



# ***Spark to Flame:***

***A Journal of Collaborative Poetry***  
***Issue One, July 2023***

# Spark to Flame: A Journal of Collaborative Poetry

Published July 2023

Issue One

[www.s2fjournal.com](http://www.s2fjournal.com)

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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] leaves 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](http://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](http://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](http://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.