Old School

Catherine McGuire

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Windows so tall a pole was used
to tug down the top, open
the paned glass for fresh air.
The yellowed linen shades snapped up
in one long snarl-pop! to let sun flood in.

No A/C, no window guards;
Flies visited each spring.
The brick school had chalkboards,
green linoleum floors, pale wood cupboards
and that window-wall of glass
overlooking the road
where we played at recess.

One day the nuns closed the shades
all the way down: a revolt
was marching by – public high school kids
parading, shouting, angry
about Vietnam. Nuns blocked our sight
but single-paned glass couldn’t block
the calls: “What we want? Peace!
When do we want it? Now!”
Didn’t sound peaceful.
Nuns said it was sin.

I listened as I stared straight ahead,
pretending like the others to ignore
what we barely understood;
mostly envious – those kids had the courage
to defy, to demand. Those kids
had a day off.
Nuns saw but could not stop
what would blow through
our little town and the country –
linen shades no defense; textbooks
no guide. It took their habits,
chalkboards, eventually
replaced books with computers,
this new world – snarl-pop! –
flooding in.

*Catherine McGuire*