



Spark to Flame:
A Journal of Collaborative Poetry
Issue One, July 2023

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Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

Thank you for diving into this first issue of Spark to Flame. Our journal was born of the excitement we as co-founders felt while writing poetry together. The feeling of leaning into each other's words, of riffing as if we were engaged in theater or musical improv, as we played with language itself, together – this is the feeling we want to create space for in our journal.

The majority of the poems in this issue were created by a process in which poets submitted fragments (sparks), which were then passed on to other poets, who turned them into completed poems (flames). We also accepted submissions of finished, co-authored poems. We are grateful to each poet who submitted. As editors, we were privileged to read a variety of collaborations and witness the transformations of the sparks into flames. We are honored to present the following twelve collaborative poems and hope that you will enjoy them as much as we did. We look forward to reading and publishing more collaborative poetry in issues to come.

Kindly,

Katherine and Natalie

Nettles Three Ways

Salena Casha (Flame) and Emily Hayhoe (Spark)

I

Baby [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] to hurt [redacted] them
[redacted] leave [redacted] already [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] and [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] be [redacted]
Free [redacted]
[redacted]

II

When you asked, he
talked about the
sea salt nestled in the seams
of her broken skin.
How her fingernails were toothed
in baby stinging nettles.

That was how he described
Her:
fragile rooted. Gently jagged.
All chartreuse velvet
hemmed with silvered thorn.

She was a cold and blank
early spring.
She was anything that could happen
between now and autumn.
What are we talking about, you asked
and he said,
Time.
How inevitably, she carries on.

III

now their leaves carry
a cold early spring knowing
what it's like to end

Shadows on the Street

Roger Bloor (Flame) and C.W. Bryan (Spark)

She pushes a shopping cart, time-worn wheels
rattle on warped concrete, six plastic bags
slung on the side, a sweeping brush and mop
serve as a flagpole for her cardboard sign
HUNGRY - PLEASE HELP - GOD BLESS YOU

her world compressed to
four paper coffee cups
two cardboard egg boxes,
one pillow and a handbag
three bags of clothes, one trainer
a blanket and a plastic pirate sword
newspaper bedding and a plastic sheet
her blue stuffed elephant toy
an umbrella and a bag for life

as sirens crease and fold
the rain-damp evening air
she slipper shuffles down the street
heads back to find a doorway
somewhere safe to rest and dream
herself into a different place

Echoes in Oil

Simon Kaeppli (Flame) and J. A. Hartley (Spark)

The fleeting taste of these random memories
Fragments that want to be remembered
Slivers of recognition that force themselves into my mind
And I think, if I'm just careful
Not to think these unsettling thoughts
At night, when I sigh into my soft pillows
Maybe they will fade, will vanish
Like a thing that once was, that belonged to another life
But the memories always surface and repeat, repeating thus:

Inside
The paintings were worlds
Spilled from the artist's mind
Flooding the canvas in muted colors
Stories unfolded

To the guard
Who let his tired gaze wander over
Old, cracked paint
Life breathed into them centuries ago
They were
But magnets to fools

The thief reached for the frame
Fingers passed through the canvas
The thick layer of paint
Swallowing up the hand, the arm
Pulling the thief into the color
Pulling *me* into the color

Another fool
Tumbling into an imaginary landscape
Feeding the oil's hunger
The guard turned his back
As the paint congealed in my lungs

... and the whole ceiling turned into bat wings
Beating at my chest as I woke with a gasp

lil beast / my lil baby

Alice Agro-Paulson (Flame) and Julio Rainion (Spark)

lil beast

in our second week
I told you,
you'll see God tonight
& this was a promise

&

you hissed
into nothingness;
demanded my attention
as we entered
into a game of
rescue
& recovery

then
a dozen toys
under the couch
dust-covered &
beyond a paw's reach

you only cared for canned chicken
greedy & possessive

you
a menace,
above all

my lil baby

two years in,
I cooed
in a cat-nipped heaven
of forever

even though

my anxiety
& my grief
clung
together
healing
love
pranced in with you

more love
strewn about
out of sight
behind the dresser, but
once

& again, those yellow-green eyes blinked
I love yous

& you, here, not only
a cat
but also my beloved friend

Dichotomy of Life

Michele Rule (Flame) and Leila P. (Spark)

Winter holds me tight
full on minus twenty-five
for days on end.

How I miss those summer nights.

Long nights of darkness
suffocating with blankets
of nimbostratus cloud.

I miss late drives, screaming out the window.

Not caring who sees, not caring who hears.

No one hears.

The aura of waves, forming a dome of companionship.

Keeping you safe from the dangers of the dark.

Only dark now, hours dragging into hours

I'm afraid to go outside

afraid to be alone in the silence.

That's what my ears pick up on those gorgeous summer evenings.

Biking at sunset, picnics on the beach, giggling when you can't sleep.

I'm so cold

fingers and toes burning with frost.

The heat washing against your face.

The water singing a tune.

The sand gliding around you.

Wind cuts against my face.

Icicles crash in a great cacophony around me.

Sandman leaves grit in my eyes.

Oh winter, will you ever leave me?

Oh summer, won't you come soon?

Sitting here watching life

my life

slowly

slip away into the cold.

(S)park

Jen Schneider (Flame) and Louise Hurrell (Spark)

On summer days, we'd wait, patiently, for the ice cream truck to turn on our street and park. As the children readied to consume a few of their newly-favourite things, I'd sketch in pastel chalk – lips (raspberry sherbet), tongues (cherry pink), and rosy cheeks (cotton candy swirls). Their eyes (sky-blue) full – of whimsy, wonder, and spark in real time.

Ten. Nine. Eight.

A man approaching ninety years would stroll (metal walker always two steps ahead), nod, and spit grins from across the street. His lips were puckered. His gums would grow larger with each passing (s)mile. Balloons, flags, and lawn decorations would also wave. Now, I wonder if the gentle sways were foreshadowing warnings to contemplate.

Inhale. Exhale. Blow.

None of us, with our compromised 20/60 vision, could anticipate that shooting stars would soon succumb to gravity in previously safe spaces where the past blends with the present and sugar crystals spark then melt as temperatures rise and worlds divide – views increasingly stifled. Now, streets (all blocks tense) capture attention for reasons far removed from the sweetness of the ice cream truck's surprise.

Groovy

Anna Jackson (Flame) and Rosa Angelica Garcia (Spark)

There's a fan in the neighbour's window.
Two circles and two dots.
As I blend into the walls,
I close my eyes and see-
Am I getting a migraine?

A spoonful of heavy sugar,
Crowded in the back of my throat.
The sweat on the back of my neck
Is sticky and smells of fantasy.
There's a fan in the neighbour's window.

The colours swarm and separate
Rippling kaleidoscopes burst at the seams.
A warmth coats my skin like lacquer.
I turn my fan on to hear the whirring.
Two circles and two dots.

Shivers roll over my flesh
Like tender waves of bedlam,
I weave the fabric betwixt my fingers,
Wishing that I could walk away
As I blend into the walls.

I flinch as my back touches the surface,
The pounding in my skull echoes,
Reaching its crescendo.
With my heart sat heavy in my chest,
I close my eyes and see.

My saliva is thick and sweet,
Spoonfuls of lemonade-flavoured alcohol.
My eyes roll back into my head
Like marbles on a hardwood floor.
Am I getting a migraine

Apotheosis

Kathryn Reese and Ester Reato

I'm scavenging the depths of the pantry
dishevelled like 4pm,
searching for a tin of legumes
to make a meal no one will eat.

*So find a shaker of clumped-up salt,
a packet of stale breadcrumbs,
maybe a tin of chickpeas
that remind you of the time you made hummus
in just a t-shirt
and wet hair.
Find a small glass of anchovies and
a bottle of wine hiding
behind the ketchup—*

But I'm digging for the hole
in a world that lets me disappear
away from the daily soundtrack, away
from shouting sisters, away
from shrieking cartoons—

*So let the cartoons find their way
out of their picture. Let the shrieks sit
in the space in the wall. Let the sound
snake around your head,
turn you into god-of-the-long-soaked-lentils
that sprouted in a strainer on the windowsill
with sunlight
and condensation
when the rain slid down the window and
we were alone
hiding amongst the cinnamon and thyme.*

You and I, we are gods among jars
of last summer's spiced peaches
and dried peas cascading
across the dusty, tiled floor.

Magnolia Blood

Julio Rainion (Flame) and Jen Schneider (Spark)

Fragmented speech simmers on a back burner.
Grease gathers in bunches of sour grapes.
Consonants poke at vowels.
Punctuated phrases grasp for space amongst concepts already plucked.
Cherry tomatoes waltz with strips of chuck steak.
A hummingbird watches from the window. Most panes cracked.
The scarecrow in the distance, dressed in freshly pressed overalls, smirks.
The wind blows, untied soles trip, all seams rip.
All produce over ripe. All ribs exposed.
All exposures subject to consumption.
The kettle howls. A crow circles. A pigeon pecks.
Puddles on concrete spread then scatter.

Ever-so-natural it is, then
when my mouth waters
and eyes find those daring, bold necks
mind so full of ever-clear gumption

the doors, closed; tentative fears unripe
left behind in a sheathe of madness, left to outstrip
better works.

the focus changes from scene to act
detail to mind, cook to bake
that's all it takes to abduct
words from another; owls
set to traipse
across just one leftover quick-learner
i will eat this feast you have left me
my teeth will sink into the tough skin of cherry tomatoes
and their blood will burst

horns will play and the girls will dance
their mouths bloodied too
left alone on this abandoned, a-bonded farm

where just the scarecrow stands tall.

Untitled

Rosa Angelica Garcia (Flame) and Alice Agro-Paulson (Spark)

Weeping: adjective

expressing grief, sorrow, or any overwhelming emotion by shedding tears:

weeping pain, weeping exhaustion, weeping sting

The sting. It sits at the throat and pierces your soul. You're desperate for relief. You tried making a list of thoughts to stop weeping while weeping. Your bones are anxious. You listen to the song that played at his funeral. *Settle down*, he sings softly. An intrusive thought, *I wonder if his urn is okay*. You have fog and bricks for a brain. Memories of him like seams ripping slowly. The thread undoing itself. Pain forming like constellations on your body. Sitting and dispersing and returning to the center. You dry your hollow eyes and realize your list worked.

Loam

Emily Hayhoe (Flame) and Anna Jackson (Spark)

Sometimes, I think I want to disappear
Should disappear
Sinking into the mud as all rotten things should
Disappearing in a never-ending crowd
Hiding and seeking in a labyrinth of my own design
Hidden amongst the chaos of life and living
I am drowned out and drowning
In a place I wish would decay me into nothingness
Buried and never found again
But submerged, there can be no apotheosis
My false refuge of water keeps me from decomposing
Here, change can only come slowly
Beneath the surface tension of my self imposed jailer
But perhaps if the sun illuminates directly on me
It could make my invisible form visible
Even just a little, with the light tracing a glowing outline
The drying of the heat shall cause me to crumble
To become something new
My sorrow going back to the earth imbuing it with health that will let it grow something new
For me, leaving behind a truer form
And perhaps, through that, I shall simply be becoming something incredible—
Myself

Unburdened

C.W. Bryan and Sam Kilkenny

The clicking latch
of the evening door,
boot tracks through
fallen feathers,
crows adorn the eaves
little ebon stomachs
growling.
“I don’t have any seeds
on me right now,”
Bird’s beady eyes
cut through camouflage—
now crows adorn
my shoulders
pecking at my ears,
my eyes, my heavy heart.
With outstretched arms
still as statuary
I stand like scarecrows
in fallow fields
and am stripped bare.
The murder flies
away with strips
of my anxiety,
chunks of grief,
little worms of loss
and I pull my collar
back up and walk inside
unburdened.

Contributor Bios

Alice Agro-Paulson is a Brooklyn-based developmental editor and poet. Her work has been supported by Roots. Wounds. Words. and Tin House. She is currently working on a hybrid speculative memoir.

Roger Bloor edits The Alchemy Spoon. He is published in magazines such as Magma, Poetry London, Dreich, Erbacce. His collection *Stacking Winter Wood* was published by Dempsey and Windle in 2021. He is a winner of the 2019 Poetry London Prize.

C.W. Bryan is a poet and student at Georgia State University. He lives in Atlanta, GA with his girlfriend and 3 beautiful cats. He writes daily poetry prompts with a friend of his at poetryispretentious.com.

Salena Casha's work has appeared in over 100 publications in the last decade. Her most recent work can be found on Block Party, Variety Lit, and Ghost Parachute. Subscribe to her substack at salenacasha.substack.com.

Rosa Angelica Garcia is a Salvadoran American writer and cat mom from New Jersey. Her nonfiction writing has appeared in Tint Journal and Months to Years.

J. A. Hartley was born near Liverpool, England, but now lives in Madrid, Spain.

Emily Hayhoe is a queer and neurodivergent poet and actor. She has recently finished training at LAMDA. He enjoys writing about their personal experiences growing up being atypical and also writing based on nature.

Louise Hurrell (she/her) is a writer from Scotland. Her work has recently appeared in Trash to Treasure Lit, Oranges Journal and Heartbalm Lit.

Anna Jackson is a queer York based poet and short fiction writer, with special interests in horror, feminism, and everything strange and unusual.

Simon Kaeppli is a scientist and writer. He currently lives on the East Coast with his two senior cats.

Sam Kilkenny is a writer and proud father of a dog named Moose. He lives in Colorado with his wonderful partner. He writes daily poetry prompts with a friend of his at poetryispretentious.com.

Leila P. is a 13-year-old beginner writer who is super excited to explore the world of words and start an incredible journey!

Contributor Bios

Julio Rainion is, unfortunately, a fan of Elden Ring. They've been published through Ghost Orchid Press, Speculative 66, and will be in the inaugural issue for Stark Nights Lit.

Ester Reato is a poet, social worker and author of children's fiction from Melbourne, Australia. Her children's story is found in the Anthology Angels collection, "It's a Kind of Magic."

Kathryn Reese lives in Adelaide, South Australia and works in medical science. Her poems are published in Neoperennial Press Heroines Anthology, Hayden's Ferry Review, Paperbark and Yellow Arrow Journal.

Michele Rule is a disabled writer from Kelowna BC Canada and an associate member of the League of Canadian Poets. "I write so my head doesn't explode."

Jen Schneider is an educator who lives, works, and writes in small spaces throughout Pennsylvania.