

THIRD PLACE

Kaylin Maher, Rockville High School, Vernon

Ten

I was ten when I found you with
your back pinned against the baked cement.

The heat cutting through your cheeks like a scythe,
arms sprawled & swollen & sun bleached,

spine melting into the concrete.
I wonder what would've happened if

I had left you there--
face permanently fixed on the stark

August sun. Mom tells me not to be afraid
as she shovels your body into the shade

your limp wrists suspended over her shoulder,
tongue lolled and eyes half-lidded,

your face twisted into a starved smile
& an empty flask in the crook of your arm.

Judge's remarks:

This poem gives us as vivid a rendering of a pivotal moment as I can imagine—and in only fourteen lines—accomplished with strong, stark noun/verb combinations, and the haunted musing just short of the poem's mid-point: I wonder what would've happened if//I had left you there. The reader, already in the grip of the poem's painful imagery (and soon to be riveted by more) is left to imagine that which might have been worse (or, more dreadfully, better). With each reading, beyond the first, what the poet wonders (and, therefore, requires the reader to imagine) becomes more powerful; that wondering haunts poet, poem, and reader alike.