

Echo of Boy

Darlene Young

My son hunches into the storm in his oversized coat
to collect fast offerings, a two-hour route
because the other mother's sons stay in when it's cold.
He is mine.
His wrists

out-hang his sleeves. His hair
squirms from his well-slicked part,
and he is mine. He's out there
in the snow and I can't settle. Thirteen years old; thirteen,
the way he slides a little to the right of us on the Sunday pew,
like someone has hit "tab" on the keyboard, though still
he'll let me pull him back to drape my arm around
those slumping shoulders.
Shadow of boy.

It's snowing and he is fine out there.
He's fine. At home
he sprawls on the couch behind those heavy eyes. Outline
of boy. Echo of boy. I tell it to him straight: "The reward
for showing up," I say, "is that you're the first one they call
next time. Find a way to be proud of that." He looks
away. Should I apologize for this burden of duty I've bred
into him, for the fact that from now on he'll leave
no ward gathering without putting away chairs? Welcome
to Mormon guilt, my son. Welcome to the wilderness.
Sometimes a suit is a front bumper, silver plating, deadweight.
Sometimes it is wings.

Those heavy-lidded eyes. Let there be a man
behind there. The still-narrow shoulders, crooked
tie. Does he slump to parenthesize the space
he'll leave when he's gone? Look
forward, son. Look forward,
mother. On the horizon
in the chalky dusk:
contrail of boy.