

Name: Christian Rodriguez

Work title: Boyfriend Material

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

Relationships are a lot like jackets

They're not necessary

and to an outsider they sure look comfortable

To be wrapped around by silk so soft it covers up insecurities

Threads that stitch up scars

Cloth that can work wonders

I knew I wanted one

I knew I wasn't going to cheap out

I didn't want these connections with cheap friendships

I wanted something that was going to keep me warm in my dark hours of life

Something that wasn't going to rip in a light breeze

Something that wasn't going to fade in a wash

Watching these tares slowly heal with strong string

The opening in my heart would finally close

But I could never find one that satisfied my needs

Nothing hugged my skin tight enough

They constantly itched more than they said they would

20% loving and the rest were labeled as other

Other things they didn't want me to know

And so I thought,
If I learned the technique
If I sewed every week we would be woven together
The right hand motions crafting the beginning
It would all be naturally put together with my own two hands
Tailored specifically for your enjoyment
Our love would be finedraw
Secured with high-quality knitting
I'd make sure it's fitting
For an "us" to be sewed together
The threads I spun up until this point would make needlepoint
Our backstory told through back stitches
Even when the hem stitching is finished
The mesh will still need work
I know we'll work it out
I've weaved through obstacles
Resewed my approach to love
So the final product wouldn't fall apart
As the years loosen by
Even when our love has a couple of loose ends
I'd like to preserve it
An ancient textile
These works of art
Connecting to tell a story

Intertwine our lives with one ball of yarn
The patches to match our long journey together
For an “us” to be ironed in history

I thought I would know when I got strung along
The pinches on my skin I thought were part of the process
That patterns wouldn't repeat themselves this time
tares that went unnoticed slowly ripped
Ripped out the place you were supposed to go
Using scissors to cut me off
Now these scars can't be crocheted the same way
And as I look through materials and fabric
The story I fabricated about our perfect story told through art, slowly fell apart
And I still can't fathom the way you left me
The button holes you made still haven't closed properly
Nothing fits quite right ever since that night
I wear protection two sizes bigger
While you doubled down on your feelings for me
Trying your skills on me
While you were out trying on different men
You just couldn't commit to a fashion trend
I guess I was so last season and
You allowed me to overcast
And cast me aside

Being tangled with me wasn't good enough

I tried avoiding this pattern

I still find myself getting hurt the same way

Was our love worn out?

Was my work worth throwing away?

But it doesn't even matter anymore

This sweater that slowly weathered away is just another lesson

Motivation to keep quilting on

Not to quit just because there are some creases

This pain I felt is embroidered in my history

But I was able to salvage the selvage not for you but hopefully for her

You said That I wasn't boyfriend material

That I needed to be a little bigger

That my material made you too comfortable

That I was merely an accessory for your popularity

But I think I finally found someone who likes soft guys

Name: Devin Modia

Work title: Comic Book Love

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

I've always wanted our love to be a comic book

I would replace all the superheroes in Marvel and DC with me

and the Damsels in distress with you

But, in my stories, you were the one saving me

For instance, I would pretend I was Green Lantern and you were my ring

It was the closest I got to you being wrapped around my fingers

I was obsessed with the comic

I guess it translated because I felt like a superhero around you,

Minus the animated suit - I don't think green flatters me

Or I would pretend you were my hammer and I was Thor

It was the closest I got to you being attracted to me

With you in my hand, we could be gods

There's no real lightning, but is it weird that I still feel sparks when I see you?

I'd love to be Batman and for you to be Catwoman

They say opposites attract,

And I don't see anything more opposite than a bat and a cat,

so I guess it works out?

There's no one else I'd rather share my bat cave with

I want our love to be Spider-Man and MJ

I wouldn't have to knock on your front door at eleven o'clock at night -

I could just climb your wall

Which I guess sounds creepy?

We could sneak out the house to go webslinging

I want that different multiverse kind of love,

The kind of love where I'll find you no matter

what Earth we're on

It doesn't matter because you're my world

I want our love to be Superman and Lois Lane -

You give me super strength

I promise you I'll be respectful with my X-ray vision

Besides, my powers won't work around you

You're my Kryptonite,

You're the only person I'd want to be vulnerable around

I want our love to be like The Incredibles,

A big family with crazy kids

I'll be a much thinner version of Mr. Incredible,

And Elastigirl fits you because you're so easy with change,
You are incredible

The most realistic comic book to us is *Archie*,
I'm Archie and you are my Veronica,
I've chased you throughout our whole book
I've never been fond of the Betty's

We'll have that old-school love,
The type of love where I'll open a door for you,
Pull a chair out for you,
Send you paragraphs when you go to bed,
Give you my jacket when you're cold,
The milkshake with two straws in it kind of love
I want that love where I'm under the covers with
a flashlight, reading
Clinging onto your voice
Waiting for your next word

I want that comic book love
I want to know you from the front cover to the back cover
I want to fill the empty pages with us

My heart bleeds for you

The same way the pen on the page does

I want the "To be continued..." sign at the end of

the book kind of love

There will be no secrets between us -

The dialogue boxes at the top of the page take care of that

I want us to have pointless conflict and resolution,

For every day to be our climax

For our biggest problem to be a paper cut

That the only supervillain will be the mortgage on our home

I want our sequel to be me finding you in another life,

But I wouldn't want any other book than you

Most of all I want to make our own story

Our comic book will have a TV show

It'll be aired for the rest of our lives,

Through sickness and health

We'll go #1 on the charts because you are my #1

People say comic books aren't really books because of the pictures,

But they are books. Because I can picture us together.

To be continued!

Name: Devin Modia

Work title: Dear Abuela

Category: Poetry

Award: Gold Key

Abuela,

It's been a long time

I want you to know

I've been getting straight A's

like you told me to

I still save my money instead of spending

I pray every night

I'm still writing like I promised to

I'm trying to stay on a straight path

Like you taught me

I reminisce about our last times together

I've lost the scent of your home cooked meals

How the smell of sofrito and Cuban coffee

had been replaced by bleach,

A far downgrade from the sweet aroma of fabuloso

that welcomed me into your happy home

I've been looking after your house like you asked me to

I can only pray that the new homeowners will water your plants,

Respecting their elegance,

Hoping they would feed the Venus flytrap

while you were trapped in the nursing home

Hoping they would cut the weeds

the same way my family weeded you out of the house

Hoping they would trim the bushes

the same way I got to trim your hair

That they would cut the branches off the trees

the same way your olive branch was cut too soon

That they would pick the mangos

and appreciate the fruits of your labor

I remember the first day I visited you in the nursing home

The man next door never had any visitors

He'd watch as people went in and out of rooms

So lonely, even the nurses didn't pay him a visit

So neglected, that the only words that came out of his mouth spoke out of desperation

asking, "Are you here to see me?"

So unnoticed that even I didn't pay attention to him

I would replace

"hello's" with excuses to him - after all, I was just there to see you

I didn't want you to end up like him with no visitors

Like him whose family no longer calls

Where nobody listens

So I'd ask you to

tell me stories of your past and marvel as you told me

You were my broken record who had no record of ever telling me

the story you said a thousand times,

It never got old,

But you did

Your happy-ever-after didn't end with a castle

Your prince was merely a nurse

His noble steed being a hospital bed

You would wander,

Chasing after your memory

The walls creaking as your bones did

You would talk to ghosts of your past to pass the time,

Recalling the sad times rather than the good

Remembering what your husband did to you

He didn't treat you like the queen you are,

But I called,

Hoping I could get more lessons

or stories out of you while I still could

"It's not worth living this long," you'd cry

"Don't say that, Abuela, people love you,"

And all you'd say back is, "Let me out,"

Or “What were we talking about again?”

Like you were stuck in your own mind,

Living in a Groundhog Day

Until the day you went underground

The final lesson you taught me was how to write a eulogy

I volunteer at the nursing home,

Even though you aren't there

I admit - It was hard for me to stop ignoring the patient next door

It took all of my patience to humble myself,

But you told me to,

So I stopped ignoring his calls

He was unfair to you, Abuela

Cheated on you more times than you could count

But since you were never able to cheat death,

He was all I had left of you

So when he asked for the 100th time, "Are you here to see me?"

I replied with "Hola, Abuelo, yes - I am."

Name: Devin Modia

Work title: Hard Knock Life

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

'It's the hard knock life,

For us,

It's the hard knock life

For us.'

Imagine a life where no one really does care

When no one knocks at your front door

Where doors keep closing

No one even opening her arms to you

Puzzled by your loneliness,

too many corner pieces of you are missing

You feel cornered

Can't fit in anywhere

It's your soul on the back of a milk carton,

Empty but fresh - you've never been spoiled a day in your life

Young but without the advantages of youth

No riding bike through the neighborhood

No team sports

Kids never stay around long enough for that

You've spent your life searching for home base,

and all you've done is strike out,

You never had a soccer team

Your goals are just dreams anyway

It's like the world is pinning you down,

waiting for you to tap out

No medals in your life,

just metal bed frames rusting

Urine stained sheets

A reminder of the home u-r in

No be-home by sundowns

Here, the moon is always out

No light in your eyes,

innocence is long gone

No one wants to adopt a 13-year-old

That's 13 reasons why

It's a hard knock life

'Stead of treated,

we get kicked!"

"Stead of kisses,

we get tricked,

It's the hard knock life!

No trick-or-treating on Halloween

Masks are always worn at home

The real treat is surviving each day

Malnutrition is the biggest word in your dictionary,

The only magnets on your fridge spell H-E-L-P

You seek nightly refuge under the bed

Putting the covers over your head doesn't hide the fact that society

doesn't see you as worthy

Society has crossed the line with you

No lines on the wall to mark your height

No Hallmark birthday cards

No one to sing you lullabies

No lull in the quiet of the night

No one interested in what you have to say

No penny for your thoughts,

No coins for the wishing well

If you had a nickel for every time

you were told you would amount to nothing,

perhaps then you'd have a chance to dream

For all the times people walked past you looking for a baby

Every time you got attached to a temporary family

If you had a dime for every pro-life

movement that didn't care for the living, breathing baby

after they fought for its birth,

you'd be rich

Rich enough to buy yourself a happy home

People can only imagine what it's

like to be a number in the system

A system that raised the bar of

corruption so high, you are forced to play limbo,

'Santa Claus, we never see

Santa Claus, what's that?

Who's he?'

Santa Claus is the final reminder that you're unloved

When you're old enough, you realize

his lack of visiting was not because you were naughty

You discover everything you knew was a big lie

You used the coal in the stocking to keep the room warm

Everyone else's hearts were cold

And while you didn't make your bed,

you're forever forced to lie in it

Alone

Knock knock

Who's there?

(Pause in silence)

Name: Christian Rodriguez

Work title: Father Folklore

Category: Poetry

Award: Gold Key

I love urban legends

One of my favorite urban legends is the one about fathers because Father folklore goes through many iterations

Mothers will tell their kids Daddy went to buy milk

To buy more time

Until the narrative turns sour

And when her children are at the age where gullibility expires

She'll say Daddy made some bad decisions

She'll say Daddy got locked behind bars

Frames the conviction as a misunderstanding

Paints the picture that daddy wanted to see his children grow up

It's the kind of story that gives you hope

That one day, he'll come home

My mother told me my father left when I was born

Which is a parallel phrase to my father left because I was born

I've tricked myself into thinking that one day he'll come back

I'm filled with hope when I hear the doorbell ring

Hoping the person on the other side

Is the man that is responsible for my existence

I've heard if you say his first name loud enough before you go to bed
You'll wake up with him right at your side
But I wake up from the same dream
Forced to live a nightmare I've been stuck in for the past 17 years
My life is lucid dreaming, except I can't control the outcome
I have had to learn the definition of a man
From hand-me-down books
With outdated knowledge of the world
I've been treating my feelings like an urban legend
Stomaching my sorrows and making them a myth
Creating an alter ego to put on just to go on with my day
Happiness just seems like an emotion someone made up
And "I'm fine" are two words placed together to politely answer a question
I'm now questioning if it's healthy to still wait for my father to come home
I've interpreted this story my own way to swallow it like a pill
And the side effects are more than I can handle
I'm wondering if my anger was inherited or if I just learned it
The same way I learned to throw a punch when a classmate made fun of the way I threw a
football
I made their face a black stain
A shade that matches my internal scars
Who knew absence would be this critical
Dad has become a forbidden word for my sacred tongue
And dared not to be uttered in my presence

I've created the perfect response if he ever came back into my life and asked for forgiveness

I'd tell him my answer was hidden away

It was lost treasure I buried for him to find

And when he opens up the chest with nothing inside, I would say

Aren't you proud of me, Dad?

For giving you false hope

The same way I hoped you come home

Aren't we just one big happy family of disappointment?

We're sticking to tradition

I come from a long line of fathers who abandon the family they created

But I will break this curse

So my legacy won't become another tall tale

You will be nothing but a bedtime story for my children

And when they ask, "Dad, will you be here when I wake up?"

I'll say, "Of course I will."

Because it's just an urban legend

Name: Graceanne Smith

Work title: Just Write

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

any minor inconvenience and my mind slips..

some call it a hobby, I call it a distraction

some call it talent, I call it the easy way out

don't think, just write.

it's funny because any teacher would tell me to do this same task and it would just be crickets...

I can write for what seems like an eternity,

ten minutes slowly become an hour, suddenly becoming 3.

my emotions may hit like a category 5 hurricane, but it's okay...

I'll just put my feelings into words and call it art.

don't cry, just write.

my tears are to blame for the errors in my sentences.

sometimes it gets hard to see the words and it all comes pouring out of my mind-

the tears pour with them as if they go hand in hand.

I often wonder about why I express myself this way...

is it love — *or what I thought was love* —

that did this to me?

was the occurrence of the past the key to this gift?

don't feel, just write.

maybe if I type the words fast enough the pain will follow it...

maybe if I wasn't so immature I would've been able to prevent the pain in the first place...

maybe if I wasn't so blind...

maybe if I wasn't so forgiving...

things may be different for me-

then the pain wouldn't have to come out like this-

and my talent would still be my own secret.

....so shhh

don't share, just write.

Name: Rebecca Elitzur

Work title: Leave

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

I would leave right now

But what if my window

Won't open

And my Dad won't be

Down the hall

Ready with pliers

And tools and his hands

To fix all my problems

What would I do when I walk

Into my new home

And the doormat that we've

Always had

Isn't there to take the

Dirt off my shoes

And who would help me with

My social life

When my Mom isn't sitting

On my bed at night

Listening to me vent and

There to make the world right

And how would I feel when

A new group chat is made

The same as the last

Just without me in it

And what if

The ice cream shop

Down the street

Shut down

Without me and my friends

There to support them

What would I do

When I want to go on a walk

Like I did with my family

On those warm summer nights

But now I must go all alone

Without the security of

The familiar streets

And my parents' hands

Shielding me from danger

So therefore I can't leave

Because

I don't know

I just

Can't

Name: Avery Redlich

Work title: american classics

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

one of these things

is not like the other

how's my breath?

he whispers

to his friend

while eyeing a girl

near the window

he reaches into his pack

to pick out peppermint

and plop it

onto his tongue

TRIDENT

reads the mint-marked

wrapper

left carelessly

beneath the desk

I guess there are worse things

to be left carelessly

beneath desks

one of these things

is not like the other

they clink and clang

against the bottom

of his cello case

ah, the rebellious teenage spirit

he sneaks the canned beer

around during the day

for a parking-lot party

set after his four o'clock

band-practice

did it spill? can they smell it?

no, teachers now have other things

to worry about

besides underage drinking

teachers have other things

to worry about

being hidden in backpacks

one of these things

is not like the other

gameday!

his duffel is adorned

with pins

and stickers

and youthful joy,

it's stuffed with

shoulder pads

a jersey with Patrick Mahomes'

number "15"

and a brand-new helmet

with a *CHIEFS* logo

painstakingly stuck on

with double-sided tape

if only a football was

the most American thing

in a school-bag

one of these things

is not like the other

shiny wrappers

sticky fingers

a tongue turned to

raspberry-red
the candy casing crinkles
and wrinkles in the
inner pocket,
a sweet treat
when the bell rings
feeling like “a kid” again
the bag unzips
and he reaches in—
for a dum dum
lolly

one of these things
is not like the other

it’s heavy
hidden in the pencil case
it rubs against his

CLASS OF '24

sweatshirt,
loose sheets of
loose leaf.

it scratches

his TI-84

graphing calculator
and his AP U.S. History notebook
nestled near the cartridge.
little bits of its powder
taint the peppermint packaging,
the never-used helmet,
even the shiny *BUD LIGHT* labels,
and poison
the sugar on the lollipops.
it's heavy
in its weight
what lies in its wake
as it lies in the backpack
of a secondary classroom

why is this thing
in a school
with the others?

Name: Avery Redlich

Work title: do you wanna walk under my broken umbrella

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

do you wanna walk

under my broken umbrella

and risk the rain

on your shoulder

just for a chance

to brush mine

do you wanna take cover

under my weak protector

because you know I'll

protect you

from the raindrops

myself

do you wanna stand

under my flimsy shade

knowing that chilling water

may trickle down

your neck

but my breath

so near

will keep you warm
and do I never
plan to use
another umbrella
because I know I can handle
a little rain
if I have the sun
at my side
“what good is a broken umbrella”
puddles still splash
at naysayers’ shoes
their skies remain grey
and cloudy
but I don’t
mind the haze
and you don’t seem
to mind it either

Name: Katrina Modesti

Work title: Middle Passage

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

This is the story of the Middle Passage.

It was all so nightmarish, but worth being told:

I am a ship,

I see to it that sugar and tobacco reaches Europe

Iron, cloth, alcohol, guns and gunpowder reaches Africa

and Africans to the Americas.

I do not sleep at night,

my destination is much too far for rest

I sleep less should the sharks follow my stern

I was once accompanied by the grace of dolphins

Now the sharks follow me in a funeral procession.

I can hear the screams at night

And during the day

I scream myself at dusk!

I have seen more people thrown starboard than the days I've been on this earth

I am not a ship of war

So, why have I become a pawn in this game of violence?

Why is the sea complacent in its silence!

I wish to not make this delivery

Can the wind find no compassion- rip my sails apart?

Must it whisper to me the names of all those enslaved?

The white man tells them they will work in the fields

The black man cannot hear, he is sealed in the hull

peeled... apart from a land he will never know again

He will not be allowed to heal

I can hear the women, too

who fear the white men are cannibals

Whose hunger extend beyond their stomachs

Call me the Boat of Misery

In the span of one night

My cargo hold has held more prayers than you will ever pray in your life.

My cargo hold, is a cradle of death

There goes another body over the side of my railing-

I am so sorry the silent sea was a better option than my silent screams.

The only water I wish to hold is that of the ocean

Will the sea not drown me?

But if swallowed by the sea, who will ever see the nature of man?

If the salt water that rubs my wounds does not wish to hold testament

Then the blood stained on my planks will tell my story

There is no more room for my name to be made of glory

But I was made for this purpose.

You can't scratch me out of history

Who will know that life's hardest lessons are born in pain

And so it remains that I was here

I was the vessel to generations of injustice

Don't let my story get washed away by waves of guilt

Name: Crystal Robinson

Work title: My Hair is NOT Social Justice

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

Social justice, defined in terms of

Distribution which includes all of the above

Wealth opportunity and privilege

So when I wake up in the morning and decide to walk out with an Afro

I'm not doing it to provide you with tutelage

I don't want to see an out turned fist

I don't want to hear it's not about black and white

And yes my Afro is a show of "black excellence"

But for me

When I wake up with a matted bed hair in the morning

When I'm getting ready for school

When I grab a spray bottle to water my hair like a plant

When I wait for hair to curl up

My Afro is just an Afro

Not a statement about Black Lives Matter

Not a representation for people to stare at

It's my go to style

My favorite way to wear my hair

It's my Afro

My hair

Name: Alice Machado Bernert

Work title: You, Simply You

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

You, simply you

I watch you from the shadows

I carry you in my heart,

I tolerate your painful presence

as you tolerate my heart.

I look at you,

I watch you from a far,

Anger fills my bones,

I look at you,

your sad eyes,

your longing stare.

I love you, I say

a morsel for the starved.

This love, that we must cherish

This bond, made from one look

Since I was born.

We fight as if I were the villain

And you the hero.

As if my accomplishments were none,

To your extraordinary knowledge,

Because you know best.

This ongoing fight

Was set to never end,

No apologies,

Simply a change of subject

A new day might come by,

Our grey moment,

with storms in our eyes,

and tears from our sky.

A curse in our home,

Yet, I run to you

I never let you go,

A cycle we don't want to end

I cannot reject it,

So I say it back,

I love you-

We hold onto our heartbreak,

in the name of protecting ourselves.

Our peace, paralyzed by time

Our sympathy, set in ruins

I'm hanging from the sky,

like a marionette,

following your wishes,

even though in the end,

all i am is a girl falling,

from that same sky,

the one I've been so comfortable in.

We stand at the byline,

With recurring screams,

That tore our home apart

The worst chapter of our lives,

our shining home,

With colorful walls,

That became dull and dreary,

Our now grey house.

The love we share,

Slowly dying

Sliding between our fingers.

The nine supposed lives,

Turned into a short lived one.

That keeps torturing our souls.

We both know,

they all know

we act as if it's unknown.

How our pain walks through our home.

How it rests on our sofa, sleeps in our bed, dines at the kitchen table.

I love you, you say

You have always known best.

I struggle to say it back

I no longer live starved

Begging for scraps of your attention

But, I'm a poor liar

The hurt we share comes in waves

We will hurt tomorrow,

As we did yesterday.

But I will forever love you.

My dearest,

My mother,

I love you.

Name: Savanna Osei

Work title: Maternal Lines

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

Don't you hear the voices?

In the places where edges meet

Aren't the maddening whispers drenching your soul

Don't you feel them quaking the ground beneath your feet?

I looked down and saw the cracks in the sidewalk

Twisted children's rhymes racing through my head

And I fell.

I fell flat on my face to avoid that crack in the sidewalk

That rip in the fabric of all things good that baited me to step on it

And break my mother's back

The back that carries the weight of the world, *my world*

That void hidden under suburban society knows me well

It's heard my cries

It is the cause of sick mothers, sad daughters

And tear-soaked maternal lines

It's sly

It's sick

It

Lies

Lies

Lies

It's that tumor, inches from her heart

It's hands that were held being dragged apart

And if you asked me of its wicked origins

I don't think I could even begin to start

It's the Spanish moss that haunts trees hung with rope

It's the scythe that severs angels' wings

It's row after row after row of cotton

It's the cloth shoved down your throat, silencing your screams

And I think I know

I will never be free

Name: Ashlyn Gao

Work title: Mathematics

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

1+1=2

What's plus??

It's when you put something together, my father says

Together?

Yes.

What does that mean?

You and me are father and daughter

And with you, I am happy

1-1=0

What's minus??

It's when you take something apart, my mother says

So it's broken?

Yes, broken.

What does that mean?

You and me are mother and daughter

But without my daughter

I am nothing

$$\underline{1/1 = 1}$$

Who shares a cake with themselves?

Uh, me, my sister says

That's why I left my friends!

Uh, what?

Uh, what do you mean, what?

When you're alone,

You can have all the cake you want!

And eat it too?

Of course, darling, and eat it too.

...

$$\underline{d/dx[1] = 0}$$

How does that work??

'Cause one is constant, my boyfriend says

Constant?

Yes darling, constant

(Like me)

What?

What?

I said nothing

Fine

I guess I'm the derivative of one

Because I'm never leaving your side

I'm gagging, shut up

I'm trying to be romantic

The integral of 1 is $x + C$

Who defined C?

You define C, my teacher says

C is anything

Anything?

Yes, anything.

So there's no answer?

No, quite the opposite

The answer lies not only in x

But the infinite Cs that lie behind it

undefined

I look in the mirror

With my father I am happy.

Without my mother I am nothing.

With my sister I am myself.

With my boyfriend I am constant.

With my teacher I am anything.

I am

Infinite.

Name: Giuliana Leon-Velarde

Work title: Summer Nights

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

Take me back to summer nights
with freedom salted air,
ice cream cones by tennis courts,
and short walks by the beach where
sand and sea breed ecstasy.

Eating age old recipes
of carne asada
and ceviche.

Take me back to summer nights
with star-speckled skies,
long Disney movie marathons,
and small white-coated lies.

Playing *telephono malogrado*
under the street lamp light,
and giggling all night long
till' all the air left our lungs.

Take me back to simple nights

with gentle honeyed dreams,
big chocolate covered coffee cups,
and short not-thought-out schemes.
Wondering what life will one day be
when we're all grown up
and wishing time could sprint
and let us leave.

Take me back to when I didn't know
growing is not what it seemed.
Take me back and make time slow,
make it last until eternity.

Name: Giuliana Leon-Velarde

Work title: Till My Bones Turn To Dust

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

Loving you is easy

Loving you is ice cream

under the summer sun

Loving you is filling

It's feelings

I never thought I'd experience

Loving you fixed my bleeding heart

And nothing hurts more

than being apart from you

We might be young and naïve

But I'm willing to bet in the impossible forever

I'll write a novel to our future

dedicate each sentence to your smiles

Write prayers to your lips

Trace all our memories in permanent marker

I thought I was smarter

Than to set a future in stone

But loving you is simple

It's automatic

They call it problematic

But its never erratic

This world is unjust

And we'll get looks of disgust forever

But I'll love you till my bones turn to dust

They'll try to tear us apart,

Until they can see what they want to

Until they could call us friends

Confuse us for sisters

Ask us where we're hiding our misters

They'll try to keep us apart

But our love is insisting

Resistant to the hatred

Persistent despite their ignorance

Our love is prideful

So it's doubtful that they'll

Ever

leave a dent on us.

Name: Calvin Fleurinor

Work title: Crocodile Tears

Category: Poetry

Award: Silver Key

A crocodile with a tie sat in the front row of a church,
In remembrance for a woman known as his grandmother.

The whole kingdom payed a visit,
from the packs, the flocks, the clans, the murders,

To gather around a woman in a box,
Painted to look alive,
Who they knew to be his grandmother.

Lil' Miss Elephant's makeup tries to conceal her tears as if conducting espionage,

For the crocodile's mother...
It already gave up.

But for the crocodile with a tie,
Knowing that woman since birth,
The woman painted fake,
The woman in that box,

The woman he knew as his grandmother,

He wonders why he couldn't cry,

And how he should fake it.

His thoughts halted at a red light as the pastor took the podium,

The big black bear known for roaring the word of God,

And preaching a hallelujah,

Spoke so delicately as if the flowers near the casket,

Could cut a hair off his fur,

As if the portraits of that woman,

Were still breathing,

And singing in the choir with the zebra sisters,

And the certainty of her survival wasn't so black and white,

and bleak.

"... She was a great woman," The black bear said,

As if confessing a crime

to the jury of Sunday church goers who just last week would've treated this day as a blessing,

And not a day of mourning,

The bear gestures then announces the viewing.

The front row rose in unison as if they're all linked by rope,
with a little slack on where the crocodile sit before he too cautiously stands up,
Funneling to see someone's fate on display,

It was uncomfortable.

First it was the crocodile's aunt,
The business woman,
The professional,
The Economic maestro,

Watching her battle her tears is like seeing titanium shatter like glass,
But in an instant
She pulled her head up, and walked out of line.

Next his mother

Who was an ice sculpture,
Until she touched the woman's hand,
Her emotions thaws violently as if it was a hornets nest swatted,

Screams forecasting her tears going category 5

Her heart, begging on its knees,

She's pleading, "God no please!"

She never tries to make these outburst publicly...

And she just,

Kept, on, going,

and going,

With her back hunched like a dead worm,

Her emotions ice skated

frictionless downhill her cheek

Until she waddles out of line.

Now him,

The crocodile,

Face to face to that woman in the box

He knows as his grandmother,

and yet doesn't feel attached to,

just staring at her painted face

pretending to be alive

Here is where someone would feel remorse,

Here is where the pain of her death causes bleeding in his mind,

But he didn't feel anything,

Which made him feel guilty,

That when faced someone's final cymbal crash

Their conclusion-

When there's not a drum beat

A heartbeat signalling

That they might be okay,

That this just felt like another Sunday,

He walks out of line.

To sit in the front row of a church,

In remembrance of his grandmother,

This time fearing God,

Because if he was real, his grandma would exist in heaven disappointed,

If he was real, his Grandma would know her love was one-sided,

If he was real, she would know more about the crocodile than he likes to admit,

He dawned on this,

His tie felt a bit tight,

Then his eyes water,

Maybe now he cries crocodile tears.

Name: Calvin Fleurinor

Work title: I Won't Miss You

Category: Poetry

Award: Gold Key

A while ago,

At family dinner,

My sister announced that she will be enlisting in the military.

So on the last day,

When her yellow bedroom became a bit less vibrant,

She asked, "Would you miss me?"

Next to the open door,

Seeing the wind impatiently tug on my sister's new cap,

I stared at her as if she got my order wrong,

And I wanted to tell her "No."

That missing you would be the most selfish thing I could do,

Because missing you is just missing my memories,

And I'll never hold my sister to the expectations of my imagination,

I'll simply smile that you happened.

Like cherry blossoms,
When they bloom, they're a spectacle
And as you marvel, you forget that they are ephemeral-

That you, are ephemeral.

That you are an impatient jack-in-box
fueled by chicken wings and electric guitars,

That, if you were to disappear for the last time,
You'd want me to be as brave as when you said goodbye.

So I won't miss you,
I'll cherish you,
With a temple made of fake marble
Like our counter-top where we dine like royals
Eating spaghetti off of paper plates,

I'll sing your name like a 1 man choir
Telling legends about Alexandra the Great,

I'll look inside your room and pretend it's a museum,
Uncovering ancient artifact

Like our 5th grade arts and craft project,

Or your Pikachu plush,

I'll look at your bed sheets and think its a mummy,

Remembering the now ghost

Who haunts me with her hugs

I'll, analyze your finished perfume you stole from mom and smell a scent that manifests a marriage in my mind,

I'm, reaching my hand out but I'm just grabbing a hologram-

Running my hands through smoke screens

As you running around my head like a halo

Or Saturn rings,

You wont be here and yet your presence would take so much space

That I'll feel claustrophobic

like a haunted Halloween escape room-

I'll, escape my dreams and wake up to a nightmare

So I'll,

I'll, fight wars like you,
I'll be on the front lines capturing
Alpha 8 times on my school's report card,
As you sail around the world and prove it's round 8 over,

I'll brush my teeth
As vigorous as you brushing your arms against leaves
Training for a conflict I'll hope you'll never perceive,

I'll ask out my crush
With the precision of a sharpshooter,
But I'll still miss like a Stormtrooper,

All to let you know
that I'm okay.

So when you come home...

All you have to prove is that you are you
And that you are my sister,

And as I speak I realize that maybe I'm am a bit selfish,

Pretending to be as calm as a ballerina surgeon preparing pufferfish

I'll still miss you with dense love that requires a pressurized tank,

I'll miss you so much I see you in other people's faces,

I'll miss you so bad but when I call Sherlock Holmes he tells me it's a cold case,

No I cannot miss you-

But, I'll miss you so frequently your voicemail will run out of breath

It would be too painful-

to miss you, like I'm searching for the last popcorn in a bag

That's what I wanted to tell her,

Alex.

So when she asked,

"Would you miss me?"

I stared at her as if we met for the first time

and said,

"Yeah, just a little."

Name: Noa Dobzinski

Work title: Their Hands, My Hands

Category: Poetry

Award: Gold Key

I light a candle in my room, braid my loose curls, take a sip of water

By now these tasks are of second nature, daily activities that bring me peace

And suddenly, I think to my grandparents, my great-grandparents, my great-great grandparents

In whom the same actions were just as ingrained

The hands of my ancestors strike the matches, plait the challah dough, bless the fruit of the vine

They light the Shabbat candles, eat the bread, drink the wine

And I realize no matter how far detached I feel from my homeland

In my hands I carry generations of family within me

Tradition and legacy.

My culture is embedded within, an inseparable part of my being, tangible, holy within my grasp

My soul, my mind, my hands

My roots run deep, even when I feel my connection becoming shallow, I remind myself *I can reach out and touch them*

I am a vessel, adorned with the imprints of my lineage, carrying the torch of tradition.

Tomorrow, I'll take out our silver candlesticks and our embroidered challah covering

And I'll light the candles

I won't let their flame be extinguished.

I'll braid the challah just as I braid my hair

Over under, over under, over under (don't pull too hard)

The hands of my ancestors reach out to hug me everyday as I am enveloped in the embrace of generations past

And in the flickering glow of the candle's flame, I feel their eternal warmth.

Name: Deren Akin

Work title: World Without Eyes

Category: Poetry

Award: Gold Key

World without eyes

You look at me,

as if I am someone entirely different than your kind.

I ask you,

Why the disdain?

You tell me a mere face never betrays,

it holds the traces of a thousand.

Oh to live in a world without eyes,

where perception didn't rely on the concept of visualization.

Lines are only drawn where you can see them,

somewhere on the verge of actualisation.

You gather a little here and a little there,

you push the unaccustomed the furthest away.

For in your tongue it seems,

that native defines what only comes from the land below your feet.

We've become the violent creatures,

the shadow behind your glees,

those that taint your translucent society,

the image behind the muted seemingly perfect glass,

for you only put only what needs to be seen the closest,
the rest discarded,
unnoticed,
unwanted,
in a place far behind the pane.

Is the thing you're afraid of,
what the truth speaks?

You do not care to say my name,
so much hatred you hold for mere vowels.

For the simplest vibration of a chord holds fragments of a million,
a reminder that time never forgets,
it lingers within every crease of our skin,
the roughness of our hands.

Still I speak in your tongue,
I flow in accordance to the motion of your lands,
I flow past the curses you spoke,
the curses not only towards me but to the centuries of love that thrived,
to plant my feet upon this ground,
to live in a land that will not say my name.

They say the heart never beats the same,
it pounds in accordance to the motion of the soul.

When a child cries,
still it is a child of this earth,
and a mother shall love the pieces of herself the same,

she sacrifices her dignity,
for the sake of her children to be held higher above her head.

You seek to find the outlier,
the one that sticks out in the facade of generations.

I who have forgotten my name,
mutter letters in your accent,
the words that will sound right to you,
the sound that will blend in with the translucent noise.

You smile at me cruelly,
for a face always reveals more than words.

I find myself left to wonder,
What part of me was it that betrayed?

Perhaps it was in my dark brows,
the curve of my nose,
the distance between my eyes,
that you found the outlier.

Or was it the fire igniting in my eyes,
the flame that surpassed the boundaries of physical reality,
that threatened your demeanor?

Oh to live in a world with eyes.

I tell you to open them,
those marvelous glassy orbs,
vision unaffected by the color around those pupils,
reflecting the light of the new age.

The very ground you step on is not one land,
it is part of a world not of the same form and shade.
Choose to look at not only what is in front of you,
but broadly across fifty seas.
Once you meet our gaze,
we will hold it,
with eyes stricken by the ash of the pieces you burnt.
And despite the mist,
and the haze of anguish and longing,
we see the future that lies in the distance,
the world behind the translucent pane of glass,
we see it all,
our vision clear.