

Patricia J. Mottola

Unspoken

By the bedside by myself
Almost alone
Still there he lingers
Me keeping company
Deathwatch for a soldier
My father

An only child I thought
Again today
My siblings stay away so far
His breath comes hard
Conversation but a subtle glance
With one eye shut

The silence feels the same
We seldom spoke before
The war we lived is over
And suddenly the deafening quiet roars
The echo large and loud

The hands that struck with vengeance
Now reduced to bone and blue-gray flesh
Lay clasped upon his chest
As if in silent prayer
“Forgive me daughter I have sinned”

One final gasp I grasp a word
And feel his hand a gentle touch

A tourist from a foreign land
So much remains
Untraveled here

With wounds of battle
AWOL for today
I watch him watch me.
Get some rest, I say.
“No, stay, you were the best”

Photo of Him

I found it yesterday
Intentionally by accident
The box said vintage
And I remembered
That priceless sixties gaze

You sent it to me
As I waited
For some sign you were alive
Those blue eyes burning holes
Through Kodak paper

Blinking out reality
Can't remember to forget
That war continues in your head

With pills to ease your pain
So lonely now you need to be alone

Somewhere in Hanoi
You learned to carry
Guns you traded for your youth
Still vulnerable beneath your strength
What do you guard now?

You left your soul behind
It was damned in Vietnam
Those eyes cried past the horror
And love of Saigon whores
Your cocky smile the weed you smoke

You came back labeled
Damaged goods
Weighed down by all you carried there
Brought back unpacked
With nightmares lacking clarity

As you arrive
Unstamped like private paper
Still clinging to your tags
I know the silent shroud of you
Too proud to see yourself alive

The battle scars you hide
All locked inside
Imprisoned by your fear of freedom
As you ride
The hero's great white horse

PATRICIA J. MOTTOLA is an artist and poet who lives in Connecticut. She practices art therapy, helping people understand themselves through poetry and fine arts.