

Elena Ferrari
Milton Academy, Milton, MA
FINALIST, 17th Annual Poetry Prize For High School Girls in New England and New York

a history of speaking

up there where the people slur
their *r*'s & days don't pass but pool like sweat—

thunderstorms not gray as Leopardi's
but cold enough, wet enough, & anyway it's mostly sun

three soft-outlined children go running
on light-hot *terra cotta*, baked earth, babbling

between vines & lizards rolling glassy eyes. each chlorine
soaked handprint evaporates in seconds, as they know

it would be on the dusk-hued roof, too.
a man chews on his cigarette curbside & a girl

chews on *c*'s in *ciliege*, cherry curve
sweet in her mouth as the dry heat over grapevines.

on that mountain's spine, her name means iron
without tasting of blood, metal-cold in the mouth,

& this happiness lasts. now an ocean farther,
a stutter in the throat, a wish for the promise of memory--

she writes a poem about her grandfather in
a language slanted in his mouth & this may be

her greatest crime yet. still, they pull her
to a room strung heavy with eyes, cajole

with that spilling cadence & so she reads
for creased women & a deaf man & the onlookers.

they look to her to translate now, like
sparrows, quiet heads tilted, humming the rain,

forget she is but flight over buckets of seawater,
tails of a thread still finding the end of themselves.