

“After”

by Cathleen Lundy Daniel

I am your baby
confused in the desolate after.

My tiny body doesn't understand the aftermath,
my face not reflecting an afterglow.
I'm just an afterthought
in a family becoming an afterbirth
in the decay swallowing our dark house.

Mother doesn't speak about the before:
you volunteered to fly someone else's mission,
your downed A1-E, with its empty parachute,
Christmas Eve becoming the day you died,
her sobs at “Love Me Tender.”

Because you are missing
at soccer games, on Father's Day,
when I got lost at five and Mother called the police,
on my lonely trip down the aisle.

The war emptied our world
of your dimpled smile,
large hands, bright mind,
and deep voice.

A picture of me crawling at your feet,
your mention of me in a reel to reel,
a green Air Force jacket that I wish still smelled like you
is all I have.

The beginning of me
abandoned in the deserted after,
lost without Sandy o3
Not knowing before

Cathleen Lundy Daniel is the youngest of six. Her father, Maj. Albro L. Lundy Jr., was an Air Force pilot whose A1-E was shot down on Christmas Eve over Laos. Her mother went on to become an attorney while raising her children without their beloved Daddy. Cat is currently an adjunct professor. She graduated with a B.A. from UCLA, and her master's thesis from the University of Virginia was on cinematic portrayals of prisoners of war. Her creative work has appeared in *Expressing Motherhood* and the PVL D anthology of short stories.