

Chrissy Kolaya

First Memory, 1954

First there are the sirens,
flashing lights,
a commotion of adults.
He remembers cradling his sister,
a baby then, watching
through the screen door,
his father, other men,
policemen, and
his mother shushing.

A glimpse of his aunt on the sofa,
face bruised, eye blackened,

and the door slams.

The men
with their smell of whiskey
and engines
snarling outside.

The sound of gravel under tires
means both departure and arrival.

At fifty he sits to tell a story
and can remember only pieces:
a door closing,
cigarettes,
the weight and heft of the baby in his arms,
men with their quick
angry movements,

and the women
who lay their hands
on the arms of their men,

hands that say:

slow

and *think*.

It's possible he killed someone,
the son thinks
years later.

Evidence:

the way everything stopped abruptly.

One minute
they were out for blood—

his aunt
seventeen
bleeding into the couch cushions beneath her,

men
pacing on the porch

it went on for days,

the hunt
for the
boys
responsible

—and the next
it was
over.

What had happened?

He couldn't say.

Just that he believes his father to be the kind of man who

hands around a throat

might keep squeezing.