

Beloved Boy

Through the water-speckled pane I watch you
as I place a fragile glass in the rack to dry
and see a tender sapling

adolescence looming. Across the dandelion-pocked lawn,
your cousins play, while you—your wrist and neck adorned
with jewels from your mother’s box, battle a dragon
just now unfurling her colors in the wood beyond.

I am afraid for you my dearest child.
You don’t yet know the choking hold of vines
consigned to constrain you—to what a boy should be
or how he should learn to be a man.

I see red flag warnings of coming storms,
gather my battle gear—clippers, pruners, saw.
I want to build you a fortress from heartwood,
cut away the brambles winding around your feet.

Look up, son. Spend these last days drifting
with the warming breeze. Find your silhouette
etched in the cumulus clouds. Too soon,
summer will take you in its hardened hold.

What then will become of the sparkle
that bracelets your tender wrist,
your willow neck?

Diane Melby
Originally published by Carolina Piedmont Writers Guild in County Lines, 2025.