

JULIET BEL, GRADE 11
SILVER KEY IN POETRY
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA: A COLLECTION

River Daydream

The heat melts on your skin
like Roman Candy in your teeth,
sucking the energy
out like fillings.

Split-pack AC and central air
are more practical
but there's just something so magical
about lying on your back
watching the ceiling fan rock.

The windows are three-layer painted-shut
so you couldn't open them
even if you wanted to.
Welcome the mosquitoes in to perch.

When you were a kid, you'd tighten the muscles in your arm
to trap them to you,
watch them panic.
Such stupid little bugs.

When you ride your bike along the levee
and see the river so high up
so close to your feet
you wonder what it might be like to slip in silently

swim with the polluted catfish
watch the Natchez paddle by
avoid the hooks set by men on the levee.

You can't see the river from your porch anymore.
Someone bought the empty lots at the end of the block
and built tall houses to soak up the view.

Your house is eight feet above sea level,
high up for a house in a swamp
you'll never flood.
The whole block won't flood
but you wish it would.

You want your river view back.

Deathwatch Beetles

A bedroom in the attic has its perks
when you live on the Mississippi.
The Natchez and her calliope swim
silently in the almost-autumn heat.

The bright yellow paint
on the house next door
can be seen peeling through my window.
If I look hard enough I can see the termites underneath.

Sometimes when I can't sleep
I open the window and
drape myself over the sill,
looking into the long-abandoned building,

her guts a sad reminder of the hurricane.

Which one?

People used to live there,
I know that,
but I was too young to remember them
once they moved away.

On my sleepless nights,
I look at the scattered pieces of life
on the attic floor
and make up a story
of why they had to leave.

Last night I saw a figure in the attic
and I watched it.
Like a ghost, it hovered above the floor
from one not-so-rotten floorboard
to the next,
kept company only by the
Deathwatch Beetles.

They knock
 knock
 knock
in the lonely night

looking for another in the walls.

They are an omen
sitting alone with the ill
and the dying.

They accompany Death
in all His cloaked glory.

For the figure in the attic next door,
they keep watch.

Bywater Blessings

Tonight, we are filled with wine
from boxes at the Julia Street Art Openings.

We are too young to be out alone like this,
but there's a parade nearby
and who are we to deny a good time?

To my right,
I see an angel with purple teeth
whose hair falls in her eyes with each step,
her laugh echoing off of the sleeping houses around us.
The too-big cardigan on her shoulders slips to her elbows and she has wings.

Ahead of us
I see our final puzzle piece
and the Bywater street lamps have crafted her a halo.
When she turns to face the other angel and me,
I am breathless.
She glides backward over the broken sidewalk
And the live oaks bow as if to worship her.

I tell them they look like seraphim
and they laugh,
filled with love and wine.

I am no angel!
cries the purple-toothed angel to my right,
I am a child of Dionysus tonight!
She steps into the silent street and spins,
her skirt whirling around her
like the bloom of a flower.

We join her
spinning and laughing,
welcoming the warm earthy smell
of the river breeze that carries us
whichever way it pleases.

Arcana

I . The Moon

My gut tells me
Now is not the time
To admire pretty sculptures

Maybe it is my love of the magical
But I think they're trying to tell me a story
Or a message from the universe:

For the Mystic Orphan Misfit
For the Cosmic Debris

II . The High Priestess

In a hall of mirrors
A voice whispers in my mind

Look at that
The crooked reflection
Of hips and hair
Golden for all eternity

And I think for a moment
I have heard Her voice

III . The Hermit

In spaces alone
I wonder if I truly am.

Who is she to lurk in the shadows
Quiet like a creature not wanting of light
Who would be blind without the dark.

What if I drew the curtains to take a peek?
Would she see me too?

IV . The Wheel of Fortune

I wear saint coins around my throat
I like to think they strum my vocal chords
When I hum alone

They feel the rumble of my laughter
The shaking of my shoulders
When I find another silly thing to light me for a moment

In the night I sometimes pray
For rain and for a patch of clovers
And a ladybug for good measure

V . The Hanged Man

My last night in the haunted quarter
I spent alone
Wandering the streets

A young woman joined me
Aglow with gin and love
She bumped my shoulder with hers

*One day she said
You'll let go of all that holds you
And you will never have felt so free*

The Last Parade of The Grand Marshall

In time we all will come to dance.
Death does not come
cloaked with scythe in hand,

But Death is preceded by music,
a Danse Macabre,
a soulful song of time passed.

The jester comes first
the faint jingling of his shoes
the first notes of the song.

He is followed then by
the nobility in their
flouncy skirts and dapper suits.

They find their living
partners and begin
the Danse Macabre.

Linked hand in hand
the dead dance
with the living and their own.

The hours never seem to pass,
dusk settles in the sky
and the Danse continues.

Slowly, Death peels his court
from the arms of the living
stopping at the final pair.

The man lingers a moment
his hand still clasped
in the grasp of his lover.

No longer the sick
man in the hospital bed,
but again in his ruby shoes.

Night-blooming jasmine
permeates the evening
as their dance begins to slow.

His grip slips from hers
as he joins
the joyous dance of welcome.

The celebration ends
as night fills the sky

and the Grand Marshall
takes his place at the front
of the Danse Macabre.

Helène Bofisé, Grade 11
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY
A COLLECTION

Letter to a neglected daughter

Dear child,
You felt unloved, unwanted, abandoned
in a world of torment and indignation.
Self-hatred was injected in your flimsy body.
The needle's scar marked you forever.
You believed love to be a fictitious invention
Created by the easily tricked, to make life seem worth the agony.
Words, they were spit at you by those who should have cared.
They should have cared.

But, my dear child,
The world is not torment and indignation,
And your scarred soul could have hardly understood,
That those words wouldn't have harmed you forever.
Because, my beautiful rose,
Words are the water of the soul.
You were a flower who was never given a chance to
Enchant those passing by.
Those words, they caused for you to drown
Into an ocean of lies.

I would have watered you, I would have given you a chance
To enchant those passing by. I would have shown you love,
The beauty of this frantic world.
I would have made you forget those horrifying scars.

Oh, my child,
You are now long gone,
Beneath a big black wave
of sorrow and falsity,
And I can no longer
Save your soul from this
World of vile lies.

A Present Far Gone

We welcome your pain in our melting arms,
and pray to Penthos, God of Grief,
Give her back a heart of grey.

Please, take your shoes off and come in.
Sit on the couch, hold your soul in your lifeless hands
and we will take your sunken heart.
In exchange, here's a teacup filled with loving memories.
They will warm the dark away.

Our dishes will cleanse your palate from the taste
Of salty tears and reminiscence,
and we will wash off the shame you carry.
Of forgotten words you'd like to say.

It's too late! But as you say goodbye
To a present far gone, we welcome you
To the cloudy skies of a new home,
Of a new day.

We welcome your pain
in our melting arms,
and we will pray
to erase your life of ruin.

Hang your coat of worries
at the entrance,
And let us turn your mind
of deathly black into cloudy grey

For life won't feel of summer joy for long,
But our home
(our love for you!)
will always stay.

A plea to stop time

Moonshadows,
Strip me of each unavailing complication,
And be the light I so long searched for
Within the starless skies of a city night.

Liberate me from the routine of a nullity
Too heavy for me to carry on my sole,
And trap my feet below a pile of sand.

Tear me apart and remind me of a buried joy,
One which belongs to a child with salt in her
Hair and not in her overused, blinded eye.

Moonshadows,
Let me rise with the sun, when the time is right,
And let me transmute into a candied sky
Before I must return within those starless lies.

Stop!
Hear me scream and let me stop your disappearance
For if you leave you'll take with you the joy I called mine.

If the moon sets, it will be the sun's turn to fly.
And you will disappear with her.
You, too, will die.

moon sets,
 sun, rise.
 Let us return to those
 starless skies.

LUCREZIA BRANDIZZI, GRADE 10
GOLD KEY IN FLASH FICTION

A talent Vitruvian

He walked down the cobble paved streets,
As rain trickled down to his intricate beard.
He licked the fissures in his lips,
And pressed the concave scar on his index.
He straightened his spine as it let out a soft cracking noise.

He could taste the scent of beer on his beard,
And feel the furtive whispers around him.
He took off his black ushanka
And his grease-smoothed hair flapped in the wind.
He entered the bar marked Madigan's.

As he walked through the door, the noise arose
And he could no longer hear his loud exhales.
His nostrils quivered and he knocked on the bar table.
The bartender slammed a rag and a sash on the table,
Pointing firmly at the stage.
He tightened his jaw muscle and tilted his head.
The bartender rolled his eyes and slid him a pint of beer.
He grabbed the pint and the rag leaving the sash behind.

He grabbed the long, light umber instrument,
And skeptically caressed it with the rag.
He untucked the bow and rubbed it against the rosin.
Then he enclosed the rosin in the cloth and dropped it in the case.
He took a sip of the beer as the white foam rested on his moustache.

He violently massaged the strings tightly knitted on the umber instrument.
as the people stared up at him.
It was as if they could smell the weight of his sorrows,
And taste the bittersweetness of his symphony in their drinks.

Each time he finished a piece he traced the scar on his index, and started a new one.
His eyes twitched as he focused on the different chords,
And his arm danced back in forth orchestrating the symphony,
His left leg was relaxed as the big instrument rested on it,
While his other leg contracted frequently along with his thoughts.

He imparted a sense of awe,
That stunned the people scattered around the bar each time.
His symphony fiercely graced their ears.

Much chatter would arise in the bar, attending his arrival,
They couldn't define his talent yet
they knew it was something pure, raw, natural;
Vitruvian.

ILARIA CHEN, GRADE 10
SILVER KEY IN POETRY

Mind of November

Rain spills one-handed claps.
Drops fall flat onto my head.
Tears of paint drag
their plump bones
through a thicket of hair;
dig and burrow
dig and eat.
Rain, wash my brain, I plead.

I drink tart skies-
Chrysanthemum teeth.
Tooth-stained stomach
chokes lungs and I breathe
and cry.
Petals slit skin
and paint leaks.
Crush me like shrivelled leaves.

Sidewalks glossed by water-skins
gummed with smile-worthy leaves.
Feet jump on fronds
like boats of lilies in ponds.
Flipped-mirages mock
my steps and contort my vision
Shoes mid-soak.
Allow me to hear your apocalyptic glee.

“The sky needs to rain and mama needs to marry.”
Let her be.

Let me be.

ILARIA CHEN, GRADE 10

SILVER KEY IN POETRY

CONSANGUINITY: A COLLECTION

Back home

The boy wakes up and blinks twice
under the stitched reed roof.
It is dawn and he does not feel
the duvet of his father's warmth,
who is busy tending ducks out near the marsh.
He crawls out of the shack
and greets the petrichor
of morning dew with a crisp and delicate yawn.

His feet sink into the silky mud
and pop the pearl-drops of rain
one by one.
He pats down the folds on his cotton top
with his squashy hands
and scampers to his father.

There is no hint of blue-green
in the ample marsh.
It is layered with plump beige-black
feathers with glints of white
and tangerine beaks;
strokes by Monet.
The father is sitting cross-legged on patted-down reeds,
looking at his paddling of ducks
negotiating cordgrass blades
and scouting around for leaves and seeds.
His once-sunken cheeks
now bloomed
like the first flowers of spring.

The boy squats down next to his father
and looks at the dozens of ducks.
How plump they've grown, how free.
He cups his neck and looks up at the sky.
A flight of swallows slits the cerulean waves
and like a whiff of glitter,
trails the tail of the winds.

Eventide

The first cold night flows
into Rome.
Ink-stained eyes
peer into my bedroom window
searching for something,
but I don't know what.
I pull its eyelids shut
and fumble in the dark.
My pinky toe scrapes skin
against the corner of my bed frame
and I stop. I lie
next to the muffled outline
of my sister and say
"Good night".
She crosses her left arm
over my stomach and nods.

I lie in the porous dark
and count the ivory sheep.
Thousands soar by yet I
still can't dream;
I then decide to count
the bundles of wool they left behind.

My vision is half-black-half-white
and my mind droops slightly,
stroked by the pulse of her heartbeat
tapping on my left arm
like a hum
of soft knocks on doors.
My nerves caress her garnet heart
and pillow its fall;
dandelions in flight.

The beat quickens after a handful
and I look over to see if she is well.
"Nightmares?"
I wrap my right arm over her left
and place my chin
onto her head.
Right then, we are heart to heart.
"Sleep tight".

let the night sleep on my chest and dream

i.

Take my hand
and walk with me
a step left, right,
and then repeat.
Jump in, jump out,
exchange our hands
Let's twirl and laugh-
Medieval's beat.

ii.

It is dusk outside
the castle door.
The briny air sleeps
under a fresh blanket of milk-stars,
like day-old lillies
in a thin stream glittered
with blonde pomelos;
soused siesta.

iii.

Down the braid of cobblestone
and past the shops asleep
we hoist our joys to the stars
and feel them breathe.
I listen to a passion-dweller
recount the fragility
of the celestial lustres
with sweet articulation;
lyrical taps of teeth and tongue.

iv.

An old man sits in front
of the village bar
smoking a saccharine
strawberry cigar.
Behind him it is dimly lit
and his shadow is brown.
He smiles
and the smoke
leaves through the burnt slivers
between his teeth.
It swims up into the sky
and for a split second,
I see a star in his eyes.

PHOEBE CIOCCA, GRADE 9
SILVER KEY IN POETRY

Adagio, poco a poco crescendo

A halo of dense Pacific fog settles
on a vast teal enigma
of ceaseless shimmering waves,
Jagged black boulders
peppered across the coast.

Milk-foam crashes
at the feet of a cliff
lined with wispy lavender bushes
Swaying in the salty breeze,
Engaged in a lyrical dance.

Slender palms reach
for the silver sky,
watchful, shifting clouds
with lightning veins,
electric, purple prickles.

Fallen junipers sprinkle the damp earth
Small sprouts of spearmint
prance about the musky air,
the petrichor spiked with fragrance.

Pearly curtains close
over remaining light,
the wind howling goodbye.

Specks of people retreat to the sand,
riding on trusted wooden steeds
Coated in coloured streaks,
No longer yelling “Surf’s up!”

A symphony of seagulls
now glides above the empty abyss
A thunder-clash crashes from above
the sky begins its song:
Gentle droplets start to fall,
Tides turn flat.

The sun peeks out ever so slightly.

PHOEBE CIOCCA, GRADE 9
SILVER KEY IN POETRY

Oublié

Gray masses cover the sky.
A cypress stands alone,

quiet,

above infinite hills.

Hills in a soft cotton uniform,
questioned by nobody.

Overlooked.

But the cypress is rough,
a proud dab of emerald
against a blank canvas.

It stands tall,
floating on a blanket of mist,
so fragile,

Circumstantial.

It lurks everywhere,
sliding off the hills,
through the valley,
free.

But the cypress clings to it,
for it knows it is not
free.

It is a statue.

Admired from afar,
but unreachable,

yet still

Admired.

The mist begins to vanish,

an inflamed orb replacing it,
melting the gray.

The world is bathed in baroque light.
Hills now radiant green.
The sky a screaming scarlet,
filling the canvas.

The mist is gone,
the cypress unprotected.

Surrounded by other colours,
the emerald fades.

The cypress shrinks.

Notes once strummed alone,
muffled by new sounds.

They grow smaller,
softer,
until they die out.

Forgotten.

The cypress can no longer be seen.
Lost in all the colour,
it has become a monochrome.

GIULIA DI CICCIO, GRADE 9
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY

to all the Gods on Earth,

I kindly beg you to listen
my single futile thought,
as Eyes began to glisten
and Head began to rot.

I implore you
and all your brawn,

to let Memory
and Head not be gone.

I no longer hear Memory's
airy voice whispering
her fragile stories
and calm whistling.

I no longer see
those glittering colors
falling behind the
unlimited seas.

memories begin
to disintegrate in paltry fractions:
gentle God Air singing
in her pale tone;
furious God Sun
flaming innocent heads;
joyful God Animal happily
frightening trembling minds;
disheartening God Shadow
continuously kidnapping velvet lips.

I beg you to prevent Mind
from discarding me,
while rivers of velvet beads
soak what was left of those merry cheers.

LEILA EL ZABRI, GRADE 11
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY
A COLLECTION

WHERE IS IT

I spit out my hatred, matted with pomegranate blood that slips
through my fingers in pain

It comes up like bile,

Dark;

The anger I have at myself, the putrid flood of burning doubt.

I tremble in this sack of skin and bones,

All impulse and no one else.

Where is it?

I can't find it, I don't want to understand.

I curve into my fetal position,

Absolving myself from all that came after.

I tear at the frailty of it all, I break it until the blood is the (stale) river
that never stops flowing,

never remains the same.

I don't want to step back in, I want to fly,

But I've killed things.

Maybe I Was Sleeping

Oh love,

You're perfect, aren't you?

Let's swirl in the painted lines of symphony.

But I'm only crazy, you're only dead.

I want to talk to you but I need your help. What is one to do? I want to run.

Yellow oozes from a blanketed horizon, a banana peel lying unfeelingly in a sticky sleep.

Your stubbed fingers lift my eyelids, white nails covered in lengthy words
which spill at an uncanny pace.

I pull at your lip, yet you are unresponsive. I don't understand, why did you tell me you would hold me, when now you are asleep?

Yet the leaves still lie sweetly on the burning skies, and The Killers still spin
in roaring waves.

I wallow on the undone bed and think of your whispering hands.

Lionhair

i.

You remind me of the words
I clumsily read while waiting
And the smooth tang of sticky fingers.
Rivulets of blemishes and scars etch small curls in your hair,
And the cobblestones scream to your bare feet
(Mine are padded with brown socks).
The cold marble seeps into my back and the running clouds reflect in your blue cheeks
We convince our sadness that it is important by celebrating it
with words and tears and running paint,
But we don't mind because we sit on the rickety stools and laugh.

ii.

Our heavy legs chase our breath as we trudge around the bright breeze
as it numbs our cracking knuckles.
The sun makes us see white
And we lie on the striped hammock with my tears and his.
Who I want him to be isn't who he is but I wish he were,
So he leaves my heart but takes me with him.

TATIANA KNEALE, GRADE 10
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY
THE BEAUTY OF BLUE: A COLLECTION

bluing

I have a friend of blue.
I don't know what to do.
The cruel, sick veil of self-betrayal
has taken and twisted her too.

She's lost it, that whimsy.
She sits now, pale and fraught.
What did I miss?
Where went the bliss?
I had thought we were happy,
Were we not?

Some great power has gone
and plucked the gaiety from her mind,
casting a curtain of this wretched blue
before her eyes,
which filters out all warmth
and impedes her heart
from leaping, as it once did,
at the sight of a spring's first blossom,
or the velvet scent of a rose,
freshly picked from its bush.

Thoughts run wild
in the maze that is her mind,
as she fights to find her way
through narrowing paths of endless worry.
I am witness to these struggles,
against the hurricane of her own despair.
Forced to watch, as she scrambles
before a scattered array
of broken puzzle pieces,
leading her in no uncertain direction.

Where's that flicker?
The glimmer, gone so long
from those two deep oceans
of her now-sunken eyes.
I would never have thought that bright blue
could ever turn so sickly and pale.

But like ink from a bottle,
it too has seeped out of our lives.

I had come to know it so well,
learnt to admire its capacity
to shift me from any mood,
skillfully guiding me
through the eternal darkness
of self disillusionment.

It seems that all lights of the world
have gone out for those eyes,
leaving me with no trace
of a path back home.
Leaving me to wonder
why, if she is the one lost,
do I have nowhere left to turn?

I once knew how to hope for more,
but it now feels as though my heart
has grown too tired for such frivolities.

How much more would I do to help,
if I didn't feel such a burden
weighing me down.
I know that I can help,
but that same knowledge impedes me from doing so.
I know that I will help,
but what is the use,
if I do not do so in time?

I know well that these questions have answers,
I have even sought to find them.
But like leaves on crisp autumn mornings,
they dance tauntingly before my eyes.
Inviting me to chase them through the streets,
to cry out with every strength of my being
for some form of response.
An explanation as to where it is that they are going,
And why I had not thought of them before.

Who is left,
When the last petals fall,
And you alone are responsible
for picking up the pieces?
Who is it you turn to,

when the blue seeps from her to you,
and the notion of a friend turns to a thought,
residing, oh so comfortably, up in your head,
slowly and persistently buzzing
to the empty, unending chorus,
of blue.

steady lines

I'll sit some time for hours and hours,
with notebook, pen in hand.
Steady lines draw empty rhymes,
as colour melts unto this cotton land.

Abandoning these words I find
there's something more to say,
through letters stretched and morphed and kept,
disguised to fit in this way.

There's nothing in their colour form,
their shape or speed of rate.
The only steadiness I feel
is in their constant shape.

I don't know why I have to so,
but drawing them do stay,
There's safety in this discipline:
the control over their curveless state.

I can't help but to carry on,
though logic fights me so.
In a world that shivers at the touch,
for these few fleeting moments,

I too know where to go.

China-blue residue

Blossoms of blue break out from beneath this blank soil.
Scattered on a surface of sweet porcelain,
they lie in lines of no direction,
wondrously watching this vast world before them.

I had observed their honest features for so many years,
delighting in their delicate musicality,
and admiring the very nature of their beauty.
But now, it seems I am witness to the dread of their destruction.

I cannot help but wonder how it is that they still sit so sweetly,
though they lie in splinters on the sober surface of my bedroom floor.
Blue-black brokenness presents me with a new face to their beauty.
How strange I had not noticed it before.

**MADDALENA LUBERTI, GRADE 10
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY**

Fall of Mankind

I.
Four seats a row, six rows a carriage;
All facing each other, stripped and vulnerable.
I am seated before a theatre show
Where I am both actor and spectator.

The next herd flocks in through automatic doors.
My lips tug at the corners as I suppress the urge
to stand up and shepherd them with a staff,
As they bleat pathetically, following on all fours.

The narrow panes are ajar and the draught is leaking in
Gnawing spitefully at my cheeks and stripping the air raw.
I blow into my palms and rub them together in my gloves -
The worn out threads creating uncomfortable friction against my skin.

The doors slide apart once again
And in slips a woman,
Wearing nothing but the intimacy of her flesh
Yet moving in such a self-collected manner.

I shift further to the left as the lady by my side
Has now taken up a seat and a half -

But it's alright because she has her feet tucked beneath neatly
As not to trip anyone up.

II.

The figure sits down poisedly on the seat in front of me
And rests her head on the metal bar to her right,
Her bare flesh shrieking against
The indigo seats.

Her crown is drowned in hyacinthe locks
That tumble in ringlets against the curves of her shoulders
And nestle in the hollow of her collarbone.

Her lacerated lips remain slightly parted,
Mauve and quivering in the November air,
Dimpling ever so brazenly at the corners.
She shuffles her toes and looks up -

I break my gaze and stare into the ground,
Embarrassed by her immaculacy.

The intricate map of veins on her feet are gushing rivers
That lead up her alpine calves and thighs to her chest,
Shattering her breast like a spider's web,
Dripping down her wrist and off each slender finger.

Her figure tremors so,
Devoured by the cold,
But her eyes remain serene
and her smile so composed.

I feel so self conscious,
So fully clothed.

III.

I gaze around at the numb faces,
And have to stop myself from leaping up
And screaming in their faces in the vain search of a reaction
As they slump like dummies in a trance.

A crimson flush creeps up my neck,
Exploding in my ears
And I tug at the woollen scarf that's constricting my breath,
Tossing it in a flurry on my lap.

I wonder if it would be ridiculous,

absurd,
so out of place for me to rip all my clothes off and sit there;
innately safe within my skin -

but I couldn't.

I was sitting before the gaze of an Eve who had never met the snake;
But I had succumbed to it.

MADDALENA LUBERTI, GRADE 10
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY
A COLLECTION

Id

The shrillness of his primordial lament,
Pierces the stillness of the uncorrupt mind,
Painting the blank canvas black with torment.

His restless soul writhes, so—
Inextricably bound to the “pleasure principle”
That incinerates his pious halo.

In the midst of the heart-and-mind dispute,
His pudgy fists reach out to snatch,
The alluring forbidden fruit—

In his eye the serpent grins
And slithers through his core, seeking shade
in the darkness of his sins.

Folie à Deux

A.
He wavers in the moment,
attempting in vain to grasp it
as it slips mockingly through his fingers.
His eyes glint, malicious, and a white light floods his mind,
seeping into every inch of his sallow figure.
His mind throbs as it spins and spins on this cruel merry-go-round.
Her blue gaze bores into the back of his neck
and his knuckles grow ashen as his fingers dig deep,
seeking refuge in the palm of his hands.

spiro;
expiro.
Veiled by his quivering eyelids,
images of billowed gowns and matted locks,
sprawled dolefully across the marble floor—
And a single, crimson puddle seeps out,
instantly swallowing the lingering silence.

B.
Words are caught in motion
As they drip, poisonous, off his lax lips
And shatter on the ground.
He still lingers in her forlorn smile
And as she drowns so serenely in the depth of the green in his eyes
She feels lost,
Helpless,
As if left standing naked
In a vast, empty room.
Her frail frame sits poised upon the seat
And her edelweiss skin,
etched with cerulean veins,
mimics the cold marble beneath her bare feet.
At every tug and every pull
she obeys;
Amaranthinely chained to his heart.

A brief reflection on what is not

I recognised it as soon as it trickled down the nape of my neck
and pirouetted blindly about my shoulders.
Immense darkness appeared as the herald of every shadow cast by the devilish sun
and the sheer nothingness that fills the spaces between all that is in existence.
The air was dense and crammed itself into every inch of my cast—
displacing my breath and bones.
However, not for a mere sliver of a second did I feel unsettled
for within the damp walls of the cave,
I stood the closest I could ever be to the stranger who dwells within my red marrow walls—
from which I'd been estranged for so long.

In a fraction of a void,
With my lids sealed and all light swallowed whole,
I witnessed what lies in between what is.

Grotta Sant'Angelo, Civitella del Tronto

LUCY PANETTA, GRADE 9
HONORABLE MENTION IN POETRY

Never wanted it to end

The long, annoying
train ride
but then to finally arrive
at a wonderful place.

The warm and comforting hugs,
laughter,
long-lost memories
of some days
that you never wanted to end.

...the smell of fresh, new perfume,
while combing the long, soft hair
of the sweetest person ever...
the parties, the dancing, the music
...the stolen kisses
happened last night...

But then all these memories
make you sad,
once you leave
and return home.

The cold and hard feel
of nostalgia,
that makes you think
“I can’t wait to come back
and see you again.”

SOFIA PENG, GRADE 10
SILVER KEY IN POETRY

Three hours before Midnight, 25th of February

I

The brownish-rose porcelain tajine,
and the piping hot lid been taken off.
A smoked flavour of cooked lamb and
pepper mixed peas flutter where sight lands.
I took a deep sniff, absorbing
the local cuisine, beckoning my body
into the moroccan culture; better than
a pleasant scent of a ripe tulip. The fine meat
merges with the piece of savoury baked flatbread,
a taste of delight.
Spreading, circulating, condensing. To the deepest
steps of my tongue. Then swept away spontaneously
by a small cup of fragrant minted-green tea.

II

The soft finger-thumps
and the metallic spoon-beats
on the djembe,
rhythmic and patterned melodies flow.
The rough notes dance around our feet
like pieces of waving leaves
and lithe petals
twirl in peace within the beehived tent.
The chorus hums timidly,
trying hard to compose a set of harmonies
from the tip of their sweet-golden lips.

III

I open the silken tent.
The city of stars envelops the immense concave desert.
I see Sirius.
Each infinitesimal bright light
clothes the profound blue-black night sky.
They blink their daisied eyes like the genuine glance
of millions of children.
Orion's Belt lines up straight.
A shooting star slips through the sky,
after light years sweep by.

NATALIE SILVER, GRADE 10
HONORABLE MENTION IN SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

Blue

A spark lit up the dark cavern as two stones collided near the pile of dried pine needles. A face was illuminated for a second before the flame died out. The face belonged to a young woman with tanned skin, and small light brown freckles sprinkled on her cheeks and nose. A wisp of burnt orange hair hung in a tight coil over one of her brilliant blue eyes. Another spark. This time, the flame seemed to want to stay for longer, but it wasn't long till it was out again. More of the girl was illuminated. She was wearing a dirty light blue dress, and boots that used to keep her feet warm, but no longer did. She was wearing a jet-black cloak, tied around her neck. The cloak was the only thing keeping her warm. Kneeling on the stone cold floor, she slammed the two stones together, in one last attempt to start a fire. The nearest pine needle caught the spark, then twisted inward as the flame engulfed it, and spread. Warmth at last.

Below the cave there was a small village in the valley. The villagers rarely left the village. The only way out was over the mountains. Before, each month, twenty men would set off over the mountains to a marketplace in a nearby village in search of things that the mountains didn't already provide them with.

Many animals lived in the surrounding mountains, and the ground was extremely fertile. One of the mountains had once been an active volcano, but its flame had long ago died out. Beautiful flowers, and the sweetest fruits and vegetables imaginable grew in these fertile lands. Underneath the tallest of the five mountains lay the greatest treasure of the town. A gold mine. The town sparkled with gold. Every building in town was encrusted with it.

Fifty or so years ago, around the time of the last trip to the outside world, a man named Abbas had brought back a flower seed. The woman who had sold it to him had called it an Azra Flower. He planted that seed, and it grew into a flower. A flower of a color he had never seen before: blue. The whole village came to see the flower, and after seeing it, they all wanted one of their own. Abbas called this new color azra, after what the woman had told him. As soon as the flower started germinating, people started coming to his door begging for seeds in exchange for anything he wanted. Soon Abbas became the richest man in town, turning the town blue.

Slightly less than 20 years ago, Abbas had a daughter. She had curly, burnt orange hair, tanned skin, freckles, and eyes the color of the flower. He named her Azra, after his flower. No one in the village had ever seen any color of eyes other than brown. Every one came to see the girl with the strange eyes, just as they had done with the flower years before.

A couple of years after Azra was born, her mother died while giving birth to twin boys. By her next birthday, her father had already married an evil woman named Jala.

Azra was beautiful, there was no doubt about it. Everyone praised her for her beauty, yet people wouldn't dare go near her. Life at home wasn't any better. She hated being there. Her younger siblings constantly went out of their way to make her life harder than it already was. Jala would blame anything that her own children would do wrong on Azra, and Abbas was just getting more violent with every passing day.

Azra was about 10 or 11 when her father's violence started to trickle out into the outside world. Abbas was known as a kind man in the village, always willing to share his wealth with those who needed it. But with his family, he was selfish and violent. He would often sit alone in his room, counting his gold coins. Every once in a while Jala would intrude on his solitude to tattle on Azra.

He would subsequently call for Azra, and slap her on the face, or whip her with a belt if there was one in reach. She had quickly learned where he kept his belts, and would always try to stand as far away from them as possible. The day her father's violent side was exposed to the outside world was the day Azra first screamed for help. She walked into his room shaking with fear as always. He was standing there waiting for her, holding a belt. Just as he was about to strike her, she screamed. She had never let herself scream before. His face turned red, and he started yelling at her. People from all around the village came to see what the source of the noise was. The people surrounded the house, and peered through the windows. They saw a young girl being tormented by her father. For the first time they saw who Abbas truly was.

The next day no one in the village remembered what had happened to Azra. It was as if it never happened. Except that it had. Azra was the only one who remembered it. Azra no longer got beaten by her father, but the outside world still ignored her. Life carried on like this for a couple of years.

One morning, when Azra was almost 20, she woke up to find her father staring down at her. "What do you want from me," she asked him, backing towards the far corner of the bed, dragging her woolen blanket with her.

"Jala is dead," he announced. "One of her children went to her early this morning, and found her dead."

"What does this have to do with me?" Azra asked confused.

"Everyone thinks you did it," he replied, "and frankly, I'm not disagreeing with them. You're the only one in this house who disliked her."

"But I didn't do it!" she exclaimed.

"And who's going to believe that?" He said as he walked out of her room, slamming the door behind him.

Everyone thought that she had committed a crime, and her father was right, no one was going to believe her if she said otherwise. She had to leave. Azra stuffed her bag with as many of her things as she could, put on her boots, tied her cloak around her neck, and ran. She ran away from the town, towards the mountains. She ran until she could run no more. It was almost dusk when she found a small cave to spend the night in. It was rapidly getting colder. She needed a fire.

Once the fire had been built, she looked over the cliff at the village beneath her. It truly was beautiful. The gold and blue of the rooftops sparkled in the moonlight, sending specks of light around to every mountain, mimicking the stars.

The stars were a whole other sight. Azra had never realized the immensity of the night sky before. Normally when looking up at the sky from the village the only things visible were the bright golden rooftops. Now when she looked up, she saw sparkling dots, high up in the sky. She had no clue that the world could look like this.

That night, she couldn't sleep. She didn't know if it was the bitter cold that was keeping her up, or the thoughts roiling around inside her head. She had so many questions. Who killed Jala? Why would they want to kill her? Why did everyone suddenly suspect her? She lay awake thinking. The killer had to be someone living in her house, that was for sure. There was no way to get in without the golden key that hung from her father's belt at all times. None of Jala's children would have done it. They were all too little. There was no way that Jala had killed herself. She was selfish, just like Abbas. She only cared about her wellbeing. That and making Azra's life horrible. The only other person living in her house was her father. "Of course!" No one would have ever suspected it. The only one who knew how he truly felt about Jala was Azra. He hated her. He hated her just as Azra had hated her. But Jala had given him an excuse to hurt Azra, so he kept her around. The rest of the village just thought he was a loving husband and father. They still believed those lies even after what

they had seen all those years ago. How was that possible? Now Azra knew that her father was the killer, and that something was manipulating the village.

When Azra finally fell asleep, she had a dream. The most vivid dream she had ever had. It was of her father when he was a young boy, about the age she was now. He was standing in front of a stand of seeds, in an obscure marketplace. There was an old woman standing behind the stand. She had the same blue eyes that Azra had. The old woman picked up one of her seeds and handed it to Abbas. "An Azra flower seed" she said, as she handed the seed over. "Plant it, and you will get what you want most."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Wouldn't you want to be able to control everyone?"

"Yes."

"Then do as I say. Plant this seed once you get back to your town. Anyone near it will think what you want them to think, and believe what you want them to believe. Plant as many as you can, surrounding the whole village." The boy stood there for a moment with his mouth open in amazement.

"Is there any way for me to lose the power?" Abbas asked.

"Yes. If you die, or if all the flowers are destroyed, the power will be lost." She paused for a second while Abbas reflected on what she just said. "There are some people who are immune to the control of the flower." That caught the boy's attention.

"Who?" he asked anxiously.

"Anyone with eyes the color of the flower," she replied. "So do you want it?"

Suddenly Azra was awake. The sun was just coming over the opposite mountain. She looked over the cliff. Rows and rows of blue flowers encircled the town. There were at least a couple hundred on each mountain. There was no way to get rid of them without doing irreparable damage. She could kill him...

No. There must be another way. She was immune. How? There must be a reason? Was it something to do with her mother? She searched her mind for memories of her mother. She could barely picture her anymore. Finally she found a memory. The last time she saw her mother before she died. Her mother's name was Nadia. The two of them were out in the field of Azra flowers. Azra was spinning in circles around her mother, who was heavily pregnant. Nadia's straight hair was blowing in the wind. She smiled lovingly at her daughter. Azra saw the smile; it distracted her from her spinning. Suddenly she lost her balance and fell into her mother's lap. The two erupted in laughter. Azra picked a flower and gave it to her mother. Nadia took it, and kissed it. Azra laughed. "Eat it!" Azra said in between bursts of laughter. Nadia delicately plucked a petal of the flower, put it in her mouth, then swallowed.

"Delicious!" Nadia exclaimed. Azra laughed again.

All of a sudden Nadia bent over in pain. "What happened," asked Azra, terrified. Her mother looked up and smiled.

"You are going to be a big sister," she replied. "Now, help me up." Azra did as she was told, but something didn't seem right. Something was different about her mother, but she couldn't figure out what it was.

Azra brought herself back to reality. She was back in the cave, alone again, but now she knew what was different. When her mother had looked up at Azra, her eyes were a different color. They weren't hazel anymore, they were blue.

Down in the town, everyone was searching for the girl with the blue eyes. They didn't know why, but they were doing it anyway. Usually they tried to stay as far away from her as possible. No one

knew why they did that either. Suddenly there was a voice in their heads. "Once she has been found, and captured, there will be a feast. Everybody will be invited. Finally we will be rid of evil in this town."

The search continued as Azra left her cave, and descended towards the city, picking flowers as she went. When she was halfway down the mountain, she saw villagers holding pitchforks and other weapons. They were looking for her. The rest of her way down, she was on her hands and knees. Finally, she had reached the entrance to the town. It had taken her longer than she had expected. All she needed to do now was find a source of food or drink to put the flowers in. Something that everyone would eat or drink eventually.

Water.

The town's water supply came from a river down one of the mountains. There was a large pipe system underground that brought it to every house. She had to somehow get to the river without being seen. The river just so happened to be on the complete opposite side of the village. The fastest way would be through the village. That would be impossible... But what if she went over the village. The buildings were close enough to each other, so getting across wouldn't be that difficult. She just had to make sure no one could see her, but who looked up anyways.

She climbed up the wall, and jumped onto the first roof. The ground was scorching. It burned her hand. She would have blisters after this. She made her way over to the other side of the roof, then leaped. Pain surged through her body every time she landed. She was about half way across the town when the first person spotted her. A young woman was sitting in the shade taking a break from the heat. The woman had looked up for barely a second when she saw a young girl leaping from roof to roof. She saw the girl, and recognized her immediately. The young woman hesitated for a second as two voices fought against each other in her head, until one of them won, and she called out. "She's here!"

People were now coming for Azra, but she didn't care. She had to get these flowers to the river. She leaped onto the last rooftop, climbed down its side, then ran to the river as fast as she could. She dumped all the flowers she was holding into the river, then frantically grabbed as many more as she could around her, and threw them in as well.

The noise of the stampede was growing louder. There was no way she could escape it. She stuffed the last flowers in her reach into her dress pockets just as the mob arrived. In an instant she was knocked out cold.

She woke up in a cage. The sun light was blinding. She looked around. Her cage was in a large grassy field. There were long tables all around her, filled with heaps of food. Every person in the village seemed to be there, celebrating. Even her father. They were celebrating her capture, and soon her death. She leaned against the bars of the cage, and stuck her hands in her pockets, and found the flowers. Something gurgled. It was a pot of soup, large enough to feed the whole town. She looked around to make sure no one was looking. No one had even realized that she had woken up. She took the flowers out of her pockets, and carefully threw them into the boiling pot of soup. It was only a matter of time before the soup would be eaten.

Finally someone realized that she was awake. It was her father. "Azra." His voice boomed loudly. "Your reign of terror on this town is over, we have captured you. You killed Jala, murdered her in her sleep. The punishment for murder is your life. Any last words?"

"Here's an idea," she said. "Why don't you be civilized for once, and finish your meal before you have at me. I believe there is still a humongous pot of soup waiting to be eaten."

"Fine, the killing will happen after the feast is done!" Everybody cheered. Bowls of soup were dished out, and passed to everyone. Once everyone had received a bowl, Abbas announced that they

could start eating. They picked up their spoons, put the soup in their mouths, and then swallowed. Nothing happened.

Suddenly someone screamed in pain. It was the young woman Azra had seen before. Once the pain had passed, she looked up. Her eyes were blue. It had worked. And all of a sudden everyone was in pain, and then everybody's eyes were blue. They were free.

They all turned towards Abbas. His eyes were blue now too. A sea of blue eyes stared at him. He stood there confused for a second, before realizing what had happened. He had lost his power. He ran as far and as fast as he could, never to be seen again.

The townspeople dropped whatever they were holding, and hugged the nearest person in sight. For the first time in fifty years they were free to have their own thoughts. Azra had done it. She had saved her people, and for the first time in what felt like forever, she smiled.

BIANCA TODINI, GRADE 9
GOLD KEY IN POETRY

Ambrosia

Crisp gusts of sharp winds whip my hair in circles.
Flushed faces and noses, rosy with cold.
As I walk home, my eyes linger on a wooden crate of pomegranates:
a guarded gate to the shop behind them.
I carefully pick two.
Deep crimson-tinted skin,
unscratched and pure of imperfections.
Cold hands exchange rusted drachmae for these cherry-tinted treasures.
I gently place them in my bag, as if they were made of porcelain,
and I continue to escape the cold.
Upon arriving home, I sit down and reach for the pomegranates.
The sharp knife slices cleanly through the tough skin as if it were butter.
Two sides pulled apart,
drops of blood spill out onto my hands and down my arms.
The cherry-tinted skin reveals its yellow underbelly
as the bloody fruit gets pulled apart to expose its treasure.
Shimmering, crimson rubies all stuck together:
a conglomerate of wine-colored sweetness.
To my pleasure, the jewels release with ease.
Persephone's downfall has become my nectarous treasure.
Garnet-stained fingers bring a handful of precious stones to my lips.
The fruit bursting in my mouth.
I lick my lips, searching for more sweetness remaining from the crimson rubies.
My lips are now stained along with my fingertips.
Permanent color, equal to the permanent urge for more:
Neither recede, even after soap and water douse my garnet-stained hands.

Nothing can compare to this heavenly fruit.
Godly Ambrosia sent down from the clouds .
To bless our lips, our hands, and anything they touch.

BIANCA TODINI, GRADE 9
SILVER KEY IN POETRY

Lavender-Colored Glasses

The sky still sleeps when my eyes open.
My alarm rings in my ears.
Mindlessly, I get ready and leave.
Only then, the sky begins to stir.

I arrive at my destination
Cold winds push me towards a large door
Inside I am led up high, to the ceiling of a warehouse,
A bridge above the ground.
Below me, people scatter in unison, pushing tall metal carts of flowers,
a raging sea of color and floral aromas
35 million flowers.....
I can't quantify numbers such as these;
they become background music.
I can only take in so much at a time.
My senses overloaded with beauty and surplus.

A cart of lavender, thousands of bundles, races before my eyes
Leaving a trail of sweet scent behind them.
I follow the trail blindly, letting my nose lead the way.
Their smell puts me in a periwinkle trance.

I am suspended in space,
A bubble floating up and up.
Far from life on Earth
I watch the world shrink as I rise towards her.

She is awake now, I fear I have woken her.
Her bright eyes blink at me.
They are stars, glittering in a navy sky.

She fills my head with sweet dreams.
They roll off her tongue like warm honey,
Putting me back to sleep,
Suffusing me with amaranthine dreams and a lilac reality.
Suddenly, Icarus's curse hits me like a nightmare during a peaceful slumber.
The bubble pops as I am transported back down to Earth.

I hit the ground and blink away tears.
I miss her comforting words and embrace.
So I stare out, onto the sea of stems

And try to be satisfied with the what if ahead of me.

Maybe tonight I will be reunited with her, but until dark I shall wait,
daydreams must suffice for now.

ISABELLA TODINI, GRADE 12
HONORABLE MENTION
SENIOR WRITING PORTFOLIO: CITY/WOMAN

La Serenissima (a Haibun)

“Elsewhere eventually caught up and had their own doomsday.”*

The Grand Canal appears to me as an old woman. Her words are carried by the gondolas, winding roads of water creating syncopated sound waves. Her voice clouds the sky in the morning as cool fog stains my skin with her tales. Against my ears her story laps, aqueous tones that drip-drop from the laundry basking in the rising sun. She says:

*This is a world where
Seafoam seeps into the sky,
And the walls bleed paint.*

Each fingertip a candle, each candle a flame alight with gas that melts into midnight prayer for a world now lost. The woman locks and unlocks her doors as the *vaporetti* pass under each bridge, waits for each lock to lift. Her tongue is foreign, dips and swoons with the crests of the waves.

*Horizon blurry
With blue-green glass and toy boats
Made of cobblestones.*

In brilliant sun-crystals the woman's eyes divide across the ever-expanding lagoon. I look down and find I can walk on water; the magic of the woman seems to be rubbing off. Her magic is finite, however, and without warning the sunshine dissipates. Her voice falls into rain.

*City of water
Drowned by ships that glide through its
Elegant canals.*

If the woman's tears could level the lagoons that wash over her body, her city, she would, I can be sure. If the woman's breath could cleanse herself, her world, of the venom that snakes through the cracks in the stone, she would, I can be sure. If the woman's love could bring back the warmth once present in her cheeks, her planet, she would, I can be sure.

*Larissa Sansour, *In Vitro*. Venice Biennale 2019.

The Black Cat (or, Amsterdam)

A black cat crossed my path in Amsterdam,
And I wondered
If every time I set the salt down flat on the table
And unbroke mirrors for every seven years of bad luck that I'd had,
I wondered if perhaps my luck was buried in this cat,
All black save for tiny white paws.

The paws were the 'perhaps',
The snow-dipped whipped cream
On the Black Forest cake of sin.
They were the sunbeams heating the pavement
And tickling my nose with warmth and moisture.
Just as the rain reached its hands out to caress the concrete,
The rainbows painted in technicolor paradox.

And what of Amsterdam?
Of the city of water and wheels?
Of movement, of progress?
The cat jumped from doorstep to doorstep,
Silent as a windmill on a windless day
Until it called out to me
With a guttural scratch of a meow.

The black cat with white 'perhaps' paws was writing its own luck,
Telling me to pick up the pen and scratch the papyrus
Until the ink bled and flooded even the furthest fields and wetlands.

I decided the black cat with 'perhaps' paws would be called Amsterdam from now on.
And Amsterdam's perhaps would tip-toe its way along the streets,
Making sure to step on each cobblestone with only one paw,
Making sure that each path that was crossed was rewritten and explored,
Making sure that Amsterdam's perhaps was not dirtied or spoiled
But rather, that the black cat's white paws remained clean and unburdened.

Polis

Stand and wait.
Board the train.
Pick your way through the wall
Of one by one by one,
Packed to the brim,
Each just like the last.

In the city we are many and we are alone.
Anonymous unity,
Guilty by association,
Silenced by the crescendo of voices
Filling the space
Until the walls threaten to burst
Like a balloon inflated by small lungs
With one breath too many.

The city of ;
A faceless world.
The walls know no shapes or places,
Only stillness and commotion,
The scraping inhale and empty exhale.

Stand and wait.
Get off the train.
Fight with the walls of the city
To scratch and scrawl your name.
Whether dignity or fame
The walls may hide what you seek.

To the Pomegranate Woman

Pomegranate woman,
Unfurl your tightly crossed arms and let me crawl in.
Hold me in an embrace bound by silken threads,
Nestle me amongst your sisters who lie up high, clutched in the palms of the tree.
Your rough and tough exterior scratches the fingers that rip you from your branch.
Teach me how to use my red-hot fury to hold fast to my own trunk.

Your sparkling seeds decorate the solemn dark sky.
Show me how to shine as if Sun and Moon were my mothers, too.
Your aunts are Ocean and Sky; through tempests and torrents
They wish me winds of pomegranate womanhood,
Breezes that dance and sing amongst the trees.

Between your fingers you hold a delicate seed.
You squeeze each seed, soft at first, then sudden and strong.
I watch you watch the blood-juice burst and drip onto my arm.
The crimson liquid blossoms and spreads,
Bright against my innocent skin.

Pomegranate woman turns me to pomegranate, turns me to woman.

Yarn of Youth

“My love,” she said, and stroked my head.
“Your bed is warm and the table’s set.
It’s far too late for you to leave just yet.”
So from her palm we shared a meal
of health and heart and home and heat.
She sang me songs of plums and sugar-sweets,
Spun stories of lavender fields and dried tea.

That night I slept and dreamed a dream
Which seemed to dance around my bed.
This sunny dream told many tales
That tumbled round me and assured,
In tones just like her silky words,
That soon enough the time would come,
And when that time would truly come,
I would not face it without fear,
But rather with a dreamer’s ear.

And soon I drifted further off
Till all that danced were mindless thoughts
And milky shadows calmed my eyes
(the kind you see before sunrise).
When I awoke the world had changed;
My mother’s voice had gone away.
“Perhaps,” I thought, “I ought to leave.”
“Not yet,” she said, or so I believe.

Que Podría Pasar

Caramel corduroy desire melts your form.
Velvet love, turned to concrete,
Sings songs of immortality.
We are alone, but not by ourselves.
Your poison-gold touch calls like the sea,

While porcelain sighs calm my fear.

Eccentric summer brewed between days of immortality
And naked champagne devoured by our fear.
The drunk goddess screams of concrete
Loneliness, her broken-dancing form
In rhythm with the smoke-star falling in the sea.
Meanwhile, through the blush, we can't see ourselves,

Masked by a silent heart shut out in fear.
We are a thousand languid sculptures left to ourselves,
Living in the fervent anatomy of our unquenched form.
Beauty never tastes clear, nor concrete,
But even still you whisper worship to the sea
And tell me your dreams of immortality.

The rose moon continues to trudge through the sea,
Just as her beams have heaved through spring in fear
Of leaving her garden in the hands of humans like ourselves.
We are still virgin to revolution, blind to immortality
And so we swim through ideals of concrete,
Unable to distinguish between bronze dignity and falsified forms.

Our figures fill as we ink ourselves,
Yearning for logic and paint more than immortality.
In your eyes Eden has come to life, lives in concrete;
I am her image in your telescope pointed from across the sea.
But soon the ocean spray clouds your form,
Death begins to taste stronger than my fear.

My funeral shall smell of the sea,
Shall rhyme like concrete.
A wild nectar will be served to purge our fear,
Leaving us once more alone with ourselves.
As the glass buildings lose their form,
Spend your secrets on me and this futile immortality.

Villanelle

Her lungs are cloudy with her lonesome tears.
The cobblestone glitters with broken-heart shells.
A patchwork smile disappears.

Hidden walls muffle silent cheers
While outside she's deafened by whispering bells.
But her lungs are still cloudy with her lonesome tears

The maelstrom is the water of her fears
Water that drips down the ceiling of the stairwells.
Day after day, a patchwork smile disappears.

Her brush-stroked mask streaks and smears
As night after night her hopeful heart rebels.
Yet her lungs are cloudy with her lonesome tears.

Minutes pass that are longer than years.
Foggy eyes see colors as less than pastels.
A patchwork smile disappears.

She feels the darkness slip through both ears.
She burns from the heat of the flames she quells.
Her lungs are cloudy with her lonesome tears.
A patchwork smile disappears.

Tenuta di Spannocchia (a Haibun)

We clamored down the stairs of the farmhouse, stepped in time to the beat of our laughter. Like the sunlight that spilled over the tops of the trees as it sank towards the ground, we poured out the doorway, a smattering of students on a Sieneſe mountaintop. We walked out into the front garden, and I was deafened by the sound of the crunchy pebbles beneath our feet. I stopped short, consumed by the sweet country air, my eyelashes fluttering butterflies. I felt them fly away while I stood still, reveling in the air that swirled around me. Time changed speed, and all at once the sun set and the sky was a deep indigo, revealing more than an ocean's worth of stars.

A star shot by me,
a whisper of a daydream,
in the cool, dark night.