

## Worshipping Him

*Jazz Walker*

Sundays smelled like grease and heat,  
fried chicken cooling on paper towels,  
dust rising like incense in the yard.  
Her uncle stood at the door, calling it  
the Movement for the Melanated People of God,  
his voice rolling across the grass like a storm  
they weren't allowed to outrun.  
Women orbited him like moons trapped  
in his gravity, each carrying a child  
with his smile,  
folding themselves  
into silence small enough to swallow. (a silent thing that is small  
enough to swallow)  
Nine cousins clung to hips and shoulders,  
their faces half-sunlight, half-shadow,  
eyes too old for the games they tried to play.  
He preached about freedom,  
arms raised to the hot Indiana sky,  
sweat slipping down his temples  
like truth trying to escape.  
She remembered the shouting,  
the swaying,  
thinking it was holy.  
She remembered the women in corners—  
hands over their mouths,  
prayers sounding like breathing  
that was trying not to break.  
Only now, older,  
after Plath taught her the language of unraveling,  
after Brooks taught her how a neighborhood remembers,  
after Lorde taught her the cost of silence—  
does she see the chains braided into his words,  
the empire stitched from fear.  
She did not know then,  
while laughing barefoot in the dirt,  
that he worshipped himself

and named it God.  
But she knows now.  
And knowing is its own kind of freedom.