FORGIVE ME
—CARMEN DELA CRUZ

We met in an acting class,
    I was a freshman,
you a sophomore,
older and more learned in,
The reality of doing,
you a single mother,
we became more than partners in a scene,
a kinship, a sisterhood founded,
your daughter a toddler then,
rode on my back,
we laughed, rolling her stroller on and off trains,
but I never changed diapers,
or offered to stay with her,

but you chose me, as your maid of honor,
and I stood with you in a lavender gown,
but that’s when everything changed,
you living the married life,
a college graduate, a teacher,

I was behind you,
still working retail, still in undergrad,
when the unthinkable call came,  
a call from the hospital,

I had no car to drive to the crematorium,  
you drove me there in your family sized SUV,  
more than large enough for the box,  
the box holding the silver canister of ashes,  
a receptable too small for all the stories,  
the wisdom, the love lost,  
too small for the grief of a mother gone,  
you were there to hold my hand,

I was there for the baby shower,  
when the second baby was born,  
then you felt so far away,  
so far out in the burbs,  
a life so different from mine in the city,  
I needed the next bourgie place to be seen,  
dancing till the lights came on,  
Last Call, I swallowed it all,  
in shiny sparkly glasses,  
all the beats drowning, a last pained look,  
before the triple-by-pass,  
and after the life was drained from her face,

I was a twenty something motherless child,  
as a mother now, I see it,  
I was not there for you,  
but you were there with me,  
you drove me, you listened, a best friend,
I should have been there more before I left,
before I left behind all the bright lights of the ATL,

I could have been a better friend to you,
and gotten to know more of your two handsome boys,
I’ve had years away in different cities, different coasts,
now I hear about them more in phone calls,
and watch them grow in pictures.

Forgive me.

Carmen dela Cruz is a Black Southern writer who lives in Spokane, Washington with her husband and son. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Chatham University and is currently enrolled in Gonzaga University’s Doctorate in Leadership Studies program. Her essay Selma: An Exploration of the Womanist Lens and the Servant-Leader was first included in the 2020 edition of the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* and was more recently included in the *Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being* book published in September of 2022 by SUNY Press.