

## When a Black Man Walks

By Neiel Israel

You ever seen a black man walk?  
It's like rhythm and meter got up off the page  
And decided to move and glide like the Spirit  
You ever seen a black man walk in the room,  
Morse code style, like key tap dancing  
"I'm here!"  
In those steps are messages  
And you have to listen carefully  
"They trying to kill me."  
"Stop, search and frisk me."  
There are prayers in a Black man's walk,  
"Don't let them shoot me down where I'm  
standing."  
"Don't let the white chalk lines find me."  
"Don't let me die in the streets like an animal."  
"I'm a man. I swear I'm a man."

When a black man walks,  
A whole generation lives to see another day,  
Another sunrise,  
Another mouth to feed  
Another seed,  
Another sacrifice saved,  
Another poem,  
Another hungry burning cross.  
Another mother breathing in her son's ear  
Move easily, move quiet.  
Don't matter if you sixteen or sixty.

When a black man walks,  
He is always animal  
He smells like a KKK appetizer  
Nuggets of his own flesh,  
Dipped in his own blood  
Oooo . . . Weeee

When a black man walks,  
He often finds white women  
walking closely behind him  
But can't blame a white woman  
for liking the way a black man walks.  
She understands some things  
And is cool with the fact that  
her babies would have nappy hair  
Even though she still will not know how to comb it

When a black man walks,  
Wait for it.  
Listen to the orchestra playing beneath his feet.  
Pay attention to the vibrations  
when he walks in the room  
See how many faces change to fear  
In the presence of a black man.  
See how many women hold their purses  
So tightly their fingers frow numb.  
See how many men hide their eyes  
Wishing the darkness would go away,  
Maybe choke himself to death,  
The ugly two-thirds human being,  
That next to nothing black dot,  
That useless prison black spot.

When a black man walks,  
Every day he is like Jesus.  
Paranoid of crucifixion.  
Every day his is like Treyvon  
Knowing his hoodie had nothing to do  
with his last breath.  
If only bullets could kill racism, poverty, and the  
traumas of slavery.

You pay attention when a Black man walks  
His feet got a mind of their own,  
A compass. A homing device.  
Four hundred years of directions.  
"Find your way home safely."  
"Don't let Jim Crow steal your soul."  
"Don't let gentrification lose your memory."  
"Don't let police brutality castrate you."  
"Do what your mama said to do."  
RUN, RUN, RUN.

When a black man walks,  
he ain't got time to walk.  
When their feet are already covered with blood,  
Do what your mama said to do.  
RUN, RUN, RUN.  
Death is always like, "Black men are easiest to find.  
They are the strongest but the most fragile.  
They are the calm and the storm.  
They die like they expect to."

When a black man walks  
Think of it as a masterpiece,  
A beautiful song that you may only hear once.  
Cherish it.  
You may never hear it again.