spiral, catch my breath. I am still free.
None of this could ever envelop me.

Crow Queens' Sexiest Song

Katerina Dementeva (Flame) and M (Spark)

to Liesl, Melanie, and Megan

Amidst hazy cabaret—someone's checking the fog machine on stage—
I sit alone, ditched by the friend who invited me. “Wanna have

your mind blown?” asks Bartender. She—though, maybe
he, or they—has virescent forest forearms' tattoos.

Not really, I think. “Sure!” I say.
I'm grateful they—though, maybe she, or he—

spoke to me. “The design of the venue is based on The Song!”
Oh! Everything makes way more sense now. The sun, painted on the ceiling,

she is not judgmental, she's glaring, and the floor is not dirty grey,
it's ashen, and the crow's shadows on the red curtains are not poorly sewn

and falling, they're sagging, and the dry branches in the weirdest spots
all around the venue—they are bony skeleton trees!! “Looking at

people getting it is so entertaining,” says Bartender. “Can't believe I
didn't notice! I used to love The Song.” It's also the only one of theirs

I know, I confess to Bartender. He—I doubt it's he, though—
invites me to listen to The Song together. Please, do, I think,

“Sure,” I say. Amidst smoky cabaret—fog machine exploded on stage—
I'm not alone. The rim of my glass is covered in Bartender's

glittery orange lipstick. Songs—scorching, glorious,
old, new—draw a silver shield. Air reeks of chemicals and burned

plastic. I learn Bartender's name; we exchange Instagram handles and pronouns.
We might leave together.

End-Of-Season Sale

Lilly Purdy (Flame) and Coleman Pedigo (Spark)

My mother used to bake with honey-blood
redcurrants, reduced and distilled
into a shared sugar, *sucré, siúcra*,
until sweetness threaded through the body.

In a California thrift, a wild-eyed man
with treebark hands stained
by stubborn orange peels
digs for quarters in the pockets of trousers.

He tells me that Levi's are best,
that the seams of Sutter's Mill hold gold,
and I smile through fruit-tinged lips.

I too once found treasure passed down
through denim, through blood.

Old and New Propositions

Joel Gonzalez (Flame) and Michael Kellichner (Spark)

My accountant informed me the other day
he was not getting paid in kindness
and that it was time to stop this charade.

We invested too much in our anger,
malice, and strife. Sometimes a little bit
of despair sprinkled onto fresh, minted notes.

It's not like we got any real
souls to sell. Religion beat it out of
us, making it more unified and elite.

But I guess it's good to have an investment.
We don't want to be left behind: some things
never go out of style, is what I'm told.

This is a familiar scenario you know,
finding us at our most infallible
peak of a collective crisis.

Turning our pockets inside out,
no trace of change to be found;
it might've slipped between the cracks.

We can only hope for a better outcome
this time around, and to maybe forget
the fragility of hidden jealousy.

False promises is the only thing
that real interest builds on, but after that,
like money, forgiveness will flow.

cotton rose blues

Sorren Briarwood (Flame) and Katerina Dementeva (Spark)

those dark aspen eyes left me
 weak-kneed // splinter-stemmed.
so I took my rosewood needle and sewed it together.
stuffed the coarse seams // with peach petals // with shining-dark leaves.

embedded, enthreaded in my tangle-of-briar // I grew tall.
my body was singing, tuneless // and milkweed melodious,
just another stray fragment
 of wildflower-verse.

I wore my verdant veil for some while,
shed some petals and leaves in my wake,
and one evening // I peeled it away for the night,
 and left it hung on a chair,

drop-draped.

the veil hung there for a week.
I visited daily // caressed dying, drying petals, // cradled quavering leaves //
 contemplated a second coronation, // rejoining that strange symphony—

only to find (come sunday morning)

 my shroud,
 all rotted away.

Phantom Thread

Alex Carrigan (Flame) and Annie Liang (Spark)

I often surrender control of my hands to a
caress softer than the silk I feed through the machine. The phantom
gently recommends I let it control the pushing, its guidance tickles
the large mole on the back of my hand. I cede to its request, hand over my
manipulation of the material, if only to be able to shake out my wrist
when it starts to ache. I've long since given up control to the spirit as it
has been seated at this Singer long before I ever did. It teases
out the aches and motions my forgotten ancestors passed to me,
telling me that I should always ensure any plain fabric should be fed toward
the needle, that it deserves the kiss and tug of the thread, that the
ritual must be completed before I can eat. I'm always on the edge
of letting the phantom possess me entirely, to give all of
my joints and focus to one who dedicates my body entirely to this madness.

red CAPS

J.D. (Flame) and Alyaa Zein (Spark)

one by land, two by sea
in a church steeple
for all to see
Marianne and Liberty
“je t’aime—”
“tē amō—”
NAKED WRISTS IN THE COLD
CUFFED BY LINKS
DIPPED IN YELLOW
ANOTHER OBJECT TO BE SOLD
TWENTY THOUSAND!
A HUNDRED MORE
START A WAR TO HIDE THE SCORE
bonnet rouge
pileus, too
sans-culottes
this one’s for you
Marianne and Liberty
prevailing over TYRANNY
no more beautiful
a crown since worn
than the Phrygian cap you adorn

Unfortunate Breath

Athena Maynard and Anthony David Vernon

Of course I'm scared of the fire
Cause I only breathe gasoline
Freaks them all the way out.
I'm the weirdest thing they've all seen
And I love it.

When The Forest Is Quiet, You Must Be Quiet Also

Coleman Pedigo (Flame) and Sacha Vega (Spark)

Green shimmers in the teeth of the treeline.
Little gods dance, swathe the senses in silk and
Draw sweet water from bitter roots.
Embers light a way through a warded grove.
Hollowed elk-eyes stand still as gravestones.

I have seen men emptied by wanting.
Purple petals pressed to their eyelids,
Tripping lightly over leaves,
Grappling the wheeling stars
To the tune of Pan's pipe.

Cobwebs drift across my vision.
It seems this is the night,
But desire is a wayward thing:
Once fed, it follows any hand.
Enter a muse with teeth beneath her smile,
A will o' the wisp just out of reach.

She speaks:

I am a lure from paradise
I am a hill where poets walk
I am a wonder among flowers
I am called Love-in-Idleness

Harp strings thrum. Dew falls on April grass.

To love as grown men love
is to remain when enchantments fade.

Contributor Bios

J.D. is a queer poet and author from the Midwestern United States with a love for language and storytelling. They are a recipient of the Gunn Center for Speculative Fiction Award from the University of Kansas.

M is a poet from the United States. She likes observing and writing about nature, drawing inspiration from her backyard. Her poetry has never appeared in a journal before.

Abraham Aondoana is a writer and poet. He is a fellow of Idembeka Creative Writing Workshop 2026. He was selected for The Inaugural Class of The Jè̀sùyemí Poetry Program 2026. His poem was shortlisted for Interwoven Anthology 2025 (Renard Press). His work is forthcoming in Oyez Review, Steam Ticket.

Sorren Briarwood is a storytelling apprentice. He hopes to write in as many mediums as possible before his bones turn to dust. Find him howling at the mournful moon, or at sorrenbriarwood.com.

Sacha Vega is a late budding author who is currently working on her memoir and a fiction novel. She has been a ghostwriter for about 17 years.

Alex Carrigan (he/him) is a Pushcart-nominated editor, poet, and critic from Alexandria, VA.

Katerina Dementeva is a queer and feminist writer, poetess, performance artist, and facilitator of creative writing events based in Riga, Latvia.

Joel Gonzalez is a writer who lives in San Francisco. He graduated with an M.F.A. from San Francisco State University. He is currently a Union Organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union. He has been published in Zaum magazine and been recorded on the story-telling podcast Risk! Joel can be found performing at open mics around the North Bay. Has been a feature on Just Chugged 4 Beers, Patron of Saints and Literary Speakeasy. Joel enjoys sitting on the couch as well as waking up at 5 a.m. for a run.

Members of the ENG 2040 **Hivemind** at Bowling Green State University study Musical Theatre, Paleobiology, Digital Arts, Creative Writing, and more. Their interactive art piece, “The Wedding,” pushed social boundaries as they handed out cake to strangers amidst a feud between a wedding band and a DJ. They collectively hold a scuba diving license, a bartending position, and a yearning for the mist.

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 Liang is a Scholastic Medallist who lives and writes in San Jose, California. She has been published in Blue Marble Review, Sonder Literary and Eber&Wein Publishing Co. In her free time, she enjoys reading and painting.

Athena Maynard is a New York City based poet.

Ryan McCarty is a writer and teacher, living in Ypsilanti, MI.

Dylan Night is a former medical professional and multi-time published author. He resides in San Diego, California, with his partner and stepchild. He is currently working on his most recent novel.

Mahailey Oliver teaches English at both a college and a high school in Texas. Her work has recently appeared in The Little Things Literary Magazine, The Orange Rose Literary Magazine, and Blue Daisies Journal.

Coleman Pedigo is an actor, musician, and poet working across page, stage, and screen. He appeared in the 2025 feature film Christy and has played guitar in countless pubs across Dublin.

Lilly Purdy is a Boston native pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing at UNC Wilmington. She primarily works in poetry and loves to combine experimental forms with themes of nature, femininity, and spirituality.

Anthony David Vernon is an adjunct professor of philosophy residing in South Florida.

Alyaa Zein is a Syrian writer and university student. When she isn't writing, she is doing bead embroidery.

Cover Artist Bio

Adam is a photographer based in DC & Spain. Find him on Instagram @digitallycomposed to see his perspective of the world.