



INTRODUCTION

Every year, the *Writer’s Eye* program challenges writers of all ages to create original works of poetry and prose inspired by art on display in The Fralin Museum of Art. Begun in 1986 by docents Carole Armstrong and Valerie Morris, *Writer’s Eye* has become a mainstay of the local school curriculum. The program’s success relies on the efforts of about 40 University student and community docents, as well as the generosity of our dedicated annual donors. This year, docents led eight weeks of tours to introduce students to artwork selected for the competition. By engaging participants in active exploration of the artwork, they elicited thoughtful reactions and dialogue. Through this process of investigation and inquiry, individuals developed ideas that fueled the creative writing process.

While success in the competition is certainly an honor, the true value of *Writer’s Eye* lies in the opportunity it provides for all students to see, talk about, and be inspired by original works of art. 2021 was a unique year as students were welcomed into the museum for the first time since its closure. This year 1,001 individuals participated in *Writer’s Eye* tours, both in-person in the museum and virtually from their own classrooms. The effort and patience expressed by students, writers, teachers, and staff made this new format for *Writer Eye* possible. This continued level of involvement illustrates the importance of this program to individuals all over the central Virginia area—a program that combines the opportunity to experience art with the creative activity of writing.

Contestants submitted entries in four age-related categories: Grades 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 and University/Adult. This year’s judges took great pleasure in reading the imaginative narratives inspired by the nine artworks selected for the contest. This year’s winners had the opportunity to showcase their winning entries at virtual prose and poetry readings. These winners are just a small few of all the students and community members touched by this program.

Our congratulations go to all the contestants whose originality and literary skills are featured here. May this level of participation and quality continue far into the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the *Writer’s Eye* program has grown, so has our need for support. This program would not be possible without generous gifts from a small group of dedicated supporters each year. We would like to thank these donors for their contributions to *Writer’s Eye*.

- Shirley French
- The Thomas Piper Education Endowment
- Edith Warner and the Daniel M. and Wilma T. Horner Foundation
- The Volunteer Board of the Fralin Museum of Art
- Thesa Jolly
- June M. Heintz
- The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation

This is a new format for our *Writer’s Eye* anthology, a digital celebration of this year’s winners. Ekphrastic writing is not a new idea. This year’s winners follow a lineage of writers inspired to translate images into words . And what a selection of images to work with this year: two photographs, one painting, three works on paper, a Tlingit Bentwood box, a local mural, and a bright red skyscraper chair!

This year, *Writer’s Eye* tours occurred in-person at the museum and on Zoom. We’re incredibly grateful to The Fralin staff and volunteers who supported the program by teaching this fall.

Student Docents

David Bass	Maggie Dunbar	Nicole Ralsgård Taube
Meaghan Brennan	Jennifer Ende	Eva Sirotic
Julian Brock	Ashlyn Ferguson	Ella Thomas
Louise Brosnan	Caroline Fulton	Leslie Wade
Greer Buell	Isaac Goldstone	Rebecca Wu
Sarah Carr	Xingyao (May) Gong	Melissa Yeh
Lydia Colwell	Celia Kelty	Caroline Young
Kristen Davidson-Schwartz	Maya Kim	Lily Zabel

Community Docents

Anna Askounis	Margaret Costigan	Jing Shui
Marsha Berger	Jody Esselstyn	Suzanne Tanner
Sarah Bingham	Gay Frix	Emily Willey
Marcia Childress	Anne Harman	
Deborah Cohn	June Heintz	

WRITER’S EYE 2021 JUDGES

Our heartfelt thanks go to the judges listed below, whose thoughtful reading of a tremendous number of entries speaks to their belief in the value of this program. Their enthusiasm for the art and the writing makes this competition possible.

University/Adult Poetry and Prose	Prose, grades 3-5	Prose, grades 6-8
Matthew McLendon	Stephen Margulies	Proal Heartwell
Emma Terry	Erin James	Mark Collins
	Barbara Fuhrman	
High School Poetry and Prose	Poetry, grades 3-5	Poetry, grades 6-8
Derick Olson	Susan Washko	Marsha Berger
Katherine James	Susan Guerrant	Jenny Koster

Writer's Eye 2021

Poetry & Prose
Award Winners



Image:
 Federico Cuatlacuatl
 Mexican, b. 1991
Senyelistli, 2019
 Exterior paint on metal surface, 15 x 40 ft (4.57 x 12.2 m)
 © Federico Cuatlacuatl
 Image credit: The Charlottesville Mural Project
 Located at 1801 Broadway Street, Charlottesville, Virginia
 Image (above):

TAHLIA LONG
1ST PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 3-5
VILLAGE SCHOOL

The Lights of the Night
 Inspired by Sally Mann, *Virginia, Untitled*
 (*Virginia Kudzu*)

The woods dark,
 Hiding creatures inside.
 Only visible by
 The light of the night.

A faint mist, visible only by moonlight,
 Protection for the creatures inside.
 An illusion, used to hide.
 Made by the pale light of night.

The moon and stars shining bright,
 The sky clear and wide,
 Shining with the lights of the night.

A wolf's howl,
 A call of kite,
 A fox's soft growl,
 Only heard in the light of the night.

From the outside sad,
 But on the inside,
 Loved by many creatures,
 But they are only seen in the calm light of night.

All these things,
 All parts of the forest,
 Only seen in the light of the night.

KATHERINE BARTH
2ND PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 3-5
PEABODY SCHOOL

Desert Day
 Inspired by Federico Cuatlacuatl, *Senyelistli*

Sun burning on my shoulders
 hot, like deep red flames.

Cactus flies by me,
 a dark green wind.

Burning sand under my feet,
 walking up to a small oasis,
 crystal clear turquoise water.

A new creature appears -
 vibrant pink and jolly.
 Hoisting up
 onto its back,
 cloud-like fur under me.

We fly,
 riding to find water
 before we get swallowed up by the heat.

ZANIA MILLS
3RD PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 3-5
STONY POINT ELEMENTARY

Empowered
Inspired by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Censorship*

Nothing can hold me back.
Nobody can hold me back.
My voice will be heard.
I have a voice for a reason.

I have a lot to say.
And you’re gonna hear it.
You’re gonna hear my voice.
You have pushed me back from speaking.
But I’m not scared anymore.

You made me afraid to voice my opinion.
But I’m not scared anymore.
I’m gonna speak
and speak
and speak.
Until I can’t speak anymore.

Just know when it comes to me and my voice,
I’m going to speak.

Empowered

TRENTON SMITH
1ST PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 3-5
LIGHTFOOT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Curse of the Bentwood Box
Inspired by Nathan Jackson, *Bentwood Box*

The Lacroose family was a very, very poor family. They lived in a small house, with two rooms: a room downstairs where they dined, and a bedroom upstairs. John Lacroose was a large man who worked in the mines. His wife, Alice Lacroose was a feisty lady who had no job and did the work around the house. They had one child named Susan. Susan was very impulsive, never listened, and never thought before she did anything.

One night, something knocked at the door while the Lacroose family was eating dinner. “I’ll get it,” said Alice. When she opened the door, no one was there.

When Alice looked down, there was a box. A wide, wooden box. Alice picked up the box and brought it over to the dinner table. It was surprisingly heavy. When everybody saw the box, a chill went down their spines. On the top of the box, there was a letter attached. “Do Not Open,” read the note. Susan pushed her mother out of the way and opened the box immediately. When the lid flew off, she could hear a distant cackle.

Out of the box flew a crow. It reminded Susan of a witch. By the time John had raised his hand to shoo it away, it was already out of sight. That night, Susan had trouble sleeping. She couldn’t stop thinking about the box. Her thoughts eventually got the best of her, and she crept out of bed and snuck downstairs.

She found the box laying under the table, where Alice left it. When she saw the box, the markings on it were glowing a bright green. She could see them much more clearly than before. There was a bird on one side and on the other a large bear. Susan was freaked out, so she got back to bed.

In the morning, on John’s way to work, a large bear was standing in the road. When he tried to steer away, he hit a lamp post. John got out of the car and went to check under the hood.

As soon as he opened it, smoke went everywhere. He didn’t have his phone, so he couldn’t call for help. John waited on the side of the road for hours, until finally a truck passed by and picked him up. After what happened to her father, Susan remembered the bear on the box, which looked similar to what her father described as the one on the road. She went back downstairs to see if anything happened to the box, but when she looked under the table, it was gone! Susan looked around the room until she finally found it inside a cabinet. However, unlike the night before, the box was glowing yellow. Also, the bear had disappeared off the box. Susan went back to bed, more frightened than before.

The next day, while Alice was home cleaning, Susan’s dog, Muddy, brought in a dead bird while Alice wasn’t looking, and dropped it on the kitchen floor. When Alice stepped on it, she jumped back, which caused her to slip on the wet floor and break her ankle. Eventually, Alice gained back enough strength to get up and call an ambulance.

That night, Susan and John went downtown to the hospital to see Alice. Unfortunately, they did not have an appointment and were not able to visit her. Worried the box had something to do with all of the trouble her family was experiencing, Susan once again snuck downstairs to see the box. This time, the box was not in the cabinet, nor under the table. Susan looked around for what seemed like forever, then decided to check outside.

Behind their house, the box sat atop a rock, glowing red. Susan examined the box, and to her surprise, the side with the bird had also disappeared. More frightening to Susan was the fact that the box had changed color again. Her mom and dad had already experienced misfortune.

Would it be her next? More importantly, what comes after red? Would their bad luck go away after red?

When Susan woke up the next morning, she checked the time to make sure she wasn’t late. It was still 8 AM, the time when she normally woke up. Susan got ready and walked out of the house, extremely anxious. On the bus, Susan couldn’t stop worrying. Were they going to crash? Was the bus driver not going to let her off? Luckily, nothing happened. During math class, Susan wasn’t able to pay attention, she was too scared. It was like that for every class: science, P.E., it didn’t matter. She couldn’t focus.

When the day finally ended, Susan knew what to do. Susan was tired of the box and too scared to keep living with it. She took a hammer, raised it high above her head, and slammed it down on the box! When Susan hit it, she shot back like a bullet. When she opened her eyes, the box had shattered. Susan started jumping around with excitement and relief, but her celebration didn’t last for long... The same cackle that Susan had heard once before now sounded closer and louder than ever. Susan turned around and screamed. An old witch was standing before Susan. She wore a dark, oversized cloak. Along her skinny arms were bracelets with crow markings up to her shoulders. The only thing that could distract Susan from her grin was the cane she wielded with a large crow carving atop it. In a bone-chilling voice, the witch said, “Because of you, the curse of the bentwood box shall be following your family for years to come.” Susan shut her eyes and hoped it would be over soon. When Susan opened her eyes, the witch was gone. It was the middle of the night, and Susan was tired. She tried to go to sleep, but it was very hard. For her entire life, Susan lay awake every night, thinking about that day.



Image:
Nathan Jackson
Tlingit, b.1938
Bentwood Box, 1988
Cedar, pigment, 17¼ x 12½ x 12½ in
(43.8 x 31.8 x 31.8 cm)
Gift of Melissa L. Wilhelm and Christina Wilhelm Owens, in memory of their parents, Dr. and Mrs. Morton C. Wilhelm 2018.1
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
© Nathan Jackson

ISABELLA MILLER
2ND PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 3-5
VIRGINIA L. MURRAY ELEMENTARY

The Lonely Dot

Inspired by Robert Reed, *Scanch Branch*

The lonely leaves drooped on the branches. It smelled like mulch, bitter and strong. The gray clouds drifted away slowly. They seemed all alone. The school nearby looked like an upside-down jet. A girl slid down the slide in a rainbow of colors, but she seemed far away.

Three kids were nearby, they bounced like three cheery red balls, springing back and forth. The new girl was like just a dot, in the middle of them but far, far down from the three. She felt like she was in a deep, deep well. Far, far away from her she saw them brightly playing all together.

Feeling courageous, she yelled up to them, “Can I join?” It echoed up, up, up. They ignored it. So, she tried again, “Can I join you guys? I’d like to play with you guys.”

“Be quiet. Stop yelling. You’re insane.” She felt like she’d dropped to the bottom of the Earth’s core. It felt cold, deep, damp.

Suddenly, the girl from the slide came over. “Want to play?” she said kindly. Just like that, the girl like the dot felt like she was out of the well. “Sure! Let’s invite those three boys.” Then they were connected like rainbows, like connect-the-dots, like five in a row. The big red sun peeked out from behind the school. The leaves sprang up, standing tall and proud. It smelled like flowers blooming bright pink and red. The gray clouds turned white and floated by the building. The school looked like a royal castle. “Recess is over,” called the teacher.

My, how one kind person can make a change in the whole, mean world.

NURIEL MCGRATH
3RD PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 3-5
AGNOR HURT ELEMENTARY

The Enchanted Bentwood Box

Inspired by Nathan Jackson, *Bentwood Box*

One harsh winter, when Denali’s earth was frozen to the core and her mountain peaks adorned with snow, a little girl sat tending the fire. She felt lonely, all by herself. Her name was Edensaw. Her father had asked her to keep the fire going, so their cedar-plank cabin would be warm when he returned from hunting moose. Edensaw had become quite skilled at tending the fire. She had gotten used

to her father leaving to go hunting. She didn’t like being alone, but she knew he had to go, so they wouldn’t starve.

As she sat by the fire, she looked around the cabin. There was a picture of her beloved mother, who had very abruptly vanished under mysterious circumstances. Edensaw missed her so much. Her mother knew the wisdom of the herbs and had always steeped the best Devil’s Club tea for her. There were spears her father had made from bone. And there was the intricately designed bentwood box that had been passed down in her family for generations.

Edensaw’s father had always told her not to go near the bentwood box. She wasn’t even allowed to touch it. It was a precious heirloom, a piece that had been created by a master Tlingit carver. Edensaw did not understand why her father made such a big fuss about the bentwood box, but she had always obeyed.

As she sat by the fire, she noticed in herself a curiosity arising that hit her the way snow pellets your face during a blizzard. At first she tried to subdue it, fight against it, but the storm within her was too strong and she could bear the unknown no longer. She rose from her chair, stood up, and quietly tiptoed in her warm moccasins to where the bentwood box rested on a shelf made from driftwood. So many thoughts raced through her head. What would happen if her father found out that she had touched the box? Opened it? Peaked inside? She hesitated. Slowly and gently, she moved her fingers across the bentwood box, almost as if caressing it. Nothing happened. Emboldened, she reached out and carefully picked it up. It was rather light. Then, with her hands trembling, she lifted off the lid. Blinding beams of light shot out immediately. The whole room became so bright, Edensaw could barely keep her eyes open. What was happening? She stumbled, slipped, fell. Before she could stop herself, she was falling down, down, down. Suddenly, something soft caught her. It felt like a soft bed of grass, reminding her of times she had lain on the forest floor and stared up a conifer into the sky while her mother was gathering herbs. She could hear voices, but she could not make out the words. She squinted at first, then opened her eyes. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she was slowly able to make out a silhouette. She couldn’t believe her eyes. There was her mother. Feelings of amazement, confusion, disbelief poured over her like a cup of warming tea; but mostly happiness.

Meanwhile, upstairs her father had returned from the hunt. He called Edensaw’s name. No answer. He searched the cabin for her. No sign. Then he saw it: the precious bentwood box, the family heirloom on the floor. He peeked in, saw the light, felt the warmth. And he decided to go in. Down, down, down, he, too, went.

“Welcome, welcome,” Edensaw and her mother chirped. “Life here is so warm and peaceful.” They hugged. They were so happy to be with each other in this new delicately woven world where they lived happily ever after.

A few years later, a rich man bought the cabin the family used to live in. He found a beautiful bentwood box on the floor, picked it up, put the lid on it, and decided he had no use for it. He donated it to a museum. If you go to the right one, you might find it there.



Image:
Robert Reed
American, 1938–2014
Scanch Branch, 2000
Acrylic with oil markers and metal fasteners on paper, 30 x 40 in (76.2 x 101.6 cm)
Gift of David A. and Diana H. Kent, 2001.7
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
© Courtesy of the Robert Reed Estate

CHASE BULLARD
1ST PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 6-8
GRYMES MEMORIAL SCHOOL

Strum

Inspired by Robert Reed, *Scanch Branch*

Hours upon hours.
Strings dig into my calloused fingers.
My teacher's instructions
cut through my dreams.
“Not the A string, the G string!”
“Remember, this is your biggest performance yet.”
Then darkness.
I open my eyes
to the creak of the curtains opening.
Light spills onto the wooden stage.
Performance jitters course through my body,
roots curl into knots deep in my stomach.
I take a breath
and strum,
letting out all the emotion trapped inside me,
like air let go from an over-inflated balloon.
Immediately, all my worries
melt away.
My fingers move methodically
from string to string
and notes emerge,
like baby birds
taking flight from their nest.
Three minutes later,
the last note leaves my fingers.
Relief.
I bow,
and the sound of a thousand elephants
rockets out from the crowd.
Pure joy courses through my body,
forcing my lips into a huge smile.
The baby birds have flown the nest.

CATHERINE SLAUGHTER
2ND PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 6-8
VILLAGE SCHOOL

Introvert

Inspired by Childe Hassam, *Skyscraper Window*

During the winter,
The frigid air cooled her body as it approached
the window sill,
Inviting itself into the room where she sits.
Snow blanketed the ground,
Every building and treetop,
Was sheltered by a thick slate of white powder,
That would turn gray in a few days
Once children ran,
Cars drove,
People skipped and spoke,
Across the snow, it would darken.
During the spring,
Flowers blossomed from the garden below her,
Petals fell through her window once more,
It smelled of gardenia,
Violets, roses, citrus,
For the cold has passed,
And has now been replaced with energetic life.
The summer was scorching,
Humid and hot,
She observed that the flowers weren't as entirely vibrant,
As they had been before.
Women ran in long flowy dresses,
Children played games in nearby alleyways.
Power went out due to heat,
But she sat staring out that same window.

In the fall everything settled,
People returned inside.
Things slowed to an unforeseen stop.
She wished she could go,
Do as she pleased,
The door was wide open,
But her mind was telling her to stay seated,
It isn't safe out there,
You don't need to leave.
You're rarely weary alone.
So silenced and quiet,
As if set in rock,
She glanced out that same window sill.
This year wasn't so bad.



Image:
Childe Hassam
American, 1859–1935
Skyscraper Window, 1934
Oil on canvas, 59 ¼ x 47 ¼ in (150.5 x 120 cm)
Courtesy of the Peabody College Collection
Collection of Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, 1979.0228



Image:
 Jaune Quick-to-See Smith
 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, b. 1940
Censorship, 1989
 Pastel on paper, 31 1/2 x 48 in (80 x 121.9 cm)
 Gift of Jason Steinbaum (CLAS 1988), 2011.16
 The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
 © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

JANE FRIESEN
3RD PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 6-8
VILLAGE SCHOOL

Unconditional Faith

Inspired by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Censorship*

Reaching out,
 Grasping for an inkling,
 A tiny piece of hope among the chaos.
 Coming back,
 Empty handed again.
 My words,
 Blocked by an invisible barrier,
 Unable to reach the ears of anyone
 Simply passing by.
 I need a listener,
 Willing to commit to me.
 Through the storms of anger,
 And the gusts of sadness.
 Standing strong.
 Unfazed.
 Like an oak
 In a hurricane.
 Ruffling the leaves,
 But never moving the roots,
 Where they keep their faith.

SADIE SHERMAN
1ST PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 6-8
VILLAGE SCHOOL

Sonechka Levitsky and the Magic Box

Inspired by Nathan Jackson, *Bentwood Box*

Long ago, in the snowy town of Rossinskaya, there was a girl called Sonechka Levitsky who always wore her hair braided with colorful ribbons. She was mischievous and cunning, with a witty remark for every situation and a sly smile that intrigued everyone. People often spotted her darting through the forests, or weaving through crowds, so lithe and quick that she soon got the nickname vorobey, sparrow. But her life was not without sorrow. Money was hard to come by in the Levitsky family, and her father’s small business as a tailor was barely enough to support Sonechka and her mother. So life went on as usual, generally uninteresting but stable. Until her mother called to her one day, a shiny silver coin between her fingers.

“Sonechka, my sparrow, please go to the market and buy some potatoes.” Sonechka nodded, her blue eyes bright with excitement. She walked a few peaceful minutes before emerging into the market. The scent of warm dough, sour pickles, fresh flowers, and everything in between wafted from vendor booths. Before she could reach her destination, an old woman grabbed her arm and stared at her with wide eyes. “Buy my box?” She held a large cedar chest with a colorful pattern painted to its sides. Sonechka, curious, responded. “What does it do?” The old woman grinned. “It cooks! Just whisper make for me a dish for dinner! You buy it?” She knew that this was a horrible idea, but there was something about it that led her to hand over her coin.

Her mother groaned when she laid eyes on the chest. “Look what you’ve done, foolish girl! We will have nothing to eat. As punishment, you will be in charge of making our food out of thin air.” Full of shame, Sonechka wandered to her chest and half heartedly began to speak. “Make me a dish for dinner!” Nothing happened. Of course, she was stupid for ever thinking that a box could make food. The sparrow was about to turn away before she noticed a savory scent. Hand shaking, she pulled off the top to reveal three steaming bowls full of stew. A miracle! Sonechka brought the dishes to the table and called her parents. “Daughter of mine, did you create such a fine meal?” She was about to open her mouth and say “No, this came from the box I bought!” But then an idea came to her sharp mind. There’s no reason for a chest I purchased to take credit. And so the words that came out of her mouth were instead “I made it, mother!” They enjoyed a delicious stew that night, and all seemed well. Days passed like this, beautifully crafted meals one after another, and soon Sonechka’s mother could contain her pride no longer. On her trip to the market, she bragged to Eva, the baker’s wife, about her girl’s cooking talent. “My daughter makes the most scrumptious foods every night! We feast on roasted chickens and warm bread, tarts full of fresh fruit and juicy pickles!” Eva, jealousy in her eyes, responded with a sugary voice. “I will spread the news.” And so it was, everyone in the town of Rossinskaya soon knew of Svetlana and her wonderful daughter. Whenever Sonechka was seen, she was called povar, or chef. And it was all making her head quite large. There was no doubt in her mind

that she deserved all of this acclaim. After all, she had made the decision to purchase the box and should be given credit for its miracles. Only a blossom of guilt was left, and that was buried beneath layers of ego. It was true, the little sparrow was on top of the world and nothing was bringing her ribbon wrapped braids down. Nothing at all, except for the news her mother brought to her. “I have exciting news for you! Some girls from the village are coming to our house, and you will teach them how to make one of your famous dinners.” And with that, Sonechka fell right back down to the bottom of the world.

The days passed rapidly as the dreaded lesson approached. How should she tell others what to cook when she barely knew the difference between flour and sugar? Her only skill was talking to a box. Should she run away? Fake an illness? Solution after solution crowded her mind, each one worse than the one before. There was no room for good ideas in the anxious mess her brain had become. Finally, the day came in a haze of excited glances from her mother and a stomach twisting with nerves for Sonechka. Girls were welcomed in, curious but skeptical. Soon the sparrow settled in front of a dozen girls in flowery dresses and snowy boots. They sat there for a minute, just waiting for Sonechka to do something. Until Galina opened her lips. “Well, sparrow, did our mothers drag us here for nothing?” Frustrated, Sonechka opened her mouth to speak. But before she could even get a word out, potatoes began to spill out of the magic box.

The girls shrieked while Sonechka watched in amazement. It didn’t stop! They filled up the kitchen floor, rolling down the stairs and onto the beds. Around the feet of the parents, through the foyer and chairs, with no end in sight. On and on and on. “MY SPARROW!” screamed her mother. “What is the meaning of this?” An explanation tumbled off her lips before she could think of another option. “When you sent me to buy potatoes from the market, I came back with this chest! It cooks for me, and now you all think I’m a chef!” The food stopped pouring out of the chest. A stunned silence lasted for several seconds. “Well,” Sonechka’s father responded drily. “You definitely got us potatoes.” He was very, very right. The moral? Lying will get you more potatoes than you will ever need.

AMY WANG
2ND PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 6-8
LAKESIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Dreamland

Inspired by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Censorship*

There once was a girl who loved to draw. The nurses would sneak her scraps of paper and charcoal nubs before she was hooked up and fell into dreamland. Her fingertips would always be smudged with black, staining the gel that encased her like an envelope, but once she'd drifted off the nurses would wipe her fingertips clean and pretend like nothing happened, closing the capsule with a final clink.

There once was a girl who loved to draw the cityscape, peering out of windows when she wasn't supposed to, memorizing the sharp, hard lines of concrete buildings against cloudy nights. If she strained she could see cracks on the pavement leading to a chain-link fence in the distance, the ethereal meadow beyond on one side, and the unyielding city on the other. She loved drawing them, studying the shape and the light and the perspective of space. But most of all, she loved to draw the capsules inside the building. All lined up in perfect rows, green-tinted gel encasing the people resting inside. She would go around, letting her fingers trail on the glass, and observe their faces. Young and old, tall and short. There were people with wrinkles radiating out from the corners of their eyes like vibrant suns, and people whose faces seemed folded in an external frown. Talking wasn't allowed, but each conveyed their own stories. She would've looked at the faces forever, but the nurses took her by her arms and dragged her back to her capsule. She cried out, begged them to stop, pleaded with them to explain, but they were silent and the girl was once again plugged into dreamland. The nurses pretended like nothing happened, closing the capsule with a final clink.

There once was a girl who loved to draw escape routes. She would trace the lines over and over again until the paper formed deep trenches and wrinkled along the charcoal. When they let her out, she would scratch the wires, so when the nurses plugged her in the wires were so worn down she didn't drift off. The nurses pretended like nothing happened, closing the capsule with a clink. But this time, the girl heard them leave. She rubbed open her eyes, blinking away the gel, and cracked open the capsule.

It was dark. Thick moonlight spilled through tall windows onto shadowy, coffin-like shapes. The girl took a tentative step out and closed the capsule. She grabbed her stash of art supplies, clenching them tightly, and headed towards the exit door.

Beyond was an endless, dark stairwell. Her feet slowly crept down, careful not to make a noise. No one came to stop her. Shadows scattered on the walls, drawing higher and higher. The girl clenched her drawings tighter. She'd never been let outside her capsule this long before, and the nurses' visits were becoming infrequent. One day, they might close her capsule and never return, leaving her trapped in her dreams forever.

The constant hum of electricity behind the walls was interrupted when a nurse opened a door. The girl ducked behind a railing, watching as the nurse walked down a narrow hallway. After a pause, she followed. Long, flickering light bulbs swung haphazardly. The concrete beneath her feet was cold, but her whole body was thrumming with excitement. Her hands were jittering. When she forced them to stop, she could still feel the thrum of energy running through her fingers, little ants trapped in a jar. They were all scrambling on top of one another, looking for a way out, looking for something.

The door was old-looking, its hinges half-rusted through. It planted itself firmly against the wall, blocking everyone from the outside. She rushed up to it, closing the distance in seconds. With one forceful heave, the door was open— and she was outside. Fireflies winked. The girl took a deep breath. Even the air smelled different, fresh and green and new. She cast her eyes towards the distance and the meadow and set out, climbing over the fence with ease.

The sky was dreamy, and below it the meadow stretched so far that the grasses, which were waist high, seemed as short as fingers waving in the distance. The world was more of a dream than, well, dreamland. Grass cut her legs, flowers thorned her feet, but it didn't matter. It was beautiful. The girl sat between the dancing grasses and drew. Art supplies sprawled over the ground. Her hands moved themselves, replicating the dreamlike image in front of her. Every little detail she had observed blossomed on paper— the cities, the meadow, and the towers full with capsules and their people. The buildings were always silent, but she had escaped, and now she was free.

Warning. Missing subject. The voice echoed so loud that she clamped her hands over her ears. But no, the sound wasn't coming from afar; it was in her own head. It kept ringing and ringing, bouncing off her skull until she thought it would crack. What was it? Voices sounded, harsh and grating. Find the girl. Don't bother bringing her back, she's defected.

She ran, snatching the drawing, feet pounding against bare ground. Shots sprayed, burrowing themselves into the ground. One hit her calf, and the girl let out a cry and went down. Her hands shoved the drawing between clumps of tall grass. She had to believe that someone else was out there, someone else would see her mark and understand.

The patrol team found her moments later and shot her dead. As they left, one noticed something fluttering between the grass. He stooped down, snatched it, and unfolded the wrinkled paper. The girl was gone, but her drawing remained, of the misty hopes of freedom. It was stained by his bloody hands as he gently shoved the picture into his pocket. The yearning for freedom was much too familiar to him, for he had once been a capsule patient too.

ELIZABETH COOK
3RD PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 6-8
VILLAGE SCHOOL

Twelve Lucky Leaves

Inspired by Sally Mann, *Virginia, Untitled (Virginia Kudzu)*

I look up at the sky, dark clouds fill the great expanse. The sun has set, but in these woods, the line between night and day is blurred. A cool breeze blows by, the leaves on the tall trees flow in the wind. A single red and gold leaf floats down from the tallest tree right to where I stand.

“Luna! Where did you go?” I hear a far-off voice.

“Coming!” I reply, snapping out of my momentary trance. I find my way back to the trail, back to where my mom has been waiting for me.

“Have I ever told you my ‘Fall of Eighth Grade’ story?” my mom asks.

“Mom, is this another one of your riveting stories of the ‘good old days?” I reply sarcastically.

“You could say that,” Mom replies. “But if you listen carefully, it might mean more to you than just another story.”

“Fine,” I begrudgingly respond. “I will stop you if you get too sentimental.”

“No promises,” says Mom, smiling. “I had just started eighth grade, and I was thirteen just like you are now.” She pauses and takes a deep breath of the fall air, then continues. “My mom, dad, my brother, and I had just moved from the city, out to the country. I was starting at a new school, and I didn’t have any friends.”

“Mom, I have definitely heard this story before,” I interrupt. “The typical story of the girl who doesn’t have any friends, but then finds her way in a new place. Yeah, yeah, I get it.”

“Okay,” replies Mom, “You’re right. But just listen, there’s more to the story.”

I roll my eyes, but Mom forges on with the story.

“On the first day of school, I walked to school. The air was crisp and cool, a quintessential fall day. I was walking slowly, my old sneakers dragging through the damp leaves on the sidewalk.

It had rained the day before, not light rain, but a torrential storm. As I was walking, I found a piece of paper on the sidewalk. The paper was soggy, and the blue ink was blurred. The handwriting was beautiful, a swirly cursive that flowed across the paper. I picked it up, drops of water falling from it. It read, ‘Catch twelve falling leaves, and gain good luck for each of the twelve coming months.’ I stared for a minute reading, again and again, the words on the paper.”

Mom paused, taking a deep breath, then continued, “I tucked the piece of paper into the pocket of my sweatshirt, and kept walking toward school. The first week of school passed, just like any other days for me. I tried to stay under the radar at school, not wanting to be noticed by the bullies or the cool kids. I forgot about the note I had found on that first day. But one afternoon, when I was walking home from school, I passed a park full of little kids. They were raking leaves with their hands, making piles, then jumping in them. They laughed and shouted and screamed joyfully, not a care in the world. I watched them as I walked past, wanting life to be that simple. That’s when I remembered the note. Maybe, I thought, If I catch twelve leaves, life could be that simple for me, too.”

“I wish, Mom,” I say, “Life never is that black and white.”

“Exactly,” said Mom, “But I wish it was.”

As Mom and I are walking, we come upon a large, smooth rock off the side of the trail, in a clearing of the trees. “Let’s sit.” says Mom, and we do.

“Keep telling the story,” I say enthusiastically.

“Well, now you’re invested in my little story,” Mom replies.

“I guess I am,” I retort.

“Do you remember the big oak tree in Grandma and Grandpa’s front yard?” Mom asks.

“Yeah, the one I like to climb?” I reply.

“Exactly. Well, when I got home that day, after seeing the kids on the playground, I sat under that tree. The sun was glowing, its light shining through the tree branches of the tree above me, giving everything around me a radiant glow. I was doing my Algebra homework, and a small red, gold, and orange leaf was falling right in front of me. I reached up, marveling at its beauty, and caught it. I flipped the leaf over and over again, it wasn’t crisp, like leaves on the ground, but fresh, right off the tree. I tucked the leaf into my Algebra textbook, and the next day, I took it out of my book during class. I stared at it, wishing for the good luck the note told me it would bring. Throughout the next few weeks, I collected falling leaves, and I did my homework under that tree every day. I don’t know if it really gave me good luck,” Mom concludes, “But it sure felt like it did.”

Mom stands up from the rock again, in silence now, and I follow, standing up. We continued to walk down the trail. As we walk, a leaf, golden orange in color, floats down in front of me. I reach, catching the leaf with the tips of my fingers. I examine it, then tuck it into the pocket of my sweatshirt. Let’s hope I get luck for the next year, I think, and we keep walking down the trail.

SHANNIE PORTER
1ST PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 9-12
ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

Autocomplete...
Inspired by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Censorship*

You can't draw hands.
Nobody can.
Somewhere between the phalanges
and the metacarpals, you get stick stuck
like a stylus in a haystack,
and no amount of baby pink pumice erasers
bring you all the way back.

So how is it I get
knuckles and thumbs,
pencils and guns,
from a suggestion of lungs.

I can't write sense.
I never could.
All I can do is talk about sentient houses
and leave you to speculate about my neighborhood.
Lace up my half-cocked rollerblades
and hope no one steps on my face,
and hope you don't guess my address and burn
down my place.

So how is it I get
the lips the teeth the tip of the tongue,
eats shoots and ladders and busted up rungs,
from a suggestion of lungs.

Before I turn on my car,
I look down at my sawn-off scars,
Barbie-bare and blotted out with spinning
censor bars,
and my wrists lock shut like child-proof caps
against my missing hands,
which cannot safely operate safety scissors,
which cannot hurt or hold anybody,
or even suggest such a thing.

And of all the bones connected to the head bone
I chew on the duct tape pressed to my teeth.
The soul follows the brain follows the body
follows the hand -
I swear the rest will follow
as soon as I can breathe.

BRENNA KIDD-BANIA
2ND PLACE, POETRY, GRADES 9-12
FLUVANNA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

My Red Painted Chair
Inspired by Paul T. Frankl, *Skyscraper Chair*

I paint the chair red.
Red like the scraped knees of a crying child.
Red like the polka-dot pimples spread across faces,
Adding fuel to the fire burning in bullies.
Red for all the girls that have gone home with jackets tied around their waists
To hide from embarrassment.
For the anxious biting of my lips and nails, always chewing a little too far.
Just until they sting and throb.
I paint it with the red of my puffy eyes after crying through the night.
Red to remember the men that take up 77.9 percent of suicides.
Trapped behind misogynistic teachings like, "boys are supposed to be strong."
I paint it red to tell the people that are dripping in pain that I'm listening.
Red to remind me of the violence going on around the world.
Red for the children hurting because of childish adults.
Red like the ketchup spread across our styrofoam lunch trays.
Fuel before the fight.
Red for all of the people with bloody knuckles and regret.
Take a seat and heal.
Red for the people mourning the victims of racial injustice.
Just praying for the inequality to end.
I paint it with the red fire burning inside of the women still fighting for their rights.

Red to remember the people that have lost their lives or a loved one to abuse.
Tired of hearing "just leave," because it's never that easy.
I use red to symbolize the people in pain across the planet.

Maybe my red-painted chair will be a place to sit and breathe,
A moment of peace in the chaos of this world.



Image:
 William Wylie
 American, b. 1957
Untitled [00-220] from the series *Stillwater*, 2000
 Gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in (50.8 x 61 cm)
 Gift of the artist, 2003.2
 The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
 © William Wylie

EMMY SUMPTER
3RD PLACE, POETRY, 9-12
ST. CATHERINE'S SCHOOL

In the Water

Inspired by William Wylie, *Untitled [00-220]* from the series *Stillwater*

I grew up sticking my feet in the water,
 Feeling the icy rush surge through my veins
 I wiggled my toes and watched the minnows pass by

I laughed in the water,
 Bringing my friends to the place I called home
 We shared secrets as the salty air swarmed our noses

I loved in the water,
 Lacing our fingers just below the tide
 I savored our stolen kisses

I shared in the water,
 Giving away my hopes, dreams, and desires
 I allowed a part of myself to drift into the current

I comforted in the water
 Rubbing salve onto scars that would never fade
 I held years of hidden pain in my hands

I cherished in the water,
 Reminiscing the days of my youth
 I let the long-lost memories drench my senses

I fought in the water,
 Screaming out in the distance

I threw my anger into the stream

I lost in the water,
 Grieving the passing of my parents
 My salty tears disappeared into the water's flow

I found myself in the water,
 Remembering what I had forgotten
 I returned to where I had begun

KATIE FITZGERALD
1ST PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 9-12
ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

The Inner Mechanism of Convenience

Inspired by Robert Reed, *Scanch Branch*

I’ve seen a menagerie of characters that enter our glass-paned doors in the dead of night. From the intoxicated teens to the brash men donned in camo print; not many have lingered for more than an exhale of smoke from a cigarette. At three in the morning, convenience stores exude a thick, liminal haze that pulls me out of consciousness. Not even the bright colors of capitalism can save me: but apparently eclectic teenagers can. They—three of them—scuffle in, huddling around an obsolete hot dog machine, scheming whispers penetrating the new wave music.

“Hey, is that thing on?” The tallest one points, accusing the humble machinery of unspoken crimes.

“No.”

“Is it dead?” She pesters, brown eyes widening, invested in the conversation.

I couldn’t care less.

“Sure.” A second girl, now eyeing the garish candy (snickers), whilst another maintains distance from the others; tall with thick brown hair pulled back. The girl in front of me continues her interrogation.

“Alright, well, are you still making food?” She cocks her head up towards the sign draped above us. Ponytail interrupts, placing a hand on her shoulder.

“Sorry about her. We just needed to stop somewhere.” Her eyes dance across the counter. “Road trip.” I nod. “Cameron.” She prods at the other. “Come on.” This checks the intoxication box off the list. The two step back, and once more harass a chip stand, glancing between the nauseating space that holds us. Laughter blankets the crinkling of plastic, and the crystal ball clears. The lights flicker warily whilst Cameron— if that was her name— bothers the last girl, the shortest one. Their laughter comparable to squealing tires of a dilapidated delivery truck, as they halt at the frozen goods.

Six months into the world of gas stations, and I’d grown accustomed to juvenile thieves. A missing energy drink and a candy bar really was nothing to scoff at, contrary to what my boss had said. Out of the ‘cosmic sense of duty’ which I’m granted, teenagers are the least of my problems. These ones are cute enough, round faced and no older than seventeen, yet don’t reek of liquor like most of their peers typically would. Instead, fresh paper and hand sanitizer ring through checkered linoleum. It keeps me awake, at least. Their voices remain hushed, but they grab a few items as they recount some horrible teacher they had, as Cameron shoves a pack of gum to the bottom of her pockets.

Cosmic. Small with grandiose implications. A sense of awe is not supposed to strike a minimum wage employee at three in the morning. Especially not while experiencing the depths of sleep deprivation. The group grows closer once more, dropping their goods onto the table like pleased cats giving gifts to their owners. Enough sugar and caffeine is dispersed in the items to keep them awake until sunrise. At twenty-three and nihilistic, I concentrate hard on why kids like these would waste their time at unfavorable hours. But here I am, the biggest hypocrite of all. Cameron looks up at me once more as irritation boils in my throat.

“What do you think happens when we die?”

What.

I pause. “Ghosts— our souls. They just stick around and bother everyone.”

The tall girl freezes, puttering forward. “So like a permanent annoyance.”

“Yeah. Sure.”

“You don’t think we’ll go anywhere?” She responds, cool. “Our bodies just rot here?”

“I’m not into any of that religious stuff.” I bag at least four bottles of soda, glancing out the window. More of them have to be lingering outside.

“Me neither.”

The short one pipes up. “Okay, sure, but what if the world explodes or something? What happens then?”

“Ryan, why are you even asking this?” Ponytail inquires, leaning against the soda machine. “I mean, I’m just saying, it could happen. Everything could end tomorrow. What would you all do if it did?” The three stand stoic, as if this is a frequent debate amongst themselves, staring at me. Pressure tightens in the room, in my head, in my lungs.

“Work, I guess.” No better answer approaches me.

“That’s boring.” Ryan, the shortest, groans, deflating. “Wouldn’t you want to rob this place, or something? Have fun?”

“That’s not incriminating for you at all.”

“And you’re not very exciting yourself.” She quips.

“Maybe that’s not the point of adulthood.” I grumble, voice ringing unsentimental. Ponytail drops a crumpled set of tens on the table. “Go party, drive away, whatever. Have fun. Maybe just don’t commit crimes.” Cameron’s eyebrows furrow, but, defeated, she pulls out the gum, bright red contrasting with the distant aqua of the store, and slams it on the table, huffing. “You’re good at this.”

“I do it every day.”

“Every day?” Ryan pauses. “That’s really sad. Don’t you have something else better to do?”

“Not exactly.” The tapping of feet and the foreboding whirl of the air conditioning meshes into a haunting cacophony. If I could quit, I would. If a serendipitous encounter were to bless me. In the cold present, I just bag snacks and serve hot dogs. As I hand them their bags, Cameron nods, akin to a mutual sign of condolence at a funeral. We’ll never see each other again—no passing glances, no thin smiles and waves. The world is too large for kindness.

Ryan and Cameron continue a long winded conversation regarding an idiotic hypothetical as the doors hum a familiar farewell. As they breach the gates to reality, the lanky girl---Ponytail--- pauses, firm, without fidgeting or glancing down at checkered linoleum.

“Thanks.”

A single word is uttered as she gives me five dollars and a smile before escaping. The store is engulfed in silence again as laughter can be heard, resounding in the crisp night. While silence can be a desired benefit, it isn’t at this moment. What would you do if it ended tomorrow? Answers prick my brain, short and quick.

I would enjoy it however I can.

And the four of us depart, none the wiser.

JOHN DOZIER
2ND PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 9-12
ST. ANNE’S-BELFIELD SCHOOL

The Nook

Inspired by Sally Mann, *Virginia, Untitled (Virginia Kudzu)*

I’m afraid to admit it now, but I summoned the kudzu. For the longest time, I had been dreaming about finding a quiet place to curl up, somewhere cool but warm at the same time, heated from some internal, invisible furnace I knew existed, but the ugly mechanics of which were hidden from my eyes. Somewhere dark enough that my eyes could rest, my little orbs focusing and unfocusing on the sparkling magic of dust particles in dappled light. The word “nook” kept coming to mind, not quite a burrow or a cave, but a little open spot where I could rest my head and sink into the ground, becoming one with the peat and pine needles and the occasional rose-colored piece of quartz you find in this part of Virginia.

What I had in mind was a little break from the chatter that filled my mind, replacing the pings of “I need to do” and “I wish I was” with the sound of dew dripping or sticks breaking under tentative deer feet navigating the woods. I’ve always heard that if you listen closely, you can translate what birds are saying to each other. I would like to think that the bird world is calmer than my own; what a disappointment it would be if I learned that their peeps and chips translated to “hurry up” or “flying is tiresome.” The older I get, the more I am noticing how much I overlook my sense of smell. Just a few years ago, I would roll down the car window each time we drove by the gas station near our house to smell the pies and gasoline. Now, I have both hands on the wheel and a to-do list in my head.

From my little nook on the forest floor, I would have nothing to do but take deep breaths of the mulchy goodness of the valley. I’ll take greedy gulps of humid air and hold them inside while I feel the heat of the ground, smell the wet fur of the chipmunks and admire the shiny leaves of the kudzu, like twinkle lights among the trees.

The nook on the forest floor was where I liked to retreat in my mind when I had too much going on, and days of dawn until dusk movement and action. Wouldn’t it be nice, I thought, if the world just slowed down for a while, and we could just huddle in our nooks? Out there, the kudzu heard me.

A virus snuck its way into our everyday lives, first squirming into news headlines, then growing mightier, grounding airplanes, silencing roadways, and bringing our lives to a halt. We sheltered in place, but in my mind, I traveled to the nook, delighted and joyous to finally get my wish. Nothing to do, nowhere to go, just peace and thoughts and senses. At first, it was bliss; I reveled in the simplicity and made plans for my life to always be like this.

But, after a while, I started noticing that the ground was soft, but also often wet. The mulch was not just a smell, but a dirty taste in my mouth that I couldn’t spit out. The birds were relentless, shuffling around after dark and confusing lightning with daylight. The gentle shagginess of the kudzu was just a window dressing distraction for the kudzu’s mercenary strangling of the canopy above. I could hear it, like the virus, coiling tighter and tighter around all that was alive, shutting off the brightness that was the world outside the nook.

I knew now what I didn’t know before. The nook was for visiting. It would be there, tucked away, quiet and warm like the deer bedded down who I imagined took my place while I was out in the world. I liked my larger life, with the noise, the lists and the movement. I would claw my way through the kudzu, and out into the brightness.

CAROLINE MILLER
3RD PLACE, PROSE, GRADES 9-12
WESTERN ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

On a Young Woman's Hatching

Inspired by Childe Hassam, *Skyscraper Window*

On the first morning that the newly hired maid enters the young woman's bedroom, she finds the girl standing at the window, gazing out with a sort of wistful loneliness. Upon hearing the maid enter, the girl gives a little gasp— somewhat belated, though with enough theatrics to be a somewhat convincing performance— and rushes over to introduce herself and begin fussing over the breakfast tray that's been brought in. Though the girl has a proper name, the maid can't help but internally refer to her as "Princess." There's something so ethereal, so very lovely about the girl's shining copper hair and her smooth, pale skin, so unblemished it almost seems unnatural; she possesses the sort of beauty that fills the pages of story books.

After picking at her breakfast with the daintiness of a baby bird, Princess returns to her position at the window. Though they'd talked a bit over breakfast— only about the most mundane topics, neither attempting to hide their awkwardness— the maid feels certain that her presence is no longer wanted nor needed. As she gathers the remains of breakfast on the tray and prepares to make a silent exit, Princess glances over her shoulder. "You have the key, then?" The maid searches through her pockets for a moment before extracting said key: old and skeleton-toothed, it seems more like a play thing than something that could lock doors. Princess gives the maid a curt nod before turning back to the window, a vacant, dreamy expression crossing her face. Quietly, the maid leaves the room, locking the door behind her. As she descends the stairs, she's almost certain a quiet chirp echoes from the room. On the second morning, Princess is in bed when the maid arrives with breakfast. Though she'd seemed like the picture of good health the day prior, the girl looks fragile and sickly lying against the pillows. However, she hops out of bed with the energy of a small child and repeats the activities of the previous day: eat, chat, stand at the window. While tidying what's left of breakfast— the majority, as it seems Princess's appetite still remains that of a hatchling— the maid watches as Princess undresses and gazes at herself in the mirror. "Is there anything there, yet?" the young woman asks the maid, craning her neck to get a glimpse of her back. The maid straightens and crosses the room to examine the spot between the girl's shoulder blades: dozens of tiny bumps prick Princess' skin, all an angry red.

"You're making progress, Ma'am," the maid promises, to which Princess grins.

The third morning is difficult. Princess refuses to eat, yet tearfully begs the maid to stay as the latter

prepares to leave. "I don't want to do it anymore," the girl whispers, shoulders shaking with repressed sobs. "It's too hard." Gently, the maid removes Princess' hands from where they've grabbed the front of the maid's blouse in a vice-like grip. Guiding the girl over to her bed, the maid feels a pang of guilt as she helps Princess settle under the covers.

"You're doing wonderfully, Ma'am," she assures the young woman, but even she can hear the hesitance lacing her voice. As Princess rolls over and almost immediately falls into a restless slumber, the

maid sits by her bed, stroking her back. She can feel the sharpness of the bumps on the girl's back, can feel what's beginning to grow out of them. The maid is shocked— and, to be quite honest, disconcerted— by the speed of Princess' progress. She leaves the room wondering what she's gotten herself into.

On the fourth morning, Princess is back at the window and in an improved, though still rather irritable mood; she eats a bit more breakfast than usual and peels back her dressing gown to show the maid the soft glossiness of what's beginning to cover her back. She flits around the room, feet scarcely touching the ground, before returning to the window. This time, as the maid leaves, she doesn't miss the pure bliss that illuminates Princess' face as the girl gazes outside. Princess has completely grown her wings by the time the maid enters on the fifth morning. The girl is standing in the middle of the room, naked, the glistening white feathers protruding from her back flapping gently. For a moment, the maid is too overcome by the beauty of the scene before her to move. It's a heavenly picture, but there's an underlying melancholy all the same. The maid puts aside these thoughts to embrace Princess, who's once again crying, but this time with a joy so pure and loud it makes the maid's heart break. "I'm so proud of you, Ma'am," the maid whispers to Princess, squeezing the girl tightly while taking care to avoid her wings.

They spend the day together in the room, Princess fluttering about and pirouetting through the air, wings spread as wide as they'll go; the two women find themselves erupting into raucous laughter time and time again as the wings knock over various objects. At nightfall, the maid joins Princess by the window. It's a beautiful view: deep purple skies, vast mountains in the distance, a cosmopolitan metropolis stretching for as far as the eye can see. "I have my wings, but I'll still never be able to join them out there," Princess says softly as a family of birds flies past. The maid turns to the girl; she's crying once more, a sad smile gazing off into the distance. She's so beautiful; such a beautiful creature deserves to fly through the most beautiful skies, the maid thinks to herself. She turns back to look out the window; ever so slowly, a soft wing wraps around the maid's shoulders. They cry together.

The maid enters the room on the sixth morning to find nothing but a dead swan.

KRISTIN SANCKEN
1ST PLACE, POETRY, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

Oxygen: A Parlor Trick
Inspired by Valentine Green, *A Philosopher Shewing an Experiment on the Air Pump*

Born to succumb to curiosity and obsession
Dangling descendent of dinosaur
Angled and atrophied
All living things survive on something
Not God
It is I who keep you all alive
Invisible and odorless
Oh ye of little faith
Oh two.

ERIN WELLS
2ND PLACE, POETRY, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

All My Words Become Air
Inspired by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Censorship*

All My Words Become Air
for the speakers of Salish and Kootenai

Let me tell you how mountains unfold, how a lake appears
in their ancient arms and moves with each shudder of air.

I have a name for this, for the white curved bone of moon,
for the bronze shield of moon. You turn them into air.

Let me say bitterroot, camas, rustle of cedar, of partridge,
of deer, a sheen of sleek salmon as they arc through air.

I have a word for this and for the dry kindling of autumn,
for the long secret of winter. But you turn them into air.

You make them disappear. Let me catch them, my hands
a bowl of clay stained with dawn as it moistens the air.

I name the ones who spoke before me, their many faces,
the bright stones of their words. You turn them into air.

You erase me, my body a tree of no limbs, of no leaves,
a land too meager to grow in the dark haze of your air.

I have a word for this. Your buildings are not mountains.
Your streets are not my streams. Your air is not my air.

I have a name for how the land held water in
its arms, how a creature found its solace in the
benevolence of air.

(Salish and Kootenai languages are now spoken
fluently by only dwindling numbers of first
generation speakers, and most are elderly. Their
once widespread tribes are gathered in the Flathead
Nation Reservation. Forced teaching of English
in government schools sought to eradicate
indigenous speech.)



Image:
Valentine Green
British, 1739–1813
A Philosopher Shewing an Experiment on the Air Pump, 1769
After Joseph Wright of Derby, British, 1734-1797
Mezzotint on laid paper, 18¼ x 22½ in (46.4 x 57.2 cm)
Promised gift of James Langhorne, EL.2019.9.54
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia



Image:
 Paul T. Frankl
 American (born Austria), 1886–1958
Skyscraper chair, c. 1927
 Lacquer and silver leaf on wood,
 26 x 20 x 18 in (66.04 x 50.8 x 45.72 cm)
 Minneapolis Institute of Art

3RD PLACE, POETRY, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

Looking Glass

Inspired by Childe Hassam, *Skyscraper Window*

Late afternoon, and it's time
 for tea. The sun's low slant
 shimmers the buildings across
 the avenue. My skin, cold

in this turn to fall, to early dark,
 shivers underneath this string
 of stones. Which one will render
 me porcelain or alabaster? Will

he notice? Down below, people move
 along the street with purpose,
 pebbles underneath the water
 of this window glass. As a child,

I used to place my palm below
 the rushing waters of the creek
 behind my parents' house, groping
 for the single smooth stone

to pocket, carry home. Here my face
 wavers in the glass. The pebbles slide
 below me, unreachable in this silent,
 darkening tower, the music of fading light

falling at my feet. Who is this woman
 in the window? I'm lost
 beneath the fabric drapes
 of this gown. Even though I've pulled

back my hair to reveal my face,
 I can't see clearly who I am.

ELLA DAILEY
1ST PLACE, PROSE, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

Fruit Flies Like a Banana

Inspired by Robert Reed, *Scanch Branch*

On a day when the sun fries eggs sunny side up on the pavement and the asphalt squishes to sticky tar under high-tops, children in garish nylon gather around gushing fire hydrants, and Simone, cardboard box in hand, throws all my belongings from a second-story window. Heaps and heaps crash to the cement cracked through with leafy greens. Polka dot underwear. Bottles of dark nail polish. A Tijuana Brass vinyl. Dozens of gray sweatshirts. Everything rests atop the translucent trash bags tossed to the curb before heatwaves crept from the steam stacks and smacked sweat on my brow. The same bags are already beginning to attract buzzing bunches of bugs. And Simone is screaming at me from the window, something about it being over and how I should never come back. But my eyes are still on the massive heap of stink, lingering on the cloud of flies swirling around and around like the washers and dryers of the laundromat a few streets over. Suds and soaking clothes shoved into giant rattling, clattering machines. One load left, and the coin rolls are nothing but unfurled brown paper in my hands. A man sitting in the corner with a newspaper over his face and a hat over his newspaper breathes on beat with the flickering fluorescents. The scraps grow heavier in hand, in head, in empty pocket after empty pocket. The bell over the door rings out, and a rush of rain and roaches follows in on the heels of a female figure. She wears lime green braids like whips to the middle of her back and feminist fringe to match her man-kicking boots. Simone. Nina in stride. Beauvoir in mind. She dumps the insides of the bag on her shoulder into a wheeled cart until it spills over with patterned socks, persimmon sweaters, pleated skirts, plush stockings. Her piano hands stuff everything into a washer and pat down her pockets before hitting something heavy. She peels back the candy-striped wrapper, feeds the machine with spare change, and as her clothes tumble cotton on metal, sees the contents of my cart. She snatches a gray sweatshirt from my stack and sizes it up, saying something about solid colors and style. My fingers tighten to fists around invisible money until my skin breaks and my insides run red in my palms. She is speaking to me, lips moving but words fuzzed over with time. She taps twenty-five cents into my hands. I ask the catch but still crunch the coins into the slot before she chances a reply. When detergent finally drips down the side of the tub, clothes whip to a froth, and Simone writes her digits over my veins in lazy loops of gel. Each number wraps around the next in an endless scribble, spiraling like the flies around rotted fruit. And her head is in the window again with another box, her hair now rising into a furious black cloud around her head, her orange eyebrows pointed: Don't come back! Ever! And change your wardrobe! God! Are you even listening! My tongue is peanut butter stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my pits are slicked sour, but I am listening. I pull my sweatshirt over my tow-head. Sweat-stained fabric sucks to my shirt as I throw it all into the street and watch as black dots descend upon the pile for a final time. Then I walk home in a bra, skin lobster broiled, with curls plastered to my skull, only reaching my apartment when the sky burns brown. The only stars, the lights of a thousand office buildings, filter through the open window in soft jaundice squares. I crawl over the covers with the heat of the day still slathered across my limbs, smeared across my eyelids in a heinous marmalade. The more I think about it, the more aware I become that I have a body and am not just the white floater in the vision, not just the after image of the afternoon sun, not just the overflowing sink. I am bone below the waist, knees too hard and rounded, thighs glued together, skin pimpling and puckering, cramping into a restless ball. And there, just by the whirring fan and melting ice cube tray, something is buzzing as it twists toward the shell of my ear. Slap. A fruit fly. It must have followed me home.

EVA STEERS-SMITH
2ND PLACE, PROSE, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

Virginia Kudzu

Inspired by Sally Mann, *Virginia, Untitled (Virginia Kudzu)*

The summer of '96 she turns 12 years old.

Life is much as before, but it's also the first time the season's heat and humidity layer with the concave ache of cramps, and there's a sense of desperation crystalized with this official threshold into adolescence, even though she knows full well what it means to get her period. The stakes of discomfort seem higher that summer, her defenselessness against the seasons of the world thrown into stark relief.

Nowhere does she feel more powerless than in the back of her mother's yellow hatchback wagon, years away from a license and even then, how would she get a car and where would she go? Life seems to drag on riding the back roads with the family packed into the old Subaru with the ticking engine. She's never had a weak stomach so library books blur the repetitiveness of the country miles, and she stresses less about accidents in summer than the icier months, though overheating or some other mechanical issue is always a lurking concern. But the drive to Lynchburg is innocuous enough —seventy-five minutes or so with the mixed-blessing promise of her grandmother's cooking on one end, and the familiarity of Albemarle on the other. This pilgrimage to see her dad's mom —he himself is rarely around, four kids and one parent fill the car up — is a roughly quarterly event which can be counted on to take the whole day, though each part feels short, right down to the in-Jesus-name grace and the list of conversation topics around the lunch that Grandma Smith will have set out on the formica table when they arrive a little before noon, and that she calls "dinner." The transition from car to plate happens in a matter of minutes; everyone has their traditional seat, and the menu is just as predictable. There are butter beans with margarine ("a stick in every bowl of vegetables," as her mother will later criticize), homemade sweet pickles musky with cloves, tangy yellow potato salad, her sister's favorite corn pudding, stewed tomatoes, white rolls with more margarine. The meat is almost always ham — which her mother hates, though she eats quantities of all the rest. Dessert is slid onto the table before the main course has even concluded, faultlessly cloying, something store- bought and one-note or a cheesecake from the freezer. There is always a whisper of mothballs and a two liter bottle of Pepsi. Lynchburg water tastes different, or maybe she's just freaked out because her Grandpa Smith died in this house years ago so even the glasses seem a little haunted. After dinner, afternoons in the den with its religious paintings on the wall, her grandmother rocking, talking, biding until she can put supper on the table (sandwiches and tea), the only time she ever gets to watch soaps or Bob Ross or The Price is Right, because there's no TV at home. Then they drive back through dusk.

Maybe the trips to Lynchburg are comforting because of their finiteness, their predictability. There are small variations: mixed nuts and Dollar General chocolates around Christmas, homemade barrettes one year and hymn sings in another era. However menacing its name, it's still a city and there's something to be said for exiting the thick vegetation that surrounds her everyday country life. Nature, so evocative of peace and bien-être for the well-adjusted, is just another malevolence in her life — especially in the summer, with the vegetative growth encroaching, humming, tangling upon itself, ambivalent to her frustrations, her pains, her powerlessness. Sometimes when she's walking in the woods, a snake will fall from a tree, adding terror to general insult. But first, descending into the

pre-Lynchburg river basin off Route 29, she stares like always, out the window toward the kudzu curtains hanging heavy like the disquiet of her womanly predicaments, the dreadful lack of agency over anything, living one meal and one book to the next but not in a good way.

What she won't realize until later is that there are different kinds of love. The ascetic love she is taught by her mother, the caloric love of her grandmother's dinner table, and the generous love her dad has for mankind with little left for himself.

Later, she builds a life for herself. She creates agency and unearths identities that she glossed over reading those library books for so many years, hid in fantasies and addictions and evasions and fear. The spring of 2021 she is 37. She drives to Lynchburg in her first car, which is actually a truck. It's the only place the vaccine is available. After, she takes herself to Biscuitville, the local chain that she'd always lusted after decades before. Food is still her love language, in a good way now. That summer, she and her siblings clear out three generations of junk and just as the project wraps, her mom dies from a sudden brain disease. Or maybe it wasn't that sudden after all. How long had it colored their worlds?

So it is that that fall, she inherits her grandmother's table. She lives in the city now. The autumn leaves are still a little melancholy, but it's not so bad.

JEAN GAZIN
3RD PLACE, PROSE, UNIVERSITY/ADULT

Margaret Bryan

Inspired by Valentine Green, *A Philosopher Shewing an Experiment on the Air Pump*

Margaret vividly recalled the moment from her childhood when she understood the nature of man. It was an awakening from sweet childish play to the darker side of human motivations, an unveiling of the impetus that drives people to make horrific mistakes. Her tiny hands had clasped the bird gently, fingers sinking into soft feathers as she whispered reassuring words, asking it what its name was. The animal, soothed by her gentleness, settled into her lap and cooed softly.

Her uncle had let her play with the sweet bird as he prepared his experiment, not out of cruelty but benign distraction. Of course he loved seeing his niece amused but was too self absorbed to realize that she would bond with the animal and then shouldn't watch it be killed. His focus on scientific discovery superseded empathy, which would shape Mararet's life forever.

When he had arrived with the gilded cage and bird and all of his equipment, it had seemed like a gift for her. He had once brought her an hourglass with the tiniest grains of fine white sand that fell in a stream, marking exactly one hour. There was always a shiny bauble or new ribbon for her sister, but Margaret received a scarab beetle from Egypt and an Ottoman crystal, like Uncle Phillipe had seen the scientific curiosity in her eyes.

Her sister's eyes shined when given trinkets and ornaments, glittering glitz and bright colors kept her attention. How she had shrieked at Margaret's scarab beetle! And she refused to touch the bird, which may have spared her some anguish to have never felt the puffy velvet bird breast. Margaret knew what that heart fluttering inside felt like, and couldn't stop wondering if it slowed or quickened before it stopped.

Ever the hostess, Margaret's mother fawned over the other guests, really believing that her role in the world was to flit around like a pretty bird herself. Living for praise and attention granted her immunity to others's suffering and spared her the exhaustion of being attentive maternally. Children could be part of her display while being attended to by others. Perhaps this refusal to bond with her own children spared her, too?

As for the other adults, Margaret's young mind saw with clarity the roles they all played. This was no casual parlor night. Of course Phillipe was demonstrating for an end- was he asking for money? Did he want to sell this contraption? When the talk turned to larger demonstrations, her grief for the now limp bird, forgotten in the dome, turned to horror. Of course, that would be why her father and Phillipe had invited Giles to observe the demonstration. Giles' position at the Tower led one to believe he was more inclined to demonstrations of rigid law and order than science. But this was not about just the bird in the air pump.

Diverting the crowd's lust for fire on Bonfire night was a growing concern. Should such a large and emboldened crowd turn, there could be dire consequences. Creating a "more humane" public execution display may very well distract, and this was certainly a subdued way of extracting life. Giles, keeper of the keys at the Tower, had a keen interest in civility and guises of humanity, while believing that displays of force and law were for the common good. This could prove to be an innovative tactic if a large enough glass dome could be built.

Later in her life, Margaret learned about the papal effigy stuffed with cats burnt by the Fawkes crowds and wondered back if air pump executions might have been a safer diversion. She never knew why the plan did not go forward, it may have been the unrest in the Colonies or Phillie's expedition to the South Seas. The bird was the only execution that she witnessed in her life.

It was in that dark night of her childhood that she could credit her lifelong drive to weave empathy into science, to keep an eye on morality before discovering new forms of destruction, to appreciate creation before its inevitable death. Holding the cold stiff bird afterwards was not nearly as pleasing, but she wanted to say goodbye to it, to thank it for its lessons. For the rest of her life, she surrounded herself with sweet soft cooing. In her classrooms, Margaret dwelled on the fascinations of the animal kingdom, instilling a loving respect in her pupils as they cared for her flocks and menagerie. Head tilted towards the stars, she persevered, looking above the shortcomings of men. Educating women scientists, publishing texts, promoting intellect over domination, Margaret Bryan's life as a woman and a scientist was shaped by the final moments of an unfortunate bird.

Honorable Mentions

GRADES 3-5

CARTER BURKETT
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY
ORANGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

BRENNA LAFAVE
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE
BROWNSVILLE ELEMENTARY

SAQIB KHAN
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE
AGNOR HURT ELEMENTARY

GRADES 6-8

ZEE CEGIELA
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY
WALKER UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SHILOH JONES
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY
HOMESCHOOLED

SADIE TOBIAS
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY
VILLAGE SCHOOL

NOAH SAUNDERS
1ST HM, PROSE, GRADES 6-8
CHARLOTTESVILLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

GRADES 9-12

OLIVIA “ARI” COGSWELL
1ST HM, POETRY, GRADES 9-12
ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

MORGAN BIZIER
2ND HM, POETRY, GRADES 9-12
ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

CAREY MALONEY
3RD HM, POETRY, GRADE 9-12
WOODBERRY FOREST SCHOOL

NATE STEIN
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE
WOODBERRY FOREST SCHOOL

LEO WANG
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE
WOODBERRY FOREST SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY/ADULT

INDIA HILL
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY

KATRIEN VANCE
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, POETRY

FRANCIS BRADY
1ST HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE

EDWARD MCNETT
2ND HONORABLE MENTION, PROSE



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