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.