

Spark to flame

A JOURNAL OF COLLABORATIVE POETRY



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Spark to Flame: A Journal of Collaborative Poetry

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Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

Welcome! Thank you for diving into this second issue of Spark to Flame. We are grateful for everyone who submitted and contributed to this issue. As editors, it is truly breathtaking to personally witness the collaboration during the spark-to-flame creation process. Working with other people's words (a stranger's words!) is hard. Watching poets take their sparks and build them into flames inspires and pushes us. What do you assume art is? What if your assumptions are wrong?

This issue reads like a mixtape—one that cycles through grief and love, with repeating imagery of nature, bones, and sunrises and sunsets. We invite you to explore how these pieces connect. Sit with them.

Kindly,

Katherine and Natalie

P.S. This issue is where we say goodbye to co-founder and co-editor, Natalie. This is where, for the time being, the “we” will turn into an “I” as I, Katherine, will fully take the helm. Thank you, Natalie, for your partnership this past year. This journal would not exist without you being brave enough to start it with me.

What The Cicada Saw

Liza Boyce Linder (Flame) and Mahailey Oliver (Spark)

I like the sound of your voice;
slow life, slower still waiting for you. We buried
our bodies beneath a dark elm, so we could
sip sap and doze for seventeen summers
then dreamed each other awake
on the other side. We'd never seen
the day, but it was beautiful. So many red
eyes glistened through grass. I saw only you.

Contractor Oversees Excavation

Abigail Hora (Flame) and Louise Hurrell (Spark)

Stalactites and stalagmites in your ma
who lies comatose on a molten bed
forged in words you can't translate
with a tooth-twisted tongue—
try curling it with terminal
after breaking bread with prognosis
when your lips kiss your own gums
the same way your ma's cool fingers
massaged chilled ginger paste
into your palate to comfort you
wrap you in childhood's bitter spice
taste decades later in her sterile cave.

As your larynx hardens
you hold onto the cold bed
edge along the threshold
of hospital home.

You peer into her maw
breathing tube condensation
and crystalline lungs
taking her breath away.

Embrace her being
guzzled by the sounds
of her depths going
home in your hands.

Breathe in the flatline
to cut the heartbeat
monitor telling
what has left

you split in two.

On a Sunny Morning, I Teach My Four-Year-Old How To See My Bones From The Outside

Terri Linn Davis (Flame) and Abigail Hora (Spark)

I hold my hand out to him
and make a fist, and my knuckles—the tendons and bone

show through my skin like white sharks
in the shallow end of a pool. He and I are riveted

by bone, confined by red spider lilies.
I know it is hard to acknowledge

the skeleton inside your mother. I show him
I am bendable and make him laugh

by folding my ear into something smaller
than what it is, like a mollusk or a map of the world.

He finds a flashlight and learns how to ignite
my fingernails into blood windows.

There are acres of capillaries behind stained glass,
and he shouts the verb, “bleed” instead of “blood.”

Your mother is dead, and this grief is a kind of bleed-ing.
Even now—it reds, it spiders, it lilies.

Epithelial Tissue

Shelagh Rowan-Legg (Flame) and Leigh Brady (Spark)

We are taught that we share the
with the rhythm of our pulse
breathing in the collective air.

Our eyes can see we share
our days with vibrations
into an audible nature.

Although it's not
seen,
feel that we do not have
the parts to build
the same heart.

*light that enters through the cracks,
stuttering with that bright invasion
beneath the skin it can thunder,
branches into the blood,
bubbles trapped outside the lungs,*

*this sensation of necessary entrapment,
each moment with mutual longing,
traveling roundabouts on our bones,
miniature flashes of bodily lightning,
molecules that float into mouths,*

*Shall I consider you a mirror?
Even these cracks
these are proof of our
composition and sensation and
existence.*

I refuse to

Fantasm

Jamie Anderson (Flame) and Jose Jay (Spark)

There's this sketch hangin' around
my brain. This half-developed, blurry picture
of you in motion, a fragment of torn jeans, curly hair.
Sometimes, I think you were a dream.
Two and a half years of sleep
paralysis. I catch your laugh in the sputter
of my car's engine, taste your chapstick
on my lips—details I can't pinpoint.
The mocking lick of your voice singing
along to love ballads. Your arm—
molten lead melded to the slope of my shoulders.
I wake up at 4 am and add strokes to a portrait of you
I'll never finish. Mixed media, the stink of oil paints,
the wet smudge of acrylic on cotton.
You're never in focus. Most days, neither am I.

In Eclipse

Leigh Brady (Flame) and Melissa Curran (Spark)

“I will meet you at sunset,” said a friend, we used to drive in his blue car, blurring past the coast, leaving the city behind in a cool ocean breeze, under the illusion of peace, I did not know then how easily it is disturbed, only to settle gently again after the interruption / it was left in the cracked dish, atop the stove, its warmth diluting, never to be touched again / the television, buzzing in an electrical fuzz, suspending its stories in the crackle / the book, whose pages were torn out, dropped, and dusted on the floor, a single moment forgotten in the fleeting panic / I looked for the blue car in a swarm of colour, but I could not find him, there was an upheaval in the ocean, communications were out, I leave the city, the things I leave behind in eclipse, your words echo through the deserted land, “rising and setting is the only time we have now.”

Washing Up

C.W. Bryan (Flame) and Jamie Anderson (Spark)

The memories of laughter burrow into in my mind, like a frog in the mud—they didn't even
bother knocking.

I do not mind them, despite how much they highlight:
Eating dinner with my father, on a Friday night, for the last time.
Riding a train home from work high above the highway.
Smoking a cigarette hand-rolled so well I can feel my lungs groan.
Coming back to your legal pad, after a long, long time and having nothing to write.

But now that I am lying on a bed made for a bigger man than me, I wonder if this liquid form
of nostalgia, that permeates my brain and settles in with the frost, is really me.

Whatever happened to stopping at a roadside antique store on a fourteen-hour road trip?
Buying books from a used bookstore for someone else to read?
Pulling up dirt by the fistful?
Dandelion sap staining your shirt as you run through Elysian fields?
At some point in time not knowing the word Elysian?
Running for four miles straight?
Visiting a museum that stays open later than ten p.m.?
Having so much to write that your brain no longer feels like mud.

third quarter

Melissa Curran (Flame) and E. Staal (Spark)

if i had a nickel every time
i asked for change

but didn't like
the change i got

instead i'm falling

out of pockets
onto roads & into cracks

into crevices & folds

a penny for your thoughts?
not even that

change spins on capital's dime
& bowie stutters in my ear

if he doesn't know, i don't know

here's the change you're looking
for in ten easy steps!

lose a dress size by christmas

i blame it on my double sign
moon and sun in taurus

no change until it shakes me
& breaks the soil from my roots

how unusable i am
how undesirable

the only change
that reaches me is age

yet still i'm here
begging for change

see me rattle
a tin at your feet

Thawed Membrane

Jose Jay (Flame) and Heather Ann Pulido (Spark)

My bones crumble beneath me.
I do nothing but breathe.
What I've run away from
comes around the corner.

It seeps in under the oxygen,
crushing my aging bones—
a chill
I thought I lost
forever.

It's heavy,
stored up tears forced out
through each crack,
memories full of smiles
warming my cheeks,
losing heat with every spill.

What if I found happiness?

It isn't a place, like my youth,
but points in time.
Nobody can stay there.

We all have to run,
at some point,
we all have to stop.

Playground Politics

Louise Hurrell (Flame) and TeenyTinyThor (Spark)

Sharpen tongue on whetstone,
dip smiles in water,
press paint across your cheeks and look
across the playground; patchwork of pastel
marking territory, and the bright blades
of nature, bottle green and alert. Follow
the gravel trail of bloodspot berries,
the red thread stitching towards home.

They wait,
voices breaking like bombs in their throats.
Curled in the usual cubbyholes, clots
in the flow of stone and grass. They wait,
patient, predictable, spears in their sneers,
knowing every exposed nerve, where to hit
hardest, the cruellest way to cut.
No matter;

slip on armour, a buckled Boudica,
Hippolyta on battle's edge.
Be careful with her, your elders said.
They use the same warning, still
weaned off pity now,
as they watch you strike out, head high,
marching towards the enemy,
an unfurled flag against the field.

Vernal Lamentation

Mahailey Oliver (Flame) and Merlin Flower (Spark)

In spite of the dahlia inkblot stains
promising Precipice and
betraying acts of Forgery, their petals provoke
no perceptible signs of perjury...

The songs go on
Look—
I prayed calla lilies into existence for you too

Then didn't—uprooted them in my anger, my regret.

Who
Cares
As
I
Tear
Them
Up
And
Out?

Rootless endeavor.

There are no lamentations, no
dirges uttered for the loss,
just

lull

and my
tears,

The
battering rain
left residue
for the mind
to fill up,
an overzealous pail,
ready to spill all over
and over again
at the first sign

of Spring.

after the storm...

Genevieve and Dennis Aguinaldo

after the storm
the soil on my fingertips
embraces each nail
forming new continents
where centipedes roam free

leaf-drops shake loose
in the wake of tiny legs
shuffling for a dry patch
trace mudprints
vein into maps

a bullfrog welcomes
the sunbird's return
twittering in flight—
another world sits
on stones of emerald moss

the same sun warms it
the soil trades
in moisture and bloom
lavish light on paths
out from the dripping shade

Desert Ocean

Caiti Quatmann (Flame) and K Weber (Spark)

Drawn by the allure of twilight,
I step into the desert's heart.

The sun, our fierce deity,
relinquishes the day;

the full moonrise bakes
waves of dust, casting

a spell of fluidity
on the arid land.

The dunes breathe
in gentle waves,

cresting towards
the heaven's glow.

Silhouettes of cacti,
shadows rippling,

currents of long blue light.
The horizon, where the cobalt

dunes met the deepening sky,
where the boundaries between

land and heaven blur—
an endless seascape

beckoning my soul to sail
away from mortal realms.

The light, this life,
it makes my skin

shiver dark lavender.
Amid the serenity,

whispers of mortality seep
through the cool sands below.

The night sky, royal
canvas of eternity,

holding stars that outlive
the transient beat of a heart.

As I lie amidst
the ancient sands,

the profound silence
speaks of endings—

the ephemeral beauty
of dusk, a soft prelude

to the infinite
night that awaits.

After the blue walk,
I rest in deep, desert reds,

outstretched among
the sands, offering

myself up to
the rising sun.

Contributor Bios

Dennis Aguinaldo teaches for the Department of Humanities, CAS, of the University of the Philippines Los Baños where he helped institute courses on creative nonfiction, young adult narratives, and literary approaches to film, TV, and the internet. His other poems appear in Petrichor, Better than Starbucks, Softblow, Spare Parts Lit, {m}, and in his blog: tekstong bopis.

Genevieve Aguinaldo is a mother to four children. She received her BA Communication Arts degree from the University of the Philippines Los Baños and Diploma in Language and Literacy Education from UP Open University. She participated in group exhibitions including Salungguhit: Sining at Tula held in Sining Makiling Gallery and Threatened Species organized by Malikhaín Community and Art Space. Some of her written works appeared in Shot Glass Journal, Cold Moon Journal, The Fib Review, Wales Haiku Journal, Scarlet Dragonfly Journal, Shadow Pond Journal, and Sunday Times Magazine.

Originally from Winnipeg, **Jamie Anderson** lives in so called Victoria, British Columbia on the unceded lands of the lək̓ʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ peoples. They graduated from the University of Victoria, with a degree in Theatre Production and Management and Creative Writing.

Leigh Brady is a writer from Dublin, Ireland, currently living in Edinburgh, Scotland. She has completed a MA in English literature, and a BA in English and Sociology, both from Maynooth University.

C.W. Bryan is a student at Georgia State University. He lives with his clowder of cats (the best to ever do it) and girlfriend in Atlanta, GA where he writes poetry and short fiction. He is currently writing daily poetry prompts with a friend of his at poetryispretentious.com.

Melissa Curran is a poet and educator from Sydney, Australia. Her book, *The Long Drowning*, was published by Five Islands Press. She has previously worked collaboratively with the writer John Scott, in his novel *Before I Wake* (Penguin).

Terri Linn Davis is the co-editor of Icebreakers Lit, a chaotic, loving home for collaborative writing. You can read some of her work in Taco Bell Quarterly, Rejection Letters, & Five South. Come find her on Twitter @TerriLinnDavis and on her website www.terrilinndavis.com.

Merlin Flower is an independent artist and writer.

Abigail Hora is a Filipina-Dutch American writer who navigates identity, trauma, and intimacy by exploring the physical and mental spaces of the body in her writing.

Louise Hurrell (she/her) is a writer based in Scotland. She enjoys writing short fiction and poetry in particular but finds writing statements about herself very challenging (mainly because she's quite boring).

Jose Jay just wants to tell stories for everybody that's stuck in the middle. MFA from San Diego State University. Gamer, reader, story-enjoyer in all forms.

Liza Boyce Linder lives near a lake with her husband in the United States and writes with friends and students from all over the place.

Mahailey Oliver is a graduate student of English and Advanced Pedagogy at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Her work has previously appeared in multiple anthologies, as well as in Amarillo Bay.

Heather Ann Pulido is an indigenous bisexual author from Baguio City, Philippines. A freelance journalist and content writer, she is a returning artist. Her poetry is in Moss Puppy and Sage Cigarettes. She has a BOTN-nominated poem published by JAKE. Her debut poetry chapbook "Coming Home to Myself" (Naked Cat Publishing) was released in September 2023.

Caiti Quatmann (she/her) is a writer, teacher, and Lit Mag Editor. She has been published by LitBreak Magazine, Thread Lit Mag, and others. Caiti lives with her husband and children in St. Louis, Missouri, and can be found on Instagram and Threads @CaitiTalks.

Shelagh Rowan-Legg is a writer and filmmaker. Her work has been published in The Windsor Review, New Poetry, Carousel, and numerous other magazines, and her short films have screened at festivals around the world.

E. Staal, also known as Elisabeth Staal, was raised in Massachusetts. She has spent her adult life working in and around the arts and education, with a particular focus on equitable arts education for students with disabilities. She recently graduated from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. She currently resides in Washington D.C. with her husband and many, many plants.

TeenyTinyThor is a 28-year-old, Canadian based writer. Currently writing about life's ups and downs, and starting her new chapter of motherhood.

K Weber lives and writes in southwestern Ohio. Her projects and credits can be found at kweberandherwords.com.