

First Prize – Grades 11 & 12

Taxi in Kampala

Downpour in Kampala, capital of Uganda:
rain pelting the windshield like bursts of bullet-fire,
water gouging gullies in the orange clay road
and carving ruts that rush with turbid mud.
This dirty white van weaves through traffic,
swerving past cattle and people, jerk-
ing out of potholes, bouncing, creaking, banging,
our driver slamming on the horn, the horn, the horn.

Mutiso, my Ugandan friend, smiles at me,
the white American crammed into a Ugandan taxi.
The air stagnates. Closed, foggy windows
bottle in the hot stench of sweat seeping
from the stained upholstery and jostling people.
Ebony African faces shine with perspiration,
their mouths jabbering loud Swahili syllables
as I lean against cold window-glass, gawking.

People are everywhere, immune to the rain
sitting, walking, standing, perched on bicycles,
one boy herding long-horned, lumbering cattle.
The buildings in the capital are ramshackle shanties,
almost nothing looks new, and even the dirt is dirty,
strewn with trash and speckled with brown puddles.
Over the radio the Minister of Health reminds us,
“Please use a latrine and do not feed with animals.”

by Jessie, Staunton, VA