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Age: 16, Grade: 10

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Category: Poetry

Fountain

Out by my baby brother's preschool
there is a three tier stone fountain,
and I came across it on a day that I picked him up
some day during a broiling Alabama July.
Who makes a two year old go to summer camp?
Only the cruelest kind of person, a mother so busy,
so up to her knees in muck and to-do lists
that she prays not to see her children on weekdays,
God-forbid-sick-days-and-snow-days-too
and worst of all, the whole of June and July.
I was thinking of how miserable that day had been
and how glad I was that my baby brother missed it
and how badly I wanted my baby brother
to miss so many things, so many of life's big lessons.
I was sitting in my car thinking
why the sun never shined on a home like mine,
and why I was born fighting battles too big for baby fists.
In the 12 minutes I had till I picked him up,
in the lonely Lutheran parking lot, I stared at a Toyota Corolla
and prayed for better days and I asked questions
with no good answers, with no sound responses,
like why everyone I loved had to leave me so early,
why I was stripped of everything before I got the chance
to get ready, to take deep breaths, to count to 3.
These were questions too big for my body, too loud for my mouth,
and it wasn't the time to think them.
Maybe I thought a Lutheran Church was a good place to ask why
my father was my biggest fear and my mother my second,
to ask why good things never lasted and
why I was always abandoned.
And when I was finished wondering,
I went to pick up my brother and he toppled out of the
classroom that was badly painted blue
and he trudged onto fresh mown grass
and flailed his little arms at mosquitos.
All the mosquitos grouped at the three tier fountain
so my baby brother stood there too.
He turned and smiled at me with his spaced baby teeth
and eyes gleaming bright blue (they hadn't turned brown yet),
and I prayed for him to never realize
all that I realized before he could even walk:
that your home is out to get you and cousins are bound to die
and fathers bound to threaten and mothers bound to scream

and everyone else bound to leave in a hurry
because it is all too much.
My baby brother stood at the fountain of youth,
the three tier, mossed-over, stone fountain of youth,
the only place where, if he stood long enough,
I think he could be saved from it all,
from all the bad of getting older,
from all the truths I never wanted him to know.