

# 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  
acrid 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? Lingerin,  
she leaves her securities, leafs 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 Urquiza (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](http://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](http://www.linktr.ee/TheCaveMouthYawned)

**Lori D'Angelo's** first book, a collection of short stories titled *The Monsters Are Here*, is forthcoming from ELJ editions in 2024. Find out more at [loridangelo.com](http://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>